



FAQ – Frequently asked questions

A) BUYING COINS

A-1) Does Swissmint have a shop?

No. You can order goods from our online [shop](#) or obtain them from a coin dealer. [List of dealers](#)

A-2) Which payment options are available in the online shop?

You can choose from the following payment options: Payment in advance, PostFinance Card, credit cards (VISA or MasterCard).

A-3) Can older commemorative coins be obtained from Swissmint too?

Only those coins which are listed in our [shop](#) are available. Please contact a coin dealer for earlier issues of commemorative coins. [List of dealers](#)

A-4) Are gold and silver ounce coins, so-called bullion coins (see below for explanation), available from Swissmint?

No, only the items which are listed in our [shop](#).

A-5) Can loose circulation coins, e.g. a new 5-franc coin, be obtained from Swissmint?

Swissmint delivers all circulation coins that are intended for payment transactions to the Swiss National Bank, which is responsible for coin distribution. The Swiss National Bank puts coins for a new year into circulation only when those from earlier years have been depleted for the unit in question. This can occur two to three years after the year actually struck on the coins. New coins can be obtained at Swiss National Bank counters. The Swiss National Bank does not send items out.

However, the current coin sets (two or three years back) can be obtained from Swissmint in two minting qualities and contain all circulation coins as well as a bimetallic commemorative coin. A baby coin set is also available, which contains a bear medal in addition to the circulation coins; see the [shop](#). The baby coin set is also available from larger Swiss Post shops.

A-6) Can coin catalogues be obtained from Swissmint?

No. But on our website on the page [Links](#) you can find the document "Current catalogue of Swiss circulation and collector coins".

B) SELLING COINS, HAVING COINS VALUED

B-1) I would like to sell my coin collection. Who can I turn to?

The best thing is to contact a coin dealer. [List of dealers](#)

Old silver coins that are no longer legal tender but whose dimensions correspond to those of current coins can still be exchanged at face value at the Swiss National Bank. However, this is advisable only when silver prices are lower.

B-2) Can I have my collection valued by Swissmint?

Swissmint does not estimate values. Please contact a coin dealer for this. [List of dealers](#)

B-3) For how long can I exchange a coin that has been withdrawn from circulation?

If a coin is withdrawn from circulation, there is an initial exchange period of approximately two years during which coins can be exchanged at face value at post offices, Swiss Federal Railways counters and the Swiss National Bank. Thereafter, coins can still be exchanged at the Swiss National Bank for up to 20 years after their withdrawal from circulation. The return period is unlimited for withdrawn circulation coins if they correspond to the coins that are legal tender in terms of their dimensions and images (see [Rates of 7 April 2006 for coins withdrawn from circulation](#) german or french only).

C) GENERAL AND TECHNICAL QUESTIONS ON SWISS COINAGE MATTERS

C-1) When was the euro introduced in Switzerland?

The euro is not Switzerland's currency.

C-2) When will the 10-franc coin be introduced?

There are no plans for 10-franc circulation coins in the near future.

C-3) Who approves the subjects and coin imagery for circulation coins?

The Federal Council is responsible for approving the subjects and coin imagery.

C-4) Who approves the subjects and coin imagery for commemorative coins?

The Head of the Federal Department of Finance is responsible for approving the subjects, while the Director of the Federal Finance Administration is responsible for approving the coin imagery.

C-5) Who determines mintage quantities?

The need for circulation coins is determined by the Swiss National Bank. As the Confederation is responsible for issuing coins, Swissmint submits an application to the Head of the Federal Department of Finance via the Federal Finance Administration. This person then approves the [minting programme](#). In the case of collector coins, the mintage quantity is set by Swissmint.

C-6) How many coins are there in circulation?

Over 5 billion coins with a face value of more than CHF 2.9 billion. This is the equivalent of over 18,000 tonnes in terms of weight.

C-7) Are coins subject to the Swiss National Bank's money supply restrictions?

Although there are coins worth around CHF 2.9 billion in circulation, this quantity is too insignificant for it to be included in monetary aggregate calculations. The quantities of coins to be minted are thus based on requirements.

C-8) Why does the 50-centime coin show ½ franc rather than 50 centimes?

