



Collecting Complexity

A Quandary of Quetzals - Part 2



There are still an awful lot of Quetzals out there. In Part one I talked about the iconic or classic Quetzal issues, but mentioned that there was another and rather larger series of designs based on the national coat of arms. These are usually referred to as the “National Emblem” design, but whilst there is a distinct and very interesting series with this name, I would argue that it can be widened to include a number of other design types whose central feature remains the same coat of arms.

Guatemala adopted its coat of arms in 1871. As you can see from figure 1, it consists of an array of laurels symbolising victory, with a Quetzal above a scroll giving the date of independence. The bird symbolises liberty and the weaponry is a reference to the country’s armed struggle for liberation from Spain. The design also forms the centrepiece of the national blue, white and blue tricolour flag.



Fig.1 - Guatemalan Coat of Arms

In collecting terms, this is a much larger and far more complex group of stamps than the Classic Quetzal. I have calculated that across all the design types that use the national emblem - at least 11 designs in all - 118 individual stamps were issued. That’s estimated as being nearly 40% of all Guatemalan stamps that contain the Quetzal in some form. Of these, 57 are the SG Type 9 National Emblem design - over 48% of all those issues with the coat of arms and nearly a fifth of all issues that contain the Quetzal. Overall, this is a significant and important grouping. It is also a rich source of complexities.

But first, a toe in the water, an introduction. The earliest example of the national emblem on stamps is SG Type 2, first issued in July 1872 with just two values, the 4 Real violet and 1 Pesos Orange yellow (SG 5 and 6). See figure 2 below.



Fig.2 - 1872 4r & 1p issues

Their colouring is perhaps on the pale side, but the design is nevertheless tidy and workman-like and the emblem with Quetzal within a shield quite distinct. These are the only issues with this design.

But they were then followed by the SG Type 9 in July 1886 and this is the design that I want to really focus upon. It's another "classic" issue, and millions were produced. It initially came with "eleven" values between 1 and 200 cents and examples are provided in figure 3 below.



Fig.3 - 1886 (Type 9) National Emblem

I have deliberately placed the number issued in apostrophes because my old SG simplified gives twelve values with an additional 6c mauve! Gibbons also refers to them as, "Arms of Guatemala." Scott as "National Emblem," so it starts to become messy here. I prefer to follow Scott, which is always excellent and anyway much stronger on the America's. Table 1 below is to indicate the differences.

Table. 1 - 1886 1st (Litho) National Emblem Issues

Value	Scott	Stanley Gibbons
1c	Blue	Blue
2c	Brown	Brown
5c	Violet	Violet
6c	NONE	Mauve (SG47)
10c	Red	Red
20c	Light green	Green
25c	Orange	Orange
50c	Olive green	Olive
75c	Rose	Red
100c	Reddish brown	Brown
150c	Dark blue	Blue
200c	Orange yellow	Yellow

We have barely got going and already the fun has started. As well as being a large, indeed, the largest Quetzal design group, it is also the one with the most complexities as it includes some re-issues as well as a considerable number of overprints and surcharges.

For “Guatemalistas” like myself, the overprints are usually referred to as “Provisionals,” and the country has a rich history of them - for both Quetzal and non-Quetzal issues. Indeed, they are an area of considerable study in themselves.

One surcharge appeared in November 1886. This is a 1 cent on the 2 cent brown and it is overprinted “PROVISIONAL 1886. 1 UN CENTAVO.” Quite straightforward. But then a month later and in subsequent years until 1894/5 a number of the original Type 9’s were re-printed and re-issued without overprints and without date indicators. I say a number because there is some confusion here. William Steiner in an article on Guatemala stamps gives eight for the second issue, but doesn’t list them. I think it may be a typo. Stampworld’s Scott based free catalogue suggests it is seven and does list them. Oh, and the SG simplified - rather true to form - gives nothing at all! Table 2 below gives the Stampworld listing.

Table.2 - 1886/95 2nd (Recess) Issues

Values	Colours
1c	Blue
2c	Brown
5c	Violet
6c	Purple
10c	Red
20c	Green
25c	Reddish orange

Note the inclusion of the 6 cents purple which explains why the SG simplified gives a 6c “mauve” for the original issues. They have just lumped them altogether. However, the value range this time is certainly reduced with nothing over 25 cents. And with the exception of the 6c, also observe the similarity of colours between the two editions. Oh, dear. So apart from the 6 cent and high values which are unique, how do we tell which is which?

