

Some gunmoney-related evidence in French diplomatic and military correspondence, 1689-90.

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The purpose of this note is to highlight some evidence of relevance to gunmoney in French correspondence of 1689-90, particularly that of Antoine de Mesmes, the Comte d'Avaux, the French ambassador to the Irish court of James II.¹ Reference is also made to correspondence held in French state, military, and naval archives, which was published in the 1980s.² The journey of the engraver Hupierre to Ireland has already been identified by Timmins from the latter source.³ The evidence highlighted here provides new insights on French planning to establish the Limerick gunmoney mint, their provision of engraving expertise and copper supplies to Ireland, and their operation of the mint autonomously of Irish Jacobite authority.

Both sets of published correspondence are in French without translation (and the former is without an index). The author's French is basic, sufficient (on occasion) to identify general subject matter, but inadequate for precise translation. The relevant passages are therefore given in the original French, together with an (occasionally tweaked) English translation from translate.google.com. There may be further relevant material in the sources which escaped either the authour's attention, or his understanding.

Evidence and discussion

The first piece of relevant evidence is from a letter of d'Avaux to Louis XIV, sent from Drogheda on 20 September 1689. Here and throughout it is either verified or assumed that dates in French correspondence are Gregorian (11 days ahead at the time of the Julian calendar of gunmoney coins) new style (New Year's Day 1st January, not 25th March). In the letter d'Avaux requests supplies and expertise to be sent from France:

*'Et du cuivre pour continuer a faire de la monnoye, il en faudroit bien une cinquantaine de tonneaux; mais en attendant il seroit tres necessaire d'en envoyer la quantité qu'on pourroit en avoir. Il n'est pas moins necessaires d'avoir de l'acier et un bon graveur, avec un ou deux garcons, pour faire des coins, n'y ayant ici qu'un graveur, qui est Protestant, et qui peut manquer a tout moment.'*⁴

And copper to continue to make coinage, it would take about fifty barrels; but in the meantime it would be very necessary to send the quantity that we could have. It is not less necessary to have steel and a good engraver, with one or two boys, to

¹ Négociations de M. le Comte d'Avaux en Irlande, 1689-90. Edited by James Hogan. Jean Antoine de MESMES, Count d'Avaux. Dublin, 1934.

² Franco-Irish correspondence : December 1688- February 1692. Three volumes, edited by Sheila Mulloy. Dublin : Stationery Office for the Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1984.

³ Timmins, P., 2019. 'The French Engraver at the Dublin Mint 1689-90', *Coin News* June 2019, 48-50.

⁴ Hogan 1934 465.

make dies, having only one engraver here, who is Protestant, and who may leave at every moment.

Richard Talbot, the earl of Tír Conaill, also requested engravers, on 22nd October. The Dublin mint at some point experienced the sudden loss of a number of experienced Roman Catholic staff following the discovery of a plot to embezzle sixpences;⁵ it has been argued by the author elsewhere that this happened in September 1689 Julian.⁶ It is known from Withers and Withers⁷ that an experienced engraver, the ‘spiked-J’, last produced dies for coins dated September 1689 Julian, and that another, the ‘T-engraver’, first made dies in November Julian. The religion of the ‘branch’ of the Dublin mint that was dismissed for the sixpences was recorded specifically by Anonymous 1690, and is consistent with what d’Avaux writes of the Protestantism of the only incumbent in September. However the Julian date of his letter (from Drogheda) is 9th September, so if the sixpence plot was discovered in September Julian as suggested by the author, it must have been very early in the month. It is clear regardless of when the plot came to light that the religious composition of the Dublin mint was a factor in contemporary thinking, and d’Avaux’s comment suggests that religion was a relevant factor in the selection of the engraver to be sent from France. It is therefore appears overwhelmingly probable that the T-engraver was French; and, given that these events took place barely four years after the Edict of Fontainbleu, which re-introduced state-sanctioned persecution of Protestants in France, that they were also Roman Catholic; and that they arrived to re-establish an autonomous branch of the Dublin mint, organised on religious lines. This is consistent with the numismatic evidence of the self-contained way in which this individual made coins.

