

Sullanum Tempus

Historical Studies on the Age
of L. Cornelius Sulla



A Jordi Cortadella y Oriol Olesti

Sullanum Tempus
Historical Studies on the Age
of L. Cornelius Sulla

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(eds.)



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ÍNDICE

PROLOGUE	9
Sulla at the Light of History, beyond Antiquity: A Modern Historiographical Survey	
B. ANTELA-BERNÁRDEZ	13
Rewards, Punishments, and the Sullan <i>nomoi</i> of Athens: Shedding Light on Sulla's Settlement in the Towns of the East	
S. ZOUMBAKI	33
Sulla, Norbanus, and Rhodes	
A. THEIN	51
<i>Post fata resurgo</i>. Pérgamo: la recuperación de una <i>polis</i> asiática tras la represión silana	
I. ARRAYÁS MORALES	63
The Memory of Sulla in Ephesus	
E. LAFLI & M. BUORA	87
Sulla <i>Felix</i>, Sulla <i>Epaphroditos</i>. The Role of Venus in the Dictator's Rise to Power: Epigraphical and Archaeological Issues	
V. VARI & I. TRAFFICANTE	95
Money for the Emperor. The Birth of Imperial Coinage in L. Cornelius Sulla Felix' Propaganda	
S. P. MALTESE	115
The Foxy Lion. Sulla as Field Commander	
B. ANTELA-BERNÁRDEZ	143
L. Cornelio Sila y los inicios de Julio César	
M. A. NOVILLO LÓPEZ	159
BIBLIOGRAPHY	171

PROLOGUE

Among the many historical characters from the past, the name of Lucius Cornelius Sulla deserves a careful approach. Like Alexander the Great or even Jesus from Nazareth, Classical Scholars have argued many ways to understand the deep impact Sulla meant for the Politics and Culture of the Late Roman Republic. Deadly Reformer, in the way Ernst Badian described him, or failed attempt of a Roman monarchy in the end of the Republic, if we decide to follow Jérôme Carcopino? The well-known assessment by Wilcken that every Historian and Scholar has his own Alexander can easily be here applied also to Sulla. Not in vain, many scholars on Alexander had also feel the attraction of the difficulties to understand Sulla's rule, and his time and legacy.

However, silence has been also a usual answer concerning Sulla. Ancient authors dedicate him a wide attention, and we have a considerable amount of sources, if we compare them with other situations or topics. However, the general historical perception on Sulla have to solve a difficult struggle, both with himself as a violent, forced authoritative ruler, and also with the generation that follows his own time, when the greatness of the charismatic Julius Caesar shades every previous historical change as a framework, marking each interpretation as a precedent (or not) of his own challenging age.

Likewise, the facts and development of Sulla's career and the political transformation of the Roman Republic was a result of the rest of actors in context. Actually, in our opinion, we shall consider not just Sulla as a key role in a changing world, but the whole age: the *Sullanum Tempus*. In his book of 2002, M. Lovano used the label *Cinnanum Tempus* to recall the importance of the rule of Cinna (and Marius) in the thrilling clash of political conceptions (and practices, including the use of extreme violence and aggressive, lethal politics) of the First Civil War in Rome during the First Century BC. Due to the friendly efforts by Alexander Thein

and Alexandra Eckert in their Panel at the 2016's Celtic Conference in Classics on Sulla that gathered many scholars interested in working and reworking of Sulla's scholarship, the editors of this book decided to follow their path and re-unite every scholar interested on Sulla. So we did an ill-fated call for a reunion to be held in 2020. The rest is just another episode of the History of Mankind in our own days: Covid-19 Pandemics stopped everything. Our first attempt to re-locate the reunion in 2021 felt in the same hole, and Covid-19 threw our aim twice.

The book the reader has at hands now is the result, and in some way the solution, the editors find to finally put all problems from Covid-19 situations aside in order to collect what must have been the papers in discussion during the reunion that never happened. In the first version of this collection, many other authors would like to take part, but the delays, the problems and the inconvenient unknowing of the unexpected shocked the whole initial project of this book. So on, the essays finally gathered are a brilliant show of what is nowadays at the table for those who work on Sulla and *his* Times. A quick overview can first notice the deep impact of the seminal work by Federico Santangelo, *Sulla, the Elites and the Empire* (2007) had in the last decades in this topic. After Santangelo's work, other authors have faced the difficult enigma of Sulla's history and impact. In order to put some order in the meaning of Sulla and the use and understanding of his person and the historical character he embodies in the many reviews Historians through the ages, this book starts with a historiographical survey by Borja Antela-Bernárdez on Sulla and his times through different European traditions until recent authors.

On the other hand, many chapters in this book are related to the Eastern cities and the Sulla's effect on them. The chapters by Sophia Zoumbaki, Alexander Thein, Isaías Arrayás, Ergün Laflı and Maurizio Buora are dedicated to analyze many facets of this question with their studies on concrete cities, cases, and evidences. A second part of the book is clearly dedicated to the features and novelties Sulla put to work in his charismatic conception of the exhibition of power, in order to build a brand new (at least in Rome) scheme for legitimacy. The reader can find traces from different approaches to Sulla's development of a special relationship with the divine in the chapter by Valentina Vari and Ilaria Trafficante, while Sebastiano Paolo Maltese deals in his chapter with the way Sulla's propaganda finds its expression on coins. Finally, Borja Antela-Bernárdez shares some questions concerning the way Sulla commands his troops and how he manage closely with his soldiers. To finish, and maybe in order to observe the real impact and historical meaning of Sulla's Times, Miguel Ángel Novillo draws the lines between Sulla and the unavoidable Julius Caesar.

Until its conclusion, this book has suffered so many difficulties, obstacles and problems. The main one had been, of course, Covid'19 Pandemic situation and all the unexpected (and sometimes, nonsense) situations that lead us to deal with; but the worldwide pandemic scenario was not the unique complication, and if the book finally became a reality, it is worthy to note here that it was due to the compromise

of the great authors (some of them finally didn't took part, but many tried to during the four years this book took to be done) gathered in the following pages. For this reason, as editors we are in debt with Sophia, Alex, Ergün & Maurizio, Valentina & Ilaria, Sebastiano and Miguel Ángel, everyone a dear friend and a brilliant scholar who with great generosity offered their time, hard work and aim to surpass previous knowledge to contribute to this volume.

To conclude, the final aim of this book is to contribute scholarship in order to get deeper perspectives concerning a challenging and so thrilling age, when Rome tried to keep being Rome while the Hellenistic way of life and rule threads the main base of the Roman society and world concept, in order to create a new world to be born by the hands of Caesar and Augustus. May Sulla be the last reformer? May he be the Roman Republican at Rome? Shall he conciliate the different opposed parties despite destroying them, as he did? We can not probably know for sure the answers, but in History, and mainly in that of the Antiquity, questions are key, and the gate to find original proposals and perspectives in order to face our own contemporary challenges.

The Editors

Barcelona, June 2023

SULLA AT THE LIGHT OF HISTORY, BEYOND ANTIQUITY: A MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY

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The history of the era of the First Civil War and the initial phase of the crisis of the Roman Republic has received considerable attention from historiography. The period is profoundly complex, especially due to the nature of its sources¹, as well as the fundamental bibliography and studies on this historical moment². However, despite the detailed attention that research has dedicated to this period in Roman history, a historiographical review of the perspectives on the Dictatorship of Sulla has not been conducted (with the exception of the German tradition, reviewed in detail two decades ago by the great Karl Christ³) from the Modern Era to the present day⁴. The aim of the following lines is precisely to address this gap in historiography⁵.

¹ Vervaeke 2023, 16: “Roman history from the origins of the Social War to the epochal dictatorship of Cornelius Sulla tends to be relatively well known but poorly understood, not least because the extant body of source material resembles the remains of an old library after thorough bombardment, and we furthermore have no more or less contemporary Italic literary sources”.

² For a recent compilation on the fundamental works that study this historical period, see Vervaeke 2023, 16, n. 4.

³ Christ 2002, 145-170.

⁴ Regarding the perception of Sulla by the ancients, we have excellent studies: Laffi 1967; Hinard 1984b. The best overview of the ancient perception of Sulla has been recently published by Eckert 2019, featuring invaluable opinions and arguments, as well as a comprehensive bibliography.

⁵ As far as I have been able to ascertain, beyond the notable German exception discussed by Christ 2002, only Hinard 1985a, 286-290 has undertaken a similar approach (albeit very succinctly) to that of the present proposal. François Hinard’s effort, despite its brevity, is remarkable. Firstly, it highlights the deep connection between French culture and the myth of the personal dictatorship in French culture, evident both in the critique of absolute monarchy –as shown by the early discourse of Étienne de la Boétie– and in the contexts before and after the French Revolution, including the roles of certain personalities (especially Napoleon,

The preface of one of the most popular biographies of our time on Sulla, the fascinating *Sulla: The Last Republican* by Arthur Keaveney, begins by surprisingly mentioning the little-known work of George P. Baker from 1927. Baker, in turn, began his work by clearly stating the reasons that had led him to write his book:

“There are many reasons why Lucius Cornelius Sulla should be of particular interest to us to-day. (...) Not to know who Sulla was, or what he did, is to be ignorant of one of the crucial episodes of history: an episode which neatly illustrates the problems of our own age.

