

## The coinage supply to the army during the Cantabrian Wars (Hispania, 27-19 BC)

The early date of the Cantabrian wars carried out by Augustus in Hispania allows us to use the monetary supply to this army as the preamble of what shall be years later the supply to the troops in Germania. In both cases the wars took place far away from the Romanized territories. Cantabria, Asturica, Gallaecia and the Lippe valley (Germania)... were lands that lacked, not only *municipia* or *colonia*, but also indigenous *civitates*; all knots that could had helped the Romans to organize the supply of the army. In these territories, not only were coins not minted, but a public aerarium did probably not even exist. Augustus did not find here the political net that he had used in Orient some years ago and the Scipios had found in the SE Hispania during the Second Punic War. This urbanization had allowed them not only to collect indigenous coins for the Roman army but also to mint Roman coinage using non-Roman mints.

This lack of urbanization in the NW of Spain is probably the reason why we face a continuous improvisation in these earlier phases of the Roman conquest, between 27 and 19 BC. These years constitute an important period of economic and political changes. Although we still find significant remains of the Republican *imperatorum moneta* coined by August himself in NW Hispania, during his stay in Hispania (26-24 BC), Augustus organizes a centralized mintage, ascribing the first imperial coinage of silver to the Colonia Emerita (25-23 BC), and, later (19-16 BC), also gold to Colonia Patricia(?) and Colonia Celsa(?). Meanwhile, he organizes the bronze to be struck in *municipia* and *colonia* of the provinces where the army is quartered. This monetary politics foresaw to take the coinage of silver and gold, as well as bronze, away from the generals and to make the civic communities, *coloniae* and *municipia*, responsible for all of it. Behind this strategy there was also probably the intention to keep territorial distances between mints and troops. This is a new conception of the military coinage that we find neither in the Republic nor in the earlier Octavian wars. Other political measures were then

taken. For example, the not privileged *civitates* were forbidden to struck coinage. This was new in provinces like Hispaniae ulterior and citerior where, in the Republican times, there had been c. 200 indigenous working mints with total freedom in terms of monetary politics.

### *Spanish mints*

The beginning of the Cantabrian war (27-25 BC). The Hispanic NW area lacked mints and monetary circulation, obliging Augustus, as IMP AVG DIVI F, to struck the first local coinages on the spot for, at least, four legions. These are the bronzes of the “caetra”, which seem to have been struck in *Lucus Augusti*, judging by the significant finds (including coin blanks) in this location (Ferrer 1996). This abundant military bronze currency invades the NW areas and provokes copies in the more oriental military camps such as Herrera de Pisuerga (Palencia) (fig. 1 a, b). That the finds of these coins occur in NW Spain, indicates that they were not only coined, but also used in this area. Probably besides this bronze, August coins also silver such as CAESAR AVG DIVI F, with the type again of “caetra” (RIC I2, 543). The illustration of the shield of Gallaecian and Lusitanian warriors, as it is shown in the frequent sculpture representations, corresponds to a local iconography (fig. 2 a, b, c)<sup>1</sup>, in agreement with the idea of a local coinage, which, in fact, I believe to have taken place probably also in *Lucus Augusti*'s mint.

In regard to this supply of silver to the NW army I will comment only on Alvarelos's hoard (Centeno 1987, n° 21, p. 35), which has a clear military character. We are facing a precious sample of silver nourishment to the army around 26 BC, before Emerita mint was

---

1. Volk (1997, 71), after identifying well the Gallaecian iconography and establishing their finds in NW, ascribes the coins to the Vacceans territory, where not such kind of sculptures or coin finds are attested.

open. It is composed of c. 5000 pieces, mainly of old Republican denarii, but including also a minority of triunviral, some post Actium silver of Italia and six closing local denarii of “caetra” (RIC I<sup>2</sup>, 543a)<sup>2</sup>. Besides, the hoard contains nine cakes of *argentum infectum* of Gallaecian metrology of 366 g, i.e. they are not Roman pounds. But exceptional and never commented in relationship to the supply of the army, is that two of these cakes are inscribed with the name CAESAR<sup>3</sup>. All this suggests that one of the duties of the local populations to the Roman army was to provide silver as raw material, which in many cases would be used as it was, in military payments or to buy agreements, mercenaries, vestimenta, etc. In other cases it would be struck in Roman coins. In this case probably denarii of “caetra” type (fig. 2 a).

