

Chapter 4

THOMAS SCHMIDT, Université de Fribourg, Fribourg
 thomas.schmidt@unifr.ch.

Local Past and Global Present in Plutarch’s *Greek, Roman, and Barbarian Questions*

There is no doubt that Plutarch had an antiquarian-like curiosity for the past. This was certainly not his only way of approaching the past, but as Pascal Payen writes in his piece, “Plutarch the Antiquarian”, in *A Companion to Plutarch*,¹ “it seems evident that antiquarian knowledge is integral to Plutarch’s way of thinking and writing” and that it pervades his entire oeuvre. His antiquarian erudition is especially apparent in works such as the *Sayings of Kings and Commanders*, the *Bravery of Women*, the *Greek and Roman Questions*, and the nine books of *Table Talk*, but, as Payen rightly stresses, “Plutarch’s wealth of antiquarian erudition is not limited to a few treatises in the *Moralia* (...). [It] is also manifest in the *Lives*. (...) One cannot overemphasize the fact that the *Parallel Lives* contain an abundance of antiquarian knowledge by virtue of the fact that, in them, Plutarch explores all aspects of the past, including those areas where legend overlaps with history, such as foundation narratives, etymological myths, and religious practices”.² It could indeed be shown through a wealth of examples that ‘Plutarch the Antiquarian’ had a “passionate curiosity for the past”.³ To stay within the scope of this workshop, however, this paper will focus on Plutarch’s interest in local traditions.

¹ Payen 2014: 235. This article was originally published in French as Payen 2013.

² Ibid. 238 and 240.

³ Ibid. 235.

The Greek Questions

This interest in local traditions is especially visible in his *Greek Questions*, a series of 59 questions on various customs, institutions, and religious practices of the Greek world, of which Plutarch tries to explain the origins. As made clear by the very title of the treatise (*Αἰτίαι Ἑλλήνων*),⁴ this is an aetiological work, in the line of the long literary and scientific tradition of *Αἰτίαι* and *Προβλήματα*, known especially (but not only) from the school of Aristotle and the Peripatetics.⁵

In this work, Plutarch puts forward questions about various – often rather peculiar – practices or traditions of the Greek world, such as the following:⁶ “Why is it that among the Rhodians a herald does not enter the shrine of the hero Ocridion?” (QG 27); “Why is it that at the Thesmophoria the Eretrian women cook their meat, not by fire, but by the rays of the sun?” (QG 31); “Why is it that the statue of the Labrandean Zeus in Caria is fashioned holding an axe, but not a sceptre or a thunderbolt?” (QG 45); or “Why is it the custom for the women of Chalcedon, whenever they encounter strange men, and especially officials, to veil one cheek?” (QG 49).

In accordance with the aetiological tradition, most of these questions start with “why?” (διὰ τί) or its equivalents (διὰ τίνα αἰτίαν, τίνος διανοίας, τί δήποτε, τίς ἢ αἰτία, ἀπὸ ποίας αἰτίας), but the first word can also be “what?” (τί) – e.g., “What is the ‘wooden dog’ among the Locrians?” (QG 15) – or “who?” (τίς, τίνες) – e.g., “Who are the Perpetual Sailors among the Milesians?” (QG 32) – or “whence?” (πόθεν, ἀπὸ τίνος) – e.g., “Whence arose the proverbial saying ‘This is valid?’” (QG 42).⁷ The questions touch upon a great variety of aspects, customs and institutions which, following Nouilhan, Pailler, and Payen, can be classified into three main fields: (1) foundations and colonisation, (2) institutions, (3) religion

4 This is the title found in the *Lamprias Catalogue* (no. 166), a list of Plutarch’s works probably dating from the 3rd or 4th c. CE (see Ziegler 1949 and Irigoien 1986). The manuscript tradition, however, has either *Προβλήματα Ἑλληνικά* or simply *Ἑλληνικά*, by reference to the *Αἴτια Ῥωμαϊκά* which immediately precedes it in the manuscripts. As Plutarch himself (*Cam.* 19.12) refers to the latter as *Αἴτια Ῥωμαϊκά*, it seems plausible that the title of the *Greek Questions* was actually *Αἴτια Ἑλληνικά*. See Boulogne 2002: 179.

5 See e.g., Boulogne 1992; Harrison 2000; Grandjean 2008. Cf. also Payen 2014: 244.

6 In the following, QG stands for *Quaestiones Graecae*, QR for *Quaest. Romanae* and QB for *Quaest. Barbaricae*. All translations and Greek quotations of QC and QR are taken from Babbitt 1936, the other quotations from their respective volumes in the Loeb Classical Library. The standard commentary on the *Greek Questions* remains Halliday 1928. Recent commentaries include Nouilhan, Pailler, & Payen 1999; Boulogne 2002; Carrano 2007.

7 See the table in Payen 1998: 41 (also reproduced in Nouilhan, Pailler, & Payen 1999: 36).

and sanctuaries, in which the unifying aspects are the Greek language and the general framework of the Greek polis.⁸

This neat classification, however, does not account for the great diversity of subjects nor the feeling of perplexity and confusion one experiences when reading this work. This complexity is further enhanced by the large number of cities and places in which the various customs are located, as can be seen on the very convenient map drawn by Payen.⁹ Some localities appear more often than others, like Samos and Megara (both 5 times), and Delphi, Boiotia and Euboea are well represented too, but so are other cities, and it appears that the places mentioned in the *Greek Questions* actually cover the entire Greek world: putting the emphasis quite obviously on Central Greece and the Peloponnese, they also include the Ionian Islands, the South of Italy, Northern Greece, the Troad, the Bosphorus, the Ionian Coast, but also Crete, Cyprus and a number of small, remote and less well-known cities. There does not seem to be a unifying system at work in the *Greek Questions* (unless this randomness was part of Plutarch's plan, as K. Oikonomopoulou has recently argued)¹⁰ – they rather illustrate the great diversity of local traditions all over the Greek world.

More precisely, this is the Greek world as known from the Archaic and Classical period. For almost all of the traditions, customs and institutions mentioned in the *Greek Questions* can be traced back to archaic and pre-classical times and more often than not, to mythical times.¹¹ For example, in QG 27 (“Why is it that among the Rhodians a herald does not enter the shrine of the hero Ocriidion?”), the explanation is set in the mythical past of Rhodes, citing the story of Ochimus, the eldest of the seven sons of Helios and ruler of the island:

QG 27: ἢ ὅτι Ὀχιμος τὴν θυγατέρα Κυδίππην ἐνεγγύησεν Ὀκριδίῳ; Κέρκαφος δ' ἀδελφὸς ὦν Ὀχίμου τῆς δὲ παιδὸς ἐρῶν, ἔπεισε τὸν κήρυκα (διὰ κηρύκων γὰρ ἔθος ἦν τὸ μετέρχεσθαι τὰς νύμφας), ὅταν παραλάβῃ τὴν Κυδίππην, πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἀγαγεῖν. τούτου δὲ πραχθέντος, ὁ μὲν Κέρκαφος ἔχων τὴν κόρην

⁸ See Nouilhan, Pailler, & Payen 1999: 35. On the importance of language in the *Greek Questions*, see also Jazdzewska 2018: she argues that language is actually the principal focus of Plutarch in this work, which she places in the line of the lexicographic tradition, but although she makes some fine observations, I am not convinced that the treatise should be read exclusively in this way. On the Greek polis as unifying element, see also Oikonomopoulou 2017.

