

## **RUBBER STAMPS: FAKE OR GENUINE**

*How to distinguish the fake from the genuine*

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So-called rubber stamps, although these are actually made of silicone and other similar materials, are still widespread both in business and private life. But how does one distinguish genuine rubber stamps from fakes and what are the techniques that forgers use to make forgeries? Such problems are commonly encountered by private investigators and detectives who often have to deal with cases involving forged papers and who know at least the basics of the trade.

Nowadays it is very easy to create a brand new duplicate of a rubber stamp with computer technologies that are both accessible and prevalent in every high street, but most forgers still use old techniques that are far from sophisticated. One of the oldest is the so-called *potato technique*, widely used by resistance movements during the Second World War in Europe, and also in Nazi concentration camps. In Europe the 'potato technique' is still in use.

The forger boils the potato (not too much), and then cuts it down the middle. One part is pressed on the genuine rubber stamp on the original document for a few seconds to produce a 'picture' of the rubber stamp print on the half-boiled potato. The potato is then pressed on to the fake document. The result is a rubber stamp print with the same shape as the original, but much brighter with an unclear picture and shapes. You can distinguish the genuine and fake by their colours, which are thicker (more condensed) on the genuine stamp. Also the lines and shapes are much sharper on the original document. Under the microscope you can also usually see some stains of starch on the surface of the document. The starch can also be detected in a laboratory.

The same procedure has also been employed by forgers using a *fresh apple* instead of a half-boiled potato, and the *egg technique* was also popular among forgers. They boiled an egg, peeled away the eggshell and rolled it over the original rubber stamp on the genuine document. They then rolled the imprinted egg over the fake document to establish a fairly good picture, which was always very bright but with poor shapes, on the paper.

A more sophisticated technique is to engrave the shapes of the original rubber stamp in flat wood, slate, plastic and others hard materials. These fakes can be distinguished very easily from the original. In most cases the falsifier presses the engraving wood or plastic too strongly on the document so that under the microscope the relief of the stamp can be discerned – which is not the case for original rubber stamps which also typically give quite

different shapes of lines. Moreover, the different shapes and sizes of engraved letters and pictures can lead to the conclusion that the stamp has been faked. However, the most delicate and hardest to prove are documents forged by modern techniques used on photocopies (Photostats documents) and on documents »received« by facsimile machines. The technique is very simple.

The falsifier makes a scan of the original rubber stamp or a photostat of it on a transparent film. Then this film is put over a document, so that the stamp is positioned on the proper place. After that no special efforts are needed to finalize the forged document; all that the falsifier has to do is to push of the button on the facsimile or photostat machine. The faked document and the layer (film) with the pre-copied stamp unite and make one document, on which contains are all the details on their places. Even an expert cannot, either with unaided eyes or with a usual magnifying glass, distinguish the genuine from the forged photostat »faxed« document.

**Points to look for to establish that a rubber stamp is forged:**

- Colours are usually very bright
- The shapes of letters and pictures are not sharp and often blurred.
- Proportion between letters and other details of the stamp are different from those in the original
- When the stamp partially covers is over the picture or something alike, the stamp could be slightly moved, so that the lines of it are broken on the edges of the picture and the background foundation etc.

For all these first steps on the field of examination a private investigator needs only a good magnifying glass and a handy ultra violet (UV) light. In the laboratory a document can be examined under the different types of UV and infrared (IR) light, with microscopes and by means of various other techniques including microphotography, computer scans, chromatography etc., not techniques that the average private investigator or private detective can employ himself.

In my practice I had to examine the diploma degree of the University in pristine – Kosovo and investigate it's authenticity. The local contact send me the document from the University. On first glance of inexperienced eye all was OK, including the rubber stamp. However, the expert investigator can see some characteristics even with naked eye and under the microscope and other instruments this characteristics became visible also to everyone else. With computer techniques you can forge a document and rubber stamp almost perfectly, but computer is not a friend of criminals and always leaves a visible trace of the forgery for investigators to discover.

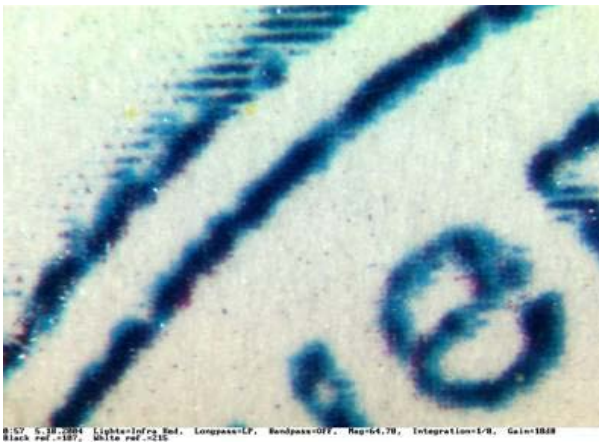


**Picture 1**

The stamp was suspicious also on first glance, because it has no clear number and the name of faculty is missing.

**Picture 2**

Under the microscope, here we used 17x magnification, you can distinguish fake and genuine also by lines, which was made by ink jet printer. Genuine rubber stamps have no such lines even under the microscope.

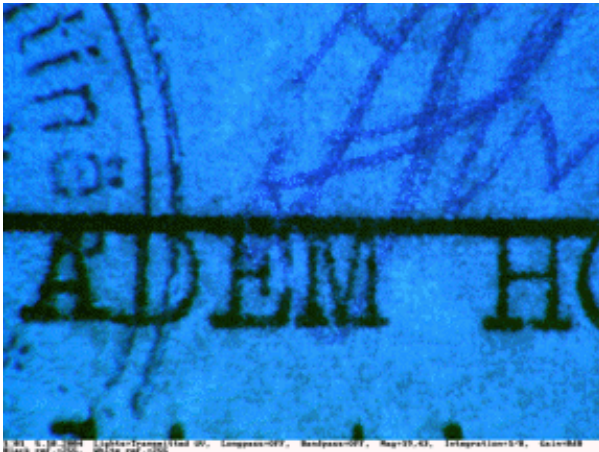


**Picture 3**

Detail under the 64x magnification

**Picture 4**

Sometimes it is necessary to check the document also with different types of light. This picture was made under Infrared illumination.



**Picture 5**

Same part of the document made by ultra violet light from behind the document.

**Picture 6**

Same part of the document, but we used side light at a very acute angle to the document.





**Picture 7**

Same part of the document under the normal (North) light.

***NOTE: all pictures are from the archive of Andrej Dvorsak, made with VSC 2000 in the Forensic lab of Slovenian Ministry of Interior***

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