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15. The Coinage of the Kingdom of Italy from Louis II to Berengar II (855–961)

*A Reappraisal**

▼ **ABSTRACT** Following the death of Lothair I (855), the denari issued in the Kingdom of Italy ceased bearing the name of the mint of origin and adopted the representation of a church in the form of a tetrastyle temple accompanied by the legend XPISTIANA RELIGIO. This representation remained in exclusive use until 905/10; however, it was gradually phased out during the tenth century. The availability of a new set of coins from excavations and a large group of specimens recently rediscovered in public and private collections has made it possible to establish their mint of origin with greater accuracy and to assume a break in the monetary unity of the Kingdom of Italy at the beginning of the tenth century, more than fifty years earlier than previously believed.

▼ **KEYWORDS** early medieval Italy, Carolingian coinage, coin finds, denari, Milan, Venice, tenth century

New Research Perspectives

Beginning with the reign of Louis II (855–875), for a period of approximately fifty years, the mints of the *Regnum Italiae* (Fig. 15.1) issued a single type of denari, which featured a cross with four pellets in the field on the obverse and the façade of a four-columned building, surmounted by a cross and surrounded by the legend *Christiana religio* on the reverse (Figs 15.2–15.3).¹ These

coins did not contain any explicit reference to their place of production. There are several exceptions with regard to Arnulf of Carinthia (894–899) and Berengar of Friuli (888–924), whose coins occasionally featured the name of Milan or Pavia; however, these were rare cases and did not impact the rigidly standardized series.

Over the years, the study of these coins has predominantly focused on the identification of their mint of origin. Philip Grierson developed specific guidelines

* This paper represents a preview of a more comprehensive study focusing on coins featuring the representation of the tetrastyle temple, which is currently underway (Gianazza forthcoming). The data presented are based on a systematic inventory of coins from public and private collections conducted by the author as part of a larger research project on the coinage of the

Regnum Italiae from Charlemagne to Berengar II, with Adalbert (773/4–961). To date, the project has resulted in a survey of over 4250 specimens and 440 finds. For more information, visit <<https://www.sibrium.org/coinage-kingdom-of-italy/>>.

¹ The tetrastyle temple has traditionally been assumed to be a temple, but it is now being considered a church (Coupland 2018, 40).

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for this purpose based primarily on specific figurative details such as the shape of the letters in the legends or the cross on the obverse, which he initially presented in a short article in 1978 (Grierson 1978) and later in the chapter on the *Regnum Italiae* in the first volume of *Medieval European Coinage* (MEC 1, 249–59).

While Grierson stated that ‘the problem of identifying the mints responsible for the *Christiana religio* coins has now been largely solved’, he acknowledged that his criteria were only valid for issues from the 890s but not necessarily for those from the 870s–880s (MEC 1, 252) or the tenth century (MEC 1, 256–58). Today, the overall depictions of this coinage have changed significantly, and many specimens with characteristics that do not correspond with Grierson’s criteria have been discovered, leading to uncertain attribution to a specific mint.

The availability of a large number of specimens supported by high-quality images and reliable data concerning weight and module permits a shift from Grierson’s specific criteria towards broader evaluations that focus on identifying common stylistic traits among the coins. This approach divides the coins into ‘stylistic groups’ based on shared style, ideally indicating the work of a common die engraver. This makes it possible to emphasize more effectively the different production lines among the issues of the same ruler and potentially indicate the simultaneous operation of several mints. It also highlights the affinities between issues of different rulers, which is crucial for evaluating the continuity of the production lines and potential mints over time.

The Productive Continuity of the Mints

Almost all the issues made between the reigns of Louis II (843–876) and Charles III ‘the Fat’ (839–888) can be divided into two distinct stylistic groups. The very homogeneous characteristics between these sovereigns suggest that the production of the same two mints was continuous in time. They reflect the distribution made for these kings by Grierson in *Medieval European Coinage*, where they are traditionally linked to the work of the mints of Milan and Pavia, respectively.

