Counterfeiting in 18th-Century France: Political Rhetoric and Social Realities

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In a monarchy that was theoretically absolute, an attack on the king was the most heinous of crimes, and was accordingly punished with the most final of sentences. Lèse-majesté was broader than treason and encompassed a wide variety of crimes, from blasphemy and sacrilege (which fell under the rubric of lèse-majesté divine) to plotting against the king's life or merely uttering seditious words. It was as one of the lesser forms of this lèse-majesté humaine that counterfeiting was understood. While dealing in false coinage did not constitute a direct attack on the monarchy, it undermined the king's prerogative to issue currency, illegally reproduced his image, and threatened the economic viability of the state. And like the other forms of lèse-majesté, it was taken very seriously, punishable by death in the early modern period, usually by hanging or beheading, but in some cases, and as late as the seventeenth century, by boiling alive.¹

Despite this level of gravity, however, two points stand out: counterfeiting was rampant in the eighteenth century, and most of it was relatively small-scale, its practitioners seeking to make ends meet rather than to undermine the state. That does not mean, of course, that an effective counterfeiting operation, even if it were run by a group of villagers, peddlers or pot-makers, could not be damaging in a material way, but the rhetoric of the law seemed out of touch with the reality of the crime. Like peasants and manual laborers who found

¹ Christiane Plessix-Buisset, Le Criminel devant ses juges en Bretagne aux 16e et 17e siècles (Paris: Maloine, 1988), 163-4. I have not found any reference to this extreme penalty continuing in the eighteenth century; in fact, as the end of the Ancien régime approached, counterfeitors' sentences were more commonly commuted to years on the galleys or banishment.
themselves indicted for seditious speech charges during the Revolution for merely voicing their opinion, there is a degree of irony in the prosecution of the small-time coin-clipper caught up in a state machinery that had been designed to deal with much greater threats.

This paper lays out the initial positions for a wider project on counterfeiting in France from 1670, the date of Louis XIV’s Criminal Ordinance, to 1800. The study will include not only coining but also counterfeit bills from eighteenth-century notes of exchange to the assignat – and it will investigate criminal processes and prosecutions at different court levels and in different parts of France. To date, there has been relatively little attention to the question of counterfeiting in this period, and those studies that do exist have focused on a narrow geographic region and often do not address wider questions about the incidence of the crime.

What was the nature of counterfeiting in border regions like Flanders and upper Savoy, for example, compared with the same crime in rural inland areas? What was different about the cases which were appealed up to

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3 Counterfeit bills have received even less attention than counterfeit coins. For the range of bills used in the eighteenth century, see Jean Lafaurie, Les Assignats et les papiers-monnaies émis par l’état au XVIIIe siècle (Paris: Le Léopard d’Or, 1981).


5 Some excellent work has been done on border areas in the south-east and south-west; for the region bordering Switzerland, see the work of Arnaud Clairand and Charles Froidevaux, such as “L’Industrie des fausses monnaies françaises au Pays de Neuchâtel”, Revue historique neuchâteloise 3 (2000) 173-212. On the south-west, see Bernard Lloansi, “La répression du faux-monnayage en Roussillon aux XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles,” in Les faux en numismatique (Perpignan: Musée Numismatique Joseph Puig, 1997), 37-70, and Olivier Caporossi and Bernard Traimond, eds., La fabrique du faux monétaire: du Moyen âge à nos jours (Toulouse: FRAMESPA-UMR, 2012), particularly the contributions of Jack Thomas and Olivier Caporossi.

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2012
the Cour des Monnaies in Paris (and, as of 1704, in Lyon for the south),\(^6\) compared with those cases that were settled by a local *Monnaie* or even in the *sénéchaussée* or *prévôtal* courts? After describing how coins were produced, both legally and illegally, this paper will advance some early observations on two key themes of the project: the divergent social origins and sophistication levels among *Ancien régime* counterfeiters, and the significant role played by women in the more homegrown variety.

