

III CORNELIUS NEPOS

1. *The achievement of Cornelius Nepos.* Cornelius Nepos is the first writer of political biography, a significant part of whose work is extant, and the earliest writer of any sort of biography in Greek or Latin from whom whole Lives survive. To what extent this fact reflects the realities of the history of ancient biography rather than the chances of transmission and survival will have to be discussed later. Yet we have seen that there is no compelling evidence to surmise the existence of political biography in the Hellenistic Age: the burden of proof will rest with those who assume predecessors for Nepos. Nevertheless, even the absence of any definite proof is not in itself a very strong argument for Nepos' primacy: Steidle's claim, reviewed in the previous chapter, that it is impossible to believe that Nepos did not have forerunners, deserves to be taken seriously and is in need of refutation. Consequently, we shall try to demonstrate that the *argumentum e silentio* can be supported by a not inconsiderable body of circumstantial evidence. Of necessity, this circumstantial evidence must consist in the first place of a thorough criticism of the work and character of Cornelius Nepos himself. It would be an act of unforgivable rashness to attribute to that writer a not unimportant innovation – though it will be seen that given the circumstances the act was far less surprising than might be thought at first glance – without investigating everything that can be ascertained about his life and work. Luckily for us, Nepos lived in the well-documented period of the Late Republic; the fact that he was on more or less intimate terms with some of the most important literary personages of the period helps to shed more light on him; and lastly, it is entirely possible that the preoccupation with biography came towards the end of a long life, so that it will be right and proper to see it in the light of the author's previous achievement. It is with these factors in mind that we turn to the literary career of Cornelius Nepos prior to his biographical writing: if it turns out that the characteristic most consistently seen in his literary output is the constant appearance of minor, at other instances more significant, innovations, it will be all the easier to credit him with an important and timely step in the development of ancient biography.

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Cornelius Nepos was born and raised in the Po valley¹, and, like many of his compatriots from North Italy, devoted some of his interests to the geography and antiquities of his narrower fatherland². It is not known when he migrated to Rome: the mistaken information concerning the delivery of Cicero's speech *pro Roscio Amerino*³ suggests that he did not live yet in the capital at the time of Sulla's dictatorship; on the other hand, he seems to have resided there at the time of the delivery of the *pro Cornelio* in 65⁴. Shortly after that year came the acquaintance with Atticus and the entry, one may surmise, into Roman literary circles⁵. It is impossible to tell whether Nepos had already started an active literary career at the time: but he was now about forty⁶, and his later output, impressive at least in its quantity, does not suggest a very late starter. So, perhaps, the light verse, mentioned but once by the Younger Pliny⁷, may have belonged to the period of his youth. Another work without any chronological clues is the *libellus, quo distinguit litteratum ab erudito*⁸, a possible result of student days. Be that as it may, the opportunities of the capital were not lost on him: the attentive listening to the *pro Cornelio* must have been typical, and though not a senator (Plin. *ep.* 5.3.6) he was close enough to senatorial circles both to notice the fashions of the day⁹ and to collect information about the wide world under the rule of

1 Plin. *n.h.* 3.127 (Padi accola); Plin. *ep.* 4.28.1: 'municèps' of Catius, who was called an Insuber by Cic. *fam.* 15.16.1. Nepos may have been from Ticinum (Pavia) as proposed by Mommsen, *Zur Lebensgeschichte des jüngeren Plinius*, *H* 3 (1869), 62, n. 1, followed most recently by N. Horsfall, *Cambr. Hist. Class. Lit.* II (Cambridge 1982), 845, or from Mediolanum: see Sherwin-White, *ad loc.*, following O. Hirschfeld, *Timagenes und die gallische Wandersage*, *S-B Berlin* 1894, 343 and G.F. Unger, *Der sogenannte Cornelius Nepos*, *Abh. München* 1882, 134 f.

2 Plin. *n.h.* 3.125 - frg. 18 (Nepos' fragments will be quoted, unless otherwise indicated, by Marshall's numbers); *ibid.*, 127 = frg. 19; *ibid.*, 132 = frg. 20; 6.5, Solin. 44.1, cf. Mart. Cap. 6.689 = frg. 23.

3 Gell. 15.28.1 = frg. 37.

4 Hieron. *contra Ioan. Ieros.* 12 (PL 23.381) = frg. 38; cf. Plin. *n.h.* 9.137 = frg. 27.

5 See Nepos, *Att.* 4.5 and the vivid description in E. Jenkinson, *Genus Scripturae Leve: Cornelius Nepos and the Early History of Biography at Rome*, *ANRW* 1.3.704: "Nepos was a frequent visitor to the Villa Tamphiliana on the Quirinal, where the two Ciceros, Hortensius and Varro were also often to be found."

6 He was roughly coeval with Atticus, who was born between mid-110 and mid-109: Nepos, *Att.* 19.1; 21.1; 22.3.

7 Plin. *ep.* 5.3.6 = frg. 63.

8 Suet. *gramm.* 4; most probably a separate work: see Leo, *Biographie*, 193, n.1; placed by both Marshall (frg. 61) and Malcovati (frg. 60) among the fragments of the *vir. ill.*

9 Plin. *n.h.* 9.137 = frg. 27; *ibid.*, 9.60 = frg. 26; *ibid.*, 10.60 = frg. 28; *ibid.* 36.48 = frg. 33; *ibid.*, 36.59 = frg. 34; contrast the enthusiastic description of Atticus' modest life-style in Nepos, *Att.* 13 f.

Roman governors¹⁰. The major works of the later years all drew upon a great number of sources, supplying an astonishing amount of variegated material. The collection of this material must have been well under way – not necessarily with a definite literary purpose in mind – in Nepos' early days in Rome.

The works mentioned hitherto are known by chance references only. The first work, discussion of which can be based on at least some fragmentary material, is the *Chronica*. As is well known, the *terminus ante quem* for the publication is the dedicatory poem of Catullus' *libellus*, published in or shortly after 54¹¹. By that date Nepos must have been over fifty: thus, the *Chronica*, never mentioned by any other contemporary, may have been in circulation for some time, as can be inferred from Catullus (iam tum, cum. . .).

Though by its very nature Catullus' dedicatory poem is full of the praises of his friend's work – predictably some critics¹² have thought they detected more or less subtle irony – it contains a fair amount of factual information concerning the *Chronica*. Thus, it is best to start with that solitary contemporary evaluation of what appears to be Nepos' first major work. Perhaps not too much should be made of its general assessment as *doctis . . . et laboriosis*, nor should too much energy be wasted on the exact meaning, condescending, disparaging or otherwise¹³, of these words. But other statements are straightforward and unambiguous. By far the most important among these is *unus Italorum*. There is no need to rely on inference or on *argumentum e silentio* to determine Nepos' position inside the genre, as Catullus' explicit statement vouches for the uniqueness of the work. Following in the main Apollodorus' chronological versification¹⁴, it tried to span in three books (*tribus . . . chartis*) all the important events from the

10 Mela 3.5.44 and Plin. *n.h.* 2.170 = frg. 15; on the probable date, see H. Bengtson, Q. Caccilius Metellus Celer (cos. 60) und die Inder, *Historia* 3 (1954–5), 229 ff. with discussion of previous literature.

11 The last contemporary references in Catullus' poems are at 55.6 (Pompey's porticus built in 55) and the allusions to Caesar's British expedition at 11.11; 29.20 (not disputed by T.P. Wiseman, *Catullan Questions* (Leicester 1969) according to whom all dateable poems, and hence all poems, belong to 56–54).

12 The latest discussion of Nepos, Catullus and Poem 1 is to be found in T.P. Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics* (Leicester 1979), 167 with a full up-to-date bibliography; add now R. Mayer, *LCM* 7.5 (May 1982), 73 f.; O. Skutsch, *LCM* 7.6 (June 1982), 90. Among recent authors supporting the interpretation that Catullus' praise was ironical one may single out Jenkinson, *op. cit.*, 703 and Horsfall, *op. cit.*, 290.

13 For a spirited defence, see Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics*, 171.

14 Solin. 1.27 = frg. 5; E. Rohde, *Zur Chronologie der griechischen Literaturgeschichte*, *RhM* 36 (1881), 533.

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earliest times to his own day (*omne aevum*). The very few extant fragments seem to bear out this statement, as there are references to Saturnus¹⁵, to Homer¹⁶ and Archilochus¹⁷, as well as to a number of events from Roman history starting with the foundation of the city¹⁸. The influence of the work was slight, since after a few years it was superseded by Nepos' friend Atticus' *liber annalis*¹⁹. This last work, so much handier than the three volume *Chronica*, was in one book, used a date that came to be accepted as standard for the foundation of Rome²⁰, avoided the cumbersome reckoning from the foundation of the city forwards as well as backwards, and must have attracted readers and supporters from among the ranks of the aristocracy by the greater stress it laid on the successions of Republican magistrates and the family relationships of the Roman nobility²¹. These must have been among the main reasons for Cicero's preference for Atticus²², even though it appears that at times he had recourse to Nepos' *Chronica* as well²³.

Nevertheless, one point cannot be too strongly stressed: the *Chronica* was the first work of Roman historiography – or, perhaps, antiquarianism – not concerned with exclusively Roman (or Italian) history. It is of some interest that despite the great influence and the approval met by Polybius' Universal History²⁴ there were no Roman attempts at imitation, even though a Rome-centred Universal History must have been a need, the fulfillment of which must have flattered Roman patriotism and self-awareness. Perhaps not too much should be made of Nepos' reference to Polybius at *Hann.* 13.1; a more important clue

15 Tert. *apol.* 10.7, *nat.* 2.12, Min. Fel. *Oct.* 22, Lact. *inst.* 1.13.8 = frg. 3.

16 Gell. 17.21.3, Hieron. *a. Abr.* 1104, p. 69 Schöne = frg. 4.

17 Gell. 17.21.8 = frg. 7.

18 Solin. 1.17 = frg. 5; Gell. 17.21.23 = frg. 8; cf. O. Leuze, Das synchronistische Kapitel des Gellius, *RhM* 66 (1911), 243 f.; G. d'Anna, Alcune osservazioni sulle fonti di Gellio, *NA* XVII.21 e sulla cronologia Jeronimiana dei poeti latini arcaici, *Arch. Class.* 25–26 (1973–74), 166 ff.; now also E. Fantham, The Synchronistic Chapter of Gellius (*NA* 17.21) and Some Aspects of Roman Chronology and Cultural History between 60 and 50 B.C., *LCM* 6.1 (January 1981), 7 ff.

19 The most valuable discussion is still F. Münzer, Atticus als Geschichtschreiber, *H* 40 (1905), 50 ff.; see also G. d'Anna, Alcune considerazioni sulla fortuna del 'Liber Annalis' di Attico: Attico fonte di Gellio?, *Studi Urbinati* 66 (B1) (1975), 331 ff.

20 G.F. Unger, Die römischen Gründungsdata, *RhM* 35 (1880) 1 ff.

21 Nepos, *Att.* 18.2.

22 Cic. *Brut.* 19 and A.E. Douglas in his edition and commentary, p. LIIf.

23 L. Alfonsi, Nepote fonte di Cicerone, *RhM* 93 (1950), 59 ff.; idem, Studi sulle "Tusculanae," *WSt* 80 (1967), 153 ff.; Cicero's use of Nepos elsewhere was already postulated by E. Rohde, *loc. cit.*, with references to earlier writers.

24 For a short résumé, see K. Ziegler in *RE* XXI.1572 f., s.v. Polybios.

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may be the common dating of the foundation of Rome, to all appearances derived by Nepos from Apollodorus. For the educated Roman there continued to exist two distinct strains of historical reading material: on the one hand the Roman annalists, telling and retelling a traditional and familiar tale – a tale that did not lose in the telling either, and on the other hand the Greek historians of both the classical and the Hellenistic Age, whose reading formed an important part of Greek education and culture and was thus by its very nature confined to a relatively narrow circle: such notices dealing with Roman affairs, as may have been found in Greek historians, cannot be regarded as establishing a unified Greco-Roman history²⁵. The synchronisms that seem to have been a standard component of Nepos' work²⁶ may have been intended to bridge that gap at least to some extent. Even more interesting are the fragments concerned with the chronology of Greek mythology and literary history. It is entirely possible that we can discover here a clue to Nepos' intended public. These must have been readers sufficiently interested in Saturnus, the age of Homer and Archilochus, and perhaps in the chronology of the athletic festivals²⁷, but for whom this material was apparently not readily available in Greek. That such a reading public, middle-brow in outlook, did exist in Rome need not be doubted²⁸, and is positively attested by Nepos himself, who aimed the *de viris illustribus*, or, at the very least, the book on Foreign Generals, at the Greekless reader²⁹. To recognise the existence of such a reading public is not only important in itself, freeing us from preconceived notions about bi-lingual Roman society, derived as it is from our acquaintance with Cicero and some of his like-minded intellectual friends, but also for the central position it occupies for the understanding of Cornelius Nepos' life-work and achievement. Indeed, it may be asked whether we are not overlooking such a reading public even for Cicero's philosophical works³⁰: Greekless

25 For a collection of the writers on Sicily and Magna Graecia, see *FGRHist* III B, no. 554 ff.; on Rome and Italy III C, no. 809 ff.

26 Gell. 17.21.9 = frg. 7; Solin. 40.4, p. 220 Mommsen; cf. Leuze, *loc. cit.*

27 Gell. 15.16.1 = frg. 6; without author's name, credited to Nepos by F. Münzer, *Beiträge zur Quellenkritik der Naturgeschichte des Plinius* (Berlin 1897), 336.

28 Cf. N. Horsfall, *Doctus sermones utriusque linguae?*, *EMC/CNV* (1979), 79 ff., who demonstrates that even the famous bilingual culture of the upper classes was not what most modern works would like us to believe. R.J. Starr, *The Scope and Genre of Velleius' History*, *CQ* 31 (1981), 162 ff. assumes (p. 173) a similarly middle-brow public as the target of Velleius.

29 Nepos, *vir. ill. praef.* 2 (*expertes litterarum Graecarum*); *Pelop.* 1 (*rudibus Graecarum litterarum*).

30 See the illuminating passages, *Cic. fin.* 1.10; *ac.* 1.10.

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readers with a sufficient interest in the tenets of Greek philosophy must have been among the considerations that brought about Cicero's decision to transplant the whole corpus of Greek philosophy into Roman soil by translation into the Latin language³¹. Be that as it may, the publication of the *Chronica* must have answered a genuine need for a literary genre that, however pedestrian, was not to be found in Latin³². The silence of his contemporaries – except for Catullus' voice crying in the wilderness – should not mislead us. As hinted above, in all probability the *Chronica* was pushed aside by the more successful *liber annalis*; it is not only that Atticus' work must have derived its initiative directly or indirectly from the book of a close friend³³, but its very success is witness for the need of such a work. Nepos' fate was no different from other inventors', whose first hesitant and not always properly executed steps in a given field cleared the way for those profiting from the mistakes of the pioneer: by all appearances Atticus' work proved most useful in the areas neglected by his friend – who did not fail to heap unselfish praise on a work whose success helped to push his own product into semi-oblivion³⁴. Bad luck and slovenly execution – perhaps; but certainly no failure to rise to the need of the hour and introduce a literary genre for which a genuine need was felt, nor absence of adaptability when that literary genre had to be bent to the tastes and interests of its intended public. It is against this background that we have to see Catullus' appreciation of the boldness of Nepos' scheme (*ausus es*).