The first Federal Coinage Act of 1850 was closely modelled on the French coinage system. In line with the French franc, the Swiss franc was defined as follows: "The standard for the Swiss coin unit, denominated francs, shall be five grammes of silver, 90 percent fine." (= coin standard) The coin series was divided into three groups, which differed significantly in terms of colour and their features: ½, 1, 2 and 5-franc pieces in silver, 5, 10 and 20-centime billon coins (alloy with lower silver content) and 1 and 2-centime bronze coins. In accordance with the definition in the Coinage Act, the 5-franc coin was made of 25 grammes of 0.900 fine silver, the 2-franc coin contained 10 grammes, the 1-franc coin 5 grammes and the ½-franc coin 2.5 grammes (= coins whose metal content was equal to their face values = full-bodied coins). The designation of ½ franc was taken over from the French half-franc coin, which bore the lettering "½ FRANC" or "DEMI FRANC" until 1845. This, together with the image on the coin (seated Helvetia), emphasised that it belonged to the group of silver coins.

C-9) Why is the ½-franc coin smaller than the 20-centime one?

As explained in C-8, the series of coins originally consisted of three coin groups, i.e. bronze coins, billon coins and silver coins. The smallest unit in the silver coin group was the ½-franc coin, which weighed 2.5 grammes and had a diameter of 18 mm. Aside from the full-bodied silver

coins, there were also so-called token coins (= coins whose metal content was lower than their face values) made of billon (5, 10 and 20 centimes) and bronze (1 and 2 centimes). The weight of these coins was not defined by the coin standard. Consequently, alloys and dimensions could be set independently of it. It was thus not imperative to produce a 20-centime coin that was even smaller than the already tiny ½-franc coin.

C-10) What fonts are used on the 1-franc and 5-franc coins?

The fonts used on our circulation coins are not standard fonts; they are fantasy fonts that were created especially for these coins by the designers of the types of coin in question. Accordingly, they do not have any names.

C-11) What is used to make the Swiss coins that are legal tender?

The 5-centime piece is made of aluminium bronze, while all of the other circulation coins are made of a cupronickel alloy. Commemorative coins are minted in bimetal, silver or gold.

[Technical data on legal tender Swiss coins \(PDF, 140 kb\)](#)

C-12) When did our coins stop being made from silver?

The coins from ½ to 5 francs have not been made from 0.835 fine silver since 1968; they are made using a cupronickel alloy. Only the 1969 5-franc piece was once again in silver. The reason for switching material was an increase in silver prices, which caused the silver content of the ½, 1 and 2-franc coins to be worth more than their face values and the coins were thus melted down and exploited by third parties. This was not the case for the 5-franc coin (see C-13). All silver coins were scheduled to be withdrawn from circulation on 1 April 1971, and this deadline was then extended to 31 March 1972.

C-13) Is it true that the 1969 5-franc piece was made from silver?

As the silver 5-franc piece contained proportionately less silver than the other silver coins (the 5-franc coin was only three times the weight of the 1-franc coin), there was no risk that the price of silver would soon exceed the coin's face value. In order to be prepared nonetheless for switching to base-metal 5-franc coins, a large number of 5-franc coins were minted using a cupronickel alloy in 1967 and 1968, and struck with the year 1968 (33.81 million pieces). However, these coins were not issued initially. In 1969, 5-franc coins were once again minted in silver, struck with the year 1969, and put into circulation (8,637 million). The withdrawal of the other silver coins triggered a veritable boom in collection activity, which the 5-franc coin did not escape either. When the largest coins in circulation became extremely scarce in 1969 because of collection activity and the price of silver rose again after having dipped briefly, it was decided to switch definitively to a cupronickel alloy also for 5-franc coins.

C-14) What are billon coins made from?

Billon is a copper alloy with a small amount of silver. Other alloy components are zinc, tin or nickel. The Confederation's billon coins (5, 10 and 20 centimes) had a silver content of between 5% and 15%. From 1871, they were replaced with ones in cupronickel (5 and 10 centimes) or pure nickel (20 centimes). According to the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia, the word billon comes from the Mediaeval Latin word billio, meaning unit of payment.

C-15) What are bullion coins?

