SOME UNIDENTIFIED ROMAN PROTOTYPES OF BRITISH CELTIC COINS

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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.¹ While the British artist or designer clearly strove to copy the Roman prototype as closely as he was able in some cases, it remains the fact that ‘there are remarkably few British coins which are unchanged copies of Roman originals’.² While one cannot entirely exclude the possibility that a British designer may occasionally have made minor changes because he misunderstood his Roman prototype, the thematic unity displayed in such changes across a variety of different coin types can sometimes point to a very different conclusion, that the changes were deliberate and much more sophisticated than might otherwise have seemed to be the case.³ In some cases, while it is clear that the British designer has deliberately changed some subtle details of his original prototype, the fact that he relied on one particular prototype remains clear enough also.⁴ The purpose of this paper, however, is to offer some new suggestions concerning the prototypes of some British coins where the designer seems to have engaged much more inventively with his Roman prototypes than was often the case, either adapting certain images in a much freer manner than previously or even combining elements from very different models. The result was some sophisticated obverse or reverse types whose origins and potential significance are that much harder to understand.

1. Cunobelinus and the female dog

Cunobelinus issued a silver unit whose reverse depicts a female dog facing right and standing on an extended looping snake. Two variants survive, one with the letters CAM in the exergue, in reference to Camulodunum (Fig. 1), the other with the letters CVN in the exergue, in reference to his name instead.⁵ They were each paired with the same obverse, the letters CVN surrounded by a wreath. The same type was also issued in the name of a certain Agr(?), probably a son of Cunobelinus, with the legend AGR on both obverse and reverse.⁶ Finally, Cunobelinus

² Allen 1958, 43–63, at 43.
³ See the exemplary study by Williams 2005 on the importance of vine-imagery on the coinage of Verica in particular.
⁴ See e.g. the reverse of the silver unit of Solidu(?) (VA 2073, BMC 1894–5, ABC 474) where the standing figure is generally agreed to have been directly copied from a depiction of Neptune on the reverse of a bronze as issued under Caligula (RIC 1, Caligula no 58), but with changes to his headgear and the object in his outstretched right hand.
⁵ VA 2069, BMC 1893, ABC 2891 (CAM in exergue); ABC 2894 (CVN in exergue).
⁶ The significance of the letters AGR has exercised much debate, whether an abbreviation of Roman Agrippa, Celtic Agricu, or of something else altogether. See e.g. de Jersey 2002; Rudd 2002; Sills 2003.
also issued a bronze unit with a similar reverse except that the dog faces towards the left and the details of the snake are a little different.\(^7\) In this case, the obverse depicts a male bust facing towards the left. So what is the origin and significance of this type? Henig interprets the dog as a debased griffin, and identifies its prototype as a gem similar to one found in Cornwall depicting a griffin trampling a snake.\(^8\) Van Arsdell and de Jersey follow him in this.\(^9\) Since the name Cunobelinus means ‘hound of Belenus’, one obvious possibility is that the dog represents Cunobelinus himself trampling some enemy symbolized by the snake. Three points need to be borne in mind next. The first is that, in the case of the silver coinage, the reverse type depicting the dog standing on a snake seems to replace a reverse type depicting a springing dog as used on two earlier issues (Fig. 2).\(^10\) The second is that the addition of the snake to the type was accompanied by other changes, most noticeably, changes in the pose of the dog and in the direction in which the dog was facing, from left to right, and the addition of prominent teats. The third is that the snake upon which the dog stands bears no resemblance to the ram-headed snake as depicted on the obverse of two silver units issued by Cunobelinus during the earliest phase of his coinage when Celtic influence remained strongest.\(^11\) Hence the snake is not necessarily Celtic in origin.\(^12\) The real question, therefore, is why Cunobelinus decided to change the depiction of the dog on his silver coinage in the way that he did.

One possibility that deserves more attention than it has received heretofore is that he did so in imitation of the denarius which Julius Caesar issued in 49/48 BC with a reverse depicting an elephant about to trample a snake and the legend CAESAR below an exergual line (Fig. 3).\(^13\) Given the association of the name CAESAR with the elephant, the interested viewer could easily have interpreted it as a symbol of Caesar, even if he did not necessarily understand why Caesar would have wanted to be depicted in this way. It is arguable, therefore, that Cunobelinus

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\(^7\) V A 2085, BMC 1900–1, ABC 2951. In the case of the silver units, there is a row of dots along the length of the snake, whereas the body of the snake on this bronze unit is entirely smooth. Furthermore, the head of the snake on the bronze unit has distinctive protuberances, whatever exactly these represent, but there is no apparent effort to add such detail in the case of the snake on the silver units.

\(^8\) Henig 1972, 217.


\(^10\) For the reverse type with the springing dog, see VA 1949, BMC 1858–61, ABC 2846; ABC 2852. Van Arsdell and BMC misidentify the dog as a celticized horse. De Jersey 2001, 8, 15, attributes these types to his group ‘C. Middle issues’, whereas he attributes the types with dog standing on snake to a later group ‘E. Late vegetal issues’. The springing dog also appears on the reverse of a bronze half unit by Cunobelinus, VA 1967, ABC 2990.


