

# “The Coinage of Mexico Struck During the Reign of Charles and Johanna”

(revised 6/09)

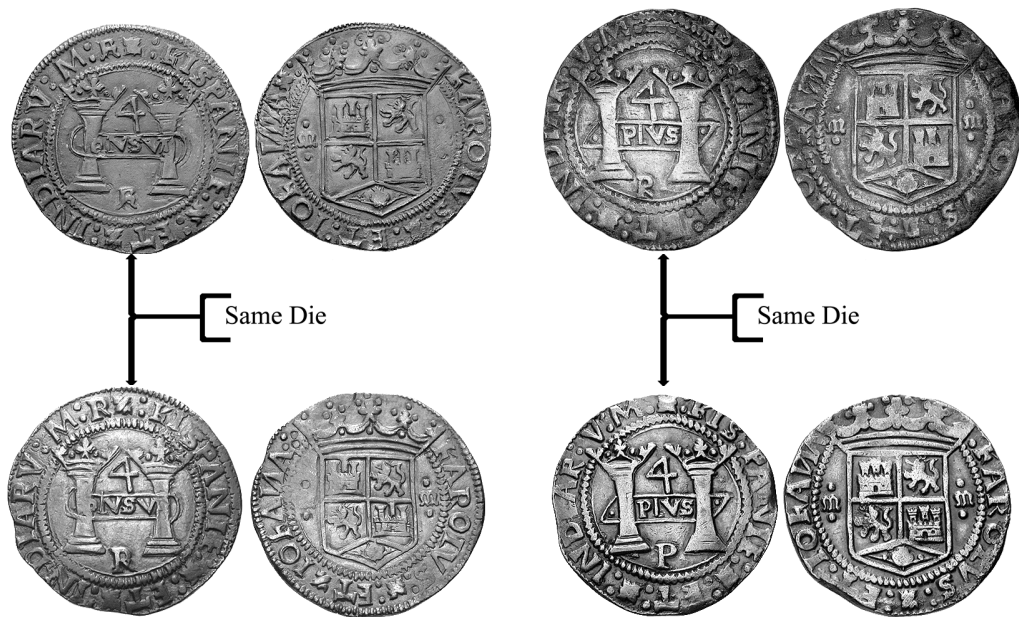
By: Kent M. Ponterio

## Early Series (without waterlines)

The decree to establish a mint in Mexico City was written on May 11, 1535, however officials from Spain did not arrive in Mexico until November 14, 1535, and the first coins were not minted until April of 1536.

### 1) The first assayer at the Mexico City Mint was assayer “R” (Francisco del Rincón), who struck coins between the years of 1536 and 1538. The office of assayer at this time was only a two-year lease.

- a. Dating the coins of Rincón is much easier than that of most assayers in this series. When the Mexico City Mint began production of coinage in April of 1536, it was only authorized to strike coins in denominations of 1/4, 1/2, 1, 2 and 3 Reales. On November 18, 1537 a decree was issued authorizing the minting of 4 and 8 Reales, while at the same time calling for the minting of 3 Reales to cease.
- b. Although the decree authorizing the mintage of 4 and 8 Reales was issued on November 18, 1537, it would have taken several months for this information to reach the Mint in Mexico City, and most certainly these issues were not struck until the following year. In studying the punches used to produce dies and the die styles themselves, one can conclude that the production of 4 Reales began some time before that of the 8 Reales. This is seen in the use of older gothic punches present in the legends and assayer’s mark of the earliest 4 Reales. The 8 Reales contain a rhomboid banner across the pillars, a characteristic found only on the latest 4 Reales of Rincón. Dies with the rhomboid banner were used only for a brief period of time near the end of Rincón’s term in office and were then carried over by the next assayer.
- c. Denominations for this assayer: ¼, ½, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8 Reales.