Bullion coins are investment coins that are minted in great numbers and traded worldwide with a small premium. They are usually minted in 22 carat gold (916.7), fine gold or fine silver in troy ounces (31.103 g) or fractions thereof. Well-known examples of gold bullion coins are the Krugerrand (South Africa: 22 ct, weight 1.09 troy oz, or 33.930 g), Eagle (United States: 22 ct), Maple Leaf (Canada: 999.9), Britannia (Great Britain: 22 ct), Kangaroo (Australia: 999.9) and the Philharmoniker (Austria: 999.9). Switzerland's Vreneli (last minted in 1949) has the character of a bullion coin, although it meets the aforementioned criteria only to a limited degree.

C-16) Why does Swissmint not issue its own bullion coins?

Production of a Swiss bullion coin is not worthwhile in view of the low premium and the limited sales potential. Moreover, the issue of investment coins carries a high financial risk due to fluctuations in gold prices.

C-17) Are gold coins solid gold?

Unless they are coins in a fine metal, e.g. bullion coins (see C-15), gold coins are alloys. An alloy is a mixture of gold and copper, for example, obtained by means of smelting. An alloy is usually harder than a fine metal and has greater abrasion resistance. The usual gold alloy in Switzerland consists of 90% gold and 10% copper (0.900 gold). Switzerland's silver coins are made from an alloy of 83.5% silver and 16.5% copper. Unlike an alloy, gold or silver plating consists of a thin precious metal coating, usually electroplated, on a base metal. In this case, the precious metal content is tiny relative to the total weight.

C-18) Why are all gold Vreneli not the same colour, i.e. how come some coins are "more golden" than others?

The alloy used for minting the Vreneli, as well as all other Swiss gold coins, consists of 90% gold and 10% copper. The colour of this material is quite red. However, Vreneli coins are yellow to reddish-yellow in colour, as the blanks (planchets or flans) were oxidised and then cleaned in a pickling bath before striking. Copper is removed from the surface during pickling. This leads to a higher proportion of the precious metal, i.e. gold, on the surface. The colour is more or less yellow depending on the intensity of the pickling. Pickling has various advantages. The coins seem more golden and have a nicer, more resistant, spotless surface, but they maintain the good technical characteristics of the gold-copper alloy such as hardness, resistance to wear and tear, homogeneity and good striking properties. This was important, as earlier Vreneli issues were used for payment transactions and thus had to withstand the hardships of daily use.

C-19) What is meant by medallion orientation and coin orientation in minting terms?

The alignment of the reverse relative to the obverse side of the coin depends on how the dies are positioned during minting. In the case of medallion orientation (British turnover or German mintage), the top of the reverse shares the same position as the top of the obverse, whereas in the case of coin orientation (pre-euro French coinage or US mintage), the image on one face of the coin is upside-down relative to the other. Information on the coinage types for Swiss coins can be found in the [coinage table](#). See also D-20.

C-20) Why do some coins have designs on the edge?

Originally, precious metal coins had ridges on the edge to prevent the precious metal from being filed off (= coin diminishment). Later, edge designs (edge inscriptions and ridges) were also important for preventing forgeries. Even in current coin forgeries, the edge design is usually the weak point.

C-21) Why do coins have a raised edge?

The raised edge around the coin imagery is not primarily for decorative purposes; it is used to protect the imagery from wear and tear. The coin slides on the raised edge, thereby protecting the struck design.

C-22) What is a coin set?

A coin set is a collection of circulation coins that are legal tender in a country; they generally have the same year of issue.

C-23) What is a baby coin set?

A baby coin set is intended as a gift upon the birth of a baby and consists of the circulation coins from the year of the birth and possibly a medal as well.

C-24) Why are there ridges on the edge of some coins while others are smooth?

A ridge design was used for security reasons and is still used today. Originally, edge designs were used to prevent metal from being filed off the edge of precious metal coins. Since our coins no longer contain precious metals, coin diminishment is not an issue anymore. However, edge designs are still important security features today. Based on experience, the biggest problems when forging coins come from edge designs. As coins with a low face value are rarely forged, an edge design is not necessary for these. Starting with the ½-franc coin, our coin edges have ridges, and the 5-franc piece has an edge inscription, which is even more difficult to imitate. Moreover, edge designs are an important way for the visually impaired to distinguish between

coins. For example, they can easily tell a 5-centime coin from a ½-franc coin thanks to the ridges on the edge.

D) NUMISMATICS IN SWITZERLAND

D-1) How long has the current version of the Swiss franc existed?

