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# Military Leadership in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*

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The candidate hereby confirms that this thesis was composed by him and represents his own work, except where credit has been given to the work of others.

He furthermore confirms that no part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or qualification except as specified on the title page.

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Devin Oliver

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## Abstract

This dissertation is a study of Plutarch's portrayal of military leadership in his *Parallel Lives*. I investigate Plutarch's use of extended military narrative to provide examples of good generalship for his readers, his conception of the importance and dangers of a military education, his attitude toward the moral use of deception in warfare, and the importance of *synkrisis* to the reader's final assessment of a general's military ability. I conclude with a case study of the *Pyrrhus-Marius*, in which I examine how Plutarch uses military narrative throughout the pair to compare the generalship of the two men.

I demonstrate that Plutarch's conception of generalship in the *Parallel Lives* is nuanced, consistent, and often significant to the interpretation of a pair. Plutarch constructs his military narratives in such a way as to identify specific acts of generalship through which the military leaders among his readership could evaluate and improve their own generalship. Plutarch's treatment of the morality of generalship is consistent with his views on education and character; while he accepts the necessity and appreciates the effectiveness of military deception, he also recognizes its limitations and holds up for criticism those generals who do not use it appropriately.

I also examine the importance of the formal *synkrisis* at the end of each pair of Lives to the structural integrity of the Plutarchan book and the evaluation of military leadership in each pair. These concluding *synkrisis* demonstrate that Plutarch had a consistent set of criteria for evaluating the generalship of his subjects, and encourage the reader to make similar judgments on military ability themselves. This process of evaluation and comparison of military leadership is particularly important to my reading of the *Pyrrhus-Marius*, as comparing the military careers of its subjects allows for a more complete reading of the pair than is otherwise possible.

## Lay Summary

This dissertation is a study of Plutarch's portrayal of military leadership in his *Parallel Lives*. I investigate Plutarch's use of extended military narrative to provide examples of good generalship for his readers, his conception of the importance and dangers of a military education, his attitude toward the moral use of deception in warfare, and the importance of Plutarch's formal comparisons to the reader's final assessment of a general's military ability. I conclude with a case study of the *Pyrrhus-Marius*, in which I examine how Plutarch uses military narrative throughout the pair to compare the generalship of the two men.

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## Introduction

Today, Plutarch is not often read for his insight on ancient military leadership. While it is possible to find essays among the *Moralia* that address the campaigns of Alexander the Great or the military achievements of Athens, there are certainly no manuals of military science such as those written by Onasander or Polyaeus. Likewise, his *Parallel Lives*, traditionally read as historical sources as much as biographical pieces, lack the personal military commentary that can be found, for example, in the works of Xenophon. Indeed, Plutarch's sole first-hand military knowledge appears to have come from occasional visits to battlefields such as Bedriacum (*Otho* 14.2) and Chaeroneia (*Sulla* 21.4). It is certainly tempting to take Plutarch's assertion in the proem of the *Alexander* that he writes "not histories, but lives" (*Alex.* 1.2) as sufficient reason to ignore anything he says on the subject of military leadership.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to read any of the *Parallel Lives* without encountering a significant amount of detail about the military achievements and careers of his subjects. Plutarch may not have been personally involved in military operations as writers like Thucydides, Xenophon, or Caesar were, but his narratives of Nicias' Sicilian Expedition, Agesilaus' Persian campaigns, and Caesar's Gallic Wars nevertheless make up a substantial part of their respective Lives. Nor can these extensive military narratives be considered merely coincidental to Plutarch's more overt interest in the character or virtue of his subjects: in all but two of the eighteen extant *synkriseis* to the *Parallel Lives*, Plutarch specifically encourages the reader to judge the military successes of his



subjects against each other, affording military achievement the same status in the *synkriseis* as political accomplishment and moral virtue.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis seeks to address the considerable amount of material to be found regarding military leadership within the *Parallel Lives*. Over the course of this thesis I examine the majority of the *Parallel Lives* to varying degrees, excepting only those few pairs whose constituent Lives lack any serious discussion of generalship.<sup>2</sup> Through a close examination of military narrative, military education, and specific acts of generalship throughout Plutarch's work, I will demonstrate the consistency and significance of Plutarch's portrayal of effective military leadership within the *Parallel Lives*. One area of particular interest throughout my investigation is Plutarch's frequent emphasis on imitable acts of generalship. In many Lives, such as the *Lucullus*, *Aemilius Paulus*, and *Marius*, Plutarch identifies discreet actions that his subjects take on the battlefield that lead to their success. He cites, for instance, Lucullus' methodical and attritional campaign against Mithridates' numerically superior army (*Luc.* 8-11), Aemilius' observation and exploitation of gaps in the Macedonian phalanx (*Aem.* 20.4-8), and Marius' effective use of terrain against the Teutones (*Mar.* 20-21), as being specifically responsible for their successes against difficult odds. The level of analysis contained in these passages and others goes beyond that which is needed simply to progress the narrative in their respective Lives. Indeed, it is indicative not only of

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<sup>1</sup> The two pairs whose *synkriseis* do not compare their subjects' military accomplishments, the *Lycurgus-Numa* and *Demosthenes-Cicero*, understandably do not include much discussion of generalship in the individual Lives themselves. They are the exception that prove the ubiquity of military leaders across the rest of the *Parallel Lives*.

<sup>2</sup> See n.1, above.

Plutarch's interest in the specific military deeds of his subjects, but also of his recognition that many of his readers would be similarly concerned with the generalship of these accomplished statesmen.

Another trend I follow in this thesis is Plutarch's use of *synkrisis* in his portrayal of effective military leadership. The formal *synkriseis* that conclude most pairs of Lives often contain significant comparisons of their subjects' generalship across a range of criteria, from relatively simple measurements such as number and scale of battles to more complex evaluations of personal responsibility, the influence of fortune, or the impact of specific military innovations. These comparisons demonstrate the degree to which Plutarch analyzed his subjects' actions on the battlefield, and allow us to identify precisely what Plutarch considered important in his assessment of generalship. Just as important as these formal *synkriseis* are the internal comparisons both within and between pairs of Lives. Several pairs which feature some of the most militaristic of Plutarch's subjects, such as the *Alexander-Caesar* and the *Pyrrhus-Marius*, lack the concluding *synkriseis* that so help to reinforce Plutarch's portrayal of generalship from the pair itself. Nevertheless, the parallels between the military narratives within these pairs and others provide key insights into Plutarch's judgments concerning what constitutes effective generalship. These judgments, both implicit and explicit, constitute an important aspect of the *Parallel Lives*, as they provide the opportunity for interested readers to further their own understanding of military leadership. This concept of self-improvement is central to Plutarch's conception of his work, and throughout this thesis I demonstrate that the *Parallel Lives* provide as much opportunity for aspiring generals to

better themselves as it does for any other statesmen.

### **Previous Scholarship on Generalship in the *Parallel Lives***

Plutarchan scholarship has tended to avoid investigating the military aspects of Plutarch's works to any great degree, and this comes as no surprise. Plutarch lacked the military background of predecessors like Xenophon or Polybius, and his stated purpose in the *Lives* is to help improve the moral character and virtues of his readers, not to provide a handbook for aspiring generals.<sup>3</sup> The traditional tendency to avoid military themes among Plutarchan scholars is not, of course, without some justification, and several have identified legitimate shortcomings in Plutarch's treatment of military matters. In the preface of his commentary on the *Alexander*, Hamilton (1969) correctly comments on the paucity of military narrative in the *Life*, which is particularly surprising for one who is so defined by his military successes. In addition to the weakness of some of his military narratives, Plutarch has earned criticism for his understanding of broad military trends. Pelling (1986a) argues that Plutarch seems to be mostly unaware of the real significance of Marian military reforms, largely due to his ignorance of Roman political institutions that do not have clear Greek analogies. Keaveney (2005) identifies another flaw in Plutarch's understanding of military matters in the late Roman Republic made clear in the *Sulla*, in which Plutarch describes Sulla treating his soldiers in a way much more appropriate to the Triumvirs of the late 30s BC

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<sup>3</sup> *Aem.* 1.1-3; *Per.* 1.3-2.4; *Dem.* 1.3-6.

than to a consular commander of the early 80s.<sup>4</sup> De Blois (1992) similarly acknowledges that while Plutarch may have been aware of the organizational and tactical changes that the Roman army underwent throughout the Republic, he makes very little mention of it. Plutarch likewise has little discussion of the development of Greek hoplite warfare in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC or of the changes Philip II made to the phalanx before the campaigns of Alexander. I do not disagree with these observations, but I do not believe that the lack of specific discussion of larger military trends in the *Parallel Lives* detracts from his ability to discuss the generalship of his subjects with accuracy. Indeed, passages such as Philipoemen's efforts to upgrade the phalanx formation of the Achaean army (*Phil.* 9.1-14), Marius' alteration of the *pilum* (*Mar.* 25.2), and the difficulties Aemeilius faced when attempting to engage a Greek phalanx with his legionaries (*Aem.* 16-20) are not uncommon in the *Parallel Lives*. Such examples demonstrate that while broad historical development may not have been Plutarch's main focus, Plutarch was certainly aware of at least some of the tactical innovations and difficulties that influenced the military careers of his subjects.

