

The control numbers of the Large Hermes Heads' 80l denomination in the year 1863

The 80l denomination of the Large Hermes Heads (LHH) which circulated within 1863 is notable for the wide variety of its Control Number (CN) colors. In this article, we will examine their circulation within that year, focusing on the more "difficult" examples with rose-colored CNs and the four major post offices of the period—Athens, Piraeus, Syros, and Patras, from where we have examples canceled with a type II cancelation, many of which give us valuable information about their dates of issue.

While all other denominations were already being printed in trial and coarse printings in Athens and were in regular circulation starting late 1861/early 1862, the 80l Athens-printed denomination became available only starting in mid-1862 onwards, directly with a fine printing outcome. The most obvious reason is that the 80l represented a denomination that was not often used at the time and, as such, the stock of the preceding Parisian 80l issues lasted much longer than that of other denominations.

80l with orange CNs (Const. 26a, Hellas 21)

From mid-1862 and well into 1863, there was wide circulation of the 80l stamps with the orange CNs, in various shades (figure 1). Due to their infrequent use, they remained in stock in regional offices until they were exhausted, depending on the area and frequency of their use. The first 80l LHHs with the orange CNs began to circulate in June 1862, according to the Constantinides' "Study" (*Étude sur les timbres de Grèce*) while the Parisian 80l stamps were already circulating (and would continue for many months after). The earliest known circulation date of these 80l is June 5, 1862 (on cover, according to the Study¹—off-cover, according to Kohl's handbook).²

80l with rose CNs (part of Const. 26b, Hellas 22A)

In March 1863, the first 80l with rose CNs began to appear, in parallel circulation with the ones with orange CNs. The earliest such example that I know of appears to have circulated from the Piraeus PO on March 18 or 28, 1863.³ It is a typical deep carmine copy with a vertically laid background (Figure 2). I'm not aware of any other clearly-canceled copies with rose-colored CNs from this PO so I can't speculate up until when it circulated there. Piraeus has not been mentioned in philatelic literature as a PO where rose-colored LHHs were used, thus it is likely that very few sheets circulated from there. In May 1863, we also have the first copies with rose CNs from Athens and Syros (Image 3). It is possible that they

¹ Constantinides, T. *Étude sur les timbres-poste de Grèce*. Athens, Greece: Hellenic Philatelic Society, 1933, p. 315.

² Kohl, Paul. *Translations from Kohl's Handbook—Greece*. New York: Collectors Club Philatelist, 1943–1950, p. 78.

³ Papitsis, D. *The Large Hermes Heads of Greece—Deciphering These Magnificent Classical Stamps*. WA, USA, 2024, p.93.

were used there earlier, but I have not found anything in philatelic literature or by personal observation. At the Athens PO, copies of the rose-colored CNs circulated at least until August, at the same time as those with orange CNs.

At the Patras post office, copies with rose CNs started circulating during the summer and up to December of 1863 (image 4); I have also seen copies stamped as late as early 1864.

No copies with rose-colored CNs have been mentioned as circulating from any PO other than the four mentioned at the beginning of the article.

80l with carmine colored CNs (part of Const. 26b, Const. 33, Hellas 22)

From August/September onwards, circulation of the 80l with carmine CNs (figure 5) begins at the major post offices—except Syros, where they appeared earlier, in May 1863, around the same time (perhaps a little later) that the LHHs with rose CNs.

It is worth noting that the date of first circulation given by the “Study” for the 80l with carmine-colored CNs (no. 26b, 4/6/62)⁴ is clearly wrong—not surprisingly, since it had been provided by DeSmeth, who had also made other, serious, classification errors related to first known days of circulation which were carried over to the “Study” and which have long plagued LHH researchers and collectors.

Comments/thoughts

Why was there such a large variation in CN colors of the specific denomination? The fact that there was a standardization of the LHH stamps in terms of the color of recto design and that of CN verso, perhaps gives an answer as to why the carmine-colored CNs finally prevailed, since this color was also used in the front design.

But this does not explain the initial choice of orange color and the short period of it changing to rose. Especially in the case of the “transitional” rose CNs, given the very short period in which they circulated, they can be considered as some form of experimentation or a wrong mixing of inks.

According to the distinguished LHH collector and researcher Yannis Peristanoglou, an explanation would be that the CNs were initially printed with rose ink mixed with orange, and the sheets were set aside to print either stamps of a different denomination or CNs of a different color; when time came to print the 80l stamps on the sheets that bore the CNs, new ink without orange admixture was used.

All the above are pending “proof” of relevant stamps on cover, but until (and if) this is possible we will have to make do with what is available in our collections.

I would like to thank Demos Iskos and Yannis Peristanoglou for their apt observations and additions.

⁴ Constantinides, T. *Étude sur les timbres-poste de Grèce*. Athens, Greece: Hellenic Philatelic Society, 1933, p. 315.



Figure 1



Figure 2 - back



Figure 2 - front



Figure 3 - back



Figure 3 - back



Figure 4 - back



Figure 4 - front



Figure 5