

AN ANCIENT SURPRISE

by Peter E. Lewis



Figure 18 – View of ancient temples at Palmyra in 2010. (Wikimedia Commons. Photo by Bernard Gagnon.)

RECENTLY a friend asked me to identify 30 ancient coins that had accumulated in his collection over the years. They were all dark brown and fairly worn. I approached the task with excitement because one never knows if there might be a rare or even previously unknown coin hidden in a mixture of coins like this. As it turned out, they were mostly Roman coins from the 1st to the 4th

century AD; and as one would expect, the commonest emperors were Constantine the Great (2 coins), Constantius II (2 coins) and Arcadius (2 coins).

An interesting coin was the billon antoninianus that was issued jointly by the Roman emperor Aurelian (270-275 AD) and the king of Palmyra, Vabalathus (267-272 AD). (**Figure 1**) In 2015 Palmyra was in the news because it was captured by the extremist Islamic group known as ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) or “Islamic State”. These people are terrorists and cultural vandals. When they captured Palmyra, which is an ancient ruined city in the Syrian desert (See map, **Figure 2**), they blew-up some of the still-standing buildings including

the temple of Bel, which had been dedicated in 32 AD. (**Figure 3**) This was a great tragedy because Palmyra is very important historically. Although uninhabited for centuries it had been occupied since Neolithic times. It developed into a city known as Tadmor in about 2,300 BC and was mentioned in Babylonian documents. The god, Bel, is mentioned in the Old Testament, and in Canaan he was known as Baal.

In 260 AD the king of Palmyra, Odenathus, sided with the Romans when the Sasanian king, Shapur I, invaded the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire and captured the Roman emperor Valerian. Odenathus inflicted a severe defeat on the Sasanians and twice threatened



Figure 1 – Billon antoninianus issued jointly by Vabalathus, king of Palmyra, and the Roman emperor Aurelian. On the obverse Vabalathus wears a diadem, and on the reverse Aurelian has a radiate crown. It was minted at Antioch from 270 to 272. Sear, Vol. III, 11718.

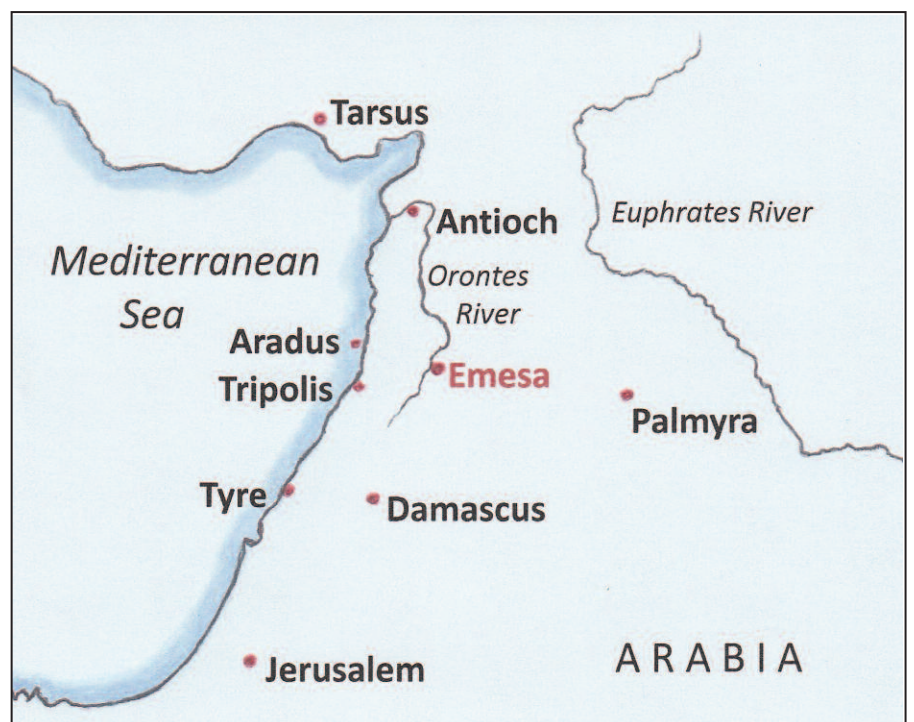


Figure 2 – Map showing Palmyra, Antioch and Emesa.

their capital, Ctesiphon. As a result, Valerian's son and successor, Gallienus, gave Odenathus control over all of Rome's eastern provinces and the title, *Corrector Totius Orientis* (Administrator of the Whole East).

