

# Hengistbury Hairy

by Chris Rudd

Almost two-thousand years ago, on a windy promontory overlooking Christchurch harbor in Dorset, an innovative Celtic moneyer did something unusual, something no moneyer had ever done before. He pressed his fingernail into a clay mould, poured molten bronze into the mould and cast a unique type of coin—a coin that would forever carry his individual identity, his exclusive finger-print, his own personal mint-mark.

I call the coin 'Hengistbury Hairy' because it was probably cast at the late Iron Age mint-site of Hengistbury Head, Dorset (Fig. 1), in the tribal territory of the Durotriges (Fig. 2), and because the moneyer had used his sharp fingernail to create a pattern of human hair on both sides of the coin.

Hengistbury Hairy is unusual in three other respects. Firstly, because it may have been one of the last Celtic coins

minted anywhere in Europe, *ca.* 40-100 AD. Secondly, because only one other example is recorded—a broken specimen excavated at Hengistbury Head, 1911-12. And thirdly, because it is one of the few Celtic coins that apparently features male and female sexual organs.

At first glance, this remarkable Durotrigan coin (Fig. 3) has a simple geometric design of lines, crescents and pellets—an abstract motif of no particular significance. But the more you look at it, the more you see and the more you realize that Hengistbury Hairy can be interpreted in several different ways—all subjective, all ambiguous. You and I can look at this coin and see completely different images. Yet both views are valid, because both were intended by the designer.

For example, look at the obverse of Hengistbury Hairy and you may see a stylized, almost childlike, facing head with a long nose, vacant eyes and open



Figure 1—Hengistbury Head, Dorset. Excavation of late Iron Age port on shore of Christchurch harbor, with mint site to right of photo.

mouth. Or is it a grimacing, down-turned mouth? Or is it a droopy Celtic moustache? You can't be sure, you're not



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meant to be sure. Look more closely and you may observe that the head has short hair.

Look again and you may see that the phantom face—now you see it, now you don't—has become a phallic face with pubic hair instead of cranial hair. If you find this suggestion offensive, I apologize. But I must state categorically that I be-

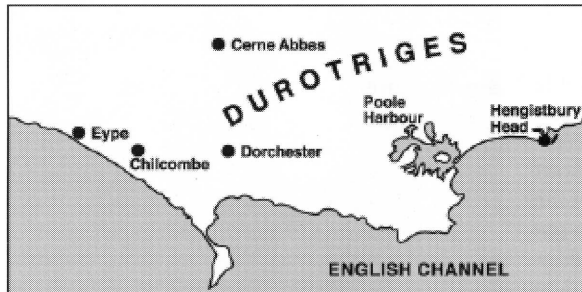


Figure 2—Southern territory of Durotriges, whose capital was Durnovaria (Dorchester).

lieve the sexual imagery was intentional, not accidental.

The reverse of Hengistbury Hairy is equally ambiguous (Fig. 4). When you look at the design horizontally you simply see a row of seven pellets, surrounded by a mass of fingernail impressions.

However, when you view the image vertically, you may—or may not—see a hairy vagina. The choice is yours. Once again, I'm sorry if this upsets you, but I'm convinced that the idea was in the mind of the moneyer (not just mine) when he made this coin.

In defense of my provocative sexual interpretations I offer you four items of local corroborative evidence: four other phallic faces, all Durotrigan, all from Dorset, all within fifty miles of Hengistbury Head (Fig. 2), all of late Iron Age or Romano-British date. They are the Cerne Giant, the Eype head, the Chilcombe head and the Dorchester pot-knob; and I invite you to examine them candidly, with an open mind and without prejudice. If you dare.

The Cerne Giant (Fig. 5), a 55-meter Celtic colossus carved out of the chalk hillside above Cerne Abbas, Dorset, provides the most outstanding and compelling evidence that the Durotriges, in common with other uninhibited Celts, were familiar with public displays of the male organ. In addition to his erect phallus (originally

4.8 meters high and lengthened to 7.2 meters in 1908 by incorporating his navel), the Cerne Giant also has a flaccid phallus on his face, with his eyes as testicles. Because this Durotrigan deity—perhaps Helis Toutatis or a Celtic version of Hercules—was probably created before the Claudian invasion of 43 AD, it is likely that the man who made Hengistbury Hairy was aware of the giant and may even have visited the sacred site himself, which is only eight miles from the tribal center at Dorchester.

The Eype head (Fig. 6), found near Bridport, Dorset, is the upper part of a phallic pillar of gray greensand. A simple oval face, with long nose and slit mouth, is carved on the glans of what is clearly a stone penis. Below are overlapping, compass-drawn circles which probably represent wheels of subtle energy. The Chilcombe head (not illustrated), also from near Bridport, Dorset, is a smooth stone pillar with a rudimentary slit-mouth and eyes carved at the top, which widens slightly. Similar phallic pillars, all with face on glans, have been found at Maryport in Cumbria, Broadway in Worcestershire and Port Talbot in Glamorganshire (Fig. 7).

