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Looking for a *Conditor*. Munatius Plancus and the Cultural History of Basel from Cicero to the 20th Century

In 1957, the city of Basel celebrated the bimillenary of its foundation that traditionally went back to Lucius Munatius Plancus, Caesar's general in the Alpine region and first governor of the new province of Gallia Comata.¹ There is an intimate connection between Munatius Plancus and the city of Basel since this *imperator* is considered the founder of the city in 44/43 BC:² two thousand years later, the city celebrated this important anniversary with a series of events during the year, inside as well as outside the academic world.

Two academic works devoted to Plancus were published for the anniversary. The first was a German edition, with introduction and notes, of the correspondence between Plancus and Cicero in book 10 of Cicero's letters *Ad familiares* by the Basel scholar Gerold Walser (1917–2000), ancient historian and epigraphist, one of the founders of the international review *Historia*; the second was a study of Plancus' funerary monument in Gaeta by the Basel archaeologist Rudolf Fellmann (1925–2013), who had already authored the book *Basel in römischer Zeit* (1955).³ Both works were conceived not only as scientific contributions on the historical figure of Plancus, but also as civic tributes to the city founder from within the community of citizens. Introducing Fellmann's book, the archaeologist Rudolf Laur-Belart cites Plancus' own words addressed to Cicero and states:

¹ This study of Plancus originated in summer 2019 as a talk to be presented at the conference *Cicero in Basel*. In November 2019 a book by Stefan Hess, *Die Suche nach dem Stadtgründer*, was published (but © 2020; I wish to thank Prof Leonhard Burckhardt who kindly brought it to my attention): chapters IX–XI of the book treat the same subject as the present paper, as they deal with the figure of the city founder Munatius Plancus and his *Nachleben* from the 15th century to contemporary Basel. The reader will find that the two studies variously overlap, even in the title; this happened completely by chance, as they were done independently from each other: in this written version of my talk I will be often referring to Hess' work which was unknown to me by the time of my oral presentation at the conference.

² On the historical figure of Plancus see Hanslik 1933; Walser 1957a, 13–46; Mancini 2000; L. Burckhardt 2014.

³ Walser 1957a; Fellmann 1957.

*Optamus, ut nobis liceat iam praesenti pietate nostrorum officiorum vestra beneficia vobis facere iucundiora,*⁴ möchten wir der Jubilarin mit Munatius Plancus sagen, der diese Worte am 6. Juni des Jahres 43 v. Chr. aus Gallien an Cicero geschrieben hat.⁵

Outside the academy, events to celebrate the city's anniversary and to honour Plancus included public ceremonies, issues of celebratory stamps and coins with his portrait and even cartoons ironically representing Basel's strong health ("kerngesund") though well up in years.⁶

While Alice Borgna's contribution concentrates on the historical figure of Plancus and his different, even contradictory, attitudes in the crucial years of the civil wars and during the transition from the Republic to the Principate,⁷ this contribution will focus on the "myth" of Plancus, *Ciceronis discipulus*, as founder of Basel, and on his presence in the cultural history of the city that still calls him its founder. In short, we shall try to reconstruct how this myth developed in Basel and how the city honoured its Roman founder through the centuries.

The historical L. Munatius Plancus

The figure of Plancus is mostly known, as has been said, from his correspondence with Cicero in book 10 of Cicero's letters *Ad familiares*. Cicero's affection and admiration for his pupil are attested by various letters in which the great orator speaks of his *amor* for Plancus and gives him advice like a father to his son.⁸

As a general, Plancus was appointed governor of Transalpine Gaul in 44/43 BC and during this period he settled two Roman colonies in this area, Lugdunum (modern Lyon) and Raurica, modern Augst, the city seen as the ancestor of Basel.

4 Cic. *Fam.* 10.23.7. Plancus' own words are: *Opto, ut mihi liceat iam praesenti pietate meorum officiorum tua beneficia tibi facere iucundiora.*

5 Fellmann 1957, 5 ("We pray that we may be able in person to add by our devoted services to the pleasure you take in your benefactions, may we say to those who celebrate the anniversary with Munatius Plancus, who wrote these words to Cicero on 6 June 43 BC from Gaul." – Translations from Cicero's *Ad familiares* are quoted from Shackleton Bailey 2001; other translations are my own).

6 "2000 Jahre Basel. Diagnose: Kerngesund", is the title of the cartoon found on the cover of the satirical magazine *Nebelspalter* 83, 1957. On the ceremonies for the bimillenary see also Hess 2020, 136–140.

