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KING ANTONY: A NOTE ON AN EXTINCT COIN

Peter J. Bicknell



The subject of what follows is a remarkable *aureus*, almost certainly now extinct, whose significance may not have been fully appreciated. Struck by Mark Antony during the period of the second triumvirate, the coin survived antiquity in only two examples which I designate A and B. A once resided in the collection of the Este family of Modena. It was listed and described in C. Calcagnini's handwritten catalogue, compiled in 1541, of the Este collection's gold coins¹. Indications are that it is now irretrievably lost. Around the middle of the seventeenth century B passed into the holdings of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris whence it was removed in the great robbery of 1831. Missing ever since, it is presumed to have been melted down. Prior to its arrival in France it belonged to the Gonzaga collection in Mantova; hence the presence on its obverse of an impressed eagle, the Gonzaga crest². Much confusion has resulted from C. Cavedoni's mistaken deductions that A and B were one and the same coin and that the eagle emblem stamped on the latter was associated with the Este family³. It is clear from Calcagnini's description of A that no extraneous features were present⁴.

No depiction of A survives. While, regrettably, no cast of B was made prior to its disappearance, three early line drawings of the coin are extant. The latest of these, executed by A. Morell and published by S. Havercamp in 1734⁵, is reproduced above. The first was published by C. Patin in 1663⁶ and the second by J. Vaillant in 1703⁷. As Havercamp notes in his comments on the Morell version⁸, Patin's representation of the obverse type was

¹ C. Calcagnini, *Aureorum Numismatum Ill.mi Herculis secundi, ducis Ferrariae quarti, elenchus* (handwritten manuscript, Modena 1541).

² See B. Simonetta - R. Riva, «Aquileta» Estense o «Aquileta» Gonzaga, *Q Tic 8*, 1979, 359-373 together with the same authors' *Ancora sull' Aquileta Gonzaga e non Estense*, *Q Tic 12*, 1983, 333-341.

³ C. Cavedoni, *Delle monete antiche in oro un tempo del Museo Estense descritte da Celio Calcagnini intorno all'anno MDXL*, *Atti e Mem. Acc. di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti I*, 1825, I ff: See especially 27-28.

⁴ See Simonetta - Riva, *Q Tic 8*, 1979, 366.

⁵ S. Havercamp, *Thesaurus Morellianus, sive familiarum Romanarum numismata omnia* (Amsterdam 1734) vol. 2, pl. 2, Antonia No. 1.

⁶ C. Patin, *Familiae Romanae in antiquis numismatibus ab urbe condita ad tempora divi Augusti* (Paris 1663) pl. 2, Antonia No. 1.

⁷ J. Vaillant, *Numi antiqui familiarum Romanarum perpetuis interpretationibus illustrati* (Amsterdam 1703) vol. 2, pl. 14, No. 41.

⁸ Havercamp, *Thesaurus Morellianus*, vol. 1, 29.

highly inaccurate; so too that of Vaillant who copied from his predecessor. Morell's drawing is not to scale. The actual diameter of the lost *aureus* would have been in the order of 1.8 centimetres. In 1764 P. De la Nauze gave the weight of B as 149 1/4 grains French⁹, equivalent to 122.5 grains Troy and 7.93 grams.

The coin's pictorial content is relatively uncontroversial. The figure on the obverse, facing right, is Antony in military dress. His right foot is placed on the ground; his left rests upon a ship's prow. An upright spear is gripped in his raised right hand; his left grasps an object which at first sight resembles a knobbed baton or rod, but which may in fact be the hilt of a sheathed sword. The reverse type is a lion advancing left and holding a short sword in its right paw. Above the lion's back a star is conspicuously placed.

Somewhat more contentious are the inscriptions on either face. According to Morell's figuring the legend of B's obverse ran: *M(arcus). ANTONIUS. M(arcus). F(ilius). M(arcus). N(epos). AUG(ur). IMP(erator). I E(rum)*. That is: *Marcus Antonius, son of Marcus, grandson of Marcus, Augur, Imperator for the second time. I E* is surprising given that none of the numerous extant coins struck by Antony alludes to his second imperatorial salutation. In 1815 and again in 1827, T. E. Mionnet, who as director of the Paris Cabinet was in a position to examine the coin in person until its theft, recorded the penultimate and final elements as *IMP. TER*¹⁰. By Calcagnini the last two elements of the legend of A's obverse were described as *IMP. E*. Almost certainly the intrusion of *I* in the concluding component of Morell's version is an example of the occasional lapses on his part noted by J. Eckhel¹¹. In this particular case Morell may well have been influenced by Patin in whose inaccurate (see above) reproduction *I E* also features. While we can be confident enough that Antony was described as *Imperator for the third time*, it is not easy to achieve a definitive resolution of all the minor discrepancies. Granted that A and B were struck from the same or very similar dies, the concurrence of Calcagnini and Mionnet militates in favour of *IMP* rather than *IMP* as the penultimate element. On the other hand, the agreement of Calcagnini and Morell suggest that *T* and *E* might have been in monogram rather than independent. Calcagnini's failure to record the *R* of the final element could be due, *exempli gratia*, to failure of a wearing or deficient die to strike it up on the Este specimen.