The Dorchester pot-knob (Fig. 8), a fragment of smooth, black, Durotrigan pottery, made at Poole harbor or Chickereil and found in household debris of the fourth century AD, is the closest parallel to Hengistbury Hairy in the way that it combines male and female sexual imagery. It shows a pregnant woman with an agonized expression on her face, as if in labor. Her nose is an erect phallus and her chubby cheeks are testicles. Her legs are folded inwards and her vulva, like her mouth, is wide open—an ambivalent, almost fetal posture, which may indicate that she is ready for sex or about to give birth.

The close similarity between the face of the Dorchester pot-knob and the face of Hengistbury Hairy (Fig. 7) is striking and inescapable—once you've seen them together you can't deny their resemblance—and may suggest a long standing Durotrigan tradition of gender-bending iconography.

Hengistbury Hairy is by no means the only British Celtic coin with a phallic face. There are many others and I illustrate six here. An early silver unit of the Cantii, Facing Heads, has two ithyphallic bull heads, each with nose-ring as glans (Fig. 9a). An early gold stater of the Atrebatas, Selsey Two Faced, conceals a small phallic face in its wreath motif (Fig. 9b). An unscribed silver unit of Commios shows the penile nose of a bat-like phallic face—with-ears about

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to enter the mouth of a head in profile (Fig. 9c). A Freckenham gold stater of the Eцени has a flaccid phallic face above the horse, a fact publicly acknowledged by Spink not long ago (Fig. 9d). An Eцениan silver unit, Norfolk Boar, has a phallic face under the horse, described by Van Arsdell as a 'copper-pin shaped line' (Fig. 9e). And a Catuvellauni gold stater of Andoco features a phallic bucranium with horns (Fig. 9f).

I'm not aware of any Gaulish coins with phallic faces such as these. But I expect there are some that I haven't spotted yet. However, the Champagne Wild Man, a common potin coin of Gallia Belgica, known as *potin à la tête d'indien* or, more vulgarly, as 'Dick Head', displays no less than eight male members in varying degrees of arousal: seven on the obverse as knob-ended locks of lime-stiffened hair, plus one on the reverse as the horse's tail (Fig. 10).

Once again, the sexual inference is optional. You're not obliged to see it. That's the beauty of surrealistic Celtic art. It can be seen on several levels and as you view it, keeps moving from one level to another, never standing still. Hengistbury Hairy is an excellent

example of surrealistic Celtic art and I congratulate the moneyer with a sharp wit, as well as a sharp fingernail, who created it.

*Acknowledgments*—I thank Prof. Barry Cunliffe for Fig. 1, Rodney Castle for Fig. 5, Dr Anne Ross & Richard Feachem for Figs. 6 & 7, Rodney Legg & Colin Graham for Fig. 8. Design: Brendan Ralison. Production: Elizabeth Cottam. Copyright © Chris Rudd 2001.

*About the author*—Chris Rudd is a dealer who specializes in Celtic coins from Aylsham, Norfolk.

See the following pages for Figures 4-10.

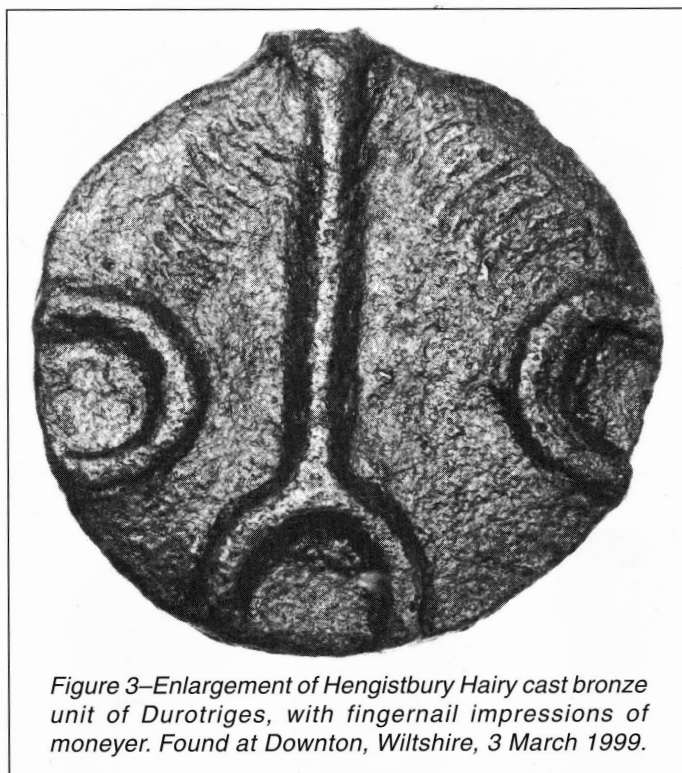


Figure 3—Enlargement of Hengistbury Hairy cast bronze unit of Durotriges, with fingernail impressions of moneyer. Found at Downton, Wiltshire, 3 March 1999.

