

Medieval Money

by [Michael E. Marotta](#)

Castles, crusaders, and questing knights come to mind when you handle the coins of the Middle Ages. Medieval coins are surprisingly affordable and offer an opportunity to hold history in your hand.

Kings and barons created silver pennies to pay their armies and to buy imported items for their domains. Europe in those days consisted of about 100 small, independent states. Occasionally, a powerful king from Lithuania, Poland, or Hungary would expand their realm. While England and France had monetary traditions reaching back to Roman times, new towns like Florence and Antwerp became prosperous trading centers.

The fact is that most knights never held much money. Those landed nobles and warriors were generally outside the mainstream of commerce. Coined money was the medium of city-dwellers who traded in wool, pickled herring, pepper, and other the necessities of daily life. Coins were carried to great fairs that lasted several days or even several months.

Most coinage from the middle ages does not impress the viewer the way ancient Greek or 19th century American coins do. Most medieval coins were small and thin. The coins are so thin that often only one side was struck well. The artwork did not glorify life on Earth. But there is no denying that the coins of the Middle Ages carry their own history.

The silver pennies of Richard the Lionhearted are perhaps the best-known coins from the Middle Ages. Demand from buyers keeps them priced near \$100 each. However, you can buy the silver pennies of lesser known kings, such as Wladislaw of Hungary, for as little as five dollars.