

SILENCES IN PLUTARCH

BENEKER (J.), COOPER (C.), HUMBLE (N.), TITCHENER (F.B.) (edd.) *Plutarch's Unexpected Silences. Suppression and Selection in the Lives and Moralia*. (Brill's Plutarch Studies 10.) Pp. xiv + 307. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022. Cased, €140, US\$169. ISBN: 978-90-04-51424-9.

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This volume collects sixteen papers from the 2019 meeting of the International Plutarch Society meeting (CA/USA section). The title promises engagement with a challenging topic: how does one talk about what is 'not there' in an author? As remarked in the brief introduction by the editors, the approach is justified: 'Since Plutarch knew a lot and loved to communicate what he knew, the moments when he pulled his punches are especially significant' (p. 3). What looks like 'silence' can sometimes simply be a manifestation of our ignorance: we do not possess all that Plutarch wrote. But there are at least three methodological inroads to bypass the problem: we can notice what Plutarch references (for example, about a biographical subject) in one text, but omits in another (this is most germane to the *Lives*, which Plutarch considered a single project); what is missing in the structure of a text or pair of texts; or what he omits from the range of sources that we know he and his readers would have had access to. These are what E. Almagor refers to, respectively, as 'intratextual', 'narrational' and 'intertextual' silences (p. 13) in the essay that opens the volume: 'When Hermes Enters: Towards a Typology of the Silences of Plutarch's Narrator and Their Uses in Characterization'. This is a useful piece that I expected to be cross-referenced elsewhere in the book given its length, prominent position at the beginning of the book and status as a 'typology'; in any case most of the essays deal with intratextual and intertextual silences in the characterisation of individuals. (Accordingly, most deal with the *Lives* rather than the *Moralia*.) Almagor's fourth type, 'Herodotean Silence', denotes moments when Plutarch either promises to take something up in another work that he ends up not producing or, alternatively, ironically imitates features for which he criticises other authors. This is reflected in C.W. Oughton's essay 'What about the Gold-Digging Ants? The Silences and Irony of Plutarch's *De Herodoti malignitate*', which explores the treatise on Herodotus as a satire of the genre of historiographical criticism. A handful of other essays contemplate silences not on individuals but on peoples (and a place): Spartans, Christians and Jews (specifically their monotheism), and Plutarch's hometown of Chaeronea.

Many essays make a straightforward connection between intertextual/intratextual silences and characterisation. In 'Fine-Tuning Portraits in the *Lives*: Omissions that Clarify the Lessons in Leadership' S. Jacobs applies the list of statesmen's concerns in Plutarch's *Præceptae gerendae reipublicae* (e.g. 'Establishing a reputation for moral integrity', 'Managing friendships', p. 83) to the *Lives*, with *Alcibiades*, *Agesilaus* and *Fabius Maximus* as main examples, arguing that Plutarch's choices of inclusion and omission have the goal of providing positive and negative models for readers who intend to take on leadership roles. C. Cooper's essay 'The Peek-a-Boo Presence of Aeschines in Plutarch's *Demosthenes*' argues that Plutarch presents a balanced portrait of Demosthenes by 'rereading' only two speeches (Demosthenes 18 and Aeschines 3). C. Bailey, in 'The *Repulsae* of Aemilius Paulus in Plutarch's *Aemilius*', argues that Plutarch suppresses three earlier *repulsae* of Aemilius Paulus and invents a later one so as to highlight positively Paulus' comparative lack of overambition. B.L.

Cook, by contrast, suggests a more personalised reading of one historical personage: Philip V, whom Plutarch alternately ignores and treats harshly out of hostility to the man as both an autocrat and a Macedonian. This raises the question, in my mind, of the degree to which Plutarch sees historical figures as functioning mainly for the lessons they can provide (which is something we might conclude about his preface to the *Demetrius*, which Plutarch says he has included in the *Lives* for the purpose of providing a negative example) or, alternatively, whether Plutarch has a personal position on some historical figures (or even peoples, like the Macedonians). J.T. Chlup, in 'A Life in Pieces: Plutarch, *Crassus* 12.1–16.8', takes a critical view of Plutarch as the author of the *Crassus*, pointing to the biographer's failure to produce a *bios* of the man worthy of the rest of his Roman Republican *bioi*.

