

# COINAGE AND CURRENCY OF THE BELGIC TRIBES DURING THE GALLIC WAR

SIMONE SCHEERS

THE dating of the gold coinage of the continental *Belgae* is important for the monetary history of Britain, for some issues were current in Britain as well as on the Continent, while others never crossed the Channel.



FIG. 1. Weights of 'Belgic' staters.

1. *Ambiani*, types both sides. 2. *Ambiani*, uniface. 3. *Veliocasses* (?). 4. *Suessiones*, anepigraphic.  
5. *Nervii*. 6. *Treviri*.

This paper describes a phase of Belgic coinage of special importance derived from a single prototype, the staters of the *Ambiani* with types on both sides (Pl. I, 1-2). This series was formerly but wrongly attributed to the *Atrebatés*, and must have been struck immediately before the Gallic War, waged between Caesar and the *Belgae* from 58 to 50 B.C.

The cohesion and importance of this group of coins is evident, for though there are many varieties, all are characterized by a clear relationship of type, weight-standard (Fig. 1), and technique of minting. The series consists for the most part of staters only. Coins can be attributed to the *Ambiani*<sup>1</sup> (Pl. I, 3-4), the *Suessiones*<sup>2</sup> (Pl. I, 5-6), the

<sup>1</sup> Uniface staters formerly attributed to the *Morini*. The coinage of the *Ambiani* comprises the following successive issues: broad-flan staters (Gallo-Belgic A), staters with types on both sides (Gallo-Belgic C) and uniface staters (Gallo-Belgic E and Xc. 1). The latter were contemporary with the Gallic War, and were the

last gold coins to be issued by the *Ambiani*.

<sup>2</sup> H. de la Tour, *Atlas de monnaies gauloises*, Paris 1892 (cited as LT), pl. XXXII, 8018-20 and XXXI, 7631-2. Cf. S. Scheers, 'L'histoire monétaire des *Suessiones* avant l'arrivée de César', *Ancient Society*, i (1970), pp. 135-61, Pl. V.

*Meldi*<sup>1</sup> (Pl. I, 7–8), the *Nervii*<sup>2</sup> (Pl. I, 9–10), the (?) *Veliocasses*<sup>3</sup> (Pl. I, 11–12), and the *Treviri*<sup>4</sup> (Pl. I, 13–18). The presence of certain of these staters, particularly the uniface staters of the *Ambiani*, in a good number of hoards, demonstrates that they must be linked to events in the Gallic War.

There is no doubt that these 'Ambianic' or 'Belgic' staters are contemporary with the war. The weight, the extremely low fineness of the gold (Table 1), and the large hoards are all evidence of this. Noteworthy also is the appearance of inscriptions, in particular the presence of the same legends on silver and bronze issues.

TABLE I

*Fineness of 'Belgic' staters*

	% gold	s.g.	fineness
Ambiani, types both sides	69	14.6–15.3	3.10–4.20 g.
uniface	45–55	12.8–14.8	3 g. and less
Suessiones		12.9–13.7	
Nervii			1.90–2.20 g.
Treviri	50		

Careful reading of Caesar's Commentaries enables us to relate certain details of the coinage to the historical account, and thus obtain a more precise chronology for some of these series.

To the *Meldi*, for example, can be attributed the gold staters inscribed ROVECA. Caesar mentions this people for the first time in 54 B.C.<sup>5</sup> Before the war, they had been a part of the confederacy of the *Suessiones*, but after its collapse in 57 B.C., the *Meldi* gained their independence.<sup>6</sup> There is no doubt that the striking of coinage, especially in gold, implies political independence, at least during the war. The gold staters of this people cannot therefore be earlier than 57 B.C. The strong influence upon the ROVECA staters of the gold coinage of the *Suessiones* can be accounted for by the proximity and the long period of political association of the issuers, an influence extending also to certain struck bronzes.

