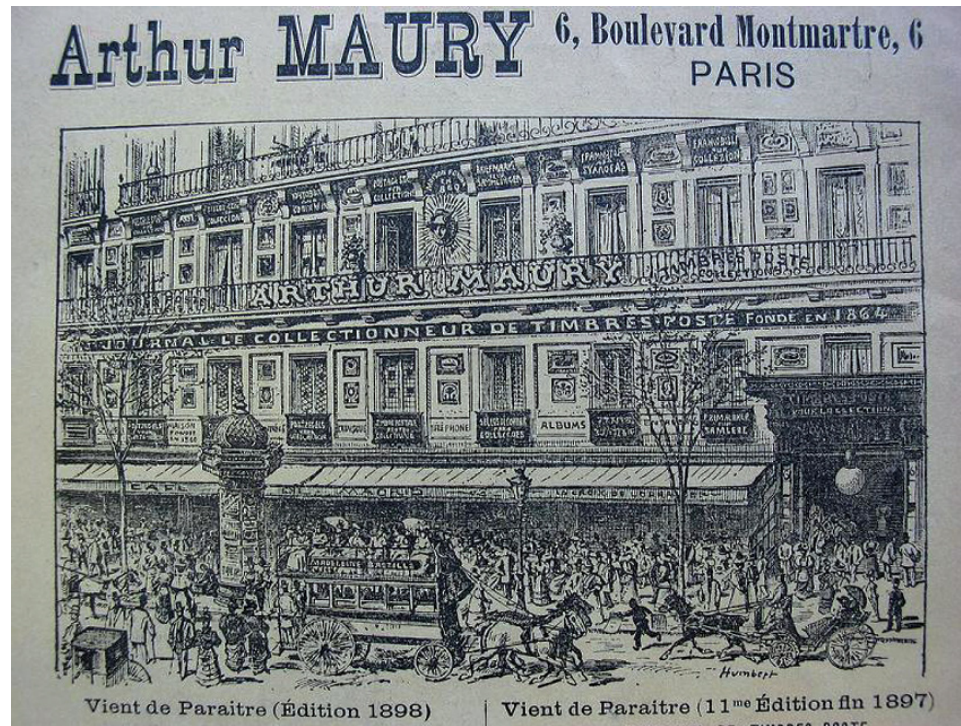


Cinderella Time: Curious Poster Labels Advertise Parisian Stamp Dealer

By Christer Brunström, AIJP



Occasionally one encounters extremely puzzling stamp-like labels. This was the case on a recent visit to the open air stamp market in Paris where one of the dealers offered a couple of rather curious poster stamps. The elegant labels show an impressive portrait of a distinguished gentleman sporting a greying beard. The stamps carry the following very strange inscription: Serbmit – Sirap a Yruam.

The solution to this linguistic problem is fortunately rather easy. The wording has quite simply been reversed! When read from right to left



*Left, the stamp as issued;
right, a mirror view*



we get the following message: Timbres – Maury a Paris. “Timbres” is the French word for stamps and Maury the name of a famous Parisian stamp dealer. The Serbmit labels simply served as advertisements for the Maury firm.

Arthur Maury was born in Paris in 1844. At age 16 he began dealing in postage stamps for collectors. He probably sold his first stamps at the open air stamp market which was started in the



Left, a picture post card showing the Paris Bourse in 1941, with a label picturing La Mosquee, from a sheet of labels produced to raise funds for artists; below left, the Bourse as it appears today; below right, another of the fund raising labels, this one with the same Paris Bourse illustration as seen on the picture post card.



Palais-Royal gardens in 1860. It was later transferred to its current location at the Carré Marigny close to the avenue des Champs-Élysées. Rather amazingly, this open air stamp market is still alive and well 150 years later. In connection with this important anniversary France’s *La Poste* released a five stamp souvenir sheet (Sc. 3817, page 3). Arthur Maury was depicted on one of the stamps (arrow) along with U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt and other famous collectors.

Maury opened his very first shop in the Rue Richelieu. As the business developed he moved to other locations but finally settled at 6, boulevard de Montmartre where Maury had very large premises (illustrated, page 1).

In many ways, Maury was a pioneer in our hobby. In 1864, he founded *Le Collectionneur de timbres-poste*, one of the world's very first philatelic magazines (below, right). One year later he published the first edition of *Le Catalogue Complet de timbres-poste*.

