

## A Bury B Unit from Iron Age England Courtney Nimura

This is a silver unit from a village in Norfolk, and it is one of my favourite coins from the Iron Age coin collection in the Heberden Coin Room at the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology (John Talbot Collection, HCR120962).

This type of coin, a Bury B unit, was likely made around 30 BCE, when East Anglia was inhabited by a community referred to as the Iceni. This was the same 'tribe' that revolted against the Romans in 60/61 CE led by their 'Queen' Boadicea. The pre-Roman Iron Age in Britain (c. 800 BCE–43 CE) was a period of many social and political changes. It is also when the first coins were introduced to Britain from Europe around the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. These first coins were imported but then minted locally shortly thereafter. The early issues of locally-made coins bore designs that reflected connections to Europe, often referencing the iconography of Gallo-Belgic coins. Gradually, local minters developed their own ornamentation that was decidedly local in its style and content.

This small silver coin (c. 16 mm diameter) is an ideal example of the types of motifs and visual tropes that were represented in so-called 'Celtic' coins. On the reverse of this coin we see a horse, mid-gallop, above which are symbols that may represent solar bodies, such as the sun. On the obverse we see the profile of a head, complete with locks of hair, hair band, prominent nose, and pointy chin. One almond-shaped eye is depicted in the middle of the face. What is special about this coin is that when you turn it, the lock of hair in front of the face becomes a second eye – the face on the coin seems to follow you like the Mona Lisa. If you want to see the hidden face yourself, you can interact with this coin and inspect it close-up in the Ashmolean's first ever online exhibition here: <https://www.ashmolean.org/interactive-money-gallery-online-tour>.



Image caption and credit: This is a silver 'Bury B' unit minted around 30 BCE. On the obverse, we see a portrait with locks of hair and an ornate headband, which reveals a hidden face when turned. On the reverse, we see a galloping horse below 'solar' motifs. (© Ian R. Cartwright, Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford)