

Le Câtillon Hoard

Olga Finch relates how a slight mishap while a ploughman was working in a Grouville field 50 years ago led to the discovery of one of the Island's most important archaeological treasures.



Fifty years ago a hoard of over 2,500 Celtic coins representing tribes in Armorica and Gaul, as well as southern Britain, unearthed on farmland at Le Câtillon, Grouville, became one of Jersey's most important archaeological finds.

The Le Câtillon Hoard was discovered on 22 January 1957 by 17-year old Peter Langlois while he was removing a boulder that had clipped his plough in a field in Grouville. The hoard consisted of over 2,500 coins and pieces of jewellery dating from the Late Iron Age (1st century BC).

The coins are of Armorican (modern-day Brittany and Normandy), Belgic and British origin, the majority being from the Coriosolitae tribe, who were based around Rance in the area of modern-day St Malo and Dinan. Other Gallic tribes were also represented, including the Osismii, Aulerici Cenomani, Abrincatui, Baiocasses and Redones, along with British tribes such as the Durotriges of Dorset.

Such a variety and geographical range of coins provides us with striking evidence of expanding trade networks between France and England at this time. The Channel Islands would have been convenient stopping places for ships along the route from Alet (St Malo) to Hengisbury (Dorset). This was a much-used trade route along which Mediterranean commodities such as wine were brought to the north in return for metals, corn, slaves and hunting dogs. The Channel Islands would certainly have benefited from this trade and enjoyed a share of some of the luxuries.

Few Iron Age sites have been discovered in Jersey, but we know that at this time the armies of Julius Caesar were advancing north-westwards through France, driving the tribal communities towards the coast. Some of them would have crossed the sea to Jersey, making it an offshore haven for refugees from Caesar's campaigns. The only safe way to store their wealth was to bury it in a secret place. If the owner died before recovering it, or if the landmark marking its position was destroyed, hoards like the Le Câtillon would have remained hidden, only to be discovered many centuries later.

The coins were hand-minted and would have required a considerable degree of technical and artistic skill to produce. A blank metal disc was placed on a concave obverse (front) die and struck with the convex reverse die. The die tended to be much bigger than the area of the blank, so that often only a part of the design shows on the resulting coin.

The designs of most Celtic coins were derived from the Greek coinage of Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. These showed the head of Apollo on one side and a horse, chariot and a rider on the other, and are believed to have reached Gaul as payment for mercenaries. The coins in the Le Câtillon Hoard bear abstract versions of these and exhibit a high expression of the Celtic art of the time. The most common symbols on the coins are the head, the horse (often depicted with a human head), the boar, the lyre (a stringed musical instrument associated with Apollo, the Greek god of music), the hampe, a vertical pole with a ring or torc at the top, a 'banner' symbol or vexillum (war standard) extending on a leash to the front of the horse, the chariot wheel, the sun and stars. All these symbols occupy prominent positions in Celtic iconography.

The hoard also contained pieces of jewellery, including fragments of a gold torque or arm-ring, silver and bronze fibulae (a brooch like a safety pin), one of which may have been an import from northern Italy or the Alpine area, a plaited silver chain and bronze rings, possibly from a belt.

The Le Câtillon Hoard is not only a major discovery for Jersey, but is exceptionally important in terms of European prehistory. The presence of about 20 coins minted by tribes from the south coast of England is unique in Jersey or French hoards and has made it possible for leading European Celtic coin experts to date the earliest British coins.

Unfortunately, after its discovery in 1957 the hoard was dispersed and most of it was sold on the international coin market. Over the years, however, the Société Jersiaise has managed to acquire parts of it, which are currently on display at La Hougue Bie Museum.

obverse = heads
reverse = tails

The Armorican Coins In addition to the tribes listed below, the Le Câtillon Hoard also contained coins from the Redones, Unelli, Veneti, Ambiani, Bituriges Cubi, Aedui and Volcae Arecomici.

Coriosolitae

Of the estimated 2,500 coins in the hoard, 2,279 were a type known as a stater, made from billon (an alloy of silver with a base metal). There were also 43 quarter-staters. These were produced by the Coriosolitae tribe. Apart from the several hoards found in Jersey, the distribution of Coriosolite coins tends to be concentrated around the gulf of St Malo, and continues further north through modern-day Normandy. This pattern has traditionally been interpreted as reflecting the retreat of the Coriosolitae after the defeat of the Armorican tribes by Caesar.