In common with so many other 19th century stamp dealers, Maury was no stranger to peddling forged or bogus stamps. He made and sold forgeries of Diégo-Suarez, a French possession on the island of Madagascar. Maury also distributed early Persian bogus stamps and Ethiopian forgeries.

However, by far the greatest part of his business was devoted to genuine postage stamps. He not only became the president of the association of French stamp dealers but also a leading authority on French philately. The year after his death in 1907, *Histoire des Timbres-Poste Français* was



An early edition, dated November 15, 1864

published. This 648-page book served as the basis for serious studies of French philately for a great many years.

Arthur Maury was in many ways an advertising genius. Quite early on he had poster stamps printed which advertised his company and its many services and products. The Serbmit design was first printed on magazine wrappers in 1894 (right).

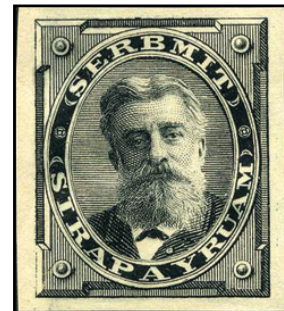
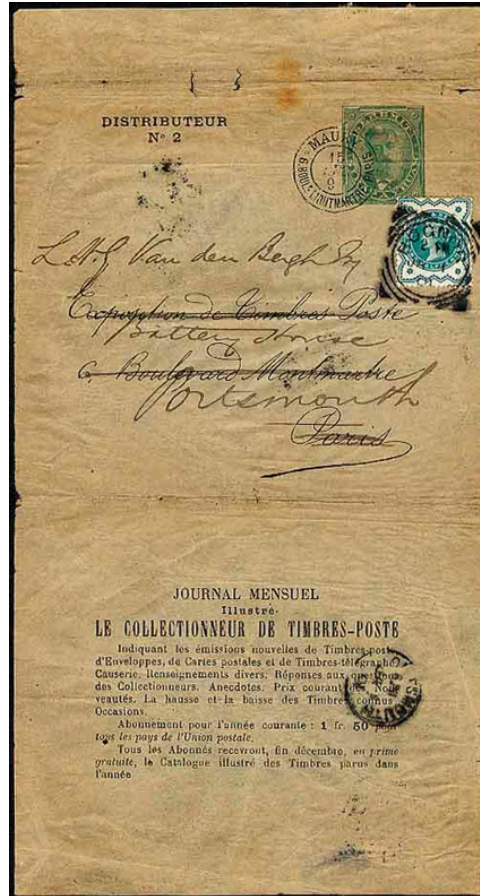
Somewhat later the same design was produced as an adhesive and perforated stamp in a variety of colours. The stamps can be found perforated 11 or 13.

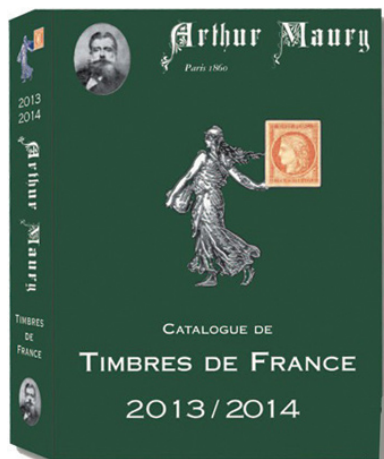
Shown at right is an imperforate stamp printed in black on thin hard paper. It is possibly a proof. As can be seen it is a beautifully engraved stamp of the highest quality.

At a later stage the printing plate was somewhat altered resulting in rather scarce varieties of the label.

The Serbmit stamps were given away for free to the company's customers. Sometimes they were affixed to tiny slips of paper with an imprinted message stating that their origin was unknown. I am pretty certain that Maury was somewhat of a joker.

Like a Phoenix the Maury name has been resuscitated in recent times. There is now a new catalogue work covering France and its colonies which carry his name. It is a serious competitor to the well established Yvert & Tellier catalogues that have dominated the French philatelic market for years.





Maury's name and photo are prominently placed at the top of the catalogue

The portrait of the aging Maury is frequently used in the advertising promoting the new catalogue.

But we will probably never discover why Maury decided to have his poster stamps printed with a reversed advertising message.

Some of the images in this article were found at

<http://www.filavaria.nl/maury.htm>, where the text is in German.

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