

NEPOS AND THE GENERALS

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In memory of Arnaldo Momigliano

This paper begins in the year 1569, when a hefty commentary on the *Lives* of Cornelius Nepos was published in Paris by one of the Royal Professors, Denys Lambin (known to classicists as Lambinus). The event intrigued me for two reasons. Firstly because, in France at that time, history was not a proper subject for professors. A professor could deal in Greek and Latin poetry, in oratory, philosophy, maths or Hebrew, or of course in the degree subjects theology, medicine and law; but history, including ancient history, was mostly a popular interest among the cultured ruling class, who preferred to read it in elegant vernacular versions, like Amyot's Diodorus and Plutarch, not in the dusty didactic form of text and commentary. So why did a professor, famous for his work on poetry and philosophy, suddenly devote himself to Nepos? The second puzzle was that, within weeks of publishing this commentary, Lambinus was violently attacked for it, and came close to losing both his job and his life. How, I wondered, could commenting on Nepos so seriously endanger the health?

Reading the commentary (which remains much the best exegesis of Nepos) soon answered both questions. In the preface Lambinus explains that since, for the third time in less than a decade, France is rent apart by bitter religious and civil war (mainly a civil war, as he sees it), this is no time for belles-lettres; philosophy is full of wonderful ideals, but too abstract to be of immediate use; himself too old to be a soldier, and too poor to help sustain the public purse, all that he can contribute as a citizen is his scholarship, and he will do so by directing it to history: history, perhaps, may help himself and his fellow-citizens to understand the crisis they are living in, and work towards a solution.

And in fact the commentary itself frequently pursues ideas in the text for their relevance to the current state of France, taking up a very forthright political stance; which is, of course, what got him into trouble. Lambinus had chosen Nepos, he says, mainly because the *Lives of Foreign Generals* embrace a wide span of history in a relatively short space. But it becomes clear in the commentary that he came to find Nepos interesting for a quite different reason, by seeing him as a sort of *alter ego*: a scholar, not a politician, devoting himself to history in a time of prolonged and apparently insoluble civil war, genuinely interested in the past, but in constant awareness of the problems and issues of the present; so a writer worth taking seriously, provoking thought about the Roman experience of civil war, and about the uses of history.

This is a very different Nepos, as far as I have seen, from any that emerges from the more recent literature about him, from Nipperdey's commentary of 1849, frequently reprinted, down to the present day. Nipperdey's generation began the onslaught from the angle of resurgent historical studies: schoolmasters should alert their pupils to Nepos' multiple factual errors, and avoid the *Lives* where these are most prevalent.¹ In the second half of the century, renewed linguistic studies and the growing obsession with prose composition dealt another blow: Nepos' quirky and un-Ciceronian Latinity disqualified him as a text for serious students.² He remained useful, in small amounts, for the most junior pupils, as simple Latin narrative adorned with salubrious moral maxims. This late-nineteenth-century view of Nepos has even given rise to the notion that the work was written for school-children. In fact there is no evidence that the ancient curriculum ever included texts of this kind, or that Nepos envisaged a scholastic readership.³ But even for schools his moral maxims

¹ See Nipperdey's very interesting preface to his edition.

² O. Schönberger, 'Cornelius Nepos' in *Das Altertum* 16 (1970), 153–63 gives a sketch of the polemic.

³ Ancient schoolchildren learnt what history they did from exegesis of the poets and study of historians recognized as literary models. Even the late antique

historical epitomes, where we have any indication, are addressed to adults; they needed them precisely because they had had no such teaching at school. Since Nepos does make remarks about his readers (*Praef.* 1, xv *Epam.* 1. 1, xvi *Pelop.* 1. 1, xxiv *Cato* 5), one would expect a reference to their youth if he had had youngsters in mind: nothing suggests it.

have become a dubious asset in our own day, when classical authors, if not prime ministers, do best to avoid Victorian moralizing if they want to keep a place in the syllabus.

So now we have a reviewer of the recent Teubner edition complimenting the editor, but wondering whether the author was really worth the trouble.⁴ The modern English-speaking student is introduced to Nepos as an 'intellectual pygmy', naively potting other people's scholarship for an ignorant public, writing in a clumsy Latin style, prone to moral platitude, muddling his facts and mis-translating Greek—a stupid ancient, in short, whom any intelligent ancient, like Cicero or Catullus, must surely have laughed at; even if what they actually say can scarcely bear such an interpretation.⁵

In higher scholarship Nepos remains unavoidable in any discussion of ancient biography, but even here the negative press hangs heavy. So in Leo's lapidary judgement, 'Nepos ist weder Künstler, wie Plutarch, noch Gelehrter, wie Sueton'.⁶ Recently, Joseph Geiger has tried to redress the balance a bit by arguing that Nepos invented a new genre, 'political biography'; but even he concludes that the idea probably came from Atticus, that Nepos was perhaps only half aware of what he was doing, and that anyway his achievement should not be judged by the deplorable surviving book on Foreign Generals, but rather by the lost one on Roman Generals, which of course, like most lost works, was much better.⁷

So was Lambinus' approach to Nepos quite misguided? Did he, as happens to the best of us, merely read into his author concerns and insights of his own? Or is it worth putting this question: can Nepos' *Lives* in fact tell us something about how a Roman citizen, cultured and in touch with public affairs, but not directly involved in them, understood and interpreted the collapse of his country's political system?

The best way to consider it seems to be to re-read Nepos. But first it may be as well to get a few bearings.

Most of Nepos' *Lives* are about Greek leaders of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. How much did Romans of the Republican period know, or indeed care, about that period of Greek history (bearing in mind that they had not had the benefit of the Romantic movement)? The surviving evidence is of course scanty, and much of it not of a kind from which to expect an answer. Still, I would guess that for much of the second century a Roman's history of Greece, if he was not himself a historian, began and ended with Alexander the Great. A Gracchan law prompted C. Fannius to recall a few famous tyrants (*ORF* frs 6–7), and C. Gracchus himself may have adduced Greek examples to warn the Romans that *avaritia* and *stultitia* can be the ruin of states (fr. 22). But, granted that our evidence is very fragmentary, it seems likely that such references were at best sporadic *exempla* of primarily rhetorical origin. By the time of the *ad Herennium* (mid-80s B.C.) we have a bit of progress. Thanks to the rhetorical figure of *gradatio*, the Roman student learns that Greek history has a shape (IV. 34):

Item: Imperium Graeciae fuit penes Athenienses, Atheniensium potiti sunt Spartiatae, Spartiatas superavere Thebani, Thebanos Macedones vicerunt, qui ad imperium Graeciae brevi tempore adiunxerunt Asiam bello subactam.

But still the only individual who rates a mention in the work is Alexander the Great.

No doubt if you studied rhetoric with a Greek teacher, in Rome or in the East, you would meet heroes and exploits from Greek history in reading the orators. And, as we see in the *de inventione*, rhetorical exercises could also exploit historical events.⁸

⁴ Cornelius Nepos, ed. P. K. Marshall (1977), reviewed in *CR* 29 (1979), 55–6.

⁵ E.g., W. V. Clausen and E. J. Kenney (eds), *Cambridge History of Classical Literature* II (1982), 290–2.

⁶ F. Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie* (1901), 193; but A. D. Momigliano, *The Development of Greek*

Biography (1971), 97–8, sounds a note of caution.

⁷ J. Geiger, *Cornelius Nepos and Ancient Political Biography*, *Historia Einzelschriften* 47 (1985).

⁸ *De inv.* I. 55–6, 68–70: the case of Epaminondas 'quae apud Graecos est pervulgata'; but otherwise allusions to Greek history are few: I. 93, II. 69–70, 144.