Plutarch, then, rarely launches into extended discussions or digressions on the topic of generalship *per se*, and does not often dedicate much space in his *Parallel Lives* to analyzing broad military trends in Greek or Roman history. Nevertheless, several scholars in recent years have observed that Plutarch had more than a passing interest in the subject. In his seminal book on the *Parallel Lives*, Wardman (1974) recognizes that

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<sup>4</sup> Keaveney (2007), 93 n.5, identifies two further – if relatively minor – historical inconsistencies with Plutarch's treatment of Marius' reforms and Sulla's discipline of his soldiers during the Social War.

generalship played an important role in the lives of many of Plutarch's subjects, and identifies several parallels between military and political leadership; however, Wardman sees both military virtue and the victories created by good generalship as subordinate to political virtue and the larger goals of the '*politicus*' in the *Parallel Lives*.<sup>5</sup> This view, while justifiable within his discussion of the '*politicus*', does not do justice to the actual significance of military virtue in the *Lives*, and ignores Lives like the *Sertorius*, *Eumenes*, or *Pyrrhus* in which the subject's military career is foremost among Plutarch's concerns. Duff (1999) shows considerably more appreciation for Plutarch's interest in the military accomplishments of his subjects. Unlike Wardman, Duff does not see military achievement in the *Parallel Lives* as subordinate to a statesman's political career, and indeed recognizes that Plutarch frequently shows an admiration for military success and achievement beyond that which reflects on a subject's character.<sup>6</sup> While Duff does not significantly expand further on the importance of military achievement in its own right, it is nevertheless an important recognition of an often-overlooked aspect of the *Parallel Lives*, and it was this initial work which led me to investigate further just how much Plutarch reflects upon generalship and what the ancient reader could infer about effective military practice from his writing.<sup>7</sup>

In more recent years scholars have begun to look more clearly at military generalship in the *Parallel Lives*, perhaps in some part due to greater recognition of the

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<sup>5</sup> Wardman (1974), 93-100.

<sup>6</sup> Duff (1999), 97-98.

<sup>7</sup> Duff (1999), 121-3, 184-204 does consider the conflict within several pairs between Plutarch's high valuation of military success and the questionable means that some generals employed to achieve it, which is a theme I will address in Chapter 2. He likewise (1999, 263-4) discusses the importance of military achievement to Plutarch's concluding *synkriseis*, which I expand upon in Chapter 3.

subject in Duff (1999). Teodorsson (2005) examines the importance of fortune to Timoleon's military success and the degree to which that contributes to Plutarch's praise of the general's achievements. Tröster (2008), on the other hand, looks at the eventual failure of Lucullus' military leadership due to his inability to control his soldiers. Several scholars have also examined the close interplay in some Lives between generalship and moral virtue. Verdegem (2005) compares the military achievements of Alcibiades with the consequences of his consistently questionable moral choices. Ingenkamp (2008) explores the impact of Pelopidas' and Marcellus' anger and rashness on their military careers (and particularly their untimely deaths). Beneker (2010) uses Sertorius' warlike nature and military ability as a foundation to explore his relations with his δόξα and the consequent similarities between his Life and those of other Roman generals of the late republic. Xenophontos (2012) focuses solely on military ethics within the *Fabius Maximus*, and shows how Plutarch constructs the military narrative in that Life so as to demonstrate and reinforce correct moral action. This type of scholarship has been becoming more frequent, and represents a positive trend in the growing recognition of the importance of military leadership and narrative to the *Parallel Lives*. In particular, these recent scholars have been treating military, political, and moral achievements as interconnected and equally valuable to a complete understanding of individual Lives and pairs. Military activity in the *Lives* is no longer necessarily treated as peripheral, as it was in Wardman's time, but as an integral component of the work. Nevertheless, apart from Marincola's (2010) investigation of military narrative in the "Persian War Lives", this research has tended to be limited in scope to a single Life or pair, and still focuses

primarily on the relationship between generalship and moral virtue rather than examining generalship in its own right. This is completely understandable given the current state of Plutarchan scholarship and the clear importance of character and virtue to the *Parallel Lives*, but at the same time leaves considerable room for new scholarship on the subject of military leadership. I build on this recent work, and focus particularly on how completely Plutarch integrates military narrative and analysis into the *Parallel Lives* as a whole.

### **Methodology and Organization**

The *Parallel Lives* represent a significant body of work, and in order to examine Plutarch's portrayal of military leadership more effectively across all of the relevant Lives I have had to impose certain boundaries on my treatment of his works. First, I treat Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* as literary works, and avoid analyzing his military narratives for their historical accuracy. This is something best suited for commentaries on individual Lives or pairs, which have the depth and detail to do such a topic justice.<sup>8</sup> That being said, I do engage with the sources of Plutarch's military narratives at times, particularly in Chapter 1, in an attempt to identify how Plutarch adapted his source material to highlight particular military actions or themes.<sup>9</sup> Overall, though, I take the

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, historical commentaries have proven to be an invaluable resource for the origin and accuracy of Plutarch's military narrative in many Lives. Hamilton (1969) meticulously identifies what is missing from Plutarch's narratives of Alexander's campaigns, while Pelling (1988b), Albin (1996), Georgiadou (1997), Pelling (1997), Shipley (1997), and Pelling (2012) each deal with Plutarch's military narrative in useful detail. I found Shipley and Pelling (2012) particularly influential: Shipley for his analysis of the frequent acts of military deception in the *Agesilaus*, and Pelling for his meticulous detail regarding the sources and historical details of Caesar's many campaigns.

<sup>9</sup> For Plutarch's adaptation of his source material, cf. Pelling (1980), Larmour (1988), Larmour (1992).

details of Plutarch's military narratives as they are written, and do not attempt to explain away even obvious factual errors or omissions; my work is not an apology of Plutarch's worth as a military historian, but an appreciation of his significant interest in the art of the successful general.

Secondly, as the title suggests, this thesis focuses on military leadership in the *Parallel Lives* rather than all of Plutarch's work as a whole. I do not avoid the *Moralia* altogether, and indeed delve into them quite heavily when examining Plutarch's views on education and deception. Despite the wide variety of rhetorical pieces, philosophical dialogues, and miscellaneous essays that make up the *Moralia*, I believe that it is counterproductive to consider only half of Plutarch's literary output when exploring such important themes in the *Parallel Lives*. Amongst everything else that Duff (1999) has added to the study of Plutarch, his work has shown the considerable benefits to be gained from examining the entirety of Plutarch's *corpus*. Nevertheless, while I do address works from the *Moralia* within this thesis, I only consider Plutarch's treatment of military leadership within the *Parallel Lives* themselves.

I have organized this thesis into four chapters, which together consider the variety of ways in which Plutarch incorporates themes of military leadership into the *Parallel Lives*. Chapter 1 examines Plutarch's use of extended military narrative to provide concrete examples of generalship that his audience would be able to imitate or avoid. It begins by considering the contemporary readership of the *Parallel Lives*, and the possibility that at least a small portion of Plutarch's Roman readers would have been in the position to put lessons of generalship into practice. It then addresses the



importance of imitation to Plutarch's conception of how his audience would engage with individual pairs, and the idea that his readers would examine the *Parallel Lives* in order to identify great deeds that are worthy of imitation. The concept of imitation provides the framework for an examination of Plutarch's extended military narratives across several Lives, where it is seen that Plutarch consistently constructs his narrative in such a way as to highlight particular acts of military leadership that he considers to be worthy of imitation. It is from these narratives that Plutarch's ideal of a rational and conscientious military leader begins to emerge.

