

The Transitional 8 Reales of Philip V Struck at the Mexico City Mint 1732-1734

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The Mexico City Mint underwent dramatic changes during the early 1730's. The introduction of new minting equipment and gradual phasing out of older coining methods resulted in a transitional period, producing numerous different coinage types and varieties. The numismatic findings recovered from the Dutch East Indiaman "Rooswijk" are largely focused on this area and offer a rare opportunity for Mexican numismatists to better study and understand the coinage of this period. With the uncovering of hoards and shipwreck finds, new discoveries are often made helping numismatists grasp a better understanding of coins and how they were produced.

In 1536 the Mexico City Mint became the first mint to produce coins in the New World. Initially the mint used the method of hammering coins by hand. This method remained in use until it was eventually phased out by the screw press some time in the year 1733. A royal decree was issued on June 9 1728 authorizing the Mexico City mint to strike new milled coinage (*Pradeau*, pg.53). This set in motion a series of events that would drastically change and modernize the mint.

1. Patterns for the new milled coinage or "Pillar Dollar" as they are often called dated 1729 were struck at the Madrid Mint in Spain. An example of one such specimen can be seen on pg.x in the introduction to Frank Gilboy's book "The Milled Columnarios of Central and South America". These were shipped to the New World mints as samples of the new coinage type. One such example is housed in the Mexico City Mint Museum's collection.
2. New minting equipment was imported from Spain, in effect mechanizing the mint with state-of-the-art machinery.
 - Screw presses to more efficiently strike coins.
 - Mule-powered roller presses for flattening silver into sheets used in the production of coin planchets.
 - Cylindrical punches for the cutting of planchets from sheets of metal.
 - Edge milling machinery enabling coins to be produced with an ornamented edge, protecting it from clipping and counterfeiting.

After the arrival of the new equipment the first milled coins or "Pillar Dollars" were struck March 29 1732 (*Pradeau*, pg.53). Prior to this date the mint used the method of hammering coins by hand, known as "cobs". Although the origin of the term "cob" is uncertain, it is most likely an abbreviation that derives from the Spanish term "cabo de barra," meaning end of the bar. A name adopted due to the planchets method of manufacture, cobs were hand struck on crude planchets that were cut from the end of a silver bar. During the year 1732, production continued for "Cobs" and commenced for the first "Milled" coinage.



1732 8 Reales "Cob" and 1732 8 Reales "Milled"

Fig.1

1733 8 Reales

In the following year, 1733 the mint produced more different types and varieties of 8 Reales than in any other single year. Four major different types of 8 Reales were produced: Cobs, Cobs struck with "Klippe" dies, Klippes and the Milled "Pillar Dollars". Examples of the four major types can be seen in Fig.2. Of the four major types there are multiple varieties for each type, most of which are listed below. This year marks the end of the "Cob" coinage as its final year of production.

1. 8 Reales 1733 Cob

- 1733/2 Mo F
- 1733 Mo F

2. 8 Reales 1733 Cob struck with Klippe Dies

- 1733 Mo F Coin Die Axis
- 1733 Mo F Medallic Die Axis
- 1733 Mo MF Medallic Die Axis
- 1733 Mo MF Medallic Die Axis, Dot below denomination

3. 8 Reales 1733 Klippe

- 1733 Mo MF Coin Die Axis
- 1733 Mo MF Medallic Die Axis
- 1733 Mo MF Medallic Die Axis, Dot below denomination

4. 8 Reales 1733 Milled

- 1733/2 MX F
- 1733 MX F Small Crown
- 1733 MX F Large Crown
- 1733 MX MF Dot above assayer's letters
- 1733 MX MF Without dot above assayer's letters
- 1733 Mo F
- 1733 Mo MF Small Crown, Dot above assayer's letters
- 1733 Mo MF Small Crown, Without dot above assayer's letters
- 1733 Mo MF Large Crown



1733 8 Reales Cob, 1733 8 Reales Cob struck with Klippe dies, 1733 8 Reales Klippe
and 1733 8 Reales Milled
Fig.2

1734 8 Reales

There were two major types of 8 Reales struck in 1734, Klippes and Milled "Pillar Dollars". This year marks the second and final year of the "Klippe" coinage. Clearly they were only struck for a portion of the year until they were completely phased out by the Milled "Pillar Dollar". The majority of 1734 "Klippes" were struck from recut dies of the previous year 1733. This would indicate a smaller number of dies were manufactured with the intent to strike coins. The 1734 Milled "Pillar Dollar" remains fairly common in comparison to the "Klippe". This reflects the fact that the striking of "Klippe" coinage was temporary until Milled "Pillar Dollar" production was successfully in full effect.