**2) The second assayer to produce coins in the early series was assayer “P”. Both the name of this assayer and the exact dates of when the coins were struck are at this point unknown. Possibilities being Pedro de Espina or Pedro de la Membrilla, whose names appear on several contemporary documents pertaining to this subject.**

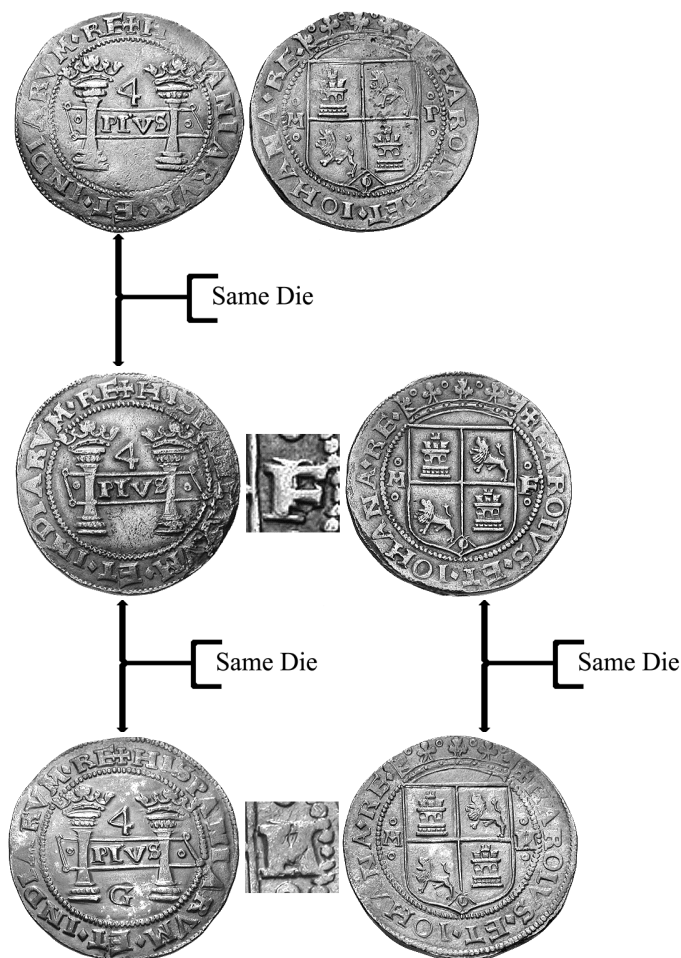
- a. It is known for fact through die linking that “P” is the second assayer in this series. The first emission of assayer “P’s” coinage are all produced from reworked dies of the previous assayer. They all appear with assayer “P’s” initial re-punched over that of assayer “R” (photo above). When Francisco del Rincón’s lease on the office of assayer expired, he naturally requested to have it reinstated for another term, at which point the owner refused to reinstate it for reasons of favoritism. The dies for coining were kept in a locked box; there were two separate locks with two separate keys. The assayer had access to one key while a different official at the mint kept the other. At the time when Francisco del Rincón left the mint, he would have been able to take the punches used to make dies with him but would not be allowed to take the already prepared dies. This would explain why old dies were available and re-used for a brief period of time until new dies could be produced. With the exception of a few random remaining punches, the new dies were produced with an entirely new set of punches.
- b. Dating the coins of assayer “P” is somewhat more complicated than that of the previous assayer. Assayer “P” began striking coins sometime in 1538. It is uncertain as to exactly when his responsibilities as assayer ceased. It is, however, certain that he did hold this position for some period of time. Evidence would suggest at least a full two-year term if not longer (probably longer). Out of the four assayers in the early series, this assayer is by far the most frequently encountered. There are more known dies for this assayer than that of the other three early series assayers combined, this suggesting a rather long term in office.
- c. Denominations for this assayer:  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{2}$ , 1, 2 and 4 Reales.

**3) The third assayer in the early series used the initial “F”. Both the name of this assayer and the exact dates of when the coins were struck are at this point unknown. Possibilities being Francisco de Loaysa or Esteban Franco, whose names appear on several contemporary documents pertaining to this subject.**

- a. There is very little known about this assayer. Coins of this assayer are anywhere from extremely rare to unique. A limited number of dies were used to strike coins during “F’s” term as assayer, this suggesting a very short time period of which he was in office. It is likely that this individual took over the job of assayer as either a temporary replacement until the position could be permanently filled, or perhaps for some reason had his term cut short. Data points towards coins being struck some time in 1540 or 1541.
- b. Very few new dies were prepared during the office of this assayer, with most being re-worked dies from the previous assayer.
- c. One outside possibility as to the identity of this assayer (although no evidence can be linked to this) would be Francisco Rodriguez, the individual who was assayer for the mint in Santo Domingo.
- d. Denominations for this assayer:  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{2}$ , 1, 2 and 4 Reales.