But all this was a precarious, and not maintainable, way of getting silver and bronze for the whole Spanish army, and Augustus knew the danger of leaving to the generals the freedom of the military mintage in these circumstances, as this includes, sometimes, arbitrary taxes to the indigenous population and *praeda* obtained by no regular ways. The responsibility for coining was, therefore, soon taken away from the army and given to the *coloniae* and *municipia*, probably through the provincial governor.

In 25 BC *colonia Augusta Emerita* is founded and, possibly in 24, when August is still in Hispania, the coinage begins to be struck in this colony (RIC I<sup>2</sup>, 1-25). An important change takes now place in the imperial politics, in an attempt to centralize and organize the monetary system. From now the mints of silver will remain in the colonies and the payments of stipendia, as well as those of retirements, will be done, I believe, at the end of the campaigns. This is the reason why this silver does not surface in the warlike horizons as we are used to find in Republican war scenarios (Punic and Sertorian wars) and in the previous period. The Emerita denarii are found in NW, generally in later hoards, together with denarii of C.L. Caesars of the 4 AC (?) in mining zones where *emeriti* could have set their homes<sup>4</sup>.

But it is mostly in Germania superior and Raetia that Augusta Emerita coins finds are concentrated (fig. 3). One of these Emerita denarii closes the most ancient archaeological testimony of *Colonia Augusta Emerita Raurica*, in c. 15 BC<sup>5</sup>. In this case we do not doubt that this silver comes from Emerita because the name-place is clearly written on the coins<sup>6</sup>. The numerous finds of

Emerita silver in Raetia, much more abundant than in the proper Hispania, show that this military imperial silver was very often paid and used in the provinces to which the legions had moved<sup>7</sup>. It is possible that the explanation for the numerous Colonia Patricia(?) or Colonia Celsa(?) coin finds in Gallia and Germania lies on the same historical phenomenon as we shall see next<sup>8</sup>.

It is only in 19 BC that the Cantabrian wars finally conclude, thanks to Agrippa's presence in the place. It was, probably in this year, that Agrippa opened two imperial mints, striking now gold and silver.

*Colonia Patricia*, head of all the mining industry of gold, silver, cinnabar, zinc, etc. of western Sierra Morena, with imperial coinages since Pompeyo, is probably the mint that struck huge quantities of Roman silver and some gold in 19-16 BC (“uncertain mint 2”: RIC I<sup>2</sup>, 50-153). This massive coinage must be the reason of the birth in Corduba, unparalleled in the western empire, of the business of *argentarii*, (for a more through analysis see García-Bellido 2004). For the purpose of this article, suffice to say that particular and official inscriptions and other archaeological testimonies show, in this early Augustan times, the importance of its mining societates in Roman hands. These owned private routes that entered into Corduba city from the *Mons societatis Sisaponensis* and countermarked with their private names Augustan coins. Some of the more important families, such as the *Annaei*, (the family of Seneca), have their roots in these *argentarii* of Corduba/Colonia Patricia. This kind of business seems to be born in general under the special conditions of the cities as military knots, important mints or provincial capitals: Lyon, Narbona, Nîmes,

2. This hoard states that the adscription of the issue to Spain made by Mattingly and Giard was correct (RIC I<sup>2</sup>, p. 38).

3. In the same Alvarelhos scenery, rests of Roman military equipment have been found, indicating that the huge coin hoard could well be also military evidence (García-Bellido 2004, 75, fig. 18).

4. See similar circumstances in *Ampelum* (Dacia), Noeske 1977, 315.

5. I owe to the generosity of Dr. Makus Peter (Römermuseum Augst) the information about Spanish coins in Augst.

6. Contra Volk (1997, 69f) who believes that the coins with legend EMERITA were not struck in this city.

7. It is probable that the new colony, *Augusta Emerita Raurica* was named after the one founded in Lusitania, *Augusta Emerita*. In this case we should spect that the *emeriti* of the new one came from the same legions as the old one in Spain, *legio V alaudae* I suppose (García-Bellido 2004, 211).