⁹ Payen 1998: 53.

¹⁰ Oikonomopoulou 2017: 108.

¹¹ Cf. Payen 1998: 55.

ἔφυγεν, ὕστερον δὲ τοῦ Ὀχίμου γηράσαντος ἐπανῆλθε. τοῖς δὲ Ῥοδίοις ἔθος κατέστη κήρυκα μὴ προσιέναι τῷ τοῦ Ὀκριδίωνος ἠρώφω διὰ τὴν γενομένην ἀδικίαν.

Is it because Ochimus affianced his daughter Cydippê to Ocridion? But Cercaphus, who was the brother of Ochimus, was in love with the maiden and persuaded the herald (for it used to be the custom to use heralds to fetch the brides), when he should receive Cydippê, to bring her to him. When this had been accomplished, Cercaphus fled with the maiden; but later, when Ochimus had grown old, Cercaphus returned to his home again. **But the custom became established among the Rhodians** that a herald should not approach the shrine of Ocridion because of the wrong that had been done.

Other examples of mythical past include QG 43 (Sisyphus), 45 (Herakles), 41 (Trojan War), 31 (the return of Agamemnon), 14 (Odysseus at Ithaca), but many more could be added. Other questions refer to a distant past, most often in archaic times. For instance, QG 20 (“What is it that is called in Priene ‘the darkness by the Oak?’”) refers to a time “when the Samians and Prienians were at war with each other” and to the famous “Battle of the Oak”, which can be dated to around the mid-6th century (as known through Herodotus 1.170). Likewise, QG 32 (“Who are the Perpetual Sailors among the Milesians?”) is set in Miletus at the time “when the despots Thoas and Damasenor had been overthrown”, i.e., at some point during the 6th century. Most of the *Greek Questions* relate to the early history of the Greek cities,¹² i.e., to the 6th or 7th century or even to the 8th, as is the case with the five *Questions* concerning Megara, which Hans Beck has analysed in greater detail in his book *Megarian Moments*.¹³ Often enough, the time is simply referred to as τὸ παλαιόν or the like, i.e., “the days of old”.¹⁴

To sum up this very brief overview: the traditions or practices mentioned in the *Greek Questions* are definitely local, and they belong to a distant past, hence the words “local past” used in the title of this paper. Is this simply ‘Plutarch the Antiquarian’ at work, taking us on

12 See Payen 1998: 55.

13 Beck 2018: 37–42.

14 For instance in QG 6, 17, 19, 37 and 46.

a nostalgic tour through past traditions of his beloved Greece, in a way that foreshadows Pausanias' *Description of Greece*? I refer to Pausanias advisedly, as Pausanias has been used in recent years, notably by Tim Whitmarsh and Simon Goldhill,¹⁵ as a paradigm of “local thinking”, i.e., of a “vision of Greek culture as fragmented into a myriad, atomised locales”, as opposed to Aelius Aristides' vision of a “global uniformity” of the Roman empire.¹⁶ Where does Plutarch stand in that respect? First of all, it is important to stress that, despite Plutarch's obvious and antiquarian-like curiosity for the past, almost all of the past traditions mentioned in the *Greek Questions* are in some way connected to the present of Plutarch's own days. This can be deduced from the fact that for the vast majority of the actual questions Plutarch uses the present tense (only 6 out of 59 questions are set in a past tense). Obviously, the use of the present in itself does not necessarily mean that these traditions were still alive in Plutarch's own time. Most of the time, however, the formulation of the question itself, or of the explanation given by Plutarch, leaves no doubt about the fact that the traditions under discussion were still alive in his time, even when the events which lay at their origin are (quite obviously) narrated in a past tense. In many cases, this contemporaneity is fairly self-evident,¹⁷ but there are also several passages where an explicit reference to the present is made by Plutarch,¹⁸ such as the following:

QG 12: τίς ἡ παρὰ Δελφοῖς Χάριλλα; τρεῖς ἄγουσι Δελφοὶ ἑνναετηρίδας κατὰ τὸ ἐξῆς, ὧν τὴν μὲν Σεπτήριον καλοῦσι, τὴν δ' Ἡρωίδα, τὴν δὲ Χάριλλαν. (...) ἐκ δὲ τῶν δρωμένων φανερώς Σεμέλης **ἂν τις ἀναγωγὴν εἰκάσειε**. (...) μόλις οὖν ἀνευρόντες ὅτι τοῦνομα τοῦτ' ἦν τῇ ῥαπισθείσῃ παιδί, μεμειγμένην τινὰ καθαυρῶ θυσίαν ἀπετέλεσαν, ἣν ἐπιτελοῦσιν **ἔτι καὶ νῦν** δι' ἑννέα ἐτῶν.

Who was ‘Charilla’ among the Delphians? The Delphians celebrate three festivals one after the other which occur every eight years, the first of which they

15 See Whitmarsh 2010 and Goldhill 2010.

16 Whitmarsh 2010: 2.

17 See e.g., QG 3 (“Who is ‘She that Kindles the Fire’ among the people of Soli?”) about certain ceremonies that the priestess of Athena performs at Soli; QG 13 (“What is the ‘beggar’s meat’ among the Aenianians?”) mentioning the hecatomb the inhabitants regularly offer to Apollo; QG 24 (“What is that which is called an *enknisma* (a roast) among the Argives?”) on the custom of sacrificing to Apollo in times of mourning; or QG 44 (“Who were the ‘solitary eaters’ in Aegina?”) on a sacrifice to Poseidon called *thiasoi*.

18 On this, see also Preston 2001: 109-110; Payen 1998: 56; Payen 2014: 242.

call Seperion, the second Heroïs, and the third Charilla. (...) but from the portions of the rites that are performed in public **one might conjecture** that it represents the evocation of Semelê. (...) Accordingly, when they had discovered with some difficulty that this was the name of the child who had been struck, they performed a certain sacrificial rite combined with purification, which **even now** they continue to perform every eight years.

QG 38: τίνες οἱ παρὰ Βοιωτοῖς Ψολόεις καὶ τίνες αἱ Ὀλεῖαι; (...) φασι (...) αὐτὰς δὲ ὀλείας ὄϊον ὀλοάς. **καὶ μέχρι νῦν** Ὀρχομένιοι τὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ γένους οὕτω καλοῦσι. καὶ γίγνεται **παρ' ἐνιαυτὸν** ἐν τοῖς Ἀγριωνίοις φυγὴ καὶ δίωξις αὐτῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ ἱερέως τοῦ Διονύσου ξίφος ἔχοντος. ἔξεστι δὲ τὴν καταληφθεῖσαν ἀνελεῖν, καὶ ἀνεῖλεν **ἐφ' ἡμῶν** Ζωῖλος ὁ ἱερεὺς.

Who are the 'Psoloeis' and who the 'Oleiae' among the Boeotians? They relate that (...) the Minyads themselves were called 'Oleiae,' that is to say, 'Murderesses.' **And even to-day** the people of Orchomenus give this name to the women descended from this family; **and every year**, at the festival of Agrionia, there takes place a flight and pursuit of them by the priest of Dionysus with sword in hand. Any one of them that he catches he may kill, **and in my time** the priest Zoïlus killed one of them.

