

Santa Fe, the Final Silver Cob

1755 Quarter Real – A Tentative Attribution

by: **Herman Blanton**



[Editorial Note]: This transcribed article originates from the *NI Bulletin*, the publication of the non-profit educational organization: **Numismatics International**. It was published in Volume 44, Number 1/2 (Jan/Feb 2009). The Web site and Yahoo! ® "Numismatics" group has over 3000 articles on all numismatic subjects in a searchable database.

Please consider joining & donating to this excellent organization, find out more by visiting www.Numis.org

Santa Fe, the Final Silver Cob
1755 Quarter Real, a Tentative Attribution
Herman Blanton, NI #LM115



Cuartillo (Quarter Real) cob, 13 mm, 0.87 grams

The Spanish quarter real, at 32 pieces to the peso (eight real), is a small coin with low commercial value, comparable to other small Spanish coins, both billon and copper. The silver cob quarter real coin, called *cuartillo*, was produced primarily in Spanish America, but not at all mints or during all reigns. It has a specified mass of 0.859 grams.¹

In peninsular Spain we know of silver cuartillos of *Fernando* and *Isabel* (Ferdinand and Elizabeth, Isabel or Isabella) which have their symbols the yoke and bundle of arrows or their initials F and Y. In Aragon, both Barcelona and Saragossa issued silver quarter-croats of Ferdinand. Other than these pieces I don't know of any silver cuartillos from peninsular Spain that are contemporaneous with Spanish American cob issues. Spain primarily used billon and copper for low value coins.

In Spanish America the cuartillo was first produced at Mexico for *Juana* and *Carlos* (Joan or Johanna and Charles) with the distinctive I & K initials. After this I don't know of any cob cuartillos from Mexico. Lima and Potosí produced cuartillos for Philip II. Potosí produced these possibly as late as 1600 (Philip III).² The cuartillos from Lima are of two basic styles: the earlier has the initials R and I, and the later a castle and lion, one on each side, each within a shield. The Potosí design is similar to the later Lima design. These are the only cob cuartillos I am aware of from Spanish

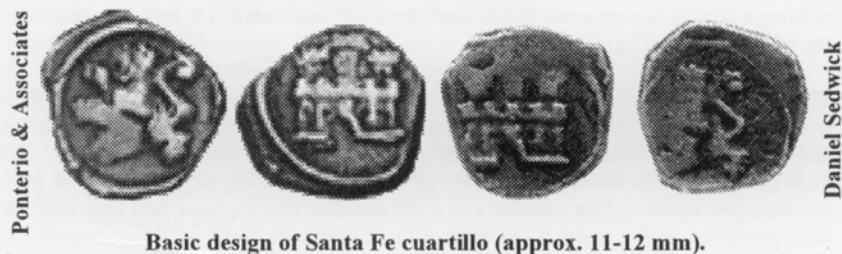
¹ A.M. Barriga Villalba, *Historia de la Casa de Moneda*. (Bogotá: Publicaciones del Banco de la Republica, 1969), 1:182. Spanish coin silver was *once dineros y cuatro granos fino* which is 11 / 12 plus four grains fine. Twelve dineros to the whole, 24 grains per dinero = $12 \times 24 = 288$ grains of fineness for 100% pure silver. $(11 / 12) \times 288 = 264$ grains, $264 + 4 = 268$ grains silver. $268 / 288 = 0.93055$ fine. 1:30, Sixty-seven reals to the mark, the mark is 230.1232 grams, therefore 268 cuartillos (67×4) to the mark, $230.1232 / 267 = 0.859$ grams per cuartillo.

² Dan Sedwick and Frank Sedwick, *The Practical Book of Cobs*, 4th Edition. (Winter Park, FL: 2007), pp. 92-7.

America, outside of Colombia. All of these have some legend or inscription by which they can be attributed.

This brings us to Colombia, the Spanish colonial mints of Cartagena (*de las Indias*) and Santa Fe (*de Bogotá*). Cartagena produced cuartillos in 1622, made of billon, with a specified mass of 2.3 grams; these are distinctly different from the subject coin. There is a cuartillo with punches from a Cartagena eight real, but we can't confirm whether the cuartillo itself was made in Cartagena or Santa Fe, as punches from Cartagena were also used in Santa Fe.³ Also, the Cartagena mint closed for the final time shortly after 1655.

