

Plutarch's *Lives* in the Byzantine chronographic tradition: the chronicle of John Zonaras*

Theofili Kampianaki

University of Oxford

theofili.kampianaki@gmail.com

This article focuses on the presence of material from Plutarch's Lives in Byzantine chronicles, particularly that of John Zonaras, the only chronicler to draw heavily on Plutarch's biographies. Zonaras' strong appreciation of Plutarch is evident when he repeatedly digresses from the main narrative to incorporate Plutarchean material related to secondary topics. His method of selection from Plutarch's Roman Lives is governed by particular principles: Zonaras' individual literary tastes, as well as those of his contemporary audience, and the adaptation of Plutarch's material to the Byzantine social and cultural context. These considerations reveal Zonaras to be not merely a copyist of earlier writings, but instead a compiler with his own authorial agenda.

Keywords: Byzantine literature; chronicle; *Epitome of Histories*; *Lives*; Plutarch; reception; twelfth-century; Zonaras

Introduction

The chronicle of John Zonaras, which in some manuscripts bears the title the *Epitome of Histories* (*Epitome*), is the longest Byzantine chronicle of which we know, printed in three volumes in the Bonn series.¹ Extending from the creation of the world to John II Komnenos' accession to the throne in 1118, it appears to have been one of the best-sellers of the Middle Ages, as indicated by the enormous number of manuscripts that

* I would like express my sincere thanks to Prof. Marc Lauxtermann, my academic supervisor, and Prof. Elizabeth Jeffreys for their thorough comments and suggestions on my paper. I would like to extend my gratitude to the Alexander Onassis Foundation and the A.G. Leventis Foundation, whose generous support has allowed me to carry out my doctoral studies at Oxford.

1 John Zonaras, *Annales*, 3 vols., ed. M. Pinder, Th. Büttner-Wobst (Bonn 1841–97). The manuscripts which transmit the title *ἐπιτομή ἱστοριῶν* can be seen in the critical apparatus in Zonaras, I, 3. The text has been partly translated into English: *The History of Zonaras: from Alexander Severus to the Death of Theodosius the Great*, trans. Th. Banchich, E. Lane (London 2009).

transmit the text or parts of it.² With the exception of a few notable studies dealing with linguistic and thematic aspects of the text, much existing scholarship on the chronicle has been concerned with the examination of the sources which underpin Zonaras' narrative.³ This *Quellenforschung* has focused particularly on the presence of classical and late antique material in the work, which, among other things, has famously been used for the reconstruction of the lost books of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*.⁴ Far less scholarly attention, however, has been given to the second major classical text exploited by Zonaras for his account of Roman antiquities, namely Plutarch's *Roman Lives*.

Plutarch appealed to the educated elite throughout the Byzantine period, with his Greek and Roman *Lives* being frequently read and cited by Byzantine intellectuals.⁵

2 For the manuscript tradition of the chronicle, see P. Leone, 'La tradizione manoscritta dell' *Epitome Historiarum* di Giovanni Zonaras', in *Syndesmos. Studi in onore di Rosario Anastasi*, II (Catania 1991) 221–62.

3 An examination of linguistic and literary aspects of the chronicle can be found in I. Grigoriadis, *Linguistic and Literary Studies in the Epitome Historion of John Zonaras* (Thessalonike 1998); Grigoriadis, 'A study of the prooimion of Zonaras' Chronicle in relation to other 12th-century historical prooimia', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 91 (1998) 327–44. For some observations on ideological features of the text, see P. Magdalino, 'Aspects of twelfth-century Byzantine Kaiserkritik', *Speculum* 58 (1983) 326–46; A. Kazhdan, S. Franklin, *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Cambridge 1984) 59–63; R. Macrides, P. Magdalino, 'The Fourth Kingdom and the rhetoric of Hellenism', in P. Magdalino (ed.), *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe* (London 1992) 117–56; N. Matheou, 'City and sovereignty in East Roman thought, c.1000–1200: Ioannes Zonaras' historical vision of the Roman Empire', in N. Matheou, Th. Kampianaki, L. Bondioli (eds.), *The City and the Cities: From Constantinople to the Frontier* (Leiden 2016), 41–63. Some of the studies which deal with the chronicle's sources are Th. Büttner-Wobst, 'Die Abhängigkeit des Geschichtschreibers Zonaras von der erhaltenen Quellen', in *Commentationes Fleckeisiana* (Leipzig 1890) 123–70; idem, 'Studien zur Textgeschichte des Zonaras', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 1 (1892) 202–44; E. Patzig, 'Über einige Quellen des Zonaras I', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 5 (1896) 24–53; M. Dimaio, 'The Antiochene Connection: Zonaras, Ammianus Marcellinus, and John of Antioch on the reigns of the emperors Constantian II and Julian', *Byzantion* 50 (1980) 158–85; Dimaio, 'Infaustus Ductoribus Praeviis: The Antiochene Connection, Part II', *Byzantion* 51 (1981) 502–10; Dimaio, 'Smoke in the wind: Zonaras' use of Philostorgius, Zosimus, John of Antioch, and John of Rhodes in his narrative on the Neo-Flavian emperors', *Byzantion* 58 (1988) 230–55.

4 Cassius Dio, *Cassii Dionis Cocceiani historiarum Romanarum quae supersunt*, 3 vols., ed. U. Boissevain (Berlin 1901). For Zonaras' use of Cassius Dio, see the classic study of F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford 1964) 2–3, 195–203. More recent studies which look at Dio's work and make heavy use of Zonaras include P. Swan, *The Augustan Succession: A Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 55–56* (Oxford 2004); B. Simons, *Cassius Dio und die Römische Republik* (Berlin, 2009); V. Fromentin, 'Zonaras abrégiateur de Cassius Dion: à la recherche de la préface perdue de l'Histoire romaine', *Erga-Logoi* 1 (2013) 23–39.

