

“The Bulletin” January, 1998

President's Message

Each member will find a survey card with this mailing of their bulletin. The card is ready to be filled in and mailed back to the Club. You may recall that the Executive has discussed the idea of moving our meeting date to a standard time each month, other than the 4th Tuesday. This is your opportunity to indicate other times which are convenient for you.

This is a reminder that time is running out to renew your Club membership. Statements were included with the November bulletin. You can pay by mail or see the Treasurer at our January meeting.

There was a meeting of your Club Executive earlier in the month. There will be 25 bourse tables available at our October 3 show at \$20 each. Flyers will be available in time for Torex and we are asking everyone to promote this event to the coin dealers from whom they buy. ONA draw tickets will be available for pickup at the next meeting.

Need to reach the President? Phone calls are welcome at **416-745-3067** (leave a voice mail message if you can't get through in person) and e-mail may be sent to **petchp@ican.net**.

Other Hobbies and Interests

The next meeting of the North York Coin Club will be held on **Tuesday, January 27, 1998**, at the Edithvale Community Centre, 7 Edithvale Drive.

This month we are asking members to bring along something to do with a secondary hobby or interests they may have outside of coin collecting. I have attended a couple of club meetings where the members have shared other leisure interests. This may be some other form of collecting, activities and crafts or particular authors or personalities. We are looking forward to learning a little more about you! This is also the Club's annual business meeting with a full financial report.

Coming Events

Southwestern Ontario Numismatics (SWON) February 1, 9am-5pm at the Convention Centre, 139 Silver St., Paris Fairgrounds. Admission \$1 includes includes draw for gold coin. Contact Ted Bailey, (519) 442-3474.

Oshawa & District Coin Club Semi-Annual Show February 14, 9:30am-5:00pm at the Pickering Town Centre between Kmart & PJ Pet Centre, Liverpool Road & Hwy #2. Free admission & draws

Torex February 21, 10am-5pm and 22, 10am-3pm at the Primrose Hotel, Pearson Ballroom, 111 Carlton St., Toronto. Daily admission \$5. Contact: Ingrid K. Smith, (416) 260- 9070.

Tillsonburg Collectibles Show March 8, 10am-4pm at the Tillsonburg Community Centre, 45 Hardy Ave. Admission adult \$2, 12 and under free with adult. Contact Ian Ward,

(519) 426-8875.

7th Annual Cambridge Coin Club Show March 28, 9am-5pm at the Cambridge Newfoundland Club, 1500 Dunbar Road. Free admission. Contact L.R. (Verne) Shaull, (519) 621-3810 Ext. 253.

ONA Annual Convention April 18, 10am-6pm and 19, 10am-4pm sponsored by the City of Ottawa Coin Club at the Citadel Hotel, 101 Lyon St. N. Admission \$2 per day per adult. Contact Graham Neale, (613) 521-2117

North York Coin Club Annual Show October 3, 9am-3pm at the Edithvale Community Centre. 25 bourse tables. Free admission and draws. Free parking.

***Next Meeting:
January 27***

A NUMISMATIC HORROR STORY

by Al Bliman

In the first of this short series we read of a specific tragedy created by counterfeiters and made possible by the kind of simple greed by which we have all been tempted and which these notes try to defeat.

Bogus Dough!

Counterfeiting is a problem as old as coinage. In Mediaeval times coins were made by the hammered method. A rough planchet was heated to soften it somewhat and then placed between dies which were then struck by hand with a heavy hammer. No collar was used so the coins produced this way had an irregular, even jagged outline. The first and easiest abuse to this coinage took the form of clipping off some of the metal from the edges to make enough precious metal to either sell or restrike into counterfeits. This practice was key in developing the collar in the minting process as well as reeded edges to make it more obvious when clipping took place.

In these times punishment for such deeds ran as high as the death penalty.

Another step taken towards uniformity was to weigh coins at the production stage to make them a standard weight. While planchets were still crudely made they were changed to conform by weight before striking with a hand file! A coiner would simply file a little metal from the sides of the flan at the edges to bring it to the desired weight tolerances. These marks were still left on the planchet when striking occurred and are called "adjustment marks". Uncirculated coins may display these marks and can be told from worn coins because the design elements are struck into the file marks, not the other way around.

