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# Connecting Cicero with Basel: Lucius Munatius Plancus, *Ciceronis discipulus*

## Introduction

Cultural developments in Basel in the Humanistic era also entailed a retrospective look at the history of the city, above all the search for a founder congenial to its new identity as a centre of book production.<sup>1</sup> This desire was particularly felt by the Humanist Beatus Rhenanus (1485–1547), and resulted in the deliberate cultivation of the memory of Lucius Munatius Plancus, a choice determined by the reasonable geographical proximity between Basel and Augusta Raurica, a colony indeed founded by Plancus between the summer and autumn of 44 BC, following a successful campaign against the Raeti.<sup>2</sup>

Born around 90 BC, Lucius Munatius Plancus, like Cicero, was of municipal origin and a *homo novus*.<sup>3</sup> Unlike Cicero, however, Plancus was firmly Caesar's

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1 On the history of Basel cf. Laur-Belart 1957a and 1957b; Walser 1957b; Teuteberg 1986; Steinmann 2000; Helmig 2012; Hess 2020, 140–148.

2 The epitaph of Plancus' tomb mentions the foundation (cf. *CIL* X 6087, quoted in full below, p. 39). The circumstances of the foundation of Raurica, however, remain a much-debated problem, as the first significant traces of settlement date back to 15 BC, which is almost thirty years after the supposed foundation by Plancus. In this regard, it is usually believed in scholarship that the founding act of Plancus should be interpreted as a simple declaration of intent within the vast programme of provincial settlements and colonisations launched by Caesar. It is probable that Raurica was imagined as a defensive post strategically located where the Rhine bends to the north, but the subsequent outbreak of civil wars slowed its actual development. On the topic see Martin 1971; Lieb 1974; Drack-Fellmann 1988; L. Burckhardt 2014, 113.

3 Cf. Hanslik 1933. The year of Plancus' birth cannot be placed after 86 BC, since he took over the consulate in 43 BC, an office for which the minimum age was 43 years. His hometown is uncertain: the scholarship is divided between Atina, where there is a tradition of the presence of Planci (cf. Morello 1997, 9–13) and Tivoli, since we have a verse by Horace who invites his friend Munatius to rest *Tiburis umbra tui* (Hor. *Car.* 1.7.21, from which derives Porph. *Hor. Carm.* 1.7.15: *Plancus enim inde [scil. Tibur] fuit oriundus*) and an inscription that records a *C. Munatius T. f.* among the magistrates of the city (cf. *CIL* I2 1496 = *ILS* 6231). We can be fairly sure that Plancus owned a villa in Tivoli: the question is whether he was also a native of Tivoli, apart from being a vacationer there. If Plancus was born in Tivoli, the established friendship between his family and Cicero (who also mentions a marked similarity between their lives, cf. below, p. 43), would be less easy to explain, as it does not appear that Cicero was particularly attached to that geographical area. That problem does not arise if we accept the thesis of the birth of Plancus in Atina, just twelve km from Arpinum and situated along the road to Formia and Minturnae, where Cicero

man all his life: he was Caesar's lieutenant in both Gallic and Civil Wars and his career proceeded without setbacks: in 46 BC Plancus was one of the *praefecti urbi*, the magistrates appointed to the government of Rome during the absence of Caesar in Iberia due to the last outbreaks of the civil revolt.<sup>4</sup> Two years later, when Caesar organised the alternation of offices in view of another absence from Rome, this time for the Parthian campaign, Plancus was appointed to the government of Gallia Comata for 43 BC and to the consulate for 42 BC. According to Caesar's plans, Plancus would share the consulate with Decimus Brutus: what Caesar could not know was that Decimus would be among the conspirators.

After the Ides of March, Plancus participated in the senatorial session on 17 March 44, where he spoke in support of the amnesty for all the assassins of Caesar.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, he travelled to Gallia Comata, from where he followed the evolution of the political situation by constantly corresponding with Cicero. Once the Second Triumvirate was established, Plancus was for a long time Antonius's right-hand man, playing a leading role in Egypt at Cleopatra's court, and yet in 31 BC, all of a sudden, he returned to Rome, to join Octavian. But Plancus was not just a shrewd politician: in the best Republican tradition, he was also deeply engaged in contemporary intellectual life. Horace dedicated an ode to him, and Beatus Rhenanus was not mistaken in labelling Plancus an *orator*, as we know from Suetonius that he founded a rhetorical circle.<sup>6</sup>

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had business interests. Another argument in favour of Atina is Plancus' sponsorship of the restoration of Saturnus' temple in Rome (as witnessed by his epitaph and Suet. *Aug.* 29.5), Saturn being Atina's alleged mythical founder. If, therefore, it is more likely that the origin is from Atina, what role should we assign to the testimony of Horace? When Horace published the first three books of the Odes (23 BC) Plancus must have already built the imposing villa of Gaeta which would also house his mausoleum, hence the invitation of the poet, who himself must have had some residence in Tivoli, could be a simple appeal not to abandon a place dear to both of them. Watkins 2018, 68 rejects too the thesis of the birth of Plancus in Tivoli and places it in the area between Formia and Gaeta but seems to ignore the role of Atina in the debate. Cf. also Bione 1934; Vassalli 1949; Morello 1998; Mancini 2000; Watkins 2018, 44–51.

4 In Caes. *BGall.* 5.24.3 (54 BC, fifth year of the Gallic War) Plancus is in command of a legion which wintered in Belgium; in *BGall.* 5.25.4 he is in charge of a delicate mission in the land of the Carnutes. Plancus reappears in the memories of Caesar during the first year of the civil war: he is in command of two legions in Spain (Caes. *BCiv.* 1.40.5–7). Three years later Plancus is in Africa trying to oppose the enemies who occupied the city of Hadrumetum (cf. Caes. *BAfr.* 4). Plancus' *praefectura urbi* is attested by Cass. Dio. 43, 48. For Morello 1998, 18 it is highly probable that Plancus occupied a predominant role among these *praefecti*, as he was the only one to mint gold coins, as also noted by L. Burckhardt 2014, 111–112.

5 Plut. *Brut.* 19.1: Ἀντωνίου δὲ καὶ Πλάγκου καὶ Κικέρωνος εἰπόντων περὶ ἀμνηστίας καὶ ὁμονοίας.

6 Hor. *Carm.* 1.7 (already mentioned in n. 3); Suet. *De oratoribus*, fr. 7 (p. 84.1–3 Reifferscheid): *Munatius Plancus, Ciceronis discipulus, orator habetur insignis*. Suet. *Gramm.* 6 (30), mentions a

Skilled soldier, politician, and man of letters, Plancus was indeed one of the main characters of his age, as clearly summarised in the inscription on his mausoleum, an imposing monument still standing prominently at the top of Mount Orlando near Gaeta:<sup>7</sup>

L. MVNATIVS L. F. L. N. L. PRON.  
 PLANCVS COS. CENS. IMP. ITER VII VIR  
 EPVLON<sup>8</sup> TRIVMP. EX RAETIS AEDEM SATVRNI  
 FECIT DE MANVBIBVS AGROS DIVISIT IN ITALIA  
 BENEVENTI IN GALLIA COLONIAS DEDVXIT  
 LVGDVNVM ET RAVRICA.<sup>9</sup>

However, despite his adventurous life, Plancus has not received much attention over the centuries. A not insignificant factor in his fall into oblivion was the disparaging picture painted of him by one of his near contemporaries, Velleius Paterculus, who crystallized Plancus' image with the famous label *morbo proditor* ('pathological traitor'). These words quickly became a sort of tag for him.<sup>10</sup>

Centuries later, Plancus and Velleius would find themselves re-connected in the figure of Beatus Rhenanus, and in the city of Basel. In 1515, in the Benedictine abbey of Murbach, Beatus Rhenanus discovered a parchment codex (now lost) containing the work of Velleius Paterculus. From this manuscript he derived the *editio princeps* of the *Historiae Romanae*, printed between 1520 and 1521 at the Froben publishing house in Basel.<sup>11</sup> However, Beatus Rhenanus was also the man who was trying to ennoble the origin of Basel, a task for which the memory of Munatius Plancus as the founder of Raurica could serve well. Velleius, despite considerable discussion of Plancus (see below, p. 63–67), said nothing about the connection between him and

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*Planci oratoris contubernium*. Cf. also Plin. *HN* 7.55: *L. Plancus orator*. See Moles 2002; Balbo 2007, 56–57 and Manuwald 2019, 158–164.

<sup>7</sup> *CIL* X 6087. For an introduction to the famous monument of Gaeta see Fellmann 1957; Iacopi 1961; Coarelli 1982, 354–359; von Hesberg 1992, 97; Morello 1997, 64–86; Graen 2008, 245–246.

<sup>8</sup> The college of *septemviri epulones* was in charge of the public banquets offered to the people on the occasion of games or triumphs.

<sup>9</sup> For a translation, see Ricchieri in this volume (above, p. 31).

<sup>10</sup> Vell. 2.83. Velleius probably attacked the memory of Plancus in an attempt to lash out at Plancus' niece, Munatia Plancina, who, along with her husband Calpurnius Piso, was suspected of having poisoned Germanicus (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 2.71 and 2.75). This political question is well analysed by Valentini 2009. See also Wright 2002; Pistellato 2006 and Valentini 2008. The image of Plancus in Velleius will be discussed in more detail below, pp. 63–68.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Reynolds 1983b; Calvelli 2016.

Raurica; it seems clear that Beatus Rhenanus learned it from Raffaello Maffei's *Commentariorum rerum urbanarum libri XXXVIII*, of which he possessed a copy.<sup>12</sup> Maffei reported the funerary inscription of Plancus verbatim, but preceded by a short introduction in which he not only mentions Plancus' connection with Basel but also describes him as *Ciceronis discipulus*.<sup>13</sup> This definition, therefore, deserves further study: in what sense was Plancus a 'disciple of Cicero'? And, above all, why did Beatus Rhenanus choose to include this detail in the inscription he composed for the Fruchtmart portrait of Plancus, and what was its function?

## The relationship between Plancus and Cicero

The friendship between Cicero and Plancus is well attested in Cicero's *Epistulae ad familiares*, a collection well-known to Humanists.<sup>14</sup> Between them, Plancus and Cicero exchanged twenty-six epistles: a single independent letter included in Book XIII, and a sequential correspondence, which has not survived in full, found in Book X.<sup>15</sup> This correspondence covers a ten-month period from September 44 BC. The final letter in this collection (*Fam.* 10.24), dated July 28, 43 BC, is also the last letter in Cicero's entire correspondence, as he died in December of the same year.<sup>16</sup> These texts, therefore, are an extraordinary first-hand source for understanding the relationship be-

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Hess 2020, 93 and Ricchieri in this volume, pp. 25–28. The copy of Maffei's work owned by Beatus Rhenanus still exists and has been digitised: [http://bhnumerique.ville-selestat.fr/client/fr\\_FR/search/asset/4759](http://bhnumerique.ville-selestat.fr/client/fr_FR/search/asset/4759), last accessed 20/05/24.

<sup>13</sup> R. Maffei, *Commentariorum rerum urbanarum libri XXXVIII*, f. CXC (r).

