

MAVE AND SALDANIA, TWO NEW MINTS OF THE COINAGE OF SISEBUT FROM NORTHERN CARTHAGINENSIS IN THE PRESENT PROVINCE OF PLACENCIA¹

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Sisebut (612-621) is one of the best known of the Visigothic Kings due to surviving writings of his contemporary Isidore of Seville as well as several of his own. His coinage is also one of the best known and extensive in terms of the number of mints in operation. When Miles compiled his corpus of Visigothic coins in 1952 he was able to locate 201 coins of Sisebut from 31 mints or two fifths of the total of 78 mints known to him. The 36 mints only exceeded the number of mints listed by Miles for Sisebut for the reigns of both Reccared (586-601) and Suinthila (621-631). However the number of coins recorded was twice as great for Reccared (441) and three times as great for Suinthila (660). One wonders if the number of mints for Sisebut might have been equal or even greater than those of Reccared and Suinthila if an equal number of coins had been examined. Since the work of Miles many more coins have been found including large numbers from the reigns of Sisebut and Suinthila. For the reign of Sisebut nine more mints (Gerunda from Tarraconensis, Monecipio from Lusitania and Aurensis, Bergancia, Bracara, Nandolas, Pannonias, Senabria, and Turico from Gallaecia) have been published bringing the total to 42 with the addition of MAVE and SALDANIA reported here. At the same time mints unrecorded by Miles for Reccared and Suinthila have also been published increasing the total number to 41 for Reccared and 43 for Suinthila among some 90 mints now known to have been active during the period from Leovigild to Achila II².

Mave

The coin from the mint of Mave is of historic interest because it extends the known date for beginning of coinage at this mint by at least 10 years from the reign of Sisenand (631-636) to that of Sisebut (612-621). The coin may in fact date from the first two years of the reign when Sisebut conducted a military campaign to pacify the region before beginning his successful campaigns against the Byzantine enclave in the South ca. 614³. Single coins from MAVE are also known from the reigns of Chintila

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- 1.- MILES, G. C., *The coinage of the Visigoths of Spain, Leovigild to Achila II*, places Mave in the province of Gallaecia but on his map shows in on the border with Tarraconensis. GARCÍA MORENO, *Historia de España Visigoda*. Madrid, 1989, p. 333, clearly shows Mave within Carthaginensis.
 - 2.- For a current review see KURT, A., *Minting, State and Economy in the Visigothic Kingdom ca. 418-ca. 713*. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2001. With the publication of several coins from unpublished mints in private collections the total number of mints will approach 100.
 - 3.- See VALLEJO GIRVÉS, M., *Bizancio y la España tarδοantigua (ss. V-VIII): un capítulo de historia Mediterránea*. Alcalá, 1993.

(636-639) and Chindasvinth (642-653). Mave was a *castro* or fortified outpost strategically located on an important route into the Cantabrian region of northern Spain still used by major highways and railroads today. The fortifications date from Roman time and are located on Mount Cildá just across the Pisuerga River 1 km north of the present village of Mave. The Visigoths never dominated the northern mountainous regions but constructed a series of similar fortifications along its frontier several of which sporadically produced coins including Pesicos, Bergidum, Georres and Petra⁴.

The coin itself has to be one of the poorest coins made during the reign of Sisebut. The lettering is large and crude. The busts are poorly engraved and although of the general Miles type 5 it is unlike any other known coins of Sisebut from the region. The coin closest in style is Miles No 207 from the mint of Pincia in which the lettering is somewhat similar as well as the faces and which also has two pellets on either side on the reverse but is of better workmanship and has a different type cuirass (Miles type 5 l). The other coin from Mave closest in time, that of Sisenand, is completely different in style (Miles type 12d and 5 e). It would appear that the diesinker was unskilled in engraving coins and may have been a local metal worker recruited to produce what may have been a very limited coinage on the spot.



Obverse: +SISEBVTVSRE Miles: General type 5 but subtype poorly defined
 Reverse: +MAVEPIVS* Miles: General type 5 but subtype poorly defined
 Weight: 1.550 g. Diameter: 19 mm Dies Axis Orientation: ↑↓
 Metal Composition⁵: Au, 80.8%; Ag, 17.8%; Cu, 1.2%; Fe, 0.2%
 Condition: EF, double struck
 Provenience: La Capilla II Hoard

4.- See page 302 in GARCÍA MORENO, L. A. , “*La Economía y la vida rurales. La ciudad y la vida urbana*”, *Historia de España fundada por Ramón Menéndez Pidal, dir. J. M. Jover Zamora III-1*, España Visigoda, Madrid 1991.

5.- João Peixoto Cabral using the PIXE method at the Instituto Tecnológico e Nuclear, Sacavém, Portugal, performed the chemical analysis on both coins.

Saldania

Saldania, present day Saldaña is 45 km to the southwest of Mave, 30 km south of the foothills of Cordillera Cantabrica and 60 km north-northwest of Palencia the nearest bishopric. Saldania first appears as a mint under Leovigild (facing bust type of ca. 585-586), which led Mateu y Llopis to suggest that it may have been first occupied by the Visigoths during the campaign of Leovigild in 574⁶. However Saldania was of importance in late Roman times and a number of earlier Visigothic *Duero* type grave sites are known in the area suggesting that its Visigothic occupation may have predated Leovigild⁷. Saldania was strategically located at the junction of 3 secondary roads that connected to the main Roman road in northern Hispania, the *Via De Italia in Hispanias* which had a Mansia at Lacorbiga, present day Carrión de los Condes 25 km to the south-southeast⁸.

