

MAECENAS' ADMINISTRATION OF ROME AND ITALY

A.J.M. Watson, Edinburgh

Octavian's acquisition of supreme power was the result of the combined effort and support of a group of talented men, whose political and military influence secured his success. Two men stand out as Octavian's closest confederates and personal friends. M. Vipsanius Agrippa and a person no less egregious and important to the inception and ultimate fruition of Octavian's ambition, C. Maecenas.

Maecenas seems to have been of Etruscan descent (Hor. *Sat.*1.6.1-2 and *Carm.*3.29.1-3; *Macr.Sat.*2.4.12) and since Augustus himself calls him *Cilniorum zmaragde* [emerald of the Cilnii] and *lasar Arretinum* [Arretine lasar] (*Macr.Sat.*2.4.12) he appears to have had connections with the Cilnii family and the Etrurian town of Arretium, which was the seat of power of the extremely powerful Cilnii (Livy 10.3.2); this town had been loyal to Octavian since he entered the political scene in 44 BC (App.*B.C.*3.42).

Maecenas was a close and dedicated supporter, companion and friend of Octavian who advanced Octavian's rise by his diplomatic abilities, who ensured the supremacy of his friend by protecting his person and by promoting his policies and who influenced Augustus' decisions and judgements by his valuable and humane advice. Maecenas is primarily remembered for his role as patron of poets during the Augustan period, principally Vergil and Horace. However, there were other activities which Maecenas had performed for Octavian during the years of the Second Triumvirate and which were equally as important. As well as his role as Octavian's principal negotiator, Maecenas was outstanding in his administration of Rome and Italy simultaneously during which he twice had to deal with security by the suppression of elements hostile to Octavian. This unique administration has received less attention than Agrippa's martial activities, but was just as necessary to Octavian.

Whenever Maecenas' administration of Rome and Italy is mentioned there is no reference to date (Dio.55.7.1, Prop.3.9.23-24, *Eleg.Maec.*1.14 and *Eleg.Maec.*1.27-38). Tacitus (*Ann.*6.11.3) concurs with Seneca (*Ep.*114.6) that it was exercised during the Civil war. Under the year 36 BC in their histories, Appian and Dio, in reporting Octavian's attempts to crush Pompey, state that Maecenas was placed for the first time in charge of Rome and all Italy *Μαικήναν δ' αὐθις ἐς Ῥώμην ἔπεμπε διὰ τοὺς νεωτερίζοντας* [he < Octavian > again sent Maecenas to Rome because of the revolutionaries] (App.*B.C.*5.112) and *τά τε ἄλλα τὰ ἐν τῇ πόλει τῇ τε λοιπῇ Ἰταλίᾳ Γάιος τις Μαικήνας, ἀνὴρ ἱππεύς, καὶ τότε καὶ ἔπειτα ἐπὶ πολὺ διώκῃσεν* [But a certain Gaius Maecenas, an equestrian, handled the affairs both in the city and in the rest of Italy, both then and afterwards for a long time] (Dio.49.16.2); the phrase *καὶ ἔπειτα ἐπὶ πολὺ* [and afterwards for a long time] indicates that there were two periods of administration and refers to the one in 31 BC. This time is more or less confirmed by Tacitus, who states that Octavian placed Maecenas in charge of Rome and Italy during the Civil Wars (Tac.*Ann.*6.11.3), after leaving the army for the second time (André 1976:64 and 67). Maecenas' administration of Rome and Italy in 36 BC must have ended by 13 November, when Octavian's *ovatio* was celebrated (Reinhold 1988:41); Reinhold suggests that his administration was from 3 July either for four months until November or for two periods, that is from July for a month and then from the middle

of August until the *ovatio*. However, it seems that the dispatch of Maecenas to Rome in July was more of a diplomatic mission than one with a military purpose; on 3 July Octavian again lost a large part of his fleet in a storm and, because the populace in Rome began to riot, Maecenas, Octavian's principal diplomat, was sent to Rome to mollify them (App.B.C.5.99; André 1967:68). Having succeeded in his mission, he returned to Octavian (André 1967:67), as indicated by the phrase ἀδῆις εἰς Ῥώμην [again to Rome] (App.B.C.5.112).

