

Guadeloupe, 1802 Issue of 4 & 1 Escalin Cut Countermarked Coins - Copies and The Modern Makers Mistake

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Guadeloupe was one of a number of islands where occupation and control changed several times between British and French administrations. In common with nearly all the island colonies Guadeloupe suffered from a lack of small denomination coinage with which to conduct day to day marketplace transactions.

Although the French did produce some coinage for their colonies, they were the limited 15 and 5 Sol coins dated 1670 and then different copper issues at various times into the 18th Century. While these half-penny size copper coins were used in French North American, for some reason they were not generally used or wanted in the French West Indies. The islanders preferred the smaller various billon Sous (which were extensively counterfeited in Birmingham and shipped in huge quantities to the West Indies) where they circulated on not just the French islands but also those islands under British and Dutch control.

It was during a long period under French administration, 1763 to early 1810 (the British briefly occupied Guadeloupe in 1794), that in 1802 Guadeloupe followed the action taken on most of the British islands to cut and countermark Spanish-American dollars (8 Reale coins) into segments with specified values. Indeed, this was the first time 8 Reale coins were cut and countermarked under French administration in all of the West Indies. (It can be noted that the only other time 8 Reale coins were cut under French administration also occurred on Guadeloupe prior to 1810 and this action is referenced in the British Decree of May 1811 when a large comprehensive British issue of cut and countermarked dollar segments was authorised.)

In November 1802, Rear Admiral Lacrosse, Captain General, etc., Prefect of Guadeloupe and Dependencies, authorised a resolution to cut 2000 Dollars (Spanish-American 8 Reale coins) into 9 parts. The cutting style is most unusual in that an octagonal centre segment, equal in value to one-third of the dollar (Four Escalins) was removed and the resulting ring was cut into 8 segments with a value of One Escalin each. The centre segment was stamped



Figure 1- Genuine Example

4E/RF and the One Escalin segments were stamped RF (Fig. 1). These countermarks were applied incuse.

All images are from the author's collection and are not depicted at actual size.

Incuse countermarks can be an identification challenge in that the force of striking and any variance from perpendicular relative to the surface of the host coin can have an effect on the appearance of the resulting countermark. In some cases, countermarks from the same punch could be mistaken for two different punches.

Presumably at some point, perhaps only a short time later, there must have been a very effective official recall of these coins as the 4 Escalin segment is today a lost coin with no genuine specimens known to have survived, however, there are quite a number of modern fakes (Fig. 2). The 1 Escalin segment is today an extremely rare coin (the author is only aware of 6 or 7 specimens and 3 of these are in an intuitional collection. However, modern fakes, or perhaps as readers will see below, 'copies' might be an alternative term, are common (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2, modern copy (c. 1889)



Fig. 3, modern copy (c.1889)

It is at this point that I must acknowledge information previously unknown to me, recently published by Jerome Jambu¹. It appears that Ernest Zay, author of *Histoire Monetaire des Colonies Francaises*,² first published in 1892, 'produced' these 4 Escalin and 1 Escalin copies, along with some other countermarked series from the West Indies, as 'educational' pieces in conjunction with the Universal Exhibition held in 1889 in Paris. I was aware that E. Zay purchased some George III Sixpence and Shilling coins, dated 1787, from A. H. Baldwin &

¹ Jambu, Jerome, Catalogue Des Monnaies Americaines, Bibliotheque nationale de France, CMA 1, 2021

² Zay, E., Histoire Monetaire des Colonies Francaises, Paris, 1892

Sons and later offered some of these coins back to Baldwins countermarked with the 'crowned G' stamps purporting to be issued by the British Administration on Guadeloupe in 1811. Regrettably, these educational cut and countermarked segments were not identified as copies and they have entered the numismatic marketplace and for many years they have been passed off as original contemporary examples causing much confusion. Further confusion was created in that some of these 'educational copies' (including some concoctions) were used to illustrate Zay's 1892 book.

The simple incuse RF countermark begged the question: What was genuine and what was fake. Examination based on the diagnostics of the segments; looking at evidence of genuine circulation wear, or the lack of, and toning, experienced students of the series were actually quite sure which was which, but was there any proof to support this conclusion?

Finally, a 'smoking gun' was discovered that identified the fake stamp. On the rather flattened obverse side of one of the suspect segments (the countermark was applied to the reverse of the host coin) the letters 'DIN' could be discerned (Fig. 4). On a Spanish-American 8 Reale coin DIN could only be part of FERDINAND VII and thus the host coin could not date prior to 1808 and as such at least 6 years too late to been a used for this issue. Thus, this particular RF stamp, which accounts for the vast majority of the modern copies (or fakes if you prefer), could now be confirmed as a copy and it is the same RF stamp that appears on the larger 4E/RF copy pieces (Fig. 2).



Fig. 4, (obverse of Fig 3) showing partial legend DIN

I have to believe that Mr Zay viewed his educational copies as useful learning aids and probably realised a modest profit from his efforts, but I can't reject the thought that some will have benefited from a numismatic profit as these copies entered into the hands of collectors.