The coin from Saldania of Sisebut fills in a major gap between Witteric (603-609) and Suinthila (621-631). There are also single coins known from the reigns of Reccared (586-601) and Chindasvinth (642-653) as well as a reference to one of Chintila (636-639)⁹. For the period between ca. 584 and ca. 650, coins now only missing from the reigns of Liuva II (601-603), Gundemar (610-612), Reccared II (621), and Tulga (639-642) all of which were short in time and generally short on extant coins. For the period before 650, Saldania may fill the criteria of Metcalf for a stable or regular mint not requiring a special explanation and indicating it met the needs of 'normal' requirements for coinage¹⁰. After 650 the use of secondary mints was greatly reduced and one would expect that both Saldania and Mave would have ceased minting.

The workmanship of the coin is generally good. The bust is primitive but well executed and while of the general type 5 is unique in the rendition of the cuirass and chin. A curved line at the top, which also serves as the chin, connects the three vertical lines that form the cuirass. The other bust types known from Saldania are all different: Leovigild, 5 l; Reccared I, 5 d; Witteric, 5 r; Suinthila, 5 e; Chindasvinth, 5 g. The distinct style of the engraver for Sisebut would suggest he did not work on other coins known to us from Saldania or in other mints in the region. On the other hand, his skills compared to the engraver of the coin of Mave suggest that this may not have been the only die he engraved. Unfortunately only one coin is known for each ruler except for Suinthila for whom two are reported of which only one poor quality photo is available so it is not possible to verify if the issues required more than one die. Although coin production was probably never very large at Saldania, the fact that few coins have been found to date does not necessarily mean a very low production either

6.- See MATEU Y LLOPIS, F., "Sobre los límites de la conquista visigoda en Vasconia y Cantabria" in *Ampurias*, 6 (1944), pp. 222-225.

7.- See figure in GARCÍA MORENO, *Historia de España Visigoda*, p. 71.

8.- See map 1 in MORENO GALLO, I., *Descripción de la vía romana de Italia a Hispania de las provincias de Burgos y Palencia*, Burgos, 2001.

9.- See MATEU Y LLOPIS, F., *Catálogo de las monedas previsigodas y visigodas del Gabinete numismático del Museo Arqueológico Nacional*. Madrid, 1936, 299.

10.- See METCALF, D. M., "Many mint-places, few coins. Visigothic coinage in Gallaecia and northern Lusitania", in *Homenagem a Mário Gomes Marques*, Sintra 2000, pp.175-194.

as the existing sample of Visigothic coins may be very limited and biased. For example for ASIDONA under Suinthila, recently more than a dozen coins from at least 5 Obverse and 3 Reverse dies have come to light indicating a moderate production at that mint under Suinthila which was unknown to Miles even though he included some 400 coins of Suinthila from the La Capilla hoard buried relatively close (125 km) to ASIDONA. Also the coinage of Reccared II was unknown to Miles, but recently coins have been found from at least 6 mints, some with multiple dies¹¹.



Obverse: +SISEBVTVSRE Bust: Miles General type 5 but subtype distinct
 Revers: +SALΔANIPIVS¹² Bust: Miles General type 5 but subtype distinct
 Weight: 1.51 g Diameter: 18.5 mm Dies Axis Orientation: ↑↓
 Metal Composition¹³ : Au, 74.7%; Ag, 23.9%; Cu, 1.0%; Fe, 0.4%
 Condition: EF
 Providence: Individual surface find 30 km North of Toledo

The location of these two mints in the North-central region could be of interested in relation to the importance of coinage and its uses in the Visigothic Kingdom. M. Gomes Marques has recently reviewed the four theories which while not exclusive, have been put forward to explain the location of a multiplicity of mints in Gallaecia which formed the Northwestern region of the Kingdom, namely; (1) for collection of taxes, (2) for the payment of soldiers, (3) for the conversion of ore from mines and (4) for the reminting of Suevic coins¹⁴. In the case of Mave and Saldania both (3) and (4)

11.- See “Visigothic mint practices, March 621: What can the coins of Reccared II tell us?” in *Homenagem a Mário Gomes Marques*. Sintra, 2000, pp. 195-218.

12.- The small triangles are clear on the coin and definitely not ghosting but difficult to photograph.

13.- See note 5.

14.- See M. Gomes Marques, “Hipóteses sobre as causas do ploidcentrismo da produção monetária na Galécia Visigoda (Personal communication). For a general review of the reasons for minting also see A.Kurt (ob.cit.).

can be dismissed as they were not in the area of known mining or in the region controlled by the Sueves. Mave with the adjacent Castro de Monte Cidá on the Cantabrian frontier could have had importance as a military mint with the associated functions of the collection of booty and tribute but it was located at some distance from populated areas that would have provided normal taxes. Saldania close to the Cantabrian foothills could also have been important militarily but its longer period of minting and larger number of extant coins as well as its location in a more populated and agriculturally productive area may imply involvement with other minting needs including the collection of taxes. If Saldania was important in the collection of taxes and other normal requirements of coinage, then why was that location at the northern edge of the region used instead of some other more central location of greater importance such as Palencia? The reasons for the location of mints still remain a largely unsolved problem in the understanding of the organization and administration of the Visigothic coinage.