It dates back to 1850, when the cantonal currencies were unified into a single currency at federal level. However, it was only when the Latin Monetary Union was disbanded on 1 January 1927 (see below) that domestic coins became the exclusive legal tender in Switzerland.

D-2) Why were the first coins of the Swiss Confederation minted abroad?

The Confederation's first coins were minted in Paris and Strasbourg because Swiss minting facilities were inadequate at the time and the establishment of such a mint had not been envisaged initially. The coins produced by French mints, however, were far from satisfactory. To remedy this problem, the Confederation took over Bern's former cantonal mint in Gerberngraben in 1853. Although the monetary reform of 1850-1852 ensured the old Swiss coinage was replaced, the relatively small amount of new mintage fell extremely short of the quantities needed to nationalise all of the coins in circulation, which was unforeseen. The close reference to the French coinage system meant that foreign mintages could be used and money could thus be saved.

D-3) What is the Latin Monetary Union?

The emerging world economy of the 1800s lacked a cross-border and international payment transaction system. To facilitate their trade relations, France, Belgium, Italy and Switzerland signed a monetary convention in 1865 (the Latin Monetary Union) which contained specific provisions on the weight, fineness, shape and exchange rate of gold and silver coins, and established per capita minting quotas based on the population of each state. In 1866, the national government made the following statement: "The Federal Council regards the parity of the silver coinage originating from these four countries as the first step towards implementing the notion of a universal monetary system." The monetary convention, which Greece subsequently joined, remained officially in force until 1926. From this year onwards, the legal tender of our country has been exclusively the Swiss franc. In 2002, the introduction of the euro marked a renewed venture towards establishing a common European single-currency area – this time, however, without the participation of Switzerland.

D-4) Where does the word "rappen" come from?

Originally, the "rappen" (Swiss German for centime) was a dark-coloured type of pfennig that circulated in the Upper Rhine regions in the 14th century. It was thought that the name "rappen" came from the raven heads embossed on the pfennigs of the Counts of Rappoltstein. Nowadays, however, it is generally assumed that the name comes from the dark colour of the coin. The word "rapp" in Old High German means "dark" and the word "rappen" also means "black horse". (Source: www.moneymuseum.com)

D-5) Where does the word "franc" come from?

The term "franc" comes from a French gold coin dating from the year 1360 which bore the Latin inscription *Rex francorum* (King of the Franks). In 1577, the franc was minted in France also as a silver coin. A silver 10-batzen coin minted in Bern in 1757, and subsequently in Basel, Solothurn and Luzern too, was called the Swiss franc. In the Helvetic Republic, attempts were made to convert the currency to the decimal system based on the Bern coin standard. From 1799 on, the Swiss franc, containing 6.6194 grammes of fine silver and worth 10 batzen, or 100 centimes, was introduced with the aim of standardising the currency. This initiative failed, however, due to a shortage of precious metal. During the Mediation Period (1803-1813), the cantons regained the right of coinage. Despite the efforts of the Diet (legislative and executive council of the Swiss Confederacy) to establish a single coin standard, francs differing in fineness, features and weight, as well as many other coins, remained in circulation until the Federal State's monetary reform. In 1848, the Confederation assumed the right of coinage and established the silver currency with

the franc, made up of 100 centimes. (Source: Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz <http://hls-dhs-dss.ch>)

D-6) Where does the term "fünfliber", commonly used in German-speaking Switzerland to refer to the 5-franc piece, come from?

The popular expression "fünfliber" originally stems from the French term "livre", meaning "pound". The French franc, which followed on from the "livre tournois" (Tours pound) and had more or less the same value as the previous currency, was also in circulation in Switzerland, where the term "fünflivres" was coined to denote the French 5-franc coins. The use of this term was subsequently extended to the domestic 5-franc coins, which were the same size as their French model. With time, the term evolved into "fünfliber" and is commonly used in everyday parlance in the German-speaking part of the country.

D-7) Where does the term "Stutz" to denote franc come from?

"Häsch mer fuf Stutz?" (Can you give me five francs?) "Für dä Charre z'chaufe bruchsch en Huufe Stütz." (The car costs a lot of money.) The Schweizer Idiotikon dictionary, which explains old and new expressions from different dialects, gives the following explanation: Stutz = franc in street, student and army slang. In Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's German dictionary (Leipzig 1942, Verlag S. Hirzel), one of the meanings given under the entry for "Stutz", among several other meanings which have nothing to do with money, is the following: Stutz = exchange, stutzen = to exchange, verstutzen = to squander. As we all know, money is a medium of exchange, i.e. a sum of money can be exchanged for goods. It can therefore be assumed that the regional slang term "Stutz" has its origins in the old German word for exchange.

