

# Lost Puppy Found

How a rare new coin restored the long lost name of an Iron Age British king, revealing who his grandfather was and confirming a radical revision of how we think his tribe was governed.

Last year, a rare gold stater was found by a detectorist in the Mansfield area of Nottinghamshire. Struck sometime around AD 30-40 in Lincolnshire, heartland of the Corieltavi ('Army of Litavis'), this coin is important because it reveals, at least partially, the full name of the ruler who issued it – a name that has been lost for the last two thousand years. This coin is also important because it appears to tell us the name of the ruler's grandfather, or at least the first part of it. Moreover, this rare new coin (a type I've never seen before, although I've heard that a couple of other examples exist) causes us to question other names on other Corieltavian coins and, as a result of this questioning, to thoroughly reconsider how the Corieltavi were ruled.

## The Coin's Inscription

The first part of the inscription clearly says VEPO, a name known to numismatists for over a hundred and fifty years. It means 'voice, word, speech'. The second part of the inscription, the part before and under the horse, is difficult to decipher because only the first letter, C, and the last two letters, OS, are clearly visible. However there are other silver coins of the Corieltavi inscribed CATVS CNAVO (ABC 1944) and CVTAS CNAVO (ABC 1947), so I realised that the second part of our inscription was CNAVOS. What's more, the left-leaning letter N on the CATVS and CVTAS coins indicates to me that there is meant to be a letter V



The unpublished Vepocunavos gold stater, c.AD 30-40, found near Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, sold at auction on the 17th May for £4,800. (© Chris Rudd)

between the C and the N, spelling CVN 'dog' and that the second part of our inscription should therefore be read as CVNAVOS. So what does it mean?

## CUNAVOS

At first, I naively thought CVNAVOS meant 'river-dog' or 'water-dog' – in other words Celtic for 'otter' (the

Welsh for 'otter' is dyfrgi 'water-dog'). Feeling pleased with myself, I told Dr Daphne Nash Briggs, who wrote *Coinage in the Celtic World*, a classic guide to the series that's been popular with collectors and scholars for the last 33 years. She suggested that we consult Dr Thomas Markey, the talented American linguist. I'm glad we did.

## Whelp or Puppy Grandson?

He gently rejected my amateur 'river-dog' theory, confirmed that VEPO meant 'word, voice, to speak' and, much to my delight, suggested that CVNAVOS meant 'puppy grandson' or 'grandson whelp' and concluded that Vepocunavos seemingly signified 'Vepo's puppy grandson' or 'Vepo's whelp grandson' or similar. Dr Markey's interpretation of Vepocunavos as 'Vepo's puppy grandson' is significant to our understanding of the Corieltavi and their coins for the following reasons:

Having been aware for many years that the father of Vepocunavos was called Cor-, because the inscription COR F means 'son (Latin *filius*) of Cor', we now know that his grandfather was almost certainly called Vepo-.

We now also know that Corieltavian coins inscribed VEP, VEPO and VEPOC were issued by his grandson, not by old Vepo himself, in the same

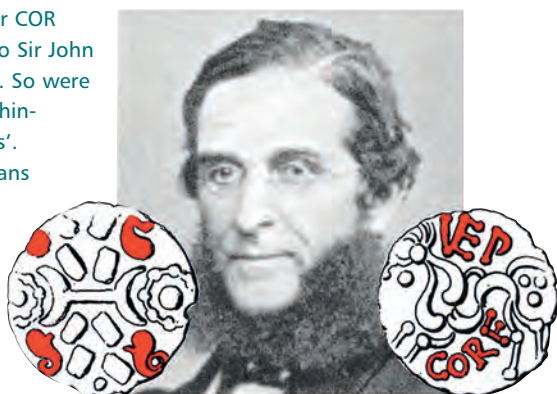


The left-leaning N on Catuscunavos coins (ABC 1944, 1947) helped me to see the 'hidden' V in C[V]NAVOS which means 'puppy grandson'. (© Chris Rudd)

VEP and father COR were known to Sir John Evans in 1864. So were the four 'dolphin-shaped figures'.

