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Plutarch’s Chaironeia: the Local Horizon of World Empire

What kind of wine did Plutarch drink? Did he grace his table with wine from his local world of

Chaironeia in Boiotia, or did he prefer to drink imported products from the global market of the

Roman Empire? These are seemingly innocent questions, yet their prospective answers could

contain a plethora of information about Plutarch and his views of his world. My project explores

those views as they shine through the writings of Plutarch. Specifically, I ask: what defined

Plutarch’s local world? How can we understand its relationship to the growing empire of Rome?

And, how is all of this reflected in Plutarch’s writings? I approach these questions by reviewing the unique aspects of Chaironeia to challenge the idea that there is no fixity for Plutarch’s local world. Plutarch spent most of his life in his hometown of Chaironeia, staying active in the community despite his growing fame, remaining there, he tells us, “lest it become any smaller” (Demosthenes 2.2). But this is not a simple statement. Rather, it is indicative of my second argument that Plutarch uses Chaironeia to establish a narrative of loyalty to Rome, and to set himself up as an exemplum. As a citizen of Chaironeia and Rome, Plutarch is a most eminent figure that allows us to study the tensions and horizons between the local and the global in the ancient Mediterranean. This project is thus situated at the fruitful juncture of the lively, ongoing debate about localism and connectivity in the ancient Mediterranean.