On the coin's reverse Antony's titulature continues. According to Morell the legend of B ran: *III.VIR(=triumvir). R(ei). P(ublicae). C(onstituendae). COS(=consul). DESIG(natus). ITER(um). ET. TERT(io)*. That is: *triumvir for the regulation of the republic, designated consul for the second and the third time*. Here *DESIG* is dubious. Mionnet attested *DESC* and Calcagnini recorded the same reading for the reverse of A. Again granted that the two coins were struck from the same or highly similar dies, their consensus ought to be decisive. As Bahrfeldt observes¹², *DESC* rather than *DESG* or *DESIG* is not unprecedented; it appears, for example, on some reverses of *denarii* struck by Q. Salvidienus on behalf of Octavian in 41 (perhaps, rather, 40) B.C.

The correct reading of Antony's titles once established, the coins chronological termini emerge forthwith. Antony received his third Imperatorial salutation in 38 B.C. in the wake of the victory of his legate, P. Ventidius Bassus, over the Parthian Pacorus in Syria

⁹ P. De la Nauze, *Dissertation sur le poids de l'ancienne livre romaine*, Mémoires de l'Académie 30, 1764, 185.

¹⁰ T. E. Mionnet, *De la rareté et du prix des médailles romaines; ou, recueil contenant les types des médailles frappées pendant la durée de la République et de l'empire romain*, first edition (Paris 1815) 70; second édition (Paris 1827) 93.

¹¹ J. Eckhel, *Doctrina nummorum veterum* (Vienna 1792-1798) vol. 5, 114.

¹² M. Bahrfeldt, *Die römische Goldmünzenprägung* (Halle 1923) 88, note 2.

Cyrrhastica¹³. Antony's second consulship was held in 34 B.C. The coin was struck, then, between late 38 and January 1, 34. I turn now to matters of interpretation.

To reiterate, the reverse type is a lion advancing left and holding a short sword in its right paw. Above the lion's back is a prominent star. A walking lion appears on the reverse of earlier coins of Antony, silver *quinarii*, struck in Gaul in 43 and 42 B.C. Accompanying it in addition to either a reference to the location of the mint, Lugdunum, or to Antony himself as *Imperator* are the numerals *XL* or *XLI* preceded by the letter *A*. *A* is to be expanded to *annorum* (years); the figures state Antony's age at the time of issue. The logical inference from the conjunction of type and reference to age is that the lion is Leo¹⁴, an astrological motif paralleled by the Capricorn symbol which features on issues of Antony's erstwhile fellow triumvir and rival, Octavian, eventually Augustus¹⁵. The lion on the *aureus*, it may safely be assumed, stands also for the zodiacal sign.

Antony was born on *XVII Kal. Febr.*¹⁶ (the fourteenth day of January) in *A.U.C.* (*year from Rome's founding*) 671 (more or less coincident with 83 B.C.) in terms of the old Roman Republican calendar which operated with an ordinary year of 355 days and was brought into line with the seasons by means of erratic intercalation¹⁷. Even granted maximal, regular discalibration of *A.U.C.* 671 and its extrapolated Julian counterpart¹⁸ the sun could not have been in Leo when Antony was born nor could it have occupied that sign at the time of his conception, set by the then prevailing astrological convention 273 days prior to parturition¹⁹. It is conceivable, but in the absence of sufficient data impossible to establish, that Leo was Antony's ascendant sign, the location of his *horoscopus* in the jargon of his time. There is a further possibility more susceptible to confirmation. Of especial significance in the Roman horoscope was the position of the moon at the time of the subject's birth and/or conception. Thus Octavian's partiality for Capricorn (his sun sign at birth was Libra)²⁰ was bound up if not wholly at least in part (the fact that his *horoscopus* at conception was 1° Capricorn may be relevant) with the moon's location at 24° Capricorn at the time of his birth and at 25° of the same sign at his putative conception. In 83 B.C. by the extrapolated Julian calendar and with the normal Roman astrological practice of calibrating the vernal equinox with 8° Aries taken into account²¹, the moon entered Leo at approximately 10:30 pm local time at Rome on January 15 and left it at approximately 10:12 am on January

¹³ See, for example, H. A. Grueber, *Coins of the Roman Republic in the British Museum* (London 1910) vol. 2, 505–506 note 1.

