INTRODUCTION

The subject of writing in pre-Roman Britain has, until recently, been the object of curious neglect among archaeologists and historians. One simple reason for this is that there is not very much of it in evidence. There are no lapidary inscriptions, and only a few, short graffiti and other scraps of evidence (on which see more below). Contrast this with the situation after the Roman conquest, and the overwhelming impression is that pre-Roman Britain was essentially a pre-literate society, and that writing was brought to Britain by the Romans. And yet there is the not inconsiderable corpus of coin legends from pre-Roman Britain which, if allowed to do so, might seem to tell a rather different story. The object of this paper is to see what kind of story that might be.

It has always been a major blind-spot of numismatists, and increasingly archaeologists too since they stopped reading ancient texts, that they tend not to think very much about coin legends other than as a key to attributing the coin to a particular tribe, city or ruler. One result of this is that it seems to have gone more or less unremarked upon in most treatments of late iron-age Britain that the coin legends that appear on the coins in the late first century BC are the first, and by far the largest, body of evidence for the introduction of writing into these islands and of its uses in the pre-Roman period. In the standard books on iron-age Britain, the topics of writing and literacy are by and large not treated at all (neither for instance appears in the index to Barry Cunliffe’s standard work, *Iron Age Communities of Britain*). To date there is only one extensive treatment in existence of British iron-age coin legends as writing, in John Creighton’s recent book *Coins and Power in Late Iron Age Britain*. More generally, it seems as if, for most students of antiquity, writing on coins inhabits a different functional world from writing on stone or other materials, or that it is not writing that really means anything or requires reading and interpretation, but serves merely as a useful source from which to create object taxonomies. This, certainly, is by and large how iron-age coin-legends have tended to be used by numismatists. The only dedicated studies of inscriptions on Gaulish coins are philological or linguistic in aim and tend not to consider the social meaning and function of writing on coins. The only detailed study of inscriptions on British coins did not get very far and has now been surpassed by recent developments in the reading of certain legends. This paper is a step towards attempting to redress the balance away from the philological and numismatic, and towards the study of iron-age coin-inscriptions as writing.

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3 J. Creighton,* Coins and Power in Late Iron Age Britain* (Cambridge, 2000).

4 See RIG IV.

5 M. Mays,* ‘Inscriptions on British Celtic coins’, NC 152 (1992), 57-82.
Roman and Gaulish coin legends in the second and first centuries BC

Most of the legends on Gaulish and British coins consist of abbreviated personal names. There are also some ethnic names, place names and magistrates’ titles. This pattern is actually rather similar to the kinds of legends that appear on contemporary Roman coinage in the late Republic and in the reign of Augustus. These show a plethora of often heavily abbreviated personal names, mostly those of monetary magistrates (tresviri monetales) under the Republic; the regular though increasingly less frequent use of ROMA to indicate the name of the issuing community; and, under the principate, the names of the emperor and his family, often accompanied by various imperial titles and honours which increase in complexity under Augustus and his successors with the development of imperial titulature. This pattern, which was also accompanied by the new phenomenon of constantly changing designs rather than immobilized continuity, began to develop in the early second century BC. It represented a major change in the Roman coinage tradition which had previously followed the practice of classical Greek city coinages, and had used coin legends simply as a means of indicating the issuing authority of the coin concerned.

Why did this change take place? There is a whole range of social and political reasons relating to the politics of the late Republic in Rome too complex to go into here. The simplest explanation is that by the second century BC the Romans had conquered the whole of Italy and much of the rest of the Mediterranean too and, as a consequence, there were no other major coinages in circulation in their immediate vicinity. Within Cisapennine Italy at least there was really only Roman coinage, alone and more or less without competitors apart from a few cities that continued to mint in bronze, so there was effectively no need to identify it as Roman any more, either with an inscription or through the maintenance of an unchanging design. Variety and personal expression in design and legend could thus flourish on the coinage as never before.

Then in the late first century BC another big change occurred on Roman coins – the regular and named depiction of living individuals. This began with Julius Caesar in 44 BC, shortly before his death, and was quickly picked up by Brutus, his murderer, Mark Antony, and then Octavian. Under the emperors, the imperial name and image became more or less standard on the Roman coinage, though different members of the imperial family might appear on the obverses, and of course the coins of several different emperors were in simultaneous circulation at any one time. Nevertheless, an element of consistency in design returned to the Roman coinage which had been lacking for a hundred years or so during the late Republic, albeit reverse designs continued to change frequently under the emperors, a tradition that persisted until the late third century AD.

One innovation in the style of Roman coin legends that came into vogue in the early imperial period was the occasional tendency to put the emperor’s name in the Latin dative case, meaning ‘to’ or ‘for the emperor’, as for instance the coins of Trajan with the obverse legend IMP TRAIANO AVG etc. A small change perhaps, but it makes quite a difference in Latin, so what does it mean? Caesar’s name in the nominative, as the name of the case itself suggests, names the emperor depicted on the coin. It is in effect a label. Put the name in the dative, and it suggests that the inscription and the image, and the coin itself, are dedications to the emperor, not merely depictions of him. There was a corresponding development in imperial coin legends in the Greek East, with the emperor’s name sometimes appearing in the honorific accusative as well as the dedicatory dative and the proprietary genitive, which had been the most common case for rendering the king’s name in the previous era of the Hellenistic royal coinages. This represents a significant development. After all, who else received dedicatory inscriptions in the dative and their images displayed prominently in public? Who else indeed had formed the most frequent subject of Roman coin types before the advent of the emperors? The answer, of course, is the gods. Indeed

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7 See A.M. Burnett, ‘The currency of Italy from the Hannibalic War to the reign of Augustus’, AIIN (1982), 125–37 for an overview.
8 RIC Trajan 91 ff.
9 For an honorific accusative on Roman provincial coins (common also on statue dedications), cf., e.g., the coins of Magnesia ad Sipyllum for Caligula (RPC 1.2454), with obverse legend FAVON KALAPA, ΣΕΒΑΣΤΩΝ. For the genitive on Hellenistic coinages, cf., e.g., the coins of Philip II of Macedon inscribed ΦΙΑΝΤΙΟΥ, [a coin] of Philip.
the image of the emperor on a coin was, sometimes at least, regarded with similar religious awe as the image of a divinity. The biographer Suetonius mentions that people were denounced under Tiberius when found in possession of a coin or a ring bearing the emperor’s image in a public latrine or a brothel.10 This was clearly regarded as a rather excessive reaction at the time, but it gives us some flavour of the powerful religious aura potentially surrounding any representation of the person of the emperor, including those on coins.

By the early first century AD, then, Roman coin inscriptions had developed from merely identifying the name of the community and the issuing magistrate in an essentially secular fashion, into inscribed namings and, sometimes, dedications with heavy dynastic and religious overtones, owing to the nature of the persons being named – the emperor and members of his immediate family – and the divine status that was widely attributed to them within the Roman world.

In pre-Roman Gaul writing was certainly in use on coins and other media (graffiti on pots, a few longer texts on stone and lead), and a variety of scripts were in circulation across the region. As early as the fifth century BC, Iberian speaking communities in Mediterranean Spain and the Languedoc developed their own script in response to cultural contacts with Carthaginians. Somewhat later, possibly because of the influence of the Greek city of Massalia (Massilia in Latin), Greek script was in use in certain areas of southern Gaul east of the Rhône by the third or second century BC to produce what are known as Gallo-Greek inscriptions (though it is striking that this influence took so long to come into effect – up to 300 years after the foundation of the city if the chronology is correct). The texts from these areas are mostly found on excavated hillforts and other kinds of settlement sites across the region, and they often seem to have a commercial context or to represent marks of ownership of certain kinds of imported goods. As Greg Woolf has shown, the picture of the adoption of writing in this period is complex and discontinuous: south-west Gaul takes it up (in certain areas for certain purposes) earlier than the south-east, and it appears in two different forms from two different sources.11 This will be the hallmark of the later spread of writing within temperate Europe and Britain as well.

