

# The Celtic coin that *says it is Celtic*

By Chris Rudd

An ancient bronze coin from southern Spain, published in September by Dr Oliver Simkin of the University of Cambridge, has raised a few eyebrows. Not because of its great rarity (only a handful of examples have been recorded), nor on account of its excellent condition (one of the finest known specimens), but due to its unusual inscription which clearly proclaims that the coin is of Celtic origin. Thousands of different coin types of iron age Europe are classed as 'Celtic' by collectors and dealers, including hundreds which were minted by people who probably never thought of themselves as *Keltoi* or *Celtae*, but this coin from ancient Iberia is the only one which unmistakably states that it was made by Celts.

The coin is a large bronze as with a laureate male bust on the obverse and a boar standing on a spear-head on the reverse. It was struck sometime in the 2nd/1st century BC at an Andalusian town called Celti which can confidently be identified with present-day Peñaflores on the Guadalquivir river in the province of Seville, southern Spain. Dr Simkin says: "Leandre Villaronga dates it to 200-150 BC, although Fernando Alvarez Burgos considers a later date possible. Despite suggestions that the reverse shows a military boar standard of the Gaulish or Roman type, the iconography couldn't come from anywhere else but Andalusia: the distinctive young male head with its wreath and trailing ribbons is found on the coinage of several other towns in the region, as is the curly-tailed boar."

This elusive Andalusian bronze coin is of great fascination to Celtic collectors because it is the only ancient coin which carries the word CELT. It is also hugely important – archaeologically, historically, numismatically, linguistically – because its Latin inscription CELTITAN, short for *Celtitanorum* or *Celtitanum* (made by the 'people of Celti') – or perhaps even *Celtitani* (using the boar's tusk as a letter I) –



Bronze as of Celti, 32-35mm, c.200-50 BC. An important and extremely rare coin, usually found near Peñaflores, Seville prov., S.Spain. Picture by Elizabeth Cottam.

arguably reinforces the hypothesis that Celti was originally established in the bronze age by indigenous Celts in southern Spain and not by Celtiberian migrants from north-central Spain. Dr Simkin says: "Apart from a modern fake with a bull instead of a boar, this is the only coin type from Celti; the similar but uninscribed jabalí-clava series is sometimes attributed to Celti, but Villaronga rejects this. However, there are three types of lead tesserae or plomos monetiformes, all either unique or extremely rare: one with a similar design to our coin, another with a monogram CELTITAN on one side and a boar on the other, and a third, smaller type bearing the legend CELTE with a garland above and a metal weight or ingot below, and a reverse apparently depicting a miner carrying a shovel. Lead tesserae have often been linked to mining, and the region around Peñaflores was an important source of metal ores. To the right of the miner is what's described as an altar with a strigil and unguentarium on top, perhaps indicating that it functioned as a bath token.

The ethnonym *Celtitanus* turns up again in Latin inscriptions from the region, and the town Celti is mentioned in various ancient sources (Pliny's Natural History, the Antonine Itinerary and the Ravenna Cosmography, which calls it *Celtum*). The place-name has been taken to

indicate the presence of Celts since 1673, and although some people remain unconvinced, the theory has been defended in the literature right up to the present day (most famously by Antonio Tovar, e.g. 1962:360). This would apparently make our CELTITAN bronze the only known attestation of the ethnonym 'Celt' in a coin legend: in other words, the only Celtic coin that says it is.



Lead tessera of Celti, 45mm. Boar r., mallet above, pellet triad below, knife below, vegetal border./ CELTITAN monogram, mallet (or T) above, club (or I) below, pellet border. Unique?

Picture by Rafael Rodríguez Hernández, in A.Casariago, G.Cores, F.Pliego, *Catalogo de plomos monetiformes de la Hispania Antigua*, Madrid, 1987.

Is this plausible? Well, there certainly were Celts in Spain. In fact, the vast majority of Celtic place-names and town ethnonyms on coins come not from Britain or Gaul but from Spain, as does the longest ancient Celtic text in existence (Botorrita III). These were produced by the Celtiberians of central and NE Spain, but there were Celts outside Celtiberia too: Galicia seems to have been firmly

Celtic, and classical authors describe the inhabitants of southern Portugal and SW Spain as Keltoi or Keltikoi/Celtici. A neat way to map the presence of Celts in Spain is to plot the place-names ending in -briga (the Celtic for 'hill, hillfort'), which gives a line that curves across Spain diagonally. Our town of Celti is on the non-Celtic side, but only just; furthermore, it's near two sites with the well-known Celtic names Segida/Segeida and Segovia. Consequently, John Koch's Atlas for



Lead tessera of Celti, 20-26mm. Naked miner walking r., shovel on shoulder, strigil and pignoneum in front./ CELTE, garland above, weight or ingot below. Extremely rare. Picture by Rafael Rodríguez Hernández, in A.Casariago, G.Cores, F.Pliego, *Catálogo de plomos monetiformes de la Hispania Antigua*, Madrid, 1987.

Celtic Studies (2007), which includes all apparently Celtic names and not just those in ending -briga, places Celti on the Celtic side of the dividing line. The next question is whether Spanish Celtic-speakers actually identified themselves as Celts. This is much more controversial: it's often said that the term keltoi was originally restricted to Gaul, and was only applied to other Celtic-speaking populations secondarily, by the Greek and Romans. However, Untermann (2001) argues that keltikoi, at least, really was a genuine self-designation of the Spanish Celts."