We tend to think today of only scarce coins being counterfeited. In Canada's recent past even common 5¢ pieces have been faked. King George V coins

Meeting News from the December 11 Meeting

The 424th meeting of the North York Coin Club was held on Thursday, December 11, 1997 at the Edithvale Community Centre, 7 Edithvale Dr., Willowdale, Ont.

The President Paul Petch opened the meeting at 7:30 p.m. and welcomed 21 members and 5 guests.

The On Time Attendance Draw was missed by Sam Snider who was not present to receive the \$4.00 pot but it was nice to have him remembered.

Ron Zelk delivered the hot Chicken Chalet dinners and they were added to buffet table along with a fine selection of salads, pickles and desserts. Many thanks are extended to the following for their donations: Jean Orr, Marg and Roger Fox, Carolyne-Marie and Paul Petch, Brian and Lyan See, Paul Johnson, May Bunnett, Norman G. Gordon, Dion Van Laethem and Lucille Colson. Many thanks also to Ron Zelk for picking up the chicken. My apologies if I missed anyone. For

entertainment, Paul Petch provided a non-numismatic quiz which was quite a challenge. This was followed the Gift Exchange.

The business meeting was then called to order. Marvin Kay has graciously agreed to serve as a Director during 1998/99. We have had an application for membership from Ms. Karen Eaton. If no objections are received, Ms. Eaton will become member number 500 at the January meeting.

Lucky Draw winners were: George Fraser, May Bunnett, Paul Johnson, Marg Fox, Paul Petch(2), Rick Fraser, Karen Eaton, Rick Craig (2), Ted Boxall & Leslie Kurestzky. The draw ably run by Al Bliman brought proceeds of \$27.00.

The Chair extended Christmas Greetings and All Best wishes for the holiday season.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9:23 p.m.

of all denominations have been seen counterfeited, as well as 1939 \$1, and a large number of \$20 1967 gold coins made in Lebanon during the 1970's.

Even mints themselves are victims. In 1967 a Royal Canadian Mint employee deliberately made some silver dollars with rotated dies which became known as the Diving Goose Dollars. So popular were these with collectors that others without RCM equipment at their disposal attempted to counterfeit the spurious coins by slicing good examples down the middle, rotating the two halves and then soldering them back together.

The point to this case illustrates that there is no end to the inventiveness or brashness of those with real larceny at heart. Again the onus is on the buyer —you—to investigate well before you

part with *your* dough!

All rights to this material are retained by the author. Please do not reproduce without express permission.

Question of the Month

We're back, after taking time off for Christmas, with a Canadian decimals question of the month. When the Ottawa Branch of the Royal Mint began operation in 1908, what visual alteration was made to all of the Dominion of Canada's silver coinage. The answer comes next month.

The Great Repatinate Debate compiled by Paul R. Petch

The roots of our hobby sprout strongly from the rich soil of academia. The study of ancient civilizations and their cultures is naturally enhanced by any artifacts which have survived the years intact. Coins are a valuable tool of the archeologist and scholars of ancient civilizations. They are also a collectible in their own right which take on special significance in the hands of a numismatist. A group of collectors recently discussed and debated some of the troubling issues which are raised when practices of preservation and presentation meet the purity of maintaining ancient coins in their natural state. An especially interesting aspect of the discussion is the patina or toning a coin may naturally take on over time and the tricks in maintaining or enhancing it. Is this fraud? Is it restoration of art? Is it good or bad? Let's join the discussion...

Considering Fakes

Doug Carson: Compared to the 10,000 to 15,000 coins you publish for sale each year in the CNG auction catalogs how many fakes do you see and therefore reject each year?

John Lavender: This is really a bit difficult for me to say with any precision. We see many fakes. Most are obvious, but many are not. Occasionally, one slips through and makes it to press in our publications. Fortunately, there are enough knowledgeable dealers and collectors out there to point them out to us when they do so that we can withdraw them.

