

Concepts of

NUMISMATIC RESEARCH

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for the
Numismatic Bibliomania Society
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Based on curricula from Department of History and Philosophy of Science,
University of Cambridge.

A

Personal Research Approach



What is Numismatic Research?

- ▣ It's the collection and analysis of data to:
 - Understand reports or observations made by others;
 - Test hypotheses concerning causes, effects or trends that may help explain past events.

Purpose of Numismatic Research

- ▣ Understand past practices and their relationship to coins and medals
- ▣ Verify, modify or challenge earlier publications
- ▣ Locate previously unknown information
- ▣ Encourage additional or new research paths

Steps Involved in Historical Research

- ▣ Define the subject or problem
- ▣ It should be:
 - a numismatic subject in which you are interested;
 - a specific issue, coin, controversy, technique, person, etc. that is related to the issue or subject.
- ▣ Decide what you expect to learn about the subject
- ▣ Limit the scope of your research – better to begin small and expand than to start big and lose focus

Sources of Information

- ▣ Primary (rarely on-line)
 - Eye or ear witnesses
 - Original Mint or Treasury documents
 - Personal papers of participants
- ▣ Secondary (print and on-line)
 - Books
 - Periodicals
 - Newspapers
 - Encyclopedias
 - Review of research and other references

Evaluating Numismatic Sources

▣ On-line Sources

- ▣ Most internet sources are out of date or false in whole or in part
- ▣ Strong bias toward selling rather than informing

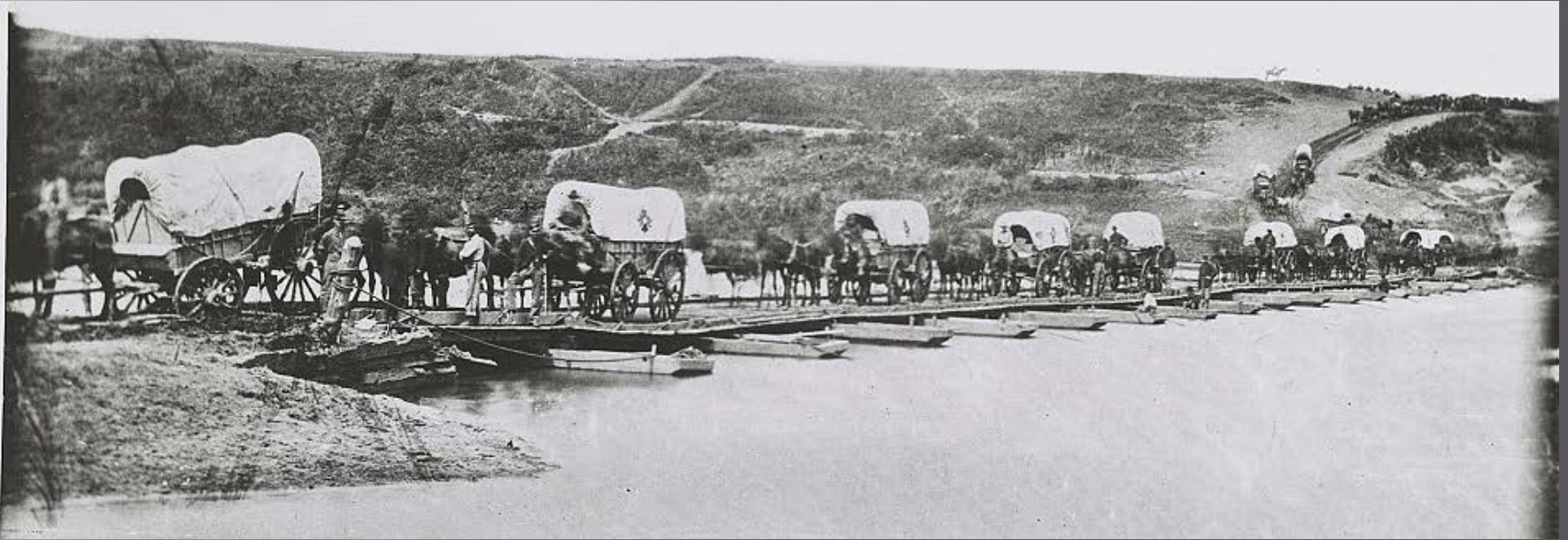
▣ Auction Catalogs

- ▣ Often use facts and imagination indiscriminately to motivate buyers.

