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Dedicated to the memory of David J. MacDonald (1943-2025)
Historian, Numismatist, Author, and a valued contributor to the
KOINON Editorial Advisory Board

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In Memoriam: David MacDonald (1943-2025), Friend and Mentor

MARK FOX¹

Has the reader ever thought what is the point in having friends? If we don't die first or simultaneously with them, then they will be first in line. And then we are in pain, which may last the rest of our lives. Is it worth it? Would it not be better to live without becoming too close to one another, to keep our relationships strictly professional? Recently, in a homily I heard, I was made aware of the extreme outcome of this philosophy of insulating ourselves from all pain, all hurt, for there is a place where this approach can be perfected. It is called Hell.

Obviously, this is to be avoided, for without accepting pain, there is no gain, no reward, no desire to love outside of ourselves where true happiness and meaning lies. My late friend, David MacDonald (Plate I.1), a founding member of the editorial board of KOINON (more on this later), was more than willing to build close friendships and show selfless academic support throughout his productive life as a historian and numismatist. It was like a personal apostolate. This might all seem ironic for a person who was of the cynical sort without religious conviction, but sometimes we need to concentrate more on one's actions rather than on their words. 'Mac,' as he is commonly known to his friends, had also claimed to be argumentative and have a big mouth. No doubt there was a grain of truth in both assertions, but throughout this writer's long friendship with Mac was the incomparably greater sense of his immense kindness, patience, and willingness to help and listen regardless of what painful physical state he was in.² And none of this is to forget his deep humility in general. Because of this, it is hard for one to fully grasp and appreciate the extent of his abilities and accomplishments. And even if this writer was somehow sufficiently enlightened, detailing everything here would be both unfeasible and superfluous. That said, the present work will attempt to build on a preliminary tribute published earlier this year,³ and dig deeper into a life that touched and molded so many others for the better.

YARD SALES AND A SOUTHERN BELLE

David John MacDonald was born in Denham, Massachusetts, on June 26, 1943, to Charles (1912-1979) and Virginia MacDonald (1917-2000). He is said to have been born with a full set of hair and seven teeth.⁴ His sister, Laurie, would join the family in 1949.

¹ E-mail: marktfox@gmail.com. The author would like to thank the General Editor, Rosanagh Mack, the Co-Editors of KOINON, and all the contributors to this tribute for their important content, support, and other assistance that has made the current work what it is. Some of those not named in the main text include Dr Daniel Wolf, Philip Davis, Michael Braunlin of The John Miller Burnam Classics Library at the University of Cincinnati, Julie Neville of the Dr Jo Ann Rayfield Archives at Illinois State University, and the Perez family.

² He was also known to have a slightly mischievous sense of humor! Personal e-mail comm., 13 April 2020: 'It is a strange world [in reference to COVID]. I have a close friend and writing partner who is a germophobe to begin with—she started self-isolating before anyone else I know. Sometimes my sense of humor is a little sick. I had Amazon send her a copy of Daniel Defoe's [A] *Journal of the Plague Year*.'

³ Fox, M. 2025. Joyful Cynicism Overstruck on Numismatic Passion: David John MacDonald (1943-2025). *The E-Sylum*, vol. 28, no. 28, art. 5 (13 July), viewed 21 August 2025, https://www.coinbooks.org/v28/esylum_v28n28a05.html.

⁴ Personal e-mail comm., Nicholas Molinari, 19 June 2025; verified by Sharon MacDonald, 1 August 2025.

After World War II, Charles, having had enough New England weather (influenced no doubt by the inhospitable rain that assailed him in Europe after directing traffic onto shore while standing neck-deep in water during the Invasion of Normandy), decided to move his family south and west. As the story goes,⁵ he took along a winter photo of his locality in the hope of eventually finding someone who would scratch their head over the ‘white stuff’ in the image. Apparently, such an individual was found in San Diego where the family settled down and would call home for several years before moving to Fresno.

In San Diego, Charles opened a retail business with a partner whom he later discovered to have swindled customers. Charles had him prosecuted and spent many years making restitution to the victims from his own resources. This was an example of the high moral standards the MacDonald family adhered to.

Just how Mac first became enchanted by numismatics was surprisingly a bit of a puzzle that has partly been pieced together for this article. Thanks to Mac’s wife, Sharon, we can dismiss the statement in a 2005 retirement notice that claimed MacDonald’s interest was first sparked while assisting a Turkish archaeological excavation.⁶ At the back of *Overstruck Greek Coins* (MacDonald 2009), a more reasonable claim states he ‘got his first ancient coin when he was ten years old.’ More details were gathered from Sharon herself, as well as from Mac’s inquisitive colonial history co-author, Raine Waters (via Sharon). The imagery is as follows: a young boy on his bicycle on the streets of San Diego and Fresno, frequenting pawn shops and yard sales as if it were a hobby in itself, accompanied sometimes by his mother and/or father. On one occasion, he obtained an ancient coin which ignited his fascination to learn more and more about Roman coinage.

The collecting bug and Mac’s thirst for knowledge eventually led him by the hand to the ancient coin and antiquities dealer, Joel Malter, in Los Angeles, whose shop he would regularly patronize, from high school to college. Malter provided the young collector with early mentoring and ample exposure to ancient coins, a few of which Mac would occasionally obtain, when affordable.