8. I do not agree with Volk's arguments (1997) in assigning to Nemausus the imperial silver and gold of the 19-16 BC. (generally believed to have been struck in Colonia Patricia and Caesar Augusta). Volk's assignation is based on the many finds of these coins in Gallia and Germania.

Maguncia, Colonia, Carthagonova (Andreu 1987, 177-179), where could have happened that *stipendium militibus per omnis annos a civitatibus mensis palam propositis, esse numeratum* Cicerón (in Pis. 36,88). But in these cities the concentrations of argentarii do not reach the number of those of Corduba/colonia Patricia.

*Colonia Celsa*, not Caesaraugusta (“uncertain mint 1”: RIC I<sup>2</sup>, 26-49) because was not yet founded, seems to have been the other colonia that supplies silver and gold to the Empire. Celsa had an Iberian mint since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC, and it struck military coinage first with Pompeius and Lepidus, and then with Augustus since 26 BC, as he arrived in Hispania. It is probable that Celsa, as the only colony of the Ebro valley, was in charge of imperial coinage in the years 19-18 (García-Bellido 2003). Its coinage was not as abundant as that minted by Colonia Patricia, and, as a result, did not spread as much. It did, however, reach far away (fig. 4). It is interesting, for example, that Celsa’s, and not that of Emerita or Patricia, is the only silver found in Nijmegen suggesting that it came with the troops from Hispania citerior just after the 19-18 BC, in the military box loaded in Colonia Celsa. With the same troops arrived in Nijmegen the abundant and coetaneous Spanish bronze of Emporion, Lepida, Bilbilis... (García-Bellido 2004).

Because Hispania stays since Agrippa in a relative long peace period and no hoarding horizons existed, not many Colonia Patricia or Celsa silver come from Spanish hoards. Again, like those of Emerita, these coins are found mostly in Gallia and Germania in the same places where provincial Spanish bronze coins with the name of the Spanish cities are also found. This is well illustrated in, for example, the mapping of Celsa coins (fig. 4). The data seem to indicate that both arrived with the same troop. In a general scope we could suspect that the bronze entered in the soldier pockets and the silver in the military box<sup>9</sup>.

### *The supply*

We have seen how the payment politics changed during the course of the Cantabrian wars. First, the silver was coined in NW, following Republican habits and probably paid during the campaigns. Later, from 25-24 BC, these mints were centralized in colonies of the two provinces, probably by August himself who was in Hispania from 26 to 24 BC. The stipendia were paid after the campaigns, a measure that provoked an important shortage of

silver in the frontiers. This is, I believe, the reason of a major supply of bronze for which the municipia of the Ebro valley in Spain became now responsible.

These politics seem to have been applied to the colonies of Gallia later on as well, during the period when eight legions had to be supplied with coinage in the Rhin camps. In this case, Nemausus and Lugdunum were the mints involved. If Lyon is an imperial mint, why don’t we consider also imperial those which struck bronze for the army, such as Nemausus or, in our case, Calagurris or Turiaso...? or was Lugdunum an imperial mint for silver and gold but a provincial bronze atelier, in the same way as it has happened with Colonia Patricia and Colonia Celsa in Spain, sharing in both cases their imperial and provincial character?

The massive asses supply of these cities to the camps has led to the suggestion that the whole stipendium might have been paid in bronze (Wigg 1997) or only in silver and gold (Volters 2000-2001). I believe that only a small quantity of the money owed to the soldiers was delivered in asses for the daily expenses in the camps. The bronze was changed in the canabae and vici at 16 asses per denarius, an exchange rate that led to one of the complaints that the troops made in Germania in 14 AC (Tac. Ann. 1,17,4). The remaining silver and gold stayed *in deposito* in the aerarium for final stipendia and the retirements, both probably paid after the wars and as Plinius (n.h. 33,45) clearly attests without nuances, then at a ratio of 10 asses 1 denarius. With respect to the amount paid for retirements, we should remember that most of it in these dates was not delivered in cash but in lands. Emerita, Italica, Colonia Patricia, Acci... were military *deductiones*. So, no much silver remains in Spain to be paid in cash, and this is probably the reason why hoards of these silver coins are more frequent in Gallia-Germania than in the Peninsula.

