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The Iberian Coinages, 6th-1st century BC

*by*

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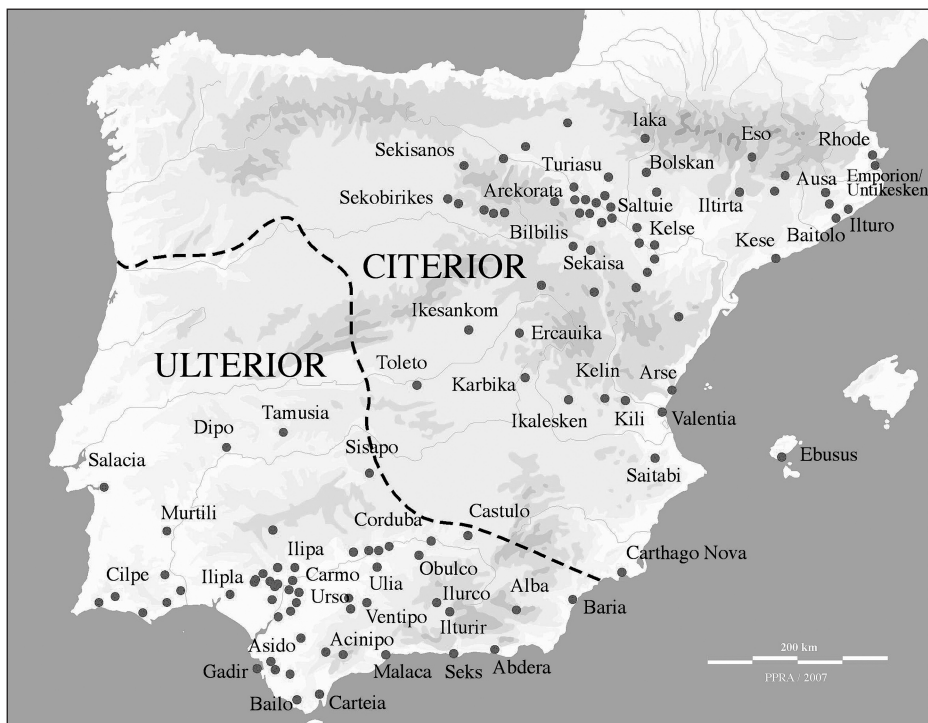
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# The Iberian Coinages, 6th-1st century BC<sup>1</sup>

PERE PAU RIPOLLÈS

[PLATES 1-3]



Map 1. Mints of the Iberian peninsula during the 6th to 1st centuries BC

## *Geography and ethnics*

The Iberian Peninsula was inhabited by a remarkable variety of cultures with very different levels of social, political and economic development, depending on whether they were located on the coast, where contacts with traders and sailors allowed many advances and innovations to take place, or inland, where access was more difficult. Of the products which the first seafarers sought in Iberia, silver was one of the most in demand. Silver was soon integrated into the commercial life of the most important populations of the Spanish Mediterranean coast, becoming a form of currency.

<sup>1</sup> Universitat de València. This paper is the lecture which I delivered to the RNS in London on 20 December 2016 at the time of receiving the Society's Medal.

### *Greek style coinages*

The first coinages of the Iberian Peninsula were minted at the Phocaeen colony of Emporion, towards the late 6th century BC, following a model of minting similar to the one developed in Massalia, another Phocaeen colony in southern France. The weight standard is Phocaeen. At the beginning, Emporion struck heavy denominations (**pl. 1, 1**), but then, during the 5th and 4th centuries BC, its coinage was characterised by a reduced weight, most of the coins weighing less than 1g, and by a great diversity of types (**pl. 1, 2-10**). These coinages had a local function, rather than the financing of armies or important trading activities. From their fractional character and pattern of circulation, it can be deduced that they were widely used, by Greeks and natives; due to their low value, a large segment of the population had access to them.

