

The Origin of the “Star of Lima” Mint Mark

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Numismatists have long admired the beauty of the coins issued by the Lima mint during the tenure of assayer Diego de la Torre in the latter 16th century. The particular pieces that carry the assayer mark of Diego de la Torre also carry a star mark. Ever since Ernesto Sellschopp proposed that the star mark was the arms of the city of Lima¹ numismatists have known it as the *Star of Lima*. If this is true, then how did it come about that the star appeared on these coins?



This article will show that the star on the referenced coins is indeed the *Star of Lima*. Furthermore, it was the official seal of the City of Lima for showing approval of weight and fineness. The seal was created in 1549 by Juan de Bruselas under authorization of the *Cabildo of Lima* (town council).

The origin of the Star of Lima mintmark is intimately associated with the Spanish conquest of Peru. With the reader’s permission offered here is a brief narrative in order to place the mark in historical context; to skip this narrative jump ahead to the next section.

Section 1: Historical Setting

Historians date the conquest of Peru from the capture of the Inca Atahualpa in 1532, who the Spaniards killed in 1533, until the execution of the Inca Túpac Amaru (the First) in 1572. The conquistador Francisco Pizarro left Spain in 1509 to seek his fortune in the New World. While in Panama he made an agreement with Hernando de Luque, a priest, and a fellow adventurer one Diego de Almagro to explore and conquer Peru. A failed expedition in 1524 returned to Panama and a second expedition set out in 1526, but it too faced extreme difficulties. Pizarro and Almagro agreed to separate with Pizarro waiting on an island off the coast and Almagro returning to Panama for reinforcements. The governor of Panama, Pedro de los Ríos, rejected the request for a third expedition and assisted only so far as to bring the Spaniards back to Panama. It was agreed among the conquistadors that Pizarro should

¹ Sellschopp’s meticulous study of cobs led him to propose that the coins with the star mark were not Potosi but were actually Lima. In his English language book *The Coinage of Peru* co-authored with Henry Grunthal (1978: 14) he wrote “This star had been the official hallmark of the city since 1535, and was stamped on goldsmith’s work, weights and weapons.” In the prolog by Arnaldo J. Cunietti-Ferrando in Dargent (2011:8) “*En 1963, un estudioso alemán radicado en el Perú, el Dr. Ernesto Sellschopp, basado exclusivamente en una minuciosa y apasionada observación de las mismas monedas, publicó un revolucionario artículo: ‘Nuevo datos para la diferenciación de monedas limeñas y potosinas bajo el reinado de Felipe II’. Descubrió que si bien se conocían piezas de la breve acuñación de 1568/70 y de la brevísima de 1659/60, era lógico suponer que debían aparecer también los abundantes ejemplares de período 1572/88 y sobre todo, las últimas emisiones, cuando con mayor número de empleados, la ceca de Lima elevó su producción de monedas. Arribado a esta conclusión, fue cuestión de tiempo, resolver el problema. Pronto descubrió que las monedas del escudo coronado del ensayador D atribuidas hasta entonces a Potosí, llevaban una pequeña estrella sobre su sigla y recordó que ya en 1549, el cabildo de Lima había dispuesto estampar una estrella como sello de Armas de la ciudad. Luego encontró que la inicial D correspondía a un ensayador llamado Diego de la Torre, que había jurado su cargo ante el Cabildo limeño en 1577.*”

bypass the governor of Panama and go to Spain to appeal directly to the king for permission to conquer Peru; Pizarro arrived in Spain in 1528. King Charles was persuaded by Pizarro and had the Council of the Indies negotiate and draft a *capitulación* (contract or agreement) to conquer Peru within certain constraints. Due to the king's travel schedule the contract was signed by his wife, queen consort Isabella. The contract, known as the *Capitulación de Toledo de 1529*, gave Pizarro license to explore, conquer and populate (settle) Peru.

