

NAXOS
AudioBooks

**NON-
FICTION**

BIOGRAPHY

Plutarch Roman Lives

Read by **Nicholas Farrell**



NA630212D

Introductions read by Steve Hodson
Plutarch's biographies read by Nicholas Farrell

1	Plutarch – The Roman Lives Introduction	5:24
2	Plutarch begins his sequence of Roman Lives	4:42
3	Coriolanus	4:14
4	It may be observed in general	5:33
5	The Romans were now at war with the Volscian nation	4:38
6	The day after, when Marcius, with the rest of the army	5:47
7	Not long after he stood for consulship	5:37
8	He came, therefore, as it were, to make his apology	5:15
9	Marcius alone, himself, was neither stunned nor humiliated	4:50
10	The Romans themselves soon furnished Marcius and Tullus	5:03
11	When Marcius heard of this	5:23
12	Having spoken thus, she took Vergilia by the hand	4:32
13	The next morning he broke up his camp	3:56
14	Pompey the Great	5:47
15	Thus Cinna being slane	3:44
16	About this time news came to Sulla	2:50

17	When Pompey returned back to the city of Utica	6:16
18	In the meantime Sertorius died	5:10
19	The power of the pirates first commenced in Cilicia	5:25
20	When the news came to Rome	5:15
21	Pompey in the meantime made an invasion into Armenia	5:15
22	Pompey having now by his forces under the command of Afranius	4:41
23	The splendour and magnificence of Pompey's triumph	4:59
24	About that time Caesar, returning from military service	6:03
25	Meantime Caesar grew great and famous	6:08
26	On his return into the city Pompey married Cornelia	4:27
27	Caesar, on the other side, was more and more vigorous	4:54
28	But Pompey, arriving at Brundisium	4:55
29	With this determination, Pompey marched forwards	4:18
30	Caesar's army consisted of twenty-two thousand	5:58
31	Pompey, sailing by the city of Amphipolis	4:40
32	As soon, therefore, as it was resolved upon	3:12
33	These were the last words he spoke to his friends	4:24

34	Caesar	4:57
35	In the meantime Sulla's power being now on the decline	4:01
36	At this time, Metellus, the High-Priest died	4:26
37	There is a law among the Romans	5:22
38	He was so much master of the goodwill and hearty service of his soldiers	5:37
39	After this action, Caesar left his army at their winter quarters	5:08
40	In the passage of his army over it, he met with no opposition	5:51
41	Caesar had long ago resolved upon the overthrow of Pompey	4:21
42	Afterwards there came letters from Caesar	5:26
43	Caesar took into his army all those whom he found in any town	5:11
44	When the two armies were come into Pharsalia	4:21
45	Pompey fled to Egypt, pursued by Caesar	4:24
46	Thence he passed to Asia	5:53
47	Nevertheless his countrymen	6:50
48	This made the multitude turn their thoughts to Marcus Brutus	4:45
49	The place which was destined for the scene of this murder	5:09

50 Cicero	6:00
51 But after he had received the news of Sulla's death	4:40
52 He had a very pleasant seat at Arpi	4:40
53 Cicero, endeavouring in the first place to provide a remedy	4:26
54 After Cicero had received this power	5:28
55 Whilst Cicero was doubting what course to take	3:43
56 At this time, therefore, Cicero's authority was very great	5:08
57 Cicero was at this time his friend	5:18
58 Clodius, having thus driven away Cicero	5:36
59 But as soon as Caesar was marched into Spain	5:00
60 He had no concern in the design that was now forming against Caesar	6:00
61 Whilst these things were contriving	5:50
62 Marcus Brutus	6:21
63 After the great overthrow at Pharsalia	6:19
64 When Cassius went about soliciting friends	5:26
65 But a meeting of the senate being appointed	4:20
66 Now when the senate was gone in before to the chamber	4:34
67 But the next day, the senate being assembled in the temple of the Earth	5:11

