

LATE ANTIQUE AND EARLY MEDIEVAL IBERIA



Andrew Kurt

Minting, State, and Economy in the Visigothic Kingdom

From Settlement in Aquitaine
through the First Decade of the
Muslim Conquest of Spain

Amsterdam
University
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Minting, State, and Economy in the Visigothic Kingdom

Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia

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Introduction

The Visigothic regime in Gaul and Iberia flourished during the latter stages of a long era now commonly referred to as late antiquity, which spanned from the troubles of the Roman Empire in the third century to the Islamic invasions across the vast expanse from Central Asia to Spain. The ancient Mediterranean, along which the Visigoths found their eventual home, is open to various conceptualizations. Ambitious approaches that examine a large span of cultures on a grand scale compete in a sense with a more isolated approach, focused, for instance, on Western Civilization. The latter perspective, channeled along a path centered on the developments of Greece and Rome, can be a legitimate focal point but should not be cut off from interactivity between the Mediterranean rim and regions well beyond it, not only in Western Europe but in the Near East and North Africa including the Red Sea region, which, in turn, was spurred by interaction with eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean peoples. The Mediterranean can be seen as a massive zone of contact with multiple micro-zones, which, at the same time, had unifying elements in political culture, economic activity, social and intellectual traditions, and religion. It saw tremendous continuity in some respects even as it experienced important changes as well as a diverse range. In studying the Mediterranean in the ancient and early medieval eras, one can work one's way around the region and become immersed in the particular characteristics of various sub-regions such as Hispania, Gallia, Italia, Graecia, and so on, but what can be at least as striking are basic consistencies. As new residents entered the European landscape and necessarily propelled modifications in public and private life, the firm foundation left by the Roman Empire established a pattern that deeply affected the new kingdoms of early Europe. This influence was felt to a greater or lesser extent in such areas as administration, religion, literary culture, military habits, rural and urban life and economy and, not least, currency.

The field of late antiquity has burgeoned in recent decades, as a new sense of the interconnections and significance of a broad sector of Afro-Eurasia

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across some five centuries has been accompanied by an enormous amount of specialized research focused within this world. It was an era of subtle and not so subtle transitions, when developments in the Roman Empire led to more pronounced differentiations in the provinces, which became separate barbarian kingdoms by the fifth century. Connectivity is evident even as political unity can be seen to have been breaking down and culture transformed. The tail end of Classical civilization in the West slowly reworks into the first stages of Western Europe. This becomes evident in the territories of western Gaul and Hispania as the Visigoths first entered and eventually dominated zones populated by Romans. As Roman culture in its varied character continued to have a significant influence on the Mediterranean world in subsequent centuries, the Levant and the northern littoral of Africa experienced directly the transformative influx of Muslims in the seventh century. It is in Iberia after the Islamic conquest in 711 that a part of Europe saw a new dynamic with the intermingling of Hispano-Visigothic and Islamic culture. Thus, it is instructive and exceedingly interesting to see what resemblance there is between several monetary systems that emerged from the imperial base yet developed under very different circumstances, and what resulted from their direct contact.

How currency fits into the big picture of this transformative era can be tricky. In a small editing change in the section of the *Cambridge Economic History of Europe* on medieval coinage, noticeable only to someone comparing the same part in the 1963 and 1987 editions, the first sub-heading was altered from 'Roman-Barbarian Continuity' to 'Roman-Barbarian Discontinuity', even though the contents of this first segment remain practically the same. What is more obvious to the user of both editions is the movement of the section on coinage from an appendix to a full chapter (XII) in the later version.¹ Both changes are indicative of the challenges involved in approaching the monetary history of late antiquity and the early medieval world. Should continuity or discontinuity be stressed? How significant was currency in the period in which Europe was in its early stage of formation? Given the fact that the barbarian kingdoms did produce their own currencies and that these were of Roman inspiration, can we correctly speak of continuity in this area if, in fact, whole regions such as Hispania were without Roman minting facilities and these therefore had to be newly adopted?² It is reasonable to

1 Peter Spufford, "Coinage and Currency" (appendix), in *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 576-602, and idem, "Coinage and Currency" (Chapter XII) in *ibid.*, vol. 2 (1987), 788-863.