Also from Mac’s early years in coins, we have this rare anecdote recounted by him on a preeminent online discussion board devoted to ancient coins:

Many years ago when I was about fourteen, I attended my first coin auction in person. Of course, I had little money but at least I could look on. The auction included some very early and very choice [U.S.] large cents. Among the bidders were two men in their seventies, both long-time collectors and rivals. It transpired that they had made a secret agreement about bidding—not legal but I have subsequently learned not uncommon. They agreed that one would bid on a certain lot and the other would not, and in exchange the other man would get to bid on another lot while the first fellow would not. The first man duly bought the first lot, but then he broke the agreement and bid on the other lot also. In righteous (well, maybe not so righteous considering the illegal deal) indignation,

⁵ Personal phone comms.; related to the author by David MacDonald more than once; verified by Sharon MacDonald, 9 July 2025.

⁶ Personal e-mail comm., Sharon MacDonald, 1 August 2025: ‘Absolutely false. [...] he came to the dig as the excavation’s expert on Roman coins.’ The article in question: Author unknown, 2005. Four colleagues begin retirements. *Today & Yesterday: Illinois State University, Newsletter of the History Department*, vol. 29, no. 2 (summer): 1, 6, viewed 10 August 2025, <https://history.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/departments-newsletters/summer05.pdf>

the fellow who felt he had been cheated used his cane to beat the cheater to the ground. He was taken away in an ambulance and the man with the cane was taken away by police. This was my introduction to the passion of coin collecting.⁷

At California State University, Fresno, he first ‘bumped into’ Sharon Sellers, originally from Greenville, North Carolina, during registration. They sat beside one another in the front row of Prof. John Bohnstedt’s history class on the Muslim world, held at 6:00 P.M. every Tuesday and Thursday in January 1965.⁸ The rest is ‘history,’ as they would say, with both historians in training dating soon afterwards and later marrying in 1968 over Christmas vacation in Fresno.

DIGGING DEEPER

In 1965, Mac obtained a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in history from Fresno State (whose history department Sharon described as ‘wonderful’), followed by a stint in Germany between August 1965 and August 1966, as a Fulbright Fellow at Heidelberg University. While there, he took part in one or more archaeological excavations hosted by the Kurpfälzisches Museum. He returned to the States just in time to begin his postgraduate study in September at Professor Bohnstedt’s alma mater, the University of Minnesota, under the renowned Tom B. Jones.⁹ It was Bohnstedt, who, as an advisor to both David and Sharon, had directed them to Minnesota.

Mac earned a Master of Arts (MA) from the university in 1968, the same year he gained more archaeological experience, this time excavating Diocletian’s Palace in Split, Yugoslavia (modern Split, Croatia),¹⁰ sponsored by both the Smithsonian Institute and the University of Minnesota Excavations. However, the archaeological toiling that arguably left the largest impression on our globetrotting numismatist were the three seasons he took part in the excavations at the ancient Greek city of Aphrodisias in Caria (near modern-day Geyre, Turkey), in 1970, 1973, and 1975. He was warmly invited to lend his numismatic expertise in cataloging the coin finds at the site by the famous Turkish archaeologist Prof. Dr. Kenan Tevfik Erim of New York University.

Though the details are currently hazy in this writer’s mind, I will still attempt to relate an amusing anecdote told to me by Mac. While chatting during a break in the ruins of Aphrodisias, a

⁷ FORVM’s Classical Numismatics Discussion Board, Resources, The Members’ Gallery, ‘Weird and Unusual coin stories: Tell us your strange connections with the past,’ viewed 22 August 2025, <https://www.forumancientcoins.com/board/index.php?topic=117959.msg737726#msg737726>

⁸ Personal phone comm., Sharon MacDonald, 3 August 2025. For some details on the remarkable life of John (Johann) Wolfgang Bohnstedt (1927-2015), see Barajas, F.P. 2016. Guest commentary: History of Professors—Stories to Connect with Students, especially First Gens. Part 1. Amigos805.com, viewed 23 August 2025, <https://amigos805.com/guest-commentary-history-of-professors-stories-to-connect-with-students-especially-first-gens-part-1/>

⁹ Mac had claimed to a student that Tom Bard Jones (1909-1999) could speak seventeen languages. In a ‘biographical sketch’ on The University of Minnesota Libraries website, the number given was ‘approximately a dozen,’ but without noting whether Jones could speak them or whether his rare ability to read Sumerian cuneiform was included. Over 100 books, articles and reviews are credited to Jones over the course of his academic career at Minnesota, where he was active as a professor of ancient history from 1949-1977. See: University of Minnesota Libraries, University of Minnesota Archives, Tom B. Jones papers, viewed 23 August 2025, <https://archives.lib.umn.edu/repositories/14/resources/1410>. MacDonald noted his ‘contributions to the study of the Greek imperial issues are well-known’ (MacDonald 1976, Acknowledgements). Just how much of a numismatic influence Jones was on MacDonald is hard to say for this writer, but we can, in Mac’s characteristically cautious approach to such matters, say he was far from a source of discouragement.

¹⁰ This remarkably well-preserved fortress complex largely served as Diocletian’s lavish retirement home after his abdication in AD 305, where he reputedly enjoyed growing cabbage in the palace gardens.

colleague of his, out of the blue, pulled a large Byzantine bronze (possibly a 40-nummi of Justinian I) out of a nearby flowerpot!

Unlike previous excavations, Mac's meticulous fieldwork at Aphrodisias would produce many numismatic works relating to it (refer to Appendix), including his dissertation (MacDonald 1972) that completed the requirements for his PhD in history from Minnesota (1972).¹¹

MAC ROCKS

By the time Mac's academic schooling was complete, he and Sharon had already been living in Illinois since the year before and joined the faculty of Illinois State University (ISU) in 1971 and 1973, respectively. Mac would henceforth be connected to this house of learning for the rest of his life, from 1977-2005 as a full-fledged history professor. The shift to Illinois also blossomed with the close friendship of the ancient coin dealer Harlan J. Berk. Whenever there was a perplexing numismatic question, Mac was regularly Harlan's go-to person for guidance.

