

# NUMISMATIC EVIDENCE OF A POSSIBLE EARLY JEWISH SETTLEMENT IN NORTH-EASTERN SPAIN

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In 1978 and 1979 respectively the discovery of 21 Judaeen coins from the period of the early principate found during excavations conducted on three sites in North-Eastern Spain, namely in Emporiae, Iluro and Lerida (see map on Fig. 1) was reported by Eduardo Ripoll, José María Nuix and Leandro Villaronga<sup>1</sup> by Francisco Gusi Gener<sup>2</sup> and by Anna M. Balaguer.<sup>3</sup>

We are lucky that all these coins, (except one of type 6 below) originate from properly conducted excavations and not from clandestine amateur finds, thus verifying their provenance. We are able to name three sites where the coins were discovered. These are namely Emporiae, the most important city in the region under discussion, present-day Ampurias some 120 km north of Barcino, present-day Barcelona and Iluro, present-day Mataro some 30 km north of Barcino and Ilerda (Lerida) 180 km north-west of Barcino.

1. Eduardo Ripoll, José María Nuix and Leandro Villaronga, Monedas de los judios halladas en las excavaciones de Emporiae, Numisma, Año XXVI (nos. 138 - 143 (1976) pp. 3 - 10.
2. Francisco Gusi Gener, Hallazgo de dos monedas de los Procuradores de Judea en Iluro (Mataró, Barcelona), Numisma, Año XXVI, nos. 138 - 143 (1976) pp. 67 - 69.
3. Anna B. Balaguer, Hallazgo de seis cobres judios y de tres fulus orientales en el Castillo de Balaguer (Lerida), Symposium Numismatic de Barcelona, 1979, vol. II

### List of coin-types found.

(all coins are of bronze)

#### **Alexander Jannaeus** (103–76 BCE) (Plate, no. 1)

1. Obverse: Star surrounded by dotted border. Legend around (in Aramaic and Square-Hebrew letters): אלכסנדרוס מלכא שנת כה (= king Alexander year 25 ) (= 78 BCE).

Reverse: Anchor surrounded by circle. Legend around from right above: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ (= from the king Alexander)

Provenance: 5 specimens from Ilerda: 1.92 grs., 1.72 grs., 1.35 grs., 1.32 grs., 1.29 grs., (ref. Balaguer [3])

#### **Herod I** (37 - 4 BCE) (Plate, no. 2)

2. Obverse: Anchor; border of dots. Legend around from left below: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΗΡΩΔΟΥ (=king Herod).

Reverse: Double cornucopiae, between the horns caduceus; border of dots. No legend.

Provenance: a. 1 specimen from Emporiae 2.05 grs ., 15 mm. (ref. Villaronga [1]) p. 3, no. 2).

b. 1 specimen from Ilerda 1.23 grs.(ref. Balaguer [3])

#### **Herod Archelaus** (4 BCE - 6 CE) (Plate, no. 3)

3. Obverse: Bunch of grapes. border of dots. Legend in semicircle from above to right: ΗΡΩΔΟΥ (= from Herod).

Reverse: Helmet en face decorated with horse-tail hairs and two cheek pieces; on left below small caduceus; border of dots. Legend below, reading inwards: ΕΘΝΑΡΧΟΥ (= the ethnarch).

Provenance: 1 specimen from Emporiae 1.86 grs., 15 mm. (ref. Villaronga [1]) p. 3 no. 2).

#### **Annius Rufus**, Roman procurator of Judaea under Augustus (12 - 15 CE) (Plate., no. 4)

4. Obverse: Ear of barley; border of dots. Legend around from left below: ΚΑΙΣΑΡΟΣ (=Caesar, referring to Augustus).

Reverse: Palm-tree; with two bunches of dates, border of dots.

Legend in field left and right of palm-tree: Date of issue:  
L MA = year 41 of Augustus (= 13/14 CE).

