

The Third Side of the Coin: Magnifiers

by [Michael E. Marotta](#)

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In the *Coin World Almanac 2000* is an article about magnifying glasses. I wrote it. What you are about to read here has nothing to do with that article.

The best lenses in the world come from Zeiss. Carl Zeiss was an instrument maker. In 1841 he started a firm to manufacture microscopes. Unable to solve certain technical problems in optics, Zeiss took on Ernst Abbe in 1866. (Zeiss and Abbe appear on commemorative coins and stamps from the DDR and BRD.) Still puzzled by the unknown, they acquired the Schott Glassworks.

About 100 years ago, the Zeiss heirs agreed to divest themselves of their property and the firm was reorganized as a *foundation* ("Stiftung"), more akin to a university than a business. Zeiss exemplified "Bismark Socialism" in which organizations took care of their members with free schooling, free healthcare, annual paid vacations, etc. Zeiss stood up to the Nazis and protected their Jewish employees during the dark days of the 30s and 40s. Today, they make Planetariums, medical instruments, industrial coordinate measuring machines, and, of course, hand lenses. There is no finer workmanship on Earth. I worked as a contractor to Zeiss IMT in Detroit in 1997 and 1998.

For those unable to afford the best, there is Bausch & Lomb. Not bad at all, Bausch & Lomb is well-known in America for their contact lenses and other personal and consumer optical devices. In my professional work as a numismatic journalist, I keep at my desk several Bausch & Lomb lenses that I bought from Edmund Scientific. I also carry in my briefcase the self-encasing 5x pocket piece you find in coin stores.

Then there is Anco. Anco magnifiers are extremely popular with coin collectors because they are cheap.

Quality lenses are glass, not plastic. Glass lenses are truer in shape and present a less distorted image. If you do not care if Mint marks look a little bit larger or smaller or thinner or wider, then it does not matter which lens you use. Glass does not scratch as easily as plastic. Quality glass lenses are coated to resist scratching. If you do not care whether or not you see little lines on your coins, then it does not matter what lens you use. Quality lenses correct for false colors inherent in the physics of optics. If you do not care what little frosty rainbow sparkles your shiny white coins throw out, then it does not matter what lens you use.

If you want to know more about the scientific details of lenses and loupes, you can start with the article in the *Coin World Almanac* and investigate further on your own.