The association of these two stylistic groups with the two mints in question now finds new confirmation due to recently rediscovered coins of Arnulf of Carinthia. Besides presenting the elements discussed previously, these coins propose on the reverse an explicit reference to the cities of Milan (MEDIOLANVMCIVIS)² and

Pavia (INPAPIACIVITAS) (CNI 4, 473 no. 1 — issues in the name of Arnulf only; MG 1538) in place of the usual inscription *Christiana religio*. In other issues, again in the name of Arnulf but now coined in association with Berengar, the reference to these two cities is more discreet, as the words MEDI (CNI 5, 34 nos 1–2, 458 no. 1a; MG 1537) and PAPI (CNI 4, 473 no. 1 — issues in the name of Arnulf and Berengar; MG 1539) replace the temple columns on the reverse (Fig. 15.2.d and 15.3.d).

Amongst almost all the coins identified so far for Louis II, Charles II ‘the Bald’ (875–877), Carloman (877–880), and Charles III ‘the Fat’ (881–887), just under 300 specimens can be almost equally divided between the mints of Milan and Pavia. Only six specimens are excluded — three by Louis II,³ two by Carloman,⁴ and one by Charles III ‘the Fat’⁵ — whose characteristics differ from the majority of them.

These do not appear to display any evident elements in common with each other, except for one of the three specimens of Louis II⁶ with that of Charles III ‘the Fat’. A potential relationship between these two coins is particularly relevant as it would necessitate the definition of a third stylistic group. Based on the approach defined by Grierson and adopted for the two major stylistic groups, this would imply the assumption of the activity of a third mint within the *Regnum Italiae*, the production of which would, however, have remained on a much smaller volume than Milan and Pavia. If we chose to apply the same approach to the other coins of ‘unusual’ style, the scenario could become even more complicated because we would find ourselves in the position of having to consider the existence of further new stylistic groups, and consequently, of new mints. However, if this were the case, we would be presented with a scenario in which we would replicate the situation attested with Lothair I (840–855), where c. 90% of the known specimens explicitly bear the name of Milan or Pavia, and only a minority can be linked to Treviso and Venice.⁷

2 CNI 5, 33 no. 1; MG 1536. Believed to be a possible modern forgery made by Luigi Cigoi in MEC 1 (254); however, the specimen in a private collection (Varesi 78, lot 154) that I was able to examine appears genuine.

3 One specimen came from the Marsum find (Wigersma 1907, 331 fig. 2), another from the Museo Bottacin in Padua (inv. 5a; Carraro 2013, 123), and a third from a private collection (Artemide 48, lot 723).

4 One specimen still from the Marsum find (Wigersma 1907, 333 fig. 4), and another in a private collection (Bolaffi 34, lot 816).

5 Pavia, Musei Civici (Pavia – Strada Nuova find, no. 433; Carraro 2013, 137). The name of the sovereign is rendered as *Karolvs*, the As in the legends are barred, similar to the coins attributable to the first stylistic group. However, the overall style of the engraving appears distinctly different.

6 Specifically, the one preserved at the Museo Bottacin of Padua (see n. 3).

7 As can also be appreciated by the representativeness of the mints of Milan and Pavia in coin finds, which is much higher than that of Treviso and Venice (Coupland, Emmerig 2019). The percentages

With Berengar, Guy (889–894), Arnulf, and Lambert (894–898), we have a larger number of coins with stylistic peculiarities that prevent them from being associated with one of the two main stylistic groups, and thus, to the activity of the mints of Milan and Pavia.

Particularly relevant is the case of some coins of Berengar, characterized by the fact that the name of the king is proposed in the form of BERNEKARIVS⁸ in the obverse legend. Although the cross in the obverse field appears small and displays the arms ending in spikes, identical to that observed in the specimens belonging to the first stylistic group related to the mint of Milan, the overall style of these coins is markedly different, and thus, are to be linked to the work of a third mint alternative to those of Milan or Pavia.

In these specimens, a potential link with the previously discussed *unicum* of Charles III ‘the Fat’ can be identified. This correlation is related to one of the three atypical specimens of Louis II. The most obvious similarities are in the legends, specifically, the shape of the letter ‘K’, which is characterized by very elongated oblique strokes, similar to those observed on the specimen of Charles III ‘the Fat’. This is an interesting link, as it could suggest that this hypothetical third mint existed alongside the mints of Milan or Pavia during the reign of Charles III ‘the Great’, or even earlier during the time of Louis II.