Chapter 2 builds on the significance of military narrative established in the first chapter to examine two related themes that connect military leadership to moral virtue. It begins by considering the importance that Plutarch places on his subjects receiving a balanced education, and the moral implications for those statesmen whose education is primarily or exclusively military. The chapter then examines the portrayal of military deception in the *Parallel Lives*, focusing particularly on two brief case studies: one on the Spartan Lives *Lysander* and *Agessilaus*, and another on the *Sertorius-Eumenes*. These two studies demonstrate that Plutarch clearly appreciated the effectiveness of military deception, but that he was also willing to identify and implicitly criticize those generals who did not use it appropriately.

Chapter 3 focuses on the formal *synkriseis* that conclude the majority of pairs in the *Parallel Lives*. It examines the criteria that Plutarch uses to compare his subjects' military careers in the *synkriseis*, and considers the consistency between such comparisons and the portrayal of the same military careers in the Lives themselves. This

analysis demonstrates that Plutarch's comparison of military achievement in the *synkriseis* is considerably more nuanced than it first appears. The chapter further examines the *synkriseis* in the context of their traditional purpose of directly comparing and judging between the actions of two men. While Plutarch rarely makes an explicit judgment between the military ability and achievements of his subjects, his frequent use of *synkriseis* suggests that he fully expected his readers to come to their own conclusions about which statesman in each pair should be considered the superior general.

The importance of *synkrisis* to the discussion of military leadership in the *Parallel Lives* becomes clear in Chapter 4, an extended case study of the *Pyrrhus-Marius*. Pyrrhus and Marius are both known for their extensive military careers, and the pair itself is one of the few that lacks a concluding *synkrisis*; these two characteristics make it particularly worthwhile to examine the *Pyrrhus-Marius* in terms of the themes discussed throughout the rest of the thesis, with the goal of concluding which man was the better general. Comparing the military narratives within the two Lives not only makes it possible to evaluate the generalship of each man, but also magnifies several important themes within the pair that are not otherwise apparent. The military leadership of the two men, upon close inspection, proves to be one of the most important features in the entire pair.

Plutarch's diverse treatment of military leadership throughout the *Parallel Lives* demonstrates an interest in the subject that is rarely acknowledged. He is not merely concerned with the intersection between generalship and character, although that is certainly a common theme in many Lives, but with the actual mechanics of good

generalship and the success that effective military leadership brings for both individuals and states. One of Plutarch's stated aims in the *Parallel Lives* is the betterment of his readers, and his consistent focus on the actions of successful generals on the battlefield encourages the military-minded among his audience to reflect on how they might improve their own leadership abilities. Plutarch's portrayal of military leadership in the *Parallel Lives*, then, is not an afterthought, and should not be treated as such. It is deliberate, well-crafted, and an integral part of the work as a whole; its study allows for a more complete understanding of the *Parallel Lives*.

## Chapter 1

### Military Narrative in Plutarch's *Lives*

Plutarch's military narrative in the *Parallel Lives* often pales in comparison to that found in other sources. His descriptions of important battles such as Cannae (*Fab.* 14-16) or Gaugamela (*Alex.* 31-33), while often of admirable length for the size of the Life they are found in, lack significant detail compared to other extant accounts.<sup>10</sup> Such details as the orders of battle and troop movements that other authors traditionally include rarely find much space in Plutarch's descriptions of battles and campaigns. While these limitations sometimes earn special mention in commentaries of particular *Lives*, such as by Hamilton, they are rarely held against Plutarch as an author.<sup>11</sup> After all, as is often cited, Plutarch wrote “not histories, but lives” (*Alex.* 1.2), and so would not be expected to dedicate much time to the details of war. And yet, with a few notable exceptions, Plutarch dedicates a substantial amount of space in many Lives to the battles and campaigns fought by his subjects.

In some Lives Plutarch chooses to highlight one or two particular campaigns with a particularly lengthy narrative. The *Caesar* contains extended narratives of both the Gallic Wars (*Caes.* 15-27) and the Civil War (*Caes.* 36-47), which is of course not surprising given the importance of those campaigns to his life and career. Lucullus'

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<sup>10</sup> Both Polybius and Livy dedicate eight chapters to the battle of Cannae (Pol. 3.110-18; Livy 22.44-52). Arrian spends seven chapters on Gaugamela (3.8-15), while Diodorus Siculus spends five (17.56-61). Chapters are obviously not a precise unit of measurement and can vary widely in length, but in my opinion still provide an effective rough comparison of length.

<sup>11</sup> Hamilton (1969), xl.

campaigns against Mithridates and Tigranes (*Luc.* 7.1-19.5; 24.1-35.7), Marius' war with the Cimbri and Teutones (*Mar.* 13-27), and Antony's Parthian expedition (*Ant.* 37-52) are a few other examples that are equal in length and detail to what is found in the *Caesar*. In other Lives, such as the *Fabius Maximus*, the *Nicias*, and the *Sertorius*, however, military narrative is even more prominent, and effectively forms the centerpiece of the entire work in each case.<sup>12</sup> All of the statesmen mentioned above are well-known generals, and it is understandable that Plutarch dedicates much of their Lives to their respective military careers. The presence or absence of military narrative in a particular Life is not always so predictable, however. The *Alexander* stands out clearly as the Life of a general with surprisingly little military narrative. In the *Alexander*, descriptions of major military operations make up fewer than 8 of 77 chapters, and narrative of actual fighting takes up even less space.<sup>13</sup> This contrasts sharply with the *Caesar*, which dedicates the majority of thirteen chapters to Caesar's campaigns in Gaul (*Caes.* 15-27), twelve to his war with Pompey (*Caes.* 36-47), and several more to his wars in Pontus (*Caes.* 50), Africa (*Caes.* 52-53), and Spain (*Caes.* 56). Other Lives, on the other hand, contain considerably more military narrative than one might expect; both the *Aristides* and the *Crassus* show that Plutarch could highlight the generalship of men who were primarily politicians. The Persian Wars feature heavily in the *Aristides*, and Plutarch dedicates 13 of 27 chapters to the battles of Marathon,

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<sup>12</sup> The entire second half of the *Nicias* details his participation in the ill-fated Sicilian Expedition (*Nic.* 15-30); the war with Hannibal dominates nearly the entirety of the *Fabius Maximus* (*Fab.* 2-27); and Sertorius' campaigns in Spain against Metellus and Pompey form the majority of his Life (*Sert.* 12-26).

<sup>13</sup> Plutarch's descriptions of the major battles of Alexander's campaign are consistently short: Granicus: 16.1-14; Issus: 20.8; Tyre: 24.5-25.3; Gaugamela: 31-3; Bactria and Sogdiana: 45.5-6, 58; Hydaspes 60.1-8.

Salamis, and Plataea.<sup>14</sup> The *Crassus* as well includes a surprising amount of military narrative considering its subject. Plutarch dedicates four chapters to the revolt of Spartacus (*Cras.* 8-11) and a full seventeen (*Cras.* 17-33) to Crassus' failed expedition against Parthia. Plutarch's description of the disastrous battle of Carrhae (*Cras.* 23-27) is far more detailed than his narrative of any of Alexander's battles.<sup>15</sup> There are, in fact, very few Lives that lack any military narrative; only the *Lycurgus-Numa*, *Demosthenes-Cicero*, and the *Gracchi* do not contain at least some description of their subjects' actions in command of soldiers.<sup>16</sup>

It is this military narrative, which Plutarch includes in nearly every Life, that will be the focus of this chapter. Over the course of the chapter, I will argue that these narratives are not only in accord with but also complement Plutarch's stated goal of improving his readers' character.<sup>17</sup> First, I will examine the recent scholarship on Plutarch's use of military narrative in the *Parallel Lives*, and consider the relationship between military narrative and the depiction of character. I will argue that actual military narrative, as distinguished from the anecdotes about early military service that are frequent in the *Lives*, is particularly effective at demonstrating the character of the generals involved. After this I will discuss the readership of the *Parallel Lives*,

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<sup>14</sup> Plutarch's treatment of Marathon (*Aris.* 5.1-7) and Salamis (*Aris.* 8.1-9.4) is understandably short, but the narrative of Plataea is ten chapters long (*Aris.* 11.1-20.7).

<sup>15</sup> The focus on Crassus' Parthian campaign is much less surprising when it is set next to the Sicilian Expedition in the *Nicias*, and Plutarch states explicitly in the first sentence of the pair that he saw the two disasters as suitable parallels (*Nic.* 1.1).

