

SPANISH COLONIAL MARITIME MAIL IN THE AMERICAS

This exhibit chronicles the evolution of Spanish colonial maritime mail in the Americas from the creation of the *Correo Mayor de Indias*, in the second decade of the XVI century, until the introduction of postage stamps in the Spanish American colonies, in 1855. The emphasis is in the two principal institutions that carried colonial maritime correspondence: the *Correos Marítimos del Estado* (Royal Maritime Mail Service), and the *Empresa Mercantil de Correos Marítimos* (Maritime Mail Company). The first one was created in August 1764 by King Carlos III, and was later abolished in 1802. Its assets were absorbed by the Royal Navy. The second one, the *Empresa*, was a private company, incorporated in Havana in 1827, which finally folded in 1851. In the years before and after these institutions were active, mails were carried by merchant ships, chartered vessels, or by the Spanish Royal Navy, but all of them also continued to operate simultaneously with the (preferred) official mail system.

The three maritime mail markings created with the establishment of the Royal Maritime Mail Service were: **ESPAÑA**, for mail originating in Spain; **YSLAS**, used very rarely on letters from the West Indies; and **YNDIAS**, for correspondence from the Americas in general. These postmarks outlived both, the Royal Maritime Mail Service and the *Empresa*, and some of their different styles were in use for nearly a century, just before Spain and its colonies entered the U.P.U. in 1877. In 1779 a postal reform established nine postal demarcations in the New World. The marking **ISLAS DE BARLOVENTO** (Windward Islands), created for the West Indies demarcation, was used exclusively on maritime mail. Some of the other demarcation postmarks were also used on maritime mail, such as **NUEVA ESPAÑA**, **PERU**, **GUATEMALA**, and **BUENOS AYRES**. Occasionally, ordinary town handstamps were also applied to maritime mail, and rarely, letters even circulated in the mail system without any postal markings (against regulations).

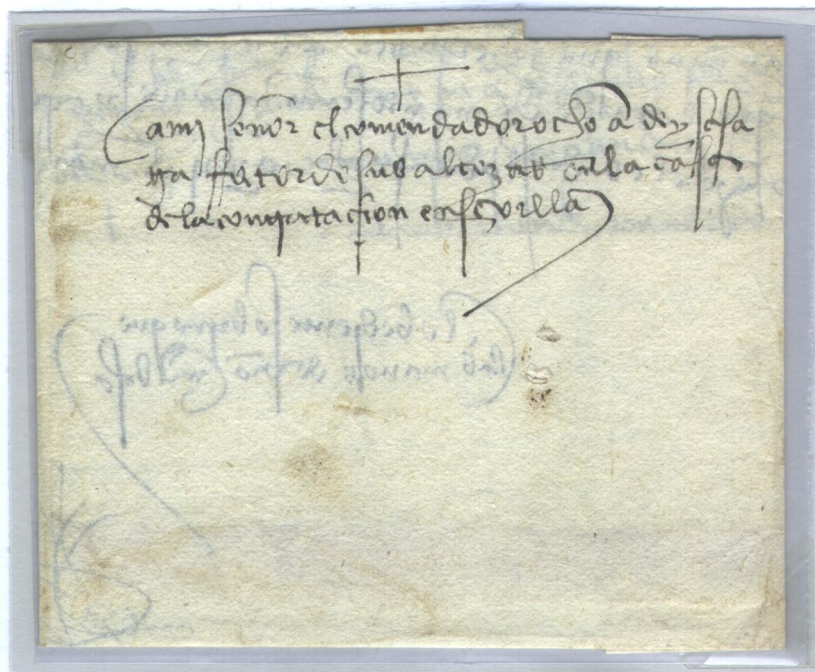
From the beginning of transatlantic mail in the early XVI century until the creation of the Royal Maritime Mail Service, most of the American continent was in Spanish hands. Since the second quarter of the XIX century and until the end of this exhibit, there were only two Spanish possessions left in the New World: the West Indian Islands of Cuba and Puerto Rico. In contrast to ground mails, Spanish colonial maritime correspondence during the XVIII century can be considered fairly rare, especially in good condition. The goals of this exhibit are: 1) to illustrate the development of maritime mail carried by the Spanish mail system to and from the Americas in the colonial period; 2) to present a comprehensive study of the markings used for this service; and 3) to show the evolution of the *Empresa Mercantil de Correos Marítimos*, its correspondence, and postmarks, until the introduction of the first postage stamps in the Spanish possessions in the Americas. The material is presented chronologically (more or less) within the following sections:

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| 1) Early transatlantic mail (1513 - 1764) | 7) Other categories of mail: military, certified and official mail. |
| 2) Maritime mail markings (1765 - 1850s) | 8) Early incoming mail markings used in Cuba (1818 - 1827) |
| 3) Demarcation markings used on maritime mail (1776 - 1858) | 9) "Empresa" markings (1827 - 1851) |
| 4) Town markings used on maritime mail (1766 - 1850s) | 10) Maritime mail with the first stamps issued for the Spanish colonies in the Americas (1855) |
| 5) Privately carried maritime mail (late XVIII century) | |
| 6) Maritime mail carried by foreign vessels (late XVIII century) | |

Early XVI Century Mail

1513 (March 12). Island of San Juan (Puerto Rico) to Seville, Spain. It was sent by an early settler in the Island to his uncle, the *Comendador* (knight commander) Ochoa de Ysasaga, merchant at the *Casa de Contratación de Sevilla*.

One of the earliest transatlantic letters from the New World sent several years before official mail service with the Americas was established.





1674. Rome to Lima, Peru.
Correspondence between
members of the Catholic
church.



1727. St. Pierre, Martinique,
to Bordeaux, France, via San
Sebastian in northern Spain.
The crowned black circular
SSⁿ was used in San Sebastian
from 1721 to 1729. Carried
by the *Andromede* to Spain
and then overland to France.
From May 13, 1720 until
August 24, 1764, Spanish
transatlantic mail was carried
free. Rate: 8 sols for ground
transportation to France.

Earliest reported Spanish
town marking on a
transatlantic letter.

XVIII Century Mail

Prior to the Establishment of the
Royal Maritime Mail Service

*Transatlantic Mail
West Indies to Europe
via Spanish ports*

1755. St. Pierre, Martinique, to
Marseille, France, via Cadiz,
southwestern Spain. The black
"Andalucia la Alta" was used in
Cadiz from 1756 to 1757. The
addressee was charged 14 sols.



1762. Le Cap, Hispaniola (French side)
to Bordeaux, France, via Ceuta, in
Spanish northern Africa. This type of
black AFRICA marking was used in
Ceuta from 1757 to 1771. Carried on
board the frigate *La Modeste de
Marseille* into Africa and then through
the strait of Gibraltar and overland to
France. Sixteen sols were charged to
the addressee.

XVIII Century Mail

Royal Mail and Early Period of the
Royal Maritime Mail Service

Transatlantic Mail



1748. Madrid to Jalapa, New Spain. Royal correspondence to the Mayor of Jalapa containing an order signed by King Fernando VI allowing the establishment of the Saint Francis of Sales religious order in that city. It was written at the *Buen Retiro* Palace in Madrid. Royal mail always enjoyed postal franchise.



1764 (October 31). Cordoba de Tucuman, now Argentina, to Granada, Spain. Unpaid single-weight letter likely carried by merchant ship into Cadiz. It was sent three years before the Royal Mail Packets started making direct trips to South America.

This is the earliest recorded transatlantic postal rate applied in Spain (established on October 1764) and the first known handstruck rate postmark on a letter from the Americas.

Maritime Mail Markings:
ESPAÑA
 (Applied in La Coruña and Cadiz)

Transatlantic Mail

1765 (February 2). Cadiz, Spain, to Lima, Peru. It was carried on board the merchant ship *Matamoros* (Moor Slayer). The initials "Q.D.C." meant "Quem Deus Conserveat" (May God Guard). Unpaid single weight letter (three silver reales).

Earliest recorded transatlantic ESPAÑA marking, applied in La Coruña.



1767 (September 25). Cadiz to Buenos Aires, Rio de la Plata (now mostly Argentina). All the postmarks on this cover were applied in Cadiz. Unpaid single weight letter (three silver reales). This was the first regularly scheduled trip of a Royal Mail Packet directly to South America and is the earliest incoming letter with postal markings to modern day Argentina.