...licencia e facultad a vos, el dicho capitán Francisco Piçarro, para que por Nos, en nuestro nombre e de la Corona real de Castilla, podais continuar el dicho descubrimiento, conquista e población de la dicha provincia del Perú...

The text of the *Capitulación* is available on-line at the URL below [accessed July 12, 2014]. http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/bib/historia/CarlosV/9_9.shtml. It is also recorded in print such as William H. Prescott: *History of the Conquest of Peru: with a Preliminary View of the Civilization of the Incas. Vol. II.* (1874) Appendix No. VII.

The conquest began with a period of exploration from 1530-32 after which in 1533 the Spaniards settled in the town of Jauja where Pizarro appointed *alcaldes* and *regidores* (mayors and aldermen). At an elevation of about 3350 meters (11,000 feet) Jauja is located in the fertile Mantaro valley some 250 km (160 miles) inland from present day Lima and 875 km (540 miles) from Cuzco. Jauja served as the provisional capital of the Spaniards in Peru. After this Pizarro divided his army, leaving some and taking the rest with him to Cuzco. After capturing the Inca capital in Cuzco he returned and ordered the relocating of the town to a more suitable location. Following orders from Pizarro the aldermen in Jauja met on December 4, 1534 to discuss the affairs concerning a relocation. The title page of book 1 of the *Cabildo de Lima* is dated 1534. "*LIBRO, 1° DE LOS cavildos de esta CIUDAD, DE LOS REYES, QUE COMIENZA EL AÑO DE 1534*". Therefore the Cabildo of Lima was formed and operated even before a permanent site of the town or its name had been selected (Cobo 1882: 13-15).

Since the name of the new capital, *Ciudad de los Reyes* (City of the Kings), is central to the theme of this article some space ought to be devoted to it. Citing the foundation date of the city as the Day of Epiphany, January 6, 1535, may be convenient but it is not accurate. On the Day of Epiphany a Catholic Mass was conducted and on that holy day it seems, but not expressly written, that help of the Magi was sought to locate the best site for the town. Although the Bible does not say how many Magi there were, tradition holds there were three because of the mentioning of the three gifts as recorded in Matthew 2:1-12. Francisco Pizarro selected the name *Ciudad de Los Reyes* to honor the Magi (Cobo 1956: 292-93). Cobo also recorded the orders issued by Pizarro dated January 6, 1535. In these orders Pizarro selected three experienced men to choose a specific site for the new city. "*...fecho [hecho] en Pachacamac a 6 de Enero de 1535.—Francisco Pizarro, por mandato de su señoría, Antonio Picado*" (Cobo 1882: 13-28).

Nicolas de Ribera el Viejo (the elder) favored the village of San Gallán, which is today called Pisco, situated about 240 km (150 mi.) south of Lima but he quickly moved the people with him to the new site once Pizarro had selected it. The City of the Kings, which was soon to be called Lima, was officially "founded" on January 18, 1535, the day on which Pizarro changed the status of the native community on the Rimac River to that of his capital city. (The native peoples along the coast pronounced the "R" in Rimac as an "L" hence the spoken

name became Limac.) On January 21, 1535, the Cabildo set to work at organizing the new city (Torres: 11).² Conscriptio of the native population was implemented in order to accomplish the construction projects which were to be built over top of their own communities.

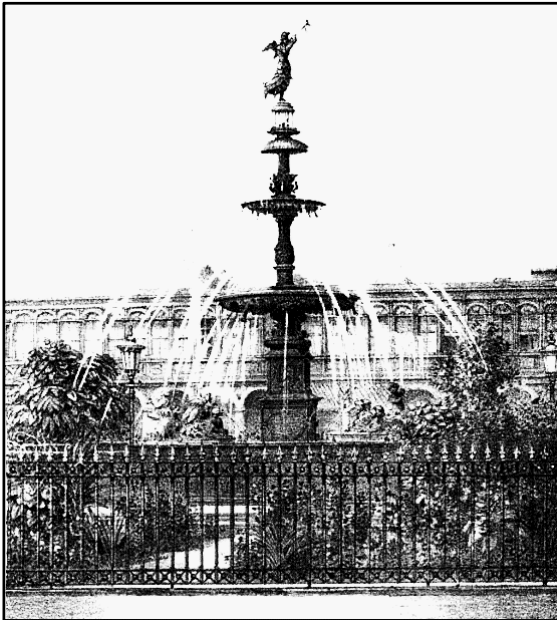
The city was officially named and recognized by the Spanish Crown in a decree dated 1537.

