

The Role and Function of Celtic Coinage in Pre-Roman Iron Age Britain

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For Mrs J. Duffy and Mr I. Watson

“Veni, vidi, vici”

Appian, *The Civil Wars*. 2.13.91

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people who made this dissertation possible.

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1 Introduction

The way that we understand coinage these days is as one form of money, of relatively low value and not much use other than taking up space in our pockets. This idea of coinage is so ingrained into our culture that for most people it is difficult to perceive it in any other way. However, in archaeological contexts, coinage plays an integral role in the reconstruction of cultures, peoples and places.¹ For instance, the metal content of coinage can tell us about the economy of a place, whereas the images can give us an indication of significant images in that culture.

This idea is no different in Late Iron Age British coinage. Using coinage, we can identify practical aspects of a period such as areas of control and dynasties through inscriptions, but it gives us an invaluable insight into the peoples and culture of the peoples of the period.² The main aim for this dissertation is to bring together a variety of research in order to present a fresh perspective on the political and religious significance of high value coinage in Late Iron Age Britain (which will be referred to henceforth as LIA Britain), by analysing the evolution of the imagery and inscriptions present on the coins and the contexts in which we find them.

The primary argument of this dissertation will be that although high value coinage may have been a convenient way of transferring wealth, it was so readily adopted and minted by the elite in Britain as had cultural links with themes such as status, authority and militaristic connotations. As such, coinage in Britain can not only be seen as an early form of money, but also as a status object and was used as such in political and religious environments in LIA Britain.

¹ Haselgrove 2012: 236

This dissertation will be split into three sections, each discussing a different theme surrounding coinage. The first chapter will be a discussion of the origins of coinage in Britain. It will discuss the spread of early coinage into Britain from Gaul, analysing the context in which it was possible, the relationships that existed between Britain and Gaul and the systems in which it would spread, specifically referring to Collis' 'Overlapping Systems' model.

My second section will be a discussion of the political significance of coinage, discussing how coinage was utilised as a representation of status and authority in LIA Britain. I will analyse the inscriptions present on coinage, discussing the connotations of this, and why we see a change in the designs on the obverse of coinage.

My final section will be regarding the religious significance of coinage. I will be discussing the potential religious significance of horse imagery on the reverse of the coins and how horses connect with Celtic ritualistic traditions. The second section of this chapter will be analysing the contexts in which we find significant amounts of coinage, such as hoards at religious sites, and how this may link with the ideas of status.

2 Origins of Celtic Coinage in Britain

2.1 Introduction

One of the issues facing scholars who study the ‘Celtic’ world today is the origins of the coinage that circulated around Gaul and Germania, eventually spreading into Britain.

Many scholars believe that coinage was introduced to the Celts after mercenaries were hired by Philip II and Alexander the Great to bolster their armies.³ However, there is no evidence to suggest that any mercenaries from further west than the Balkans and Illyria served under either king.⁴ So we must ask the question, how did coinage that was introduced to the Celts situated in the east of the ‘Celtic world’ in the third century BC evolve into the coinage imported into Britain in the second century BC?

2.2 One Coin’s Journey: The Philip II Stater in Gaul

Archaeological excavation of find-spots throughout Gaul suggests that only a handful of the Philip II staters, seen in Figure 2.1, found their way to the area, and so the designs that we find on later coinage in the west, such as Gallo-Belgic A and B, are the product of imitations produced by various factions, that have been transferred across Europe within the Celtic systems.⁵ Counter to this idea, Sills suggests that it is not evidence of absence that we do not have many examples of Philip II’s coinage in Gaul, but rather the absence of evidence. He argues that in order for 40 examples to survive and be discovered today, there would have to be 80,000 staters



Figure 2.1 Philip II of Macedon Gold Stater
(Source: Numisbids.com)

³ Creighton 2000: 26; De Jersey 2001: 6; Sills 2003: 87; Van Arsdell 1989: 4

⁴ Sills 2003: 87

⁵ Sills 2003: 5

minted and in circulation at the time.⁶ Whilst his calculations can be debated and criticised for their accuracy, he does present a valid point, that lack of evidence does not equate to absence. There are many potential reasons why the archaeological record does not show the significant presence of the Philip II stater in Gaul. For example, the coins could have potentially been re-purposed into jewellery or bullion, melted down and reminted into new coins, or maybe they did not just spread far enough west in their original forms. Whilst we do not fully understand the reasons behind this, it is clear that if we compare the iconography from Gallo-Belgic A to the Philip II stater, it shows that it is one of the main influences on Celtic coinage in Europe due to the similarities.⁷

2.3 Good as Gold: Introduction of Coinage to Britain

Gallo-Belgic A, Figure 2.3, is the earliest type of gold coinage to be found in Britain, with finds predominantly located in the Thames estuary, Essex, and Kent.⁸ Struck in the first century BC by the Ambiani and the Ballovaci in central and western Gaul, the import of Gallo-Belgic A into Britain signalled the introduction of high value coinage to the socio-political factions based in the south east of Britain, and eventually leading to the of minting of coins by individual factions.⁹ As can be seen in Figure 2.2, the distribution of Gallo-Belgic A coinage in Britain is primarily in the territory of the Trinovantes, which suggests some form of relationship between the Trinovantes and the Ambiani or the Ballovaci.

The second earliest coin type to be found in Britain is Gallo-Belgic B, which was minted in the same period as Gallo-Belgic A.¹⁰ The design of this coin is

⁶ Sills 2003: 6

⁷ Compare: Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.3

⁸ De Jersey 2007: 367

⁹ Van Arsdell 1989: 64; Briggs 1995: 244; For dating concerns: See Haselgrove 1993: 32

¹⁰ De Jersey 2007: 368

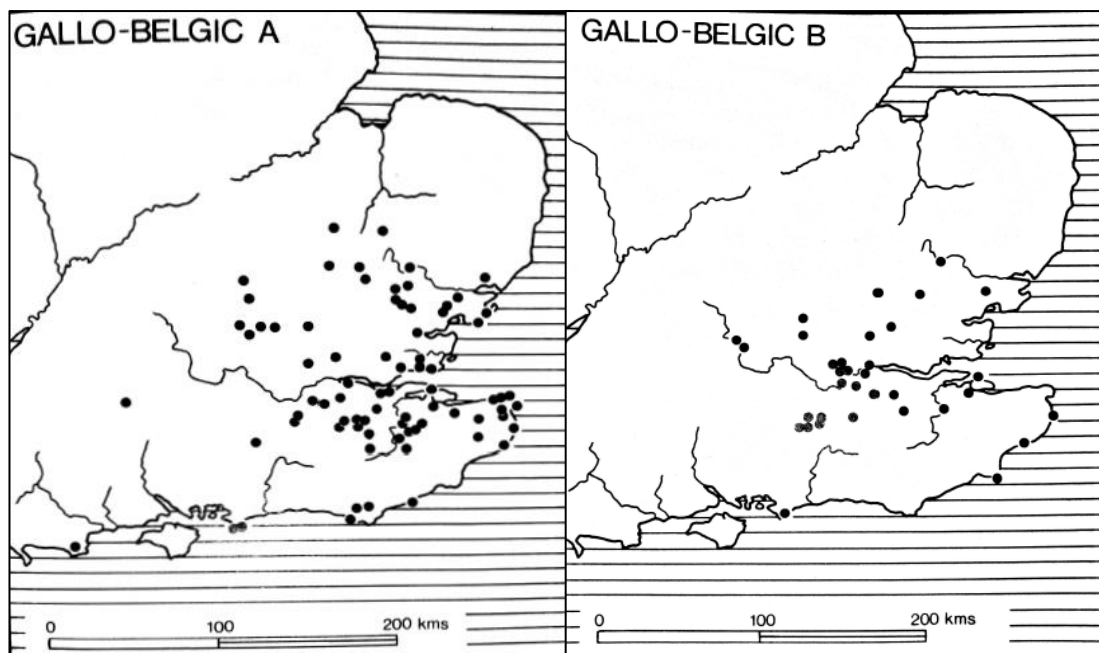


Figure 2.2 Left: Distribution map of Gallo-Belgic A find spots Right: Distribution map of Gallo-Belgic B find spots (Source: Cunliffe 2005: 111)



Figure 2.3 Left: Gallo-Belgic AA1 (VA10-01) Middle: Gallo-Belgic BB1 (VA33-01) Right: Gallo-Belgic C (VA42-01) (Source: Van Arsdell 1989: 'Plate 1'; 'Plate 2')

accepted in scholarship to be a defaced version of the die used by the Ambiani tribe to mint Gallo-Belgic A, with chisel marks obscuring any imagery present on the obverse of the coin, which can be seen in Figure 2.3.¹¹ However, there is some disagreement between scholars around which faction originally minted the coins, Van Arsdell attributes it to the Caletes, whilst Sills attributes it to the Nervii.¹² Whilst we may not know for certain who minted the coinage, we have an idea of who imported it into Britain. As can be seen in Figure 2.2, the distribution of the finds of Gallo-Belgic B are predominantly within the Thames Valley, further inland than its sister coin, and within the territory of the Catuvellauni. Much like with Gallo-Belgic A, the presence of this coinage within the Catuvellauni territory suggests a relationship between that faction and whichever faction minted the coin on the continent.

