

**THE GOLD COBS  
OF MEXICO  
1679-1732**



**Part 2: The Plain Cross  
Issues of 1695-1699**

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## 2.1 The Plain Cross issues of 1695-99

From 1695 to 1699 Mexico City struck escudos with the same cross side design as the Jeweled Cross issues but with a “jewelless” or unadorned cross. A thinner and unadorned cross replaces the style of cross used since 1679. Otherwise, the design is unchanged. The tressure continues to frame the crossbars but remains unattached to them (the same configuration as on Jeweled issues). Fleurs and other features remain largely the same. Apparently no general re-design of the dies has been undertaken, but now a single conspicuous feature has disappeared. The most spectacular examples of the Plain Cross style are the two Royals of 1695 and 1698. That Mexico City chose to strike its presentation coins in the Plain Style says something about how that style was regarded in 1695-99. Yet much if not most of their gold production in that period continued to be struck with Jeweled dies.

In the absence of archival evidence it may not be possible to say anything definitive about the relation of the Plain Cross issues to the Jeweled Cross series. It is surprising that in the period 1695-99 Mexico City is striking Jeweled, partially Jeweled, and Plain Cross escudos.

On the shield side of the Plain Cross issues the central device remains a crowned Hapsburg shield. The same shield die is sometimes paired with a Jeweled and a Plain Cross issue. No significant changes in the shield design occur 1695-99, but the

crown goes through at least three and possibly four variations. Again, these varieties are found with both Jeweled and Plain Cross dies.

In 1699 both the Jeweled and Plain Cross come to an end and a simplified re-design is introduced. The issue of 1700 begins what we call the Box-End Cross series.

## 2.2 The 1695 Plain Cross Royal

The 1695 Royal deserves more study than it has yet received. For the purpose of trying to understand why the Plain Cross issues appeared in 1695, we should focus on the cross. Notice how thin the arms and crossbars are compared to Jeweled Cross onzas. It would be practically impossible to “jewel” such a narrow surface on the punch and no jewelings has been attempted. Clearly a much narrower cross punch has been put into service, perhaps simply because it was easier to produce and more durable in use. This new much thinner cross punch is the key to understanding the Plain Cross issues: they were struck from dies whose cross was made too thin to “jewel”. Look at the 1699/8/7 business strike onza below. Lower pressures result in a somewhat thicker cross, especially on the crossbars, but the arms are clearly much too thin to have been “jeweled.” The Plain Cross issues of 1695-99 resulted when Mexico City began using a narrow cross punch that was just too thin to “jewel”.

What does this tell us, if anything, about the accompanying Jeweled Cross issues of 1695-99? Is there any reason Mexico City would throw away its still usable Jeweled Cross punches in 1695? What was there to prevent their re-use in 1696-99 if the need arose? Perhaps the thin cross punches simply worn out or for other reasons were not adequate to handling the task of cutting all new dies required. The supposition that the 1695-99 Jeweled Cross issues were all struck from surplus pre-1696 dies seems

improbable, but that some (or even many) 1696-99 cross dies were prepared using older jeweled cross punches seems quite possible.



**Mexico 1695 Eight Escudos Royal**



**Mexico 1699/8/7 eight escudos**

### 2.3 Plain Cross one and two escudos

It is possible that Plain Cross one escudos were struck annually or occasionally in the 1695-99 period, but if so, very few have survived. No dated Plain Cross one escudo is known. No undated Plain Cross one escudo has been found by our census. It is possible that lot 35, a one escudo showing parts of CAROLUS II in the legend, is this rara avis, a Plain Cross one escudo, but the grainy photo is very hard to study. Even if one or two Plain Cross one escudos exists, it is clear that the vast majority (if not all) of the one escudos struck 1695-99 were in fact Jeweled Cross issues.

No proper census of Plain Cross two escudos has yet been attempted but it is clear that they are rare. Fortunately there is at least one dated example (Tauler 196, pictured below). Tauler records this as 1697 issue, but numismatists who have studied the coin think 1699 is more likely.



Tauler 196 is an important coin because it proves that a two escudos size (9m) Plain Cross punch was prepared in the late 1690's. We have no such assurance regarding a 0n3 escudo Plain Cross punch.

## 2.4 Plain Cross four escudos

We have already had occasion to illustrate Plain Cross four escudos in section 1.8. There we were dealing with the claim that Plain Crosses were struck as early in 1693. The two media onza pictured in 1.8 are in fact 1696 issues (from the same dies). Only one other dated Plain Cross media onza is known, the 1698/7 pictured below. It is very close in style and details to the 1696's, and may in fact share a single cross die with them. A census of undated Plain Cross is in progress.



**Mexico 1698/7 four escudos**



Photo credit: R. Tauler

## 2.5 Plain Cross eight escudos

Plain Cross onzas may have been struck in decent mintages throughout the five year period 1695-99, but very few have survived. 1696 is attested only by a single 1697/6 overdate. A second dated 1697 is known. 1695 and 1698 are known only through two Royals that share the same shield die (the 5 is recut to 8). A dated 1698 and a single 1699/8/7 (pictured to the right) complete the census of dated coins: six examples including two Royals. Several undated Plain Cross onzas exist but there as yet no satisfactory census of them.



With no complete count of the 1695-99 onzas we must be cautious, but it appears that the Plain Cross onzas were produced in much greater numbers than the Jeweled Cross issues in this period. Only one undated (1697) Jeweled Cross onza is currently attested, though surely more exist. Onzas seem to be the only denomination in which Plain Cross issues dominate. Indeed, there may be no Plain Cross one escudos at all. No obvious explanation suggests itself for this unusual pattern, unless the older Jeweled Cross punches failed more quickly in engraving the onza dies and had to be replaced sooner. If the gold coinage 1695-99 emphasized onzas, we would expect the older punches and dies to fail sooner under heavy usage.



## 2.6 The Royal Onza of 1698

In the 2000 Division the State of Florida claimed an interesting Douglass Beach recovery (whence all the Mexican Royals). Florida took for its collection (#11.01772) only the second known gold Royal from the reign of Carlos II, a 1698 onza. The other Carlos II Royal, a 1695 onza now in private hands, somehow passed through the 1964 Division. Real 8 sold the coin in the Ubilla-Echerez sale of October 1964.

We have already pictured and spoken about the 1695 Royal. More needs to be said, but the 1698 Royal is even less well known. The first thing to notice is that the shield dies on these onzas and not just very similar but in fact identical. The 5 was artful erased and replaced by a slightly angled 8 to resurrect the 1695 die for use in 1698. Several numismatists have emphasized how carefully Royal dies were cared for and preserved. Here is a perfect example of that. The recut die shows no deterioration in 1698.

The Plain Cross die on the 1698 is a new die. We wonder what happened to the 1695 cross die. The new die is very similar to the 1695 Plain Cross die, but a little less carefully executed. The tressure, the fleurs, and several letters show mistakes. And the striking is noticeably less perfect! But the doubling at least confirms what many of us have long believed: Royals required multiple strikes to bring up full detail. If Mexico City did not get its first screw press until the early 1700's and Royals had to be

hand struck, it is amazing feat of workmanship to have produced these special issues.



