

CHAPTER 1

Plutarch and Rome

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1. A Greek in a Roman World

No man more successfully bridged the two classical cultures, Greek and Roman, than Plutarch. His crowning achievement, the *Parallel Lives*, testifies to the dignity and intrinsic worth of the two nations, comparing their heroes and their history. His sense of the contribution that each made to his own world, and would continue to make, won him fame in his own time and has made him a favorite window to the classical world ever since. How did this Greek learn to speak of Rome so effectively?

When Plutarch was born, his home, Chaeronea, had been subject to Romans for more than two centuries. Chaeronea had been a battleground of Greek independence. Here the Thebans, Athenians, and other Greeks had fought against Philip of Macedon and his son Alexander, vainly, in 338 BCE. Here in 86 BCE Sulla had defeated the forces of Mithridates of Pontus, who was trying to force the Romans to abandon Greece. Sulla's success assured that Rome would continue to rule Greece, as it had since the victories of Flamininus at Cynoscephalae in 197 and Aemilius Paullus at Pydna in 168. Plutarch could point to the monuments of the two battles and see the combatants' weapons dug up from the fields.

At times Roman domination could be oppressive. Chaeronea was almost destroyed when a proud young man rejected the advances of a Roman officer; it was saved by the intervention of Lucullus, an officer of Sulla's (Plut. *Cim.* 1–2). Family tradition recalled that Plutarch's great-grandfather had had to carry on his back grain to supply Antony's forces at Actium in 31 (Plut. *Ant.* 68.6–8). That war had established the dynasty that would end in Plutarch's day with the death of Nero and the civil war of 69 CE. Roman rule for Plutarch was a given, but the stability of its government and the benevolence of its rulers was never assured.

His language, his rhetorical and philosophical education, his historical and literary heritage, and later his position as priest at Apollo's ancient shrine at Delphi bound him intellectually and culturally to a millennium of Greek tradition. His voracious reading in Greek literature, history, and philosophy, in particular Plato, continued throughout his life and is evident in every page he wrote. Plutarch is one of the earliest figures of the Greek literary renaissance that would flower in the second century CE.¹ Unlike his contemporary, Dio of Prusa, he chose to present himself as a philosopher rather than an orator. In addition, his deep familiarity with Rome's history and institutions set him apart from other contemporary Greek intellectuals.

Plutarch as a young man decided to engage with Rome and with individual Romans, with extraordinary success. His teacher at Athens, Ammonius, whose significant civic office as Herald of the Areopagus required regular contact with imperial officials, may have introduced the notion. A crucial stimulus might have been Nero's trip to Greece in 68 CE, accompanied by leading figures of the court, including the future emperor Vespasian. Plutarch writes of attending the games at Delphi where Nero was competing, along with his teacher Ammonius (Plut. *De E* 385B). It would have been a good occasion for Plutarch, now in his twenties, to meet prominent Romans. He had perhaps already served as envoy to the proconsul of Achaia (*Prae. ger. reip.* 816CD). Within two years Vespasian had claimed the title of emperor in Alexandria: Plutarch may have journeyed there with an embassy to salute him.² Either in Greece or in Alexandria he seems to have met a close associate of the new emperor's, the senator L. Mestrius Florus. Florus became a friend and patron to the young philosopher, and at some point obtained him Roman citizenship, with the name L. Mestrius Ploutarchos.³ Plutarch would have entered the equestrian class: his education, public service, and Roman citizenship bear witness to his belonging to a prosperous family.⁴ When Plutarch traveled to Rome, sometime in Vespasian's reign, but probably in the early 70s, Florus had him accompany him to northern Italy. In his biography of Otho, Plutarch proudly writes that Florus, a consular, had shown him the battlefield of Bedriacum, where he himself had fought for Otho, and Otho's monument at Brixellum.⁵ This association with Florus was to be extremely important to him, for it meant that he had someone who could introduce him to other leading senators and, most importantly, speak of him to the emperor.⁶

2. Visiting Rome: The Immersion Experience

This first journey to Rome would have combined three purposes: to augment his reputation in the society of the capital as a philosopher and speaker, to represent his fellow citizens in Boeotia or Delphi at the court, and to enlarge his circle of Roman friends.⁷ "While I was in Rome and other parts of Italy," Plutarch tells us, "I did not have leisure to practice the Latin language on account of political business and people coming for philosophy" (Plut. *Dem.* 2.2). Apparently he gave lectures on philosophical topics, as did Euphrates, a philosopher whom the younger Pliny heard and admired.⁸ These no doubt would have been in Greek. Florus was probably among his listeners, for Plutarch later recalls his interest in philosophical debates and his regular celebration of the birthdays of Socrates and Plato. Another Roman contact, Julius Secundus, who also had served with Otho, became a much admired speaker during Vespasian's reign.⁹

Plutarch does not define further his political business in Rome, but it may well have concerned Delphi, since Vespasian granted that city the right to remain free and autonomous, as well as other privileges. Possibly he also negotiated the appointment of Vespasian's son Titus as archon, or chief magistrate, at Delphi, a considerable honor for that city. Titus held the position while emperor in 79/80 CE, the year of the quadrennial Pythian games.¹⁰