![Figure 1: Moneymaking in the *Encyclopédie*](image)

**Making (and Faking) Money**

If the crime of counterfeiting has been somewhat neglected in studies of *Ancien régime* criminality, it may be at least in part because its study requires a degree of technical knowledge and a specialized vocabulary that can be intimidating.\(^7\) The eighteenth-century *monnayeur* or minter starts by preparing a

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\(^7\) The information which follows comes from the sources cited in notes 4 and 5 and from
flan, a blank metal piece in the correct weight (measured in deniers and grains) and shape for a given coin. The blanks then undergo a process of blanchiment, or cleaning, using harsh chemicals such as ammonia and alum. Ready to be imprinted, the blanks are briefly heated in a furnace to make them more malleable. They are then fit into a machine called a balancier, and pressed using a matrice (or a die), a stamping block carved in relief. As shown in Figure 1, a pendulum turns the screw (letter I) which applies enough pressure to permanently imprint both sides of the coin. After the coins are imprinted, they are verified by agents to ensure they are the proper weight.

In fact, the existence of a large number of checks and regulations is suggestive, itself, of the perceived threat of counterfeiting activities. The precious metal content for each coin was highly regulated; the mixture was always an alloy in which a specified degree of copper was mixed in for strength as well as to control the value, and the component metals were carefully weighed before being melted down and formed into blanks. The images and legends for the inscription were decided by the authorities in concert with a maître-monnayeur, and the task of carving the dies was the purview of official graveurs (or engravers, also known as tailleurs). Unauthorized possession of such dies – or, for that matter, of any of the necessary equipment for coining including furnaces, crucibles, stamp-presses, precious metals or old coins that could be melted down, and the variety of chemicals commonly used in the process – was grounds for suspicion of counterfeiting. In one case, the defendant Nicholas Gledieu was convicted of making dies, punches and other tools for counterfeiting: he was tortured before he was executed. In 1645, the use of the balancier by authorized monnayeurs became mandatory, in order to avoid the confusion created by a wide variation among “official coins” struck using a hammer: people used to off-center imprints and overlapping images from repeated strikes were more likely to accept amateurish copies. Finally, each coin struck in a regulated mint was marked with a différent, a unique symbol to identify its place of origin. In counterfeits, such marks were copied, invented, or simply left off, a detail that would often escape notice among the public, but which was scrutinized in official investigations.

Despite the layers of controls and regulations in place, counterfeiting


8 Different French terms were used for this, including carré, the more general matrice, or coin, from the Latin word for “wedge” and giving us the English “coin.”

9 Trial of Gledieu et al., 1710, Z1B 752, Cour des Monnaies de Lyon, Archives nationales (AN), Paris.
coins remained a feasible enough prospect to entice a (relatively) large number to try their hand at it. If we set aside the common charge of fausse réformation – where artisans unsanctioned by the Monnaie undercut an official re-issue by restamping otherwise valid coins themselves and profiting from the devaluation – the manufacture of false coins falls into two broad categories. While the more serious criminals worked by changing the precious metal content of the coin, there was also a range of coiners who did not have the technical wherewithal to strike coins anew, but who participated at a lower level by passing off, as whole, coins that had been “lightened” of some of their burden of gold or silver. This includes the familiar “coin-clipping” (referred to in French as rognage) usually accompanied by filing, or limage. The clipplings and shavings of precious metal would be retained by the clipper, to be melted down and sold, or kept for other purposes. The clipped coin, marginally lighter but perhaps not enough to be noticed in a quick transaction, would be used for its face value. Measures were undertaken to discourage clipping, including the placement of inscriptions on the edge of the coin and grènetis – the characteristic pattern of small dots around the circumference on both sides – so that it became less common in the eighteenth century than it had been in earlier periods.10 Some still tried to clip coins and then replace the edge-markings, but the increased difficulty of this may explain the appearance of other crimes, such as barattage, or “churning” coins to superficially remove a small amount of precious metal dust, and lavage, which aimed to achieve the same end by briefly exposing coins to strong acids.11

At any rate, while treatments of counterfeiting in England and in earlier periods in France have emphasized the preponderance of coin clipping,12 the majority of trials examined for the eighteenth century appear to be for the more serious activities involved in changing or disguising the proportion of precious metal in a coin. In contemporary jurisprudence, this was generally referred to as altération de la monnaie if not simply fabrication de la fausse monnaie, but on the streets as in the courthouses, more specific terms were employed. Those with good metalworking skills, or at least some experience with a forge, were able to produce coins whose outer shell was true, but whose core was made of cheaper material; such coins were described as fourrées (filled), plaquées (plated) or even just saucées (dipped or coated) [Figure 2]. More feckless criminals experimented with methods of chemically altering the appearance of copper or other cheap

