

Oldest Roman Coin in Britain Found in Hoard

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A slightly worn 2220 year old silver coin, one of over 5000 discovered at a site near the village of Hallaton, Leicestershire, is about to get its moment in the limelight after museum staff realised it is the oldest Roman coin ever found in Britain.

The coin, a silver denarius dated to 211 BC, depicts the goddess Roma wearing her characteristic helmet on the front. The mythical twins, Castor and Pollux sit astride galloping horses on the reverse. The type of coin known as a denarius was first struck in Rome in 211 BC, making the Hallaton coin a very early version. A soldier or unskilled worker living in the 1st century AD could expect to earn 1 denarius for a day's work.

A Council Officer, said: "We knew we had a coin dating to 211 BC amongst the coins from the Hallaton Treasure but only realised its full significance after a coin dating to 207 BC was publicised as the oldest Roman coin found in Britain".

The previous oldest known Roman coin found in Britain was discovered by metal detectorist Malcolm Langford in Berkshire and recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme last year.

David Sprason, County Council Cabinet Member for Communities and Wellbeing, said: "Leicestershire boasts the largest number of Iron Age coins ever professionally excavated in Britain in the Hallaton Treasure. To also have the oldest Roman coin ever found is something very special."

The Hallaton coin will be on display at Harborough Museum, Market Harborough, Leicestershire alongside other coins that were excavated at a Late Iron Age shrine of the Corieltavi tribe dating to the 1st century AD. Archaeologists believe the coins were buried as gifts to the gods with other incredible finds including a richly decorated Roman cavalry helmet, a unique silver bowl and the remains of over 300 pigs.

How this coin came into the possession of the local Corieltavi tribe is an intriguing mystery. The fact that the coin is fairly worn perhaps suggests the preceding 250 years were spent on the continent, only later arriving in Britain in the purse of an invading Roman soldier after the conquest of AD 43. However, some archaeologists speculate that Roman Republican coins such as this were finding their way into Britain before the Roman conquest and are evidence of exchange through trade or diplomacy. If this is so, then the Hallaton coin is evidence of early Roman contact in the East Midlands, an area previously seen as something of a backwater during the Late Iron Age.

The finds from Hallaton were declared treasure and acquired by Leicestershire County Council for permanent display at Harborough Museum which opened its specially designed Hallaton Treasure Gallery in September 2009.