... in a province which in the language of the Indians is called Limac, and in it a town made of Spanish Christians for which we command to name and entitle *la Ciudad de los Reyes* (the City of the Kings), because now Hernando de Zevallos on behalf of its residents has begged us on her behalf. We order the city arms, for putting on their banners and seals and other parts and places ... and this is our mercy and will that now and henceforth forever the said Ciudad de los Reyes have and be known by its shield on a blue field with three golden crowns of the kings, brought into a triangle, and above them a gold star, with each of the three points of the star touching the three crowns, and bordered by gold letters that say *Hoc signum vere regum est*, on a red field, and for capping and motto two black eagles with king crowns in gold, looking at each other, and embracing an I and a K, which are the first letters of our names [I for loana or Joana and K for Karolus or Charles], and above said letters a star of gold, as described and sketched...given in the city of Valladolid, this seventh of December in the fifteen hundred and thirty seventh year of the birth of Our Savior Jesus Christ.—I the King.... (Fuentes 1858: 82-83).³

² *De Cajamarca acompañó Ribera á Pizarro en la reducción de las provincias que, en su marcha al Cuzco, tuvo que recorrer; y cuando en 1534 se intentó trasladar á mejor sitio la ciudad fundada en el año anterior, en la valle de Jauja, para residencia de las autoridades, se encargó á Ribera de ejecutar la traslación. Fundó con este propósito el pueblo de San Gallán, que, aun en sus principios, se refundió en la ciudad levantada por Pizarro el 18 de Enero de 1535 en la valle de Lima, trasladando allí la población de Jauja, en obediencia de resoluciones del Cabildo de ésta, dictadas al respecto. En 21 de Enero del indicado año 1535, quedó definitivamente organizada la nueva población, constituyéndose en ese día el Cabildo. Pizarro, en uso de sus facultades de Gobernador, y atendiendo á que el Ayuntamiento de Jauja no había elegido su personal para el indicado año 1535, nombró Alcaldes y Regidores de ese Cabildo. Nicolás de Ribera y Juan Tello recibieron entonces las varas de justicia, correspondientes á los Alcaldes de la ciudad. Al erigirse ésta, Ribera y Diego de Agüero trazaron el plano y distribuyeron los solares entre sus fundadores. Penosa labor fué la del Cabildo de 1535. Todo el tiempo tuvo que pasarlo en dictar resoluciones que organizaran la Administración local, entonces excesivamente complicada por las variadas atenciones y deberes que á sus miembros competían. Satisfactoriamente fué llenada la misión de Ribera, á tal punto que mereció que sus compañeros de Cabildo le encargaran nuevamente de su Alcaldía por cuatro veces más.*

³ *...en una Provincia que en lengua de yndios se dice Lima, y en ella hizo un pueblo de cristianos españoles, al qual mandamos llamar e intitular la Ciudad de los Reyes, e por agora hernando de Zevallos en nombre de los vecinos de ella, nos ha suplicado que acatando lo que han servido, mandásemos dar á la dicha ciudad armas que pongan en sus banderas y sellos y en las otras partes y lugares ... e por la presente es nuestra merced y Voluntad que agora y de aqui adelante perpetuamente para siempre jamas, la dicha Ciudad de los Reyes aya y tenga por sus armas conocidas Un escudo en campo azul con tres coronas de oro de Reyes, puestas en triangulo, y encima de ellas una estrella de oro la cual, cada una de las tres puntas de la dicha estrella toque á tres coronas, y por orla unas letras de oro que digan hoc signum Vere Regum est; en campo*

[“*Hoc signum vere regum est*” can be translated as “THIS IS THE SIGN OF THE TRUE KING”.]



