

# Sperati Confederate Forgeries

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

The name “Sperati” leaps off the page to those in every aspect of philately, for this forger produced incredibly deceptive likenesses of stamps from across the globe. His fascinating story has been told in countless philatelic publications for decades.

Jean de Sperati was born Giovanni Desperati in Pisa, Italy, in 1884, although he lived most of his life in France where he Francophiled his name Jean. Sperati was clever in that he chemically removed the design off genuine but low value stamps and then printed his new design on the altered but genuine stamp paper. His forgeries are so superior that even today, with wide dissemination of his methods and published details of the tell-tale signs, these stamps are still mistakenly offered on the market as genuine by the most experienced of philatelists.

Sperati created what he called a *Livre d’Or* of which he boasted in his autography and which contained examples of his work that had received favorable opinions from leading experts. He is arguably the most well-known of all philatelic forgers and boasted the highest skill set.

He became the subject of international publicity in the 1942 when he sent an approval selection to a dealer in Lisbon. Customs agents opened the package and discovered what appeared to be valuable stamps. Sperati was charged and brought to trial for violating a law forbidding the exportation of substantial sums of capital from France. The stamps were turned over to a local philatelic society that estimated their worth at tens of thousands of francs. Sperati protested the findings were inaccurate. In 1943, the Court of Appeal submitted the stamps to a recognized authority who felt they were all genuine and with a value of over 300,000 francs. In 1944, Dr. Edmond Locard scoffed at Sperati’s claim that they were “artistic copies.” Eventually, Sperati proved his case and was convicted of a very minor charge and given a token fine. By this time, his notoriety in philatelic circles was at its peak.

In 1953, fearing the worst for the hobby, the British Philatelic Association approached him and bought out all of the forgeries that he had in stock, as well as his dies and reference collections. The BPA had those forgeries backstamped, as shown in Figure 5. Sperati forgeries are very collectable in their own right and the Confederate issues he created often fetch near the full price of the genuine. Some forgeries have sold for far more than the original stamp. When Sotheby’s sold a collection of 1,500 known Sperati forgeries in 2007, one sold for £3,270 (roughly \$5,250 in today’s U.S. dollars).

The most deceptive forgeries of the Confederate States general issues were done by Jean de Sperati. Fortunately, he only forged two issues, the CSA 5, 10¢ rose lithograph, and CSA 9, 10¢ blue intaglio, known to specialists as the “T-E-N” (pronounced TEE-EE-NN) because the value is spelled out. Other Confederate 10¢

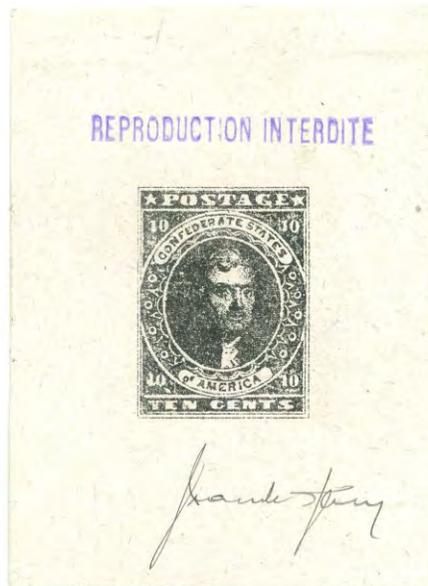
engraved issues have the value expressed as “10 CENTS.”

He also produced a number of fake cancels which he used not only on his own designs but on genuine Confederate stamps as well. Some Confederate issues are scarcer used than unused, such as CSA 8 the 2¢ brown red Andrew Jackson, and CSA 13, the 20¢ green George Washington. They are the issues generally seen with fake Sperati cancels.

The CSA 5, 10¢ rose lithograph is rare in its own right. Figure 1 shows a genuine CSA 5, compared to Figure 2, a Sperati forgery. On the forgery, the star at the top right has a dot of color in it. The value “10” below the right star is malformed. It is smaller than the zero and under magnification; it appears as a “3.” The “1” of the lower left “10” has a color flaw at the bottom; a colorless flaw appears below and slightly to the right of the “0” and above the “E” of “TEN.”



