

THE COINAGE OF THE GENOESE SETTLEMENTS OF THE WESTERN BLACK SEA SHORE AND ON THE DANUBE

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During the 13th-15th centuries the historical sources frequently mention the presence of the Genoese in the area of the Western Black Sea shore, on the present territories of Bulgaria, Romania and south-western Ukraine (Bessarabia). The deeds so far published show that the ports of Messembria, Anchialos, Varna, Kaliakra, Vicina, Chilia, Licostomo and Moncastro were the main places which focused the attention of the Genoese merchants, but it is quite reasonable to suppose that some other towns, as those located at Nufâru, Isaceea, Hârşova, Cernavoda (in Romania) or Silistra (in Bulgaria), near the Danubian Delta, were visited as well. Certainly, the huge economic potential of the Black Sea region was known to the Genoese since the second half of the 12th century, but they could play an important role only after 1261, when the Byzantine Empire recovered Constantinople and opened the Bosphorus. Soon, from the 1280's, the Genoese established permanent prosperous and powerful commercial communities in the main centres of the area, which were granted by the local authorities with the right to establish their own quarters, legal, financial and religious institutions. Often, these communities were large enough to be lead by consuls or vice-consuls¹.

It was a long way, however, from the economic penetration to achieving the political control, to which the right to struck their own coinage was directly connected. Judging by the formal prohibition contained in their "Statuti" for the local Genoese authorities of the main Eastern establishments of Pera and Caffa to engage in any kind of activities related to the coinage, provisions reinforced several times over the next decades, it should be hard enough to conceive that the new Overseas communities were always ready to launch themselves in such enterprises. On the other hand, because the largest part of the international trade of the Genoese merchants undertaken in the Aegean or the Black Sea regions was carried-out using the local coinages: Byzantine hyperpera, Golden Horde, Trapezuntine or various Turkish aspers, cast silver ingots (sommi), or Venetian gold ducats², there was little pressure to strike their own coinage, as long as the local or foreign currency was sufficiently available and stable enough to cover the needs of the commercial traffic. Due to the fact that the right to strike its own coinage was during the Middle Ages a mark of full autonomy or sovereignty, if such a right was not the result of a unilateral grant of an overlord toward a vassal ruler, it could only be achieved or imposed by the use of force.

Or for quite a long while, the balance of the military power between the local rulers and the Genoese in the Western Black Sea area was utterly unequal, so they were content to limit their actions and to enjoy only the granted economic advantages. During the last decades of the 13th century, at the very moment of the foundation of the first Genoese trade colonies, the region of the Black Sea and Danubian shores from Messembria to Vicina was more or less under the Byzantine rule. In some cases, such as the region of the Mouths of the Danube, the present day Dobrudja, some local Christian lordships of Byzantine tradition existed under the overlordship of the Mongol ruler Noghay. All the territories northward of the Danube till the

¹ Balard 1978 (I), 143-150; Iliescu 1989, 26-29; Papacostea 1985, 29-42; Papacostea 1997, 277-283.

² Balard 1978 (II), 643-672.

Dnester, where the town of Moncastro was located, and beyond it, were under the direct control of the Golden Horde. Later, starting with 1285-6, the Mongols gradually extended their domination over the territories situated south of the Danube, over Dobrudja and Northeastern parts of Bulgaria, till Varna³. During the first half of the 14th century the region situated between Varna and Messembria was the theatre of the struggle between the Byzantine Empire and Bulgaria for its control (*IB* 1982 302-43). For the largest part of the period the region remained under the Imperial rule, although starting with the 1320's a local Christian lordship emerged in the area between Kaliakra, Karbona and Varna, in the "Land of Karbona", which kept strong contacts with the Constantinopolitan authorities⁴.

The first opportunities for the Genoese authorities from the region of the Western Black Sea shore to create fully autonomous political constructions appeared during the troubled times from the beginnings of the 14th century, and especially after 1361, when the Golden Horde entered a period of continuous civil wars for almost two decades. Although in the new circumstances the political and military power fell for a while into the hands of the Mongol warlords from the border areas, their authority was far less overwhelming than that of the former Khans of the Golden Horde. On the other hand, in the ever shifting political environment the Genoese communities, now strong enough, had better chances to impose their aims and to establish their complete control over some restricted areas, although displaying few formal external marks of the local rulers (the payment of the tributes and the display of their tamghas on the coins).

