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*NEW STUDIES IN ARCHAEOLOGY*

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**Coins and Power in Late Iron Age Britain**

Cunobelin, Shakespeare's Cymbeline, ruled much of south-east Britain in the years before Claudius' legions arrived, creating the Roman province of Britannia. But what do we know of him and his rule, and that of competing dynasties in, south-east Britain? Dealing with Britain in this period when a series of dynasties emerged to take control of much of southern Britain, John Creighton draws on historical, archaeological and numismatic evidence to examine the background to these first individuals in British history, and explores the way in which rulers bolstered their power through the use of imagery on coins, myths, language and material culture. After the visits of Caesar in 55 and 54 BC, the shadow of Rome played a fundamental role in this process. The result is a vivid picture of how people in Late Iron Age Britain reacted to the changing world around them.

JOHN CREIGHTON is a Lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Reading

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*To the memory of my mother, Molly Creighton*

## CONTENTS

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<i>List of figures</i>	page viii
<i>List of tables</i>	x
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xii
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xiii
<i>Note on translations used</i>	xiv
Introduction	i
1 The Middle to Late Iron Age transition	4
2 Coin and the representation of individual authority	22
3 The Southern and Eastern kingdoms	55
4 Classical imagery and ideology in Britain	80
5 The location of Britain in the Roman world	126
6 Legends and language	146
7 Dynasties and identities	174
8 Conclusion and epilogue: from Britain to Britannia	216
Appendix: A brief introduction to Iron Age coinage in Britain	222
<i>References</i>	228
<i>Index of coin types</i>	238
<i>General index</i>	241

## FIGURES

---

Fig. 2.1	The development of coinage in northern Europe from the Phillipus to its regional successors	<i>page 27</i>
Fig. 2.2	Distribution map of Gallo-Belgic A and C, and the communities of NE Gaul	29
Fig. 2.3	The development of gold coin in Britain, from Gallo-Belgic A to its British regional derivatives	32
Fig. 2.4	The succession of coins leading to the SW 'Durotrigan' and NE 'Corieltauvian' coin series	34
Fig. 2.5	The alloy content of early 'gold' coinage and other objects in Britain	39
Fig. 2.6	Various coins mentioned in the text	46
Fig. 2.7	The various stages of trance imagery	48
Fig. 2.8	Basketry compass work on the Latchmere Heath Mirror	50
Fig. 3.1	The development of the gold coinage of the Southern and Eastern kingdoms	65
Fig. 3.2	The development of the gold and silver coinage of the West (the 'Dobunni')	66
Fig. 3.3	Coin hoards containing coin from Southern and Eastern Britain	67
Fig. 3.4	The alloy content of the 'gold' coinage of the Southern and Eastern kingdoms	69
Fig. 3.5	An outline of the development of imagery on Gallo-Belgic gold	71
Fig. 3.6	Distribution maps of Gallo-Belgic E, the families of imagery in NE Gaul and Britain, and the distribution of the coins of GARMANOS COMMIOS and ANDOBRV GARMANOS	72
Fig. 3.7	The dynasties of south-east Britain	76
Fig. 3.8	The distribution of the coinage of the fathers and 'sons' of the principal dynasties of south-east Britain	77
Fig. 4.1	The most common images on Roman silver coin north of the Alps	83
Fig. 4.2	The most common images on Roman bronze coin north of the Alps	84
Fig. 4.3	The adoption of Octavian/Augustus' imagery by the British dynasts	86
Fig. 4.4	The date of alleged Roman coin prototypes of British coins	101

