

The Hunt for World Coins

Beginning your collection of foreign coinage

can be easy on the eyes as well as the wallet.

ONE OF THE true joys of numismatics is the chance to acquire appealing items without spending a lot of money.

Recently, I was reminded of this by a pleasant experience at a local coin shop, where an ordinary container the size of a shoebox was chock-full of world coins. Dealers often sell some of their foreign coins this way: loose, unlabeled and unsorted, at a small price per piece. I spent 20 minutes choosing 30 coins and paid a total of \$10.

My new coins were inexpensive, but highly attractive and very interesting. Most show some wear, but others are nearly pristine. They span six continents, date from the late 18th century to the early 21st, and include an incredible array of specifications, designs and stories. Together, they illustrate the opportunities available when collecting world coins.

The coins are a variety of shapes and sizes, ranging from a Brazilian centavo smaller than a dime to a British crown larger than a silver dollar. I am now the proud owner of a square coin from the Netherlands Antilles, a 12-sided Canadian piece, a holed specimen from Japan and a scalloped-edge Israeli coin. Copper-nickel is the most common composition, though brass and bronze are plentiful. A few pieces were minted in aluminum and other metals.

Some coins symbolize significant political changes. Spain's transition to democracy is seen in a 1972 peseta featuring dictator Francisco Franco and a 1976 peseta acknowledging constitutional monarch Juan Carlos I. A 1959 Argentine peso struck during a democratic interlude between military governments revives a 19th-century



▲ World coins, often unusually shaped, are struck on many different metals.

Liberty motif. The oldest coin in the group, a well-worn French 5 centimes, witnessed the end of the French Revolution. Dated "L'An 8" (Year 8) in the Revolutionary calendar (1799-1800), it bears an image of Liberty, reflecting the change in French politics and society.

Other coins commemorate various cultural, historical or natural subjects. The Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacán

appears on a Mexican coin, and the ancient Sphinx gazes from a modern Egyptian issue. Many pieces honor national heroes, such as Simón Bolívar of Venezuela and Winston Churchill of Great Britain. Still others feature flora or fauna—an Australian kangaroo, a Liberian elephant and a Guatemalan ceiba tree.

Unusual design elements occur occasionally. A Portuguese 20 escudos has a decorative and entirely wordless reverse design. Part of the image on a Greek 50 drachmes is incuse (stamped into the coin), rather than raised. There even is an overdated coin, a 1973 Colombian 20 centavos with a "1" visible underneath the "3."

A few coins have odd denominations, including a New Zealand half penny, an El Salvador 3 centavos and a Bahamian 15-cent piece. A 12½ centimos from Venezuela is a legacy of the Spanish Colonial 8 reales. A Peruvian coin is inscribed DE ORO ("gold"), though it is made of brass. ☉

A modern Egyptian coin carries an image of the Great Pyramids on the reverse. The obverse displays the Islamic date at the left and the Christian date at the right. Other coins from Egypt feature the Sphinx on the reverse.



COIN PHOTOS: ANA MUSEUM



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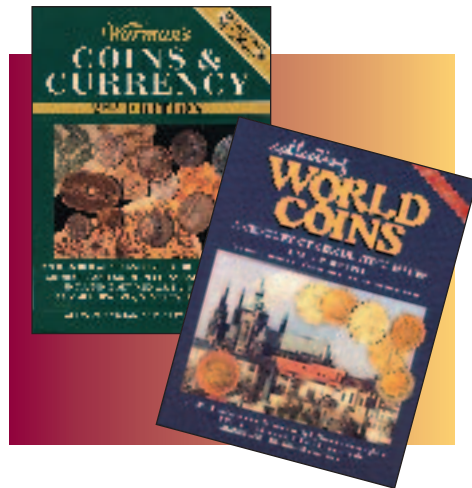
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GETTING STARTED ■ *continued*

Two coins actually were struck in Philadelphia. An 1876 Venezuelan centavo was among the first made by the United States Mint for another country. A 1944 Belgian 2 francs has an even closer American connection. It was struck on leftover zinc-plated, steel blanks originally prepared for the 1943 wartime U.S. cent.

My experience assembling this collection shows how easy it is to get interesting coins from a variety of places and times at a modest cost. Whether you acquire a few miscellaneous world coins occasionally or pursue specific types systematically, you'll need just a few dollars to build a compelling collection.

There are several excellent references on world coins. *Eyewitness Guide: Money* by Joe Cribb is full of color photographs and anecdotes, whereas *Warman's Coins & Currency* by Allen G. Berman and Alex G. Malloy contains essays and a catalog of coins



▲ *Collecting World Coins* and *Warman's Coins & Currency* are great references. Both are available from the ANA Library.

types with their values. *Collecting World Coins* by Chester Krause and Clifford Mishler lists 20th-century circulating coins by date and mintmark, with photos, mintages and values.

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