2 Useful discussion of the term 'barbarian' can be found in the chapter "Who are the barbarians?" in Edward James, *Europe's Barbarians, AD 200-600* (London: Routledge, 2009), 1-20.

ask if, across regime changes, we get the same or similar answers to directly related questions: For what purpose were coins issued, by which authority, and in which way was minting organized? On what basis can the answers be established? Such challenges are part of the wider problem posed by the transition in the West from the Roman Empire to a configuration in many ways different yet bearing the marks of several centuries of Roman tradition.

This examination of the largely neglected Visigothic monetary system has been undertaken with the conviction that an up-to-date, full-length study is vital to a well-rounded understanding of the government and the society of the Visigothic kingdom in southern Gaul and Iberia from the early fifth through the first phase of the Islamic conquest launched in 711. Monetary history is the study of the making of money, usually, as in this case, coinage. Naturally, the production of currency is linked to political and economic history, the latter allied to money's use, and these themes are explored here in relation to the monetary system of the kingdom, including some of the evidential challenges. Early medieval Iberia's place in the larger western European and Mediterranean monetary history is also examined in the chapters that follow.

The intended audience of this book is not limited to the few numismatists and economic historians focused on the fifth to eighth centuries, rather it includes scholars and students interested in late antiquity generally or late antique-early medieval Iberia in particular. It aims not only to make available a comprehensive study of a subject often consigned to the margins in the mounting scholarship on post-Roman western Europe, but also to suggest ways in which the numismatic data is intertwined with questions that continue to concern historians. The value of bringing archeological and other forms of research on material history into greater dialog with mainstream historiography has become obvious in recent decades through the work of those willing to delve beyond the narrow confines of traditional thematic divisions.

Some of the expanding scholarship on Iberia from late Roman to Islamic rule can be brought to bear on the how and why of minting under the Visigoths, yet it is equally true to say that the dissemination of poorly known data on Visigothic numismatics, here and in several other recent works, can be of great worth to historians who become familiar with terms and issues frequently left solely to specialists. The author hopes to contribute to filling a lacuna in Visigothic studies and at the same time to form a bridge between this specialized field and general studies of the period or other sub-fields concerned with political history, archeology, the history of administrative structures, and economic history. Advancement in the

subject explored here is much needed. Where not neglected entirely, even in well-recognized works on the period one occasionally comes across errors as basic as misidentification of coins or upside-down images apparently unnoticed by author or editor. Old suppositions call for correction or nuance.

Production and utilization of coinage is a rich field of investigation. Technicalities of monetary research, such as details of the complex minting network, metallic alterations, or questions surrounding volume of coinage, all shed light on the workings of the state. Added to the higher political strength as demonstrated in longevity in Spain relative to other post-Roman western provinces, as well as singular legal and ecclesiastical mechanisms,³ such facets of the kingdom's creation of currency demonstrate sophistication and ingenuity. Study of how the coinage in Visigothic lands was made and in later centuries discovered opens our eyes to a whole range of activity and movement otherwise considered only in vague terms if at all. The configuration of finds is an open road to several lines of inquiry about economic life and the relationship between various populations or with subjects and the crown.

Unfortunately, there remains a large gap between the study of the coined money – termed numismatics – and the historiography of the Gothic kingdom of the far western reaches. Indicative of a limited trend toward incorporation of monetary matters in the post-Roman period, the *New Cambridge Medieval History* has chapters treating this topic in both volumes on the early medieval period.⁴ The Visigothic kingdom receives brief attention there, yet even the best modern histories of the Visigoths in English neglect the subject almost entirely.⁵ Spanish historians have tended to be

3 On very early medieval Spain's potency, often repudiated but, in fact, not receding but increasing, see Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 93-100.