(...) Not until the idea of Dictatorship became a living contemporary issue was any one likely to see either interest or meaning in Sulla’s career. We shall look in vain for any authoritative biography of Sulla from the great Victorians. There is none⁶. There is not even any sign that they knew what he was, or meant. But with Mussolini dominating Italy, Primo del Rivera ruling Spain, and Pilsudski Poland, and with a Dictatorship of the Proletariat reigning in Russia, and likely to go on doing so –with all these present actualities, we can look at Sulla with fresh eyes and suspect that he had more meaning than our fathers imagined. And he had. He did mean more than they thought. But there was nothing in the circumstances of their own days to reveal what that meaning was. We can understand Sulla better, because we live in an age more like his own.

There is a proverb that History repeats itself. There is just this much obvious truth in it, that the history of social institutions is a kind of biology; for the collective life of man, like his individual life, develops by a definite law. We know the series of changes through which the physical body goes. Everything we can say about it we can similarly say of the changes through which civilisation passes. Both have definite stages. (...) The course of civilisation can be predicted with no less –and no more– certainty. (...) We erred in imagining that the democracy which succeeded was the last, final, never-to-be-changed form of political organisation... It has all happened before... On the last journey round, Sulla followed Tiberius Gracchus as Mussolini has followed Mazzini.

Sulla was thus a very modern man –far more modern, more one of ourselves, than Alfred the Great or Cesar Borgia. Sulla faced most of the problems which a modern statesman has to face. He was familiar with the decay of religious faith, the failure of aristocracy, the rise of Bolshevism, the industrial revolution, and the power of International finance. He was accustomed to the modern woman; he was an ardent play-goer; he was involved in the problem of the ex-service man.

(...) His life story is one of the very few available to us which give us a working model for a great civilisation like our own, struggling with our own difficulties”⁷.

but not exclusively). Secondly, it is unique, until these pages, in its intention to perceive the interpretative tradition regarding Sulla, encompassing not only the historiographic perspective but also the perception within cultural tradition.

⁶ Indeed, there were likely no strict biographies of Sulla in Great Britain around the 1800s, but there were histories of Rome, and some of them provided detailed accounts of Sulla. A magnificent example can be found in Pococke 1852, 374–476, which includes over 100 pages and a chapter dedicated to Mithridates. The chapters on Sulla were authored by Thomas Arnold.

⁷ Baker 1927 [2001], 5–8.

Beyond the surprising historicist tone after the first quarter of the 20th century, certainly a result of the *popular* nature of Baker's objective –Baker being a successful and prolific author of his time, though not an academic⁸– such a presentation of Sulla has two major values. The first is to highlight the remarkable relevance of the Roman figure in the historical context of the 20th century, especially in relation to the emergence of certain personalities who, particularly in the interwar period, seized power with varying degrees of initial respect for the legal or juridical framework (and often even at its expense). At the time Baker wrote, prior to the devastating Crisis of 1929, these were figures clearly linked to the army⁹. Secondly, and of greater interest for the present study, Baker is aware of the scant historiographical attention that his time, and previous generations, had paid to the figure of Sulla. In this, he is entirely correct.

Beyond the Victorian authors that Baker explicitly mentions, we can slightly trace the fundamental reference works on the history of modern Europe to notice that the character of Lucius Cornelius Sulla was not one that deeply fascinated, unlike other figures from Antiquity, such as Alexander or Cyrus, to cite two well-known cases. Machiavelli, for example, does not mention Sulla in his major works, and although he shows awareness of the character, in some of his letters he simply associates Sulla with Marius as an example of a bad relationship or bitter enmity, which proves detrimental to the community as a whole¹⁰. Similarly marginal is Sulla's inclusion in Bossuet's work, *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, published in 1681. Bossuet only mentions Sulla in relation to Marius and as a degradation of the struggle for power in the Roman Republic, but in no way could we consider him a notable protagonist in Bossuet's historical discourse. Nonetheless, in Bossuet we find a concern, shared by Baker centuries later, regarding Sulla as the first and pernicious antecedent of tyrannical and illegitimate unipersonal power¹¹:

“At the same time, Rome was torn by the furious struggle between Marius and Sulla (666 A.U.C. et seq., 88-87 B.C.), one of whom had terrified the south and the north, while the other was the victor over Greece and Asia. Sulla (671 A.U.C., 82 B.C.), who was called the Fortunate, was too fortunate against his country, which he enslaved by his tyrannical dictatorship (675 A.U.C., 79 B.C.). Even though he did relinquish the sovereign power voluntarily, a bad precedent was established. Everyone wanted to rule”¹².

⁸ Cary 1928, 30-31.

⁹ I wonder if he would have considered later figures such as Truman or Churchill among the roster of these emerging personalities who amassed power, as I pretend Ernst Badian seem to have done: Antela-Bernárdez 2012; 2020.

¹⁰ Machiavelli *Epistle* 7 17.

¹¹ In a certain way, the context of the aforementioned letter by Machiavelli already establishes this tacit link between the idea of Sulla and tyranny, as in the preceding sentence, Machiavelli incidentally mentions Tarquin the Proud (*Superbus*).

¹² Bossuet 1967, 66-67. The influence of Bossuet in Baker is, to me, perfectly clear, both in the sentence “Fortunate Sulla” and in considering his historical meaning just attached to Dictatorship.

On the contrary, there is clear evidence that the character was widely known. The numerous instances in which Montaigne mentions him in his marvelous *Essays* could be more than eloquent proof, although it should be noted that in these instances, Sulla often appears in relation to Marius, or within the list of significant military politicians or those with aspirations for unipersonal power, such as Caesar or Pompey¹³. In contrast, his friend Étienne de la Boétie, who dedicates deep and still relevant reflections to tyranny, does not mention Sulla, probably because his treatise *Discours de la servitude volontaire ou le Contr'un* (published in 1548), when referring to what he calls “Roman tyrants,” intends to reference the era of the emperors, not the Republic.

Nonetheless, against this certain marginality in the French context, the rich work of Juan Luis Vives emerges in Spanish. Vives is the author of the *Declamationes Sullanae*, which were highly appreciated by European scholars, including Erasmus himself¹⁴, although over time, including our own, they have been easily forgotten. In these *Declamationes*, published between 1520 and 1538, originally dedicated to Emperor Charles V, although the intended recipient was later changed to his young brother Ferdinand, Vives aims to influence the formation of the prince through these political reflections on a complex and tumultuous period of Roman history. The central theme of this pseudo-fiction, meticulously crafted from a profound knowledge of the sources (which is surprising, given the early stage of the reception of classical literature in Western Europe), is none other than Sulla's abdication and his reasons and motives for the virulence of his dictatorship¹⁵, a recurring theme in the perception of the character, who is considered a tragic protagonist.

In fact, Sulla was a protagonist in various forms of popular fiction during the modern era, as evidenced by Corneille's theatre in 17th-century France¹⁶, or the different operas in which he appeared as a character in the 18th century¹⁷. This popularity reflects both the tragic tradition of the character in the face of violence and power, and his friendship with Marius. In contrast to this tradition, which often criticizes Sulla, another tradition emerges in parallel, particularly around the context of 18th-century Europe and the debates on forms of participation, governance, and revolts. This tradition, opposed to the tragic criticism, praises the character as

¹³ The influence of Plutarch on Montaigne is more than evident.

¹⁴ Indeed, Erasmus was the author of a prologue for the work: Fantazzi 2008, 3. Similarly, Vives maintained an intense relationship with various prominent scholars (who have gained more fortune in memory), such as Thomas More (Fantazzi 2008, 3) and G. Budé (Tournoy / Mund-Dopchie 2015).

¹⁵ George 1989.

¹⁶ Hinard 1985, 287: “Plus familier à notre culture, Corneille a, bien sûr, contribué à accréditer l'image du tyran”.

¹⁷ Hinard 1985a, 288 mentions the work *Lucio Silla* by Giovanni di Gamerra, which was later set to music by Mozart (1773), Jean-Christien Bach (1776), and Michele Michele Mortellari (1778); Hinard 1985b, 1-2. The context is clearly pre-French Revolution. The dissemination of these motifs across Europe demonstrates that this context was common and applicable to a large part of European nations.

a model patriot and a self-sacrificing reformer. Based on the profound enigma of his abdication, Sulla is reclaimed as a politician supposedly driven to excessive repression by the need to safeguard the homeland. This tendency gains more strength after the French Revolution, with works like *Sylla* by Étienne de Jouy (1821), which, through fiction and history, mapped out a significant part of the public debate on Napoleon (who had died shortly before the play premiered¹⁸). Both traditions remain alive in the discourse on Sulla to this day.

