

## PLATING MOLS STAMPS

by B.P. HUDSON

### Part 9: 3½/3 francs

#### Introduction

Parts 1 to 8 of this series were issued with Bulletins 85 and 87 to 89. Part 1 provided a general introduction and parts 2 to 8 covered the 5 centimes to 1 franc. Part 9 and the remaining parts should be read in conjunction with part 1.

The 3½ francs, which was changed to 3fr in 1910, is the third highest of the ten Mols values. It is the scarcest of the ten values. Its principal use was for parcels; it was also used for registered packets and telegraph forms. When it is found on a normal-sized cover this probably suggests over-franking and therefore philatelic rather than bona fide postal usage.

The design was based on a drawing by Lieutenant Masui published in the book "D'Anvers à Banzyville" and showing part of a native village in the jungle on the caravan route.

#### Main issues

In the following table the number on the left is the Catalogue Official 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.

#### Belgian Congo

27	May	1898	3½fr vermilion	État Indépendant	23,200
37B	Jan.	1909	3½fr vermilion	Congo Belge Brussels	100
37L	Jan.	1909	3½fr vermilion	Congo Belge local	5,300
47	Jan.	1909	3½fr vermilion	Congo Belge typo	22,400
47P	Mar.	1909	3½fr vermilion	Princes unoverprinted	100
47PB	Mar.	1909	3½fr vermilion	Princes Brussels	250
47PT	Mar.	1909	3½fr vermilion	Princes typo	4,650
61	Jan.	1910	3fr vermilion	Bilingual	125,000
92	July	1921	3fr vermilion	Recuperation overprint (on 61)	69,500



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### Plate combinations

1898	I+A	Original frame and centre plates
1910	III+A	New frame plate
	II2+A	Frames retouched

There has been only one change from the nomenclature first introduced by Du Four. Because of corrosion which appeared on the centre plate before the Princes printing, he divided this plate into two states A1 and A2. Corrosion is not now regarded as creating a new state of the plate.

### Identifying the plate combinations

1898. Princes stamps can be recognised by the shade of the centres, which are brownish-black rather than grey-black as in the 1898 issue. Princes typo stamps can also be recognised by the constant varieties in the typo overprint - see page 10 of part 1.

1910. In III+A the horizontal shading in the top panel of the frame is rather weak, especially in the top line. In II2+A these lines were partly retouched. In some positions the retouching shows clearly with marked thickening of the lines or burin escapes. In other positions III1 and II2 are hard to tell apart. Where the horizontal lines seem the same, II2 is sometimes indicated by a thickening at the top of the left and right vertical framelines.

### Varieties

The following sections list the varieties of plate combination, shade, overprint and perforation known for each issue of the 3½ and 3 francs. The list covers 'normal' stamps only; errors and curiosities such as imperf-between pairs are excluded.

The Princes and 1910 issues were printed on paper watermarked in large outline letters "JAS WRIGLEY & SON Ld - 219". Many collectors distinguish between stamps which show a portion of this watermark, which appears twice in each sheet, and those which do not. The listing below does not make this distinction.

Unlike all the other values, there are no significant shade variations in the 3½fr or 3fr issues.

The middle column of the listing indicates the overprint or surcharge type. For handstamped Congo Belge overprints, B = Brussels, L = Local.



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Each variety is followed by a two-letter code in brackets. This code gives my 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 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

### 1898

I+A p14(CB), p12x14(EE), p14x12(EE)  
I+A Princes p14(EX)

### 1909 Congo Belge handstamp

I+A	B1	p14(EE)
I+A	B2	p14(DE)
I+A	B5	p14(EE)
I+A	B6	p14(EE)
I+A	L1	p14(DC)
I+A	L2	p14(DC)
I+A	L3	p14(DD)
I+A	L4	p14(DC)
I+A	L5	p14(DC)
I+A	L6	p14(DD)
I+A	L7	p14(DD)
I+A Princes	B2	p14(EX)

Forged overprints are found. Du Four also reports B3 and L8, but neither Ray Keach nor I can confirm these.

### 1909 Congo Belge typo

I+A p14(CB)  
I+A Princes p14(DC)

### 1910 bilingual

II1+A p14(BA)  
II2+A p14(CD)

### 1921 Recuperation

II1+A p14(CD)  
II2+A p14(BA)

This gives a total of 22 varieties of the 3½fr and 3fr.

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### GUIDES TO POSITIONING

The following pages 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. They also describe the more difficult positions in each sheet where the plater is most likely to experience problems.