10 Dubuis, Faux-monnayage.
11 On “barattage”, see Jambu, “Frauder avec la monnaie,” 250. My thanks to Jotham Parsons for the description of “lavage”.
12 Gaskill, Crime and Mentalities, 131-2, and Yves Cotivy, “De la Fraude à la falsification: Le Faux monnayage en France à la fin du Moyen Âge,” in Fraude, contrefaçon et contrebande, eds. Béaur et al., 239-48. Information gleaned from numismatics catalogues also seems to confirm this impression.
metals and cutting out the cost of precious metals altogether. Figure 3, which was included among the evidence against a gang of counterfeiters working in the Charollais, near Lyon, is an example of a formula for whitening copper, by means of aqua fortis (“strong water” or nitric acid), a quantity of silver threads, mercury, and “a pinch of antimony.”\(^{13}\) A variety of such “recipes” exist for giving a gold or silver cast to different materials, using a similar cocktail of strong chemicals. In some of the simplest incidences of counterfeiting, defendants were accused of whitening copper tokens and trying to pass them off as silver currency. As with all proverbs, there was an underlying reality to the eighteenth-century saying, “faux comme un jeton” (false as a token).

After imprinting the false blank with an authentic-looking inscription, either with molds from true coins\(^ {14}\) or with false or stolen dies, the final step was to monetize the fraud. Passing off fake coins would have required a great deal of skill, given that the public was anything but unsuspecting. If serious counterfeiters paid others to pass the coins for them in exchange for a share of

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\(^{13}\) Trial of Morel, Desbrosses et al., 1743-44, Z 18 771, Cour des Monnaies de Lyon, AN. Antimony is a white metallic element listed on the modern periodic table as Sb, number 51. The translation “silver threads” comes from the 1872 definition for parfilure by Émile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*. See The ARTFL Project, *Dictionnaires d'autrefois*, s.v. “parafilure,” [https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/dictionnaires-dautrefois](https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/dictionnaires-dautrefois) (accessed July 17, 2014). The word used in this instance, however, is préfilure, a variant spelling.

\(^{14}\) Dubuis, *Faux-Monnayage*, 143. For a description of a wooden mold with a space for making an écu, see the trial of Delatour et al., 6B127, Juridiction du Siége de Monnaie de Lyon, 1703, Archives départementales (AD) du Rhône, Lyon.
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the profits, small-scale operations tended to come down to paying for merchandise with false currency, and references abound to the rejection of lightweight or low-quality coins, described as being *de mauvais aloi* or *de bas titre* – of doubtful quality – at fairs, markets and taverns, where merchants were not expecting to recognize all of their customers. In cases where the defendant knew his intended victim, a common strategy was to pay a debt or a bill with a larger, false coin, and benefit from receiving change in real specie. When Annet Dumonteil of the village of Chassaignas, in the Dordogne, was told that Combi, *dit* Cuisinier, wanted to repay his debt of 100 sols to her, she was pleased but suspicious. For one thing, he had sent an intermediary to set up the exchange, and, for another, this man instructed her to bring change, as Combi would pay her using a gold Louis. Luckily for her, the meeting was arranged in a public place, a tavern, so there were plenty of second opinions offered on the “*prétendu Louis*,” which everyone agreed did not seem to be “*de bon alloy*” (in the trial documents, it is referred to as a “yellow token”). Combi’s fate is unknown, but his gilded token was retained by the police, and is still attached to his case in the archives. The attempt at Louis’ effigy on one side [Figure 4A, left], is poor when compared with a true *Louis d’or*, from 1755 [Figure 4B], and the other side remained a *jeton* [Figure 4A, right].

The Eighteenth-Century Expansion of Small-Time Counterfeiting Operations

Combi’s case is interesting because he was typical of a particular type of counterfeiter. He himself was of humble, country origins; his work was quickly and poorly done; and his motivation appears to have been simply the resolution of an immediate need for cash, with no indication of a grander counterfeiting operation. Counterfeiting in this casual way appears to have been very common in the *Ancien régime*, and cases like Combi’s were investigated by the authorities.

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15 B672, Sénéchaussée de Périgueux, 1776, AD Dordogne, Périgueux.
in the same way as more sophisticated operations. When comparing the circumstances and actions of defendants who were markedly dissimilar from such casual counterfeiters, a great deal about the world of counterfeiting comes to light, including the role of women in this branch of criminal activity, the link between artisanal expertise and technical competence, and the attitude towards counterfeiting activities in society.

