

NOTES ON THE GENOESE COINAGE AT PERA DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THE 15th CENTURY

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In spite of its huge economic and political importance, as well as its leading position among all the Overseas Genoese settlements, Pera starts its own coinage very late. This delay was caused by the special political circumstances in which Pera was established and evolved. Pera developed from an old borough of Constantinople, lying next to the seaside walls of the Byzantine capital, on the opposite shore of the Golden Horn. This vicinity with the capital of a great empire offered not only exceptional economic opportunities, but it also severely hampered the freedom of movement of the local Genoese administrative authorities. Though enjoying a large domestic autonomy, including a lot of extraterritorial privileges, the Genoese settlement in Pera was the result of an imperial grant. Although in a quick loss of power during the 14th–15th centuries, for long times the Byzantine emperor had enough means at his disposal, if not to revoke the grant, certainly, to limit seriously its benefits. This implied for the Genoese authorities a quite strict observance of the imperial sovereignty. Or, according to the Byzantine legal traditions and practices, the right of coinage was an unquestionable attribution of the Emperor. As a clear acknowledgement of this situation, the “*Statute of Pera*” of 1304, totally forbid any attempt to strike its own coins (PROMIS 1871 513). Despite the worsening of the relationship between Byzantium and Genoa, as well as the shifting of the political and military balance between them, this provision was observed for more than a century.

The only concession in the monetary field conferred to the Genoese community of Pera by the Byzantine emperors was the use of their own coin-weight, called during that time *exagion*, *exagium*, *saggium* or *saggio* (BELGRANO 1877–1878 106 and 119). The right conceded by Andronicus II, in 1304, and later reconfirmed, in 1317, represents the starting moment for the creation of an account coin – the “hyperperon ad sagium Peyre”. Expressed either in gold or silver, the account hyperperon of Pera was worth 0.66% less than its Constantinopolitan counterpart (PEGOLOTTI 1936 40; BERTELE 1973 113–5; BALARD 1978 II 647–58).

The existence of the coins struck by the Genoese of Pera was attested only by few contemporary sources. One of the most important among them is *Pratica della mercatura* of Giovanni di Antonio di Uzzano. It was written at the beginnings of

the 1440s, but, as usually for this kind of work, it embodied some older information. In chapter 56, mentioning the discounts practised by the Florentine moneychangers in September 1425, di Uzzano refers to “Fior[ini] di Costantinopoli” (di UZZANO 1766 167–8). Although the source of di Uzzano labelled them as “Constantinopolitan”, it is very likely that, in fact, they were gold coins issued in Pera (BABINGER 1956a 111 note no 4). Another interesting mention of such coins could be found among the entries of Giacomo Badoer. Not too akin with the arcane of the Levantine coinage, Badoer was obliged to accept that he was wrong when he misread some Turkish ducats, sent in a sealed sack to Trebizond to be sold there. In the final entry of his account book, when he settled the deal, Badoer noted that, seven of the said ducats “... *ne fo duchati de Pera e duchati scarsi*”; and accordingly, he valued them to only 71 aspers of Trebizond, instead of 80, as he did with the Turkish ducats (BADOER 1956 103, l. 9–12 and 155, l. 9). The last mention of the coins struck in Pera, so far known to me, dates from 15th June 1453. One of the wounded defenders of Constantinople, escaping on a Genoese ship to Chios, died during his journey. In the inventory of his belongings left behind, dressed by a notary, were mentioned the following currencies: “... ducati auri Veneti novem, item perperi de Pera decem et novem item asperi Teucri XII, item carati de Chio XXV...” (ROCCATAGLIATA 1982a no 17). Clearly, this list contains only *real* coins in use that time in Levant, among them those of Pera.

