



No.1 Quetzalitos

The New “Classic” Definitives

Introduction

Those of you who read my Quandary of Quetzal articles in Flight Magazine (September 2018) might recall in Part One my piece on the later “Classic Quetzal” issues. I now want to say something more about them.

These were the last outing of the bird on its classical Ionic column. Designated Type 5 in the SG catalogues, and issued between 1954 and 1987 they were better printed than their famous and much sought after predecessors, being issued on higher quality paper and improved gum, but also with a larger if sometimes confusing range of single colours.



Fig. 1 - First of the new Quetzalitos - 1954 1c Deep Ultramarine

I not so subtly hinted that there were some difficulties with these issues and since writing the original article I have spent some time studying them a little deeper and come to realise that, if anything, I understated those problems. In fact, by a large measure I don't think I did them justice. They can be daunting. The International Society of Guatemala Collectors (ISGC) has summarised the “new regulars,” or to use their Spanish equivalent, “Quetzalitos” as, and I quote, “problematic.” Frankly, I could not express it better. For a relatively modern series of issues you would expect them to be straightforward. They are not.

So, with this new series of articles I want to kick-off by focusing on just these stamps, sharing what I have now discovered and hopefully clarifying what makes them trickier to collect than you might have first thought.

The Background

Firstly, a little bit of history and context.

The Guatemalan Philatelic Society (Sociedad Filatelica de Guatemala) had been lobbying for some time for a new series of Quetzal stamps to honour and follow the dual colour classic issues of the early 1880's. This was initially accomplished to some extent in 1951 with the

small scale UPU souvenir sheet depicting a 1c stamp, but a proper new definitive series did not appear until three years later following an official decree in September 1954. And yes, stamps were only issued when the president authorised them

All the stamps issued were printed recess and were engraved by Arnoldo Chavarry for the Guatemalan Bureau of Engraving using the die from the UPU souvenir sheet stamp. As I remarked in my original article, they cannot be confused with the original “classics.” They have a marginally squarer format and are crisply printed on better quality papers. They are well centred and appear clean and tidy.

The Quetzal on column design has a number of differences in details from the original. Most notably there is a little more column showing than previously as well as some differences in the bird’s feathering. Additionally, the issues have an imprint below the design which reads, “T N DE GRABADOS EN ACERO GUATEMALA-CHY”.

The inner ring of the oval surrounding the Quetzal is simply lined and the values are in figures at the top with the currency is below written as, “CENTAVOS” without the value. The value figures are always in a circular scroll design, while the originals were either circular or rectangular. Finally, and most obviously the newer issues are single colour. A comparison of the new regulars and the original classic is provided in Figures 2 and 3 below.



Fig. 2 - 3c 1954-87 issue



Fig. 3 - 2c 1881 issue

Periods of Issuance

Initially there was just one issue, a 1c deep ultramarine, but this was then followed by further values and colours in subsequently years, although the next ones didn’t see the light of day until 1957 and then more into the early 1960’s.

As I have noted before, some catalogues tend to lump the issuing dates into one or sometimes two parcels, but in reality this is a gross over-simplification. It can be fairly said that there are indeed two and a half issuing periods; the first between 1954 and 1963, and then a second series - described as re-issues - between 1984 and 1987. Oh, and I’ll talk about the “half” later.

The first period of the new regulars is by far the more complicated and Roland Goodman for the ISGC emphasised that they provided a number of difficulties for classification. From a simple listing perspective twelve basic values were issued for 1954/1963. These are given in Table. 1 below.