Nepos' innovation in this composition of the *Chronica* should be seen in its proper context of literary history. Even though it may be conceded that this work could hardly bear comparison with such truly epoch-making achievements as his friend Catullus' poetry (which he did not fail to appreciate³⁵) or Cicero's astonishing philosophical

31 This must be at least the partial meaning of Cic. *div.* 2.1: 'si optimarum artium vias *trade-rem* meis civibus' and lurks behind his well-known sarcastic description, *Att.* 12.52.3: 'Ἀπόγραφα sunt, minore labore fiunt verba tantum adfero quibus abundo'. Such passages as *off.* 1.6: 'non ut interpretes, sed, ut solemus, e fontibus eorum iudicio arbitrioque nostro quantum quoque modo videbitur, hauriemus' and *fin.* 1.6: 'non interpretum fungimur munere' prove, paradoxically, that translation had at least some function in these works.

32 For that reading public interested in history, see Cic. *fin.* 5.52: quid quod homines infima fortuna, nulla spe rerum gerendarum, opifices denique delectantur historia?

33 Cicero, who used Nepos in *de rep.* (Rohde, *loc. cit.*) was the instigator of the *liber annalis* (Cic. *Brut.* 19) on which he later relied in the *Brutus*.

34 Nepos, *Att.* 18.1 f.; after Catullus' dedication and the use by Cicero the next writer to refer to the *Chronica* is Gellius, after some two centuries.

35 Nepos, *Att.* 12.4.

output, it does reveal the same overall trend of a concentrated attempt to bring Latin literature up to par with Greek. May be success did not smile on Nepos: but he seems to have resolved to persevere and also in the future to do what he could for Latin literature.

The evidence for the *Chronica* is meagre, but clear and unambiguous. Not so with Nepos' next major works. All three of the modern collections of the fragments – differing among themselves on minor detail only – assign twenty-six or twenty-seven fragments to this work³⁶, although only two passages are cited by both author and title besides one passage quoted by title only. Nevertheless, all the modern editors list another two dozen or so passages (mostly, but not always, quoted by the author's name) to the same work, despite the fact that a majority among them seem, on unprejudiced reading, to come from an altogether different kind of composition, a fact repeatedly noted by a great number of scholars. Before discussing these fragments in detail, it will be as well to understand the thought processes of the editors. Apparently the reluctance to assign fragments obviously not belonging to the *Exempla* to one, and perhaps two, other works seems to be justified³⁷ by the lack of attestation of such a work or works – in other words, it is all right to list two dozen fragments under the title of the *Exempla*, because this title is incidentally quoted two or three

36 The only disagreements are that Gell. 4.18, where Nepos is not mentioned, is not included in Peter's collection but appears as frg. 11 in both Malcovati and Marshall; and that Suet. *Aug. 77*, included among the *exempla* by Peter (frg. 7) and Malcovati (frg. 17) is put by Marshall correctly among the fragments of the *vir. ill.* (frg. 62); when suggesting that location in my note, An Overlooked Item of the War of Propaganda between Octavian and Antony, *Historia* 29 (1980), 112 ff., I did not have yet an opportunity to consult Marshall's edition.

37 Since it is impossible to distinguish with accuracy between the fragments of the *Exempla* and those of the geographical work (see below), it is as well to mention here a composition of Cicero, which may have been related in some of its aspects, at least, with one or the other of these works. Pliny the Elder quotes twice from Cicero's *Admiranda* (*n.h.* 31.12; 51) and a number of other passages have been assigned to that book by F. Münzer, *Beiträge*, 172 ff. It would be ill-advised to try and establish the differences and similarities between the works of Cicero and Nepos on the present evidence; there exists also the possibility that Cicero's *Admiranda* were actually identical with the geographical work he may have written (see Büchner, *RE VII A*, 1271). Nor can the relative dates be established with any degree of certainty, though it may be suggested that the most likely times for Cicero's occupation with a subject of this character are the years 53–52, where the evidence of the correspondence fails us almost completely, or perhaps 46 or even 45, when, despite the great immersion in philosophical studies and writing, Cicero still could find the time for such minor works as the *Cato* (46) and the *laudatio Porciae* (45). It may also be of some interest to note that Pliny's mode of quotation could reflect the fact that Cicero's *Admiranda* consisted of a single book, while Nepos' *Exempla* were composed, as we know, of five books at least.

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times; to ascribe a much smaller number of obviously geographical fragments to a geographical work would be wrong according to this logic, simply because the title does not survive. Nepos was perhaps not a great writer: but he has not fared too well with his editors either.

The difficulty in assessing the extent of Nepos' innovation in the *Exempla* is a consequence of the very lack of precedent for such a work. In all probability, in this book, too, Nepos scored a first in a literary genre never before attempted in Latin. Once more, as with the *Chronica*, Nepos undertook to transfer a literary form from Greece to Rome: but the very slight evidence for the literature of *Exempla* in Greek³⁸, together with the doubtful attribution of the fragments, renders it difficult to assess whether Nepos copied slavishly an established literary genre or modified it in accordance with the special demands of a Roman audience.

Neither are we in a position to date the work with any accuracy. One fragment that has been seen as providing us with a *terminus post quem* of 43 appears to derive from the *de viris illustribus* rather than from that work³⁹; and there is no substance to the view⁴⁰ that would connect Jerome's notice under the year 40, 'Cornelius Nepos scriptor historicus clarus habetur', with the date of the publication of the *Exempla*⁴¹. The rest of the evidence is of little help. If the fragment commenting on the different fashions in purple at Rome (frg. 27) belongs to this work, it provides the not very useful *terminus post quem* of 63; another possible fragment (33) post-dates it to Mamurra's service with Caesar in Gaul⁴². It will be perhaps more prudent to rely on general considerations. The work consisted of at least five books (frg. 12) from a very wide field, containing a great amount of original Roman material that Nepos was not likely to find in his Greek predecessors, such as they were. Even though the kind of work under consideration entailed mainly, if not exclusively, collection of material rather than the application of critical judgment to it, that activity must have been spread over a number of years.

38 The very slight evidence is surveyed in Traube, S-B München 1891, 397 = *Vorlagen und Abhandlungen* 3.9; 17; cf. Wachsmuth, *Einleitung*, 224; Ziegler, *RE* XVIII, 1137 ff., s.v. Paradoxographoi; W. Spoerri, *Lexikon der Alten Welt*, s.v. Buntschriftstellerei; H. Kornhardt, *Exemplum. Eine Bedeutungsgeschichtliche Studie*, Diss. Göttingen 1936; see also H.W. Litchfield, *National Exempla Virtutis in Roman Literature*, *HSCP* 25 (1914), 1 ff.

39 Geiger, *Historia* 29 (1980), 112 ff.

40 Schanz-Hosius I⁴, 352.

41 See already F. Ritschl, *Parerga Plaut.* I (Leipzig 1845), 623 f.; cf. T. Mommsen, *Ges. Schr.* VII, 621; L. Vossen, *De Suetonio Hieronymi auctore* (Diss., Bonn 1912), 13 f.

42 For Mamurra in Gaul, see the evidence in *MRR Suppl.*, p. 38.

Again, as in the *Chronica*, Nepos seems to have put Roman material alongside the Greek. The fact that among the surviving fragments that can be assigned to the *Exempla* with any degree of probability there is only one concerned with Greek subject matter (frg. 14) may be due to the interests and selection of the authors transmitting them. If there is any substance to the suggestion⁴³ that Valerius Maximus derived from Cornelius Nepos his general plan of dividing his *Exempla* into Roman and foreign ones, then one can assume that also in our author there must have been a reasonable balance between the two parts of the work. This suggestion is most acceptable not so much for the proposed connexion between Nepos and Valerius Maximus, as for its bringing the *Exempla* in line with Nepos' other major works. Between the composition of the *Chronica*, for the first time attempting the synchronization of events of Greek and Roman history, and the *de viris illustribus* that were to set against each other Greeks and Romans from different walks of life, the *Exempla* taken from both Greece and Rome have a natural place. Thus, the novel features of the earlier work were again employed: it seems a reasonable assumption that both because of the larger scale of the *Exempla* (at least five as against three books) and the nature of the material a much greater amount of original research must have gone into it.

If Nepos' innovation appears firmly established, the extent of his dependence must remain to a large degree an object of query. There is, indeed, serious danger of involvement in circular argument, as most of the little we know about the literary genre of the *Exempla* is inferred from the work of Valerius Maximus and the meagre — and sometimes unjustifiedly assigned — fragments of Cornelius Nepos. It is best not to make too much of such authors as Hyginus⁴⁴ or the collection quoted under the name of Nicolaus of Damascus⁴⁵, let alone the *Various History* of Aelian, composed some two and a half centuries after Nepos.

A more dependable guide seems to be the Elder Pliny, from whose *Natural History* most of the fragments commonly allocated to the *Exempla* derive. Those fragments that belonged, in my opinion, to the geographical work will be discussed later. On the other hand, there appears to be little support for the view⁴⁶ that the remaining fragments

43 Wissowa, *RE* IV, 1411, s.v. Cornelius Nepos.

44 The only piece of evidence for this work comes from Gell. 10.18.7 and it concerns literary criticism. On Hyginus' *vir. ill.*, see below.

45 Its authenticity is not doubted by F. Jacoby *FGrHist* II B, p. 255 ff.

46 Cf. F. Münzer, *Zur Kunstgeschichte des Plinius*, *H* 30 (1895), 542 f.

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indicate a separate work on cultural history by Cornelius Nepos. A combination of the chapter-headings of different categories of *exempla*, contained in the indices of Pliny and the author-lists of the books where Nepos appears frequently, seems to suggest that except for the geographical information Pliny used the *Exempla* only⁴⁷.

Some characteristics of Nepos' work that will be noted in the context of his biographical writing come to the fore already in the *Exempla*. A long life in the capital on terms of acquaintance, if, perhaps, not always intimacy, with members of the aristocracy provided opportunity for first-hand knowledge on a number of topics⁴⁸ – Nepos seems to have inserted eye-witness accounts whenever possible. These links with the people who mattered seem also to have enabled him to have recourse to documentary and other valuable historical material⁴⁹ – again a welcome component of the *Lives* (cf. below); of course these men were quoted wherever possible to add authenticity to Nepos' story (cf. above, n. 48).

Pride of place among the surviving fragments seems to belong to examples of luxury and their first importation to Rome⁵⁰. It would be pleasing to know for a fact that the author of the *Exempla* was indeed acquainted with that chronicler of moral decline and the destructive influence of luxury, Sallust⁵¹.

An important concomitant of this record is a chronological framework of Social History – or at least those aspects of Social History that were piquant or sensational to a degree that would ensure them of some literary success. How far such a framework could depend on written sources is difficult to say – our chance fragments seem to suggest that contemporary events and personal observation may have played a major role.

But not only Social History. Some of the fragments generally attributed to that work deal with events from Roman history that could be used as *exempla* but might have been found in any of the standard

47 Cf. *ibid.* Note, e.g., the chapter-headings of the various sorts of *exempla* in *n.h.* VII, where Nepos is not quoted but is listed among the authorities, as against the geographical books III–VI, where chapter-headings of *exempla* never occur.

48 Frgs. 27, 31, 33, 34; cf. 26, 28.

49 Frg. 13; cf. 11, 12.

50 Frgs. 27, 31, 32, 33, 34; cf. 26, 28.

51 As is well known, Dares' *de excidio Troiae historia* is prefaced by a letter from Nepos to Sallust concerning the 'discovery' of the work. Though this is a late, and ridiculous, pseudepigraphon, it is just possible that it was based on the fact that the two men were acquainted. Note that Nepos' correspondence with Cicero is quoted almost exclusively by very late sources.

annalistic narratives⁵². This would hardly have been Nepos' first serious encounter with Roman historiography; but it is significant that acquaintance with major figures and central themes in Roman history, so basic for the future biographies, can already be evidenced in the *exempla*.

Another part of Nepos' achievement that has to be discussed in this context is his geographical work. This work is never explicitly cited by its title, and this failure seems to be the main reason for the denial of its existence by a great number of scholars – including the various editors of the fragments. This surely means giving chance a much greater importance than should actually be assigned to it. The *Exempla* are referred to by author and title only twice, one of these quotations coming from a grammarian, where exact references are much more frequent than in other writers. Nor are such explicit quotations more numerous from the *Chronica*; it is in both cases most often the subject matter that is decisive in the attribution. About ten attributed fragments of Nepos deal with geographical matters: distances, geographical positions, derivations of place-names and the like. Since all these fragments are to be found in two writers on Geography, the one, Pomponius Mela dealing solely with this subject, the other, Pliny the Elder, dealing with it in the framework of a larger work, both of whom are, as a rule, not accustomed to quote by author and title, this failure looks, in the present case, anything but decisive⁵³.

A geographical work by Nepos seems to be most likely, though not explicitly attested. What is its place in the overall achievement of our author? Nothing can be said about the chronology of the work with the possible exception that it can be post-dated to Metellus Celer's proconsulate in Gaul (frg. 15) – thus, hardly earlier than the *Chronica*. Another question is the possibly innovative nature of such a work. Here a rival to Nepos should be registered. In 59 Atticus urged Cicero

52 See frgs. 11–13.

53 Recently B.D. Shaw, *The Elder Pliny's African Geography*, *Historia* 30 (1981), 424 has revived the thesis of L. Teutsch, *Das römische Städtewesen in Nordafrika* (1962) that the list in *Plin. n.h.* 5.29–30 derives from an author writing under Caesar rather than under Augustus; if so, one may suggest Nepos. There is no benefit in listing scholars accepting or rejecting the existence of a geographical work of Nepos, as the point has never to my knowledge been seriously discussed; for a partial survey one may consult K.G. Sallmann, *Die Geographie des älteren Plinius in ihrem Verhältnis zu Varro. Versuch einer Quellenanalyse* (Berlin 1971; *Unters. zur ant. Lit. u. Gesch.* 11), 123 ff. The evidence of the fragments lends itself to two alternative explanations: a) that they belong to a geographical work, or b) that *exempla* included such matter as, e.g., geographical distances – which is not supported by any case other than the one under discussion. Clearly the first hypothesis is to be preferred.

