

# Loyalty divided or doubled? : Plutarch's Hellenism saluting Rome

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# I

LUC VAN DER STOCKT

## LOYALTY DIVIDED OR DOUBLED?

PLUTARCH'S HELLENISM SALUTING ROME

At first sight the theme of Greece's debt to Rome may seem a gratuitous paradox. Indeed, Horace's famous lines about Rome's debt to Greece succeeded in indoctrinating if not his own times, then at least posterity! Yet Rome's conquest of Greece was most likely also to some advantage of Greece, or at least to some advantage of some Greeks. Now most recently, a surprising and brilliant interpretation of the composition of Plutarch's *Quaestiones Romanae*<sup>1</sup> revealed that the structure of that writing is based ... on a guided tour through the heart of Rome!<sup>2</sup> Thus Plutarch (ca. 45 – ca. 125 AD) seems to have been very familiar with the topography of Rome. But in the context of the present *Entretiens* my question is of course if and to what extent Plutarch was one of those who Greeks who profited from the Roman dominion. And I will argue that, on the one hand, for several reasons Plutarch managed to cope with, if not to sympathize with the reality of the Roman dominion, and on the other hand that that reality could not but challenge his Greek pride. After having briefly reviewed the bare facts of Rome's presence in Plutarch's *curriculum vitae*

<sup>1</sup> SCHEID (2012).

<sup>2</sup> In this respect, this study reminds one of a similar interpretation, but this time of *De Gloria Atheniensium*: JOHNSON (1972).

I will focus on those Plutarchan writings that are most relevant for the question of his relation to Rome.

## 1. Rome in Plutarch's *curriculum vitae*

a) In *De sera numinis vindicta* 558 a, one of the interlocutors in the dialogue, namely Timon, addresses (among others) Plutarch, saying: "you and your family, I take it, feel entitled to greater consideration than others in Boeotia as descendants of Opheltas etc."<sup>3</sup> If we are to believe that this Timon is Plutarch's brother,<sup>4</sup> and that this interlocutor thus knows what he is talking about, then Plutarch could claim to be a descendant of the Thessalian king Opheltas. This king would have conquered Boeotia and most of his posterity would have settled in Chaeroneia. Plutarch's family thus became Boeotian. In the end, however, the Boeotian Plutarch became a Roman citizen under the name Mestrius Plutarchus, his patron being Lucius Mestrius Florus, who was consul under Vespasian and proconsul of Asia. Unfortunately we do not know when exactly Plutarch obtained this citizenship, but it must have brought some legal and financial advantages with it, and especially also prestige and access to higher Roman circles.

It has been observed that Plutarch never uses his Roman name nor mentions his Roman citizenship in any of his writings: "dazu fühlte er sich zu sehr als Hellene".<sup>5</sup> Yet it would

<sup>3</sup> All translations are from the *Loeb Classical Library*.

<sup>4</sup> The editors indeed believe that this Timon is Plutarch's brother: PATON / POHLENZ (1972) 394; VERNIÈRE (1974) 97-98, with further literature on Plutarch's family; DE LACY / EINARSON (1994) 173 are somewhat hesitant; but see also BOULOGNE (1994) 25. On Opheltas see also PLUT. *Cim.* 1.1. APUL. *Met.* 1.2 seems to have known about this claim and possibly even read the Plutarchan passage, since he makes Lucius say: *Thessaliam, nam et illic originis maternae nostrae fundamenta a Plutarcho illo inclito ac mox Sexto philosopho nepote eius prodita gloriam nobis faciunt, ... petebam*. I overlooked this possibility when I discussed the passage in *Metamorphoses* in VAN DER STOCKT (2012) 169-170.

<sup>5</sup> ZIEGLER (1951) 650.

not be unlike Plutarch to avoid clammy boasting with a Roman name. Besides, his own Greek name Πλούταρχος occurs only very rarely in his works. This absence of staging his own person, even in the *Table Talks*, that are idealized reports of dinners he had with Greek and Roman friends in Greece and in Rome, is characteristic of Plutarch.<sup>6</sup>

b) Plutarch undertook some travels to Rome and Italy. We are not sure how many times and for how long he stayed in Rome,<sup>7</sup> but he must have been there several times and long enough to create or reinforce an impressive network of Romans in high station. The most telling passage is in the *Life of Demosthenes* 2.2:

“... and during the time when I was in Rome and various parts of Italy I had no leisure to practise myself in the Roman language, owing to my public duties and the number of my pupils in philosophy (ὑπὸ χρεῖων πολιτικῶν καὶ τῶν διὰ φιλοσοφίαν πλησιαζόντων).”

“Public duties” probably means that Plutarch was acting as an ambassador on behalf of his home town or of his province: that shows how prominent his position was *in Boeotia*. But the fact that Romans attended his lectures and were contacting him as a philosophical counsellor shows that he earned himself a name in Rome over time. And the people that sought his advice were not of low rank: among them was, e.g., Arulenus Rusticus, consul under Domitian (*De curiositate* 522 d-e).

c) Rusticus was by far not the only Roman aristocrat in Plutarch’s network. I add only names such as (the already mentioned) Mestrius Florus, Sosius Senecio, friend of Trajan and three times consul, Minucius Fundanus, consul in 107, Herennius Saturninus, proconsul of Achaëa in 98/99 and *consul*

<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, there is also a discrete self-promotion on the part of Plutarch: see VAN HOOFF (2010) 261; Plutarch as “a clever social player”, and KÖNIG (2011).

<sup>7</sup> On the question of Plutarch’s travels to, and stays in Rome and Italy, see JONES (1971) 20-27.



*suffectus* in 100.<sup>8</sup> It is to be noted that the Romans in Plutarch's life were not just casual acquaintances. As is clear from the *Quaestiones Conuiuales*, many of them were his guests in his home-town Chaeroneia, or were his host in Rome or elsewhere. And Plutarch dedicated many of his writings to Roman friends:<sup>9</sup> a practice that shows how much honouring and being honoured was part and parcel of the aristocratic commerce. A man like Fundanus was given a flattering role in the dialogue *De cohibenda ira*, whilst the monumental *Lives* were dedicated to Sosius Senecio. Apparently, Plutarch felt at home, and was made to feel at home in those aristocratic circles. It is nevertheless to be expected that this intimate contact with Rome and Romans caused Plutarch to muse on the relation of Greece and Greeks to Rome.

d) These intimate relations raise also the more concrete question of Plutarch's knowledge of Latin. The passage quoted above from the *Life of Demosthenes* continues as follows:

"It was therefore late and when I was well on in years that I began to study Roman literature. And here my experience was an astonishing thing, but true. For it was not so much that by means of words I came to a complete understanding of things, as that from things I somehow had an experience which enabled me to follow the meaning of words. But to appreciate the beauty and quickness of the Roman style, the figures of speech, the rhythm, and the other embellishments of the language, while I think it a graceful accomplishment and one not without its pleasures, still, the careful practice necessary for attaining this is not easy for one like me, but appropriate for those who have more leisure and whose remaining years still suffice for such pursuits."

This passage should not be misunderstood:<sup>10</sup> Plutarch is not saying that his knowledge of Latin is below par, only a) that he

<sup>8</sup> An overview of Plutarch's Roman friends is to be found in ZIEGLER (1951) 687-694 and PUECH (1992).

<sup>9</sup> A complete list in BOULOGNE (1994) 28.

<sup>10</sup> In what follows, I summarize the nuanced position of STROBACH (1997) 32-46; see also VAN DER STOCKT (1987).

started reading Latin “literature” at a more advanced age, and b) that he is not familiar with (and perhaps not even interested in) the stylistic “embellishments” of the Latin language. We can indeed be certain that Plutarch had a sufficient “reading knowledge”<sup>11</sup> of Latin, so as to be able to read the Latin historical and biographical prose texts he wanted to consult as sources for his own writings.

e) There are some ‘marks of esteem’ to be mentioned. Firstly, if we are to believe the Byzantine *Suda*,<sup>12</sup> Plutarch would have received the *ornamenta consularia* from Trajan, thanks to the intervention of Senecio. However, there is a problem here: the lemma in the *Suda* says that Trajan ordered the governors of Illyria not to do anything without consulting Plutarch; but this seems to imply an anachronistic subjection of Illyria to Achaëa. Nonetheless, the fact of granting the *ornamenta consularia* is sometimes considered historical.<sup>13</sup> The reason for this ‘eagerness to belief’ is probably that one would like to imagine Plutarch involved in a more personal relationship with the emperor Trajan. That is perhaps also the deeper motif behind the recent plea for the authenticity of the *Letter to Trajan* (*Moralia* 172 b-e) preceding the *Regum et imperatorum apophthegmata*.<sup>14</sup>

Plutarch was also brought into close contact with Hadrianus. Indeed, Eusebius in his *Chronicle* says that Hadrianus made the elder (γηραιός) Plutarch *procurator Achaëae*, but “Plutarch probably held the position only in a nominal capacity”,<sup>15</sup> or, if the fact is considered unhistorical, there must be at least “a core of

<sup>11</sup> Terminology of RUSSELL (1973) 54.