At some point before the Roman conquest in the early first century BC, Gallo-Greek inscriptions begin to occur in temperate Europe as well, mostly graffiti on potsherds from a few sites in Burgundy (Mont Beuvray and Alesia) and a handful from Manching in Bavaria.12 Roman letters also spread into northern Gaul, seemingly at the same time as Greek, as evidenced by their occasionally mixed use on coin legends (see below). The distribution of these alphabets through Gaul was, however, not evenly spread. Large areas of Gaul are seemingly entirely anepigraphic (especially Brittany and Normandy and western Belgium).13 Greek letters are mostly restricted to coinages attributed to the peoples of central and eastern Gaul and eastern Belgica, whereas the use of Roman letters appears to be more widespread, penetrating into western and southern Gaul as well.14 There was a third alphabet in use in parts of east-central Gaul and northern Italy, called Lepontic. This script, derived from a variety of the Etruscan alphabet, takes its name from a cluster of inscriptions written in this alphabet located in the Lepontic Alps. It may have been in sporadic use among the possibly Celtic speaking inhabitants of the Italian Lakes region from as early as the sixth century BC, whence its use spread over the Alps into Gaul.15 The picture of writing in pre-Roman Gaul is therefore complex. There is local variation, but there is also inconsistency within regions, with Greek and Roman alphabets being in simultaneous circulation and

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10 Suet. Tib. 58.
12 A chronological peg of sorts is provided by the long-lived series of silver coins inscribed ΚΑΛΛΕΔΟΥ (RIG IV no. 92) which, according to the archaeological evidence, can be shown to have been in widespread circulation in eastern Gaul by the end of the second century BC. For discussion, see C. Haselgrove, ‘The development of Iron Age coinage in Belgic Gaul’, NC 159 (1999), 111–168, at p. 143 n. 149.
13 This pattern seems to be replicated in the distribution of Latin inscriptions in Roman Gaul. For maps, see G.D. Woolf, Becoming Roman. The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 86–7.
14 As C.-A. Moberg, ‘Quand l’archéologie rencontre les rencontres d’alphabet ... (Quelques réflexions sur des monnaies épigraphes celtes)’ in Mélanges Offerts au Docteur J.-B. Colbert de Beauchêne (Paris, 1987), pp. 639–649, points out at p. 642 distribution maps for alphabets tend to be based on the tribes to which the coinages are attributed rather than on their distribution patterns, which may be rather wider in extent.
15 For the corpus of Lepontic inscriptions, see RIG II.1.
use in certain areas. From the available evidence the overall picture seems to be that both Greek and Roman scripts penetrated into temperate Gaul (i.e. beyond the Roman province in the Mediterranean south) rather late and at about the same time, in the late second and early first centuries BC.

The inscriptions on Gaulish coins seem to consist primarily of Gaulish personal names, often abbreviated, mostly in the Gaulish nominative ending in -os.16 A few are accompanied by ethnics in the singular, perhaps qualifying the name concerned or possibly describing the coin (see below).17 A much smaller number of personal names are written in the genitive, such as Q DOCI, though in these cases (as indeed on Roman Republican coins) it is often difficult to tell whether this is a real genitive or an abbreviated nominative termination in -itos or -itus.18 There is a handful of legends mentioning ethnic names, in both Greek and Latin.19

One rather more wordy inscription gives the name and ethnic identity of the coin in full, calling it a PUBLICOS LIXOVIO SIMISSOS. This seems to be a Gaulish rendering of a Latin phrase meaning a 'public, [i.e. official] Lexovian semis' (the Lexovii being a Gaulish people of eastern Normandy). It appears together with various different inscriptions on different issues. One names two individuals together with an official title vergobretos also known from Caesar's De Bello Gallico: CISIAMBUS CATTOVS VERGOBRETO.20 Another mentions a different personal name, MAVPENNOS, complemented by what may also be an official title ARCANTODAN (possibly meaning 'silver-giver'), which also appears on other Gaulish issues.21 Both these inscriptions are simply Gaulish, unlike their accompaniment. Semis is a Latin word describing a small bronze coin, which is what the Gaulish coin in question is.22 What then is the nature of the legend publicos lixovios simissos? Is this just bad Latin, or is it, more interestingly, a Gaulish phrase drawing on Latin vocabulary and ideas?23 It is certainly not just Latin, whatever it is, as it has clearly undergone a certain amount of translation and transformation before finding its way onto this Gaulish coin. This is not just a case of one-way Romanization. There is a considerable amount of Gallicization as well in this inscription for which there are no precedents on its Roman equivalents. It is clearly in some degree a Gaulish innovation, in both language and content. It is also evidence of the transmission and reception not merely of Roman material culture but also of Roman ideas, i.e. the name of the coin, simissos, and the notion of coinage being public. whatever this may have been construed as meaning in the Gaulish context.24

To return to the naming inscriptions on Gaulish coins, most of them, as already mentioned, seem to name individuals, not communities, though there are a few exceptions. How different is this from Roman practice at the time? Not very, is the answer. Romans were also making coins with individuals' names on them in the second and first centuries BC. They may be those of junior monetary magistrates, not kings or princes as we imagine the Gaulish names to be. But many of these Roman names belonged to people who came from the bluest-blooded nobility of Roman society, and perhaps we are wrong about some of the names on Gaulish coins. They need not be kings or rulers just because their names appear on coins. Some clearly are, like Vercingetorix, the famous rebel leader of the united peoples of Gaul against Julius Caesar in 52 BC, whose coins

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16 For the morphology of Gaulish coin inscriptions, see RIG IV pp. 525-8.
17 E.g. RIG IV no. 56: ATISIOS REMOS, and no. 232: REMO / REMO; no. 291: TVRONOS / CANTORIX, presumably referring to the Remi and the Turons, both Gaulish peoples.
18 For Q. DOCI see RIG IV no. 227-8.
19 See RIG IV pp. 526-8.
20 RIG IV no. 226. See Caes. BG 1.16.5 on vergobrets among the Aeduli. See also no. 109 where Cisiambus's name appears on its own without a title on the obverse of a 'public Lexovian semis'.
21 RIG IV no. 263. On arcantodan, see L. Piau, 'Noms propres ou noms de fonctions sur quelques monnaies celtiques', in G. Grasmann, W. Jansen and M. Brandt (eds), Keltische Numismatik und Archaeologie, part 1, (Oxford, 1984), pp. 34-42. For other occurrences of arcantodan, see RIG IV no. 108 where Cisiambus's name on the obverse is complemented with ARCATODAN on the reverse. See also RIG IV no. 240: ROVECA ARCATODAN, on bronze coins attributed to the Medii in northern Gaul, and, possibly, no. 45: ARG AMBACT on bronze coins attributed to the Mediomatrici of eastern Belgica. See also RIG IV no. 262: SIMISSOS PUBLICOS GAL. / ARCATODAN MAVPENNOS. What GAL stands for here is uncertain.
22 These coins weigh around 6-7 g, which is about right for a Roman semis of the first century BC.
23 See Woolf, op. cit. n. 11, p. 96 on the relationship between Gaulish and Latin languages.
24 For the Roman coinage as public, cf. the lex de Gallia Civilissima, CIL I 15792, col II, l. 1: 'pecunia ... signata forma publica) p(opulei) Romanici' ('money ... minted with the public type of the Roman People').
name him in the clearest of Latin scripts. But the inscription ARCANDOTAN, mentioned above, has often been interpreted as the title of some sort of monetary magistracy, and it may be that not all the individuals mentioned on Gaulish coins are necessarily monarchical rulers. So perhaps there is not such a clear difference in kind between the name inscriptions on Gaulish coins and those on Roman Republican coins as might at first be imagined. The differences of course become even less pronounced with the arrival of Julius Caesar and the end of the Republic.

What are we to make of this? Is the appearance of Gaulish coin inscriptions naming prominent individuals in the early first century BC to be viewed as a function of Romanization? Clearly there are Roman influences on the alphabet, the orthography, and, in some cases, even in the language in use on Gaulish coins. On the other hand, the similarity in the content of Gaulish and Roman coin inscriptions — naming individuals rather than peoples — suggests not that Gaulish inscriptions are merely derivative of Roman practice, but rather that both Roman and at least some Gaulish societies were together and simultaneously experiencing a shift in the balance of power towards the kind of powerful individuals whose names began to appear on the coins in the first century BC.

