

Not worth a penny

Article

Published Version

Ross, D. J. A. (1978) Not worth a penny. Reading Medieval Studies, IV. pp. 69-90. ISSN 0950-3129 Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/84360/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

Publisher: University of Reading

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

Medieval French epic,¹ like that of ancient Greece and that of many peoples still actively producing and diffusing epics and epic songs today, is formulaic in style and character. Whether it was orally composed, like that of the Yugoslav guslari and those of several Central Asian peoples recently recorded, is uncertain, and confirmatory evidence is lacking. It is however certain that it was very largely orally diffused, at least as late as the thirteenth century. In either case it is clear that the use of repeated formulas made the composition and memorising of these long poems much easier for the jongleur whose profession it was to perform them. Since the publication of Jean Rychner's book: La chanson de Geste, essai sur l'art épique des jongleurs in 1956,² the formulaic character of Old French epic has been generally recognised, though the controversy over the question whether the original method of composition was oral or written still rages.

The formulaic unit in French epic is the hemistich of four or six syllables. Apparent whole line formulas occur but their hemistichs can be found also in other combinations. The presence of rhyme or assonance naturally causes considerable variation in the form of second hemistich formulas in the chanson de geste. Dr. Aspland³ has recently pointed out that, owing to this circumstance, the original devisers of the formulaic system of French epic versification found it necessary to work less with fixed invariable word-patterns (though such are of course also common, especially in the first hemistich of the epic line) than with clusters of variable syntactic word-patterns which allow the same thing to be said in a six-syllable phrase with a number of different rhymes or assonances. This formulaic cluster can also be further expanded to embrace variations of tense, person or number.

In the present study I propose to examine one such group which has interesting historical and archaeological connections. This concerns the various ways of expressing derisory or minimal value by the basic idea 'not worth a penny' or 'twopence', or some other nearly valueless sum of money.⁴

It must be remembered that in the epic period, at least down to St. Louis' creation of the gros tournois (Fig. 1) or grand blanc of twelve deniers or one sou tournois in 1266, the only coins actually circulating in France were pennies, deniers, of many kinds and very variable value and silver content, and the much less common halfpennies, mdailles or oboles. Reference to sous and livres in early texts are to money of account actually payable in deniers. Farthings, pites, to judge by their present rarity, must always have been uncommon. I cannot discover that the word occurs in any epic formula.

To take the general before the particular, the word denier itself appears

in this sense twice in the Chanson de Roland, but not at the assonance:

Sis bons escuz un denier ne li valt. I.1262.

His good shield is not worth a penny to him, that is, does not protect him in the least;

and:

Tute lor leis un dener ne lur valt. I.3338.

All their faith is not worth a penny to them, does them no good.

However, denier is far more common at the rhyme in formulas of this type, where it occurs in the very numerous laisses assonating in jĕ or rhyming in jĕr. In this position it is in fact by far the commonest of all the 'not worth a penny' formulas. In fourteen epics which I searched, some of them, long ones like Aspremont, Raoul de Cambrai and the Roman d'Alexandre, I found this type of formula no less than ninety-eight times. A few examples are:

Car li ne ses honors nē pris un sol denier. Aye d'Avignon, 2612.
for I don't value her or her fiefs at a single penny.

Ne lor lairai le montant d'un denier. Raoul de Cambrai, 1633.
Nor will I leave them the value of a penny, a pennyworth.

Del tuen n'avront vaillissant un denier. Charroi de Nimes, 334.
They shall not have a pennyworth of your property.

Occasionally the sum at which a person, object or action is valued is twopence where a rhyme in -iers is required.

L'orguel des Frans ne pris je dos deniers. Aspremont, 9607.
I don't reckon the pride of the Franks at twopence purchase.

or even is set as high as fourpence:

Ja n'en avra vaillant quatre deniers. Couronnement de Louis, 226.
He will never have four pennyworth of it.

Of course denier also occurs in normal use as the coin itself. For example in the Charroi de Nimes we have:

Se gel sëlse ne m'en fusse aprochiez
 Qui me donast mil livres de denier. Charroi de Nîmes, 563-4.
 Had I known it I would not have approached it even if someone
 had given me a thousand pounds in pennies;

which incidentally shows the use of livre as money of account, and:

Je te donrai un grant mui de deniers. Couronnement de Louis, 2351.
 I will give you a great bushelful of pennies.

There are also some special uses like:

De mon tresor vos doing le quart denier. Ibid., 392.
 I give you the fourth penny of my treasure, a quarter of my
 treasure.

At least as common as the laisse assonating in -jē or rhyming in -jēr or jērs, is that which rhymes or assonates in -ē from tonic free -a. Here the formula ends in denier monéé, a coined or struck penny, from monetatum. This seems to be about half as common as denier by itself, occurring forty-eight times in the texts which I searched. Curiously enough, the two formulas tend not to occur in the same poem. Denier monéé is found eleven times in Parise la Duchesse, three times in Simon de Pouille, four times in Enfances Guillaume, in none of which does denier appear alone. In Les Narbonnais, denier monéé is found seventeen times, denier alone seven. On the other hand, we have denier alone twenty-three times in Aspremont, denier monéé once only; and in Raoul de Cambrai the proportion is fourteen for denier to twice for denier monéé. In other poems the proportion is more nearly equal. I can suggest no reason for these preferences as the two formulas rhyme or assonate differently and laisses in both assonances are extremely common in all epics.

