

## TWO BIT HEADS

By: Thomas Jasek C-33

Mexico, with a minting history of more than 450 years, presents today's collectors with many different coin series to specialize in. Coins in practically all series have years/mints of issue that are very common or exceedingly rare, to the point of being unique in many cases.

Another aspect of Mexican coins, especially before the emergence of the Estados Unidos Mexicanos (the United States of Mexico) coinage, is the proliferation of varieties. With numerous mints in operation at various times, different levels of quality can be seen in all issues predating the centralization of minting activities beginning with the 1906 issues. The results are the numerous varieties that exist in practically all coin series before 1906. It should be noted that even after 1906, many varieties abound in practically all issues, but these are not as diverse as had existed before the closure of the branch mints and more specifically, before the use of standard dies in 1888 (1).

A fascinating series is the *10 CENTAVOS* coinage (KM403), beginning with the general issues of 1869 through 1897. This series contains numerous varieties, some minor, while others are quite dramatic.

To begin with, this series' obverse design, the side with the eagle (2), (sometimes referred to as the reverse by American collectors and dealers) has the same eagle device, legend, and date as the other decimal series coins issued during this same time period. However, there is one distinction of this series that separates it from the other decimal types of this period. This is the design of the head of the snake in the eagle's claw. Within the *10 CENTAVOS* series, the head is very distinct, with a well-defined, widely opened mouth (*Figure 1*). In the other series of this period, the snake's head tends to be small, less distinct, with a less pronounced, open mouth (See *Figure 2* for an example of a snake's head on a *25 CENTAVOS* coin). Why this type of head was used for this series has not been described (to the author's knowledge), and it does not appear to exist in any other series of Mexican coinage.



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**Figure 1:** 1881 ZsS with normal snake head.



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**Figure 2:** 1871 MoM *25 CENTAVOS* snake head.

Within the *10CENTAVOS* series there are numerous variations of the standard (for this series) snake head, many of which are quite distinctive. However, this article will focus on the existence of four (all that have been discovered to date) issues that have snake heads that are not of the standard type. Rather for three, the heads are of the type that can

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be found on the 25 *CENTAVOS* denomination issued during this time period. The fourth issue appears to have started with the 25 *CENTAVOS* head before being converted to the standard style. All of the coins in question were issued from the Zacatecas mint. It should be noted that coins with the standard head also exist for these years.

The initial coin of this type to be discovered by the author was the 1878 Zs S, 8/7, large S coin (*Figure 3*). Based on features, resembling the head of the snake present on the 25 *CENTAVOS* series, the author referred to this variety as the 25 *CENTAVOS* head. the snake's

Only one of each of these coins have been found as of this writing. Aside from the style of the snake's head, the remainder of the obverse And reverse elements appear "normal mint issue", but that these could be counterfeit issues has not been ruled out. Therefore, if any reader is aware of other issues with these distinctly different snake heads, or has a coin that the snake head style as illustrated, the author would appreciate knowing about it or, if possible, photographing the coin in question. The author can be contacted via e-mail at [fiothink@swbell.net](mailto:fiothink@swbell.net), or P. O. Box 270775, Corpus Christi, TX 78427-0775.

The three currently known issues with the non-standard heads are the: 1878 Zs S, 8/7 large S (*Figure 3*); 1880 Zs S (*Figure 4*); and 1884 Zs S (*Figure 5*).

The 1881 Zs S (*Figure 6*) seems to be more intriguing, it appears to be a standard snake head over the non standard style. Although this specific coin is quite worn, there are protrusions at the front of the head that resemble and are at the correct location where one would expect to find the nose and lower jaw of the normal snake. If this coin does represent such an over-design, does that mean coins with just the non normal head exist for this year or was the design corrected before being put to use?



**Figure 3:** 1878 ZsS 8/7, large S.

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**Figure 4:** 1880 ZsS.



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**Figure 5:** 1884 ZsS.



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**Figure 6:** 1881 ZsS.

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Would, perhaps in the other years, one find coins with a similar over-design? If this design difference was noted and corrected in 1881, why did this non-standard style appear again in 1884? With Mexican numismatics, there are always plenty of opportunities for new and intriguing discovers. Again, all comments and thoughts on this specific issue are welcomed.

### References

- 1.) Dunigan, M., and J. B. Parker, **Resplandores**\_Cap and Rays 8 Reales of the Republic of Mexico 1823 ~ 1897, Superior Stamp & Coin, 1997
- 2.) *Elementos Principales de la Moneda* ( Principal Elements of a Coin) **El Boletín Numismático**, **174, 23**

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