\(^12\) Evans 1864, 316, claimed that this reverse ‘must be regarded as in some manner connected with the early British mythology’. The parallel with the reverse type by Julius Caesar (below) renders such speculation unnecessary. For comparative purpose, note a silver coin by Togirix of the Sequani (c.80–50 BC) which shows a horse trampling a snake (CCCCBM II, nos 366–400). However, the similarities between the relative positions and poses of the animals are much greater between Cunobelinus’ type and that by Caesar than that by Togirix. Dubnovellaunos of the Cantiaci also issued a stater with reverse depicting a horse and a ram-headed snake, but in such a way that they seem to be being associated together rather than the horse to be trampling the snake (VA 169, BMC 2492–6, ABC 303).

\(^13\) On the coin by Caesar, see RRC 443/1 and Woods 2009 arguing that the elephant represents Caesar about to crush his enemy King Juba of Numidia. Rudd 2002, 3, quotes Italo Vecchi making the comparison, referring in brief to ‘a Cunobelinus silver unit (VA 2069), which represents a bitch or the Roman she-wolf trampling a serpent and, presumably, as with Julius Caesar’s elephant trampling serpent denarius (Crawford 443/3) (sic), is symbolic of the victory of good and great over evil’.
was initially attracted to this design because it seemed to show Caesar using an animal as a symbol in the same way that he sometimes did, and that he was then influenced by it to depict himself, or rather his symbol, trampling a snake in the same manner as Caesar. This could explain why, in the case of the silver coinage, he begins to depict his dog facing right in the manner of the elephant on Caesar’s reverse also rather than left as previously: he, or rather his designer, was unconsciously influenced to do so by the fact that this was a feature of the model that he was imitating. This brings us to the sudden addition of prominent teats to the dog.\footnote{It is important to clarify that the addition of prominent teats to the dog does not necessarily require that there was any change in the understanding of its gender. Teats are not normally prominent on a female dog except when she is nursing, so the addition of prominent teats proves only that the dog was now considered to be with young.}

These are reminiscent of the prominent teats of the wolf depicted on the reverse of a denarius issued by L. Papius Celsus in 45 BC, or those of the wolf depicted on a denarius issued by P. Satrienus in 77 BC (Fig. 4).\footnote{As noted in Chris Rudd List 64 (2002), 36. It is not clear what the significance of the wolf is on Satrienus’ coin. See Harlan 2012, 92–7.}

Next, the change in the pose of the dog on Cunobelinus’ silver coinage needs to be explained also. The springing dog holds its rear legs together and its front paws raised into the air, while the dog standing on a snake adopts a calmer pose with only his inner front paw raised. In fact, he adopts almost the exact same pose of the wolf on the denarius by Satrienus, where one rear leg stretches back, and the other forward, and one front leg stretches forward on the ground, while the other is raised chest-high in front of it.\footnote{The result is a dog that bears a startling similarity to that on a Roman quadrans c.265–42 BC (RRC 24/6), but there is no need to invoke the influence of this.} The only features that the dog standing on a snake inherits from his predecessor, the springing dog, are the head held high on a long upright neck and a long tail curling high behind him.\footnote{See Woods 2012a for a standing dog reverse type of Epaticcus (RRC 2358–63, ABC 1364) based on another Roman wolf type also (RRC 235/1).}

It seems, therefore, that when Cunobelinus decided to imitate the reverse of Caesar’s denarius depicting a snake being trampled, he also decided to depict his symbolic dog in a more Roman fashion, and so based his new depiction of it very much on the depiction of the wolf on Satrienus’ denarius, whether or not he realized that this was actually a wolf and not a dog.\footnote{de Jersey 2001, includes five types within his group ‘E. Late vegetal issues’, but one was the dog trampling snake type issued in the name of a certain Agr(?)}. Of the three other issued in the name of Cunobelinus, the reverses of two depicted exergual lines, but one included an extra line parallel to it beneath the legend (VA 2049, BMC 1367A, ABC 2885), and the other set the reverse legend in a panel (VA 2047, BMC 1866–7, ABC 2888), while the third set the reverse legend in a panel (VA 2051, BMC 1868–9, ABC 2897). The only features of the design of Cunobelinus’ earlier types with the springing dog, neither of which had included an exergual line, and in contrast also to the design of other silver units of the same phase of coinage.\footnote{Finally, one notes that the snake being trampled on the silver coinage is depicted as formed from a row of dots in an apparent attempt to mimic the segmented or creased appearance of the snake being trampled on Caesar’s denarius. Hence Cunobelinus’ depiction of himself as a dog trampling a snake may represent a thoughtful engagement with and adaptation of two different Roman types, where Caesar’s reverse type depicting an elephant trampling a snake provides the primary model, and Satrienus’ depiction of a standing she-wolf exercises an important secondary influence.}