Writing on coins in late iron-age Belgica and Britain

What about Britain? Where does writing come from to Britain, and can the coins tell us when it was first introduced? The answer to the first question can only be formulated from the coin evidence. There is very little other evidence for the active indigenous use of writing in late pre-conquest Britain, apart from a small corpus of ceramic graffiti, inscribed mostly on imported pottery and, where at all meaningful, consisting of names probably denoting ownership: some styli from pre-conquest contexts; and an ink-pot. None of these can be plausibly dated before about 10 BC. The coin evidence helps push thing back a little further, however, beginning with the Gallo-Belgic series, the coins from which were mostly made on the Continent but circulated widely in southeastern England.

Probably the earliest coin legends that appear in Britain consist of a group of single-letter inscriptions. On the later classes of Gallo-Belgic E, the otherwise blank obverse shows a single letter ‘A’ (with a dropped rather than horizontal bar), while a motif resembling an ‘S’, sometimes reversed, also makes an appearance on the reverse (PI. 1, 1). The joint appearance of both these alphabetic design elements in the later stages of the Gallo-Belgic uniface series strengthens the case for the ‘S’ being, in origin at least, a letter, rather than a random squiggle, though it may be that it was not being employed for its phonetic value in this case. There is also a rare sub-class of Scheer’s Gallo-Belgic gold quarter-staters ‘au bateau’ whose obverse is distinguished by the use of the A-motif on an otherwise blank field.

Among the earliest of inscribed coins made in Britain is a group of gold staters and silver coins
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found south of the River Thames and often attributed to Commius. On the reverse above the horse they have what appears to be a modified letter 'E' either standing upright to the right or facing downwards, whose central bar projects out beyond the main body of the letter and then slopes downwards at an angle (Pl. 1, 2). There is also a series of gold quarter-staters with the 'E' reverse that have the obverse 'A' motif as well (Pl. 1, 3). Among the Danebury-type silver coins is a type on which the legend 'EX' appears on the obverse next to a stylized human head (Pl. 1, 4).

All of the above rather suggests that at some point towards the end of the Gallo-Belgic E series and the beginning of the British inscribed series, in the middle decades of the first century BC, individual Latin letter-forms began to be taken up and used as elements in coin design in western Belgica and southern Britain. They may not have been made to be read and their function remains obscure. But they show knowledge of at least some letters in the alphabet, if they do not yet show active use of it for writing words.

A continental context for this tentative take-up of letters, if not yet of writing, on coins in western Belgica and south-east Britain is provided by the spread of coin-legends within southern Belgica. While there is evidence that the earliest coin inscriptions in southern Belgica may date to before about 60 BC, the burden of the evidence suggests that the practice of placing writing on coins did not really take off there until the second half of the century. That Britain seems to have participated in this the ultimate phase of the characteristically ad hoc and patchy spread of writing into temperate Europe which began in the pre-conquest period, as well as the post-conquest importation of Latin language and Roman scripts, is suggested by one or two important pieces of evidence from the earliest of British coin inscriptions that can reasonably be termed writing.

On some Gaulish coin inscriptions there is the interesting phenomenon of the mixing of Greek and Roman letters within the same word. Single letters are also borrowed from one alphabet into the other. This occurs in both directions but it is more common from Greek into Latin. The Greek letters involved here are Κ, Γ, Θ, Η, Χ (as aspirant before 's' and 't'). C (mostly as a terminal sigma) and possibly ΟΥ. Only one of these Greek letters, Θ, seems to have made it over the Channel, to appear first on the coins of ΑΘΩΘΟΔΟΜΑΡΟΣ (also spelt ΑΘΩΘΙΔΟΜΑΡΟΣ) which circulated in the Essex–Hertfordshire region (Pl. 1, 5). On these coins the letter is formed in different ways on different dies. Sometimes it is constructed from two curved lines with or without a cross-bar, when it most resembles a Greek theta. On other specimens it is clearly formed from a straight downstroke and a curve with cross-bar, when it looks more like a crossed Roman 'D'. On coins this form only appears in Britain, though it does appear on the continent in stone inscriptions. It recurs in Britain on the rare East Anglian silver type attributed to the icon with the legend AEDIC, and the Dobunnic and Iceniand gold and silver issues inscribed ANTED (on which more below).

The name ΑΘΩΘΟΔΟΜΑΡΟΣ is well attested, and is paralleled by a continental issue from Belgica inscribed ΑΘΩΘΙΔΙΑΚΙ. This name also mixes Θ and Δ, and has a very Roman inscription on the other side, HIR IMP, which probably dates it to some time during or after Hirtius’ governorship of

29 BM 730-57, VA 352-55 (not in Mack). See also S. Bean, The Coinage of the Atrebates and Regni (Oxford, 2000), pp. 115–26. VA at pp. 129–36 calls the obverse 'A' a 'digamma (an archaic Greek letter with the phonetic value 'w'). It is more likely that the letter either is, or imitates the form of, the Latin letter 'A'.

30 Cf. in the Coritaviusian series, though rather later, what appears to be a letter 'E' on the obverse of a recently discovered gold stater of the South Fertility type, and on the reverse of a race type of Coritaviusian silver. See illustrations in the Treasure Annual Report 2000 (London, 2002), p. 108, Fig. 230.3 and p. 110, Fig. 236.1.

Haselgrove, op. cit. n. 12, esp. pp. 147 ff., argues that most pre-war coinages from Belgica were epigraphic, legends only becoming widespread after 60 BC. See also id., Mediterranean influence on southern Belgic Gaul between the fifth and the first centuries BC’ in B. Chaume, J.-P. Mohen and P. Pépin (eds), Archeologie des Celtes. Mélanges à la Mémoire de René Joffroy (Montargis, 1999), pp. 131–44, esp. pp. 137–8.

31 RIG IV nos 133ab, 134, 212 (see list on p. 523).

32 It is an alternative for E in Latin epigraphic script of this period.

33 For the gold coins inscribed with the name ΑΘΩΘΟΔΟΜΑΡΟΣ, see BM 2399–2415; VA 1605–66 (also including some uninscribed, attributed types), Mack 266–8. For the silver coins in his name, see J.H.C. Williams, ‘Delete-undelete: Mack 280 and early British silver’, NC 158 (1998), 53–61. For an example of the bronze, see the H.R. Morris sale, Glendining 6 November 1991, 346.5, illustrated on plate X.

34 E.g. in RIG III 91, 8, 8, L-6, an inscription from Néris-les-Bains (Allier), in central France.

35 For Gaulish forms of Greek Θ and Latin D on coins, see table in RIG IV p. 12.

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Gaul in 45 BC, that is to more or less the same period as the coins of ΑΘΕΔΟΜΑΡΟΣ. The appearance of theta in its various forms in these names is not merely arbitrary borrowing or senseless confusion of alphabets. The languages spoken both in southern Britain and northern Gaul clearly had need of a Greek letter within inscriptions otherwise written in Roman characters to represent a phonetic value not provided for by the Roman alphabet. That there was some awareness on the Continent that the Greek and Latin scripts were different, potentially alternative, alphabets is demonstrated by three types which repeat the same name in Latin and Greek letters: ΡΟΒΕΚΑ / POOYIKA, ΕΠΕΝΘΟΣ (also spelt ΕΠΕΝΥΣ) / ΕΠΕΝΟΗΟΣ, ΣΟΛΙΜΑ / COALIMA. They were also recognised as complementary to one another in the successful rendering of the sounds present in Gaulish and British names is revealed in this case by the selective borrowing of Θ into a name otherwise written in the Latin alphabet. Though drawing on Roman and Greek scripts emanating ultimately from southern Gaul, the rise of Gallo-Latin scripts was also an indigenous development that created a new alphabetic convention suited to Gaulish needs.