Unlike the Aegean region or Crimea, where the coinage related to the local Genoese political structures was studied since the 19th century, the coinage of the area of the Western Black Sea became known quite recently, only after the mid 1950's, thanks to the researches of Octavian Iliescu. He first published two bronze follari or puls, bearing on one side the representations of what he considered to be the tamgha of the Mongol khans of the Golden Horde. According to Iliescu some of the coins were struck in A.H. 810 = 8.06.1407 - 28.04.1408⁵. Later, the same author did not mention anymore that the coins belong, actually, to two very distinct types. But on those occasions Iliescu corrected some of his own wrong suppositions concerning the chronology of these issues. He largely dated them in the 14th century, and considered that they have been struck by a Genoese colony from the area of the Mouths of the Danube, located somewhere in the modern Northern Dobrudja⁶.

This later work of Iliescu was the main source of information on the local coinage used by G. Lunardi in his standard work on the coinage of the Genoese establishments from Levant. Unfortunately, Lunardi, in spite of the lack of any further evidences, asserted that these coins must have been issued by a supposed Genoese colony in Vicina, a famous and elusive 13th-14th century commercial centre in the area of the Mouths of the Danube, often mentioned by the Genoese, Venetian and Byzantine sources⁷. Quite recently Konstantin Khromov, who seems to ignore the later researches on this topic, had accepted this attribution⁸.

³ Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1987, 245-258; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1993, 291-304; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1997B, 93-120.

⁴ Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru 1976, 13-20; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1988, 108-117.

⁵ Iliescu 1958, 456, no 21, pl. 2, no 2-3.

⁶ Iliescu 1971, 261-266; Iliescu 1977a, 163.

⁷ Lunardi 1980, 139-141, LR 1.

⁸ Khromov 1999, 17.

Relaying on several mentions of the name of “*asperi de Chili*” or “*asperi boni et spendibiles de Chili*” found in the Genoese deeds concluded between 1360-1361, and that of the “*asperi de Licostomo*”, found in some records from 1383 and 1398, O. Iliescu thought that two other Genoese mints were active in the area of the Danube Delta during the second half of the 14th century⁹. D. M. Metcalf also discussed this question, but he was rather cautious in accepting the existence of such mints¹⁰.

In his work on the Genoese coinage in Romania, O. Iliescu put on the behalf of the town of Moncastro (also called during the Middle Ages *Asprokastro*, *Aqkerman* or *Cetatea Albă*) a series of bronze coins, with the tamgha of Noghay on the obverse and a Greek cross on the reverse, surrounded by a so-called Arabic inscription. According to him this issue was struck before 1299¹¹. Lunardi too followed this attribution and dating¹², but by misunderstanding the complexity of the local historical evolution of Moncastro during the 15th century, the Italian author considered as being local Genoese issues two other kinds of coins of this town¹³.

During the last 25 years a lot of progresses were made in the field of the coinage of the Genoese settlements from the Western Black Sea shore and the region of the Mouths of the Danube. Today the general landscape of the local coinage related to the Genoese authorities is far simpler than the image projected by the previous works of Iliescu and Lunardi, because the attributions of many coin types considered so far as “*Genoese*” were reconsidered. At the same time, a lot of the historical questions raised by the coinage of the Genoese settlements are far more complicated than it was previously presumed, and we should accept that so far, for some of them, there are no clear answers.

Actually, from the entire local medieval coinage of the region of the Western Black Sea shore and of the Mouths of the Danube, there are only two issues, which could be connected with the Genoese presence in this area during the 14th century. The earliest issue, which seems to be also the earliest local Genoese coinage from the entire Black Sea and Aegean area so far known are the bilingual follari or puli, bearing on the obverse the tamgha of the Mongol khans of the Djuchi dynasty (the rulers of the Golden Horde), the date of the minting – A.H. 711, 712 and possibly 707 (A. H. 1310-1311, 1311-1312 and possibly 1307-1308), and the Arabic figure 75¹⁴. On the reverse is represented a “*Maltese*” cross, having in the quarters the Latin inscription *S/A/T/Y* or variants. In spite of the great number of coins studied so far there were found neither issues dated A. H. 754 (A.D. 1353) nor A. H. 777 (1375-6) as Iliescu and Lunardi thought¹⁵.

