

Auspicious Ancestors: perceptions of the order of things under the Triumvirate
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This paper examines one attempt to use myths about the foundation of Rome to mediate the trauma of the proscriptions and contextualize the new order of things under the triumvirs Lepidus, Antony, and Octavian. Specifically it focuses on a series of three portrait *aurei* struck by the moneyer Lucius Regulus in 42 BCE at the mint of Rome; the reverse coin type for each issue of *aurei* associates the triumvir portrayed on the obverse with an heroic ancestor. The reverse for Lepidus (RRC 494/1) depicts a Vestal usually identified as the Vestal Aemilia; that for Octavian (RRC 494/3), Aeneas carrying Anchises on his shoulder. The reverse for Antony (RRC 494/2) portrays a young Hercules seated on a rock holding weapons in each hand. That these reverses illustrate the heroic ancestors of the *gentes Aemilia, Iulia, and Antonia* has been recognized.¹ That these heroic ancestors are each connected with a different foundation story for Rome has not been noticed. Hercules slew Cacus making the site of Rome safe for habitation; Aeneas alloyed his Trojan metal with Italian stock to craft the Roman race; and the Vestal Aemilia, in one tradition (Plutarch, *Rom.* 2), gave birth to the famous twins who founded Rome.

It is my contention that Regulus' series of *aurei* are contemporary evidence for a culture-wide dialogue about the power and position of the triumvirs. The very title of *triumvir rei publicae constituendae* asserted the continuation of Republican institutions at the same time as it signaled the creation of an unprecedented form of *imperium* that was diametrically opposed to the power wielded by traditional Republican magistrates. This new kind of *imperium* was autocratic and violent. Regulus and his designers for the *aurei* use stories about the foundation of Rome to explore and provide answers about the relations between citizens, the triumvirs, and the gods. They engage in an act of mythopoeism that links Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus with Hercules, Aeneas, and Romulus. In so doing they emphasize the otherness of the triumvirs as well as their intimate connection to the topography of Rome. The triumvirs' use of extreme measures, like the proscriptions, falls in the tradition of brutality exercised by their heroic ancestors when confronting forces that disregard the law, violate sacred traditions, and threaten peaceful coexistence. In short Regulus' series of portrait *aurei* provide a kind of aetiology for the triumvirate in the need for a refoundation of the city.

¹ Dorothea Michel. 1967. *Alexander als Vorbild für Pompeius, Caesar und Marcus Antonius*. Brussels.