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CONTENTS

- World War I Medals
- Corner Cards on
USPI Postal Stationery
- Snuff Bottles
- Berlin Wall
- Rosetta Mission
- Club News



*World War I
Commemorative
Issue*

editor's
note

OUT OF THE TRENCHES?



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In 2014 we celebrate the 100th anniversary of WORLD WAR I otherwise known as "The Great War for Civilization" ("The War to end all wars"). By 1918, when it ended, national borders, particularly those in Europe, had been re-drawn and re-adjusted, in the wake of political and economic instability, violence, fear and anxiety. The war that was waged, and the peace that emerged from its ruins, had set new systems, standards and models for the international community. And yet, it did not take too long

before the very same fears and anxieties which had troubled the world, as well as the emerging nationalist and separatist movements, would again find their way, through another Great War, to the present day. As we speak a hundred years on, despite astounding advances in science and technology, the world is rocked by international conflict and explosive political and sectarian violence, driven by a particularly cruel terrorist edge, which have attacked the most vital of democratic institutions, to once again threaten to re-align the political and economic boundaries in many parts of the world. The world seems to have entered a new cycle of re-examination and re-definition of traditional dogma in religion and political ideology, resulting in surprisingly unconventional alliances challenging age-old limits and loyalties. Indeed, the most recently publicized separatist movements, such as those of Scotland and Cataluña, as well as the more volatile and violent movements in the former Russian Empire, as well as in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the Orient, are constantly challenging the cultural, political and economic resolve of the established world order.

Beset by a much bigger and increasingly more complicated world, grand ideas, established through several waves of political and economic uncertainty over the last hundred years, have driven the world to re-examine the traditional role and significance of money, currency, gold and other stores of value in the face of looming uncertainty. The previous world order, which was backed by a

sovereign, has transformed itself into a virtual promise to pay on the basis of the reputation of some central governing authority. No longer is money tied closely to gold, or other precious metals, which once wielded power, influence and control in the not so distant past, but which are now almost at their lowest ebb.



The de-coupling of currency from hard assets, together with the rise and development of regional economies, aided by the emergence of the worldwide web, has also encouraged merchants, economists and financial institutions to turn to new types of non-traditional currency such as the EURO (since 1992), as well as purely digital /intangible cryptocurrency such as the BITCOIN (Satoshi Nakamoto, 2008).

The EURO is the official currency used by the organizations and institutions of the European Union. It is managed and administered from Frankfurt, Germany, by the European Central Bank (ECB). It is the official currency of the EUROZONE, which consists of 18 of the 28 member-states of the European Union. It was officially adopted in December 6, 1992, by virtue of the Maastrich Treaty, and introduced to the world financial markets, as an accounting currency, on January 1, 1999. Physical euro coins and banknotes entered circulation on January 1, 2002. Aside from the European Union, the euro has been used in five other European countries, as well as worldwide, making the euro the currently most traded currency in the world, surpassing the American dollar.

Yet, in spite of its vaunted sophisticated organization and international reputation, the euro did not survive unscathed the world financial crisis of 2008. This was a critical year for the Eurozone, as it was deluged by a giant wave of financial defaults among many of its members, accompanied by an unprecedented worldwide abuse of public trust and confidence in the international banking and financial systems. This critical situation continued until such time that the world, and particularly these countries, were slowly and painfully able to climb back to solvency. Then followed an extended period of delicate balancing between recession / stimulus/ inflation on the one hand, and deflation/ "stagflation"/ depression on the other. As of 2013, there were still serious doubts whether the euro, as a system, or the European economic union itself, would survive. The jury is still out on this.

PNAS salutes

THE ROSETTA MISSION



ROSETTA and PHILAE (cnes.fr). Inset medal shows the first man-made satellite, Russia's SPUTNIK 1 (1957).

Somewhere in the deep darkness of space, on November 12 of this year, at around 5:00 pm (local time), the European Space Agency's (ESA) satellite probe ROSETTA disengaged its lander PHILAE, sending it on its seven-hour descent to a spinning comet, tagged 67-P, speeding at more than 41000 miles per hour, which ROSETTA had been tracking over a distance of more than 300 million miles, for more than ten years! Despite several glitches during the long flight, and the lander bouncing once over the near zero-gravity surface, the lander finally settled in a hollow where it was to attach itself by two harpoons and three large leg screws.

This was the astonishingly successful culmination of a more than ten-year effort by the ESA team of scientists and technicians to send an unmanned probe into space, to do what had never been done before, which was to catch a speeding comet no more than 16 square kilometres in area, and to attach a small lander-explorer-scientific laboratory to its surface (a near-impossible task in the vastness of space), in order to photograph, survey and explore this new world, perform specific experiments, and relay back to mission control vital scientific data bearing on fundamental questions such as, among others, the origins of the universe, the presence of water, and the beginnings of life as we know it.



