

# Minimum impact

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In the last decade or so of recording finds of Celtic coins at the CCI, it has become increasingly apparent that there is something odd, or at least rather different, about the reporting of Celtic minims. Put simply, I hardly ever see any. Why is this? Is it just chance, or are there good reasons for this? I'd like to explore some possible explanations here.

At the time of writing, the CCI holds records of some 625 'minims'. These are tiny silver coins, typically weighing not more than 0.30g, and usually 8 or 9 mm in diameter, or about half the diameter of the current five pence piece. More than 98% of these coins (614) are associated with the South Thames kingdom, in particular Verica (56% of the total) and Epaticcus (21%); Tincomarus, Eppillus, Caratacus and a few uninscribed issues make up the remainder. These are the coins I'll be focusing on here. I'll leave to one side a handful of very rare types, including coins of Amminius and ?Solidus in Kent, and the Vep Corf minims of the Corieltauvi.

My particular interest in these 614 South Thames minims, on this occasion, lies not in the undoubted skill of their engraving, or the sources of their designs, but almost exclusively in where they have been found. In the accompanying table I've attempted to divide them into four categories, according to provenance. The coins themselves have been split according to the usual classifications, mostly Van Arsdell (V) or the British Museum catalogue (BMC); the figure in brackets indicates the total number of specimens of each type.



Reconstruction of Romano-Celtic temple at Wanborough by David Williams, courtesy of Surrey Archaeological Society.

The first column, headed **temple**, lists those coins which are certainly from a temple site: the most famous is Wanborough, but also included here are coins from Hayling Island, Lancing Down, and "Waltham St Lawrence" (probably Weycock Hill: see Simon Bean, *The coinage of the Atrebatas and Regni* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 273-275). The second column, headed **?temple**, records coins which I suspect are from a temple site but which have no provenance attached. Many of these are fairly easy to spot, according to their source, the date when they were included in the CCI, and so on. Most of the coins which appeared in trade in the mid- and late 1980s were from Wanborough or Waltham St Lawrence, for example, while some more recent finds from 'near Chichester' are also allegedly from a temple site. I'm confident that nearly all of the **?temple** coins did indeed come from a temple site.

A few are not so straightforward, and in the third column, headed **unknown**, I've listed a relatively small number of coins where I have been unable to come to a firm decision. One of the more significant groups in this column is the so-called Danebury hoard. Simon Bean suggests (*op. cit.*, p. 277) that this was probably a religious deposit, but the presence of a temple is unproven.

In the next column, **not temple**, I've listed those coins which I'm certain have come from other locations. These include the few metal-detected examples which have turned up on my desk in the past decade. Some of these locations might, of course, turn out to have a temple associated with them, and again it's not always easy to draw a clear line which separates out these coins. But again I'm confident that these are all, or very nearly all, from non-temple sites.

In the final two columns I've listed i) the percentage of each type which I calculate to have certainly or probably been found at a temple site, and ii) the percentage of each type which I can confidently say did not come from such a site.

So, what do the rows of figures tell us? In the first place, there seems to be an undeniable association between Celtic minims and temple sites. Of the

