Ancient Biographies

L. MUNATIUS PLANCUS

SERVING AND SURVIVING IN THE ROMAN REVOLUTION

SECOND EDITION

Thomas H. Watkins

ROUTLEDGE

L. Munatius Plancus

This volume examines the life and career of L. Munatius Plancus, and through him, explores the tumultuous final years of the Roman Republic. Plancus had a very active and lengthy political career, from his initial appearance on the staff of Julius Caesar in Gaul in 54 BC at least through the censorship of 22 BC. During this time, he was in close contact for over 30 years with all the major figures during a period of tremendous political and social upheaval in Rome. He maneuvered carefully and cautiously, changing affiliation from boyhood ties to Cicero, to Caesar, to Antony and Cleopatra, and finally to Octavian – it was Plancus himself who proposed the motion whereby the Senate conferred the name "Augustus" on the new ruler of Rome. More than just a biography of this fascinating figure, this volume also offers insight into the politics of this complex period.

Thomas H. Watkins is Emeritus Professor at Western Illinois University, USA, and after his retirement taught Roman history at Virginia Tech for 10 years.

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L. Munatius Plancus

Serving and Surviving in the Roman Revolution

Second edition

Thomas H. Watkins

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In 2003 I relocated to Blacksburg, Virginia, and for ten years taught part-time in the History Department at Virginia Tech. Over the years I have accumulated new friends and colleagues who encouraged me to continue to be professionally active. Adjunct faculty status gave me enhanced access to the university library and its interlibrary loan services, so thanks to successive department chairs and colleagues, Glenn Bugh, Dan Thorp, and Mark Barrow, and associate chair Trudy Becker. Renewed work on Plancus led me to revise my arguments on several aspects of his career, particularly his ties to Horace. I am especially grateful to

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This revised edition, like the original, is dedicated to my wife Sharon who over the years has endured countless discussions about Plancus and, recently, provided immeasurable care in helping me through a prolonged heath crisis.

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1 The evidence

Discontinuity, biases, and hypotheses

For more than two millennia the reputation of L. Munatius Plancus has suffered from a steady drumbeat of denunciation, condemnation of the person arising from disapproval of what appear to be self-serving actions, and a lack of stability. The trend began early: in a letter of 44 BC. Cicero urged Plancus to prove wrong those who were saying that he "*nimis servire temporibus*," "engaged in excessive time-serving." Cicero did not say who these detractors were and tactfully proceeded to state that, because he had been a family friend for years and had been the young Plancus' tutor, he knew the slurs were false. This letter has been influential in shaping Plancus' reputation as the archetypal politician without principles, whose only goal was to further his own career. Plancus' response more or less admits the existence of the charges, though not their truth.[1] Indeed, Cicero spoke favorably of Plancus when it suited his purposes, though what he thought about him in private was perhaps quite different. He never expressed his personal judgment in any surviving text. Influenced by these unsubstantiated allegations and the tone set by admirers of Cicero, historians have found their prejudices confirmed in Plancus' performance over the subsequent remainder of a career which extended until at least 22. Since Cicero bluntly told Plancus that he was developing the reputation of being a shifty time-server, it must be true, and writers have simply found confirmation of this assessment whenever they encountered Plancus' participation and influence.

The constant hostility toward Plancus originated in writers who approved of Cicero and disliked Caesar and Antony, notably Seneca the Elder and Velleius Paterculus, who wrote about a generation after Plancus' time, and was picked up by later writers and so became the standard verdict.[2] It was bad enough that Plancus not only served the dictator who ended the traditional Roman *res publica*. He then apparently betrayed Cicero in the crisis of 44–43 and was in part responsible for his death. Still worse, he joined the disreputable Antony in mid-summer of 43, served him prominently until 32, and then, when it looked as though that master was about to lose, jumped to join Octavian. Plancus lacked integrity and was always ready deviously to abandon right in the pursuit of advantage. His chief talents were the ability to flatter and to judge the winds and currents of the political storms.

These interpretations ignore the complexities of the constantly shifting politics of the time. Few, if any political, figures in the highest ranks were constant in their affiliations and loyalties. Active participation, even survival, required flexibility,

which is not identical with a total lack of principles. Right and wrong were not as clear-cut as some who later took the moral high road and enjoyed the safety of historical hindsight liked to think. Cicero himself was devious, borderline illegal, and treacherous in his dealings with Caesar and Octavian and in his appeals to Brutus and Cassius, but his voluminous writings and speeches adopted high-minded but unrealistic policies bearing much responsibility for the resumption of civil war in 44–43. However, his letters and orations have shaped the interpretation of events.