Examples of denier monéé are:

Mais ne lor vaut un denier monéet. Raoul de Cambrai, 8705.
 But it is worth not a coined penny to them.

and
 N'avroiz qui vaille un denier monéé ... Les Narbonnais, 92.
 You shall not have a coined penny's worth ...

Where a rhyme in -és is required, the value rises to twopence:

READING MEDIEVAL STUDIES

Je ne pris Mahomet deus deniers monēés. Siège de Barbastre, 1360.

I don't value Mahomet at twopence in coin. I don't give twopence for Mahomet.

And as with denier alone, denier monēé can also refer to the actual coin:

Vignent o moi, je lor donrai asseiz
Or et arjant et deniers monēeiz. Enfances Guillaume, 1767-8.

Let them come with me, I will give them plenty of gold and silver and pennies in coin.

The feminine laisse rhyming or assonating in -ee from ε from tonic free ǣ followed by atonic ǣ is, like all feminine laisses, of relatively infrequent occurrence; and the epic poets have preferred to use the word denree (denarata) pennyworth. It occurs sporadically in a fair number of the poems searched, twenty-one times in all. It is found in the singular in laisses in -ee.

Ainz n'en perdirent vaillant une denree. Charroi de Nimes, 1478.

Never did they lose a pennyworth of it.

But I have not found it in the plural.

It, too, can be used literally of a pennyworth:

Por un denier dos granz pains i veïsmes;
La denree vaut dos en autre vile; ... Charroi de Nimes, 1910-11.

We saw two great loaves for a penny there, the pennyworth is as good as two penn'orth in any other town.

Passing from the penny to the halfpenny we have assonances in ǣ-ǣ with maille and ǣ-ǣ with poitevine (Fig.2). The word maille, originally mēaille or māaille, has been variously derived from metallea or from medalia for medialia connected with medium, half. It seems likely, however, that there is a connection with the deniers and oboles which the Counts of Poitou struck at the silver-mining village of Melle and inscribed METALLO or METULLO, as these deniers came to be of very poor quality and silver content and passed as mere half pennies. The fact that poitevin or poitevine, a denier of Poutou, was synonymous with maille increases the likelihood of a connection with the Melle coinage and that the derivation from metallea is correct.

There is a passage in Huon de Bordeaux which seems to distinguish

poitevine from maille to the former's disadvantage: the jongleur is addressing his audience at the end of the day's instalment of the poem, encouraging them to come back for more next day:

Et si vos proi cascuns m'ait porté
 U pan de sa chemise une mēaille noué;
 Car en ces poitevines a poi de largeté;
 Avers fu et escars qui les fist estorer,
 Ne qui ains les donna a cortois menestrel. Huon de Bordeaux,
 4987-91.

And I beg that each of you may have brought me a (good) half-penny knotted in the tail of his shirt, for there is little worth (literally generosity) in those Poitou halfpence; He was a miser and a mean devil who had them struck and so was anyone who ever gave them to a courteous minstrel.

This passage, which incidentally shows how you carried your money in the days before pockets, may perhaps be explained by the fact that by the thirteenth century maille had become a general term for an obole or halfpenny of any kind, and could apply to the maille tournois or maille paris, with their relatively high silver content, no less than to the debased poitevine. The latter seems to have enjoyed a very bad reputation as the Renclus de Molliens calls a female forger of the coin of the realm a poitevineresse, a fabricator of false Poitou pennies or halfpence.

I have only one example of poitevine at the rhyme:

Un anelet qui ne vaut poitevine. Jean Bodel, Chanson des
Saisnes, II, 15.

A ring not worth a base halfpenny.

The masculine form poitevin is also known but not so far as I can discover in epic.

Maille is a good deal commoner, usually in the older form mēaille, than poitevine. It occurs eleven times in my texts and can be used in the singular:

La vieille broigne ne li valut mēaille. Couronnement de Louis, 914.
 His old shirt of mail was not worth a halfpenny to him, did not protect him at all.

and

Tuit vo Franceis ne valent pas mēaille. Couronnement de Louis,
2433.

All your Frenchmen are not worth a halfpenny.

and in the plural:

Li escu de lor cols ne valent deus mēailles. Alexandre, Branch III,
1815.

The shields slung round their necks are not worth a couple of
halfpence.

De maille can be used adjectivally:

... Et si ne poise mie douze pains de mēaille. Ibid., 6351.

And yet it (a hauberk) does not weigh as much as twelve halfpenny
loaves.

Maille, too, like denier, can stand literally for the coin itself:

Onques n'i ot offert maaille ne denier. Siège de Barbastre, 7265.

Never was there offered there a halfpenny or a penny.

What may be regarded as the official rather than the colloquial designation of the halfpenny, obole, I have not found at the rhyme and I have seen it only in three examples in the late epic of the Crusade Cycle, Baudouin de Sebourc in the form n'obole ne denier, neither a halfpenny nor a penny:

A ses heirs ne demeure ne obole ne denier. Baudouin de Sebourc,
VII, 385.