In the 18th century, Herder's work, so innovative and influential, marked an important shift in the general consideration of European historiography regarding Sulla. Herder judges both Sulla and Marius as responsible for the degradation of the Republic, and consequently the greatness of Rome, due to the non-aristocratic origin he attributes to both Marius (who was indeed of plebeian origin) and Sulla himself. Underlying this interpretation is the plutocratic conception of social hierarchy, which in turn links political capacity with noble origin, such that any access of the popular classes to government is seen, in this view, as entirely imbued with the selfish greed of the poor who become rich through social disorder¹⁹. This is how it is expressed in his *Ideas for a Philosophy of Human History* (1784-1791):

“So that in later times the first statesmen to possess supreme authority in Rome, Marius and Sulla, were plebeian in origin and finally even the lowliest men rose to the highest dignities. This was unquestionably the ruin of Rome: for in the early days of the republic patrician pride had been its basis and only gradually did the nobility's overbearing arrogance become the cause of all the internal dissensions that would follow. How to strike a balance between senate and people, between patricians and plebeians, was the issue perpetually in dispute for the constitution of Rome; so that, with the scales tipping in favor of one side and then another, the republic eventually came to an end”²⁰.

Undoubtedly, the Enlightenment, and the historical development of social conflict leading to the French Revolution and subsequent European revolutions, form the framework from which Herder seeks to elaborate a historical explanation (with rational intent and universal validity!). This also had to do with who financed the works and the time of men like Herder, and who was supposed to be the audience for their works, although certainly the rest of the reading population also absorbed many of these readings and were fully aware of the classical tradition (as demonstrated by modern theater from Shakespeare and Racine to Lope de Vega, and the many classical references in highly popular works such as *Don Quixote*).

¹⁸ Hinard 1985a, 288 draws a direct relationship between the death of Napoleon and the premiere of Jouy's work.

¹⁹ These ideas were applied indiscriminately to historical explanations of many other epochs, as we can see, for example, in the conception of the decline of classical Greece by 19th-century authors: vid. Antela-Bernárdez 2019, 99-100.

²⁰ Herder 2024, 396-397.

In a context clearly marked by discussions of ideas on political distribution and participation, and the questioning of royal power, Herder returns to the political tradition that advocated the balance of powers. However, this was not a general position in the Enlightenment, as demonstrated by Montesquieu's intense criticism of Sulla's excesses and his violations of the law in his *Considerations on the Causes of the Grandeur and Decline of the Romans* (1734) and in the fictional dialogue (which reveals an impressive knowledge of the sources) titled *Dialogue de Sylla et d'Eucrate* (first published in 1745). Voltaire also unequivocally opposed Sulla, again using him as a symbol and example of the excess of unipersonal power and absolutism:

“Cette jurisprudence qui consiste à ravir a nourriture aux orphelins et à donner à un homme le bien d'autrui fut inconnue dans tout le temps de la République romaine. Sylla l'introduisit dans les proscriptions. Il faut avouer qu'une rapine inventée par Sylla n'était pas un exemple à suivre”²¹.

The idea of corruption that Herder emphatically pointed out in participatory government²² takes on enormous prominence in Hegel's work. Although Hegel appears to be well-versed in the sources and the history of the end of the Republic, providing very specific details about it, including mentions of Sulla, the presence of Sulla is indeed very marginal, as is the case with most of the major figures of that time, perhaps with the exception of Caesar or Augustus. The reason for this is likely the very conception of Hegel's work and his true objectives, which are not historical in nature, although he certainly demonstrates a profound understanding of the detailed events that marked the end of the Republic. It is no coincidence that Hegel was a mentor, directly or indirectly, to the first great generation of scientific historians in German, among whom Droysen stands out, though he is by no means the only one.

Thus, in describing those times, Hegel aims to offer global explanations of an objective nature, which, due to their conception of universality, could be applicable to any similar moment (perhaps even his own).

“We thus see the most terrible and dangerous powers rising against Rome; yet the military force of this state is victorious over all. Great individuals now appear on the stage as during the times of the fall of Greece. The biographies of Plutarch are here also of the deepest interest. It was from the disruption of the state, which had no longer any consistency or firmness in itself, that these colossal individualities arose, instinctively impelled to restore that political unity which was no longer to be found in men's dispositions. It is their misfortune that they cannot maintain a pure morality, for their course of action contravenes things as they are, and is a series of transgressions. Even the noblest –the

²¹ Cf. Hinard 1985a, 287-288.

²² Perhaps this was partly due to the influence of others, such as Gibbon, or maybe it was in the perception of some authors as an explanation for their own era.

Gracchi— were not merely the victims of injustice and violence from without, but were themselves involved in the corruption and wrong that universally prevailed. But that which these individuals purpose and accomplish, has on its side the higher sanction of the World-Spirit, and must eventually triumph. The idea of an organization for the vast empire being altogether absent, the senate could not assert the authority of government. The sovereignty was made dependent on the people—that people which was now a mere mob, and was obliged to be supported by corn from the Roman provinces”²³.

In the midst of the intermediate period of the liberal revolutions in Europe, between 1822 and 1830, Hegel decries the dangers of a popular class turned into an uncontrollable mass and advocates for those great personalities he considers conduits of the Spirit’s will in the evolution of Universal History. Always complex, and at the same time profoundly simple, Hegel lays the foundation for a conception of the crisis of the Roman Republic and the specific period of Sulla that can well be observed in a much more historical, ostensibly more rigorous, and above all, historically more prestigious framework, such as the work of Theodore Mommsen. His *Römische Geschichte* is still one of the most highly regarded and relevant works, and the awarding of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1902²⁴ made it a classic of great popularity beyond the usually hermetic academic circles.

Throughout his *volume III*, Mommsen dedicates extensive and detailed attention to the character of Sulla, due to his pivotal importance in the historical process of the Republic’s crisis. Nevertheless, it seems noteworthy to include the conclusion with which he assesses Sulla’s dictatorship:

“Hardly had any democrat ever exercised justice in forms so tyrannical, or disturbed and remodelled the foundations of the constitution with so reckless an audacity, as this conservative reformer. But if we look at the substance instead of the form, we reach very different results. Revolutions have nowhere ended, and least of all in Rome, without demanding a certain number of victims, who under forms more or less borrowed from justice atone for the fault of being vanquished as though it were a crime”²⁵.

Mommsen’s aim to exonerate Sulla from grave responsibility for his terrible acts seems evident, all for the sake of the outcome²⁶. This Machiavellian assessment by Mommsen allows him to compose an explanation with clear echoes of the tradition we have traced, while still offering a historically liberal explanation. Its reactionary tone is not without probable warnings about the risks that the revolutionary movements

²³ Hegel 1914, 322.

²⁴ The only Nobel Prize awarded for a historical work until 2015 was when the Swedish Academy awarded it to Svetlana Alexievich.

²⁵ Mommsen 1894, 543.

²⁶ It is worth noting, following Hinard 1985a, 289, that Mommsen seeks to hold the entire Roman aristocracy accountable for the horrors of Sulla, which reflects his contemporary outlook and historical context.

of his time (different from those in Hegel's era and evolving towards the various forms of popular and labor struggle that marked the early 20th century) could face in their attempts at revolt. These risks, which Mommsen considers more than justified, at least in his assessment of Sulla, are seen as necessary for the good of the system.

Indeed, this was a common interpretation of Sulla in some erudite contexts (and I would add among wealthy classes) in Europe, judging by the similarity of Mommsen's judgment to that of Edward A. Freeman, a British historian²⁷. Freeman justifies abuses of power for the common good and, above all, for building the future (through the dispute over the past, of course). In one of his texts defending Frederick II of Prussia²⁸, he argues:

“But a man who influences future ages is not necessarily a good man. No man ever had a more direct influence on the future history of the world than Lucius Cornelius Sulla. The man who crushed Rome's last rival, who saved Rome in her last hour of peril, who made her indisputably and for ever the head of Italy, did a work greater than the work of Caesar. Yet the name of Sulla²⁹ is one at which we almost instinctively shudder. So the faults and crimes of Frederick, his irreligion, his private licentiousness, his barbarous cruelty, would not of themselves be enough to hinder him from leaving his stamp upon his age in the way that other ages have been marked by the influence of men certainly not worse than he. Still, to exercise any great and lasting influence on the world, a man must be, if not virtuous, at least capable of objects and efforts which have something in common with virtue. Sulla stuck at no crime which could serve his country or his party, but it was for his country and his party, not for purely selfish ends, that he laboured and that he sinned. Thorough devotion to any cause has in it something of self-sacrifice, something which, if not purely virtuous, is not without an element akin to virtue. Very bad men have achieved very great works, but they have commonly achieved them through those features in their character which made the nearest approach to goodness”³⁰.

In terms that are very similar, the other major representative of positivism, Niebuhr, expresses himself similarly. In his own words, we can once again observe the notion of decay and corruption due to the lower classes:

²⁷ In addition to being a candidate for the English Parliament, Freeman was first a professor and later the father-in-law of Sir A. Evans at Oxford. They both fought together in Bosnia against the Ottoman Empire.

