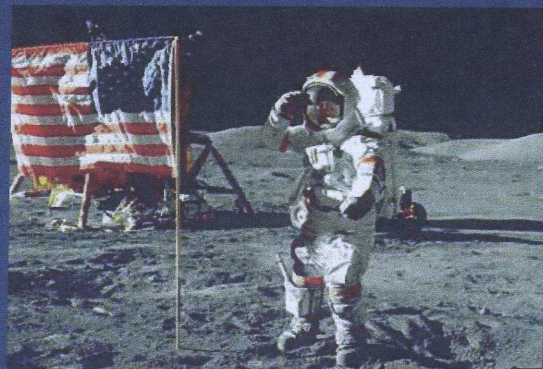
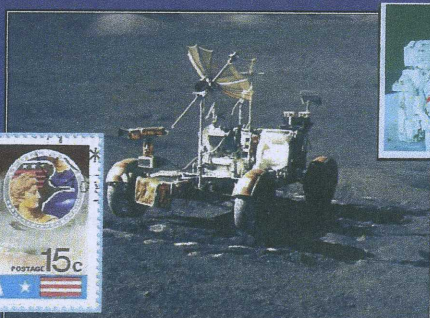
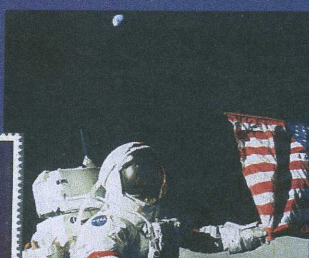


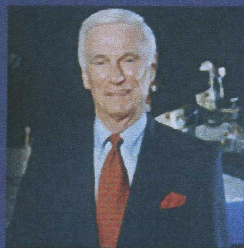
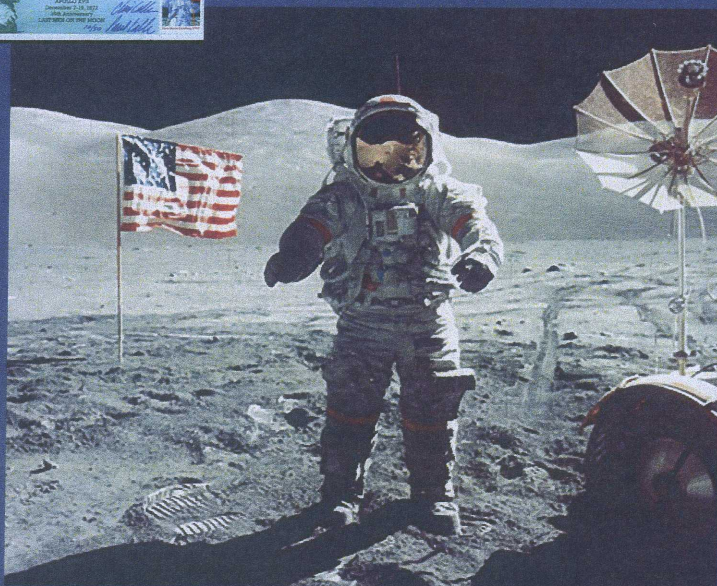
# ORBIT



Eugene Cernan, commander of Apollo 17, still holds the distinction of being the last man to walk on the Moon, as no humans have visited the Moon since December 14, 1972.



The four-wheel, lightweight vehicle greatly extended the lunar area that could be explored by humans.



If I can call the Moon my home long before today's generation of young adults were even born, then I challenge them and their children to tell me what in their lifetime is impossible.

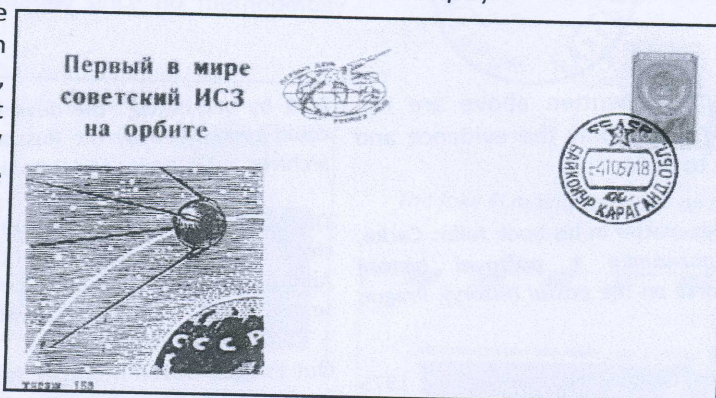




## The Baikonur-Karaganda Fakes by Umberto Cavallaro

These are unfortunately the most "popular" among the Soviet fakes, so widely spread that it is hard to find an astrophilately collector who sooner or later doesn't realize he holds as well at least one of them in his collection.

