

TESTS AND TRIALS OF STANDING HELVETIAS**ROBERTO LOPEZ**

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A whole series of steps are required between the decision to issue a new stamp and its arrival for sale at post office counters. So it was for "Standing Helvetias".

We do not want to reinvent the wheel with this article. The goal is to bring this topic to the public. This topic is often avoided by collectors because it is not always easy to distinguish between an original and a fake. Not everyone has Pierre Guinand's book, "Standing Helvetia 1882-1907" published by Zumstein & Cie in Bern in 1982, but this book is a must if you want to enter this area. We will use the terminology thus established in this book.

The definition of the terms "test" and "trial" is essential so that everyone uses the same language.

The test (PD) refers to prints that are directly related to the stamps issued. So they test the colour, the printing technique, the paper used, the general appearance of the pattern and quality of design. You can imagine that the sketches, usually large, will not have the same effect when the size is reduced. For the same reasons, it is necessary to test the colour and paper to be used before final printing.

The trial (ES) is for non-approved projects.

We do not pretend to present the full testing and trials with this article, but to show you the main outline.

Let's start with the tests. At the beginning, we find projects and sketches. These are the first projects and drawings produced by the artist, including handcrafted tests.



PD 66.1.01



PD 67.1.02



These pieces (above left) date from 1880 and 1881, and are pencil sketches enhanced by red ink, sketches engraved on copper and on buff paper, or single pieces with a handwritten indication.

The tests (above right) were carried out with a mother die (a kind of letterpress printing) to print the image. You can see that the image is mirrored and the upper and lower sections are not coloured.

Among the isolated tests, we find pieces printed in intaglio on heavy paper or cardboard. They were produced until 1881 by Müllhaupt and Son, and from 1891 by Max Girardet. The engraving is similar or comparable to the final format.

The first tests were printed in 1881 intaglio on white cardboard, but without the upper cartridges (first two images below left). In the same year, the design was modified, the cartridges were now in the upper corners. These tests come in different colours (other images below right).



Grey, unlisted



Grey, unlisted



PD 67.2.02a



PD 67.2.02d



PD 67.2.02f

The next isolated tests were prints of the original engraving on cardboard (see below).



PD 76.2.04c



PD 76.2.04g



PD 93.2.04b

The test print enables the printing plate to be tested in intaglio (complete or partial). The two above-mentioned printers delivered proof printings. They come in all values from 20 cents to 3 francs. All these tests were in black (see below).



PD 69.3.01a



PD 72.3.01a



PD 76.3.01a

The two printing tests come from an unaccepted printing plate (see below).



PD 93.3.01a



PD 93.3.02a

In order to test and compare the colour to be finally adopted for the stamp on sale at the counters, colour tests were performed (see below).



PD 66.4.01a



and reverse



PD 71.4.02a



and reverse

Below is a block of ten of a colour proof of a non-accepted sheet (positions 81-95 of a plate of 100 stamps).



Illustrated below is a set of five vertical strips of three copies of 20, 25, 40, 50 cents and 1 franc, non-perforated in the colours finally adopted. These strips are bonded to a sheet of paper. Of the five bands, the 20, 25 and 40 cents bear a wide, oval watermark. The 50 cents and 1 franc have no watermark. This piece came from a Director General of the PTT who had “made order” in the PTT archives.



PD 66.4.01a PD 67.4.01a PD 69.4.01a PD 70.4.03a PD 71.4.03a

In order to see which paper was suitable for printing, different prints were made on paper of various kinds. These are the paper tests. There exist therefore pieces on paper laid horizontally with portions of large letters as a watermark (the brand of the factory). These tests in intaglio were conducted by Müllhaupt and Sons.

The laid paper (or “papier vergé”) is a high quality paper with a watermark of fine, horizontal parallel lines. These impressions are due to the paper being made on a wooden mould or frame with a cover of closely-spaced parallel laid wires fastened to wider-spaced, stronger chain wires running at right angles. This forms a sieve through which the water drains during the paper making process, producing a paper with a slightly ribbed surface on one side. You can see these white horizontal lines in the image on the right.



PD 70.5.01a

The purpose of the perforation tests was to control and adjust the harrows. The illustrations below show five perforation and colour tests that are not listed in the aforementioned book from 1882.



There were also cancellation tests. These cancellations were made on the tests on original paper or not, in order to test the appearance and safety of the ink.

A test cancelled on a fragment is shown (right). This is a colour proof (PD 68.4.03b) cancelled with the stamp of Berne 28.1.92 (Güller No. 9271). This test is mentioned in the catalogue Zumstein 1924 under No. 240, it is not however in the 1982 book.

Let’s discuss trials. The house Müllhaupt & Fils in Berne printed the 20 and 25 cents “Libertas” type trials at the request of the PTT on 20th November 1880. Only isolated prints of these two values are official trials. The 50 cent and 1 franc values appearing later were made with plates made up by private electroplating sources. You will find all imaginable colours, all types of paper available to printers, perforated or not perforated.



PD 68.4.03b

All these products have no philatelic value. We differentiate between individual trials and trial prints. Shown below are some individual trials - Left: three examples of Type trial "Libertas" centre and framing in type I. Centre: three examples of Type trial "Libertas" centre and framing in type II. Right - Type trial "Libertas" in type III.



The type trial "Serment du Rütli" shown below was a design inspired by Ernst Stückelberg that you can find in the Tell Chapel on the banks of Lake Lucerne.



The trial type "Rütli" shown below was designed by A. Zschiesche, engraved by Keller-Kehr and printed by Müllhaupt et Fils in Bern.



The three pieces illustrated below, are examples of printing trials.



The three items below are "Libertas" types from private provenance so without any philatelic value. You can find them, en masse, perforated, not perforated, of all colours and on all kinds of paper imaginable. The origin of the Paris Reprints is similar to the origin of the "Libertas" of 50 cents and 1 franc. Müllhaupt et Fils, or his successor, crafted plates in order to produce private printings. Max Girardet unfortunately also contributed to the flooding of the market with this commodity. These private reprints are made (probably still today) with two plates whose production was interrupted after a measurement error was noticed. These items are wrongly called "Girardet trials". Like the "Libertas", these pieces are also from private sources without any philatelic value.



The item shown below left measures 27x17cm. It is on a thick paper and represents the unfinished plates of Max Girardet. The preparation was not completed because the intervals in the framework would not allow complete punching of the stamp perforations. The question we must ask is this: Why would Girardet have made on a single sheet, imprints of two unfinished plates which he did not complete? Remember that no stamp was produced from either of these two plates.



The plates of the Paris reprints can be identified with the help of the piece in blue (above, right). This facilitates the identification of those pieces that are, let us remember it again, without philatelic value.

We urge you to submit the pieces to experts, in order not to be made a "fool" of by malicious merchants.

The following table will allow you to classify the tests and trials. For more information, we advise you to consult the work of Pierre Guinand 1982 where you will find more details.

Tests

Projects and sketches
Isolated tests
Print test
Colour tests
Paper tests
Perforation tests
Cancellation tests

Trials

Isolated trials
Print trials

"Libertas" from private sources

Reprints of Paris ("Girardet Trials")

Literature and References:

"Standing Helvetia 1882-1907", P. Guinand, G. Valko, J. Doorenbos, Mr. Hertsch, Zumstein and Publishing Co., Bern, 1982.

"Zürich 4 + 6 tests, Probedrucke und Fälschungen" Ch. Hertsch, Philatelic Journal of Bern, pp.1-2, 2015.

"Die Briefmarken der Schweiz-Spezial-Katalog" Zumstein et Cie Editions, Bern, 1924.

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