

Zitierhinweis

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Peter Scholz: Lucullus

The need for a new full-scale account of Lucullus and his times has long been felt, even after the new edition of Keaveney's biography just over a decade ago. [1] Peter Scholz has now brilliantly filled the gap with a book whose ambition and significance considerably exceed the remit of a focused treatment of the trajectory of an individual, albeit noteworthy. This volume takes Lucullus as the vantage point for a wide-ranging discussion of key developments in the political and social history of the late Republic, and the strategies through which the period has been read in the ancient evidence and in modern historiography. [2]

Scholz is clear that there is very little that can plausibly be said about Lucullus' character (p. 289). It is possible, though, to provide a reasonably detailed account of his political career and military achievements, and identify what his stance might have been regarding the major political issues of his time. To do so - Scholz argues - it is necessary to go beyond the disingenuous account that casts Lucullus as a profligate aristocrat and a blueprint of senatorial corruption: he should rather be understood as a committed champion of Republican freedom, who took a firm and influential stance against autocracy and demagoguery, and embodied the values, interests, and consumption patterns of the Roman nobility. Far from being a paragon of moral and political decline, he upheld the qualities and aims of a highly accomplished and impressively professionalised political elite. At the heart of this assessment lies the welcome rejection of any teleological reading: the fall of the Republic and the emergence of a new regime were by no means an unavoidable outcome. Lucullus has long been pigeonholed into a crass caricature: a Sullan crony who fell short of achieving a major victory in the East, and went on to lead a life of political disengagement and profligate consumption after his return to Italy. Scholz views Sallust as the source of this deforming portrait, which reflects the *popularis* allegiance of the historian and his pervasive interest in *luxuria* (Scholz is rightly sceptical of the analytical value of the concept of *optimates*, but seems to place some confidence in its rival one); the moralising aims of much of early imperial historiography did little to reverse this balance. The echo of this theme may be felt well into the twentieth century: Bertolt Brecht's keen interest in Lucullus is part of this very story.

The close critical scrutiny of the literary evidence is one of the main rewards of Scholz's book, which ably takes stock of most of the key scholarship on the period. Another major strength is the ability to bring the focus well beyond the remit of a biographical treatment: precisely because Lucullus is so central to much of what goes on in the first four decades of the first century BCE, a full-scale overview of the period is called for. The brief of the first part is a thorough overview of the developments from the Gracchan crisis to the victory of Sulla, which serves both as a survey of what is known about Lucullus' youth and as a map of the tensions and conflicts that marked his formative years. As the political role of the main character becomes more prominent, and he is found playing a key part in a number of military engagements in the East, less room is made for the big-picture dimension. What one misses in this respect is amply made up by the ingenuity and keen attention to detail that marks the treatment of the operations in Egypt and in Asia Minor, or indeed the account of the villas that Lucullus owned on the Pincio and in Campania and the role that they had in establishing their owner's after his return to Italy. Much attention is given to the trial of L. Licinius Murena and Lucullus' involvement in that affair; the connection with Cato the Younger is singled out as a major aspect of Lucullus' political profile at the time, and is invoked as part of the explanation for his relative sidelining in the political discourse of the early Principate. S. makes good use of the argument from silence: there is no compelling

reason to rule out that Lucullus kept playing a significant political role even in 60 and 59 BCE, when the evidence is lacking, and the correspondence of Cicero becomes far less informative. [3]

Scholz rightly devotes much attention to the afterlife of Lucullus in antiquity: that is a necessary step in studying any major figure in late Republican history, but is especially fruitful in this case. One of the most successful sections of the book is the discussion of the statue of dying Hercules (*Hercules tunicatus* , i.e. wearing the Shirt of Nessus) that Lucullus brought to Rome upon his return from the East, and the meanings that the choice carried; and due weight is given to Lucullus' presence among the great men in the Forum of Augustus. The *elogium* from Arretium shows that a non-hostile characterisation of Lucullus was also possible in the early Principate, and how the paradigm that he embodied could be put to fruition even in an autocratic setup. But S.'s fundamental point holds true: Lucullus is best understood as the prime representative of the ethos of an oligarchic republic, and of a political elite that valued high culture, was engaged in a conspicuous consumption culture, and was thoroughly trained in the fulfilment of its military and administrative tasks. This book suggests that this technocracy of *bons vivants* had much more going for it than is often maintained. That is a genuinely thought-provoking contention, and will warrant further exploration in the light of the eventual failure of that group to preserve the regime in which it operated, and of the scale of the economic and social inequality that underpinned its longstanding hegemony.

Notes :

[1] A. Keaveney: *Lucullus. A Life* , Piscataway 2013², 1st ed. London / New York 1992.

[2] For a much shorter discussion in a similar vein cf. F. Santangelo: *Roma repubblicana. Una storia in quaranta vite* , Rome 2019, 211-219.

[3] In 59 BCE Cicero was not in exile yet, though: cf. page 255.