

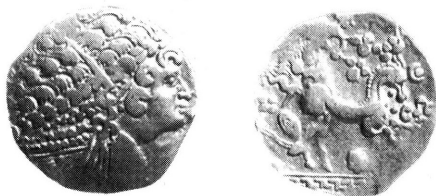
The earliest British coins: dating the undated.

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The earliest coins found in Britain in any quantity are gold staters and quarter staters imported from north-eastern France and Belgium. Until recently, it was thought that there were two main series: Gallo-Belgic A, the 'Apollo head' type, and Gallo-Belgic B, the 'defaced die' and 'crossed lines' types, and that these came over at different times during the second century BC. The reason for their appearance in this country has always been a mystery. Derek Allen thought that they were brought by Belgic immigrants, who Caesar says 'came to plunder and stayed to till the soil', and Van Arsdell has suggested that they came over in the course of trade. My own work indicates a very different reason, one which holds out the hope that we may be able to date them for the first time.

Three Gallo-Belgic series

It is now clear that there are not two early series, but three: Gallo-Belgic A comes in two varieties, one with the head and horse facing right (Aa) and another with head and horse left (Ab). Both had been thought to have been issued by the Ambiani, a wealthy tribe who lived in



1. Apollo head stater, Gallo-Belgic Aa



2. Defaced die stater, Gallo-Belgic B

the Somme valley around Amiens. However, it is now clear that although the left-facing coins start out almost as mirror images of the right-facing ones the two series diverge over time and are separate issues. The right-facing series was quite brief, and soon changed to a small flan type (Gallo-Belgic Ca), but the left-facing coinage was a much longer one that overlapped with the first half of the small flan series. Its distribution suggests that

it was struck by the Bellovaci, a powerful and warlike people who lived around modern Beauvais; it was succeeded by a newly identified variety of the small flan type (Gallo-Belgic Cb) which is found mainly in the Beauvais area. The defaced die and crossed lines types should also be re-attributed: they were thought to have been struck by the Caleti, a little-known people near the mouth of the Seine, but recent discoveries favour an origin around the French/Belgian border in a region occupied by the Nervii, described by Caesar as being the fiercest of the Belgic tribes.



3. Late Bellovaci stater, Gallo-Belgic Ab



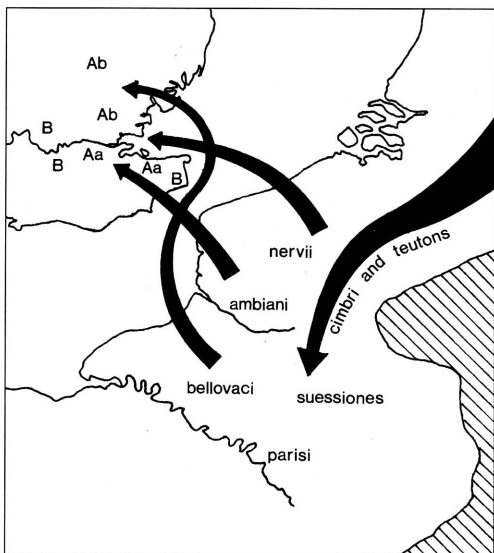
4. Small flan stater, Gallo-Belgic Ca

It now seems that not only were Gallo-Belgic Aa, Ab and B struck by three rich and powerful tribes but that all three series began at about the same time. The earliest classes of left- and right-facing Apollo head stater are synchronised and change type together, suggesting two parallel coinages. The defaced die staters copy an unusual geometric step pattern seen on the reverse of early right-facing staters and are struck to the same weight and fineness. Gallo-Belgic B, like Aa, was a relatively brief series: three-quarters of the known dies are interlinked and there are signs of very hurried production. Not only do three major tribes start striking similar coins at about the same time, each one immediately exports a large proportion to Britain, a country with little or no previous history of coin use. All of these things together suggest that a single event lay behind their issue. We know that all three series were struck sometime between c. 150 and c. 80 BC, and within this time only one event of sufficient magnitude is recorded. In 113 BC, the Cimbri and Teutons broke out of their north German homelands and for the next decade or more ravaged western Europe in

general, and Gaul in particular, until their final defeat by Rome in 101 BC. Caesar, writing fifty years later, makes a very significant comment about these Germanic invasions: he says that of all the Gaulish people, only the Belgae were able to exclude the Cimbri and Teutons from their territory.