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to devote his time to the composition of a geographical work⁵⁴. The correspondence seems to suggest that Cicero, reluctant from the beginning, eventually evaded the scheme. Yet there exists evidence to the contrary. Priscian quotes (*GLK* 2.267.5) Cicero 'in chorographia' for the use of *quercus* in the second declination. The quotation is not without its problems; the different MSS provide a variety of versions, ranging from orthographia to cosmographia and chronographia; and the quotation itself contrasts with *Att.* 13.28.2, where Cicero employs the fourth declination form *quercu* (other instances have all neutralised case-endings). However the evidence cannot be easily dismissed. Perhaps the most convenient assumption would be that Cicero undertook such a work, if at all, much later than in 59, when his reluctance is evident: thus, possibly under the dictatorship of Caesar, the period of his almost frantic literary activity — a suggestion already made above in connexion with the *Admiranda*. There is no telling which of the two geographical works — if there were two such works — preceded the other; neither is it possible to weigh the chances of the possibility that it was Atticus, after the rejection of the idea by Cicero, who suggested the subject to Nepos⁵⁵. At any rate, Nepos' geographical work certainly did not follow slavishly his Greek predecessors, whoever they were. The extension of Roman conquest provided rich opportunities to the curious enquirer. Indians were driven to the shores of Germany, thus supporting the theory of a circumfluent Ocean: the story was told by Metellus Celer, proconsul of Gaul (frg. 15). Eudoxus, fleeing from Ptolemy Lathyrus, circumnavigated Africa to land in Gades, so Nepos affirmed (frg. 16). Such and similar passages bear witness to an inquisitive, though credulous writer⁵⁶. The latter characteristic, frowned upon by modern scholars, is rarely absent from the ancients: it is telling that Nepos is censured for it by no other than Pliny the Elder (*n.h.* 5.4), that storehouse of absurdities and exaggerations. Most welcome must have been Nepos' knowledge of his native Northern Italian traditions (cf. above, n. 2), collected perhaps with more industry than discrimination.

54 *Cic. Att.* 2.4.3; 6.1; 7.1.

55 A writer who should be mentioned in this context is the most learned of Romans, Varro. But Sallmann, *op. cit.*, in the most recent and exhaustive discussion of the subject, denies the existence of a major geographical work by Varro, while he surveys many of the fragments containing geographical information to be found in a number of minor works.

56 On Metellus Celer and the Indians, cf. Bengtson, *op. cit.* (above, n. 10); the story of Eudoxus should be read as against the accurate and detailed version of Strabo 2, C98 ff.

This review of the meagre fragments of Cornelius Nepos has not been, it is hoped, without profit. There emerges from it a writer, industrious, inquisitive, constantly on the lookout for a new theme, never shrinking from an innovation, always ready to adapt Greek literary genres and traditions to Roman circumstances and his personal preferences. If, in the course of this literary career, he showed haste, lack of precision and little critical faculty, these shortcomings must be balanced against the undoubted services of his innovations to Roman literature.

2. *Nepos' Roman predecessors and contemporaries.* Having surveyed Nepos' literary achievement in brief, before turning to the output of his old age, and the work that interests us most, it is proper to turn to the possible and probable Roman influences on his most important, and only surviving, composition. A word of caution, first. The beginnings of Roman prose literature coincide with those of Latin historiography: taking even the lowest view of Nepos' literary interests and erudition – a view by no means necessitated by weighty considerations – no Latin work known to us, extant or attested in citations and fragments, can *a priori* be assumed to have been unknown to Nepos: a long life spent, for all we know, exclusively in unceasing literary activity, must have sufficed to peruse the not yet too substantial output of Roman literature several times over. Obviously, a survey of all that Nepos may have read, and all that could have influenced him, is out of place here. Neither is it necessary to survey the major trends of Latin literature of the Republican period: it is Nepos' place in this picture rather than a redrawing of the picture in part or in its entirety that is our present task. Nevertheless, some authors and works will have to be discussed: on the one hand, it is central to our discussion to establish whether Nepos had any true forerunners or contemporaries in the writing of biography in general, and in the composition of political biographies in particular; on the other hand, those works that can be connected by more than the general assumption of literary erudition to his own work will have to be examined as to their possible influence on Nepos' conception and execution of his biographical oeuvre.

Among the distinguishing features of Latin historiography, which set it apart from its Greek predecessors, there is one that deserves mention here. It has been observed above that Hellenistic historiography showed an increasing preoccupation with the personalities who played the leading roles in the historical narrative. Roman senatorial historiography was very different in its conception: that paradoxical

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work, the Elder Cato's History Without Names, was only the most extreme manifestation of a generally prevailing trend of the Roman annalists⁵⁷. Significantly, it was the first freedman to write history at Rome, Voltacilius Pitholaos, who composed monographical works centred around the personality of his patrons, Pompeius Strabo and his son Magnus: the information is transmitted by none other than Nepos himself⁵⁸. After what has been said in the previous chapter on historical monographs, it will not be necessary to repeat here that Voltacilius Pitholaos was not a biographer and that his work should not be viewed as political biography⁵⁹ – there can be very little doubt that it stood in the direct tradition of Hellenistic monographs. Thus, Nepos' acquaintance with the genre is assured – and another example of it may be the Sulpicius Blitho mentioned by him in connexion with Hannibal⁶⁰.

Akin to these monographic works was a genre that achieved its *akme* in Rome at the turn of the second and first centuries: Memoirs and Autobiographies.

It has been noticed that the Greeks did not write autobiographies. Two reasons may be adduced here to account for the fact. First, we have noted that Greek biographical writing was concerned with series of Lives of men: not with the personality in its individual apartness, but in the typical and characteristic for a whole category of men. It goes without saying that autobiography could not fit into this mould. But there is an additional reason, important to stress in the present discussion. Autobiography is a genre particularly well suited for the description of the Lives of men of affairs: but it was precisely this sort of man, as has been demonstrated above, that did not form the subject of biographies in Greek literature.

57 For this tendency, see the pertinent remarks of F. Bömer, *Naevius und Fabius Pictor*, *SO* 29 (1952), 39, n. 4, with further bibliography. For the early first century, cf. E. Rawson, *L. Cornelius Sisenna and the Early First Century B.C.*, *CQ* 29 (1979), 342.

58 Fig. 57 (= Suet. *rhet.* 27). See also R.G. Lewis, *Pompeius' Freedman Biographer: Suetonius, de gramm. et rhet.* 27 (3), *CR* 16 (1966), 271 ff., and the sober criticism of S. Treggiari, *Roman Freedmen under the Late Republic* (Oxford 1969), 119, n. 8; for the identification, cf. also ead., *Pompeius' Freedman Biographer Again*, *CR* 19 (1969), 264 ff.

59 The works are described as 'res gestas . . . compluribus libris'; they are called biography by, e.g., Schanz-Hosius I^a, 328; see there for the forms of the name and cf. previous n. To increase this misrepresentation to an entire paragraph dealing with biography, Schanz-Hosius add the fact that Sulla's freedman Cornelius Epicadus completed his patron's *Memoirs* (referred to in this context as 'Biographie'). Treggiari, *op. cit.*, 114 sensibly sticks to the evidence in describing this work, as that of Pitholaos, as the source does.

60 Sulpicius Blitho is otherwise unknown; neither identification nor dating are possible: see *HRR* I. CCCLXXVIII.

Nevertheless, the Hellenistic Age first introduced the genre of Memoirs into Greek literature. A number of characteristics, apart from the obvious one of the identity of author and subject matter, can be ascribed to them. Their style was without literary pretensions, taking the form of notes towards the composition of a literary work rather than a literary work in itself; their aim was apologetic, recounting the history of the events described from the author's own point of view – the style purporting to lend credibility to the self-serving contents. Not that these works, few in number as far as we can tell, enjoyed great popularity: only the acquaintance with Aratus of Sicyon's descendants and their urging induced the widely read Plutarch to exploit his *Memoirs* for a biography⁶¹. It is necessary here to differentiate between these Memoirs and kindred works that had at their centre a figure who was not the author, though the author was normally associated with him for part or even his entire career – Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (*Ἀπομνημονεύματα*) providing the first known instance and the most famous specimen of the genre. In distinction, a work like Aratus' Memoirs was, to all appearances, most closely similar to historical monographs evolving around the figure of a personage, with the difference that here author and hero coincided in one man.

It is this genre of writing that achieved a certain popularity at Rome at the end of the second and beginning of the first centuries. The reasons are not far to seek: the political in-fighting, and the scores that remained to be settled in a number of aristocratic vendettas, the tradition of family-fame and self-glorification, all came to the fore in these works.

Nothing new can be added to the details known about the works of Lutatius Catullus, Aemilius Scaurus, Rutilius Rufus and Sulla⁶²: suffice it to say that despite the misleading modern terminology, these works should be viewed as a special case of the historical monograph rather than of political biography. Nor can anything be said about Nepos' familiarity with these works – some of them of considerable length⁶³

61 On the genre in general, see G. Misch, *Geschichte der Autobiographie*⁴ (1949), 209 ff.; the very few remains are collected in *FGrHist*, nos. 227 ff.; see also Jacoby's commentary, *ad loc*; on Aratus, see *FGrHist* 231.

62 For the respective fragments, see *HRR* I. CCLXIIIff.; 190 f.; CCXLVIff.; 185; CCLIVff.; 189 f.; CCLXXff.; 194 ff.; see also H. Bardon, *La littérature latine inconnue* I (Paris 1952), I, 108 ff., 153 ff.; G. Misch, *op. cit.*, I, 240 ff.

63 Lutatius Catullus' work was book-length, Scaurus' in three books, Rutilius Rufus' at least five and Sulla's twenty-two; clearly, the size alone of these works would be sufficient to assign them to the historical genre of monographies.

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— except for what has been stated as a general presumption of Nepos' acquaintance with Latin literature.

If monographs on political personalities continued in Rome a Greek tradition, their counterpart, namely, biographies of intellectuals, are not attested before Nepos. Nor is the cause far to seek. Social relations and conventions were not conducive to depicting the careers of men who, more often than not, were looked upon as of inferior status; certainly no writer of the senatorial class could have presumed to occupy himself with the life and works of poets, still very often of servile descent. Thus, not very much has been achieved by looking at the more distant possible connexions of Nepos' biographies. More can be learned from works where a safer claim to personal connexions can be made, or where the proximity of the literary genre seems suggestive of personal acquaintance.

Two works, whose influence on and connexions with Nepos may be of some importance belong to Varro — a possible acquaintance⁶⁴ — and Atticus, a close friend. Varro published in 39 (cf. Gell. 3.10.17) his *Imagines* or *Hebdomades*, a curiously arranged collection of 700 portraits with short accompanying texts; it should be noted that Varro may have worked on the project already in 44, if the notice in Cic. *Att.* 16.11.3 pertains to that work (cf. Shackleton Bailey ad loc.). Not too much is known about the subject matter except for Pliny describing it as *homines illustres*⁶⁵. Neither is the chronological relationship between that work and Nepos' *de viris illustribus* as clear-cut as some scholars seem to believe⁶⁶. As will be seen, the only chronological indications of Nepos' work ascribe books XIII-XIV to 35–32; the beginning or at least the planning of the series could easily antedate Varro's publication, or even the tentative date of 44 of Varro's engagement on his illustrated work.

64 The only piece of evidence is the fact that Varro composed a logistoricus with the title *Nepos* (Charis., p. 44.7). Perhaps it is better to identify the subject with Q. Caecilius Metellus Nepos (cos. 57), as proposed by R. Heisterhagen, in *Varronische Studien* I (Ak. Wiss. Lit., Mainz 1957.4), 159, n. 3, against the earlier scholars quoted by him. But is it at all possible to assume that Varro and Nepos, near-contemporaries living in the same city for about thirty-five years and sharing such mutual acquaintances as Cicero and Atticus, never met?

65 For the evidence, see Dahlmann, *RE Suppl.* VI, 1227 ff.; for the possible inclusion of Roman aristocrats, see below.

66 See most recently N. Horsfall, *Cambr. Hist. Class. Lit.* II, 291; note that L.E. Lord, *The Biographical Interests of Nepos*, *CJ* 22 (1926–27), 499, has considered the possibility of Nepos preceding and influencing Varro.

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Whatever direct influence Varro's work may have exercised on Nepos must remain a matter for speculation; but an indirect influence, hitherto unnoticed, should be opened up. Atticus composed a collection not dissimilar to Varro's, where four or five verses were attached to each portrait: only that here all portraits depicted Roman statesmen (Nepos, *Att.* 18.5). Since the priority of Varro's work is safely attested (Plin. *n.h.* 35.11), Atticus' collection can be dated between 35 and 32 (the publication of the *Imagines*) and 35–32 (the *termini post quem* and *ante quem* for the first edition of the *Life of Atticus* which is mentioned; cf. below). It may appear as an obvious conclusion that the motive for Atticus' work was provided by what he, the author of the *Liber Annalis* and of genealogical works on families of the Roman aristocracy, saw as a point to be further elaborated and improved. The great scholar's work did include, among others, portraits of Roman aristocrats⁶⁷. Atticus must have seen the interest in that part of Varro's work and decided to give to the reading public more of what was previously the most popular part of the *Imagines*. Thus, some light is thrown on the elusive personality of Atticus. As with the *Liber Annalis*, following in the wake of Nepos' *Chronica*, also in this work Atticus' personal talent is revealed in improving on other people's ideas rather than being an innovator. But, above all, Atticus acted as a catalyst: it will be shown below that in all probability it was Atticus who suggested to Nepos the inclusion of political biographies in the series of the *de illustribus*: Atticus' own experimenting with short epigrams attached to portraits of political leaders as a corrective to Varro's underplay of their importance in his much larger and ambitious project only reinforces his role in connexion with Nepos the more easily credible.

Another connexion is more tenuous, perhaps only because of an almost total lack of direct evidence. The mid-forties, in all probability the time when Nepos started planning, if not executing, his first biographical compositions, saw the political and literary world of Rome involved in a series of controversies with far-reaching consequences. First, immediately following his suicide at Utica, around the figure of the Younger Cato, then, after the Ides of March, around that of Julius Caesar. Again, there is no need to recount in any detail these well-known stories, unless some positive light can be shed on the immediate problem concerning us. First, Cato. It is significant that of the Roman literature around him there is no suggestion of a true biographical position – a fact best explained by the thesis of the present

⁶⁷ See Symm. *ep.* 1.4 and cf. N. Horsfall, *Anc. Soc.* (Macquarie) 10 (1980), 20 ff.

interestingly, even the one work that has been written by a companion and an eye-witness to a great portion of the events dealt with seems to have exhibited the accustomed features of *Memorabilia*⁶⁸. Nepos' friend Atticus managed Cato's financial affairs (Nepos, *Att.* 15.3), and seems to have encouraged Cicero to devote a work to Cato (Cic. *Att.* 12.4.2); on the other hand, we know that at some time prior to 35–32 (the date of the book on Latin Historians in the *de viris illustribus*) it was Atticus who proposed to Nepos to write a volume-length biography of the Elder Cato (Nepos, *Cato ad fin.*). Unfortunately, no clearer indication can be found for the date of that work: thus, a connexion with the controversy around the Younger Cato, though eminently probable, must remain in the realm of hypothesis. However, on the present view it should be emphasized that the multiple connexions with Atticus envisaged at different stages of the present investigation seem to render these connexions more, rather than less, credible.

