THE PROTOTYPE OF THE FIRST COINAGE OF WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR.

By H. Alexander Parsons.

Evolution of design in the coinage has perhaps not received all the attention which the interest, if not importance of the subject demands, although some useful work has been done in this connection from time to time, notably in Mr. Keary's "The Morphology of Coins," and in a paper by Mr. W. Sharp Ogden on "The Evolution of some reverse types of the Anglo-Norman Coinage." Fruitful as this aspect of our coinage is in connection with post-Conquest issues, the possibilities opening out to the student of Saxon coins along the same line of enquiry are considerably greater, since the variations in the die-sinkers' work, at least so far as the obverses are concerned, are far more pronounced in the Saxon dispensation than subsequently. This was largely owing to the stricter supervision in the die-sinking office of the King's Exchequer in post-Conquest times, in contrast with the loose check imposed on the engravers by the King's Treasury in the Saxon period.

In the present note nothing of a comprehensive character regarding the evolution of design on the Saxon coins can be given, even on skeleton lines, but my ensuing remarks can be focussed round one point of the general theme which lends itself to separation from the major proposition by its appeal to collectors generally; for the subject of this enquiry is into the evolution of the Norman Conqueror's first coinage, which finds its prototype in the Saxon period. This initial issue of William I has always been of considerable interest to numismatists, and I believe it is almost universally

1 Numismatic Chronicle, 1885 and 1886.
2 British Numismatic Journal, ii, 57–86.
taken for granted that the type was evolved from the coins of Harold II. At least that seems to be the general impression and, indeed, William’s first type is often called “the Harold type,” from a too superficial consideration of the two designs. Closer comparison, however, shows that there are essential differences between the two types which force us to look elsewhere for the prototype of William’s coinage. On the obverse of Harold’s coins there are no shoulders delineated below the King’s head, which is amplified to show only the neck, admittedly, like that on William’s first issue, a very long neck. Hence the introduction of the neck muscle on both issues. The head on Harold’s coins is also confined within the inner space. On the other hand, William’s first issue invariably discloses the shoulders, more or less pronounced, which divide the inscription. On the reverse, the designs of the two issues are so markedly different as to need no more demonstration than a glance at the illustrations, Figs. 1 and 2.

![FIG 1.—PENNY OF HAROLD II. H. A. PARSONS.](image1.png)  
![FIG 2.—PENNY OF THE FIRST TYPE OF WILLIAM I. H. A. PARSONS.](image2.png)

It will therefore be realised that the hitherto accepted idea that William’s coins were copied from Harold’s is open to discussion. On historical and sentimental grounds it has always been difficult for me to believe that the Conqueror would copy much from the coins of his rival; historically, because of the known fact that, in the Acts of William I, and notably in the Domesday record, Harold II as king was consistently ignored; and sentimentally, because he was anathematised, and everything connected with him would or should

1 In *British Numismatic Journal*, ii, 127, 131–133, Major P. Carlyon-Britton raised the question whether the design of William’s first type was derived from Harold’s or from the last type of the Confessor.
have been destroyed. Hence, I think, William’s first coins would naturally differ, to a considerable extent, from those of Harold II, and we must look further back into the Saxon period for their prototype. But we ought not to have to look far back for two theoretical reasons: first, William’s obvious desire to retain as many of the Saxon customs and institutions as his dignity and safety permitted would prompt him to retain all that was possible of the institutions of the old regime, and, indeed, in pursuing his claim that he was the successor to the throne by right, and not by conquest, such a course would naturally follow. Secondly, his friendship with and indebtedness to Edward the Confessor would lead him to obtain his ideas from the issues of that king; that is if he were consulted, or if he were not, as is possible, the same reasons would prompt his chief cuneator to look to that source for inspiration. Indeed, if the assumptions of the late Mr. Spicer¹ and of Major P. Carlyon-Britton² were correct, the same cuneator, Theodric the goldsmith, was responsible for the coins both of Edward and of the early types of William. However that may be, a new variety of the Confessor’s last type, which I can now bring forward is, I think, the immediate prototype of William’s initial issue, at least so far as the obverse is concerned.

This type of Edward is No. 15 in the British Museum Catalogue, Anglo-Saxon series, vol. ii; and No. 11, and last, in Major Carlyon-Britton’s treatise on the coin types of Edward the Confessor.³ Although, as before remarked, the coins of the Saxon kings show, in the main, considerable variation of design in each type, this, the last of the Confessor’s, is particularly remarkable for departures from the general design. A notable illustration of this is in the coins, of which so very few are known, represented by Hildebrand as Type I, variety a, and in the British Museum Catalogue as Type XIV, but which of recent years have been regarded as mule coins. In my opinion these coins are neither a type, as such, nor mules. They do

³ Numismatic Chronicle, 1905.
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not constitute a distinct type, for the reason that the reverse design is of the normal, though distinctive, design of Edward's last issue; and they are not mules, because there is no counterpart of the obverse in the preceding issues of coins. Although full faced, like the penultimate issue of the Confessor, there are essential differences in detail. The explanation, therefore, of these coins is that they are trial, or pattern, pieces. It is not usual to associate these words with our early coinages, but, on the general merits of the question, there is more probability of such assays having been issued than otherwise, and it is a feature which cannot, with safety, be ignored in dealing with types of coins of the Saxon period. It would be an extremely narrow view to restrict trial and pattern pieces, and I may add commemorative pieces,\(^1\) to modern times alone. Possibly a further illustration of the same thing is given in the decidedly new and distinctive variant of the Confessor's last type, illustrated as Fig. 3. However that may be, the coin more nearly resembles the Conqueror's first issue than does the coinage of Harold II.

