A parte ciò, il libro di O., grazie soprattutto alla pregevole introduzione e alla traduzione inglese che accompagna il testo georgiano dei Comm. – consentendone quindi la fruizione anche a quanti non conoscono la lingua del Paese tanto amato da Boris Pasternak («Ho trascorso molto tempo nei vostri musei e fra i vostri giovani artisti, che sono un museo vivo, un perpetuarsi del passato nel presente. Credo che mai più nella vita conoscerò qualcosa di così luminoso» scriveva Pasternak in una lettera del 17 marzo 1959, vd. B. Pasternak, Lettere agli amici georgiani, raccolte da G. Margvelašvili, trad. di C. Coïsson, Torino 1967, 140) –, rimane un contributo importante per la fortuna dello Pseudo-Nonno e un sicuro vademecum per valutare il diverso approccio metodologico (e ideologico) dei traduttori georgiani a questo curioso manuale di mitologia in usum Christianorum. 

Pisa

Domenico Accorinti


A. contends that 'Foreign Generals' (strictly, the second post-32 BC edition in which Datames, Hamilcar and Hannibal are additions) is a structured work, in which appreciation of individual parts presupposes understanding of the whole. The basic register is moralistic historiography (not provision of material for rhetorical exempla), the core principle that the lives are to be read in the light of contemporary circumstances, and an essential presupposition that history is repetitive. The heroes of the non-Roman world are not necessarily inferior to Romans: A. notes that Nepos' comments about differing Greek and Roman customs all concern private life, and public behaviour is evidently judged by Roman 'Wertbegriffen'. (Indeed making a fuss about the issue is perhaps meant to draw attention to a general prevalence of Roman values. There is incidentally some piquancy in comments about Greek values in Epaminondas, straight after the life of a Persian barbarian.) Nepos' subjects are 'big' figures (cf. not only Pel. 1.1 – quantus, not qualis, as A. notes – but e.g. Lys. 1.1, Iph. 1.1, Them. 1.1, 6.1, Paus. 1.1 Con. 1.1, Eum. 1.1, Timol. 1.1, Hann. 5.4) and are exemplary (even when they have negative characteristics, e.g. Lysander), and the project's purpose is to warn of Rome's fate if a New Order is not achieved. In short, it is all in the title: 'Foreign Generals' is a structured ('Struktur') glass through which ('Transparenz') one can see the real world – not a mirror (it seems), but a window.

I. Structure

A. claims that the 'Lives' (excluding the 'Preface') fall into decades, heptads and triads, thus: 10 (=7+3) + 3 + 10 (=7+3). Objective arguments are advanced. (a) There are editorial comments at the end of Alcibiades (the end of Heptad 1) and Timotheus (the end of the middle triad) and at the start of De Regibus (the start of Triad 3); (b) Miltiades, Chabrias and Hannibal – the first, middle and last lives – alone have both praescriptio and subscriptio; and (c) a parallel scheme ap-
pears in *De Regibus* where, after initial reference to Agesilas (already described separately earlier on), we have 15 kings grouped thus: \((3+2) \times 2 + (3+2)\). Moreover each major unit has a theme: Decad 1 the glory days of Athens (‘Glanzzeit Athens’), the Middle Triad the end of Athenian hegemony, and Decad 2 the Decline of the Foreign World.

Against this one might make various objections. (a) The pattern of editorial comments seems too random: why nothing at the end of Decad 1 (Dion) or Heptad 4 (Timoleon)? (b) On A.’s own analysis Pausanias also has a *praescriptio* and *scriptio*, even if the latter is modest and not literally at the end of the life. Nor is it clear why the last sentence of *Chabrias* is a *scriptio*, but that of Timotheus – i.e. the last before the link to Datames – is not. (c) To discount Agesilas from the *De Regibus* scheme, or assimilate him to the ‘Preface’ in relation to the work as a whole, but count Hamilcar and Hannibal in *De Reg.* 3, 4 looks arbitrary. (d) Dion is not plainly part of the ‘Glanzzeit Athens’, however much he was influenced by an Athenian philosopher. (e) There is decline in Decad 2 – Thebes’ glory died with Epaminondas (Epan. 10.24), Sparta never recovered after Leuctra (Ages. 7.1) – and Eumenes ends an era (everyone became Kings after he was dead: Eum. 13.2), but what about Datames and Timoleon? A. claims (168) that Datames is associated with the end of a dynasty – which is untrue both in reality and in Nepos’ ‘Life’ – and on Timoleon is forced to change tack and say (119) that he represents a connection (wholly implicit) with the Sicily-related world of Roman-Carthaginian conflict and hence with a future, Roman era. There is an inescapable whiff of special pleading.