<sup>12</sup> *Suda* π 1793 Adler: μεταδοὺς δὲ αὐτῷ Τραιανὸς τῆς τῶν ὑπάτων ἀξίας προσέταξε μηδένα τῶν κατὰ τὴν Ἰλλυρίδα ἀρχόντων παρέξ τῆς αὐτοῦ γνώμης τι διαπράττεσθαι.

<sup>13</sup> ZIEGLER (1951) 657-658; JONES (1971) 29-30 and 34.

<sup>14</sup> Whilst BABBITT (1968) 5-6 seemed to accept the thesis of the authenticity of that *Letter*, ZIEGLER (1951) 658 and 863-864 rejected its authenticity, and so did JONES (1971) 31. The recent plea in favour of the authenticity is of BECK (2002).

<sup>15</sup> JONES (1971) 34; see also LAMBERTON (2001) 12.

truth" in it.<sup>16</sup> That truth may simply be that posterity had no trouble imagining Plutarch, the author of *An seni respublica gerenda sit*, of *Ad principem ineruditum*, of *Maxime cum principibus philosopho esse disserendum*, being in close contact with emperors. Wishful thinking?

As a provisional conclusion I would stress that Plutarch had a lot to loose by resisting Rome, and that his close, friendly commerce with so many Romans suggests that he did not even think of resisting Rome. If there was any irritation or reservation, we can expect to find it expressed only most implicitly; and its motivation will not be inspired by any aristocrat's offended pride: in his personal life, he could hardly complain about Rome or Romans. There is a good chance that Plutarch took pains to 'construct' an 'acceptable' relation Greece — Rome: one that was realistic enough to humour the Romans, and idealistic enough to spare the Greeks. Plutarch was thus doubling his loyalty.

## 2. Rome and Romans in Plutarch's *Moralia*

a) Whilst Rome and Romans are notoriously present throughout the *Moralia*, they are more present in some of those writings than in others. It is no surprise to find them almost absent from the more technical philosophical writings,<sup>17</sup> the Romans not being famous for any philosophical *penchant*. A remarkable exception is *Aduersus Colotem*: this polemical writing is dedicated (in 1107 e) to L. Herennius Saturninus, *proconsul Achaetae* in 98-99. The exception is remarkable precisely because of the technical-polemical nature of the essay that defends "the other philosophers" who had been under attack in Colotes' book;

<sup>16</sup> ZIEGLER (1951) 658-659.

<sup>17</sup> Exceptions are *De communibus notitiis* 1059 d (a biting saying of Cato Minor), *Quaestiones Platonicae* 1010 c-d (on the Roman language), *De latenter uiuendo* 1129 c (a reference to Camillus).



Colotes had argued that living in conformity to the doctrines of the other philosophers actually makes life impossible. As to the dedication of Plutarch's essay to Herennius Saturninus, it is possible that a literary allusion is involved, Colotes' book being dedicated to Ptolemy II, who was an ally of Athens in the Chremonidean war.<sup>18</sup> The allusion would then also suggest friendly relations between Greece and the proconsul. And I think it explains an element of the diction in the dedication, since Plutarch calls the perusal of his essay "a most *royal* occupation" (βασιλικωτάτην διατριβήν: 1107 d). What we have then, is a friendly flattery addressed to one who is called "lover of all that is excellent and *old* (φιλόρχαιον)", and of "the teachings of the *ancients* (τῶν παλαιῶν)" — which is not exactly the same as "a lover of philosophy". But perhaps this and all the other dedications of Plutarch's writings to prominent Romans are also a discrete suggestion of how Greeks should deal with prominent Romans.<sup>19</sup>

b) Rome and Romans are conspicuously present in Plutarch's political writings.<sup>20</sup>

A first observation is that Romans in those writings are not portrayed in principle differently from Greeks: they provide examples of good or bad conduct just as the Greeks do. What is more: Plutarch seems anxious to always couple a Roman to a Greek when he gives illustrations of attitudes, virtues, or behaviour. Thus in *Ad principem ineruditum* 781 c-d, Cato Minor and Epameinondas are adduced as examples of leaders who have no fear for themselves, but only for those they were guarding; and in 782 f, when mention is made of the calumny about slight shortcomings in men of high repute, reference is

<sup>18</sup> See DE LACY / EINARSON (1967) 154 and 182.

<sup>19</sup> This relevant point is made (in connection with Sosius Senecio, dedicatee of the *Quaestiones Convivales* and of the *Lives*) by KLOTZ (2007) 651-652; it is applauded by PELLING (2011) 208.

<sup>20</sup> I adopt the classification of Plutarch's works in ZIEGLER (1951) 702-708 for merely practical reasons.

made to Cimon's drinking, Scipio's excessive sleeping and Lucullus' expensive dinners.

*Maxime cum principibus philosopho esse disserendum* presents the same situation: we find only a few examples, but with the same tendency. Thus, in order to illustrate how philosophers benefitted many through their commerce with rulers, examples from the Roman as well as from Greek world are adduced in 776 a: Anaxagoras and Pericles, Plato and Dion, Cato and Athenodorus, Scipio and Panaetius (777 a-b).<sup>21</sup> Now it is tempting to read these examples (and the essay *Ad principem ineruditum*), not so much as illustrations of philosophers advising Greeks and Romans alike, but as symptoms of "an intercultural drama of power and authority. Rome may rule Greece politically, but to do so well necessitates submission to Greek learning".<sup>22</sup> Yet it cannot be denied that the Greek philosophers in the illustrations are indeed Greeks, but that they do advise Greeks as well as Romans. Moreover, the essay may well be a philosophical *διάλεξις*; and its audience would then be Plutarch's pupils.<sup>23</sup> I wonder if it is conceivable that Plutarch is inciting his pupils to get a hold on Roman rulers for the sake of the wellbeing of the whole empire: to kindle that kind of ambition in younger people seems to be at odds with Plutarch's plea for the role of elderly, wise politicians.

*An seni respublica gerenda sit* is addressed to Euphanes, a friend whom Plutarch met at the Ampictyonic Council.<sup>24</sup> If the essay is indeed written by the *elder* Plutarch,<sup>25</sup> it can be read as an *oratio pro domo*,<sup>26</sup> an old man advising his old friend not to give up, with the consequence that he should not abandon him in being politically active in local matters. Then it is

<sup>21</sup> The philosopher's pleasure consisting in advising the ruler is illustrated by the carpenter who imagines serving Themistocles or Pompey (779 a).

<sup>22</sup> WHITMARSH (2001) 186.

<sup>23</sup> See ROSKAM (2009) 25-28.

<sup>24</sup> PUECH (1992) 4849.

<sup>25</sup> ZIEGLER (1951) 821: the essay is "zum guten Teil deutlich aus eigener Erfahrung des Autors geschöpft".

<sup>26</sup> RENOIRTE (1951) 34; DESIDERI (1986) 381.



all the more surprising that the essay is full of examples, anecdotes and sayings from the Roman world; but mostly, as in the previous writings, they are paralleled with Greek examples, anecdotes and sayings.<sup>27</sup> Thus, e.g., we encounter Cato Maior, Caesar Augustus, Pericles and Agesilaüs as examples of elderly statesmen performing excellently (784 d-e);<sup>28</sup> Plutarch sees no reason why Agesilaüs, Numa, Darius, Solon, Cato, or Pericles should be removed from the political scene because of their old age (790 b-c); and that elderly politicians are good at educating and instructing the younger politicians is illustrated by the couples Aristeides — Cleisthenes, Cimon — Aristeides, Phocion — Chabrias, Cato — Fabius Maximus, Pompey — Sulla, and Polybius — Philopoemen. In fact, Plutarch explicitly blurs all distinction between Greek and Roman elderly statesmen, when he has an imagined character addressing “a Phocion or a Cato or a Pericles”, and who says, “My Athenian (or Roman) friend (ὦ ξέν’ Ἀθηναῖε ἢ Ῥωμαῖε) etc.” (789 c). I cannot but conclude that *An seni respublica gerenda* is about *old* men in politics, regardless of their Greek or Roman origin.<sup>29</sup> And it is also apparent that Plutarch makes no distinction between politics in a city-state and in the Roman empire,<sup>30</sup> his interest being in political conduct and instruction rather than in political structures.<sup>31</sup>

c) Of the so-called practical-ethical writings and of the “antiquarian writings”, I refer only to two essays. Firstly, *De capienda ex inimicis utilitate* is dedicated to Cn. Cornelius Pulcher, *procurator Achaeae*, which makes it immediately clear that the

<sup>27</sup> ‘Unparalleled’ are the saying of Cato (748 a), Pompey’s criticism of Lucullus’ luxurious lifestyle (785 d-e), Lucullus as a general (792 a), and the saying of Tiberius (794 c).

<sup>28</sup> See also 786 d-e (Epameinondas — Sulla); 791 e (Phocion — Masinissa — Cato); 794 d-f (Appius Claudius — Solon); 797 a (Aristeides — Cato — Epameinondas); 797 b-d (Agis — Menecrates — Scipio — Cicero).

<sup>29</sup> WHITMARSH (2001) 186 sees the old man as “the site of distillation of Greek wisdom”.

<sup>30</sup> VOLKMANN (1869) 227-228.

