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Detecting Counterfeit Slabs – PCGS

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Imagine this scenario: you're in a coin show, browsing hundreds of tables of coins. There are a couple thousand people in the large convention center with you, and they are looking at the exact same coins you've seen already. The pressure to buy the coin you want right away is very strong because you don't know if it will still be there in 10 minutes.

Now imagine that you walk up to a dealer's table at the back of the showroom, and in the middle of his case there is a 1914 Republic of China dollar, the exact coin you were looking for. The dollar is housed in a PCGS MS62 holder, the certification number works, and there is a TrueView image. Everything checks out until... you notice a slight difference between the slab you're holding and the PCGS image.

The slab I was describing above is a real counterfeit holder one of my good friends in numismatics found while browsing eBay. He contacted me and shared a screenshot from the eBay listing that he believed to be counterfeit, and I confirmed that it was a fake slab. He concluded that it was also a counterfeit coin, based on his knowledge of world coins and the PCGS image.

With a good knowledge of PCGS slab types, I quickly identified this as a counterfeit slab. There are several big giveaways that it was a counterfeit: the Secure shield on the left side of the label is a color different from the usual gold, and it is not sparkly. Another giveaway is the KM number; it is of the wrong font and size. Below PCGS MS62, it reads "China.Republic" instead of "China, Republic"... you can tell a counterfeit from the real slab there because there is a period instead of a comma, and the words don't have space between them.

For the convenience of the reader, I have attached photos of the counterfeit slab and the PCGS TrueView image.

Although not the most common coin, the 1916-D Mercury Dime in PCGS XF40 can be found with some searching, and won't break the bank for some of us that deal in coins on a regular basis. Yet this 1916-D dime is not what you think it is: like the China dollar mentioned earlier, this dime is also a counterfeit in a fake PCGS slab. Although this slab is harder to see the mistakes, they are still there.

One of the biggest mistakes on the slab, although difficult to see unless you, like me, have stared at PCGS slabs for hundreds of hours analyzing different parts in order to become an expert on slabs, can be found. What was this mistake that gave it away for me? The date, denomination, and grade are in a bold text. PCGS never uses that bold of a font on their labels. The font itself is also wrong, the numbers and serifs on the G of PCGS denote a different font used. I will often compare the G in PCGS of a questionable holder to slabs I know are genuine so that I can see the difference. On this slab, I did not bother to check the certification number to see if it would still come up with the right coin. Even if the certification number works, you should still always look the slab over to make sure it's a genuine holder.

Here is one final example of a counterfeit slab. This is the label from an 1877 cent in PCGS XF45. Once again, I did not bother to check the certification number. First giveaway:

each letter in PCGS XF45 is spaced too far apart. Upon further inspection, I found that all of the numbers and letters on the label were spaced too far apart as well. The certification number is too close to the barcode, and the barcode itself is not straight.

Counterfeit holders from PCGS can be either easy or hard to detect, it sometimes takes a lot of knowledge to figure one out. In my time as a coin dealer, I have seen multiple counterfeit coins and slabs, but the best knowledge of detecting counterfeits does not come from looking at fake coins and slabs all day. You can become more educated on counterfeits by staring at real coins and slabs, and then comparing your knowledge of a real slab/coin to the questionable one down the road.

If you would like to see more images of counterfeit slabs of different types, I encourage you to visit www.theblackcabinet.org/series/counterfeit-slabs/