

PLATING MOLS STAMPS

by B.P. HUDSON

Part 7: 50 centimes

Introduction

Parts 1 to 6 of this series were issued with Bulletins 85, 87 and 88, part 1 providing a general introduction and parts 2 to 6 covering the 5 centimes to 40 centimes. Part 7 and future parts should be read in conjunction with part 1.

The 50 centimes is the fifth highest of the ten Mols values, and is the value found most frequently on letters. From 1886 to 1910 50 centimes was the postal rate for letters up to 15 grams sent to Belgium and other overseas countries; from 1924 to 1926 it was the rate for such letters up to 20 grams.

As with the other Mols values first issued in 1894, the design of the 50 centimes was based on one of the paintings in the diorama exhibited by the artists Robert Mols and Piet Van Engelen at the Anvers Exhibition of that year. The painting was in turn based on a photograph by Lieutenant Wyns showing the railway bridge crossing the river M'Poza in lower Congo. In both the photograph and the painting the bridge is empty; on the stamp, however, the designer placed a locomotive on the bridge sporting a fine plume of smoke.

Main issues

In the following table the number on the left is the Catalogue Officiel number. The right-hand column shows the number printed, excluding those that were subsequently overprinted or surcharged, as listed by General Du Four in 'Cinquante Ans D'Histoire Postale', and drawn from official and other sources. But as the General warns, these numbers have to be treated with caution and in many cases, as has now been confirmed by study of Waterlow's file copy sheets, understate the true figure. This is particularly true of the figures given for the unoverprinted 1910 and 1915 issues which are undoubtedly far too low.

Belgian Congo

24	Nov. 1894	50c green	État Indépendant	250,000
25	May 1900	50c olive	État Indépendant	594,000
35B	Jan. 1909	50c olive	Congo Belge Brussels	1,000
35L	Jan. 1909	50c olive	Congo Belge local	83,000
45	Jan. 1909	50c olive	Congo Belge typo	97,000



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45P	Mar. 1909	50c olive	Princes unoverprinted	100
45PB	Mar. 1909	50c olive	Princes Brussels	250
45PT	Mar. 1909	50c olive	Princes typo	4,650
53	June 1909	50c olive	Unilingual	175,000
59	Jan. 1910	50c olive	Bilingual	245,000
69	Nov. 1915	50c brown	Bilingual	95,000
77	May 1918	50c+50c brown	Red Cross	100,000
87	July 1921	15c/50c olive	Recuperation surcharge (on 59)	278,500
95	Jan. 1922	5c/50c brown	Malines surcharge (on 69)	52,000

Ruanda Urundi

14	July 1916	50c brown	Ruanda Tombeur (on 69)	2,750
21	July 1916	50c brown	Urundi Tombeur (on 69)	2,750
33	Nov. 1916	50c brown	Est Africain (on 69)	120,000
41	May 1918	50c+50c brown	A.O. on Red Cross	100,000
45	Jan. 1922	5c/50c brown	Malines on Est Africain (on 69)	77,500

Plate combinations

1894	II+A1	Original frame and centre plates
1900	II+A2	Centres re-entered
	I2+A2	Frame lay marks added
1909	II+A2	New frame plate
1910	III1+A3	New frame plate; centre lay marks added
	III2+A4	Frames re-entered and retouched; centres re-entered
1915	III3+A4	Frames retouched
	III4+A5	Frames partly retouched; centres re-entered
	III4+B	New centre plate
1918	III5+B	Frame lay marks added

There have been the following changes from the nomenclature first introduced by Du Four:

- (1) Du Four designated centre plate A1 as A, A2 as B1 and so on. The discovery that B1 was a re-entered state of A rather than a new plate was reported in Bulletin 28.
- (2) He did not differentiate between A2 and A3, both of which he described as B1. The addition of lay marks to create A3 was reported in Bulletin 42.
- (3) He described III3, III4 and III5 all as III2, being unaware of the retouching which created III3 (Bulletin 42) and III4 (Bulletin 72) and the lay marks on the Red Cross and AO sheets which created III5 (Bulletin 42).



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(4) Bulletin 72 also reported the discovery of a few specimens from two positions of the sheet - nos 40 and 50 - without the doubling in the sky which characterises A5, as well as being without some of the additional retouching of the frames which created III4. Accordingly the plate combination which Du Four described as III2+B3, and which subsequently was renamed III3+A5, had to be split into two: III3+A4 followed by III4+A5.