This is not to claim that the depiction of one creature attacking another, even a snake, was previously unknown in pre-Roman Britain. Tincomarus had probably already issued his silver unit with a reverse depicting a standing eagle clutching a snake by the time that Cunobelinus issued the types under discussion, and Epatticus and Caratacus, contemporaries of Cunobelinus, both produced silver units continuing the same basic reverse as introduced by Tincomarus.\footnote{For Tincomarus’ type, see VA 397, BMC 880–905, ABC 1106; for Epaticcus’ type, see VA 580, BMC 2024–293, ABC 1346; for Caratacus’ type, see VA 593, BMC 2376–84, ABC 1376.}

However, Cunobelinus, or his officials, were increasingly looking to Roman models for the
coinage, and the influence of Caesar’s type best explains also both the sudden change of direction in which the dog faces on the silver coinage and the careful inclusion of the legend below the new exergual line. Furthermore, as Creighton observed, this issue by Caesar was one of the five most common types of silver coins in circulation north of the Alps during the late Republican and early Imperial periods, and had already been imitated in north-east Gaul. He used its apparent lack of influence upon British dynastic coinage to argue that ‘the most common imagery from the precious metal issues of Rome was not of great interest or import to the British dynasts’. However, in this case at least, it is arguable that the imagery was, but that Cunobelinus was more subtle in his use of this Roman prototype either than the Gauls had been or than Creighton was prepared to allow.

2. Cunobelinus and the hunters

Another silver unit issued by Cunobelinus appears to depict a hunter on each side (Fig. 5). There can be no doubt as to the identity of the model for the figure depicted on the reverse since the fact that it is depicted with a dog at its side and a bow in its hand suggests that it has been modelled on some depiction of the goddess Diana. As has long been recognized, this figure bears a strong resemblance to that on a reverse type issued by Augustus c.15–13 BC depicting Diana standing with a dog at her right foot and a bow in her left hand (Fig. 6). There are several differences between the figures – Diana holds a spear in her right hand, while the British figure holds its right hand down towards the dog; Diana turns her head towards her left, while the British figure turns its head towards its right; Diana’s upper body is fully clothed, while the British figure leaves half its upper body exposed; the dog next to Diana is depicted in full and gazing outwards, while the dog next to the British figure is depicted as if the hind part of its body was concealed behind this figure, and with head raised to nuzzle or licks its hand – but these are not sufficient to cause any serious doubts concerning the identification of Augustus’ reverse type as the prototype for this British type. However, it is much more difficult to identify the figure on the obverse of the British coin. It does not seem to bear a close resemblance to anything depicted on a republican or early imperial Roman coin. More importantly, it is difficult to identify its two main attributes, the object that it carries in its right hand, and the object that it seems to carry on its back. Evans saw a ‘partially draped figure marching to the right, holding in his right hand a short staff or sword, and carrying a dead animal on his shoulders’, and identified it as Hercules carrying the Cerynean stag. Henig sees a huntsman with a dead animal over its shoulders, but does not identify the object in his right hand; Van Arsdell claims once more that it ‘holds staff or sword

21 Creighton 2000, 82–3. The imitations occurred under A. Hirtius and the proconsul Carinus in the territory of the Treviri c.49 BC and 30 BC respectively. See RPC I, nos 501–2.
22 VA 2063, BMC 1886–8, ABC 2879. Hence ABC refers to the type as ‘Cunobelinus Hunters’.
23 The BMC catalogue seems to be alone in describing this side as the obverse. I follow de Jersey 2001, 13.
25 Evans 1864, 315.
and a dead animal'; Scheers describes it as ‘holding in his right hand a sword (?) and carrying on his left shoulder a large object, animal or man’; the BMC catalogue describes it as ‘holding spear by side, stag (?) over the shoulders’; de Jersey describes it as ‘Hercules r., ?lion-skin draped over shoulders, club in r. hand’, and ABC follows de Jersey. 26 Hence the object in the figure’s right hand has been variously identified as a staff, sword, spear, and club, and the object over its shoulders has been described as a dead animal of some type or a lion-skin.