1. 8 Reales 1734 Klippe

- 1734/3 Mo MF
- 1734 Mo MF

2. 8 Reales 1734 Milled

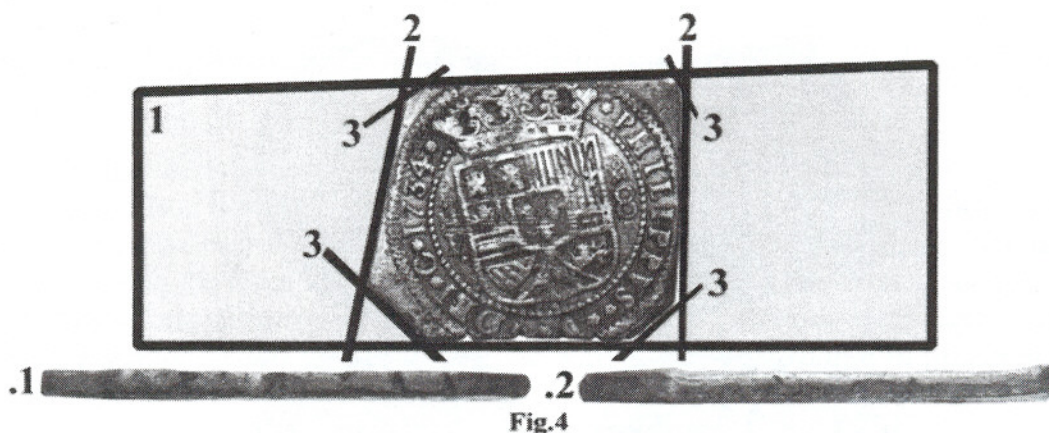
- 1734/3 Mo MF
- 1734 Mo MF



1734 8 Reales Klippe and 1734 8 Reales Milled
Fig.3

Production of "Klippe" Coinage

Although little is published about how "Klippes" were produced, a lot can be learned through examination of the coins. For instance, all "Klippes" were struck with aligned dies set at a fixed axis, including the Cobs struck with Klippe dies. The vast majority of coins examined have a medallie die axis, a small portion of them have coin die axis and a minute number have a slightly rotated medallie die axis. This information tells us that all Klippes, including the ones struck on Cob planchets were in fact machine struck. The planchets for the 1733 transitional coins or Cobs struck with Klippe dies, were produced in the same manner as traditional cobs. Klippe planchets however were produced differently, first by rolling or flattening silver into a sheet by the process of a mule-powered roller press. Planchets were then cut from the sheet and weighed. If needed, adjustment cuts or clips were made until the planchet was of the correct weight standard. The coin pictured in Fig.4 is an example of how planchets were cut from sheets. Note the coin has two opposing edges at the top and bottom showing signs of stress cracks or edge splits (Fig.4.1). These represent the original edges from the sheet of silver from which the planchet was cut. This coin also contains two opposing cut edges at left and right, showing evidence of sheer marks (Fig.4.2). These marks are where the initial cuts were made creating the planchet. Adjustment cuts were then made in the corners until the planchet was of the correct weight standard (Fig.4.3).



The exact reason the mint produced Cobs, Klippes and Milled coinage between 1732 and 1734 seems to be unknown. It's probable that the mint encountered multiple problems that played a large role in this strange occurrence. In a 1987 American Numismatic Association, Numismatic theatre lecture, Clyde Hubbard cited an original 18th century mint manuscript reporting that 3 new screw presses, along with other equipment in route from Spain to Veracruz, Mexico were lost when the ship carrying them sank off the coast of Little Cayman Island. The lack of essential equipment, combined with the time needed to properly train personnel on new minting machinery resulted in the production of several new and fascinating transitional issues during this period. By contemporary standards, both state-of-the-art and antiquated minting machinery were in operation simultaneously. This resulted in the production of several new coinage types unique to this period of Mexican numismatics. In 1734 the mint discontinued the production of the short-lived Klippes and converted solely to the striking of milled "Pillar Dollars".

Bibliography

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