

The Bolivian Monetary Medals of 1825-1879

by Daniel Frank Sedwick

Numismatics is the marriage of art with history, and few examples show this better than the Bolivian monetary medals of 1825-1879, for in these pieces of silver and gold we see not just the history of a fledgling country but also the creative expression and skilled artisanship of experienced craftsman at a centuries-old mint. You don't need to know Bolivian history or Latin American numismatics to appreciate the beauty of these medals, but you do need both to understand them.

The history of early Bolivia can be summarized in one word—*caudillism*—and to some degree all the nascent Latin American republics suffered from this concept after independence from Spain because of the military nature of their liberation. As the original *caudillo*, General Simón Bolívar spawned future generations of macho military leaders who treated their various presidencies like divine appointments. Their bravado is explicit on these medals.

The harder element for understanding these medals is sheer numismatics: Why were they made in certain sizes and finenesses, and in relatively large quantity? How can we use their die designs and other numismatic aspects (like edge and axis) to determine in what order they were made, and why?

To a great degree the study presented here, on the occasion of our offering of the Whittier Collection of Bolivian Monetary Medals as part of our Treasure, World, U.S. Coin and Paper Money Auction #26 (November 1-2, 2019), is just a re-organization of information already published in various books, articles and auction sales, particularly by Bosco, Burnett, Craig, Derman, Doty, Flatt, Fonrobert and others. Anyone with further interest should absorb these excellent references (see bibliography at end). My goal here is simply to explain and present these fascinating pieces clearly and succinctly.

The Early Bolivian Presidents

The best way to start to categorize these medals is by the order of Bolivian presidents who oversaw their issue. I must stress these were not just presidents in the sense that we think of today but in fact were more like rulers or monarchs. To keep this article brief, I will not present the full history of each man listed—as retrospectively amusing as some may be—nor will I discuss the various interim presidents who did not issue medals in this period (in fact they are omitted from this list entirely). Any specific historical events relevant to the medals will be mentioned within each series of medals. Here I present the presidencies to which the medals correspond (with the names in boldface to be used as shorthand for the rest of the article), the dates given here being their dates of tenure and not necessarily dates of issue for the medals:

Simón **Bolívar**, 1825
Antonio José de **Sucre**, 1825-1828
Andrés de **Santa Cruz**, 1829-1839
José Miguel de **Velasco** Franco, 1839-1841
Mariano Enrique **Calvo** Cuellar, 1841
José **Ballivián**, 1841-1847
Manuel Isidoro **Belzu**, 1848-1855
Jorge **Córdova**, 1855-1857
José María **Linares**, 1857-1861
José María de **Achá**, 1861-1864
Mariano **Melgarejo**, 1864-1871
Hilarión **Daza**, 1876-1879



Evidence that Monetary Medals were Coins

While knowledge about the medals has progressed over the years, the documents behind the production of these medals—if such records ever existed—have never been found. What we think is that any record of striking these pieces was subsumed into the various tallies at the mints where they were made, presumably limited to Potosí, La Paz

and Oruro, as surely only official mints could have made such quantities.¹ Some known contemporary documents refer to these pieces as coins: An 1831 letter in reference to pieces commemorating the new Constitution calls them *monedas de un real* (coins of 1 real), for example, and an 1853 document mentions *algunas monedas del sello especial* (some coins of a special stamp) being prohibited except by order of the government, as well as permission being granted to strike *la moneda de timbre especial* (coin of a special stamp).²

There is other circumstantial evidence, however, to show these pieces were actually intended to circulate as coins all along. The most obvious evidence is that nearly all these medals, with the exception of the larger-than-dollar sizes, correspond to known denominations. For most of the period in question, the official silver coins were denominated in *soles*, in exact analog with the Spanish *reales* that preceded them; i.e., the former silver-dollar-sized³ 8 reales was replaced by the 8 soles.⁴ The fractions of these coins, in descending order, were 4 soles, 2 soles, 1 sol, ½ sol and ¼ sol. In 1863 a decimal system was adopted, with the dollar-sized coin known as a *boliviano* and its fractions logically known as 1/5 boliviano, 1/10 boliviano and 1/20 boliviano. Numismatic catalogs also show a slightly smaller medallion coin denomination of *melgarejo*⁵ starting in 1865 (after Melgarejo took over the presidency and put his bust on the coins), with fractions of ½ melgarejo and ¼ melgarejo (note the return to a system of eighths versus decimal). This brief series effectively replaced the smaller coinage in the boliviano series (in which mintage of minors actually ceased in 1866) and is a key to our discussion because in fact they followed the tradition of the monetary medals that started in 1825.

