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Notes and Comments

The Copper Coinage of the Cabildo of Manila

CELESTINA P. BONCAN

The coinage of a society can be regarded as one of the ways in which it expresses itself and satisfies one of its primary needs, that of providing a mechanism for the exchange and evaluation of commodities and services. This note is a study of the coinage which the *Cabildo* of Manila adopted when a nascent monetary crisis in the colony threatened its trade. As a primary source of evidence of community life, coinage is a useful indicator of the social and economic forces which affected and influenced the city. It provides historical data for a heretofore unknown crisis in the municipal life of early Spanish Manila.

As in all other cities founded in the Indies, trade was the life of early Spanish Manila. Trade assured the city population of abundant goods and available services and earned income for the city to render important municipal services. At the center of this urban corporate complex was the Cabildo or Municipal Council which controlled all aspects of trade.

In the first few decades of Spanish rule, the great distance from the Peninsula, the absence of rich gold and silver mines, and the general poverty of the islands made the Philippines a dismal failure to Spain. Moreover, the preoccupation of the Superior Government with matters of defense and the propagation of the Faith forced it to neglect the development of a strong colonial economy. To insure the economic survival of the Philippines and its

This note is part of the author's masteral thesis on the monetary crisis of the Philippines during the Spanish colonial period.

continued domination as an integral part of the Spanish seaborne empire, Spain charged its fiscal program to Mexico. Thus, the trade between Manila and the south China coast was extended into an overseas enterprise, across the Pacific, aboard the galleons of Manila which finally laid anchor at Acapulco. It became the colony's sole commercial activity.

The Manila-Acapulco traffic was both a commerce and a program of aid. The trade earned income by means of a customs tax on the merchandise and the freight charges of the ships. The proceeds were charged to the Philippines as the aid of the Crown. It bought provisions for the colony, paid salaries and other miscellaneous expenses, and assured a revolving capital in the colony. It brought Mexican money to the Philippines. Mexican *reales* were made from crudely cast bars of refined silver, heated and hand-hammered between crudely engraved dies, and later stamped and divided into monetary units. In their final form, they appeared as ingots.¹ Following the introduction of the Spanish cash-based mode of consumption and exchange, the Mexican *real* became the colony's monetary standard.

THE MONETARY CRISIS

Under the viceregal machinery, the Castilian monetary system faltered. Although money from the Peninsula did arrive in the colony, this was never plentiful nor enforced. On the other hand, there was no initiative to establish a distinct money for the Philippines, peculiar to its own needs, for the Philippines was practically governed as a province of Mexico. More important, the logistics of establishing a mint in the Philippines, the tremendous costs involved in transporting machines and skilled personnel, the difficulties in maintaining the standards and security of a mint so far away from Mexico, and most especially, the scarcity of high-grade gold and silver negated this option. The Mexican reales were most appreciated in the colony's external trade – the traffic with China and India.² In the interior however, Mexican money was scarce and inconveniently large-denominated. The big 4 and 8 real denominations were burdensome because they could not be

1. Geo Vogt, "Standard Catalog of Mexican Coins, Paper Money and Medals," p. 21.

2. Guillaume Joseph Le Gentil de la Galaisiere, *A Voyage to the Indian Seas* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1964), p. 148.

used in the retail trade of the people.³ Amidst the difficulties with the reales, Manila, where local trade was at its greatest extent, and therefore, most affected, checked the ill effects of the nascent monetary crisis by minting its own money.

One of the powers granted by Miguel Lopez de Legazpi to the first Cabildo of Manila⁴ was the authority to regulate the trade of the city.⁵ The proviso for trade regulation empowered the Cabildo to enact municipal ordinances relating to finance, to organize income-earning enterprises, to administer city revenues, and to supervise local market prices. Yet, principal to the success of municipal trade was a viable monetary system. In this respect, it was logical that in order to protect its trade, the Cabildo minted small-change coins for the city.

The Cabildo minted small metal bars made of cast copper. These were called *barrillas*, derived from the word *barretas* (metal bars), thus literally small metal bars.⁶ Later, they came in round cast uniface and diface ingots. Despite the entry of the round variety, the term *barilla* was retained.

The audacity of the Cabildo to mint small-change copper coins contradicted the monetary jurisdiction of Mexico over the Philippines.⁷ However, the Superior Government never recognized them to be legal and circulating throughout the colony. Instead, it considered them only as a municipal or token money of the city. The stamp of the coat-of-arms of Manila⁸ expressly defined them as the sole franchise of the city. First, Manila was the minting authority. Second, they could only circulate within the jurisdiction of Manila – inside the city walls, the province of Tondo, the port of Cavite, and all the towns and villages five leagues roundabout.⁹ Third, they were vested only with the force and

3. Among the Tagalas, the *salapi*, which was the most common term for money, was divided into two *cahatis*, the *cahatis* into *seycapatas*, the *seycapatas* into two *seycavalos*, the *seycavalos* into two *calatios*, and the *calatios* into two *cutings*. Juan Francisco de San Antonio, *The Philippine Chronicles of Fray San Antonio* (Manila: The Historical Conservation Society, 1977, p. 164).

