Lives and Moralia: How Were Put Asunder
What Plutarch Hath Joined Together*

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The theme of the present conference unmistakably announces a guiding principle, inherent in the very founding and activities of this Society: Plutarch’s works are of a piece, students of our author ought to view the œuvre as a whole, a logical consequence of adhering to the ideal of klassische Altertumswissenschaft. Yet every declaration of policy hides some criticism or polemics against a certain state of affairs. It is no secret, that many students of the Lives only take occasional recourse, when needed, to the Moralia and of course vice versa. Though this situation is but an outcome of the various interests of a rich assortment of scholars and of the fashion of specialisation, it is no doubt facilitated by the customary division of the works of Plutarch and by the long tradition of their study. In the present paper I shall attempt to survey one aspect of the history of Plutarch’s reception, viz. the question of the genesis of the present division. My paper will be of two parts: the first will deal summarily with what happened from Plutarch’s own day until the reappearance of his works in the West at the end of the fourteenth century. This shorter part will on the whole repeat some well-established facts. In the second part, dealing, in the main, with the fifteenth century, I shall try to uncover the roots of the present situation.

I

It hardly needs repeating that the chronology of Plutarch’s works is one of their less well-known aspects, and that very little progress has been made in the almost forty years since the study of C.P. Jones and that not much advance can be expected in the future. It is one of the unambiguous outcomes of that survey that Plutarch worked on Lives and Moralia at the same time, though of course it is not known whether he did so pari passu or in a number of separate bursts of energy. Certainly the innumerable threads connecting the two

* When composing this paper, Marianne Pade, The Reception of Plutarch’s Lives in Fifteenth Century Italy, 2 vols., Copenhagen 2007, had not appeared yet; see now my review in SCI 27 (2008), 164–166.
corpora attest to the author’s composing in proximity various works, often exploiting for them the very same source material. Nor do we possess evidence for a twofold division in Antiquity. It suffices to quote in this connexion Eunapius in his survey of writers on the history of philosophers (VS 454), where he calls Plutarch divine (δειότατος) and the charm and lyre of all philosophy (ἡ φιλοσοφίας ἀπάστη ἀφροδίτη καὶ λύρα) and later also divinely inspired (Θεσπέσιος) and seems, at least in part, to explicate these epithets by the fact that ‘Parallel Lives of the best men according to their deeds and achievements’, are his ‘most beautiful’ (καλλιστὸν) work. It is not so much the context of these remarks – Plutarch’s failure to compose his own Life or that of his teacher Ammonius, which thus must be gathered from scattered references – that is of interest in the present context, as the seemingly natural assumption that the Parallel Lives were the most distinguished work of the ‘philosopher’.

I shall only repeat in brief the relevant facts concerning the Lamprias Catalogue. It was composed in the third or fourth centuries and it seems to be agreed that it reflects the convenience of some librarian rather than a scholarly edition of the works. Its positioning at the head the Parallel Lives, followed by the other, now mostly lost, biographical writings was but an expediency of organisation, and no attempt has been made to introduce any logical order in the remaining titles. Moreover, let it be said already here that the series of Parallel Lives could and were often viewed as one work and that placing them together was but the self-evident conclusion from this fact. Probably not far removed in time from the Catalogue of Lamprias is the sophist Sopatros, excerpted by Photius (cod. 161). The excerpts made use of a fair number of the Moralia (including some lost and some spurious works) and Lives. It is of some interest that but for the Life of Brutus, for some reason mentioned together with that of Demetrius, Sopatros excerpted only the Greek Lives and ignored the Romans. The deplorable separation between Parallels still fashionable in some quarters looks back to a tradition at least as early as the fourth century.

There is no need here to repeat what is known about the textual tradition of the various works nor to assess the impact of the transition from roll to codex on its development and we may hurry on to the man whose work was decisive for the transmission of the works of Plutarch. The works other than the biographical ones were transmitted singly, or in small groups, until towards the end of the thirteenth century Maximus Planudes collected all that was available of these works, placing at the top a group of writings, named with

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1 Treu; cf. Ziegler, 60–61.
2 Including almost always the Lives of Aratus, Artaxerxes, Galba and Otho.
3 It is a rare misjudgment of Hirzel, 82, to say that already at that time readers of the Lives and the Moralia were separated, and to mention Sopater as an example of the former.
only partially justifiable claim Ἡπικό. Thus the partition between the Lives and the other works came to be established, as the collection of Maximus Planudes included almost all that has survived from Antiquity.

This is where the best-known part of the story of the transmission of Plutarch’s works comes to its end, and this is where our main story begins. For in the beginning it was not the collection of Maximus Planudes that has reached the West, it was not this compilation that maintained the division of the works until it became permanent with the invention of printing. On the contrary, the spread of Plutarch’s works in the West was slow and piecemeal. The renewed division between Lives and Moralia that came into being with the printed editions of the collected works and that lives on to the present day was the result of the reception of Plutarch’s works in the fifteenth century. How did this division come about?