Despite the frenzy race for collecting, studying and publishing the monetary issues of the Frankish East undertaken by the pioneers of the Levantine numismatics during the 19th century, the coinage of Pera remained unveiled for a long time. Paul Lampros published the first coins of Pera in 1872 (LAMPROS 1872; LAMPROS 1873 12–22). Lampros conclusions were fully adopted by Schlumberger and integrated in his monumental work *La numismatique de l'Orient latin* (SCHLUMBERGER 1878 447–54). Very little new published material was added since then (CASTELLANI 1925 242, no 16171; IVES-GRIERSON 1954 24, pl. XII, no 5–6; GAMBERINI di SCARFEA 1956 147; BABINGER 1956a 111–2; BABINGER 1956b 123). During the early 1980's G. Lunardi summarized it in a very few lines (LUNARDI 1980 25–8 P 1 var. a and P 2). Due to the extremely few issues of Pera so far published, our common wisdom remains quite limited, in spite of some recent contributions (ILIESCU 1989 31–2; GIACOSA 1998 654–5; SLEPOVA 1998 53; MORRISSON 2001 230; MAZARAKIS 2003 76–7; OBERLÄNDER-TÂRNOVEANU 2004b 71 and 74–5).

The first known issues of Pera are the full-weight gold ducats of Venetian type, struck in the name of Filippo Maria Visconti, Duke of Milan and Lord of Genoa (1421–1436) (LAMPROS 1873 17–8, pl. I, no 3; SCHLUMBERGER 1878 453–4, pl. XVII, no 21; CASTELLANI 1925 242 no 16171; IVES 1954 24, pl. XII, no 5; LUNARDI 1980 27 P 1 var. a). The coins bore as mintmark a large Gothic P, at the bottom of the staff of the pennon held by the saint, represented on the

reverse. These ducats are part of a larger group of Eastern issues, often debased and lightweight gold coins, imitating most of the inscriptions and the design of the Venetian, but bearing the names or the titles of the Genoese rulers, and sometimes the name of Saint Lawrence, the Holly Patron of Genoa.

However, some peculiarities of the reverse inscription strongly distinguish the ducats of Pera among all other Levantine gold issues of the Duke of Milan and Lord of Genoa. Unlike the unmarked Venetian type ducats of Filippo Maria Visconti, on which the name of the ruler is omitted, being mentioned only his title **DMEDIOLANI** (LUNARDI 1980 200–1 S 18 var. a–q), on the issues of Pera the reverse inscription mentions the abbreviated form of the ruler's name **FMA** – *F(ilippus) Ma(ria)*, as well as his title of **MEDIOLA(ni) D(ux)•**. But the inscription emphasizes at the same time that the coins were struck not only in his own name, but of the Community of the Genoese citizens, as their reverse inscription reads: **ETCOIS•IA•** – *et Co(mmunita)s Ja(nuensium)*. Among the entire coinage of the Overseas Genoese settlements, a similar formula is to be found only at the beginnings of the autonomous bilingual issues of Caffa, struck in the name of Toqtamysh Khan (1376–1395) and Bek Sufi Khan (1419–1422) and **COMVNEIANVEIN** (MITCHINER 1977a 320; MITCHINER 1977b; LUNARDI 1980 45 C 4). Even more striking is the meaning of the inscription of the ducats of Filippo Maria Visconti, recently attributed by Giacosa to the same city – **IANVA•ME•G** – **EnVIT** – **CAFA/ +MEDIOLANI** – **DNSIANVA** (GIACOSA 1998 654–5).

Very likely, such monetary inscriptions must have had a strong domestic and foreign propagandistic value, emphasizing the full involvement of Genoa in the coinage of its Levantine settlements. In the peculiar case of Pera's issues, I think that it could contain some echoes of the bloody internal disputes between different factions not only in Genoa, but also in Pera, which finally lead to the acknowledgement of Filippo Maria Visconti as their ruler. The meaning of the inscriptions could contain also some allusions to the position of the Genoese settlement on the Golden Horn in respect of two of its powerful neighbours – Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire.