The 1c, 2c, 5c, 10c, 20c and 25c are very similar to look at and, as Steiner has acknowledged, “the two issues can be confused.” Indeed. However, the 1st edition was printed Litho and the second Recess-engraved, so it is possible, with experience, to determine the editions by shade and closer examinations. We have to become technical at this point.

In shorthand, the two issues are normally referred to as either the “Litho’s” or the “Engraved.” Helpfully, the normally trustworthy Scott says that the Recess-engraved issues are sharper, crisper. I am less sure about that having struggled with the hundreds of these issues I own, but they do point out that the top four lines of the design are heavier while the Litho lines are more uniform. This can be seen below - figure 4 is printed Litho, while figure 5 is Recess-engraved.



Fig.4 - 1886 1st Issue Litho



Fig.5 - 1886/95 2nd Issue Recess-engraved

I understand that this works best for the 1c blue and 2c brown but that it is less clear with the other values. However, there are other features to look for as well. With the 5 cent violet the figures of the value differ between printings. The Litho “5” tends to be narrower as if it has been pulled from top to bottom. The Recess-engraved is plumper. I have found this to be a more reliable indicator.

In figure 6 below, the stamp on the left is Litho, while both the middle and right hand stamps are both Recess-engraved. See how different the “5’s” are.



Fig.6 - 5 Cent Issue distinctions

For the 10 cent red, the Litho version has the one and the zero closer together than is found in the Recess-engraved printing. With the 20 and 25 cent stamps, to the right of the word “CENTAVOS” there is a slight outer frame line after the let “S.” See figures 7 and 8 below.



Fig.7 - 25c Litho printing



Fig.8 - 25c Recess-engraved printing

I could go on as this is a fascinating if tricky area for those who like to play stamp detective, but there is not space here. In any case, Steiner suggests a wonderful quick test to determine whether an issue is Litho or Recess-engraved. You place some aluminium foil over the stamps with them face upwards. Gently rub on the top of the foil with a pencil eraser until you can see the perforated outline. If there is an image of the stamp design on the foil it is Recess-engraved; if not, it’s Litho. I’ve not tried it, but he claims that it never fails. Given the impress nature of Recess-engraved it certainly makes sense.

There is also a quick rule of thumb in that any value over 25 cents has to be Litho printed as they only occur with the first (July) edition. As the 6 cents was introduced in the second (November) edition it has to be recess engraved. Simple.

There was a further issue of the design between 1900 and 1902, also recess-engraved, and on this occasion my catalogue sources agree on the number being nine, including two 20 cents and two 25 cents. The quibbles are with the colours with Scott being perhaps more precise. This time the colours for each value differ from the previous issues so there should be no further confusion. Table 3 gives the new selection of colours and compares with the previous array. Again, I have used the Scott descriptions.

Table.3 - Colour Comparisons 1900-2 with 1886

Values	1900-1902 Issues	1886 2 nd Issues
1c	Dark green	Blue
2c	Red	Brown
5c	Dark blue	Violet
6c	Light green	Purple
10c	Olive brown	Red
20c	Violet	Green
20c	Olive brown	NONE
25c	Yellow	Reddish orange
25c	Bluish green	NONE

There are shades or variations in colour within each of the three editions, and this can make things quite “interesting” for those who like collecting complexity. You probably noticed it with figure 6 above. So a little more on this later.

Still with me? I make that 27 basic stamps for all three editions without considering varieties, and we haven’t finished yet as there are still the overprints and surcharged issues to describe. As we began to see with the classical Quetzal design, Guatemala is a rich source for overprints, and this design is no exception. Indeed, there are more overprints in total than there are original issues, so I shall step through them chronologically but, hopefully, keeping it straightforward.

There are eight series of overprints with surcharges. The first was issued in November 1886, so at the same time as the engraved edition. It’s a 1 cent overprinted on the 2 cent brown and clearly marked: “PROVISIONAL 1886 1 UN CENTAVO.” See figure 9. A set of five more overprints followed eight years later in 1894. These are distinctly marked: “1894” followed by a simple bar and then “2 CENTAVOS.” An example is provided as figure 10, but a warning, there are varieties with the year as either 12mm or 14mm wide. You can have fun just collecting the varieties!