Nobody knows about the origin of those fakes that, in their own way, "commemorate" the Soviet space events between 1957 and the mid Seventies. The 1983 CIFAR catalogue (well known to the Italian Space collectors of that time) listed over 160 such items, from page 16 to page 20. The number of those "vintage" Baikonur-Karaganda fakes continued to grow year after year.



A faked cover from "Baikonur-Karaganda" dated 4th October 1957 purporting to celebrate the launch of Sputnik on launch day.

The 1985 Lollini catalogue "C.O.S.M.O.S. Catalogue des Oblitèrations Spéciale set des Marques Officielles Spatiales" (6th Edition) listed 300 of them, that became 397 in the 7th Edition (1994). The 8th Edition (1998) reserved to the "old cancel covers" (as it named them) 18 full-colour pages (from page 299 to page 316) where it offered to unaware collectors 400 quite expensive "junks". At that time the "commemorative" Sputnik 1 and Sputnik 2 covers were already sold out and the oldest items were the covers "commemorating" Sputnik-3, priced at 833 US\$ each.

For virtually every Soviet space event you may find the "proper" commemorative cover cancelled in Baikonur-Karaganda, exactly on the day of the event. Usually the covers carry a serial number and "Tirage" (printing) which is normally "150" for each cachet (sometimes "only" 100" or "50", as long it was a credible figure). It's easy to calculate that the family of the Baikonur-Karaganda fakes should be globally quite large and encompass not less than 58.000 items. There is not, however, a complete list and we may fear that the total number of such forgeries is actually considerably greater.

How unlikely could be a "commemorative" cover issued for the launch of Sputnik 1, like the one shown here, is immediately clear as one realizes that the early Soviet space programme, especially during the first decade, was developed under top secrecy. No collector could know in advance about the launches, nor could be able to prepare in time commemorative covers. But, mostly, nobody could have their covers cancelled at the location of the launch which – for many years – was treated as a State secret (even if the American U-2 had already pinpointed the R-7 launch pad in June 1957).

This is why the early phases of the Soviet space programme are usually documented through belated items celebrating subsequent recurrences such as anniversaries or special satellite orbit (like 1000th or 3000th or 10000th orbit, for example).

Such items were often cancelled in Moscow (from where KNIGA was officially selling abroad Soviet philatelic material) or in other towns where philatelic clubs were active. For almost two decades there is no commemorative cover cancelled at the secret missile test range, located near the Tyuratam village (a remote place sheltering a few dozen people, in the barren Kazakh steppe where no post office

existed, but only a water-pump station on the railroad linking Moscow with Tashkent), or in the unknown remote Kzyl Orda village which actually was the postal district to which belonged the secret Tyuratam facility, whose address – we know nowadays – was designated with the code-name "Kzyl-Orda-50" <sup>1</sup>.

There was no need to mention the secret test range until 1961, when – in order to register Gagarin's flight as a world record with the International Aviation Federation – it was required to specify the launch site, flight details and landing location. Kremlin leaders wanted however to maintain maximum secrecy around the launch site and fictitiously claimed that Vostok was launched from the "Cosmodrome" located "near" Baikonur, a village known for its copper and coal mines, located 300 km northeast from Tyuratam. No "Baikonur-Karaganda" post office existed there, though.

The secrecy of the space programme and the total unavailability of information allowed unscrupulous individuals to invent, years later, nice and attractive covers that finally documented the early phases of the space race, viewed from the Soviet side.

Uncommon covers suddenly appeared on the market, made out of an unusual semiglossy paper, in an unconventional format, smaller than the typical Soviet covers at the time (mm 165 x 91, which in the Lollini catalogue was named "international format" <sup>2</sup>, in which everything – and mainly the postmark – was forged.

Due to the total lack of data, nobody would have been able at that time to challenge the authenticity

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Baikonur-Karaganda covers for the flight of Gagarin, (April 12,1961 – asserted printing 150) And for his death (March 27, 1968 – asserted printing 50).

of those suspected forgeries which, instead, sold successfully for years.

Paul Bulver refers in his book <sup>3</sup> that he had sought clarification in 1972, and the French dealer replied that he was "absolutely sure that the black cancel with date, has been fixed by the local post-office of the town Baikonur" and he added "I wrote, already several years ago, to the Central Post-Office of Moscow, and they gave me confirmation of this fact". When asked to show copy of such letter, he reported that he had lost it <sup>4</sup>.