The examples of the Arms of the City mentioned in the original 1537 decree seem to be lost, however the arms still exist on the fountain located in the Plaza de Armas which is today called the Plaza Mayor. The fountain, which brought water into the heart of the city, was dedicated in 1578 with a large celebration including the tossing of coins to the public.⁴ (A scene in which one can imagine newly minted coins with the Star of Lima mark.) The city arms on the fountain have three crowns and two six-pointed stars, unlike many of the arms dating later which show eight-pointed stars. The image here shows the fountain as it appeared in 1866 (Fuentes 1866: 11). The star image on the title page of this article is from the fountain.

In 1542 the Viceroyalty of Peru was established as was the Royal Audiencia and Chancery of Lima. Also that same year of 1542 King Charles issued the *New Laws of the Indies for the Good Treatment and Preservation of the Indians* intended to provide the native population some measure of protection from exploitation.

Between 1544-46 the *encomenderos* [basically the conquistadors who had become large landowners with rights of inheritance] in Peru refused to comply with the *New Laws*. Word of the *New Laws* reached Lima before the first viceroy, Blasco Núñez Vela, arrived in 1544. He soon understood the discontent of the *encomenderos* and became sympathetic to their position but in obedience to the king he still tried to enforce the *New Laws*. Hostility arose between the existing authorities in Peru and the new viceroy to such an extent that the Audiencia tried to remove the viceroy from office. Led by Gonzalo Pizarro (Francisco Pizarro’s half-brother) an open rebellion began with the viceroy being killed in 1546. In 1552 *The New Laws of the Indies for the Good Treatment and Preservation of the Indians* was weakened by issuance of a revised set of laws.

colorado y por timbre y divisa dos aguilas negras de corona de oro de Reyes que se mire la una á la otra, y abracen una I y una K que son las primeras letras de nuestros nombres propios, y encima de estas dichas letras una estrella de oro segun que aqui van figuradas y pintadas... Dada en la Villa de Valladolid, á siete del mes de Diciembre, año del nacimiento de nuestro Salvador Jesucristo, de mil quinientos y treinta y siete años.—Yo el Rey—

⁴ (Bromley: 26)... *que hubo en la Plaza Mayor fue la que se inauguró el 21 de Octubre de 1578, acto que se celebró con corridas de toros, salvas de arcabucería, música de trompetas y chirimías y arrojó de monedas al pueblo.* (...that was in the Plaza Mayor was inaugurated on 21 October 1578 celebrated with bullfights, salvos of musketry, music of trumpets and chirimías [wooden flute instruments], and the tossing of coins to the people).

Section 2: The Star of Lima mark

The origin of the Star of Lima mark dates early in the history of that city. In order to understand the history it is helpful to explain the meaning of specific terms and offices used in that time and place.

Selected Vocabulary:

Bruselas: Spanish for Brussels (Belgium)

Fiel: *Encargado de que se cumplan con exactitud y legalidad ciertos servicios públicos.* (Diccionario de la Lengua Española del Real Academia Española). One charged with keeping certain public services accurate and legal.

Fiel de pesos (y pesas): *platero elegido anualmente por el cabildo, a partir del año de 1544, para visitar, junto con los diputados de la ciudad, los pesos y pesas y sancionar a los mercadores que tuvieron pesos faltos. Entre sus funciones se recogen también las marcar los pesos con marca personal y de la ciudad, así como hacer las matrices de las propias marcas por encargo del municipio.* (Heredia: 57). Silversmiths elected annually by the Cabildo, beginning in 1544, together with city deputies called on city merchants to inspect for short weightments. Among their functions was to mark scale weights with their personal mark and that of the city.

Marcos: weight standards especially that of the *marco* (mark) which came out of the middle ages. (In the metric system the mark is approximately 230 grams.) Coin weight (mass) was specified in pieces per mark.

