

CONCEPTS CONCERNING THE MOON IN PLUTARCH'S *DE FACIE IN ORBE LUNAE* – FOUND, INHERITED, OR BORROWED IDEAS

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In considering ancient Greco-Roman concepts about the moon, particularly with regard to the transmission and legitimisation of different ideas from different sources, Plutarch's dialogue *On the Face on the Moon* (*De facie in orbe lunae*) offers an unusual opportunity to consider a number of distinct views, presented in deliberate juxtaposition within the same work. Indeed, the dialogue form of the work offered Plutarch the possibility of approaching his topic from very different perspectives; the dialogue is a particularly convenient way to introduce distinct – even opposing – concepts to readers. As Scott Montgomery has noted, *De facie* has seemingly been used as an “encyclopedia in the history of lunar studies”: he reminds us of Dreyer's earlier remark, in his *History of Astronomy*, that “all that the most enlightened minds of antiquity could make out with regard to the constitution of the moon is contained in a most delightful dialogue by Plutarch”.¹ In the dialogue *On the Face on the Moon*, the participants in the conversation discuss the nature of the “face” that appears on the moon, as well as the role of the moon in the cosmos. And, while Plutarch does not include absolutely everyone's ideas about the moon, he does cover a good deal of conceptual territory, including questions about the sources and authority of knowledge itself.

1 MONTGOMERY, 1999, p. 32; DREYER, 1953, p. 189. Regarding Plutarch's frequent engagement with ideas about the moon, LESAGE GARRIGA, 2015, pp. 145-154 has suggested that “it would actually be easier to list [his] works in which the moon is not mentioned than those in which at least some mention is made”.

The questions posed by the editors of this volume on finding, inheriting, or borrowing are particularly relevant when reading Plutarch's *De facie*, as he himself seems to have grappled with – and offered some answers to – similar questions. In fact, one can imagine that *De facie* is a response to the questions: What are the mechanisms of legitimisation? Are there special fields of knowledge that are linked to certain societies or social groups? How is “foreign” knowledge given authority? To what extent are the ascriptions by the sources concerning the origin of a specific piece of knowledge (found, inherited, or borrowed) traceable and liable to confirmation? Or might they be unattested, or even fictitious?²

Plutarch (born before 50 and died after 120 CE) was from Boeotia in central Greece; he studied philosophy in Athens, visited both Egypt and Italy, and lectured and taught in Rome. Known as a philosopher and biographer, he was also a priest at Delphi, and played an important role in the revival of the shrine there. Especially through his travels, he had opportunities to encounter many different perspectives. Furthermore, he was heir to several distinct traditions, both philosophical and religious.

Many of his works are dialogues, written in the tradition of Aristotle rather than that of Plato: that is, with long speeches and the appearance of the author himself. Plutarch is, however, regarded as a Platonist, and he was particularly interested in Plato's *Timaeus*. As in the *Timaeus*, the dialogue juxtaposes the ideas and arguments of natural philosophers and mathematicians with mythological accounts. The conversation and discussions reported in *On the Face on the Moon* include the consideration of questions grounded in the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition, as well as mathematical astronomy, relating to the appearance of the moon, its size and material constitution, and also the recounting – in a rather circuitous route, from foreign sources – of what seem

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- 2 Several ancient authors offered what might be regarded as satirical or even pseudo-scientific narrative accounts of travel to the moon; see, for example, Lucian's *A True Story* and Antonius Diogenes' *The Wonders Beyond Thule* (described in Photius' Summary [*Bibliotheca* 166], produced in the ninth century CE); see REARDON, 1989 for translations of both.

I have previously discussed Plutarch's *De facie*, in TAUB, 2008, pp. 57-78. The present contribution builds upon my earlier work, and has benefitted from comments made by participants of the *Finding, Inheriting or Borrowing?* conference held at Mainz in 2016. I am grateful for the impetus to consider further the sources of Plutarch's concepts relating to the moon on an earlier version of this paper, and for further suggestions from Jochen Althoff and John Patterson.

to be rather exotic stories (*mythoi*) about the moon – whether it is inhabited, its relationship to the soul, and its association with various gods and goddesses.

There are questions that emerge from reading Plutarch's dialogue that are relevant to our consideration of the finding, borrowing and/or inheriting of concepts related to the moon. Does the juxtaposition of rational and mythological concepts suggest anything regarding the relative status of these two seemingly contrasting approaches to describing the moon? Are certain types of knowledge more valued than others? Are we meant to have a view regarding the status of the concepts discussed by experts, educated laymen and Strangers?

Overview of *De facie in orbe lunae*

The structure of *De facie* can be understood as a dialogue set within another dialogue. Both are recounted by the same narrator, Lamprias, who reports an earlier conversation to the participants of the “larger”, surrounding dialogue. These participants are: the narrator (Lamprias), two mathematicians (Menelaus and Apollonides, with the latter identified as a geometrician), a Stoic (Pharnaces), an Aristotelian named Aristotle, Lucius, who represents the Academic position, Theon, a literary authority, and finally Sulla, who is identified as a Carthaginian (942 C), who tells a story at the end.

The work, as we have it, begins with the words of Sulla (quoted by the narrator, Lamprias), retelling a myth he heard from a Stranger, who in turn had heard it from the chamberlains of Kronos (945 D); the identity and status of Kronos will be considered below. This is followed by Lamprias' report of an earlier “scientific” discussion about the moon, involving named contributors, and the ensuing conversation by participants in the larger dialogue. The work ends (at 920 B) with Lamprias, recounting the words of Sulla, and the myth that he had heard from an unnamed Stranger.³

We do not have the original beginning of the work, and it is impossible to know what is missing.⁴ The surviving text begins in this way (920 B):

3 “Strangers” play important roles in some Platonic dialogues, notably the *Statesman* and the *Laws*.

4 The beginning of the text appears to be mutilated, see the introduction to Plutarch's *The Face on the Moon* by CHERNISS, 1984, pp. 26f., and 2. As it stands, the structure of the work does not unfold until the reader is well in to the text.

[...] ὁ Σύλλας ταῦτ' εἶπε. “τῷ γὰρ ἐμῷ μύθῳ προσήκει κάκειθὲν ἔστι· ἀλλ’ εἰ δεῖ τι πρὸς τὰς ἀνὰ χεῖρα ταύτας καὶ διὰ στόματος πᾶσι δόξας περὶ τοῦ προσώπου τῆς σελήνης προανακροῦσασθαι, πρῶτον ἡδέως ἂν μοι δοκῶ πυθέσθαι.”

