

# POST WWI STAMP FORGERIES



## Erivan

This was the first designed set printed in the Armenian capital for the Armenian S.S.R. Although created closer to the postal market, inflation made it instantly obsolete. It was not used but still is listed in Scott. Zakian says that each stamp was printed in quantities of 427,500 except for the 500 ruble at 882,000 and the 1000 ruble at 810,000. The set was later overprinted with higher values, which were used for postage. Two different paper colors, white and yellowish, were used. A table is needed to tell what is what.

Paper colors for the first Erivan set.

Scott No.	rubles	color	Color of the Paper	
			white	yellowish
300	50	green & red	genuine	fake
301	300	blue & buff	genuine	genuine
302	400	blue & pink	genuine	fake
303	500	violet & lilac	genuine	fake
304	1,000	blue & lt. blue	genuine	fake
305	2,000	black & gray	genuine	fake
306	3,000	black & green	genuine	fake
307	4,000	black & brown	fake	genuine
308	5,000	black & red	fake	genuine
309	10,000	black & rose	genuine	fake

In this set, the stamps printed on white paper only were: 50 ruble, 400, 500, 1,000, 2,000, 3,000 and 10,000. The 4,000 ruble and 5,000 were printed only on yellow paper. The 300 ruble was

printed on both white and yellow. A stamp can be ruled a fake if it was printed on the wrong paper. If printed on the right paper, that does not guarantee it being genuine. Fakes were printed on both kinds of paper.



Left: **Armenian SSR, 1922, Erivan**

Left: Scott 300.

Top 2nd: The genuine star is not symmetrical and the bottom two points look undernourished.

Top 3rd: The fake has two fat points at the bottom of the star.

4th: Scott 301.

5th: The genuine sky above the mountains and around the star has white streaks in the gold background.

Right: The fake sky is a solid gold color.



Left: **Armenian SSR, 1922, the Erivan issue**, Scott 302.

2nd: A look at the genuine lower left center shows two clean white channels running around the inscription.

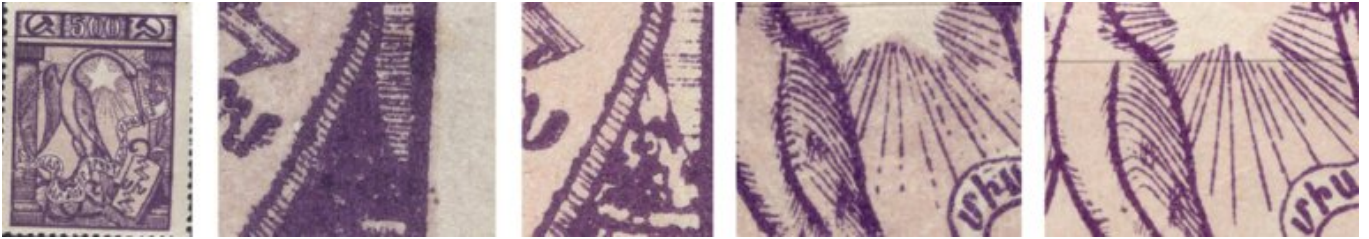
3rd: This fake shows a blue blob in the inner white channel. If this shows up, it means a fake. But this marker occurs only half the time or maybe less.

4<sup>th</sup>: The genuine hammer and sickle shows a faint background line between the two.

5<sup>th</sup>: The fake has the sickle shifted sideways so a larger break occurs on the top of the hammer handle.

6<sup>th</sup>: The genuine writing has the comma directly below the ball of the "r."

Right: The fake has the comma shifted just to the right of the ball of the "r."



Left: **Armenian SSR, 1922, the Erivan issue**, Scott 303.

2<sup>nd</sup>: Behind the stone slab at the lower right, there is a dark shadow on the genuine stamp.

3<sup>rd</sup>: The fake has well-lighted rubble behind the slab.

4<sup>th</sup>: The genuine rays descend into dashes.

Right: The fake rays are unbroken.



Left: **Armenian SSR, 1922, the Erivan issue**, Scott 304.

2<sup>nd</sup>: In the area above the left shoulder of the harpy, there is water and an island with a cone-shaped structure. The genuine stamp has a few lines drawing the water and the cone-shaped building is all colored in.

3<sup>rd</sup>: The fake has many lines crossing the water and the cone building on the island is not colored in.

4<sup>th</sup>: Scott 305, the harpy.