<sup>14</sup> The *editio princeps* appeared in 1467 in Rome for the editors Sweynheym and Pannartz. It enjoyed a remarkable editorial success, so much so that today there are still about sixty *incunabula*, cf. Flodr 1973, 104–109.

<sup>15</sup> The correspondence includes references to letters that have not survived, suggesting that the exchange between Plancus and Cicero was even more extensive than what is currently preserved cf. White 2010, 36.

<sup>16</sup> Although within the Ciceronian correspondence the twelve letters of Plancus represent - after those of Marcus Caelius Rufus - the largest group of letters written by an author other than Cicero (cf. Dénioux 1993, 96–108; White 2010, 173–175), to the point that it may have known an autonomous circulation (cf. Gell. 1.22.19: *ita enim scriptum est in libro epistularum M. Ciceronis ad L. Plancum*), to date there has been very little scholarly discussion of the peculiar style of Plancus (we will return to talk about the subject also below, p. 63). The only attempt in this direction dates back to the Basel scholar Gerold Walser, who on the occasion of the two thousandth anniversary of the founding of the city (1957) published the letters with a German translation and short historical notes (Walser 1957a, cf. the review of Cuff 1958, 233, which defines the work as "unpretentious"). Some decades later (1989), Giorgio Bernardi Perini and Alberto Cavarzere pub-

tween Cicero and Plancus, and the role it could have played in Beatus Rhenanus' choice of defining Plancus as *Ciceronis discipulus*.

In the following sections, we shall analyse the construction of the relationship between the two as it emerges from the correspondence, paying particular attention to the vocabulary choices. In fact, this does not only touch on the construction of their relationship but also on its evolution: how Cicero and Plancus define themselves in the framework of their mutual relationship, as well as the expectations that they have of each other, change significantly according to the historical-political circumstances.

## Plancus and Cicero before the Ides of March

The only letter external to the correspondence (*Fam.* 13.29) is also relevant. It dates to the end of 46 BC when Plancus was in Rome as one of the *praefecti urbi*.<sup>17</sup> It is a cover letter: Cicero writes to Plancus to recommend a friend's cause, and, following standard practice,<sup>18</sup> he begins by referring to their relationship (*Fam.* 13.29.1):<sup>19</sup>

Non dubito quin scias in iis necessariis qui tibi a patre relictis sint me tibi esse vel coniunctissimum, non iis modo causis quae speciem habeant magnae coniunctionis sed iis etiam quae familiaritate et consuetudine tenentur, quam scis mihi iucundissimam cum patre tuo et summam fuisse. Ab his initiis noster in te amor profectus auxit paternam necessitudinem, et eo magis quod intellexi, ut primum per aetatem iudicium facere potueris quanti quisque tibi faciendus esset, me a te in primis coeptum esse observari, coli, diligi. Accedebat non mediocre vinculum cum studiorum, quod ipsum est per se grave, tum eorum studiorum earumque artium quae per se ipsae eos qui voluntate eadem sunt etiam familiaritate devinciunt.

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lished a commented edition of Books IX–XII of the *Ad familiares* (= Bernardi Perini *et al.* 1989) but still focussed on the reconstruction of the historical-political framework rather than on a stylistic analysis of the different correspondents. For editions of the whole corpus of the *Ad familiares* we cannot fail to mention the monumental Tyrrell/Purser 1901–1933, with commentary. In more recent times see Shackleton Bailey 1977; Shackleton Bailey 1988; Beaujeu 1980–1996; Shackleton Bailey 2001; Garbarino/Tabacco 2008.

<sup>17</sup> This is the thesis of Beaujeu 1980–1996, vol. 7, 229–232, but there is no agreement between the editors, cf. Marinone/Malaspina 2004, 194.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Hall 2009, 56–57.

<sup>19</sup> The Latin text is the one published by Shackleton Bailey for Teubner (1988), the translations are taken from Shackleton Bailey's Loeb edition (2001), with slight adaptations.

I am sure you know that among the connections you inherited from your father I stand pre-eminently close to you, not only on such grounds as present the façade of an intimate association, but on those of familiar intercourse – for, as you are aware, I had such a relationship, most valid and most delightful, with your father. Such were the origins of my affection for yourself. It strengthened my association with your father, the more so because I observed that, from the time when you were old enough to discriminate in your regard for this person or that, I was the object of your special notice and fond attention. Add to this the strong attachment of common pursuits, important in itself, and of such pursuits and accomplishments as automatically link those who share the love of them in the bonds of familiar friendship.

The language employed here by Cicero is extremely significant. First of all, Plancus' father (a man not otherwise known to us),<sup>20</sup> is termed *necessarius*, to indicate a relationship of *necessitudo*. Studies on the occurrence of *necessarius* and *necessitudo* in Cicero have shown that they refer to a form of bond similar to *cognatio* or *adfinitas*, which is of greater weight and relevance than *amicitia*, as also recalled by Festus' definition.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, *necessitudo* was a relationship that could be inherited from father to son.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, Cicero also refers to his relationship with the son of his old friend as one of *necessitudo*. It is not an isolated case: in the subsequent correspondence between Cicero and Plancus their bonds are defined as *amicitia* only twice, whereas *necessitudo* is used six times.<sup>23</sup>

However, even if Plancus inherited this *necessitudo* from his father, his relationship with Cicero is not equal. Cicero feels *amor* for Plancus, an emotion connected to the sentimental sphere, whereas Plancus' regard for Cicero—manifested in his actions of *observare*, *colere*, and *diligere*—was based on his own *iudicium*, or considered opinion.<sup>24</sup> But there was much common ground between them: first, their common love for education,<sup>25</sup> and secondly the generic similarity between

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Watkins 2018, 51 for a reconstruction of Plancus' family tree.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Fest., *Gloss. Lat.* p. 158 Lindsay: *necessari sunt, ut Gallus Aelius ait, qui aut cognati, aut adfines sunt, in quos necessaria officia conferuntur praeter ceteros.* For a list of all Cicero's *necessarii* cf. Rowland 1970, 196–198 and Déniaux 1993, 202.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Rowland 1970, 195.

<sup>23</sup> Cicero uses *amicitia* in *Fam.* 10.1.3. Plancus employs that word only once referring to Cicero (*Fam.* 10.11.1), while in 10.24.5 he calls the relationship he had with Caesar *insignis amicitia*. *Necessitudo* is employed by Cicero in *Fam.* 10.2.1; 10.3.2 (two occurrences); 10.5.1; 10.6.2; 10.12.5 and by Plancus in 10.4.1 and 10.24.1. For the words used by Cicero to define his relations with his correspondents cf. the table of Déniaux 96–198, in particular 103, about Plancus.

<sup>24</sup> Especially in cover letters, Cicero uses the tricolon *observare*, *colere*, *diligere* almost in a formulaic way, cf. *Cic. Fam.* 11.28.8; 13.16.2; 13.22.1; 13.78.1. For Cicero's writing style when his correspondent is younger, see Leach 2006, 259–261.

<sup>25</sup> For a list of all the correspondents mentioned by Cicero as his peers in their love for *studia* cf. White 2010, 208–209.

their lives, as Cicero asserts a little later on, presumably alluding to their geographical origin and to their shared status as *homines novi* (*Fam.* 13.29.5).<sup>26</sup>

Te, mi Plance, pro paterna necessitudine, pro nostro amore, pro studiis et omni cursu nostro totius vitae simillimo rogo et a te ita peto ut maiore cura, maiore studio nullam possim, ut hanc rem suscipias, meam putes esse.

Now, my dear Plancus, I appeal to you in the name of my friendship with your father and our mutual affection, of our studies and the whole tenor of our lives in which we are so much alike: I beg you with all possible earnestness and urgency to take this matter up and regard it as mine.

As we will soon see, after the Ides of March Cicero will return to the subject of the similarity between their lives, but this time to retract it, and to divide the existence of Plancus into “before” and “after”.

## Plancus and Cicero between the death of Caesar and the battle of Mutina

As far as we know, Cicero wrote to Plancus again a few years later, in September 44 BC.<sup>27</sup> It was a complicated historical moment: after Caesar’s death, power was rapidly concentrated in the hands of Marcus Antonius, who had shared the consulate for the year 44 with Caesar himself. Antonius, who had long been second in the Caesarian party, aspired to primacy after the Ides of March, but his path soon proved to be fraught with difficulties. One of the very first was the distribution of the provincial governorships.

Shortly after the Ides of March, the Senate ratified the provisions given by Caesar, in view of his prolonged absence from Rome, for the campaign against the Parthians: Gallia Comata would go to Plancus, Gallia Narbonensis and Hispania Citerior to Lepidus, Hispania Ulterior to Pollio and Gallia Cisalpina to Decimus Brutus. At the end of March (or early in April), the Senate allotted consular provinces for the following year: Antonius received Macedonia, where it was still Caesar’s Balkan army, six of the best of the Roman legions. In theory, it was not a poor outcome for Antonius, especially from a military point of view. The crux

<sup>26</sup> On the role of these statements in the debate on Plancus’ hometown cf. above, n. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Cicero briefly mentions Plancus in *Att.* 12.52.1 and 15.29.2.

was the position of Decimus Brutus, who despite being one of the conspirators, would govern a territory of enormous strategic importance: Gallia Cisalpina was the main communication route with the rest of Gaul, and with Iberia. As if that were not enough, it contained a significant concentration of troops, whose direct command would strengthen control over Rome, since these legions could reach it more quickly than any eastern army. To remedy this, in June Antonius proposed the *Lex de permutatione provinciarum*, with which he proposed to exchange provinces, to give up Macedonia (but retain the Balkan army) and receive both Gallia Cisalpina and Gallia Comata as his consular provinces.

Naturally, Decimus Brutus had no intention of accepting this, and was already in his province in April, where he was preparing to fight. However, Decimus was not Antonius' only concern, since his plans for political succession to Caesar were also hampered by the cumbersome presence of Caesar's heir, Gaius Octavius. This boy, not yet twenty, to whom Caesar had bequeathed three-quarters of his fortune, did not seem particularly resolved to enjoy his wealth far from the politic scene, since *privato consilio et privata impensa* he was already setting up a personal army.<sup>28</sup>

The fracture that was emerging in the Caesarian party seemed, at last, to leave room for action on the senatorial front, which had achieved little or nothing from Caesar's death, considering that Marcus Brutus and Cassius had fled to the East, and the uncertain position of Decimus Brutus. Cicero, hoping he could finally play a prominent role, quickly abandoned the idea of an extended stay in Greece, and returned to Rome at the end of August 44 BC with the main intention of guaranteeing the support of the provincial governors for the senatorial party and for Decimus Brutus.

That is the historical context of the first letter of our correspondence. It opens with a simple *Cicero Planco*, an absence of titles that is characteristic of their correspondence.<sup>29</sup> This informality is explicitly referenced also in this letter (*Fam.* 10.1.2):

Illud autem erat amoris mei, quem a tua pueritia susceptum non servavi solum sed etiam auxi, monere te atque hortari, ut in rem publicam omni cogitatione curaque incumberes.

