

“Deceptive Imitation” MONETA FLAND *Leeuwengroten*

by Paul A. Torongo

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*Private collection / 3.37 g.
a suspected deceptive imitation (previously unpublished)
cat. N° 4 (this paper)*

The *leeuwengroot* (*gros au lion*, *gros compaignon*) was a (nominally) silver coin, struck in the 14th century in Western Europe, particularly in the Low Countries. The type was first minted in Flanders (or perhaps in Brabant) in 1337, in response to the devaluation of silver coins in France earlier that same year. The type was quickly imitated in the regions around Flanders, and was minted (on and off) until 1364.

Medieval records tell us that there were 8 “issues” of *leeuwengroot* in Flanders under count Louis of Male (1346-1384), each with a reduction of either the weight or fineness (silver content) of the coins compared to the previous issue.

We have at our disposal numerous coin specimens that show a number of different sets of characteristics, which, in theory, can be “matched up” with the known issues minted in Flanders. In addition to these fairly uniform sets of characteristics, there are a small number of coins showing “anomalous” characteristics that do not match the majority. These anomalous coins remain enigmatic; they are usually partially illegible, and many of them display so many unusual traits that it seems likely that they are not “new sub-types”, but rather examples of “deceptive imitations”, i.e. medieval counterfeits struck in reasonably good silver and produced with a reasonably high degree of quality and workmanship.

Deceptive Imitation (a term borrowed from Susan Tyler-Smith) refers to medieval counterfeit coins (i.e. coins not officially issued by the mint) that look so much like the official issues that it is all but impossible to tell them from the real coins. They are distinguished from “ordinary” medieval counterfeits, which are struck in poor metal (e.g. copper), and thereafter often plated with silver or tin. In modern times, much of this plating will have worn away, revealing the base metal beneath.



Museum Rotterdam 59254-187 / 1.24 g.

A medieval counterfeit of a Louis of Male coin

Note that the reverse, outer legend erroneously begins at 6:00 instead of at 12:00

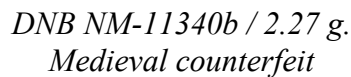


Private collection / 2.82 g.

A medieval counterfeit of a Louis of Nevers coin

clearly showing the copper from which it was produced

Although some **medieval counterfeits** are surprisingly well made and give the impression of perhaps having been made by “official” engravers or die-sinkers, many others were struck in poor metal, and quite often they have a hole punched through them. Such coins “stick out like a sore thumb” among the genuine coins.



Tyler-Smith listed three methods for identifying deceptive imitation *gros tournois*: weight and fineness, style and quality, errors and anachronisms. In theory, these same three methods can be applied to the *gros compaignon* as well.

Four historical coins are displayed in a row. From left to right: 1. A circular coin with a central lion passant guardant, surrounded by a decorative border. 2. A circular coin with a central cross, surrounded by a decorative border. 3. A circular coin with a central lion passant guardant, surrounded by a decorative border. 4. A circular coin with a central cross, surrounded by a decorative border.

3.62 g. 2.37 g.
Louis of Male / Issue V, 'Serif L' sub-group

One must, of course, be very careful not to distort the facts to fit the theory. There must be good reasons for deciding that a coin is either a new sub-type, or conversely, a deceptive imitation (medieval counterfeit).

In the case of the Flemish *leeuwengroten*, it seems evident that a sole anomaly probably indicates either a mint error or a new sub-type, while multiple anomalies are likely to indicate a deceptive imitation. The changes in issue generally involved one (or at most two) changes from the previous issue, e.g. the adding of a pellet by the initial cross or a change in the mark after MONETA on the obverse.



Elsen 133-898
A coin of Louis of Nevers (1322-1346) reading NLAND

This is the only example of a genuine Flemish coin with an error known to us. The coin has an obverse legend reading MONETA NLAND instead of the correct FLAND, but everything else about the piece looks “right”. While it is certainly conceivable that this is not a genuine, Flemish piece, there are no other visible errors or anomalies, and the lettering is consistent with all of the other known examples, as are the border leaves and central lion.



Elsen 110-1010 / 3.91 g.
A coin of Louis of Nevers (1322-1346)

To give an example: every single known Flemish *leeuwengroot* has a gothic (uncial) N (Ꝁ) in FLAND (**FLꝀND**) on the obverse. That is to say, there are literally thousands of examples known with Ꝁ in FLAND, but not a single example known with a Roman N.