But the picture of Greek history resulting from such study would be distinctly patchy and idiosyncratic.⁹ Something of this filter may be detectable both in Cicero's historical allusions and in Nepos' choice of subjects. For instance, whereas Miltiades, Themistocles and Aristides are canonized as heroes of the Persian Wars, Pericles is remembered as a brilliant orator and symbol of the apogee of Athens, not for any particular political or military initiatives; and of all the leaders in the Peloponnesian War, only Alcibiades survives as a major figure, with Critias as a favourite villain. But would study with someone like Apollonius Molon, Cicero's teacher, include reading of the Greek historians? Perhaps the odd purple patch, but in general I rather doubt it. The devotees of Thucydidean style were a later phenomenon, described by Cicero in 46 B.C. as a new and unheard-of species of incompetent; what Greek teacher of rhetoric, he goes on to ask, ever drew anything from Thucydides?¹⁰ And in the *de oratore* (II. 62), he more calmly remarks that he has never seen rules for history included among *rhetorum praecepta*.

Admittedly in the same context (and the dramatic date is 91 B.C.), he has just made the elder M. Antonius perform a rapid critical review of Greek historians from Herodotus to Timaeus. That we should not take this portrayal too seriously as historical fact is shown, I think, by J. Caesar Strabo's reaction to the roll-call: 'Well, well,' said Caesar Strabo, 'and who says that Antonius does not know Greek? What a lot of historians he has named! And how knowledgeably and aptly he has given the character of each!'.¹¹ Antonius then hurriedly adds that of course he only reads them for fun on holiday, and that their effect on him is subliminal. For all Cicero's claims that that generation had had much more Greek culture than generally supposed, there is surely a tongue-in-cheek admission here that he is going a bit far: wide-ranging enthusiasm for Greek history, even as an extra-curricular activity, was scarcely credible of the generation of M. Antonius; but it was a fresh and vigorous interest in the mid-50s, when Cicero was writing the dialogue.

It is in fact at this time that we first, I think, find Greek history invading one of Cicero's speeches. The peroration of the *pro Sestio* enlarges on the theme that defence of the state, especially against the levity of the mob, can be an ungrateful business but is nonetheless always worth it. After citing the example of L. Opimius, the killer of Gracchus, he goes on:

Even among the Athenians, Greeks that is, a far cry from our tradition of responsibility, there were those prepared to defend the state against popular recklessness, even though all those who had done so were thrown out of their country. The famous Themistocles, saviour of his country, was not deterred from defending it by the ruin of Miltiades, who had saved the city shortly before, nor by the exile of Aristides, who is known as the most just man there has ever been. And later too, great Athenians, whom there is no need to name, in spite of so many instances of the mob's fickle temper, nonetheless defended their state. What then should we do, born in a city which seems to be the very home of responsibility and generosity, living in such glory that all personal considerations must seem of lesser account, and undertaking to preserve a state of such worth, that it is more glorious to die defending it, than to attack it and rule the world?¹²

⁹ Cf. for the moment M. Nouhaud, *L'utilisation de l'histoire par les orateurs attiques* (1982). A more selective but very illuminating analysis is offered by Rosalind Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

¹⁰ *Orator* 30-1: 'ecce autem aliqui se Thucydidi esse profitentur: novum quoddam imperitorum et inauditum genus... Quis porro umquam Graecorum rhetorum a Thucyde quicquam duxit?'

¹¹ *De orat.* II. 59: 'haec cum ille dixisset, "quid est" inquit "Catule?" Caesar; "ubi sunt, qui Antonium Graece negant scire? Quot historicos nominavit! Quam scienter, quam proprie de uno quoque dixit!"'

¹² *pro Sestio* 141: 'Quod si apud Athenienses, homines Graecos, longe a nostrorum hominum gravitate diunctos, non deerant qui rem publicam contra populi

temeritatem defenderent, cum omnes qui ita fecerant e civitate eicerentur; si Themistoclem illum, conservatorem patriae, non deterruit a re publica defendenda nec Miltiadi calamitas, qui illam civitatem paulo ante servavit, nec Aristidi fuga, qui unus omnium iustissimus fuisse traditur; si postea summi eiusdem civitatis viri, quos nominatim appellari non est necesse, propositis tot exemplis iracundiae levitatisque popularis, tamen suam rem publicam illam defenderunt—quid nos tandem facere debemus, primum in ea civitate nati unde orta mihi gravitas et magnitudo animi videtur, tum in tanta gloria insistentes ut omnia humana leviora videri debeant, deinde ad eam rem publicam tuendam aggressi quae tanta dignitate est, ut eam defendentem occidere <amplius> sit quam oppugnantem rerum potiri?'

One notes that the three named heroes are not so famous as to make a bit of glossing redundant, and suspects that 'there is no need to name' the later ones because few Romans would know of them. Still, the inclusion of such references in a speech is not insignificant, a brave enactment of the wide horizon of the *de oratore*.

Cicero's reading of philosophy also clearly extended and reinforced his own, and then his readers', awareness of characters and episodes from Greek history. So in the *de finibus*, arguing against the Epicureans:

We can summon up as witnesses from the annals of history men whose whole lives were devoted to noble toil, who could not stand the mere mention of pleasure: in your discussions history is dumb. In the school of Epicurus I have never heard the names of Lycurgus, Solon, Miltiades, Themistocles, Epaminondas, names constantly on the lips of all other philosophers. And now that we Romans have also begun to discuss philosophy, what shining examples Atticus will supply us with from his great storehouse of Roman history! Is it not better to talk of these, than to fill volumes about madam Themista? Leave such things to the Greeks. For though we owe philosophy, and indeed all liberal studies, to them, there are things on which they can afford to waste their time, but we cannot.¹³

In other words, a Roman's philosophy must be linked and in tune with history, as befits a people with a job to do, ruling the world.

Common to all these passages, and several others like them, is of course the comparative and competitive approach. In this respect Nepos' juxtaposition of Greek and Roman commanders was no novelty: it was the only approach to Greek history that had any currency. In literature and philosophy the superiority of the Greeks was such that their achievement might be explored and celebrated for its own sake, with or without hopes of matching it. But Greek history of three or four centuries ago was a different matter. A successful imperial power can hardly be expected to acclaim the political achievements of its victims as superior to its own; and the paradigmatic *levitas* of the Greeks, all too proven by their current situation, made their history mostly worth knowing and citing in a *fortiori* argument, to show how Romans had done, or should do, better.

But at the beginning of the year 49 I think we find something different, and more serious. Between January and May of this year Cicero unburdens to Atticus the arguments that wrestle in his mind, as he tries to understand the situation and decide what he should do. Repeatedly in these letters Cicero cites Greek historical figures—Themistocles, Pericles, Thrasybulus, Themistocles again, Hippias, Themistocles yet again. And verbal quotations from Thucydides only confirm what the tone anyway suggests, that this is no roll-call of proverbial examples, but the result of fresh and personal study of their actions in historical context.¹⁴ Perhaps with the looming reality of constitutional collapse and major civil war one could now turn to fifth-century Greek history and see it not as the bygone glory of a defeated people, but as a painfully relevant experience, which might help one to think.

We do not know exactly when Nepos wrote his lives of Greek commanders. The dedication to Atticus guarantees a date before his death in March 32 B.C.; how much before is uncertain.¹⁵ But clearly civil war and upheaval is a live issue. Consider this passage, where Thrasybulus is encamped at Phyle:

¹³ *de finibus* II. 67: 'Ut enim nos ex annalium monumentis testes excitamus eos, quorum omnis vita consumpta est in laboribus gloriosis, qui voluptatis nomen audire non possunt, sic in vestris disputationibus historia muta est. Numquam audivi in Epicuri schola Lycurgum, Solonem, Miltiadem, Themistoclem, Epaminondam nominari, qui in ore sunt ceterorum omnium philosophorum. Nunc vero, quoniam haec nos etiam tractare coepimus, suppedabit nobis Atticus noster thesauris suis quos et quantos viros! Nonne melius est de his aliquid quam tantis voluminibus de Themista loqui? Sint ista Graecorum; quamquam ab iis philoso-

phiam et omnes ingenuas disciplinas habemus; sed tamen est aliquid quod nobis non liceat, liceat illis.'