APOLLO 11 silver and bronze medals (38mm diameter) celebrating the first manned landing on the MOON, July 20, 1969.

This event is a milestone in man's attempt to explore and interact with his universe and, astounding as it may seem, these explorers stand on the shoulders of the three men of NASA's APOLLO 11 Mission (NEIL A. ARMSTRONG, EDWIN E. "BUZZ" ALDRIN JR. and MICHAEL COLLINS) who, with computer power less than that of today's simplest cell phone, successfully accomplished the first manned landing on the MOON on July 20, 1969, and whose pioneering feat we now recall. (Medals courtesy of F. WILLIAM L. VILLAREAL)



Five pink gold tea caddy-shaped snuff bottles, each attached by chains to chatelaine and/or suspension hooks and accoutrements. Height of bottles ranges from 4 cm to 6 cm.

number and quality, have been considered the top collectibles by experienced collectors. This will explain the fabulous prices that snuff bottles of proper quality and provenance have commanded at auction in the past.

As time rolled on, Qing pieces quickly disappeared into museums and a handful of public and private collections, leaving most other collectors and enthusiasts painfully wanting and mired in a sea of mediocre copies, clever forgeries and outright mass production. Fortunately, there have always been the occasional discoveries which would eventually end up in curio and antique shops, or in a few reputable auction houses, which would sustain the interest of collectors and scholars alike.

In China, renewed post-war Western interest in antiquities has spurred tremendous interest in art objects and which has driven the international market, despite draconic penalties imposed by the Chinese government on the gathering, possession and export of these items, most of which were ironically considered political contraband during the Cultural Revolution. In the 1990's, as a modernizing China prepared itself for major international events, particularly the Beijing Olympics, the excavation and development of land for infrastructure and general real estate purposes incidentally unearthed such a number of artifacts, including snuff bottles, jades, porcelain and pottery, that the informal local traders and dealers needed to cleverly hide these items among vegetables and other perishables in trucks and containers, in order to spirit them out of China to the collectors' market worldwide. Current land development to satisfy China's growing need for



Group of seven important tiger's teeth snuff bottles with a variety of gold and enamel mounts. Two have enamel hinged lids. The one on top has an accompanying clip with the royal insignia of Queen Sawang Wattana (1862-1955), one of the consorts of King Rama V. Length of each tooth ranges from 7 cm to 13 cm.

THE COLLECTION

Fig. 1: 80mm clear quartz rock crystal, in the form of a sacred cabbage, with enclosed tourmaline needles, designed to rest on its side. Carved cabbage, vines, bitter melon and bat (longevity) with crystal stem cover and ivory spoon.

Fig. 2: 72mm black (translucent mottled dark green) nephrite? with small rounded flat base. Coral and jadite cover with ivory spoon.



Fig. 3: 90mm one-piece expertly carved lustrous white, yellow and brown agate, incised on both sides, in the form of twin goldfish (domestic harmony), designed to rest on its belly. Cover made of carved coral with ivory spoon.

(NOTE: Many bottles featured here have been enlarged for detail, and are not necessarily to scale.)

Fig. 4: 97mm flat dark beer-bottle brown glass with a pinched hip and a small flat base, probably designed to lie on its side. Yellow stone cover with ivory spoon (probably not original).



Fig. 5: 58mm polished clear agate, with brown mottling and a tapering "D" cross-section, short concave foot and flat back, on which it is designed to rest. Carved floral translucent stone cover with no spoon, as found.



Fig. 6: 55mm cherry red and opaque white glass, in the form of an artichoke (partly showing bottom) with rounded base. Coral cover with twisted wire bronze setting and spoon.

Fig. 7: 72mm two aspects of clear glass (stained by substance) in the form of a gourd, with a concave base, designed to stand at an angle, and embossed on two sides with two young dragons. The floral cover, designed as a stem, together with its spoon, are all made of silver.



Fig. 8: 50mm (68mm width) green marble/onyx, in the form of a squat vase, with a short concave foot. Cover made of wood and coral with an ivory spoon.

Fig. 20: 57mm clear oval glass (enlarged for detail), with a flat rounded base, which contains a continuous miniature painting, executed from the inside, with specialized tools, pens and brushes, to depict a busy street scene with multifarious activities on one side, and, on the other side, a grand house with its master and attendants in a grove of trees, overlooking a swirling lake with boat house and fishermen hauling their nets in the background. Cover of a brownish material (probably not original), with no spoon, as found.



Fig. 21: 45mm coin silver, a pocket piece ingeniously made from two sides of a genuine USA 1881 Morgan-type Dollar. OBV: Liberty Head, REV: War Eagle. The entire piece, including chain and spoon, made from coin silver.