

THE LIFE OF A CONTEMPORARY:
SOME THOUGHTS CONCERNING NEPOS'
LIFE OF ATTICUS

“(Nepos, *Atticus* is) an illuminating study of a remarkable man”
E. Rawson, *Intellectual Life in the Late Roman Republic* (London 1985) 104

Abstract: This study intends to explore whether indeed the *Life of Atticus* was unique at the time in dealing with the life of a living person. It considers other possible cases, and draws attention to the parallelism and the connexions between the biography of a living person and autobiography. Particular consideration is given to the place of the *Atticus* in the heyday of realistic portraiture in the Augustan age as well as to the new fashion in career inscriptions in that age.

Keywords: biography; autobiography; Nepos, *Atticus*

The thesis that Cornelius Nepos, who is the earliest extant author of political biographies, was indeed the inventor of the genre, has been advanced over thirty-eight years ago.¹ That argument received a quite extensive, though mixed welcome. Interestingly enough the latest, and by far most exhaustive treatment of Nepos the biographer only advocates a variant and modification of the line of reasoning of that book.² Be this as it may, it is essential to discuss another of Nepos' firsts that has not hitherto received sufficient attention. While scholars acknowledge that the *Life of Atticus* is the

1) J. Geiger, *Cornelius Nepos and Ancient Political Biography*, Stuttgart 1985.

2) R. Stem, *The Political Biographies of Cornelius Nepos*, Ann Arbor 2012; see also, more recently, T. Cornell, Momigliano and Biography, in: T. Cornell / O. Murray (eds.), *The Legacy of Arnaldo Momigliano* (London 2014) 184–6, for a spirited defence of my case and even more recently J. Klowski, *Forschungsbericht zu Cornelius Nepos, beginnend mit Geigers *Cornelius Nepos* und den Arbeiten, die den Erfolg dieser Schrift vorbereitet haben*, in: B. Dunsch / F. M. Prokoph (Hrsg.), *Geschichte und Gegenwart. Beiträge zu Cornelius Nepos aus Fachwissenschaft, Fachdidaktik und Unterrichtspraxis, mit einem Forschungsbericht und einer Arbeitsbibliographie* (Wiesbaden 2015) 287–90.

earliest extant biography of a living contemporary³ I have not seen an exhaustive discussion of this fact and of its implications, including in some major studies allocating the *Life* a central place.⁴ In the following I intend to assign to this biography of a living person its proper position in the intellectual climate and its later developments in the period of transition from Republic to Principate.

I propose to pursue the subject under a number of headings. These include the question of whether indeed the *Life of Atticus* was unique among Nepos' biographies in dealing with the life of a living person, of Atticus' own biographical oeuvre, the parallelism and the connexions between the biography of a living person and autobiography, as well as the connexion of all these both to the heyday of realistic portraiture in the Augustan age on the one hand and to the new fashion in career inscriptions in that age on the other.

Let us start with basics. Nepos, Atticus 19.1 declares that the biography up to this point had been published in Atticus' lifetime.⁵ The remaining section, 19.1–22.4 belongs to a second edition,⁶ pub-

3) I am not dealing with the possibility of such biographies of contemporaries having been written in the remote past, such as a likely *Life of Empedocles* by his (near)contemporary Xanthus of Lydia, see FGrH 1001 F 1.

4) See F. Millar, Cornelius Nepos, "Atticus", and the Roman Revolution, G&R 35 (1988) 40–55; H. Lindsay, The Biography of Atticus: Cornelius Nepos on the Philosophical and Ethical Background of Pomponius Atticus, Latomus 57 (1998) 324–36; N. Horsfall, Cornelius Nepos. A Selection, Including the Lives of Cato and Atticus, Oxford 1989; R. Stem, Nepos' Atticus as a Biography of Friendship, in: C. Deroux, Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History XII (= Coll. Latomus 287), Brüssel 2005, 115–29.