# Provenances of Celtic minims recorded by CCI

| type                       | temple | ?temple | unknown | not temple | % temple   | % not temple |
|----------------------------|--------|---------|---------|------------|------------|--------------|
| <b>uninscribed</b>         |        |         |         |            |            |              |
| V358-5 (21)                | 1      | 8       | 8       | 4          | 43         | 19           |
| V482 (17)                  | 1      | 6       | 7       | 3          | 41         | 18           |
| <b>Tincomaros</b>          |        |         |         |            |            |              |
| V383-1, 5 (27)             | 3      | 11      | 10      | 3          | <b>52</b>  | 11           |
| V483 (15)                  | 1      | 11      | 1       | 2          | <b>80</b>  | 13           |
| <b>Eppillus</b>            |        |         |         |            |            |              |
| V420 (6)                   | 2      | 2       | 1       | 1          | <b>67</b>  | 17           |
| V421 (11)                  | 4      | 6       | 1       | 0          | <b>91</b>  | 0            |
| V422 (10)                  | 4      | 6       | 0       | 0          | <b>100</b> | 0            |
| SNC 1995, pp. 89-90 (1)    | 0      | 0       | 1       | 0          | 0          | 0            |
| <b>Verica</b>              |        |         |         |            |            |              |
| V383-7 (6)                 | 2      | 4       | 0       | 0          | <b>100</b> | 0            |
| V384 (8)                   | 1      | 7       | 0       | 0          | <b>100</b> | 0            |
| V480 (2)                   | 0      | 2       | 0       | 0          | <b>100</b> | 0            |
| V484 (11)                  | 2      | 6       | 1       | 2          | <b>73</b>  | 18           |
| V486 (7)                   | 0      | 4       | 1       | 2          | <b>57</b>  | 29           |
| V487 (10)                  | 0      | 7       | 0       | 3          | <b>70</b>  | 30           |
| V510-1 (21)                | 2      | 15      | 1       | 3          | <b>81</b>  | 14           |
| V510-5 (8)                 | 4      | 3       | 1       | 0          | <b>87</b>  | 0            |
| V511 (14)                  | 2      | 7       | 4       | 1          | <b>64</b>  | 7            |
| V550 (19)                  | 2      | 15      | 1       | 1          | <b>89</b>  | 5            |
| V551 (26)                  | 8      | 14      | 2       | 2          | <b>85</b>  | 8            |
| V552 (7)                   | 3      | 2       | 1       | 1          | <b>71</b>  | 14           |
| V553 (19)                  | 3      | 12      | 2       | 2          | <b>79</b>  | 11           |
| V554 (9)                   | 0      | 9       | 0       | 0          | <b>100</b> | 0            |
| V555 (57)                  | 17     | 35      | 4       | 1          | <b>91</b>  | 2            |
| V556 (13)                  | 5      | 7       | 0       | 1          | <b>92</b>  | 8            |
| V557 (19)                  | 5      | 14      | 0       | 0          | <b>100</b> | 0            |
| V559 (8)                   | 0      | 6       | 1       | 1          | <b>75</b>  | 12           |
| V561 (12)                  | 1      | 5       | 2       | 4          | <b>50</b>  | 33           |
| V562 (2)                   | 0      | 1       | 1       | 0          | <b>50</b>  | 0            |
| V563 (28)                  | 6      | 17      | 4       | 1          | <b>82</b>  | 4            |
| V564 (15)                  | 3      | 9       | 2       | 1          | <b>80</b>  | 7            |
| BMC 1582 (1)               | 0      | 1       | 0       | 0          | <b>100</b> | 0            |
| BMC 1583 (15)              | 3      | 10      | 1       | 1          | <b>87</b>  | 7            |
| BMC 1587 (10)              | 4      | 6       | 0       | 0          | <b>100</b> | 0            |
| SNC 1990, p. 50 no. 57 (2) | 0      | 1       | 0       | 1          | <b>50</b>  | 50           |
| <b>Epaticcus</b>           |        |         |         |            |            |              |
| V512 (15)                  | 5      | 8       | 1       | 1          | <b>87</b>  | 7            |
| V558 (16)                  | 4      | 10      | 1       | 1          | <b>87</b>  | 6            |
| V560 (21)                  | 6      | 15      | 0       | 0          | <b>100</b> | 0            |
| V585 (61)                  | 21     | 33      | 3       | 4          | <b>89</b>  | 7            |
| BMC 2358 (18)              | 7      | 7       | 2       | 2          | <b>78</b>  | 11           |
| BMC 2365 (3)               | 1      | 1       | 1       | 0          | <b>67</b>  | 0            |
| <b>Caratacus</b>           |        |         |         |            |            |              |
| V595 (24)                  | 5      | 18      | 1       | 0          | <b>96</b>  | 0            |
| CAR/eagle (1)              | 0      | 0       | 0       | 1          | 0          | 100          |

The figures in bold red type show that a strikingly high percentage of minims have certainly or probably been found at temple sites.

overall total, only 50 coins (8.1%) have secure provenances other than these sites; or in other words, *more than nine out of every ten minims are likely to have been found on a temple site*. There's barely a single minim type which is not significantly more common from a temple source, and the exceptions tend to be extremely rare types with only one or two specimens known. A number of types are known *only* from temples, including seven of Verica's minim coinages.

## Cult minims?



VA 551. The neck torc may signify the divinity of Commios and, by implication, Verica too.



VA 552. The two-door shrine and sacrificial bull's head may both point to ritual practices associated with Commios and Verica.



VA 553. Does the figure in this temple represent a statue of the deified Commios?

*Dr John Creighton says that these three Verica minims may indicate the development of an ancestor cult dedicated to Commios, perhaps with a temple on Hayling Island, Hampshire.*

If we split the minims up by ruler, some more interesting patterns are revealed. For argument's sake let's identify an 'early' group, consisting of the uninscribed coins, one of which (V358-5) has been attributed to Commios, and the coins of Tincomarus. In contrast to the overall figure, 15% of this group come from non-temple sources, noticeably more than any other group: Verica scores 8.0% non-temple, Epaticcus 6.0%, Caratacus 4.0% and Eppillus 3.6%. Could there be some chronological change here? The proportion of

temple coins seems in general to increase over time, although on that basis we might have expected Eppillus – probably contemporary to Tincomarus – to have scored rather higher on non-temple coins.

It's all very well demonstrating that there is apparently a link between temples and minims, but how do we explain it? It would be nice to be able to say that these tiny, inconvenient coins had a function in southern Britain specific to ritual sites – perhaps struck deliberately for use as offerings – but there are several drawbacks to this theory. Firstly, our table shows that they are found elsewhere, albeit rarely. We could allow for some to escape into general circulation, however, or envisage a situation where some were stored until the next visit to the temple, and never made it there. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, we should consider whether there might be a set of entirely different factors at play here. Minims may be found at temples because these are nearly the only circumstances in which they *can* be recovered. These are tiny coins: is detecting technology good enough to pick up a single silver minim in a ploughed field, perhaps six or eight inches beneath the surface? That's a question which detectorists may be able to answer. But I suspect that at least part of the minim/temple association reflects the difficulty of recovering these coins in a non-archaeological or non-hoarded context. It may be significant that at least 12 of our 50 non-temple minims have been recovered in archaeological excavation: although I do not have precise figures for comparison, I suspect that this is an unusually high proportion from archaeological sources. Again this would seem to indicate that the coins might be missed in ordinary detecting (or, of course, in the stripping of topsoil by archaeologists).

So, were Celtic minims specifically associated with temples? I think we can make a strong case that they were, but we cannot prove it, and indeed there are several reasons why our current picture may be misleading. It is possible that as metal detecting technology continues to improve, the number of single minims arriving at the CCI will increase, and I'll have to write an article about how minims are no different from any other Celtic coinage. Watch this space!

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