5 For an overview of Plutarch's reception in Byzantium, see A. Garzya, 'Plutarco a Bisanzio', in I. Gallo (ed.), *L'eredità culturale di Plutarco dall'antichità al Rinascimento* (Naples 1998) 15–27; M. Pade, 'The reception of Plutarch from Antiquity to the Italian Renaissance', in M. Beck (ed.), *A Companion to Plutarch* (Chichester 2014) 531–43, particularly at 535–6; N. Humble, 'Plutarch in Byzantium', in F. Titchener, A. Zadorojnyi (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plutarch* (Cambridge) [forthcoming]. I should like to thank Prof. Noreen Humble for allowing me to read her study prior to the publication of the volume. Sophia Xenophontos has written about the presence of Plutarchean material particularly in the works of Nikephoros Basilakes and John Tzetzes: see S. Xenophontos, 'Resorting to rare sources of Antiquity: Nikephoros Basilakes and the popularity of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* in twelfth-century Byzantium', *Parekbolai* 4 (2014) 1–12; Xenophontos, "'A living portrait of Cato": self-fashioning and the classical past in John Tzetzes' *Chiliads*', *Estudios bizantinos* 2 (2014) 187–204.

Plutarch's biographies were valuable sources of historical information about the Greek, and perhaps more importantly, the Roman past, which was inextricably linked with the history of the Byzantine state.⁶ Byzantine literati particularly appreciated the moral and ethical character of the *Lives* and would frequently consult them to derive models for comparison and emulation.⁷ Plutarch's *Lives*, moreover, played a key role in the development of the biographical style of writing, noted in Byzantine historical accounts from the tenth century onwards, and offered useful templates for imperial biographies.⁸

The purpose of this article is to investigate Zonaras' treatment of the *Lives* in conjunction with the reminiscences of Plutarch's biographies in other universal chronicles, to examine the uses to which the Plutarchean material is put in the *Epitome*, and, finally, in the light of these considerations, to assess Zonaras as an author.

Plutarch's *Lives* in Byzantine Chronicles

The historical material covered by Plutarch in his *Lives* was to a great extent treated also by the later authors of universal chronicles. Byzantine chroniclers usually traced world history, commencing with the biblical story of the creation and reaching up to the author's own time. Within this wide chronological framework, they would cover subjects related to Greek antiquities, in addition to their central focus on Roman history. It may be surprising, therefore, that the great majority of them would not heavily rely on the *Lives* as historical and antiquarian sources.

Plutarch's biographies do not seem to have been among the texts exploited at all by John Malalas and the unknown writer of the *Chronicon Paschale*.⁹ In the works of George Synkellos, George the Monk, George Kedrenos, and Constantine Manasses one finds only short pieces of information taken from Plutarch. For example Synkellos draws on *Caesar* and cites 'Plutarch, the philosopher from Chaeronea' as his source, when he relates Julius Caesar's successful campaigns against the Gauls.¹⁰ Of particular note is Kedrenos' reference to the now lost *Life* of the emperor Tiberius. From the short fragment of *Tiberius* contained in Kedrenos' chronicle, we learn that the emperor, enraged at Thrassylus of Mendes,

6 A. Kaldellis, 'The Byzantine role in the making of the corpus of Ancient Greek historiography: a preliminary investigation', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 132 (2012) 71–85, particularly at 74–7.

7 A. Simpson, *Niketas Choniates: A Historiographical Study* (Oxford 2013) 290–1; Simpson, 'From the workshop of Niketas Choniates', in P. Armstrong (ed.), *Authority in Byzantium* (Farnham 2013) 259–68, at 262–3. See, for instance, A. Kaldellis, 'The original source for Tzimiskes' Balkan campaign (971) and the emperor's classicizing propaganda', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 37 (2013) 35–52; Xenophontos, 'Portrait of Cato'.

8 R. J. Jenkins, 'Constantine VII's portrait of Michael III', *Académie Royale de Belgique: Bulletin de la classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques (5e série)* 34 (1948) 71–7 [repr. in R. J. Jenkins, *Studies on Byzantine History of the 9th and 10th Centuries* (London 1970)]; Jenkins, 'The classical background of the Scriptorum post Theophanem', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954) 13–30.

9 Marianne Pade believes that there are traces of Plutarch's *Lives* in the *Chronicon Paschale*, but she does not give textual evidence that attests to this: Pade, 'The reception of Plutarch', 535.

10 George Synkellos, *Ecloga chronographica*, ed. A. Mosshammer (Leipzig 1984) 361.20–3; cf. Plutarch, *Caesar*, in *Vitae parallelae*, ed. Cl. Lindskog, K. Ziegler, 2nd edn, II.2 (Leipzig 1968) 15.

the astrologer of his court, considered his assassination.¹¹ Interestingly, the corpus of the *Lives* seems to have played a more important role for the *Chronological History* of John of Antioch.¹² This author employed numerous of Plutarch's Roman *Lives*, such as those dedicated to Romulus, Marius, Mark Antony, Brutus, Cicero, Marcellus, Lucullus and Sulla, as supplements to his principal source (in all likelihood, a Greek translation of the fourth-century *Breviarium* of Eutropius, or an intermediary source which made heavy use of it).¹³ What is particularly difficult, however, is to say whether these chroniclers drew directly on Plutarch's works or via some intermediary source.

This short overview of the presence of material from the *Lives* in the Byzantine chronographic tradition demonstrates that Plutarch's biographies were not particularly popular sources of information among authors of universal chronicles. This observation may allow a better appreciation of Zonaras' individual approach to and special interest in Plutarch. Indeed, Zonaras is the only chronicler to cite abundantly from a series of *Lives* in his work. More importantly, he can be seen to choose data from Plutarch and make additions or alterations to his source-text following a programme of his own.

Plutarch's *Lives* in Zonaras' Chronicle

Zonaras generally employs the *Lives* in much the same way as he handles all the major sources he consults in the course of his narrative. As an epitomiser he was particularly concerned with creating a concise account, with brevity being highlighted in the proem of the *Epitome*.¹⁴ To achieve this, he would significantly compress the texts at his disposal, summarizing them to the barest outline and omitting a large amount of information. Only sometimes does he quote his sources verbatim to emphasize a momentous event.¹⁵ As with the rest of his material, he heavily abridges and paraphrases Plutarch's

11 George Kedrenos, *Compendium historiarum*, in *Georgius Cedrenus, Ioannis Scylitzae ope*, ed. I. Bekker, I (Bonn 1838-9) 344.1-8.