Almagor's piece makes an interesting claim about Plutarch's method that resonates elsewhere in the volume. He argues that, with each type of silence, Plutarch tends to match the narrator's actions with those of his subjects, with 'the artistic aim of highlighting features of ... the protagonist' (p. 30). The abrupt ending of the *Alexander*, for example, reflects the unexpectedness of Alexander's death; starting Caesar's life *in medias res* reflects the man's native impatience. It seems hard to gauge whether we can really apply this idea to *all* Plutarchan silences in characterisation, but the suggestion that Plutarch's gaps may reflect gaps in his subjects' ways of thinking encourages us to see Plutarch more as a clever literary artist than as a mere moraliser or quasi-historian. In 'Plutarch's Narratorial Silences in the *Dion*', for example, M. Nerdahl argues that silences in *Dion* express something about the tyrant's inability to connect with the people who will eventually betray him. In 'The Quiet Life: Silence in Plutarch's *Demetrius*' T.C. Rose notes the prominence of the silence theme in the *Demetrius*: in addition to minimising the man's achievements and suppressing material that might lead readers to view him positively, Plutarch hardly allows the man to speak; instead, he lets him be defined by other characters and in this way highlights his passivity. As Rose rightly points out, this is particularly noteworthy given Plutarch's programmatic claim in *Alex.* 1.2–3 that a subject's words are often more revealing than the actions. The aforementioned piece by Oughton arguing that Plutarch's omissions deliberately mirror his accusations of Herodotus seems to reflect a similar method. C. Giroux's 'Silence of the Lions: Exploring Plutarch's Omissions on Chaeronea' gives a historicising example of a reflective silence: Plutarch (who wants to present his city in a positive and pro-Roman light) omits mention of the Lion of Chaeronea monument, which was famous in his day. Since this was constructed to commemorate the fallen Sacred Band of Thebes during the battle against the Macedonians in 338 BCE, Giroux suggests its absence is a way of mimicking the way in which Alexander the Great 'silenced' Thebes by destroying it.

Another interesting 'silent' thread in the volume is religion – a main concern of Plutarch, who served as a priest at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. Two essays deal with fascinating puzzles: the fact that Plutarch completely ignores Christians in the extant texts and the fact that he says nothing about Jewish monotheism. In 'Plutarch on the Christians: Why so Silent? Ignorance, Indifference, or Indignity?' F.E. Brenk reviews the evidence for Christian visibility and imagines circumstances under which Plutarch would have heard about Christians: for example, during his travels or through prominent friends. Brenk posits that he must have heard about Christians being scapegoated by Nero for the fire in Rome and may have written about them in his lost *Claudius* and *Nero*; but if he ignores them, it is because he generally did not address the present (as is also the case with eastern religion and Judaism) and may have found them mysterious and threatening to the dominant culture. In 'Plutarch's (Unexpected?) Silence on Jewish

Monotheism' J. Geiger asks why, despite speaking about the Jews at length, Plutarch does not mention their monotheism – their belief in an eternal god who created everything other than himself and cannot be depicted. Geiger suggests that Plutarch's priority to 'match rituals' among religions leads him to syncretise the god of the Jews to Dionysus – something for which Geiger proposes Tacitus (who, along with Josephus, is one of two authors from Herodotus to late antiquity to mention Jewish monotheism) may have covertly critiqued Plutarch. A few other articles touch on religion in significant ways. The late R. Stem, in 'Plutarch's Silence about the Relationship between Military Success and Political Virtue in *Sulla* and *Caesar*', emphasises Plutarch's praise of Sulla, who was famous for his tyrannical behaviour, for his military and even his diplomatic skills. Comparing this with his treatment of Caesar, Stem suggests that Plutarch's attitude towards Sulla is based on the idea that the man's achievements were divinely supported. C. Pelling's characteristically lively essay, 'What Your Best Friend Won't Tell You: Thucydidean and Plutarchan Silences on Sicily', is an outlier in the volume in that it only minimally deals with 'Plutarchan Silences' and is chiefly concerned with the way in which Plutarch draws attention to gaps in Thucydides, among them his notorious silences on religious matters.

Not unrelated to his religion is Plutarch's Platonism. In 'The Unspoken Bridge between Philosophy and Politics: Plutarch's *De genio Socratis*' B. Boulet attempts to connect the two seemingly disparate parts of the *De genio Socratis*, in which one purely political discussion (among statesmen, the narrative of the overthrow of the Theban tyrants) and one purely philosophical discussion (among philosophers, the nature of Socrates's *daimonion*) take place in the same house on the same day. (Here we may see another example of Almagor's idea of 'narrative silence'.) Boulet argues that the figure of Epaminondas creates a 'Socratic bridge' between politics and philosophy, as he is an excellent statesman and a philosophy student, but not a philosopher, so not someone directly enlightened. Plutarch's silence on what connects the two parts of the work is joined by another silence: that of Socrates' *daimonion*, which, as described by Simmias, is not a voice but an inaudible perception. Boulet concludes with the idea that Plutarch may be channelling the *daimonion* of Socrates, who speaks to him silently. Finally, N. Humble's essay on Plutarch's Sparta, 'Silencing Sparta', has a strong philosophical twist. Humble notes that Plutarch's Sparta would be unrecognisable to early readers of Xenophon, Plato or Aristotle, who blamed the Lycurgan system for Sparta's ultimate failures. Plutarch instead models the Lycurgan system on Plato's *Republic* (which he indicates was influenced by Lycurgus) to create a contrast with Spartan behaviour after the Peloponnesian War as well as to solidify his status as a Platonist.

The essays are well edited. I found the organisation of the book slightly puzzling and the titles of the three sections ('Silence and the Narrator', 'Silence as a Literary Technique' and 'Silencing the Past and Present') unrevealing, but this is not unusual for conference volumes. Given the massive range of topics about which Plutarch writes, readers will tend to look for essays that deal with the Plutarchan works that most interest them and are likely to find something worthwhile here when they do.

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