II

It is well known that Plutarch’s works were unfamiliar in the West in the Middle Ages: Petrarch knew only the spurious Institutio Traiani. It was the early Renaissance that first showed its interest in the author and the imminent and eventual fall of Constantinople and the growing number of refugees reaching Italy that satisfied the demand. The story has been told more than once, though not with the present emphasis on the separate histories of the two divisions of Plutarch’s text.

As we have learned many years ago from Philip Stadter, the Ambrosian MS of the Moralia had arrived in Italy already early in the fourteenth century, not long after its completion, and was in the possession of Pace of Ferrara of the pre-humanist circle of Padua (see Stadter). Yet it appears that Pace had no Greek, and that his ownership of the Planudean MS is only a prologue to the reception of Plutarch in the West. The ground was not ready to receive the entire corpus of the Moralia in one fell scoop. In fact it is only late in the fifteenth century that we have definite evidence that the MS has been read. But in the meantime the first real arrival of Plutarch in Italy took place.

4 Ziegler, 313–4 quotes the relevant bibliography.
5 For a summary of Planudes’ work see Ziegler, 314–5: first Planudes collected all the available non-biographical writings: these 69 works are included in Ambros. 859 written in 1295; in July 1296 a second MS, Paris. 1671, was finished. It included the Lives and after them the same collection of the Moralia. The last effort was the luxury codex Paris. 1672, written in the beginning of the next century and containing nine more works of the Moralia, thus in fact fixing almost entirely what is now extant.
6 Weiss, 323; cf. Zucchelli.
This arrival was piecemeal and lasted over two generations. Albeit the role of the correspondence of Coluccio Salutati with Manuel Chrysoloras is acknowledged as giving the initial push to the diffusion of the works of Plutarch in Italy the differing aims of the two men should not be lost on us (see Berti). Chrysoloras wished to impart acquaintance with Greek language and literature, while Salutati, typically for the humanists, saw the works as important new sources for an improved familiarity with Antiquity, and was attracted to the opportunity of learning about Rome and the heroes of the Republic from Greek sources. On the whole, of course, it was the contents of the newly recovered works that mattered most for the West, and in our case, as Pfeiffer puts it the Lives of Plutarch strongly appealed to the feeling of the Italian Renaissance for the individual, in particular those of the great Romans; and to a lesser degree his _Moralia_ appealed to its concern for problems of moral philosophy. (I would make here the reservation that, as will be seen presently, Pfeiffer’s words are valid for only a part of the _Moralia_). Add to this the sheer volume of the works of our author and one easily understands the piecemeal reception as well as the separation between _Lives_ and _Moralia._

Both _Lives_ and _Moralia_, not differently from the rest of Greek literature, were studied for their intrinsic values, for the insights one could derive from the accumulated wisdom of Antiquity. A good way of appreciating the different attitudes to these two corpora is viewing the history of the translations and of the printed editions, both in the original and in translations into Latin and into the various vernaculars. Only thus do we appreciate the gradual reception of this bulky œuvre and its absorption into Western tradition. Single _Lives_ and tractates of the _Moralia_ were translated, occasionally joined into small groups. The diverse works were chosen for their particular appeal, more often than not assimilated to the (imagined) taste of an assortment of dedicatees or the preferences of the translator. Thus the first half of the fifteenth century brought about the translation into Latin of all the _Lives_, more or less one by one, and they were then printed in 1470, not very long after the art of printing had reached Italy. While particular _Lives_ may have seemed more appropriate to certain dedicatees or to the political circumstances of a given translator, very soon the common usefulness of both their moralistic attitude and of the historical information contained in them was acknowledged. Thus collected editions of the _Lives_ became the rule, although of course single _Lives_, or small groups of them, continued, and continue, to be printed. Another indicator of the reasons for the popularity of the _Lives_ provide the various

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7 Pfeiffer, 29.
8 See the comprehensive account of Giustiniani and cf. Pade 1998.
9 Some examples of this will be found in Celenza; Pade 1991; cf also Pade 1989; Botley, 16–20.
epitomes composed in the Quattrocento: it was the historical facts contained in the Lives, rather than their style, that was of interest. Yet another pointer by which the popularity of the Lives may be gauged cannot here be treated as it requires a separate study: Plutarch’s Lives – but very seldom any of the Moralia – provided major themes for Renaissance art. Specifically one may mention in this context the impact of the 1470 Campano translation.

But this translation also bears important witness to the biographical, or shall we say historical, interest rather than to the literary attraction of our author. To the Lives translated by Filelfo, Tortelli, Lapo Birago, Acciajuoli, Guarino, Pasini, Barbaro, Leonardo Bruni and Leonardo Giustiniani there were added the Lives of Hannibal, Scipio Africanus and Charlemagne by Acciaiuoli as well as Isocrates’ Euagoras, translated by Guarino, and Nepos’ Atticus. To these the Life of Plato by Guarino and biography of Aristotle by Bruni were added, and the volume was rounded off with the Life of Homer ascribed to Herodotus and translated by P. Allius and finally, the Life of Virgil.