12 The last few years have seen two editions of fragments attributed to John of Antioch: *Fragmenta ex historia chronica*, ed. U. Roberto (Berlin 2005), and *Fragmenta quae supersunt omnia*, ed. S. Mariev (Berlin 2008). For a discussion of the different ways in which the two editors use and present their material, see P. Van Nuffelen, 'John of Antioch, inflated and deflated. Or: How (not) to collect fragments of Early Byzantine historians', *Byzantion* 82 (2013) 437-50.

13 The indexes of sources in the editions illustrate the parallel passages between the *Lives* and John's fragments: 638-9 in Roberto's edition, and 579-80 in that of Mariev. For the complex relationship between John and Eutropius, see cxxxi-iv in Roberto's edition, and 33*-4* in Mariev's one. See also A. Cameron, review of *Umberto Roberto, Ioannis Antiocheni Fragmenta*, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (July 2006: 37).

14 Zonaras, I, 7.5-8 (proem). See also Grigoriadis, 'Prooimion', 341.

15 A characteristic example of this may be seen in the section in which Zonaras talks about the birth of Jesus. There, the chronicler quotes a long passage from Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* and a passage derived from a text which the Byzantines would erroneously ascribe to Josephus, the so-called *Against Plato* or *Discourse on Hades*: Zonaras, I, 479.1-480.14. It is worth pointing out here that Zonaras is likely to have made use of Josephus' material through an epitome of the *Jewish Antiquities*, see Th. Büttner-Wobst, 'Die Abhängigkeit des Geschichtschreibers Zonaras'.

narratives. He tends to give a rough outline of the events recounted in the *Lives*, skipping details and retaining essential data only.

Before proceeding to a closer examination of the Plutarchean material in the *Epitome*, it is necessary to point out that the chronicle is neatly articulated in two distinct sections. The first one covers Books 1–6 in the Pinder and Büttner-Wobst edition and deals with Jewish antiquities. Zonaras begins his narrative with the Creation and continues up to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. The second-to-last paragraph of the sixth book is clearly used as a concluding paragraph, as is expressly stated: ‘So, at that time the affairs of the Jews came to an end, when Jerusalem was captured in the final conquest by the Romans’ (‘Ἐνταῦθα μὲν οὖν τότε τὰ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐτελεύτησε πάθη, ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων τῆς Ἱερουσαλήμ τὴν τελευταίαν ὑποστάσης ἄλωσιν’).¹⁶ The reference to the Romans offers the author the chance to introduce in the final paragraph of Book 6 the theme of the second large section of his account. This section, Books 7–18, relates the history of the Roman Empire and Byzantium, starting with the mythical story of Aeneas’ arrival to Italy.

The way in which Zonaras inserts Plutarch’s material into his work differs depending on the section of the chronicle in which it is included. Information from Plutarch in the Jewish section is introduced into the narrative in the form of digressions, discrete units of information not closely related to the principal theme of the section. In this section the author uses two *Lives*, *Alexander* and *Artaxerxes*.

For his description of the apocalyptic visions of the Old Testament prophet Daniel he bases his narrative mostly on Theodoret of Cyrillus’ *Commentary on Daniel*. He digresses from Theodoret’s account in order to insert a short extract from the *Artaxerxes*,¹⁷ where Plutarch talks about scaphism (σκάφευσις), a type of death penalty known in ancient Persia. The term scaphism comes from the Greek word σκάφη (skiff) and denotes an extremely painful punishment in which the condemned person eventually died of septic shock.¹⁸ Analysing the prophet’s vision of the four beasts taken to symbolize the greatest empires of the world, Zonaras tries to account for the bear-like representation of the Persian Empire. He attributes it to the cruel behaviour Persians frequently exhibited, as is indicated by the gruesome punishments they inflicted upon their enemies, such as scaphism. Zonaras explains in detail what the punishment consisted of, essentially rewriting the relevant section of *Artaxerxes*. What is significant in this case is that Theodoret’s *Commentary on Daniel*, does not mention scaphism at all.

16 Zonaras, I, 561.17–8.

17 Zonaras, I, 223.12–224.15; cf. Plutarch, *Artaxerxes*, ed. Cl. Lindskog, K. Ziegler, in *Vitae parallelae*, 2nd edn, III.1 (Leipzig 1971) 16.3–7. For some remarks as to how Byzantine chroniclers integrated information from the biblical *Book of Daniel* into their compositions, see G. Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reicheschatologie: die Periodisierung der Weltgeschichte in der vier Grossreichen (Daniel 2 und 7) und dem tausendjährigen Friedensreichen* (Munich 1972) 57–61.

18 J. Lockwood, *Six-legged Soldiers: Using Insects as Weapons of War* (Oxford 2009) 36.

Πάντων γὰρ τῶν βαρβάρων οἱ Πέρσαι τιμωρήσασθαι ἀπηνέστεροι, σκαφεύσει τε καὶ δορᾶς ἀφαιρέσει πικροτάτας καὶ μακροτάτας τὰς κολάσεις τιθέμενοι. Εἰκὸς δὲ τισιν ἀγνοεῖσθαι τὴν κόλασιν τῆς σκαφεύσεως. Καλὸν οὖν καὶ ταύτην δῆλην θέσθαι τοῖς ἀγνοοῦσι.

Zonaras, I, 223.9–12.

Of all the barbarians, the Persians were the cruelest in their punishments, making them extremely painful and long by scaphisms and stripping (their enemies') skins. And it is reasonable that some may not know about the punishment of scaphism. It is good, therefore, to make it known to those who are ignorant of it.

Βαρβάρων γὰρ ἀπάντων ὠμότεροι περὶ τὰς τιμωρίας οἱ Πέρσαι, ἐκδοραῖς χρώμενοι, καὶ τῇ κατὰ μέρος τῶν μορίων ἐκτομῇ μακράς τὰς κολάσεις μηχανώμενοι, καὶ πικρὸν κατασκευάζοντες τοῖς κολαζομένοις τὸν θάνατον.

