

Caratacus Strikes Gold



Figs. 1a & b. A gold stater inscribed [C] VNO CARAT, the first recorded gold coin of Caratacus. CVNO attests that his father was Cunobelinus. Found near Newbury, Berks.



Fig. 2. Caratacus, freedom fighter and best-known member of Britain's first famous royal family, here portrayed on a stained-glass window in Colchester town hall. His historical status as a powerful warrior-prince is confirmed by a newly found gold stater. (Courtesy Miranda Aldhouse-Green and Colchester Borough Council)

Introduction

At precisely 2pm on Sunday 10 November 2019, a detectorist found a unique Celtic gold coin (Figs. 1a & b) in a field near Newbury in Berkshire, in the former territory of the Atrebates. As soon as he got home he tried but failed to find it in *Ancient British Coins* (ABC) – which isn't surprising, because it isn't there.

So he wrote to my colleague Elizabeth Cottam and sent her images of the coin. She could hardly believe her eyes, neither could I when she showed me the photos. It was a gold stater of Caratacus (Fig. 2), the British 'freedom fighter', who had defied the forces of Rome for eight years, mostly in what is now Wales. More to the point, it was the first gold coin of Caratacus that anyone had seen for two thousand years. A gold coin of the highest rarity and therefore the highest importance, both historically as well as numismatically.

Significance in Terms of Rarity

My aim here is to explain the significance of this rare gold stater, to tell you a bit about Caratacus and, very briefly,



Fig. 4. The cavalryman on the Caratacus gold stater was inspired by this gold stater of Verica (ABC 1190) who fled to Claudius for help when Caratacus invaded his kingdom.



Fig. 5. The Caratacus silver unit (ABC 1376) is almost identical to Epaticcus's (ABC 1346). Like Alexander the Great, they both wear the lion skin headdress of Hercules.



Figs. 3a & b. The Caratacus gold stater closely copies that of his uncle Epaticcus (ABC 1343), unsung hero of the Catuvellaunian royal family. He captured Calleva before Caratacus did.

where the stater was unearthed. It is almost identical to the gold stater, ABC 1343, (Figs. 3a & b) issued previously by Caratacus' uncle, Epaticcus. The obverse shows CVNO (short for Cunobelinus, father of Caratacus, brother of Epaticcus) divided by a bushy ear of barley. On the reverse we see a naked, heavily muscled horseman, a javelin thrower to be more precise, charging into battle on a sturdy stallion. He seems to be riding bareback, his long legs almost touching the ground and he holds a large oval shield. The boldly engraved legend reads CARAT.

Could the naked cavalryman be Caratacus himself? (Like President Vladimir Putin – remember that photo of him sitting on a horse, stripped to the waist?) I think Caratacus wants to be seen as a tough guy, which is presumably why his main silver coin (ABC 1376), like his uncle's, shows



Fig. 6. Caratacus' boar's head minim (CR 139.15, £3600) mimics Epaticcus's (ABC 1370). CV links Caratacus to Cunobelinus like TA ties Epaticcus to his father Tasciovanos.



Fig.7. Caratacus issued three other silver coins, all very rare. CVN on ABC 2903 indicates that his father was Cunobelinus.

him posing as Hercules, the mythical 'Mr Muscle', in a lion skin head dress (Fig.5).

Further mimicry of Epaticcus's coinage can be seen in Caratacus' boar's head minims (Fig.6). Caratacus issued three other silver units, all of which are extremely rare (Fig.7).

Missing Link

The discovery of this previously unknown Caratacus gold stater is of colossal significance. Dr John Sills says, "The Caratacus stater is perhaps the most important single Iron Age coin ever found in this country being the only known gold coin of one of Britain's greatest resistance leaders." It's not just the extreme rarity of the coin, nor is it



Fig.8. A bronze coin depicting Cunobelinus (ABC 2957) who was the most powerful tribal ruler of his time in Atlantic Europe. After his death, Caratacus become his best-known son.

the international celebrity, both ancient and modern, of the man who struck the coin: Tacitus tells us that, "The reputation of Caratacus had spread beyond the islands and through the neighbouring provinces to Italy itself... Even at Rome his name meant something," (*Annals* 12.36). It's more than rarity, more than celebrity.