#### I+A

Compared with the other values, relatively few sheets of the 1898 3½fr were printed. This had two consequences: first, both frame and centre plates present a clean appearance; second, the flaws that are visible show little change throughout the printings. The only exception is that by the time of the Princes printing in 1909 a number of additional flaws had appeared, including one corrosion mark on the frame plate and two on the centre plate that are classified as Balasse varieties.

There are no lay marks on either plate. Until the Princes printing, constant varieties on the centre plate are negligible. The most noticeable are the faint vertical guidelines that appear in the middle of the upper part of the stamp, but they are not much help in positioning since they appear in much the same location on most positions of the sheet.

The frame plate, on the other hand, gives considerable help to platers despite its clean appearance. Although they are often very fine, the flaws show up well under the magnifying glass because of the strong vermilion colour of the stamps. They have been well documented in J.M.Frenay's study and on pages 1 to 7 of Bulletin 33; indeed the illustrations on page 7 of the latter, which bring all 50 positions together, are so good that this stamp is an exception to the rule that it is inadvisable to attempt plating without a complete sheet to hand. Since complete sheets of the 3½fr are hard and costly to obtain, this is just as well.

The most prominent frame plate varieties are the following. In 3 the bottom left corner is missing (Balasse V3). In 11 the top frameline is missing on the left (Balasse V5). In 32 there is a thick horizontal line crossing the bottom of EP in INDEPENDANT (Balasse V4). In 43 the bottom left and bottom right corners are doubled.

The most common variety takes the form of fine horizontal or near-horizontal scratches in the top or bottom margins or between the top framelines. These marks are found in the top margin in 2,5,7,17,28,31,37,38,44 and 45; between the top framelines in 4,6,7,10,17,25,28,33,37,38,40,44 and 48; and in the bottom margin in 2,8,14,15,16,18,22,23,26,31,34,38,39,41,43,45,46,47 and 50. In 16, 19,20 and 39 there is a dot just in the bottom margin under the N of CINQ. There are few guidelines visible in the margins of the stamps, the main exceptions being a horizontal line leaving the top right corner in 1 and 13 and a vertical line through the N of CINQ in 27 and 42.

I consider the most difficult positions to be 12 (short red dash just visible in the top of the C of FRANCS); 26 (two red dots close together in the middle of the

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stamp, plus faint short scratches in the bottom margin); and 36 (traces of vertical red line in the right side of the S of FRANCS).

The most prominent flaws which appeared with the Princes printing are frame plate blotches in the bottom left corner of 50 (Balasse V6) and 45; in 22, an elongated black mark just to the right of the tall palms (Balasse V1) and 45; and in 40, a large black spot under the base of the rightmost short palm. These last two flaws persist in the 1910 issue which used the same centre plate.

### III+A and II2+A

III+A would be a difficult stamp to position but for one invaluable feature. In all positions of the sheet except 28 and the bottom row, a guide dot appears a little below the bottom left corner (similar dots are visible in the 1910 10fr, but only in about half a dozen positions of the sheet). These dots vary in size and location: in rows 4,5,6 and 9, for instance, they are close to the corner; in rows 1,2,3 and 8 they are relatively far away. In positions 1,3,4,5,38,39 and 40 a short horizontal line passes through or close to the dot.

Other varieties worth mentioning are the horizontal coloured scratches in many positions in the top or bottom margins (particularly the latter), and the vertical guideline between the left framelines in 2,6,7,10,20,22,23,26,32,37,42, 43,44,47 and 50.

The large centre plate flaws which first appeared with the Princes printing are also present in the 1910 stamps. In addition, numerous faint black scratches are found in the centre vignettes of the 1910 issue, no doubt as a result of cleaning. If the red dot under the bottom left corner is concealed by the perforations, these scratches are the main aid to positioning stamps from III+A.

II2 was formed by retouching around the top framelines. In some positions this is pronounced and shows, for instance, as a prominent burin escape. In others the retouching is almost imperceptible. Thickening or burin escapes are visible towards the left end in 5,14,24,31,33,36 and 37; left of centre in 9,10,14, 23,26,32 and 44; at the centre in 11,10,18,20 and 41; right of centre in 1,19,25,27,33,43 and 49; and towards the right end in 40. III1 and II2 are hard to tell apart in positions 2,3,6,7,12,13,21,22 and 37.

Although it may be difficult to distinguish III1 from II2, no sheet position as such is classified as difficult, provided the red guide dot is visible.