The gold coinage of the *Treviri* is very interesting and shows much variety. It consists of six classes, two uninscribed and four bearing legends, VOCARANT, LVCOTIOS, POTTINA, and APΔA. They fall into two distinct groups. The first comprises the anepigraphic class with the 'oval eye' and those inscribed VOCARANT and LVCOTIOS (Pl. I, 13–15). Type and style are similar, and the weight exceeds 6.00 g. (Fig. 3). Coins of this group are found in considerable numbers throughout the whole of northern Gaul, though rarely in the actual territory of the *Treviri* (Fig. 2). The second group contains the other anepigraphic class, that with 'concentric circles', and the inscribed coins of POTTINA and APΔA (Pl. I, 16–18). These classes never exceed 6.00 g. and the last two are struck to the very low standards of 5.40 to 5.49 g. and 5.30 to 5.39 g. respectively (Fig. 3). Their distribution is confined to Treviran territory itself (Fig. 4).

<sup>1</sup> LT XXXII, 7941–5.

<sup>2</sup> LT XXXV, 8746–66.

<sup>3</sup> LT XXIX, 7234–48. There are also quarter staters.

<sup>4</sup> LT XXXV–XXXVI, 8799–825.

<sup>5</sup> Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, v. 5. 2.

<sup>6</sup> J.-B. Colbert de Beaulieu and J.-M. Desbordes,

"'Criciru" et "Roveca", les Belges sur la Marne', *Revue Belge de Numismatique*, 110 (1964), pp. 98–101; J.-M. Desbordes, 'César et les Suessiones', *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire offerts à André Piganiol*, Paris, 1966, pp. 972–3.

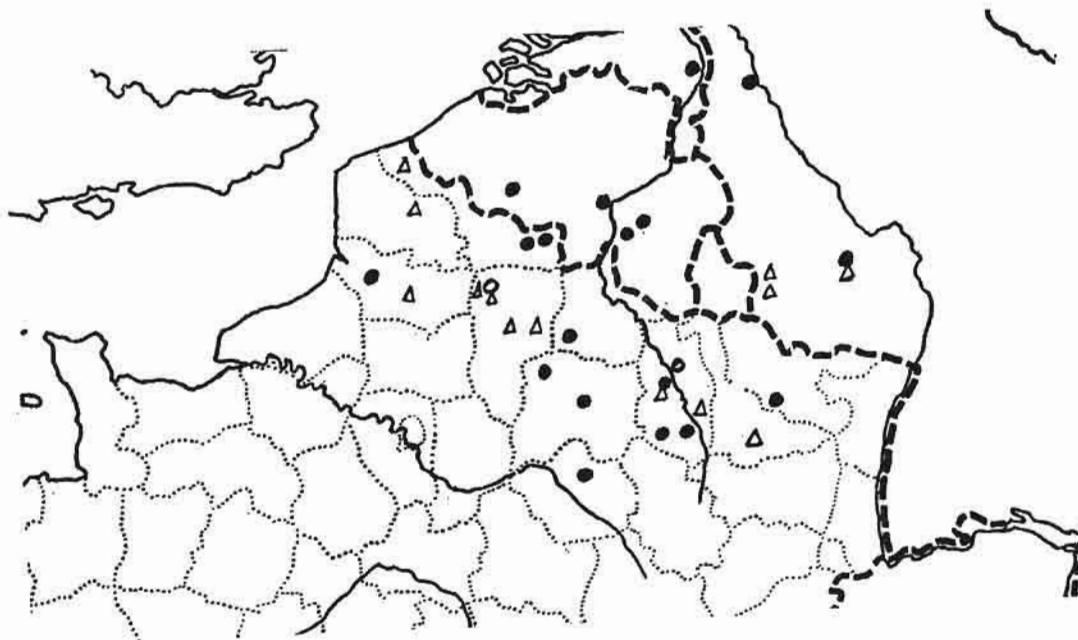


FIG. 2. Findspots of Treviran stater (First Group).

● Anepigraphic stater with the 'oval eye'. ○ Stater inscribed VOCARANT. Δ Stater inscribed LVCOTIOS.

