

Talking heads

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In many old religions we encounter the concept of an audible creator. Some mystics have said that the cosmos was created by sound¹ and that God's voice can sometimes be heard, not by the physical ears, but by an inner sense of hearing.² Did the Druids believe this? Maybe, maybe not. Sacred music was arguably a key part of ancient Druidism³ and this may have echoed a belief in 'inner music'. The Druids left behind no Bible or Koran, so we'll probably never know. However, many iron age coins (possibly influenced by Druidism) depict deities with open mouths – speaking? singing? shouting? – and some seem to have things coming out of their mouths like 'speech bubbles'. Others appear to have flowers or corn ears growing out of their mouths. Here is a small selection of 'talking heads' I've noticed on Gaulish and British coins.



LT 4555

1. It's not only the gods who talk. This beaded 'speech bubble' comes from the mouth of a helmeted, man-headed horse. Gold stater of Pictones 'painted people', 1st cent. BC, DT 3668-69.



LT 6755



LT 6793

2. Ploulec'h type gold stater with long curved 'tongue' (DT 2346) and wheel type silver stater with pupil-less (blind?) eye, volute and little heads on cords all coming out of mouth (DT 2245-46). Both struck by Osismii 'the furthest (away)', 2nd/1st cent. BC.



LT 6555

3. The eloquence of this sun-god magnetises mere mortals and drags them delightedly behind him on golden chains tied to his tongue. His androcephalic solar steed seems to possess the same pulling power. Osismii silver stater, c.80-50 BC (DT 2243-44).



Hooker 15



Hooker 41



Hooker 76



Hooker 91

4. Many silver and billon staters of the Coriosolites 'army of the sun' display oral scrolls or beaded speech-lines, clearly indicating that the sun-god is saying something. These four reconstructed dies were drawn by Major Rybot from a hoard of 12,000 Armorican coins found at La Marquanderie, Jersey, 1935.



LT 8577



LT 8584



LT 9155

5. Divine utterances are depicted in many different ways. Two bronzes of Bellovaci 'strong fighters', c.80-25 BC (DT 231, 509) and potin of upper and mid Seine, c.60-40 BC (DT 229).



ABC 1034

6. Small animals and human heads are sometimes associated with the talking heads of gods and goddesses. For example, a phallic-faced creature appears to be emerging from the parted lips of this moon-faced deity. A British version of the 'creative word' of God? Commios silver unit, c.50-25 BC.



ABC 677



ABC 680

7. The 'creative word' symbolised by oral leaves or corn ear (l.) and oral floral motif. Silver units of Regini, 'the tall ones' or 'the proud, stiff ones', c.55-25 BC.



ABC 1513

8. The grinning god sprouts flowers on a stem while his horse lets out a loud S-shaped scroll. Silver unit of Iceni, c.50-10 BC.



ABC 1522

9. One scroll comes out of the god's mouth, another from his forehead, indicating perhaps that he can create things (or make things happen) just by thinking of them. Silver unit of Iceni, c.50-10 BC.



LT 9194



ABC 1537

10. The power of prophecy – being able to see into the future and speak with foresight – may be symbolised by an eye in the mouth. Potin of Paris region, c.60-40 BC (DT 683) and Odin's Eye silver unit of Iceni, c.20 BC-AD 10. See also LT 6793 (Fig.2).



ABC 2018



ABC 2036



ABC 2072



ABC 2084

11. Enlarging the mouth enhances its importance as a sacred conduit and draws attention to what comes out of it: mostly worm-like scrolls and crescents in the case of these Dobunnic silver units, c.40 BC-AD 40?



ABC 1567



ABC 2855

12. Even if there is no symbol directly emerging from it, an open mouth implies that something is being said, sung or created by it. Norfolk God silver unit with two trefoils in front of face, c.AD20-50, and war-god with CAMV before, on silver unit of Cunobelinus, c.AD8-41.

Notes and sources

1. For example: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by it; and without it was not any thing made that was made" (Holy Bible, John 1:1-3).

2. For example: "And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice

of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: And I heard the voice of harpers, harping with their harps" (Holy Bible, *Book of Revelation* 14:2). Similar references to the 'word of God' and 'mystic music' can be found in the scriptures of Judaism, Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Sikhism. 'Cosmic harmony' or 'music of the spheres' is also mentioned by several classical philosophers such as Pythagoras (born c.580 BC), Heraclitus (c.535-475 BC), Plato (c.428-348 BC), Plotinus (c.AD 205-270) and Iamblichus (c.AD 245-325).

3. Diodorus Siculus (1st cent. BC) says the Gauls have "lyric poets whom they call Bards. They sing to the accompaniment of instruments resembling lyres" (*Library of History* 5.31). Lyres occur on numerous coins of Gaul and Britain, and a silver unit of Cunobelinus (ABC 2867) shows a lyre player (Apollo?), which might perhaps allude to the presence of druidic Bards at *Camulodunon* in the early 1st century AD.

Pictures credits

1 and 10 (LT 9194) by Lancelot Lengyel in *l'Art Gaulois dans les médailles*, Corvina 1954, pl. XI, 121 and pl. XXXIX.430; 2 and 5 by Leon Dardel in Henri de la Tour, *Atlas des monnaies gauloises*, Paris 1892; 3 by Derek Allen in *The Coins of the Ancient Celts*, ed. Daphne Nash, Edinburgh 1980, Fig. 23; 4 by Major N.V.L.Rybot in *Armorican Art*, Société Jersiaise 1952, nos. 19, 35, 59 and 78, © Société Jersiaise; 6 by David Wicks in *Chris Rudd List* 17, no.8; 7, 10 (ABC 1537), 11 and 12 (ABC 2855) from *Ancient British Coins*, Chris Rudd 2010; 8 from Robert Van Arsdell, *Celtic Coinage of Britain*, Spink 1989, VA 81-1, p.74; 9 by John Talbot from The Iceni early face/horse series, in Philip de Jersey (ed.), *Celtic Coinage: New Discoveries, New Discussion*, BAR 2006, fig. 20c, p.225; 12 (ABC 1567) by Liz Cottam in *Chris Rudd List* 111, no.27.

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