5) *Haec hactenus Attico vivo edita a nobis sunt.*

6) The dissenting view of M. Toher, Nepos' Second Edition, Philologus 146 (2002) 139–49 does not seem to have convinced; for its dismissal see J. Geiger, The First Hall of Fame. A Study of the Statues in the *Forum Augustum* (Leiden / Boston 2008) 43 n. 60 and cf. Stem (n. 2) 14 n. 48. At 24–30 he accepts the fact of a second edition of the *Atticus* but is highly sceptical of a second edition of the book on generals. Few will be convinced by the recent effort of N. Holzberg, *Struttura encomiastica e riflessi di realtà tardo-repubblicana nella Vita di Attico di Cornelio Nepote*, in: G. Bernardi Perini / A. Cavarzere (eds.), *Orizzonti culturali di Cornelio Nepote dal Po a Roma. Atti del Convegno Ostiglia, 27 aprile 2012–28 aprile 2012*, Mantova (Firenze 2013) 131–45, to found the thesis of a second edition on the encomiastic structure of the biography. This question may be of some import in the following, when discussing the time of the composition of the (hypothetical) *Life of Antony*.

lished after Atticus' death, dated to March 31, 32 BCE.⁷ This second edition was published after Octavian assumed the style Imperator Divi filius in 29,⁸ and from the use of that designation it seems to follow that also before the Senate bestowed on him the name Augustus in January 27. One detail that should arrest the attention of the reader of the biography is that there is nothing in the section written during the subject's life that would alert him to the exceptionality of this practice: either it has been employed by Nepos or others earlier, and perhaps often, or else the author was totally insensitive to the need to warn his readers of a major literary innovation.⁹ In the *Lives of Foreign Generals* the apology on discussing such matters as Epaminondas' dancing and playing the flute (Praef. 1) and the like surely forewarns the reader that the men about to be discussed differ fundamentally from the various types of intellectuals described hitherto;¹⁰ admittedly this does not necessarily have to be construed as announcing a literary innovation. The question presents itself whether he employed this novelty only here, or was it a routine way with him to make use of it in the biographies also of other contemporaries?¹¹ One obvious candidate for such a practice would have been Cicero, a man whose biography Nepos has written and with whom his relations were fairly close, comparable to his relations with Atticus.¹² That Life consisted of at least two books¹³ and was thus, probably because of the subject's importance and his relationship with the author, considerably longer than both the *Life of At-*

7) Nepos, Att. 22.3: *pridie Kal. Apriles Cn. Domitio C. Sosio consulibus decessit.*

8) See Nepos, Att. 19.2.

9) The denial of H. Rahn, *Die Atticus-Biographie und die Frage der zweiten Auflage der Biographiensammlung des Cornelius Nepos*, *Hermes* 85 (1957) 205–15, of a second edition, based on his absurd interpretation of *edita* was universally rejected (first, and in detail, by R. Stark, *Zur Atticus-Vita des Cornelius Nepos*, *RhM* 107 [1964] 175–89), but it is worthwhile to note, that at 208–9 he wonders whether it were possible for Nepos to publish the biography of a Roman citizen during his lifetime without some reference to this fact. It would be possible, of course, if it were not an isolated case.

10) Cf. Geiger (n. 1) 113–4.

11) Cf. J. Geiger, *The Augustan Age*, in: G. Marasco (ed.), *Political Autobiographies and Memoirs in Antiquity* (Leiden / Boston 2011) 234.

12) See J. Geiger, *Cicero and Nepos*, *Latomus* 44 (1985) 261–70.