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<sup>28</sup> *Mon. Anc.* (= *R. Gest. div. Aug.*) 1. On the historical background, the analysis of Syme 1939, 112–134 is still a milestone; see also Alston 2003 and 2015, 15–52.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. White 2010, 69. The only exception is the last letter of the correspondence (*Fam.* 10.24), where Plancus presents himself as *IMP. COS. DESIG.*



The steadfast and indeed increasing affection I have entertained for you ever since you were a boy prompts me to urge and admonish you to consecrate all your thoughts and care to the commonwealth.

For further details about this relationship, we have to skip the second epistle of the correspondence, (short and containing a service communication),<sup>30</sup> and go to the third, dated 9 December 44 (*Fam.* 10.3.2):

ego, Plance, necessitudinem constitutam habui cum domo vestra ante aliquanto quam tu natus es, amorem autem erga te ab ineunte pueritia tua, confirmata iam aetate, familiaritatem cum studio meo, tum iudicio tuo constitutam. His de causis mirabiliter faveo dignitati tuae, quam me tecum statuo habere communem.

My friendly connection with your family, my dear Plancus, came into being some time before you were born. My affection towards yourself dates from your early childhood. When you became a grown man, my desire and your choice established a familiar friendship. For these reasons I take the most lively interest in your standing in the world, which I hold to be mine also.

Note how the letter presents the same subtle disparity as *Fam.* 10.1: Cicero says that the *familiaritas* that binds them is – on his part – an inclination, a fancy (*studium*), while Plancus is again moved towards Cicero by his choice (*iudicium*). But there is more. In the continuation of the same letter, Cicero returns once again to the bonds between the two families, but this time to introduce a much thornier theme (*Fam.* 10.3.2–3):

Omnia summa consecutus es virtute duce, comite fortuna, eaque es adeptus adolescens multis invidentibus, quos ingenio industriaque fregisti. Nunc, me amantissimum tui, nemini concedentem, qui tibi vetustate necessitudinis potior possit esse, si audies, omnem tibi reliquae vitae dignitatem ex optimo rei publicae statu acquires.

Scis profecto (nihil enim te fugere potuit), fuisse quoddam tempus cum homines existimarent te nimis servire temporibus; quod ego quoque existimarem, te si ea quae patiebare probare etiam arbitrarer. Sed cum intellegerem quid sentire, prudenter te arbitraber videre quid posses.

Guided by ability and accompanied by good fortune, you have achieved the highest success in everything you attempted, and you have gained these triumphs as a young man in the face of much jealousy, which you have overcome by capacity and energy. Now, if you will listen to me, your truly affectionate friend, who could allow no man pride of place with you in virtue of old association, you will derive all further advancement to the end of your days from the establishment of the best form of constitution.

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<sup>30</sup> Cic. *Fam.* 10.2: Cicero mainly notifies Plancus that he could not attend the senatorial session on September 19, where the discussion should also include the possibility of awarding a *supplicatio* to Plancus for his military achievements.

You are of course aware, for nothing could escape you, that there was a period when the world thought you too much at the service of the times. I should have held that opinion myself, if I had taken acquiescence on your part for approval. But, perceiving your sentiments as I did, I considered that you took a realistic view of your power to influence events.

The memory of Plancus as a child allows Cicero to start to be credited as a teacher in order to introduce discomfiting observations. The first is the somewhat venomous mention of the role played by luck in the life and career of his young friend. The second is to have *nimis servire temporibus*, an expression that, although it has become almost a label for Plancus, Cicero had also widely used to refer to his own life under the dictatorship of Caesar;<sup>31</sup> consequently, as also demonstrated by a recent study, it is likely that it should not be interpreted as entirely adverse.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Cicero's interpretation of Plancus' Caesarian experience leaves no room for incertitude: it is simply inconceivable that Plancus would approve of what he was forced to undergo, a passive sufferance (not distant from the previous *servire*) highlighted by choice of the verb *patior*. In addition, dismissing the recent past, Cicero emphasises that they are now living in a time likely to return the Republic to an *optimus status*, and the self-evident consequence of this statement is that the previous *status*, in which Plancus had collaborated, was a *peior* one.

The same concept is also reiterated a little further on, where Cicero renews his negative judgment of Caesar's governance (*per tot annos re publica divexata*), and then calls on his old student to live up to his talents (*Fam.* 10.3.3–4):

Nunc alia ratio est. Omnium rerum tuum iudicium est, idque liberum. Consul es designatus, optima aetate, summa eloquentia, maxima orbitate rei publicae virorum talium. Incumbe, per deos immortalis, in eam curam et cogitationem quae tibi summam dignitatem et gloriam adferat; unus autem est, hoc praesertim tempore, per tot annos re publica divexata, rei publicae bene gerendae cursus ad gloriam.

Haec amore magis impulsus scribenda ad te putavi quam quo te arbitrarer monitis et praeceptis egere. Sciebam enim ex iisdem te haec haurire fontibus ex quibus ipse hauseram. Qua re modum faciam. Nunc tantum significandum putavi ut potius amorem tibi ostenderem meum quam ostentarem prudentiam. Interea quae ad dignitatem tuam pertinere arbitrabor studiose diligenterque curabo.

Now the case is altered. You will form your own judgement on all questions, and it will be unconstrained. You are Consul-Elect, in the prime of life and the flower of oratorical talent, at a time when the commonwealth is so sorely bereft of men of such calibre. In heaven's

<sup>31</sup> Cic. *Att.* 8.3.6; 10.7.1; *Fam.* 9.7.1.

<sup>32</sup> Mitchell 2019, analysing this expression and the usages of the verb *servire*, notes that it indicates a loss of freedom that occurred mostly against the will of those who suffer it.

name, throw your thoughts and solicitude into the channel which will bring you to the highest honour and glory. To glory there is only one path, especially now, when the body politic has so many years been torn asunder: good statesmanship.

Affection, rather than any notion that you were in need of admonition and advice, made me think fit to write to you in this strain. I know you drink in such ideas from the fountains at which I myself imbibed them. Therefore, I will go no further. At this time, I thought I ought to intimate that much, to advise you of my affection rather than to advertise my wisdom. Meanwhile I shall most zealously and faithfully attend to any matters which I judge to bear upon your personal standing.

As for Plancus' voice, we hear it for the first time in *Fam.* 10.4 (end of December 44).<sup>33</sup> His first letter already clearly shows his distinctive feature, the determination to model his writing on his illustrious correspondent's content, tones, and style.<sup>34</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, the letter opens by confirming the depth of mutual bonds and – what is more relevant – admitting a subordinate role to that of Cicero (*Fam.* 10.4.1):

Nullum enim in te officium ne minimum quidem sine maxima culpa videor posse praeterire, in quo tuendo habeo causas plurimas vel paternae necessitudinis vel meae a pueritia observantiae vel tui erga me mutui amoris.

Even the slightest failure in due attention to you could not but make me feel most deeply to blame. I have many reasons to be punctilious – your relations with my father, the respect I have paid you since childhood, your reciprocal affection for me.

There is more, however. Plancus, in his elegant style, perfectly echoing that of the correspondent, declares feeling for Cicero not only *observantia*, the respect due to a teacher,<sup>35</sup> but also the devotion of a son to his father, a relationship which entails the need for absolute obedience (*Fam.* 10.4.2):

Qua re, mi Cicero, quod mea tuaque patitur aetas, persuade tibi te unum esse in quo ego colendo patriam mihi constituerim sanctitatem. Omnia igitur tua consilia mihi non magis prudentiae plena, quae summa est, videntur quam fidelitatis, quam ego ex mea conscientia metior. Qua re, si aut aliter sentirem, certe admonitio tua me reprimere aut, si dubitarem, hortatio impellere posset, ut id sequerer quod tu optimum putares.

Therefore, my dear Cicero, be assured that (as our respective ages allow) in cultivating your friendship I have invested you, and only you, with the sacred character of a father. Your counsels all appear to me full no less of sincerity, which I measure by my own conscience, that of the wisdom for which you are distinguished. If my disposition were otherwise, your

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Marinone/Malaspina 2004, 251–252.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. below, p. 63.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *ThLL* s.v. *observantia* col. 193.

admonition would assuredly suffice to check it; and if I were hesitating, your exhortation would be enough to urge me forward in pursuit of what you hold to be best.

Moving on, Plancus did not reply to Cicero's observation about his *nimis servire temporibus*, confirming that perhaps it was not an accusation but a common condition. However, he seems vaguely annoyed about the insinuation that he was more fortunate than virtuous and puts some effort into refuting it.<sup>36</sup> A more relaxed final paragraph follows, in which Plancus reassures Cicero that his every action will always have the good of the Republic as its sole goal.<sup>37</sup>

The conclusion reaffirms the depth of his devotion, and his intention to follow Cicero's directions with rigorous obedience (*Fam.* 10.4.3):

Non est ignotus mihi sensus tuus; neque, si facultas optabilis mihi quidem tui praesentis esset, umquam a tuis consiliis discreparem nec nunc ut ullum meum factum reprehendere iure possis.

I am not unaware of your sentiments. If I could have you with me in person, as I should so much wish, I should never dissent from your policies; and as it is, I shall take good care not to let any of my action give you fair ground for censure.

Cicero's answer (*Fam.* 10.5, mid-January 43 BC) shows a meaningful advance in his communicative strategy, a development that has its theoretical foundations in the recent *De amicitia*.<sup>38</sup> Mutual affection, something on which both agree, is linked to love and commitment to the fatherland (*Fam.* 10.5.1):

Binas a te accepi litteras eodem exemplo, quod ipsum argumento mihi fuit diligentiae tuae. Intellexi enim te laborare ut ad me mihi exspectatissimae litterae perferrentur. Ex quibus cepi fructum duplicem mihi que in comparatione difficilem ad iudicandum, amoremne erga me tuum an animum in re publica pluris aestimandum putarem.

I have received two letters from you, duplicates.<sup>39</sup> That in itself showed me how punctilious you are. I appreciated your anxiety that the letters I so eagerly awaited should duly reach me. The letter itself gave me a twofold satisfaction; and when I try to make a comparison, I

<sup>36</sup> *Fam.* 1.4.2: *quaecumque in me bona sunt aut fortunae beneficio tributa aut meo labore parta, etsi a te propter amorem carius sunt aestimata, tamen vel inimicissimi iudicio tanta sunt ut praeter bonam famam nihil desiderare videantur.*

<sup>37</sup> *Fam.* 10.4.3: *qua re hoc unum tibi persuade, quantum viribus eniti, consilio providere, auctoritate monere potuero, hoc omne rei publicae semper futurum.*

<sup>38</sup> Cicero wrote *De amicitia* between the spring and summer of 44 BC, cf. Marinone/Malaspina 2004, 235.

<sup>39</sup> Cicero is referring to the practice of giving copies of the same letter to different messengers to be sure that at least one reaches its destination, as also confirmed by Cic. *Att.* 6.1.9; *Fam.* 9.16.1; 10.33.3; 11.11.1. Cf. Nicholson 1994, 54.

find it hard to decide which I should esteem the more precious, your affection to me or your spirit of patriotism.

The question posed by Cicero is clear: what is of more importance, fatherland or friendship? He does not have real doubts (still *Fam.* 10.5.1):

Est omnino patriae caritas meo quidem iudicio maxima, sed amor voluntatisque coniunctio plus certe habet suavitatis.

