

CLCS4009

READING ANTIQUITY: A SURVEY OF ANCIENT LITERATURE



Lecture 20
Workshop:
Philosophical
Discourse and
Letter Collections:
Plutarch

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Plutarch: Life

- Born around 40-45 AD and lived in Charonea in Boeotia until his death around 120 AD (shortly after the accession of the emperor Hadrian).
- An aristocrat: his or his wife's family traced their ancestry to the ancient heroes of Boeotia.
- When he was about 50, he became one of the priests of Apollo at Delphi.
- A philosopher: a Platonist philosopher.

Temple and Oracle of Apollo, Delphi



Temple and Oracle of Apollo, Delphi



Plutarch's Works

- *Parallel Lives*: biographies of Greek and Roman prominent figures, 22 or 23 pairs of the Parallel Lives survive (offers examples for readers to emulate or avoid).
- *Moralia*: “moral works” – studies on politics, philosophy, religion and literature. Treatises include: *On Isis and Osiris*, *Virtues in Women* (both dedicated to Clea, a priestess), *Table Talk*, *On the Decline of Oracles*, *The E at Delphi* (and many more!).

The Political Context of Plutarch

- A Greek while Greece was under Roman rule (the Romans were politically dominant, but Greece still exercised great influence in terms of culture – Romans imitated Greek precedents).
- The chronological and geographical context of Plutarch: often referred to as ‘Hellenistic Greece,’ ‘Imperial Greece’ or ‘Roman Greece’ (this terms are often used interchangeably).

The Context of Plutarch

- **Second Sophistic:** Greek education (*paideia*) considered to be vital – for Plutarch, this is full comprehension of Platonic philosophy which enables one to live a good and happy life.
- Emphasis on the production of internal discipline.
- Imitation of virtuous behaviour through observation.
- Interchange between public and private spheres.

Further Reading

- Sarah B. Pomeroy (ed.), *Plutarch's Advice to the Bride and Groom and a Consolation to His Wife*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Simon Swain, "Plutarch's Moral Program," in Sarah B. Pomeroy (ed.), *Plutarch's Advice to the Bride and Groom and a Consolation to His Wife*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 85-96.
- Philip A. Stadter, "*Philosophos kai Philandros*: Plutarch's View of Women in the *Moralia* and the *Lives*," in Sarah B. Pomeroy (ed.), *Plutarch's Advice to the Bride and Groom and a Consolation to His Wife*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp.173-182.