When Odenathus was assassinated in 267 his wife, Zenobia, assumed control. She appointed her young son, Vabal-

athus, king of Palmyra, and seized Egypt and most of Asia Minor in an attempt to establish an independent Palmyrene empire. When Aurelian became the Roman emperor in 270 he granted to Vabalathus the titles that Odenathus had held, and coins with Vabalathus on the obverse and Aurelian on the reverse were issued at Antioch and Alexandria.

On the coin in Figure 1 the Factory number (Z for 7) under Valerian's bust indicated that this side was the reverse. By 272 Aurelian had grown strong enough to invade the East. In response Zenobia declared herself 'Augusta' and issued coins with her image on them. (Figure 4) Aurelian defeated Zenobia's forces and liberated the region from Palmyrene control. He went on to capture Palmyra where Zenobia and Vabalathus were taken prisoner, and Zenobia was paraded as a captive in Aurelian's triumphal procession in Rome.

Another interesting coin was minted at Ephesus during the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan (97-117 AD). It is worn and pitted but Trajan's head can be seen on the obverse with some of the legend, and a stag can be seen on the reverse. (Figure 5) The stag was the symbol of the goddess Artemis, and at Ephesus she had an enormous temple which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The temple and the idol of the goddess appear on a large silver coin of Claudius. (Figure 6)

Ephesus is especially important for Christians because Saint Paul lived there for about two years from 54 AD. He converted so many people that the craftsmen who made little silver shrines of the goddess were losing money and they caused a riot in the city. The ruins of Ephesus can still be seen and are visited by thousands of tourists every year.



Figure 3 – The temple of Bel at Palmyra before its destruction in 2015. (Wikimedia Commons)



Figure 4 – Billon antoninianus of Zenobia, queen of Palmyra. The crescent behind the bust of Zenobia equates her with the moon goddess, Selene. The legend is *S ZENOBIA AVG* (Septimia Zenobia Augusta). On the reverse Juno stands with a peacock at her feet. The mint is Emesa or Antioch. Sear, Vol. III, 11732. (Roma Numismatics, Auction 6, Lot 989)



Figure 5 – Bronze coin of the Roman emperor Trajan, minted at Ephesus. Size 19 x 21 mms, and weight 5.34 grams. Trajan's head is on the obverse. On the reverse there is a stag walking to the left. Roman Provincial Coinage, Vol. III, 2051.



Figure 6 – Cistophorus of the Roman emperor Claudius (41-54 AD). The façade of the temple consisted entirely of columns and the idol of Artemis would have been well inside the temple, but the goddess occasionally appeared in the large square window in the pediment above. Sear, Vol. I, 1839. (Triton XIV, Lot 649)



Figure 7 – Crowds of tourists at Ephesus. (Wikimedia Commons)