It was noted in this writer's earlier tribute that Mac was beloved by his students, but this description, though true and conveying a level of emotion, still falls short in adequately explaining the deep bonds that were forged between many of them. A couple of examples are therefore in order. The first contribution, by John B. Freed, Distinguished Professor of History, Emeritus, Illinois State University, crystallizes the university's perception:

I was on the search committee that hired David and was his chair during the last ten years he taught at Illinois State. As the department's medievalist, I taught, like David, the first half of the western civilization survey course every semester; and students often took both his and my class offerings in ancient and medieval history. Naturally, they compared us. It was no contest. David would return to his office surrounded by students; and enrollments in his classes were limited only by the strictures of the fire marshals. I read thousands of student evaluations every year. I knew in advance he would receive rave reviews without a dissenting word. Like my own undergraduate teacher, Donald Kagan, he entranced them with the tales of Thucydides and Livy. To quote the students' favorite accolade: 'Mac rocks.'

For a more behind-the-scenes assessment, Jennifer Baniewicz, currently a social studies teacher at Amos Alonzo Stagg High School in Palos Hills, Illinois, graciously agreed to share the following memories:

I consider myself very lucky to call Dr. MacDonald my teacher, mentor, and friend. I was a student in one of his Western Civ classes at Illinois State University. I was a sophomore; I just changed my major from Chemistry to History and I was so unsure of my decision. In my mind, this class was going to be the make-or-break class for my new major. It did not

¹¹ While MacDonald 1976 is based on the dissertation, an unpublished catalog of the Aphrodisias coin finds (MacDonald 1975) provides a largely unknown link between the two. See footnote 2 in: Tek A.T. 2019. Greek and Roman Provincial Coins Found at Aphrodisias: Preliminary Results from the 1998-2019 Seasons, in E. Kortanoğlu, B. Hürmüzlü, M. Alparslan and N. Karul (eds.) *Institutum Turcicum Scientiae Antiquitatis* (Colloquium Anatolicum 18): 155-182. İstanbul: Türk Eskiçağ Bilimleri Enstitüsü.

take Mac long to figure out that I was a ball of anxiety and despite my natural penchant for history I had very little confidence in my ability. Mac took me under his wing and helped me find my way, not just in the class, but also into my chosen career. I am a high school history teacher. At the time, teaching was not on my list of possible careers, but watching Mac teach a 300-person class was just inspiring. He held our attention with great stories about the Akkadians, Romans, and the Goths. What could have been a very boring and predictable class never was with Mac's great sense of humor and his ability to make ancient people come alive by recounting their stories as if we were there.

There were times that Mac would miss a class or two and only after he would return did we find out that he was called to authenticate ancient coins in a court case or at a dig site. He was incredibly modest about all of this, but when I saw him put his fedora hat on, I realized that I was being taught by a real-life Indiana Jones. He would laugh when anyone referred to him by that character. Like many in the field of academia, Mac was an expert in his craft. What made him special is that he was also a gifted teacher. He loved teaching young people about appreciating ancient civilizations and he helped his students understand the problems of modern society can often be solved by studying the past.

He lived history by being a student of history. Retirement allowed Mac more time to pursue research on a variety of topics. He loved learning. When one would talk to Mac about his work, his excitement about his research was simply contagious. Dr. MacDonald influenced many of his students, including myself, to dedicate their professional lives to history. I know I would not be where I am today without him by my side when I was so unsure of myself. Miss you Mac, thank you for everything.

During his active years at ISU, Mac's Aphrodisian research would eventually come to a final head with the publication of *The Coinage of Aphrodisias* (MacDonald 1992), focused solely on the city's own coinage, but containing material from public and private collections and sale records around the world in addition to excavation finds. It is still considered a standard reference today.¹² His numismatic work in general during this time would also flourish, with a plethora of articles and larger works on various topics, from Greek overstrikes to Indo-Greek coinage, culminating, as it were, in his *magnum opus*, *An Introduction to the History and Coinage of the Kingdom of the Bosphorus* (2005), in the year of his retirement. Although outside his collecting interests, the famous numismatic collector and scholar BCD secured a copy of the work for his world-class private library, noting to this writer that 'it was an important book and that is why it was in my library.'¹³

¹² In spite of criticisms from a prominent scholar. See: Johnston, A. 1995. Aphrodisias Reconsidered. *Numismatic Chronicle* 155: 43-100. See also the introduction written by Philip Davis in the Aphrodisias section in the printed version of Harlan J. Berk Ltd, 2025, *Harlan J. Berk Ltd, 233rd Buy or Bid Sale* (30 October 2025): 37.

¹³ Personal e-mail comm., BCD, 5 August 2025. Since the recent decision to dismantle the library, several public auctions of the reference books have been held by Kolbe & Fanning Numismatic Booksellers. BCD's copy of MacDonald's Bosphoran guide was lot 316 in Kolbe & Fanning's BCD Library Web Sale #1 (31 July 2025) where it sold for \$45.