In truth no simple structural analysis will work. The oddest feature is the chronologically irrational placing of Dion, but any attempt to account for it by e.g. saying that there are two sets of ten lives, each ending with a Sicilian liberator (Dion, Timoleon) plus a three-item appendix is spoiled by the randomness of that appendix and the sense of *Iphicrates, Chabrias and Timotheus* as a group created by *Timoth.* 4.4: *haec extrema fuit aetas imperatorum Atheniensium, Iphicratii, Chabriae, Timothaei, neque post illos obtinuit quisquam dux in illa urbe fuit dignus memoria.* One could address the latter by claiming (with A.) that Thrasybulus, Conon and Dion form a group, giving \(10 = (7+3) + (1+7) = 10 + 3\), but I doubt this is an improvement over A.’s scheme. The putative first edition is no better: one could discern 19 lives preceded by a preface and followed by a postlude *De Regibus* – which would make *Dion* the central life, but supply no compelling reason why that should be so. Nor am I confident that another observation gets us anywhere: *Timothaeus* is signed off at 4.4 after 1514 lines of (OCT) text, and the remainder of the book, starting with the link to Datames, occupies 1512 lines. This spookily precise division cuts across A.’s structure, of course, though it corresponds to one of her structural breaks. But it is a reminder that, in searching for shape in ‘Foreign Generals’, counting ‘Lives’ may not be the only criterion; a broad division of the non-Roman world into Athenian and non-Athenian would be natural, and one could insist that *Timoth.* 4.4, though naming the last three subjects is also about the whole *aetas imperatorum Atheniensium*. But, though considerations of date and association might justify leaving Pausanias and Lysander in the Athenian half, the placing of *Dion* seems unnecessary and insupportable, and we are back where we started.

A. claims (65) that internal structuring of ‘Foreign Generals’ turns it into a ‘seismograph of social tendencies at the time of composition’, but this does not follow with special lucidity from anything said in her preceding discussion. Contemporary resonance is not dependent on structural analysis.
II. Content and Transparency

If Nepos is a (moralistic) historian, not just a compiler, his accuracy is in theory important. In practice it is not a major issue here. A. does claim that some mistakes (52) result from Nepos interfering in order to make a point. But (e.g.) observing that confusion between Miltiades I and III allows alternating reference to Chersonese and Lemnos in Milt. 1–2 does not constitute an explanation. It is much more likely that Nepos simply got it wrong (like many student readers of Herodotus). Confusion about Pausanias’ trips abroad is similar, and calling Eurymedon Mycale another simple lapse. By contrast to call distribution of Laurium profits largitio magistratum (an explicitly negative concept in Milt. 6.4; and cf. largitio by a princeps in Hamil. 3.3) may bring the contemporary world to mind (A. speaks of luxury – but more is involved) and contribute to heroisation of Themistocles for acting against its principles.

If the work is intended to persuade people of the need for a New Order (one in which magisterial largitio, for example, is absent), who are the people in question? The formal addressee is Atticus; A. hails him as an ‘ideale Leser’ (71, 175), but he represented retreat from the political world and, though he was a retentant who knew and kept in with everyone, persuading him or his type of the rottenness of the status quo was not a way to change it. To say that conjunction of praise of Atticus with approval of political/military heroes reflects the ‘Zerrissenheit’ of Nepos and his age may be true but does not sound like a recipe for change. Perhaps we should rather imagine the book as (so to speak) a private conversation between Nepos and Atticus intended to be overheard by less ideal but more influential readers. One may wonder whether the rude/erpetes litterarum Graecarum of praef. 1.2 and Pel. 1.1 come into that category, but they were not the only wider market Nepos had in mind, and at the end of her exposition A. muses about a particularly influential reader, suggesting that Nepos’ mixture of nostalgia and desire for change influenced the young Caesar’s inclusion of republican restoration and celebration of the mos maiorum in his revolutionary project. Earlier (71) she suggests that Nepos’ talk of getting on with his task and not exceeding limitations of space (praef. 8, Lys. 2.1, Alc. 2.3, 11.6, Epam. 4.6, Pelop. 1.1, Timoth. 4.2, Hann. 5.4) reflects his concern to make a contribution to the political environment before it is too late – which I cannot help feeling may be over-interpretation of cliché.