5<sup>th</sup>: In the sky just to the left of the harpy's face, the genuine stamp has a few dashed lines.

Right: The fake, clearly so because it is on yellowish paper, has skylines that are straight and uninterrupted.



Left: **Armenian SSR, 1922, the Erivan issue**, Scott 306.

2<sup>nd</sup>: We look at the sky to the right of the sower's right shoulder, where horizontal lines are drawn.

The genuine stamp has gaps in the lines both above and below his elbow.

3<sup>rd</sup>: The fake has the paper color right but has uninterrupted horizontal lines both above and below the elbow.

4th: Armenian SSR, 1922, the Erivan issue, Scott 307. This was issued only on yellow paper.

5th: The genuine stamp has thin sun-rays and a mottled sky.

Right: The fake has dark sun-rays and a smooth sky.



Left: **Armenian SSR, 1922, the Erivan issue**, Scott 308. This was issued only on yellow paper.

2nd: The genuine round bottom of the forge, pointing toward the viewer, has two strong lines curving in an arc.

3rd: The fake curved arc of the forge has the two strong lines, with a third weaker one in between.

4th: Armenian SSR, 1922, the Erivan issue, Scott 309. This was issued only on white paper.

5th: The lowest genuine skyline starts at the left and dies out.







Right: The lowest fake skyline runs all the way across and touches the horn of the ox.

## Inflation

Inflation continued to climb and the Erivan stamps were overprinted with numbers in the tens to hundreds of thousands of rubles. Recall that the pre-war postal rates were in kopecks, which were and are like cents for us, whereas rubles are like dollars. Below, I list only the cheapest and most common of these stamps, all of which have black overprints. This was the last desperate measure to live with the old currency. Besides black, red and violet overprints are mentioned in the catalog, but these are likely scarce.

Scott numbers for **Armenia inflation** stamps. The prices are not necessarily accurate but show that black is more common than violet, which is more common than red.

Scott cat. No.	denomination	overprt color	Catalog value \$	Scott cat. No.	denomination	overprt color	Catalog value \$
328	200,000r on 4000r	violet	12	312	10,000r on 50r	black	30
329	200,000r on 4000r	black	12	315	15,000r on 300r	black	30
333	500,000r on 10,000r	black	12	317	25,000r on 400r	black	30

323	50,000r on 1000r		25	320	30,000r on 500r		30
327	100,000r on 2000r		25	324	75,000r on 3000r		30
331	300,000r on 5000r		25		other violets		60 to 90
					other reds		90 to 120



**Armenia Inflation** Issue, Scott 310-333. These genuine stamps were crudely overprinted at a time of desperation. All but one shown here came from Mr. Pateman, but the 15,000 ruble stamp has no pedigree. Overall, it appears that

- 1) The "1's" have serifs top and bottom but nothing else does.
- 2) The "0's" are a bit square and some of the numbers appear to trail off rising upward on the right.



**Armenia Inflation** Issue, Scott 310-333.

Left: The violet number is too well-printed to be real and the sky behind it is solid, so the basic stamp is also a fraud.

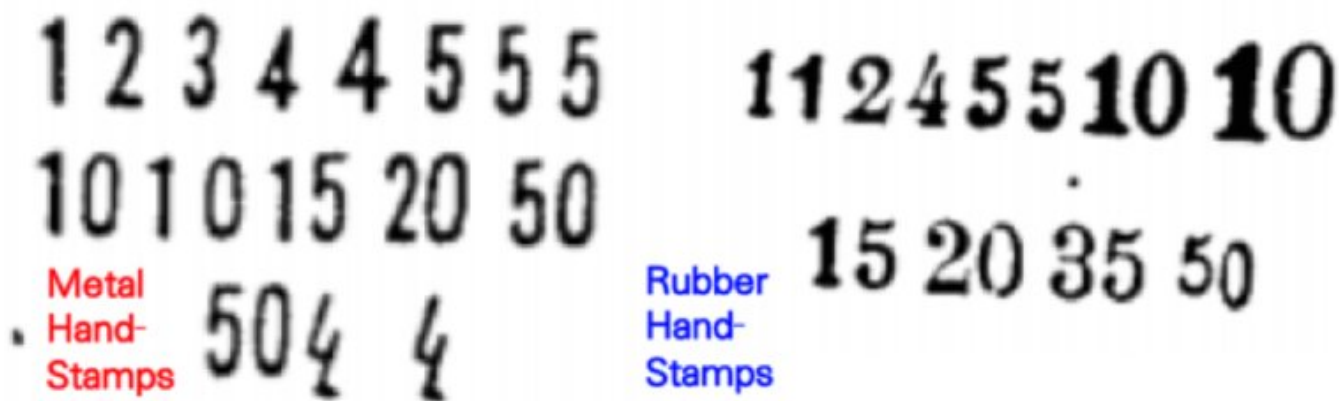
The rest are printed on genuine stamps. Any color but black is suspicious and red and violet show up a lot on eBay. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> one, the "5" looks different from the black versions above. The third purple one has a "1" that seems too high. The 4<sup>th</sup> black one has a ball on the "2" and rather rounded "0's." The right is a purple mishmash where the forger didn't even look at the real thing.

