

Royal Coin for Gareth and Juliana, Æthelmearc Reign 51.

English, late 14th c.

“The War of the Gold Nobles” (Richard II)

*For foure Things
our Noble sheweth to Me
King, Ship, and Sword
and Power of the Sea*

I. The War of the Gold Nobles

In the late 14th century, the Hundred Years War had depleted England of gold bullion. Coins were being sent to France to pay the soldiers and knights, and English merchants were buying materials from across the continent. Thankfully, English coins were famous for their purity; despite the pressures of the War, the English monarchs had not debased their currency by mixing in less precious metals.

But the same could not be said of Flemish coins. In Flanders, the coins were regularly debased, so eventually everyone wanted to do business with the trustworthy English coins. This had the unintended consequence of drawing even more bullion out of England.

England was running out of gold with which to make coins; something had to be done. So in 1383, Richard II issued an edict forcing wool merchants in Calais to use only English nobles (the base denomination for gold coins). This left wool buyers with the burden of converting low-value Flemish coins into high-value English coins.

In retaliation, Flanders minted counterfeit English nobles (still made of gold, but less pure). The imitations were so good that they appeared in circulation in England itself. But this led to an even greater shortage of gold bullion in England.

So Richard issued his “Bullion Ordinance”, demanding that all merchants hand over an ounce of foreign gold coins. Once purified, this became the source of gold for new English nobles. Then Flanders banned English nobles in their territory and confiscated any they found (a double win – more money and more bullion to strike new coins).

Before things could get even worse for merchants working along the English channel, Richard II was deposed in 1399.

II. Richard II

Young King Richard (1377 – 1399) stuck with his grandfather's coin designs. Edward III had been a popular monarch with tremendous military successes, and Richard had a tenuous claim to the throne. Stability was important. Richard even avoided debasing his currency, despite the pressures of the ongoing Hundred Years War.

Richard's gold coins come in essentially two types: 1) a recreation of Edward's famous noble commemorating the Battle of Sluys (to be fair to Richard, all English monarchs through Elizabeth I used this image on their coins), and 2) Quarter-nobles bearing the royal arms ensaloped, often with trefoils or quatrefoils in the spandrels. On the reverse, all the gold coins bear either a symmetric cross surrounded by eight crowns or a flower motif of similar appearance. These are happily much like an escarbuncle!



Richard II Gold Noble, in the manner of Edward III's issue, with cross-and-crowns on reverse



Richard II Quarter-noble, with flower motif on reverse

Before 1390, simple lettering was used for the inscriptions. After 1390, a new style of lettering, called "fishtail" was employed. This consisted of indented serifs and concave uprights, and it became a standard for lettering past Richard's reign into the 15th century. Richard's French titles may be present or absent depending on diplomatic needs and military successes on the continent.

A typical obverse inscription would be: RICHARD DG REX ANGL (Richard, by Grace of God King of England). A typical reverse inscription would be: EXALT ARBITUR IN GLORIA (He is exalted in glory).

III. SCA Modifications

We are recreating one of Richard's quarter-nobles. An escarbuncle substitutes for the cross-and-crowns on the reverse of the coin. The obverse inscription has the names changed: "GARETH ET JULIANA AETHELMEARC". The reverse inscription is pluralized to include both King and Queen: "EXALT ARBITUNT IN GLORIA". Their household arms are used on the obverse in place of the English royal arms.



IV. Bibliography

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