

What is wrong with RÖMMLER & JONAS Postcards ?

More precisely it should read "What is wrong with *early* Römmler & Jonas postcards". The undivided back postcard period, prior to February 1905 in Germany, particularly the second half of the 1890's. When improved printing processes in combination with new constructed printing presses, working faster and holding bigger printing formats, met the ever growing demand/craze for picture postcards by the public.

The previously established printing processes (chromo) lithography and letterpress – gravure played only a minor role – were faced with a new competitor: The photographic collotype process, also named *Albertotypie* after the photographer Joseph Albert (1825-1886), Munich, who had successfully perfected the process for production (1869-71), designed a collotype press and experimented with multi-colour (collotype) printing.

The photographer **Carl Emil Römmler** (1842-1941) from Dresden obtained his basic knowledge on the collotype process/printing techniques from J. Albert. In general most collotype printing businesses were set up by photographers by trade. Emil Römmler had an own studio since 1861. In 1871 the fine art printing business **Römmler & Jonas** was set up at Pillnitzer Str. 54, Dresden. The family of Römmler's partner Leopold Jonas provided most of the needed business capital.

After another move to Neue Gasse 28 the first 'fast' flatbed collotype press was installed. So far printing was done on hand presses. The very first flatbed presses (c. 1872) were rebuilt litho presses. Then Faber & Schleicher, Offenbach/Main, introduced the first "real" collotype flatbed press in 1874 and Römmler is said to have been the second customer to order the new constructed model. Between 1879-1889 the company was found at Striesener Platz 10, Emil Römmler became photographer appointed to the court, some 40 workers were employed and 10 presses running. Since 1887 Römmler was sole company owner.

Finally it was the time for an own new factory building (together with "prestigious villa") at Blasewitzer Str. 27. Now equipped with a total of 20 presses, letterpress printing, own bookbinding dept, electric lights, 80-120 workers a.s.o. At that time (1889/90) and during the following years, Römmler & Jonas was not only one of the earliest commercial, but the biggest German collotype printer in business.

A major business competitor came also from Dresden. No, it was NOT Stengel & Co. (Stengel & Markert), but **Wilhelm Hoffmann**, established 1862. Situated at Marschallstr. 12/14 according Klimsch 1895, the same year converted into a joint stock company. Klimsch 1898 reports move to R&J's neighbourhood: Blasewitzer Str. 25. W. Hoffmann (photographer!), another important picture postcard printer, had been directed by Bruno Schulze since May 1892. According to an article on Hoffmann company published in issue 22, 1887 of "Freie Künste" (bimonthly published printing trade periodical from Vienna with branch at Leipzig), the company had 5 collotype flatbed presses, including one with the biggest

then printing format, as well as four hand presses. Daily production 6,000-7,000 collotype "images". Hoffmann produced also art reproductions similar to R&J who are mentioned in above article, too. Said to have an excellent reputation internationally.

Other than R&J, Hoffmann not only concentrated on photography and collotype but used lithography means and printing quite early (combination printings). An own hand-colouring staff was also employed before 1895. Guess Wilhelm Hoffmann company belongs also to the group of early picture postcards sources.

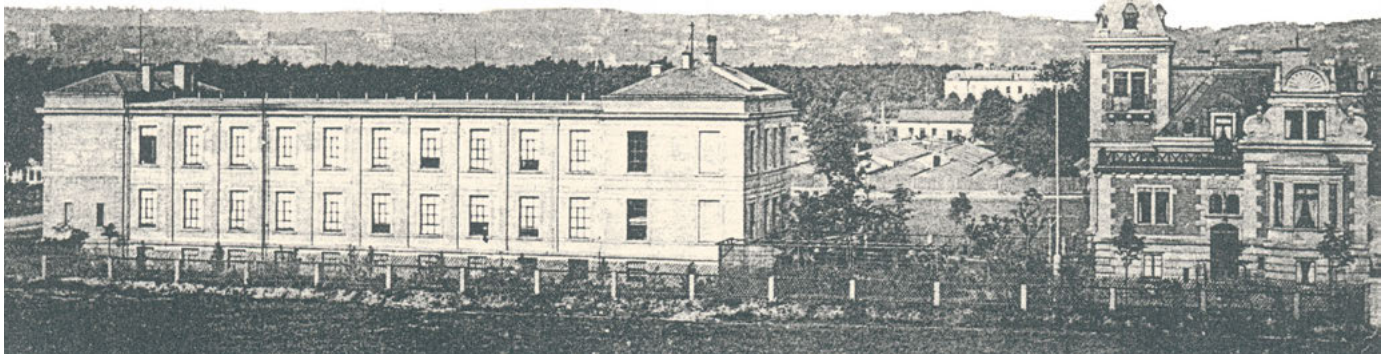
The book "**Emil Römmler - Lebenserinnerungen eines Königlich-Sächsischen Hofphotographen**" (Dr. Günter Voigt, 1996 · ISBN 3-00-000844-6), my major source for this article, includes several well done articles besides the memoirs and family/business anecdotes of Emil Römmler himself he had written down quite late. Signed and dated Dresden 28 January 1937. Vaguely mention on R&J's postcard production found only here and there.