In a nutshell, the fundamental problem historians now face is the shortage of evidence outside the Ciceronian tradition. We do not have the writings and speeches of the other figures of the day, aside from the scattered letters preserved in the Ciceronian corpus. Leading Romans wrote constantly, as correspondence was a part of the daily routine; couriers, merchants, and private travelers carried packets of letters all through the Roman world. Plancus illustrates the situation. We have a few of his letters in book 10 of the *ad Familiares*, but all were written in the crisis of 44–43 and are either to Cicero or dispatches to the Senate. Surely, he wrote to other influential politicians and military men (some to Antony and Octavian are referred to), and equally surely he wrote other letters to Cicero over the years, but these letters have not survived. He is repeatedly said to have been a well-known orator, but there is no trace of his speeches. For instance, we greatly regret not having the text of the speech he delivered in the Senate in 27 when he proposed "Augustus." This partial evidence makes historical analysis and assessment tricky and unreliable.

The universally negative assessment of Plancus cannot be the whole truth, and the ensuing chapters examine his career. Hypotheses are necessary and frequent, doubtless some better grounded and more convincing than others. Deductions from the evidence rather than specific statements are at the heart of several fixed convictions. Most important is the belief that the three men under whom Plancus served for the majority of his long career recognized his talents and abilities and were not deterred by any slurs. Julius Caesar did not pick incompetent subordinates, even when rendering political favors to those whom he sought to make allies, and clearly saw much in Plancus. He promoted him steadily and tabbed him for a consulship with Dec. Junius Brutus in sequence to his trusted associates A. Hirtius and C. Pansa – at a time when Caesar was to be off fighting the Parthians. To be left as joint head of state when Caesar was to have been more than a thousand miles distant surely implies he had the dictator's full confidence.

Much the same can be said of Plancus' service under Antony. Antony kept Plancus in positions of trust and power for a decade, and modern scholars admit the soundness of Antony's administration of the eastern domains of Rome (altogether a different matter from his involvement with Cleopatra). No source details Plancus' administrative achievements, but Antony's decision to entrust him with his signet ring while he was to be away on campaign in 35 is confirmation of his assessment. Plancus' role under Antony combined the roles of Agrippa and Maecenas under Octavian in the 30s. Octavian is the third of Plancus' masters. Octavian welcomed him in 32 and employed him for probably another ten years. No more than his adoptive father did the young Caesar employ men whose primary talent was flattery. Choosing him to propose senatorial adoption of "Augustus" in 27 was certainly a mark of appreciation of Plancus' talents, and it is equally proof

that he did not think Plancus would in any way disgrace the new regime. The same holds for Augustus' decision to make Plancus a censor in 22.

Plancus thus served the three dominant Romans of the period from 54 to 22. None of the three has left a written evaluation, and this makes it difficult to form a balanced assessment. On the other hand, Plancus' long employment under very different superiors in a turbulent age makes him worth studying. For years he was in the inner circle of power, clearly influential but never supreme. We can label him a man of the second rank, but nobody else is a close parallel, and this leaves him in a class by himself. None of Caesar's officers from the 50s and 40s enjoyed careers of similar length and success. In a limited sense, evaluations of Plancus are similar to those traditionally made of M. Lepidus; he, too, held high office under Caesar and obviously enjoyed his confidence. Because Lepidus later fell from power in a humiliating fashion, he has been dismissed as a nonentity or worse. Weigel's biography, *Lepidus the Tarnished Triumvir* is a welcome corrective. Along the same line, in *Magnus Pius* Welch has demonstrated that Sextus Pompey was of greater significance than has been traditionally recognized: he was a major player until his downfall in 36–35, not a mere pirate or brigand. Neither, however, is a good parallel to Plancus, who never had or sought triumviral powers or to control portions of the Roman Empire.

There is no denying Plancus' success, if durability in high office is the marker. His known career ran for over thirty years, from legate under Caesar in 54 to censor under Augustus in 22, and perhaps a few more years. Carter has remarked that Plancus "was one of the most distinguished, astute, and unprincipled survivors of the civil wars."[3] Similarly, Osgood summarizes him as "if anything, a survivor" who enjoyed "a remarkable career" and has been "almost universally condemned."[4] Those who kept their heads and remained prominent throughout this chaotic age were necessarily capable and flexible. They incited jealousy and hatred in those who dropped out of, or were eliminated from, the competition – and their heirs and admirers.

We can accept, then, that Plancus in one sense is a type: the survivor, able to shift positions repeatedly and emerge on the winning side each time. But he was not just a survivor, and adaptability need not mean a total lack of principles or treacherous conduct, as it fails to consider influence. Alcibiades is similar in the twists and turns of his career. The agile Greek would have found a more historical parallel in Plancus than the quasi-mythological Coriolanus whom Plutarch used to illustrate the art of changing sides in times of political turmoil. Unlike Alcibiades, however, Plancus was almost always in a subordinate position to a superior – first Caesar, then Antony, and finally Octavian/Augustus. He was, in short, a reliable "number two" man. The only exception was in 44–43 when he was governor of Gallia Comata and one of several commanders of substantial armies. Like the others, he maneuvered carefully and cautiously in the evolving struggle between Antony and Octavian. Even when one of the consuls in 42 and so occupying the leading magistracy in the state, he was beneath the triumvirs.

