

THE BURNHAM MARKET CELTIC HOARD

A scattered hoard of 200 late Iron Age silver coins of the Ecenii tribe has recently been unearthed by metal detectorists near Burnham Market in south-west Norfolk, reports Chris Rudd.

Local archaeologists believe the coins may have been buried at the time of the Ecenian uprising of AD 47, when the governor of Britain, Ostorius Scapula, enforced a Roman law, the *Lex Julia de Armis*, which prohibited Celtic warriors from carrying their battle weapons. Though nominally independent, the Ecenii were included in this repressive legislation. According to the Roman historian, Tacitus, the Ecenii rebelled and then retreated into fortified earthworks - possibly Stonea Camp, on a former island in the Cambridgeshire fens, or Holkham Camp, Norfolk, at the time in the middle of a vast expanse of tidal saltmarsh - where they were decisively defeated.

Though the deposition date of AD 47 is a tentative hypothesis, it is supported by the fact that the Burnham Market hoard contains a higher percentage of early issues than is normally found in Ecenian hoards.

Derek Allen, the Celtic numismatist, divided the silver coins of the Ecenii into three major categories: Boar-Horse, Face-Horse, and Pattern-Horse (the latter being the latest chronologi-



Fig.1. Bury Diadem silver unit, VA 80, from Burnham Market hoard.

cally). He also analysed the composition of Ecenian silver hoards and found that on average they were 60% Pattern-Horse, 30% Face-Horse and 7% Boar-Horse.

The composition of the Burnham Market hoard differs markedly from Allen's typical analysis and is 47% Pattern-Horse, 28% Face-Horse and 20% Boar-Horse, with a much higher percentage of early types; which makes a deposition date of AD 47 look more likely than the usual AD 60 (the date of the second Ecenian rebellion).

There are other peculiarities about the Burnham Market hoard. For example, typical Ecenian coin hoards of the

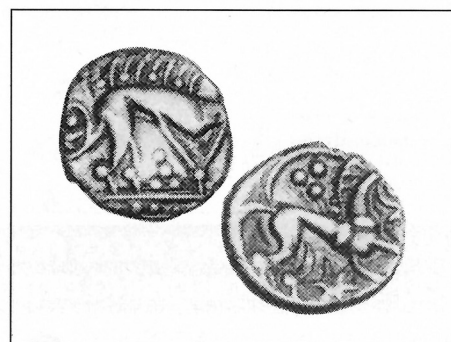
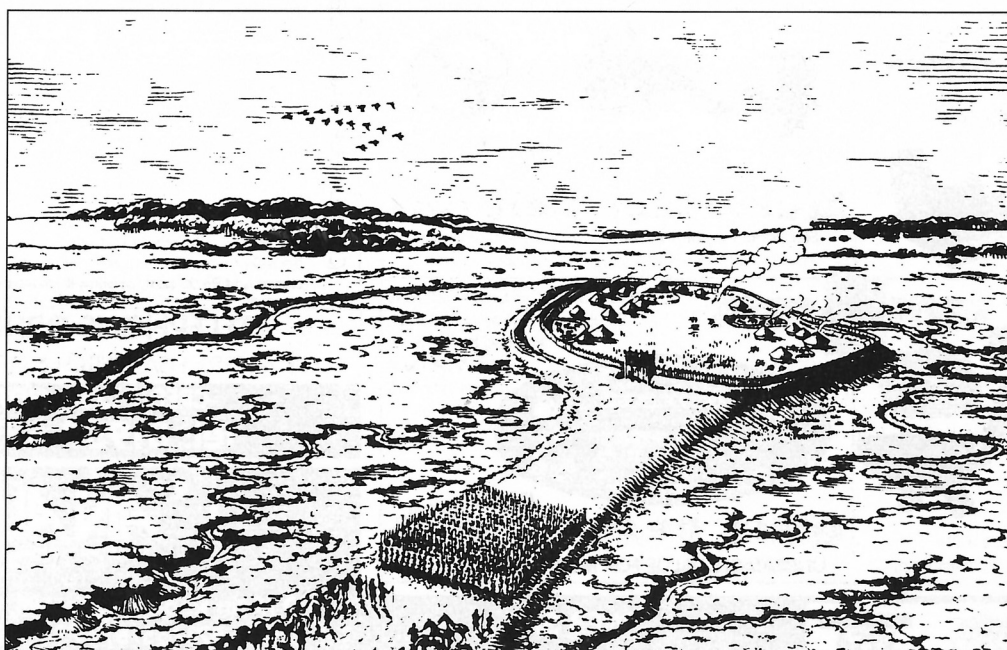