7 See Borgna in this volume, pp. 37–68.

8 See e.g. Cic. *Fam.* 10.1.2: *amoris mei, quem a tua pueritia susceptum non servavi solum, sed etiam auxi* ("The steadfast and indeed increasing affection I have entertained for you ever since you were a boy"); *Fam.* 10.5.3: *sic moneo ut filium* ("I admonish you as a son").

Plancus' settlement of Lugdunum, a town that three decades later would become famous for being the birthplace of the emperor Claudius, is a well-known historical episode, also reported by literary sources.⁹ Conversely, evidence for Plancus' foundation of Raurica is scanty: the only reference to the episode comes from Plancus' funerary monument still surviving in Gaeta, a small town on the gulf of Naples where he owned a villa and where he was buried at his death, probably in 1 BC. Since the Middle Ages his mausoleum has gone under the name of "Torre d'Orlando". Over the main entrance of the monument an epigraph is still visible: according to Roman funerary custom, it summarises the deceased's political career, his deeds and merits:¹⁰

L. MVNATIVS L. F. L. N. L. PRON.
 PLANCVS COS. CENS. IMP. ITER. VII VIR
 EPVLON. TRIVMPH. EX RAETIS AEDEM SATVRNI
 FECIT DE MANVBIIS AGROS DIVISIT IN ITALIA
 BENEVENTI IN GALLIA COLONIAS DEDVXIT
 LVGDVNVM ET RAVRICAM

Lucius Munatius, son of Lucius, grandson of Lucius, great grandson of Lucius, Plancus, consul, censor, imperator twice, member of the septemviri epulonum, he celebrated a triumph over the Raeti, he built the temple of Saturn with the war booty, he shared lands around Beneventum among his veterans, in Gaul he settled the colonies of Lugdunum and Raurica.

The most important statement for our concern is the last: after recording Plancus' *cursus honorum*, the epigraph says that "in Gaul he settled the colonies of Lugdunum and Raurica"; this is the only ancient evidence for a connection between Plancus and Raurica. The colony supposedly established by Plancus in 44/43 BC may be seen as the first stage of Colonia Augusta Raurica that was definitely settled during the Principate of Augustus (archaeological evidence goes back to 15 BC); today Augst is a small town some 20 km from Basel which boasts an important archaeological site and an amphitheatre. So Plancus' Raurica is traditionally seen as the Roman ancestor of modern Basel. Accordingly, 1957 was the year of the bimillenary of both Augst and its daughter-town Basel. The resonance of the bimillenary shows how important the cult of the origins was for the city. Let us consider how it developed.

⁹ See Seneca *epist.* 91.14 and *apoc.* 6.1. On Plancus' settlement of Lugdunum see Jullien 1892, 93–125.

¹⁰ *CIL* X 6087.

The renaissance of Plancus in Basel

First of all, a caveat should be made about the purpose of this survey. It will deal with the *cultural* tradition of the foundation of Basel and *not* with the complex problem of the actual origins of the city as posed by archaeological evidence, a much-disputed issue that I am not going to consider here.¹¹ Suffice it to say that there is no actual coincidence between the founding of Basel and Augusta Raurica, which have in fact different origins. While Raurica was probably founded by Plancus, there had already been a 2nd century BC Celtic foundation on the site of modern Basel. However, since archaeological evidence seems to reveal a Roman presence in Basel in the years 46–10 BC, it has been suggested that Plancus' Raurica should be identified with the site of modern Basel, in particular the area of the Münsterhügel.¹² This hypothesis, however, cannot explain why the Roman colony established by Plancus in 44/43 BC would have been transferred after only a few years (i.e. by about 15 BC) to the site of modern Augst, a city that would consistently develop in the first two centuries AD, reaching in 200 AD the number of 20.000 inhabitants. The problem remains unsolved. Moreover, as recently as 2004 archaeological excavations have revealed graves that date back to the end of the Bronze era, pushing back the original settlement of the town to a time even before the Celtic invasion of the region.

As a matter of fact, the development of Basel was favoured by the decline of Augusta Raurica, which suffered from raids of the German tribe of the Alamanni from the 3rd century AD on and whose inhabitants fled to the site that would become Basilia.¹³

The need to provide Basel with a 'proper' founder, suitable to the cultural and economic importance the city had acquired, was particularly felt during the Renaissance, when Basel became a stronghold of European culture and Humanism, especially after the establishment of the University in 1460. Among the schol-

11 On this subject there has been much debate among historians and archaeologists: for an up-to-date survey on the debate and a detailed overview on recent scholarly tendencies see Hess 2020, 140–148. On the problems raised by the identification of Plancus' Raurica (Basel or Augst) see also Berchtold 1991, vol. 1, 33–36.