In Tudor England, an equally tumultuous age, we find an analog in Sir Richard Rich (1496–1567). Cooperating with Henry VIII in the break from Rome, he committed perjury to assist his sovereign in gaining a "confession" from the

steadfast Catholic Sir Thomas More in 1535, joined in the torture of the Protestant Anne Askew, and acquired lands from dissolved monasteries. Participants in the Pilgrimage of Grace of 1536 linked his name with Archbishop Cranmer and Secretary Cromwell – against whom Rich testified in 1540. Under the young king Edward VI, Rich adhered to the rising Calvinist brand of Protestantism promoted by the Duke of Northumberland. When the reactionary Mary Tudor acceded in 1553 Rich rejoined the old church and founded a boys' school in Felsted (his home town) to train the young in the true faith. A few years later he adhered to Elizabethan Anglicanism. In 1559 he voted for the Act of Supremacy to protect his property but against the Act of Uniformity since the Mass saved his soul. Only a flexible conscience could go halfway on the *via media* of the Church of England.[5]

Two and a half centuries later, Talleyrand (1754–1838) personifies political adaptability. Born into an illustrious family of the *Ancien Regime* and compelled by his parents to enter the church (as a cripple, the military was barred to him), he became bishop of Autun, but advocated the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in 1790. He survived the Terror, in part by visiting the United States, and served as foreign minister under the Directory. Coming to scorn the five directors, Talleyrand worked with Napoleon to replace them with the three consuls and then in 1804 helped make First Consul Napoleon emperor. Napoleon kept Talleyrand as foreign minister and elevated him to grand chamberlain, then in 1806 prince and Duke of Benevento. (Interestingly, Plancus distributed land at Benevento in 41 and boasted of it on his epitaph.) The next year Talleyrand's disapproval of Napoleon's infinite expansionism led him to leave the government. He reappeared at the Restoration in 1814, now in the service of Louis XVIII, and represented France at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. He continued to be active in foreign affairs up into the July monarchy of Louis Philippe in the 1830s.[6]

Talleyrand, Rich, and Plancus illustrate the art of political pliability, of long careers in tumultuous times, of service under various masters. In magnitude the changes in England 1534–1563 and France 1789–1830 are comparable to those in Rome between 54 and 22 BC.

The discontinuous evidence on Plancus does not permit a full biography. The fullest survey is E. Jullien, *Histoire de L. Munatius Plancus*, a sympathetic account of the founder of Lugdunum (Lyon), which is now well over a century old and severely outdated.[7] More recent studies have improved our understanding of this critical period, and it is now possible to argue that Plancus was more able, better "connected," and perhaps more prominent and less selfish than has been generally recognized.

The shortages in our evidence do not, however, leave us stranded and without hope. Bits and pieces allow the assembly of a reasonable and, it is to be hoped, convincing assessment of Plancus' career and significance. The remainder of this opening chapter surveys these fragmentary sources, and the ensuing chapters assemble them into a coherent whole. To begin with, we have only a tiny bit of evidence as to his father Lucius (the name is attested on Plancus' epitaph) and none at all as to the identity of his mother or wife. This is greatly to be regretted from a prosopographical point of view; the names of mother and wife or wives and more distant kin would help us align the Munatii Planci socially and politically. He had

one, maybe two, brothers. M. Titius, the consul of 31, is labelled his nephew, son of Plancus' sister. No other relatives are on record. Since Cicero tutored the young Plancus, it seems safe to infer that the great orator and Plancus' father were at least acquainted. He is generally said to be from Tibur (Tivoli), but my reassessment shifts his family homeland to the area around Caieta (Gaeta) and gives him a villa near Tibur. As he was consul in 42 and Caesar adhered to the terms of the *Lex Annalis*, we can posit a birth date at about 84. His last certain appearance is as censor in 22.

Few people have lived on such close terms to persons of the first rank as did Plancus. He knew Cicero from boyhood and Caesar for at least the final decade of the latter's life; they were fifteen to twenty years older than he. Lepidus, Decimus and Marcus Brutus, Cassius, Asinius Pollio, and Antony were close contemporaries. Vergil, Horace, and Octavian were fifteen to twenty years younger, but he knew both poets, too. Memoirs of his service justifying his caution and shifts in loyalty throughout his career, highlighting his prominence and rebutting his detractors, would make fascinating and informative reading, but there is no sign that Plancus ever wrote them.[8] Some points would have required delicate handling and careful writing, for instance, his role in late 44–43, after 32, and in proposing "Augustus" in 27.

