

Plutarch's Lives, Volume 2 Study Guide

Plutarch's Lives, Volume 2 by Plutarch

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Contents

Plutarch's Lives, Volume 2 Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Sertorius, Eumenes and The Comparison of Sertorius and Eumenes.....	4
Agesilaus, Pompey and The Comparison of Pompey with Agesilaus.....	6
Alexander.....	9
Caesar.....	11
Phocion.....	13
Cato the Younger.....	14
Agis and Cleomenes.....	15
Tiberius and Caius Gracchus.....	17
The Comparison of Tiberius and Caius Gracchus with Agis and Cleomenes.....	18
Demosthenes, Cicero and The Comparison of Demosthenes and Cicero.....	19
Demetrius, Antony, and the Comparison of Demetrius and Antony.....	21
Dion, Marcus Brutus and The Comparison of Dion and Brutus.....	23
Aratus.....	25
Artaxerxes.....	26
Galba and Otho.....	27
Characters.....	28
Objects/Places.....	33
Themes.....	35
Style.....	38
Quotes.....	40
Topics for Discussion.....	42



Plot Summary

"Plutarch's Lives Volume II" is the second part of a collection of biographies of well-known figures from ancient Greece, Rome, Macedonia, Sparta, Persia, and Egypt. In this volume are included Plutarch's depictions of Sertorius, Eumenes, Agesilaus, Pompey, Alexander, Caesar, Phocion, Cato the Younger, Agis, Cleomenes, Tiberius Gracchus, Caius Gracchus, Demosthenes, Cicero, Demetrius, Antony, Dion, Marcus Brutus, Aratus, Artaxerxes, Galba, and Otho. Working from various sources and writing in the second century A.D., Plutarch produces character sketches of each of these great leaders based on episodes from their lives. He describes not only the grand exploits of his subjects, but also passes on stories of their private behavior he believes best illustrate their personal character and motivations.

Also included are shorter pieces in which Plutarch compares the characters of men to one another, such as Sertorius with Eumenes, Pompey with Agesilaus, Tiberius and Caius Gracchus with Agis and Cleomenes, Demetrius with Anthony, and Dion with Brutus. These pairings are arbitrary, Plutarch admits, based loosely on similarities between the lives of the men being compared. However they provide contrasts upon which Plutarch bases his observations on the proper virtues of a good leader. In choosing men to compare to one another, Plutarch, who was himself a Greek living under Roman rule, always pairs a Roman figure with a Greek or Spartan one.

Of particular interest to Plutarch is the manner in which each leader died, the nature of his death providing a final judgment of the nobility of his life. Not all of his great subjects died noble deaths, according to Plutarch. Dying victoriously is not required to die nobly, as several of the men that he profiles die in defeat and are perhaps even nobler for it.

Plutarch's lives are not biographies in the modern sense. Plutarch acknowledges that historical accuracy cannot always be determined surrounding his subjects and he sometimes includes asides where he weighs competing versions of a story and expresses his own opinion on what happened. He begins most of the lives with a brief discourse on the overarching themes of his subject's life, suggesting the lessons that might be drawn from it. His lives are not meant merely to chronicle events, but to instruct in virtue as well.

These virtues include fidelity to one's friends, graciousness to one's enemies in defeat, and devotion to principle over personal gain. Plutarch suggests that good leaders balance ambition with moderation and a spirit of service to their people. They are brave, but not rash, and they welcome an honorable death. They should seek to serve their subjects, but not merely be their servants. No one figure among Plutarch's subjects embodies all these virtues, however from reading them together and following Plutarch's comparisons among them, the image of greatness emerges.



Sertorius, Eumenes and The Comparison of Sertorius and Eumenes

Sertorius, Eumenes and The Comparison of Sertorius and Eumenes Summary and Analysis

Sertorius was a Roman nobleman who rose to the rank of general after proving his cleverness in defending Gaul against the Cimbri and Teutones, and was eventually elevated to be the military commander of the region of Gaul. In Rome, two rival factions developed between the supporters of the consuls Octavius and Cinna. Sertorius threw his lot in with Cinna, but it was Octavius who prevailed. Along with Cinna and the exiled general Marius, Sertorius raised an army and won back control of Rome, only to lose favor once again when Sylla came to power.

Plutarch describes Sertorius as a firm and fair commander whose troops were known for their discipline and virtue, unlike the reputation of the soldiers under Marius or Cinna. Having been driven out of Rome, Sertorius became a mercenary commander, defending those who appealed to him against the power of Rome.

Sertorius became the leader of the Spaniards, outwitting the great Roman general Pompey in defending them. In Spain, he created his own "senate" as a kind of Roman government in exile, appointing Roman senators who had also been driven from Rome. A jealous faction led by Perpenna arose within this senate, which conspired against and killed Sertorius while he was reclining at a feast.

Upon his death, the Spaniards gave themselves up to Pompey. Perpenna proved to be a terrible military leader and was soon defeated by Pompey. In an attempt to spare his life, he offered Pompey Sertorius' papers that provided evidence of the Romans that had conspired with Sertorius against Rome. Pompey had Perpenna killed and the letters burned, in what Plutarch judges is a sign of his great virtue.

Eumenes was a Greek born to common parents who attracted the attention of Philip of Macedon and was educated and taken into his service. He served as private secretary to Philip and his son, Alexander the Great, who made him a general on his great excursion into India.

Eumenes drew the scorn of his fellow military commanders because he rose in rank as a secretary, not as a fighter. After the death of Alexander, Eumenes took control of a mixed army of Greek and Macedonian soldiers and defeated the Macedonian generals Craterus and Antipater, who had revolted in an attempt to seize control of Asia from Eumenes and Perdiccas. When Perdiccas was killed by his own troops in Egypt, Eumenes became the top commander, but was deeply resented among the Macedonians because of his Greek heritage and because he had killed Craterus.



Eumenes and his army were besieged in the city of Nora, where they held out against the armies of Antipater and Antigonus. When Antipater died however, Eumenes was able to ally with his successor, Polyperchon, and escape.

His army was pursued by Antigonus, who engaged him in battle. While Eumenes won the battle with Antigonus, his "baggage camp" was captured, the encampment containing all the spoils of his victories. Antigonus demanded Eumenes be turned over as ransom for return of the spoils. Eumenes was betrayed by the Macedonians in his command, who turned him over to Antigonus. Antigonus starved Eumenes for three days while he considered what to do with him. He had him killed when it came time for his camp to move.

Plutarch concludes these first two biographies with a comparison of Sertorius and Eumenes. They were alike in that they were both foreigners in charge of armies made up of different nationalities, but different in that Sertorius was given his command freely while Eumenes had earned his by competing with others. Sertorius had risen to power as a general, while Eumenes had gained his high position as a writer.

Eumenes loved war and conflict, Plutarch claims, while Sertorius always aimed for peace. Sertorius was killed when he least expected it, while Eumenes lived every day expecting that he might be killed. Plutarch calls Sertorius' death "noble," because he died while trusting his friends. Eumenes, on the other hand, was willing to live in captivity and appealed for his own life at the end, giving in completely to his enemies.



Agesilaus, Pompey and The Comparison of Pompey with Agesilaus

Agesilaus, Pompey and The Comparison of Pompey with Agesilaus Summary and Analysis

Agesilaus was the younger son of Archidamus, King of the Lacedaemonians. His older brother, Agis, was the rightful heir to Archidamus' rule and was educated with that in view, while Agesilaus received a common Spartan education that emphasized obedience to the law. He was a small man with a bad leg, Plutarch writes, but put others at ease by joking about his limp.

