

A NEW Introduction to the “Star of Lima” Coinage of 1659-1660

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This is a case of “it’s easier to ask forgiveness than permission.” The city of Lima, Peru, was short of silver coinage and needed to remedy the situation before asking the king. For 67 years the Lima mint remained closed while coins were struck at a furious rate in Potosí, the source of the silver. To avoid heavy taxation, wealthy mine owners were shipping their coins and even whole ingots back to Spain, sometimes using contraband eastward routes to Buenos Aires. The situation was exacerbated by the Potosí debasement scandal and subsequent recall of coinage in 1649-1652. When the Lima town council suggested re-opening the Lima mint in 1658, the Viceroy, Count Alba de Liste,¹ considered it within his authority to allow it, even without prior permission from Philip IV. Forgiveness eventually came, but permission never did.

Documents show that the Lima mint began striking this unauthorized coinage in January 1659 and ceased in April 1660. One of the great mysteries of Spanish colonial numismatics is why the mintage continued for so long when the king clearly did not approve. One theory is that the first samples for the king were lost on a shipwreck, for the remains of the *San Miguel el Arcángel*,² sunk in 1659 off Jupiter, Florida, has indeed yielded several round and well-struck presentation examples.³ In fact this wreck has become the primary source for “Star of Lima” coins, but only for the year 1659. As we shall see, the coins that are not from that wreck have slightly different designs and were presumably struck later.

The design is where the moniker for this series of unauthorized coinage becomes obvious, for the central element on the obverse of each coin is a large star,⁴ which symbolized Lima from its founding as *Ciudad de los Reyes* (City of the Kings).⁵ In much smaller form the star was used on Lima’s previous coinage under assayer Diego de la Torre, from 1577 to 1588 (with one more year of recorded production in 1592), placed interchangeably with the P mintmark, the oD assayer-mark and the denomination around the central obverse element (shield or monogram). In comparison the new version of Lima’s star used in 1659 and 1660 was large and prominent.

The other distinguishing elements of design are the date, the denomination, the assayer-mark V and the mintmark LIMA, LM or L, which are placed around and among two pillars under a large crown and above some flat waves, in accordance with a requirement for all the South American mints (the others being Potosí, Bogotá and Cartagena). The issues of 1660 also show the motto PLVS VLTRA, which was another requirement that seems to have been overlooked in 1659. The cross side for both dates is pretty much the same with no appreciable variation. Unlike the pillars-and-waves issues of the other mints, on the “Star of Lima” coinage the legend begins on the pillars side with PHILIPPVS IIII D.G. and continues on the cross side with HISPANIARVM ET INDIARVM REX.

We can categorize all “Star of Lima” silver coins above the ½ real chronologically into three main Series simply by their mintmarks, as follows (see table at end for all known varieties):

¹ Alba de Liste was Viceroy of Peru from 1655 to 1661; prior to that he was Viceroy of New Spain (Mexico) from 1650 to 1653.

² This wreck, also known simply as the “Jupiter wreck,” is sometimes referred to among the salvage community erroneously as “San Miguel de Archangel” (as opposed to the proper Spanish *San Miguel el Arcángel*).

³ We hesitate to call these “Royals” (galanos) because they are generally not perfectly round and centered, nor are their axes aligned, but they are clearly superior to regular issues.

⁴ In most cases this star is eight-pointed, but in some cases it has only six or even just five points.

⁵ Popular belief holds that Lima’s original name, given by Pizarro himself, refers to its founding on the day of the Epiphany (January 6), but an article by Herman Blanton explains that on that date it was decided to enlist three local “magi” (like the Biblical three kings) to select a site for the new city. The actual date of founding of the city of Lima was January 18.

Series I: Mintmark LIMA, single assayer and denomination (1659)



The first Series, to which all *San Miguel* coins belong, displays a big (eight-point) star above the full word LIMA above the date 1659 inside the pillars, with the assayer V between dots to left and Arabic-numeral denomination between dots to right of the pillars, sometimes lacking the dots in the lower denominations, which typically have smaller five-point stars. The 2 reales show the word LIMA with the last two letters in monogram. There are also two transitional 8 reales (formerly called Series IB, with no corresponding minors) that have a smaller (five-point) star above the LIMA plus a horizontal line above the date, one variety with assayer left and denomination right but with hollow florets instead of dots, and the other variety with denomination above assayer outside the pillars to left and right.

Series II: Mintmark L-M (1659)



The second Series is defined as having just L-M for its mintmark, with the star still above but basically bisecting the two letters. Below the mintmark is the date, sometimes with a horizontal line above. This series is populated with a bewildering array of minor varieties on the pillars side in terms of number and placement of dots. The 8 reales in this series show denomination above assayer outside each pillar, but the lower denominations show just assayer to left and denomination to right (like the Series-I coins above). The star is always eight-pointed for the 8 and 4 reales, but the smaller denominations vary. Curiously, instead of 1659, on the 2R the date is 165 and on most of the 1R the date is either 159 or 169, and the 1R with 169 date typically lack the M to the right of the star.