The earliest evidence for his career is a few passing references in the Caesarian corpus.[9] Far more helpful is the correspondence with Cicero in the tenth book of *ad Familiares* and dating from September 44 to the following July: an exchange of letters with Cicero and copies of dispatches from Plancus in Gaul to the Senate. Cicero also sent two letters to Plancus' legate C. Furnius. In none of these letters are there any casual remarks, no best wishes or inquiries about personal matters such as family, friends, or health: all are pure business and deal with the evolving political-military crisis. These letters are only a small portion of Cicero's enormous correspondence from these hectic years, and they have to be read in their broader context. The few letters from Plancus, more than we have from the hand of Antony, Lepidus, or Pollio, give a peek into his cautious political and military maneuvering, but as already noted we must be lacking other letters to and from Cicero and his correspondence with others. There is also one other letter from Cicero in 46 included in the letters of recommendation.[10] These letters all date to a very tightly defined period in Plancus' career, 46 and eight months in 44–43. No other primary evidence exists save the epitaph.

Plancus is not mentioned in any of Cicero's letters to other people, though a brother and either another brother or cousin do appear. He appears five times in the *Philippic* orations but in no other speeches. The value of the Ciceronian corpus is limited, as most writers felt it necessary to be less than fully candid. One never knew whether one's messenger or courier might break a seal and reveal a letter's content to parties other than the addressee. The impetuous Cicero, however, flattered Plancus and strove mightily to get him to lead his army in Cicero's grand crusade to crush Antony and save the state. Plancus had a different view of the situation, formed his own opinions, and acted as he thought best. He was polite but noncommittal: in other words, time-serving if one takes a negative view. More careful men than Cicero realized that this was not a time for rash action. While Plancus certainly wanted to preserve his career (especially the designated consulship for

42), he also wished to avoid a renewal of civil war with the uncertainties of the battlefield. Many were convinced that caution was preferable to boldness.

Also to be regarded as primary source material is his *elogium*, the funerary inscription over the door of the imposing hilltop mausoleum overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea from a height of 167 meters at Caieta (Gaeta) on Monte Orlando some 130 kilometers south of Rome and two-thirds of the way to Naples. See Figures 1.1 and 1.2.

L MVNATIVS L F L N L PRON/
PLANCVS COS CENS IMP ITER VII VIR/
EPVLON TRIVMP EX RAETIS AEDEM SATVRNI/
FECIT DE MANIBIIS AGROS DIVISIT IN ITALIA/
BENEVENTI IN GALLIA COLONIAS DEDVXIT/
LVGVDUNUM ET RAVRICAM/

Lucius Munatius Plancus (son, grandson, and great-grandson of Lucius) [was] consul,
censor, twice victorious general, a member of the priestly college the *Septemviri*
Epulonum. He triumphed over the Raeti [in modern Switzerland and] built the Temple of Saturn [in the Forum at Rome] from the spoils of war. He divided lands in Italy at Beneventum. In Gaul he founded the colonies of Lugdunum and
Raurica [Lyon and Augst, near Basel].[11]