Table 1 - Simplified First Period of Issuance

| No. | Date | SG | Scott | Value | Basic Colour |
|-----|------|-----|-------|-------|--------------|
| 1 | 1954 | 554 | 354 | 1c | Blue |
| 2 | 1957 | 555 | 367 | 2c | Violet |
| 3 | 1957 | 557 | 368 | 3c | Red |
| 4 | 1957 | 558 | 369 | 3c | Light blue |

| | | | | | |
|----|------|-----|------|----|--------------|
| 5 | 1957 | 559 | 370 | 4c | Orange |
| 6 | 1957 | 561 | 371 | 5c | Brown |
| 7 | 1957 | 565 | 373 | 6c | Green |
| 8 | 1958 | 562 | 372 | 5c | Red |
| 9 | 1960 | 556 | 380 | 2c | Brown |
| 10 | 1960 | 560 | 381 | 4c | Lilac/violet |
| 11 | 1960 | 563 | 382 | 5c | Blue/green |
| 12 | 1963 | 564 | 382A | 5c | Slate grey |

Looks straightforward? Nah. Far from it.

The early printings of this phase (1954/57) are on a slightly thicker, unwatermarked white paper and with a heavier gum, but with used examples you are unlikely to determine any differences. Nearly all these printings were on non-fluorescent paper, but two, the 2c brown and 4c lilac from 1960 can be found on both types.

For a start, the colour descriptions are grossly over simplified. The ISGC and Scott make clear that the 1c “blue” is actually deep ultramarine which, if you look at an SG colour key (albeit, not the most helpful accessory in the philatelic toolbox) is a much darker colour than just blue (See figure.1 above). The 3c “red” is actually bright rose, a colour closer to darkish pink than standard red.



Fig. 4 - 1957 3c Bright rose



Fig.5 - 1957 4c Orange



Fig. 6 - 1958 5c Vermilion

And so it goes on. Scott is clear that the 5c “red” is actually vermilion - close to standard red but with a tad more orange to it. To compare these colours together alongside the actual orange, see figures 4-6 above.

The 6c “green” in reality is olive green. The 5c is simplified as “green” by Stanley Gibbons, but is really a bluish green. And the 5c “grey” is darker than standard grey and can more correctly be described as Slate grey. And lastly, the 4c. Is it lilac or violet? Scott and the ISGC are clear it is the former, Gibbons says it is the latter. These are two distinctly different colours with violet the darker of the two. For the record, I agree with the Scott interpretation. Oddly, they both agree that the 1957 2c is violet! Check it out for yourselves with figures 7 and 8.



Fig. 7 - 1957 2c Violet



Fig. 8 - 1960 4c Lilac

Whilst not immediately helpful, the colour descriptions are nevertheless resolvable. It is true that there are also some small differences in shades, but they are so slight as to be barely discernible. In addition, there are of course the different values. So, easy-peasy. No, the heart of complexity with this phase of issues lies with the perforations.

ISGC research has shown that the Guatemalan Bureau of Engraving would spread perforating of issues over a period of time although it has proved impossible to link a specific perforation with a specific printing date. This has resulted in small but nevertheless significant differences in perforation for each value, between 10.8 at the lower end of the scale up to 12.4 at the upper end.

All but four of the twelve values for this phase can be found with recognised variations in perforation and perhaps the best way to illustrate them is to tabulate them. (See Table 2 below)