13) Gell. 15.28.1 refers to the first book of the biography.

ticus and Plutarch's biography of Cicero, the latter occupying one half of the book containing also the *Life of Demosthenes*. Could it have been composed during the subject's lifetime? Such a possibility has been raised rather hesitantly by me,¹⁴ and also Horsfall hinted at such a possibility briefly and without further argument.¹⁵ It is worthwhile to reconsider the probabilities of the issue. The length of the *Life* suggests that it was composed well before the long series of short *Lives*, in which a *Life of Cicero* would not be omitted, but of course we neither know the exact date of the series nor by how much the *Cicero* may have preceded it. More pertinently, in the biographies of the Greek generals Nepos allots considerable space to the deaths of his subjects. Cicero's was certainly a most dramatic one – but one doubts whether a way could be found to describe its details in an acceptable way in the triumviral period, considering, i. a., Nepos' good relations with Mark Antony.¹⁶

As mentioned earlier, the first edition of the *Atticus* was published before the subject's death in 32; it must have been published also after Cicero's execution / assassination in 43, which is alluded to.¹⁷ Of course it is possible, but rather unlikely, that with the *Atticus* Nepos first experimented with a biography published in the subject's lifetime, while with the biography of a far more distinguished contemporary, and on similarly friendly terms with the biographer, he decided to wait until after the subject's death (which he would be reluctant to describe, as suggested above). Nor would one suspect Cicero's shyness to stand in the way of his friend's plan – on the contrary one well remembers Cicero urging Luceius to devote a monograph to his exploits.¹⁸ On the whole, the publication of the at least two-volume *Life of Cicero* in his lifetime must remain unproven but looks plausible enough. In my estimation the scales seem to be weighed in favour of a time of writing prior to the subject's death.

14) Geiger (n. 1) 101.

15) Horsfall (n. 4) 10; cf. Stem (n. 2) 106 n. 48; FRHist I 401: "The work was written presumably after Cicero's death, although the first version of the *Atticus* was written during the subject's lifetime."

16) See Nepos, Att. 12.2; 20.4 and elsewhere.

17) Nepos, Att. 16.3: the eleven (so the MSS, 'corrected' by some editors) volumes of Cicero's letters to Atticus *ab consulatu eius usque ad extremum tempus*.

18) Cic. fam. 5.12.

Another contemporary who has been put forward as a possible subject of a biography was Mark Antony: the fragment concerning Octavian's drinking during the War of Mutina¹⁹ must have first appeared as part of the war of propaganda of the time and by way of Antony's *de ebrietate sua* turned up in Suetonius, possibly through the mediation of a *Life of Antony* by Nepos.²⁰ Still, there is no knowing whether such an – admittedly hypothetical – *Life* belonged to the first edition of the *de viris illustribus*, composed before the death of Atticus in the year preceding the battle of Actium, or to the second edition and thus after the death of Antony.

But these two examples²¹ should not distract us from a key consideration involving the *de viris illustribus*. That series comprised, calculating it by the size of the extant *Greek Generals*, probably between a hundred and two hundred Roman Lives set against and compared with their eminent Greek counterparts.²² Though of course exact numerical equality was certainly not a prerequisite, an all too great disparity between Greeks and Romans would hardly serve the purpose of the series. Whatever the other categories contained in the series were, beside the safely attested generals and historians, rejecting the inclusion of living contemporaries would have made the author short of Roman subjects even more than the handicap already imposed on him by the available material on historical figures. There is indeed absolutely no reason to assume that the *Atticus* was necessarily the only biography of a living contemporary in the series – indeed, his somewhat forced inclusion among the Roman historians is a strong argument in favour of the notion that Nepos made every possible effort to minimise the numerical disproportion between Greeks and Romans – not to mention the greater eminence of the Greeks in this category.²³ Considering the case of the Roman historians, not including, i. a., Asinius Pollio,

19) Suet. Aug. 77.

20) See J. Geiger, An Overlooked Item of the War of Propaganda between Octavian and Antony, *Historia* 29 (1980) 112–4.

21) One may refrain from a discussion of a possible *Life* of L. Julius Calidus, cf. Geiger (n. 1) 91.

22) For the number of books and the possible categories see discussion in Geiger (n. 1) 87–92; as on several other points, also on this point the criticism in the recension of U. Schindler, *Gnomon* 65 (1993) 19–27 is not convincing.

