



Collecting

oversize Chips and Plaques

by Robert Pardue (CH-003)



S"Super-size it!!" That's what fast-food restaurants call it when you order a large drink or fries.

In the world of chip collecting, super-size (or oversize) checks or chips are those gaming disks which are larger than the regular 39mm diameter chips commonly found in chip trays in most casinos.

A collection of oversize checks and chips can be an interesting and visually impressive collection to assemble, even if the collection is limited to denominations of \$25 and less. A diverse collection is deceptively difficult to acquire however, due to the specialized use and limited quantities of oversize chips.

Oversize chips – defined

Oversize chips are manufactured in 44mm to 46mm diameter versions, and sometimes even larger sizes and shapes. Oversize chips are visually impressive because the extra 5mm+ in diameter translates into a chip that is 27%+ bigger than standard size chips. (The new 50mm promotional chips are 65% bigger than regular chips!) Oversize chips are sometimes used in full-size baccarat games at major casinos. Recently, oversize chips have been issued for specialized "no cash value" or non-gaming uses as well.

There are two primary challenges in assembling a collection of oversize checks, chips and plaques:

1. locating these unusual chips in casinos;
2. limiting the collection to affordable denominations.

Oversize casino chips – Baccarat

In the past two decades or so, it was fairly common to find specialized chips in use on Nevada baccarat tables. To add to the luxury ambiance of the game, the tuxedoed dealers would stock unique oversize chips in the specialized trays of full-size baccarat tables. These chips – exclusive to the baccarat area – added to the mystique surrounding the game.

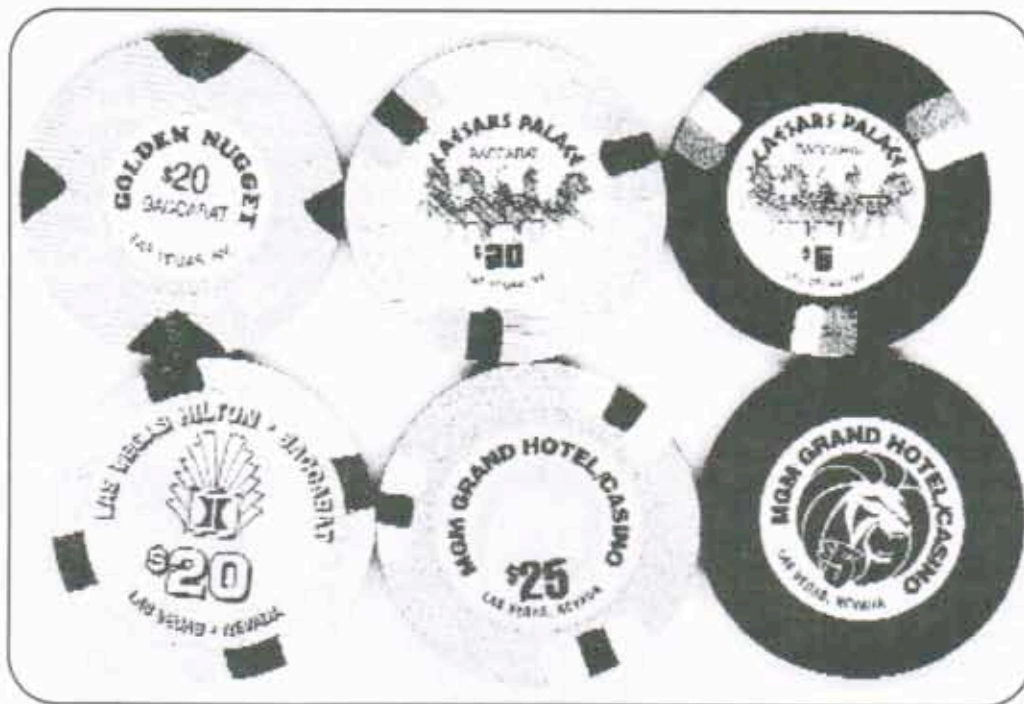
In fact, when the Sahara opened its baccarat game in the 1970s, they used European style rectangular plaques in denominations of \$20 and above. Currently, oversize chips are relatively tough to find in the casinos. The number of full-size baccarat games is limited to a few "whale" oriented casinos that can handle the action of the highest of high-rollers ... casinos such as Caesars Palace, Las Vegas Hilton, MGM Grand, Mirage, and a few other mega-casinos. Some casinos with full-size baccarat tables use regular size chips in lower denominations, and the mini-baccarat tables found side-by-side with blackjack tables in many casinos also use regular issue chips.