A letter of significant importance to understanding the origin of the Limerick mint was sent by Francois Michel Le Tellier, Marquis de Louvois, the French secretary of state for war, to d’Avaux from Versailles on 11 November 1689:

‘Il en arrivera beaucoup avec les troupes qui débarqueront à Limerick, mesme du cuivre et des toiles, et des graveurs pour la monnoye, que la Reyne d’Angleterre a demandé avec beaucoup d’instance... mais il sera fort nécessaire que vers le quinze ou vingt du mois prochain, vous y envoyiez le Commissaire Fumeron, pour y faire préparer les choses dont on aura besoin pour le soulagement des troupes qui y arriveront, et qu’au paravant son départ vous lui fassiez donner les ordres du Roy d’Angleterre, pour ce nombre de troupes puisse estre logé dans Limerick et dans les autres villes des environs, ou elles puissent rester en sécurité, et y faire un séjour considérable, en attendant que M. de Lauzun s’être rendu auprès du Roy d’Angleterre, puisse régler avec Sa Majesté

⁵ Anonymous, 1690, p. *An account of the transactions of the late King James in Ireland. Wherein is contain'd the Act of attainder past at Dublin in May, 1689. As also the proclamation for raising twenty thousand pounds per mensem, without an Act of Parliament. With other proclamations and acts made there* (London). p 57. Available online at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo2/B16635.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext>

⁶ Mac Conamhna, O., 2021. *Gunmoney Embezzlement at the Dublin Mint, the Introduction of the Numerical Months, and the Start of Minting in Limerick*. BNJ 2021, to appear.

⁷ Withers, P. and Withers, B., 2020. *Irish Gunmoney and the Emergency Issues of 1689-1691, a Corpus and Die Study* (Llanfyllin).

Britannique les lieux ou ces troupes pourront demeurer jusques au commencement de la campagne...⁸

Many will arrive with the [French] troops who will land at Lymerick, even copper and canvas, and engravers for coinage, which the Queen of England has requested with great insistence...but it will be very necessary that towards the fifteenth or twentieth of the next month, you send Commissioner Fumeron there, to have the things prepared there which will be needed for the relief of the troops who will arrive there, and that before his departure you send him the orders of the King of England, so that this number of troops can be lodged in Lymerick and in the other towns in the vicinity, or they can remain in safety, and make a considerable stay there, while waiting for M. de Lauzun having submitted to the King of England, may settle with His Britannic Majesty the places where these troops may remain until the beginning of the campaign...

The significance of this is that it demonstrates intent, at the highest level of the French administration in November 1689, to establish a mint in Limerick early in the new year, in the context of the first major deployment of troops to the region. The plan was changed later to a landing in Cork, and the fleet arrived on 23 March 1690 (12 March 1689 Julian). As has been highlighted by Timmins, this fleet brought with it the engraver Hupierre and two assistants. The naval correspondence shows that they were engaged for the expedition on 10 January 1690; boarded the fleet in Brest on 13 March 1690; and that Hupierre was back in Brest on 21 October 1690.⁹ His Irish sojourn seems to have been an unsuccessful one from a personal perspective, as he appears to have returned flat broke; the last letter granted him his fare back to Paris. The March fleet brought much copper, and it is known from other recently-identified evidence¹⁰ that some of it was sent from Cork to Limerick, to arrive there in March 1690 (Julian old style, 25th-31st March 1690). New portraits appeared on halfcrowns for March 1690 Julian old style that were identified by Dolley and Rice, who interpreted them as of Limerick and marking the beginning of the activities of the Limerick mint. Before the significant documentary evidence that has emerged recently, Timmins proposed an earlier start date for the Limerick mint in September 1689;¹¹ however the documentary record of the French expedition and their plans for it above are consistent with the hypothesis of Dolley and Rice.

The scale of the expedition is shown by Fumeron's efforts to prepare for it. Two letters he sent to d'Avaux from Limerick, dated 15 January and 10 February, show him to have been engaged in sourcing biscuits, beer, corn, bread, salt beef, tobacco, cotton and wagons; establishing a saltpetre works and powder mill; preparing a hospital for 400; and preparing lodgings for the Irish troops who would return with the fleet to France, in part-exchange for the French forces. A naval officer, Lambety, was despatched to sound and survey the port's roadstead and river.¹² D'Avaux reported on Fumeron's activities to Louvois on 25 January 1690:

⁸ Hogan 1934 581-2.

⁹ Mulloy, documents 44, 615, 232.

¹⁰ Mac Conamhna 2021.

¹¹ Timmins, P., 2020. *Gunmoney, The Emergency Coinage of 1689–1691 for the Irish Campaign of James II, Edition II* (Peterborough).

¹² Hogan 1934 657.