Towards the end of the 4th century BC, the Greek colony of Rhode, located about 18 km to the north of Emporion, initiated the minting of drachms and fractions, with an average weight of 4.74g (**pl. 1, 11-12**), modifying the pattern of fractions in use until then. Rhode was, in addition, one of the first cities of the Iberian Peninsula to mint bronze coins, with a standard of 4.12g, many of which were overstruck on bronze coinages of Punic Sardinia, during the first half of the 3rd century BC. (**pl. 1, 13**)

Shortly afterwards, Emporion also struck drachms with an average weight of c.4.70g and ceased the issue of fractions. This new phase at Emporion took place at the beginning of the 3rd century BC and lasted intermittently until the second half of the 2nd century BC. (**pl. 1, 14-15**)

The types chosen for the first Emporion drachms were the female head with corn ears in her hair, which had already been used on the drachms of Rhode, and a Nike flying over a horse. They have prompted the idea that the Carthaginians could have been to some extent involved in their manufacture, perhaps for the payment of mercenaries recruited in Gallia, where these coinages were widely imitated. In the later issues, Emporitan types show a greater Syracusan influence, with on the obverse a female head adorned with an ear of wheat in her hair and surrounded by three dolphins, and on the reverse Pegasus.

### *The first Iberian coinages*

The introduction of coinage among the Iberian population was a delayed, slow and territorially uneven process. The Iberian world had knowledge of foreign coinages in the early part of the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 4th centuries BC. Coins had come into the hands of the natives through trading activities and the Iberian mercenaries who fought in the wars in the central Mediterranean between Greeks and Carthaginians, at least from 480 BC.

The first Iberian issues were struck in the city of Arse, presumably in the second half of the 4th century BC, as the political organisation of the city developed (**pl. 1, 16**). They could be linked with the process of regulating civic institutions. With its coinages, Arse did no more than begin to formalise, in coin form, the use of silver bullion valued by weight. But, for a large number of native populations,

true monetization began only in the late 3rd century BC. The designs and the artistic style of the coins struck in Arse reflect the Hellenistic Greek cultural world and show typological ties with Massalia, Magna Graecia and Sicily, areas with which Arse maintained trade contacts (**pl. 1, 17-21**).

### *The Carthaginians and the Second Punic War*

The natural evolution of native societies towards monetisation accelerated with the presence of the Carthaginians and the development of the Second Punic War. The coin hoards of this period provide information on the type of coinages used to finance the war and the area of their circulation. The Carthaginians covered their military expenses, largely, with metals mined in Iberia. The silver currency they coined there followed the shekel standard (**pl. 2, 26-27**). Electrum coins were also struck (**pl. 2, 25**). The monetary system was completed with bronze issues for daily use (**pl. 2, 28**).

For their part, the Romans financed their military expenditure with a more varied set of currencies. Unlike the Carthaginians, they used local mints and designs. Most of the payments were made with drachms from Emporion with the Pegasus type, with the head transformed on the reverse (**pl. 2, 22**). This explains the huge volume of coins minted by the city in a short period of time.

Other coinages found in hoards buried during the years of the war are the Iberian imitations of Emporion drachms, and drachms of Ebusus, Gadir, Arse and Saitabi, most of them minted in a military context (**pl. 2, 23, 29-31**).

Finance for war contributed decisively the indigenous population's familiarisation with, and use of, coins. Nevertheless, coins did not extend uniformly throughout the whole territory, since the findspots of hoards indicate that they were concentrated basically on the Mediterranean coastal strip, seldom penetrating inland.

### *The Roman dominion*

After the defeat of the Carthaginians, the Roman Senate decided to remain in the Iberian Peninsula in order to exploit its resources. The Roman presence had important repercussions for the life of the natives of the Iberian Peninsula, because it generated a slow and complex process of assimilation and sociocultural exchange. Roman dominion integrated the native economy within that of the Roman state, and contributed to the increase of coin use.

### *Metals and denominations*

During the 2nd and 1st centuries BC, coins in Spain were made of silver and bronze. A ternary alloy of bronze (copper, tin and lead) was used by cities in both provinces of the peninsula Hispania Citerior and Hispania Ulterior, as around the Mediterranean at that time; although pure copper has also been recorded in use by Celtiberian mints.

The identification of the native bronze denominations is complex, because the Roman names of denominations were not always suitable, due to the obvious

variations of weight with respect to the Roman standard, presumably because native bronze coinages had a local purpose. At the onset, many issues were minted with a high average weight, around 20-24g. (**pl. 2, 32, 34-35**). For the later coinages, a standard of around 9-13g, tended to be more common (**pl. 2, 33**).

