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NOVEMBER 26th, 2018

VDB MATTE PROOF RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

I am questioning the idea that there is only one 1909 VDB matte proof die pair. All I ask is that you look at all the evidence and keep an open mind.

Generally accepted common knowledge within numismatics states that in 1909, the US Mint used one die pair to make 1,196 matte proof wheat cents. 420 of these cents were released from the mint and they ALL have the exact same die markers.

However, my research shows confirmation of a *second* proof die pair. This die pair was initially used to manufacture matte proof 1909 VDB wheat cents. The die pair then received a light hand polish, so it could subsequently be used to manufacture business strike coins.

The bottom line: Currently there is an unattributed proof die pair for proof 1909 VDB wheat cents.

EXAMINING THE DIE PAIR

First, let's compare examples of the proof coins from this die pair against business strike coins from this die pair.

COIN #1 - **PROOF** COIN FROM THE SECOND DIE PAIR *[immediately below]*



COIN #2 – **BUSINESS STRIKE** FROM THE SECOND DIE PAIR *[immediately below]*



SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

COIN 1 is the *proof* strike from the second die pair. COIN 2 is the *business* strike from the proof dies.

You can see that the business strike coins that came from the proof dies – like COIN 2 - display semi squared-off rims, with some rounding in areas of the rims. These coins also display a matte proof-like finish, but they have a slightly more cartwheel lustrous look to them.

In order to differentiate these two different strikes which came from the same die pair, we have to look at the differences *as well* as the similarities in the die states of the proof COIN 1 and the business strike COIN 2. This is absolutely *essential* in preventing all matte *proof-like* vdb wheat cents from being mistaken for the *proof* from this die pair. For that, I will introduce one more coin.

COIN #3 – [slabbed view] THE SECOND EXAMPLE OF A PROOF COIN FROM THE SECOND DIE PAIR



Imaged by Heritage Auctions, HA.com



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COIN #3 – *[loose view]* THE SECOND EXAMPLE OF A **PROOF** COIN FROM THE SECOND DIE PAIR



The above coin, COIN 3, is the best example I could find online of another proof from this die pair.

Here is where they are all identical, and how to tell the difference between proof and business:

- **Commonalities**

One aspect that remains constant in all of these coins, business strikes and proofs: They all have a slightly rotated obverse. It is rotated to the left by about 10 degrees.

- **Differences**

The proof coin (COIN 1 and COIN 3) exhibits the unmistakable hallmark qualities of a matte proof. They have the obviously squared off rims. The strike is of great quality. The definition is above par. The dies have been sandblasted.

