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The Greek Inscriptions on the Coinage of Count Baldwin II of Edessa (1100-18)

Alan V. Murray[1]

The county of Edessa was the first of the four principalities founded in the Near East in the course of the First Crusade (1096–99). It was established during the winter of 1097–98 when the crusader Baldwin of Boulogne, brother of Godfrey of Bouillon, liberated several towns and strongholds in northern Syria and Upper Mesopotamia from Turkish rule with the help of local Christian Armenian allies. By 1100 the county comprised a significant territory on both sides of the Euphrates, covering an area roughly equivalent to the modern provinces of Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa in south-eastern Turkey, with its main centres at Edessa (mod. Şanlıurfa), Turbessel (mod. Tilbeşar), Ravendel (mod. Ravenda kale) and Duluk (mod. Dülük). The immigrant Westerners, known both to themselves and the native peoples as Franks, formed a small minority; the majority population consisted largely of Armenian- and Syriac-speaking Eastern Christians.[2]

The county was the first of the Frankish principalities to issue coins. There are several different series attributed to Baldwin I of Boulogne (1098–1100), Baldwin II of Bourcq (1100–18), Richard of the Principate of Salerno (regent while Baldwin II was in Turkish captivity in 1104-8), Joscelin I (1119–31) and Joscelin II (1131–50). Apart from a unique coin with a Syriac legend attributed to Joscelin II, the language used on all the comital coinages was Greek.[3] The aim of this short article is to consider what one aspect of the Greek legends may reveal about the cultural background of the production of coins in Edessa.

There is still uncertainty about the relative chronology of the different issues in the name of Count Baldwin, but a recent breakthrough has been made by Stefan Heidemann in his study of the towns of northern Syria and northern Mesopotamia. He noted that some of a group of coins, hitherto regarded as being of uncertain date, were overstruck on 'black dirhams' circulating in the region before the arrival of the First Crusade (Fig 1). This must therefore be the earliest comital issue, attributable to either Baldwin I or to the earlier part of the reign of

[1] I am grateful to Marcus Phillips for his assistance and helpful suggestions in the preparation of this article. Any errors are my own.

[2] Laurent 1924; Amouroux-Mourad 1988; Dédéyan, 2003, 1: 5–360, 2: 1057–75.

[3] Schlumberger 1878, pp. 10–25; Porteous 1975, pp. 169–82; Metcalf 1995, pp. 33–39. There are also a number of dubious attributions to the coinage of the counts of Edessa (M. Phillips, personal communication, 6 July 2022).

Baldwin II. The style and fabric of these coins is relatively crude. The reverse shows a cross in a roundel, surrounded by the legend ΣTAYP I-C NIXACI, which Heidemann (following Casanova) read as *staur(e) Iēs(ou) nikas*, i.e. 'cross of Jesus, (you) are victorious'.[4] The obverse shows a legend in four horizontal rows, reading +BA / ΓΔOY / INXO / MI. Heidemann sees this as Latin *Balduinus comes*, but the letters, like most of the legends on other series, are clearly Greek; the final word would be better understood as *komēs*, being regularly used in medieval Greek as the equivalent of Latin *comes*.

Figure 1 here

There are peculiarities in the realisation of individual letters on the obverse legend. One could understand the letter chi (X) being used in error (or as a blundered form) for the correct initial kappa (K) in *komēs*, but it is difficult to explain why the third letter of the count's name is shown as a gamma (Γ) rather than a lambda (Λ) which would be correct for Greek, or Latin rendered in Greek letters. Is this simply poor workmanship or might there be another explanation?

Additional evidence can be found in a small copper follis, whose superior design and realisation suggests that it probably dates from later than the series overstruck on the black dirhams. Baldwin I was in charge of the county only from early 1098 until October 1100, when he left to take up the succession to the kingdom of Jerusalem on the death of his brother, Godfrey of Bouillon. In view of Baldwin I's relatively short reign in Edessa I think it likely that the follis belongs to the eighteen-year reign of his successor (and distant cousin) Baldwin II. Examples with relatively complete legends are scarce. Two are illustrated below (Figs 2 and 3).[5]

Figure 2 here

[4] Casanova 1897, pp. 533–4; Metcalf 1995, p. 36; Heidemann 2002, pp. 181–3, 460–1.
[5] The illustration on the website of the Museum of the Order of St John transposes obverse and reverse.

Figure 3 here

The obverse shows the count standing facing left, clad in a knee-length coat of mail and a conical, 'Norman-style' helmet with noseguard, holding a small cross in the right hand and a sheathed sword at the waist in the left. The reverse shows a floriated cross with three roundels in each of the four quadrants formed by the arms. The obverse legend was reproduced by Schlumberger and Metcalf as ΒΑΛΔΟΥΙΝΟΣ ΔΟΥΛΟ(Σ) (ΤΟΥ) ΣΤΑΥ(ΡΟΥ), i.e. *Baldouinos doulo(s) (tou) stau(rou)*, meaning 'Baldwin servant of the Cross'; this wording explains the symbolism of the cross on both sides, proclaiming Baldwin's status as a Christian ruler in an area liberated from Turkish rule.[6] Yet, while the meaning of the legend is clear, a close inspection of the coin suggests that a more accurate representation of the actual characters would be:

B□Γ□oÂINOC □oÂ□O C0Â~

The second character (0) of the abbreviated final word is evidently a ligature which combines the characters tau (T) and alpha (A) by showing a horizontal bar running across the apex of the alpha. By contrast, the alpha in the first word has a bar to the left of the apex only. The lambda (□) in *doulo(s)* also has a leftward bar at the top, but is distinguished from the alpha in having no horizontal bar across the middle. The two characters intended to represent delta (□) in the first and second words are both indistinct; they show some resemblance to the alpha but it is difficult to say whether this is a result of poor execution or confusion by the engraver. The three ypsilons are realised as V rather than Y. The most unusual feature, however, is that on this coin and other examples illustrated by Schlumberger and Metcalf the third character of Count Baldwin's name is quite distinctly shown as a gamma (Γ) rather than the lambda which one would expect in its Greek form. So the complete legend can be read in the standard transliteration of Greek as *Bagdouinos doulo stau-*.