9. Other group of this Spanish silver and bronze is concentrated in the knot of routes between Metz, Treveris, Tetelberg, Ricciacum. In this region no military camps seems to have existed, but there are sufficient traces of military equipment, found in *oppida* as Tetelberg, for example a Spanish military knife. At this knot of roads many Spanish coins –bronze and silver– have been found, probably indicating that Agrippa, who has just made the viaria net plans of Gallia (Str. 4,6,11), sent Hispanic troops in 19 BC to these engineering works just after the Cantabrian wars. Simultaneously he dispatches troops to Noviomagus (Nijmegen), the first Germania inferior camp where Hispanic soldiers arrived if we must judge for the archaism of the many Spanish coins found at the Kops Plateau (van der Vliet 2003; García-Bellido 2004, 123).

If the whole interpretation is correct, it seems that while silver and gold was struck for the whole occidental army initially in three colonies (*Emerita*, *Patricia* and *Celsa*), and later in only one (*Lugdunum*), bronze was conceived with a more provincial understanding. This is the reason why the silver and gold coins travel quick and far away from the mint, and bronze tends to remain in the same province where it was struck. We find great quantities of *Emerita*, *Colonia Patricia* o *Celsa* denarii in Gallia and Germania, but very few bronzes of *Nemausus* or *Lugdunum* in Spain. While this bronze was not minted to supply the Spanish army, the silver of *Colonia Patricia* was struck to pay the troops in Germania. Conversely, few Spanish bronzes are found in Germany because this coin fed only the Spanish army while in Spain. When we consider that at least four Spanish legions and several *auxilia* (a total of c. 30.000 soldiers) were moved to Germany in Augustan times, we realize that the Spanish coins found there are in too small a quantity to result of the spending-related traffic of these soldiers pay. These coins must have been brought by the soldiers in their pockets merely as souvenirs or as residual circulation.

A result of these Augustan change in strategy, the bronze coinage shall only be supplied by local *municipia* and *coloniae* placed, all of them, away from the military camps. Why did Augustus not make things easier by establishing mints in *Lucus Augusti*, *Bracara Augusta* or *Asturica Augusta*? These *civitates* had been founded by him, were situated at the border of the territory in war and could have been promoted to *municipia* by Rome. This is, for example, the strategy adopted by Tiberius some years later, when he opened the mint of *Clunia*. The only reasonable answer is that

Augustus knew the dangers of the imperial coinage and decided to mint the military coinage in civic knots far from the frontier. This decision implied two facts that will lead to considerable problems: First, probably to avoid the transport, the payment in silver of the *stipendium* was made, I believe, after the campaigns and always in much smaller quantities than what was owed to the soldier. The gross of the troops payments was kept *in deposito* as we know for the complaints in 14 AC in Germania (Tac. Ann. I, 17, 4). Second, the bronze supply to the camps was realized always in a scarce and slow manner. This generated a great lack of money in the camps and a scarcity of small values that resulted in the countermarking, *Halbierungen* and *Barbarisierungen*, habits that we have testified in Hispania very early, even in Preaugustan period: *Halbierungen* in 45 BC (Blázquez 1995; Ocharán 1998), countermarking in the same dates (García-Bellido 1999, 56) and *Barbarisierungen* since 20 BC probably (Pérez *et alii* 1995)<sup>10</sup>.

It seems then that each province was in charge of the bronze supply to the army in its territory and this implies that we should not accept the idea that *stipendia* were paid in provincial bronze, like the one of *Celsa*, *Calagurris* or *Nemausus* but in silver or gold, the real imperial values. The mints of the Ebro valley (*Celsa*, *Calagurris*...) supplied the small coinage at the Spanish frontier while *Nemausus* supplied small coinage at the Gallic frontier and this is the real pattern we find in the archaeological rests. The question now remains weather we should consider the bronze of *Lugdunum* as imperial or, like that of *Nemausus*, provincial; or weather we should consider imperial all mints that supply coinage to the army?

10. Copies of "caetra" coins appear in the IIII Macedonian legionary camp in Herrera de Pisuerga dated since c. 20 BC (Pérez *et alii* 1995; García-Bellido 1996, 107).