But it is in conjunction with the assassination of Julius Caesar that the one work to which a biographical character is assigned with greater probability than to any other can be discussed most conveniently.

We encounter two questions of great importance with the work of C. Oppius, one of Caesar's most eminent agents: the exact nature of his work, and its date – absolute, and relative to the biographies of Nepos. Some of his works attest to preoccupation with contemporary matters: the one on Caesar's paternity of Caesarion, Cleopatra's son, is best connected with the eve of Actium and the war of propaganda between Octavian and Antony⁶⁹; and since his survival to that time is surmised on other grounds⁷⁰, that work should be tentatively assigned to the eve of his life. Similarly, the work on Cassius – its existence is not entirely beyond doubt – may date from the period of the controversy between the two triumvirs, whatever its exact nature⁷¹.

But two other works lay most claim to our attention. The work on Caesar, exhibiting the usual features of an eye-witness account, has

68 I have attempted an analysis of that work in Munatius Rufus and Thrasea Paetus on Cato the Younger, *Athenaeum* 57 (1979), 48 ff.; for the most important literature on the Cato-controversy, see there, n. 1.

69 See K. Scott, The Political Propaganda of 44–30 B.C., *MAAR* 11 (1933), 7 ff. (esp. 38 on Oppius writing 'almost certainly' in 32).

70 O. Cuntz, Legionäre des Antonius und Augustus aus dem Orient, *JÖAI* 25 (1929), 70 ff.

71 Quoted only in Charis. 186.20 Barwick = *GLK* I.147.3. N.B. that no traces of such a *Life* are detectable in Plutarch's *Brutus*, which takes full account of the career and personality of Cassius – a further point to be considered on the question of the very existence of that *Life*.

been thought, probably rightly, to belong to the genre of *Memorabilia*⁷². More probably a biography was the work on Scipio Africanus, thought by some modern critics to be connected with the polemic around Julius Caesar⁷³. Whatever the truth – and it cannot be ascertained – neither work will antedate the Ides of March; they can quite possibly be a few years later, thus allowing the concentration of the entire literary activity of Oppius in the last years of his life. But even on the less radical theory, the priority of Oppius as against Nepos is by no means secure. Not only may the beginning of the series of the *de viris illustribus* be assigned to the mid-forties, but Nepos must have embarked on biographical works even earlier. The lost *Cato* surely antedates the series – and the connexion with the date of the Younger Cato's suicide in 46, though hypothetical, should not be easily dismissed. Thus, even if one or two of Oppius' works were true biographies, the correct chronological relationship between them and Nepos' works must remain undecided. Moreover, no view of Oppius' oeuvre can describe it as anything like the more ambitious biographical series of Nepos. Admittedly, in the mid- or late forties the time for biography had arrived in Rome: but perhaps it is not entirely a matter of chance that Nepos is the only author about whose achievement anything definite can be said.

3. *The biographies of Cornelius Nepos.*

a. *The date and the composition of the de viris illustribus.* The survey of Nepos' literary activity prior to his immersion in the field of biography paints a clear and coherent picture, notwithstanding the fact that many of the details are missing or controversial. His engagement in a new literary genre at, or shortly before, his entering on his eighth decade, must be viewed against the background of a long life spent in writing and publishing major as well as minor works of literature and being in the company, and doubtlessly discussing the output of such literary figures as Catullus, Cicero and Atticus, and perhaps Varro and Sallust as well. His judgment of the work of others was entirely sound: his evaluation of the merit of Lucretius and Catullus (*Att.* 12.4) as well as his assessment of the importance of Cicero's letters to Atticus (*Att.* 16.3–4) and of his contribution to oratory and philosophy (frg. 58) could pass muster in any modern textbook of La-

72 See Münzer, *RE* XVIII, 735, where it is also suggested that the fragments concerning Pompey and Marius derive from the same work.

73 Thus already Mommsen, *Röm. Forsch.* II, 502 ff.; see Münzer, *ibid.*

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tin literature. It is impossible to know what his exact motives were in proceeding to write a long literary series in the autumn of his days. Yet there is evidence to prove what common sense would have suggested — the habits of a lifetime did not change and the methods and procedures that brought him a modest literary fame and the appreciation of Catullus, Atticus and Cicero were to guide him in his latest venture. It is as well to start with a discussion of what can be ascertained about the date of composition. The only surviving part of the *de viris illustribus* about which clear data are at hand⁷⁴ is the *Life of Atticus* from the book on Latin Historians. It has been generally recognised that the first edition of that work, published in Atticus' lifetime, was later than 35⁷⁵ — written at some time between that year and Atticus' death on March 31, 32. The second edition⁷⁶ of the same work appears to have been published after Octavian's assuming the *praenomen* Imperator, but certainly before the senate's grant of the title Augustus in January 27. There is evidence for a second edition of the book on Foreign Generals as well: the first edition was dedicated to Atticus, whose death is the *terminus ante quem* for this book, too. It is not an unreasonable assumption that the entire work was revised at some date: if so, it is not impossible that this revised edition was published in a relatively short time during Nepos' last years; on the other hand, there are considerations that suggest a lengthy and piecemeal publication of the original edition. Foremost among these is the size of the series. The book on Foreign Generals, the only one extant in its entirety, consists of twenty-two Lives in the present second edition; the first edition, apparently without the Lives of Datames, Hamilcar and Hannibal, was some twenty per cent shorter. In its surviving form the book is the longest extant from classical Latin literature⁷⁷; but Nepos' complaints of its length in the preface seem to have been included already in the first edition. All this might suggest that the length of the book was extraordinary compared with other parts of Nepos' series; on the

74 Such passages as *Eum.* 8.2 f. complaining about the behaviour of contemporary veterans (cf. R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* [Oxford 1939], 250) are not detailed enough to provide exact dates.

75 Nepos, *Att.* 12.1 and the deterioration in relations between the two triumvirs from 35 on.

76 Evidence for the two editions in Leo, *op. cit.*, 95 f.; Schanz-Hosius, I⁴, 356 f. (not mentioned in H. Emonds, *Zweite Auflage im Altertum* (Leipzig 1941). The attempt of H. Rahn, *Die Atticus-Biographie und die Frage der zweiten Auflage der Biographiensammlung des Cornelius Nepos*, *H* 85 (1957), 205 f., to deny the existence of the second edition is utterly unconvincing; cf. R. Stark, *Zur Atticus-Vita des Cornelius Nepos*, *RhM* 107 (1964), 175 f.

77 Cf. T. Birt, *Das antike Buchwesen* (Berlin 1882), 313.

other hand, our limited knowledge of the books on Historians (below) is in line with assuming that the book on Generals may have been not atypical. If so, a series of eighteen books or more (cf. below) would suggest a total of close to four hundred biographies — and even if this figure errs on the high side it must be kept constantly in mind when discussing the whole series. Clearly, a work of such proportions did require a considerable period of time for its composition, even with an author who is often charged with haste and carelessness⁷⁸. In any event, all we know about ancient editions and publication suggests that the work was given to the public as composition progressed — most probably in pairs of books (cf. below). There is good reason to believe that the pair of books on Greek and Latin Historians constituted the thirteenth and fourteenth books in the series (cf. below), in other words, that at their inception Nepos had already composed and had given to the public some two hundred or two hundred and fifty biographies. It is impossible to guess how long this would take; but it is just possible that the apparently intense discussion of Julius Caesar and his standing as an orator in the correspondence of Cicero and Nepos in 44 or 43⁷⁹ can be related to Cicero's suggestion to include Caesar in the series. Admittedly, this is a long shot; but abandoning it does not relieve us from the necessity of seeking alternative avenues to our goal. If the *de viris illustribus* did not get off to an early start and a lengthy production, the most likely alternative seems to be a long hiatus after the previously discussed works followed by a period of almost feverish composition at the age of seventy or more. The previous period of about twenty years yielded an output that included the three books of the *Chronica*, five or more of the *Exempla*, and, it has been suggested above, an unknown number of books of a geographical work as well as perhaps some minor works — the whole totalling, it may be assumed, the equivalent of not more than the *de viris illustribus* and the related biographical works. Considering the more heterogeneous sources of the biographical series (cf. below), there is no need to depart without serious reason from the hypothesis of a lengthy and gradual composition. If so, the (somewhat vague) date of the Life of Atticus, the only reliable datum we possess, is no more than a beacon indicating the general direction we are seeking.

78 Not too much should be made, though, of Nepos' own admission of haste (*praef.* 8: 'festinatio') as this seems to be a commonplace with historians: cf. A.J. Woodman, *Questions of Date, Genre and Style in Velleius: Some Literary Answers*, *CQ* 25 (1975), 272 ff., esp. 277.

79 Cf. my paper *Cicero and Nepos*, *Latomus* (forthcoming).

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Composition and number of books. A chance quotation from the sixteenth book of the *de viris illustribus* (Charis. I, p. 178.20 Barwick, = frg. 43) led all scholars to the assumption that this was the minimal number for the total. As a matter of fact, eighteen seems to be the more correct figure: a quotation concerning the historian A. Albinus is generally believed to derive from the book on Latin Historians; the majority of the MSS of Gellius assign this quotation to the thirteenth book of the series, though one family of MSS has XIII rather than XIII. As we have evidence for a book on Greek historians as well, and since at the conclusion of the book on Foreign Generals it is clearly indicated that the book was to have a counterpart in a book on Roman Generals, it is generally believed that the whole series was composed in pairs of books, the Greek (or Foreign) book preceding its Roman counterpart. This would assign uneven numbers to the Greek books: it is without any factual support to presume an introductory book after the fashion of Varro's *Imagines*⁸⁰, thus allocating the uneven numbers to the books on Roman subjects. It is much better to accept with other scholars the *varia lectio* XIII in Gellius and, at any rate, the working hypothesis should be that books XIII-XIV dealt with Greek and Roman historians⁸¹. Since there is a reference in the past tense to the book on Greek historians in the extant book on Generals (*Dio* 3.2), we may deduce from the order of composition that the two books on Generals could not have been earlier than numbers XV-XVI in the series⁸². Now the one surviving quotation from book XV, though actually missing in the text of Charisius, must have included the usage 'partum' for 'partium'⁸³: since this does not occur in the extant book on Foreign Generals, that book could not have been the fifteenth in the series, nor consequently the book on Roman generals

80 See Schanz-Hosius, I⁴, 356 f.

81 There are a number of other potential solutions to the problem that should be mentioned here, if only to complete the record.

a) Sometimes the Romans may have preceded the Greeks in the series – one might compare Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* where in a few cases the order of Greek-Roman is reversed.

b) Albinus may have been included in a special book concerned with Roman historians writing in Greek: the quotation is dealing with a man who 'res Romanas oratione Graeca scriptitavit'. In that case there may have been three books on historians: this would allow for the numeration XIII-XV, XI-XIII and even XII-XIV (in case the series included also other tripartite subjects).

82 Except on the hypothesis of a tripartite work on historians with the serial numbers XI-XIII. The doubts of Schanz-Hosius, I⁴, 357 as to the quotation referring to a past work seem to me over-cautious.

83 Charis. I, p. 179.5 Barwick = frg. 42: Partum. Caesar in analogicis 'harum partum', Cornelius Nepos *inlustrium* XV (. . .).

rians (below) have been not below) would and even if this n mind when oportions did on, even with 1975⁷⁸. In any ation suggests progressed – ood reason to torians consti- s (cf. below), dy composed hundred and is would take; sion of Julius nce of Cicero ion to include abandoning it rative avenues an early start seems to be a d by a period or more. The t that included *empla*, and, it of a geograph- hole totalling, *de viris illustri- re* more heter- here is no need a lengthy and of the Life of than a beacon

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the sixteenth. On the present argument the lowest possible serial number for them – and the minimal figure for the whole series – is XVII–XVIII. It may be thought that it is of little consequence whether the series included sixteen (or more) or eighteen (or more) books: but it will be shown that the length of the series as well as the position of the books on Generals in it is of some importance, not only for Nepos, but for the history of ancient biography.

Composition. We have seen that the series of the *de viris illustribus* included books on Greek and Roman historians and books on Foreign and on Roman Generals. Nothing else can be asserted with any degree of confidence: but since there were other books and since speculation on them abounds, there is no escape from discussing the various hypotheses.

The *codices* of Nepos contain at the end two fragments of the letters of Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, attributed by the MSS to the book on Latin historians. This has been long felt to be inaccurate, and the fragments are usually thought to belong to an – of course unattested – book on Latin orators. The conclusion is possible, but far from inevitable. As I have suggested elsewhere⁸⁴, Nepos could have composed books on Greek and Roman women after the fashion of Charon of Carthage, who devoted equal numbers of books to both sexes: the place of Roman women in society made them even more eligible than their Greek counterparts. Nevertheless, books on orators may well have been part of the series even if the Cornelia fragments were not contained in them.

Neither is the evidence for books on *grammatici* convincing: Suetonius (*Gramm.* 27.2 = frg. 57) cites Nepos for the opinion that L. Voltacilius Pitholaos, the author of Histories of Pompeius Strabo and his son Magnus, was the first freedman in Rome to write History, an occupation reserved hitherto for people of honourable descent. The simplest interpretation of this passage would assign it to the Book on Roman Historians: the inclusion of Voltacilius Pitholaos, who was also Pompey's teacher, among the *grammatici* by Suetonius does not carry any weight in regard of the composition of Nepos. Nor is there any ground for connecting the *libellus, quo distinguit litteratum ab erudito* (Suet. *gramm.* 42 = frg. 61) with the biographical series, and

84 Cornelius Nepos, *de regibus exterarum gentium*, *Latomus* 38 (1979), 662 ff.

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85 *Ibid.*

in particular with a pair of books on *grammatici*; it should be best accepted as a separate work, as has been suggested above.

More reasonably, Nepos' fragments concerning the life of Terence (53, 54) are assigned to a book on Roman poets: it will be argued in the following that more probably it was a book on Roman Comic Poets. Other books are even more hypothetical. Our surviving biography of Cato from the book on Roman Historians is on the author's own evidence an abbreviated version of a volume-length Life; since it is known that Nepos also composed a Life of Cicero in several volumes (Gell. 15.28.1 = frg. 37), it is a reasonable guess that a shortened version of this Life, too, has found its way into the *de viris illustribus*. It is evident from frg. 58 that it was not contained in the book on Historians: thus, orators (most obviously), or perhaps philosophers, not many of whom could Rome boast to set against the sages of Greece. There is no factual support for presuming books on artists, architects (?), lawyers, lawgivers and the like: but two categories must be eliminated before we can proceed.