Coriosolite coinage can be divided into six classes, all closely related in style, with the head distinguished by elaborate hairstyles (rolls and curls) and differing facial features on the obverse. The reverse features a horse with either a boar or lyre motif beneath. The earlier coins featured a hampe above the horse, replaced in later coins by a vexillum in front of the horse's head on pearled cords, leading back to the charioteer.

XN Series

These billon (base silver) coins were traditionally linked to the Abrincatui tribe, who lived in the Avranches region, but they are also referred to as the XN series. Their distribution is limited to occasional single finds in Brittany as well as the Jersey coin hoards, including 53 staters and nine quarter-staters in the Le Câtillon Hoard. They are known to some collectors as the 'Jersey Moon stater', as the Island has been the source of the majority of these coins.

The obverse is characterised by a head in a distinct half-moon shape, and the four different classes of coin are differentiated by hairstyle and the triple-circle tattoo on the cheek. The reverse shows little variation, a human-headed horse, beneath which is a vertical lyre and usually two circles or stars. Above the horse is a hampe similar to that of the early Coriosolite coins and on some a boar standard in front.



Billon quarter staters of the Coriosolites tribe



Billon staters of the XN Series





Osismii

The Osismii tribe inhabited the Finistère area of western Brittany and produced an abundance of different types of coinage in the 1st century BC.

'Winged figure type'

The obverse has a typically stylised head to the right surrounded by beaded cordons, ending in small heads. The hair is formed of large horizontal rolls with a cross above. The reverse has a human-headed horse with a circle or beaded four-spoked wheel above the saddle. Below the horse is a winged figure holding a torque or closed ring.

'Boar type'

The obverse of this coin shows a stylised head facing right with a boar in the hair. There are small human heads on beaded cords in front of the boar and in front and behind the main head. Behind the cheek is a plain triangle. The reverse has a human-headed horse galloping, with a boar standard below and a small human head on a beaded cord (the whip) in front of the horse.

'Wheel type'

Originally attributed to the Redones tribe, who lived in the region around modern-day Rennes, its attribution remains uncertain, as only four of this type of coin have been recorded.

The obverse of this silver alloy coin shows a stylised human head facing left with a small head hanging in front on beaded cords and fancy scrollwork coming from the mouth. The reverse has a human-headed horse facing left with plume and large 8-spoked wheel below.



Gold quarter stater of the Osismii 'Winged figure type'



A silver stater of the Osismii 'Boar type'



Stater of the Osismii 'wheel type'.



Aulerci Cenomani

The Aulerci were a large tribe living between the lower Seine and lower Loire. They were divided into three sub-groups called Aulerci-Cenomani, Aulerci-Diablintes and Aulerci-Eburovices. The Aulerci-Cenomani lived in the Sarthe around Le Mans.

These gold coins are among the oldest in the hoard, dating from the late 2nd or early 1st century BC.

In this example the coin is struck off-centre, with some of the features of the face lost at the edge of the coin. The obverse shows the head facing right, a large eye and earring of two L-shapes back to back. The reverse shows a winged, galloping, human-headed horse, with a wheel behind. The charioteer and vexillum are partly visible above. Beneath the horse is a figure holding a curved sword or stick in the left hand.



Gold stater of the Aulerci Cenomani, late second or early first century BC



Baiocasses

The Baiocasses lived in the Calvados area of Northern Normandy around the modern-day town of Bayeux.

The obverse of this beautifully clear and well-struck coin shows a head facing right with hair of stylised locks. Above the head is a boar surrounded by beaded cordons. The reverse depicts a galloping human-headed horse facing right, driven by a stylised figure holding a long rein, which ends in a vexillum, and a boar below the horse.



Gold stater of the Baiocasses tribe



Gallo-Belgic

An influential coin imported in large numbers into Britain. This particular coin was made with a die linked to coins found in Dover, Whitstable (Kent) and Digeon (Somme).

These coins were the direct precursors of the English quarter staters.

