

MONETA AGEN: The *Gros au Lion* No One Has Ever Seen

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Bibliothèque Nationale D 993
piedfort / 19.9 g.

Far too many numismatic researchers rely far too heavily upon previous literature, without bothering to check the source materials cited as references. The “Fruit of the Poisonous Tree” is a constant, looming danger for those engaged in the study of medieval coins.

Case in point: the elusive *gros au lion* of Agen, struck for Edward III, King of England (1307-1377) at one of his holdings in France during the Hundred Years War (?).

As far as we can tell, no modern researcher has ever actually seen an example of a MONETA AGEN *gros au lion* coin. The piece shown above is a *piedfort*, weighing almost 20 grams (far above an expected 2 - 4 g. for a *gros au lion*). A presumption is made by numismatists that this *piedfort* was copied from an actual coin, although no original is known to exist. The *piedfort* seems to have a leaf, or perhaps a *quatrefoil* after MONETA on the obverse, but the area is unclear.

There has been a great deal of confusion regarding the AGEN *piedfort* and its theoretical original model coin. The MONETA AGEN *gros au lion* coin is a figurative “can of worms” which we must now open.

{Torongo/van Oosterhout} Catalog Type IV (Anglo-Gallic)

Ainslie *Supplement*, pl. I, 6^[2]

Poey d'Avant n° 2794; pl. LXII, 5^[3]

n° 2795; pl. LXII, 6^[3]

Hewlett n° 2; pl. IV, 5^[8]

Elias n° 76^[7]

Withers/Ford n° 83^[11]

Ainslie (1847)

The MONETA AGEN type, such as it is, was first reported by Ainslie in his *Supplement* (ref. 2, p. 4) to his *Illustrations for the Angle-French Coinage* (ref. 1). Ainslie reported the piece as a *piedfort*, saying that it was in the Bessières collection, and describing it as follows:

“EDWARD III

PATTERN GROAT, OR PIEFORT, NO. 6.*

OBVERSE A Greek cross patée, passing through the inner legend.

LEGEND, Inner. EDOVARDOS (*sic*) RE.

Outer. BNDICTVS (*sic*) SIT NOME: DNI: NRI: DE.

REVERSE. Lion rampant to the right, tail turned in towards his back, surrounded by the legend within a circle of roses.

LEGEND. ✚ MONETA AGEN.

WEIGHT. Troy grains.

M. Bessières.

* This is an imitation of the Lion groat of Lewis de Male, count of Flanders (1346-1384) and accordingly, cannot be appropriated to Edward I. : no more can the groat described in Pl. III. No. 19. The Lion groat of Lewis de Male has been copied by many princes and bishops, for, like the fiorino d'oro, it was a highly-esteemed coin, and is presumed to have been struck during the reign of Edward III. No coin with the name of Agen at full length has until now been published, and the present one is unique.

A coin perfectly similar to this, except that it reads BVRD instead of AGEN, is in the cabinet of J. D. Cuff.” [*sic*]

– p. 4

Ainslie clearly states that the coin is a *piedfort* or “*pattern groat*”. His “No coin with the name of Agen at full length has until now been published, and the present one is unique” is not technically correct; he is reporting a *piedfort*, not a “coin”. But this statement clearly implies that no other specimen was known to Ainslie, real coin or otherwise.

Ainslie fails to provide the weight of the piece:

WEIGHT. Troy grains.

Ainslie is silent about a mark after MONETA, which, in his illustration, appears to be a leaf (like every other type of Anglo-Gallic *gros au lion* known). Ainslie says that the lion is “to the right”, which is the heraldic method of reference for a lion that is facing right on the shield of a person holding it, but facing to the left for the viewer. His transcription is missing the final X of REX.