### Gold Kopeck Essayen

The first Essayen stamps were designed to go to 25,000 rubles but the inflation outran that by the time they arrived in Armenia. In the previous section, we saw huge numbers overprinted onto the Erivan stamps. In 1922, the Bolsheviks did what everybody does in this case- put out new money, which they claimed was based on gold. It took two years to replace the money supply in Russia, but their attempt to change the postal currency in Armenia came quickly in February, 1922. They took some of the first Essayen stamps and overprinted by hand-stamp just numbers, which were

supposed to represent kopecks, so that the new postal rates should have dropped by a huge amount.

According to Zakian, there are 29 different overprints in 10 denominations made from both metal and rubber hand-stamps. The metal overprints have no serifs, except for a small one on the "1's," but the rubber ones have large ones on everything. The 3 kopeck overprint was used only with the metal stamp and the 35 only with rubber. Otherwise, there are multiple versions.



Summary of the Inflation overprints done with both metal and rubber hand-stamps from Zakian. The metal numbers have no serifs except for the "1's." The rubber stamps have large serifs. The kopeck symbol on the 50 looks like a "4."

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The first thing to look for on a gold stamp is whether the underlying stamp is genuine. If it is a fake, then the overprint must be forged and about half of the common market can be thrown out at this point. We want to consider only the ones with genuine underlying stamps.



These are four of the five most commonly found gold kopecks, all with genuine underlying

stamps, using overlays and description from Messrs. Berger and Pateman material. The second is rubber-stamped; the other three are metal-stamped.

Top row: 35 kopecks on the 20,000 ruble maroon monster.

Top left and 2<sup>nd</sup>: Berger's genuine overprint and overlay. The real one has crisp edges, a flag on top of the "5" going thick to thin, a long center bar on the "3," and big balls on both numbers. It is an elegant-looking number.

Top 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>: Recent eBay fakes which look very different and certainly show up using the overlay.

Next: 50 kopecks on the 25,000 ruble blue Mt. Ararat. The "4" at the end is the kopeck symbol.

Top right: Overlay for the genuine 50 kopeck.

Middle left: The genuine 50 k overprint is glossy black. The "0" is squarer than the forgery.

Middle 2<sup>nd</sup>: This is the most common forgery and the ink is a dull gray-black. The "0" is rounder and the whole thing fails the overlay test. This appears on both genuine and fake underlying stamps.

Next: 20 kopecks on the 500 ruble brown Mt. Ararat. 3<sup>rd</sup>: Overlay.

Middle 4<sup>th</sup>: The genuine number is glossy black and there are two breaks in the "0."

Middle right: The ink is much fainter and there is only one break in the "0." Although it fits the overlay, the zero tilts slightly to the right, so I think this is a forgery.

Bottom left: On this forgery, the printing is very light and there are no breaks in the "0." The background has been lightened.

Next: 15 kopecks on the 250 ruble blue bird. They are hard to see with black on dark blue, so computer enhancement is used. 2<sup>nd</sup>: Overlay.

Bottom 3<sup>rd</sup>: This is Berger's perfect genuine overprint.

Bottom 4<sup>th</sup>: This is a highly-inked genuine stamp, where the ink bulges way outside the overlay.

Bottom right: The printing of this forgery is poor, the bottom serif of the "1" tilts and the top flag of the "5" is too short. Forgeries tend to have a grayer color that blends into the dark blue background. Also, they do not fit into the overlay.

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I ran a search of the common market websites. The four shown in figure above are the most common. The 50-on-500 orange soldier is the other. My current estimate of the number of genuine among the four common ones shown above is about 12% with genuine backgrounds. If we counted in the fake stamps, the number probably drops to 5%.