Theodoret of Cyrillus, *Interpretatio in Daniellem*, in *PG*, ed. J.-P. Migne, LXXXI (Paris 1857–66) 1416.3–6.

Of all the barbarians, the Persians are the most rough in terms of their punishments, making them long by stripping (their enemies') skins and castrating a part of the genitals, and rendering the death painful to those who are punished.

It is obvious, however, that Zonaras deliberately interpolates the punishment of scaphism so as to have the opportunity to embed in his chronicle this short piece of information from *Artaxerxes*.

The *Alexander* is the only Plutarchean biography of a famous Greek historical figure exploited in the *Epitome*. This does not look peculiar, of course, if we consider that the writer pays only scant attention to Greek history.¹⁹ It is characteristic, for example, that he relies on the works of Herodotus and Xenophon to derive information concerning the Persian Empire, rather than Greek antiquities.²⁰ The Macedonian ruler, though, was an exceptional case. He was still very much a central figure in Byzantine culture, as is proved, for instance, by the wide circulation and various recensions of the late antique *Alexander Romance*.²¹ Interested in relating a story that appealed to his audience, Zonaras would understandably make use of the material on Alexander available to him. This may also be the reason why he offers a relatively long and thorough presentation of the famous king. Based on Plutarch, the writer recounts the leader's military successes as well as memorable episodes that stand out in the narrative of his source, such as Alexander's meeting with Timocleia of Thebes and his exchange with the philosopher Diogenes.²² Notably, he gives some space to the divine signs that predicted Alexander's glorious future prior to his birth, his achievements as a young boy and the education he received from Aristotle.²³ In this respect the way in which Zonaras handles *Alexander* contrasts with his use of Plutarch's Roman *Lives*, from which he

19 E. Jeffreys, 'The attitudes of Byzantine chroniclers towards ancient history', *Byzantion* 49 (1979) 199–238, at 234.

20 Zonaras, I, 260–303 (for Xenophon), and 303–13 (for Herodotus).

21 For an English translation of the late antique *Alexander Romance*, see R. Stoneman, *The Greek Alexander Romance* (Harmondsworth 1991), which includes a detailed introduction in 1–23. There are eighteen Byzantine manuscripts, which date from the 11th to the 16th centuries and contain five different recensions of the Greek *Alexander Romance*: see N. Trahoulias, *The Greek Alexander Romance: Venice Hellenic Institute Codex 5* (Athens 1997) 29–31, 42–6, for an overview of the Byzantine recensions of the text.

22 Zonaras, I, 332.16–333.13.

23 Zonaras, I, 329.17–332.7.

tends to omit data that shed light on a figure's background.²⁴ The history of Alexander is introduced as an excursus from the main narrative line, when the chronicler discusses the Persian-Jewish conflicts.

Ἐπεὶ δὲ μνεῖαν τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου ὁ τῆς ἱστορίας λόγος πεποιήται, καλὸν καὶ τούτου τὰς πράξεις τε καὶ τὰ ἦθη καὶ ὅθεν κακὰ τίνων ἔφω κατ' ἐπιδρομὴν διηγῆσασθαι, καὶ οὕτως αὐτίς ἐπαναγαγεῖν τὸν λόγον πρὸς τὴν συνέχειαν·

Zonaras, I, 329. 9–16.

Now that the account of history made mention of Alexander, it is good to narrate in brief his deeds and dispositions, and whence he came and from whom he was born, and then once again to bring back the account to its continuation.

The passage about Alexander's deeds and character largely constitutes a complete and independent section in itself, which is only loosely attached to what precedes in the narrative. Understanding that his digression into the Plutarchean *Alexander* deviates considerably from the proper course of his account, Zonaras explains to his readers in advance that he will resume the main thread of his narrative once he has completed the history of Alexander.

The fact that on two occasions Zonaras departs from the main narrative of Jewish history in order to incorporate material from the *Lives* attests to his strong appreciation of Plutarch as a historian. It shows that Zonaras was intent on using the Plutarchean biographies he had at his disposal, even if they concerned topics to which he would refer only in passing. He would take pains to rework the narrative of his source texts in order to integrate data from Plutarch, eager of course to display his erudition and wide reading.

This is further corroborated when one looks at another text of Zonaras, known as *Speech Against Those People who Believe that a Natural Emission of Sperm is a Pollution*, addressing the question of whether ejaculation is unclean and therefore not acceptable for a monk.²⁵ The writer claims that a monk should not be considered impure on account of ejaculation itself, unless he has sexual fantasies of a woman which lead to the emission of sperm. Even in this case he does not commit a sin, if he is not able to mentally control such dreams. Consequently, he should not be judged and reproached, as if these dreams corresponded to reality. To support his view, Zonaras incorporates as a frame story a short tale known from the Plutarchean *Demetrius*.²⁶ The opening statement reads: 'It would not be disagreeable to give with a story some weight to the argument. The story is as follows...' ('Οὐκ ἄχαρι δὲ καὶ τὸ ἐξ ἱστορίας δοῦναι τῷ λόγῳ

24 See below 10–11.

25 John Zonaras, *Λόγος πρὸς τοὺς τὴν φυσικὴν τῆς γονῆς ἐκροὴν μίασμα ἡγουμένους*, in *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*, ed. G. A. Rhalles, M. Potles, IV [Athens 1854 (repr. Athens, 1966)] 598–611. For an investigation of the text, see M. Th. Fögen, 'Unto the Pure All Things Are Pure: the Byzantine canonist Zonaras on nocturnal pollution', in J. Ziolkowski (ed.), *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in European Middle Ages* (Leiden 1998) 260–78 (the translation of the title at 261).

