
Colaboraciones

THE COINAGE OF THE VISIGOTHIC KING SISEBUT (612-621) FROM THE MINT OF BARBI

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The Visigoths struck coins at Barbi in the names of all the rulers from Sisebut (612-621) to Tulga (640-642).¹ Barbi is believed to have been located at the site of the Roman city of Singilia Barba, some 7 km to the west of Antequera, and is mentioned as the station immediately before Antequera in the Itinerary of Antoninus, which ran from Hispalis (Seville) to Málaga.² Along with several other cities of western Betica and southwestern Carthaginiensis, Barbi was first mentioned in Visigothic writings in 612, in a law of Sisebut against the Jews that was to take full effect on 1 July 612; of those cities Barbi was the closest to the coastal strip that formed the Byzantine Province of Spania from 552 to c.625.³

We have located a total of 39 coins of Sisebut from the mint of Barbi (see appendix), struck using 10 obverse and 17 reverse dies. Undoubtedly, the first coins of Barbi are those of Sisebut with the reverse legend VICTOR BARBI, as the discussion, below, of their place within the sequence of Sisebut's coinage from Barbi will show. At first glance, one would assume that these coins indicate that the Visigoths captured Barbi during the reign of Sisebut, but this would have had to have taken place prior to the drafting of the anti-Semitic law that was to take effect there on 1 July 612. Is this, however, chronologically possible? The reign of Sisebut followed that of Gundemar, who died in February or March 612, but some time has to be allowed for Sisebut's election as king and for the organization of his administration and army before commencing military activities against the Byzantines. Although not impossible, it seems very unlikely that he could have done all of this, drafted his law and captured Barbi in the short period of time before June 612 (after all, the law was to come into effect on 1 July and it had

¹ S. CORZO PÉREZ and S. SEMPÈRE DÍAZ, 'La ceca visigoda de Barbi: aspectos historiográficos y arqueológicos', *Numisma* 236 (1995), pp. 125-138.

² P. SILLIERES, *Les voies de communication de l'Hispanie méridionale* (Paris, 1990), pp. 400-412.

³ L. GARCÍA MORENO, *Historia de España Visigoda* (Madrid, 1989), pp.150-151.

to be written and circulated first). In fact, Vallejo Girvés suggests that Sisebut may have first pacified his northern borders and only was able to begin his important campaigns against the Byzantine enclave in 613.⁴ Yet, given the evidence of the VICTOR BARBI coins, either Sisebut commenced his Byzantine campaign at the very beginning of his reign or we must look for an alternative numismatic interpretation of the coins.

Several of the Visigothic coins known with the epithet VICTOR were struck by Reccared I (586-601) and come from the area of the former Suevic Kingdom in the Province of Gallaecia.⁵ Leovigild captured the Suevic Kingdom in 585 and his son Reccared I succeeded him upon his death in 586; thus the VICTOR coins in the name of Reccared I actually commemorate the victories of Leovigild, which took place a year or more earlier. The numismatic precedent of the VICTOR coins of Reccared I, the very limited time available to explain the capture of Barbi by Sisebut as well as the opinion of historians that Sisebut could not have begun his Byzantine campaign until 613, suggests that the capture of Barbi could have occurred late in the reign of his predecessor Gundemar (609-612), but was only commemorated on the first coins produced for Barbi at the beginning of the reign of Sisebut. While Isidore in his *Historia Gothorum* is very brief and lacking in specific details concerning the re-conquest of the Byzantine enclave, he does make one reference to Gundemar (*HG* 59), which has been interpreted as pertaining to his involvement in the siege of an unknown town.⁶ Might this town have been Barbi? Barbi was situated close to the boundary between Visigothic Spain and Byzantine Spania and was strategically located on one of the main access routes to the important city of Málaga.⁷ The historical events that weakened Byzantine military forces in the West and facilitated the re-conquest of Spania began with the revolt of the exarch Heraclius and his son Heraclius in the summer of 608. Using military forces, including ships drawn in part from Mauretania, which Spania may have been a part of administratively or, at least, would have depended on for reinforcements,⁸