(Photo of J.Evans c.1865)

© Ashmolean Museum.  
Coin: Paul Sellier  
1864/CR.)

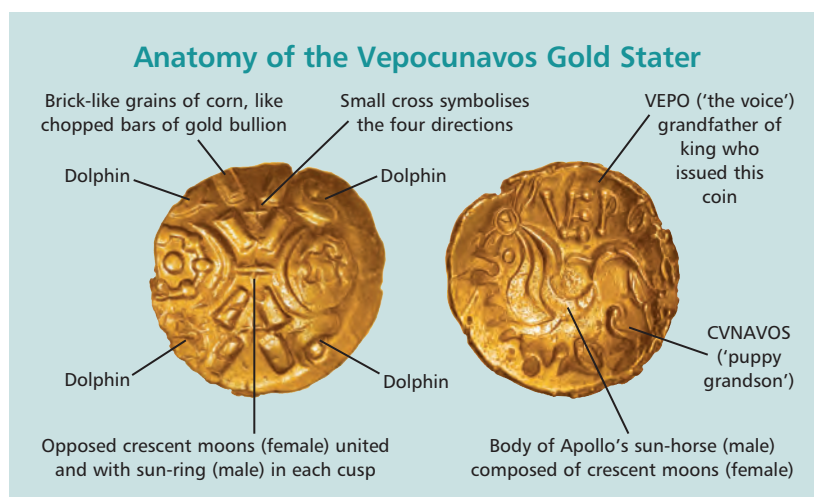


Like his fellow autocrat, The Hound of Belenus (Cunobelin), Vepo's Puppy Grandson was a powerful ancestral sword-swinging British warrior-king, not a peaceful democratic French poodle magistrate. (Jane Bottomley © Chris Rudd)





British hunting dogs (Celtic *cuno*, 'dog'), like this bronze deer-hound from Lydney, Glos, were highly prized at home and abroad. Hence dog-names like Vepocunavos and dog-coins like (I.to r.) ABC 1328, 2846 and 2951. (Coins © Chris Rudd. Dog courtesy Lord Bledisloe, Lydney Park Estate)



Linking the crescents might imply a tribal or dynastic alliance. Dolphins might suggest maritime prowess. The 'owl eyes' are surely deliberate (cf. ABC 1875, 1884, 1893, 1917, 1920, 1923, 1941), evoking the cry of a fierce bird of prey (Vepo means 'voice'). (© Chris Rudd)

way that we know that coins inscribed COM F weren't struck by Commios and coins inscribed TASC F weren't struck by Tasciovanos.

Having previously wondered if father Cor- issued any earlier uninscribed coins of the Corieltavi (some South Ferriby types?), we may now reasonably ask if grandfather Vepo- also struck any even earlier types (like some North East Coast gold staters and Boar Horse silver units?).

We now know that -c[o]mes is highly unlikely to have been the

second part of Vepo's name, as we speculated ten years ago in *Ancient British Coins* (see p.96 and our note under ABC 1869, p.97).

If Vepocunavos can be interpreted as 'Vepo's puppy grandson' – I'm convinced it can, thanks to Dr Markey – then I think we can now read the split inscription CATVS-CNAVO (see ABC 1947) as a single name, Catascunavos, and interpret it as 'puppy grandson of Catus (the warrior)'.

We can now also speculate that grandad Catus may have been the



Vepocunavos gold staters may have been inspired by staters of Tasciovanos (ABC 2550-74) and his son Cunobelin (especially ABC 2774 which has a small cross). (© Chris Rudd)



Vepo-, grandfather of Vepocunavos, may have minted some North East Coast gold staters, c.60-50 BC (ABC 1716-40), but which ones? (© Chris Rudd)