There is no firm evidence attesting to the knowledge or use of the so-called Gallo-Greek script in Britain, though it cannot be discounted as a possibility. The legend ΑΘΕΔΟΜΑΡΟΣ is written in a Gallo-Latin alphabet and rendered in its un-Latinised, British form in the same way as Gaulish names are rendered on continental issues. What this legend does suggest, though, is that certain areas of south-east Britain participated in the consequences of the pre- (or rather non-) Roman spread of writing (on coins at least) in similar ways to, and perhaps at the same time as, various parts of temperate Gaul. The attractive and plausible implication of this is that writing may have come to Britain as part of its primary diffusion into northern Europe in the early to mid first century BC, rather than solely as a reflex of the secondary, post-conquest diffusion of Latin language and scripts after the conquest of Gaul. Britain participated in this latter development as well, as the arrival of Roman lettering, together with Latinised terminations for British names, Latin words and epigraphic formulae appearing on coins in the latter part of the first century BC demonstrate. But that this was not the only source for writing in Britain is clear from the ΑΘΕΔΟΜΑΡΟΣ legend. This does not necessarily provide us with a new, higher chronology for the adoption of writing in Britain, though it opens up the distinct possibility some knowledge, and possibly the active use, of writing was present in Britain at some point in the earlier part of the century, even if there is no direct evidence to prove it.

There is, however, a fair quantity of evidence on the coins for the pre-conquest presence of Greek letters especially within Belgica. There is a surprisingly early and fairly passable Gallo-Greek legend reading something like ΘΙΟΑΕ on gold coins from eastern Belgia which Haselgrove dates to the mid to late second century BC. From the early first century BC, there is the silver issue inscribed ΝΙΔΕ / ΑΛΛΑΠΡΩΔΙΙΟΣ, a legend written in a suggestive mix of Greek and Latin characters, and the bronze series inscribed (according to the editors of RIG IV) ΔΕΙΟΥΓΙΙΑΓΟΣ, both from southern Belgica. Other candidates for early legends in Belgica are the potins inscribed ΑΡΗΑ; the silver coins inscribed ΙΙΕΝΝΟΥΙΝΑΟΣ; and the various genuine and pseudo-legends on the coins from Villeneuve-Saint-Germain including ΒΙΡΙΤΙ (or

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38 RIG IV no. 13 = Scheers no. 153, class 1. RIG IV p. 60 wrongly asserts that Hirtius was governor of the Belgic cities (?) from 44 and 31 BC. He in fact died in battle as consul in 43 BC.
39 See Evans, op. cit. n. 37, p. 419. Cf. also RIG IV no. 53, ΙΙΙΟΟΑ ΛΙΧΟΙΟΙΟ / ΜΑΓΚΙΦΕ, mixing Greek and Roman letters, not haphazardly but purposely to represent different sounds.
40 RIG IV nos 241-2 (= Scheers no. 28), 163 (= Scheers no. 143), 267. The first two types are Belgic, while the latter is from eastern Gaul, and they all seem to belong to the latter part of the century. This does not of course exclude the possibility that this knowledge was present in Belgica before the conquest. Cf. also RIG II.1, pp. 85-6, no. L-4A, a brief bilingual stone inscription from Genouilly (Cher) in central France where the name Virilio is written out in Latin and Greek letters, together with the interesting Greek language inscription [ ... ] εφοιμος / [ ... ] εφοιμος (" ... Jeneanum made [ili].") This must be one of the best pieces of evidence that some knowledge of the Greek language as well as of the alphabet penetrated temperate Gaul in the first century BC apart from Caesar. BG 1.29.1 and 6.14.3 on the use of "Graecae litterae" in Gaul.
41 Scheers no. 48 = RIG IV no. 212; Scheers no. 155, class 1 = RIG IV nos 133-4, sometimes connected with the name Diocletian, mentioned by Caesar as that of a former king of the Suebillians, a Gaulish people of the southern Belgian region, who held sway over most of Gaul and even a part of Britain (BG 2.4.7).
42 Scheers no. 185, class 1 = RIG IV no. 14.
43 Scheers no. 49 = RIG IV no. 221.
Greek letters seem to predominate within this group but Latin letters are present too. The Villeneuve coins were also often overstruck on imported earlier first-century types from east and central Gaul including Q. DOCI and SEQUANOIOITVOS, as well as ΚΑΛΕΤΕΔΟΥ, suggesting that knowledge, if not use, of Latin letters was probably present at least in southern Belgica along the Aisne Valley substantially earlier than their more widespread adoption on the coinage in the later first century BC.

The best literary evidence for pre-conquest knowledge of writing in Belgica tells a possibly rather conflicting story. It comes from Caesar’s De Bello Gallico, where Caesar sends a secret message written in Greek (Graecis ... litteris) to his legate Q. Cicero (younger brother of the famous orator) who is surrounded by the Nervii ‘so that our plans would not be realised by the enemy through the interception of the letter’. This passage suggests that, so far as Caesar knew, the Nervii of northern Belgia knew Latin and could read Latin letters, but could not read Greek, which is rather the reverse of what the evidence of the early coin legends would suggest was the case in southern Belgica, where Greek seems to predominate. This does not of course exclude the possibility that Caesar was completely wrong, or that some familiarity with the Greek alphabet, as opposed to the language, was present among the Nervii. Caesar’s letter was surely written in the Greek language, and was not merely using Greek letters to render Latin words. This would have been a bizarre and unnecessary combination for educated Romans like Caesar and Q. Cicero who were entirely fluent in reading and writing Greek.

Taking all of this together, it looks as though writing, mostly in Greek letters but also to a lesser extent in Latin, was beginning to be used, and was therefore already familiar, in some areas of southern Belgica in the early first century BC; while further north Caesar’s testimony seems to suggest that the knowledge of writing was acquired some time before its first appearance on the coins. In the western region of Belgica closest to Britain, we have already noted the appearance of single-letter inscriptions in the middle of the century which also presuppose some knowledge of writing, even though they do not necessarily prove that it was used at all extensively. All of which opens up the distinct possibility that writing was not entirely unfamiliar to at least some of the inhabitants of south-eastern Britain before the Roman conquest, even if it does not become prevalent on the coins either side of the channel until the mid to late first century BC.

The coins of A00edomaros discussed above seem typologically to belong to the latter part of the century. They show affinities to those of Tasciovanus and Dubnovellaunos, and are conventionally, and reasonably, dated to about 20 BC. Even the gold coins inscribed with the name COMMOS and usually (though not necessarily rightly) attributed to the Commius who appears in Caesar’s De Bello Gallico tend to be dated no earlier than the 30s or 20s. But the important point at issue here is not so much the date when writing first came to Britain, as the circumstances and sources of its earliest appearances. The evidence for the use of characteristically Gallo-Latin scripts in Britain, set within the context of the Belgic evidence, suggests that writing was first adopted within Britain not in the wake of, nor solely as a consequence of, the sudden presence of Romans in Gaul, but as an outcome of the widespread but patchy diffusion of the knowledge, and occasional use, of Greek and Roman letters through various areas of temperate Gaul in the early to mid first century BC.

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46 Caes. BG 5.48.4. For more on Gaulish knowledge of Greek letters, see BG 6.14.3 where Caesar describes the druids’ use of litterae Graecae for all manner of public and private affairs (‘in reliquis fere rebus, publicis privatisque rationibus’), apart from their sacred lore which they never write down and only commit to memory; and BG 1.29 on the tablets inscribed with Greek letters found in the camp of the Helvetii containing a catalogue of the tribes involved in the great raid westward. On Gaulish writing further south, see Strabo 4.1.5 on Gauls learning to write contracts from the Massilians, and Diodorus 5.28 on letters written to the dead and thrown on funeral pyres.
47 The context, attribution and chronology of these coins is controversial. For a recent review of the evidence, see Bean, op. cit. n. 29, pp. 115–26. The attempts to invent a ‘Commios son of Commios’ on the basis of a supposed reverse inscription COMMIOS, so as to dissociate these coins from Caesar’s Commius is, as yet, poorly founded. The evidence for this inscription is not good, consisting of BM 728 and another vanished specimen from the same reverse die (see Bean, op. cit., pp. 117, 221 n. 130); it seems more likely that BNI 728 simply reads COM·clockwise above the horse and ·HIOi ·aster·clockwise in front of it (cf. the similar disposition of the Tinoco-MARVS legend on the early stater in his name: BM 761–5, VA 363, Mack 94), and that ‘Commios son of Commios’ is a will o’ the wisp.
The Roman invasion did not put a sudden stop to the story of indigenous literacy within Gaul, no more indeed than it put a stop to the production of coinage in the indigenous Gaulish tradition. It is clear that writing of both Gallo-Greek and Gallo-Latin varieties continued to spread into new areas, or at least to find its way onto coins, within Belgica after the conquest. It is this development that provides the context for the spread of Gallo-Latin-style writing onto the coins in Britain in this period. In Britain, though, the picture is made more complex by the late adoption of Gallo-Latin letters onto the coins, which seems to have been more or less contemporary with the first appearance of more orthodox Roman letters, and name forms, on some of the coins of Tincomarus and Tasciovanus south and north of the Thames respectively in the late first century BC. It is not possible from the coins to identify a period in Britain when only Gallo-Latin was in use on the coins, as it is in Belgica.

