

WATERMARKED QUEEN ISABELLA II STAMPS OF 1859

By Sofronio S. Agustin, Jr.

Early postal issues of the Philippines, prior to 1899, are virtually devoid of watermarks. During the Spanish era, the one real green and two reales carmine stamps (Scott Nos. 8 and 9), which circulated in the archipelago between 1856-66, have earned, until now, the distinction of being the first and the only Philippine stamps on watermarked paper. These adhesives were typographed at the Fabrica Nacional de Moneda y Timbre (FNMT) in Madrid on bluish paper with a characteristic "loop" watermark (Scott type 104). Originally intended for distribution in Cuba and Puerto Rico, these stamps were likewise shipped to the Philippines to be used on foreign mail in lieu of locally-printed stamps of similar denominations being sold in the Islands' post offices at that time. It is common knowledge among Philippine philatelists that there are no other stamps printed either locally or in Spain and issued between 1854-98 which bear watermarks.

In this article, I would like to announce the discovery of a watermarked variety of the five cuartos Queen Isabella stamps of 1859 (Scott No. 10). I came upon an anecdotal account of its existence; however, this has not been substantiated by factual or written evidence in the literature. Therefore, this report is the first one to document and describe this unknown variety.

While I was examining my collection of five cuartos stamps of 1859

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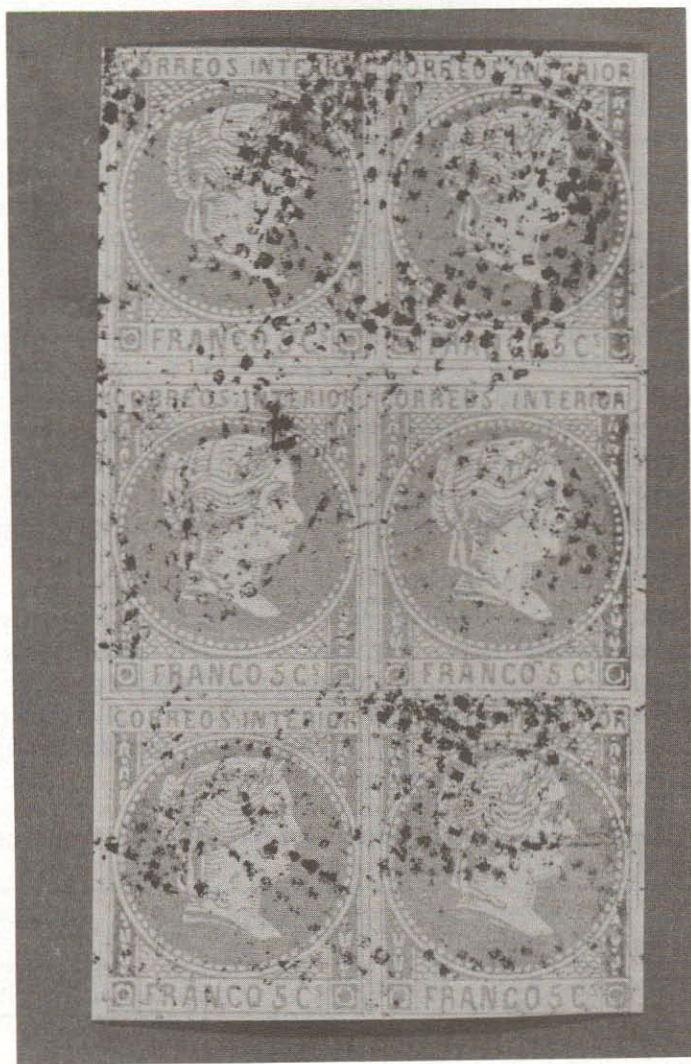


Figure 1. Obverse side of the watermarked variety 5 cuartos Isabella stamps of 1859. The letter A. falls on the middle left and F (P or B) near the edge of the lower left cliché. (Enlarged 1.5 x original size.)

(Scott No. 10) for paper types and characteristics, I stumbled upon a used vertical block of six with a watermark consisting of a fancy double-lined A, a period, and a portion of a second letter that looks more like an F, or probably a P or a B (Figures 2 and 3). This five cuartos multiple is dull red orange in color and printed on thick ribbed paper (Figure 1). The watermark is so prominent that it easily shows when viewed against ordinary table lamp light, obviating the need for the use of watermark fluid and tray. Oriented vertically and reading downwards, the letter A and period are situated on the middle left stamp and half of the other letter, F (P or B), on the edge of the bottom left cliche. The letter A measures 15 mm x 15 mm from apex to base and base tips, respectively. One millimeter away from the right leg of letter A is a fancy period which appears as a little hollow circle with a diameter of two millimeters. The left fragment of the letter F (P or B) measures 15 mm high and 5 mm across. There is a distance of 15 mm from the period and the second letter. In this instance, the watermark can be considered to be of the **reversed sideways** type because the letters read normally, from left-to-right, when the block of these stamps is examined from their flip side and vertically in relation to the stamp design.