To be sure (in my judgement at all events) love of country transcends all other sentiments; but affection and friendly attachment undeniably exercise a greater charm.

Here Cicero enriches the familial and spiritual bond – on which they both agree, with an element of the utmost importance, but so far not shared: the *caritas patriae*. It is probable that in the past – at least in Cicero’s opinion, Plancus, being a Caesarian, had been lacking in that area, and this seriously impeded the possibility of a true friendship, since for Cicero that was only possible between *boni*, people committed to the good of the state.<sup>40</sup> The situation changed with Caesar’s death, and Cicero can finally proclaim their absolute equivalence, sealed with yet another memory of the more distant past, linked to Plancus’ father and childhood.<sup>41</sup> Even the present is a source of joy for Cicero, thanks to Plancus’ explicit commitment to the state.<sup>42</sup>

If the distant past offers tender memories and the present great satisfactions, unfortunately the recent past continues to raise some problematic issues. Cicero returns to a subject to which Plancus had shown himself sensitive, the accusation that he had been more fortunate than virtuous (*Fam.* 10.5.3):

Adhuc enim (patitur tua summa humanitas et sapientia me quid sentiam libere dicere) fortuna suffragante videris res maximas consecutus; quod quamquam sine virtute fieri non potuisset, tamen ex maxima parte ea quae es adeptus fortunae temporibusque tribuuntur.

Hitherto (your admirable good nature and good sense allow me to put my thought freely into words) you appear to have won brilliant success with luck on your side. That would

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40 Cic. *Amic.* 40: *haec igitur lex in amicitia sancitur, ut neque rogemus res turpes nec faciamus rogati. Turpis enim excusatio est et minime accipienda cum in ceteris peccatis, tum si quis contra rem publicam se amici causa fecisse fateatur*; 43: *quare talis inproborum consensus non modo excusatione amicitiae tegenda non est, sed potius supplicio omni vindicanda est, ut ne quis concessum putet amicum vel bellum patriae inferentem sequi.*

41 Cic. *Fam.* 10.5.1: *itaque commemoratio tua paternae necessitudinis benevolentiaeque eius quam erga me a pueritia contulisses, ceterarumque rerum quae ad eam sententiam pertinebant, incredibilem mihi laetitiam attulerunt.*

42 Cic. *Fam.* 10.5.2: *rursus declaratio animi tui quem haberes de re publica quemque habiturus esses mihi erat iucundissima, eoque maior erat haec laetitia quod ad illa superiora accedebat.*

not, it is true, have been possible without merit. None the less, the greater part of your achievements is credited to Fortune and circumstances.

Luckily Plancus now has an extraordinary opportunity for redemption, as Cicero points out, emphasising once again the connection between friendship and love of the state (still *Fam.* 10.5.3):

His temporibus difficillimis rei publicae quicquid subveneris, id erit totum et proprium tuum. Incredibile est omnium civium latronibus exceptis odium in Antonium, magna spes in te et in tuo exercitu, magna exspectatio; cuius, per deos, gratiae gloriaeque cave tempus amittas. Sic moneo ut filium, sic faveo ut mihi, sic hortor ut et pro patria et amicissimum.

But if you come to the aid of the commonwealth in the very difficult circumstances of today, all you do will be properly your own. The universal hatred of Antonius (bandits excepted) is extraordinary. Great is the hope pinned upon you and the army under your command, great the expectancy. Do not, in the name of heaven, lose the opportunity to render yourself popular and renowned. I admonish you as a son, I hope for you as for myself, I urge you as one addressing a very dear friend in his country's cause.

In the following months, the attempts to resolve the dispute between Decimus Brutus and Antonius (who in the meantime had exhausted his mandate as consul) with diplomacy failed. Cicero, one of the most ardent supporters of the armed solution, was hugely satisfied, especially when the new consuls – Aulus Hirtius and Vibius Pansa – set off at the head of the senatorial troops in the direction of Mutina, where Antonius was besieging Decimus Brutus.<sup>43</sup> Octavian too was officially incorporated into the anti-Antonius coalition and with his army, participated in military operations while holding the title of *propraetor*.<sup>44</sup>

While the situation seemed to be rushing towards yet another civil war, on 20 March the Senate received letters from Lepidus and Plancus inviting peace. As if that were not enough, within a few days Cicero came into possession of another letter, sent by Antonius to Hirtius and Octavian. Here Antonius asked them not to betray the memory of Caesar in favour of that camp of Pompey which they insisted on calling the Senate and – what is more – led by a chronic loser like Cicero.<sup>45</sup> The letter goes from bad to worse when Antonius warns his correspondents not to dare to think that he is isolated and defeated, as he can still count on many friends: in listing them, he also includes Plancus.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. the crystal-clear reconstruction of Syme 1939, 164–172.

<sup>44</sup> Cic. *Phil.* 5.46; *R. Gest. div. Aug.* 1; Liv. *per.* 118; Cass. Dio 46.29.2.

<sup>45</sup> Cic. *Phil.* 13.26: *castra Pompei senatum appellatis*; 30: *victum Ciceronem duces habuistis*.

Cicero takes the blow, and in the *Thirteenth Philippic* dismissed the words about Plancus as Antonius's usual boasting, and, although Plancus has actually signed a letter advocating a moderate and pacific line, Cicero describes him in the oration as an ardent patriot ready to provide the state with decisive military help. On the other hand, Cicero reserves words noticeably harsher for Lepidus.<sup>46</sup> Why? Considering that Plancus' brother was also present at the session, it is probable that Cicero flaunted disbelief at Antonius's declarations about Plancus in order to show him (through his brother) that he was still taking both the *necessitudo* mentioned in the previous letters, and (consequently) the contents of their correspondence, very seriously.<sup>47</sup> Far less naïve, however, are the tones that Cicero reserves for his private letter to Plancus, written the same evening as the senatorial session (*Fam.* 10.6.1):<sup>48</sup>

Quae locutus est Furnius noster de animo tuo in rem publicam ea gratissima fuerunt senatui, populo Romano probatissima. Quae autem tuae recitatae litterae sunt in senatu nequaquam consentire cum Furni oratione visae sunt. Pacis enim auctor eras, cum collega tuus, vir clarissimus, a foedissimis latronibus obsideretur; qui aut positis armis pacem petere debent aut, si pugnantes eam postulant, victoria pax, non pactione parienda est. Sed de pace litterae vel Lepidi vel tuae quam in partem acceptae sint ex viro optimo, fratre tuo, et ex C. Furnio poteris cognoscere.

Our friend Furnius' account of your political disposition was most agreeable to the Senate and warmly approved by the Roman People. But your letter, which was read out in the Senate, appeared by no means in accordance with Furnius' statement.<sup>49</sup> You wrote as an advocate of peace, at a time when your distinguished colleague<sup>50</sup> is under siege by a band of foulest brigands. Either they ought to lay down their arms and sue for peace must be had by

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46 Cic. *Phil.* 13.44: '*nec Plancum prodere participem consiliorum*'. *Plancum participem? Cuius memorabilis ac divina virtus lucem adfert rei publicae – nisi forte eum subsidio tibi venire arbitraris cum fortissimis legionibus, maximo equitatu peditatuque Gallorum – quique nisi ante eius adventum rei publicae poenas dederis, ipse huius belli feret principatum*. On Lepidus cf. Cic. *Phil.* 13.9–10; 21.

47 Alternatively, according to a theory that dates back at least to Von Streng 1885, Cicero would have criticised Plancus in the same way as he did Lepidus, but after *Fam.* 10.8, the official letter with which Plancus openly declared loyalty to the Senate (cf. below, p. 55), Cicero revised the *Thirteenth Philippic* to eliminate the attacks on Plancus and preserve only those aimed at Lepidus, who was still behaving ambiguously.

48 On the same evening, Cicero would also write to Lepidus, but this letter is remarkably short and the tones harsher (*Fam.* 10.27).

49 Gaius Furnius (cf. *RE* s.v. *Furnius* n. 3 coll. 375 ss.) tribune of the plebs in 50 BC and now *legatus* of Plancus. He had been a man of Caesar but also a friend of Cicero to the point that at the time of Caesar's power, he had acted as an intermediary between the two. (cf. *Att.* 9.6.6).

50 The reference is to Decimus Brutus, who was designated consul for the year 42 BC together with Plancus (cf. above, p. 38). Writing to Plancus, Cicero often refers to Decimus as "your col-

victory, not by negotiation. However, you will be able to learn from your excellent brother and from C. Furnius how letters about peace have been received, whether yours or Lepidus'.

With this abrupt debut, Cicero dismisses the question of the letter to the Senate. For the continuation, he unquestionably chooses the role of the teacher (*Fam.* 10.6.2):

Me autem impulit tui caritas ut, quamquam nec tibi ipsi consilium deesset et fratris Furnique benevolentia fidelisque prudentia tibi praesto esset futura, vellem tamen meae quoque auctoritatis pro plurimis nostris necessitudinibus praeceptum ad te aliquod pervenire.

You are well able to think for yourself; and the good will and loyal good sense of your brother and Furnius will be at your call. None the less, my affection for you prompts me to wish that a word of advice, to which the many ties between us ought to lend some weight, should also reach you from myself.

From that position, Cicero is therefore authorized to give Plancus a true *praeceptum* (*Fam.* 10.6.2–3):<sup>51</sup>

Crede igitur mihi, Plance, omnis quos adhuc gradus dignitatis consecutus sis (es autem adeptus amplissimos) eos honorum vocabula habituros, non dignitatis insignia, nisi te cum libertate populi Romani et cum senatus auctoritate coniunxeris. Seiunge te, quaeso, aliquando ab iis cum quibus te non tuum iudicium, sed temporum vincla coniunxerunt. Complures in perturbatione rei publicae consules dicti, quorum nemo consularis habitus nisi qui animo exstitit in rem publicam consulari. Talem igitur te esse oportet qui primum te ab impiorum civium tui dissimillimorum societate seiungas, deinde te senatui bonisque omnibus auctorem, principem, duces praebas.

So, believe me, Plancus when I say that all the stages of advancement which you have hitherto attained – and most splendid they are – will count but as so many official titles, not as symbols of public esteem, unless you ally yourself with the freedom of the Roman People and the authority of the Senate. At long last pray dissociate yourself from those whom no choice of yours but bonds forged by circumstances have attached you. In this period of political turmoil, a number of persons have been called Consuls, none of whom has been considered a Consular unless he displayed a patriotism worthy of the office. Such a patriot you should show yourself: firstly, in dissociating yourself from all connection with disloyal citizen, persons utterly unlike you; secondly, in offering yourself to the Senate and all the honest men as adviser, principal, leader.

Compared with the previous letters, the tone here is noticeably more serious: Cicero sets aside the invitations for honours to admonish his student about ethics. The usual reassurances about the rewards Plancus might receive for his service

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league” to remind Plancus of the powerful bond that unites them (even though Decimus had been among the conspirators, but on this point Cicero seems to be quite forgetful).