4. The members were the following: Juan Pacheco Maldonado, Alonso Cepeda, Hernando Lopez, Juan Lopez Salgado, Juan de Moron, Francisco de Herrera, Pedro de Herrera, Francisco de Leon, Martin Gutierrez, Mateo Brezon, Juan Martinez de Arriaran, Alberto Orozco, San Juan de Aguirre, Luis Enriquez, Bartolome Zorita, Diego Vibar Melgarejo.

5. "Deed of Foundation of the City of Manila," in *The Christianization of the Philippines* (Manila: The Historical Conservation Society, 1965), p. 337-338.

6. Humberto Burzio, *Diccionario de la Moneda Hispano-Americano*, p. 54.

7. *Recopilacion de las Leyes de los Reinos de las Indias*, Book 4 Title 23 Law v.

8. Royal Cedula of March 20, 1596.

9. Royal Cedula of December 8, 1638.

guarantee of the Cabildo of Manila.

This author has compiled two categories of evidence of copper coinage in Manila during the greater part of the Spanish colonial period. These sources are in part documentary and in part material, i.e. extant specimens of the coins themselves.

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

On 26 January 1599 the *Audiencia* and Chancellery of Manila passed an Ordinance which cautioned the city against the circulation of counterfeit gold, silver and base metal money.¹⁰ The document however does not qualitatively classify "the money of base metal" as the city's mintage. It could not have been of Mexican origin since Mexico did not mint copper coins, either for the Viceroyalty or the Indies, until 1814.¹¹ Peninsular copper coins were called *maravedises*. Alloys of copper coins were called *vellon*. Thus, it may be indirectly inferred that this unknown base metal money, freely circulating and legal in Manila, must have been the city's mintage.

The *Cedula* of Philip IV dated 3 September 1633 gives the first direct evidence of the existence of municipal mintage in Manila. Philip IV ordered Governor-General Lorenzo de Olaso (1632-1633) to study a petition earlier sent by the Cabildo of Manila for a license to mint coins for the colony. They would be made of an alloy of gold, silver and other metals and would only be used for general internal circulation.¹² From this petition the following can be deduced. First, it is the earliest evidence that the Cabildo must already have had a mint. Second, the small-change copper coins of Manila must have already greatly contributed to the growth of the city trade, which success it was confident could be duplicated on a colonial scale. Third, it is the earliest evidence that the Cabildo elevated to the Crown its intentions to transcend its limitation as a municipal mint and thus acquire the preeminence of a colonial mint.

The value of small-change coins in the retail market can be quantified by the amount of goods and services which they

10. Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson, *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898* (Manila: Cacho Hermanos, 1973), vol. II, pp. 57-58.

11. C.H. Haring, *The Spanish Empire in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 292.

12. "Carta de Ciudad de Manila al Rey," 15 de Julio de 1658.

bought or made available. The purchasing power of the barrillas of Manila is adequately proven by the *arancel*. The arancel was a codified list of goods sold in the city markets and their corresponding prices.¹³ It was formulated by the Cabildo to regulate prices and to protect the consumers. The arancel of 1647¹⁴ is the earliest found by this author. Besides enumerating the goods offered by the city markets in this year and their cost, the arancel is also important for two other reasons. It is the earliest document to mention the name of the Cabildo's small-change copper coins. It proves that the barrillas existed and were used in the city since a number of goods could be bought by them. The following provisions, e.g., could be bought for one barrilla — eight tomatoes, two lettuce, eight eggplants, twelve green onions, twelve green garlic, four small cucumbers, four lemons, and two large cucumbers.

On 15 July 1658 the Cabildo again wrote to Philip IV to renew its petition for a license to mint coins for the colony. According to the Cabildo, the great trade cities and kingdoms in the region, like Goa, Macassar, and Siam, all minted coins for internal circulation.¹⁵

On 20 March 1660 Philip IV issued a cedula to Governor-General Sabiniano Manrique de Lara (1653-63). Essentially, the Crown recognized the colony's difficulties with the reales. At the same time, it acknowledged the good intentions of the Cabildo to provide relief through the minting of such coins. By this cedula Philip IV ordered Governor Manrique de Lara to convene a council together with the *Hacienda* to discuss the feasibility of granting minting powers for the entire colony to the Cabildo.¹⁶

On 4 February 1734 the Cabildo petitioned Governor-General Fernando Valdes Tamon (1729-39) to issue an edict warning the city populace that counterfeits of the city Cabildo's coinages were circulating.¹⁷ It is the first evidence of counterfeiting of the copper coins on a scale large enough to warrant the intervention of the Superior Government. It is also the first evidence that aside

13. *Recopilacion*, Book 4 Title 9 Law xxij.