<sup>16</sup> Plutarch does say that Cicero was saluted as *imperator* by his soldiers after defeating a band of robbers while in Cilicia (*Cic.* 36.6), but gives no further detail. As mentioned above, Plutarch mentions the early military service of the two Gracchi brothers (*Gracchi* 4.5-6, 23(2).1-3), but provides no subsequent narrative of their actions.

<sup>17</sup> Duff (1999), 49-51. See below, pp. 27-32.

specifically considering the relevance of its dedicatee Sosius Senecio. Plutarch intended the *Lives* to have a positive educational effect on its readers, and I will demonstrate that there were indeed contemporary readers of the *Parallel Lives* who could have benefited from reading about the actions of successful generals. In the next section I consider how this process may have actually occurred. In the proems of several *Lives*, most notably the *Pericles*, *Aemilius Paulus*, and *Demetrius*, Plutarch explains that he wrote the *Lives* in part so that his readers would have the opportunity to imitate the virtues of past statesmen.<sup>18</sup> I argue that Plutarch's descriptions of battles and campaigns often provide the possibility for the same sort of imitation: even though contemporary generals would not have been likely to encounter the same exact situations as Caesar or Fabius or Philopoemen, Plutarch frequently isolates key actions and decisions that were indeed imitable by those of his readers who commanded armies. Finally, after examining select passages of military narrative from various *Lives*, I will consider what precisely a reader could learn about successful generalship from the *Parallel Lives*.

### **Scholarship on Plutarch's Military Narrative**

The scholarship which has focused on military narrative within the *Lives* has done so within the context of Plutarch's interest in portraying moral virtue. Sophia Xenophontos' recent work on practical ethics in Plutarch's work is one such example. In an earlier article, she argues that Fabius' frequent disagreements with the other Roman

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<sup>18</sup> *Per.* 1.4-2.4; *Aem.* 1.1-4; *Demetr.* 1.3-6. For a more detailed analysis of these passages in terms of military imitation, see below, pp. 27-32.

generals throughout the *Fabius-Maximus* serve to display Plutarch's views of proper, ethical generalship. The contrasts between the generalship of Fabius and that of his colleagues in the face of Hannibal's invasion demonstrate both the dangers of rashness and ambition in a general, and the consequent importance of prudence and foresight.<sup>19</sup> She has more recently argued that Plutarch uses military narrative as a setting for both his subjects and his audience to engage in reflection of their own character and actions.<sup>20</sup> I completely agree with the utility of military narrative in the *Parallel Lives* that Xenophon advocates here, but believe that this point can and should be taken further: as I argue below, Plutarch's military narrative provides interested readers with an opportunity to reflect on their own generalship as well as their character. Other scholars have likewise used Plutarch's portrayal of military leadership in the *Lives* as a lens through which to examine specific moral questions.<sup>21</sup> Such work shows a growing awareness of the prevalence of military narrative in the *Parallel Lives*, but at the same time also demonstrates a continued reluctance to see Plutarch's portrayal of generalship as anything other than another window into the moral character of his subjects.

Timothy Duff has acknowledged the importance that Plutarch places on the military successes of his heroes, and has even suggested that Plutarch had a particular interest in military affairs. He makes a distinction between military narrative which characterizes a particular subject, and that which does not. The non-characterizing

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<sup>19</sup> Xenophon (2012).

<sup>20</sup> Xenophon (2016), 151-172.

<sup>21</sup> Tröster (2008) discusses Lucullus' difficulties in dealing with the *plēthos*, which are particularly clear in his treatment of soldiers while on campaign; Ingenkamp (2008) considers Plutarch's conflicting judgments concerning the excessive rashness that he thought characterized the generalship of Pelopidas and Marcellus.



passages, Duff argues, demonstrate both Plutarch's interest in military affairs and the high regard in which he held success, even success which came at the price of questionable morality; this conflict between success and morality, in turn, makes several pairs of *Parallel Lives* particularly problematic.<sup>22</sup> Duff identifies passages from the *Cato Major*, *Pelopidas*, and the *Gracchi* as particularly clear examples of characterizing military narrative, and indeed they are. Cato appears brave, incorruptible, and boastful during his campaigns in Spain and Greece (*Cato Major* 10-14), Pelopidas and Epaminondas demonstrate great loyalty during the battle of Mantinea (*Pel.* 4.5-8), and Plutarch explicitly identifies the bravery and discipline that the Gracchi brothers show during their early military careers (*Gracchi* 4.5-6, 23(2).1-3).<sup>23</sup> There are many more similar passages throughout the *Lives*. Marius appears much like the Gracchi in his early military career, when he excelled the other young men in bravery and readily accepted the changes that his commander Scipio introduced into the army (*Mar.* 3.2). In the *Camillus*, Plutarch describes the Roman engaging and routing the bravest of the enemy at the head of the army while dragging along a missile in his wounded thigh (*Cam.* 2.1). The difficulty only comes when attempting to identify military narrative that does not, in fact, characterize the subject. Duff singles out Plutarch's description of Caesar's Gallic campaigns (*Caes.* 15-27) as a contrast to the passages cited above, and sees it as an example of Plutarch's admiration for military achievement. I agree that this passage from

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<sup>22</sup> Duff (1999), 98. Duff identifies the *Coriolanus-Alcibiades*, *Lysander-Sulla*, *Phocion-Cato Minor* and *Pyrrhus-Marius* as pairs which embody this conflict. See Duff (1997); (1999), 101-240 for more on these *Lives*.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Georgiadou (1997), 36-7 for the close connection between Pelopidas and Epaminondas throughout the *Pelopidas*.

the *Caesar* is indeed considerably different than those found in the *Pelopidas* or the *Gracchi*, but not because of any lack of characterization.<sup>24</sup> While the opening chapters of the section focus on Caesar's achievements (*Caes.* 15.1-5) and the virtues demonstrated by the soldiers under his command (*Caes.* 16.1-9), Caesar's character is conspicuous throughout the rest of the narrative. His impressive resilience and continual efforts to train his body while on campaign, despite his apparent frailty and epileptic fits (*Caes.* 17.2-3), clearly demonstrate his self-control and dedication. He was constantly busy, confident on horseback, wrote frequent letters, and lacked pretension (*Caes.* 17.4-11). Caesar's actions in the campaigns and battles that follow characterize him as well: he is decisive (*Caes.* 18.2, 19.9, 24.4, 26.7), bold (*Caes.* 19.7, 20.8-9, 23.2), clever (*Caes.* 22.7, 24.6), and eager for glory (*Caes.* 22.6). Herein lies the main difficulty with trying to identify military passages that do not inform on the subject's character. As Duff and others have recognized, the ancient notion of character was inextricably linked with action: one's character determined one's actions, so it was through a man's actions that his character could be best observed.<sup>25</sup> This relationship between action and character lies at the heart of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. Plutarch wrote about statesmen, not philosophers, and so even the Lives of dedicated politicians such as Demosthenes and Cicero demonstrate their subjects' characters by highlighting the important actions of their careers.<sup>26</sup> It is not only actions that illustrate character, of course; at the beginning

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<sup>24</sup> I would suggest, however, that the passage Duff cites from the *Cato Major* is much more closely related to that from the *Caesar* than those from the *Pelopidas* or *Gracchi*.

<sup>25</sup> Duff (1999), 13-14. Cf. Gill (1983; 1990; 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Duff (1999), 15-16.

of the *Alexander* Plutarch famously says that phrases and jests may reveal even more about a man's character than illustrious deeds (*Alex.* 1.2), and he does not neglect the meaningful sayings of his subjects in the *Parallel Lives*. However, while aphorisms are particularly prevalent in a few Lives, actions inevitably form the background of both characterization and narrative in Plutarch's biographies.<sup>27</sup> Because of the relationship between action and character, then, military narrative, with its focus on the actions of a particular general, invariably forms part of that general's characterization.

