

# Royal Coin for Gareth Kincaid II and Juliana de la Mer II 44<sup>th</sup> King and Queen of Æthelmearc

## **Introduction**

When he was 15 years old, Harald Hardrada, the future king of Norway, left Scandinavia and travelled to Constantinople. There, he joined the famed Varangian Guard and served the Empress Zoe and her husbands for seven years. When he returned to Norway to claim his throne, he brought a famously large amount of treasure with him (it is said that his ship listed to the side from the weight of the gold and silver).

Even as Harald fought to become king of Norway, making shifting alliances with Magnus the Good and Sven Estridsen, he began minting silver coins. But instead of using the Anglo-Saxon and Roman motifs that had been popular in previous Viking coins, he took inspiration from the Byzantine coins that he had brought back from Constantinople. These early coins from Harald's reign have a curious combination of Byzantine and Norse motifs that we have attempted to re-create in the Royal coin of Gareth and Juliana.

## **Norse Coins of the mid-11th century**

Scandinavian coinage lagged behind that of other medieval European states until the Norse conquered Britain in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century. The Norse learned coinage techniques from the Anglo-Saxon moneyers of Britain, and by the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century, there was a mature system of coinage throughout Scandinavia. The images on these coins reflected Norse icons combined with Western Christian motifs. But for a short period, Byzantine iconography crept into the coinage. Harald was not the only ruler to include these Byzantine images, but the introduction of Byzantine themes is usually attributed to Harald.

Popular Norse images from the combined coins included the “curled worm” that was popular on King Cnut’s coins. (This presumably is a representation of the Midgard serpent Jorgandmunder.) The triquetra symbol was seen on Roman coins through the Anglo-Saxon period and into 11<sup>th</sup>-century Scandinavian coins, but Harald was particularly fond of it. Of course, crosses in various formats remained popular on the reverse of many coins.



Curled worm, Cnut 1030



Triquetra, Harald 1050



Cross, Harald 1050

The Byzantine influence was more evident on the obverse face. Particularly popular were coins that included Jesus seated. Numerous similar Byzantine coins are known from the same time period.



Harald (Viking) 1050



Romanus (Byz) 1030

Another borrowed Byzantine motif was a pair of figures standing. On true Byzantine coins, this might represent two religious figures or the Virgin Mary blessing the Emperor. On Norse coins, the same image is used to represent an angel handing a staff of rule to the Norse king. Because these coins were minted in times of war, the images were considered important to legitimize the patron as king.



Harald (Viking) 1050



Sven Estridsen (Viking) 1050



Romanus (Byz) 1030

A third Byzantine motif to appear on Norse coins was the Imperial face. The unusual appearance of Norse coins with en face portraits may be a poor attempt to copy the headdresses seen on Byzantine emperors of the period.



Harald (Viking) 1047



Michael (Byz) 1040



Constantine (Byz) 1050

## Æthelmearc Royal Coin

For the coins of Gareth and Juliana, we chose to reproduce two of these Byzantine/Viking coins. For the obverse of our Royal coin, we replicated the image from Harald's 1047 issue:



The inscriptions on Harald's coins, like those of most Norse coins, were extensively blundered, often to the point of illegibility. Most frequently, they are a blundered form of HARALD REX NO (Harald King of Norway). This particular coin, however, reads "Mahnus Arald Rex". It was issued at a time when Harald happened to be allied with Magnus the Good, and they had declared themselves co-rulers of Norway. (An alternative theory holds that the coin was issued right after the death of Magnus, and Harald used Magnus's name to demonstrate lineage and support his claim to the throne.) We found the reference to co-rulers to be inspiring from an SCA perspective, so we included both Gareth's and Juliana's names on their coin.

For the reverse of the Royal coin, we replicated an angel coin of Harald's from 1050:



Although this was originally intended to represent an angel giving a staff of office to the king, it works well in SCA iconography as a symbol of joint rulers. Thus, we chose to depict Gareth and Juliana standing together, both grasping the scepter of royalty.

Surviving Viking coins are almost all pennies. Although other denominations were theoretically available, only pennies were in routine circulation. These pennies were struck in silver and were uniformly about  $\frac{3}{4}$ " in diameter. Thus, we used  $\frac{3}{4}$ " blanks, substituting the more reasonably-priced pewter for the original silver.

## Post-script

Harald Hardrada would go on to become the undisputed King of Norway. And a few years later, in 1066, he would play a critical role in the Norman invasion of England. But for a little while, he was responsible for an odd combination of cultures on some unusual Viking coins.

## References

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