<sup>31</sup> See also JONES (1971) 111.

theme of the essay has also strong political connotations.<sup>32</sup> And then perhaps we should not be surprised that here as well reference is made to Greeks as well as to Romans, and as illustrations of the same virtue or vice. Thus at a certain moment, suspicion of unmanliness was aroused against Lycades, king of the Argives, Pompey, and Crassus (89 e). The Romans referred to are mostly positive examples of honesty (Cato Minor [91 d], Caesar [91 a], Scaurus [91 d]). Secondly, *Mulierum uirtutes* upholds the thesis that “man’s virtues and woman’s virtues are one and the same” (242 f), but that there is diversity only because of varying natures and temperaments of persons and because of varying customs (243 c). The historical exposition offers examples of bravery, intelligence etc. of men and women, but also, and without any need for justification, of Greeks and Romans alike!

The conclusion of this section must be as follows. When Plutarch in his *Moralia* casually refers to historical anecdotes or famous sayings of historical persons in order to illustrate an ethical or political thesis, he adduces Greek and Roman material alike and often mixed together, without questioning this practice. It follows that to Plutarch’s (uncritical) mind Greeks and Romans are equally capable of implementing ethical virtues and political skills; there is no hint at any animosity against Romans, rivalry with them, or any feelings of superiority of Greeks or Romans in this respect. On the other hand, this rhetorical practice appeals to what is apparently the collective cultural repertoire of Plutarch’s Greek and Roman readers,<sup>33</sup> their shared ideology concerning ethical and political conduct.

<sup>32</sup> That is also the case for *De adulatore et amico*, dedicated to Philopappus, a royal prince of Commagene. The Romans referred to in the essay are all important public figures (Marcus Antonius [56 e], Caesar Augustus [68 b], Nero [56 f, 60 e], Tiberius [60 d]).

<sup>33</sup> CARRIÈRE (1984) 56.

### 3. Plutarchan *Moralia* about Romans

a) *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae* contains some explicit meditations and advices on the situation of Greece under Rome's dominion, albeit we should understand "Greece" in the sense of "the Greek city/cities", since the main theme is indeed how to conduct local politics.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, the intended readership<sup>35</sup> consists of local Greek aristocrats. The perspective is broadened because in the exercise of political power in the city, the local ruler has to take into account the power and dominance of Rome. Plutarch consecrates §17 b-19 to this topic.

A first counsel is that, just like Pericles' power was limited by the fact that he ruled free men<sup>36</sup>, so the local politician, whatever office he enters, should always be aware that his power is limited, viz. that he is subject to the proconsul and procurator (813 e). Neglecting this obvious fact can result in death or banishment (813 f-814 a). Plutarch thus simply accepts the historical conditions. In this advice one cannot read any grudge, resentment or bitterness, nor are we to read a "dark picture of Rome"<sup>37</sup> here. Plutarch gives the commonsensical advice to respect the powers that be: he advises pragmatic realism.<sup>38</sup>

The reference to Roman governors, however, returns in *De exilio* 604 b: there it is argued that to be free from the burden of paying one's respect to the governor and from being dependent on his temperament is a consolation for the exile: apparently any argument would do if it offers consolation to the exile! But before concluding that Plutarch thus hints at any

<sup>34</sup> JONES (1971) 112.

<sup>35</sup> The title of the book of Th. RENOIRTE is telling: *Les "Conseils politiques" de Plutarque: Une lettre ouverte aux Grecs à l'époque de Trajan*.

<sup>36</sup> The comparison with Pericles thus takes on a surprising twist: from power limited by the freedom of those ruled to freedom of local governors limited by higher power; another interpretation is to be found in CATANZARO (2009) 84-85.

<sup>37</sup> DUFF (1999) 298.

<sup>38</sup> CARRIÈRE (1984) 54: "la voie sûre du réalisme"; CAIAZZA (1993) 244: "l'accettazione dignitosa di una libertà condizionata dalla supremazia romana".



unbearable oppressiveness of Rome, one does well to wonder if the deportee would not prefer the Roman magistrate to his exile. To bear the whims of the powerful is certainly unpleasant, especially for aristocrats, but one can live with that.<sup>39</sup>

The second *praeceptum* (814 a-c) continues the commonsensical argument. Taking into account the present times and conditions, a ruler should be careful in recounting past events. He is not to stir up the masses (τὰ πλῆθη) by urging them to imitate the glorious deeds, ideals and actions of their ancestors. No talk then about Marathon, the Eurymedon, Plataea: this makes the common folk (τοὺς πολλούς) vainly proud, and that kind of talk should be “left to the schools of the sophists”. The examples of the past should mould the character of the contemporaries: the past should serve the politician’s educative role.<sup>40</sup> I will come back to the “foolish exaltation of the ancestral past”, because that is exactly what Plutarch seems to do in *De gloria Atheniensium*...

The third counsel (814 c-e) advises the local ruler to have a Roman friend among the men in high station, and to use that friendship for the welfare of his home-town — again an advice that Plutarch himself implemented as an official: an argument from personal experience. He assures the dedicatee Menemachus that the Romans are prone to promote the political interests of their friends;<sup>41</sup> one may wonder whether Plutarch is deliberately naïve: the Romans probably did not offer help *propter Jesum tantum*! Anyway, this is an exhortation to have confidence in Rome as an ally. But Plutarch nuances the counsel immediately (814 e-815 b): internal feuds and contentiousness among the foremost citizens forces some to appeal too frequently and about almost every decision to the Romans, and

<sup>39</sup> Pace AALDERS (1982) 56: “a Greek magistrate... has to take the whims and fancies of his governor *too* much into account” (my italics).

<sup>40</sup> This is in conformity with the programmatic statements in the *Lives*: cf. MUCCIOLI (2012) 33.

<sup>41</sup> A concrete example is in *De Pyth. or.* 409 c: L. Cassius Petraeus helping Plutarch in Delphi!

thus they reduce their country to slavery (δουλείαν) — a very strong term —, and destroy all political life (πολιτείαν). Again, Plutarch's warning and exhortation to φιλία among the members of the local élite<sup>42</sup> are quite *ad rem* in view of the ambitious rivalry between aristocrats, a rivalry also prompted by the system of εὐεργεσία.<sup>43</sup>

Related to this advice is an important passage to be quoted from the *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae*. In 824 b-c Plutarch expresses the hope that the statesman can prevent factional discord among his fellow-citizens. No statesman is needed to bring peace, for there is now universal peace (the *pax Romana*):<sup>44</sup> "And of liberty the peoples (τοῖς δήμοις) have as great a share as our rulers grant them, *and perhaps more would not be better for them*" (my italics). The interpretation of this last clause is much discussed. Are we to discern "a touch of resignation"?<sup>45</sup> Or is Plutarch alluding to the then universal idea that the *imperium* was a fortunate necessity, since it was impossible to restore the old republic?<sup>46</sup> Or shall we simply praise Plutarch's realism?<sup>47</sup> Perhaps we should accept that the situation of peace and prosperity brought about by the Roman empire is, in Plutarch's honest opinion, the best possible condition for the peoples, and that he regards the loss of a certain amount of liberty as a justified and gladly paid price for that.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup> On the theme of friendship in politics, cf. VAN DER STOCKT (2002).

<sup>43</sup> CUVIGNY (1984) 51-53.

<sup>44</sup> CUVIGNY (1984) 210 observes that the reference to the *pax Romana* is expressed in a personal tone, "où un peu de tristesse se mêle à la satisfaction". I see no "tristesse" in Plutarch's reference, nor do I see why this peace would be "un peu prosaïque". Plutarch applauds the *pax Romana* also in *An seni respublica gerenda sit* 784 f, *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae* 805 a, *De Pythiae oraculis* 408 b-c, *De tranquillitate animi* 469 e.

<sup>45</sup> AALDERS (1982) 54.

<sup>46</sup> CAIAZZA (1993) 285.

<sup>47</sup> RENOIRTE (1951) 48; on Plutarch's 'political realism', cf. also MASSARO (1995).

<sup>48</sup> Maybe one should interpret τοῖς δήμοις as a reference to the 'masses', the 'mob', the 'common people' in the cities. Plutarch regards that 'people' as an irrational beast to be held under control by the statesman.



b) *De fortuna Romanorum* will explain the reasons for Plutarch's sincere satisfaction with the present situation, including Rome's dominance over Greece. However, before adducing the most relevant passages it is necessary to point to the very rhetorical character<sup>49</sup> of this epideictic oration. Epideictic orations are often distrusted and regarded as 'mere play'; they allegedly do not convey the serious and sincerely upheld convictions of the author/orator. Thus, e.g., Lamberton<sup>50</sup> holds that *De fortuna Romanorum* as an epideictic oration does not reflect Plutarch's "genuinely held beliefs"; Swain,<sup>51</sup> however, tries to make sense of this text by comparing the ideas it contains with their occurrence in Plutarch's more 'serious' writings,<sup>52</sup> thereby taking into account the different contexts that might shade the ideas in a somewhat different way. Moreover, one should remember that epideictic oratory, inasmuch as it praises a person or a people, is also about qualities, values, virtues and thus that it cannot be simply discarded as 'empty rhetoric'.