As far as the object in the figure’s right hand is concerned, it seems a little too short to be a staff, spear, or a sword; it does not have the curved shape that one would normally associate with a throwing stick, and it is far too slim to be a club. Furthermore, the figure seems to be clasping this object about its middle, which effectively excludes its identification as a bladed weapon of any sort. Unfortunately, the identification of the object over the figure’s shoulders is rendered even more difficult than it might otherwise be due to the fact that most specimens are struck off-centre to some extent at least, so that this element of the design is usually only partially preserved. Where the object over the figure’s right shoulder is visible, however, it seems to form a broad rounded mass behind its neck which then tapers away into a straight line. In the case of perhaps the best surviving depiction of this object (CCI 98.2058), there are three dots or bulges along this line suggestive of joints. 27 On this specimen, a short vertical length also rises upwards at the first dot (knee-joint?) along the main length, suggestive perhaps of the lower part of a second ‘leg’, obscured for the most part behind the first ‘leg’, as it bends upwards and away from the latter. However, on another specimen (CCI 68.0453) this short vertical length is included within the main ‘leg’ to give the impression that it is bent at an angle rather than extended straight. Whatever is the more correct rendition of what the original artist intended, the overall impression is that of the hindquarters of some beast resting behind or upon the figure’s right shoulder. Something is also visible over the figure’s left shoulder, but it is much smaller than the object over the right shoulder, and even more difficult to identify. In perhaps the best surviving depiction of this object (CCI 68.0453), a small line, or limb, seems to extend from, or from behind, some rounded mass. This mass may represent the head of the slain beast, while the extension from or behind it may represent a front leg. Whatever the case, the object over the left shoulder seems best interpreted as some extension of the object seen over the right shoulder, and the whole as some slain beast. In support of this interpretation, one notes that the figure bends forward as if carrying a substantial weight upon its shoulders. 28 The same stooped posture tells against interpreting the object on the figure’s shoulders as a lion-skin, since this ought not to have weighed so much as to cause it to stoop in this way. More importantly, the fact that this figure is wearing a chiton in the same way as the figure on the reverse tells significantly against identifying it as Hercules, and the object on its shoulders as a lion-skin, because Hercules was normally depicted as a heroic nude. Indeed, he is depicted in this way on the obverse of another silver unit issued by Cunobelinus during the same phase of coinage, as well as on various late republican Roman issues. 29

So who is this figure with the apparent dead beast upon its shoulders, and what classical model, if any, did the artist draw upon in this matter? Henig points out that ‘the return from the hunt is a very common theme on engraved stones, although the quarry is generally shown hanging from a stick’, and draws attention also to the fact that another common artistic theme was that of Ajax carrying the corpse of Achilles. 30 However, neither parallel seems particularly relevant here. One clue as to how to approach this matter may lie in the fact that the figure on the obverse is dressed in exactly the same manner as the figure on the reverse, in a chiton that begins above the knees and only covers one shoulder. Another may lie in the fact

27 The same, or similar, line is visible on CCI 92.0329 and 95.1272.
28 Scheers 1992, 39, describes the posture of this figure as identical to that of Ajax carrying Achilles as depicted on a gemstone in Bonn, but this is simply the natural way to depict any figure carrying a substantial weight.
29 VA 2061, BMC 1884–5, ABC 2864. de Jersey 2001, 11–13, attributes this to his group ‘D. Tasciovanus issues’ as D1, and the coin under discussion to the same group as D6. For Hercules as a heroic nude, see RRC 455/1–2, 461/1, 494/38.
30 Henig 1972, 214.
that the action of the figure on the obverse seems to complement, or complete, the action of the figure on the reverse. By this I mean that the figure on the reverse seems to stand waiting as if it has already shot its arrow, while the figure on the obverse seems to be hurrying forward under the weight of a slain beast and with what could well be an arrow in its right hand. Hence the figure on the obverse could be the hunting partner of the figure on the reverse, depicted retrieving the body of the beast that its companion has shot, while holding the arrow that it has recovered from the same. This suggests that the artist responsible for the figure on the obverse based his depiction of this figure on the manner in which he, or another, had already decided to depict the figure on the reverse. Hence the two sides of the coin seem to tell the story of a single hunt, and to the extent that the Augustan reverse type both suggested this as a suitable topic for coinage and acted as the direct model for the British reverse which then acted as the model for the British obverse, the Augustan reverse type may be said to have inspired both sides of this type by Cunobelinus. It is not clear whether Cunobelinus, or his designer, understood who, or what, Diana was, but he certainly understood the concept of hunting by bow-and-arrow, and that was all that was necessary here. There is no need to interpret this coin to celebrate anything other than the act of hunting itself, although one cannot entirely exclude the possibility that one or both figures were also being honoured as gods of the hunt in the manner of Diana.

3. Cunobelinus and the sacrifice at the sloping altar

Cunobelinus issued another silver unit whose reverse appears to depict a figure standing between two altars, with its back to one altar while stretching out its right hand to do something to the altar in front of it, or so it is generally agreed (Fig. 7).31 To be more precise, Allen sees an altar behind the figure and, in front, ‘a tripod, towards which this figure may be extending some kind of knife or other straight instrument’, and Henig identifies the object to the front of the figure as a tripod rather than an altar, and the line rising from this as possibly a snake rather than a flame, while Van Arsdell sees two altars behind and in front of the figure, while the BMC catalogue refers to a ‘figure stg. r., draped, before & behind an altar’; de Jersey, however, sees a ‘standing figure in toga r., preparing offering at an altar; another altar behind’, and ABC describes ‘a ‘figure standing r., altar in front and behind.’32 However, one may seriously doubt whether the alleged altar in front of the figure is really identifiable as such. The first reason to doubt this is that its steeply sloping surface is without parallel. One may search the catalogues of Roman coins in vain for the depiction of a sacrifice at such a sloping altar, or tripod. While several republican or early imperial coins do depict one or more figures sacrificing at an altar, none depict such a sloping altar, and for the very good reason that it would have been impossible to offer sacrifice at such an altar or tripod from which everything would have slid straight down onto the feet of the presiding official.33 Here one must also question why the altar behind the figure is depicted with a level surface, while that before it is depicted with a sloping surface.

