



Civico Museo Parisi Valle  
Maccagno con Pino e Veddasca – Lago Maggiore (Varese)  
The Treasure of Imperial Maccagno

## 6. The mint, the building and the mint-makers

In Maccagno, we find one of the few well preserved and still clearly recognisable mint buildings. This is surprising because the construction was indeed very simple, as shown by a plan, probably from the 18th century, recovered by Carlo Alessandro Pisoni on the occasion of a previous exhibition (2003) in this museum. Pisoni was then the curator in collaboration with Luca Gianazza.

The map, found in the Borromeo Archives on Isola Bella, clearly shows that the mint was nothing more than a two-room, two-storey building, with the production area located on the ground floor with the *fondaria* (foundry), where metal processing, alloy preparation and actual minting took place. There was also a *gabinetto* (cabinet), perhaps for storing coins. From an irrigation ditch on the backside of the building, water was led into the rooms to regulate metalworking. That's all: in any case, the artefacts created were small in size and the quantity produced was modest.

Everything is still almost intact, including the irrigation ditch (which, from the 19th century onwards, fed another, more lucrative local economy, that of sawmills); and this is truly a fortune: the modest building, in fact, served its purpose only until around 1668, when the activity of the mint can be considered concluded; from the second half of the 19th century onwards, the building was extended and raised to become the seat of the Albergo della Torre Imperiale. The mint of Maccagno was only remembered centuries later, on the occasion of the first numismatic studies.

### *Contracts and mint-makers*

The business was run by contracts with the mint-makers: both the rent and the percentage of production due to the feudal lords were regulated in the contract. Mint-makers and assistants came from other coin workshops and, not infrequently, were dubious characters tinkering with bellows, *'tongs for rebating and rounding coins'*, ovens, cookers and *'hammers for coinage'*, as



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listed in an inventory of 1632. Shortly afterwards, on 25 February 1638, a certain Carlo Cantù, 'who was in the Zecha' (we do not know in what function) had 'been killed' in unclear circumstances, perhaps in a fight. His name and the event were noted in the Register of the Dead in the parish archives. Shortly afterwards, in 1645, 'Giacomo Balocco and another one, Mazzerano, mint-makers in the mint of Maccagno' were accused of having set up a clandestine forgery, which was hidden in the fortress of the Castelli di Cannero, even with the complicity of the then curate of Cannero.

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