68	Brutus took ship from hence, and sailed to Athens	5:33
69	Having made his army, that was very considerable	4:28
70	About the time that they were going to pass out of Asia	5:11
71	Brutus that night at supper showed himself very cheerful	4:37
72	Cassius had been forced to fly with a few about him	4:44
73	Neither were the affairs of Caesar and Antony	5:56
74	Mark Antony	4:45
75	He also had a very good and noble appearance	4:58
76	There was not one of the many engagements that now took place	3:49
77	These passages gave great encouragement to Brutus and Cassius	4:32
78	Cicero was at this time the man of the greatest influence in Rome	5:00
79	This triumvirate was very hateful to the Romans	4:00
80	Such being his temper, the last and crowning mischief that could befall him	4:39
81	Plato admits four sorts of flattery	4:38
82	Antony, once more, upon some unfavourable stories	6:31

83	The war was now become grievous to both parties	4:52
84	But, on the fifth day, Flavius Gallus	5:21
85	Antony ran from one place to another	5:18
86	Cleopatra, feeling her rival already	5:34
87	The speed and extent of Antony's preparations alarmed Caesar	4:09
88	Antony, seeing the enemy sailing up	4:15
89	When they engaged, there was no charging or striking of one ship	5:11
90	At the same, they sent ambassadors to Caesar	4:49
91	When he understood she was alive	4:59
92	Some few days after, Caesar himself came to make her a visit	6:54

Total time: 7:44:34

Plutarch

Roman Lives

It is a great loss for posterity that Plutarch, who was so concerned with the accuracy of the 52 lives he chronicled in his *Parallel Lives*, didn't record more information about his own. There are brief autobiographical references found in his writings, but the known facts are few.

Plutarch was born about AD 45–50, in the reign of Claudius. He lived most of his life in Chaeronea in Greece, where his family had long been established and were of good standing. He had two brothers, Timon and Lamprias, and he mentions the former in his essay on affection between brothers: 'My brother Timon's affection to me is one, past and present, that may be put in the balance against all the rest...' Plutarch studied in Athens under a philosopher named Ammonius, who may have been an Egyptian, and it is known that Plutarch once visited Egypt. Around AD 90 Plutarch was in Rome on 'public business', probably to do with his home town. Whilst there he won considerable fame for himself as a lecturer on philosophy, his popularity taking up so much of his time that there was none left to learn Latin, with which, he tells us, he

struggled in later years whilst writing the *Roman Lives*.

I... had no leisure, while I was in Rome and other parts of Italy, to exercise myself in the Roman language, on account of public business and of those who came to be instructed by me in philosophy, it was very late, and in the decline of my age, before I applied myself to the reading of Latin authors. Upon which that which happened to me, may seem strange, though it be true; for it was not so much by the knowledge of words that I came to the understanding of things, as by my experience of things I was enabled to follow the meaning of words.

Plutarch is saying modestly that his understanding of the Roman tongue is more by instinct than industry, which he feels does not therefore justify his criticising the Roman orators such as Cicero, unfairly comparing him to Demosthenes, with whom he is paired in the *Lives*. On that subject he says wisely, 'We are but like a fish upon dry land.' Instead his comparisons will be based on their actions and remarkably similar personalities.

He has left us an anecdote of his years in Rome:

We should habituate ourselves when letters are brought to us, not to open them instantly and in a hurry, not to bite the strings in two, as many people will if they do not succeed at once with their fingers... Once when I was lecturing at Rome, Rusticus, whom Domitian afterwards out of jealousy of his reputation, put to death, was one of my hearers; and while I was going on, a soldier came in and brought him a letter from the Emperor. And when every one was silent, and I stopped in order to let him read the letter, he declined to do so, and put it aside until I had finished and the audience withdrew; an example of serious and dignified behaviour which excited much admiration.

Despite gaining a reputation in Rome, Plutarch decided not to pursue the philosopher's life, and returned to Chaeronea, where he seems to have spent the rest of his life. Sosius wrote a poem in praise of Alcibiades in which he states that in order for a man to be happy he should be born in 'some famous city', but Plutarch disputes this:

For him that would attain to true happiness, which for the most part is placed in the qualities and disposition of

the mind, it is, in my opinion, of no other disadvantage to be of a mean, obscure country, than to be born of a small or plain-looking woman... virtue, like a strong and durable plant, may take root and thrive in any place where it can lay hold of an ingenuous nature, and a mind that is industrious. I, for my part, shall desire that for any deficiency of mine in right judgement or action. I myself may be, as in fairness, held accountable, and shall not attribute it to the obscurity of my birthplace.