¹⁴ *ad Att.* VII. 11. 3, VIII. 3. 6, IX. 10. 3, X. 8. 7.

¹⁵ Since there is evidence that we have both the *de ducibus* and the *Life of Atticus* in revised editions (not necessarily simultaneous), neither the parenthesis 'non est enim celandum' at *Att.* 12. 2 (implying a *terminus post* of c. 35 B.C.) nor the cross-reference at *X Dion* 3. 2 seem to me strong pegs on which to hang the original order or date of composition of these books of the *de viris illustribus*; both are just the sort of thing that might well be added in revising. See further n. 29 below.

Yet Thrasybulus' forces did not increase as much as one might have expected. For, already at that time, the *boni* tended to talk for liberty with rather more courage than they fought for it.¹⁶

Or in the life of Agesilaus, after a string of successes in Asia Minor:

He was already planning an expedition into the heart of Persia to attack the king himself, when a messenger arrived from home sent by the ephors, to say that the Athenians and the Boeotians had declared war on Sparta, so he should come without delay. This event shows that Agesilaus' *pietas* is as much to be noted as his military ability. For though he was in command of a victorious army, and could confidently hope to conquer the kingdom of Persia, yet he was as respectfully obedient ('*tanta modestia dicto audiens fuit*') to the orders of the far-away magistrates, as if he had been a private citizen (*privatus*) face-to-face with them in Sparta. If only our leaders had been willing to follow his example! But back to Agesilaus. He preferred a good name to the richest of kingdoms, and regarded it as far more glorious to have been subject to the constitution of his country ('*si institutis patriae paruisset*'), than to have conquered Asia in war.¹⁷

Nepos, the critics say, is prone to moralizing. But I would put it to you that passages like this are no mere moralizing. They are comment on political behaviour, with a pretty sharp edge to recent events, implying also a specific view, as much political as moral, of what has gone wrong.

How specific, and how relatively unmoral, emerges clearly if one compares Nepos with his contemporary Sallust. In Sallust a major, though not only, cause of the current débâcle is generalized moral corruption: *avaritia*, *luxuria*, *libido*, *superbia* have spread through the Roman people like an epidemic. In Nepos these vices are almost exclusively confined to individuals: the corruption of a people is repeatedly ascribed to *largitio* on the part of their leaders, a specifically political kind of corruption, though it has more general moral and political consequences. So the corrupt Hasdrubal (xxii *Ham.* 3. 2) '*princeps largitione vetustos pervertit mores Karthaginensium*', and Themistocles

elected to office by the people, made Athens more warlike not only for the current conflict but also for the future. For whereas the public revenue from the mines was annually frittered away in *largitio* by the magistrates, he persuaded the assembly to employ it in the building of a fleet of 100 ships.¹⁸

And this, he goes on to say, was the material and moral basis both of Athenian power and of the heroic Greek survival against Persia. Commentators crossly remark that Nepos is wrong: the revenue from the mines was distributed to citizens by law, not by any *largitio* on the part of magistrates. It is all the more significant that Nepos assumed, or misinterpreted, the nature of the hand-out in this way. He might equally have said that the revenue was squandered because of the *avaritia* and *luxuria* of the mob, timely curbed by Themistocles; but that is not how he sees it.

What then are Nepos' values, his central concerns? Pride of place, certainly, goes to *libertas*. Only two of Nepos' lives begin with whole-hearted commendation of the person as someone quite exceptional. They are Thrasybulus and Timoleon, introduced in very similar terms:

¹⁶ viii *Thras.* 2. 4: 'neque tamen pro opinione Thrasybuli auctae sunt opes: nam iam tum illis temporibus fortius boni pro libertate loquebantur quam pugnabant.'

¹⁷ xvii *Ages.* 4. 1-3: 'Hic cum iam animo meditaretur proficisci in Persas et ipsum regem adoriri, nuntius ei domo venit ephorum missu, bellum Athenienses et Boeotos indixisse Lacedaemoniis: quare venire ne dubitaret. In hoc non minus eius pietas suscipienda est quam virtus bellica: qui cum victori praesesset exercitui, maximamque haberet fiduciam regni Persarum potundi, tanta modestia dicto audiens fuit iussis absentium

magistratum, ut si privatus in comitio esset Spartaee. Cuius exemplum utinam imperatores nostri sequi voluissent! sed illuc redeamus. Agesilaus opulentissimo regno praeposuit bonam existimationem, multoque gloriosius duxit, si institutis patriae paruisset, quam si bello superasset Asiam.'

¹⁸ ii *Them.* 2. 1-2: 'praetor a populo factus non solum praesenti bello, sed etiam reliquo tempore ferociorem reddidit civitatem. Nam cum pecunia publica, quae ex metallis redibat, largitione magistratum quotannis interiret, ille persuasit populo ut ea pecunia classis centum navium aedificaretur.'

Thrasylbulus, son of Lycus, Athenian. If we should evaluate on the basis of *virtus* alone, irrespective of fortune, I think I would rate this man higher than anyone. Certainly, I know of no one greater than him in loyalty, determination, generosity of spirit, or patriotism. Many have wished, and few have been able, to rid their country of a single tyrant: it was his blessing to free it from oppression by thirty tyrants, and restore it from slavery to freedom.

Timoleon, from Corinth. Unquestionably this was a great man, in everybody's estimation. For it was his particular blessing, not I think shared by anyone else, to free not only his native country from oppression by a tyrant, but also, when he was sent to help the Syracusans, to rid them of inveterate slavery...¹⁹

In this book describing twenty-two commanders the highest honours go not to the conquerors, like Agesilaus, not to the great patriots against a foreign foe, like Themistocles or Epaminondas, not to the morally perfect, like Aristides, but to the tyrant-slayers. This preference may also account for the position of the life of Timoleon, which is the only one seriously out of chronological sequence.²⁰ As it is, it concludes the series of figures from Greek history. Is it an accident that this concluding life is, from beginning to end, a veritable hymn to *libertas*?

The last paragraph, for which Nepos singles out two anecdotes, is illustration enough. A tiresome character called Laphystius wanted to haul Timoleon up in court. The citizens, outraged at such treatment of their liberator, try to stop him by force:

But Timoleon begged them all not to do so, saying that it was precisely so that Laphystius or anyone else should have this liberty, that he had faced all the toil and danger of his career. For, he said, it is the essence of *libertas* that recourse to the law should be available to everyone for whatever he might want.²¹

Another tiresome character called Demaenetus attacked Timoleon in the assembly, belittling his achievements. At this Timoleon said that his prayers were finally answered: 'namque hoc a diis immortalibus semper precatum, ut talem libertatem restitueret Syracusanis, in qua cuivis liceret de quo vellet impune dicere'.