2.4 Of Trade and War: Relationships between Britain and Gaul

The evidence suggests that the relationships between the factions were built on trade agreements that link Brittany, Britain and Atlantic France.¹³ It is thought the development of major powers in the Mediterranean, such as Rome, played a significant role in the encouragement of the trade alliances between Britain and the continent, as there was a significant demand for various resources such as tin.¹⁴ Writing in the first century BC, Strabo lists the exports of Britain in Book 4 of *Geography* as “grain, cattle, gold, silver, and iron... also hides, and slaves, and dogs”.¹⁵ Interestingly, tin is not included in the list provided by Strabo. However, from Strabo’s account, we can see that Britain has multiple exports during the first century BC at the latest, and whilst the list may not be exhaustive of all the exports of Britain it certainly contains what can be

¹¹ De Jersey 2007: 368; Cottam 2010: 28; Van Arsdell 1989: 5

¹² Sills 2003: 162, 182; Van Arsdell 1989: 66

¹³ Cunliffe 1984: 3-5

¹⁴ Cunliffe 1984: 3

¹⁵ Strab.5.4.2

thought of as the most well-known. Finds of Potin, a type of bronze coinage found in Britain dating to the first century BC, suggests that trade between the continent and Britain occurred before 60 BC, as such, it is possible to presume that Gallo-Belgic A and B were introduced into Britain through these already existing trade routes.¹⁶

However, it is not just trade relationships that connect the factions on the continent and the factions in Britain but also political ties. By using the coinage of the Ambiani tribe, we can begin to reconstruct the political climate of the continent during the late second and early first century BC. Topographical links connect Gallo-Belgic A, C and E, all minted between 125BC and 65 BC, suggesting almost 60 years of continuous minting of high value coinage.¹⁷ Due to their high value, some scholars suggest that these coins were not used for commercial purposes but rather were minted to finance various military exploits of the faction.¹⁸ For example, De Jersey suggests that the production of Gallo-Belgic E was due to the increased need of financing warriors in an effort to combat military incursion by Caesar during his Gallic Wars.¹⁹ However, it is not only full-scale warfare that the Ambiani were minting coins to finance, but also inter-faction conflict before Caesar's invasion. Sills suggests that the production of Gallo-Belgic C was to finance resistance against incursions from the Limbri and the Teutons between 90 and 80 BC.²⁰

The importance of these examples is that they demonstrate that the Ambiani and the Ballovaci factions were minting high-value coinage during times of conflict from c.90 BC until c.65 BC. This would then imply that the earliest coin, Gallo-Belgic A, was also produced in order to finance a time of conflict in c.125 BC. If this

¹⁶ Holman 2005: 1

¹⁷ De Jersey 2007: 336-37

¹⁸ Sills 2003: 244; De Jersey 2007: 396-37;

¹⁹ De Jersey 2007: 370; For an alternative approach on the chronology of Gaulish coinage: See Haselgrove 1999: 111-168

²⁰ For Gallo-Belgic C: See Figure 2.3; Sills 2003: 244; Van Arsdell 1989: 68

theory is true, then the numismatic evidence shows a conflict between the Ambiani and the Ballovaci, with the aid of Trinovantes in Britain, and the Gallo-Belgic B minting faction, whether it be the Nervii or the Caletes, with the aid of the Catuvellauni. If we take into account both forms of relationships, it shows that the Celtic factions on the continent and the factions in Britain were not as separate as some scholars may think, but were joined in a series of economic and political relationships.²¹ It was through these relationships that the Gaulish types of Gallo-Belgic A and B were imported into Britain.

2.5 Connecting Coinage: The Spread of Coinage through Iron Age Systems

In his paper ‘Functional and Theoretical Interpretations of British Coinage’, Collis puts forth a model to suggest how coinage spreads through different societies and is adapted over time.²² This model can be applied to the Celtic world to describe how the Philippi spread from Macedonia to Gaul, eventually becoming Gallo-Belgic A and being imported into Britain. Each ‘system’ within Collis’ model represents a different group of people, and the overlap between each is the interactions that those groups would have with each other, such as migration, commerce, or conflict.²³

In Figure 2.4, System 1 would represent the introduction of a new type of coinage. With each new system, it utilises selected features from the previous systems coinage, whilst introducing new and individual aspects.²⁴ Examples of these aspects could include imagery that is directly culturally relevant to that system or changing the precious metal content or changing the metal of the coin entirely, such as from gold to

²¹ Nash 1984: 92

²² Collis 1971: 71-84

²³ Collis 1971: 71

²⁴ Collis 1971: 71

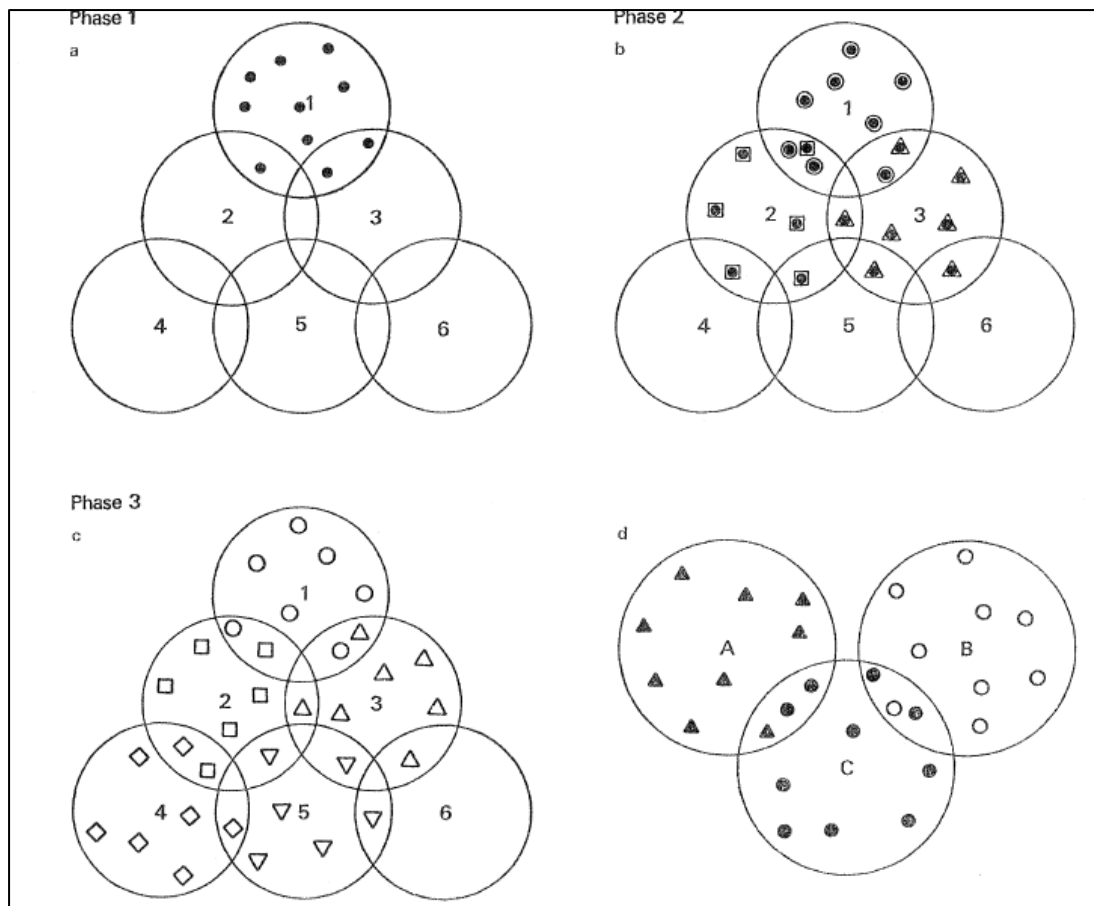


Figure 2.4 J.R. Collis' 'Overlapping systems' model for explaining the introduction of coinage (Source: Collis 1971: 72)

silver. However, due to this “chopping and changing” method, the coinage of the later systems, such as System 4 and 5 may not resemble the coinage in any way, due to the influences of previous systems.