Figure 1.1 The mausoleum of L. Munatius Plancus on Monte Orlando at Gaeta

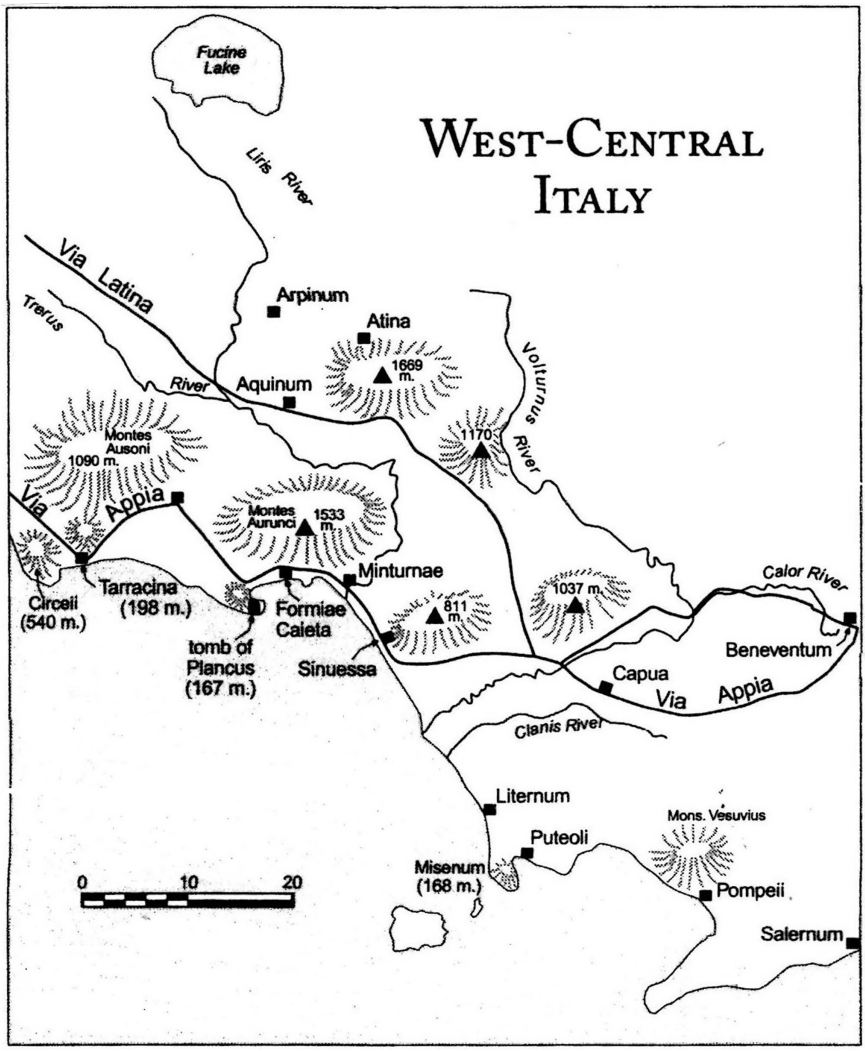

Figure 1.2 West-central Italy

This epitaph, his *res gestae*, or deeds, is similar to many others at first glance, such as those of the Scipios. Like most *elogia*, it is factual and truthful as far as it goes, but it does not give the entire truth. In many ways, the omissions are as interesting as the contents, and they will be analyzed in the following chapters. He probably chose the words himself, and thus tells readers how he wished to be remembered through the ages. There is nothing about any offices held before the consulship. The text passes over without comment his career under both Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. Nor does it mention that he proposed the name "Augustus" for

Octavian in the Senate in January 27.[12] It was wise not to highlight his years of high rank and service to Antony; and with regard to his role in 27, one can assume that he thought it best not to encroach in any way upon the status and glory of the *princeps*. The very shape of his mausoleum, mirroring that of Augustus in Rome, was sufficient. With four chambers opening off the interior ring corridor, the mausoleum was obviously intended for subsequent generations of his family, and it is possible he might have transferred ashes of ancestors there as well, but no other inscriptions from the tomb are known.

The mausoleum was constructed in the late 20s, only a few years after that of Augustus and is one-third its diameter: 29.5 meters (100 Roman feet) vs. 87 meters. It is closely contemporary and similar in dimensions to two other well-preserved mausolea: those of Caecilia Metella on the Via Appia and of the Plautii Silvani at Ponte Lucano on the Via Tiburtina. The former has the same diameter as Plancus' – 29.5 meters but stands slightly taller at 11 meters vs. 8.8; the latter is about 17.3 meters in diameter and some 6 meters to the cornice. These drum-shaped mausolea had conical earthen tumuli above the masonry rising another 8 or 9 meters and were topped by a statue or trophy. The mounds are long gone, replaced by Medieval crenellations. Plancus' epitaph mentions the censorship of 22,[13] permitting the inference that construction was in the preceding few years. Caecilia was the wife of a son of the triumvir Crassus, so her tomb can be dated to the early years of Augustus. The sepulcher of the Plautii is probably a bit newer, as the oldest tomb is that of the consul of 2 BC, M. Silvanus.

Typical of Roman *elogia* and different from modern tombstones, there is no reference to the deceased's date of birth or death and no allusion to mother, wife, or children. Paternal lineage indicates descent; and oddly in this formal context, the tribe (voting district) is omitted, but the great-grandfather's *nomen* is provided. That is to say, Plancus was the fourth consecutive Lucius Munatius Plancus, each the eldest son of his father. The importance of this rather peculiar designation is considered in the next chapter. Later sources, notably Tacitus, provide information on his grandchildren, a consul of AD 13 and the notorious Munatia Plancina who died in 33 after years of friendship with Livia and rivalry with the elder Agrippina. Whether the brother and sister were buried at Caieta is unknown.

The mausoleum dominates a long stretch of the coast. The spectacular location is another witness of Plancus' judgment. Monte Orlando is less than one-third the height of Monte Circeo to the north, but the port of Caieta made it a landmark for sailors. At the very top was either a trophy complementing the military ornamentation of the frieze or a statue of Plancus, likely gilt and gleaming in the sun and visible for miles out to sea. Gaeta is one of the few deep-water ports along the west coast of Italy. Fearing an Allied landing as the battle lines moved north from Salerno, the Germans fortified it in World War II, placing an anti-aircraft battery adjacent to the mausoleum. Allied bombing or shelling inflicted damage, but it has been repaired and the area is now a park and nature preserve.