Nevertheless, there is a considerable difference between the Gallic War narrative in the *Caesar* and the rather perfunctory pieces of military narrative which Duff cites from the *Pelopidas* and the *Gracchi*. The passage from the *Caesar* covers several campaigns over a span of many years and has a clear chronological progression; it is by any definition a coherent narrative. The passages from the *Pelopidas*, *Gracchi*, and others cited above, on the other hand, are simply anecdotes. It is telling that these examples all fall in the beginnings of their respective Lives, in what Duff has termed 'proemial openings'.<sup>28</sup> Such openings appear in the majority of Lives, and serve to introduce both the subject's character and important themes that will appear throughout the rest of the Life. These openings often include stories from early in the subject's military or political career, but, crucially, do not form part of the standard chronological narratives of their respective Lives.<sup>29</sup> References to early military actions in these

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<sup>27</sup> Plutarch is particularly fond of Laconisms, as can be seen at *Lyc.* 19-20; *Lys.* 22.1-5; *Cato Major* 7-9; and, of course, the *Apopthegmata Laconica*.

<sup>28</sup> Duff (2008a), 190.

<sup>29</sup> Duff (2008a), 190-1. The proemial openings are often, though not always, grammatically separated from the primary narrative.

proemial openings do primarily focus on characterization, as Duff has observed: Plutarch's brief illustrations of the loyalty of Pelopias (*Pel.* 4.5-8) and the bravery of Marius (*Mar.* 3.2) and Camillus (*Cam.* 2.1), as discussed above, support this. However, because these anecdotes are so limited in scope and are isolated from the actual narrative of a particular Life, they should not be classified as military narrative. From this point on, military narrative will refer only to passages in the primary chronological narrative of a Life that cover a complete battle and campaign. These will be the focus of the rest of the chapter.

### Readership of the *Parallel Lives*

So far I have suggested that Plutarch's military narratives in the *Parallel Lives* provide examples of effective generalship that his readers could imitate. This necessarily brings up the difficult question of who actually read the *Parallel Lives*, and whether any readers would realistically have benefited from practical advice on generalship. In the *Political Precepts*, Plutarch specifically dissuades his readers from glorifying the Greek military successes of Marathon, Plataea, and the Eurymedon: contemporary Greeks no longer had the opportunity (or need) for independent military action under Roman rule, and stirring up the common people with memories of past victories is not only laughable but potentially dangerous (813C-814C).<sup>30</sup> If Plutarch expected all of the readers of the

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<sup>30</sup> Marincola (2010), 121 sees a potential paradox in Plutarch's warning here, considering not only that the Persian Wars form the central narrative of the *Themistocles*, *Aristides*, and *Cimon*, but also that Plutarch makes more than a hundred references to the Persian Wars in the *Moralia*. However, this passage is not truly in conflict with the rest of his writings. Plutarch only says that it is τὸς πολλοὺς (814C) that begin to act wantonly at the thought of past military glories; he certainly would not have expected τὸς πολλοὺς to be reading his works, and thus no doubt expected his readers to understand the educational purpose behind

*Parallel Lives* to be Greeks, politically active or not, then he could not have expected his military narratives to have had any educational effect on his readers. Of course, we know that at least one reader of the *Lives* was Roman: the dedicatee of the series, Sosius Senecio. Although the opening pair of the *Parallel Lives*, which would have likely contained an explicit dedication, is not extant, several references to Senecio in other *Lives* have made his position as sole dedicatee of the series widely accepted.<sup>31</sup> Sosius Senecio was not only twice consul and a prominent general under Trajan, but also a well-educated and philosophically-minded man, sympathetic to Greek culture, who additionally received the dedications to Plutarch's *Table Talk* and *Progress in Virtue*.<sup>32</sup> Senecio appears to be a perfect representation of the type of reader most able to benefit from reading the *Lives*: an influential Roman in the imperial administration who was interested in philosophy and who had the opportunity to put both political and military lessons from the *Parallel Lives* to practical use. Nevertheless, opinion is still divided on how representative of the *Parallel Lives*' readership he actually was. Duff acknowledges the possibility that Romans besides Sosius Senecio may have read the *Lives*, and that some Greek readers may also have achieved similarly high positions in the imperial administration; however, he also asserts that “the majority of Plutarch's readers”, even if they were indeed politically active, faced the political limitations that Plutarch sets out

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his discussions of the Persian Wars.

<sup>31</sup> Plutarch references Senecio by name at *Thes.* 1.1; *Dem.* 1.1; 31.7; *Dion* 1.1. At *Aem.* 1.6 and *Ag./Cleom.* 2.9 Plutarch addresses an unnamed reader in the second person singular, who appears likely to have been Senecio as well. On the basis of this, Ziegler (1949), 52-3 suggested that Senecio was the dedicatee of the entire series of *Parallel Lives*, and this has become the *communis opinio*; cf. Jones (1970), 102; (1971), 55.

<sup>32</sup> *Quaest. conv.* 612C-E; *prof. in virt.* 75B; see Jones (1971), 55-6.

for Greek magistrates in the *Political Precepts*.<sup>33</sup> This is certainly reasonable, especially given that many aspects of the *Lives* appear to be written with a distinctly Greek audience in mind, as discussed below.

Duff does provide a stronger case for a primarily Greek readership of the *Lives*, although not in connection with Senecio's role as dedicatee. He observes that Plutarch frequently judges his Roman subjects according to Greek virtues and values, especially in regards to the existence of a Hellenic education: that Coriolanus and Marius reject proper education, for example, counts as a major stroke against each of their characters in their respective *Lives*.<sup>34</sup> Duff also argues that the frequent glosses and explanations of relatively simple Latin words and phrases throughout the *Parallel Lives* are evidence that Plutarch constructs both the author and the reader of the *Parallel Lives* as Greek.<sup>35</sup> In contrast, Philip Stadter, drawing upon work by Simon Swain, has recently suggested that such Latin glosses were a stylistic necessity when including foreign words in Greek literature of Plutarch's time, regardless of the reader's expected knowledge.<sup>36</sup> He suggests that Plutarch saw the *Parallel Lives* as a means to bring practical Greek philosophy to Rome, so that he might in some way educate the most influential statesmen of his time as Plato had once done.<sup>37</sup> Christopher Pelling, in turn, has

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<sup>33</sup> Duff (1999), 66-7.

<sup>34</sup> Duff (1999), 303-308. Cf. Swain (1990b); *Cor.* 1.2-3; *Mar.* 2.2-4.

<sup>35</sup> Duff (1999), 302. Some of these examples, such as Plutarch's explanation of Pompey's surname Magnus at both *Crass.* 7.1 and *Pomp.* 13.6-7, or his discussion of Roman naming practices at *Mar.* 1.1-3, are particularly telling for a Greek readership. Cf. Cerezo Magán (1992), 16-18; Wardman (1974), 39-40.

<sup>36</sup> Stadter (2014), 46; following Swain (1996), 40-2.

<sup>37</sup> Stadter (2014), 50-5. Again following Swain (1990), Stadter highlights the emphasis that Plutarch often put on the benefits of the Hellenic education (or the consequences of its absence) for the Roman subjects of the *Lives*.

advocated a middle ground, and, most importantly, does not attempt to narrow down the real-life audience of the *Lives*. He agrees with Duff that Plutarch has constructed a primarily Greek audience for the *Lives*, but he also recognizes the significance of Plutarch's dedication of the work to Senecio. Pelling suggests that the dedication to Senecio not only represents one end of the range of actual readers but also indicates that the *Lives* will be valuable in some way to everyone from local Greeks to influential Roman leaders; the real-life readership of the *Lives* almost certainly included influential Romans like Senecio, local Greek politicians like Menemachus, and Plutarch's students in Chaeronea.<sup>38</sup>

I believe that this is the most productive way to consider the readership of the *Parallel Lives*. The evidence for a constructed Greek readership is convincing; while Stadter has shown that some of Plutarch's explanations of Latin words and Roman customs do serve an additional narrative purpose in some *Lives*, the numerous glosses that Plutarch includes are clearly aimed toward a presumed Greek reader.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, that Plutarch constructs a Greek narratee for the *Lives* by no means suggests that he did not expect Romans to read the work as well.<sup>40</sup> The dedication to Sosius Senecio is important, and appears to be based on a genuine relationship between the two men. Senecio's frequent appearances in the *Table Talk*, which is also dedicated to him, are particularly illustrative of the friendship between the two: Plutarch relates several

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<sup>38</sup> Pelling (2004), 407-409.

<sup>39</sup> Stadter (2014), 46. He specifically considers both Plutarch's explanation of Roman political terms like *populus*, *patricius*, and *senatus* in *Rom.* 13, and his definition of a *decies* at *Ant.* 4.7-9.