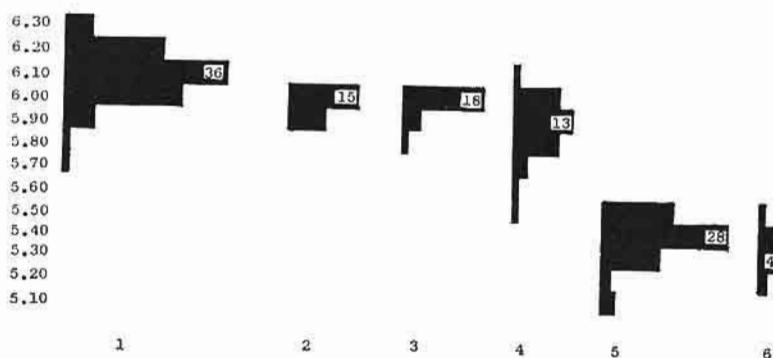


FIG. 3. Weights of Treviran stater.

1. Anepigraphic stater with the 'oval eye'.
2. Stater inscribed VOCARANT.
3. Stater inscribed LVCOTIOS.
4. Anepigraphic stater with 'concentric circles'.
5. Stater inscribed POTTINA.
6. Stater inscribed APAA.

The coinage of the *Treviri* well reflects the political and military intrigues of that people. Before 54 B.C. they pursued a devious course, taking care to remain on good terms with the three powers between which they found themselves: the Germans from beyond the Rhine, the *Belgae*, and Caesar. Sometimes they helped one, sometimes another, and thus succeeded in avoiding war. In 54 the anti-Roman party, led on by

Indutiomarus, took over the leadership of the tribe, and Roman intervention became inevitable. We can date the first group of coins with certainty before 54 B.C., in view, as we shall see, of its wide distribution outside Treviran territory. The second group falls therefore in and after 54; its restricted distribution corresponds admirably with the new policy pursued from this date.

This conclusion is supported by the evidence of rare staters attributed with near certainty to the *Eburones*<sup>1</sup> (Pl. I, 19). On the obverse is a triquetra, related to that on the 'Regenbogenschüsselchen' struck by the Germanic peoples on the Rhine; the

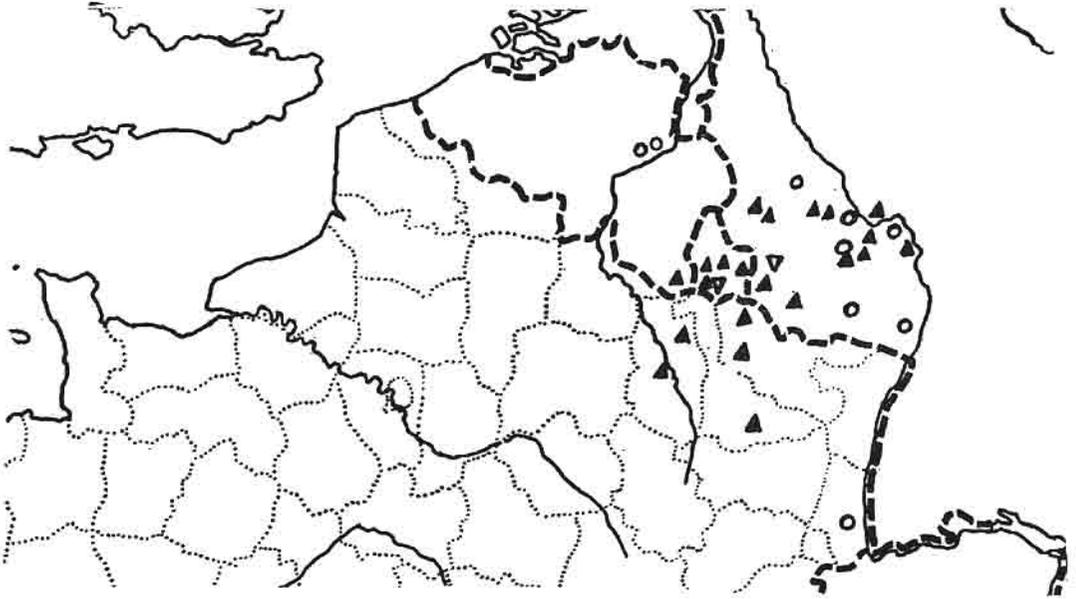


FIG. 4. Findspots of Treviran staters (Second Group).