26 See Plutarch, *Demetrius*, in *Vitae parallelae*, ed. Cl. Lindskog, K. Ziegler, 2nd edn, III.1 (Leipzig 1971) 27.

ροπήν τινα. Ἡ δ' ἱστορία'') The tale features a man that fell in love with a woman named Thonis, who would repeatedly reject his advances in spite of the great amount of money he offered her. Ultimately the flame of his love died out when he dreamt of having sexual intercourse with her. Thonis then asked to receive her payment, a request not granted to her by the man. She took the matter to Bokchoris, the leader of the state, who asked the man to bring into the court the amount of gold Thonis demanded of him. Bokchoris then moved the purse with the gold back and forth in the sunlight and urged the woman to receive the shadow as her payment, implying that fantasies are only shadows of the truth. This digression is reflective of Zonaras' high regard of Plutarch, since the ancient author is the only pagan source on which he relies in his treatise. Aside from *Demetrius*, he makes use only of writings penned by well-known Church fathers, such as those of Paul, Dionysius of Alexandria, Athanasius of Alexandria, and Basil the Great.

To return to the *Epitome*, the *Lives* are of greater usefulness to the author in the second section of the work, when he presents the history of the Roman Empire. He draws upon a series of Roman *Lives* in cases when the relevant books of Cassius Dio are not available to him, namely *Romulus*, *Numa*, *Publicola*, *Camillus*, *Aemilius*, *Pompey*, *Caesar*, *Brutus* and *Antony*.²⁷ His extreme interest in the biographies of distinguished historical figures of ancient Rome is closely connected to the great attention he pays to Roman antiquity in general. Zonaras' quest for Byzantium's Roman antecedents fit well in the broader intellectual context of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a period which seems to have witnessed an intensification of interest in Old Rome.²⁸ Some indications of this are offered, for example, by contemporary legal manuals and treatises, such as Michael Psellos' *Synopsis Legum*, a text that explains several Roman juridical terms, or Michael Attaleiates' *Ponema Nomikon*, in which we find a short account of the history of Roman jurisprudence.²⁹ Psellos' *Historia Syntomos*, moreover, and the historical works of Attaleiates and Nikephoros Bryennios clearly echo their authors' preoccupations with the Empire's ancient Roman origins.³⁰ Dio, too, must have been

27 That Zonaras did not have all the books of Dio's work at his disposal is made clear at the end of Book 10, where he apologizes to his readers for leaving out of his narrative the events of the late Republican period. As he says, this is because he was unable to find the books which recounted these events, although he repeatedly asked his friends to search for them: Zonaras, II, 297.

28 For an extensive presentation of the subject, see A. Markopoulos, 'Roman antiquarianism: aspects of the Roman past in the Middle Byzantine period (9th–11th centuries)', in E. Jeffreys, F. Haarer, J. Gilliland (eds.), *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, London, 21–26 August, 1* (Aldershot 2006) 277–97. See also Magdalino, 'Kaiserkritik', 343; Macrides, Magdalino, 'Fourth Kingdom', 121–2.

29 Michael Psellos, *Synopsis legum*, in *Poemata*, ed. L. Westerink (Stuttgart, Leipzig 1992) 123–77; Michael Attaleiates, *Πόνημα νομικὸν ἤτοι σύνοψις πραγματικῆς*, in *Jus Graecoromanum* ed. J. and P. Zepos, VII (Athens 1931), 411–97. For an extensive analysis of the two texts, see W. Wolska-Conus, 'L'école de droit et l'enseignement du droit à Byzance au XI^e siècle', *Travaux et Mémoires* 7 (1979) 1–107, at 79–97 (for Psellos' text), and 97–101 (for Attaleiates' text).

30 For Psellos' *Historia Syntomos*, see Markopoulos, 'Roman antiquarianism'. For Attaleiates' *History*, see D. Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (Tempe 2012). For Bryennios, see L. Neville, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-century Byzantium: The Material for History of Nikephoros Bryennios* (Cambridge 2012) 5–6, 37–8, 89–111.

quite a popular author among learned men of the time. Apart from Xiphilinos who epitomized his history, Kekaumenos, John Tzetzes, and Eustathios of Thessalonike would also include excerpts of Dio's work in their own.³¹ Although the great emphasis Zonaras places on the Roman past fits into this pattern of nostalgia for ancient Rome, it may also be viewed as a result of the chronicler's individual interest in the Roman Empire, and particularly in the forms of Roman government.³² His use of Plutarch's *Lives* assists him in describing the evolution of the Roman political constitutions over time. By selecting Plutarchean material which deals with renowned figures of Republican Rome and the early Roman Empire, he manages to partly repair the loss of certain sections of Dio's history and thus give a more or less uninterrupted account of the Roman political history.

In the Roman section of the *Epitome*, Plutarch is either the single source that provides the fundamental narrative articulation of the text, or is combined with data drawn from Dio to form the spine of the chronicle. For his account of Romulus, the first king and mythical founder of Rome, Zonaras' account is based solely on *Romulus*, offering essentially a summary of the text. Moving on to cover the reign of Romulus' successor, Numa Pompilius, he draws heavily on *Numa* from the second chapter of the text onwards.³³ Thereafter the author leaves Plutarch aside for a while. He consults Dio's history to talk about the five kings of Rome until the overthrow of the monarchy, but soon resumes the use of Plutarch and summarizes *Publicola* for his narrative of the well-known Roman consul.³⁴ He continues to closely follow Dio until he reaches the consulship of Camillus, a point at which he is able to incorporate into his account a considerable amount of material from *Camillus*.³⁵ Afterwards, Dio's work becomes Zonaras' main authority for a great portion of his text, until the late Republican period. The only notable Plutarchean material is the closely paraphrased short speech of the famous Roman general Aemilius Paullus to the Persian king Perseus, when the latter was brought to Amphipolis.³⁶

The presentation of the late Roman Republic, contained in Book 10, is slightly more complex. Here, the chronicler mixes a large store of information taken from different *Lives* with material from Dio. He integrates these pieces of information into his text

31 Xiphilinos' *Epitome* is reprinted in Boissevain's edition of Cassius Dio. For an analysis of Xiphilinos' treatment of Cassius Dio, see Millar, *Dio*, 2–3, 195–203; C. Mallan, 'The style, method, and programme of Xiphilinos' *Epitome* of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*', *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies* 53 (2013) 610–44. For Kekaumenos' *Strategikon*, see *Raccomandazioni e consigli di un galantuomo*, ed. M. D. Spadaro (Alexandria 1998) 44–242; Ch. Roueché, 'The literary background of Kekaumenos', in C. Holmes, E. Waring (eds.), *Literacy, Education and Manuscript Transmission in Byzantium and Beyond* (Leiden 2002) 111–38, at 124–6. Tzetzes consults Dio's work in his commentary of Lykophron's *Alexandria*. For Tzetzes' and Eustathios' use of Dio, see the introduction in Dio's *Roman History*, trans. E. Cary, I (London 1914–27), xxiii.