Emil's son Hans Emil Römmler who had started training in the parent company in 1895 followed by further studies at Vienna, had begun to replace collotype presses with latest letterpress machinery after his return home in 1901. R&J had installed an own block making/etching dept by 1899 already. The aim was to print all coloured orders (mostly art reproductions and commercial orders for the trade and industry) by three and four colour letterpress process. Hans Emil Römmler became managing director (together with a Christian Ludwig Mensing from Leipzig) of the new formed **Römmler & Jonas G.m.b.H.** (limited company) in 1909. The same year Emil Römmler retired from the company he had built up.

An article by Andreas Kruse in previous mentioned book refers to the memories of a former pressman who recalls the very last collotype press had been removed from works in 1911. But why do I have several, definitely collotype printed, cards from WW1 years? For instance an artist signed (with year date '1914') view of Dinant, with wartime "Feld-Postkarte" and full name of Römmler & Jonas, Dresden, imprinted. Klimsch 1913 and 1914 editions still mention three-colour collotype printing together with three/four-colour letterpress process offered by R&J. The company employed 120 workers then.

The pressman's memories, he is said to have joined R&J in 1911, included that the four colour (letterpress) printing at R&J had reached heights then. National and international customers. Million of cards were shipped to Russia, Denmark, Sweden and Egypt ("our four colour cards were available from Cairo down to Assuan"). R&J printed goods were shipped even to China. Did he refer to times prior or after he had joined the company? By 1911 the situation on the postcard markets were difficult. Protective tariffs as well as general overproduction left little or no profits. And yes, R&J printed many (fine) cards for Egypt. I do have quite some.

The unclear state of information above reminds me of the information found on R&J on the internet (Wikipedia and other -local- sites). Here it reads 'photographs' but



The 1889 completed Römmler & Jonas factory at Blasewitzerstr. 27, Dresden. With the Römmler villa seen on the right.

in fact it were quality **collotype prints**, glazed and glued onto heavy board to be sold separately or in form of souvenir albums. Or the statement R&J had rotary gravure for colour printing... well, not before the late 1920's. Hans Emil Römmler sold the R&J limited company on 1 January 1928 to the Dr. Güntzschen-Stiftung, a foundation under control of the city of Dresden. The Römmler family era was over? According to the Römmler book it was. But, Klimsch 1930 lists Hans Römmler as one of three directors in charge. The company now much bigger and equipped with all printing processes. Some 490 workers! The (old) business name was used until 1938, then it read Dr. Güntz-Druck, Blasewitzer Str. 27.

Oh, I have digressed from the original topic a little bit. Sorry.

The early R&J postcards I want to talk about are the typical collotype printed views from Germany, Europe and the Ottoman Empire. For some time already I spotted them on sale in "cheapo-boxes" at flea markets, and part of "junk lots" on offer on the internet. Single cards often on sale for 1 Euro on dealers sites. Why? Many dating from the second half of the 1890's, although often not postally used but in good to excellent condition. Look unwanted, neglected. Why? They are some 120 years old meanwhile, usually well printed. Because of the popular views? Of course R&J did reproduce popular then places and views, but that did others, too. Or is it because they are only collotype printed, mono- or duochrome? Showing quite authentic views after photos taken by R&J's travelling photographers or even by Emil Römmler himself, who appeared to have enjoyed travelling a great deal.

