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Tête-bêche pairs and other blocks in a main type collection

(computer aided translation)

You can get an easy basis for a main type collection by purchasing a series of album pages with a space for all stamps from Finland or another country. The pages are practically always for single stamps. Spaces for blocks may be reserved either instead of, or in addition to, singles if different stamps are side by side as is usually the case in miniature sheets.

For example in auction lots, you might get blocks that do not fit in the album spaces. If the blocks are scattered along the edges of the pages, the aesthetic impression that the publisher of the album has sought with the layout is lost. Blocks can always be broken up, but this does not necessarily make sense from a philatelic or financial point of view.

Blocks intact or broken

In its basic form and traditionally, stamping is collecting single stamps of Finland or another country as main types. The stamps are used, mint, or both. The collection may well be in a stock book, for example, but the goal of most collectors is probably to get stamps onto pages, at least at some point, either purchased or self-made.

The main type collector faces a problem if from somewhere comes a pair, a block of four, or some other block, and there is room in the collection for only a single. Should one break the block up and choose the best single for one's collection, or what should be done? One solution is to try to sell the block, buy a single stamp and, if something is left, use the money for other purposes. In self-adhesives there are really no blocks, as the stamps are usually died cut separately already at the printing stage.

In tête-bêche pairs, the threshold to break up is high and especially when the pairs are printing errors. If you happen to tear or cut accidentally, you should mark the stamp that is in a wrong position. Based on the sheet position numbers, the stamp can possibly be identified afterwards and thus be found to be different from other stamps in the sheet. I guess such a stamp should be put upside down in the collection page.

The tête-bêche pairs of oval stamps

The Finnish 5 and 10 kopeck oval stamps of 1856 are perhaps the first that come to mind to a Finnish collector when speaking of tête-bêche pairs. Stamps canceled with a date postmark alone have at least once been more sought for than others. Mikko Ossa says in

Keräilyuutiset 4/2008 that there are two such tête-bêche pairs known of 10 kopecks. Both are described in Leo Linder's book *Suomen soikiomerkit* (1956).

“A poor man’s tête-bêche” is sometimes called an oval stamp with part of another stamp above. Linder’s book has such a 5 kopeck stamp depicted with the text “1 1/2 oval stamps as a tête-bêche pair”. Almost a tête-bêche pair, one could say.

The largest known block of oval tête-bêches is the unused 10 kopecks tête-bêche block of six. It no longer exists, as in the late 1960s one tête-bêche pair was separated from the whole. Ossa writes about it in *Abophil* 4/1969 and considers the breach as an invaluable bearish service to Finnish philately. On the other hand, he states: “There are probably not many philatelists in Finland today who would be able to acquire the item, this is the unfortunate truth.”

The tête-bêche block of six is described in Linder’s book and in the stamp booklet of the Finlandia 1988 exhibition. This block and all the other items in the booklet have been in Agathon Fabergé’s collection. An additional print of 6,000 copies of the booklet was published for the Finlandia 2017 exhibition and were made with manual equipment one booklet at a time.



The tête-bêche block of six of 10 kopecks is in the Fabergé booklet of the Finlandia 1988 exhibition. It is depicted so that the tête-bêche pair removed from it is visible on the postage stamp and the rest is in the vacant space. Perforation is where a knife or other tool once did its job.

Postiljonen held an auction in Malmö on March 26, 2021, featuring Terttu Österman’s gold medal collection of classic Finland. It included the afore mentioned tête-bêche pair, which was sold for 42,000 euros (excluding auction commission). The tête-bêche block of four has been at least in the Corinphila auction in 1997, and according to *Filatelisti* 10/1997 became the most expensive item in the auction. Both the pair and the block of six are in the OvalPoint database.

Intentional tête-bêche pairs heads and feet end to end

Finnish oval tête-bêche pairs are rare, but quite normal in that the stamps were printed in such a position relative to each other. A vertical pair in the normal position would be a great sensation. The printing was done by hand.

By contrast, the first Bavarian, and at the same time the first German, stamps from 1849 were to be printed in normal position. The stamp of one kreuzer is called *Schwarzer Einser* and is depicted on stamps of, for example, East and West Germany in 1949. In *Abophil* 4/1986 and 6/1986, an unused block of 12 is reported, with one sheet edge stamp in a tête-bêche position. In the early summer of the same year, the item was sold at a German auction, with commission included, in present money for half a million euros.

Intentionally made tête-bêche pairs are not necessarily any rarer than regular pairs or single marks. The tête-bêche pair of the 100th anniversary stamp of the Finnish stamp, published for the Finlandia 1956 exhibition, is priced in the *LAPE* special catalog in fact one euro cheaper, compared to two separate stamps combined. The stamps in the pair have the same posthorn watermark but in a different position.



Pictured are tête-bêche pairs from Turkey, West Germany, Morocco and Belgium, a tête-bêche pair of a wartime Christmas cinderella “heads end to end”, and a Swiss gutter tête-bêche pair. The theme of the Turkish stamp is the International Sobriety Congress, and it depicts a snake in a bottle with a guitar open with a bifurcated tongue outdoors. The stamps are from 1956, 1961, 1965, 1973, 1937 and 1942.

In stamp booklets, there are often tête-bêche pairs in Germany, for example. In perfins, tête-bêches have been formed by perforating the stamps folded opposite each other. Triangular stamps must be printed in a tête-bêche position unless you want to leave vacant spaces between them. Such are the insect stamps designed by Osmo ‘Omppu’ Omenamäki, which were issued in sheets of ten due to the Finlandia 1995 exhibition. Ladybug stamps can be found on the cover of a pastille box published by the Finnish Stamp Center, with the text “our brand is the stamp”.

From the 1942 Christmas cinderella stamps, tête-bêche pairs with two different perforations are known. In his book, Åke Berglund prices those with fewer teeth more common. The Christmas cinderella is summer themed as well as in the previous year, and both are designed by Martta Wendelin.

The Turku Stamp Club has published three sealing stamps, the first of which dates from 1938. The sheet has 20 stamps, and there are five tête-bêche pairs in the middle of each. Veikko Niskala writes in *Abophil* 2/1979 that the stamp was designed by factor Veikko Toivonen, and it was printed in about 5,000 copies by Uusi Aura printing house. The stamps are available in two colors.



The 1988 discount stamps are nonperforated on one side, as are the lion stamps of the next year’s Finlandia 1987 exhibition automatic booklet. If you expand the main type collection to such perforation varieties, it would seem natural to collect them in pairs if possible. In Sweden, similar ones were published as early as the 1930s.

In the main type collection, tête-bêche pairs and other blocks are not usually favored. Instead, you can make a separate appendix to the end of the album, or compile a collection of its own. At the beginning of the millennium, I started a collection of Russian type postmarks on horizontal pairs of eagle stamps only. For postmark collecting, the singles are a little too narrow.

You don’t have to build everything into a systematic collection. An interestingly selected sample of number blocks of six, for example, may well suffice for one’s own needs. The general collector of stamp blocks is looking for different types of items in different countries and at the same time probably a few tête-bêche pairs as well.

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