#### 4) The fourth and final assayer in the early series: Assayer "G" (Juan Gutierrez).

- a. This individual held multiple terms as assayer, producing coins in both the early and late series. Previously thought to be the second assayer in the early series, recent evidence of die linking (photo below) as well as other documentation has clearly proven otherwise.
- b. The exact date Gutierrez began minting coins is at this point unknown. He renewed his two-year lease in 1543, which points to the date of his original lease being some time in 1541.
- c. It is during the office of this assayer that the transition from early series to late series clearly took place. Evidence would suggest this transition probably took place in 1542, at which point new punches to prepare dies arrived from Spain.
- d. It is during the office of Gutierrez that copper Maravedis were introduced for the first time in 1542, produced for a period of about a year until the dies were replaced by those of the new late series style. All early series coppers should be considered rare.
- e. Denominations for this assayer: 2 and 4 Maravedis,  $\frac{1}{2}$ , 1, 2 and 4 Reales. (early series  $\frac{1}{4}$  Reales of this assayer are currently unknown. One should not rule out the possibility they were struck, as there are three known examples produced during his term in the late series.)



### Late Series (with waterlines)

#### 1) The first assayer in the late series: Assayer “G” (Juan Gutierrez).

- a. The arrival of new punches from Spain in 1542 is an important place marker, as it clearly pinpoints where the early series ends and the late series begins. Note that none of the old punches are mixed with the new punches from early to late series. The first issues of Gutierrez in the late series bear the king’s name spelled with a “CH”, and bear a small “o” above and below both the mintmark and assayer’s letter, a characteristic of early series coinage. This emission is considered somewhat of a transitional type from the early series to the late series. Assayer “G” is the only assayer in the late series to have this characteristic. An interesting fact to note on some late series issues of assayer “G” is the feature of the “Mo” (Mexico City mintmark), which appears for the first time in the manner that it is still used to this day.
- b. The first emissions of assayer “G” are on smaller planchets or modules, similar to the planchet diameters of the early series coinage.



- c. On January 17<sup>th</sup> 1543, Juan Gutierrez signed his second two-year lease for the office of assayer. There was, however, a brief interruption in this lease. On March 21<sup>st</sup> 1543, Francisco del Rincón (first assayer in the early series) swindled his way into purchasing the position of assayer for 550 Pesos of Gold De Minas from Pedro de la Membrilla, the rightful owner of the position and controller of its lease. This allowed Rincón a very brief period for minting coins in the late series which ended in a lawsuit. After de la Membrilla realized the office had been purchased for a fraction of its actual value, he re-signed a lease with Gutierrez on August 1<sup>st</sup> 1543 and filed a lawsuit against Rincón on September 29<sup>th</sup> 1543. The eventual outcome was that de la Membrilla leased the office back to Gutierrez on April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1544 for 1500 Pesos of Gold De Minas. It should be noted that although rare, there are a few examples of coins with the assayers mark “G” punched over an “R”.
- d. This assayer marked the peak of quality for the series. The finest style and execution of coins were struck under this assayer. Many of the coins of this assayer are struck on full round planchets with full legends and nice deep strikes. The coins of this quality may be attributed to the year 1545. In that year the “Tello de Sandoval Investigation” was conducted. This was a full mint investigation that spanned several months and is one of the most important documents pertaining to this period of Mexican numismatics. All of the workers at the mint were being closely monitored and interviewed. What better reason to make sure that the coins came out perfect than not only your job being on the line but possibly your life? It is interesting to note that during the investigation coins were selected at random for assay and analysis. It was concluded that not only were the coins of correct weight and fineness, but that many contained a slightly higher silver content than ordered by official decree.
- e. Denominations for this assayer: 2 and 4 Maravedis, ¼, ½, 1, 2 and 4 Reales.



## 2) The second assayer in the late series: Assayer “R” (Francisco del Rincón).

- a. This assayer struck coins for only a very brief period of time. Judging from the date he purchased his lease and the date where he was brought to court, he could have only struck coins some time between 1543 and 1544. The longest period of time he could have held the position of assayer is approximately 13 months. It is, however, unlikely that he minted coins for the entire 13 months, since he had to return to Spain to endure a lawsuit brought forth by Pedro de la Membrilla. Please see subparagraph “b” of the previous assayer).
- b. It is possible that some of the late series copper Maravedis were struck under this assayer. However this is impossible to confirm considering they bear no assayer’s mark.
- c. None of this assayer’s coins bear the mintmark with a small “o” above it.
- d. Denominations for this assayer: 1, 2 and 4 Reales. (currently  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{1}{2}$  Reales for this assayer are unknown.)