32 Macrides, Magdalino, 'The Fourth Kingdom', 127–8.

33 Zonaras, II, 5.19–18.4 (for Romulus), and 18.5–23.5 (for Numa).

34 Zonaras, II, 42.17–49.21.

35 Zonaras, II, 75.21–91.7.

36 Zonaras, II, 274.17–275.7.

without naming the different sources from which they originate. Schematically, the compositional structure of this part of the narrative is as follows:

Sources	Zonaras: Book 10
Plutarch's <i>Pompey</i>	chs 1–5
Plutarch's <i>Caesar</i>	chs 6–8
Plutarch's <i>Caesar and Pompey</i>	chs 9–10
Plutarch's <i>Caesar</i>	ch. 11
Dio's <i>Roman History</i>	chs 12–18
Dio's <i>Roman History</i> and Plutarch's <i>Brutus</i>	chs 19–20
Dio's <i>Roman History</i>	ch. 21
Dio's <i>Roman History</i> and Plutarch's <i>Antony</i>	ch. 22
Dio's <i>Roman History</i>	chs 23–28
Dio's <i>Roman History</i> and Plutarch's <i>Antony</i>	chs 29–31
Dio's <i>Roman History</i>	chs 32–39

One of the principles that dictates the author's selection of his material is avoiding thematic overlap, which is understandably observed between certain *Lives*. Zonaras would not repeat the same material found in different *Lives*, despite slight modifications in the manner in which Plutarch reworked his narrative to draw the reader's attention to the protagonist of each *Life*. Such repetitions would unnecessarily prolong his account and tire his audience as a result. For example, Zonaras skips the first chapter of the *Numa*, where Plutarch briefly recounts the legend about the mysterious disappearance of Romulus, and draws on the *Romulus* instead, in which this episode is discussed more extensively.³⁷ The chronicler also attempted to combine the narrative of his sources, in case they partly overlapped with one another. This becomes evident when he stops drawing on the *Pompey* for a while and starts deriving material from the *Caesar*. At this point, Zonaras tell us that:

“Ἰνα δὲ μὴ δις τὰ αὐτὰ ἱστορῆται, ἐν τοῖς περὶ Καίσαρος τὰ λοιπὰ τοῦ Πομπηίου εἰρήσεται, τῇ περὶ ἐκείνου συνεπιπτοντα ἱστορίᾳ.

Zonaras, II, 314, 6–8.

So as not to narrate the same things twice, I will narrate the rest of Pompey's story along with the story of Caesar, because it coincides with it.

This statement is particularly eloquent, for it reveals something of the chronicler's own method of work. It indicates that Zonaras would select different sources in order to turn the focus of his narrative to certain historical figures. In this case, he relies on *Pompey* to discuss the statesman's career and individual achievements. However, when Plutarch's text broaches the subject of Pompey's relationship to Caesar, Zonaras prefers to leave the *Pompey* aside and exploit the *Life* dedicated to Caesar. This betrays his intention to push Pompey to the 'background' of his narrative and bring Caesar to the

37 See Zonaras, II, 16.16–18.5; cf. Plutarch, *Romulus*, in *Vitae parallelae*, ed. H. Gärtner, K. Ziegler, 5th edn, I.1 (Leipzig 2000) 27–9.

forefront. Later on, he places emphasis on Pompey's downfall and tragic death by selecting once again material from *Pompey*, where the focus of the narrative is naturally on the central figure of the *Life*.³⁸ A second example of this strategy can be seen in the way in which Zonaras collates information from Dio and Plutarch to talk about the Battle of Philippi.³⁹ The chronicler draws on Dio to give the events of the battle through the eyes of the victors, Octavian and Antony. However, to relate the assassination of Crassus and the fate of Brutus afterwards, he opts to consult *Brutus*, thus inviting his readers to view the aftermath of the battle from the perspective of the defeated Brutus. This is also the reason for which he changes his sources in the description of the Battle of Actium.⁴⁰ It is Dio's text that provides information for the battle itself. The chronicler, though, relies on the Plutarchean *Antony* to narrate what followed immediately afterwards. The material he derives from *Antony*, including the scene in which Cleopatra finds Antony sitting in silence at the prow of the ship, highlights the general's miserable state after his humiliating defeat.

There are some further considerations on Zonaras' approach to the Roman *Lives* which are worth mentioning. A comparison between the text of the *Lives* and the corresponding sections of the *Epitome* reveals that the chronicler had evidently less taste for the detailed and comprehensive portrayals of Roman individuals than his source. He supplies very little of the general information about the characters' background and most distinctive features usually found in the introductions and early chapters of the *Lives*. He does not talk about Numa's education and origins, nor does he refer to Publícola's lineage and notable qualities. He excludes Plutarch's general remarks on Camillus' career and achievements contained in the opening chapters of *Camillus* and pays limited attention to the portrait the Roman historian draws of Pompey at the beginning of his *Life*. In his presentation of Caesar, moreover, Zonaras omits all material provided by Plutarch about Caesar's education and gradual rise to power. In a similar fashion, comments and judgments scattered throughout the *Lives* about the personalities of historical figures are normally also left out of the narrative.⁴¹

It can be noted, additionally, that the chronicler shows limited interest in aspects of ancient Roman society and civilisation, as demonstrated by the omission of material concerning social institutions, traditions, and customs of the early Roman Empire. For example, Zonaras excludes from his text the numerous foundation myths of the Roman nation appearing in *Romulus*, as well as information about festivals, means of worship, laws, and religious institutions introduced by the first Roman kings, including both the

38 Zonaras, II, 325.7–327.15; cf. Plutarch, *Pompey*, in *Vitae parallelae*, ed. Cl. Lindskog, K. Ziegler, 2nd edn, III.2 (Leipzig 1973) 74–80.

