

MUNICIPAL COINAGE OF MEXICO

Handout from Clyde Hubbard's Presentation
Clyde Hubbard, C-127

1. WHEN AND FOR HOW LONG DID MUNICIPAL COINS CIRCULATE?

Period is approximately a century, starting in the latter part of the 18th century and continuing to the 1880's. They were outlawed by a national decree in 1905

2. WHO ISSUED THEM?

Municipalities, or persons doing business within a municipality. Some of the coins bearing the name of a municipality also have the name or initials of an individual who may or may not have been authorized to strike coins for circulation.

3. WHY WERE THEY MADE?

Although they did make small transactions easier, profit motive was probably the main reason for coinage of copper coins. Copper was much cheaper in intrinsic value than silver. Labor was cheap and simple dies could not have been very expensive.

4. ARE THESE PIECES COINS OR TOKENS?

Several books include them as tokens. However, they should be considered as coins if authorized by a government. Many issues were officially sponsored and some were not. Incomplete or non-existing records make it impossible to distinguish the difference.

5. WHERE DO THEY FIT INTO THE MEXICAN NUMISMATIC CATEGORIES?

During the nineteenth century there were national, state, municipal coins all circulating simultaneously. At the same time there were private tokens of haciendas, mining companies and business establishments.

6. WHAT ARE THE BEST REFERENCES AVAILABLE FOR IDENTIFICATION AND STUDY?

The only book dealing exclusively with the subject of municipal coins of Mexico is LAS MONEDAS MUNICIPALES MEXICANAS, by Mauricio Fernandez Garza. Printed in 1979 it lists and illustrates with drawings approximately 300 different pieces. The first 37 pages covering the historical background are in Spanish and English. The remaining pages with coin descriptions, rarity population figures and comments are in Spanish, ending on page 106.

Second book of importance is LAS MONEDAS DE NECESIDAD DEL ESTADO DE MICHOACAN by Manuel Romero de Terreros. An article of 28 pages in Spanish printed in 1940 as a part of Vol. II, No. 5 of the Autonomous University of Mexico's annals, lists 156 entries of municipal and hacienda pieces of the State of Michoacan. Two plate pages have photos of one side only of 21 pieces. A state map is included to show location of municipalities.

More recent publications of Frank Grove and Russell Rulau include drawings of a few municipal coins in their books about TOKENS OF MEXICO. Mauricio Fernandez points out that municipal issues are coins – not tokens.

7. DO COUNTERFEITS EXIST?

Yes, they do. Some are contemporary, especially ones of Zamora, Michoacan. In Guadalajara, several years ago, some entrepreneur began to produce die-struck fantasies in imitation of municipal coins. They may fool a beginning collector but are generally recognizable for what they are.

8. WHAT MATERIALS WERE USED TO PRODUCE MUNICIPAL COINS?

Copper predominates, followed by brass and lead. Lead was used in Yucatan. Also known, but rarely encountered, are leather, wood and soap.

9. WHAT DENOMINATIONS PREVAILED?

Some pieces bear no indication. The majority of coins are marked 1/8 or UN OCTAVO. To a lesser extent, 1/4 is found. At least two are CENTAVOS (Campeche, 1861 and Progreso, Yucatan, 1873).

10. WHAT IS A MUNICIPALITY?

A municipality in Mexico corresponds roughly to a country in the United States. It may include several towns or villages.

11. HOW WIDELY DID MUNICIPAL COINS CIRCULATE?

They were used only within a local market area. Traditionally, each commercial center of a region had certain established market days at which time people gathered to buy, sell or exchange goods. This was the time in which municipal coins were used most frequently.

12. IN WHAT CONDITION ARE MUNICIPAL COINS ACCEPTABLE FOR A COLLECTION?

This is a tough question, a matter for personal decision. Some issues can be found nicely and evenly struck in completely readable condition. Others may have been unevenly struck so that several pieces may be needed to decipher the complete legends. The colonial coins of Lagos are an example. Mauricio Fernandez classifies them as common; yet he could not be certain of the denomination – which is 1/4.

13. HOW SCARCE ARE MUNICIPAL COINS?

Fortunately, Fernandez Garza has a rarity scale, which is applied to every piece listed: Very Rare, Rare, Scarce, and Common. Again this may be adjusted according to condition.

14. HOW MANY STATES WERE REPRESENTED IN THIS TYPE OF COINAGE?

Michoacan, Jalisco, Zacatecas, Colima, San Luis Potosi, Mexico, Yucatan and Campeche were the principal ones. Perhaps there are a few others.

15. WHAT TYPE OF COINS MIGHT ONE EXPECT TO FIND?

Many are uniface – that is, struck on one side only. The majority of coins were die struck, using two dies. A few were made by using incuse punches (those of PIEDAD 1871 for example.) In several instances, worn state coppers were countermarked with initials to circulate in specific localities. Those of Jalisco predominate. Some planchets were made by casting then countermarked (state coinage of San Luis Potosi 1859, with a CE punch for Catorce).

Thank you for your interest, Any comments about the above will be appreciated. Sometimes I can answer questions.

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The following three pages, which show a map of the Mexican State of Michoacan, and two pages of Municipal coins accompanied the hand out.