CANNON BALLS AND COLLECTING TWO COINS IN ONE

Mac's retirement in 2005, which coincided with Sharon's, did not slow our polymath researcher down, but rather energized him to branch out into new terrain outside numismatics. There had been signs of this growing enthusiasm for years, which is why a little backstory would be helpful here. Sharon's first academic calling was medieval history, which was eventually replaced by a focus on the American Civil War period. In one early exchange with Mac, I had mistakenly thought he was the one specializing in this time period, to which he kindly corrected me: 'Actually, it is my wife who is the Civil War historian, though I do have a love for Civil War artillery. My fireplace is cluttered with disarmed Civil War artillery shells and cannon balls.'¹⁴ The many visits by Sharon to Civil War cemeteries and battlefields in which Mac tagged along would quietly nurture his awe for more contemporary history. Mac would be instrumental in preserving and relocating many Civil War era cannons and become the subject of a news article detailing those efforts (Plate I.2).¹⁵

Just where Mac found his own historical research niche in an American setting will be discussed in a later section of this article, for it would be a mistake to imply here that Mac had somehow lost interest in numismatics—as if that were possible! Even before the conclusion of the Kingdom of the Bosphorus project, he must have started distilling his knowledge of Greek overstrike coinage in the form of an introductory guide catering to both scholars and newcomers. Evidence that a lengthy manuscript of 220 pages was already in existence by 2005 is indicated by a talk he gave to the Chicago Coin Club at their 1042nd Meeting in October of that year.¹⁶

The circumstances that led to the book's eventual publication as the highly acclaimed, but remarkably academic sounding, *Overstruck Greek Coins: Studies in Greek Chronology and Monetary Theory* (2009), also demand some explanation. In a recent remembrance by former Whitman publisher Dennis Tucker,¹⁷ he recounted his conversations with Mac in 'late 2006 and early 2007' on the proposed book, which inevitably hinted of his hesitancy in picking up such a 'specialized exploration' of ancient coins. All very understandable. What was surprising, however, is that the publishing giant still decided to take the literary leap. Why? Harlan Berk, in an excerpt from a personal tribute to Mac,¹⁸ gives us a clue:

When I began writing the first edition of my own 100 Greatest Ancient Coins,¹⁹ I found myself stuck on how to get started. I came to David, and he stayed with me in my office for three days, until I was able to get off the rock and move forward. This book, nor any

¹⁴ Personal e-mail comm., David MacDonald, 4 October 2008.

¹⁵ Blystone, S.M. 1998. Historian helps preserve reminders of Civil War. *The Illinois State Community*, vol. 6, no. 4 (summer): 3.

¹⁶ Hybert, P. 2005. Our 1042nd Meeting, *Chatter*, Chicago Coin Club, vol. 51, no.10, viewed 24 August 2025, <http://www.chicagocoinclub.org/chatter/2005/Oct/>

¹⁷ Tucker, D. 2025. More on David MacDonald. *The E-Sylum*, vol. 28, no. 32, art. 11 (10 August); viewed 21 August 2025, https://www.coinbooks.org/v28/esylum_v28n32a11.html. For *Overstruck Greek Coins*, Tucker claimed MacDonald won the award for the Best Specialized Book on World Coins from the Numismatic Literary Guild (NLG) in 2010. He must have been mistaken. In the published list on the organization's website, the book was one of many that had achieved the Extraordinary Merit status. Results of the Annual Writers Competition for 2010, viewed 1 September 2025, <https://nlgonline.org/awards/annual-winners/results-of-annual-writers-competition-for-2010/>

¹⁸ Unpublished as of this writing.

¹⁹ Berk, H.J. 2008. *100 Greatest Ancient Coins*. Alanta: Whitman Publishing, LLC. Not surprisingly, David MacDonald wrote the book's foreword.

of its later editions, would not exist today without his help, and I could not have done it without him.

After Whitman Publishing agreed to publish Harlan's initial book, the Chicago coin dealer strongly urged the same publishing house to give *Overstruck Greek Coins* a proper hearing. As such, Mac credited the efforts of his close friend for enabling his own book project to see the light of day on collectors' shelves.

Mac's success in popularizing Greek overstrikes did not signal the end of his interest in the field. Quite the opposite. There are indications that he had intended to publish a supplement to his book, but which was not completed by the time of his death.²⁰ He also formed a close friendship with the Belgian numismatist, Prof. François de Callataÿ, who started gathering numismatic material in 2010 for what would later be the Greek Overstrikes Database (GOD). Mac's heavy involvement in the project, including especially coin submissions collected from a variety of sources, was such that De Callataÿ would organize a conference in Brussels held in MacDonald's honor.²¹ As with many close friends, Mac's passing came as an unexpected shock to De Callataÿ, one that he wished to address in a separate tribute published in this volume of *KOINON*.²² For an example of a historically significant overstruck coin in GOD with a personal connection to both this writer and Mac, see Plate I.3.

ILLYRIAN COWS, DUTCH LIONS, AND LA CHAPELLE

Besides Greek overstrikes, three other areas of study that captivated Mac would be common topics of conversation in our many e-mails and phone calls, beginning in the late 2000s with probably the voluminous cow-and-calf drachms produced in Illyria by the Greek cities Dyrrhachium and Apollonia. His main approach to understanding the complex series and their imitations was through a die study, which he prophetically remarked was a project that would likely be for someone else to finish. Gradually, his interest in the numismatics of Illyria spread to all the cities in the region, giving rise to an unfinished manuscript titled, 'An Introduction to the Coinage of Ancient Illyria.'²³

As alluded to earlier, Mac also made a deep dive into the French colonial history of Illinois (which due to no coincidence was in his backyard) and the colonial past of the Americas in general. Naturally, numismatics managed to enter the picture from time to time (e.g., Plate I.4; MacDonald 2013), with also ample opportunity to cosplay (Plates II.6 and 8)! Mac would often keep this writer informed of his latest research or visit to a French colonial fort. This relatively new area of study would expand his already extensive friend base, with Dr. Joseph Gagné, historian and archivist at the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, being numbered among the newcomers. He had a few heartfelt words to contribute to the present tribute:

²⁰ Personal e-mail comm., Philip Davis, 10 June 2025.