Non-Roman Gallo-Latin scripts do persist in certain areas of Britain throughout the pre-conquest period. In addition to the barred D’s in the Iceniand Dobunnic series mentioned above, there is a further, rather telling instance. The name in the recently deciphered inscription ESVPRASTO which appears on the obverse of the silver coins formerly attributed to King Prasutagus of the Iceni, husband of the more famous Queen Boudica, and datable to the mid first century AD, seems to be represented on a series of presumably more or less contemporary gold and silver coins of the neighbouring Corieltauvian series as ISVPRASV or ESVPRASV, written in very Gallo-Latin looking letters on a thoroughly traditional, un-Romanized reverse type (on which, see more below).\(^{48}\)

There seems then to be some evidence for the co-existence of ‘indigenous’ Gallo-Latin and newer Roman writing traditions in pre-Roman Britain as a whole, both in the letter-forms used, and in the ways in which names, especially their terminations, were represented. However, within the two south-eastern coinage traditions either side of the Thames associated with the dynasties of Commius and Tasciovanus, there is an almost exclusive preference for Roman styles of lettering and writing, whereas the evidence for co-existence is strongest in the peripheral traditions associated with the Iceni, Dobunni and Corieltaui. This of course does not mean that Gallo-Latin scripts were not used at all in the ‘core kingdoms’, merely that they were not used on coins.

**Romanization and British coin-legends**

The Romanization of writing on British coins reveals itself in five ways: in the styles of lettering used, in the disposition and composition of the inscriptions, in the Latinized terminations adopted for British names, in the adoption of a Latin epigraphic convention to express filiation, and in the use of one Latin title (=rex, on the coins of Eppillus, Verica and Cunobelin).\(^{49}\) These developments seem also to overlap with the rise of new styles of coin design in south-east Britain. The coins of the individual, probably some kind of king, formerly known as Tincomius, whose real name, Tincomarus, was restored to him only recently by the discovery of a hoard of gold coins from Alton, illustrate this change.\(^{50}\)

Some of Tincomarus’ early gold coins have what was then the traditional design for a gold coin in southern Britain, what John Creighton calls ‘serial imagery’, with the abstract remains of a wreathed head of Apollo on the obverse and a similarly abstract horse on the reverse – with his name inscribed also on the reverse around the horse in neat, rather Roman-style lettering TINCOMARVS, already with a good Latin termination (Pl. 1, 6). But most of Tincomarus’ coins are conceived in a quite different manner, with what one might call rather more Roman-style motifs and Roman-looking lettering as well, though not necessarily copying either designs or inscriptions on


\(^{49}\) On the use of *rex*, see Creighton, op. cit., n. 5, pp. 165–72. I see no reason to think that NICON on an issue of gold coins in the name of Tasciovanus (BM 1623; VA 1760; Mack 184) is the Celtic version of the title *rex*, as is usually asserted. It seems just as likely that it is a personal name associated with that of Tasciovanus like SEGO (see BM 1625; VA 1845; Mack 194) and DIAS (BM 1728; VA 1882; Mack 192). See D.E. Evans, ‘Rex Icenorum Prasutagus’ in C. Tuczay, U. Hirlinger, K. Lichtblau (eds.), *Ir Sult Sprechen Willekomen: grenzenlose mediävistik. Festschrift für Helmut Birkhan zum 60. Geburtstag* (Bern, 1998), pp. 99–106, where this idea is canvassed with approval at pp. 103–4.

Roman coins. The type BM 770 (VA 385; Mack 100) shows a rather fine equestrian scene on the reverse with Tincomarus’s name abbreviated and positioned under the horse’s feet, in the same way as similarly abbreviated moneyers’ names often appeared on Roman Republican denarii (PL I, 7). The obverse displays a rather different sort of trend, which if anything is rather more typical of developments in pre-Roman Britain in that its use of Roman sources of inspiration is eclectic rather than slavish. Here we have another abbreviated inscription in large, bold, lettering, well spaced, and with punctuation as well: COM · F. All very Roman-looking, an impression that is compounded by the fact that the legend is written in Latin – ‘COM’, short for ‘Commi’, the genitive form of the personal name Commius, and ‘F’, the standard Latin epigraphic abbreviation for filius, the Latin for ‘son’, the whole meaning ‘Son of Commius’, referring to Tincomarus. This is good epigraphic style and completely new within the British context, at least in the way it is written – there is no reason to suppose that patronyms were not common in indigenous nomenclature as well. What is most un-Roman though is the way in which the inscription is displayed in large letters across the face of the obverse within a tablet or cartouche. This is unprecedented in either Roman or Gaulish coinage traditions, though there are other possible Roman sources for this kind of inscription. The lettering used is of the best Roman epigraphic style, while its setting within a tablet is reminiscent of Roman manufacturer’s stamps, as used for instance on bricks, glass, terra sigillata or amphorae.51

What the evidence of these coins shows is that in the late first century bc between Commius and his (purported?) son Tincomarus there is a profound change in writing styles and language use, at least on coins in south-eastern Britain. But it is by no means a straightforward borrowing from, or imitation of, Roman precedents. The new-style inscriptions are disposed in entirely new and un-Roman ways across the face of the coin, whether within a cartouche as on the example mentioned above, a pattern which became popular across several other British coinage traditions, or in the four quarters of a simple cross design as on some silver coins of Tincomarus (T-I-N-C; BM 930–45; VA 372: PI. I, 8), a pattern also seen in the gold and silver coins of Tasciovanus (gold: BM 1641–4; VA 1690–2; Mack 152–3; silver: BM 1661–2; VA 1796; Mack 164) and the C-R-A-B silver coins from Hampshire and the Isle of Wight (BM 2788; VA 1285; Mack 371). The coins clearly demonstrate that Roman writing styles and conventions were being heavily drawn upon and were extremely influential within pre-Roman Britain, but that they were also being creatively manipulated. They also reveal a fairly thorough-going familiarity with the culture and conventions of Roman writing which facilitated the borrowing of conventions appropriate to one medium, for instance that of lapidary and ceramic epigraphy with their characteristically large, bold lettering, onto another, in this case coins. The way in which the letters in the inscription TINC on the obverse of some of Tincomarus’s gold coins are formed is simply unparalleled in the lettering-styles on Roman Republican coins, and is far more reminiscent of the bold lettering on public monumental epigraphy or ceramic stamps.

There are two ways of interpreting borrowing of this sort – either optimistically as evidence of conscious local creativity in the exploitation of Roman styles of writing, or pessimistically as proof of the inability of the ancient Britons to recognise what a coin should look like and how writing should be properly used on it. Were it merely a case of the latter we should perhaps expect to see bad copies of recognisable originals, as on the early continental copies of gold staters of Philip II of Macedon which often reproduce the reverse Greek inscription Philippou accurately, but just as often allow it to degenerate into a meaningless pattern.52 But this is not what we see in most pre-Roman British coin inscriptions. Again, as with the Gaulish examples mentioned above, they are essentially homegrown creations drawing on some obvious Roman sources but reassembling them in an original manner.