These were Sulla’s words. “For it concerns my story [*mythos*] and that is its source; but I think that I should first like to learn whether there is any need to put back for a fresh start to those opinions concerning the face of the moon which are current and on the lips of everyone.”⁵

That the “fresh start” is done to report an earlier conversation only becomes completely clear well into the text (at 937 C), when the narrator, Lamprias, states: “So we for our part, said I, have now reported as much of that conversation as has not slipped our mind”, indicating the fragility of memory and knowledge. The style of Lamprias’ narration – and his concern for what might have slipped his mind – gives a sense of reportage. The reader is encouraged to think that the discussion may have actually taken place amongst real people. Sulla’s opening words also reinforce the immediacy of the conversation. He emphasises that the question of why the moon shows a “face” is widely debated: everyone is talking about it.

The work may be read as being composed of two principal sections, each with its own style of explanation. The first part (920 B-940 F) is usually regarded as an exercise in natural philosophy, that is, as a “scientific” debate about the nature of the moon and its place in the cosmos; the second part reports a myth, closing the discourse.

Plutarch, through Lamprias, at various points provides information about the sources of scientific concepts, and of myths. Some individuals are identified by their area of expertise, others by their allegiance to particular philosophical schools, for example that of the Stoics.⁶ Portions of the earlier conversation are reported as indirect discourse (e.g. at 933 F), but most of the debate is presented directly, as an ongoing exchange.

In the “scientific” section of the work, a number of different – sometimes conflicting – natural philosophical and mathematical explanations of the appearance of the moon’s “face”, the source of the moon’s light, the material

5 Translation: CHERNISS, 1984, p. 35. All translations from Plutarch’s *De facie* are from this edition, unless otherwise noted.

6 RIHLL, 1999, pp. 76-80 introduces the participants in terms of their areas of expertise.

constitution of the moon, and whether it belongs to the terrestrial or the celestial region of the cosmos are presented. Rival views associated with the several different philosophical schools (the Academy, the Lyceum, and the Stoa) are aired. The principal participants are Lamprias and Lucius, well-educated men, but not specialists. Nevertheless, the standard of conversation is sophisticated, and specialist, technical works are quoted (for example, Aristarchus' *On the Sizes and Distances*).

So, for example, Lamprias reports the Stoic philosopher Clearchus' explanation of the face on the moon (920 F-921 A):

[...] εἰκόνας ἐσοπτρικὰς εἶναι καὶ εἶδωλα τῆς μεγάλης θαλάσσης ἐμφαινόμενα τῇ σελήνῃ τὸ καλούμενον πρόσωπον. ἥ τε γὰρ ὄψις ἀνακλωμένη πολλαχόθεν ἄπτεσθαι τῶν οὐ κατ' εὐθυωρίαν ὁρωμένων πέφυκεν, ἥ τε πανσέληνος αὐτῇ πάντων ἐσοπτρῶν ὁμαλότητι καὶ στιλπνότητι κάλλιστόν ἐστι καὶ καθαρότατον.

[W]hat is called the face consists of mirrored likenesses, that is images of the great ocean reflected in the Moon, for the visual ray when reflected naturally reaches from many points objects which are not directly visible and the full Moon is itself in uniformity and lustre the finest and clearest of all mirrors.⁷

This is one of many explanations debated by the group; it presumes a degree of familiarity with contemporary science, including optics and meteorology. The discussants do not shy away from mathematical arguments, as when later in the conversation Lucius, speaking to the mathematician in the group in particular, reportedly said (930 Af.):

αἰσχύνομαι μὲν [...] σοῦ παρόντος, ᾧ φίλε Μενέλαε, θέσιν ἀναιρεῖν μαθηματικὴν ὥσπερ θεμέλιον τοῖς κατοπτρικοῖς ὑποκειμένην πράγμασιν· ἀνάγκη δ' εἰπεῖν ὅτι τὸ πρὸς ἴσας γίνεσθαι γωνίας ἀνάκλασιν πᾶσαν οὔτε φαινόμενον αὐτόθεν οὐθ' ὁμολογούμενόν ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ διαβάλλεται μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν κυρτῶν κατόπτρων, ὅταν ἐμφάσεις ποιῇ μείζονας ἑαυτῶν πρὸς ἓν τὸ τῆς ὀψεως σημεῖον, διαβάλλεται δὲ τοῖς διπτύχοις κατόπτροις, ὧν ἐπικλιθέντων πρὸς ἄλληλα καὶ γωνίας ἐντὸς γενομένης ἐκάτερον τῶν ἐπιπέδων διττὴν ἔμφασιν ἀποδίδωσι [...].

In your presence, my dear Menelaus, I am ashamed to confute a mathematical proposition, the foundation, as it were, on which rests the subject of catoptrics [mirrors]. Yet it

7 Translation: CHERNISS, 1984, p. 41.

must be said that the proposition, “all reflection occurs at equal angles,” is neither self-evident nor an admitted fact. It is refuted in the case of convex mirrors when the point of incidence of the visual ray produced images that are magnified in one respect; and it is refuted by folding mirrors, either plane of which, when they have been inclined to each other, and have formed an inner angle, exhibits a double image [...].⁸

The discussion is thoughtful and reflects the high level of education of the participants. Numerous well-known authorities and their texts – including the celebrated philosopher Posidonius (ca. 135-ca. 51 BCE) and the astronomer Aristarchus, who observed the summer solstice in 280 BCE – are cited and in some instances quoted.⁹ The scientific section is challenging in its detail, requiring careful attention in order to be understood, and presuming, in places, a familiarity with natural philosophical and mathematical concepts informing ideas about the moon, including its place in the cosmos (whether in the celestial or the terrestrial region), its material constitution, and the source of its light.

After this scientific section (to 937 C), Lamprias suggests that the time has come to hear Sulla’s promised story. Up to that point, the participants in the dialogue had been out walking; he suggests “if it is agreeable, let us stop our promenade and sit down upon the benches, that we may provide him with a settled audience” (937 C-D). With this change in setting and posture – a further indication of the presumed contrast between science and myth – an eschatological myth dealing with the question of what happens at death is retold by Sulla. The myth describes the role of the moon in the cosmos: the moon is the place to which souls go when they have left their bodies after death (945 A) or have not yet been born into their earthly bodies (943 A).

