

COINS, KINGS and TRIBES. East Anglia and beyond in the Iron Age.

by Dr. Ian Leins (Curator of iron Age and Roman coins, British Museum)

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Dr. Leins said he assumed the audience had little familiarity and no prior knowledge but his talk would be essentially about Iron Age coins in Norfolk. Unfortunately the Iceni, and Boudicca as a popular and heroic figure, cast a large and dominant shadow over the period. This is evident in the Norwich Castle Museum galleries and in press reports of hoard finds. Whereas the Colchester hoard of buried Roman Jewellery provides real material and similar hoards left for safe-keeping relate to the revolt, the Wickham Market hoard in Suffolk discovered 2008 is local coinage for the period 20BC to AD20 but is unlikely to have anything to do with Boudicca. Yet newspaper headlines were 'Boudicca's Gold' ; as such she is tied into every Iron Age find and affects the way these are viewed.

Most Iron Age coins have horse or wolf motifs on one side with heads and inscriptions on the other. However, there are no coins with the name 'Iceni' designating a local Iron Age tribe. Even though it is a well attested name, how far back does it go? Ptolemy, writing in AD150, gives a list of place names based on ten tribes: the Iceni may be the *Simenoi*. Potentially the Iceni may go back to the time of Julius Caesar 55/54BC who mentions different names such as the *Trinovantes* and other people in SE England not on Ptolemy's list such as the *Cenimagne*. Obviously there is a changing political geography occurring over a 200-year period. In the absence of direct historical sources, coins offer a timeline – when and where created and used in SE England from the River Severn towards the Humber Estuary and then southwards.

Dr. Leins described Iron Age coins as similar to modern abstract art. Copying from Greek coinage produced a local take on a classic design. They used the wreath around the head as significant but gradually lost the face element and extracted the horse from the chariot figure, sometimes turning it into a wolf.



Head /hairstyle



Horse



'abstract' wolf

Using a single large punch or die (perhaps stamped on a plate of metal which was then cut up into circular coins), any one coin only had a part of the total design which can only be seen when the different coins are placed together. This is deliberate not accidental, technically clever and artistically interesting. Roman coins, such as those of Caesar Augustus, are easy to interpret since they have the profile face and name of the ruler plus date with the portrait similar to known statues. This is not true of British Iron Age coins.

Moreover, East Anglian coins differ from those in Essex or Herts or Kent and the West Midlands. Regional differences show a family of coins with similar styles of head and horses: Early period 50BC

show the hair and wolf or horse; Middle period 20BC–AD20 show head and horses; Late period AD50 include inscriptions. By looking across the groups, similar styles and ties become apparent: the wolf in Lincolnshire and largely north Norfolk plus showing claws or a similar horse design of head, tail and mane. There appears to be copying and exchange of ideas between the Iceni and Trinovantes, *i.e.* the face and horse design plus the technology.

The number of Iron Age coins found has doubled since 1987, now some 32,000 with 1000 different types. This has been aided by metal detecting with coins being discovered at an average rate of one a day. Lots more material than 20-30 years ago allows individual coins to be looked at in more detail and classified.

Iron Age Britain is a world of small villages not large towns. Are differences in coins evidence of splits or sub-divisions in Norfolk?

(a) 'Norfolk Wolf' gold is primarily north coastal Norfolk



Circa 65-45BC Norfolk 'Iceni' wolf gold slater

Whereas

(b) 'Boar A' silver is focussed much more to the south



Circa 5-43AD Norfolk Boar phallic silver coin

In the Later middle period 20BC–AD20 "Early Boar Horse –EBH" gold coins are found in western areas but silver coins are found in central areas. Does this pattern show divided communities?

Just before the Roman invasion, coins of Cunobeline (circa AD10–40), king of the Trinovantes, are found widely in Essex, Herts, Oxfordshire, London, Kent and also south Norfolk. His coins show a definite Roman input; some have a laurel wreath design and classical motifs plus the title Rex. He is mentioned by Roman historians Suetonius and Dio Cassius. Is this growth of powerful leaders or

kings a result of Roman influence? Did it go further? Were they travelling to Rome, sending their children to be educated there and then sent back to Britain?



Sometimes coins appear to be issued jointly with other rulers? Were these colleagues or subordinates or do they show alliances? Cunobeline coins have DUBN (Dubnovellaunces) or AGR (Agrippa) on them.

The Iceni as a tribe don't appear to go back as far as the Trinovantes. Most likely they were a confederation of a number of smaller tribes forming an identifiable group in response to Roman pressure after Claudius' invasion; first as Roman allies being given over-lordship of an administrative area, then as opponents who fatally rebelled.

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Dr. Leins answered a number of questions from the audience.

Is the geographical distribution of coins evidence of trade or the movement of people?

Gold travelled further than silver or bronze in the late period because of its high value as a precious metal but the local difference was not a result of trading. The horse and wolf images are significant as they are symbols of power and prestige. The coins are evidence of wealth (replacing the older torques) and show relationships and social behaviour possibly acting as gifts.

Do the gold and silver coins show where the gold came from and where they were made?

Much of the precious metal was recycled several times, being melted down and reused, so isotope analysis cannot show the metal's origin. Not local so presumably continental rather than from Wales.

Could the "Cenemagni" refer to the Iceni?

No one is certain whether Caesar's mention of Cenemagni refers to Iceni or to some other tribe in Kent – after all Caesar didn't reach Norfolk so it's unlikely he would know about the Iceni.

Could the double names on coins indicate the name of the minter or moneyer?

Possible but difficult to determine. Iron age coins in Britain could be Fathers and Sons such as Verica son of Cominus – shows ancestry/continuity rather than place or the mint.

The new President, Sophie Cabot, thanked Dr. Leins for an interesting and thought-provoking lecture.