



Cartagena 4 Reales with Star Punch
Tentative Attribution
Herman Blanton

This specimen was brought to my attention in 2022 by a collector in Spain. Initial observations suggest it is a 4 reales of Cartagena of the Indies (Colombia) and this is likely correct, but...some characteristics need examined.



Obverse

Reverse

4 Reales, silver, 13.4 grams, 29.3 mm maximum dimension

The obverse has the general appearance of Cartagena and uses a seldom seen star punch as a data separator.

Observations on the obverse. The planchet is smooth and evenly thick which is more like Cartagena than Santa Fe. It seems there is no “Granada” (triangle with pomegranate at the bottom of the shield). While the absence of Granada is characteristic of Cartagena it is also characteristic of other colonial and peninsular Spanish mints. (However, some Cartagena coins do have Granada, see Restrepo M45-1 and M45-2.) The obverse shows 3 small stars near 10-11 o’clock. Generally the coins use a dot (*punto*) as a legend separator but this coin uses a star (*estrella*). Likely the star was used at other places on the coin but are not visible. Unfortunately the coin does not show the mint mark or assayer mark. This last characteristic is what prevents certain attribution. Hopefully more specimens will come to light allowing certain attribution to be determined.



I have seen this star punch used on two specimens of Cartagena 8 reales. The two 8 reales were struck from the same dies as each other. Since one of the coins has the date 1626 visible on the reverse both coins are 1626. The coin without a visible date is Restrepo M45-6, 1626 (the image caption erroneously has it M45-9). The dated specimen I examined in Chicago in 2004 and I have an image of it; there is no doubt the date is 1626.

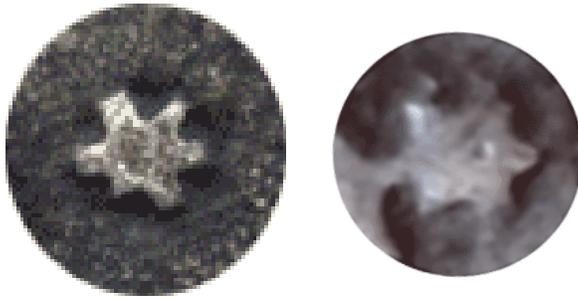
Below are the two specimens of Cartagena 8 reales that have the same star punch used on the subject 4 reales. This shows that this star punch was used at Cartagena in 1626.



Henry Christensen, May 14, 1982, Lot 213, 8 Reales (45 mm max., 26.068 g)



8 Reales, Chicago specimen with STAR enlarged



**Christensen 8 Reales Subject 4 Reales
Same star punch**

Observations on the reverse. There are two distinctions to consider. 1) the tressure (eight lobes encircling the cross), 2) Castle and lion punches.

Tressure: The standard design on the coins of both Cartagena and Santa Fe use double arcs (*curvas pareadas*) at the four ends of the cross arms. Between the arcs are double brackets (*curvas pareadas quebradas*). On the subject 4 reales and on the two 8 reales above the arrangement of the tressure is reversed.





Tressure



Reversed tressure

The reverse side of this coin employs the castle and lion punches that are standard on Santa Fe 4 reales beginning in 1627. The date on the reverse ends with a round shaped digit either 0, 6, 8 or 9. 1620 is prior to the opening of either the Cartagena or Santa Fe mint so we can eliminate 1620 (unless it was struck from original Madrid supplied dies but this coin is not in the style of such coins, see Restrepo M33 and M34). If the coin is Santa Fe we can eliminate 1626 since the mint opened in 1627. The date possibilities are 1628 and 1629. The final digit does not show a lower tail so that leaves the date 1628—if the coin is Santa Fe.

Illustrated below are castles and lions on Santa Fe 4 reales in the Eldorado collection. This shows that the castle and lion punches of the subject coin were used at Santa Fe from 1627 forward.



Subject 4 reales



Eldorado 11052: 1627



Eldorado 11053: 4 reales (1631)



Eldorado 11054: 4 reales 1643



Eldorado 11055: 4 reales 1651 (Columnar design)

Additional 4 reales of coulmnar design in the Eldorado sale with same castle and lion: 11056, 11057, 11058, 11060, 11061, 11062 and 11063.

For similar observations see:

Blanton pp. 90 “M44-6a A to D”, 93 “M44-6a, M62-23 & 24 A-G”

Cortés pp. 67 “T”, 68 “1651 PoRAM”, 69 “1652” and 70 “1676”.



Tentative summary and conclusion.

The general design is consistent with Cartagena, most notably the absence of Granada, and uses the same star punch as two known 8 Reales dated 1626. The error of a reversed tressure around the cross matches the same two 8 reales. The main obstacle to attributing to Cartagena is the use of castle and lion punches that are undeniably Santa Fe. The most logical explanation for this conflict is that the punches for the castle and lion were shipped from Cartagena to Santa Fe in preparation for the opening of the mint in 1627. It may be that these punches were made and used at Cartagena before dispatch to Santa Fe. If my supposition of transferring punches to Santa Fe in 1627 is correct then we will not find them on Cartagena coins dated later than 1627, thus eliminating the date of 1628 for this coin. The subject coin should be classified as Cartagena 1626.

To confirm the attribution of the subject coin we need a specimen(s) that clearly reveals the date, more importantly the mint mark and most importantly the assayer mark.

Works cited:

- Blanton, Herman. “Identification of Silver Cob Cuartillos from Santa Fe and Cartagena” in *Numismatics International Bulletin*, Vol. 50, Numbers 5/6, May/June 2015, pp. 81-102.
<https://archive.org/details/NIB2015MayJunVol50Nos05to06/page/n15/mode/2up>
- Cortés, Gregorio. *Castillos y leones de las macuquinas de américa. 1573-1773*. Colombia: Sociedad Numismática de Colombia, 2021.
- Restrepo, Jorge Emilio. *Coins of Colombia (Spanish Colonial and Republican 1619-to 2012 (Monedas de Colombia 1619-2012) Fourth Edition-First English Edition*. Medellín: self-published, Impresiones Rojo (printer), 2012, p. 82, number M46-28 (illustrated).

- Stack's Bowers Galleries. *The Eldorado Collection of Colombian and Ecuadorian Coins – January 12 & 13, 2018 New York City – Grand Hyatt Hotel*. Santa Ana CA: Stack's Bowers Numismatics, LLC, 2017.
<https://auctions.stacksbowers.com/auctions/3-965CN/january-2018-nyinc-session-d-the-eldorado-collection-of-colombian-and-ecuadorian-coins-part-1-lots-11001-11403>



Due to the effort spent researching for his book *Las monedas coloniales hispano-americanas* José Toribio Medina referred to it as his collection regardless if the coins were in his personal collection or not. (Medina. *Las Monedas Coloniales Hispano-Americanas*: VII) *Por tal razón, en esa parte bien podría llamarle Catálogo de mi colección de monedas hispano-americanas*. I feel the same way towards my own virtual collection and in his honor I am emulating some features of his book including the use of selected graphics—*author*.