

Philip A. Stadter, ed. *Plutarch and His Roman Readers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. x, 394p. ISBN 9780198718338. UK £80.00 / US \$111.00 (hardback).

Plutarch and His Roman Readers is an outstanding interdisciplinary work at the crossroads of classics, political philosophy and literary studies. The book is a reliable and solid collection of essays, a valuable summation of an entire life dedicated to the inquiry into the legacy of the ancient historian by their author. The articles are gathered in this anthology by Eugene H. Falk, under the pseudonym of Philip A. Stadter, and focus on the *Parallel Lives*, a series of 22 book-length pairs, each setting side by side the lives of two statesman, one Greek and one Roman — Alexander and Caesar, Aristides and Cato, Lysander and Sulla, to give only a few examples. To his contemporary readers, Plutarch wished to present leaders from these traditions as models for the government action of his own day. His main purpose was to examine the moral issues and decisions involved in politics, in order demonstrate that virtue and greatness are possible when reason directs and guides passion instead of historical circumstances and conditions.

Part I, “Two Worlds – or One?,” examines Plutarch’s easy-going social encounter with his friends, elite Romans who held prominent military and administrative positions, as depicted in *Table Talk*. The author partially revises and refines the conclusions of recent studies into patronage during the reigns of the Flavian emperors and their successors, Nerva and Trajan. In the process, he displays a vast knowledge of ancient history and its sources. His critical narrative draws a carefully delineated picture of the social and political context. The subsequent chapters deal with, amongst other subjects, the sanctuary of Apollo in Delphi (where Plutarch was a priest for many years), the dinner parties attended by the philosopher and the socialite pleasures experienced in the *symposiaca*.

Part II, “Writing for Romans,” is devoted to a reflection on how the biographer born in Chaeronea challenged the mind-set of Trajanic Rome. His approach to Roman and Greek history was thoroughly innovative in that he compared two nations and two cultures separated by geography and language but under strong reciprocal influence. Greek literature and culture formed an essential part of Roman life in that day. Both peoples were bound at the time not only by conquest but also by a common paradigm, based ultimately on Greek philosophy since Rome had been Hellenized. Moreover, these essays explore Plutarch’s competence in reading Latin and a wide range of topics related to ideologies and political science.

Part III, “Statesmen as Models and Warnings,” calls attention to important transversal threads which reverberate across the pairs in sets of lives, such as the nature of kingship, the empty pomp of power, and the tragedy of its ultimate inability to inspire goals and impermanence as a metaphor of rule. The historical drama of *Parallel Lives* warns of the pitfalls intrinsic to statecraft and of the unavoidable, rather than unexpected, fate. Falk wittily endorses the idea that the noblest human act is to govern well. In Plutarch’s lifetime, there had been, likely, more spectacles in imperial politics than genuine leaders, as it happens in some ways nowadays.

Part IV, “Post-Classical Reception,” investigates the treatment of Plutarch and his works in Joseph Addison’s tragedy *Cato* and Alexander Hamilton’s paybook. The former was an early representative of the English Enlightenment who contributed to a new form of citizenship and code of manners by advancing a rational vision of society in a number of works published between 1709 and 1714 in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. The latter listed the payments to the soldiers and other expenses while serving as captain of the New York Artillery until May 1777. The author brilliantly elucidates revealing statements on which Addison and Hamilton drew from Plutarch on economy, political arithmetic, education, legal thinking, governmental institutions, slavery abolition, civil religion and sex.

A book such as this one is more than a laudable compilation. It is a major academic achievement. Even though rulers of exceptional quality are rare at all times, we should always search determinedly for those who have in some measure honesty and integrity as well as that impartiality and objectivity which come from the prevalence of intellect over emotion, for the sake of liberty, happiness and prosperity.

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