Provenance:

a. 1

specimen from Iluro 1.77 grs., 11 mm. (ref. Gener [2] p. 68, no. 1).

b. 1 specimen from Iluro 1.96 grs., 15 mm. with unclear date (ref. Gener [2] p. 68. no. 2)

c. 1 specimen from Emporiae 1.39 grs., 17 mm. with wrong description of date: L( $\lambda$ )B should be: L $\Lambda$  $\Theta$  = year 39 of Augustus (=11/12 CE). (ref. Villaronga [1] p. 4, no 3).

b. could therefore have been issued by one of the Roman procurators of Judaea serving under Augustus, namely either Coponius (6-9 CE), or Marcus Ambibulus (9-12 CE) or Annius Rufus (12-15 CE) as all three issued the same coin-type with just the relevant dates of issue referring to their years of office.

a. and b. were discovered in the II<sup>nd</sup> stratum at Iluro referring to the end of the 1st cent. CE (ref. Gener, [2] p. 67). They might well have been handed over from grandfather to grandson and kept in the family as tokens of the traditional connections with the Judaeian homeland.

**Valerius Gratus** Roman procurator of Judaea under Tiberius (15 - 26 CE) (Plate, no. 5)

5. Obverse: Wreath surrounding a legend of two lines: IOY/ IA (= Julia Livia) the mother of Tiberius.

Reverse: Olive branch upright; border of dots. Legend on both sides of the olive branch, date of issue: L B = year 2 of the reign of Tiberius (15/16 CE).

Provenance: 2 specimens from Emporiae 1.59 grs., 1.29 grs., 16 mm. (ref. Villaronga [1] p. 4, nos 4-5).

6. Obverse: Double cornuacopiae, caduceus between the horns;

border of dots. (Plate no. 6) Legend above: TIBEPIOY (= from Tiberius); below, flanking the double cornuacopiae, date of issue:

L = year 3 of the reign of Tiberius (=16/17 CE).

Reverse: Wreath surrounding a legend in two lines: KAI/CAP (= Caesar, referring to Tiberius).

Provenance: a. 1 specimen from Emporiae 1.16 grs., 15 mm. (ref. Villaronga [1] p. 4, no. 6).

b. 1 specimen from Emporiae, probably surface find. (ref. Villaronga [1] p. 3 note 1).

7. Obverse: Wreath surrounding a legend in two lines: IOY/ IA (- Julia (Livia) the mother of Tiberius).

Reverse: Three lilies upright; border of dots. Legend below in field flanking the lilies, date of issue: L = year 3 of the reign of Tiberius (16/17 CE). (Plate, no. 7)

Provenance: a. 4 specimens from Emporiae 2.72 grs.; 2.22 grs., ; 1.69 grs.,; 1.66 grs.; 15-16 mm. (ref. Villaronga [1]) p. 4, no. 7-10.

b. 2 further specimens from Emporiae 1.62 grs., 1.14 grs., (ref. Villaronga [1] p. 10).

### Summary table

Excavation site	Alexander Jannaeus 103-76 BCE	Herod I 37-4 BCE	Herod Archelaus 4 BCE - 6CE	Annius Rufus 12-15 CE procurator under Augustus; dates of issue: 11/12 and 13/14 CE	Valerius Gratus 15-26 CE procurator under Tiberius; dates of issue: 15/16 and 16/17 CE
Emporiae		1	1	1	10
Ilerda	5	1			
Iluro				2	
	5	2	1	3	10 = 21

The summary table gives a clear picture of the material found. The maximum range of the coinage according to its dates of issue is from 78 BCE to 16/17 CE, i.e. about 95 years. However, 3/4 of the coins belong to a short period of 4 years, namely 13/14 - 16/17 CE. The five coins of Alexander Jannaeus are of a type widely spread in ancient Palestine and remained in circulation up the time of the Jewish War (66-70 CE).

