SOME ANCIENT BRITISH NOTES

By D. F. Allen

1. Two Ancient British Coins in Paris

There have long lain in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris two bronze coins, attributed in the catalogue to a continental origin, but from their position evidently suspected by those who arranged the Celtic collection to be British. I had the advantage in 1957, by the kindness of Mademoiselle Gabrielle Fabre, of seeing these two coins, and I have no doubt that both are British and belong to Kent. One is a new type altogether, the other adds important details to a type already known.

The first coin (Pl. XV, 1) no. 9599 in the Catalogue, is an unpublished bronze coin of Dubnovellaunus. His coins tend to be rare, and most are known from only a few specimens. The types are particularly diverse, but even so the new coin is a strange one, not so much for what it shows as for the manner in which it shows it. On the obverse is a standing boar, facing right. It is represented with exceptional realism; its chin, for instance, is marked with warts, and its body with flesh in folds almost like a rhinoceros. There are a great many boars on Ancient British coins, but I recall none remotely resembling this one. Its forelegs appear to stand on the ground, but its hind legs are off the coin. Between the legs, however, is some kind of star or flower, which is balanced by an immense revolving whorl in front; both of the objects look as if they are growing out of the ground. A curved line in front seems to bend back over the boar’s tusk, but the edge of the coin leaves in some doubt what this is meant to be, possibly a snake of some kind. Above the bristles on the boar’s back and his big, floppy ear is the legend DVNO.

The last letter is somewhat confused with the curved line, but I have no doubt about the reading.

The reverse shows us a horse, clearly engraved by the same hand. The head of the horse aims at more naturalism than is usual on these coins, but the really exceptional feature lies in the horse’s legs. It is common for a foreleg, as on this coin, to be shown raised, but I know of no other example where one hind leg is raised, as on this coin, until it touches the nearside foreleg. It looks like an attempt to render a horse in the act of scratching himself. The other hind leg is off the coin. I am unable to explain the curve beneath the scratching leg in the place usually occupied by an ornament, unless this too is part of a snake. I suspect there may be a legend in front of the horse, but if so only the letter Y is visible.

The coin weighs 40.2 grains (2.60 grammes). Its find-spot is not recorded, but it agrees so well with the other Kentish coins of Dubnovellaunus that there can be no doubt where it should be classified.

1 One is rightly cautious of religious or magical explanations, but in the Irish tales, which reflect a later stage of Celtic tradition, sorcerers and their kind frequently only have one foot and one hand, while even supernatural horses only stand on one leg; e.g. R. Thurneysen, Die irische Helden- und Konigsage, p. 144.
The second bronze coin, (Pl. XV, 2) no. 9600, is of a type of which a number of specimens are already known. Evans gives it as N 9, Mack as no. 296. Evans records specimens from Springhead, near Southfleet, and from Canterbury (p. 478), both in the British Museum, while a third there comes from Borham Downs, all Kentish find-spots.

The new specimen proves that the animal on the obverse is meant to be a bear moving to the right, although it does not look as if the engraver had seen many. It has no tail and the four feet, each with two claws, are somewhat humanized. Nevertheless the head, with little ear and open mouth showing teeth, is not a bad attempt; the tongue hangs out, as if licking something on the ground, drawn in with a corded line. It has previously been possible only to suspect what the Paris specimen proves, that a bird is perched on the bear's back. The bird's legs and claws, its tail, and the beginning of its wings are clear, but its beak is lost on a crack at the edge of the coin. I am not certain whether it belongs to the crow or eagle family, but the former seems the more likely. There is a well-known series of Gaulish coins of gold and silver which show a crow of this kind over a horse's back (de la Tour XXII. 6584 and XXVII. J55), which are amongst the coins given to the Osismii in Finistère. Finally it is pretty clear that behind the bear there is a legend, but not enough can be made out to suggest a name. There appear to be traces of 1110, but the O is identical with what is certainly a ring ornament between the bear's legs. One might compare the apparently meaningless legend of Mack 294, a gold stater from Sittingbourne.

The reverse of this Paris specimen for the first time enables us to appreciate the peculiarities of this quite exceptional type. We have here a rendering, in a manner without parallel on British coins, of what I must assume to be a bull. The body of the animal follows the slim, lilting proportions of an ordinary, curvilinear Celtic horse, even to the tail. On the top of a neck, long even for a horse, is a facing head which might almost have been taken from the famous horse ornament found long ago in the late pre-Roman camp at Stanwick, Yorkshire, and now in the British Museum (B.M. Guide to Early Iron Age, 2nd ed., fig. 153). The two eyes are set on either side of the head and the nostrils are clear. The head would pass as that of a horse were it not for two great S-shaped ox horns which curve up from the forehead; only the horn to the left is visible, but it is obvious that there is a parallel horn to the right, seen, in fact, on the specimen illustrated by Evans. Centrally between the two horns and above the head is a large annulet. Similar rings (or suns ?) between the horns of cattle may be seen on de la Tour XXXIII. 8456,1 or on our own staters of Tasciovanus, Mack 149–50 (in this instance between the horns of a bucranium). Although in all other respects the animal is a horse, there is no gainsaying the horns. The animal's legs, of which all four are shown, are curiously bunched together, in a pose which is certainly no ordinary gallop. A pellet between the legs may be an attempt to sex the animal, commoner on Gaulish than on British coins. There is a small annulet between the legs, another beside the head and a third, not seen on the Paris specimen, over the rump. Finally a corded line, ending in an annulet, lies between the