On the other hand the Moralia were – and are – a mixed bag. How to Educate Children, How to Derive Profit from One’s Enemies, How to Maintain Good Health and a number of other subjects were obviously profitable, very soon enjoying great popularity. For example, between 1400 and 1530 there are ‘seven extant Latin versions of Plutarch’s quomodo ab adulatore discernatur amicus; at least seven of his De utilitate quae habetur ex amicis’. It is also easy to see that as long as Mirrors for Princes were in demand the apocryphal Institutio Traiani did not lose from its attractiveness. Other works were or were thought to be of a piece with the Lives as far as the historical information was concerned, among them the Greek and Roman Questions, the variously attributed Sayings, the Fortune of Alexander or the miscellaneous anecdotes contained in the Parallela Minora. On the contrary some of the treatises did not arouse any interest and remained the property of a few scholars conversant with Greek or were translated only rarely: so, understandably enough, perhaps, the technical philosophical works, but more surprisingly also the Delphic dialogues and other works of a religious character. One may instance the German translations of Plutarch up to 1550 as indicators of these trends. Some of the Lives – including those of Scipio Africanus and Hannibal by Acciaiuoli erroneously attributed to Plutarch – were printed already in the

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10 Resta, 58: Era necessario, pertanto, presentare ai lettori non parti più o meno ampie, ma tutta l’opera di Plutarco, in stile semplice e senza eleganti e fastidiosi orpelli, ordinatamente disposta, compendiata con misura ed opportunità, rispettando i fatti storici ma tralasciando le inutili prollisità.

11 Guerrini is the latest important contribution on the subject with an ample bibliography; for the impact of the 1470 Latin translation see the contribution of Marilena Caciorgna in that volume.

12 For what follows see Worstbrock, 117–125.
very first year of the sixteenth century (1501), and eventually the entire Parallelae, including Aratus and Artaxerxes, were available in German by 1541. The Moralia fared very differently: early in the century there were editions of de liberis educandis (1508), mulierum virtutes (ca. 1505), de capienda ex inimicis utilitate was translated twice (once from the Latin of Erasmus) in the second decade of the century, and there were also early translations of quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur, the coniugalia praecepta and the various apophthegmata collections; by 1535 a collection of the Moralia appeared comprising twenty-one tractates, including all those mentioned and some other ethical works, but also the praecepta gerendae rei publicae, ad principem ineruditum, maxime cum principibus philosopho esse disserendum, as well as the entire quaestiones convivales and from among the more technical philosophical works an recte dictum sit latenter esse vivendum and the de sera numinis vindicta from among the Delphic dialogues. It is easy to make up the list of the missing works and not much more difficult to account for the taste of the time.

Admittedly, this reception of Plutarch’s works was typical for the German-speaking countries, as we have been reminded at our last conference (see Gemert), and one could indeed usefully compare this with the situation in France, where Montaigne debated with Jean Bodin the historical accuracy of the biographer (see Smith).

Returning to the Latin translations, one is now hardly startled to find that the first edition of the entire corpus of the Moralia was printed almost a century later than the corresponding Lives. If I am not mistaken, some of the works were first translated for this collection. These are the dates that are significant, not the eight years or so that elapsed between the printing of the Greek texts of the Moralia and of the Lives. These editions were aimed at scholars who could read Greek – and perhaps also at persons who wished to display original Greek works in their libraries. The scholarly editions are not the most significant indicators of the influence of Plutarch and of the attitudes to his œuvre as a whole.

It appears also, that the translators of Vitae and Moralia were often very different sets of people. Let me illustrate this by an example from a somewhat later period. Plutarch in Elizabethan England will evoke in everybody’s mind Shakespeare’s tragedies based on the Lives of Coriolan, Caesar and Antony. But Elizabethan England was not all stage-stricken: John Rainolds, Shakespeare’s contemporary and President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, best known as the initiator of the King James Bible, published a tractate almost two hundred pages long, on ‘The over-throw of Stage-Playes’ fuming against that wicked activity and proving its sinfulness from both Scripture and the classics. That learned man also translated Plutarch’s tractates de utilitate ex inimicis capienda and de morbis animi et corporis, (that is, de tuenda sanitate) both dedicated
to Elizabeth. I dare say that such a division between men interested in the two corpora of Plutarch’s works was not entirely accidental.

Let me sum up: the *Moralia* is not a *corpus* in the same sense as the *Lives* are. While interest in the *Lives* was comprehensive, though of course some people had their favourites and, as mentioned, from early on the Greek and Roman *Lives* were often studied separately, some of the *Moralia* attracted some readers, others again others, while a great number of them were all but totally neglected. This, in turn, is not unconnected with the simple fact that while some of the *Moralia* have looser or stronger connexions with the *Lives*, other works share only the feature of a common author with perhaps common linguistic usages unconsciously applied and of course a common cultural background.

Thus, I guess that to a certain extent the success of the theme set by this conference, *The Unity of Plutarch’s Work: Moralia Themes in the Lives, Features of the Lives in the Moralia*, may be in part subject to the lack of the unity of the *Moralia*: and in fact it is evident that while even here the interest in the various *Lives* is fairly evenly distributed, the *Moralia*, as always, remain a mixed bag, with a greatly varying attractiveness of the diverse tractates.

**Bibliography**


2. Plutarch’s Methods of Work