QG 41: πόθεν ἐν τῇ Βοιωτίᾳ περὶ τὸν Ἐλέωνα ποταμὸς Σκάμανδρος ὠνομάσθη; (...) Ἀκίδουσαν δὲ τὴν κρήνην ἀπὸ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ γυναικός, ἐξ ἧς ἔσχε τρεῖς θυγατέρας, ἃς τιμῶσιν **ἄχρι νῦν** 'παρθένους' προσαγορεύοντες.

From what cause was a river in Boeotia in the vicinity of Eleon called Scamander? (...) The spring Acidusa he named after his wife; and from her he had three daughters whom **even to this day** they honour under the name of the 'Maidens'.

A closer look shows that in 40 of the 59 questions, i.e., 2/3 of the cases, there is a clear connection with the present, and in some cases at least it is clearly based on autopsy.¹⁹ So in a sense, there is a Pausanian attitude at work here too: after all, Pausanias too based his description of Greece mainly on autopsy. The difference, however, is that, contrary to Pausanias, Plutarch's interests were not limited to Greece, as is evidenced by the fact that he also wrote the *Roman Questions*.

The Roman Questions

The *Roman Questions* are almost twice as long as the *Greek Questions*, with 113 questions (as opposed to 59) and 83 Loeb pages (as opposed to 37), and they are also concerned with past traditions.²⁰ However, they show lesser diversity than the *Greek Questions*, as they invariably start with the question “why?” (διὰ τί) – with only two exceptions²¹ – and focus much more heavily on religious matters, with 70 questions (i.e., almost 2/3) relating to ritual, whereas 26 address questions of parentage, 18 political and military institutions, and 4 matters of calendar.²² On the other hand, the answers to these questions are usually more diverse, with up to 6 different hypotheses, whereas the *Greek Questions* usually offer a more definite explanation in the form of a narrative or a single hypothesis.²³

Despite these differences, it is striking that, just as in the *Greek Questions*, the customs or institutions mentioned in the *Roman Questions* all relate to a remote past, which almost exclusively coincides with the earliest history of Rome, prior to the 5th century, with only occasional incursions into the times of the early Republic and notably the Sack of Rome by the Gauls: all the rest concern (1) the mythical times of Evander and Aeneas; (2) the age of

19 On autopsy in Plutarch (in general), see Buckler 1992. See however Neumann 2019 for a distinction between speaker and historical author in *QG* (and *QR*).

20 The main commentary is still Rose 1924; recent ones include Nouilhan, Paillet, & Payen 1999; Boulogne 1994 and 2002.

21 *QR* 105 and 112. See the tables in Payen 1998: 41 and Nouilhan, Paillet, & Payen 1999: 36.

22 See Payen 2014: 245, as well as the table in Nouilhan, Paillet, & Payen 1999: 32. For different classifications, see Preston 2001: 97-99 and Brenk 2019: 247-248.

23 See the table in Nouilhan, Paillet, & Payen 1999: 38. On the meaning of these multiple explanations in the *Roman Questions* and the difference with the *Greek Questions*, see Boulogne 1992; Payen 1998: 45-49; Preston 2001: 95-96; Payen 2014: 245.

Romulus and the foundation of Rome; (3) the reigns of Numa and Servius Tullius.²⁴ Even more striking is the fact that, geographically, the *Roman Questions* are strictly limited to the city of Rome and its immediate surrounding territory.²⁵ The vast majority of the customs, traditions or institutions under discussion are connected to specific locations (places, streets, monuments, temples, etc.) situated within the city walls. In a remarkable attempt to find a structural logic behind the diversity of customs mentioned in the *Roman Questions*, John Scheid put forward the idea that the *Roman Questions* actually follow a topographical route through the city of Rome.²⁶ One may or may not be convinced by his demonstration, but it is certainly true that, just as with the *Greek Questions*, some of the customs or traditions referred to in the *Roman Questions* are based on autopsy. This can be seen in the numerous places where Plutarch refers to his own times when dealing with these past traditions.²⁷

Sometimes, this link to the present is visible within the question itself:

QR 69: διὰ τί τῷ καλουμένῳ Σεπτομουντίῳ παρεφύλαττον ὀχήμασι ζευκτοῖς μὴ χρῆσθαι, καὶ μέχρι νῦν οἱ τῶν παλαιῶν μὴ καταφρονοῦντες παραφυλάττουσι;

Why on the festival called Septimontium were they careful to refrain from the use of horse-drawn vehicles; and why **even to this day** are those who do not condemn ancient customs still careful about this?

QR 72: διὰ τί τῶν ἐπ' οἰωνοῖς ἱερέων, οὓς Αὔσπικας πρότερον Αὔγουρας δὲ νῦν καλοῦσιν, ᾤοντο δεῖν αἰετοὺς λαμπτήρας ἀνεωγμένους εἶναι καὶ τὸ πῶμα μὴ ἐπικεῖσθαι;

24 Payen 1998: 54–55. Most frequently, the time is simply referred to as τὸ παλαιόν or the like, e.g., in QR 4, 5, 11, 19, 20, 25, 30, 32, 33, 40, 41, 42, 43, 46, 61, 63, 66, 70, 72, 76, 85, 86, 87, 91, 92, 98, 101, 107, 111.

25 Payen 1998: 49.

26 See Scheid 2012 (with various maps), based on Scheid 1990–1991 and 1991–1992. See also Scheid 2018.

27 However, see again Neumann 2019 for a distinction between speaker and historical author in QR.

Why did they think that the priests that take omens from birds, whom they formerly called Auspices, but **now** Augures, should always keep their lanterns open and put no cover on them?

QR 53: διὰ τί τοῖς Καπετωλίοις θέας ἄγοντες ἔτι νῦν κηρύττουσι Σαρδιανούς ὠνίους, καὶ γέρων τις ἐπὶ χλευασμῶ προάγεται παιδικὸν ἐναψάμενος περιδέραιον, ὃ καλοῦσι βοῦλλαν; (...) ἐπεὶ δὲ Λυδοὶ μὲν ἦσαν οἱ Τυρρηνοὶ ἐξ ἀρχῆς, Λυδῶν δὲ μητρόπολις αἱ Σάρδεις, οὕτω τοὺς Οὐηίους ἀπεκήρυττον· **καὶ μέχρι νῦν** ἐν παιδιᾷ τὸ ἔθος διαφυλάττουσι.

Why do they **even now**, at the celebration of the Capitoline games, proclaim ‘Sardians for sale!’, and why is an old man led forth in derision, wearing around his neck a child’s amulet which they call a bulla? (...) But since the Etruscans were originally Lydians, and Sardis was the capital city of the Lydians, they offered the Veians for sale under this name; and **even to this day** they preserve the custom in sport.