Possibly the enhanced prominence of Caieta in the 20s suggested to Vergil, then writing the *Aeneid*, the idea of inserting a reference to the place in the epic at the start of book 7. Alternatively, it has been suggested[14] that Plancus deftly

engineered a bit of propaganda on his own behalf. Having already associated himself with Caesar Octavian since 32 and significantly by proposing "Augustus" in 27, he now took advantage of Vergil's recent commemoration of Caieta in the *Aeneid* to strengthen his standing with Augustus by constructing a mausoleum for himself on the very site where Caieta had been entombed many centuries ago. If this is correct, the tomb is Plancus' ultimate act of ingratiation and time-serving. His monument has withstood the stresses of the centuries better than has Augustus' in Rome.

Having left the faint-hearted on Sicily, Aeneas set sail for Italy but lost his helmsman Palinurus on the crossing. Cape Palinurus is named in his honor. Another old companion, Misenus, died not long after landing in Italy, and his ashes were buried in a tumulus near Cumae. Following the visit to the Underworld, Aeneas journeyed up the coast toward Latium.[15] *En route* he put to shore to conduct the funeral of his old *nutrix* (nurse, governess) Caieta.[16] She is an obscure figure, not in the earlier narrative, and the poet says nothing of her services, so readers are left uninformed as to the ties between her and Aeneas. All we have is the melancholy apostrophe:

> Tu quoque litoribus nostris, Aeneia nutrix,
> Aeternam moriens famam, Caieta, dedisti:
> Et nunc servat honos sedem tuus, ossaque nomen
> Hesperia in magna, si qua est ea gloria, signat.
>
> In death you confer eternal fame (*famam*) on our shores; your reputation (*honos*) preserves the site and its name in turn marks your remains in great Hesperia – if indeed that can be called glory (*gloria*).[17]

Might this passage, easily overlooked between the solemn book 6 and the landing on the Latin shore in book 7, refer to Plancus? Certainly, his tomb increased the fame of the place; *moriens*, he too *aeternam famam dedit*. His *honos* was his political career, the *cursus honorum* outlined on his epitaph, perhaps just then being mounted over the mausoleum's door. The lines in the epic perform several functions. Primarily Vergil intended to illustrate Aeneas' *pietas* toward his former nanny and to underline the hero's growing isolation as members of his Trojan family and band die off – his wife Creusa before they left the homeland, his father Anchises on Sicily, Palinurus and Misenum barely in Italy, and now Caieta.[18] Vergil was also commenting on the shallowness of earthly glory and providing an explanation of how the place acquired its name, as he had earlier done with capes Palinurus and Misenum. Further, 7.1–4 link the two halves of the *Aeneid*.[19]

To return to the sources, Horace, who probably knew Plancus, dedicated an ode to him and mentioned him at last once more, perhaps twice, and these poems receive a fresh interpretation later.[20] Velleius Paterculus, born about the time Plancus' career came to an end, provided the most hateful verdicts. He accused Plancus of proscribing his brother, a charge which other writers pick up but which I reject, and characterized him as "*morbo proditor*" ("diseased or congenital

traitor") and "*humillimus adsentator*" ("scrounging flatterer"). A well-known passage describes Plancus, costumed as the merman Glaucus, slithering on the floor at one of the banquets of Antony and Cleopatra, presumably to the delight of hosts and assembled guests.[21] This colorful episode has been damaging to Plancus' reputation over the centuries, and few writers have been unable to resist referring to it. But in reality, it was harmless relaxation typical of Roman nobles in off-duty hours, less than dignified to be sure, but certainly less harmful than Octavian's masquerading as Apollo and possibly ravishing Livia when she was still another's wife at a similar banquet about the same time. The Plancus-as-Glaucus incident seems to have been a solitary occasion, and there is nothing to indicate that Plancus lived a dissolute life. In *Ode* 1.7 Horace advised him to set aside his cares and worries, to have a drink and relax, and there is no sign that Plancus ever exceeded this recommendation.

Velleius' hatred is largely unfounded,[22] but the reasons for it have never been fully explained. In part, it reflects the propaganda of the 30s and early 20s, the world before and after the battle of Actium, in which the Augustan victors blackened the reputation of the Antonian losers. Second, Velleius' pro-Tiberian attitudes mirror the AD 20s, the complex and highly politicized events after the death of Germanicus. Tiberius struggled to deal with his mother Livia and Germanicus' widow Agrippina the Elder. Livia was a patron of Plancus' granddaughter Munatia Plancina, who Agrippina was convinced was partly responsible for her husband's sudden and mysterious death. Thanks to the intervention of Livia, Plancina escaped trial altogether, as her case was dismissed and never heard.[23] Discussion of the scandals and confusion comes in the Epilogue and is touched on here because it helps us understand the prevailing negative assessment of Plancus.