The coins always bear on the obverse the mention of their face value, 75 puli, an account unit for the bronze coinage of the Golden Horde, where during the 14th century puli of 16 puli and 40 puli were struck.

Because until quite recently their inscription remained unread the place of their minting was elusive. The meaning of the inscription was solved in 1981, when it was read as **SATY**,

⁹ Iliescu 1971, 261-266; Iliescu 1974, 451-456; Andreescu 1981, 1736.

¹⁰ Metcalf 1979, 332.

¹¹ Iliescu 1977a, 162-163, pl. II, 2.

¹² Lunardi 1980, 142, LR 2 MONCASTRO.

¹³ Lunardi 1980, 143-144, LR 3-4.

¹⁴ Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1995-1996, 193 and note no 3.

¹⁵ Iliescu 1977b, 152; Lunardi 1980, 139-141, LR 1.

for Sat(c)y = Sāqčy, the name of the modern town Isaccea (Tulcea County, Romania), situated on the Danube, 37 km upstream from Tulcea¹⁶.

The name of the town was mentioned as *ساقى* or *صاقى* in the Arabic, Ottoman and Western European sources, as being one of the main centres of the Golden Horde and Ottoman Empire during the 13th-18th century. During the second half of 13th century, ca. 1273-1286, Sāqčy was the capital of a local Christian lordship of Byzantine tradition, using Greek as the official language. There were struck at least one issue of silver aspron and three types of anonymous bronze follari or puls, having on the obverse the tamgha of the Noghaides, as a mark of acknowledgement of the overlordship of this famous Mongol ruler of the Western parts of the Golden Horde. After 1286 the town, as well as the largest part of Dobrudja, fell into the hands of the Mongols and the name of the mint of Sāqčy appears on the silver and bronze coins with Arabic and Uyghur inscriptions struck for the rulers of the Golden Horde and, later on, around 1296-1301, for the Noghaides. During the last decade of the 13th century Sāqčy was the capital of the "Empire" of Noghay and his elder son Chaka, who rebelled against the legitimate ruler of the Golden Horde, Toqta (1291-1312). After a bloody civil war won by a last chance victory by Toqta, the town of Sāqčy kept its previous importance and it was given as a highly prestigious fief to very senior members of the Djuchi dynasty, such as the sons or the brothers of the Great Khan. Despite the presence in the town of the highest representatives of the imperial family of the Golden Horde after 1301, the idea of a dissident Western Mongol Empire did not perish with the death of Noghay and Chaka and all the lords appointed by Toqta to rule the area of the Mouths of the Danube were, finally, involved in rebellions against their relatives, and tried to re-establish an autonomous Mongol state at the Lower Danube and on the Western shores of the Black Sea¹⁷.

The representation on the coins of the specifically shaped cross and the use of the Latin inscription in an area and time when only the Greek, Arabic or Uyghur were previously used in the coinage represents a clear mark that the issuing authority was of Western origin, although it recognised the overlordship of the Khans of the Golden Horde by putting their tamgha on the obverse. And there are little doubts that the only Westerners strongly represented in the Black Sea area at the beginnings of the 14th century were the Genoese. We ignore any detail on the circumstances, which led to the creation of the Genoese lordship of Sāqčy, because so far the only witnesses of its existence are the coins struck during the years 1307-1311. It is quite strange that the period covered by the coinage largely coincides with the times when the Genoese-Mongol relationships in Crimea underwent the first major crisis ever known, which led to the arrest of the Western merchants within the Golden Horde, to the siege and the abandon of Caffa for several years¹⁸. It is rather unclear if the territory of the former lordship of Sāqčy was given to a Genoese citizen as fief, in reconnaissance of some kind of special services, by Toqta himself, just before the worsening of the relations with his fellow countrymen, or if the transfer of the political leadership was a consequence of a violent initiative of some local Genoese community to take advantage of the continuous conflicts among the members of the ruling family of the Golden Horde for the control of the Danubian regions and of the crisis which shook the Golden Horde during the early years of the 14th

¹⁶ Oberländer-Târnoveanu and Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1981, 100-102, "Genoese-Tartar Issues, 1st type".