▣ U.S. Mint

- ▣ Most U.S. Mint materials were for internal use and of high reliability
- ▣ Letters from the Mint to ordinary citizens are not necessarily complete or accurate
- ▣ Press releases are usually incomplete or misleading

The Journey Begins



Where and How to Begin

- ▣ Preliminary investigation – Identify prior work and define your search
 - Look on-line and in hobby publications (books and auction catalogs) for information about your topic.
 - Copy and read everything you find, even if it is repetitious or outdated. Right now you are collecting data not analyzing it

Preliminary Data

- Keep track of all your contacts.
- Bibliography of published material
 - Notes relating to each such as errors, reliability, etc.
- Title and URL, author, age of data.
 - Notes relating to each such as purpose of site, errors, misinformation, deliberate bias, reliability, etc.
 - Skeptical of all commercial sites.
 - NNP is highly reliable – but
 - It is a repository
 - Content is not curated for accuracy of content

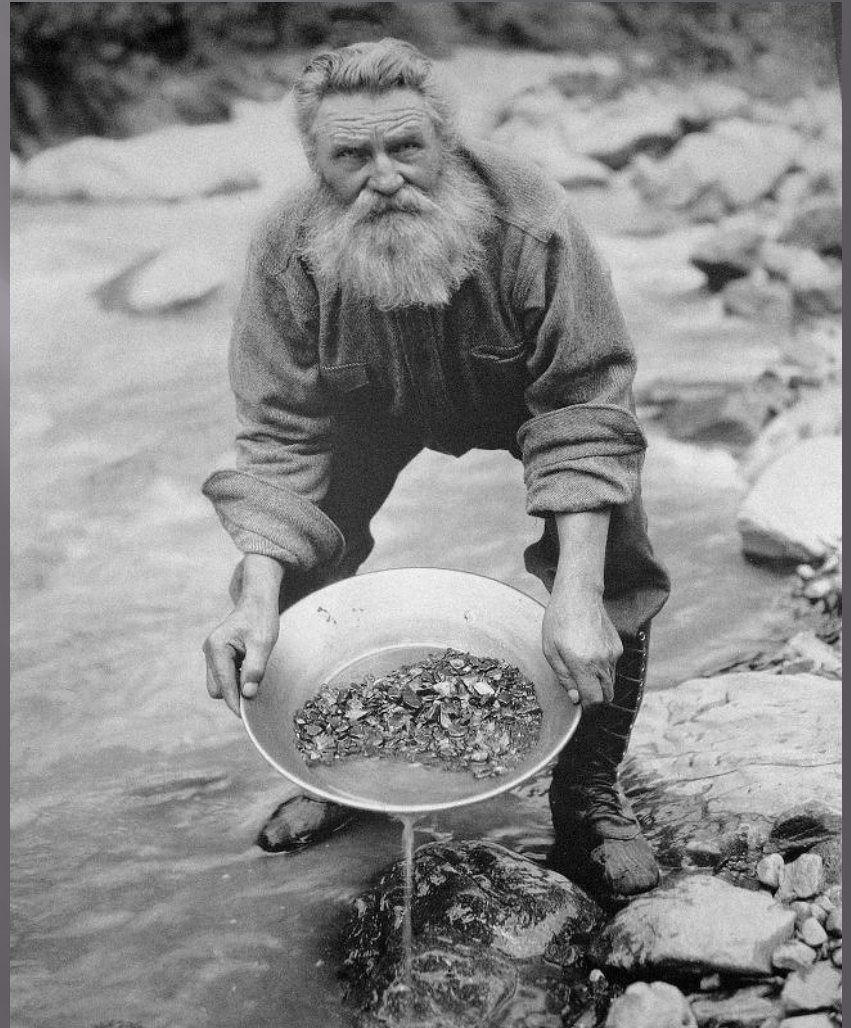
Preliminary Data

- ▣ On-line search will return a lot of 'hits,' but we have to sift through them to find useful material.
- ▣ Look for non-sales oriented sites.
- ▣ Look for published articles.
- ▣ Look for names of recognized hobby authorities.
- ▣ Sites listed on the first page or two of results might not be the best.
- ▣ With a little practice you'll get the 'feel' for which sites have useful numismatic data and which are just selling smoke.