Oversize baccarat chips sometimes are available in affordable \$5, \$20 or \$25 denominations. (The uncommon \$20 denomination chip is used in baccarat games due to the commission structure built into the game – when a 5% commission is charged on winning "banker" bets, an even \$1 commission results from bets in increments of \$20.)

Acquiring oversize baccarat chips can be challenging because, even in the limited number of casinos using such chips, they must be purchased directly from the baccarat pit – the casino cashiers cage does not routinely keep a supply in stock. (I have found that the best time to purchase baccarat chips from the tables is in the afternoon or early evening – after the room is open, but before you risk interrupting the flow of high roller action at night.)

The quantity of baccarat chips manufactured for the baccarat games is pretty limited, since only a few baccarat table racks in each casino need to be stocked. In most cases, obsolete baccarat chips are not readily available in quantity, as compared to availability of obsolete general issue chips of the same era. However, the demand for baccarat chips among collectors has not been as broad as the demand for regular issue chips, either.

Oversize baccarat chips in lower denominations are currently available in just four Las Vegas casinos: Caesars Palace (\$5 and \$20 - with horse and chariot logo); Golden



Current oversized baccarat chips from four Las Vegas casinos



Castaways - Sports Book (Bud Jones) and Harveys Baccarat (Brass) oversized chips

Nugget (\$20); MGM Grand (\$5 and \$25 - Paulson style); and Las Vegas Hilton (\$20).

Obsolete oversized baccarat chips have been in play at: Aladdin (\$5 and \$20); Caesars Palace (\$5 and \$20 - with Caesar/scroll logo); Caesars Tahoe (\$5 and \$20); Dunes (\$5 and \$20 - 2 versions); Harrah's Reno/Tahoe (\$5 and \$25); Harvey's (\$5 and \$25); Las Vegas Hilton (\$20 - 2 prior versions); MGM Grand (\$5 and \$20 Bud Jones style); MGM Sands (\$5 and \$20); Riviera (\$5 and \$25); Sands (\$5 and \$20); plus the Sahara plaques (\$20 and above).

Oversize casino chips – other uses

Casinos have found additional uses for oversized chips in a few cases. The old Castaways Sports Book, operated by Sonny Reizner in the 1970s and '80s, was the home of some "major league" sports betting. The Castaways used oversized Bud Jones/metal center chips in large denominations (\$500 and \$1000) to facilitate sports book transactions. (These chips are occasionally available at chip shows for under \$100.) Binion's Horseshoe issued a set of oversized \$5 chips to commemorate nominees to its "Poker Hall of Fame". The original set of 20 chips has been augmented with an additional chip each year representing the new nominee. The Lady Luck Casino Hotel issued an oversized commemorative \$10 chip in 1997 for its "Puttin' on the Ritz" event. Another commemorative chip (that didn't pass Gaming Control approval, however) was the \$5 Opera House Casino "April Fool's Day" 1997 chip – an 8-sided Chipco that was cancelled (drilled) before distribution.

In California, Sonoma Joe's issued a \$5 8-sided chip for its Thanksgiving Tournament in 1995.

The MGM Grand in Darwin, Australia recently issued oversized Bud Jones chips in \$1 and \$5 denominations. These chips resemble the now-obsolete MGM Grand-Las Vegas chips made by Bud Jones. (The \$1 MGM Grand-Darwin chip is the only oversized chip of this low denomination that I'm aware of.)