This newly discovered gold stater is crucially important because it provides irrefutable proof that the CARA named on silver coins (ABC 1376, 1379, and 1382) is one and the same person as the historical Caratacus cited by classical authors Cassius Dio, Suetonius and Tacitus, and by Welsh authors in the early middle ages.

For decades, cautious academics have cautioned us not to assume that the CARA we see on our silver coins is the Caratacus we see in our history books. They need worry no longer. At

a stroke their doubts have been dispelled by this gold stater. The CVNO is obviously patronymic, clearly indicating that the person named on the other side of the coin is the son of Cunobelinus, and the CARAT is obviously Caratacus. Who else could it possibly be? That letter T, absent on silver coins, is the clincher. A coin of Cunobelinus can be seen in Fig.8.

Caratacus the Man Himself

Who was Caratacus and what did he do to win international fame? A younger son of Cunobelinus, the most powerful potentate in pre-Roman Britain and grandson of Tasciovanos (Fig.9) of Verlamion (St Albans, Hertfordshire), king of the Catuvellauni. Interestingly, Tasciovanos may well have been known to the Emperor Augustus as he clearly attempted to copy a *denarius* issue of this emperor (Fig.10a & b).

Caratacus (Fig.11) may have been born around AD 10, perhaps shortly after his father had taken control of Camulodunon (Colchester, Essex).



Fig.9. Caratacus' grandfather was Tasciovanos. (Portrait of Tasciovanos © The British Museum)



Figs.10a & b. Tasciovanos was probably known to Augustus, whose silver *denarius* he copied with this silver unit (ABC 2643).



Fig.11. Caratacus was possibly a direct descendant of Cassivellaunos, commander of the British coalition against Caesar in 54 BC.



Figs.12a & b. It could very well be Cassivellaunos portrayed on this silver unit, c.50-40 BC (ABC 2478).

Fig.13. Caratacus' invasion of the Atrebates caused Verica (ABC 1310) to flee to Claudius, who invaded Britain in AD 43.

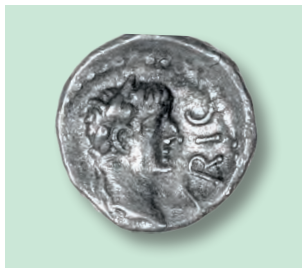


Fig.14. Claudius' triumphal invasion of Britain is celebrated with this DE BRITANN reverse design aureus and by naming his son Britannicus. (Courtesy of Martin Henig, photo Ralph Merrifield)



Caratacus grew up in what was undoubtedly Britain's first famous royal family. The father of this family, Cunobelinus, was the strongest, wealthiest and most widely known tribal king of his time – the most powerful in Atlantic Europe, who personally controlled more land, more lives and more riches by AD 41 than any tribal leader west of the Rhine. The Roman historian Suetonius called him Britannorum Rex 'king of the Britons' (Caligula 44).

It is quite possible that Caratacus was a direct descendant of Cassivellaunos, commander of the British coalition against Caesar in 54 BC, who

is possibly depicted on a silver unit (Figs.12a & b).

Caratacus the Warrior

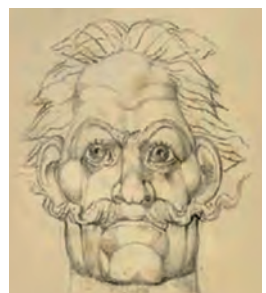
As a leading member of this Catuvellaunian royal family, well known for its expansion by aggression, prince Caratacus will surely have been well trained in the art of warfare. His uncle Epaticcus seems to have taken him under his wing. When Epaticcus died (or was killed) Caratacus succeeded him at Calleva, causing Verica (Fig.13), king of the Regini and Atrebates, to flee to the Roman emperor Claudius for help. This resulted in the Roman invasion of Britain in AD 43, celebrated on the reverse of the well-known aureus issue (Fig.14). Caratacus and his brother 'Togodumnus' (some of us think his real name was Dubno-) led the fight against the Roman invasion. After the death of 'Togodumnus', Caratacus retreated to the land of the Dobunni in the West Midlands, where the Catuvellauni had some influence, crossed the River Severn

and entered what is now Wales, where he commanded a remarkable guerrilla war against the Roman forces for eight years. The fact that Caratacus was over 100 miles from his powerbase at Calleva and over 200 miles from his hometown at Camulodunon and yet still managed to lead the resistance against Rome, first with the Silures of south Wales and then with Ordovices of north Wales, testifies to his skill as a military strategist and as a leader of men, even though he never won a single set-piece battle against the Romans.

