

## HALF-REAL COINS OF CARTAGENA OF THE INDIES

HERMAN BLANTON

Due to their small size the half-real cob type coins are less studied and less popular than the 8 real or "piece of eight." However, the half-real coin is certainly interesting and is a challenge to identify. There is still plenty to learn about this small denomination coin.

Through the years unidentified types of Spanish half-real coins have been erroneously classified as specific mint issues simply because they did not "fit" with any published confirmed types. At the present time there remains much to be learned and what we assume to be correct is open for review and update.

In this article I propose to discuss three coins that have come to my attention within the last 4 years, each was a new type and all remain unique at this writing (January 2007). Figure 1a is from Aureo Subastas auction 5 March 2003, lot 87. Figure 1b and Figure 1c are courtesy of Nikolas Liakopulos Falcon.



*Figure 1a, Figure 1b and Figure 1c*



*Figure 2 (enlarged, actual size 20 mm)  
Half Real, Cartagena 1622 RNA. (Áureo Subastas)*

The coin illustrated in Figure 2 was sold by Aureo Subastas as lot 87 in their auction *Selección de 500 Monedas, Medallas y Billetes* on 5 March 2003.

Obverse: Since this is the only known coin we can only surmise the peripheral legend as ".PHILIPPVS·III·D·G·" what is visible on the coin is ".PHIL". The central design is a shield with Castile and Leon (castle and lion) in their correct positions, there is no indication of a pomegranate in the shield. Above the shield is a crown. To the left of the shield are the letters RN arranged vertically. Our assumption is that the ".RN·" is the mint mark for Nuevo Reino. To the right of the shield is the letter "·A·" which is the assayer mark. We do not know who the assayer was, but the leading candidates are Antonio Arias de la Rúa, Alonso de Gálvez and Jerónimo de Acosta.

Reverse: Columns of Hercules with large pomegranate between and crown above. On the left side the letter "P" for PLVS and to the right the letter "V" for VLTRA. The columns and PLVS VLTRA are of course the motto for Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire (Charles I of Spain). Little of the peripheral legend is visible, but the letters HIS at the beginning and the important numerals 1622 at the end are partially visible. We assume the full legend would be ".HISPANIARVM·REX·1622·" (the stop between REX and 1622 may be a double dot like a colon mark ":"). On both the obverse and reverse the peripheral legend is separated from the central design by a ring.

I can not find documentation authorizing this coin, but since it exists I feel compelled to classify it. The coin does not have a denomination stated on it, so likely it is a  $\frac{1}{4}$  or  $\frac{1}{2}$  real since these denominations did not have a value in the design; by weight it is a  $\frac{1}{2}$  real even though it is 0.13 grams over weight. It is not uncommon for small denomination coins to vary outside the specifications on a piece to piece basis. In fact, during a 1638 mint investigation Turrillo and his lieutenant Juan de Uribe Salazar were judged to have failed in maintaining the weight and fineness standards for billon coinage. The investigation concluded that a hand count of the billon coinage showed a shortage but the records of receipts and shipments were correct (inferring that on average the coins must have been overweight).<sup>1</sup> I classify the coin as a half-real because of its mass of 4.73 grams and its similarity to the S-A quarter-reales dated 1622. According to Friede the purpose of establishing a subsidiary mint in Cartagena was to produce low silver quarter-reales. The specified fineness was 0.186 silver and 0.814 copper with a mass of 2.3 grams, hence a  $\frac{1}{2}$  real would weigh 4.6 grams. The specifications are stated as marks of silver and copper, see below.

The coin listed in Calicó 1998 (#987 page 290) is in my opinion a quarter-real, not a half-real.

As of today for assayer "A" issues we know of ¼ real (mint mark S), ½ real (the subject coin), 4 reales (coins with mint mark S and coins with mint mark RN) and 8 reales (mint mark RN). The assayer "A" coins share a distinctive style of lion. The date of 1622 is known for all types and a few 1621 dated 8 real coins are known. Missing from this census are 1 and 2 real coins. Nearly all (if not all) of the known specimens are from the shipwrecked 1622 fleet (Atocha and related ships).