Series III: Mintmark L (1660)



The third Series, which was used only in 1660 and is generally much rarer than the first two Series, is defined by both a simplification down to a single-letter mintmark L and the incorporation of the motto PLVS VLTRA into the central design. The 8R and 4R show L-8-V or L-4-V outside each pillar and PLVS above a six-point

star flanked with dots above VLTRA above the date 660 (lacking the first digit), with placement of dots and horizontal lines as noted varieties. There is also a variant (and a subvariant) of the 8 reales that lacks the date altogether. The 2R shows the three-digit date either above or below the denomination. In the 1R, there is one variety with the date in three digits at top and mintmark-assayer to sides as on the 8R, and several varieties with date in two digits either above or below the star and denomination, with PLVS VLTRA in two lines below that, and with the mintmark and assayer appearing singly outside the pillars.

Table of Known Varieties

8 reales

<u>#</u>	<u>left</u>	<u>center</u>	<u>right</u>	<u>notes</u>
I.8.1	•V•	* / LIMA / 1659	•8•	Royals are known
I.8.2	◊V◊	★ / LIMA / 1659	◊8◊	Hollow floret ornaments
I.8.3	•8•V•	★ / LIMA / 1659	•8•V•	
II.8.1	•8•V•	* / L M / 1659	•8•V•	Royals are known
II.8.2	•8•V•	* / L M / 1659	•8•V•	
II.8.3	8•V	* / L M / 1659	8•V	Royals are known
II.8.4	8•V	•*• / L M / 1659	8•V	
II.8.5	•8 V•	•*• / L M / 1659	•8 V•	
II.8.6	•8 V•	•*• / L M / 1659	•8 V•	
II.8.7	•8•V•	•*• / L•M / 1659	•8•V•	
III.8.1	L 8 V	PLVS / •*• / VLTRA / •660•	L 8 V	
III.8.2	L 8 •V	PLVS / •*• / VLTRA / •660•	L 8 •V	
III.8.3	L 8 •V	LVS / * / VLTRA / 660	L 8 •V	Missing P in PLVS
III.8.4	L 8 •V	PLVS / •*• / VLTRA	L 8 •V	No date
III.8.5	L 8 •V	PVLS / •*• / VLTRA	L 8 •V	No date, misspelled PLVS

4 reales

<u>#</u>	<u>left</u>	<u>center</u>	<u>right</u>	<u>notes</u>
I.4.1	•V•	* / LIMA / 1659	•4•	
II.4.1	•V•	* / L M / 1659	•4•	
II.4.2	•V•	* / L M / 1659	•4•	
II.4.3	•V•	•*• / L M / 1659	•4•	
III.4.1	L 4 V	PLVS / •*• / VLTRA / 660 / •	L 4 V	
III.4.2	L 4 V	PLVS / •*• / VLTRA / 660	L 4 V	

2 reales

<u>#</u>	<u>left</u>	<u>center</u>	<u>right</u>	<u>notes</u>
I.2.1	•V•	★ / LIMA / 1659	•2•	MA in ligature
II.2.1	•V•	* / L M / 165	•2•	Missing 9 in date
III.2.1	L V	PLVS / 2 ★ 2 / 660 / VLTRA	L V	6/5 in date
III.2.2	L V	660 / 2 ★ 2 / PLVS / VLTRA	L V	

1 real

#	left	center	right	notes
I.1.1	•V•	★ / LIMA / 1659	•I•	
II.1.1	•V	* / L M / 1659	•I	
II.1.2	•V	* / L M / 159	•I	Missing 6 in date
II.1.3	•V	L * / 169	•I	Missing 5 in date
II.1.4	•V	L * / 169	•I	Missing 5 in date
III.1.1	L V	660 / I ★ I / PLVS / VLTRA	L V	
III.1.2	L	60 / I ★ I / PLVS / VLTRA	V	
III.1.3	L	I ★ I / 60 / PLVS / VLTRA	V	
III.1.4	L	★ I ★ / 60 / • PLVS / VLTRA	V	

Other issues: Half reales and gold



“Star of Lima” coins of the half-real denomination are known (including from the *San Miguel*), but do not bear any attributes that would assign them to any particular series, for their obverse design is the usual (but distinctive) monogram. At least one is known with a 1659 date in the legend on the cross side. A half real with design like the higher denominations has been reported but not confirmed. Intriguingly, mint records show that quarter reales were struck as well, but nothing attributable to this issue has come to light.



The gold coins struck under the “Star of Lima” issue are the rarest of all. While mint records indicate that “Star of Lima” gold cobs were struck in the denominations of 1 and 8 escudos only, in VERY small numbers, from September 1659 to April 1660, only three 8 escudos are known to still exist. One 8E of each date can be found at the Banco de España in Madrid, Spain, with another 1659 recently discovered. The 1660 example appears to be an overdate 1660/59. Curiously, none of the die elements on these 8 escudos (lions, castles, pillars, crowns and letters) matches the style of any of the silver coins.