

VISIGOTHIC CIRCULATION: *STATUS QUAESTIONIS*

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To position coinage accurately within the greater economic system of the Visigothic kingdom, there must first be some consensus, or at least agreement around the remaining points of disagreement, concerning how coins moved within the Iberian Peninsula and outside the kingdom's borders. In pursuit of this, scholars of Visigothic numismatics will quickly find themselves faced with a plethora of studies, most restricted by period, region, or denomination, and each demonstrating mastery over some facet of the question of circulation. Over the last century and a half, relatively few scholars have attempted to produce a more comprehensive statement about where coins moved, or tried to answer the even more elusive questions of how and why. In part, this has been due to the relatively slow and recent publication of archaeological material and the small number of coins that can be securely connected with such information. These may be juxtaposed with larger, but largely unprovenanced, museum collections, which have provided information on series and minting, but cannot be used to explicate circulation patterns. Early efforts to identify types and produce corpora gradually led to the first efforts to describe patterns of circulation, even with limited evidence.¹ Recently, more comprehensive discussions have been possible, and have placed those patterns into a growing consensus around the balance between

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¹ George Carpenter Miles, *The Coinage of the Visigoths of Spain: Leovigild to Achila II* (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1952) and Xavier Barral i Altet, *La circulation des monnaies suèves et visigotiques. Contribution à l'histoire économique du royaume visigot* (Munich: Artemis, 1976).

the workings of the kingdom's fiscal machinery and the practices of commercial agents.²

Despite this progress, circulation *qua* circulation has always occupied a subordinate position to questions of minting and typology overall. These topics have, understandably, taken priority as our number of known coins has grown and as older corpora grew dated, but there has also been a reticence to consider circulation, given the small number of Visigothic coins overall and the imbalance in our data between hoards and isolated finds.³ Fortunately, many new finds, whether hoards or individual coins, come from well-excavated contexts, which makes it increasingly possible to speak with some certainty, as well as with some continued hesitation, about a number of different circulation patterns throughout the period and the peninsula, and to place recent findings into the context of earlier work on the subject.⁴

In discussing circulation, we are, of course, examining coins that come to us with at least some archaeological provenance. Coin finds, whether singly or as part of hoards, that come to us with geographical information can, at a minimum, provide us with insight into the distance coins moved from their place of origin.⁵ Often, it is desirable, but difficult, if not impossible, to discern

² Ruth Pliego, "Visigothic Currency: Recent Developments and Data for Its Study," in *Framing Power in Visigothic Society. Discourses, Devices, and Artefacts*, ed. Eleonora Dell'Elicine and Céline Martin (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 181–215, and Andrew Kurt, *Minting, State, and Economy in the Visigothic Kingdom* (Amsterdam University Press, 2020).

³ Pliego, "Visigothic Currency," 204–09, states that the small sample-size of Visigothic coins makes it impossible to undertake any analysis of circulation deeper than the general patterns visible in a rough mapping. She has stressed that the disparities between isolated finds and hoards require different and irreconcilable methodologies, and that any attempt to generate a detailed study of Visigothic circulation will inevitably be flawed by the comparison of apples and oranges. As we will see, this does not mean that it has not been attempted, nor that those efforts have been wholly wasted.

⁴ For example, Lauro Olmo Enciso and Manuel Castro Priego. "Coins, Cities and Archaeological Contexts in the Centre of the Iberian Peninsula between the 6th and 8th Centuries AD: Reccopolis and Toledo," in *Numismatica e Archeologia. Monete, stratigrafie e contesti. Dati a confronto*, ed. Giacomo Pardini, Nicola Parise and Flavia Marani (Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 2018), 557–71.

⁵ There has been, rightly, some question as to whether the mint site identified on a coin is actually the site at which it was both created and dispersed. Andrew Kurt, "Visigothic Currency in its Making and Movement: A Varying State of Circumstances," *Visigothic Symposium 3* (2018): 165–97, at 175, reports that nearly half of individual coins are within 200 km of their mint of origin. The numbers appear to be more evenly distributed when coins from hoards are considered, see David M. Metcalf, "Some Geographical Aspects of Early Medieval Monetary Circulation in the Iberian Peninsula," in *Problems of Medieval*

the speed of that travel. Coins from hoards can be given a terminus post quem, and some tentative inferences may be drawn from patterns of wear, but often scholars are wholly in the dark about the hand-to-hand motion of individual coins. Hoards that preserve coins from over a long period of time do not necessarily clarify matters, as they may represent savings, and show us coins that were quickly pulled from circulation, rather than kept in active use for many years. The Visigothic situation is complicated by the common understanding that older coins, especially late Roman bronzes, continued to circulate throughout the fifth and sixth centuries.⁶ The date of a coin's striking is therefore not a reliable indicator of the date of deposit, nor does it illuminate much about the paths a coin may have taken before that moment. These blind spots leave scholars with many unanswered, though tantalizing, questions, and it is imperative that we push our available evidence to its limit to ascertain what may be plausibly claimed about the monetary habits of the Visigoths and what must be left unknown.

