

Foreign Coins Manufactured at US Mints

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During a work-related visit to the Philippines in 1980, I ran across a beautiful silver dollar sized coin which said "United States of America" and had a design I had never seen before. In researching this coin, I discovered that not only had the US minted coins for the Philippines, but many other countries as well. This was my introduction to a very fascinating and satisfying area of numismatics.

The production of foreign coins by US Mints began in 1833 with the striking of a Liberia (LR) one cent coin. The Liberia one cent, in essence a token dated 1833, was struck by the Mint for the American Colonization Society, founded in 1817 for the sole purpose of transporting "freeborn blacks" and "emancipated slaves" back to Africa. The U.S. Mint had long been in the business of striking medals for various groups and artists. In fact, the U.S. Mint was the only place to go in North America if you wanted a large sized medal struck, since no other equipment was available that could handle the immense pressures required to strike such pieces. The prospect of the mint manufacturing tokens, as in the case of the Liberian cents, was not a far offshoot from the medal making business. It is believed that the medal manufacturing activities of the mint led to some of the very first foreign coinage struck by the U.S. Mint. The one-cent token featured "Freed Negro" standing next to a palm tree, with a ship in the distance. Though many regard the one-cent piece a "hard times" token, and thus not acknowledged by the US mint as foreign coinage in its annual reports, it did function as coinage in the Liberian colony.



There are indications of other coins produced between 1833 and 1855, but this possibility is still being researched.

Official and wide-scale minting of Foreign coins began in the US with the passage of the Act of January 29, 1874 which read:

"Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That it shall be lawful for coinage to be executed at the mints of the United States, for any foreign countries applying for the same, according to the legally prescribed standards and devices of such country, under such regulations as the Secretary of the Treasury may prescribe; and the charge for the same shall be equal to the expense thereof, including labor, materials, and use of machinery, to be fixed by the Director of the Mint, with the approval of the Secretary of the Treasury: Provided, That the manufacture of such coin shall not interfere with the required coinage of the United States."

The first coins struck under this new authorization were 1 and 2 ½ centavo issues in 1875-76 for Venezuela in a Copper-Nickel-Zinc (mintage of 10 and 2 million respectively) at the Philadelphia Mint, and were dated 1876 and 1877.



From these 1st issues for Venezuela until 1895, only the 1883 issues for Hawaii were minted (4 denominations, Philadelphia struck proofs, then sent the dies to the San Francisco Mint to produce circulation strikes) of which only about 30% survived official US melting.

In 1895, beginning with Ecuador, coins for foreign countries have been produced almost every year up until 1984, nearly a 100 year time span, at which time all excess minting capacity in the US was dedicated to producing modern commemoratives and other numismatic issues. Only 1 coin, the 1000 Kronur for Iceland (issued with the Leif Ericson commemorative) was minted in 2000 at West Point.

Since beginning official production in 1876, coins have been minted:

- For 1127 issues not counting varieties
- For 43 countries
- In Gold, Silver (several alloys), Copper-Nickel, Bronze, Brass, German Silver, Zinc, Steel (including Stainless), Nickel and Aluminum
- At 6 US Mints, including Philadelphia, Denver, San Francisco, New Orleans, West Point and Manila
- Including many 1st's and "one-and-ONLYs" in terms of shape, size and form

Some of the US records held by these issues include:

- The smallest coin ever minted in the US (Panama 1904 2 ½ centesimos, the "Panama Pill" – only 10 mm dia)
- The only hexagonal coin ever minted in the US (Belgian Congo 1943 2 Francs)
- The only "crimped edge" coin minted in the US (Ethiopia 1944 25 centimes)
- The largest coin ever minted in the US (Liberia 1973 5 dollars, 42.5 mm)
- 1st US minted coin with a hole in the center (Siam 2461 [1918] 1 Satang)

A detailed summary of US Minting of Foreign Coins is included on the 4th page of this article. This summary includes the countries for which minting was done, and for each country which mints participated and whether or not mint marks appear on coins, the number of issues (not counting varieties), the metals used for minting, the dates when coins were minted, and any unusual features about the country's coinage.

Much of the early silver coinage for other countries was also melted both publicly and privately due to the silver and gold content, thus creating true rarities of what at one time were fairly common coins. In several cases, only a few survive.

The Philippine Coinage represents a special case, as in fact the mintage of US-Philippine coins cannot be considered "foreign" from the 1st territorial issues in 1903 up to the McArthur commemorative circulation strikes in 1947, as the Philippines were either a Territory of, or Commonwealth with, the United States. These coins are included in the discussion,

but can formally be considered a regular US Coinage as they were legal tender in the US at the rate of 2 Pesos per dollar. Furthermore, mintage between 1920 and 1941 at the Manila Mint is also a US Coin, as the Manila Mint was in fact an official US Branch Mint, the only off-shore branch mint ever established by the US.

