

Philip A. Stadter, *Plutarch and his Roman Readers*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, X + 394 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-871833-8, £80.00.

Philip STADTER [= S.] has published on Plutarch extensively for the last fifty years, starting with his 1965 book on *Mulierum virtutes*¹. In this period he has authored numerous papers (mostly on the *Lives* but occasionally also on the *Moralia*), published a commentary on the *Life of Pericles*², edited several volumes dedicated to Plutarch, and influenced the growth of Plutarchan scholarship by engaging in the activities of the International Plutarch Society³.

The reviewed book is a collection of twenty three papers by S., mostly devoted to Plutarch's *Lives*, published in the last twenty or so years (the earliest paper dates back to 1992; the most recent ones are still in press); the "Introduction" and the first chapter ("Friends or Patrons?") are completely new. The book makes S.'s scholarship more accessible to a broader audience – several of the papers included in the volume were published in conference proceedings that are difficult to acquire; two papers, originally published in Italian, have been translated into English. The formatting throughout the book is fairly consistent (though there is no consistency in the titles of Plutarch's texts, e.g. *Quaestiones convivales* are referred to in one paper as *Table-Talk* and in another as *Symposiaca*; the *index locorum*, however, helpfully uses uniformly Latin titles); some papers have been slightly revised and updated. The order of the papers is not chronological, but they are divided into four thematic groups constituting the four parts of the volume (I: "Two Worlds – or One?"; II: "Writing for Romans"; III: "Statesmen as Models and Warnings"; IV: "Post-Classical Receptions").

The title indicates the overarching theme of the book: the purpose of Plutarch's writings (in particular his biographies) and its intended and actual audience. Indeed, while S.'s contributions cover a whole range of Plutarch's texts and focus on a variety of topics, they share a common perspective on Plutarch and his goals. S.'s Plutarch is not an insulated philosopher avoiding engagement in contemporary political affairs. S. believes and repeatedly emphasises that Plutarch ambitiously intended to influence and instruct *via* his works. This was aimed not only at his Greek and occasionally Roman friends, but also at the ruling elite of the Roman empire, both Greek and Roman, those "responsible for the governance of cities, provinces, and the empire itself" (p. 108). This theme is particularly prominent in chapter 2 ("Plutarch's *Lives* and their Roman Readers"), but runs throughout the volume. S.'s Plutarch is a political philosopher and a philosophical adviser to the imperial ruling class, answering Plato's call to engage with the world of politics (pp. 10–12). From an early age he was acutely interested in political history of the empire, impressively educated in Roman history and customs, and purposefully maintaining personal ties with prominent Romans. This is an intriguing portrait, though by no means unproblematic if we take into account the fact that there are few explicit references to contemporary politics in Plutarch's works, which in general, as has been observed, seem to avoid direct engagement in current affairs⁴.

¹ P.A. STADTER, *Plutarch's Historical Methods: An Analysis of the Mulierum Virtutes*, Cambridge 1965.

² P.A. STADTER, *A Commentary on Plutarch's Pericles*, Chapel Hill 1989.

³ The International Plutarch Society published a volume dedicated to Philip STADTER in recognition of his contribution to Plutarchan scholarship: A. PÉREZ JIMÉNEZ, F. TITCHENER (eds.), *Historical and Biographical Values of Plutarch's Works. Studies Devoted to Professor Philip A. Stadter by International Plutarch Society*, Málaga–Logan 2005.

⁴ See e.g. C. PELLING, *Plutarch's Caesar: A Caesar for Caesars?*, in: P.A. STADTER, L. VAN DER STOCKT, (eds.) *Sage and Emperor: Plutarch, Greek Intellectuals, and Roman Power in the Time of Trajan, 98–117 AD*, Leuven 2002, pp. 213–226.