²¹ Fox, *The E-Sylum*, 28:28:5: 'The reasons for declining the conference are a bit uncertain, but Sharon noted to this writer that he [David MacDonald] was badly affected by the summer heat in 2015 and took a long time to recover. She further reflected, 'What a shame if that prevented him from going to Europe. But he never mentioned it to me (he was probably worried I would have put him on the plane one way or another)'. It was later learned that the event was held in June 2017 (see following footnote).

²² De Callataÿ, F. 2025. David MacDonald as a Pioneering Figure in the Study of Overstruck Coins in the Greek World. *KOINON The International Journal of Classical Numismatic Studies* VIII: xxiii-xxvii.

²³ Under the wishes and guidance of Sharon MacDonald, this writer has tentatively offered to bring the Illyrian project to eventual fulfillment, with the possible assistance of one or more other numismatists. Readers' prayers for a successful and happy conclusion to this daunting endeavor are welcome.

I met Mac back in 2010ish during my masters'. Coincidentally, we were both interested in the same 18th century Frenchman [Pierre François Passerat de La Chapelle].²⁴ I have no clue how he found my email, but from that first message, we quickly became friends. Most times I went across the U.S. border, we would figure out ways to meet up. During the final years of my PhD, Mac even stepped in to pay part of my tuition: he was that generous.

I'm at loss for words on how to describe someone who was as generous, funny, and kind. I've lost a mentor, benefactor, and most importantly, friend. I can't speak for everyone who's ever met him (though I know they'd agree), but as for myself, I wouldn't be who I am today without his influence. Mac will be missed.

One of the last numismatic subjects Mac investigated at length, despite stating his wish not to get into it 'big time,' were Dutch Lion Daalders, which he became interested in while researching 'a book on failed colonies of the Caribbean and South America.'²⁵ He also credited Lion Daalder collector and coin cabinet maker, Craig McDonald, for cultivating his fascination in the series which, this writer must note, bear some general similarities to the earlier mentioned Illyrian drachmas! Of their common interests and yet another unpublished manuscript, Craig contributed the following:

I didn't really know 'Mac' that well. Our communications were mainly through the FORVM Ancient Coins message boards, specifically, my entry about my collection of Dutch Lion Daalders, which I began back in 2019. We also exchanged a few emails on the topic over the next few years. About a year after I began the thread, he posted his first message, commenting on the overall quality of my coins, and commenting that he wanted to 'pick up one' of them. He also mentioned that he was doing some research on the Dutch and their virtual trade monopoly with the Caribbean islands at that time. In March 2020, he posted that he had bought his first Lion Daalder, and posted an image of the coin, a very respectable 1637 West Friesland specimen [Plate II.9].

Over the next year or two we exchanged multiple posts and images of our various pieces and the discussion then turned to contemporary counterfeits, which seemed to really fascinate him. In early 2024 he mentioned that he had written an 'introduction' to the series and the counterfeits and asked if I would look it over and give him my thoughts.

²⁴ David MacDonald's response to this writer's gift of a 1739-A Sou Marque (Plate 1.4), personal e-mail comm., 25 July 2012: 'I returned to the house late this afternoon to quite a surprise! I very much appreciate the two articles—I have only had a chance to glance at them yet—but I really fell over about the Sou marque piece, which is really quite nice for these. The alloy for this series was not good—too much copper to be fully absorbed by the silver and vice versa. As a result, it is only in part a true alloy with islands of copper in it—and that sets up corrosion within the coin. As a result, most specimens have rough surfaces. This one does not. As a matter of fact, after studying the coin under my binocular microscope, I could see that what looked like corrosion encrustation was not—just crud on the surface. So I washed it! The improvement was amazing—the crud disappeared, more detail emerged, color improved—and the surfaces are among the best I have seen. Thank you again! Oddly, I was out in pursuit of French Illinois all day, travelling up to just to the west of Ottawa, Illinois, where there is a place called Buffalo Rock. Even aerial photographs do not reveal what exactly it is. Originally an island in the Mississippi, the river sculpted all sides of the island into cliffs and steep ascents. Then the river changed course slightly, so it was no longer an island, only one side now on the water. It remains, though, a natural fortress, and it was here in 1760 that a French officer [La Chapelle] built a winter fort. He was escaping the British, to whom he did not want to surrender at the end of the French and Indian War, and against all odds managed to take his 120 or so troops from Detroit all the way to New Orleans in dead winter without any losses, a 1200 mile retreat conducted without assistance, in the face of obstructions caused by officials who feared to offend the British forces. This is exactly the sort of coin that could well have been in his pocket during that epic retreat'.

²⁵ Personal e-mail comm., David MacDonald, 13 April 2020. The book in question: MacDonald and Waters 2020.

Obviously, I agreed. Little did I know that this would be our final exchange. When he finally sent me the file, I was absolutely blown away. When he said ‘introduction,’ I expected to get a couple pages of a ‘Why I like Lion Daalders’ type item. What I received was a 111-page in-depth treatise on the series, covering among other things, an introduction going into the history of the series, the various legends and their translations from Latin. Then he went into details about the Dutch trade with the West Indies, and the eastern Mediterranean areas. The article also touched on the circulation of the daalders in the early North American Colonies. Subsequent ‘chapters’ included a concordance of the various dates and the mints which issued them. Also discussed were various countermarks which appear on the series, filled with images of just about every type mentioned. Pages 46 through 99 delved into the counterfeits and restrikes issued contemporaneously with the authorized Dutch issues. I was pleasantly surprised to see one of my coins plated in this section. The paper ends with an appendix covering the history of Dutch commerce from 1570 through 1720, and a detailed bibliography. While the paper exceeded my understanding of the series by orders of magnitude, it was a pleasure to read. I only wish that somehow the paper will be published for others to see the depth of knowledge, commitment, and passion Mac put into the work.

