

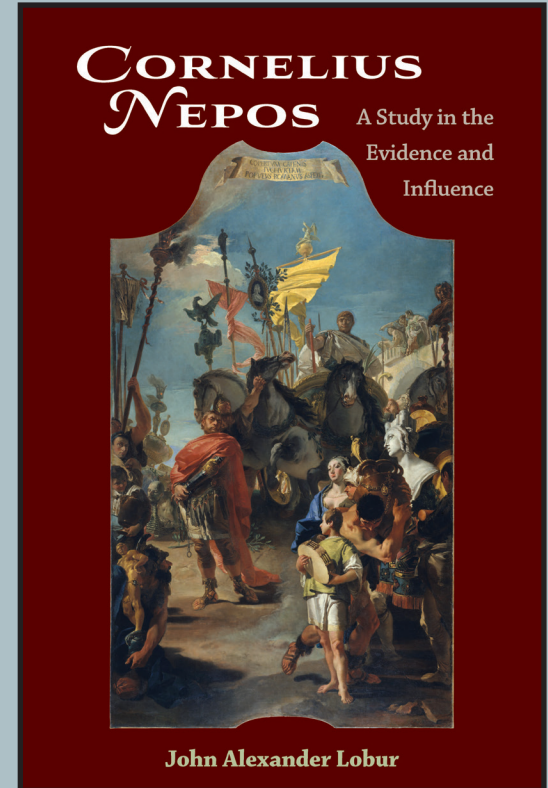
Cornelius Nepos

A Study in the Evidence and Influence

Roman author Cornelius Nepos wrote at a very dynamic time in Roman history, but oddly enough little has been said about what his surviving work as a whole can tell us about that period. In the scholarship of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the author was much maligned as inaccurate, simple-minded, and derivative, and thus it has been hard to make the case that the evidence he provides is important or even useful. John Lobur's work rehabilitates Nepos to show that in fact he should be understood as an emblematic member of the Italian intelligentsia, one well-positioned to write narratives of great potency with respect to the ideological tenor of emerging Roman imperial culture.

Cornelius Nepos: A Study in the Evidence and Influence begins by exploring the writer's ancient reception, which suggests he was in no way seen as beneath consideration by the Romans themselves. The volume then deconstructs the critical framework that cast him as an "inferior" author in the classical canon. What emerges is an author who reworked Greek historical narratives in a learned, sophisticated way, yet one still limited by the compositional logistics and limitations inherent in ancient scholarship. The study then explores his contemporary relationships and embeds his work among the crucial ideological activity at play in the late Republic and Triumviral periods. *Cornelius Nepos* spends considerable time on the fragmentary evidence (which highlights Nepos' interest in changes in fashion and consumption) to suggest that he was a valued cultural elder who informed a public eager to recover a sense of tradition during a period of bewilderingly fast social and cultural change. The book finishes with a thematic examination of the entire *Lives of the Foreign Commanders* (a set of biographies on ancient non-Roman generals) to show that despite the expression of very "Republican" sentiments, he was in fact fashioning an ideological framework for something imperial and quasi-monarchic which, though autocratic, was still antityrannical and imagined as resting on a broad and "democratic" foundation of social consent. Nepos saw that Rome would soon be ruled by one person, and his biographies show how the elites of the day both processed that reality and attempted to circumscribe it for good ends through the creation of new models of legitimacy.

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