

BOOK REVIEW

A Companion to Plutarch. Ed. by MARK BECK. London: Wiley Blackwell, 2014. Pp. xvii + 625. Hardcover, \$195.00. ISBN 978-1-4501-9431-0.

The recent trend of publishing companions to ancient authors, eras, and ideas is a laudable one, for such companions typically marshal an array of scholars to write short essays on different aspects of a wide subject. Blackwell itself has published over forty of these so far and shows little sign of quitting. But of all ancient authors Plutarch has most deserved such a companion, and this *Companion to Plutarch* does an admirable job of trying to cover his extensive and diverse oeuvre.

Few scholars, I believe, would count themselves as experts of *all* of Plutarch's work, for apart from the sheer mass and variety of it typically research leads in one of two directions: either into the morally instructive theater of his *Lives* or into the forest of his *Moralia*. Modern Plutarchan studies, however, have begun to pursue a holistic approach, and the *Companion* serves them well in this regard. As a bonus, in the final section of this volume readers will also learn the reasons behind this long-seated division in the reception of Plutarch, a breach still in the process of being healed.

Beck has divided the *Companion* into four parts and assembled forty-two short essays, few of which exceed fifteen pages. As with other Blackwell companions, most essays include a guide to further reading, an especially welcome feature here. I cannot hope to summarize all the essays in this short review, but I will focus on the ones that I feel are especially helpful for scholars wishing to broaden their acquaintance with the Chaeronean. (For a complete list of chapters and their authors see: <http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1405194316,subjectCd-CL40.html>).

The three essays in the first part, "Plutarch in Context," firmly ground Plutarch in the political and social context of Greece under early Imperial Rome (Philip Stadter) and in the intellectual contexts of the Second Sophistic (Thomas Schmitz) and imperial philosophy (Michael Trapp). Schmitz's essay helpfully

tracks Plutarch's conception of sophists and sophistry and points to possible evidence of his encounters with the wider trends of public rhetoric in the first and second century CE.

The second part, "Plutarch's *Moralia*," attempts to cover the wide range of topics and genres of that half of Plutarch's works, something only a series of volumes could do real justice to. Scholars, however, who lack acquaintance with the nuances of Plutarch's philosophy (among whom I count myself), will find much profit in the first five chapters of this part, which describe the relationship of Plutarch to each of the five major philosophical schools of the Empire (the Academy, the Lyceum, the Stoa, the Garden, and the Sceptics). As John Dillon notes in his essay, although Plutarch regarded himself as an orthodox Platonist, he, like other Roman-era Platonists, embraced some aspects of Stoicism and Aristotelianism, and Plutarch himself exhibits significant idiosyncrasies, such as his belief in a fundamentally irrational soul that is nonetheless susceptible to rational ordering and his ties to Pythagoreanism.

The rest of the second part covers a range of topics, e.g. education, political philosophy, the role of *eros*, Plutarch's sympotic works, his antiquarianism. Notable among these are Rainer Hirsch-Luipold's essay on religion and myth in Plutarch, which gives the reader much insight into his "polylatric monotheism" and discusses Plutarch's creation of eschatological myths in the Platonic tradition. I must also mention Stephen Newmyer's essay, "Animals in Plutarch," which explains Plutarch's revolutionary and anti-Stoical ideas about animals, especially his belief in the necessity of humane treatment of them.

The largest part of the book is the third, "Plutarch's Biographical Projects," which consists of nineteen essays that cover not only the *Parallel Lives* proper but also the remains of his *Lives of the Emperors* and his earlier biographies on Aratus and Artaxerxes. Readers will also encounter chapters devoted to the different parts of biographical structure of the *Parallel Lives* (prologues, epilogues, *synkriseis*) and a number of themes in them (tragedy, ambition, gender, childhood, eroticism, *et al.*). David Larmour makes a strong case for the importance of the *synkriseis* of the *Parallel Lives* as complements to the prologues, as vital structural justification for the juxtaposition of the paired lives, and as implicit invitations for readers to continue the process of comparison. Certainly readers of his essay will think twice before placing books that separate paired *Lives* like Penguin's *The Rise and Fall of Athens: Nine Greek Lives* on their syllabus for undergraduate classes.

Also noteworthy in this part are Bernard Bouler's essay on the philosophizing in Plutarch, which synthesizes his political essays and his treatment of Lycurgus and Numa in the *Lives*, and Geert Roskam's essay on how Plutarch uses the *Lives* in part to demonstrate to contemporary politicians the proper use of and proper motivations for euergetism. Overall, the essays in this part, especially Anastasios Nikolaidis', show how closely the *Moralia* and the *Lives* are linked to each other, the former giving Plutarch's theories of moral virtues and the latter providing demonstration of them in a historical context.

The fourth and final part, "The Reception of Plutarch," treats the long afterlife of his works. Marianne Pade's essay on the reception of Plutarch from antiquity to the Italian Renaissance traces the slim survival of Plutarch's reputation in the West during the Middle Ages (as a teacher of Trajan no less) to the reintroduction of his works by fugitive Byzantine scholars in Florence and the beginning of a "Plutarchan Age." The essays by Olivier Guerrier and Françoise Frazier cover the extremely influential French translation of the *Lives* and *Moralia* by Jacques Amyot and explain how it created the bourgeoisie sensibility, inspired generations of French playwrights and authors, and inspired major figures of the French Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and beyond. Particularly interesting is the story of how the figure of Plutarch and the "heroic" character of his *Lives* became a flashpoint in post-World War I France. Carl Richard's essay is a reminder of the pervasive importance of Plutarch's *Lives* in early American education and society and in particular his deep influence on the Founding Fathers, who learned, among other things, the "great man" theory of history and a nagging paranoia regarding anti-democratic conspiracies.

I found very few errors, chiefly minor typographical or editorial slips. Although the hardcover price is high (and the e-book price not cheap by any means), I recommend it to any Plutarchan scholar as an aid not only in research but also in gaining a fuller understanding of an author who occupies a central place in our conception of Greco-Roman antiquity. Every Classicist is an acquaintance of Plutarch: here is a great opportunity to begin a path to a deeper friendship with him.

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