The tenure of his administration really began in mid-August, with the naval defeat of Octavian off Mylae (App.B.C.5.112). As a result of this, a rebellion began in Etruria and Octavian appointed Maecenas with control of Rome and Italy (Dio.49.16.2) to keep Rome loyal and to stop the rebellion or, at least, to prevent it from spreading. However, before he could deal with it, there was an outburst of unrest in Rome (App.B.C.5.112), also almost certainly given encouragement by the naval defeat and possibly related to the revolt in Etruria, and this was Maecenas' first objective as controller of Rome and Italy.

It was no clandestine operation. The insurgents acted in the open and had already progressed to the point where unrest was evident, since Maecenas was sent to deal with them, not find them. The fact that they were making progress is seen in Octavian's appointment of such an important figure as Maecenas to Rome.

The reason for Octavian's choice of Maecenas was that he was the only person whom Octavian could trust with the position who was available, all the other people more capable militarily being involved in the war with Pompey or in ensuring the security of the provinces. As has been said, he seems to have been connected with Arretium and may have had family connections in Etruria and drawn support from there. It seems that Octavian was reluctant to rely on the consuls at this time; they were suffect consuls L. Nonius Asprenas and a person known only by his *nomen* Marcius, possibly a Marcius Rex, and may have been Antonian nominees.

There are no details of the participants, except that they were called νεωτερίζοντες [revolutionaries] (App.B.C.5.112). They were almost certainly Republicans who were supporters of Sextus Pompey, who was at this time the champion of the last remnant of this cause. Their aim must have been to capitalise on the fear that Pompey was unbeatable, a fear arising from the fact that Octavian's fleet had been damaged and the news of Octavian's defeat at Mylae. They were probably trying to take control of Rome and from there Italy, thus depriving the Triumvirs of their power-base and their source of manpower and financial support and possibly the Triumvirate's legitimacy. Should Italy have been lost, strategically Octavian would have been in a vice to be crushed.

Maecenas' plan of action did not require any period of surveillance to identify either the plan or the persons involved, since both had been revealed. The first and only requirement was to move in and crush the unrest quickly. This he did. The speed with which Maecenas neutralized the plot is not specifically mentioned but is suggested by the fact that the unrest had reached a point that, if the plotters had not been stopped quickly, the insurgency would have increased and proceeded further and the plotters would have seized Rome; but this did not occur, therefore confirming that Maecenas must have acted quickly. The rebellion in Etruria appears not to have spread beyond that region, possibly because of Maecenas' influence or power in the area, and it died out after Octavian's victory over Pompey at Naulochus on 3 September 36 BC.

There is no record of it but presumably the leaders were executed, the word *ἐκολάσθησαν* [they were punished] (App.B.C.5.112) being a euphemism; this is indicated by the use of the same word *ἐξεκόλαστο* [he was punished] (Dio.54.15.4) to describe Augustus' treatment of M. Aemilius Lepidus in 30 BC, who was executed (Livy *Per.*133).

Dio states, under the year 31 BC *ὧ καὶ τότε ἢ τε Ῥώμῃ καὶ ἡ λοιπῇ Ἰταλία προσετέτακτο* [also at that time both Rome and the rest of Italy had been assigned to him <Maecenas >] (Dio.51.3.5); from the use of the pluperfect tense *προσετέτακτο* it can be seen that the beginning of this appointment was certainly before Actium, contrary to André's idea (1967:64). Velleius (2.88.2) says that at the time of the conspiracy of Lepidus, that is 30 BC, *erat tunc urbis custodiis praepositus C. Maecenas* [at that time C. Maecenas had been put in command of the guards of the city]. Dio does not state the exact length of Maecenas' second command of Rome; a reasonable and safe estimate is that it was from 31 BC, while Octavian was fighting against Antony, until 29 BC (Reinhold 1988:126).

