

## ASPECTS OF PLUTARCH'S PORTRAYAL OF POMPEY

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On reading the *Parallel Lives* it is clear that Plutarch writing early in the 2nd century AD made use of a wide range of sources.<sup>1</sup> Plutarch is not only well aware of historical traditions to be found in the written accounts of his own time, but he is also familiar with authors who were the contemporaries or near contemporaries of the events which he describes. Certainly in writing the *Life of Pompey*, Plutarch, who seldom cites his sources, does mention by name such sources as Caesar and Cicero.<sup>2</sup> Other contemporaries of Pompey who are specifically named are Caius Oppius "the friend of Caesar",<sup>3</sup> and Asinius Pollio "who fought at Pharsalus on the side of Caesar".<sup>4</sup> Plutarch knows the work of Pompey's personal historian, Theophanes, and that of Posidonius who wrote a history of Pompey's achievements.<sup>5</sup> He quotes the contemporary historians Timagenes and Rutilius.<sup>6</sup> In the other *Lives* dealing with Pompey's era references occur to the *History* of Sallust, Livy's *History of Rome*, the *Memoirs of Sulla*, the historian Sisenna, *Memoirs of Brutus*, *Memoirs of Octavius Caesar*, and many other historians and contemporary sources of information now lost to us. From the surviving works or fragments of these authors and from indications in later authors, such as Cassius Dio, Appian, P. Annius Florus, Granus Licinianus, and P. Orosius, who used material from some of the works now lost to us, it can be seen that Plutarch was acquainted with writers who adopted a pro-Pompeian view and those who were following an anti-Pompeian tradition.

Pelling in a recent article<sup>7</sup> argued that the *Lives* of Crassus, Pompey, Caesar, Cato, Brutus, and Antony were written as a single project and were based on the same source material. In a subsequent article<sup>8</sup> he points out variations among these *Lives* which are not to be attributed to differing source material but rather arise from Plutarch's literary devices in handling his material and differences of interpretation and emphasis among these *Lives*. I propose to examine Plutarch's *Life of Pompey* during the period of Pompey's rise to greatness in order to determine the nature of the biographer's selection of his material in this *Life*. The results will show that a variety of factors influence his presentation in a particular *Life*. Of the literary factors perhaps the most dominant are his preoccupation with a theme, his desire to write dramatically, and his consciousness of a *Life* as a parallel to another *Life*. Besides being influenced by these factors, Plutarch is also concerned to represent the *Life* as a moral lesson. His viewing of the character of Pompey influenced by all these factors in the *Life of Pompey* is not necessarily in keeping with his assessments of Pompey which occur in the other *Lives* where Plutarch's concern with Pompey is more incidental.

A comparison of the authors who have anything to say about Pompey shows that Plutarch in his *Life of Pompey* has not omitted any event of great

significance. Very often Plutarch is the only available source of information for a minor incident or detail. Indeed of all the ancient works Plutarch's *Life of Pompey* is the most comprehensive and informative account. It is true that at times he deals with his subject topically and thus difficulties of chronology arise. Very often Plutarch has his particular interpretation or emphasis of an event. However, he does not invent but aligns himself with an interpretation existing in the tradition available to him or he draws conclusions from his understanding of Pompey's character.

#### THE REIGN OF SULLA

In the *Life of Pompey* the period during Sulla's reign is presented as a time when Pompey gains recognition for his achievements.<sup>9</sup> In the words of a modern scholar "we can see Pompey as an efficient, if inexperienced, officer, doing what is required of him by his superiors, and giving convincing proof of both his loyalty and his value to Sulla."<sup>10</sup> Avoiding any blemish which an association with a ruthless tyrant may impart, Plutarch in his *Life of Pompey* puts the best cloak on the reign of Sulla and describes him as a tyrant "whom most men were delighted to welcome to Rome."<sup>11</sup> It is a moment of great glory for Pompey to win from Sulla the coveted title of Imperator after he successfully engaged many other generals.<sup>12</sup> The association with Sulla was strengthened by a marriage alliance. Pompey divorced his wife Antistia to marry Aemilia, the stepdaughter of Sulla. It is true that this close association between Pompey and Sulla became strained at times, but in the *Life of Pompey* this was due to the ascending prestige and power of Pompey threatening to eclipse that of Sulla. Pompey is depicted as acting with great composure (μετρίως) and loyalty (πολιτικῶς) towards Sulla, the benevolent tyrant.<sup>13</sup> In Plutarch's *Life of Pompey* there is very little indication that Pompey had become the associate of a ruthless tyrant and a partner in the crimes marking a cruel reign of terror.

