

Introduction

The strength of republican traditions... Lublin “biographical” symposia dedicated to the Roman Republic

We hand over to the Readers, the enthusiasts of a turbulent history of the Late Roman Republic, a collective monograph titled *Marcus Antonius – History and Tradition*. Declared in the title dedication to tradition, well-understood conservatism, manifests itself in many ways. This volume is the aftermath of an academic conference organized at the end of 2014 in Lublin under the identical title¹. The subject matter clearly refers to the traditional research profile of the Department of Ancient History at the University of Maria Curie-Skłodowska formed many years ago by such distinguished scholars as Professor Roman Kamienik and Professor Tadeusz Łoposzko. It is also a part of a series of conferences and rather iconic, for the circle of Lublin historians working on ancient history, series of publications on Roman criminal law (and to a large extent its Ciceronian aspect)². I have mentioned the *elder* tradition in the Introduction to the publication *Lucius Cornelius Sulla – History and Tradition*. There I have reflected also on the condition of Polish research on the Late Republic, dominated in the native historiography at the end of the 20th century by other trends in studying antiquity, but catching a new breath and drawing momentum in the wake of the 21st century³.

It is believed that this breath of fresh air has, at least to some extent, its origins in Lublin. For a *newer* part of this tradition was in fact a conference dedicated to Lucius Sulla (Lublin, 15–16.04.2013). That meeting created, in a manner of speaking, a group of around 20 scholars coming from all the significant academic institutions in Poland researching antiquity, who treat the

¹ The proceedings took place on 8–9 December 2014, traditionally in the seat of the Scientific Society of Lublin.

² The latest, eighth in a row, link in the chain of interdisciplinary conferences devoted to these problems is the work *Criminal Law and Politics in the Roman State*, ed. K. Amiełańczyk, A. Dębiński, D. Słapek, Lublin 2015.

³ D. Słapek, *On the Need of Studies of the Roman Republic*, (in:) *Lucius Cornelius Sulla – History and Tradition*, ed. *Idem*, I. Łuć, Lublin 2013, pp. 9–13.

Roman Republic already as a standard object of their academic reflections. It is enough to familiarize yourself with the list of authors of both volumes, the one on Sulla and the one on Antonius, to become convinced about a gradual stabilization of the circle of historians who specialize in the studies on the abovementioned epoch. Further proof of its stability is last year's conference (23–24.11.2015) titled *Gn. Pompeius Magnus – History and Tradition* organised this time by the Department of Ancient History, University of Silesia, Katowice.

Realistic plans of the historians of ancient history from the University of Maria Curie-Skłodowska include a conference on Spartacus, leader of the largest Roman uprising of slaves. This timeless and partially universal hero of *the oppressed and the overburdened*, strongly *fetishized* in the Marxist provenance of historiography of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the period before the democratic transformations in this part of the world, has become at this point in time shelved, as it seems, as the past... However, for many reasons it is perhaps worth to return to this figure – almost appropriated by the communist propaganda but neglected and marginalized in the historiography of already free Eastern Europe. Thoroughly new generation of historians of ancient history has sprung up from it; unburdened and not incapacitated by any ideology, it should have the courage to make a sort of a new entrance to a serious discourse on the institution of Roman slavery, slave wars at the end of the 2nd century BC, a large uprising of 73–71 BC and, finally, its key leader. Let this short paragraph become then the announcement for an important conference titled *Spartacus – History and Tradition, Lublin, the fall of 2017*. Already at this time we invite all the scholars working on the history of ancient Roman to take part in it and we hope that the ancient sphere of this symposium will not become dominated by deliberations and reflections dedicated solely to tradition (particularly of the post-antiquity nature...).