If we apply Collis' model to pre-Roman Iron Age Britain, System 1 would be the Celtic people employed as mercenaries by Phillip II, and so would introduce coinage to the rest of the 'systems' or other factions on the continent. The coinage would then filter through the different factions, who paid for soldiers or mercenaries at times of conflict, to be adopted and changed, with one outcome eventually becoming Gallo-Belgic A and B. Britain would be represented by a system at the edge of the model, when Gallo-Belgic A and B are imported, however, as later chapters will show, Britain eventually becomes the central system to a new wave of coinage.

Collis' system model is important to consider as it is a valuable contribution in considering the way that coinage is developed and the various effects and influences that may change the design of the coin. The importance of the imagery and symbolism present on the coins minted in Britain will be discussed in later chapters. However, if we consider the militaristic connotations of the early importations of coinage into Britain, such as funding inter-faction conflicts in Gaul, it would not be unreasonable to assume that it was seen as an object of prestige. According to Caesar, it was the elite class, the equivalent of the *equites*, that engaged in matters of warfare and as such would be the ones receiving this coinage as a reward for engagement.²⁵ As such, when coinage was introduced to Britain it may have had militaristic connotations, as a display of engaging in conflict, but with the emergence of the 'luxury goods' economy, it would not be unreasonable to assume that coinage also became a symbol of wealth and status.

2.6 The Introduction of Materialism: Coinage as a Status Object

Collis' model presents an idea of how coinage could be introduced into a society; however, it does not necessarily explain why the people within those communities would adopt the newly introduced coinage into their culture, and eventually into their daily lives. First, we must consider the types of people that would be utilising early coinage in Britain. As explained earlier, due to the high precious metal content of Gallo-Belgic A and B, it would not have been practical to use in an every-day scenario and so would not have been introduced to the majority of the population of Britain, as such the coinage would have been reserved for the wealthy elite, or soldiers and mercenaries who engaged in conflicts.

If we were to use this combined with Collis as a model for transmission of coinage, then we need to examine Britain in this period. During the late 2nd and early 1st centuries, the

²⁵ Caes. *Gal.* 6.13-15

landscape of Britain began to change. Hillforts that were previously occupied in the Middle Iron Age were abandoned, in favour of well defended ‘farmsteads’, in which, the landowners could produce goods and expand into arable farmland, similar to the Roman villas that appeared post-conquest.²⁶ Interestingly, settlements that existed apart from the hillforts remained in occupation, with some even flourishing.²⁷ Cunliffe suggests that this change in the way people lived occurred due to the increased imports of prestige goods from the continent during that period, including the import of foreign coinage.²⁸

As there is little evidence regarding power structures in Britain, it is possible to take those of factions in Gaul and apply them to Britain. The gaining of wealth, honour and status through to warfare is a prevalent theme throughout the perception of ‘Celtic’ people in ancient sources.²⁹ However, this theme could be construed as the ancient authors perceiving the ‘Celtic’ people as having barbaric customs, which lack the refinement of say Roman social practices, which is not to say that the Romans weren’t militaristic. On the other hand, as shown previously, we have the potential evidence to suggest that these inter-faction conflicts did occur, and so it could be that these occurred as a way of displaying power.

The introduction of prestige goods into Britain would have had a resounding effect on the established way of the displaying of wealth and power, as it allowed the display to occur without the bloodshed.³⁰ The abandonment of hillforts and the increased import of these goods during the early 1st and later 2nd centuries suggests this did occur. Due to Gallo-Belgic A and B containing large percentages of precious

²⁶ Creighton 2000: 4

²⁷ Creighton 2000: 4

²⁸ Cunliffe 1991: 544

²⁹ Poly.2.17; Dio Sic.5.27; Caes. *Gal.* 4.15

³⁰ Cunliffe 1981: 544

metals, it allowed for leaders and wealthy elite to transfer wealth with ease and so is the perfect item through which these elite could display their wealth and status.

One must also consider the effect of this coinage on the rest of the population of Britain. As these coins were such high-value, the majority of the population would probably not have had access to them. However, due to the increased demand for prestige goods from the elite, a material culture began to occur and so merchants and traders would have begun to trade in these goods more.³¹ As such, it would not be wrong to presume that these high-value coins might have been traded for these goods and so introduced into general use in the form of an early money market.

The introduction of these coins into the general population may have also had an effect on their social relevance. Goods were traditionally traded in kind, as such a high-value coin would have no place in the day-to-day trading, such as in a marketplace. However, some household goods were exchanged as a means of displaying social prestige, through rituals such as dowries or gift exchanges.³² High-value coinage may have served a need within the general population as an alternative to giving prestige goods in these social practices and may have also made the transfer of wealth more balanced.

2.7 Conclusion

In answer to the question proposed at the start of the chapter, “how did coinage that was introduced to the Celts situated in the east of the ‘Celtic world’, end up being imported into Britain in the second century BC?”, I would argue that Collis’ model of the transfer of coinage through independent systems is the most logical for the evidence we have. Whilst not necessarily being the only form of coinage present in ‘Celtic’ Gaul, the

³¹ Creighton 2000: 10

³² Collis 1971: 76

coinage of Philip II of Macedon had a resounding influence on the imagery present on coins minted by Gaulish factions, acting as the first system in Collis' model. Each of these different factions in Europe would have acted as the separate systems, applying their own cultural influences on the coinage, eventually accumulating in the designs present on Gallo-Belgic A and B.

The transfer of such coinage would have been facilitated by the relationships between the factions in Britain and those on the continent. As described in this chapter, these relationships seem to be both for economic value and political, with the import of early Gaulish types into Britain potentially showing a conflict that included the Trinovantes and the Catuvellauni. Whilst we may never know the extent of these economic and political relationships, we can see that the coinage that was imported into Britain had a resounding effect on the society there. With the import of Gallo-Belgic A and B we begin to see a shift in the way that status was perceived in Britain, from the previous displays of military strength to displays of material wealth and the connections that can be made to status.

3 Status and Politics

3.1 Introduction

The political and social structures of pre-Roman Iron Age Britain are difficult to reconstruct prior to Caesar's invasion of Britain, as we are heavily reliant on incomplete information from anecdotal or later sources, such as Caesar's *Gallic Wars*. However, using numismatic evidence we can begin to see distinct kingdoms and dynasties develop, allowing us to gain a deeper understanding of the political climate of the time. As argued in previous chapters, gold that was increasingly imported into Britain as Gallo-Belgic A and B coinage which paralleled the increased influence of a prestige goods in the economy. In the decades after the Roman-Gallic Wars we see a shift in the political and social structures. This chapter will discuss the potential uses of specific imagery on the coins minted post-invasion and will argue that it was used as a form of propaganda in conjunction with the prestige goods economy, to enhance the status and political standing of the emerging rulers and their kingdoms in Britain.