Fig.15. Coin of Cunobelinus (ABC 2912), considered to be the first British statesman.



Fig.16. An artist's impression of Caratacus, who perhaps should be considered as the first great British commander. (Caratacus portrait by William Blake © The British Museum)



Agr

Caratacus

Amminus

Solidu

Dubn

Fig.17. Artist's impression of Caratacus and his brothers, each shield with motif from their coins. Cunobelinus probably had more children than those shown here. (Courtesy of Sue White).

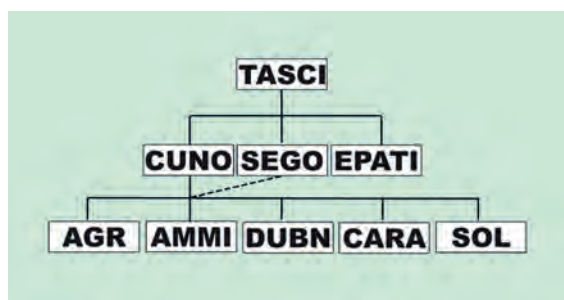


Fig.18. Diagram showing the speculative family tree of Britain's first famous royal family, based on recent coin finds rather than ancient authors. Amminius may have been Sego's son. Dubn was 'Togodumnus'.



Fig.19. A map showing where Caratacus and his brothers ruled, as suggested by distribution of coin finds. Arrows show approximate route of Caratacus' eight-year resistance campaign.

A Charismatic Commander

Caratacus must have been a charismatic commander, probably inspired and aided by the Druids throughout those eight years of hit-and-run campaigning. Dr Graham Webster says, "If Cunobeline (Fig.15) can be said to have been the first British statesman, Caratacus (Fig.16) was certainly the first great British commander." In view of what he achieved in Wales, a foreign country to this Catuvellaunian prince, and in view of his inspiring leadership of Welsh tribal leaders and their warriors for eight years, (longer than Caesar's Gallic War and longer than Hitler's World War Two), I'd call Caratacus the first 'Prince of Wales'.

However, his exit strategy from Wales wasn't smart. Caratacus sought aid in Yorkshire and, after being captured in AD 51 by Cartimandua, queen of the Brigantes of Northern England, he ended up in chains in Rome. He was due to be executed after a triumphal parade held to celebrate Claudius' conquest of Britain. However, Caratacus spoke so eloquently to the Senate, "If you preserve me safe and sound, I shall be an eternal example of your clemency," (Tacitus *Annals* 14.31) that his life was spared and he died a natural death sometime later, still in Rome.

Brothers

Now I'll quickly discuss Caratacus' brothers and supposed brothers (Fig.17). Sons and brothers in the royal

family of Cunobelinus didn't mean quite the same thing as they do in today's royal family of Windsor. Just because a British Celtic coin claims that so-and-so is the son of so-and-so doesn't necessarily mean that there was a biological father-son relationship, although I believe it often does mean exactly that. Guy de la Bédoyère says, "It is probably more accurate to regard the 'sons' of Cunobelinus as a mixture of men he had fathered by more than one woman, nephews, adopted sons, cousins and kin."

Cunobelinus probably sired many

sons and daughters during his long life. To clarify this complex family, I have included Fig.18 and to illustrate potential areas of rule Fig.19 is provided. I think that Caratacus had three or four brothers (or so-called brothers) who struck coins (Fig.20). Two of them, Amminius and 'Togodumnus', are known to history. So I'll deal with them first.

Suetonius says Amminius (misspelt 'Adminius') was a son of Cunobelinus who banished him shortly before Caligula's sham 'seashell' invasion of Britain (Caligula 44.2). Was he really Cuno's son? I doubt it. Dr John Sills argues that Amminius was a son of Sego, a former king in Kent and possible son of Tasciovanos (*Divided Kingdoms: The Iron Age gold coinage of southern England*, Chris Rudd 2017, p.785-6). Amminius ruled in Cantion (Kent) c.AD 10-40 (Figs.21a & b).