Table 2 - Phase One Issues Perforation Variations

| Year | ISGC | Scott | SG | Value | Colour | Perf | Paper | Gum |
|------|------|-------|-----|-------|------------------|-----------|-----------|---------|
| 1954 | 749 | 354 | 554 | 1c | Deep ultramarine | 12.4 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| | 750 | | | | | 10.8 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| | 751 | | | | | 11.1 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| 1957 | 784 | 367 | 555 | 2c | Violet | 10.8 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| | 785 | | | | | 11.3 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| | 786 | | | | | 12.4 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| 1957 | 787 | 368 | 557 | 3c | Bright rose | 12.4 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| 1957 | 788 | 369 | 558 | 3c | Light blue | 10.8 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| | 789 | | | | | 11.1 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| | 790 | | | | | 11.1x10.8 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| | 791 | | | | | 12.4 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| 1957 | 792 | 370 | 559 | 4c | Orange | 10.8 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| | 793 | | | | | 11.1x10.8 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| | 793a | | | | | 11.1 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| | 794 | | | | | 12.4 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| 1957 | 795 | 371 | 561 | 5c | Brown | 10.8 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| | 796 | | | | | 11.1 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| 1957 | 797 | 373 | 565 | 6c | Olive green | 11.1 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| | 797a | | | | | 11.1x10.8 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| | 797b | | | | | 110.8 | Non-fluor | Heavy |
| 1958 | 806 | 372 | 562 | 5c | Vermilion | 10.8 | Non-fluor | Glossy |
| 1960 | 830 | 380 | 556 | 2c | Brown | 11.1 | Non-fluor | Glossy |
| | 830A | | | | | 11.3 | Fluor | Glossy |
| | 831 | | | | | 12.4 | Non-fluor | Glossy |
| 1960 | 832 | 381 | 560 | 4c | Lilac | 11.1 | Non-fluor | Glossy |
| | 832a | | | | | 11.1 | Fluor | Glossy |
| | 833 | | | | | 12.4 | Non-fluor | Glossy |
| | 833a | | | | | 11.1x12.4 | Non-fluor | Glossy |
| 1960 | 834 | 382 | 563 | 5c | Blue green | 11.1 | Non-fluor | Thinner |
| 1963 | 894 | 382A | 564 | 5c | Slate grey | 12.4 | Non-fluor | Thinner |

For completeness I have included the paper and gum types. As I hope can be seen, this has some importance with respect to providing distinctions for the 2c brown and 4c lilac.

The ISGC have their own catalogue numbering system for all Guatemalan issues and they have been diligent in ensuring that all variations in perforation for the Quetzalitos are recorded and catalogued. I have accordingly provided their catalogue number within the table. The general Scott catalogue does not record the variations and neither does the Simplified SG catalogue. I don't have access to a copy of the SG Central American catalogue, which is in any case out of print and now grossly overdue for updating and re-issuing, but it may be that it captures some of the variations as I have stumbled across some suffixed catalogue numbers with dealers. Whatever, the ISGC catalogue remains the most detailed, thorough and reliable by a large margin.

And the upshot of all this? We go from twelve issues to thirty. If you are masochistic enough to seek both used and mint - my hand goes up - that makes it sixty. But of course, there would be even more if you attempted to find them on cover.

The re-issue of the "new regulars" between 1984 and 1987, the second phase, now seem comparatively straightforward. There are eleven of them and all have the same perforation of 12.4. Again they were printed recess engraved and all have the same glossy gum. The main differences on this occasion are that some are on non-fluorescent paper and slightly more on fluorescent. One, the 1987 5c Carmine Rose, is on paper described as "low fluorescent" paper. The split between the two types of paper is roughly 45% against 55%.

The most curious - perhaps frustrating - aspect of this phase is the duplication of values; there are no less than six 3c issues. I have again tabulated and listed all the issues in Table 3 below.

Table 3 - Phase Two Issues

| Year | ISGC | Scott | SG | Value | Colour | Perf | Paper | Gum |
|------|------|-------|----|-------|---------------|------|-----------|--------|
| 1984 | 1515 | 436 | | 3c | Olive green | 12.4 | Non-fluor | Glossy |
| | 1516 | 437 | | 3c | Sepia | 12.4 | Non-fluor | Glossy |
| | 1517 | 438 | | 3c | Blue | 12.4 | Non-fluor | Glossy |
| | 1518 | 439 | | 3c | Red | 12.4 | Non-fluor | Glossy |
| | 1519 | 440 | | 3c | Orange | 12.4 | Non-fluor | Glossy |
| 1986 | 1520 | 441 | | 3c | Vermilion | 12.4 | Fluor | Glossy |
| | 1523 | 444 | | 6c | Blue | 12.4 | Fluor | Glossy |
| 1987 | 1513 | 434 | | 1c | Green | 12.4 | Fluor | Glossy |
| | 1521 | 442 | | 4c | Brown | 12.4 | Fluor | Glossy |
| | 1522 | 443 | | 5c | Carmine Rose* | 12.4 | Low fluor | Glossy |
| | 1514 | 435 | | 2c | Deep blue | 12.4 | Fluor | Glossy |

