

D. A. Russell, *Plutarch*, London, Duckworth, 1972, pp. 295.

More significantly than any other writer, Plutarch has been an important influence in Western civilization, and his work has helped Europe toward a clearer understanding of the historical and moral traditions of classical antiquity. To do justice to such greatness, Russell has written *Plutarch* in the hope of pointing out what one must bear in mind in order to read Plutarch with understanding and with pleasure.

Russell begins his book by providing a general account of Plutarch's life, concluding with the fact that he was active in public life and was a natural leader in his own community.

The emphasis of Russell's book is on Plutarch's highly sophisticated manner of writing. Russell correctly describes Plutarch's characteristic and homogeneous style as rich, imaginative, exuberant and metaphorical. Plutarch's language is full of studied word patterns, allusions filled with imagery and a vocabulary not only large but also carefully chosen. Russell then proceeds to say that Plutarch's most complex genre is the dialogue which is composed of a series of developed speeches giving numerous answers to questions already posed. Russell closes this detailed analysis and commentary on Plutarch's style by making two important points: first, he points out that Plutarch's appeal was to the highly educated and the leisured; second, one must remember that a great deal of the flavour of Plutarch's style evaporates in translation.

The book has separate chapters on Plutarch's religion, moral outlook and scholarship. Let me briefly examine what Russell has to say about each of the above three topics.

Plutarch, says Russell, was a pious believer (actually, he grew more pious as he grew older) and he thoroughly expected happiness for the virtuous, in another life. As a Platonist, Plutarch strongly believed in the essential reliability and goodness of God. In fact, this trust in the fairness of God is the key to Plutarch's attitude toward religion.

In regard to Plutarch's moral outlook, Russell says that he believed that there are good men but that he did not believe in the perfectibility of human nature. For Plutarch, the most important thing is the proper use of education and environment, not only to conceal evil, but significantly also to strengthen the good tendencies within human beings.

As far as Plutarch's scholarship is concerned, writes Russell, he was thoroughly conversant with history, philosophy, physics, botany, zoology and mathematics, and he was especially attracted to Hesiod and Pindar.

Continuing his book, Russell then proceeds to give a general account of the major enterprise of Plutarch's career-*Lives*. Russell first begins by listing the following differences between biographies of today and Plutarch's *Lives*.

1. In Plutarch, as opposed to modern biographies, man and nature do not change-they are static-and the world remains fixed.
2. In Plutarch we are expected to allocate praise and blame.
3. Plutarch is occupied only with the individual human qualities of his heroes and barely notices their wider historical influence.

Russell then proceeds to explain Plutarch's ambitious scheme of parallel *Lives* (Roman and Greek). The grounds of comparison vary and are sometimes not the most obvious. There is linear movement from birth to death, and *Lives* are divided into distinct periods, the arrangements of which depend more upon character and subject matter than upon date. Plutarch's work was created, concludes Russell, for the personal improvement of others.

Russell ends his book with an analysis of one of Plutarch's *Lives*-the life of Alcibiades-in which the writer's narrative and descriptive powers are clearly evident.

Russell's up-to-date, stimulating and reliable book is the perfect primary introduction

to the study of Plutarch. Its sharp, clear and plain narrative should no doubt help towards understanding Plutarch's life and work. Russell's *Plutarch*, a remarkable book, is clearly a must for both new and old readers of Plutarch.

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Dionysios Zakythinos, *Byzance: État-Société-Économie*, London, Variorum Reprints, 1973, pp. 424.

There is a story to the effect that someone once asked Zakythinos to tell him who among the contemporary historians of the Byzantine empire was, in his opinion, the greatest. «There are two», he is said to have replied, «The other is Ostrogorsky». The story is no doubt apocryphal, but its implication has a very strong basis in fact. That basis was laid down by the publication of the first volume of his *Despotat grec de Morée* and was solidified by the appearance of the second volume some years later. A series of other studies, most of them relatively short, but remarkable for their synthetic and thought-provoking qualities, added additional strength to it. They show Zakythinos to be not only a scholar, but also a thinker, two qualities which distinguish a true historian from a simple compiler of data.

Fourteen of these studies have now been brought together in the present collection. They extend in time from 1947 to 1971; two of them are in German, two in Greek and the rest in French. They range from 9 to 149 pages and cover a variety of subjects, including the position of Byzantium in the historiographical thought of Europe since the seventeenth century, the nature of Byzantine society, whether it was oriental or western, and a brief history of Greece during the Middle Ages.

However, two essays on Cyril and Methodius, one in which the attempt is made to explain the darkness and the apparent lack of any development in the seventh and eighth centuries, and several studies devoted to an analysis of the social, cultural and economic conditions of the empire, including some features of its administrative system, constitute the core of the book. It is here that Zakythinos shows his powers as a thinker. The essay on the darkness of the seventh and eighth centuries is particularly impressive. The apparent lack of any new constructions and the rarity of coins belonging to these two centuries which the coin finds in certain regions of Greece reveal, have been generally attributed to the occupation of these regions by the Slavs, and the consequent loss of jurisdiction over them by Byzantium. But the lack of new construction and the rarity of coins belonging to this period obtains also for Asia Minor where no Slavs ever entered by force, and as a consequence the explanation must lie in some cause applicable to both Greece proper and Asia Minor. Zakythinos finds this cause in the general poverty caused by the irruption of the Arabs, their repeated invasions of Asia Minor and their domination of the sea. He is no doubt right. Some years ago in a study which I devoted to the coin finds in Athens and Corinth, I suggested the same explanation. This is not to say, of course, that the Slavic penetration of Greece proper was without violence and serious dislocations. That the Slavs came into Greece as early as the end of the sixth century and that their coming caused serious dislocations, Zakythinos himself now seems to accept. This may be inferred from the reference which he gives in his brief history of Greece included in the collection to the effect that Monemvasia was founded in 582-83.

The Slavs in Greece were absorbed partly at least because when they came they had no national identity. Developments among the Slavs in the rest of the Balkan peninsula were