²⁸ Frederick II himself wrote a play dedicated to Sulla in French, which was translated into English by Samuel Derrick in 1753. The theme of the play, as expected, is Sulla's abandonment of power. However, in the preface of the first edition of the English translation, it can be read that “The Author of *An Hymn to Liberty*, in his *Note upon Sylla*, remarks, that what Plutarch attributes to him as Acts of Cruelty, were rather those of Justice, such as a noble Resentment for the Injuries done to the Republic, extorted from him, and without which the reinstating her Tranquility seemed impossible”: Derrick 1753, 4.

²⁹ It seems clear to me the connection in a text about Frederick II of Prussia, between Freeman's “the name of Sulla” and Droysen's “Der Name Alexanders...”, which Droysen allegedly used to begin his famous *Geschichte Alexanders des Grossen*, first published in 1831 and which Freeman likely knew. Regarding the relationship between Droysen's Alexander and Frederick II of Prussia, vid. Antela-Bernárdez 2019, 41.

³⁰ Freeman 1871, 287-288.

“The Roman people ever refreshed and renewed itself, and Rome is the only state, which down to the fifth century constantly returned to its own principles, so that its life was ever becoming more glorious and vigorous, a feature which Montesquieu regards as the only true movement in the life of states.

At a later period checks were employed to repress that which was coming into existence, and then life began to withdraw and symptoms of decay became visible. Traces of this state of things appeared even a hundred years before the time of the Gracchi; in their age it broke out and continued to increase for forty years, until it produced the war of the allies and that between Sulla and Marius, from which the people came forth as a disorderly multitude, which could no longer exist in republican unity, but necessarily required the absolute authority of a ruler”³¹.

In the interpretative context of Mommsen’s (and Niebuhr’s) success, seemingly favourable towards absolute personal authority³², the shadow of Sulla reappears as a historical argument in public discourse. Evidence of this can be found in works such as the tragedies *Sylla* by Alfred Mortier (1913, before World War I) or Leon Daudet (1922, after WWI) in France³³, or later, in England, Baker’s work anticipates the 1930s and the rise of fascism, although in its prologue one can observe how skilfully the author read the zeitgeist of his contemporary time. Baker shares with Mommsen the positive idea about Sulla and the violence of his reforms, attributing them to the organic flow of the usual, circular, objective, and universal paths of historical evolution.

It’s hard not to be aware of how these historical discourses aim to explain the reality of the growing discontent among the working classes, along with the spread of social reform movements among them, which among many international processes would eventually culminate in the Russian Revolution. As we’ve seen at the outset, this presence of proletarian revolution is very much in the consciousness of authors regarding Sulla’s history, as exemplified by Baker’s mention of Soviet Russia as a communist dictatorship of the proletariat, equated with other contemporary single-person dictatorships (Mussolini, Primo de Rivera, or Pilsudski).

Certainly, the echo of these times found common formulation in the interest in Sulla, as demonstrated by the influential work of Jérôme Carcopino, *Sylla ou la monarchie manquée*, originally published in 1932. Arguably, this is the most influential (and

³¹ Niebuhr 1850, 96.

³² This must have been a general ideological context in some European political trends during the period between the French Revolution and World War II. The great scholar François Hinard (1985b, 3) asserts that “On devrait évaluer l’importance de l’histoire de Sylla utilisée par les polémistes, au lendemain de la première Guerre mondiale, notamment dans la droite française qui n’hésitait pas à qualifier l’épuration de 82 de «remède héroïque» destiné à purger la république des «traîtres et tarés» qui «avaient persisté à défendre ou prôner la révolution violente et émeutière, ou simili-légale, et même législative et démocratique, et à la soutenir de leurs deniers» et qui affirmait qu’elle était une procédure légale justifiée par la nécessité de rétablir l’ordre”.

³³ Hinard 1985a, 289.

perhaps the least known) work on Sulla throughout the 20th century³⁴. His interpretive proposal fits well with the trends observed in the preceding context while adding a new perspective. In his attempt to explain the revolutionary nature of Sulla's dictatorship in Roman history, Carcopino elucidates the influence of Hellenistic absolutism on Sulla's political formulation, while also reconciling it with Sulla's republican tradition by considering him a traditional Roman republican, opposed to popular reforms since the Gracchi, or even earlier to the *Secessio plebis*³⁵. Therefore, in form, Sulla may have developed the first step towards Augustus' one-man empire (perhaps also sketched by Caesar), but in essence, his objective was not to establish a one-man authority but to reconstruct the oligarchic values of the Republic³⁶.

This vision acquired another, much more contemporary perspective in the reading of Carcopino by Carolina Lanzani in fascist Italy of 1936. The connection drawn between Sulla and Mussolini is evident.

“E mi sia permesso ancora esprimere una speranza. La speranza che al grande Construttore dell'Italia nuova possa non indegnamente essere consacrata questa mia indagine di verità sull'opera vetusta di un altro immortale Construttore di nostra gente”³⁷.

Among all those under the significant influence, direct or indirect, of Carcopino, perhaps the most surprising is Sir Ronald Syme himself. Although the chronological context of his *Roman Revolution* (published in 1939 and developed during the decade of totalitarian rise across much of Europe³⁸) covers a period after Sulla (60 BC-14 AD), Syme dedicates some reflections in his introductory chapter to Sulla that deserve attention, even if they are not entirely novel. Syme was deeply influenced by German historiography³⁹, and the echo of the traditions meticulously detailed in Carcopino's work (which, to some extent, were on the minds of conservative intellectuals of the time, as we have seen with Baker). Indeed, Syme's words primarily display a veiled admiration for Sulla, who, in addition to clearly marking a

³⁴ Hurllet 1993, 9: “Sa thèse influença longtemps la recherche, mais elle est aujourd'hui abandonnée. (...) Cette thèse fut très tôt défendue par C. Lanzani et V. Valgiglio; elle prévaut actuellement chez tous les spécialistes de Sylla et de cette période: E. Gabba, E. Badian, Cl. Nicolet, A. Keaveney et Fr. Hinard”.

³⁵ According to Taylor 1927, 118, Carcopino's work shares many similarities with Baker's initially less developed opinion: “Mr. Baker hesitates to modify the traditional view of Sulla's unvarying conservatism: the dictator's aim (p- 256) was apparently the restoration of the mystical, the ideal democracy, by the re-creation of the old aristocracy—a conservative policy after all. (...) Unconsciously Sulla prepared the way for Augustus”.

³⁶ Hurllet 1993, 9: “En réalité, il faut voir en Sylla un républicain au sens romain du terme: sa dictature restaura un régime oligarchique et tendait d'abord à annuler la plupart des initiatives “populaires” réalisées depuis les Gracques”.

³⁷ Quoted by Hinard 1985a, 288.

³⁸ Regarding the impact of Syme's contemporary reality on his work, and the context of his political relations during the 1930s and World War II, vid. García Vives 2016, 30-37.

³⁹ Regarding this direct influence, Momigliano's opinion in his review of Syme is very interesting: Momigliano 1940, 75-80, esp. 75.

chronological boundary between one period of Roman politics (and the crisis of the Republic) and the next, also appears in Syme's words as the restorer of order, thus presenting a clear exoneration of any negative effects of his actions:

"The party led by Marius, Cinna and Carbo was defeated. L. Cornelius Sulla prevailed and settled order at Rome again through violence and bloodshed. Sulla decimated the knights, muzzled the tribunate, and curbed the consuls. But even Sulla could not abolish his own example and preclude a successor to his domination"⁴⁰.

"Sulla the Dictator, himself a patrician and a Cornelius, did his best to restore the patriciate, sadly reduced in political power in the previous generation, not so much through Marius as from internal disasters and the rise of dynastic houses of the plebeian nobility"⁴¹.

Beyond the evident parallel that Syme draws between the two warring factions in the period of his *Roman Revolution* and the political reality of his Great Britain, with Tories and Whigs, his introduction also exudes the idea of generational degradation, where the Rome he describes seems to have lost the greatness of the men (aristocrats) of another time⁴². However, his opinions on Sulla appear much more explicitly in his *Papers*:

"In 80 BC Sulla had been consul as well as dictator, perhaps more the one than the other. Tenure of the magistracy enabled him to modify the character of his regiment, to glide with discretion from despotism into legality, and to safeguard the delicate transition. (...) But Sulla Felix was satiated with glory. He envied no man, and he feared none. (...) Sulla resigned because his work was done, his mandate fulfilled. The title of his office described his function and implied a brief duration. (...) But if, from a later point of vantage, one [12] contemplated the succession of military leaders from Sulla to Caesar and Caesar Augustus, the emergence of an emperor to rule a universal empire seemed logical and inevitable.

(...) As long as Sulla held the dictatorship, his rule was absolute, his competence universal, reviving the integral imperium of the ancient kings.

(...) Sulla's despotism admits no disguise and needs no palliation. Its very excesses are explained by the time and the season—a decade preceding, full of war and revolution.