51 Cf. *ThLL* s.v. *praecipio* col. 453: *quod aliqua auctoritate vel potestate constitutum est*. Cf. coll. 456 ss. for the educational usage of the word.



to the state are replaced – and for the very first time – with a moral precept: the freedom of the Roman people must be defended not for potential rewards, but because it is the duty of every respectable man. This duty persists even if one had been tied to the scoundrels,<sup>52</sup> but temporarily and against his *iudicium*, as this same judgment previously led Plancus to admire and respect a very different person.<sup>53</sup> However, it is possible for an honest man to become entangled with individuals who do not uphold their duties to the state. The important thing, as Cicero theorised in *De amicitia*, is to distance oneself from such individuals as soon as possible.<sup>54</sup> This is the only way to invest the positions of honour, which Plancus so desires, with true meaning (*Fam.* 10.6.3):

Haec si et ages et senties, tum eris non modo consul et consularis sed magnus etiam consul et consularis; sin aliter, tum in istis amplissimis nominibus honorum non modo dignitas nulla erit sed erit summa deformitas.

If such are your acts and sentiments, you will be not only a Consul and a Consular, but a great Consul and Consular. If otherwise, there will be no honour in these splendid official designations; rather they will carry the direst disgrace.

As has been said, Cicero wrote this letter on the evening of 20 March, following the senatorial session in which the appeals for peace from Plancus and Lepidus were discussed. Cicero was unaware that, during the same period Plancus was writing him a letter revealing intentions more aligned with his old friend's desires. (*Fam.* 10.7.1):<sup>55</sup>

Plura tibi de meis consiliis scriberem rationemque omnium rerum redderem verbosius, quo magis iudicares omnia me rei publicae praestitisse quae et tua exhortatione excepti et mea adfirmatione tibi recepi (non minus enim a te probari quam diligere semper volui, nec te magis in culpa defensorem mihi paravi quam praedicatorum meritorum meorum esse volui); sed brevior me duae res faciunt; una, quod publicis litteris omnia sum persecutus,

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52 It should also be noted that Cicero habitually uses *vincla* in the physical sense of chains, i.e., instruments of coercion (cf. only by way of example *Verr.* 2.3.59; 2.4.24; 2.5.17; 18; 23; 79; 107 etc.; *Cat.* 1.27; *Deiot.* 22). The intuition of Mitchell 2019 is therefore confirmed: *servire temporibus* does not have an expressly negative connotation but refers to a servile condition (as to be subject to *vincla*) that Plancus – not unlike Cicero – had suffered (cf. above, n. 32).

53 Cf. above, p. 42.

54 Cf. *Amic.* 42: *praecipendum est igitur bonis, ut, si in eius modi amicitias ignari casu aliquo inciderint, ne existiment ita se alligatos, ut ab amicis in magna aliqua re publica peccantibus non discedant.*

55 Scholarship is unanimous in believing that both 10.7 and 10.8 (the official letter of Plancus *ad magistratus et senatum*) were written in the second half of March and almost concurrently, cf. Marinone/Malaspina 2004, 266; 270.

altera, quod M. Varisidium, equitem Romanum, familiarem meum, ipsum ad te transire iussi, ex quo omnia cognoscere posses.

I should be writing at greater length about my plans and rendering you a more extended account of all particulars, thus enabling you better to judge how faithfully I have discharged the commonwealth all that I took upon myself and your instigation and to which I am pledged by my solemn word too you given – I have always wanted your approval no less than your affection, and if in you I have secured a defender when at fault, I have also wished you to be the herald of my good works – but two things make me comparatively brief: first, I have dealt with everything in an official dispatch; second, I have told M. Varisidius,<sup>56</sup> a Roman knight, and my close friend, to come over to you in person, so that you can learn it all from him.

Plancus is remarkably prompt in adapting to Cicero's role-play: if Cicero has been the teacher, he will be the student. Consequently, he claims to have learned the lesson contained in the *exhortatio* of the master,<sup>57</sup> from whom he has always desired approval (*probari*) rather than mere affection (*diligi*), a contrast also expressed by the opposition between *defensor* and *praedicator*. The conclusion, however, is occupied by the usual, obsessive, request for rewards (*Fam.* 10.7.2):

A te peto ut dignitati meae suffragaris et quarum rerum spe ad laudem me vocasti harum fructu in reliquum facias alacriorem. Non minus posse te quam velle exploratum mihi est.

Let me ask of you to support my public standing and to render me more ardent in the further pursuit of glory by the enjoyment of those rewards which you set before my eyes when you called me to that endeavour.<sup>58</sup> That your power is no less than your will I am well assured.

While this letter is traveling together with the official dispatch, Cicero writes again to his correspondent. *Fam.* 10.10 (30 March) replies to a letter from Plancus that has not survived. It probably contained the habitual plea for official recognition, Cicero starts putting forward a problem of procedure: in the absence of the consuls, it was impossible to proceed with the conferral of anything.<sup>59</sup> However, there is more than a legal issue between Plancus and the coveted honours, and Cicero does not miss the opportunity to remind his correspondent of this. He thus

<sup>56</sup> This man, who also appears in *Cic. Fam.* 10.12.2, is not otherwise known.

<sup>57</sup> *Quae et tua exhortatione excepi* likely is an answer to *Cic. Fam.* 10.5.2: *itaque te non hortor solum, mi Plance, sed plane etiam oro [ . . . ] ut tota mente omnique animi impetu in rem publicam incumbas.*

<sup>58</sup> Probably the reference is to the long-awaited triumph, a request that will also close Plancus' official dispatch (cf. *Cic. Fam.* 10.8.7, passage cited in full below, n. 61).

<sup>59</sup> *Cic. Fam.* 10.10.1: *itaque, si consulem Romae habuissemus, declaratum esset ab senatu cum tuis magnis honoribus quam gratus esset conatus et apparatus tuus.*

takes on the teacher's role again to impart another major moral *praeceptum* to his pupil (*Fam.* 10.10.1–2):

Is enim denique honos mihi videri solet qui non propter spem futuri benefici sed propter magna merita claris viris defertur et datur. Qua re, sit modo aliqua res publica in qua honos elucere possit, omnibus, mihi crede, amplissimis honoribus abundabis. Is autem qui vere appellari potest honos non invitamentum ad tempus sed perpetuae virtutis est praemium.

For I always considered an honour to be really and truly such when I offered and given, not in the expectation of future benefit, but to persons whose great services have made them illustrious. And so, provided always that some form of free society exists wherein honours can shine, all the highest, trust me, shall be yours in abundance. But an honour truly so called is not an allurement offered at a crisis, but the reward of constant merit.

On 7 April, the official letter that Plancus had announced to Cicero in *Fam.* 10.7.1 finally reaches the Senate. It is not a short dispatch but a long and articulated self-defence: Plancus regrets that many people have not understood his far-sightedness and consequently have accused him of ambiguity. He claims it was prudence, since it is futile to make bombastic statements before having completed a long and silent tactical preparation. Nobody seems to have interpreted his approach correctly, laments Plancus. He, who is usually accused of careerism, actually has been the only one to demonstrate common sense in choosing to take on this underground work at the expense of his personal glory. Moreover, so as not to compromise the secrecy essential to final success, he often had to pretend and lie,<sup>60</sup> but now he can finally declare himself ready for a military action, on the condition that he will obtain the longed-for rewards, if only to satisfy his troops.<sup>61</sup>

Cicero's reaction to these declarations is both proud and enthusiastic. On 11 April, he writes to Plancus emphasising the unanimity of the support he enjoys in Rome, where – Cicero says – both the Senate and the people are competing in acclaiming Plancus as their hero. This consensus, however, is not unconditional,

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. Cic. *Fam.* 10.8.1–5.

<sup>61</sup> Cic. *Fam.* 10.8.6–7: *ipse ita sum animo paratus ut vel provinciam tueri vel ire quo res publica vocet vel tradere exercitum, auxilia provinciamque vel omnem impetum belli in me convertere non recusem, si modo meo casu aut confirmare patriae salutem aut periculum possim morari. Haec si iam expeditis omnibus rebus tranquilloque statu civitatis polliceor, in damno meae laudis rei publicae commodo laetabor; sin ad societatem integerrimorum et maximorum periculorum accedam, consilia mea aequis iudicibus ab obtrectatione invidiorum defendenda commendo. Mihi quidem ipsi fructus meritorum meorum in rei publicae incolumitate satis magnus est paratus. Eos vero qui meam auctoritatem et multo magis vestram fidem secuti nec ulla spe decipi nec ullo metu terreri potuerunt ut commendatos vobis habeatis petendum videtur.*

but depends on his commitment to the defence of the Republic.<sup>62</sup> The letter continues with the return of a didactic tone: this time the lecture is not only on the nature of the true honours, but also on Plancus' duty towards his fatherland (*Fam.* 10.12.5):

Perge igitur ut agis, nomenque tuum commenda immortalitati atque haec omnia quae habent speciem gloriae collectam inanissimis splendoris insignibus contemne; brevia, fucata, caduca existima. Verum decus in virtute positum est, quae maxime illustratur magnis in rem publicam meritis. Eam facultatem habes maximam; quam quoniam complexus es, tene. Perfice ut ne minus res publica tibi quam tu rei publicae debeas.

Continue then in your present course, and hand down your name to eternity. Despise all these prizes that have only the semblance of glory, deriving from meaningless badges of distinction; hold them for brief, unreal, perishable thing. True dignity lies in virtue; and virtue is most conspicuously displayed in eminent service to the commonwealth. Such you have a splendid opportunity to render. You have grasped it; do not let it slip. Make your country's debt to you no less than yours to hers.

The same relationship of Cicero and Plancus is again presented as an inseparable connection not between two elements, but three: Cicero, Plancus, and the Republic (still *Fam.* 10.12.5):

Me tuae dignitatis non modo fautorem sed etiam amplificatorem cognosces. Id cum rei publicae, quae mihi vita est mea carior, tum nostrae necessitudini debere me iudico.

You shall find me prompt not only to support but to amplify your standing. That I consider I owe both to the commonwealth, which is dearer to me than my life, and to our friendship.

## Plancus and Cicero after the battle of Mutina

Meanwhile, the situation under the walls of Mutina had reached a turning point: a series of clashes in rapid succession freed Decimus Brutus and forced Antonius into a daring escape with a few and disordered troops. It was not an epic senatorial victory, however, since both the consuls died in the battle.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, the war scenario changed profoundly: Plancus, who in *Fam.* 10.9 had announced having set off towards Mutina and having crossed the Rhone, stopped in the territory of the Allobroges when the news of Decimus Brutus's liberation reached him.

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<sup>62</sup> Cic. *Fam.* 10.12.4: *senatus gravior, constantior, amior tuis laudibus esse non potuit quam tum fuit, nec vero tibi senatus amior quam cuncta civitas. Mirabiliter enim populus Romanus universus et omnium generum ordinumque consensus ad liberandam rem publicam conspiravit.*

<sup>63</sup> Hirtius fell in the assault (cf. Suet. *Aug.* 11; Tac. *Ann.* 1.10), while Pansa died shortly after due to wounds received in battle (as reported by Decimus Brutus in Cic. *Fam.* 11.13.1–2).