Identifying the plate combinations

1900. I1+A2 became I2+A2 through the addition of vertical lay marks between 11 and 12 and between 36 and 37. The 1900 stamps are found in two distinct shades, olive and yellow-olive; early and late printings were olive, and printings in between were yellow-olive. Yellow-olive stamps are always I2+A2; olive stamps may be either I1 or I2, unless the lay marks described above are visibly absent or present on them.

Princes printings, which are I2+A2, can be recognised by the shade of the centres which are brownish-black rather than grey-black as in the 1900 issue. Princes typo stamps can also be recognised by constant varieties in the overprinting plate - see page 10 of part 1.

1910. III1+A3 and III2+A4 are most easily distinguished by their shades. Stamps from III1+A3 range from grey-olive to olive to yellow-olive; those from III2+A4 range from greenish yellow-olive to a distinctive olive-green. Without the 1921 surcharge III2+A4 is uncommon unused and apparently unknown used.

When the shade is ambiguous, III2+A3 can often be distinguished by slight signs of doubling in the frames, particularly in the lower right corner, and by doubling or thickening of the centre plate, particularly in the lines of the sky.

1915. III3+A4 and III4+A5 cannot be told apart except by positioning the stamp. The former combination is very much less common than the latter, and appears to be found only in the lilac-brown shade. No sheets or multiples are known of III3+A4, and only a handful of single copies. In about one-third of the positions of the sheet A5 shows conspicuous doubling or thickening of the sky lines, a feature which is not present on A4. In most other positions the sky lines are slightly thickened in A5 but not in A4; in a few positions of A4 there is doubling between unthickened sky lines whereas in the corresponding A5 positions the lines are thickened but do not show doubling.

By contrast, centre plates A4/A5 and B can easily be told apart. The retouching of the die used to make B produced three noticeable changes: dots appear in the smoke emitting from the locomotive; the shading on the left bank of



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the river is continuous rather than dotted; and there is a 'sunrise' effect over the mountains.

Varieties

The following sections list the varieties of plate combination, shade, overprint and perforation known for each issue of the 50 centimes. The list covers 'normal' stamps only; errors and curiosities such as inverted overprints and imperfections between pairs are excluded.

The list is based on my own collection and that of Ray Keach. If members have varieties which are not on the list I would be glad to hear of them so that the list can be updated and made as comprehensive as possible.

Shades are given only where shade varieties are considered to be significant, and are listed in what is thought to be the chronological order of printing. Of course, the impression of shades is highly subjective: other collectors may see them quite differently from the way I do. Shades are abbreviated thus:

bl=blue br=brown g=green li=lilac ol=olive r=red y=yellow

The middle column indicates the overprint or surcharge type. For handstamped Congo Belge overprints, B = Brussels, L = Local. For the Malines surcharge, m = matt and s = shiny. For Tombeur RUANDA and URUNDI overprints, K = Kigali, G = Grysolle and H = Havre. For the nomenclature of EAA overprints, see page 11 of part 1 and Bulletin 46.

For details of the perforation varieties, see page 13 of part 1. Each perforation variety is followed by a two-letter code in brackets. This code gives my (highly subjective) judgement of the relative scarcity of the variety in question. The first letter indicates the scarcity of unused copies of the stamp, the second the scarcity of postally used copies. Stamps cancelled by favour or with forged cancels are not taken into account in arriving at the scarcity factor for used stamps. The codes are as follows:

- A: Very common
- B: Common
- C: Fairly uncommon
- D: Scarce
- E: Rare
- X: Probably unknown



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1894 green

I1+A1 bl-g	p14(BB), p15(CC), p12-14(CC), p14½-15(BC)
I1+A1 y-g	p13½(DD), p14(AA), p15(BA), p16(CC), p12-14(CC), p14½-15(AA)

1900 olive

I1+A2 ol	p14(CA), p15(AA), p12-14(EE), p14½-15(CA)
I2+A2 ol	p14(CA), p14½-15(CA)
I2+A2 y-ol	p13½(CB), p14(CA), p15(CB), p16(DB), p12-14(EC), p14½-15(CA)
I2+A2 Princes	p14(EX)

