

# Solidu, King of Kent.

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The recent discovery of three silver minims inscribed SOL. compels me to ask three questions about the inscription SOLIDV on a silver unit, VA 2073, which is traditionally attributed to Cunobelin. Who or what was Solidu? If he was a ruler, where did he rule? And when? First, let us hear what others have said about Solidu.



1. *Inscription from silver unit, VA2073*

Beale Poste thought Solidu was another name for Aquae Sulis (Bath). John Evans also felt that it was probably a place-name, but added: 'the site of Solidunum, if such a town was designated by the coin, has still to be determined'. R.P.Mack said the meaning of the word was 'uncertain'. Robert Van Arsdell says it is 'still a mystery'. Richard Hobbs says it is of 'uncertain attribution'. All pretty non-committal, and understandably so.

However, in 1987 Colin Haselgrove said that the Solidu type was 'evidently late, possibly even post-conquest.' And last year Philip de Jersey also suggested that it was a very late issue and, more significantly, that it may have been 'produced, or at least circulated' in Kent. Last year the evidence for Solidu being a Cantian type was slim, but persuasive: three out of four recorded examples had been found in Kent.

Today the evidence looks much stronger. Within the last twelve months three silver minims inscribed SOL have been found in Kent - all from Springhead, near Southfleet. I mistakenly assigned the first one to Vosenos, having misread the legend as VOS retrograde. Now that I have seen the other two, I realise that it says SOL. There is no doubt about it.

## One and the same?

Of course, it is theoretically possible that Sol and Solidu are two different entities; so I should state right-away that I believe they are one and the same and that Sol is simply an abbreviation of Solidu. My reasons are as follows:



2. *Inscription from silver minim found at Springhead, Kent c. December 2001.*

The first three letters of Solidu are engraved in the same way on both types, probably by the same hand. Both types depict marine imagery: Neptune or a Neptune derivative on the silver unit, a whale or dolphin on the silver minim. Both types are found in Kent and nowhere else. There is only one precedent in ancient British coinage of an inscribed silver minim or fraction being issued without an accompanying full unit (a unique Atrebatian minim inscribed SIIC). If Sol does not stand for Solidu, what else could it signify in this context?

## Is it a place-name?

Until now, Solidu has generally been regarded as a possible place-name or honorific title, or perhaps descriptive of Cunobelin or his kingdom. In view of the fact that a monarch's moniker (CVNO) is displayed on the full unit, VA 2073, the place-name theory looks reasonable, because Solidu might refer to a mint-site, as CAMV does on other coins of Cunobelin.

The problem with this idea, as Evans and others have observed, is that we have no record of such a place as Solidu or Solidunum, either north of the Thames or south of the Thames or indeed anywhere in Britain. This absence in the record does not in itself mean that a Late Iron Age settlement called Solidu or Solidunum never existed. Many ancient British mint-sites and other significant places were not recorded by later classical writers. That's not the point.

The key question is this: How likely is it that a place which was *big enough and important enough to be a mint-site of Cunobelin*, the most powerful potentate of pre-Roman Britain, could have disappeared so quickly and so completely after AD 43 and thus entirely escaped the notice of Tacitus, Suetonius, Cassius Dio, Ptolemy's Geography, the Antonine Itinerary and the Ravenna Cosmography? Possible, yes. Likely, no.

Moreover, if Cunobelin was hypothetically striking coins at a place called Solidu(num), for use in Essex or in Kent, we must also wonder why he would do so, when he was already minting vast amounts of money in all metals at Camulodunon, which by AD 30-40 must have been Britain's biggest and most efficient mint-site. It would not have made economic sense. What is more, if Cunobelin was going to strike coins at some location other than Colchester, he would surely have selected a secure and well-established town such as Verolamion (St Albans) or Durovernum (Canterbury), not a village so small that it never got on a Roman map or published itinerary.



