REVIEW

PLUTARCH AND CULTURAL CONNECTIVITY

Chandra Giroux, ed., *Plutarch: Cultural Practice in a Connected World*. Teiresias Supplements Online 3. Münster: Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Münster, 2022. Pp. 188. Online only, open-access. ISBN 978-3-9821178-1-2.

Plutarch famously claimed to be from 'a small city' and chose to reside there so that it would not become 'smaller still' (*Dem.* 2.2). Yet, he was well travelled and even better read, and in his writings touched on all regions of the world as it was known to him. As such, Plutarch is an excellent subject for thinking about cultural connectivity in the Roman Empire. Chandra Giroux's edited volume, *Plutarch: Cultural Practice in a Connected World*, does just this in eight engaging chapters.

The volume, as explained by the editor in her preface, stems from a workshop held at the University of Münster in 2020. In addition to this preface and the eight chapters the volume contains a 'Forward' and an 'Epilogue' written by prominent Plutarch scholars. There are no indices. The volume was published online by the University Library Münster in the series *Teiresias Supplements Online*. It is fully open access, and both the volume as a whole and the individual chapters are conveniently available as PDF-downloads. Giroux is to be highly commended for making peer reviewed research free and easily accessible for all interested readers.

Connectivity is not only understood geographically in the volume. In keeping with Plutarch's own interests and aims, connections between the past and the author's present are also a recurring theme. As is to be expected, Plutarch's biographical project of the *Parallel Lives* features more prominently than his philosophical essays of the *Moralia*. Culturally speaking the emphasis is mainly on Greece and Rome, with only two chapters taking readers farther afield. I will first discuss the volume's chapters in the order in which they appear, followed by some general observations.

The 'Forward' (7–9) is written by Judith Mossman. After a brief illustration of the 'internationalism' of Plutarch's works, she provides a helpful and concise overview of the chapters. Chandra Giroux's 'Preface' (10–11) lays out the volume's main theme. The speakers at the workshop, she writes, were asked 'to consider how Plutarch represented cultural practices in the past and in his

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present, and how he engaged with said cultural practices before the backdrop of an increasingly connected world' (10). She goes on to define cultural practice as 'the activities, events, rituals, language, and expressions that were used, produced, and repeated to create meaning in the everyday lives of the participants' (10).

The first chapter, by Karin Schlapbach, is titled 'The Place of Dance in Plutarch's World. Written Traces of a Physical Cultural Practice' (17–39). Schlapbach surveys connections between dance and space, and between dance and other kinetic behaviours. Dance emerges as a complicated, ambiguous phenomenon, that can both be a symptom of or catalyst for civilisation, or, conversely, be dangerous and destructive. A considerable portion of the chapter concerns moments of dance in the pseudo-Plutarchan work, *Parallella Graeca et Romana*. Schlapbach discusses much interesting material, and does so deftly though at times somewhat quickly, drawing on her extensive prior research on the topic of dance (pantomime especially) in imperial literature.

Sebastian Scharff's chapter, 'No Life Without Athletics. Plutarch and Greek Sport' (40–55), sets out to pursue two questions: the relationship of war and athletics in Plutarch, and the role athletics plays in the *Parallel Lives*. The dismissal of athletics' use for military training in *Philopoemen* 3.2–4 must be understood, argues Scharff, as an attempt on Plutarch's part to distance the Greek Philopoemen from this quintessentially Greek pursuit, and paint him as being equal to his counterpart Flamininus in the stereotypically Roman art of war (Beneker's interpretation of this pair in the volume differs sharply; Scharff acknowledges this, but neither author engages with the other's contribution). With respect to the larger question of the role of athletics in the *Lives*, Scharff concludes that there is no Greek *Life* without athletics, and that Plutarch 'adapts his judgement to the necessities of the particular context in which he uses athletics to talk about something else' (53). Occasionally he quarrels with athletic trainers, because they competed with those offering rhetorical and philosophical education.

In her chapter, 'Feeling Scaphism: *Enargeia* and Assimilation in the *Artaxerxes*' (56–71), Rebecca Moorman offers a close reading of one particularly gruesome and graphic episode from the only Persian *Life*. Drawing on the notion of 'aesthetic engagement' Moorman proposes that through this scene Plutarch 'implicates his audience in the very practices they are condemning, forcing readers to confront their own susceptibility to vice' (57). She argues convincingly that the vividness (*enargeia*) of Plutarch's description of the torture draws in the reader to such an extent that they become aligned with the Persian spectators internal to the narrative, and, as a consequence, can no longer easily distance themselves from the brutality as 'barbarian' or 'other'. Moorman contextualises her argument with other moments where Plutarch

simultaneously evokes disgust and fascination, and with ancient observations about the device of *enargeia*.

The only other chapter, in addition to Moorman's, that takes us away from Greece and Rome, is Thomas Schmidt's contribution, titled 'Local Past and Global Present in Plutarch's *Greek*, *Roman*, and *Barbarian Questions*' (72–96). Schmidt offers a clear and engaging overview of the geographical and chronological scope of the extant *Greek* and *Roman Questions*, respectively. He also attempts a reconstruction of the lost, so-called *Barbarian Questions*, by lifting suitable passages from the *Parallel Lives*, on the grounds of the amount of shared ethnographic material between the extant sets of *Questions* and the *Lives*. The results of this survey are quite interesting. All three sets take a strong interest in the past, but often in connection to the present. Conversely, while the Greek and 'barbarian' questions are spread out over a large area, the Roman questions are confined to the city of Rome. However, Schmidt's persistent use of the term 'barbarian' without any discussion of its ancient or modern connotations is a bit jarring.