We have four numismatists on staff cataloguing different areas, so I often do not see a fake someone else has detected unless I am asked to examine it, and vice versa. As well, the many fakes in collections we are offered in London (where we do most of our buying) that we pass on I never see. So I can't really quantify the number of fakes that CNG encounters annually, but I can sum up my experiences by saying that

I see many, many fakes, most are quite obvious, and the percentage of fakes to the mass of coins I handle is minimal.

Doug Carson: I'm sure you are offered many hoards each year (especially through your London operation) how many of these look questionable, and especially, do you see real coins mixed in with fakes?

John Lavender: We do see some fakes mixed with hoards. I recently heard a story of a deal we were offered and told the seller that basically we were happy with the price but only wanted the real coins in the group. When we buy a hoard and find fakes in it, we just incorporate them into our collection of forgeries and sell the rest (i.e., the good coins). I don't know specifically of any instance when we were offered a hoard that all it consisted of were fakes, but I'm sure it has happened.

Doug Carson: How big of a problem do you think that this is now and will become in the future?

John Lavender: To a certain degree the market is "buyer beware", so it is in every collector's best interest to become knowledgeable with whichever period they are collecting. However, I don't know of any dealers that would refuse to buy back anything they might have sold in good faith that is later proven to be fake, so in this regards I don't think there is much of a problem.

Of course, what you are really driving at is how deteriorated is the coin market at present due to undetected fakes? Without trying to sound smug, if we could detect them, there wouldn't be a problem. As far as identifiable fakes are concerned, the percentage isn't great. This leads me to believe that there aren't that many of the former either, at least not percentage-wise.

The **real** problem at present is lack of knowledge on the part of collectors and

dealers alike. Currently, there is no sure-fire litmus test for fakes, so the knowledge required to distinguish the good from the bad only comes from reading books and handling as many coins as one can. Since most collectors don't have ready access to large hoards, it is in their best interest to read books. But even with this said, I know of many collectors and dealers that don't have a problem spending hundreds or thousands of dollars on coins, but never make it past the basic Seaby references (if they even have those)! This trend will only further encourage counterfeiting, so I propose that everyone judiciously spend some of their coin money on a reference book this coming year.

Doug Carson: Are current ancient coin fakes better than they were 10 or 20 years ago?

John Lavender: I didn't have the same perspective on coins 10 or 20 years ago that I have today, so again I'm really not the person to ask. However, with the current advances in technology, I would think that most things seen on a real coin can be imitated with some precision. The question then becomes how economically feasible is it for the counterfeiters to continue producing? I imagine it could become a very lucrative business, so collectors and dealers need to take the preventative measures I've already suggested.

Since I'm only somewhat experienced with forgeries and not an expert on the subject, I would also be interested in hearing from more knowledgeable parties as to their perceptions of the role fakes play in today's marketplace.

Maybe next we can have a discussion on the more serious problem of worked (i.e., tooled, smoothed and repatinated) coins.

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

Restored Coins and Repatination

Gabe Camacho: This is one of the dirty secrets of the hobby, as there seems to be a fear that if we discuss it, it will be perpetrated more often.

As proof, a recent discussion on cleaning and repatination led some to say they knew how it was done, but couldn't specify. The "you must pay your dues" argument was given as the only way to learn. I'm glad advances in medicine aren't always guarded as closely as this secret!

Oliver D. Hoover: Does anyone know whether it is possible to chemically repatinate a bronze coin that has been largely stripped down to the bare metal by harsh cleaning?

Charlie Karukstis: The short answer is yes; it is a common occurrence. Don't let any dealer feign ignorance about how or where it's done. Much high-end bronze material on the market these days has been repatinated.

The longer answer is that how it is achieved will affect the coin's future. Copper and its alloys will oxidize naturally (and in fact, so do almost instantaneously). Certain reactions, however, can either occur faster or take precedence over the conversion to cuprous oxide.

If you have to accelerate the oxidation process, simply heating the coin will accomplish this (there are a number of more complicated procedures involving forced air as well). One can certainly utilize various surface treatments as well (some of which might be considered attempts at so-called repatination), but this is where most people get into trouble. Utilizing any compound containing sulfides or chlorides is simply asking for trouble; most of the commercial "toning" products being foisted upon unsuspecting consumers are nothing other than some form of sulfide compound. This almost guarantees the coin's destruction. Reactions induced

using nitrate or oxide compounds are, in general, more stable and less destructive (now watch some activist curator hop all over me for that suggestion — it's getting to where I am afraid to recommend anything these days!)