**3) The third assayer in the late series: Assayer “A” (Alonso del Villaseca).**

- a. Evidence of Alonso Del Villaseca can be found documented in a lease agreement dated 1543 between Juan Gutierrez and Pedro de la Membrilla. At this point Gutierrez signed a lease for the office where it states a time of two full years as principal trustee. This document notes Alonso Del Villaseca as trustee to Gutierrez. It also states Villaseca is to lease the office, however it does not disclose a date as to when this would take effect. This document was renewed and re-signed after a deposit was made on the office in 1544, following a string of interfering events by Francisco Del Rincon (see subparagraph b. under Gutierrez.) Judging by the fact that Gutierrez was still assayer during the Sandoval Investigation in 1545 and that his two-year lease would have expired in 1546 points towards Villaseca minting coins either in 1546 or 1547.
- b. It is uncertain as to how long Villaseca held his term as assayer. Several facts point toward it being a very brief period of time, the first being the rarity of the coins. When Robert Nesmith wrote ANS monograph No. 131 “The Coinage of the First Mint of the Americas At Mexico City” in 1955, he noted only 16 coins produced by assayer “A”. This out of the over 2400 late series coins examined. Since then, more examples have appeared on the market, either from hoards, shipwreck finds or collections that were unavailable at the time of his analysis. Regardless, one can conclude this assayer struck coins for a much shorter term than the majority of the others in the late series.
- c. Several of the coins examined bear the initial “A” over the initial “G” of Juan Gutierrez. When this assayer took office, dies from the previous assayer were re-used and re-punched rather than preparing new dies. A limited number of new dies were prepared during the office of assayer “A” suggesting a limited term in office.
- d. Denominations for this assayer: ½, 1, 2 and 4 Reales. (currently ¼ Reales for this assayer are unknown.)



#### 4) The fourth assayer in the late series: Assayer “L”.

- a. This assayer has been documented in several publications as being Luis Rodriguez. However, this attribution is highly unlikely and appears to originate from a letter to Spain dated 1570 informing the Council of the Indies of this individual’s death. Several factors conflict with this theory and suggest otherwise. Large quantities of this assayer’s coinage were present on the 1554 Padre Islands shipwrecks suggesting the time period of minting nearly two decades before the previously suggested date. In 1556, Charles I abdicated the throne to his son Philip II and the mint in Lima, Peru began striking coinage in the name of the new King two years prior to the previously suggested date of 1570. It is doubtful this individual was still striking coins in the name of “Charles & Johanna” 14 years into the reign of a new king. Historically posthumous issues extended a year, maybe two into the reign of the new king, usually only long enough for the news to reach the New World and the time it took to make new dies. Pellicer suggests this assayer as “Luis Gutierrez”. This may be a possibility but I have yet to see any supporting documentation.
- b. It is important to note that the coins of assayer “L” recovered from the Padre Islands shipwrecks all bear the mintmark as a plain “M”, of good style and on round planchets. Coins of assayer “L” struck on smaller compact planchets and often not completely round for the most part bear the mintmark “Mo” and come later in the series. It is worthy of note that this latter type of “L” was not present on the 1554 Padre Islands wrecks, nor were they present in a more recent hoard discovered in the early 1990s. The “Mo” mintmark and deterioration of style take place shortly after the brief intervention of assayer “S” directly following these coins.
- c. The first coins minted under this assayer are struck from dies of the previous assayer. The “L” assayer mark can be found punched clearly over an “A”. A few examples have been recorded where the assayer letter is punched over a much older reverse die of assayer “R”.
- d. This assayer put out a very large emission of coinage. Dating the coins at this point is virtually impossible. Not enough documentation has come to light as of yet to narrow down any closer than some time before 1553.
- e. Denominations for this assayer: ½, 1, 2 and 4 Reales. (currently ¼ Reales for this assayer are unknown.)