The Identification of the Mints

In *Medieval European Coinage*, the coins of Berengar upon which the king’s name is rendered in the form BERNEKARIVS are referred to a mint located in Verona. The attribution is based on an assumption by Emil Hahn, who believed that coins with this legend in the hoard discovered at Ellikon an der Thur⁹ arrived there

through a route that crossed the Brenner Pass. However, there is no evidence of a possible presence of a mint in Verona until the 910s. In September 911, Gisemundus *monetarius* and a second *monetarius* named Natale were attested in the city, and in April 913, Gisemundus was mentioned again, but this time alone.¹⁰

Medieval European Coinage also states that there was a mint in Modena during the reign of Louis III (900–902), citing unspecified documents as support (MEC 1, 252, 256). However, this possibility has been ruled out as a thorough re-examination of the sources has not found any confirmation.¹¹

On the other hand, the possibility of mints in Mantua and Treviso during Berengar’s time has not been considered, despite evidence in documents.

A charter dated 21 November 894 confirms the notion that a mint may have operated in Mantua.¹² In the charter, Berengar confirmed to the Mantuan bishop, Eginulf, the charters that were lost in a fire, the *teloneum* and the *ripaticum*, and made other concessions, including the *moneta publica*.¹³ For Treviso, a slightly later charter, dated 9 January 905, granted the local church two parts of the *teloneum* and the harbour market, two parts of the *moneta publica* and the *teloneum* outside and inside the city, which were due to the royal fisc.¹⁴

Venice requires a separate discussion in the search for possible mint locations. The city did not belong to the *Regnum Italiae*; however, its geographical position and trade relations meant it inevitably had to deal with it on a monetary level. A charter of Rudolph II (924–926) granted the right to mint coins to the doge Orso Partecipazio;¹⁵ however, it does not irrefutably attest to the actual minting of coinage by Venice

are calculated from the number of specimens of Lothair I minted for the *Regnum Italiae* bearing the explicit indication of Milan, Pavia, Treviso, or Venice in the reverse field, which provides evidence of the activity of a mint in those cities. Issues in his name, whose attribution to the *Regnum Italiae* appears uncertain, have been excluded here. These are specimens with the depiction of the tetrastyle temple (Coupland 2001, Group D) with stylistic features very similar to those observed on similar issues of Louis I the Pious usually assigned to the mint of Venice (Coupland 1990, Group G), and others with the same image (Coupland 2001, 185–86, Group A) originally thought to be a possible product of the mint of Lyon but for which the hypothesis of an Italian origin has now been put forward (Coupland 2023).

8 MEC 1, 254–56, correcting the legend reported there as BERNE(or I)KARIVS.

9 *Repertorio* no. 9199. The place of discovery was formerly believed to be Wiesendangen (Jecklin, Hahn 1922; MEC 1, 256), but is now more correctly identified as Ellikon an der Thur (Zäch 2001, Anhang no. 1; Coupland 2011, no. 198).

10 Schiaparelli 1903, docc. lxxxviii (April 913) and cxvii (January 918, in the transcription of a charter dated 29 September 911).

11 Confirming what has been argued in this regard by Alessia Rovelli (2008, 135 n. 72).

12 Schiaparelli 1903, 42; Fasoli 1949, 214; Saccocchi 1996, 128 (reservations about the reliability of the document). Santos Salazar (2021, p. 39) even considers it ‘of fundamental importance for reconstructing the goods and privileges of the Mantuan church’.

13 Schiaparelli 1903, doc. xii: *seu monetam publicam ipsius Mantuane civitatis nostro regali dono ibi perpetuiter habendam concedimus*. For a more general comment on the document, see also Santos Salazar 2021, 39.

