Stalin on Stamps, Covers, and Postcards: Philately at the Service of Dictatorship*

The dictator Joseph Stalin ruled the Soviet Union from 1929 until his death in March 1953 and was one of the central figures of 20th century history. His public image in different countries was shaped by their respective ideologies and politics, particularly in regards to Stalin’s leadership during WWII. This exhibit illustrates the representation of Stalin on various philatelic items – stamps, regular and first day covers, postcards, and USA patriotic covers. The collection of worldwide Stalin-related stamps is nearly complete. Historic research and commentary describe the political circumstances of Stalin’s appearance on stamps, postcards, and covers as well as original sources of images.

Content

**Soviet Union (Frames 1–2).** Stalin tightly controlled the use of his likeness on Soviet stamps because of their role in international propaganda. Although only one philatelic item (souvenir sheet) dedicated to Stalin personally was issued in his lifetime, he appeared on many stamps as a figure of utmost authority in official ideology. This part of the exhibit includes a collection of Stalin-related Soviet stamps, with many of them also shown on covers, as well as a selection of postcards depicting Stalin.

**Communist Countries (Frames 2–5).** Prolific use of Stalin’s image on philatelic items issued by communist countries served the purposes of propaganda and support of their own dictators. These issues reflected the specifics of particular regimes, their relations with the Soviet Union, and their attitude towards the denunciation of stalinism by Khrushchev in 1956.

**Rest of the World (Frame 5).** In the period between the beginning of WWII and Germany’s invasion of the USSR, Stalin had been perceived in Western Europe as an aggressor and manipulator, as illustrated by political caricatures on postcards. Germany used caricatures of Stalin for its own propaganda purposes.

**USA (Frame 6).** On American cachets, Stalin first appeared after Pearl Harbor as the leader of a major ally and later as a partner in the negotiations on post-war international relations. The triumvirate of Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin became a symbol of victory throughout the world.

After the onset of the Cold War in 1946, Stalin’s figure in the USA acquired two opposite meanings. For the mainstream public, it represented dictatorship and repression; for the left, it was an admired symbol of communist ideology. These changing perceptions are illustrated by cachets and postcards.

**Highlights**

★ Stalin on early postally used Soviet postcard (1926)  ★ Registered covers addressed to Stalin (1936-1937)
★ Anti-Stalin Catholic cinderella (1940)  ★ German postcard with Stalin caricature issued for occupied territories  ★ Registered postcard with the Victory triumvirate from Tel Aviv exhibit (1945)  ★ Stalin stamps on a rare Albania cover (1950)  ★ Study of Stalinallee definitive (GDR, 1953-1961)  ★ Extensive collection of Stalin-related US cachets

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Picture postcard showing young Stalin and sent from Moscow to Prague. Postmarks of Moscow central post office are dated 27.10.25, while the sender dated his message 25.10.26.

At that time Stalin was the Secretary General of the Party, and his main rival and harsh critic was Trotsky, a popular and powerful member of Politburo. By choosing this postcard, the sender, Czech lawyer Bohdan Bartoškov, demonstrated his political preference.

The sender wrote to his wife: “...I delivered a speech at the meeting of farmers... Tonight I am going to Jewish Theater, I hope I will understand a little bit. I visited the editorial board of the magazine “Atheist” and will give a lecture there...” Apparently, Mr. Bartoškov was a leftist activist of Jewish descent.

A year later, Trotsky was expelled from the Party and sent to exile.
The postcard shows Stalin with his famous pipe. It was sent from Moscow by a traveler who had some business with the University and then was planning to leave Russia for Finland by boat. The message is not ideological. The recipient was at a sanatorium in Bad Blankenburg in Thuringia, Germany.
1934. On Stalin’s 50th jubilee, December 21, 1929, the Soviet press proclaimed: “Stalin is the Lenin of today.” For the first time Stalin appeared on Soviet stamps in the spring of 1934 in this set commemorating ten years since the death of Lenin. The double profile of Stalin and Lenin on the 30 kop. stamp became the visual representation of the “Stalin is the Lenin of today” formula, the staple of communist propaganda.

1943. Stalin appeared with Lenin in a set commemorating 25 years of Bolshevik revolution. On the 5 kop. stamp, there is a worker under a banner with already familiar double profile and a slogan: “Under the banner of Lenin-Stalin – towards the victory over German invaders!” Separate profiles of the Bolshevik leaders also appeared on the 30 kop. stamp. Because of war time difficulties, this set was issued three months after the actual celebration, in January of 1943.

1944. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Lenin’s death, the set of 1934 was re-issued with new dates. Besides, two new stamps were added: one showing the Red Square and Lenin’s Mausoleum, and another – the top value of the set – the “Lenin-Stalin” stamp repeated in different colors.

1945. During WWII, the common battle cry of the Red Army was “For the Fatherland, for Stalin!” However, this slogan first appeared on a stamp only in April 1945, when the outcome of the war had been determined.
The postcard depicts Stalin as a fatherly figure, kind and confident. This image is typical for Soviet propaganda of 1930s, after the ascent of Stalin to dictatorial power.