⁴ M. VALLEJO GIRVÉS, *Bizancio y la España Tardoantigua (ss. V-VIII): Un Capitulo de Historia Mediterránea* (Alcalá de Henares, 1993), pp. 288-289. The post 612 date for the campaigns of Sisebut against the Byzantine enclave is also attested to by others including Garcia Moreno (*loc. cit.*) and E. A. Thompson, *The Goths in Spain* (Oxford, 1969), pp.332-33

⁵ G. MILES, *The Coinage of the Visigoths of Spain Leovigild to Achila II* (New York, 1952), pp.230-233.

⁶ R. COLLINS, *Visigothic Spain 409-711* (Oxford, 2004), p. 75.

⁷ VALLEJO GIRVÉS, *Bizancio y la España Tardoantigua*, p. 294.

⁸ M. VALLEJO GIRVÉS, 'Sobre la península Ibérica y el Mediterráneo Bizantino: efecto de la rebelión de Heraclio en la contingencia Visigoda-Bizantina (a. 602-610)',

Heraclius moved east and was in possession of Alexandria by 609, capturing Constantinople in October 610. By the time of his victory over Phocas, the empire was both in poor economic condition and under attack from the Persians to the east, so Heraclius probably lacked the resources to reinforce Spania. These events occurred at the end of the reign of Witteric (603-610) and would have been felt during that of Gundemar (610-612); although they were not fully taken advantage of until the major campaigns of Sisebut when most of the enclave was overrun. Only Cartagena and a small adjacent area were left in the hands of the Byzantines, and that was captured in a final mop up campaign by Suintila c.625.⁹

The style of the VICTOR BARBI coins is very similar to that of the coins of Witteric, Gundemar and earliest coins of Sisebut from the mint of Eliberri¹⁰, thus confirming their early date and suggesting that the same engraver produced the dies. He could have traveled to Barbi to make them, or, perhaps more likely, could have cut the dies at Eliberri after which they would have then been taken to Barbi, or, rather less likely, the coins could have minted, the coins at Eliberri itself. This series was probably made in 612, in the first year of the reign of Sisebut; from the number of dies and extant coins it must have been a very limited issue.

in J. González (ed.), *El Mundo Mediterráneo (siglos III-VII)* (Madrid, 1999), pp. 489-499. Chapter 17 of *The Chronicle Gothorum Pseudos-Isidorian* relates that Heraclius gathered all the dromons and galleys that he had found in Africa, in the lands of the Arabs, and those of Spain: F. González Muñoz, *La crónica gothorum pseudos-isidoriana: Edición crítica, tracción y estudio* (A. Coruña, 2000), pp. 174-175. .

⁹ The existence of a coin of Sisebut minted at Ilici to be published in the forthcoming book: J. Vico Monteoliva, G. Cores Uria and F. Pliego Herrera, *Corpus de las Monedas Visigodas, 575-714*, in press, indicates that than after the campaign of Sisebut, even less of Spania remained around Cartagena that previously believed. For a discussion of the boundaries of Spania around Cartagena, see S. Gutiérrez Lloret, “La ciudad en la antigüedad tardía en el sureste y de la provincia Carthaginiensis: la reviviscencia urbana en el marco del conflicto Grecogótico”, in L. García Moreno and S. Rascón Marques (eds), *Complutum y las Ciudades Hispanas en la Antigüedad Tardía*, (Alcalá de Henares, 1999) pp.101-128.

For a general review see P. Díaz, “En Tierra de Nadie: Visgodos Frente a Bizantinos. Reflexiones sobre La Fontera” in *Bizancio y la Península Ibérica de la Antigüedad Tardía a la edad Moderna*, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, (Madrid 2004) pp. 37-60.

