Lepidus Reassessed: Tackling the Reputation of the Tarnished Triumvir

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Introduction

Overview of Previous Research

Scholarship focusing solely on Lepidus is not entirely abundant and much of it seems to come from three successive wave, respectively the 1970's, 1990's and 2000's. The available research is useful however, since much of it aims to reassess Lepidus' role and reputation to move away from earlier works that branded him as useless and a non-entity. The most significant monograph on Lepidus is that by R.D. Weigel, *Lepidus: The Tarnished Triumvir* 1992, who offers a good starting point from which research can be continued. Weigel is however, at times, a little too lenient and forgiving of Lepidus, but overall provides a well-balanced reassessment of the man. In addition to re-examining Lepidus' actions and activities during the triumvirate – for which Lepidus receives much condemnation in the sources and scholarship – Weigel focuses on Lepidus' career prior to Caesar's murder, highlighting his successes and achievements without heaping undue praise on him.

On the few occasions where Lepidus is the focus of study, his family and ancestry are regularly highlighted. Lepidus came from an illustrious and proud patrician family tracing its roots back many centuries. Lepidus' father is frequently mentioned since he held high political office before suffering a humiliating end. Additionally, Lepidus' great-grandfather, Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (cos. 187)[1] makes consistent appearances in the scholarship and the sources relating to Lepidus since he was a man of great esteem and is considered by some to have been the Octavian/Augustus of his day. They both offer easy comparisons and each often paints Lepidus in a poor light. These comparisons are not fruitless since they reflect the seemingly inescapable animosity that Lepidus was faced with by contemporaries (particularly Cicero) and in later sources. Context is sometimes ignored or downplayed when making these comparisons since the second triumvirate was a unique and extremely volatile period, and so to compare Lepidus with his great-grandfather might be unfair. This does not absolve Lepidus of wrongdoing or criticism, but it is important to bear in mind.

Reassessments of Lepidus' character is becoming a recurring theme in this scholarship. One such reassessment by A. Gowing[2] reinterprets an Augustan inscription which presented Lepidus as cruel and unfeeling whilst also implying significant responsibility for the proscriptions. Lepidus' tenure as *pontifex maximus* has been another point of issue for researchers. His accession to the role was seen by many as some kind of backroom deal between himself and Antony, which is seized upon by the sources to further discredit both men. Lepidus and his family brought prestige to the role, so he

[1] All dates henceforth are B.C.E. unless otherwise stated.
[2] 1992.

was certainly worthy of holding the position, but there is disagreement amongst scholars as to why Lepidus was allowed to stay in the role after his fall from grace. R.T. Ridley Ridley[3] and C. Simpson[4] explore the issues surrounding Lepidus' position as chief priest to pose some interesting questions: Does Lepidus' continued tenure tell us more about Octavian's thoughts on Lepidus or the priesthood? Who might this be more humiliating for, the supreme ruler forced to wait for a disgraced colleague to die or the priest who exists as merely a placeholder?

Crucially, Lepidus's life and career before the triumvirate has been given greater prominence. By all accounts Lepidus had been a trusted lieutenant of Caesar's, having essentially been his deputy in Rome. Lepidus had tremendous success in Spain, both military and diplomatic, and his truce with Sextus Pompey marked him at his very best, as has been pointed out by K.E. Welch 1995.[5] Lepidus was clearly a capable man and historians have begun to recognise this.

Research Aims

While there has been some renewed focus on Lepidus, general opinion of him is much the same as it was; that of a third wheel. Reassessments of his life and career have certainly offered new perspectives and this paper aims to take this a step further by using a comparative approach. Crassus offers a good point of comparison since he too was considered to be the lesser man of his alliance with Pompey and Caesar. Crassus has received treatment in a few monographs and biographies and, as with Lepidus, scholars have begun to reassess Crassus' characterisation in the sources to see if it holds up to scrutiny.

Regarding the Late Republic and the triumvirates, the comparative studies that do exist tend to focus on Antony and Octavian (or Pompey and Caesar), while Lepidus is only ever mentioned in relation to them, often briefly. When Lepidus is brought into comparison with others it is most often members of his own family, namely his father and great-grandfather. An extra examination can be made through the methods employed by Plutarch and the treatment he gives to the other triumvirs who feature in his *Parallel Lives* to suggest that Lepidus was a man deserving of biographical treatment by him. This paper does not seek to criticise Plutarch for this omission, but rather to argue that Lepidus' inclusion is warranted.

By comparing two sidelined individuals there is opportunity to bring them both to prominence while still maintaining a critical eye. The aim is to bring Lepidus out of the sidelines and to the forefront by comparing him with a similar character. My research looks to address Lepidus' characterisation,

[3] 2005.
[4] 2006.
[5] p.451.

and, while not seeking to avail him, provide a new perspective in comparison with a man who found himself meeting a similar, though arguably less humiliating end.

The key research aim throughout this paper will be to bring Lepidus to greater prominence than he has been given and to attempt to reinterpret, where possible, his place within certain sources to suggest new ways of framing him.

Methodology and Approach

The overall methodological approach will be comparative to identify and compare the similarities and differences between Lepidus and Crassus in a way that highlights Lepidus' possible mistreatment and identifies recurring themes between them. Biographical research will form a large part of the thesis since in addition to studying the lives of these men in detail, the content and methods of Plutarch's biographies will be studied. The key focus of this paper will be on Lepidus' characterisation and representation in the sources and in scholarship.

In regard to Lepidus at least, this approach does not appear to have been done before. Any comparison with his own family that Lepidus has been subject to has always been brief. Lepidus is quite often ignored in historical research and, while Crassus is slightly more fortunate in this respect, both pale in comparison to their respective triumviral colleagues. Crassus is quite often compared with and said to have been in competition with Pompey, but Lepidus is rarely compared to his triumviral colleagues in the same way and when he is, Lepidus is always out of his league. Furthermore, Crassus and Lepidus both receive similar treatment by Cicero. Cicero attempts to separate each man from another of his triumviral colleagues (Crassus from Pompey, Lepidus from Antony) to forestall one man rising to supremacy. When this fails both men later received biting criticism from Cicero.

Moreover, Lepidus and Crassus share a skill for being adaptable. This is not a skill that the primary sources would attribute but one that has come forth from renewed reassessment of both men. Lepidus is accused of disloyalty and being easily swayed, which to a degree holds some merit, but it enabled him to reach supremacy with his colleagues and kept him alive until old age. Crassus too shows resilience and adaptability. While Caesar and Pompey are away campaigning and acquiring great military prestige and glory, Crassus turns to money lending and finance to gain power and wealth in Rome. Unfortunately, both Lepidus and Crassus' legacies are tainted by their ultimate failures. It is easy to judge a man by his final humiliating act and to judge the sequence of events leading to it as foolish, therefore ignoring many of his positive attributes.

Comparison with Crassus and an examination of Plutarch's method in compiling the *Lives* makes it clear that Lepidus would (and perhaps should) have been a prime candidate for inclusion in the biographer's work. This hypothesis will be addressed and expanded on in the following parts of

this research. Might Lepidus' legacy have been different had he received his own biography, or would Plutarch have followed the same narrative and only made things worse?

The majority of the primary sources used in this thesis are literary with the additional use of some numismatic and epigraphic evidence too. Plutarch's Lives form a large portion of the evidence used. Plutarch's own approach in the *Lives* is comparative, as is a large part of this thesis, helping to provide insight into those under his study. Plutarch's focus on character is particularly relevant to this paper's area of study. While Lepidus does appear throughout the work, since he is never the focus, there is not a huge amount that can be taken from it relating specifically to Lepidus himself. Plutarch's treatment of the other triumvirs offers insight into how Lepidus might have been written about and his chapter on Crassus offers material to work with to enable comparison. Plutarch does not always provide sufficient historical context since his focus is on the character of the men he studies rather than history and great events. As he is writing over a century later, Plutarch would have relied on already available sources and since these were already quite openly hostile to Lepidus, Plutarch's narrative is too.

Cassius Dio and Appian's histories offer robust and detailed accounts of events. Since Dio is writing a comprehensive Roman history, his work places Lepidus within the broader historical context of the Late Republic. Appian is often concerned with military matters rather than political intrigue and so he often underappreciates Lepidus' role. Dio gives Lepidus credit in some instances, particularly immediately after Caesar's murder, but echoes the opinion of others by saying that Lepidus aimed for sole power for himself, with little evidence to support this claim. Both historians wrote several centuries later leaving them to rely on earlier sources which we do not have and was likely following already established narratives.

Cicero's work is useful since he was a contemporary and participant in the political events of both triumvirates offering a firsthand account. Cicero's proximity to the events gives us an immediate understanding of Lepidus' role within them. Cicero's personal correspondences provide a unique glimpse into his thoughts as do his *Philippics* against Antony. Cicero's work is also likely the main reasons why Lepidus' legacy and reputation is the way that it is and often requires some critical distance.

Tacitus only briefly mentions Lepidus at the beginning of the *Annals* and so there is not a huge amount that he can offer us. However, what little he does give is telling. He refers to the rule of one man in Rome coming about thanks to the fall of Antony and the old and lazy Lepidus.[6] This appears unkind to Lepidus but Tacitus' framing of Augustus' rise to power is far less favourable than other

[6] 1.9.

historians. Tacitus is writing over a century later, but this has enabled some critical distance and enabled him to frame events differently and within a wider context since he was out of reach of retribution from Augustus.

This thesis will be laid out in three chapters. The first of which will deal with the bulk of the comparison between Lepidus and Crassus. This chapter will explore both men's ancestry, relationships with their colleagues and their skillset to highlight what made them worthy of inclusion in their respective alliances. The following chapter will argue that Lepidus warranted inclusion in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* through examination of some of Plutarch's methods in compiling the work. Additionally, this chapter will explore Crassus' appearance in the *Lives* alongside some of the other triumvirs, often bringing in Lepidus for comparison to further highlight the case for his inclusion. The final chapter will explore three case studies, each one an event or piece of evidence that has been used to cast Lepidus in a particularly poor light, in an attempt to reframe them to explore whether Lepidus was deserving of such negative reception.

Lepidus and Crassus in Comparison

Introduction

The main aim of this section is to place Lepidus in comparison with Crassus to highlight what made Lepidus worthy of being included in the triumvirate, despite the hostility of the historical record. Though the justification for this comparison have been stated in the introduction, some key points will again be briefly mentioned so that they are borne in mind throughout the reading of this chapter and the paper as a whole. In the ancient sources, in later fictional works and in modern day scholarship, Lepidus has found himself attacked and dismissed by the majority.[7] Crassus, though featuring more prominently in the sources and scholarship than Lepidus ever did, is similarly derided, with particular attention paid to his alleged greed, pettiness and vengefulness.[8] Crassus' wealth is often cited as the sole reason for his inclusion in the triumvirate with Pompey and Caesar. The reasons given for Lepidus' inclusion within the second triumvirate with Antony and Octavian can, at times, be hard to discern. Lepidus does not appear to have been (significantly) more or less wealthy than his contemporaries, but Lepidus' family name certainly carried a high level of prestige, so he likely outranked his colleagues in this respect.

Compared with their triumviral colleagues we have few sources which provide an assessment of the events from either Lepidus or Crassus' point of view. Of course, as it is often said, history is written by the victors, therefore it makes sense that the accounts of Caesar and Octavian have survived and dominated the historical record. However, despite ultimately being losers, both Pompey and Antony have received extensive treatment in the sources to try to understand their positions and contextualise the events of their lives. It is the aim of this chapter to seek to understand Lepidus and Crassus' respective alliances from their points of view using a comparative approach. This should contribute to better understanding Lepidus' place within the second triumvirate and Roman history in general. This chapter will focus on a selection of key aspects for comparison. Firstly, a comparison of their family, ancestry and wealth; second, an examination of the importance of Spain to both Lepidus and Crassus; next, their relationship with their colleagues and fellow statesmen; and finally, a summation and comparison of their areas of expertise, as well as their military and administrative careers.

