

SPECIMENS OF THE SPANISH PHILIPPINES

by *Don Peterson*

In the philatelic literature there is almost no mention of specimens of the Spanish Philippines. This article describes the five types of specimen overprints that occur on postal and newspaper issues of the Spanish Philippines. Specimen overprints also occur on revenue and telegraph stamps; however, they are not included within the scope of this article.

Specimen overprints on Spanish Philippine stamps occur in two general forms. The overprint occurs as a single word "MUESTRA", meaning "sample" or "specimen", or it occurs as a phrase: "MINISTERIO DE ULTRAMAR MUESTRAS", meaning "overseas minister samples." The latter format is of such size that it extends over several stamps. The overprints were either handstamped or typeset at the National Stamp Factory in Madrid. Occasionally, on the typeset overprints, a fine horizontal frameline can be observed over and under the letters.

To my knowledge, few of these specimens ever reached the Philippines. Except in one instance, as I shall later describe, all of the specimens were distributed from the National Stamp Factory in Madrid. In fact, there is a well-circulated story among philatelic circles in Spain that the specimens first appeared on the philatelic market in the mid 1930's. Although the specimens were produced approximately at the same time when "host" stamps were printed/issued, apparently all or most remained in storage (intentionally or

Table of Contents

Vol. X No.2

April 1988

Specimens of the Spanish Philippines

(Don Peterson)Page 1

The Legislative Palace Commemorative

Issue of 1926 (Arnold H. Warren) Part IIPage 9

The "Tachibana-Maru and Gunji-Yubin

from the Philippines (Fumihiko Yano)Page 16

unintentionally) at the National Stamp Factory. It is rumored that the release of these stamps occurred through the Madrid stamp dealer, Manuel Galvez. Even today, these overprints can regularly be found in stamp dealer stocks in Spain, whereas they are scarce in the Philippines and elsewhere.

Alvarado (1977) indicated that specimen overprints of Spanish Puerto Rico "are merely samples sent to the different consulates and agencies to notify them of changes in stamp color or design." However, there is no evidence indicating that this was done for Spanish Philippine stamps.

All evidence indicates that the specimen overprinted stamps were not sent or did not reach the Philippines, at least until after the mid 1930's. The bright hues, clear gum, and lack of tropical staining on the stamps is indicative of stamps that have remained in more temperate climates (such as Spain) rather than in tropical climates (such as the Philippines.) The condition of these stamps and the almost total lack of reference to them in 19th century and early 20th century stamp catalogues supports this theory.

None of the specimens are known to have experienced legitimate postal use in the Philippines. In fact, no covers are known anywhere. The few "used" stamps I have examined have bogus or "out-of-period" cancels.

To date, specimen overprints have been recorded on Philippine stamp issues of 1871-1872, 1875-1879, 1890-1897, and 1898. Specimen overprints also occur on the newspaper issues of 1886-1896. No specimen overprints are known on postal issues earlier than 1871, or on the issues of 1874 and 1880-1886. No specimen overprints are known on the surcharged issues of 1881-1888, 1877-1879 and 1897. Although the quantities of specimen overprints produced are unknown, they are generally scarce to very rare, depending on the specimen type and "host" stamp.

Specimen overprints have been reported on proofs or essays of the Spanish Philippines. For example, Harradine (1987) reported that all four stamps of the 1871 issue (Scott # 39-42) can be found printed in blue on white card stock with the overprint "MUESTRA." Although I have not seen these cards, I suspect that the actual specimen overprint was "MINISTERIO DE ULTRAMAR MUESTRAS", which was the specimen type used on the "normal" stamps issued between 1871 and 1877.

On the 1872 issue, the 12c blue (normally rose) and 62c rose (normally violet) are considered color trials, proofs, or essays. Both of these stamps can be found with the "MINISTERIO DE ULTRAMAR MUESTRAS" overprint.

Harradine (1987) reports an interesting story on Scott #178 (25c dull blue). The source of the information was Warren Browne in Manila.

"Ten sheets of the 25 centavos de peso value (regularly printed in dull blue) were sent to the Manila post office (arrived April 20, 1891) to be distributed as samples only - to various officials and interested parties. These were clearly marked on the upper portion of each stamp, MUESTRA, (i.e. "Specimen"), but were also placed on the mails to prepay postage. These stamps, naturally enough, were quickly snapped up by some philatelists and other speculators in Manila for resale at large profits. However, these same people found themselves "cornered", as many more similar sheets, apparently scheduled in another consignment, arrived in Manila the following year (1892) and the value of the original holdings fell very dramatically."

I have no records (philatelic literature, auctions, or collections) of any of these stamps, either on or off cover. If the above statement is correct, these would be the only specimen overprinted stamps actually shipped to the Philippines and the only ones that could have been used legitimately in the mails. Surviving examples, if they exist, would appear to be very rare. The type of specimen overprint on this stamp cannot be determined from the above reference.