This anomaly raises the question why the count's name is spelled *Bagdouinos* rather than the usual Greek-language form *Baldouinos*. The engraver clearly knew how to produce a correct lambda, since this character appears in *doulo(s)*; the Γ character thus cannot simply be

[6] Schlumberger 1878, pp. 18–19; Metcalf 1995, p. 34; Metcalf and Willis 1979.

regarded as a badly rendered Λ. A final piece of evidence for this practice can be seen in a cruder type of the lighter Baldwin follis, showing the letters B/A/Γ running vertically to the left of the knight. The remainder of the name, i.e. Δ/O/I/N, is placed on the right but is illegible on this piece. The whole inscription is therefore clearly meant as an abbreviated form of *Bagdouinos*. The obverse has a floriated cross similar to that of the previous example.

Figure 4 here

We thus have examples of a substitution of Γ for Λ in the name of Count Baldwin on three issues from the period 1100 to 1118. An explanation may be found in the sociolinguistic situation of the county of Edessa. Relatively few Franks settled there: they were mostly nobles, knights and clerics. The defence and administration of the county depended to a large extent on the much more numerous Armenian population. Most of this group belonged to the Armenian Apostolic Church, but a minority which had traditions of service in the Byzantine empire adhered to the Greek Orthodox Church, which was regarded as being in communion with the Latin Church of the Franks. As the Armenians had a warrior aristocracy, unlike many of the other Christian communities of the region, many of those belonging to the Greek Church were regarded as suitable marriage partners for the Frankish nobility; Baldwin I, Baldwin II and Joscelin I, as well as many of their vassals, took wives from leading Armenian families.[7]

French, Armenian and Syriac were all spoken by different communities in the county of Edessa, but Greek had a high degree of recognition. It was used as a means of communication between various ethnic groups in the region generally and had a high status.[8] The county of Edessa had close political ties with the neighbouring principality of Antioch, which had considerable populations of ethnic Greeks in the cities of Antioch and Laodikeia.[9] Finally, there was a wide circulation of Byzantine coins and imitations thereof in the period leading up

[7] Laurent 1924; MacEvitt 2008; Forse 1991; Hodgson 2011; Arutjunova-Fidanjan 1988.
[8] Thus after Baldwin II succeeded to the throne of Jerusalem in 1118, his Armenian wife, Morfia, used a seal with Greek inscriptions. Mayer and Sode 2014, pp. 89–90.
[9] Edgington 2006; Murray 2018.

to the First Crusade, which meant that the inhabitants of the region were used to seeing coins with Greek inscriptions.[10]

A post-vocalic /l/ in Greek names was often rendered in Armenian as a voiced velar fricative represented by the phonetic symbol [ɣ], and in modern transcription as <gh> (alternatively as <ł>), and a similar development seems to have occurred with Western names, which may have been transmitted into Armenian through the medium of Greek. One of the principal sources for the reign of Baldwin II is the Armenian chronicler Matthew of Edessa, who completed his history at some point before 1137. When referring to the count, Matthew uses the name form *Baghdoyn*.[11] The original voiced plosive represented in writing by Γ in classical Greek was by the eleventh century realised as a voiced fricative which was equivalent to the <gh> sound in Armenian. The count's name on the follis would thus most accurately be transcribed phonetically as *Baghdouinos*. This form was in all likelihood precisely how an Armenian engraver might hear the name and attempt to reproduce it on a coin die in Greek letters; as this spelling was evidently accepted by the moneyer, it would also seem that his knowledge of Greek cannot have been perfect. Thus, while Greek, rather than Latin or Armenian, was the preferred language for the coinage of the counts of Edessa, the inscriptions discussed here suggest that during the reign of Baldwin II the minting of coins in Edessa involved Armenian personnel. These considerations explain a hitherto puzzling anomaly in the inscriptions on comital coinage and also provide a small but significant piece of evidence of the role played by Armenians in the mechanisms of Frankish rule.

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[10] Phillips 2019.
[11] Matthew of Edessa 1869, 1: 52 (Armenian text with French translation); Andrews 2021. I am indebted to Prof. Tara Andrews (University of Vienna) for information on the name form in Armenian (personal communication, 30 April 2021).

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CAPTIONS

Fig. 1. Coin of Baldwin of Edessa overstruck on base Islamic dirham (2.48g, 21x16mm). Spink (London) auction 238 (27 June 2016), lot 2021.

Fig. 2. Follis of Baldwin II of Edessa (2.27g, 23mm). © Museum of the Order of St John and University of Birmingham 2016, object number LDOSJ ED3. PLEASE TRANSPOSE THE TWO IMAGES, and rotate the new right hand image by 180 degrees (the images were supplied by the Museum, which displays them incorrectly on its website)

Fig. 3. Follis of Baldwin II Edessa (5.49g, 24mm). CNG (Lancaster PA) Triton auction 25 (11 Jan. 2022), lot 1105

Fig. 4. Follis of Baldwin II Edessa (3.27g, 21mm). *Numismatik Naumann* (Vienna) auction 43 (1 May 2016), lot 1154