For the first and basic design of Santa Fe cob cuartillos, the castle and lion punches were the same used on eight reals from 1627 until at least as late as 1693. A few other punch styles are known, but follow the same basic design.



Santa Fe began striking coins in April 1627 and the first cuartillos were struck on December 4th of the same year.⁴ These cuartillos are anepigraphic (without a legend or inscription) but since by this time no other mints were producing cuartillos, the consensus is that *cob* cuartillos made from 1627 forward are from Santa Fe. Santa Fe produced cobs from 1627 through 1753 under private owners and under Royal control from 1753-6.⁵ The Royal mint produced cobs until the new equipment for milled coins was installed and operational.

Barriga lists production data for the *private mint operations*, 1627-1753; no silver coins (cobs) were produced after 1748.⁶

The Santa Fe cuartillos use the same lion and castle punches used on the eight real coins. Some of the designs were used for over 50 years, and there are only a few distinctly different punches. The subject coin of this article, Restrepo number M14-4, is markedly different from the others. I can't match the castle or the lion with those

³ Jorge Emilio Restrepo, *Monedas de Colombia 1619-2006*, 2nd edition. (Medellín, Colombia: 2007), p. 71, #M13.

⁴ Barriga, 1:50.

⁵ Ibid., 3:514.

⁶ Ibid., 3:532-9. Barriga is not explicit; a table on p. 538 could be interpreted as silver no later than 1743, or as late as 1748. For the six years, 1743-8, 2342 marks of silver were coined, that is an average of 390 marks/year; Ibid., 1:122. This value is consistent with the long term average over 47 years (1696-1742) of 493 marks/year, whereas if all 2342 marks were coined in a single year it would be almost five times the average and higher than any of the 47 previous years except 1698, when 4557 marks were coined.

used on any eight real *from any mint*; most distinctive is the wreath around the periphery on both the obverse and the reverse.

We can be confident that the coin is Santa Fe because it does not match those made in the other mints mentioned above and Santa Fe produced cob cuartillos in many different years. However, if we can't match the lion or castle to any eight real, then how can we attribute the coin?

After 1703 (possibly 1705) the number of known eight-real types is only three: Restrepo M76-3 (1721 assayer Arce), M76-6 (1722 assayer Sanchez) and M76-9 (1742 assayer Molano). The lion and castle do not match those used on these eight reals. From 1728 to 1755, a period of 28 years, eight reals were produced in only two years, 1742-3.⁷ Since the subject coin does not match any eight real known, including 1742, it seems logical that the cuartillo was made later, after 1743. In fact, according to Barriga, after 1748 (or possibly 1743) no silver cobs of any denomination were produced with only one exception, *cuartillos were made in 1755*; this occurred after the mint transferred to royal control.

The crown nationalized the Santa Fe mint in 1753, erecting a mint building which was completed in 1759.⁸ During the first four years while constructing the building and installing the machinery for milled coins (called *cordoncillo* in Spanish),⁹ the mint continued to produce gold cobs. For the period 1753-6 we know of cob gold escudos, two escudos, four escudos and eight escudos. During these first four years of mint operation under direct royal control, no silver cobs were produced except for cuartillos in 1755, as mentioned previously.

*Durante los cuatro primeros años de actividad, se acuñó solamente moneda recortada.... En moneda de plata no se acuñaron sino piezas de cuartillo, el 6 de Agosto de 1755, en la cantidad de 147 marcos, 4 onzas y 3 ochavas, que dieron 40536 cuartillos macuquinos.*¹⁰

During the first four years of activity, only cobs were struck.... No silver coins were struck except cuartillos, August 6, 1755, in the amount of 147 marks, 4-3/8 ounces, which produced 40,536 cob cuartillos.

Acta de la primera moneda de cuartillos recortados, emitida en agosto de 1755, que se fabrico bajo el régimen virreinal, antes de la circular de cordoncillo. ...Agosto de mil setezientos sinquenta y cinco. Estando en la Sala de Libranza...El Fiel...condujo a dha Sala, tres talegos de moneda de plata acuñada en espezie de quartillos; que dijo contenían: ciento quarenta y siete marcos, quatro ons. y tres ochs...Y haviendo hecho varios experimentos por menor Dixo estar conformes a lo provenido por Rs. Ordenanzas. Y

⁷ Ibid., 3:537-8. Eight reals are possible between 1743-8, but none are known.

