

An Important Santa Fe *Cuartillo* from an Old Spanish Collection

By Herman Blanton

Copyright 2013 Herman Blanton



(Enlarged originally 0.87 g, 5×7 mm)

From a late 19th century Spanish collection comes this distinctive *cuartillo* (1/4 real) featuring a corded periphery with lion rampant right. The lion punch is a major heraldic blunder, as by convention animals are supposed to face heraldic right, which means that to the viewer the lion should be facing left. Santa Fe frequently transposed (swapped positions of) the castles and lions on the shield, which aids the numismatist in attributing its cobs. There are also other heraldic errors which will be mentioned below, but this lion-facing-right error is egregious considering that, except for the periphery, the lion is the single element in the reverse die. This coin is likely an early version of the “corded style” coins which have thus far been only lightly addressed in Colombian numismatics. A discussion, therefore, is in order.

Corded Periphery Design

The earliest mention of the corded periphery that I’ve found is Pradeau (37 and plate 1 no. 9), where he described and illustrated a *cuartillo* in the ANS collection:¹

To the author’s knowledge only one specimen of what may be the [Mexico] 1552 silver cuartillas is known to exist. It is found in the cabinets of the American Numismatic Society of New York City. It shows a lion on one side and a castle on the other, both designs within a corded circle. The specimen seems to be crudely cut, Pl. 1, 9.

Today we attribute this type of *cuartillo* to Santa Fe. By comparing the picture in Pradeau with the Huntington Collection of coins de-accessioned from the ANA and sold by Morton & Eden on March 6, 2013 (lot 224), we can say that these two *cuartillos* are not the same specimen.

Barriga noticed that the design changed for silver coins after 1700 and mentioned the corded periphery on an illustrated 1721-dated four reales: “*un cordon torcido circular ... dos columnas con base y capiteles coronados torneados* [a cord twisted round ... two crowned turned columns with base and capitals].” I have written about the appearance of this design on a one real dated 1721 (Heritage #143, lot 23631) and in a review of the Huntington / Morton & Eden sale for the 50th anniversary *Boletín* magazine published in Bogotá by NumisCol this year.

¹ Pradeau p. 147. *Errata p. 37—1st par.: the silver fourth of a real referred to and illustrated on Pl. 1, No. 9 is not the right specimen. For the proper reproduction of one such piece consult Wayte Raymond’s THE COLLECTOR SERIES, No. 2, entitled: “The Coins of Mexico. Silver and Copper.” New York, 1940, plate on page 6, No. 1. Three varieties are known.* This correction does not alter the fact that the coin illustrated is a corded *cuartillo*, which today is attributed to Santa Fe; the correction in the errata table means it is not Mexico.



4 Reales 1721: 13.305 g, 23 mm
 Collection of the Banco de la República in Bogotá, Colombia
 Cited in Barriga (I: 117)

Dating the Sedwick auction corded *cuartillo*



Obv:



Obv.



Rev:
Sedwick *cuartillo*



Rev:
Morton & Eden *cuartillo* lot 224
Courtesy Morton & Eden

With the current state of knowledge it is not possible to date this specimen to a specific year; however, through some analysis we can estimate a date range. It must be realized that this analysis is not proven and does not suggest the corded ring entirely displaced the solid ring design which had been in use since the mint opened; the solid ring design is found on other *cuartillos* that I attribute to Philip V, *cf.* Restrepo M14-2 and Sedwick auction #12, lot 1195.

We have four useful factors to consider. Three of these are the design style of castle, lion and peripheral cord. Before looking at these three we should consider the conspicuous heraldic error that the lion is facing the wrong direction; it should be facing left. If asked whether such an error is consistent with Santa Fe minting errors, we must answer yes, albeit this is an extreme error, so extreme that it helps us to date the coin.²

From my studies it is clear that punches and dies from the initial opening of the mint in 1627 were used for many years; in fact I've seen a 1694 two reales made with the lion punch that dates even further back, to the 1622 two reales of Cartagena! [Blanton: unpublished monograph]. By the early 1690s these punches, dies and presumably some of the other tools in the mint workshop must have been worn out. After Buenaventura de Arce was approved assayer in 1691 the low quality of the coins continued for some years but eventually improved to the point where, in 1721, the year Arce left office, the silver coins are much improved and are in fact quite beautiful. We can't necessarily credit Arce for the improvement, but his initials are on the coins.

The following are a few examples of errors produced in the first decade of Arce's tenure.



4 reales, 1693, assayer VA (not visible), 24 mm [Morton & Eden lot 223]
Two errors: (1) the numeral 6 of the date 1693 is backwards and upside down, and (2) the bottom-right castle on the obverse is upside-down (not recognizable due to Guatemala countermark of 1839, cf. Restrepo M60-16).

² Interestingly, royal authorities in Madrid would create another heraldic error in connection with Secret Royal Ordinances of March 18, 1771 (which reduced the purity) and the public Proclamation of May 29, 1772 (announcing design changes to gold and silver coins). Along with the public proclamation the authorities of the Madrid mint supplied the colonial mints with sample uniface pattern pieces that showed the Golden Fleece suspended in the wrong direction on the reverse of the gold coins. The colonial mints followed the patterns and issued gold coins with this error. Authorities in Spain sent instructions to rectify this. During the years 1772-74 the colonial mints issued coins with this heraldic error, so accordingly these milled gold coins can be dated to the time frame 1772-74 by virtue of this heraldic error alone. See Carlos Jara's "Orientation of the Golden Fleece on Spanish Colonial Eight Escudos" in *Numismatics International Bulletin Vol. 47, Nos. 3 / 4* (March / April 2012) pp. 53-60. Also see Restrepo, p. 114.