## Bibliography

- Andreau, J. (1987): *La vie financière dans le monde romain. Les métiers de manieurs d'argent*, Paris/Roma.
- Blázquez, C. (1992): *La dispersión de las monedas de Augusta Emerita*, Cuadernos emeritenses 5, Mérida.
- (1995): Consideraciones sobre los hallazgos de moneda partida en la península ibérica, en García-Bellido, M.P. y Centeno, R.M.S. (eds.): *La moneda hispánica: ciudad y territorio*, *Anejos de AEspA XIV*, 297-304.
- Centeno, R.M.S. (1987): *Circulação monetária no Noroeste de Hispânia até 192*. Anexos de *Nummus I*, Porto.
- Ferrer, S. (1996): El posible origen campamental de *Lucus Augusti* a la luz de las monedas de la caetra y su problemática, en Rodríguez Colmenero, A. (ed.), *Lucus Augusti I. El amanecer de una ciudad*, A Coruña, 425-446.
- García-Bellido, M.P. (1996): La moneda y los campamentos militares, en Fernández Ochoa, C. (ed.) *Los Finisterres atlánticos en la Antigüedad. Época prerromana y romana*, Gijón, 103-112.
- (1999): Los resellos militares en moneda como indicio de movimiento de tropas, en Centeno, R.M.S.; García-Bellido, M.P. y Mora, G. (coords.): *Rutas, ciudades y moneda en Hispania*, *Anejos de AEspA XX*, 55-71.
- (2003): La historia de la colonia Lepida/Celsa según sus documentos monetales: su ceca imperial, *AEspA* 76, 273-290.
- (2004): *Las legiones hispánicas en Germania. Moneda y ejército*, *Anejos de Gladius VI*, CSIC, Madrid.
- Noeske, H.Ch. (1977): Studien zur Verwaltung und Bevölkerung der dakischen Goldbergwerke in römischer Zeit. *BjB* 177, 271-416.
- Ocharan, J.A. (1998): Monedas perdidas en un combate inédito de las guerras cántabras en el valle de Cuartango (Alava), *X Congreso Nacional de Numismática*, 335-342.
- Pérez, C.; Illarregui E. y Morillo A. (1995): Reflexiones sobre las monedas de la caetra procedentes de Herrera de Pisuerga (Palencia), en García-Bellido, M.P. y Centeno, R.M.S. (eds.): *La Moneda hispánica: ciudad y territorio*, *Anejos de AEspA XIV*, 199-206.
- Volk, T. (1997): Hispania and the gold and silver coinage of Augustus, en *La moneda en temps d'Auguste*. *Curs d'Historia monetaria d'Hispania*. Barcelona, 59-90.
- Wigg, D.G. (1997): Coin supply and the Roman army, en W. Groenmann-van Waaterling et al. (eds.): *Roman Frontier Studies 1995. Proceedings of the XVI<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies*, Oxford, 281-288.
- Wolters, R. (2000-01): Bronze, silver or gold? Coin finds and the pay of the Roman Army, *Zephyrus* 53-54, 579-588.



Fig. 1.a  
As of "caetra" of Lucus Augusti (?)



Fig. 1.b  
Copies. IVDJ



Fig. 2.a



Fig. 2.b

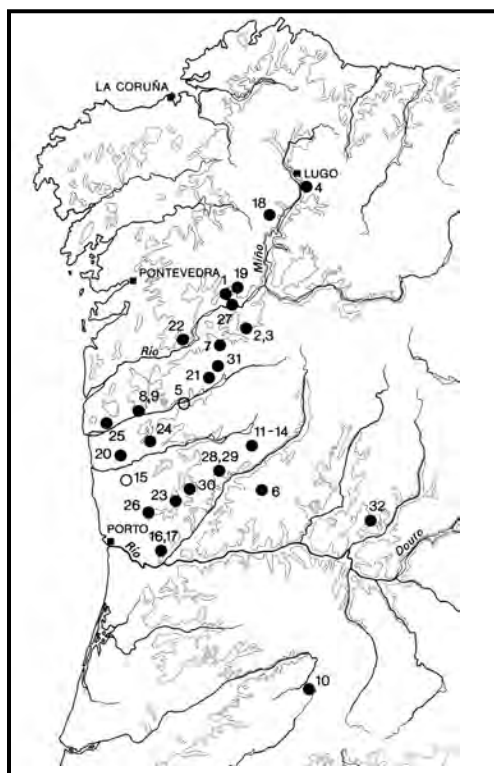


Fig. 2.c

Fig. 2.a Denarius of "caetra" of Lucus Augusti (?), MAN; b) sculpture of Gallaecian and Lusitanian warriors; c) mapping of the sculptures finds (b. and c. are courtesy of Drs. M. Blech and Th. Schattner, DAI Madrid)