12 See on this Hess 2020, 140.

13 Even the origins of the name are obscure: the humanist Beatus Rhenanus connected the name Basilia to the Latin word *passus* ('ford', 'river crossing'): *puto Basileam dictam [. . .] a traiectu, quem lingua Romanensis, hoc est Gallica, passum vocat* (Rhenanus 1551, 147; Mundt 2008, 324). Its apparent connection with the Greek word *basileus* ('king') is unclear and probably groundless (unless we suppose a derivation from a personal name *Basilios* or from a late-antique, Greek-speaking king). More recently, a Celtic origin has been suggested for the name, connecting it to the Celtic words *basios* ('boar') or *wasal* ('water'): see discussion in Hess 2020, 146–148.

ars who settled in Basel and contributed to its cultural flourishing was the Alsatian Humanist Beatus Rhenanus (1485–1547), a great editor and commentator of ancient texts and one of the luminaries of the *Humanistenstadt*. Rhenanus was and is to be considered the father of the cult of Plancus in Basel who renewed the myth of Raurica as its ancestor city. In particular, he fostered the image of Plancus as a learned general: a strong *imperator* who won over the Raeti but also a fine orator who had studied in Cicero's school and was therefore an adequate candidate to the role of *conditor* of a Humanist city. But how did Rhenanus come to know about Plancus?

Scholars agree¹⁴ that Rhenanus discovered the connection between Raurica and Plancus, documented by the Gaeta monument, thanks to the encyclopedic work *Commentariorum Vrbanorum libri octo et triginta* by the Italian Humanist Raffaello Maffei from Volterra (Raphael Volaterranus, 1451–1522), published in Rome in 1506 and then in Paris in 1511 (another edition appeared in Basel in 1530). A copy of this monumental work was in Rhenanus' possession at the time of his stay in Basel.¹⁵ In volume 18 of this work, in a section devoted to *anthropologia*, Volaterranus presents the figure of Plancus and reports the Gaeta inscription, explicitly connecting Plancus with the modern city of Basilea in a passage that is certainly the source for Rhenanus' knowledge about the supposed *conditor* of Augst.¹⁶

L. Munatius Plancus, vir consularis et praetorius ac orator, Ciceronis discipulus. Ad quem sunt eius epistulae. Is dum Galliam comatam regeret, Lugdunum condidit, et Rauricam, quae nunc Basilea est, ut etiam ex ipsius inscriptione deprehenditur, quae adhuc Caietae in turri quadam dicitur Orlandi, legitur hoc modo eqs.

L. Munatius Plancus, man of consular and praetorian rank, and orator, pupil of Cicero. His letters to him are still extant. While he was governor of Gallia Comata, he settled Lugdunum and Raurica, now Basel, as we learn from an inscription by him that can still be read in Gaeta, in the tower called "of Orlando" etc.

After reporting the inscription, Volaterannus makes a harsh judgment on Plancus:

Magnus alioquin scurra fuit, patriae infidus, in quo maxime sperabatur.

Otherwise, he was a great joker, unfaithful to his motherland, that had great expectations on him.

¹⁴ Litwan 2014, 239–240; Hess 2020, 93.

¹⁵ It is extant in the *Bibliothèque humaniste de Sélestat* (shelf mark K1275), and has been digitised: http://bhnumerique.ville-selestat.fr/client/fr_FR/search/asset/4759, last accessed 20/05/24. Cf. the contribution by Alice Borgna to this volume, p. 40.

¹⁶ Maffei 1506, coll. 549–550.

Volaterranus refers to Plancus' ill repute as a *scurra* ("a buffoon") which had resulted in particular from the episode of his naked dancing, wearing a sea-god's tail, at the court of Cleopatra.¹⁷ Moreover, he criticises his unfaithfulness and political incoherence:¹⁸ Plancus kept a very ambivalent attitude during the war of Mutina (43 BC) and finally joined Antony and Lepidus, then he supported the triumvirs (in this period he is said to have denounced even his brother Plancus Plo-tius, who was put to death,¹⁹ as was Cicero, his former mentor) and he finally deserted Antony in 32 BC and went over to Octavian.²⁰

In summer/autumn 1528, ten years after the outbreak of the Protestant reform and shortly after the Senate of Basel had decreed the removal of holy images from several churches,²¹ a portrait of Plancus was commissioned from the painter Hans von Krotzingen²² to be put up in the *Fruchtmarkt* (the painting is now lost). This decision shocked a local historian from the nearby Catholic monastery of Guebwiller in Alsace: in the *Chronicle of the Dominicans of Guebwiller* it is recorded that while in Basel all the holy images found in five Catholic churches were being destroyed by the Protestants, the city decided to honour Plancus, a pagan, with a monument.²³