Taking into consideration the terminus post quem of 16/17 CE which is given on 8 specimens out of a total of 21 coins, it is likely that all the coins registered above reached Spain in about 17/18 CE.

In order to emphasize the importance of the finds of Judaeen coins during the excavations at Emporiae, Villaronga [1] offers on p. 5 the following table of coin-finds from the period of the emperors Augustus and Tiberius:

Roma	Gallia	Hispania not Emporian issues	Emporiae	Judaea
Augustus and Tiberius	Nîmes 20-10 BCE	Augustus and Tiberius	from the be- ginning of e- mission 10 and restriking	Augustus and Tiberius
21	18	15	142	10
10%	8.8%	7.3%	69%	4.9%

The question arises, as to who brought these tiny coins of minimal purchasing power from as far away as Judaea to Spain under the emperor Tiberius. The scholars who reported these finds faced the same problem. Three possibilities were mentioned by them:

- a. Do these coins give evidence of commercial connections between

## Judaea and Hispania during the early principate ?

b. Were these coins carried by members of military units stationed in Judaea and thereafter transferred to Hispania ?

c. Do these coins give evidence that early settlements of Jews, probably of freed slaves, were established in North-Eastern Spain with its centre in Emporiae ?

a. Because of their small purchasing power, I do not believe that these coins can serve as evidence for commercial connections between Judaea and Hispania. They were on the other hand only the local currency of Judaea. What goods could these coins buy in Hispania to be exported to Judaea ? The chances that these coins reached Hispania by way of commercial interaction are therefore very small indeed especially as these coins were not only found in the important sea port Emporiae where Judaeans might by chance have been accepted by local money changers as means of payment for certain goods, but also in a city such as Ilerda situated some 180 km inland from the coast.

b. Unfortunately we know very little about military movements in and around Judaea in the first quarter of the first century CE, a fact which does not enable us to state that certain military detachments of legions, such as cohorts or centuries of legions or even auxiliary forces were transferred during those years from Judaea to Hispania. We are therefore unable to point at any military factor which might possibly have brought these coins from Judaea to Hispania in or around 17/18 CE.

c. The final possibility would thus be that Jews coming from Judaea settled in Hispania around 17/18 CE. One reason for their emigration from Judaea might have been the oppressive taxation imposed on the province Syria and its sub-province Judaea in 17 CE and the complaints thereof by the inhabitants.<sup>4</sup>

The listed Judaeans coins come from sites such as Emporiae, which

4. Tacitus, *Annales* ii 42: *provinciae Syriae atque Iudaea, fessae oneribus, deminutionem tributi orabant.*

may be considered as the main city of the region and from two other towns about 100 km from Emporiae. This would seem to suggest that people from Judaea may have settled spread over this region. It must also be taken into consideration that these sites have not been completely excavated so far and further Judaeian coins might still come to light in the area. There are indeed other historical sites in the region which have not yet been touched by the archaeological spade. We may therefore consider the quantity of coins discovered may be only the beginning of evidence of the possible presence of people from Judaea in North-Eastern Spain during the early principate. Paul's intention to visit Spain<sup>5</sup> may also point to the existence of at least one Jewish community there, but again there is no proof that he realized his intention.<sup>6</sup>

Based on the probability, which is rendered by the evidence of the above mentioned Judaeian coins, (which fortunately bear dates of issue and give us the terminus post quem of 16/17 CE), that people from Judaea, most probably Jews, settled in North-Eastern Spain, these coins could well serve as a terminus ante quem for the dating of the earliest establishment of Jewish communities on Hispanian territories. There is so far no other conclusive evidence but the coins on which we can rely in our attempt to show a possible Jewish presence in Spain as early as the first quarter of the first century CE.

5. Paul's letters to the Romans XV, 24 and 28, which most probably were not written by him at all.
6. Joseph Klausner, *Von Jesus zu Paulus*, Jerusalem 1950, p. 389.