3.2 Brilliant Bronzes: Kentish Cast Bronzes, 'potins'

Whilst this chapter will focus primarily on the gold and silver coinage minted in various factions post-Caesar's invasion, they were by far not the first coins to be minted in Britain. The earliest coinage to be minted in Britain were the 'potins', also known as the *Kentish Cast Bronzes*, as seen in Figure 3.1.³³

Whilst the dating of these coins is not exact, they are presumed to be minted around 100 BC and continually developed until after Caesar's invasion.³⁴ Cunliffe argues that these coins



Figure 3.1 Cantian A, 'Kentish Cast Bronze' (VA102-01) (Source: Van Arsdell 1989: 'Plate 4')

³³ Van Arsdell 1989: 7; Creighton 2000: 28

³⁴ Van Arsdell 1989: 8; Cunliffe 2005: 113

document a need for smaller denominations of coinage within an early money exchange system.³⁵ Furthermore, De Jersey notes that these coins ceased being minted in the mid-first century BC and are not commonly found with the British gold coins, suggesting that they played a different role in Celtic society than the gold coinage, possibly due to the incremental value of the coins themselves.³⁶ These coins are significant in their own right in the reconstruction of the economy of pre-Roman Iron Age Britain, but they are worthy of discussion elsewhere as this chapter will focus primarily on the social and political implications of gold coinage post-50BC.³⁷

3.3 A Game of Thrones: Social Hierarchy and Emergence of dynasties

In Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, he describes the political structure of Gaulish 'tribes' as hierarchal societies with two ruling classes: the knights, which he describes as being like the *equites*, whom took part in matters of war and had significant political influence; and the Druids, who conducted all matters of religion.³⁸ Along-side these two ruling classes lived the majority of the population, who Caesar describes as little more than slaves who live in vassalage to the nobles.³⁹ Whilst this description emphasises the divide between the two classes, the division may not be as cut-and-dry as Caesar makes out. De Jersey summarises this as:

“the two groups have close social and economic ties, based principally on the system of clientage. a warrior noble would enter into formalised relationships with peasant farmers, allowing them to use his land In return for which the farmers gave him a proportion of their produce.” (De Jersey 2001: 8)

³⁵ Cunliffe 2005: 113

³⁶ De Jersey 2001: 21

³⁷ Holman. D 2005

³⁸ Caes. *Gal.* 6.13-15; cf. Hill 2012: 243-261

³⁹ Caes. *Gal.* 6.13-15; See Champion 1995: 85-94

Whilst there may not be a uniform political structure across the Celtic world, the numismatic evidence suggests that the socio-political factions in Britain had within it a group of individuals who would be classified under Caesar's "*equites*" class, and it was from this within this group that coinage would be minted. This could have been done by the group or potentially whomever was the most influential and powerful noble at the time.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the importation of early Gaulish coins into Britain coincided with the emergence of a luxury goods economy as a new means of displaying wealth and prestige.⁴⁰ During the Gallic Wars, gold in the form of Gallo-Belgic E (Figure 3.2), minted in order to finance resistance against the Roman presence in Gaul, started to be imported in large quantities into Britain.⁴¹ It was due to this influx of gold coinage that we begin to see individual factions minting their own coinage in significant quantities, and the emergence of individual rulers and dynasties.⁴² Most scholars

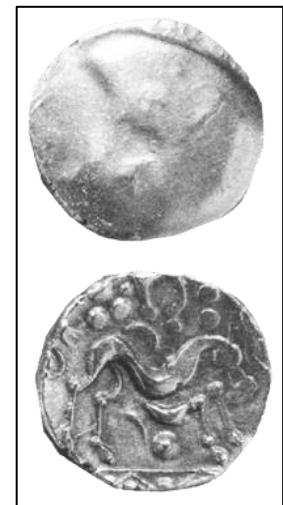


Figure 3.2 Gallo-Belgic E (VA50-01) (Source: Van Arsdell 1989: 'Plate 2')

seem to agree that coinage was adopted so readily by the elite of Britain as it became a convenient way for individuals to display wealth and prestige, displaying images that were heavily associated with their own authority.⁴³ Over the course of the following decades, coinage developed from a means of displaying wealth and status into a "tangible symbol of authority".⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Hobbs 2010: 23

⁴¹ Cunliffe 2005: 116; Van Arsdell 1989: 6

⁴² Cunliffe 2005: 116; cf Mays 1992: 57-82

⁴³ De Jersey 2001: 9; Cunliffe 2005: 123; Creighton 2000: 6-8

⁴⁴ Cunliffe 2005: 123

In the decades after 50 BC we begin to see the emergence of significant political figures in Britain. The first of these is Commius, whom in 50 BC, fled to the protection of the Atrebates in Britain after a failed attempt at rebellion against the Romans in Gaul.⁴⁵ It appears that the Atrebates quickly accepted Commius as their leader, possibly due to his already existent reputation within the faction, as in c.45 BC he begins to mint coinage.⁴⁶ Commius' initial series of coinage is a modified form of Atrebatian C, whilst the designs are similar, he includes an abbreviated form of his name, *COMM*, on the reverse.⁴⁷ This was potentially seen as a symbol of immense prestige, as in an effort to not be surpassed in status, the Trinovantes/Catuvellauni ruler Addedomaros inscribed his coinage with his name emblazoned across the reverse of his coinage.⁴⁸

This is a tradition that continues in Britain up until the Roman conquest in 45 A.D., as such we can identify dynasties within the different factions.⁴⁹ The first that we can identify comes from the Atrebates. Following Commius' reign, the subsequent rulers Tincomarus, Eppillus and Verica all inscribed their coinage with not only their names, but also *COMMI F*, Commius Filus, or son of Commius.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Eppillus and Verica both go on to inscribe their coinage with the Latin term *REX*, meaning king. An example of this is Atrebatian G, a coin of



Figure 3.3 Atrebatian G (VA415-01)
(Source: Van Arsdell 1989: 'Plate 18')

Eppillus, which can be seen in Figure 3.3.⁵¹ These legends are important as they not only show attempts at using coinage as a tool to legitimise rule by claiming a relation to

⁴⁵ Creighton 2000: 59-60; Frere 1974: 56

⁴⁶ De Jersey 2001: 28

⁴⁷ Van Arsdell 1989: 18

⁴⁸ De Jersey 2001: 33-34

⁴⁹ See Appendix 1

⁵⁰ Van Arsdell 1989: 134; For Verica Coinage: See Allen 1979: 1-17

⁵¹ Williams 2001: 9

previous leaders, in this case Commius, but it also demonstrates that coinage develops within the Atrebates as a symbol of authority.⁵²

We do not only see this evolution within the Atrebates, we also see the appearance of inscriptions within the Trinovantes/Catuvellauni faction around the same time. It is thought that Commius' introduction of inscriptions on his coinage was a great display of vanity, as such, in order to not be out matched, the ruler of the Trinovantes/Catuvellauni, Addedomarus, began to mint his own coinage with his name emblazoned across it.⁵³ Similarly to the Atrebatian faction, this tradition continues on through subsequent rulers Dubnovellannus, Tasciovanus and Cunobeline.⁵⁴ Here we see parallels with the Atrebatian faction, in that the tradition of inscriptions within the Trinovantes/Catuvellauni continues through subsequent rulers and demonstrates that coinage develops a significance within the society and as such becomes a symbol of authority and status.

The inclusion of inscriptions on coinage is significant as it is one of the major sources of literacy for LIA Britain. As mentioned previously, the inclusion of COMM F on Atrebatian coinage may have been an attempt by subsequent rulers to legitimise their rule by claiming relation to Commius. However, it is not just the message of the inscriptions that is important, but also the language in which it is written. Williams argues that writing in Britain, specifically that on coinage, did not come about solely by Roman influences in Gaul after 50BC but rather as “an outcome of the widespread but patchy diffusion of the knowledge, and occasional use, of Greek and Roman letters through various areas of temperate Gaul in the early to mid-first century BC”.⁵⁵

⁵² De Jersey 2001: 28

⁵³ Van Arsdell 1989: 18

⁵⁴ See Appendix 2

⁵⁵ Williams 2001: 8

In my interpretation, the inclusion of Latin phrases in legends, such as *filus* and *rex* on Atrebatian coinage, is significant as it is not until much later that we see similar Latin inscriptions appearing in other factions, notably the coinage of Cunobeline of the Trinovantes faction, whom uses the Latin term *rex* on his coinage.⁵⁶ The Roman influence on Atrebatian coinage potentially comes from Commius and Tincomarus' direct relationships from Rome, Commius as Caesar's mediator between Rome and factions in Gaul and Britain during the Gallic Wars and potentially Tincomarus' time in Rome as a political hostage.⁵⁷

One can interpret the inclusion of Latin legends on coinage in two main ways, the first is that the Latin legends on coinage were not for the benefit of the local population of Britain, but rather as a show of power to those in Rome. Whilst this may be possible, I have found no evidence to suggest that British coinage spread to Rome in significant enough amounts to be perceived as an 'advertisement' of British political power.