<sup>40</sup> Jones (1971), 78.

dinners and discussions that the two of them shared (612E-615C; 622C-623C; 635E-638A), including one which took place while Senecio was a guest at the wedding of Plutarch's son (666D). This is certainly not to say that there was no hint of a client-patron relationship in Plutarch's dedications to Senecio, which present the Roman as a particularly educated and cultured individual; it is very likely, as Stadter suggests, that it was on Senecio's recommendation that Plutarch received his *ornamenta consularia* from Trajan.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, it was not a one-sided dedication, and while Plutarch obviously addresses the *Lives* to Senecio because of the philosophical and moral benefits that reading them would bring, he could not have been unaware that the consul's career and aptitude lay in the military sphere.<sup>42</sup> Likely to have been in command of a legion in Lower Germany during the reign of Domitian, Senecio was appointed governor of Gallia Belgica soon after Domitian's assassination. After his first ordinary consulship in 99, Senecio held high command under Trajan in the Dacian Wars, and it is likely his success in that campaign which earned him his second consulship in 107.<sup>43</sup> Senecio, then, because of his combination of a philosophical education and political influence, closely embodied the statesmen of Classical Greece and Rome featured in the *Lives* by simultaneously exercising both political and military power.

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<sup>41</sup> Stadter (2014), 41-2. Cf. Jones (1971), 56. While Jones (1971), 49 cautions against presuming a similar client-patron relationship between Plutarch and L. Mestrius Florus, who secured the Chaeronean's Roman citizenship, there must have been some sort of mutual exchange between the two; Stadter's suggestion that Florus may have received the dedication of Plutarch's *Lives of the Caesars*, although pure speculation, is tempting. See Stadter (2014), 40-1.

<sup>42</sup> Plutarch never makes specific reference to Senecio's military experience, but he does refer to Trajan's expedition across the Danube in *On the Principle of Cold* (949E), and would certainly have known that Senecio was a part of that campaign. It might well have been Senecio who provided Plutarch with the story of boats being crushed by the river when it froze over.

<sup>43</sup> Jones (1971), 55-6.



Sosius Senecio was not the only one of Plutarch's friends to have held significant military command in the imperial administration. Perhaps the eldest of these was L. Mestrius Florus, to whom Plutarch owed his Roman citizenship. Florus served under Otho at Bedriacum in 69, apparently by duress, and later provided Plutarch with a tour of the battlefield (*Otho* 14.2).<sup>44</sup> There are more such friends to be found among the following generations. Quietus Avidius, a joint recipient of *On Brotherly Love* and the sole dedicatee of *On Delays of Divine Vengeance*, was a legionary legate late in Vespasian's reign or early in Domitian's, was suffect consul in 93, and held a consular command in Britain under Trajan.<sup>45</sup> If the Saturninus to whom Plutarch dedicates *Against Colotes* is L. Herrenius Saturninus, who intervened in Delphi as proconsul of Achaea in 98/9, he is another of Plutarch's friends with military influence; this Saturninus was a legate of Upper Moesia during the second Dacian War.<sup>46</sup> Of course, none of these men have any explicit connection to the *Parallel Lives*, and none of them appear to have shared the same close relationship that Plutarch and Senecio did. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that Plutarch did not only surround himself with local Greek magistrates or students of philosophy; Senecio was not the only influential Roman with whom Plutarch was on good terms. More significantly, Plutarch's friends in the imperial administration demonstrate Plutarch's awareness – if it was not already clear from the *Lives* themselves – that an interest in philosophy could successfully coexist with a military career.

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<sup>44</sup> Jones (1971), 49.

<sup>45</sup> Jones (1971), 51-3. *De frat. am.* 478A-B; *de sera num. vind.* 548A.

<sup>46</sup> Jones (1971), 57. *Adv. Col.* 1107E.

The virtues that Plutarch's subjects demonstrate in the *Parallel Lives* are, of course, relevant to all readers, regardless of their political or military influence. While it is difficult to deny that Plutarch did not expect at least some of his readers to have the opportunity to put into action some of the more practical lessons in statesmanship demonstrated by the famous leaders of the past, it is important not to take Plutarch's Roman connections too far when considering his composition of the *Lives*. While Senecio and Plutarch's other similarly influential acquaintances may well represent 'ideal' readers – those most able to put into practice lessons learned from the *Lives* on the widest scale – it is very unlikely that Plutarch would have composed the *Parallel Lives* with such readers in mind. Plutarch must surely have written the *Parallel Lives* with the well-educated but local Greeks that made up his immediate social circle in mind as the series' primary readers. Nevertheless, while the moral and political lessons so prevalent in the *Lives* would have applied to a wider readership, there was at the same time an audience for military lessons as well, for whom the generalship of Philopoemen, Marius, or Caesar might elicit particular interest.

### **Imitation of Generalship in the *Parallel Lives***

The importance of imitation to Plutarch's stated purpose of the *Lives* is widely accepted. While the first book of the *Parallel Lives*, the *Epaminondas-Scipio*, and the presumed introduction that would have begun it, have been lost, there exist in the beginning of other *Lives* authorial statements from Plutarch indirectly explaining his methodology. His purpose appears to be clear. Through the *Parallel Lives*, Plutarch seeks

to demonstrate the character of his subjects by describing their actions and sayings – both great and small (*Alex.* 1.1-3; *Nic.* 1.5); he expects that by examining the lives of great men, his readers will be driven to imitate their virtues, avoid their vices, and in so doing improve their own characters (*Aem.* 1.1-3; *Per.* 1.3-2.4; *Dem.* 1.3-6). The importance of imitation to the reading of the *Parallel Lives* can be seen particularly in the proem to the *Aemilius Paulus*. Plutarch begins the Life by briefly discussing his reason for writing the *Parallel Lives*:

Ἔμοι [μὲν] τῆς τῶν βίων ἄψασθαι μὲν γραφῆς συνέβη δι' ἑτέρους, ἐπιμένειν δὲ καὶ φιλοχωρεῖν ἤδη καὶ δι' ἑμαυτόν, ὥσπερ ἐν ἐσόπτρῳ τῇ ἱστορίᾳ πειρώμενον ἀμῶς γέ πως κοσμεῖν καὶ ἀφομοιοῦν πρὸς τὰς ἐκείνων ἀρετὰς τὸν βίον. οὐδὲν γὰρ ἄλλ' ἢ συνδιαιτήσῃ καὶ συμβιώσῃ τὸ γινόμενον ἔοικεν, ὅταν ὥσπερ ἐπιξενούμενον ἕκαστον αὐτῶν ἐν μέρει διὰ τῆς ἱστορίας ὑποδεχόμενοι καὶ παραλαμβάνοντες ἀναθεωρῶμεν “ὅσσοις ἔην οἷός τε”, τὰ κυριώτατα καὶ κάλλιστα πρὸς γνῶσιν ἀπὸ τῶν πράξεων λαμβάνοντες (*Aem.* 1.1-2).

It fell to me to undertake the writing of the Lives for others, but now to continue it and be fond of it for myself as well, endeavouring in some way as in the mirror of history to arrange a Life and make it like the virtues of those men. It is like nothing other than what happens when one lives together and spends time together, whenever, as if welcoming and entertaining each one of these men from history, we examine “how great and of what kind he was”, taking from his deeds the most authoritative and most beautiful to know.

The overall message of this passage is that readers of the *Parallel Lives*, including Plutarch himself, should read the *Lives* in a similar way to how they read history, by examining the lives and actions of those they read about and picking out the qualities that made them great.<sup>47</sup> Plutarch’s reference to the mirror of history similarly suggests

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<sup>47</sup> Plutarch makes a similar argument in *How to recognize that one is making progress in virtue*, where he suggests that history, poetry, and philosophy should be read as much for the practical benefit they bring the reader as much for enjoyment (*Prof. in Virt.* 79C-E).

the importance of self-reflection while reading his works.<sup>48</sup> Just as important, in my opinion, is the idea of identifying and ‘taking’ the best deeds of the men one reads about. This suggests that while the *Parallel Lives* allow readers to examine the lives and careers of great men in their entirety, Plutarch also expected his readers to select specific actions of the subjects of individual Lives, and to use those particular actions to better themselves. I would suggest, as we shall see below, that this process of selecting individual actions from the Lives to examine and imitate is particularly important to the understanding of military narrative within the *Parallel Lives*.