It was during his second administration that Maecenas dealt with the conspiracy of Lepidus. This was planned by M. Aemilius Lepidus, the son of the Triumvir M. Aemilius Lepidus. Although most modern commentaries on this conspiracy date it to 31 BC (McFayden 1923:237; Syme 1939:298; Volkmann 1935:13 and Rhoden RE 1.1.561), the plot should be assigned to 30 BC (Raaflaub and Samons II 1990:418, 421 and 422; Sattler 1960:29 and n67; Syme 1986:35, 112, 272 and 384). Velleius states *proximo deinde anno persecutus regimen Antoniunque Alexandriam, ultimam bellis civilibus imposuit manum* [then in the following year, having pursued the monarch and Antony to Alexandria, he gave the final touch to the Civil Wars] (Vell.2.87.1), showing that the discovery and neutralizing of the plot happened after the battle of Actium. This is confirmed when Velleius (2.88.1, 3) then says *dum ultimam bello Actiaco Alexandrinoque Caesar imponit manum, M. Lepidus ... interficiendi, simul in urbem revertisset, Caesaris consilia inerat* [While Caesar gave the final touch to the Actian and Alexandrian war, M. Lepidus ... had formed plans for the killing of Caesar, as soon as he had returned to the city]; this fixes the time of the conspiracy not just to some time after Actium but to the time of Octavian's attack and capture of Alexandria in 30 BC at the earliest. Finally, the date of the plot can be seen to be 30 BC from the statement that Maecenas, in dealing with the plot, *inmane novi ac resurrecturi belli civilis restinxit initium* [he extinguished the frightful beginning of civil war, new and about to rise again] (Vell.2.88.3); Lepidus could only be said to have been creating new wars if the old ones had been finished, and they were only regarded as finished after the death of Antony in 30 BC.

Only one person other than Lepidus is known to have any connection with the plot, his mother, Junia (App.B.C.4.50); his wife Servilia committed suicide after Lepidus' arrest (Vell.2.88.3) but this does not indicate that she even knew of the plot, let alone was involved and Velleius does not even suggest that she was. However, there must have been a large number in the conspiracy. Velleius' praise for Maecenas is based on his ability to crush the plot with the minimum of disruption (Vell.2.88.2); Maecenas' action would not be worthy of such a comment, let alone praise, if the conspiracy had consisted of only Lepidus or not much more than he, therefore there must have been a large number of conspirators. Moreover, Livy indicates that Lepidus was taking steps towards war (Livy.*Per.*133) and the organisation and preparation of this would have required a number of people larger than just a small band. The source of the manpower to support him may have been the veterans, who had behaved mutinously in late 31 BC (Dio.51.3.4), especially if he paid them. Although they were sick of war, as seen by the fact that in 40 BC they had forced their leaders to negotiate the Pact of Brundisium and by the relief shown when the Pact was signed (App.B.C.5.64), they were dissatisfied with the

apportionment of land on discharge (Dio.51.3.4) and Lepidus may have decided to capitalise on this and draw support from them. It would not have been difficult. They had been pacified only by the actual presence of Octavian and were possibly still restive.

Lepidus may have acquired Republican ideals from his relatives, since his mother had been the half-sister of M. Junius Brutus and his aunt had been married to C. Cassius Longinus. But his motive was probably merely personal, that is revenge for the relegation and humiliation of his father (App.B.C.5.124, 5.126) (Watson 1988:40) and it has been suggested that there is no reason to think otherwise (Raaflaub and Samons II 1990:422).