Richard Hughes and Michael Rowe's *The Colouring, Bronzing and Patination of Metals*, published some years back, at least attempted to explore the stability and suitability of a number of "techniques" being passed around these days. I am sure as well that a number of readers will have their favorite "recipes". As I have mentioned several times (and have been consistently ignored) is that introduction of new chemical compounds onto a coin, whether for "conservation" or repatination, often cause far more problems than they solve. Take a little time to analyze the particular alloy with which you are dealing, and understand the effect of the chemical reactions you are inducing. Don't forget that the reactions may keep occurring longer than you might wish.

Wayne G. Sayles: The subject of repatination is just about as complex as the subject of grading. Just what constitutes repatination? For example, if the fine patina (oxidation) on a silver coin is removed by stripping with a mild acid and then the coin is dulled with an oxidizing agent, is that repatination? If so, I would venture to say that the great majority of ancient silver coins on the market have been repatinated. If a bronze coin is stripped and coated with renaissance wax, should we consider it repatinated? If so, a good many coins in the world's museums are repatinated.

There are several ways to enhance the natural patina of a bronze coin, including the use of a burnishing wheel. Is this unethical? Virtually every collection has coins that have been enhanced in some way. Often they are the most prized pieces. Where repatination becomes a problem is when surface pits and scratches etc. are filled with a foreign substance and patinated over the filling. This is clearly an unethical act for anyone selling such a coin.

Of course this is a gross simplification of the topic, but the point is that coins are enhanced every day. Any coin with a flat black look to it has probably been stripped and reoxidized. That doesn't necessarily make it undesirable. It was probably much more undesirable before the cleaning and reoxidation.

As far as repatination being the next thing to forgery, I think that is a bit overstating the case. Still, the buyer has the right to choose coins with natural patina if he or she prefers, and a reputable dealer would never misrepresent the surface of a coin as natural if it were not. Caveat-some processes are so good that it is hard, even for an experienced dealer, to tell what is natural and what is artificial. Personally, I would rather have a professionally cleaned and repatinated coin than one with chipped, mottled or thick natural patina. In fact, many collectors pay handsomely for this service. Repatination is a personal choice, but it is certainly not a crime.

Dr. Gyula Petranzi: There have been different approaches and advice to repatinate coins. One swears that coins should be dug in your garden packed in saw dust dampened with goat urine; possibly the best matching liquid for Greek ancients: goats in vast herds have been fertilizing the territories of classical history throughout the ages. However, to have a really nice patina, it is best to leave the coin for a thousand or so years intact in the environment where the best patinated coins come from. If the job is urgent, ask a counterfeiter for help... but never attempt to sell *that* coin to me please.

Wayne G. Sayles: You may sometimes see silver coins that have a dark gray or black patina with details and high-relief points without patina or silver coins that have a glossy dark gray uneven patina with a slight green colour. These are more likely to be naturally patinated since there would be little advantage to repatinating a silver coin in this way.

The reason for cleaning the original dark patina is that the majority

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

of buyers, both dealers and collectors, prefer a silver coin to be silver. Chances are that a darkly toned silver coin is naturally patinated. The fact that details and high relief remain does not mean that the coin is repatinated, it simply means that the coin is not covered with horn silver. I, for one, like dark natural patina on a silver coin, but I suspect that I am in the minority.

Jerry Brauer: Insinuations have been made that some of the highest priced Roman sestertii currently on the market have been repatinated. Is this really the case? If this is so, then what is going on with the ordinary \$500 coin sold to the ordinary collector?

One often sees the qualifier "some tooling" or "patina smoothed" in the descriptions of Roman bronzes, but seldom if ever "repatinated".

I would like to hear from the dealers on this list about this important matter. I realize that all ancient coins have been cleaned at one time or another, but in my mind a repatinated bronze coin is just short of a forgery.