In other cases, as the last example has already shown, the reference to the present is found within the explanations that follow a question:

QR 25: διὰ τί τὴν μετὰ καλάνδας ἡμέραν καὶ νῶνας καὶ εἰδούς ἀνέξοδον καὶ ἀνεκδήμητον τίθενται; (...) ἐπεὶ τοίνυν πᾶσα μὲν ἀξία σπουδῆς ἀποδημία καὶ πρᾶξις οἰκονομίας δεῖται καὶ παρασκευῆς, Ῥωμαῖοι δὲ τὸ παλαιὸν ἐν ταῖς ἐορταῖς οὐδὲν ᾠκονόμουν οὐδ’ ἐφρόντιζον ἀλλ’ ἢ περὶ τοὺς θεοὺς ἡσχολοῦντο καὶ τοῦτ’ ἔπραττον, ὥσπερ **ἔτι νῦν** προκηρύττουσιν οἱ ἱερεῖς ἐπὶ τὰς θυσίας βαδίζοντες (...) ἢ καθάπερ **ἔτι νῦν** προσευξάμενοι καὶ προσκυνήσαντες ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς ἐπιμένειν καὶ καθίζειν εἰώθασιν, οὕτως οὐκ εὐθύς ἐπέβαλλον ταῖς ἱεραῖς ἡμέραις τὰς ἐνεργούς, ἀλλ’ ἐποίουν τι διάλειμμα καὶ διάστημα, πολλὰ τῶν πραγμάτων δυσχερῆ καὶ ἀβούλητα φερόντων;

Why do they reckon the day that follows the Kalends, the Nones, or the Ides as unsuitable for leaving home or for travel? (...) Since, therefore, all travel and all business of importance needs provision and preparation, and since in ancient

days the Romans, at the time of festivals, made no provision or plan for anything, save only that they were engaged in the service of their gods and busied themselves with this only, just as **even to this day** the priests cause such a proclamation to be made in advance as they proceed on their way to sacrifice. (...) Or is it **even as men now**, who have offered their prayers and oblations, are wont to tarry and sit a while in the temples, and so they would not let busy days succeed holy days immediately, but made some pause and breathing-space between, since business brings with it much that is distasteful and undesired?

QR 50: διὰ τί ὁ ἱερεὺς τοῦ Διός, ἀποθανούσης αὐτῶ τῆς γυναικὸς, ἀπετίθετο τὴν ἀρχὴν, ὡς Ἀτήιος ἱστόρηκε; (...) ὅθεν οὐδ' ἀποπέμψασθαι πρότερον ἐξῆν, οὐδὲ **νῦν**, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἔξεστιν, ἀλλ' **ἐφ' ἡμῶν** ἐπέτρεψεν ἐντευχθεὶς Δομετιανός.

Why did the priest of Jupiter (Flamen Dialis) resign his office if his wife died, as Ateius has recorded? (...) Wherefore it was formerly illegal for the flamen to divorce his wife; and it is **still**, as it seems, illegal, but **in my day** Domitian once permitted it on petition.

QR 86: διὰ τί τοῦ Μαΐου μηνὸς οὐκ ἄγονται γυναῖκας; (...) ἢ ὅτι τῶ μηνὶ τούτῳ τὸν μέγιστον ποιοῦνται τῶν καθαρμῶν, **νῦν** μὲν εἶδωλα ῥιπτοῦντες ἀπὸ τῆς γεφύρας εἰς τὸν ποταμὸν πάλαι δ' ἀνθρώπους; διὸ καὶ τὴν Φλαμνίκαν, ἱερὰν τῆς Ἥρας εἶναι δοκοῦσαν, **νενόμισται** σκυθρωπάζειν, μήτε λουομένην τηνικαῦτα μήτε κοσμουμένην.

Why do men not marry during the month of May? (...) Or is it because in this month they hold their most important ceremony of purification, in which they **now** throw images from the bridge into the river, but in days of old they used to throw human beings? Wherefore **it is the custom** that the Flaminica, reputed to be consecrate to Juno, shall wear a stern face, and refrain from bathing and wearing ornaments at this time.

QR 101: διὰ τί κοσμοῦσι τοὺς παῖδας τοῖς περιδεραίοις, ἃ βούλλας καλοῦσι; (...) ἢ τοῖς παλαιοῖς οἰκετῶν μὲν ἔρᾶν ὥραν ἐχόντων οὐκ ἦν ἄδοξον οὐδ' αἰσχρὸν, ὡς **ἔτι νῦν** αἱ κωμωδίαι μαρτυροῦσιν.

Why do they adorn their children's necks with amulets which they call bullae? (...) Or did the Romans of early times account it not disreputable nor disgraceful to love male slaves in the flower of youth, as **even now** their comedies testify.

Finally, in other cases, the Roman tradition under discussion prompts Plutarch to a comment on similar traditions in Greece:

QR 16: διὰ τί δούλαις τὸ τῆς Λευκοθέας ἱερόν ἄβατόν ἐστι, μίαν δὲ μόνην αἱ γυναῖκες εἰσάγουσαι παῖουσιν ἐπὶ κόρρης καὶ ραπίζουσιν; (...) διὸ καὶ **παρ' ἡμῖν ἐν Χαιρωνείᾳ** πρὸ τοῦ σηκοῦ τῆς Λευκοθέας ὁ νεωκόρος λαβὼν μάστιγα κηρύττει, 'μὴ δοῦλον εἰσιέναι μὴ δούλαν, μὴ Αἰτωλὸν μὴ Αἰτωλάν.'

Why is it that it is forbidden to slave-women to set foot in the shrine of Matuta, and why do the women bring in one slave-woman only and slap her on the head and beat her? (...) Wherefore **also in my native town, Chaeroneia**, the temple-guardian stands before the precinct of Leucothea and, taking a whip in his hand, makes proclamation: 'Let no slave enter, nor any Aetolian, man or woman!'

QR 29: διὰ τί τὴν γαμουμένην οὐκ ἔωσιν αὐτὴν ὑπερβῆναι τὸν οὐδὸν τῆς οἰκίας, ἀλλ' ὑπεραίρουσιν οἱ προπέμποντες; (...) ἢ σύμβολόν ἐστι τοῦ μηδ' ἐξιέναι δι' αὐτῆς μηδὲ καταλιπεῖν τὴν οἰκίαν, εἰ μὴ βιασθεῖη, καθάπερ καὶ εἰσηλθε βιασθεῖσα; **καὶ γὰρ παρ' ἡμῖν ἐν Βοιωτίᾳ** καίουσιν πρὸ τῆς θύρας τὸν ἄξονα τῆς ἀμάξης, ἐμφαίνοντες δεῖν τὴν νύμφην ἐμμένειν ὡς ἀνηρημένου τοῦ ἀπάξοντος.

Why do they not allow the bride to cross the threshold of her home herself, but those who are escorting her lift her over? (...) Or is it a token that the woman may not go forth of her own accord and abandon her home if she be not constrained, just as it was under constraint that she entered it? **So likewise**

among us in Boeotia they burn the axle of the bridal carriage before the door, signifying that the bride must remain, since her means of departure has been destroyed.

QR 40: διὰ τί τῶ ἱερεῖ τοῦ Διὸς οὐκ ἔξεστιν ἐν ὑπαίθρῳ ἀλείφεσθαι; (...) ἢ τὰ μὲν μόνῳ τῶ ἱερεῖ, τὰ δὲ πᾶσιν ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου προστέτακται διὰ τοῦ ἱερέως; **διὸ καὶ παρ' ἡμῖν** τὸ μὲν στεφανηφορεῖν καὶ κομᾶν καὶ μὴ σιδηροφορεῖν μηδὲ τοῖς Φωκέων ὄροις ἐμβαίνειν ἴδια λειτουργήματα τοῦ ἄρχοντός ἐστι...