I must quote the most important passage in full:

Ἐγὼ δέ, ὅτι μὲν, εἰ καὶ πάνυ πρὸς ἀλλήλας αἰεὶ πολεμοῦσι καὶ διαφέρονται Τύχη καὶ Ἀρετῇ, πρὸς γε τηλικαύτην σύμπηξιν ἀρχῆς καὶ δυνάμεως εἰκὸς ἔστιν αὐτάς σπεισαμένας συνελθεῖν καὶ συνελθούσας ἐπιτελειῶσαι καὶ συναπεργάσασθαι τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ἔργων τὸ κάλλιστον, ὀρθῶς ὑπονοεῖν οἶομαι. καὶ νομίζω, καθάπερ Πλάτων φησὶν ἐκ πυρὸς καὶ γῆς ὡς ἀναγκαίων τε καὶ πρώτων γεγονέναι τὸν σύμπαντα κόσμον, ἔν' ὀρατός τε γένηται καὶ ἀπτός, γῆς μὲν τὸ ἐμβριθὲς καὶ στάσιμον αὐτῷ συμβαλομένης, πυρὸς δὲ χρῶμα καὶ μορφὴν καὶ κίνησιν· αἱ δ' ἐν μέσῳ φύσεις, ὕδωρ καὶ ἀήρ, μαλάξασαι καὶ σβέσασαι τὴν ἑκατέρου τῶν ἄκρων ἀνομοιότητα συνήγαγον καὶ ἀνεμίξαντο τὴν ὕλην δι' αὐτῶν· οὕτως ἄρα καὶ ὁ Ρώμην ὑποβαλόμενος χρόνος μετὰ θεοῦ τύχην καὶ ἀρετὴν ἐκέρασε καὶ συνέζευξεν, ἔν' ἑκατέρας λαβῶν τὸ οἰκεῖον

<sup>49</sup> KRAUSS (1912) 20-26; FORNI (1989) 10-11.

<sup>50</sup> LAMBERTON (2001) 97-98.

<sup>51</sup> SWAIN (1989b) 504.

<sup>52</sup> Related to the question how to value this epideictic text is the problem of its date; those sceptic of its 'seriousness' would classify it as the work of the 'juvenile' Plutarch: cf. e.g. ZIEGLER (1951) 720; a more nuanced opinion on the date of this oration is to be found in FRAZIER (1990) 15-17.

ἀπεργασῆται πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ἐστὶαν ἱεράν ὡς ἀληθῶς καὶ ἀνησιδώραν καὶ “πεῖσμα” μόνιμον καὶ στοιχεῖον αἰδῖον, ὑποφερομένοις τοῖς πράγμασιν “ἀγκυρηβόλιον σάλου καὶ πλάνης”, ὡς φησι Δημόκριτος.

“I believe myself to be right in suspecting that, even if Fortune and Virtue are engaged in a direct and continual strife and discord with each other, yet, at least for such a welding together of dominion and power, it is likely that they suspended hostilities and joined forces; and by joining forces they co-operated in completing this most beautiful of human works. Even as Plato asserts that the entire universe arose from fire and earth as the first and necessary elements, that it might become visible and tangible, earth contributing to it weight and stability, and fire contributing colour, form, and movement; but the medial elements, water and air, by softening and quenching the dissimilarity of both extremes, united them and brought about the composite nature of Matter through them; in this way then, in my opinion, did Time lay the foundation for the Roman State and, with the help of God, so combine and join together Fortune and Virtue that, by taking the peculiar qualities of each, he might construct for all mankind a Hearth, in truth both holy and beneficent, a steadfast cable, a principle abiding forever, “an anchorage from the swell and drift”, as Democritus says, amid the shifting conditions of human affairs (316 f-317 a).”

It will not do to dismiss this text as just epideictic lyrics,<sup>53</sup> nor as just a juvenile school exercise. In fact, the author of the oration was old enough<sup>54</sup> to have already at least a general idea of the course of Roman history; and in the quoted passage the orator knows how to use Plato, notably his *Timaeus* (31 b-32 b), for an interpretation of that history.<sup>55</sup> Indeed Plutarch parallels the progressive growth of Rome amidst the chaotic turmoil of colliding (Hellenistic)<sup>56</sup> powers and dominions, until it succeeds in bringing the whole world under its lasting dominance

<sup>53</sup> Cf. SIRINELLI (2000) 76: the oration contains “l’essentiel de la pensée de Plutarque sur l’empire”.

<sup>54</sup> FRAZIER (1990) 16.

<sup>55</sup> On the relevance of Plato’s *Timaeus* for this passage, cf. DILLON (1997).

<sup>56</sup> DESIDERI (2005) 8-10.

(317 c), with the way in which the orderly cosmos originated from chaotically colliding elements which finally were brought to order by the Demiurge. This is ‘naturalising’ Roman world dominion at its truest, also Platonic sense of the word! True, Plutarch’s terminology is somewhat slippery, alternating Τύχη with πρόνοια, and suggesting that ἀρετή means “virtue” but later on “bravery”. But there cannot be any doubt that for Plutarch the Roman world dominion is the everlasting result of a combination of human virtue and divine providence.<sup>57</sup> A combination indeed, because Plutarch believes in double causation: throughout the oration τύχη as a guiding, divine force grafts itself upon humanly motivated actions. This means that we cannot uphold the thesis that Plutarch is downplaying the importance of Roman virtue in favour of divine intervention; but at the same time we cannot reduce Τύχη to ‘mere luck’ and then have Plutarch suggest that things could equally well have turned otherwise. One should keep this in mind also when reading the end of the oration. There Plutarch all but hazards a prophecy, or better: a *uaticinium ex euentu*. For Alexander had planned to invade Italy, but his death prevented him from implementing that plan. Plutarch ascribes his death to Τύχη (326 a). Plutarch muses about the bloodshed the clash between Alexander and the Romans would have caused; then the oration breaks off. This startling end is not in contradiction with the previous argument: divine Τύχη assists the brave (“warlike and intrepid”: 326 c) Romans. But at the same time Plutarch pays homage to the Great Greek, whose splendour matches that of Rome.<sup>58</sup>

c) *De gloria Atheniensium* has much in common with *De fortuna Romanorum*: the anecdote about Themistocles (320 f =

<sup>57</sup> See also *Life of Romulus* 8, 9: “but we should not be incredulous ... when we reflect that the Roman state would not have attained to its present power, had it not been of a divine origin (θείαν τινὰ ἀρχήν)...” and BARIGAZZI (1994) 310; SWAIN (1989a) 272-302. On Plutarch’s view of divine providence, see especially OPSOMER (1997).

<sup>58</sup> SIRINELLI (2000) 76.



345 c), the literary technique of evoking two processions (317 c sq. ≈ 348 d), Platonic inspiration (316 e-317 c and 346 f-347 c)<sup>59</sup>, and — but this has to be qualified immediately — the glorification of the deeds of great man. In the case of *De fortuna Romanorum*, this parading of the warlike bravery of the Romans has been read as an implicit criticism of Roman militarism and craving for dominion without benefit for the subjected peoples; in the case of *De gloria Atheniensium* Plutarch's outspoken admiration for the military exploits of Athens, downplaying its cultural merits, has shocked modern interpreters.<sup>60</sup> Yet it has been argued convincingly that in the latter oration Plutarch is voicing the same opinions as in the rest of his writings.<sup>61</sup> But being construed around the opposition λόγος - ἔργον,<sup>62</sup> it emphasizes the supremacy of the (patriotic Greek) action, the ultimate service to the *polis*; at the same time, it precludes on the image that the Second Sophistic will create of Greece's past as a symbolic compensation for the Roman political and military supremacy.<sup>63</sup> This proud Hellenism, however, shows no signs of any anti-Roman feelings, but, as we have seen, its author is well aware of its limits. And it is generous enough to grant the Romans their share of virtue as it is shown in military action in *De fortuna Romanorum*. The benefit from that bravery, for that matter, was mentioned at the very start of its argument: "an anchorage from the swell and drift <...> amid the shifting conditions of human affairs".

<sup>59</sup> This latter passage is analysed in VAN DER STOCKT (1992) 26-31. On the Platonism of *De Gloria Atheniensium*, see also GALLO / MOCCI (1992) 9-12. FRAZIER (1990) 168 warns that a declamation does not have to exhibit the most strict philosophical precision.

<sup>60</sup> Consequently, the oration has been regarded as empty rhetoric, typical for the young and immature Plutarch: cf. ZIEGLER (1951) 726; KRAUSS (1912) 41-48; DI GREGORIO (1979) 11.

<sup>61</sup> FRAZIER (1990) 172-174; THIOLIER (1985) 20-21, and JOHNSON (1972).

<sup>62</sup> Cf. WARDMAN (1974) 15: "[...] Plutarch remains doggedly faithful to one of his cherished convictions, that action is superior to theory or talk (*logos*)".

<sup>63</sup> This is the essence of the argument of FRAZIER (1990) 175-176.

d) The *Quaestiones Romanae*<sup>64</sup> are part of a triptych together with the *Quaestiones Graecae* and the — now lost — *Quaestiones barbaricae*. The first obvious observation to be made is that the author apparently had a sincere ethnographic interest; the second that he was concerned with positioning Greeks, Romans and barbarians in the historical and cultural landscape of the then known world.