Dahero haben sie wiewohl mit höchsten Schmerzen die fünff Khürchen denen Lutherischen eingehändigt, in welchen sie ihren ketzerischen Unglauben undt Muethwillen getriben, die Bilder hin undt wider in der Khürchen undt auff den Altären, theils zerhauwen,

17 The episode of Plancus' exhibition is reported by Velleius Paterculus 2.83.2. Interestingly, Plancus' fame as a *scurra* is already known to Volaterranus, even though Velleius' work was discovered only in 1515 by Beatus Rhenanus in the Benedictine Abbey of Murbach (the *editio princeps* appeared in Basel in 1520: see Reynolds 1983c).

18 Volaterranus' moral judgement on Plancus reflects the traditional opinion on Plancus' double-dealing and opportunism; a hint at this can already be seen in a letter of Cicero to him (*Fam.* 10.3.3), where the orator says, *scis profecto* [. . .] *fuisse quoddam tempus cum homines existimarent te nimis servire temporibus* ("You are of course aware [. . .] that there was a period when the world thought you too much at service of the times"). On Plancus' lack of *fides* (*infidus*) our main source is again Velleius 2.63.3: *Plancus* [. . .] *dubia (id est sua) fide* ("Plancus, with his usual loose ideas of loyalty"), and 2.83.1: *morbo proditor* ("treachery was a disease with him"; translations of Velleius are quoted from Shipley 1961). Cf. Borgna in this volume, pp. 63–67.

19 Vell 2.67.3.

20 According to Velleius 2.83.1, he betrayed Antony for Octavian "not through any conviction that he was choosing the right, nor from any love of the republic or of Caesar [. . .] but because treachery was a disease with him" (*non iudicio recta legendi neque amore rei publicae aut Caesaris* [. . .] *sed morbo proditor*).

21 Litwan 2014, 238.

22 More details about the painting, its author, and the historical context to which it belongs are now to be read in Hess 2020, 94–100.

23 Berchtold 1991, vol. 1, 30; Litwan 2014, 238; *Chronique Guebwiller* 1844, 166–167.

theils aber verbrandt oder in der Rhein geworffen; [. . .] herentgegen haben sie des Lucii Munatii Planci, eines alten heidnischen Römers Bildsaul in mitten des Kornmarkhts auffgericht und gesetzt mit folgendter Ehrengeschriff, die also lautet [. . .].²⁴

The “laudatory inscription” referred to and quoted in the *Chronique* is a Latin text composed by Rhenanus for the painting that celebrated the Ciceronian orator and statesman and stated the monument’s aim to renovate the “abolished memory” of the city founder. The original inscription was lost together with the painting, but the identical text was also reported by Rhenanus in the section devoted to Basel in his *Rerum Germanicarum libri tres* (III, p. 147–148).²⁵

Si quid igitur post multa excidia miserae Augustae superfuit, hoc totum velut colonia quaedam Basileam commigravit. Hinc nos in Munatii Planci memoriam et illustrationem Basileae Alamannorum coloniae, huiusmodi inscriptionem composuimus, quae in foro frumentario sub imagine Munatii legitur:

“L. Munatio Planco, civi Romano, viro consulari et praetorio, oratorique ac M. Ciceronis discipulo, qui post devictos Rhetos, aede Saturni de manubiis extracta, non modo Lugdunum, sed et Rauricam coloniam deduxit, quae Augusta fuit appellata ab Octavio Augusto tum rerum potente, S.P.Q. Basiliensis tametsi Alemannorum transducti coloni, subactis ac depulsis Rauricis, amore tamen virtutis quae etiam in hoste venerationem meretur, vetustissimo tractus huius illustratori, culpa temporum prorsus abolitam memoriam postliminio renovarunt. Anno M.D.XXVIII”.

If something of the wretched Augusta survived after many disasters, all that moved to Basel as a sort of colony. For that reason we have composed such an inscription to the memory of Munatius Plancus and to the celebration of Basel, a colony of the Alamanni, which can be read in the grain market under the portrait of Munatius:

“To Lucius Munatius Plancus, Roman citizen, man of consular and praetorian rank, orator and pupil of Marcus Cicero, who after defeating the Raeti and building the temple of Saturn with the war booty, not only settled the colony of Lugdunum, but also that of Raurica, which was named Augusta by Octavius Augustus who seized power at that time: the senate and the people of Basel, even though they were established as a colony of the Alamanni after the Rauraci were defeated and expelled, nonetheless, moved by the love for virtue which arouses admiration even in an enemy, have renewed the memory, abolished by the fault of time, of the man who in ancient times dignified this region”.