23) Cf. Geiger (n. 1) 94–5.

and possibly Sallust, who may have been still alive at about the time of the composition of the series,²⁴ would have deprived the author of some of his prize assets, as historians far surpassing Atticus (whose achievements as an historian merit just one out of the eighteen chapters of the first edition of his biography), and of other historians in the series such as Aulus Albinus²⁵ or L. Voltacilius Pitholaus²⁶ – and still far from being a match for the likes of Herodotus, Thucydides, or Xenophon. True, our studies are constricted by the miserable remains of ancient literature, but it will be foolish to regard these remnants as the limits of our argument.

Accordingly we assume that Nepos may well have composed a (perhaps considerable) number of biographies of living contemporaries; but even if the *Atticus* was unique in this respect we should still consider Nepos in the context of his contemporaries, friends, and acquaintances. Pride of place among these belongs to Atticus himself. Nepos' *Life* is not only one of our main sources for his friend's literary activity but Atticus is also the dedicatee of the book on foreign generals (praef. 1) and it was at his request that Nepos composed the lost full length biography of Cato the Elder (Cato 3.5). Whether other books of *de viris illustribus* were dedicated to him we cannot tell, though it would have been rather awkward in the case of the book on Latin historians that contained also the *Life of Atticus*.²⁷ It is thus not at all farfetched to assume that the two friends shared also some attitudes to the writing of historical works and were in communication, and in all probability active collaboration,²⁸ with each other on such issues.

Did Atticus' historical and prosopographical books include living persons? The information provided by Nepos, in the last

24) For the possible acquaintance of Nepos and Sallust see Geiger (n. 1) 75 n. 51; A. Cavarzere, Cornelio Nepote e la letteratura epistolare, in: Bernardi Perini / Cavarzere (n. 6) 116–7.

25) For his inclusion among the Latin historians see Nepos, frg. 56 (Gell. 11.8); Horsfall (n. 4) 119 considers the alternative possibility that this fragment comes from the full-length *Life of Cato*.

26) See Nepos, frg. 57 (Suet. rhet. 3).

27) Cf. Stem (n. 2) 15. One must withstand the temptation to guess possible dedicatees of the other books.

28) Nepos, Hann. 13 explicitly attests the author's use of Atticus' *Liber animalis*.

chapter (18) of the first edition of the *Life* is not straightforward, yet not impossible to interpret. (The fragments of the works of Atticus all refer to details preceding his generation.) The biographer tells us that the book that contained the succession of the magistrates, that is, the *liber annalis*, was organised in such a manner that one could recognise from it the descendants of famous men (*clarorum virorum propagines*). It seems to me quite obvious, that leaving out the present generation, those descendants alive and desirous to advertise their ancestry, would have disappointed the most important part of the intended public of the book. Though these were not biographies but possibly only short prosopographical entries, it may be safe to conclude that these included living contemporaries. This is clearer yet in the family histories Atticus composed at the request of M. Brutus, Claudius Marcellus, Cornelius Scipio, and Fabius Maximus (Nepos, Att. 18.3–4). Though the identification of some of the nobles requesting their family trees may be controversial,²⁹ almost certainly all of these requests reached Atticus already in the forties.³⁰ Of course it would have been self-defeating and entirely contrary to the wishes of the men who suggested such works if Atticus only mentioned their ancestors down to their fathers without referring to their own persons. Similarly the work in which Atticus combined portraits and epigrams³¹ very probably included living contemporaries. Since according to Pliny it was Varro who

29) See A. M. Marshall, Atticus and the Genealogies, *Latomus* 52 (1993) 307–17, for a thorough discussion.

30) The three Claudii Marcelli, one of whom will have made the request from Atticus, were M., cos. 51, C., cos. 50, and C., cos. 49; all three were dead by 40. Horsfall (n. 4) 101, who discusses the matter, commits a logical error in assuming that the absence of a cognomen in the text of Nepos means that at the time of Atticus' writing there was only one Marcellus alive – to Nepos (and perhaps to members of his intended public) the identity of the Claudius Marcellus in question may well have been clear though for some reason he refrained from defining it for his readers.