In fact Nepos' tyrant-slayers are not literally such, not heroic assassins like Harmodius and Aristogeiton or Brutus and Cassius. Thrasylbulus kills Critias in the field of battle, and limits any further reprisals by his famous amnesty. Timoleon arranges, but does not himself enact, the murder of his tyrant brother, and on defeating Dionysius II just packs him off to Corinth unscathed. What matters is that they restored liberty. After the Ides of March it became grimly apparent, as Cicero remarked, that getting rid of a tyrant and restoring liberty were not the same thing.²² Two days after the assassination of Caesar Cicero had, he later recalled, done all he could to lay the foundations for peace:

I resuscitated that ancient exemplary action of the Athenians, indeed I even used the Greek term by which that city had put an end to civil discord, and proposed that all memory of our strife should be lost in oblivion for all time.²³

¹⁹ VIII *Thras.* 1. 1-2: 'Thrasylbulus, Lyci filius, Atheniensis. si per se virtus sine fortuna ponderanda est, dubito an hunc primum omnium ponam. illud sine dubio: neminem huic praefero fide, constantia, magnitudine animi, in patriam amore. nam quod multi voluerunt, paucique potuerunt, ab uno tyranno patriam liberare, huic contigit ut a triginta oppressam tyrannis e servitute in libertatem vindicaret.'

xx *Timol.* 1. 1: 'Timoleon, Corinthius. sine dubio magnus omnium iudicio hic vir exstitit. namque huic uni contigit, quod nescio an nulli, ut et patriam, in qua erat natus, oppressam a tyranno liberaret, et a Syracusanis, quibus auxilio erat missus, iam inveteratam servitutem depelleret...'

²⁰ If one takes dates of death, all the *Lives* (including those of the Syracusan Dion and the Carian Datames) are in correct chronological sequence within ten years

(several of the dates are even now uncertain); but Timoleon (d. 337) is put at the end after Eumenes (d. 316) and Phocion (d. 318).

²¹ 5. 2-3: '...namque id ut Laphystio et cuivis liceret, se maximos labores summaque adiiisse pericula. hanc enim speciem libertatis esse, si omnibus, quod quisque vellet, legibus experiri liceret.'

²² *Ad Att.* xiv. 9. 2 (17 April 44): 'o di boni! vivit tyrannis, tyrannus occidit! eius interfecti morte laetamur cuius facta defendimus...'

²³ *Phil.* 1. 1: 'in quo templo, quantum in me fuit, ieci fundamenta pacis, Atheniensiumque renovavi vetus exemplum; Graecum etiam verbum usurpavi quo tum in sedandis discordiis usa erat civitas illa, atque omnem memoriam discordiarum oblivione sempiterna delendam censui.'

But this amnesty, paradoxically in any case needed by the liberators for their own safety, was little more than symbolic. Hence the grim pointing in the way that Nepos reports Thrasybulus' amnesty:

It is also to the credit of Thrasybulus that, after peace was established, and when he was all-powerful in the state, he passed a law that no one should be charged or punished for past deeds, which they called a law of oblivion. But he not only had this law passed, he made it have effect.²⁴

Next to *libertas*, and indissolubly linked with it, there is the theme of obedience, *parere, dicto audiens esse*, submission to the law and to properly constituted authority. So Timoleon, when his brother mounted a military coup and he could have shared in monarchical power, 'so far from collaborating in the crime, preferred the *libertas* of his fellow-citizens to his brother's safety, and thought it better to obey the laws than to hold sway over his country ("parere legibus quam imperare patriae").²⁵ Accordingly he had his brother murdered. Not everyone approved: 'This most glorious deed of his was not universally admired. For there were those who thought that he had violated *pietas*, and who cast aspersions on his achievement'.²⁶ But clearly Nepos does approve: obedience to the law is a higher form of *pietas*.

Similarly in the case of Timotheus. Nepos ends this life with an anecdote supposed to illustrate Timotheus' 'moderata sapiensque vita' and the devotion he inspired among his friends, 'quam carus suis fuerit'. In fact the story leaves the good character to be deduced from the devotion: the Thessalian tyrant Jason of Pherae valued his ties of hospitality with Timotheus so highly that he risked his life to go and support Timotheus at his trial in Athens. But Nepos adds a sequel: 'Later, however, Timotheus waged war on this very Jason, 'populi iussu'; he regarded the claims of his country as more holy than those of hospitality'.²⁷ No one else records a campaign of Timotheus against Jason, and historians doubt it happened. Moreover, the addition is scarcely coherent with the theme 'quam carus suis fuerit'. The original anecdote had highlighted private morality; the rider displaces this in favour of patriotism, identified with obedience to the people's will, at whatever moral cost to the individual.

So too the *pietas* of Agesilaus, which Nepos wished Roman commanders had emulated, consisted in his choosing to obey the ephors rather than conquer Asia. And this antithesis is more than a banal, patriotic maxim. In the *pro Sestio* Cicero had stirringly declared Rome to be such a city, that it was more glorious to die defending it than to attack it and rule the world. Arguably, dying in defence of one's country is easier and commoner than voluntarily giving up power in one's hands to obey its laws.

As obedience and respect for constitutional authority are a hallmark of Nepos' heroes, so its opposites, free-booting off one's own bat or resistance to the people's will, are a hallmark of his villains, like Pausanias, Lysander and Phocion.²⁸ Of course it applies to all ranks. So the censure of Alexander's army:

Antigonus distributed the troops into winter quarters, not as he wanted to, but as the soldiers' wishes forced him. For that famous phalanx of Alexander the Great, which had wandered all over Asia and defeated the Persians, long accustomed not only to glory but to having its own way, presumed not to obey its leaders, but to command over them ('non parere ducibus, sed imperare'), as our veterans do today. So there is a danger that they

²⁴ VIII *Thras.* 3. 2-3: 'praeclarum hoc quoque Thrasybuli, quod reconciliata pace, cum plurimum in civitate posset, legem tulit, ne quis ante actarum rerum accusaretur neve multaretur, eamque illi oblivionis appellarent. neque vero hanc tantum ferendam curavit, sed etiam ut valeret effectit.'

²⁵ XX *Timol.* 1. 3: 'tantum a fuit a societate sceleris, ut antetulerit civium suorum libertatem fratris salutem, et parere legibus quam imperare patriae satius duxerit.'

²⁶ *Ibid.* 1. 5: 'hoc praeclarissimum eius factum non pari modo probatum est ab omnibus. nonnulli enim laesam ab eo pietatem putabant et invidia laudem obtinebant.'

²⁷ XIII *Timoth.* 4. 3: 'Hunc adversus tamen Timotheus postea populi iussu bellum gessit; patriae sanctiora iura quam hospitii esse duxit.'

²⁸ See J. F. Bommelaer, *Lysandre de Sparte: histoire et traditions* (1981) and C. Bearzot, *Focione tra storia e trasfigurazione* (1985). Cf. also the careful distinguishing between public and private campaigning in the life of Chabrias. The consistency of Nepos' attitude makes it unlikely that he merely reproduced that of his sources, which were certainly multiple.

will do as Alexander's veterans did, and destroy everything by their greed and utter lack of discipline, ruining their own side as much as their opponents. And if you read about what Alexander's veterans did, you will see that it was just what our veterans are doing now, with nothing but dates distinguishing them.²⁹

In general, though, it is the self-discipline of commanders rather than of their troops that concerns Nepos. The point is often implicit, but no less significant for that. Consider the story of the Spartan capture of Thebes in 382 B.C.:

When the Spartan Phoebidas was leading an army to Olynthus and marching through Thebes, he occupied the citadel, known as the Cadmea. This was at the instance of some Theban oligarchs, who favoured Sparta the better to fight their political opponents, and Phoebidas acted on his own initiative, with no authority from home ('suo privato, non publico fecit consilio'). The Spartans dismissed Phoebidas from his command and fined him, but nonetheless retained control of the citadel: since hostilities had taken place, they considered it was better that Thebes should be occupied rather than freed. For ever since the Peloponnesian War and the defeat of Athens, they saw Thebes as the power they had to reckon with, the only one that might dare to oppose them.³⁰

Xenophon's account of this (*Hell.* v. 2. 25–35) makes no mention of Phoebidas' disgrace, and has the Spartans accept his action as beneficial to the state, albeit unauthorized. But Polybius (iv. 27. 4) cites the episode as a prime example of unprincipled behaviour by Sparta: punishing the evil-doer while hanging on to the profits is mere hypocrisy, and no way to act for an individual or a state. Plutarch (*Pelop.* 5–6) more mildly remarks that other Greeks found Sparta's behaviour in this case passing strange. And finally Diodorus' version (xv. 20) cuts the corner by saying that Phoebidas did have instructions—secret ones—to take the Cadmea, and was punished just as a sop to adverse public opinion.