Alvarado (1977) provided some additional information on specimen overprints in an article on the 1898 Alfonso XIII issues of Puerto Rico. He indicated that the "MUESTRA" overprinted stamps were "possibly for Infanta's collection." Although this could be an appropriate explanation with regard to the 1898 issue, it would not apply to any specimen overprinted stamps printed/issued before his birth in 1886. Interestingly, one of the illustrations in Alvarado's article shows the "MUESTRA" overprint typeset vertically on an 1898 Puerto Rican stamp. On the 1898 issue of the Philippines the typeset "MUESTRA" is only known to have been applied horizontally.

Another interesting piece of information from Alvarado's article is that all values of the 1898 Puerto Rican issue, both perforate and imperforate, exist with the "MUESTRA" overprint. The presence of "MUESTRA" on imperforate 1898 Philippine issues is rare; how-

ever, I believe the overprint likely occurs on all of the 1898 Philippine values, perforate and imperforate.

One final note. In current auction catalogues, I have occasionally seen a Spanish Philippine postal, revenue, or telegraph stamp (usually issues of the 1880's) with the overprint (or part of it) "GOBIERNO GENERAL URBIZTONDO." Frequently, it has been described as a specimen. That is incorrect. It is not a specimen. In addition to being the name of a Spanish Governor between 1850 and 1853, "URBIZTONDO" means that the stamp was officially "retired" and was no longer in use by the government.

Table 1 describes the five types (A through E) of specimen overprints applied on Spanish Philippine postal and newspaper stamps. Figure 1 provides examples of each type.

Table 2 summarizes the known occurrence of specimen types of postal and newspaper stamps based on a review of philatelic literature, auction catalogues, and private collections.

A possible forgery of a specimen is known on Scott #56. Instead of the normal violet Type E overprint, it is blue-green and has thicker letters. Another possible forgery is known on the surcharged Scott #95 (specimen type not known.)

TABLE 1

Description of Specimen Types of the Spanish Philippines.

TYPE A: Handstamped "MINISTERIO DE ULTRAMAR MUESTRAS" in two lines. The top line "MINISTERIO DE ULTRAMAR" has sans serif letters. The bottom line "MUESTRAS" has serif letters. 15mm by ?mm Blue. No gum. Found on 1871-1877 issues.

TYPE B: Handstamped "MUESTRA" with sans serif letters. 2mm by 14mm. Smooth yellow-white gum. Found on 1886-1896 issues.

TYPE C: Handstamped "MINISTERIO DE ULTRAMAR MUESTRAS" in two lines. Sans serif letters. 17mm by 42-1/2mm. Violet. Smooth white gum. Found on 1890-1896 issues.

TYPE D: Typeset "MUESTRA" with sans serif letters. 1-1/2mm by 10-1/2mm. Violet. Smooth white gum. Found on 1897 issues.

TYPE E: Typeset "MUESTRA" with sans serif letters. 3mm by 13mm. Violet. Smooth white gum. Found on 1897-1898 issues.

TABLE 2

Known Occurrence of Specimen Types on Postal and Newspaper Issues of the Spanish Philippines.					
Scott No.	A	B	C	D	E
39 (cardstock)	VR*				
40	R				
40 (cardstock)	VR*				
41 (cardstock)	VR*				
42 (cardstock)	VR*				
43 (blue essay)	R				
45	VS				
46 (rose essay)	R				
48	R				
50	R				
51	R				
52	VS				
54	VS				
56	VS				
57	VS				
58	VS				
140		S	VS*		
141		S	VS		
143		S		S	VS
144		S			
145		S			
146		S			
147			VS		
148			VS*		
149		S			
150		S			
151		S			
152		S			
153		S	VS		
154 (proof)			R1*		
155			VS*		
156		S	VS*		
157		S	VS		
158		S	VS		

Scott No.	A	B	C	D	E
160		S			
161		S			
162		S			
163		S			
164		S		VS	
166		S		VS	
167		S			
168		S		VS	
169		S		VS	
170		S		VS	
171				VS	
172		S		VS*	
173		S			
174		S			
175		S			
176		VS*			
177		S			
178		S			
179		S			S
180					R*
192					S
193					S
194					S
195					S
196					S
197					S
198					S
204 (imperf proof)					R*
P1		S*			
P2		S*			
P3		S			
P4		S*			
P5		S			
P7				VS	
P9		S			
P12				VS	
P13		S*			
P15				VS	
P17		S*			
P18				VS	
P19				VS	
P20				VS	

*Reported in philatelic literature and auctions, but not visually verified.

Note: Relative scarcity is indicated in S=scarce, VS=very scarce, R=rare, and VR=very rare.



#43

Color Essay.
Blue Instead of Rose



#40



#45

TYPE 1



#52



#153



#P3

TYPE 2



#143

Pale Brown Claret
Color Variation

TYPE 4



#171



#P20

TYPE 3



#143



TYPE 5

#194

Bibliography

Alvarado, Luis. "The Alfonso XIII Issues for Puerto Rico". *PURIPLEX - 77* (booklet). September 2-5, 1977. San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Harradine, P.W.A. *Philippine Postage Stamp Handbook, 1854-1982*. 1987. London.