Earliest recorded ESPAÑA marking from Cadiz carried on the first direct trip of a Royal Mail Packet to South America.

'Correo Mayor' Marking:
PERU
(Applied in Lima)

*Transatlantic Mail
South America to Spain*

The Royal Maritime Mail Service started operating in October 1764, but the office of the "Correo Mayor" of Peru was not abolished until July 1, 1769. There are three known examples of this marking that could have been a regional marking created by the "Correo Mayor" and thus would be the only such marking of all the four regions in which the "Correos Mayores" operated (Peru, Mexico, Guatemala, and Cuba) recorded on a maritime mail letter.



1766, January 11. Lima, Peru, to Cadiz, Spain, via Panama. Single weight rate of four reales (vellon) charged to the addressee. This style of handstamp became a "Demarcation" marking in 1779. The maritime route via Panama began to be used after Antonio de Ulloa published a study in 1765 showing that it was faster than the overland route across the Andes previously in use.

Earliest recorded transatlantic letter with a postmark applied in the Spanish Americas.

Maritime Mail Markings:

ESPAÑA

(Applied in Cadiz)

Transatlantic Mail
Spain to Central and South America

1772 (January 8). Barcelona, Spain, to Guatemala city. The black framed CATALUÑA was used in Barcelona during 1772. The ESPAÑA was applied in transit at Cadiz. Unpaid single weight letter (three silver reales postage due).

Second earliest transatlantic letter to Central America carried by a Royal Mail Packet. The earliest one, from the same correspondence, was sent several months before.



1774. Cadiz, Spain, to Lima, Peru. Early example of the ESPAÑA handstamp from Cadiz. Carried on the merchant ship *Galicia*. Unpaid single weight letter (three silver reales).

1783. Cadiz, Spain, to Guatemala city, via Veracruz, Nueva España. Carried by a chartered vessel or "Aviso" into Veracruz and from there by overland mail to Guatemala. The *sobreporte* of 1779 added inland fees to the maritime rates (5 reales for double-weight transatlantic rate + 2 for the inter-American fee).

Third earliest recorded date of the oval VERACRUZ and unique combination of markings.



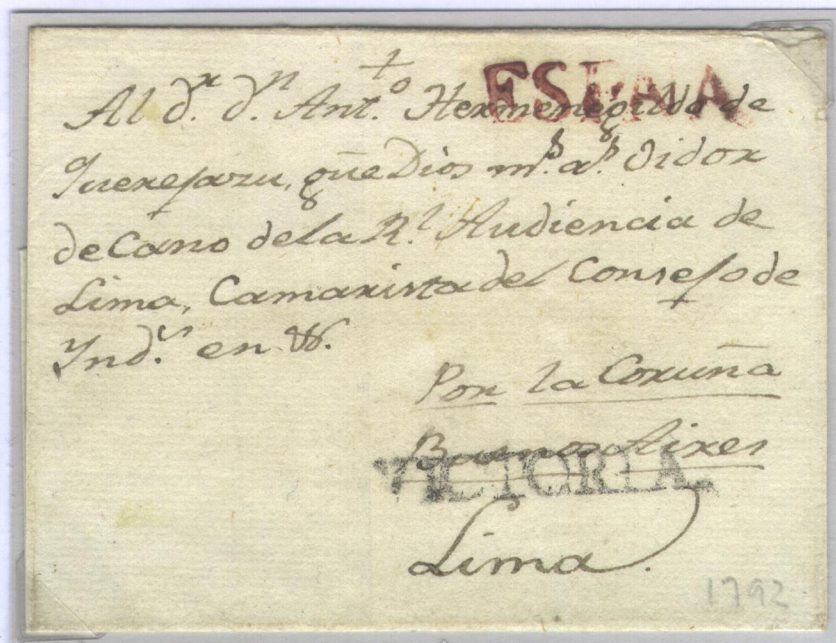
Maritime Mail Markings:

ESPAÑA

(Applied in La Coruña)