There remains neither a halfpenny nor a penny for his heirs.

Though the word pite, farthing, is rare and is apparently not found at the rhyme in epic, the epic poet was not deprived of an equivalent of 'not worth a farthing'.

The bishops of Le Puy en Velay struck, from some time in the eleventh century, a large silver denier with on the obverse a cross and the word MONETA and on the reverse SC MARIAE and a characteristic six-branched cross deriving from the chi-rho monogram, ✠, the inscription meaning Money of St. Mary. Originally a sound coin of good silver content it rapidly became debased.

Heavily alloyed with copper, reduced in size and with its legend blundered or replaced by a wavy line, it came to pass for no more than the half of a denier (Fig.3). The corresponding maille or obole was then treated as a quarter denier. By the latter part of the twelfth century this last coin, widely circulated by the numerous pilgrims to Notre Dame du Puy, was the general equivalent of a farthing throughout France. As such we find it used as an expression of minimal or derisory value in the forms pujois or pojois (Fig.4) (podienne) and also in the feminine pujoise, pojoise, and used at the rhyme or assonance in masculine laisses in -oi and feminine ones in oi. Sometimes one pojois and sometimes two is the sum at which an action, person or object is assessed. It is not common and I did not find it in the texts I searched but here is an example in the masculine:

Il ne doute arme valissant deus pujois. Ogier le Danois, 11241.
He fears no arm to the extent of two farthingsworth, i.e., at all.

and in the feminine:

Se ne sequeurt Maugis ne vaut une p[o]joise. Maugis d'Aigremont.
[MS. Montpellier H.247, fol.166.]

If he does not help Maugis he is not worth a farthing.

When the Carolingian realm finally dissolved into a chaos of feudal anarchy in the late ninth and tenth centuries, the various local dignitaries, counts, dukes and marquises, whose offices had originally been royal appointments limited in time, personal, and withdrawable at the will of the monarch, succeeded in transforming these posts into permanent heritable territorial domains, held of the crown on a feudal tenure which, in the case of the more powerful of these feudatories, amounted to little more than a voluntary acknowledgement of suzerainty.

The control of the coinage was in theory a jealously guarded royal prerogative, and such in England it has always remained. The few privilege mints of such ecclesiastical dignitaries as the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the bishop of Durham and the abbots of Bury and Reading were under strict control and might strike only royal money of correct legal standard with some small mark or sign for difference. No layman in England ever enjoyed coinage rights, though in the anarchy of Stephen's reign a few baronial pennies were struck illegally.

Very different was the picture in France. Poor communications in medieval Europe made any kind of centralised minting system impossible in a country of any size, and even under Charlemagne the control of minting had

to be entrusted to local dignitaries, counts and dukes, and to ecclesiastics, bishops and the abbots of the greater monasteries. Occasionally these were permitted to set their names alongside the royal name or monogram on the deniers struck under their control. Among the dozen such names of laymen of Charlemagne's day is found a Rodlan who has inevitably, but without any sort of proof, been identified with the Britannici limitis praefectus who lost his life on 15 August 778.

The presence of these names represented, however, an acknowledgement of responsibility, like those of the 'moneys' which appear on all English coins down to Edward I's reign, not an assertion of independence. Indeed, Charles the Bald by his edict, made at Pîtres in Normandy on 15 June 864, tried to establish a single type of denier and to reduce the number of mints to ten. That edict seems to have remained largely a dead letter, and under Charles's successors the flood of feudal coinage began.

It began, in fact, rather tentatively; at first there would usually be a royal monogram or name, e.g., LVDOVICVS REX, KAROLVS REX FR[ANCORUM] on the obverse, retained, often in a debased form, from an earlier reign to give as it were an air of official respectability to the coinage, accompanied by the name, often reduced to an initial, of the issuing dignitary, and on the reverse the usual cross with the name of the territory for which the coinage was destined.

Thus, the Counts of Chalon sur Saône began in the late tenth century with a penny ostensibly of king Lothair and reading LOTARIUS REX with a large B for Burgundia, and on the reverse the cross and CAVILON CIVIT for civitas, City of Chalon. By the time of their successor Duke Hugh III of Burgundy (1162-93) LOTARIUS REX has given way to HUGO DVX BUR[GUNDIE].

By the period between 1090 and 1300, during which nearly all the surviving chansons de geste were composed, dozens of authorities of every kind were striking their own feudal deniers, from great territorial magnates like the Count of Anjou and the Duke of Burgundy, and great lords spiritual like the Archbishop of Lyon with his proud inscription PRIMA SEDES GALLIARUM, down to petty barons like the Counts of Melgueil. The illegible denier melgoire (Fig.5) produced by these last imitating the coinage of Narbonne, enjoyed a wide circulation in the South and, after the counts had in 1215 been dispossessed by the Albigensian crusaders, continued to provide a good income to the bishops of Maguelonne to whom the pope made over their county. Their coinage rights passed finally to the house of Aragon as lords of neighbouring Montpellier.