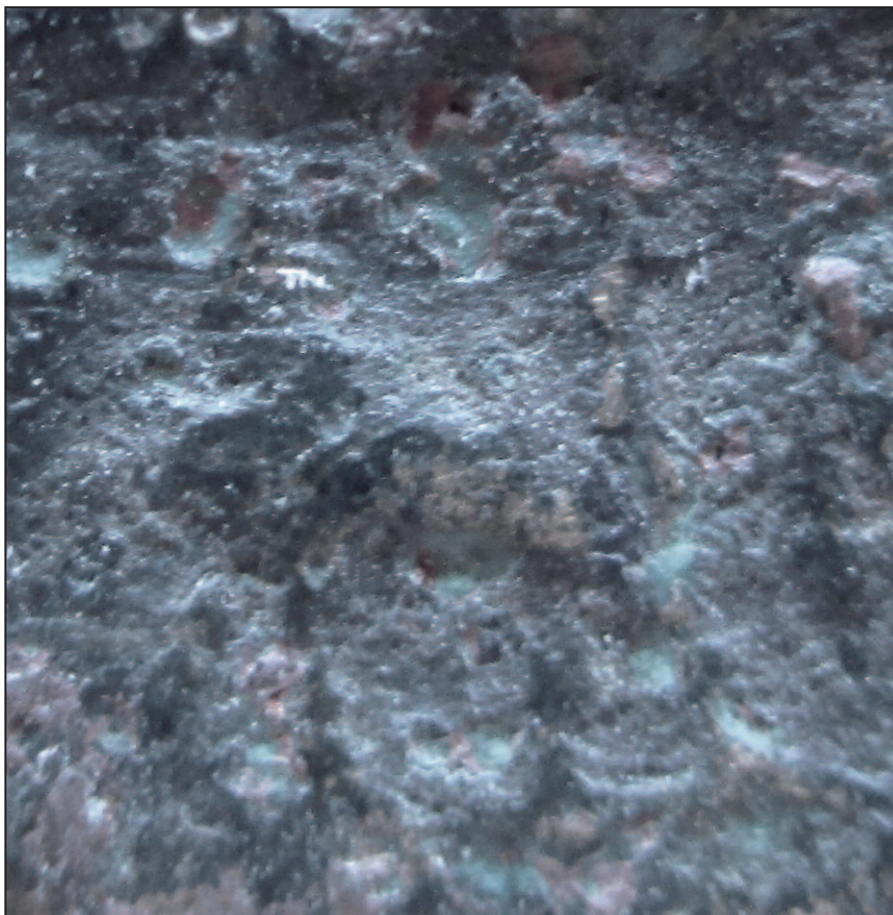


Figure 8 – Countermark to the right of Trajan's head on the coin in Figure 5. It is an oval incuse countermark showing a stag walking to the right. It is similar to Howgego 316.

(Figure 7) What is particularly interesting about this coin is that there is a countermark of a stag to the right of Trajan's head. **(Figure 8)** A similar countermark is listed as number 316 in *Greek Imperial Countermarks* by C.J. Howgego. He records only one example and it is on a coin of Amyzon, a small town of Caria. The coin was issued from 166 BC to 27 BC. As there is a gap of over 100 years between the coins with the countermarks it is unlikely that the same countermark die was used for Trajan's coin. A new die would have been made, but where and for what reason is unknown.

The big surprise was a small bronze coin only 16.5 mms in diameter and 1.82 grams in weight, with a die axis of 6h. **(Figures 9 and 10)** On the obverse there is the laureate, draped bust of a beardless emperor, seen partly from behind. The obverse legend is clear: ANTΩN-EINOC. As Caracalla (198-217 AD) and Elagabalus (218-222 AD) both used this name on their coins (usually with some letters before and after) one cannot tell which emperor it is. On the reverse there is a large A in a wreath, and outside the wreath there are some tiny letters. Unfortunately some of the letters are not clear, but they are probably [EM]ECIQN, which would indicate that the mint was Emesa in Syria. (See map in Figure 2) The

city was also known as Emisa. I have not been able to find this coin in the reference books that I have, so there is a good chance that it is unpublished and possibly unique. Elagabalus was the high priest at Emesa before he became emperor, and on his coins he is without a beard whereas Caracalla is more often shown with a beard. So the emperor on the coin is probably Elagabalus.