His stay in Rome also gave Plutarch the opportunity to achieve reading and probably speaking fluency in Latin.¹¹ Plutarch was already able to read Latin historical authors with some ease at the time of the composition of the *Lives of the Caesars*, which, as will be discussed below, was probably in the mid-70s, when he would have been in his late twenties or early thirties. This work required extensive use of Roman sources, at least one of which was significant enough to be used later by Tacitus and Suetonius.¹² Plutarch may have begun his study of Latin in Chaeronea or Athens, then continued more intensively after he resolved to expand his interests toward Rome. Much later, he would write, "I began to read Roman works late and when advanced in age" (*Dem.* 2.2), an indication that he did not begin his second language from his earliest years, as was preferred by educators like Quintilian, but after he had already been reading Greek for some time. His wide reading in Greek literature as an adolescent and his early experience on embassies prepared him to understand the Latin texts he was confronting. As he goes on to say, "It happened that I followed along the words from the circumstances, insofar as I had some experience of them, rather than understood and recognized the circumstances from the words." But as for the finer points of Ciceronian prose style, he professed ignorance. "I think it charming and pleasurable to perceive the beauty and rapidity of Latin delivery and the stylistic figures and rhythms and the other features in which it glories, but practice and exercising for this purpose was not convenient: that is more for those whose greater leisure and suitable age permit such ambitions" (*Dem.* 2.4). This self-deprecatory confession that his Latin did not reach the high standard which he had attained in Greek also intimates that he had better things to do while in Rome than perfect the finer points of Latin rhetorical language.¹³ The study of the errors in Plutarch's paraphrases of Latin texts has been significant for establishing his acquaintance with the originals and the relative accuracy of his notices.¹⁴ But it has sometimes led to a rather pedantic evaluation of his ability to read Latin. As Hartmut Erbse has remarked, scholars tend to treat him as if he were a high school student.¹⁵ Even those who think that he read widely in Latin tend to speak of his difficulties in reading, rather than his ease and rapidity. On the contrary, his extensive use of Roman historians in the *Caesars*, and later in the *Parallel Lives* and other works, proves his ease with the language.¹⁶

Plutarch's knowledge of Latin, as well as conversations with his Roman friends, gave him access to a fuller spectrum of Roman culture than he would have had in Greece. This is manifest in his declamation *On the Fortune of the Romans*, which most likely was delivered at Rome under Vespasian.¹⁷ The speech demonstrates an exceptional familiarity with major figures in Roman history, from Romulus to Augustus, compared, for example, to the orations on Rome of Dio Chrysostom and Aelius Aristides. The Roman authors Valerius Antias and Livy are cited, while the scholar Varro seems to be the source for the list of the temples of Fortuna at Rome. He must have begun reading in these works, as well as the histories treating Augustus and succeeding emperors needed for the *Lives of*

the Caesars, while in Rome, or even before. At the same time, his personal contacts with Romans would have enriched his general knowledge of Roman customs, traditions, and practices. His trip to northern Italy with Florus gave him the opportunity to see recent battlefields and, probably, a statue of Marius erected in Ravenna (*Mar.* 2.1). No doubt Florus, Secundus, and others he encountered could tell him many stories not only of the terrible year 69, but of the reigns of Nero and earlier emperors to encourage and supplement his reading.¹⁸

Another work, the *Roman Questions*, written after the death of Domitian in 96 CE, draws heavily on the reading in Roman sources that underlay the *Parallel Lives*. The 112 short investigations span a broad spectrum of issues related to Roman practices and customs and furnish further evidence that Plutarch had immersed himself not only in Roman history but its antiquarian lore. Terentius Varro, already cited in *On the Fortune of Rome*, appears to have been an important source, as well as the Augustan scholar Verrius Flaccus.¹⁹ Here again, Plutarch may have drawn on oral sources as well. Remarkably, none of the Roman practices is interpreted as harmful or foolish. Rather, they are shown to be different from, but consonant with Greek practice and Greek philosophy. Occasionally Plutarch even prefers the Roman custom to the Greek. Overall, the Romans are seen as separate from the Greeks, but equally to be respected.

Over the years Plutarch seems to have made several trips to Rome, including a possible stay about 89, and another about 92.²⁰ After that the record is silent: Plutarch would have been over fifty, and perhaps less ready to travel, but Domitian's expulsion of philosophers from Rome and Italy in 93 or 94 may have kept him away. Again, service on embassies may have been one reason for his visits in the 80s and early 90s. He may have spoken on behalf of the Delphians before the emperor Domitian, who restored the great temple of Apollo in 84. The imposing inscription on the temple recording his gift is still preserved at Delphi.²¹ He continued as well to teach philosophy. He casually mentions a lecture he was delivering at Rome that was attended by Iunius Rusticus. Rusticus received a hand-delivered letter from Domitian, but preferred to hear the rest of the lecture before reading it. Plutarch admired Rusticus' Stoic restraint, but not long after Domitian had the senator, a consul in 92, executed. Rusticus had written a laudatory piece on Thræsea Paetus, who had been an outspoken critic of Nero and the author of a life of Cato, the great opponent of Caesar (*De cur.* 522DE; Tac. *Agr.* 2.1).

3. Roman Friends

Plutarch's repeated visits to Rome gave him occasion to meet other Roman friends, some of whom he would have known already from their service in Greece. He enjoyed a dinner with Avidius Quietus and Aufidius Modestus, when in summer 92 the former had just returned from serving as proconsul in Achaea.²² Quietus, like Rusticus, had philosophical interests and had been a friend of Thræsea Paetus. Quietus had been honored at Delphi, where it is likely he met Plutarch. He became suffect consul in 93, and later proconsul in Britain. Plutarch addressed his treatise *God's Slowness to Punish* to him, and *On Brotherly Love* to him and his brother Nigrinus. Aufidius Modestus was a literary scholar, believed to have written a commentary on Vergil's *Georgics*.

Our two chief sources for Plutarch's Roman friends, as for his Greek, are his dialogues, where he introduces them as interlocutors, and the dedications of his works. The nine books of *Table Talk*, recalling (and perhaps inventing) conversations at dinner in various Greek cities, are especially informative. They are dedicated to Sosius Senecio, as were the *Parallel Lives* and the treatise *On Progress in Virtue*. Sosius had shared many dinners with Plutarch in Greece, was a companion of his sons, and had been present at one son's wedding.²³ Plutarch had probably met this much younger man when Sosius had been quaestor in Greece in the 80s. Sosius' strong interests in philosophy did not impede his brilliant senatorial career. After aiding Trajan's ascent to the throne in 98 he was named ordinary consul in 99. He held high commands in Trajan's Dacian wars and won a second consulate in 107. Sosius' two consulships and intimacy with Trajan made him the most powerful of Plutarch's Roman friends.²⁴ He also seems to be Plutarch's ideal reader, one pursuing an active and significant political career, but concerned to apply philosophical reasoning in his life. *On Progress in Virtue* encourages Sosius, as addressee, to reject Stoic absolutism concerning virtue and to confidently observe the signs of his own moral progress.²⁵