Ken Dorney: I would have to disagree with this because of one very important reason. I have handled many tens of thousands of coins as a dealer, and looked through hoards and groups of "raw" coins numbering many times that. There are many times when I come across coins that are in high grade, but heavily encrusted, corroded, etc. For many of those coins the only option is to completely clean them down to the metal then repatinate. If this were not done, few if any collectors would want to buy them in their original state.

Also, very few collectors will buy an original patinated silver coin. Most want that "shiny new look", and thus the coin must be cleaned down to the metal. I know many dealers who tone silver down to give the coin an old collection look. I would never do this because I think it is misrepresentative, but then I have no way of knowing for sure if I have handled such coins.

I personally don't buy coins like that because I prefer to leave those "problem" coins to the experts to handle. I only like to handle coins that need mild cleaning since I am no expert in that field. However, you can be sure that many superb and choice coins from very old collections were originally cleaned drastically, they have just had a hundred years or so to retone.

So, why should a retoned coin be considered "just short of a forgery"? I admit it would help if dealers revealed that a coin had been retoned or not, but then again when a coin gets sold a few times somewhere along the line someone will keep that fact to themselves, and the coin will be presented as having an original patina.

John Hooker: Repatination might be the wrong term. If the patina has been stripped off and a new one is applied, then the patina would be different in appearance, most likely, from the one that existed before.

I once had to use the patina evidence to reassign some coins of Chalcis from the Wallace collection to the hoards they came from after they had parted company with their original tickets. Certain types of patinas provide clues to the coins provenance in some circumstances. If patinas are first stripped off, and then replaced with other patinas, this sort of evidence is lost. At least a coin without its original patina does not pretend to be something else.

Billon coins can be a great problem when they have been badly cleaned. Many coins of the Le Catillon hoard have been very badly cleaned, so much, in fact, that I sometimes can identify the hoard coins by their poor current state!

When acids like citric acid are used on billon coins, it dissolves away some of the copper corrosion leaving an enriched silver behind. This has been used in the past to give the impression that there was a higher silver content than there really was. Strangely, this is not just a modern activity. Colin Hasel-

grove told me that a small hoard of Coriosolite coins from London showed signs of being in a saline environment, while someone else (I forget who) wrote that Coriosolite billon coins could have been immersed in salt water while they were still hot, and this could have given them a greater silver appearance.

The coins from the Le Catillon hoard exhibit a large number of test-cuts, and I believe that the people who were involved in recycling these coins after the Gallic war were faced with widely varying alloys that had a similar surface appearance. These coins were struck and paid out in quantity, they were not used for market type transactions. Exact standards were not really needed.

A number of coins from the Trebry hoard were analyzed by neutron activation analysis in France. It is customary to examine such data using averages to determine an intended standard, but I preferred to do a cluster analysis that plotted the coins against the die chronology. This revealed a curious habit of the moneymen: at the outset of each issue they took greater care to get the alloy right than they did after working for a while. In effect they became sloppy and had to readjust the alloy mixes to compensate. This resulted in coins that were of low intrinsic value as well as coins that were too high in value. I deduced from this that the moneymen had been given pre weighed metals with directions to mix them at a certain rate, and to produce a certain number of coins.

The results of the analysis done by Katherine Gruel revealed a very gradual reduction in silver content by less than 2 percent. It is my opinion that this was caused by a sampling error, and that coins that were visibly too high in silver were culled from the mint in order to make a profit. As some of the lower silver content coins would have appeared to be little more than copper, some deliberate surface enrichment might have been deemed necessary.

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

In short, perhaps it is best to leave the patinas alone unless there is some active corrosion, and if coins are found that are cleaned down to the metal they should also be left alone. Patinas and natural surface enrichment can provide useful data.

Vince Mooney: As someone new to ancient coin collecting, I find catalog descriptions which talk about “beautiful green patina”, or “rich chocolate brown”, or “nice reddish tone”, etc. more like the talk you’d expect to hear from an announcer at a women’s fashion show. (As the models walk down the runway, everyone ooh’s and aah’s.) Please, think like an outsider for a moment.

