

- R. GIBSON and R. MORELLO (EDS), *PLINY THE ELDER: THEMES AND CONTEXTS* (Mnemosyne. Supplements. Monographs on Greek and Latin language and literature 329). Leiden: Brill, 2011. Pp. xiv + 248. ISBN 9789004202344. €103.00/US\$141.00.
- S. CITRONI MARCHETTI, *LA SCIENZA DELLA NATURA PER UN INTELLETTUALE ROMANO: STUDI SU PLINIO IL VECCHIO* (Biblioteca di 'Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici' 22). Pisa: F. Serra, 2011. Pp. 308. ISBN 9788862273268 (bound); 9788862273251 (paper). €136.00 (bound); €68.00 (paper).

The appearance of two substantial collections of essays on the Elder Pliny's *Natural History* perhaps marks a moment of stock-taking, following a decade that witnessed a modest boom in the study of this challenging text. The Gibson-Morello volume, arising from a 2006 conference in Manchester, contains twelve new essays by an international group of scholars, including some of the leading voices in contemporary Plinian studies. And Citroni Marchetti, for thirty years an influential contributor to this field, has compiled a volume of nine essays previously published in 2002–8 (revised for this collection) and one new essay, framed by a substantial introduction and conclusion. Thus we have, on the one hand, a smorgasbord of various contemporary approaches, and on the other, a more focused series of explorations executed by a single scholar.

The Gibson-Morello volume opens with Rhiannon Ash ('Pliny the Elder's attitude to warfare') examining warfare and militarism in Pliny's oeuvre. She examines its rôle, both ideological and practical, in creating knowledge of, and expropriating the wonders of, the subjects of the Empire, including nature itself (her title somewhat undersells the essay). Andrew Fear ('The Roman's burden') leverages the Victorian resonance of his title to explore Pliny's view of imperialism. According to Fear, Pliny presents Roman imperialism as something benevolent and beneficial for its subjects; Fear also finds this view (and its opposite) elsewhere in early imperial literature. Eugenia Lao ('Luxury and the creation of a good consumer') focuses on Pliny's use of financial language to describe and quantify luxury items — whether in the service of moral denunciation, to provide useful knowledge about prices and value, or to display his own connoisseurship. Valérie Naas ('Imperialism, *mirabilia*, and knowledge') examines the *NH* as a text that simultaneously constructs and inventories the Empire. She contends that Pliny's marvels manifest nature's power, thereby glorifying the emperor whose dominion embraces those marvels — though marvels also have a downside, potentially monumentalizing a decline in both morals and knowledge. Mary Beagon's suggestive essay ('The curious eye of the Elder Pliny') considers the rôle played by *cura/curiositas* and wonder in the *NH*. Pliny's focus on the terrestrial — the domain of mutability, in contrast to the immutable translunar realm to which philosophy urges that the gaze be directed — generates wonder, which kickstarts reason and the quest for explanation; Pliny wants us to continue to wonder at the world. Ernesto Paparazzo ('Philosophy and science in the Elder Pliny's *NH*') likewise seeks to disentangle 'philosophical', theoretical modes of inquiry from 'scientific' inquiry that is based on observation and focused on practicality. In general Pliny does not combine these two approaches, though Paparazzo suggests that the moralizing discourse surrounding even 'scientific' inquiry derives from Stoicism, where physics and ethics are intertwined. Aude Doody ('The science and aesthetics of names in the *NH*') sees Pliny's use of names as a fundamental strategy for inscribing the world into the text. She examines how names function as forms of knowledge, and as devices to structure the text; she also offers a fascinating analysis of how Pliny's naming practices take into account the needs both of those who merely consult the text and those who read it continuously. Cynthia Damon ('Pliny on Apion') examines the very specific question of the title of Apion's work as cited in Pliny's preface. Her argument turns on broader issues of authorial self-presentation in both Apion and Pliny, as well as on a textual conjecture. Ruth Morello ('Pliny and the encyclopaedic addressee') tackles the perplexing epistolary preface to the *NH*, with its unexpected invocation of Catullus. She sees this invocation as one of several strategies by which Pliny seeks to align himself with Titus, and to attribute to him an 'encyclopaedic' quality like that of the work itself. Clemence Schultze ('Encyclopaedic exemplarity') brilliantly discusses a pair of Plinian exempla that, though not straightforward in interpretation, foreground issues close to the heart of Pliny's project: 'old Roman values', including the virtue of working hard at night; and the artifice of nature/nature of artifice. Roy Gibson ('Elder and better: the *NH* and the *Letters* of the Younger Pliny') uncovers Pliny the Younger's striking rewriting of the literary history that the Elder constructed for himself in his preface: its effect is to present the *NH*, rather than the 'History from the end of Aufidius Bassus',