31) Plin. n. h. 35.11: *imaginum amore flagrasse quondam testes sunt Atticus ille Ciceronis edito de iis volumine, M. Varro benignissimo invento insertis voluminum suorum fecunditati etiam septingentorum inlustrium aliquo modo imaginibus; Nepos, Att. 18.5–6: attigit poeticon quoque, credimus, ne eius expertus esset suavitatis. namque versibus de iis, qui honore rerumque gestarum amplitudine ceteros populi Romani praestiterunt, exposuit ita, ut sub singulorum imaginibus facta magistratusque eorum non amplius quaternis quinisque versibus descripserit: quod vix credendum sit tantas res tam breviter potuisse declarari.*

first deployed this genre of illustrated prosopography in Rome, and since we can date Varro's *Hebdomades* to 39³² Atticus' illustrated book may have been somewhat earlier than, or contemporary with, Nepos' *de viris illustribus*.³³

Of course none of these works by Atticus and by Varro could lay a claim to being even short biographies, but the generic proximity is undeniable. It seems to me that in the prevailing intellectual climate in which the reading public became used to the frequent appearance of short biographical data of living persons together with those of previous generations they must have also come to regard the appearance of biographies of living persons together with those of the long deceased as acceptable, perhaps almost self-evident.

To repeat, the status of the *Life of Atticus* as the first extant biography of a living person is commonly known and very often referred to. Nevertheless I have not seen discussed in this context that we have considerable fragments of the biography of a far more important person composed not many years later in the subject's lifetime. Moreover, this next biography of a living person will lead us to the connexion between such biographies and autobiography. The future emperor Augustus entered into the very highest level of public life and civil strife at an unprecedented early age, as he was himself to proclaim emphatically in the very first words of his official account (RG 1). Though he lived to the (for his time) ripe old age of seventy-six years, a fact of course no one, certainly including him, would have predicted of the frail youth, he published an autobiography in all probability already in his fortieth year.³⁴ Disre-

32) Gell. 3.10.17. He was working on them already in November 44, see Cic. Att. 16.11.3 and Shackleton Bailey ad loc.; cf. also F.M. Prokoph, Cornelius Nepos und ein Stück Literaturgeschichte: Indizien zur Chronologie der *Imagines* des Atticus und des Varro, in: Dunsch / Prokoph (n. 2) 106–7.

33) On the possible influence of Varro's *Hebdomades* on Atticus' illustrated book see Geiger (n. 1) 81–2. On the relative dates of the works of Varro, Atticus and Nepos see Stem (n. 2) 108 n. 53; see also for an extended discussion Prokoph (n. 32), and especially 123–9; he misunderstands at 104–107 Gell. 3.10.17 *septuaginta hebdomadas librorum* as if referring to the *Imagines*, while this actually means '490 books'; there can be little doubt that this wording in Gellius is Varro's own.

34) Suet. Aug. 85.1. For a discussion and rejection of the later date of 19 see G. Dobsch, Nikolaus von Damaskus und die Selbstbiographie des Augustus, GB 7

garding for the time being the decision to undertake such a task at a relatively very early age it should be realised that the composition of an autobiography was part of a rising fashion of publishing such works by people in public life.³⁵ Obviously autobiography is a sub-genre of biography differing from the wider field in that it does not describe the life of its subject until and including his death and also in that the author and the subject of the biography happen to be the same person.³⁶ Now the biography of a living person clearly occupies a middle place between biographies of dead persons and autobiographies – though writer and subject are different persons evidently the author cannot describe the life of his subject until and including his death. In parentheses it may be remarked that in practice, at least, there is one more criterion that links the biographies of contemporaries with autobiographies as against biographies of long dead persons: while in the latter the writer often takes the liberty to apportion praise and blame according to his judgment of the subject, biographies of contemporaries, not unlike autobiographies, tend naturally to show their subjects in the best possible light.³⁷ Is it too farfetched to consider the likelihood, that the spread of the writing of autobiographical works may have aroused, or enhanced, the notion that the life of a person may be described even if one had to do without the dramatic prospects provided by its natural conclusion?

