

УДК 355.48(37:394)(049.32)

Sergey Litovchenko

Candidate of History, Associate Professor

V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University

4 Svobody sq., 61022, Kharkov, Ukraine

Email: litovchenkosd@gmail.com

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7602-9534>

“GREAT ROMAN EASTERN WAR: ARMENIAN DIMENSION”

Book review: Sampson, Gareth C. *Rome’s Great Eastern War: Lucullus, Pompey and the Conquest of the East, 74–62 BC.* Yorkshire – Philadelphia, 2021. 320 p.

The large-scale Asian wars in the 1st century BC were one of the key moments in the creation of the Roman Empire. It led to the final strengthening of the Roman presence in the East. Therefore, it is not surprising that events in the Middle East have attracted the attention of researchers for more than two hundred years. Now the number of articles that in one way or another address various aspects of Roman policy in the East in the last years of the Republic numbers several thousand. Only special monographs devoted directly

Як цитувати: Litovchenko, S. “Great Roman Eastern War: Armenian Dimension” (Book review: Sampson, Gareth C. *Rome’s Great Eastern War: Lucullus, Pompey and the Conquest of the East, 74–62 BC.* Yorkshire – Philadelphia, 2021. 320 p.). *Вісник Харківського національного університету імені В. Н. Каразіна. Серія «Історія»*, вип. 63, 2023, с. 188-194.

How to cite: Litovchenko, S. “Great Roman Eastern War: Armenian Dimension” (Book review: Sampson, Gareth C. *Rome’s Great Eastern War: Lucullus, Pompey and the Conquest of the East, 74–62 BC.* Yorkshire – Philadelphia, 2021. 320 p.). *The Journal of V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University. Series: History*, no. 63, 2023, pp.188-194.

© Litovchenko S., 2023



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

to international relations in Western Asia in the first century BC can be named by several dozen. However, such an abundance of scientific research did not lead to the formation of a concept of Roman Eastern policy generally recognized in the scientific world, and also it did not solve the problem of numerous «blanks» in the relations in the East of the first century BC. Due to the specifics of our sources the absence of a common approach is completely clear. Our sources represent an exclusively Roman point of view, and the position of researchers who are not free (sometimes by position) from the modern political agenda. That ultimately leads to the dominance in the works of the «pro-Roman» approach or, conversely, «anti-Roman» approach to the analysis of events. The reason for the controversial points is not a lack of sources. They are constantly replenished with archaeological and numismatic finds. The main reason is the specificity of the modern research approach. This approach, in some cases, does not imply that the author is familiar with the work of his predecessors, especially if the work is not written in English. Therefore, the appearance of a new work on the history of Roman eastern politics in the first century BC can only be welcomed. It postulates not only a critical analysis of sources, but an objective approach to the events described: “The clear danger of studying the background to the war which broke out in the Near East in 74 BC, and which would engulf virtually all the kingdoms and empires of the region, is to judge it simply from the perspective of Rome, a task made easier by the bulk of the surviving sources for these conflicts being Roman” (Sampson 2021, 3). The relevance of the work under review is not reduced by the existence of the brilliant work of A. N. Sherwin-White “Roman Foreign Policy in the East: 168 B. C. to A. D. 1.” (Sherwin-White 1984), which, nevertheless, was written almost forty years ago. During that time the source base has been replenished, and the historiography of the issue has expanded significantly. In addition, «Roman foreign policy ...» covers the entire territory of the Eastern Mediterranean over a fairly long time period, which affects the method of presenting material in the study. It is not surprising that there are no recent monographs written in other European languages (not to mention Armenian) in G. Sampson’s work. Unfortunately (and surprisingly, as mentioned above), English-speaking readers and even researchers often ignore non-English literature. Much stranger is the author’s

ignorance of the works of European researchers T. Mommsen (Mommsen, 1856) and T. Reinach (Reinach, 1896), whose historical constructions (albeit not always indisputable) formed the basis of the work of many modern English-speaking researchers.

The work begins with a fairly extensive introduction, which covers the entire first chapter of the first part. The author gives an overview of the gradual advance of the Romans to the Hellenistic East. The chapter also includes a brief description of the First Mithridatic War. In addition, G. Sampson pays attention to the strengthening of the Great Armenia of Tigranes II. The researcher considers that as the main threat to Roman hegemony in the East (sic!).