**3. Solidu silver minim with whale or dolphin on obverse and griffin on reverse.  
Chris Rudd list 64, no.22.**

That is not all. When we consider the minims inscribed SOL, then the possibility of Solidu being a place-name becomes even more remote. A few dynastic silver coins bear the names of places as *solus* inscriptions (i.e. without the name of the ruler), such as VA 1699 (with VER only), BMC 1655 (with VER only) and a variant of VA 1949 (with CAM only), these are all full units, not fractions. Of the 56 different types of inscribed silver half-units and minims struck in Britain, not a single one carries a name which can unquestionably qualify as a place-name. The reason for this is all too human and absurdly simple. When word-space is restricted (there's not much room for text messages on a seven-millimetre flan) the proud Celtic king always prefers to see his own name on the coin, rather than the name of the place where it was made.

**What does it mean?**

Whether a place, a title or a person, the word Solidu appears to be derived from the Latin *solidus*, which literally means 'dense, firm, solid' and, in a broader sense, means 'whole, complete, entire' or 'firm, enduring, real.'

When commenting on the period of confusion that may have followed the death of Cunobelin in c.AD 41, Italo Vecchi of CNG said that '*Solidu(s)* possibly implies a firm, solid, whole, complete consolidation of the territory by a new regime.' This is a fresh and interesting interpretation of the word.

Another possible meaning of *solidu* is to be found in Julius Caesar's *Gallic War*. When describing the campaign of Publius Crassus in Aquitania in 56 BC, Caesar says that 600 followers of the tribal king, Adiatuanus, were 'all bound by a vow of loyalty. The Sotiates call such people *Soldurii*, and they all observe the following rule of life: they share all the good things of life with those to whom they have pledged themselves in friendship, and if any such friend meets a violent death, they all share his fate or kill themselves.'

Beale Poste equated *solidu* with the *soldurii* and said: 'This must have been a confederation or brotherhood, resembling freemasonry, cemented doubtlessly by religious rites; and it is extremely probable such as establishment may have existed also in Britain, and being possessed of property, and bringing gold and silver to the royal mint, may have procured it to be impressed with their name.'

I find Italo Vecchi's interpretation of Solidu more appealing than Beale Poste's; when viewed solely in relation to the silver unit, VA 2073, it carries some conviction. However, when Solidu is reduced to Sol on the minim, it somehow looks less plausible as an expression of 'complete consolidation' because, once again, there are no precedents in British Celtic coinage to support it. Of the 56 different types of inscribed silver half-units and minims cited above, not one carries an honorific or descriptive title such as this.

Therefore, if Solidu isn't a place-name, isn't an honorific title and isn't a description of an abstract quality, I can only conclude that it must be the name of a person.

**Son of Cunobelin**

Having discussed at length what Solidu isn't, now comes the hard part. Who was Solidu? It is fun to fantasise, unfettered by the armour of argument. Academics have to do it in private behind closed doors. Shameless dealers like me can do it in public, letting the imagination dance naked. What have we got to lose? Only credibility and customers. So here is my theory on Solidu. A cloak of supporting evidence, neatly woven by Philip de Jersey to cover all but my most indecent speculation, will hopefully follow at a later date.

I think Solidu was one of the younger sons of Cunobelin, born into the royal family of Tasciovanos, possibly around AD 10-20, perhaps at Verolamion or Camulodunon. At some point he was given (or adopted) this rather strange Latinate name Solidu (or Solidus), meaning 'firm' or 'enduring' and, like his

uncle Epaticu, favoured the Celtic version of it on his coinage, with '-u' at the end, not '-us'<sup>5</sup>. This is not uncommon. In Britain we have Esuprasu of the Corieltauvi, Aesu and Saemu of the Eteni, and Eisu of the Dobunni; though all of these might be abbreviations. In Gaul we have Caletedu (LT 8158, 8291), Anobru, Donnadu, Obgiru, Lecisu and Viricu.