Rutebeuf in the Dit de l'Herberie⁵ or Cheapjack's Patter which depicts

the 'spiel' of a thirteenth-century vendor of cure-alls, has a passage which well demonstrates the monetary confusion existing in France at that period:

Or ostez les chaperons, tendez les oreilles, regardez mes herbes que ma dame envoie en cest país et en ceste terre; et por ce qu'ele vuet que li povres i puist aussi bien avenir come li riches, ele me dist que j'en feisse danree; quar tels a un denier en sa borse qui n'a pas cinq livres; et me dist et me comanda que je preisse un denier de la monoie qui corroit el país et an la contree ou je venroie: a Paris un parisi, a Orliens un orlenois, a Estampes un estampois, a Bar un barrois, a Viane un vianois, a Clermont un clermondois, a Dyjon un dijonnaois, a Mascon un masconois, a Tors un tornois, a Troies un treessien, a Rains un rencien, a Prouvins un provenoisien, a Amiens un moncien, a Arras un artisien, a Mans un mansois, a Chartres un chartain, a Londres en Aingleterre un esterlin; por du pain, por du vin a moi, por de faïn, por de l'avoïne a mon roncin; quar tels qui autel sert d'autel doit vivre.

Now take off your hoods and stretch your ears and look at my herbs that my lady is sending to this country and to this land; and because she wishes the poor man to be able to obtain them no less than the rich man, she told me to make them up in penny-worths; for a man may well have a penny in his purse who has not got a fiver, and she told me and ordered me to accept a penny of the money current in the country and in the district where I should come: in Paris a parisi, in Orleans an orlenois, in Etampes an estampois, in Bar a barrois, in Vienne a vianois, in Clermont a clermondais, in Dijon a dijonnaois, in Mâcon a masconois, in Tours a tournois, in Troies a treessien, in Reims a rencien, in Provins a provenoisien, in Amiens a penny of Mons, in Arras an artisien, in Le Mans a mansois, in Chartres a chartain, in London in England a penny sterling; to get bread and wine for myself and hay and oats for my nag, for one who serves an altar should live by the altar.

The different manuscripts vary the list.

It will be noted that the names of many of these assorted pennies end in -ois, and we shall examine the use of some of them at the rhyme in epic formulas. The numerous forms in -ien appear not to occur at the rhyme, as laisses in -ien are extremely rare in epic, but parisi, chartain and estrelin will also engage our attention.

I begin with the monetary system of the royal domain. The penny of the Capetian kings of France was originally 1 $\frac{2}{3}$ denier paris (Fig.6) of Paris. It was minted in a number of places besides the capital, the names of some of which appear on the coins. Paris is of fairly frequent occurrence at the rhyme or assonance in epic metres, in laisses in -i or -is, with the usual meaning of an object, person or action which is virtually worthless. I found seven examples in my texts and the dictionaries produce several more. The basic formula is vaillant un paris. For example:

Que n'en puisses conquerre vaillant un paris. Elie de St. Gille,
 That you cannot win so much of it as is worth a Paris 161.
 penny.

The supposed value is as often as not two paris:

Je ne quidase por tout l'or de Paris
 ler au matin, ains que fus miedis,
 Vers nos durassent vaillant deus paris. Raoul de Cambrai, 2646-8.

For all the gold of Paris I would not have thought yesterday morning before midday that they would have held out against us to the extent of two Paris pennyworth, so, at all.

and:

Je ne me pris vaillant deus paris. Ibid., 2805.
 I don't value myself at two Paris pennies.

Paris, like the other kinds of denier, can also be used of the coin itself:

Une grant mine li enfes prendre fist
 Et puis l'a fait emplir de paris. Huon de Bordeaux, 1491-2.

The young man had them take a great bushel measure and then fill it with paris.

Of all the ecclesiastical and baronial coinages one was destined to have an extraordinary career of success. The abbots of St. Martin of Tours had minted royal pennies already under the Carolingians, and under the Capetian and Anglo-Angevin dynasties continued to strike their characteristic denier tournois (Fig.7), with its so-called chastel design (really a degenerate version of the façade of a classical temple deriving ultimately from Roman antiquity). When in 1204 Philip Augustus, having annexed the continental possessions of King John, was settling the rates of exchange for the various deniers circulating

in his dominions he fixed the denier tournois at one and a quarter to the parisis.

Wishing also to discourage the use of the deniers of Anjou and Maine, which were the standard coinage of the former English provinces, he established mints in Tours and elsewhere in which he imitated the abbots' coinage, retaining SCS MARTINUS, Saint Martin, on the reverse and replacing the legend TURONUS CIVI for civitas, city of Tours on the obverse by PHILIPUS REX (Fig. 8). He then struck countless silver pennies of tournois standard, which are still common, and which competed successfully with the baronial coinages and also with the royal parisis. This policy was continued by Philip's successors, and though the parisis continued to be struck down to the end of the Middle Ages, as late as Charles VIII's reign, the tournois system triumphed and continued in use until the Revolution.

The denier tournois was widely imitated in the feudal coinage. Even so far as Outremer it was closely copied by the de la Roche, Dukes of Athens and the Villehardouin of Achaea; and the tornese remained the smallest copper coin of the Bourbons of Naples until the founding of the Kingdom of Italy.