Okay, the 'Place XYZ at Night' type of cards, the so-called "by moonlight" views, actually daylight photos reproduced darker on bright blue card with clouds added and the obligatory full moon, can become a bit boring. But this special design was sort of a craze around c. 1897-99, popular with ppc collectors and most publishers were quick to add such views to their line of cards.



Sample of the mentioned **rectangular rubberstamp imprint** used by R&J. Here with year date 1890 plus separate image number 1561. A view from Hildesheim (cathedral). One of three glazed collotype prints of thin paper (two views of cathedral, above and no. 1554/1892 and another with old house/street view, no. 1580/1890) found by Dutch collector Oene Klijnsma. All three prints are in about picture postcard size (140 x 90 mm). With short handwritten description of place shown. Why they came into circulation is unknown to me.

Emil Römmler's otherwise fine nose for customers demands and wishes appeared to have failed when it came to coloured postcards. R&J invested into **coloured letterpress process** at the end of the 1890's. Competitors like Louis Glaser ("Autochrom"), Emil Pinkau ("Heliocolor"), Stengel & Co., Dr. Trenkler & Co., C.G. Röder and a number of others were quick to introduce own combined printing processes for faster and reasonable costs colour reproductions. Either letterpress or collotype combined with lithography process.

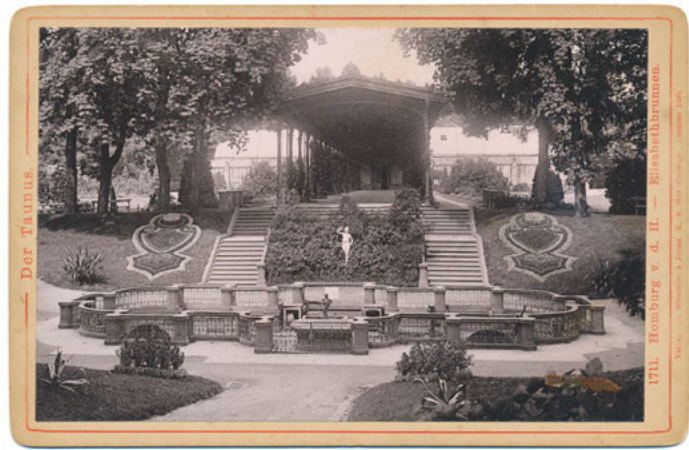
The coloured collotype R&J cards I have seen so far were hand coloured usually. Not very many compared with the total postcard output, most of rather common quality anyway.

With monochrome collotype printing the former pioneer R&J was soon faced with numerous competitors, with higher production capacities and probably lower prices. His former big customer Ernst Was-muth, fine arts publishers specialised on architecture, who had once tried to convince Emil Römmler to move his business to Berlin, installed an own printing department for collotype/lithography. The 1872 set up business did also some postcard printing under own name.

Another setback was the loss of long-time customer, E. A. Seemann from Leipzig. Leading art publisher as well as source of several popular art publications. During a period R&J was faced with technical problems with their colour letterpress printing (c. 1904), E. A. Seemann decided to place all colour printing jobs with Förster & Börries, Zwickau, Saxony. A printing house with high reputation, especially for perfecting the original three-colour letterpress process printing. Enough of R&J's fading business glory.

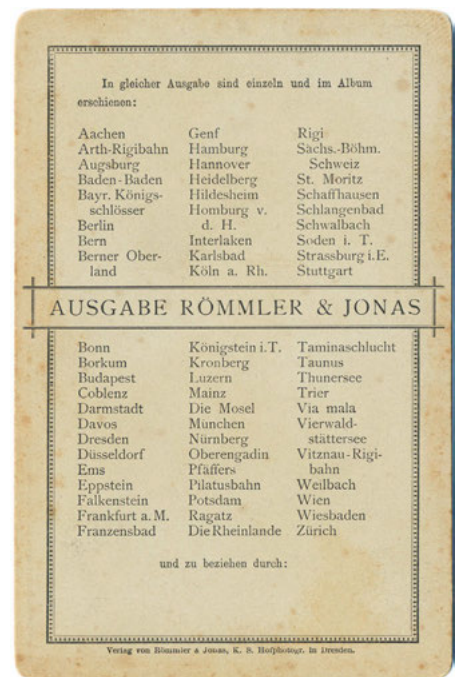
Greetings from Cologne.