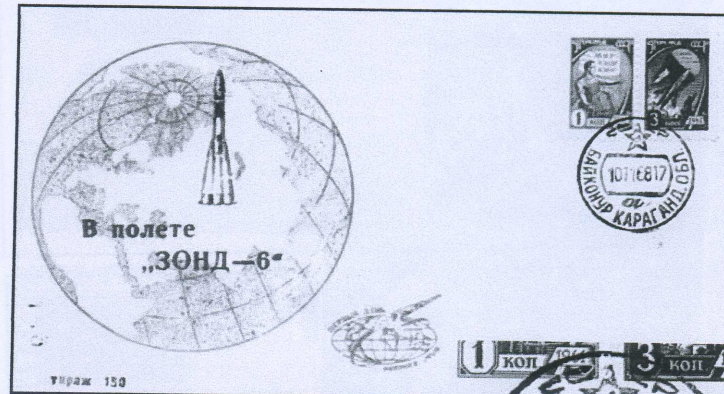
Only later, during the USSR-USA cooperation for the ASTP project, did verifiable data start to surface and, in particular, it was possible to ascertain that no Baikonur-Karaganda post office ever existed.

Ray Cartier refers to an occasional meeting which happened at *Pacific 97* between the American Collector Les Winick and Prof. Oleg Vaisberg – from Russian Science Academy – who revealed that those fakes had been produced in Moscow by Boris Korichev (who passed away at the beginning of the 80s) "who had then sold them to a Frenchman" <sup>5</sup>.

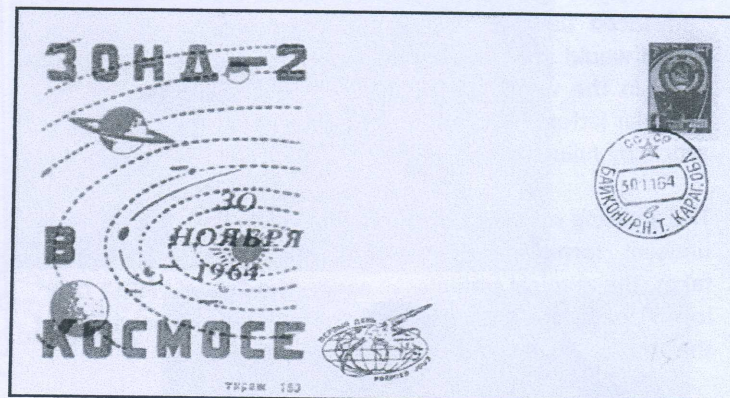
I discussed this topic with a renowned expert on Russian fakes and he told me that he could hardly believe this story. Philately was used in USSR as a strategic propaganda factor – he explained me – and it is unlikely that a "business" of this size, if originated in USSR, could escape the attentions of the KGB which had a special "Philatelic Commission" and, as everyone knows, had a very strict control over territory.

Two different versions of this fake do exist. The main peculiarity of the Type "A", the most popular one, is the "α" below the date, between the date bridge and the external crown. In Type "B" the letter is replaced by "b" in the same position.

An "annotation" box on page 316 (reproduced right) of the abovementioned 1998 edition of the Lollini catalogue informed us that the "old cancel" was in use until mid June 1975. As of June 15, 1975 a "new cancel" had replaced it. As shown in the article by Julius Cacka in this edition those dates sound at least approximate.



Left Fake Type B and above A



**NOTE :** Du FDC N° 1 Baikonour jusqu'au N° 289, c'est le cachet traditionnel qui est utilisé **BAÏKONOUR KARAGANDA**.  
Un 2° cachet : **BAÏKONOUR COSMODROME** apparaît à partir du 14 Juin 1975 et remplacera l'ancien.