Cicero's personal longtime knowledge of Plancus ought to cancel Velleius' slanders to some extent, but as already noted, Cicero was striving to persuade Plancus to heed his advice, not serving as an impartial observer; and, of course, Cicero's testimonies come to an end in 43 when Plancus' career had many years ahead of it. Indeed, Cicero could have provided a wealth of personal information about Plancus – physical appearance, family members – but did not, at least in the surviving correspondence. It is a pity that we do not have Cicero's candid assessment of Plancus in a letter to some third party similar to that which M. Brutus wrote to Atticus with regard to Cicero. Also in a hostile manner, Seneca noted Plancus' reputation as the greatest flatterer before Vitellius (three times consul under Claudius and father of the emperor of AD 69).[24]

There are a few anecdotal references to Plancus. Pliny has four in his *Natural History*, two of them of some significance to this study. Toward the end of his Preface, he reports a squabble between Plancus and Asinius Pollio. Pollio was another Caesarian officer but after his consulship dropped out of politics and spent the next thirty-five years studying, writing, and engaging in literary criticism. He seems to have been bitter and resentful, sharply hostile toward all those with whom he disagreed, in politics as well as literature. Pollio and Plancus quarreled over some unknown matter, and Pollio prepared speeches to be used against him, to be delivered only after Plancus' death. Refusing to be drawn into

this controversy, Plancus responded pithily, "*cum mortuis non nisi larvas luctari*" ("only ghosts fight with the dead"). The loss of Pollio's history of the period 60–30 is to be regretted, as it must have included many references to Plancus in his narrative, with critical anecdotes sprinkled along the way. Indeed, Pollio is said to have persuaded him to follow his lead and join Antony in the summer of 43. Plutarch and Appian use Pollio, and they probably picked up hostility toward Plancus.[25] Similarly, his correspondence has vanished except for a few letters to Cicero. It would be most valuable to know what he wrote to Antony in 43.

Pliny's other noteworthy reference to Plancus is that he was the referee at the banquet when Cleopatra demonstrated her ability to exceed Antony in wastefulness by arranging a meal which consumed an enormous sum of money.[26] She topped Antony by supposedly dissolving a pearl earring of staggering value in a cup of vinegar and then before she could dispose of its mate the same way was stopped by Plancus. The sources do not date or locate this fabulous repast. Plutarch mentions that the queen hosted sumptuous banquets for Antony at Tarsus in 41, but he does not mention either the pearl earring or Plancus. Since Plancus was still in Italy all through 41 and into 40, the feast cannot have been held at Tarsus. Pliny the Elder tells the story in the midst of his discussion of pearls, mentions Plancus, but does not locate it. As will emerge from further discussion in Chapter 6, the importance of this anecdote is not so much that it illustrates the lavish lifestyle of Cleopatra and Antony as that it corroborates other evidence as to Plancus' high standing at the court of Alexandria in 35–33. Pliny's two other allusions to Plancus are of little value: that three suns appeared during his consulship, and that when *imperator* he placed a painting of Victoria on the Capitol.[27] Both presumably belong in 42. Plancus was *imperator* a second time, but as this occurred about 35 when he was with Antony, it is not likely to have been the occasion for setting up a painting on the Capitol.

The windings of Plancus' career have attracted much attention, for he worked with a series of persons who were political enemies of one another, and at each stage he came out ahead. He witnessed the transition from the traditional *res publica* to the Principate. My task is to attempt to determine the extent to which he was more than a witness. It is argued here that he was far more than a bystander and peripheral participant, but a figure of considerable, though hidden, influence. The labels "smooth" and "the great careerist"[28] are as close to a favorable assessment as any modern historian has come. It is doubtful that Plancus was any less principled than most political figures of his time, but he was spectacularly successful in his flexibility, and this success provoked jealous enmity and hostile comments. He was never accused of *ferocia*, ruthlessness, in politics. Most would say that he lacked the principles to be *ferox*. One cannot conceive of Plancus as so attached to a body of political or philosophical beliefs that he would commit suicide if his side lost: he was no Cato. Nor did he achieve notoriety by leading his army against fellow citizens, as he tried hard not to go to war in 44–43. There is no evidence of profligacy, rampant sexual immorality, provincial misgovernment, grabbing properties for a song during the proscription much of which occurred during his consulship in 42, or wasting wealth in conspicuous consumption.[29] He

was certainly rich, but he did not gain his wealth through illegal means, unless one chooses to regard Roman militarism and thus Plancus' triumph as proof of corrupt cultural values.

Much to the frustration of historians who would like to use prosopography to place Plancus socially and politically, we know next to nothing about the women in Plancus' life; their presence is conspicuously absent from the many accounts. In his *Saturnalia* (2.2.6), written in the AD 430s but set in 382, Macrobius reports a tidbit to Plancus' discredit:

> Post hunc Caecina Albinus: 'Plancus in iudicio forte amici, cum molestum testem destruere vellet, interrogavit, quia sutorem sciebat, quo artificio se tueretur. Ille urbane respondit: "gallam subigo." Sutorium hoc habetur instrumentum, quod non infacete in adulterii exprobrationem ambiguitate convertit. Nam Plancus in Maevia Galla nupta male audiebat.
>
> After him [Symmachus], Caecina Albinus spoke up. 'When by chance Plancus was in court on behalf of a friend and wanted to destroy a bothersome witness whom he knew to be a shoemaker, asked by what skills he maintained himself. 'I grind gall-nuts' he replied slickly, for this is an implement used in that trade. Using the double meaning of 'subigere', he thus wittily converted it into a charge of adultery, for Plancus was being bad-mouthed because of adultery with the married Maevia Galla.