The case for an optimistic reading of the British adaptation of Roman themes and motifs in pre-Roman British coinage has recently been asserted afresh by John Creighton. He has argued that its

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52 On the Iron-age copies of gold Philips in Belgica, see most recently Haselgrove, op. cit. n. 12, pp. 120–5.
apparently thorough-going Romanization in the late first century BC is due to the presence of young British princes in Rome who had grown up as hostages at the court of Augustus. and who, on returning home, brought back with them the visual language and symbolism of Augustan Rome. Creighton has identified some remarkable affinities between new coin types appearing in the late first century BC in Britain, Gaul, and the Kingdom of Mauretania in North Africa which he argues may be attributable to their shared up-bringing in Rome. Augustus certainly did entertain the sons of various barbarian chiefs in Rome precisely in order to de barbarise them and render them sympathetic rulers in the future, but whether or not this is the whole explanation for the phenomenon Creighton is looking at, the pre-conquest Romanization of British coinage, is perhaps open to question. However, one of his observations in this connection is very persuasive. The rise of the prominent advertisement, in Latin, of dynastic connections such as the one we have just looked at - Tincomarus son of Commius - on British coins is more or less contemporary with its appearance on Roman coinage prompted by the rise to power of Caesar Augustus Son of the God (Divi filius) as emperor of the Roman world. Creighton suggests plausibly that ‘Tincomarus Commi filius’, or ‘Cunobelinus Tasciovanus filius’ (BM 1956; VA 2091; Mack 243), are local reflections of the grand figure of Imperator Caesar Divi Filius. Dynasty-building certainly seems to have become an important phenomenon both inside and around the edges of the Roman world in the mid to late first century BC, and coin-types and legends are exploited in new ways to express the point.

Creighton is right to argue that the imitation and borrowing of Roman, and more specifically Augustan, words and motifs referring to dynastic claims were clearly going on in Britain. But whatever social changes gave rise to these apparently new expressions of the cultivation of dynasty within Britain cannot be regarded as merely imitative or Romanizing. No doubt the increased proximity of Roman power in Gaul after Caesar’s conquest had a transforming effect on the political landscape within at least south-eastern Britain, as it did on conquered Gaul. The attested flight of two British kings to Rome to seek help from Augustus, as that of Dio’s Berikos to Claudius, is a clear indication of the new context within which the parochial power-struggles of British dynasts could, or perhaps inevitably would, be played out. But whether Tincomarus and Cunobelin saw themselves within their realms as little versions of Augustus rather than of Commius or Tasciovanus seems an open question.

If emulative Romanization was all that was going on among the elites of south-east Britain, we should perhaps expect to see more explicit expressions of closeness with the Augustan dynasty, as certainly appears on the coinages of various other kingdoms on the edge of the Roman world like those of Judea, the Crimea and Bosphorus, and Thrace, which bear the emperor’s name and portrait, sometimes in association with that of the local ruler. Yet there is not a trace of any of this on the British coins. There are heads on British coins from the ‘North Thames’ kingdom of Tasciovanus and Cunobelin clearly modelled on that of Augustus, but in no case are they labelled as such. Indeed they seem rather to be named for their respective British rulers (Pl. 1, 9). What Augustan language and imagery there is on the coins of pre-Roman Britain, and there is a lot of it as

53 Creighton, op. cit. n. 3, chapter 4.
54 It is a bit odd that Creighton seems not to take account of one piece of hard evidence we have for contacts between the kings of Britain and Augustus, the passage in the Res Gestae in which two kings, one Dumnobellus[us] and another whose name is only, and uncertainly, preserved as TIM[ ... ] (hence his long-standing identification with Tincommius/Tincomarus), are attested as having visited Augustus, but as suppliants (ad me supplices congruent: RG 32), not as hostages. On the uncertainty of the reading ‘Tim ...’, see Cheesman, op. cit. n. 50, p. 312.
55 Creighton, op. cit. n. 3, pp. 188–93. Cf. also the claims of Verica and Epaticcus to Connian paternity on their coins.
56 See n. 54 on the two British suppliant kings; and Dio 60.19.1 on Berikos.
57 See RPC I for a conspectus of the relevant types: nos 1701–26 for Kings of Thrace and nos 1842–1934 for Kings of Bosphorus, both of which refer to the Roman imperial family; nos 4901–92 for Judean rulers, of whom Herod Antipas and Philip, Agrippa I and Agrippa II (but not Herod the Great or Herod Archelaus) made coins with imperial portraits. The rare coins of Armenia Minor show Nero (nos 3839–40); while those of Armenia show Augustus (nos 3841–44), as do those of the Himyarites of south Arabia (nos 4993–98). Coins of the Kingdoms of Cappadocia (nos 3601–68), Commagene (nos 3845–67), Pontus (nos 3801–38) and Cilicia (nos 3871–72) lack imperial portraits as do those of the Nabataeans (see ibid. p. 686). For the coins of Mauretania and Numidia, see J. Mazzard, Corpus Nummorum Numidiae Mauretaniae (Paris, 1955). These coins are free of imperial portraits, but legends accompanying altar- and temple-types do refer to Augustus and Tiberius.
58 Cf. the silver and bronze types of Tasciovanus, BM 1681, VA 1794, Mack 163; BM 1685, VA 1818, Mack 178; BM 1736, VA 1814, Mack 176; and the bronzes of Cunobelin BM 1902, VA 2083, Mack 227; BM 1968, VA 2089, Mack 242.
Creighton rightly shows, nowhere explicitly refers to the Roman world beyond the shores of Britain, or to the person of Augustus. The visual language of the coins seems to suggest that Augustan words and symbols are not simply being mobilized as an expression of closeness to the new Roman focus of power in the person of Augustus. Rather it seems to point to the construction of new, local focuses around dynastic figures such as Commius and Tasciovanus north and south of the Thames respectively. Creighton is certainly onto something here, but we do not need Tincnmarus, Verica or Cunobelin to have spent their formative years in Rome to account for it.

So far we have looked mostly at examples from the south-eastern region, either side of the Thames. But what of coin-using regions further afield and the coinage traditions attributed to the Iceni of East Anglia, the Corieltauvi of the East Midlands (whose coins also circulated well into Yorkshire), the Dobunni of Western England, and the Durotriges of Dorset? In all of these except the last, writing in both Gallo-Latin and Roman forms appears on the coinage, unlike the two kingdoms either side of the Thames, where Roman script predominates. In the Dobunnic western zone, the earliest coins are anepigraphic, followed by a series of gold and silver issues inscribed with abbreviated names in a style identifiable as Gallo-Latin, with respect to the placing of the inscription (in the traditional manner around the edge of a stylised, reverse horse), and the letter forms adopted, in particular the occasional use of Θ on the coins of ANTED, although this alternates with a more standard, unbarred Latin ‘D’ (Pl. 1, 10).

One group, the gold and silver coins of BODVOC, stands out in its use of a more obviously new (Roman) style of lettering, together with the ‘cartouche’ style on the gold and a human profile head on the silver (Pl. 1, 11 and 12). Perhaps understandably the coins inscribed BODVOC have tended to be placed at the very end of the Dobunnic series, on the assumption that Romanization of this sort was a cumulative, one-way process from which there was no return, such that Gallo-Latin ANTED is inconceivable after Roman BODVOC. This is clearly wrong. The BODVOC coins may be able to be placed last in the series for other reasons such as weight or metal-fineness, but not just because they look more Roman.

The same principle has been applied to the silver coins of the Iceni formerly attributed to Prasutagus which are clearly inscribed not merely with Roman-style letters but with a good Latin legend (though an odd one in terms of Roman coin conventions), ESICO FECIT / SVB ESVPRASTO (‘Esico made it / under Esuprastus’), and a Roman-looking obverse head (Pl. 1, 13). Their Romanized appearance (in particular the persuasive similarity of the obverse head to that of the young Emperor Nero on Roman coins) and the presumed historical connection with Boudica’s Prasutagus encouraged a post-invasion date for these coins in the AD 50s. In this instance the evidence is somewhat better than it is for the case of BODVOC’s coins. Metrology (the ESVPRASTO coins are noticeably lighter than other Iceni silver issues) and more abundant hoard evidence suggest that they are indeed very late, if not indisputably last, in the East Anglian silver series. They follow on from a tradition of inscribed silver coinage involving, at the start, Gallo-Latin letter forms (ANTED, the D being barred: Pl. 1, 14), apparently succeeded by something of a shift towards more Roman-looking styles of inscriptive writing, involving a more even distribution and sizing of the letters on the ECEN, ECE, SAENV and AESV series (Pl. 1, 15).