In the following, I will proceed by considering circulation, both in terms of the historiography of the issue and the patterns of coin movement, in so far as they are currently understood.⁷ I will discuss circulation first by metal type and then by region. In accordance with the level of attention paid by the field and the volume of coinage overall, I will begin with the circulation of the gold denominations, the solidus and, more commonly, its fraction the tremissis. It will become apparent that while the proliferation of mint locations has led to questions about the purpose of coinage in the Visigothic kingdom, circulation followed a handful of patterns across the peninsula that do not neatly align with the location or density of mint sites. The available evidence suggests a high level of coin production in the south, especially in the seventh century, that spread, generally, northward. Coins produced in the northeast seem to have had a more limited circulation, with a surge in production in the early eighth century. The northwest has uncovered more isolated finds than hoards, and the center of the peninsula, while it has been relatively under-represented

Coinage in the Iberian Area, ed. Mario Marques and David M. Metcalf (Santarém: Instituto Politécnico de Santarém, 1988), 307–24, at 313–14, esp. fig. 3.

⁶ Bartolome Mora Serrano, "The Circulation of Bronze Currency in Málaga during the Sixth Century AD: new findings," *The Numismatic Chronicle* 169 (2020): 424–30. Foreign bronze, Barral i Altet, *La circulation des monnaies suèves et visigotiques*, 45, 65, 143–44. See also the findings of FLAME (Framing the Late Antique and Early Medieval Economy).

⁷ Space has not permitted me to be exhaustive in my coverage of recent work, rather this chapter seeks to summarize current trends and highlight some of the important scholarship on this topic.

in terms of numismatic production, seems to display similar patterns of hoard and single finds as the peninsula on the whole.

After this, I will examine the differences, in so far as they are currently known, between the circulation of foreign coins within the Iberian Peninsula and the movement of Visigothic coins outside the borders of the Kingdom. Current understanding of the former is based on the discovery of a higher concentration of these coins in Lusitania, possibly as a result of foreign trade, and a general tendency for Byzantine coins found in the peninsula to have originated at the mints of Milan and Ravenna, while the latter demonstrates that despite connections between Visigothic Spain and the rest of the Mediterranean, there was little acceptance of Visigothic gold outside the peninsula. The extant finds suggest that there was a riverine trade through Merovingian Gaul to Frisia and Britain, where a number of tremisses have been found, but that Visigothic coins were less welcome in other regions of the Mediterranean world.

Finally, I will turn to Visigothic silver and bronze coins, which have only recently been proven to be true and authorized currency of the Visigothic kingdom. Though both are restricted within limited regional bounds and periods of time, the discovery of these coins opens up numerous questions and possibilities for future study. The bronze, in particular, which circulated in conjunction with older, Roman *nummi* and bronze from elsewhere in the late-antique Mediterranean, is strongly indicative of a circulation that was independent of the exchange of gold, and it is to be hoped that this material will encourage future work on Visigothic trade and on the greater numismatic system of the Visigothic kingdom.

I. Gold Circulation: The Solidus and Its Fractions

Most considerations of Visigothic coinage of the last two centuries have begun and ended with gold coinage. Indeed, until the 1980s, it was widely believed that the Visigoths had struck exclusively gold coins, the solidus and, especially, the tremissis, first as pseudo-imperial coinage, which imitated Byzantine issues, and then as royal issues in the names of Visigothic kings, beginning around 580 CE and continuing until the early eighth century and the end of Visigothic rule.⁸ Certainly, these coins are still the most numerous known today and represent the vast majority of coins that circulated from the

⁸ Miles, *The Coinage of the Visigoths of Spain*. Now supplanted by Ruth Pliego, *La moneda visigoda*, vols. 1 & 2 (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 2009).

5th to the 8th centuries, though we now know that there also existed options for small change.

The quantity and insecure mint attribution of the pseudo-imperial issues has precluded any meaningful study of their circulation patterns.⁹ There is general consensus that the earliest Visigothic issues were struck in southern Gaul, prior to the advance into Spain, and there is some reason to accept Narbonne as an early mint site, perhaps by 460 CE.¹⁰ The Seville I hoard, which contained a number of pseudo-imperial issues, confirms that there was a southern mint in the mid-sixth century, after which we generally gain more certainty.¹¹ Wallace Tomasini made substantial efforts in 1964 to identify mints and engravers on stylistic grounds.¹² Unfortunately, his interpretations are largely impossible to corroborate and there are still many coins in this pseudo-imperial category that are variously identified as Visigothic, Merovingian or Burgundian. As a result, little regarding circulation can be said until there is greater consensus about which coins in southern Gaul in this period belong to which kingdom and in what contexts they are found.