*Figure 3 is detail  
of lion from 1622 S-A 4 reales.*



*Figure 4 (enlarged)  
Half-real, Cartagena (1626-30) NRE  
(Nicolas Liakopoulos Falcon)*

The second type of Cartagena half-real came to my attention in 2004, it is of coin silver, not billon. It uses the NR mint mark and assayer mark E,

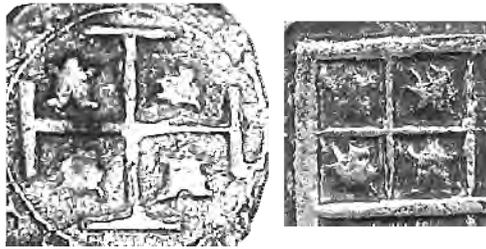
therefore I date the coin between 1626-1630 as this is the date range for various combinations of the letters R, N and E on other silver and gold coins, although it is not impossible that it could have been issued as late as 1635. Very interesting is the location of the assayer mark "E" as it is located in the area specified for the billon coins (see document 4 section 6 below, *y la letra del nombre del ensayador en la parte baja*). The year 1625 is also a possible date, but so far no known coins show a date of 1625 even though this is the logical date "assumed" for the RN-H one real coins. It appears that assayer H arrived in Cartagena in 1625 and was replaced by assayer E. Whether assayer H continued into 1626 or assayer E began in 1625 is problematic as we just don't know, we do know that a 1626 dated 8 real of assayer E exists.



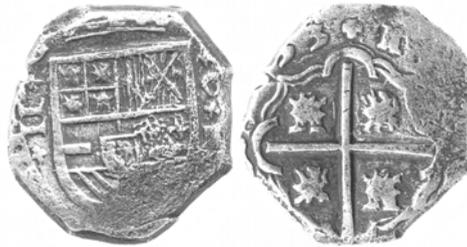
*Figure 5 (enlarged)*  
*Half-real, Cartagena (1630-35) EC*  
 (Nicolas Liakopoulos Falcon)

The third type of Cartagena half-real was discovered in 2006, it too is coin silver. This coin has the mint mark C and assayer mark E, both located under the monogram. I date the coin between 1630 (earliest known dated coins with mint mark C) and 1635 (closing of the Cartagena mint). The coin has a thin lined ring surrounding the cross on reverse side. The obverse has the PHILIPPVS monogram with " + E + C +" below. The reverse shows part of the legend HISPANIARVM • REX and appears to have no space after REX for a date.

An interesting die study shows the Lion and Castles on the EC half-real are from the same punches as used on the obverse (shield) of a 2 real coin dated 1633.



*Figure 6*  
*Die Comparison 1/2 real, 2 reales*



*Figure 7*  
*Cartagena 2 reales 1633 CE for comparison of punches*  
*Approximate diameter 21mm*

I am not including a fourth type of half-real presumed to be from a re-opened Cartagena mint circa 1655 with assayer mark S (a 1655 dated 8R is known) as I am not certain about it.

#### *The Cartagena assayers from 1621-1635*

Assayer A is uncertain, possible candidates listed in text above and method of selection explained below.

Assayer H is Juan de la Hera. Assayer E is uncertain.

In a royal decree dated 1 April 1620 the king authorized Turrillo to take along with him some 36 officials including "one official assayer."<sup>2</sup> In another royal decree of the same date the king grants Turrillo permission to travel, taking with him specified persons including "one assayer."<sup>3</sup>

In the document "File of information and license to travel to the Indies" (AGI: 1620-12-24 Contratación 5374, No. 39) we find the following names which have the letter A as the first letter of the first or last names; in the case of one passenger, Antonio Arias de la Rúa, it is the first letter of both

his first and last names. The names below are listed in order of appearance in the document.

*Alonso Turrillo de Yebra*: Eliminated as assayer because the documents (see above) say he was bringing another person with him as assayer. Turrillo was the founder of the Cartagena and Santa Fe mints.

*Antonio Recuero (Requero)*: Eliminated as assayer because on the passenger list he is identified as a servant of Turrillo and possibly also a mason worker.

*Lorenzo Alberite*: Eliminated as assayer because on the passenger list he is identified as a servant of Turrillo and possibly also a minter.

*Antonio Arias de la Rúa (Riva)*: Sent as an official of the mint (position unknown).

*Antonio de Vega*: Sent as an official but eliminated as assayer because upon arrival with Turrillo in 1621, he immediately returned to Spain, being sent by Turrillo himself to testify as to Cartagena's objections to the mint operations (Friede, document 35, p.131).

*Alonso de Gálvez*: Sent as an official of the mint (position unknown).

*Jerónimo de Acosta*: Sent as an official of the mint (position unknown).

Thus the names not eliminated are Antonio Arias de la Rúa, Alonso de Gálvez and Jerónimo de Acosta, making them candidates for the assayer "A" of 1621-2.

#### *Metrological aspects of the billon coinage.*

In the 17th century, Spain used two different grains, *grains* of fineness and *grains* of weight (mass).

According to Burzio.

*Grano de peso...el grano de Castilla que fué el que uso en América durante la época colonial. Hasta la Real Orden de 31 de agosto de 1731, el marco castellano de oro se dividía en 4800 granos y el de plata en 4608...*<sup>4</sup>

"Grain of weight...the Castilian grain was used in America during the colonial era. Until the royal decree of 31 August 1731, the Castilian gold mark was divided into 4800 grains and the silver into 4608..."