¹⁷ Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1987, 245-258; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1993, 291-304; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1995-1996, 191-214; Ciociltan 1998, 230-244.

¹⁸ Balard 1978 (I), 152-153.

century. If the second scenario was followed, the new rulers of Sāqčy tried to make-up the usurpation by putting the tamgha of the Djuchi dynasty on the obverse of their coins as a formal acknowledgement of the overlordship of the Great Khan of Saray.

Even though they are anonymous and bear the tamgha of the Djuchi dynasty, the bronze coins of the Genoese lordship of Sāqčy represent a very unusual practice on the territories of the Golden Horde at that times, were the right of the coinage was considered until the late 14th century as belonging exclusively to the Supreme Khan. Although, being the first, so far, known local Genoese monetary issues from Levant, the coins struck at Sāqčy announce the basic model of later coinage of this kind developed later in the Black Sea area:

1. Anonymous issues, but using some elements from the Genoese heraldry and the name of the issuing town.

2. The use of the tamghas of the local dynasties.

3. The issued denominations follow the local monetary standards.

The coins struck by the Genoese lordship of Sāqčy were found almost exclusively locally, at Isaccea and its surroundings (Niculițel, comm. of Niculițel, Tulcea County), Nufăru (comm. of Nufăru, Tulcea County), or in Southern Dobruđja, at Păcuiul lui Soare (Galița, comm. of Ostrov, Constantza County) and Silistra (Bulgaria). Very few other finds from more far away places, as Staryi Krym (Crimea) or the area of Varna (Bulgaria) were so far published¹⁹.

Despite their relative rarity (only about 80 pieces are known so far), the analysis of the variants of the coin dies used shows that the amount of these issues was actually quite important. The coins of the Genoese lordship of Sāqčy have very strong stylistic and metrological connections with the previous issues of the mint, struck during the autonomous (ca. 1273-1285) or the Golden Horde and Noghaide periods (ca. 1286-1307).

The second monetary type, which could be put in connection with the Genoese control over some territories from the Mouths of the Danube, is represented by few anonymous follari bearing on the obverse the tamgha of an unknown ruler, and on the reverse a “Maltese” cross on a step. The coins were first published by Iliescu²⁰, but later they were confused with the issues of the Genoese lordship of Sāqčy. Actually, the issue was rediscovered and properly described only in 1981²¹.

Due to the absence of any references to the names of the ruler, of the mint, or of the issuing date on the coins, as well as to the rarity of their finds, the task of establishing the minting authority and the chronology of this issue is quite a hard one. The only sure thing is that the owner of the tamgha represented on the obverse of the coins was not at all related either to the Djuchi dynasty of the Golden Horde, or to the Noghaides, whose emblems were represented on the local coinage from late 13th or early 14th century. The tamgha, whose design was obviously influenced by the Genoese emblem, the city gate – “Ianua”, could only belong to a local ruler of a political entity split-out from the Golden Horde, during the period of the dissolution of the Mongol Empire. Or such a possibility could only happen during the 1360’s -

¹⁹ Oberländer-Târnoveanu and Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1981, 105-106, nos 76-107; Oberländer-Târnoveanu and Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1989, 127-128, nos 33-44; Khromov 1999, 17; Mănușu-Adameșteanu 2000-2001, 672, no 220; Lazarov 2004, 372-373, no 4.

²⁰ Iliescu 1958, 456, no 21, pl. II, no 3.

²¹ Oberländer-Târnoveanu and Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1981, 92 and 106, nos 109-112, “Genoese-Tartar Issues, 2nd type”.

1370's, when the civil war ravaged the Golden Horde and led the once mighty Empire to the brink of the disintegration and at the mercy of its neighbours: Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Wallachia, Moldavia and the Genoese of Caffa. This period, which begins after the death of Birdibek (1359-1361), represents precisely the time when the historical sources started to mention the names of some border area Tartar lords, who tried to stop only with their own forces the attacks of the neighbouring states, or to establish diplomatic and commercial agreements with them as fully autonomous rulers. Such secessionist trends must have been developed even more quickly in the area of the Mouths of the Danube, which always had a strong tendency toward independence, being always a periphery situated too far from the main centres of the Mongol power established in the steppes along the Lower Volga and having a mixed population, the largest part of them being Christians, settled farmers or urban inhabitants.