D-8) Where does the word "thune", commonly used in French-speaking Switzerland to refer to the 5-franc piece, come from?

In the 17th century, the French term "thune" was synonymous with "aumône" (alms). After the French Revolution, the new, silver 5-franc coin was called a "thune" because it was given as alms. Nowadays, the word no longer means alms.

D-9) Who is Helvetia?

Helvetia is the pictorial allegory of Switzerland. She is a mythical figure who never actually existed. Allegorical depictions were very popular in the 18th and 19th centuries. Even though Helvetia was depicted seated on the first franc coins, she has been obliged to remain standing since 1874.

D-10) Who is Libertas?

Libertas is the pictorial allegory of freedom. Illustrations of her head are featured on the current 5, 10 and 20-centime coins as well as on gold coins from the period 1883-1896. Libertas can be recognised by her attributes, such as the Phrygian cap, or by the inscription LIBERTAS on Swiss coins.

D-11) Which coins are referred to as Vreneli, and where does the name come from?

The following gold coins are referred to as Vreneli: 20-franc coins from 1897 to 1949, 10-franc coins from 1911 to 1922, and 1925 100-franc coins. The term Vreneli did not come to be used until just before the Second World War, and first appeared in print in 1943. A possible explanation is that Landry's depiction of the young Helvetia figure was more of a young miss (Vreneli) than a mother of the people. It is not a reference to Saint Verena as sometimes assumed. More on [gold Vreneli \(1660 kb\)](#) (in german only).

D-12) How come the people in Ticino refer to gold Vreneli coins as Marengo?

The term Marengo goes back to the name of the Piedmont locality called Marengo in the district of Alessandria. The original Marengo was a gold coin with a face value of 20 francs and weighing 6.542 g which was minted in Turin to celebrate the victory of Napoleon Bonaparte against the Austrians in the Battle of Marengo (1800). The obverse side of the coin shows a bust of Minerva and the words "L'ITALIE DÉLIVRÉE À MARENGO"; the reverse shows "20 FRANCS" and "LIBERTÉ – ÉGALITÉ – ERIDANIA". In Italy, the term Marengo was later used also for other

French 20-franc pieces (e.g. Napoleon) as well as for the 20-franc and 20-lire gold coins of Belgium, Italy and Switzerland (Latin Monetary Union) struck in accordance with the French coinage system, thus also for the gold Vreneli (marengo belga, marengo italiano, marengo svizzero).

D-13) Why is there an "L" to the left of the year on certain 20-franc gold Vreneli coins from 1935?

There was major demand for gold coins in Switzerland after the Second World War. Consequently, over 20 million 20-franc gold Vreneli coins were struck between 1945 and 1947. As the 1936 devaluation decree based on emergency law did not provide for a fixed gold parity, unlike the 1931 Coinage Act, these coins were struck with the year 1935 so as to indicate that they contained the necessary fineness in accordance with the Coinage Act. In order to be able to distinguish the post-war coins from the 1935 ones and underline the character of the item, the letter "L" (Lingot = ingot, bullion) was placed before the year 1935. Predating was abandoned later on, i.e. the correct year was struck on the coins. Reference to the 1931 Coinage Act was made with the edge inscription "☆☆☆☆☆☆AD / LEGEM ANNI / MCMXXXI☆" (in accordance with the act of 1931). An additional 9.2 million coins were struck with the year 1947. More on [gold Vreneli \(1660 kb\)](#) (in german only).

D-14) Who posed as the Vreneli model?

Initially, the identity of the model for the young Helvetia was not an issue. However, after the Second World War, two sons claimed it was their dead mother. The model was supposed to have been either Françoise Kramer-Egli (1859-1946, from Neuchâtel) or Rosa Tännler (1878-1946, from Gadmen in Oberhasli). Records indicate that Tännler seems more credible, given that an 1895 letter from the artist Fritz Landry to Federal Councillor Hauser mentions that he had studied a "type de femme très pur du Hasli" (very pure lady from Hasli) for his revised draft. Rosa Tännler was only 17 years old back then, whereas Françoise Kramer-Egli was already 36. The youth of the Helvetia portrayed suggests that Tännler was more likely to have been the model.