The second interpretation that we can make is that the Latin inscriptions were used as a way of separating the status of the Atrebatian rulers from those of the other factions in Britain, presenting themselves as 'cultured' and 'worldly'. I have discussed previously that the change in the political landscape towards a luxury goods economy facilitated the importation and acceptance of early coinage in Britain.⁵⁸ It is important to note here that a significant amount of these goods were imported from within the Roman empire, meaning that the link between Rome and status was created early on.⁵⁹ As such, the inclusion of Latin on coinage takes this association one stage further by utilising it in conjunction with a symbol of authority, in order to enhance both.

⁵⁶ Williams 2001: 9

⁵⁷ Creighton 2000: 90-91

⁵⁸ See Chapter 2.6

⁵⁹ Creighton 2000: 7

3.4 Men from Across the Sea: The Presence of ‘Gaulish Kings’ in Britain

From coinage in Britain, we can reconstruct the dynasties of two major factions of Britain up until the Roman conquest in 45AD, however, we know very little about the political structure of Britain before this. Cunliffe suggests that between 130 – 55 BC, it would not have been unusual for the factions in Britain to pledge alliance to Belgic high kings in Gaul, suggesting that in return for men and arms when the need arose, the factions in Britain were given gifts of gold amongst other luxury items.⁶⁰ Whilst the evidence for this is sparse, in the *Gallic Wars* Caesar does explain that a high king in Gaul called Divitiacus “had held the government of a great part of these regions, as well as of Britain”.⁶¹

Whilst connecting the two is highly speculative, the presence of ‘high kings’ in Gaul could explain why the design of the abstract head on the obverse of early Gaulish types was so prolific and heavily influenced the designs of the coins in Britain. There is evidence to suggest that what is referred to as the ‘Celticized head of Apollo’ is actually either a stylised portrait of a Gaulish high king or is the symbol of the position of ‘high king’ in Gaul.⁶² Furthermore, its gradual disappearance on British coinage suggests the waning of the power and influences of these ‘high kings’ in Britain, allowing individual powerful figures of the various factions to flourish.

⁶⁰ Cunliffe 2005: 110

⁶¹ Caes. *Gal.* 2.4

⁶² For parallel see: *cf* Erickson, Wright 2011

However, after Caesar's invasion of Gaul and the beginning of individual factions minting their own coinage, we see the decline of the head design on the obverse of the coin and it is eventually erased altogether in the coinage of the Trinovantes/Catuvellauni, suggesting a detachment from the influence of the factions on the continent. Furthermore, in 25 BC, Tasciovanus inscribes his coinage with TASCIOV RIGON, RIGON here meaning "high king".⁶³ Whilst it would be easy to assume that this was an attempt at legitimising his



Figure 3.4 Trinovantian O (VA1780-01)
(Source: Van Arsdell 1989: 'Plate 73')

rule, it is a little more complicated. Towards the end of the first century BC, it appears that the Trinovantes/Catuvellauni developed close relations with the Romans, possibly building on the relationship formed by signing a treaty with Caesar.⁶⁴

In the period of Tasciovanus' reign, Augustus began his consolidation of the empire, bringing Gaul under even more Roman control and as such the influence of the 'high kings' in Gaul would have diminished in Britain.⁶⁵ Seeing this opportunity, it appears that Tasciovanus aimed to monopolise on his faction's ties to Rome and attempt to style himself as 'high king', displaying his Roman ties with the imagery on his coinage. In the end, it does not appear that Tasciovanus' attempt was successful; however, it is important to note how he utilised coinage as a means of portraying his status and to attempt to legitimise his rule.

During a time of significant political change in Britain, we not only see the emergence of inscriptions but also the changing of the imagery used on coinage. If my previous speculation is correct, then what is classified as the 'Celticized head of Apollo'

⁶³ See Figure 6.2; Simkin 2010: 2-3

⁶⁴ Cunliffe 2005: 123

⁶⁵ Cunliffe 2005: 125

on the obverse of early Gaulish and British types, is that of a stylised portrait of a Gaulish high king, or a symbolism of a ‘Gaulish King’. If its presence on early British coinage is a representation of Gaulish influence in Britain, then in the middle and towards the end of the 1st Century BC we see this influence wane in the core factions in Britain.

3.5 When Heads Roll: The Loss of ‘Celticized’ head on British Coinage

For the two major factions this paper has mentioned, the Atrebates and the Trinovantes/Catuvellauni, we see the eventual loss of the ‘Celticized head’ on the obverse of gold coinage, specifically those that can be considered dynastic coinage. In replacement for the head we begin to see more abstract and individual imagery.⁶⁶ This change could be the culmination of multiple influences, for which I will discuss three. The first influence could be the ability to mint coinage, without relying on coins imported from Gaul, meaning that the factions could develop their own individual identities and as such produce more original designs. The second possible influence could be the rise of Roman presence in Gaul, lessening the power of the ‘Gaulish kings’ that Caesar describes, and instead, allowing powerful individuals in Britain to present themselves as rulers without fear of reprisal from the kings that they would have pledged allegiance to.⁶⁷

The final influence could come from the individuals themselves. The introduction of a ‘luxury goods’ economy shifted the focus of the powerful individuals away from displays of military strength in terms of a way of showing status to displays of material wealth. This would mean that the gold stater would not only possess an intrinsic value, i.e. the value of the gold itself, but would also hold a social value. The

⁶⁶ See Appendix 6.1; Appendix 6.2

⁶⁷ For Roman influences on post-invasion coinage: Henig 1972: 209-223; Creighton 2000: 80-125

ability to freely design and mint coinage would put the individual in a position of significant social and political status. This is linked with the diminishing influence of the ‘Gaulish kings’ as the powerful individuals would be able to ‘advertise’ themselves as rulers without threatening the status and power of a higher power. The introduction of inscriptions on coinage only hastened this effect. Van Arsdell describes the emergence of inscriptions on coinage as a “one-upmanship game”.⁶⁸ This phrase highlights the phenomenon that was brought about by the ‘luxury goods’ economy in that coinage became a tool to display one’s wealth, status and political power, and later, a way of legitimising their rule and as such became intrinsically linked with them.

As discussed in Chapter 1, it is readily accepted in modern scholarship that the designs of the early Gaulish types, Gallo-Belgic A and B for example, are ‘Celticized’ versions of the Philip II stater, with a ‘Celticized’ head of Apollo on the obverse and a horse and chariot of similar design on the reverse. Whilst this may have been true when coinage was first introduced into the ‘Celtic’ world, I have some doubts about simply writing off the designs on Gallo-Belgic A and B as direct copies of the Philipus as it ignores the potential cultural context of the designs.

The imagery that is present on the imported Gaulish series are the product of a century’s worth of adaption and manipulation by various factions across Europe and as such the persistence of the images of the head and the horse suggests that they become culturally significant. We see the disappearance of the head image on the obverse of the coinage as the political focus shifts from Gaul onto Britain, allowing powerful individuals to mint coinage using their own imagery. In this period of the evolution of coinage we see that coinage becomes a symbol for not only authority but also status in Britain, with these powerful individuals inscribing their coinage with their names and

⁶⁸ Van Arsdell 1989: 18

Latin phrases such as *rex* and *filus* in an attempt to legitimise their rule and enhancing their status above the leaders of the other factions. However, we do see the persistence of one image throughout all of the coinage of the Atrebates and the Trinovantes, that of the horse.

3.6 Conclusion

Early British coinage consisted of bronze coins that could have been used as an early monetary exchange system and are vital to understand the economy of LIA Britain. However, this chapter has focused on the political and social significance of gold coinage, specifically the stater, and how what it represents and how it was changed during over the course of the LIA. To reiterate the first line of this chapter, the political and social structures of pre-Roman Iron Age Britain are incredibly difficult to reconstruct, however, over the course of this chapter I have attempted to show that the two are closely linked as displays of status.

