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# New coin confirms old king—or was he a queen?



1. Bronze core of Inamnn stater found in 1862 (enlarged)



2. Silver unit of Inamnn found March 12, 2006

**T**HE recent discovery of a unique Iron Age coin in Gloucestershire may solve a 144 year old mystery but, at the same time, poses new puzzles.

In 1862 a bronze coin with a beautiful green patina was found at the Iron Age hill fort of Hod Hill in Dorset. It was acquired by Sir John Evans, author of *The Coins of the Ancient Britons*, and is now in the British Museum. Evans correctly concluded that it was the core of a gold-plated stater of the Dobunni tribe—a contemporary forgery, made to deceive the unwary—but he was unsure of the inscription. In 1864 he wrote: “The legend appears to be INMA, or INAM, or INARA...INARA is the preferable reading, though we must await further discoveries before this point can be established”.

It has been a long wait—almost a century and a half. On Sunday, March 12 this year, a metal detectorist unearthed a silver coin of the Dobunni near Cirencester, Gloucestershire. Struck sometime around AD 0–20, probably at the *oppidum* of Bagendon where fragments of over a 100 coin moulds have been found, it shows a stylised “moon-head” on one side and a three-tailed horse on the other, and is clearly inscribed INAMN, with a phallic letter I tied to the letter N above the horse.

*Inamnn* is unparalleled as a personal name in Britain and Gaul, and is almost certainly the first part of a fuller name such as *Inamnos* or *Inamnamentos*. Or it might be an abbreviation of a female name such as *Inamna* or *Inamnandua*. We automatically, and maybe foolishly, assume that all the personal names we see on Iron Age coins are masculine, not feminine. Ancient British history does not warrant such an assumption. Boudica was Queen of the Eborac and Cartimandua was Queen of the Brigantes. If *Inamnn* was indeed a woman, this might explain the presence of the

enigmatic and most unusual phallic letter at the beginning of her name. In much the same way that Margaret Thatcher was often considered more manly than the males in her cabinet, so too the engraver of this coin might have been making a wry comment on the virility of his queen.

Who was *Inamnn*? When and where did he or she rule? And why was his or her reign apparently so short? We don’t know and maybe never will. What is beyond doubt is the exceptional rarity of the coins of *Inamnn*. Only two are known for certain: the bronze stater core found in 1862 and the silver unit found this year. A gold stater of *Inamnn* was rumoured to have been found at Bisley, Gloucestershire, in 1992 and sold to a London dealer, but the report was never confirmed and the stater has never been seen. Therefore the 2006 find could well be only the second coin of *Inamnn* to have surfaced, which makes its discovery all the more significant.

The *Inamnn* silver coin was found on farmland near Cirencester by a 38 year old business manager who wishes to remain anonymous. It was reported to the local finds liaison officer, Kurt Adams—another success for the Portable Antiquities Scheme—and to Dr Philip de Jersey of the Celtic Coin Index, Oxford. The coin is due to be auctioned by Chris Rudd in July and is expected to fetch in excess of £2,000.

Archaeologist Dr Alison Brookes of the Corinium Museum, Cirencester, says: “What a fantastic and interesting find!” Dr Paul Robinson, Curator of Wiltshire Heritage Museum, Devizes, says, “The new *Inamnn* silver unit is an amazing and fascinating coin and is helping to throw the typology of the Dobunnic silver series, as we thought we knew it, into disarray. I am impressed by the quality of the design and the highly unusual way that the name is set out. I think we shall soon be seeing a radical re-evaluation of the status and history of the Dobunni”.

Picture credits: 1. Based on engraving by F.W.Fairholt, 1864. 2. Photo by E.Cottam © Chris Rudd.  
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