24 “So they have, with the greatest suffering, handed the five churches over to the Lutherans, in which they practice their heretical faithlessness and malice, and have here and there partly chopped up, partly burnt, partly thrown into the Rhine the images found in the churches or on the altars; [. . .] conversely, they have erected a statue of Lucius Munatius Plancus, an ancient, pagan Roman in the middle of the corn market, and they have put the following laudatory inscription, that runs like this [. . .].”

25 Rhenanus 1551, 147–148; Mundt 2008, 326.

Rhenanus' inscription is clearly indebted to what he had read in Volaterranus' *Commentarium* (thus Plancus' presentation as *vir consularis et praetorius*, as *orator ac M. Ciceronis discipulus* clearly recalls Volaterranus' words). In his laudatory inscription, Beatus Rhenanus underlines the importance of the Ciceronian legacy in addition to Plancus' political and military merits, thus suggesting the presence of Cicero as spiritual father of the humanist city. However, Rhenanus, as an erudite scholar, knows that Basel was not actually founded by Plancus, and needs to justify his inscription and its purpose. In a quite convoluted sentence, he therefore explains that, even though Basel was settled as a colony of Alamanni who had expelled the Rauraci from their territory (*tametsi Alemannorum transducti coloni, subactis ac depulsis Rauricis*), nonetheless love for virtue arouses admiration even in an enemy (*amore tamen virtutis quae etiam in hoste venerationem meretur*): in other words, even though the Alamanni, ancestors of Basel, had destroyed the Roman Raurica and were *hostes* of the Romans, nonetheless their descendants in Basel honour the virtue of Plancus, struck by his valour and merits. At the end of the inscription, Plancus is praised as the most ancient glory of the whole region (*vetustissimo tractus huius illustratori*), whose memory had been erased by time, but was now brought back.

The aim of the inscription is clearly that of harmonizing two diverging identities of the city of Basel: on one hand its spiritual, classical, Roman heritage coming from Raurica and Plancus, on the other its actual, historical, German background that goes back to the invasion of the Alamanni. And the best person to promote such a conciliation between the Roman and the German "Geist" of Basel was of course Beatus Rhenanus, a German Humanist, whose fondness for classical antiquity went hand in hand with his deep interest in the history and traditions of the German people.

There is another work by Rhenanus in which we find an interesting hint of the origins of Basel. In 1515, Froben published his *Scholia in ludum L. Annaei Senecae de morte Claudii Caesaris*, a commentary on Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*,²⁶ whose text was based on the error-ridden *editio princeps* published in 1513 in Rome by the "German dilettante" Caius Sylvanus.²⁷ Commenting on a passage of the Latin text, Rhenanus suggested an emendation where his philological and historical skill goes hand in hand with his pride as a citizen of Basel.

At 6.1 Seneca mocks Claudius for his provincial birth in Lugdunum, saying (as we find in manuscripts): *Lugduni natus es, Marci municipem vides*, "you were born in Lyon, you see a fellow-townsmen of Marcus". The name *Marci* has always trou-

26 On this work by Rhenanus see André 2000 and Montepaone 2021, 41–53.

27 Reynolds 1983b; on this edition see also Montepaone 2021, 31–39.

bled scholars who find it difficult to explain convincingly who the Marcus might be who is mentioned in close connection with the city of Lugdunum. The most common view is that it is Mark Antony, who was the first *patronus* of Lugdunum after its foundation, but such a reference to Antony is quite odd in this context and, moreover, it would be very uncommon to call him just by his *praenomen*. Accordingly, the text of the manuscripts has been variously doubted by scholars.

Commenting on this passage, Beatus Rhenanus suggests emending *Marci* into *Munatii* in order to have a reference to Plancus, the founder of Lyon . . . and, of course, of Basel. His note is as follows:²⁸

Lugduni natus es, Marci municipem audis. Legendum credo Munatii. Lucius enim Munatius Plancus Lugdunum coloniam duxit et Rauricam, ex qua Basilea derivata est, urbs amoenissima, necnon optimis iuxta civibus ornata.

You were born in Lugdunum, you listen²⁹ to a fellow-townsmen of Marcus. I think that *Munatii* should be read (instead of *Marci*). Lucius Munatius Plancus, in fact, settled the colonies of Lugdunum and Raurica, whence Basilea originated, a very beautiful town, adorned with excellent citizens.

