



Manuel Tröster. *Themes, Character, and Politics in Plutarch's : The Construction of a Roman Aristocrat.* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2008. 206 S. \$104.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-515-09124-4.



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M. Tröster: Plutarch's Life of Lucullus

Lucullus, consul in 74 B.C., has received much less scholarly attention than more famous figures of the late Roman Republic such as Sulla, Pompey and Caesar. With this book, based on his doctoral thesis, Manuel Tröster aims to give Lucullus the place he deserves amongst the elite of his times. His careful study of the available sources shows a picture of Lucullus as an ambitious politician and general who pursued his personal objectives of power and prestige by adopting a variety of techniques, including both coalition-building with fellow aristocrats and regular appeals to the multitude (p. 155). As such, this interpretation offers a welcome complement to the traditional image of Lucullus as a conservative member of the *optimates* whose eventual failure is to be ascribed to his love of luxury and his inability to woo the bulk of his soldiers as well as the multitude of citizens in Rome. According to Tröster, this interpretation, adopted by most modern scholars, presents an image of Lucullus that has been distorted quite significantly by the propaganda of his political adversaries, to a certain degree by his own self-fashioning, and finally by Plutarch's adaptation of the material to his biographical purpose (p. 158); he himself, on the other hand, sets

out to give a historically accurate account of his subject. Some readers will no doubt object to Tröster's return to (a form of) *Quellenforschung* as well as to his search for (a particular form of) 'the truth'. Yet all will agree that Tröster's approach is thorough and precise, and significantly advances our understanding of the historical figure of Lucullus in his political and historical context.

The book consists in an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. In his introduction, Tröster presents a brief but critical survey of modern scholarship on Lucullus and of the relevant ancient sources. Special attention is given to Plutarch's *Life of Lucullus*: Tröster not only introduces the reader to the aims and nature of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, he also offers acute observations on relative chronology, especially opposing the *Life of Lucullus* to the later *Life of Pompey*.

The main part of the book discusses Lucullus's life (and *Life*) thematically. Chapter two deals with Lucullus's Hellenism. In Tröster's view, this does not originate in genuine philhellenism on Lucullus's part, nor in fabrication on Plutarch's; rather, should it be understood as a propaganda tool in Lucullus's military actions in the

East and political agenda in Rome. If philhellenism was thus used as an argument to promote Lucullus, his adversaries would associate him primarily with luxury. In the third chapter, Tr ster demonstrates how Lucullus's lavish lifestyle found its place in the *exempla* tradition which then influenced the opinion of later writers, both ancient and modern. The next three chapters focus on Lucullus's activities in different spheres. Chapter four looks at Lucullus as a Roman politician. Taking into account recent publications on the political scene in the late Republic, Tr ster argues against the view of Lucullus as a conservative nobleman whose power base lay exclusively with the senate. Instead, he shows how Lucullus sometimes capitalized on the multitude in order to oppose his aristocratic peers. Furthermore, this chapter also discusses Lucullus's relationship with Pompey, and contains some interesting confrontations between Plutarch's presentation of affairs in the *Life of Lucullus* and in that of Pompey. The next chapter examines Lucullus as a military leader. According to Tr ster, the defects in his leadership on the one hand and the legionaries's intractability on the other are considerably overdrawn in the sources (p. 105). The sixth chapter, finally, studies Lucullus's activities in matters of foreign affairs. It shows how Lucullus built out a wide network of personal connections in the East, which also boosted his political power at home. The chapter contains some of the most interesting sections of the book, including the ones where Tr ster uses epigraphic material and the one on Pompey's subsequent efforts to favour different Eastern friends than those favoured by Lucullus; the section on aristocrats and intellectuals, however, although potentially one of the most fascinating topics to be discussed, is not only brief, but also leaves one wondering what its point is.

The conclusion sums up the results of Tr ster's examination once more, and as such lays bare both its merits and its limits. It starts off with a discussion of Plutarch's *Life of Lucullus*. Tr ster states that it would be misleading to suppose that he (sc. Plutarch) encountered accurate and complete information in his sources before going on to remodel and rearrange this material to

suit his own agenda (S. 151-152). First of all, this claim suggests that the sources available to Plutarch were often biased either against or in favour of Lucullus. Throughout his book, Tr ster argues this point very convincingly, and it is, I think, one of the book's most important and innovative aspects. At the same time, however, Tr ster's claim also illustrates how he searches to construct what he calls an accurate historical account, that is, one in which any trace of propaganda has been wiped out. For one thing, this betrays a conception of historical truth which, as I said before, many twentieth and twenty-first century readers will object to. The assumption is all the more striking, however, given that Tr ster's interpretation, more than any previous one, brings to the fore how Lucullus was a different person to himself, to his supporters, and to his opponents: Lucullus's life, as well as his *Life* (written by Plutarch or by others, including Lucullus himself), is inseparable from what Tr ster considers mere propaganda. More engagement with some of the excellent work on identity published in the last decade or so would therefore have been helpful in providing a better framework. What I also missed â given statements like the one just quoted and Plutarch's importance as a source for Lucullus â is a discussion of Plutarch's agenda, of his aims, strategies, and readership: although Tr ster repeatedly stresses the importance of taking into account Plutarch's agenda, he never really discusses its implications for his reading of the *Life of Lucullus*. Notwithstanding the order of title and subtitle, then, Tr ster's book is not so much about Plutarch's *Life of Lucullus* as about Lucullus himself. This does not mean, however, that it is of no interest to scholars studying Plutarch's *Lives*. On the contrary, Tr ster's book offers a very good starting point for studying Plutarch's *Life of Lucullus*, offering the necessary historical background that is all too often missing in Plutarch. But it is more than that, and therefore of interest to a much wider circle of classicists: it presents a new and more dynamic image of Lucullus in his historical context on the basis of detailed discussion and convincing arguments, and in constant dialogue with previous scholars. As such, it will become a point of reference for any scholar studying Lucullus.

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