The evidence presented here is drawn from an initial research sample of 265 trials for counterfeiting activities dating from 1658 to 1788, including 140 incidents from the courts of appeal in Paris and Lyon and 125 trials from six departmental archives, covering the institutions centered in Rennes, La Rochelle, Périgueux, Marseille, Lyon and Lille. These are often extended investigations, in which torture was used to reveal accomplices and expose entire counterfeiting rings. One group working out of Aix-en-Provence included a barber-surgeon, a schoolteacher, a local landowner and an army captain. Another group near Grenoble involved a weaver, a doctor, a master silk-worker, and a retired hospital administrator and his wife. Crimes that required capital, connections and artisanal skill apparently made for strange bedfellows. Indeed, close socio-economic analysis of the defendants reveals that counterfeiting was practiced by a remarkable cross-section of Ancien régime society, with a number of interesting trends standing out.

The following preliminary data concerns the 125 cases from departmental archives only, and categorizes individual defendants by profession. From a total sample of 320 individuals, 58% of cases involved only one or two defendants, but 10% contain five or more. The proportion of male defendants whose profession is not indicated is high at 22%. Indictments often indicate undetermined “others” who were involved, but were not brought to trial. As a result, any classification of defendants by profession is impressionistic rather than exhaustive, but revealing nonetheless. Of 259 individuals from known professions, we see a strong representation of the urban artisan class generally (72 cases, or 28%), with an over-representation, as might be expected, of the metalworking trades. Indeed, there was an entire range of trades tangentially related to the use of precious metals, such as passementiers (trim makers), guimpiers (filament makers), and brochiers (filament weavers), all of whom worked with gold and silver threads in the textile industry. Only 11% of defendants described themselves as financiers

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16 8B93, Tribunal de la Monnaie d’Aix, 1727, AD Bouches-du-Rhône, Marseilles.
17 6B119, Juridiction du Siége de la Monnaie de Lyon, 1699, AD Rhône.
18 Passementier could refer to makers of lace, trim or tassels, but contemporary dictionaries describe the passement as a “tissu large et plat, d’or, d’argent et de soie, qu’on met par décoration sur les habits ou sur les meubles.” Guimpiers prepared golden and silver threads for galons and épaulettes, and an eighteenth-century brochier added golden or silken threads to fabric. The ARTFL Project, Dictionnaires d’autrefois, s.v. “passement,”
or *bourgeois*, while members of the nobility and clergy made a minor appearance at 3%.

At the opposite end of the social scale, however, we find significant counterfeiting activity in rural areas, and particularly among the lower classes: 10% of identified defendants are peasants and 13% are small merchants and tradesmen. Horse-dealers seem particularly likely to be involved in counterfeiting. And true to the nature of smuggling and counterfeit activity in general, the number of unsettled or otherwise marginalized persons is remarkably high at 46 or 18%; the sample includes soldiers, peddlers, rag-sellers, servants, prisoners, one executioner and one man who (strangely, given his interlocutors) described himself as a fugitive. Women, who make up 13% of the defendants, will be discussed further, below. Even taking into account that these statistics come from local courts, rather than from the courts of appeal, the profile of counterfeiters in the eighteenth century suggests a significant shift downwards on the social scale in comparison with findings for the sixteenth century. Even at this early stage of research, it seems likely that this shift can be linked to the greater financial burden placed on the lower classes at the end of the reign of Louis XIV, and to increased demographic pressure in the eighteenth century.

The wide social profile of defendants, together with the difference in their technical abilities, is also reflected in a range of different sophistication levels in the counterfeits they produced. The following two cases offer a glimpse into the lives of counterfeiters of very different circumstances. Philippe Truilhier, a “bourgeois” of Marseille, was accused of making counterfeit money in his private *bastide* (a summer home or villa in Provence) in Pélissanne, about 50 km northwest of Marseille. Truilhier came to the attention of local police in 1716 when a man often seen frequenting his villa was reported to have used counterfeit 20-sol pieces to buy eggs and cheese. The coins, it turned out, were only copper tokens, chemically whitened and stamped with the inscriptions of old 20-sol pieces. However, even the *vendeuse* who had been initially duped by the coin suspected that it “was not well-made,” and, indeed, closer inspection revealed that some of the decoration and characters of the token showed through the re-stamping. As other witness accounts emerged, describing Truilhier’s suspicious activities – that he had taken a long iron bar to a local blacksmith, Honoré Bounaud, to be shaped, and that he had asked a merchant’s wife to weigh a block of a silver-colored metal on her scale – the case against him grew. When they searched his *bastide*, the *maréchaussée* (constabulary) found the tools and materials needed

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20 Z18 755, Cour des Monnaies de Lyon, 1716, AN.
for counterfeiting, including a *balancier* that worked with a screw mechanism, tongs for removing objects from the fire, crucibles, metal cutters and files. They also found a large cache of counterfeit coins both in the workshop and on Truilhier himself.