**ANCIEN CACHET**

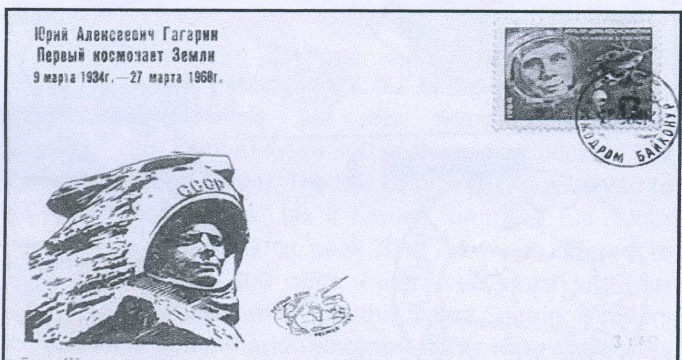
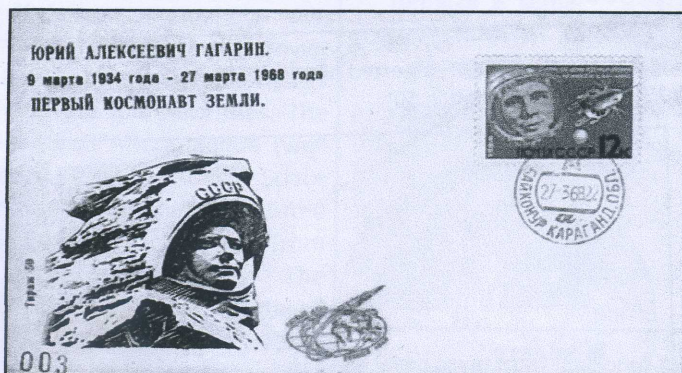
**NOUVEAU CACHET**





Baikonur-Karaganda fakes continued to be produced even far after that date. The cover shown right "commemorates" the launch of the Space Station Salyut-5 on June 22, 1976, when the *Cosmodrome Baikonur* cancel had already been in service since for more than a year.

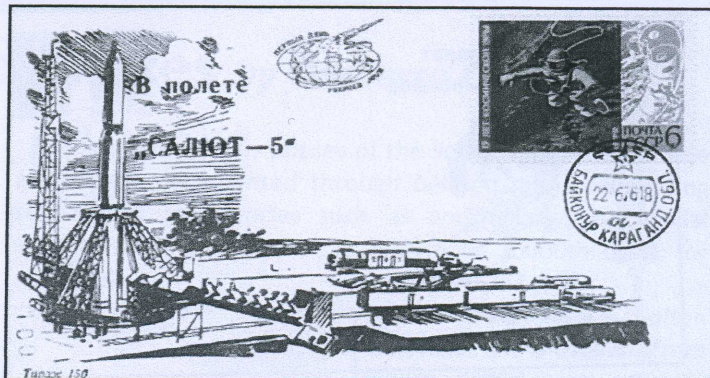
Undoubtedly the forged postmarks at that time were used with some impertinence. Both the covers shown below – which would commemorate the death of Gagarin – are postmarked on March 27, 1968.



The first cover is cancelled with the fancy postmark Baikonur-Karaganda, whilst the other bears an even fancier "advanced use" of the Cosmodrome Baikonur postmark which would start the service **seven years later!** One may spot, in the word "БАЙКОНУР" of the second cover, the irregular letters ЙК typical of the fake F1, as described in his article by Julius Sacka.

The amazing similarity of the cachet of the two covers, their unusual format, characterizing the Baikonur-Karaganda fakes, the atypical semiglossy paper, the "usual "FIRST DAY" logo strongly suggest some liaison between the producer of the two well-known families of forged items.

The same similarities are found, as a further example, in the two covers shown opposite. Once again they have the same physical characteristics and the same cachet to "commemorate" respectively the tragic flight of Soyuz-11 in 1971 (postmarked at Baikonur-Karaganda) and the flight of Soyuz-35 in 1980 (postmarked at the Baikonur Cosmodrome). The same cachet is used in several covers of both "families" of fakes. A peculiarity of this very Baikonur-Karaganda cover is the unusual – and unlikely – red postmark.



There is still something here worth investigation !!

#### Acknowledgements

Thanks to Amore Rufini, Enrico Grassani and Renzo Monateri for contributing with items, documents and personal testimony.

1 In the best tradition of secrecy, all mail was addressed to Kzyl-Orda-50, and later to Tashkent-90. The secret location of the missile test range itself carried numerous official and unofficial names including Leninsk, Baikonur, Leninskiy, Zarya, Zvezdograd. In 1995 – four years after the break-up of the Soviet Union – in force of a Boris Yeltsin's decree, the location was officially named Baikonur, so solidifying the decades-long confusion.

2 See Lollini "C.O.S.M.O.S. Catalogne des Oblitérations Spéciale set des Marques Officielles Spatiales", 1998, p. 316

3 Paul Bulver, Les Winick and Dr. Reuben Ramkissoon, "Study of Suspect Space Covers", Space Unit, 2001 (2nd Ed.)

4 Paul Bulver, et alii, *ibid.*, CD version, Page 8.1

5 Ray E. Cartier, "Fake Baikonur Cancel Story Uncovered", *Astrophile*, Jul. 1997; Vol. 42; No. 4: page 8-9.