In truth the Bolivian monetary situation throughout the 1800s was even more complicated than that. Debasement was at the heart of it, for while dollar-sized coins and gold remained steady at about 90% and 87.5% purity respectively, all the silver minors dropped to 67% fineness in 1830.⁶ Further complication came in 1859 when all but the 4 soles dropped in weight by more than 25% while the fineness was raised back to 90% (the 4 soles continued at regular weight but lower fineness). More troubling still was the fact that no silver minors were struck at all during 1831-52.⁷ Small-size monetary medals, however, were struck in great number during this time. What other purpose would they serve?

On the commercial side we have even more evidence that these monetary medals were made to be and used as coins. For example, they are referenced in Argentine money-exchange tables from the time, despite the fact that they generally bear neither denomination nor country name.⁸ Also, a hoard of about 1400 of these pieces from the vaults of a Cochabamba bank (the so-called NASCA hoard of 1979, cataloged by Bosco) proves that they were deposited as money at some point.

Finally we go back to the pieces themselves: Most have reeded edges (versus the plain edge we see on traditional medals), and some are even struck in coin alignment.⁹ The fact that different designs were used for silver and gold monetary medals—with virtually none made in copper—is also evidence of their use as money, since true medals generally used the same dies for copper, silver and gold issues depending on the importance of the intended recipient. Most significant, perhaps, is the fact that production of Bolivian monetary medals began in 1825, two years before any official coins were struck, following a Spanish colonial tradition in which so-called proclamation medals were made in coin denominations as well (some with the denomination stated thereon) and in fact used as money. Of course, the Bolivian monetary medals were not proclaiming new kings like the colonial proclamation medals did, and it is confusing or even erroneous to call the new Bolivian pieces proclamation medals. But they were quite useful for putting the

1 Some medals are attributed to other cities like Cochabamba and Sucre, as stated on the medals themselves, but without any official mints in those cities it is assumed these issues were struck at Potosí for those cities. In fact it is possible that issues attributed to La Paz were made in Potosí as well (no prior publication to my knowledge has ever addressed this question in depth); my statement here is simply that the three cities listed are the only ones known to have had official coin mints.

2 Flatt, pp. 123-4.

3 Spanish speakers tend to call this size of coin a *peso*, but I find that term confusing when later coins are actually denominated in pesos and in other context *peso* can simply mean *weight*. The British term *crown* is used by other numismatists; to my North American audience the term *dollar* just makes the most sense.

4 Similar for gold, formerly *escudos* but now simply *scudos*, although many believe that is simply a misinterpretation of the denomination letter S on the coins, which was used in colonial times as well to denote *escudo* (Latin: *scutum*).

5 Note that for denominations the first letter is lower case, whereas any reference to the actual person (Melgarejo) is upper case.

6 Spanish speakers refer to this debased coinage as *moneda feble*.

7 Approximate dates, as it differed by denomination. For example, 2 soles are known for 1831 and the ¼ sol was struck in 1852.

8 Lill, referencing Christensen.

9 Alignment (or axis) refers to whether the orientation from front to back follows a top-to-bottom flip (coin) or side-to-side (medal).

important news and propaganda of the time into a form that everyone from poor natives to wealthy criollos would see and propagate. Richard Doty said it best: “the slogans would appeal to the literate, the images to the illiterate, the intrinsic value to both.” They were, plain and simple, medallic coins.

So why the big fuss to prove they are coins? With the exception of the melgarejo series mentioned above (and a few others), these pieces are **not** listed in the *Standard Catalog of World Coins* (Krause-Mishler), and they are **not** certified as coins by NGC. The Whittier Collection featured here is significant in that each piece is certified by PCGS **with a coin denomination**. It is time for us all to get on the same page about these monetary medals!

Cataloging the Monetary Medals

The works of Fonrobert (1868), Bosco (1980) and, above all, Burnett (1987) went a long way to organize and classify the Bolivian monetary medals, but the list of newly discovered varieties keeps growing, as the Whittier collection demonstrates. In most cases there is a basic design (sometimes in several different sizes) with a long string of varieties, such as axis (coin or medal), edge (reeded, plain, lettered) or placement of the elements relative to the legends. As Burnett himself said, “If I have found new types and varieties, you are no less able to do so.” Much like the ever popular and heavily studied British “Admiral Vernon” medals of 1739, the academic corpus grows closer to reconstructing the entire record of what was made and in what order with each new generation of collectors. To quote Burnett again, “This list is certainly expandable and it must be done.” It is our duty as serious numismatists to carry the torch. My hope is that the next generation of collectors will find some inspiration here and accept Burnett’s invitation to expand the list through studious collecting.