4 Mark Blackburn, "Money and Coinage," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, v.1: c. 500-c. 700, ed. Paul Fouracre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 660-74; idem, "Money and Coinage," in *New Cambridge Medieval History*, v. 2: c. 700-c. 900, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 538-60. Both chapters are excellent in their range and offer many useful points, but are limited and now outdated on Visigothic currency.

5 For example, Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Spain: Unity in Diversity, 400-1000*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1995) and idem, *Visigothic Spain, 409-711* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004); E. A. Thompson, *The Goths in Spain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), with useful remarks on some coin inscriptions and specific issues of currency, but almost nothing on the minting system as such; Herwig Wolfram, *The History of the Goths*, trans. Thomas J. Dunlop (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988). The works of Luis A. García Moreno and José Orlandis mentioned in this Introduction and elsewhere in this book are exceptions. A number of shorter studies by other Spanish scholars cited later in the present work, such as those of Iñaki Martín Viso, Félix Retamero, Santiago Castellanos, and Miquel Crusafont have begun to transform

much better in this area in their studies on Visigothic Spain: José Orlandis, Luis A. García Moreno, and the contributors to R. Menéndez Pidal's *Historia de España* have not only discussed Visigothic mint organization and the gold currency competently, but have made a number of useful observations. Their treatments are necessarily general, and they cannot be expected to be perfectly up to date on numismatic research. Medieval economic surveys covering this period are of no help.⁶ Even as germane a work as Peter Spufford's *Money and Its Use in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1988), laudable in many respects, is woefully inadequate on Visigothic and, indeed, later medieval Spain. And it did nothing to correct Spufford's erroneous view from previous years on the disappearance of bronze (or copper-alloy) coinage in the West by the middle of the sixth century,⁷ which had been refuted in various writings on Visigothic currency including in English by the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁸

There is nevertheless a considerable amount of specialized work now published on the topic of Visigothic gold coinage, which was modeled on the two main denominations of the late Roman Empire, the solidus – 1/72 to the pound – and its third, the tremissis or triens. The most significant work for over half a century was without doubt George C. Miles's 1952 catalogue of Visigothic tremisses, which have acquired the title of 'regal' because they are inscribed with the name of the reigning king at the time of issue.

the historiographical landscape with respect to monetary realities. Jairus Banaji, *Exploring the Economy of Late Antiquity: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) presents a critique of the economic minimalism commonly applied to late antiquity, and specifically the neglect of coinage in Wickham, *Framing*, a work whose general project he largely extols.

6 Robert-Henri Bautier, *The Economic Development of Medieval Europe* (London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971), completely skips over the Visigothic kingdom in his short discussion of early medieval coinage and economy; *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe* is too basic to be of use; there is nothing useful on the entire early medieval period (!) in N. J. G. Pounds, *An Economic History of Medieval Europe*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1994). Matthew Innes, "Economies and Societies in Early Medieval Western Europe," in *A Companion to the Medieval World*, ed. Carol Lansing and Edward D. English (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 9-35 omits currency and in its extensive bibliography and various categories for 'Further reading' does cite not a single title specifically treating coinage.

7 In fact, it reiterated this error (p. 14).

8 Miquel Crusafont i Sabater, "Un numerario visigodo de cobre?" *Gaceta Numismática*, nos. 74-75 (1984), 131-41; idem, "The Copper Coinage of the Visigoths of Spain," in *Problems of Medieval Coinage in the Iberian Area*, v. III, ed. Mário Gomes Marques and M. Crusafont i Sabater (Santarém, 1988), 35-70. Another otherwise excellent work, Alejandro García Sanjuan, *La conquista islámica de la península ibérica y la tergiversación del pasado. Del catastrofismo al negacionismo* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2013), continues the claim that Visigothic copper minting was inexistent (154); in this he is persuaded by the formidable scholar Eduardo Manzano Moreno, *Conquistadores, emires, y califas. Los omeyas y la formación de al-Andalus* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2006).