He adds on second thoughts that perhaps for a potential historian it would be useful to be born in a populous city, 'addicted to the liberal arts', where there may be a good supply of books: '...and upon inquiry may hear and inform himself of such particulars as, having escaped the pens of writers, are more faithfully preserved in the memories of men...'

He does not seem to have felt confined by his provincial environment, but instead chose to become a useful public servant, embracing the prosaic day-to-day necessities of running a small town, and putting into practice his personal philosophy that men of intellect should involve themselves in the running of the community. He seems to have had all the instincts of a modern town councillor: 'I am often a jest to my neighbours... when I am

reproached with standing by and watching while tiles are measured out, and stone and mortar brought up, "This service," I say, "is not for myself, it is for my country." There is no doubt the simple routine of municipal life left him plenty of time to pursue and develop his intellectual and philosophical interests.

Plutarch's wife was called Timoxena, and the single surviving letter to her from her husband, relating to the death of their young daughter, reveals a tenderness tinged with the practicality to be expected from a public servant:

If there is anything which you have wished to do and have omitted, awaiting my opinion, and think would be a relief to you, it shall be attended to, apart from all excess and superstition, which no one would like less than yourself. Only, my wife, let me hope, that you will maintain both me and yourself within the reasonable limits of grief.

They also had four sons, two of whom seem to have survived into manhood.

He eventually rose to be an Archon, or principal administrator of Chaeronea, and for many years was also a Priest of Apollo. From his writings we know that he lived to old age, though his date of death is not certain. He probably lived into the reign of

Hadrian and died around 120 AD.

The Influence of Greek Culture on the Romans

Captive Greece captivated her barbarous conqueror. (Horace)

Superstition as the very name (dread of deities) indicates, is an emotional idea and an assumption productive of a fear which utterly humbles and crushes a man, for he thinks that there are gods, but that they are the cause of pain and injury. In fact the atheist, apparently, is unmoved regarding the divinity, whereas the superstitious man is moved as he might not be, and his mind is thus perverted. (Plutarch, *Superstition 2*)

Living in the first century AD, **Plutarch** was a Greek under the rule of Rome, the occupying power. Thoroughly integrated into the Roman way of life, he was however fiercely proud of his Greek origins, and in a quiet way took the opportunity wherever he could in his writings to point out the differences between the two cultures, often to the detriment of Rome. Thus in his treatise on 'Superstition' he gently admonishes those who have an irrational fear and need to invent gods to explain the inexplicable; superstition was fundamental to the Roman religion. The Romans created numerous household gods

that needed to be propitiated on a regular basis to ward off daily evils; if there wasn't a god that covered the problem it was necessary to invent one. Over and above these rites were the official state cults in which all shared – these higher gods were celebrated on regular feast days fixed in the Roman calendar, and were regulated by *pontifices*, not strictly priests but educated patricians who specialised in matters connected with divinity.

In his Roman *Lives*, Plutarch makes the effects of superstition a recurring theme, particularly in relation to prodigies: signs foretelling the outcome of significant events. These were of supreme importance to the Roman mind: prophetic dreams, bees swarming in an unexpected place, the imperfect organs of a sacrificed animal, all play their significant part in the decisions of Rome's great men, and wars and policies are undertaken in the light of these irrational predictions. Plutarch seems to be directly contrasting the inbuilt superstition of the Romans against the rational logic of the Greeks. Although he does not over-emphasise the point, its regular inclusion in the chronicled events is enough.

This belief in and fear of the supernatural collectively bound Roman society together, and it was acknowledged from the patrician class to the slaves. For

instance, the taking of a solemn oath of loyalty had a deeper meaning to the individual, when breaking it could anger and infuriate the gods, bringing disaster upon a whole community. Sacred oaths were taken not only before battles, but also before business deals: a seller of wine, for instance, could be made to swear on oath that he was not cheating on the measure. So intrinsic was the Roman fear of the gods that citizens were afraid to utter a word or perform an action that might attract the wrathful notice of their deities. Holy days were polluted if a priest saw a man working, so a crier went ahead of a religious procession to warn workers to lay down their tools until it had passed. The people dutifully kept their place in society, happy for the most part to let the appeasing rituals be performed by the *pontifices* on their behalf, and live by such universally recognised values as *Pietas* (loyalty and devotion to one's family) and *Fides* (literally 'good faith', a mutual sense of obligation to the state). It was the rise of the individual versus the state, men in search of personal glory – such as Pompey and Caesar – which put an end to this status quo.