Possibly because the great expansion of the circulation of the tournois took place after most of the epics had been composed, at a time when the formulas were already fixed, and because the use at the rhyme in laissez in -ois of some of the other coin names in -ois was well established before the intervention of Philip Augustus, I have only one example of its use in the usual meaning of derisory worth:

De mon service n'ai qi vaile un tornois. Raoul de Cambrai, 728.
For all my service I have not the value of a tournois.

There is also an example of tournois as the coin:

Plus puet despandre chascun jor estellins
Que nos ne fomes tornois o parisis. Les Narbonnais, 1965-6.
He can spend more pennies sterling a day than we can tournois
or parisis.

The early Norman dukes, beginning with William Longsword, 921-42, at first struck barbarous deniers of poor quality, but their practice of debasing their coinage for their own advantage caused friction with their subjects. After the failure of a compromise solution whereby they promised to mend their ways in return for a triennial fouage or hearth-tax, they gave up minting and preferred to allow the coinage of neighbouring territories to circulate in their own. Their successors as kings of England continued this policy.

Nevertheless, the poor quality coins struck by the dukes, mostly with blundered and even illegible legends replacing the RICHARDVS and ROTOM-AGUS CIVITAS, Richard (I or II) and city of Rouen, of their prototype (Fig. 9), continued to circulate alongside the superior mansois and angevins of Maine and Anjou which had replaced them as the coinage of Normandy. Known as romoisins or romesins (rotomagus -inus?) they provide a fairly frequently used measure of worthlessness in our texts. For example, we have:

Par Mahomet! ne vaus un romoisin
Se ne lor fez toz les membres tolir. Prise d'Orange, 1513-14.

By Mohammed, you are not worth a base Rouen penny if you don't have all their limbs cut off.

Despite the apparent acceptability of the explanation just given, romoisin/romesin poses some problems. Du Cange cites examples in Latin in both masculine and feminine forms. Romesina he defined as 'Monetae romanae species qua utebantur Baresnes in Apulia', a kind of Roman coin used by the people of Bari in Apulia, and he quotes the chronicle of Fulco of Benevento under the years 1139 and 1140, suggesting that it may have been some small Byzantine copper piece of slight value: 'incertum tamen an ita viliores ac sereas Constantinopolitanorum Augustorum monetas appellarint'; it is not certain if the name was given to the more worthless copper coins of the emperors of Constantinople. The masculine form romesinus Du Cange glosses as: 'monetae romanae species' and cites from a charter of an unidentified King Henry of England: 'Unum millenarium allecium vel quinque solidos romesinorum'; a thousand herrings and/or five sous (shillings) in romesins. He also quotes from Gregorio Grimaldi's History of the laws and magistracies of the kingdom of Naples, Book V, chap. 156: '... un antica moneta Romana, Romesine chiamata ... picciola detta follere'; an old Roman coin called a romesina ... a half farthing (?) ⁶ called a follis.

The explanation of the romesin as the Rouen denier agrees satisfactorily with Du Cange's quotation from King Henry's charter but it seems hardly likely that the base Norman pennies circulated in South Italy, where the coinage was partly of Byzantine origin and partly Arabic under the Norman dynasties. I can only suggest that the name may have been introduced by the Norman conquerors and was applied to the local copper coinage.

The two most important magnates whose coinage circulated in most of North-Western France except Brittany were the Counts of Maine and the Counts of Anjou. The mansois, or denier, of Maine or Le Mans (Fig. 10), is a good example of the immobilisation and persistence of a coin type. Herbert I, 1015-36, struck a good silver denier, with on the obverse his monogram ERBERTUS and

COMES CENO MANNIS, count of Le Mans, and on the reverse a cross with α and ω depending from the cross bar and the legend SIGNUM DEI VIVI, the sign of the living God. It has been suggested, but not proved, that the bishop of Le Mans was associated with Count Herbert, which would account for the reverse design. This type remained unchanged for over two centuries and mansois, ostensibly of Herbert I, were still circulating and being struck in the mid-thirteenth century. A similar immobilisation occurs in the English short-cross penny of Henry II which remained unchanged, retaining the inscription HENRICUS REX, from 1180 down to the middle of Henry III's reign in 1243, and more recently in the reverse (Britannia) type of our penny, unchanged from 1860 to 1970.

I have found mansois occasionally in the epics, once as the usual expression of minimal value:

Toute no terre nos met en tel destrois
 Qui n'i prenons valissant dous mansois. Girart de Viane [ed.
 Tarbé, p.5.]

He so lays waste all our land that we do not get two mansois value from it.

and a little more frequently as the coin itself:

Oncor ai je un setier de mensois. Les Narbonnais, 1565.

I still have a gallon measure of mansois left.

Even more important was the Count of Anjou who ultimately, in the person of Henry Plantagenet, inherited, absorbed or acquired by marriage almost all his neighbours' territories between the Scotch border and the Pyrenees and established that Anglo-Angevin empire which, though larger than the royal domain, so quickly disintegrated.