D-15) Is the image on the 5-franc piece Wilhelm Tell?

The 5-franc piece depicts an Alpine herdsman, not Tell. The first drafts of the coin designer, Paul Burkhard, clearly show this. See [Paul Burkhard and the 5-franc piece \(1248 kb\)](#) (in german only)

D-16) What does "DOMINUS PROVIDEBIT" inscribed on the edge of the 5-franc piece mean?

The Lord will provide (Genesis 22, 8). Religious expressions (mottos) were very popular from the Middle Ages and are still found on many coins, usually as a circumscription. See [DOMINUS PROVIDEBIT and other mottos \(506 kb\)](#) (in german only)

D-17) What leaves are found on our circulation coins?

5 centimes: vine leaves; 10 centimes: oak leaves, 20 centimes: Alpine rose leaves, ½ to 2 francs: oak and Alpine rose leaves, 5 francs: edelweiss and Alpine rose leaves.

D-18) What is meant by INCT. on the 5 or 2-franc piece?

INCT. is the abbreviation of "incidit" from the Latin verb "incidere", meaning "engraved by". "A. BOVY INCT." = engraved by Antoine Bovy (on ½ to 2-franc coins) and "P. BVRKHARD, INCT." (on the 5-franc coin). Similar writing is found on the golden 25-franc pieces by Remo Rossi, where we can read "HODLER PINX", abbreviation of "pinxit" from the Latin verb "pingere", meaning "painted by", and "ROSSI SCULPT", abbreviation of "sculpcit" from the Latin verb "sculpere", meaning "sculpted by", "carved by".

D-19) Which edge inscription positions exist for the 5-franc coin?

In the case of the raised edge inscription (lettering and stars in relief), the position is always the same, i.e. seen from the image side, it commences at the opening in the herdsman's shirt, runs clockwise and is divided into three segments: ☆☆☆DOMINUS / PROVIDEBIT / ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆. In the case of the 5-franc coin with the recessed edge inscription (years 1985 to 1993), the position is arbitrary, as it was applied in a separate procedure before the coins were struck.

D-20) Is a 1-franc coin where the reverse is upside-down counterfeit?

Since 1982, all coins have been minted with medallic orientation ($\uparrow\uparrow$), i.e. the top of the reverse shares the same position as the top of the obverse ($\uparrow\uparrow$, also called British turnover or German mintage). Until 1981, however, the ½-franc to 5-franc coins were minted with coin orientation, i.e. the image on one side of the coin is upside-down relative to the other: ($\uparrow\downarrow$, also called French or US mintage), whereas the 1-centime to 20-centime coins already had medallic orientation. The orientation was changed in order for the coins to be presented better in coin sets (annual sets). See also C-19.

D-21) What do the 13 stars stand for on the edge of the 5-franc piece?

As mentioned in an 1889 report from the Director of the Federal Mint, Edmund Platel, no special meaning is to be attached to the 13 stars. They are merely fillers. There is no sound basis to say the stars stood for the 13 locations of the Old Swiss Confederacy or that they were religious symbols (three stars for the trinity and ten for the Ten Commandments).

D-22) What do the stars stand for on the ½, 1 and 2-franc coins?

The ring of stars represents the cantons of Switzerland. There were 22 stars until 1982, and there has been an additional 23rd star since 1983 for the Canton of Jura, which was founded in 1979.

Since the entry into force of the totally revised Federal Constitution in 2000, the Constitution no longer has half-cantons, which is why the Confederation now has 26 cantons rather than 23 (Article 1 Cst. 1999). However, the former half-cantons still count only half in the case of the Council of States and the majority of the cantons (see Articles 142 and 150 Cst. 1999). Since 2000, therefore, the 23 stars refer to the "states" of the Confederation and not the cantons themselves.

D-23) Mintmark "B"

The mintmark "B" on Swiss coins stands for Bern (= Federal Mint). Mintmarks from foreign mints (Paris, Strasbourg, Brussels) are to be found on some Swiss coins, particularly those from the years 1850 to 1851 and 1894.

D-24) Why is the mintmark missing on some coins?