However, conquest can have its repercussions for the victors, and ideas can prove to be mightier than the sword; it was

a grudging admiration for the Greeks, coupled with a singular lack of curiosity in the Roman make-up, that led them to absorb the Greek culture with such little adaptation.

By the second century BC, there was a fashion amongst Roman nobles for anything Greek: Greek luxury and refinement, Greek literature, Greek philosophy, Greek medicine, and when in 155 BC three Greek philosophers were invited to Rome and spoke against Roman imperialism, Cato the Censor (234–149 BC) prophesied that Rome would indeed lose her empire if she became infected with Greek literature and philosophy. He therefore set about creating a national Latin literature, but for quite some time, before finding its own voice, it largely imitated the Greek. Indeed, Greek influence was unavoidably to infiltrate all aspects of Roman life. For instance, the more the Romans found out about Greek religion, the more they wished to adopt the Greek gods who had strong and winning personalities, which the Roman gods lacked. Thus the Greek Herakles became the Roman Hercules; Jupiter became Zeus; Athena became Minerva. With the adoption of names also came the mythology connected with each Greek god, which strangely the Romans had

never thought to develop for their own gods. Greek gods were humanised and needed to be fed and watered, which encouraged the whole population to join in the celebratory feasts, rather than rely on a priestly aristocracy to officiate for them. By 217 BC any differentiation between Greek and Roman Gods was abolished by official decree – the *lectisternium*. In effect the Greek way of doing things had won.

The Greeks referred collectively to the Romans as ‘Barbarians’, but as the Greek general Pyrrhus realised at first hand when he saw the ordered and organised way the Roman army fought against him, they would one day be a force to be reckoned with. That day came with the Second Punic War (218–202 BC) between Carthage and Rome for domination of the Western Mediterranean, when the Greeks realised that they might become engulfed in Rome’s territorial ambitions. It was fortunate for Greece that a wave of interest in all things Greek was current in Rome when the Punic Wars ended, and the Roman victors, led by Scipio, were keen to understand and absorb Greek culture. Consequently the senate declared that Greece would be free and allowed to retain her traditional laws. The relationship between Rome and Greece would not be that of conqueror and conquered, but

more patron and dependant, the senate preferring to rule conquered provinces by a reliance on their principle of *Fides* rather than by force. In return for their freedom, the Greeks must however swear loyalty to their Roman masters. The acceptance of this state of affairs by the Greeks led to the Roman armies withdrawing from Greek territories completely in 194 BC. By this time the Greek democracies were in fact disintegrating of their own accord, and petty legal cases involving debts and redistribution of land tried the patience of the Romans to the full, yet the 'special relationship' continued. Laws affecting Greece directly were drafted in their own language, and upper-class Romans learnt Greek in schools established as early as 161 BC, and many skilled Greek artisans and freed slaves were encouraged to settle in Rome.

As the democratic ideals of Greece had been changing, so their belief in the old gods had been superseded by rational philosophy, which became a challenge to the old Roman religion. The Greek philosophy put forward the theory of there being one supreme god, whom they called Tyche; the Romans then adopted this god under the name of Fortuna. The belief in a single god did not take hold at once, and men like **Sulla** and **Marius** continued to

hold strong superstitious beliefs, as Plutarch reflects in the *Lives*. However, the cracks in the old religion were gradually widening, so that by the end of the republic many temples were in a state of disrepair. Rational philosophy was epitomised in Cicero, who privately in his writings made it clear he no longer believed in the state religion, but publicly, as an orator, was pragmatic enough to make use of those beliefs if it helped his cause.