Sulla refers to his account specifically as a myth (*mythos*), and he makes clear he is simply reciting; he is not the author of the story he tells, having heard it from an unnamed Stranger who had himself learned of it from “the chamberlains and servitors of Cronus [Kronos] (945 D)”. Before sharing the myth, Sulla relates the Stranger’s¹⁰ account of how he had travelled to Carthage (where he met Sulla; 942 B-C). The status of Carthage for Plutarch is

8 Translation: CHERNISS, 1984, pp. 107-109.

9 Posidonius at 929 D and Aristarchus at 932 B.

10 The Stranger (*xenos*) is first mentioned as such at 942 B; the term *xenos* has a range of connotations, some friendlier, some more hostile, than others. For parallels in Plato, cf. note 3.

somewhat ambiguous. Prior to recounting the myth, the Stranger (who is first referred to as such at 941 B) explained to Sulla how he had come to the Isle of Kronos from a continent on the other side of the Atlantic, west of Britain.¹¹ In other words, a place exotic and possibly unknown.

Lamprias' report of Sulla's recounting of the Stranger's myth is lengthy and detailed, as was his report about the earlier conversation about the various concepts relevant to understanding the moon's "face". He also refers to philosophers (including Plato and Xenocrates, head of the Academy from 339-314 BCE, at 943 F), and to the work of geometers (at 944 A), as well as to the Homeric poems, and numerous mythological figures. In other words, numerous and varied sources are cited. And various aspects of the moon, including its material composition (943 F-944 A) are explained; especially its special status and role in our cosmos.

Sulla reported the Stranger's words (942 C): "among the visible gods he said that one should especially honour the Moon, and so he kept exhorting me to do, inasmuch as she is sovereign over life." The moon is responsible for the human soul. The Stranger explained that "most people rightly hold man to be composite but wrongly hold him to be composed of only two parts" (943 A); rather, for the composition of man, "earth furnishes the body; the Moon the soul, and the sun furnishes the mind (*nous*) for the purpose of his generation even as it furnishes light to the Moon herself." Indeed, the moon's most important role (for humans) is as the resting place of the soul, when it is not located within a human body. So, after death "the substance (*physis*) of the soul is left upon the Moon and retains certain vestiges and dreams of life as it were" (944 F); "the Moon is the element [of souls], for they are resolved into it as the bodies of the dead are resolved into earth" (945 A).

The dialogue ends as it begins in our version, with the words of Sulla, stating: "This I heard the Stranger relate and he had the account, as he said himself, from the chamberlains and servitors of Kronos. You and your companions, Lamprias, may make what you will of the tale."

How are Lamprias' listeners and Plutarch's readers meant to form an opinion of what they've heard and read? As Cherniss points out, "hearing it

11 This geographical introduction (941 A-942 C) has attracted a great deal of interest. Johannes Kepler, who published a Latin translation and extensive notes on Plutarch's dialogue, was convinced that this continent was America. See CHERNISS, 1984, p. 21. See also Plutarch's *De Defectu Oraculorum* in which Kronos is described being held on an island near Britain, in COLE BABBITT, 1936, p. 405.

from Lamprias now, the reader has [the mythological] part at fourth hand and the geographical introduction of the Stranger at third hand.”¹² Was this distance from the original source significant for Plutarch in his presentation of the account of the function of the moon in the cosmos? How is one meant to judge the source(s) of the concepts described? Philip Hardie argues that Plutarch’s approach to myth “varies according to the hat that he chooses to wear at any particular time”; how confident are we that we can identify Plutarch’s headgear in *De facie*?¹³ Indeed, it is the diverse wardrobe of “hats” displayed by Plutarch that is distinctive about his approach to presenting differing concepts about the moon. At the end of the work, auditors and readers are invited to choose what they will.

The Sources of the Concepts Presented in the *De facie*

Lamprias, the narrator, provides information about the background of the various individuals named in *De facie*, including Sulla, and the various concepts related to different ways of understanding the moon. The information about philosophical affiliation and expertise enables the auditors of Lamprias’ narration of the earlier conversation, as well as the readers of the work, to form their own opinions, and to evaluate the ideas presented to themselves. The sources of the concepts related to understanding the moon – both the scientific theories and the mythological accounts – are identified, presumably with the view of helping the readers to assess those ideas.

The background of some of the individuals named in the dialogue is indicated by the part they play in the discussion, or by overt references. Lamprias is the narrator of the entire work and mostly speaks in the first person; he also quotes those who took part in the earlier discussion. He is knowledgeable about various philosophical positions, criticising Stoic doctrine and supporting positions identified with the Academy (922 F); he may be

12 CHERNISS, 1984, p. 14.

13 HARDIE, 1992, pp. 4743-4745. HAWES, 2014, p. 127 cautions that “a kind of poststructuralist position has emerged which emphatically highlights the gulf which separates our modern, textual sense of myth as a canonical genre from the more flexible conceptions of ancient writers”; such a flexible conception is helpful when reading *De facie*.

taken to represent the educated layman.¹⁴ Sulla refers to Carthage as his country (942 C),¹⁵ his main role in the dialogue is to recount the myth. It is not certain whether he should be regarded as a “mythographer”;¹⁶ he is not credited by Plutarch here with collecting other myths and his status as a purveyor of myth is ambiguous. Some of the participants in the dialogue are learned experts in relevant subjects, such as astronomy; others, like Sulla, are presented as having acquired their information almost by chance. At certain points in the dialogue, specialist expert knowledge is highly valued; at others, the reader is left wondering how they should judge the sources of information and explanations on offer.

We can now return to the questions posed earlier: Does the juxtaposition here of rational and mythological concepts suggest anything regarding the relative status of these two seemingly contrasting approaches to describing the moon? Are we meant to have a view regarding the status of the concepts discussed by experts, educated laymen, and Strangers?

To begin to situate Plutarch's *De facie* against the background of his predecessors, Plutarch's work had clear and deliberate resonances with Plato's dialogue *Timaeus*. Indeed, Plutarch's reliance on the form, content, and spirit of the *Timaeus* enabled him to emphasise his allegiance to Platonic ideas. Much of the content of Plato's dialogues can be described as an attempt by him to solve various problems in a rational and analytical manner. However, in a number of Platonic dialogues, myth seems to take over, offering, as it were, another way of describing the world – an alternative to analytic discourse.¹⁷ But the status of the myth is not always made clear, and is sometimes ambiguous. Both Plato's *Timaeus* and Plutarch's *De facie* are concerned with “scientific” cosmology, and concepts regarding the order and character of astronomical bodies – including the moon – as well as the place of humans in the cosmos. Furthermore, both the *Timaeus* and the *De facie* incorporate myth

14 Some of the participants here play a role in other of Plutarch's dialogues, and there may be the expectation that readers will be familiar with these. For example, Plutarch identifies Lamprias as his brother in *The Obsolescence of Oracles*; Plutarch himself does not appear in *De facie*.