While the idea of imitation forms the central focus of Plutarch's proem to the *Aemilius Paulus*, it is not immediately clear how Plutarch actually conceived of this process of imitation. Duff has made the argument that the subjects of the *Lives* were so far removed from Plutarch's own time that the readers of the *Lives* would have had no opportunity to imitate the exact circumstances of the men they read about.<sup>49</sup> He points to the *Political Precepts* as evidence that Plutarch was well aware of the stark lack of political and military independence enjoyed by contemporary Greek magistrates, and argues that Plutarch could not then have expected his readers to imitate the lives of past statesmen as he proposes in the proems.<sup>50</sup> This objection, however, needlessly creates a problem where there was not one before. When Plutarch considers how reading the *Lives* might lead to imitation in the beginning of the *Pericles* (*Per.* 1.4-2.4), he is not

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<sup>48</sup> For the use of mirror imagery in general, see McCarty (1989); for more on Plutarch's use of the mirror in this particular case, see Duff (1999), 32-34; Zadorojnyi (2010).

<sup>49</sup> Duff (1999), 66-8.

<sup>50</sup> *Pol. Pre.* 805A, 813D-814C, 824C-D.

suggesting that his readers should imitate the exact actions of Pericles by, for instance, building another Parthenon. However, many of Plutarch's politically-involved readers would have likely had the means and opportunity to imitate Pericles to an extent by implementing at least some form of building projects to beautify their local city, and Plutarch clearly stresses the benefits of such actions within the *Life* (esp. *Per.* 12-13). Moreover, it is by imitating these actions that Plutarch's readers should (and by nature will) imitate the virtues embodied by those actions, which will in turn lead them to choose to act in such a way more frequently.<sup>51</sup> That Plutarch did indeed see this process as an imitation of virtue – rather than exact action – is most clear from the *Philopoemen*: Plutarch says that Philopoemen imitated (ἐμίμητο) Epaminondas' energy, wisdom, and incorruptibility, but (because of his own failings) not his gentleness, gravity, or kindness in political disputes (*Phil.* 3.1).<sup>52</sup> Philopoemen saw the precise actions of Epaminondas as a model of general action and good character that he might imitate, and so consciously strove to act in the same way in his life that he saw that the Theban leader did in his. The political situation in Greece during Philopoemen's time was considerably different than Epaminondas' situation more than a century before, but the virtues demonstrated by Epaminondas were just as applicable to the third century BC as the fourth. This must certainly be the same process which Plutarch expects his readers to experience upon reading the *Parallel Lives*; the precise actions of past statesmen may be

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<sup>51</sup> This is in line with Duff's comments on προαίρεσις in his explanation of the *Pericles*' proem (1999, 39). Cf. Wardman (1974), 107-15.

<sup>52</sup> Duff cites this passage and others (*Dem.* 5.1-5; *Them.* 3.4-5; *Pel.* 7.2) as emblematic of Plutarch's concept of imitation (1999; 51), and so surely understands the concept, but at times seems to get too caught up with the idea of imitating deeds rather than virtue (1999; 34-45, 66-8). Cf. Valgiglio (1992), 4011-13, and Frazier (1995), 148-9 for more such examples of heroic emulation.

unique to their own time, but the *way* in which they acted demonstrates timeless virtue worthy of imitation.

The preface to the *Demetrius-Antony* further helps to clarify Plutarch's conception of imitation in the *Parallel Lives*. Before he introduces the pair itself, Plutarch discusses the importance of negative examples when learning particular arts or virtue, citing how healers incidentally study disease and musicians must consider discordant sounds in order to create harmony (*Dem.* 1.3-4). He further describes how ancient Spartans would show drunken helots to their youth so they could see the dangers of drinking unmixed wine (*Dem.* 1.5), and how the Theban flute-player Ismenias would have his students listen to bad players so they knew how not to play (*Dem.* 1.6). These examples all serve as an introduction to Plutarch's idea to include one or two pairs that feature men who are conspicuous for their vices, such as Demetrius and Antony (*Dem.* 1.6). Many scholars have since attempted to identify other such 'negative' pairs, or even to introduce a third category in between 'positive' and 'negative' pairs.<sup>53</sup> Duff has argued, on the other hand, that it is incorrect to attempt to classify Lives as either 'positive' or 'negative': even Demetrius and Antony, he says, demonstrate virtue at times in their respective Lives, while many subjects of so-called 'positive' Lives at times behave in ways that are not particularly praiseworthy.<sup>54</sup> This, I believe, is the correct view: Plutarch's subjects are rarely so simplistic that they can be easily classified as

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<sup>53</sup> Russel (1973), 108, and Aalders (1982), 9, suggest the *Alcibiades-Coriolanus* as another potential negative pair, while Nikolaidis (1988), 331-2, and Piccirilli (1989), 14-16, see the *Nicias-Crassus* as a largely negative pair. Piccirilli (1990), xxix-xxxiv, puts forward the concept of a category between positive and negative Lives for pairs which simply give an unfavourable portrayal of their subjects.

<sup>54</sup> Duff (1999), 53-65. See Pelling (1988b), 10-18, for positive examples within the *Demetrius-Antony* in particular.

simply good or bad. Instead, all pairs provide examples of both good and bad actions and character in varying degrees. What is significant here for the discussion of imitation is how Plutarch describes these negative cases working. The examples show that he had in mind people who are trying to learn an individual skill (such as flute-playing) or a particular virtue (such as moderation in drink), and in both cases seeing an art practiced poorly or the lack of a virtue would induce the learner to do things the correct way. The converse of this, although Plutarch does not explicitly state it, is that seeing a skill performed well or a virtue adhered to would similarly help the learner practice or act correctly.<sup>55</sup> This, as I argue below, is precisely the context in which Plutarch provides examples of good generalship to imitate and bad generalship to avoid. In light of the above discussion of the imitation of virtue, however, it is important to keep in mind that the examples of good generalship that Plutarch provides still promote the imitation of particular fundamentals rather than specific actions. The precise historical acts of military leadership that Plutarch describes are not imitable, because the circumstances of a particular battle or campaign could never be exactly the same. Nevertheless, they provide guidance for more broad methods of leadership that could serve to improve a general's overall skill.

It is particularly important to place the concept of military imitation in the context of its time: the use of *exempla* for teaching generalship was hardly an alien concept for Plutarch's audience. Frontinus, a rough contemporary of Plutarch's and a

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<sup>55</sup> Ingenkamp (2008), 264-5, in his discussion of Pelopidas and Marcellus, similarly recognizes the importance that Plutarch places on observing practitioners of a τέχνη (such as generalship) rather than simply learning the rules of the τέχνη.

prominent general under Trajan, wrote the *Strategemata*, a manual on military tactics and stratagems that is essentially a collection of *exempla* from Greek and Roman generals. In the proem of the *Strategemata* Frontinus sets out his purpose quite clearly, saying that he feels obligated to examine the correct actions of generals so as to provide his readers with examples of deliberation and foresight; this, he says, will enable them to increase their own ability to act similarly (Front. *Strat.* I). His work suggests that Frontinus saw military leadership as a rather straightforward skill that could be learned by the study of past practitioners, wherein the same techniques used by generals in antiquity could still be effective in the early Roman Principate.<sup>56</sup> Frontinus, then, expected his audience to approach his work in the same essential way as Plutarch intended his readers to, just with a different primary focus. Not all such military manuals of the time were composed of imitable *exempla*. Onasander's work, the *Strategikos*, is of a slightly earlier date than Frontinus', and is more specifically didactic: he does not provide *exempla* of past actions, but rather directly instructs the reader on the correct actions of a good general. Even though Onasander does not directly cite the specific actions of past generals within his work, he nevertheless makes a point to tell his readers that all of the principles that he espouses in his work are derived from authentic deeds and battles (Onas. P.7-8). That being said, Onasander's treatment of generalship still has some connection to Plutarch's. Like his fellow Greek, Onasander was concerned with moral virtue, and the first section of the *Strategikos* sets forth his belief that a general should be temperate, self-disciplined, and frugal, among many other qualities (Onas.

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<sup>56</sup> Campbell (1987), 14-15.



1.1-11).