Greek thought and Greek art were to have a hold on intellectual Romans right up until the time of Plutarch in the second century AD. Young men went as 'tourists' to the Greek Islands to soak up the history. Ovid was one of these, and in the first century AD the Emperor Nero too was obsessed with Greek culture. But there were setbacks. Cato the censor (234–149 BC) had banished Greek philosophers from Rome on the grounds that they encouraged free thinking, and the Emperor Domitian, (81–96 AD) expelled all philosophers, for being subversive and dangerously political. Plutarch, living in obscure Chaeronea, was untouched by this persecution. By Trajan's reign (97–117 AD) balance had been restored and Tacitus writes gratefully of 'the rare happiness of these times, when you can think what you

like, and say what you think'. Such an atmosphere of calm in the Empire may well have encouraged Plutarch to begin writing his *Parallel Lives*.

Plutarch's Philosophy

The seeds of philosophical thought were sown in Plutarch around 66 AD, when he was still very much a youth, by the teacher Ammonius in Delphi. As he matured he seems to have assembled a personal philosophy for himself, incorporating many of the essentials of other sects that he found useful. From the **Academicians** he took modesty of opinion and their rational theology, without employing their scepticism. He followed the **Peripatetics** in their interest in natural science and logic. From the **Stoics** he took fortitude and belief in a single God, though eschewing any notions of future reward or judgement, and his writings contain no references to Christianity, despite living at the time of the dramatic struggles of the Early Church. Plutarch seems most sympathetic to the theories of the early Greek philosopher **Pythagoras**. These incorporate a love for nature and a tenderness to animals, who, according to the founder of the sect in his theory of transmigration, might be housing a human soul. Plutarch writes himself about the inhuman treatment of animals,

in his *Life of Cato the Elder*:

Kindness and beneficence should be extended to creatures of every species; and these still flow from the breast of a well-natured man, as streams that issue from the living fountain... We certainly ought not to treat living creatures like shoes or household goods, which, when worn out with use, we throw away...

He also includes domestic slaves in this category. It was said of Plutarch by Gellius that when he corrected a slave he did it like a philosopher, and disciplined him without losing his temper.

Though Plutarch believed in a Supreme Being, he also believed in intermediate beings of an inferior order between the divine and the human nature. These he called *genii* or *daemons*, intelligences to bridge the vacuum between the mortal and the immortal. They were responsible for the pronouncement of the oracles, and administered for the Supreme Being the affairs and fortunes of men, rewarding the good and punishing the bad. They seem to bear a resemblance to the Christian concept of Angels. It is worth remembering that as a testament of Plutarch's deeply held religious feelings he was made a chief Priest of Apollo on his retirement in Chaeronea.

As a Greek living under Roman rule **Plutarch** found himself subject to a constitution he could not change, yet it seems he may have had the opportunity to instill good leadership and clemency in one of its Emperors. There is a letter of doubtful origin, purporting to be from Plutarch to the Emperor Trajan, in which it would seem that Trajan studied under Plutarch when he was lecturing in Rome. The connection between them is not unlikely, for young Romans of wealth, rank and taste were eager to learn about Greek values, and therefore sought out the philosopher. It is a frank letter from a master to his student, and one feels that perhaps Plutarch would have liked to address some elements in the letter to the heroes of his *Lives*:

Should your future government prove in any degree answerable to your former merit, I shall have reason to congratulate both your virtue and my good fortune on this great event. But if otherwise you have exposed yourself to danger and me to obloquy; for Rome will never endure an emperor unworthy of her; and the faults of the scholar will be imputed to the master. Seneca is reproached, and his fame still suffers, for the vices of Nero; the reputation of Quintillian is hurt by the ill conduct of his scholars; and even Socrates is accused of negligence in the education of Alcibiades. Of you, however,

I have better hopes, and flatter myself that your administration will do honour to your virtues. Only continue to be what you are. Let your government commence in your breast; and lay the foundation of it in the command of your passions. If you make virtue the rule of your conduct and the end of your actions, everything will proceed in harmony and order... If this should be the case, I shall have the glory of having formed an emperor to virtue; but if otherwise, let this letter remain a testimony with succeeding ages that you did not ruin the Roman Empire under pretence of the counsels or the authority of Plutarch.