### 5) The fifth assayer in the late series: Assayer "S".

- a. Much like the previous assayer, very little is known of this individual. Most of what we can gather comes from hoard and shipwreck evidence. Published in "Glosario De Maestros De Ceca Y Ensayadores" as being Gomez de Santillan, however, more recent evidence would suggest otherwise. Hoard evidence recovered from the 1554 Padre Islands shipwrecks would suggest a date of 1554 or slightly earlier.
- b. This assayer's coins come with both the M and Mo mintmarks. The first coins struck by this assayer bear the mintmark as M. The remainder of this issue bears the mintmark as Mo. Examples have been cited struck from re-cut dies of the previous assayer S over L.
- c. This individual obviously held the office for a very brief period of time due to the rarity of coins and the minimal amount of documented dies. When Robert Nesmith wrote ANS monograph No. 131 "The Coinage of the First Mint of the Americas at Mexico City" in 1955, he noted only 12 examples of this assayer out of the over 2,400 late series coins examined. One must take into account that this book was written before the discovery of the 1554 Padre Islands shipwrecks. Most of the heavily corroded examples which appear occasionally originated from this source.
- d. Denominations for this assayer:  $\frac{1}{4}$ , 1, 2 and 4 Reales. (currently the  $\frac{1}{4}$  Real is unique, and the  $\frac{1}{2}$  Reales for this assayer are unknown.)



### 6) The sixth assayer in the late series: Assayer "L".

- a. Possibly and quite probably the same individual as the fourth assayer in this series. Interrupted with a brief intervention by the previous assayer for reasons as yet unknown.
- b. Examples have been noted struck from re-cut dies of the previous assayer where the "L" assayer letter is clearly punched over an "S".
- c. Examples are frequently encountered struck from re-cut dies of the following assayer where the "L" assayer letter is clearly punched over an "O".
- d. Most of this issue bears the mintmark as "Mo", and are of much cruder style than that of earlier coins bearing this initial. The planchets are of lesser manufacture, often uneven, thicker and out of round.



- e. One very important and sometimes confusing point about this assayer is the fact that many of the coins are re-cut from dies of assayer "O". Assayer "O" obviously is the last assayer in this series continuing coining through the first portion of the reign of Philip II. On a similar note, many of the coins of assayer "O" are struck from re-cut dies of assayer "L". Over assayers "L/O" and O/L" exist back and forth for the last two assayers in this series. The most likely explanation for this is that assayer "O" was either working as an apprentice or working side by side with assayer "L" at the same time. It was not uncommon for the mint to have multiple assayers in office at the same time. For example the "MF" assayers mark which is present on pillar coinage during the reign of Philip V was, Manuel de la Peña and Francisco de la Peña y Flores.
- f. By this time, production at the mint had increased enormously, focusing efforts primarily on quantity of production rather than quality. This is evident when examining the quality and style of the coins.
- g. Denominations for this assayer: ½, 1, 2 and 4 Reales. (currently ¼ Reales for this assayer are unknown.)



## 7) The seventh and final assayer in the late series: Assayer "O".

- a. This is the final assayer of the late series and first assayer for the following king Philip II. In the past, it has been published that this assayer struck coinage in the name of "Charles & Johanna" up until the year 1572. However this theory is very unlikely. Posthumous issues typically only extended one or two years into the reign of the new ruler. Philip II ascended the throne in 1556 and like all Spanish monarchs, would have wanted his name as new king in the public's eye as much as possible. Another fact that points against posthumous issues being struck in Mexico this late would be that the mint in Lima, Peru was already striking coins under the name of Philip II. It is possible that assayer "O" struck coins up until 1572, however later issues were in the name of Philip II.
- b. The last coins struck in the name of Charles and Johanna were most likely struck in 1557. It is doubtful they would extend much beyond this date. Once word of the new king reached Mexico City, the assayer would have had new dies prepared.
- c. This individual probably apprenticed under or held office at the same time as assayer "L" (see subparagraph "e" under the previous assayer).
- d. The quality of coinage produced at this point is by far the poorest quality. Many examples are of uneven strike, uneven planchets, display planchet cracks, double strikes and are of poor quality. Planchets tend to resemble those used on the later cob coinage. It is quite apparent that at this point the mint's primary focus was mass production.
- e. Denominations for this assayer: ½, 1, 2 and 4 Reales. (currently ¼ Reales for this assayer are unknown.)



a. Die style would indicate being struck during the office of assayer R ca. 1543 or 1544. An extremely rare and interesting piece, struck without mint mark or assayer's letter punched into the reverse die. Currently four specimens are known with unconfirmed reports of a fifth. There are two known obverse die combination for this type, all sharing the same reverse die.

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