Agis became king, married and had an heir of his own. Rumors arose, however, that his son Leotychides was illegitimate. When Agis died, the issue was pressed by Lysander, a Spartan general who saw a chance to place Agesilaus in the throne. A supporter of Leotychides countered that an ancient oracle warned against the coming of a "halting," or limping king. Lysander replied that the oracle was meant to warn against the illegitimate Leotychides. Agesilaus was made king.

Having been raised to be an obedient citizen made Agesilaus better suited to be king, Plutarch argues. He treated everyone with deference and respect and soon gained a reputation as a leader who would help a friend in any situation, but who also was ruthless toward anyone he thought his enemy.

Agesilaus gained a wide reputation for his modest ways, obtaining great wealth for his kingdom through his military exploits, but never living extravagantly. He was also criticized for being stubborn in his aggression, pursuing war even after peace terms had been agreed upon, and even when he had to borrow money to support the war. He ruled for 41 years and died at the age of 84, leaving the kingdom to his son, Archidamus.

The next biography is of the great Roman general Pompey, with whom Plutarch intends to compare Agesilaus. Pompey was the son of Strabo, an unpopular Roman military leader and politician who was so hated by the people for his greed that they defiled his body when he died. Pompey, just a young man at the time of Strabo's death, inherited his estates near Picenum in Italy, where he lived and was popular.

As the son of Strabo, Pompey found that he had many enemies. He allied himself with the general Sylla against the tyrant Carbo, raising an army under his own command to support him. When Sylla came to rule Rome, he sent Pompey to Sicily and Africa, where Pompey was triumphant. He became very popular with the Roman people and was given the title "magnus," or "great" by Sylla.



Sylla was not pleased by the rapid rise of Pompey and the influence he began to have in Roman politics. Plutarch writes that upon his death, Sylla left nothing in his will to Pompey, a serious insult. Pompey reacted nobly, Plutarch writes, taking part in the funeral honors for Sylla.

Pompey was given the title "procursul" and sent to Spain to battle Sertorius, defeating his armies only after Sertorius was betrayed and killed by his own people. While returning to Rome, Pompey captured the remains of the rebellious army of Spartacus, which had just been defeated by Crassus. Pompey took credit for the victory, which angered Crassus but increased Pompey's popularity among the common people of Rome. Despite being too young legally to hold political office, Pompey was made consul of Rome along with Crassus.

Pompey engaged in several more successful campaigns. His involvement in Roman politics continued to be contentious, and he openly disagreed with his co-consul Crassus. Julius Caesar, who at this time was establishing his own military career and gaining in popularity decided to seek the office of consul, but realized he would have to take either the side of Crassus or Pompey to receive enough support. Plutarch writes that Caesar cleverly devised a way to become consul without having to choose sides. With the cooperation of Pompey and Crassus, Caesar created a "triumvirate" of three leaders. Pompey further cemented his support of Caesar by marrying his daughter, Julia.

After Julia died, and after the death of Crassus, Pompey began to oppose Caesar, who was away in Gaul leading a military campaign. When Caesar began to make his way back toward Rome, Pompey, fearing Caesar intended to take sole power by force, left the city with his armies and Metellus, leaving Rome to Caesar

A civil war ensued, with Caesar defeating Pompey's ground troops. Pompey escaped in hopes of reestablishing his naval superiority. He sailed to Egypt to ask for refuge from King Ptolemy, who, upon hearing of Pompey's approach, put the matter to his advisors to decide if they should side with Ptolemy or Caesar. It was decided to back Caesar and assassinate Pompey. A small group of men went in a small boat to Pompey's ship, apparently to welcome him and take him to shore. Once Pompey was in the boat with them, they stabbed him to death, cutting off his head. Later, when Caesar was shown the head of Pompey, he turned and wept.

Plutarch compares the careers and characters of Pompey and Agesilaus, drawing contrasts generally in favor of Pompey. Pompey obtained his high position justly, Plutarch claims, while Agesilaus relied on the treachery of defaming Leotychides and misinterpreting the oracle of the lame king. Pompey behaved more properly toward the people he had conquered, Plutarch argues. In military matters, Plutarch suggests that while Pompey had a more prolific career, Agesilaus was perhaps the greater general because he had the skill of forcing his enemies into battle when they were at their weakest, while Pompey allowed his army to be beaten by Caesar's forces who were weakened by hunger. Finally, Plutarch makes a connection between the two leaders regarding Egypt. Agesilaus had gone to Egypt hired to protect the people, but ultimately

betrayed them. Pompey had gone to Egypt for protection and had been betrayed by them.



Alexander

Alexander Summary and Analysis

Plutarch opens his life of Alexander with an explanation that it is not his intention to try to document all of the events of his life, as these are covered by other writers, but to paint an outline of the man. "My design is not to write histories, but lives," he writes, (pg. 139) providing insight to his literary intentions.

Alexander was the son of Philip, King of Macedon and conqueror of Greece, and Olympias, a Greek woman. On his father's side, Plutarch writes, he was descended from Hercules. The matter of his descent on his mother's side is a matter of much speculation, Plutarch writes, for oracles at the time supposedly interpreted a dream of Philip's as indicating that Olympias may have been impregnated by Jupiter, making Alexander a demigod. Plutarch adds that some historians claim Olympias herself propagated this rumor and told Alexander of his divine heritage. Others have her denying it.

Alexander impressed his father at a young age when he subdued a fiery horse that nobody else could tame. Deciding his son should receive the best education, Philip hired the Greek philosopher Aristotle to tutor his son. When Alexander was 20, Philip was murdered, leaving him as king.

During his relatively short life, Alexander defeated the armies of Darius, the king of Persia, and pressed on into India, where he turned back after his Macedonian troops became resentful of his adopting customs of the Persian kings. He was active in battle, receiving several severe injuries including an arrow wound which nearly killed him. Alexander died on his way back from India, in Babylon, after a sudden, brief illness.

Plutarch describes Alexander as generous with his friends and ruthless with anyone he felt had betrayed him. Plutarch praises him for his respect for women, and notes the respect other kings had for him.

Alexander is also depicted as gracious toward his enemies, as when he offers water to the dying Darius, and weeping and covering his body with his own cloak when he dies. Plutarch also mentions Alexander's rashness and fondness for drinking wine and sleeping late into the day. He was often quick to anger and lash out, but Plutarch also describes him as remorseful after some of these episodes. He was loyal to his friends, and was especially devoted to his companion and general Hephaeston, upon whose death Alexander was devastated, and for whom he had an elaborate monument erected.

On the subject of Alexander's death, Plutarch takes issue with other writers who have claimed he died suddenly after drinking some wine, as if stabbed. Plutarch cites primary sources of diaries made at the time of his death which describe the gradual decline of

Alexander over about 12 days before his death. Despite his statements that he does not intend to write a history, Plutarch cannot seem to resist setting the factual record straight by correcting the historians.



Caesar

Caesar Summary and Analysis

As a young man, Caesar left Rome when Sylla came to power, his family relationship with Marius, Sylla's enemy, making it dangerous to remain. As Sylla's power declined, Caesar returned to Rome and began to grow in popularity among the citizens there for his fine orations and good nature, and was elected to a position in the army. He began to ally himself with the supporters of Marius in opposition of Sylla. His popularity with the people worried the established politicians such as Cicero, who feared he would use it to make sweeping changes in the government. Caesar was granted the office of praetor and then given authority over the province of Spain.