Nepos' account is at first sight dead-pan, but in fact it is a thought-out justification of the Spartan position. For Nepos, and only for him, Phoebidas' sin was not breaking a treaty or taking the Cadmea, but acting 'suo privato, non publico consilio', on his own initiative as a general and without political authority; and he takes it as axiomatic that a *res publica* should punish such behaviour, as undermining of itself, irrespective of the result. But the state's own policy must pursue the national interest on a realistic appraisal of the actual situation: 'susceptis inimicitiis', and given the threat of Theban power, it would have been folly to give up the Cadmea. So Nepos reconstructs the Spartan thought-process. Nothing suggests that Nepos' sources for this life were pro-Spartan, nor is it, in fact, the kind of justification that Spartans might put forward. So it is likely that it is Nepos' own, and revealing of his attitudes.

The issue of private initiative against constitutional authority was of course a delicate one in the rise of Octavian. Cicero's *Philippics* engage in various acrobatics on the theme. Octavian's raising of an army 'privato consilio' (the same phrase is used repeatedly by Cicero³¹), against the consul Antony had saved the state, which should accordingly be grateful, not least by ratifying this regrettably quite illegal conduct. Nepos' *Lives*, the extant ones at any rate, offer no comforting precedents for such a

²⁹ xviii *Eum.* 8. 1–3: (Antigonus) 'hiematum copias divisit, non ut voluit, sed ut militum cogeat voluntas. namque illa phalanx Alexandri Magni, quae Asiam peragrata deviceratque Persas, inveterata cum gloria tum etiam licentia, non parere se ducibus, sed imperare postulabat, ut nunc veterani faciunt nostri. itaque periculum est ne faciant quod illi fecerunt, sua intemperantia nimiaque licentia ut omnia perdant neque minus eos, cum quibus steterint, quam adversus quos fecerint. quod si quis illorum veteranorum legat facta, paria horum cognoscat, neque rem ullam nisi tempus interesse iudicet. sed ad illos revertar.' Cf. e.g. Cic., *Phil.* 1. 6 (with Denniston's note), x. 15–16, 18–19. This, and other issues likewise reflected in Cicero's *Philippics* (see below), suggest a date in the late 40s.

³⁰ xvi *Pelop.* 1. 2–3: 'Phoebidas Lacedaemonius cum exercitum Olynthum duceret iterque per Thebas faceret, arcem oppidi, quae Cadmea nominatur, occupavit, impulsu paucorum Thebanorum, qui adversariae factioni quo facilius resisterent, Laconum rebus studebant, idque suo privato, non publico fecit consilio. quo facto eum Lacedaemonii ab exercitu removerunt pecuniaque multarunt, neque eo magis arcem Thebanis reddiderunt, quod susceptis inimicitiis satius ducebant eos obsideri quam liberari. nam post Peloponnesium bellum Athenasque devictas cum Thebanis sibi rem esse existimabant et eos esse solos, qui adversus resistere audent. hac mente...'

³¹ Both of Octavian and of D. Brutus: *Phil.* III. 3–5, 12, 14, v. 3, 28.

way of thinking. Even the famous case of Epaminondas' refusal to lay down his command is made to point a quite different moral. In the schools, this example was used to debate whether it could ever be right for an individual commander to break the law in order to benefit the state (cf. above n. 8). But Nepos puts the emphasis on the sequel: the fact that after the war Epaminondas returned home, took full responsibility for his action and accepted the right of the state to execute him, as the law required. In fact the anecdote is introduced as one of many testimonia of his 'patience and forbearance in suffering from his fellow-citizens, because he regarded it as *nefas* to be angry with his own country'.³² Thus a paradigm case of a general's disobedience to political authority is turned into an example of submission to it.

Obedience to the state includes respect for its customs and traditions. Pausanias, dismissed from his command, returns *sua sponte* to the army and adopts the life-style of a Persian autocrat, a clear symptom of his treasonable intentions.³³ Conon, on the other hand, whom Nepos presents as an unswerving patriot, even where the facts suggest a free-booting *condottiere*, gives a fine example of the way to behave. Having business to do with the king of Persia, the chamberlain warns him that, if he does it by an audience rather than by letter, he will have to kneel in homage like a Persian subject, 'quod προσκύνησιν illi vocant'. Conon replies: 'As far as I'm concerned, I would pay the king any homage you wish. But I represent a country that has held imperial sway, and I fear I would shame it if I behaved according to foreign rather than native custom'.³⁴ What is striking about this anecdote, known only from Nepos, is that it is not a case of the proverbially free Greek refusing to kow-tow in Oriental fashion. Conon refuses as a representative of his country, and explicitly not as an individual Greek.

This is also interesting in relation to the relativistic comparison of Greek and Roman customs that Nepos makes in his Preface, and introducing the life of Epaminondas—passages nowadays more quoted than any other part of the *de ducibus*. What the Conon anecdote makes clear is that understanding, and even adopting, foreign customs as a private individual is one thing; to do so while holding public office, quite another.

In fact, any kind of individualism in public life is seen as a bad thing. Of course, Nepos probably found this attitude in many of his Greek sources. Is he just mechanically reproducing it, unconscious or unconcerned about its meaning in the age of Caesar and the Second Triumvirate? The explicitly topical reflections we have seen show that any such assumption is unwarranted, whatever may have been his sources. And in fact Nepos is well aware that the bias as well as the facts in his sources need critical appraisal. At the end of the *Life of Alcibiades* he says: 'While most people have decried him, three serious historians have given him high praise: Thucydides, who was a contemporary, Theopompus, somewhat later, and Timaeus. These latter two hardly ever have a good word for anyone, yet in this one case they miraculously concur in praise'.³⁵ In the body of the *Life* Nepos achieves an interesting compromise between the blatant individualism of his subject, the approval of the sources he judges most trustworthy, and his own attitudes: Alcibiades' individualism remains apparent, but it is tempered by suggestions that he respected the constitution (4. 1, 4. 3, 7. 1), and repeated assertions of his underlying patriotism (4. 6, 5. 1, 6. 3, 8. 1–6, 9. 4).

The life of Pausanias is also revealing in this respect. Most of it is directly based on Thucydides, so we can watch Nepos at work. In the first paragraph Pausanias is introduced as a mixture of virtue and vice. The first example of his virtue is his victory at Plataea; of his vice (IV *Paus.* 1. 3–4):

³² xv *Epam.* 7. 1: 'Fuisse patientem suorumque iniurias ferentem civium, quod se patriae irasci nefas esse duceret, haec sunt testimonia...'

³³ iv *Paus.* 3. 1: 'at ille post non multo sua sponte ad exercitum rediit et ibi non callida, sed dementi ratione cogitata patefecit: non enim mores patrios solum, sed etiam cultum vestitumque mutavit. apparatu regio utebatur, veste Medica...'; for similar uses of *sua sponte* = *privato consilio* cf. Cic., *Phil.* III. 7, v. 23, VIII. 5.

