

Theodore (“Ted”) Vern Buttrey, Jr.

December 29, 1929 – January 9, 2018

by W. E. Metcalf and J. H. Humphrey

with the assistance of Sarah Buttrey and others



T. V. Buttrey in January 1991 at the age of 62.

The death in Cambridge, England, of T. V. Buttrey, a member of the editorial board of this journal since its inception in 1987, has left a gaping hole in the field of numismatics. Many obituaries have already rehearsed the details of his biography, a testimony to his prominence. Born in Havre, Montana, he attended Princeton University (graduating with *magna cum laude* in Classics, 1950) and received his Ph.D. there in 1953 with a dissertation entitled *Studies in the coinage of Marc Antony*. In 1952 he had attended the very first Seminar in Numismatics at the American Numismatic Society. After a Fulbright Fellowship in Italy, he taught at Yale University, but did not receive tenure and moved in 1964 to the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he was promoted to full professor in 1967. In 1974 he shifted to a half-time position at

Michigan so as to spend much of his time in Cambridge, where was an affiliated lecturer in the Classics Faculty and a resident member of Clare Hall, the graduate college. He devoted much time to the Fitzwilliam Museum, serving as Keeper of Coins and Medals (1988-91) and later (from 2008 to his death) as Honorary Keeper while amassing a vast collection of coin auction and sale catalogues. He used to cross the Atlantic with huge suitcases, bringing the Fitzwilliam's and other materials to the American Numismatic Society's library in exchange for the latter's duplicates. The former institution now holds the world's largest and best repository of sale literature, due almost entirely to his efforts.¹ He was President of the Royal Numismatic Society from 1989 to 1994 (the only foreigner to have held that post). He also received the medal of that society (1983) and the Archer M. Huntington Medal of the American Numismatic Society (1996), the two highest distinctions the discipline bestows. In December 2011 he became the second recipient of the Wolfgang Hahn-Medaille of the Institut für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte der Universität Wien.

His early numismatic work centered on the Late Republic and, as had his dissertation, the triumviral portrait coinage.² Subsequent papers detailed other coinages of the period,³ but his most significant contribution was centered on the Princeton University excavations at Morgantina, with consequences for the date of the first *denarius*.⁴ The coincidence of literary, archaeological and numismatic evidence ought to have closed the matter, and the new chronology was enshrined in M. H. Crawford's *Roman Republican coinage* (Cambridge 1974), but Ted would return to it in 1979 to refine his treatment⁵ while remaining critical of Crawford's methodology and interpretation of die studies.⁶ Morgantina

1 By 2009 there were already more than 45,000 sale catalogues in the collection.

2 *The triumviral portrait gold of the quattuorviri monetales of 42 B.C.* (ANSNM 37, 1956).

3 “ΘΕΑ ΝΕΩΤΕΡΑ on coins of Antony and Cleopatra,” *ANSMN* 6 (1954) 95-109; “The ‘Pietas’ *denarii* of Sextus Pompey,” *NC* ser. 6, 20 (1960) 83-101; “The *denarii* of Cn. Pompeius Jr. and M. Minatius Sabinus,” *ANSMN* 9 (1960) 75-94; “The *denarii* of P. Ventidius,” *ANSMN* 9 (1960) 95-108; “Dio, Zonaras, and the value of the Roman *aureus*,” *JRS* 51 (1961) 40-45.

4 “The Morgantina excavations and the date of the Roman *denarius*,” *Congresso Internazionale di Numismatica Roma, 1961, II. Atti*, 261-67, reprinted with revisions in *Morgantina Studies* 2 (Princeton, NJ 1989) 215-19.

5 “Morgantina and the *denarius*,” *NAC* 8 (1979) 149-57, reprinted with revisions in *Morgantina Studies* 2, 220-26.