Using coinage, we can begin to build an understanding of how authority and status were perceived in LIA, and how intrinsic coinage became to the representation of authority. The emergence of inscriptions on coinage played a pivotal role in this change, allowing an individual to not only display his wealth, but also use it as a form of propaganda to display his political influence. However, the imagery present on the coins were also important to this representation. Over the course of the decades after Caesar's Gallic Wars, we potentially see the diminishing of Gaulish influence in Britain, symbolised by the disappearing of the 'Celticized' head present on early imported coinage. This may have been due to the Roman presence in Gaul, and due to Augustus' consolidation of the empire, the removal of the 'Gaulish King', allowing powerful individuals in Britain such as Tasciovanus and Verica to style themselves as the new kings.

However, one piece of imagery does stay consistent throughout the whole of the LIA, the presence of the horse on the reverse of the stater. If we are to follow Creighton's theories, then the horse is a symbol of authority and status in the Celtic world, playing an important role not only in the social aspects, but also political and religious aspects of daily life. The persistent presence of the horse imagery on coinage is due to this relationship with these ideas, and the rulers in Britain utilised this relationship on their coinage as a means to not only enhance their own status but also to have the underlying connotations of authority and leadership.

4 Religion

4.1 Introduction

The term ‘Celtic religion’ is difficult to define. Classical authors, such as Pliny the Elder, Tacitus and Caesar speak of mystic rituals, human sacrifices, sacred groves and Druids.⁶⁹ Whilst these sources are useful for recognising that these rituals may have existed and the presence of some form of belief system, they are filled with misconceptions and prejudices and must be considered as such. For Britain however, the evidence becomes even more sparse, as such we must look to archaeological evidence and outside sources to begin to reconstruct a religious tradition in Britain. This chapter will be utilising literary and archaeological evidence to suggest how coinage and the imagery on it played a role within the ‘Celtic’ religious tradition in Britain.

One of the main issues facing scholars who attempt this reconstruction is that the strongest evidence of a religious tradition in Britain comes from post-conquest Britain after 45AD in the form of Romano-Celtic epigraphy and iconography.⁷⁰ During the period after the conquest, the Roman religious tradition and the native Celtic tradition were combined to form a new, hybrid religion, heavy with Roman influences.⁷¹ Whilst the evidence for a pre-conquest religious tradition in Britain is sparse, there is evidence to suggest the presence of religious sites and ritual deposits that date to the LIA.

4.2 Heads or Tails: The Recurrence of Horse Imagery on British Coinage

Throughout all the changes of coinage in the later Iron Age, we see the recurrence of one particular image, the horse. In all the coins presented so far in this paper, the image of the horse is present on the obverse of gold coinage in Britain, in one form or another, from the early imported coins of Gallo-Belgic A and B, right up until the coinage of

⁶⁹ Plin. *Nat.* 16.95; Tac. *Ann.* 14.30; Caes. *Gal.* 6.16

⁷⁰ Mat Cana 2005: ‘religion, Celtic’

⁷¹ Green 1995: 466

Cunobeline in 20 AD. If we consider the discussion of the presence of the ‘Celticized’ head image waning on LIA British coinage in the previous chapter, why did the imagery of the horse preserver?

The Gaulish warriors are famous in the ancient world for their horsemanship, excelling in combat from horseback, and are so closely associated with them that Caesar draws a parallel between their noble class and the Roman *equites*, a class that is traditionally defined as the ability to afford to keep a horse for combat.⁷² As such, in Celtic Gaul, horses have distinct connotations with status and authority, however in Britain, it appears that the situation may be a little more complex.

Creighton attempts to broach this subject and writes on the importance of horses and horse imagery in the Celtic world in his work *Coins and Power in Late Iron Age Britain*.⁷³ Whilst facing a mixed reception for his work, predominantly criticisms on his methodology and interpretation of imagery, this work is a noble attempt at understanding a subject that few scholars even attempt.⁷⁴ A section of his book is dedicated to analysing the link between horses and a ritual basis for authority in the Late Iron Age Britain.⁷⁵ Utilising Irish vernacular literature, which he attempts to compare to LIA Britain, he forms a theory that horses not only play an integral role in displays of authority, but also play a role in the religious tradition of LIA Britain.

In the Irish vernacular literature, we see the strong connection between kings and their kingdoms, representing the position as not only the acquisition of power to rule, but also a deep connection with his land and nature in the form of a ‘sacral kingship’.⁷⁶ Simms sums this up as “the fundamental theory underlying such literary references is that right

⁷² For horsemanship in combat: Strab.4.4.2; Plut. *Marc.* 6; Ritchie 1995: 44-46. For *equites* comparison: Caes. *Gal.* 6.13-15; Millar 2012: ‘Equites’

⁷³ Creighton 2000: 22-26

⁷⁴ For concerns: De Jersey 2005: 121 – 122; For Praise: Ray 2002: 577-578

⁷⁵ Creighton 2000: 22-26

⁷⁶ Creighton 2000: 22

order in society can only flourish under the rule of the right king”, and the ‘right king’ must be one who is pure and ‘married’ to the land herself.⁷⁷ A variety of rituals surrounding kingship can be found in Simms (1987) whom collected literary evidence surrounding kingships and rituals.⁷⁸ These rites vary and there does not seem to be a standard, but the connection between horses and authority is consistent, it can be predominantly seen in the description of the inauguration ritual of the kings of Ulster, described by an 11th Century author Giraldus Cambrensis:

When the whole people of that land has been gathered in one place, a white mare is brought forward into the middle of the assembly. He who is to be inaugurated, not as a chief, but as a beast, not as a king, but as an outlaw, embraces the animal before all, professing himself to be a beast also. The mare is then killed immediately, cut up in pieces and boiled in water. A bath is prepared for the man afterwards in the same water. He sits in the bath surrounded by all his people, and all, he and they, eat of the mare which is brought to them. He quaffs and drinks of the broth in which he is bathed, not in any cup, or using his hand, but just dipping his mouth into it round about him. When this unrighteous rite has been carried out, his kingship and dominion have been conferred. (Giraldus Cambrensis, quoted in Simms 1987: 21-22)

Whilst the ritual described may seem unpleasant, it represents a bond between a king, his subjects and his land. If we take Simms’ description of the aspects of a true king from earlier, the white mare may represent the purity of the land, and as such, the eating of the meat and drinking of the bathwater/broth by the future king represents the marriage between a man and the land and transferring the purity from the mare to the

⁷⁷ Simms 1987: 21

⁷⁸ Simms 1987: 21-41

king. Furthermore, the fact that all parties involved partake in the eating of the mare meat may represent a connection between the king and his subjects as they all have a connection to the land on a spiritual level.⁷⁹

The horse is a persistent image on coinage throughout the Iron Age, and as Creighton suggests, horses play an important role in the ritualistic traditions as well. The presence of the horse in Irish vernacular literature suggests that the horse has strong affiliations with the forces of nature and status, and as such, it would not be wrong to suggest that these beliefs extend to the ritualistic deposits of Gussage All Saints and Danebury.