<i>Figures</i>	ix
Fig. 4.5 Images on British coin, Theme 1: Octavian's ability and inheritance	102
Fig. 4.6 Images on British coin, Theme 2: Octavian's destiny and association with Apollo	108
Fig. 4.7 Images on British coin, Theme 3: Victory at Actium (i)	109
Fig. 4.8 Images on British coin, Theme 3: Victory at Actium (ii)	111
Fig. 4.9 Images on British coin, Theme 4: The healing of the state through sacrifice	113
Fig. 4.10 Images on British coin, Theme 5: The Golden Age	115
Fig. 4.11 Images on British coin, Theme 6: Mars Ultor and the Forum of Augustus	117
Fig. 4.12 Links between the coinage of Britain, Arda, North Africa and Rome	119
Fig. 5.1 British coins with Perseus, Medusa and Pegasus	129
Fig. 5.2 The different versions of the Aeneas/Ascanius genealogy	138
Fig. 6.1 Social and regional dialect variation	150
Fig. 6.2 Dialect and language variation: domains of competence from the Iron Age to Early Roman Period	153
Fig. 6.3 Language choice in Paraguay	157
Fig. 6.4 The developing complexity of language on Roman and British coins	165
Fig. 6.5 A set analysis of the language on coins	168
Fig. 6.6 The contrasting distribution of Cunobelin's coins which have his 'father's' name and Camulodunum on them	172
Fig. 7.1 Romanised portraiture on dynastic coins	179
Fig. 7.2 Portraits and images related to Heracles and Zeus Ammon	182
Fig. 7.3 Coins portraying 'Cunobelin's throne' and various styles of hat	185
Fig. 7.4 Coins related to a possible cult of Commius	193
Fig. 7.5 The Chichester entrenchments and the development of Hayling Island	194
Fig. 7.6 The grave assemblage from a burial at Aylesford	200
Fig. 7.7 The Porta Argentariorum (after Haynes and Hirst 1939): the internal face of the east pier	203
Fig. 7.8 Scenes of sacrifice on British coin	205
Fig. 7.9 Plan of Verulamium, with details of Gorhambury and King Harry Lane	206
Fig. 7.10 Plan of Silchester, with details of the excavated remains beneath the later Roman forum	207
Fig. 7.11 The <i>lituus</i> on British coin	212
Fig. A.1 Map of the seven regional coin series in Iron Age Britain	223
Fig. A.2 Chronological table of the development of Iron Age coin in Britain	224



## TABLES

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Table 1.1	The Roman perception of the social structure of tribes in north-east Gaul and parts of Germany	12
Table 1.2	Proportion of principal animal bones from Danebury	15
Table 4.1	The five most common silver coins north of the Alps (Republic to Tiberius)	83
Table 4.2	The five most common bronze coin types north of the Alps (Republic to Tiberius)	83
Table 4.3	The prevalence of the Roman ‘prototypes’ for British coin in Italy and Germany	88
Table 4.4	Key themes in Octavian/Augustus’ political imagery (in approximate chronological order)	100
Table 4.5	Horseman imagery on gold	105
Table 4.6	The sphinx on British coins	107
Table 4.7	The imagery of Actium	110
Table 4.8	The imagery of Apollo and sacrifice	114
Table 4.9	The imagery of plenty	116
Table 4.10	Images of Mars	117
Table 5.1	The occurrence of ‘Pegasus’ on British coin	130
Table 5.2	Types with Medusa and Perseus	130
Table 6.1	The use of monarchical titles in Britain	170
Table 6.2	Various legends on Cunobelin’s coinage	171
Table 7.1	Male ‘Romanised’ portraits on British dynastic coinage	178
Table 7.2	Portraits and images related to Heracles and Zeus Ammon	183
Table 7.3	Coins portraying ‘Cunobelin’s throne’	186
Table 7.4	Verica and the cult of Commius	193
Table 7.5	Ritual enactment on British coin	205
Table 7.6	The <i>lituus</i> on dynastic coins	213

## PREFACE

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Many years ago I saw a production of Shakespeare's play *Cymbeline* set in Britain shortly before Britain was invaded by the Claudian Legions. The British court was filled with Roman officials, British princes travelled to and from Rome, and even the British soothsayer at the end had a vision of the Roman god Jupiter in his sleep instead of an ethereal Celtic deity. All of this jarred with the image of Late Iron Age Britain I had grown up with, where Caesar's conquest of 55/54 BC was but a sham. The Britons might have been beaten, but unlike the Gauls they soon stopped paying their tribute to Rome and a further century had to pass until the Emperor Claudius invaded and Britain finally fell under Roman dominion. Now I am not so sure. I think Shakespeare was right, I think the British court was probably riddled with Romans and I think Cunobelin probably did worship Roman gods. In this book I set out to explain why.

I began to write this book with a number of clear aims and values. First, I wanted to write a positive work of synthesis, not something which simply attacked and deconstructed the work of previous generations. Second, I believed that in this period where prehistory met history, the work had to be thoroughly interdisciplinary, combining the best of archaeological, historical and numismatic research. Finally, my interest in the past has derived from wondering what it was actually like to live then, to experience a very different world around oneself. That being the case, this book moves away from the discussion of 'economy and society'; it avoids detailed discussions of pot typologies or settlement forms; instead it tries to look at the past from the point of view of the impact upon the individual. How was imagery seen and interpreted, how did people use language and speak to each other in a multi-lingual world? How did people use myths and stories to explain and legitimate the changes that were taking place in the world around them? In a recent book on the transformation of Gaul from the Late Iron Age into the Early Roman period, Greg Wolf described the Roman Empire as 'a world of cities and of friends'. As readers of this book will discover, I certainly believe that Late Iron Age Britain cannot be understood without appreciating the networks of friendship within Britain and beyond at that time.