Why is it not allowed the priest of Jupiter (Flamen Dialis) to anoint himself in the open air? (...) Or are some regulations prescribed for the priest alone, while others are prescribed for all by the law through the priest? **Wherefore also, in my country**, to wear a garland, to wear the hair long, not to have any iron on one's person, and not to set foot within the boundaries of Phocis, are the special functions of an archon...

QR 67: διὰ τί 'λικτώρεις' τοὺς ράβδούχους ὀνομάζουσι; (...) ἢ νῦν μὲν παρέγκειται τὸ κ, πρότερον δὲ 'λιτώρεις' ἐκαλοῦντο, λειτουργοὶ τινες ὄντες περὶ τὸ δημόσιον; ὅτι γὰρ λῆτον **ἄχρι νῦν** τὸ δημόσιον ἐν πολλοῖς τῶν Ἑλλήνων νόμων γέγραπται, οὐδένα ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν λέληθε.

Why do they call the rod-bearers 'lictors'? (...) Or is the c but a recent insertion, and were they formerly called *litores*, that is, a class of public servants? The fact that **even to this day** the word 'public' is expressed by *leitōs* in many of the Greek laws has escaped the attention of hardly anyone.

QR 68: διὰ τί κύνα θύουσιν οἱ Λούπερκοι; (...) τῶ δὲ κυνὶ πάντες ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν Ἑλλήνες ἐχρῶντο καὶ χρῶνταιί γε **μέχρι νῦν** ἔνιοι σφαγίῳ πρὸς τοὺς καθαρμούς.

Why do the Luperci sacrifice a dog? (...) Nearly all the Greeks used a dog as the sacrificial victim for ceremonies of purification; and some, at least, make use of it **even to this day**.

All these examples show that in the *Roman Questions*, just as in the *Greek Questions*, these past traditions have a clear connection to the present, something which, once again, is confirmed by the fact that the vast majority of these questions are formulated in the present tense.

The Barbarian Questions

A connection to the present would probably also have been noticeable in Plutarch's *Barbarian Questions*, a work now unfortunately lost. This treatise is listed as number 139 in the *Lamprias Catalogue* under the title *Αἰτίαι Βαρβαρικάι* and it is likely that it was meant to be the equivalent of the *Greek* and the *Roman Questions* with regard to barbarian matters. Thus, from a general comparison with those two extant works, one can reasonably postulate that the *Barbarian Questions* were constituted of a series of independent questions, on various subjects largely related to the customs of barbarian peoples, especially their religious practices, their institutions and their general way of life, and that these questions were given one or several answers, in more or less detail and in the form of successive hypotheses formulated as questions or narrations. Furthermore, as I have tried to show elsewhere,²⁸ thanks to Plutarch's tendency to repeat himself in his works (or, rather, to reuse material he had collected in the form of ὑπομνήματα),²⁹ it may even be possible to reconstruct parts of its content. Thus when I looked for possible traces of the *Barbarian Questions* in Plutarch's extant corpus, using various criteria adapted from Jean-Marie Pailler's search for traces of the *Roman Questions* in Plutarch's *Lives*,³⁰ I came up with a total of 51 'questions', categorized as follows:³¹

18 cases of a 'potential Question'
(= a subject-matter without an explanation)

- on barbarian evils such as smearing oneself with mud, wallowing in filth, immersions, casting oneself down with one's face to the ground (*De superst.* 166a)
- the Syrians do not eat sprats nor anchovies (*De superst.* 170d)

28 Cf. Schmidt 2008.

29 For a short summary on this vast question, see Van der Stockt 2014: 329-330.

30 Pailler 1998.

31 The criteria and categories are explained in more detail in Schmidt 2008: 172-173.

- on human sacrifice practised by the Gauls, Scythians, Carthaginians, Persians (*De superst.* 171b–d)
- the Tyrians put chains upon their images (*Quaest. Rom.* 279a)
- in memory of Horus, the people throw down a rope and chop it up (*De Is. et Os.* 358c–d)
- the Scythians blind the slaves who produce their cream (*An virt.* 440a)
- the Scythians do not bury their dead (*An vit. ad infel. suff.* 499d)
- the Persians scourge the cloaks of culprits instead of the culprits themselves (*De sera* 565a)
- Mithridates nicknamed “Dionysus” for being the greatest drinker of his time (*Quaest. conv.* 624a)
- the barbarians use the hides of their domestic animals for clothing rather than their wool (*Quaest. conv.* 646e)
- the well-to-do Babylonians fill wineskins full of water and sleep on them to keep cool (*Quaest. conv.* 649e)
- the women of the Gauls used to take a bowl of porridge into the bath-chamber and eat it while they bathed (*Quaest. conv.* 734b)
- Egyptian women sleep beside a crocodile (*De soll. an.* 976b–c)
- among a tribe of Ethiopians a dog reigns and is addressed as king (*Comm. not.* 1064b)
- some barbarians have three months in their year (*Num.* 18.6)
- on the royal initiation of the Persian kings (*Art.* 3.2)
- on the torture of the boats among the Persians (*Art.* 16.3–7)
- on the custom among the Persians that the one appointed to the royal succession should ask a boon, and that the one who appointed him should give whatever was asked for (*Art.* 26.4–5)

12 cases of an ‘outset of Question’

(= a subject-matter with a short explanation)

- the flatteresses in Cyprus acquired the nickname of “ladderesses” (*Quomodo adul.* 50d)
- as a sign of mourning, some barbarians go down into pits and remain there for several days, and some even cut off parts of their bodies (*Consol. ad Ap.* 113a–b)
- the Persian kings send their wives away when they wish to be merry and get drunk (*Praec. conj.* 140b)
- the women of Egypt, by inherited custom, were not allowed to wear shoes, so that they should stay at home all day (*Praec. conj.* 142c)
- the Egyptians call the Persian king Ochus “the Sword” (*De Is. et Os.* 355c)
- the Indian wives strive for the honour of being consumed together with their dead husband (*An vit. ad infel. suff.* 499c)
- the Scythians, Hyrcanians and Bactrians let dogs and birds devour the bodies of their dead, as this is considered a sign of happiness (*An vit. ad infel. suff.* 499d)
- the Thracians tattoo their wives to this day in revenge for Orpheus (*De sera* 557d)

- the Persian kings have the dinner of their slaves and dogs served to their friends and officers (*Quaest. conv.* 703e)
- the Ethiopians get old rapidly and the Britons live up to 120 years (*De plac. phil.* 911b)
- the Medes and the Assyrians give honours to fire, because from fear, by way of propitiation, they worship the maleficent forces rather than the reverend (*De facie* 935b)
- the Egyptians extract the viscera of the dead and cut them open in view of the sun (*De esu carniū* 996e)

1 case of an ‘outline of Question’

(= a subject-matter with a short explanation and an introductory or concluding formula)

- the Egyptians think that little children possess the power of prophecy (*De Is. et Os.* 356e)

3 cases of an ‘atmosphere of Question’

(= a subject-matter with a long explanation)