Swiss circulation coins were struck without a mintmark between 1970 and 1985. As is well known, the withdrawal of silver coins in 1968 led to extensive (obsessive) collecting by Swiss people. They collected not only the old coins, but also the newly minted cupronickel ones. As there were two versions of the ½ and 1-franc coins of 1968 and 1969 (with or without the mintmark "B" – the latter were minted in London to help overcome the coinage crisis), both types were collected. This collecting led to a shortage of circulation coins. Consequently, the mintmark "B" was abandoned from 1970 onwards, and was reintroduced in 1986.

D-25) When was the "golden" 5-centime coin introduced?

In 1981. Prior to that it was in white cupronickel; it is in yellow aluminium bronze today. The change was made in order for it to be easier to distinguish between 5-centime coins and ½-franc coins.

D-26) How is it possible to distinguish between the 1st and 2nd minting of the 250-franc anniversary gold coins from 1991?

The edge inscription on the first minting of the anniversary coins is as follows: "CONFODERATIO HELVETICA ++ 1291 – 1991++". In the case of the second minting, there is a dot above and below the hyphen between the two years: "1291 ÷ 1991".

D-27) When did Switzerland stop using gold coins for making payments?

In 1936. Switzerland devalued the franc by approximately 30% at that time as a result of the global economic crisis. This meant that the material value of gold coins outstripped their face value, and gold coins disappeared from circulation.

D-28) What was the first Swiss commemorative coin?

The subscription success enjoyed by the war loan in 1936 caused the Confederation to issue the first Swiss commemorative coin. 200,000 units of the silver 5-franc piece were minted.

D-29) When were coin sets introduced?

In 1974.

D-30) Are "Schützentaler" with a value embossed on them coins or medals?

"Schützentaler", or shooting thalers, minted by the Federal Mint between 1850 and 1855 for the organisers of shooting events were not legal tender despite the nominal face value of five francs marked on them. As such, they were not accepted by the Federal Treasury as money, as instructed by the Federal Finance Administration (cf. *Revue Suisse de Numismatique*, 1894, p. 56). Because the shooting thalers were the same size and weight and had the same composition as the 5-franc coin, i.e. they had been minted in accordance with the Federal Coinage Act as full-bodied coins, people used them as money and the Confederation appeared to do nothing to stop this, which led to grievances on the part of the Latin Monetary Union allies. In addition, the organising committees of the shooting festivals of Fribourg and Lugano ordered more shooting thalers than they actually needed and used the surplus coins to pay their suppliers' invoices, which turned out to be quite profitable thanks to the low price of silver. The Treasury was not prepared, however, to allow these coins to compete with the official currency. From 1885 on, shooting thalers were no longer minted with market value, but only as shooting medals (without a value embossed on them). Because shooting thalers were not an official means of payment, they are not included on the Swissmint coinage list. From 1934 on, shooting thalers were once again produced with a market value that was only valid for a fixed term; these could be used at shooting festivals at face value. They have never regained their former, more extensive status as an unofficial means of payment.

D-31) Why is the 5-franc "Landitaler" from 1939 not included in the Swissmint commemorative coin catalogue or in other coin catalogues?

The Landitaler is not an official commemorative coin, but a private commemorative coin that was only valid as a means of payment for a fixed term (until 30 November 1939) at Switzerland's expo, similar to the shooting medals. The die production and striking processes were carried out by the Le Locle-based company Huguenin. The medals differ from the silver commemorative 5-franc coin in that they are larger in diameter (33.5 mm compared to 31.2 mm) and heavier (19.5 g compared to 15 g).

E) HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

E-1) Is it possible to get a nickel allergy from our coins?

With the exception of the 5-centime coin, which is made of aluminium bronze, all Swiss circulation coins are made from cupronickel (alloy of 75% copper and 25% nickel). There is no known case of a nickel allergy being caused by the proportion of nickel contained in coins. However, if a person has a pronounced nickel allergy, frequent contact with coins containing nickel can lead to allergic reactions.

E-2) What happens with damaged and dirty coins?

These are taken out of circulation by Swiss Post, banks and the Swiss National Bank, and are sent to Swissmint for destruction, i.e. to prevent abuse, the coins are deformed and then forwarded to the suppliers of blanks in order for the metal to be recovered (recycling). The suppliers make new coin blanks (also called planchets or flans) from the recycled material, and the blanks in turn are used to mint new coins.