Paying Britons to fight Germans

This is a clue to the likely function of the earliest Gallo-Belgic coins found in Britain. The use of gold coins to pay mercenaries is well documented in the ancient world, and the first Gaulish coins imitate Greek issues brought back as mercenary pay; Celtic coinage seems to have started when local tribes in turn needed to finance their own wars. This suggests that Gallo-Belgic Aa, Ab and B may have been struck by a loose confederation of Belgic tribes to pay troops, including British mercenaries, to fight against the Germans. The three tribes may each have obtained help from a different British tribe or tribes,



5. Coinage of the Germanic invasion period, c.115-100 BC

as shown on the map: a concentration of early left-facing staters in Essex and Suffolk, for example, suggests that the Trinovantes supplied mercenaries to the Bellovaci. These differences may reflect tribal links between Britain and Gaul still remaining from the earlier period of Belgic settlement described by Caesar. We should be careful about attaching dates that are too precise to the first Gallo-Belgic issues, but it seems reasonable to suggest that, if they do relate to the Germanic invasions, the bulk of Gallo-Belgic Aa and B should date from c. 115 to c. 100 BC along with at least the earlier half of Ab, the left-facing coinage.

Expansion of King Diviciacus

Some of the Belgic tribes would have been left weakened by the attacks of the Cimbri and Teutons, and this may help to explain why in the early decades of the first century BC the Suessiones around Soissons under their king, Diviciacus, were able to expand into northern Gaul and even south-eastern England. Caesar comments that Diviciacus was at one point the most powerful ruler in Gaul and that he held sway over part of Britain, probably Kent, as well as much of Belgic Gaul. To control Kent Diviciacus would first have needed to conquer his northern neighbours, the Ambiani, to give access to the Channel ports. Near the middle of the small flan Ambiani series there is one issue, Scheers class 3, that entered Kent in such large quantities that it seems to have passed into circulation there, and the most likely explanation for its sudden appearance is that the Ambiani were using Kentish mercenaries to defend themselves against the Suessiones. Class 3 can be roughly dated on numismatic grounds to c.85-75 BC, which would fit Caesar's statement that Diviciacus ruled 'within our memory', meaning his own memory. The large flan Bellovaci series may have ended at about the same time as the class 3 small flan staters: the final issue of Gallo-Belgic Ab, Scheers class 8d, is common in south-east England suggesting that the Bellovaci were again at war, possibly with the Suessiones.



6. Kentish A stater



7. Kentish A quarter stater

The presence of Kentish mercenaries in Gaul would explain why Diviciacus turned his attention to Britain. Like Caesar a generation later, who invaded Britain partly to stop the Belgae receiving help from abroad, he may have wanted to halt the supply of mercenaries across the Channel. If he did indeed rule over Kent for a period it would explain why it is here that the first British gold coinage was minted, a series of staters and quarter staters modelled on Gallo-Belgic C and on the 'boat type' quarters, Gallo-Belgic D. The staters have decorative flourishes not present on the continental prototype: a rosette around the 'coffee bean' motif on the reverse, occasionally with a serpent-like animal above the horse and a whorl added to the obverse. The quarters similarly have a rosette next to the obverse boar rather than a pellet.

We may never know exactly when or why this important series was struck, but the staters at least may have been issued by the Cantii to finance resistance to Diviciacus. Although based on class 3 of Gallo-Belgic C, they postdate it and may belong to the later 70's and 60's BC, while the quarters appear to have continued into the Gallic Wars; both may have circulated alongside Thurrock type potins, the earliest base metal coinage of Kent. The transition from the heavy Thurrock type to the lighter class 1 potins may have happened at the start of the Gallic Wars as copper became needed for military equipment.

Galic Wars and Westerham staters

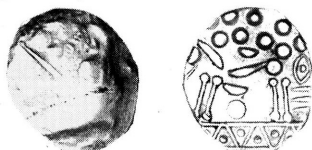
The Gallic Wars, which began in 58 BC when Caesar invaded Gaul, seem to have kick-started coinage over much of south-eastern England. Several of the Belgic tribes appear to have issued a common currency, the uniface staters of the Ambiani (Gallo-Belgic E) to finance their campaigns, and enormous numbers were used to buy British help. The first three classes of Gallo-Belgic E are often found in Britain hoarded together and in near-mint condition, a sign that they were struck in rapid succession and entered the country together. It seems from this that they were the coinage of the first Belgic coalition of 58/7 BC; class 4 has a more restricted distribution than earlier types and must postdate the Belgic defeats of 57 BC.



8. Gallic War stater, Gallo-Belgic E



9. Ingoldisthorpe stater, British A0: Catuvellauni



10. Westerham stater, British A1: Catuvellauni



11. Ingoldisthorpe stater, British A3: Icenii



12. Westerham stater, British A4: Icenii

A newly discovered stater coinage found north of the Thames, the Ingoldisthorpe type (British A0 and A3), imitates Gallo-Belgic C but copies motifs from class 4 of Gallo-Belgic E as well as from other Gallic War series. It is the prototype for the Westerham stater (British A1 and A4), which means that both types are unlikely to predate the mid 50's BC. Both the Ingoldisthorpe and Westerham types were struck in parallel at two mints, one in Catuvellaunian territory producing British A0 and A1 and the other possibly in the territory of the Icenii, issuing A3 and A4. The Catuvellaunian issues were minted at great speed, mostly from a single obverse die, and have all the hallmarks of an emergency coinage. At the same time the Trinovantes in Essex and southern Suffolk suddenly replaced their own distinctive coinage, the early Clacton type (British G), with a short-lived Westerham-style issue (British F, the late Clacton type), again struck from only one obverse die; south of the Thames, the Atrebatas issued a fourth Westerham type coinage, British A2.