The piece is illustrated on **Plate I, n° 6**:



Ainslie Supplement, pl. 1, 6^[2]
Agen, piedfort

✠ MONEA [...] AEN [sic]
 EDO VTR DOS REX
 ✠ BNDICTVS : SIT : NOMB : DNI : NRI : DE [sic]

Note that other than the mark after MONETA on the obverse, the drawing gives the impression that the illustrated piece is fairly legible. In fact, as with so many numismatic drawings from the 19th century, this drawing has been idealized compared to the model *piedfort*, which has several semi-illegible areas.

The drawing shows a long, “keyhole” O in MONETA on the obverse, and (incorrect) double pellets in the reverse, outer legend. On the piece itself, the O’s are likely to be long, “split” O’s: O. The BNDICTVS outer legend is highly unusual (and incorrect Latin). We have not seen such a final S on any other *gros au lion* of any region. The final I of DEI is missing. Although one might expect IHV : XPI at the end of the legend, as found on most *gros au lion*, other Anglo-Gallic *gros au lion* legends (from mints other than Agen) tend to end at DEI and have no IHV XPI. The end of the outer legend is, in fact, illegible, but appears to read D[E] (?).

Missing from the drawing (and text description) is a large pellet to the left of the initial, obverse cross, as well as an apostrophe after AGEN, both of which are found on the actual Paris piece.

We can see the problems with Ainslie's drawing (and text transcription) by comparing it with the *piedfort* in Paris:



The reverse outer legend is far less clear in the photograph than in the drawing, but the pellet left of the cross and apostrophe after AGEN are clear (obverse), as well as some of the triple (not double) pellet stops in the outer legend (reverse).

Anyone working from Ainslie's 1847 description of this *piedfort* (alone) would easily be able to know that the "coin" under discussion is in fact a *piedfort*, as Ainslie clearly states in capital letters.

PATTERN GROAT, OR PIEFORT,

Ainslie p. 4 ^[2]

(our digital copy of this page is somewhat distorted)

Yet for some reason, subsequent researchers seem to have had great difficulty in reading Ainslie's description, and understanding that he was describing a *piedfort* (**only**), and not an actual coin at all. Or, they took someone else's word for it (e.g. Poey d'Avant's) without double-checking anything.

There is no actual evidence at this time that any other examples of the MONETA AGEN type exist, *piedfort* or otherwise, nor any variants of it.

No one knows when this *piedfort* was made; it may or may not even be medieval. All we know for sure is that it has existed since 1847. We cannot conclude with certainty from this piece that actual MONETA AGEN *gros au lion* were ever struck in the 14th century. Obviously, it is a likely possibility, given the existence of this *piedfort*. But we cannot be certain, nor can we be sure that the *piedfort* is not a much later piece and therefore disconnected from the *gros au lion* coins.

Ainslie states that the piece was in the collection of a Mr. Bessières. It would appear that this *piedfort* eventually found its way to the Cabinet de France in Paris, where it can be found today. However, the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris has no *provenance* for the piece, and can neither confirm nor deny whether the piece came from Bessières or not.

The illegible area after MONETA, the extra S after BNDICTV and the unusual (if unclear) end of the reverse, outer legend make it unlikely that the Bessières *piedfort* described by Ainslie, and the 19.9 g. piece currently found in Paris, are not one and the same. In addition, no other specimen has ever turned up, implying that the Bessières specimen did not go anywhere else, other than to the Cabinet de France in Paris, where the only known example can currently be found (*sans provenance*).

Poey d'Avant (1858)

The next author to attempt to describe the AGEN *gros au lion* was Poey d'Avant, and this is where things started to go seriously wrong. Although Poey's book is a masterpiece, it was written a very long time ago, and the information contained within should always be taken with a grain of salt, because the book contains numerous factual errors.

