

Royal Coin for Andreas and Kallista, Æthelmearc Reign 50.

French 14<sup>th</sup> c.

“Châtel Tournois”

## I. French Coins in the High Middle Ages

In the 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, coins struck in the regions of modern-day France had remarkably little variation. Even though new issues might appear within weeks of each other, there were only 7 main types of design on the front of coins: Inscription, Crown, Fleur, Châtel, Arms, Initials, and Portrait. Of these, the most common was the Châtel coin. This style of coin was so popular and well-accepted that it became the most widely-imitated coin of medieval Europe; coins of the Châtel style can be found throughout Germany, Greece, and Italy in the later middle ages. Even English monarchs, when striking coins in their French holdings, used the Châtel style.

The Hundred Years War, in particular, had a dramatic effect on coinage. Compared to the Carolingian era, France in the 14<sup>th</sup> century had a weak monarchy, so many coins were struck by local landowners. Once a particular style of coin became popular, it was imitated to ensure recognition and acceptance. This was especially important at a time when frequent cycles of monetary inflation and deflation were used to raise money for the War. Coins would be repeatedly debased by issuing coinage with lower and lower quantities of bullion (precious metal). Then, an issue of genuinely high value would be introduced, with the requirement that all taxes be paid in the new coins, rendering people's existing holdings almost worthless. This cycle would be repeated by French monarchs with remarkable frequency – coin issues might be less than a month apart. Maintaining a similar appearance to the coins made it harder for the populace to recognize this economic trickery.

The basic coin denomination in medieval France was a silver gros. The more useful denomination was the denier – it had a fixed ratio of 12 denier to 1 gros, was small and thin, and was usually struck in a base alloy (not bullion). The gold denomination was the Écu d’Or, worth about 60 gros.



Ecu, Philip VI 1337

#### A Very Incomplete List of French 14th-Century Coin Denominations

Denomination	Value
Pite	¼ denier
Obol	½ denier
Denier	
Double Tournois	2 denier
Maille Tierce	4 denier
Maille Blanche	6 denier
Gros	12 denier
Teston	10 gros
Franc	20 gros
Écu	60 gros

## II. Châtel Coins

Châtel Coins were struck from 1200 to 1500 throughout Europe, but especially in France. On the obverse would be the titular Châtel Tournois (Tournament Castle), while on the reverse a cross of some sort. The reverse edges would have religious inscriptions, such as Saint Louis's first Gros Tournois: "BNDICTV SIT NOME DNI NRI DEI IHV XPI" (the name of our Lord Jesus Christ be blessed). The 12 fleur-de-lis on the obverse indicate the denomination (12 denier = one gros).



Louis IX Gros Tournois 1266

The success of the Châtel coins can be appreciated in their myriad imitations. By 1300, fringe French estates were striking Châtel coins. Shortly thereafter, they would be seen in Germany and Luxemburg. Italian versions were available by 1400. Even the far-flung Greek crusader states had coins in the Châtel style. Edward III and the Black Prince used Châtel style coins for their issues in the Aquitaine.

On later coins, the Châtel Tournais itself is reduced to a cartoon depiction with little resemblance to a castle. But the evolution of the stylized cartoon can be seen by tracing various coins of the era.



William of Namur 1360



John of Bourbon 1320



Edward III 1330



Edward III 1330

(These coins are not direct descendants of one another. They are used to explain the derivation of the symbols seen on later coins that may be less evocative of a medieval castle. The first Châtelés may actually have been based on abbeys rather than castles, as similar-appearing abbeys can be found on earlier French ecumenical coins. Alternatively, the original Châtel may have been based on depictions of the Hebrew temple from the coins of Louis the Pious.)

### III. SCA Modifications

The coin for Andreas and Kallista is based primarily on the denier of Charles of Blois from 1350.



Denier of Charles of Blois, 1350

We have substituted a tau cross for the original long cross, in reference to the symbol of Their Majesties' household. The inscription is based on a coin of Richard the Lionheart from 1195. The original coin was struck in silver, for which we substituted pewter. Charles's coin has an average diameter of about 7/8 inch, which we sought to maintain.

The dies for Charles's coin were likely made with a combination of punches and engraving. We also used a combination of these techniques, although we probably leaned more heavily on the engraving than did the original artists.



### IV. Bibliography

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