Platero: Literally “silversmith” but in Lima during the period discussed “goldsmiths, jewelers, assayers, smelters and other experts in non-ferrous metals, since specialization in these fields was not thorough.” (Lockhart: 118)

Pesa: scale weights (for weighing) and calibration weights for checking accuracy.

Peso: weight (or mass).

Sello, sellar: Stamping, punching, printing or otherwise marking things to indicate their character.

In May 1538, just three years after the founding of the city, the Cabildo first mentioned the office of assayer and an assayer’s name, the platero Diego Bravo. On September 28 the Cabildo set rules for the size of assay and fees for performing the assay. On November 5 the Cabildo required that assayers mark each assay with the fineness and their own personal mark but that no additional fee could be charged for the marking (Heredia: 50).

In 1544 complaints about short weight (less weight than declared) and dishonest scale weights came before the Cabildo. The Cabildo agreed to appoint an honest *platero* who they would authorize to inspect scale weights, weight transactions and to punish short weight violations. Eventually this inspector position would be called *fiel de pesos (y pesas)* (Heredia: 51).

The first appointment to the office of *fiel de pesos y pesas* was in May 1549, either May 25 (Heredia: 51) or May 21 (Dargent 2001: 136), when the Cabildo authorized Juan de Bruselas⁵ to inspect *marcos* and *pesas* of iron and other metals and mark them with a seal (punch) consisting of a star (to represent the city) and with the inspectors name. It seems that the

⁵ (Lockhart: 118) A certain Juan Renero, a native of Brussels, departed for New Spain in 1535. Then in the 1540s he appeared in Peru where he was known as Juan de Bruselas.

punch (seal) was applied only to those standards and weights that satisfied Cabildo requirements for honesty and fairness.

*En este cabildo se acordó que se vea los marcos e pesas de hierro e otro metal las mandaron que Juan de Bruselas, fiel, ha hecho por sellos una estrella que con las armas de la ciudad y su nombre del dicho Juan de Bruselas (Dargent 2001: 136 with footnote 180 reference: *Libros de Cabildos de Lima* (en adelante, LCL), libro IV, tomo III, p. 128). (In this Council it was agreed that the weight standards and scale weights made of iron and other metal approved by *fiel* Juan de Bruselas, have a star seal [punch] for the arms of the city and his name.)*

Shortly after the “weight seal” the Cabildo commissioned Juan de Bruselas to provide another seal, this one for sealing official documents. The entry below is recorded in the books of the Cabildo for June 14, 1549.

En este cabildo, Juan de Bruselas, platero, truxo y presentó el sello que esta cibdad acordó e mandó facer, grande de plata, esculpidas las armas della para sellar y dar la autoridad a las cartas que esta cibdad escribiesen y las escrituras y probanças que en esta cibdad se hiziesen. (Dargent 2001: 137 with footnote 181 same reference as 180). (In this Council the silversmith Juan de Bruselas delivered and presented the seal that was agreed to and ordered to be made; it being a large engraved arms in silver for sealing and authorizing letters in this city.)

On July 5, 1549, the Cabildo asked Bruselas for yet another seal, this one with “three crowns and a star” for marking textiles coming into the city.⁶ Likely these textiles were mostly woolens. By these records in the books of the Cabildo it is clear that Juan de Bruselas created the Star of Lima seal in 1549 and it along with other seals that he made were official seals authorized, commissioned and sanctioned by the Cabildo of Lima. In the year 1551 Juan de Bruselas departed Lima for Charcas (Heredia: 51) and would become assayer for the city of Potosí. For a full account of Juan de Bruselas and other Flemish personalities in Peru see Dargent 2001.⁷