2 escudos 1694/3, 21 mm [Sedwick auction #10, lot 43]

Multiple errors: (1) lions and castles (obverse) are swapped (a frequent error with Santa Fe) but in this case they are also upside-down; (2) the Flanders & Tyrol* shield on the obverse is also upside-down; and (3) the lily flowers on the reverse located between the cross-arms of the cross are backwards in that the “scissors blades” point outward instead of inward.



2 escudos 1702, 19 mm [Sedwick auction #10, lot 47]

Two significant errors: (1) the date 1702 located on the reverse at 10 o’clock reads outward and is reversed so the date appears as “2071”; and (2) the names of two kings are on the coin: Obverse shows CARO(LVS II) and reverse shows PHILIPVS (V).

Design elements of the corded *cuartillo*

The castle has three towers, of which the outside two lean outwards; the right tower is especially prominent. The castle door is towards the right, which is opposite of the castle seen on earlier examples.

The lion is a distinct design and should be facing left but instead faces right. This is the first instance of this error seen on a coin of Santa Fe.

The peripheral cord design is crude, especially when compared to the Morton & Eden *cuartillo*.

The distinct castle and lion designs suggest that the punches for these were made after the original punches had been worn out and retired around the mid-1690s. Because the lion facing right is such a significant heraldic error, it seems most likely that the lion punch was

made during the height of mistakes in the first decade or so (1691-1702) of assayer Buenaventura de Arce.

Considering all four factors—castle punch design, lion punch design, lion punch error and the corded periphery—leads me to date the coin in the range of 1704-1720. Since by 1721 the corded design is well executed, this *cuartillo* with its crude periphery is more likely from the early part of that range.

Production figures from Barriga:

Mint records	Marks of silver	Denominations
(Barriga I:122)		(Barriga III: 536)
1702	1332	8 reales
1703	1711	8 reales
1704	554	1/4 real
1705	1013	1/4 real
1706	none	
1707	517	1/4 real
1708	211	1/4 real
1709-1715	none	
1716	137	1/4 real
1717-1721	none	
1722	786	1, 4 & 8 reales

These data from Barriga must be considered carefully. By matching known dated coins against Barriga’s data it is clear that the mint records are dated for the report, not for the date applied on the coins. Furthermore we don’t know if reports were prepared annually or not. Because we know of 1721-dated specimens, the record in Barriga of “*no hubo acuñacion*” for 1721 probably means that the coins dated 1721 are recorded in the 1722 report. Therefore since the data for 1704 may be for coins dated 1703, and the known 1703 eight reales does not have a corded design, we can assume that the corded design *cuartillo* is not 1703 either. This is reinforced by the attribution of a solid-ring *cuartillo* in Restrepo to the date 1703 based on matching punches to the eight reales. [Restrepo M53-2]

If my hypothesis is correct that the lion punch was made in 1691-1702, then *cuartillos* with this punch could have been made in that period but without the corded design; in other words this error lion punch could also have been used with a solid peripheral ring design *cuartillo*. The Sedwick specimen with both the heraldic error and the crude corded periphery was probably struck after 1703 but before 1721, so the mint record years for production are 1704, 1705, 1707, 1708 and 1716. Since it is possible these years include prior-year production, then the date range for the heraldic error *cuartillo* is 1704-16 (after ruling out 1703) and *more likely earlier than later*, so that the narrowest date range we want to estimate for the striking is 1704-1708. Since these years were during the War of Spanish Succession (1701–1714), the coin can be considered Charles II posthumous (following Restrepo) or Charles III of Austria (following the Spanish references by Calicó and Cayón).³

* I inadvertently labeled Flanders & Tyrol as Portugal in the Sedwick auction catalog October 30, 2013.

³ Santa Fe cobs struck from 1700-14 for the most part are in the name of Charles with ordinal II. For example see Sedwick auction #10, lot 52, for a 2 escudo 1709 with clear ordinal II (decidedly not III). There are some in the name of Philip V, like the 2 escudos 1702 shown above. Some Spanish numismatists attribute the 1700-14 timeframe to Charles III of Austria, who was pretender to the throne of Spain after the death of Charles II in 1700.

References

- Barriga Villalba, A.M. 1969. *Historia de la Casa de Moneda*. Bogotá. Banco de la Republica (de Colombia) 3 volumes.
- Morton & Eden, in Association with Sotheby's. 2013. *The Huntington Collection of Spanish Colonial Coins (London, Wednesday 6, March 2013)*. London, England.
- Pradeau, Alberto F. 1978. *Numismatic History of Mexico*. Reprint of 1938 first edition with annotations and revisions by Clyde Hubbard. New York: Sanford J. Durst.
- Restrepo, Jorge Emilio. 2012. *Coins of Colombia (Spanish Colonial and Republican) 1619 to 2012. Fourth edition. First English edition*. Medellin, Colombia.
- Sedwick, Daniel Frank. 2011. *Treasure and World Coin Auction #10 (October 25-26, 2011)*. Winter Park, FL.
- Sedwick, Daniel Frank. 2012. *Treasure and World Coin Auction #12 (October 25-26, 2012)*. Winter Park, FL.