Corroborating any so far available information the existence of an autonomous local political structure of Tartar tradition could be dated around 1362-late 1370's or early 1380's, just before the extension of the Wallachian and Moldavian control over northern Dobrudja and southern Bessarabia. O. Iliescu thought that the tamgha could have belonged to "Demetrius, Princeps Tartarorum", mentioned during the 1360's as being involved in the events underwent in the Lower Danubian area²².

During this period there is attested for the first time the direct Genoese rule over some settlements of the Western shores of the Black Sea. One of them was located in the region of the Mouths of the Danube, at Licostomo. Unlike other Genoese communities from the Black Sea area, which were led only by consuls, the contemporary sources mention that the "isle and the stronghold of Licostomo" were under the jurisdiction of the consuls and "governors", representing a Mahona organised to finance the defence of the place and its economic exploitation. These officials had under command a garrison consisting in mercenaries and some ships, a military force large enough to deter the threats posed either by the local or regional enemies and to protect the economic interest of the local trading community and its autonomy. The Genoese rule over Licostomo will continue at least until the first years of the 15th century²³. Licostomo was not the only settlement occupied by the Genoese in Dobrudja, during the last decades of the 14th century. Recent studies proved that during 1396-1402 Kaliakra, on the Black Sea shore was controlled by a Genoese "capitaneus", and Salagruso di Negro, a Genoese citizen seized the fortress of Galata, located to the south of Varna in 1403-1404²⁴.

The Genoese lordship responsible for the issue of the bronze coinage bearing on the obverse the tamgha of that unknown local ruler was hypothetically located at Chilia (comm. of Chilia Veche, Tulcea County)²⁵, or at Enisala (comm. of Sarichioi, Tulcea County), on the shores of the Razim Lake²⁶. These attributions were based on the distribution of the coin finds. The largest part of the coins were found at Enisala, where is located an impressive Western style fortress. Other finds are reported at Chilia and Isaccea. But I consider that the distribution of the coin finds so far published is not an entirely reliable criterion to locate the mint. The fact that the largest part of the coins of this type so far published came from Enisala (about 13 specimens), could be explained because they were found during the archaeological diggings in the fortress. Meanwhile, such researches are not undergone so far at Chilia. At Chilia the situation is more complicated because

²² Brătianu 1965, 39-46; Iliescu 1977, 166-170.

²³ Balard 1978 (I), 146-147; Papacostea 1985, 29-42.

²⁴ Papacostea 1997, 277-283.

²⁵ Oberländer-Târnoveanu and Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1981, 102.

²⁶ Iliescu 1997, 161-167.

even the possibility to access the stray finds is severely limited by the thick layers of mud carried by the Danube since the late 15th century, when the “Old” Byzantine and Genoese town was demolished, abandoned and covered by the deltaic deposits and vegetation.

So, until more accurate data will be available, is it quite difficult to locate the mint, which issued the Genoese-Tartar follari of the 2nd type. Chilia and Enisala should be the best placed candidates, but Licostomo could also be another suitable candidate.

The style of these coins is very peculiar, being totally different compared to any other 14th century issue not only struck in the Mouths of Danube region, but also from the entire Black Sea basin. It is obvious that these issues had no connections with the previous local minting traditions. I think that this peculiarity is due to the fact that the personal of the mint were Westerners, probably Genoese and they were certainly highly skilled.

The medium weight of 12 coins, 0.77 g, is far lower than the weight of any other previous bronze issues from the region of the Mouths of the Danube. It is also clearly different of the metrological standards used for the contemporary issues of the Golden Horde puls, but surprisingly quite near to the medium weight of the Byzantine bronze coinage struck during the last quarter of the 14th century.

Judging by the scarcity of the preserved specimens (only about 15 are known so far), the mint only worked for a very short period and the amount of the issue was limited to some tenth of thousands specimens, although several pairs of dies were used. The issue was conceived to cover only the needs of small change for a quite little community, in a time when the normal supply of such currency was no longer available, due to the reduction of influxes from abroad (especially from the Golden Horde and Byzantium, the former main provider of bronze coins in this area).