The second chapter is devoted to the events of the second half of the 80s – the first half of the 70s. BC, described as the prehistory of a great war in the East that broke out in 73 BC. In this chapter, the change in the method of presenting the material becomes obvious. There is a significant part of the text in the second chapter that is occupied by lengthy quotations from the works of ancient authors. Such an approach is certainly appropriate in analytical articles devoted to specific episodes of Roman foreign policy, when the author provides his own translations of sources, significantly correcting the existing ones. However, the usage of that kind of technique in a review monograph seems, in our opinion, not entirely appropriate. In addition, the author sometimes uses relatively unsuccessful translations into English¹.

In general, this kind of presenting the material causes noticeable difficulties, even the author sometimes mentions the dubiousness and even erroneousness of the messages of some source. Usually, a situation arises against which G. Sampson himself opposes, since the reader's view of the events described is formed on the basis of frankly pro-Roman sources.

Noticeable that, by going directly to the events of the 70-60-s BC in Asia, the analysis of which is stated as the main goal of the study (parts 2, 3 and 4),

¹ So, for example, in a quotation from the English translation of Fest's Breviary (p. 123), only two thousand archers are indicated in the army of king Tigranes II in the battle of Tigranocerta, while most researchers believe that the source refers to one hundred and twenty thousand Armenian archers. The same confusion arises with the translation of Eutropius (p. 123), which speaks of 700 thousand Armenian soldiers, while traditionally they indicate 107,5 thousand.

the author desires to demonstrate his own view of the changing situation in the East. The refusal of the usage of the well-established expression «The Third Mithridatic War», as the desire to rely on ancient sources, as emphasizing the role of Tigranes II and his Armenian Empire in the events of the war also demonstrates the author's will to provide his own view to the historical moment.

In chapters 3 and 4, the author's attention is focused on the initial stage of the Third Mithridatic War, primarily the campaign of Lucullus in the Asia Minor. A lot of space in the work is given to military operations, the description of which contains more and more lengthy quotations from ancient authors. But it cannot be said that G. Sampson offers an original explanation of the military or political events of the Mithridatic War. The narrative remains within the framework of the concept traditional for modern historiography.

It is fairly obvious that chapters 5-7, devoted to the campaigns of 69–66 BC, are the key part of the study. The author pays special attention to the participation of Tigranes II in the conflict. This fact which favorably distinguishes the work of G. Sampson from numerous Roman politics in the East studies. Most of the studies consider all events exclusively through the prism of Rome's relations with Mithridates Eupator.

Speaking about the preparation of the campaign of Lucullus against Greater Armenia, G. Sampson correctly points out that Tigranes II was not at war with Rome, and at the same time repeats the assertion, typical to modern historiography, about the threat that the Romans saw in the Armenian Empire. The story about the embassy of the Romans to the Armenian king is based mainly on the reports of Plutarch, whose bias is beyond doubt. The further description of the events also depends, first of all, on the narration of the Greek biographer, which leads to the formation of a traditionally caricature image of an oriental despot, which has become firmly established in modern historiography (Reinach, 1896, 346). Already the title of the paragraph: "Tigranes' Complacency-War by Proxy", sets the general tone of the story. The Armenian king, on the one hand, supports Mithridates with troops, and on the other hand, does nothing to repel a possible attack by the Romans (p. 108). According to Plutarch and most

modern researchers The carelessness of Tigranes II led to the initial success of the invasion of Lucullus. Unfortunately G. Sampson shares the opinion.

Some elements of source analysis were expected in the description of the events associated with the siege of Tigranocerta and the battle of Tigranocerta. G. Sampson even doubted, unlike many researchers, the number of Roman troops, which was reported by the sources. But the method of presenting the material, based on ancient authors' quotations, does not, as it turned out, imply an analytical approach and acquaintance of the reader with all versions of the interpretation of events by modern researchers. This is probably the reason why the description of the Battle of Tigranocerta (the course of Battle of Tigranocerta continues to cause controversy²) appears in the reviewed work as a retelling of ancient authors works. We can observe a similar example in the description of further events of the Armenian campaign of the Roman army. It is possible to mention the specific use of the sources as references in the process of analysis of the actions of Mithridates in Pontus in 68 BC. It is initially stated that there were almost no Roman troops in the region, and then it turns out that Triarius was able to gather large forces in Asia (p. 137-140).

The author also views the actions of Pompey in the East traditionally for Western historiography of the 20th century. The author almost does not mention any controversial issues that interfere with both Pompey's actions in the East and Pompey's organization of Asia. In the text of the work, we can see the assertion that has become commonplace that Pompey did not turn Armenia into a province due to the fact that it was weakly Hellenized (although, to the credit of the author, it also speaks of Tigranes' significant possibilities for resistance).