Bringing Lepidus and Crassus into comparison with one another will help to highlight their similarities and will in turn bring both Lepidus and Crassus to greater prominence. Any similarities present between Lepidus and Crassus should enable us to identify areas where Lepidus might be deserving of more credit or attention. This is because Crassus, having died in battle, is regarded as less

[7] Weigel 1992, p.2.
[8] Marshall 1976, p.2-3.

of a failure than Lepidus, who suffered a final humiliation at the hand of a former ally. The comparison will not be a detailed run through of their respective lives comparing every event or milestone of theirs. In some cases, it will be direct comparison of similar events or circumstances in which Lepidus and Crassus found themselves, such as their involvement in Spain. In other cases, it will be a comparison of their reception and characterisations more generally, particularly their characterisations as failures. Additionally, despite the large contribution of his biographies to our understanding of the triumviral periods, this chapter will generally avoid analysing Plutarch's take on matters where possible, since that will be the focus of the following chapter.

First and foremost, it is important to recognise that Lepidus and Crassus were not just counterbalances within their respective alliances to help keep their colleagues in check. Some of the sources may even lead us to take things a step further and suggest that the inclusion of Lepidus in the second triumvirate was not worth mentioning. Josephus recounts Augustus' almost sixty year supremacy over Rome, adding that he had shared power with Antony for twelve of those years, yet there is no mention of Lepidus.[9] This glaring omission illustrates just how marginalised Lepidus had become within the historical record.[10] Both Lepidus and Crassus were politically and militarily active and capable. They both had agency and while they certainly sought wealth and power, they should not be judged too harshly for this since every Roman noble in the Republic had been doing the same for generations.

Family, Ancestry and Wealth

Marcus Aemilius Lepidus was born around 89, a tumultuous time in Rome's history, and so he was no stranger to civil war and unrest. Lepidus was the son of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, who served as consul in 78. Lepidus had a brother named Lucius Aemilius Lepidus Paullus, who was consul in 50. Their father led the renewed *populares* faction after Sulla's death and attempted an unsuccessful rebellion against the *optimates* in 78–77. Defeated near Rome, he fled to Sardinia where he died in 77. Lepidus married Junia Secunda, and together they had at least one child, Marcus Aemilius Lepidus the Younger.

Crassus was born in either 115 or early 114, though it is thought more likely to be 115.[11] This uncertainty surrounding Crassus' exact year of birth (let alone date of birth) is emblematic of the ambiguity surrounding his early life in general compared with those of his triumviral colleagues whose birthdates are known, often with certainty.[12] Crassus' father, Publius Licinius Crassus, had been consul

[9] *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.32.
[10] Gowing 1995, p.123.
[11] Marshall 1976, p.5.
[12] Ward 1977, p.46.

in 97. Crassus had two brothers, both of whom died before Crassus' rise to supremacy alongside his triumviral colleagues. When the eldest brother, Publius Licinius Crassus (born c. 116), died around 91 Crassus married his widow.[13] Crassus' father and other brother died (possibly forced to suicide) at the hands of supporters of Marius and Cinna after their victory in 87.[14] As with Lepidus, Crassus' father's legacy was one of tragedy.

Despite his father's final failure and fall from grace, Lepidus' family history and ancestry was one of great success and esteem, a fact that would have been known not only to Lepidus himself but to the Roman nobility as well.[15] Lepidus therefore had a lot to live up to and, from the Republican perception of inheriting one's ancestral virtues, an obligation imposed upon him to succeed.[16] Extensive literary evidence from the end of the Republic and the first two centuries of the Empire show that a Roman noble had a social and moral obligation to remember his origin, family names, and ancestors, as well as their achievements.[17] This remembrance involved more than simply recalling ancestors in one's mind, but through acts and gestures too, in particular, political acts in service of Rome as a magistrate. Remembering one's forebears was not just a passive mental exercise, but an action undertaken by Roman nobles. An example from Cicero's *Philippics*, where the orator praises Brutus, highlights this point well: "Truly a citizen born to serve the State, mindful of the name he bears, and an imitator of his ancestors!"[18] To remember one's ancestors is to follow in their footsteps and imitate them.[19]

Two key members of Lepidus' family most often mentioned in the sources and scholarship are his father and his great-grandfather, Marcus Aemilius Lepidus[20] (consul 187), thanks to the effect that both men are thought to have had on Lepidus and his reputation. Lepidus' father had been propraetorian governor of Sicily in 80[21] and then consul in 78. It was in 77 that he orchestrated a failed coup in an attempt to gain a consecutive consulship. It is quite possible that having seen what a general with his own army of loyal soldiers could achieve might have pushed Lepidus' father to try to exceed the deeds of his forebears. In his oration against Verres, Cicero uses Lepidus' (the father of the triumvir) mistakes as governor of Sicily as a point of comparison to Verres' extortion there.[22] Cicero claims that

[13] Plutarch, *Crassus* 1.
[14] Plutarch, *Crassus* 4.1.
[15] Weigel 1992, p.4.
[16] Baroin 2010, p.25-26.
[17] Baroin 2010, p.19-20.
[18] *Philippics* 3.8.
[19] Baroin 2010, p.30.
[20] Henceforth referred to as M. Lepidus.
[21] Brennan 2000, p.483. Prorogued in 81 to be praetorian governor in 80.
[22] Weigel 1992, p.14.

"even Lepidus… had not committed this fraud [extortion of money for the granary]",[23] as if to suggest that the elder Lepidus had done wrong in Sicily though nothing quite on the scale of Verres. Cicero does not make clear what the elder Lepidus had done but it must have influenced the Sicilians for Cicero to bring him up again. Clearly it had little effect in Rome since the elder Lepidus was elected consul shortly after his governorship.[24] Lepidus' father while successful for having been consul and governor ultimately squandered this success in a failed power grab. This bears mentioning since the circumstances are somewhat mirrored later when Lepidus attempts to assert himself in Sicily and for the fact that he lost his father in political turmoil, much like Crassus.

M. Lepidus also served as governor of Sicily in 191[25] before attaining the consulship in 187.[26] From 180 onwards M. Lepidus experienced a meteoric rise through Rome's political ranks, becoming *pontifex maximus*,[27] then *princeps senatus* and censor the following year,[28] before being elected consul once again in 175. M. Lepidus' institution based authority, which spanned almost three decades and involved many vital aspects of Roman public life, most closely resembled what Octavian/Augustus ultimately achieved.[29] M. Lepidus had attained a level of power that was virtually unrivalled at the time, and he acted with little hesitation.[30] During Lepidus' early career as *triumvir monetalis* from 62 to 58, he minted coins that were dedicated to M. Lepidus, which bore his political offices in the legend, as a way to attract attention to himself by highlighting a family connection to one of Rome's great statesmen.[31] In addition to creating this connection and signalling Lepidus as a political player, these coins may also have helped Lepidus to distance himself from his father's legacy. Lepidus achieved many great offices of state himself including *magister equitum* in 46, consul in 46 and 42, and *pontifex maximus* in 44, in addition to triumvir. Lepidus' family name no doubt helped him secure the positions he held, but this was hardly unusual for a high ranking noble in Rome. Lepidus knew to exploit his family name to advance himself.

Like Lepidus, Crassus' ancestry was one of great esteem and so he too would have felt the moral and social obligation to match or surpass the achievements of his family.[32] Crassus' family had been one of Rome's most distinguished and noble plebeian families. However, Crassus' family was not

[23] *In Verrem* 2.3.212.
[24] Brennan 2000, p.483.484.
[25] Livy, 36.2.
[26] Livy, 38.42.
[27] Livy, 37.43.
[28] Livy, 40.45-46.
[29] Brennan 2014, p.22.
[30] Brennan 2014, p.22.
[31] Evans 1990, p.105.
[32] Baroin 2010, p.25-26.

particularly wealthy by the standards of the Roman nobility, having been "reared in a small house."[33] Their lack of extravagance was likely down to necessity rather than personal choice,[34] which perhaps helped to drive the triumvir to seek wealth as an adult. Nevertheless, it is thought Crassus' family origins stretched back to the Etruscans making his family older than those of most Roman nobles.[35] Crassus' own mother was an Etruscan who came from a family of business and trade which no doubt influenced and helped him in his own financial endeavours.[36]

Crassus too had an exemplary ancestor to emulate. Publius Licinius Crassus Dives (the rich) held multiple political and religious posts including *pontifex maximus* in 212, *magister equitum* in 210, censor in 210, consul in 205, and proconsul in 204 during which time he fought successfully against Hannibal.[37] Crassus' political career was esteemed though it did not measure up to his ancestor. Crassus attained the office of consul twice (both times with Pompey as his colleague) in 70 and 55, was censor in 65, and, of course, triumvir. Although both Lepidus and Crassus lost their fathers under what might be termed revolutionary circumstances (which forced Crassus to flee Rome), unlike Lepidus, Crassus would not have needed to distance himself from his father's legacy. Both triumvirs were no doubt spurred on by the greatness of their ancestors and the loss of their families to achieve greatness.

There is no doubt that both Lepidus and Crassus were wealthy individuals which helped to secure their places within their respective alliances. Lepidus owned many estates in addition to his home in Rome, but it is hard to gauge how rich he was in comparison to others at the time. If Lepidus had been extremely wealthy then we would expect to see references to his use of money to advance his own power and gain political offices, as Crassus had done, however there is no evidence of this.[38] Lepidus' wealth was partly connected to his family in addition to wealth he had accumulated himself, but Crassus' wealth is virtually all his own and no discussion of Crassus can avoid mentioning it. Crassus' wealth and "avarice" is noted in an anecdote by Plutarch at the very beginning of his biography.[39] Crassus' wealth and greed are regularly mentioned in discussions about him which, while sometimes distracting from other aspects of his life, clearly marks him out as having been successful. He was able to amass incomparable wealth in an age full of wealthy and competing aristocrats. Despite everything else he did and everything else that may have happened to him, Crassus is always remembered as being financially successful and ruthless.[40] Lepidus is not so lucky in this respect since

[33] Plutarch, *Crassus* 1.1.
[34] Ward 1977, p.47-48.
[35] Ward 1977, p.49.
[36] Stothard 2022, p.8.
[37] Marshall 1976, p.5.
[38] Weigel 1992, p.36.
[39] *Crassus* 1.2.
[40] Ward 1977, p.1.

he was not enormously wealthy. Lepidus would have been very rich but compared with Crassus it pales in comparison. Unfortunately, this makes Lepidus all the easier to forget and cast aside since his triumviral colleagues were not only extremely wealthy but militarily superior too.

Lepidus and Crassus had esteemed family history and at least one great ancestor to whom they could look back with pride and emulate. This meant they and their families well known to other Roman aristocrats, enabling them both to pursue successful careers even before becoming triumvirs. Lepidus' family in particular was highly regarded which no doubt helped to secure his place within his alliance with Antony and Octavian. Crassus' wealth was likely the key driver behind his inclusion in the first triumvirate, but his family name was greatly respected too.

Spain

A brief mention will now be made on the importance of Spain for both Lepidus and Crassus. In addition to the two of them coincidentally having control over parts of Hispania during their careers, both men (but especially Lepidus) experienced great successes there. K.E. Welch characterises Lepidus' time in Spain as Lepidus at his absolute best.[41] In 48 Lepidus was made governor of Hither Spain by Caesar[42], likely as a reward for watching over Rome while Caesar had faced Pompey and to ensure he had allies in provincial power. Lepidus' appointment here is especially significant since opposition in Spain had only just been quashed. This would suggest that Caesar had a high degree of confidence in Lepidus to maintain control where a weaker governor may fail.[43] Caesar's confidence was well placed since Lepidus prevented a larger conflict from breaking out in the region when he intervened in the scuffle between Farther Spain's governor and his right hand man.[44] Lepidus was given a triumph by Caesar for his actions in Spain despite the fact there was no great military success, but rather the avoidance of calamity.[45] Lepidus' exploits had alleviated Caesar of some of his anxieties, however, as with most good things that Lepidus had done, it was tempered with negativity since Caesar received the spoils, not Lepidus.[46] It appears that Lepidus was quite content to be a tool in Caesar's machinations since he remained consistently loyal to him and Caesar continued to rely on Lepidus. Lepidus was publicly honoured and recognised by his peers in Rome for his actions, therefore it was known that he was capable and could stand out at a time when Caesar dominated Roman affairs.

[41] Welch 1995, p.451-452.
[42] Dio, 43.1.1.
[43] Weigel 1992, p.27.
[44] Weigel 1992, p.28-29.
[45] Dio, 43.1.
[46] Welch 1995, p.451-452.