³⁴ ix *Con.* 3. 4: 'tum Conon "mihi vero" inquit "non

est grave quemvis honorem habere regi, sed vereor ne civitati meae sit opprobrio si, cum ex ea sim profectus, quae ceteris gentibus imperare consuerit, potius barbarorum quam illius more fungar.'"

³⁵ VII *Alcib.* 11. 1: 'hunc infamatum a plerisque tres gravissimi historici summis laudibus extulerunt: Thucydides, qui eiusdem aetatis fuit, Theopompus, post aliquanto natus, et Timaeus; qui quidem duo maledicentissimi nescio quo modo in illo uno laudando consenserunt.'

quod ex praeda tripodem aureum Delphis posuisset epigrammate inscripto, in quo haec erat sententia: suo ductu barbaros apud Plataeas esse deletos eiusque victoriae ergo Apollini donum dedisse. hos versus Lacedaemonii exsculperunt neque aliud scripserunt quam nomina earum civitatum, quarum auxilio Persae erant victi.

This is so close to Thucydides (I. 132) that the verb 'exsculperunt', nowhere else attested in the sense 'sculpt out, erase', is probably a calque on Thucydides' ἐξεκόλασαν. But in Thucydides the tripod episode is related as a flash-back much later in the story. Perhaps Nepos brought it forward to give it its appropriate chronological place—not that he is in general very fussy about chronology. But certainly by giving it this place, he also invests it with much more symbolic importance: Pausanias' vice is first and foremost exemplified not by Pausanias the dissolute, nor by Pausanias the traitor, but by Pausanias the individualist. Moreover, though Nepos says that the inscription was in verse (as it is quoted in Thucydides), he translates it as prose. But it is not just any prose: the phrase 'suo ductu', the archaic 'eius victoriae ergo', the alliterative 'donum dedisse' (*donum* anyway archaic and formal of an offering to a god)—I think that for a Roman these features would combine to make the phrase strongly reminiscent of inscriptions recording the achievements of Roman generals, like those of Lucius Mummius, whose dedications were still famous in Strabo's day: 'ductu auspicio imperioque eius Achaia capta Corinto deleto Romam redieit triumphans...hanc aedem et signu(m) Herculis Victoris imperator dedicat'.³⁶

Mummius' capture of Corinth was of course a popular date for the beginning of Rome's moral decline, because of the fabulous wealth it imported. But Nepos is not hinting at wealth, but at the individualism of the Roman general. If Pliny's account of Pompey's triumphs (*N.H.* VII. 26) is anything to go by, Nepos' readers might recall plenty of more recent examples; and I think he meant them to.

Closely related to a general's individualism is the more concrete question of what he does with the spoils of war. Of Agesilaus Nepos remarks:

Among the most admirable things about him was the fact that though the most lavish gifts were presented to him by kings, dynasts and cities, he never took anything back to his own home.³⁷

The point is made even more sharply about Timotheus. He conquered Samos for the Athenians 'sine ulla publica impensa', gave them 1,200 talents from his campaign against Cotys and, whereas Agesilaus had accepted cash from Ariobarzanes

Timotheus preferred that his fellow-citizens' territory and cities should be increased, rather than take something of a kind that he might partly divert to his own home. So he accepted Crithotes and Sestos.³⁸

Historically much of this account is confused, but the message could not be clearer. The same principle is propounded by Cicero: in the utopian language and world of the *de legibus* the consuls

duella iusta iuste gerunto, sociis parcunto, se et suos continente, populi sui gloriam augento, domum cum laude redeunto

and the last phrase is glossed: '“They shall return home with honour”: for the only booty that good, upright commanders should bring home, whether from enemies or allies, is honour'.³⁹ The extent to which any real laws defined what a Roman general

³⁶ *CIL* I². 626.

³⁷ *XVII Ages.* 7. 3: 'atque in hoc illud in primis fuit admirabile, cum maxima munera ei ab regibus ac dynastis civitatibusque conferrentur, quod nihil unquam domum suam contulit.' Cf. also *V Cim.* 2. 5, *IX Con.* 4. 5.

³⁸ *XIII Timoth.* 1. 2-3: 'ille civis suos agro atque

urbibus augeri maluit quam id sumere, cuius partem domum suam ferre posset. itaque accepit Crithoten et Sestum.'

³⁹ *De leg.* III. 9 and 18: 'nihil enim praeter laudem bonis atque innocentibus neque ex hostibus neque a sociis reportandum.' Cf. also *de rep.* II. 15.

could do with booty is disputed; what most of them actually did in the age of Cicero and Nepos is scarcely in doubt.

* * *

I have tried to suggest that Nepos is no general moralizer, that the issues which he puts in the foreground—*libertas*, not tyranny, obedience in public office, not private initiative, the *civitas*, not the individual, are quite specific, more political than moral, and coloured in their choice and presentation by the events of his own day. Is it perhaps inevitable, and not a choice on the part of Nepos, that lives of major ancient political figures should centre on such issues? No, for comparison with Plutarch shows that this focus was far from inevitable. Plutarch's life of Timoleon, for instance—probably, like Nepos', based on Timaeus—has none of Nepos' concentration on the theme of freedom.

This may seem to contrast sharply with the conclusions that might be drawn from the *Life of Atticus*, which for obvious reasons has always attracted more interest than the other *Lives*.⁴⁰ There Atticus is presented as a model of quietism and neutrality, unswervingly observant of his private *officia* and refusing any public or political alignment. But before deciding that this was Nepos' ideal, we should reflect that the biography of a respected friend, largely written in his lifetime to boot, is likely to be less revealing of Nepos' own views than biographies of remote historical subjects. A favourable account of Atticus' life, short of pretending that political issues did not exist, and given that those issues were not yet resolved, was bound to make a virtue of his neutrality. The way that Nepos does this is perhaps more significant: not by praising it as a matter of philosophic or political principle, but by emphasizing its difficulty, the selfless courage and strict morality that underpinned it, and how it benefited not just Atticus but all his friends and dependents.

As for the decision not to participate in the civil war in the first place, Nepos simply reports how Atticus himself justified it (6. 1–2). Likewise in the case of Epaminondas, when Pelopidas led the exiles to liberate Thebes:

As long as there was slaughter of his fellow-citizens Epaminondas stayed at home, because he neither wished to defend bad citizens, nor fight them and stain his hands with their blood; for he regarded any victory in a civil war as calamitous.⁴¹

Only Nepos records such an abstention by Epaminondas. Recording, of course, is not the same as espousing, as is shown by the cross-reference in the following *Life* (xvi *Pelop.* 4. 1), where the liberation of Thebes is described as 'propria laus Pelopidae'. But the question was one facing every thinking person. It was not for Nepos, much less for us, to pass glib judgement. In 44 Cicero eventually persuaded himself that war against Antony was the first Roman civil war that could be justified. Even in civil wars centred on much clearer issues, it has never been a question admitting of a single answer. Lambinus' long discussion on the case of Epaminondas was present to Montaigne (*Essais* III. 1), as he weighed the claims of patriotism and political principle against those of private *officia* and common humanity.

Scattered passages can indicate the style, diffusion and consistency of political comment in Nepos' writing, but it may be helpful briefly to consider at least one *Life* as a whole. That of Miltiades may serve, the first in the book, so perhaps to a degree paradigmatic. The life is peppered with historical errors. In the very first sentence, Nepos seems to confuse Miltiades the son of Cimon, hero of Marathon, with Miltiades the son of Cypselus, colonist of the Chersonese.⁴² This has put critics into

⁴⁰ Most recently and interestingly Fergus Millar, 'Cornelius Nepos, "Atticus" and the Roman Revolution', *G&R* 35 (1988), 40–55.

⁴¹ xv *Epam.* 10. 3: 'Epaminondas, quamdiu facta est caedes civium, domo se tenuit, quod neque defendere malos volebat, neque impugnare, ne manus suorum sanguine cruentaret: namque omnem civilem victoriam funestam putabat.'