Oversize casino chips – No cash value

Oversize chips occasionally have been issued for non-monetary uses by casinos. Recently, the Palace Station issued an oversized 5-No Cash Value chip for the "It Pays to Play" locals promotion.

Harrah's Reno produced an 8-sided Chipco for use in its "100% Satisfaction Guaranteed" customer relations program last year. (The chip didn't last long, although Harrah's continues to emphasize excellent service.) Caesars Tahoe issued a "No Cash Value" plain mold oversized chip a few years ago, although samples of this chip have been drilled in the center. More recently, Caesars Tahoe has issued oversized high value (\$1000) no cash value chips with expiration dates for use in V.I.P. gaming programs.

In Atlantic City, oversized "no value" chips have been issued by three casinos. Resorts issued a "Poker Played Perfect" chip to commemorate the 1993 opening of its poker room. A rare oversized Caesars chip commemorates the 1993 opening of its Poker Parlor. Another rare oversized chip was produced for Trump Taj Mahal for a private "50th Birthday" for Wolf Lichten, a Taj executive.

A Riverboat casino – the President Casino on the Admiral, in St. Louis, MO – issued two oversized "no cash value" chips for a special promotion a few years ago. Also, two cruise

operations have issued special oversize chips: the Galveston, TX "Star of Texas" day cruise maiden voyage was commemorated with a 46mm Chipco dated Nov. 4, 1993. The Starlight Cruise – a Florida day cruise operation – issued a \$1000 chip with their seagull logo (but no name). Other than the miscellaneous chips noted above, oversize casino chips are virtually non-existent beyond a few baccarat games in Nevada.

Oversize advertising chips (non-casino)

In recent years, several businesses have chosen to use oversize Chipco chips as "in trade" advertisements. These chips normally have a collectible value of at least the "in trade" stated amount. Often, these chips carry the phrase "Good for \$x off..."

The State Theatre in Portland, Maine, near Chipco's headquarters, issued an 8-sided chip good for \$5.00 toward admission or for refreshments in their restored theatre. (This may be the first 8-sided Chipco issued.)

The Palm Restaurant, in the Forum Shops complex at Caesars Palace, has oversize chips in several denominations labelled as gift certificates. The \$5 chip features a picture of a martini on the reverse side.

Four Colorado businesses have issued oversize Chipco chips: the Victorian Lady, a Cripple Creek bed & breakfast, has produced a set of 5 different "\$10 off" chips, plus additional "winker" chips with higher values. The Chateau L'Acadienne, a Central City B&B, issued two "\$10 off" chips last year. The Brewmasters U. in Westminster, CO has two different chips, good for "\$5 off" or "\$10 off your next brew". And finally, a Colorado chip and token dealer, Bob DeWitt has issued a set of "in trade" Chipcos which include oversize \$5 and \$10 trade chips and an 8-sided \$20 trade chip.

The most recent oversize advertising chip belongs to the "Greater Nevada Detachment" of the U. S. Marine Corps in Las Vegas – a colorful 50mm plain mold disk made by Paulson.

Oversize chips - Chip manufacturers

Chipco has issued manufacturer's advertising chips in both round (46mm) and octagonal shapes

Paulson recently issued several styles of 50mm advertising and promotional chips which were distributed at the 1997 gaming industry convention in Las Vegas.

(Also, watch for oversize – 50mm – chips to be issued by Brand One Marketing, a joint venture company owned by Paulson and DeBartolo Entertainment. These chips, designated as "trading disks" are to be targeted at the sports, travel and entertainment markets, according to a Paulson press release.)

Oversize chips – Fantasy

On a cost per chip basis, it's hard to beat the oversize chips (44mm or 50mm) produced by Paulson and available at their retail store in Las Vegas. For about \$1 each, you can purchase fantasy chips from several fictitious casinos. Check with Paulson for current availability, but their previous issues include such names as "The Horseshoe Club-Gardena, CA" (a real club, now closed, but these were never in play); Capitol City Casino; Derby Gran Casino; and "NOP".



