

Early Soviet Propaganda-Design Satellites

By Don Hillger and Garry Toth

This article examines a **propaganda-design satellite** that was widely used in the past as a substitute for the actual designs of some satellites launched by the USSR. This Soviet propaganda-design satellite is commonly shown in early space-age postal items. On many of the stamps that include it, the text mentions various satellite names such as Kosmos, Luna, Vostok (East), or Voskhod (Ascent). These satellites are known to never have had the design shown; the propaganda design was used *in lieu* of realistic satellite images for both un-manned and manned missions.

The propaganda design may have been a compromise between the stamp and cachet designers, who wanted to depict the new spacecraft, and the Soviet censors, whose goal was to keep secret as many aspects as possible of their early space programme. The propaganda design was used to generically represent various satellites, for lack of better images. It was used repeatedly for a number of years until actual satellite designs on postal items were permitted.

It should be mentioned that the primary propaganda design featured in this article is a particular style incorporating features that are detailed below. Other non-realistic designs, or design variants, were used as well, but they were not as widely used as the propaganda design discussed in this article.

Distinguishing features of the propaganda design

Most images of the propaganda design have at least two of the following three distinguishing features:

1) Three or more **paper-clip-like antennas** on the bottom of the spacecraft, similar to those that were carried on both the base and sides of the Soviet Sputnik-3 satellite (e.g. Mongolia *Scott 554, Michel 570, 1969*; and Cambodia *Scott 1101, Michel 1179, 1990*; both of which include reasonably accurate drawings of Sputnik-3). Unlike Sputnik-3 however, there are no similar paper-clip-like antennas on the sides of the propaganda design.



2) One or two **shark-like fins** attached to the main body of the spacecraft. Sometimes only one of these fins is seen, with the other hidden on the opposite side of the spacecraft;

3) One or more sets of three **radial antennas**, with the three antennas in each set attached to the spacecraft body at a single point. Generally, one antenna in each set is perpendicular to the spacecraft body and the two others are at about a 60 degree angle from the spacecraft body.

Most propaganda designs have all three design elements; some are missing one of them.

Early history of the propaganda design

The first appearance of the propaganda design (actually, a design variant) is on a stamp issued by Bulgaria (*Scott C85, Michel 1280*) in late 1961 to represent "Vostok-2", as indicated in the text. The image on that stamp, part



of a set designed by P. Rusinov and G. Popov, has only two of the three distinguishing features described in the previous section, lacking only the shark-like fins. It was followed by a

Russian postage stamp (*Scott 2586, Michel 2595*) from early 1962, the first to contain all three of the principal propaganda design features. The designer of that stamp was I. L. Levin

(reference "Catalog of Postage Stamps of Russia, 1857-1995", Pevzner, A. Ya. (et al) editors, Tsentrpoligraf (publisher), 1995, page 168).



In the Cyrillic text at the right of the Russian stamp, the word "Soyuz" ("Union") is part of a quote from Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev: "Socialism - this is that reliable launching pad which the Soviet Union uses to launch its space ships." Therefore, the stamp was not intended to show the Soyuz spacecraft. Rather, the satellite on this item is often mis-interpreted as being Kosmos-3, since the stamp was issued on the launch date for Kosmos-3 (1962-04-24).

Although the propaganda design has some features similar to those seen on Sputnik-3, it has a **more cylindrical body**

and a **more rounded nose** than the conical Sputnik-3. At the base of the cylindrical body of the propaganda design is a larger diameter **ring or collar**. *Orbit* editor Jeff Dugdale noted in a September 1995 article published in *Spaceflight* that this fanciful design reminded him of a “thimble and collar”.

The propaganda-design satellite subsequently appeared on many other postage stamps, mostly from Eastern Block countries in the 1960s, but appears to have outlived its usefulness thereafter.

Other Russian examples



Russia used the propaganda design in 1963 on a pair of nearly identical issues (*Scott*

2733 and 2733a, *Michel* 2748-2749, only the first of which is shown). The design lacked the shark-like fins, but had the other features. The spacecraft is noted as “Vostok” in the



small text on the body of the satellite. In 1964 the propaganda design was used for a Cosmonautics Day (12 April) issue (*Scott* 2889, *Michel* 2900), along with a picture of Yuri Gagarin, and supposedly also his Vostok spacecraft.

When the design re-appeared on Soviet stamps in 1965 (*Scott* 3015, *Michel* 3032 and *Scott* 3016, *Michel* BL38) it was again missing the fins. In this case the satellite is noted in the text as “Voskhod-2”. The set was issued for the historic first spacewalk of Alexei Leonov.



More examples from other countries

Another propaganda representation of “Voskhod-2”, as indicated in the text, is seen on a stamp from Albania (*Scott* 817, *Michel* 942) from 1965. Czechoslovakia issued a stamp (*Scott*



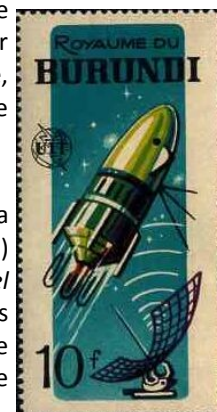
1233, *Michel* 1463) in 1964 with a propaganda design for Yuri Gagarin’s “Vostok-1” that is quite similar to the propaganda design found in Bulgaria *Scott* C85 (already mentioned).



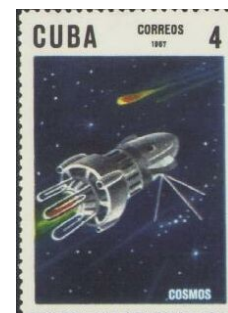
In 1965 Bulgaria used a propaganda design variant (in *Scott* 1394, *Michel* 1521) to show a “Voskhod” spacecraft, in which the fins differed from those seen previously. Burundi, however, stuck with the primary propaganda design



in 1965 (*Scott* 131, *Michel* 172). The same stamp also appeared in a souvenir sheet of two stamps (not shown here, for an image see the authors’ online information).