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of the changes in the style of the busts and letters in coins of Eliberri during this period see: A. Walker, ‘The Identification of the coinage of Reccared II: New evidence from the Visigothic mints of Emerita and Eliberri’, in *Numismatics: Witness to History* (Wetteren, 1986), pp. 81-83.



VICTOR BARBI coin of Sisebut (Dies 1-1)



Coins of Gundemar from Eliberri



PIVS BARBI VI coin of Sisebut (Dies 2-2)



PIVS BARBI coin of Sisebut (Dies 2-4)

The VICTOR BARBI series was followed by a second and final series beginning with reverse dies bearing the inscriptions PIVS BARBI VI: and PIVS BARBI VI (the VI: and VI were abbreviation for VICTOR, which could not be spelled out in full because of the lack of space caused by the addition of the epithet PIVS). The new series began with a single obverse die first paired with one reverse die of each of the forms of VI and then paired with two reverse dies bearing solely PIVS BARBI.¹¹ The reverse form PIVS BARBI remained in use during the rest of coinage of Sisebut, and of his successors from Reccared II to Tulga. The style of the second series is very different and distinct from that of the first. The letters and figures of all of the PIVS BARBI VI and PIVS BARBI coins of Sisebut are all very similar to each other and although they are superficially similar to some of the coins of Sisebut from Ispali and to the later series of Eliberri, they have certain unique characteristics that suggests that they were made by a single engraver working only for the Barbi mint. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Barbi engraver is his use of a complete A with cross bar instead of the usual Λ. Miles noted that “A is very uncommon” and he was unable to find any case of the use of the complete A at any mint for the coinage of Sisebut.¹² The use of the complete A is also found on both the obverse and reverse of coins from the single pair of dies known for Reccared II.¹³ In a preliminary die study of 116 coins of Suinthila from the Barbi mint, a complete A was found only on three of 42 obverse dies and the corresponding reverse dies of two of them out of a total of 47 reverse dies. The dies of Suinthila with the complete A are only known from a hoard buried in the first years of the reign of Suinthila¹⁴, suggesting that the engraver stopped working early in his reign.

The first obverse die of the second series (No. 2) is known from 9 coins and is paired with 4 reverse dies (Nos. 2-5). In our sample, there are another 8 obverse dies used with 12 reverse dies, all with the inscription PIVS BARBI. While these 8 obverse dies must have succeeded the first, probably in a sequential manner, it is not possible to determine the exact order that they

¹¹ A die break between the bottom of the hair and the top of the cuirass on the right side, which can be seen in the photo of reverse, die 4, indicates that the PIVS BARBI forms were used last.

¹² Miles, *Coinage of the Visigoths*, p. 147. Miles lists two coins of Barbi from Sisebut but he did not actually see these coins as indicated by his lack of describing the types of facing busts.

¹³ G. CORES, J. M. PEIXOTO CABRAL, L. C. ALVES, and P. BARTLETT, ‘Visigothic mint practices, March 621: what can the coins of Reccared II tell us?’, *Homenagem a Mário Gomes Marques* (Sintra, 2000), Pl. 2.3.

¹⁴ WALKER, ‘Coinage of Reccared II’, p. 77 and note 16.

followed because of the lack of die links. Only one die link was found, that between the obverse dies Nos. 5 and 6. The lack of die links could mean that issues were made using one obverse die at a time; it would then be withdrawn from use to be replaced by a new die, engraved whenever another issue was required; the size of the sample is as yet too small to tell.¹⁵