It has been supposed that the books on generals were accompanied by books on kings and statesmen. Elsewhere I have argued at length⁸⁵ that Nepos never composed books on Foreign (and, implicitly, Roman) kings. The main points of that argument may be repeated here in brief. The passage on which the argument is based appears at the beginning of the chapter *de regibus*, inserted between the Lives of Timoleon and of Hamilcar and Hannibal:

Hi fere fuerunt Graecae gentis duces, qui memoria digni videantur, praeter reges: namque eos attingere nolumus, quod omnium res gestae separatim sunt relatae.

(The reading *nolumus* is adopted here from the *Parcensis*, the best witness, against *noluimus*, which is printed by the modern editors.) Nepos says that he prefers not to treat the Foreign Kings, as these have all Histories (*res gestae*) allotted to them: Nepos must refer to existing Histories by different authors, as he took care (cf. *Pelop.* 1.1) to distinguish between the *vitae* he composed and *res gestae*.

It is generally assumed that the kings enumerated in that chapter were those included in the book on Foreign Kings: this would be contrary to Nepos' probable practice of avoiding repetitions of Lives in different categories; comparing these kings (including Darius, Xerxes, Philip, Alexander, etc.) with the seven legendary kings of Rome would render the comparison ill-balanced; in the book on Foreign Generals

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

the non-Greeks Hamilcar, Hannibal and probably Datames were an afterthought added to the second edition; among the fourteen kings of the chapter *de regibus* there are five Persians, which would presuppose a thorough revision of the book in the second edition. The chapter *de regibus*, interpreted as an appendix serving as a résumé of an earlier book, would be out of character with what we know of Nepos' work; a parallel chapter on Roman kings added to the book on Roman generals would seem out of place. Most importantly, the apology at the beginning of the Foreign Generals, as well as some of the detailed examples in that preface, make it clear that these are the first political biographies included in the series.

The argument for two books on statesmen seems to be even more feeble: Ampelius, the author of the *liber memorialis*, admittedly depended (ch. 15), directly or indirectly, on Nepos in his résumé of Greek generals, as is evident from the almost identical list of heroes in both works (cf. discussion below), but this is a far cry from proving that it was the same source from which he derived his chapter on the *Romani qui in toga fuerunt illustres*. Not surprisingly, the chapter does not have a Greek counterpart in Ampelius. Indeed, the very title militates against the assumption that this had its origin in a book where Greeks and Romans were carefully balanced.

One has only to consider Nepos' Life of Aristides. This very short biography is included in the series of Greek Generals on extremely shaky grounds (*Arist.* 2.2, after three lines concerning his role at Salamis and Plataeae: *neque aliud est ullum huius in re militari illustre factum quam huius imperii memoria*, etc.) — and would have been much better qualified for a series of statesmen, if such a series existed. Moreover, the separation of men with prominent military and civil careers seems to suit the age of Ampelius rather than that of his sources, and has, as far as I can see, no known antecedents in Classical times: Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* may be referred to in this context. Thus, the whole hypothesis is worthless. Not only do we lack any positive evidence for the alleged categories of kings, statesmen and generals there, but also the question of priority is by no means clear (cf. above).

On the other hand, some sort of impression of what the composition of the *de viris illustribus* may have looked like can perhaps be derived from a passage of Jerome. In *epist.* 112.3 (I.p. 738 Vallarsi) he writes:

legisti enim et Graecos et Latinos, qui vitas illustrium virorum descripserunt, quod numquam epitaphium titulum indiderint, sed de illustribus viris, verbi gratia: ducibus, philosophis, oratoribus, historicis, poetis epicis, tragicis, comicis.

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Jerome was acquainted with Nepos' work, and his list could well have been inspired by it. Certainly there is much to be said for the suggestion that the poets were subdivided into the various categories representing the various literary genres, as this is in accord with a great number of Hellenistic biographical series⁸⁶. Thus, certainly lyric poets: Catullus must have taken pride of place; neither is it impossible that Nepos was Suetonius' ultimate source of information for Lucretius, as for Terence; more debatable is whether the highly appreciated L. Julius Calidus was honoured with a biography in his lifetime⁸⁷. The book on Roman orators — if there was such a book — must have taken a leaf or two from Cicero's *Brutus*: at any rate, there is solid evidence that some time between the appearance of Cicero's survey of Roman orators and the putative inception of the work *de viris illustribus* the two men discussed subjects related to rhetoric⁸⁸. Philosophy constituted another subject of their correspondence in 45–44⁸⁹: though Nepos' attitude is mainly negative, censuring the philosophers for not living according to their tenets, this does not exclude the possibility that eventually Lives of philosophers were included in the series.

The possible influence of Cicero's *Brutus* on the biographical work of Nepos does not rest on mere conjecture, but may be deduced also from the apparent correspondence between a pair of passages in the two works. In *Brut.* 41ff., in the famous discussion comparing the careers and death of Coriolanus and Themistocles, Atticus smilingly (*ridens*) corrects Cicero's version of Themistocles committing suicide by reference to the testimony of *Thucydides, qui et Atheniensis erat et summo loco natus summusque vir et paullo aetate posterior*, according to whom he died of illness and was secretly brought to burial in Attica, though he mentions the alternative version of suicide. Nepos, in his own account of the life of Themistocles, closely follows Thucydides and refers to his source rather more often (1.4; 9.1; 10.4) than is his wont, giving the reason for his preference in the second of the passages referred to:

86 Since Jerome's notions concerning Greek writers were second-hand, as has been maintained above, not much should be made of his inclusion of Greeks among those writing series with *duces*.

87 The existence of L. Julius Calidus was doubted by C. Cichorius, *Römische Studien* (Leipzig 1922), 88 f.

88 See the fragment of Cicero's letter to Nepos preserved in Suet. *Jul.* 55 (C.F.W. Müller IV.III., p. 293, frg. 4).

89 Frg. 39 = Lact. *inst.* 3.15.10. For this and the previous note, cf. Cicero and Nepos, *Latomus* (forthcoming).

sed ego potissimum Thucydidi credo, quod aetate proximus de iis, qui illorum temporum historiam reliquerunt, et eiusdem civitatis fuit.

The third passage discusses the various versions concerning Themistocles' death, preferring Thucydides' report and dismissing the story of the suicide.

Very possibly it can be argued that the whole discussion does not reflect much credit on Nepos, who hangs his dead earnest 'historiographical' reflexions on the peg of a tongue in cheek remark of Cicero: but it would be difficult to deny that the two passages are connected, especially as Nepos' comes from a work dedicated to Atticus⁹⁰.

But it is the extant book on Foreign Generals that focusses our interest. The relevant conclusions hitherto that bear on that book are two: a) that it was very late in the series, perhaps belonging to the very last, possibly ninth, pair, written long after the inception and the original plan; b) since there is no evidence for books on Kings or Statesmen, the late books on Generals were exceptional in the series, coming as they did after categories arranged according to intellectual accomplishments. These conclusions will be shown to be well in line with other facts connected with this book⁹¹.

It can clearly be seen that the assumption concerning books on kings, and even more, statesmen, in Nepos do not derive from evidence but rather from preconceived views about the history of biography in antiquity — viz., the almost uncontested hypothesis that political biography existed and flourished for centuries before Nepos. Even so, it is difficult to understand the reasons for assuming separate categories for generals and statesmen; as the very same scholars also subscribe to the view that Nepos wrote on Orators, one is tempted to presume that they believe in the existence of a category of statesmen in Rome who were neither generals nor orators.

90 The present discussion should not be affected by L. Alfonsi's suggestion, *RhM* 43 (1950), 59 ff., that Nepos' *Chronica* was the source of Cicero's synchronism of Coriolanus and Themistocles; it does not preclude the possibility that the reference in Nepos' *Life* of Themistocles to the preference for the version of Thucydides was intended as a compliment to Atticus. It is noteworthy that a decade earlier Cicero still believed in the story of Themistocles' suicide (*Scaur.* 3); cf. also H. Berthold, *Die Gestalt des Themistocles bei Marcus Tullius Cicero*, *Klio* 43 (1965), 38 ff. For discussions of the story of Themistocles' death, see also R.J. Lenardon, *The Saga of Themistocles* (London 1978), 194 ff.

91 Many of the differences between the book on generals and the remaining extant works and fragments of Nepos were noticed a century ago by G.F. Unger, *Der sogenannte Cornelius Nepos*, *Abh. München* 16.1 (1882), 127 ff.: his conclusion was to assign the two bodies of work to different authors, viz., the book on Generals to Hyginus. Many of the observations of Unger may still be read with profit. On a recent attempt to resurrect Unger's theory and its refutation, see *LCM* 7.9 (1982), 134 ff.

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b. *The books on Greek (Foreign) and Roman generals in the series.* Thus far it has been seen that the books on generals may have been very late, perhaps last, in the series, and that they differed essentially in their subject matter from the rest of the books in the series. All this seems to suggest that they may have been an afterthought, not included in the original plan of the *de viris illustribus*. There is no need to invoke Leo himself⁹² for the fact that the title of the work suggests a preoccupation with subjects from the intellectual walks of life. More persuasive is perhaps the widely known fact that ancient literary works on a large scale, and especially those composed in series, often deviated from or extended their original conception. Famous examples like Polybius changing the all-important date of conclusion of his *History* in mid-composition will jump to everybody's minds; but even more relevant is Nepos' fellow biographer, Plutarch, who on his own admission changed his plans while writing, adding *Lives* by reason of the success of the series (*Aem Paul* 1.1). Moreover, as I have endeavoured to show elsewhere⁹³, Plutarch may have extended his biographical series considerably by adding some half a dozen biographies of heroes from the Hellenistic Age, and their Roman counterparts, beyond the original plan. As will be seen, a similar hypothesis concerning the books on generals may be supported with a considerable body of circumstantial evidence. The suggestion of a late addition, possibly an afterthought, carries with it the inference of lack of precedent and innovation. Considering Nepos' record prior to the composition of the *de viris illustribus* as surveyed here this should be anything but surprising. But there is no need to go that far: the *de viris illustribus* themselves, even without taking account of the addition of the books on generals, exhibits a considerable amount of new, hitherto unheard of, features in Roman literature.

1. Pride of place belongs to the very idea of composing a series of biographies in Latin. Nepos' various Roman forerunners and possible influences have been discussed elsewhere; suffice it here to say that the very idea of composing a biographical series, at what must have been even at the original planning an ambitious scale, is a major innovation in Latin literature.

⁹² *Biographie*, 112 ff.

⁹³ Plutarch's *Parallel Lives: The Choice of Heroes*, *H* 109 (1981), 85 ff.

2. Nepos' first major work, the *Chronica*, was truly revolutionary in that it tried, for the first time, to bring under one cover, as it were, events of Greek and Roman history and made an effort at synchronisation of data from two fields that had been hitherto strictly separated. It has been suggested above that the ambitious plan was beyond Nepos' powers – or at least beyond the effort he was prepared eventually to make (*pace* Catullus' 'laboriosis'). Atticus' improvement on the scheme, and ultimately greater success, involved in the event a retreat from Nepos' far-reaching attempt. Yet the idea of confronting Greek and Roman must have lingered on; when it surfaced eventually in the *de viris illustribus* it was to be one of Nepos' triumphs that was to influence decisively the climactic achievement of ancient biography. Of course the idea of *σύγκρισις* was not new⁹⁴: but with Nepos it was to reach new literary success and influence.

What is our evidence for the confrontation of Greeks and Romans in the *de viris illustribus*? We have seen that besides the book on Foreign Generals (Greek Generals in the first edition of the work) there was a book on Roman Generals (*Hann.* ad fin.); and since there survive two Lives, besides a number of fragments, from the book on Latin historians, and Nepos himself refers to the book on Greek historians (*Dio* 3.2), it is more than plausible that the whole series was arranged in pairs of books. But there is more than mere parallel arrangement: the conclusion of the book on Foreign Generals clearly indicates a comparison of the men in the two books of the pair:

Sed nos tempus est huius libri facere finem et Romanorum explicare imperatores, quo facilius collatis utrorumque factis, qui viri praeferendi sint, possit iudicari.

Thus, not just putting side by side, but active confrontation and judgment of respective value and achievement.

Fortunately, a fragment from the book on Latin Historians preserved in a Wolfenbüttel codex of Cicero's *Philippics* (frg. 58) testifies to the fact that a similar confrontation must have been part of the books on Historians: that the Romans cut here a sorry figure (it should be noted here that Nepos is concurring with Cicero's own opinion on Roman historiography⁹⁵) is, according to Nepos, due to the fact that Cicero did not write History and thus did not achieve for it what he did for

94 See in general A. Stifenhofer, Zur Echtheitsfrage der biographischen Synkrisis Plutarchs, *Philol.* 73 (1916), 462 ff.; H. Erbse, Die Bedeutung der Synkrisis in den Parallelbiographien Plutarchs, *H* 84 (1956), 398 ff.

95 See esp. Cic. *leg.* 1.5.

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both Oratory and Philosophy. Thus, not only confrontation, but concern for balance: we shall keep this point in mind when discussing the particular case of the biographies of generals.

It is not possible to compare with any confidence the substantial remains of the *de viris illustribus* with the all too meagre fragments of the *Chronica*; nevertheless, it seems clear enough that Nepos not only carried on the practise of the former work in bringing together Greek and Roman material, but gave it a new edge in making this feature central to the literary structure of the whole work.

3. Another innovative feature of Nepos' work has been recognised and appreciated⁹⁶: Nepos seems to be the first author in Greek or Roman literature who has attempted to write the *Life* of a living person; it is not necessary to assume that the biography of Atticus, a close friend for decades, was the only exception in this regard. Elsewhere I have suggested⁹⁷ that the fragment preserved in Suet. *Aug.* 77 may have been included in a *Life of Antony*; such a *Life*, if part of the first edition of the series, must have been written in the subject's lifetime. There is no need to add speculation concerning other possible contemporaries as subjects of biographies (cf. above on L. Julius Calidus): even if the case of Atticus was unique, Nepos' status as a writer who did not hesitate to introduce novel features to existing literary genres is definitely strengthened by it.

4. The *Chronica*, it has been suggested, was aimed at the Greekless or near Greekless reader who nevertheless wanted to know about Saturn, the age of Homer, or Archilochus. The *de viris illustribus* clearly appealed to the same audience. Twice in the book on Foreign Generals there are clear statements to the effect that the work is aimed at readers lacking in Greek education⁹⁸. It would be absurd to assume that this feature was unique to this very late book in the series; on the contrary, it seems that the idea of providing access to material readily available in Greek to Roman readers may have been Nepos' point of departure, the addition of Romans and the confrontation of the two nations only an improvement on that scheme. As suggested above, this confirmation of the existence in Rome of a – perhaps

⁹⁶ E.g., by R. Syme, *Sallust* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1964), 235.