As I mentioned, my goal here is not to completely re-catalog the known pieces but to provide a simplified overview based on what I see as related designs within a cohesive series. In a word, I am establishing *types* that often encompass different denominations. The generally accepted starting point is date, as the majority show dates in their designs, although some designs span multiple years. Keep in mind these could be dates of issue or simply the date of what is being commemorated (like a Constitution or a battle) on a medal issued years later. Very often we find medals from two different issues, known as “mules,” some even with different dates on each side and others with no date on either side. Burnett was diligent in trying to determine which side was the obverse and which was the reverse for any given piece, but the fact is that each die could have been used for either side. This made for lots of “mules” between what otherwise should have been different series. The critical thing is to learn *when* each design originated, and *why*, which is what I hope to convey here.

Bolívar (1825)



1) 1825 Potosí—Burnett 1 through 6

The first series of medals in 1825 focused on celebrating new independence and liberation by Bolívar. Naturally, the largest of the medals (10, 12 and 15 soles) show a portrait of Bolívar with various statements of homage, like POTOSI MANIFIESTA SU GRATITUD (“Potosí shows its gratitude”). On the other side is either the Cerro de Potosí¹⁰ with a radiant sunface above (for the Potosí issues) or Minerva and a Roman soldier flanking a globe (for the Chuquisaca issues). The smaller 2-soles issues combine the Cerro de Potosí on one side with a llama on the other. While the larger pieces arguably were intended as just medals and not coins, the smaller pieces surely set the stage for the intentional manufacture and use of these medals as coins.

Sucre (1825-1828)

2) 1826 Potosí—Burnett 7

The second series is dated 1826, during the tenure of Sucre but really just commemorating the new Constitution of Bolivia, adopted on December 9, 1826, represented by an open book with the fragmented words LEY FUNDAMENTAL (“fundamental law”). The other side shows a wreath around the word BOLIVIANA. Legends follow the previous pattern but with homage to the Constitution this time. Only the small 1-sol denomination is known.



¹⁰ Cerro literally means hill, but really this place is a small mountain, famous for harboring vast amounts of silver and making Potosí at one time the richest city in the world. To say “mountain of Potosí” is an exaggeration, while “hill of Potosí” is too diminutive, so I prefer to preserve the Spanish term in this instance.

Santa Cruz (1829-1839)

3) 1829 Potosí—Burnett 8

The 1829 issues show either a dove of peace on one side and Cerro de Potosí with name of Santa Cruz in legend on the other side, or the same Cerro de Potosí design on one side and a seated native on the other side without a date, and they are all known only in the 1-sol size. We see this same seated-native design as a muling later in this list with an Ingavi Four-Year Anniversary design (undated but presumably 1845).



4) 1831 Potosí—Burnett 9

The 1831 issues are presented in Burnett as just a 1-sol size with open-book Constitution like before but with a dated legend in five lines in the center on other side; however, the Derman and Whittier collections have both yielded pieces in 2-, 1- and ½-sol sizes that are linked to this 1831 issue by one side showing Bolivian arms within legend REPUBLICA BOLIVIANA. One of the 1-sol pieces also shows AMERICA LIBRE around the face of Bacchus, a symbol of the Potosí mint.

5) 1833 and 1835 Potosí—Burnett 10 through 13

An urn inside a wreath defines the issues of 1833 and 1835, which show either the Cerro de Potosí or a standing angel with a dog on the other side, known in both 1-sol and ½-sol sizes. The legends refer to either Santa Cruz or (amazingly) his wife, Francisca Cernadas. Muling of dies prevents this series from being split by date.



6) 1838 Potosí—Burnett 14

The 1838 issues feature Santa Cruz's victories at Yanacocha and Socobaya, marking his conquest of and confederation with Peru (North and South), reflected in the legends, with central imagery of a standing native holding a palm frond in one hand and a cornucopia in the other on one side and the Cerro de Potosí linked by breastworks to the neighboring Mt. Illimani on the other side. These pieces are all in the 2-soles size.



Velasco (1839-1841)

7) 1839 Potosí—Burnett 15 and 16

The first 1839 issues mark the new Constitution following the downfall of Santa Cruz after his defeat at Yungay by Argentina and Chile (who opposed Bolivia's confederation with Peru). This time the open-book Constitution (LEY FUNDAMENTAL) is being carried by a flying angel blowing a trumpet that says LIBERTAD (Liberty), with a palm tree on the other side of the medal, struck in 1-sol size only but in both silver and gold, the latter (the first gold monetary medal) being a 1 scudo.