¹⁴ While countenancing such an interpretation M. Crawford is rather more cautious. See *RRC* vol. 2, 740 note 1.

¹⁵ Capricorn first appears on his coins soon after 27 B.C.; see H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum* (London 1923) vol. 1, 107 together with pl. 16, 9.

¹⁶ For the evidence and a definitive discussion see W. Suerbaum, *Chiron* 10, 1980, 327–334.

¹⁷ On the irregularity of intercalation in Republican Rome see, for example, A. E. Samuel, *Greek and Roman Chronology* (München 1972) 162–164. By and large the official and seasonal years were not allowed to get seriously at variance. In the turbulent years between 65 and 46 B.C., however, a massive discrepancy built up which led to the Julian reform.

¹⁸ The first day of January in *A.U.C.* 689 was the equivalent of January 6 65 B.C.; see P. Brind'Amour, *Le calendrier romain* (Ottawa 1983) 321. There are no grounds for supposing grossly deficient or excessive intercalation within the two preceding decades. Precise backward projection is precluded not only by the aberrance of intercalation but also by the fact that the intercalary month could consist of either 22 or 23 days.

¹⁹ See Brind'Amour 72.

²⁰ The sun stood at 1° Libra. His *horoscopus* at birth was 4° Libra. On all aspects of Octavian's horoscope, see, in particular, Brind'Amour 62–76.

²¹ See Brind'Amour 72.

18²². With the pre-Julian Republican calendar's normal vagaries the equation of any of the days of January 83 B.C. within which the moon was in Leo with *XVII Kal. Febr. of A.U.C. 671* is quite within the bounds of reasonable possibility. Given that Antony was born on January 15, 16, 17 or 18 83 B.C. together with the convention of 273 days from conception to birth, the corresponding putative days for his conception are April 17, 18, 19 and 20 84 B.C. The moon entered Leo at approximately 9:30 pm on April 17 and left it at approximately 8:50 am on April 20. I suggest that Antony favoured Leo, just as Octavian favoured Capricorn, principally because it was his moon sign at both birth and conception.

A star is a frequent subsidiary motif on Roman coins of the triumviral period. In each case it is the overall design content which determines its precise significance. The reverse of an *aureus*, for example, struck by Octavian in 36 B.C. features a star within the pediment of a tetrastyle temple whose architrave is inscribed *DIVO.IVL(io)*²³. This can only be an allusion to the so-called *sidus Iulium* of 44, alleged certification of Caesar's reception into the celestial company of the gods²⁴. Once it is accepted that the lion on our *aureus*' reverse represents zodiacal Leo, identification of the star suspended above its back is a matter of course. The obvious candidate is Regulus (the name we use goes back to Copernicus), the brightest and most conspicuous luminary in the actual constellation. Imitating the Greeks, who took their cue from Babylon, the Romans associated it with royalty, hence the appellation *stella regia*, kingly star, in a lost work on astronomy by Julius Caesar which the elder Pliny cites²⁵.

Regal aspirations on Mark Antony's part are frequently dismissed as a figment of Octavian's persistent and successful propaganda. In the light of the lost coin this assessment loses some of its credibility. It was struck by Antony, I surmise, late in 37 B.C. after the disillusioning compact of Tarentum, his abandonment of his wife Octavia, Octavian's sister, and resumption at Antioch of his liaison with Cleopatra that had been in abeyance since 41. The message of the obverse is that Antony as paramount warlord is military master of the world both by land and sea. The reverse insinuates that a monarchical basis, doubtless on hellenistic lines already countenanced by Julius Caesar²⁶, for the universal rule that he anticipated after Octavian's liquidation, was seriously, but possibly transiently²⁷, envisaged²⁸.

²² I have performed the necessary calculations on the basis of interpolation from the tables of B. Tuckerman, *Planetary, Lunar and Solar Positions 601 BC to AD 1 at Five-day and Ten-day Intervals* (Philadelphia 1962).

²³ See RRC 537 together with pl. 64.

²⁴ See especially the elder Pliny, *Natural History* 2.92-94.

²⁵ Pliny, *Natural History* 18.271.

²⁶ Such is my view based in particular on my perception of the celebrated diadem incident at the Lupercalia of January 26 in 44 B.C.; for the ancient evidence see M. Broughton, *The Magistrates of the Roman Republic* (Cleveland 1968) vol. 2, 313.

²⁷ No subsequent coin struck by Antony himself (issues of Cleopatra are another matter) is obtrusively redolent of regal aspirations.

²⁸ In conclusion, I wish to thank the two referees for their helpful comments on an earlier version and Dr. F.E. Koenig for sending me copies of the relevant pages and plate of *Thesaurus Morellianus* and of the two articles cited at note 2 above.