‘J’adjouteray, Monsieur, a cette lettre, que j’en viens de recevoir une du Commissaire Fumeron, de Lymerick, qui me mande qu’il a bien del la peine a faire faire toutes les choses necessaires pour l’arrivée des troupes; mais qu’il espere d’un venir a bout a force de presser et de tourmenter les gens.’¹³

I will add, Sir, to this letter, that I have just received one from Commissioner Fumeron, of Lymerick, who informs me that he has taken great pains to have all the things necessary for the arrival of the troops done; but that he hopes to come to an end by dint of pressing and tormenting people.

A revealing observation, providing contemporary evidence of the regional levels of gunmoney circulation, articulating expectations of inflation in the context of the planned Limerick mint, and further evidence of the unacceptability of gunmoney to the Protestant community, was made by d’Avaux writing from Dublin to Louvois on 01 February:

‘La monnoye de cuivre s’avit tellement ici, que l’on donne a present jusques a vingt sept a vingt huit schelins pour un lois d’or; ou n’en donne que vingt deux ou vingt trois schelins a Cork et a Lymerick, ou le cuivre n’est pas encore si commun; mais dans peu de temps lorsque le cuivre sera respandu dans se quartiers la comme il est du costé de Dublin, on en donnera tout autant; cela vient en partie de ce que les Protestans ne prennent pas de cuivre, et que pour acheter d’eux del la laine, ou d’autres choses, il faut donner de l’or ou de l’argent.’¹⁴

The copper coinage has degraded so much here that they are now giving twenty-seven to twenty-eight shillings for a louis d’or; or only twenty-two or twenty-three shillings are given in Cork and Lymerick, where copper is not yet so common; but in a short time when the copper will be spread in its quarters there as it is on the side of Dublin, we will give just as much; this is partly because the Protestants do not take copper, and to buy wool or other things from them gold or silver must be given.

The want of copper was an ever-present refrain from Ireland in the months before the fleet arrived. Two letters from Louvois, to d’Avaux on 05 January¹⁵ and to Bouridal in Brest the day after,¹⁶ relate the personal command of Louis XIV to deliver a single (admittedly, large) canon from a Brest fort to Ireland to coin, illustrating also the Sun King’s micro-managerial tendencies. A letter to Louis from d’Avaux in Dublin on 11 February reports the melting of more cannon, and that the mint was nearly out of copper.

By 18 February, the plan for the fleet’s landfall had changed from Limerick to Cork (and Kinsale). Naval concern for such a concentration of assets clearly played a role, d’Avaux writing to Louvois from Dublin:

¹³ Hogan 1934 637.

¹⁴ Hogan 1934 637.

¹⁵ Hogan 1934 658-9.

¹⁶ Mulloy 1984 Document 41.

‘Je croy, Monsieur, que les officiers de marine ont eu raison de dire que la flotte du Roy estoit une fois entrée dans le port de Lymerick, elle n'en pourroit sortir tant que le vents tiendroient de l'ouest regneroient...’¹⁷

I believe, sir, that the naval officers were right to say that the King's fleet once entered the port of Limerick, it could not leave it as long as the winds held westerly...

The long-suffering Fumeron was dispatched to Cork to re-do all the preparations; a touch of frustration is evident in his letter to d'Avaux from Cork on 01 March in remarking that *‘we will be obliged to bring from Limerick all the supplies and tools that I have had made there.’*¹⁸ He was unable to source canvas or covers for the beds of another hospital; and the unfortunate man asked to be relieved so that he could return to France with the fleet to have surgery on an anal fistula.

The fleet delivered many French troops to Ireland, under the command of the Comte de Lauzun; a figure of 6,666 is given by Timmins,¹⁹ a slightly higher one of 7,291 by Macaulay.²⁰ As mentioned, some of the copper it brought was sent to Limerick; and while no documentary evidence has been identified that Hupierre went there also, the numismatic evidence of the new March 1690 (Julian old style) portraits in Limerick, as well as the declared French intent to establish a mint there, is very strongly suggestive that he did. Furthermore, as found by the Withers and elaborated by the author,²¹ the T-engraver transferred to Limerick, leaving an unfinished March 1690 (Julian old style) reverse shilling die behind in Dublin, concentrating French coin-making expertise in Limerick, and leaving the Dublin mint to its Protestant staff, in which denominational state it was to remain until its closure after the Boyne.²²

Evidence of the thinking that Limerick was garrisoned and its mint established as a deliberate strategic hedge at the start of the campaigning season is found in a letter from Houlette, who had taken over from Fumeron in Cork, to Louvois, dated 8th May 1690:

‘Keingsale et Limmerick sont les deux lieues que le Roy peut envisager de garder en cas de revolution, et il est neccesaire de les munir tous deux.’²³

Keingsale and Limerick are the two places that the King can look to keep in the event of a revolution, and it is necessary to equip them both.

