

Some irregular deniers tournois of the Frankokratia in Greece

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Abstract: The article deals with six specimens of “irregular” deniers tournois and adds some considerations regarding their possible origin, stylistic conditions, classification and possible place in the history and numismatics of the late Frankokratia in Greece. All of the specimens are from the 14th century and can be differentiated from the regular issues first by the base metal used for the planchets and second by the legends – they seem to be struck in copper rather than silver billon and the legends are mostly illiterate or pairing legends from two different issues. Although rather different in both style and fabric and perhaps manifesting some local characteristics, all of them seem to be copying the generic Clarentine denier tournois, the most long-serving and well represented coinage in 13th and 14th century Frankish Greece.

Keywords: denier tournois, tornese, Frankokratia, Frankish Greece, Crusader, counterfeit, Morea, Catalan Company, Navarese Company, Angevin rule, Iacopo del Balzo, Jacques des Baux, Principality of Achaea, Glarentza, Acciaioli, irregular coinage, Jaime de Majorca

1. Prior research

Ever since Lord Grantley published his opinions on the *deniers tournois* he had bought in Athens sometime before 1923¹, there have been attempts to decipher similar « irregular » issues and assign them to different figures connected to the tumultuous history of the later part of Latin rule in Greece. Of these tentatives, one of the most informative and well-argued is A. J. Seltman’s article in R. A. G. Carson’s « Mints Dies and Currency – Late deniers tournois of Frankish Greece »² which is revelatory especially for proposing the assignation of a distinctly small module *immobilized tornese*, of the Guy II de la Roche type, to the rule of the Acciaioli Florentine banking family as Dukes of Athens at the end of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th³. Malloy et al also added a short list of (mostly) previously recorded specimens to their catalog of Crusader coinage, under the very general designation of « Catalan Duchy of Athens or uncertain issues of Frankish Greece »⁴ but without contributing much in terms of hypotheses to the ones launched by Seltman in his 1971 article. Tzamalīs, in his work on Frankish coinage in Greece adds his own three types (similar to the ones put forth by Seltman) and stops briefly to discuss some general questions regarding these coins⁵ – with special focus on the IACOBVS coins and the possibility of the Catalan interests in Athens minting imitation *tournois* post 1311/1318⁶. There is also a very fugitive mention of the *tournois/tornesi* of Nicola di Monforte and their presence in Greece together with « mule » imitations combining

¹Grantley. (1923). pp. 47-48.

²A. J. Seltman. (1971). pp. 319-23

³Seltman (1971). p. 321

⁴Malloy et al. (1994). pp. 407-11

⁵Tzamalīs (2016). pp. 168-175

⁶Tzamalīs (2016). p. 169

Campobasso with Athens and Glarentza, proving according to Tzamalis the long-serving life of the *tournois/tornese* in mainland Greece, which seems now to extend even after the Ottoman invasion⁷.

It's thus safe to say that these coins did not attract a lot of attention, likely due to their dull appearance and low quality texture and alloy. They are not points of high interest neither in auctions nor in numismatic research.

2. Scope of the paper

The scope of this paper is to bring some attention to a few select specimens of these so-called « irregular » and « uncertain » Frankish *deniers tournois*, to add them to the corpus of known and published specimens and see if we can gather something in terms of classification and attribution from them. This paper does not include coinage attributed by Seltman to the Acciaoli in Acrocorinth (his Category C), nor the coinage copying (?) the *deniers tournois* of Giovanni II Orsini from Arta. All 6 items presented in this small catalog come from European private collectors and auction companies. They could be added and classified, with some degree of liberty, in the categories put forward by Seltman in his 1971 article, with perhaps one exception, specimen 4 which I have identified as a copper variation of Malloy 72-74 for Robert de Taranto (1332/1346-1364)⁸. This coin has the appearance of a regular official *denier tournois*, with the exception that it is base metal rather than billon. It's probably unlikely, but it could still be an official product of the mint of Glarentza, as shown below in a comparison with official deniers minted 1346 and later (cf. Fig. 1) :