The cathedral. Published and printed by R&J. Name on picture side in very small type. Caption set in typical for R&J then script-type caps. Year date inside rectangular imprint found at lower right corner reads '1898'. The photo may be years older. Address side with R&J code '842gt' at lower left corner position. Has old "Deutsche Reichspost - Postkarte" imprint.



1711 Homburg v.d.H. – Elisabethbrunnen from "Der Taunus" series. Published and printed by Römmler & Jonas, Dresden, 1890. Excellent collotype printed view, glazed surface (NOT a photograph!) pasted onto strong card, rounded corners. Size 166 x 108 mm.

On reverse a longer list with other series published covering popular cities and places in Germany, Switzerland and Austria. Available as single views like above and in albums. Space left for imprint of local retailer.



When did R&J now print the first picture postcards? Well, I don't know for sure. The information from the Römmler book is not very clear on this. Probably in 1892. Earlier? An undated passage mentions millions of postcards showing the German emperor in red and green uniform printed by R&J. Wish I would have a sample to find out the printing process used.

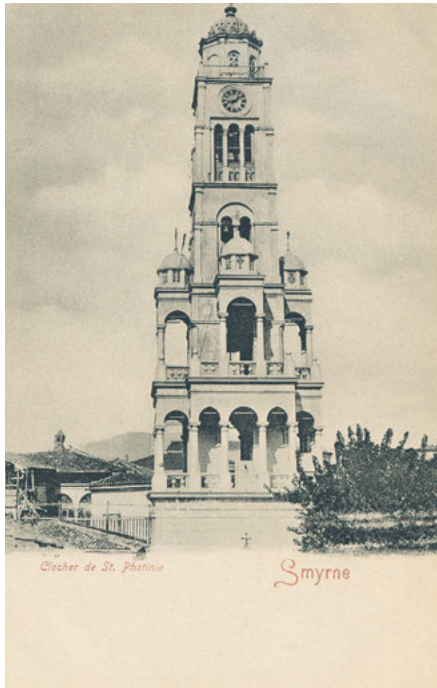
Fact is that there are quite some glazed collotype prints in about standard ppc format around, the same that were pasted onto strong card and on sale since the late 1880's. These (loose) prints on thin paper usually show a rectangular (boxed) rubberstamp imprint with R&J name, image no. and year date on verso. What were these good for? Image source? The earliest I have bears the year date 1890. The same style rubberstamp imprint is also found on a regular postcard from Cologne on picture side. Likely for promotional purposes.

Postcards printed by R&J usually show their full name, the initials and/or the spade logo. Some show just the typical R&J card code, often on address side left corner position, then again part of publisher line. Consisting of a number (3 to 5-digit) followed by one or more (up to four to my actual knowledge) – mostly – small letters. Occasionally with another number added = card number of a (city) series.

The meaning of these small letters was researched by a Dutch collector years ago. I recall he was very sure that some letters had to do with the picture orientation. A "g" and/or "b" for landscape, "h" and/or "t" for portrait. I don't have his work at hand anymore. No idea what his explanation for the other small letters were. And, there is no rule without exceptions.

Another good identification are the characteristic captions used by R&J for quite some years. The relatively tall, script-type caps used for the place, together with much smaller italic type for description. Usually printed in red ink. Cards with this caption style may show the above code in addition. Others like a couple of views from the Osman Empire I have, show no name, code but typical captions only. Once again there are other types found from about the same time.

Let's take a look at some pre-1900 / early collotype cards printed (& published) by R&J. Pioneers of commercial collotype printing and early big ppc company. Many of their cards well worth a second look.



Smyrne. Clocher de St. Photonie. Izmir/Turkey. No R&J code. Address side in French language. Not p/u.

Grüss Gott!

(Hello! Good Day! Good Morning! etc. common greeting in South Germany and Austria). Nice sample of an early R&J non-topo design. Postally used in March 1897. R&J in small type on picture side, code 2497 bb on address side. Mailed within Bavaria / Bavarian postage stamp.



QUO VADIS ART POSTCARD SERIES

I have four cards from the **Quo Vadis** series. This is design no. 5. Signed G.G. Bruno. Published by Belforte, Livorno, Italy. Not p/u, undivided back. Printed by R&J, collotype with some machine- but mostly hand-colouring.