Count Folques Nerra, 987-1040, established the angevin with a denier with his monogram FULCO and GRACIA DI COMES on the obverse, and the usual cross with ANDECAVIS CIV for CIVITAS, city of Angers, on the other face. His successor, Geoffrey II, 1040-60, kept the monogram, substituting GOSFRIDUS COIS (for Comes) for GRACIA DI COMES and adding α and ω to the cross in imitation of his neighbour, Herbert of Le Mans. Foulques IV, 1060-1109, substituted his own name FULCO for GOSFRIDUS (Fig.11), but thereafter the angevin remained unchanged until driven out of circulation by the denier tournois in the thirteenth century.

Angevin is a convenient measure of worthlessness for use in epics as it

has a feminine angevine and so can be used in laisses assonating in -i or -iə and rhyming in -in or -ine. As such laisses are not very common, its use is rather infrequent. I found it five times in my texts both in the masculine:

L'une n'avra sanz l'autre vaillant un engevin ... Siège de
Barbastre, 2836.

The one will not have an Anjou penny's worth without the other.

and in the feminine:

Je ne vous laisseroie vaillant une angevine. Elie de St Gilles, 937.

I would not leave you the value of an angevin.

The dukes of Brittany struck anonymous deniers in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries with a cross on each face and the names of their three towns in Rennes, Nantes and Guingamp in which the coins were produced. Nantois (Fig.12) is the only one I have found in the usage with which we are concerned, and the only case I have found is in Rutebeuf's propaganda poem for St. Louis' last crusade, Li Diz de la Voie de Tunes:⁷

Chevalier qui ne suit ne pris pas un nantois.

I do not reckon at a nantois the worth of a knight who does not join up.

Orlenois (Fig.13), estampoïs (Fig.14) and masconnois (Fig.15) are also found rarely in this sense in epics. Orléans, Etampes and Mâcon were all really royal mints producing the royal coinage, but in the early period, and as late as the reign of Louis VII, the names of these towns appeared on the coins struck in them. Orlenois occurs in the concrete sense in Les Narbonnais, 2572:

Je nel vosisse por cent sous d'orlenois.

I could not wish it for a hundred sous in orlenois.

Raoul de Cambrai has an example of estampoïs in the usual sense of minimal value:

N'i ai conquis vaillant un estampoïs. Raoul de Cambrai, 723.

I have not gained an Estampes pennyworth by it.

And Jean Bodel makes a similar use of masconnois in Les Saisnes:

Ne vaut as Saisnes arme un denier masconnois. Jean Bodel,
Saisnes II, 187.

No weapon is worth a Mâcon penny to the Saxons, is of any
 use to them.

Already in the tenth century the Counts of Chartres were striking a clumsy and primitive denier (Fig. 16) on which no mention is made of any royal name. The reverse has the usual cross with CARTIS CIVITAS and the obverse an extremely abstract version of a human head with no inscription. This head type is common in the area South-West of Paris. It originates in a tenth-century type found at Chinon in Touraine and occurs in varying states of disintegration also on the coins of Blois, Vendôme, Châteaudun, Perche and Romorantin; the Chartres version is perhaps the most primitive of all. ⁸

The chartain occurs occasionally in the rather infrequent laisses in -ain in the epics. We have an example of vaillissant un chartain in Gaufrey:

Mes dessous ot la pel d'un mal serpent crestain
 Si qu'il n'en empira vaillissant un chartain. Gaufrey, 3508-9.

But under it he had the skin of an evil crested serpent so that
 it was not harmed to the extent of the value of a Chartres penny.

Occasionally foreign coins are used in the epics in the sense with which we are concerned. The balois (Fig. 17), the denier or pfennig of the bishops of Basel, a very thin uniface coin of the type known as a bracteate with incuse reverse, seems to have enjoyed the usual poor reputation, and is not infrequently found as a measure of worthlessness. It is not easy to see why as there were already available a considerable number of French pennies with names in -ois. I take an example from Raoul de Cambrai:

En cest païs n'ai ami si cortois
 Que vers ces deus me valsist un balois. Raoul de Cambrai, 721-2.

In this country I have no friend so courteous as to be worth a
 Basel penny to me compared to these two.

The pfennig of the Archbishops of Cologne, the collognois (Fig. 18), occurs in Aiol in a passage in which its exchange value is set relatively low, but it is not at the rhyme and does not indicate minimal worth:

Quatre saus porterés, fieus, de deniers;
 Ceus ferés a vostre oste sempre cangier.
 S'arés de collognois cinc saus u mieus. Aiol, 242-4.

My son you shall take four sous worth of pence and get your host to change them at once and you will have five sous worth or more of Cologne pennies.

And now finally, a word on the estrelin or esterlin. The English penny sterling was certainly the doyen of West European medieval coinage. Except for one deplorable episode in the sixteenth century, when Henry VIII debased it to put money in his pocket, the standard of the English coinage remained consistently at the Sterling rate of 925 thousandths pure silver down to 1920, though the penny, originally of the twenty-four grains of the Troy weight table, had been reduced to half that by Edward IV's time.

Philip Augustus fixed the rate of exchange of the estrelin in 1204 at three deniers tournois, and this rate still held good seventy years later when Edward I matched St Louis's gros tournois of twelve deniers with his fourpenny sterling groat. Thereafter the long and sorry tale of the debasement of the French coinage began.