It is tempting to read all ancient historiography as inter alia a reflection of and comment on its own time, if only because chronic shortage of sources incites maximum exploitation of any source that does exist. But it is always helpful to have specific prompts. They certainly exist in Nepos (cf. Milt. 6.11, Tbras. 2.4, Ipb. 2.4, Ages. 4.2, Eum. 3.4, 8.3), and it is a pity that A. nowhere provides a coherent check-list and summary analysis of all of the explicit and (allegedly) implicit contemporary references in ‘Foreign Generals’. Relevant material is scattered through the seriatim discussions of each life that form the book’s core, and lack of indices makes it difficult to compensate for this fact.

There are times when even explicit reference defeats us: the analogy between Iphicratenses and Fabiani (Ipb. 2.4) is obscure as the latter are only attested here. But on other occasions there are postulated examples of ‘Transparenz’ that are not wholly persu-
sive: for example, the suggestions (121) that the delivery of Thyrs (Dat. 3) is a parody Roman triumph or that Pausanias is written in the style of Caesarian Commentarii (the only evidence cited is an ablative absolute in 5.1) to enhance a Pausanias-Caesar analogy are not obviously true.

On other occasions again – e.g. Dat. 5.4 (kings claim success themselves while attributing failure to subordinates), Eum. 2.3 (Perdiccas wanted to seize overall control quod fere omnes in magnis imperis concupiscunt), Eum. 3.4 (fourth century Macedonian soldiers enjoyed the reputation Roman ones do now: eternum semper habiti sunt fortissimi qui summa imperii potiventur) – A. asserts contemporary relevance without precise explanation. (Admittedly, it is usual for Nepos not to spell out lessons to be learned: when Ages. 4.2 both contrasts Agesilas’ obedience to the state with contemporary imperatores and expresses a wish that the latter had followed his example, it is a rare example of agenda rather than just comparison, and perhaps significantly it is agenda for the past: one wonders how long before his own time Nepos thought they needed to have behaved differently to produce a better outcome.) When A. notes (122) that Datames suffers from false friends, like Alcibiades, Dion and Hannibal – and Eumenes (Eum. 11.5) – is she hinting at Caesar? Pelopidas 3.1 warns about nimia fiducia and A. says this is ‘valid in Rome’: is she linking the neglected warning letter in Thebes with Caesar’s failure to open a similar letter? Caesar is certainly (as A. notes) evoked by the observation that Miltiades found it hard to be privatus and omnes autem et dicantur et habentur tyranni qui potestate sunt perpetua in ea civitate quae libertate usus est (Milt. 8.3), but how does this relate to A.’s insistence that Miltiades is a guiltless victim of popular suspicion? A possible implication of Miltiades is that it is better to purge innocent men than run the risk of getting a tyrant. But A. says (78–79) that Miltiades’ virtues make him a proper model for ‘romische Imperatoren’, so there is some tension here. Perhaps he would only be a safe model in a Roman world that counter-factually resembled classical Attica and the early Republic in permitting only modest honores (Milt. 6.11; for the theme cf. also Thras. 4.2; Timoth. 2.3). Elsewhere A. reads Nepos’ Pausanias as a window on Caesar, since the Spartans were able to control Pausanias but the Senate could not control Caesar, and then claims that Lysander is to be contrasted with Pausanias because Sparta could not control him. That would make Lysander Caesar-like (A. does not explore this), but the Lysander-Pausanias contrast seems artificial: after all, Lysander did not actually succeed in overthrowing the state.