▲ Anepigraphic staters with 'concentric circles'. ○ Staters inscribed POTTINA. ▽ Staters inscribed APΔA.

horse of the reverse is copied from that on Treviran staters with the 'concentric circles' (Pl. I, 16). Little is known of the *Eburones*, other than Caesar's statement that they were of Germanic origin. They were incited to revolt by Indutiomarus, chief of the *Treviri*, and in 54 Ambiorix attacked the camp of Sabinus and Cotta, annihilating the garrison. If the *Eburones* struck coin, it can only have been at this time, when Ambiorix needed to finance his campaign. The close links between the *Treviri* and the *Eburones* in 54 explain the presence of the type of the one on the reverse of the stater of the other.

It follows that the Treviran staters with the 'concentric circles' must be assigned to Chief Indutiomarus. This explains at the same time why this is the first issue not to be found outside Treviran territory, and the slight reduction in weight. It might equally explain the absence of a legend on these coins, since this practice was of Roman origin. In order to strike these coins, Indutiomarus will have had to withdraw all earlier coins; this, then, is the reason for their almost total absence within the land of the *Treviri*, in

<sup>1</sup> LT XXXVI, 8859.

contrast to later issues. As for the coins inscribed POTTINA and APΔA, they are as we have seen of a much-reduced weight standard. They come after the pause in hostilities during the winter of 54–53, some time after Indutiomarus himself had fallen in battle in 54.

We are not in a position to offer so detailed a picture of other Belgic currencies, for which information on the coins is less clear and the role of the issuing peoples less precisely known.