Chamonix (Mont-Blanc), Glacier Sea. France. R&J code 3289 t plus "Importé". Not p/u, undivided back. Likely a quite early issue with plenty of room for message on picture side. Too much pressure used on letterpress machine for address side imprints.



Ricordo di Nervi. Villa Gropallo. Italy. R&J and code 14194 bnh. P/u October 1900. Collotype printing on light blue card.





ANVERS

Am 11. Nov. 96.

Lafayette's Fährerin!

Ihre Schiffen nehmen Ludwig Walther Keller
mitbringt in nur 24 Stunden von Antwerpen
nach London und umgekehrt. Die besten und besten
Speisen und Getränke.

De Viver

s Gravenhage

Klöncker & Jönck, Dresden. 4047 Cb, 12

A black and white photograph of the Museu Arqueològic in Barcelona. The large, ornate building is the central focus, surrounded by a park with a circular fountain and stone ruins in the foreground. The text 'Museu Arqueològic' and 'Barcelona' is printed in red at the bottom.



Gruss aus Westerland

Lieber Hannes! Da ich
 schon so lange nicht mehr von
 dir höre, möchte ich mich nach
 dem Befinden der Frau be-
 fragen. Ich bin ganz wohl
 und hoffe, dass du auch
 so bist. Mit besten Grüßen
 von mir. 1. Sept. 97. Pöschel.

Amalienborg

Kjøbenhavn

21. August 1948

Q501 borg B. & J. D.

THE POSTCARD ALBUM #31

Gruss aus Westerland

Liebes Mami! Da ist

19

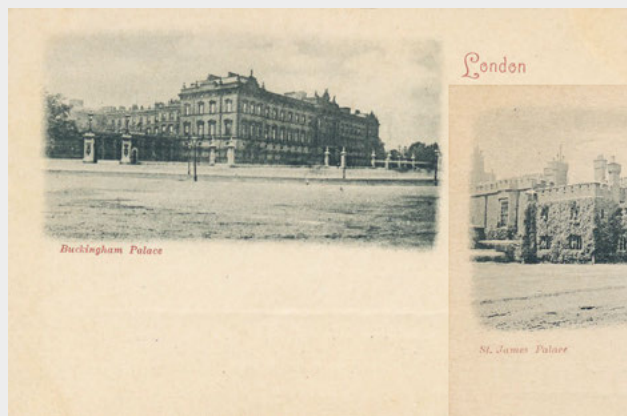
Römmeler & Jonas – Early British Connection

The British Post Office allowed privately published picture postcards (with adhesive postage stamp) to be mailed from 1 September 1894. Their size smaller than the “normal” (c. 140 x 90 mm) used on the Continent (“intermediate size” & “court size”). The normal/bigger size was introduced in late 1899 in Britain. R&J appears to have been quick to secure orders for collotype printed cards from British publishers. All my samples measure max. 128 x 84 mm.

Illustrated is a card (Law Courts) from a series with London views for **De Keyser's Royal Hotel, Ltd.** Shows R&J code 9007 t, p/u in August 1897.

Other early R&J London views were on offer by local **A. Mansford & Sons** (manufacturing stationers). Some with promotional imprints on address side. Probably local distributors only. Illustrated is Buckingham Palace, R&J code 9025 qt and 9026 qt St. James Palace, both with identical Mansford promotional imprint.

Very likely the early British ppc publishers **Blum & Degen** placed orders with Römmeler & Jonas. Monochrome as well as duo tone (bright blue card) printed.



London. Strand. A popular and always busy London postcard view. Printed (and published?) by R&J with code 9014 bng. The image covers much more space on picture side than the above vignette-style views. Mailed from London to Potsdam, Germany on 29 September 1898. The delivery took only a single day according to the then usual arrival postmark. Printed on bright blue card in “by moonlight” style.

I show another London view, same size and also collotype printed on bright blue card, but without moon. London, St. Paul's Cathedral with R&J code 9004 bns. Not postally used.



► **Halberstadt.** Breiter Weg und Martinikirche. Germany. R&J + code 5419 t. Not p/u. One of my favourite R&J with nicely detailed street view. Halberstadt was the home of two postcard printers: H. Meyer's Buchdruckerei (see TPA #28) and well-known (big!) Louis Koch. The latter firm still around after the end of WW2 (“Willi Koch”). Card purchase from a major German internet dealer for 1 Euro.