Figure 1: 1-3 billon deniers tournois of Robert de Taranto, from left to right ROBT P' AChE/[...]CLARENCIA, ROBT P' [AChE]/DE CLARENCIA, ROBT P' AchAIE/DE CLARENCIA and 4 copper denier tournois imitating Robert de Taranto RoBT P AChE/[...]CLARE[N]CIA

The rest of them do not conform to any known issue of official coinage: one fits an early obverse for Guillaume II de Villehardouin from ca. 1270 with a reverse used for Philippe de Savoie at the earliest in 1301 (or even 1302); another is a very well made but illiterate variation of an issue for the same Philippe (both of them could perhaps be squeezed into Category D cf. Seltman⁹); two of them of similar look, thin and spread coppery fabric (one of them silvered – specimen 5) bear what looks like the name of IACOBVS (on specimen 6 with the form YACObVS). Specimen 5 has also part of the recorded mOR[...] on the obverse legend (Group C or the «so-called Greek tornesia» cf. Tzamalis¹⁰ and Category E or F cf. Seltman¹¹), but in contrast to the specimens recorded by both Tzamalis and Seltman, these two have somewhat illiterate versions of DE CLARENCIA in reverse

⁷Tzamalis (2016). p. 175

⁸Malloy et al (1994). p. 372

⁹Seltman (1971). p. 321

¹⁰Tzamalis (2016). p. 170

¹¹Seltman (1971). p. 322

(legend starting at 11 o'clock and flowing counterclockwise) instead of the recorded variations on the name of the city of Thebes. And finally and possibly most interestingly, another copper with blundered legends, assignable to Category D by Seltman and Group B cf. Tzamalís, but impossible to discern for certain after which lord it was modeled (if any), although it is a definite copy of a Glarentza issue, with a counterclockwise reverse pseudo-legend.

3. Historical and numismatic context

The 14th century marks the erosion of Frankish power in Greece, a process which only accelerated after the fall of Athens to the Catalan Company in 1311. The lack of interest by the Angevin princes who followed Isabella de Villehardouin and the continuous rule by appointed baillies instead of the actual prince had a negative effect not just on social and political stability but also on economic and monetary matters, a downfall visible also in the coinage – a devolution of style, craftsmanship and (to a smaller degree) billon title. Surprisingly enough, the coinage of Glarentza (and possibly Corinth) maintained an obvious silver title until the end of the mint's operations around 1350¹².

As mentioned, the first item in the catalog is a base metal mule issue, mixing an earlier obverse from around 1270 with a reverse from after 1301. The coin is remarkably literate with the obverse legend of G [PRINC]EPS reconstructable, while the reverse DE CLARENCIA is very clear. What is less convincing – besides the obvious fact that it is a copper piece – is the style of the lettering, inconsistent with both the official coinage of the 1270s under Guillaume II de Villehardouin, and the coinage of Philippe de Savoie (1301-1307).

Somewhat unexpectedly, specimen 2 is the exact opposite: it copies a known coinage minted during the early first decade of the 14th century – the denier tournois of Philippe de Savoie – but although the legend seems to be garbled and meaningless, it is well executed and in very good early 14th century Frankish style. The lettering, the proportions of the devices, even the use of dotted stops and privy marks (likely random in this case), all look as if the coin was an official product. Except it is, of course, struck in copper rather than billon.

As far as its origin is concerned, it could be a local coinage outside the Principality – maybe of Catalan origin from the Duchy of Athens and/or from Neopatras after 1318, but the fact that the prototype is easily identifiable as an Achaean coinage makes it more likely that the coin is in fact a Morean counterfeit, struck probably as early as the reign of Philippe de Savoie or later to around the 1310s. The crisp condition is also indicative of the fact that it did not circulate much.