Although interrogators subjected him to torture in order to determine his accomplices – burning wicks were placed between his fingers and toes, such that by the end of the session he could not sign his name – Truilhier resisted giving further information. In the end, the file remained open on the men seen entering and leaving Truilhier’s villa, and Bounaud, the blacksmith, was fined 100 *livres* for his involvement, even though he repeatedly insisted that he had not known what Truilhier wanted the shaped iron bar for. Truilhier himself, however, was clearly identified as the principal perpetrator. He was hanged like a common criminal, and his belongings seized. After his death, and as a warning to others, his villa was demolished and a signpost erected in its place, bearing a slate tablet engraved with the judge’s decision in his case.

An example of counterfeiting and its consequences from the lower-classes is provided by the case of Jean Porchet, *dit* la Roche, and Olivier Gicquel, who lived in the village of Plumaugat, now in the Côtes d’Armor, about 50 km northwest of Rennes.21 La Roche was a boilermaker and the principal defendant; his accomplice, Gicquel, had little visible means of earning a living, and when pressed by the royal prosecutor, he described his profession as “normally looking about for old rags to make paper out of.”22 Having come together on a scheme, Gicquel and La Roche were indicted in 1726 for “making and trying to unload false coins at the tavern of La Bonté” in exchange for some cider. The tavern-keeper was immediately suspicious of their coins, and an official from the nearby village of Boisgervilly, also present, came to his aid. The official tricked La Roche into showing his hand by pretending that he, too, was a *faux-monnayeur* and by bragging about how many coins he and his father had produced. In response, La Roche foolishly insisted that *he* had produced far more. When Gicquel and La Roche were searched, counterfeit coins were recovered from both their pockets and their shoes, and their satchels were found to contain coin molds made out of stone and wood (including one with imprints in the top and bottom), iron tools, and pieces of pewter. While Gicquel was pardoned for his minor involvement in the affair, La Roche, like Truilhier, was hanged for his crimes in Rennes.

A Different Family Economy: Women in Counterfeiting Operations

Cases like that of Gicquel and La Roche abound in the departmental

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21 6B142 case 5, Cour des Monnaies de Rennes, 1726, AD d’Ille-et-Vilaine, Rennes.
22 Interrogation of Olivier Gicquel, January 3, 1726, 6B142 case 5, Cour des Monnaies de Rennes, 1726, AD Ille-et-Vilaine.
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archives. Far from being the preserve of well-connected professional criminals or wealthy crooks, counterfeiting activities commonly involved lower-class families who were falsifying currency as merely one more tool in the effort to make ends meet. In this context, it is not surprising to find a significant presence of women among the sample of defendants, yet the literature remains divided about the extent to which women were primarily responsible for counterfeiting activities. Jotham Parsons suggests that in sixteenth-century cases, women appear primarily as part of the families or households of other protagonists, and Olivier Dubuis calls counterfeiting “a masculine crime.”\(^\text{23}\) Nicolas Tosney’s work on London, on the other hand, found an unusually high level of female participation in counterfeiting: 46% of all defendants at the Old Bailey from 1674 to 1749 were women, either alone, with their husbands, or in groups both mixed-sex and female-only.\(^\text{24}\) The evidence here falls between these two extremes. Although only 42 (13%) of the 320 defendants analyzed above were women, 34 trials (27% of the total) include at least one woman on the indictment list, and in ten cases they were the principal or even the only defendants.