As I said above, some scholars thought that during the second half of the 14th century two Genoese mints were active at Chilia and Licostomo²⁷. According to them the “*asperi de Chili*” or “*asperi argenti de Licostomo*” were imitations of the *aspers* or *dirhams* of the Golden Horde. In spite of the mention included in some deeds from 1360-1 that the “*asperi de Chili*” should be “*boni argenti et spendibiles*”, there are no reasons to accept the idea that such coins were real ones. According to me, in this case, the practical meaning of the terms “*boni et spendibiles*” was that the salesman required to be paid only in good quality coins, which were accepted on the local market.

Nowadays we have strong enough information available to consider that the previous hypotheses on the imitative character of the Genoese coinage in Chilia and Licostomo were based on some fake presumptions. First of all, a more detailed analysis that I undertook on the imitations of the Golden Horde *dirhams* found in several hoards and stray finds in Romania (in Dobrudja, Wallachia and Moldavia) led me to the conclusion that these imitations were struck only during the last years of the 13th century. All the imitated coins so far known had as prototypes the issues of Toqta Khan, struck in the mint of Qirim in A.H. 695-698. There are clearly missing any copies after later issues of this ruler or of the subsequent Khans of the Golden Horde. Several die links proved that the imitations were struck in the same mints as the issues of Noghay and Chaka - Saqčy and “Ordu”. It seems that the imitations of the silver coins of the Golden Horde, most of them struck in a debased alloy or just plated, were produced by the Noghaides authorities for financing the growing expenditures of the civil war.

²⁷ Iliescu 1971, 261-266; Iliescu 1975, 451-456; Lunardi 1980, 129-130.

Later researches that I carried out in all the major public and private collections containing coin finds from the area of the Mouths of the Danube proved that in this region there are basically no more influxes of fresh silver coins of the Golden Horde after 1300. For the entire 14th century I was able to find less than ten silver specimens from Janibek Khan to Toqtamysh, in spite of the fact that the anonymous and signed bronze coins struck from A.H. 751 to 761, are quite common²⁸. The virtual absence of the contemporary Tartar silver issues from the 1360's - 1380's leaves very few possibilities to presume that the "asper de Chili" or the "asper argenti de Licostomo" were, actually, imitations of these coins, because the monetary markets from the region of the Mouths of the Danube the Golden Horde silver coinage was lacking at that time. The most common silver coins found in the local finds from the second half of the 14th century are the Serbian ones, often clipped to match a new weight standard, as well as the Bulgarian, Wallachian and Moldavian issues²⁹. Most likely, actually, the so-called "asper of Chili" and of "Licostomo", as well as the sommi wearing the same labels were account coins. This assertion is strongly supported also by the fact that one deed concluded at Licostomo in 1383 contains the indication that the "asper of Licostomo" is worth 1/16th of the hyperperon of Pera³⁰. According to this source the local asper was equal to the smallest Byzantine contemporary silver coins, the so-called "ducatelli" or 1/8th of stavraton. If the "asper argenti de Licostomo" were imitations of the Golden Horde silver coinage such an equivalence should be quite unlikely, because during the 1370's-1390's the Tartar aspers were always much heavier than the contemporary Byzantine silver issues of 1/16th hyperperon³¹. In the case of Licostomo, it is quite obvious that, despite the name of its denominations, the local monetary system was strongly influenced by the Constantinopolitan one, as well as the entire economy of the place, for that matter³². As account coins, the aspers of Chili and Licostomo, as well as their corresponding sommi, represented a certain amount of silver having an established title. The accuracy of the payments was checked using coin-weights, the so-called saggii.

Being expressed in account coins, in practical terms, the sums in "asper de Chili" or "de Licostomo" mentioned in the deeds were paid either on place, in the most common foreign coins used locally – Serbian, Bulgarian, Wallachian or Moldavian coins, or were cleared later abroad, mostly in Pera, in Byzantine currency. Although the requested quantity of coins was supposed to be checked with the local monetary weights, in some cases, the buyer was obliged to promise that each coin will be of good quality alloy and well struck, or even freshly struck.