Roman society was dominated by considerations of class and rank. Plutarch's friends belonged to the elite of the empire. In addition to Florus, Rusticus, Quietus, and Sosius, five other acquaintances held consular rank. The children of the two Avidii, the younger Quietus and Nigrinus, also known to Plutarch, both became consuls (in 111 and 110, respectively). The younger Nigrinus served as Trajan's special envoy to Achaea, and later as legate in Dacia. In 117 CE, at Trajan's death, he was important enough to be dangerous to Trajan's heir Hadrian, and so was one of the four consulars executed to ensure a smooth succession. Herennius Saturninus, a dinner companion and the dedicatee of *Against Colotes*, served as proconsul of Achaea, then suffect consul in 100 and legate of Upper Moesia. Minucius Fundanus, principal speaker of *On Control of Anger* and a close friend, held the consulship in 107. C. Julius Antiochus Epiphanes Philopappus, grandson of the last king of Commagene, held the consulship in 109. A fellow citizen of Athens and friend, his extraordinary monument, still standing opposite the Acropolis on the hill of the Muses, testifies to a dual allegiance. He is portrayed twice, both as an Athenian in Greek *himation* and as a Roman in consular toga, with his royal lineage inscribed in Greek and his Roman *cursus honorum* given in Latin. Philopappus expresses in his monument the same desire to respect and combine both cultures which we recognize behind Plutarch's biographies. Plutarch addresses to him *Friends and Flatterers*, a subtle discussion of social relations in which he presents himself as an equal to this immensely wealthy descendant of royalty. Most of this group of friends attained the peaks of their careers under Trajan, when Plutarch reached his sixties. It was for men like this, as well as his many Greek friends active in local and imperial government, for whom he wrote the *Parallel Lives*.²⁶

4. Evaluating Emperors, Past and Present

The emperor sat at the peak of Roman society. As we have seen, Plutarch may have had contact with Vespasian already in Alexandria and his friendship with Florus had connected him to Vespasian's inner circle. Strikingly, he immediately set to writing a collection of biographies of earlier emperors, perhaps with Florus' encouragement.

The work he composed, *Lives of the Caesars*, treated the eight emperors from Augustus to Vitellius, a period of roughly 100 years (31 BCE–69 CE).²⁷ This work is often given slight attention, since only two short lives are preserved, *Galba* and *Otho*, treating a portion of the year 69. Nevertheless, the project of reappraising such an extended period was enormously ambitious. The whole work would have run at least 375 modern pages, and perhaps 500 or more. The *Caesars* is also the first known work to have presented Roman history as a series of biographies, directing attention especially to the character and actions of the emperors. Suetonius and the authors of the *Historia Augusta* were to follow this practice, and even Tacitus organized his historical narratives according to the reigns of the emperors.

From the two extant lives, it is apparent that Plutarch wished to write history with a philosophical cast, giving attention to moral values and to general issues of just government, according to ethical principles found also in his essays and dialogues. Plutarch held the Platonic view that a monarch should be devoted to the welfare of his people and establish justice, harmony, and peace in his kingdom.²⁸ He presents Numa and Lycurgus as being just such kings, though in different ways. In *Dion*, he describes the ideal king, a ruler who

would conform his character to the principle of virtue and render it similar to the most divine and holy model of reality which guides the universe from disorder to order, and thus would procure great happiness for himself and his citizens. He would achieve by his paternal rule, through self-control and justice and with the good will of his subjects, what [before] had been obtained from their discouragement and oppression, so that he would be a king rather than a tyrant. (10.2–3)

The *Caesars* gave ample opportunity to examine how this vision played out in real life. In the proem to *Galba*, after citing Plato's *Republic* on the good ruler, Plutarch presents the situation during the civil war: troops out of control, heads severed from bodies, and stage tyrants entering and exiting one after another – the complete breakdown of rational government (1.3–8). The series began differently, perhaps. From the very few fragments we have of the lost lives, Augustus was portrayed as the opposite, at least once he had assumed sole power: a bringer of peace after the civil wars (in which he himself had acted as violently as any) and a ruler who knew self-restraint and respect for the law. At one point, many years after composing the *Caesars*, Plutarch wrote that Augustus' political acts "became much more kingly and helpful to the people toward the end of his life" (*An seni* 784D). Augustus, then, in mature age seemed a kingly ruler, in the Platonic sense, and the complete opposite of the wretched leaders portrayed in *Galba* and *Otho* at the end of the series. We can say little about the intervening emperors, but Plutarch had a low opinion of Nero. He rejoiced at Nero's proclamation of freedom for Greece in 68, but even so that only won the emperor's soul reincarnation, after dreadful agonies, as a frog in a swamp rather than as the viper his murder of his mother would demand.²⁹ It is reasonable to think that Plutarch, in describing the decline of rulers from the kingly Augustus to the tyrants of the civil war of 69, is looking forward to a new beginning in Vespasian's reign. The *Caesars* apparently projected Plutarch's hopes for a renewed Rome after the collapse under Nero and the disaster that followed his death, but he hardly held a utopian vision of the monarchy. The history of the emperors made it clear

enough that they bore little resemblance to Plato's philosopher-king. At the same time this history suggested to Plutarch himself and to his readers a need for the kind of moral training of the ruling class which a philosopher might provide, a subtle hint of Plutarch's own potential usefulness to Rome. Plato had been willing to travel to Sicily to put his abstract political theories into practice by educating the Syracusan tyrants. With the help of his Roman friends, Plutarch could dream of something similar, to educate the ruling class, and perhaps even the emperor, to rule wisely and humanely. The *Lives of the Caesars* were the first major step in that direction, employing historical biography to inspire political morality.

