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Plutarch: Cultural Practice in a Connected World



T S O

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S U P P L E M E N T
T S O N L I N E

Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität
Münster, Germany ▪ 2022

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Edited by Chandra Giroux

Published by Universitäts-und Landesbibliothek Münster
Krummer Timpen 3
48143 Münster
www.ulb.uni-muenster.de

Created in Germany.

Online version accessible at <http://teiresias-supplements.org>

Plutarch: Cultural Practice in a Connected World / edited by Chandra Giroux. ISBN 978-3-9821178-1-2
(Teiresias Supplements Online, Volume 3)
Teiresias Supplements Online / edited by Hans Beck, Elena Franchi, and Angela Ganter

doi: 10.17879/tso-2022-vol3

PDF layout and design by Hans Beck. Front cover design by Chandra Giroux.
Photograph: Oedipus and the Sphinx (1806-8), François-Xavier Fabre; Wikimedia Commons:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fran%C3%A7ois-Xavier_Fabre_-_Oedipus_and_the_Sphinx.jpg.

1. Mediterranean Region — Antiquities — Ancient Greece — Plutarch. 2. Mediterranean Region — Cultural Practice. I. Giroux, Chandra, 1987-, author, editor. Plutarch: Cultural Practice in a Connected World.

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Plutarch: Cultural Practice in a Connected World

Edited by Chandra Giroux

Teiresias Supplements Online, Volume 3

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|---------|
| Editorial Board | 3 |
| Forward | 7-9 |
| Preface | 10-11 |
| Abbreviations | 12-15 |
| | |
| (1) The Place of Dance in Plutarch's World. Written Traces of a Physical Cultural Practice Karin Schlapbach, <i>Université de Fribourg</i> | 17-39 |
| (2) No Life without Athletics. Plutarch and Greek Sport Sebastian Scharff, <i>Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität</i> | 40-55 |
| (3) Feeling Scaphism: <i>Enargeia</i> and Assimilation in the <i>Artaxerxes</i> Rebecca Moorman, <i>Providence College</i> | 56-71 |
| (4) Local Past and Global Present in Plutarch's <i>Greek, Roman, and Barbarian Questions</i> Thomas Schmidt, <i>Université de Fribourg</i> | 72-96 |
| (5) The Last of the Greeks, and Good Riddance: Historical Commentary in Plutarch's <i>Philopoemen-Flamininus</i> Jeffrey Beneker, <i>University of Wisconsin</i> | 97-118 |
| (6) Building Cultural Bridges to Statesmen of the Past: Plutarch's Heroes as Guides to City Leaders Susan Jacobs, <i>Independent Scholar</i> | 119-147 |
| (7) Plutarch's Imaginary Sparta: Hybridity and Identity in a Paradoxical Community Noreen Humble, <i>University of Calgary</i> | 148-163 |
| (8) Beyond Bacon: Plutarch and Boiotian Culture Chandra Giroux, <i>McGill University</i> | 164-184 |
| (9) Epilogue Hans Beck, <i>Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität</i> | 185-188 |

Forward

The connected character of Plutarch's world is epitomized by the opening of *On the Obsolescence of Oracles*, where the old legend of Zeus releasing two eagles, one from the East, one from the West, whose flight converged at the navel of the world in Delphi, is updated to introduce two of the participants in the dialogue: Demetrius of Tarsus, who has been travelling in Britain, and Cleombrotus of Sparta, who has just returned from Egypt, and has visited 'the country of the Troglodytes' and sailed far up the Red Sea.¹ Other dialogues have Roman participants as well as Greek; and Plutarch projects internationalism back into the pre-Persian Wars period in *The Dinner of the Seven Wise Men*, which boasts a Scythian participant, Anacharsis, and the involvement at a distance of the Egyptian pharaoh Amasis.

This diverse 'human community'² in Plutarch's writings is the subject of the essays in this volume, which mirror that diversity and provide a rich series of readings of the ways in which Plutarch articulates the connectivity of his cultural and political world.

Karin Schlapbach's analysis of Plutarch's writing about dance, a cultural practice which connected great swathes of Plutarch's geographical and cultural world, demonstrates that the experience of dance described in Plutarch is particularly valuable in connecting us to ancient society. This is true not least because of all the arts, dance is the hardest to record. Sebastian Scharff notes that Plutarch is very fond of athletic metaphors, and both the first two essays offer reminders that metaphor both explains the world it describes and also is illuminated, even created, by it. In general in the volume, connections are forged, often very deliberately by Plutarch himself, not only between contemporaries but between the past and Plutarch's present, and between that present and ours.