Plutarch did know the darker side of Sulla's reign. Livy described it, and Plutarch in the *Parallel Lives* frequently refers to Livy as a source.<sup>14</sup> We get some idea of Livy's version from the Summaries of Livy. According to the *Periochae*:

"After Sulla had restored the state, he befouled a most glorious victory by cruelty greater than any other man had ever displayed. He butchered 8000 men, who had surrendered, in the Civic Villa; he set up a proscription list, and filled the city and all Italy with slaughter . . ."<sup>15</sup>

Sulla's cruelties were common knowledge beyond his own times. Diodorus Siculus (c. 60–30 BC)<sup>16</sup> and Velleius Paterculus (19 BC–AD 31)<sup>17</sup> were well acquainted with his outrages. The knowledge of it persisted well after Plutarch's own time as the account of Florus (2nd century AD)<sup>18</sup> makes quite clear. This is the tradition which Plutarch knew and avoided in Pompey's Life.

In the *Life of Sulla*, where Plutarch is not concerned with a particular portrayal of Pompey, he gives a different impression of Sulla, Pompey's close associate and master. In this Life there is no concealing of Sulla's deceitful and murderous intent.<sup>19</sup> Sulla is described as busying himself with slaughter, and it is

said that murders without number or limit filled the city of Rome.<sup>20</sup> Here there is no hushing up of the butchery and ruthlessness which were characteristic of Sulla and his generals in a state torn by civil strife and conflict whereas in the *Life of Pompey* Plutarch seems deliberately to have fostered a more glorious image of Pompey in his association with Sulla.

#### THE MURDER OF CARBO AND DOMITIUS

As a biographer Plutarch could not altogether ignore Pompey's share of the cruelties of Sulla's reign. However, the murders of Carbo and Domitius are reported in the lowest key possible. Consequently in Plutarch's presentation of these two episodes Pompey is hardly tarnished.

The report on Carbo is brief:

"Moreover, he was thought to have treated Carbo in his misfortunes with an unnatural insolence. For if it was necessary, *as perhaps it was*, to put the man to death, this ought to have been done as soon as he was seized, *and the deed would have been his who ordered it*. But as it was, Pompey caused a Roman who had thrice been consul to be brought in fetters and set before the tribunal where he himself was sitting, and examined him closely there to the distress and vexation of the audience. Then he ordered him to be led away and put to death . . . Furthermore, Caius Oppius, the friend of Caesar, says that Pompey treated Quintus Valerius also with unnatural cruelty . . . . But *when Oppius discourses about the enemies or friends of Caesar, one must be very cautious about believing him*. Pompey was compelled to punish those enemies of Sulla who were most eminent and whose capture was notorious; but as to the rest he suffered as many as possible to escape detection and even helped to send some out of the country."<sup>21</sup>

I have quoted Plutarch at length because the context shows Plutarch's apology most clearly: Pompey acted under orders, he generally treated even the proscribed with kindness, and any reports to the contrary Plutarch hints should not be believed.

There was a strong tradition which justified Pompey's action against Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus. Pompey was instructed by the Senate to proceed with his forces to Africa to wipe out the "Marian" resistance led there by Domitius. Pompey in a short time overcame all resistance, Domitius' camp was captured and he was slain. His status as one of the proscribed justified Pompey's action.<sup>22</sup> Another account has it that Domitius died fighting.<sup>23</sup> There are "official and approving echoes"<sup>24</sup> to be found in Pliny *NH* 7.96. In Plutarch's *Life of Pompey* it is simply reported that Pompey executing the orders of the senate successfully advanced against Domitius and his army, "the camp was soon taken, and Domitius was slain (ἀποθνήσκει Δομέτιος)."<sup>25</sup>

For a tradition hostile to Pompey we must turn to Valerius Maximus.

"Helvius Mancina of Formiae, a freedman's son and a very old man indeed, was prosecuting L. Libo before the censors. In the trial Pompey the Great

reproached him with his humble birth and old age, remarking that he had been sent back from the underworld to accuse the defendant. 'You are right, Pompey,' he replied 'I do indeed come from the underworld, and I come to accuse Libo. But while I was tarrying there I saw the bloody Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus weeping because, though a man of the highest nobility and the sternest integrity and the staunchest of patriots, he had been killed in the very prime of his youth on your orders . . . I saw Gnaeus Carbo, who was the fiercest protector of your boyhood and your father's property in the third consulship, bound in the chains which you had ordered to be clamped on him, and protesting that contrary to all laws of right and wrong he had been slaughtered by you, a mere Roman knight, when he held the highest office in the state . . . and all of them with one voice complaining that they had died uncondemned at your hands—the teenage butcher (*adulescentulus carnifex*).'<sup>26</sup>

Plutarch may very well have been aware of this very critical view of Pompey's action against Domitius and Carbo because he knew the work of Valerius Maximus whom he quoted by name in his *Life of Brutus*.<sup>27</sup> It would seem that he deliberately ignored, one might even say countered, the anti-Pompeian view which described Pompey as a ruthless partner of Sulla in his continuing butchery of individuals and cruel elimination of all potential political opposition.