8) 1839 Potosí—Burnett 17

The 1839 issues continue with new imagery of a phoenix rising from flames on one side and a standing angel holding a staff topped with a Liberty cap and with a lion at his feet on the other side, known in both silver and gold, in the 1-sol size only.



9) 1840 Potosí—Burnett 18

Visually very similar to the 1839 issues, and also in only 1-sol size, the 1840 pieces revert to an homage to the president (Velasco), represented by a small military bust above flags on one side and a standing Justice figure on the other side.

Calvo (1841)

10) 1841 Potosí—Burnett 125

This undated issue, the first to be struck in 4-soles size (and nothing else), is a tribute to acting president Calvo, issued in uniface with the design of an arm holding a Liberty cap-topped lance.

Ballivián (1841-1847)

11) 1841 Potosí—Burnett 126 (2S), 19 through 21 (1S and 1/2S)

This 1841-dated series is a memorial to national independence following the defeat of forces under Peruvian president Agustín Gamarra by General José Ballivián at Ingavi on November 18, 1841, after Gamarra had invaded Bolivia during a chaotic situation in which the Bolivian government was split between three regions (Chuquisaca, Cochabamba and La Paz) but galvanized under Ballivián. These



medals come in three different sizes, with two totally different designs. The 2-soles size without date shows a standing native blowing a horn to the left with an olive branch in his other hand and a llama at his feet on one side and a flag-topped column supported by an arm inscribed with BALLIN (for Ballivián) coming from the right within a wreath on the other side. The smaller medals, in 1-sol size in silver and 1-scudo and ½-scudo size in gold, all feature a radiant sun over mountains and battlefield on one side and a flag-topped monument on the other.



12) 1841 Potosí—Burnett 124 and 127

These 1-sol sized issues (in silver and gold) are a tribute by the city of Sucre to peace after the Battle of Ingavi and show a descending dove with an olive branch in its beak on one side and a column within a wreath on other side.

13) 1842 Potosí—Burnett 22 and 23



The tribute to Ingavi morphed into an homage to Ballivián in the 1842 issues, all in the 1-sol size, which show the Cerro de Potosí on one side and the bare head of Ballivián on the other.

14) 1843 Potosí—Burnett 24 and 25

The 1843 issues concern the new Constitution of 1843, rendered like before as an open book with LEY FUNDAMENTAL on one side of the medal, the other side being either the same descending-dove design as the 1841 Sucre issues or a tied bundle of quill, sword and staff with the last topped with Liberty cap. As in 1842, these are all 1-sol size.

15) 1844 Potosí—Burnett 26 and 27

The 1844 issues revert to a tribute to Ballivián, this time shown in the form of a laureate bust, the open-book Constitution now reduced to a small version with just L F (for LEY FUNDAMENTAL) atop a pedestal with a sword piercing the book, all within a wreath. As before, these are 1-sol size only.

16) 1845 Potosí—Burnett 128

This is a commemorative for the fourth anniversary of Ingavi, no date, 1 sol only, showing a tall column said to be erected on the spot where Gamara was killed. The obverse of this issue shows a seated native design that is also found with an 1829 reverse (Burnett 8).

17) Pre-1848 Potosí—Burnett 129 and 130

Struck without date in 1-sol size in gold and silver, these are a tribute to Ballivián's wife, Mercedes Coll (the second time a Bolivian president's wife was so honored), which is strange considering that Ballivián's seduction of Belzu's wife around 1845 lost him the support of his former friend, Belzu. Since Ballivián was exiled in December 1847, it makes no sense that Burnett categorized this issue as "ca. 1848."



Belzu (1848-1855)

18) 1849 Potosí—Burnett 28



This issue marks the first of many issues honoring President Belzu, this particular type struck only in 1-sol size with a clasped-hands design on one side and explicit mention of GENERAL BELZU on the other.

19) 1849 Oruro—Burnett 29

A new mint started operation in Oruro in 1849, using partially debased silver (0.750 fine), and its first "coins" were these medals, all in the 1-sol size. One side shows the Cerro de Socabón (Oruro's counterpart to the Cerro de Potosí) with a church and the sun on one side and a tribute to Belzu on the other with (significantly) a mintmark, denomination and assayers' initials placed around the date. Reference books consider these to be true coins, which in fact they are, even though all except one specimen in the Whittier sale are medal alignment and the great majority are holed for wearing as pendants.