*Grano de ley...Para el ensaye del oro se usaba el castellano dividido en 24 quilates, cada quilate en 4 granos y cada grano en 8 partes. Para la plata el marco, dividido en 12 dineros y cada dinero en 24 granos.*<sup>5</sup>

"Grain of fineness...For the assay of gold the castellano was divided into 24 carats, each carat into 4 grains and each grain into 8 parts. The silver mark was divided into 12 dineros and each dinero into 24 grains."

"Coin silver" had a fineness of eleven dineros and 4 grains (see Friede Document 4, section 4 below).

*Calculation of "coin silver" fineness.*  $([11 \text{ dineros} \times 24 \text{ grains/ dinero}] + 4 \text{ grains}) / (12 \text{ dineros} \times 24 \text{ grains}) = 268/288 = 0.93055 \text{ fine.}$

*Fineness specification of the billon coins.* According to April 1, 1620 document the fineness is 1 part of "coin silver" (0.93055 silver, 0.06945 copper) to 4 parts copper (1.000).

*Calculations for fineness:*  $(4 \times 1000) + 69.45 = 4069.45 \text{ copper to } 930.55 \text{ silver}$  Fineness  $(930.55/5000) = 0.18611$ .

*Mass of one grain:* If we use Barriga<sup>6</sup> for the mass value (Vol 1, p. 32) for the mark at 230.1232 grams and the relative masses of: 1 mark = 8 ounces = 64 ochavas = 384 tomines = 4608 grains, then 1 grain equals  $(230.1232 \text{ grams}/4608) = 0.0499399 \text{ grams.}$  (Burzio uses 230.0465g for the mark.)

*Mass of the quarter-real and half-real:* In the April 1, 1620 document the mark = 25 reales of billon. There are four quarter-reales in each real. Twenty-five reales  $\times$  four quarter-reales equals 100 quarter-reales per mark  $(25 \times 4 = 100)$ , each quarter-real =  $4608 \text{ grains}/100 = 46.08 \text{ grains}$ , which in grams =  $46.08 \times 0.0499399 = 2.30 \text{ grams.}$  The half-real is therefore  $92.16 \times 0.499399 \text{ grams} = 4.60 \text{ grams.}$  The Aureo coin at 4.73g weighs close to this value.

The following extracts are from *Documentos Sobre la Fundación de la Casa de Moneda en Santa Fe de Bogotá (1614-1635)* by Juan Friede.

Document # 4. *Capitulación con el capitán Alonso Turillo de Yebra. Madrid 1 de abril de 1620.* Agreement with captain Alonso Turillo de Yebra, Madrid, 1 April 1620.

Section 4: *La moneda de vellón rico que, como queda dicho, habéis de labrar para la contratación y comercio por menor del dicho Reino, ha de ser ligada a cuatro marcos de cobre, ... con uno de plata, de ley de once dineros y cuatro granos, como se hace en las demás casas de moneda de estos Reinos.*<sup>7</sup>

"The enriched billon coinage that should be minted for retail trade in the said kingdom is to be made by combining four copper marks, with one of silver, fineness of eleven dineros and four grains, as is done in the other mints of these Kingdoms".

Section 5: *Cada marco hecho moneda de esta liga, ha de tener de valor veinticinco reales, y cada real cuatro piezas, y todo el marco, cien piezas, y cada cuartillo, cuarenta y ocho granos de peso. de cuyo género quiero y mando que se labren de presente trescientos mil ducados, para lo cual habéis de poner por vuestra cuenta todo el cobre necesario, por manera que de hacerse esta labor ha de quedar para aumento de mi Real hacienda, demás del beneficio común, a razón de treinta y cinco por ciento en esta manera: que labrándose ciento y treinta y cinco mil ducados han de ser para mí los treinta y cinco mil, de forma que para hacer ciento y veinte mil ducados, los que me pertenecen, se han de labrar cuatrocientos y veinte mil ducados; que han de cobrar los oficiales de mi Real hacienda del dicho Reino.*<sup>8</sup>

“Each mark, made with this alloy, should have the value of twenty-five reales, and each real four pieces, and the whole mark, a hundred pieces, and each cuartillo, forty-eight grains of weight. I want three hundred thousand ducats of this kind to be minted, for this purpose you should supply all the necessary copper yourself. From this task there must remain for the Royal Treasury, aside from the public benefit, thirty five percent in the following way: by minting one hundred thirty five thousand ducats, thirty five thousand will belong to me. In order to produce for me one hundred and twenty thousand ducats, four hundred and twenty thousand ducats should be minted, that should be collected by the Real Treasury officers in that Kingdom”.