#### THE DEATH OF M. BRUTUS

When Lepidus tried to assume the powers of a dictator in the civil war which ensued after the death of Sulla, Pompey according to Plutarch's account<sup>28</sup> became the protector of the threatened consul Catulus, a man of great wisdom and justice,

“to whom the incorrupt and sounder element in the senate and people attached themselves.”<sup>29</sup>

As the protagonist of a noble cause Pompey commanded the forces against Lepidus who had employed Brutus to hold Cisalpine Gaul with an army. Since Plutarch cleverly shifts the emphasis from the killing to Pompey's denunciation of Brutus after his death, even the murder of Brutus is not greatly to Pompey's discredit.

“ . . . Pompey announcing that he had brought the war to a close without a battle. For Brutus, whether he himself betrayed his army, or whether his army changed sides and betrayed him, put himself in the hands of Pompey, and receiving an escort of horsemen, returned to a little town upon the Po. Here after a single day had passed he was slain by Geminus who was sent by Pompey to do the deed. And Pompey was much blamed for this. For as soon as the army of Brutus changed sides, he wrote to the Senate that Brutus had surrendered to him of his own accord; then he sent another letter denouncing the man after he had been put to death.”<sup>30</sup>

Plutarch's account has nothing of the bitterness of the struggle suggested by some other authorities. Florus speaks of a brief but violent civil war.<sup>31</sup> Valerius

Maximus in the reply of the old man whom Pompey taunted at the trial of Libo records a very harsh reproach:

“You are right, Pompey,” he replied, “I do indeed come from the underworld . . . But while I was tarrying there I saw . . . Marcus Brutus . . . hacked by the sword and complaining that his fate was due first to your treachery and then to your cruelty.”<sup>32</sup>

There are also some modern scholars who have strongly condemned Pompey for his role in this civil war.<sup>33</sup>

Considering these accounts Plutarch once again seems to have followed a line most favourable to his hero.

#### THE WAR AGAINST SERTORIUS

In the pages of L. Annaeus Florus we find a tradition which puts a rather inglorious stamp on the Sertorian War.<sup>34</sup> It is seen as the continuation of the civil strife in Sulla’s day in which Roman leaders were waging war with Spanish forces against Romans. It is even said that the victorious generals wanted the struggle to be viewed as a foreign rather than a civil war so that they might celebrate a triumph.<sup>35</sup> Florus further describes the Sertorian War as a long drawn out conflict in which the contests were such that victory was dubious. Sertorius’ defeat is attributed not to the success of operations in the field, but to the crime and trickery of his own followers.<sup>36</sup> In Livy’s account<sup>37</sup> it is a long drawn out war in which Pompey fought indecisively with Sertorius, “who proved more than a match for him in all the arts of war and campaigning.”<sup>38</sup> Appian<sup>39</sup> has much greater detail than most accounts, but here too Pompey is very much in the shade of Metellus.

Livy was a source known to Plutarch. Appian and Florus reflected a tradition which was known in the 2nd century AD when Plutarch was writing his Lives. All these authors have more details of Pompey being vanquished than can be found in Plutarch’s *Life of Pompey*. Besides, there is in this Life a shift of emphasis in Pompey’s favour.<sup>40</sup> Pompey is the defender of Rome sent to assist Metellus wavering before the onslaughts of Sertorius.<sup>41</sup> The capture of Lauron, Pompey’s earliest setback, is reported but immediately countered by his victory near Valentia (over Herennius and Perperna though).<sup>42</sup> Pompey’s defeat at Sucro pales in the glowing account of his close encounter with an enemy and the cleverly effected escape.<sup>43</sup>

It is in Plutarch’s *Life of Sertorius* where a more realistic assessment of Pompey’s position in Spain is to be found. There he is prepared to say:

“Indeed, this story was prevalent in Rome, that Sertorius would come back to Italy before Pompey did. To such straits were the first and ablest generals of the time reduced by the skill of Sertorius.”<sup>44</sup>

The battles at Lauron and Sucro are recounted in greater detail and redound less to Pompey’s credit than they do in the *Life of Pompey*.<sup>45</sup> In the *Life of Sertorius* we are given details of the battle on the plains of Saguntum where the Romans were overwhelmed for some time and one of Pompey’s most capable generals

fell.<sup>46</sup> The omission of this in the *Life of Pompey* is significant.

Other sources, too, have some details which Plutarch has found convenient to omit in his biography of Pompey. Frontinus,<sup>47</sup> quoting Livy, mentions the destruction of 10 000 of Pompey's army along with the entire transport at Lauron. Appian<sup>48</sup> gives an indication of huge losses which never feature in Plutarch's *Life of Pompey*.