With regard to the AGEN *gros au lion*, Poey d'Avant ended up making matters (much) worse, by **inadvertently fabricating a non-existent second sub-type which, as it turns out, is likely to be the same *piedfort* that he had already described (albeit differently).**

In fact, neither PdA n° 2794 nor PdA n° 2795 accurately describe the only known AGEN *gros au lion*, i.e. the *piedfort* previously reported by Ainslie. But at least Poey describes his n° 2794 as a *piedfort*, making it the item that is closest to reality

It seems that the *piedfort* from the Bessières collection ended up in the Cabinet de France in Paris at some point after Ainslie’s publication (1847), but before Poey wrote this section of his book (<1858).

It is clear that Poey lost track of what was going on, and somehow misread Ainslie’s description, and the fact that the piece described by Ainslie was a *piedfort*.

Poey d’Avant n° 2794

On p. 87, Poey, writing some 10 years after Ainslie published his *Supplement*, describes what is almost certainly the very same AGEN *piedfort* specimen previously described by Ainslie (now apparently in the Cabinet de France), as follows:

**2794. ✠ EDOVARDOS REX. Croix coupant la légende. 2^e légende : BNDICTV.
 &c. R. MORET. Trèfle. AGEN. Lion debout. Bordure de trèfles.
 BILL. Pied-fort.
 Cab. de France. — Pl. LXII, n° 5.**

PdA, p. 87^[3]



PdA pl. LXII, 5 (n° 2794), *piedfort*^[3]

Note that Poey provides neither a literary reference, nor a weight for the piece. He does, however, clearly state that the piece is a billon *pied-fort*.

Poey’s legend transcription gives **BNDICTV** {*sic*}, instead of the correct **BNDICTVS**, while his drawing shows **BEDICTVS** {*sic*}.

Furthermore, the drawing incorrectly shows **IRI : hV** {*sic*} instead of the correct (?) **[ORI : DE]**. Poey’s drawing indicates the apostrophe after AGEN, which is not mentioned in his text transcription, but does indeed appear on the *piedfort* itself. Poey’s text transcription and drawing are both missing the pellet to the left of the initial cross. The reverse, inner legend is basically correct.

Presumably, we are looking at Poey’s own interpretation of the *piedfort* in Paris, while the following coin (n° 2795) would be what Poey thought was a different piece, an actual coin, as described by Ainslie – but somehow Poey missed Ainslie’s clear “PATTERN GROAT OR PIEFORT” description, while still citing him as a reference for n° 2795.

Poey d'Avant n° 2795

It is here that the tale of the AGEN *gros au lion* takes another turn, a wrong turn, as Poey introduces {fabricates} a second sub-type, which he claims has ⚆ after MONETA instead of a leaf (or *trèfle*). He reports this piece as being an actual coin (a billon *blanc* and not as a *piedfort*), giving this description:

2795. EDVARDOS REX. Même type. ⚆. MONETA ⚆ : GEN. Même type.
BILL. Blanc. (*Suppl. à Ainsworth*, pl. 1^{re}, n° 6.)
Cab. Bessières. — Pl. LXII, n° 6.

PdA, p. 87^[3]



PdA pl. LXII, 6 (n° 2795)^[3]

The problems with this description are numerous.

First of all, Poey's ⚆:GEN {*sic*} transcription does not match his illustration's ⚆:AGEN, and while his text reads EDVARDOS {*sic*}, his illustration shows an incorrect EDVVARDOS {*sic*}. Neither is the correct EDOVARDOS.

Poey describes this piece as a billon *blanc*, but gives “Ainslie *Supplement*, pl. I, 6” as a reference, despite the fact that this reference is Ainslie's description of a *piedfort*. (Poey said “Ainsworth”, but he meant Ainslie.)

The reference to Ainslie should have been used for Poey's n° 2794, a *piedfort*, but was not. Why not? It is **not** the correct reference for **PdA 2795**. Poey's description of his n° 2795 does not say anything about being a *piedfort* (quite the opposite), nor does the mark after MONETA in Poey's drawing match that shown in Ainslie's (i.e. an illegible mark).

Apparently, it never occurred to Poey that the *piedfort* he saw (?) in Paris might be the same specimen that was described by Ainslie, despite Ainslie's description of the piece as a *piedfort*.