Miles's book provided a classified inventory of the tremisses issued from the 570s to c. 713, updating the information in previous works concerning the identification of mints, the monarchs, and usurpers who issued coins, and the precise contents of modern collections. It also gave a short analysis of the various coin types and styles, and provided the weights and photos of many hundreds of coins.⁹ A few years later, a monograph on so-called pre-regal coinage appeared, although it was actually more narrowly focused on the dominant occidental form of the tremissis, which, in the sixth century, became the main Visigothic gold denomination; since pre-regal coinage is without mint names or kings' names, it could not offer a definitive classification.¹⁰

A few works published since that time in various western European languages provide excellent treatment of specific aspects of Visigothic coinage. In 1976, Xavier Barral i Altet covered coin hoards and circulation, assessing the movement of gold currency around the kingdom and beyond its borders from an economic standpoint.¹¹ A more recent book by Miquel Crusafont i Sabater includes a short survey of the Visigothic monetary system, but its real contribution lies in its presentation of the 'copper' coinage.¹² A book of essays by Mário Gomes Marques and two other Portuguese scholars, published in 1995, provides stimulating considerations on pre-regal and regal minting, presenting data on weights and fineness from a large sample of coins.¹³

9 George C. Miles, *The Coinage of the Visigoths of Spain: Leovigild to Achila II* (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1952). The catalog incorporated information from an enormous array of literature, among which the following have special importance: Aloïs Heiss, *Description générale des monnaies antiques de l'Espagne* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1870); Wilhelm Reinhart, "Nuevas aportaciones a la numismática visigoda," *Archivo español de arqueología* 18 (1945), 212-35; Felipe Mateu y Llopis, *Catálogo de las monedas previsigodas y visigodas del Gabinete Numismático del Museo Arqueológico Nacional* (Madrid: Imp. Gongora, 1936), and several major articles by the same author. At the heart of Miles's catalog was the outstanding collection of the American Numismatic Society, for which he served as the Islamic Curator. To Miles's work should be added a museum collection of Barcelona which was published in the same year and is therefore almost absent from the book: J. Amorós and A. Mata Berruezo, *Catálogo de las monedas visigodas del Gabinete Numismático de Cataluña* (Barcelona: Ayuntamiento, 1952).

10 Wallace J. Tomasini, *The Barbaric Tremissis in Spain and Southern France: Anastasius to Leovigild* (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1964).

11 Barral i Altet, *La circulation des monnaies suèves et visigotiques. Contribution à l'histoire économique du royaume visigot* (Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1976). Economic history examines one main aspect of monetary history, the use of coinage, while numismatics examines how currency is made and attempts to identify and classify coins.

12 Miquel Crusafont i Sabater, *El sistema monetario visigodo: cobre y oro* (Barcelona: Asociación Numismática Española, 1994).

13 Mário Gomes Marques et al., *Ensaio sobre história monetária da monarquia visigoda* (Lisbon: Sociedade Portuguesa de Numismática, 1995).

While extremely useful, the essays are based almost entirely on Portuguese collections, and the book lacks any detailed historical investigation, study of dies, stylistic analysis, treatment of minting techniques or personnel, or a full discussion of the possible motives of minting. Publication of *Corpus Nummorum Visigothorum: ca. 575-714, Leovigildus-Achila* offered a type catalog of the tremissis series in the king's name and much information, but it is unfortunately dogged by errors in some areas.¹⁴ It was only with the publication in 2009 of Ruth Pliego's full catalog and accompanying study of the Visigothic regal series, which emerged under Leovigild's authority around the last quarter of the sixth century, that the most celebrated portion of minting in the kingdom had a full modern study. In this splendidly illustrated and elaborated set, a wealth of scholarship was brought to bear on the minting system and the current state of knowledge of the tremisses of nearly the last century and a half of the Visigothic regime.¹⁵