Transatlantic Mail

1792. Vitoria, northern Spain, to Lima via Buenos Aires. Unpaid single weight letter.



1795. Barcelona, to Tenerife, Canary Islands, via La Coruña. One real postage due (single weight letter).

1799. Northern Spain, to Havana, Cuba. Unpaid single weight letter.



Maritime Mail Markings:
ESPAÑA
 (Applied in La Coruña)

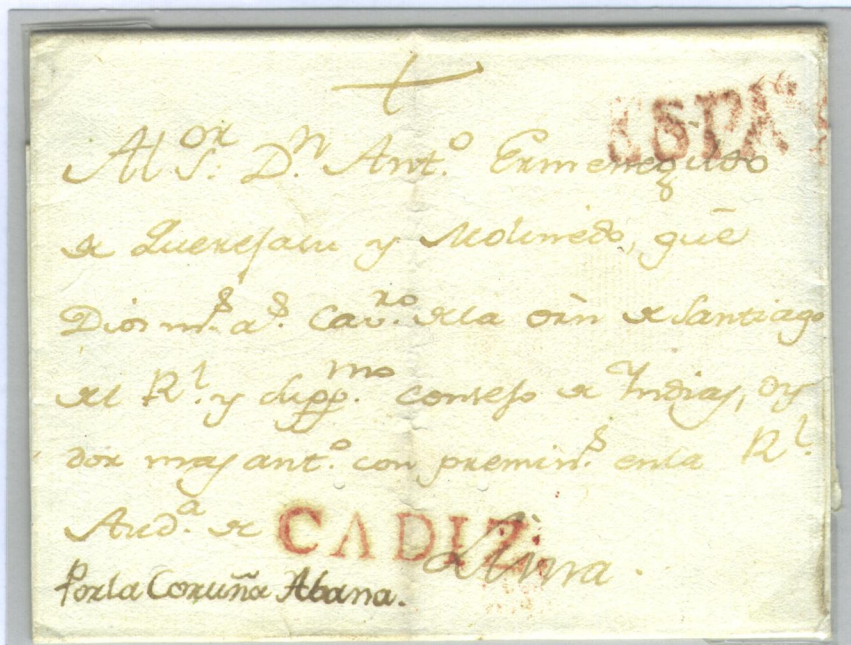
Cis-Atlantic and Transatlantic Mail

1791. Hamburg, Germany, to Orotava, Canary Islands, via La Coruña. Two reales postage due (double weight letter).



Undated. Madrid to Santiago de Chile via Cadiz. Thirteen reales postage due.

Undated. Cadiz to Lima via La Coruña and Havana. Unpaid single weight letter.



Maritime Mail Markings:
ESPAÑA
(Applied in Cadiz and Veracruz)

Undated. Madrid to Santiago de Chile via
Cadiz. Thirteen reales postage due.



1800. Veracruz to Valencia, Spain. Four reales (vellon) postage due for single weight letter. Carried by a chartered vessel or "Aviso".

This is the only know example of an ESPAÑA marking used on mail to Spain.

Undated. Spain to Guatemala city via
Veracruz. Four silver reales due (3
transatlantic rate + 1 overland inter-
American fee).



Maritime Mail Markings:
ESPAÑA
 (Applied in Buenos Aires)

Transatlantic Mail
Spain to South America

1802. Vigo, northern Spain, to Buenos Aires.
 Unpaid single weight letter.



Early 19th century. Madrid to Santiago de Chile via Buenos Aires. Official mail without postal franchise. Forty nine reales included the maritime rate for a multiple weight letter plus the inland fee. The oval *sello negro*, was applied in Madrid. Very unusual combination of markings.

Maritime Mail Markings:

ESPAÑA

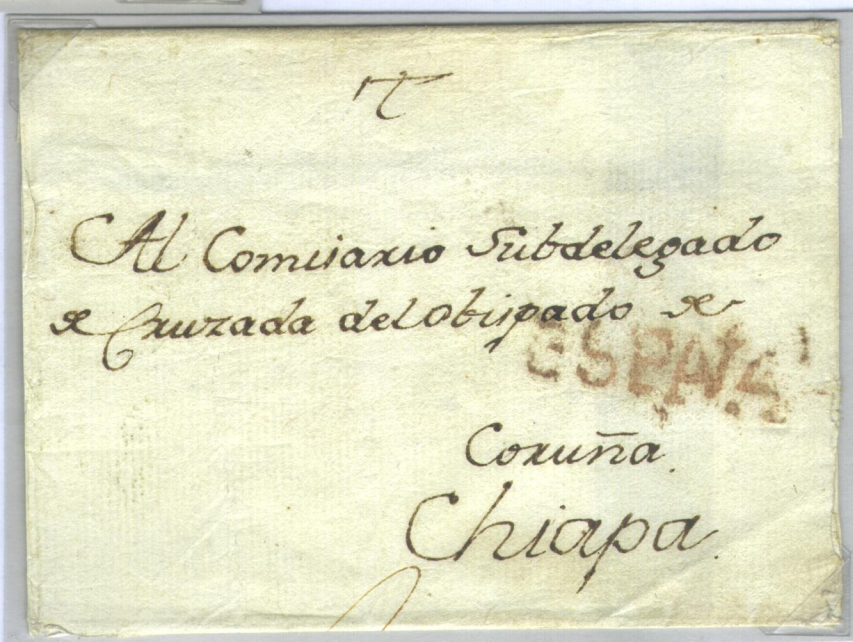
(Applied in Tenerife, Canary Islands)

1802. Rioja, Spain, to Mexico City, via La Coruña, Tenerife, and Veracruz. Unpaid single weight letter.



1803. Vigo, northern Spain, to Buenos Aires. Unpaid single weight letter.

Undated. Spain to Chiapas, Yucatan Peninsula, via La Coruña. Unpaid single weight letter.



Maritime Mail Markings:

ESPAÑA

(Applied in Havana)

*Transatlantic Mail
Spain to Cuba*

1837. La Coruña, Spain to Havana.
Carried on board the brig *Vigilante*.
Unpaid single weight letter. First of two
types of ESPAÑA markings used in
Havana.



1839. Barcelona to Havana via Nuevitas,
in the northeastern coast of Cuba.
Unpaid single weight rate of four silver
reales.

*This is the only recorded example of a
Cuban ESPAÑA marking in combination
with a town handstamp.*