as the crowning achievement of the Elder's literary career. This rewriting is entangled with Junior's restructuring of literary hierarchies overall, within prose genres as well as between prose and poetry. Finally, Michael Reeve ('The *Vita Plinii*') provides the first modern critical edition of this short but important text about Pliny's career, and discusses the manuscripts in detail. His analysis tends to confirm the traditional attribution of this *Vita's* core to Suetonius, though he regards the 'tailpiece' as a later addition.

All the essays are of high quality, whatever bones one may pick here and there. Yet they are extremely diverse. Is there a whole here greater than the sum of the parts? What themes run through this collection, to provide hints about current preoccupations and future directions in Plinian studies? I miss a conclusion, where the editors might have gathered such threads. Lacking that, let me list some themes that struck my eyes as being addressed, in different ways, by multiple contributors. (1) How does Pliny foresee users engaging with his work (e.g., consulting vs. continuous reading), and how does he cater to his different users' differing needs? (2) Concerning Pliny's varied methods of knowledge production — e.g., whether information is taken from previous writers, is derived 'theoretically', or is based on autopsy (etc.) — what epistemological and ideological status do these different methods have, and what are their implications for the different types of readers? (3) The question of genre: not 'what kind of work is this?' But 'where is this work presented as standing, by Pliny and others, in relation to other literary works of various types?' (4) What qualities and virtues are celebrated or denigrated within the work? (5) How does the work represent, engage, and structure the Flavian Roman world? These themes include the familiar (e.g., 5), or the familiar with a twist (2, 3); others strike me as new (1, perhaps 4). Of lesser interest, at least in these essays, are the long-standing questions about the overall structure or flow of topics within the work, and the older genre question about the kind of work this is.

I will be briefer regarding Citroni Marchetti's volume, as the bulk of its content has appeared previously. The collection is organized with earlier essays addressing broader problems (e.g., Pliny as 'intellectual'; the characteristics of the speaking 'I') and the later ones providing a selection of this scholar's characteristically deep, rich, and probing exegeses of particular passages and problems (e.g., Tiberius Gracchus *père* and the snake prodigy; and the new essay on Pompey's elephant spectacle). It is convenient to have Citroni Marchetti's recent output gathered under one cover, but again I wonder whether the final product is greater than the sum of its parts. Moreover, such a collection is perhaps inevitably more retrospective than prospective. However, her concluding remarks on Erasmus' reception of Pliny (272–5) assuredly point to another emerging trend in Plinian studies, namely the scope and character of Pliny's reception. The essays by Fear and Beagon in the Gibson-Morello volume point in the same direction, as both venture into the nineteenth century to find discourses on empire and wonder that, if not directly indebted to Pliny, at least recall him. Aude Doody's recent monograph likewise investigates aspects of Pliny's reception. But for a thorough stock-taking, with due attention to both retrospect and prospect, we may actually (dare one say it?) need a 'companion' volume to Pliny's *NH*. Perhaps one of the scholars represented in these two collections will take it on.

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F. KLOTZ and K. OIKONOMOPOULOU (EDS), *THE PHILOSOPHER'S BANQUET: PLUTARCH'S TABLE TALK IN THE INTELLECTUAL CULTURE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. xx + 279. ISBN 9780199588954. £55.00.

As stated in the Preface (viii), the inspiration for this book came from a colloquium organized at the Institute of Classical Studies (London, March 2007), devoted to the topic 'Questioning philosophy in Plutarch's *Quaestiones Convivales*'. It is clear that the editors did careful work in producing the volume, in order to have a coherent book on a quite often neglected or at least not very much studied part of Plutarch's oeuvre. The result is a well-balanced volume, with an extensive Introduction (1–31) that provides a sound presentation of the main problems involving the *Table Talks* (henceforth *TT*) and of the literary tradition and cultural background in which they are embedded, with special attention paid to the *symposium*, the literature of *problems* and the Second Sophistic, thus situating the *TT* 'within its cultural context as the first extant miscellanistic text' (3).