BACKSTAGE EDITOR

Considering the venue of this tribute, this writer would be amiss if he did not have more to say about David MacDonald’s critical role in establishing *KOINON*. As noted from the outset, he was a member of the editorial board. So was I and still am, but my inclusion, a relative numismatic nobody, was made possible by his recommendation to the publication’s founder and first general editor, Dr. Nicholas Molinari—completely without my knowledge! By now, such hidden acts of ‘Macian charity’ should be a familiar theme to the reader.

From Nick’s perspective, however, we have a lot more to digest. Before he sat down to write his in-depth contribution for this article, he was able to essentially sum up the greater part of it in a single sentence: ‘[David MacDonald] was essentially my behind-the-scenes general editor (big decisions, advice, warnings, etc.) except he kindly allowed me to do all the grunt work.’ The full version of Nick’s thoughts is gratefully presented below:

It is difficult for me to sit and write about David, as though I can’t accept the fact that I can no longer write an email at any time and almost instantly hear back from my friend. I miss him dearly. I always had role models growing up—when I was a child and teenager, it was my grandfather, but as I entered college and later graduate school and he began to age, I couldn’t go to him with the same sorts of questions anymore (he was in his 90s and lived to 100!). It was in graduate school when I first met Mac, and he was just the sort of mentor I needed. When I was writing my book about Acheloos, Curtis Clay said I should email Mac and ask if he’d read a few chapters for feedback, since Curtis didn’t know what the heck I was talking about! David’s response was overwhelmingly enthusiastic—‘wildly enthusiastic’ were his words, and from that day on we were in almost constant communication. I still clearly remember when he read my thesis that

combined the two prevailing schools of thought—local river gods and Acheloios—which he said was ‘sophisticated, well written, and utterly convincing.’ I was shocked, to say the least. That email literally changed my life and was pivotal in my development into a bona fide scholar (if I may). I don’t think I ever shared his words with anyone (other than my co-author) but I’ve never forgotten them. It gave me a lot of confidence to do my own thing and believe in myself, something Mac always advocated (‘you do you’ is what he would say). I still remind myself of that all the time when I feel pressured to compromise on something for the sake of appearances.

After the first book was finished, I decided to pursue a PhD and of course, Mac was my no. 1 reference. It was during those studies that I had the idea for *KOINON*. As usual, Mac was on board instantly and we basically conceptualized the whole thing through a few emails and, within a couple of weeks, had an entire editorial board (many were his friends—Mark, Curtis, and Phil, for instance). He was my default reviewer for a lot of material, including my editorials. Every time I’d send him something I was sure he’d respond that I sounded crazy but he never did, and for me that was so reassuring. In my editorials, it is easy to spot how important he was to me—I think I talk about him or relay his anecdotes in virtually every one!

Mac was also a source of many stories [in general]—I think I know about every bit of ancient coin ‘drama’ from the academy and trade for the last 100 years or so! He was also my watchdog. Without naming names, he’d steer me away from certain folks. When I said earlier that *KOINON* wouldn’t exist without him it was absolutely true—not just for his contributions and enthusiasm, but because he was there the entire time to guide me. I wish I could continue on as Editor but it seems fitting now with Mac’s death that it was time to pass on the reins, because it really was something we did together and a foundation we established that I’m eager to watch grow.

After the dissertation was finished it became a book. He described the experience this way, which is what his advisor told him (he claimed it was the best piece of advice he ever received): ‘the relation of a dissertation to its book form is like Brutus to Caesar, possible illegitimate son and certain assassin!’ I didn’t get it at first—Mac had an odd sense of humor—but now I do, and it applies to a lot more than academic work.

As I sit and write my latest book, I often think of him. It is getting published by Edinburgh University Press—a dream come true for me, and he would have been thrilled, especially since it is a Scottish university. I don’t know why I have an affinity for the Highland Scots (Keith Rutter also comes to mind) but Mac liked Italians too for some odd reason. He relayed to me that when he was a kid growing up on the mean streets of Massachusetts the Protestants would give him a hard time because he was a different denomination,²⁶ but the Italian kids didn’t care, and would literally fight by his side. He said he learned a lot about friendship and loyalty in those days, lessons he never forgot. I like to imagine that I would have fought by his side too because he was—among so many other things—a genuinely good person. In any case, it can be really lonely writing about such things as Acheloos, but sometimes when I make a new discovery as I sit here all alone, I talk to him—‘Mac, can you believe it, another Acheloos river and this one is in Boeotia!’ Were he

²⁶ Personal phone comm., Sharon MacDonald, 3 August 2025: ‘Scots Presbyterian.’

alive he would have been thrilled to learn about it, and I know—to a level of certainty that Mac would absolutely dispute—that he is still near me sometimes. As I relayed to Sharon, when I get to Heaven Mac owes me a beer because at least in this one case, I was right. I suppose the greatest way I can honor Mac is by imitating him—which I do every day, in my writing, in the classroom, and with my friends. He’s left an indelible mark on me, and I will always be grateful for his years of friendship.