4.3 Laid to Rest: The Ritual Deposition of Horse Remains

Whilst it would be wrong to automatically assume that rituals such as these took place in LIA Britain, it does not mean that horses did not play a role in the religious traditions and as a representation of authority. Archaeological evidence dating to the LIA does show us that horses may have been perceived differently than other animals in Britain and have a significant role in religious sacrifices. The two examples Creighton presents in his argument are that of Gussage All Saints and Danebury.⁸⁰

Gussage All Saints is a high-status hill fort with a number of horse trappings discovered along-side horse remains that display butchery marks.⁸¹ However, they appear infrequently when compared to other animal remains, such as those primarily bred for food.⁸² An interpretation of this evidence is that horses were only butchered at significant times, such as part of the rituals that Creighton suggests. If we do accept this interpretation, then the hesitancy to butcher horses supports the idea that they were in fact perceived separately from other animals. Furthermore, Creighton states that the lack

⁷⁹ Simms 1987: 21; Creighton 2000: 22

⁸⁰ Creighton 2000: 24-25

⁸¹ Harcourt 1979: 151 - 155

⁸² Harcourt 1979: 151 - 155

of evidence of neo-natal horse fatalities suggests that horses were not bred on this site, leading to the conclusion that horses were brought in and tamed from the wild, enhancing his metaphor of the connection between kingship and the forces of nature.⁸³ However, he is not the only scholar to link the taming of horse from the wild to ideas of a force of nature, Hill suggests that: “It is this process of bringing in from the wild, taming, controlling that made them a potent metaphor to express ideas about culture and nature within society”.⁸⁴

A spiritual conception of the natural world is thought to have permeated all aspects of the Celtic religious traditions, as such, it would be not small wonder why if a horse is seen as a force of the natural world, that capturing and taming it would have not only religious connotations but also those of status and authority, as it shows dominance over an aspect of the natural world.⁸⁵

The second example Creighton presents us is the archaeological evidence found at Danebury. In this example, all of the skeletal evidence suggests that horses on the site were all male, suggesting that in “demographic structure and in sex ratio”, the horse remains were entirely separate from other animals at the site.⁸⁶ Furthermore, horse remains found in ‘special animal deposits’, such as those in the grain pits, display no butchery marks and nearly the entirety of the carcass was placed in the pit, suggesting that they were placed there of purely ritualistic reasons.⁸⁷ On the other hand, Grant suggests that due to the frequency of discovering horse remains in a ritual context, it appears that they held a significance to the people living there, and were to be only eaten in times of severe need or in a ritual context.⁸⁸

⁸³ Creighton 2000: 25; Harcourt 1979: 158

⁸⁴ Hill 1995: 107-8

⁸⁵ Green 1995: 465

⁸⁶ Creighton 2000: 24

⁸⁷ Cunliffe 1983: 157

⁸⁸ Grant 1991: 476

However, these are not the only two sites where horse remains appear in a ritual context, we also see this at the Romano-British temple in Harlow, Essex. Whilst the previous two examples were deposits within a domestic setting, here we see deposits of animal remains, horse included, in a specifically ritualistic setting. Whilst the top structure is that of a square *cella* which forms a Romano-Celtic temple built during the Flavian period in c. 80 A.D., beneath this is evidence of ritualistic depositions dating to the LIA.⁸⁹

The majority of the bones discovered at Harlow were found within the vicinity of the *cella* and the ancillary buildings to the south-east suggesting that the temple built in c.80 A.D. was built almost directly on top of a site with ritualistic meaning in the Iron Age.⁹⁰ In contrast to the finds at Danebury, here we see only fragmented horse bones rather than the deposition of whole or part carcasses. Also, as a contrast to the previous sites, horse bones are rare at the sites, and only make up 0.2% of all identified bones found within this temple.⁹¹ It is thought that these buried bones are representational of the horse as a whole, similar to pit-offerings containing horse-trappings.⁹² If this is the case then it demonstrates the ritualistic significance of the horse within these votive offerings.

As shown, the horse may play a key role in the religious tradition of LIA Britain as a symbol of the forces of nature, but also authority and kingship. If we apply this theory to coinage, it suggests that the image of the horse that is so perseverant on British coinage draws from this existing connection with the religious tradition, in an attempt to acknowledge the connection between a ruler and the land but also in an attempt to justify one's ruler through religious means.

⁸⁹ France 1985: 23

⁹⁰ Legge 1985: 122

⁹¹ Legge 1985: 123

⁹² Green 1992: 115

4.4 Lost and found: The Ritualistic Deposition of Coinage as a Votive Offering

However, it is not just the imagery on the coins that have a connection with the religious tradition of LIA Britain, but also the physical coins themselves. Northern France produces multiple examples of Celtic coinage associated with religious sites, one such site is that of Villeneuve-au-Cuâlot (Aube), which produced a total of 939 coins.⁹³ However, the tradition of coinage used as votive offering does not only occur in Northern France as there are multiple examples in Britain.

The two main examples that will be analysed in this section is the Hayling Island Temple and the Romano-Celtic temple at Harlow. At the Hayling Island Temple, archaeologists discovered a series of artefacts in a ritual context that appear to be deliberately placed offerings.⁹⁴ Alongside the discovery of 151 Iron Age coins, from throughout the life of the temple, we find materials of other value such as brooches, bracelets and rings, along with horse trappings and animal bones.⁹⁵

In their general discussion of the coinage found at Hayling Island, Haselgrove and Briggs focusing on using the coinage to date the period of use at the temple, however, they run into difficulties when they acknowledge that Celtic coinage is extremely hard to date.⁹⁶ However, their findings show that there were “two chronologically distinct groups of offerings”, with the first group consisting mainly of Gaulish imports and local minted coinage dating towards the end of the first century BC, and the second consists of “Dynastic southern issues and Durotrigan coins”, not certainly dated, but it is thought to date to around the mid first century AD.⁹⁷ The

⁹³ Fitzpatrick 1985: 56

⁹⁴ Briggs 1992: 1

⁹⁵ Briggs 1992: 1

⁹⁶ Haselgrove 1992: 34

⁹⁷ Haselgrove 1992: 40

importance of these two groupings is that it shows a continuous tradition of the ritual deposition of coinage as votive offerings for nearly a century.

If Haselgrove and Brigg's dating of the first grouping is correct, then this would coincide with the development of a luxury goods economy as mentioned in Chapter 1.⁹⁸ The coinage of the earliest grouping would have been predominantly gold and silver, meaning that they would have had high intrinsic values. We could draw the conclusion that the presence of coinage as votive offerings in association with other status objects such as brooches and mirrors suggest that high value coins were seen as a high-status object, presumably with a display of wealth attached in being able to sacrifice some in a votive offering.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Hayling Island Temple is not the only place that we see coinage used in a ritualistic context as a votive offering, we also see this at the Romano-Celtic Temple at Harlow in Essex. Here we see 224 coins retrieved from the excavations within the temple complex, and 123 of these were from "stratigraphically closed contexts", suggesting that these coins were deposited as votive offering, distributed primarily within the area of the Romano-Celtic Temple.⁹⁹ Fitzpatrick suggests a number of possibilities of why this might occur, one such suggestion is that the lack of finds may be due to the removal of coinage throughout the life of the temple, examples of which can be drawn from throughout history.¹⁰⁰

However, the majority of coins found at Harlow that date from the LIA were bronze, primarily from the reigns of Tasciovanus and Cunobeline, these were found in the building east and west of the main temple.¹⁰¹ Once again Fitzpatrick presents the idea that these deposits were either buried or suspended in perishable containers around

⁹⁸ See Chapter 2.6

⁹⁹ Fitzpatrick 1985: 56

¹⁰⁰ Fitzpatrick 1985: 57; For removal of wealth: Strab.4.1.13; Cass. Dio.42.49.1-2

¹⁰¹ Fitzpatrick 1985: 57

a wooden idol as a form of votive offerings.¹⁰² It is interesting that in this situation bronze is the primary metal of coinage rather than gold at this site. However, this may suggest that the bronze coinage of Tasciovanus and Cunobeline became accessible to the general population, and so in an attempt to emulate the traditions already practiced by the elites, or those who have enough wealth to deposit gold coinage consistently, used bronze as an alternative.

On the other hand, if we take the concept of substituting full horse carcasses for a single bone or skull, or even in some cases horse trappings, as can be seen both here at Harlow and at Gussage All-Saints, it may not be a large leap to suggest that bronze coinage became a substitute for gold coinage in votive offerings, and was used as a representation of wealth, as it was available in larger quantities and was less expensive to use in an offering.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, we can see from the examples presented in this chapter that the imagery presented on Celtic coinage may have religious connotations. Whilst Creighton's connections to Irish vernacular literature and LIA Britain seem to be tenuous, they provide a key example of where horses could play a ritualistic role in the assertion of authority and kingship. Whilst it would be inaccurate to automatically assume that these rituals existed in Britain, archaeological evidence from sites such as Danebury, Gussage All-Saints and Harlow suggest that horses did play some key role in religious traditions in Britain. Furthermore, the archaeological evidence suggests that it was not just the physical form of the horse that held an importance in these traditions, as a complete carcass could be substituted for a fragment of one, such as a leg bone as seen at Harlow, or something symbolic in nature, such as horse trappings.