The presence of foreign coin planchets in the US Mints resulted in many regular US issues being struck on odd metals and in odd sizes. Error collectors constantly are uncovering these oddities.

Each coin made by the U.S. Mint for another country was minted to the specifications dictated by the client country. Some of the clients of the U.S. Mint requested to be furnished with planchets to be utilized at their native mints in the coining process, as was the case with Argentina in 1919 and 1920. In the case of the Venezuelan 1 and 2½ Centavos struck in the Philadelphia Mint in 1876 and 1877, the U.S. Mint sub-contracted out to the Waterbury Mint, owned by the Scovill Manufacturing Company, to supply planchets for foreign and regular U.S. issues. The Waterbury Mint provided the US Mint with many of the planchets for regular U.S. 1¢ and 5¢ pieces from 1888 to 1906.

In some cases the client country would manufacture and furnish the dies to the U.S. Mint to strike the coins, while other countries opted for the U.S. Mint to produce the minting dies and to mint the issues. A third alternative that was utilized by some client countries, most notably the Dominican Republic, was the usage of a third party mint to produce the dies and then use the U.S. Mint to manufacture the coins. This arrangement led to coins like the 1897 Dominican Republic One Peso struck in 1898 and 1899 by the US mint with dies made by the Paris Mint that bear the "A" mint mark on the reverse near the bottom of the coin. In theory, a foreign coinage issue manufactured by the U.S. Mint could involve four or more parties:

- The client country wanting the issue
- The mint that designed and produced the dies for coinage
- The mint that manufactured the coin planchets
- The U.S. Mint that actually minted the issue.
- The mint or central bank that distributes the minted coinage into the economy

In the case of the 1944 French 2 Franc pieces, it is believed that the French Algerian provincial government issued the pieces into general circulation into the Algerian economy and not into the originally intended French commercial economy.

Over the years of producing coinage for other countries, the traditional U.S. Mint marks appeared on some foreign coins. As mentioned before, a mint mark from another country could be present on a foreign coin produced by the U.S. Mint. The New Orleans Mint never had a chance to display its "O" mint mark on a foreign coin. The only foreign issue that was struck at that Mint was a 1907 Mexican silver 20 Centavos piece that bore the Mexico City mint mark from where the coinage dies originated.

Not all of the foreign mintages of the U.S. Mint were met with great success. Some mintages met undignified ends in the melting cauldron such as the Chinese dollars and half dollars or the coinage of our present-day Hawaiian Islands. While war and political turmoil sent some issues back to the melting pot, war was also the reason for such high demand for the U.S. Mint to produce foreign coinage. Demand during the early to mid 1940's pushed coinage requests to all time highs as devastated World War II participant countries in the midst of rebuilding required coinage to be produced in order for their respective economies to recover in the post war era. Coinage requests from these war torn countries supplemented and competed for the surplus coinage capacity normally reserved for the US Mint's usual client countries. One can see in the annual mintage reports that many coins were reported as struck in one year but dated with the previous year's date.

While producing foreign coinage, the U.S. Mint demonstrated its metallurgical talents producing numerous alloys it normally did not use for standard US circulating coinage along with coin shapes that the U.S. Mint until that time was unfamiliar with. Coin shapes such as square, scalloped, hexagonal coins and those coins designed with holes in the center were required to be produced. While the U.S. Mint did make limited run pattern coins with holes in the center, as documented in Judd/Pollack, the U.S. Mint never executed a production run of such coins until the dated 2461 Siam (Thailand) One Satang it produced at the Philadelphia Mint in 1918. The U.S. Mint followed up the holed One Satang with additional holed foreign coinage issues such as the 1920 French Indo-China One Centime; the Fiji

Half Penny and Fiji Penny produced from 1942 to 1943.

Scanning the mintage figures of numerous client countries of the U.S. Mint over several years, one can see the ongoing effect of economic policies of each country by the debasing change of coinage compositions used to issue certain denominations of that country. It is interesting to note that a country often debases its coinage by substituting an inferior composition. Sometimes the metal is switched from gold to silver, or from silver to copper-nickel or brass.

One interesting example occurred for Costa Rica in 1923. U.S. minted 50 and 25 Centimos coins were re-struck or counter-struck by the Costa Rican government into higher 1 Colon and 50 Centavos denomination pieces because of their metal content and a revaluation of their currency.

In a collection of Foreign Coins Struck at US Mints, one can find instances of overstriking, counterstamping, much melting, intrigues like the Saudi Arabian gold discs, odd shaped coins, issues struck on planchets originally made for US coinage, several beautiful and important commemoratives, proof sets, a wide range of design and composition, and a wealth of history to study.

In addition, such a collection can contain some of the rarest coins known, many of which are fantastically undervalued.

In the Summary Table that follows, note that non-branch mints located in the US such as Waterbury (Scoville), CN and Providence, RI are not included.