If a specimen were to come to light with a **FLꝀND** legend, what should we make of it? Should we take it as a new sub-type, or as a counterfeit? Obviously, such an abstract question cannot be answered, because all of the other characteristics of the theoretical coin would have to be examined as well, to see how closely they match the known examples of “real” Flemish coins. But the fact that such a coin showed a variation in a letter that, as far as we know, never varies, should be a red flag to a researcher.

This is the only known example of a Louis of Nevers *leeuwengroot* with a round **O** in COMES on the reverse:



Private collection / 3.26 g.

Is this a new sub-type, or a deceptive imitation? Based on the fact that other than the round **O**, absolutely everything else about this coin is completely in line with the other known examples of Louis of Nevers *leeuwengroot*, we are of the opinion that this is a genuine, Flemish issue, i.e. a new sub-type and not a deceptive imitation. But we can “prove” nothing, and the identification remains an opinion.

The current “catalog” of Flemish *leeuwengroten* is fairly accurate (for as far as we know), but it is unlikely to be complete, if for no other reason than the fact that we do not know what the characteristics of the coins of Louis of Male’s Issues IV and VIII were. At this point in time, we are unsure as to whether or not we have examples of either of these issues among the known anomalous pieces.

Whenever a given specimen shows (multiple) anomalies when compared to other known examples, there are a number of possibilities as to the reason:

- Previously unknown type or sub-type
- Mint error
- Medieval counterfeit (including “deceptive imitations”)
- Modern counterfeit

We have yet to come across a *leeuwengroot* that gives the impression of being a **modern counterfeit** (which is, of course, a fairly subjective decision). There is, generally speaking, little reason to counterfeit a coin as common today as a Flemish *leeuwengroot*. (At the time of writing, there are well over 40 examples of Louis of Male *leeuwengroten* for sale on eBay.)

It must be pointed out that the very “best” *leeuwengroten* from 1337 contained only 75% silver, which over time decayed to a mere 50% by 1364. It is an unfortunate fact that the large majority of (official) *leeuwengroten* known today are unclear somewhere on one or both

faces, to a lesser or greater degree (unlike the French *gros tournois*). This means that a meaningful comparison of the characteristics of the coins is only really possible by viewing a very large number of coins. For example, most *leeuwengroten* do not have a reverse, outer legend that is complete and legible.



*Dokkum Hoard (1932) K066 / 2.89 g.
A typical, official leeuwengroot
(Louis of Male, Issue V, "Footless N" sub-group)*

Part of the outer legend is illegible, the central lion's feet are unclear, as is his face, etc. This piece has an unusually clear lion in the obverse border (12:00).



*Private collection / 2.76 g.
Another typical, official leeuwengroot
(Louis of Male, Issue V, "Narrow L" sub-group)*

Examples of Deceptive Imitation “Flemish” *Leeuwengroten*

To date, we have identified a number of *leeuwengroot* coins that are, in our opinion, deceptive imitations. The first of these looks so “wrong” in so many of the details that it is almost inconceivable that it came from one of the Flemish mints:

1.



Private collection / 3.29 g.

✠ MONET + FLAND'

LVD OVI COMES

✠ BNDICTV : SIT : [NO]HE : DNI : NRILV : XPI



- The **M** of MONETA is unusual.
- The central lion looks unusual.
- There is no crossbar in FLAND, which is rare for Issue II (round **O** in COMES coins)
- The leaf (?) between words is odd: †.
- The reverse **B** and **P** are downright strange: **IB IP**.
- The **M** of COMES appears to be **IL**.
- There is no **:** after **NR**I (never seen on official, Flemish issues).
- There is an odd line between **NR** and **RI**.
- There is a Roman **M** in NOME (never seen on official, Flemish issues).
- There is **:** after **XPI** (never seen on official, Flemish issues).

Although we can again “prove” nothing, and this identification also remains an opinion, this is far too many errors for a genuine Flemish coin (bearing in mind that the known genuine, Flemish coins display a high degree of consistency).



*Private collection / 3.57 g.
Louis of Male, Issue II*

2.