31 VA 2065, BMC 1889–90, ABC 2900.
33 See RRC 334/1, 372/1; RIC2 1, Augustus nos 363–6, 369, 411; Gaius no. 36. For a lighted altar by itself, see RRC 455/4–5.
The second reason to doubt the identification of the altar in front as such is the fact that the apparent flame, if that is what it is, rises in a straight line from its surface, but at an unnatural angle to the horizontal, in order to touch the hand of the standing figure. Yet a flame ought to have been depicted rising perpendicular to the horizontal, and probably broader in form than this line, exactly like the flame depicted rising from the altar behind the standing figure. The shape of this line remains equally unusual even if one prefers to interpret it as a snake instead, because it should then have adopted a traditional curved, even coiled, shape, as in the case of the curved snake depicted rising from the altar on a silver unit issued by Tincomarus. Together, these two unusual features, the strange sloping surface of the alleged altar and the stranger linear movement of the apparent flame rising from its surface, suggest that the alleged altar is not in fact an altar, nor the alleged flame a flame. Instead, the standing figure seems to be grasping at some handle or lever emerging from some form of stand or lectern in front of it, or prodding this stand with some type of short, straight instrument. One possibility, therefore, is that this figure is using a stylus, or other instrument, to leave its mark on something resting upon the sloped surface of the stand before it, that is, that it is performing some form of writing.

So what model influenced Cunobelinus, or his designer, in the choice of this reverse type? No republican or early imperial Roman coin depicts any figure using some form of short, straight instrument to prod or mark something resting upon the sloped surface of a stand. Henig draws a parallel with gems depicting Apollo before an altar or tripod, but he relies on a mutilated specimen of the type where the key section of the coin has been badly damaged. However, the answer to the origin of the sloping stand may lie in a reverse type issued by the triumvir Mark Antony in 41 BC (Fig. 8). This depicts the goddess Fortuna standing and facing towards the left with her right arm stretched out before her to grasp the handle of a rudder. The rudder passes behind her body so that it is mostly concealed from the viewer’s sight, but its base emerges into view once more at ground level on the right hand side. Two of the three issues of this type also depict a stork standing in front of Fortuna and immediately below the handle of the rudder. The relevance of this type here is that the slope of the main shaft of the rudder as it descends behind Fortuna’s body is reminiscent of the slope of the stand upon which the British figure appears to write, while the short, straight handle of the rudder resembles the short, straight instrument which the British figure appears to hold, and the angular intersection of the handle with the main shaft of the rudder is reminiscent of the angular intersection of the seeming writing instrument with the slope of the apparent stand on Cunobelinus’ coin. It is plausible, therefore, that Cunobelinus, or his designer, mistakenly identified the part of the rudder in view to the front of Fortuna as a depiction of her using a short straight instrument to write upon a sloping stand where the figure of the stork was assumed to be concealing most of this stand, if its outline was not actually misinterpreted as the stand’s front edge.

In short, it is arguable that Cunobelinus adapted this reverse type by Antony in the creation of the reverse type under discussion. He reversed the direction in which the main figure was facing, removed the cornucopia from its left arm, created a little more distance between it and what he thought was some form of stand in front of it, and added a burning altar to its rear, but he copied its basic activity, or so he thought. The strangely voluminous robe of the figure on Cunobelinus’ coin reinforces this interpretation. It sweeps from around the back of the figure to form a large mass dragging along the ground to its side and front, and bears no resemblance to the clothing of any other figure on Cunobelinus’ coinage. However, it does resemble the sort of robe that Fortuna could have been thought to be wearing if one had misinterpreted the base of the rudder emerging from behind her at ground level as part of a voluminous dress. Hence the best explanation of the origin of this reverse type by Cunobelinus is that he, or his designer, attempted to adapt a reverse featuring Fortuna holding a rudder which he had completely misinterpreted. He seems to have intended the resultant scene to depict some sort of ritual situation where a long-robed figure performed some form of writing in the

34 ABC 1130.
36 RRC 516/1 (aureus), 2–3 (denarii).
presence of a lighted altar, so that it not unnatural to ask whether this figure is not a priest or druid, exactly as has already been suggested.\footnote{Allen 1958, 62.}