14 Schiaparelli 1903, doc. lii: *et duas portiones publicae monetae ad cameram nostri palatii olim pertinentes*.

15 MGH, *Capit.*, II, doc. 240; Papadopoli 1893–1919, I, 303–05, doc. 1; Schiaparelli 1910, doc. xii; Cessi 1937, doc. 1. The exact dating of the document, for which only copies not older than the mid-fourteenth century are known and which do not depend directly on the original, is a matter of debate, but is in any case dated 924–925.

at the time. The reference to a habit of minting by Venetian doges in the document¹⁶ could simply be related to those issues in the name of Louis the Pious (814–840) (CNI 7, 2–6 nos 1–41) and Lothair (CNI 7, 6 nos 1–3), in which the name Venice appears explicitly on the reverse. At the same time, this does not conflict with the repeated attestation of coins from Louis II onwards, with stylistic elements that cannot be linked back to the mints of Milan or Pavia,¹⁷ which are now found with increasing frequency compared to Grierson's time.¹⁸

The Breakdown of Monetary Uniformity

With Berengar, the figurative unity that characterized the coinage of the *Regnum Italiae* since the reign of Louis II was broken. The mints of Milan and Pavia abandoned the representation of the tetrastyle temple on the reverse in favour of an inscription on three lines in the field, on which, next to the name of the city of origin, a clear reference to the word *civitas* appears (MEDI | C | OLA and PA | PIA | CI). The renovation also involved the obverse, adopting a Christogram to replace the cross (Fig. 15.2.f and 15.3.f).

The precise date when this change took place is unknown; however, an assessment based on the number of known coins for the two types suggests that it occurred around 905/10 (Gianazza forthcoming). The change that affected the typology was not matched by a substantial alteration in the style that had characterized the coins attributed to these two mints up to that

time. In regard to the coins of Milan, the arms of the Christogram end with spikes, while in those of Pavia remain flat and thin, which is coherent with what had been observed up to that time.

These figurative changes may have originated from certain modifications in the weight standard introduced by coins with the tetrastyle temple. With Berengar, the coins with the tetrastyle temple are c. 0.1 g less than the average weight recorded by the coins with the Christogram of Milan and Pavia (1.48 g vs 1.59 g). This difference widens to 0.3 g with Hugh of Arles (1.29 g vs 1.56 g), and only at the time of the co-rulership of Berengar II and Adalbert II (950–961) do the coins of Milan and Pavia also appear to turn towards a decisive reduction in weight, bringing them back in line with the issues with the tetrastyle temple (Fig. 15.4).

The coinage of the *Regnum Italiae* was thus differentiated into two clearly separated production standards. On one side, the issues of the mints of Milan and Pavia, characterized by a new type, common to both mints, in which the name of the place of minting was proposed explicitly. On the other side, the coins that continued to propose the usual representation of the cross on the obverse and the tetrastyle temple on the reverse, which, in turn, could be subdivided into a plurality of stylistic groups with often blurred contours, were all characterized by reduced weight compared to the issues of Milan and Pavia. This situation appears to be repeated also with Berengar's successors. The mints of Milan and Pavia proposed the type with the Christogram and also the name of the city with Rudolph II and in the early stages of the reign of Hugh of Arles (926–931), when each of these mints began to issue coins with its own typology. Later, during the co-rulership of Hugh and Lothair (931–947), Verona also began to issue a coin with specific elements with the explicit indication of the name of the city, thus freeing itself from the typology of the tetrastyle temple and the progressive decrease in weight of these issues.

The coins with a tetrastyle temple in the name of Berengar can be divided into at least seven stylistic groups, whereas those of Hugh can be divided into no less than six.¹⁹ According to the traditionally adopted approach, the postulation of a series of mints that is far greater than the number currently considered would be necessary, thus complicating the identification process. In the case of Hugh, the majority of the coins belong to

16 Schiapparelli 1910, doc. xii: *ei numorum monetam concedimus, secundum quod eorum provincie duces a priscis temporibus consueta more habuerunt*.

17 The document of Rudolph II perfectly follows in content and even in the formulas used a privilege issued by Guy on 20 June 891 (MGH, *Capit.*, II, doc. 239; Schiapparelli 1906, doc. ix), in which, however, there was no reference to the mint. Guy's document echoes earlier agreements between Berengar and Doge Pietro in a *pactum* of 7 or 11 May 888 (MGH, *Capit.*, II, doc. 238; Schiapparelli 1903, doc. iii), which in turn was linked to similar documents signed by Lothair I in 840 (MGH, *Capit.*, II, docc. 233–34; but on the first of these documents see also further on in the text, n. 34), Louis II on 23 March 856 (doc. 235), Charles III 'the Fat' on 11 January 880 (doc. 236) and on 10 May 883 (doc. 237). The concession was renewed by Hugh with a *diploma* of 26 February 927 (MGH, *Capit.*, II, doc. 241; Schiapparelli 1924, doc. viii), repeating the same words as in Rudolph's charter borrowed from that of Guy, but adding the part concerning the mint.