In preparation for his campaign in Parthia in 44, Caesar assigned magistrates for the next three years and Lepidus was chosen to govern Hither Spain once again (in addition to Narbonese Gaul) and was made *magister equitum* for a second time until he should depart for his provinces.[47] The choice of Lepidus was an obvious one due to his previous successes in Spain and showed again Caesar's trust in Lepidus' abilities. Since Caesar would likely be away for several years, he could not afford to have those provinces rebel and so a trusted and competent governor was required. Lepidus fit the bill.

In 43, and once again in Spain, Lepidus showed his skill when he secured a truce with Sextus Pompey,[48] whose actions threatened to throw the region into turmoil. Cicero, who is often credited with damaging Lepidus' reputation the most, heaped praises on Lepidus for this truce.[49] Cicero later commended Lepidus' *consilium*, *auctoritas* and *clementia*, and opined that if more men were like Lepidus there would have been fewer civil wars.[50] This would suggest that another man in Lepidus' position might have jumped to military action whereas Lepidus chose the route of diplomacy. Spain had given Lepidus the opportunity to demonstrate his skills as a peacemaker.

Crassus' connection to Spain comes with less success than Lepidus, but it was an important region to him early in his career. Crassus' father Publius was governor of Farther Spain from 96 to 93 where he fought local tribes and received a triumph.[51] It is likely that Crassus travelled to and served with his father in Spain when he was proconsul.[52] Publius suffered a defeat in 90 but his military reputation was so well established that it appears to have had little to no adverse effect.[53] Publius' time in Spain enabled him to establish firm and lasting connections which likely mitigated the effect of his defeat in 90. These friendships proved crucial for Crassus when he was forced to flee Rome following his father and brother's deaths. He went straight to Spain where he was able to rely on the connections his father had made while praetor there.[54] Crassus remained in Spain from 87-84 during which time he was able to amass a small army from his and his father's clients in the region.[55] Crassus was able to gather roughly two and a half thousand men with whom he joined Sulla in Greece to assist him.[56] This was not a large number but it speaks to the lasting relationships his family had in Spain and shows that there were those loyal to him and his cause.

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[47] Weigel 1992, p.37.
[48] Dio, 45.10.6.
[49] *Philippics* 5.38-39.
[50] *Philippics* 13.8.
[51] Ward 1977, p.51.
[52] Marshall 1976, p.10.
[53] Appian, *Civil Wars* 1.41.
[54] Plutarch, *Crassus* 4.1.
[55] Plutarch, *Crassus* 6.1.
[56] Marshall 1976, p.13.

Though Lepidus and Crassus experienced quite different levels of success in Spain, the region provides an interesting area of study since it helps to push back against some of the unflattering characterisations for them both. Lepidus is shown as reliable, loyal and capable at maintaining order and control, when usually he is characterised as weak and unable to assert control.[57] Crassus' exploits demonstrate the strength of his connections and his ability to plan and regroup after suffering the loss of his family and the threat of death, while also giving a glimpse into his abilities as a military leader.

Workplace Relations

This section will examine some of the relationships of Lepidus and Crassus with their contemporaries and to their respective alliances as well. Both men can be quite easily cast aside within the narrative since they fall out of their alliances several years before the final showdowns between their remaining colleagues, but they both must have had reasons for being included and roles to play outside of being mediators. Lepidus is easily forgotten within the historical narrative and is dismissed as unimportant,[58] and Crassus too mostly appears in the triumviral narrative in relation to the two dominant men of the period, Caesar and Pompey.[59] The only occasion where Crassus remains the main focus of the narrative is in retellings of his ill-fated Parthian campaign, but this has only served to smear his reputation and separate him further from events in Rome and from his triumviral colleagues.

Within their respective alliances, Lepidus and Crassus can certainly be classed as outsiders to a degree, and this is not something that this paper seeks to ignore or gloss over. For example, the marriage of Octavian's sister Octavia to Anthony in 40 by senatorial decree marked the cornerstone of the bond between the triumvirs,[60] which already somewhat alienated Lepidus. One of Lepidus' sons had been betrothed to Antony's daughter,[61] but this never came to fruition and did little to secure any kind of loyalty between Antony and Lepidus. Despite this alienation however, Lepidus was clearly considered crucial to the triumvirs' undertaking to reconstitute the Republic.[62] For starters, Lepidus' ancestral prestige likely outranked that of Antony and Octavian even after the latter's adoption by Caesar. Similarly, Pompey wedded Caesar's daughter Julia[63] to secure their alliance at its inception. The fact of the matter is that in certain ways both Lepidus and Crassus were slightly distanced from

[57] Dio, 49.12. Lepidus' troops in Sicily (in 36) apparently have no loyalty and easily abandon him. Lepidus is left powerless and humiliated.

[58] Weigel 1992, p.1.

[59] Marshall 1976, p.1.

[60] Lange 2009, p.20-21.

[61] Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.93.

[62] Lange 2009. p.20-21.

[63] Plutarch, *Pompey* 47.6.

their colleagues and their respective alliances by these marriages. On the other hand, simply being more of an outsider does not mean that either Lepidus or Crassus was not worthy of their position within their triumvirates. This chapter has already touched on some of what made them worthy of their position and this section too shall do the same.

Lepidus and Crassus both had a clear hand in Caesar's successes at different stages in the dictator's life and Caesar was instrumental in some of their success too. Caesar was no doubt crucial to Lepidus' earlier appointments and honours, but we should not rob Lepidus of all credit. Caesar obviously saw something in Lepidus. Crassus and Caesar's relationship was far less one sided with each man being able to offer the other something in return. Regardless, both Lepidus and Crassus were important to Caesar and vice versa.

During his early career, Lepidus' chain of commands under Caesar were virtually unbroken.[64] It was Lepidus who advised the people to elect Caesar dictator as he prepared for his final showdown with Pompey.[65] Caesar clearly valued Lepidus which has already been noted in the previous section examining his role in Spain. According to both Plutarch[66] and Appian,[67] in 49, Lepidus was essentially running things in Rome as *praetor urbanis* in Caesar's absence. Following Pompey's defeat, Caesar appoints Lepidus as *magister equitum* on multiple occasions between 46-44,[68] and when Lepidus left the post to govern his provinces Caesar appointed two men to take Lepidus' place.[69] While Caesar's reliance on Lepidus does certainly lend credit to Lepidus' skills, it should be noted that Lepidus' reliability was likely only part of the reason for his own rise to power. Lepidus' relationship with Caesar should not be used to entirely rehabilitate his early career as Weigel attempts to.[70] Caesar's affinity for Lepidus allowed him to demonstrate some of his skills and capabilities, but he was mostly working at Caesar's behest. Lepidus' lack of independence and imagination and his willingness to serve others for little in return aided him under Caesar's supremacy, but would ultimately lead to his downfall in the triumviral period.[71] These appointments and his Spanish triumph were likely rewards granted by Caesar to Lepidus – since he was a man from a great family – to help enhance the legitimacy of Caesar's own authority.[72] Lepidus' role in administering Rome in Caesar's absence in 49 gave Caesar reason to

[64] Welch 1995, p.443.
[65] Dio, 41.36.1.
[66] *Antony* 6.4
[67] *Civil Wars* 2.41
[68] Dio, 43.28.2; 43.33.1; 43.48.1; 43.49.1.
[69] Dio, 43.51.8.
[70] Weigel 1992, p.26-32.
[71] Welch 1995, p.443.
[72] Weigel 1992, p.30.

value Lepidus, but it was his term as proconsul in Hither Spain in 48 that caused Caesar to treat Lepidus with remarkable affection.[73]

During the 60's, Crassus had essentially become Caesar's patron. There is a common belief that Crassus was just a wealthy man with little interest in politics who only wanted power and that Caesar was, as early as the 60's, far more politically astute than Crassus was.[74] Crassus had been active in Roman politics and business for a while before Caesar's ascendancy and was regularly on hand as an advocate and money lender.[75] Crassus and Caesar's bond at this stage was mostly financial and it is likely that Caesar was indebted to Crassus for his assistance.[76] We are led to believe by Dio that Caesar, on returning to Rome in 60, skilfully befriended Pompey and Crassus, settled their differences and brought them all into alliance with one another informally creating the first triumvirate.[77] Modern writers have run with this assertion too,[78] which risks robbing Crassus (and Pompey) of virtually all agency. Crassus and Pompey had already allied once before during their joint consulship in 70, which, while politically barren, was a mostly amicable affair.[79] It seems likely that Crassus would have had more involvement in brokering this alliance since he had had contact and dealing with both Pompey and Caesar beforehand. No doubt Crassus' wealth and political connections were the assets his colleagues wished to utilise, but Crassus did not acquire them by remaining passive.

Due to the enormous mark Caesar left on Rome's history, it is unsurprising that Lepidus and Crassus' dealings with him have tended to afford Caesar greater agency. Lepidus was certainly the more passive partner throughout their engagements, but he was a trusted and loyal friend to Caesar who had skills to offer. Crassus was a shrewd and capable political player in his own right who had financially supported Caesar for many years before they made their alliance with Pompey. Even when this alliance was formed, it was not entirely at Caesar's direction, but likely that Crassus had a more active hand in its formation.

By covering Lepidus and Crassus' dealings with Caesar, we have also been able to glimpse at the formation of Crassus' triumvirate. In keeping with this theme, we can now briefly examine how Lepidus' three-way alliance came together. Antony and Lepidus had been friends and allies of Caesar for many years before the dictator's assassination and the subsequent formation of the second triumvirate. Antony had been at Caesar's side since his crossing of the Rubicon into Italy[80] and Lepidus

[73] Welch 1995, p.450.
[74] Marshall 1976, p.82.
[75] Plutarch, *Crassus* 7.2-4.
[76] Marshall 1976, p.82.
[77] 37.54.3-37.56.
[78] Marshall 1976, p.100.
[79] Plutarch, *Crassus* 12.1-2.
[80] Plutarch, *Antony* 5.4.

began to become a close ally of Caesar's from 49 onwards. Additionally, Antony had helped Lepidus to secure the position of pontifex maximus through somewhat unclear circumstances.[81] Following Caesar's murder, Antony and Lepidus presented a mostly united front although the sources are contradictory regarding who of the two took control in Rome. Appian says that Lepidus mustered a legion of soldiers stationed on Tiber Island and moved them to the Campus Martius, but he states that Lepidus awaited the orders of Antony since Antony had allegedly been a closer friend and confidant of Caesar's.[82] This feels like a somewhat snide remark by Appian since Lepidus had been one of Caesar's most trusted allies, regularly keeping order in Rome in Caesar's absence. Dio says Lepidus occupied the forum with soldiers throughout the night while Antony fled.[83] L. Hayne argues that the only man acting with any presence of mind in the immediate aftermath of the assassination was Lepidus.[84] This seems more likely since Lepidus had experience keeping order in Rome and because Antony had allies he could gather from outside of Rome.

After Antony is declared a public enemy by the Senate,[85] Cicero began heaping praises and flattery on Lepidus to convince him to stay loyal to the Republican cause and not side with Antony.[86] Around this time, Cicero was exchanging letters with Decimus Brutus whereupon they express their hope that Lepidus will not form an alliance with Antony which might throw the Republic into chaos.[87] Letters such as these have helped to paint the image of Lepidus as fickle and a betrayer of the Republic, but should we be so quick to judge? Cicero and Decimus Brutus were both experienced politicians, yet they thought that Lepidus, who had been an ardent Caesarian for half a decade and connected to Antony through the betrothal of their children, would abandon Antony in 43 in support of those who had killed Caesar.[88] Lepidus' loyalties were certainly questionable at times, but it seems odd that Cicero and Brutus would make this assumption. As the Senate faced off against Antony, Lepidus took his time in choosing who to openly support and where to place his stock since no obvious winner had emerged, and this attitude is what led to him being branded as indecisive by historians.[89] For Cicero to have assumed that Lepidus would support the Republican cause is folly. As friends and colleagues of Caesar's, Lepidus and Antony no doubt wanted revenge against his killers and the Senate would never allow this, so it seems unlikely that Lepidus would abandon an ally so easily.

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[81] These circumstances and the nature of the two men's relationship will be explored in further detail in the final chapter.

[82] *Civil Wars*, 2.118.

[83] 44.22.2.

[84] 1971, p.110.

[85] Dio, 46.31.

[86] Weigel 1992, p.53.

[87] *Ad Familiares* 11.9.

[88] Welch 1995, p.444.

[89] Weigel 1992, p.57.