The beginning of the autonomous coinage in Pera raised a lot of questions, in respect to the Byzantine reaction to such a severe break of the imperial sovereignty. Such a decision of both metropolitan and local Genoese authorities appears difficult enough to explain, if we are taking into consideration the fact until the early 1430s the Byzantine-Genoese relations remained rather good and the Empire was strong enough. I suspect that the decision to strike the signed ducats of Filippo Maria Visconti in Pera could have some connexions with the aborted siege of Constantinople, ordered by Murad, II in 1422. On this occasion or soon after, the authorities of Pera tried to signal once again to the Ottomans that Pera must be regarded as a territory outside the Byzantine sovereignty, as well as the strong commitment of Genoa and Milan to protect its status.

The chronology of the coinage of Pera during the rule of Filippo Maria Visconti's rule remains rather unclear. The common wisdom dates the striking of these

ducats during 1421–1436 (LUNARDI 1980 27), though Lampros and Schlumberger considered that these ducats could have been struck during the later years of Visconti's rule (LAMPROS 1872; SCHLUMBERGER 1878 454). Recently A. Mazarakis supposed that the strike of the Venetian type ducats of Visconti, marked with letters at the bottom of the shaft of the pennon started around 1428 (MAZARAKIS 2003 74). Some evidence for solving this question could be found in the records of di Uzzano. He mentions the gold coinage of Pera, together with those of Rhodes and of the "Turks". Or the Rhodian coinage di Uzzano referred is quite well dated. In February 1423 the Venetian authorities protested against the imitation of the design and the inscriptions of their ducats by the Great Master Antonio di Fluviano (1420–37). The Venetian reaction was produced because the appearance on the market of the first series of Rhodian ducats, bearing the name of St. Mark (**S•M•VENETI**). Very likely, soon after the Venetian protest, during the second half of 1423 or early 1424, the design of the Rhodian ducats was slightly changed, the name of St. Mark being replaced by that of St. John and the title of the Great Master of Rhodes was clearly précised. These issues were soon well known on the Florentine monetary market, before the early autumn of 1425. The association made by di Uzzano between the Rhodian, the Peran and the "Turkish" ducats should be an indication that these were more or less contemporary new issues, which appeared in Florence in the same time. It is quite likely that the ducats of Pera were struck some few years earlier, before 1425, during 1422–3, soon after the recognition of the election of Filippo Maria Visconti as Lord of Genoa. Due to the fact that Visconti took the power on 2nd November 1421, it is likely to suppose that the news regarding his election reached Pera before the end of January 1422, or even later, because the difficulties to communicate between the metropolis and the area of the Black Sea during the winter season.

Taking into consideration the extremely few coins of this type which survived (only two pieces were so far published), one might consider that the amount of the issue was quite limited, although their appearance on the Levantine monetary market did not left unnoticed by the professional money handlers from abroad. It seems that taking the decision to issue its own gold coinage in the name of Filippo Maria Visconti, the first aim of the Genoese administrative authorities in Pera was a political and propagandistic one, rather than an economic one. Despite this remark, one could suppose that Pera should have produced some other gold issues during the last years of Visconti's rule. This assumption is based on the clear connexion which has been established between the amount of the coinage of Levantine ducats of this ruler all across the Aegean and the Black seas and the Genoese-Venetian war of 1431–5.

This war was a crucial political event for the entire Genoese network of possessions in Levant and it put at a considerable strain all the economic and military resources of the metropolis and the overseas settlements (BASSO 1995 199–205). It is hard to suppose that only Pera could have been able to escape from such a pattern,

especially during the years 1433–4, when large military operations underwent in the Black Sea area, as well as around the city itself. As an administrative and the main economic centre of the Genoese Romania, one should expect that Pera was called to largely supply the war expenditures in the Pontic region. As well as the issues struck at the beginning of Filippo Maria Visconti's rule, his later Peran coinage had a strong political purpose, to provide with cash the navy and the mercenaries.

