

How many Cuartos equal One Real? - by Donald J Peterson.

While doing research in the postal history of the Spanish Philippines, particularly with regard to Postal Rates, I found that the monetary units listed for the Philippines in the Scott Catalogue are incorrect. (Scott 1982 Catalogue, Volume IV, page 67). The monetary units, which are shown as:-

"8 Cuartos = 1 Real"

-have been listed as such at least as far back as 1901.

Much of my research has been involved in studying the postal rates for registered mail, overseas, (U.P.U.) mail, and interior mail. The early Spanish royal orders and Captain-General circulars and regulations which promulgated these rates all refer to monetary denominations of 5, 10 and 20 cuartos, and 1 and 2 Reales. In addition, the stamps that were printed and issued were also in these same denominations, as would be expected. At no time was there mention of any other denomination for regular postage, nor were stamps issued in the 8 cuartos denomination, or any combination thereof.

Obviously, this discrepancy poses a problem for any serious study of the Postal History of the Philippines. Although the Scott Catalogue indicates that 8 cuartos = 1 Real, the evidence indicates that the actual monetary units, which were applicable to the sale and use of postage stamps as well, were 20 cuartos = 1 Real. In my studies, I have simply ignored the rate shown in the Scott Catalogue.

The strongest support for the fact that 20 cuartos = 1 Real, comes from an article by Arnold H. Warren in the 1954 PHICIPEX Souvenir Book, published in Manila. The following quotations from Warren's article clarify the subject:-

"The REAL DE PLATA (Silver Real), also called the REAL FUERTE (Strong Real) and REAL DE PLATA FUERTE (Strong Silver Real), should not be confused with the REAL DE VELLON (Real of Vellon) which was the monetary unit of Spain.....One REAL DE VELLON (Real of Vellon) was equal to eight cuartos."

"The discovery of the fabulously rich silver mines of Mexico made silver the principal monetary medium, not only of Mexico, but also of all other Spanish-American Colonies and of the Philippines. By a Royal Decree of the King of Spain, the value of the REAL DE PLATA (Silver Real) of the Spanish Colonies was fixed as equal to two and one-half REALES DE VELLON, (Reales of Vellon). Since the REAL DE VELLON (Real of Vellon) of Spain was equal to eight cuartos, it followed that the REAL DE PLATA (Silver Real) of the Spanish Colonies, including the Philippines, was equal to twenty cuartos."

Therefore, from these quotations, it is revealed that the monetary system in the Philippines and other Spanish Colonies was based on the fact that 20 cuartos = 1 Real, rather than 8 cuartos = 1 Real, which was applicable only to Spain. I, too, agree with Warren and have no reason to doubt his expertise and conclusions on the subject.

There is additional evidence as well. A Spanish Royal Order from Madrid, dated January 12, 1853, which authorized the printing of the first Philippine postage stamps, also established the postal rates. The Royal Order stated that a single letter, (less than one-half ounce) would require a stamp of 5 cuartos; a double letter, (one half-ounce to less than one ounce), 10 cuartos; and a letter weighing one ounce up to one and one-half ounce, 1 Real Fuerte or two stamps of 10 cuartos. Other subsequent royal orders also confirm these units.

The pieces of Philippine mail examined in my research of postal rates also verify the use of the above-mentioned monetary units; that 20 cuartos, and not 8 cuartos were frequently used in place of the 1 Real stamp.

Additional evidence could be given by providing specific examples of letters using combinations of these units, or by providing further quotations of explanation from Warren's article. I believe, however, that the case has been made that the "8 cuartos = 1 Real" listed in the Scott Catalogue for the Philippines, is incorrect; and that it should be changed to read:"20 cuartos = 1 Real".

I can find no logical explanation for why this error has never been corrected in the Scott Catalogue; or what the justification has been for listing it for as such for so many years.

If anyone has any additional information on the subject, please contact Mr. Donald J Peterson, 7408 Alaska Ave., N.W., Washington D.C. 20012. USA..

Editor's Note:-

Well, Don, for once the British seem to have stolen a march on the Americans!. The 1978 Stanley Gibbons "Overseas 4" Catalogue, P-Z, gives the currency as follows:-

"1854. 20 cuartos = 1 Real
8 Reales = 1 Peso Plata Fuerte. "

Nice one, Stanley!.