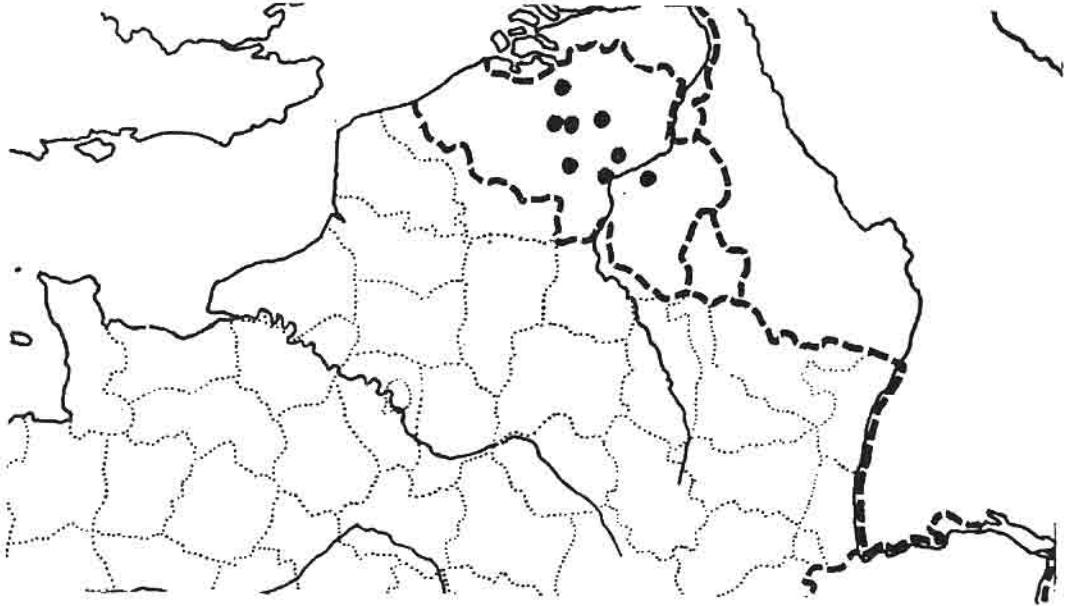


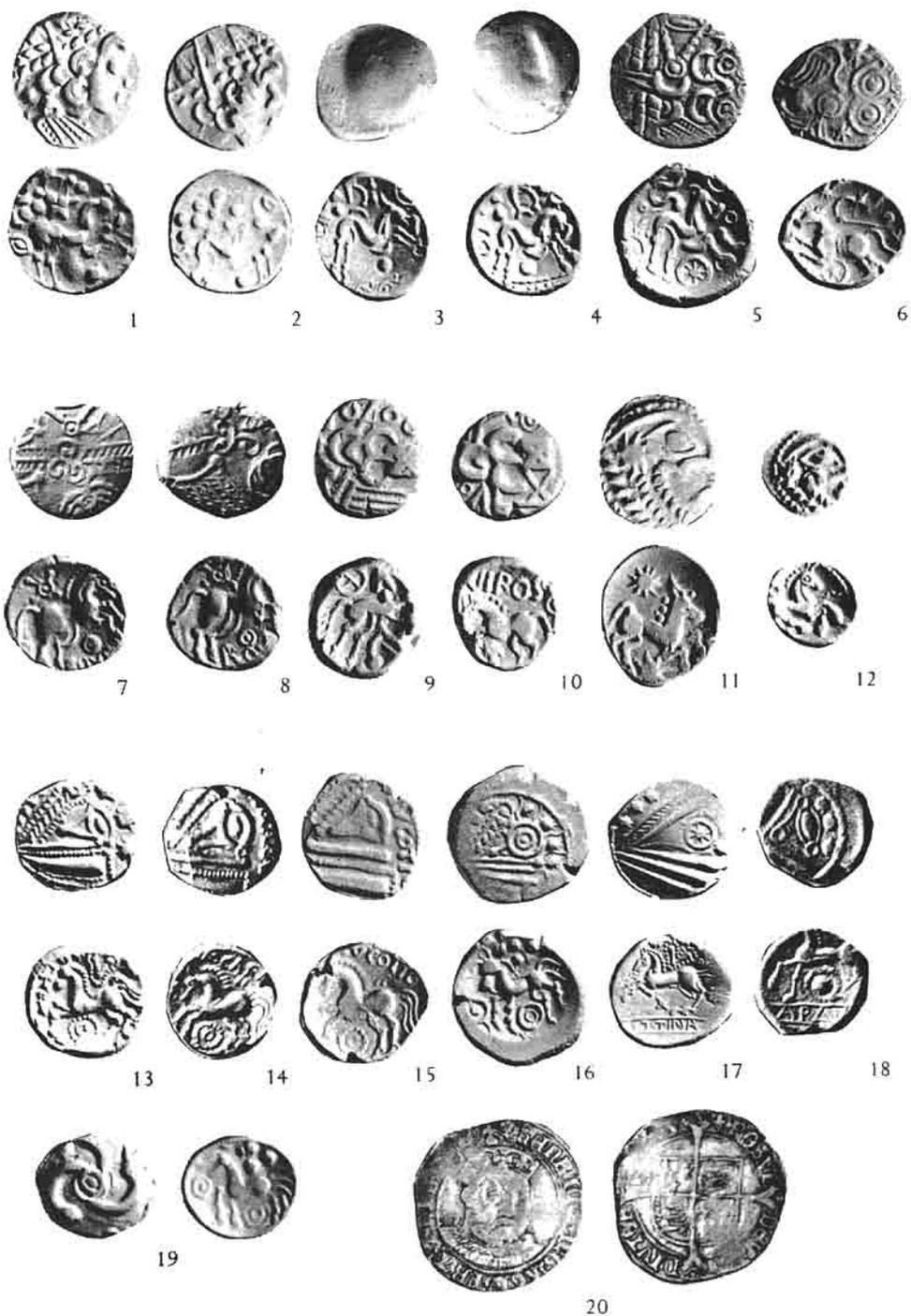
FIG. 5. Findspots of staters of the Eburones.