Much within the book comprises solid argument presenting a very different view of this period to that commonly given; but in certain areas I have also used informed and sometimes relatively free speculation to imagine things for which we have very limited evidence. I hope I have flagged these clearly enough so that the reader will be able to clearly distinguish between the two. I hope readers will also appreciate the

simple pleasure of playing around with ideas. Nonetheless I hope that this book will highlight discussion of what it was like to live in the past rather than simply retreating into description of past material culture and its distribution. The past is nothing, if it is not peopled.

### **Acknowledgements**

This book was written over a couple of years during 1996 and 1997. During that time many people assisted, some knowingly, others unknowingly. My friends and colleagues in the Departments of Archaeology and Classics at the University of Reading provided a great deal of support. I would particularly like to thank Richard Bradley, Janet DeLaine, Ray Lawrence and Maria Wyke. Writing this would have been much more difficult if it had not been for time spent at the library of the Römisch-Germanische Kommission, which was made possible by the kind offices of Prof. von Schnurbein and the generosity of the Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. I would like to thank Angelika and David Wigg for helping make my time in Frankfurt so enjoyable. In Britain Jonathan Williams at the British Museum and Philip de Jersey at the Institute of Archaeology in Oxford provided invaluable information.

David Wigg, Jeremy Evans, Colin Haselgrove and Richard Bradley kindly read and commented upon earlier drafts; their extremely diverse perspectives and interests were revealed by their very different responses, which both improved the work and kept me amused. Of course, the many faults which remain are entirely my own. The editorial and production team at CUP also provided invaluable support and my thanks are extended to them.

Figure 2.8 was drawn by Steve Allen, and Figure 7.6 is reproduced by kind permission of the Society of Antiquaries of London. All the other drawings are by the author.

Finally I would like to thank my family and friends who have had to put up with me throughout the stresses and strains of writing.

## ABBREVIATIONS

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The following abbreviations are used to refer to the standard catalogues and works for various coin series. Further details on the referencing of Iron Age coins are provided in the Appendix.

### **British Iron Age coinage**

- VA Van Arsdell (1989a)  
BM Hobbs (1996)  
ICC Index of Celtic coin: maintained at the Institute of Archaeology in Oxford.

### **Continental Iron Age coinage**

- Sch. Scheers (1977). These are all gold coins unless otherwise specified.  
BN This is the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale. Most are illustrated in de la Tour (1892).  
Nash Nash (1978)

### **Roman coinage**

- RRC Roman Republican coinage (Crawford 1974)  
RIC Roman Imperial coinage (Sutherland 1984)  
RPC Roman Provincial coinage (Burnett *et al.* 1992)

### **Mauretanian coinage**

- Maz Mazard (1955 and 1957)

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## NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS USED

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The following translations have been used and are duly acknowledged. Standard abbreviations have been followed; one of the most often used is *BG* for Caesar's *De bello gallico* (Caesar, *The Conquest of Gaul*, as below).

- Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, translated by Herbert Weir Smyth (Loeb Classical Library 1922)  
 Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by F. J. Sheed (Hacket Publishing Company, Indianapolis 1993)  
 Caesar (and Hirtius), *The Conquest of Gaul*, translated by S. A. Handford, revised by Jane Gardner (Penguin Classics 1982)  
 Caesar, *The Civil War*, translated by Jane Gardner (Penguin Classics 1967)  
 Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, translated by Earnest Cary (Loeb Classical Library 1917)  
 Diodorus Siculus, translated by C. H. Oldfather (Loeb Classical Library 1935)  
 Florus, *Epitome of Roman History*, translated by Edward Saymore Forster (Loeb Classical Library 1929)  
 Frontinus, *Stratagems*, translated by Charles E. Bennett (Loeb Classical Library 1925)  
 Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, translated by Lewis Thorpe (Penguin Classics 1966)  
 Horace, *Odes*, translated by C. E. Bennett (Loeb Classical Library 1914)  
 Livy, *History of Rome*, translated by B. O. Foster (Loeb Classical Library 1919)  
 Nennius, *British History*, translated by J. Morris (Phillimore 1980)  
 Quintillian, *Intitutio Oratoria*, translated by H. E. Butler (Loeb Classical Library 1921)  
 Strabo, *Geography*, translated by Horace Leonard Jones (Loeb Classical Library 1923)  
 Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, translated by J. C. Rolfe (Loeb Classical Library 1914)  
 Tacitus, *The Agricola* and *The Germania*, translated by H. Mattingly, revised by S. A. Handford (Penguin Classics 1970)  
 Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, translated by Michael Grant (Penguin Classics 1971)  
 Virgil, *Eclogues*, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough (Loeb Classical Library 1920)