⁴⁰ Syme 1939, 16-17.

⁴¹ Syme 1939, 18.

⁴² Syme 1939, 18: "But neither Valerii nor Fabii stand in the forefront of his oligarchy. The predominance of the Valerii had passed long ago, and the Fabii had missed a generation in the consulate. The Fabii and the main line of the Cornelii Scipiones had been saved from extinction only by taking in adoption sons of the resplendent Aemilii. But the power of the Cornelii was waning. Their strength now lay in the inferior Lentuli, whose lack of dangerous enterprise was compensated by domestic fertility and a tenacious instinct for survival"; 19: "abrupt decadence"; 20: "a suitable and visible inauguration of the restored aristocracy"; 21: "the principes viri of note during the first decade of its existence"; 24: "Roman noble houses, decadent or threatened by rivals in power and dignity"; etc.

Sulla's tyranny was a temporary remedy, designed not for duration but as a means of restoring the ancestral constitution, with necessary amendments"⁴³.

Once again, Sulla is presented as a necessary evil for the defense of the homeland⁴⁴. There is little doubt that Syme aligns himself with the Sullan side of the evaluation of events, rather than maintaining the supposedly impartial stance he claimed with his purported positivism. The justification of historical moments that necessitate a Sulla, in the 1930s, when Baker's Primo de Rivera or Piłsudski were giving way to Franco and Hitler, along with Mussolini, reflects a specific stance on the events of his time.

World War II, along with the horrors that ravaged the world, also brought about a post-war academic scenario in which different orientations emerged regarding the crisis of the Roman Republic. Among these, the work of Kovaliov (originally published in 1945-1948) stands out for its subsequent influence, including in the international context⁴⁵. Kovaliov writes a history of class struggle. Although in his work there is a specific conceptual framework that allows for a renewed and novel reading of the events, focusing on the economic and social aspects from the theoretical perspective of historical materialism, some of Kovaliov's viewpoints also reveal the significant influence of a tradition we have been observing, one that even the supposed profound rupture by Soviet authors could not entirely escape:

“Историческая роль Суллы была велика. Каковы бы ни были его субъективные цели, объективно именно он заложил основы той государственной системы, которую впоследствии расширил и укрепил Цезарь и которую мы называем империей. Принцип постоянной военной диктатуры при сохранении республиканской формы, уничтожение демократии, ослабление сената при его внешнем укреплении, улучшение административного и судебного аппаратов, расширение прав гражданства, муниципальное устройство Италии — все эти меры впоследствии вновь появятся в деятельности преемников Суллы и войдут органической составной частью в государственное устройство Рима”⁴⁶.

⁴³ Syme 2016, 62-64.

⁴⁴ Syme was a devoted patriot: *vid.* García Vives 2018, 281.

⁴⁵ The influence of these manuals by Soviet authors in the Spanish-speaking context was intense. In fact, there were diverse reactions, the most traditionally known was that of Guillermo Fatás (Fatás 1974).

⁴⁶ Ковалев 2002, 496. As far as there is no English translation of this work, the Spanish translation is here truly useful: Kovaliov 1959, 283-284: “La función histórica de Sila fué muy grande. Independientemente de cuáles hayan sido sus propósitos subjetivos, el hecho cierto es que puso las bases del sistema estatal que luego fué reforzado y extendido por César, sistema que nosotros llamamos “Imperio”. El principio de la dictadura militar permanente con el mantenimiento de la forma republicana, la destrucción de la democracia, el debilitamiento del senado aparentando su con solidación, el mejoramiento del aparato administrativo y del judicial, la extensión de los derechos de ciudadanía, la organización municipal de Italia fueron medidas que retomaron sus sucesores y que entraron a formar parte orgánica de la organización estatal de Roma” (I provide here an English translation of this quotation: “Sulla's historical role was significant. Regardless of

With the end of World War II and the establishment of the welfare state, a new society emerged, and with it, a new form of history and academia undergoing profound transformation⁴⁷. Few figures embody this transformation in the field of Ancient History as much as Ernst Badian, a direct student of Syme, though much more versatile and, over time, more influential. Gómez Pantoja noted in an initial effort to compose a modern historiography of Sulla that between 1940 and 1959, the academic production on the period of the first phase of the Republic's crisis (from the Gracchi to Sulla) was still traceable, but from then on, the exponential multiplication of publications made any attempt to undertake this *titanic* task⁴⁸. Those dedicated to historical research on Antiquity become specialists, professionals gradually focusing more on themes and study objects that become concrete and fragmented to an unimaginable extent due to the enormous production (of which it would be unjust to overlook the fundamental importance of German contributions⁴⁹), exponentially increasing the immense difficulties of keeping up with all the publications on a specific topic. It is within this transforming reality that Badian emerges, an author in whom one can still perceive the leap between those works in the pure style of Syme or Mommsen, with eminent source-based work in which Badian excelled in his early years⁵⁰, and the Badian of the 1980s and 1990s, a true prodigy of bibliographic knowledge, who was also up-to-date with all the new epigraphic, archaeological, and numismatic discoveries that inundated the study of Antiquity with new data⁵¹.

his subjective purposes, it is a fact that he laid the foundations of a state system that was later reinforced and extended by Caesar—a system we now call “Empire”. The principle of permanent military dictatorship under the guise of maintaining a republican form, the destruction of democracy, the apparent consolidation yet weakening of the Senate, the improvement of administrative and judicial apparatuses, the extension of citizenship rights, and the municipal organization of Italy were measures taken up by his successors and became integral to Rome's state organization”).

⁴⁷ Perhaps to the imaginary list we could add Momigliano and Altheim.

⁴⁸ Gómez Pantoja 1990, 67: “Hace un cuarto de siglo, era todavía posible enfrentarse a la producción historiográfica de 1940 a 1959 sobre el período de los Gracos a Sila y señalar cuáles eran las metas conquistadas y cuáles, en cambio, eran los puntos que aún requerían mayor investigación. Hoy día, el volumen de artículos y libros sobre esta materia y la multiplicidad de lugares donde pueden aparecer publicados, ponen fuera de lo posible la realización de un *Forschungsbericht* de este medio siglo que resultó crucial para Roma”.

⁴⁹ This interaction and clear dependency of English historiography on German authors are magnificently exposed in the preface to the English translation of the eminent M. Gelzer's work, *The Roman Nobility* (Gelzer 1969, xii-xiii), written by Robin Seager.

⁵⁰ Many of these studies are compiled in his *Studies in Greek and Roman History* (Badian 1964). It is noteworthy that in those studies, already considered classics by 1964, Badian often relies little more than on sources, his critical capacity, and his own interpretation of historical realities. A magnificent example of this is his classic “Alexander the Great and the Loneliness of Power” (Badian 1964, 192-205), originally published in 1962, which contains minimal notes and bibliography. Another seminal work, “Waiting for Sulla” (Badian 1964, 206-234), while having a much richer critical apparatus, lacks the methodological and bibliographical elements that would have satisfied even Badian himself two decades later.

⁵¹ Gómez Pantoja 1991, 71-72. Precisely, that titanic and impossible task of compiling a *Forschungsbericht* on the Sullan period (note 33) would have been undertaken for the earlier period analyzed by Gómez Pantoja, precisely by Badian 1962b. This demonstrates magnificently his mastery of bibliography.

Although Badian's work is extensive, and crucial studies such as *Foreign Clientelae* (1958) or *Publicans and Sinners* (1972) highlight his extraordinary ability to tackle complex historical processes of economy and society on a global scale with collective protagonists, we cannot overlook his fascination with personalities and specific figures⁵². This may perhaps be an inheritance or a collateral result of his training with Syme, who was so close to prosopography, a field in which Badian always excelled. Nonetheless, despite the two most deeply analysed topics in his vast academic production being Alexander the Great and Lucius Cornelius Sulla, Badian never published a biography of either⁵³. In the case of Sulla, which concerns us here, beyond the numerous articles on issues of this period, we might consider that his lecture in the Todd Lectures, titled *Sulla: The Deadly Reformer*⁵⁴ and subsequently published (in 1970), could be the contribution that comes closest to a monograph on Sulla. In those lines, Badian establishes a relationship of continuity, while also adding a certain distance, with the tradition of historians regarding the questions surrounding the character:

"Order has to be restored"⁵⁵. During 81, with full 'dictatorial' authority that permitted him to do literally whatever he chose to, he reorganized the state by means of a programme of comprehensive reform. (...) Here we might notice a striking aspect of the disintegration that marked the decline of the Roman Republic. Most of the time, it was not opposition to reform that destroyed the state (...); it was reform itself. It was almost as though history had been out to confirm the forebodings of those traditional Optimates who saw anything new (*res nouae*) as a revolution and any change as a change for the worse. The process is perhaps a warning on the limitations of human foresight –limitations in no way due to the ancients' unfortunate ignorance of computer technology, but as read and obvious today as in antiquity.