Both pseudo-imperial and regal coins have been discovered in hoards and stray finds all over the Iberian peninsula and, though some recording of Visigothic material began in the late nineteenth century, much of our information regarding circulation of the regal coinage is due to the publication efforts of scholars of the mid-twentieth century.¹³ Foremost among these were Felipe Mateu y Llopis, who serially published finds from the 1940s through the 1970s, and Pio Beltrán Villagrasa, who worked as both a numismatist and

⁹ While some scholars have attempted to codify the distinction between “imitation” and “pseudo-imperial” coinage, this paper will adopt the latter as a catch-all term, as the differences are not necessarily relevant for circulation, at least with our current, limited information about these coins. Pliego, *La Moneda Visigoda*, 72–79, offers one set of definitions, though Kurt, *Minting, State and Economy in the Visigothic Kingdom*, 35, n. 54 still follows the majority in using the terms somewhat interchangeably.

¹⁰ Kurt, *Minting, State and Economy*, 44.

¹¹ Kurt, *Minting, State and Economy*, 65–66. The deposit of the hoard is dated to 548–554, with the first royal issues being struck shortly after either by Liuvigild or Hermenegild.

¹² Wallace J. Tomasini, *The Barbaric Tremissis in Spain and Southern France, Anastasius to Leovigild*, Numismatic Notes and Monographs 152 (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1964), 30, discussed in Kurt, *Minting, State and Economy*, 54–55.

¹³ Nineteenth-century interest in Visigothic numismatics was sparked by the discovery of several major hoards in this century, including La Grassa in 1817 and La Capilla in 1891. These led to a handful of early works in Spain, Portugal and France concerning Visigothic numismatics, including Aloïss Heiss, *Description générale des monnaies des rois wisigoths d’Espagne* (Paris: L’Imprimerie Nationale, 1867), which remained the standard work until the publication of Miles in 1952.

field archaeologist in Spain.¹⁴ Through their work, it was increasingly possible to see the extent of coin finds throughout Spain and to consider, for the first time, what the topography of the peninsula had meant for the movement of Visigothic money.

Accordingly, the same mid-century moment that saw early efforts to record finds systematically also saw some of the first discussions that raised the issue of circulation. Pierre Le Gentilhomme was in the vanguard here, organizing a series of conferences on the subject, but he was severely hampered by the availability of even a confirmed series of types produced during the period of Byzantine imitation as well as many of the reigns of the Visigothic kings.¹⁵ These uncertainties, combined with limited archaeological evidence, led to few conclusions about circulation patterns. In an attempt to circumvent these challenges, Tomasini attempted to use museum collections as a proxy for finds with confirmed archaeological or even regional context, but his findings were widely disputed and the matter was largely shelved.¹⁶

It was not until 1976 that the first and most comprehensive work dedicated to the circulation of Visigothic coins was produced when Xavier Barral i Altet published his monumental study of Visigothic and Suevic circulation.¹⁷ This work was the first, and still remains the most influential, source for understanding patterns of distribution, owing to its dedication to balancing a holistic view of the entire period along with smaller snapshots of several decades at a time. Thus, it was finally possible to identify regions with

¹⁴ Published as part of his *Hallazgos Monetarios* series, first with *Ampurias*, then with *Numario hispánico*, and finally with *Numisma*. A full record of this prolific scholar's work was published as *Titula de Felipe Mateu y Llopis* in 1984. Pío Beltrán Villagrasa, *Obra completa: I, antigüedad* (Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza, Departamento de Prehistoria y Arqueología, 1972).

¹⁵ Pierre Le Gentilhomme, "Le monnayage et la circulation monétaire dans les royaumes barbares en Occident (Ve–VIIIe siècle)," *Revue numismatique* 7 (1943): 46–112 and "Le monnayage et la circulation monétaire dans les royaumes barbares en Occident (Ve–VIIIe siècle)," *Revue numismatique* 8 (1944–45): 13–59. His main sources were Heiss and some of the earliest updates of Mateu y Llopis.

¹⁶ As in Tomasini, *The Barbaric Tremissis in Spain and Southern France*. Despite its good intentions, Tomasini's work was recognized at the time as being methodologically unsound, on which, see Jean Lafaurie, "Review of Tomasini, *The Barbaric Tremissis in Spain and Southern France: Anastasius to Leovigild*," *Revue numismatique* 6 (1966): 336–38.

¹⁷ Barral i Altet, *La circulation des monnaies suèves et visigotiques*. The issue of the relationship between Visigothic and Suevic coinage is not covered in this work, but a useful discussion of the challenges, and some of the possible remedies, of studying this material can be found in J. M. Peixoto Cabral and David M. Metcalf, *A moeda sueva—Suevic Coinage* (Porto: Sociedade Portuguesa de Numismática, 1997).

plentiful single finds or to visualize patterns of hoarding in the reigns of particular kings.¹⁸ More than this, Barral i Altet determined that it was possible to identify three main zones of circulation: Narbonensis, along with the northeastern section of Tarraconensis, central Iberia, including most of Carthaginensis, and Baetica together with southern Lusitania. While central Iberia was found to be largely without numismatic activity, a position which has been subsequently revised, the north-south divide has remained apparent in our evidence, though not precisely along the lines that Barral i Altet proposed.¹⁹