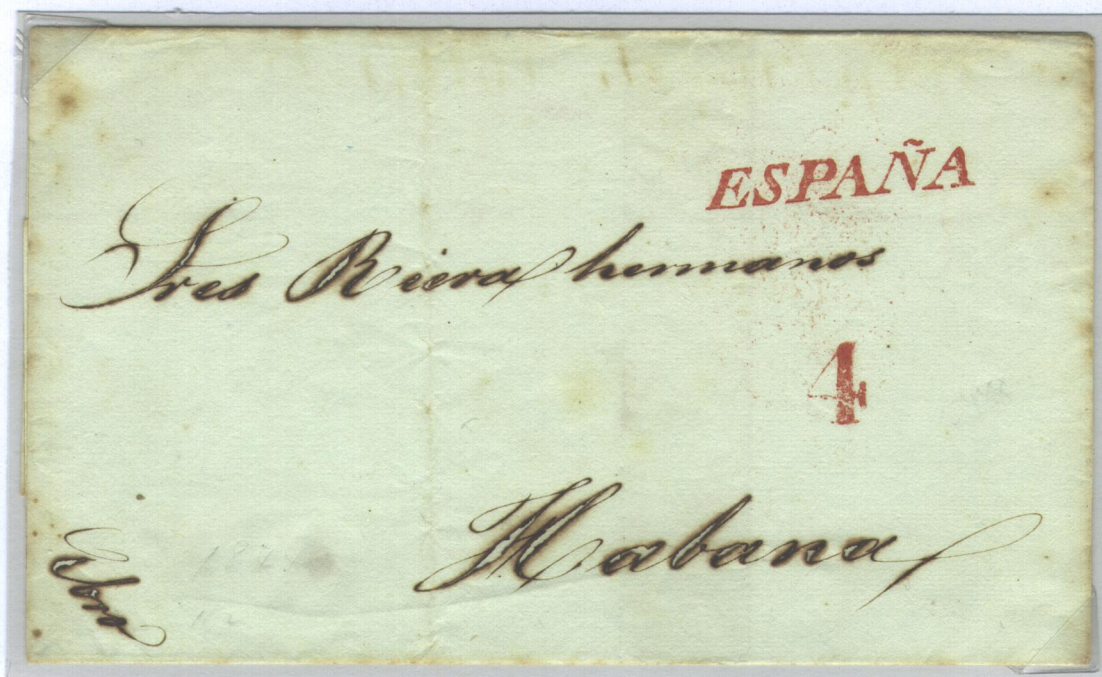
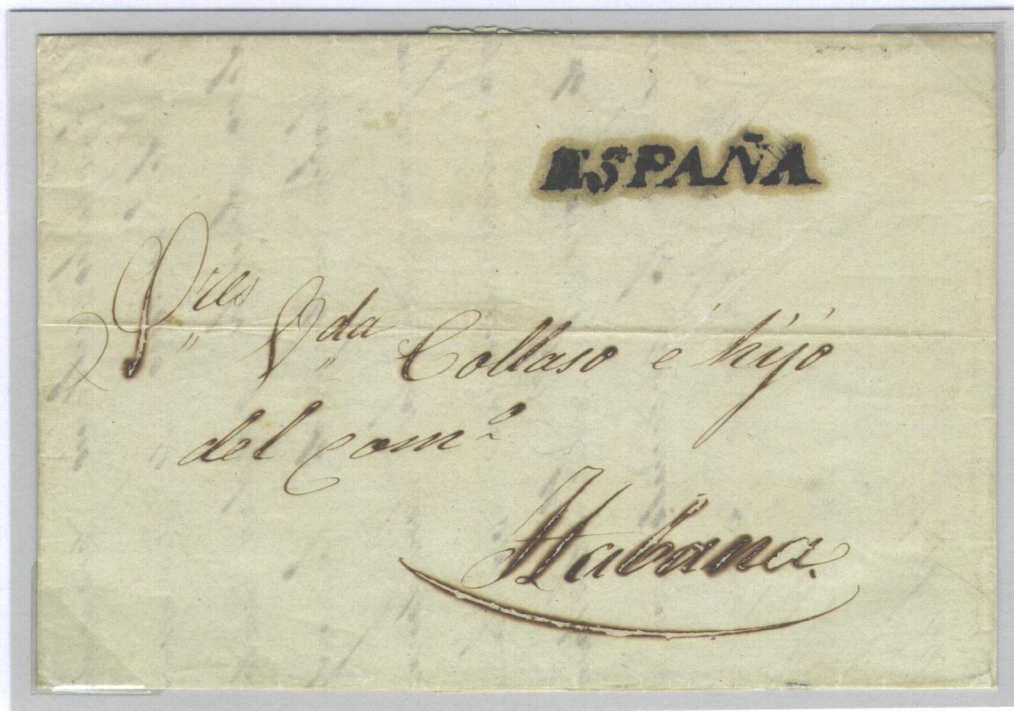
Maritime Mail Markings :

*Transatlantic Mail
Spain to Cuba.*

ESPAÑA

1840. Barcelona to Havana.

This is the earliest of the two recorded examples of this type of **ESPAÑA** marking in black, applied in Havana. Unpaid single weight letter (4 silver reales postage due).



1844. Spain to Havana. There are five examples of this type of **E S P A Ñ A** marking in red, applied in Havana. Unpaid single weight rate of 4 silver reales.

Maritime Mail Markings:
PENINSULA and ESPAÑA
 (Applied in Havana and Santiago de Cuba)

Transatlantic Mail
Spain to Cuba

1844. Santander to Havana. Four silver reales single rate postage due. The PENINSULA was used in Havana between 1845 and 1849.

Less than ten reported examples of this marking in red.



1853. Santander to Santiago de Cuba. Four silver reales single rate postage due. This style of handstamp was used in Santiago from 1848 to 1853.

This is the latest of the five known examples of this handstamp, and the only one in green.