In his comprehensive catalogue, *The Coins of Roman Antioch*, Richard McAlee puts the bronze coins of Elagabalus into six groups, but except for the

last group there is no indication on these coins that the mint was Antioch. On the reverse of the first four of these groups there is a wreath surrounding SC with one of the following: Δ and ε, Δ and ε with a small eagle, Δ and ε with a ram, KA (Figure 11). The SC probably stands for SENATUS CONSULTO (by decree of the Senate). In group 5 the wreath surrounds only Δ and ε with a star (Figure 12). In Group 6 the coins are much larger and name Antioch as the mint on the reverse. On these large coins there is the

continued overleaf

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TO BE UPDATED



Figure 9 – Small bronze coin probably minted at Emesa. On the obverse there is a laureate bust of an emperor, probably Elagabalus. On the reverse there is a large A in a wreath, with tiny letters outside the wreath.



Figure 10 – Drawing of the coin in Figure 9.



Figure 11 – Small bronze coin with the radiate draped bust of Elagabalus on the obverse. On the reverse there is SC with K above and A below, all in a wreath. Diameter 16 mms and weight 4.18 grams. McAlee 796. (Classical Numismatic Group, eAuction 246, lot 345)

Tyche of Antioch on the reverse with SC, Δ and ε, a ram, and a star or crescent (Figure 13).

Δε probably stands for ΔΗΜΑΡΧ ΕΞΟΥΣΙΑC, which is Greek for “tribune authority”. These Greek words appear alone on the reverse of tetradrachms minted at Antioch by Gordian III, 238-244 AD. (Figure 14) They appear with the addition of ΥΠΑΤΟC (Consul) on tetradrachms of Caracalla and Elagabalus minted at Antioch.

KA in Greek means the number 21, and probably refers to the value of the coin. When Aurelian introduced new coinage in 274 AD the reformed denomination bore the letters XXI (Figure 15) or KA on the coins of some eastern mints (Figure 16), and according to David Sear in *Roman Coins and their Values III* (page 415) this “is usually taken to mean that the coin was worth 1/20th of its equivalent weight in pure silver.” The coin with A in a wreath is presumably the lowest

denomination in a series, perhaps with some denominations in the series being minted at Antioch and some at Emesa. The coins with a ram or a star would have been minted at Antioch while the coins with a small eagle would have been minted at Emesa.

I enjoyed identifying these coins for my friend but there was one coin that I could not identify. I have no idea what it is. It is a large bowl-shaped coin, 34 mms



Figure 12 – Bronze coin with the laureate draped bust of Elagabalus on the obverse. On the reverse there is Δε and a star, all in a wreath. Diameter 23 mms and weight 7.83 grams. McAlee 799. (Münzen & Medaillen, Auction 20, lot 562)



Figure 13 – Large bronze coin with laureate head of Elagabalus on the obverse and the Tyche of Antioch seated on the reverse. On the reverse the river god Orontes swims at Tyche's feet and the legend means “of the people of Antioch, colonial metropolis.” Diameter 31 mms and weight 17.41 grams. McAlee 802(b)/1. (Classical Numismatic Group, eAuction 246, Lot 349)



Figure 14 – Tetradrachm of Gordian III minted at Antioch in 240 AD. On the reverse the Greek words mean “tribune authority.” Prieur 282. (Heritage Auctions, January 2011, Lot 24733)



Figure 15 – Post-reform antoninianus of Aurelian (270-275 AD) with his radiate head on the obverse and the sun-god Sol standing with a captive at his feet on the reverse. XXI in the exergue. Mint: Cyzicus. Sear, Vol. III, 11566. (Solidus Numismatik, Auction 1, lot 125)

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in diameter and weighing 27 grams. On the convex side there is a branch pattern, but it is blank on the concave side. (Figure 17) If a CAB reader knows what it is, please let me know.

☆☆☆



Figure 16 – Post-reform antoninianus of Aurelian with his radiate head on the obverse and the sun-god Sol standing with a captive at his feet on the reverse. KA in exergue. Mint: Tripolis. Sear, Vol. III, 11609. (Classical Numismatic Group, eAuction 275, Lot 160)



Figure 17 – Large bowl-shaped coin with a branch pattern on the convex surface.