The Survival of Ancient Texts

The stories of Homer established an oral literary tradition in Greek culture in the eighth century BC, handed on from generation to generation. It is generally believed that the first written version of Homer was created in the sixth century BC by order of the Greek tyrant **Peisistratus**, but written works did not become common until well into the fifth century BC. Papyrus seems to have been the main material on which the Greeks wrote, though animal skins were also used. Papyrus is made from the pith of a water plant that grew mainly in Egypt, strips being layered and glued together, and the

surface polished to make it smooth for writing on. It may have been originally imported into Greece from the Phoenician town of Byblos, which name was adopted for both 'papyrus' and ultimately 'book'.

By the middle of the fifth century BC, it was becoming possible for individuals to build up their own collections of philosophy, poetry and tragedy, and it was then a short step from being a collector of books to becoming a librarian. The grandest library of ancient times was created at Alexandria in the third century BC by the Egyptian rulers, the Ptolemies, based on Aristotle's library, and it is because of the librarians and scholars who worked there that we have so many classic Greek texts today. There was a veritable industry of scholarship, as texts, already ancient by the third century BC, were edited, classified and analysed. The intention was to collect or make true copies of all the extant literature of Greece, but varying standards of taste and scholarship meant that mistakes and omissions were inevitable, leading to the exclusion of some authors whose texts are now lost forever. For the Roman scholars Greek was a foreign language and there was a need, therefore, to produce annotated editions, dictionaries and commentaries.

By Plutarch's time, five hundred years later, during the second century AD, scholarly interest in the ancient Greek texts was in decline, though the essential texts of Plato, Sophocles, Aristophanes etc. used in schools were assured a place in Roman culture. Many papyrus rolls were copied onto parchment at this time, ensuring the survival of these precious but disintegrating texts, though some rolls too delicate to be copied were lost forever.

By the beginning of the Christian era, towards the end of the fourth century, there was little interest in these texts beyond their educational value, although there is no evidence that texts were deliberately destroyed for being pagan. Wars and political change from the fourth century onwards meant that there was little interest in researching or copying ancient literature, and by the sixth century the decline of scholarship led to what are now known as the Dark Ages. For three centuries little is known about classical studies. It was Photius, the patriarch of Byzantium, (858–67 AD) who revived interest in the study of ancient Greece, producing a lexicon and a criticism of 280 books that he read, many of which, particularly histories, have since been lost and are known to have existed only because of Photius. More texts were lost or

considered unworthy of copying when in the ninth century works on parchment were transferred to paper. This had been invented by the Chinese and later stolen by the Arabs in 751 AD, who then profited greatly by developing it and selling it to the West. Thus many more texts were saved by the relative ease of copying them to paper, and more copies meant the spread of Greek literature from Byzantium to the West, which by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries had its own flourishing scholastic tradition. The meticulous search for ancient documents by western scholars in this period resulted in the discovery of nine plays by Euripides. Thus it is erroneous to maintain that the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 precipitated the flight of scholars and texts to the West: the dissemination of the classic texts, both Greek and Latin, from East to West had long been happening.

The monastic orders which began to spring up during the sixth century AD throughout Europe collected many texts and made it their speciality to copy and preserve these ancient writings, despite their pagan origin. Monasteries created vast libraries, importing books from other monasteries abroad; thus in England, the historian **Bede** (673–735) was able to study rare texts without leaving England's

shores. With the reconstitution of the Roman Empire under Charlemagne came a revival of interest in old manuscripts. The monasteries under the guidance of the English scholar, **Alcuin** (735–804) continued to copy texts well into the tenth century. The inclusion of Latin texts as part of the curriculum for education in the Middle Ages ensured their survival, although not all the classical authors – Cicero and Tacitus, for instance – were represented.