The estrelin was an influential coin and gave a standard to much of the coinage of Northern Europe. The Renclus de Molliens⁹ tells us:

Ausi sont tout estrelinois
Yrois, Escot et li Danois,
Et Frison et chil de Hollande.
Tyois, Brabant et Avalois
Tienent des estrelins les lois
Et Flamant et le gent vermande. *Carité*, 25.1.

So the Irish, Scots and Danes, the Frisians and the men of Holland are all sterling folk. Low Germans, Brabanters and Lower Rhinelanders and the Flemings and the people of Vermandois all keep to the sterling standard.

From the fourteenth century Edward I's long-cross pennies (Fig. 19) were much imitated, usually in debased metal, by the feudal issuers of money on the continent. We have in France bogus or imitation estrelins put out by the Dukes of Lorraine (Fig. 20), the counts of Flanders, the bishops of Cambrai and Toul (Fig. 21), such minor personages as the counts of Chiny and the lords of Florennes (Fig. 22), and many more in Germany and the Low Countries. These, known as pollards, crockards or lushbournes,¹⁰ were not well thought of in England, where they could too easily pass as the current coin of the realm.

It is only fair to add that the deniers, doubles and gros tournois of the kings of France were even more assiduously imitated by their semi-independent subjects, who seem to have wavered between a wish to assert their importance

with original types of their own, and the desire to turn a dishonest penny by imitating those of their overlord in dubious bullion.

It is perhaps significant that I have found no example of estrelin as a measure of worthlessness though such may exist. It is occasionally used of the coin itself in a concrete sense:

D'esterlins blans la borse li empli. Gaydon, 104.

He filled his purse with glittering sterling pennies.

We have seen its superior value demonstrated in the passage already quoted from Les Narbonnais, 1965-6:

Plus puet despandre chascun jor estellins

Que nos ne fomes tornois o parisis. Les Narbonnais, 1965-6.

He can spend more pennies sterling a day than we can deniers tournois or parisis.

So with the estrelin, which in the period of composition of the epics was worth considerably more than the French pennies, I close this survey of the formulas of minimal worth.

DAVID J.A. ROSS
BIRKBECK COLLEGE, LONDON

NOTES

1. The editions quoted are:

La Chanson de Roland, ed. F. Whitehead, Oxford, 1942.
Aye d'Avignon, ed. S.J. Borg, Geneva, T.L.F., 1967.
Raoul de Cambrai, ed. P. Meyer and A. Longnon, Paris, S.A.T.F., 1882.
Le Charroi de Nîmes, ed. J.L. Perrier, Paris, c.f.m.â., 1966.
Le Chanson d'Aspremont, ed. L. Brandin, Paris, c.f.m.â., 1923-4.
Le Couronnement de Louis, ed. E. Langlois, Paris, c.f.m.â., 1925.
Parise la Duchesse, ed. F. Guessard and L. Larchey, Paris, 1860.
Simon de Pouille, ed. J. Baroin, Geneva, T.L.F. 1968.
Les Enfances Guillaume, ed. P. Henry, Paris, S.A.T.F., 1935.
Le Narbonnais, ed. H. Sucher, Paris, S.A.T.F., 1898.
Le Siège de Barbastre, ed. J.L. Perrier, Paris, c.f.m.â., 1926.
Huon de Bordeaux, ed. P. Ruelle, Brussels/Paris, 1960.
Jean Bodel, Chanson des Saisnes, F. Menzel and E. Stengel, Jean Bodels Saxonlied, Part I, Marburg, 1906; Part II, Marburg, 1909.
The Old French Roman d'Alexandre, Vol. II, ed. E.C. Armstrong, D.L. Buffum, B. Edwards and L.F.H. Lowe, Version of Alexandre de Paris, Critical Text, Princeton, Elliott Monographs 37, 1937.
Baudouin de Sebourc, (ed. L.N. Boca), Li Romans de Baudouin de Sebourc, 2 vols., Valenciennes, 1841.
Ogier le Danois, ed. J. Barrois, La Chevalerie Ogier de Danemarcke Paris, 1842.
Elie de St Gille, ed. G. Raynaud, Paris, S.A.T.F., 1879.
Girart de Viane, ed. P. Tarbé, Reims, 1850. Also ed. G. Yeandle, New York, 1930.
Gaufrey, ed. F. Guessard and P. Chabaille, Paris, 1859.
Aïol, ed. J. Normand and G. Raynaud, Paris, S.A.T.F., 1877.
Gaydon, ed. F. Guessard and S. Luce, Paris, 1862.
La Prise d'Orange, ed. C. Régnier, Paris, Bibl.fr. et romane Série B, edns. crit. de textes 5, 1966.

2. And see especially, J.J. Duggan, The Song of Roland, formulaic style and poetic craft, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1973.
3. C.W. Aspland, Epic Formulas and Formulaic Expressions containing the -ant forms in 12th century French Verse, St Lucia, Queensland Univ. Press, 1970. See also Duggan, op.cit.