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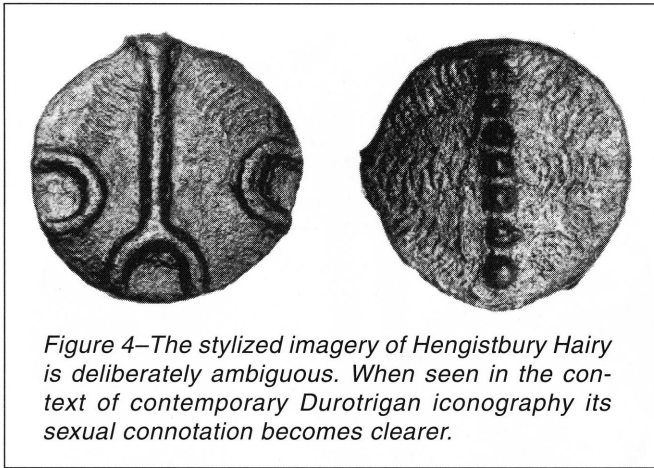


Figure 4—The stylized imagery of Hengistbury Hairy is deliberately ambiguous. When seen in the context of contemporary Durotrigan iconography its sexual connotation becomes clearer.

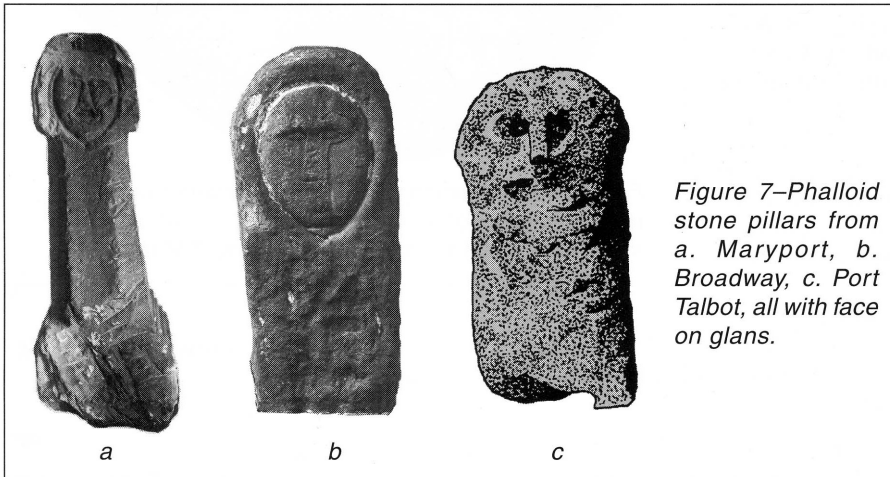


Figure 7—Phallic stone pillars from a. Maryport, b. Broadway, c. Port Talbot, all with face on glans.

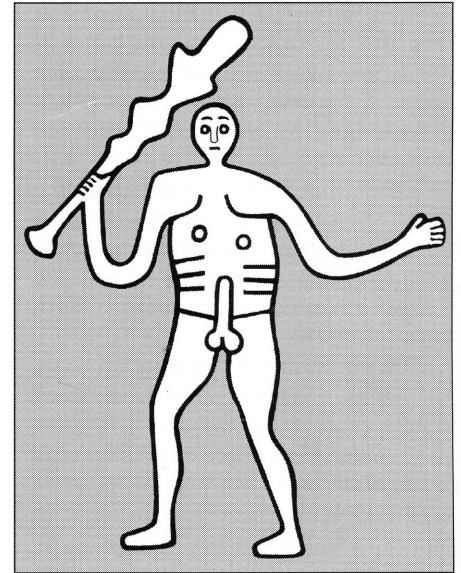


Figure 5—The Cerne Giant, Cerne Abbas, Dorset, as he is today. 2000 years ago his phallus was shorter and he possibly carried a severed head in his left hand.