References:

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Foreign Coins Manufactured at US Mints

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Foreign Coins Minted in US Mints - Summary by Country														Tim Ziebarth - 3/3/2006	
Country	Mints	MM's	Total Issues	Base Metals					Precious		Proof Sets	Issue Dates		Notes	
				C/N	Brnz	Brass	Gsil	other	Silver	Gold		First Issue	Last Issue		
Australia	SD	all	16							16			1942	1944	
Belgian Congo	P	none	1			1							1943	1943	only hexagonal
Belgium	P	none	1					1-Steel					1944	1944	Zn coated Steel - US WWII 1c plans
Bolivia	P	none	3		1			2-Zinc					1942	1942	
Canada	P	none	1					1-Nickel					1968	1968	US Reeding (flat bottoms)
China	PDS	none	3							3			1934*	1949	1936-(S) 1/2 & 1 DoI all melted; none known; 1934 DoI restruck 1949
Columbia	PDS	none	21	14						7			1902	1946	
Costa Rica	PDS	none	54	19	2			9-Steel	10	14			1903	1970	most '03 2 cv OS to 5 cv; most '04 & '14 50 cv OS to 1 Colon 1923
Cuba	P	none	59	13		3			31	12			1915	1960	ABC Pesos minted for reserve on notes, never released, most melted
Dominican Republic	PS	none	58	18	13				27		4		1897	1981	Proof Sets '78 & '79; CuNi plus 15 Silver
Ecuador	PD	some*	28	10	1	5		1-Nickel	11				1895	1946	*MM "Phila" "Phila USA" "Philadelphia"
El Salvador	PDS	one*	59	32	10		5		12				1904	1972	*Only 1928-S 1 cv has MM
Ethiopia	P	none	6		5				1				1944	1944	only crimped edge coin
Fiji	S	all	10			4			6				1942	1943	issues with center holes
France	P	none	1			1							1944	1944	Allied Issue for Algeria
French Indochina	S	some	8	2	1			1-Nickel	4				1920	1941	1920 1 cv has center hole
Greenland	P	none	1			1							1944	1944	
Guatemala	PS	none	13			4			6	3			1925	1944	
Haiti	PDS	none	19	3			14		2				1949	1979	includes proof commemoratives
Hawaii	PS	none	4						4		*		1883	1883	*proofs minted in P exist all 4 denom
Honduras	P	none	30	7	8				15				1931	1958	
Iceland	W	none	1						1				2000	2000	1000 Kronur minted in set with Leif Ericson US Commemorative
Israel	S	none	4	4									1969	1970	
Liberia	PDS	none	64	44	10				10		8		1941	1976	Largest US coin - 1973 5 dollar 42.5 mm
Mexico	PDSO	none*	7						5	2			1906	1949	*only New Orleans minted foreign coin
Nepal	S	none	35	15	5			15-Alum			5		1970	1975	only proof sets minted
Netherland (Homeland)	PD	all	12						12				1943	1945	2 possibly do not exist
Netherlands Curacao	PD	all	12		3		1		8				1941	1944	1942-P 1 cent is square
Netherlands East Indies	PDS	all	17		6				11				1941	1945	1 cent issues have center hole
Netherlands Suriname	P	all	9		1	1	1		6				1941	1943	
Nicaragua	P	none	47	12	21	4			10				1917	1943	1943 Brass shell casings used
Panama	PDSW	none	124	61	20				43		9		1904	1983	smallest US Minted coin - Panama Pill
Peru	PS	some	43	14	2	23			4				1918	1976	
Philippines - US Sovereignty	PDSM	some	153	22	42				89		5		1903	1936	Proof Sets '03 '04 '05 '06 '08
Philippines - Commonwealth	PDSM	some	30	6	6				18				1936	1947	1947 1/2 & 1 Peso McArthur issues
Philippines - Republic	PDS	none	68		14	5	38	6-Alum	5		1		1948	1977	1974 Proof Set not released to public
Poland	P	none	2						2				1924	1925	
Saudi Arabia	P	none	8	3					3	2			1946	1949	Arabic 1354 or 1356; gold assay discs say "Philadelphia"
Siam (Thailand)	P	none	2		2								1918	1919	1st US coin made with center hole 1918
South Korea	P	none	5	1	2		2						1959	1961	
Syria	P	none	4						2	2			1947	1950	
Taiwan (ROC)	PD	none	4	4									1973	1974	
Venezuela	PDS	none	80	24		2			53	1			1876	1958	1st US Minted Foreign Coin 1876 1 cv

countries with brass coins minted 1942-1945 used Shell Casings; Gsil = German Silver = Copper-Zinc-Nickel; counts still being refined; does not include varieties, overdates, counterstamps

Totals - 43 Countries PDSOW 12 with 1127 328 175 54 61 36 437 36 32 1876 1983* except for 2000 Iceland