From here, he declared himself ready for any event, from facing Antonius alone to making every effort to prevent anyone – and especially Lepidus, whose loyalty was openly uncertain – from sheltering the fugitive in his camp.<sup>64</sup> There was some bad blood between Plancus and Lepidus, but Plancus guarantees that he is willing to put aside *privatae offensiones* for the good of the Republic.<sup>65</sup> As for his relationship with Cicero, even in this difficult situation Plancus is consistent in his language and his multiple role-play (*Fam.* 10.11.1):

Immortalis ago tibi gratias agamque dum vivam; nam relaturum me adfirmare non possum. Tantis enim tuis officiis non videor mi respondere posse, nisi forte, ut tu gravissime disertissimeque scripsisti, ita sensurus es ut me referre gratiam putes cum memoria tenebo. Si de fili tui dignitate esset actum, amabilius certe nihil facere potuisses. [ . . . ]. Non mediocris adhibenda mihi est cura ut rei publicae me civem dignum tuis laudibus praestem, in amicitia tua memorem atque gratum.

Thank you a thousand, thousands times. As long as I live I shall thank you – as for repaying you, I cannot promise. I feel incapable of matching such services as yours – unless, perchance, as you have so movingly and eloquently written, you will consider yourself repaid so long as I hold them in remembrance. If your own son's standings had been in question, assuredly you could have shown no warmer affection. [ . . . ] I must study, no light matter, to show myself a patriot worthy of your eulogies and a friend whose gratitude is undying.

In his answer, Cicero seems to abandon temporarily the role of the severe *magister* and softens his tone to the point that the safety of the Republic and the glory of Plancus are placed at almost the same level (*Fam.* 10.19):

Quamquam gratiarum actionem a te non desiderabam, cum te re ipsa atque animo scirem esse gratissimum, tamen (fatendum est enim) fuit ea mihi periucunda. Sic enim vidi, quasi ea, quae oculis cernuntur, me a te amari. Dices 'quid antea?' Semper equidem, sed numquam illustrius. Litterae tuae mirabiliter gratae sunt senatui cum rebus ipsis, quae erant gravissimae et maximae, fortissimi animi summique consili, tum etiam gravitate sententiarum atque verborum.

Sed, mi Plance, incumbere ut belli extrema perficias. In hoc erit summa et gratia et gloria. Cupio omnia rei publicae causa; sed mehercules in ea conservanda iam defatigatus non multo plus patriae faveo quam tuae gloriae, cuius maximam facultatem tibi di immortales, ut spero, dederunt; quam complectere, obsecro.

I felt no need for words of thank from you, knowing how grateful you are in truth and heart. But I must acknowledge that they gave me deep pleasure. I saw your affection for me plain as I see what is in front of my eyes. 'And before?' you may ask. Yes, indeed, always, but never more clearly. Your dispatch made an extraordinary favourable impression on the

<sup>64</sup> Cic. *Fam.* 10.11.

<sup>65</sup> The reasons for this mutual dislike (also expressed in Cic. *Fam.* 10.11.3; 10.15.1; 10.18.2; 10.23.1), are not clear.

Senate, both from the great and momentous news it contained, magnificent evidence of your courage and judgement, and from the impressive quality of sentiments and style.

Forward now, my dear Plancus, to finish the last remnants of the war! That will be a most grateful and glorious achievement. I am heart and soul devoted to the commonwealth; yet, truth to tell, I have grown weary in its preservation and my zeal for my country is not much greater than that which I feel for your glory. The immortals have given you, as I trust, a golden opportunity to earn it. Grasp that opportunity, I beg of you.

The real problem is that the *extrema belli* are not so easy to destroy. It is true that Antonius, after the messy escape from Mutina, was in all likelihood too weak to sustain a pursuit. Too bad that no one chased him, and if Decimus Brutus was justifiably exhausted by months of siege, the immobility of Octavian had been far less understandable, nor was he showing any sign of willingness to move his troops in the foreseeable future. Consequently Antonius, left free to wander around northern Italy, soon revealed the destination of his apparent roaming, namely – as widely expected – the camp of Lepidus, where he hoped to find hospitality.

At this point, Cicero's letters become more and more urgent and worried, while those of Plancus reflect the uncertainty of the situation. Everything seemed to revolve around Lepidus: the fate of the entire war was hanging on his loyalty. If Lepidus, too, barricaded the doors of his camp to Antonius, then he would have no escape. Otherwise, the war was destined to continue, and with unclear alignments, given the conspicuous presence of Caesar's veterans in the armies of Lepidus, Plancus and Octavian. It was no mystery that the veterans, men who still idolised Caesar, were not eager to fight for Decimus Brutus, one of the conspirators. To make the situation even worse, the consular army was without a guide: both consuls were dead, and their replacement was a thorny issue. Despite being only nineteen, Octavian no longer concealed his ambition to run for one of the vacant consul positions perhaps with Cicero as colleague.<sup>66</sup> While discussions were in full swing in Rome, on 11 May Plancus reported to Cicero (*Fam.* 10.15) that he had commenced an assiduous negotiation with Lepidus to win him over to the cause of the Republic, and he also communicated this same plan in an official letter, now lost, about which Cicero in *Fam.* 10.16 (end of May 43 BC),<sup>67</sup> comments with enthusiasm. It is even more remarkable that Cicero is overly solicitous in highlighting the difference between one of Plancus' official dispatches to the Senate and that of Lepidus (*Fam.* 10.16.1):

Nihil post hominum memoriam gloriosius, nihil gratius, ne tempore quidem ipso opportunus accidere vidi quam tuas, Plance, litteras. Redditae sunt enim frequenti senatu Cornuto, cum is frigidas sane et inconstantes recitasset litteras Lepidi.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. App. *BCiv.* 3.82; Cass. Dio 46.42.2; Plut. *Cic.* 45.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Marinone/Malaspina 2004, 262.

I know of nothing in history, my dear Plancus, more glorious than your dispatch. No happening in my experience has been more welcome, more fortunate too in its moment. It was delivered to Cornutus<sup>68</sup> during a well-attended meeting of the Senate, after he had read out a distinctly cold, shuffling communication from Lepidus.

This consensus, of course, was not unconditional but depended on Plancus' commitment to the Republic. Cicero also persisted in his role as Plancus' *magister*, and proudly stressed the difference between his pupil and Lepidus, also in terms of style (still *Fam.* 10.16.1):

Sub eas statim recitatae sunt tuae, non sine magnis quidem clamoribus. Cum rebus enim ipsis essent et studiis beneficiisque in rem publicam gratissimae, tum erant gravissimis verbis ac sententiis.

Yours was read immediately after, and to loud cheers. The fact themselves and your patriotic zeal and services gave the most lively satisfaction; and furthermore words and intentions alike were deeply impressive.

Unfortunately, the situation on the war front was becoming more and more complex. In *Fam.* 10.21 (13 May 43 BC), Plancus reports that Lepidus was struggling to keep discipline among his troops: as expected, they seemed to refuse to fight against Antonius and his men. Plancus, therefore, decided to stop his march, deeming it too risky to advance alone near armies that could join against him at any moment. The letter ends with an urgent invitation to Cicero to hasten the arrival of reinforcements. In Rome, Cicero quickly understood how much the war was jeopardised: Antonius was anything but defeated and annihilated. Not chasing him immediately after the Mutina rout had been a colossal mistake. Who was to blame? For Cicero, Decimus Brutus seemed to be at fault, and consequently, Cicero reproached him with a certain severity.<sup>69</sup> In the meantime, another letter from Plancus arrived reporting urgent solicitations from Lepidus: fearing not being able to manage a possible revolt of veterans alone, he was inviting Plancus to join him to reinforce the front against Antonius.<sup>70</sup> Around 18 May, Lepidus himself wrote to Cicero to offer ample reassurance about his adhesion to the Republican cause.<sup>71</sup> Shortly after, Plancus corresponds again with Cicero, announcing that Antonius has arrived at Forum Iulii, 24 miles from Lepidus, who was stationed at Forum Voconii. Plancus

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<sup>68</sup> Marcus Caecilius Cornutus (cf. *RE* s.v. *Caecilius* n. 45, col. 1200), being the urban praetor, presided over the senatorial sessions when the consuls were not in Rome.; cf. *Cic. Fam.* 10.12.3: *ad Cornutum, praetorem urbanum, litteras deferremus, qui, quod consules aberant, consulare munus sustinebat more maiorum.*

<sup>69</sup> *Cic. Fam.* 11.12.1–2.

<sup>70</sup> *Cic. Fam.* 10.18.

<sup>71</sup> *Cic. Fam.* 10.34.

claims to believe in Lepidus' loyalty and announces his intention to join him to manage the situation together. He is therefore hastening his march.<sup>72</sup>

Too bad that in the meantime Antonius too had reached the camp of Lepidus. For a while, there is a stalemate: Lepidus lets Antonius know that he will not attack an old friend first, but he is not going to offer any hospitality.<sup>73</sup> All for nothing: as widely expected, the veterans opened the camp gates to Antonius, their old comrade in arms in Caesar's times, and escorted him to Lepidus's tent, all asking for peace and mercy. Lepidus yielded to the will of the troops.<sup>74</sup> Plancus, informed that the two armies had joined, stopped his advance and set up his camp forty miles away. From there, on 6 June, he wrote once again to Cicero (*Fam.* 10.23): the opening is an abrupt attack on Lepidus to emphasise the severe dangers he is running for the good of the homeland.<sup>75</sup> After venting his indignation, Plancus continues with an account of the recent events, and closes, once again, by remembering his affection to Cicero, a sentiment from which derives yet another promise to live up to the expectations of his old master (*Fam.* 10.23.7):

Te quidem, mi Cicero, in dies mehercules habeo cariorem sollicitudinesque meas cottidie magis tua merita exacuunt, ne quid aut ex amore aut ex iudicio tuo perdam. Opto ut mihi liceat iam praesenti pietate meorum officiorum tua beneficia tibi facere iucundiora.

Of yourself, my dear Cicero, I do assure you I grow fonder daily; and every day your good offices sharpen my anxiety not to forfeit one jot of your affection or esteem. I pray that I may be able in person to add by my devoted services to the pleasure you take in your benefaction.

At the end of May, Decimus Brutus joined Plancus near Cularo (modern-day Grenoble). The two consuls-to-be combined their troops and informed the Senate of this in a co-signed official letter dated around 10 June.<sup>76</sup> In Rome, Cicero increased the epistolary pressure on Marcus Brutus and Cassius, hoping to convince them to return to Italy as soon as possible and – above all – at the head of a solid army. However, his efforts were in vain. The two were not only unwilling to aban-

72 Cic. *Fam.* 10.17.

73 Cf. App. *BCiv.* 3.83; Cass. Dio 46.51.2.

74 The episode is narrated by App. *BCiv.* 3.84. Lepidus announces the mutiny on May 30 with a laconic dispatch to the Senate (Cic. *Fam.* 10.35).