In the same letter, Houlette reports that he had dispatched nine companies of troops from the fleet to Limerick. Writing to Louvois from Dublin on 07 June, Lauzun requested more copper, and made a remarkable request:

‘Il nous est impossible de pouvoir payer nos troupes en campagne et d'y soustenir l'armée, si vous ne nous envoyez pas du cuivre par la flotte, au moins pour le

¹⁷ Hogan 1934 657.

¹⁸ Mulloy 1984, Document 676.

¹⁹ Timmins 2019.

²⁰ Macaulay, T. B., 1855, 247. *The History of England from the Accession of James II*, Vol 5. Leipzig: Tauchniz.

²¹ Mac Conamhna 2021.

²² Anonymous 1690 57.

²³ Mulloy 1984 Document 833.

somme de vingt mille écus. Mr. l'intendant a soixante mille francs en cuivre d'une prise d'une frégate conduite à Limerick, lequel cuivre, si vous trouvez à propos, Monsieur, je le feray convertir en argent par le soldat..²⁴

It is impossible for us to be able to pay our troops in the field and to support the army there, if you do not send us copper by the fleet, at least for the sum of twenty thousand écus. Mr. the intendant has sixty thousand francs in copper from the prize of a frigate taken to Limerick, which copper, if you find it appropriate, sir, I will have the soldier convert it into money...

What is striking about this letter is that Lauzun is requesting approval to coin in Limerick to pay French troops, not from James II in Dublin, but from the French secretary of state for war in Paris. This heightens the impression that the Limerick mint was exclusively a French operation, at least until the troop withdrawal back to France, which began in August.

An eyewitness account of the end of gunmoney is recorded by Fumeron, writing to Louvois from Vannes on the Morbihan in Brittany on 22 December 1690. He quotes the account of an Irish traveller he met there, who had left Limerick on 11 December:

'...parce que l'on y a dépendu à toutes sortes de personnes de refuser la monnaye de cuivre sur peine de la vie, qui l'on n'aportoit plus rien pour vendre dans la place; et que cette monnoye ayant manqué dans le temps qu'il estoit sur les lieux, on y avoit fait fondre une des plus grosses pieces de canon de ladite ville pour donner quelque argent aux troupes...'²⁵

...because all sorts of people have been forbidden there to refuse copper coins on pain of life, then nothing more was brought to sell in the market; and that this coinage having failed during the time he was on the spot, one of the largest pieces of cannon in the said city had been melted down there to give some money to the troops...

Given that gunmoney had failed, the point of melting a cannon to make more of it would be unclear; so this letter perhaps records the origin of the small Hibernia halfpennies. Another eyewitness account of the end of the coinage is provided by John Stevens, a captain in the Jacobite army, who was based in Limerick from 16 October 1690:

'As for pay a small part of the winter we received subsistence money in brass, which was equivalent almost to nothing, for a captain's subsistence which was a crown a day would yield but one quart of ale and that very bad, whereas for four Irish halfpence there was much better drink to be had... But...before Christmas all the brass was consumed, so that nothing remaining to coin money, and there being no duties or taxes to be raised because the small territory we had was in no capacity of paying any, the army from that time never received any pay whatsoever, and to say the truth they were better satisfied without it than with such as they had before, for the brass was accounted to them as if it had been

²⁴ Mulloy 1984 document 846.

²⁵ Mulloy 1984 document 1024.

*gold or silver, and at the same time was worth nothing, whereas now as they received nothing so they had nothing to account for.*²⁶

Conclusion

The evidence of this correspondence, augmented by that of gunmoney numismatics, is that the Limerick gunmoney mint was a French institution in conception, establishment and operation; and that it began in March 1690 Julian old style. This interpretation is consistent with the dearth of evidence pertaining to the mint in the records of Irish Jacobite officialdom. It is also consistent with the fact that gunmoney had two purposes only, which were to pay for the Jacobite army and for the expenses of James II's Irish court and administration, both of which had been concentrated on Dublin or on the campaign trail to Ulster until the French expedition arrived; and that the genesis of the Limerick mint coincided with the first major deployment of troops to the region.



²⁶ The Journal of John Stevens, containing a brief account of the war of Ireland 1689-1691, online version <https://celt.ucc.ie/published/E680002-001/index.html>, 191-2. Accessed 26/01/2022.