

Russian “Army of the North” Stamps

Christopher L. Murphy, BF

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What might be termed as provisional government stamps were issued by the Russian “Army of the North” (Russian initials OKCA) in about September 1919 and discontinued in December of that same year. There must have been many produced because the stamps are not rare (Scott value 70 cents each). However, many forgeries were produced, and for that reason, the illustrations shown here are of cancelled stamps, which I believe attests to their authenticity.

The stamps found their way into Masonic lore because they appear to show a square, positioned in the way as worn by the Master of a Lodge. There was then speculation that wording on the stamps stated, “Are you a Mason?” I sent the stamp images to a long-time friend in Moscow who has assured me that such is not the case. His reply was that other than the initials OKCA, the stamps show in Russian just the words “Postal Stamp” and the denomination.

The stamps are printed on very thin (inexpensive) paper and were obviously a “quick fix” to facility postal services in the region now controlled by the Army.

Whatever the case, someone had to sit down and design the stamps and a die had to be made to produce them. The artistry is very good and the allegory on the last stamp shown is somewhat intriguing. The background symbols on this stamp are crossed Roman fasces, crossed arrows, crossed trumpets, and a central figure, which I believe is a ceremonial mace. In the foreground are circles with a square and a cross.

The Roman fasces is a symbol of governmental power. The same symbol is used on a US stamp (#798), but is most familiar to Americans by its use on the back (or reverse side) of the Liberty/Mercury Head dime. The crossed arrows are a symbol of military power; the trumpets are a symbol of declaration or proclamation; and the mace is a symbol of authority.



Now we come to the wreathed square and cross, which is shown on all of the stamps, so naturally was considered the most important symbolism. The square has equal “legs” and no graduations, so it is a true stone mason’s square (graduations, incidentally, which are now shown in Masonic symbolism, are an incorrect innovation—but do look nice).

Although all references to the square as a symbol of honesty, truthfulness, and morality are now connected with the Masonic Order, such definitely predated Freemasonry as we now know it.

Both stone masons and carpenters use a square, although with the latter, one “leg” is longer than the other. I will venture a guess that a “moral lesson” was created soon after the square was invented.

Whether the designer of the stamps used the square as a general reference or Masonic reference will likely never be known, although I’m inclined to side with the latter. Wikipedia states the following:

Freemasonry in Russia started in the 18th century and has continued to the present day. Russian Freemasonry pursued humanistic and educational purposes, but more attention is given to ethical issues. It was a spiritual community of people united in an effort to contribute to the prosperity of the Motherland and the enlightenment of the people living in it.

One might reason that showing a square was intended to make people feel better.

The little cross shown below the square is neither a Masonic nor a Christian symbol. Again, according to Wikipedia:

It [a cross] may be seen as a division of the world into four elements (Chevalier, 1997) or cardinal points, or alternately as the union of the concepts of divinity, the vertical line, and the world, the horizontal line (Koch, 1955).

With regard to the third stamp shown, where we see two sheathed swords, such symbolize military power but not the desire to use it. Americans will recall this same symbolism on the Statue of Freedom atop the Capitol dome in Washington, DC.

For certain, whoever designed the stamps knew what he (or she) were doing, but why an Army went to all the trouble of designing meaningful stamps, as opposed to designing very basic stamps, is an interesting question. All I can think of is that the General in charge had a flair for stamps. (*Russia, Army of the North #A1 to A5*)

Note: I do not have actual stamps, so if I have missed something in this analysis please let me know.



Soldiers of the Northwest Army. That Army later joined with the Army of the North.