4. Verica and the head on a spear

Verica issued a silver unit whose reverse depicts a figure standing facing left with some form of vegetation in his outstretched right hand, while a head rests on some form of upright in the field to the right (Fig. 9).\footnote{VA 506, \textit{BMC} 1450–84, \textit{ABC} 1235.} Van Arsdell describes a figure with ‘branch in right hand’, but mistakenly claims that this figure also holds ‘bust on lance in left hand’, while the \textit{BMC} catalogue describes a ‘figure stg. l., helmeted, left arm across body, r. arm holding a palm (?) branch’, with ‘to r. head on lance’, and \textit{ABC} describes a ‘figure standing l., holding branch in r. hand, head on spear in l.’. Similarly, Laing describes a figure ‘holding a branch and a head on a pole’, while Bean describes ‘a female draped figure facing left, large ear of corn in right hand, human head impaled on ornate staff in left’.\footnote{Laing 1991, 22; Bean 2000, 247.} Finally, Creighton prefers ‘figure with ancestral bust’, and uses this image to support his argument that Verica promoted an ancestral cult of the Commius whose son he claimed to be.\footnote{Creighton 2000, 191–3.} Bean identifies the prototype of this reverse as the reverse of a denarius issued in 42 BC depicting Pietas standing facing to the left with a branch in her outstretched right hand and a sceptre in her left hand (Fig. 10).\footnote{Bean 2000, 193, referring to \textit{RRC} 494/19.} The problem with this identification, however, is that the figure on Verica’s coin bears little real resemblance to this depiction of Pietas: it seems to be male (no breasts), bears a branch that is longer and more erect, and does not hold anything in its left hand. In fact, the figure on Verica’s coin is better compared to the soldier depicted on a denarius issued by the \textit{legatus pro praetore} M. Poblicius in the name of Cn. Pompeius Magnus in Spain \textit{c}.46/45 BC (Fig. 11).\footnote{\textit{RRC} 469/1a–e.} The soldier is standing on the prow of a ship with right arm outstretched to receive a palm branch from an armed female figure. His stance, facing towards the left with right arm outstretched and left arm at
his side, but bent forward at the elbow, is identical to that of the figure on Verica’s coin, with a stronger similarity between the branches in their hands also.

As for the alleged ancestral bust behind the figure on Verica’s coin, it bears a strong similarity to a type of Roman military standard, the *imago* or bust of the emperor normally borne by a Roman *imaginifer.*

Allied princes were expected to signify their submission to Rome by honouring the image of the emperor among the standards, and Verica would certainly have been required to do so after he fled for refuge to Roman territory, if he had not already done so long before then. While no Roman coin seems to have depicted this particular type of standard, this identification is reinforced by the depiction of the shaft of this standard in the same way that the shafts of the *signa* were depicted on the legionary denarii issued by Mark Antony c. 32–31 BC (Fig. 12). Two points of similarity are evident, the facts that the shafts are depicted as a single columns of dots, and that they end in a triangular spear-head designed to penetrate into the ground. Since these denarii formed one of the most common silver types in circulation north of the Alps during the early imperial period, it is not surprising that Verica, or his designer, should have been familiar with them, and Creighton errs in his claim that ‘this massive issue failed to impress any of the British dynasts, as none imitated it’. Hence Verica, or his designer, seems to have borrowed elements from two different Roman reverse types to create a new composition.

So what exactly does this reverse type depict? One possibility is that it depicts Verica himself carrying a palm branch in celebration of some victory gained with the support of the Romans as symbolized by the *imago* of the emperor, although it is impossible to determine on this evidence whether this victory was real or imagined, past or prospective. However, much depends on the identity of the bust on the standard. Some better preserved specimens seem to depict a bearded bust, and if this is correct, the bust is unlikely to be that of any of the early Julio-Claudian emperors who were never depicted bearded, assuming that the engraver would have been sufficiently informed to know this. This leaves two other main possibilities. The first is that the bust on the standard is that of some god, while the standing figure is Verica, so that coin proclaims Verica’s victory under the sign of this god. The second is that the bust on the standard is that of Verica himself, while the standing figure represents the state, or some element of the state, so that the coin proclaims the victory of the state under the sign of its king. The key point here, however, is that the designer has juxtaposed these two elements, a figure holding the palm-branch of victory, and some adaptation of a Roman military standard, in such a way as to suggest that he has correctly understood the symbolism of each.

Finally, one should note that the bust on the standard is unlikely to be that of an enemy, or to have anything to do with the Celtic practice of head-hunting, precisely because this standard was drawn in imitation of the Roman eagle-standard and at a time when British designers seem to have been deliberately avoiding anything too distinctively Celtic or British. The suspicion must be that the designer replaced one positive symbol, the eagle, with another positive

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43 See Alexandrescu 2005, 147–56, at 148–9. For an example of such an *imago*, a large bust in the round, exactly as depicted on Verica’s coin, see the gravestone of Aurelius Diogenes in Chester (*RIB* 521), although it dates to the mid-third century AD.

44 On worshipping the image of the emperor among the standards, see Campbell 1984, 96–9.

45 *RRC* 544/8–39.

46 The shafts of the *signa* on Mark Antony’s denarii are always formed of columns of dots, but there is some variation in the depiction of their butts, so that not all are depicted ending in spear-heads. Both of these features distinguish them very clearly from the various standards depicted on the coinage of Augustus, such as on those many coins issued in connection with his reception of the captured standards back from the Parthians in 20 BC.

47 Creighton 2000, 82. In fact, Verica copied the eagle from this type for use as the main feature on the reverse of a minim, as revealed by the fact that his eagle retains the same pose and, more importantly, the distinctive collar of the eagle on Antony’s legiory denarii. See VA 563, *BMC* 1572–8, *ABC* 1331.