Consolidate

- ▣ Consolidate data from several sites.
- ▣ Extract from your data:
 - Who was involved,
 - What was done,
 - When was it done,
 - Where was it done,
 - Why was it done.
- ▣ A table or diagram can be very helpful in sorting and consolidating preliminary data

Archival Gold



What to Expect

- ▣ If you go to any archive – national, congressional, university, state – you will be expected to have some information concerning where to search
- ▣ You cannot walk in and ask someone to locate everything on your topic
 - You'll get a blank stare and maybe directions to search their database

What to Expect

- ▣ Begin with results from your who, what, when, where and why questions
 - ‘What’ is your subject
 - ‘Where’ and ‘When’ narrow your search to a place and time
 - ‘Who’ identifies participants and/or decision makers
 - ‘Why’ is part of the answer for which you are searching

What to Expect

- ▣ Research libraries and archives have strict rules about accessing and using materials.
 - You will have to register
 - Follow all their rules
 - Pass through security screening before you enter and before your leave.
 - There will also be constant scrutiny of everything you do.

Example - NARA

- ▣ An archivist can help you locate the broad category of the U.S. Mint at Philadelphia
- ▣ They will probably direct you to a “finding aid” and you will have to look through the descriptions for something that might include the place and time of interest
- ▣ These will also have the physical location of documents you want
- ▣ For US Mint and Treasury, there is no comprehensive paper or electronic index

Example - NARA

- You will complete a form like this to request documents.

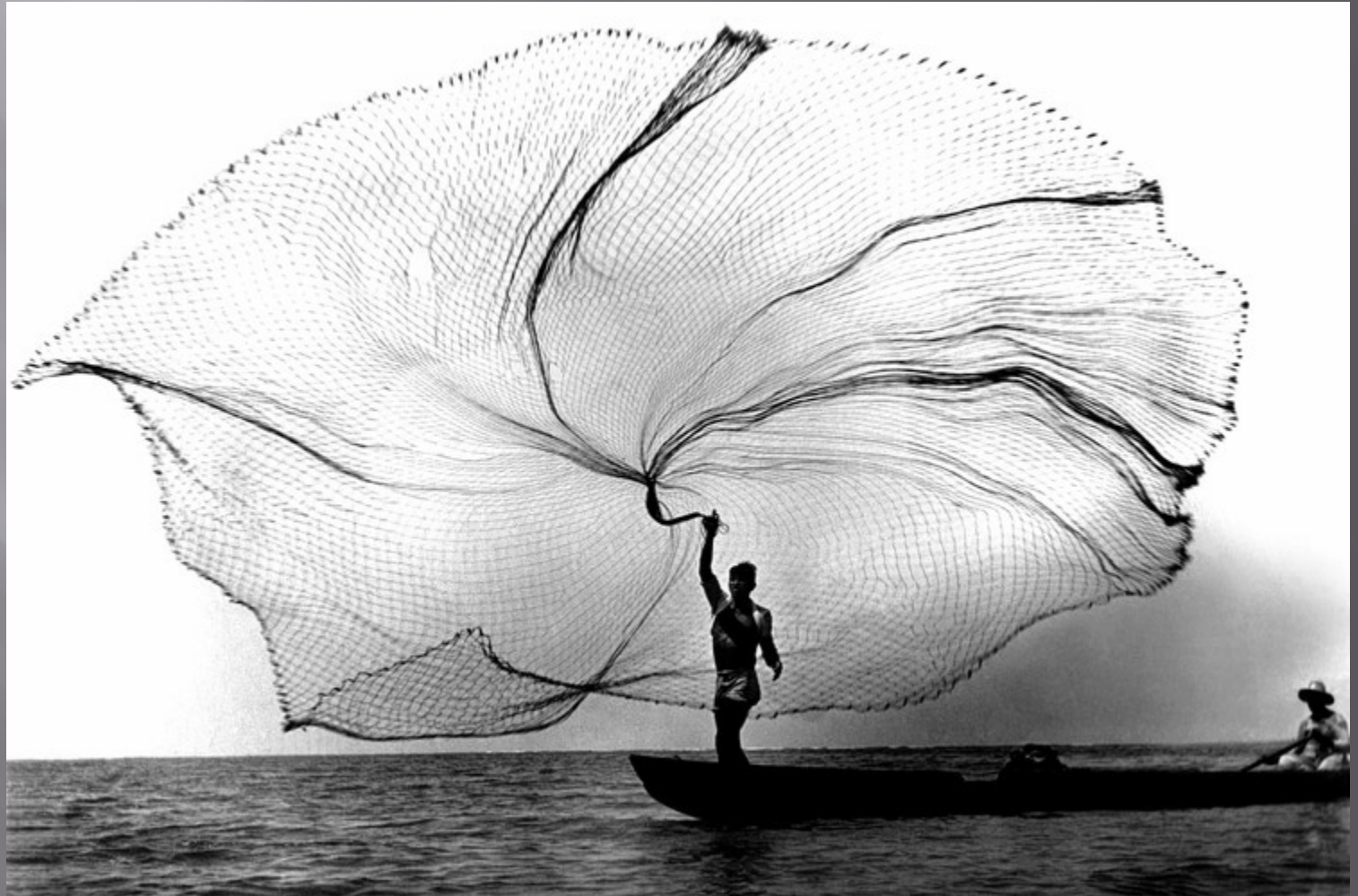
REFERENCE SERVICE SLIP <small>*SHADED BOXES FOR NARA USE ONLY*</small>				DATE (MM/DD/YYYY)	TRACKING NUMBER
LAST NAME (PRINT) BURDETTE		FIRST NAME (PRINT) ROGER		RESEARCHER CARD NUMBER 126112	
SERIES OR COLLECTION NAME U.S. MINT					
RECORD GROUP NUMBER/ COLLECTION DESIGNATION 104	ENTRY NUMBER 229	NATIONAL ARCHIVES IDENTIFIER (OPTIONAL) 7065060	BOX/ITEM NOS. REQUESTED Box 70-75		
STACK 450	ROW 66	COMPARTMENT 19-27	SHELF 5-01	NUMBER OF BOXES/ITEMS PULLED	
OTHER RECORD IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION [SPECIFY FOLDER TITLE(S)/FILE NUMBER(S)] "LETTERS RECEIVED"					
REQUEST REVIEWED BY			REQUEST PULLED BY		
RECEIVED BY	DATE (MM/DD/YYYY)	REFILED BY	DATE (MM/DD/YYYY)		
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION			DO NOT REMOVE FROM RECORDS		NA 14001 (08-16) Required by NARA 1572