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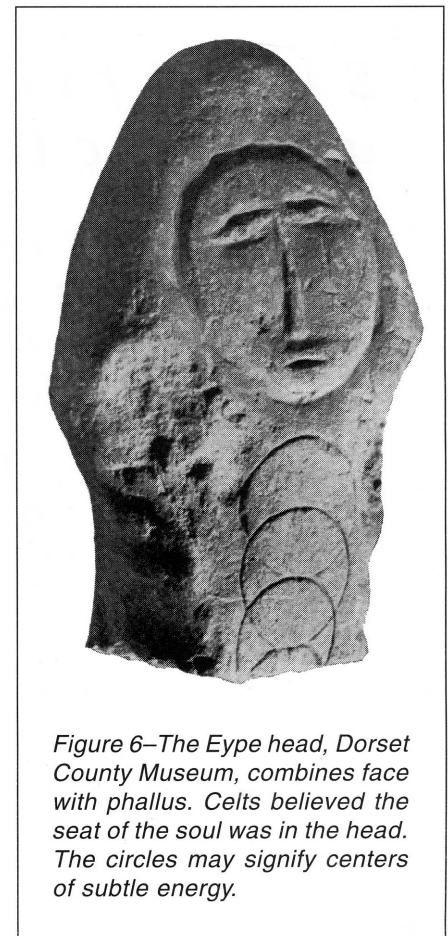


Figure 6—The Eype head, Dorset County Museum, combines face with phallus. Celts believed the seat of the soul was in the head. The circles may signify centers of subtle energy.

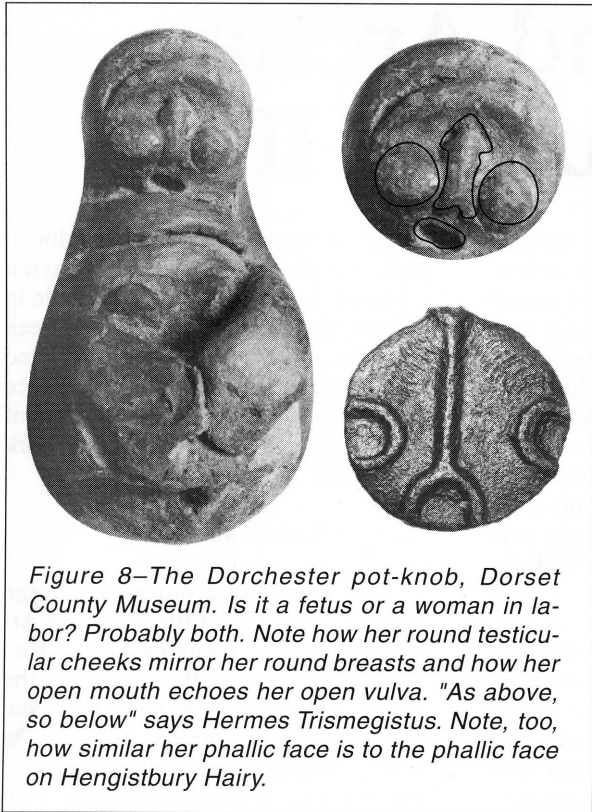


Figure 8—The Dorchester pot-knob, Dorset County Museum. Is it a fetus or a woman in labor? Probably both. Note how her round testicular cheeks mirror her round breasts and how her open mouth echoes her open vulva. "As above, so below" says Hermes Trismegistus. Note, too, how similar her phallic face is to the phallic face on Hengistbury Hairy.

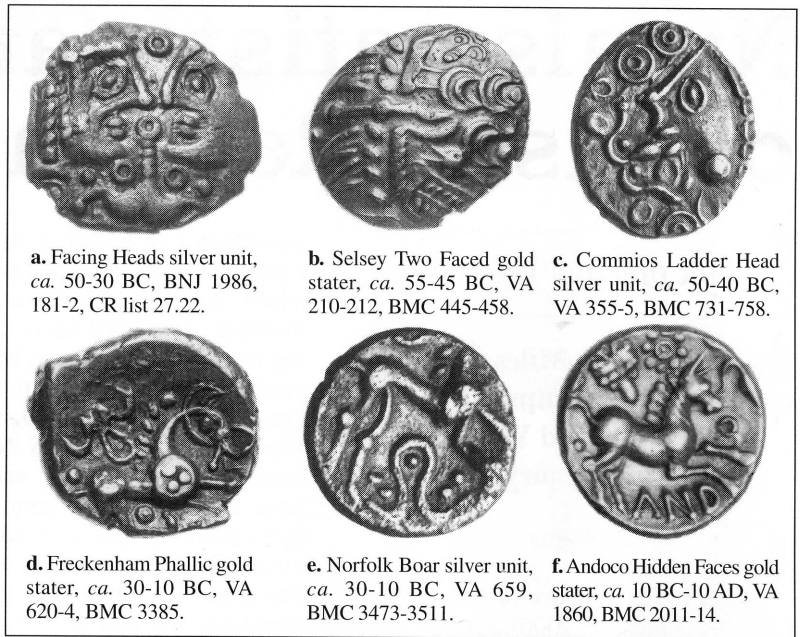


Figure 9—British Celtic coins with hidden phallic faces.



Figure 10—Champagne Wild Man cast potin of Tricasses tribe, ca. 75-50 BC, with no less than nine knobbed phalli, LT 7417, BMC 389-404.



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