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Radiate Sunface Copper Coinage Issued In Uruguay 1840 To 1869



By Clifford H. Adams
Washington, D. C.

Since time began, man has worshiped the sun and not infrequently endowed it with a reflection of his own image. In coinage we find this reverence for the "man in the sun" well illustrated in the early copper coinage of Uruguay.

Although Uruguay proclaimed its declaration of independence August 25, 1825, it did not mint its first coins until 15 full years later, in mid-1840. At first it permitted the circulation of foreign monies, but on March 14, 1831, Uruguay passed a law authorizing only the circulation of the copper coinage of neighboring Argentina known as the "decimos de Buenos Aires," revalued at half their original face value.

Finally, on June 14, 1839, a law was passed authorizing the coinage of copper pieces of five and 20 centesimos. "Centesimos" . . . hundredths . . . indicated hundredth parts of the real de plata . . . silver real. The government negotiated with a private contractor, one Agustin Joive or Jouve, for the new coins to be struck in Montevideo.

The law called for the design of the obverse of the coins to carry the date and the legend REPUBLICA ORIENTAL DEL URUGUAY, plus a sunface with 16 rays (El Sol de Mayo, featured on the national flag;) and on the reverse the value in numerals in a circle with the word CENTESIMOS above on a ribbon. The reverse central design was to be enclosed by two wreaths entwined at the base.

Although the amount authorized for minting was to the value of 20,000 reales, only coins amounting to a value of 500 reales were actually minted, and these not until mid-1840. It is estimated that 1,500 pieces of the five centesimos, and 2,125 pieces of the 20 centesimos, were struck in Montevideo. These mintages make this pair of coins true rarities of Latin America.

It is perhaps worthy of note that the need for coins could not have been overwhelming. Uruguay's total population in 1840 is estimated at some 200,000

people, and this figure declined to 132,000 by 1852.

Beset by internal and external strife in its early years, Uruguay was wracked in 1842 by the beginning of a tremendous civil war, "La Guerra Grande," in which the entire country laid siege to the capital city, Montevideo. The siege lasted nine long years.

If truth must be told, the siege bothered Montevideo very little. The city was most ably defended by a legion of 3,000 French Basques and a smaller force of Italians commanded by Giuseppe Garibaldi . . . later to become a hero in his own country . . . as well as by its native forces. Life, including the theater and other entertainments, went on much as usual.

At the height of the siege, and by decree of December 13, 1843, copper pieces similar in design to those of 1840 were ordered struck by the Mint at Montevideo. Although the law called for a minting to the value of 80,000 reales in pieces of five, 20 and 40 centesimos, only pieces to the value of 4,000 reales were actually struck.

There is no record of the number of pieces of each denomination minted,



Uruguay 20 centesimos, 1843. The "3" of 1843 is cut over the "0" of 1840. Minted in Montevideo in very limited quantities from defective dies.

but all are very scarce to rare and with the exception of a handful of pieces are unknown in uncirculated condition. All were crudely struck with many die and planchet defects.

One of the most distinctive, and rare, varieties known of all Uruguayan coinage is the famous second die of the 40 centesimos of 1844, the "sol con cabellera" or "sun with peruke" coin. Here, the surface is that of a woman, not a man. This curious portrait is almost identical to one used by Uruguay on its early postage stamps of 1859.

It is interesting to note that the 20 centesimos of 1840 weighs one ounce, while the same coin of 1843 and 1844 are each of a reduced weight, only three-quarters of an ounce. Although of approximately the same diameter (36-37 millimeters) as the 1840 piece, the 1843 and 1844 pieces were struck on thinner planchets. (This holds true also for the coinage of 1854 and 1855. The 20 centesimos of 1857 also weighs $\frac{3}{4}$ of an ounce, but is 34mm. in diameter on a thicker planchet.)

The five centesimo piece was known as "cinquino," from the Portuguese *cinquino*, a small silver piece of five reis minted during the reign of King Manoel of Portugal, 1495-1521, and the 20 centesimo piece was nicknamed "vinten," from the Portuguese *vintem*, or copper piece of 20 reis. These Portuguese pieces, used in Brazil, circulated widely in the "Banda Oriental," as Uruguay was called during its early years. It was only logical that the large cartwheel 40 centesimos piece



First year of issue of Uruguay copper coins. Radiate surface type 20 centesimos, 1840.