13. Early Clacton stater, British G: Trinovantes



14. Late Clacton stater, British F: Trinovantes

All these issues seem to have appeared at about the same time and to have been of very limited duration, and the most likely explanation is that they are related in some way to the massive second Roman invasion of Britain in 54 BC. This involved the largest single movement of ships and men across the Channel until the first world war, and Caesar records that he was faced by a coalition of British tribes led by Cassivellaunus, whose territory was immediately north of the Thames some seventy miles from the sea. From this description it is clear that he ruled over the Catuvellauni, issuers of the first and largest Westerham coinage, and it is probable that all four Westerham style issues were struck under the authority of Cassivellaunus and are the coinage of the

British coalition against Caesar. The Icenii, who Caesar calls the Cenimagni, are recorded as surrendering to Rome in 54 BC and we may now have a wartime coinage associated with them. Caesar also notes that before the second invasion Cassivellaunus killed the king of the Trinovantes, forcing his son Mandubracius to flee to Gaul, and again we now have coin evidence that fits the historical record exactly, with intrusive Westerham style staters replacing the local early Clacton type.



15. Westerham stater, British A2: Atrebatres



16. Whaddon Chase stater, British La



17. Atrebatric abstract stater, British Qa

After 54 BC, much finer types appear, struck to uniform standards of weight and fineness. The Catuvellauni strike the Whaddon Chase coinage (British La), while at the same time the Atrebatres issue the Atrebatric abstract type (British Qa/b); both types were found together in the great Whaddon Chase hoard of 1849. Varieties of British Qa once thought to predate Whaddon Chase (eg VA 210-1) are now known to belong to a new continental series, Gallo-Belgic G, on which the Atrebatric abstract staters and quarters are based. The Whaddon Chase type seems to have been struck in three roughly equal blocks, and it is possible that these represent annual episodes of production.

Paying taxes to Rome

Shortly before he left Britain Caesar imposed an annual tribute on the people of Britain, although the treaty terms make it clear that it was to be paid through Cassivellaunus. The tax is likely therefore to have been paid mainly or partly in Whaddon Chase staters; it is unlikely that it was paid after Caesar left Gaul in 51 BC, which fits the three bursts of minting exactly and gives a date of 53 to 51 BC for the bulk of British La.

A letter written by Quintus Cicero confirms that tribute was imposed and we can assume that Caesar would not have mentioned the tax if it was never paid. There is evidence of rapid production in the Atrebatric abstract type at exactly the same time as the Whaddon Chase series: the first obverse die of British Qa is used until it wears flat, and thereafter the coinage becomes uniface for a short period (British Qb) before reverting to its original form. A third contemporary coinage, the Chute type (British B), was minted in large quantities by the Durotriges in either two or three brief episodes. Several other tribal coinages appear in the immediate aftermath of the invasion: the Corieltauvi start striking north-east coast type staters (British H and I) at two separate mints, the Norfolk wolf series begins (British J), the Trinovantes issue a Whaddon Chase style coinage (VA 1498-1 to 1502-1), the Belgae a derivative of the Chute type (VA 1210-1) and the Regni a fusion of the Atrebatric abstract type and Gallo-Belgic F, the Gallic War coinage of the Suessiones. The Cantii seem to have continued using class 4 of Gallo-Belgic E as currency, but soon issue their own small-scale coinage: they may have been in temporary disarray after taking the brunt of two successive invasions.

Within a few years of the second invasion, then, between eight and ten mints are operating compared to perhaps one or two before the first invasion. What seems to have happened is that after 54 BC Cassivellaunus was forced to pay tribute to avoid the (to him) very real threat that a third invasion would bring with it a full-scale Roman occupation. He has, nevertheless, fought the Romans almost to a standstill and is, as later Welsh annals attest, a heroic figure, the stuff of future legend. In settlement, and in order to be able to pay the Roman demands, he in turn exacts tribute from as many of the British tribes as possible, and a massive amount of bullion is coined in a short space of time. The combined mintage of the Whaddon Chase, Atrebatric abstract and Chute types alone was probably between one and two million staters, and the Durotriges seem to have exhausted virtually their entire gold reserves, for they never again strike a gold coinage. In addition, the different tribes all have liabilities to their own troops which must be settled, and the effect of all this is that gold coinage is produced in such quantity across southern Britain that it is propelled into circulation even in regions with little previous history of coin use such as Lincolnshire and Dorset. Coinage barely spreads outside these areas and on the eve of the Roman conquest in 43 AD the map of coin-using Britain still reflects the British alliance of almost a century earlier.

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