Rebecca Moorman's meticulous examination of the brutal execution of Mithridates in Plutarch's *Artaxerxes* introduces another form of connection between the reader and the text

¹ We are protected from cynical assumptions about the possibility of Plutarch exaggerating the cosmopolitan nature of his world by archaeological finds such as the tombstone of Regina at Arbeia (South Shields) on Hadrian's Wall. Regina was a woman of the Catuvellauni (whose territory lay north of London in modern Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Hertfordshire). She was the freedwoman and wife of Barates, who was from Palmyra in Syria, and who caused a line of Palmyrene to be added to the tomb's Latin inscription.

See: <https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/1065#edition> (accessed 9 November 2022).

² I borrow the phrase from Richter 2011: 21–54.

– the heady combination of disgust and fascination which the narrative provokes, and the resulting connection of feeling between the reader and the narrated Persians. The relationship between the global and the local, and the intermediate position between the two occupied by Rome, is further explored by Schmidt, who notes that the *Roman Questions* are concentrated on the city of Rome itself. Schmidt also brings into sharp relief the (perhaps inevitable) Hellenocentric perspective of the *Roman Questions*.

Jeffrey Beneker's analysis of the *Philopoemen-Flamininus*, however, suggests Plutarch can be more critical of the Greek past, especially of its disunity. Here and in Schmidt's essay, too, the present is visible in the past and vice versa, and Plutarch's own world is connected to, and partly explained by, the past. Plutarch was capable of deploring Roman disunity as well as Greek (see *Pompey* 70, where the best of the Romans and some Greek observers reflect sadly on the waste of civil war), but Beneker is undoubtedly right that this pair calibrates itself around a triple focus on the local, the national (that is, Greece as a whole) and the global (that is, Greece under the sway of Rome). The last of the Greeks is overtaken by something bigger than Greece. Beneker also stresses the connection of the narrative to the Plutarchan presence via visual reminders of the Greek past.

Susan Jacobs focusses more on the practical significance of the links Plutarch builds between the past and his contemporary present, and between Greeks and Romans; Noreen Humble, by contrast, concentrates on Sparta and assesses Plutarch's relationship with it. Once again, the imagined Sparta of the past and the Sparta of the present are held in a continuum, though as Humble points out, Plutarch's contemporary Sparta was very different from the Sparta of his *Lives*, which was itself an evolving construct. Once again, the perspective imposed by Rome alters the dynamic.

Finally, Chandra Giroux, the editor of the volume and to whom we also owe the excellent colloquium on which it is based, and the thoughtful Preface, considers Plutarch in his Boiotian context. Plutarch's localism, as Giroux convincingly shows, is demonstrated by his knowledge and love of his whole region, not only Chaironeia, with whose history he is minutely acquainted. My own favourite example of his use of local Boiotian history is the story with which Plutarch opens his *Life of Cimon*, a sad tale of a wild boy who murders the Roman commander who has made unwelcome romantic overtures to him, returns to murder the magistrates who condemn him, and runs away to lead the life of a bandit. When he is lured back and murdered in the bathhouse, his spirit haunts the place in such a sinister

way that the baths have to be abandoned.³ The awkward relationship with the occupying Romans (the commander is planning to consummate his passion for Damon by force when he is killed sacrificing in the market-place – but Chaironeia has embraced *Romanitas* to the extent of having a bathhouse), the sense of the city’s hinterland, and its troubles – it is small and neglected, which emboldens the Roman, and it can ill afford the rapacity of the vengeful Damon, introduces Plutarch’s declaration of intent to write the life of Lucullus, the pair of *Cimon*, since Lucullus twice assists the city after this distressing incident. The haunting persists even to Plutarch’s own day, making one of the now familiar connections between the Greek past and the contemporary present; but happily, it is implied, after Lucullus relations with Rome are better. Giroux captures with a wealth of detail the zest with which Plutarch introduces the reader to his city and his region, its customs, its strategic importance, and the tapestry of its history.

The volume as a whole demonstrates clearly the capaciousness of Plutarch’s view of the world, his ability to look beyond the local without overlooking its importance; his ability both to feel – and demonstrate in practical ways – a local attachment and yet also to swim in a bigger river, to meet Romans and others on an equal footing, and to seek to understand the full gamut of the connected world of the Roman empire.

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³ On this passage see Ma 1994: 49–80; Blamire 1989 ad loc., and Mossman 2019: 59–75, esp. 61–66.

Preface

This volume derives from an international workshop of the same name, organized by Hans Beck and Chandra Giroux at Münster University, Germany, on February 6 and 7, 2020. The event was made possible through funding from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the Chair of Greek History at Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster.