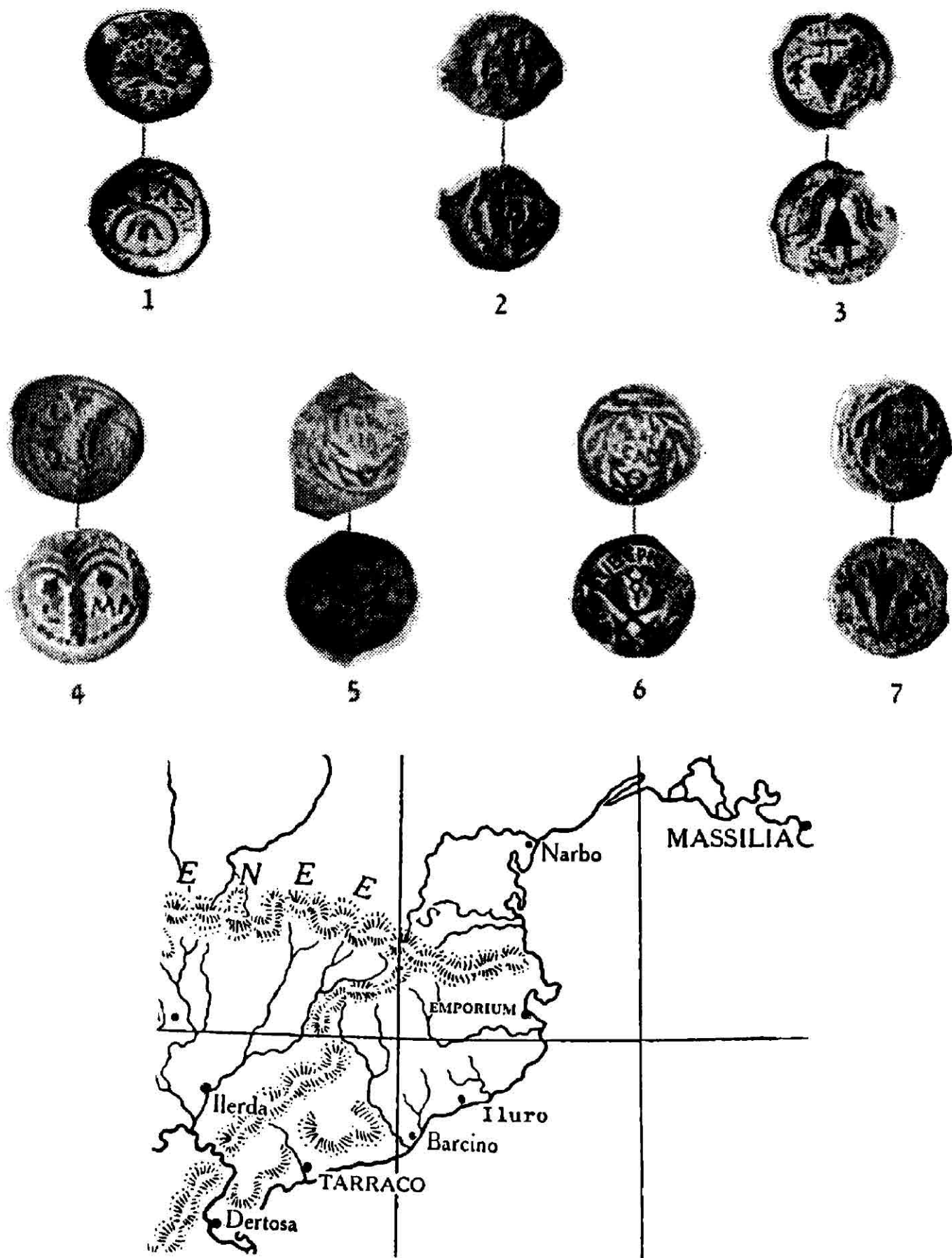


Fig. 1: Judaean coin-types, such as found in Emporiae, Ilerda and Iluro