

Collecting in the Global Community

Coins depicting a wealth of exotic and fascinating topics

beckon to collectors from around the world.

LAST MONTH, I wrote about various U.S. coins that are compelling collectibles.

This month, I want to expand on that idea and share some examples of fascinating coins from around the world. While American numismatists naturally are most familiar with U.S. issues, world coins offer similar appeal and even wider variety. With that in mind, here are some of the many interesting pieces from the wide world of numismatics.

Errors and Varieties. The vagaries of coin production generate errors and varieties on coins worldwide. Mints sometimes extended the life of usable but outdated dies by repunching them with new digits, resulting in “overdated” coins. Overdates are found on coinage throughout the world, particularly on inexpensive Belgian and Peruvian issues of the early 20th century.

There also are more fundamental design blunders. A 1997 Italian 1,000-lira coin showed a map of Europe that botched the boundaries of several countries. A corrected design was issued the same year, but with millions minted, the flawed version is far from rare.

Commemoratives. On every continent, circulating coins have commemorated important contemporary or historical events. Recent issues have honored Mexican writer Octavio Paz, Eva Perón and the 50th anniversary of women’s suffrage in Argentina, the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Nelson Mandela’s inauguration as president of South Africa, the centennial of the birth of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and the contributions of Australian volunteers. With circulating commemoratives, and

an even wider variety of non-circulating commemoratives, the collector of world coins will find numerous numismatic connections to international history and culture.

War. World coins have been affected by wartime exigencies, sometimes dramatically. In 1914, when Paris was threatened with invasion during World War I, the French Mint relocated its equipment about 300 miles south to



▲ A 1964 Japanese 1,000 yen (left) and a 1918 Philippine 10 centavos are just two of the many world coins waiting to tell you their stories.

Castelsarrasin, where silver pieces were made with a distinctive “C” mintmark.

One of Canada’s coins underwent changes in both composition and design during World War II; to conserve nickel for the war effort, 5-cent pieces were made of brass in 1942-43 and chrome-plated steel in 1944-45. On 1943-45 issues, a Roman numeral “V” indicated the denomination and represented Churchill’s famous Victory salute, while Morse code around the perimeter spelled “We Win When We Work Willingly.”

History. The evolution of global poli-

tics is evident on world money. Consider the 1903-45 coinage of the Philippines, made while the islands were a U.S. territory. These issues coincide with America’s rise as a world power, and the lovely designs blend Philippine imagery with American symbols.

National identity also is evident on 20th-century Irish coins. Portrayals of birds and animals, along with Gaelic inscriptions, reflected Irish independence in the years following Ireland’s separation from Great Britain.

Contemporary events have numismatic consequences as well. The 21st-century euro coinage is part of a historic movement, as 12 nations (and counting) have abandoned their individual currencies as part of Europe’s economic integration.

Art. Although coins are mass-produced, they can attain an aesthetic excellence worthy of great works of art. Various crowns, about the size of a U.S. silver dollar, have provided canvases for some striking numismatic imagery. Britain’s heroic St. George slays a dragon on a 1951 crown, Japan’s scenic Mount Fuji rises from a 1964 1,000-yen Olympic commemorative, and a kinetic locomotive traverses a 5-peso coin celebrating the completion of Mexico’s southeastern railroad in 1950.

Once you begin exploring the coins of the world, you’ll find a wide assortment of engaging pieces. And there’s an added bonus: the law of supply and demand likely will work in your favor, because these pieces can be significantly less expensive than their American counterparts. The geography and imagery may be different, but the world’s coins provide countless opportunities to appreciate the familiar appeal of numismatics in new and exciting contexts.

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