The next specimen is very similar in terms of overall look, stop marks, weight and fabric, which might point to some sort of connection between them. The lettering is different, the letter shapes being more in tune with the late 1310s and the 1320s. The two coins can be (with some caveats) added to Tzamalís Group B, of which the author notes: « the letters I, O, C and D dominate because they were the easiest to make.¹³ » There might also be a hint to Seltman's theory that these coins are not merely counterfeits but an actual independent issue, used locally in mainland Greece¹⁴. If they were ever silvered (which is a possibility that would have helped them get accepted in the markets of the Morea), it is long gone.

As a very interesting feature, if we read IOANI instead of what looks like IDANI, the obverse legend makes a reference to a name similar to Ioannes – a name of Greek extraction – combining it

¹²According to Tzamalís research on the Elis/1964 hoard, the denier of Robert has a title of about 150/1000, enough to give the surface of the coin a silvery look.

¹³Tzamalís (2016). p. 169

¹⁴Tzamalís (2016). p. 170

afterwards with the nonsensical CIA TIA and then CIA again, no doubt the end parts taken from the commonly known [DE] CLARENTIA/CLARENCIA reverse legend of the Clarentine *denier*. The name (if it actually is a name and not just a fortunate but random sequence of letters) is unlikely to refer to Ioannes II Angelos, the Sebastokrator of Neopatras, as his coins only refer to him as ANGELVS, but could possibly be a reference to Giovanni di Gravina, Prince of Achaea (1318/1321-1332), of whose early *deniers* struck with the obverse legend of IOANS (P'ACHI)¹⁵ are known from around 1321. As Tzamalis emphasises the provenance of his Group B as being mostly finds from mainland Greece¹⁶, these coins could have been in use as far North as the lands of the Sebastokrator of Neopatras, taken over by the Catalan Company after 1318.

Another very tentative identification of the obverse legend might be related to the castle of Ioannina, part of the Despotate of Epirus (another John-Ioannes-Giovanni connection there - Giovanni II Orsini, who ruled as Despot from Arta, but after the castle of Ioannina had been lost to the Palaeologans in 1319). It is not impossible though that even Greek communities used *deniers tournois* during the Byzantine rule or even to after 1346/8, when Stefan Dusan conquered the castle and much of the old Duchy of Neopatras.

Thus, and considering the stylistic similarities to the *denier tournois* of Neopatras – the shape of the flan, the quality of the strike and of the legends, although blundered, and mostly the wide shape of the *château tournois*, typical for Neopatras coinage – there could be an influence from the coinage of Ioannes II Angelus, lingering to a period after the Catalan conquest and mixed with illiterate legends but reminiscent of the most used coinage of Frankish Greece, the Clarentine *denier*. This in turn could put a dating of this specimen most likely in the 1320s to perhaps even as late as the 1340s. Its origin could be located somewhere between Ioannina and Neopatras, closer to the Latin fiefs than the local imitations of the *deniers* of Giovanni II Orsini – which seem to have been used further north, in Albania and parts of Thrace and Bulgaria¹⁷.

Another thing to be taken into account is the fact that the Catalans of Athens often employed raids on the Principality of Achaea after the death of Louis in 1316 (the raiding was still going on in 1321¹⁸) and it is not improbable that Catalan interests might have minted counterfeit Morean *tournois* purposefully defrauding the Frankish markets, or at least allowed such operations to gain root in Catalan-controlled continental Greece. In fact, as mentioned above, much of these recorded copper variations seem to be coming from deposits found in continental Greece rather than the Peloponese, thus serving as further clue that they were possibly minted by Catalan interests or under the protection of the Catalans in the Duchy of Athens and/or further north in Neopatras.

The last two specimens might be part of the Category F coinage according to Seltman¹⁹ which could account for both the rather wide flan, spread out fabric and even the silver wash of specimen 5. This silvered specimen could point to an interesting period of late Latin rule in Greece – the pseudo-reign of Jaime de Majorca, in contest to the Niccolo Acciaoli administration for Catherine de Valois. As heir to usurper Ferdinand de Majorca, Jaime was supported by some Frankish lords to claim the title of Prince of Achaea and Lord of Morea²⁰ and is considered by Lord Grantley and Seltman to have had coins minted in his name/for him in Morea proper – the IACObVS * mORA (and similar) are tentatively assigned to his « rule » according to Seltman²¹ and Lord Grantley²².