We are left with a completely unreferenced, unexplained, uncorroborated drawing showing EDV and ⚆ AGEN, with no matching coin specimens whatsoever, and no real reason to believe that it ever actually existed as anything more than a botched drawing of **PdA 2794** (the Paris *piedfort*). We are not at all convinced that any such coin exists as described/illustrated by Poey for his n° 2795.

If (IF) there ever was an actual AGEN *gros au lion* coin, it is likely to have “matched” the *piedfort*, which is illegible and cannot be shown to have a 8 mark. The mark is, at this point in time, nothing more than a fabrication on Poey’s part and it should be ignored.



The illegible mark, with an ∇ before and after

It is clear that Poey has created two, separate sub-types from a single (*piedfort*) coin.



*A hybrid illustration of PdA n^o 2794 - 2795
better illustrating the known AGEN *piedfort* (19.9 g.)*

We are left with either *PdA 2794-2795, or *PdA 2794 and PdA 2975.

Hewlett (1920)

Hewlett (ref. 8) describes the AGEN *piedfort* reasonably accurately, and provides a photograph of the Paris specimen, although he reads the final word of the outer legend as DI instead of DE (the area is unclear on the *piedfort* itself and open to interpretation). He does not note the pellet left of the initial cross (his transcription final “pellet” is simply a period). His given weight of 307.7 troy grains matches the Paris specimen at 19.9 g.

2. Agen.

Obv.—EDO | VNR | DOS | REX | . + BNDICTVS : SIT :
NOMI : DNI : NRI : DI. in two concentric
circles. Type as last.

Rev.—✠ ΜΟΝΕΤΑ · ΑΓΕΝ·. Stop, quatrefoil. Type
as last.

Piedfort. Wt. 307·7 grs. [Pl. XX. 5.]
Cab. de Fr.

ANGLO-GALLIC COINS.

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An ordinary specimen of this coin, in the Bessières Collection, is described in the *Supplement* to Ainslie (Pl. i. 6).

Hewlett, pp. 294-295 ^[8]



Hewlett pl. XX, 5, piedfort ^[8]
Bibliothèque Nationale, 19.9 g.

Hewlett’s final note, however, contains a glaring error, which illustrates the problem with the AGEN type rather well: the Bessières Collection specimen described by Ainslie is **not** “ordinary”, it is a *piedfort*, and almost certainly the **very same** *piedfort* that Hewlett is describing as being in the Cabinet de France. Apparently, Hewlett missed the words “PATTERN GROAT, OR PIEFORT” in Ainslie’s article.

Hewlett does not report the large pellet left of the initial cross, and he does not give the forms of the **O**'s used (few authors ever do). For some reason, he gives an incorrect Roman **N** in AGEN:

✠ MOÑETΛ [✦] ΠCEN' [sic]
 EDO VTR DOS REX
 ✠ BÑDICTVS : SIT : ÑOME : DÑI : ÑRI : DE [sic]



From Hewlett's photograph, is it easy to see how either a quatrefoil or a double pellet mark could be envisioned. We suspect that the mark is a leaf, like every other Anglo-Gallic *gros au lion*.

Conclusion:

*Hewlett 2
 *~~Hewlett 2 nota p. 295~~

Elias

The Anglo-Gallic Coins (1984)

On p. 116 (*AGC*, ref. 7), Elias attempts to describe the AGEN *gros au lion*, but in fact, he only makes matters even worse by creating yet a 3rd variation of a coin (*piedfort*) that can (so far) only be shown to have one sort:

*76 [also Elias *Aquitaine* n° 7]
 same as 74 but

EDV VTR DOS REX [sic] in outer legend BÑDICTVS
 ✠ MOÑETΛ ☉ ΠGEN [sic]

76 a

same as 76 but

EDO VTR DOS REX [in outer legend **BNDICTVS**]

•✠ MONETA ✠ PCEN'

piedfort Bibliothèque Nationale, 19.9 g.