(1978) 131 n. 13; J. Rich, *Cantabrian Closure: Augustus' Spanish war and the ending of his memoirs*, in: C. Smith / A. Powell (eds.), *The Lost Memoirs of Augustus and the Development of Roman Autobiography* (Llandysul, Ceredigion 2009) 145–72 maintains and accounts for the ending of the autobiography with the Cantabrian war, but also suggests that it may have been published in installments at different stages of the Princes' career.

35) For Republican autobiographies down to the corpus of Caesar's writings see the relevant chapters in G. Marasco (ed.), *Political Autobiographies and Memoirs in Antiquity* (Leiden / Boston 2011) by Candau, Tatum and Mayer and for a new collection of the fragments see P. Scholz / U. Walter, *Fragmente römischer Memoiren*, Heidelberg 2013.

36) For a theoretical discussion see P. Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique*, in: P. Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique*, Paris 1975, 13–46 = *Der autobiographische Pakt*, in: G. Nigel (ed.), *Die Autobiographie. Zu Form und Geschichte einer literarischen Gattung*, Darmstadt 1998, 214–57 and esp. the tables on 247–8.

37) Cf. A. C. Dionisotti, *Nepos and the Generals*, *JRS* 78 (1988) 45, arguing that Nepos was more likely to express his own views on long dead persons than on Atticus, and Stem (n. 2) 114–127, who reconciles Dionisotti's analysis of the *Foreign Generals* with Millar's (n. 4) on the *Atticus*.

The relationship between the lost autobiography of Augustus and the relatively large segments extant of Nicolaus of Damascus' *Life of the Young Caesar* rely more on guesswork than on even circumstantial evidence, no direct reference being found to the former in the latter. The evidence seems to point to a much later date of composition than the very close chronological relationship propagated by Jacoby, "a time when Augustus' rule had long been established and was accepted as a benefaction to all".³⁸ Nevertheless, it would be absurd to deny the literary, generic, association between the two works, even if ascribed to some degree to the rather hazy notion of *Zeitgeist*. It would be missing some of the relevant context to consider all this without reference to the publication of the *Life of Atticus* by Nepos in the subject's lifetime, of the second edition a few years later, and of the subsequent publication of Augustus' autobiography.

Be this as it may, the work of Nicolaus is proof, if such is needed, for the propinquity in the intellectual atmosphere of the time between autobiography, or autobiographical works in a wider sense, and biographies of living persons or biographical works in a wider sense referring to them. Whether, on the other hand, Nicolaus saw before him³⁹ the work of Nepos must remain an open question, as is the rather distant possibility, that Nepos was still alive when Nicolaus first visited Rome.⁴⁰ And Nicolaus was of course himself the author of an autobiography and he may also have had a hand in inducing King Herod to compose an autobiography of his own.⁴¹ The first of these works almost certainly, the other probably post-dated the *Life of the Young Caesar*. In any

38) In this and what follows M. Toher, Nicolaus of Damascus: *The Life of Augustus and The Autobiography*. Edited with Introduction, Translations and Historical Commentary (Cambridge 2017), is the latest, and most important, discussion; the quotation is from p. 27.

39) It has not been questioned that Nicolaus could have read Augustus' Latin autobiography, and the same must be true of his reading Nepos.

40) Nepos' death in the reign of Augustus (Plin. n. h. 9.137) can be interpreted in the strict sense, viz. after 27, or between 29 and 27, as above, p. 350 we have no evidence that he survived to an extremely old age; as for Nicolaus' sojourns in Rome we are again relying on guesswork and various, more or less speculative, interpretations of the evidence, except for the express mentions in Josephus of his much later visits on behalf of Herod.