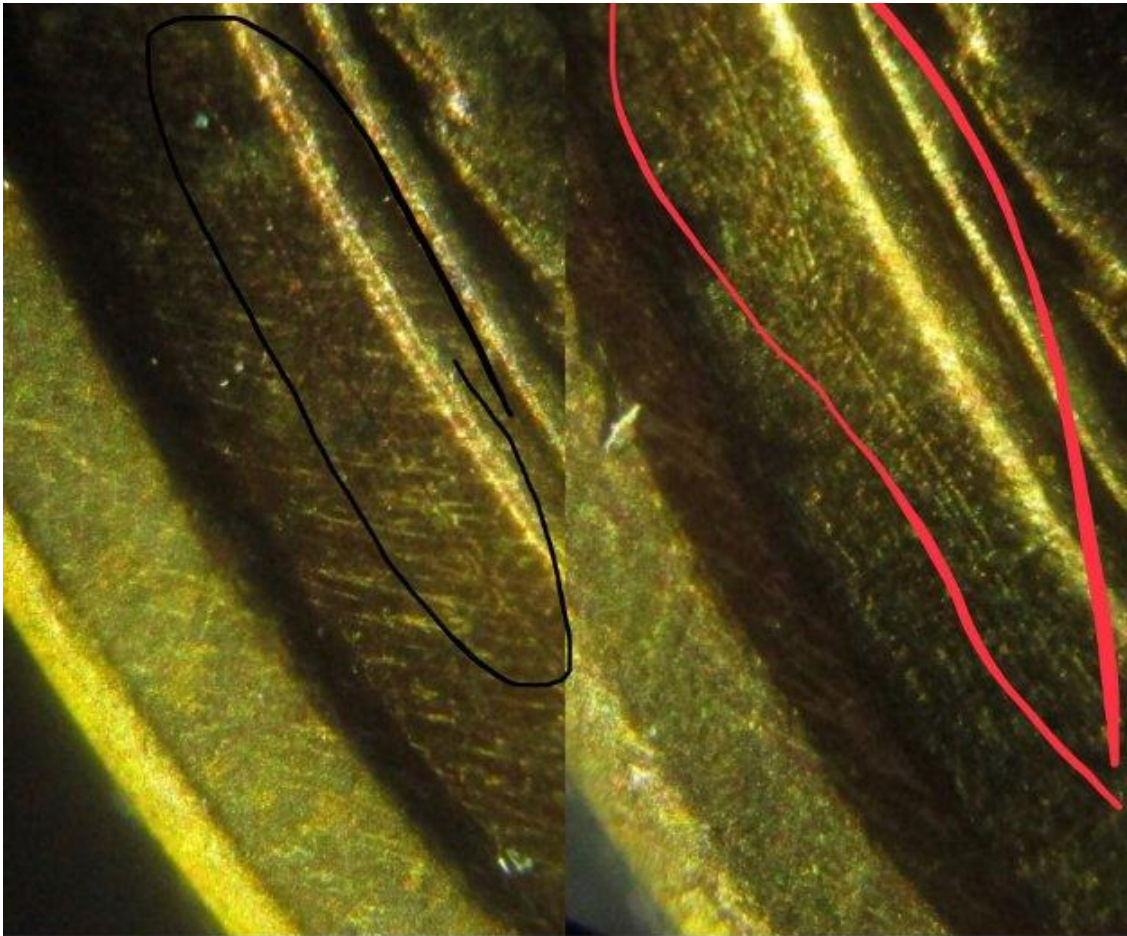
- **Die Markers**

The die markers are absolutely *key* here. There are die markers that that transferred through the changeover to business strike and die markers that did not survive the hand polishing before going into business strike production. ***This is crucial*** as it verifies that this is the same die pair and also verifies the two distinct die states.

SHARED/IDENTICAL DIE MARKERS

- **Die Marker 1**

Both coins share the same die scratch/wiggle lathe line to the left of the wheat stalk.



Coin 1 is black coin 2 is red.

Both share the same die scratch/wiggled lathe line to the left of the left wheat stalk

- **Die Marker 2**

In the motto, the letters are slightly thickened, with the bowls and counters of the letters being noticeably smaller. Below is the “US” of “PLURIBUS”. The S is the most noticeably thickened device. *[These examples are reduced a little bit by machine doubling.]*



Coin 1 is black coin 2 is red.

Thickening of letters in motto on reverse

DIVERGING DIE MARKERS

Here we will see the die markers that changed during hand polishing as the coins went into business strike production.

- **Die Marker 3**

The proof coin has a scratch between the U and N of “UNITED” while that scratch has been polished out before the business strike.