According to Velleius (2.88.3) the plan was that Octavian would be murdered on his return to Italy from abroad. Lepidus planned to carry out the coup on Octavian's return to Italy and Rome in 30 BC for two good reasons. When Octavian arrived in Italy his army would still have been in Greece and the East and he would have been separated from his power-base and means of executing his decisions. He would have been at the mercy of Lepidus and his force. Secondly, Lepidus had to strike at Octavian as soon as he returned because, if he waited, Octavian would use the treasure of the Ptolemies to pay the veterans, the landowners and the army and would thus be in an unassailable position. The timing of the plot at the same time as the war against Antony meant that all the Caesarian military leaders and even a goodly part of the Senate were abroad and that the only Caesarians with either the authority or the military power were respectively the suffect consul for that period of the year, who would have been M. Tullius Cicero, son of the orator and a man renowned only for his hard drinking (Sen.Suas.7.13), which must have encouraged Lepidus, and Maecenas, whom Lepidus probably under-estimated because he was an Equestrian and reputedly lazy.

Maecenas pretended to do nothing, no doubt to cause Lepidus to assume that nothing was suspected, but was, in fact, carrying out a surveillance programme (Vell.2.88.3); Maecenas' period of surveillance was necessary because a move too soon may have driven potential supporters into hiding. The period of apparent inactivity coincides with the period from the battle of Actium to the death of Cleopatra. But Maecenas moved swiftly once the war in Alexandria was over (Vell.2.88.3), thus avoiding panic and the report of a coup which would have caused Octavian's image of *tota Italia* an embarrassment (Syme 1986:35). Speed was also necessary because Octavian was returning and Lepidus' plan would be put into action. The method of suppression is not stated but it appears to have been a swift arrest of all conspirators. Lepidus was sent to Octavian at Actium (App.B.C.4.50), probably while Octavian was celebrating thanksgiving for his victory in 31 BC, and was executed (Livy *Per.*133).

Vitucci (1956:22) and Cadoux (1959:153) claim that Maecenas had Agrippa as a colleague in the administration. This is contrary to the sources. According to Dio (51.3.5) Octavian's appointment of Agrippa in the autumn of 31 BC after Actium was to give support and status to Maecenas in handling the veterans and, although he receives equal powers with Maecenas (Dio 51.3.5-6), it is clearly not for the administration of Italy, but merely to assist with the handling of the veterans. Once the issue of the veterans was settled by Octavian in person in the winter of 31 BC, Agrippa had no reason to remain. In fact, the suppression of the conspiracy of Lepidus in 30 BC is attested by Appian (B.C.4.50) and Velleius (2.88.3) as being the sole responsibility of Maecenas; Agrippa is never mentioned in connection with the conspiracy and therefore, after the placating of the veterans, he must have been absent from Rome and, in 30 BC, no longer the colleague of Maecenas, who was, once again, in sole control of Rome and Italy.

Although some authorities mention just his governance over Rome (App.B.C.5.112, Vell.2.88.2 and Dio.55.7.1), possibly implying that this was the extent of his authority, Maecenas' territorial jurisdiction was actually Rome and Italy (Tac.*Ann.*6.11.3) or, according to some, over Rome and the rest of Italy (Dio 49.16.2 and 51.3.5). It is never stated that he administered only Italy; Rome is always mentioned as a separate area of control from Italy. Historically Rome was administered separately by elected Roman magistrates and, therefore, it was accepted that Rome was separate from Italy.

