

# The Puteaux Hoard

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In November, 1950, 53 large flan staters of the Parisii and a Gallo-Belgic Xb ‘bullet’ stater were brought in to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris for identification. Gabrielle Fabre, curator in the Cabinet des Médailles, took casts of them and established that they were from a hoard of up to 120 staters found during roadworks in the suburb of Puteaux, on the left bank of the Seine near La Défense. Fabre died at a tragically young age in 1960 leaving only the briefest note describing the circumstances of the find (1951, p. 69), and it fell to Monique Mainjonet to publish the hoard in *Revue Numismatique* (1962, p. 59-72, pls. 2-5). Colbert de Beaulieu later incorporated her work into his general synthesis on the coinage of the Parisii (1970, p. 20-37); he divided the series as a whole into seven classes, and suggested that the Puteaux type, class 5, was struck a few years before the start of the Gallic Wars in 58 BC (*ibid.*, p. 115). In a review article Simone Scheers emphasized the ground-breaking nature of Colbert’s work, but could not resist illustrating around fifty coins from major collections and auctions that he had omitted (1972, p. 174-183).



Fig. 1 Class 5 stater (no. 7 in this list)



Fig. 2 Class 5 stater, flawed reverse

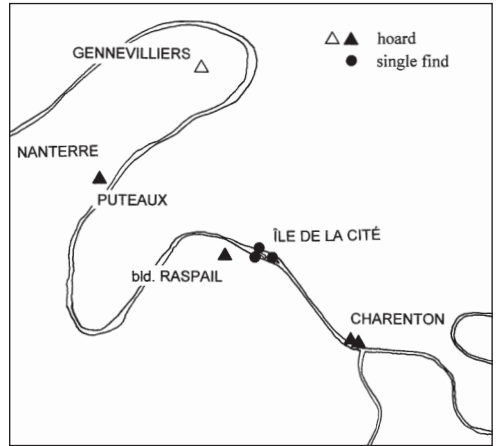
The Puteaux coins show how important it is to do a full die study of a series and to analyse it correctly. Colbert published a reasonably accurate die chain for class 5 staters, but interpreted it as a single sequence (1970, p. 35). Detailed analysis with the benefit of more examples, however,

shows there are two parallel sequences, a ‘normal’ one with two or three reverses paired with each obverse, and a highly unusual one with at least eight *obverses*, three of which also appear in the main sequence, paired with a single reverse, my die no. 29 (Sills, 2003, p. 279, fig. 97): the reverse die usually wore out well before the obverse, and the pairing of so many obverses with just one reverse is wholly exceptional in Gaulish coinage. Reverse 29, in contrast to all others in the series, was deliberately kept in use well beyond the point that it would normally have been discarded, with the result that many coins struck from it are heavily flawed (fig. 2); the coin featured in this list (no. 7) shows the die at an early stage, when it had only just begun to crack (fig. 1). The most likely explanation is that a second workshop opened to strike a large batch of staters, probably to make an emergency payment, and that quality control was temporarily sacrificed to speed up production. Some idea of the relative size of the batch can be got from the number of surviving coins from reverse 29, equal to that of the other thirteen class 5 reverses combined!

The key to understanding this odd phenomenon may lie in two 19<sup>th</sup> century hoards discovered while dredging the Seine at Charenton, at the confluence of the Seine and Marne. The Charenton finds, which include class 5 staters, nearly all have test cuts, and this along with their location well to the east of other finds from Paris suggests that they represent payments made to an outside group who saw them essentially as bullion to divide up and melt down, and not as circulating currency. This fits in precisely with what was happening at the mint, where not only had an emergency batch been struck to make a specific payment or payments, but production had also switched between classes 4 and 5 from a standard medium flan stater to a much more impressive broad flan type. Whoever was camped at Charenton wanted paying in big, brash coins: they were suspicious of their paymasters, hence the test cuts, and didn’t care too much about the quality of striking as long as they were good gold, hence the heavily flawed die.