⁹⁷ An Overlooked Item of the War of Propaganda between Octavian and Antony, *Historia* 29 (1980), 112 ff.

⁹⁸ *vir. ill. praef.* 2 (expertes litterarum Graecarum); *Pelop.* 1 (rudibus Graecarum litterarum).

large – middlebrow public is of some importance for a generally neglected chapter of cultural history.

5. Another feature of some interest is Nepos' choice of his subjects. At least in the Roman books, where he had no predecessors, he must have relied on his own resources in compiling the lists of his various heroes. These lists may have been fairly heterogeneous: the book on Roman historians apparently featured, besides the extant Lives of Cato and Atticus, also A. Albinus and Voltacilius Pitholaos; whether the book on Greek historians, from which only Philistus is safely attested, was equally a mixed bag is impossible to tell. But it is in the only extant book that we can appreciate Nepos' choice and arrangement. The salient point of these is a chronological arrangement of Greek generals from the Classical period; the only exception to this (in the first edition of the work) is Eumenes, belonging as he does to the first generation of Hellenistic history. That Greeks were preoccupied with the period up to the death of Alexander and tended to neglect the Hellenistic Age is a rule that has been drawn to explain – or to question – the attitudes of much later times⁹⁹; the concurrent phenomenon of Atticism is not attested before the times of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a generation after Nepos, though of course little reliance can be put on the fullness of the record. Whether Nepos' choice was due to accident, was influenced by factors not identifiable now, or bear witness to a fine sense of history is impossible to tell; but the mere raising of such possibilities should warn us yet again from dismissing Nepos' achievement too easily¹⁰⁰.

The books on Generals. The perspective hitherto gained reflects on the persistent characteristic of innovation added to traditional forms throughout Nepos' literary career. As we have seen, the books on Foreign and on Roman Generals may well have been the last products of a long life, written when the author was well advanced in his eighth decade, and thus justifiably measured against the background of his previous literary output. Moreover, the Generals may have been a relatively late afterthought; if so, what could have caused it? Though express information on the subject is lacking, the known circumstances

⁹⁹ See, e.g., J.R. Hamilton, *Plutarch, Alexander, A Commentary* (Oxford 1969), XXII and my reservations, *H* 109 (1981), 89.

¹⁰⁰ It is noteworthy, however, that the canon of Greek historians in Cic. *de or.* 2.51–58 does not include any writer later than Timaeus.

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1. We have seen that the confrontation and comparison of Greeks and Romans seems to have been a central characteristic of the series. Moreover, the fragment from the book on Latin Historians on the failure of Cicero to write History suggests strongly that Nepos was concerned with the Romans' inferiority in that category when compared with the Greeks. Unfortunately, the layout of the entire series is anybody's guess: but on almost every conceivable hypothesis, the Greeks must have gained the upper hand in most possible categories. It is perhaps not too bold to suggest that the addition of books on Greek and Roman Generals may have been in part at least due to Nepos' desire to redress the balance in the one category of men where Romans could have been demonstrated as superior without unduly weighting the evidence in their favour. Indeed, the concluding sentence from the *Life of Hannibal* (quoted above) sounds very much like an invitation to view exactly such a demonstration¹⁰¹.

If this hypothesis is correct, it may be connected with an old crux concerning the book on Generals. It was seen long ago (cf. above, n. 76) that the Lives of Datames, Hamilcar and Hannibal were added only in the second edition of the work, while the first edition featured Greek Generals only: critics used to viewing and depicting Nepos as a semi-imbecilic compiler of textbooks designed for schoolboys were excused by their very attitude from giving reasons for this strange behaviour, and could satisfy themselves by merely remarking on its stupidity. Nevertheless, explanation – if not excuse – is not impossible. First, a premise. Whatever other categories besides historians were included in the series – and we have seen that the most probable ones are Comic Poets (other categories of poets?), Orators and Philosophers – it is difficult to envisage suitable Barbarians for inclusion among them. Thus, probably, the Barbarians in the book on Generals were the only additions of this kind in the whole series. It may be suggested, with the utmost diffidence, that this addition was an outcome of what proved now a too heavy imbalance in favour of the Roman Generals.

101 To add speculation to speculation: much has been written on Plutarch's purpose in the *Parallel Lives* and on his wish to maintain a just balance between Greek and Roman generals and statesmen; given his use of Nepos, it is not impossible that he, on his part, wanted to redress the balance to some extent in favour of the Greeks.

2. Books on Greek and Roman Historians preceded the books on Generals. Given the reading public aimed at by Nepos, as well as the probable standard of the work, readers may have been confronted with the somewhat paradoxical situation of reading about historians and their books while entertaining only a hazy notion of the subject matter of such works – and some of these biographies, at least, must have been based mainly on the authors' own data in the historical work¹⁰².

To the possible influence of the books on Historians may be added an even more hypothetical connexion: if there were a pair of books on women – a suggestion that has been put forward above with some diffidence – Roman women in particular, belonging as they certainly did to the nobility, may have rendered desirable the composition of the Lives of those men to whose careers they must have been linked.

It would involve a circular argument to try and deduce some of the subjects of the book on Greek Historians from the references to sources in the book on Generals, and then suggest that the existing Life of, say, Thucydides, rendered a biography of Alcibiades desirable. Nevertheless, this may well have been the case: at any rate, it is remarkable that as far as it is possible to arrive at safe conclusions, Nepos seems to have relied on a limited number of fairly well-known historians in his book on Generals¹⁰³. Also, it is just possible that the inclusion of the short *Life of Cato* among the Roman Historians – orators and generals may have been equally possible choices – may perhaps reflect on the fact that the book on generals was not yet planned at the time.

3. The Atticus Connexion. The reasons hitherto produced are purely hypothetical; the next represents the only piece of tangible evidence connected with the circumstances of the composition of Nepos' work. The book on Foreign Generals is addressed to Nepos' friend Atticus (*praef.* 1). Though there is no hint in this dedication that the idea itself was Atticus', that possibility should be given careful consideration. Certainly Atticus' short verses accompanying the portraits of Roman statesmen and published shortly before Nepos' book on Generals (cf. above) are valuable testimony to Atticus' interest in the subject. Nepos also testifies to the fact that it was Atticus who suggested to him the

102 Thus, perhaps, in a none too dissimilar fashion from the Lives of the Poets: *supra*, Ch. I, n. 30.

103 For Nepos' sources, see the discussion in the preceding chapter, p. 56.

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full-length biography of the Elder Cato; Atticus may have been similarly godfather to other works, notably to the long *Life of Cicero*. Moreover, this was an accustomed role for Atticus — though perhaps after the death of Cicero he may have been reluctant for some time to accept such substitutes as Nepos. More important is the fact that possibly the books on Generals were the only ones in the series of the *de viris illustribus* dedicated to Atticus. Remarkably, the only other book in the series about which anything definite can be said, the book on Latin Historians, was *not* dedicated to Atticus. The very inclusion in it of the *Life of Atticus*, strictly confined to the third person, should be proof enough; add to this the third person reference at the end of the *Life of Cato*, contrasting that short composition with the volume-length biography written at the behest of Atticus, and our contention becomes certainty as much as any negative statement is likely to approximate certainty¹⁰⁴. There is no safe inference whether the books on Generals dedicated to Atticus, or rather the books on Historians not dedicated to him were the exception (though it appears more probable that the exception came at the end rather than in the middle of the series): but in either case, Atticus' connexion with the extant work seems firmly established.

No doubt in the eyes of many a modern scholar the enigmatic Atticus was a man for all seasons. His friend's biography, written during the subject's lifetime, may reflect the way Atticus preferred to see himself: as a historian. At any rate, the possibility that Atticus' historical interests were ultimately responsible for Nepos' choice of subject matter seems to be supported by everything we know about the circumstances of the composition. Atticus' interests as a historian seem to have been confined to the annals of Rome; thus, if the books on Generals were composed at his suggestion, their point of departure must have been the Romans. But more importantly, Atticus must have been a source used by Nepos in the composition of the *Roman Generals*; in our surviving parallel work Atticus is referred to as one of three authorities, along with Polybius and one Sulpicius Blitho, for the different dates given for the death of Hannibal. Conceivably all three dates were found already in Atticus; yet the more relevant conclusion is that Atticus must have served as a source for the *Roman Lives*.

104 The third-person reference to Atticus as one of the sources consulted at the end of the *Hannibal*, though coming from a book dedicated to Atticus, is not really analogous. Moreover, the *Hannibal* was added to the second edition of the work, published after Atticus' death. This explains not only the third person reference, but also the past tense.

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The information about Hannibal may be connected with other facts concerning him that were found in Nepos' *Life of Marcellus* (Plu., *Pelop. et Marc. comp.* 1 [= *Marc.* 31 = frg. 48]; Plu. *Marc.* 30 [= frg. 49]); here Atticus may have had a special interest, as a family history of the Claudii Marcelli was one of a number of such undertakings he composed at the behest of members of the nobility (Nepos, *Att.* 18.4). The most illustrious member of the family, the conqueror of Syracuse, must have been given a place of prominence in such a history¹⁰⁵.

The connexion with Atticus may point to another relevant circumstance, and perhaps to the starting date of Nepos' biographical writing. Atticus suggested to Nepos the *Life of Cato* in one book (*Cato* 3.5). It is very possible that that book was composed before the inception of the work on the *de viris illustribus*: if so, it may have been designed to test the water – or, conversely, may have triggered the idea of a more extended series. Now it is just possible that a date for the lost *Life of Cato* can be suggested. Immediately after the Younger Cato's suicide in Utica in April 46, Atticus came down on the side of those who wanted to influence Cicero to devote a work to him¹⁰⁶. Atticus was a friend of Cato, whose financial affairs he supervised; moreover, strong ties of friendship bound him to Brutus¹⁰⁷, Cato's nephew and posthumously son-in-law, who took upon himself to keep Cato's memory green. His great-grandfather had been Cato's model in public life: it may now be surmised with due diffidence that Atticus' suggestion to Nepos to write a biography of the Elder Cato was connected with these circumstances. If so, it would be best to put it in 46, when the issue was still fresh; in any event, it would not be reasonable to date it later than the assassination of Caesar.

Another, even more hypothetical, suggestion may be put forward in connexion with that date. The *de viris illustribus* may have contained a pair of books devoted to the *Lives of Orators*, whether the surviving fragments of Cornelia and the appreciation of Cicero do or do not belong to it. Cicero and Nepos have discussed at length rhetoric, in the context of Julius Caesar, at a time that must have been close to the Ides of March; I have argued that this may have been connected with Cicero's urging Nepos to include Caesar in a book on Latin Orators.

105 Atticus also wrote a genealogy of the Junii, who were connected with the Marcelli: Nepos *Att.* 18.3; cf. Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics*, 61, n. 25.

106 See Cic. *Att.* 12.4.2.

107 Acknowledged by Nepos, *Att.* 8, well-attested by Cicero's philosophical works and letters.

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108 See, e.g.
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Such a book, if it existed and if composed at that time, may have been dedicated to Cicero and perhaps initiated by him – but certainly influenced by Cicero's own survey in the *Brutus*, a work whose connexions with Nepos have already been mentioned. If so, it may have had an advantage over the *Brutus*, involving a trick elsewhere observed in Nepos – viz., it would have included orators still alive, a category explicitly excluded by Cicero. Nor is it difficult to guess whose career would be the crowning point of such a book – a surviving fragment of Nepos' *Latin Historians* bears witness for the fact that in Nepos' opinion Cicero's achievement made Latin oratory equal Greek.

The circumstances of the composition of the multi-volume *Life of Cicero* are not known. Nevertheless, it seems probable that it was composed after its subject's death (though we have seen that with Nepos such a surmise is not absolutely necessary), perhaps prompted by it – again possibly at the suggestion of Atticus. Neither is it possible to tell whether this *Life* preceded the beginning of the composition, or the planning, of the *de viris illustribus*. Though not certain that this is analogous in any sense, it may be worthwhile to remark that Plutarch, before embarking on the major enterprise of the *Parallel Lives*, composed the series of Imperial biographies from which the *Galba* and *Otho*, inferior in literary quality to the later series, survive; possibly a number of other Lives, attested in fragments and in the *Lamprias Catalogue* and for which there is evidence, date also from before the *Parallel Lives*.

4. *Political circumstances and the composition of the books on Generals*. Almost the only fact that we know with certainty about Nepos' personal circumstances is that he was not a senator (Plin. *ep.* 5.3.6). Historiography at Rome was, and with few though significant exceptions remained, a senatorial preserve¹⁰⁸. Nepos' early *Chronica* brushed the subject, but the addition of non-Roman material, as well as other apparent departures from the traditional annalistic arrangement, put it into a category all of its own; Atticus' subsequent *Liber Annalis*, without the Greek material, came much closer to the accepted forms of aristocratic historiography. Later still, Atticus' own and Varro's genealogical works¹⁰⁹, the first expressly composed *ad maiorem fami-*

108 See, e.g., R. Syme, *The Senator as Historian*, *Entretiens Hardt* IV (Genève-Vandoeuvres 1956), 188.

109 Varro's *de familiis Troianis* does not appear in the catalogue of his writings but is attested by Serv. *Aen.* 5.704.

liarum gloriam (cf. Nepos, *Att.* 18.3–4), came to fulfil the needs of present-day political ambitions and pretensions. True, in senatorial annals, as elsewhere, it was by means of the *vir*i no less than the *mores antiqui* that the *res Romana* extended and prospered; nevertheless, these *vir*i were representative of a class, an attitude and an accepted mode of conduct: even with the greatest of them, historiography never degenerated into hero-worship. In Livy, the non-senatorial heir of the traditions of senatorial annalistic, the heroes are secondary to the idea of the Republic and its traditions¹¹⁰; though far removed from that extremism of the Elder Cato, the History Without Names¹¹¹, it never developed into a concatenation of the *aristeiai* of the leading statesmen and generals of the Republic. Nepos' vantage-point may have been different. It was he who remarked on the fact that Voltacilius Pitholaos was the first freedman to write history in Rome (frg. 57); and it is significant that his known works were Histories of Pompeius Strabo and of his son Magnus, Pitholaos' pupil. Apparently this was the first introduction to Rome of a historical genre, the development of which in Greece we have attempted to follow to some extent. Nepos, most probably a local aristocrat from northern Italy, was different. He was almost certainly of equestrian status and his friends included Knights like Catullus and Atticus along with such men as Cicero, who have risen from that order to prominence in the State; but he was also to be found in the company of the mighty by descent: he could question a Caecilius Metellus on his experiences in Gaul (frg. 15) and his detailed acquaintance with the luxury of Roman aristocrats (cf. above, n. 50) must have been based in part at least on autopsy. Smoky *imagines* in the noble houses he knew, funeral eulogies in the forum he frequented must have formed his impression of the great Republican personages long before he turned to the writing of biography. And there were the times and the political upheavals. At a later period, when unabashed autocracy supplanted the *res publica*, History had to give way and totally surrender to Imperial biography; in the period of transition political biography became established and claimed a rightful place besides traditional historiography.

