

Layer 5 (top layer) Stratigraphy Card

Penny

Many changes in design and composition are visible in the more than 300 billion pennies minted since 1787, the original minting date. For archeologists the beauty of coins is that many have dates imprinted directly on them. However, even if the date is unreadable, the pictures, words and physical composition provide many clues to at least a span of dates for the coin. For example, a penny with Lincoln's portrait on it could not have been produced before Lincoln's birth, and a coin made of a zinc alloy probably dates from the early 1940s when World War II copper shortages brought about a temporary change in composition. It is also important to remember that most coins stay in circulation for many years. Just because the date on a coin is "1928" does not mean that 1928 was the only year it was used or the year it was dropped in a spot that later became part of an archeological investigation. A 1928 date does mean that the coin could not have been dropped before 1928.