The success of this enterprise will most assuredly confirm the thesis that the efforts to create a series of symposia, which give an opportunity to specifically view the Roman Republic through the prism of outstanding individuals, turned out to be not only justified but necessary. The intention of the initiators of these academic projects (concerning Sulla, Antonius and others) was mainly to awaken and revitalize Polish research on the Late Roman Republic. An unexpected result of both of these projects was to have them classified as the achievements of *ancient biography*, a genre which is, euphemistically speaking, somewhat disregarded and treated as *a poor cousin of serious historiography*. This kind of qualification does not depreciate the importance of the volume already published as well as the one brought now to the hands of the Readers. The lack of concern to be typecast this way stemmed from the fact that ancient

biography (*vide*, quality and quantity of the sources) can only be as one of the *pretexts* and, thus, thoroughly acceptable from the perspective of the theory of modern biography writing. Another inducement to defend the thesis on the *modernity* of the form of biography, which triggers and provokes broader discourse about antiquity, is both the characteristic interdisciplinary approach towards the main research subject as well as the phenomenon – representing to some extent the effect of applying various methods and the so-called research approaches – of a ***collective authorship of a biography*** (this is probably not entirely neat, working *terminus technicus*).

A risk deriving from this *communal authorship* is by no means the lack of full control over creating a thoroughly authorial (i.e. homogenous, coherent and logical) vision of a character; a feature which is rather important and characteristic for typical and classic monographs. The advantage domineering over these concerns seems to be, however, the possibility of relatively easily creating in a collective work the holistic and multifaceted picture of an individual (the matter applies also to a certain levelling, the *handling* within one publication of potentially extreme opinions, i.e. affections and antipathies, deference and dislike towards a researched object). The results do not need to lead in any way to a specific, and stemming from the diversification of assessments/authors, chaos of information. Condition for the consistency of the image is the presence in every view/part of work of a fundamental and universal paradigm: an individual as a product, a derivative of the epoch or a driving force that determines its development and duration. This kind of perspective provides both the desired *biography of pretext* as well as the broadening, so accurate is this contextual approach, of the subject of interest of the *collective author* into the *collective object of study* (i.e. still awaited for, not only in Polish historiography on antiquity, collective and full picture, portrait of the Roman elites in politics, army, etc.)⁴.

Having said that, it would be an overstatement to say that the authors and editors of this volume intended a reflection on the character of Marcus Antonius, one of the most controversial Roman politicians of the Late Republic, which could be tabled as a thorough and *final* synthesis. It is wiser to admit that while searching for characteristics typical for this publication, the serious and scholarly (going beyond predominantly popular and full of stereotypes) approach provoked many deliberations of a far broader nature than those purely

⁴ Much more attention to the notion, “theory”, of a *collective authorship of a biography* and potential benefits coming from it is dedicated in the article by D. Słapek, Biographical experiences of the modern historians of antiquity (some remarks on the Conference *Marc Antony – history and tradition*, Lublin 08–09.12.2014) [in Polish], *Res Historica* 38, 2015, pp. 255–266.

prosopographical. The opinion that the multi-dimensional extraordinariness of the triumvir has been recognized is a truism. Thus, it sounds more serious to state that overall Antonius has been presented as a tragic figure for his final defeat of a personal nature was tightly linked with the death of a certain ideal, a specific vision for the functioning of the Roman state. This, on the other hand, gives an inducement to express the opinion that the volume presents the ending of the Republic from an original perspective of an outstanding, but after all defeated, leader and politician. It also seems that many authors managed to somehow free this historical figure from the domination of Cleopatra and Caesar (and the black *public relations* of Octavian). It was, however, unsuccessful to unambiguously settle a dispute fundamental for modern biography writing: an individual as a product of the epoch or a driving force significant for it. But such a sublime aim surpasses the tasks even of much more serious scholarly projects, conducted with a much greater momentum and a commitment of much larger forces and funds. In summary, it is nevertheless necessary to modestly mention that the majority of the authors of the volume perceives Marcus Antonius not in the role of a subject, but an active player on the political and military stage of the Late Republic.

In order to avoid a certain chaos, typical for the vast majority of the so-called collective monographs (participation in which is not the effect of inviting the author and ordering his article on a specific subject which is an element of an idea considered beforehand), the content of this publication has been cautiously divided. The titles, literary in form, of a few groups of articles seem to indicate not only the fundamental division of content between *history* and *tradition*, but also to correspond in some way with the abovementioned common characteristics and the main concepts present in the publications included in the volume.

Dariusz Słapek