EPILOGUE

Having been increasingly weak for some time, Mac quietly passed away at his home in Carlock, Illinois, on March 29, 2025, from an undiagnosed illness that culminated in a fatal case of pneumonia. One rather profound observation he made shortly before, while being bedridden, was the lack of bird seed in his backyard birdfeeder. Left behind, besides his ever-supportive wife, Sharon, are his sister Laurie Dungan of Virginia, sister-in-law Sheridan Sellers of New York and grandnephew Jonathan Sweet of New Jersey, and countless friends.

For some of his closest friends, a celebration of life was held locally for Mac on June 17, although some of those invited, including this writer, were sadly a little too far away to make the trip to central Illinois.

Mac’s vast coin collection and numismatic library were transferred shortly after his death to the offices of Harlan J. Berk (HJB) Ltd, where they are slowly being disseminated to the public in multiple sales as of this writing, beginning with 75 ancient coins in their 232nd Buy or Bid Sale (BBS), first launched on June 5. The Greek overstrike portion of Mac’s collection published in *Overstruck Greek Coins*, was sold privately en bloc to an institution or individual to preserve their scientific value.²⁷

So here we are. What has the reader learned? Hopefully enough to imitate the virtues embodied in a certain numismatic role model, but be warned that like the coins we study, there will likely always be something more to discuss about Mac. His love of opera, dogs, and children (Plate II.10), his years as a ‘minister’ (!) embracing his skepticism of organized religion,²⁸ and his sane involvement in numismatic controversies (which may never be known fully) to name a few. But if there is one thing that we could point to that can easily encapsulate Mac’s personality for us, it is the type of coins he regularly studied and collected. Rather than pursuing flashy works of numismatic art in pristine condition, he was more attracted to the homely, underappreciated coin series that arguably offered just as much, if not more, scientific and historical value. His love and appreciation of people, especially those with hidden or undeveloped talents, was no different. God bless you, Mac. We all miss you very much.

²⁷ Personal e-mail comm., Philip Davis, *ibid*. It was assumed in the author’s earlier tribute (Fox, *The E-Sylum*, 28:28:5) that MacDonald’s later group of overstrikes (135 pieces in January 2021 according to de Callatay) for the projected supplement was included in the private sale, but this was not the case. The first batch of the coins was offered in HJB’s 233rd BBS 28 August 2025.

²⁸ MacDonald was a ‘minister’ of The Universal Life Church, Inc., of Modesto California. While kindly reviewing this manuscript (24 August 2025), Sharon explained the following about her husband’s unlikely career choice: ‘David was attracted to the church by its members wanting to expose the tax fraud the IRS was not prosecuting with groups trying to get out of paying income and property tax and military service by pretending to be a church (David did not join until 1983, after the conclusion of the Vietnam War), but the IRS tried to come after [The Universal Life Church] instead. David initially joined for “for the hell of it,” but perhaps as many as five or six couples asked him to officiate for special reasons, such as his first wedding of people of Jewish and Catholic faith.’

APPENDIX²⁹

CURRICULUM VITAE: DAVID J. MACDONALD

EDUCATION

PhD History: University of Minnesota (1972)
MA History: University of Minnesota (1968)
BA History: California State University, Fresno (1965)
Fulbright Fellow, Heidelberg Universität (1965-1966)

TEACHING

Illinois State University: Professor Emeritus (2005-2025)
Professor (1985-2005)
Associate Professor (1977-1985)
Assistant Professor (1971-1977)
Illinois Wesleyan University: Visiting Professor (part-time 1979, 1982, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1993)
Lincoln College, Extension Division (part-time 1983)
Loyola University of Chicago: Visiting Professor (part-time 1978)
University of Minnesota: Teaching Assistant (1969-1971)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

New York University Excavations at Aphrodisias, Turkey (1970, 1973, 1975)
Smithsonian Institute/University of Minnesota Excavations, Diocletian's Palace, Split, Yugoslavia (1968)
Kurpfälzisches Museum, Heidelberg (1965-1966)

ACADEMIC HONOR

Hellenic Numismatic Society **Silver Medal and Honorary Lifetime Membership** for Contributions to the Study of Greek Numismatics, Athens, 31 December 1998

LITERARY AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Illinois State Historical Society 2020 **Award of Superior Achievement** to David MacDonald and Raine Waters for *Kaskaskia: The Lost Capital of Illinois*
Recipient with Raine Waters of the Friends of Morris Library, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2020 **Delta Award** given to individuals who have contributed significantly to the southern Illinois region, either by their writing, or by other service for *Kaskaskia: The Lost Capital of Illinois*
FORVM Ancient Coins **Member of the Year –Tribunus Plebis** 2017
The 2010 Numismatic Literary Guild **Award for Extraordinary Merit** for *Overstruck Greek Coins*

²⁹ Gratefully prepared almost entirely, and with the utmost attention to detail and accuracy, by Sharon MacDonald. The unfinished supplement to MacDonald 2009 has not been included, its state of completion being uncertain at the time of writing (1 September 2025).