Book Review by Dr K.A. Rodgers

RENNIKS AUSTRALIAN COIN & BANKNOTE VALUES 27th EDITION

THE 2016 edition of *Renniks Australian Coin & Banknote Values* crash-landed on my desk on the last day of the year. I had missed seeing the 26th edition but had heard a number of comments about its pricings. I was keen to see the changes introduced in the 27th.

As with recent editions the catalogue has been edited by Michael Pitt. Major contributors are Michael Craft, Eric Eigner, Klaus Ford, Mick Vort-Ronald, Trevor Wilkin, Steele Waterman, Steven Nugent and Alan Pitt.

Pages 6 & 7 are devoted to defining coin grades and numismatic terms. A correlation is provided of ANDA and PCGS gradings. Intriguingly this differentiates uncirculated pre-decimal coins from uncirculated decimal. Sounds like a great debating topic for club night.

In a review of an earlier edition I gave Renniks full marks for providing a copy of Gidley-King's proclamation of 1800. As in that earlier edition the 27th edition goes on to list items as "Proclamation Coins" that ain't in that proclamation. It then has the decency to add alongside each such item "Not included in original proclamation". And we all know why that is!

All pre-Commonwealth coins are there as are Commonwealth pre-decimal. In places abundant detail is provided to clarify subtleties of Aussie coin collecting as, for example, the entire page devoted to commemorative florins. Full marks for this.

Regrettably this is not always the case as in the paragraph devoted to the 1965 fantasies of Edward VIII on p.48. This should either be deleted or expanded. As it stands it is neither fish, nor fowl, nor good red herring. At least 13 different, Australia-related, "unofficial crown size patterns" of Edward VIII were knocked-off between 1955 and 2008.

The content of the three pages on pre-decimal patterns and proofs is excellent but the pages are not all that user-friendly. For starters, it would be helpful if patterns and proofs were separated out in their combined pricings on p.55.

There are just two pages on pre-decimal varieties. In my 1980 12th edition of Renniks information on varieties of a particular denomination is grouped with that denomination in the main section. For example, varieties of King George V pennies are listed with King George V pennies. Not only does this provide considerably more information on the available varieties but such a format provides a context in which the different varieties can be understood. Both aspects are worthy of reconsidering for the 28th edition given the popularity of variety collecting.

The multitude of decimal issues are all there. Throughout this section the numer-

ous illustrated page layouts help identify those many, many issues. Also a clear call has been made to separate circulation issues from those the cataloguers consider "Non-Circulating Legal Tender." But this is done for RAM issues only. Perth's contributions are referred to as "Collector Coins" although most if not all are NCLT given its definition on p. 7.

Perhaps in the 28th edition the RAM's use of the term privymark - along with mintmark, and counterstamp - could be clarified in the RAM listing and on p. 7. There are differences in usage between RAM and Perth as there is with the traditional concept of privymark.

PNC collectors have not been overlooked. They have four-and-a half pages of glorious colour to help figure-out what is missing from their collections.

Internment camp monies and Keeling-Cocos get four pages and then we are on to paper money. The latter is here in considerable detail as warrants the huge expansion in this collecting area over recent decades. It all comes fully priced. If for no other reason, this section of this Renniks will find the 27th edition standing on my desk, ready to hand, for the next 12 months.

Which brings me to the highly contentious question of pricing. After all, this catalogue was once called simply *Australian Coin & Banknote Guide*. Today it is about *Australian Coin & Banknote Values*.

I decline to comment on any of the prices given. I believe each user of the 27th edition has to determine for themselves how the prices cited in their particular collecting area stack up with the prices paid at auction or being asked by dealers both in the last few months of 2016 as well as throughout 2017.

I have started to do this with the Roxbury and Noble sales in November last. It is proving highly educational.

☆☆☆