This apparent trend, however, is tempered by the rare and undatable issue inscribed with AED (barred) 1C on the obverse within a prominent cartouche, and {ISA[ on the reverse under the horse (Pl. 1, 16). The tablet-form of the inscription suggests a later style, as does the clear Roman lettering, but the barred ‘D’ also raises the possibility of the local preservation of Gallo-Latin forms.

In the Corieltauvian series the newer style of Latinate coin-inscriptions – bold letters set within a cartouche – was innovatively reconciled with older traditions of coin design, the tablet being

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61 In the recent group of finds (probably not a single hoard) from ‘South-west Norfolk’ which contains almost everything Iceni from very worn Bury-type coins to three examples of ESVPRASTO, these coins are clearly the least worn in the group and therefore probably the latest. For an almost up-to-date summary of the finds from this site, see the listing by the author in Treasure Annual Report 1998–1999 (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, London, 2001), pp. 105–7, no. 277. See also J. Creighton, ‘The decline and fall of the Iceni monetary system’ in M. Mays (ed.), Celtic Coinage. Britain and Beyond (Oxford, 1992), pp. 83–92, and id., ‘A time of change. The Iron Age to Roman monetary transition in East Anglia’, Oxford Journal of Archaeology 13 (1994), 325–33 for thoughts on Iceni hoards.  
combined crosswise with the traditional obverse wreath-motif on a number of different issues, while reverses showed an old-style inscription disposed around the edge of a stylised, thoroughly non-Roman-looking horse. In this region non-Roman endings for names seem also to have been preserved – so VOLISIOS, CARTIVELAUVNOS and DVMOCOVEROS – in contrast to the situation further south where the change to Roman-style lettering seems also to have involved a move towards Roman-style name terminations, as in the case of Tincomarus, where these are legible and not omitted (Pl. 1, 17).

Is this merely an indication of peripheral backwardness, an inability fully to comprehend the new styles emanating from the south-eastern core? To deal with this question, we need look no further than the coins inscribed ESVPRASV (or alternatively ISISVPRASV) from the same region, already mentioned above (Pl. 1.18). What could be more ‘Celtic’, more indigenous in appearance? Here we seem to have some local ruler naming himself in a fairly unreconstructed Gallo-Latin style on his gold and silver coins with their traditional designs and letter-forms. As a consequence, and also because of their apparent weight-standard, these coins have in the past been dated relatively early in the Corieltauvian series, before the more Roman-looking ones with obvious name-in-cartouche inscriptions, to around the turn of the millennium. But this stylistic ordering has recently been rather upset by the discovery of a hoard from Silsden, West Yorkshire, containing six coins of ISISVPRASV together with nineteen gold staters of Cunobelin of all the principal varieties (in addition to one stater each of Epaticcus and Volisios Dumnoniaunos). This association suggests a rather later date for the coins of ESVPRASV if the generally accepted chronology of the coins of Cunobelin is at all correct. Add to this the close similarity mentioned above between this inscription and the name ESVPRASTO on the apparently late East Anglian coins, and we may be looking at a date for the ESVPRASV coins perhaps more towards the middle of the first century AD than its beginning. This either suggests that all the more Roman-looking coins of the Corieltauvi were made very late indeed, if we want to maintain that Romanized coins must come after traditional-looking coins – not in itself an impossible position to take – or, what is perhaps more likely, that both Gallo-Roman and more Romanized styles of writing and coin-design were concurrent in this area the mid-first century AD.

This last option is supported by the connection with the Romanized East Anglian ESVPRASTO coins. The ESVPRASV and ESVPRASTO types look as though they come from different periods or completely different worlds, but now they seem not to. They are probably roughly contemporary, and come from adjacent regions of Britain. Between them they reflect different locally-determined responses to a new range of options in coin-design and writing made available in the first century AD by the increased proximity of Roman power and Roman styles. Coin designers in iron-age Lincolnshire (if that is where the ESVPRASV coins were made) may have been relatively conservative compared to those elsewhere, but this is not because they were marginal bumpkins who just did as their fathers did, untouched by, or resistant to, the outside world. They know of new styles but do not follow them slavishly, and instead create a new kind of design out of a combination of traditional motifs and more recent influences. The situation was rather different in East Anglia. Here, a contemporary who was working within the context of a rather immobilized tradition of silver coin design, not particularly receptive to new influences apart from the shape of the lettering under the horse which becomes rather more Roman-looking, suddenly at some point in the middle of the first century AD made the choice to innovate hugely with the ESVPRASTO type, which is in many ways the most Romanized of all British coins, although, of course, it is also very un-Roman in the form and content of the inscription. It should of course go without saying that using Latin did not indicate pro-Roman sensibilities – it was, after all, the locals from Norfolk who under Boudica burnt the new towns of Roman Britain to the ground.

63 Cf. BM p. 13, fig. 3, & pp. 27-8. 64 See ‘Coin Hoards 1999’, NC 159 (1999), no. 12 for summary and Treasure Annual Report 1998-1999, op. cit. n. 61, pp. 103-4, no. 273 for fuller publication. 65 Hobbs tentatively suggests a weight-standard of ‘5.4 g (?)’ for the ESVPRASV staters at BM p. 28, table 8. The six examples from the Silsden hoard range from 4.94 to 4.55 g, suggesting a rather lower standard, which would perhaps fit in with a rather later date for them in the series.
Writing and Romanization

To conclude, the point at issue here is that the use of writing in pre-Roman British iron-age societies was certainly more important and extensive than is generally allowed for in treatments of the period. The coins are more or less all that survive, though the affinities observed in the adopted lettering-styles with those on lapidary and other sorts of Roman inscriptions suggest a degree of knowledge of writing on other media. There is nothing like the legends COM · F or BODVOC on Roman coins of the period. The coins also suggest that the exploitation of writing was potentially a lot more innovative than is usually thought; and that the process whereby influences from the continent, including writing, were picked up in Britain was far more complex either than wholesale adoption or barbarous imitation.

But what is the significance of all this writing and all these complex patterns? Are there any larger lessons to be learnt from the patchiness and unevenness of the distribution and development of the use of writing beyond the mere observation of the pattern itself? In his study of pre-Roman writing in continental Europe, Woolf has drawn a picture of a discontinuous, drawn-out and piece-meal process which, so far as we can tell from the scanty evidence, resulted in some populations using writing of a variety of different kinds, and others not, with little apparent significance beyond the purely local. This contrasts with the much quicker and more meaningful spread of Roman inscriptive writing across Gaul in the few decades after the conquest during the reign of Augustus, which effectively displaced all previous forms of public writing and displayed a visible patterning related to the presence of large Roman settlements and military installations.68 There are elements of both of these processes in the pre-Roman British context, and it is hard to disentangle them since, as argued above, the coins suggest that ‘pre-Roman’ writing, as evidenced in the use of Gallo-Latin letter forms, appears on coins in Britain at more or less the same time as Roman writing, and because the former is never entirely displaced by the latter in the pre-conquest period.

In Britain as a whole, the precise picture may be uncertain but there are also recognisable patterns. The writing-using area more or less corresponds to the coin-using area, with the exception of the Dorset/Durotrigian tradition. The use of Latin scripts is concentrated on the coinages of the kingdoms/traditions either side of the Thames which seem, eventually at least, to opt for them exclusively, whereas the peripheral coinages preserve Gallo-Latin forms while also displaying an openness towards newer Latin styles. This pattern more or less also coincides with the take-up of what might loosely be called Roman-style imagery on coins, which also seems to concentrate in the two ‘core’ coinage traditions either side of the Thames while also being taken up sporadically beyond.

The cultural difference Woolf draws between the pre- and post-Roman contexts of writing is between a world where opting for writing was a relatively marginal matter of limited significance, and one where writing in a certain language in a certain style came as an inevitable part of the Roman cultural package.67 Is this also a distinction that can be drawn between the two central ‘kingdoms’ and the peripheral areas of Britain beyond: that is, that the former are opting for the whole Roman thing, including writing, while those beyond are continuing to pick and choose, combining and recombining eclectically until the Roman invasion puts an end to this iron-age alternative? The answer seems to be that the evidence of the coins does not quite allow us to conclude that the kingdoms of south-east Britain participated fully in the same processes of becoming Roman that were in train over the Channel in Gaul during the century or so around the turn of the millennium. The language and writing on their coins was changed into Latin, but the coins themselves were wholly unaffected by Roman denominational structures and only tangentially influenced by Roman precedent. Even the Romanizing-classicizing types on ancient British coinages display a considerable degree of eclecticism and inventiveness in their use of Roman models and, despite Creighton’s convincing demonstration of a thorough-going reception of Augustan imagery, as a corpus they remain eccentric when viewed from the Roman perspective.68 As

66 Woolf, op. cit. n. 13, pp. 82-91.
67 Woolf, op. cit. n. 13, p. 93.
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regards the question of the use of writing, the lack of clear evidence from pre-Roman Britain, even in the ‘core area’ of the south-east, for the exploitation of the full range of applications characteristic of Roman writing, especially monumental inscriptions on stone, militates against assimilating the development of writing there too closely to the situation in large parts of post-conquest Gaul.