***76 b**

same as 76a but normal coin

[**EDO VTR DOS REX** in outer legend **BNDICTVS**]

[**•✠ MONETA ✠ PCEN'**]

Elias 76 seems to be based solely upon **PdA 2795**, which, as we have seen, does not really even exist at all, since, even in Poey's own work, it appears to itself be based solely on a misunderstanding of Ainslie's **pl. I, n° 6** and nothing more. Elias does not state one way or the other if he had seen any such piece, but his lack of any specific example implies that he had not. Elias gives EDV instead of EDO (as per Poey d'Avant).

Elias 76 does not exist as such.

Elias 76 a seems to be based on the extant *piedfort* in the Bibliothèque Nationale (i.e. **Ainslie I, 6; PdA 2794; Hewlett 2**). It is the only "Elias 76 type" that is actually known to exist. Elias is the first author to mention the pellet left of the initial cross.

As far as we can tell, **Elias 76 b** seems to be based on a theoretical coin, an actual *gros au lion* of Agen, which no modern researcher has actually yet seen (if they ever existed at all). While it certainly seems logical to presume that an actual MONETA AGEN coin must have existed since we have the *piedfort*, we cannot actually even be certain that the *piedfort* itself is not a 19th century fabrication.

Elias does not state one way or the other if he has seen any such coin, but again, he provides no example, strongly implying that he never saw one.

Elias 76 b has not been shown to exist as such.

The problems with Elias' "same as" method are emphasized when one looks up his **n° 74** to see what his **n° 76** is "the same as", and the reader is confronted with: "same as 73"...

Elias: *The Gros au Lion of Aquitaine* (1981)

In his 1981 article (ref. 6), which was theoretically superceded by his 1984 book, Elias lists 3 types of AGEN coin: **n° 7** (which is his later **Elias 76**, citing **PdA 2795** as a reference, as well as using Poey's flawed drawing), giving : after MONETA and EDV. The second, **n° 8**, is the *piefort* in Paris, weight 19.9 g. (pl. 21, 8), his later **Elias 76 a**. The third (**n° 8 a**), is "as **n° 8** but normal weight" (later **Elias 76 b**), {incorrectly} cited reference: "Ainslie, suppl. 1, 6" {sic}.

As with Poey (?) and Hewlett before him, Ainslie's words "PATTERN GROAT, OR PIEFORT" seem to have escaped Elias' attention for all of the many years that he studied the Anglo-Gallic coins. The bottom line:

Elias AGC 76	Elias Aquitaine 7	(unlikely to exist)
Elias AGC 76 a	Elias Aquitaine 8	(<i>piefort</i>)
Elias AGC 76 b	Elias Aquitaine 8 a	(theoretical and unconfirmed)

Withers/Ford (2015)

On p, 73, Withers/Ford (ref. 11) list the AGEN *gros au lion* as their **n° 83**:

"Types as 82 but mint name on reverse.
E76; P d' A2795; Ainslie Suppl. Pl. I,6; D1079B.

✠MONETA ⚄ AGEN

We have not found a specimen to confirm." [5]

Withers/Ford make no mention of *pieforts*, and they do not report that their cited reference "Ainslie Suppl. Pl. I,6" is, in fact, a *piefort*.

They provide Poey's flawed illustration for his **n° 2795**, but make no mention of the erroneous EDV legend shown. They do not mention **PdA 2794** (*piefort*) at all.

Withers/Ford do not list any MONETA ✠ (or MONETA ⚄) legend. Although Withers/Ford make it clear that they themselves have not seen an AGEN *gros au lion*, they do not emphasize the fact that the theoretical existence of an AGEN *gros au lion* is based completely upon the sole known *piefort* example, and nothing else. No previous author has ever actually reported anything but this same *piefort*. Withers/Ford report the type for the sake of thoroughness, based upon the previous literature, but they make no actual claims that an AGEN coin was ever struck or not, leaving it as "unconfirmed".