20) 1850 Potosí—Burnett 30 through 32

These larger pieces are evidence of Belzu's unabashed caudillism (as they all show a bust of the president as the main feature) and demonstrate his penchant for Greek mythology, perhaps inspired by the "phoenix" medals of 1839. The largest pieces (60- and 36-sol size, with PREMIO in exergue to indicate they were prizes of some sort) show Liberty placing a wreath over Belzu's bust on a pedestal on one side and a lion sleeping with a nude boy under a palm tree on the other; the 4-sol size (nothing smaller) shows the same bust of Belzu alone on one side and



Hercules with club atop the Hydra on the other side. (Note: smaller issues attributed to 1850 are grouped under the 1851-1852 series below, for reasons I state there.)

21) 1851 and 1852 Potosí—Burnett 33 through 35 and 38 through 50



I refer to this as the “angel/assassin/temple” series of 8-, 4-, 2-, and 1-sol size pieces (some in gold) across two dates in shared designs, many of which also (or only, in the case of Burnett 33 and 34) show an 1850 date in reference to an attempted assassination of president Belzu by General Morales on September 6 of that year. These pieces diverge from the previous 1850 issue and other 1852 issues in that they do not show a bust of Belzu. As my first sentence indicates, all show a

combination of two (one on each side) of three designs: a flying angel blowing a horn to left and holding a wreath with Belzu’s name to right; a togate criminal (whom Fonrobert thought might be Oedipus, following Belzu’s Greek mythology theme, but I prefer to equate to Belzu’s would-be assassin) fleeing to right threatened by a sword at left; and the radiant, domed temple known as La Rotunda, erected on the spot where Belzu’s attempted assassination took place. Less used but also in the mix is a design of Liberty seated with a baby and a youth facing a radiant sun, as well as one-off designs such as a congressional scene, the main plaza of Potosí with Cerro to right, or a large moth (with Cochabamba reference in legend), all of which are found mated with one of the “angel/assassin/temple” designs.

22) 1851 Potosí—Burnett 36 and 37



This separate issue in just the 1-sol size commemorates the new Constitution of 1851, represented as an open book like before but this time with CONSTITUCION BOLIVIANA, the other side showing either a nude angel (whom Fonrobert calls Genius, from Roman mythology) placing a wreath on the head of Belzu on a pedestal (a design re-used in 1853) or the traditional arms (without flags) of Bolivia. The legend of the former is the first instance of reference to Belzu as “jefe” (boss or chief).

23) 1852 Potosí—Burnett 51

This one-off in 1-sol size shows the main plaza of Potosí under the Cerro to right on one side, with a small bust of Belzu on the other side above date 1852. The Potosí plaza scene was reused in 1854 (see Burnett 66 below).



24) 1852 Potosí—Burnett 53

This appears to be another 1-sol one-off, with Cerro de Potosí above a pair of cornucopiae on one side and a tiny radiant face of Bacchus on the other side, with legends giving tribute to Belzu from the “azogueros” (refiners) of Potosí.

25) 1853 La Paz—Burnett 54 through 60

The third Bolivian Republic mint (after Potosí and Oruro) was established in La Paz in 1853 (striking sporadically thereafter), and these pieces are the first issues, all with mountains behind the city, also found muled with earlier Potosí issues from 1841 and 1843. One Whittier specimen even shows a cornucopia side struck over a 1/5 boliviano of 1865!

26) 1853 Potosí—Burnett 61 through 63

These 1-sol pieces are what I call the “Christmas Eve” issues, as the unifying design is the Cerro de Potosí over the date 24 DE DICIEMBRE DE 1853, the other side being either an angel placing a wreath on Belzu’s head, a left-striding woman or a simple five-line tribute to Belzu as the “Salvador de la Dignidad Nacional” (savior of national dignity).

27) 1854 Potosí—Burnett 52, 64 through 69

Struck in 1- and ½-scudo size in gold (Burnett 64 and 65) and 1-sol size in silver (Burnett 66), with a standing woman holding a baby and flanked by two children on one side and Belzu above clouds and a wreath on other side, but with a chain of mixes with the previous three years’ designs in the 1-sol size, as follows: Burnett 52 is a muling of the Belzu/clouds/wreath side with the main-plaza-of-Potosí scene from 1852 (Burnett 51); Burnett 67 is a muling of the Belzu side with a new design of a seated woman (facing left) next to a condor-on-pedestal (no date); Burnett 68 shows this seated-woman design mated with the national dignity reverse from the 1853 issue (Burnett 63); and finally, Burnett 69 is a muling of the seated-woman design with the Bolivian arms design from 1851 (Burnett 37).