¹⁵Malloy et al (1994). pp. 355 and 368

¹⁶Tzamalis (2016). p. 169

¹⁷Tzamalis (2016). p. 110

¹⁸Hazard (1975). pp. 114-115

¹⁹Seltman (1971). p. 321

²⁰D'Andrea, Andreani (2007). p. 342

²¹Seltman (1975). pp. 321-22

²²Grantley (1923). p. 50

This could be seen as a possibility on account of:

- a) Jaime was coveted by the local barons as prince as early as 1343/4 against the Angevin overlordship and the Acciaiuoli-influenced regency for Robert de Taranto (the « rightful » Prince of Achaea) ; lead by Erard III le Maure, baron of Arcadia and Saint Sauveur, a delegation of Frankish lords from the Morea presented their recognition as Prince of Achaea to Jaime in October 1344²³, following the earlier memorandum of 1338 which affirmed his rights, in the context of Niccolo Acciaiuoli's rise to power ;
- b) The *deniers tournois* naming Robert as Prince of Achaea do not appear in context before 1346²⁴, although the mint at Glarentza was under the control of Acciaiuoli during this time (from ca. 1338) and was possibly minting imitations of gold *florins* and billon *soldini*²⁵.

On the downside, Jaime did not set foot in Greece, being content to grant favors to Erard from Montpellier in 1345²⁶, and by 1349 he was killed in his conflict with the Aragonese for the throne of Majorca. So it's rather hard to say for certain who and for how long did actually support his claim after accepting the offer of the local barons. His « rule » was a disappointment from the start, as he opted for yet another baillie (even if it was a local) to represent him instead of being the involved ruler that the barons of the realm had hoped for.

Nevertheless this hypothesis is the most referenced²⁷ and although obscure, it also makes sense with the very fragmentary legend on the obverse of the coins referenced by Grantley and Seltman. Tzamalis disapproves of this attribution as an actual Morean issue but leaves some space for a possible issue in Montpellier, or at the very best an « irregular » temporary issue by Erard and his supporters somewhere in Arcadia. The silver coating of the specimen presented here resonates with what Tzamalis notes – « they would no longer have the significance of regular coinage and come perilously close to being forgeries. »²⁸

Of similar fabric but of even worse overall quality, specimen 6 shows the same thin and spread coppery fabric but with no trace of any coating. The obverse also names a « Jacob » but with the YACObVS orthography. At first glance without trying to read any words (the reverse legend is also a counterclockwise [DE] CLARENCA pseudo-legend variation), this specimen would have to be assigned somewhere between categories F and G cf. Seltman²⁹. Malloy, who follows Seltman's tentative identifications, seems to favor an identification of the deniers naming IACOBVS or marked I S B as minted during the short reign of Jacques des Baux (Iacopo/Giacomo del Balzo) between ca. 1381 and 1383 – even going as far as to add Androusa as a possible minting place for the I S B AGDRVIIGI coins³⁰.

The coin presented here has the following characteristics, with some being somewhat different from the specimens described by Seltman and Malloy:

- the cross pattee is less pattee and more irregularly angular
- the bordering enclosing the middle field with the cross is not a pearl border but rather a continuous and at times crooked wire border
- the partially legible obverse legend reads YACObVS rather than IACOBVS, while the reverse legend seems to be an illiterate attempt at [DE] CLARENCA placed counterclockwise ; actually in both specimens 5 and 6 the reverse legend departs from the recorded variations of CEBANI CIVIS to a pseudo-Glarentza, Achaean type.

