

Date/Mintmark Sets

*Decisions, decisions . . . but rest assured,
there are no right or wrong choices.*

IT'S THE oldest story in the numismatic book: you encounter a coin type, become enamored with its imagery or history, and decide to put together a date/mintmark set. But even after devoting yourself to a particular design and denomination, you still must make some decisions about exactly how to assemble your collection. The way to go is entirely a matter of personal choice. There are no right or wrong answers, just some things to consider as you plan the scope of your collection.

The first issue to think about is what date/mintmark combinations to include in a set. The most thorough approach, of course, is to collect them all. But you might instead pursue only pieces meant for circulation, excluding those made for sale to collectors. These premium issues encompass most coins since 1968 from the San Francisco Mint, which typically were made only for proof sets, and a few circulation-quality pieces made exclusively for uncirculated sets.

Depending on the issues you choose, a collection's cost can vary considerably. Take Kennedy halves, for example. They don't circulate widely, but 64 date/mintmark combinations have been made for circulation since 1964. Several more (1970-D, 1987-P and 1987-D, and most issues since 2001) were made for uncirculated sets or sold to collectors, and these aren't particularly expensive. But pieces with "S" mintmarks, including copper-nickel clad proofs since 1968 and silver proofs since 1992, can raise a set's cost dramatically. This same pattern holds for most

modern coin series, such as collector-only issues, making a set more expansive, but also more expensive.

A date/mintmark collection might also comprise several varieties. There might be differences in appearance—obscure or obvious, created by design or by accident—that distinguish among



An "S" mintmark on a 1973 Kennedy half dollar can increase a set's value.

coins with a particular date and mintmark. Varieties fall into several general categories:

- Design varieties represent changes in the details of a coin's motif. For example, the digits of the date have different dimensions on "Large Date" and "Small Date" Lincoln cents of 1960, 1970 and 1982. Other design varieties arise from variations in coin lettering or layout, like the thickness of the reverse lettering on 1976 Variety 1 and Variety 2 Eisenhower dollars, or the date's distance from the rim on 1979 "Near Date" and "Far Date" Anthony dollars.

- Mintmark varieties exist because, until recently, these letters were added by hand to individual dies. Repunched mintmarks have multiple images of the

same letter and are fairly common, with the 1943-D/D cent a prominent example. Over-mintmarks, like the 1938-D/S Buffalo nickel, have one mintmark visible underneath another, a situation that occurs when a die is modified for use at a different mint. A particularly unusual mintmark mistake occurred in 1982, when some Roosevelt dimes were inadvertently issued without mintmarks.

- Overdates and doubled dies are the most dramatic modern varieties, arising out of fundamental mistakes in the production of coinage dies. Doubled dies exhibit two distinct, rotated images of some or all of a design. The doubled-die Lincoln cents of 1955 are particularly prominent, and other instances of doubling are found on 1995 cents and 1974 Kennedy half dollars. Overdates occur when a die is impressed with images bearing two different dates, as on the 1942/1 Mercury dime or the 1943/2 Jefferson nickel.

Prices for varieties can vary. Design varieties often are inexpensive, because they represent midyear changes affecting a substantial fraction of a coin's mintage. But other varieties, especially doubled dies and overdates, affect only small numbers of coins, and these idiosyncratic issues generally are more costly. Price guides like the "Red Book" have listings, photographs and values for notable varieties, so you can decide which, if any, belong in your set.

It's always nice when an important question can't possibly have a wrong answer, and that's certainly the case when deciding what your collection will encompass. As long as you pursue coins you enjoy buying and appreciate owning, you're sure to have a great experience while assembling a fine collection.

sanders@money.org

PHOTO: ANA ARCHIVES