

## Sulla δημοκράτωρ

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In the course (1.255–9) of his *Acroasis*, a poem celebrating the recapture of Crete by Nicephorus Phocas in 961, Theodosius the Deacon apostrophises various ancient authors, telling them that the great men they wrote about were as nothing compared to his Byzantine hero. Depreciated thus are Philip II, Julius Caesar, and the (unspecified) great men of Xenophon. Completing the quartet is Dio Cassius, who is informed that Sulla was *εἰς μάτην δημοκράτωρ*.

The noun *δημοκράτωρ* is absent from *LSJ* (and its Supplement), also from the lexica of Lampe and Sophocles. The vigilant Stephanus spotted it, but gave only the present passage. On the analogy of such Byzantine concepts as Christ the *παντοκράτωρ* (cf. *δεσπότης* as the regular later title of emperors), the word ought to be complimentary in tone. Its context reinforces this: a villain would be quite out of place in this comparative eulogy. In his most pertinent surviving fragment (Bks. 33–35, 109: Boissevain 1, p. 350), Dio states that Sulla had been, or seemed like, a great and good man until his victory over the Samnites, by which he was changed into the monster of the proscriptions. It is a judgement that closely follows Plutarch, *Sulla* 30.4–5. However, in the latter's formal Comparison between Lysander and Sulla, the Roman is lavishly praised (4.4) for his military exploits—as a general he was *ἀσύγκριτος*.

Dio for his part may very well have enlarged upon the theme of Sulla's generalship, perhaps in a necrology. Moreover, there was a contemporary impulse for going further and finding merit in his dictatorship. For the historian himself tells us (75.8.1) that Septimius Severus in 197 made an alarming speech to the senate in which Commodus was rehabilitated, partly through an argument in which the cruel severity of Sulla, Marius, and Augustus was represented as being more beneficial to the state than the clemency of Pompey and Caesar.

Arguably, then, Dio was thereby influenced into some mitigation of Sulla's regime along the same lines. This would account for the otherwise curious reading of him by Theodosius the Deacon, and would in general terms be a reminder of how a greater knowledge of classical texts can be teased out of Byzantine allusions to them.