Section 6: *Las insignias que esta moneda ha de tener, será por una parte las Armas de Castilla y León y de la otra, dos columnas con la granada en medio, insignia de la dicha ciudad de Santafé, y el Plus Ultra a los lados y la letra del nombre del ensayador en la parte baja. Y el letrero de toda la dicha moneda diga así: Philippus Tertius Yspaniae et Indiae Rex, como parece por los cuerpos impresos que van en el papel incluso, firmado de mi infrascrito secretario.*<sup>9</sup>

“The insignias that this coin must have are, on one side, the shield of Castile and Leon, and on the other, two columns with a pomegranate in the center, emblem from that city of Santafé, and the Plus Ultra around and the assayer's initial at the bottom part. The label of this coinage should say Philippus Tertius Yspaniae et Indiae Rex as is stated in the enclosed printed material by my undersigned secretary”.

Document #23. *Real Cédula, Madrid, 10-Junio-1620.*

*Don García Girón, mi gobernador y capitán general de la provincia de Cartagena, y oficiales de ella: El capitán Alonso Turrillo de Yebra, mi ingeniero militar, que por orden mía va a fundar casa de moneda en la ciudad de Santafé del Nuevo Reino de Granada, me ha hecho relación que para que se consuma la plata corriente que hay en esa provincia y se provean las islas de Barlovento y otras circunvecinas de moneda labrada, para su trato y comercio, sería necesario se pusiere en casa ciudad alguna oficina de la dicha casa, donde se labrase la dicha moneda, suplicándome le mandase dar licencia para ello, pues demás del beneficio general que resultará de recoger la dicha plata corriente, se excusarán los gastos y costas que tendrá el llevarla a labrar a la dicha casa de moneda...*<sup>10</sup>

“My governor, and general captain of Cartagena province, Don Garcia Girón, and his officers: Captain Alonso Trujillo de Yebra, my military engineer, who following my order is going to establish the mint in Santafé of New Granada, has reported that in order to consume the available silver in that province and to supply the Windward and neighboring islands with coinage for the trade and commerce, it would be necessary to establish a mint office in that city, where coins can be made. For this purpose he asked for my tolerance

because aside of the general benefit that will follow the gathering of the available silver, the costs and expenses of carrying it for coinage will be exempted...”

Other documents in Friede's book confirm that Turrillo opened a sub-mint in Cartagena, and produced billon coins there and relate to the profit on the coinage.

To put it bluntly, the silver in *two* billon quarter-reales is 0.8556g ( $2 \times 2.3\text{g} \times 0.186$  fine) only slightly more than the amount in *one* quarter-real made of "coin silver" ( $0.859\text{g} \times 0.931$  fine = 0.7997g). This nearly doubled the income from quarter-reales to be divided between the king and Turrillo. It is no wonder the citizenry of Cartagena complained about it, especially the merchants, see Friede for more information.

My thanks to Aureo Subastas and Nikolas Liakopulos Falcon for the use of their images, and to Dr. Jorge Restrepo and Andres Langebaek for their help. A special thanks to Jorge Proctor for archival information and our many emails and telephone calls during the preparation of this article.

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<sup>1</sup> ...*el dicho Tessorero no guardó lo que tenía obligación dándole tal peso y ley a la dicha moneda de vellón rrico que correspondiese la cuenta al peso y a la ley por lo cual el dicho Oydor y su acompañado atento a que por el recibo y cuenta del libro de la dicha oficina no consta de culpa ni falta en la dicha moneda de vellón absolvió y dio libres a los herederos del dicho Tessorero la confirmamos.* BARRIGA VILLABA, A.M., *Historia de la Casa de Moneda*, Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1969 Vol.1:233.

<sup>2</sup> FRIEDE, JUAN, *Documentos Sobre la Fundación de la Casa de Moneda en Santa Fe de Bogotá (1614-1635)*, Conservados en el Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla, *Transcritos y Anotados*, Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1963, document 4, p.58.

<sup>3</sup> *ÍBID.*, document 10, pp 68-9

<sup>4</sup> BURZIO, HUMBERTO F., *Diccionario de la Moneda Hispanoamericana*, Santiago de Chile: Fondo Histórico y Bibliográfico José Toribio Medina, 1958, Vol.1:230-1.

<sup>5</sup> *ÍBID.*

<sup>6</sup> BARRIGA VILLABA, Vol.1:32.

<sup>7</sup> FRIEDE, document 4 p. 55.

<sup>8</sup> *ÍBID.*, 55-6.

<sup>9</sup> *ÍBID.*, 56.

<sup>10</sup> *ÍBID.*, 80-1.

