

HAVE DIES - WILL TRAVEL

Paul Withers

In late December of 2022 I received an e-mail from Dr Jörn Schuster, FSA MCIfA, a Consultant Archaeologist and Finds Specialist, asking us for help on a coin-weight discovered during the excavations carried out by Context One Heritage & Archaeology for the extension of the Dorset Museum in Dorchester. It is interesting to note an archaeologist's clever touch to the details, that of adding the profile of the object to the photograph.

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He wrote “From my understanding, it is a weight for a half ryal or half rose-noble (see attached illustration), and it weighs 3.7grams or 57.0995 grains. Unfortunately, it comes from a modern layer with numerous residual finds from periods as early as Roman.”

He continued “as I have been able to glean from your very useful publications of 1993¹ and 1995², the hexagonal shape suggests it is Anglo-Gallic. However, the reverse leaves me slightly puzzled, as I have not been able to find any comparison, and I wondered whether you might be able to shed some light on this.”

¹ *British Coin-Weights, A Corpus of the Coin-Weights made for use in England, Scotland and Ireland*, P & B R Withers, Galata Print Ltd, 1993.

² *Lions Ships & Angels, Identifying Coin-Weights found in Britain*, P & B R Withers, Galata Print Ltd., first edition, 1995.

The Ryal was a gold coin introduced in 1464 during the reign of Edward IV, in imitation of the *royaux* of Charles VI and VII of France. It weighed 120 grains (7.8g) and was tarified at ten shillings, a ratio of 12:1 to silver. The rose-noble, as the ryal was called abroad, was imitated in and weights for it were produced in the Low Countries, France and further afield.

And yes, we could, and it was an astonishing find. We knew of a uniface coin-weight W.195 from the same obverse die for a ryal (and its half and quarter) which were struck from single die depending on which weight was required. The same die was also used to strike a rectangular uniface coin-weight W.196. Both were metal detector finds, the round one found in the river Thames mud.

Since the publication of our books *British Coin-Weights* and *Lions, Ships & Angels* three decades have elapsed and advances have been made not only in metal-detector design, but there have also been similar leaps forward in photography, communication, printing and our understanding.

In 1993 we thought that because a coin-weight was found in Britain it was likely to have been made here; similarly, we believed that coin-weights struck on hexagonal flans were Anglo-Gallic.

Now, from having seen thousands of coin-weights in collections all over Europe, read more widely, and communicated with museums, dealers, and collectors in France, Flanders, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy and Portugal our views have changed somewhat. Recent research by us and others has shown that hexagonal weights were made in Paris, part of northern France, and Flanders, where English gold coins and subsequently rose noble imitations were accepted and traded in exchange for English and Welsh wool.

The reverse of the weight is puzzling. Within a rope-like circle there is a single-arched crown with a bezant either side of a heart. To the left there is a contraction bar above a squiggle, and to the right there is iii. Some weights show a number in Roman numerals to indicate the number of coins that could be struck from a mark of gold. But there were 64 half ryals to the mark, so that does not fit. There are several other systems which it could be - as fractions of a French ounce, or multiples of a French gros, but it doesn't accord with these either.

We know that the manufacture of weights and scales was regulated and tightly controlled by guilds who specified the metal, shape, design and the checking and marking of weights. Communication, particularly with members of the metal-detecting fraternity here in the UK and the Netherlands has resulted in the discovery that weights such as these often have a close and tight regional distribution. This, however is modified by the discovery that some coin-weights which were definitely made in the north of France, Flanders and the southern Netherlands, are found in several British coastal ports, most frequently London, the Norfolk region, the Isle of Wight, Southampton, and now Dorchester, and, amazingly the west coast of Scotland.

At various times, some die engravers, mint workers, and weight-makers were often peripatetic and associated with exchangers, assayers, scale makers, and bankers. Groups worked in France in Paris, Brittany, North-west France and Flanders, Lyon (and elsewhere), and also in Geneva in Switzerland. Others worked in southern France and what is now northern Spain. One group worked in both the Low Countries (Netherlands) and followed the rivers east into what is now Germany. Yet another guild worked in Bruges. One of these makers made dies that were used for round and square coin-weights used in England, though his products were possibly not used in the Netherlands.

Our researches show that coin-weight production in many places was controlled by guilds who were both jealous and zealous in policing the products of their members, and belonging to the guild was essential to work, particularly in the major cities. The result was conformity of shape and pattern for all weights made in that city or region. In France, at various and later times a series of symbols and letters were stamped onto weights to guarantee them, much as French coins have letters or symbols to identify the mint and sometimes also the mint master.

In conclusion, it would seem that the die that made these coin-weights travelled from the Paris region, to the Netherlands and Britain, or the weights were made in one place and exported to the others.



Ryal weight, W.195a, 7.58 gram, uniface.

(Photo by Paul Withers, *British Coin-Weights*)



Ryal weight, W.196a, 7.09 gram, uniface.

(Photo by Paul Withers, *British Coin-Weights*)



Half ryal weight, W.195b, 3.59 gram, uniface.

(Photo by Paul Withers, *British Coin-Weights*)



Half ryal weight, 3.70 gram, obverse.

(Photo by Chiz Harward, Dorchester)

The obverses of the four weights, all struck from the same die.



Noble weight from Paris of typical hexagonal form.

(Photo by Paul Withers)



Bullion weight for a gros (3 deniers), from Paris, with the mark of a Lombard banker, Biertelet, ca.1285-1350,
and a scale pan with the same stamp.

(Photo by Paul Withers, line drawing from Dieudonné, *Poids Monétaires*, 1925)