28) **1854 La Paz—Burnett 70**

While the Potosí 1-sol issues (above) went through their transformations, in the same year the La Paz mint made just one design, also in 1-sol size, showing a distinctive condor with wing on left pointed upward and face looking to right above a broken chain on one side, the other side with seated woman (facing right, not left as for Potosí) placing a wreath on the small head of Belzu on a pedestal.

Córdova (1855-1857)

29) **1855 Potosí—Burnett 71 through 75**

This issue commemorates the abdication of Belzu and transmission of office to the new president Córdova (Belzu's son-in-law), all in 2-soles size with some gold known. With lots of mixing of designs, this series starts with a congressional scene wherein Belzu is being given a medal and sash, followed by pieces with Córdova's bust over flags and arms, along with designs of either seated Liberty or a flying angel strewing flowers or a helmeted woman offering a baby to God as represented by a radiant cross in the sky. Another design used in this mix shows just the date April 4, 1855, plus one final issue with that date mixed with a standing helmeted woman. The significance of April 4 is unknown (at least to me), as it is neither Córdova's transmission date nor birthday.



30) **1856 Potosí—Burnett 76 and 77**



These medals in 2-soles and 1-sol sizes commemorate the first anniversary of Córdova's accession and universally feature a seated woman presenting the sash of office on one side and the open-book Constitution within flags on the other side. The fact that Córdova celebrated his first anniversary tells you something about his presidency, which was effectively an extension of the despotic and increasingly challenged regime of Belzu.

31) **1856 La Paz—Burnett 78**

This renewal of operations at the La Paz mint consists of a single 1856-dated 1 sol with bust of Córdova on one side and PAZ on the other.

32) **1857 Potosí—Burnett 79**

Another 1-sol-only issue with a flying condor on one side and an angel in clouds placing a wreath on Córdova's head on the other. Córdova was finally run out of office and country by Linares in October of 1857.

33) **1857 La Paz—Burnett 80 through 82**

This issue, with legends indicating the La Paz mint, all in 1-sol size only, consists of two designs: one with an angel in clouds placing a wreath on Córdova's head (as for Potosí) on one side and a coat of arms on the other side, the other with a standing condor on one side and St. George and the Dragon on the other side.



Linares (1857-1861)

34) **1857 La Paz—Burnett 83**

Continuing the 1-sol-only issues is this new one from La Paz, featuring a facing bust of the new dictator Linares on one side and a standing Minerva on the other side.



35) **1860 Potosí—Burnett 84**

This rare one-off, presumably in the 1-sol size only, shows the coat of arms on one side and a wreath around a cap on the other side.

Achá (1861-1864)

36) **1861 Potosí—Burnett 85 and 86**

Marking the start of both a new president and a new denomination system, these medals made only in the ½-peso size show a bust of Achá on one side and standing Liberty on the other. The legends state "to the victor of San Juan," from either the people of Potosí (Burnett 85) or of Cochabamba (Burnett 86), but I cannot find any logical "San Juan" event to complete the reference.



37) 1863 Potosí—Burnett 87 and 88 and 131

A series of ¼-peso pieces (some without dates) showing the bust of Achá on one side (two different types, one with two different legends) and a small, flying condor over either the Constitution as a closed book (Potosí) or arms and armor and flags (Cochabamba).



38) 1863(?) Potosí—Burnett 132

A single issue, with a downward-flying dove (like the 1843 issues) above Achá's initials on one side and a sailing ship on other, in a size that has to be a ½ peso (Burnett and Fonrobert both call it a 1 sol), which technically could have been struck any time from 1861 to 1864, but given the explosion of medals from 1863 I feel this probably came from the same year.

Melgarejo (1864-1871)

39) 1864 Potosí—Burnett 89

A one-year type in just the ⅛-melgarejo size, signaling the change to yet another new denomination system, which continued in parallel with the boliviano system that began in the next year. Here is as good a place as any to compare these two denomination sets:

1 boliviano = 25 grams	1 melgarejo = 20 grams
½ boliviano = 12.5 grams	½ melgarejo = 10 grams
1/5 boliviano = 5 grams	¼ melgarejo = 5 grams
1/10 boliviano = 2.5 grams	⅛ melgarejo = 2.5 grams
1/20 boliviano = 1.25 grams	1/16 melgarejo = 1.25 grams

Note that the three lowest denominations are the same weight in both sets. As we shall see, that creates numismatic confusion as to which denomination system a given smaller piece belongs to, although of course in their time that made no difference for commerce.