We believe that the mark after MONETA is likely to be a leaf, but it is illegible, and we cannot say with any certainty that it is not a double annulet: ⚄ .

CONCLUSION

To summarize:

MONETA [...] AGEN *piedfort* with † (or perhaps †) – extant, 19.9 g., Paris

Ainslie Supplement, plate I, 6 “Bessières Collection”

* **PdA 2794 (plate LXII, 5)** “Cabinet de France”

* **Hewlett 2** “Cabinet de France”

Elias 76 a “Cabinet de France”

Withers/Ford —

Not reported (*piedfort*) by Withers/Ford.

{Questionable} AGEN *piedfort* (or coin?) with 8 (?) – no example known

Ainslie —

* **PdA 2795 (plate LXII, 6)**

incorrect reference to Ainslie “Bessières Collection” [*sic*]

Hewlett —

* **Elias 76** (not seen by Elias)

Withers/Ford 83 (not seen by Withers/Ford)

Not described as a *piedfort* by Poey d’Avant, Hewlett, Elias or Withers/Ford.

{Theoretical} AGEN coin (with † ?) (?) – no example known

Ainslie — (not seen)

PdA — (not seen) [* **PdA 2794 / 2795** (unconfirmed)]

* **Hewlett 2 var. (his note, p. 295)** (not seen)

incorrect reference to Ainslie “Bessières Collection” [*sic*]

* **Elias 76 b** (not seen)

Withers/Ford — [**W/F 83 var.**] (unconfirmed)

Reported by Hewlett, who did not actually see one.

Described by Elias as “not seen” and therefore, only theoretical.

An AGEN coin, with whatever mark, is described by Withers/Ford as “not seen” and therefore, only theoretical.

* indicates a (partially) incorrect description

In other words, the only “MONETA AGEN *gros au lion*” known to exist is a *piedfort*, currently found in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, weighing 19.9 g.

Descriptions of any other such “*gros au lion*” are (unintentional) fabrications, and at best, indicate “theoretical” coins, the only precedent for the existence of which is the self-same *piedfort* under discussion.

It is not the normal numismatic procedure to “invent” coins in this manner, although it should be pointed out that cases of “known *piedfort* only” are fairly uncommon. The fabrications seem to be the results of misreadings of previous literature, over-reliance on previous literature, and a lack of attention to detail.

The only, correct transcription of the legends of the AGEN *piedfort* that can be given are as follows:

• ✠ MONETA [✚] REX
EDO VTR DOS REX
✠ BNDICTVS : SIT : NOMB : DNI : RRI : [DE]



Bibliothèque Nationale D 993
MONETA AGEN piedfort
19.9 g.

The obverse border is made up of 12 leaves, but it is all but impossible to see what the actual form of the leaf is.

At this point in time, subject to the discovery of an actual MONETA AGEN coin (not a *piedfort*) in the future (an asterisk indicates a partially incorrect description):

{Torongo/van Oosterhout} Catalog Type IV (Anglo-Gallic)

* **Ainslie Supplement, pl. I, 6** (*piedfort*)^[2]

* **Poey d'Avant n° 2794; pl. LXII, 5** (*piedfort*)^[3]
n° 2795; pl. LXII, 6^[3]

* **Hewlett 2; pl. IV, 5** (*piedfort*)^[8]

n° 2 var. (his note p 295)^[8]

Elias n° 76^[7]

* **n° 76 a** (*piedfort*)^[7]

n° 76 b (theoretical and unconfirmed)^[7]

Withers/Ford n° 83 (theoretical and unconfirmed)^[11]

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Illustrations for the Anglo-French Coinage: taken from the Cabinet of a Fellow of the Antiquarian Societies of London, and Scotland; of the Royal Societies of France, Normandy and Many Others, British as well as Foreign

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London, 1830

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