4. *Solidu* silver unit, VA 2073, found near Deal, Kent. Chris Rudd list 66, no.21.

The word CVNO on the reverse of *Solidu*'s silver unit, VA 2073, testifies to his connection with Cunobelin, whether actual or merely claimed. At the very least *Solidu* is claiming a special relationship with Cunobelin, either as a political associate or an administrator or a moneyer or, indeed, as a close member of his royal family. I doubt that anyone would deny that. Whatever his actual position and role, the name of Cunobelin says that *Solidu* was a very important person and had the authority to issue coins.

I would go further. I would say that CVNO is being used as a patronymic on this coin and is a compelling indication that Cunobelin really was the father of *Solidu*. Just because the letter 'F' for *filius* (son) is missing from the coin doesn't mean that it wasn't implied. Of the fifteen coin-types of Cunobelin that mention Tasciovanos (his father) only four include FIL or F in the legend. So there is a close and clear precedent in the coinage of this dynasty for *not* citing the F word when publicising the father-son relationship.

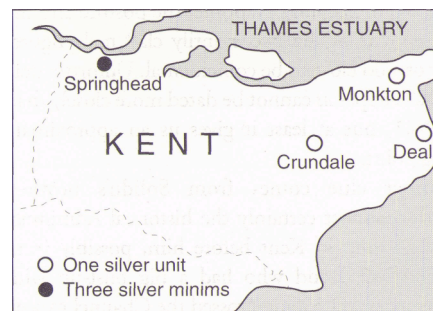
If Cunobelin had a son called *Solidu*, why haven't we heard of him before? Good question, and there isn't an equally good answer. All I can do is quote Philip de Jersey and say 'The classical literary evidence suggests he had more children than those we know of, Caratacus, Togodumnus and Adminius.' Philip is well qualified to talk on this topic. In July this indefatigable excavator, aided by another archaeologist, Guy de la Bédoyère, unearthed a long lost son of Cunobelin and christened him Agrippa (or, if a daughter, Agrippina). Inspired by their discovery, I am now suggesting that *Solidu* has an equal aright » maybe even a better claim — to be

recognised as a son (or daughter) of Cunobelin.

The regal status of *Solidu* is perhaps reinforced by the guilloche or 'chain' pattern encircling his name on the silver unit. I think this may be more than a decorative device. I believe it may represent an actual piece of regalia — a gold diadem that could originally have belonged to Tasciovanos, or even his father, and was handed down through the dynasty to Cunobelin. If he was a younger son, I doubt that *Solidu* would have inherited it, but he might have had it engraved on coins to remind people of his royal blood, just as *Sego* might have done half a century earlier (see his unit VA 1851), for the same reason. A fanciful NOTION maybe, but not utterly lunatic, I hope.

#### King of Kent

Only eight coins of *Solidu* are recorded. Statistically this is too small a sample from which we can draw any confident conclusions. However, no fewer than the eight have been found in Kent (the other two lack provenances). Therefore, I think we can reasonably infer that, if *Solidu* was a king, then his kingdom was in Kent. His territory may not have encompassed the whole of the modern county of Kent — a hundred years earlier it was divided into four self-contained kingdoms - but the distribution of his coins suggests that he probably had sovereignty over at least the northern and eastern parts of Kent.



5. *Where coins of Solidu have been found in Kent*

How did *Solidu* acquire his Cantian kingdom? it may have been due to his naval expertise. Whereas his elder brothers Caratacus and Togodumnus were probably cavalry commanders in the Celtic tradition, I think *Solidu* may have been more interested in messing about with boats as a youth, on the river

Colne perhaps on the river Tiber if he was educated in Rome, as he might have been. Certainly shipping was important to his father, as demonstrated by the Cunobelin Ship bronze, VA 1989 (one was found during excavations at Canterbury). And certainly the coins of Solidu carry more than a slight whiff of the sea, with a figure derived from Neptune on his silver units and a whale or dolphin on his minims.