As mentioned, Jeffrey Beneker returns to the pair of Philopoemen and Flamininus in his chapter titled 'The Last of the Greeks, and Good Riddance: Historical Commentary in Plutarch's *Philopoemen–Flamininus*' (97–118). He argues that the structure of these two *Lives* and the *synkrisis* serve to foreground Flamininus' achievement: 'Philopoemen is both an individual and a metaphor; he is his own man and at the same time embodies the deficiencies of all Greeks, past and present, while Flamininus becomes their saviour' (99). Ultimately, Philopoemen's story is subservient to Flamininus', while the latter's declaration of freedom for the Greeks is the climax of the pairing. Beneker offers a persuasive close reading of this remarkable pair of *Lives*—the only one to deal with two contemporaries—set during the final days of 'real' freedom for Greece.

In the sixth chapter, titled 'Building Cultural Bridges to Statesmen of the Past: Plutarch's Heroes as Guides to City Leaders' (119–47), Susan Jacobs traces connections between the political practices he and his contemporaries participated in and the deeds of past rulers he narrates in the *Parallel Lives*. By comparing three pairs of *Lives* (Solon & Publicola, Aristides & Cato Maior, and Phocion & Cato Minor) to the piece *Precepts of Statecraft*, and, in some cases, to other authors' accounts of the same events, she demonstrates how Plutarch intentionally inserts mention of certain measures into the *Lives* 'to amplify the contemporary resonance' (134). Jacobs argues that in this way Plutarch forged 'inter-cultural connections' between his present day and 'the varied array of individual political constitutions and cultural heritages' of the cities and regions that made up the Empire (120).

Noreen Humble's chapter, 'Plutarch's Imaginary Sparta: Hybridity and Identity in a Paradoxical Community' (148–63), draws on the work of the philosopher Julia Kristeva to contribute to the debate on Plutarch's own cultural identity. Borrowing Kristeva's terminology she characterises Plutarch as 'a foreigner in the world of Rome, who is reconciled with himself to the extent that he recognizes himself as a foreigner, i.e., is both same and other, and puts his own Greek culture in perspective to the extent of having it not only exist side by side but also alternate with the culture of Rome' (150). Humble sides with those who trace in Plutarch's writing about Greek history and his Roman present at least some amount of resistance to Rome. She positions her argument specifically against Hugh Liebert's book *Plutarch's Politics: Between City and Empire* (2016), which claims that Plutarch identified closely with classical Sparta. She sees Plutarch's treatment of Sparta instead as mixed and emphasises his ties to Chaironeia. This second part is less convincing than the discussion of Kristeva, and does not fit easily into the chapter overall.

The eighth chapter is written by the volume's editor Chandra Giroux and is titled 'Beyond Bacon: Plutarch and Boiotian Culture' (164–84). Giroux offers an overview of Plutarch's treatment of his native Boiotia and fellow Boiotians, which, she argues, 'carried a message of equality, one that likened Boiotia and its culture to the "greats" of Greece, in other words, to Athens and Sparta, and even occasionally, to the Romans that now dominated their soil' (165). He foregrounds the region for its military prowess, and frequently discusses the Theban hero Herakles to present Boiotia as 'the progenitor of Greek customs' (179). Given the popularity of Herakles in imperial Greek and Latin literature generally, this last point is not entirely persuasive, but on the whole the amount of evidence Giroux presents for Plutarch's special attention to Boiotia is impressive.

The volume closes with an 'Epilogue' (185–8) by Hans Beck which discusses the relationship between the global and the local in Plutarch's works, and touches very briefly on the eight preceding chapters. He credits Plutarch with capturing as an 'entangled world' the experiences of 'people around the Mediterranean Sea and in its adjacent lands' which 'at the time … was a truly global geography' (186). By defining as 'global' the lands known to Plutarch, however, we risk discursively erasing the many cultures which were out of his sight but were also thriving then; what may have been global to Plutarch was not global in actuality, and we should not treat it as such.

Throughout the volume there is relatively little discussion of concepts and terminology. If Plutarch lived in a 'connected' world and wrote about 'otherness' and 'barbarians', how did he construct these categories in his works, and how do his categories compare to modern ones? The scholarly debate about

such questions has been especially vibrant in recent decades, and it is surprising to see only limited engagement with this type of research in the volume; the situation is similar with regard to the evaluation of Roman imperialism.[1] Additionally, more sustained treatment of regions outside of Greece and Rome would have been welcome (Plutarch's interest in Egypt, now featured only in Schmidt's chapter, comes to mind in particular). These criticisms notwithstanding, Giroux has put together a worthwhile volume that will contain much of interest to Plutarch scholars and enthusiasts. Without exception the chapters are stimulating and substantive yet highly readable, and they make a meaningful contribution to the field.

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[1] On 'otherness', race, and ethnicity antiquity see, e.g., E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford, 1989); J. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1997) and id., *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago, 2002); B. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, 2004); E. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton, 2010); D. McCoskey, *Race: Antiquity and Its Legacy* (Oxford, 2012). On imperialism and resistance see, e.g.: M. Loar, C. MacDonald, and D. Padilla Peralta, edd., *Rome, Empire of Plunder: The Dynamics of Cultural Appropriation* (Cambridge, 2017); F. Ursin, *Freiheit, Herrschaft, Widerstand. Griechische Erinnerungskultur in der Hohen Kaiserzeit (1.–3. Jahrhundert n. Chr.)* (Stuttgart, 2019); D. Padilla Peralta, 'Epistemicide: The Roman Case', *Classica* 33.2 (2020) 151–86.