15 Carthage, on the coast of what is today Tunisia, was originally a Phoenician colony, later a powerful rival to Rome, and eventually a provincial centre within the Roman Empire.

16 As suggested by RHLL, 1999, p. 77.

17 LAMBERTON, 2001, p. 150. On Plutarch's use of Plato's *Timaeus*, see HAMILTON, 1934, pp. 24-30; DEMULDER, 2015, pp. 199-214.

as part of their conceptual toolkit, used to explicate their cosmological explanations. In other words, “scientific” (including mathematical) accounts do not displace the mythological. As in the *Timaeus*, Plutarch’s dialogue juxtaposes the concepts and arguments of natural philosophers and mathematicians with mythological explanations. Plutarch was certainly familiar with Plato’s dialogues; the inclusion of the myth in the *De facie* very likely was inspired by Plato’s own incorporation of myth, particularly in his cosmological dialogue, the *Timaeus*; at certain points in Plutarch’s dialogue, the *Timaeus* is glimpsed in the background.

Let’s recall that as Timaeus begins his account of the cosmos and its origin (29 C 7-D 3), he addresses Socrates and warns that:

ἀλλ’ ἐὰν ἄρα μηδενὸς ἦττον παρεχώμεθα εἰκότας, ἀγαπᾶν χρή, μεμνημένους ὥς ὁ λέγων ἐγὼ ὑμεῖς τε οἱ κριταὶ φύσιν ἀνθρωπίνην ἔχομεν, ὥστε περὶ τούτων τὸν εἰκότα μῦθον ἀποδεχομένους πρέπει τούτου μηδὲν ἔτι πέρα ζητεῖν.

If we can furnish accounts no less likely than any other, we must be content, remembering that I who speak and you my judges are only human, and consequently it is fitting that we should, in these matters, accept the likely story and look for nothing further.¹⁸

Timaeus presents an account of the origin of the cosmos as a “likely story”, with many mythic elements. Timaeus rejects the possibility of arriving at the truth. To attempt to search for a completely true account of the world would be futile, for human beings can only hope to offer an explanation that is plausible. The *Timaeus* has the form of only an “*eikos mythos*”, because Timaeus (through Plato) is describing an object of the phenomenal world: the whole cosmos. Such phenomenal objects cannot be described in terms of absolute truth, because they do not have the absolute truth and stability which exists only in ideas. Strictly speaking, for Plato there are no scientific accounts about the phenomenal world, only myths which approach truth (29 A 2-D 3). At 29 B 3-D 3, Timaeus explains that:

ὥδε οὖν περὶ τε εἰκόνοσ καὶ περὶ τοῦ παραδείγματος αὐτῆς διοριστέον, ὥς ἄρα τοὺς λόγους, ὧν πέρ εἰσιν ἐξηγηταί, τούτων αὐτῶν καὶ συγγενεῖς ὄντας· τοῦ μὲν οὖν μονίμου καὶ βεβαίου καὶ μετὰ νοῦ καταφανοῦς μονίμους καὶ ἀμεταπτώτους – καθ’ ὅσον οἶόν τε

18 Translation: CORNFORD, 1937, p. 23.

καὶ ἀνελέγκτοις προσήκει λόγοις εἶναι καὶ ἀνικῆτοις, τούτου δεῖ μηδὲν ἐλλείπειν – τοὺς δὲ τοῦ πρὸς μὲν ἐκεῖνο ἀπεικασθέντος, ὄντος δὲ εἰκόνος εἰκότας ἀνὰ λόγον τε ἐκείνων ὄντας· ὅτι περ πρὸς γένεσιν οὐσία, τοῦτο πρὸς πίστιν ἀλήθεια. ἐὰν οὖν, ὃ Σώκρατες, πολλὰ πολλῶν πέρι, θεῶν καὶ τῆς τοῦ παντὸς γενέσεως, μὴ δυνατοὶ γιγνώμεθα πάντη πάντως αὐτοὺς ἑαυτοῖς ὁμολογουμένους λόγους καὶ ἀπηκριβωμένους ἀποδοῦναι, μὴ θαυμάσης· ἀλλ’ ἐὰν ἄρα μηδενὸς ἦττον παρεχόμεθα εἰκότας, ἀγαπᾶν χρή, μεμνημένους ὡς ὁ λέγων ἐγὼ ὑμεῖς τε οἱ κριταὶ φύσιν ἀνθρωπίνην ἔχομεν, ὥστε περὶ τούτων τὸν εἰκότα μῦθον ἀποδεχομένους πρέπει τούτου μηδὲν ἔτι πέρα ζητεῖν.

Concerning a likeness, then, and its model we must make this distinction: an account is of the same order as the things which it sets forth—an account of that which is abiding and stable and discoverable by the aid of reason will itself be abiding and unchangeable (so far as it is possible and it lies in the nature of an account to be incontrovertible and irrefutable, there must be no falling short of that); while an account of what is made in the image of that other, but is only a likeness, will itself be but likely, standing to accounts of the former kind in a proportion: as reality is to becoming, so is truth to belief. If then, Socrates, in many respects concerning many things—the gods and the generation of the universe—we prove unable to render an account at all points entirely consistent with itself and exact, you must not be surprised. If we can furnish accounts no less likely than any other, we must be content, remembering that I who speak and you my judges are only human, and consequently it is fitting that we should, in these matters, accept the likely story and look for nothing further.¹⁹

Timaeus’ speech can be read as a creation myth, in which the *Demiurgos*, the craftsman, fashions the world, its contents and inhabitants. Yet, in the development of that mythic account, mathematical concepts and details underpin the structure of the cosmos and, necessarily, the account of its creation. In other words, the creation myth is closely bound to a scientific account, even if it is only “likely”.

Plutarch seems to have developed these ideas further, in that he does not accept scientific accounts of the moon as impossible; however, they are supplemented by mythological accounts.²⁰ In the *De facie*, the science and the myth play important but separate roles. Furthermore, the perception that the two approaches – of science and myth – are completely separate has been reflected in the way the work has been studied by modern scholars. For us it is

19 Translation: CORNFORD, 1937, p. 23.

20 Cf. ERLER, 2007, pp. 89-92.

crucial to recognise that the work is a dialogue, in which both myth and science play significant roles, offering alternative ways to encounter differing concepts used to explicate the nature of the moon.