The supposed existence of a Genoese coinage at Moncastro during the 13th-15th century is based also on wrong suppositions or a lot of misunderstandings. The town of Moncastro located at the mouth of the Dnester River was an important commercial centre visited by the Genoese merchants since the late 13th century, but it was never controlled directly by them. Until the 1370's the town was part of the Golden Horde, being ruled by "an exharch", i.e. a tümen-noyan or an emir, belonging to the Djuchi dynasty or the highest local aristocracy. During the 1370's the authority of the Golden Horde was overthrown by the local Christian forces. In 1386 Genoese sources mention that the town was ruled by a Constantine "Voyevode". This local independence was short lived. Around early 1392 Moncastro was

²⁸ Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1992A, 61; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1993, 300.

²⁹ Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1992, 69-89.

³⁰ Raitieri 1973, no 12 and 14.

³¹ Ivanov 1996, 471-472; Bendall 1988, 57, nos 307.1-6; DOC V/2, nos 1242-1250.

³² Metcalf 1979, 332; Balard 1978 (I), 149.

incorporated into the Moldavian Principality, to which it belonged until the 4th of August 1484, when the town fell into the Ottoman hands. During the troubled period of the 1440's - 1450's, when Moldavia was divided "de facto" by the members of the ruling dynasty into two states, the "Highland" and the "Lowland", Moncastro, called in Romanian Cetatea Albă, became the capital of the "Lowland" and was used as a Princely residence. Although Moncastro enjoyed a very considerable autonomy within the Moldavian state, being governed by a "pârcălab", assisted by a council of 12 jupans, the Genoese community living here was never so important to have even a consul, not to speak of self-government³³.

In 1977 Iliescu attributed to Moncastro a series of follari having on the obverse the tamgha of Noghay and on the reverse a Greek cross, with an unread inscription, supposed to be Arabic³⁴. This supposition was accepted also by Lunardi³⁵. Latter the inscription was read and it turned out not to be Arabic at all, but Greek. In spite of the clumsiness of the die-cutter and to some specific abbreviations used, it read clearly **IC-XC/NI-KA**. These follari were struck by the Byzantine lordship of Saqçy before 1286 and had nothing to do with the town of Moncastro³⁶.

Lunardi attributed to a supposed 15th century Genoese colony in Moncastro two other coin types³⁷. The first were copper follari with the auroch's head on the obverse, between crescent and rose and having a five-rayed star between the horns, and the Greek inscription **ΑCΠPΚΑCΤPΟV**, around a Greek cross with bezants in each quarters. The second group is represented by the countermarked Golden Horde aspers with a countermark representing a Greek cross with bezants in each quarter³⁸. These coin types were municipal issues, struck during the 1460's, after the monetary reform undertaken around 1465 by the Moldavian Prince Stephen the Great (1457-1504). As Iliescu proved, the coats of arms of the town of Moncastro, the Greek cross with bezants in its quarter, for a long time considered to be a Genoese influence in the medieval heraldry of the Black Sea area, was in fact inherited from the Byzantine tradition, as was also the use of Greek as official language³⁹.

The most important collections containing Genoese-Tartar issues struck in the area of the Mouths of the Danube are in Romania. The richest and the most complete is the collection of the Danube Delta Museum in Tulcea (now the Institute for Eco-Museum Researches). It contains both types, many of the coins having known finding places (Isaccea, Enisala, Nufăru, Niculițel, and Chilia Veche). Rather important samples of such issues are also preserved in the collections of the Archaeological Institute in Bucharest, the National History and Archaeological Museum in Constantza and the National History Museum in Bucharest. The coins of these collections were found mostly at Isaccea and Enisala. The collection of Genoese-Tartar coinage of the National History Museum, quite small until 1990, was substantially increased during the last decade, thanks to the steady policy of acquisitions and to some generous donations, becoming one of the largest in Romania. The County History Museum of

³³ Balard 1978 (I), 147-148; Andreescu 2000, 57-77.

³⁴ Iliescu 1977a, 162-163, pl. 2/ 2.

³⁵ Lunardi 1980, 142, LR 2.