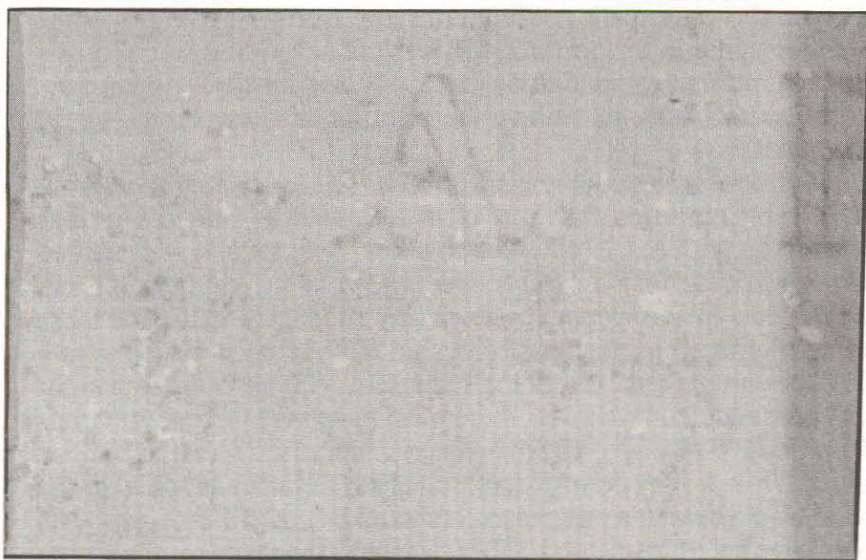


Figure 2. Unretouched photograph of the reverse side of the five cuartos Queen Isabella multiple showing the A. F (P or B) papermaker's watermark. (Enlarged 1.5 x original size.)

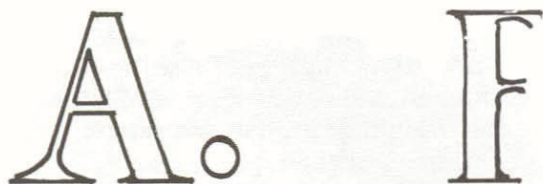


Figure 3. Slightly enlarged tracing of the letters comprising the watermark; horizontally positioned for easy viewing.

I believe the letters are a portion of the name of the manufacturer of the thick ribbed paper used in the printing of the Isabella issue in Manila. This may then be aptly classified as a **house or papermaker's watermark**. Such watermarks normally occur on the margin of the sheets and are usually not intended to show on the printed stamps. It can be surmised that in the printer's efforts to maximize the utilization of the sheets of paper supplied to him, even the edges were printed with stamps. To make matters even worse, the stamps were printed on the bad side since the watermarked side, the side with the watermark reading normally from left-to-right, is the good side suitable for printing. This is not surprising since locally printed stamps were often done carelessly and hastily. Apparently, quality control was lax during the printing of these issues in the Philippines.

It is hereby proposed that the 1859 five cuartos dull red orange imperforates with A. F(P or B) papermaker's watermark, as described herein be considered a separate collectible variety. Although it is not the intention of this paper to attach any monetary value for these watermarked stamps, the possibility that this variety is scarce or rare should be entertained. Out of the supposedly 5,000 copies issued for each color and denomination, there must have been very few stamps upon which this paper manufacturer's identifying marks can be found. While it may be true that each sheet of paper supplied to the printer would bear this watermark, it should be noted that these sheets would have been cut up into smaller sizes to fit the stone configuration of the stamps. Since the watermark is normally marginal in nature, the great majority of stamps on the sheets will show no watermark. These are just a few of the many extenuating circumstances that can add to the difficulty in finding these watermarked stamps. The mere fact that

there is no written account of the existence of a watermarked variety of this five cuartos stamp, from its printing in 1859 to date, is an indication of its scarcity. Finally, it may be argued that these indigenously printed stamps are the **first watermarked stamps produced in and specifically for the Philippines.**

The question that this phenomenon presents us is; how many of these watermarked stamps have survived the test of time: not to mention scorching tropical heat, floods, typhoons, the trash can and termites? With the help of the IPPS membership, hopefully, this question will be resolved soon. Readers are encouraged to examine their holdings of 1859 five cuartos Queen Isabella stamps (Scott No. 10) and report similar varieties to the author or the IPPS. It is hoped that other stamps will be found with similar watermarks. Eventually, we may be able to piece all the letters together, reconstruct the watermark, and reveal the identity of the manufacturer of the paper used in printing the stamp. ■

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