

A ROMAN REPUBLICAN PROTOTYPE FOR THE ANIMAL-UNDER-A-TREE TYPES OF EPATICCUS

DAVID WOODS

THE inscriptions reveal that Epaticcus (c. AD 20–40?) issued two different denominations of silver coins featuring strongly similar types – an animal moving towards the right from under a tree – while similar types also appeared, without an inscription, on two other silver coins that seem best attributed either to him or to his apparent successor Caratacus (c. AD 40–43?).¹ The type is realistic and highly Romanized in each case, and is accompanied by an equally highly Romanized obverse or reverse type in each case also. The similarities between these different types, all depicting some form of quadruped facing or moving towards the right while sheltered by the overhanging growth of a tree situated towards its left, suggests that they are best treated as a group. The purpose of this note is to identify the probable prototype and model for this group of types, which identification then allows us identify the probable sequence in which they were issued.

There are four different coins within this group:



Fig. 1. Silver unit with charging boar, *BMC* 2299 (BM, CM 1988,6.27.792) (2 x actual size). © The Trustees of the British Museum.

1. Silver unit with charging boar (VA 581; *BMC* 2294–328; *ABC* 1349; Fig. 1).

Obv. A winged ‘Victory’ seated right, with left arm holding wreath out towards right, surrounded by legend TASCIO V.

Rev. A boar charges right from under a tree to its left, with the legend EPAT beneath it.²



Fig. 2. Silver minim with standing dog, *BMC* 2358 (BM, CM 1988,6.27.834) (2 x actual size, *rev.* 3 x actual size). © The Trustees of the British Museum.

¹ For the sake of convenience, I follow the regnal dates given in *ABC*, but these are approximate at best, and the reigns of Epaticcus and Caratacus may well have overlapped.

² Hobbs (*BMC*) identifies the object above the boar’s back as an animal, although as Van Arsdell (VA) recognises it was clearly intended to represent a branch. Unfortunately, Hobbs misidentifies this branch as an animal rather than as part of a tree in the case of all four of the animal-under-a-tree types under discussion here.

2. Silver minim with standing dog (*BMC* 2358–63; *ABC* 1364; Fig. 2).

Obv. Helmeted bust right.

Rev. A dog stands facing right, with right fore-leg raised high from the ground, beneath shelter of tree to its left, and with letter E beneath its main body.



Fig. 3. Silver minim with crouching dog, *BMC* 2371 (BM, CM 1988,6.27.830) (2 x actual size, *rev.* 3 x actual size). © The Trustees of the British Museum.

3. Silver minim with crouching dog (VA 558; *BMC* 2371–4; *ABC* 1361).

Obv. Bareheaded female bust right.

Rev. A dog crouches facing right, beneath shelter of tree to its left.



Fig. 4. Silver minim with butting bull, *BMC* 2366 (BM, CM 1984,6.1.47) (2 x actual size, *obv.* 3 x actual size). © The Trustees of the British Museum.

4. Silver minim with butting bull (VA 512; *BMC* 2366–70; *ABC* 1358).

Obv. A bull butts right, beneath shelter of tree to its left.

Rev. An eagle faces left, with raised talons.

The similarities between the types described above are such as to encourage the suspicion that they derive from the same prototype, although not necessarily directly in each case. It is equally possible that only one derives directly from the original prototype, and that the others derive from the original imitation. So what was this prototype? It is well-established that many dynastic coins of late Iron-Age Britain derive their imagery from Roman prototypes, usually from either coins or inscribed gems.³ Here one must pay due attention to the full scene on each of the above types, the fact that the animal is depicted beneath a tree.

Many earlier British coins had depicted the same animals as shown on the coins being discussed here – a bull, boar, or dog – but none seem to have depicted them in quite the same way, sheltered by an overhanging tree to the left. This is not to claim that no British coin had ever depicted a tree in association with one of these animals beforehand, but the examples are rare and their types are clearly distinguishable from those of the coins under discussion here. In fact, there seem to be only three coin types that depict an animal under the shelter of a tree other than the coins under discussion here, a bronze issue of Dubnovellaunus of the Cantii (c. 30–10 BC?) and two bronze issues of King Cunobelinus of the Catuvellauni and Trinovantes (c. AD 10–40?). The obverse of the coin issued by Dubnovellaunus depicts a boar charging towards the right while some sort of tree emerges from behind the centre of its back and spreads its branches on either side (Fig. 5).⁴

³ See e.g. Henig 1972; Laing 1991; Scheers 1992; Creighton 2000, 80–125.