### Caligula's *as*

When did Solidu rule in Kent? The best clue comes from a common copper *as* struck by Caligula to commemorate his grandfather, Agrippa. The obverse shows the head of Agrippa wearing a rostral crown (with the prow of a ship on top of it). The reverse has a near-naked Neptune standing with a trident (three-pronged fish-spear) in his left hand and a dolphin in his right hand.



6. Copper *as* of Caligula, struck in Rome, AD 37-41, ref. RIC 58. Photo by courtesy of Spinit, from *Roman Coins and their Values*, vol. 1, by David Sear

There is a slight chance that the guilloche border on the obverse of Solidus silver unit may be a Celticised version of Agrippa's rostral crown. And there is a very high probability that Solidu's Neptune was copied directly from Caligula's Neptune; the posture and the accoutrements of the two scantily clad male figures are almost too close to be coincidental. Unfortunately Caligula's copper *as* cannot be dated more closely than AD 37-41, but at least it gives us an approximate starting point.

The other clue comes from Solidu's brother, Amminus (almost certainly the historical Adminius) who was ruling in Kent before him, possibly from around AD 35, and who had a big bust-up with Cunobelin in AD 39 and crossed the Channel to seek assistance from Caligula, who was having his own problems in Germany at the time. We don't know what happened to Amminus. But we do know that Caligula was tempted to invade Britain in AD 40 and that Cunobelin died that year or the year after. A time of great instability in south-east Britain. My guess is that Solidu was either the cause of Amminus's quarrel with Cunobelin (who may have favoured the former) or the

beneficiary of the argument. Either way, on the evidence of Caligula's Neptune *as*, I'd say that Solidu took control of the Cantiaci around AD 40.

### Friend of Rome

If Solidu was king of Kent from about AD 40 or managed to hang onto his throne for the next couple of years, it seems likely that he would have been involved in the Claudian invasion (annexation, if you prefer) of AD 43. In fact, if he was still in control of northern Kent at the time — perhaps on account of his naval supremacy in the Thames estuary — there is no way whatsoever that he could have avoided getting caught up in the Claudian take-over of south-east Engl.

If Solidu was anti-Roman, he might have died at the battle of the Medway or disappeared into Wales with his brother, Caratacus. Or, if he was pro-Roman he probably ruled by courtesy of Caligula and Claudius and therefore would have facilitated the progress of Aulus Plautius across Kent to the Thames, assuming that the main force landed at Richborough, which is by no means certain. Alternatively, if the Romans established their main beachhead at Chichester, as seems more likely, then Solidu may simply have kept the anti-Roman faction under control in Kent and been rewarded for his loyalty by continued tenure of the Cantian throne for a year or so; which is possibly why there is so little incontrovertible evidence of Claudian military defences in Kent. A speculation, of course.

### The Celtic kings of Kent

Cingetoric Carvilius Taximagulos Segovax	c. 60 – 50 BCE
Dubnovellaunos	c. 25 BCE – 5 CE
Vosenos	c. 10 BCE – 5 CE
Sam	c. 10 BCE – 5 CE
Eppillus	c. 10 BCE – 10 CE
Cunobelin	c. 10/15 - 30 CE
Amminus	c. 35 – 40 CE
Solidu	c. 40 – 43 CE

7. Was Solidu the last ruler of the Cantiaci? Or did I alongside Amminus for a brief period?

In summary, my wild idea is that Solidu — Sol to his family and friends - was a younger son of Cunobelinus; that he was

more interested in sailing than horse-riding; that he took charge of the Thames estuary shortly before his father died; that he caused and/or took advantage of the departure of his brother Amminus; that he was king of the Cantiaci c.AD40-43 (possibly longer); that he owed his throne to Rome; and that, for a combination of political and commercial reasons, he welcomed the Roman invasion of Britain.

*I thank Dr Philip de Jersey for helping me with this*