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Today's Collector
New Opportunities

So Many Split Stamps in Classic Mexico



This letter front has the 1861 type Cuatro Reales split on the right side of the stamp.

This was mailed in Leon, Guanajuato, to cover the Dos Reales rate.

Last week's message, I talked about splits found in Classic Mexico, but I didn't explain why there were so many compared to other countries. Splits are often used when the most commonly used denominations run short. For most countries, stamp supplies during the 19th Century were sufficient for the postage required. One stamp issue replaced by another new issue often didn't end the value of the preceding stamps in many countries. Not so in Mexico, because they would make the last issues used to no longer have value for postage. The old, unused stamps would be returned to Mexico City for disposal or storage in the National Postal Service Archive. So, this is just the first reason a local postmaster would resort to splitting higher denominations into denominations that cover the most needed values. This covers the action that these postmasters took, but now we will focus on the reason that Mexico was in need more often than most countries to resort to splits.



This 1856 type Cuatro Reales, split into a quarter-size, for the Un Real rate.



These two Dos Reales from 1856 and 1861 were split to make the Un Real rate.
All three of these stamps are considered among the better splits used in Mexico.

I remember sitting at a dealer's table when I was still collecting the United States issues, and he had several splits of the two-cent black Jack on covers for a one-cent local rate. His prices on these were very low, and I thought they were fakes at that price. I wasn't familiar with splits, and my doubt was just based on the fact that any genuine splits on genuine US cover are supposed to cost a lot of money. Well, when I started collecting Mexico, it took me a good while and further study to understand what the splits should look like when used on the Mexican covers and on a piece. I was first surprised that they were often found in offers to sell at prices that were modest for this rare use. I had set my collection on collecting Dos Reales, so I was not interested in collecting the splits that were used for that denomination. In time, as a dealer, I would wind up with splits that were in some of the collections I was buying for resale. My normal work on such collections was to pull out the costly stamps that would sell the quickest. Then, if I found a Dos Reales that I could use, I would add it to my collection. I finally ask myself why I don't add these splits to my collection at the rate of Dos Reales like all the other stamps I was using.



These two splits of Cuatro Reales, making the Dos Reales rate, are the most common splits.

What makes these special is that these stamps did not have the district overprint.

But the cancels tell us they came from the left: Guadalajara and the right: Guanajuato, Silao sub-office.

The most important thing about splits is why they were used, and secondly, what constitutes a genuine split. Okay, we do know that they are used as replacements for needed stamps. The most common reason was the postmaster running out of stamps. So, this was generally a supply of stamps needed from the main postal authorities. In Mexico, supply was cut short either by the loss of shipments, which was uncommon, or, for some reason, by the postal authority's failure to send more stamps. In the years from 1856 through 1864 and beyond, there was political upheaval throughout Mexico, and post offices would change hands as warring parties took control of districts. There was also the factor that the Postal Service in Mexico City was not sending out stamps to some districts. The postal authority regulations generally required local postmasters to send letters as Sello Negro, meaning "Black Mark". These were mostly used with a 'Franco' postmark meaning 'paid', and the denomination was stamped in numerals for the rate paid.



These two Ocho 1/4s for 2R splits are Guadalajara left 1856,
and at right is 1861, from Guanajuato.

One thing I wish to get straight is that these splits, while used more often in Mexico than other countries, are still fairly scarce to downright rare. For instance, the Dos Reales issues split for an Un Real are much scarcer than the Cuatro or Ochos split for the Dos Reales. Splits for the Medio Real are even more scarce than many of the others for different

values. One of the most valuable splits was that of a Cuatro Reales with a quarter split removed to make a rate of Three Reales. There are others that are also worth more than \$10,000. Regardless of the value, these splits still have to be proven genuine. Generally, only with good evidence may a mint split on the cover be proved genuine. Almost all splits must have been canceled, with the cancellation covering the split side. Lastly, everything on the cover has to be genuine in use, cancellations, and docket. Some of the Districts of Mexico do not have splits because they never needed to make up rates due to split issues. Although we have been talking about the early classic issues of 1856 and 1861, splits were also used on the Eagles issues, 1868s, 1872s, Banknotes, and others, but they are very scarce to rare items. So, all of these splits tell a wonderful story of the postmaster's use of a 'Can Do' approach to meeting the demand for postage stamps in the early era of the Mexican Classic issues.

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