Rather than the conscious business of becoming Roman, the incompleteness of the adoption of Roman practices associated with writing in pre-Roman Britain points instead to a more parochial cultural significance for this change. Tincomarus, or at least Tincomarus’s die-engravers, wrote his name in large, Latin letters not primarily to refer to the Roman world from which the inspiration for those letter-forms came, but to create a sense of difference from what had gone before on local coins – which had mostly been uninscribed – and from what was going on elsewhere in the region at around the same time in the third quarter of the first century BC, for instance on the coins inscribed with the name of Aëthedomaras where the option in favour of writing was also taken, but writing of a different sort, set within the context of a very differently conceived series of coin-designs.

On the occurrence of Roman-style toilet instruments in late iron-age Britain and the changes in life-style which they imply, J.D. Hill has written: ‘We could perhaps see the adoption of these new life-styles as the development of alternatives to existing dominant discourses and power structures ... adopted by emergent elite groups and others, to distinguish and disembody themselves from existing discourses and power structures.’ The picture he draws is of people making deliberate choices in favour of alternative ways of being, which involved the exploitation of certain classes of material artefact not associated with previously established local practice. This must be right. Pre-conquest south-eastern British elites were not just blindly imitating the Romans, nor are they to be seen as consciously adopting a Roman ideology of civilization in preference to a learnt, and rejected, notion of barbaric Britishness. There is no evidence that an awareness of this binary opposition, so characteristic of much Roman thinking, was really operative in pre-conquest Britain, in the ways that it was coming to be in post-conquest Gaul at the same time. This is the difference that is reflected in, and revealed by, the variant ways in which Britons and Gauls take to Roman writing in the late first century BC and the early first century AD. The option for writing is just one of those alternatives which, like toilet instruments, new (?) British elites could take, once the possibility had become available in its various forms over the first century BC. It was taken by some and not others, just as the option for coinage was also taken by some and not others. Even by those that did take up writing, it was not exercised in all the ways it could have been, though it may well have been used in many contexts other than coinage now lost to us. This at best partial assimilation of the Romans’ so-called epigraphic habit is not an indication of a lack of understanding on the part of its British users, nor indeed of any lack of intrinsic significance. Rather it is an indication of how writing could be significant in iron-age Britain: as a new way of monumentalizing the names of powerful individuals, and in some instances expressing their relationship, whether actual or merely asserted, to famous forebears, within the context of a changing society. There was experimentation with a range of new conceptual and material alternatives, some of which came from the continent. But the people of iron-age Britain were not simply buying wholesale into a foreign culture and ideology. They were not yet becoming Roman, but they were becoming different kinds of people by exercising choices within a context of cultural diversification stimulated, among other factors, by the suddenly increased proximity of Roman things, styles, language, ideas, and power.

Here is not the place to speculate on the presumably minimal extent of literacy in pre-Roman Britain in the hope of gauging thereby the nature of monumentality on ancient British coins, nor to return to the now hackneyed question of whether anyone in antiquity ever looked at coin-types

69 J.D. Hill, ‘“The end of one kind of body and the beginning of another kind of body”? Toilet instruments and “Romanization” in southern England during the first century AD’ in A. Gwilt and C. Haselgrove (eds.), Reconstructing Iron Age Societies, Oxbow Monograph 71 (Oxford, 1997), pp. 96–107, at p. 102.

Public commemoration of individuals of the sort that appears on coins or monumental inscriptions surely does not consider its own function in such instrumental terms. It does not necessarily require a large readership or audience in order to operate effectively according to its own standards. Monumental inscriptions need not even be legible or set up in a readily accessible public place. The main point of monumental inscriptions is simply that they are impressively and memorably there, and further that they successfully evoke the memory of the person concerned, an evocation that will inevitably bring with it all the many qualities and deeds that made them worthy of a monument in the first place. In short, expressions of monumentality such as the inscribing of the names of kings and rulers on coins can flourish in the absence of an already literate mass audience. The use of coins as expressions of personal and family commemoration had been in vogue at Rome since the 130s BC, and it became particularly intense under Augustus. This was also one option taken up by some of the rulers of south-eastern Britain, with some local variations. But other obvious possibilities made available by Roman example, stone inscriptions on buildings in particular, were not taken up. This merely reflects what we already know about the piecemeal and deliberately selective nature of what we may still just about call the Romanization of pre-Roman Britain.

The difference between writing in pre-Roman Britain and in the Roman world, even post-conquest Roman Gaul, is that in Britain its use seems to have been restricted to a comparatively limited number of functions and media. Of these we can be certain of its use in monumental inscriptions on coins and in graffiti on pottery, perhaps indicating ownership (see bibliography in n. 26). There may well have been other ways in which it was used, but it is unlikely that the picture of writing as a ‘special-purpose’ activity in pre-Roman Britain is very wrong. This is, of course, not the same as saying that it was somehow ‘primitive’ in contrast to all-purpose Roman writing. On the most banal level what is remarkable about writing in pre-Roman Britain, in the light of its significant absence from most accounts of the period, is perhaps that it is there at all. This has been a preliminary attempt to draw attention to the significance of this fact, and to stimulate further discussion of what it all might mean.


72 And ‘there’ can even a long way away and very hard to get to, like Pompey’s and Augustus’ inscribed monuments to their Spanish and Alpine victories in the Pyrenees and at La Turbie in the French Alps respectively, which were all the more memorable, and therefore successful in monumental terms, for their inaccessible, epic positioning, expressing triumph over both faraway peoples and insurmountable natural obstacles.

73 For the distinction between ‘special purpose’ and ‘all-purpose’ in the context of money, see G. Dalton, Tribal and Peasant Economies. Readings in Economic Anthropology (Austin, 1967). For a discussion of writing in another context where the epigraphic evidence is scarce but it is likely that the use of writing was rather more extensive than the evidence might suggest, see T.J. Cornell, ‘The tyranny of the evidence: a discussion of the possible uses of literacy in Etruria and Latium in the archaic age’ in J.H. Humphrey (ed.), Literacy in the Roman World (Ann Arbor, 1991), pp. 7–33.
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KEY TO PLATE

1. Gallo-Belgic E stater, Scheers class VI, BM CM 1911.12-4.1
2. Gold stater attributed to Commios, BM 730
3. Gold quarter-stater attributed to Commios, BM CM 1878.3-5.41
4. Silver 'Danebury type' coin inscribed EX, BM 615
5. Gold stater of Aededomaros, BM 2390
6. Gold stater of Tincomarus, BM 765
7. Gold stater of Tincomarus, BM 771
8. Silver coin of Tincomarus, BM 931
9. Bronze coin of Tasciovanus, BM 1731
10. Gold stater attributed to the Dobunni inscribed ANTED, BM 3023
11. Gold stater attributed to the Dobunni inscribed BODVOC, BM 3139
12. Silver coin attributed to the Dobunni inscribed BODVOC, BM 3144
13. Silver coin attributed to the Iceni inscribed SVB ESVPRASTO, BM CM 2000.3-1.2
14. Silver coin attributed to the Iceni inscribed ANTED, BM 3826
15. Silver coin attributed to the Iceni inscribed ECE, BM 4464
16. Silver coin attributed to the Iceni inscribed AEDIC, BM 4581
17. Gold stater attributed to the Corieltauvi inscribed VOLISIOS DVMVOCOVEROS, BM 3333
18. Gold stater attributed to the Corieltauvi inscribed IISVPRASV, BM 3296