Whatever his hopes, Plutarch recognized that Vespasian had weaknesses. He criticized the emperor's harshness toward the wife of a Gallic rebel, the mother of a friend he knew in Delphi (*Amat.* 771C), but recognized his good fortune (*Publ.* 15.2). Plutarch's diplomacy may have helped persuade Titus to serve as archon and Domitian to restore Apollo's temple. Nevertheless, after his death, Plutarch criticized Domitian's excesses. Wryly he notes that Domitian named two months after himself, but not for long: "they resumed their names again after his assassination" (*Num.* 19.7).

In his *Publicola*, moreover, Plutarch criticizes Domitian for the extravagance of his new palace on the Palatine, even more costly than the new temple to Jupiter on the Capitoline, imagining that someone would say to Domitian, "You aren't pious or liberal, you are diseased: you delight in building; just like Midas you want everything to be in gold or stone" (*Publ.* 15.6). A passage of the companion life, *Solon*, suggests the philosopher's reaction to such display. Solon entered the court of Croesus, walking past courtiers and guards, up to the king himself, whose dress "lacked nothing that men regard as remarkable or extraordinary or desirable in the way of precious stones, dyed clothing, and wrought gold jewelry." But "Solon stood unmoved by the spectacle ... he actually despised the vulgarity and petty ostentation of it all" (*Sol.* 27.3–4). There is nothing of Herodotus in this description: the scene rather reflects Plutarch's own experience with Domitian in the Domus Flavia. Later in *Solon*, Plutarch describes Solon's willingness to advise Peisistratus, even though he opposed his tyranny. The implication is that a wise man should continue to try to influence even a tyrant, if it is possible. Plutarch here perhaps defends his own position *vis-à-vis* Domitian: not outright defiance, but doing what good one can.³⁰ Nevertheless, the *Parallel Lives* were not composed until after Domitian's death. Clearly Plutarch believed that Domitian's absolutism would not tolerate the freedom of judgment he had exercised in the *Caesars*.

There is no indication of a connection to Nerva, but several of his friends, especially Sosius Senecio, were quite close to Trajan. In addition, Plutarch appears to have written for Trajan a collection of historical anecdotes, the *Sayings of Kings and Commanders*.³¹ The dedicatory letter, now thought to be genuine, recognizes that the author's lives may require more leisure than is available, and offers to the emperor "the first fruits of philosophy," "samples and seeds of the lives" of many famous men, material for the understanding of "the character and choices of leaders" (*Ap. Reg.* 172C–E). Perhaps Sosius had intimated that the emperor had little time to read history, but might enjoy some inspiration in the form of edifying anecdotes. The collection, in fact, contains only positive sayings, and concludes with Augustus, one of Trajan's models. Plutarch's letter explains how he expected his biographies would be read. "These expressions and utterances, like mirrors, give the opportunity to observe the mind of each statesman."³²

Sayings, like lives, give an insight into the thinking of the famous men, useful for the ruling elite of the empire, even the emperor. Nevertheless, the emperor's preference for a few short anecdotes over his well-researched and insightful biographies might well have left Plutarch discouraged. Even though Plutarch shared much of Trajan's ideology of rule, the emperor's mind appeared more focused on his Dacian and Parthian wars than on the moral values revealed in the *Lives*.³³

Whether through Sosius' influence, or Trajan's own initiative, Plutarch received from the emperor one of the highest honors given to Romans of the equestrian class, the *ornamenta consularia*.³⁴ This gave him consular rank and privileges such as wearing the *toga consularis* and seating with senators on public occasions. Less credible is another late notice reporting that Hadrian had made Plutarch an imperial procurator for Greece, though possibly this could refer to some kind of non-administrative oversight of the province.³⁵

5. Delphi and Rome

Sometime in the mid-90s Plutarch was chosen one of the Delphic sanctuary's two priests of Apollo, a post he would hold for over fifteen years, probably to his death.³⁶ A better platform from which to champion the heritage of Greek culture to Greeks and Romans could not be found.³⁷ Delphi had been a major religious center in archaic and classical times, but by Cicero's day had declined considerably. The emperors, beginning with Augustus, took steps to improve its position, promoting the sanctuary as a major element of the Roman conception of Greece. Augustus renewed the Amphictyonic council which governed the sanctuary; his wife Livia dedicated a great golden E to be hung on the façade of the temple. Claudius served as archon for Delphi, as did Titus later, and encouraged new colonists in the city. Nero on his visit competed in the Pythian games and made gifts to the city and sanctuary, but as usual, what he gave with one hand he took with the other. Domitian rebuilt the temple and imitated the Pythian games in his new Capitoline games at Rome.

Then, in the 90s, Delphi saw a remarkable period of construction, which included a fountain, an aqueduct, a house for the Pythia, and a library. Plutarch was confident that Delphi flourished as never before. "You all see for yourselves many new buildings where there were none before, and many ruined and desolate buildings now restored" (*De Pyth. or.* 409A). The major increase in building was no doubt helped by the donations of its Greek patrons, especially the friends of Plutarch named in this dialogue, but imperial gifts may have contributed as well. Finally, around 110, Trajan sent a pro-praetorian legate, Avidius Nigrinus the younger, son of the friend of Plutarch, to make a final settlement of a land dispute that affected the sanctuary's income. His judgment affirming earlier Roman decisions was inscribed prominently on the temple in a monumental bilingual inscription. The Greek and Latin parallel texts are arranged in six columns, running almost seven meters across. Nigrinus' comment reflects Plutarch's own desire for harmony under a beneficent ruler: "Even if the hope of each party was somewhat curtailed, it will be clear that this decision was made in the best interests of both parties when in the future, by the generosity of the Best Prince, their ownership is found to be sure and free from litigation."³⁸ The empire, as led by a strong and just emperor, meant

peace and prosperity; internal fighting was no longer either profitable or possible. In the same dialogue, Plutarch's friend Theon rejoices: "There is profound peace and tranquility, war has ceased, and there are no migrations, civil wars, and tyrannies, nor other Greek ills and troubles requiring powerful and complex medicines" (*De Pyth. or.* 408C).

