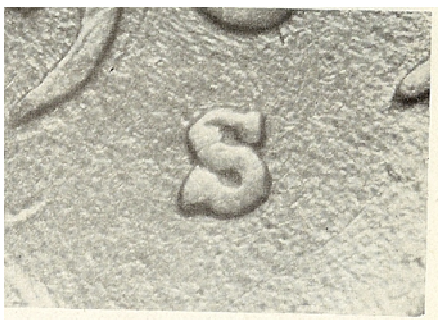
Characteristics of the Real 1909-SVDB

The ability to assess the originality of a US coin can be very valuable in the determining if you should purchase the coin or not. One of the most counterfeited US Coins is the 1909-S VDB and so this document helps to evaluate if the coin in questions is a true US mint product or an altered coin. There is no fancy equipment necessary just knowledge of the diagnostics of true US Mint product and a 20 x loops and good common sense. The key elements on the 1909-S VDB are the mint mark itself, the four positions of the mint mark with reference to the date and some more subtle diagnostics which will be discussed last. The VDB on the reverse of the 1909 S VDB and some other less obvious diagnostics are all keys to authentication process. The most common means of counterfeiting a 1909-S VDB is to add a mint mark to another 1909 Lincoln cent. This is because adding a VDB to a 1909-S coin means the counterfeiter has to procure the 1909-S first if this coin is going to be used and this substantially increases the cost to the counterfeiter.

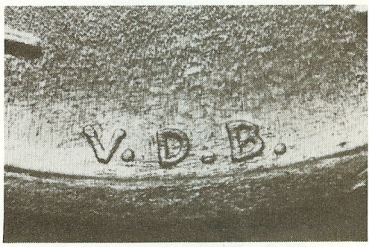
The mint mark shape and style is important and can all by itself give a strong indication of the coins authenticity.

The genuine mintmark punch used in the San Francisco dies had squared off serifs with the top one vertical and the bottom serif 20 degrees off the vertical. The top serif usually looks like a notch because of a diagonal line in the top serif. There is a lump nestled in the lower back curve of the upper loop. The diagonal lines are caused by die erosion which occurs when the die is used beyond its normal limits. Thus if the die is in the early stages of use these die erosion lines may not be observable and thus cannot be used as a diagnostic. Notice the shape of the mint mark which has a slender upper loop and a fat diagonal and a narrow bottom curve leading into a squared off serif.

In the image below the shape of this mint mark is just not anywhere close to the authentic San Francisco mint mark even though the position may be correct. We will discuss the correct positions of the mint mark in a later section of this paper. This mint mark has the vertical serif in the upper loop of the “S” but does not have the notch and is much fatter than the real “S” so it is an altered mint mark.



The VDB is added to 1909-S Lincoln cents in some cases and I have found this to be the toughest to detect so it is very important to understand this characteristic. The position of the VDB is slightly off center and positioned to the left in relationship to the wheat stalks.



The Key elements are the bottom and middle diagonal bar in the “B” is angled up and to the right. The bottom of the “D” Is not fully rounded and angles up to the right. The top of the initials are often weakly struck, in some cases almost not existent and one or more of the periods may be missing.

The next most important diagnostic is the position of the mintmark relative to the 1909 date and there are four positions that are valid for the mintmark on the real 1909-S VDB. Let’s look at each one of them individually in order 1 through 4, so we get a full understanding of this important diagnostic. There were four dies used and Position #1 was the last die in service, first matched with a reverse with VDB and later matched with a reverse that did not have a VDB. This obverse can be found on both 1909-S and the 1909-S VDB. This is why the VDB characteristics discussed above are so important. The 1909-S which used this die with Position #1 mint mark and an added VDB can be detected by a die chip in the right obverse field. This is shown in a picture below in the right side of the chart.