A comparison with other sources and even Plutarch's own *Life of Sertorius* shows that Plutarch has by his selection and emphasis given a view of the events which favoured Pompey as much as possible. Plutarch's account is more akin to Sallust's version of Pompey's glowing report of his campaign in Spain which he sent to the Senate when requesting financial assistance.<sup>49</sup> In this report Pompey represents his defeat at Lauron as a bold stand against the attack of Sertorius;<sup>50</sup> his defeat at Sucro becomes "the capture of the adversary's camp" (which, incidentally, was the achievement of Metellus, not that of Pompey);<sup>51</sup> and the victory at Valentia, as is to be expected, features prominently.<sup>52</sup> Plutarch's portrayal of Pompey in the war against Sertorius is more in keeping with the eulogising rhetoric of Cicero in the *De Imperio Gnaei Pompei*,<sup>53</sup> or the poetic exaggeration of Lucan in the *de bello civili*.<sup>54</sup>

#### THE SERVILE WAR

Velleius Paterculus in his general assessment of Pompey has two points of criticism. He was excessively covetous of glory and honours, and he could not brook an equal.<sup>55</sup> Plutarch, too, readily admits these faults in character.<sup>56</sup> However, while presenting Pompey in the flower of his achievement, i.e. until the time of his victorious return from his conquests in the East, Plutarch admits these blemishes of character in such a way that it does not detract from the growing fame of his hero. In fact in the Servile War the incident which illustrates Pompey's love of honour is included to add to his achievements.

Plutarch is the only source to mention that Pompey claimed the chief responsibility for ending the war.<sup>57</sup> Referring to Crassus' successful battle against Spartacus Plutarch comments:

"Even in this success, however, fortune somehow or other included Pompey, since five thousand fugitives from the battle fell in his way, all of whom he slew, and then stole a march on Crassus by writing to the senate that Crassus had conquered the gladiators in a pitched battle, but that he himself had extirpated the war entirely". And Plutarch adds: "it was agreeable to the Romans to hear this said and to repeat it, so kindly did they feel towards him."<sup>58</sup>

In his *Life of Crassus* Plutarch gives greater detail of the Servile War and he there refers to the public expectation that Pompey would gain the victory in this war and finally states that Pompey put an end to it.<sup>59</sup> That such claims were being made to enhance Pompey's fame is corroborated by Cicero. In his *De Imperio Gn. Pompei* he gives Pompey the credit for completing the Slave War.<sup>60</sup>

Appian who offers the most detailed account of this war simply mentions

that a contention for honours arose between Crassus and Pompey without any mention of Pompey's participation in the struggle.<sup>61</sup> Livy gives no share to Pompey in the Servile War even though the brief *Periocha* mentions the campaigns of other generals at this time.<sup>62</sup> Pompey is not mentioned in Velleius Paterculus' brief account. He pertinently concludes his description of the Slave War thus: "The glory of ending this war belongs to Marcus Crassus."<sup>63</sup> Pompey has no part in the fairly extensive narrative of Florus' version of the war against Spartacus.<sup>64</sup>

From these differing traditions, Plutarch has chosen that which is most in keeping with his particular image of Pompey.

#### THE CONSULSHIP OF POMPEY AND CRASSUS

The subsequent jealousy and rivalry which marred the consulship of Pompey and Crassus in 70 BC receive little mention in Plutarch's *Life of Pompey*.<sup>65</sup> Plutarch elaborates on Pompey's delight in having the opportunity of doing Crassus some service and kindness by supporting Crassus when suing for the consulship. There is only a brief mention of the contention between the two consuls.<sup>66</sup> Plutarch rapidly passes on to the more positive aspects of Pompey's consulship: his greater power among the people, while Crassus has more weight in the Senate; his restoration of the tribunate; the transference of the courts of justice to the knights. He elaborates on his popularly acclaimed discharge from military service when he could proudly proclaim that he had performed all the military services required by law and that under himself as *imperator*.<sup>67</sup> In this context even the brief mention of the contention between Crassus and Pompey is almost lost amidst the mention of his achievements.<sup>68</sup>

In Plutarch's *Life of Crassus* a more negative view of Pompey's consulship is given.

"When once they had assumed office, they did not remain on this friendly basis, but differed on almost every measure, quarrelled with one another about everything, and by their contentiousness rendered their consulship barren politically and without achievement . . ." <sup>69</sup>

Both in the *Life of Pompey* and the *Life of Crassus* Plutarch has emphasised the reconciliation between Pompey and Crassus before laying down their office.<sup>70</sup> From another source, Appian,<sup>71</sup> we learn of seditions brewing, and of armies in readiness while people feared civil strife reminiscent of the contention between Marius and Sulla. It is a situation far less favourable to Pompey than Plutarch has depicted. In the *Life of Pompey* there is no indication of the violent outburst of anti-Pompeian sentiment in the years immediately after Pompey's consulship.<sup>72</sup>

#### THE COMMAND AGAINST THE PIRATES AND MITHRIDATES

When Plutarch speaks of the greatness of Pompey, he seems to think in particular of his achievements as a general in the wars in Africa, against Sertorius in Spain, and the pirates and Mithridates in Asia.<sup>73</sup> Comparing the three 'greats'

of the Late Roman Republic, he refers to Pompey 'with his three triumphs'.<sup>74</sup> Plutarch believed that in the supreme struggles of a political career one should adopt a course which dazzles men by the greatness of one's power.<sup>75</sup> Judged from such a viewpoint Pompey reached the most dazzling period of his career and hence his greatest power in the wars against the pirates and Mithridates. Plutarch specifically states that Pompey reached the acme of his distinction at the time when he celebrated his triumph for the conquest of the East.<sup>76</sup> It is therefore to be expected that Plutarch's account of Pompey's command against the pirates and his campaigns in the East contributes much to the enhancement of Pompey as the greatest of the Romans.