39 Zonaras, II, 359.1–366; cf. Dio, *History*, 47.35–48; Plutarch, *Brutus*, in *Vitae parallelae*, ed. Cl. Lindskog, K. Ziegler, 2nd edn, II.1 (Leipzig 1964) 43–5.

40 Zonaras, II, 395.5–399.2 Cf. Dio, *History*, 50.11–35; Plutarch, *Antony*, in *Vitae parallelae*, ed. Cl. Lindskog, K. Ziegler, 2nd edn, III.1 (Leipzig 1971), 66–8.

41 See, for example, *Pompey*, 39 and 46; *Caesar*, 17 and 55.

Vestal virgins and the *Salii* priests.⁴² Neither does he tell us of the unlucky days of the Romans, or the feast of the *Nonae*, about which we read in *Camillus*.⁴³ It is therefore certainly not coincidental that Plutarch's descriptions of the temples erected in Rome do not attract the chronicler's attention either.⁴⁴

It is not hard to understand why Zonaras saw fit to exclude such material from his composition. Information about the characters of Roman individuals as well as details about everyday life in ancient Rome were not immediately relevant to the twelfth-century readers and were therefore cut away. The writer evidently tried to tailor his Plutarchean material to the needs and interests of the contemporary audience. Significantly, though, he maintains in his narrative Roman elements which were still connected to Byzantine culture in some way. He sees fit, for instance, to tell us of the reformation of the Roman calendar instituted by Numa, who introduced January and February into the calendar and created the twelve-month year.⁴⁵

The *Epitome's* passage dedicated to the reign of Numa deserves particular attention, for it mirrors Zonaras' aims to adapt the Roman *Lives* of Plutarch to the social, religious and cultural context of his own time. Although the chronicler was inclined to abridge the extensive portraits of his exemplar, in the case of Numa, he did so fulfilling his own moralising agenda. In the opening chapters of his *Life*, Numa is described as a virtuous, self-disciplined and wise man, who, averse to all kinds of entertainment, devoted himself to the service of the gods.⁴⁶ We read that, seeking solitude after his wife's passing, Numa:

ἐκλείπων τὰς ἐν ἄστει διατριβὰς ἀγρὰυλεῖν τὰ πολλὰ καὶ πλανᾶσθαι μόνος ἤθελεν, ἐν ἄλσεσι **θεῶν** καὶ λειμῶσιν **ιεροῖς** καὶ τόποις ἐρήμοις ποιούμενος τὴν δίαίταν.

Numa, 4.1-4.

forsaking the ways of city folk, determined to live for the most part in country places, and to wander there alone, passing his days in groves of the gods, sacred meadows, and solitudes.⁴⁷

At this point, Plutarch also recalls the legend of Numa's purported union to the nymph Egeria, thanks to whom he was given divine wisdom. Indeed, one of the key elements of Plutarch's depiction of Numa is his strong connection with the divine.

42 *Romulus*, 1-2, 21-2; Plutarch, *Numa*, in *Vitae parallelae*, ed. Cl. Lindskog, K. Ziegler, 2nd edn, III.2 (Leipzig 1973), 7, 9, 10-2.

43 Plutarch, *Camillus*, in *Vitae parallelae*, ed. H. Gärtner, K. Ziegler, 5th edn, I.1 (Leipzig, 2000), 19, 33.

44 *Romulus*, 19; Plutarch, *Publicola*, in *Vitae parallelae*, ed. K. Ziegler, 4th edn, I.1 (Leipzig, 1969) 4, 15; *Camillus*, 20, 32.

45 Zonaras, II, 21.21-22.7; cf. *Numa*, 18.

46 For Numa's portrayal by Plutarch, see Ph. Stadter, *Plutarch and his Roman Readers* (Oxford 2014) 246-57.

47 For the translation, see *Plutarch Lives, Volume I: Theseus and Romulus. Lycurgus and Numa. Solon and Publicola*, trans. B. Perrin (London and Cambridge Mass., 1914) 317.

Zonaras now, echoing his source text faithfully, introduces Numa as a 'man who was known to all for his virtue' ('ὄντα ἄνδρα γνώριμον πᾶσι δι' ἀρετήν').⁴⁸ He eliminates, however, all references to Numa's devotion to the Roman gods, including his 'marriage' to Egeria. Indicative of this are the two minor, but telling, alterations to the aforementioned extract that he makes.

Ὁ δὲ Νομᾶς ἐκλιπὼν τὰς ἐν ἄστει διατριβὰς ἀγραυλεῖν τὰ πολλὰ καὶ διατρίβειν ἤθελεν ἐν λειμῶσι καὶ ἄλσεσιν.

Zonaras, II, 19.21-22.

Numa, forsaking the city folk, determined to live for the most part in country places and to live in groves and meadows.

In this case, the chronicler copies Plutarch almost verbatim, only deleting elements suggestive of Numa's connection to paganism.

The image which emerges of Numa later on in the Plutarchean text is that of the ideal secular and religious ruler. In chapter 8 of the *Numa* (*Numa* 8), for example, Numa is presented as a just and peace-loving king, who tried to tame the harsh and warlike temper of the Roman people. To achieve this, he would organize sacrifices, processions and dances in honour of the gods, rituals which were both beneficial and pleasing to the people.⁴⁹ Launching an extensive programme of legislation, moreover, he introduced a series of political and religious reforms. Through his laws, Numa aimed to regulate the Romans' relationship to and worship of their gods. This is exemplified by his ordinances against the human- or beast-like representation of deities. For a very long period of time, therefore, Romans did not erect shrines or idols to venerate their gods, for they understood that only spiritually could they approach the divine.⁵⁰ Changing the religious practices current in his time, Numa banished blood sacrifices too.⁵¹ In chapter 16, moreover, Plutarch writes that, to secure peace among citizens, the king distributed land to those who were destitute, as he considered poverty one of the reasons people would resort to criminal activity.⁵²

These accomplishments must have made a strong impression on Zonaras, who repeats each one of them. Once again, however, the omissions in his narrative are striking. We can look particularly at how he reworks *Numa* 8. Although he informs us that the Roman leader managed to soften the fierce disposition of his subjects, he does not tell us of the means through which he was able to achieve this, namely by organizing several festivities and celebrating pagan deities.⁵³ More remarkable still, he 'conceals' from his audience the ideological context from which Numa's religious policy is said to have originated: the doctrines of the Greek philosopher Pythagoras. The chronicler does

48 Zonaras, II, 19.13.

49 *Numa*, 8.1-3.