Oversize Paulson disks -- up to 50mm in diameter

Plaques and Jetons

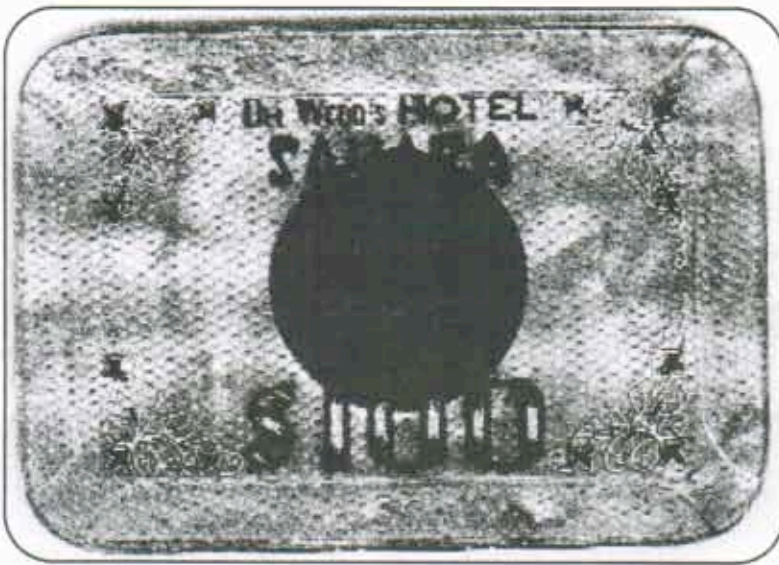
European style plaques and jetons have been made in larger sizes for a long time.

The now-obsolete Sahara baccarat plaques brought a style of elegance to baccarat as it was introduced to Las Vegas in the 1970s. These plaques are still available at collector shows, with the \$20 and \$100 plaques being more common than the \$50 or the larger sizes.

The Eldorado-Reno used a \$100 Chipco rectangular plaque for a while, although it is not in play currently.

Most plaques and oversize jetons have been manufactured by Bourgogne et Grasset (B&G) for use in European or other non-U. S. casinos. These composite layered counters often include a honeycomb-lattice structure and/or round translucent lunettes as part of the "chip". Shapes include round, oval and rectangular with rounded corners.

As examples, in Belgium, Casino Dinant issued a series of



Sahara Baccarat plaque from the 1970's

"flag" chips including a colorful 65mm x 95mm American flag plaque. The El San Juan in Puerto Rico once used a now-obsolete bright pink \$25 baccarat round European-styled jeton.

Some of my favorites include antique plaques from the Monte Carlo casino in Monaco. These intricate pieces reflect an elegance that's hard to replicate, even in today's posh high-roller baccarat pits.

Final notes

This review of oversize chips is not a definitive list of such chips and plaques. In particular, there are many other high-denomination (\$100+) chips not listed, since these are beyond the means of most collectors. If I have overlooked other lower denomination chips, it's because I'm not aware of them. (If you have others, send me a photocopy or description and I'll include in a future update to this article, if possible.)

If you are looking for a challenging, but manageable alternative to keeping up with all the new issues, or if you want to expand your horizons into a specialty sub-collection within the field of chip collecting, try focusing on oversize chips. Just say, "super-size it!"