Largest copper coin ever minted in Uruguay is this 40 centesimos of 1844, struck in Montevideo in very limited quantities.

should quickly be dubbed "dos vin-tenes."

The "Guerra Grande" over, and the country once more united, a law was passed July 15, 1854 authorizing the mintage of 60,000 silver dollars worth of copper coins of five, 20 and 40 centesimos; design as decreed by the law of June 14, 1839, i.e., similar to the coinage of 1840. The pieces were struck at the Mint in Montevideo under the direction of Juan Gard during the years 1854 and 1855.

In connection with the mintage of the five centesimos of 1854, it is noteworthy that all these pieces were made from the original dies of 1840 and 1844. No new die was made for this value, although a new die was made for the 20 centesimos. Where the 1840 die was used, the numerals "54" were struck over the last two digits of the original date, and where the 1844 die was used, the numeral "5" was struck over the first "4" of 1844. The overstrike is most apparent on the 1840 die.

An interesting anecdote is connected with the mintage of the 1854-55 pieces. Because of their scarcity, and in some

instances the peculiar color of the metal, to this day old-time "Orientales" claim that no sooner were the pieces of 1855 put into circulation than that they promptly disappeared; everyone sought them, and people offered two, three, four and even five times their face value.

Why? Had everyone in Montevideo in the year 1855 suddenly become a numismatist? No indeed. It was simply (so the story goes) that while the copper for these coins was being prepared in the foundry of Don Ignacio Garragori, some thieves, who had stolen a hoard of gold and jewels and were being hotly pursued by the police, entered the foundry, and in fear of being discovered with their loot threw it into the oven where the copper for the coins was being melted.

The coins minted and placed in circulation, it was not long before people began to notice their peculiar color and take credence in the story of the robbers. After all, copper coins minted from an alloy that contained gold . . . and with each telling of the story the amount of gold thrown into the oven by the thieves grew larger and larger . . . were not just to be spent for a loaf of bread!

Once again, as happened in 1844, "insurmountable technical difficulties" arose and an unknown but very limited number of each denomination was struck, to the value of only 2,500 silver dollars. These pieces likewise are crudely struck on defective planchets and are very scarce to rare.

As an aside, the Montevideo Mint was created and established by Don



Uruguay 20 centesimos, 1844. Struck from defective dies within Montevideo during the 9-year siege of the city by Uruguayan rebels. Mintage is unknown.

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Uruguay 5 centesimos, 1854, "1854 over 1840" variety.



Obverses of the 1857-D copper coinage of Uruguay are as the 5 centesimo piece shown. Although the "D" mint mark for Lyons, France, appears on the reverse, the obverses also show Lyons Mint designators in the small anchor and lion flanking each date. Although exact statistics are unknown, hundreds of thousands of these Lyons-struck specimens were made.



Uruguay 5 centesimos or cinquino, 1854, "1854 over 1844" variety. Both types of the 1854 five centesimo coin (54 over 40 and 54 over 44) were struck in Montevideo in unknown but extremely limited quantities and are very rare.



Uruguay 20 centesimos, 1855. The same type was struck in 1854, both dates coined in Montevideo in limited, but unknown, quantities.

Andres Lamas and was opened on February 2, 1844, closing its doors in January, 1845. A second Mint was opened August 21, 1854 and lasted until 1855. The authoritative work on the coins of Uruguay, "El Regimen Monetario del Uruguay 1829-1955" by Antonio Odicini Lezama, notes that the same day, December 13, 1843, that the law was passed authorizing the second coinage, "first pattern was made, in lead, of the 20 centesimos," which unique piece rests in the National Historical Museum in Montevideo.

Finally, in 1856 and apparently a bit "fed up" with promises but no coins, the government of President Gabriel Antonio Pereira contracted with the firm of Adolfo and Hipolito Tampied to "get the \$60,000 job done" in compliance with the law of July 15, 1854. Trusting not in the Mint at Montevideo, but aware of the excellence and reliability of the great mints of France, the brothers Tampied subcontracted with the Royal French Mint at Lyon to handle the job, with the happy result that by August, 1857 some very beautiful French-made Uruguayan coppers were busily circulating throughout Montevideo and the "Eastern Republic of Uruguay."