Plutarch continued as priest of Apollo into the reign of Hadrian. His last known action, taken as *epimelete*, or director, of the Delphic Amphictyony, was to supervise the erection of a statue to that emperor.³⁹ Hadrian favored Delphi in various ways, but chose to make Athens, not Delphi, the center of his new Panhellenion. A final note: despite imperial concern for Delphi over the years, Plutarch in his writings never directly mentions Roman aid to the sanctuary, but fiercely insists on its Hellenic associations. Furthermore, he never speaks of Romans of his day consulting the god, a silence that may reflect his discretion, or the fact that Romans considered Delphi more a touristic site than a locus of contact with the divine.⁴⁰

6. Plutarch's View of Rome in the *Parallel Lives*

Plutarch composed the *Parallel Lives* in the period of prosperity and good will associated with the reign of Trajan. Plutarch's earlier biographical series had focused on the men who exercised imperial power for better or worse. His new project looked deeper into the past, and while apparently undefined at first, had from the beginning a much broader scope: to compare the two cultures, Greek and Roman, through leading figures of their history. The very act of pairing Epaminondas and Scipio, Philopoemen and Flamininus, Cimon and Lucullus, to name some of the earlier lives, asserted a bond of similar challenges and similar virtues throughout their respective histories. The emphasis was on moral virtue in political contexts where leaders worked for the good and even the survival of their cities. The Roman heroes usually act upon a larger stage, but their strengths and weaknesses are similar to those of their Greek counterparts. The striking difference is temporal: the Romans are most often out of phase with the Greeks by centuries, so that Pericles is put with Fabius Maximus, Agesilaus with Pompey, Alexander with Caesar, and Philopoemen, "the last of the Greeks," with Flamininus, whose conquest of Greece was only one step in Rome's expansion.⁴¹ In the comparative epilogues which conclude most pairs, Plutarch is careful to distribute praise and blame equitably, so that neither nation can claim superior virtue. The fundamental moral outlook is Greek, or rather Platonic and Aristotelian: an insistence on training oneself to control one's passion through reason and a vision of one's highest goals. For Plutarch, this perspective was neither Greek nor Roman, but a truth of human nature. A chief object of education, *paideia*, was to introduce a person to the qualities needed for both living and leading: the virtues of justice, temperance, prudence, and courage, and the subsidiary qualities of self-restraint, humanity, and reasonableness.⁴² The *Parallel Lives* presume a reader who shares this moral perspective.⁴³

Such *paideia* is desirable for all, but it arose in a Greek context and was identified with Greek culture. In the *Lives*, Plutarch frequently remarks the deleterious effects of the absence of *paideia* in Romans, most notably Coriolanus and Marius, while commenting on the special value of Greek influence.⁴⁴ Cato Censor's fear that Greek influence would be fatal to Rome was the opposite of the truth: "Time shows that he

was wrong; for Rome's greatest achievements came at the time when it was most welcoming to Greek studies and Greek culture" (*Cat. Mai.* 23.3). But training in virtue could take various forms, including Lycurgus' Spartan law code (*Lyc.* 31), Numa's softening of the Roman martial spirit (*Num.* 8), or Aemilius Paullus' insistence on proper training and discipline both as augur and as general (*Aem.* 3). Because of its late adoption, Plutarch often calls attention to the presence or absence of Greek culture in considering Roman character. The city's militaristic bent, seen both in its readiness to fight and its success, was already apparent in Romulus' day, he notes, and Numa's peaceable reign, free of war and civil strife, was only a brief interruption in a history of continuous warfare. However, it was an idyllic moment and the biographer questions whether it might not have been better if Rome had continued on that path, forsaking war (*Num.* 20; 26 (4). 10–14). Plutarch may have hoped that the peace of his own day would revive Numa's legacy, free of the violence of the civil wars he had seen in his youth. The hope that by assuming the task of moral and historical educator he might hasten this goal would have been a sufficient reason in itself for him to compose the *Lives*.

The *Parallel Lives* encompass Greek and Roman history, as seen from the perspective of Plutarch's own day, when Greece had been subsumed into the empire. Greece had had great moments in defending itself against Persia, in the glorious days of Athenian democracy, and the grand march of Alexander across Persia. But Greece had consumed itself in inter-city wars and reckless ambition. The Romans had not only beaten off their enemies but conquered them, and somehow they had survived intense internal struggles to emerge as rulers of the Mediterranean world and, surprisingly, to complete Greece's work. A few examples will illustrate how the comparison of heroes brings this to light. Solon established the laws of the Athenian democracy with fairness and moderation, but was unable to prevent Peisistratus' tyranny. His counterpart Publicola did away with the Tarquin tyranny and founded the Republic, demonstrating that "he had virtue and purpose equal to Solon, combined with the good fortune and power that could make his virtue effective" (*Comp. Sol.-Publ.* 3.5). Pericles built the monuments which remained a lasting ornament to Athens, more splendid than anything the Romans erected until the age of Augustus (*Per.* 13; *Comp. Per.-Fab.* 3.7), but the Athenians lost the war he had urged, whereas Fabius defended Rome until it could take the offensive and defeat Hannibal. As Swain notes, although Plutarch suggests many similarities in the history of Rome and Athens, there is also a notable contrast, for Athens quickly lost its empire.⁴⁵ Lysander "perhaps hurt Sparta more by winning it money [i.e. the booty of the Athenian empire] than Sulla hurt Rome by looting it" (*Comp. Lys.-Sull.* 3.7). In fact, Lysander's victory over Athens led to Sparta's decline, but Sulla's victories in Greece as a loyal exile ensured Rome's presence in the East and guaranteed that Greece would remain Roman.⁴⁶ Rome, despite all its leaders' failings, continued to extend its domination. The very permanence of its preeminence was a testimony of divine favor.