As for the silver coinages of the 2nd-1st centuries BC, the published data makes it clear that the average quality of the metal minted was relatively high. All the silver coins were minted in the Citerior province and the majority adopted the weight of the Roman denarius; for that reason, they probably had an equivalent value. Although some silver coins could have been struck for strictly local purposes (e.g. Arse, Iltirta, Ausesken, Kese) (**pl. 3, 39**), a good number were minted in a military context, in Celtiberian cities and the Pyrenean area (Sekobirikez, Arekorata, Turiazu or Bolskan) (perhaps to pay auxiliary troops) (**pl. 3, 36-38**).

### *Monetisation as an effect of civic development*

The native coinages were promoted by the city authorities, who were in charge of their appearance, not only the designs, but also the scripts used in the legends. The monetisation of the Iberian Peninsula took place largely from within, from issues minted by more than 180 communities. This was linked to their urban development, and the existence of economies in which payment and retail trade were common, as was the case with the mining zones, the rich agricultural territories, the port areas or the military establishments.

### *Designs*

During the 3rd to the 1st centuries BC, the native populations had a relatively autonomous development, in which they adapted the coinage to suit their own local conditions. The native issues borrowed Hellenistic Greek iconography from a variety of origins. From their repeated use they became characteristic of a number of mints or regions (e.g. corn ears, Hercules, sphinx, bull, horseman). The lack of connections of the designs and the ideology of the Hispanic coinages with the Roman cultural world can be explained by the autonomy that the Hispanic communities enjoyed, since Rome did not yet have a standardised iconography of cultural symbols.

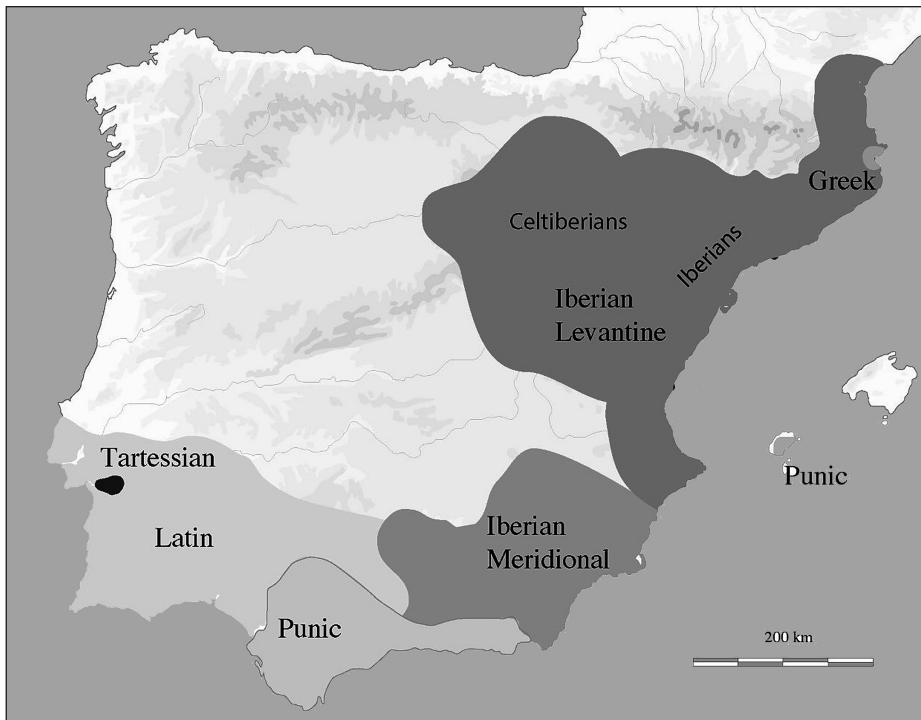
Some features of the designs allow us to establish differences in the monetary production of the two Hispanic provinces. In the cities of Citerior, the monetary types were characterised a certain uniformity. For the bronze units and the silver denarii, they preferred the male head on the obverse, and the horseman with spear, palm or another object on the reverse (**pls 2-3, 33-34, 36-39**). The obverse could represent the founding hero or a local divinity of the community and the reverse could be adapted to reflect the values or beliefs of the elites of equestrian status.