14. It was compiled by *sargento mayor* Marcos Zapata, Mayor-in-Ordinary of Manila, and by capitan Diego de Morales, an alderman, January 11, 1647.

15. "Carta de Ciudad de Manila al Rey," 15 de Julio de 1658.

16. Royal Cedula of March 20, 1660.

17. "Bando del Sor. Dn. Fernando Valdes Tamon para que no corran mas barrillas y condines que las fabricadas por este Ayuntamiento" 4 de Febrero de 1734.

from the barrillas, the Cabildo also minted one other kind of copper coin called *condin*, which was likewise counterfeited.

On 22 June 1764 Simon de Anda y Salazar, interim Governor-General during the British invasion of Manila (1762-64), sent a letter to Charles III in which he enumerated the measures which he adopted during the war. In the province of Pampanga, he permitted the circulation of the barrillas which the Cabildo of Manila minted, although Pampanga was well beyond the jurisdiction of Manila. However, the Sangley traders introduced counterfeits of these, thus compelling him to prohibit altogether their circulation.¹⁸

On 25 June 1764, one month after hostilities with the British officially ended, the Cabildo convened a council to discuss a plan to mint new barrillas. Permission was granted by the Fiscal, Francisco Leandro de Viana. In March of the following year, new barrillas in the amount of 5,000 *pesos* were minted. The Council of Local Government, Justice and Order of the city proclaimed the legality of the new coins and ordered their immediate circulation.¹⁹ On 29 July 1766 the Cabildo sent a letter to Charles III, enclosed two samples of the new coins, and petitioned for the license to mint the same kind of coins for the provinces of Bulacan, Taal, Pampanga, Laguna de Bay, Pangasinan, Ilocos and Cagayan.²⁰

On 19 December 1769 Charles III issued a *cedula* to Governor-General Jose Raon (1765-70), informing him that he approved the petition of the Cabildo. It could mint the same kind of coin for the said provinces, although under certain conditions. The Audiencia would supervise the minting operations and examine all coins minted. The coins should carry the royal coat-of-arms, instead of the seal of Manila.²¹

On 18 March 1771 minting of the new coins started. Completed in the same year, the coins passed to the Audiencia for examination. On 7 January 1773 it approved the new coins and ordered the immediate recall and demonetization of the 1766 barrillas. The new coins were called *cuartos*. Samples were sent to Spain for approval. A *cedula* issued on 10 October 1777 ap-

18. Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, vol. 49, p. 265.

19. *Ibid.*, 50:28.

20. Royal *Cedula* of December 19, 1769.

21. *Ibid.*

proved the minting, the marks and dies of the new coins and ordered their immediate distribution as legal and current money.

EXTANT SPECIMENS

To corroborate the above-mentioned documentary evidence of municipal copper coinage in Manila, there are extant specimens of these coins.

The earliest is the uniface 1728 barilla. Around its outer edge is the inscription BARRILLA ANO DE 1728. At the center is the coat-of-arms of Manila.

The 1733 barrilla is a diface. On its obverse, on the outer edge, is the inscription ANO DE 1733. At the center is the "AB" monogram. On the reverse is the coat-of-arms of Manila. This specimen is a counterfeit because it is made of lead. It coincides with the 1734 Memorandum of the cabildo denouncing the counterfeiting of its coinages.

The 1743 barrilla is a diface. On the obverse, on the outer edge, is the inscription ANO DE 1743. On the reverse is the coat-of-arms of Manila. It is also made of lead, thus a counterfeit.

The 1766 barrilla is a diface and made of copper. On the obverse, on the outer edge, is the inscription CIUDAD.D.MAN. 1766. At the center circle there is a crown on top and a castle below. On the reverse, within a wide-crowned shield is a sea-lion holding a sword. The shield divides a "BA" monogram and the figure 1.²²

CONCLUSION

The municipal experiment on copper coinage was a response of the Cabildo of Manila to the colonial monetary crisis of scarce small-change coins. The barrillas became an asset to the city trade and a service to the greater number of the people. Although they contradicted the principle of seigniorage which only the Crown exercised, or delegated, as in the case of Mexico, they did solve the city's monetary crisis of scarce small-change coins.

22. Aldo Basso, *Coins, Medals and Tokens of the Philippines, 1728-1974* (Quezon City: Bookman Printing House, 1975), pp. 2-5.