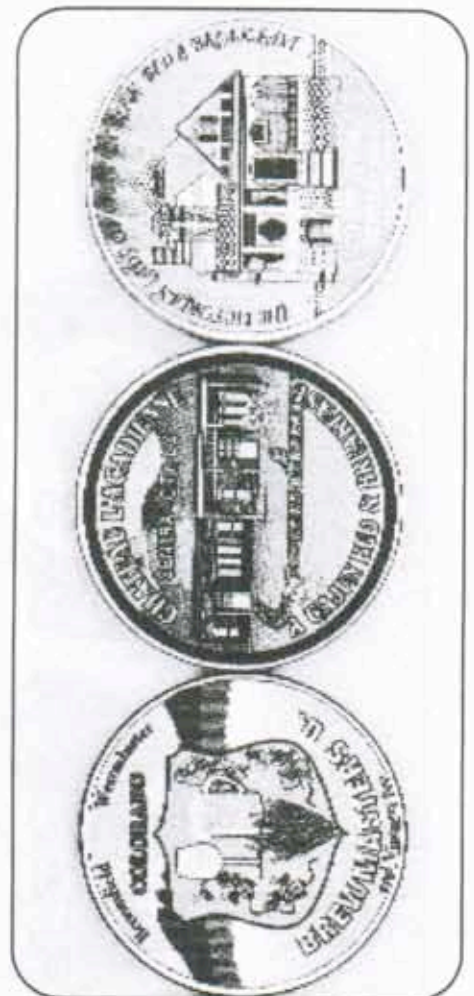
Oversize chips are visually impressive -- a regular size chip (39mm) in center in comparison to various oversize chips



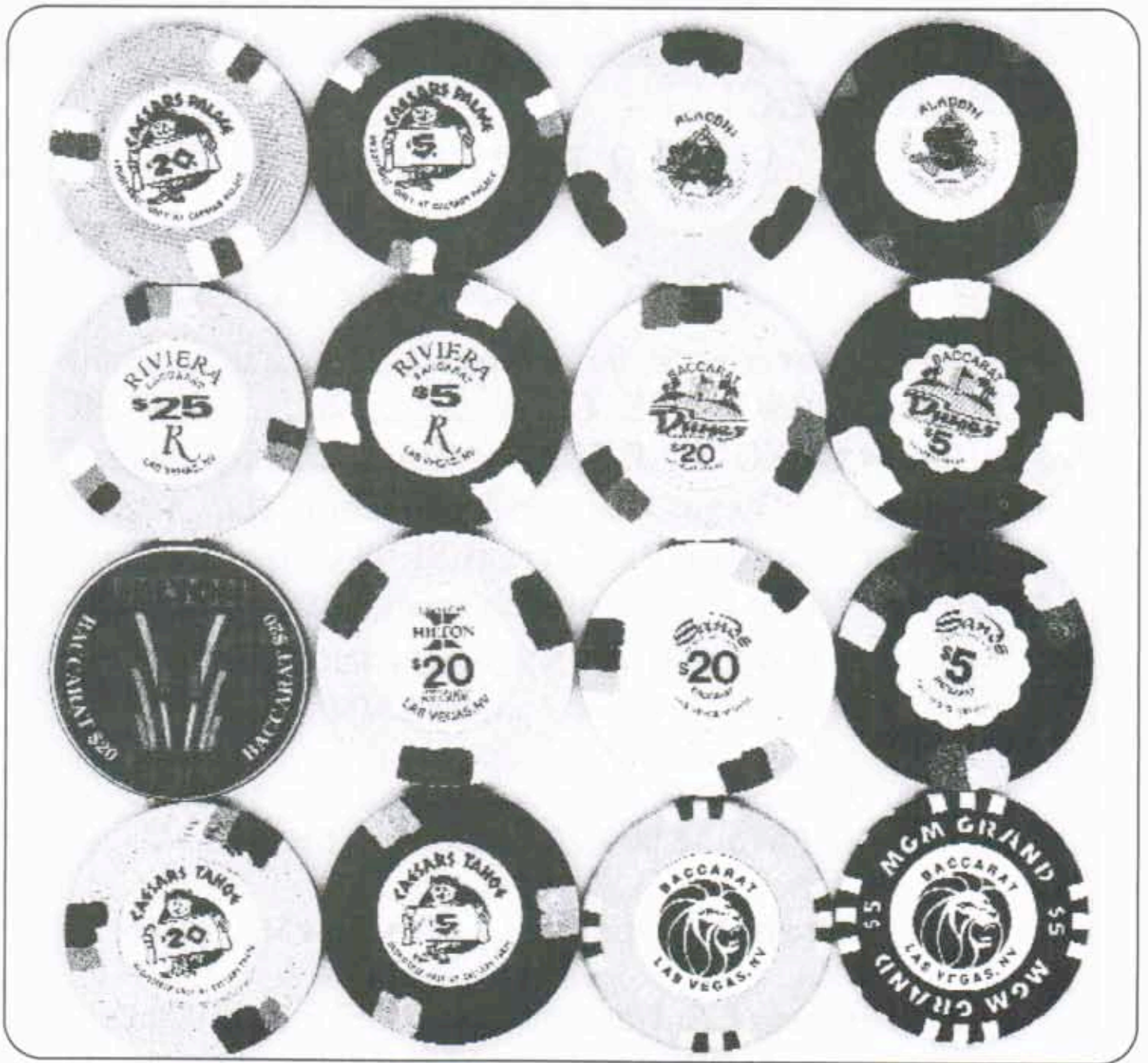
Examples of Chipco oversize octagonal and round chips...used for gaming, no cash value and advertising purposes.