- in Leptis, it is an inherited custom for the bride, on the day after her marriage, to send to the mother of the bridegroom and ask for a pot (*Praec. conj.* 143a)
- the barbarians on the Po wear black in mourning for Phaethon (*De sera* 557d)
- among the Persians, a suppliant stands in a river with fire in his hands (*De primo* 950f)

5 cases of a ‘quasi-Question’

(= a subject-matter with several explanations)

- why the Egyptians abstain from sea-fish (*De Is. et Os.* 353c-d)
- why once a year the Egyptians sacrifice and eat a pig whereas they usually abstain from it as being impure (*De Is. et Os.* 353f-354a)
- why the cult of the Sun can be assimilated to the cult of Osiris (*De Is. et Os.* 372c-d)
- what is the meaning of the daily offerings of incense among the Egyptians (*De Is. et Os.* 383b-d)
- why the Persians hold anyone who killed a large number of water mice to be fortunate (*De invidia* 537a-b + *Quaest. conv.* 670d + *De Is. et Os.* 369e-f)

12 cases of a ‘genuine Question’

(= a subject-matter with a long explanation or several explanations and an introductory or concluding formula)

- why the deceased votaries of Isis are decked with their sacred garb (*De Is. et Os.* 352b)
- why the priests of Isis remove their hair by shaving and wear linen garments (*De Is. et*

Os. 352c-d)

- why the Egyptian priests abstain from salt (*De Is. et Os.* 352f-353a)
- on the origin of the name “Sarapis” (*De Is. et Os.* 362a-e)
- why the Egyptians regard the ass as an unclean animal and sacrifice cattle of red colour (*De Is. et Os.* 362e-363d)
- why the Egyptian priests call salt “the spume of Typhon” and abstain from it (*De Is. et Os.* 363e-f)
- why the Egyptians give Nephthys the name of “Finality” (*De Is. et Os.* 366b-c)
- whether the Jews abstain from pork because of reverence or aversion for the pig (*Quaest. conv.* 669e-671c)
- who is the god of the Jews? (*Quaest. conv.* 671c-672c)
- why do the Egyptian priests abstain completely from salt? (*Quaest. conv.* 684f-685a)
- that deliberating on public affairs over wine was no less a Greek than a Persian custom (*Quaest. conv.* 714a-d)
- why the Egyptian priests abstain from fish (*Quaest. conv.* 729a-c)³²

From the examples listed above, it appears that the barbarian people mentioned in this attempted reconstruction of the *Barbarian Questions* are very diverse and geographically spread over a large area:³³ Egyptians (18 mentions), Persians (12), Scythians (3), Jews (3), Gauls (2), Ethiopians (2), Syrians (2) and, with one mention each, Indians, Hyrcanians, Medes, Assyrians, Libyans, Thracians, Britons and the inhabitants of Northern Italy. Occasionally, the customs under discussion are very precisely located,³⁴ but most of the time the references to barbarian people are generic and geographically only vaguely situated.

It is more difficult to assess whether or not the customs described in the *Barbarian Questions* belong to a distant past, as was the case with the *Greek* and the *Roman Questions*, because most of the time we lack evidence about these practices elsewhere. However, as there are cases where these practices are attested, for instance, in Herodotus, Ctesias, and other authors of the Classical period,³⁵ or are explicitly put in relation with figures such as Cyrus the Great and other Persian kings of olden times, one may reasonably assume that at least parts of the *Barbarian Questions* referred to ancient practices antedating the Classical period. Yet, again,

32 On the connections between these various questions about salt and fish, see Schmidt 2008: 177-180.

33 See the map at the end of this paper.

34 E.g., in Leptis (*Praec. conj.* 143a), Lycopolis and Oxyrhynchus (*De Is. et Os.* 380b), or Antaeopolis (*De soll. an.* 976b-c).

35 Herodotus: *Praec. conj.* 142c, *An virt.* 440a, *An vit. ad infel. suff.* 499d, *Quaest. conv.* 729a. Ctesias: *Art.* 16.3-7. Other authors include e.g., Aristagoras, Megasthenes and Agatharchides of Cnidus, cf. Schmidt 2008: 182.

just as with the *Greek* and the *Roman Questions*, there are several cases where these practices are directly connected to the present of Plutarch's own days. For instance, in the 6th question of book IV of *Table Talk* (one of the 'genuine Questions' listed above), Plutarch refers several times to his own time:

Quaest. conv. 671c-672c: Τίς ὁ παρ' Ἰουδαίοις θεός. (...) Οἶμαι δὲ καὶ τὴν τῶν σαββάτων ἑορτὴν μὴ παντάπασιν ἀπροσδιόνυσον εἶναι· Σάβους γὰρ **καὶ νῦν ἔτι** πολλοὶ τοὺς Βάκχους καλοῦσιν καὶ ταύτην ἀφιᾶσι τὴν φωνὴν ὅταν ὀργιάζωσι τῷ θεῷ. (...) μιτρηφόρος τε προῖων ἐν ταῖς ἑορταῖς καὶ νεβρίδα χρυσόπαστον ἐνημμένος, χιτῶνα δὲ ποδήρη φορῶν καὶ κοθόρνους, κώδωνες δὲ πολλοὶ κατακρέμανται τῆς ἐσθῆτος, ὑποκομποῦντες ἐν τῷ βαδίζειν, **ὡς καὶ παρ' ἡμῖν**. (...) **καὶ μέχρι νῦν** τῶν τε βαρβάρων οἱ μὴ ποιοῦντες οἶνον μελίτειον πίνουσιν, ὑποφαρμάσσοντες τὴν γλυκύτητα οἰνώδεσι ρίζαις καὶ αὐστηραῖς.

Who is the god of the Jews? (...) I believe that even the feast of the Sabbath is not completely unrelated to Dionysus. Many **even now** call the Bacchants Sabi and utter that cry when celebrating the god. (...) the High Priest, who leads the procession at their festival wearing a mitre and clad in a gold-embroidered fawnskin, a robe reaching to the ankles, and buskins, with many bells attached to his clothes and ringing below him as he walks. **All this corresponds to our custom.** (...) **Even up to the present time** those of the barbarians who do not make wine drink mead, counteracting the sweetness somewhat by the use of winelike bitter roots.

In another 'genuine Question' about the religious duties of Egyptian priests, taken from book VIII of *Table Talk*, one likewise reads:

Quaest. conv. 729a: οἶόν ἐστι καὶ τὸ τῶν κυάμων· οὔτε γὰρ σπεῖρειν οὔτε σιτεῖσθαι κύαμον Αἰγυπτίους, ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὀρῶντας ἀνέχεσθαι φησιν ὁ Ἡρόδοτος. ἰχθύων δὲ τοὺς ἱερεῖς **ἴσμεν ἔτι νῦν** ἀπεχομένους.

An example is abstention from beans; Herodotus says that the Egyptians neither plant nor eat beans, and cannot even bear to look at them; and **we know that even now** the priests abstain from fish.

Further examples of such references to the present are:

De sera 557d: ποῦ δὴ ταῦτα τὸ εὐλογον ἴσχει καὶ δίκαιον; οὐδὲ γὰρ Θραῖκας ἐπαινοῦμεν, ὅτι στίζουσιν ἄχρι νῦν, τιμωροῦντες Ὀρφεῖ τὰς αὐτῶν γυναῖκας· οὐδὲ τοὺς περὶ Ἡριδανὸν βαρβάρους μελανοφοροῦντας ἐπὶ πένθει τοῦ Φαέθοντος, ὥσπερ λέγουσιν.

