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**F. Klotz and K. Oikonomopoulou (EDS), *THE PHILOSOPHER'S BANQUET: PLUTARCH'S TABLE TALK IN THE INTELLECTUAL CULTURE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. xx + 279. isbn 9780199588954. £55.00.**

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as the crowning achievement of the Elder's literary career. This rewriting is entangled with Junior's restructuring of literary hierarchies overall, within prose genres as well as between prose and poetry. Finally, Michael Reeve ('The *Vita Plinii*') provides the first modern critical edition of this short but important text about Pliny's career, and discusses the manuscripts in detail. His analysis tends to confirm the traditional attribution of this *Vita's* core to Suetonius, though he regards the 'tailpiece' as a later addition.

All the essays are of high quality, whatever bones one may pick here and there. Yet they are extremely diverse. Is there a whole here greater than the sum of the parts? What themes run through this collection, to provide hints about current preoccupations and future directions in Plinian studies? I miss a conclusion, where the editors might have gathered such threads. Lacking that, let me list some themes that struck my eyes as being addressed, in different ways, by multiple contributors. (1) How does Pliny foresee users engaging with his work (e.g., consulting vs. continuous reading), and how does he cater to his different users' differing needs? (2) Concerning Pliny's varied methods of knowledge production — e.g., whether information is taken from previous writers, is derived 'theoretically', or is based on autopsy (etc.) — what epistemological and ideological status do these different methods have, and what are their implications for the different types of readers? (3) The question of genre: not 'what kind of work is this?' But 'where is this work presented as standing, by Pliny and others, in relation to other literary works of various types?' (4) What qualities and virtues are celebrated or denigrated within the work? (5) How does the work represent, engage, and structure the Flavian Roman world? These themes include the familiar (e.g., 5), or the familiar with a twist (2, 3); others strike me as new (1, perhaps 4). Of lesser interest, at least in these essays, are the long-standing questions about the overall structure or flow of topics within the work, and the older genre question about the kind of work this is.

I will be briefer regarding Citroni Marchetti's volume, as the bulk of its content has appeared previously. The collection is organized with earlier essays addressing broader problems (e.g., Pliny as 'intellectual'; the characteristics of the speaking 'I') and the later ones providing a selection of this scholar's characteristically deep, rich, and probing exegeses of particular passages and problems (e.g., Tiberius Gracchus *père* and the snake prodigy; and the new essay on Pompey's elephant spectacle). It is convenient to have Citroni Marchetti's recent output gathered under one cover, but again I wonder whether the final product is greater than the sum of its parts. Moreover, such a collection is perhaps inevitably more retrospective than prospective. However, her concluding remarks on Erasmus' reception of Pliny (272–5) assuredly point to another emerging trend in Plinian studies, namely the scope and character of Pliny's reception. The essays by Fear and Beagon in the Gibson-Morello volume point in the same direction, as both venture into the nineteenth century to find discourses on empire and wonder that, if not directly indebted to Pliny, at least recall him. Aude Doody's recent monograph likewise investigates aspects of Pliny's reception. But for a thorough stock-taking, with due attention to both retrospect and prospect, we may actually (dare one say it?) need a 'companion' volume to Pliny's *NH*. Perhaps one of the scholars represented in these two collections will take it on.

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F. KLOTZ and K. OIKONOMOPOULOU (EDS), *THE PHILOSOPHER'S BANQUET: PLUTARCH'S TABLE TALK IN THE INTELLECTUAL CULTURE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. xx + 279. ISBN 9780199588954. £55.00.

As stated in the Preface (viii), the inspiration for this book came from a colloquium organized at the Institute of Classical Studies (London, March 2007), devoted to the topic 'Questioning philosophy in Plutarch's *Quaestiones Convivales*'. It is clear that the editors did careful work in producing the volume, in order to have a coherent book on a quite often neglected or at least not very much studied part of Plutarch's oeuvre. The result is a well-balanced volume, with an extensive Introduction (1–31) that provides a sound presentation of the main problems involving the *Table Talks* (henceforth *TT*) and of the literary tradition and cultural background in which they are embedded, with special attention paid to the *symposium*, the literature of *problems* and the Second Sophistic, thus situating the *TT* 'within its cultural context as the first extant miscellanistic text' (3).