The present investigation, notwithstanding the author's admiration for these works, aims to be more comprehensive than any work to date on the problems of minting and the functionalities of coinage during the entire Visigothic period, providing an extensive overview of the entire evolution of the currency from beginning to end while examining many specific related themes. Several factors make such an undertaking desirable. The corpus of extant Visigothic coins has grown enormously since Miles and Tomasini published their books. Two massive hoard finds in recent decades have more than doubled the four thousand royal-name tremisses estimated by Miles.¹⁶ Largely as a result of these hoards, a number of previously unknown issues – i.e. mint-ruler combinations – have been established. Moreover, several new mints have been discovered since Miles's 1952 catalog. Even since Pliego's study, hoards have continued to bring tremisses to light, and her work was not focused on currency before the 570s. With the pre-regal coinage it is rather difficult to estimate the number of known specimens, because identification is much less systematic compared with that for the

14 Jesús Vico Monteoliva, María Cruz Cores Gomendio, and Gonzalo Cores Uría, *Corpus Nummorum Visigothorum: ca. 575-714, Leovigildus-Achila* (Madrid: the authors, 2006). It is not, in fact, a corpus and must be treated with caution, but it does provide a Spanish-English guide with much of value.

15 Ruth Pliego Vázquez, *La moneda visigoda*, 2 vols (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 2009). Volume I: *Historia monetaria del reino visigodo de Toledo (c. 569-711)*; Volume II: *Corpus*. This work is invaluable not only for providing a proper corpus to that point, but also in its judicious discussion of a number of areas as well as detailed treatment of hoards.

16 Miles himself included 3461 tremisses, but estimated a total of approximately 4000: Miles, *The Coinage of the Visigoths*, ix. See below, Chapter Three, section B, on the new finds.

regal series, and there has been comparatively less interest in it on the coin market. Nonetheless, discoveries of new coins have been made over the years. The current quantity of extant Visigothic coinage is also hard to pinpoint with the very active market and 'discreet' dealers of the past few decades, but great strides have been made from the confirmed evidence. This book brings together the whole of Visigothic currency matters in Gaul and Spain, not only tremisses but also solidi and other denominations of recent discovery. It looks carefully into not merely the minting of coins but likewise what is of equal importance yet frequently dealt with in separated fashion, the utilization of coined money.

As the chief primary sources in question, the gold coins must be considered closely. This means gaining a complete understanding of the vast variety of these physical objects, from the physical characteristics of the specimens themselves to the variegated manufacture to which they point, so that a proper picture can be drawn of the minting system overall. This can only be developed by analyzing the multiple characteristics of the entire body of known currency: weight and fineness measurements (allowing large-scale considerations of quality and possible reasons for its variation); differentiations of style (permitting more specific chronologies and giving clues as to the arrangement of artisan labor behind the crafting of dies and perhaps the emission of coins); the reigning monarch announced on each coin in the case of the regal series starting in the 570s (providing at least a basic chronology); and mint names in this series (allowing the geography of minting to be established). Physical data extended to deductions about the systematic whole can then be brought into relation with broader contexts of politics, law, and commercial, urban, and agricultural life in the Visigothic kingdom and of currency systems of the same period viewed in comparison.