41) See discussion in Geiger (n. 11) 260–4.

case it is not to be imagined that Nicolaus influenced Nepos, nor is the opposite course necessarily true, though if Nepos composed indeed a (great) number of biographies of living persons this would certainly increase the likelihood of Nepos' influence, if only in a general sense: it would ascribe much too great an importance to the *Life of Atticus* were we to believe that it alone sufficed to make Nicolaus aware of the possibility of exploiting Augustus' autobiography as a source for a biographical treatment of the living *princeps*.

Thus far biographies of living contemporaries and autobiographies. Another avenue to the wider appreciation of what is regarded as Nepos' innovation is to look beyond the confines of literature in order better to sense the intellectual currents of the times that enabled such works. In the following two such important phenomena will be given short consideration. One is the comparison of biography and the art of portraiture, a connexion that has been expressly accounted for in what is probably the best known statement of his craft by the most celebrated of ancient biographers:

Accordingly, just as painters get the likenesses in their portraits from the face and the expression of the eyes, wherein the character shows itself, but make very little account of the other parts of the body, so I must be permitted to devote myself rather to the signs of the soul in men, and by means of these to portray the life of each, leaving to others the description of their great contests.⁴²

Though this famous passage has been quoted innumerable times too little attention has been paid to the fact that the biographer not only compares his art with that of the portrait artist, but is also taking a leaf from the book of the latter.⁴³ One is certainly not forgetting that Plutarch composed this passage almost a century and a half after Nepos, nor should one be suggesting that it was Nepos' influence that may have made an impact on Plutarch's statement.⁴⁴ But to understand the possible influences on Nepos

42) Plut. Alex. 1.3 (trl. B. Perrin, LCL); cf. also Plut. Cim. 2.3.

43) See briefly on this issue J. Geiger, Political Biography and the Art of Portraiture: Some Parallels, in: I. Gallo / C. Moreschini (eds.), *I generi letterari in Plutarco. Atti del VIII convegno plutarco, Pisa, 2-4 giugno 1999* (Napoli 2000) 44.

44) For Nepos' influence on Plutarch see J. Geiger, *Plutarch and Nepos, From Latin to Greek Political Biography*, ICS 13 (1988) 245-56

and on other biographers it will be wrong to ignore their physical environment. One is aware, of course, of the general pervasiveness of statuary in ancient Rome and in fact in the entire Roman world in the heyday of realistic portraiture – and it is welcome to be reminded by Plutarch that this realism did not extend beyond the face – but it is also most pertinent to ask to what extent did this statuary contain recently added portraits of contemporaries. In this context one statement immediately captures our attention: the bust of Varro was that of the only living person in the new public library established by Asinius Pollio.⁴⁵ The reason given by Pliny of Varro's eminence as outstanding orator and intellectual may well have been accurate, though one should not exclude a possibly additional reason, namely that this was a tribute to Varro who was originally designated by Caesar to set up his library. Be this as it may, it surely is an important indication of rewarding great contemporaries with statues or portrait busts in their lifetime. Of course this was not an innovation – one remembers for instance Cato the Elder's famous mot on those having or not having a statue,⁴⁶ clearly testifying for the relative abundance of that distinction.⁴⁷ However, it appears that in the triumviral and Augustan periods an important development took place. The illustrated books of Varro and of Atticus for the first time intended to organise the likenesses of persons under specific categories – be these walks of life in the case of Varro or families in the case of Atticus. It was only in the second half of Augustus' long reign that the Princeps himself established in his Forum the series of statues of the Republic's *summi viri* with a provision to add future great men, meaning living contemporaries: it has been argued that Augustus' scheme has been influenced by Varro's *Hebdomades*.⁴⁸

45) Plin. n.h. 7.115 *M. Varronis in bibliotheca, quae prima in orbe ab Asinio Pollione ex manubiis publicata Romae est, unius viventis posita imago est, haut minore, ut equidem reor, gloria, principe oratore et cive ex illa ingeniorum quae tunc fuit multitudine uni hanc coronam dante quam cum eidem Magnus Pompeius piratico ex bello navalem dedit.*

46) Plut. Cato ma. 19.4–6.