A coin was meant to be used and circulated. Just recently, I bought an unattributed coin for \$2 which is the same coin as number 260 in the Italo Vecchi #9, 4th of December, auction collection of the coinage of Augustus. Of course, this coin has a “lovely dark olive-green patina, as struck. Extremely fine.” My coin is almost worn away. My coin was probably used many thousands of times in useful transactions and was a very successful coin—that is, it got the most possible use before being lost. Does it make any sense that this coin is worth 500 times less than lot 260? Just imagine what some collectors would pay for a “proof” coin that never was exposed to the atmosphere or touched by a human hand. Wow! Millions I guess.

Philosophically, it would make sense to strip found coins (after all historical data is secured about the hoard) to what they were when minted. Then they should be given a protective coating which could keep them safe for a million years... a clear coating, of course. (Given the amount of time the earth has left, we and the ancient Greeks occupy the same “second” in time. We need to think about coins lasting millions of years—not just a few hundred more.) The cleaned coins would reveal the real coin, pitting and all. The true condition

could be ascertained.

Patina is good for covering defects and acting as some assurance that the coin is not a fake. But it is really grime. Ideally, no one should have an incentive to repatinate a genuine coin: if there was not a market for such.

Now, I am very happy that collectors pay thousands for coins. It makes all those beautiful catalogs possible. It makes the whole dealer network possible. It allows me to buy my inexpensive coins—which I consider actually superior in transaction value. I may deal in bulk coins with “low end” dealers, and I may be said to prefer “quantity over quality”, and I may not even see the “Emperor’s clothes”, yet. I’d like every type of Athenian coin that Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle may have touched. But I want them to be used.

Stephen Knapp: Kind of like the difference between natural pearls and cultured pearls? Although they may appear identical, and are both formed by essentially the same process, I believe they are treated differently in the marketplace, since one represents a higher order of rarity than the other. A beautiful natural patina is not as easily acquired as its laboratory cousin; it has a higher intrinsic scarcity. Although the chemical form and function of an artificial patina may be identical to that of its natural counterpart, in the aesthetics of collecting the rarity differential makes the two completely different from one another *as collectibles*. Whether or not this aesthetic is important to an individual depends entirely on the motivation for acquiring a piece in the first place.

If I see my coins primarily as historical, cultural artifacts, points of connection with a bygone age to be preserved for posterity, I may wish to apply an artificial patina to assist in preserving the piece. However, if my coins are meant to be indicators of my discerning eye and good judgment as a collector, or even as sources of pride or displays of power, then the only good patina is a natural one.

Ken Dorney: As a dealer and as a collector both I don’t particularly care. If a coin comes to me bright, so what? It will eventually tone down on its own. If a coin comes “raw”, I leave it that way. I recently had a very nice tetradrachm from Antioch of Nero consigned to me. The coin was covered with a light coating of soil, and the consignor asked me if I could remove it. I simply ran water over the coin and the soil gently washed away revealing a magnificent original toning. Of course I left it that way. To me it was one of the nicest Antioch tet’s I’d seen in a while, even though it was dark instead of bright.

Jerry Brauer: I define repatination as the cleaning and removal of the naturally occurring encrustation, dirt and surface oxidation of a bronze or copper coin and their replacement by a chemically created surface enrichment intended to enhance the appearance and eye-appeal of the coin. Further, the motive for this process is not conservation, but rather to increase the coins marketability and price (often substantially).

I continue to maintain that repatination is a deceptive practice when not disclosed to the purchaser of a coin. The fact that a dealer resells a repatinated coin that he purchased from another source (and does not inquire about its past chemical treatment) does not excuse the practice or make it more palatable to me.

Each collecting hobby has an “aesthetic” or set of principles by which individual objects and entire collections are judged. Originality and object integrity are first principles in most collecting hobbies. The 18th century chest with its original painted surface is valued (as an object) more highly than the stripped and refinished chest. The modern first edition with its original dust jacket is more desirable than the same book without its dust jacket. This hierarchy of value translates into higher market prices for more “complete” objects.