⁴² 'Miltiades, Cimonis filius, Atheniensis, cum et antiquitate generis et gloria maiorum et sua modestia unus omnium maxime floreret, eaque esset aetate, ut non iam solum de eo bene sperare, sed etiam confidere cives possent sui, talem eum futurum, qualem cognitum iudicarunt, accidit ut Athenienses Chersonesum colonos mittere vellent.' For the confusion cf. Thomas (above, n. 9).

such a state of shock that they have not thought it worth asking what kind of Miltiades Nepos in fact presents. We are introduced to him as someone pre-eminent for his noble and famous family, and his own *modestia*. No writer we know of ever ascribed anything like *modestia* to either Miltiades. What does Nepos mean by it? He uses the word again, just once, to describe how Agesilaus submitted to the orders of the ephors: it means 'properly unassuming conduct', giving respect where it is due no matter how powerful one's position. In fact this Miltiades is no independent aristocrat in the world of Peisistratus (or his sons), acquiring (or succeeding to) a personal fief in the Chersonese, in alliance with some Thracians, who had asked Delphi whom they should invite to help them against some other Thracians (or himself consulting Delphi about whether to accept the Chersonese), and there ruling over a mixture of Thracians and Athenian followers, as we find in Herodotus and elsewhere.

Nepos' account of Miltiades in his first chapter is different not because it has different events, nor because it confuses events, but because it has pummelled the same events into a quite different political structure: Miltiades is a citizen in a democratic Athens, esteemed by 'cives sui'; so it is Athens which decides to colonize the Chersonese, dislodging the Thracians, as a public venture; and Miltiades is appointed to lead it after official consultation of the Delphic oracle.

Accordingly, in chapter 2, Miltiades emerges as a special sort of provincial governor. Having scotched the Thracians and settled his colonists 'summa aequitate',

he decided to remain there. For he enjoyed a royal status among the colonists, though without the title, and having achieved it as much by his justice as by his command; and in spite of this position he continued to carry out *officia* for the Athenians from whom he had set out. Hence he held power permanently with the consent not just of the colonists, but also of those who had sent him.⁴³

This provincial governor does not fit too well with the story which occupies the whole of the next chapter, the episode of Darius' bridge. Nepos explains that Darius had left as guards for the bridge the puppet dynasts whose safety from their fellow-citizens depended on his own; and baldly adds that Miltiades was of their number. Evidently the inconsistency was less important to him than the moral of the story (3. 6): although Miltiades' plan did not succeed, yet it is worthy of every praise, 'cum amior omnium libertati quam suae fuerit dominationi'. The freedom implied by Miltiades' plan was primarily freedom of the Greeks from the Persian yoke. But 'omnium libertati' juxtaposed with 'suae dominationi' underlines the political rather than the nationalist aspect: Miltiades becomes as much a democrat as a patriot.

The next two chapters narrate the Marathon campaign, with emphasis on Miltiades' psychological insight and able strategy, ensuring a victory against the heaviest numerical odds ever known. Nepos then continues:

It seems not irrelevant to describe what kind of reward was given to Miltiades for this victory, which will make it easier to realize that all states are of the same nature. For just as the honours conferred by the Roman people were once rare and modest, and for that very reason glorious, but now extravagant and two-a-penny, so we find it once was with the Athenians. In fact the honour that was paid to this Miltiades, who had freed Athens and the whole of Greece, was as follows...

The story of the picture in the Stoa Poikile is then capped with: 'That same people, after it had gained greater power and had been corrupted by the *largitio* of magistrates, voted three hundred statues for Demetrius of Phalerum'.⁴⁴ The theme

⁴³ 'ipse ibidem manere decrevit. erat enim inter eos dignitate regia, quamvis carebat nomine, neque id magis imperio quam iustitia consecutus. neque eo setius Atheniensibus, a quibus erat profectus, officia praestabat. quibus rebus fiebat ut non minus eorum voluntate perpetuo imperium obtineret, qui miserant, quam illorum, cum quibus erat profectus.'

⁴⁴ (6. 1): 'cuius victoriae non alienum videtur quale praemium Miltiadi sit tributum docere, quo facilius

intellegi possit eandem omnium civitatum esse naturam. ut enim populi Romani honores quondam fuerunt rari et tenues ob eamque causam gloriosi, nunc autem effusi atque obsoleti, sic olim apud Athenienses fuisse reperimus. namque huic Miltiadi, qui Athenas totamque Graeciam liberarat, talis honos tributus est...idem ille populus, posteaquam maius imperium est nactus et largitione magistratum corruptus est, trecentas statuas Demetrio Phalereo decrevit.'

was a trite one, and Nepos may well have found the contrast between Miltiades and Demetrius in his Greek source.⁴⁵ But he is not content with a contrast between once proudly democratic and now slavishly subservient Greece: he uses it to turn the reader's mind to Rome.

Chapter 7 tells of Miltiades' failed expedition to Paros (but with no suggestion of private motives), his trial, sentence to a fine and death in prison.

But the *Life* does not end here. The fate of Miltiades, along with the ostracisms of Themistocles and Aristides, were paradigm cases of the ingratitude of peoples towards great men who have saved them. Cicero, understandably after his exile, finds this approach specially congenial. So in the *de republica*, against those who argue against participation in public life:

And they never wax so eloquent as in roll-calls of the calamities and injustices that great men have suffered at the hands of their ungrateful fellow-citizens. Hence those examples famous even among the Greeks: Miltiades, triumphant conqueror of the Persians, the breast-wounds of his glorious victory not yet healed, surviving the enemy's weapons only to die in his fellow-citizens' chains; Themistocles, expelled with threats from the country he had liberated, finding refuge not in the Greek havens he had saved but in those of the foreigner he had trounced; and indeed examples of the fickle cruelty of Athenians against their great men are plentiful, and from there, they say, have spread even into our responsible society.⁴⁶

And the *pro Sestio* passage I quoted earlier continues:

Those Greeks whom I mentioned were unjustly condemned and expelled by their fellow-citizens, yet, because they deserved well of their states, they are now regarded as glorious heroes not only among the Greeks but even here in Rome and in other lands; so much so that no one knows the names of those who did them down, and everyone rates their downfall as more admirable than their opponents' *dominatio*.⁴⁷

Dominatio: the Athenians as a people are seen as wielding autocratic and scarcely constitutional power.

A golden opportunity, you might think, for Nepos to come out with some trite moralizing on the same lines. But does he? He begins by stating that though the charge against Miltiades related to the Parian expedition, the reason why he was condemned was something else, namely Athenian fear of tyranny.

It did not seem possible that Miltiades, with his long experience of high command, could be just a citizen [*privatus*, again like Agesilaus before the ephors], especially since he seemed to be drawn to a lust for power by his past life: all the years that he was in the Chersonese he had held continuous personal power and had been called a *tyrannus*, albeit a just one; for he had not obtained this position by force, but with the consent of his compatriots, and retained his power by goodness. But everyone is called and reckoned a *tyrannus* who holds continuous power in a state that has had liberty. Miltiades had great humanity and extraordinary *communitas* [the common touch, a virtue in kings, of course], so that there was no one so humble that he could not approach him; he had great standing with all states, a famous name, the highest military glory. Taking account of all these

⁴⁵ Cf. Duris of Samos on the Athenians hymning Demetrius Poliorcetes (*FGrH* 76 F13):...ταῦτα ἦδον οἱ Μαρθωνομάχαι...