With Antony and Lepidus now allied they had a formidable force at their disposal with each man's retinue complimenting the others. What Antony lacked in foot soldiers, Lepidus provided, while Antony had a significant cavalry force.[90] Appian indicates that some reports have Lepidus begging Antony on his knees for mercy since he was "an irresolute and timid man", but Appian states that neither he nor others believe this since there was no bad blood between them and their union could only strengthen them both.[91] Appian's dissenting opinion against these reports suggests that there were multiple versions of this story and that while Appian may disagree, many others may not since general opinion of Lepidus at the time was that of an irresolute and timid individual. Cicero holds Lepidus wholly responsible for the Republic's downfall after teaming up with Antony and rejected the story that Lepidus' soldiers had mutinied therefore forcing his hand.[92] Lepidus can't really win here since he's either a fickle traitor for choosing to side with Antony or a spineless coward forced into alliance with a more powerful adversary.

Octavian too began to realise that the Senate would not give him all that he wanted. After marching on Rome to secure his consulship, Octavian was in full control of the city and so had his adoption by Caesar officially ratified, passed a law condemning Caesar's murderers, and held a trial where all the conspirators (and others) were proclaimed as guilty.[93] Through force Octavian had given legality and legitimacy to the Caesarian cause.[94] Octavian no longer had a reason to oppose Antony or Lepidus since all three fought for the same cause and legal matters had been resolved, albeit through force. At this stage, Dio says Octavian had already secretly made a deal with Antony since the Senate were treating him unfairly and that this is why Lepidus joined Antony.[95] This seems unlikely since Antony had been defeated by Octavian at Mutina. This assertion denies Lepidus any agency in these events when it appears more likely that he played a hand in deciding his own fate and who to ally with, rather than simply being dragged into events around him. With Lepidus, Antony and Octavian now on mostly friendly terms, they made their pact, divided the empire amongst themselves and legally ratified their alliance.[96]

From the formation of the triumvirate onwards, Lepidus' reputation and position began to decline. The three men were able to work relatively well together to achieve their aims but relations between them all began to suffer. It seems clear that Lepidus was not present at the renewal of the triumvirate at Tarentum in 37, nor was he consulted.[97] Lepidus is specifically mentioned at Brundisium

[90] Weigel 1992, p.62.
[91] *Civil Wars* 3.84.
[92] *Ad Familiares* 12.10.
[93] Appian, *Civil Wars* 3.94-95
[94] Weigel 1992, p.65.
[95] 46.41.4-5.
[96] Dio, 46.55-56.
[97] Badian 1992, p.8.

by Dio[98] and Appian[99] while at Tarentum he is totally ignored[100], illustrating the strain in relations. Friendliness between himself and Antony may have remained, but loyalty disappeared rather quickly. After Lepidus fell from the triumvirate, Antony expressed annoyance at Lepidus' removal, not through feelings of loyalty towards him but because Antony did not receive an equal share of Lepidus' holdings.[101] Octavian treated Lepidus as less of an equal and more like a subordinate. In fact, Octavian might even be characterised as having been deceptive and deceitful, giving Lepidus the false impression that they were friends.[102] However, these relations will be examined in more detail in the final chapter since it is far more relevant to the events that will be discussed there.

As a contemporary of both Lepidus and Crassus, it is worth probing some of Cicero's work since he also contributed greatly to the overriding opinions of both men. Cicero's writings, even when praising Lepidus or addressing him as a friend, can often still contribute negatively towards Lepidus' image. In his thirteenth *Philippic*, Cicero gives a mini-lecture on legitimate power where he lauds Lepidus while pleading with him to remain loyal to the Republic, stating that having enormous power does not grant one to wield it.[103] Cicero urges Lepidus to exercise restraint with his power just as his great-grandfather M. Lepidus had done.[104] Cicero is attempting to appeal to Lepidus' sense of pride in his ancestor's legacy by making this positive connection. Lepidus himself had used M. Lepidus' status and achievements to advance his own career through coinage.[105] The issue, however, is that M. Lepidus had acted with little to no restraint.[106] If Lepidus acts with restraint, he allays Cicero's fears but is unlike his ancestor, and if he wields his powers how he wishes, he angers the Republicans but acts exactly as M. Lepidus had done. There is little Lepidus can do to win here. Cicero's later invective against Lepidus for this transgression helped seal his reputation.

One of Cicero's proudest achievements was his ending of the Catilinarian conspiracy of 63. Crassus allegedly caught wind of it early and went straight to Cicero to warn him of the impending threat.[107] However, in some of Cicero's later works, the orator implicates Crassus in the conspiracy, possibly to try to separate Pompey from the triumvirs.[108] We are told that when Crassus was named as a co-conspirator many thought it unbelievable and when brought before the Senate it was voted to

[98] 48.28.4.
[99] *Civil Wars* 5.7.65.
[100] Dio, 48.54; Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.10.95.
[101] Dio, 50.1.
[102] Tacitus, *Annals* 1.10.
[103] Brennan 2014, p.21.
[104] *Philippics* 13.5.
[105] Crawford 1975, p.444.
[106] Brennan 2014, p.22.
[107] Plutarch, *Cicero* 15.2.3.
[108] Marshall 1974, p.813.

be false.[109] Despite Sallust suggesting that it was Cicero himself who had accused Crassus in 63,[110] there is little evidence to suggest Crassus' involvement, since surely Cicero would have seized upon this opportunity at the time.[111] Cicero's fiction found its way into Sallust's account where it was essentially accepted as fact,[112] leading to further tarnishing of Crassus' reputation in the historical record. Cicero's works and opinions of both Lepidus and Crassus helped to denigrate them further, often unfairly, and shows that Cicero was often hostile and at times misinformed. Cicero was also too easily fooled by Octavian's charm and youth, ignoring the young man's many crimes and underestimating his political skills and aspirations. This ultimately fed into Augustan narrative that painted an image of the triumvirate (and the triumvirs) as a dark period in Rome's history while separating Octavian (now Augustus) from responsibility for its misdeeds.

Lepidus is seen as someone to counterbalance his two colleagues and keep them from fighting each other rather than someone who has something of much value to offer to the alliance. Crassus is viewed in a similar way although there can be no questioning that his enormous wealth was an asset that Caesar and Pompey (in addition to historians) recognised as being essential. Both men were clearly seen as valuable in one way or another by their colleagues otherwise they might have just found another. They likely had more active roles in the formation of their respective triumvirates than the sources let on. Antony is seen as the one to bring Lepidus in before Octavian is convinced to join. Caesar is made out to be the one to unite Crassus and Pompey despite the fact that the two of them had previously allied with one another to secure a joint consulship. The narratives possibly overestimate the political weight and acumen of the two Caesars at these relatively early stages of their respective careers.

Skills and Achievements

The expertise and talents of Lepidus and Crassus seemed to lie outside of the military realm, however they have both showed themselves to be capable militarily. Unfortunately, their final failures have masked this well. Crassus was especially successful in his earlier military endeavours particularly in the Servile War against Spartacus. Lepidus' greatest military success, outside of his actions in Spain, arguably takes place immediately before his final undoing in Sicily. However, both triumvirs' military achievements were essentially stolen by a triumviral colleague, which has only helped contribute to their negative receptions rather than poorly impacting the colleagues who slighted them.

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[109] Sallust, *Catiline* 48.5.
[110] *Catiline* 48.7-9.
[111] Marshall 1974, p.806.
[112] Marshall 1974, p.813.

In the war against Sextus Pompey, Octavian and Lepidus both attacked Sicily in 36. Since arriving in Sicily Lepidus had been relatively successful while Octavian dealt with one failure after another likely straining relations between the two.[113] The details of this portion of the Sicilian campaign will be examined further in the final chapter, but suffice it to say that Lepidus, along with Marcus Agrippa, successfully laid siege to and plundered Messana, one of Sextus' last strongholds.[114] This war had been hard fought and while Lepidus suffered several losses[115] compared to Octavian he emerged relatively unscathed. Lepidus' successes in Sicily become entirely overshadowed by his fall from the alliance and so he is never associated with any kind of military achievement.

Crassus on the other hand is well known for his role in ending the war against Spartacus. In fact there is clearly more impetus within Crassus' family than there ever was in Lepidus' to assert themselves militarily amongst the Roman elite since both his sons were on upward trajectories through military campaigns.[116] Crassus was chosen by the Senate to conduct the war against Spartacus in 71 after the consuls had failed and Spartacus' army was advancing through Italy.[117] Crassus pursued the war actively and effectively, quickly bringing the final battle to a close in 71.[118] Despite effectively ending the war, a few thousand slaves were still on the run and it was Pompey, stumbling upon them by chance, who slew them, allowing him to claim that it was he who had finally ended the conflict.[119] Velleius Paterculus gives Crassus full credit for ending the servile war,[120] which is somewhat unusual considering Velleius is rarely laudatory of Crassus. This suggests that, despite Pompey's assertion that he had ended the war, others knew this was not the case. It seems that there are differing narratives (or at least interpretations of the narrative) not long after Crassus' time. No triumph was afforded since a servile war was not deemed worthy of one,[121] but Crassus had the makings of a great military man. However, he only attempted to obtain military glory for himself quite late in life with his Parthian campaign[122] which ended in disaster. Crassus' military success is overshadowed not only by Pompey's interjection but also by Crassus' disastrous and humiliating defeat in Parthia in 53.[123] Crassus saw great success at the battle of the Colline Gate in 82 while Sulla's legions were being driven back and losing

[113] Hayne 1974, p.61.
[114] Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.122.
[115] Dio, 49.8.2; Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.98 & 5.104.
[116] Stothard 2022, p.6.
[117] Plutarch, *Crassus* 10.1.
[118] Plutarch, *Crassus* 11.1-7.
[119] Plutarch, *Crassus* 11.7.
[120] 2.30.6.
[121] Plutarch, *Crassus* 11.8.
[122] Stothard 2022, p.5.
[123] Ward 1977, p.3.

morale,[124] which, while admirable, should not be used to overstate his talents. Crassus was clearly capable, but he was no military genius.

Where others would jump to use military force, Lepidus was more likely to aim for negotiation.[125] Cicero's overall opinion on Lepidus can only be described as negative, but this had not always been the case. Cicero praised Lepidus for the truce he made with Sextus Pompey in 43,[126] showing that he was clearly quite adept at negotiation, even if the truce did not last. Cicero also commends Lepidus' *consilium*, *auctoritas*, and *clementia*, and says that if more men had been like Lepidus there would have been fewer civil wars.[127] This seems like an almost glowing endorsement of Lepidus by Cicero. However, this can also be interpreted as passivity which was a fatal flaw when up against the likes of Antony and Octavian who were all too quick to resort to armed conflict. Despite Cicero's later invective against Lepidus, he had obviously thought that the triumvir was not someone who openly waged war, even if these were attempts to placate him and separate him from Antony.

Lepidus' role as a successful steward of Rome has already been covered in the previous section but will be touched upon again briefly here. When Antony and Octavian left to deal with Caesar's assassins Lepidus was left in charge of Rome again. No doubt the logic behind keeping Lepidus in Rome was that he had proven himself beforehand and, as *pontifex maximus*, his presence may provide a certain level of stability. However, by relinquishing so many legions and staying home to guard Rome while Antony and Octavian claimed glory in the east, Lepidus sealed his role and his fate as the lesser triumvir when it came to spoils of war.[128] Lepidus' mistake was trusting his colleagues and not foreseeing that they would be in it for themselves.

Crassus' key skills, in addition to amassing vast wealth, were control and coercion.[129] As well as vast land holdings and numerous skilled slaves to help run them, Crassus had many people connected to and indebted to him through loans.[130] Crassus was able to amass large numbers of clients and friends in Rome whom he could call upon when needed. The *amicitia* relationships amongst the elite, where friends and colleagues would provide reciprocal services for one another became more unequal as the expansion of empire led to increased inequality amongst the elite.[131] Crassus occupied a top position amongst the elite and was therefore able to exploit these reciprocal relationships with

[124] Marshall 1976, p.14.
[125] Welch 1995, p.445.
[126] *Philippics* 5.38-39.
[127] *Philippics* 13.8.
[128] Weigel 1992, p.70.
[129] Stothard 2022, p.4.
[130] Stothard 2022, p.9.
[131] Vanderbroeck 2022, p.25-26.

ease, apparently being readily available in Rome to help.[132] He built up many political connections in Rome thanks to his willingness to help in legal matters and granting of interest free loans.[133] While Caesar and Pompey amassed power and wealth through warfare, Crassus was building a web of connections in Rome through generous lending and a friendly demeanour.