NUMISMATIC STUDIES

Forthcoming posthumous publications:

- An Introduction to the Coinage of Ancient Illyria.
- An Introduction to Dutch Lion Daalders and Their Imitations.
- 2009. *Overstruck Greek Coins: Studies in Greek Chronology and Monetary Theory*. Atlanta: Whitman Publishing, LLC.
- 2005. *An Introduction to the History and Coinage of the Kingdom of the Bosphorus*. Classical Numismatic Studies No. 5. Lancaster, PA and London: Classical Numismatic Group, Inc.
- 1998. R.C. Senior and D. MacDonald. *The Decline of the Indo Greeks: A Re-appraisal of the Chronology from the Time of Menander to that of Azes*. Athens: Hellenic Numismatic Society.
- 1992. *The Coinage of Aphrodisias*. Royal Numismatic Society Special Publication no. 23. London: Royal Numismatic Society.
- 1976. *Greek and Roman Coins from Aphrodisias*. British Archaeological Reports Supplementary Series, Supplement no. 9. Oxford: BAR.
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STUDIES IN US HISTORY AND COLONIZATION OF THE AMERICAS

- MacDonald, D. and R. Waters. 2025. *Encountering North America: Profiles of Frontiersmen, 1650–1820*. Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing.
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- MacDonald, D. and R. Waters. 2019. *Kaskaskia: The Lost Capital of Illinois*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- 2016. *Lives of Fort de Chartres: Commandants, Soldiers, and Civilians in French Illinois, 1720–1770*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

ARTICLES AND BOOK CHAPTERS

- 2024. Apollo/Three Nymph Denarii of Apollonia Illyriae. *KOINON The International Journal of Classical Numismatic Studies* VI: 129–163.
- 2022. A Succession of Coinages in the Balkans: Imitation Roman Republican Denarii Overstruck on Drachms of Apollonia and Dyrrhachium. *KOINON The International Journal of Classical Numismatic Studies* V: 79–83.
- 2022. An Unrecognized Countermark of the Knights of Malta. *KOINON The International Journal of Classical Numismatic Studies* V: 140–142.
- 2020. Overstruck sigloi of Azbaal and Baalmelek II of Kition. *KOINON The International Journal of Classical Numismatic Studies* III: 1–10.
- 2019. A Bacchid at Apollonia: a Late Survival of an Ancient Family. *KOINON The International Journal of Classical Numismatic Studies* II: 20–23.
- 2017. Ancient Weight Alterations of Silver and Gold Coins, in D. Boteva-Boyanova (ed.) *Ex nummis lux: Studies in Honour of Dimitar Draganov*: 369–377. Sofia: Bobokov Bros. Foundation.
- 2013. French American Jetons of the 1750s. *Journal of the Early Americas* 3, no. 4 (September/ October): 12–17.

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2012. A French Cloth Seal Recovered at Fort St. Joseph, Michigan. *Le Journal* 28, no. 1 (Winter): 8–9.
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- 2002 (published 2003). Sicilian and Southern Italian Overstrikes on Pegasoi. *Nomismatika Khronika/Νομισματικά Χρονικά* 21: 55–71.
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- 2002/2003 (published 2004). MacDonald, D., W. Eck and A. Pangerl. Neue Diplome für die Auxiliartruppen von Unterpannonien und die dakischen Provinzen aus hadrianischer Zeit. *Acta Musei Napocensis* 39/40, no. 1: 25–50.
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2002. MacDonald, D., W. Eck and A. Pangerl. Neue Militärdiplome zur Geschichte der Provinz Germania inferior. *Kölner Jahrbuch* 35: 227–236.
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- 1999–2000 (published 2001). MacDonald, D. and O.D. Hoover. Syrian Imitations of Athenian New Style Tetrachms. *Berytus* 44: 109–117

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GUIDE TO PLATE I

1. Portrait of David MacDonald, taken by quick-witted Dr. Daniel Wolf on 20 November 2012 during a visit at an Illinois diner.
2. David MacDonald posing on 14 June 1998 for a news article on his efforts to discover and preserve U.S. Civil War cannons in the State of Illinois. (Photo: Jerry Liebenstein; courtesy of the Dr. JoAnn Rayfield Archives at Illinois State University.)
3. A Macedonian bronze of Antigonus II Gonatas (277/6–239 BC; 21.68 mm, 5.49 g, 11 h) struck over an issue of the Aetolian League, thereby potentially refining the dating of the undertype by several years at either end. It was given to David MacDonald in December 2015 by Mark Fox as a surprise gift. The coin is currently listed on the Greek Overstrikes Database (GOD) under SILVER ID 3736 (viewed 24 August 2025). <https://silver.kbr.be/Special:URIResolver/?curid=3736> (Photo: Mark Fox)
4. A worn 1739-A Sou Marque (22.81 mm, 1.52 g, 6 h), graciously given to Mark Fox by Alan Anthony to forward on to David MacDonald for his 69th birthday in 2012. (Photo: Mark Fox)
5. Joseph Gagné, David MacDonald, and Robert Englebert at the 2011 meeting of the Center for French Colonial Studies in Cahokia, Illinois. (Photo and caption: Joseph Gagné)

GUIDE TO PLATE II

6. David MacDonald and Joseph Gagné at the 2012 Fort Saint-Joseph Archaeology Open House. (Photo: Cathrine Davis. Caption: Joseph Gagné)
7. David MacDonald speaking at the 2017 edition of Fort Ticonderoga's War College of the Seven Years' War. (Photo and caption: Joseph Gagné)
8. David MacDonald attempting to blend into the militia at the 2012 Fort Saint-Joseph Archaeology Open House. (Photo and caption: Joseph Gagné)
9. David MacDonald's first acquisition of a Dutch Lion Daalder, a 'very respectable' West Friesland example dated 1637. (Photo: courtesy of David MacDonald)
10. David MacDonald as a 'beast of burden,' mounted by Zoë Perez and in conference with Gabby. (Photo: Lou Perez, courtesy of Michael Perez)

IN MEMORIAM: DAVID MACDONALD (1943-2025), FRIEND AND MENTOR

Plate I



1



2



3



4



5

MARK FOX

Plate II



6



7



8



9



10