50 *Numa*, 8.7-8.

51 *Numa*, 8.8.

52 *Numa*, 16.3

53 Zonaras, II, 20.21-2.

not copy Plutarch, who claims that Numa introduced bloodless sacrifices in imitation of Pythagorean rituals, and offers his own explanation instead, which is the belief that ‘gods, who are the guardians of peace and justice, should be clear of murders’ (δεῖν γὰρ τοὺς θεοὺς, εἰρήνης καὶ δικαιοσύνης φύλακας ὄντας, φόνου καθαρὸς εἶναι).⁵⁴ Although this statement is not attributed directly to Numa, it serves to emphasise the piety of the Roman king.

Throughout the Plutarchean text readers are invited to understand the king’s exemplary attitude as a result of the great influence the Pythagorean philosophy exerted on him.⁵⁵ Not surprisingly, Zonaras excludes from his account all the pro-Pythagorean material contained in his source. By deliberately omitting such information from his narrative, the chronicler aims to play down Numa’s pagan background and draw a picture of a king who essentially embodies the qualities of a good Christian. He presents us with a Roman leader who managed to bring peace to his people, forbade them to venerate idols and taught them to relate to the divine through some kind of ‘prayer’. He is also viewed as an example of philanthropy, seeking to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. It is clear that Zonaras saw that the *Numa* was a text which had the potential to undergo a ‘Christianisation’ of sorts.⁵⁶ This then elucidates both the author’s awareness of the inherent ethical and moral purposes of the *Lives*, as well as his inventiveness in adjusting Plutarch’s text so as to make it more meaningful to Byzantine readers.⁵⁷

One more passage of the chronicle deserves particular attention. At a certain point in his narrative, Zonaras makes a parallel between a Roman statesman and a Greek one, namely the Roman king Tarquinius Superbus and Thrasybulus, the tyrant of Miletus in the seventh century BC.⁵⁸ Just as Plutarch arranges his *Lives* in pairs, the chronicler too juxtaposes the story of a Greek historical figure with that of a Roman. As we read in the *Epitome*, Sextus, the son of Tarquinius who seized power in the city of Gabii, asked his father how he could surrender the city to him. Rather than sending a written reply to his son, Tarquinius cut down the tallest stalks of corn in his field, implying that Sextus must primarily exterminate the most prominent of the Gabii citizens. Zonaras recalls that Herodotus narrates a similar story. Periander of Corinth appealed to Thrasybulus for advice on rulership. Thrasybulus responded by cutting the tallest stalks of corn in his field, meaning that he should by all means eliminate the most distinguished

54 Zonaras, II, 21.7–8.

55 See Stadter, *Roman Readers*; J. Colman, ‘The philosopher-king and the city in Plutarch’s *Life of Numa*’, *Perspectives on Political Science* 44/1 (2015) 1–9.

56 As has been noted, one of the principal reasons of Plutarch’s popularity in Byzantium was the fact that his overall moral attitude was in broad agreement with Christian ethics: see Garzya, ‘Plutarco’, 24–5; Humble, ‘Plutarch’.

57 Zonaras was not the only Byzantine writer to have proceeded to such instances of creative adaptation of a Plutarchean *Life*. For example, see Xenophontos, ‘Portrait of Cato’, 194, 203–4, in which it is shown that Tzetzēs tried to rework Plutarch’s narrative of Cato the Elder in order to reconcile the Roman character of the text with traits of Hellenism which started to emerge during the twelfth century.

58 Zonaras, II, 37.3–14.

of his subjects who might pose a threat to his authority. Zonaras combines pieces of information from two different sources available to him, Herodotos and Dio, and presents them in a parallel format. Although the author used individual *Lives* only, it might be tempting to speculate that in this case he was influenced by Plutarch as a literary model, and attempted to imitate the broader organisational scheme of his exemplar.

Conclusions

To recapitulate, unlike his fellow chronographers, Zonaras makes heavy use of Plutarch's *Lives* in his *Epitome*. There are references and allusions to the *Lives* in other universal chronicles as well, but these are scarce and rather limited in scope compared to the great deal of information included by Zonaras in his own text. The digressions into *Artaxerxes* and *Alexander* make it clear that the author held the Plutarchean biographies in high regard; one observes that he was keen on tampering with his sources or deviating from the proper course of his narrative in order to exploit the Plutarchean material available to him. An additional reason why Zonaras drew extensively on the *Lives*, in particular those of Roman individuals, is that he sought to reclaim parts of Dio's history which were lost to him, and in this way give a timeline of the development of the Roman polity. The great interest he exhibits in a number of Plutarch's Roman *Lives* places him at the heart of contemporary scholarly activity, as it corresponds to the vogue for Roman antiquities observed among Byzantine literati of the period. At the same time, though, it echoes the chronicler's own intellectual pursuits and cultural attitudes.

Zonaras selects and arranges the data he derives from the Roman biographies of Plutarch in such a manner so as to lay greater emphasis on a certain figure at the expense of another. The type of information he systematically cuts away from his account, attempting to write succinctly, betrays his individual preferences and tastes as an author. Unlike Plutarch, he was disinclined to elaborate on the background and the personality of a Roman figure and offer many details on aspects of Roman civilisation, subjects which were alien to the current Byzantine traditions. Furthermore, by implicitly 'christianising' the portrait of Numa, Zonaras tried to tailor the Roman material he took from Plutarch to suit the social and religious milieu of his time. The structure of the *Lives* in pairs might have also provided him the inspiration to adopt the same pattern in his presentation of the material he collected from different sources. Such processes of selection, adaptation and reinterpretation indicate that Zonaras' treatment of his source texts was governed by certain sets of principles, and show the chronicler to be not merely a copyist of earlier writings, but instead a compiler with his own authorial preoccupations.