

**Sulochana Ruth Asirvatham**  
**Plutarch's Alexander and Philosophia**

Plutarch's Lives owe much of their richness and complexity to the depth of Plutarch's learning and his narrative skill, as well as to his interest in human character. In reading him we feel justified in viewing his subjects as not simply historical agents but as moral "types." For example, as Judith Mossman demonstrates in the case of Alexander, Plutarch gives a nuanced view of Alexander's morality by associating him with both the Homeric and tragic hero. Here I will examine an even more explicit characterization of Alexander--as philosopher par excellence--using both the Life and an earlier rhetorical treatise called *De Fortuna aut Virtute Alexandri*.

An obvious implication of this association between Alexander and *Philosophia* is Plutarch's desire to uphold Alexander as a "poster-boy" for Hellenism; the pride of Second Sophistic authors in their Greek past was to a large extent pride in Athenian paideia. But this prompts us to ask to what extent "The Greek" was felt by Second Sophistic writers to be contiguous with "The Macedonian." Macedonians had held an uncomfortable place in the imagination of classical Greeks as semi-barbarians; how did this sit with the later perception of Alexander as Great Hellenizer? What is striking about Alexander's claim to *Philosophia* is that it is often accompanied by a negative view of Philip and the Macedonians, who appear as hopelessly flawed in contrast to Alexander. In one scene, for example, Plutarch depicts the Macedonians' fondness for Persian luxury while having Alexander himself imply, aphoristically, that in their enthusiasm to plunder, the Macedonians misunderstand the meaning of kingship. Just as Alexander's *Philosophia* is both an intellectual and a moral quality, in their focus on the wealth afforded by empire, the Macedonians are shown to be intellectually and (more emphatically) morally barbaric, and therefore inadequate.

Other Second Sophistic writers similarly privilege Alexander. For example, Aelius Aristides' strict Atticism almost entirely precludes the mention of Philip and the Macedonians, but inasmuch as they are mentioned they are disparaged; Alexander alone is used to connect Greece and Rome through the certainly unhistorical conceit of a world "joined together" under Hellenism. Such associations in Plutarch between Alexander and Hellenicity are not simply a result of historical love of Greek culture; I believe they are also part of a strategy typical of Second Sophistic writers to draw the most "Hellenic" link possible between Macedonian past and Roman present, and that this implies in part the limitation of Macedonian entanglement in "Greek history" to the figure of a surpassingly Greek Alexander.