For this workshop, we asked our participants to consider how Plutarch represented cultural practices in the past and in his present, and how he engaged with said cultural practices before the backdrop of an increasingly connected world. Cultural practice, for our purposes, refers to the activities, events, rituals, language, and expressions that were used, produced, and repeated to create meaning in the everyday lives of the participants. The practices could be traditional or newly constructed but were all exposed to change and challenge over time. They were helpful compasses of orientation for both insiders and outsiders because of their ability to instill a sense of belonging when combined with local discourses. Keeping these ideas in mind, we asked how Plutarch conceived of cultural phenomena in local spheres and in relation to the wider world. Was it possible to discern expressions of cross-fertilization, hybridization, or entanglement? The present volume is the result of the fruitful and lively discussion during the workshop and in the ensuing months to publication.

Almost immediately after our workshop in Münster the world went into lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic. For many of us, it was our last in-person event for approximately 1.5–2 years. Right after we discussed how international our meeting was, with participants from Canada, Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, we were confined to our local worlds in a wholly unique way. Although our individual experiences were unique, the pandemic brought to light and connected us to the local in new ways, in some cases heightening our local awareness. We limited our travel and existed primarily in our local spheres. But we remained connected to our global networks and friends through the internet and social media outlets. It became common to ask, “How are the case counts in your area? What kind of restrictions are in place?”, and comparing the answers to our own experiences. Our local and global peripheries had never been so obvious, and yet we also gained an appreciation for how they were intricately intertwined. In some ways, living through the pandemic enabled us to consider the workshop questions from a new perspective. Granted from a changed personal experience with our own local cultural practices and the global ones that were no longer as

available to us. Plutarch's parochial life in Chaironeia – see specifically his statement in *Demosthenes* 2.2 – suddenly became much more relatable.

Nonetheless, much like Plutarch, we remained connected to the outside world. Our personal and academic networks, collaborations on projects (such as this one), and planning for future travel, kept us engaged with our global contexts. This volume comes not only from our rich academic discussions pre-COVID 19, but also from our own lived experiences through the pandemic as we witnessed the changing and challenging times that affected more than just cultural practices.

It is from this atmosphere of change and challenge that this volume arose, and for this I have many people whom I would like to thank. First, Hans Beck, whose support, not only of the initial conference but also of the edited volume, is immeasurable. Next, thank you to the entire editorial board of *Teiresias Supplements Online*, who offered their encouragement, thoughts, and excitement about this volume. Thanks are also due to the two peer-reviewers whose observations and critical eyes improved this collection of papers and helped to transform it into a comprehensive whole. Lastly, I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to the contributors of this volume, not only for their endless enthusiasm but also for being such an inspiration in how they supported each other throughout the entire process, from conference presentation to final submission. In a world of isolation, you have all made everything feel so close. Thank you.

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Abbreviations for Plutarch's Works

The following abbreviations have been employed for Plutarch's works:

Lives

| | |
|------------------|------------------|
| <i>Aem.</i> | Aemilius Paullus |
| <i>Ages.</i> | Agesilaus |
| <i>Alc.</i> | Alcibiades |
| <i>Alex.</i> | Alexander |
| <i>Ant.</i> | Antony |
| <i>Arat.</i> | Aratus |
| <i>Art.</i> | Artaxerxes |
| <i>Arist.</i> | Aristides |
| <i>Caes.</i> | Julius Caesar |
| <i>Cam.</i> | Camillus |
| <i>Cat. Mai.</i> | Cato Maior |
| <i>Cat. Min.</i> | Cato Minor |
| <i>Cic.</i> | Cicero |
| <i>Cim.</i> | Cimon |
| <i>Cleom.</i> | Cleomenes |
| <i>Cor.</i> | Coriolanus |
| <i>Crass.</i> | Crassus |
| <i>Demetr.</i> | Demetrius |
| <i>Dem.</i> | Demosthenes |
| <i>Eum.</i> | Eumenes |
| <i>Fab.</i> | Fabius Maximus |
| <i>Flam.</i> | Titus Flamininus |
| <i>Galb.</i> | Galba |
| <i>Luc.</i> | Lucullus |
| <i>Lyc.</i> | Lycurgus |
| <i>Lys.</i> | Lysander |
| <i>Marc.</i> | Marcellus |
| <i>Mar.</i> | Marius |
| <i>Nic.</i> | Nicias |
| <i>Num.</i> | Numa Pompilius |

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Ot.</i> | Otho |
| <i>Pel.</i> | Pelopidas |
| <i>Per.</i> | Pericles |
| <i>Phoc.</i> | Phocion |
| <i>Phil.</i> | Philopoemen |
| <i>Pomp.</i> | Pompeius |
| <i>Pub.</i> | Publicola |
| <i>Pyrrh.</i> | Pyrrhus |
| <i>Rom.</i> | Romulus |
| <i>Sert.</i> | Sertorius |
| <i>Sol.</i> | Solon |
| <i>Sull.</i> | Sulla |
| <i>Them.</i> | Themistocles |
| <i>Thes.</i> | Theseus |
| <i>Ti. Gracch.</i> | Tiberius Gracchus |
| <i>Tim.</i> | Timoleon |