Fig.2. Boar-Horse silver unit, VA 657, from Burnham Market hoard.

post-conquest period tend to be restricted in the number of different coin types they contain; whereas the Burnham Market hoard displays a wide chronology, spanning the entire range of Ecenian silver coinage and including a Bury Diadem, Boar-Horse minims, a Cans Duro, and individual coins of the Corieltaui and Catuvellauni/Trinovantes tribes. Moreover, a number of the silver units are base or of poor silver, which again is unusual for a hoard of this period. In addition to coins, silver pellets and three unstruck silver coin flans have been found on the same site, which might suggest that some coins were minted there.

The two most important coins in the Burnham Market hoard are of Prasutagus, a "client king" of the Ecenii,

Fig.3. Roman soldiers attacking Holkham Camp, Norfolk, to end the Ecenian rebellion of AD 47. Drawing by Susan White.



THE BURNHAM MARKET CELTIC HOARD

one of the few Celtic leaders who was allowed to retain his sovereignty after the Roman invasion, albeit in a limited capacity.

In order to protect his estates and property King Prasutagus named the emperor Nero as co-heir along with his own two daughters. His foresight proved futile. When Prasutagus died in AD 60 the financial management of Britain was being handled by the procurator, Catus Decianus. His administrators raided the Eцени, abusing them as they would a tribe that had been defeated in battle and obliged to capitulate, which was not the case with the pro-Roman Eцени. Land held by Eцени nobles was confiscated and the owners evicted. Queen Boudica, the widow of King Prasutagus, was flogged and her two daughters were raped. This unjust plunder of Eцени territory and wealth led to the Boudican revolt of AD 60-61 and the end of the client kingdom of the Eцени.

The pro-Roman character of King Prasutagus can be seen in the two coins found near Burnham Market. The Roman-style bust of Prasutagus is clearly copied from coins of Caligula or Claudius (not Nero, as some say) and



Fig.4. Face-Horse silver unit, VA 790, from Burnham Market hoard.



Fig.5. Prasutagus silver unit, VA 780, from Burnham Market hoard. Photo by Norwich Castle Museum.

the inscription on both sides of the coin is in Latin. It reads ESICO FECIT SVB RI PRASTO and means "made by Esico under King Prasto".

It is generally agreed that "Prasto" is an abbreviation of Prasutagus, that "ri" is short for ricon, a Celtic word for king, and that Esico was his mint-master or die-cutter. Less certain is the date of issue. Robert Van Arsdell, author of *Celtic Coinage of Britain* (Spink 1989), gives a date of AD 50-60, but it could well have been earlier, possibly just prior to the Claudian invasion of AD 43. If the Burnham Market hoard was indeed deposited in AD 47, then these rare coins of King Prasutagus must have been made in the same year or some time before.

The Burnham Market hoard had been scattered over a considerable area, was recovered by metal detectorists working closely with Norfolk archaeologists and was declared Treasure, following the introduction of the Treasure Act (1996). The majority of the coins, including rarities such as Prasutagus, have been acquired by Norwich Castle Museum. Others have been purchased by Chris Rudd, the Norfolk dealer who specialises in Celtic coins.

RED HEAT

Wishes you all a Merry Christmas

"To say that I was impressed would be a massive understatement, so much so, that my wife insisted on one for herself!

We can both honestly say that the Mk11 has performed in a vastly superior way, on any site we've tried than any other detector we've ever used!

It's ability to locate the tiniest coins at truly amazing depth on even rough plough, has to be experienced to be believed. This excellent performance, coupled with it's extreme lightness and perfect balance make it as far as I'm concerned, the finest detector available at any price!"

Barry Sherlock Devon



"I feel sorry for anybody who has not acquired one of these machines. The more you use it the better it gets, it's a phenomenal machine"

Mick Freeman

Price £400-00

"I have been detecting since 1968, but have never had a machine as sensitive as this before."

A Palmer.

Be the leader in your field and own a Red Heat
For more information call 0171-639-1439