The survival of the literature from the classical period was a precarious business, and it makes one reflect on what must have been irrevocably lost. It was men like the philosopher and Catholic theologian **Thomas Aquinas** (1225–1274) and the English scientist **Roger Bacon** (1214–1294) who revived an interest in the original Greek manuscripts and translated them into the more accessible Latin. This prepared the way in Italy, where culture had continued to flourish outside the monasteries, for the massive revival of interest in the ancient texts from the thirteenth century onwards that became known as the Renaissance, when scholars and artists endeavoured to recapture the essential humanism of the classical age. Writers of the calibre of **Petrarch** and **Boccaccio** sought manuscripts and new

translations, bringing to light texts by Cicero and Martial, amongst others. As late as 1500, Pliny the Younger's letters were found in Paris. The enthusiasm of Italy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries for ancient culture led to an exodus of Greek scholars from the failing Byzantine Empire prior to its collapse when invaded by the Turks in 1453. They brought with them more ancient works, including the original Greek version of the New Testament, which led to theological reinterpretation. With the arrival of the printing press in the 1480s the preservation of the ancient texts in a durable form was at last assured.

The Journey of Plutarch's *Lives*

The writings of Plutarch – his *Parallel Lives* and his collection of essays called *Moralia* – appear to have been the most influential of all the ancient texts on shaping western thinking and literary style during the Renaissance. He was widely read and printed in a considerable number of impressions. His popularity as a role model is no doubt due to his accessibility, for he is unashamedly populist in his style, being unafraid to use anecdote and a pithy quote to illustrate his theme. In his *Moralia* too, he presents the moral argument in the format of dinner-party conversations, and his essays with attractive titles, such as 'On Busybodies', 'On Garrulity' and 'How to

distinguish a Flatterer from a Friend', reveal a writer who is amiable, humane and witty whilst maintaining his moral integrity. It is not surprising therefore that Plutarch was one of the first of the ancient writers to be translated in modern times. The first recorded printing of the original Greek text was in Florence as early as 1517. **Amyot**, Abbé of Bellozane, published a French translation in 1559, during the reign of Henry II. He sought diligently in the libraries of Rome and Venice for those *Lives* of Plutarch's which are lost; though unsuccessful in his quest, he was able in the process to correct the existing texts from other versions he found in manuscript and early printed copies. It was Amyot's French translation that was the basis for the first English translations, there being no reliable printed Greek text available in England at that time. The most famous is that by Sir Thomas North in 1579, which inspired Shakespeare to write his great Roman epics *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare was so impressed by the translation that he follows some passages, such as the description of Cleopatra's barge, almost word for word.

Plutarch's *Moralia* provided the pattern on which the French philosopher **Montaigne** (1533–1592) based his Essays; the statesman **Francis Bacon** (1561–1626) was likewise influenced.

The next English translation of the *Lives* of note was undertaken by **John Dryden** (1631–1700) between 1683 and 1686, though it seems he gave his name to head a project that was the work of a committee; Dryden said that it had been written by almost as many hands as there were 'Lives'. Dryden's translation, though full of errors and inconsistencies of style, led the field for 30 years, being revised and re-edited in 1758. It is essentially the Dryden translation that the nineteenth-century scholar A.H. Clough used in his 1864 version, revising and modernising much of the archaic English and sentence structure. Of the opinion that Plutarch's style is colloquial and at times rambling, Clough claimed that every translation improved Plutarch's original. It is Clough's version of Dryden that is used in this recording.

Dryden quotes at the end of his brief life of Plutarch, which accompanied his translation, a commemorative verse to Plutarch himself, attributed to Agathias, who lived in the sixth century AD:

Chaeronean Plutarch to thy deathless praise
Does martial Rome this grateful statue raise,
Because both Greece and she thy fame have shared,
(Their heroes written and their Lives compared).
But thou thyself couldst never write thy own;
Their lives have parallels but thine has none.

Roman Offices of Government

Consul

In the republic, the supreme office. A civil and military magistrate, elected in pairs, with equal powers. The office, originally known as Praetor, was created after the expulsion of the kings from Rome in 509 BC. Consuls were elected annually by the people from the candidates. These were always senators, but after the fourth century BC, one of the elected had to be a plebeian. Their chief power lay in the control of the Roman army, but during the age of the emperors the office became mainly honorary.

Quaestors

Two magistrates who were the deputies of the consuls in the administration of criminal justice. They were elected annually. In 421 BC the office was increased to four, and two of them controlled the treasury. As Rome's empire grew the number of quaestors increased to deal with the increased financial responsibilities. Sulla raised the numbers to 20, declaring that the minimum age for holding the office was 30. Holders were automatically elected to the senate.