Conclusion

Weigel and Ward both offer useful starting points to begin reassessment of Lepidus and Crassus respectively, but they can go a little too far in their attempts. Weigel suggests that much of the reason for Lepidus being viewed as weak and feeble was thanks in large part to Cicero.[134] While this is true to a degree, Lepidus was in many ways flawed and severely outmatched by his colleagues in the military and political realms. Ward says that Crassus' values and political career were massively shaped by the events and times he lived in, just like his more famous colleagues.[135] While certainly true to a degree, in trying to absolve Crassus of some of the worst aspects of the time, this frames him as a passive participant. It would be wrong to rob him of all agency and simply ascribe his actions to the times. Crassus had motivations and goals that he pursued using the skills he had. Both triumviral periods were, however, unprecedented times and they no doubt altered how the lives of both men might have panned out in more 'normal' circumstances, but we must be careful to strike the right balance between attributing the events of their lives to the circumstances and affording them greater agency.

This chapter has aimed to demonstrate, through comparison, why Lepidus (and Crassus) was deserving of a place within his alliances. In addition, it has shown that both Lepidus and Crassus acted with greater agency and shrewdness than the sources might have us believe. In much of the comparison between the two, it is often Lepidus who comes out on top. Crassus has far more written about him thanks in large part to his enormous wealth and his humiliating end, but Lepidus, while more passive at times, had plenty of success, ancestral esteem and was a skilled statesman. To start, we examined some of the illustrious ancestry of both men, with Lepidus' in particular providing a strong foundation to work with and which he himself exploited on coinage. Crassus too had one ancestor in particular who likely provided motivation to him and marked himself and his family out for success. Next, we saw how Spain had provided success to Lepidus and refuge to Crassus in times of need. Lepidus' time in Spain allowed him to demonstrate his skills as statemen and negotiator, successfully curtailing the risk of war breaking out in the region on two separate occasions. Crassus

[132] Plutarch, *Crassus* 7.3-4.
[133] Marshall 1976, p.16.
[134] Weigel 1992, p.1.
[135] Ward 1977, p.5.

had less success there but was able to use his family connections build a small army and assist Sulla after being forced to flee Rome.

Upon examining their relationships with their colleagues, it became clear that, while Lepidus and Crassus were alienated from their respective alliances to a degree, they were not total outsiders acting on the sidelines. They both played key roles in Caesar's earlier successes and Lepidus in particular was a trusted friend and ally of the dictator. This chapter has also shown that after probing the source material more carefully, it emerges that both Lepidus and Crassus played more active roles in the formation of their alliances than the historical record would have us believe. However, it also becomes clear that soon after the formation of the second triumvirate, Lepidus' standing began to falter, and he was quickly eclipsed by his colleagues. Additionally, Lepidus and Crassus suffer at the hands of Cicero's, at times quite unfair, invective. The orator's stinging words helped to seal both men's reputations within the historical record. Finally, we identified some of the key skills and talents of our tarnished triumvirs in an effort to slightly rehabilitate them and demonstrate their worth to their colleagues. It goes without saying that Antony, Octavian, Caesar and Pompey were far more militarily active than Lepidus or Crassus ever were, and the early lives of Lepidus and Crassus are less well known, but the seeming lack of interest in both men appears undeserved. Lepidus and Crassus share a skill for being adaptable. Crassus' early actions showed tenacity, skill and flexibility which carried on into his later career.[136] He waited in exile until the right time before joining the attack against his enemies, raised his own army in Spain, joined Sulla in the civil war of 82, and when he lost Sullan support he turned to other means of political strength. Lepidus bided his time in the aftermath of Caesar's murder and the Senate's actions against Antony to figure out what course of action was best for him, though this saw him labelled as fickle.

[136] Ward 1977, p.82.

The Republican Triumvirs (and Lepidus) in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*

Introduction

An extra examination can be made through the treatment Plutarch gives to Lepidus' triumviral colleagues (as well as Crassus and to a lesser extent his colleagues) in the *Parallel Lives* to suggest that Lepidus was a man deserving of biographical treatment by Plutarch. This thesis does not seek to criticise Plutarch for this omission, but rather to argue that Lepidus' inclusion is warranted. It could be argued that his omission from the *Lives* has allowed Lepidus to fall out of memory and historical significance far more easily than if he had been included like his colleagues. Men of less popularity than those featured in Plutarch's *Lives*, but arguably of equal or greater importance to Greek and Roman history have faded somewhat into the background because they were not included in the biographer's work.[137] Lepidus is, of course, not absent from the *Lives*, but only receives mention in the context of those whose biographies Plutarch is writing. This can only go so far in giving us an insight into Lepidus' character and motivations when compared with his contemporaries. Might Lepidus' legacy have been different had he received his own biography? Would Plutarch have followed the same narrative and done little to alter perceptions of the triumvir? It is not possible to answer these with certainty, but this chapter will aim to explore what might have changed if Lepidus were featured in Plutarch's magnum opus.

Speculations on missing biographies in the *Lives* is not new. Figures from the imperial period such as Marcus Agrippa and Germanicus have been put forward as likely subjects worthy of biographical treatment and it seems unlikely that many would argue for their inclusion.[138] In the *Lives*, however, Plutarch avoids the imperial period entirely, no doubt in part because he had compiled a series of now lost imperial biographies from Augustus to Vitellius.[139] Men like Agrippa and Germanicus are of course featured extensively in other works and were both likely regular characters in Plutarch's lost biographies of Augustus and Tiberius. This has enabled us to gain clearer insights into their lives than we are able to with Lepidus. One cannot blame Plutarch for the omission of Lepidus and his general lack of coverage in the historical record. Rather, this chapter will suggest that a Plutarchean biography of Lepidus would have given us so much more to work with and perhaps put him more on par with his colleagues.

This chapter follows on from the comparison with Crassus and incorporates an examination of Plutarch's method in compiling the *Lives* to argue that Lepidus would (and perhaps should) have been a prime candidate for inclusion in the biographer's work. Comparison with Crassus will be a key theme

[137] Geiger 1981, p.85.
[138] Geiger 2017, p.121-122.
[139] Geiger 2017, p.121.

once again, though Crassus will not be the only point of comparison. Cicero and the other republican triumvirs will also be examined in the context of Plutarch's work, though in less detail, to ensure that the focus remains first and foremost on Lepidus. This chapter will be laid out as follows; it will begin with an overview of some of Plutarch's methods in compiling the *Lives*, next, an examination of Crassus in the *Lives*, followed by a brief study and comparison of the other triumvirs in the *Lives*, and lastly a look at the instances where Lepidus appears in the *Lives* followed by arguments in favour of his inclusion in the project.

Plutarch's Methods in the *Lives*

Plutarch himself says that he is not aiming to write histories, but lives, and therefore not all events and exploits may be revealed if they have little to say about the character of the man under examination.[140] This point must be borne in mind during any study of the *Lives* and Plutarch's methods in compiling them. While we can of course build a historical picture from his biographies that allows us to plot a chronological arc, Plutarch's goal was to understand a man's personality. With Lepidus already being so absent from the sources, would Plutarch have struggled to collect enough information to build a clear picture of his character? Let us look more closely at some of the biographer's methods before attempting to answer this question.

In general, it seems clear that Plutarch's narrative follows that of Appian quite closely and uses the work of Asinius Pollio too, but at intense or dramatic moments Plutarch furnishes his account with information that has come from elsewhere.[141] Prior to beginning his work, it is likely that Plutarch had read the standard Greek histories of Rome, since this was an expectation of an educated Greek, but he probably did not know all the details.[142] Unlike with Greek literature, which Plutarch would have read simply for their own sake and his own pleasure, the biographer would have needed to read the Roman historians in order to write his Roman lives.[143] A biography of Lepidus might have afforded us some of this extra detail in the more 'dramatic' moments of Lepidus' life, which, while not necessarily completely altering his characterisation, would no doubt have provided a more insightful account to work with and critique.

In his work, Plutarch focuses on minor events, sayings, and jests, examples of which are prevalent throughout the *Lives*. These minor events occur as much within the political realm as they do on the battlefield,[144] and so it seems as though Lepidus would have suited treatment by Plutarch

[140] *Alexander* 1.2.
[141] Pelling 1979, p.87.
[142] Pelling 1979, p.74.
[143] Pelling 1979, p.74-75.
[144] Wardman 1971, p.255.

quite nicely. In the *Caesar*, for example, Plutarch mentions Caesar experiencing "an unnatural dream" on the night before his crossing of the Rubicon in which Caesar "was having incestuous intercourse with his own mother."[145] This passage adds no historical benefit, but it gives us an insight into Caesar's (apparent) thoughts and feelings at this time, a hallmark of biography. These so called minor events and jests might be seen as a protest against military history and the retelling of great battles,[146] the hallmarks of Roman history. Essentially, Plutarch is not aiming to tell a complete historical story of events with his work.

How might Plutarch have settled on the men he chose to cover in his biographies? It goes without saying that Plutarch's decision to cover these men as his biographical subjects presumed greatness in one way or other.[147] What form might this greatness take, however? Certainly, all the triumvirs did great things. For the likes of Caesar, Pompey, Antony and Octavian this goes without saying. Crassus too had moments of greatness for sure, but it is difficult for him to measure up to his colleagues in many respects other than wealth, in which he far exceeds them. Lepidus also showed flashes of greatness at times, but again it rarely compared with Antony or Octavian. As already stated however, this paper is not aiming to lionise Lepidus (or Crassus), but simply give credit where it is due. M.A. Beck suggests that Plutarch's subjects' greatness come from their leadership.[148] Here Lepidus again falls short. He had run and defended Rome, but at the behest of others, and while he did lead legions, he lost their loyalty quickly.[149] The strict framework of the *Lives* likely also forced or compelled Plutarch to include some of his biographies so that they would provide a pair and point of comparison for another.[150] However, this would not have been the only reason for Plutarch to include one biography over another. Plutarch himself states that he wrote more biographies than he intended because he was enjoying it so much,[151] so there can be no doubt that there was a preliminary plan in place when Plutarch began and that it was likely then expanded upon.[152]

Crassus and the *Lives*

Plutarch's *Life of Crassus* helped set much of the foundation upon which Crassus' reputation rested for about two thousand years. However, there is a noticeable lack of scholarship specifically examining Crassus in Plutarch's *Lives*, and this section aims to partially address this gap. Like many of

[145] 32.9.
[146] Wardman 1971, p.254.
[147] Beck 2023, p.197.
[148] 2023, p.197.
[149] Dio, 49.12.
[150] Geiger 1981, p.87.
[151] *Aemilius* 1.1-2.
[152] Geiger 1981, p.87-88.

the sources relating to Crassus' life, Plutarch's work does not paint Crassus in a particularly flattering light and the accusation of greed is rife throughout. In fact, at the very beginning of the biography Plutarch begins with an anecdote detailing Crassus' avarice[153] which compelled him to acquire enormous wealth, much of it through "fire and war [and]… public calamities."[154] It might be said that Crassus' role in the first triumvirate was the smallest, or rather, the least public of the three men,[155] but he is still given centre stage in his own biography. Lepidus could certainly be labelled the same in his alliance but received no biography.

Crassus' early life is rushed through rather quickly by Plutarch so that by chapter 4 of his biography we reach already one of the highlights of his career, the Sullan civil wars. Clearly Plutarch wanted to introduce the dominant themes to his narrative as early as possible leaving us with a biography that, at its beginning at least, is somewhat lacking in, biographical content but is instead rather anecdotal.[156] This same haste is seen in the *Antony*,[157] *Caesar*[158] and *Pompey*[159] too, suggesting that, at least for the triumvirs, Plutarch was keen to explore his biographical themes quickly. Should Lepidus have been given a dedicated biography by Plutarch, might its structure have been much the same? A similar treatment, with a cursory look at Lepidus' early life and a focus on anecdotes, might have offered limited value and little alteration to the established characterisations of Lepidus.