⁸ Barriga, 2:26. "The mint that Director Sánchez Reizente began in 1753 and completed 1759..."

⁹ Humberto F. Burzio, *Diccionario de la Moneda Hispanoamericana*. (Santiago de Chile: Fondo Historico y Bibliográfico José Toribio Medina, 1958), 1:94. Burzio describes Cordoncillo as the circumference or edge of a coin, when it is surrounded with a design in relief or incuse, taking the form of reeds, leaves, striations, or with symbols or lettering

¹⁰ Ibid., 2:33

*contada toda la referida moneda, se hallaron un mil dozientos sessenta y seis pesos y seis rrs.*¹¹

Record of the first hammered (cob) cuartillos, issued in August 1755, which were made under Viceroyalty regulations, before the round milled coinage... August 1755. Being in the Payment Room...the Superintendent...had brought into the said room, three bags of silver money struck into cuartillos; which contained 147 marks, seven and three-eighths ounces...And having made several detailed tests [the coins] were said to comply with royal ordinances. And counting all of the aforementioned coin, found there to be 1,266 pesos and six reals.

Even though silver cob coins were produced, they were only cuartillos, which were not treasure, but were the currency of small transactions, so these coins were likely made to meet market demands. Other silver coins required for commerce came from the mints of Potosi, Lima and Mexico, but those three mints did not produce cuartillos.

I propose that the subject coin is one of the coins produced in 1755. Silver coins had not been produced since 1748 (or perhaps 1743), some seven or more years prior. If the castle and lion punches were made by the new mint administration, and no eight real cobs were produced, then *there is no possibility to match the cuartillo with an eight real.*

Examples of Milled Cuartillos
(Nominal diameter 11.5-12.5 mm)



Wide castle example of milled cuartillo attributed to Santa Fe.

¹¹ Ibid., 2:214-5. 1266 pesos = 10,128 reals = 40,512 cuartillos (1/4 reals), plus six reals (24 cuartillos) equals 40,536 cuartillos total.



Narrow castle example of milled cuartillo, attributed to Santa Fe.

On the cob cuartillo the lion seems to be wearing a crown on his head and is sticking out his tongue. The lion does not wear a crown on any other Santa Fe cob, but is standard on milled coins, as can be seen on the two examples above. Compare the castle, the archway of the door is triangular in shape. The walls of the castle are contracted (squeezed in) at the window level, reminiscent of the castle used on most milled coins.



Lion wearing crown, extending tongue. Castle door in triangle shape.

However, it is the peripheral wreath design that is the most intriguing. I know of no Colombian cob, gold or silver, which has a wreath of leaves in its design. The wreath was used for the edge design of some *cordoncillo* (milled coinage, see footnote 9) which Santa Fe would begin making the following year, 1756, and the tools for which the mint had already received. So, it seems that the wreath design in the periphery was intended to represent the edge design of the milled coins. Below is a closeup of the leaves on the cuartillo, configured in an arc, compared with edge design from the 1762 eight real milled coin in the Numismatic Museum in Bogotá.¹²

¹² Restrepo, p. 120.



Cuartillo



Periphery design has three leaves, as does the edge of the milled eight real.



Calicó

Ferdinand VI (1746-59), Santa Fe, 1/4 real (1755), assayer Sebastián de Rivera. This, then, is the only *known* silver cob coin from Santa Fe for Ferdinand VI and for assayer Rivera (1743-57).¹³ Catalog numbers: Restrepo M14-4 and Calico (1998) Philip V number 1653b.¹⁴ Documented mintage, 40,536. Two pieces known, both illustrated here.

My thanks to Ponterio & Associates, Daniel Sedwick and Calicó for their images. A special thanks to Dr. Jorge Restrepo for proofreading the text as well as for all images not otherwise identified.

NI

¹³ Barriga, 1:132, 2:202

¹⁴ F. and X. Calicó and J. Trigo, *Numismática Española*, 9th edition. (Barcelona: 1998).