Cuba used the primary propaganda design in 1964 (*Scott* 878, *Michel* 942) and again in 1967 (*Scott* 1285, *Michel* 1354). The latter item indicates “Cosmos” (possibly as a reference to the Kosmos series of Soviet satellites) in the text. Both designs from Cuba have just one set of three radial antennas.





Hungary likewise used the primary propaganda design in 1962 (Scott C219, Michel 1864) for “Vostok-3” and “Vostok-4”, as noted in the text. Furthermore, in 1964 the design was re-used (Scott B242, Michel 2056) for a 37th Stamp Day issue. That latter stamp was part of a souvenir sheet of four stamps (not shown here).

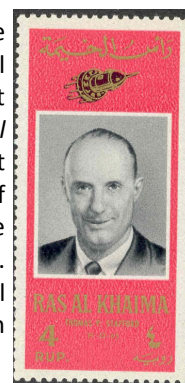
Jordan used the propaganda design in 1965 on an imperforate souvenir sheet of one stamp (Scott 496a, Michel BL18), which also later appeared overprinted (not shown here). The latter item was specifically for “Voskhod-1”, as noted in the overprinted text. Both of these items were yet again overprinted in 1966, but with a realistic Voskhod design (again, not shown here).



Poland issued two stamps in 1963 with the primary propaganda design, one representing “Vostok-1” (Scott 1183, Michel 1442) and the other representing “Vostok-3 and 4” (Scott 1185, Michel 1444). The fins on these spacecraft are seen from the top and are not obvious at first.



One of the more unusual uses of the propaganda design was adopted by Ras Al Khaima in 1966 to supposedly represent the American Gemini spacecraft (Michel 54), because the stamp shows Astronaut Thomas Stafford. A realistic image of Gemini would have been available, as the design of Gemini was widely published. Successive overprints of this item, as well as an accompanying souvenir sheet, can also be found.



Romania issued two stamps (Scott C135-C136, Michel 2134-2135) in 1963 with smaller renditions of the propaganda design. Both indicate that they are for “Luna-4” in the text.



Although nearly all of the propaganda designs on postal items were issued in the 1960s, the design still persisted into the early 1970s with an item from Fujera (Michel 963) issued in 1972. The item again shows the spacewalk of Alexei Leonov, supposedly alongside Voskhod-2. By this time some postal items were already showing realistic images of Voskhod, so this use of the propaganda design would not have been necessary.



Many other propaganda designs, or designs with some of the three primary features, can be found on postal items. However, most of those images are quite small, making it hard to discern the details. Interested readers are invited to check the authors’ website for additional items; there are too many to include in this short article. However, the authors have attempted to include in this article all the stamps with the primary propaganda design. In the following section are discussed the propaganda designs as found on satellite launch covers.



The Propaganda Design on Launch Covers

The propaganda satellite design also appeared on many launch covers for early Kosmos-series satellites, starting with Kosmos-3 in 1962. The Kosmos-3 cover shown has a cachet with the same spacecraft design as on the affixed postage stamp (Scott 2586), which has already been mentioned as *not* showing Kosmos-3. Nevertheless the cachet has "Kosmos-3" in the Cyrillic text above the spacecraft, as well as "Kosmos-3" in the text of the cancel.

(As an aside, the Kosmos name itself was used to mask the details of the early Soviet space programme. Many satellites carried the "Kosmos" name in order to keep their missions and technical details secret until after their launch. If the launch was successful, they were then given other names more closely related to their missions.)

More than 20 different cachet designs with propaganda images, and even more colour variations, can be found on Russian launch covers, nearly all of which were for Kosmos-series launches. There are also a few cases of the propaganda design in launch covers for Vostok-3 and 4 and Elektron-1 and 2 (not shown here).



The most widely used propaganda design to appear as a cachet on numerous Kosmos launch covers started with Kosmos-30 and ended with Kosmos-228. That cachet was placed on covers by the Tartuski Klub Kolleksionerov (TKK - Tartu Collectors Club). Each cover was assigned an "Astronautika Annaalid" (AA) number, which is often provided in small print over the cachet, along with the Kosmos number and the launch date. AA numbers reached values above 200 before the system was discontinued. For more detailed information on these covers, see Jim Reichman's *Philatelic Study Report on Tartu Space Club Covers, 1962-1978*, published in 2011. (See *Orbit* index)

The most-widely-used Tartu Club "AA" cachet, which was used on numerous Kosmos launch covers (this one is for Kosmos-35)

Other types of Tartu Club cachets with propaganda satellite designs are less commonly found, some with the TKK acronym and the AA designation and/or AA numbers. See the authors' online information for examples of these other Tartu Club cachets, as well as many other different cachets with propaganda-design satellites.

The last known use of the propaganda design on a launch cover is found on a Kosmos-272 cover from 1969. This cover is one of many known fake Baikonur-canceled covers, which were backdated to the dates of significant space-related events. Many other examples of the propaganda design on launch covers are found in the online information provided by the authors.



Additional online information

A checklist of postal items showing Soviet propaganda-design satellites (<http://rammb.cira.colostate.edu/dev/hillger/propaganda.htm>) is available as part of the authors' website for Un-Manned Satellite Philately (<http://rammb.cira.colostate.edu/dev/hillger/satellites.htm>). Users of the website are asked to provide missing or additional information or images that they may have. The online information will be updated whenever new details are provided to the authors. E-mail correspondence is welcomed.

Biographical notes

The authors have researched and written extensively on the subjects of weather, climate, and un-manned satellites on stamps and covers.

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