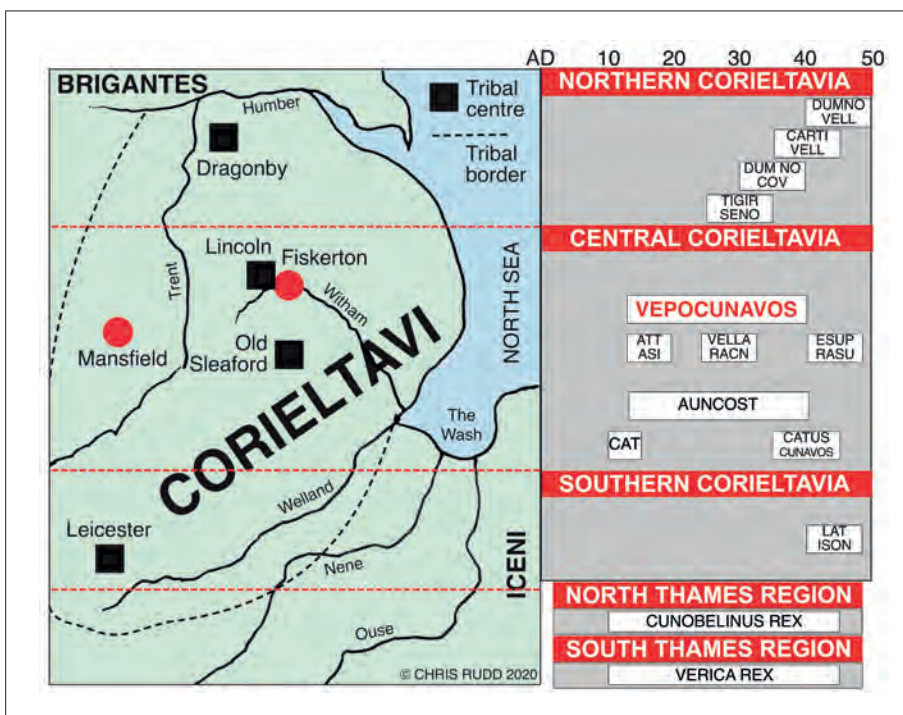
Cor-, father of Vepocunavos, may have minted some South Ferriby gold staters, c.45-10 BC (ABC 1743-61), but which ones? (© Chris Rudd)



The lunate horse echoes ancient Corieltavian moon rituals. Wooden posts at Fiskerton, Lincs, were replaced in 457 and 447 BC, coinciding with total lunar eclipses, as did later reconstructions at Fiskerton. (Horse: Jane Bottomley © Chris Rudd. Fiskerton excavation photo: Naomi Field / Michael Parker Pearson, archaeologydataservice.ac.uk)



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Veopocunavos was arguably the strongest and longest-reigning king of the Corieltavi, c.AD15-40. 'Top dog' from the Humber to the Wash, from the Trent to the North Sea, with his power-base probably around Lincoln (Celtic Lindo 'lake'), Fiskerton and the sacred river Witham. (© Chris Rudd)

Latison- or Latisom- (perhaps Latisomos or Latisomullos?); TIGIR and SENO become Tigirseno[s]; VELLA and RACN become Vellarac[u]n.

Uniting these previously divided names means that we can now finally dynamite Derek Allen's idea that the Corieltavi had abandoned kingship and were ruled by pairs of magistrates (*The Coins of the Coritani*, The British Academy, 1963, pp.30-32). Looking at the coins of the Corieltavi, especially those whose inscriptions seem to imply a dynastic father-son or grandfather-son relationship, I'd say this tribe was ruled by good old fashioned British kings, just like the tribes north and south of the Thames. The only difference, as far as I can tell, is that, unlike some later rulers of the Catuvellauni, Trinovantes, Atrebates, Regni and Dobunni, the rulers of the Corieltavi didn't inscribe their coins with regal titles such as REX, RIG, RIGV or RIGON. But this doesn't mean they didn't think like kings, rule like kings or mint money like kings.