The *Quaestiones Romanae* sketches a rather nuanced, but overall flattering image of the Romans.<sup>65</sup> The interpretations of the god Janus in *Q.R.* 19, 22, and 41 are a clear illustration of Plutarch's positive evaluation of the Roman people. Janus, a Greek god, has civilized the Roman life-style (ἐξημερώσας τὸν βίον) and thus installed "ordered government" (εὐνομία) (274 f); for formerly, the Romans had lawless customs (ἀνόμοις ἔθεσιν: 269 a). Numa had the year start in January because Janus was "a statesman and a husbandman rather than a warrior" (πολιτικὸν καὶ γεωργικὸν μᾶλλον ἢ πολεμικὸν γενόμενον: 268 c). The suggestion is clearly that the Romans have become civilised peace-keepers; anyhow, they hardly qualify as barbarians (and Plutarch nowhere calls them barbarians)! The explanation for this civilised nature of the Romans is Greek influence. Indeed, Greek authors are omnipresent in these *Quaestiones Romanae*,<sup>66</sup> and they offer, sometimes even more than Varro, the better explanations to a given problem; in any case, they are never criticised, whilst Roman authors are. Plutarch's appropriation of Roman culture may also imply the claim that a Roman god like Janus is originally Greek<sup>67</sup> and that the Latin language has Greek origins (e.g. *Q.R.* 46, 276 a, concerning the goddess Horta). If the *Quaestiones Romanae*

<sup>64</sup> My comments on the *Quaestiones Romanae* rest largely on the invaluable studies of BOULOGNE (1992); BOULOGNE (1994); BOULOGNE (2002); BOULOGNE (1998); BOULOGNE (1987).

<sup>65</sup> A brilliant essay on the complexity of Plutarch's construction of Greek and Roman identity is to be found in PRESTON (2001); cf. also GOLDHILL (2002) 264-271.

<sup>66</sup> BOULOGNE (1992) 4701.

<sup>67</sup> For this kind of *interpretatio Graeca*, see also Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*.



have a political purpose, it is in the message that Greeks are intellectually superior to the Romans, even if the latter have a legitimate claim to world dominance given their peace-keeping mission.

This overall positive view of the Romans is confirmed by the results of a study on the question of how Plutarch represents Greeks, Romans and barbarians through Homeric references;<sup>68</sup> Bréchet convincingly argues that, in Plutarch's mind, a Roman is not a barbarian, nor will he ever become Greek.

#### 4. Plutarch's Hellenism and the *Lives*

That is because in Plutarch's mind the Greeks were obviously, among all the peoples subjected to Nero, "the most noble and most beloved of Heaven" (τὸ βέλτιστον καὶ θεοφιλέστατον γένος: *De sera numinis uindicta* 567 f-568 a); and thus Nero's soul deserved to receive a milder punishment than to be reincarnated in a viper, because he had granted freedom to the Greeks. This claim to a preeminent status of the Greeks occurs in the myth of Thespesius that concludes the essay *De sera numinis uindicta*. Livy would have some reservations here, for in his *Praefatio*, 3 he states that the Romans are the *princeps terrarum populus*. The discussion, however, should not be about who was right, Thespesius or Livy. Plutarch has Thespesius make the claim in a mythical, fictional, non-historical story. Yet such stories "raise the more important questions about motives for adoption and adaptation of the fables, the context in which they were framed, the attitudes they reveal to other cultures, and the role they played in forming a people's sense of cultural distinctiveness".<sup>69</sup> Deliberately forged fiction, however, in this case goes hand in hand with historical narrative. Indeed in the *Life of Flaminius* 11 Plutarch muses about

<sup>68</sup> BRÉCHET (2008).

<sup>69</sup> GRUEN (1993) 4.

the scope and meaning of Flamininus' proclamation of the freedom of the Greeks; he summarizes conversations of the (anonymous) Greeks celebrating the event as follows:

“Greece has fought all her battles to bring servitude upon herself, and every one of her trophies stands as a memorial of her own calamity and disgrace, since she owed her overthrow chiefly to the baseness and contentiousness of her leaders. Whereas men of another race (ἀλλόφυλοι δὲ ἄνδρες), who were thought to have only slight traces of a common remote ancestry, for whom it was astonishing that any helpful word or purpose should be vouchsafed to Greece — these men underwent the greatest perils and hardships in order to rescue Greece and set her free from despots and tyrants.”

These stories about the liberation of Greece and Plutarch's comments (through Thespesius and the anonymous Greeks) on them are most revealing. They testify to Plutarch's proud 'patriotism'. After all, to liberate Greece was only the right thing to do; it was the work of a man who was just (δίκαιος), and knew “how to use his successes so as to win legitimate favour and promote the right” (πρὸς χάριν εὐγενῆ καὶ τὸ καλόν): a nice compliment to Flamininus. But at the same time the message is that the Greeks simply deserve to be free. This Greek 'patriotism', although it is not blind — the Greeks are blamed for their self-destructive contentiousness —, appears in various forms in Plutarch's writings.<sup>70</sup> Thus in the *Life of Marcellus* 21 the hero is spoken of with sympathy because he “adorned the city [of Rome] with objects that had Hellenic grace and charm and fidelity”. A Roman who loved Greek culture and language (Ἑλληνικῆς παιδείας καὶ λόγων [...] ἐραστής: *Life of Marcellus* 1) *artes intulit agresti Latio!* Indeed, Greek art is far superior to the Roman art, and the Romans only ruined the originally beautiful Greek pillars for the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus by recutting and scraping them in Rome (*Life of Publicola* 15). The *Comparatio Periclis et Fabii Maximi* 3 is

<sup>70</sup> Several telling passages are listed in SCUDERI (1988) 140, n. 116; they were extensively discussed by FLACELIÈRE (1963).

very clear on this: the Periclean monuments in Athens are beautiful beyond comparison, and the Roman attempts at grandeur in these matters “are not worthy to be considered”. It is, however, not Greek visual art *stricto sensu*, but Greek culture in general that is superior. Marius (*Life of Marius* 2) is severely criticised because of his fierce temper. It is then suggested that this was due to his contempt of the Greek language and literature; he thought it was “ridiculous to study a literature the teachers of which were the subjects of another people”. Plutarch regards this contempt of “the Greek Muses and Graces” as the cause for his “blasts of passion, ill-timed ambition, and insatiable greed”. Similarly, Coriolanus in his intercourse with his fellow citizens was harsh, ungracious and arrogant (*Life of Coriolanus* 1) because of his lack of Greek *paideia*<sup>71</sup>. And Cato Maior (*Life of Cato Maior* 23) was wholly averse to philosophy, and mocked all Greek culture and training; in fact he warned that Rome would lose her empire if she became infected with Greek letters. And Plutarch comments: “But time has certainly shown the emptiness of this ill-boding speech of his, for while the city was at the zenith of its empire, she made every form of Greek learning and culture her own”, thus even suggesting that Rome became a superpower *because* it embraced Greek culture.

But if Plutarch is so convinced of Greece’s cultural superiority, how did he cope with Rome’s dominion in his *Lives*? The question is legitimate and relevant, since in each pair of the *Lives* Plutarch compares a Roman with a Greek, and it is but natural to ask, in those circumstances, if this parallelism serves an agenda other than the explicit ethical program as it is stated in some proems. This is a vexing question, because Plutarch nowhere explains why and for what purpose he compared Romans to Greeks in his *Lives*, and so there is a real danger of *Hineininterpretierung*: reading what is not there and inadvertently projecting one’s own frame of ethical, social, political references. Thus, e.g., it is all but obvious to expect the ancients to cherish our

<sup>71</sup> PRESTON (2001) 116-117.



contemporary sensitivities concerning multiculturalism like the need to understand and respect the other in his legitimate otherness, and to renounce feelings of superiority. These are values that have only recently been upheld in some contemporary societies, and not without hardship and trouble. As a rule, understanding probably goes simply and inadvertently along the lines of the Thomistic ‘wisdom’: *quidquid recipitur recipitur in modum recipientis*. And thus, as an ancient Greek Plutarch will spontaneously understand Rome in Greek terms. The Latin language now and then is actually Greek, Roman gods tend to be originally Greek, Roman political institutions are translated into Greek terms and institutions.<sup>72</sup> Plutarch thus creates a unified Greco-Roman cultural world from a Hellenocentric point of view, and, if we take into account the historicity of this ‘narrowness’, there is nothing wrong with that.

In the *Lives*, this Hellenocentrism implies that Roman and Greek ‘heroes’ are judged by the same Greek standards of moral and political behaviour.<sup>73</sup> And, going by the formal comparisons (*synkriseis*) that, as a rule, conclude the paired lives, and as we observed also in the *Moralia*, there is no clear ‘winner’: the ‘heroes’ “emerge fairly equal”.<sup>74</sup> Plutarch’s *synkriseis*, like the *Lives* themselves, are not intended to rate and rank, and to answer the question “who is the better one, the Roman or the Greek?”,<sup>75</sup> but to bring out the differences between the two incarnations of a particular virtue (or vice) in political and military deeds. In short, the *Lives* have an ethical-educational purpose, not so much a cultural-political — conciliatory — one.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> DUFF (1999) 302-303, with references to the publications of PELLING.