75 Cic. *Fam.* 10.23.1: *numquam mehercules, mi Cicero, me paenitebit maxima pericula pro patria subire, dum, si quid acciderit mihi, a reprehensione temeritatis absim. Confiterer imprudentia me lapsam, si unquam Lepido ex animo credidissem; credulitas enim error est magis quam culpa, et quidem in optimi cuiusque mentem facillime irrepit. Sed ego non hoc vitio paene sum deceptus, Lepidum enim pulchre noram. Quid ergo est? Pudor me, qui in bello maxime est periculosus, hunc casum co<e>git subire.*

76 Cic. *Fam.* 11.13a, enthusiastically commented by Cicero in *Fam.* 10.22.



don the East but also appeared less concerned about the situation in Gaul. Instead, they were more troubled by the ambiguity of Octavian. Despite the honors and all the supportive rhetoric (chiefly from Cicero), the young man continued to show no intention of actually committing his army at the service of the Senate. What is worse for Cicero is that Marcus Brutus makes no secret of holding him responsible for this dangerous impasse.<sup>77</sup>

This is the historical context of the last letter of Cicero's entire epistolary corpus. Plancus wrote it on July 28, 43 BC. It opens, once again, with a series of articulate acknowledgements, and if both Cicero and Plancus alternated various roles in the course of the correspondence, here Plancus refers mostly to a father-son relationship (*Fam.* 10.24.1):

Facere non possum quin in singulas res meritaque tua tibi gratias agam, sed mehercules facio cum pudore. Neque enim tanta necessitudo, quantam tu mihi tecum esse voluisti, desiderare videtur gratiarum actionem, neque ego libenter pro maximis tuis beneficiis tam vili munere defungor orationis, et malo praesens observantia, diligentia, adsiduitate memorem me tibi probare. Quod si mihi vita contigerit, omnis gratas amicitias atque etiam pias propinquitates in tua observantia, indulgentia, adsiduitate<sup>78</sup> vincam; amor enim tuus ac iudicium de me utrum mihi plus dignitatis in perpetuum an voluptatis cottidie sit adlaturus non facile dixerim.

I cannot refrain from thanking you with respect to your services in this matter or that, but I assure you I do so with embarrassment. The intimate friendship which by your choice binds you and me does not seem to require expression of gratitude. And it goes against the grain to acquit myself of your splendid benefactions with so cheap a commodity as words. I prefer to prove myself grateful in person by diligent and assiduous observance. If life is granted me, my devotion to you will transcend all gratitude of friends, all deuteous observance of kin. For I should be hard put to it to say whether your affection and esteem will tend more to my lasting honour or to my pleasure from day to day.

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. Cic. *Ad Brut.* 1.10 and *Fam.* 12.8 (both written in early June), followed by *Ad Brut.* 1.9 and *Fam.* 12.9. Marcus Brutus, after a long silence (see Cicero's complaints in *Fam.* 11.25.2), on 1 July finally re-established his epistolary connection with Cicero (*Ad Brut.* 1.13), but without showing any intention to move. He has heard of Lepidus' betrayal, but he hopes it is false news. Cicero replies in urgent tones (*Ad Brut.* 1.12) and presses Cassius as well (*Fam.* 12.10). Within a few days, Cicero sends Brutus two more letters, *Ad Brut.* 1.14 (4 July) and the very long *Ad Brut.* 1.15 (mid-July) where he tries to justify the excessive indulgence of Octavian demonstrated by both himself and the Senate as well. At the end of the month (27 July), Cicero writes again to Brutus (*Ad Brut.* 1.18) to express his painful amazement at knowing that neither he nor Cassius are on the way to Italy and – for the umpteenth time, urge their return.

<sup>78</sup> Here I accept the textual intervention of Giovanna Garbarino (cf. Garbarino/Tabacco 2008, 167), who disputes the deletion proposed by Shackleton Bailey: *in tua observantia [indulgentia adsiduitate]*: the repetition could not be an error of the copyist since it fits well in Plancus's redundant style, especially in a context of flattery as here.

The letter then continues with a report from the battlefield. The situation of Plancus and Decimus Brutus is unchanged, and even though they know how much everyone in Rome is anxiously awaiting their victory and the final defeat of Antonius, for the moment they judged more prudent not to move: their troops would not be up to a fight with the joint forces of Lepidus and Antonius. The situation, therefore, is not the best for the senatorial side. The question, however, remains the same: who is to blame? Is there a culprit in all this? Yes, and Plancus has no doubts about his identity: if Antonius is alive and ready to fight again, allied with his old friend Lepidus, the responsibility lies with Octavian.<sup>79</sup> Having said that, all Plancus can do is wait with Decimus (*Fam.* 10.24.8):

Nos interea duriore condicione bellum sustinemus, quod neque expeditissimam dimicationem putamus neque tamen refugiendo commissuri sumus, ut maius detrimentum res publica accipere possit. Quod si aut Caesar se respexerit aut Africanæ legionis celeriter venerint, securos vos ab hac parte reddemus.

Tu, ut instituisti, me diligas rogo proprieque tuum esse tibi persuadeas.

V Kal. Sext. ex castris.

Meanwhile we are bearing the brunt of the war in a situation of considerable difficulty. We do not see our way quite clear to a decisive engagement, and on the other hand we have no intention of risking further damage to the national cause by taking to our heel. If Caesar considers his own best interest, or if the African legions come up quickly, we shall free you from anxiety on this side.

Please maintain your regard for me and be sure that I am thoroughly yours.

28 July, from camp.

These words conclude the Ciceronian correspondence. Plancus assures Cicero that he is *proprie tuus* and once again reiterates his loyalty to both the *res publica* and to Cicero, his old friend, teacher, and father. However, the reality proved quite different: Octavian would never arrive, and Plancus, presumably swayed by the revolt of his legions, eventually allied himself with Antonius and Lepidus.<sup>80</sup> Decimus Brutus attempted to escape to the East, where he planned to find refuge with Marcus Brutus, but was captured and killed.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Cic. *Fam.* 10.24.5: *sed (quidquid tibi scribo, dolenter mehercules magis quam inimice facio) quod vivit Antonius hodie, quod Lepidus una est, quod exercitus habent non contemnendos [habent], quod sperant, quod audent, omne Caesari acceptum referre possunt. Neque ego superiora repetam; sed, ex eo tempore, quo ipse mihi professus est se venire, si venire voluisset, aut oppressum iam bellum esset aut in adversissimam illi<s> Hispaniam cum detrimento eorum maximo extrusum.*

<sup>80</sup> App. *BCiv.* 3.96–99; Liv. *per.* 120; Cass. Dio 46.53; Val. Max. 4.7.9 and 9.13.3.

<sup>81</sup> The ancient sources disagree on the death of Decimus Brutus: according to Velleius (2.64.1), he was killed by assassins hired by Antonius. Appian (*BCiv.* 3.97–98) reports he fell into the hands of some Gallic tribes, who executed him to win over Antonius, while Cassius Dio (46.53) claims he committed suicide. See Šašel Kos 2017.

## Who is the real Plancus?

Plancus deinde dubia, id est sua fide, diu quarum esset partium secum luctatus ac sibi difficile consentiens, et nunc adiutor D. Bruti designati consulis, collegae sui, senatuique se litteris uenditans, mox eiusdem proditor.

Plancus, with his usual loose ideas of loyalty, after a long debate with himself as to which party to follow, and much difficulty in sticking to his resolutions when formed, now pretended to co-operate with his colleague, Decimus Brutus, the consul designate, thus seeking to ingratiate himself with the senate in his dispatches, and again betrayed him.<sup>82</sup>

With these words, Velleius Paterculus dismisses the complex story that we have followed through the voice of Plancus himself. It is difficult to deny that Plancus' actions were likely less resolute than his statements. Cicero himself seems aware of his correspondent's weakness, as evidenced by the well-structured strategy he employed to push Plancus towards the senatorial cause. Although Cicero sometimes supports and teases Plancus' hunger for honours, he remains consistently focused on emphasizing that, once the Caesarian experience is behind them, their *necessitudo* must be based not only on family tradition and cultural affinity but also on a shared commitment for the *res publica*.<sup>83</sup> In other words: it is time for Plancus to adhere – once for all – to the teachings of his esteemed mentor, Cicero.

For their part, Plancus' letters are notable for their mimetic ability, to the extent that Ronald Syme does not rule out a parodic intent.<sup>84</sup> It is more likely, however, that represents an exaggerated attempt at *captatio benevolentiae*: we know from Seneca that Plancus was renowned for his talent in open flattery (Sen. *QNat.* 4a.pr.3–5):

Fac ergo, mi Lucili, quod facere consuisti; a turba te, quantum potes, separa, ne adulatoribus latus praebeas. [ . . . ] Alius adulatione clam utetur, parce; alius ex aperto, palam, rustici-

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<sup>82</sup> Vell. 2.63.3; translation: F.W. Shipley.

<sup>83</sup> White 2010, 157 noted that Cicero uses the term *res publica* with unusual frequency in the correspondence with Plancus: 37 occurrences, nearly 3 per letter, which is particularly striking compared to the only 11 occurrences in the letters between him and Decimus Brutus. Additionally, the correspondence is marked by a notable recurrence of imperatives, especially *incumbe* (cf. Cic. *Fam.* 10.3.3; 10.10.2; 10.14.2; 10.19.9).

<sup>84</sup> Syme 1939, 165: “Plancus perhaps indulged in mild parody of that smooth exemplar”. More recently White 2010, 158 defined Plancus as a “mockingbird” (a bird whose male has the odd ability to imitate the call of other animals) and characterized his style as “Ciceronian camouflage” “Plancus had a way of wrapping himself in Ciceronian camouflage when writing letters”.

tate simulata, quasi simplicitas illa, non ars sit. Plancus, artifex ante Villeium maximus, aiebat non esse occulte nec ex dissimulato blandiendum. ‘Perit’ inquit, ‘procari, si latet’.<sup>85</sup>

Therefore, my Lucilius, act just as you usually do. Keep yourself separated from the crowd as much as possible and expose no side of yourself to flatterers. [ . . . ] One man will use flattery secretly, sparingly; another openly, obviously, which pretended roughness, as though it were naïveté, not artfulness. Plancus, the greatest flattery-artist before Villeius, used to say that flattery must not be concealed or dissembled. “When you pay court” he said, “your effort is lost if not recognized”.<sup>86</sup>

At this point of our analysis, a question arises: who is the real Plancus? The man worried about the state’s fate as it appears from Cicero’s letters or the pathological, two-faced man criticized by Velleius? Giving an answer is quite impossible, but even admitting that Plancus probably behaved more cautiously than he proclaimed in the correspondence with Cicero, Velleius’ judgment still remains considerably unfair. As Hannah Mitchell has recently shown, if we adopt a less prejudiced viewpoint than Velleius, Plancus’ behaviour was substantially consistent and, above all, in line with the pacifying attitude befitting a consul. After the Ides of March, Plancus spoke in the Senate in favour of amnesty and concord:<sup>87</sup> his subsequent moves, including the official letter supporting a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Decimus Brutus and Antonius, are still in logical agreement with that first intervention. At the outbreak of hostilities, Plancus continues to behave in accordance with this policy: he joins his troops to those of Decimus Brutus, his future colleague in the consulate, and together they send a letter to the Senate. “This was the principle of the amnesty in action”, comments Mitchell, who summarises this phase of the story as follows: “Plancus did not change sides – the sides changed around him”.<sup>88</sup> Even the ancient sources seem to deny the possibility that Plancus planned the betrayal of Decimus and the agreement with Antonius and Lepidus in advance: Appian records that when Plancus finally joined Lepidus and Antonius, the relationship between them remained cold, and only the mediation of Pollio eventually mended at least the friendship between Plancus and Antonius.<sup>89</sup>

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85 The passage is complicated, both because some manuscripts read *Vitellius* instead of *Villeius*, and for the interpretation of *procari*, cf. *ThLL* s.v. *proco* col. 1541.54–58; Oltramare 1921, 32; Borgna 2021.