³⁶ Oberländer-Târnoveanu and Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1981, 91 and 104-105, nos 58-67, fig. 2, nos 9-11; Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1995-1996, 197-198, pl. 2, nos 3-4.

³⁷ Lunardi 1980, 143-144, LR 3-4.

³⁸ Nicorescu 1937, 75-88; MBR 75, no 573-576; Beljakov 1990, 180-185; Iliescu and Dinu 1957, 342-345; Kocievskij 1990, 156-165.

³⁹ Iliescu 1991, 151-164.

Galatz has the most important collection of Genoese-Tartar issues of 2nd type, all of them found during the archaeological researches at Enisala. During the 1980's two important private collections of Genoese-Tartar coins were, in Tulcea, those of Dr. Dorin Nicolae and Eng. Matei Ioan, but unfortunately nothing is known about their present location, since 1990. Very few information is available on the Genoese-Tartar issues found outside Dobrudja. One coin is kept in the collection of the Regional Archaeological Museum in Varna (Bulgaria) and another is mentioned to be preserved in a private collection in Ukraine. I did not find such coins during my researches in the collections of the British Museum, of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford or at Cabinet des Médailles de la Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris.

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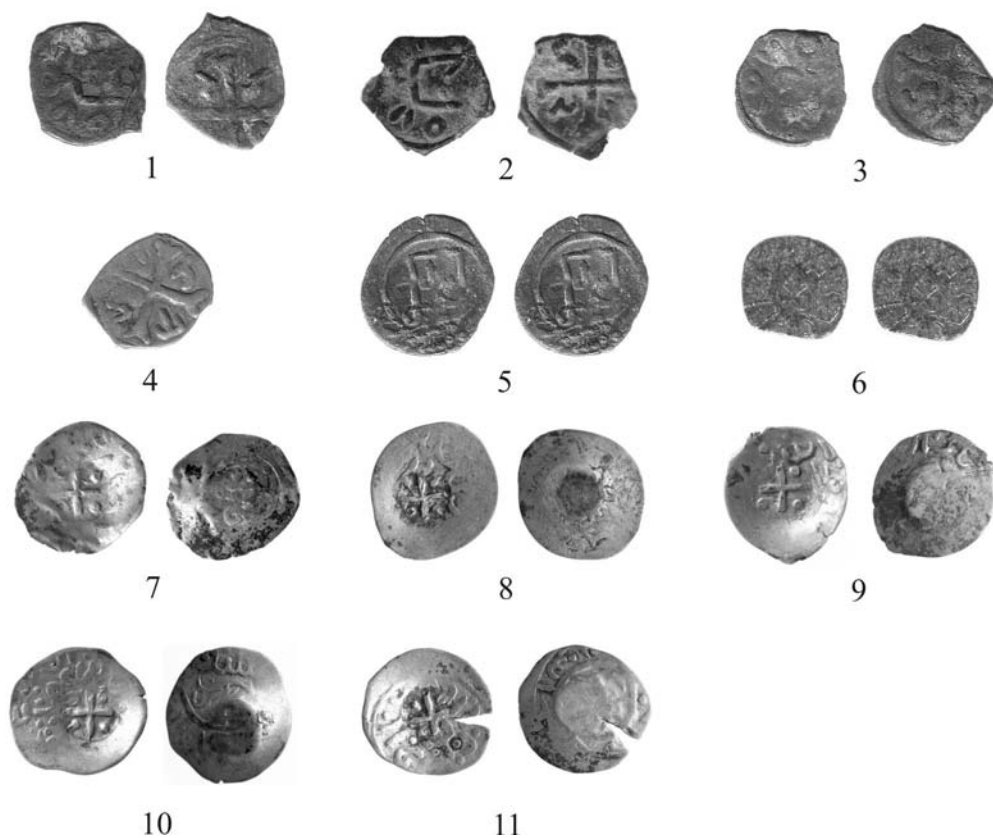
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Pl. no I. 1-4 – The Genoese Lordship of Saqçy – Bilingual follari; 5 – Unprecised Genoese mint in the area of the Mouths of the Danube – Anonymous follaro; 6 – Asprokastron – Follaro; 7-11 – Asprokastron – Countermarked Golden Horde dirhams with the coat of the arms of the town, the Greek cross with bezants in each quarter