18 In *Medieval European Coinage*, some coins in the name of 'Berengar' characterized by *pointed-cross arms and a broad outer border* are assigned to Venice, which we now know also include issues to be attributed to Berengar II (950–961; v. Gianazza 2013, 79–86).

19 The exact number cannot be given precisely because the differences observed between the coins are sometimes particularly subtle and attributable to very specific details. This raises the doubt that what have been considered two distinct stylistic groups should be seen as one stylistic group instead.

just two stylistic groups, characterized respectively by the legends HVGOPIVSREX²⁰ and VCVSPIVSREX, and that today can be referred to as Venice. The mint of Venice would, therefore, have been an ideal reference point for the eastern most regions of the *Regnum Italiae*, including mints such as Mantua, Treviso, Verona, as opposed to the western regions, which were more closely linked to the mints of Milan and Pavia and produced coins with different figural characteristics and significantly greater weight. During Berengar II's time, Venice would have even dominated the activity of every other mint in its monetary area as all the tetrastyle temple coins attributed to this ruler belong to a single stylistic group, similar to the one characterized by the legend VCVSPIVSREX for Hugh.²¹

In view of the above, the separation of the *Regnum Italiae* into two distinct monetary areas may have started as early as during Berengar I's reign in the first decade of the tenth century. This leads to a different interpretation of a document dated 27 May 945, in which Lothair II confirmed the Church of Mantua the right to mint coinage, and granted the citizens of Mantua, Verona, and Brescia the right to regulate their own coinage based on common reference values for alloy and weight.²² The fact that the document mentions a common standard for these three cities, and not a more general standard for the entire *Regnum Italiae*, could be considered evidence that the fragmentation of its monetary unity began well before the 970s, as previously assumed.²³

²⁰ However, Pigozzo (2020, 158) also interprets this legend as HVcus LOtharius PIVS REX, which leads to an obvious problem of concordance since the royal title is expressed in the singular (*rex*) despite referring to two sovereigns.

²¹ This type would further evolve in the Ottonian period (961–1002), coming to show an explicit indication of its provenance from the Venetian mint in the reverse field (Castellani 1923; Castellani 1925, 157 no. 246; MEC 12, 59–60 fig. 6).

²² Schiaparelli 1924, 251–52, doc. i: *confirmamus, concedimus et restauramus sanctae Mantuanae ecclesiae [...] publicam ipsius civitatis monetam a predecessores nostris iam dictae sedi concessam, statuentes ut in his tribus civitatibus, Mantua videlicet, Verona atque Brixia, firmum et inviolabilem habeat roborem, et absque alicuius interdictu firmiter discurret. Volumus tamen, ut secundum libitum et conventum civium predictarum urbium constet atque permaneat mixtio argenti et ponderis quantitas.*

²³ Fragmentation that would become clear in the Ottonian age, as shown by an *instrumentum locationis* between the patriarch of Aquileia and the bishop of Bergamo of July 972, in which the Milanese currency is found to have double the value of Venice (*argenteos denarios bonos mediolanenses solidos quinque, aut de Venetia solidos decem*; Porro Lambertenghi 1873, doc. dccxxxvii). A reference to *libras Veneticorum* is already present in a controversial document of Lothair I (Romanin 1853–1861, I, 351–61; MGH, *Capit.*, II, doc. 233), in which, however, the proposed date (23 February 840) does not seem consistent with the reported indication of the year of Lothair's reign when it was issued.

Figure 15.1. The Kingdom of Italy at the end of the ninth century. © Luca Gianazza 2023.

Figure 15.2. Evolution of the denari with the representation on the tetrastyle temple, mint of Milan: a) Louis II of Italy (855–875); b) Charles III the Fat as emperor (881–887); c) Guy of Spoleto as king (889–891); d) Arnulf of Carinthia with Berengar of Italy (c. 895/896); e) Berengar of Italy as king (888–915); f) Berengar of Italy as king (888–915), post 905/910 issue. All coins from private collections, except d; former Pietro Verri collection, today owned by Banca Intesa San Paolo (after Crippa and Crippa 1998).