Some scholars also attributed to Pera a very rare type of full weight Venetian type ducats of Filippo Maria Visconti, bearing the inscriptions **•+ •ME•GENVIT – IANUA•CAFFAM/ DVXMEDIOLANI – DNIANVE** (AUCTIONES A. G. BASEL 1980 lot 755; SLOCUM COLLECTION 1997 98 no 915; LUNARDI 1980 27 P 1, var. b). Recently Giacosa proved such an attribution was based on a wrong reading of the monogram represented on the obverse, at the feet of Christ, supposed to be a large **P** letter. According to the above mentioned author, the mint that struck these ducats was Caffa (GIACOSA 1998 649–55). So, the answer to the question of the identification of the latter issues of Filippo Maria Visconti in Pera depends on the further publication of well dated hoards containing such ducats. In this respect, a huge opportunity was missed during the second half of 1980's. Then a large hoard containing more than 4,000 gold coins, buried around 1431–1435, was found in the Aegean region of Western Anatolia. According to some reliable information it was brought to light in 1989, in the area of Foça (Phocaea or Foglia) (STAHL 2000 216 foot-note no 92). It included a few ducats of Pera struck for Visconti, as well as genuine Venetian issues, the latest from Francesco Foscari (1423–1457), Turkish imitations of the Venetian ducats, as well as issues of Chios, Mitilene, Foglia, unmarked Levantine ducats of Filippo Maria Visconti and Rhodes. Unfortunately, the hoard was dispersed before being properly studied (GIACOSA 1998 650–1).

The second series of Peran ducats were struck during the 2nd or the 3rd rule of Tommaso di Campofregoso (1436–43) (LAMPROS 1873 18, pl. I, no 4; SCHLUMBERGER 1878 454, pl. XVII, no 22; CASTELLANI 1925 242 no 16172; LUNARDI 1980 28 P 2; IVES 1954 24, pl. XII, no 6) [See, Fig. No. 1].

Although preserving the same mintmark, the gold coinage of Pera during Tommaso di Campofregoso last doganat shows a lot of changes, not only regarding the design of the coins, but also in their weight and alloy standards. Unlike the ducats issued for Filippo Maria Visconti, these coins have on the obverse the same inscription as the genuine Venetian pieces – **SIT•T•XPE•DAT•Q• – REGISISTEDVC** while, on the reverse it is mentioned the name of St. Lawrence – **S•LAVRETI**. On the other hand, the new issues seem to be produced not “al pezzo”, as the Western gold coinage was usually struck during the 14th–15th centuries, but “al marco”, and according to a very low weight standard and from a strongly debased alloy.

In my opinion, these changes are not casual and could indicate an attempt to reform profoundly the coinage of Pera. The previous weight standard of the Venetian ducat followed during Visconti's rule was abandoned for a lighter one. Though keeping most of the external appearances of the Venetian gold ducat,

actually, the issues of Tommaso di Campofregoso represent the gold equivalent of the silver account hyperpera of Pera. This new situation explains the ambiguity of their denomination found in some contemporary sources – “ducats” in Badoer’s account book and “perperi” in the inventory list of 1453. Similar attempts to strike equivalents of the local account silver coins under the form of light and debased imitations of Venetian type for Tommaso di Campofregoso, Filippo Maria Visconti and Raffaele Adorno were undertaken in Caffa and in other places around the Black Sea area (OBERLÄNDER-TÂRNOVEANU 2004b 65–75).

Besides the rather limited number of the ducats of Filippo Maria Visconti struck in Pera, the monetary reform introduced by Tommaso di Campofregoso largely contributed to their disappearance from the Levantine monetary market and is to be considered one of the major reasons of their present rarity. Being struck from a better alloy and being heavier the old issues were recalled and melted down.