Cassius Dio says that 'Togodumnus' and Caratacus were sons of Cunobelinus, that they were defeated during the Roman invasion of AD 43 and that 'Togodumnus' died shortly afterwards (*Histories* 60.20, 21). Clearly 'Togodumnus' was a leading prince of the Catuvellauni, of equal if not greater status than his brother Caratacus. Yet, incredibly, not a single coin inscribed TOGO has ever been found and never will be. Why not? Because Dio, writing at least 160 years after AD 43, had got the name wrong, or his informant had, or later copyists had. This big booboo

	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	Camu
Agr	●	●	●	● C
Ammi		●	●	
Dubn	●			● C
Cara	●	●		
Sol		●		
'Togo'				

Fig.20. Only Agr, Dubn and Cara (Cuno's most senior sons) seem to have struck gold coins. No coins naming 'Togo' have been found, probably because there was no 'Togo'.

Fig.21a. Amminus, perhaps a son of Segos, who was banished from Britain by Cunobelinus.



Fig.21b. Amminus silver unit inscribed SIIC (Sego), found in Kent (CR 132.12, £13,200).

was first revealed by Rainer Kretz. He realised that the DVBN on two gold quarters (ABC 3008) (Figs.22 & 23) was the 'Togodumnus' of Dio (*Chris Rudd List* 86, p.2-4). His brilliant insight guarantees Kretz a high place in the numismatic hall of fame.

Other Brothers?

I believe that two other Catuvellaunian rulers, Agr and Solidu, known to us solely from their coins, were also brothers of Caratacus. Eight years ago, aided by good ideas from Robert Van Arsdell, Michael J Cuddeford, Dr Philip de Jersey, Guy de la Bédoyère and Dr John Sills, I concluded that Agr was an elder son of Cunobelinus, perhaps his heir apparent; his full name was probably Agricu 'war hound' (Sills' idea); he was the first of Cuno's sons to issue coins (ABC 2819, 2999, 3002, 3005) (Fig.24); he ruled briefly in Essex and Suffolk on behalf of his father (*Chris Rudd List* 124, p.2-8). Sills says that Agr may have acted as regent for his father if Cunobelinus had gone to Rome shortly after AD 14 to pay homage to Tiberius. Another good idea (*Divided Kingdoms*, p.757-8).

In 2002 I suggested that Solidu (ABC 474, 477) (Fig.25), Sol to his family and friends, was a younger son of Cunobelinus; that he took charge of the Thames estuary before his father died; and that he replaced his brother Amminus as king of the Cantiaci c.AD 40-43 (*Chris Rudd List* 66, p.4-7).



Figs.22a & b. Gold quarter stater (ABC 3008) struck by Dubn, believed to have been the historical 'Togodumnus' who died during the Roman invasion of AD 43.



Figs.24a & b. A silver unit (ABC 3005) shows a bitch attacking a snake, which makes me think Agr is short for Agricu 'war-hound'. Did he once act as Cuno's regent?

What the Royal Names Mean

Agr, probably Agricu 'war hound'
Amminus, not Adminius, 'friend'
Caratacus 'beloved leader'
Cartimandua 'sleek pony'
Cunobelinus 'hound of Belenus'
Dubn, probably Dubno ... 'deep, world'
Epaticcu 'horse commander'
Sego 'victorious, strong'
Solidu 'firm, enduring'
Tasciovanos 'killer of badgers'
Verica 'the high one'

As I mentioned at the beginning I would consider calling Caratacus the first 'Prince of Wales', however unlike the ancestors of Edward the Black

Figs.23a & b. Dubn may have issued this apparently posthumous gold stater of Cunobelinus (ABC 2804) while the succession was still in dispute, and perhaps other coins too (ABC 2801, 2822, 2825?).



Figs.25a & b. Solidu replaced Amminus as Cuno's king in Kent, where Rome's invasion forces landed in AD 43. This silver unit with Neptune (ABC 474) reflects the maritime importance of Kent and perhaps the naval prowess of Solidu.



Prince (Fig.26), who was made Prince of Wales in 1343, Caratacus fought for the Welsh, not against them. In addition, he was also British and not of Norman French extraction.

Auctioning of Numismatic History

This so far unique Caratacus gold stater will be sold in November in Aylsham, Norfolk. For their help, I thank Dr John Sills, Dr Daphne Nash Briggs, Dr Thomas Markey and Elizabeth Cottam.

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Fig.26. Effigy of Edward the Black Prince in Canterbury Cathedral. (Courtesy of Wikipedia)