Alcibiades’ defence of anti-Athenian action (he is against imicus, not patria) raises the question of who really has the state’s interest at heart. The contemporary resonance is plain, though A. does not really pursue the point. Still, civil war is apparently sometimes justifiable. Another case is Thrasybulus (102). He is a fighter of civil war – and little else; the rest of his career is barely touched, making the life quite as distinctively manipulated on its small scale as Alcibiades (postponed after Lysander to make it adjacent to Thrasybulus) is on a larger one – and one who spares fellow-citizens, wants reconciliation (he is credited with the amnesty-decree proposal, against other versions, to underline this) and is a rare example of a hero undamaged by invidia – a point stressed by the remarks about his corona in 4.1–3. The comment in 2.4 – ‘already in those times the boni talked more in favour of liberty than fought for it’ – and the observation that Thrasybulus was pre-eminent in virtue but not in nobilitas (1.3) apparently cast him as a popular politician in Roman terms, but this is another matter A. does not pursue, and there is still a larger question: it is easy to say that civil war has contemporary resonance, but is Nepos taking a specific view? Did the civil strife of his time fall short of the moral tone seen in Alcibiades and Thrasybulus? Or is the message that history proves civil strife can be good?

Civil strife can, of course, be problematic too. Epaminondas thought omnen civilem victoriam funestam (10.3), though Pelopidas gains credit from involvement in the Theban coup. Timoleon’s love of liberty won the hatred of his mother (1.5), and Thrasybulus is juxtaposed with Conon and Dion, two liberators (the latter in civic guise) whose stories were less than fortunate: Conon could not deal with secunda fortuna – always a problem (cf. Timol. 1.2), but specially piquant when failure consists in impudent patriotism – and Dion suffered the changeability of fortuna. Another shared attribute was a personal history that put them close to unappetising forms of rule: Conon is above all a servant of Per-
sia (complete exclusion of his Cypriot period is symptomatic), Dion had been a servant of tyrants, and neither escaped the consequences. Liberation is a hard act to pull off, it seems, and Conon (more darkly nuanced than A. suggests) is a notable point on the downward trajectory from Thrasybulus to Dion – from ‘good’ to ‘bad’ revolutionary. Given the hints provided by Alcibiades, Thrasybulus, Conon and Dion (including Conon’s association with the barbarian east and Dion’s interest in philosophy, and recalling Plutarch’s view that he and Brutus were a natural pair) Nepos might certainly have hoped that, if Caesar Octavian had read his book, he would not have seen it as patently dissident.

Nepos’ essential concern is political and moral. Hence there is often little purely military detail: Datames, Eumenes and Hannibal are the big exceptions, and even so there is preference for consilium or prudencia (cf. Tim. 4.6 on Datames and the prominence of ingenuity in the lives in question). A. draws attention to one case, Themistocles, where there is explicit praise for good leadership in time of peace as well as war (6.1), but as the proof lies in building fortifications there is perhaps more artificiality in Nepos’ comment than A. allows. Other, maybe better, examples of a positive association between individual and pax are Cim. 4.1 (Cimon’s liberality to disadvantaged fellow-citizens), and – though the word pax does not appear – Hann. 7.5, on Hannibal’s tax-gathering skills. The most striking exclusion of strictly military detail is probably Epaminondas, which provides no account of Leuctra.

A.’s claim that the Middle Triad repeated explores the interplay between imperator/dux and civis/privatus in order to provide models for the successful coexistence in a single individual of military achievement and civil political competence (cf. 113, 113, 117) also seems forced. Private status is not an explicit issue in Iphicrates and is a by-product of invidia in Chabrias and old age in Timotheus, and associated with death or disgrace: it is hard to see a positive paradigm, e.g. of the desirability in a well-ordered republic for movement back and forth between being a privatus and a holder of imperium. (The same goes for Epam. 7.1-2. See also above on Miltiades and below on Timoleon.) More generally, Iphicrates, though a bonus civis, is not politically active, Chabrias is purely a general (that he dies fighting as a privatus is irrelevant, and the spectacle of a privatus with auctoritas in a military context might be thought suspect), and although Timotheus is disertus and re militaris peritus neque minus civitatis regendae (1.1) and has often held magistratus (3.1), all his actions, including those after 3.1, are military. (Here too, it happens, there is an issue about personal auctoritas and office-holding; Timoth. 3.2f.) On the matter of private status, one may also note Timoleon, who laid down imperium and lived out his life as a privatus. Neque vero id imperite fact, says Nepos (3.1) – a conscious rebuttal of Caesar’s famous condemnation of Sulla?