When it comes to Rome's actions in Greece, Plutarch's opinion is surprisingly favorable. He admires both Philopoemen's brave struggle to preserve Greek independence and Flamininus' moderation in using his victory (*Phil.* 1.6, 11.3–4). The Roman is presented as a just liberator and benefactor, even though of a different race (*allophylos*, *Flam.* 2.5, cf. 11.4, 12.6). Plutarch's evaluation of the moment is significant: Greece had seen great commanders, but except for the victories against the Persians, all their

battles had been fought to enslave other Greeks, and every trophy was a shame to them. Now this foreign people, only distantly related, had rescued and freed her (*Flam.* 11.3–7).

If the quarrelsome spirit of the Greeks weakened them, divine providence also was moving behind the scenes.⁴⁷ Before the battle of Chaeronea the oracle at Delphi issued warnings of dire events to come. In this case the god expressed what Plutarch considered inevitable: “It seems that some divine fortune or revolution of events (*tyché ... daimonios ē periphora pragmatôn*) which was bringing to a close the freedom of Greece ... was revealing the future by many signs” (*Dem.* 19.1).⁴⁸ A god was also operating behind Flamininus’ victory: “Rome’s strength, with superhuman help (*meta tou daimonos*), advanced powerfully against all opposition; the conclusion was near to which the revolution of fortune necessarily was taking it” (*Phil.* 17.2, cf. *Flam.* 12.10). Often, Delphi as a sanctuary and a cultural center appeared as a stage for historic shifts of power. Flamininus, in his victory dedication at Delphi, offered to the god the freedom he had won for the Greeks (*Flam.* 12.11). When Aemilius Paullus defeated Perseus in 168, he appropriated the equestrian statue the king had been preparing as a dedication at Delphi and made it his own: a clear signal that Rome had replaced Macedon in Greece. But divine providence did not necessarily protect Greece from the harshness of the Roman presence. When Sulla confiscated the silver and gold offerings at Delphi to pay for his war against Mithridates, the Delphians protested, claiming that the god had sounded his lyre in anger within the temple. Sulla interpreted the sign differently: an indication of pleasure, not annoyance. He took the loot and defeated Mithridates’ general. Plutarch’s world had been determined by that victory. He intimates here that perhaps the god indeed favored Sulla’s despoiling of his temple to repulse Mithridates, as he seems later to have favored the victory in Italy that allowed Sulla to become dictator (*Sull.* 12.6–9, 29.11–13).

The early declamation on the *Fortune of the Romans* bears witness to the fact that Plutarch’s view of the role of the divine in Roman history was already taking shape when he was a young man. With exuberance and considerable rhetorical skill he unfolds an analogy between the slow coalescence of chaotic atoms into a permanent and orderly whole and the gradual growth of Rome until “at last the world found stability and security, when the controlling power entered into a single, unwavering cycle and world order of peace” (*De fort. Rom.* 317C). The speech glorifies Rome for its good fortune (*tyché*) and courage in war (*aretē*) and offers a stunning vision of the current prosperity of Rome, avoiding any mention of difficulties or civil war under the principate (325D–E). Its notion of a new, stable order is at variance not only with the *Caesars’* description of governmental collapse in 69 CE, but also the *Parallel Lives’* more nuanced presentation of political struggles throughout Rome’s history.⁴⁹

Plutarch believed in divine concern for and beneficence toward mankind. So it was natural for him to see major historical changes as taking place under divine guidance and bringing benefits to society, without denying that mortals acted according to their own motivation and ability as well. The last major change before Plutarch’s day was the establishment of monarchy at Rome.⁵⁰ Providential direction lay behind the actions and events which led to that outcome, as Plutarch indicates in reporting Pompey’s complaint to Cratippus of his treatment by Providence. Although the philosopher avoided challenging the fallen dynast, the biographer does not. Cratippus, he remarks, might have observed

that “monarchy was now needed for affairs, because of bad government (*kakopoliteia*)” and asked in turn, “Would you have used fortune better than Caesar, if you had won? These affairs of the gods must be left as they are” (*Pomp.* 75.4–5). Providence was moving to replace the broken senatorial regime with monarchy, and Caesar was the mildest doctor for the transition (cf. *Comp. Cim.-Luc.* 1.1; *Comp. Dion-Brut.* 2.2). The divine power likewise removed Brutus at Philippi, since “affairs ... required monarchy” (*Brut.* 47.7).

This epoch-making transformation from republic to monarchy became a special focus of the later lives of the series. The period 70–30 BCE is treated in *Caesar*, *Pompey*, *Crassus*, *Lucullus*, *Cato*, *Cicero*, *Brutus*, and *Antony*.⁵¹ Plutarch was breaking new and potentially dangerous ground in treating this period, especially with the lives of Caesar’s opponents, Cato and Brutus.⁵² Only a few years before, Domitian had executed Rusticus for praising Thrasea Pactus, who had written a life of Cato. The greater length of this group of lives reflects the importance Plutarch attached to them. They reveal major flaws in the protagonists alongside their great achievements. Even Caesar is presented as driven by unquenchable and ultimately fruitless ambition. Plutarch appears to be responding to his Roman readers’ desire to hold in their hands not just treatments of legendary republican heroes, but probing studies that dealt directly with the realities of political life: pride, self-interest, and naked power. Monarchy was necessary in Plutarch’s mind to avoid the excesses of competition that had led to the breakdown of the first century, but he knew only too well from his biographies of the emperors and his observation of the wars of 69 CE that monarchy did not guarantee peace and good government. Outbreaks of violence were always possible. Plutarch wrote of Sulla’s arbitrary cruelty, “we must pray to avoid such times and hope for better” (*Prae. ger. reip.* 816A). That hope depended upon the good character of the emperor and the leading men of the empire. By holding up his biographical mirror to his Roman audience, revealing all the strengths and faults of men like Caesar, Cato, Pompey, and Antony, he hoped to make them more aware of their own character and its workings. Certainly he hoped that his work might help avoid the kinds of civil strife that destroyed the republic.