While emending Seneca's text, Rhenanus does not refrain from praising the beauty of Basel and the virtue of its citizens. A century later, Gronovius took inspiration from Rhenanus' conjecture as he suggested the emendation *Planci* for *Marci*. Rhenanus' emendation, providing for this passage a reference to the city's *conditor*, still figures in critical apparatuses to Seneca's work, and was adopted by P. T. Eden in his 1984 Cambridge edition of the *Apocolocyntosis*.³⁰

However, Rhenanus' proposal for this passage is not convincing. As two Italian scholars, Renata Roncali and Silvia Marcucci, have shown, the name Marcus probably conceals a wordplay to mock Claudius and should therefore be maintained. According to Roncali, who prints *marcus* (in lowercase) in her 1990 Teubner edition of the *Apocolocyntosis*, the name could refer to a kind of vineyard typical of Gaul, thus hinting at Claudius' usual drunkenness.³¹ On the other hand, Marcucci convincingly argues that Marcus, the most common of Roman names, often given to freedmen and provincials who had become Roman citizens, hints at Claudius' provincial birth,³² and, moreover, makes allusion to his project of ex-

²⁸ Rhenanus 1515, 7: the text is extant in the *Universitätsbibliothek Basel* (shelf mark DB VII 25:1) and has been digitised: https://www.e-rara.ch/bau_1/doi/10.3931/e-rara-40246, last accessed 20/05/24.

²⁹ Note that Rhenanus' reading is *audis* instead of the transmitted *vides*.

³⁰ Eden 1984, 89.

³¹ See Roncali 1973, 540.

³² Marcucci 1999, 421.

tending the *ius adipiscendorum honorum* to the *primores* of Gallia Comata.³³ Thus the transmitted text for this passage is probably correct, but Rhenanus' efforts to secure for this passage a reference to the mythical founder of Basel is of course noteworthy.



Fig. 1: The statue of L. Munatius Plancus in the courtyard of the *Rathaus* of Basel.
Image: © Kanton Basel-Stadt, <http://www.bs.ch/bilddatenbank>.

Following Plancus' revival promoted by Beatus Rhenanus, in 1580 the city honoured her *conditor* with another *Denkmal*, this time a statue of Plancus adorned with golden elements made by the Alsatian sculptor Hans Michel. It can still be seen today in Basel's *Rathaus* and is one of the city's most renowned monuments (Fig. 1). A new inscription, which recalls both that of Gaeta and the one composed by Rhenanus in 1528, was put under the statue, again celebrating Plancus as the founder of Raurica and *illustrator* of the whole region of modern Basel.³⁴

³³ On Claudius' project to allow the *primores* of Gallia Comata to become Roman senators see Tacitus *Ann.* 11.23–24.

³⁴ The author of this new Latin inscription is unknown: according to Hess 2020, 108 n. 264, it could be the jurist Basilius Amerbach, the son of Bonifacius, former dean of the University of Basel and close friend of Beatus Rhenanus.

HON. ET VIRTUTI L. MVNATHI L. F. L. N. L. PRON. PLANCI
 CO. IMP. ITER. VII VIRI EPVLONVM
 QVI TRIVMPH. EX RAETIS AEDEM SATVRNI F. EX MANVB.
 AGROS DIVISIT IN ITALIA BENEVENTI
 IN GALLIA COLONIAS DED. LVGDVNVM ATQ. RAVRICVM
 CIVITAS BASILENSIS
 EX BELLICOSISS. GENTE ALEMANNORVM
 IN RAVRICORVM FINES TRANSDVCTA
 SIMVLACRVM HOC EX SENATVS AVCT.
 DICANDVM STATVENDVMQ. CVRAVIT.
 AN. SAL. CHRISTIANAE
 CIO IO XXC

To the honour and virtue of Lucius Munatius, son of Lucius, grandson of Lucius, great grandson of Lucius, named Plancus, consul, imperator twice, member of the *sempiterni epulonum*, who celebrated a triumph over the Raeti, built the temple of Saturn with the war booty, shared lands in Italy around Beneventum, settled in Gaul the colonies of Lugdunum and Raurica. The city of Basel, descendant of the martial people of the Alamanni who migrated into the territories of the Raurici, through the senate's authority had this statue dedicated and established in the year of the Christian salvation 1580.

This new inscription is similar to that by Rhenanus: after listing the political and military merits of Plancus (*honori et virtuti*), it refers to the origins of Basel founded by the Alamanni, a *bellicosissima gens* who settled in the land of the Rauraci. This inscription, however, has no reference to Cicero as Plancus' teacher.

Plancus and the local historians

In the 16th century, then, Plancus gained a major place as one of Basel's glories especially thanks to Rhenanus' efforts. In the following centuries, references to this figure become a common topic of local histories and biographies. I therefore wish to conclude my paper with a look at different and even opposite ways Plancus is described in two important works dealing with the history of Basel:³⁵ the *Geschichte der Stadt und Landschaft Basel* by Peter Ochs and the biography of Plancus by Felix Staehelin for the series *Basler Biographien*.