1909 Congo Belge handstamp

I1+A2 ol	B1	p14(DE), p14½-15(DE)
I1+A2 ol	B2	p14(DE), p15(DE)
I1+A2 ol	B5	p14(CE)
I1+A2 ol	B6	p15(DE), p14½-15(DE)
I1+A2 ol	B7	p14(EE)
I2+A2 y-ol	B6	p14(DE)
I2+A2 y-ol	L1	p13½(DD)
I2+A2 y-ol	L2	p14(DD)
I2+A2 y-ol	L3	p13½(DD)
I2+A2 y-ol	L4	p13½(DD), p14(DD), p14½-15(DD)
I2+A2 y-ol	L5	p13½(DD), p14(DC), p12-14(EE), p14½-15(DD)
I2+A2 y-ol	L6	p13½(DD), p14(DD)
I2+A2 ol	L1	p14(BA)
I2+A2 ol	L2	p14(CC), p14½-15(DD)
I2+A2 ol	L3	p14(CC), p15(DD)
I2+A2 ol	L4	p14(CB), p15(DD), p14½-15(DD)
I2+A2 ol	L5	p14(BB), p14½-15(CC)
I2+A2 ol	L6	p14(CB), p15(DD)
I2+A2 ol	L7	p14(BB)
I2+A2 Princes	B2	p14(EX)
I2+A2 Princes	B5	p14(EX)

Frame plates I1 and I2 can be distinguished on only 4 positions of the sheet; it is assumed that olive stamps with Brussels overprint are all from I1+A2, but this has not been confirmed.

The following combinations were reported by Du Four but have not been



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confirmed by Ray Keach or myself:

I1+A2 ol B3 I2+A2 ol L8

Other combinations may well exist. Forged overprints are common: I have forgeries on I+A2 ol p14 and p15 and I2+A2 y-ol p14 and p14½-15.

1909 Congo Belge typo

I2+A2 ol p14(AA), p14½-15(CB)
I2+A2 Princes p14(DC)

Some forgeries are found, one of which is dangerously accurate. I have forgeries on I+A2 ol p15 and I2+A2 y-ol p13½, p14 and p14½-15.

1909 unilingual

II+A2 ol p14(AA)
II+A2 br-ol p13½(CB), p14(BA)

1910 bilingual

III1+A3 p14(AA), p15(ED), p14½-15(DE)
III2+A4 p14(CX)

1915 bilingual

III3+A4 li-br p14(ED), p15(ED)
III4+A5 li-br p14(BA), p15(DD)
III4+A5 r-br p14(DC), p15(DC)
III4+B li-br p14(BB), p15(EC)
III4+B r-br p14(AA), p15(DC)

1918 Red Cross

III5+B p14(AC), p15(CD)

1921 Recuperation

I2+A2 ol Typo p14(DX)
II+A2 ol p14(DX)
III1+A3 p13½(CD), p14(AA), p14½-15(BC)
III2+A4 p14(AA)

1922 Malines

III4+A5 li-br s p14(EE)
III4+B r-br m p14(AA)
III4+B r-br s p14(AA), p15(EE)

1916 Tombeur (Ruanda and Urundi)

III4+A5 li-br K p14(EE)
III4+B r-br G p14(EX)

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III4+A5 li-br	H	p14(CX),p15(DX - Ruanda only)
III4+A5 r-br	H	p14(CX),p15(DX)

Forgeries abound.

1916 Est Africain

III4+B li-br	S	p14(CC)
III4+B li-br	L1(o)	p14(BE)
III4+B li-br	L1(t)	p14(CE)
III4+B r-br	L1(o)	p14(CE)
III4+B r-br	L1(i)	p14(DE)
III4+B r-br	L1(.)	p14(DD)
III4+B r-br	L2	p14(CA)

1918 Red Cross AO

III5+B		p14(AC),p15(CD)
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1922 EAA Malines

III4+B r-br	m	p14(AC)
III4+B r-br	s	p14(AC)

In total, 113 varieties of the 50c are listed above.

GUIDES TO POSITIONING

As with the positioning guides in the earlier parts, I assume that the reader has a complete sheet of the plate combination he wishes to reconstruct, and will make his own plating notes as he studies individual positions. The guides do not list all the constant plate varieties, but describe the more important ones, particularly the 'generic' varieties which appear in more than one position in the sheet, and also describe the more difficult positions in each sheet where the plater is most likely to experience problems.

II+A1

Because of the strong green colour of the frames, and the numerous re-entries (or strictly fresh entries) in the top left corner, many sheet positions of the 1894 issue are relatively easy to identify.

The first place to look is the 'CINQ' in the top left corner. Parasitic entries, consisting of one or more curved lines crossing the Q, are found in 6,12,14,16,19,31,33,34 and 47. In 47 there are also two curved lines crossing the lower left 50 (Balasse V4). In many positions there is doubling on or around the C of CINQ, with slight variations in each position. In 5,9,13,33,34 and 50 the doubling is inside and above the C. In 1 it is below the C, in 7 inside and below it, and in 25 inside it. Doubling is also visible on or around the C, but to a lesser extent, in 6,32,35,38 and 39. In 1,11,18,22,28,36,40 and 45 the upper left vertical inner frameline is doubled to varying degrees. In 1 - Balasse V3 - the doubling is prominent.