Caesar went to Spain, raising an army as he went, and successfully enlarged the territory by subduing several tribes. He returned to Rome to stand for the office of consul, which he was granted with the support of Crassus and Pompey, with whom he shared power in what was called a "triumvirate."

At this point in Caesar's life, Plutarch writes, it is as if he started over afresh. He undertook an extended series of campaign against the Gauls, advancing to the island of Britain, as well as into German territory. He was generous with the spoils he obtained from these conquests, and used them to increase his popularity.

Meanwhile, Crassus was killed, leaving Pompey and Caesar as rivals. Pompey was in Rome and Caesar still in Gaul. Caesar began to march back toward Rome. Pompey fearing Caesar was coming to attack him, fled the city with his armies and generals. Caesar entered Rome. Mustering his armies, he pursued Pompey.

A civil war followed between the armies of Pompey and Caesar. Caesar overextended his army, which became weakened by illness and hunger. Pompey was not able to capitalize on his relative strength, however, and Caesar eventually triumphed. Pompey escaped to Egypt, where he was murdered as related by Plutarch. Plutarch relates several of the omens that were observed prior to Caesar's victory that presaged his triumph.

Returning to Rome, Caesar was re-elected consul and also named dictator. He led several more military campaigns, defeating Scipio in Africa and the sons of Pompey in Spain. His popularity at its peak, he was made dictator for life. There were those, Plutarch writes, who wanted to restore the Roman monarchy to make him a king, which Caesar resisted.

Despite his great popularity, resentment arose among a faction of politicians in Rome. Led by Cassius, a group of other high-ranking Romans including Marcus Brutus, conceived a plot to murder Caesar in the senate. Surrounding him at the agreed signal, they all stabbed him repeatedly. He fell at the foot of the statue of Pompey, which had



been torn down but which Caesar had put back up after he defeated Pompey. Plutarch here again relates the various omens that seemed to foretell Caesar's death.

Caesar's body was taken by the common people and burned in honor on a large funeral pile. His assassins, expecting to take power after his death, fled Rome.

Phocion

Phocion Summary and Analysis

Phocion was an Athenian statesman and general at the time of the ascent of the Macedonian kingdom. He was considered an honest man and lived an austere life despite his high position as the virtual ruler of Athens. Plutarch describes him as a stern-looking man who was never seen to laugh or cry, but who maintained a steady temperament.

Phocion gained a reputation of being an excellent commander and was repeatedly elected by the Athenians to lead their forces into battle, even though he never campaigned for the appointments and always spoke in favor of peace. In the Athenian assembly, Phocion was often contrary and spoke severely to those he disagreed with, yet, Plutarch remarks, he was courteous and kind in general conversation.

Phocion was successful in defeating Macedonian forces at Euboea and Byzantium and gained the respect of Philip, the King of Macedon. Phocion favored Athens making peace with Macedon, but the Athenian assembly voted to confront Philip's forces against Phocion's advice. The Athenian forces were defeated at Chaeronea, and Athens was forced to contribute ships and men to Philip's forces.

When Philip died, Alexander became king and advanced into Thebes. He demanded that the Athenians hand over to him all politicians who were opposed to the Macedonians. The Athenians sent Phocion to speak with Alexander, who received him on account of the respect his father had for him. Phocion convinced Alexander to give up his demand and when asked for advice, suggested that rather than subdue the Greeks, Alexander would find greater glory in conquering Persia.

After the death of Alexander, the Athenians saw a chance to revolt against Macedonia. Phocion advised against it, as they did not have the forces for a long campaign. He was again overruled, and the Athenians were defeated by the Macedonian king Antipater who placed a Macedonian garrison near Athens and banished all Athenians who did not own property from the city.

Phocion accepted these terms in the interest of peace, but became unpopular with the exiles. Upon the death of Antipater, the Macedonian throne went to Polysperchon, but was contested by Cassander, who was supported by Phocion. To undermine Phocion, Polysperchon restored the rights of the banished Athenians, allowing them to return to the city. Phocion soon found himself accused of treason by the angry exiles. He was seized, and quickly sentenced to death in a mock trial. After his execution, the Athenians realized what an excellent leader he had actually been and honored his memory with a brass statue.

Cato the Younger

Cato the Younger Summary and Analysis

Cato the Younger was a Roman statesman at the time of the triumvirate of Caesar, Pompey and Crassus. He was a wealthy man, but lived a life of intentional austerity. He served in various political offices in Rome and gained a wide reputation for his honesty and integrity, despite his severe behavior and open condemnation of the widespread corruption that was common in Roman politics.

As a boy, Cato demonstrated a natural aversion to tyranny, Plutarch suggests. His close attention to the law, his extreme care in accounting for public funds, and his condemnation of bribery and corruption made him unpopular but respected out of fear. His name became a synonym for honesty and integrity.

Plutarch depicts Cato as having a cutting political acumen. Although his warnings were often ignored or dismissed by his fellow politicians, he was usually proved correct in the end. Cato correctly interpreted the ambitions of Caesar, for example, at a time when he was enormously popular. He correctly predicted the disastrous civil war that took place after the death of Crassus left the triumvirate unbalanced.

As Caesar approached Rome to challenge the senate, Pompey fled with his forces to Greece, and Cato followed with him, taking command of some of the forces. As Caesar pursued Pompey's forces, Cato took refuge in Utica where he committed suicide as Caesar's armies approached. Later, a statue was erected in his honor in Utica.



Agis and Cleomenes

Agis and Cleomenes Summary and Analysis

Plutarch frequently uses the method of comparison to make observations about the characteristics of great men and in the introduction to the life of Agis, he presents his intention to compare the two Spartan kings Agis and Cleomenes to the brothers Tiberius and Caius Gracchus. All four were true leaders who attempted to influence and lead people to adopt reform rather than those who are usually called leaders, but are actually slaves to the popular will, Plutarch says. All four also met with violent deaths as a result of their leadership.

Agis was a king of Sparta several generations removed from Agesilaus. He came to power at a time when Sparta had abandoned its austere ways and adopted the more luxurious habits of the Greeks. Agis, who shared the Spartan throne with a king from another family, named Leonidas, set out to return Sparta to greatness by returning to its former ways. The main reform he proposed was to eliminate the private wealth that had been accumulated by canceling all debts and redistributing the property of the wealthy Spartans among all the citizens.

This plan met with understandable support from the common people, but opposition from most of the Spartans who had grown rich lending money and purchasing property. Leonidas opposed the reforms, as well, but was removed from power after he was accused of having taken a foreign wife, which was illegal. Leonidas escaped the city, and his son-in-law, Cleombrotus, was named his successor.

Agis left Sparta to lead his forces into battle against the Greeks, leaving his untrustworthy uncle, named Agesilaus, in charge of the city as one of the "ephors," or magistrates. Agesilaus abused his power by excessive taxation, provoking the citizens to revolt and call for the return of Leonidas.

Leonidas returned and Agis and Cleombrotus fled to temples to take refuge. Leonidas convinced his son-in-law to accept exile from Sparta but had Agis seized when he left the temple to go to the baths. Agis was executed by hanging.

After the death of Agis, Leonidas forced Agis' widow, Agiatis, to marry his young son, Cleomenes. Cleomenes grew up to love Agiatis, and from her learned about the virtue of Agis and his efforts to return Sparta to its former glory.

When Cleomenes became king upon the death of Leonidas, he instituted the reforms that Agis had proposed. He abolished the offices of the ephors and named his brother his co-monarch. He and the rest of the citizens gave up their private wealth and divided the land among the citizens, inviting back those that had been banished.

Aratus, a Greek general, learning of this change, thought it a good time to invade the region, believing Cleomenes would not want to leave the city while he was busy with



these reforms. Cleomenes valiantly opposed Aratus and the Greeks in a series of military campaigns described by Plutarch in some detail. Cleomenes was eventually defeated by the Greek forces, who were supported by Antigonos. He fled to Alexandria, where he received the protection of King Ptolemy of Egypt.

Ptolemy protected Cleomenes and put his services to use, but Ptolemy's son and successor grew wary of his influence and placed him under house arrest. Cleomenes fooled his guards into thinking he had been freed and rode out with a small group of followers to try to lead a revolt against the king. He found no support for his cause, however, and committed suicide along with the friends who had followed him.

Tiberius and Caius Gracchus

Tiberius and Caius Gracchus Summary and Analysis

Tiberius Gracchus was a man of noble birth who rose within Roman politics to be elected tribune. Rome at this time was overrun by homeless soldiers who had returned from battle but who had lost their property in their absence. Tiberius proposed a reform to the land laws to redistribute the public lands among these soldiers. This reform was opposed by the wealthy landowners in the senate, who convinced Octavius, one of the other tribunes, to exercise his veto power to stop it. Tiberius prevented Octavius from voting by force and the new laws were passed.

This illegal suppression of Octavius was construed by the senate as a direct challenge to its authority. Tiberius was accused of wanting to make himself a king and was beaten to death in the senate by senators who tore apart their stools to make clubs. After his death, many of his friends were also persecuted. In time, however, Nasica, who had led the mob that killed Tiberius, was driven out of Rome.

Caius Gracchus was the brother of Tiberius who at first seemed to have no ambition for public service. This may have been out of fear of his brother's enemies, Plutarch suggests, but he also hints that Caius may have been waiting for the public to grow indignant over his brother's murder. Caius was elected quaestor and soon developed a reputation as an excellent orator, clearing himself easily after being falsely charged by opponents who feared he would eventually be elected tribune like his brother.

Caius was elected tribune, and undertook a series of reforms to the judicial system and an expansion of the land reform laws. He was re-elected to a second term as tribune, but was opposed by, Opimius, who had been elected consul, and who began to undo the reforms of Caius. The animosity between the two factions erupted into violence. Caius was chased after by the supporters of Opimius and trapped in a grove of trees along with a servant. Here he either was killed by his servant at his own request or they were both slain by their attackers, Plutarch says. Caius' head was cut off and presented to Opimius for a reward.



The Comparison of Tiberius and Caius Gracchus with Agis and Cleomenes

The Comparison of Tiberius and Caius Gracchus with Agis and Cleomenes Summary and Analysis

Having outlined the lives of these two pairs of leaders, Plutarch proceeds to compare them. The Gracchi exceeded the Spartan rulers in their education but might be said to have inherited their virtue. On the other hand, the Spartans had parents of very different morals than themselves. The Roman rulers were opposed to unjust gain whereas Agis was opposed to any kind of gain over his neighbor, no matter how justly it was acquired.

The scope of their proposed reforms were different, Plutarch writes. The Roman rulers sought to make relatively small changes to the law, where the Spartans attempted complete social revolution. Plutarch notes that in the deaths of the four rulers, the two Romans died while fleeing their enemies, while the Spartans died in action. None of the four were given a chance to really prove themselves great in battle, however, Plutarch adds, having all died fairly young.

Turning to the misdeeds of each, Plutarch mentions Tiberius' subversion of the tribuneship and the complicity of Cleomenes in the murders of the ephors and others. He concludes with a kind of ranking of the four men, naming Tiberius the most virtuous, Agis the least guilty of misdeeds, and Cleomenes much bolder than Caius.



Demosthenes, Cicero and The Comparison of Demosthenes and Cicero

Demosthenes, Cicero and The Comparison of Demosthenes and Cicero Summary and Analysis

Demosthenes was an Athenian politician at the time of the ascent of Philip and Alexander of Macedon. He became best orator of his time, Plutarch writes, by practicing long hours, developing a dramatic, persuasive style.

Demosthenes spoke often in the Athenian assembly against cooperating with Philip, the king of Macedon, fearing his intentions to conquer Athens, and Plutarch credits his influence for the resistance the Greeks showed both to Philip and his son, Alexander. Demosthenes was convicted of submitting to bribery, fined and sent to prison. He escaped and went into exile, but was called back by the Athenian assembly, which dismissed his sentence.

When Antipater, the Macedonian ruler who succeeded Alexander, approached Athens with his forces, he demanded Demosthenes be turned over for his opposition to Macedonia. Demosthenes escaped and hid in a temple in Calauria, but his location was discovered. Before he could be captured, he committed suicide by taking poison. He was honored by the people of Athens. Demades, the politician who spoke in favor of turning him over to Antipater, took refuge with the Macedonians but was later murdered by them.

Like Demosthenes, Cicero was a gifted orator who came by his ability through hard work. He was of noble Roman birth and a student of Greek philosophy. He was well known for his sharp wit and was often disliked for his constant joking and sarcastic remarks, of which Plutarch provides several examples.

After serving in several lower positions, Cicero was elected consul of Rome. During his term of office, a conspiracy to overthrow the government was discovered, led by a senator named Cataline. Cicero exposed the conspiracy in several orations to the senate, which after much deliberation, decided that Cataline and his followers should be executed.

Cataline fled, but several of his supporters were captured and executed under the authority of Cicero. This was controversial, as the conspirators had not received a formal trial, but had simply been condemned by the senate. When Clodius, an opponent of Cicero, was made tribune, he passed a law that would exile Cicero for having made these executions without a trial. Cicero fled Rome for several months. When Milo was made tribune, his exile was reversed and he was welcomed back. Cicero fled once again as Caesar approached to face Pompey, choosing to take the side of Pompey but



leaving avenues open with Caesar. When Caesar defeated Pompey, he welcomed Cicero back to Rome.

After the assassination of Caesar and the rise of Antony, Cicero backed Caesar's son, also called Caesar, for the office of consul. With his support the younger Caesar was elected, but soon betrayed him and formed an alliance with Antony and Lepidus. These three made up a list of enemies to be executed, with Antony insisting that Cicero be first on it. Caesar resisted, but eventually gave in. Cicero was hunted down and killed. Antony had his head and hands cut off and displayed publicly.

In comparing Demosthenes and Cicero, Plutarch remarks on their fundamental difference in personality. Where Demosthenes was serious and his speeches eloquent, Cicero loved to jest and make fun of his opponents. Demosthenes never sought praise, but Cicero was often boastful.

Demosthenes was thought by many to have been overly motivated by his own gain, and would speak on the any side of an issue he was paid to take up. Cicero refused to take gifts from anyone. On the nature of their deaths, Plutarch notes they both died while fleeing, but while Demosthenes fled from a charge of bribery, Cicero flight was honorable. Plutarch does find some redemption for Demosthenes in his decision of take his own life.



Demetrius, Antony, and the Comparison of Demetrius and Antony

Demetrius, Antony, and the Comparison of Demetrius and Antony Summary and Analysis

Demetrius was a Macedonian general, the son of Antigonos, who became King of Macedon after a career as a general. He freed Athens from the control of Cassander and was named along with his father as deities by the Athenians. Demetrius' status in Athens reversed more than once, however. After he liberated the city a second time, the Athenians found his personal behavior repulsive and were insulted when he demanded a large sum of money from them, which he squandered. Demetrius was reconciled to the Athenians once again, however, after saving them from a blockade that had created widespread famine.

Plutarch writes that Demetrius and his father began to think of themselves as kings, as did Cassander, the king of Macedon. Upon the death of Cassander, the throne was contested between Antipater and Alexander, one of the sons of Cassander. Alexander called upon Demetrius for support, but soon began to fear his power and conspired to kill him. Learning of his plan, Demetrius had Alexander killed and took the throne himself.

Demetrius led forces into Asia, but was defeated by the armies of Seleucus who took him captive. He died in captivity, having become unhealthy from overdrinking.

Antony was a leader who led Rome into battle against the assassins of Caesar and later fought against Octavian, Caesar's son. He was defeated by Octavian in Egypt.

After the assassination of Caesar, Antony at first argued that his assassins Cassius and Brutus should be given provinces to govern, but then incited a popular revolt against them in a powerful public speech. He later took power along with Lepidus and Octavian in a triumvirate similar to the one formed by Caesar, Pompey and Crassus.

Antony fell in love with the Egyptian queen Cleopatra, and left Rome to be with her in Alexandria. With the financial support of Cleopatra, Antony went on to conquer large portions of the eastern Mediterranean, giving the lands to Cleopatra's children. Rome declared war on Cleopatra, who was defended by Antony. When Octavian's forces approached Antony in Egypt, his forces deserted him in the face of certain defeat. Antony committed suicide. Cleopatra was taken captive by Octavian and despite his efforts to prevent it she committed suicide as well.

In his comparison of the two men, Demetrius and Antony, Plutarch finds much to criticize. Demetrius declared himself a king, while Antony acted as one. This was more excusable for Demetrius, as the Spartans were a people used to kings, Plutarch writes.



Likewise, Demetrius is not so much to blame for taking several wives and having a mistress, as this was common practice among Spartan kings. It was not acceptable to the Romans, however, and Antony was blameworthy for taking up with Cleopatra. On the matter of their deaths, neither died honorably, but Demetrius less so because he allowed himself to remain a prisoner for three years.



Dion, Marcus Brutus and The Comparison of Dion and Brutus

Dion, Marcus Brutus and The Comparison of Dion and Brutus Summary and Analysis

Dion was a Syracusan who grew rich serving Dionysius, the tyrannical Greek king of Syracuse. Dion also served the king's young son, also named Dionysius, when he came to power but was banished when the young king's supporters began to fear his influence. Dion was a pupil of Plato, and had introduced the young king to Plato's philosophy against tyrants.

From Greece, Dion used his wealth to raise an army of Peloponnesian soldiers which drove Dionysius out of Syracuse. Dion tried to establish a new government, but a popular faction arose against him and he and his foreign troops were forced to leave Syracuse. Dionysius took advantage and attacked the city and set it afire. The Syracusans ran to Dion and begged him to return and defend them, which he did successfully.

With Dion again established in Syracuse, opposition to his rule returned, led openly by the admiral Heraclides and secretly by Dion's friend, Callippus. Heraclides was murdered by some of Dion's friends, and Dion himself was murdered in a plot led by Callippus.

Marcus Brutus was a wealthy Roman senator and one of the assassins of Caesar. Although an opponent of Pompey in the senate, when civil war broke out between Caesar and Pompey, Brutus left Rome with Pompey. Nevertheless, he remained a favorite of Caesar, Plutarch writes, who had once had an affair with Brutus' mother and possibly suspected he was his own son. Upon Pompey's defeat, Caesar welcomed Brutus back into Rome.

As Caesar's power grew, a group of senators began to conspire to kill him, led by Cassius, a close friend of Brutus. Brutus was brought in on the plot and along with the other conspirators took a dagger with him to the senate on the 15th day of March, intending to kill Caesar there.

Caesar's wife had received an ill omen, however, and tried to prevent Caesar from going to the senate. Plutarch's here presents a suspenseful description of the events as Brutus and the others waited for Caesar to appear, wondering if his delay meant he had discovered their plot. When Caesar did finally appear, the assassins surrounded him and stabbed him to death.



After the assassination, Antony called for a pardon for the killers, which was granted, but he then enraged the public so much that Brutus, Cassius and the others were forced to leave Rome.

When Antony and Octavian Caesar's forces were split and fighting one another, Brutus tried to take advantage and attacked Rome with forces raised by Cassius and himself. Antony and Octavian joined their forces to defeat Brutus, who committed suicide.

In comparing the two men, Plutarch finds many noble similarities. Dion was the better general, he believes, but Brutus faced the more worthy opponent in Caesar. Dion overthrew a tyrant, but many thought he wished to take over the power for himself. Brutus wanted only to serve Rome.

Brutus' greatest fault was in betraying the man who had shown him leniency and friendship, but this showed that he was driven by principle and not by personal feelings.

Aratus

Aratus Summary and Analysis

Aratus was a famed Greek general who overthrew the tyrant Nicocles and led the Achaeans against Macedonia and Sparta. He was the son of Clinias, a magistrate in the city of Sicyon, who was killed by the Sicyonian tyrant Abantidas when Aratus was a boy. He himself escaped and was taken to Argos, where he was educated and grew into a strong and able young man.

Meanwhile in Sicyon, the tyranny continued under Nicocles. Aratus hatched a plot to return to Sicyon and liberate it from tyranny by secretly scaling the wall of Nicocles' castle and overwhelming him. He was successful in his plot, and hailed as a liberator. Plutarch describes this secret attack in some detail, and writes that while Aratus on the surface seemed to lack boldness and aggression, but that he was the kind of person who was very bold in acting secretly toward his goals.

Under the influence of Aratus, Sicyon joined with Achaea, a league of Greek cities allied for common defense. He was made "strategos," or general of all the Achaean forces, several years in a row, an unprecedented occurrence. He fought against Antigonos of Macedon and then Cleomenes of Sparta. When Cleomenes had defeated nearly all the Achaean cities, Aratus turned to his form enemy, Macedon, allying Sicyon with Antigonos.

Antigonos welcomed Aratus as a trusted advisor. Upon his death, Antigonos' son Philip became king of Macedonia, and for a time lived in Sicyon with Aratus, who provided for his education. Philip was a tyrant at heart, however, Plutarch explains, who soon grew resentful of Aratus and had him poisoned, driving him into madness and death.

Among the lives that Plutarch describes, this one is unusual in that it is written directly to Polycrates who was a descendent of Aratus. Plutarch praises Polycrates for his virtues that are so much like those of Aratus and hopes his description will be an influence in educating Polycrates' sons in similar virtues.

Artaxerxes

Artaxerxes Summary and Analysis

Artaxerxes was the second king of Persia by that name, the grandson of the first Artaxerxes and the oldest son of Darius. He became king on the death of Darius, but was challenged by his younger brother Cyrus. Artaxerxes defeated Cyrus in battle, and Cyrus was killed. The matter of Cyrus' death is uncertain, Plutarch writes, and he provides several accounts based on previous writers, giving the matter much attention.

When Persia came under attack by the Spartans, Artaxerxes cleverly diverted their efforts by bribing the Greeks to declare war on Sparta. Later, he allied with Sparta and allowed them to take control of most of Greece.

Artaxerxes had several children by many wives. His eldest son named Darius was the evident successor to the throne but Darius was discovered to have conspired to kill Artaxerxes and was executed. This left three of his other legitimate sons in contention, Ochus, Arsames, and Ariaspes, who was the favorite of the people. Ochus, the least virtuous of the three, murdered Arsames and drove Ariaspes to commit suicide, leaving himself the sole heir. Artaxerxes died at the age of 94. Ochus went on to rule with great cruelty.



Galba and Otho

Galba and Otho Summary and Analysis

Galba was a wealthy Roman who served under the emperor Nero, and who became emperor after Nero's death. He was not a popular leader and soon a revolt arose among Roman soldiers in Germany, who declared their own emperor, Vitellius. Realizing his grip on the leadership was weak, Galba set about naming a successor, choosing Piso.

This angered one of Galba's supporters, Otho, who gained the support of the Praetorian soldiers and was declared emperor by them. Galba led forces to subdue the rebels, but was himself killed, offering his own neck when he was captured by Otho's cavalry.

Otho proceeded to Rome and took the title of emperor. Along with the office, he inherited the mutinous situation of the soldiers in Germany under Vitellius. Otho mustered a large force to combat the rebels. The battle waged back and forth, with some of Otho's forces suffering a defeat in a battle at Bedriacum. Otho still had a strong force of willing soldiers who pledged to keep fighting, but Plutarch writes that he came to realize that win or lose, the civil war between Romans would come to no good. Otho called together his commanders and told them he would die himself to end the fighting. The following morning he was found in his room, dead from a self-inflicted dagger wound to his heart.



Characters

Alexander

Alexander was the son of Philip of Macedon, succeeding him as king when he was 20 years old. From a young age he showed promise as a leader and Philip spared no expense in his education, hiring the philosopher Aristotle to teach him. Alexander proved himself to be an able military commander and under his leadership, Macedonia conquered much of Persia, where Alexander spread Greek culture and ideas. He also adopted some of the behaviors of the Persians, such as adorning himself with luxurious clothes and instituting the Persian custom of kissing the king as a sign of respect. These behaviors led to resentment and near mutiny among his soldiers while fighting in India.

Alexander died after a sudden and brief illness. He may have been poisoned, Plutarch suggests. Plutarch praises him for his respect for women. When the wives and children of Darius were captured by Alexander's armies, for example, he provided them with the same honor and even greater comfort than they had enjoyed before. This won Alexander the great respect of Darius who regretted on his deathbed that he would not live to serve him.

Alexander's virtue extended to his graciousness and respect toward his defeated enemies. However, he was too often ruled by his passion against those close to him he thought meant to betray him, Plutarch writes.

Caesar

Otho was the Roman Emperor who took power after Galba and continued the war against Vitellius and the rebellious troops in Germany. Otho died by his own hand rather than extend the civil war. Artaxerxes was the only Persian leader profiled by Plutarch in this volume. Artaxerxes was the second Persian king by that name, and the son of Darius who was defeated by Alexander. He fended off the Spartans by allying with the Greeks, but later allied with the Spartans. He also fought against the Egyptians.

The Gracchi consisted of Tiberius and Caius Gracchus, Roman brothers whose aims at strict reforms of Roman land laws and the judicial system made them unpopular. Each was murdered. Agis was a Spartan king who sought to return Sparta to its former glory by re-establishing the institutions of austerity and banning private wealth. He was killed for his unpopular views. Cleomenes was the son-in-law of Agis and son of Lepidus, Agis' enemy. Cleomenes forcefully instituted the reforms proposed by Agis and had the magistrates of Sparta killed, taking their place as a de facto king.



Marcus Brutus

This individual was a wealthy Roman senator who at first sided with Pompey against Caesar in the civil war, but was then welcomed back by Caesar after Pompey's defeat. Brutus was part of a group who feared Caesar had become too powerful and who plotted to kill him in the senate. After helping assassinate Caesar, he fled Rome and raised a military force. He was defeated and committed suicide.

Cicero

This was a Roman consul and excellent orator. Cicero exposed the Cataline conspiracy to overthrow the city. He sided with Pompey in the civil war with Caesar, but returned to Caesar after Pompey's defeat. He supported Caesar's younger son for the Roman leadership, but was betrayed by him when he joined with Antony, his enemy. Antony condemned Cicero to death. He was tracked down and killed.

Cato the Younger

This was a wealthy Roman known for his austere ways. Cato fought with Pompey in the civil war against Caesar. He was defeated in Utica where he committed suicide as Caesar's forces advanced.

Antony

This was a Roman statesman who rose to power after the death of Caesar to rule in a second triumvirate with Octavian and Lepidus. Antony left Rome to be with Cleopatra, and fought for her against Rome. He committed suicide in Alexandria when he was told falsely that Cleopatra was dead.

Eumenes

This was the Greek scholar who became a general in the Macedonian army. He was taken captive by Antigonus while fighting the Spartans and killed in captivity.

Agesilaus

This was the Spartan king who had been raised as a citizen. Agesilaus was lame in one leg, and had a reputation as a stubborn leader.



Pompey

This was a great Roman general who defended Rome and rose to great power to rule along with Caesar and Crassus in the first triumvirate. He engaged in a civil war with the forces of Caesar, and was defeated on land. He fled to Egypt to seek assistance and was murdered at the order of King Ptolemy.

Phocion

This was an Athenian statesman who counseled against war with the Macedonians. He was betrayed by the Athenians and executed.

Agis

This was a Spartan king who sought to return Sparta to its former glory by re-establishing the institutions of austerity and banning private wealth. He was killed for his unpopular views.

Cleomenes

This was the son-in-law of Agis and son of Lepidus, Agis' enemy. Cleomenes forcefully instituted the reforms proposed by Agis and had the magistrates of Sparta killed, taking their place as a de facto king.

The Gracchi

This consisted of Tiberius and Caius Gracchus who were Roman brothers whose aims at strict reforms of Roman land laws and the judicial system made them unpopular. They were both murdered.

Demosthenes

This was a gifted Athenian orator who openly opposed the expansion of Macedonia and who committed suicide rather than be captured by Antipater.

Demetrius

This was a king of Macedon who was repeatedly welcomed and then expelled by the Athenians. He defended Macedon against Egypt and was captured while invading Persia, where he died in captivity.



Sertorius

This was a Roman general who revolted against the rule of Sylla and raised a force in Spain, fighting against Pompey. He was betrayed and murdered by his friends

Dion

This was a Syracusan who overthrew the tyrant Dionysius but was murdered in a plot led by Callippus.

Aratus

This was a Greek general who allied Sicyon with the Achaeans and fought against Sparta.

Artaxerxes

This was the only Persian leader profiled by Plutarch in this volume. Artaxerxes was the second Persian king by that name, and the son of Darius who was defeated by Alexander. He fended off the Spartans by allying with the Greeks, but later allied with the Spartans. He also fought against the Egyptians.

Galba

This was a Roman emperor who ruled for a short time after Nero and was overthrown by the forces of Otho.

Otho

This was the Roman Emperor who took power after Galba and continued the war against Vitellius and the rebellious troops in Germany. Otho died by his own hand rather than extend the civil war.

Crassus

This was a wealthy and powerful Roman who ruled along with Caesar and Pompey as part of the first triumvirate of Rome.



Cleopatra

This was the Egyptian queen who captured the heart of Antony and for whom Antony abandoned his family and Rome. She was captured by the Romans and committed suicide.



Objects/Places

Rome

This is the central city of the Roman empire and the center of many of the lives Plutarch examines. Rome was ruled as a republic until the time of Caesar.

Athens

This is the most important city of ancient Greece, Athens was ruled by a democratic assembly.

Sparta

This is a powerful city-state in ancient Greece. Plutarch profiles several Spartan leaders in his "Lives."

Egypt

This is a region in North Africa ruled by the Ptolemy family of kings and the queen Cleopatra.

Achaia

This is a region of Greece made up of allied cities and islands that banded together to resist the Spartans.

Persia

This is the Near Eastern region ruled by the kings Darius and Artaxerxes. Persia was conquered by Alexander.

Macedonia

This is a region north of Greece that became extremely powerful under the leadership of Philip and his son, Alexander.

Sicily

This is an island off the coast of Italy where Syracuse is located.

Gaul

This is a region of what is now Western Europe, where Caesar raised his forces.

Spain

This is the region where Sertorius built up his power in opposition to Rome.

Alexandria

This is a city in Egypt founded by Alexander. Antony goes to Alexander to be with Cleopatra, and kills himself there.

India

This is the farthest point east reached by Alexander before turning back toward the Mediterranean.



Themes

Honorable Death

Each of the "Lives" of Plutarch describes the manner in which the subject died, and the way he faced his death Plutarch finds a clue to the true character of each man. Dying in battle while fighting for a just cause is certainly a noble way to die, but this is not the fate of most of Plutarch's subjects. Intrigue, jealousy, murder and conspiracy all come to the surface among the highest levels of power in Plutarch's "Lives," and violent deaths seem to form the life of all great leaders. Sertorius, Pompey, Caesar, Tiberius, Caius Gracchus, Cicero, Dion, and Aratus were all murdered, and Alexander possibly poisoned to death. Phocion, Agis and Artaxerxes were executed. Cato, Cleomenes, Demosthenes, Antony, Brutus, and Otho all committed suicide. Galba died in battle, Demetrius and Eumenes in captivity. Among Plutarch's subjects, only Agesilaus died a natural death, although he was far from home.

Most of his subjects are noble in their deaths, Plutarch suggests. Caesar and Sertorius were betrayed by those they thought friends and their devotion to the virtue of friendship was the immediate cause of their deaths. The Gracchi, Dion, and Aratus were rulers who became unpopular while trying to do what was best for their subjects.

Otho's suicide was a sacrifice made for the sake of Roman unity. The suicides of Cato, Cleomenes, Demosthenes and Brutus were undertaken in the face of defeat in battle, a preferable fate to these proud men than being taken captive. Antony's suicide was not so noble as Plutarch depicts it, for it is his belief that Cleopatra is dead, a selfish and personal reason, that drives him to kill himself. Likewise, the deaths of Eumenes and Demetrius are not as worthy as the others for they preferred being captured to being killed.

Leadership

In his prologue to the lives of Agis, Cleomenes, Tiberius, and Caius Gracchus, Plutarch expounds on the nature of leadership. Most politicians, he suggests are not leaders of people but servants to them. They must court the good will of the populace in order to maintain their positions of power and thus are actually enslaved by popular opinion.

The four men profiled in this section were true leaders, Plutarch suggested, for they sought to do what was best for their people even though what was best was not popular. Agis and Cleomenes were Spartan leaders who came to power as Sparta was in decline. Sparta had once been great, widely known for its austere culture that shunned personal wealth and luxury and trained its soldiers in extreme obedience and discipline. Under Greek influence, Sparta had changed its ways over the generations. Some Spartans now grew rich at the expense of others and the military was undisciplined. Agis and Cleomenes proposed and took drastic action to bring about



social reform to return Sparta to its former glory by returning to its ancient values. They were betrayed in their noble goals, however, and driven out and killed by the people they were trying to serve.

Tiberius and Caius Gracchus faced a similar situation in Rome, where the interests of the wealthy landowners were driving the free soldiers into poverty. In attempting to do what was right, Plutarch writes, they only inflamed popular opposition and paid the price for their bold leadership.

Plutarch suggests that such unilateral rule is acceptable if its based on the principle of best serving the people. Certainly the tyrant Dionysius was no less autocratic than Cleomenes, but he sought only to aggrandize himself at the expense of the people of Syracuse and so Dion was justified in overthrowing him.

Good leaders are like fathers, Plutarch might argue. They have the interest of their subjects always in mind, but rule them with wisdom and grace. Like Caesar, they should be willing to accept them back after they rebel, as he did with Brutus. They should be courageous, like Alexander at his best, but not rash, like Alexander at his worst, and should lead by virtuous example. Also like fathers, Plutarch might suggest, they should accept that their children will one day grow to resent the power they hold over them and naturally desire to overthrow them.

Writing History

Plutarch not only writes about famous people in his "Lives," he also writes about writing. He sums up his general intentions with a line included in his life of Alexander. "It must be borne in mind that my design is not to write histories, but lives," he writes. "And the most glorious exploits do not always furnish us with the clearest discoveries of virtue or vice in men; sometimes a matter of less moment, an expression or a jest, informs us better of their characters and inclinations, than the most famous sieges, the greatest armaments, or the bloodiest battles whatsoever" (pg. 139.)

These more "weighty matters" he is content to leave to other writers, he says. He does not always agree with these others, however, and despite his intention to focus on character rather than historical events, he finds it necessary to weigh in on the question of accuracy in historical writing. Later in his life of Alexander, Plutarch mentions the possibility that he met with the legendary Amazon while in Scythia. Plutarch lists the writers who claim this happened, as well as the list of writers who say it did not. He himself notes that Alexander's own account does not mention any meeting with the Amazon and gives this the greatest weight.

This small question can hardly be thought to cast any light on Alexander's character. Plutarch seems mostly interested in settling a minor factual question. He includes similar asides in the lives of other figures, where he names directly the sources that say one thing, those that say another, and then offers his own opinion and why. Plutarch

recognizes that accuracy is something that is to be strived for, it seems, but in many cases is a judgment call.



Style

Perspective

Plutarch is writing in the second century A.D., hundreds of years after the lives of some of the men he profiles, but only a generation or less removed from others. His perspective changes from life to life somewhat, as he is more or less removed in time from his subject. He works primarily from the writings of other historians for the outlines of his lives, but he notes that these sources often disagree and gives his own opinion on the likely accuracy of each version.

Plutarch is an educated Greek living in a small town in Greece under Roman rule. He prefers small town life to that of the city, he writes, and his perspective is as something of an outsider to the dominant politics of his day. His heritage as a Greek seems to influence his perspective in his choice of leaders to write about, although he appears to be equally complimentary and critical to his Greek and non-Greek subjects. In the sections where he parallels leaders, he always pairs a Roman with a non-Roman, suggesting a perspective that recognizes the cultural differences between peoples but seeks to find common attributes of greatness that transcend these differences.

Tone

Plutarch's "Lives" are generally critical in their tone but not overly so. He recognizes the greatness of his subjects and chooses episodes from their lives that he feels illustrates a strength or weakness in their character. These episodes are sometimes minor occasions in the life of the person compared to his later achievements, but Plutarch writes that he is more concerned with depicting the true person than merely recounting his personal history.

This episodic structure provides Plutarch a framework for employing a wide variety of tones. When he is describing the quick and sharp wit of Cicero, Plutarch provides several amusing examples of his one-liners and putdowns. In describing the plot to kill Caesar, Plutarch creates a suspenseful mood as Marcus Brutus and his conspirators wait nervously to commit their murder, jumping at the smallest sound and interpreting every word as a sign they had been discovered. His description of Aratus' raid on the citadel at Sicyon has all the elements of a thriller as Aratus and his men sneak over the wall under cover of darkness. Otho's speech to his men announcing his intention to sacrifice himself for the good of Rome reaches the loftiest tones of nobility.

Structure

"Plutarch's Lives Volume II" includes 28 chapters of varying lengths. Of these 28 chapters, 22 are dedicated profiles of individual men and 6 are short chapters that compare the lives of two or more of the subjects that are inserted after their profiles.



This volume begins with the lives of the Roman general Sertorius and the Greek general Eumenes who fought for the Spartans, followed by a comparison of the two men. Next comes profiles of the Spartan leader Agesilaus and the Roman leader Pompey the Great, with a comparison of the two following.

Following this are the lives of Alexander, the great Macedonian leader, Julius Caesar, the first Roman emperor, Phocion, an Athenian statesman, and Cato the Younger, a Roman leader. The next four lives are presented and compared in pairs. The lives of the Spartan kings Agis and his son-in-law and successor Cleomenes are described, followed by the lives of the Roman leaders Tiberius Gracchus and his brother, Caius Gracchus. Plutarch compares all four of them in a separate piece.

Next in the collection are the lives of Demosthenes and Cicero and a comparison of the two, followed by Demetrius and Antony and their comparison, and Dion and Marcus Brutus and a comparison. The final four chapters are lives of the Greek general Aratus, the Persian king Artaxerxes, and two successive Roman emperors Galba and Otho.

Within each life, Plutarch usually opens with a brief synopsis of the person's life, followed by a largely chronological account of illustrative events. Each chapter ends with a description of the subject's death and sometimes includes an epilogue describing how he was honored afterward and the fate of his friends and family.



Quotes

"For as it is the opinion of philosophers, that could you take away strife and opposition out of the universe, all the heavenly bodies would stand still, generation and motion would cease in the mutual concord and agreement of all things, so the Spartan legislator seems to have admitted ambition and emulation, among the ingredients of his Commonwealth, as the incentives of virtue, distinctly wishing that there should be some dispute and competition among his men of worth, and pronouncing the mere idle, uncontested, mutual compliance to unproved deserts to be but a false sort of concord...Yet this maxim is not simply to be granted, without restriction, for if animosities go too far, they are very dangerous to cities, and of most pernicious consequence" (Agesilaus. pg. 42.)

"Pompey now desired the honor of a triumph, which Sylla opposed, alleging that the law allowed that honor to none but consuls and praetors... Pompey, however, was not daunted ; but bade Sylla recollect, that more worshipped the rising than the setting sun; as if to tell him that his power was increasing, and Sylla's in the wane. Sylla did not perfectly hear the words, but observing a sort of amazement and wonder in the looks and gestures of those that did hear them, he asked what it was that he said. When it was told him, he seemed astounded at Pompey's boldness, and cried out twice together, 'Let him triumph'" (Pompey, pg. 80.)

"The statues that gave the best representation of Alexander's person, were those of Lysippus, (by whom alone he would suffer his image to be made,) those peculiarities which many of his successors afterwards and his friends used to affect to imitate, the inclination of his head a little on one side towards his left shoulder, and his melting eye, having been expressed by this artist with great exactness" (Alexander, pg. 141.)

"Cicero was the first who had any suspicions of [Caesar's] designs upon the government, and, as a good pilot is apprehensive of a storm, when the sea is most smiling, saw the designing temper of the man through this disguise of good-humor and affability, and said, that in general, in all he did and undertook, he detected the ambition for absolute power, 'but when I see his hair so carefully arranged, and observe him adjusting it with one finger, I cannot imagine it should enter into such a man's thoughts to subvert the Roman state'" (Caesar, pg. 201.)

"Agis, being now at the point to die, perceived one of the officers bitterly bewailing his misfortune; ' Weep not, friend,' said he, 'for me, who die innocent, by the lawless act of wicked men. My condition is much better than theirs.' As soon as he had spoken these words, not showing the least sign of fear, he offered his neck to the noose" (Agis, pg. 229-30.)

"It is said of Cato, that even from his infancy, in his speech, his countenance, and all his childish pastimes, he discovered an inflexible temper, unmoved by any passion, and firm in every thing. He was resolute in his purposes, much beyond the strength of his age, to go through with whatever he undertook" (Cato, pg. 270.)



"This news afflicted him extremely, and he grieved, as a young man would do, for the loss of a very beautiful and excellent wife; yet he did not let his passion disgrace him, or impair the greatness of his mind, but keeping his usual voice, his countenance, and his habit, he gave necessary orders to his captains, and took the precautions required for the safety of Tegea. Next morning he came to Sparta, and having at home with his mother and children bewailed the loss, and finished his mourning, he at once devoted himself to the public affairs of the state" (Cleomenes, pg. 344.)

"From the circumstances of their deaths, also, we may infer some difference in the quality of their courage The Gracchi, fighting with their fellow-citizens, were both slain, as they endeavored to make their escape; Agia willingly submitted to his fate, rather than any citizen should be in danger of his life. Cleomenes, being ehamefully and unjustly treated, made an effort toward revenge, but failing of that, generously fell by his own hand" (Comparison of Tiberius and Caius Gracchus with Agis and Cleomenes, pg. 385-6.)

"Antony was so captivated by [Cleopatra], that, while Fulvia his wife maintained his quarrels in Rome against Caesar by actual force of arms, and the Parthian troops, commanded by Labienus (the king's generals having made him commander-in-chief), were assembled in Mesopotamia, and ready to enter Syria, he could yet suffer himself to be carried away by her to Alexandria, there to keep holiday, like a boy, in play and diversion, squandering and fooling away in enjoyments that most costly, as Antiphon says, of all valuables, time" (Antony, pg. 497.)

"But this Brutus, whose life we now write, having to the goodness of his disposition added the improvements of learning and the study of philosophy, and having stirred up his natural parts, of themselves grave and gentle, by applying himself to business and public affairs, seems to have been of a temper exactly framed for virtue; insomuch that they who were most his enemies upon account of his conspiracy against Caesar, if in that whole affair there was any honorable or generous part, referred it wholly to Brutus, and laid whatever was barbarous and cruel to the charge of Cassius, Brutus's connection and familiar friend, but not his equal in honesty and pureness of purpose" (Marcus Brutus, pg. 572.)

"But as to the death of Cyrus, since Xenophon, as being himself no eye-witness of it, has stated it simply and in few words, it may not be amiss perhaps to run over on the one hand what Dinon, and on the other, what Ctesias has said of it" (Artaxerxes, pg. 650.)

"As to the prodigies and apparitions that happened about this time, there were many reported which none could answer for, or which were told in different ways, but one which everybody actually saw with their eyes was the statue in the capitol, of Victory carried in a chariot, with the reins dropped out of her hands, as if she were grown too weak to hold them any longer; and a second, that Caius Caesar's statue in the island of Tiber, without any earthquake or wind to account for it, turned round from west to east; and this they say, happened about the time when Vespasian and his party first openly began to put themselves forward" (Otho, pg. 686-7.)



Topics for Discussion

What are the characteristics of a good leader, according to Plutarch? What makes a bad leader?

What role do women play in the profiles of Plutarch?

Plutarch frequently mentions omens and oracles that are used to predict the future. What weight does he give these?

Why does Plutarch choose to compare the lives of some figures? What does he base his choices upon?

How does Plutarch's Greek culture affect his interpretation of the great lives of Romans and Greeks?

Plutarch states he intends to write lives and not histories. What does he mean by this?

Is Plutarch concerned with being factually accurate in the details of his profiles? Does it matter one way or the other?