*Bibliothèque Nationale FRBNF44991693 / 3.35 g.
btv1b11341289d / cb449916935
Théry.67.272.1539*

✠ • **MONETA** + **FLAND'**
LVD OVI QDO MES
✠ [BNDI]CTV : SIT : **QOME** : DNI : DRI : IHV : **XP**



- **U** instead of ✠ in the obverse border
- **T** instead of **Y** in **MONETA**
- **E** instead of **H** in **FLAND**
- ✠ • on the obverse but **COMES** (not **COMES**) on the reverse
- **QOME** instead of **QOME** on the reverse
- **XP** instead of **XPI** on the reverse
- odd central lion
- odd leaf mark after **MONETA**

Again, this is far too many serious variations for this to be an official coin, let alone the odd **U** in the obverse border.

Compare this coin (n° 2) to an official, Issue II coin:



*Comptoir de Monnaies-01 / 3.33 g.
Louis of Male, Issue II*

3.



Private collection / 3.50 g.

✠ MONETA ✠ FLAND'
 LVD OVI **Q** **Q** MES
 ✠ B[NDIC]TV : S[IT : N]O**Q**'E : D[NI : NRI : **H**V] : **X**PI



- 3-lobed leaves instead of 5-lobed in the obverse border
- **Q** instead of **O** in COMES on the reverse
- **Q** instead of **M** in NOME
- **E** instead of **A** in NOME
- **H**V instead of **I**hV in IHV
- **X** instead of ✠ in XPI
- ' instead of ^ as abbreviation marks in the outer legend
- The feet of the border lion
- **Q** instead of **C** in LVDOVIC and COMES on the reverse

These characteristics are unusual seen for an official *leeuwengroot* of Louis of Male (most of them on the coins of Louis of Nevers as well), and this is once again far too many variations from the 'norm' for this piece to be an official, Flemish coin.

This coin does not appear to have been struck from the finest silver, but on the other hand, it was clearly not struck in copper either. The metal appears to be "reasonable" for a Flemish *leeuwengroot*, and not particularly suspect. There are no spelling errors in the legends (often, but not always, a sign of a counterfeit coin).



*Private collection / 3.27 g.
Louis of Male, Issue V
5-lobed border leaves*



*Private collection / 2.95 g.
Louis of Male, Issue VII
3-lobed border leaves, pellet L's*

4.



Private collection / 3.37 g.

• ✠ MONET ✠ FLAND'
 LVDOVI **Q** COMES
 [... BNDICT... IT : NO... DN... RI : **H**V : XP...]



- 3-lobed leaves instead of 5-lobed in the obverse border (but no **L**)
- **Q** instead of **C** in LVDOVIC and COMES on the reverse
- **H**V instead of **Ih**V in IHV
- The feet of the border lion

This coin, previously unpublished is very similar to the coin described above (n° 3), although this piece is illegible in many spots, and many key letters are unreadable. There is a pellet to the left of the initial cross, 3-lobed leaves in the border, no pellet **L**'s, and **H**V instead of **Ih**V. The **X** of XPI appears to be 'normal', and not the stylized **X** found on n° 3 above.

Compare these two coins

	n° 3 (3.50 g)	n° 4 (3.37 g.)
3-lobed leaves instead of 5-lobed	yes	yes
0 instead of O in COMES	yes	(yes)
0 instead of M in NOME	yes	? (no?)
Q instead of A in NOME	yes	? (yes?)
hV instead of IhV in IHV	yes	yes
X instead of ✱ in XPI	yes	? (no?)
' instead of ↙ as abbreviation	yes	? (yes?)
The feet of the border lion	yes	yes
A instead of Q	yes	yes

We have been studying the *leeuwengroot* (of all regions) for several years now. Our database of photos contains somewhere in the neighborhood of 1,000 examples of Flemish, Louis of Male, Issue V *leeuwengroten* (the “common type”).

Other than the highly suspect coin previously described (n° 3), and obvious copper counterfeit pieces, not a single Flemish *leeuwengroot* in our database has **hV** on the reverse. Furthermore, none* of them have **C**’s with *mandorla*-shaped **O** hollows (as opposed to pill-shaped or hourglass-shaped):



N° 4



genuine Flemish issue

* See n° 5 here below, however.

5.

There are other pieces known that do not fit neatly into the current catalog of Flemish *leeuwengroten*:



Museum Rotterdam 59254-553 / 3.20 g.



private collection / 2.90 g.