47) On the entire subject see M. Sehlmeier, *Stadtrömische Ehrenstatuen der republikanischen Zeit*, Stuttgart 1999.

48) Geiger (n. 6) esp. 44–7, 99–108.

But to return to the wealth of sculptures in Rome – and, to various extents, in all the cities of the Graeco-Roman world. An exhaustive discussion of the subject⁴⁹ distinguishes between statues erected in the subject's lifetime (Ehrenstatuen) and commemorative statues (Memorialstatuen): for our purposes it is significant, that both kinds filled the cityscape more or less chaotically, except for such examples as the putative likenesses of the seven kings on the Capitol. What with a proliferation of Ehrenstatuen in the last generation of the Republic and the triumviral period people must have regarded as perfectly common the coexistence of these two kinds of images. Considering that a significant number of these statues represented members of the same families, the quick and the dead, one realises that in all probability nobody raised an eyebrow when encountering a similar phenomenon in the illustrated books of Varro and of Atticus – nor, one surmises, if he were to bump into it in Nepos' biographical series. And, of course, there was a very great overlap between the persons depicted in Atticus' books as well as in parts of the series of Varro and of Nepos and the Romans whose effigies filled the cityscape. If the statues of living persons mixed with those of the dead, and 'four or five lines'⁵⁰ under the portraits of the living as well as the dead were regarded as commonplace, who would deem the biographies of living contemporaries alongside those of the long dead as even worth a mention?

Finally, another important phenomenon of the age not considered in the present context. Werner Eck in a wide sweep surveying the changes senatorial self-representation underwent in the Augustan age, noted the prevalence of public monuments and statues, for us more often than not within reach only by their surviving accompanying inscriptions.⁵¹ Most relevantly for our query, in the Augustan period there occurred a change in the conventional formulae of Roman inscriptions: while hitherto those for the living did as a rule refer only to the honorand's latest, and under the circumstances relevant, office, and only inscriptions for the dead would

49) Schlmeyer (n. 47).

50) Nepos, Att. 18.6.

51) W. Eck, *Senatorial Self-Representation: Developments in the Augustan Period*, in: F. Millar / E. Segal (eds.), *Caesar Augustus. Seven Aspects* (Oxford 1984) 129–67.

contain their full *cursus*, from now on full *cursus*-inscriptions in the subject's lifetime became the rule.⁵² Again, though a *cursus honorum* is definitely not a biography, for a Roman office-holder it contains at least the bare skeleton of one. The transition from full *cursus*-inscriptions for the dead to such for the living is entirely in line with the developments discussed in this paper.

It seems to me that this brief survey has not only put an important aspect of the *Life of Atticus* in its appropriate context but has also achieved a further goal in strengthening Nepos' claim for his proper place in the intellectual developments of his age. It appears that if not a leader in these developments he was at least an important contributor to the Augustan *Zeitgeist* and its fresh look at the personality.

Jerusalem

Joseph Geiger

52) W. Eck (n. 51) 149, repeated at id., *Elite und Leitbilder in der römischen Kaiserzeit*, in: J. Dummer / M. Vielberg (Hrsg.), *Leitbilder der Spätantike – Eliten und Leitbilder* (Stuttgart 1999) 44–5, and, with slight reservations, at id., *Auf der Suche nach Personen und Persönlichkeiten. Cursus honorum und Biographie*, in: K. Vössing (Hrsg.), *Biographie und Prosopographie. Internationales Kolloquium zum 65. Geburtstag von Anthony R. Birley*, 28. September 2002, Schloß Mickeln, Düsseldorf (Stuttgart 2005) 56.