In marked contrast, in Ulterior there was a great variety of designs. In Phoenico-punic cities the types reflect the continuance of Semitic cults, with the main divinities, and the animals and plants associated with them (Ba'al Hammon, Tanit, Melkart, Chusor, Eshmun) (**pl. 3, 44-45**). On issues with Latin and southern-Iberian script, the types included a wide variety of portraits, animals, vegetables and other objects on the reverse (**pl. 3, 41-42, 46-47**). These designs have been explained either as

a reflection of the economic wealth of the cities or as symbols of a divinity or a religious cult. Both interpretations may be compatible.

### *Legends*

Another characteristic of the ancient coinages of the Iberian Peninsula was the script they used. As we have seen, depiction of the cultural features of the native societies were a form of the autonomy and self-representation of the elites, and the same can also be detected in the legends of the coins, which reflect the diversity of the peoples in Hispania, and the Roman permission to coin, as well as the development of urban life.



*Map 2.* Scripts used on ancient coinages of the Iberian peninsula

Coin legends are in many different types of script. Foreign cultural groups used their own, like Greek (pl. 1, 9, 11, 14) and Punic (pl. 1, 44-45). However, the native population used at least two types of pre-Roman scripts. The ‘Levantine Iberian’ was used in the ‘Iberian area’ a broad coastal strip from Alicante to Hérault in France (pls 1-3, 17-19, 34, 39), and it was employed to write the Celtiberian language (pls 2-3, 33, 37-38). The ‘Meridional’ Iberian script was used in the Southeastern part of the Peninsula (pl. 3, 41-42). Finally, the so-called ‘Tartessian’ or ‘South-Lusitanian’ script, about which virtually nothing is known, is only recorded on the issues of Salacia (Portugal) (pl. 3, 43). In addition, many native populations of Hispania Ulterior used Latin script from the beginning, but in a restricted way and for official purposes only (mainly for place names) (pls 2-3, 35, 46-47). This does not demonstrate that a majority of the population knew Latin.

*The impact of the promotion of cities by the Romans*

From the 1st century BC, the establishment of Roman colonies and the promotion of indigenous cities, which were now converted into Roman municipalities, constituted the beginning of a new stage in the monetary history of Hispania. The number of such new municipalities was significant, because under Pompey, Caesar and Augustus, twenty-three colonies were created and up to seventy-seven native cities were granted municipal status. These foundations brought important changes to the socio-political geography of the Iberian Peninsula and allowed the indigenous elites and the newly established population to acquire Roman citizenship. In fact, from the last third of the first century BC, native cultural elements of a public nature in the newly-privileged cities almost completely disappeared. This is confirmed by the way that many different aspects of native Spanish life (such as pottery, language, script etc.) became extremely scarce. In this context, Roman iconography and Roman symbols came to visibly dominate the civic coinages.

Coins of this new period bear on the obverse the portrait of the emperor surrounded by his name and titles, and on the reverse a figure with a local significance, sometimes accompanied by the names of civic magistrates (**pl. 3, 48**).

*Key to Plates*

(Coins 1-10, 12, 16 and 19-21 are illustrated double size.)

1. AR. Diobol. Emporion. Late 6th cent. BC. Madrid, Cores coll. no. 1.
2. AR. Tritartemorion. Emporion. Early 5th cent. BC. Barcelona, private coll.
3. AR. Obol. Emporion. First half of 5th cent. BC. Madrid, Cores coll.
4. AR. Obol. Emporion. First half of 5th cent. BC. Barcelona, Gabinet Numismàtic de Catalunya 20507 (from Pont de Molins hoard).
5. AR. Obol. Emporion. First half of 5th cent. BC. Barcelona, Gabinet Numismàtic de Catalunya 20512 (from Pont de Molins hoard).
6. AR. Obol. Emporion. First half of 5th cent. BC. Madrid, Cores coll.
7. AR. Obol. Emporion. Second half of 5th cent. BC. Barcelona, private coll.
8. AR. Obol. Emporion. Second half of 5th cent. BC. Barcelona, private coll.
9. AR. Obol. Emporion. Early 4th cent. BC. Vico 1/3/2012, lot 51 (from Penedès hoard).
10. AR. Obol. Emporion. Mid 4th cent. BC. Barcelona, Gabinet Numismàtic de Catalunya 20522 (from Tarragona hoard)
11. AR. Drachm. Rhode. *c.*300 BC. London, The British Museum (*SNG BM Spain* 1).
12. AR. Tritartemorion. Rhode. *c.*300 BC. Madrid, Cores Coll. 37.
13. AE. Rhode. First half of 3rd cent. BC (overstruck on Sardinian Punic bronze).  
Barcelona, private coll.
14. AR. Drachm. Emporion. Early 3rd cent. BC. Vico 26/6/2012, lot 11 (ex HSA 12451).
15. AR. Drachm. Emporion. Mid 3rd cent. BC. Barcelona, private coll.
16. AR. Obol. Arse. *c.*350-300 BC. Valencia, seen on market.
17. AR. Drachm. Arse. *c.*300 BC. Stockholm, Royal Coin Cabinet.
18. AR. Dracma. Arse. 3rd cent. BC. S. Sagunto, Vela coll.
19. AR. Hemidrachma. Arse. 3rd cent. BC. Castellón, E. G. coll.
20. AR. Hemiobol. Arse. 3rd cent. BC. Sagunto, S. Vela coll.
21. AR. Hemiobol. Arse. 3rd cent. BC. Sagunto, S. Vela coll.