As concerns the coinage of 1857, to this day no one knows quite how many of each denomination of the Lyon-minted



Uruguayan mint designators on the obverses of the 1857-1869 copper issues are shown by (from left): 2 centesimos 1869, La Rochelle, stag's head and

star; 20 centesimos 1857, Lyons, anchor and lion; 2 centesimos 1869, Paris, anchor and bee. All three Mints were in France.

five, 20 and 40 centesimos were struck, although it is safe to say that hundreds of thousands of each were issued. When the D-mint mark Lyon pieces were received in Montevideo, the Uruguayan government promptly passed a decree nationalizing them as "coins of the realm."

The contractors, the brothers Tampied, were empowered to sell or exchange the copper coins for gold or silver pieces, preferably foreign, under certain conditions. Advertisements in the newspapers placed by the contractors offered the five centesimos piece, for example, in barrel lots each containing 57,600 pieces!

This led some witty lads of the press to comment in print on these "copper delights" (*delicias del cobre*) by referring to the fact that if one wanted to buy a pack of cigarettes with a silver dollar "it was necessary to bring along your servant so that he could carry the change for you!" Although the press exaggerated a bit, nevertheless the government on May 4, 1858 actually passed a law limiting to a small fraction of a silver dollar the amount of copper one was obliged to receive in change!

The last of the great "radiate sun-face" coppers of Uruguay are dated 1869 and were authorized by the law of June 23, 1862. As in the case of the 1857 pieces, these were minted in France, but this time in the denominations of one centesimo, and two and four centesimos. Basically, obverse and reverse are identical to the first coins of 1840.

Here at last we have some concrete data. Of the four centesimos, two mil-

lion were minted at Paris (mint mark A) and 6,250,000 were struck at La Rochelle (mint mark H.) Of the two centesimos, three million were minted at Paris and two million at La Rochelle. Of the one centesimo, Paris and La Rochelle each minted one million.

In the case of the French Mints, although the different mint marks . . . D, A and H . . . are on the reverse, the distinctive symbols of each Mint also are on the obverse. At each side of the date, for the Lyon Mint there is a tiny anchor and a lion; for the Paris Mint a tiny anchor and a bee and for the La Rochelle Mint, a tiny stag's head and a star.

The coinage of 1869 was ordered retired from circulation by the law of December 6, 1900 and demonetized July 13, 1902. The metallic composition of all the copper pieces 1840 through 1869, is 950 copper, 40 tin and 10 zinc.

Excessively rare are the few patterns known for these unusual and attractive coins. We have already referred to the unique pattern in lead of the 20 centesimos of 1843. There are patterns in copper dated 1856 for the coinage of 1857. There are patterns in both gold and silver for the A and H Mints of the 1869 pieces.

Most curious, and probably also unique, is a pattern in bronze, dated 1868, of a rejected design for the four centesimos. This, struck at Montevideo, is a monstrosity and it is not difficult to see why it was rejected. The obverse shows a sunface in the center of what only can be described as a cabbage patch of rays, surrounded by an enor-

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Copper Coinage Issued In Uruguay

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Uruguay copper coin reverse of 1869 issues. At top, from left, are La Rochelle (H) 4, 2 and 1 centesimos. At bottom, from left, are Paris (A) 4,

2 and 1 centesimos. See mintage table for numbers of coins struck. (All photographs are of specimens in the Clifford H. Adams collection.)

mous date and the enormous letters R.O. del U. The reverse has a large 4 in a circle surrounded by a wreath on the lower half and at the top half the word centesimos in very large letters. The whole thing is impossibly crude and impossibly rare!

Collecting these fascinating coins is a rewarding challenge. Leaving aside the patterns, most of the other coins are available in conditions ranging from good to uncirculated. The 1857 and both Mints of the 1869 issues are occasionally encountered in uncirculated condition. The Montevideo strikings, with the exception of the first strikes

of the 1840 issue, which are neat and clear, are so crude and full of defects as to qualify a "red uncirculated" coin as "about very fine."