<sup>73</sup> DUFF (1999) 302. The same goes for the *Quaestiones Romanae*: cf. GOLDHILL (2002) 267.

<sup>74</sup> DUFF (1999) 260.

<sup>75</sup> DUFF (1999) 250; TATUM (2010) 12-13 points out that the rhetorical *synkrisis* is, as a rule, not that neutral. WARDMAN (1974) 236 holds that, even if Plutarch’s preference would go to the Greek hero, that would not be because he is Greek, and furthermore that the whole question of preference is “a minor matter”.

<sup>76</sup> The question whether they intend to sketch a Global History has to be answered in a nuanced, but altogether negative way: cf. PELLING (2010).

Up till now, all seems peace and quiet. Rome, as an obedient pupil of Greece, has become Greek, that is, civilised; Greece knows the limits of its political ambitions. But there might be some disturbing *Lives*. Firstly, the *Life of Romulus*. The most founding of Rome's founding fathers disappeared in a mysterious way, and was believed to be, soul and body, dwelling in heaven. Plutarch, to put it somewhat more impolitely than he does, thinks this is rubbish. What he actually says is that this story resembles the fables which the Greeks tell (*Life of Romulus* 28)! Anyway, bodies are mortal and one should not "violate nature by sending the bodies of good men with their souls to heaven". But 'Plutarch took his theology seriously' and that implies that the cult of Romulus/Quirinus was, according to Plutarch, founded on a lie.<sup>77</sup> If the *Life of Romulus* is indeed "une enquête ethnologique et sociologique sur Rome",<sup>78</sup> then this study threatens to undermine one of its sacred foundational myths.

But things get even worse, namely in the *Life of Numa*. "Against his better judgement, Plutarch casts doubts on the chronology of Numa. He knew perfectly well that Rome was founded in 753, and that Numa was king from 715 to 673, and on the other hand that Pythagoras (ca. 580-500) "lived as many as five generations" (*Life of Numa* 1, 2) after Numa. So Plutarch knew that it would be an anachronism to suggest that Numa was inspired by Pythagoras. Yet that is exactly what Plutarch does! Although he acknowledges that "the chronologies seem to be made out accurately" (ἀκριβῶς) (*Life of Numa* 1, 1), he ventures to cast doubts on the chronology — making a certain chronographer Clodius his ally, or being sceptical about the list of victors in the Olympic games, published by Hippias of Elis — only to conclude that "chronology is hard to fix" (*Life of Numa* 1, 4: τοὺς χρόνους ἐξακριβῶσαι χαλεπὸν ἔστι). This worrying observation sounds like the serious concern of a biographer, but it is actually a hypocritical manoeuvre to make

<sup>77</sup> LAMBERTON (2001) 82.

<sup>78</sup> DEREMETZ (1990) 72.



the anachronism acceptable, for Plutarch wanted to leave open the possibility that Greek philosophy and παιδεία were present in the heart of Rome from its very beginning.<sup>79</sup> It must be said that Plutarch, throughout the *Numa* [...], shows an uneasy conscience, like in 8, 10: “however, since the matter of Numa’s acquaintance with Pythagoras is involved in much dispute, to discuss it at greater length, and to win belief for it, would savour of youthful contentiousness (μειρακιώδους φιλονεικίας)”. Still, his final plea for the possibility of Numa’s acquaintance with Pythagoras sounds like this: “we may well be indulgent with those who are eager to prove, on the basis of so many resemblances between them, that Numa was acquainted with Pythagoras” (22, 4).<sup>80</sup>

In the *Comparison Lycurgus — Numa*, 1, Plutarch leaves aside this vexed question of Pythagorean influence on Numa, but that this founding father of Rome is one of his darlings, and why that is so, becomes clear when he grants him the most honorific title of being ‘Hellenic’: “Numa’s muse, however, was gentle and humane, and he converted his people to peace and righteousness, and softened their violent and fiery tempers. And if we must ascribe to the administration of Lycurgus the treatment of the Helots, a most savage and lawless practice, we shall own that Numa was far more Hellenic as a lawgiver etc.”. ‘Hellenic’, then, is not he who is Greek by birth, but who is humane, gentle, peaceful, righteous. These Greek values Numa embodied, and thus the ethical-cultural foundation of Rome is Greek. The *Life of Numa* thus threatens to undermine the very Roman character of Rome, or, to put it in P. Desideri’s terms:<sup>81</sup> “la revincita greca era sottile ma crudele: ai Romani veniva sottratta la propria identità culturale”.

<sup>79</sup> On the tradition of this idea and the resistance against it, see already FLACELIÈRE (1948) 407, and, recently PRESTON (2001) 103-104.

<sup>80</sup> VAN DER STOCKT (2009) 206-207. My interpretation differs from that of PRESTON (2001) 104.

<sup>81</sup> DESIDERI (1992) 4486.

## 5. Conclusion

Now to cast doubt on a foundational myth and to call a founding father of Rome “very Greek” is not a totally innocent procedure. But I would not call the procedure “cruel”. That would imply a deliberate attack, a premeditated hostile plan to harm the other, and I see no indication for that. The need to attack and to harm would testify to a hostility that I simply cannot see elsewhere in Plutarch. But if there is no hostility, there is no need to talk about ‘a reconciliatory attitude’ either, unless we would understand this ‘reconciliation’ in a very pragmatic sense. The appropriation of Roman religion, language and history as a part of Greek culture is for Plutarch one side of the deal with the Romans. It is the side that spares the Greek pride, and Plutarch indeed insists on the Greek cultural supremacy and on Rome’s debt to it — to Rome’s own advantage, for that matter! The other side of the deal is that the Greeks will accept Rome’s dominion without defying it — and to Greece’s advantage, for that matter. This pragmatic deal — a kind of *entente cordiale* — allowed Plutarch to be at the same time a proud Greek, and a Greek loyal to Rome. After all, the deal was also to his own advantage.

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## DISCUSSION

*A. Heller:* Il me semble que tous les 'intellectuels' grecs qui ont fait l'éloge de Rome et de la *pax Romana* trouvent leur intérêt à accepter, voire exalter l'ordre romain en partie parce que celui-ci garantit aux élites sociales (dont ils sont issus) une position dominante au sein des cités. La domination romaine s'est accompagnée d'une oligarchisation croissante des sociétés civiques, dont elle n'est pas seule responsable mais qu'elle a sans nul doute encouragée.

*L. Van der Stockt:* I totally agree. When Plutarch says that the Romans are "eager to help" the local magistrates in the Greek cities, he knows perfectly well that the Romans expect something in return from the local aristocrats: loyalty to Rome and keeping peace and order among their citizens. After all, Rome ruled Greece through the agency of the local elite, and in this respect one is tempted to use the term 'collaboration', if that term were not negatively coloured by our more recent history. Conversely, the local elites knew perfectly well that Rome was very useful in securing their social position. One could speak of an *entente cordiale* between Roman and Greek aristocrats, inspiring the latter to praise Rome.

*T. Whitmarsh:* I am not sure that we should be thinking simply in terms of praise or blame, promotion or criticism, positive or negative. Literary works can be subtle, allusive, complex, multi-layered — especially on big issues, like those of empire and religion. Some of Plutarch's writing is highly suggestive, without being anti-Roman as such. *De fortuna Romanorum* is a case in point. The opening sentence of the passage you quote claims it as a universal (note ἀεί) truth that fortune and

virtue are at war. The situation at Rome, where they have come to a truce, is thus a distortion of cosmic law, or perhaps even a temporary suspension. Similarly, the ending seems challenging: Plutarch alludes to the well-known question of what would have happened had Alexander headed towards Rome, but refuses to predict who would have won. He simply says “there would have been a lot of bloodshed”! If the ending has not been lost, this seems to be deliberately aporetic, and so provocative. I would read *DFR* as neither pro- nor anti-Roman; rather, it opens up an experimental space of possibilities, playing inconclusively with these powerful questions.

*L. Van der Stockt*: I agree that some literature, and in particular also epideictic oratory, can be subtle and multi-layered. But precisely in the case of *De fortuna Romanorum* I think the tendency of the quoted beginning of its §2 is most clear, and it is an unequivocal praise of the everlasting Roman empire. Let us first look at the generation of that empire. The Roman empire is the most beautiful exception (note γε) to what is the general rule (ἀεί), namely that Fortune and Virtue are continually at war with each other. Their truce, however, creating the Roman empire, is not a distortion of cosmic law. The comparison with the generation of the cosmos, inspired as it is by Plato’s *Timaeus* 28b (cf. also *De facie in orbe lunae*), makes it clear that the harmony of the cosmos is the result of the agency of the demiurg (in Plutarch’s text: μετὰ θεοῦ), who through persuasion made the elements to give up their ‘natural’ position so as to function perfectly in the harmonious cosmos. Secondly, the Roman empire is everlasting. It would be merely transitory if it were generated only by Fortune whose gifts are unreliable (ἀπίστα) and who is instable (ἀβέβαιον). But the empire is also the fruit of Virtue. Thus, being the result of the cooperation of both Virtue and Fortune, it is a “principle abiding for ever” (ἀίδιον), whose stability is reflected in the repeated ἰδρυθῆναι, ἰδρυσιν, as F. Frazier observed in her edition of the text. So, if we take into account the *whole* passage *and* its philosophical

background, we must conclude that we deal with an outspoken praise of the Roman empire.