Moralia

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <i>Amat.</i> | Amatorius (Dialogue on Love) |
| <i>An seni</i> | An seni respublica gerenda sit (Whether an Old Man Should Engage in Public Affairs) |
| <i>An vit. ad infel. suff.</i> | An vitiositas ad infelicitatem sufficiat (Whether Vice is Sufficient to Cause Unhappiness) |
| <i>An. virt.</i> | An virtus doceri possit (Can Virtue be Taught?) |
| <i>Apophth. Lac.</i> | Apophthegmata Laconica (Sayings of Spartans) |
| <i>Comm. not.</i> | De communibus notitiis adversus Stoicos (Against the Stoics on Common Conceptions) |
| <i>Consol. ad Ap.</i> | Consolatio ad Apollonium (A letter of Condolence to Apollonius) |
| <i>Conv. sept. sap.</i> | Convivium septem sapientium (The Dinner of the Seven Wise Men) |
| <i>De amic. mult.</i> | De amicorum multitudine (On Having Many Friends) |
| <i>De cap. ex inim. util.</i> | De capienda ex inimicis utilitate (How to Profit by one's Enemies) |
| <i>De def. or.</i> | De defectu oraculorum (On the Obsolescence of Oracles) |

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <i>De esu carnium</i> | De esu carniū orationes (On the Eating of Flesh) |
| <i>De facie</i> | De facie quae in orbe lunae apparet (On the Face which Appears in the Orb of the Moon) |
| <i>De fort. Rom.</i> | De fortuna Romanorum (On the Fortune of the Romans) |
| <i>De frat. am.</i> | De fraterno amore (On Brotherly Love) |
| <i>De garr.</i> | De garrulitate (On Talkativeness) |
| <i>De gen.</i> | De genio Socratis (On the Sign of Socrates) |
| <i>De gloria Athen.</i> | De gloria Atheniensium (Were the Athenians more famous in War or in Wisdom?) |
| <i>De Herod. malig.</i> | De Herodoti malignitate (On the Malice of Herodotus) |
| <i>De invidia</i> | De invidia et odio (On Envy and Hate) |
| <i>De Is. et Os.</i> | De Iside et Osiride (Isis and Osiris) |
| <i>De lib. ed.</i> | De liberis educandis (On the Education of Children) |
| <i>De mul. vir.</i> | De mulierum virtutibus (Bravery of Women) |
| <i>De plac. phil.</i> | De placitis philosophorum (On the Opinions of the Philosophers) |
| <i>De primo</i> | De primo frigido (On the Principle of Cold) |
| <i>De Pyth. or.</i> | De Pythiae oraculis (Oracles at Delphi no longer given in Verse) |
| <i>De. rec. rat. aud.</i> | De recta ratione audiendi (On Listening to Lectures) |
| <i>De sera</i> | De sera numinis vindicta (On the Delays of Divine Vengeance) |
| <i>De soll. an.</i> | De sollertia animalium (Whether Land or Sea Animals are Cleverer) |
| <i>De superst.</i> | De superstitione (On Superstition) |
| <i>De tranq. an.</i> | De tranquillitate animi (On Tranquility of Mind) |
| <i>De tuenda san.</i> | De tuenda sanitate praecepta (Advice about Keeping Well) |
| <i>De virt. mor.</i> | De cirtute morali (On Moral Virtue) |
| <i>Inst. Lac.</i> | Instituta Laconica (The Ancient Customs of the Spartans) |
| <i>Non posse</i> | Non posse suaviter vivi secunsum Epicurum (That Epicurus Actually Makes a Pleasant Life Impossible) |
| <i>Par. Graec. et Rom.</i> | Parallela Graeca et Romana (Greek and Roman Parallel Stories) |
| <i>Praec. conj.</i> | Coniugalia praecepta (Advice to the Bride and Groom) |
| <i>Praec. ger. reip.</i> | Praecepta gerendae reipublicae (Precepts of Statecraft) |

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| <i>Quaest. Graec.</i> | Quaestiones Graecae (Greek Questions) |
| <i>Quaest. conv.</i> | Quaestionum convivales (Table Talk) |
| <i>Quaest. Rom.</i> | Quaestiones Romanae (Roman Questions) |
| <i>Quomodo adol.</i> | Quomodo adolescens poetas audire debeat (How a Young Man Should Study Poetry) |
| <i>Quomodo adul.</i> | Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur (How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend) |
| <i>Quomodo quis suos</i> | Quomodo quis suos in virtute sentiat profectus (How a Man may become Aware of his Progress in Virtue) |
| <i>Reg. et imp. apophth.</i> | Regum et imperatorum apophthegmata (Sayings of Kings and Commanders) |