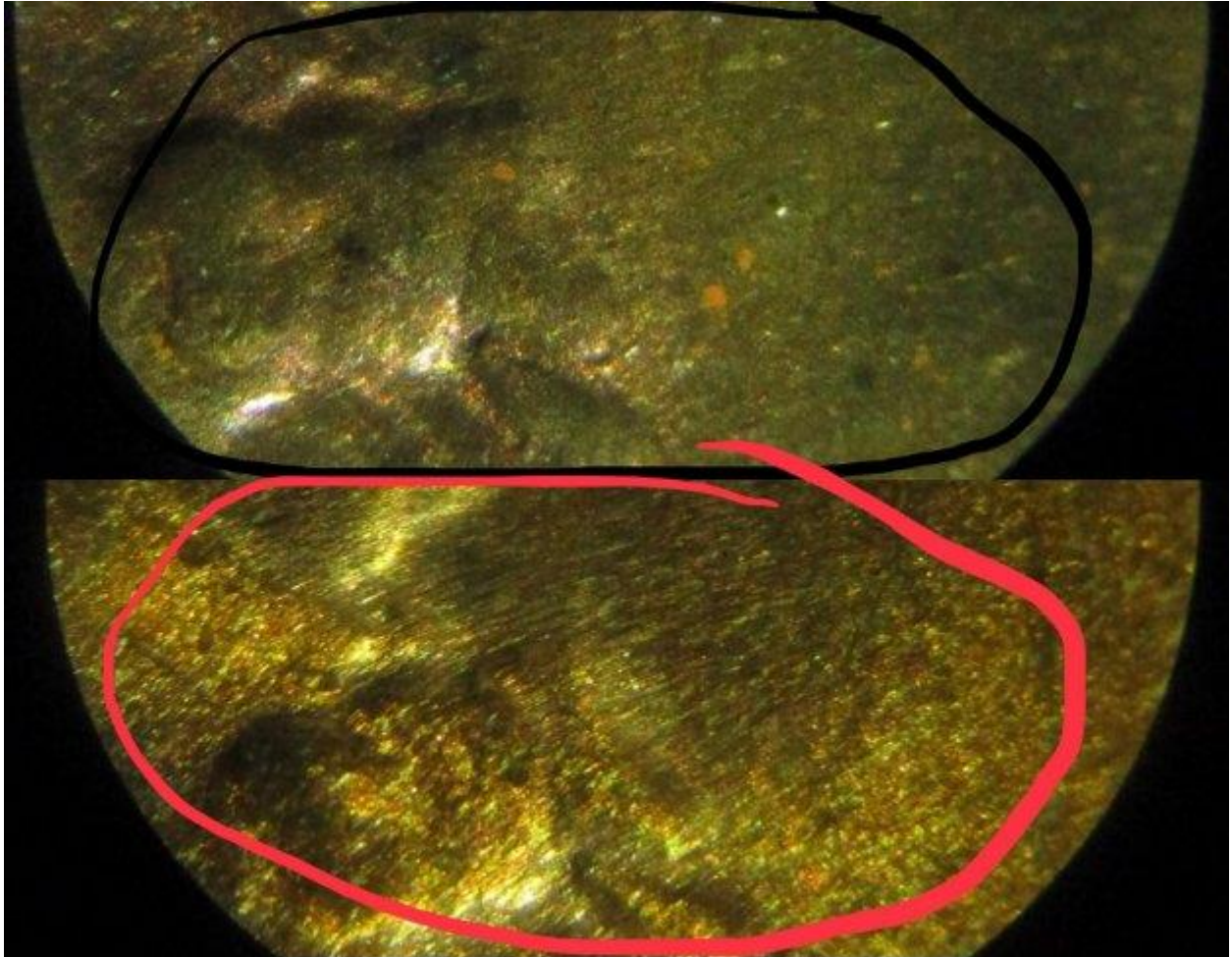


Coin 1 is black coin 2 is red.

Coin 1, proof, has a die scratch in the middle of U and N of UNITED. Die polishing removed it

- **Die Marker 4**

The 'smoking gun' here is the die-polishing lines on the business strike that do not appear on the proof. These marks can be seen near Lincoln's tie on the bust.



Coin 1 is black coin 2 is red.

After the dies were polished for business strike production, die polishing lines appeared near Lincoln's bust



Coin 1 is black coin 2 is red.

More vertical die scratches appear towards the rim, removing a die gouge on coin 1

DIE MARKERS TO BE DETERMINED

I cannot be 100% sure of the following die markers. They may appear on all 1909 VDB cents or they could be unique to this particular coin. I would need access to a much larger sample size to examine the highest quantity of coins available to determine exactly where these fit in.

- **Die Marker 5**

Doubled Die obverse and reverse with thickening of letters and some light notching.



Coin 1 is black coin 2 is red.

This die pair is a doubled die obverse and reverse with thickening in the letters and some light notching

- **Die Marker 6**

Lines near top of S in "STATES"



Coin 1 is black coin 2 is red.

Lines next to top of S are the same on these coins

- **Die Marker 7**

Similar lines near the E in "STATES"



Coin 1 is black coin 2 is red.

More similar lines

CONCLUSION

I showed the proof COIN 1 to a few numismatic associates, and before they have an opportunity to examine the die markers, they individually and unanimously agree that the coin looks to be a proof. Only another numismatist would know what I mean when I say- It simply has that hard to describe "*model look*" of being a proof. This IS a proof!

We are all SO programmed to only look at one set of vdb die markers as proof that we use that as our only metric 100% of the time. We won't even *consider* any other option!

If you take die markers completely out of the equation, I have no doubt that you would look at this coin and easily determine that it is a proof.

As for COIN 2, it is obviously and undeniably a business strike coin from the proof die pair. This coin displays both vertical and horizontal die scratches from the hand polishing, which simply does not exist on the sand-blasted proof. The business strikes possess a noticeable cartwheel luster while still retaining the sand blasted look.

This die pair started its life as a sandblasted, proof die pair, and went on to serve as a business strike after polishing.

My biggest hope is that this finding ignites a renewed wide-spread interest in coin collecting, particularly among young people. I believe the story "*18 Year Old Coin Collector Makes Valuable Discovery*" would do just that. In fact- I think it will also help revitalize the older, more experienced collector who may have shelved their collection at some point over the years. I am absolutely certain that it will have people looking through their cents!

-Ozzy Pendarvis