Plutarch's narrative consistently portrays Crassus as combative and passive aggressive with Pompey,[160] while Caesar brings the three of them together and is the driving force behind the formation of the triumvirate.[161] Crassus' alleged passivity when it comes to the triumvirate's formation is mirrored in the way that Lepidus is characterised during the formation of the second triumvirate. Cicero's writing has also contributed to the tradition that there was great hostility between Crassus and Pompey.[162] However, it was more likely that this was an attempt by Cicero and others to separate Pompey from Crassus (and Caesar), and because of Cicero's personal dislike of him.[163] Plutarch makes

[153] *Crassus* 1.2.
[154] *Crassus* 2.3.
[155] Pelling 1979, p.77.
[156] Pelling 1979, p.85.
[157] Plutarch tells us of Antony's "immoderate and extravagant expenditures" and behaviour almost immediately (2.3) before jumping to his appointment as *magister equitum* in 58 (3.1).
[158] Plutarch begins with Caesar's early dealings with Sulla (1) and then we are briskly taken to his kidnapping by pirates (2.1).
[159] The people's love of Pompey is immediately made clear (1) followed swiftly by comparisons with Alexander the Great (2).
[160] *Crassus* 12.2 & 12.4.
[161] *Crassus* 14.1-3.
[162] *Ad Atticum* I.14.3 & II.21.3.
[163] Marshall 1976, p.40-41.

it clear that Crassus was "an out-and-out foe of Cicero" during the triumvirate.[164] Might Plutarch have written something similar about Lepidus and Cicero's relationship? We can clearly infer that Cicero was a foe of Lepidus[165] (and the triumvirate, even if he was praising Octavian), but his opinions on the triumvir were, for a while, left unchallenged in scholarship. An outright admission of Cicero's hostility to Lepidus might have given pause to those still looking to form their opinion on Lepidus and his actions.

Cicero's invective against both Crassus and Lepidus cannot be taken at face value. Cicero fawns over Octavian shortly after Caesar's murder, seemingly desperate for power and out of hatred for Antony.[166] Cicero was clearly deceived by Octavian's youth and charm with little hesitation or thought for the danger the young man may represent. Ultimately, Cicero was instrumental in having Octavian assigned immense power to fight in defence of Rome.[167] Cicero's invective against Lepidus lays heavy blame at his feet for the downfall of the Republic,[168] but Cicero certainly had his part to play too. Cicero's eagerness to be drawn in by Octavian's character discredits the orator somewhat, especially his rhetoric against those he holds responsible for the Republic's downfall, Lepidus included. Plutarch observed Cicero's enmity towards Crassus and so it is likely that in an imagined biography of Lepidus Plutarch would have picked up on Cicero's dislike of him.

At Plutarch's hands Crassus does suffer another small blow. In the comparison of Crassus with his Greek counterpart Nicias, Plutarch notes that Alexander's Parthian campaign was hailed as a monumental achievement, contributing significantly to his legacy as 'the Great'. In stark contrast, Crassus' Parthian expedition is deemed frivolous and is judged as entirely motivated by selfishness and greed.[169] This judgment seems notably unfair. Alexander's campaign is lauded for its strategic brilliance and ambition, while Crassus' similar endeavour is harshly criticized without acknowledging the potential parallels in their motivations and objectives. This juxtaposition underscores a perceived double standard in evaluating historical figures' motives and accomplishments, suggesting that Crassus' ambitions, though perhaps ill-fated, might be viewed more sympathetically when compared to similarly ambitious endeavours by other leaders. It should be noted however, that it remains unclear what pretext or legal right Crassus had to make war on the Parthians,[170] but Plutarch's assessment

[164] *Cicero* 30.3.

[165] *Ad Familiares* XII.8. Cicero describes Lepidus' teaming up with Antony as a "heinous" act brought about by "his utter fickleness and lack of principle."

[166] Plutarch, *Cicero* 44.5-45.2.

[167] Plutarch, *Cicero* 45.4-6.

[168] *Ad Brutum* I.15. The alliance of Antony and Lepidus was one that "feared peace" and made "foes of tranquillity."

[169] Plutarch, *Comparison of Nicias and Crassus* 4.5.

[170] Marshall 1976, p.142-143.

reflects a broader tendency to elevate some figures while diminishing others based on their ultimate success or failure. Despite the arguably reckless nature of Crassus' Parthian expedition, it could be argued that his motivations were not entirely different from those of other ambitious leaders of his time. Assessments of Lepidus' final failure, which will be covered in detail in the final chapter of this paper, echo those of Crassus' too.

The Other Triumvirs and the *Lives*

Plutarch wrote biographies for all the other triumvirs and this section will briefly examine a few instances of their mention. Unfortunately, Plutarch's biography of Augustus, along with the rest of his imperial biographies (except for the *Galba* and *Otho*), have been lost to us. While a Plutarchean biography of Augustus would be most welcome, there is such an abundance of material on the man that we are hardly at a great loss. The extant triumviral biographies have afforded us greater insight into the lives and characters of the triumvirs and helped them to retain relevance in the annals of history.

Plutarch notes that the triumvirate and their actions were "odious to the Romans" and therefore all three men were disliked.[171] In addition to exasperation, the formation of the triumvirate sparked intense panic thanks to the return of the proscriptions,[172] a fear that was exploited by Augustus once he held supreme power. Plutarch says that it was Antony who "bore most of the blame, since he was older than Caesar, [and] more powerful than Lepidus."[173] This is one of the many examples where Lepidus' colleagues receive blame for the turmoil of the triumviral period, but Lepidus is still stung by this assessment. Antony here is saddled with the most blame because he outranks Octavian in age and Lepidus in power. While Antony clearly comes off worse from this assessment, Lepidus too is brought down a peg by being relegated to eldest yet least powerful in the alliance. It is these fleeting mentions of Lepidus in relation to or the context of his colleagues that has helped to frame him as both cruel and useless. An individual biography would certainly have done more to move Lepidus out of the shadows of his colleagues while focusing the narrative on Lepidus himself. The overall assessment of Lepidus may not have seen a great improvement in his likeability, it would have provided a clearer insight into his life and character, providing historians more evidence to work with.

While Lepidus may have received a mild sting in Antony's biography, Antony himself fairs much worse. Plutarch's narrative characterises Antony as having lived luxuriously, extravagantly and

[171] *Antony* 21.1.
[172] Hurlet 2020, p.237.
[173] *Antony* 21.1.

sensually.[174] This framing plays heavily on already established motifs and Augustan propaganda. It makes for entertaining reading but does little to offer further insight. Plutarch does temper the severity of his criticisms of Antony with an analysis of his character flaws (specifically slowness and simplicity),[175] and notably his playful nature which granted high tolerance against being laughed at.[176] Despite a likelihood that an imagined biography of Lepidus would play on his already established criticism and failures, a similar analysis of Lepidus' character problems as shown here may have afforded him more sympathy and greater thought.

Turning to Caesar now, we again see a tendency for Plutarch's narrative to reinforce already established accounts. In early 61 as Caesar prepared to depart for Spain, he was heavily indebted to several creditors, so he sought Crassus, "the richest of the Romans, who had need of Caesar's vigour and fire for his political campaign against Pompey."[177] Crassus' rivalry with Pompey is mentioned again, giving the impression that it was an insurmountable barrier for them to overcome without Caesar's input. Caesar is the one taking charge and remains active in forming partnerships and alliances that would eventually lead to the forming of their triumvirate.

Throughout the biography, Plutarch favourably compares Caesar's leadership and supremacy with that of other renowned Roman statemen such as Fabius, Scipio, Sulla, Marius, and Pompey.[178] These examples indicate that, when evaluating leadership, Plutarch himself thinks beyond the strict parallel structure of his *Lives* in a comparative way that sees contrasts of Greeks with Greeks and Romans with Romans.[179] This further suggests that Plutarch, in addition to comparing Lepidus with a Greek counterpart, would also have compared him with fellow Romans throughout his biography. Since this is the very nature of the present paper, one cannot help but be excited by that prospect. Such comparison would provide us with greater insight into Plutarch's own thinking and the attitudes of his contemporaries to Lepidus as well as more prominently highlighting some of Lepidus' achievements and acts.

[174] Plutarch, *Antony* 23-24.
[175] Beck 2023, p.211.
[176] *Antony* 24.7-8.
[177] Plutarch, *Caesar* 11.1.
[178] *Caesar* 15.
[179] Beck 2023, p.213.

Lepidus and the *Lives*

This section will examine some of the instances where Lepidus does appear in Plutarch's work in addition to continuing to argue why Lepidus should have been given a biography of his own. Let us assume that Plutarch's imagined biography of Lepidus had stuck mostly to the tradition surrounding the triumvir and that later scholarship had done little to push back or question this characterisation. While not ideal, we would have been given much more material to work with and a greater chance and being able to build a more solid picture of the man. It is also likely that we would see far more writing and scholarship dedicated to Lepidus had he been featured in the *Lives*. One could of course say that countless Romans should be afforded a biography by Plutarch if these were the only criteria. Despite Lepidus' shortcomings and his characterisation in the sources, he was integral to Rome's history at this time and there are no doubt lessons to be learned from his life that Plutarch would have been able to highlight and elaborate on.

While Caesar was chasing down Pompey and his supporters, including the consuls, Lepidus is essentially running things in Rome as *praetor urbanis*.[180] The anecdotes within Plutarch[181] and Appian[182] make it clear that Lepidus is watching over Rome in Caesar's absence, but Dio[183] neglects to mention Lepidus' input, instead attributing this role to Antony. The fact that Plutarch specifies that it was Lepidus who took charge in Rome, and that Appian followed this name narrative, suggests that this is the more likely course of events. It points to there being more than one narrative circulating amongst historians and biographers including one that is perhaps needlessly hostile to Lepidus. Plutarch's claim, within his biography of Antony, adds more weight. All three writers make mention of Antony's failure to maintain order in Rome later in 47,[184] indicating that Antony could not always maintain control while Lepidus, under Caesar at least, had been a good steward of Rome. This might suggest that Caesar had lost faith in Antony's abilities and preferred to have Lepidus in charge since he had proven his worth to Caesar on numerous occasions. Later however, Plutarch states that much of the power Lepidus had received from Caesar had been facilitated by Antony.[185] Yet it seems clear from the evidence that Caesar had implicit trust in Lepidus having utilised his skills on more than one occasion as his *magister equitum*.[186]

[180] Weigel 1992, p.26.
[181] *Antony* 6.4.
[182] *Civil Wars* 2.41.
[183] 41.18.3.
[184] Plutarch, *Antony* 9-10; Dio, 42.27-33; Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.92-94.
[185] *Antony* 18.1.
[186] Dio, 43.28.2; 43.33.1; 43.48.1; 43.49.1.

Such inconsistencies are often present throughout the *Lives* where Plutarch has clearly come across new or better (according to him) information that is included in a later written biography.[187] Another such inconsistency involves our man Lepidus. Plutarch reports that Lepidus had wished to save his brother Paullus during the proscriptions but had relented at Antony and Octavian's insistence.[188] However, in the *Life of Antony* Plutarch claims that it was Lepidus who had wanted Paullus gone and suggests that the earlier version was merely an alternative narrative.[189] This contradiction could quickly erase any sympathy a person may have had for Lepidus at the potential loss of his brother and no doubt helped contribute to the characterisation of the triumvir as having been cruel, as well as handing him greater personal responsibility for the enacting of the proscriptions.

Plutarch's *Antony* is generally unkind to Lepidus where he is characterised as especially weak and pitiful when faced with a defeated Antony following the battle of Mutina. Following his defeat, Antony and his army faced the risk of famine amongst many other difficulties, but Plutarch notes that, despite these hardships, Antony was a model of resilience to his soldiers.[190] Antony and his men hoped to join forces with Lepidus who was nearby since he had considered Lepidus a friend but was annoyed when Lepidus did not offer "tokens of friendliness" after setting up camp nearby.[191] The narrative has already characterised Lepidus as a disloyal friend while Antony is portrayed as a man courageously persevering in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. Plutarch recounts that when Antony entered Lepidus' camp the soldiers were immediately enamoured by his words and appearance, offered to kill Lepidus if he wished, and that Lepidus was only saved from this fate thanks to the kindness and clemency of Antony.[192] Lepidus' efforts to stop his troops from going over to Antony fall flat and he is presented as being entirely at the mercy of those around him and robbed of all agency. Antony comes out of this a hero and a champion of the soldiers. Lepidus' depiction again feeds into the already established paradigm that he is weak willed and unable to lead. This story echoes that of Lepidus' attempts to stand up to Octavian in Sicily in 36 (to be covered in the next chapter) which only helps to further this negative image.