Peter Ochs (1752–1821) was a Swiss diplomat, politician, and historian who championed in Switzerland a revolutionary reform inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution. He played a major role in the first period of the Helvetic Re-

³⁵ For the purposes of this study, I have selected some significant cases. For a detailed survey on the lasting fortune of Plancus in Basel in the 17th and 18th centuries see Hess 2020, 121–136.

public (1798–99) and became the first president of the Helvetic Senate. After being deposed in 1799, he spent the rest of his life in Basel. As a historian, he wrote a *Geschichte der Stadt und Landschaft Basel* (1786–1822) in eight volumes. In the section devoted to the origins of Basel, he obviously dwelt upon the figure of its supposed founder. As we have seen from Volaterranus' description, the historical Plancus is well known for his political incoherence and frequent tendency to engage in treachery, a character that might arouse moral misgivings even in his admirers. Ochs' judgement on Plancus is very harsh: he chastises his "Niederträchtigkeit" ("wickedness") and is particularly shocked by the episode of his naked dancing at the court of Cleopatra, to which we have already seen a reference in Volaterranus' work. As a consequence, Ochs feels ashamed that his compatriots could honour such a man as their city founder. But let us read Ochs' own words:

Zum Andenken dieses Munatius Plankus hat man, im Jahre 1528, im Hofe des Rathhauses, eine mit Gold und andern Farben angestrichene Bildsäule errichten lassen, welche diesen Erbauer der Stadt Rauricum vorstellen soll. In der am Fußgestell befindlichen Innschrift, wird gemeldet, daß es aus Verehrung und Liebe gegen Tugend oder Tapferkeit geschehen sei. Wir wollen glauben, daß unsere Altvordern entweder die Innschrift nicht verstanden, oder von der Aufführung des Munatius nichts gewußt haben. Warum haben sie nicht ehender diese Säule zu Augst, mitten unter den Trümmern, aufstellen lassen, und folgende Worte für die Innschrift gegeben: "So zerfällt das Werk des Ruchlosen".³⁶

Ochs here describes Basel's tributes to Plancus but confuses the various monuments found in the city. In fact, he wrongly dates Plancus' golden statue to 1528 (that is, instead, the year of the painting commissioned by the Senate for the *Fruchtmarkt*); moreover, he clearly cites Rhenanus' laudatory inscription (but without naming him) wrongly saying that it was put under the statue, while it was composed for the painting, as we have seen.³⁷

Apart from these errors, Ochs faithfully paraphrases Rhenanus' sentence *amore tamen virtutis quae etiam in hoste venerationem meretur* as he notes that the inscription speaks of "Verehrung und Liebe gegen Tugend oder Tapferkeit"

³⁶ Ochs 1786–1822, vol. 1, 92 ("In memory of this Munatius Plancus they erected a statue in the courtyard of the townhall, made of gold and adorned with other colours in the year 1528, representing this founder of the city of Rauricum. In the inscription found on the base it is said that it is made in admiration and love for virtue or valour. We would like to believe that our ancestors either did not understand the inscription, or did not know about Munatius' exhibition. Why did not they put this statue in Augst amidst the ruins, with the following words for the inscription: 'Thus decays the work of a wicked man'.")

³⁷ A clear allusion to Rhenanus' inscription may be seen in the words "Verehrung und Liebe gegen Tugend oder Tapferkeit" translating the Latin words *amore* [. . .] *virtutis*; interestingly, Ochs gives a double translation for the word *virtus*, both as "moral virtue" (Tugend) and as "military strength" (Tapferkeit). On Ochs' error see also Litwan 2014, 256.

(“admiration and love towards virtue and valour”). Now, according to Ochs, Plancus was anything but a virtuous man, so he ironically wonders whether his fellow citizens did not understand Latin, or they had ignored Plancus’ ‘behaviour’, alluding to his outrageous exhibition at the court of Cleopatra (“von der Aufführung des Munatius nichts gewußt haben”). Otherwise, he suggests, they would never have honoured him so magnificently. Thus Ochs seems to forgive his fellow citizens for their public tribute to Plancus only because he believes that they actually ignored the details of his conduct. Ochs concludes his criticism of Plancus with the ironic suggestion that another inscription should be written for Plancus instead of the official one, to be put not in Basel but among the ruins of Augst: “So zerfällt das Werk des Ruchlosen” (“thus decays the work of a wicked man”). According to this view, the ruins of Raurica, far from bearing record of a glorious past, become a memento of the *vanitas* and human wickedness embodied by the city’s founder.

