

The Austrian Newspaper Tax

This is an introduction to a complex subject, which is explained in considerable detail in an essay [[CLICK HERE](#)] and an 8-frame international exhibit [[CLICK HERE](#)]

Introduction

The Austrian government was perennially short of money, and between 1 July 1789 & 31 Dec 1899 they instituted various systems of levying a tax on newspapers and magazines. Initially, payment was shown by a “signet” imprinted by hand or as part of the printing process; later adhesives were also used. Although this was a revenue tax, much of the detail was handled by the Post Office. The tax was abolished on 1 Jan 1900.

The exhibit contains examples of signets and of adhesives on newspapers, and of loose adhesives illustrating cancellations and varieties. Special usages and situations are illustrated. The subtly different arrangements for Lombardy-Venetia are shown separately; its governance was partly devolved from Austria, and sometimes also differed between the two provinces.

Arrangement of the exhibit

Imposition of a Tax in 1789 on inland and foreign newspapers, payment being shown by an imprinted “signet”. Its abeyance and reimposition are covered in Frame 1

Examples of year-specific signets from 1811 to 1855 are shown in frames 2 & 3

Introduction of an adhesive tax stamp in 1853, and the currency changes of 1858, are discussed on frame 4

Signets and adhesives as used from 1859 to 1899 occupy frames 5 and 6

The subtly different arrangements in Lombardy and Venetia between 1805 and 1863 are set out on frames 7 and 8.

The last frame is concluded with unusual situations such as the wrong revenue adhesive, and apparently double, erroneous, or mixed frankings.

History and background



The tax began on 1 July 1789; the 1789-1791 signet is extremely rare. Between 1792 and 1803 the tax was in abeyance. In 1803 the tax was re-imposed, and from then till 1854 the signet's design was changed annually (this is the 1813 1Kr value as used at Graz). The exhibit shows a selection from a larger collection.

The tax on foreign newspapers was usually twice that on inland newspapers; however, newspapers from certain countries (eg Germany) ordered by advance subscription through the Post Office were taxed at the inland rate (which at times eg 1851-1857 was zero).



From 1 March 1853, adhesive stamps were introduced as an alternative way of paying the tax. There were 4 issues: “arms in frame” designs in 1853, 1858/9, and 1877, and a “medallion” design in 1890. These adhesives are found cancelled by a wide variety of Post-, Tax- and Customs-office cancels.

They were often applied to the newspaper sheet before printing so as to be “cancelled” by the print (and in this example by a tax office canceller as well!). A 25Kr perforated adhesive was introduced in 1890, to facilitate paying the tax on 26 copies of a weekly journal bound into a half-yearly volume.



The signets were withdrawn in 1854, but when on 1 Jan 1858 the inland tax was reintroduced, a new design of signet appeared, with a coat-of-arms and the stamping die's serial number in a single circle; this design did not change from year to year.

From 1881, a change in the rules meant that a newspaper printed in multiple sections, or a bundle of separate newspapers posted in one wrapper, had the tax levied on each item instead of once per package. 3- and 4-fold signetting, and multiple use of adhesives, are found.



In 1885 a new design of signet appeared: a double-circle, with arms, inscription, and the stamping die serial number.

The Newspaper Tax was finally abolished on 1 Jan 1900, coincident with and perhaps caused by Austria's change from silver-based to a differently-named gold-based currency.