Probing more deeply into some of the central tenets of political biography can help us to build a picture of how Plutarch might have constructed his biography of Lepidus. In his examination of Plutarch's biographies, C. Pelling aims to see how Plutarch's work matches up with modern expectations of a biography. Pelling achieves this by mapping (as best he can) H. Lee's "ten rules for

[187] Pelling 1979, p.76.
[188] *Cicero* 46.5.
[189] 19.2.
[190] *Antony* 17.2-3.
[191] *Antony* 18.1.
[192] *Antony* 18.

biography" onto the *Lives*.[193] The first of these rules is that the story told in the biography should be true. Plutarch indicates, with his frequent discussions of his sources and alternative narratives, that he too is keen on bringing out the truth. Pelling however, notes a slight issue with Plutarch's pursuit of truth in the *Lives*. Looking to a quote from Plutarch's *Solon*, which discusses the alleged meeting between Solon and Croesus despite the issues of chronology, the issue starts to emerge. Plutarch says:

> "*As for his [Solon's] interview with Croesus, some think to prove by chronology that it is fictitious. But when a story is so famous and so well-attested, and, what is more to the point, when it comports so well with the character of Solon, and is so worthy of his magnanimity and wisdom, I do not propose to reject it out of deference to any chronological canons, so called, which thousands are to this day revising, without being able to bring their contradictions into any general agreement*" (*Solon* 27.1)

For Plutarch, any chronological discrepancy is of little issue since the story suits the character of Solon so well. This points to Plutarch's desire for his biographies to be true to life; to the life of the characters he writes.[194] Plutarch aims to establish the personality of his subjects quickly so that these characteristics and themes are borne in mind throughout the narrative. Plutarch is willing to alter some details in the narrative to accentuate traits that he believes important to understanding what the subject was really like and to build a picture of their identity.[195]

Should these same methods have been applied to a biography of Lepidus, this might have proved damaging to his character. Lepidus' alleged cruelty, feebleness and weakness would no doubt have been further accentuated by any bended truth employed by Plutarch. In the case of the *Antony*, Plutarch makes a young Antony seem especially susceptible to the damaging character of Curio[196] helping to set Antony up as a man who is all too easily swayed by debauchery and excesses. These are characteristics and traits which have stuck to Antony to this day and so it seems likely that Plutarch would have capitalised on Lepidus' alleged personality flaws to enhance his character. However, one could also hope that stories of Lepidus' greater feats and achievements may also have received similar treatment. Lepidus showed himself to be a loyal ally to Caesar, a capable and reliable guardian of Rome in times of war.[197] Plutarch may well have focused on these traits since it can, in a way, highlight Lepidus' flaws too, namely his naivety and how out of his depth he appeared to be. Lepidus' loyalty to and belief that his allies would stick to their word, while admirable, was foolish.

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[193] Pelling 2023, p.13.
[194] Pelling 2023, p.14.
[195] Pelling 2023, p.14.
[196] *Antony* 2.
[197] Dio, 43.28.2; 43.33.1; 43.48.1; 43.49.1.

The past can be characterised as "a school for statesmen" and this is often the goal of historians and biographers.[198] Like Crassus (and any other man featured in the *Lives*), Lepidus' life could provide lessons to be learned from. The overarching theme of the *Crassus* concerns the risks of greed for money and power which ultimately led to Crassus' downfall. For Lepidus, the moral of his biography, had Plutarch stuck to the general narrative surrounding the triumvir's life, would likely have concerned the dangers of alliances between powerful competing men, the risk of fickle loyalty and the ultimate humiliation that can result. Lepidus' life provided ample opportunity to Plutarch to flex his biographical skills, which, in addition to being a fascinating read, may well have helped to rehabilitate the triumvir at least slightly.

Conclusion

In sum, this chapter can conclude, that while it may not be wise to speculate on Plutarch's exact thought processes as he wrote and compiled his biographies, there are possible reasons to consider as to why Lepidus was not included, beyond simply suggesting that Plutarch did not want or care to write about him. Since Plutarch does mention Lepidus in the other biographies, he clearly had information pertaining to his life, so it may well be that a biography of Lepidus had been under consideration. The strict framework of the *Lives* required that a Greek comparison be included, but perhaps a suitable comparison for Lepidus could not be found and so a separate treatment was not pursued. Plutarch himself discusses the pairings and justifies his choices,[199] but it must also be pointed out that the need for a pair was not the only reason a person was chosen Plutarch would have chosen to write about a man.[200] Additionally, Plutarch covers this period so extensively with his work that perhaps the inclusion of Lepidus would add very little, since we already get a clear enough picture of his character from his mention within the other biographies.

One might think that it is pointless to speculate on what could have been had a particular writer or historian dedicated some of their work to a specific historical actor. It can certainly look trivial when written as such, but it is not the only point this chapter aims to make. Rather, when a person, be they scholar or amateur historian, comes across the story of Lepidus and seeks to judge him one way or another, the general picture is unkind, but he is given far less prominence and narrative space as his colleagues. With more material on Lepidus for us to work with, perhaps scholars and historians could have begun to attempt reassessment of him earlier. The previous chapter explored several reasons why Lepidus was deserving of inclusion within his alliance and, while not on an even footing with his

[198] Wardman 1971, p.256.
[199] *Cimon* 3.1 & *Nicias* 1.1.
[200] Geiger 1981, p.88.

colleagues, he was worthy of inclusion in the triumvirate. Lepidus is also deserving of a little more respect than he has so far been given. Lepidus' absence from the *Lives* could be viewed as disrespect, though Plutarch's reasons for the omission can and should be respected. Lepidus was no hero, and he is certainly deserving of criticism, but he is also deserving of further attention.

Case Studies

Introduction

This final chapter examines three key moments from Lepidus' life that have contributed significantly to his unkind portrayal in the sources. The aim of this chapter is to show that all three case studies can be reframed in a more positive light for Lepidus while also negatively reframing Octavian. The three case studies are as follows: the *Laudatio Turiae*, a funerary inscription that details one woman's disagreement with Lepidus at the height of the proscriptions, next, Lepidus' fall from power in 36 after standing up to Octavian in Sicily, and finally, Lepidus' appointment and continued tenure as *pontifex maximus*. It should be noted that these three incidences were, in general, bad for Lepidus and this chapter will not attempt to absolve him of all such negativity. However, there is clear scope for reinterpretation that can offer differing insights.

Laudatio Turiae

The *Laudatio Turiae*[201] is an unusually long funerary inscription to a woman (Turia) set up by her husband. The inscription contains a rather brutal anecdote about Lepidus' mistreatment of the woman as she attempts to have her proscribed husband restored.[202] The historical record gives vivid accounts of the horror and chaos of the proscriptions,[203] and these have in turn come to blacken the reputation of the triumvirate. The *Laudatio Turiae* has especially besmirched Lepidus' reputation. With Antony and Octavian pursuing Caesar's assassins across the empire, Lepidus was left in charge of Rome, during which time the proscriptions were well underway. The *Laudatio Turiae* tells us that Turia, having laid prostrate at Lepidus' feet was unceremoniously dragged away and her request ignored.[204] Additionally, the inscription makes mention of Turia's unbroken spirit in the face of Lepidus' insolent cruelty and the kindness and clemency of Octavian who subsequently granted her request.[205] This undoubtedly looks bad for Lepidus, but there is more to be examined.

The proscriptions and the triumviral period were no doubt times of upheaval and violence, but some of the stories are particularly outlandish. One such example sees Fulvia taking joy in seeing and mutilating Cicero's severed head.[206] These more bizarre stories are often not taken to be historical fact but rather hyperbole to tarnish the perpetrators.[207] Lepidus, however, is not so fortunate. The *Laudatio*

[201] *ILS* 8393.
[202] Gowing 1992, p.283.
[203] Hurlet 2020, p.237.
[204] *ILS* 8393. II.11-18.
[205] *ILS* 8393. II.19-21.
[206] Dio, 47.8.3.
[207] Gowing 1992, p.283-284.

Turiae has been grouped with these outlandish accounts but has also been accepted as credible evidence of the violence and cruelty of the proscriptions and for Lepidus' behaviour and character.[208] In addition to being given a leading role in the undertaking of the proscriptions,[209] Lepidus is accused of having been responsible for proscribing his own brother.[210] It is therefore easy to see how this inscription was so easily taken at face value for evidence of Lepidus' cruelty.

Octavian went over Lepidus' head when he removed the Turia's husband from proscription.[211] For this, Lepidus was right to be troubled since Octavian had done so on his own authority without consultation with Lepidus.[212] Turia and her husband clearly regarded Octavian's authority as superior to that of Lepidus, and Octavian, in granting their request, evidently viewed Lepidus' involvement as immaterial.[213] Lepidus' reaction therefore seems predictable and justified, though the apparent cruelty with which he responded to Octavian's clemency is likely an invention of Augustan propaganda, since this inscription was set up under the principate. While Lepidus certainly does not emerge from this incident looking good, it seems clear that the accusations of cruelty levelled at him were unfounded. Additionally, his reaction to having his authority ignored appears justified whereas Octavian comes across as arrogant. The contradiction in the historical record regarding Lepidus' level of involvement in the proscriptions[214] and the context of the *Laudatio Turiae* (i.e., an Augustan monument) make it hard to believe that Lepidus was as cruel as the inscription claims.

A brief comparison will now be made with an example from Crassus' life where he was accused of unnecessary cruelty. In his war against Spartacus, Crassus was faced with large numbers of his men abandoning their arms and fleeing. When the soldiers were brought back and rearmed Crassus had five-hundred who were deemed the most cowardly divided into fifty equal groups and one from each group slaughtered by his comrades to instil discipline again.[215] Crassus has been condemned for this despite the desperation of the situation,[216] and it has come to colour perceptions of him as cruel and violent. This was, however, a hallmark of traditional Roman discipline,[217] that, while unpleasant, was not unusual and demonstrated Crassus' ability to maintain control.

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[208] Gowing 1992, p.283-284.
[209] Appian, *Civil Wars* 4.12.1.
[210] Plutarch, *Cicero* 46.5.
[211] *ILS* 8393. II.1-3 & 11-12.
[212] Gowing 1992, p.287.
[213] Gowing 1992, p.288.
[214] Tacitus, *Annals* 1.9-10. Tacitus identifies two conflicting reports regarding responsibility for the proscriptions, one which blames Antony and Lepidus and another that blames Octavian almost entirely.
[215] Plutarch, *Crassus* 10.2.
[216] Ward 1977, p.88.
[217] Ward 1977, p.49-50.

These two reappraisals both mirror and contrast with one another. We afford both Lepidus and Crassus more agency in their respective coalitions and frame them as more active. With Lepidus we suggest he was not as cruel as the sources would have us believe and that he was exercising the powers and the authority granted by the law. Crassus' decimation though ruthless, was hardly un-Roman and reanalysing it shows that he took an active military role.

Sicily in 36

At the closing stages of the war against Sextus Pompey, Octavian summoned Lepidus from Africa to assist in Sicily.[218] Octavian's treatment of Lepidus was looking less like that of one ally of equal standing addressing another, but rather addressing a subordinate.[219] Dio confirms as much, and Lepidus' frustrations were becoming clear.[220] Octavian is showing himself to be rude and arrogant while Lepidus generally complies. Agrippa (and to a lesser extent Lepidus) successfully laid siege to Messana, one of Sextus' final strongholds and secured the surrender of Plinius' legions who Lepidus eagerly accepted into his ranks.[221] Octavian had faced huge losses in the leadup to the final confrontation in Sicily while Lepidus had been relatively successful,[222] yet this goes mostly unnoticed thanks to how the story in Sicily ends for Lepidus.

Lepidus, feeling slighted and now puffed up with twenty-two legions, demanded he have his position and lands restored to him, but Octavian took issue and chastised Lepidus for attempting to claim Sicily as his own.[223] Lepidus' claims had merit despite what the hostility of the sources may have us believe since Lepidus had been betrayed already after Philippi, the triumviral alliance was in writing, and he had assisted in defeating Sextus.[224] As an equal partner in their alliance with matching *imperium*, Lepidus was justified in claiming Plinius' legions and plundering Messana.[225] Lepidus is derided for this and attempting to claim Sicily for himself after being robbed of his other holdings at the triumvirate's renewal,[226] but he was simply attempting to regain his equal status. Despite how this story ends, Lepidus demonstrated remarkable skill and initiative by claiming the legions for his own after Agrippa's loyal but unwise refusal.[227] This can and (as we have seen) has been interpreted

[218] Velleius Paterculus, 2.80.1.
[219] Badian 1992, p.10.
[220] 49.8.3.
[221] Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.122.
[222] Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.98.
[223] Dio, 49.11.3-12.1.
[224] Weigel 1992, p.89-90.
[225] Hayne 1974, p.62.
[226] Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.123.
[227] Badian 1992, p.11.

negatively, however, it goes against the general characterisation of Lepidus having been passive and feeble.