However there is in this part of Plutarch's narrative a note of censure. He relates Pompey's interference with Metellus in Crete, and comments:

"Even his best friends were not pleased with his treatment of Metellus in Crete . . . since he lent his name to godless miscreants, and threw around them the mantle of his reputation to serve like a charm against evil, through envy and jealousy of Metellus."<sup>77</sup>

Plutarch offers no justification for Pompey's action. Livy<sup>78</sup> refers to some justification by Pompey for his treatment of Metellus. Cicero<sup>79</sup> presents his clash with Metellus in Crete so as to redound to Pompey's credit. Plutarch, like Velleius Paterculus,<sup>80</sup> uses the incident to illustrate Pompey's inability to tolerate a rival for fame and glory. Plutarch is in fact admitting a well-known failing of Pompey, which Pompey's own monuments reflected. When departing from Spain, Pompey erected a triumphal monument at the summit of the pass over the Pyrenees. On it he recorded his successes in Spain—no mention is made of his colleague Metellus.<sup>81</sup> This characteristic Plutarch noted when relating Pompey's claim of a share in Crassus' victory and his appropriation of a share in Metellus' victory in Crete. This failing is once again noted in Pompey's treatment of Lucullus when Pompey took over the command against Mithridates.

In the *Life of Pompey* Plutarch records Pompey's feigned displeasure at receiving the command against Mithridates. Plutarch comments:

"Even his intimate friends could not abide his dissimulation; they knew that his enmity towards Lucullus gave fuel to his innate ambition and love of power, and made him all the more delighted."<sup>82</sup>

Pompey in taking over from Lucullus

"tried to prevent any attention to Lucullus' commands, and took away all his soldiers from him (except a mutinous few)."<sup>83</sup>

Generally he belittled Lucullus' achievements and there were mutual recriminations. Pompey is taunted with fighting a shadow of war

"following his custom of alighting, like a lazy carrion bird, on bodies that others had killed, and tearing to pieces the scattered remnants of wars. For it was in this way that he had appropriated to himself the victories over Sertorius, Lepidus, and the followers of Spartacus, although they had actually been won by Metellus, Catulus, and Crassus. Therefore it was no

wonder that he was trying to usurp the glory of the Pontic and Armenian wars . . .”<sup>84</sup>

There was some justification for Pompey’s action, and the war was not close to being wrapped up as Lucullus would have liked to believe. Plutarch, however, does not offer any justification in his *Life of Pompey*; the details are to be found in his *Life of Lucullus*.<sup>85</sup> Apart from the fact that Pompey had been appointed by popular demand to the command against Mithridates, there is evidence that Lucullus needed to be replaced. Although he had almost brought the war against Mithridates to an end and had falsely informed the senate that it was completed, he had become ineffective and was again losing ground to Mithridates. With him losing the allegiance of his own soldiers, Tigranes and Mithridates were resuming their insolent ways.<sup>86</sup> The fact that the Manilian Law had the powerful support of Cicero suggests that there were good grounds for replacing Lucullus.<sup>87</sup>

It was the senate and nobility who considered Lucullus a wronged man:

“He had been superseded, they said, not in a war, but in a triumph, and had been forced to relinquish and turn over to others, not his campaign, but prizes of victory in his campaign.”<sup>88</sup>

Plutarch thus singles out the main weakness of Pompey, while hitherto ignoring many other faults or incidents not enhancing to his hero figure. Plutarch is in agreement with Velleius Paterculus who describes Pompey’s essential weakness thus:

“Pompey, from the time when he first took part in public life, could not brook an equal at all. In undertakings in which he should have been merely the first he wished to be the only one. No one was ever more indifferent to other things or possessed a greater craving for glory; he knew no restraint in his quest for office, though he was moderate to a degree in the exercise of his powers.”<sup>89</sup>

Plutarch has chosen to reveal this characteristic most explicitly in the biography of Pompey at a time when he gained his greatest successes, viz. the sweeping of the pirates from the Mediterranean and the defeat of Mithridates in the East. This trait presented in this context does not detract from the achievements which were among Pompey’s greatest.