So, for example, the refusal of G. Sampson from a detailed analysis of the texts of ancient authors about the post-war fate of Sophene and Gordyene, led to the next fact. In the description of the Armenian-Parthian conflict of 64 BC Gordyene appears as the stumbling block, while it was invaded by the Parthians, but according to G. Sampson's work, Gordyene should belong not to Armenia, but to Cappadocia. But it is obvious that Gordyene, like Sophene, ended up in the state of Tigranes the Great³.

² Background: (Olbrycht 2021).

³ Such confusion looks all the more strange, because the list of references includes the work of M. Marciak (Marciak 2017), which discusses this issue in detail (p. 244).

Quite a lot of attention in the work is devoted to the transformation of the Seleucid kingdom into a Roman province, but the reasons for this extraordinary step of the Roman commander are practically not considered (as in the sources and in the literature). Attachment 1 is also descriptive, covering the events of the 50s BC. It would be logical for a work that covers such a vast and important period in the history of the Eastern Mediterranean to be ended with a fundamental conclusion, but we, unfortunately, do not find even a brief summary.

In our opinion, it is still impossible to recognise the attempt to consider the decisive period of Rome's advance to the East, relying only on the analysis of narrative evidence and research by English-speaking scientists of the 20th century, ignoring the latest articles and monographs that directly relate to the stated issues as completely successful. The lack of analysis of modern hypotheses is not always compensated by G. Sampson's commendable desire to move away from many historiographical myths of the history of Roman expansion.

On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that the work of G. Sampson is more of a popular science events description than a monograph based on the scientific method, so it is probably not worth making too high demands on it.

Список джерел та літератури / List of sources and literature

Amela, L. *Cneo Pompeyo Magno. El defensor de la República romana*. Madrid, 2003.

Ehling, K. *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der späten Seleukiden (164–63 v. Chr.): Vom Tode des Antiochos IV. bis zur Einrichtung der Provinz Syria unter Pompeius*. Stuttgart, 2008.

Lerouge, C. *L'image des Parthes dans le monde gréco-romain. Du début du Ier siècle av. J.-C. jusqu'à la fin du Haut-Empire romain*. Stuttgart, 2007.

Manaseryan, R. *Tigranes the Great: The Armenian Struggle Against Rome and Parthia, 94–64 B.C.* Yerevan, 2007 (In Armenian).

Marciak, M. *Sophene, Gordyene, and Adiabene. Three Regna Minora of Northern Mesopotamia Between East and West*. Leiden, 2017.

Mommsen, Th. *Römische Geschichte. Dritter Band: Von Sullas Tode bis zur Schlacht von Thapsus*. Berlin, 1856.

Olbrycht, M. The Battle of Tigranokerta, Lucullus, and Cataphracts. A Re-Assessment. *Mnemosyne*, 2021, p. 1-36.

Panov, A. R. *Rim na severo-vostochnykh rubezhakh: vzaimootnosheniya s gosudarstvami Severnogo Prichernomor'ya i Zakavkaz'ya v I v. do n. e. – pervoy treti II v. n. e.* Arzamas, 2008. (In Russian)

Панов, А. Р. *Рим на северо-восточных рубежах: взаимоотношения с государствами Северного Причерноморья и Закавказья в I в. до н. э. – первой трети II в. н. э.* Арзамас, 2008.

Reinach, T. *Mithridate Eupator, roi de Pont*. Paris, 1896.

Sampson, G. *Rome's Great Eastern War: Lucullus, Pompey and the Conquest of the East, 74–62 BC*. Yorkshire – Philadelphia, 2021.

Sherwin-White, A. N. *Roman Foreign Policy in the East: 168 B.C. to A. D. I*. London, 1984.

Сергій Литовченко

кандидат історичних наук, доцент

Харківський національний університет імені В. Н. Каразіна

майдан Свободи 4, 61022, Харків, Україна

Email: litovchenkosd@gmail.com

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7602-9534>

«ВЕЛИКА РИМСЬКА СХІДНА ВІЙНА: ВІРМЕНСЬКИЙ ВИМІР»

Рецензія на книгу: Sampson, Gareth C. *Rome's Great Eastern War: Lucullus, Pompey and the Conquest of the East, 74–62 BC*.

Yorkshire – Philadelphia, 2021. 320 p.

Текст надійшов до редакції 02.05.2023.

The text was received by the editors 02.05.2023.

Текст затверджено до друку 19.06.2023.

The text is recommended for printing 19.06.2023.