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The marks described above identify over half the positions in the sheet. The remaining positions can be rather more difficult. Among them, 10,20,21,23,26,30,42,44 and 49 show a slight overlap between the outer frame and the sharp tip of the curved ornament on the outer edge of the frames just below left centre. Many positions show traces of a vertical guideline in the left margin; the guideline is most marked in the first column.

There are fewer centre plate varieties in I1+A1. In the course of the printing a strong diagonal black scratch appeared in the sky of 42 - Balasse V1. A short section of vertical black guideline is visible in the sky in the majority of positions. In several positions a similar guideline is also visible below the left of the rock in the river.

I classify the most difficult positions as the following. In 10 there is a short green dash in the top of the left margin, and (in later printings only) a long faint scratch crossing QUAN. In 15 there is a faint dot in the white line above the C of CINQ. 20 shows virtually no distinguishing marks apart from the pattern of the traces of green vertical guideline in the middle of the left margin. 23 has a small black dot between the river lines under the left end of the rightmost of the two larger rocks. In 24 the vertical black guideline in the sky crosses five of the continuous sky lines. In 27 there is a small slanting black scratch off the bottom left corner. In 30 the upper right vertical frameline is slightly doubled. In 37 the corner circle in the top right corner is faint. In 42 (difficult to identify before Balasse V1 appeared) there is a faint green horizontal scratch just under the bottom right corner. In 49 the corner circle in the top right corner is just doubled.

I1+A2 and I2+A2

In the olive stamps of 1900 the frame plate varieties of I1 are still present, though the paler shade of the stamps means that some of them are less prominent and others are nearly invisible. The parasitic entries and fresh entries around CINQ remain, however, the principal means of identifying about half the positions in the sheet.

In addition there are centre plate varieties - many more than in the 1894 issue - which aid the identification of these stamps. In 5,18,23,24,35,42 and 46 there is a faint vertical black guideline to the right of the lower right part of the vignette, usually crossing or close to the lower right 5. In 43,44 and 45 there is a transfer roller variety in the form of a small black arc of a circle at the top centre of the centre plate design. There is also a transfer roller flaw in 49 and 50, in the form of an irregular mark like a hook crossing the top of the trees to the right of centre. In 6 there is a diagonal scratch through the river (Balasse V2). A number of positions show extra black dots in the smoke of the locomotive - 16,17,22,23,25,26,37 and 48. Generally speaking the centre plate is quite flawed with many positions showing scratches of various shapes and sizes in the margins of the stamp. Stamps in the first row show slight doubling of the horizontal hill lines on the left.

I classify the following positions as difficult. In 2 there is a horizontal frame plate scratch in the left part of the top margin, quite clear in the 1894 issue but almost invisible in the olive stamps. In 3 there is a black spot in the upper left part of the stamp, but it is found in later printings only and before its appearance the best identifying mark for this position is a faint horizontal black

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scratch to right of centre in the top margin. In 8 almost the only marks are two black dots close together, and diagonal to one another, in the middle of the right margin. In early printings of 10 a near-horizontal black scratch is just visible above the top left corner of the sky; in later printings there is a curved vertical scratch in the centre of the right margin. In 32 there is slight doubling in the C of CINQ, and two or three black dots in the left margin. In 44 the small arc referred to above is sometimes barely visible; the best distinguishing mark otherwise is a faint vertical black scratch in the top left corner.

Frame plate I1 was converted to I2 by the addition of vertical lay marks between 11 and 12 and between 36 and 37.

II+A2

The unilingual stamps have the same centre plate as the 1900 issue, and the flaws on it are the main guide to positioning them. In addition to those described above some prominent scratches appear for the first time with this issue, notably on 28 and 48 (top centre) and 49 (bottom centre).

There is less assistance from the frames of the unilingual stamps. The most helpful varieties are retouches of the horizontal sections of the outer framelines: on 13,14,16,17,27 and 38 (upper left); 2,7,18,19,23,24,34 and 37 (upper right); 1,2,9,21,28,29,38,39,43,44 and 45 (lower left); and 38,43,44,47 and 50 (lower right). In 45 and 50 there is clear doubling of the inner frame in the lower right corner.

The frame plate has vertical lay marks between 11 and 12 and between 36 and 37.