7. Living Under Roman Rule

Concord, the productive cooperation of the leading citizens for the good of the whole state, was essential for individual cities no less than for the empire. In a significant treatise on civic politics addressed to an ambitious young aristocrat in Smyrna, Plutarch’s preoccupation is precisely harmony and avoidance of conflict among the civic leaders. Civic unrest, such as had recently occurred at Smyrna, could have only one result, the direct interference of the Roman authorities.⁵³ The Greek cities, he writes, already have great blessings: peace and liberty (“as much as our rulers allow, and perhaps more would not be better”): they should pray for concord (*Prae. ger. reip.* 824C). Politicians should recall that they govern “a city subordinate to proconsuls and procurators of Caesar” (813E) and that Roman power would enforce order if they stirred up disturbances in their cities. Calls to imitate the victories at Marathon or Plataea were untimely and dangerous in the present context and should be left to sophistic display oratory. Rather Greek politicians should make friends in the Roman

power structure. “The Romans themselves are quite eager to help their friends in political matters,” Plutarch notes. One should “pluck the fruit of friendship with leaders,” as Polybius had done with Scipio, and Areius with Augustus (814C). Furthermore, politicians should avoid servile consultation of the Romans on small matters: this is slavery (814E). Political leaders could best keep their independence by promoting internal harmony in their cities.⁵⁴

The two-element political structure, elite and demos, that Plutarch sees in contemporary Greek cities he employs as well in his biographies, both Greek and Roman. This approach is consistent with his Platonic-Aristotelian concept of human nature, which distinguishes the rational element from the irrational, and insists that the rational should direct and limit the irrational. He therefore presumes that the “aristocratic” segment of the state should lead and keep under control the “popular” portion. From this viewpoint, concord and harmony under sagacious leadership will mark the peaceful state, internal conflict and war the troubled one.⁵⁵ In the contemporary Roman Empire, political concord was particularly desirable after the year of the four emperors and the abuses of Domitian’s reign. Plutarch admired Camillus’ wise admittance of plebeians to the consulship as a solution to a domestic crisis, and notes that his vow to establish a temple to Concord preceded his decision. The Gracchi, though rightly opposing senatorial rigidity, were wrong to push too hard; on the other hand Opimius’ construction of a temple of Concord after slaughtering the Gracchan faction was hypocritical (*Cam.* 42.4, 6; *Gracch.* 38 (17) 8–9).

However, Roman republican politics is often distorted by this elite–populace schema, which repeatedly pits the few against the many, the senate against the people: not only does it omit the equestrian class as a major factor, but it tends to ignore how both the popular and the aristocratic element changed over time, as well as the internal divisions among those groups. In the *Parallel Lives*, Plutarch often classes reformers attempting to change political structures as demagogues, suppresses major transformations such as the Marian army reforms or Sulla’s innovations, and marginalizes or omits other complicating factors. Soldiers he treats as an irrational element similar to the urban populace.⁵⁶ Partially this results from his applying Greek values to Roman concepts, enfolding Rome into the Greek cultural tradition.⁵⁷ But there is also a conscious purpose. By making temporal and institutional distinctions less clear, he introduces a philosophically based timelessness into his analysis, as a result of which his biographies focus not on the peculiarities of Greek and Roman practice, but on the communalities. This perspective permits and encourages the reader to view moral character in politics comparatively, not only between Greek and Roman protagonists, but also between the reader and the heroes portrayed. As Pelling points out, Plutarch often seems to avoid contemporary issues, “keeping his distance from the specific and preferring the bigger and more timeless themes.”⁵⁸ He wished his readers to see in his biographies beyond the specific problems faced by the protagonist to the larger categories – demagoguery and tyranny, political envy and ambition, etc. – and the virtues his heroes demonstrated or lacked in dealing with them. His more abstract focus permitted the accounts of events and decisions in the biographies to become accessible to the Romans and Greeks of his own day, who could apply the lessons learned in their own lives. In this way, the study of Roman history became an exercise in moral philosophy.

NOTES

- 1 Cf. Swain (1996), Whitmarsh (2001) and (2005), Borg (2004), Woolf (1994), Veyne (1999), and Desideri (1991) and (1998).
- 2 Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 678 CD. Cf. Stadter (2004) 22.
- 3 Plutarch never mentions his Roman citizenship, which we know only through the inscription on a statue base for Hadrian by Plutarch as priest of Apollo and *epimelete* of the Delphic Amphictyony, *SIG*³ 829A.
- 4 At some point before receiving the *ornamenta consularia* from Trajan, he certainly was an equestrian. If his personal wealth was insufficient, Florus or another benefactor could have helped with a gift.
- 5 Plut. *Otho* 14.2, 18.2. Cf. Jones (1971) 21–22. Florus was consul *c.* 75 CE.
- 6 On Mestrius Florus, cf. Jones (1971) 48–49; Puech (1992) 4860.
- 7 See Stadter (2004) 23–25; for Plutarch's travels to Rome, see Jones (1971) 20–25.
- 8 Plin. *Ep.* 1.10, cf. also *Ep.* 3.11, on his relation to the philosopher Artemidorus. Both letters give a good indication of how Florus might have befriended Plutarch.
- 9 Julius Secundus is cited for information at *Otho* 9.3: cf. Jones (1971) 50, 75; Puech (1992) 4855.
- 10 Stadter (2004) 23–24.
- 11 On Plutarch's knowledge of Latin, see Stadter (2010) and notes 14 and 15 below.
- 12 The similarities and discrepancies are set out by Hardy (1890) xi–xxiii, xxix–xliii. See also the full study in Fabia (1898; rpt. Rome, 1967) and Damon (2003) 24–30, 291–302, 305–306. No sure candidate for a common source has been identified.
- 13 On the interpretation of *Dem.* 2 cf. Mossman (1999) and Zadorojnyi (2006).
- 14 Cf. Sickinger (1883) 64–86; Rose (1924) 14–18; Glucker (1978) 386–390; De Rosalia (1991); Strobach (1997) 33–39.
- 15 Erbse (1979) 491 n. 39.
- 16 Cf. Georgiadou and Schettino in this volume, on the sources of the *Lives*.
- 17 The work is not finished and there is no hard evidence for date. Jones (1971) 14 and others consider it an early rhetorical exercise from the 60s CE, but the knowledge of Roman history it demonstrates seems more appropriate later. If indeed it is that early, it shows that Plutarch's commitment to acquiring an understanding of Rome began even earlier than argued here.
- 18 Cf. Theander (1959).
- 19 Cf. Boulogne (1992), (1994) 75–146, (2002); Nouilhan, Pailler, and Payen (1999).
- 20 Jones (1971) 21–25; Flacelière (1987) xxxi–xxxii.
- 21 Flacelière (1954) no. 120; *SIG*³ 821.
- 22 *Quaest. conv.* 632A.
- 23 *Quaest. conv.* 612E, 734E, 666D.
- 24 Cf. Jones (1971) 48–64; Puech (1992) 4883; Stadter (2000) 495–496.
- 25 Cf. Swain (1996) 144–145.
- 26 For friends not listed here, see Ziegler (1951) 665–696; Jones (1971) 39–64; and Puech (1992).
- 27 See in general Jones (1971) 72–80; Bowersock (1998); Stadter (2005). Literary analysis in Ash (1997); Keitel (1995). The date is disputed, and many put the series later: see Stadter (2005) 428–432, with references.
- 28 This notion, common in Hellenistic thinking, is explained in his *To an Uneducated Ruler* (*Ad princ. inerud.*) and *Philosophers and Rulers* (*Max. cum princ.*). Cf. Roskam (2009) 132–138 and Chapter 10 in this volume. Cf. also *Num.* 3.7–8, 20.7–12, and *Lyc.* 31.1–3.
- 29 Freedom for Greece: Plut. *Flam.* 12.13; cf. Jones (1971) 17. Reincarnation as a frog: *De sera* 567F; cf. Brenk (1987).
- 30 *Sol.* 31.2–3. Cf. Stadter (2002b) 232–236.