The decades following this publication were full of assessments and reassessments of the patterns Barral i Altet had identified, as well as debate about the meaning behind those patterns. The 1980s, in particular, found Michael Metcalf making several responses to the work, including push back against some of Barral i Altet's assumptions about single coin finds.²⁰ While Barral i Altet had presented data based upon the idea that stray coins were typically lost within the reign in which they had been struck, Metcalf noted that this need not be the case and that there was rarely sufficient corroborating data to make that claim.²¹ Moreover, Metcalf's aim in these years seems to have been focused upon the "why" of circulation, as he took into consideration the alignment of fiscal, commercial, and ecclesiastical motivations with the evidence.²² This issue remained of central interest in the late 1980s and 1990s as debate grew about the scale of coin production that

¹⁸ Recognizing, of course, that finds were, and still are, the result of biases in our search methodology as much as a consequence of ancient use.

¹⁹ Pliego, "Visigothic Currency," 205 refutes "the central void," though there was already push back by Metcalf, "Some Geographical Aspects," showing the distances traveled for coins in hoards.

²⁰ David M. Metcalf, "Many Mint-Places, Few Coins: Visigothic Coinage in Gallaecia and northern Lusitania," in *Homenagem a Mario Gomes Marques: Separata*, edited by Mario Castro Hipoólto, David M. Metcalf, J. M. Peixoto Cabral and Miquel Crusafont i Sabater (Sintra: Instituto de Sintra, 2000), 175–94; David M. Metcalf, "Some Geographical Aspects"; and, David M. Metcalf, "For what Purposes were Suevic and Visigothic Tremisses used? The Contribution of Topographical Analysis, illustrated by some Comments on Single Finds from the Alentejo, and on the Mint of Elvora," in *Problems of Medieval Coinage in the Iberian Area 3*, ed. Mario Marques and David M. Metcalf (Santarém: Instituto Politécnico de Santarém, 1988), 15–34.

²¹ Metcalf, "Some Geographical Aspects," 314–17.

²² Metcalf, "For what Purposes were Suevic and Visigothic Tremisses used?" Metcalf has argued consistently for a commercial motivation behind circulation, an argument that more or less directly contradicted the position of Grierson, which has been highly influential.

might have supported one or the other of the possible explanations.²³ Furthermore, archaeological efforts increased in these years, leaving the field to wait until the new finds were integrated with these earlier analyses or demonstrated some flaw in earlier arguments.²⁴

The first few decades of the twenty-first century accordingly brought a series of small, regional- or period-based evaluations of circulation based on this new, and newly published, data.²⁵ Iñaki Martín Viso has published on the circulation of tremisses in northeastern Lusitania, and has demonstrated that the area had a high level of integration with other regions in the peninsula.²⁶ His findings demonstrate that a full two-thirds of coins found in Lusitania come from outside the province, with the largest proportions coming from Baetica and Tarraconensis. Similarly, Manuel Castro Priego has taken a close look at Carthaginensis, but primarily through the lens of a limited number of finds, and exclusively considering the 7th and 8th centuries.²⁷ This analysis concluded, in agreement with Barral i Altet, that the region was largely unmonetized, and that the crisis of the late-seventh and early eighth centuries limited numismatic production to the extreme south and northeast. Ruth Pliego has recently pushed back against this argument and demonstrated that the finds remain more or less even across the peninsula, and that our data, with its bias in favor of large southern hoards, has led to this misinterpretation.²⁸

Overall, the work that has taken place thus far on Visigothic gold circulation has demonstrated the effects of the topography of the Iberian Peninsula as well as the dominance of a handful of large hoards on our

²³ Félix Retamero, "La moneda del regnum gothorum (ca. 575-714). Una revisión del registro numismático," in *Between Taxation and Rent: Fiscal Problems from Late Antiquity to Early Middle Ages*, edited by Pablo C. Díaz and Iñaki Martín Viso, 189–220 (Bari: Edipuglia, 2011), and Mário Gomes Marques, J. M. Peixoto Cabral and J. Rodrigues Marinho, *Ensaio sobre história monetária da monarquia visigoda* (Porto: Sociedade Portuguesa de Numismática, 1995).

²⁴ For example, Jaime Vizcaino Sánchez, *La presencia bizantina en Hispania, siglos VI-VII: la documentación arqueológica* (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 2009).

²⁵ The corpus of Pliego, *La Moneda Visigoda*.

²⁶ Iñaki Martín Viso, "Tremisses y potentes en el nordeste de Lusitania (siglos vi-vii)," *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* 38, no. 1 (2008): 175–200.

²⁷ A point made in both Manuel Castro Priego, "La circulación monetaria de los siglos VII-VIII en la península ibérica: un modelo en crisis," *Zona arqueológica* 15, no. 2 (2011): 225–44, and Manuel Castro Priego, "Absent Coinage: Archaeological Contexts and Tremisses in the Central Iberian Peninsula in the 7th and 8th Centuries AD," *Medieval Archaeology* 60 (2016): 27–56.