If Plutarch had recounted the less complimentary aspects of the passing of the Gabinian Law, it might well have marred the image of Pompey as a most popular general who as a result of this command was soon to reach the peak of a most successful career. In Plutarch’s *Life of Pompey* the Gabinian Law, giving Pompey the command against the pirates, is passed with strong popular support. The senate, reluctant to give so much power to one man, yielded to public pressure. There is a brief reference to a threat of violence, while the emphasis is on the ardour of the popular support.<sup>90</sup> Dio Cassius, writing later than Plutarch, knew of a tradition making Pompey a party to the violence and lawlessness of his close associate Gabinius. According to this source

“. . . Aulus Gabinius, a tribune, set forth his plan; he had either been

prompted by Pompey or wished in any case to do him a favour; certainly he was not prompted by any love of the common welfare, for he was a most *base fellow*." . . . "But that body (the senate) preferred to suffer anything whatever at the hands of the freebooters rather than put so great a command into Pompey's hands; in fact they came near slaying Gabinius in the very senate-house, but he eluded them somehow. When the people learned the feelings of the senators, they raised an uproar, even going so far as to rush upon them as they sat assembled; and if the senators had not got out of the way, they would certainly have killed them."<sup>91</sup>

Trebellius, a tribune who tried to oppose the law, was not given an opportunity to speak.<sup>92</sup> Pompey is described as being

"very eager to command, and because of his own ambition and the zeal of the populace no longer now so much regarded this commission as an honour as the failure to win it a disgrace . . ."<sup>93</sup>

Dio Cassius was familiar with Livy's work.<sup>94</sup> Livy was also used by Velleius Paterculus, who wrote somewhat closer to the events than Plutarch or Dio Cassius, and he, too, has this theme of violence:

"The nobility opposed the measure, but prudence was overcome by violence."<sup>95</sup>

This tradition, which is to be found in these two authors who used Livy,<sup>96</sup> must have been known to Plutarch who quotes Livy by name in the *Lives*. Furthermore, Peter also mentions Livy as an important source of Plutarch in the *Life of Pompey*.<sup>97</sup> This damaging aspect of a glorious period in Pompey's career Plutarch has withheld, leaving the impression of Pompey being a popularly acclaimed hero figure who reached great heights because of his achievements in the East. While in Plutarch's *Life of Pompey* the triumph for the victories over Mithridates marks the moment of greatest glory, Velleius Paterculus speaks of Pompey's unpopularity at this time rendering Lucullus and Metellus more popular in the eyes of all good citizens.<sup>98</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Plutarch himself states that he has related those achievements and experiences of Pompey which were the greatest and most illustrative of his character.<sup>99</sup> For Plutarch the acme of Pompey's career is reached when Pompey returned from the East and in the splendour of his third triumph celebrated his success in a third continent. He comments:

"How happy would it have been for him if he had ended his life at this point, up to which he enjoyed the good fortune of Alexander! For succeeding time brought him only success which made him odious and failure that was irreparable. That political power which he had won by his own legitimate efforts, this he used in the interests of others illegally, thus weakening his own reputation in proportion as he strengthened them, so that before he was aware of it he was ruined by the very vigour and magnitude of his own power."<sup>100</sup>

It is in the light of this assessment of Pompey's career that the events are presented in his Life. Plutarch has aligned himself so much with this viewpoint that for the period until Pompey's third triumph he has consistently presented Pompey in the most favourable light even to the extent of suppressing incidents and interpretations not conducive to such a view. In the earlier part of the *Life of Pompey* Plutarch has been silent about unfavourable features such as his cruelty, his questionable associates, and his use of violence to achieve his ends. And yet it is clear from his other Lives that he is not unaware of these features, and, what is more, he has used sources which noted these unfavourable characteristics. Any censure or conduct damaging to the image of his hero figure rising to the acme of his greatness is either ignored or minimised.

The one blemish which Plutarch does reveal with increasing candour is Pompey's desire for glory and power.<sup>101</sup> But until the acme of Pompey's career this failing is presented as a mere crack in the hero figure—it does not detract from the image of Pompey as the greatest general at the time of his third triumph. Pompey's desire for glory and power was in Plutarch's view the very characteristic which proved to be Pompey's undoing and which led to the conflict between Pompey and Caesar—a conflict which pulled down the Roman Republic around them.

In the *Life of Sulla* Plutarch says that Sulla's conduct

“fixed a stigma upon offices of great power, which were thought to work a change in men's previous characters, and render them capricious, vain and cruel.”

However, he adds the comment:

“whether this is a change and reversal of nature, brought about by fortune or rather a revelation, when a man is in authority, of underlying baseness, were matter for determination in some other treatise.”<sup>102</sup>

To judge from Plutarch's determination to reveal Pompey's love of fame and power to an increasing degree in an otherwise wholly sympathetic assessment of Pompey, one must conclude that in his opinion men revealed their true nature when in authority, and did not really change in nature. This might very well be the moral lesson of this Life.

In that part of the narrative which deals with the period after Pompey's return from the East to the time of his defeat at Pharsalus, Plutarch is more ready to involve judgments and incidents damaging to the greatness of his hero figure but they are still tempered so that Pharsalus represents a dramatic reversal of fortune. What a dramatic reversal of fortune for a man depicted as the greatest and most powerful in Rome to have his biography end with his ignominious death at the hands of murderers on foreign soil and a make-shift funeral at the hands of a former freedman!

