

COINS
WITH HISTORY II
COLLECTION OF BANCO DE PORTUGAL

Cristina Mota Gomes

Introduction by Maria Graciana Dias Marques



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EUROSYSTEM

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Authors

Cristina Mota Gomes
Maria Graciana Dias Marques (Introduction)

Design and distribution

Department of Support Services
Documentation, Editing and Museum Area
Banco de Portugal

Numismatic Revision

José Alberto Lemos
Banco de Portugal

English Translation

John Elliott - Arte & Línguas

Photography

Manuel Farinha
Banco de Portugal

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WHEN MONEY TOOK THE FORM OF BARS

As mentioned earlier, due to the lack of coins in the Brazilian colony, the Crown allowed gold dust to be used for a few years as legal tender in Minas Gerais for current payments. With large quantities of gold going astray, this practice had to be banned on various occasions.

The royal charter of 19 March 1720, said:

*“... in the whole district of Minas, only gold bars marked at the Casting House shall circulate as legal tender...”*²

Despite this ban, gold dust continued to be used as currency in Minas Gerais. In 1750, its circulation was again authorised, only definitively being brought to an end in 1808, when, because of the charter issued on 1 September of that year, it was banned, not only in Minas Gerais, but in all of the captaincies.

With the ban imposed on the use of gold dust as money, permission was given for gold bars to serve as legal tender, and these began to be used as money in trade.

The process involved in the production of gold bars was a highly painstaking and complex one. After the gold dust had been presented for casting, the first step was to weigh it, in the presence of the *Mesa da Intendência*, a body composed of the police intendant, the tax inspector, the treasurer, two registrars and the bearer. Immediately after this, a fifth part of the gold was removed for the payment of the *quinto* tax and placed in the workshop's safe. Next, the gross weight of the metal and the weight of the corresponding fifth part were recorded in the casting house's ledger, along with the net weight of the gold to be cast and the name of the bearer.

The quantity of gold (already minus one fifth) thus recorded was taken away for casting by the assayer's assistant, accompanied by the owner of the gold with the receipt made out by the registrar, mentioning the name of the owner and the net weight of the gold to be cast. The gold was immediately handed to the caster to be turned into bars, with the various parties involved being allowed to monitor the handling of the metal, also watched by a registrar from the Intendancy of Police.

The particles of gold were then placed in a crucible³, together with a small quantity of iron filings, and the mixture was taken to a high temperature furnace. After the metals had melted and fused together, the crucible was removed from the

(2) Sousa, D. António Caetano de, *História Genealógica da Casa Real Portuguesa*, Tomo IV, Lisboa Occidental, MDCCXXXVIII, p. 407.

(3) The crucible is the container made of iron, lead, or clay, used to melt substances.

furnace and its contents were poured into moulds, which were oiled beforehand. The cast bar was removed from the mould and plunged into water. This whole process took roughly ten minutes.

The same officer who took the gold dust to the casting house brought it back to the *Casa de Despacho* (Customs House) already in the form of bars, with the Arms of Portugal being punched onto one of its ends, together with the name or initials of the casting house, and with the armillary sphere being stamped onto the reverse.

Also shown were the order number and the casting date of the bar. This was then handed to the chief assayer, who determined the gold's fineness, which was marked on each bar by the assistant, as well as the initials of the assayer, almost always in the form of a monogram. Finally, the bar was handed to the treasurer, who checked its weight, thereby marking the end of the process of casting the gold dust.

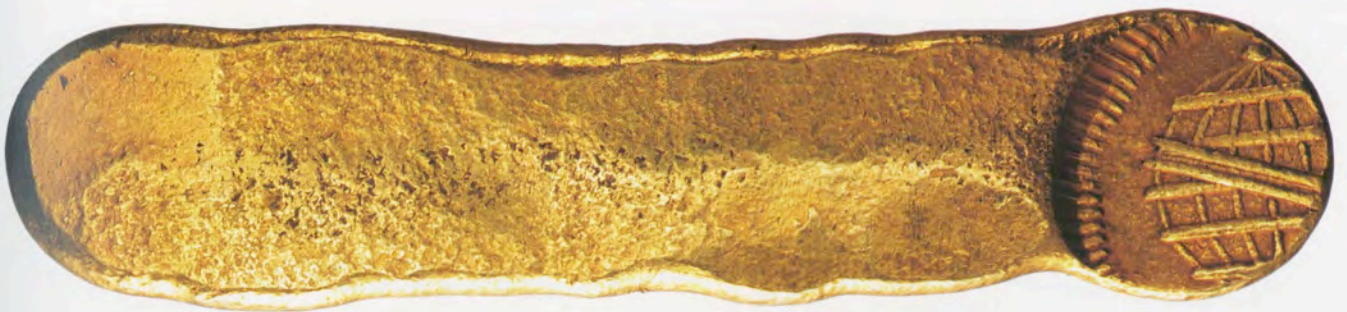
Gold Bar (Vila Rica)
(No. 208)
1796 (D. Maria I)
1.65 x 0.4 x 7.62 cm
M.B.P. No. 9002948200



Obverse



Reverse



Gold Bar

(Rio das Mortes)

(No. 2743)

1800 (D. Maria I)

1.77 x 0.44 x 8.17 cm

M.B.P. No. 9002948300

80



Obverse



Reverse



Gold Bar (Sabará)

(No. 630)

1806 or (1808) (D. João P. R.)

1.99 x 0.5 x 7.59 cm

M.B.P. No. 9002948400



Obverse



Reverse



Gold Bar (Serro Frio)

(No. 983)

1810 (D. João P. R.)

2.03 x 0.52 x 8.66 cm

M.B.P. No. 9002948500



Obverse



Reverse



Gold Bar (Mato Grosso)

(No. 1382)

1813 (D. João P. R.)

2.51 x 0.8 x 14.25 cm

M.B.P. No. 9002948600



Obverse



Reverse



Gold Bar (Goiás)
(No. 618)
1821 (D. João VI)
1.46 x 0.53 x 8.97 cm
M.B.P. No. 9002948800

84



Obverse



Reverse



Gold Bar (Cuyabá)
(No. 545)
1821 (D. João VI)
1.77 x 0.87 x 8.38 cm
M.B.P. No. 9002948700



Obverse



Reverse