Where is the logic or justice of this? Nor yet do we commend the Thracians for tattooing their own wives **even to this day** in revenge for Orpheus, nor the barbarians on the Po for wearing black in mourning for Phaethon, as the story goes.

De Is. et Os. 380b: μόνοι γὰρ ἔτι νῦν Αἰγυπτίων Λυκοπολίται πρόβατον ἐσθίουσιν, ἐπεὶ καὶ λύκος, ὃν θεὸν νομίζουσιν οἱ δ' Ὀξυρυγχίται καθ' ἡμᾶς, τῶν Κυνοπολιτῶν τὸν ὀξύρυγχον ἰχθὺν ἐσθιόντων, κύνα συλλαβόντες καὶ θύσαντες ὡς ἱερεῖον κατέφαγον.

Even to-day the inhabitants of Lycopolis are the only people among the Egyptians that eat a sheep; for the wolf, whom they hold to be a god, also eats it. **And in my day** the people of Oxyrhynchus caught a dog and sacrificed it and ate it up as if it had been sacrificial meat.

De Iside et Osiride actually contains several more such references to the present (9 in total),³⁶ and these may well point to autopsy by Plutarch, either from the time when he stayed in Egypt himself or from his personal contact with the cult of Isis elsewhere, notably in his native Boiotia, where these cults are well attested in his time.³⁷ Or he might have gotten his

36 Cf. *De Is. et Os.* 355c (μέχρι νῦν), 356c (ἔτι καὶ νῦν), 357c (καὶ ἔτι νῦν), 358c-d (καὶ νῦν), 360b (μέχρι νῦν), 367a (μέχρι νῦν), 367b (ἔτι νῦν), 375e (μέχρι νῦν), 380b (quoted above).

37 Cf. Schmidt 2008: 182 n. 49. For more on Plutarch's Boiotia, see Giroux, in this volume.

present-day information in yet another way, as he explicitly says in *On the cleverness of animals*:

De soll. an. 976b–c: ἔναγχος δὲ Φιλῖνος ὁ βέλτιστος ἤκων πεπλανημένος ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ παρ’ ἡμᾶς διηγεῖτο γραῦν ἰδεῖν ἐν Ἀνταίου πόλει κροκοδείλω συγκαθεύδουσαν ἐπὶ σκίμποδος εὖ μάλα κοσμίως παρεκτεταμένω. (...) ἐπεὶ καὶ περὶ Σοῦραν πυνθάνομαι, κώμην ἐν τῇ Λυκίᾳ Φελλοῦ μεταξὺ καὶ Μύρων, καθεζομένους ἐπ’ ἰχθύσιν ὥσπερ οἰωνοῖς διαμαντεύεσθαι τέχνη τινὶ καὶ λόγῳ ἐλίξεις καὶ φυγὰς καὶ διώξεις αὐτῶν ἐπισκοποῦντας.

Recently our excellent Philinus came back from a trip to Egypt and told us that he had seen in Antaeopolis an old woman sleeping on a low bed beside a crocodile, which was stretched out beside her in a perfectly decorous way. (...) Indeed, I have heard that near Sura, a village in Lycia between Phellus and Myra, men sit and watch the gyrations and flights and pursuits of fish and divine from them by a professional and rational system, as others do with birds.

Global present

As the last example has shown, Plutarch obviously also had his direct sources, and although I do not claim that all the local practices he refers to (be they Greek, Roman or barbarian) are based on first-hand information,³⁸ I would however wish to call his interest in them ‘global’, not in the sense that these practices would have been widely prevalent and universally followed in his time, but in the sense that Plutarch had a global view of the world around him. The very existence of the *Greek*, the *Roman* and the *Barbarian Questions* and, I hope, my reading of them, show that Plutarch’s interests lay in the local traditions not only of the Greek world, but also in those of the Romans (admittedly limited to the city of Rome) and of the barbarians at large.³⁹ This global, tripartite view of the world is visible also in

38 Large parts of his *Greek* and *Roman Questions* rely of course on literary sources, as the various commentaries have established (esp. Rose 1924 and Halliday 1928).

39 On these treatises as forming a triptych, see Darbo-Peschanski 1998: 23 and Mossman 2010: 145. Payen (1998: 39 and 49) rather considers the *Greek Questions* and the *Roman Questions* as a single unity, without being in contradiction to the existence of the *Barbarian Questions*.

works such as *The Sayings of Kings and Commanders*, which are mainly a collection of sayings by famous Greeks and Romans, but do actually start with a section about barbarian kings. Likewise, the *Bravery of women* narrates noble deeds of women, mainly Greek and Roman, but 9 of the 27 stories (exactly 1/3) actually relate to barbarians. And one may add the nine books of *Table Talk*, which include several questions concerning barbarians and which, more generally, contain a lot of ‘barbarian matters’.

Of course, I am well aware that this concept of Plutarch’s global, tripartite world view has its limits. There is no denying that large parts of Plutarch’s works are based on a parallelism between Greeks and Romans and on the binary vision of a strictly Greco-Roman world from which the barbarians generally seem to be absent. The *Parallel Lives*, to start with this obvious case, only compare Greeks and Romans, not Greeks with barbarians or Romans with barbarians. Likewise, the *Parallela Graeca et Romana*, if they really are by Plutarch, only contain parallels between Greeks and Romans. Furthermore, among Plutarch’s works, one finds, for instance, a treatise entitled *On the Fortune of the Romans* and another one *On the Fame of the Athenians*, but nothing similar for barbarians. However, the existence of the *Life of Artaxerxes*, to which one can add the treatise *On Isis and Osiris* and, to a lesser degree, the *Dinner of the Seven Wise Men*, shows that an opening towards the barbarian world is certainly present in Plutarch’s thought.⁴⁰ And, more generally, one should bear in mind that Plutarch’s corpus contains an appreciable number of references to barbarians: throughout his oeuvre, more than 950 passages mention barbarians, sometimes quite extensively, and some barbarian figures definitely stand out, such as Artaxerxes, Darius, Cyrus, Surena, Spartacus, and others.⁴¹ Therefore, it seems difficult to follow Pascal Payen when he writes that “[Plutarch’s antiquarian] knowledge acquires significance *exclusively* within the context of the parallels he draws between Greece and Rome.”⁴² This is denying Plutarch a genuine interest in barbarian matters as well.⁴³

40 Mossman (2010) rightly points out, however, that the *Life of Artaxerxes* remains a special case among Plutarch’s works. See also Almagor 2014: 282.

41 See Schmidt 1999. Compare also Nikolaidis 1986 and Stadter 2015.

42 Payen 2014: 241 (my emphasis on *exclusively*).

43 See e.g., Plutarch’s interest in foreign languages (Strobach 1997) and in foreign religions (Hirsch-Luipold 2014: 163: “His interest extends beyond the Greco-Roman realm to the religions of Egypt, Iran, and India, to Zoroastrianism and Judaism, to Chaldean astrologers, to the Magi, and to the gymnosophists.”). On Plutarch’s multiculturalism (and its limits), see also Pelling 2016.