Part I (“Two Worlds – or One?”) consists of seven chapters which focus, to a greater or lesser extent, on Plutarch’s relationship with Rome and the Romans. This theme is particularly dominant in the first three contributions, which examine Plutarch’s “friendships” with prominent Romans (in particular with Mestrius Florus and Sosius Senecio) in the context of the conventions of the Roman institution of patronage (chapter 1: “Friends or Patrons?”), discuss the intended audience of the *Parallel Lives* (chapter 2: “Plutarch’s *Lives* and their Roman Readers”), and reconsider the place of the *Lives of the Caesars* in the Plutarchan corpus (chapter 3: “Revisiting Plutarch’s *Lives of Caesars*”). This last paper proposes a Vespasianic date for Plutarch’s largely lost biographies of emperors; if this were true, the work would have been composed by a young Plutarch, who had already managed to acquire an impressive knowledge of Roman history. Chapters 4 and 5 (“Plutarch: Diplomat for Delphi?” and “Plutarch and Apollo at Delphi”) focus on Plutarch’s ties with Delphi and the role of Delphic oracle in the *Parallel Lives*, chapters 6 and 7 (“Drinking, *Table Talk* and Plutarch’s Contemporaries” and “Leading the Party, Leading the City: The Symposiarch as *politikos*”) turn to the *Table-Talk* and relationship between *symposion* and politics.

The first three papers in Part II (“Writing for Romans”) discuss Plutarch’s preparations for the *Parallel Lives* (chapter 8: “Before Pen Touched Paper: Plutarch’s Preparations for the *Parallel Lives*”), his knowledge of Latin and use of Roman sources (chapter 9: “Plutarch’s Latin Reading: Cicero’s *Lucullus* and Horace’s *Epistle* 1.6”), and his representation of the careers of Roman politicians and Plutarch’s good understanding of the *cursus honorum* and its anomalies in the late republic (chapter 10: “Plutarchan Prosopography: The *Cursus honorum*”). S.’s arguments in chapter 9 for Plutarch’s good familiarity with Latin and with the works of Cicero as well as his suggestion that the biographer, who paraphrases Horace’s *Ep.* I 6, 45 f. in *Life of Lucullus* 39, might have had direct knowledge of the Roman poet’s work, are congruent with a recent shift in scholarship, no longer determined to deny Plutarch’s knowledge of Latin. Chapters 11 and 12 (“Plutarch and Trajanic Ideology” and “The Justice of Trajan in Pliny *Epistles* 10 and Plutarch”) focus on parallels in works of Plutarch and Pliny the Younger and consider them in the context of Trajanic ideology. S. believes that Plutarch’s *Lives*, like Pliny’s *Panegyricus* and Dio Chrysostom’s *Kingship Orations*, offer some suggestions for the Trajanic rule, though they are phrased indirectly as self-censorship was necessary in times of absolute monarchy. Not all will agree with this interpretation of the *Lives*; in fact, several contributions in the 2002 volume from which chapter 11 originates⁵ emphasise Plutarch’s disengagement rather than engagement with contemporary political life. Chapter 13 (“Plutarch’s Alexandrias”) discusses the representation of Alexandria in the *Lives* and *Moralia* and speculates about Plutarch’s own knowledge of and visit to the city (S. proposes that Plutarch travelled to Alexandria with an embassy to Vespasian in 69/70). The last chapter in section II (“The Philosopher’s Ambition: Plutarch, Arrian, and Marcus Aurelius”) compares the careers and ambitions of Plutarch, Arrian, and Marcus Aurelius.

The contributions in Part III (“Statesmen as Models and Warnings”) focus for the most part on the moral dimension of the *Parallel Lives*. In chapter 15 (“Plutarch’s *Lives*: The Statesman as Moral Actor”) S. argues that the *Lives* are innovative in their use of history and biography for a moral purpose; what sets Plutarch apart from earlier Greek historians is his focus on the moral aspect not only of specific actions of his protagonists, but of their whole lives. In chapter 16 (“The Rhetoric of Virtue in Plutarch’s *Lives*”) he asks how precisely the reader is to become more virtuous as a result of reading the *Lives* and examines the rhetorical strategies used to influence the moral growth of the audience. S. argues that Plutarch’s aim is to sensitise the reader to his own shortcomings and to spur him to emulate virtue by presenting images of men in action. He also points out that the technique of *synkrisis*, setting two lives side by side, allows the reader to see them more accurately and increases his ability to discern and differentiate virtues. Plutarch’s

⁵ STADTER, VAN DER STOCKT (eds.), *op. cit.* (n. 4).

moralizing programme in the *Lives* has been further examined by scholars⁶ in a vigorous and nuanced way since S.'s original delivery (in 1996) of the conference papers from which chapters 15 and 16 originated.