⁴⁶ *De rep.* 1. 3. 4–6: 'illo vero se loco copiosos et disertos putant, cum calamitates clarissimorum viro- rum iniuriasque iis ab ingratis impositas civibus colligunt. hinc enim illa et apud Graecos exempla, Miltiadem victorem domitoremque Persarum, nondum sanatis vulneribus iis quae corpore adverso in clarissima victoria accepisset, vitam ex hostium telis servatam in civium vinclis profudisse, et Themistoclem, patria quam liberavisset pulsum atque proteritum, non in

Graeciae portus per se servatos sed in barbariae sinus confugisse quam adflixerat; nec vero levitatis Atheniensium crudelitatisque in amplissimos civis exempla deficiunt. quae nata et frequentata apud illos etiam in gravissimam civitatem nostram dicunt redundasse.'

⁴⁷ *pro Sestio* 142 (cf. above, n. 12): 'homines Graeci, quos antea nominavi, inique a suis civibus damnati atque expulsi, tamen, quia bene sunt de suis civitatibus meriti, tanta hodie gloria sunt non in Graecia solum, sed etiam apud nos atque in ceteris terris, ut eos a quibus illi oppressi sint nemo nominet, horum calamitatem dominationi illorum omnes anteponant.'

things, the people preferred that he should be punished, even though innocent, rather than itself continue to live in fear.⁴⁸

And that is the end of the *Life*. On the face of it, it seems a finely balanced appraisal of both sides of the case. But set against the current cliché of ungrateful citizens, it is rather a justification of the people's action. Certainly, the reader is left to decide for himself whether a people has the right to ensure its own safety at the cost of an innocent individual's suffering. But the issue is treated as a serious political problem, not as a hallowed example of the ungrateful *levitas* of the mob.

The issue of course recurs: the ostracisms of Themistocles, Aristides and Cimon, the condemnations of Alcibiades and Timotheus. The people's fear, *timor*, of tyranny, of *potentia*, of anyone threatening to be more than a *privatus*, is repeatedly adduced as a main reason.⁴⁹ The best heroes, Aristides and Cimon, accept their exile without resentment. Phocion's condemnation, for all his claim that he was suffering unjustly like all great Athenians, is in fact portrayed by Nepos as both legal, and due to justified anger and hatred on the part of the people.

More negatively, the people's feelings are also often described as *invidia*, the bent to do down anyone great. It was of course a commonplace. So Cicero:

An hoc non ita fit in omni populo? Nonne omnem exsuperationem virtutis oderunt? Quid? Aristides—malo enim Graecorum quam nostra proferre—nonne ob eam causam expulsus est patria, quod praeter modum iustus haberetur?⁵⁰

So also Lucretius graphically invoked *invidia* as a justification for staying out of public life (v. 1120–30):

at claros homines voluerunt se atque potentes...
certantes iter infestum fecere viai,
et tamen e summo, quasi fulmen, deicit ictos
invidia interdum contemptim in Tartara taetra;
invidia quoniam, ceu fulmine, summa vaporant
plerumque et quae sunt aliis magis edita cumque;
ut satius multo iam sit parere quietum
quam regere imperio res velle et regna tenere.

But when Nepos reflects on this in the *Life of Chabrias* he adds an interesting limitation: 'It is a common vice in states both great and free, that *invidia* accompanies glory, and men are prone to detract from anyone who seems too eminent'.⁵¹ *Invidia* is indeed a vice, but it is a vice 'magnis liberisque civitatibus': it can be suppressed, at the cost of suppressing such states. There was not much that *invidia* could do against the Second Triumvirate.

As I mentioned at the beginning, Joseph Geiger has recently argued that Nepos was the first founder of a new genre, which Geiger calls 'political biography'. The definition of this genre, like much of the argument, invites all manner of question. But I think it is more useful to consider just what category of people Nepos' book in fact describes. The transmitted titles of the book, and Nepos himself, refer to the subjects

⁴⁸ I *Milt.* 8: 'hic etsi crimine Pario est accusatus, tamen alia causa fuit damnationis. namque Athenienses propter Pisistrati tyrannidem, quae paucis annis ante fuerat, omnium civium suorum potentiam extimescebant. Miltiades, multum in imperiis magistratibusque versatus, non videbatur posse esse privatus, praesertim cum consuetudine ad imperii cupiditatem trahi videretur. nam Chersonesi omnes illos quos habitarat annos perpetuam obtinuerat dominationem tyrannusque fuerat appellatus, sed iustus: non erat enim vi consecutus, sed suorum voluntate, eamque potestatem bonitate retinebat; omnes autem et dicuntur et habentur tyranni, qui potestate sunt perpetua in ea civitate, quae libertate usa est. sed in Miltiade erat cum summa humanitas tum mira communitas, ut nemo tam humilis

esset, cui non ad eum aditus pateret; magna auctoritas apud omnes civitates, nobile nomen, laus rei militaris maxima. haec populus respiciens maluit illum innoxium plecti quam se diutius esse in timore.'

⁴⁹ Cf. II *Them.* 8. 1, VII *Alcib.* 3. 3, 7. 2, XIII *Timoth.* 3. 5; note also that Nepos refrains from any comment in his account of Themistocles' exile, cited as classic material for emotional history-writing by Cicero, *ad fam.* v. 12. 5.

⁵⁰ *Tusc.* v. 105; contrast Nepos III *Arist.* 1.

⁵¹ XII *Chabr.* 3. 3: 'est enim hoc commune vitium magnis liberisque civitatibus, ut invidia gloriae comes sit, et libenter de iis detrahant, quos eminere videant altius.'

of the *Lives* as *excellentes duces* or *imperatores*, 'commanders' or 'generals'. In fact virtually all the figures have as much a political as a military career, and their peacetime achievements are often specifically recorded.⁵² But military success remains a crucial ingredient: statesmen no longer famous for it, like Pericles, are excluded. So also are kings, who are briefly dismissed in a post-script to the life of Timoleon, on the grounds that their deeds have been individually related elsewhere. Geiger may well be right that this is not a cross-reference to a special book about kings within Nepos' *de viris illustribus*, but to large-scale treatments by others.⁵³ If so, however, the excuse is a lame one. Few monographs about a king were more famous than Xenophon's *Agésilas*, yet that did not prevent Nepos from including him, and indeed referring to Xenophon's work in his first sentence. In fact in the postscript he points out that he has included Agésilas because, like all Spartan kings, he was king in name, not in power, 'nomine, non potestate fuit rex'. And I think that this is both the real reason why he excluded other kings, and a major factor in the definition of the book and why he wrote it.

For if a monarch is militarily successful, this is really neither here nor there: it poses no constitutional problem. The issue that Nepos' *imperatores* raise, again and again, is the relationship between military success and political control. The careers of Datames and Eumenes illustrate the precarious existence and ultimate impotence of generals subject to a monarch. But how can a state that is not a monarchy cope with the power that inevitably accrues to a successful military leader? Nepos was surely right to see this as a central problem when he wrote. His exploration of Greek history in this light might not offer any practical solutions, history rarely does; explaining ostracism to the Romans was not to suggest that they either could or should institute it. But I think Nepos' effort to understand the problem is both interesting and worthy of respect. Of course the younger generation, Virgil now writing his *Eclogues*, Horace his *Epodes* and *Satires*, saw the problems differently. Nepos could not, like Tityrus, imagine that *libertas* was something bestowed by a divine young man in Rome.

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⁵² Cf. I *Milt.* 2. 1-2, II *Them.* 6. 1, V *Cim.* 4. 1, XIII *Timoth.* 1. 1, the limitation in Iphicrates (XI *Iphicr.* 1. 1) and the apology for Aristides (III *Arist.* 2. 1-2).

⁵³ Geiger (above n. 7), 89-90; though the only strong

argument seems to me that Nepos is unlikely to have written this curious summary chapter if a cross-reference would have done.