In the surviving version of Plutarch's dialogue, the discussion of the various scientific concepts and explanations of the nature of the moon is framed by a reference by Sulla to the myth that he recounts in the closing portion of the text. In the opening lines, he is quoted by Lamprias as having said (920 B): "For it concerns my story and that is its source; but I think that I should first like to learn whether there is any need to put back for a fresh start to those opinions concerning the face of the moon which are current and on the lips of everyone." We've seen these lines before, but now let's consider Lamprias' own response (920 Bf.):

τί δ' οὐκ ἐμέλλομεν [...] ὑπὸ τῆς ἐν ταύταις ἀπορίας ἐπ' ἐκείνας ἀπωσθέντες; ὥς γὰρ οἱ ἐν νοσήμασι χρόνιοις πρὸς τὰ κοινὰ βοηθήματα καὶ τὰς συνήθεις διαίτας ἀπειπόντες ἐπὶ καθαρισμὸν καὶ περιαιψα καὶ ὀνείρους τρέπονται, οὕτως ἀναγκαῖον ἐν δυσθεωρήτοις καὶ ἀπόροις σκέψεσιν, ὅταν οἱ κοῖνοι καὶ ἔνδοξοι καὶ συνήθεις λόγοι μὴ πείθωσι, πειρᾶσθαι τῶν ἀτοπωτέρων καὶ μὴ καταφρονεῖν ἀλλ' ἐπάδειν ἀτεχνῶς ἑαυτοῖς τὰ τῶν παλαιῶν καὶ διὰ πάντων τάληθές ἐξελέγχειν.

What else would you expect us to have done, [...], since it was the difficulty in these opinions that drove us from our course upon those others? As people with chronic diseases when they have despaired of ordinary remedies and customary regimens turn to expiations and amulets and dreams, just so in obscure and perplexing speculations, when the ordinary and reputable and customary accounts are not persuasive, it is necessary to try those that are more out of the way and not scorn them but literally to chant over ourselves the charms of the ancients and use every means to bring the truth to test.²¹

Suggesting that a frustration with the "usual" accounts of the face of the moon spurred him on, Lamprias offered a detailed report of a discussion of various scientific explanations of the figure seen in the moon, including a weakness of our vision (920 C).

Not only is the scientific discussion juxtaposed with myth, but, by one reading, the scientific discussion is *completed* by the myth that closes the dialogue, for it is the concept that the moon is inhabited by human souls that

21 Translation: CHERNISS, 1984, p. 35.

establishes the purpose of the moon in the cosmos. Indeed, it is this concept that allows a teleological message to underpin the dialogue: the moon is earthy in its constitution and thus, in principle, habitable; it therefore can serve a purpose as the home of souls without bodies. Recall that we are told (at 944 F) that after death “the substance of the soul is left upon the Moon and retains certain vestiges and dreams of life as it were”. Furthermore, “the Moon is the element [of souls], for they are resolved into it as the bodies of the dead are resolved into earth” (945 A). Just as our bodies have a place after death, so do our souls. Once again we glimpse Timaeus’ account of the Demiurgos, who (41 D 4-E 1)

[...] καὶ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸν πρότερον κρατῆρα, ἐν ᾧ τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ψυχὴν κεραννὺς ἔμισγεν, τὰ τῶν πρόσθεν ὑπόλοιπα κατεχεῖτο μίσγων τρόπον μὲν τινα τὸν αὐτόν, ἀκήρατα δὲ οὐκέτι κατὰ ταῦτά ὡσαύτως, ἀλλὰ δεύτερα καὶ τρίτα. συστήσας δὲ τὸ πᾶν διεῖλεν ψυχὰς ἰσαριθμούς τοις ἄστροις, ἐνειμέν θ’ ἐκάστην πρὸς ἑκάστον.

turned once more to the same mixing bowl wherein he had mixed and blended the soul of the universe, and poured into it what was left of the former ingredients, blending them this time in somewhat the same way, only no longer so pure as before, but second or third in degree of purity. And when he had compounded the whole, he divided it into souls equal in number with the stars, and distributed them, each soul to its several star.²²

The number of souls equals the number of stars; each individual soul is assigned to a particular star. And, once the souls were divided, they were shown the nature of the universe, after which each was implanted in a human body. After completing their life after this first incarnation, those souls that lived well on earth return to their own original star, to reside there happily (42 B 3-5). Sulla’s account of the Stranger’s myth reminds us of Plato’s version of Timaeus’ “likely story”: instead of the stars, the moon now has special significance as the home of human souls. The Stranger’s myth is grounded – as it were – in Timaeus’ own, and Plutarch’s valorisation of myth is built upon Plato’s.

In *De facie*, scientific enquiry and mythological explanation are not set up as rivals; rather, they are presented as two complementary approaches to a full consideration of the nature of the moon. While expert knowledge is recognised and plays an important role in the discussion, the significance of a myth trans-

22 Translation: CORNFORD, 1937, p. 142.

mitted over distances of time, space and cultures is not derided. Furthermore, as is emphasised, we have not heard the full explanation until we have heard the recounting of the ancient myth. Plutarch intends that we should not only consider the accounts of the nature of the moon, but also the sources and avenues through which we encounter different concepts.

For this reason, it seems particularly appropriate to further consider the “finding, inheriting, or borrowing” that is hinted at by Sulla’s report of the Stranger’s account of the moon, which he, in turn, had heard from the chamberlains of Kronos. There are several intriguing features of the account, which lend layers of ambiguity to how the myth might be interpreted and judged, including the status of Sulla as a Carthaginian, as well as Kronos himself.

Sulla the Carthaginian plays a key role in *De facie*; his name is featured at the beginning of the mutilated version which survives, and his report of the Stranger’s account of the moon closes the work. That he was a Carthaginian is emphasised at various points (e.g., 942 C); he is a “foreigner”, who has a story to report, a story so important that the other participants in the dialogue are asked to make room for his delivery.