Maritime Mail Markings:

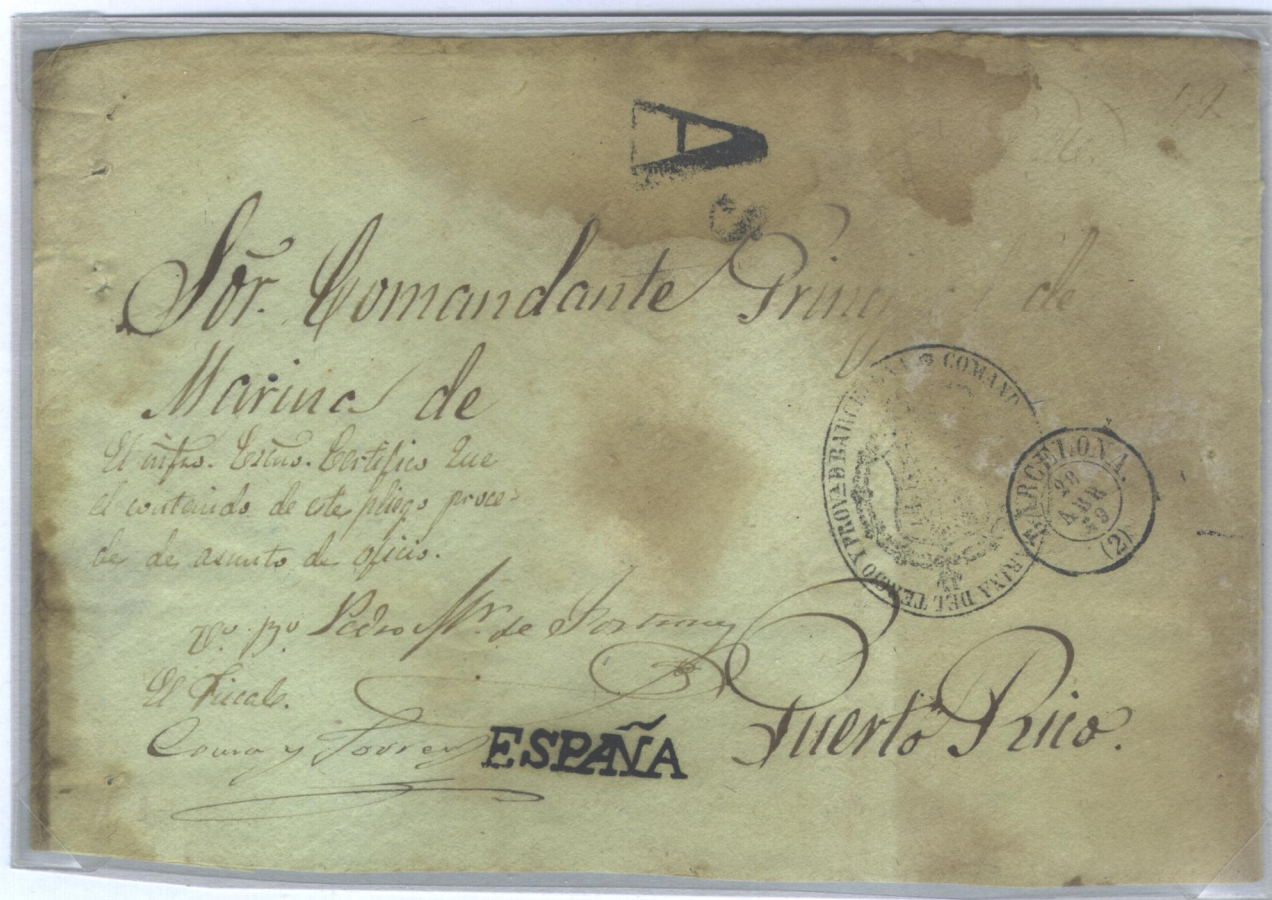
ESPAÑA

(Applied in Veracruz and San Juan)

Transatlantic Mail

1800. Veracruz to Valencia, Spain. Double weight letter charged six reales (vellon) postage due. Carried by the brig *Jupiter*. Parallel disinfection slits from the Lazaretto of Mahon, island of Menorca.

This is the only known example of the lower half of the handstamp NUEVA / ESPAÑA used as an ESPAÑA marking.



1859. Barcelona to San Juan, Puerto Rico. Official mail with postal franchise. There are four recorded examples of this style of España marking (two in black).

This is the latest known example of all the ESPAÑA markings.