* See text below

The principal area of confusion, as I indicated in my first article is with the "reds." In 1984 a 3c red was issued alongside a 3c orange. In 1986 they were followed with a 3c vermilion. I have already shown the colour type conflicts with figures 4 and 6 above, but at the risk of repeating I have provided a comparison of the red with the vermilion in the following figures 9 and 10.



Fig. 9 - 1984 3c Red



Fig. 10 - 1986 3c Vermilion

It is also quite possible to confuse this 3c red with the 1957 3c bright rose. There is a certain closeness in colour that requires a bit of study. Unfortunately they are both on non-fluorescent paper and they even have the same perforation of 12.4. There are different gums, but you'll need a pair to compare and anyway, it won't be much help if found used. The vermilion is not a problem. The 1958 version is in a different value, but also the paper type is different.

The other potentially misleading issue is the 5c carmine rose. My simplified SG catalogue calls the colour for this stamp "mauve," and on balance, I feel inclined to agree with Gibbons. It is not often I would say that, but you can judge for yourself with figure 11 below.



Fig. 11 - 1987 5c "mauve"

I have also previously highlighted the potential problem with the 3c "blues." The 1957 issued light blue comes in four different perforations, including 12.4. The 1984 3c blue comes only as 12.4. There are gum differences, but the paper in both cases is non-fluorescent. They can be distinguished and certainly this is the case when they are placed side by side, but singly it remains possible to confuse them.

One minor further point is that Scharning transposes the issuing dates of these two stamps. He gives the light blue the later date. The correct order is 1957 for the light blue and 1984 for the blue.



Fig.12 - 1957 3c Light blue



Fig.13 - 1984 3c Blue

The ISGC Overprint

There is also something further to say about the 1964 overprint. If you recall, this was issued to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the International Society of Guatemala Collectors. The 4c orange is overprinted, "HOMENAJE A LA IS.G.C. 1948-1963." See the rather blurry imaged figure 14 below.



Fig.14 - 1964 0/ptd

Issued at the end of December 1964, the overprinting is in a dull blue rather than black and the issue is found only with the 12.4 perforation. It was printed in small sheets of 50 (10x5).

The stamp is catalogued as No. 736 in Gibbons, but also bears the ISGC number of 951 and a Scott number of 395. However, it has now been established that there are some variations to the positioning of the overprinting and these are worth noting.

Normally, as in figure 14, the "I" of ISGC is positioned between the 1 and 9 of 1948. But there is one version where the "I" is directly above the "9." The slippage is not on every issue within the plate but only found on positions 10, 20 and 30. The ISGC catalogue these stamps as 951a. In a further variation, the "I" is completely defective and can be found in positions 22, 23, 28 and 36 on the plates. This variation is catalogued 951b by the ISGC.

You see, even the overprints can be fun!

The "Mystery Stamp"

I mentioned that these "Quetzalitos" came in two and a half phases, so I had best say something about that half.

In my first article I advised that there was some uncertainty over the numbers issued. Was it twenty three or possibly twenty four? I realise now that the Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy got it right. The honest answer really is 42. And I jest not. If you add up all the different perforation issues, all of which are recognised, the number to collect is 42. Double that and some if you go for mint and used and on cover.

But where and why did the initial uncertainty about a mysterious issue arise?

There was something about another blue, in fact a dark blue issue. Thanks to the ISGC I now understand that the mystery stamp - their term - really does exist. As I have said before, Guatemalan stamps were always issued following an official decree. This certainly applies to all the other stamps in the new regular series. But not on this occasion. In late 1972 a 3c dark blue Quetzalito appeared. Certainly a copy has been found with a December 1972 postmark.

