

Royal Coin for Murdoch and Riognach, Æthelmarc Reign 52.

England 12th c.

“The Anarchy”

[editor’s note: the strong hands of Murdoch and Riognach will steady the keel of the Sylvan Kingdom throughout their reign. This documentation is solely intended to teach about the effect of English politics on Royal coinage in the time period that They are reproducing.]

I. Royal Coinage vs. Local Coinage

Centralized coinage depends on consolidated royal power. When a Sovereign is weak, local barons and other nobles will strike their own coins and force their people to use the local coinage.

“Numerous castles had been raised in individual areas due to the eager actions of factions, and in England there were in a sense as many kings, or other tyrants, as there were lords of castles. Each minted his own coinage, and each like a king had the power to lay down the law for his subjects.”

12th-century English historian William of Newburgh, in *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*

Most medieval kingdoms had periods of weak royal presence leading to local coinage, but England after 1066 was an exception: royal coinage was dominant throughout the island. The exception to this exception came during the time of The Anarchy, a civil war between 1138 and 1153, in which a debate occurred over which of William the Conqueror’s descendants from female lineage should rule England. The nominal King, Stephen, was William’s grandson by his daughter Adela. Stephen was opposed by “Empress” Matilda, the daughter of Henry I whom Henry had wished to succeed him but who was not accepted by the English nobles. (Nota bene: The Anarchy is not to be confused with *The English Civil War* of the mid-17th century.) Eventually, Stephen’s only heir died, so he recognized Matilda’s son Henry as his new heir, but not before 15 years of bitter warfare had divided England. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, The Anarchy was a time “when Christ and his Saints were asleep”.

During The Anarchy, English nobles in the North and West (not just the competing claimants to the throne) were able to mint their own coins. This led to greater variability in English coinage than at any other medieval time. Perhaps a quarter of the coins struck during The Anarchy were “baronial”.

II. Stephen's Coins

The coins of King Stephen (1135 – 1154) came in four basic reverse formats: cross moline, voided cross, cross fleury, and cross in quatrefoil.



cross moline



voided cross



cross fleury



quatrefoil cross

On the obverse was a portrait of Stephen with various facings.



Sample pennies from Stephen's reign. The King is depicted in line drawings, stamped rather than carved, holding the royal scepter.

The inscription on the obverse is generally brief, usually just the name of the king in English or Latin, sometimes with an appended "R." (Rex).

Baronial coins from this period usually copied the basic format, with an image of the king on the obverse and a four-point cross with decorations on the reverse. Although it may seem counter-intuitive for a local baron to use an image of the weakened king on a locally minted coin, this trick would increase regional acceptance of the issue.

III. SCA Modifications

For the obverse of the Æthelmearc coin, we have chosen a line drawing of Murdoch holding a scepter.

We have maintained the simple inscription: the king's name and the appended "REX"

For the reverse, we have chosen the voided cross because it is an unusual marking, and we wanted an example of it among Æthelmearc's royal coinage. In lieu of a religious inscription on the reverse, we have included the name of our Queen to mirror the inscription on the obverse.

The original pennies were struck in silver, for which we have substituted aluminum.



IV. Bibliography

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