It can be seen from various sources that Maecenas possessed the powers, if not the authority or status, of a magistrate. The possession of executive power is seen most clearly in the fact that Maecenas conducted public meetings from the rostra (Sen.*Ep.* 114.6); only a person vested with the power of a magistrate had the right to preside at public meetings. The possession of the trappings of a magistrate, such as apparent insignia (Prop.3.9.23) and pseudo-lictors, Maecenas being accompanied by two eunuch attendants (Sen.*Ep.*114.6), were, perhaps, to give the appearance of magisterial standing and authority which he did not have. Moreover, he, along with Agrippa, had the power to add to or to change Octavian's letters to the Senate and to use Octavian's ring (Dio 51.3.5). Finally, it is also evident in Maecenas' superiority over even the consuls. Maecenas kept a watch on the plot, suppressed it, and sent Lepidus to Octavian on his own authority, even though the suffect consul was present in Rome at that time. This demonstrates that Maecenas had power superior to even the consulship. Agrippa's commission to handle the obstreperous veterans does not alter this argument; Octavian sent Agrippa in 31 BC because he felt that the veterans, used to receiving orders from senators, would not treat Maecenas with respect. It does not mean that Maecenas' area of command did not extend over them.

The fact that Maecenas granted bail to the mother of Lepidus the Younger (App.B.C.4.50) also implies his possession of judicial power. While Maecenas presided over a public meeting as recorded by Seneca the Younger (*Ep.*114.6) he may have been acting not in his executive capacity but in his judicial capacity. The evidence for possession of judicial power by Maecenas has support (Prop.3.9.24).

Military power was also vested in Maecenas (Vell.2.88.2) and Seneca says that he issued the password (*Ep.*114.6), an activity exercised solely by a person possessing military power and acting in a military capacity. Furthermore Maecenas' suppression of Lepidus' conspiracy must have required use of soldiers. Maecenas administered Rome and Italy "undoubtedly with military forces at his command" (Reinhold 1988:41) despite the fact that this power had no constitutional basis; this was not unprecedented during the Triumviral period (Syme 1986:80; Dio.51.4.3 and Dess.*ILS* 8995 (Philae) (C. Cornelius Gallus); Grant 1946:66-67 (Proculus); Syme 1961:28 nn72, 73 and 74 and Grant 1946:382-383 (P. Vedius Pollio)). The "guards of the city" (Vell.2.88.2) and the soldiers he commanded at the time of the conspiracy of Lepidus may have been ordinary soldiers from Octavian's army or, more likely, members of his personal bodyguard, which, from the earliest days of the Republic, every Roman general had; such bodyguards were called Praetorians, since they guarded the *Praetorium* [the general's quarters] and this practice was the model for the Praetorian Guard established in 27 BC.

It is natural to assume that power over troops implies and necessitates the authority to execute Roman citizens. Yet it would appear that Maecenas sent Lepidus to Octavian for trial and execution (App.B.C.4.50) because he did not have the power to execute Roman citizens.

However, there are strong indications that Maecenas had such power. It can be seen from the use of the euphemistic word *ἐκολάσθησαν* [they were punished] (App.B.C.5.112) that

some of the revolutionaries dealt with by Maecenas in 36 BC were executed. Secondly, it is openly stated that he had very wide powers (*Eleg.Maec.*1.15). Thirdly, and more definitely, Seneca praises Maecenas for sparing the use of the sword (*Sen.Ep.*114.7); this remark, which cannot have been empty flattery since Seneca the Younger despised Maecenas, would have been pointless unless Maecenas had possessed the power to execute. The reason Maecenas sent Lepidus to Octavian may have been that, by arranging for Octavian to try Lepidus and to execute him, Maecenas avoided any opprobrium and ill-feeling which such actions may have aroused if the trial and execution had been carried out by an equestrian.

The position Maecenas held was unlike any post in the Republic or indeed, later, in the Empire. Agrippa and T. Statilius Taurus, in 21 BC and 16 BC respectively, held very similar positions and powers, but they were both consulars and Agrippa appears to have held authority only over Rome (*Dio.*54.6.4 and 54.19.6), since, unlike the case of Maecenas, he is never mentioned as having authority over Italy as well. The appointment of Maecenas was an extra-constitutional position and had no link with the *Praefectus Urbi* [Prefect for the City] of the Republic or the *Praefectus Urbi* of the Empire. Indeed, it is implied by Tacitus that Maecenas never held office (*Tac.Ann.*3.30.4). The extra-constitutional nature of the position can be seen in the very source of his power. There was no legal, constitutional basis for his authority; he derived it purely and solely from his appointment by Octavian and his tenure of the position lay with Octavian (*Eleg.Maec.*1.15). His selection was based on his close relationship with Octavian, his loyalty and the trust he received in return (André 1967:64). Maecenas' position, therefore, was actually stronger than any of the constitutional posts, since his term of office could not be determined and he could rely on the full support of Octavian.