48 For the apparent beard, see e.g. CCI 02.0298; also CNG Group, Electronic Auction 292, lot 516.

49 Laing 1991, 22, suggests that the bust is ‘likely to be a bronze mount, comparable with the Romano-Celtic head from Felmingham Hall, Norfolk’. This is a persuasive suggestion, despite the relatively late date (second/third century AD) of the Felmingham Hall hoard.

50 In general on Celtic head-hunting, see Armit 2012. Even if Cunobelinus does depict Perseus with the head of Medusa on the reverse of a bronze unit (VA 2109, *BMC* 2004–9, *ABC* 2987), or something similar based on a depiction of these classical figures, this does not prove that he, or any other British leader, had any more interest in the cult of the head than did many Greeks and Romans who also displayed an interest in this myth.
symbol more appropriate to the new British context in an attempt to create a British equivalent of the eagle-standard; if, indeed, he was not simply attempting to depict something that Verica had already invented as part of his increasing Romanization of his court.

5. Verica and the domed altar-enclosure

Verica issued a silver minim with an obverse depicting what the major catalogues agree in describing simply as an altar (Fig. 13). However, Bean describes it as a ‘two door temple with domed roof’, while Creighton wishes to identify it as a shrine, or cupboard, in which Verica kept a bust of his alleged father Commius. The reason for its identification as an altar lies in the fact that the lower part of this object or building clearly imitates the altar, or altar-enclosure to be more precise, that appeared on the reverse of an as issued by the emperor Tiberius c.A.D 22–30 (Fig. 14). In each case, there is an attempt to represent steps, a main body consisting of two rectangular doors, and an entablature on top. The similarity between the two types is increased by the fact that two large capitals appear on either side of the building, C and F in the case of Verica’s coin, to be expanded as C(ommi) F(ilius) ‘son of Commius’, and S and C in the case of Tiberius’ coin, to be expanded as S(enatus) C(onsulto) ‘by decree of the Senate’. However, there is an important difference between the two types in that Verica’s coin depicts a band arcing above the entablature to create the initial impression of a barrel roof or even a dome. In contrast, Tiberius’ coin depicts some curling ornamentation on top of, and at the two extremities of, the entablature, with some sort of flat raised surface in between. The question, therefore, is why did the designer of Verica’s coin add an apparent barrel roof or dome to the basic model that he was imitating.

One may begin by noting that the coin under discussion is one of only two British coins that depict architectural types, and the strong parallels between the two coins suggest some greater co-ordination between their issues. Both coins are minims, both were issued by Verica, both depict a classically derived architectural type on the obverse, and both depict a taurine image on the reverse. Hence, while the coin under discussion depicts an apparent altar on the obverse and the head of a bull on the reverse, the other issue depicts an apparent temple on the obverse and a butting bull on the reverse (Fig. 15). In other words, the coins seem to represent variations on the same themes. But can one push this parallelism further to argue that the apparent altar on one obverse bears the same approximate relationship to the apparent temple on the other obverse as the bull’s head on the reverse of the former bears to the full bull on the reverse of the latter? This seems possible, whether one understands this relationship as pro-

51 VA 552, BMC 1534–7, ABC 1313.
52 Bean 2000, 246; Creighton 2000, 192.
53 See e.g. Laing 1991, 20, on RIC 1, Tiberius nos 80–1, where the object is described as an ‘altar-enclosure with double panelled door’ and ‘uncertain ornaments on top’. The same object also appeared on bronze coins from Emerita in Spain. See RPC 1, nos 28, 34–6, 45–6, where it is described merely as an altar.
54 VA 553, BMC 1538–41, ABC 1316. All agree in describing the structure as a temple.
ceeding from the part to the whole, or from the central element to the wider context. It is arguable, therefore, that the apparent altar may well be intended as such since it could be said to form the central element of the temple, or temple-complex, in the same way that the head is the central or controlling element of the body. Alternatively, one could nuance this interpretation to say that, whatever exactly it was supposed to be – whether an altar, a cupboard, or a larger shrine of some sort – the key point is that this item could be said to form the central element of the temple, or temple-complex. However, all this may push the parallelism between the two issues by Verica a little too far, and still does not explain the addition of a barrel roof or dome to the altar-enclosure as depicted on Tiberius’ as.