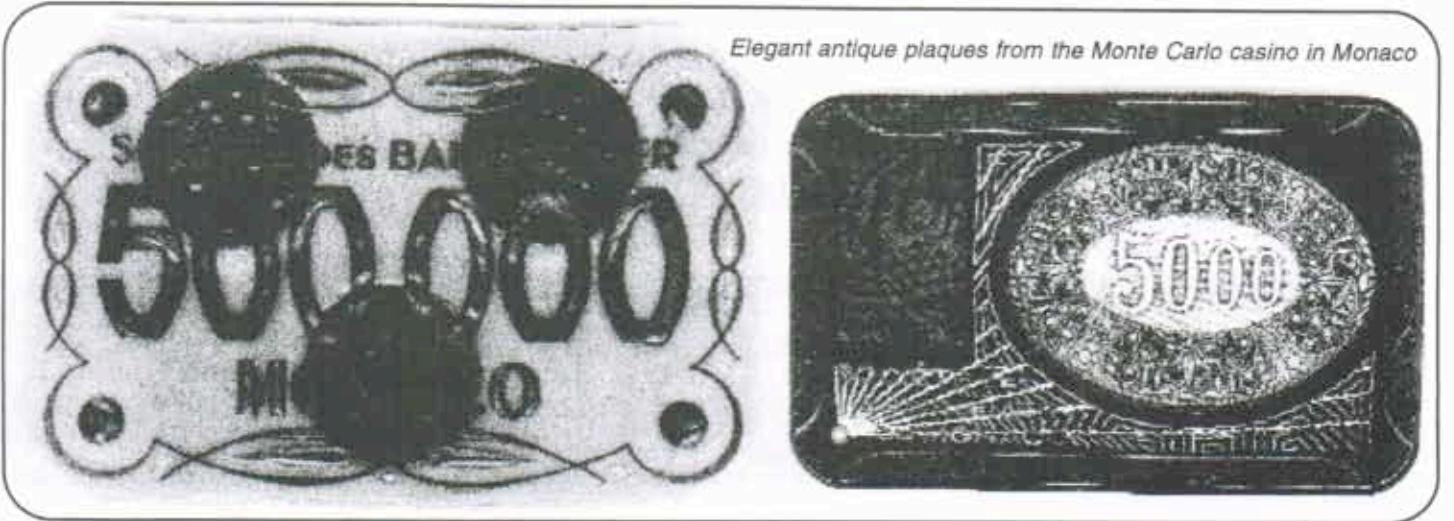
Oversize European style jetons (round disks) and plaque



Colorado "in trade" oversize Chipcos



Obsolete or closed – examples of oversize baccarat chips from Nevada casinos



Elegant antique plaques from the Monte Carlo casino in Monaco