One important fact emerges from this account; from the time of the war against the Romans only staters of the 'Ambianic' or 'Belgic' type were current, and hoards of the time of Caesar contain nothing else. The only exception is the find made in 1905 between Reims and Châlons-sur-Marne, which contained 200 uniface staters of the *Ambiani* and 200 globular staters of Allen's Gallo-Belgic Class XB. There is every reason to believe that this treasure dates from the early days of the war.<sup>1</sup>

It cannot be entirely by chance that several peoples began to strike coins of a common type at this time. The *Belgae* displayed an unusual unanimity, from the very beginning of the war, establishing for example a general assembly where manpower was assessed with a view to establishing an army. It is likely that during the assembly currency measures also were adopted: the striking of coins with related types and to the same standard; the withdrawal of all earlier coins to facilitate relations between tribes and to

<sup>1</sup> The globular staters with the type of a cross have a higher weight and gold content than the coins of 'Belgic' type; they are probably somewhat earlier. The weight varies between 7.20 g. and 7.29 g. Chemical analysis, several times repeated, of specimens from the Reims-Châlons hoard, gives the following gold finenesses:

65 per cent, 67.5 per cent, 70 per cent, and 80 per cent. Cf. V. Tourneur, 'Une monnaie de nécessité des Bellovaques', *Gazette Numismatique*, 10, 1905-6, p. 83. It may be remarked that the uniface pieces known to come from this find belong to the earliest issues of the type.





finance the war.<sup>1</sup> This agreement will have brought to an end earlier, unrelated coinages, which from this time disappeared from continental currency, and left markets open solely to coins of 'Belgic' type.

The inception of this series of coins may accordingly be placed some time in the winter of 58–57, though we cannot determine the exact date more precisely. The end of each coinage must be related to the history of the issuing peoples and to their gold reserves. It is in any case certain that after 50 B.C., gold ceased to be struck on the Continent.

The war of 58–50 B.C. resulted in the last emigrations to Britain; the only coins of 'Belgic' type to reach this country were the uniface staters of the *Ambiani* and the uniscribed staters of the *Suessiones*. All other continental Belgic gold coins and their entry into Britain must be dated earlier than 58 B.C., for, as we have seen, they disappeared from continental circulation immediately after the outbreak of the Gallic War.

I am most grateful to Professor P. Naster for his encouragement of my researches into Celtic coinage. I should also like to thank the museums whose collections I have been able to consult: the British Museum, London; the Cabinet des Médailles, Paris; the Cabinet des Médailles, Brussels; the Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe; the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, Mainz; the Bundessammlung von Münzen, Medaillen und Geldzeichen, Vienna; the American Numismatic Society, New York. The translation of this paper was provided by Dr. J. P. C. Kent.

#### LIST OF COINS ILLUSTRATED (PLATE I)

1. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, 8598
2. British Museum 1809
3. British Museum 1834
4. British Museum 1824
5. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, 8025
6. British Museum
7. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, 7631
8. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, 7632
9. British Museum
10. British Museum
11. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, 7321
12. British Museum
13. Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum
14. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, 8823
15. American Numismatic Society
16. Mainz, Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, O.25610
17. Brussels, Cabinet des Médailles
18. M. Dessewffy, *Barbar penzei*, Budapest, iii, 1910, pl. XXXX, 959
19. Vienna, Bundessammlung von Münzen, Medaillen und Geldzeichen, 26.691

<sup>1</sup> The *Treviri* were not members of the Belgic alliance, but they were certainly in touch with the *Belgae*; it would otherwise be difficult to account for their participation in the same 'monetary union' and their striking of coins of the same typology and weight standard.