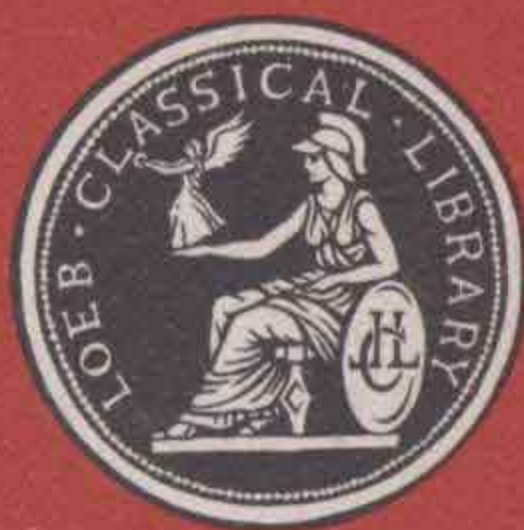


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CORNELIUS NEPOS



Translated by
J. C. ROLFE

CORNELIUS NEPOS

WITH AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY
JOHN C. ROLFE



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INTRODUCTION

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF CORNELIUS NEPOS

CORNELIUS NEPOS (his *praenomen* is unknown) was born in Cisalpine Gaul, the native land of Catullus, Vergil Livy and the Plinys. The elder Pliny speaks of him as *Padi accola*,¹ and since we know that he was a native of that part of Cisalpine Gaul which took its name from the Insubres,² it has been conjectured that his birthplace was Ticinum, the modern Pavia.

The dates of his birth and death are not known with certainty. He appears to have lived from about 99 to about 24 B.C.; for we know that he survived Atticus, who died in 32 B.C., and that he lived to an advanced age. The elder Pliny twice refers³ to "Cornelius Nepos, qui divi Augusti principatu obiit."

Nepos took up his residence in Rome early and spent the greater part of his life there. He seems to have had an independent fortune and to have devoted his entire attention to literary work. He apparently took no part in political life; at least, we know from one of Pliny's letters that he was not of senatorial rank.⁴ He exchanged letters with Cicero⁵ and he

¹ *N.H.* iii. 127.

² Pliny, *Epist.* iv. 28. 1; cf. Cicero, *ad Fam.* xv. 16. 1.

³ *N.H.* ix. 137; x. 60.

⁴ v. 3. 6.

⁵ Macrobian. *Sat.* ii. 1. 14; Suet. *Jul.* 55; etc.

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was intimate with Atticus after the latter's return from Athens in 65 B.C. Catullus dedicated a book of poems to him in complimentary lines.¹

A reference of Fronto² seems to indicate that Nepos, like his friend Atticus, was a publisher, as well as a writer, of books.

Nepos was a prolific author in several branches of literature. The greater part of his works has been lost and is known to us only through references of other writers. The list is as follows:

Love Poems, mentioned by the younger Pliny in the letter cited above.³

Chronica, referred to by Catullus in his dedication.

This work comprised in three books an outline of the history of the world from the earliest times to about 54 B.C. Like the *Liber Annalis*⁴ of Atticus, it was of a chronological character.

Exempla, a collection of anecdotes arranged under various captions, like the *Factorum et Dictorum Memorabilium libri IX* of Valerius Maximus, and intended for the use of rhetoricians. A fifth book is cited by Gellius.⁵ It must have been published after 43 B.C.⁶

A *Life of Cato*, mentioned by Nepos himself.⁷

A *Life of Cicero*,⁸ apparently composed after the death of the orator.

A treatise on Geography, known, though not by title, from references of the elder Pliny and Pomponius Mela. The former speaks of it as uncritical.⁹

¹ Catull. 1.

² Page 20, 6, Naber (i. p. 169, L.C.L.).

³ v. 3. 6.

⁴ Nepos, xxiii. 13. 1.

⁵ vi. 18. 11.

⁶ Suet. Aug. 77.

⁷ xxiv. 3. 5.

⁸ Gell. xv. 28. 2.

⁹ N.H. v. 4.