The literary effectiveness of the portrayal of a great hero figure, the dramatic reversal of fortune in the life of that hero, the moral dictum of power revealing the man, have all been delineated more sharply by Plutarch's particular portrayal of Pompey in this Life. Thus, as in the *Life of Alexander*, Plutarch

in the *Life of Pompey* “imposes his own interpretations of his hero’s character on the narrative at the expense of facts”<sup>103</sup> as is clear from differences of fact and emphasis revealed in the other Lives, and in the other sources which he is known to have used.

## NOTES

1. See in general: H. Peter, *Die Quellen Plutarchs in den Biographien der Römer*, Amsterdam 1965 (reprint of 1865 edition). P.A. Stadter, *Plutarch’s Historical Methods. An Analysis of the Mulierum Virtutes*, Cambridge 1965. C.P. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome*, Oxford 1971. W.C. Helmbold and E.N. O’Neil, *Plutarch’s Quotations*, Philadelphia 1959.
2. For Caesar see Plut. *Pomp.* 63.1, 68.3, 69.5; for Cicero see Plut. *Pomp.* 42.7, 63.1, 64.4.
3. Plut. *Pomp.* 10.4.
4. Plut. *Pomp.* 72.3.
5. For Theophanes see Plut. *Pomp.* 37.2–3, 42.4, 49.7; for Posidonius see Plut. *Pomp.* 42.5. See, too, R. Seager, *Pompey, A Political Biography*, Oxford 1979, 52.
6. For Timagenes see Plut. *Pomp.* 49.7, and for Rutilius Plut. *Pomp.* 37.3.
7. C.B.R. Pelling, ‘Plutarch’s Method of Work in the Roman Lives’, *JHS* 99 (1979) 74–96.
8. C.B.R. Pelling, ‘Plutarch’s Adaptation of his source-material’, *JHS* 100 (1980) 127–140.
9. Plut. *Pomp.* 5–15.
10. J. Leach, *Pompey the Great*, London 1978, 27.
11. Plut. *Pomp.* 5.2.
12. Plut. *Pomp.* 8.2.
13. Plut. *Pomp.* 15.1–3, also 14.1–3.
14. Plut. *Caesar* 47.2, 63.5 and *Marcellus* 11.4, 24.4—to mention only some.
15. Livy *Per.* 88. Unless stated otherwise translations are from the Loeb Classical Library.
16. Diod. Sic. 38/39, 17–19.
17. Vell. Paterculus 2.28.1–3.
18. Florus 2.9.6 ff. and 2.9.23–28.
19. Plut. *Sulla* 28.2 and 8; 30.2–5.
20. Plut. *Sulla* 31.1.
21. Plut. *Pomp.* 10.3–5. Italics mine.
22. Livy *Per.* 89, Eutrop. 5.8.2–9.1, Oros. 5.24.16.
23. Oros. 5.21.13.
24. Seager 10 n. 28.
25. Plut. *Pomp.* 11 and 12, especially 12.4.
26. Val. Max. *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 6.2.8; translation by J. Leach (Leach 225–6).
27. Plut. *Brutus* 53.4.
28. Plut. *Pomp.* 16. For a brief and well documented survey of the conflict see Seager, 14–16.
29. Plut. *Pomp.* 16.1.
30. Plut. *Pomp.* 16.4–5.
31. The text is uncertain. W.S. Watson, *Sallust, Florus and Paterculus*, 1889, has the following readings for Florus 3.23/2.11.1: Sed quantum lateque fax illius motus ab ipso Syllae rogo exarsit! On page 338 n. 1 Watson remarks “Quantum lateque is mere nonsense, as all commentators allow, except Perizonius, who would make it equivalent to quantum et quam late”. Without adhering closely to the text, he then renders it as follows: “(A civil war that was kindled was suppressed almost before it began), but how violent was it!”
- Florus 2.11.1 in the Loeb text by E.S. Forster reads: Marco Lepido Quinto Catulo consulibus civile bellum paene citius oppressum est quam inciperet: *sed quantulumcumque fax illius motus ab ipso Sullae rogo exarsit*. A civil war which arose was suppressed as soon as it began. *Yet the spark which kindled this disturbance, however insignificant, sprang from the funeral pyre of Sulla.*
- Whatever reading or rendering is followed, they all have in common the implication of a violent struggle.
32. Val Max. 6.2.8. A passage included in an Appendix of selected passages in translation, Leach 225.