Yet, for all the focus on gold when it comes to the Visigothic monetary system, two other components must be considered. It is now simply inaccurate to refer to the kingdom's monometallism, though this is still the habit in too much of the literature. Silver was probably only a minimal part of Visigothic minting and did not see a constant output across the early fifth to early eighth centuries, but even to conceive of silver coinage production in the two geographical stages of the kingdom is a novelty for many scholars of the early Middle Ages.¹⁷ Whether the fifth-century kingdom in Gaul was responsible for scattered silver issues is a matter

17 Miquel de Crusafont et al., "Silver Visigothic Coinage," *Numismatic Chronicle* 176 (2016), 241-60 and pll. 28f.

of some doubt, though modern specialists have made the case for its start not long after settlement in Aquitania probably in 419, just as the argument is made regarding gold coinage. It is fair to say that attribution of gold to the Visigoths in that period is problematic enough, and there is little room for a definitive declaration about silver minting either way. Some possibly Visigothic silver pieces of the next century, found in Spain, open the possibility of a small output before the time of Leovigild, perhaps around the mid-point of that century. Its significance cannot have been great, given that the number of specimens cited remains very low. One can no longer minimize the very small-level currency sometimes referred to as copper but more properly termed bronze. Firstly, enough examples have come to light in recent years from overwhelmingly local zones as to make the initial scholarly skepticism of Spanish origin look unreasonable at this stage. Bronze currency of the lowest denomination, the tiny *nummus* and its multiples, has appropriately been deemed a critical component of the late ancient economy without which real understanding would be impossible.¹⁸ Chapters Two and Seven of this book discuss the ways in which it is or is not fitting to speak of “Visigothic bronze coinage” or a “trimetallic system”, and the specific role that Visigothic bronze currency played in a wider sphere in which bronze coins were a common feature.

The author has taken advantage of several studies on particular aspects of early medieval minting. There are now expanded data on weights and studies of fineness, a significant feature not treated in depth by Miles and only partly by Pliego; until now, the results of this research have not been consolidated and discussed as a whole. For numismatics to be truly useful it must be brought into relation with larger historical problems. There is further potential in placing Visigothic minting in wider contexts than strictly numismatic ones, for example: examining continuities and breaches from Roman administration and how coinage correlated with other concerns of government such as taxation; the degree to which minting was centrally controlled; the relationship of mints to one another; and the very motives for creating currency. Two works especially began to open the study of coinage

18 Ruth Pliego, “The Circulation of Copper Coins in the Iberian Peninsula During the Visigothic Period: New Approaches,” *Journal of Archaeological Numismatics* 5-6 (2015-2016), 125-60, at 147, citing S. Moorhead, “Ever Decreasing Circles. The Nummus Economy at Butrint (Albania) and Beyond,” in *Numismatic History and Economy in Epirus During Antiquity. Proceedings of the 1st International Conference (University of Ioannina, October 3rd-7th 2007)*, ed. K. Liampi et al. (Athens: Society of Numismatics and Economic History, 2013), 601-16.

in Visigothic Spain to such broader questions.¹⁹ In the present volume, the greater wealth of data is used to take the answers to these inquiries to new lengths. Finally, a whole area of research has hardly been touched: the coin styles of the individual mints and die links, i.e. use of the same die at more than one place or time or with more than one opposite die (only the latter holds true of tremisses in early medieval Hispania). As I demonstrate, an increased knowledge of minting practices can lead to more informed inquiry about the economy, provincial structures, and how war is organized.

This book follows the traditional division of Visigothic coinage into two main chronological categories. The ‘pseudo-imperial’ or ‘imitation’ series was minted from some point after the Visigothic settlement in southwestern Gaul in 418 or at least until the time when Leovigild (568–586) had all coins marked with his own name instead of the emperor’s.²⁰ This was followed by the ‘regal’ series, starting, as I will argue, in c. 573 and lasting until the end of Visigothic minting in c. 713, during which period tremisses alone were struck in gold. The addition of the king’s name as well as the mint name on regal tremisses not only marked a significant change in the West, as we shall see, but it also has the fortuitous consequence of making the coins easier to study. By contrast, the earlier series, often referred to as ‘pre-regal’, is full of challenges as basic as whether or not it can be reliably attributed to the Visigoths. As we meet these difficulties in the first chapter, we shall see that large groups of coins can be confidently assigned as Visigothic.