The book has a clearly defined structure and comprises eight different analyses, distributed by four angles of approach. The first block 'Traditions' includes two studies devoted to the history of genre and to the history of interpretation. In 'Plutarch's *Table Talk*: sampling a rich blend', Frances Titchener gives a very useful review of past scholarship, showing that research on the *TT* for their own sake was done only from the latter third of the twentieth century, although they are now receiving much more attention, as is shown by recent conferences held in Quebec, London, Oxford and Coimbra. Teresa Morgan's 'The miscellany and Plutarch' presents an insightful analysis of miscellany, whose literary fertility makes it difficult to define as an independent genre. She argues that miscellanies in 'wide and narrow senses' were among the most important productions of the Roman Empire and exerted great influence until the nineteenth century, also asserting that 'no single author contributed more to the genre than Plutarch' (73).

The second part is focused on 'Topics and Themes', concerning mainly philosophical, scientific and medical contents. In 'Philosophy in Plutarch's *Table Talk*', Eleni Kechagia explores the omnipresence of Platonism in the *TT*, maintaining that it is directed both to 'beginners', to whom it provides methodological tools, and to 'philosophically-versed readers', involving them in Platonic theology and metaphysics. Katerina Oikonomopoulou ('Peripatetic knowledge in Plutarch's *Table Talk*') turns instead to the core presence of Peripateticism in the intellectual universe of the *TT*, with special attention paid to the practice of recollecting material within a performative framework of oral reception and transmission of knowledge, where memory plays a central rôle. In 'Symposium, physical and social health in Plutarch's *Table Talk*', Maria Vamvouri Ruffy explores an interesting parallel between philosophical knowledge and medical expertise, arguing that the symposiarch and the physician follow a similar methodology in order to reach comparable goals: to combat anything that may disturb the equilibrium, of a *symposium* or of a physical body alike.

The third block 'Voice and Authority' comprises another two studies. In 'Imagining the past. Plutarch's play with time', Frieda Klotz approaches the question of autobiographical information concerning Plutarch. She argues that the narrator's self-presentation is 'kaleidoscopic' — throughout the *TT* Plutarch is presented as a mature person, father, son, and modest student — and that this diversity stimulates a pedagogic impulse towards emulation and intellectual inquiry. Jason König, in 'Self-promotion and self-effacement in Plutarch's *Table Talk*', also explores the multi-faceted portrayal of Plutarch, but from a very different angle: he argues convincingly that, despite being an authoritative narrator who has a central rôle in the *TT*, Plutarch balances the risk of self-promotion with modesty, in a sympotic atmosphere created not only by the intellectual élite that participates in the meeting, but also by the 'virtual community' of the great authors convoked from the past into the discussion.

The last part is devoted to 'Contradictions' and includes a single chapter by Christopher Pelling on 'Putting the -viv- into "convivial". The *Table Talks* and the *Lives*'. He explores the concept of 'cross-fertilization' in Plutarch's production of the *TT* and the *Lives*, i.e. cases where material read for one of the works was also used for the purposes of the other. Pelling argues that this process can be detected more clearly in the use of *Lives*-reading in the *TT* than vice versa, but he also recognizes that the overlap is not very abundant. It provides in turn a clue to Plutarch's self-characterization: the writer avoids hinting at the *Lives*, in order not to appear before the eyes of his companions or of his readers as a boring narrator who knows 'about history or about *Lives*'.

In the final 'Conclusion', the editors discuss briefly the issue of *Nachleben*, taking as reference a work composed some fifty or sixty years after the *TT* — the *Attic Nights* by Aulus Gellius, who quotes Plutarch directly as a Greek intellectual authority on this kind of sympotic miscellany. Although the approach is mainly by topic, it is effective in suggesting further inquiry on the *TT*.

The volume also includes an extensive and up-to-date bibliography (238–57), and in addition three Indexes (259–79) of names and concepts, of Greek terms and of passages quoted, which prove to be quite useful to the reader.

At the end of their conclusion, the editors express the hope that 'this book will play a part in that process' of rediscovering the *TT*. This reviewer has no doubts that their wish will be fulfilled.

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