A companion to the early coppers of Uruguay would be a study of the "radiate surface" coinage of all Latin America. This would include such gems as the "Provincias del Rio de la Plata" and "Provincia de Cordoba" pieces of early Argentina; Guatemala's beautiful "sun and mountains" design for the short-lived Central American Republic, and the lovely coinage of the Republic of South Peru . . . but these are other stories best left for other tellings.

| Year | Mint. Law | Mint | Mintage | Rarity |
|---------------|--------------|------------|-----------|--------|
| 40 CENTESIMOS | | | | |
| 1844 | Dec 13, 1843 | Montevideo | Unknown | R3 |
| 1854 | Jul 15, 1854 | Montevideo | Unknown | R4 |
| 20 CENTESIMOS | | | | |
| 1840 | Jun 14, 1839 | Montevideo | 2,125 | R3 |
| 1843 | Dec 13, 1843 | Montevideo | Unkwn (1) | R3 |
| 1843 over 40 | Dec 13, 1843 | Montevideo | Unkwn (1) | R4 |
| 1844 | Dec 13, 1843 | Montevideo | Unknown | R3 |
| 1854 | Jul 15, 1854 | Montevideo | Unknown | R2 |
| 1855 | Jul 15, 1854 | Montevideo | Unkwn (3) | R3 |
| 1857-D | Jul 15, 1854 | Lyon | Unkwn (4) | R1 |

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Copper Coinage Issued In Uruguay

(Continued from page 14)

5 CENTESIMOS

| Year | Mint. Law | Mint | Mintage | Rarity |
|--------------|--------------|------------|-----------|--------|
| 1840 | Jul 14, 1839 | Montevideo | 1,500 | R4 |
| 1844 | Dec 13, 1843 | Montevideo | Unknown | R3 |
| 1854 over 40 | Jul 15, 1854 | Montevideo | Unkwn (2) | R3 |
| 1854 over 44 | Jul 15, 1854 | Montevideo | Unkwn (2) | R3 |
| 1855 | Jul 15, 1854 | Montevideo | Unknown | R4 |
| 1857-D | Jul 15, 1854 | Lyon | Unkwn (4) | R1 |

4 CENTESIMOS

| | | | | |
|--------|--------------|-------------|-----------|---|
| 1869-A | Jun 23, 1862 | Paris | 2,000,000 | C |
| 1869-H | Jun 23, 1862 | La Rochelle | 6,250,000 | C |

2 CENTESIMOS

| | | | | |
|--------|--------------|-------------|-----------|---|
| 1869-A | Jun 23, 1862 | Paris | 3,000,000 | C |
| 1869-H | Jun 23, 1862 | La Rochelle | 2,000,000 | C |

1 CENTESIMO

| | | | | |
|--------|--------------|-------------|-----------|---|
| 1869-A | Jun 23, 1862 | Paris | 1,000,000 | S |
| 1869-H | Jun 23, 1862 | La Rochelle | 1,000,000 | S |

Notes:

(1) Examples will be found with the numeral "3" struck over the "0" of 1840. Such pieces, although placed in circulation, were regarded as "patterns" for the coinage of 1844.

(2) No new die was made for this value. The dies of 1840 and 1844 were used. All are found with overstrikes; "54" over the "40" of 1840, or "5" over the first "4" of 1844.

(3) All of the early Montevideo coinage presents many varieties. In the 1843-1844 series alone some 20 different varieties have been reported. A truly uncirculated specimen of any of the early 1840-1855 coinage would qualify as a great rarity.

(4) Mintage estimated in the hundreds of thousands.

Rarity scale: R4 ... of great rarity; R3 ... extremely rare; R2 ... very rare; R1 ... rare; S ... scarce; C ... common.

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El Regimen Monetario del Uruguay 1829-1955, by Antonio Odicini Lezama, Montevideo, 1958.

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New Brazil Unit

BRAZIL INTRODUCES its new "strong cruzeiro" valued at 1,000 of the old cruzeiros, January 1, according to President Humberto Castelo Branco in a November 13 announcement. As a preliminary step, the Bank of Brazil on November 16 began buying U.S. dollars at 2,200 cruzeiros, devaluating the present cruzeiro 18 per cent from its former 1,850-per-dollar rate. The new cruzeiro will thus be 2.2 to the U.S. dollar when it is introduced. New banknotes and coins reflecting the change are expected.

Moravian Coin Group

MORAVIAN NUMISMATIC Society at Brno, Czechoslovakia, a branch of the Czechoslovak Numismatic Society, was founded in 1937 and today claims 112 members. In conjunction with the Moravske Museum, the society publishes Moravian Numismatic News (Moravske Numismaticke Zpravy), edited by Dr. Jiri Sejbál, chief of the numismatic section at Moravske Museum. Number 10 will be published in 1966. Society business is conducted through: Moravske Museum, Historicky Ustav, Namesti 25, Unora 8, Brno, Czechoslovakia.