

The first documented European contact with the Philippines was made in 1521 by Ferdinand Magellan in his circumnavigation expedition. Forty-four years later, a Spanish expedition led by Miguel López de Legazpi began the Spanish conquest of the Philippines.

Transporting goods and mail from the Philippines, especially in the first two centuries of colonial rule, was difficult and very rare. Until 1766, transport between Spain and other European countries was primarily by Spanish galleon via east-bound route to Mexico. After 1766, Spanish vessels also began using a west-bound route, via Cape of Good Hope around Africa. Until 1811, the Galleons operated to Mexico.

The different routes depended not only on armed conflicts, but also on the seasons and wind currents. The month determines the route, covers which left Manila in October to February went round Africa.

The galleon never sailed earlier than May or later than September. A date from October to April therefore indicates the route around Africa. Postmarks and notations are also indicators of the route.



Letter sent from Manila to Rome, Papal States. From its contents and based on other letters from this correspondence, it can be determined that this letter was sent on February 8, 1776. Thus, this cover is **one of the oldest known letters from the Philippines in private collections.**

Due to the date of dispatch, the cover was sent on the westbound route. The cover went around Africa and arrived in Cadiz, Spain. In Cadiz the cover was marked with the red cancel "ANDALUCIA / ALTA" on the front.

The cover was marked "3" Reales de Plata Fuerte in Manila. In literature, it is assumed that since a fee of this amount had to be paid for incoming mail from Spain, such a marking was also applied to outgoing mail. This corresponded to the rate of a cover weighing up to 4 Adarmes (¼ ounce) regardless of the route, applicable to September 1879. However, Spain did not charge for letters in transit to Rome.

The marking "3" is the **earliest recorded marking relating to postal services on the Philippines.**