²⁸ Pliego, "Visigothic Currency," 204–06.

understanding. Though it is difficult to speak of the typicality of such collections of coins, it is increasingly possible to make some general statements about how and where coins moved, and Andrew Kurt and Pliego have both recently taken up the task of providing some general assessments.²⁹ While debate persists about the meaning of mint locations in relation to circulation, current evidence demonstrates that though coins moved fairly freely around the peninsula, there were nevertheless geographic differences. Southern Iberia seems to have been the most monetized region overall, or at least the most numismatically productive. The mints of Emerita, Hispalis, and Cordoba were all especially active across the entire period, and there is a greater mingling of Visigothic and Byzantine coinage in the south, an issue to which we will return shortly. The high production of Baetica, especially, has been noted and likely explains the high preponderance of these coins found in hoards outside of its borders.³⁰ The striking of at least some of the large numbers of coins has been associated, not implausibly, with military activity in the mid-seventh century.³¹ The La Capilla hoard also attests that this period saw relatively strong connections between Baetica and Lusitania to the west.³² Carthaginensis, by contrast, seems to have produced, out of Toletum, coins that were somewhat more likely to remain in local circulation, with only some slight movement northward into Tarraconensis.³³ Despite the narrative of a “central void,” a number of hoards and isolated finds have been found in Carthaginensis, especially along and around the Tajo River.³⁴

Lusitania and the west and northwest in general, other than being characterized by a preponderance of isolated finds, has been noted as a likely hub for trade with Britain.³⁵ The uprising under Reccared in the late sixth century has been noted in conjunction with an uptick in both production and

²⁹ Pliego, “Visigothic Currency.” Kurt, “Visigothic Currency in its Making and Movement,” and Kurt, *Minting, State, and Economy*.

³⁰ Pliego, “Visigothic Currency,” 207, fig. 6. Also covered in Álvaro Rodríguez Peinado, “La circulación monetaria en el reino visigodo de Toledo,” M.A. Thesis, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2018, p. 99.

³¹ Pliego, “Visigothic Currency,” 204, notes that the high percentage of coins from this era can also be explained by the size of the major hoards in Baetica.

³² Rodríguez Peinado, “La circulación monetaria en el reino visigodo de Toledo,” 100.

³³ Rodríguez Peinado, “La circulación monetaria en el reino visigodo de Toledo,” 101.

³⁴ Barral i Altet, *La circulation des monnaies suèves et visigotiques*, 153, fig. 22.

³⁵ Pliego, “Visigothic Currency,” 206, fig. 5. For Britain, see Barral i Altet, *La circulation des monnaies suèves et visigotiques*, 147, fig. 20. On the seemingly distinct circulation of Suevic coinage in this region, see David M. Metcalf, J. M. P. Cabral and L. C. Alves, “Sixth-Century Visigothic Metrology, Some Evidence from Portugal,” *American Journal of Numismatics* 3, no. 4 (1992): 65–90, at 77.

finds in southern Gallaecia and northern Lusitania, and there is a strong concentration of coins of Liuvigild in the southwest, which has also been associated with campaigning. Recently, it has been noted that coins of Chintila seem to have spread more abundantly from Lusitania than from Baetica and Carthaginensis.³⁶

Northeastern Iberia presents a different picture, one with limited, but enticing possibilities. Though coins of Tarraconensis often remained local, it is slightly over-represented in major hoards in the south, especially for the reigns of Egica and Wittiza.³⁷ Both Narbonensis and Tarraconensis seem to have become more productive, numismatically, from the second half of the seventh century on. After this point, the coins of these provinces not only become more plentiful, but they also begin to appear more often in hoards elsewhere in the peninsula until the final defeat of the Visigothic kingdom. As yet, no argument has been made for the impetus behind this change, nor for what the intensification of coin production and circulation might have done to change the region's economic and political importance.

Beyond the regional, our evidence strongly suggests that money circulated throughout both urban and rural settings. Kurt, in his recent book, argues that this reflects a level of monetization that surpasses simple fiscal needs and supports his position with literary and legal texts that are explicit about the presence of physical money, both *solidi* and *tremisses*, in the daily lives of Visigothic people.³⁸ While the evidence is perhaps, as yet, too limited to be more than suggestive, it is plausible that the church played a role in monetization. Some coins found in ecclesiastical contexts, as well as references to coins in religious literature, indicate that the Church was involved in fiscal activity and, as with other regions in late antiquity, it is worth considering what impact the Church had on economic behavior in the Visigothic kingdom.³⁹

In terms of change over time, a cluster of hoards late in the seventh and early in the eighth century has suggested a moment of crisis to Castro Priego.⁴⁰ Barral i Altet's study does not necessarily corroborate this point, though it is clear from his work that the eighth century was a time of extreme contraction in coin deposits, limited exclusively to one small pocket in the extreme

³⁶ Rodríguez Peinado, "La Circulación Monetaria en el Reino Visigodo de Toledo," 72.

³⁷ Pliego, "Visigothic Currency," 208.

³⁸ Kurt, *Minting, State, and Economy*, 261–70, esp. 269.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 266–67.