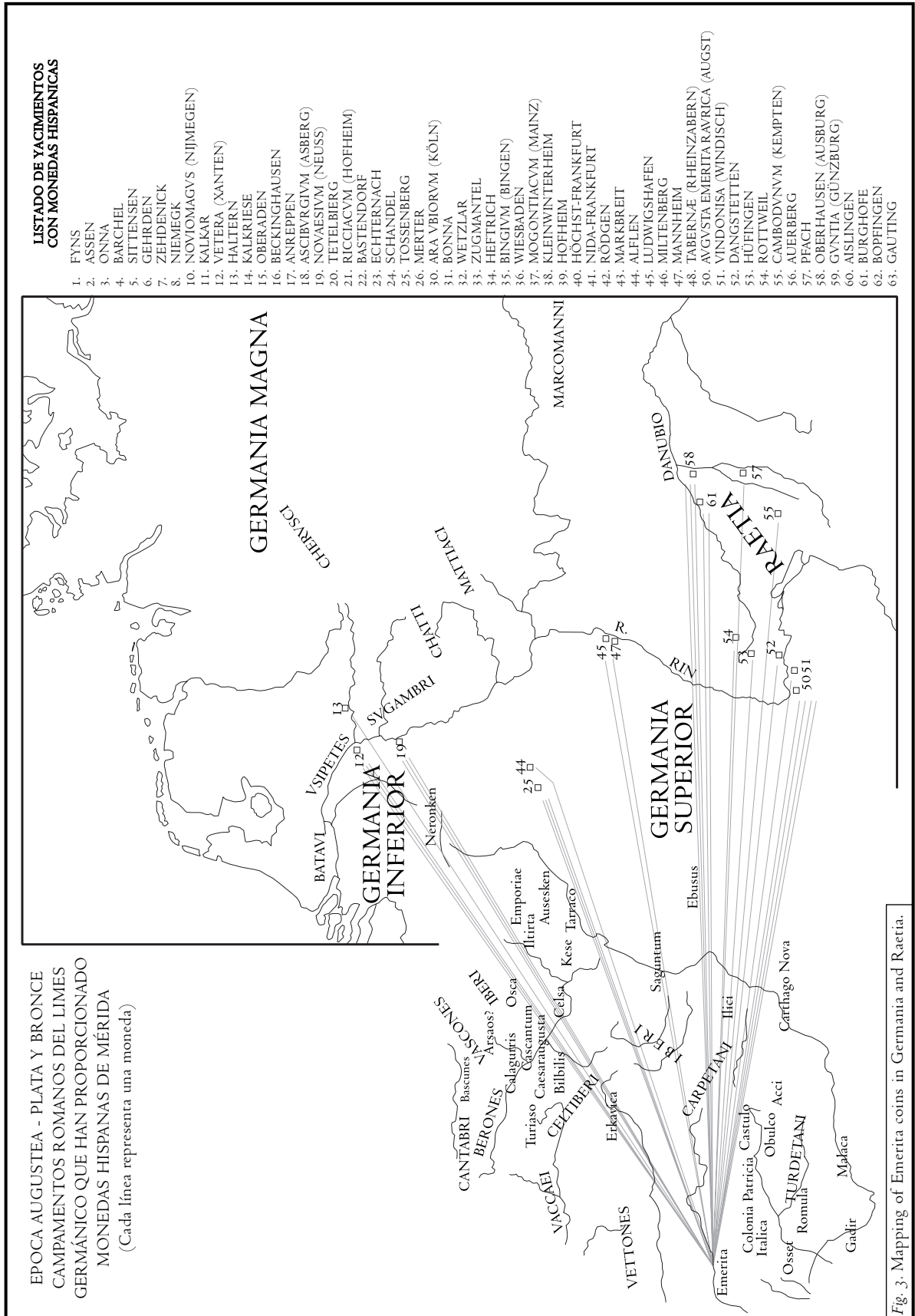


Fig. 3. Mapping of Emerita coins in Germania and Raetia.