33. H. Last, *CAH* IX.316; Miltner, *RE* 21.2077.
34. Florus 2.10.1–9.
35. Florus 2.10.9.
36. *Idem*.
37. Livy *Per.* 91–96.
38. . . . omnibus belli militiaeque artibus par fuit. Livy *Per.* 93. Later in *Per.* 96 Sertorius is described as: magnus dux et adversus duos imperatores, Pompeium et Metellum, vel frequentius victor.
39. Appian *BC* 1.13.109–115.
40. Plut. *Pomp.* 17–20.
41. Plut. *Pomp.* 17.1.
42. Plut. *Pomp.* 18.3.
43. Plut. *Pomp.* 19.1–4.
44. Plut. *Sertorius* 21.6.
45. Plut. *Sertorius* 18 and 19.
46. Plut. *Sertorius* 21.1–5.
47. Frontinus *Strategems* 2.5.31.
48. Appian *BC* 1.13.109, 110 and 112.
49. Sallust, *Ep. Cn. Pomp. ad Senatam* 4–10.
50. *Idem* 5.
51. *Idem* 6.
52. *Ibid.*
53. Cic. *de Imp. Gn. Pomp.* X/28 and XI/30.
54. Lucan *De Bello Civili* 7.15–17 for example.
55. Vell. Paterculus 2.33.3.
56. Plut. *Pomp.* 29.3, 30.6, 38.1, 67.4.
57. Plut. *Pomp.* 21.1–3, *Crassus* 11.5–8. Compare Appian *BC* 1.14.119–120, Livy *Per.* 97, Vell. Paterculus 2.30, Florus 2.8.12, Oros 5.24.5–8.
58. Plut. *Pomp.* 21.2.
59. Plut. *Crassus* 11.5 and 8.
60. See note 52.
61. Appian *BC* 1.14.121.
62. Livy *Per.* 97.
63. Vell. Paterculus 2.30.6.
64. Florus 2.8.
65. Plut. *Pomp.* 22 and 23.
66. Plut. *Pomp.* 22.3 “οὐ μὴν ἀλλ’ ἀποδειχθέντες ὕπατοι διεφέροντο πάντα καὶ προσέκρουον ἀλλήλους.”
67. Plut. *Pomp.* 22.3–6.
68. A.M. Ward (*Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, Columbia 1977, 101 ff. and especially 105) who seeks evidence to support co-operation between the two consuls, can find evidence for such co-operation on only two occasions, viz. the restoration of the tribunate and the reviving of the censorship. Seager 24 comments: “As consuls Pompeius and Crassus co-operated only once, to pass a law restoring the legislative powers of the tribunes.”
69. Plut. *Crassus* 12.2.
70. Plut. *Pomp.* 23.1–2, and *Crassus* 12.3–4.
71. Appian *BC* 1.14.121.
72. Val. Max. 6.2.4.
73. Plut. *Pomp.* 45.5.
74. Plut. *Comp. of Crassus and Nicias* 2.3.
75. *Idem* 2.4.
76. Plut. *Pomp.* 46.1.
77. Plut. *Pomp.* 29.1 and 3.
78. Livy *Per.* 99: Pompeius rationem reddit hoc se facere debuisse. Florus 1.42.4–6 describes the harsh action of Metellus as the cause for Pompey’s intervention.
79. Cic. *de Imp. Gn. Pomp.* XII/35, XVI/46.
80. Vell. Paterculus 2.34.2.
81. Pliny *NH* 3.18; 7.96.

82. Plut. *Pomp.* 30.6.  
 83. Plut. *Pomp.* 31.5.  
 84. Plut. *Pomp.* 31.6–7.  
 85. Plut. *Lucullus* 34–5.  
 86. Plut. *Lucullus* 35.5. Vell. Paterculus 2.33.1 refers to Lucullus not putting an end to the war, and in 2.37.1 comments on Mithridates' renewed strength. Livy *Per.* 98 speaks of the desertion among Lucullus' soldiers preventing him from completing the war against Mithridates.  
 87. Cic. *de Imp. Gn. Pomp.* in general. For the specific reasons for replacing Lucullus see Cic. *de Imp. Gn. Pomp.* IX/24–26, XV/45.  
 88. Plut. *Lucullus* 35.7.  
 89. Vell. Paterculus 2.33.3.  
 90. Plut. *Pomp.* 25.4–7.  
 91. Dio Cassius 36.23.4–24.2.  
 92. Dio Cassius 36.30.1.  
 93. Dio Cassius 36.24.5.  
 95. Vell. Paterculus 2.31.4: This translation, rather than that of the Loeb, conveys the meaning of the Latin: *Dissuadebant optimates, sed consilia impetu victa sunt.*  
 96. Cf. note 14 above. Unfortunately Livy's surviving summary is too brief to be informative. See Livy *Per.* 100.  
 97. H. Peter, *Die Quellen Plutarchs in den Biographien der Römer*, Amsterdam 1965 (repr. of 1865 ed.), 112–119, cites Livy as the major source for the flight and death of Pompey, i.e. for chapters 73–80 of Plutarch's *Life of Pompey*.  
 98. Vell. Paterculus 2.34.2.  
 99. Plut. *Pomp.* 8.6.  
 100. Plut. *Pomp.* 46.1–2.  
 101. Plut. *Pomp.* 38.1, 30.6 and *Crassus* 14.4.  
 102. Plut. *Life of Sulla* 30.5.  
 103. J.R. Hamilton, *Plutarch, Alexander. A Commentary*, London 1969, xlvii.

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