¹⁰² Fitzpatrick 1985: 57

The importance of the consideration of the religious nature of the imagery on British coinage is that if the imagery of the horse represents authority and kingship on a ritualistic level, then it would provide an explanation of why many of the inscriptions on dynastic coinage from LIA Britain, such as that of Commius and Addedomaros, appear on the reverse of coinage above the image of the horse. The connection between the inscriptions and the horse is important to consider as it may be an attempt to associate the rulers with well-established traditions, especially if those are in any way similar to those in Irish vernacular literature, a ritualistic joining between man and horse, as a symbolic taming and domesticating a force of nature.

Furthermore, the use of coinage as votive offerings as displayed at Harlow and Hayling Island suggest that coinage had ritualistic connotations in the LIA rather than just as a simple vehicle for the transfer of wealth. However, as we see coinage deposited amongst artefacts that can be considered status goods, such as brooches and rings, it would not be a large leap to suggest that coinage would have been considered amongst these status goods. The predominance of bronze coinage finds at Harlow is interesting to consider and will require the further study of how the peoples of LIA Britain interacted with the smaller denominations of coinage not just on an economic level but also on a religious and ritualistic level.

5 Conclusion

The topic of Celtic coinage is too broad to encompass within this dissertation, it is a subject that can, and has, filled hundreds of books and journals. However, I have attempted here to present a certain perspective of LIA coinage, seeing coinage not primarily as a symbol of monetary exchange, but rather an object of status. It was through utilising coinage as an object that the elite of LIA could display their wealth and authority, utilising existing religious traditions, new Roman influences and their own designs to produce the final product we see today.

The first chapter discussed the importation of early Celtic coinage into Britain, and how this occurred. At the start of research, it seemed like the introduction of coinage was due to a simple system of trade and exchange between Britain and the continent. However, with further research it transformed into a complex web of relationships and agreements that encompassed both political and economic matters. Sills' 'Overlapping systems' model clearly represents these connections and showing the effects of distribution through the different systems on the coins themselves, allowing us to understand the connection between the Philip II stater and early coinage in Britain.

Similarly to other scholars such as De Jersey, Sills and Van Arsdell, I am of the opinion that early coinage, such as Gallo-Belgic C and E were minted in times of conflict on the continent and so were imported when the factions in Gaul required the aid of their allies in Britain and paid them with this coinage.¹⁰³ As such, it would not be improbable to suggest that Gallo-Belgic A and B were imported into Britain during times of similar conflicts in the first century BC.

The importation of Gallo-Belgic A and B is important to consider as the coinage would not only be a symbol of wealth and status due to its value but would also have militaristic connotations due to the context in which it was received. It may be due to the mixture of these themes associated with coinage that we see the shift in the idea of status away from displays of military strength, to displays of material wealth and the 'luxury goods' economy in Britain.

The second chapter took the themes of the first chapter, early coinage representing status, wealth and military prowess and develops the idea further. The first section is an acknowledgement of other types of coinage minted in Britain, namely the Kentish Cast Bronzes. This was included as it is important to remember that the factions of LIA Britain were minting smaller denominations of coinage alongside the higher value coins, presumably for average economic transactions, whilst the higher value coinage was reserved for a different purpose.

The social and political structures of LIA Britain are incredibly difficult to reconstruct but using coinage we can begin to reconstruct how the society may have been formed. The primary evidence for this is the inscriptions we see on coinage, such as those of Commius and Addedomaros, allowing us to trace dynasties within the factions. The utilisation of inscriptions on coinage may have come from Roman influences during Commius' time in Rome, but its spread and perseverance on British coinage may have been due to it being a new way of displaying one's own status and prominence within an area. Furthermore, it is with the emergence of these dynasties that we see the gradual disappearance of the 'Celticized' head imagery on the obverse of coinage in Britain and its replacement with individual imagery.

The evidence suggests that the emerging Roman presence in Gaul, mainly Caesar's Gallic Wars and Augustus' consolidation of the empire, and the increasing

wealth of Britain meant that the influence of the leaders in Gaul, or ‘Gaulish kings’ in Britain diminished, allowing powerful and wealthy individuals in Britain to emerge as leaders. It would not be a large leap to suggest that the ‘Celticized’ head on the obverse of early coinage is a representation of either an individual as a ‘Gaulish king’, or a symbol of the position of the ‘Gaulish king’, and as such we can link the disappearance of that imagery with the diminishing of Gaulish influence in Britain.

The final chapter discusses the religious and ritualistic connotations of the imagery present on coinage and the coin itself. Building on Creighton’s link between horses and ritual kingship, the ritualistic deposit of horse remains and related trappings at Danebury, Gussage All-Saints and Harlow suggest that horses did play an important role in the ritualistic traditions of LIA Britain. As such, it is important to recognise the perseverance of the image of the horse on the reverse of coinage in LIA Britain.

If we connect the presence of the horse remains and trappings found in a ritualistic context, the kingships rituals described in Irish vernacular literature and the imagery on British coinage, it suggests that the horse was a prominent symbol of the force of nature, and as such, by taming it became a symbol of authority and kingship. Its presence on British coinage could suggest that the powerful individuals that were minting this coinage drew upon this connection and used it as a symbol to legitimise their leadership.

However, it is not just the imagery on the coin that has ritualistic connotations, but also the coins themselves. At Harlow and Hayling Island we see coinage deposited in large quantities, in ritualistic contexts that can be considered as ‘votive offerings’. We see coinage placed amongst other status objects such as brooches, mirrors and rings, and so it would not be wrong to suggest that coins could have been considered as a status object during the period of use at this site.

In an effort to explain the dominance of bronze coinage at Harlow, I would suggest that the lack of gold coin finds in the main temple area is due to the widespread activity of an invading force removing anything of wealth from religious sites, and as such the coinage was removed upon the building of the Roman temple. However, the clusters of deposited bronze coinage in the east and west buildings of the temple could be potentially explained by suggesting that due to the accessibility of bronze coinage by the general population, in an effort to emulate the traditions of those who deposited gold coinage consistently, used bronze coinage as an alternative in the traditions.

To close, the evidence suggests that high value coinage in LIA Britain not only was a vehicle for the transfer of wealth, but also a potent symbol of authority and status, utilising religious imagery and Roman influences to become the object that we see today. I have enjoyed researching and writing this dissertation, however it has not been without its troubles. The Celtic world, specifically that in Britain, is extensive and complicated, and requires further study in order to understand it to the extent that it deserves. For example, much of the research I have encountered is decades old, however there is a fresh wave of interest from scholars in recent years, and I sincerely hope this continues and gets stronger.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Atrebatric Dynastic Coinage



Figure 0.1 Atrebatric C (VA346-01)
(Source: Van Arsdell 1989: 'Plate 16')



Figure 0.2 Coin of Commius - Atrebatric
C (VA350-01) (Source: Van Arsdell
1989: 'Plate 16')



Figure 0.3 Coin of Tincomarus -
Atrebatric E (VA375-01) (Source: Van
Arsdell 1989: 'Plate 17')



Figure 0.4 Coin of Eppillus - Atrebatric
G (VA405-01) (Source: Van Arsdell
1989: 'Plate 18')



Figure 0.5 Coin of Verica - Atrebatric I
(VA460-01) (Source Van Arsdell 1989:
'Plate 19')

Appendix 2: Trinovantes/Catuvellauni Dynastic Coinage



Figure 0.6 Coin of Addedomaros -
Trinovantian I (VA1605-01) (Source:
Van Arsdell 1989: 'Plate 65')



Figure 0.7 Coin of Dubnovellaunus -
Trinovantian L (VA1650-01) (Source:
Van Arsdell 1989: 'Plate 68')



Figure 0.8 Coin of Tasciovanus -
Trinovantian M (VA1680-01) (Source:
Van Arsdell 1989: 'Plate 70')



Figure 0.9 Coin of Cunobeline -
Trinovantian T (VA1910-01) (Source:
Van Arsdell 1989: 'Plate 79')

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