40) 1865 and 1866 Potosí—Burnett 90 through 94

These are large medals in the 5-, 3 and 2-boliviano size, lauding either Melgarejo or his second-in-command (Secretary of State), Mariano Donato Muñoz, by simple inscription inside a wreath, with one of three designs known so far on the other side: large Liberty bust; standing Roman soldier; or sleeping angel surrounded by cherubs with BOLIVIA above and 1852 date below (clearly not struck in 1852, so that is a bit of a mystery for now). The Derman collection also had an 1865 piece of 5-boliviano size with cherubs on the front and a wreath on the back with a sentiment about love. Yet another known 5-boliviano-sized piece from 1866 shows a seated woman on one side and the Cerro de Potosí on the other side, the latter with tribute to "Jorje Oblitas." These are big pieces that hardly seem fit for circulation as coins, but the fact is that they were struck more or less in line with the denominations mentioned,



and many have reeded edges like coins.

41) 1865 Potosí—Burnett 95 through 100, 102, 103, 113

A complete series of melgarejo denominations (which I will now abbreviate as M) in sizes of 1, ½, ¼ and 1/16, each one with a different design on one side but universally with a left-facing bust of Melgarejo on the other, conjoined with a bust of his second-in-command Muñoz for all but the largest and smallest denominations (1M and 1/16M) and some ¼M. On the other side, the 1M shows the fineness and weight; the ½M and ¼M show AL VALOR Y AL TALENTO, with a legend referring to CANTERIA (which Doty points out refers to a place and not stonecutters). Note these three similar pieces are listed in Krause-Mishler and other coin references as actual coins and many are found worn to support this assertion. Also, as Doty points out, we see contemporary fakes of these pieces, whereas the rest of the monetary medals seem not to have suffered such ignominy. At some point, in any case, the design of the ¼M changed to a condor perched on an olive branch and a cornucopia on one side and just Melgarejo's head (no Muñoz) on the other (note Burnett refers to this last one as a 1/5 boliviano simply because the legends laud Muñoz instead, but the bust and flavor of the design clearly fit with the



rest of the ¼M pieces, the weight being the same either way). No ⅛M are known. The 1/16M (as well as a resurrection of the same design in 1868 for this denomination only, Burnett 113) show a cowering dragon under a sword, again with just the bust of Melgarejo on the other side.



42) **1865 Potosí—Burnett 101**



All of these are 1/10 bolivianos by size and theme, featuring a beehive on one side and national coat-of-arms on other side. As simple as this design sounds, Burnett was able to locate eight different varieties depending on how many bees were flying versus resting on the hive, and which directions the bees were facing.

43) **1866 Potosí—Burnett 104**

Just when you thought you could trust that the bust of Melgarejo meant a 1-melgarejo coin (or one of its fractions), here comes this 1-boliviano piece with Melgarejo's military bust but with the legend lauding his secretary Muñoz, the other side showing the Bolivian coat of arms, with both dates 1865 and 1866 shown as the tenure of Muñoz.

44) **1866 Potosí—Burnett 105**

Similar to the 1865 ½-melgarejo pieces (but in an in-between size of 32mm and 17 to 19 grams) with busts of Melgarejo and Muñoz together (Burnett 96) but with the legend referencing Viacha (a town outside La Paz) and the date January 24, 1866, the other side a resurrection of the 1850 Hercules and Hydra design (Burnett 31).



45) **1866 Potosí—Burnett 106**

Another one-off with bust of Melgarejo (alone), this time in the ¼-melgarejo size, with the Bolivian arms on the other side and legends referring to the Peruvian President (Colonel) Prado and his repelling of a Spanish re-invasion in the May 2, 1866, Battle of Callao.

46) **1867 Potosí—Burnett 107 and 109**

Yet another single-size issue with Melgarejo's bust, this in the ½-boliviano size (Burnett calls it a ¼ melgarejo, but the weight is 13.5 grams and the diameter is 30mm), but also made in gold, which would constitute a 4 soles, the other side showing the Cerro de Potosí and the legends referring to Melgarejo's visit to Potosí on December 20, 1867.

47) **1867 La Paz—Burnett 108**

This is a big medal, 5 melgarejos by weight, with high-relief bust of Melgarejo on one side and the other side pegging the issue to La Paz and thematically to the areas of science and industry, with date February 7, 1867.