⁴ VA 180; *BMC* 2509–10; *ABC* 345.



Fig. 5. Bronze unit with boar charging from under a spreading tree, *BMC* 2509 (BM, CM 1921,5.10.1) (2 x actual size). © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The reverse of one of the issues by Cunobelinus depicts a sow sitting on its haunches and facing to the right while some sort of tree emerges from behind the centre of its back also and spread its branches on either side once more (Fig. 6).⁵



Fig. 6. Bronze unit with sow sitting under a spreading tree, *BMC* 1999 (BM, CM 1919,2.13.493) (2 x actual size). © The Trustees of the British Museum.

In this case, the trunk of the tree can be seen rising from the ground in the space between the stomach of the sow and the exergual line. It is clear that the reverse of Cunobelinus' coin imitates the obverse of Dubnovellaunus, but this still leaves the question as to whence Dubnovellaunus drew his inspiration, probably from a Gallic issue.⁶ The key point, however, is that the position of the tree behind the centre of the animal, combined with its shape, the fact that its branches spread equally towards the left and right to form a true 'bush', suggests that this type has no direct link to the group of coins being discussed here.⁷ The reverse of the other issue by Cunobelinus depicts a lion facing to the right and crouched down on all fours upon a tablet bearing an inscription (Fig. 7).⁸



Fig. 7. Bronze unit with crouching lion, *BMC* 1991 (BM, CM 1991,11.10.252) (2 x actual size). © The Trustees of the British Museum.

⁵ VA 2105; *BMC* 1998–2003; *ABC* 2981.

⁶ He was probably inspired by the reverse of a bronze issue of Contoutos of the Pictones in Gaul depicting a panting wolf in front of a tree. See Allen 1995, nos 191–5.

⁷ The tree on the Gallic coin may well imitate the tree on a denarius issued by Sex(tus) Pomp(eius?) in 137 BC (*RRC* 235/1). As will become clear, therefore, there may be an indirect link.

⁸ VA 2107; *BMC* 1991–7; *ABC* 2984.

A single-trunked tree rises from immediately to the left of the lion and stretches above its back as far as its head. The similarities between the depiction of this tree and the depictions of the trees on the coins under discussion here suggests some form of relationship between this reverse-type and those of Epaticcus' coins, that the engraver of one ruler decided to imitate this feature on the coinage of the other.⁹ However, even if Cunobelinus probably did accede to rule several years before Epaticcus, they seem to have been approximate contemporaries whose reigns overlapped, so the direction of the borrowing remains unclear. In order to decide this, one must first solve the problem concerning the identity of the Roman prototype.

So what Roman coins of the late Republican or early Imperial periods did depict a tree? And do any of these coins bear a strong resemblance to any of those under discussion here? Surprisingly, very few coins produced during the whole of the late Republican or early Imperial periods did actually depict a tree. The emperor Augustus issued several coins depicting branches in such a way that they could have been misinterpreted as trees instead, but none of them seem relevant here.¹⁰ Before this, in 43 BC the moneyer P. Accoleius Lariscolus had issued a denarius with a reverse depicting a triple cult statue of Diana Nemorensis, with a grove of five cypress trees in the background, but this seems of little relevance either.¹¹ Finally, in 137 BC, the otherwise unknown moneyer Sex(tus) Pomp(eius?) had issued a denarius with a reverse depicting a scene from the mythological origin of Rome, the finding of the twins Romulus and Remus by the shepherd Faustulus (Fig. 8).¹²



Fig. 8. The denarius of Sex(tus) Pomp(eius?), *RRC* 235/1c (BM, CM R. 7561) (2 x actual size). © The Trustees of the British Museum.