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De Viris Illustribus, in at least sixteen books.¹

Nepos arranged his biographies in groups of two books each. The first book of every group included the distinguished men of foreign nations, for the most part Greeks; the second, those of Rome. From references of Nepos himself and others² the categories of generals, historians, kings and poets have been determined. What the other four were is uncertain; philosophers, orators, statesmen and grammarians have been suggested. The reference of Gellius³ to Book xii with reference to a Roman historian is variously explained, some assuming an error in the text of Gellius; others, that an introductory book of a general character preceded and introduced the pairs of lives.

Of this work we have the entire book *De Excellentibus Ducibus Exterarum Gentium*, and two lives from the book *De Historicis Latinis*, besides a few fragments. The former was for a long time believed to be the work of Aemilius Probus, a grammarian of the time of Theodosius II (A.D. 408–450) on account of an epigram of his which appears in some of the manuscripts after the Life of Hannibal.

It reads as follows:

Vade, liber, nostri fato meliore memento;

Cum leget haec dominus, te sciat esse meum.

Nec metuas fulvo strictos diademate crines,

Ridentes blandum vel pietate oculos.

¹ Charisius, i. 141. 13 K., cites the sixteenth book.

² Nepos, x. 3. 2; xxi. 1. 1; xxiii. 13. 4; Suet. *vit. Ter.* iii. (ii. p. 457, L.C.L.).

³ xi. 8. 5.

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Communis cunctis hominem, sed regna tenere
Se meminit; vincit hinc magis ille homines.
Ornentur steriles fragili tectura libelli;
Theodosio et doctis carmina nuda placent.
Si rogat auctorem, paulatim detege nostrum
Tunc domino nomen; me sciat esse Probum.
Corpore in hoc manus est genitoris avique meaque;
Felices, dominum quae meruere, manus.¹

Go forth, my book, and under a better destiny be mindful of me. When my Lord shall read this, let him know that you are mine. Fear not the golden diadem that binds his locks, his eyes smiling with kindness and goodness. Gracious to all, he remembers that he is a mortal man, but a man who rules an empire; thus he binds men the closer. Let the frail covering of useless books be adorned, but to Theodosius and the cultured unadorned songs are pleasing. If he ask for the author, then gradually reveal my name to my Lord. Let him know that I am Probus.² In this work is the hand of my father, my grandfather and myself. Happy the hands that have found favour with my Lord.

As early as the sixteenth century it was shown that the author of the book on Great Generals must have belonged to the later days of the Republic and the beginning of the Empire.³ Furthermore, the resemblances in language and style to the lives of Cato

¹ Followed in codd. A and P by "Aemilii (Emilii, P) Probi de excellentibus ducibus exterarum gentium liber explicit."

² The Honest Man.

³ See, for example, xviii. 8. 2; xvii. 4. 2; viii. 2. 4; i. 6. 2.

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and Atticus, which have come down to us under the name of Cornelius Nepos, are so great as to leave no doubt that they are the work of the same writer. Aemilius Probus, following in the footsteps of his grandfather and his father, was apparently the editor of a collection of Selected Lives from the *De Viris Illustribus* of Nepos.

The entire work was published before the death of Atticus in 32 B.C., probably in 34 or 35. At some time before 27 B.C. a second edition was issued,¹ in which the brief extract *On Kings* and the lives of Datames, Hamilcar and Hannibal seem to have been added to the existing collection and additions made to the biography of Atticus. Thus the first edition contained only Greeks and Romans.

According to his own statement,² Nepos wrote biography and not history, and it is as the oldest existing biographical work that has come down to us under the name of its author that the surviving part of the *De Viris Illustribus* may claim a modest place in the history of literature. The lives were addressed to the general public³ rather than to scholars, and their purpose was to entertain and at the same time point a moral. They therefore should, and in the majority of instances do, belong to the Peripatetic type, represented by the *Parallel Lives* of Plutarch. Nepos falls far short of Plutarch as a biographer; he preceded him in comparing Romans with foreigners, although in this method of gratifying Roman national

¹ See xxv. 19. 1. Octavian is everywhere referred to as Caesar, never with the title Augustus, conferred on him in 27 B.C.

