

## The House of Atticus: Antiquarianism and the End of the Triumvirate.

In his *Life of Atticus*, Cornelius Nepos (*Att.* 13.2) writes that his subject lived in a house built by “Tamphilus.” Beyond presuming this individual was related to the family of the Baebii Tamphili, who produced two consuls, brothers, in succession (182 and 181 BCE), scholars (e.g. Nipperdey-Witte (1913), Horsfall (1989)) do not try to specify who this was. This paper argues that Nepos’ reference is not casual, and that by paying close attention to historiographical clues, we can surmise who the original owner likely was (or was claimed to have been). Moreover, the connection established has ideological implications consistent with Atticus’ antiquarianism and standing as a cultural expert who advised the triumvirs and played a key role in shaping the archaic paradigm adopted by Octavian for his emerging regime.

Nepos mentions Atticus’ house on the Quirinal, which he inherited from his uncle in 58 BCE, in the course of relating his upstanding character and frugal habits (*Att.* 13 ff). Except for its park, this house was not notable and quite old (*antiquitus constitutum*). We are also told that Atticus did not make improvements but only did what was necessary for upkeep. As for the name attached to the house, Broughton (*MRR* II.p. 537) lists seven Baebii with the agnomen Tamphilus, and of these, only three would be distinguished or ancient enough to matter, namely the *Praetor Urbanus* of 168 BCE, or either a consul of 182, Gnaeus, or his brother Marcus, a consul of 181. Nepos mentions both of the latter (*Han.* 13.1) in the course of dating the death of Hannibal, but Marcus appears salient, because along with his colleague, he instituted the first bribery law, and there are two significant *exempla* related by Valerius Maximus dated to his consulship—most notably the famous “discovery,” by ploughmen, of the coffin of Numa Pompilius containing

books of pontifical law (V. Max 1.1.12). This event, first mentioned by Cassius Hemina, was repeated by many authors thereafter (*FRH* 6 F35). Nepos (in his *Chronica* or *Exempla*) or Atticus (in the *Liber Annalis*) surely transmitted it (with the consular date naturally included). This has relevance because one tradition derived the lineage of the Pomponii (Atticus' family) to Pompon, the son of Numa (Plut. *Num.* 21.1, cf. Nep. *Att.* 1, Hor. *Od.* 1.1). The tracing of lineages for Roman elites was a current trend and Atticus was a known specialist (Nep. *Att.* 18.2-4). Moreover, this and Atticus' chronology involved fabrications that included tweaking dates to associate nobles to famous events (see Münzer (1905) 58 ff, Wiseman (1974) 158, Drummond (2013) 349-50, 352-3, 421-22)) This phenomenon is perhaps best explained as similar to the "invention of tradition" in the early modern period noted by Hobsbawm *et al.* (1983) as precursors to the emergence of a national identity. For Atticus to inhabit a house considered to have been built over a century ago by the reformer Marcus Baebius (and left unaltered in an age of furious architectural rivalry) would have carried connotations of old-fashioned incorruptibility and provided a link to his famous ancestor Numa, the forefather of Roman religion. That the house could have been considered the original can be demonstrated by comparison to artifacts such as the corset of Cornelius Cossus (Syme (1939) 308 n.2), or of the so-called house of Romulus on the Palatine or Capitoline (D.H. 1.79.11, Vitr. 2.1.5, DC 48.43.3, 54.29.8). Moreover, Nepos depicts Agesilaus as living in a house as old as his lineage itself (*Ag.* 7.4), and Seneca the Younger (*Ep.* 86) writes about the house of Scipio Africanus, which, in addition to being austere, was viewed as the original house.

The upshot is that Atticus' closeness to the triumviral regime as a cultural advisor (see Millar (1988)) made him influential in presenting paradigms for the program of restoration. In setting a fashion establishing points of personal contact to a more simple and august time, and through his old fashioned morals and frugality, Atticus presented a counter-paradigm to the excesses of the day, and provided a model that helped influence the look and ethos of the emerging regime.

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