Chapter One addresses the pre-regal series, describing two stages conveniently divided by the loss of most Visigothic territory in Gaul in 507 at the battle of Vouillé. Before this time, the gold pieces widely attributed to the Visigothic kingdom closely resembled coinage of the Roman Empire. Much of the similarity is due to the political interdependence between Goths and Romans in the Visigothic region of Gaul until the last quarter of the fifth century, as well as to the concentration of minting there at one or two sites. After 507, however, strict imitation of Roman coinage is no longer attempted. Under the authority of Theodoric, the Ostrogoth, the tremisses acquired their quintessential pre-regal reverse type, a unique depiction of the Roman Victory goddess. The solidus kept the obverse and reverse types of its imperial model, but within a few years it also departed from imitation

19 Marques et al., *Ensaïos*; Michael F. Hendy, “From Public to Private: The Western Barbarian Coinages as a Mirror of the Disintegration of Late Roman State Structures,” *Viator* 19 (1988), 29–78.

20 Crusafont et al., “Silver Visigothic Coinage,” 243 discusses certain inadequacies of the terms used for the series and rejects the label ‘pseudo-imperial’. I concur to a large extent but rest on the usefulness of the convention and the problems with other terms employed.

of the styles current in Constantinople. Visigothic currency, moreover, did not imitate exactly the very high Roman standards of weight and purity of gold. The latter finding has been previously suggested from small test samples, but is now corroborated by a larger set of tested coins. Fluctuating weight measurements and gold analyses of a large number of the barbarian coins are indicative of the gradual spatial expansion of the Visigothic mint system, as opposed to the concentration of Roman and Byzantine minting at a handful of sites within the vast Empire.

The historical and monetary circumstances of Leovigild's adoption of a regal currency are treated in Chapter Two. We establish a chronology of his various issues, demonstrating that a sporadic process of change towards an expressly Visigothic currency began very early in the king's reign and must be associated with his subjection of numerous parts of Spain through war. The first regal issues can be narrowed down to the early 570s, several years before the dates traditionally supplied by a few notable scholars. A detailed look at the altered standards of the coinage gives further indication of Leovigild's interest in monetary affairs and of his clear authority in these matters. This chapter also discusses the evolution of regal types, which was marked by Leovigild's influence for many decades, and the recent discovery of both Visigothic copper-based coinage, which possibly began in Leovigild's reign, and silver produced in the mid-sixth century. The antiquated portrayal of a monometallic currency system can be definitively put to rest.

Chapter Three examines the material aspects of minting and explains how the minting of gold, especially the regal tremisses, was organized. The Visigothic manufacture of coins already differed in some ways from that of late Roman times, but especially the Visigothic minting network assumed characteristics very different from that of the Empire. Known Visigothic mints tally today at ninety-eight. They can now be estimated to have numbered at least one hundred, based on the fruits of scattered research on mint sites and new discoveries of coins, including extensive hoards, since Miles published his corpus. A close look at styles suggests that the engravers of the dies used in minting were not usually attached to a single workshop, but instead traveled around a large territory in carrying out their work. Thus, the organization of mints may be linked to the itinerancy of engravers and possibly other laborers. It is the author's hope that the presentation of this material leads others to undertake their own research in this area, which could tell us more about monetary administration in the face of a complete dearth of literary sources. The chapter ends with a section on the metallic quality of the coins. Such an investigation is required in order to address the large and difficult question of why the Visigoths produced coinage

during the entire course of the kingdom in Gaul and in Hispania, which is the subject of the following chapter.