E-3) What does Swissmint do in terms of occupational safety?

The standard OHSAS 18001 sets valid criteria for evaluating an occupational safety management system. Swissmint meets these requirements. Consequently, it can demonstrate that its safety-conscious behaviour is integrated into the business processes, is based on its own initiative and commitment, and leads to better results.

E-4) Is Swissmint committed to protecting the environment?

Globally applicable environmental management criteria have existed since 1996 in the form of ISO 14001; they were renewed for the first time in 2004. Swissmint meets these requirements.

Among other things, they include systematisation of environmental protection within the company and minimisation of risks and environmental impact.

F) LEGAL

F-1) Who may issue coins?

In Switzerland, the federal government has control (monopoly) over the issuing of coins. Article 99 para. 1 of the Federal Constitution reads as follows: The Confederation shall be responsible for money and currency; the Confederation has the exclusive right to issue coins and banknotes.

F-2) What is the maximum number of coins to be accepted as payment?

In accordance with Article 3 para. 1 of the Federal Act of 22 December 1999 on Currency and Payment Instruments (CPIA), everyone is bound to accept up to 100 Swiss circulation coins as payment. This is hardly feasible in practice.

F-3) Can a commemorative coin be used to pay a restaurant bill?

The acceptance obligation for commemorative coins is restricted to the cash offices of the Confederation, i.e. the Swiss National Bank, Swiss Post and Swiss Federal Railways. Consequently, the proprietor is not obliged to accept a commemorative coin as payment.

F-4) Who decides whether a circulation coin is put into or withdrawn from circulation?

The Federal Council.

F-5) Are silver coins still legal tender?

Silver coins (½-franc to 5-franc pieces) have not been legal tender since 1 April 1971. However, the Swiss National Bank still exchanges them at face value.

F-6) Can bronze coins (1-centime and 2-centime coins) still be used for payments?

The 1-centime coin has not been legal tender since January 2007, and the 2-centime coin since January 1978.

F-7) Which coins that have been withdrawn from circulation are still exchanged?

Circulation coins which have been withdrawn from circulation are exchanged by the Swiss National Bank at 100% of the face value for a period of 20 years after the withdrawal from circulation. The exchange period is unlimited for withdrawn circulation coins that correspond to the legal tender coins in terms of dimensions and imagery and also for withdrawn 5-franc silver commemorative coins. [Rates of 7 April 2006 for coins withdrawn from circulation](#) (in german and french only)

G) FORGERIES, AUTHENTICITY CHECKS

G-1) Are there forgeries of Swiss circulation coins?

Yes, although the quantity is tiny relative to the number of genuine coins. A much greater problem is caused by foreign coins, which are primarily inserted in vending machines. The value of these coins in the country of origin is usually only a fraction of the value of the Swiss coins they are used to replace.

G-2) How can forged coins be recognised?

Modern forgeries are often of good quality and are difficult to identify. Blurred imagery or a differing colour can indicate a forgery.

G-3) Is a differing sound a sign of a forgery?

A differing sound can indicate a forgery. However, differing sounds are often found also in genuine coins. More caution should be exercised in the case of coins that sound very dull or not at all.

G-4) Does the Confederation pay compensation for counterfeit money?

No compensation is paid for counterfeit money.

G-5) Does Swissmint provide expert opinions on collectors' items?

Swissmint provides expert opinions on valuable Swiss coins dating from 1850, upon request. The fees are based on the fee schedule and the work involved. If a coin proves to be a forgery, it is confiscated and handed over to the police, who decide what steps to take.

G-6) Do coins also have security features like banknotes?

Coins are forged much less frequently than banknotes because of their lower value, their complicated and time-consuming production and also the major efforts required to put them into circulation. Consequently, security features are not as important as in the case of banknotes. Aside from the relief on the front and back of the coin (= imagery), the main security features of coins are the edge design and the alloy used. The correct weight and dimensions (i.e. values within defined limits) apply in addition. 5-franc coins have a raised edge inscription that is difficult to imitate. The ½ to 2-franc coins have ridges on the edge, and the reproduction of this feature usually causes considerable problems for forgers. A planned increase in our coins' protection against counterfeiting was abandoned in 2004 for cost reasons, as was an emergency coin series that would have made it possible to quickly exchange the affected coin units in the event of the increased appearance of forgeries (FCD of 19 October 2005).