22. AR. Drachm. Emporion. Late 3rd cent. BC. Barcelona, private coll.
23. AR. Drachm. Iberian imitation of Emporion. Late 3rd cent. BC. Madrid, Cores coll. 839.
24. AR. Drachm. Carthaginians in Spain. Late 3rd cent. BC. London, The British Museum 1830.
25. EL? Carthaginians in Spain. Late 3rd cent. BC. Madrid, Cores coll. 167.
26. AR. Dishekel. Carthaginians in Spain. Late 3rd cent. BC. Madrid, Cores coll.
27. AR. Shekel. Carthaginians in Spain. Late 3rd cent. BC. London, The British Museum (SNG BM Spain 124).
28. AE. Carthaginians in Spain. Late 3rd cent. BC. New York, ANS Newell 1944.100.80150.
29. AR. Hemidrachm. Gadir. Late 3rd cent. BC. Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional 2140.
30. AR. Didrachm. Saitabi. Late 3rd cent. Barcelona, private coll.
31. AR. Drachm. Ebusus. Late 3rd cent. Madrid, Cores coll. 567.
32. AE. As. Untikesken. First half of the 2nd cent. BC. Mainz, RGZM (found in *Numantia*, Soria).
33. AE. Unit. Bilbilis. 2nd cent. BC. ANS, Newell 84103.
34. AE. As. Kese. Late 3rd-early 2nd cents. BC. Madrid, Instituto Valencia de Don Juan 744.
35. AE. As. Carmo. First half of 2nd cent. BC. London, The British Museum (SNG BM Spain 1577).
36. AR. Denarius. Ikalesken. Mid 2nd cent. BC. London, The British Museum (SNG BM Spain 1175).
37. AR. Denarius. Turiasu. Late 2nd cent. BC. London, The British Museum (SNG BM Spain 963).
38. AR. Denarius. Sekobirikes. Late 2nd cent. BC. Vico 7/11/2013, lot 188.
39. AR. Denarius. Ausesken. 2nd cent. BC. New York, ANS Newell 83885.
40. AE. Quarter. Arse. c.195-130 BC. Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional 1993/67/1973.
41. AE. Unit. Castulo. Late 2nd cent. BC. Paris, Cabinet des Médailles FG 907.
42. Ae. Unit. Obulco. 2nd cent. BC. Madrid, Cores coll. 2822.
43. AE. Unit. Beuipo. 2nd-1st cents. BC. Madrid, Cores coll. 3042.
44. Ae. Gadir. 2nd-1st cents. BC. Madrid, Cores coll. 313.
45. AE. Unit. Malaca. 2nd cent. BC. Copenhagen, SNG Cop. 36.
46. AE. Unit. Acinipo. 1st cent. BC. London, The British Museum (SNG BM Spain 1618).
47. AE. Half unit. Ilipa. Second half of 2nd cent. BC. London, The British Museum (SNG BM Spain 1549).
48. AE. As. Calagurris. Augustus (27 BC-AD 14). London, The British Museum 839.

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PLATE 1



RIPOLLÈS, THE IBERIAN COINAGES, 6th-1st CENTURY BC (1)

PLATE 2



RIPOLLÈS, THE IBERIAN COINAGES, 6th-1st CENTURY BC (2)



36



37



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39



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41



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43



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