⁴⁰ Both Castro Priego, "La circulación monetaria de los siglos VII-VIII en la Península Ibérica" and Castro Priego, "Absent Coinage" address this period, specifically.

northeast of Tarraconensis, southern Narbonensis, and some scattered finds in Lusitania. Earlier, however, both Barral i Altet and Pliego have found a largely even distribution, with only a few peaks in the reigns of Sisebut and Suinthila, which may be attributed to several, large southern hoards.⁴¹ As visually represented by Barral i Altet, central Iberia, especially, appears to be relatively sparsely populated with finds throughout the 7th century, but the overall distribution is not unlike other regions. The low total number of coins means that these conclusions must remain preliminary, as another large hoard or new excavation might radically shift our perception, but the overall stability, thus far, of Barral i Altet's assessments suggests that we may proceed with wary confidence in these interpretations.

II. Within and Without the Kingdom

This historiography and overview of the circulation of the gold has shown how scholars have thus far approached the movement of coinage within the Visigothic territory. Their conclusions indicate a shift over the course of the seventh century and some regional patterns that have withstood several decades of newly discovered evidence. Yet, how coinage traveled into and out of the area of Visigothic control must still be considered. From the time of Barral i Altet, it has been possible to discuss the latter from the available evidence. Outside the peninsula, Visigothic coins have been discovered along riverine routes through southern France into Belgium and even across the Channel in southeastern Britain.⁴² While the number of such coins is not high, they are also found alongside Byzantine and other far-flung currencies, which is suggestive of economic activity that was not numismatically discriminating.⁴³ In any case, this trade seems to have suffered a setback at some point in the late sixth century, leading to a decline in Visigothic coins in Merovingian territory.⁴⁴

Overall, the number of Visigothic coins abroad is small, fewer even than might have been expected, especially in the Mediterranean. Pliego has suggested plausibly that Visigothic tremisses were not accepted as currency everywhere, especially in areas of Byzantine control.⁴⁵ While the gold coins

⁴¹ Pliego, "Visigothic Currency," 205, fig 4. Barral i Altet, 154-157, figs. 23-26.

⁴² Barral i Altet, *La circulation des monnaies suèves et visigotiques*, 147, fig. 20.

⁴³ Rodríguez Peinado, "La Circulación Monetaria en el Reino Visigodo de Toledo," 89-90, 93-94, arguing for a trade route through Merovingian France to Frisia.

⁴⁴ Barral I Altet, *La circulation des monnaies suèves et visigotiques*, 151.

⁴⁵ Pliego, "El tremis de los últimos años," 40. Kurt, *Minting, State, and Economy*, 270-71.

need not have been the only ones leaving Iberia, their greater intrinsic value makes it likely that they were preferred for long-distance travel and that they were melted and re-struck as local currency upon their arrival in a new region.

While the outflow of Visigothic currency has been the topic of some consideration, less attention has been paid to foreign currencies entering the kingdom, despite readily available evidence. As might be expected, a large number of the foreign coins found in Iberia are Byzantine in origin. Among these, the bronze are overwhelmingly found in Carthaginensis and Baetica, and can probably be associated with commercial activity.⁴⁶ Svante Fischer and Fernando López Sánchez have published on Byzantine solidi in the post-Roman west.⁴⁷ Iberia forms only a small portion of their total analysis, but they are able to note a clear pattern of solidi struck at Milan and, to a lesser extent, Ravenna, being the most common to appear in Visigothic territory. Unlike the bronze, the gold primarily appears in central Iberia and coastal Lusitania, a pattern that was also noted by Barral i Altet.⁴⁸

This data, both within and outside of Iberia, must be put into a wider Mediterranean context if it is to be understood and subjected to proper methodological approaches. Though efforts have been made to refine our understanding of the late-antique and early medieval economies as a whole, the work undertaken thus far has not prioritized the role of coinage.⁴⁹ A numismatic history of the period requires mastery of a huge geographic extent, ideally including numerous territories outside the Mediterranean as well as all those within it, a remarkable variety of coin types, and hundreds of thousands of finds and millions of individual coins. Such expertise, while highly desirable, is unlikely to be found in an individual scholar, which has sparked a recent effort to pool information and create a collaborative, digital project focusing on the minting and circulation of coinage throughout the late-antique and early medieval world. The Framing the Late Antique and Early Medieval Economy project (FLAME) was founded by Alan Stahl in the summer of 2013 and has grown into an international effort to catalogue all

⁴⁶ FLAME database, accessed September 2020. These are mostly small bronzes.

⁴⁷ Svante Fischer and Fernando López Sánchez, "Subsidies for the Roman West? The Flow of Constantinopolitan Solidi to the Western Empire and Barbaricum," *Opuscula* 9 (2016): 249–69.

⁴⁸ Fischer and López Sánchez, "Subsidies for the Roman West?," 164, fig. 2. Barral i Altet, *La circulation des monnaies suèves et visigotiques*, 64–66.