Fig. 15.1



Fig. 15.2

Figure 15.3. Evolution of the denari with the representation on the tetrastyle temple, mint of Pavia: a) Louis II of Italy (855–875); b) Charles III the Fat as emperor (881–887); c) Guy of Spoleto as king (889–891); d) Arnulf of Carinthia with Berengar of Italy (c. 895/896); e) Berengar of Italy as king (888–915); f) Berengar of Italy as king (888–915), post 905/910 issue. All coins from private collections, except e; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Monnaies, médailles et antiques, CAR-1424.

Figure 15.4. Average weight of the denari of the Kingdom of Italy, 855–961. © Luca Gianazza 2023.



Fig. 15.3

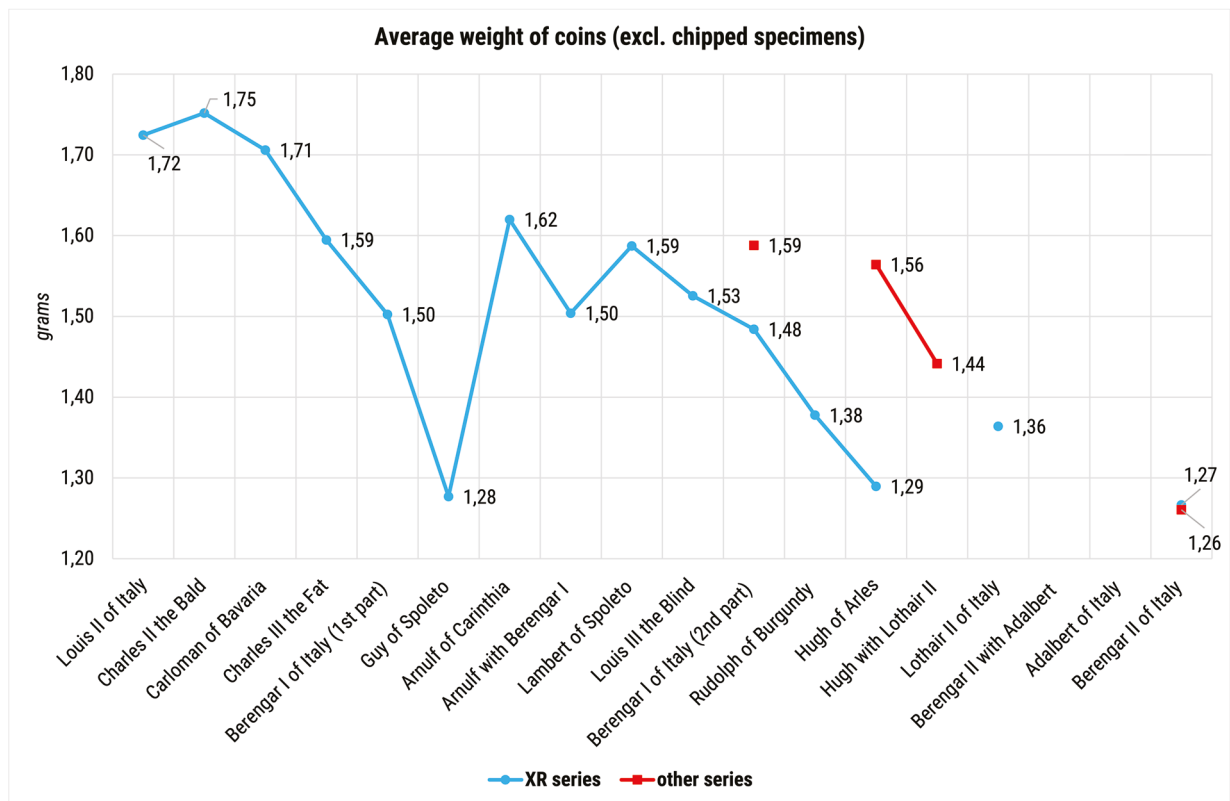


Fig. 15.4

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