² xvi. 1. 1.

³ See Praef. 1-7; xv. 1. 1; etc.

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pride he had himself been anticipated by Varro ¹ and other writers of the period.²

Nepos was not skilled in the art of composition, and as a result his work presents a combination of nearly all possible types of biography.³ Besides the Peripatetic biographies we have brief summaries in the Alexandrine-philological manner (*Cimon*, *Conon*, *Iphicrates*, *Chabrias* and *Timotheus*), and eulogies (*encomia* or *laudationes*) either in an approximation ⁴ to the conventional form taught in the schools of rhetoric and based on the virtues of the hero (*Epa-minondas*), or with a superficial resemblance to the *Agesilaus* of Xenophon and based upon the hero's exploits (*Agesilaus*). The *Atticus*, which is also a eulogy, is unique in being originally written of a person who was still living; after his death, as has been said, it was somewhat changed. It is in the main of the type represented by Xenophon's *Agesilaus* and the brief laudation of Germanicus in Suetonius' *Caligula*.⁵

Nepos writes as a rule in the "plain" style.⁶ His vocabulary is limited, and he expresses himself ordinarily in short sentences. The results of rhetorical training are shown in his attempts to adorn his narrative, especially, although not consistently,⁴ in more elevated passages, when he depicts the virtues of his heroes ⁷ or puts speeches into their mouths. He occasionally attempts long periods, but

¹ In the *Imagines*.

² See, for example, Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* i. 1.

³ Leo, p. 210.

⁴ He is rarely, if ever, consistent in the use of any literary form or rhetorical device.

⁵ i-vii.

⁶ See Gellius, vi. 14.

⁷ *E.g.* xv. 3.

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is obviously not at home in them. His principal rhetorical devices are rhythmical *clausulae*, alliteration and antithesis. The last-named figure is used to such excess that his sentences are frequently overloaded at the beginning, and end weakly. Although he was a contemporary of Caesar and Cicero, his Latinity belongs with that of Varro and the writers of the supplements to Caesar's *Civil War*. He has some archaisms, numerous colloquial words and expressions, and some words that are common to him and writers of a later date. He has little variety in his diction; in particular he uses *nam* and *enim* to an extent which taxes the ingenuity of a translator. He is also fond of the pronoun *hic*, probably owing to the influence of the Alexandrine biographers.¹

Although Nepos makes direct mention of Thucydides, Xenophon's *Agesilaus*, Plato's *Symposium*, Theopompus, Dinon, Timaeus, Silenus, Sosylus, Polybius, Sulpicius Blitho, Atticus and the writings of Hannibal, it is obvious that he rarely, if ever, made first-hand use of those authorities. The material which he needed for his Greek subjects was available in the biographical literature of that country,² such as the works of Antigonus of Carystus, Hermippus and Satyrus. In the biographies of Romans, which are lost except for the *Cato* and the *Atticus*, he may have depended to a greater extent on historical sources, although he had predecessors in Varro and Santra.

THE MANUSCRIPTS

The best manuscripts of Nepos are no longer in existence. The *codex Parcensis* (*P*), so named from

¹ See Leo, p. 217.

² See xv. 4. 6.

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the Abbey of Parc, was discovered and collated by Roth. It belonged to the fifteenth century, but represented an older tradition than the earlier *Sangallensis* and *Guelferbytanus*. It found its way to the library of Louvain, where it disappeared during the late war. The collation of Roth is preserved in the public library of Basle. Of about the same age and value, so far as it goes, is a manuscript variously known as the *codex Danielinus* or *Gifanianus* (*Dan.* or *Gif.*), which was formerly at St. Benoît sur Loire, but has been lost sight of since the sixteenth century. Many of its readings have been more or less imperfectly preserved in the margin of the edition of Languetil (1543). In many cases they are so similar to those of the *codex Guelferbytanus Gudianus*, 166, (*A*) of the twelfth or thirteenth century, that Chate-lain¹ thought it possible that *codex A* was actually the famous *Danielinus*. Other manuscripts of value are the *Sangallensis* (*B*), of the fourteenth century, the *Monacensis*, 88, (*M*), written at Ulm in 1482, and a manuscript of the *Collegium Romanum* (*R*). The Utrecht edition of 1542 (*u*) represents a special tradition and was ranked among the manuscripts by Roth and Halm.

