

Republic of Mexico 8 Reales Trial Strike in Copper without Mintmark

"Produced with dies used at the Chihuahua Mint"

By: Kent Ponterio



Trial strike from unfinished dies without mintmark.

Produced with Chihuahua Mint Dies.

Ponterio & Associates, Auction #130 April 2004.

Fig.1

I recently came across the above pictured coin while cataloging a consignment for one of our upcoming auctions. The coin was attributed simply as a “Mexico pattern 8 Reales in copper, incomplete dies, pierced”. The coin is a Republican period “cap & rays” 8 Reales struck on a copper planchet with a plain edge or rim. It is without a mintmark or an assayer’s mark and bears an unfinished date that reads only “18”. Essentially the coin is a die test or trial strike in copper used to test unfinished dies that were newly produced from hubs. Although these pieces are often cataloged as patterns they were produced for a somewhat different purpose. The term pattern technically refers to a proposed coin of a new design, metal or denomination (Doty pg.247). A trial strike by definition is a piece struck at any point in the preparation of coin or medal dies, allowing the engraver or designer to gauge the works appearance, and determine what must be done to complete the designs to his or his employer’s satisfaction (Doty pg.333). Reasons for the production of either could somewhat vary. This piece is of the already adopted design and fits the description of the latter.

To avoid confusion at this point I would like to emphasize which side of the coins I will refer to as obverse and reverse with a brief description as to why. According to Mexican law, the obverse is the side that depicts the national emblem “the eagle” and name of the country “Republica Mexicana” (Resplandores pg.xvii of the introduction). Although technically correct since deemed so by the government; this method has grown somewhat obsolete for practical uses with today’s numismatic community. In the book “Replandores” the authors chose to use the “Cap & Rays” side of the coins as the obverse in their illustrations and descriptions. The author’s good reasoning is that this side contains the pertinent information necessary to properly identify of the coins. Specifically they are referring to mint mark, date, and assayers mark. This would seem to be the most practical method since Mexico had thirteen different mints at various times striking coins of the same basic design. Richard G. Doty’s definition of the word “obverse “ in “The Macmillan Encyclopedic Dictionary of Numismatics” supports this as being the correct decision. His definition is as follows: Obverse, The side of the coin bearing the more important legends or types (Doty pg.234).



Trial strike from unfinished die's containing the Guanajuato mint mark.
Ex: Ponterio & Associates auction #125 April 2003 Lot #805
fig.2

Die trials of this sort are normally struck in copper for economical reasons and cost efficiency. At first glance the coin appears similar to those produced at the Guanajuato mint (KM-Pn24 or pictured in *Resplandores* on page 216 “photo above”). In 1830 the Guanajuato mint became the first mint to produce its 8 Reales from hubs (*Replandores* pg.208). As a result of this newly acquired minting technology several test pieces were struck after the hubbing stage of die preparation. The hubs used to produce dies at the Guanajuato mint contained the third digit of the date “3” and the Guanajuato mint mark “Go”. These two characteristics are not present on the coin under discussion (Fig.1).

Coins identical in style to those produced at the Guanajuato mint between 1830 and 1843 were struck at the Chihuahua mint between 1840 and 1868. In 1840 Chihuahua became the third mint to produce its dies from hubs (*Resplandores* pg.26). So great are the similarities to the dies introduced at Guanajuato in 1830 that we presume they were made by the same person or company (*Resplandores* pg.34). This was later confirmed to be Matthew Boulton’s Soho Mint in Birmingham England. In the recent publication “The Soho Mint & the Industrialization of Money” Richard Doty has shed some light on this subject, uncovering contemporary correspondences and documents between Mexican officials and the English firm.

Since the coin in discussion is without mint mark this slightly complicates the question as to which mint it was struck at. All of the published examples of this die style that I have been able to locate are products of the Guanajuato mint and contain the “Go” mint mark. This includes examples published in important auctions such as the Pablo Gerber and Norweb. It appears that there are no published examples or records of die trials from the Chihuahua mint for this period.



Guanajuato 8 Reales of 1830 MJ and Chihuahua 8 Reales of 1840 RG.
 Photos reprinted from "Resplandores" pg.34 & 216 courtesy of Mike Dunigan.
 Fig.3

Although Chihuahua and Guanajuato used virtually identical hubs to produce dies there are a few distinguishing differences. Aside from the obvious omitting of the mint mark and third digit of the date on hubs used to produce Chihuahua dies, a few more subtle differences exist. Perhaps the most noticeable difference is the absence or presence of two additional leaves at the end of both branches beside the eagle. This characteristic is present on the 8 Reales of this style struck at Guanajuato between 1830 and 1843 yet absent on the coins of this style struck at Chihuahua between 1840 and 1868. Although that may be the most prominent difference between the two mints it is not the only. The Guanajuato 8 Reales of this style all contain a period or dot at the end of the inscription after the "A" in "Mexicana", while the 8 Reales of Chihuahua do not. The rock on which the cactus quite smooth with very little detail on Guanajuato 8 Reales of this period. Such is the opposite at Chihuahua which has a more jagged and detailed rock. There are also some minor variances in both branches beside the eagle as well as the ribbon tying them together however they are far less noticeable.

Even though the coin in (fig 1) is without mint mark if one takes the above mentioned characteristics into consideration it can be attributed to a specific mint. Clearly containing characteristics that specifically identify is as being a product of Chihuahua Mint dies.

Normally pieces similar to this one are found in very high condition. The condition of this piece is about Very Fine, pierced with a few small rim bumps and other such problems typical of use in jewelry. Not in the most pristine state of preservation by any means. However presently the only example we are aware of and extremely rare if not unique. Like many rare coins that are found holed, mounted or used in jewelry, although it's a shame the piece has been damaged in this manner perhaps it is the only thing that kept it from being destroyed over the years.

Numismatic references

- "Resplandores" Cap and Ray 8 Reales of The Republic of Mexico 1823-1897 By: Mike Dunigan and J.B. Parker.
- "The Soho Mint & the Industrialization of Money". By: Richard Doty.
- "A Guide Book Of Mexican Coins 1822 To Date" By: T.V. Buttrey & Clyde Hubbard.
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- Ponterio & Associates, Inc. San Diego, Ca. "Various Auction Catalogs".
- Christie's. New York, N.Y. November 1985 Auction "The Norweb Collection"
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