The personal 'enigma' of Sulla –an eternal subject of speculation and romance– is not for us to discuss here. The political enigma –that of his retirement– is an unnecessary puzzle, due, like many such, to modern myth building on ancient. Caesar –a very different man, in a very different situation– at a time when the Sullan Republic had shown that it was not viable could not understand Sulla's action; later, it became a subject for debate

⁵² Antela-Bernárdez 2012.

⁵³ His scholarly output (which had already been partially collected in his tribute: Wallace, Harris 1996, 463-475) can be fully consulted in the valuable volume dedicated to him by the Association of Ancient Historians, which he himself helped to found: Thomas 2013, 79-99.

⁵⁴ If it was evident (as we noted earlier) the connection between Baker's emphasis in the title *Sulla the Fortunate* and a certain expression by Bossuet, I cannot help but also point out a similarity between the opposition emphasized by Mommsen as tyrannical and democratic and Badian's title. However, Mommsen's wordplay (tyrannical-democratic) appears in Badian's title with a new twist, by reformulating the emphasis of this juxtaposition around the idea of *deadly*. Certainly, it is worth reflecting on whether this adjective in Badian's title refers directly to Sulla ("Sulla is deadly for those who oppose him") or to his reforms ("his reforms were deadly for the Republic"): Lindersky 2013, 66.

⁵⁵ Certain echoes of Syme's narrative are clearly evident here.

in the schools, and as such it is still with us. In fact, he had no alternative. The time for military monarchy had not yet come –as even Caesar found out, a generation and a bloodbath later, when the Republic could in fact be seen to be dead. It took a great deal more slaughter to make it possible, and then by degrees, with caution and tact⁵⁶. Sulla had had his moment of *regnum*. What had long been a term of political abuse had briefly become reality. Perhaps the thought was not entirely absent, in Sulla's arbitrary cruelty and contempt for morality or public opinion, that reality should act as a deterrent. (...) Sulla's system basically lasted to the end of the Republic –so we have recently been reminded, with convincing documentation. (...) It was worth stressing how solidly, in many respects, Sulla had built. (...) Sulla's system failed because he had overrated the oligarchy to which he had entrusted his *res publica*. For one thing, the adlection of the leaders of the irresponsible equites into the weakened Senate held out little hope of improvement. (...) Sulla, looking at his own time and his own career, had seen it as his duty to provide against excessive ambition, against overeagerness to command armies and govern provinces. He had apparently failed to think of inertia and irresponsibility. Yet it was these petty vices that helped to ruin his system. (...) No one can say that Sulla alone caused the decline of senatorial government. But that he greatly accelerated it and gave it a totally new impetus cannot be seriously doubted. (...) Even more than Sulla's example, it was the example of the *Sullani* that could not be abolished. Sulla's well-planned scheme of reform had handed the government over to a class of proved cowards and open self-seekers, who could neither develop confidence in themselves nor inspire it in the governed, neither give up their gains nor show themselves worthy of them. The Republic had begun to putrefy a generation before it died"⁵⁷.

Despite many differences, Badian is not so far from Syme⁵⁸. In this dialogue between past and present, Badian expresses his concern for his own time, in a post-conflict (World War II) and Cold War setting⁵⁹. In his use of history as a warning, however, the enormous detail of his data, the cold logical foundation, to which he added deep empathy and humanity, and a magnificent prose⁶⁰, configure a new

⁵⁶ This specific passage (about Caesar) has been commented on in detail by Linderski 2013, 62.

⁵⁷ Badian 1970, 20-32.

⁵⁸ Linderski 2013, 78: "After the turmoil of Sulla, incompetence of oligarchy, and chaos of Caesar, the solidity of Augustus receives from Badian a generous though guarded acknowledgment. The Republic was lost, but the Empire of Rome was restored and improved. Augustus, 'after tals and errors of his own' came to realize that 'imperium sine fine ... was not given to any man or people'. The true actors and winners in history are the old Roman qualities of tenacity, restraint and caution".

⁵⁹ Regarding Badian and his place in historiography in relation to the Cold War, the work Antela-Bernárdez 2020 by could be useful.

⁶⁰ Brennan 2013, 10, records the description of what Eugene Borza considered Badian's greatest academic legacy: "the precision with which he wielded his intellectual scalpel, bolstered by unusual competence in both ancient and modern languages, a powerful intellect, and a formidable memory both for what he himself had written and for what he had read of others' work. His scholarship has had a profound influence on the methodology used in the study of ancient history. (...) The result of Badian's scholarship was to set new standards for the criticism of evidence and to establish more rigorous rules for the historical method".

modality of historical discourse—hyper-academic in form and, over time, in the nature of its recipients, increasingly professional and less popular⁶¹.

After Badian's immense erudition and the new academic formulation of *Altertumwissenschaft* (the study of antiquity) filled with notes and hundreds of bibliographic references to consider, the number of which grows exponentially every moment, nothing in professional and academic research on ancient history will ever be the same again. Perhaps this explains the specialized attention given to certain aspects by scholars like François Hinard on the proscriptions⁶², Emilio Gabba on the role of the army⁶³, or Frédéric Hurlet⁶⁴ on the legality of the dictatorial magistracy, to cite some fundamental examples. However, these authors did not compose monographic works on Sulla⁶⁵.

In 1982, the first edition of A. Keaveney's *Sulla: The Last Republican* was published. With notable editorial success (a kind of best-sheller about Antiquity, if such a thing can even exist)⁶⁶, the work saw a second edition in 2005. The initial objective of the book is, on the one hand, to address the absence of a complete biography of Sulla (in English), and at the same time to offer a historical text that can awaken the interest of all audiences and be accessible to any interested reader. In this supposed vacuum, Keaveney explicitly connects with Baker. Just as Badian had written that Sulla and Caesar were very different people in very different worlds, we could describe Baker and Keaveney similarly, despite the purported intention

⁶¹ There are magnificent examples of works still accessible to any reader with interest. The prime example is the almost hypnotic prose of the eminent Erich S. Gruen in *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (Gruen 1974). Nevertheless, the work maintains in its conception of the Republic's crisis concepts very similar to those of Badian (and Syme). In fact, it shares with Syme's *Roman Revolution* a significant portion of its chronology, both starting at the death of Sulla. This allows Gruen to briefly describe the character and his political impact, with assessments that, like Syme's, show a certain sympathy, perhaps a somewhat light view of dictatorship, and above all, a blatant disdain for the faction of the populares, whom he designates as *demagogues*: 8: "Sulla's policy seems clear. Aristocratic strife, which had weakened the senatorial class and erupted in fratricidal warfare, would now be reduced to less dangerous proportions. The Sullan regime advertises conciliation among hostile factions. Not that rivalry or feuds were banned. But the horrors of civil war ensured a broader consensus within the ruling class and a 'gentlemen's agreement' that squabbles were best kept within the family"; 9: "Crisis induced it to close ranks against Tiberius Gracchus in 133, against C. Gracchus in 121, against Marius and the demagogues at the end of the second century"; 12: "At that time also internal strife within the aristocracy went on side by side with demagogic pressures and foreign wars". Considering that these statements comprise part of the beginning of the work, any discerning reader could quickly understand who the protagonists of Gruen's history of Rome are meant to be, and who the undesirable antagonists of his narrative are.

⁶² Hinard 1985b.

⁶³ Gabba 1973.

⁶⁴ Hurlet 1993.

⁶⁵ It is noteworthy to mention Konrad, the author of a critical commentary on Plutarch's *Life of Sertorius*, which itself represents a profound effort, spanning many pages, to address Sullan issues: Konrad 1994.

⁶⁶ Apparently, the work was initially commissioned by Richard Stoneman: Keaveney 2005, xi.

of shared objectives. After all, Taylor⁶⁷ criticized Baker's work precisely for what Keaveney authoritatively exhibits: his extensive academic knowledge of both sources and bibliography. Nevertheless, we can draw a fine line between the fundamental elements of the character's conception, despite the differences in form and content, between both authors. Keaveney writes:

"Searching for a phrase with which we might sum up Sulla, we could do worse than say he was a Janus-like figure. His beliefs, his outlook and his attitudes are all deeply rooted in Rome's past. Moulded by centuries of tradition, he instinctively behaved as men of his class had always behaved. Service to the state had ever been the ideal of the Roman noble and Sulla strove to live up to it. He sought not the overthrow of the state, as those of a later generation did, but, in the manner of his ancestors, advanced the fortunes of his own house in its service. On the other hand, many of his actions presage those of the great military barons of the next generation. His march on Rome and his proscriptions soon found willing imitators. Above all, his brief tenure of supreme power showed the warring generals what might be achieved by the victor in their struggles. What, of course, strictly marks off Sulla from these imitators of his is the spirit in which he acted. I have said that Sulla's world view was rooted in the past, but it should be emphasised that those roots grew in a rich soil and nourished a healthy growth. He stood four-square in a tradition which was still living and strong, the tradition which informed the Roman republic. (...) In a sense Sulla sums up in his own person all of the contradictions of the times in which he lived. (...) Thus, it is impossible not to conclude that Sulla, despite all his great talents and all he accomplished, is nevertheless one of the great failures of history. (...) as he himself would probably agree, these things were surely nought when set against the fact that the last republican, who had both the will and the means, could not, for all his striving, save the Roman republic"⁶⁸.

