

# Survey of Colombian Cobs in Major English Museums – British Museum

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This is the third installment of my museum survey of cobs, focusing on the silver cobs from Colombia. This is the final one dealing with Colombian cobs, the next installment will be about my visit to the British Museum, but on a different subject.

The British Museum, one of the great museums of the world, founded 1753, houses the national collection of coins, medals and paper money. The Department of Coins and Medals displays a permanent collection in the HSBC Money Gallery in the museum and has temporary exhibits that change three times a year.

The collection, of approximately one million pieces, can be consulted by appointment with the Department's Students Room. I made visit arrangements with Annette Calton, Administrator of the Coin Room, who graciously granted me access to study their wonderful collection.

I spent two mornings in the students room during late January 2001, inspecting numerous trays of coins, encountering approximately a dozen Colombian gold cobs, mostly gold 2 escudos of Philip V, and one silver cob, a famous and wonderful 8 Reales. It was a delight to find this coin; I recognized it immediately as the plate coin in Wayne Raymond's classic book, "The Silver Dollars of North and South America". It is also in Restrepo/Lasser as catalog number M62-23 and in Yriarte catalog number 1211. This piece is truly a magnificent specimen and reproduced here from a fresh photograph, with permission from the museum. What a thrill it is to hold and study such an important coin.

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**Charles II**

**Nuevo Reino 1702, 8 reales, assayer Buenaventura de Arce.  
Museum accession # C0468 cabinet 269, tray 16**

**Weight in grams: 27.376**

**Obverse design:** Crowned Arms of Castile & Leon with a Pomegranate below.

**Obverse legend:** The legend reads clockwise and inward, "CAROLVS ● II ● D ☚  
G ☚" and "VIII" reading bottom to top along the left side of the shield.

**Reverse design:** Crowned Pillars of Hercules with Ocean Waves below.  
**Reverse legend:** The legend reads clockwise and inward “(HISPANIARV)M ● ET INDIA(RVM ● REX)”. Note: the M of HISPANIARVM is upside down and the D of INDIARVM is punched backwards with respect to the rest of the legend. Above the pillars in three rows is the legend “PLVS VL T(R)A”, the date reads top to bottom along the outside of the right pillar. The assayer mark alongside the left pillar is interesting, it appears to be “WA” but the letter W is not of Spanish origin and words of foreign influence that start with W are usually spelled with a U or V such as, vagón, which translates as wagon. The best interpretation for the W then, is a mistakenly double punched V, however it remains curious that the left leg of the V has a serif pointing left and the right leg has a serif pointing right and the center leg has no serif at all. The mint mark is not visible due to a weak strike in the center of the coin, it would be located between the pillars just above the waves. The mint mark would show as “N<sup>O</sup>R” for Nuevo Reino.

Some more about the coin, it is struck in the name of Charles II even though Charles had died in 1700 and Philip V was now king of Spain. This was not likely to have been caused by a delay in the news however, as Nuevo Reino continued to strike coins in the name of Charles II until 1714, surely the news had reached Colombia by then. There are a couple of theories about this, dealing with royal succession in Spain, but I won't deal with them here. The assayer, the person responsible for purity and weight of the coins, was Buenaventura de Arce, he was assayer between 12 – December - 1691 and 28 - November - 1721 <sup>Barriga vol. I pp125-6</sup>.

There is also a second Nuevo Reino 8 reales in the museum, it was not in the trays while I was there, it was on display in the galleries, a good place for it to be. It is a 1657 PoRS N<sup>O</sup>R, the PoRS stands for Pedro Ramos, assayer from 1642 to 1676. It is the same style as Restrepo/Lasser M46-24, but not the same coin.

Thanks to Curator Helen Wang and museum assistant Ian Lewis for their generous assistance during my inspection of the collection and providing reference books from the department's library. A special thanks to Janet Larkin who also assisted me and arranged for the photographs. For reference, the web site address for the British Museum is <http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/>

Works cited.

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