

Philippine Overprints of 1868-74, - by Dr. Geoffrey Lewis.

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Philatelists are well aware that the use of a handstamp for overprinting has often been accompanied by numerous "varieties". This article considers the 'HABILITADO' overprints of the Philippines of 1868 to 1874.

Most of the early stamps of Spain and its colonies feature Queen Isabella II of Spain. The Queen was deposed in a revolution in September 28, 1868, and a Republic was declared. All stamps were then handstamped with the slogan: 'HABILITADO POR LA NACION', which can be translated as "for the people of the nation".

On October 21, 1868, la Casa de Moneda in Madrid despatched 27 dies to Manila for the overprinting of all stamps. These dies were of cast metal. The legend was in three lines, in capitals: 'HABILITADO' on the first line; 'NACION', (with a full stop), on the third line. The middle line had 'POR LA' in smaller letters. The lengths of the three lines are 21mm, 9mm, and 18mm respectively, and the overall height is 9mm. The actual size of the overprints do vary, so these measurements are approximate.

Dies from the same source, and with the same appearance, were also used in the Spanish Antilles, (i.e. Cuba and Puerto Rico), and in Madrid. Some provinces in Spain used overprints with different designs and/or lettering.

Upon receipt of the dies in December 1868, the postal authorities commenced overprinting the current stamps, - a set of four values first issued in 1864, featuring the Queen facing left. These stamps were imperforate with size 19 x 22mm., and a spacing of 2mm between each stamp, both horizontally and vertically.

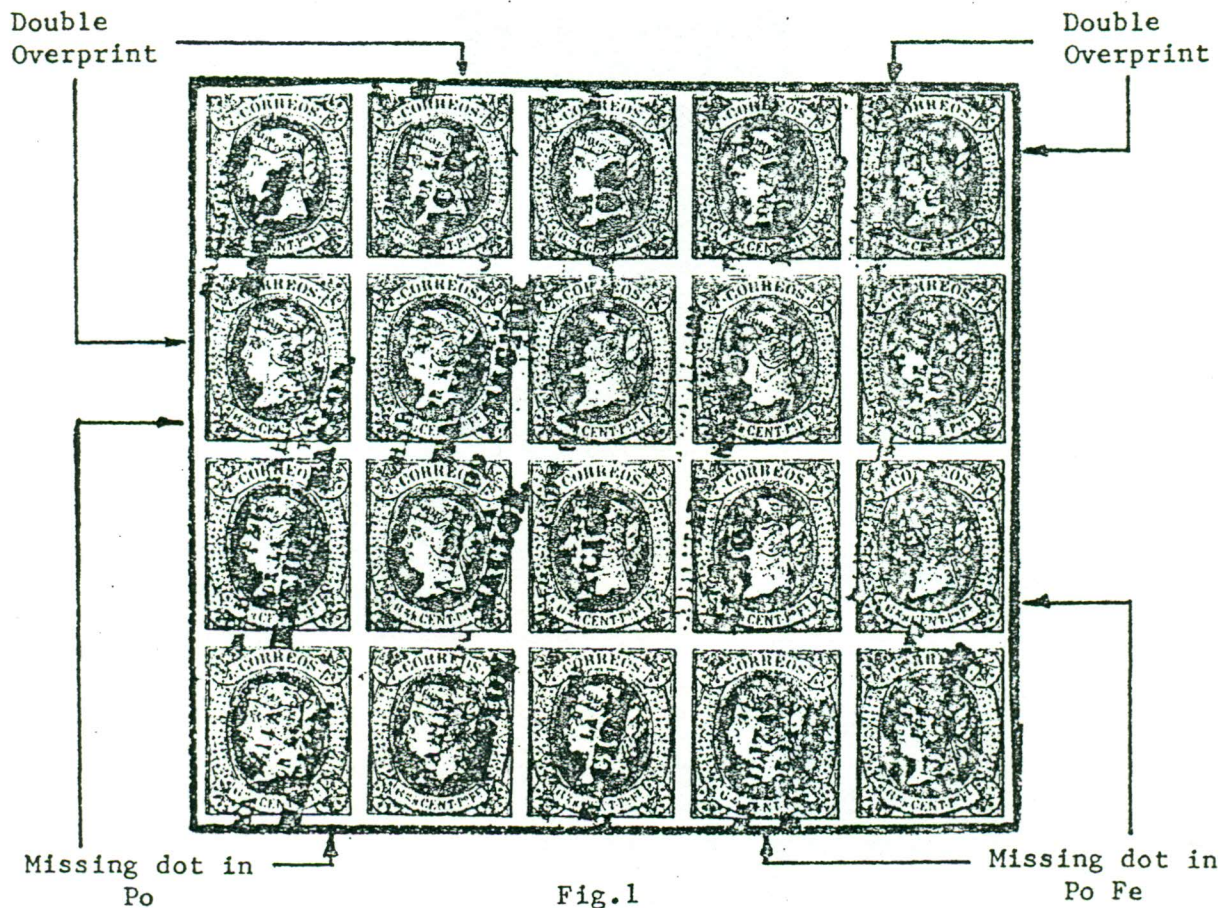
A little arithmetic and a little experimentation would have revealed that the overprints were too big for the stamps!. Three obvious alternatives were used:

1. Overprint horizontally: The slogan would read naturally, but, when each stamp was cut from the sheet, some letters of the overprint would be lost.
2. Overprint vertically: The slogan would be un-natural to read, but it would fit. Two variations were used: the overprint reading either upwards or downwards.
3. Overprinted diagonally: Several variations are found: overprint from top left to bottom right; overprint from bottom left to top right. The angle varies from almost horizontal to almost vertical.