READING MEDIEVAL STUDIES

4. The subject is treated, but not as a type of epic formula, in U.T. Holmes Jr., 'Coins of Little Value in Old French Literature', Medieval Studies XIX, 123-8.
5. Text from A. Kressner, Rustebuefs Gedichte, Wolfenbüttel, 1885, p.119, ll.1-16. E. Faral and J. Bastin, Oeuvres complètes de Rutebeuf, Vol.II, Paris, 1960, 278 print a shorter version. 'a Amiens un moncien'. The text reads: 'a miens un moucien'. Possibly we should read: 'a Mons un moncien, in Mons a moncien'. The final phrase, 'car tels qui ... vivre' is an ecclesiastical proverb.
6. Picciole was a small copper coin current in Florence worth less than a farthing.
7. Ed. Kressner, pp.41-5, l.52. Ed. Faral and Bastin, Vol.I, 461-8.
8. The most accessible illustrations of these and the other feudal coins mentioned here are in E. Boudeau, Catalogue général illustré ... de Monnaies Françaises (Provinciales), Reprint, Paris, 1970, pp.25-32.
9. A.G. Van Hamel, Li Romans de Carité et Miserere, du Renclus de Moilliens, Paris, 1885, Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes, Fasc. 61 & 62, p.14.
10. From Luxembourg, John the Blind being a particularly shameless offender.

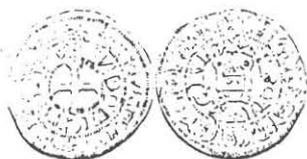


Fig. 1. Gros Tournois of St Louis

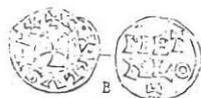


Fig. 2. Maille Poitevine of Melle

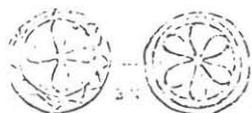


Fig. 3. Debased Denier (Poujois) of Le Puy

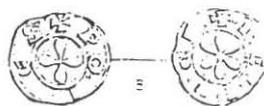


Fig. 4. 'POJES DEL PVEI' with Legend in French



Fig. 5. Denier Melgoire of the Counts of Melgueil

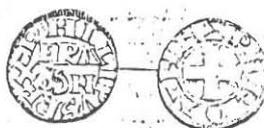


Fig. 6. Denier Parisi of Philip II (Augustus) struck at Peronne

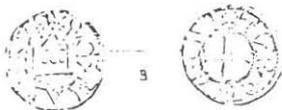


Fig. 7. Denier Tournois of the Abbots of St Martin de Tours

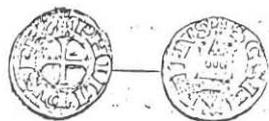


Fig. 8. Denier Tournois of Philip II (Augustus)

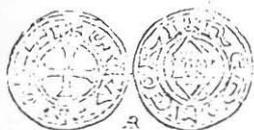


Fig. 9. Illegible Denier of the Dukes of Normandy. A Romesin

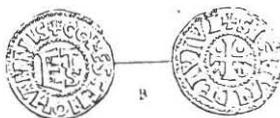


Fig. 10. Mansois. Denier of Herbert I of Maine

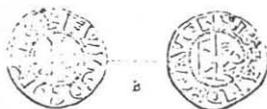


Fig. 11. Angevin of Fulk V of Anjou

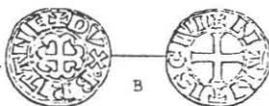


Fig. 12. Mantois. Anonymous Denier of the Dukes of Brittany

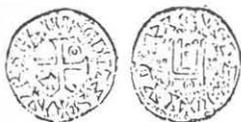


Fig. 13. Orlenois. Royal Denier struck at Orleans

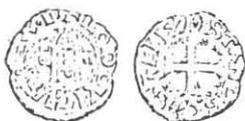


Fig. 14. Estampois. Royal Denier struck at Etampes

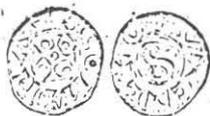


Fig. 15. Masconnois. Royal Denier struck at Macon

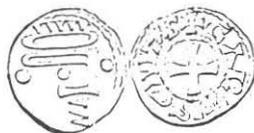


Fig. 16. Chartain. Anonymous Denier of the Counts of Chartres

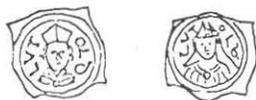


Fig.17. Two Balois. Bracteate Pfennigs of Bishop Lutold of Basel (1238-49)

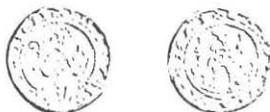


Fig.18. Colognois. Pfennig of ABP. Philip of Heinsberg (1167-91)

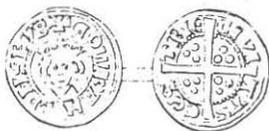


Fig.19. Estrelin. Long cross Penny of Edward I or II



Fig.20. Estrelin of Raoul Duke of Lorraine (1329-46)

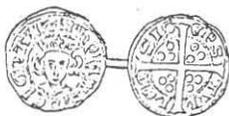


Fig.21. Estrelin of Thomas de Bourlemont, Bishop of Toul (1330-53)

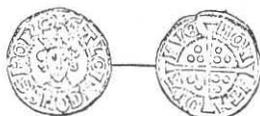


Fig.22. Estrelin of Gaucher de Chatillon as Lord of Florennes