As to the abrupt end of the oration: we simply do not know what happened here. *If* the ending of the text is abrupt because of an accident in the process of the text transmission, there is nothing provocative here. *If* the ending is abrupt because Plutarch never finished the oration, there is nothing provocative either. Only *if* the ending is deliberately abrupt so as to provoke speculation in spite of the course of history, we have a timid provocation. But this is too many *if*'s, and I refrain from speculating on the consequences of mere speculation.

*U. Gärtner:* In Ihrem Vortrag haben Sie für eine ganze Reihe von Schriften Plutarchs das jeweils anvisierte Publikum benannt, das ganz unterschiedlich zu sein scheint: prominente Römer (*Aduersus Colotem*), griechische Schüler (*Maxime cum principibus*), griechische lokale Aristokraten (*Praecepta gerendae reipublicae*). Zum Teil haben Sie darauf hingewiesen, dass auch andere von der Lektüre profitieren konnten und sollten (z.B. griechische Leser konnten gleichzeitig diskret belehrt werden, wie sie mit diesen prominenten Lesern umzugehen hatten). Es stellt sich daher die Frage, ob und wie sich im Text festmachen lässt, an welche (und welche unterschiedlichen) Leser er sich richtet, d.h. auch ob der Sprecher sich jeweils entsprechend 'stilisiert' bzw. eine bestimmte 'Rolle' übernimmt (Sie selbst sprechen davon, dass Plutarch bisweilen "deliberately naïve" sein konnte). Ebenso lässt sich fragen, ob wir außerhalb des Texts etwas über eine entsprechende Reaktion des Publikums finden können.

*L. Van der Stockt:* The question who was the primordially intended reader/audience and who — if any — was the implied reader/audience 'by extension' (as e.g. of the *Consolatio ad uxorem*, a letter of consolation to his wife, but an 'open letter' to a much larger audience as well) should of course be discussed in connection with each singular essay or oration or biography.



Obviously and as a general rule, apart from the formal address, the way in which the subject is treated may give an indication, although it must be said that the Plutarchan 'style' is to a large degree uniform (in its use of anecdote, its tendency to comparatism, its fondness of quoting literature etc.). But indeed there is to some degree a relation between theme, intended audience, and Plutarchan 'style' — I consciously avoid the term 'role' because it might unduly suggest 'lack of identity', a notion which seems to me to be rather postmodern; *possible* and *deliberate* irony is a play that still implies awareness of identity. The *Quaestiones Romanae* and the *Quaestiones Graecae* provide a good example. The former writing is, as Preston and Duff have argued, clearly primordially intended for a Greek audience. Its style is exclusive: the 'they' are the Roman others. The writing also explains terms and customs that beg an explanation only for Greeks. But of course Romans can read this piece and be satisfied with the 'sérieux' with which a Greek treats Roman customs. By contrast, the *Quaestiones Graecae* are inclusive: the 'we' are the 'we Greeks'. Another example would be the *Adversus Colotem*. The polemic tone and the detailed discussion of philosophical arguments make it clear that, apart from Herennius Saturninus, Plutarch's intended reader is a 'professional philosopher', whether he be Greek or Roman.

As to the historical reaction of his contemporary readers/audience, unfortunately we do not have detailed information. But from the fact that Plutarch had a readership for over 50 years during his lifetime, and from the promotion of his social position to which his writings must have contributed, we can in general terms surmise that he was successful and authoritative as an author.

*T. Whitmarsh:* The question of the dedication of Plutarch's works seems to get to the heart of many of the issues. There are many ways of reading a Plutarchan dedication to a Roman: at one extreme it might signify an intimate friendship, rather like a private letter; at the other, it might be a conventional, even

(in a sense) a 'fictitious' performance of intimacy for the benefit of a general audience who do not know any better. So my wider question is this: should we *believe* Plutarch when he presents this image of a friendly, international 'republic of letters' based around a traditional ideal of absolute equality (κοινὰ τὰ τῶν φίλων)? Or do we take this as Plutarch's own idealized projection, which in fact conceals the harsher, more hierarchical realities of political interaction?

*L. Van der Stockt:* The dedications of Plutarch's writings indeed deserve closer examination, and particularly a close reading of each one of them separately, since it can be expected that they do not all function in the very same way. Plutarch dedicates writings to historical persons whom he wants to please (by expressing, through the dedication, friendly feelings and/or respect). The dedication will in some cases imply the acknowledgement of the superior social status of the dedicatee (e.g. Sosius Senecio, dedicatee of the *Lives*), sometimes it will offer advice to someone in an equal position (e.g. Marcus Seditius, a father like Plutarch himself, in *De audiendis poetis*), or to a colleague in office (Flavius Euphanes in *An seni respublica gerenda sit*). Admittedly, depending on the status of the dedicatee, the prestige of Plutarch himself is more or less involved: the very suggestion of a more or less intimate relation may heighten that prestige (e.g. if the dedication is to a royal prince: Antiochus Philopappus in *De adulate et amico*). If Plutarch was free to dedicate some of his writings to historical persons, dedication to historical persons nevertheless also imposes limits. On the one hand, one cannot dedicate just anything to a particular person. On the other hand, the dedication does not assure Plutarch of symmetrical feelings on the part of the dedicatee: that symmetry is only implicitly suggested. And there indeed is the twilight zone where Plutarch can to a certain extent idealize his relation to the dedicatee, albeit on the condition that he does not offend him by imposing on him an intimacy that would annoy the dedicatee. Furthermore, to a

certain extent the dedication may also be an excuse to attract a broader audience. Be that as it may, the practice of dedicating writings to friends does not seem to me to be a mere idealizing façade in view of Plutarch's well attested network of (also Roman) friends. But then again, we do not have to think of a 'republic of letters' where all are equal. Here as well, there is a deal, the dedicatees being honoured by the dedication, and Plutarch establishing or reinforcing his philosophical/cultural/political authority.

*A. Heller:* À propos des dédicataires, le jeu est parfois plus subtil qu'il n'y paraît: ainsi, Cn. Cornelius Pulcher, le dédicataire du *De capienda ex inimicis utilitate*, est très probablement l'homonyme connu par des inscriptions de Corinthe, qui a certes fait une brillante carrière équestre, mais qui est un Grec d'origine. Sa famille provient d'Épidaure, cité avec laquelle lui-même entretient encore des liens, puisqu'il y a été agonothète des Asklépieia et y a même probablement été enterré. Les Romains à qui Plutarque dédie ses traités sont donc parfois aussi des Grecs, ce qui complique l'interprétation de la dédicace.

*L. Van der Stockt:* I don't think there are many instances of Roman dedicatees actually being Greek, but Cn. Cornelius Pulcher is indeed a case in point. I am not sure if I would use the word 'play' in connection with the practice of dedicating writings. 'Game/παιδιά' implies disengaged fun, even childish pastime. But the practise of dedicating writings has 'serious' social implications. Thus, in case the dedicatee is, in spite of his Roman name, originally a Greek, the dedication can still be a gracious acknowledgement of the superior political status of the dedicatee, and a mark of due respect. But on top of that it can express a feeling of, or a claim to a degree of common experience as Greeks with intense Roman connections. According to B. Puech, in Plutarch's view Cornelius Pulcher incarnated an ideal: that of a Greek with Roman relations and active in local politics. Very much like Plutarch...



*H.-G. Nesselrath:* Plutarch entwickelt einen sehr idealisierten Begriff des 'Hellenischen' (dies steht vielleicht in der Tradition des *Panegyrikos* des Isokrates, wo 'hellenisch' bereits nicht mehr in ethnischem Sinn, sondern als ein Begriff von 'Bildung' definiert wird: Isocr. *Or.* 4). In welchem Umfang richtet sich dieser idealisierte Begriff vielleicht nicht nur an Römer, sondern auch an Griechen, die — jedenfalls in ihrer Geschichte (die Plutarch gut kannte) — einem solchen Ideal bei weitem nicht immer entsprochen haben?

*L. Van der Stockt:* You are quite right in observing that Plutarch develops and applies an idealised, if not flattering notion of 'Hellenicity', even if, as I observed, he criticises e.g. the endemic contentiousness of the Greeks. That idealised notion of 'Hellenicity' is rather ethically tinged (although it is also about παιδεία in general); it comprises philanthropy, mildness, self-constraint and the like. Whilst Plutarch obviously does not invite his Roman reader to question this interpretation of the notion of 'Hellenicity' — even if that Roman reader may have had a somewhat disappointing experience with actual Greeks — the constant epideictic use of Ἑλληνικός is a strong appeal to his Greek reader to realize the virtues implied in the term. Many of Plutarch's ethical writings are, for that matter, exhortations in that direction. And in view of Plutarch's fair judgement on the Roman's capability of implementing ethical values, it comes as no surprise that in *De cohibenda ira* a Roman is actually an ethical model.