Figure 1, (see next page), shows an overprinted block of 20 x 6-2/8 centime value. In this block the overprints are almost vertical, although the angle from the vertical does vary noticeably. It appears that the clerk would make several impressions before re-inking the steel die. The intensity of the impressions thus vary considerably, so that many of the letters are indistinct or absent. In some cases the word 'HABILITADO' is virtually missing. To correct this, a second impression was made. This double impression can be seen on the

Philippine overprints of 1868-74, (contd.).

fifth stamp of the first row, and the second stamp of the second row.



Another reported variety occurs when a single overprint is used on two stamps, - presumably a horizontal pair. With the long overprint, this would clearly mark both stamps, and, furthermore, this method would have allowed the clerk to complete the overprinting in half the time.

It should come as no surprise to the reader to learn that some stamps have an inverted overprint. Before considering inverts, I will, however, discuss the other overprinted issues.

Altogether 16 of the 22 stamps used in the Philippines prior to 1868 were overprinted with the afore-mentioned dies at some time between 1868 and 1874. We shall see that this was a reflection of the political turbulence in Spain, and the consequent shortage of supplies of stamps to the Philippines, resulting in the re-monetisation of withdrawn issues via the overprint.

Let me digress and consider the currency of the Philippines used on these issues. The unit of currency was 1 Peso = 8 Reales, and 1 Real = 20 Cuartos. The Philippine Peso was worth more than the Spanish Peso, so it was called the "Peso Fuerte", (literally 'strong peso'), On the 1864 issues the Peso Fuerte (abbreviated as 'Po. Fe.') is divided into 100 parts, called centimos. Thus, 1 Real = $12\frac{1}{2}$ centimos, and 1 Cuarto = $\frac{5}{8}$ centimo.

Philippine overprints of 1868-74, (concluded).

This is why the fractions of centimos are expressed on this issue in eighths.

In April, 1870, the two varieties of the 1863 1 Real green were overprinted. There would have been a postal need for this value as the standard letter rate from the Philippines to Spain. Figure 2, (see next page), shows a copy on cover. Clearly, these stamps were re-validated to replace the now-exhausted 1864 $12\frac{4}{8}$ centimos.

In March, 1871, a new stamp design was issued featuring the allegorical effigy of Spain. When supplies of these were exhausted by January 1872, the overprint was applied to the 1863 5 cuartos; 1 Real violet; 2 Reales, blue, and the 1856 Spanish Colonies 1 real, green on blue, and 2 reales, red on blue.

The Spaniards returned to a Monarchy, and stamps featuring King Amadeo arrived from Spain, for use in the Philippines, in May, 1872.

King Amadeo abdicated in 1873, and, once again, the overprints were required for the republican slogan. This time the overprint was applied to the 1859 10 Cuartos, and the 1862 5 cuartos.

However, the catalogues tell us that in January 1874, the 5 cuartos, 1 real, and 2 reales of the original 1854 issue were overprinted. But a new set of stamps, featuring a republican design, had only just been issued on January 1, 1874, so there would not have been any shortage of stamps that January. Since only 3000 to 5000 of these stamps had been originally issued some 20 years previously, it is unlikely that the Post Office would have had sufficient stocks of these old issues to satisfy any postal demand.

Were these 1854 stamps overprinted by favour, or are they forgeries?. In my collection of auction catalogues I find five copies of the 1 real, and none of the other two values. Two of these show the dots cancellation, which was used prior to 1860, and the overprint is neatly applied to that part of the stamp design not affected by the cancellation. Another copy is an unused marginal copy. Lot 138 of Filatelia Hobby, (Madrid) Auction 113 of 1979 is a copy from the lower left corner of the sheet with full margins, cancelled by two strikes of the large 'Manila' c.d.s., clearly dated August 1869!. Lot 1032 of Filatelia Hobby Auction 104 of 1977 shows a copy from the bottom row of the sheet, and this stamp also has part of two strikes of the large 'Manila' c.d.s.. I plated this copy as the second stamp from the left, so that the stamps from these two auctions are shown to be neighbours. Furthermore, it can be seen, on comparison with the illustrations of these two lots, that the same cancellation was applied to both of these stamps before they were separated. It appears that part of a sheet was overprinted, then very neatly cancelled and distributed to various collectors.

We have seen that the Philippines used the 'HABILITADO' overprint to re-validate stamps for postage, rather than to write a legible political slogan, or to deface the Portrait of the deposed monarch. Thus the application of the overprint has been fairly

Philippine overprints of 1868-74.(concluded).

sloppy even compared with handstamping from other countries in the 19th.century.

Let me now discuss the inverted overprints. It is reported on almost all values, and one is tempted to dismiss it as overprinting by favour. However, the only inverted overprints I have seen are on the 1 real violet, and 2 reales blue of 1863. The overprints are so smudgy that it would not appear to have been done by favour. The un-overprinted stamps are even scarcer than the overprinted ones, so a forged overprint is almost out of the question. As naiave as it sounds, it appears as though the overprinter had become so indistinct that the postal clerk could not readily distinguish the right way up!



Figure 2.