He never had a title (Gardthausen 1891:765; Reinhold 1988:41) and he is never called a *Praefectus Urbi* in any reliable source, contrary to Vitucci (1956:22) who is referring to two very late and unreliable sources (Cadoux 1959:153). Significantly, Maecenas is remembered not by any title, but by the power he wielded. As Syme says (1986:272) "Maecenas controlled Rome and Italy - no title, only armed power". The extent of his command, both in his powers and in his jurisdiction, was greater than that of either of the later posts of *Praefectus Urbi* and the *Praefectus Praetorio* [Praetorian Prefect] (Vitucci 1956:22) and paved the way for the extension of the powers and authority of the two *Praefecti* in later years (Vigneaux 1896:54, Vitucci 1956:38 and André 1967:64). However, Reinhold says that Maecenas' position was more like the *Praefectus Praetorio* (1988:41). Although not a magistrate, or even a holder of an official post, Maecenas was superior to all normal magistrates and possessed more extensive civil and military power than the magistrates (Vitucci 1956:22). This is seen best in the conspiracy of Lepidus, when he exercised all the power of a consul and the consul present in Rome never interfered or even objected.

The examination of Maecenas' administration of Rome and Italy illustrates the contrast between his rarely mentioned military power and his more well-known literary patronage. It also shows that Maecenas, more famous for his foppish and effete manner, was, when necessary, intelligent, efficient and capable of incisive initiative and actions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- André, J.-M. 1967. *Mécène. Essai de biographie spirituelle*. Paris.
- Cadoux, T.J. 1959. Review of G. Vitucci, *Ricerche sulla Praefectura Urbi in éta imperiale (Sec. I-III)*. JRS 49, 152-160.
- Dessau, H. 1892. *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*. Berlin (cited as ILS).
- Gardthausen, V. 1891. *Augustus und seine Zeit I*. Leipzig.
- Grant, M. 1946. *From imperium to auctoritas*. Cambridge.
- McFayden, D. 1923. "The rise of the Princeps' jurisdiction within the city of Rome", *Washington University Studies, Humanistic Series* 10(2) 181-264.
- Pauly, A., Wissowa, G. and Kroll, W. 1894-. *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Stuttgart (cited as RE).
- Raaflaub, K.A. and Samons II, L.J. 1990. "Opposition to Augustus", in *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and His Principate*, ed. K.A. Raaflaub and M. Toher. Berkeley and Los Angeles, pp.417-454.
- Reinhold, M. 1988. *From Republic to Empire: an historical commentary on Dio's Roman History Bks 49-52*. Atlanta.
- Sattler, P. 1960. *Augustus und der Senat: Untersuchungen zur römischen Innenpolitik zwischen 30 und 17 v. Christus*. Göttingen.
- Syme, R. 1939. *The Roman Revolution*. Oxford.
- Syme, R. 1986. *The Augustan Aristocracy*. Oxford.
- Vigneaux, P. 1896. *Essai sur l'histoire de la Praefectura Urbi à Rome*. Paris.
- Vitucci, G. 1956. *Ricerche sulla Praefectura Urbi in éta imperiale (Sec.I-III)*. Rome.
- Volkman, H. 1935. "Zur Rechtsprechung im Principat des Augustus: historische Beiträge", *Münchener Beiträge zur Papyrusforschung und antiken Rechtsgeschichte* 21.
- Watson, A.J.M. 1988. *Maecenas. A Political Biography* (Diss. Witwatersrand).