There is very little distance not only between Baker and Keaveney, but especially between Keaveney and Badian, although Keaveney does not seem particularly close here, on the other hand, to Syme's implicit admiration for Sulla⁶⁹. In a sense, Keaveney proposes to understand the character, in part, within his own historical context, in the style of Badian, although his judgment also appears rather pessimistic.

⁶⁷ Taylor 1927, 188.

⁶⁸ Keaveney 2005, 187-188.

⁶⁹ Although in my opinion Keaveney does not defend the dictatorship of Sulla, Gómez Pantoja 1991, 77 notes Keaveney's efforts to always portray the protagonist of his biography in a positive light. In my opinion, more than focusing on the image that Sulla sought to leave for posterity, this defense (perhaps in the most literal sense of the term) by Keaveney may have much to do with his own empathy towards the character. Arthur Keaveney came from a humble and hardworking family background, and perhaps he also felt that his social ascent (from the son of a train driver in Ireland to a professor and Latin researcher at prestigious universities) was due to "family pride", and clearly to "a fortunate mix of personal qualities and luck". Keaveney may have seen in Sulla elements of his own life that fueled his empathy (the literal quotations here are related to Gómez Pantoja's words on Sulla and Keaveney).

Written in the early 1980s, Keaveney must have faced the transformation of a Britain in deep economic crisis, where certain political figures challenged the fundamental structure of British society and its socio-political and cultural model.

Also in the mid-1980s, François Hinard's *Sulla* appeared, a scholarly book presented without footnotes, intended for the general public, which at the same time reintroduced the theme of Sulla in French culture. In line with this tradition, Hinard is critical of the excesses of the character, although at the same time he demonstrates a profound mastery of the sources, which at times gives the book a certain neutral, not only academic but also distant perspective on the character. However, even with this academic perspective, Hinard does not intend to make concessions regarding the harsh judgment of the character (where echoes of the usual framework of interpretation of Sulla can also be perceived, between the last republican and the first sole ruler in Rome, following in the footsteps of Carcopino):

“En d’autres termes, Sulla, qui croyant sincèrement avoir été le nouveau fondateur de Rome, celui qui permettrait à la cite de connaître une nouvelle ère d’équilibre et de prospérité, ne fut en définitive que le dernier vrai chef républicain, mais le chef d’une république donc il démontrait lui-même qu’elle était devenue impossible. Pourtant ce décalage entre le projet qu’il avait conçu et la réelle destinée de son œuvre n’explique pas que Sulla soit devenu pour l’Histoire le prototype du tyran cruel, du monstre froid et du calculateur cynique prêt à tout pour parvenir à ses fins, jouissant orgueilleusement d’un pouvoir conquis à la pointe de son épée et finissant par s’en démettre dédaigneusement une fois qu’il s’en fut lassé”⁷⁰.

In recent decades, there has been a renewed resurgence in studies on Sulla. Although it is too early to evaluate them comprehensively as they are contemporaneous with these lines (and close to the author), names like Federico Santangelo⁷¹, Alexandra Eckert⁷², and Alexander Thein⁷³, among others⁷⁴, indicate a renewed academic interest in Sulla.

More notable and debatable, however, is the ‘popular’ interest that has recently emerged in some media regarding the Dictator Sulla, which underscores the enduring support for many theories from the 20th century about the character. The prime example of these nostalgic and somewhat forgiving views on Sulla’s cruel

⁷⁰ Hinard 1985a, 277.

⁷¹ Santangelo 2007 is already a contemporary classic and essential reference work.

⁷² Eckert 2016b.

⁷³ Thein / Eckert 2019 Thein is a magnificent starting point for anyone aiming to specialize in Sulla. Furthermore, Thein has published fundamental articles that contribute significantly to our understanding of the period.

⁷⁴ Sophia Zoumpaki has focused her attention on the impact of Sulla’s presence in Greece during the First Mithridatic War. On the other hand, the magnificent volume edited by Maria Teresa Schettino and Giuseppe Zecchini (Schettino / Zecchini 2018) The book gathers many of the voices from Italy currently dedicated to studying the themes surrounding the era of Sulla.

purging violence is undoubtedly a famous tweet from the controversial billionaire (and owner of Twitter), Elon Musk, published in response to an original tweet by David Sacks (a frequent collaborator of Musk's) criticizing allegations involving the current (when I write this words) President of the United States, Joe Biden:

"Perhaps we need a modern Sulla" (@elonmusk 13/06/2023).

The responses to this (otherwise typical in a platform like the social network Twitter) pseudo-historical opinion, clearly politically motivated, were not long in coming⁷⁵. However, among the various reactions, it seems evident that some were attempting to draw a connection between the historical model of Sulla's dictatorship, understood (as seen in the Anglo-Saxon tradition especially) as a devoted savior of the country, and Donald Trump, former President of the United States, publicly controversial (following his shadowy role in relation to the Capitol attack in 2023) and once again a presidential candidate for the 2024 elections. The identification on social networks has reached unsuspected points, as exemplified by the case of an image (of unknown authorship) that appeared on Reddit and later on Twitter, supposedly reconstructing the physiognomy of the old Sulla through Artificial Intelligence, although the result clearly bears a resemblance to the portrait of Donald Trump.

As we can see, Sulla has been during the last centuries a kind of eternal challenging question for mankind, "*Un enigme pour tous les temps*"⁷⁶. This fascination and return to nostalgia for Sulla, revitalized with the intention of convincing public opinion, is part of the conservative shift that we can observe worldwide regarding the appropriation and manipulation of historical discourse towards the far right. All of this highlights that our own time is once again confronting the increasing dangers posed by the threat of unchecked, uncontrolled personal power, in the name of order and for the sake of tradition. History, once more, is also a battleground.

⁷⁵ Notable, for example, is that of T. Corey Brennan (@Reppublica1849, 14/06/2023, 08.35 p.m), citing Linderski, regarding the harsh reality of what a contemporary Sulla would entail: purges, proscriptions, confiscations....

⁷⁶ Drumman / Groebe 1902², 422: "Ein Rätsel für alle Zeiten"; Cf. Hurlet 1993, 7. I can not avoid to notice that Drumman's intention with this words ("Ein Rätsel für alle Zeiten") seems to echo that of Thucydides (Thuc. 1.22.3), regarding history as an acquisition for all time.

**REWARDS, PUNISHMENTS, AND THE SULLAN *NOMOI* OF ATHENS:
SHEDDING LIGHT ON SULLA’S SETTLEMENT IN THE TOWNS OF THE EAST**

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In the speech which Sulla addressed to the King of Pontus Mithridates VI at Dardanus, the ambitious king is presented to have dreamt of ruling the whole world, if he only could defeat the Romans (App. *Mith.* 57: ἐν ἐλπίδι ἔχων γῆς ἄρξαι ἀπάσης εἰ Ῥωμαίων κρατήσεως). For a while, it seemed that Mithridates was about to fulfill his dreams, since his call for shaking off the yoke of Roman power had found resonance in many poleis of the East. Several towns in Asia had joined his side and a part of the population of the Greek mainland was also attracted by his promises for “liberation” of Greece¹. However, Mithridates’ good fortune was to be cut short by L. Cornelius Sulla. Despite the pro-Mithridatic climate in many poleis and the superiority of the Pontic troops, Sulla, shortly upon his arrival in Greece (87 BC), managed to defeat them in 86 BC, first in Athens and then in two battles in Boiotia, at Chaeronea and Orchomenos, the first decisive Roman victories in a long lasting war.

Meanwhile, Sulla had fallen into disgrace in Rome, had been declared an enemy of the Roman state, and had been deprived of the command of the war against Mithridates, but he was determined to reap the rewards of his victories and to send the message of his prevalence to the populations of the East, a message which was also to be delivered to his rivals in Rome². In the inscription of the permanent monumental trophy which Sulla had erected at Orchomenos, Mithridates is mentioned along with his allies, making it clear

¹ For a short overview of the reasons why Mithridates’ call found resonance in Asia Minor and Greece and on the choices of specific poleis as well as the pass of certain poleis from one side to the other, see Bernhardt 1985, 33-64 (39-49 on Athens).

² For the period of Sulla’s acting as a warlord, see Zoumbaki 2018.

that not only the king of Pontus, but also those who stood on his side were envisaged as Rome's defeated enemies³. Thus, the fate of the poleis that supported Mithridates was at Sulla's hands. Appian's phrase οἱ τε καππαδοκίσαντες ἄνδρες ἢ πόλεις ἐκολάζοντο πικρῶς (*Mith.* 61) refers to the poleis in Asia, but can be regarded as a shorthand overview of Sulla's treatment of pro-Mithridatic nuclei in general.