It depicts a she-wolf suckling twins, obviously intended to represent Romulus and Remus, while a tree rises behind the centre of the wolf's back, with one bird perched on its trunk and two in its upper branches. The shepherd Faustulus is depicted immediately to the left of the wolf with his hand outstretched towards the upper branches of the tree as if he were picking fruit. As for the obverse, this depicts the helmeted head of the goddess Roma facing right with the denomination mark X immediately below her chin and a jug to the back of her neck. This head bears a strong similarity to the helmeted head on the obverse of the silver minim of Epaticcus depicting a dog standing beneath a tree. Both heads face in the same direction and wear similar helmets with neck-guard, crest, and visor. Furthermore, the pellet within a circle on the British minim seems to have been placed in imitation of the denomination mark on the denarius. In contrast, there does not, at first glance, seem to be very much in common between their reverses except in the most general sense that they both depict a canine beneath a tree. However, a closer examination reveals a number of similarities between the figure of Faustulus on the denarius and the shape of the tree on the British coin such as to suggest that the engraver of the British coin mistakenly identified the figure of Faustulus on a worn denarius

⁹ Henig 1972, 218, suggests that the lion itself is modelled on a lion from an inscribed gem, but notes that none of the gems from this period depicting a similar lion include a tree within the composition.

¹⁰ *RIC* 1, Augustus, nos 33a–b, 36a–b, 50–52b.

¹¹ *RRC* 486/1.

¹² *RRC* 235/1a–c. I follow Crawford's date here, but there is some disagreement as to how to expand the moneyer's name and when exactly he held office. See Metcalf 1999, 1–17, at pp. 4–10.

as the trunk of the tree rising from behind the she-wolf and used it as the model for the tree on his coin.

There are three main similarities between the tree on the minim and the profile of Faustulus on the denarius:

1. the tree on the minim only projects one branch across the back of the dog in the same way that Faustulus only raises one arm to the tree on the denarius; it does not subdivide into any number of smaller branches, but remains a single stocky branch;
2. the branch of the tree on the minim projects out initially at only a slight angle to the plane, but then turns upwards once more at a sharper angle so that the angular nature of this turn resembles the angle in Faustulus' arm as his forearm bends upwards at the elbow to reach into the tree;
3. the tree on the minim displays a strange downwards bulge just below the single branch as it begins to project across the back of dog, whose triangular shape and position reveal a remarkable similarity to the shape and position of Faustulus' far (left) arm on the denarius, a rather clumsy attempt to depict the shepherd using his left arm to lean on his staff as he reaches upwards into the tree. None of the trees on the other animal-under-a-tree types depict the same bulge.

That these similarities are not mere coincidences can best be appreciated by considering any number of other depictions of trees whether on other British or Roman coins or in any other medium.¹³ Of most immediate relevance here, for example, is that Cunobelinus issued a silver unit whose reverse depicted a very different tree to the left of a seated figure playing the lyre.¹⁴ Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the tree depicted on a jasper intaglio from London in a composition cited as a possible source for this coin takes a very different form once more.¹⁵ While the depiction of single-trunked or -branched trees is not uncommon, the key diagnostic factor here – one that seems to be unmatched elsewhere – is the depiction of the strange triangular-shaped downwards bulge just below the projecting branch.

The realization that the minim depicting a dog standing beneath a tree bears a strong similarity to a denarius produced in 137 BC, and that one of the most distinctive features of its reverse is best explained as a misinterpretation of a feature on the reverse of the denarius, suggests that this minim was the first of the coins under consideration here to be produced. As for the coins with similar types, the natural assumption must be that the further any of these coins departs from the model offered by the Roman prototype, the later it was probably produced. In this assumption, the obvious suggestion is that the minim depicting the crouching dog was produced simultaneously with, or shortly after, the minim depicting the standing dog. There are three main arguments in support of this. First, this minim continues to pair the animal-under-tree reverse with an obverse depicting a Romanized head, even if a very different head. Second, this minim continues to depict the animal under a tree as a dog, even if in a very different pose. Finally, the tree on the reverse is depicted in the same stocky and angular fashion. The only real difference is that the tree on the crouching-dog minim seems to have sprouted an extra branch from what was the inside of Faustulus' elbow originally. The apparent coordination between these two minims each depicting a different Romanized head paired with a different depiction of a dog under a tree could suggest some greater political or dynastic message. Although the helmeted head on obverse of the standing-dog minim was apparently modelled on the head of the goddess Roma, it is not clear whether one should understand it as a female head in this instance. In so far as Cunobelinus inscribed his name around similar helmeted busts on two of his bronze issues, it seems probable that he intended the busts as self-portraits in these cases, even if one suspects that they also derived from standard depictions of

¹³ The depiction of a tree, usually to the side of the main design, is a common feature of many inscribed gems. See e.g. Spier 1992, nos 173, 284, 287, 288, 290 (first century BC to first century AD); 333, 376, 390, 391 (second century AD).