1 A Gaulish potin coin, de la Tour XXXIII. 8351, combines a bucranium on one side with a bear on the other.
horns and the rump; this device may well turn out to be an identifiable object on a specimen which shows it complete.

The coin weighs 27.3 grains (2.42 grammes). The find-spot is not known. Although the legend on the coin cannot be read, it must belong to about the same date as the preceding coin, say the last quarter of the first century B.C. The importance of the coin is as much archaeological as numismatic, since it provides demonstration, if demonstration were needed, of the order of date of the Stanwick mounting, always recognized as an outstanding relic of late Celtic art in this country.

I am most grateful to the authorities of the Bibliothèque Nationale for allowing me to bring these two important coins to the notice of the British public.

2. A New Coin of Verulamium

A bronze coin was found in excavations in 1931 at the Romano-British site of Stocking Close, Sawtry, Huntingdonshire, which was not identified at the time (Proceedings of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Archaeological Society, v. 184). By the kindness of the finder, Dr. J. R. Garrood, F.S.A., I was recently allowed to see it, and it is clearly a new coin of Verulamium. The following is a description.

Obv. Above an exergual line, what appears to be two leaves and a flower. (This side of the coin is in poor condition and the upper part of the die is off the flan; the above interpretation is by no means certain.) Below the exergual line the legend VER, possibly VERL.

Rev. A horse grazing to right. Above its back a crescent and a ring ornament. Below an unexplained ornament similar to that in front of the horse on staters such as Mack 150 or under it on quarter-staters such as Mack 151. Weight 20.7 grains (1.34 grammes) (Pl. XV, 3).

In general style the coin agrees well with coins of Tasciovanus, but there is no trace on this example of his name (or of the alternative legends Dias or Rues). Although another specimen might give an additional name, it is only possible to be certain of the presence of the mint name, Verulamium. The ornament under the horse presents a close link with other coins of Tasciovanus. No other example of a grazing horse is known on our coins. The obverse seems of a very unusual type also, but the condition is too poor to be certain; for instance what I have called leaves could turn out to be birds, back to back in an heraldic arrangement!

Dr. Garrood has now very generously presented the coin to the British Museum.

3. A Rare Coin from Hampshire

A second example of Evans K 13, Mack 33, has turned up (Pl. XV, 4). It was bought at Portsmouth and presumably found in that area. The only specimen hitherto known was found at Cheriton, near Winchester, and a
Hampshire find-spot for the new coin is thus likely enough. It is from the same obverse die as the Cheriton coin, but a different reverse die. The weight is 78·5 grains (5·09 grammes) compared with 78·0 (5·05 grammes) and the specific gravity of 10·2 compared with 10·7. The type is a local variant of the Chute type. The new coin does little to complete the pattern on the die, but the sun ornament under the horse’s belly has six instead of four rays. The coin is the property of Rev. S. C. Mascall of Devizes, who acquired it some 30 years ago.

Since the above was written it has come to my knowledge, through the kindness of the City Librarian of Portsmouth, Mr. H. Sargeant, that a third specimen was found at Portchester in October, 1958 (Grid Ref. 41/613061). It is in the possession of the finder, Mr. D. Barnes. There are, thus, three specimens now known with consistent provenances.

4. A RARE COIN FROM PETERBOROUGH

An example of the uninscribed gold stater, Evans C 2, Mack 49, the type on which the usual horse on the reverse is replaced by a wolf, has been found during 1958 at Peterborough. The actual site of finding lies in Paston, about a quarter of a mile north of the built-up area of Peterborough, near where the old M. & G. N. Joint line to Sutton Bridge and King’s Lynn crosses a small stream leading to the Car Dike (Grid Ref. 53/186022). Recorded find-spots of this important type and the associated type Evans C 3 (see Num. Chron. 1953, p. 116) are few. The type is undoubtedly the earliest coinage we have of the Norfolk area and this is the most westerly example so far recorded. The coin is from the same obverse die as Mack 49 but has a different reverse die. The weight is 93·8 grains (6·08 grammes) (Pl. XV, 5).