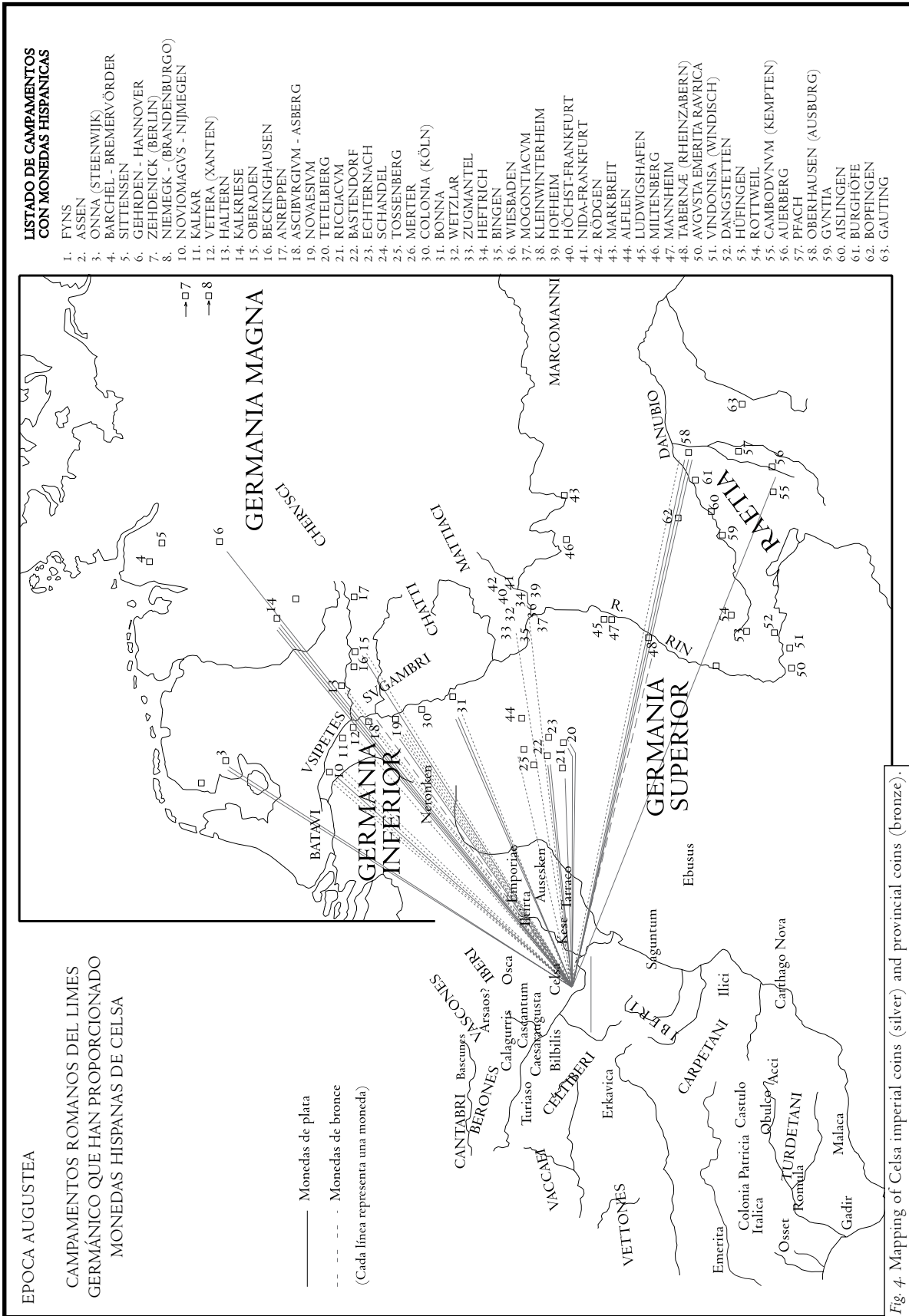


Fig. 4. Mapping of Celsa imperial coins (silver) and provincial coins (bronze).