It may prove more fruitful to assume no more than a basic parallelism between Verica’s issues, that both depict the same sort of architectural feature on the obverse in the same way that they both depict the same creature – a bull – on the reverse, but to then examine the depiction of the apparent temple to see to what extent, if any, the designer has departed from his classical model in the assumption that the designers of both obverse types probably adopted much the same approach in this matter, if it was not actually the same individual in each case. In the case of the apparent temple, therefore, while the classical influence is clear, it is difficult to identify which coin, if any, the designer has used as his model in this matter. Bean describes this temple as having a circular door because it seems to depict some circular object in the opening between its two main pillars. This, together with the fact that there are just two main pillars, suggests that the designer may have been influenced by a denarius issued by Mark Antony in 42 BC which depicts a temple with a solar disk between its two front pillars (Fig. 16). Otherwise, the thick rectangular platform at the base of the temple is more reminiscent of that of the temple to Julius Caesar as depicted on coins issued by Octavian in 36 BC (Fig. 17). However,
the British temple also displays a large chimney-like architectural feature at the apex of its pediment, precisely where one would often expect to find some statuary in the case of many Roman temples, although neither of the Roman types just mentioned depicts any significant feature at this point on their temples. Furthermore, in the case of the British temple, the roof extends far too much beyond the main body of the temple itself, as does the platform beneath it. The result is that the basic profile of this building bears a stronger resemblance to that of the Curia Julia as depicted by Octavian on a denarius issued \( c.29 \) BC (Fig. 18) rather than to that of any temple.

In other words, the designer of the British coin has not produced a close copy of any Roman model, but seems to have combined a number of different elements or influences in order to convey merely the idea of a Roman temple, if that was what he intended. Such an approach may best explain also the addition of what appears to be a barrel roof or dome to a building very clearly based on the altar-enclosure as depicted on Tiberius’ \( as \). The designer of this obverse did not copy any particular model, but copied features from different architectural types in order simply to convey the idea of a Roman temple. Here one notes that Augustus depicted a domed temple of Mars Ultor on numerous types issued \( c.19–18 \) BC (Fig. 19), and our designer may well have been familiar with some of these types. However, this type does not really explain why the designer chose to depict a dome by means of a band arcing over the top of the altar-enclosure rather than a single line. The presence of this band rather than a single line supports the depiction of a barrel roof rather than a dome, but no Roman coin ever depicted such a roof. So where could this idea have come from? The answer to this may lie in the reverse of a denarius issued by the \textit{legatus pro praetore} \( P \). Carisius at Emerita in Spain in the name of Augustus in \( c.25–23 \) BC (Fig. 20). It attempted to provide a sort of bird’s eye view of the town from the front, with the city-wall running into the distance behind the gateway. However, to the untutored eye, the arcing band formed by the city-wall enclosing the city in the distance may well have looked like an attempt to depict a barrel roof or dome over the gateway. It is my suggestion, therefore, that the British designer correctly identified the entrance to the altar enclosure as some form of monumental entrance and decided to add the same architectural feature to it as he thought he saw depicted on the reverse by Carisius, in an attempt to convey the idea of a Roman temple with a barrel roof or dome rather than to copy any particular model in full. In other words, the only two British coins to display architectural types, probably depict architectural fantasies rather than real buildings, but the same is true of many Roman architectural types also.

The question as to why Verica wished to display such fantasies on his coinage – whether as symbols of monuments that he intended to build, sym-

58 For clear depictions of this chimney-like feature, see e.g. CCI 00.0682, 01.1459, 03.0557, 90.0112, 92.0569.
59 \( RIC^2 \) 1, Augustus no. 266.
60 \( RIC^2 \) 1, Augustus nos 28, 39, 68–74, 103–6, 114–20. On the historical problem posed by this depiction of a domed temple to Mars Ultor, see Rich 1998, 79–86.
61 \( RIC^2 \) 1, Augustus nos 9a–10. This depiction of Emerita proved popular at Emerita itself which continued to use it on its bronze coinage well into the reign of Tiberius. See \( RPC^1 \), nos 20–7, 30–3, 38, 41–4.
62 On Roman architectural types, see Burnett 1999, esp. 152: ‘it is the idea rather than the actual structure that is the objective of the die engraver’. 

bols of buildings that he had seen during a visit to the Roman Empire, or for some other reason altogether – must remain unanswered.

Conclusions

As a conceptual tool at least, it may assist in the analysis of the iconography of British obverse or reverse types to sketch the logical steps in the development of this iconography under increasing Roman influence, and to attempt then to categorize the various types according to these steps. One could perhaps distinguish the following stages resulting ultimately in the depiction of subjects, or types of subjects, with no Roman precedent, that is, the emergence of a new Celtic subject matter, but in a realistic Roman style:

1. Traditional Celtic subject, Celtic style;
2. Traditional Celtic subject, Roman style;
3. Imitative Roman (simple copying of single Roman model);
4. Adapted Roman subject, single model;
5. Adapted Roman subjects, multiple models;

While it may not always be easy to assign an individual British type to one step or the next, consideration of a variety of approximately contemporary types provides a good insight into the general state of development. It is noteworthy, therefore, that the types discussed here all fall towards the end of this developmental sequence. On the whole, British artists were advancing beyond the minor adaptation of single Roman models to the use of multiple Roman models in the creation of more complex compositions, but they had not yet become confident enough to create truly new compositions dealing with subject matters that had no precedent or parallel in the Roman numismatic tradition. However, they seem to have been on the cusp of so doing when the Claudian invasion of AD 43 brought their increasing iconographic sophistication and independence to a halt.

REFERENCES

BMC. See Hobbs 1996.
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