Figure 1, Genuine CSA 5 (left) Figure 2, Sperati Forgery (right)



Sperati CSA 5 Signed “Proof”



Figure 3 Genuine T-E-N, Figure 4 type A Sperati Forgery

The color of the T-E-N forgery is close to the original and easily confused with genuine issues. The forgeries have a "flat" look when compared with a known genuine copy. There are three recorded types of T-E-N Sperati forgeries (Readers are urged to refer to: Robson Lowe, Carl Walske. *The Work of Jean de Sperati II Including Previously Unlisted Forgeries*. 2001, London: Royal Philatelic Society London.). There are uncanceled stamps with and without gum, canceled stamps with a variety of bogus Sperati cancellations and large die proofs in both blue and black on different types of paper, many of which are proudly signed by Sperati. He justifiably considered himself a consummate artist.

Figure 3. Genuine CSA 9, 10¢ blue "T-E-N." The dot that serves as the cross-bar of the "e" of "The" is very lightly printed.

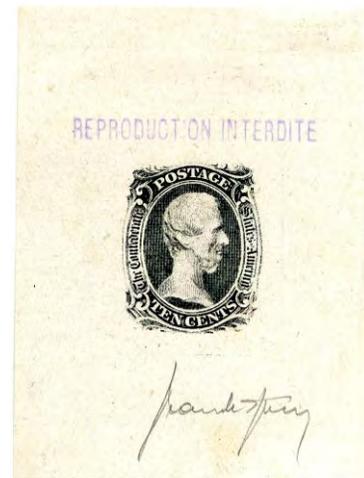
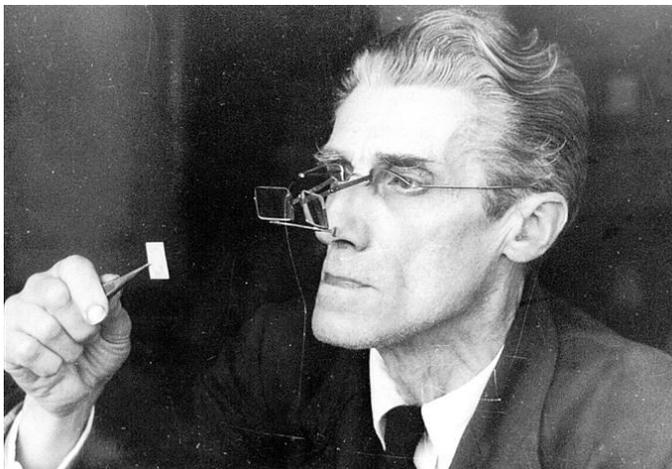


Figure 5 – Sperati and his CSA 9 signed "Proof"

Figure 4, CSA 9, Type A, has a small colorless dot that appears in the dark area between "Confederate" and "POSTAGE;" a second colorless flaw appears just after the "E" of "POSTAGE;" and the "e" of "The" is completely missing the dot which serves as a cross-bar. The latter is a universal trait of all types, as well as the flat appearance of the printing. Figure 4 also shows an example of the Sperati

Reproduction handstamp on the back of a Type A; applied by the British Philatelic Association.

Figure 5. Sperati and his T-E-N “Proof” with signature. He sometimes signed his work, as well as handstamp REPRODUCTION INTERDIE on this Sperati die proof.



Figure 6 – T-E-N with fake cancel

Figure 6. An example of a CSA 9 Type B forgery with a bogus “NEW PAID [YORK] / JUL / 10” postmark. Sperati’s grasp of U.S. geography and history was obviously not as good as his artistic skill. The New York cancel, clearly not a Confederate States marking, is clearly even more of a give-away than the uncanceled forgeries.

When you know what to look for, the Sperati Confederate forgeries are fairly simple to identify.

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& Postal History**

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