This is certainly our Plancus; as presented, the incident is without context but (assuming its reality) best suits the years before he left Italy in 40. Maevia Galla is unknown, but the *nomen* points to social standing outside the Roman aristocracy, and "Galla" is too common to be helpful. The joke depends on the double meaning of *subigere*, primarily "to grind, knead" but secondarily, to engage in sex. The *sutor* ground gall-nuts as part of his occupation, but Plancus adulterously "ground or kneaded" Galla. The Loeb translation misses the off-color joke by making Plancus a cuckold: "for Plancus' reputation was suffering because of Maevia Galla, to whom he was married." The *sutor*'s snide comment justifies his own occupation but attacks Plancus' doings. Much better is this: the shoemaker charged "Plancus with adultery, for stories were going round of his association with one Maevia Galla, a married woman."[30] We get a pun but leave Plancus without a known wife. Another interesting point is that this is the only slur of sexual misconduct against Plancus. Velleius, who never missed a chance to say something bad about Plancus, does not mention this incident; he must not have known of it because his source (Pollio?) did not bring it up. Romans were fond of hurling charges of sexual immorality against their opponents, and as this is the only such charge against Plancus, it seems safe to conclude that nobody could find anything of significance to use. His faults were subservience, flattery, and switching sides.

Plancus' physical appearance is unknown, as no ancient writer describes him. Two marble statues have been tentatively identified as of Plancus, in both cases because they were found in places associated with him. Neither was labelled Plancus. The evidence is unconvincing, and few experts accept the identification.

Figures 1.3 and 1.4 are of these statues, included as part of the presentation of evidence, not out of any conviction that either is of Plancus. Both should be left anonymous. For a start, they do not resemble one another: they are of different people. The statue shown in Figure 1.3 is quite well known. R. Paribeni found it in the Temple of Hercules Victor at Tivoli in 1925 and argued that because Plancus was of Tiburtine origins, the statue must be of him. This hypothesis is weak on the face of it, as there must have been a multitude of statues of the many wealthy Romans who had villas in and around Tibur. If I am correct that he was not from Tibur, the hypothesis collapses. Most scholars refer to it as "the general from Tivoli" and date it to roughly 75–50.[31] A full-sized photograph of the statue stands in the corridor of the mausoleum, however, so the Italian archaeological authorities convey the impression that Plancus' appearance is known. Kleiner's assessment can be taken as representative of the current majority opinion: "the Tivoli general" was fashioned sometime between 75 and 50 and is an example of "the republican veristic style" or "Romanized Hellenistic type." The muscular torso is topped by the head of a much older man "with lined forehead, bags under his eyes, prominent crow's feet, creased cheeks and neck, and sagging jowls."[32] If the statue is not later than 50, its subject is not Plancus. He would only have been about 34 at that time, far younger than this elderly subject, and he had not done anything of sufficient significance to justify a heroic statue of himself: his accomplishments lay several years in the future.

The other statue, Figure 1.4, is a herm found in the early 1800s in the Jardin des Plantes at Lyon, the city which Plancus founded as the colony of Lugdunum in 43. It was originally paired with a herm of the philosopher Zeno of Citium and may have been part of a gallery of portrait herms gracing a garden in the town. They were copies of lost (bronze?) originals and apparently date to the late Julio-Claudian period. Like the general from Tivoli, the anonymous herm from Lyon exhibits many of the artistic features of the veristic style. A recent analysis of the statue concludes that, lacking a certain representation of Plancus for comparison, in the present state of our evidence the portrait must remain anonymous.[33] On chronological grounds this herm has a slightly better chance of being Plancus than does the Tivoli general, as it could have been made soon after the colony's foundation as a commemoration of its *deductor*, say about 40, but the evidence is not convincing. The subject was a real person, probably one prominent in Lugdunum's early years, but we do not know his identity.

Any effort to reassess Plancus, to go beyond sources long available and the repetitive verdicts found in most histories and commentaries, must make liberal use of inference, and the following chapters have much speculation. One chapter's hypotheses ought not to become the next chapter's established facts, but at the same time one can only construct an entire case by building on hypotheses. Extensive reliance on "possibly" and its synonyms is admirably honest but makes for irritating reading.

The next chapter shifts Plancus' family home from Tibur to southern Latium and northern Campania and posits old ties to the locally prominent Tullii Ciceroes and the powerful Roman patrician family of the Aemilii Lepidi. These

Figure 1.3 Statue found at Tivoli and sometimes identified as Plancus