48) **1868 Potosí—Burnett 110 through 112**

These two pieces in the fractional ¼- and ⅛-melgarejo (or 1/5- and 1/10-boliviano) sizes make reference to the new Constitution of December 24-25, 1868 (as the typical open book on the smaller piece) on one side and Melgarejo's usual bust on the other side, with reference to the town of Tarata (near Cochabamba) on the larger piece.

49) **1869 Potosí—Burnett 114**

This one-off in gold (1-scudo size) is the famous "birthday issue" showing Melgarejo's bust on one side and the date March 28 (his birthday) on the other, with legends to the effect of "from Potosí to His Excellency on his birthday," in modern terms basically what we would call a "birthday card" to the dictator!

50) **1869 Potosí—Burnett 115 through 121**



The final medals struck under Melgarejo were these less-artistic tributes to the first steam-powered minting at Potosí, struck in a range of sizes that did not fit neatly into Burnett's system of denominations: a massive "5 melgarejos" (more like a 5 bolivianos, with weight around 125 grams); the next about half that size that Burnett calls "3 melgarejos" (65 grams); then a "1/3 melgarejo" (9-10 grams, but smaller in diameter than the previous ½ melgarejos); and finally a "1/8 melgarejo" (could equally be a 1/10 boliviano); with gold also in the two middle sizes (their denominations even more indeterminate). They all show the bust of Melgarejo on one side and plain wording on the other.

Daza (1876-1879)

51) 1879 Potosí—Burnett 123

The need for monetary medals apparently dropped for ten years until the new dictator Daza (acknowledged as Bolivia's last caudillo) authorized this 20-centavos series in 1879 with his bust on one side and a coat of arms on the other. Significantly, the legend on these pieces actually says "20 CS" for the denomination. Not surprisingly, these are listed in Krause-Mishler and other references as actual coins, despite the fact that they circulated alongside other "regular issue" 20 centavos without Daza's bust.

52) 1879 La Paz—Burnett 122

This one last issue must be included among the Bolivian monetary medals series, a 12mm gold piece (1 scudo) with a llama over the date on one side and the coat of arms of the city of La Paz on the other. Unlike the silver from Potosí, there is no denomination, and it is not found in coin books... but it should be.

How to Collect the Bolivian Monetary Medals

One of the best features of this series is that almost none of the 52 types outlined above is restrictively rare. In fact, many types are quite common. The challenge is to find choice pieces, as they were all generally well used (with the exception of the larger-than-dollar sizes). Most specimens are holed, as a rule, and we even see a fair number with graffiti or merchant marks.

If you are like Burnett, you will strive to find and catalog new varieties, which typically means new dies of already-cataloged designs, but also there will be mulings and maybe the occasional unknown design. In that regard the monetary medals are not like coins, which are more regular and predictable, and to most collectors that just means more fun.

I will close with one more plea to NGC and Krause-Mishler to certify and catalog these pieces as coins, even if just the peso size down, as there is no question they were made to be and used as coins. More relevant is the fact that they are bought and sold and collected as such.

Bibliography

- Bosco, Paul. "The Silver Proclamation Coinage of the Bolivian Republic," *Numismatic Quarterly* (December 1980)
- Burnett, Jr., LTC Davis. *Bolivian Proclamation Coinage* (1987)
- Derman, Alberto "Coco." *The Alberto "Coco" Derman Collection of Potosí Related Medals* (presented by Cayon auctions, Madrid, December 2007)
- Doty, R.G. "The Bolivian Monetary Medal," Vol. 25 of the *Museum Notes of the American Numismatic Society* (1980)
- Doty, R.G. "The Bolivian Monetary Medal," Vol. I No 1 of the *New England Journal of Numismatics* (Summer 1986)
- Flatt, Horace. *The Coins of Independent Peru, Vol. III, Bolivian Moneda Feble* (1994)
- Fonrobert, Jules. *Collection of Overseas Coins and Medals* (presented by Adolph Weyl, Berlin, 1878)
- Krause, Chet and Clifford Mishler. *Standard Catalog of World Coins* (various editions).
- Lill III, George. "Caudillism as Demonstrated by Bolivian Propaganda Coinage," presentation for the Chicago Coin Club (1986)
- Seppa, Dale and Alfredo Almanzar, *The Coins of Bolivia, 1820-1970* (1970)
- Watters, C.A. *Coins and Medals of Bolivia, from the Establishment of the Republic to the Present Time* (Liverpool, UK, 1876)