- 31 Cf. Flacelière (1976) 100–103; Beck (2002).
- 32 Plut. *Ap. Reg.* 172D. For the mirror image, cf. *Aem.* 1.1 with Frazier (2011); Zadorojnyi (2010); Stadter (2003/2004).
- 33 Cf. Stadter (2002a) 6–8, 11–13 and (2002b) on Trajanic ideology.
- 34 The information comes only from the *Suda*, a Byzantine encyclopedia, but seems credible. Cf. Jones (1971) 29; Flacelière (1987), L–LI; Zecchini (2002) 196–197. The reliability of the notice is rejected by Swain (1991) 318 and (1996) 171–172. The rhetorician and educator Quintilian received this honor from Domitian.
- 35 Jones (1971) 34; Swain (1991) 318; Zecchini (2002) 197.
- 36 For Plutarch's relation to Delphi, cf. Flacelière (1987) XLVI–L; Stadter (2004).
- 37 Cf. Jacquemin (1991).
- 38 Rousset (2002) no. 11, lines 12–13. Cf. Stadter (2004) 30.
- 39 *SIG*³ 829A, cf. Jones (1971) 34; Swain (1991). The philhellene Hadrian had visited Boeotia and been archon at Athens before becoming emperor: Plutarch may have met him on either occasion, or others (cf. Birley (1997)).
- 40 Cf. Stadter (2005), especially pp. 212–213.
- 41 Cf. Pelling (2010).
- 42 That is, *dikaïosunê*, *sôphrosynê*, *phronesis*, *andreia*, and *praotês*, *philanthrôpia*, and *epieikeia*. Cf. Frazier (1996). Plutarch's emphasis on moral virtue for political leadership distinguishes this function for *paideia* from the literary and rhetorical emphasis of Second Sophistic writers.
- 43 Cf. Stadter (1988); Pelling (2002a) 267–282.
- 44 *Cor.* 1.3–6, 15.4–5; *Mar.* 1.3–4, 45.10–46.5. Greek influence: e.g. *Marc.* 21.4, 7; *Luc.* 1.4–8, 42.1–4. Cf. Swain (1990).
- 45 Swain (1996) 154.
- 46 Cf. Candau Morón (2000).
- 47 On Plutarch's view of Rome's providential success and the necessary movement toward monarchy, note *De fort. Rom.* 316E–317C, discussed below, and see Swain (1989a) and Stadter (2005) 205–210.
- 48 Cf. also *Phoc.* 1–3.
- 49 On this work, the date of which is disputed, see Swain (1989b); Frazier (1990); Forni (1989); Swain (1996) 151–161. On *De fort. Rom.* 317BC, see Dillon (1997). Beck (2003) examines the rhetorical treatment of the historical anecdotes in this work that are also found in the *Lives*.
- 50 Cf. *Ant.* 56.6, “It was necessary that everything come around to Caesar (Octavianus),” with Brenk (1977) 164–165; Pelling (1988) 256–257.
- 51 Six of these (excluding *Cicero* and *Lucullus*) most probably were written at one time, late in the series: see Pelling (1979). If one were to start from the Gracchan revolution, *Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus*, *Marius*, *Sulla*, and *Sertorius* would also be included.
- 52 Cf. Geiger (2002) 97–98.
- 53 Plutarch mentions one politician, Pardalas, who had recently been executed by the Romans (*Prae. ger. reip.* 813F, cf. 825D).
- 54 Cf. Trapp (2004) and Swain (1996) 161–187. The latter, however, exaggerates Plutarch's aversion to involvement in Roman politics: contrast Stadter (2002c) 124–126. Plutarch here and elsewhere calls the Romans *hegemones*, that is, “leaders” rather than “rulers,” continuing the Greek tradition, in which the Spartans or Athenians, and later the Macedonians, could be called “leaders” of their respective alliances/empires.
- 55 See in general Duff (1999) 72–82, 89–94; Jones (1971) 111–119 and (1978) 83–94; and Chapter 10 in this volume.
- 56 Cf. Pelling (1986); de Blois (1992).
- 57 Duff (1999) 302–303.
- 58 Pelling (2002) 222.

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