- Then wait an hour or more to receive your order.

Archival Visit Objectives

- ▣ Maximum data
- ▣ Minimum visits
- ▣ Relocatable data
- ▣ Simplified references
- ▣ Multiple data reuse

Cast a Wide Net



Maximum Data

- ▣ Plan your visit around most likely record groups and boxes/volumes
 - Prepare a list of key words to aid your search
 - Examine every page and every sheet

Likely Types of Files

- ▣ What to look for.
 - Letters sent and received mentioning your subject
 - Coinage journals
 - Log books
 - Director's Annual Reports
 - Annual Assay Commission Reports
 - Special Assay Reports
- ▣ Mint documents have limited organization

Minimum Visits

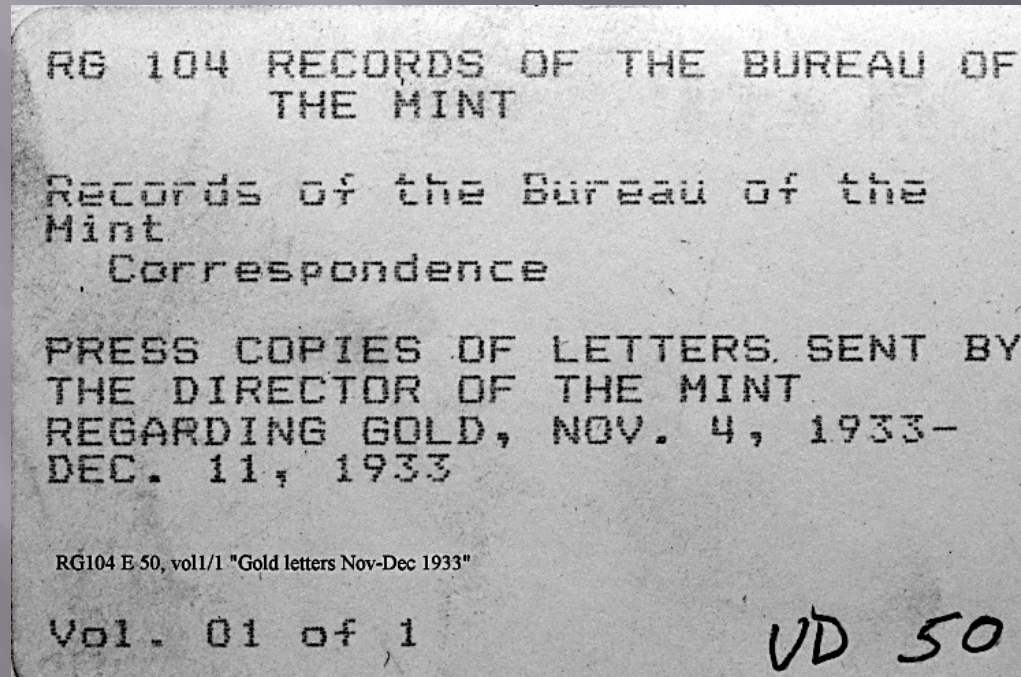
- ▣ Make every visit productive
- ▣ Visually scan documents you access for anything relating to:
 - Your topic
 - Other topics of interest
 - Unusual or unexpected subjects
 - Participation by prominent people
- ▣ Copy/photograph everything of interest

Relocatable Data

- ▣ A good memory is a wonderful thing – until you forget

Relocatable Data

- Use photos of existing archive labels or handmade cards at the beginning of each box/volume



- Or make a paper label to separate each group of copies.

Relocatable Data

- ▣ Every document has an archive home
- ▣ Put this 'home location' on every page

reproduced at the National Archives

NARA-CP RG 104 entry 218 box 1

*Statement of the Deposites and Coinage at
the Branch Mints, during the quarter ending June
30th, 1839.*

Note: It is unacceptable to state "National Archives" as a source. Be specific to be useful.

Relocatable Data

... of the Mint. The day

LoC MMS 39784 Sherman vol. 168

Peabody Essex MSS-463 box 7 folder 1

Wyoming State Archives, H-81-1 Edna Kimball Wilkins papers, box 9, Ross correspondence 1933-1935.



OFFICE OF
DIRECTOR OF THE MINT
IN REPLYING QUOTE INITIALS

TREASURY DEPARTMENT
WASHINGTON

proud of my Mint family - My heart melts when
I think of their responsiveness to my little talk;
showing that they were just hungry for a little

References and Tracking

- ▣ Back at your office, insert or print 'home location' information on every photo or copy
- ▣ This permits you to mix and match documents without losing their original location or context
- ▣ It simplifies footnoting and building a bibliography

References and Tracking

- ▣ Once each page is identified by location, you can begin tracking by date and subject
- ▣ Digitize every page of every document
- ▣ Identify documents in a manner that makes sense to you

Easy Identification

- ▣ I use document date and subject as a file name:
 - 18310201 New style quarter for 1831.pdf
- ▣ Sort/search by date, subject, etc.
 - 18310129 New quarters for 1831.pdf
 - 18310201 New style quarter for 1831.pdf
 - 18340705 Recoinng old Eagles.pdf
 - 18340709 New designs w-EPU and no Liberty cap.pdf
 - 18340715 Can old gold be recoinced.pdf
 - 18340716 Put 24 stars on new gold.pdf
 - 18340719 Prompt payment for deposits.pdf
 - 18340721 Silver-gold bullion for commerce.pdf
 - 18340725 First new gold coins.pdf
 - 18340801 First new gold coins.pdf

Transcription

- ▣ Converts image into machine-readable text
- ▣ Permits automated searching by any word, phrase or variant including:
 - Boolean
 - Phonic
 - Fuzzy
 - Synonym
 - Stemming, etc.