Invidia and related ideas about the mistreatment of prominent men are a leading motif in Decad 1, affect all the Middle Triad (the issue is the ‘common vice of great and free states’ in Chabrias, the triad’s middle item), and recur in Decad 2 with Datames, Epaminondas, Eumenes, Timoleon, and Hannibal. A.’s claim that Decads 1 and 2 differ here is not particularly convincing; overall, only Aristides, Agesilaus and Iphicrates fail to touch on the effect of invidia or fortuna or both, and this nexus of ideas is perhaps the most prominent political theme in ‘Foreign Generals’. This is not entirely surprising, since we are dealing with exceptional and (thus) vulnerable individuals. The recurrence of the word unus is another reflection of this: cf. unus restitit (Them. 4.2), unus vis prudencia Graecia liberata est (Them. 5.3), unus omnium maxime floret (Milt. 1.1), unus Miltiades nobilebat ut primo quoque tempore castra fierent (Milt. 4.4), unus post hominum memoriam ... cognomine Iustus ... appellatus (Arist. 1.2), cum unus in civitate maxime floret (Cim. 3.1), unus omnem illum prosequabantur (Alc. 6.3), namque omnibus unus insuls praefuit (Con. 1.1), illum unus pluris quam se omnes fieri videbant (Dat. 5.2), quod in unius pernicie eius patriae uitam pababant (Epam. 9.1), unus hominem pluris quam civitatem fuisse (Epam. 10.4), unus omnibus resistere cogebatur ... illum unus opposerat Europaei adversarius (Eum. 3.2), cum tam per eum unus gevernitur omnia (Eum. 7.3), sed multorum obrectatio devicit unus utrisque (Hann. 1.2). A. notes the first passage (where there are also shades of Fabius Cunctator), but does not highlight the presence of the idea elsewhere. Perhaps she is right and it has no special significance – or perhaps it is a (partly subconscious?) sign of...
Nepos’ attraction to the powerful single individual: one thinks again of Caesar Octavian as reader of ‘Foreign Generals’. But one might also wonder about the fact that the principal topic in the perfunctory De Regibus is how the various kings died. Is this a (more or less subliminal) suggestion that regnum is an undesirable state of affairs? Princeps, as we know, was a nicer word than rex, but I am not sure that Nepos’ use of it is sufficiently insistent to lead to any systematic conclusions.

We hear of optimates in several places. In Dion 6.3 they support Heraclides, who factio-nem comparavit in a quarrel about principatus (good Roman terminology), but 7.2 suggests they had been on Dion’s side originally. Dion in fact appears as an optimate-supported figure who became a military tyrant. Are we to conclude that optimates are a bad thing? Nepos seems more concerned with the inconstancy of a vulgus that denounces the live Dion as tyrant and regrets the dead one as liberator, and for A. this is indeed what matters: it shows that conspiracy is no way to do politics, because it makes Dion a posthumous hero and leaves Callocrates (rectius Callippus) as a new tyrant (128). The latter point is debatable, as Nepos lays no stress on Callocrates being a new tyrant (the political environment after Dion’s death is undescribed), but the general conclusion might be correct. (It would, of course, involve assimilating Dion to Caesar, not Brutus as suggested above – but contemporary references can be disturbingly fluid.) A more clearly negative view of optimates appears in Phocion. Phocion dies at hands of the people (and claims parity with many other famous Athenians) but does so for good reasons – his treacherous behaviour hardly conforms to the earlier good models – and for A. (143) this constitutes an attack on so-called boni or optimates. There is also hostility to the boni as useless defenders of liberty in Thras. 2.4, and the fact that Alcibiades, inimical to populi potentiae and optimatium fautor (Alc. 5.3), is an object of admiration from Nepos (despite excelling in vice as well as virtue: once again scale, not quality, is the touchstone) need not point in a different direction: Alcibiades is no ordinary figure, and the breach with fellow pro-optimate Pisander can be understood to take Alcibiades out of that camp. Nepos did not come from a grand part of Roman society and may have been more impressed by renegade members of such society than self-righteous asserters of conservative values.

III Conclusion

Nepos is a more interesting author than he is often given credit for, A.’s book will be consulted by all those who have occasion to deal with him, and its general approach is unexceptionable. Those new to academic study of Nepos may derive benefit from reading each Life along with A.’s structural analysis (enshrined in each case in tabular form) and discursive commentary. For other purposes, though, it is a pity that this is the way the book is organised (especially in the absence of proper indices). A wholly analytic approach would have forced the author to a more focused understanding and presentation of Nepos’ position on the politics of his time. Failing that a much more detailed summary at the end of what conclusions are embedded in the commentary chapters would have been a great advantage.

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