

THE GUANAJUATO 1896/1 8 REALES **A study of the dies and varieties ----- by Edward Beals**

Most collectors of Mexico are aware that there exists in the 1896 Guanajuato 8 reales an interesting overdate. Not only is the date over struck, but also the mintmark and the mint master's initials. The dies originally were for the Alamos mint and dated 1891. The mint master at Alamos during this time was Manuel Larraquibel. The mint master at Guanajuato was Rosendo Sandoval, which results in an 8 reales Go/As-1896/1-RS/ML.

When I start to speculate about the whys and wherefores of this coin my thoughts wander like the cow trails from Alamos to Guanajuato. One question brings forth another and very few seem to have concrete answers.

Why was this done? How many dies were taken to Guanajuato? How many coins were struck by these dies? Will anything else turn up?

If you are interested only in facts, a one sentence summary of my findings would be: there appears to be at least four dies of Alamos overstruck at Guanajuato in 1896.

In resolving this I passed through a little history, a little geography, some interesting reading, some high speculations, conversed with some interesting people and saw some beautiful coins.

My curiosity as to the rarity of this overstrike led me into this maze of questions and investigation. Dr. Theodore Buttrey wrote an informative article on this coin in *The Numismatist* of September, 1960. His article appears to be the first mention in print of this overstrike. Information on facts and figures were obtained from Dr. Buttrey's "Guide Book of Decimal Coins", and Dr. Alberto F. Pradeau's "Historia Numismática de Mexico" and from Dr. Pradeau's patient and knowledgeable answers to my questions.

A little background history helps to set the picture. The mints of Alamos, Hermosillo and Culiacan, along with other mints of Mexico during this period were leased out by the government of Mexico to private companies for periods of years. By decree of President Diaz of Mexico, on June 15, 1895, the contracts with the companies operating these mints were cancelled, and on June 30, 1895 the mints at Alamos and Hermosillo, Sonora, were closed. The mint machinery and equipment was subsequently moved to the mint at Culiacan, Sinaloa.

Culiacan, Sinaloa, lies some 433 miles down the west coast of Mexico from Alamos, and Guanajuato lies inland 1,000 miles further to the southeast.

It is noted that during the period from 1885 to 1895 (when the Alamos mint finally closed) there was considerably less than a million 8 reales struck each year. In 1891, the year the dies under discussion were made, 532,800 8 reales were struck, and the mintage of gold and minor coinage was also light.

I erroneously assumed that the Alamos mint, tucked under the cottonwood trees in the southeast corner of Sonora, had ample time to prepare dies and had a good supply on

hand that were not used or had been lightly used. Dr. Pradeau advises that the Alamos mint did not have an engraver and that the Mexico mint produced all dies which were distributed to branch mints where the date and mint master's initials were added. He believes that since Alamos did not have an engraver, the Alamos dies were completed at the Culiacan mint. This being the case, you can speculate if these dies were ever delivered to Alamos. In the meantime, back at the Guanajuato mint, the production of 8 reales was considerably different; 5,229,000 8 reales were stamped out in 1896; and 3½ million were minted each year between 1886 and 1895.

It is obvious that the Guanajuato mint was exceedingly busy and was hard pressed to keep the machinery running and coin the rich and plentiful silver being mined in that area.

Could it be that this production was the result of replacement machinery from the Alamos and Hermosillo mint being moved from storage in Culiacan?

Was one of the coin presses moved holding an 1891 Alamos 8 reales die? Was this one die converted to Go. 1896? If so it is probably a rare and valuable coin.

The high production at Guanajuato in 1896 might have been the result of the mint machinery at Alamos being moved directly to Guanajuato in late 1895. Was it shipped down and set up alongside the Guanajuato machinery, or sent down in pieces to replace worn out parts in the mint at Guanajuato? Either way the Guanajuato mint was in high gear. Still speculating, did someone in charge of moving this machinery, see the old 1891 dies and proceed to send them to the Go. mint? Had they been completed at Guanajuato in 1891 and never sent to Alamos? Were they in a box with other material and found upon arrival at Guanajuato? At any rate the dies went to Guanajuato and were utilized to strike 8R's.--- I believe the engraver must have been very grateful for the windfall. Dr. Pradeau believes that Guanajuato and Zacatecas mint engravers traded work back and forth to assist each other during periods of heavy work load at one mint and light work at the other. This would tend to produce further variations due to different equipment.

Here again my mind wanders --- will we find some of the 200,000 ten centavos or the 500,000 five centavos which were made in Guanajuato using 1896 over dates of the dies from Alamos?

In seeking out these 1896 Go. overdates, for several years, I would conclude that they are fairly scarce but not rare. Perhaps a one "R" or "RR" on Christensen's scale of rarity. Of the nine specimens that I have gathered from coin conventions and dealers from California, Texas, Navajoa, Sonora and Hong Kong (complete with chop marks) the cost has been from \$2.00 to 30.00.

To determine how many dies were used to make these nine coins, photographs were made of all nine specimens with no change in setting the camera. These negatives were then enlarged so that the 8 reales were 4" in diameter, with no change in setting the enlarger between negatives. Therefore they should all be exactly the same unless actual differences occurred in the coins.

A transparent plastic sheet was placed over the photo of Specimen No. 1 and outlined with a sharp metal instrument the following points on the coin:

1. The tip of each ray surrounding the liberty cap,
2. The liberty cap.
3. The letters of the word "Libertad" on the cap.
4. The star to the left of 8Rs
5. Each period in the inscription-i.e.:- after 8R, after Go., after the date, after each mint master's initial and after the 10 D^s, 20 G^s

Close examination showed that seven of the nine coins were exactly the same.

On the other two specimens the liberty cap seemed a little larger and the letters and figures around the bottom did not align. I then outlined on the plastic over specimen #1 the factors I felt would show a variance. The G^o, the date, and the R^s. The variance on close examination produced a description that sounded like a discussion of modern Lincoln cents. "Tilted 9, short 9, round G, low "0" and spread periods. It was found that 7 periods on 7 specimens were exactly the same as if struck by the master die which struck the cap and rays, and perhaps they were.

It was then discovered that a 4" diameter was not large enough to show the minor variations in detail for definite classification so 7" photos were made. A chart was then made to show the differences as compared to specimen no. 1. (see chart which follows).

From the information on this chart I am now determined that there are 4 varieties as listed on the last line of the chart. The broken serif of the R/M on Variety #1., protrudes from the upper right hand part of the "R" like a wedge pointed to the right. This identifies No. 1. The other factors that identify the other 3 varieties are so minute that I do not believe they can be used to classify by direct visual comparison of coins. The flattened periods are probably caused by die clashes with the obverse die and are not a factor in the determination of die varieties. A study of more specimens may reveal further varieties.

Mr. Rex Wilkins, Vice President of T.A.N.S., has suggested that our Society could well be a clearing house for cataloging of rare or scarce coins. to this respect I would like to hear from anyone that has an 8R-Go/As-1896/1-RM/SL. If someone decides to do a further study on this coin we will have an idea of how many specimens are known, and where they can be secured for further study.

Your comments and suggestions are solicited and will be appreciated.

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