²³Hazard (1975). p. 130

²⁴Malloy (1994). p. 355

²⁵Idem 21; Tzamalis also adds a florin type to Glarentza during the rule of Robert; Tzamalis (2016) p. 92

²⁶Hazard (1975). p. 132

²⁷Grantley (p.50), Seltman (p.322); Tzamalis discusses it but does not favor it (pp. 170, 174)

²⁸Tzamalis (2016). p. 174

²⁹Seltman (1975). p. 322

³⁰Seltman (1971). p. 322; Malloy et al (1994). p. 408

Des Baux was left as sole legitimate claimant as both Prince of Morea and the titular Emperor of Constantinople in 1382, but in Morea he had already established himself with the help of the Navarese Company in 1381. The Navarese freelancers, who had been under the employment of the Knights of Saint John during their lease of Morea between 1376 and 1381, were working for Jacques/Iacopo soon after the retreat of the Order, as early as 1381. As such, in January 1382, Mahiot de Coquerel, the leader of the Company was already settling border disputes with the Venetians of Coron and Modon in Messenia as « imperial baillie » no doubt under the employment and in the name of Jacques/Iacopo³¹. Securing Androusa and Kalamata castles (and setting their operational capital at Androusa), the Navarese were the backbone of des Baux becoming « Despot of Romania and Prince of Taranto and Achaëa » in 1382. It is to the Navarese Company in Greece as representatives of des Baux that Seltman (followed by Malloy et al) tentatively assigns these late 14th century *deniers tournois*. The death of Jacques/Iacopo in 1383 left Morea de facto under Navarese rule, a right that the Company claimed through their connection to des Baux³².

As the subject matter is rather obscure and even the reading of the legends on these coins can be plagued by subjectivity, this paper does not purport to bring clear identifications and attributions for the coins presented. Rather it is meant to present some of the possibilities that could arise from the study of even individual specimens, and hopefully with more research we might shed some light on not just the attribution and status of these issues, but rather also on the volatile period that was the late Latin rule in Greece.

4. Catalog

The coins in question have been added in a tentative chronological order and are as follows (cf. Fig. 2):

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. AE17mm 0.92g ³³ OBV : + . G [PRINC]EPS . (?) ; cross pattee REV : + DE CLARENCIA ; château tournois flanked by two pellets in left and right fields; five-pointed star in field below cf. Malloy 9 (obverse) and Malloy 18 (reverse) | 2. AE18mm 0.76g ³⁴ OBV : + PIS DI SAIh ADIC ; cross pattee REV : + DE CL `A` ICIIPA`I` ; château tournois flanked by pellets in left and right fields inedit |
| 3. AE18mm 0.80g ³⁵ OBV : + IOANI/IDANI CIA TIA CIA ; cross pattee REV : + DE CNTAICI`A`I (in reverse); château tournois inedit | 4. AE17mm 0.74g ³⁶ OBV : + RoBT P` AChE ; cross pattee ; crescent in 1st and 4th quarters(?) REV : + [...]CLARE[N]CIA ; château tournois ; n in field below(?) cf. Malloy 72-74 (Robert de Tarento) |
| 5. AE20x19mm 0.66g silvering on copper ³⁷ OBV : + IA[...]mOR[...] (?) ; cross pattee REV : + x DE CLRENTI[...] x ; château tournois | 6. AE18mm 0.70g ³⁸ OBV : YACObVS[...] ; cross pattee REV : CE[...] (in reverse) cf. Malloy 132-139 (p. 408-9) |

³¹Hazard (1975). p. 149

³²Hazard (1975). p. 150

³³Offered by Numismatik Lanz on Ebay, in April 2018

³⁴Offered by Savoca Coins, Blue Auction 16, Lot 2193

³⁵From a private Latvian collection, offered on Ebay in December 2018

³⁶Offered by Savoca Coins on Ebay, July 2017

³⁷Offered by Numismatik Naumann, Auction 61 Lot 960

³⁸From a German collection, offered on Ebay in August 2016



Figure 2

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