Sulla the Carthaginian in *De facie* may be the same as the Sextius Sulla, “a man who lacks neither learning nor charm” (Σέξτιος δὲ Σύλλας ὁ Καρχηδόνιος, οὔτε μουσῶν οὔτε χαρίτων ἐπιδείξ ἀνὴρ), mentioned by Plutarch in *Romulus* (chapter 15).²³ He may also be the Carthaginian Sulla who organised a welcome-back dinner for Plutarch when he returned to Rome (mentioned in *Quaestiones Convivales* 727 B).²⁴ Christopher Pelling regards Sulla as “clearly a very Romanised Carthaginian”, but notes that “this too is eloquent of the texture of this international society” in which both Sulla and Plutarch reside.²⁵

Indeed, elsewhere in his writings, namely his *Roman Questions* (76, 282 Af.), Plutarch displays his own cosmopolitanism, citing a Greek author, Castor of Rhodes, to whom he ascribes a similar view regarding the role of the moon as

23 In the context of a discussion of the etymologies of words relating to matrimony, rape, and spinning.

24 MINAR, 1961, p. 165, note d to 727 B: “Sextius Sulla is a frequent speaker, on a variety of topics, in the *Table-Talk*, and has an important role in the *De Facie*.” CHERNISS, 1984, p. 3 suggests that he “is probably the Sulla who appears as the interlocutor of Fundanus in the *De Cohibenda Ira* (note b, 453 A) but probably not the same as the Sulla of *Quaest. Conviv.* 636 A (ὁ ἑταῖρος) and 650 A (one of τῶν συνήθων)”.
25 PELLING, 2011, p. 210.

the resting place of souls. There, the question is asked: "Why do they that are reputed to be of distinguished lineage wear crescents on their shoes?" Plutarch wonders "Is this, as Castor says, an emblem of the fabled residence in the moon, and an indication that after death their souls will again have the moon beneath their feet; or was this the special privilege of the most ancient families?"²⁶ Here, Plutarch appears to be referring to Castor of Rhodes, the first century BCE author of a six-book *Chronological Tables* treating oriental, Greek, and Roman history;²⁷ he may also have been called "Philorōmaios".²⁸ Following on from his reference to the "most ancient families", Plutarch notes that "[t]hese were Arcadians of Evander's following, the so-called Pre-Lunar people", perhaps referring to the minor god, Evander, attested to mainly in Roman sources, who was said to have fled Arcadia and landed in Rome, transporting elements of Greek culture, and perhaps introducing the alphabet to Rome.²⁹ Whether Plutarch thought that this concept describing the role of the moon as a resting place for human souls was originally Greek, or Roman, or something else, is ambiguous.

And, what is the significance of Sulla, the purveyor of the myth about the moon, being described as being "from Carthage"? Historically, Carthage, with its Phoenician origins, was an important power and significant rival to Rome, until it was destroyed by the Romans during the Third Punic War, in 146 BCE (Plutarch, in his *Life of Cato the Elder* 27, recounts how Cato the Elder had declared that Carthage "must be destroyed", to save Rome from its threat). In the end, the city of Carthage was destroyed, while Rome annexed the remaining territory; in the process, many Carthaginians died, or became slaves. Carthage was eventually re-founded by Julius Caesar and Augustus; it once again became a major urban centre, now the capital of the province of Africa, a crucial "breadbasket" for the Roman Empire. Plutarch himself, in *On the Fortune of the Romans* (*De Fortuna Romanorum*) 317 F-318 A, describes how Fortuna once looked as if she would favour Carthage, only to decide instead to abide in Rome:

26 COLE BABBITT, 1936a, p. 115.

27 TRAPP, 2012, p. 290. See also Plutarch *De Iside et Osiride* 31, where he cites Castor as a source regarding the Egyptian sacrificial customs.

28 SMITH, 1867, p. 628.

29 DRUMMOND, 2012, p. 558.

Τῆς δὲ Τύχης ὁζὺ μὲν τὸ κίνημα καὶ θρασὺ τὸ φρόνημα καὶ μέγαλαυχος ἡ ἐλπίς, φθάνουσα δὲ τὴν Ἀρετὴν ἐγγὺς ἐστίν, οὐ περοῖς ἐλαφρίζουσα κούφοις ἑαυτὴν οὐδ' ἀκρόνυχον ὑπὲρ σφαίρας τινὸς ἵχνος καθεῖσα περισφαλῆς καὶ ἀμφίβολος πρόσεισιν, εἴτ' ἄπεισιν αἰδῆς· [...] οὕτως ἡ Τύχη καταλιπούσα Πέρσας καὶ Ἀσσυρίους Μακεδονίαν μὲν ἐλαφρὰ διέπτη καὶ ἀπεσεῖσατο ταχέως Ἀλέξανδρον, καὶ δι' Αἰγύπτου καὶ Συρίας περιφέρουσα βασιλείας διώδενσε, καὶ Καρχηδονίους στρεφομένη πολλάκις ἐβάστασε· τῷ δὲ Παλατίῳ προσερχομένη καὶ διαβαίνουσα τὸν Θύμβριν ὡς ἔοικεν ἔθηκε τὰς πτέρυγας, ἐξέβη τῶν πεδίων, ἀπέλιπε τὴν ἄπιστον καὶ παλίμβολον σφαῖραν. οὕτως εἰσῆλθεν εἰς Ῥώμην ὡς μενοῦσα καὶ τοιαύτη πάρεστιν ὡς ἐπὶ τὴν δίκην.

But swift is the pace of Fortune, bold is her spirit, and most vaunting her hopes; she outstrips Virtue and is close at hand. She does not raise herself in the air on light pinions, nor advance “poised on tip-toe above a globe,” in precarious and hesitant posture, and then depart from sight. [...], when she had deserted the Persians and Assyrians, had flitted lightly over Macedonia, and had quickly shaken off Alexander, made her way through Egypt and Syria, conveying kingships here and there; and turning about, she would often exalt the Carthaginians. But when she was approaching the Palatine and crossing the Tiber, it appears that she took off her wings, stepped out of her sandals, and abandoned her untrustworthy and unstable globe. Thus did she enter Rome, as with intent to abide, and in such guise is she present today, as though ready to meet her trial.³⁰

Plutarch Underscores the Ultimate Superiority of Rome over Carthage

Indeed, by Plutarch’s time of writing, Latin had become the official language of Carthage, then a provincial capital of the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, it seems likely that some Punic religious and linguistic traditions survived in and around the city. There remains a question of how “African” Sulla might have been: his name seems to be Roman, and not especially indicative of Punic origin.³¹ But, it is not even clear exactly what “Carthaginian” (or “Punic”) might signal; Sandro Filippo Bondi has cautioned that we cannot understand

30 Translation: COLE BABBITT, 1936, p. 331.

31 I thank John Patterson for his suggestions here.

“Punic” as referring to something that was culturally homogeneous.³² In the context of *De facie*, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill’s point about the “foreignness” of Carthaginians is apt: “if the Phoenicians play a persistent part in Greek history, their role in Roman history, through the Carthaginians, is even more central. Yet though Greek and Roman historians will not let us forget the Phoenicians of the east and west, they are always treated as ‘the Other.’”³³