For other manuscripts added by Gemss, Winsted and Guillemin, which occasionally furnish good readings, see the list of sigla. All the existing codices have the same lacuna at vi.2.3 and a number of obvious errors in common, and hence are descended from the same archetype, assumed to be a minuscule manuscript not earlier than the eleventh century. They are classified as follows by Guillemin: (1) *Dan.*-*Gif.*, *P*, *A*, θ , π ; (2) *B*, μ ; (3) *u*; (4) *R*, *M*, *F*, λ

¹ *Paléographie de classiques latins*, ii. p. clxxxii.

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Owing to the lack of reliable manuscripts and the fact that Nepos has been so extensively used in the schools of ancient, as well as of modern, times, editors have been very free in making emendations and transpositions, and in assuming the existence of *lacunae*. The extremes of conservatism and the reverse are perhaps illustrated by the editions of Winsted and Guillemin. In this edition the manuscript reading has been kept wherever it seemed possible to do so; in the words of Winsted (Praef.): "Nepotis librum limatiorem quam ipse reliquit reddere veritus sum." Deviations from the codices, except in the case of obvious and generally accepted corrections, have been indicated in the critical notes.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The *editio princeps* of Nepos was published at Venice in 1471; it was followed by the *editio Juntina* of 1525 and the Utrecht edition of 1542. Of critical editions may be mentioned: Lambin, *Aemilii Probi et Cornelii Nepotis quae supersunt*, Paris, 1569; Roth, with prolegomena of Rinck, Basle, 1841; Nipperdey, Berlin, 1867; Halm, Leipzig, 1871; Fleckeisen, Leipzig, 1884; Winsted, Oxford, 1904; and Guillemin, with a translation into French, Paris, 1923. The best commentary is that of Nipperdey, Berlin, 1849 (ed. 2 by Lupus, Berlin, 1879). The school editions in various languages are very numerous, such as Nipperdey's abridgment for the use of schools, of which an eleventh edition by C. Witte appeared in 1913; that of Browning, Oxford, 1868 (ed. 3 by Inge, 1887); and that of O. Wagner, Leipzig, 1922. Nepos' style is treated

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by B. Lupus, *Der Sprachgebrauch des Cornelius Nepos*, Berlin, 1876, and in the preface to the Nipperdey-Witte edition; and his branch of literature by Fr. Leo, *Die Griechisch-römische Biographie*, Leipzig, 1901, and D. R. Stuart, *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography*, Berkeley, California, 1928.

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A. Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography*, Cambridge, Mass. 1971

SIGLA

- Dan.* } = Codex Danielinus or Gifanianus.
Gif. }
P = Codex Parcensis, fifteenth century.
A = Codex Guelferbytanus Gudianus 166, twelfth to
 thirteenth century.
B = Codex Sangallensis, fourteenth century.
M = Codex Monacensis, 1482.
R = Codex Collegii Romani, thirteenth century.
H = Codex Haenelianus, 1469.
Leid. = Codex Leidensis Boecleri.
Leid. II = Codex Leidensis.
Can. = Codex Bodleianus Canonici Lat. 159, fifteenth
 century.
V = Codex Vindobonensis, fifteenth century.
 Σ = Codex Strozianus (Florence).
F = Codex Claromontanus 259, fifteenth century.
 θ = Codex Parisinus 5826, fifteenth century.
 μ = Codex Parisinus 6143, fifteenth century.
 λ = Codex Parisinus 5837, fifteenth century.
 π = Codex Parisinus (Arsenal Library), fifteenth
 century.
u = Utrecht edition of 1542.
Nipp. = Nipperdey.
Fleck. = Fleckeisen.
Guill. = Guillemin.

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