Section 3: The Mint at Lima

Negotiations for establishing a mint in Peru began in 1551 (Dargent 1997: 259). By decree of August 21, 1565 King Philip II authorized a mint in Peru. Arequipa was the leading candidate for the new mint but the king preferred to ennoble Lima by installing the mint there. The mint mark was specified to be a Latin letter “P” which was to signify the Viceroyalty of Peru, not any particular city ... *y pongase en la parte donde la divisa de las columnas una P latina para que se conozca como se hizo en Pirú...* (Dargent 1997: 259-62). The first receipt of silver at the mint was in 1568. Production was intermittent and none of the coins carry the Star of Lima mark (because the royal authorization specifically described

⁶ Antonio Roma Valdés “Una Pesa con Marcas de Lima” in *Gaceta Numismática* 187 Junio 2014: 115-16. Described and illustrated the top of a nested weight recovered from a building, likely a butcher shop, in Lima which collapsed in the earthquake of 1746. The weight includes the stamped design of three crowns arranged in a triangle. The author hypothesized it was made locally in Lima or else by Johann Mangold of Nuremberg Germany after 1736.

⁷ Professor Dargent has kindly made available on internet an English translation. http://macuquina.com/articles/Flemings_in_colonial_South_America_english.pdf

the design). The year 1572 was a transition year for the mint at Lima. A letter dated April 24, 1571 informed the king that production had stopped but it must have resumed after March 1572 when the new “Crowned Shield” design dies arrived because coins of that design with assayer mark X (Xinés Martínez) are known. Late in 1572 the mint was closed with one-half of its equipment and tools sent to *Alto Peru* (Upper Peru, i.e., Bolivia) for use at La Plata (1573) and then Potosí (1574). One-half of the tools and equipment were retained in Lima according to an agreement between the *Audiencia* of Lima (that wanted to retain the mint in Lima) and the Viceroy of Peru in case there should come a need to reopen the mint in Lima (Dargent 1997: 263-70).

A need for coins did develop in Lima and the viceroy changed his mind whereby he authorized the reopening of the mint which then operated between 1577 and 1587, and then again in 1592 when it seems a final decision was made to close it permanently at which time coin production resumed for a short time in order to settle open accounts (Dargent 1997: 270-71). The coins produced at the second operation (1577-87, 1592) of the Lima mint were of the “Crowned Shield”⁸ design unlike the original design authorized in 1565. They carry the “P” for Peru and the Star of Lima which must be an additional mintmark to represent the City of Lima. On some specimens the star is clearly separated from the assayer mark suggesting it is independent of the assayer. The star was employed by the Cabildo as its mark of authority ever since it was created by Juan de Bruselas therefore it seems clear that the star is the mark of the City of Lima to distinguish it from other authorities, e.g., Potosí. I’ve not seen documentation showing who authorized the use of the star on the coins, however, it seems likely that by 1577 it was standard practice to include the star as the city’s mark of authorization and therefore was not invented by the mint assayer Diego de la Torre since it had been in use since at least 1549, some 28 years earlier.

Section 4: Examples showing the Star of Lima mintmark



Obverse | Reverse

Philip II: Lima, 1/2 real, assayer Diego de la Torre. 18 mm

**Obverse shows assayer’s mark “D” with “o” above to the left of PHILIPPVS monogram
and to the right of it the Star of Lima**

(Daniel Sedwick LLC Treasure Auction 12 lot 984)

⁸ Royal decree of Philip II dated March 8, 1570 ordering a design change of coins produced in the Americas.



Obverse | Reverse

Philip II: Lima, 4 reales, assayer Diego de la Torre. 32 mm
(Daniel Sedwick LLC Treasure Auction 12 lot 974)



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Notes:

1. Spain switched from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar by dropping ten days after Thursday Oct 4, 1582. The following day became Friday Oct. 15, 1582. Therefore, all dates before October 15, 1582 in this article would be ten days later by today's reckoning.
2. Bernabé Cobo was a Jesuit Priest serving in Peru (1599-1630), then in Mexico (1630-50) and then in Peru again. His writings were not published until the 19th century. Today his writings are considered primary source material for western South America.

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Soli Deo Gloria