Commenting on the archaeological history of Celti, based chiefly on the survey and excavations of 1987-1992, archaeologist Simon Keay of the University of Southampton says: "If one accepts that the Peñaflores site is to be identified with Celti, the etymology of the name, Celti, could be taken to suggest that there was some connection between the site and the settlements in northern Spain, where Celtic toponyms, anthroponyms and aspects of 'Celtic' material culture were



Spain and Portugal were more Celtic than most coin collectors and dealers imagine. To the west of Celtiberia many Celtic place-names ending in -briga are found, also Celtic tribal and personal names, plus Celtic forts and artefacts. Most of eastern Spain was occupied by non-Celtic Iberian peoples. Photo by Chris Rudd.

widespread. However, there was absolutely no evidence for the latter and, consequently, there would be little justification for suggesting that Celti was founded by 'Celtic' populations moving southwards. Instead, the material culture of protohistoric Celti seems to have been entirely regional [my italics] in character." (S.Keay, J.Creighton, J.R.Rodríguez, *Celti Peñaflores: the archaeology of a Hispano-Roman town in Baetica*, Oxbow 2000, 197).



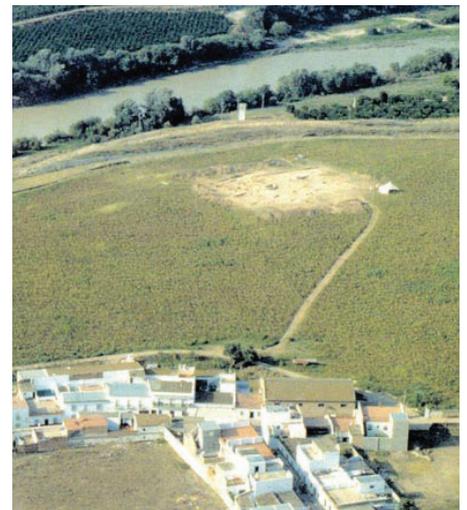
The town walls of Celti were first built c.late 7th/early 6th century BC, perhaps by indigenous Celts (not Celtiberian migrants), which is probably how Celti got its Celtic name. Photo by Simon Keay, in S.Keay, J.Creighton, J.R.Rodríguez, *Celti Peñaflores*, Oxbow, 2000.

So how did Celti acquire what seems to be a Celtic name? And when? Linguist Prof. John Koch believes that Celtic could have been spoken in southern Iberia as early as the Bronze Age and may even have developed there (see J.Koch, Mapping Celticity, in C.Gosden, H.Hamerow, P. de Jersey, G.Lock (eds.), *Communities and Connections*, Oxford 2007, 263-386; also *Chris Rudd List* 100, 2008, 5). Personally I have no doubt whatsoever that Celti was founded by Celts in the Bronze Age, which is how the town got its name and which is why the above coin, though inscribed in Latin, bears the legend CELTITAN. Can we be sure that this coin was minted at Celti and that Celti was at Peñaflores? Yes, we can. Though there were two tribes in Iberia called Celtici, there was only one town recorded as Celti and finds of this coin have usually been from around Peñaflores and a few examples have been unearthed by metal detectorists in the immediate vicinity of the site of ancient Celti (E.L.Hoyuelos, "Actividades arqueológicas en el bien de interés cultural 'Ciudad Romana de Celti', Peñaflores, Sevilla," *Anuario Arqueológico de Andalucía* 1987/III. *Actividades de Urgencia*, Sevilla, 1991, 530).

The correct identification of ancient Celti with modern Peñaflores was first made by Maldonado de Saavedra in 1673 and has been confirmed by numerous inscriptions found at or near Peñaflores. For example, POP.CELTI was inscribed on a tile found at Palma del Río (J.A.Ceán Bermúdez, *Sumario*

de las antigüedades romanas que hay en España, en especial las pertenecientes a las Bellas Artes, Madrid, 1832, 275); and the names Celtitana and Celtitanus occur on stone inscriptions found at Peñaflores (CIL II 2332, 2326).

That bronze coins inscribed CELTITAN were minted at or near Peñaflores was mentioned by A.Delgado, *Nuevo método de clasificación de las medallas autónomas de España*, 3 vols. Seville, 1871-76, and has subsequently been confirmed by all modern Iberian numismatists including A.Vives, *La Moneda hispánica*, 4 vols., Madrid, 1924-26; A.M.de Guadan, *Numismática ibérica e ibero-romana*, Madrid, 1969; L.Villaronga, *Numismática antigua de Hispania*, Barcelona, 1979, and *Corpus nummorum Hispaniae ante Augusti aetatem*, Barcelona, 1994; X.& F.Calico, *Catálogo de Monedas Antiguas de Hispania*, Barcelona, 1979; and F.A.Burgos, *La Moneda Hispanica*, Madrid, 1987, 2008.



The site of ancient Celti, with modern Peñaflores in the foreground and the Guadalquivir behind. Photo by Simon Keay, in S.Keay, J.Creighton, J.R.Rodríguez, *Celti Peñaflores*, Oxbow, 2000.

If ever an ancient coin could be described as 'Celtic', it must surely be this one. Though almost certainly minted after the creation of the Roman *provincia* of *Hispania Ulterior* in 197 BC (Livy 32.27.6) and though it shows the influence of Rome, especially in its Latin inscription, this coin overtly reveals the distant ancestral Celtic origins of the town that produced it. Simon Keay says: "These coins must be indicative of a response to the presence of Rome, both in the sense that they played some limited role in the financial reorganisation of the region by Rome and in that they reflect a choice by the inhabitants to express their identity in Latin" (*Celti Peñaflores*, 2000, 199). The importance of the bronze as from Celti is further enhanced by its great scarcity. Jesus Vico of Madrid tells me that he has had only six specimens in the last 40 years. I thank John Creighton, Simon Keay, John Koch, Oliver Simkin and Jesus Vico for their expert help with this report.