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

This is a complex issue and cross comparisons of various collecting hobbies are never exact. However, a few additional examples will serve to expand my position on the importance of originality and integrity in collecting hobbies:

Maps: 16th and 17th maps were issued in both uncolored (plain black engraving) and hand-colored versions. When the original hand-coloring is attractive (sometimes it can be crude and heavy), this tends to increase the desirability of the map, as well as the market price, over a similar uncolored map. Antique maps are also sold with "modern hand-coloring" because many collectors prefer colored maps over plain ones. Such a treatment is usually noted in the auction or dealer catalogue and affects the price accordingly. As with repatinated coins, maps with modern color can be sold and resold and later passed off as maps with original color at the peril of collectors.

Antique furniture: Collecting aesthetics can change over time. In the early 20th century, collectors preferred 18th century American furniture in glossy finishes which showed the grain of the wood. Dull brown original varnish finishes were stripped away from Chippendale high-chests and original painted surfaces were removed from simple blanket chests. Today 18th century pieces in the original finishes are often substantially more highly valued than refinished pieces.

An analogy can be drawn between a piece of hardwood furniture and a silver coin. After about 50 years the varnish surface will age and discolor to a pleasing softness much as a silver coin tones. There is today often no real difference in the collecting marketplace between a piece in original finish and in old re-finish.

This is exactly how I feel about repatinated coins. They may be attractive, but should be valued far differently than coins in original patina. I believe that this aesthetic or canon of values has

been generally accepted by collectors in the 20th century, e.g.:

- 1) *The Macmillan Encyclopedic Dictionary of Numismatics* (Richard Doty, 1982) defines patina as "the natural coloring acquired over the years by a coin, token or medal with a pure of high copper content. Such coloring can take various forms... If the object has been buried in the soil or deposited under water, its patina is apt to be far thicker and its colors range from reddish-brown to gray to light or deep green or blue... Regardless of its color... this patina is an integral part of the item which bears it". Further "Thus far, we have discussed natural patinas: they can also be created artificially. One process... to enhance their appeal to collectors, uses acids to achieve an artistic finish. Such practices are prevalent on forgeries of ancient Chinese money."
- 2) From *Roman Coins and How to Collect Them*, J. Fox, London, 1983: "A catalogue might enthuse as much about the patina as about the coin. One example (Superior, 1981) could even be describing a fireworks display. From plain green, brown and black, the spectacle flares in greenish brown, gorgeous reddish green, dark chocolate brown and desirable apple green."
- 3) And from *Collecting Greek Coins*, J. Anthony, London, 1983: "Reject specimens treated with a wire brush, just as you would those with lumps of corrosion on them. But bear in mind that patina, the smooth coating that is evidence of great age, enhances a coin, particularly a bronze one"
- 4) Ralph Kankelfitz in the introduction to his well respected *Roemische Muenzen* (3rd rev. ed., Augsburg, 1991) even ventures to establish a scale of values for different patinas: blue-green 100% higher; red-brown 50%; black 20-30%, and so forth. He also notes

"patina only increases valuation when it does not detract from the delicacy of the strike, but rather serves to improve it". (translation mine)

It is clear that attractive natural patina enhances valuation in the marketplace. I believe that this fact and this fact alone is the driving force behind artificial patination (repatination) and that the intent is almost always to deceive the collector. This is why I consider that repatination is near forgery, because it falsifies the history of the object.

Jim Shaffer: Most of the Greek and Roman coin offerings I have received in the last couple of years are from Bulgaria. This has been a wonderful addition to the field and to my own collection. Up until recently, however, most of the coins being offered had been cleaned, most to bare metal. I know some of this was to identify the coins before putting them into a price category. I asked my primary source to request that the coins be left more natural and that I would be willing to pay a 'premium' for these coins. The last couple of groups that I have purchased (a few hundred coins) have been very nice and not overcleaned (if cleaned at all). I am hopeful that this trend will continue.

By the way, having talked to other collectors and dealers early on about the state of the Greek bronze coins that had been stripped, they gave me the names of products that they were using to repatinate their coins before offering them on the market. I did not use any of the products however, choosing to offer most of the earlier coins in entry-level U-pick boxes at shows.

Ken Dorney: I think it is a question of mentality; one should be educated to accept the patina as is; this is the scientific and archaeological approach. No scholar would ever repatinate a coin. I'm sure that there will eventually be a shift in the practice.