Very likely, Tommaso di Campofregoso’s gold coins of Pera were those “ducati” which caused such problems to Giacomo Badoer, during the second half of 1437. The difficulties to properly identify these issues among many other types of light weight and debased imitations of the Venetian ducats circulating during the 1430’s in Constantinople and the Black Sea region, could have been caused not only by Badoer’s own lack of practical knowledge in the monetary field, but also because the coins had appeared quite recently on the monetary market. Very likely, due to the difficulties of the communication between Genoa and Pera, the news concerning the election of Tommaso di Campofregoso as Doge took some months before arriving in Pera and the beginning of his coinage started here only at the end of 1436 or early 1437.

Just as during Filippo Maria Visconti’s rule, it was possible that the decision to strike gold coins in the name of Tommaso di Campofregoso in Pera would generate a lot of political complications with the Byzantines. This initiative occurred just a few years after the crushing defeat in 1435, when the Perotes were obliged to offer their full submission to the Emperor and to hoist his flag over the town. Unfortunately, no contemporary source informs us how the local Genoese authorities managed to appease the Byzantine’s reaction.

The gold coins of Tommaso di Campofregoso struck at Pera seem to be issued in a larger amount than the ducats of Filippo Maria Visconti, although, they remain rare enough. Designed to match the local account hyperperon, the monetary unit of both commercial transactions and public spending in Pera, the light weight and debased “ducats” of Tommaso di Campofregoso played a certain role in the regional trade from Trebizond and Chios to Moldavia.

Very few things are so far known on the metrology of the autonomous coinage of Pera. Unfortunately, the only contemporary source regarding the weight standard of the early ducats of Pera offers no indications on this topic, because the manuscript of di Uzzano’s book on this matter is illegible (di UZZANO 1766 168). The sole recorded weight of the ducats of Filippo Maria Visconti is 3.51 g (CASTELLANI 1925 242 no 16171; LUNARDI 1980 27 P 1 var. a). It fits perfectly into the

individual variability of the contemporary Venetian ducats which served as prototype. Even if lacking any analyse of this kind of issues, such a high weight could be an indication that the fineness standard of the first Perote ducats was similar enough to that of the Venetian one. According to di Uzzano's work the ducats of Pera were struck from an alloy of 900‰ gold (21 $\frac{2}{3}$ carats), slightly worse than that of the Turkish ducats – 950‰ (22 $\frac{3}{4}$ carats) or the Rhodian ones – 925‰ (22 $\frac{1}{5}$ carats) (di UZZANO 1766 167). All the figures of the fineness of the Peran ducats of Filippo Maria Visconti recently given by A. Mazarakis are far beyond the value measured in September 1425 in Florence. They range from 790‰ (19 carats), 770‰ (18 $\frac{1}{2}$ carats) and 660‰ (16 carats) (MAZARAKIS 2003 74 and 76). If such values will be confirmed by further investigations, it could be a proof that the later issues of Visconti, struck during the years 1431–5, were considerably debased.

The medium weight of the light ducats of Tommaso di Campofregoso so far published is 2.00 g. According to A. Mazarakis their titles range from 660‰ (16 carats) to 540‰ (13 carats). However, based on Badoer's records, one might suppose that the first issues were slightly better and heavier. Badoer rated them at 89% from a Turkish ducat, which corresponds to 0.58% of a Venetian ducat (MORRISSON 2001 227 and 230). This could correspond to a fine gold content of about 2.09 g, much more than the medium weight of the coins so far published.

Nothing is known on the location of the mint of Pera; however it is quite likely to suppose that such an important institution was located near to the Podestà residence and the public Treasury of the Commune (Massaria).

Very little is known about the Peran coins kept in the collections scattered around the world. The two coins from P. Lampros collection, the same as those published by Schlumberger were sold to the Italian Royal collection and were kept in Turin. Two other Peran ducats of N. Papadopoli collection, published by Castellani are preserved in Venice. A ducat of Tommaso di Campofregoso, published by Lunardi is kept in the collection of Casa di Risparmio in Rome. Similar specimens are preserved in the collection of the Coin Room of the National History Museum of Romania in Bucharest and in the collection of the Coin Room of the Library of the Romanian Academy.



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