

Andrew Kurt, Minting, State, and Economy in the Visigothic Kingdom. From Settlement in Aquitaine to the First Decade of the Muslim Conquest of Spain, Amsterdam (Amsterdam University Press) 2020, 422 p., 34 fig., 5 pl. (Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia), ISBN 978-94-6298-164-5, EUR 129,00.

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This is the first major monograph of Andrew Kurt (Ph. D. University of Toronto) who is an Associate Professor of History at Clayton State University in Morrow, Georgia. He has been working on Visigothic coins for a good number of years, this is the fruit at this point of his main labors. It has always amazed me how numismatists and epigraphers can unpack so much from a coin or an inscription about the cultures that produced them. In this study, the author has taken on the entire corpus of Visigothic coins drawing from corollary fields to create the most up to date grand synthesis of what we can know about the coins, the culture that produced them, and what they can teach us about the larger context of Late Antique Visigothic Hispania.

In some respects, this is a work in progress for the simple fact that many more Visigothic archaeological sites have yet to be unearthed that may potentially yield more caches of coins. In my thirty-five years of going to Spain almost not a year goes by that a new site has been discovered that adds to our growing understanding of the geographical extent of Visigothic settlements and the minting of coins. That being said, the monograph is the most comprehensive up to date on this particular topic in the English language. Andrew Kurt has added his name to a long and fruitful historiography of numismatics scholarship; the luminaries that come to mind are: Philip Grierson, George C. Miles, Felipe Mateu y Llopis and more recently J. M. Peixoto Cabral, Dennis M. Metcalf, Ruth Pliego Vázquez, Miquel Crusafont i Sabater and others.

An important strength of this book is that it situates the coins in the broadest of contexts. That is, from before the Visigothic era began to the post-Visigothic up to the first decade of the Muslim invasion. This situates the minting of coins in Hispania between the two bookends of the transformation of Hispania from a late-Roman province to becoming a new independent kingdom of the Sueves and Visigoths. What the coins can tell us about this transformation is apparently a great deal. At the other end the reader is informed about what happened to Visigothic minting of coins after the abrupt dismantling of the Visigothic kingdom precipitated by the Muslim invasion in the first decades.



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No other study on Visigothic coins has situated the subject in this framework in one convenient place. The places where the coins were minted and the styles they reflect are enlightening. As one would expect, there is continuity, novelty, and imitation of coin production from the late Roman Byzantine Empire. The Byzantine impact on Suevic-Visigothic Hispania has been well-documented by scholars in many corollary areas of cultural and ecclesiastical life. Coins are one more evidence of these cultural encounters. The author deftly fleshes out chapter by chapter what the coins and their mints can tell us about the Visigothic kingdom in Hispania in great detail.

The book is made up of seven chapters, two appendices, bibliography, index, and seventeen figures and five plates. The seven chapters are: »Introduction«, 1. »Pre-Regal Visigothic Coinage«, 2. »The King's Coinage: The Beginning and Development of the Regal Coinage (c. 573–c. 720)«, 3. »The Activities of the Mints from c. 573–c. 720«, 4. »Why Were Gold Coins Struck in the Visigothic Kingdom?«, 5. »The Royal Control of Visigothic Minting«, 6. »Coinage in Spain in the Aftermath of the Islamic Conquest«, and 7. »Visigothic Currency in the Early Medieval Economy«, »Conclusion«, »Appendix I and II«, »Bibliography«, »About the Author«, and »Index«.

A deficit in the book are the photographs. The publisher should have at least included one full page of the gold coins in color. This reviewer is aware that color plates can drive up the price of a book, still just one would not be that impactful. These decisions are at the publisher level, not the author. In the end, nevertheless, the quality of the black and white photos are as adequate as one can expect. Readers, however, can find color photos of all the coins in other publications on Visigothic coins. My slight criticism here does not in any way impact negatively the high quality of the scholarship.

The Appendices I and II comprising ninety-five pages are a cornucopia of detail that will satisfy any numismatist scholar or avid amateur. Appendix I provides exhaustive analysis of every coin touching upon: weight and fineness measurements of Visigothic pre-regal tremisses, comparisons of intrinsic values of tremisses of Byzantine Spain, Constantinople, and the Visigothic kingdom, a map of gold mints in Visigothic Spain (c. 575–c. 714), photos of Visigothic copper alloy coins compared to tremisses, an extensive table of known regal mints, graphs that show frequencies of weights of Visigothic regal tremisses for every known Visigothic king, and many others too numerous to name. In all cases, the author gives due credit to the work of other scholars in these areas of research.

Appendix II engages the identification of die engravers at multiple mints. This is where five plates of coins are included with detailed descriptions of each coin. This is followed by tables of regal Visigothic tremisses attributed to separate engravers, this is a very dense descriptive inventory aimed at specialists and based on the work of the premier numismatists to which the author has added



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his own insights. The appendix closes with a concordance of new ANS accession numbers for ex-HAS regal Visigothic tremisses that is 19 pages, all coins are accounted for.

The monograph is an exemplary work of inter-disciplinary scholarship that draws from the work of previous numismatists and those who are currently active. It is a fine blend of history and archaeology. The bibliography reveals that the author has read widely the modern literature, a feature that is sometimes lacking in many books where authors will ignore in large part scholarship from language groups that are not their own. Those who are not specialists can rest assured that this monograph is based on the most solid prior scholarship.

The author's conclusions are reliable too. This book will become for a very long time an important point of departure for the study of Visigothic coins. Institutions are encouraged to make room for this book in their collections to give access to all those interested, academic and novice alike. One area that would have been desirable is more consideration of Suevic coins in a special section and what they may reveal about relations with their nemesis the Visigoths.

The author acknowledges that there is still much work to be done with known coins, those that are in the hands of private collections, and those still awaiting discovery in unknown and known archaeological sites. Andrew Kurt is to be lauded for such a superb work of scholarship that will for sure have an important place in Visigothic numismatics from this point forward. The not so prohibitive price should not keep it out of reach of individual scholars, it will be a wise investment on their part. Lastly, Amsterdam University Press is to be applauded for accepting to publish this significant book.



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