Scholars did at one time have just this

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

mentality. Around the turn of the century archaeologists were in the restoration frame of mind. That is to say that they believed an object should be restored to its original appearance. Much south Italian pottery was not just repaired, but repainted as well. Pieces were added, artistic merit was taken, etc. Now, archaeologists are in the opposite mind set. Repair and conserve only, but don't mess with it. When they replace missing pieces on pottery, they always use a different color of clay so that you can clearly see what is original and what isn't.

Wayne G. Sayles: I am a collector of Roman Provincial coins from the Cilician city of Anazarbus. The soil conditions in this region are not conducive to preservation of metal, so they usually come in pretty wretched condition have perhaps the world's largest collection of coins from this city. I very seriously considering having my entire collection cleaned and, when necessary, repatinated professionally. This is not because I expect to money on the sale of my coins--they are not for sale and probably won't until I'm a forgotten speck in history. It is because I want to enjoy t warmth and beauty of the coins without all the encrustation and discolor Don't take this as a recommendation to others, but from my own point of the collection would be more enjoyable if the coins were made visually attractive. Financial motivation is *not* the only reason for repatination.

Tony Clayton: I was always under the impression that the design of the coin was locked into the patina which may well be of variable thickness, so removal and repatination would actually result in a deterioration in the quality of the image on the coin.

I am using the word patina to describe the brown or green oxides and carbonates that form on bronze or copper coins rather than the tarnish that you get on silver.

Each to their own, but is that not the joy of coin collecting?

Coin Cleaning

Gabe Camacho: Has anyone tried using freon-type solvents to non-destructively clean coins?

A number of years ago, E & T Koin-tainer made a wonderful Trichlorofluoroethane solvent named Resolve which is no longer on the market due to the US government's Environmental Protection Agency's restrictions on freon-like chemicals. This solvent dissolved dirt, oils, lacquer and "dealer-applied concealing substances", while leaving the patina intact. It was completely non-reactive with all surfaces I tried it on, even on coins with very reactive horn-silver problems. It was great at removing chemical traces of bad cleaning attempts. Sadly, I've found no replacement for what it could accomplish.

For the last few years, I've been using 'Blue Ribbon' Coin Conditioner, which contains trichloroethane and a lubricant. Unlike Resolve, this only works well on some bronzes. It doesn't do the trick on most silver since the solvent doesn't work as well as the Resolve did and the lubricant clouds most of the silver surfaces I've tried it on. It is also not useful for bronzes that have an unstable green patina, since, in that case, it removes some of the patina and obscures the green color with a brown one, at least temporarily. If used as directed it does wonders for bronzes that have "crud" you want to remove.

I use it two different ways. If the surfaces are good, I lightly touch a Q-tip cotton swab to the liquid and swab the coin with the slightly wet Q-tip, and then immediately follow with a dry Q-tip to remove as much of it as I can. If the bronze's surfaces are really dirty or (as one dealer who is great otherwise persists in doing) are covered with darkening substances to cover surface irregularities, piling it on heavy with Q-tips using multiple applications, if needed, gets rid of a lot of junk and sometimes reveals amazing amounts

of detail.

Has anyone else tried it or have any other suggestions for similar solvents?

Walter Bloom: Gabe, there is an even better (i.e. even less destructive) solvent that I have used, namely trichlorotrifluoroethane (1,1,2-trichloro-1,2,2-trifluoro-ethane) which is used in the electronics industry. I have a tin labeled RS Components Limited, a UK company.

Todd Webber: I have used watermark fluid that contains trichlorotrifluoroethane. The product is available in Canada from most stamp dealers or from Unitrade and Associates in Toronto, Ontario. The product is called Super Safe Watermark Fluid, and it is the Unitrade house brand. The label simply states "Contains: trichlorotrifluoroethane" I don't know if there is anything else in there.

This material has been condensed and edited. It originally appeared on the NUMISM-L discussion list on the Internet during the month of December, 1997 and is in the public domain. The names in all cases identify the originator.

Please...
Contribute an article
to *The Bulletin*