Table 1

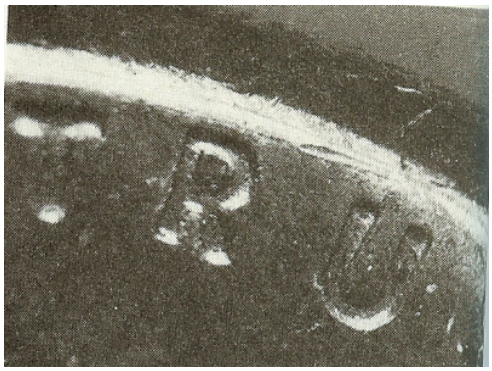
The figure with the 1909-S shown below will be identical for the 1909-S and the 1909-S VDB so the image on the right is extremely imporant because it is the only defining characteristc of the true 1909-S vdb.

	
Position #1 die #4. This mintmark is high and tilts to the right. Top of the S is above the bottom of the first 9’s in the date. The Left edge of the S is even with right edge of the first 9 in the date. The right edge of the S is even with the center of the left curve of the zero in the date.	If a 1909-S die #4 is used to counterfeit the 1909-S the obverse date and mintmark will be like the image in the right side of the table. However in the real 1909-S VDB there is a die chip in the right obverse field that is not on the 1909-S coin.

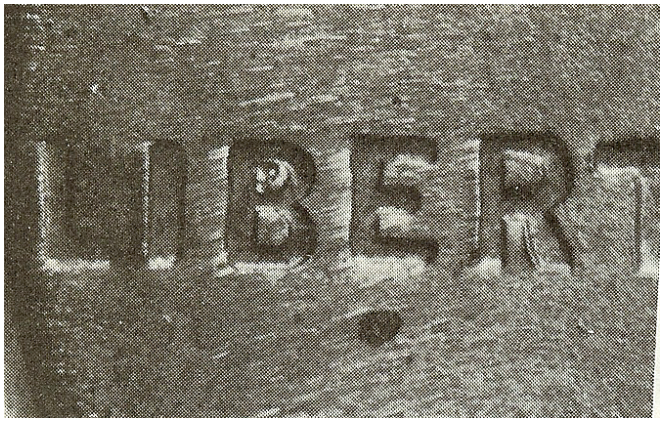
Table 2 provides the position of the mintmark relative to the date and the meaning of the medium position and low position used below is relative to the vertical height below the date. It does not refer to the horizontal position of the mintmark relative to the date.

Table 2 This table show position #2,3 and 4 respectively	
	Mintmark Position #2 The mintmark is in the medium position (relative to the date) and tilts to the right and is even with the bottom of the 9's in the date. The left edge of the S is even with the right edge of the 9 and the right edge of the S is even with the center of the left curve of the 0 in the date. Note the horizontal position is identical with the Position#1 but the vertical position relative to the date is lower.
	Mintmark Position #3 The mintmark is in the medium position (relative to the date) and tilts to the right and is even with the bottom of the 9's in the date. The left edge of the S is in the center space between the 9 and 0 in the date. The right edge of the S is just to the left of the center of the 0 in the date.
	Mintmark Position #4 The mintmark is in the low position relative to the date and the mintmark is not tilted as in Position #1,2 and 3. The top of the S is well below the bottom of the 9's in the date. Left edge of the S is even with left edge of the 0 and the right edge of the S is 30% past the center of the 0 in the date.

Other charistics also are useful when trying to evaluate the real 1909 SVDB but are sometimes not as well know but can be helpful in some instances. Both addition charistics are show for Position #2 and #3 below.



On the obverse above the U in TRUST there is a die gouge for the position #2 mintmark configuration.



One of the most unique characteristic of the #4 mintmark position is that in the late die states there is a die chip in the upper loop of the B in Liberty shown above. Of the four mintmark positions the most commonly found it position #4. Many 1909-S VDB cents have a brassy, streaky or wood grain appearance, the result of planchets inherent manufacturing and does not affect the grade of the coin and in fact many collectors like this effect.