✠ MONETA [...] FL[AN]D'
 LVD OVI ADO MES
 ✠ BNDICTV: SIT: DOMUS: DNI: NRI: IHV: XPI



- T instead of **ʒ** in MONETA
- **F** instead of **ʒ** in FLAND
- **ʒ** instead of **ʒ** in LVDOVIC and COMES on the reverse
- **ʒ** instead of **ʒ** in COMES on the reverse
- **ʒ** instead of **ʒ** in NOME
- • **ʒ** on the obverse but **ʒ** (not **ʒ**)
- odd border leaves
- border lion with feet



(detail)

The obverse border leaves are unusual, with a large, central opening, as well as large lobes and axils. They do not match any other known specimen of Flemish *leeuwengroot* except one: Museum Rotterdam **59254-553** shown above.

Generally, the **F** of FLAND on Flemish *leeuwengroten* can be all but ignored; they are almost always of this type: **F**. On the coins shown above, however, they are much more like: **F**. All of the other letters are similar to one another as well.

Until very recently, we thought that these coins might be from the elusive issue IV, having the • **ʒ** of Issues V-VII, but a leaf-mark stem curving toward the **F** of FLAND (unlike Issues V-VII).

We see now, however, that these coins also have the **ʒʒ** with *mandorla*-shaped hollows instead of the “normal” pill or hourglass shapes (something that had gone unnoticed previously). Note as well the border lion with feet, and the odd **E** in NOME.

By our own logic, these odd letters, combined with the unusual **F** and **T**, force us to conclude that these coins are likely to be deceptive imitations as well, and not Issue IV coins at all.



The border lion

The Official Flemish Coins

The differences in some of the letters in the legends are subtle, and may not be apparent to anyone but an expert in this type of coin. As mentioned, Flemish *leeuwengroten* are fairly consistent in their execution.

The Little Border Lion

While the border lions of the Louis of Nevers coins are slightly more defined than those of his son, their feet are small. They often have eyes. The Louis of Male border lions, however, have no feet, small heads, and no eyes. Compare these to n° 3 and n° 4 above.



Border lions, official Flemish coins (Louis of Nevers)



Border lions, official Flemish coins (Louis of Male)

Abbreviation Marks

The official, Flemish coins have **℥**, while imitation n° 3 has **℥'**; the abbreviation indicator is going the other direction. The same is true of the mark over the **P** of XPI; it is going the “wrong way” on the imitation:



official coin

n° 3

The official coins have thick bars as abbreviation marks, while imitation n° 3 has what are basically apostrophes: ' .

The M in NOME

The **ᵹ** in NOME is always the same on the official coins (shown here upside-down, as when the coin is viewed with correct orientation), while the **M** on some of the imitations is different:



Flemish coins of Louis of Male: ᵹ



N° 3 has ᵹ

The C and O in COMES

On the official Flemish coins, the inner hollow of the **C** and the **O** have a “pill capsule” shape, (or sometimes an hourglass or keyhole in the case of the **O**). Imitations n° 3, n° 4 and n° 5 all have unusual *mandorla* shaped hollows: 0.



N° 4



Typical Louis of Male , long O's

Some Louis of Male coins have 'keyhole' O's:



IHV

We have never seen an official, Flemish *leeuwengroot* with **IhV** in the reverse, outer legend (as opposed to **IhV**). Imitations n° 3 and n° 4 both have the extra bar running from the **I** to the **H** (**h**) of IHV, often used in the Middle Ages but not found on Flemish *leeuwengroten*:



IhV instead of **IhV** (n° 3)

This line is common on Cambrai *leeuwengroten* (see ref. 9 & 10):



a Cambrai leeuwengroot

The X in XPI

For the most part, we have transcribed the Flemish **X** in our previous numismatic reports simply as **X**, when in fact it appears as: ✠ on the coins. The form of the letter never changes, and it is therefore never used as a minting mark. We have never found any stylistic differences in this letter that might indicate the “hand of the engraver”, and so for the sake of general legibility we simply used the standard Time New Roman **X** in our facsimile transcriptions.

The **X** on coin n° 3 above, however, is a different form of **X**, never seen on official, Flemish *leeuwengroten*: **✠**, and therefore the distinction between ✠ and **✠** must be made in this case.



official coins

N° 3

The E in NOME

The **E** (Ⓔ) in NOME on n° 3 (and perhaps n° 4) differs from the genuine coins as well; the official coins have a letter like this: Ⓔ, while the imitation n° 3 has one more like this: Ⓔ.



official coins



N° 3

Issue IV or Issue VIII?

How can we be certain that the coins under discussion are not examples of official coins from either Issue IV or Issue VIII? (These issues were very small, with no examples are known, and their characteristics are unknown as well.)