Why did the Visigothic state strike coins? Not a single surviving document from early medieval Spain offers a direct answer to this important question. Chapter Four attempts to answer it by first framing the same question around the making of currency in the Roman Empire, since that is the context in which Visigothic coinage emerged. The conclusion made by those on one side of the scholarly debate, that the Roman gold currency of late antiquity was chiefly intended to facilitate taxation and expenditure, syncs with the situation in the Visigothic kingdom. There the state itself probably minted only gold coinage, but bronze eventually was made available by certain cities for the needs of their urban populations. Abundant evidence of taxation in the kingdom implies the use of gold coinage in tax collection until at least the later seventh century. The extended argument draws on the normally higher weight and fineness measurements of coins of the capital mint in each province to suggest that fiscal coinage revolved around these and a few other major mints. The great majority of the mints in Iberia, however, served an exceptional fiscal purpose: they became active only when armies operated in those specific areas. Sudden, large issues on these occasions resulted in debased coins of reduced weight.²¹ The idea that many mints existed for the support of the army is not new, but it has not received full elaboration until now. Here, a detailed discussion of the literary evidence of warfare is combined with treatment of the identification of mints, data on recently discovered issues, and a wide array of test results on both weights and gold fineness. A clearer idea of the purpose of minting puts into better focus the answer as to why the minting network took the shape it did. Its considerable and somewhat beguiling variation makes more sense as the question of the purposes of minting is developed.

Chapter Five examines the level of the kings' control over minting. While royal authority over most minting throughout the regal series is often taken as axiomatic or sufficiently proven in earlier scholarship, some have doubted the court's control of the peripheral mints which consistently struck inferior coinage. The matter can be adequately probed only with the aid of the combined data of the previous chapters. Since all mints can be best explained by either fiscal/administrative or military contexts,

21 Debasement is the reduction in the amount of the principal precious metal of a coinage, usually achieved by replacing a certain quantity of this metal with a base metal such as copper, or replacing some of the gold with silver. It can also be achieved by lowering the standard weight of a given denomination (often while attempting to keep the coin at the same value).

the great number of workshops should not diminish but rather increase our estimation of how firmly the monarchy presided over the making of money. Mints were strictly the creation of kings, as far as the evidence indicates. Some kings were more in control of minting, some less so, and some were capable enough to command significant changes in the system; all were affected by the supply of gold. In these ways, the situation in the Visigothic kingdom was not so different from that of late Rome and early Byzantium. What radically differed by the latter half of the sixth century was the extremely wide dispersal of Visigothic mints. It is one of the major aspects of administrative transformation in the early medieval West.

Chapter Six provides a brief excursus on minting and currency in the first decade after the conquest of the Iberian peninsula beginning in 711. Once again, we see a major transformation in power and with it a series of changes in administration. One important part in the story of the changes that occurred under Muslim authority was the coinage system. In the immediate transitional stage, it is of great interest to compare the Visigothic and the Islamic systems, at the same time examining the effect of the one upon the other. We will see that while major modifications would soon take place, initially some elements of the currency were deliberately patterned after those of the defeated kingdom or maintained a strong influence of the Byzantine regime.

Finally, Chapter Seven addresses Visigothic currency from the perspective of its uses. Here, the state-oriented function of gold coinage carries over to the possession and utilization of coined money by the kingdom's inhabitants, considered to some extent by socio-economic groups. The segment explores gold as well as bronze, these two main currencies understood to have separate origins and discrete usage. The geographical distribution of finds sheds light on the possibilities of the role of coins, including the economic framework in which coinage played an essential part. The chapter demonstrates that the western Mediterranean zone of exchange is key to understanding the copper-alloy currency in Visigothic Spain, some of it made within cities of the kingdom, but much of it coming from outside the borders. As with the tremisses, the southern and southeastern regions were most responsible for production of small denominations as well as their use, it would seem. When literary references to currency are considered, the combined record implies regular and widespread use of coinage in early medieval Spain, if not outright monetization as strictly defined. As reiterated in the conclusion, the comparatively high level of coin utilization as well as direct government involvement at least in minting of gold, in spite of the challenges this presented, should leave no doubt of a sophisticated monetary system not dissimilar to its Roman model.