⁴⁹ See Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), and Jarius Banaji, *Exploring the Economy of Late Antiquity: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). For further comments, see Kurt, *Minting, State, and Economy*, 257–59.

known coin finds in the greater Mediterranean world between the early fourth and the mid-eighth centuries, including those of Visigothic Spain.⁵⁰ It is to be hoped that this project will continue to grow in the coming years and provide a publicly available dataset that can throw light on these issues.

III. Silver and Bronze Circulation

A. The Silver

The next-most valuable denomination of Visigothic coinage holds the distinction of being the most recently discovered and the smallest known sample. Though siliquae of unknown provenance had been recorded with possible ties to Iberia as early as 1994, it was not until 2015 that a preliminary report was made that asserted the existence of silver coins that could be unequivocally connected to the Visigothic kingdom.⁵¹ In 2016, Miquel Crusafont i Sabater, Jaume Benages and Jaume Noguera released further details and presented a hoard of coins, including six tiny silver fragments that could not be connected with any known standard or denomination.⁵²

These coins were discovered during an archaeological survey at Les Tres Cales, a site on the Mediterranean coast south of Barcelona, as part of a hoard within a small vessel that also included gold tremisses of Justinian. Crusafont i Sabater, et al. have argued that the silver coins were likely struck in Barcelona, when the city briefly became the Visigothic capital, and have explained their apparently short life in circulation as a reflection of a late stage in the practice of copying siliquae and their fractions that took place slightly before Visigothic copper coinage was struck.⁵³ Both copper and silver seem to have been the result of closer monetary relationships with the Byzantine East, and were therefore not widely used in the western parts of the Iberian Peninsula, but silver coins, whether these fractions or copies of siliquae, are nevertheless likely to have only been used between 418 and 549 CE.

⁵⁰ FLAME project available at coinage.princeton.edu.

⁵¹ John P. C. Kent, *The Roman Imperial Coinage. Volume 10. The Divided Empire and the Fall of the Western Parts* (London: Spink Books, 1994), and Miquel Crusafont i Sabater, Jaume Benages I Olivé, Jaume Noguera Guillén, Eduardo Ble Gimeno, Pau Valdés Matías, Tomi Cartes, Xavier Sicart Chevarria and Joan Enric Vila, "La sèrie de plata de la monarquia visigoda," *Acta numismàtica* 45 (2015): 71–80.

⁵² Miquel Crusafont i Sabater, Jaume Benages and Jaume Noguera Guillén, "Silver Visigothic Coinage," *Numismatic Chronicle* 176 (2016): 241–60.

⁵³ Crusafont i Sabater, et al., "Silver Visigothic Coinage," 255–57.

This small sample of coins, as well as their small physical dimensions, has thus far restricted further elaboration on the role of silver in the economic system of the Visigoths and there has not yet been a large scholarly reaction to the find to signal either its acceptance or rejection. Nevertheless, the discovery of these coins as part of a hoard of gold coins goes some way to disproving a mere token purpose. The general decline in the use of silver across the western Mediterranean in this era must mark this coinage as a somewhat experimental effort, especially as the weight of these coins seems to indicate that they were not neatly integrated with any contemporary monetary system, either within the Visigothic kingdom or outside its borders.⁵⁴

B. The Bronze

Like the silver, bronze coins were relatively late additions to the known Visigothic corpus. They were first reported by Crusafont i Sabater, and he subsequently published the corpus, as known to him, of around 200 examples of these small bronze and copper pieces.⁵⁵ Though the coins had been known, even from excavation contexts, for several decades prior to Crusafont i Sabater's publication, they had not been identified as Visigothic coins and had been largely ignored because of their poor quality, small size, and limited numbers. Upon closer examination, the coins aligned with Byzantine nummi denominations up to the pentanummus and shared iconography with known Visigothic gold issues.

When a typology was established, it was determined that most of the coins could be associated with the major cities in central and especially southern Iberia: Hispalis, Emerita, Toledo, and Cordoba. Circulation, more generally, was determined to be southern in focus, and likely in response to the Byzantine occupation of the peninsula.⁵⁶ Early objections to the identification of the coins as Visigothic hinged on the discovery of some of these coins in Byzantine-controlled territory and the inability of Crusafont i Sabater to attribute all the coins to a recognizable minting location.⁵⁷ Pliego's recent

⁵⁴ Crusafont i Sabater, et al., "Silver Visigothic Coinage," 254–55.

⁵⁵ Miquel Crusafont i Sabater, "Un Numerario Visigodo de Cobre?" *Gaceta numismática* 74–75 (1984): 131–41, and Miquel Crusafont I Sabater, "The Copper Coinage of the Visigoths of Spain," in *Problems of Medieval Coinage in the Iberian Area*, ed. Mário Gomes Marques (Santarém: Instituto Politécnico de Santarém, 1988), 35–70.

⁵⁶ Crusafont i Sabater, "The Copper Coinage of the Visigoths of Spain," 38.