It has been argued (cf. above, ch. I), that size may have been a relevant characteristic of political biography, as it was of other literary

110 E.g., Livy 4.6.12: Hanc modestiam aequitatemque et altitudinem animi ubi nunc in uno inveneris, quae tum populi universi fuit?

111 Nepos, *Cato* 3.4: atque horum bellorum duces non nominavit, sed sine nominibus res notavit; cf. Bömer, *op. cit.* (n. 57, above).

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genres. Certainly the fully developed forms of the genre, the *Lives* of Plutarch and of Suetonius, are on the whole much longer than the great majority of intellectual biographies that we possess, including those by Suetonius himself. How do Nepos' *Generals* fit into this picture? Their size, though exceeding that of many intellectual biographies, still falls short of the developed Plutarchean or Suetonian type. An explanation may be offered, congruent with what we have learnt about Nepos. If Nepos was indeed the first author to compose *Lives of Generals*, indeed of any persons of political consequence, he did not have guidance as to the length of the *Lives* any more than he had in other matters. It has been noticed above, that in the preface to the book Nepos apologised for applying the biographical genre to an exalted subject matter; at the end of the preface he remarks that he must hurry on because of the great length of the book. Indeed, the book is unusually long, and presumably longer than the lost books of the *de viris illustribus*. This length may have been caused by either the greater number of biographies contained in it or by the greater length of the biographies (or else a combination of these two elements). There seems to be no reason to suppose that Nepos opted already in his plan for a longer book containing lengthier *Lives*, while on the other hand the list of the *Lives* that were to be included must have been more or less complete. Apparently, the *Lives* increased in size in the process of composition without previous planning, so that the author had to add a remark about size in the preface. This explanation would well accord with the brevity of, e.g., the *Aristides*, where there was no abundance of source material: that *Life* is very close in size to many extant intellectual biographies. Thus, the length of most of Nepos' *Generals* may be interpreted as the first stage in a process of development towards the full-sized Plutarchean and Suetonian types. It has also been remarked that Plutarch's earlier series, of which only the *Galba* and *Otho* are extant, seems to have contained consistently shorter biographies than the *Parallel Lives* – thus hinting at an analogous development in Nepos and in Plutarch. The present argument, offering the best explanation of the available evidence, seems also to lend further support to the hypothesis of Nepos' primacy in political biography.

4. *Cornelius Nepos and political biography.* Before turning to an analysis of the extant *de excellentibus ducibus exterarum gentium* and to an attempted reconstruction of its lost Roman companion volume, it is as well to recapitulate the results arrived at up to now. It has been seen that the series of biographies was Nepos' last work,

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composed in part at least in the eighth decade of his life. In all probability the two books on generals were the very last, numbered perhaps seventeenth and eighteenth in the series, and composed in the late thirties. These books may well have been an afterthought, added perhaps at the instigation of Atticus, to whom they (but not the whole series) were dedicated. Though a series of biographies of political personages was without precedent in both Greek and Roman literature, the innovation now must appear to us as anything but surprising. Throughout Nepos' career we had occasion to follow a steady flow of creative innovations and opportunistic adaptations of different literary works by no means less significant than the one under discussion. These innovative features were exhibited both in the earlier works and in the biographical series itself; thus, we may turn from marvelling at the fact of Nepos' priority in that issue – a fact unacceptable to Steidle – to an analysis of his actual achievement.

The book on Roman Generals. Fate may have been very unkind to Cornelius Nepos. It is not my intention to quarrel with his present-day critics: but even the most stringent among these acknowledge the superior qualities of the *Life of Atticus* compared to the book on Foreign Generals, while the praises of such ancient critics as Catullus, Atticus and Cicero have been defended against those who wish to explain them away as irony. In fact, it may well be that the only extant book of Nepos is the exception rather than the rule in the quality of his work. It has already been pointed out that this may have been an afterthought and late addition; but there are weightier considerations for the above suggestion.

It is an interesting fact that 'the extant work of Nepos . . . is never quoted as such, and virtually never referred to, in the whole of extant classical literature'¹¹²; it is worth noting that the qualifying 'virtually' refers to Ampelius' *Liber Memorialis* and the Bobbio Scholiast (cf. below). Not too much should be made of this; but it is reassuring that apparently it was not the opinion of antiquity that Nepos should be judged by the book on Foreign Generals.

What are the facts that can be asserted with any degree of certainty about the book on Roman Generals? First, composition. It is reasonable to assume that the length of the book and the number of *Lives* included in it roughly corresponded to those of the companion volume on Foreign Generals. Fragments attest beyond reasonable doubt the

112 P.K. Marshall, *The Manuscript Tradition of Cornelius Nepos* (London 1977), 1.

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existence of *Lives* of Marcellus, Lucullus and Scipio Aemilianus in that book (frgs. 48, 49; 52; 50, 60); the suggestion that there might have been a *Life of Antony* has been put forward elsewhere¹¹³. Another suggestion bears repetition and expansion¹¹⁴. Plutarch's description of his use of Latin sources (*Demosth.* 2) presumes a short introductory source that contained the main themes, as it were, of his Roman *Lives*. Such a description seems to fit Nepos better than any other known writer, lost or extant. Moreover, Plutarch knew Nepos and demonstrably used him in some of the Roman *Lives* (*Marc.* 30; *Pelop. & Marc.* 1; *TiGr.* 21; *Luc.* 43). On the other hand, not only the handful of heroes known to have been contained in Nepos' book on Roman Generals have become subjects of the *Parallel Lives*, but also the Elder Cato (included by Nepos among the Latin Historians), Cicero (perhaps in Nepos' book on Orators or Philosophers) and the Gracchi (in Nepos' book on Orators?) have been treated by Plutarch. Of course our state of knowledge of Nepos' subjects being what it is, this correspondence, total as it is for the known heroes of Nepos' *Lives* who could have been considered by Plutarch, is far from being a proof of the idea that Nepos' series may have suggested to Plutarch the choice of at least some of his heroes. Yet that idea may be supported also by a general consideration. Plutarch's gallery of Romans is a selection of exclusively Republican times – a selection by no means self-evident or unavoidable – the two last ones chronologically, Brutus and Antony, being also the last who could have conceivably figured in Nepos' *Lives*. This is not proof: but the fact that Plutarch confined himself strictly to men from the Republic is best explained by a late Republican or early Augustan source guiding him in the choice of his heroes.

Here and elsewhere issue is taken against even the mildest manifestations of the aberration known as 'Einquellentheorie'. However, it is not often enough recognised that a distinction should be made between sources read and/or used by an author and a general source guiding him in his subject matter: the assumption made here, that Nepos was a likely candidate to supply a preliminary list, later to be emended, abridged or expanded, of Roman heroes worthy of treatment does not predict anything about the amount of use made by Plutarch in any of these biographies. Thus, again Nepos is the best, and actually only, obvious candidate. However, even if the suggestion is accepted that Plutarch was decisively influenced by Nepos in the choice of his Roman heroes, this is still a far cry from reconstructing

¹¹³ *Historia* 29 (1980), 112 ff.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *H* 109 (1981), 85 ff.

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the contents of Nepos' book on Generals, *inter alia*, also because, as we have seen, Plutarch may have had recourse to other parts of Nepos' series. Guesses could be made: Atticus may have suggested to Nepos a *Life* of Brutus, a close friend (and Nepos remarks on the relations in the *Life* of Atticus [*Att.* 8]); another friend, Cato (this relationship, too, noticed by Nepos [*Att.* 15.2]), became the subject of a protracted literary controversy after his death. It is not possible to know whether Atticus, who had encouraged Cicero to defend the memory of Cato (cf. above), also attempted to have him made the subject of a biography by Nepos: he would hardly qualify for the *Generals*, but could have fitted the book on Orators.

Such guesses could be multiplied – but to no avail. It is best to restrict oneself to the general idea that Nepos may have guided Plutarch towards many of his subjects of the Roman Lives. Other considerations, such as the availability of further sources, may have played an important part in the final decisions concerning exclusion or inclusion. Thus, it is impossible to know to what degree the generally felicitous choice of Plutarch reflects the probable structure of Nepos' work.

There is yet another avenue by which it is possible to approach Nepos' Roman biographies. It has been seen that the only two writers who demonstrably used Nepos' extant *Lives of Foreign Generals* are the late authors Ampelius, who, in the chapter of the *Liber Memorialis* devoted to Athenian generals, exhibits a list that directly or indirectly was influenced by Nepos¹¹⁵, and the Bobbio Scholiast, who, in the commentary on the *pro Sestio*, shows unmistakable verbal resemblances to the *Lives* of Themistocles, Miltiades, Aristides and Hannibal¹¹⁶. But it is also distinctly possible to link these two authors to the Roman *Lives* – and, via these, to the connexion with Atticus.

Nepos is quoted by Plutarch (*TiGr.* 21) as holding the view, opposed to that of other writers, that the wife of C. Gracchus was the daughter of the Brutus who triumphed over the Lusitanians, rather than Licinia, the daughter of P. Crassus. This information was dismissed by earlier scholars, but was given an ingenious but credible explanation by no less an authority than F. Münzer¹¹⁷. Now the information to be found in the fragment of Nepos is also contained in two passages of Ampelius:

115 The names from Miltiades on in Ampelius' list are the same as those in Nepos' except for Themistocles and Timotheus who are missing and Phocion, who is placed by Ampelius between Iphicrates and Chabrias: obviously it was Nepos' arrangement that led Ampelius to believe that Dio was an Athenian.

116 The parallels can easily be observed in the editions of Hildebrandt and Stangl.

117 *Römische Adelsparteien und Adelsfamilien* (Stuttgart 1920), 270 ff.

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Decimus Brutus Callaecius¹¹⁸ qui C. Gracchum generum agraris legibus <re> ip<ublicae> statum turbantem cum Opimio consule oppresserit (19.4)

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seditio C. Gracchi . . . quem Opimius consul cum D. Bruto Callaecio socero eius . . . oppressit (26.4)

Ampelius shows acquaintance with Brutus' cognomen, with which he was awarded for his Spanish victories. And where does this information explicitly surface? In the Bobbio Scholiast: On the *lemma* Decimus quidem Brutus (*pro Arch.* 27) he explains (p. 179 St):

Hic Brutus Callaecus fuit cognomento ob res in Hispania non minus strenue quam feliciter gestas. Sub eius etiam nomine Acci, poetae tragici, exstat liber; cuius plurimos versus, quos Saturnios appellaverunt, vestibulo templi Martis superscripsit Brutus¹¹⁹

A hitherto unconnected fragment of Nepos, generally assigned to the *Exempla*, contains information on the Temple of Mars:

Aedis Martis est in circo Flaminio architectata ab Hermodoro Salaminio (Prisc. *GLK* 2.383.3 = frg. 35)

There is nothing to prevent us from assuming that it was Nepos who is the source of the detailed information about the family connexions of Brutus, about his acquiring the *cognomen* Callaicus, and about the building and dedication of the Temple of Mars with the inscription of Accius. Nor should we be surprised by that knowledge: Atticus, the addressee, and possible inspirer of the *Lives of Generals*, composed at the request of his friend Brutus a family history of the Iunii, where no doubt all these details, and many more, were to be found (*Att.* 18.3).

There is yet another aspect of Ampelius that may support one of the hypotheses advanced in the course of the present discussion. Ampelius' list of Athenian generals is, from a point onwards, in almost total, and definitely significant, agreement with the generals of Nepos (cf. above, n. 115); his list of Roman generals is, starting with Claudius Marcellus, composed almost without exception of names of heroes of Plutarch's *Lives*¹²⁰. Though many of the names are self-evident and could not have failed to appear in any list, the degree of agreement is suggestive of a common source of inspiration which is best identified

118 Thus Ampelius. For the correct form Callaicus, see, e.g., *MRR*.

119 Accius' *Brutus* is also mentioned in *Schol. Bob. Sest.* 123, p. 137 St. For the familiarity of Brutus and Accius, cf. *Cic. leg.* 2.54: *Brut.* 107.

120 The only exceptions appearing in Ampelius are Q. Nero (he may have been celebrated as an ancestor of Drusus Germanicus; see Degrassi, *Inscr. It.* XIII.3.9 and cf. *Tac. ann.* 4.9), Metellus Numidicus (whose *Life* Plutarch did plan to compose), Metellus Macedonicus and Augustus (who was included in Plutarch's *Caesars*).

with Nepos. Of course the dependence should not be taken as sufficient for a reconstruction of Nepos' list: Cato the Censor appears in Ampelius in the chapter of the *Romani qui in toga fuerunt illustres*, while in Nepos he was contained in the book on Historians; thus, the inclusion of Brutus Callaicus in the same chapter does not seem significant – no doubt Ampelius redistributed the material he found according to his own plan – and according to his lights.

Whatever the exact composition of the *Lives* of the Roman Generals, some predictions can be made as to their quality. First, the *a priori* consideration that on Roman matters Nepos would have been better informed than on matters pertaining to Greece. This consideration may be supported, as we have seen by the superior qualities, not only of the *Life of Atticus*, who, after all, was a contemporary and a close friend, but also to some extent of those of the *Lives* of the Elder Cato and Hannibal¹²¹, as well as a number of pertinent fragments. But rather than general considerations, a methodical attempt to define some of the characteristics of the Roman Lives can be made.

1. *Sources.* The survey of Nepos' sources for the extant book on Foreign Generals seems to reveal a methodical preference for major narrative historians from whose accounts a short *Life* of a leading personality could be patched together without undue effort (cf. above). No blame can be laid on Nepos for the choice of his sources: he usually preferred the best ones eligible, and for reasons that on occasion were made explicit by him (cf. above). That the results rarely corresponded with the good intentions and sound principles can perhaps be explained by haste, superficiality and, more charitably, by old age. Last, but not least, the scale of the venture – four hundred Lives or thereabouts (cf. above) – may serve as an extenuating factor. For the Roman Lives his sources, like the advice of the infatigable Atticus, must have been the best available. We have seen Nepos' recognition of the high historical value of Cicero's letters (*Att.* 16.3–4) – these must have stood him in good stead for the relevant contemporary *Lives* (the *Lucullus* is attested), as did no doubt Atticus' book on the consulate of Cicero, also referred to in the *Life of Atticus* (18.6). But Atticus must have been relied on throughout the work: the solitary reference to him in the controversy over the date of Hannibal's death (*Hann.* 31.1) is a sure sign of his employment as a source in the Roman

121 The *Hamilcar* is too short to permit conclusions.

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Lives; whether the reference in the same place to the alternative date provided by Polybius and the one derived from Supicius Blitho is at first hand or contained already in Atticus is not possible to tell; but given the contemporary regard for Polybius as witnessed by Cicero¹²² Nepos must have read him. What else he used will be mere speculation: but it may be significant that at the end of the *Life of Hannibal* he refers to the historians who wrote special works about him. Moreover, if there is any truth to the suggestion that the pair of books on historians may have been influential for the conception of the books on Generals, then such specialised works as, e.g., Voltacilius Pitholaos' on Pompey must have been used. That Nepos' acquaintance with the works of the historians whose *Lives* he composed was at first hand may be inferred from such instances as his description of Cato's *Origines* at the end of the extant *Life* (3.3–4) – easily our best piece of surviving evidence on that important work.