![Fig 3.—Variety of the last type of Edward the Confessor. H. A. Parsons.]

The main departures of this new variety from the standard design of Edward, see Fig. 4, are:

![Fig. 4.—Last type of Edward the Confessor. H. A. Parsons.]

1. The absence of a tassel dependent from the crown, a very characteristic feature of the main type.

\(^{1}\) See *Numismatic Chronicle*, 1910, pp. 285-89.
2. The pearling of the crown where, in the main type, such ornamentation is generally absent.

3. The division of the crown into two, instead of three, parts.

4. The engraving of the mantle right across the body instead of, as in the main type, simply over the shoulders leaving exposed the tunic beneath.

Departures 1 to 3 are common also to the coins of Harold II, see Fig. 1, but all four are peculiar to William’s first issue, see Fig. 2, and the last, that of the shoulders breaking into the legend, constitutes, of course, the cardinal difference between Harold’s coins and those of William or, indeed, between Harold’s pennies and any type immediately before or after his time.

This new variant, Fig. 3, of the Confessor’s money, like the normal issue, Fig. 4, has the bust engraved to the right, whereas the common design, Fig. 2, of William’s first issue, has the bust engraved to the left, but the latter was probably not the initial issue of the type, for there are some rare variants, Fig. 5, with the bust engraved in the same direction as that on the new penny of the Confessor now brought under notice, Fig. 3. A comparison of the one with the other shows how nearly related the two coins are.

**FIG 5.—PENNY OF WILLIAM I, FIRST TYPE, WITH BUST TO RIGHT.**

So far as the reverse is concerned, the difference between the designs on Harold’s and William’s coins is still more marked, for the simple word PAX between two lines of the former has no relation to the floral ornamentation of the Conqueror’s first issue. No very direct prototype for this latter is to be found on prior coins, although the basic idea is explained by Mr. W. Sharp Ogden in the work already quoted. On the Conqueror’s second type we have, on the reverse, a
repetition of the Confessor's last type, with the exception that the pyramidal ornaments are based on the cross instead of on the inner circle, see Figs. 4 and 6.

Here I should remark that nothing very convincing can be gleaned from a consideration of the reverse designs of the coins of the period. Certain types constantly recur as, for example, the small cross; but this is rather in the nature of repetition than evolution. Here and there, also, unusual features were introduced for special reasons, as in the case of the ERVX type of Æthelred II, for the interpretation of which see my article on the "Coin Types of Æthelred II."1

With the obverses of the various types of English coins it is different. From the late Saxon period to the Commonwealth the king is represented on the coins, except for certain gold issues and late small denominations in silver. Although strict portraiture, even in painting, was unknown at the beginning of this period, certain characteristic features of the sovereign, or of his dress, were introduced on the coinage, making it possible to trace evolution from one design to another, and to mark changing fashion.

Having shown, therefore, that a more direct link exists between the obverse of the initial coinage of William I and that of the last issue of Edward the Confessor than obtains between the coins of Harold II and William, it will be interesting to trace the initiation of the design of the latter and to locate the period which most readily appeals to one as commencing the sequence. This period can be dated from the time of the introduction of a beard on the king's

1 Numismatic Chronicle, 1910, p. 281 et seq.
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face, and of the revival of the crown on his head. The introduction of a beard dates only from the seventh type of Edward the Confessor. It marks quite a decided advancement in the art of delineation, and it continued on the coins right through the remainder of the Saxon period and on into Norman times.

Remarkable as it may seem, the crown is quite unusual on the coins of the late Saxon period from Edward the Martyr, a helmet being generally depicted. The crown first appears in this period in what I regard as the initial issue of Canute the Great, namely, Hildebrand Type E, and it is not even general on that issue, since the helmet also occurs on some scarce coins of the type. The helmet reappears on the following issue and continued to hold its ground through the major part of Canute’s reign, and during the whole of the time of his two successors, Harold I and Harthacnut, reappearing again in the time of Edward the Confessor’s eighth issue, the “sovereign” type, which otherwise claims a Byzantine derivation.

The crown on the Confessor’s coins was first of all of the plain variety, and remained so until his last type, when a few of the coins, including the new variant, Fig. 3, were struck with a crown ornamented with pearls, which are generally to be found upon it in subsequent issues.

From the crown and the beard we descend to the mantle and armour, the well-defined features which throw the coins of Harold II into a less direct source of inspiration for William’s first issue since, as before mentioned, there are no shoulders depicted on Harold’s issue, and, as a consequence, the design does not break into the surrounding inscription. The mantle, or armour, is never absent from the coins of the late Saxon period, with the exceptions of the eighth, or sovereign, type of the Confessor, and of the issue of Harold II. This, perhaps, would naturally follow the almost universal use of the helmet down to the period of the “sovereign” type of Edward the Confessor.

Although the crown is continued in the following types the king is disenthroned, and the mantle reappears and is continued for a long period, the unusual issue of Harold II alone excepted. Having
traced, therefore, the characteristics of the last few issues of the Confessor and shown their intimate relation with the first type of William, with special reference to the unpublished variant of Edward's last type which shows so close a resemblance to William's first, I think I may close with the suggestion that an appropriate name for the latter would be "the Confessor type."