

Internal *Synkrisis* in Plutarch's *Aratus*

The importance of *synkrisis* to Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* has long been recognised (Erbse 1956) and elaborated in multiple critical studies (e.g. Tatum 2010; Duff 2011; Stadter 2014, 286ff.). And Mossman has demonstrated the role played by internal *synkrisis* in the un-paired *Artaxerxes*, in which the biographical subject is played off against Cyrus amid a backdrop contrasting Hellenic with Persian culture (Mossman 2010). In the *Aratus*, another un-paired Life, however, there is no extended comparison of Aratus with any other figure, and apart from a brief though consequential juxtaposition of Cleomenes with Antigonus Doson (*Aratus* 38.6-7), there is nothing in the way of explicit *synkrisis*.

Now in view of Polybius' famous account of Aratus' paradoxical character (Polyb. 4.8.1-12), one might have expected a biography that set Aratus the adventurous plotter against Aratus the timid general. Plutarch, however, although his Life is indebted to Polybius and although he reacts creatively to Polybius' characterisation of Aratus (*Aratus* 10.1-5; cf. Pelling 2002, 288ff.), does not develop this potential comparison. Instead, an internal *synkrisis*, of a distinctive nature, shapes the whole of this Life.

Konstan and Walsh have recently argued that Greek biography exhibits two distinct strands, one centred round a figure they denominate a civic hero, the kind of action hero or statesman who populates the *Parallel Lives*, the other a figure they call a subversive hero, marked by political helplessness but also bold enough to speak truth to power (Konstan and Walsh 2016). Socrates is their paradigm for this latter brand of hero. Taking Konstan and Walsh's model as a critical tool, this paper argues that the *Aratus* divides into two uneven parts: *Aratus* 2-46 foreground the deeds of derring-do and the bold leadership of Aratus from his liberation of Sicyon to the Cleomenean War, whereas in *Aratus* 47-52 he becomes, in essence, a courtier, first of Antigonus Doson and later of Philip V (esp. *Aratus* 43.5; 45.5; 48.1-2). In this latter role, Plutarch's Aratus is figured as helpless (*Aratus* 38.5; 41.7) but wise and assertive on behalf of

Greece (e.g. *Aratus* 50.7-10). And his personal rectitude, like Socrates', earns him, at first, admiration, but subsequently, resentment. In the end, like Socrates, he is poisoned for his trouble. And, like Socrates, he bears it with a gentle spirit (*Aratus* 52).

Plutarch punctuates the difference between his two Aratus figures by emphasising Aratus' decision to ally the Achaean League with Macedon, an action which deprived both the man and his state of its autonomy – in Plutarch's version of events (Polybius saw it very differently: Polyb. 2.38.1-9; 2.45.1-6, nor was the historical Aratus reduced to the political margins as is Plutarch's Aratus). The two Aratus figures are also emplotted into very different biographical narratives: chapters 2-46 constitute a neatly chronological account; chapters 47-52, by contrast, are episodic in organisation, and omit pertinent and important historical events. In design and characterisation, then, Plutarch, by presenting his reader with two Aratus figures, invites their comparison by way of a novel form of internal *synkrisis*. One hero is not a better man than the other, but one is more to be envied. And in the differences between their careers he underlines the implications, for the moral hero, of his relationship to political power. The relevance of this *synkrisis* to the situation of the Greeks under Rome is unmistakable.

Bibliography

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