Censor

Magistrates, usually two, who were elected every five years, but held office for only 18 months. Their job was to oversee the census (the official number of Roman citizens) and perform the act of purification (*lustrum*), which concluded their period of office. Their powers included the general maintaining of good conduct among the citizens and the revision of the roll of senators, having the power to remove those who had been in breach of law or morality. The office was reduced in authority when emperors began to take over their responsibilities.

Aediles

An elected office. Originally two plebeian magistrates named after the *aedes* or Temple of Ceres, an important plebeian cult. Their office was extended to include the administration of public buildings, temples and markets, and the keeping of the archives of the senate. Two more offices were created from the patricians in 367 BC. Aediles were also responsible for the running of the Games, which with its opportunities for courting popularity, could lead to election to the senate.

Tribunes

These were plebeian magistrates elected annually, created to protect the lives and property of the people. They had the power to veto any laws or decrees passed by the senate which conflicted with the popular interest. Their power was immense and attempts were made to reduce it. Sulla forbade anyone who had held the office of tribune to advance to higher office, and reduced their legislative and judicial powers; but by the seventies BC their privileges had been restored and Julius Caesar found them useful in maintaining his interests in Rome while he was in Gaul. Under the emperors the power of the tribunes was invested in the emperor and the office lost importance.

The Roman Triumph

The Triumph was a celebratory procession by a victorious Roman general through the streets of Rome to the Temple of Jupiter. It was strictly regulated by religious rules. Candidates had to hold a magistracy *imperium* with its accompanying powers, have slain at least 5,000 opponents, and return with an army – or the remains of one – to show the war was over. These conditions meant Triumphs were rare events. The successful general was dressed in rich clothes, wreathed in bay and drawn

by a four-horse chariot, with a slave periodically chanting to him, lest he forget, 'Remember you are mortal'.

The army cheered their leader, as did the people, and the procession included the senate, captured wild animals, prisoners and spoils of war. Upon arrival at the temple, the general made a sacrifice and surrendered his bay wreaths to the God.

The Parallel Lives

Plutarch paired each of his Roman *Lives* with an equivalent Greek one, comparing and contrasting them in an accompanying essay. Some of these comparisons are lost. The *Lives* featured on this recording were paired as follows:

CORIOLANUS and ALCIBIADES

POMPEY and AGESILAUS

CAESAR and ALEXANDER (Lost)

CICERO and DEMOSTHENES

ANTONY and DEMETRIUS

BRUTUS and DION

Notes by David Timson



Nicholas Farrell has worked extensively on both stage and screen. He played Horatio in Branagh's film of *Hamlet*, and Antonio in Nunn's *Twelfth Night*. At the RSC and elsewhere in London he has appeared frequently in classical drama, including *Cymbeline*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Julius Caesar*, as well as Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* and *Three Sisters*. His most recent television credits include *The Jury*, *Spooks*, *Reversals* and *Foyles War*. He read the part of Buckingham in *King Richard III* and *Plutarch: Greek Lives* for Naxos AudioBooks and can be heard regularly on radio.



After training at Central School of Speech and Drama, **Steve Hodson** joined Michael Elliot at the Exchange in Manchester for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Peer Gynt* and *Catch my Soul*. The next stop was Yorkshire Television for a three-and-a-half year stint on *Follyfoot*. This was followed by TV series such as *Angels*, *The Legend of King Arthur* and *All Creatures Great and Small*, all interspersed with hundreds of radio plays. He has directed plays by John Crowen, Schiller and Bulgakov. On stage he has appeared in *Death and the Maiden*, *The Railway Children* and as George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* He also read the part of Curan in *King Lear* and *Plutarch: Greek Lives* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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Plutarch

Roman Lives

Coriolanus • Pompey • Caesar • Cicero • Brutus • Mark Antony

Read by **Nicholas Farrell**
with **Steve Hodson**

Though he was Greek, Plutarch wrote his **Lives** in the first century, a world dominated by the Roman Empire. Here he considers some of the major figures who had left their stamp on the history of Rome, including generals, rulers, philosophers and politicians. It is the companion volume to **Plutarch: The Greeks**, also read with clarity and style by Nicholas Farrell.

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