Certainly, elsewhere in his writings Plutarch distinguishes between the abhorrent customs of the Carthaginians and the judiciousness of ancient Greeks. In *De superstitione* 13, he criticises the repugnant sacrificial practices of the Carthaginians, specifically related to the god Kronos (171 C):

Καρχηδονίοις οὐκ ἐλυσιτέλει Κριτίαν λαβοῦσιν ἢ Διαγόραν νομοθέτην ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς μήτε
τινὰ δαιμόνων μήτε θεῶν νομίζειν ἢ τοιαῦτα θύειν οἷα τῷ Κρόνῳ ἔθουν; οὐχ ὥσπερ
Ἐμπεδοκλῆς φησι τῶν τὰ ζῷα θυόντων καθαπτόμενος
μορφὴν δ’ ἀλλάξαντα πατὴρ φίλον υἱὸν αἰείρας
σφάζει ἐπευχόμενος μέγα νήπιος,
ἀλλ’ εἰδότες καὶ γινώσκοντες αὐτοὶ τὰ αὐτῶν τέκνα καθιέρουν, οἱ δ’ ἄτεκνοι παρὰ
τῶν πενήτων ὠνούμενοι παιδία κατέσφαζον [...].

[...], would it not have been far better for the Carthaginians to have taken Critias or Diagoras to draw up their law-code at the very beginning, and so not to believe in any divine power or god, rather than to offer such sacrifices as they used to offer to Cronos [Kronos]? These were not in the manner that Empedocles describes in his attack on those who sacrifice living creatures:

“Changed in form is the son beloved of his father so pious, who on the altar lays him and slays him. What folly!”

No, but with full knowledge and understanding they themselves offered up their own children, and those who had no children would buy little ones from poor people and cut their throats [...].³⁴

32 BONDÌ, 2014, pp. 58-67.

33 WALLACE-HADRILL, 2014, pp. 299f.

34 Translation: COLE BABBITT, 1928, p. 493. There are other ancient Greek and Roman texts which report child sacrifices to Kronos by the Carthaginians; for example, that credited to Kleitarchos in the *Scholia Platonica* 337 A, ALLEN et al., 1938; *Bibliotheca Historica* (*The Library of History*) by Diodorus Siculus in OLDATHER, 13.86 and 20.14; Quintus Curtius, *Historiarum Alexandri Magni Macedonis*, (*Histories of Alexander the Great*) 4.3, ROLFE, 1946, pp. 194-199. See also the discussion (with references) in XELLA et al., 2013, pp. 1202f.

Who was this Kronos to whom the Carthaginians sacrificed their children? And what are we to make of the references to Kronos in *De Facie*? Is this the same Kronos who was confined to an island by his son, Zeus? And, while Sulla – to some extent – may represent “Otherness” or even the foreign Carthaginian culture, in *De Facie* he also reports a myth he heard from a Stranger. The role assigned to this Stranger may intentionally signal a backward glance at Plato’s dialogues, for strangers appear in a number of his writings.³⁵ What are we to make of Sulla’s story, reported by a Stranger, who in turn had heard it from the “chamberlains and servitors” of Kronos? How are we meant to judge the value of different types of knowledge, based on such different (and ambiguously defined) sources?

Ambiguity in the Identification and Status of Kronos

Kronos first appears in the *De facie* at 941 A, where we are told by Sulla that there are a number of islands which lie five days sailing westward of Britain:

ὅν ἐν μιᾷ τὸν Κρόνον οἱ βάρβαροι καθεῖρχθαι μυθολογοῦσιν ὑπὸ τοῦ Διός, τὸν δ’ ὀγύγιον <Βριάρεων> ἔχοντα φρουρὰν τῶν τε νήσων ἐκείνων καὶ τῆς θαλάττης, ἣν Κρόνιον πέλαγος ὀνομάζουσι, παρακατωκίσθαι.

In one of these, according to the tale told by the natives, Cronus [Kronos] is confined by Zeus, and the antique <Briareos>, holding watch and ward over those islands and the sea that they call the Cronian main, has been settled close beside him.

Plutarch also wrote about Kronos, under guard by Briareos, in *De Defectu Oraculorum* 419 E-420 A, where Demetrius explained that there is an island near Britain, of which the inhabitants “said that in this part of the world there is one island where Cronus [Kronos] is confined, guarded while he sleeps by Briareus; for his sleep has been devised as a bondage for him, and round about him are many demigods as attendants and servants”.³⁶ A number of scholars

35 See note 3 and, for example, HALVERSON, 1997, pp. 75-102.

36 Translation: COLE BABBITT, 1936, p. 405. See note 11 above.

have suggested that the source of this story is a lost dialogue by Aristotle;³⁷ this is intriguing, because (as has already been noted), Plutarch's dialogues, with their long speeches, are in some ways stylistically more like those of Aristotle than those of Plato; it is, of course, possible that Plutarch was familiar with an Aristotelian work lost to us. In any case, Plutarch would have known Briareos acting as a guard over Kronos from Hesiod's *Theogony* (729-735). According to Hesiod, Kronos was the youngest son of Uranus (Heaven) and Gaia (Earth) (*Theogony* 137-138). He was notorious as a god who swallowed his own children, except for his son Zeus (and this omission was due to a trick: *Theogony* 453-491). Was this the same Kronos to whom the Carthaginians were alleged to have sacrificed children?

But, Kronos was also a celebrated king, representative of a previous Golden Age, described, for example, again by Hesiod but this time in the *Works and Days* (111). Plato also wrote about Kronos. In *The Statesman* (269 A 7-274 E 3), it is the Stranger who recalls the tale of Kronos' reign, and notes that: "We have often heard the tale of the reign of Kronos [...]. And how about the story that the ancient folk were earthborn and not begotten of one another?" The younger Socrates affirms, "That is one of the old tales, too [...]." The Stranger then recounts that how pleasant and easy life was under the reign of Kronos. In *The Statesman*, the age of Kronos is but a mere memory – a legend to be re-told – for those humans alive in the reign of Zeus, who must live their lives reliant on their own skills, benefited by the gifts and tuition of other, more practically-minded gods. Plato provides information about the good life under Kronos, but even as a Platonist, Plutarch draws upon other sources and other images of the god.