2. *Autopsy and oral sources.* Good sources could not guarantee Nepos' performance, as the book on Foreign Generals shows. Yet in their Roman counterparts there was available to Nepos the possibility of eye-witness reports of contemporaries still alive – and of his own. The *Life of Atticus* demonstrates that this availability was put to excellent use; but not only the *Life of Atticus*. He was present at the delivery of a speech of Cicero and recorded later the adherence of the written version to the original text; he could receive information from a Roman proconsul on remarkable events in his province (frg. 15); and above all a lifetime of diligent observation provided him with a wealth of information on the changing habits and social life of the Roman nobility (frgs. 27, 33, 34; 26, 28). To this should be added the sound geographical background: the by now completed geographical work must have furnished him with useful information on the scenes of battles and on the important characteristics of the world conquered by the heroes of his Roman *Lives*; this, of course, on top of his detailed first hand knowledge of Rome herself (n.b. frg. 35 on the Temple of Mars) and of the geography, ethnography and traditions of his own native Po valley (frgs. 18?, 19, 20, 23).

3. *Documentary evidence.* In the extant *Lives* of Greek Generals there is little attempt to put to use, let alone quote, documentary evidence.

122 Cf. E. Rawson, Cicero the Historian and Cicero the Antiquarian, *JRS* 62 (1972), 41.

Of course, in Roman affairs both the availability of quotable evidence and the fact that it could be quoted in the original created more favourable circumstances. Thus, already in the *Exempla* we find original quotations¹²³; they are relatively numerous in the meagre fragments of the Roman *Lives*: we find them in the book on Latin Historians (A. Albinus), in the letters of Cornelia, from whatever book they were taken, and apparently in the *Life* of Scipio Aemilianus¹²⁴. Considering the paucity of the fragments, this appears to point to a relatively large-scale exploitation of speeches, letters and other primary sources.

4. *Genealogy*. In the *Life of Miltiades* Nepos could blunder and confuse Miltiades the uncle and Miltiades the nephew in the matter of the colonization of the Chersonesus¹²⁵. In the Roman *Lives* there stood at his elbow that patron saint of prosopographers, Atticus. No surprise, then, that he knew better about the identity of the wife of C. Gracchus (Plu. *TiGr.* 21 = frg. 51); he was well-informed about the marriage arrangements of Q. Cicero and the sister of Atticus (*Att.* 5.3), as well as about Mark Antony's arranging the marriage of Pomponia and M. Agrippa (*Att.* 12.1–2). An otherwise meaningless fragment preserved by Charisius (frg. 43) consisting of the words 'a fratre patruale' was contained in the sixteenth book, thus presumably dealing with Roman matters.

5. *Chronology*. Perhaps on no other account has Nepos received so much, and such justified criticism, as on account of his confused and uncertain chronology in the *Lives of the Foreign Generals*¹²⁶. Contrarily, in no department perhaps can the superiority of the Roman *Lives* compared to the Greek ones demonstrated as in this one.

It is not necessary to mention the *Atticus*, where the exact date of the death of the hero is stated (22.3): after all, this contemporary biography may have been exceptional in Nepos' personal involvement and first-hand knowledge of the events. A far better case is the *Hannibal*: this *Life* may indeed serve for all practical purposes as an example of a Roman *Life*. The sources, insofar as not monographic *Histories of Hannibal*, were the sources of Roman History, and the events described

123 See frgs. 12, 13.

124 See frgs. 56, 59, 60.

125 Those who censure Nepos for that blunder, like, e.g., E.M. Jenkinson, *ANRW* I.3.714, would do well to remember that exactly the same slip occurs in Paus. 6.19.6; one should hesitate before throwing the first stone at ancient writers, deprived as they were from many convenient aids of their modern counterparts.

126 For a list of Nepos' mistakes, see G.F. Unger, *Abh. München* XVI.1, (1882) 146 ff.

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largely belonged to that sphere. The chronological framework is solid and reliable: it is the framework of the annalistic tradition, providing the names of the Roman magistrates and with these continuous chronological guidance to the events described. All this is not the personal achievement of Nepos, but rather an inalienable component of Roman historiography. Political biography as practised by Nepos is a legitimate heir of the historiographic tradition, using the same source material and possessing, as will be seen, very much the same set of values and aims. Of course, the existence of a chronological framework — in the Greek *Generals* it is virtually non-existent rather than uncertain — is in itself no insurance against failure: Nepos could be mistaken about a speech of Cicero delivered in his own lifetime and give alternative dates for an event without being able to show preference for the one or the other. But these were not personal faults of Nepos. As far as it is possible to judge from the *Lives* of Hannibal (the *Hamilcar* is too short and vague to allow for any conclusions), *Atticus* and *Cato* and from the fragments, Nepos' chronology, when dealing with Roman history, was no better or worse than that of the existing tradition of Roman historiography — and, as has been asserted earlier, far superior to the vague and virtually non-existing chronology of the Greek *Lives*.

A curious phenomenon, to my knowledge hitherto unnoticed, may go a long way towards explaining Nepos' introduction of *Lives* of *Generals* into his biographical series. The short Life of Cato, abbreviated from the volume-length work written at the request of Atticus, is included in the book on Latin Historians. Were it not for the express attestation of this fact, it is doubtful whether we would be able to divine it. In fact, the *Life*, though giving a good, and for us invaluable, account of Cato's historical writing, is hardly what we would term the biography of a historian. That the account in the full length *Life* need not necessarily be much longer is suggested by the *Life* of Atticus, from the same book. One chapter among the eighteen of the first edition (and twenty-two of the second) is devoted to Atticus' historical writings. The similar place at the end accorded to these accounts in both *Lives* suggests a common feature of the book — a short account of the *vita et mores* of a person completed by a résumé of the distinguishing field of activity in which the subject was engaged. No doubt, it was the contingencies of the available material that dictated this scheme to Nepos, and, of course, the limitations set by his age and personality. It would be folly to expect from Nepos what could have been provided by Felix Jacoby: by his own standards, and the expectations of the period, his descriptions of the historical works of Cato and

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of Atticus are exemplary in form and in contents alike. But it is quite clear that Cato's biography in an abbreviated form might as easily have fitted into the book on Latin orators (if there was such a book), the account of Cato's orations somewhat expanded, that of the *Origines* somewhat reduced in length. And, after all, could Cato not have been numbered among the Roman Generals? (provided that that book was already contemplated at that stage). Surely not a less suitable subject than Aristides (cf. above).

A general consideration may not be out of place here. The composition of Roman society, with its interlapping, indeed identity, of political and intellectual élites, was hardly conducive to such a categorization as had been the standard practice of Greek biographical writing. Historiography was a senatorial preserve; rhetoric a major, and indivisible, component of politics. Descriptions of the careers of such men as Cato among the historians was but a small step from the introduction of generals in a separate category – and the generalship of some, like Aristides, on Nepos' own admission, may have been fairly marginal.

It is this matter of the biographical *series* that has to be kept constantly in mind when discussing Nepos' achievement. Whatever the claims of other writers to a first place in the history of Latin biography, Nepos' position as the innovator in taking over the Greek practice of organizing men into categories according to their individual fields of intellectual accomplishment cannot seriously be doubted. The miscalculation of treating Roman subjects exactly in the same way as Greeks could have happened to greater intellects than Nepos: it was indeed beyond the biographer's notions to observe that Greek and Roman societies differed to a degree that made a simple transplant of Greek categories to Roman soil impracticable. It is quite possible that this was in the event the most important single factor contributing to Nepos' decision to add a hitherto unaccustomed category of generals to his series. Perhaps only when the decision had been made – and may it be noted again that probably Atticus had some part in it – did Nepos notice that some apology was in place to account for his boldness.

Nepos' preface to the extant book of the *Lives of Foreign Generals* is one of the most important passages for the history of ancient biography – and one of the most consistently misinterpreted. Before proceeding to analyse it, it will be as well to repeat once again what this passage consists of. There is a dedication to Atticus – a dedication pertaining to this book – or, conceivably to this book and the accompanying volume of Roman Generals – only. (Which does not

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necessarily mean that some of the other books of the series were not dedicated to him, too.) Second, the position of the book in the series should be remembered: perhaps the seventeenth book, quite possibly the very last pair in the series. All this by way of confirming what would seem obvious but for the persistent efforts of scholars to derive from that preface conclusions pertaining to biography as a whole and not only to the subject of the book to which the preface belongs: political biography. But it will be best to let Nepos speak for himself:

Non dubito fore plerosque, Attice, qui hoc genus scripturae leve et non satis dignum summorum virorum personis iudicent. . .

and he continues with examples of facts such as, who taught Epaminondas music, etc. Now it should be clear that only political personages such as Epaminondas and the other heroes of this book can be understood to fit the description of *summi viri*: not only does the epithet not fit such attested categories as, e.g., comic poets (Terence), but also the assertion of the irrelevancy of such pursuits as music can only be understood in the context of Roman senatorial *gravitas*, not of men of letters, poets, etc. *Hoc genus scripturae* is, of course, biography: but it may be judged *leve et non satis dignum* only if applied to the lives of *summi viri*. (It should only be parenthetically added that the derivation of the phrase 'genus scripturae leve' testifies to a total misapprehension of the sentence.) The apology is prefixed to the book on Generals precisely to signify its uniqueness and the departure in subject matter from the previous books, which adhered to the accustomed prototypes of the genre. Were it not for the previous misapprehension of the passage under discussion, it would be superfluous to demonstrate the self-evident truth that the very examples that follow Nepos' general statement can only be understood in the context of an apology for applying a genre fit for lesser individuals than *summi viri*. The statement (§ 5), 'in scaenam vere prodire ac populo esse spectaculo nemini in eisdem gentibus fuit turpitudini', can only be understood to stress the difference in values with the Roman political class; the absurdity of the assumption that this is a general statement applying to all conceivable categories of persons included in the *de viris illustribus* need not be explained. The same applies, of course, to Nepos' references to Epaminondas' study of music, dance and flute-playing. Roman class-consciousness, in a later generation to be defined as the difference between *honestiores* and *humiliores*, is clearly alluded to in Nepos' preface (§ 5): *quae omnia apud nos partim infamia, partim humilia atque ab honestate remota ponuntur*. Thus, some Greek customs (such

as marrying one's half-sister) are shameful and unacceptable to all Romans; others (like appearing on the stage) are confined to those whose social standing is not inappropriate for such an action. The meaning of Nepos is clear and hardly needs this elucidation, were it not for the widely accepted general views concerning the history of ancient biography.

However, no analysis of Nepos' preface is likely to answer the question whether it was only the heroes that separated the last books from the earlier part of the series. In other words: did Nepos, once delivered from the necessity of an apology, treat his Generals exactly in the same way he did his poets, orators, historians and other literary subjects? One might suggest that the matter could be tested by comparing the *Lives* of the Generals with the surviving *Lives* of Cato and Atticus from the book of Roman Historians. The results here may well be misleading. It has been shown that the *Life* of Cato was in all possibility somewhat exceptional, and may have fitted even into the book on Generals had it been contemplated at the time. With the *Life of Atticus* the presumption that it is untypical is even stronger; the exceptionally long *Life* of a lifelong friend fitted into the series perhaps only to anticipate the wishes of the quietist Atticus. Very possibly, the *Lives* of such men as Terence and Voltacilius Pitholaos were more typical examples of the *de viris illustribus*. Fortunately we do not have to rely on such comparisons of dubious outcome. Nepos himself guides us with an important statement introducing the *Life of Pelopidas*:

Pelopidas Thebanus, magis historicis quam vulgo notus, cuius de virtutibus dubito quem ad modum exponam, quod vereor, si res explicare incipiam, ne non vitam eius enarrare, sed historiam videar scribere.

Again, a crucial passage misinterpreted because of preconceptions concerning Nepos' work and the history of ancient biography. First, a remark: *historici* are historians, writers of history (it is a measure of Nepotian scholarship that this needs pointing out) – an important pointer to Nepos' sources. But much more central is the remainder of the passage – which, incidentally, should be taken together with the very similar remarks of Plutarch in the introduction to his *Lives* of Alexander and Caesar. It is clear from both authors that the *genus proximum* that is to be avoided and from which they wish to differentiate themselves is history: were it not for certain self-imposed restraints in the narration of the events there would be a clear danger of transcending the limits of the literary genre and slipping into history. It should be self-evident, but for the contrary interpretations of scholars, that this

danger applies, and applies only, to the writing of political biography. Obviously, this statement cannot be applied to the biographies of poets, dramatists, etc. These were never in antiquity the legitimate subject matter of history, history of course being confined to political history. Nor was an apology needed: the Lives of statesmen and generals, derived largely from narrative history, may have needed, in some cases, condensation and abbreviation to fit into the pattern of Nepotian – and sometimes even Plutarchean – biography; the lives of poets and writers, in many cases, derived, nay divined, from the contents and attitudes found in their works, were more often in need of expansion than abridgement. Again, the apology is added because of the novelty of the material and the newly discovered danger of the biographer of slipping into a different literary genre, a genre from which this new material was in fact derived. It is not to the pure chances of survival that we owe the statements about method of Nepos and Plutarch any more than it is a coincidence that declarations to a similar effect are not to be found in such composers of extant biographical series as Philostratus, Diogenes Laertius or Eunapius. As argued in an earlier chapter, the writer of political biography faced an alternative – the historical monograph dealing with the career of the hero – that did not exist for the writer of intellectual biographies. Hence, apology only where choice was available.

Opting for the description of the lives of people from the political sphere meant another, far more important, thing. History, as practised in Rome and as it was derived from Hellenistic models, was moralising in its aims – the actions of the heroes exhibited the better to be able to draw the moral lesson from them. It has been long established that the same may be said about such biographers as Plutarch; by accepting the moralistic attitudes of historiography he differed from history only in the descriptive methods and subject matter, not the aims of his composition. The same attitudes may be discerned in Nepos, though the smaller scale and, one must add, the poorer quality, of his Lives exhibit them less clearly than Plutarch¹²⁷.

It may not be too presumptuous, perhaps, to argue here from probability and assume that no such aims were to be perceived in the previous books of Nepos' series. The Lives of comic poets did not lend themselves to, and were not read for the sake of, moral lessons. With the addition of statesmen and generals biography transcended its previously recognised borders and came to approach the altogether higher planes of history.

¹²⁷ For the moralistic purpose of the Lives, see Ch. I, n. 35.

JOSEPH GEIGER

CORNELIUS NEPOS
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