In the second series, as in case of obverse die 2, most of the other obverse dies are known from several coins, with only dies 7, 8, 9 and 10 being singletons. Obverse die 3 is paired with only one reverse die, but it is known from nine examples. Obverse die 4 appears on six coins struck with four reverse dies; obverse 5, known from six coins, and obverse 6, known from three coins, are both paired with two reverse dies. Using this information with the modified Carter formula¹⁶ allows us to estimate that the original issue was struck from 13 obverse and 26 reverse dies. The corresponding 95% confidence interval for the original number of dies is between 10 to 17 obverses and 18 to 38 reverses. We believe the actual value may lie toward the upper limits because the samples come from only a few sources and may be slightly biased. A coin from another obverse die that ends in REX, not found on any of the other coins, was sold as lot 173 in the auction of J.A. Herrero S.A. on 25 March 1993, but since it was not illustrated in the catalogue, it could not be included in our study; including it would increase the point estimation for the number obverse dies to 15 and the 95% confidence interval to 12 to 20. The number of dies at Barbi, which can serve as an indication of the size of the coinage, can be compared to estimations made by Bartlett, Cores and Cores¹⁷ for the principal Visigothic mints of Toledo, Ispali and Emerita of 166, 126 and 47 obverse and 274, 190 and 73 reverse dies respectively. Although the ratio of obverse to reverse dies as well as die wear and breaks would suggest the dies were used extensively, the small number of dies indicates that the total production of coins at Barbi during the reign of Sisebut must have been relatively small in comparison to the three major mints.

¹⁵ Only one die set is known for the coins of Reccared II from Barbi suggesting that only one anvil was in operation at Barbi at that time, although the sample is very small (Cores et. al., 'Visigothic mint practices', p. 198).

¹⁶ W. ESTY, 'Estimation of the size of a coinage: A survey and comparison of methods', *NC* 146 (1986), pp. 185-215.

¹⁷ P. BARTLETT, G. CORES y M. CORES, 'The use of dots as control marks in the coins legends at the Visigothic mint of Ispali during the reign of Sisebut (612-621)', *XIII Congreso Internacional de Numismática* (Madrid, 2003), in press.

Appendix – Catalogue of the 39 coins of Sisebut from the Mint of Barbi

Obv. No.	Rev. No.	Number of Coins	Reverse Legend	Provenance
<i>Group I</i> 1	1	2	VICTOR:BARBI	a)Col. G. Cores-08; b) Col. F. Molina
<i>Group II</i> 2	2	2	PIVSB ∇ BIBIVI	a) Col. G. Cores-04; (b) Swiss Bank 42, 23 Jan. 1997, #2584
2	3	1	PIVS BARBI VI:	a) Col. P. Bartlett
2	4	4	PIVS BARBI	a) Col. G. Cores-06; b) J.Vico, 23 #208; c) Aureo, 29 September 19 #1030; d) Col.P. Bartlett
2	5	2	PIVS BARBI	a) Numismatica Ars Classica 16, 29 Oct. 1999, #1493; b) Leu ^x #119
3	6	9	PIVS BARBI	a) Leu ^x #116; (b) Leu ^x #117; c)J. Vico , 5 June 1997, #229; d) J.A. Herrero, 6 April 2000, #202; e-g)Col. G. Gores # 1,2 & 5; h) J. Vico, 9 june 1994, #294; i) Numismatica Ars Classica 25, 25 June 2003, #705.
4	7	3	PIVS BARBI	a) Leu ^x #118 ; b)Col. G. Cores #7; c) J.Vico, 11 March 2004, #245.
4	8	1	PIVS BARBI	a) Aureo, Dec. 1997, #1341
4	9	1	PIVS BARBI	a) J. Vico November 4/99, #158
4	10	1	PIVS BARBI	a) Aureo, May 8/01, #2215
5	11	5	PIVS BARBI	a) Leu ^x #120 ; b)Swiss Bank 42, 23 Jan.1997, #2585; c) GC-03; d) Swiss Bank 35, 15 Sept. 1994, #1922); d) Numismatica Ars Classica 25, June 25 2003, #706
5	12	1	PIVS BARBI	a) Swiss Bank 39, 25 Jan. 1996, #2147
6	12	1	PIVS BARBI	a) Aureo, 27 April 2000, #1168
6	13	2	PIVS BARBI	a) J. Vico 29 February 1996, #151; b) Aureo, 26 December 2003, #274
7	14	1	PIVS BARBI	a) Swiss Bank Corp. 34, 27 Jan.