⁵⁷ Teresa Marot, "La península ibérica en los siglos V-Vi: consideraciones sobre provisión, circulación y usos monetarios," *Pyrenae* 31–32 (2000–2001): 133–60, and Teresa Marot and

reevaluation of the bronze has placed these objections largely to the side and firmly established a place for the bronze within the Visigothic monetary system.⁵⁸

Recent excavations and the reevaluation of previously excavated materials have now clarified that the Visigothic bronze coins circulated throughout the southern part of the peninsula, and that they did so in conjunction with Byzantine bronze coins as well as older Roman pieces from the 4th and 5th centuries.⁵⁹ A particular density of finds has been found around Hispalis leading to its identification as the primary source of these issues.⁶⁰ These have been mostly dated to the very late sixth and seventh centuries and have been studied in a handful of recent publications.⁶¹

Worthy of note is the work of Bartolomé Mora Serrano, who has offered a careful study of the circulation of bronze coinage in Malaga.⁶² His article focuses primarily on the continued circulation of pre-Visigothic bronze in the region, drawing on excavations to show that the sixth century was a time of mixed use in terms of bronze currency, with Visigothic bronze circulating along with Byzantine coins from Carthage and a few remaining pieces from Byzantine rule in Spain itself. This approach to currency has been read by Kurt as an inherently pragmatic, and likely commercial, system, where bronze was maintained to support small-scale exchanges. Thus, older coins continued to have utility within the region and could be supplemented with local issues as Roman and Byzantine nummi became less readily available.

This interpretation also explains the occasional appearance of Visigothic bronzes outside of the peninsula. Examples have been discovered as far away as Greece, and a handful of examples have also been noted in Merovingian France.⁶³ Unlike gold coins, which would have been melted and re-struck once

Maria del Mar Lloréns, "La circulación monetaria en el siglo VI d. C. en la costa mediterránea: la Punta de l'Illa de Cullera (Valencia)," *Revista d'Arqueologia de Ponent* 6 (1996): 151–80.

⁵⁸ Ruth Pliego, "The Circulation of Copper Coins in the Iberian Peninsula during the Visigothic Period: New Approaches," *Journal of Archaeological Numismatics* 5, no. 6 (2015/2016): 125–60.

⁵⁹ Mora Serrano, "The Circulation of Bronze Currency in Málaga."

⁶⁰ Pliego, "The Circulation of Copper Coins," 136–37

⁶¹ Castro Priego, "Absent Coinage," 48–49; Mora Serrano, "The Circulation of Bronze Currency in Málaga"; and, Pliego, "The Circulation of Copper Coins," 138–40, who has argued forcefully that these coins are an exclusively seventh-century phenomenon.

⁶² Mora Serrano, "The Circulation of Bronze Currency in Málaga."

⁶³ Marot, "La península ibérica en los siglos V-VI," 144, drawn from Howard L. Adelson and George L. Kustas, "A Sixth-Century Hoard of Minimi from the Western

outside the Visigothic kingdom, the few bronzes that were carried away from the region were kept and hoarded with whatever other currency was to hand. As more unknown coins are re-examined and identified as part of this series, it will be especially interesting to see whether Visigothic bronzes follow the pattern of other local bronze coins, by remaining largely local in terms of their circulation, or whether more examples will be found elsewhere in the Mediterranean world, offering evidence for greater commercial integration between Iberia and its neighbors.

IV. Conclusion

The possibility of a Visigothic bi- or trimetallic system of currency, even if it was limited to the regions and periods currently supported by the available evidence, is, by itself, an invitation to reconsider what purpose or purposes coined money may have served in the Iberian Peninsula. The traditional view of an exclusively gold coinage serving fundamentally fiscal needs may yet hold, but now needs to be reconsidered alongside the relatively robust copper use in the south of the peninsula. Whether this bronze coinage must be considered as a remnant of Byzantine control of the region and a habit that lingered on after the Visigothic reconquest or as a reflection of some real and measurable difference in the economic practices of the region, the coexistence of gold and bronze coinage is a strong indicator that a purely fiscal model cannot be used as an explanation for the whole peninsula across the entire period.

The patterns of circulation that have been noted and refined over the last fifty years suggest that there were continuities across the peninsula, but equally demonstrate that there were real differences in coin use. As new excavations are published and more coins are found, it is to be hoped that we will gain more clarity about where and when coins were in use. In particular, the involvement of the Church and rural communities in the economy is deserving of greater attention, as is the scale and extent of monetization. There remain questions, too, about the integration of the Visigothic economy with Northern Europe in both directions: how and why did foreign coins enter Visigothic Spain and under what circumstances were Visigothic coins used outside of the kingdom? The explosion of evidence both inside and outside of Iberia since the time of Barral i Altet indicates that it is time for a revaluation of this evidence. The ongoing work of the FLAME project suggests that new

Peloponnese," *Museum Notes* 11 (1964): 159–204, where its monogram was not interpreted as Toletum. See Pliego, "The Circulation of Copper Coins," 137, fig. 6.

insights may well come from collaborative, digital projects, and the chapters of this volume prove that there remain numerous dedicated and innovative scholars who are prepared to take up these and other pressing questions about the Visigothic economy and its coinage.

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