6 Crawford put forth a theory regarding the number of coins that could be produced from each die. As noted by P. Kay in *Rome's economic revolution* (Cambridge 2014) 91: “Buttrey attacked him for ... basing

was just the first of many involvements with archaeological excavations: there followed Carthage,⁷ Apollonia (Libya),⁸ Sardis⁹ and Cosa.¹⁰ His students W. E. Metcalf and P. Visonà would continue his work at Carthage, the latter devoting himself to the larger Punic coinage in copper and billon (see this issue of *JRA*). But it was his work on the *Triumviri* which best told what would come. There he examined minutely the dies used to strike the coinage, bringing together a college of moneyers that had theretofore defied classification. The task involved the detailed comparison of several dozen dies in order to establish the relative order of their use. This would seem an act of relentless compulsion — and so it would have been if the representations were identical; but they were not, and, as he observed, the reward was great: as he noted, "... if anything is accomplished in this manner, the results will stand permanently, against theory and conjecture". This kind of meticulous attention to detail was eventually to be applied in his most notorious engagement, with false Mexican gold bars¹¹ (he had a lifelong interest in Mexican coins and wrote a *Guidebook of Mexican coins, 1822 to date*, now in its 6th edition with C. Hubbard). He never shied away from challenging error and deceit. The engagement with this particular class of false history cost him time and money as he was forced to defend a libel action brought by John J. Ford, Jr., a coin dealer.

Amongst more than 100 books and articles, Buttrey may be best known for the second edition (2007) of *The Roman Imperial coinage: from AD 69 to AD 96*, co-authored with Ian Carradice. Ted would talk of many projects in hand, all sadly unfinished at his death. His last book manuscript was a return to the concept of fate in *Oedipus Rex*. The biggest of his later projects was the coinage of P. Crepusius. His study of this coinage to demonstrate the use of two anvils in the Roman Republican mint had been definitive;¹² it also provided the best documentation for the number of dies used to strike a coinage, and for their representation in the surviving population. After the death of Charles Hersh, who had first treated the coinage in 1952, and Buttrey's own 1976 article, he undertook the documentation of every known specimen, making heavy use of legwork done by Giles F. Carter up to 2010.

One cannot close without mentioning briefly other sides of the man: his enthusiasm for everything he did, from numismatics to literature (mainly Greek), not to mention his excursions into television (he wrote and recorded a series of TV programs covering a wide range of topics in classical antiquity that were broadcast at over 75 stations in the 1960-70s) and publishing (he established the Pevensey Press to publish over 20 illustrated books on British historic cities) and his many voyages as an immensely popular lecturer on Swan Hellenic Cruises. He was a two-finger typist of amazing speed. He held a fondness for aberrant beliefs and exhibited a propensity to be silly. But above all he was a teacher, constantly evincing delight in students and in the mere act of teaching. He is survived by his four children and his third wife.

[This notice also draws upon obituaries published in the *Kelsey Museum Newsletter* under the direction of Terry Wilfong, one by David Hendin published by the American Numismatic Society in the *ANS Magazine* 2018 issue 2, and one by Ursula Kampmann in *Coins Weekly* (www.CoinsWeekly.com). Paolo Visonà kindly added information.]

his die estimates on the combination of hoards of different dates, as well as for failing to establish that the coin finds and dies of any two issues fall into the same pattern". Debate over this topic continues.

7 "The coins," in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *Excavations at Carthage 1975 conducted by the University of Michigan*, vol. 1 (Tunis 1976) 157-97; "The coins — 1976," in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *Excavations at Carthage 1976 conducted by the University of Michigan*, vol. 4 (Ann Arbor, MI 1978) 99-163.

8 "The coins," in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *Apollonia, the port of Cyrene: excavations by the University of Michigan, 1965-1967* (Supplements to *Libya Antiqua* 4; Tripoli 1976) 335-70.

9 (with A. Johnston, M. L. Bates and K. M. Mackenzie), *Greek, Roman, and Islamic coins from Sardis* (Archaeological Exploration of Sardis vol. 7; Cambridge, MA 1981).

10 "Cosa: the coins," *MAAR* 34 (1980) 1-153.

11 For this saga, see the valuable account at http://www.coinbooks.org/v21/esylum_v21n04a15.html, and *The New York Times* article of March 3, 2001 by Dinitia Smith, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/03/arts/gold-bars-glamorous-stones-and-a-battle-over-authenticity.html>

12 "The *denarii* of P. Crepusius and Roman Republican mint organization," *ANSMN* 21 (1976) 67-108.