The short answer is: we cannot.

We can only form an opinion based upon the facts at our disposal, and hope to have come to the correct conclusion. But certainty is not possible.

Issue	qty.	lobes	obv.	indicators
I	719,994	3	✚	Λ A
II	13,870,824	3 / 5	✚ •	●
III	8,197,860	5	• ✚ •	Λ A
IV	318,120	?	?	?
V	22,644,213	5	• ✚	A A
VI	9,681,000	5	• ✚	Λ Λ
VII	1,989,000	3	• ✚	ℒ ℒ
VIII	456,300	?	?	?

Use of 3-lobed border leaves was discontinued at some point during Issue II (a large issue), when they were replaced by leaves with 5 lobes. The coins of Issues III, V and VI, all large issues, had 5-lobed border leaves.

The coins of Issue VII, however, had 3-lobed leaves.

If (**if**) the coins under discussion are official, Flemish issues, then it is theoretically possible that they came from either Issue IV or from Issue VIII. The • ✚ combination on the coins could fit either of those issues. One could easily argue that the • ✚ combination and the 3-lobed border leaves (imitations n° 3 and n° 4) could correspond to Issue VIII (lack of pellet L's not withstanding).

Imitations n° 3 and n° 4 are, however, the only known examples of MONETA FLAND coins with **HV**. If we include n° 5, the same is true of border lions with feet, **Q** instead of **Q**, **0** instead of **0**.

Because coin n° 4 is partially illegible, coin n° 3 is the only known example of a MONETA FLAND coin with clear apostrophes instead of *macrons*, **Q** instead of **Q**, **Q** instead of **Q**, and **X** instead of **X**.

Although the “hand of the engraver” cannot be ruled out, this is a rather long list of variations from the thousands of other known examples of Flemish *leeuwengroot* (Louis of Male or Louis of Nevers).

It seems more likely that these coins are “deceptive imitations” rather than having come from Issue IV or Issue VIII.

Note that although coins of Issue I, a small issue, are not common, they are far from unknown (40+ examples currently in the database), i.e. a small issue does not necessarily mean unknown coins.

For reasons still unknown to us, the coins of Issue VI, a fairly large issue, are rare; if it possible for over nine million coins to disappear, it would certainly be possible for c. 318,120 coins (Issue IV) and c. 456,300 coins (Issue VIII) to disappear.

The bottom line is that we are of the opinion that the coins under discussion are 14th century, deceptive imitations and not genuine coins from either Issue IV or Issue VIII, but we cannot be certain. (We are, by the way, operating under the assumption that the characteristics of the Issue IV and VIII coins make them somehow different from the other issues.)

Counterfeit Coins of Convention



Elsen 118-996
Coin of convention, Flanders-Brabant

This is the only official type of “coin of convention” *leeuwengroot* known. Struck in 1340, it has an obverse giving Ghent (GANDEN’, Flanders) and Leuven or Louvain (LOVAIN’, Brabant), and a reverse giving Louis, count (LVD’ COM’, Flanders) and John, duke (IOH’ DVX, Brabant). This is the first “Flemish” *leeuwengroot* without the word DEI in the outer legend (although it is likely that the coins were only actually minted in Brabant).

All of the other known “coin of convention” *leeuwengroot* types are low-quality, medieval counterfeits or high-quality deceptive imitations (medieval counterfeits).



*Bibliothèque Nationale 44992896(0) / 3.49 g.
btv1b11342490w
Flanders (Louis of Male) – Looz (counterfeit)*



*private collection
Flanders (Louis of Male) - Brabant (counterfeit)*



*CdMB-062 / 2.83 g.
Flanders (Louis of Nevers) - Hainaut, Holland or Namur (counterfeit)*



*Elsen 139-547
Flanders (Louis of Nevers) - Brabant (counterfeit)*



private collection
Flanders (Louis of Male) - Rummen or Rekem (counterfeit)



private collection
Brabant - Flanders (Louis of Nevers) (counterfeit)

CONCLUSION

We are of the opinion that the coins under discussion are likely to be deceptive imitations – counterfeits – struck by someone in the 14th century and intended to be passed off as official, Flemish *leeuwengroten*. It is possible that the silver content is only slightly lower than the official coins; some counterfeiters were apparently satisfied with a meager profit (as compared to that made from producing copper “coins” and then coating them with a thin layer of silver or tin).

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