¹⁴ VA 2059; *BMC* 1879–82; *ABC* 2867. Henig 1972, 210–11, suggests that the whole scene is derived from an inscribed gem. However, Scheers 1992, 38, suggests that Cunobelinus modelled the figure playing the lyre upon a silver tridrachm struck c.280 BC by Cyzicus, but added the tree behind the figure after some inscribed gem.

¹⁵ Henig 1972, 219.

the goddess Roma found upon so many republican denarii.¹⁶ Hence the suspicion arises that the helmeted head on the standing-dog minim is intended to represent Epaticcus himself. As for the head on the obverse of the crouching-dog minim, in so far as the hairstyle suggests that it is a female portrait, one is tempted to identify it as a portrait of a close female relative of Epaticcus, perhaps his wife or his mother, but it could equally well represent a goddess.

Since neither the silver unit depicting a boar under a tree nor the minim depicting a bull under a tree pairs this type with a Romanized head, neither is closer than the other to the prototype in this respect.¹⁷ However, one notes very different treatments of the tree in each instance. In the case of the minim with the bull, the tree continues to be treated in the same stocky and angular fashion as it had on the minims with the standing dog and crouching dog. In the case of the unit with the boar, however, the tree is depicted in a far more sinuous fashion. Furthermore, the small branch sprouting forth halfway along the main branch as it passed over the dog's back in the case of the crouching-dog minim has now become much larger. Finally, the main branch passing over the animal's back now breaks into two smaller branches before it finally ends. It seems, therefore, that the tree on the unit with the boar is more developed than that on the minim with the bull, and has departed much further from the model provided by the prototype. This may be due to the fact that there was more space available for the engraver on the unit. On the other hand, the stretched and straight-legged stance of the boar bears a close resemblance to that of the wolf on the Roman prototype, suggesting a direct link between the two. Furthermore, the boar is depicted on the reverse of its unit, just as the two types of dog are depicted on the reverse of their minims, while the bull, in contrast, appears on the obverse of its minim. Finally, it is worth noting that the trunk of the tree is never visible to the left of the bull, but is always obscured by its hindquarters. In this respect, one can detect a clear pattern across the minims as the trunk of the tree moves slowly towards the right. In the case of the minim with the standing dog, it is visible to the left of the dog's hind-legs as a quite separate and distinct object, while in the case of the minim with the crouching dog, the trunk's descent to the ground is just obscured by the dog's tail. However, in the case of the minim with the bull, the trunk now rises from about a quarter of the way along its back. Since this represents the greatest departure from the prototype, the natural inference is that the bull under the tree is the latest of these three animal-under-a-tree types.

The obvious suggestion, therefore, is that the unit with the boar under a tree was issued simultaneously with the minims depicting a dog under a tree in direct imitation of the same prototype and as part of the same small series. This strengthens the possibility that the bare-headed female bust on the obverse of the minim with the crouching dog is identifiable as the bust of the winged 'Victory' on the obverse of the associated unit. As for the minim with the bull under a tree on its obverse, this was the last of the animal-under-a-tree types to be issued, and since it depicts a large eagle facing left on its reverse, it is tempting to pair it with another silver unit by Epaticcus which depicts a bust with lion-skin on its obverse, but a large facing eagle on its reverse again.¹⁸ The fact that these different denominations both depict single large eagles on their reverses, even in somewhat different poses, suggests that they form another small series also.¹⁹

This leaves only the bronze issue by Cunobelinus with the lion facing to the right under a tree to be considered. The tree on this coin bears a strong resemblance to that on the unit with the boar. A single branch sprouts upwards from the main branch as it turns over the lion's back and the latter breaks into two smaller branches at its conclusion above the lion's head. This suggests that Cunobelinus issued this type after Epaticcus had commenced production of his unit with the boar under a tree, and in partial imitation of the same.

¹⁶ VA 1983, *BMC* 1952–5, *ABC* 2933; VA 2091, *BMC* 1956–60, *ABC* 2960.