				1994, #2812
8	15	1	PIVS BARBI or BARBI?	a) J.A. Herrero, Nov. 1991, #186 (weak photo)
9	16	1	PIVS BARBI	a) Aureo October 22/98#2187
10	17	1	PIVS BARBI	a) R. Chaves and M. Chaves, <i>Acuñaiones previsigodas y Visigodas en Hispania, Desde Honorio a Achila II (Madrid, 1984), p. 85 (No. 145=Reinhart, 26). (Very weak photo)</i>

^x Lote of 400 coins from the Reccared II hoard acquired by Leu Numismatik AG in 1980's, photos of which are on file at the ANS.

6	2		D		D-4	GC-06(FM=3)	1.43		PIVS BARBI
7	2		D			JV2/00#208	NA		PIVS BARBI
8	2		D			A9/98#1030	1.40		PIVS BARBI
9	2		D			A-frag	frag.		PIVS BARBI
10	2		E		D-2	NAC16#1493	1.49		PIVS BARBI
11	2		E			AW-119	1.43		PIVS BARBI
12	3	D-9	F		D-9	AW116	1.46	SISEBTVSRE	PIVS BARBI
13	3		F			AW117	1.47		PIVS BARBI
14	3		F			JV6/97#229	NA		PIVS BARBI
15	3		F			JAH4/00#202	1.44		PIVS BARBI
16	3		F			GC01(FM=4)	1.46		PIVS BARBI
17	3		F			GC02(FM miss.)	miss		PIVS BARBI
18	3		F			GC-05(FM=1)	1.47		PIVS BARBI
19	3		F			JV6/94#294	NA		PIVS BARBI
20	3		F			NAC25#705	1.45		PIVS BARBI
21	10 S		G	S		SB34#2812	1.42		PIVS BARBI
22	4	D-6	H		D-3	AW-118	1.32	SISEBTVSRE	PIVS BARBI
23	4		H			GC07(FM=2)	1.52		PIVS BARBI
24	4		H			JV-3/04-245	NA		PIVS BARBI
25	4		I	S		A12/97#1341	1.43		PIVS BARBI
26	4		J	S		JV11/99#158	NA		PIVS BARBI
27	4		K	S		A5/01#2215	1.42	SISEBTVSRE	PIVS BARBI
28	5	D-6	L		D-5	AW-120	1.44	SISEBTVSRI.	PIVS BARBI
29	5		L			SB-2585	1.46		PIVS BARBI
30	5		L			GC-03(FM=5)	1.44		PIVS BARBI
31	5		L			SB35-1922 (9/94)	1.42		PIVS BARBI
32	5		L			NAC25#706 (6/03)	1.41		PIVS BARBI

33	5		M		D-2	SB39#2147	1.47		PIVS BARBI
						=JAH11/96#175= A3/98#1514			
34	6	D-3	M			A4/00#1168	1.42	SISEBVTVSRE	PIVS BARBI
35	6		N		D-2	JV2/96#151	NA		PIVS BARBI
36	6		N			A-12/03#274	1.45		PIVS BARBI
37	7 S		O	S		JAH11/91#186	NA	SISEBVTVSRE	PIVSB <u>AR</u> BI o <u>BAR</u> BI?
38	8 S		P	S		A10/98#2187	1.46	SISEBVTVSRI-	PIVSB <u>AR</u> BI o <u>BAR</u> BI?
39	9 S		Q	S		Reinhart 25=Chaves	1.41	SISEBVTVSRE	PIVSB <u>AR</u> BI o <u>BAR</u> BI?

^x Lote of 400 coins from the Reccared II hoard acquired by Leu Numismatik AG in 1980's, photos of which are on file at the ANS.