Beginning with Olwen Hufton’s important work on poverty and the functioning of the family economy, historians have long recognized a pattern of work in which both men and women contributed to the maintenance of the household.\(^\text{25}\) The nature of this agreement is often assumed to have been a patriarchal one, with male family members prescribing the activities of the women, and indeed, many of the trials cited here suggest gendered groupings in which female participants may have had little choice in their involvement, often resulting in acquittals. Catherine Autant, for example, together with her husband, Pierre de Rassier and her sister, Marie, was accused of trying to pass off a 12-sol coin “made of false material” at the royal fair at Rochefort, near La Rochelle, and was later released.\(^\text{26}\) And in the case against two other couples, Jean Campet and Abraham Diguet and their wives, the men were sentenced to the galleys while the women were acquitted (although they likely suffered from the confiscation of their husbands’ goods).\(^\text{27}\) Yet women could also show cunning and agency before the courts. When Marie Magnan’s husband, Jacques Gaubert, was arrested for fabrication and distribution of counterfeit money in 1734, she took a few belongings and went to stay with her sister in the nearby enclave of the Comtat Venaissin. Gaubert was left behind to answer the authorities’ questions and was


\(^{26}\) B1227, Registre d’écrou de la Maréchaussée, entries for 9 March – 20 June 1740, AD Charente-Maritime, La Rochelle.

\(^{27}\) 6B111, Juridiction du Siége de la Monnaie de Lyon, 1689, AD Rhône.
even tortured to reveal his accomplices. As a result, both he and Marie were sentenced to be hanged, she in contumacy. Still she stayed away, and by the time she returned in 1738, he had been rowing in the galleys for four years on a commuted sentence. She evaded detection at a boardinghouse in Marseille for three months before she was picked up and questioned. By then, however, hard evidence of her participation had disappeared. She refused to admit any knowledge of her husband’s criminal activity – even avoiding the interrogator’s suggestion that she might have passed false currency under duress – and eventually obtained her freedom.  

Independent as these women’s actions may seem, it is also not uncommon to find women involved in counterfeiting operations which are clearly outside of the familiar household context. Many trial records reveal a hardened, self-reliant female criminal as part of a mixed-gender group, and in five cases, women criminals worked with other women or by themselves. In one case, Antoinette Chenavaz, a cobbler’s wife from Lyon, was accused together with her aunt of passing off fake four-denier coins. In another case, three sellers of second-hand goods in Marseilles, each of them married women, was accused of giving counterfeit coin in change. Lone women in difficult financial circumstances could also become involved in the counterfeit trade in the same way as they became prostitutes or thieves. Margoton Rostand had left her country home as a young girl to become a servant in a nearby town, later moving to Marseille where she worked as a server at an inn. At age 24, she was selling eau-de-vie to convicts on the galley ships. Like many desperate people, she ended up in an arrangement where she distributed false currency for her customers, some of whom were involved in the counterfeiting trade, and took a cut of the profits – or, at least that is what the police claimed, as the case was never proven and Margoton was released. Not all women were so lucky, however, and sometimes the evidence was too damning for authorities to look the other way. In the case of Julienne-Katherine Giraut, a widow and stamp-maker accused of passing off lead coins as silver six-livre écus in Brittany, her male accomplice was merely branded and sent to the galleys, while Julienne-Katherine herself was hanged.

Whether men or women, common tradesmen or grands bourgeois, agricultural laborers or corrupt goldsmiths, all those who were convicted of counterfeiting the king’s coin were prosecuted with the utmost severity. In sophisticated operations, where the production of counterfeit money was a veritable industry operating in remote places like the Vallée de la Barcelonnette

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28 8B106, Tribunal de la Monnaie d’Aix, 1734-38, AD Bouches-du-Rhône.
29 6B101, Juridiction du Siége de la Monnaie de Lyon, 1675, AD Rhône.
30 8B100 case 5, Tribunal de la Monnaie d’Aix, 1730, AD Bouches-du-Rhône.
31 8B107 case 1, Tribunal de la Monnaie d’Aix, 1735, AD Bouches-du-Rhône.
32 1Bn 3820, Parlement de Rennes, 1786, AD Ille-et-Vilaine.
on the French-Swiss border or the protected lands of a local nobleman, the application of the statute of *lèse-majesté* is perhaps understandable. But in the case of low-status criminals such as Olivier Gicquel and Margoton Rostand, for whom it was a side activity to make ends meet, there is a disconnect between the crime and the legal response. True, a great deal of petty crime, including theft, was treated harshly in the early modern period. Yet money was highly symbolic in the *Ancien régime*. By subverting the official currency, even small-time counterfeiters undermined royal authority, and the cumulative effect of many individual operations was seen to threaten to undermine the economic stability of the kingdom, if not the ideological foundations of the monarchy.