*J.-L. Charlet:* La position de Plutarque telle que vous la dégagez dans votre conclusion me fait penser à la position bien connue d'Horace: la Grèce conquise a conquis son vainqueur.

*L. Van der Stockt:* That is indeed what I suggested when I quoted the famous *artes intulit agresti Latio* — the irony involved in the fact that I had the *Roman* Marcellus introducing Greek art into Rome is, by the way, entirely mine. Horace's position,

however, is only one part of Plutarch's deal with Rome: Rome's implicit confession that Greece civilized Rome makes the Romans acceptable for Plutarch, all the more since this civilizing process is completed in Plutarch's days. But beyond Horace's adage I also stress the lasting Roman political and military dominion and Plutarch's acceptance of it. Both parties acknowledge the other's supremacy, albeit in a different field.

*A. Heller:* La différence entre Horace et Plutarque ne tient-elle pas à la chronologie qui sous-tend leurs conceptions respectives de l'influence civilisatrice de la Grèce sur Rome? Il me semble que le célèbre vers d'Horace implique que cette influence a été une conséquence de la conquête de la Grèce par Rome (conquise en retour dans le domaine littéraire et artistique), alors que Plutarque la place à la source même de l'histoire romaine (Numa inspiré par Pythagore).

*L. Van der Stockt:* What you say is correct; but some nuance is in order. On the one hand, according to Plutarch the process of Hellenising, that is: of civilizing Rome may have started with Pythagorean inspiration, but it took some time before the process was completed, and some resistance, such as that of Cato, had to be overcome. It follows that the process was completed "when Rome reached its zenith", that is: certainly in Plutarch's days. On the other hand, the chronological shift was a daring act on the part of Plutarch: he neglected the contemporary (patriotic) Roman speculations of a non-Greek origin of Rome.

*P. Schubert:* Lorsque Plutarque suggère qu'Alexandre aurait pu envahir l'Italie, mais en a été empêché par la τύχη, on ne peut s'empêcher de penser à la vision polybienne de la conquête romaine, selon laquelle Rome a précisément surpassé l'empire d'Alexandre par le fait qu'elle a dominé à la fois l'Occident et l'Orient (Polyb. 1, 2, 4). Aelius Aristide reprend d'ailleurs le motif dans son *Éloge de Rome* (24). Plutarque est-il en train de répondre à Polybe?

*L. Van der Stockt:* It is indeed possible, if not likely that Plutarch had Polybius' comments on the Roman empire in mind; and he could expect Polybius' history to belong to the literary frame of reference of his more cultivated audience. So it is possible, if not likely that a degree of intertextuality is going on. But Plutarch is not merely entering into 'a literary game of intertextuality'; he is musing on a serious issue, and one of importance for the fame and glory of Alexander, and for his own self-understanding as a Greek. Hence Plutarch's timid wondering if Alexander as well would have ruled East and West. But hence also Plutarch's conviction that divine Τύχη prevented the actual clash with Rome: it was clearly not the (divine) intention that there would be a chance that Alexander would win the battle, or that blood would be shed.

*U. Gärtner:* Der Gehalt der Aussage Plutarchs über seine Lateinkenntnisse ist äußerst umstritten; ich würde vielleicht nicht so weit gehen wie Sie zu behaupten, dass er an den stilistischen Feinheiten nicht interessiert war. Könnte es nicht auch eine kunstvolle Tiefstapelei sein? Immerhin scheint er ja der Sprache eine gewisse Schönheit zuzusprechen.

*L. Van der Stockt:* In his *De audiendis poetis*, but also in his *De tranquillitate animi*, and actually throughout all his writings, Plutarch downplays the importance of 'belles-lettres' vis-à-vis the ethical content of poetry and/or of his own writings. He regards "linguistic embellishment" as merely instrumental: it should attract the reader, but only to give way to the appreciation of useful ethical content and instruction. In the same way, I think, when it comes to Plutarch's dealing with Latin texts, he is perhaps not interested in the linguistic embellishment, but only in the information they afford and which he needs for the redaction of his *Lives*. That is in agreement with the (to my mind honest) astonishment he expresses at the very fact that he was able to *understand* what was written in Latin. It is, by the way, striking that he never quotes any Latin 'belles-lettres' *par*



*excellence*, namely poetry. But apart from that, it is correct to observe that Plutarch seems to implicitly acknowledge that the Latin language at least *has* some beauty.

*H.-G. Nesselrath*: Wie ernst kann man es nehmen, wenn Plutarch in den *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae* davor warnt, vor großen Volksmengen griechische historische Triumphe zu evozieren, um in ihnen nicht antirömische Stimmungen zu erzeugen? Es handelt sich doch um eine historische Topik, die den meisten Griechen bekannt sein konnte? Hier hängt natürlich viel davon ab, wie vertraut solche Reden den 'Massen' der Griechen waren: Wie groß waren die Auditorien, die solchen 'sophistischen' Reden mit solcher Topik zuhörten?

*L. Van der Stockt*: The triumphs mentioned by Plutarch have to do with the war against the Persians. Now we know that sophists in Plutarch's days were fond of the theme of the war against the Persians, and that they treated that theme in public orations before large audiences. The broader audience may thus well have *known* the topic; but that does not exclude the *emotional* impact an adroit orator could have when treating this patriotic theme. Be that as it may, we do not know what exactly Plutarch means here with ἐν ταῖς σχολαῖς τῶν σοφιστῶν. We cannot know if he is talking about a small circle of elitist pupils (as opposed to the illiterate masses) who make school exercises, or about sophistic declamations before large audiences. But we do know that Plutarch looks down on sophists. And I suggest that he opposes to them the politician with a sense of 'sérieux' and responsibility: he won't indulge in such frivolous (and possibly dangerous) rhetoric.

*E. Thomas*: You mention the passage from Plutarch's *Life of Demosthenes* where he claims that he had no leisure to practise in Latin when he was in Italy owing to his public duties there and the number of his pupils. But I wonder if Plutarch is being somewhat disingenuous here as surely this must have involved

speaking in Latin. Should we assume that his teaching was conducted only in Greek, and, as regards his 'public duties', if this, as one might assume, involved public speaking, does he mean therefore by "practising in Latin" something more than public speaking or daily activities, perhaps the study of Latin literature as a cultural form?

*L. Van der Stockt:* Concerning Plutarch's teaching we can be fairly confident that his conferences were exclusively in Greek, the language of philosophy. Needless to say that his Roman 'pupils'/audience understood Greek. The language used in his official capacities and dealings with Roman officials is another matter. Most probably Latin was involved here, if not in conversations, then at least in written documents. The redaction of such documents could have taken place in Greece, and with the help of a native speaker. In the period of his visits to Rome, then, Plutarch's active mastery of the Latin language (τὴν Ῥωμαϊκὴν διάλεκτον) was indeed probably rather poor. That would explain why he was so astonished that, later on (presumably when he was about 50 years), when he started reading Latin texts (Ῥωμαϊκοῖς γράμμασιν) as a source of information for the redaction of his Roman *Lives*, he understood what was written because he was familiar with it from previous reading of Greek texts.

*H.-G. Nesselrath:* Wenn Plutarch in *De exilio* es als wünschenswert darstellt, durch Verbannung von der Herrschaft eines römischen Gouverneurs befreit zu sein, ist dies vielleicht nicht nur ein rein rhetorisches Argument, sondern fasst zumindestens die Möglichkeit eines Machtmissbrauchs durch römische Provinzgouverneure ins Auge, wie es auch in Plutarchs Zeit immer noch vorkam (vgl. das zeitgenössische Zeugnis solcher Vorfälle in *Satiren* Juvenals)?

*L. Van der Stockt:* The argument that an advantage of exile consists in being free from the oppressive power of the Roman

governor may indeed very well imply a reference to a painful experience or painful experiences 'in the real world'. My point was only that the argument is not very convincing. Formulated in general terms (the need to pay respect, having to deal with fits of temper), and put in the balance against exile, it does not weigh enough as a consolation for such a disastrous experience as exile. All depends, of course, on the capability of the individual subjects to cope with an ill tempered governor, or, to put more precisely, on the degree of pride and strength of the subjects.

*P. Schubert:* Vous avez évoqué l'idée d'un processus de réconciliation entre les Grecs et les Romains. On peut se demander si le paradigme, certes présent à la période augustéenne, est encore d'actualité du vivant de Plutarque. Ce dernier, dans le passage cité de la *Vie de Démosthène* paraît plutôt condescendant envers Rome, laquelle entretient un réseau diversifié d'amis'. Dans ce contexte quel intérêt Plutarque peut-il avoir à écrire autant sur les Romains, hormis la satisfaction d'une certaine forme de *pax Romana*?

*L. Van der Stockt:* In connection with the *Quaestiones Romanae*, I pointed to Plutarch's ethnographical interest. That interest was, however, not just a scholarly hobby. Even if the times of hostility and, consequently, of need for reconciliation were over, the close interaction with the Romans continued to confront (especially) the Greek elite with the question of the Greeks' position in the empire. And even if Plutarch is not dreaming of a kind of Graeco-Roman condominium, there remained a need for understanding the Romans and for positioning the Greeks somewhat alongside them: that was a matter of satisfying Greek pride as well as securing the more practical advantages I mentioned.