However, another objection to Plutarch’s tripartite world view could be the fact that his *Roman Questions* are mostly explained in Greek terms, as Rebecca Preston has very convincingly shown.⁴⁴ Clearly there is a Hellenocentric approach at work in the *Roman Questions*, and it is very likely that it was the same with the *Barbarian Questions*, as some examples have shown, when Plutarch compares or explains barbarian practices with parallels taken from the Greek world. This means that Plutarch locates himself inside Greek culture and outside Roman culture.⁴⁵ Thus, Plutarch still speaks of “us (Greeks)” versus “them” (Romans or barbarians). This is not Aelius Aristides’ globalizing (and probably somewhat idealizing) view in which “we” encompasses all inhabitants of the Roman Empire, be they Greek, Roman or barbarian. But neither is it Pausanias’ limited view where “we” refers exclusively to the Greek world. Plutarch, it appears, although his approach was indeed Hellenocentric, had a broader view. In fact, it may be said that Plutarch was genuinely interested in the world around him, which he wanted to understand in all its aspects, as is attested by his numerous works questioning the world in the form of *Αἴτια*, *Προβλήματα*, *Ζητήματα* and other types of inquiry.⁴⁶ The *Greek*, *Roman* and *Barbarian Questions* are part of this global, almost Aristotelian approach to the world,⁴⁷ and Plutarch’s interest in past traditions is to be seen in this global light too. Plutarch was not an antiquarian for the sake of being an antiquarian. He was interested in the past as explaining the present, i.e., the world around him, as he knew it from personal experience, from being a priest at Delphi or simply from living in Chaironeia (which explains a certain preponderance of Central Greece in his *Greek Questions*), but also from his travels (notably to Rome, which could plausibly explain why the *Roman Questions* are limited to the city of Rome), and, of course, from the numerous personal contacts he had – he may have been, for a large part of his life, locally confined to Chaironeia,⁴⁸ but he was quite obviously globally linked to the world around

44 Preston 2001. See also Boulogne 1987; Boulogne 1992: 4701–4703; Goldhill 2002: 265–271. However, see Brenk 2019 for a nuanced discussion of Preston’s approach.

45 Preston 2001: 114–119. On the contrary, Payen (2014: 241–243) sees the *Greek* and the *Roman Questions* as contributing to a “cultural unity between Greeks and Romans” and creating “an enduring Greco-Roman civilization.” Boulogne (1987 and 1992: 4698–4703) also speaks of a conciliatory strategy adopted by Plutarch in these works. Likewise, Brenk (2019: 252) concludes that the Greek and Roman worlds “had become joined inextricably” in the Early Imperial Period.

46 On Plutarch’s aetiological works, see Harrison 2000; Grandjean 2008; Schmidt 2008: 165–166.

47 According to Darbo-Peschanski 1998 and Boulogne 1998, however, Plutarch’s approach remains fundamentally Platonic in his search for the universal principles behind the world.

48 By choice, as he reminds us in his *Life of Demosthenes* (2.2).

him through his many visitors.⁴⁹ The local past as described in the *Greek, Roman and Barbarian Questions* thus was actually part of the global present of Plutarch's own world.

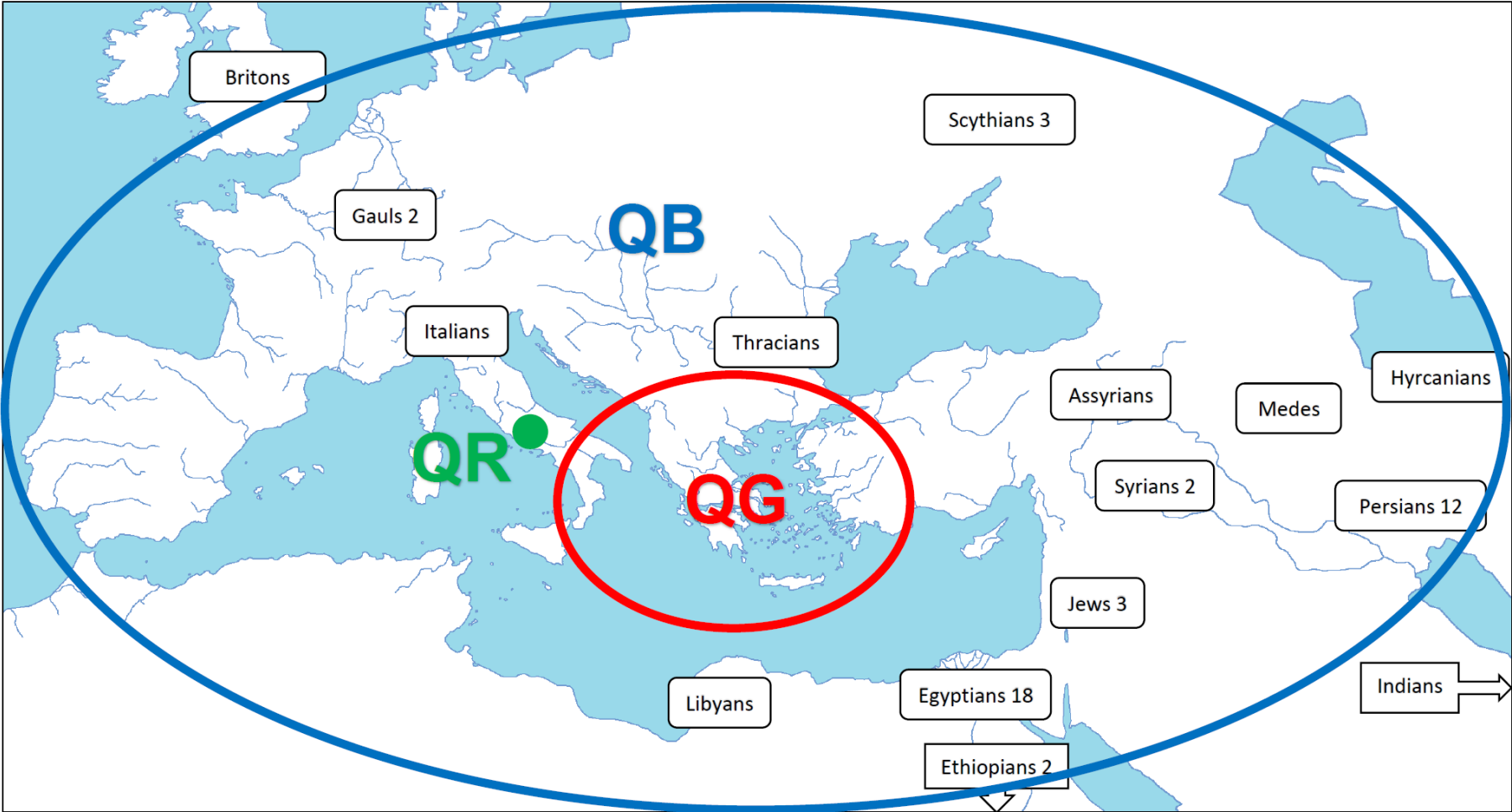
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⁴⁹ See in particular the list of his numerous friends and acquaintances in Puech 1992.

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Location of the barbarian people mentioned in Plutarch's (reconstructed) *Barbarian Questions* (in relation to QG and QR)

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