The following year there is a further surcharged issue, a 1 cent on a 5 cent violet but, just to make things interesting and even more fun, overprinted with at least two varieties: “1895 - 1 CENTAVO” and, “1 CENTAVO - 1895.” Scott gives the first variant as Type V and the second as Type W. An example of Type W is shown in figure 11. And I say “at least two varieties,” because in addition the overprint colour is not always red!



Fig.9 - 1886 O/pt



Fig.10 - 1894 O/pt



Fig.11 - 1895 “W” O/pt

There then followed a large overprinted edition in 1898, eleven stamps in all marked: “1898” followed by a bar and then the value in figures and lower case lettering. The surcharge is printed in either red or black. Examples are given below as figure 12.



Fig.12 - Examples of 1898 Overprints & Surcharges

Between 1899 and 1901 five more overprints appeared. For 1899 there is a further 1 cent on 5 cent violet, marked: "UN 1 Centavo 1899." Then in 1900 there is a 1 cent on 10 cent red overprinted as "1900 1 CENTAVO," followed in 1901 by three overprints, a 1 cent on 20 cent dark green, a 1 cent on 25 cent reddish orange and finally a 2 cent on 20 cent dark green, all marked "1901" with the value in figures and lettering and the original value obscured with small lines. Examples of the 1900 and 1901 issues are provided as figures 13 and 14 below.



Fig.13 - 1900 O/pt



Fig.14 - 1901 O/pt

Finally - yes, we are nearly there - eight overprint issues appeared in 1903, all surcharged with 25 cents on a number of different original values. These are marked: "1903 25 CENTAVOS." For examples, see figure 15 below.



Fig.15 - 1903 25c O/pts examples

And that was the last outing for this design as a whole. It doesn't appear again after 1903. That's thirty overprinted issues in total. Add these to the 27 from the three original editions and that gives you a total of 57 for this national emblem design, or 58 with the 1895 overprint variety or, in reality, many, many more with the other varieties that can be found. The overprints can be complex and a wide hunting ground for variations and errors.

In contrast, the originals have relatively few identified errors, although various colour shades and off-centring can make collecting them even more interesting. Table 4 below is an attempt to summarise where errors and variations can be found in the two 1886 original printings.

Table.4 - 1886 Editions Colour Variations and Errors

Year	Printing	Value	Colour	Error/Varieties
1886 (July)	Litho print	10c	Vermilion	Various shades
		50c	Olive green	“TE” on part of country names partially obscured
		200c	Orange yellow	Final zero on 200 partially obscured to look like “207”
1886 (Nov)	Recess- Engraved	1c	Blue	Various shades
		2c	Brown	Yellowish to brown shades
		5c	Violet	Various shades
		10c	Red	Various shades

Whilst the Type 9 design ended here, the national emblem image with the Quetzal continued with other subsequent issues. Including “Officials” and the use of fiscal stamps, I have found at least another seven design types issued between 1898 and 1970. This amounts to a further 40 stamps. There is no longer space here to describe them or the overprinted surcharges they include, but they are all wonderful issues, highly desirable and with their own degrees of complexity. Figure 16 below is just a small sample.



Fig.16 - 1902 (left) & 1918 (right) National Symbols

What I have not touched on here are the fakes. A whole array of Guatemalan early issues from the first ones and into the first few decades of the 1900’s were subject to often quite sophisticated forgeries. They are a collector’s minefield in themselves. If you own a reasonable number of Quetzals, there is a very good chance some of them are forged.

And what I have also not mentioned are the cancellations, particularly the variety of cork cancels that are found with a large number of the Litho and Recess-engraved from the 1880’s up to 1910 or thereabouts. There are many hundreds of them - at least 550 catalogued - and are a study in themselves and perhaps an article for another day.

As we have seen, there are a large number of Guatemalan stamps with the Resplendent Quetzal. If you ever wanted to bring your collecting to just one country or one bird or both, this is where you might focus your attention. You’ll be in a quandary over where and when to stop though.

Acknowledgements: The following sources were invaluable and are recommended reading:-

1. Guatemala Stamps - an article from Deep Blue - William Steiner.
2. Guatemala 1886 Quetzal & Train Litho and Recess-engraved Issues - Paper Heritage.
3. Introduction to Guatemala Philately - David Reitsema, ISGC.
4. Guatemala Stamps - Apfelbaum Inc. 2016
5. Guatemala Volume 1 - Roland Goodman (Ed) ISGC. 1969