III1+A2

The first centre plate for the 1910 issue, A3, is the same as A2 except for the addition of lay marks: a somewhat uneven vertical line between 7 and 8, and a dot between 37 and 38. The centre plate flaws which identify sheet positions in the 1900 and 1909 issues remain therefore the main source of identification for the first plate combination of the 1910 issue.

There are also helpful frame plate varieties. Several positions show doubling around the upper left 50: above the 50 in 3,5,15 and 32; on it in 16,18,25 and 50; and below it in 4,21,30 and 45. There is a vertical guideline touching or close to the centre part of the left frame in 4,5,7,11,43,44,46 and 48, and a section of guideline in the bottom left corner only in 2,12,21 and 38. The bottom frame is doubled under the GI of BELGISCH in 33,34 and 35. There are no frame plate lay marks

I classify only two positions in this combination as difficult. 8 has few marks apart from the two dots in the right margin (described above for the 1900 issue), and 44 has a short horizontal guideline touching the top frame over the E of BEL, which helps identification if the black arc at the top of the sky is obscured.

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III2+A3

The second plate combination of the 1910, found only rarely without the 1921 surcharge, had both frame and centre plates re-entered. There are no lay marks: the centre plate marks present on III1+A2 appear to have been erased.

In the frames, the doubling in III1 above, on and below the top left 5 is still visible in III2 in the positions in question (see above). The lower right vertical outer frameline is doubled in 14,19,21,22,23,24,26,29,33 and 34. There is a vertical coloured guideline in the left margin in 11,43,46 and 48. In the centre plate the horizontal sky lines show doubling towards their left end in 1,2,6,7,9,13 and 14.

III2+A3 is generally a more difficult combination to position than III1+A2, because of the smaller number of flaws in the centre plate. The fact that most of these stamps have the 1921 surcharge, from the shape of which the row number can be narrowed to 2 or at most 4 rows (see page 10 of part 1), is a great help. The most difficult position in my view is 39, identifiable only by a few corrosion dots along the top of the sky and by a black dot on the L of BELGE.

III3+A4 and III4+A5

For many years it was thought that the 'die 1' (ie centre plate A) printings of the 1915 issue represented one plate combination only. It is now known (see above) that two were involved, the first (III3+A4) rather scarce and so far found only in the lilac-brown shade, and the second (III4+A5) much commoner and found with p14 and p15 and in both lilac-brown and red-brown shades. The first combination was formed by extensive retouching of the frames, the second by re-entry of the centres and further retouching of the frames in at least one position of the sheet. Neither combination shows lay marks.

In III3 and III4 the doubling around the upper left 5 is still visible: above the 5 in 3,5,15 and 32, on it in 16,18,25 and 50, and below it in 4,21,30 and 45. The doubling of the outer vertical frameline on the lower right is visible but less clear than in the earlier combinations: it now shows as clear doubling only in 19,24,26,29 and 34.

The main aid to identifying positions on III3 and III4 comes from the retouching, which in most positions of the sheet caused burin escapes in the form of straight or slightly curved scratches to appear in and around the curled ornaments at centre height on the left and right sides of the stamp. Most positions show these lines, which vary widely from position to position: it is beyond the scope of this work to enumerate them separately, but they make positioning easy if a reference sheet is available.

On centre sheet A4, as already noted, the sky lines are fairly clean (though thicker than in A3), with the exception of the doubling visible in the left of the sky in 1,2,6,7,9,13 and 14. In A5 the doubling in these positions disappears; in 10,11,13,16,33,35,36,38-42 and 47-50 new doubling or heavy thickening appears, in some cases quite markedly; while in the remaining positions the lines are noticeably coarser or thicker than in A4. None of the positions on these two plate combinations presents serious difficulty for the plater.

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III4+B

The new centre plate with the dots in the smoke shows few varieties. The frame plate varieties mentioned above for III4+A5 persist in III4+B. In addition, the frames of III4+B present a phenomenon which make positioning very easy indeed. Throughout the plate extensive corrosion has taken place, no doubt through it having been left in a damp condition, which shows in the form of numerous coloured dots. They show particularly in the top and bottom margins, on the two larger 50s, and on the lettering of CONGO BELGE and BELGISCH CONGO. The location and pattern of the dots varies from position to position and it is a simple matter to scan the sheet for the pattern of dots which matches the pattern on an individual stamp. For the beginner in sheet positioning, the 1915 50c III3+B - a common stamp despite its elevated catalogue price - is an ideal stamp to start with.

III5+B

III5+B, found only with the Red Cross and AO issues, is the same as III4+B except for the addition of lay marks in the form of vertical lines between 17 and 18 and between 32 and 33, and dots between 17 and 18 and between 27 and 28.