In *De Facie*, Sulla mentions that Kronos receives great honour in Carthage (942 C). Elsewhere, in *De Superstitione* 171 C, Plutarch disparagingly alludes to the sacrifices made to Kronos by the Carthaginians;³⁸ in *On the Delays of Divine Vengeance* (*De sera numinis vindicta*) 552 A, Plutarch notes that

37 WASZINK, 1947, pp. 137-149; WASZINK, 1950, pp. 639-651, and Bos, 1989.

38 See also COLE BABBITT, 1928, p. 493, note d, explaining that "Plutarch says (*Moralia*, 175 a and 522 a) that the practice was stopped by Gelon, tyrant of Syracuse, after his victory over the Carthaginians in 480 b.c. But see Diodorus, 20. 14 [mentioned above, note 34] which suggests that the practice was later revived. Cronos here is, of course, the Greek equivalent of Phoenician El (Hebrew Moloch or Baal). Cf. MOORE, 1897, p. 161". See also PALMER, 1997, pp. 63-65, on the identification of the Punic Saturn (thought of by the Greeks as a Punic Kronos, and Ba'al Hammon.

“Gelon was furthermore a stout champion of his country, and after defeating the Carthaginians in a great battle refused their suit for peace until he had added to the treaty the provision that they should no longer sacrifice their children to Cronus [Kronos].” There are several clear claims in Plutarch’s writings that the Carthaginians sacrificed to Kronos. Whether or not this was historically accurate (and the accuracy of Roman claims about Carthaginian sacrificial practices is debated),³⁹ does this complicate our view of Kronos, and that of the account of the purpose of the moon, attributed to his servants?

The mythological accounts of Kronos are “marked by paradoxes”, as noted by H. S. Versnel. He argues that “the stark contradiction between the extreme cruelty manifested in the first version [in the *Theogony*] and the utopian blessings in the second [in the *Works and Days*, echoed by the Stranger in Plato’s *Statesman*] has fostered conjectures concerning different origins”.⁴⁰ The Kronos-King-of-the-Golden-Age has been read by some as an “authentic Greek (or at least Indo-European) contribution”, with Kronos-the-horrible-child-eater taken to be the product of a different culture, perhaps that depicted in the Hittite version of the Hurrian Kumarbi (father of the gods) myths, argued by Hans Gustav Güterbock as being a forerunner to Hesiod.⁴¹ However, this “borrowing” of an “oriental” or Near Eastern myth by Hesiod (however indirect the transmission may have been) does not, as Versnel points out, explain the seemingly contradictory depictions of Kronos by this epic poet, one of the earliest Greek authors. Given the complications, paradoxes, and ambiguities inherent in the oldest Greek accounts of Kronos, we should not be surprised by the difficulties in tracing the precedents of Kronos’ servants’ myth about the moon in *De facie*.

A rather different possible reading of Plutarch’s Kronos has been suggested by A. P. Bos, who argues that *De Facie* provides information about Aristotle’s theology. Basing his argument on a consideration of Aristotle’s lost dialogues, Bos suggests that, in Aristotle’s theology, Kronos (in contrast with Zeus) had responsibility for the practical aspects of life. Significantly, Bos emphasises that Aristotle’s theology would have been a reaction against that of Plato;⁴² his interpretation of *De Facie* provides another, complicating, reading of the work,

39 See, for example, XELLA et al. cited in note 34 above, as well as SMITH et al., 2011, pp. 853-874; SMITH et al., 2013, pp. 1191-1199; SCHWARTZ et al., 2012, pp. 738-745.

40 VERSNEL, 2012, p. 395.

41 GÜTERBOCK, 1948, pp. 123-134.

42 BOS, 1989, p. 86.

serving to emphasise the inherent ambiguity contained therein. Whether or not Aristotle may be regarded as an important source for Plutarch's depiction of Kronos in *De Facie* is debatable; nevertheless, Bos hits upon a crucial point when he emphasises what he refers to as the "multiformity of the mythical tradition about Kronos".⁴³ Clearly, there are many layers of possible interpretation embedded in the reference to Kronos by Plutarch,⁴⁴ via Sulla.

With these ambiguities and layers of complication in mind, let's return to the questions posed earlier. How are we meant to judge the value of different types of knowledge, based on such different (and ambiguously defined) sources? Are there special types of knowledge that are linked to certain societies (Greek, Roman, Carthaginian, or Hurrian) or social groups (philosophers, mathematicians, members of the non-specialist educated cosmopolitan elite)?

Ambiguity permeates the discussion of various concepts related to the moon, its composition, and role in the cosmos within Plutarch's *De facie*. In terms of finding, inheriting, or borrowing, there is a great ambiguity about the sources themselves: even our answers to the question of what is Greek, what is Roman, and what is Carthaginian are blurred. This ambiguity is emphasised by the closing words of the dialogue: "You [...] may make what you will of the tale", an ambiguity – or even a particular form of scepticism – that Plutarch (apparently) deliberately emphasised.⁴⁵

Yet, the Stranger's myth, as recounted by Sulla, has clear and presumably deliberate links to Platonic myth. Furthermore, Kronos was very likely chosen because he represents very ancient time, and this lends more credibility and authority to the myth. This grounding of myth in distant antiquity – even incorporating elements of other, foreign cultures, such as Carthage – is, as G. R. Boys-Stones has argued, a characteristic of post-Hellenistic Platonism, of which Plutarch is one of the key witnesses. Plutarch believed that the "traditional theology of the Greek and ancient barbarian nations have their roots in an authoritative philosophy which derives as such from the earliest

43 BOS, 1989, p. 5.

44 See, for example, BALDRY, 1952, esp. pp. 84-86 on the reign of Kronos. Baldry suggests that Kronos was associated with the "good old days", first in Hesiod's *Works and Days* 111 and "later evidence shows that the association with Kronos was taken for granted both by writers and the common people". I thank Jochen Althoff for this reference.

45 KARAMANOLIS, 2016.

generations of men”. This valorisation of ancient wisdom is crucial for post-Hellenistic Platonists, who

believed that the unique philosophical tradition of Greece had been established on the basis of the achievement of a series of brilliant thinkers in the Classical and pre-Classical period who had succeeded in reconstructing the primitive truth in its entirety, and that, in consequence, the shortest road to truth would be the one that led back there through them.⁴⁶

Of course, some of this wisdom would have been conveyed in myth. Seemingly in direct contradiction to Plato, Plutarch thinks scientific accounts of nature and the cosmos possible. However, in his view, mythic accounts supplement the scientific. It may be that, for Plutarch, myths contain a higher truth than science. This view itself may have been a rather Platonic view, situated historically in Plutarch’s time and place. The philosophical milieu in which Plutarch wrote the *De Facie*, and shared the various ideas contained therein, strongly valued the knowledge to be gained by finding, inheriting and borrowing concepts from other – and more ancient – cultures.

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46 BOYS-STONES, 2001, pp. 111f. and 122.

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