¹⁷ The obverse of the unit with the boar under a tree seems to be an adaptation of the seated victory such as one finds on the denarius issued by M. Cato c.47 BC (*RRC* 462/1b). See Scheers 1992, 40. The obverse of the minim with the bull features an eagle with outstretched talons, not closely modelled on any particular Roman coin, although it could be an adaptation of several Roman or even Greek types. See Laing 1991, 23; Scheers 1992, 35.

¹⁸ VA 580; *BMC* 2024–293; *ABC* 1346.

¹⁹ The eagle on the silver unit clearly has a snake in its claws, but the identity on the object in the claws of the eagle on the minim remains uncertain. Hobbs (*BMC*) describes the eagle on the minim as 'holding a snake (?)', while *ABC* does not comment.

A final point deserves to be made. While most of the Roman prototypes drawn upon by the British kings in the production of their dynastic coinage date from *c.* 50 BC onwards, the earliest such prototype has traditionally been dated to 139 BC.²⁰ Cunobelinus issued a quarter-stater whose reverse depicted a centaur galloping to the left with a branch over its shoulder, and since the only republican coin that had ever depicted a centaur was the denarius issued by the moneyer M. Aurelius Cotta in 139 BC, the temptation has been to argue that Cunobelinus must have been inspired by Cotta's coin.²¹ In fact, there is no real resemblance between Cotta's reverse depicting two centaurs drawing a biga driven by Hercules and Cunobelinus' reverse showing a single centaur galloping freely, so that an inscribed gem has been posited as the more probable source.²² In contrast, the similarities between Epaticcus' minim depicting the standing dog under a tree and the denarius issued by Sex(tus) Pomp(eius?) in 137 BC are such that the latter should now be admitted as the earliest firm Roman republican prototype for a British dynastic coin.

In conclusion, the recognition that Epaticcus, or his engraver, designed the minim with the reverse depicting a standing dog in imitation of a denarius issued in 137 BC is important in that it highlights the fact that the British could, and did, misinterpret their Roman prototypes. While it is tempting to interpret British departures from their Roman prototypes as deliberate actions with far greater social and cultural significance than is immediately apparent, one must be careful not to press the evidence too hard.²³ More importantly, however, this discovery provides an anchor point upon which to base the relative dating of several issues. In particular, it suggests that those issues by Epaticcus which depict an animal under a tree on their reverse form a series predating those issues which depict a large eagle on their reverse.

REFERENCES

- ABC* see Cottam *et al.* 2010.
 Allen, D.F. 1958. 'Belgic coins as illustrations of life in the late pre-Roman iron age of Britain', *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 24, 43–63.
 Allen, D.F. 1995. *Celtic Coins in the British Museum III: bronze coins of Gaul* (London)
BMC see Hobbs 1996.
 Cottam, E., de Jersey, P., Rudd, C., Sills, J., 2010. *Ancient British Coins* (Aylsham).
 Crawford, M. H., 1974. *Roman Republican Coinage* (Cambridge).
 Creighton, J., 2000. *Coins and Power in Late Iron Age Britain* (Cambridge).
 Henig, M., 1972. 'The origin of some ancient British coin types', *Britannia* 3, 209–23.
 Hobbs, R., 1996. *British Iron Age Coins in the British Museum* (London).
 Laing, L., 1991. 'Types and prototypes in insular Celtic coinage', *Celtic Coin Bulletin* 1, 19–24.
 Metcalf, W.E., 1999. 'Coins as primary evidence', in G.M. Paul and M. Ierardi (eds.), *Roman Coins and Public Life under the Empire: E Togo Salmon Papers II* (Ann Arbor), 1–17.
RRC see Crawford 1974.
 Scheers, S. 1992. 'Celtic coin types in Britain and their Mediterranean origins', in M. Mays (ed.), *Celtic Coinage: Britain and Beyond* (Oxford), 33–46.
 Spier, J., 1992. *Ancient Gems and Finger Rings* (Malibu).
 VA see Van Arsdell 1989.
 Van Arsdell, R.D., 1989. *Celtic Coinage of Britain* (London).

²⁰ Creighton 2000, 88.

²¹ VA 1918; *ABC* 2828; *RRC* 229/1.

²² Henig 1972, 215.

²³ For attempts to use dynastic coinage in this manner, see e.g. Allen 1958, 43–63; Creighton 2000, *passim*.