The Parisian series can now be tied to the relative chronology of Gallo-Belgic Aa and Ca, the broad and small flan coinage of the Ambiani or Atrebatas, and it looks as if class 5 staters are contemporary with Ca class 3 and must therefore be much earlier than Colbert thought: the best guess is that they date from the late 2<sup>nd</sup> rather than the mid 1<sup>st</sup> century. This raises the intriguing possibility that the exceptional features of the large flan type are related in some way to the invasions of the Cimbri and Teutoni, who plundered Gaul in the last decade of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century before being defeated, after several attempts, by Rome. If this was the only evidence we might think that the class 5 emergency batch was struck to pay off Germanic tribes who were threatening the city – and this is still entirely possible – but two extraordinary discoveries from the Balkans suggest a very different explanation. In 1983 a lead weight was found at Prahovo, on the Danube in Eastern Serbia, which reproduces exactly the design of a large flan Parisian stater on one side and has a Latin inscription on the other saying that it had been made by or at the behest of a Roman, Lucius Cestinus, for the king of the Scordisci, the largest Celtic tribe of the region. A little later, apparently at nearby Kladovo, a gold stater was discovered with an identical Parisian-type reverse, the only known gold coin of an otherwise silver-using tribe. What on earth was going on? One answer is that the Parisii, a wealthy but relatively small tribe, may have been forced to employ mercenaries from Celtic tribes in the Balkans and elsewhere to defend themselves from the Cimbri and Teutoni: the Scordisci had a long tradition of mercenary service. Rome herself may even have been involved in the transaction, for as well as the legend on the weight we know that in 104 BC, after yet another German victory ‘made all Italy tremble with terror’, the Senate broke with tradition and allowed the recruitment of foreign mercenaries; in this febrile atmosphere it would have been very much in her interests to help any Gaulish tribes who were looking to recruit their own mercenaries. In 103 the Cimbri and Teutoni are known to have joined forces somewhere north of Parisian territory before their last, long march south, and the combined horde would have been unstoppable without outside help. So the Charenton hoards seem to represent

either payments made to Balkan and other mercenaries stationed outside the city or money paid directly to German raiders; Puteaux and a smaller find from boulevard Raspail, closer to the city and with no test cuts, may reflect the burial of wealth by the local population. All are precisely contemporary and could have been deposited in or around 103, giving us the only fixed point in Gaulish numismatics before the Gallic Wars.



Map of Paris showing the places mentioned in the text

Recent archaeological discoveries have thrown more light on the location of the Puteaux hoard and a cache of earlier coins found at Gennevilliers, in the same loop of the Seine. The Nanterre district, adjacent to Puteaux, has produced evidence of a 40-acre Iron Age planned settlement predating the Gallo-Roman town around the Ile de la Cité. Caesar described Lutetia, the capital of the Parisii, as being sited ‘on an island in the river Seine’ (*de Bello Gallico* 7.57) and it was long thought that it must have been on the Ile de la Cité or the Ile St-Louis, despite the lack of pre-Roman finds from either. His description by no means contradicts the new evidence, however: it is quite possible that the main settlement was at Nanterre but that the population retreated to fortified islets at times of conflict. Single finds of Parisian gold coins are concentrated around the Seine islands, and some of these may represent distress hoarding by individual households; certainly if there was a mercenary encampment at Charenton it would have been ideally placed to guard the islands, but not Nanterre.

Why were none of the four late 2<sup>nd</sup> century hoards from Paris recovered? We must face the possibility that the Parisii and their mercenaries were simply overwhelmed by the massed Cimbri and Teutoni. Posidonius, writing around 80 BC, says that the Scordisci 'have forsworn gold as an abomination, and will not have it in their country, because of the many terrible things they suffered because of it' (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 234a-b). Does this otherwise inexplicable passage refer, in part, to a mercenary army that was wiped out on the banks of the Seine?

## Bibliography

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