In a later period, a biography of Plancus inaugurates the series *Basler Biographien*, biographies of famous Basel citizens, published in 1900. The author of Plancus’ biography is the Basel-born ancient historian Felix Staehelin, who wrote in 1927 *Die Schweiz in römischer Zeit* (which saw several reprints), a pivotal book on the history of Roman colonisation in the Alpine region. Introducing his historical biography of Plancus, Staehelin states the importance of this figure as the first *vir illustris* from Basel, explicitly connecting the Roman general with the spirit of the ‘humanistische Stadt’ (F. Staehelin 1900, 2–3):

So mag es denn nicht ungerechtfertigt erscheinen, wenn wir im Sinne des humanistischen Basels den Gründer von Augst auch als Gründer und ältesten Bürger unserer Vaterstadt in Anspruch nehmen und ihm in dieser Reihe von Basler Lebensbildern hiemit an erster Stelle ein Denkmal setzen.³⁸

Even though Plancus is explicitly the founder of Augst, according to Staehelin the heritage of this ancient city passed to Basel, which may now rightly claim him as founder and fellow townsman. It is noteworthy that Staehelin conceives of his work as a modern monument (“Denkmal”) to Plancus. However, as we have seen while reading Ochs’ passage, the historical Plancus arouses problems due to his political incoherence and immoral attitudes: Staehelin does not overlook this aspect but tries to justify Plancus’ “schrackenloser Opportunismus”, which he sees

³⁸ “So it may not appear unjust if, in the spirit of humanist Basel, we claim the founder of Augst also as the founder and the most ancient citizen of our native city and we pay tribute to him by giving him the first place in this series of Basel biographies.”

as a common attitude of his “Zeitgenossen” and for which, therefore, Plancus is not the only person to be blamed (F. Staehelin 1900, 28):

In der Politik huldigte er einem schrankenlosen Opportunismus, wie die meisten seiner Zeitgenossen. So wenig er uns daher auch persönlich grosse Sympathien abgewinnen kann, so wenig liegt doch Anlass vor, uns von der ausnehmend gehässigen Überlieferung zu einem härteren Urteil über ihn verleiten zu lassen als über andere, die auch nicht besser waren. Den Schattenseiten seines Characters aber steht eine hohe Begabung gegenüber, die ihn zum glänzenden Redner, zum geschmeidigen Politiker und zum tapferen Soldaten gemacht hat.³⁹

So Staehelin is quite indulgent towards Plancus’ political opportunism as well as his unstable morality, which are ascribed to the particular conditions of the age in which he lived; moreover, he warns his readers against judging Plancus too severely on the basis of ancient sources about him, since such a negative judgment should be extended to all his contemporaries. As a counterpart to these negative aspects, Staehelin praises Plancus’ talent (“Begabung”) and his eminence in the fields of oratory, politics, and warfare, which secure him a major place in the history of Basel.

It is easy to see how diverse the opinions about the figure of Plancus could be among historians, spanning the gamut from moral blame of his vicious conduct to admiration and justification of his incoherent behaviour.

We have come now to a conclusion. This paper has shown some episodes of Plancus’ Fortleben in Basel as a mythical *conditor* of the Humanist city. We have seen the primary role of Beatus Rhenanus in recovering the memory of Augst as Basel’s ancestor city and of its founder, a Roman figure whose intimate connection with Cicero provided Basel with an official mark of humanism. It is also interesting to see different perspectives on Plancus by Basel historians who either honour him as the city’s first *vir illustris* (like Staehelin) or blame his conduct and reproach the citizens of Basel for their tribute to a vicious man (like Ochs). The celebrations for the bimillenary of Basel in 1957, including academic publications, show how vital the interest around this mythical founder continues to be in contemporary Basel.⁴⁰

³⁹ “In politics he pursued an unlimited opportunism, like the majority of his contemporaries. As little as he can win our sympathy, equally little do we have occasion to judge him, on the basis of the extraordinarily spiteful tradition on him, more severely than we do others, who were not better than him. In contrast with the dark side of his character stands a great talent, that made him a distinguished orator, an adaptable politician and a valiant soldier.”

⁴⁰ See notes 3 and 6 above.

Plancus was certainly not the best of the Romans. In fact, he has incurred much criticism. Nevertheless, it was his fate to have a glorious second life north of the Alps: thanks to his relationship with Cicero and his apprenticeship at the school of the greatest orator of all times, a minor character of Roman history was to become the first *vir illustris* of a city that claims for itself a major role in the survival of the classical heritage.