86 Translation: T.H. Corcoran.

87 Cf. above, n. 5.

88 Mitchell 2019, 175.

89 App. *BCiv.* 3.96–97.

However, there is no denying that without Plancus' direct voice, it is very difficult to follow him in the subsequent events without being influenced by Velleius' invariably disparaging version.

At the end of 43 BC, Plancus was finally able to celebrate the long-awaited triumph for the victory over the Reti, albeit together with Lepidus, with whom – as we have seen – relations were undoubtedly not relaxed. Velleius does not fail to recall the heavy jokes that accompanied the two *triumphantes*: since the brothers of both Plancus and Lepidus had been proscribed, citizens claimed that the two were triumphing over the *germani*, not the Gauls.<sup>90</sup> Lepidus also took the place of Decimus alongside Plancus as consul of the year 42 BC. After the battle of Philippi, Plancus was involved in the war of Perugia, but, according to Velleius, he still behaved with ambiguity, offering hope for more help than he intended to bring (*spem magis ostenderat auxilii quam opem ferebat*). Velleius finished the account of this story with Plancus accompanying the escape of Fulvia, Antonius' controversial wife.<sup>91</sup> Plancus was then proconsul in Syria and subsequently followed Antonius to the court of Cleopatra, where he occupied a position of prestige.<sup>92</sup> Here, he also distinguished himself for his penchant for partying.<sup>93</sup> Despite that, in 31 BC Plancus abandoned Antonius all of a sudden to return to Rome and take Octavian's side, a transition that greatly astonished even his own contemporaries, as testified by the usual merciless judgment of Velleius (2.83.1–2):

Inter hunc apparatus belli Plancus, non iudicio recta legendi neque amore rei publicae aut Caesaris, quippe haec semper impugnabat, sed morbo proditor, cum fuisset humillimus adsentator reginae et infra seruos cliens, cum Antonii librarius, cum obscenissimarum rerum et auctor et minister, cum in omnia et in omnibus uenalis, cum caeruleatus et nudus caputque redimitus arundine et caudam trahens, genibus innixus Glaucum saltasset in conuiuio, refrigeratus ab Antonio ob manifestarum rapinarum indicia, transfugit ad Caesarem.

In the midst of these preparations for war Plancus went over to Caesar, not though any conviction that he was choosing the right, not from any love of the republic or of Caesar, for he was always hostile to both, but because treachery was a disease with him. He had been the most grovelling flatterer of the queen, a client with less self-respect than a slave; he had also been secretary to Antonius and was the author or the abettor of his vilest acts; for money he was ready to do all thing for all men; and at a banquet he had played the role of Glaucus the Nereid, performing a dance in which his naked body was painted blue, his head

<sup>90</sup> Vell. 2.67.4: *de germanis, non de Gallis duo triumphant consules*.

<sup>91</sup> Vell. 2.74–76. Plancus is contemptuously named *muliebris fugae comitem*.

<sup>92</sup> App. civ. 5.599. On Plancus' eastern season cf. Watkins 2018, 221–228.

<sup>93</sup> Macrobius (*Sat.* 2.14.15–17) also mentions wild banquets at the court of Alexandria and recalls Plancus in the role of *arbiter elegantiae* in an eccentric challenge between Antonius and Cleopatra: which of the two has spent more money on a single dinner? Cleopatra dissolves a giant pearl of enormous value in vinegar and drank it, so Plancus declared her the winner.

encircled with reeds, at the same time wearing a fish's tail and crawling upon his knees. Now, inasmuch as he had been coldly treated by Antony because of unmistakable evidence of his venal rapacity, he deserted to Caesar.<sup>94</sup>

The reasons for this disconcerting change of sides are unclear: Velleius mentions tensions with Antonius due to the greed of Plancus, while other sources remember strong conflicts with Cleopatra.<sup>95</sup> Once in Rome, Plancus tried to ingratiate himself with Octavian by revealing some confidential information about Antonius, in particular that he had given the Vestal Virgins custody of his will. Octavian quickly recovered this document and used it to trigger the civil war, as the will (apparently) showed that Antonius had irrevocably departed from Roman customs and aspired to be an oriental monarch.<sup>96</sup>

Plancus is then lost for a while; perhaps it is to this period of marginalisation that Horace refers, when he invites his friend Munatius to enjoy the quiet of Tivoli and refresh himself from *tristitia et vitae labores*.<sup>97</sup>

However, Plancus continues to appear at the turning points of history: in 27 BC it is none other than Plancus who proposes the title of Augustus for Octavian.<sup>98</sup> There is also yet another appearance: in 22 BC, after many years of vacancy, Augustus finally nominated a pair of censors again: Plancus and Aemilius Lepidus Paullus.<sup>99</sup> Even about this appointment, Velleius' judgment is nasty (Vell. 2.95.3):

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94 Translation: F.W. Shipley.

95 Cass. Dio 50.3.2; Plut. *Ant.* 58.4. Cf. Montlahuc 2010 for a detailed analysis.

96 Cass. Dio 50.3.3–5; Plut. *Ant.* 58.4. Suet. *Aug.* 17. It caused a sensation when Antonius assigned legates to the children of Cleopatra, confirmed Ptolemy Caesar as the true son of Julius Caesar and – last but not least – expressed the desire to be buried in Alexandria alongside Cleopatra. Syme 1939, 280–293 is still unrivalled as regards this phase of Roman history.

97 Hor. *carm.* 1.7.15–21, on whose complex interpretation cf. Moles 2002 and Montlahuc 2010, 335–336. On the role of Plancus under Augustus cf. also Osgood 2006, 276–280. The reconstruction of Watkins 2018, 271–309, requires caution: in his opinion, Plancus – despite disappearing from the radar of history, was always at Octavian's side as a trusted adviser. However, even if Octavian surely forgave Plancus, and it cannot be excluded that he occasionally used Plancus as a consultant (also considering the amount of information about Antonius that Plancus necessarily knows), it seems unlikely that Plancus was counted among Octavian's intimates without leaving any trace, since Plancus was never honoured with a second consulate, and the only other position he obtained, the censorship, was extremely controversial and never actually exercised (cf. below, n. 100).

98 Suet. *Aug.* 7.2; Vell. 2.91.1.

99 Cf. *RE* s.v. *Aemilius* n. 82.

[scil. censura] neque ipsis honori neque rei publicae usui fuerat, cum alteri uis censoria, alteri uita deesset: Paulus uix posset implere censorem, Plancus timere deberet, nec quidquam obiicere posset adulescentibus aut obiicientes audire quod non agnosceret senex.

[The censorship] was little credit to themselves or little benefit to the state, for the one lacked the force, the other the character, in keeping with the office; Paulus was scarcely capable of filling the censors' office, while Plancus had only too much reason to fear it; nor was there any charge which he could make against young men, or hear others make, of which he, old though he was, not recognize himself as guilty.<sup>100</sup>

After the controversial censorship, we definitively lose track of Plancus.<sup>101</sup> The date of his death is not known, but it is highly probable that he died in his splendid villa in Gaeta, where it is still possible to admire his majestic mausoleum.<sup>102</sup>

## Beatus Rhenanus between Plancus and Velleius

At the end of this survey, it is clear that Beatus Rhenanus had to face some difficulties in reconciling his intention to recover the memory of Plancus as the founder of Basel with the image of the same Plancus offered by Velleius, the author for whom Beatus Rhenanus was both the discoverer and the first editor.

To overcome the impasse, Beatus Rhenanus made use of the figure of Cicero, under whose aegis Plancus was brought back, so as to be an appropriate founder for Basel. The inscription that the Humanist composes for the portrait of Plancus destined for the Fruchtmarkt reveals both this impasse and its overcoming. Here Beatus Rhenanus, despite recovering much information from the funeral inscription, makes some significant changes. First of all, the traditional list of ancestors is replaced by the simple *civis Romanus*: Plancus' *maiores* were not particularly

<sup>100</sup> Cass. Dio 54.2 reports an anecdote full of implications: the tribune from which the two censors should have inaugurated their office with a speech to the crowd collapsed. As a consequence, Augustus, although he had *personally* chosen those two (καίτερ ἐκείνων αἰρεθέντων), a remark that could give rise to different interpretations, took personal possession of those powers (πολλὰ τῶν ἐς αὐτοὺς ἀνηκόντων ἔπραξε).

<sup>101</sup> Watkins 2018, 310–314 believes that our Plancus is also the *Munatius* that Horace (*Ep.* 1.3.31) includes among Tiberius' inner circle, an interpretation that strongly depends on the Watkins' overly generous interpretation of the role of Plancus under Augustus (cf. above, n. 97).

<sup>102</sup> Cf. above, p. 39. Scholarship has wondered why Plancus built his mausoleum in Gaeta and not in Tivoli, where he owned the villa mentioned by Horace, or possibly in Atina (cf. above, n. 3). Coarelli 1982, 357–358 suggests that Plancus had been influenced by Gaeta's sudden popularity as a location for tombs arising from the Aeneid. (cf. Verg. *Aen.* 7.1–4).

famous, and his descendants would be even more controversial.<sup>103</sup> Equally important are the subsequent omissions: Beatus Rhenanus does not remember the censorship (heavily mocked by Velleio), nor the triumph (equally controversial), nor the office of *septemvir epulonum*, another omission plausibly influenced by Velleius's picturesque account of Plancus' exploits during banquets at Cleopatra's court. For all its information, Beatus Rhenanus puts aside the funeral inscription and recovers the words used by Raffaello Maffei: the mention of the praetorship and – most of all – the qualification of Plancus as *orator ac Ciceronis discipulus*.<sup>104</sup> These words are undoubtedly intended to connect Cicero to Basel. But there is more.

Retracing the correspondence, we have demonstrated that *Ciceronis discipulus* is not an empty label. On the contrary, this discipleship was affirmed by both Cicero and Plancus, becoming the backbone of their entire correspondence. Moreover, the letters show Cicero proposing a more political than literary *magisterium*. After Plancus' Caesarian phase, which Cicero regarded as a youthful error, it was time for Plancus to set out along the path already travelled by his mentor, Cicero, and to fight to safeguard the *res publica*. In this sense, *Ciceronis discipulus* encapsulates Plancus' career in one of his less controversial moments, when, as the armed branch of his great teacher and spearhead of the senatorial resistance, he epitomized Cicero's perfect disciple, both literary and, most importantly, political. In short: he was a founder of whom Basel could be proud.

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<sup>103</sup> Cf. above, n. 10.

<sup>104</sup> Even in his historiographical work published a few years later (1531), Beatus Rhenanus defines Plancus as *orator ille clarissimus* (Beatus Rhenanus, *Rerum germanicarum libri tres* 3.145).