Beyond exercising terror and ravage, beyond the removal of treasures and the punishment of philo-Pontic towns with general measures for the payment of war indemnities or tributes⁴, there is some evidence for Sulla's closer engagement with certain issues concerning individual towns. The evidence is random, incomplete and scattered in inscriptions and literary sources of diverse nature and chronology. It is to be stressed that not only literary texts but also a series of *senatus consulta* are dated after Sulla's presence in the East. The *senatus consulta* confirmed retrospectively Sulla's actions, since, as long as he was regarded as *hostis* of the Roman state⁵, his measures were not officially authorized. After Sulla had regained power in Rome and could impose his will as the almighty master of the game, the senate confirmed his earlier decisions (App. *B Civ.* 1.11.97: ὅσα διώκησεν ὁ Σύλλας ὑπατεύων τε καὶ ἀνθυπατεύων, βέβαια καὶ ἀνεύθυνα ἐψηφίζοντο...). The *senatus consulta* were issued by the senate after delegations of the towns concerned were sent to Rome in order to claim their rights and ask for ratification of privileges which they had received from Sulla after the First Mithridatic War. It is thus evident that *senatus consulta* record privileges of the towns in question, whereas punitive measures imposed by Sulla to other regions arise indirectly from these texts, since certain towns were harmed by privileges awarded to others. Therefore, all senatorial documents which refer to Sulla's regulations during the period he was active in the East were issued several years later but offer precious retrospective views on the situation directly after the First Mithridatic War.

In order to gain a coherent image of Sulla's handlings with towns in the East, it is necessary to examine epigraphic and literary sources in parallel. My aim is not to revisit the indications for a *lex Cornelia*, a provincial law given to Asia by Sulla, or to reproduce a full record of sources related to Sulla's treatment of individual towns of the East⁶. I focus mainly on sources recording two major sectors of his arrangements: first, measures concerning the relations of certain poleis towards Rome, namely the

³ On the trophy found at Orchomenos, see Kountouri 2001-2004, 193-194 and the preliminary presentation in Kountouri, Zoumbaki, Petrochilos 2018; the publication of the monument is being prepared by a team of archaeologists and architects.

⁴ This was one of my concerns in Zoumbaki 2019, esp. 39-43 with earlier bibliography; see also Rendina 2020, 74-83.

⁵ For Sulla's declaration as a *hostis*, see App. *B Civ.* 1.73, 77, 81; *Mith.* 51. Generally for the publication of *senatus consulta* in Greek inscriptions, see Harter Uibopuu 2021.

⁶ For the *lex Cornelia* see Coudry / Kirbihler 2010; Kirbihler 2016, 68-76. Santangelo 2007, 122-123 summarizing in a table Sulla's attested or deduced attitude towards various towns; there are certain ambiguous and still debated cases, cf. e.g. Lewis 1991, 126-129 on Smyrna and p. 129 on other poleis; Santangelo 2007, 50-66 on various poleis of Asia.

status of “freedom”, “friendship” and “alliance” with Rome, and second affecting their internal situation, their legal and constitutional system, their social and economic life. On the basis of this evidence, I shall question whether Sulla’s engagement with individual towns was really “close” and “individualized” or whether it complied with a general pattern of his administrative strategy in the aftermath of the First Mithridatic War. My expectation is to trace a common thread behind Sulla’s choices, priorities and arrangements, which could offer a key for better understanding his actions and perhaps allow us to specify on his arrangements in Athens, which are still debated.

ARRANGEMENTS REGARDING THE STATUS OF THE TOWNS TOWARDS ROME AND THEIR INTERNAL AFFAIRS

References in literary and epigraphic sources witness that after the turbulent period of battles of the First Mithridatic War, a negotiation between the victorious ruler and the poleis was in process, as the poleis were anxious to assert their privileges and Sulla wished to re-settle the East and to demonstrate his power.

Sulla’s regulations for individual towns included the awarding or confirmation of a privileged status in their relations with Rome, that of “freedom” and “friendship”. In this paper, I am not going to contribute to the scholarly discussion of the notions of *freedom/libertas* and *friendship/amicitia*⁷, but only to put them in context of their use by Sulla as means of a reciprocal transaction between Rome and the Greek poleis. As our sources allow us to see, in other cases Sulla’s arrangements for both, punished and rewarded poleis, affected their internal affairs, laws, constitution and social life. These two sectors of Sulla’s engagement with individual poleis, namely their status towards Rome and their internal life, are not, however, totally separated. The combination of evidence shows, at least in some cases, that Sulla’s measures conceptualize both the aforementioned sectors, namely that the status of a polis towards Rome, being “free” and a “friend”, entailed or entwined in further regulations affecting the internal affairs of the poleis.

FREEDOM, SPATIAL REARRANGEMENTS, AND AUTONOMY

Sources rarely refer extensively to Sulla’s punitive measures for individual pro-Mithridatic towns of Asia, but a combination of stray pieces of evidence allows us

⁷ On the notion of “freedom”, see Bleicken 1972; Snowden 2010; Balmadeca 2020; on “friendship”, see Brunt 1965; Snowden 2014, 422-444; Marino 2021, 261-262; on the status of *amici* see Zack 2013; cf. also *AMICI POPULI ROMANI. Prosopography of the Foreign Friends of the Romans (3rd Century BCE -4th Century CE*, at <http://www.altaycoskun.com/apr>.

to perceive the situation to a certain extent. Previously “free” towns of Asia were now deprived from the status of “freedom”. The most notable among these towns was Ephesos⁸, which despite its desperate efforts to reverse Sulla’s negative attitude by declaring war against Mithridates and by presenting the town as a victim of fear⁹, was severely punished; Pergamon lost its freedom as well, but attempted to recover it, as the dossier of Diodoros Paspáros reveals¹⁰, while an inscription in honour of P. Servilius P. f. Isauricus (governor of Asia of 48 BC) ἀποδεδωκότα τῇ πόλει τοὺς πατρίους νόμους καὶ τὴν δημοκ[ρα]τίαν ἀδούλωτον shows that the polis had regained a privileged status under Caesar (*OGIS* 433). Further provisions had consequences in the internal life of pro-Mithridatic towns as they affected the heart of their political, social and economic life. As Sulla mentioned in his speech to Mithridates, the king had imposed slaves and debtors as rulers of some towns (*App. Mith.* 58: τὰς πόλεις, αἷς τοὺς θεράποντας καὶ χρήστας ἐπέστησας ἐλευθερίας καὶ χρεῶν ἀποκοπαῖς); these regimes were obviously overthrown and the ruling power in the towns changed hands. Beyond financial levies and war indemnities, Appian (*Mith.* 61) mentions that Sulla proclaimed that manumissions of slaves by Mithridates were not valid and the slaves had to return to their masters; cancellation of debts were invalid, and various transactions which took place in the towns during the period of Mithridates’ influence should be abolished. In cases of disobedience to Sulla’s decisions, slaughter both of free people and slaves ensued, while revolt in some cases was suppressed by plunder and the demolition of city-walls, and the inhabitants were sold into slavery. Sulla’s measures aimed at the reinstatement of the political order as well as of the social and economic relations which had been disturbed by Mithridates’ intervention.

As for towns which remained loyal, literary sources and inscriptions offer more details on Sulla’s decisions. Appian mentions that Ilion, Chios, the koinon of the Lycians, Rhodes, and Magnesia and some others not explicitly mentioned (καὶ τινὰς ἄλλους), either as a reward for having respected their alliance with Rome or for what they had suffered on Sulla’s account were given “freedom” and were officially inscribed as Rome’s “friends”¹¹. Appian’s passage on rewarded towns is confirmed by further literary and epigraphic sources. Thus, Appian’s reference to Rhodes as one of the rewarded towns is corroborated by Cicero’s mention that Sulla assigned Caunos and some islands to the Rhodians¹². This shows that Rhodes was additionally favoured

⁸ Santangelo 2007, 107-108, 122.

⁹ *I.Ephesos* 8.

¹⁰ Santangelo 2007, 61-62 citing epigraphic evidence and earlier bibliography, 122.

¹¹ *App. Mith.* 61: αὐτὴν δὲ τὴν Ἀσίαν καθιστάμενος, Ἰλίας μὲν καὶ Χίους καὶ Ῥοδίους καὶ Μαγνησίαν καὶ τινὰς ἄλλους, ἢ συμμαχίας ἀμειβόμενος, ἢ ὧν διὰ προθυμίαν ἐπεπόνθησαν οὐ ἔνεκα, ἐλευθέρους ἡφαίει καὶ Ῥωμαίων ἀνέγραφε φίλους. In this passage, Magnesia ad Sipylum is meant, cf. Rendina 2020, 74 n. 2.

¹² *Cic. Q. fr.* 1.1.33: *Caunii nuper omnesque ex insulis quae erant a Sulla Rhodiis attributae*. To this apparently refers *Str.* 14.2, 3: ἀπέστησαν δὲ ποτε Καύνιοι τῶν Ῥοδίων· κριθέντες δ’ ἐπὶ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀπελήφθησαν πάλιν; cf. Santangelo 2007, 123 and n. 71.