Now that we've 'assassinated' almost half the number of former rulers of the Corieltavi and finally 'massacred' all of Derek Allen's magistrates (sorry guys, but your demise was long overdue), we can see more clearly who was ruling where and when in the East Midlands. Thanks to the pioneering work of Geoff Cottam in the 1990s, later affirmed by Dr Ian Leins in 2007, and by the authors of *Ancient British Coins* in 2010, we're now convinced that there were three major series of inscribed coinage in what we

man who minted what might be the Corieltavi's earliest inscribed coin, an extremely rare boar / horse silver unit with CAT engraved backwards, ABC 1845. We can now also be pretty certain that Vepo- and -cunavos aren't two separate names and that grandpa Vepo- also had another part to his name, because the great Gallic etymologist Dr Xavier Delamarre cites a number of vep-type names – Acincovepus, Vepogenus, Vepomulus, Vepotali, Vipodualis, Togivepus, Veponius, Vepia, Vepitta, Vepolitinos – most of which are long, multisyllabic names, the sort of lengthy names that British rulers seem to have liked. (*Dictionnaire de la Langue Gauloise*, 2nd ed., 2003, p.313-314.)

Now, with greater confidence than before, we can probably unite other split inscriptions on other Corieltavian coins – split inscriptions that have previously been seen as two different

personal names, not one. For example, ATT and AS become Attas- (perhaps Attassatios, Attasedo- or Attassu-?); AVN and COST become Auncost- (perhaps Aunicosticos?); ESPV and RASV become Esuprasu- (perhaps Esuprasutagus?); LAT and ISON become



One of the Gaulish coins (LT 7159) that led Derek Allen (1910-75) to think that the Corieltavi were ruled by pairs of magistrates. (Photo of D. Allen © British Museum. Coin: Léon Dardel 1892)



Veopocunavos was contemporary with King Cunobelin (© Chris Rudd), King Verica (© Chris Rudd), Emperor Claudius (© Numista.com) and Jesus – some say he taught reincarnation, as did the Druids (© Gorny & Mosch 10.3.2020, lot 1517).

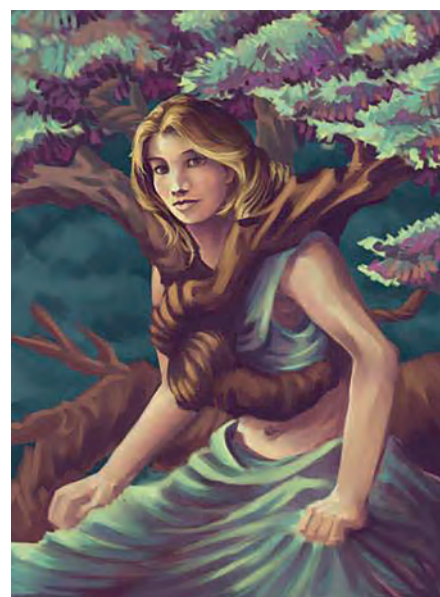


Dedicatory inscription 'To Big-Muscles Mars and Litavis', Narbonne, S France. Was she paired with a war-god in Corieltavia? (Wikipedia)



Is Litavis lurking behind any or all of these faces on coins of the Corieltavi? Or behind the 'eyes' of the Vepocunavos gold stater? (Jane Bottomley © Chris Rudd)

Vepocunavos may have revered Litavis '(goddess of the) Land' who gave her name to the Corieltavi says Professor John Koch. (goddesses-and-gods.blogspot.com/2008/01/litavis.html)



might call 'Corieltavia', much of it overlapping in time and space.

At the central core of Corieltavia we have Series 1 (Vepocunavos and Esuprasu) and Series 2 (Auncost and Latison, the latter probably being a minor ruler with a southern bias to his coins) and to the north of Corieltavia, around the Humber, we have Series

3 (Tigirseno, Dumnocoveros, Cartivel-launos and Dumnovellaunos); I believe that Series 3 coins were issued by rulers of Brigantian origin.

Almost all of the above is a matter of opinion, not fact. Much will hopefully be clarified by Geoff Cottam's forthcoming masterwork, *The Inscribed Coinage of the Corieltavi*. For their help

I thank Dr Thomas Markey, Dr Daphne Nash Briggs and Elizabeth Cottam. The Vepocunavos gold stater found near Mansfield sold at auction on the 17th May for £4,800.

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