Judging by the message in Danish, the postcard was sent by a casual traveler who visited Helsinki, Berlin, and Leningrad.
Registered letters to Stalin from Armenia. Upper letter was sent 10.01.36 from Yerevan; bottom letter was sent from Leninakan (now Gyumri) in March of 1937. The bottom letter was written by a semi-literate sender who addressed it to “Genius – Secretary Stalin” instead of “General Secretary Stalin.” Also, the letter was addressed to “Central Executive Committee,” in which Stalin never occupied any important position.
Registered letter sent by an ethnic German to International Red Cross in Geneva in December 1939 with transit postmark in Moscow and arrival postmark. Throughout 1920s and 30s ethnic Germans suffered ever growing repressions by Soviet regime. In December 1938, Russian Red Cross has been disbanded by the authorities, so the sender had little hope to obtain help from Geneva.

The letter is franked with a 80 kop. stamp “Stalin greets First Cavalry Army” (after a painting by M. Avilov). The painting was in line with the major falsification of the history of the Red Army, according to which it was created by Stalin, while in fact it was founded by Trotsky. The stamp exists in two sizes.

Correct rate was paid. Rectangular postmark in violet ink on the reverse – clandestine Soviet censorship.

Under the profiles of Stalin and Lenin, an article from “Stalin Constitution” of the USSR is quoted in Ukrainian: “Soviet citizens have the right to education.” The postcard was printed in L'vov, which was occupied by the Red Army after the division of Poland in accordance with the secret agreement between Stalin and Hitler.

The sender wrote in Ukrainian to his friend who had been recently drafted to the army and was serving in the Far East.
The upper letter was sent in 1950 to a prominent dealer of Russian stamps Maison Romeko (Dr. Serge Rockling). The postage for registered air mail is overpaid (3 rub. 30 kop. instead of 2 rub. 30 kop.) apparently to have the top value of the set postally used. The franking of the bottom letter sent from Riga to Glendale, CA, in 1957 is correct.
The postcard was sent from Moscow to Sharia (formerly Gorkii region) by an officer in training. It has a triangular military postmark allowing free mailing, a military censormark, and arrival CDS. The sender used a postcard issued in 1929. The message is not ideological.

The postcard reproduces Stalin's portrait by Isaac Brodsky (1928). Brodskii painted from a photograph made in 1926. From left to right: old Bolshevik Antipov (executed in 1941), Stalin, Kirov (assassinated on Stalin's order in 1934), and Shvernik.
The cover was mailed from Tallinn, Estonia, to Poland in 195[3]. The rate of 40 kop. was overpaid. The stamp was issued in 1946, and the same design was used for the postcard below. The postcard has a private note on the reverse dated 1947.
USSR, 1945-7

1945 and 1946. This medal was awarded to those who fought behind the enemy lines on the territory occupied by the Germans. It carries the “Lenin-Stalin” emblem and was included in two different sets.

1946, January. After the end of WWII, participants of the military operations received medals “For the victory over Germany,” while those who were employed at the home front received medals “For outstanding work effort during the war.” Both medals had Stalin’s profile on their face sides. One of the high values of the set shows a soldier with a flag also carrying Stalin’s profile. All stamps were printed with horizontal screen, except the one on the left which also exists with vertical screen.

1946, July. All-Union parade of physical culturists in Moscow. Young people carry Stalin’s portrait and the flags of sports clubs. Based on a photograph made in 1945.

1946, December. Back in 1940, Soviet government had introduced “Stalin award” for outstanding achievements in arts, sciences, engineering, etc. This stamp shows the medal.

1947, March. This stamp commemorated the International Women’s day and carried the “Lenin-Stalin” emblem. The slogan says: “Soviet women! Tighten your ranks around the party of Lenin and Stalin!”
Registered letter from Malyie Bereznytsey (Leningradskaya oblast') to Leningrad sent in 1948. Franking — "Pavilion of mechanization" from the "All-Union Agricultural Exhibition" set (1940). In front of the pavilion — sculpture of Stalin (sculptor S.D. Merkurov, 1939), one of the largest of its kind. It had to be demolished during WWII as it was a perfect landmark for German pilots.
The franking of the upper registered cover sent from Moscow to Baldwin, NY, in March 1946 includes the "Victory Medal" with Stalin profile issued two months earlier. The total postage is grossly overpaid: 3 rub. 35 kop. instead of 1 rub. 50 kop.

The bottom registered letter sent from Riga to Finland 17.5.1950 is franked, among others, by a "Stalin-Lenin" stamp (29 years of October revolution, 1946). Soviet monetary reform of 1947 did not affect the values of stamps. The postage is slightly overpaid (1 rub. 40 kop. Instead of 1 rub. 30 kop.). Arrival postmark.
This registered cover was sent in 1947 to Miss Kathleen M. Hempel in Elkader, IA (the name of the town is misspelled). Although the letter was sent from Moscow, the return address is in Prague. Probably the sender was not familiar with Soviet postal tariffs, and the rate was grossly overpaid (5 rub. 10 kop. instead of 2 rub. 30 kop.).
Postcard “February 9, 1947, - Everybody cast Votes at the election to Supreme Soviet of RSFSR!” Judging by the message (in Hungarian), the sender was an activist in a Labor Union, who came to the USSR for training. The message indicates ideological motives of the sender’s choosing of the postcard and the stamp. Franking – imperforate “Lenin-Stalin” stamp from the “Twenty Nine Years of October Revolution” set (1946).