The next two chapters focus on specific lives and their purpose. In chapter 17 (“*Paidagōgia pros to theion*: Plutarch’s *Numa*”) S. interprets the *Life of Numa* as a representation of the ideal *princeps*; chapter 18 (“Paradoxical Paradigms: Plutarch’s *Lysander* and *Sulla*”) is an attempt to illuminate the Lysander–Sulla pair by pointing out the similarities between the two successful yet deeply flawed protagonists. Chapter 19 (“Competition and its Costs: Φιλονικία in Plutarch’s *Society and Heroes*”) discusses the term φιλονικία in Plutarch; after a short discussion of the ambivalence of φιλονικία and φιλονεικία and a very brief overview of the use of the term in the prose of the classical period, S. examines the term in the *Moralia* and the *Lives* and observes that, while in the *Moralia* it typically has negative connotations, in the *Lives* it is more ambiguous – desirable in some circumstances, yet dangerous. Chapter 20 (“Parallels in Three Dimensions”) discusses interrelations between six lives of late republican Romans (Crassus, Pompey, Caesar, Cato Minor, Brutus and Antony) and accompanying Greek biographies. He distinguishes four areas of interplay between these lives: conquest, politics, kingship, and tragedy, and suggests that they might have been intended to be seen as a set aimed at the contemporary political elite speaking of great statesmen and their political failures.

The last part of the book is entitled “Post-Classical Reception” and moves away from the Roman readers to more recent reception. In chapters 21 and 22 (“Cato the Younger in the English Enlightenment: Addison’s Rewriting of Plutarch” and “Alexander Hamilton’s Notes on Plutarch in his Paybook”) S. discusses reception of Plutarch in the eighteenth century: first, he compares the figure of Cato Minor in Plutarch and in the tragedy *Cato* by Joseph Addison and, second, he examines notes by the young Alexander Hamilton on two pairs in Plutarch’s *Lives*, *Theseus–Romulus* and *Lycurgus–Numa*. The latter chapter, although chronologically removed from the realities of Plutarch’s world, nevertheless fits well with the overall concept of the volume. Hamilton, as an ambitious young man eager to engage in political life, fits S.’s image of Plutarch’s intended reader; consequently, S. reads Hamilton’s notes not only as evidence of the statesman’s development, but also as an example of a serious reading of Plutarch by a politically active man. The last chapter of the volume (“Should We Imitate Plutarch’s Heroes?”) returns to the question of how to approach the *Lives* and argues, similarly to chapter 16, that protagonists are not models to be imitated, but case studies to be examined. As elsewhere in the book, S.’s personal affection for Plutarch and his conviction that his works still have a potential to guide and instruct are clearly discernible. The book closes with a bibliography covering all the chapters, very useful *indices locorum* of both Plutarchan and non-Plutarchan passages, an index of names, and an index of topics.

All the papers included in the volume are informative and lucid. S.’s portrait of Plutarch is a result of long, intimate familiarity with the Plutarchan *corpus* (and a genuine regard and fondness for the Chaeronean author) combined with an interest in and understanding of the political realities of the early empire. He asks some big-picture questions – about purpose, audience and immediate reception. Because of the scarceness of both extra-textual evidence and Plutarch’s explicit declarations, many of S.’s conclusions remain, as he is well aware, speculative; there is certainly room for disagreement and different perspectives. However, one does not have to be entirely convinced by his arguments to appreciate the consistency with which he contextualises Plutarch’s *œuvre* with close attention to the historical and political circumstances in which it originated.

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⁶ For instance in T. DUFF, *Plutarch’s Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice*, Oxford 1999.