Transcription

- ▣ Key technology that opens the content of pre-1960 documents
- ▣ All handwritten and most typed materials do not produce usable results with present technology

Transcription

- ▣ Optical character recognition (OCR) can transcribe typeset and modern typescript documents
- ▣ Handwritten materials require human transcription into machine readable text.
- ▣ Research being conducted into automated handwriting recognition, but
 - No funding
 - Entirely volunteer, time-available basis

OCR of Typical Presscopy Typescript

May 2, 1936.

Mr. Stuart Mosher,
THE COIN COLLECTOR'S JOURNAL,
1 West 47th Street,
New York, New York.

Dear Sir:

Receipt is acknowledged of your letter of
May 1st, relative to the issue of proof coins.

Proofs will be sold separately or in sets.

They will be highly polished planchets.

They will be sold to dealers in quantities
if desired.

They will be struck at the Mint in Phila-
delphia, only.

The first proofs will be ready late next
week.

The Mint will prepare a small stock. The
number struck will depend upon requests.

Proof coins should be ordered from the
Superintendent, United States Mint, Philadelphia, Pa.. Money
order in payment should accompany the request.

No dollar proofs will be made unless there is
a very large coinage of silver dollars.

No proof coins of commemorative pieces will
be struck.

Your very cordial approval of the action of
the Secretary of the Treasury in authorizing the issue
of proof coins is very much appreciated.

Very truly yours,

Acting Director of the Mint.

CVR ak

RG104, entry 235, vol 587

May 2, 1936.

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CVR ak

RG104;entry 235, vol 587

Manual Transcription

RG104 entry 215 vol 6 of 14

279

Treasury Department
December 13th 1856.

Sir,

There being a demand at New Orleans
for dimes and half dimes, will you please
direct the Branch Mint to make coins of
those denominations.

I am Very Respectfully
Yours Truly
James Guthrie
Secretary of the Treasury

J. R. Snowden, Esq.
Director of the Mint,
Philadelphia
Pa.

RG104 entry 215 vol 6 of 14

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Data Reuse

- ▣ Your annotations and file information can present opportunities for multiple uses of the same documents
- ▣ Good source tracking allows mixing material from many sources without losing the origin of a document
- ▣ A simple search program or database will open multiple uses.

Data Reuse

- ▣ Many older official letters are single-subject.
- ▣ Correspondence between officials about specific subject
- ▣ Reports usually cover multiple topics within a more general subject such as the condition of a Mint facility.
- ▣ Production and statistical reports often include data about multiple subjects such as gold deposits, gold coinage, exchange of silver coin for gold coin.

Data Analysis in Historical Research



Analysis

- ▣ Historical data analysis is a method of examining and parsing useful information from records and accounts.
- ▣ Methodology to synthesize a large amount of data into a meaningful narrative

Analysis

- ▣ Organize information into categories
- ▣ Locate patterns or themes
- ▣ Develop a coding system to relate documents to each other

The “Nine Questions”

- 1) Who wrote the document?
- 2) Who was the intended audience?
- 3) What was the story line?
- 4) Why was the document written?
- 5) What type of document was it, or what was its purpose?

The “Nine Questions”

- 6) What were the basic assumptions made by the author?
- 7) Can I believe this document?
- 8) What can I learn about the organization or individual that produced this document?
- 9) What does this document mean to my research subject?

The “Nine Questions”

- ▣ The last question begs a document's value to your research:
 - How does this document relate to the others?

Connections

- ▣ Answers to your nine questions can be connected to those for each document you gave located.
- ▣ Similarities and insights will appear as more documents are connected.
- ▣ Irrelevant materials will also become obvious by their lack of connections.

Analysis to Results

- ▣ Connections will produce information – often new – about your subject.
- ▣ Collect related information
- ▣ What do we learn?

Maintain source metadata for each document

Organizing Results

- ▣ A simple organization plan will help you prepare results that others can read and comprehend.
- ▣ The basic categories are:
 - General background
 - Process or coin background
 - Present your data and analysis
 - Summarize and make conclusions

Conclusions

- ▣ Conclusions flow from:
 - Factual data
 - Careful analysis
 - Logical results
 - Judicious interpretation

Final Thoughts

- ▣ Numismatic research allows investigation of topics and questions that can be studied in no other way.
- ▣ Build your arguments on facts.
- ▣ Approach each topic as if you were telling the story to others.