The design of the obverse has been interpreted as a boat with two or three occupants and the reverse as a tree.



Gallo-Belgic D quarter stater



The British coins: Of the twelve Iron Age coin hoards found in Jersey, the Le Câtillon Hoard is the only one to include coins originating from the south coast of Britain.

Durotriges

The hoard included six staters and six quarter-staters of the Durotriges, a confederacy of sea-faring peoples who occupied the area of modern day Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire. The Durotriges controlled two important harbours at Poole and Christchurch and traded with Armorica.

The obverse of these coins shows a stylised and abstracted head, broken into component shapes with the laurel wreath pattern the most recognisable part. Facial features are represented by small half-moon shapes. The reverse features an equally abstract/disjointed horse consisting of blobs and pellet shapes.



Durotriges silver stater



Durotriges

This coin is heavily influenced by the Gallo Belgic D quarter-stater in design, featuring what has been interpreted as a boat on the obverse and a tree on the reverse.



Durotriges base gold quarter-stater



Hampshire

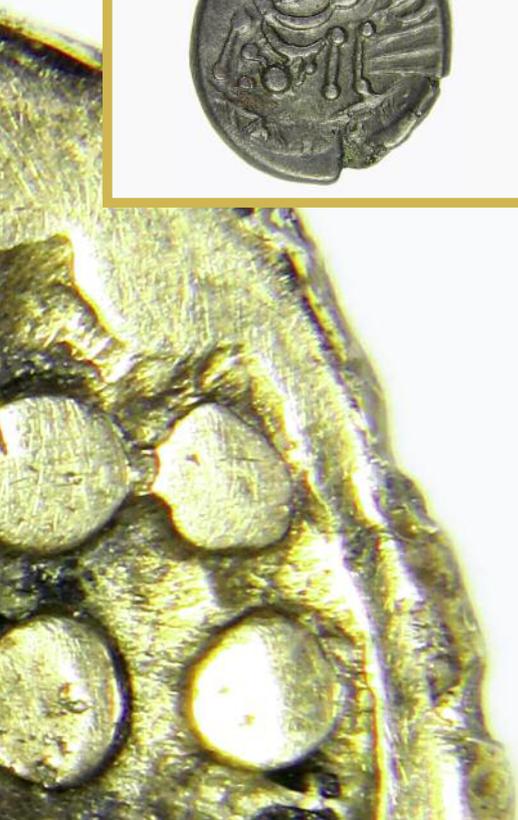
Apart from the three in the Câtillon Hoard, the distribution of this coin is limited to the Solent area of Hampshire.

The obverse ultimately derives from a stylised helmeted head of Pallas Athena, but by the time this is produced it is not much more than a pattern. The reverse depicts a horse with a ring below.

The Hampshire Thin Flan silver (c.50-30BC), was possibly issued by migrant Belgae recorded as settling in this area by Caesar.



Hampshire Thin Flan silver



Southern British

This Southern British silver unit, also known as the Sussex lyre, was attributed to the Regini and probably produced in the Chichester area. Apart from this coin in the Câtillon Hoard, their distribution is limited to West Sussex.

The obverse is modelled on an issue of the Aedui tribe from central Gaul, C50-30BC. It shows the head facing right with large curls of hair and a large nose. The reverse has a horse facing right with a long curly tail, a wheel above and lyre below.

Wiltshire/Dorset

Also called the British 'B' stater, this coin is struck from the same die as a coin found in a hoard at Chute, Wiltshire, in 1927 that gave the coin its modern name. It is traditionally attributed to the Durotriges.

The obverse of the coin shows a stylised and abstract head, broken into component shapes with the laurel wreath pattern the most recognisable part. Facial features are represented by small half-moon shapes. The reverse features an equally abstract/disjointed horse consisting of blobs and pellet shapes.



Sussex Lyre



Chute type stater, gold



I am indebted to Dr Philip de Jersey and Peter Roberts for their excellent research in the preparation of this article.

To mark the anniversary, the Jersey Heritage Trust has planned a programme of events throughout the year, including an expanded and updated display of the hoard, a talk by Celtic coin expert Dr Philip de Jersey, a project with Grouville School and a 'Money, Money, Money' Flash Day.

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