There are no records of why it was issued, nor is there any data on how many were printed. But it definitely was issued and it is definitely out there. Somewhere. Because I have never personally seen it. The ISGC have catalogued it (1236). Scott belatedly followed suit and has also given it a catalogue number (369a), but as far as I am aware, Gibbons or indeed Michel have yet to do so.

What can we say about it? Frankly, not a lot. Like the others in the series it is un-watermarked. It is perforated 11.4, which distinguishes it from the 1957 and 1984 3c blues and is on fluorescent paper with glossy gum. It is also darker in colour to the 1984 issue. Like the others it was engraved by Arnaldo Chavarry and it bears the same bureau of engraving imprint at the base. But why it was issued in the middle of the gap between first issues and the second and at that particular value we don't know. It doesn't make much sense.

Why there is no official record of it being authorised and by whom we will probably never know. Yes, it exists, but in many respects it is still a mystery stamp and the ISGC have argued that it deserves further study.

Post-thoughts

And there is another mystery. Where are these stamps? Not just the 3c dark blue, but all the others in the series? Something in the region of 45 million of these issues were printed between 1954 and 1987 (see Table. 4 below) and yet I don't often see them on the market. As far as I can determine, they are not expensive - a basic mint set would be somewhere between £15 and £20. But, in five years of trying to collect them, albeit in a haphazard way, I have only managed to acquire, well, just a handful, including only two perforation variants.

Table. 4 - Printing Quantities and Issuing Dates

| Year | Issue Date | Value | Colour | Quantity Printed* |
|------|-----------------------------|-------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1954 | Late 1954 (1) | 1c | Deep ultramarine | 5,000,000 |
| 1957 | 8 th January (1) | 2c | Violet | 7,000,000 |
| | 23 rd January | 3c | Bright rose | 1,000,000 |
| | 3 rd September | 3c | Light blue | 7,000,000 |
| | 7 th May | 4c | Orange | 7,000,000 |
| | 27 th May | 5c | Brown | 500,000 |
| | 3 rd September | 6c | Olive green | 500,000 |
| 1958 | 9 th July | 5c | Vermilion | 500,000 |
| 1960 | 15 th December | 2c | Brown | 2,000,000 |
| | 20 th February | 4c | Lilac | 2,000,000 |
| | 22 nd February | 5c | Blue green | 400,000 |
| 1963 | 7 th October | 5c | Slate grey | (400,000)# |
| 1972 | December | 3c | Dark blue | (400,000)# |
| 1984 | 20 th February | 3c | Olive green | 1,000,000 |
| | 20 th February | 3c | Sepia | 1,000,000 |
| | 20 th February | 3c | Blue | 1,000,000 |
| | 20 th February | 3c | Red | 1,000,000 |
| | 20 th February | 3c | Orange | 1,000,000 |

| | | | | |
|------|---------------------------|----|--------------------|-----------|
| 1986 | 25 th April | 3c | Vermilion | 1,000,000 |
| | 25 th April | 6c | Blue | 1,000,000 |
| 1987 | 16 th February | 1c | Green | 1,000,000 |
| | 16 th February | 4c | Brown | 1,000,000 |
| | 16 th February | 5c | Carmine rose/mauve | 1,000,000 |
| | 25 th March | 2c | Deep blue | 1,000,000 |

Unknown, but a realistic guess

44,700,000

NOTE: (1) These particular stamps were issued on a number of separate dates as follows:-

1c Deep Ultramarine - 29th Sept 1954 (2 million) & 3rd February 1958 (3 million)

2c Violet - 8th January 1957 (1 million), 22nd May 1957 (1 million), 3rd February 1958 (5 million).

I realise that, ISGC aside, it is very unfashionable to collect Guatemalan stamps but these are relatively modern “classics” and a must-have for thematic collectors, so where are they hiding? In what albums, stockbooks, or accumulations are they to be found. Answers please on a postcard. Preferably stamped with a Quetzalito.

References:

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