The soldiers, realising that another civil war could erupt if the two triumvirs disagreed, were exasperated and after considering their options, Lepidus was essentially abandoned, and all his men went over to Octavian.[228] The sources make it clear that this was highly embarrassing for Lepidus and that it was only by the clemency of Octavian that he was not killed by his own men. Lepidus' demands had been reasonable given the circumstances but then what of Octavian's response? By refusing Lepidus' demands Octavian appears power hungry and untrustworthy, after all Lepidus was an equal partner. However, if Octavian had cowed to Lepidus' demands this would have been a poor image for him and possibly opened him up to further concessions. By refusing Lepidus' demands and then offering clemency and allowing him to live, Octavian could cast himself in a far more positive light.

With Lepidus left empty handed and Octavian victorious it gives the impression that Octavian's activities in Sicily had been wholly successful.[229] However, this was not entirely the case since Octavian had suffered numerous shipwrecks, several close calls, an attempt on his life, and he was forced to arm twenty-thousand slaves to fight for him.[230] This idea of Octavian's great success juxtaposes with Lepidus' final humiliation which saw him fall out of the alliance and robbed of all authority. There can be no denying the embarrassment of the situation, but it is important to recognise that Lepidus had not been unreasonable nor brought it entirely on himself. Lepidus does bear blame for not seeing this betrayal coming. Octavian had led Lepidus into falsely believing that the two of them were friends,[231] but recent events had shown that loyalty was no longer guaranteed.

Lepidus as *Pontifex Maximus* from 36 Onwards

Despite his fall from grace in Sicily, Lepidus remained as *pontifex maximus* until his death in 12. Since all discussion by historians after 36 turned to the conflict between Antony and Octavian, Lepidus essentially falls off the face of the Earth.[232] One must wonder why Lepidus was allowed to remain in the role. Lepidus took the role of chief pontiff almost immediately after Caesar's death, however, there was speculation that he had acquired the post improperly. Under Caesar the office of *pontifex maximus* was made dynastic when a law was passed which stated that Caesar's son, whether by birth or adoption, would inherit the title.[233] This was wholly unusual since political and religious offices of state were not hereditary. Octavian likely felt cheated out of his inheritance, since Caesar

[228] Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.124-126.
[229] Ridley 2005, p.275.
[230] Pliny, *Natural History* 7.148; Suetonius, *Augustus* 16.
[231] Tacitus, *Annals* 1.10.
[232] Weigel 1992, p.94.
[233] Dio, 44.5.3.

had specified in his will that his heir should receive the office, but this was extremely un-Republican. The law which formally brought Octavian into Caesar's family did not pass until September of 43 and therefore he was not legally entitled to the office of *pontifex maximus* when Lepidus took it.[234] Lepidus would have been one of the most likely candidates for the office of *pontifex maximus* having been from one of Rome's most distinguished patrician families and one of Caesar's most trusted allies, but his taking of the position has consistently been used against him as some sort of illegal power grab.[235] Dio[236] interprets Lepidus' accession to the priesthood have been an attempt by Antony to undermine Octavian rather than an opportunistic attempt by Lepidus himself.[237] This may well be further invective being thrown at Antony (and by extension Lepidus), and while it certainly does not help to improve Lepidus' image since it makes him appear somewhat tyrannical, it shows that a narrative existed that Lepidus had not made a play for power himself.

Why then was Lepidus, now disgraced and exiled, allowed to continue as *pontifex maximus* for another twenty-four years? There is disagreement amongst scholars over the importance of the priesthood at this time, with some suggesting that it was merely a title while others assign it more kingly status.[238] One must also wonder how important the priesthood was to Octavian at this time. For the rest of the triumviral period Octavian is busy dealing with and fighting Antony, but post-Actium, nothing changes, and Lepidus remains in the role. Once Octavian (now Augustus) has supreme power, the principate sees numerous temples, games and religious festivals being dedicated to him.[239] These were the religious affairs of the time and it is likely that Augustus' centrality to the regime and the state meant that the chief priesthood became, like Lepidus, relatively unimportant.

By not removing Lepidus from his pontificate Octavian could advertise his regard for law and custom.[240] It practically made Lepidus a client of Octavian's. Lepidus' family name still carried a degree of prestige even after his downfall and so he still brought personal legitimacy to the role.[241] Does Octavian's reluctance to take the position tell us more about Octavian's/Augustus' thoughts on Lepidus or the priesthood? Who might this be more humiliating for, the supreme ruler forced to wait for a disgraced colleague to die or the priest who exists as merely a placeholder? For Lepidus it is undeniably humiliating but also somewhat gratifying since his family name certainly maintained prestige. Despite

[234] Simpson 2006, p.632.
[235] Weigel 1992, p.48.
[236] 44.53.6-7. Antony apparently feared Lepidus' power so offered him the priesthood and gave his daughter in marriage to Lepidus' son.
[237] Gowing 1995, p.141.
[238] Ridley 2005, p.280.
[239] Ridley 2005, p.284-285.
[240] Badian 1992, p.13.
[241] Simpson 2006, p.631.

all the power Augustus had amassed, he was essentially made to wait for Lepidus to die which was no doubt humiliating for him too.

Conclusion

Having re-examined these three case studies, it seems clear that Lepidus was not deserving of all the negative reception he received within the historical record. The *Laudatio Turiae* is very much a product of its time that conforms to the opinions of the prevailing Augustan propaganda and should therefore be interpreted with caution. Lepidus had acted as one would expect him to act given the circumstances of Octavian's behaviour, and while the proscriptions were violent, Lepidus shared no more blame than his colleagues in their undertaking.

The events in Sicily were undoubtedly humiliating for Lepidus but his decisions at that time should not be judged so harshly. His actions were at least partially justifiable considering Octavian's treatment of him and he was certainly owed better than he got. If Lepidus had not challenged Octavian in Sicily where might that have left him? Lepidus was being treated poorly by Octavian and there was a need to remind him that he was a colleague not a subordinate. Additionally, we see that Octavian's successes in Sicily were not as they seemed, and while he certainly came away the winner, his victory was not without significant hardship.

Augustan propaganda and the hostile historical record had its part to play in besmirching Lepidus' tenure as *pontifex maximus* too. Despite Caesar and Octavian's attempts to convert the chief priesthood to a hereditary position, Lepidus was appointed since he had the necessary prestige and the experience to hold it. Lepidus' time as head priest after the events in Sicily must have brought a certain level of embarrassment since it demonstrated the depths of unimportance that he had sunk to. Octavian could no doubt have had Lepidus executed on some charges, but by allowing him to live it intensified the humiliation and enabled him to appear to be showing a degree of clemency. Sparing Lepidus certainly helped Octavian's image post-Actium enabling him to be somewhat absolved of responsibility for the proscriptions. However, Lepidus' continued occupation of this religious post cannot have been easy for Octavian either. It must have been at least slightly embarrassing to be forced to wait for a disgraced colleague to die or else risk appearing tyrannical for having him killed.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that much of what is written about Lepidus requires careful study and oftentimes new interpretation for us to fully understand and appreciate his position. By placing him in comparison with Crassus, we saw that both men, while partially alienated in different ways, had crucial roles to play in the formation of both their alliances. Lepidus brought enormous family prestige and his talents for embassy and negotiation while Crassus' enormous wealth, vast connections and decent military skills were of use to his colleagues. At the start of the triumvirate, Lepidus was easily superior to his colleagues in both social rank and connections, thanks in part to his age but also his illustrious family name. However, he had failed to capitalise on them in the way that Octavian had done with Caesar's name. This was no doubt part of the reason why he failed to remain relevant and how he became so easily forgotten and denigrated by historians and scholars.

Lepidus' absence from Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* is unfortunate, but this paper as aimed to illuminate Plutarch's methods for choosing his candidates to suggest why Lepidus may have been considered and that he could have made a worthy addition. Unfortunately, where Lepidus does appear in the *Lives* he is often painted in a negative light and since he has no biography of his own, there is little pushback against these characterisations. Finally, the three case studies examined in the final chapter demonstrated that Lepidus was not deserving of all of the hostile reception he received in the historical record. While he was certainly humiliated and fell out of relevance in Rome, his decisions and actions were often justifiable, but he was simply up against too great a foe.

Weigel's work marks an excellent starting point for rehabilitating Lepidus, though he is often a little too forgiving. Lepidus' poor reputation is ascribed almost wholly to the imperial historians,[242] and is at times an air of perpetual victimhood. Lepidus was certainly a victim of a hostile historical cannon to a degree but faced with the likes of Antony and Octavian who stood little chance of emerging supreme, overcoming them or successfully working with them. However, casting Lepidus as a victim robs him of his achievements and accomplishments.

Lepidus' "finest days" likely came in 44-43 when he was governing his provinces and was newly made pontifex.[243] He was out on his own rather than operating in Caesar's shadow and at his behest, he had an illustrious career behind him having already been consul, was chief pontiff, had negotiated peace for Rome and was governing two of Rome's greatest provinces with an army at his disposal. In other words, the triumviral period seemed to mark the beginning of his decline which no doubt contributed to the perception of him as weak and useless. Lepidus' talents for administration and

[242] Weigel 1992, p.106.
[243] Weigel 1992, p.51.

holding down the fort may have contributed to his undoing too. He was left in Rome while Antony and Octavian went to war at Philippi. This must surely have been because he had proved himself to be capable of handling things at Rome in times of crisis, however he missed out on the spoils of war. This was likely another reason to leave him behind. One less man to share. Dio makes it seem as though it were inevitable that one of the triumvirs would be edged out eventually and that the resulting *duovir* would also falter with so much wealth, land, power, and military strength at stake.[244] Attitudes such as these have no doubt helped to fuel Lepidus' characterisation as the weak link and the inevitable third wheel. The reverse can also be true. The invective of Cicero and general characterisation of Lepidus in the sources could have helped to give rise to the attitudes expressed by Dio, that someone was bound to leave in disgrace before a final showdown. At the start of the alliance, none of the three men's fates were yet set in stone, though Rome's status as a republic was likely long gone. It might be said that Lepidus was born at the wrong time since he showed himself to be an exemplary imperial consul, content to operate under a supreme leader provided his own personal dignity was honoured.[245] Under the circumstances and time he found himself in however, this was a dangerous characteristic to embody. It made Lepidus easy to trample and push aside.

Lepidus and Crassus are often characterised as having been dragged into the political goings on of Rome by the sheer gravity and enormity of the circumstances and events happening around them. Like Lepidus, Crassus is judged almost solely by his final failure and defeat, the circumstances and characteristics of which have been retroactively applied to his earlier life and undertakings. Lepidus (in Sicily at the hands of Octavian) suffers a humiliation rather than a full blown military catastrophe though there is a military element to it, and it does not help his image. It is wrong to rob them both of all agency and simply ascribe their actions to the times they were living in. These were unprecedented times and they no doubt altered how their lives might have panned out in more 'normal' circumstances, but they were active participants in the events of the time and not just passengers. There is a fine line to be walked here. There is a risk (in this paper especially) of simply suggesting that everything bad that happened to them was someone or something else's fault and anything even marginally positive was their own doing. Lepidus and Crassus' final failures were undoubtedly humiliating and at least partially self-inflicted, a fact that will not be ignored, but there were more elements at play.

If Crassus and/or Lepidus had succeeded, how might they be remembered now? Lepidus' downfall was obviously not as heavily self-inflicted as Crassus', but both men's legacies are unable to

[244] 48.1.
[245] Welch 1995, p.454.

escape their final humiliations. Dramatic elements like these persist in the stories of both men. Each ends up suffering a similar fate to their respective fathers. The theme of history repeating itself is embedded within each man's story and between their stories; one man falling or being cast out of their alliance to make way for a showdown between the two remaining men.

This paper can perhaps begin to pave the way for further research into Lepidus' career and possibly encourage further comparative approaches to be undertaken with other and/or potentially more suitable candidates than Crassus. More emphasis on his achievements rather than his downfall and humiliation. More generally it might encourage reassessment of other Roman statemen who have been maligned by the annals of history.

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