Plutarch's readers, then, would likely have been familiar with reading texts with an eye towards useful *exempla*. To see most clearly how the imitation of military action works in the *Parallel Lives*, it is best to return to Plutarch's narrative of the Gallic Wars in the *Caesar*. Throughout the narrative, Plutarch not only makes an effort to identify the conspicuous action that led to Caesar's victory on each individual occasion, but also attempts to provide Caesar's rationale behind the decisions he made. By highlighting his decision-making process, I argue, Plutarch is providing his readers with the knowledge necessary to imitate these military successes on their own. This tendency is clear from the very first campaign that Plutarch describes: Caesar's defense against the invading Helvetii. After a hard battle in which he recovered from an ambush to drive his attackers all the way back to their fortified camp, Caesar resettled all those barbarians who had survived the battle in the lands and cities which they had abandoned; "he did this", claims Plutarch, "fearing that if the land became empty the Germans would cross over and occupy it" (*Caes.* 18.6).<sup>57</sup> This is the picture of Caesar with which Plutarch ends his description of the first campaign: not of the brave man who led a counter-charge on foot rather than on horseback (*Caes.* 18.3), but of the reasoning man who carefully considered future events.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Plutarch calls this action "better than the noble work of victory" (*Caes.* 18.5): the thoughtful precautions that Caesar takes after the battle are

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<sup>57</sup> ἔπραξε δὲ τοῦτο δεδιῶς μὴ τὴν χώραν ἔρημον γενομένην οἱ Γερμανοὶ διαβάντες κατάσχωσι (*Caes.* 18.6).

<sup>58</sup> Plutarch's interest in how a general made use of victory was a common theme in the *Lives*. See Wardman (1974), 93-100.

even better than the battle itself.<sup>59</sup> The significance and timeliness of Caesar's foresight becomes immediately apparent, as he next finds himself directly at war with the German Ariovistus. According to Plutarch, both the suddenness of Caesar's advance and the prophecies of the German holy women had disheartened the barbarian army (*Caes.* 19.7-8); when Caesar observed this, he “decided that it was a good plan to engage them while they were out of heart”, whereupon he harassed their encampment, incited them into an undisciplined attack, and completely routed them (*Caes.* 19.9-11).<sup>60</sup> It is Caesar's tactical decision here that Plutarch highlights, rather than his strategic decision seen after the Helvetii campaign. Nevertheless, Plutarch clearly emphasizes Caesar's process of rationalization and the decisive action that stems from it: after learning (πυνθανομένῳ) of the prophecies and seeing (ὁρῶντι) that the Germans kept quiet, he then thought (ἔδοξεν) of the correct response (*Caes.* 19.9). Caesar's actions against the Helvetii and Ariovistus are, of course, specific to his unique circumstances; nevertheless, his actions are indeed imitable. It is true, for instance, that not many generals would find themselves in the position to resettle an entire barbarian population as Caesar does with the Helvetii (18.6); however, the lesson that a general should consider future enemies as much as present is clear, especially as the Germans against whom he was preparing become his new enemy in the very next sentence (*Caes.* 19.1). Caesar's actions against Ariovistus are even more directly relevant to a mindful commander: effective intelligence

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<sup>59</sup> καλῶ δὲ τῷ τῆς νίκης ἔργῳ κρεῖττον (*Caes.* 18.5). Plutarch did not likely praise this resettlement on humanitarian grounds: Caesar was forcing the Helvetii back to abandoned land (χώραν ἀπέλιπον) and cities that were utterly destroyed (πόλεις ἅς διέφθειραν), and so they likely faced significant hardship trying to rebuild their lives. Cf. Pelling (2011), 226.

<sup>60</sup> καλῶς ἔχειν ἔδοξεν ἀπροθύμοις οὖσιν αὐτοῖς συμβαλεῖν (*Caes.* 19.9).

concerning an opposing army can allow an observant and thoughtful general to take advantage of an enemy's weakness.

It is important to note that Plutarch's emphasis on these particular aspects of Caesar's generalship during his Gallic campaigns, while clearly based on his sources, appears to be his own. Plutarch's narrative of Caesar's Helvetii campaign, including Caesar's motivation for resettling them after the battle (*Caes.* 18.6), is most likely directly derived from Asinius Pollio, but also closely resembles Caesar's *Commentarii* (*BG.* 1.2-29).<sup>61</sup> Although the length of Pollio's treatment of the Helvetii campaign may not be known, if it is similar in length to Caesar's account then Plutarch pared it down significantly to fit into the single chapter that Plutarch dedicates to the campaign. It is noteworthy, then, that for all of the detail Plutarch chose to cut out, he retained this instance of Caesar's practical forethought after the battle. For Plutarch, Caesar's decision to resettle the Helvetii appears to be the defining moment of the campaign, and the one most worth remembering. Cassius Dio's account of the same campaign (*Dio* 38.32-33) provides a clear contrast. Although his narrative of Caesar's battle with the Helvetii is similar to Plutarch's in both content and brevity, Dio makes no mention of Caesar's fears of a German incursion in his resettlement of the Helvetii after the battle.<sup>62</sup> Plutarch's portrayal of Caesar's generalship against Ariovistus shows a similar focus not found in other accounts. As in the case of the Helvetii campaign, Plutarch's narrative of

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<sup>61</sup> Caesar gives the same rationale that Plutarch attributes to him for his resettlement of the Helvetii: his fear that German tribes might occupy their abandoned territory. For Plutarch's use of Pollio as a source rather than Caesar's *Commentarii* directly, see Pelling (2011), 44-48; 219.

<sup>62</sup> For Dio, like Plutarch, Caesar's personal charge against the Helvetii and the fierce fighting in front of the wagon train (*Caes.* 18.4; *Dio* 38.33.3-5) are the key moments of the battle itself. See *Dio* 38.33.5-6 for the aftermath of the battle.

Caesar's conflict with Ariovistus considerably simplifies Caesar's own account (*BG* 1.30-54) into a single chapter. In this case, however, Plutarch's analysis of Caesar's actions appears to be his own interpretation. Although Caesar says that he learned from German prisoners that the German holy women had forbidden battle because of poor omens, he does not make any direct connection between this knowledge and his attack on the following day (*BG* 1.50-51). In Plutarch's version, however, Caesar makes an explicit decision to attack based on his knowledge of the omens and the German passivity (*Caes.* 19.9). While it is possible that Plutarch found this detail in Pollio or another lost source, it is much more likely that it is his own invention: Plutarch is known to have created minor details to fill in occasional gaps and streamline his narrative, and this obvious inference does just that.<sup>63</sup> However, just because Plutarch may have invented the details of Caesar's decision to attack Ariovistus to help fill a gap in the narrative does not make the detail any less influential on Plutarch's interpretation of Caesar's generalship. The emphasis that Plutarch places on the process of Caesar's decision-making, especially the link between learning, observing, and thinking discussed above, is consistent with the rest of Plutarch's characterization of Caesar's leadership in the *Life*. Indeed, as I shall demonstrate, it is a common focus of Plutarch's military narratives throughout the *Parallel Lives*.

Plutarch highlights other instances of Caesar's deliberation in the rest of the narrative, all of which provide further insight into his generalship. At one point, Caesar rejects the embassy of a tribe who had already attacked him under a flag of truce,

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<sup>63</sup> Pelling (2002), 94-96.

“believing good faith towards such faithless breakers of truces to be naive” (*Caes.* 22.3).<sup>64</sup> Plutarch’s focus here is not so much the ambush that Caesar suffered or his temporary naivety towards his enemy that may have caused it, but on Caesar’s introspection and recognition of this fault. After this warning to be on guard against deception, Plutarch demonstrates the benefits of employing deception oneself, describing how Caesar pretended to be afraid of his enemy's larger army by continuously avoiding battle: “he maneuvered so as to be despised, until, marching out against those who were attacking separately through rashness, he routed them and destroyed many of them” (*Caes.* 24.7).<sup>65</sup> Once again, Plutarch highlights the purpose and thought-process behind Caesar’s actions: he intentionally marshalled his troops in such a way as to incite his enemy into acting ὑπὸ θράσους, in which state they were no longer a cohesive army and thus easier to destroy.

In his analysis of the Gallic Wars in Plutarch’s *Caesar*, Pelling (1984b) clearly identifies Plutarch’s interest in Caesar’s “great ability and achievement” during his military campaigns, such as his ability to inspire loyalty, his endurance of hardship and danger, and his skill in horsemanship, but concludes by suggesting that “there is little interest in the more personal virtues; Plutarch is not at all concerned to stress traits which his reader might *imitate*.”<sup>66</sup> I absolutely agree that Plutarch’s interest is on Caesar’s qualities as a military leader, as we have seen, and not his other character

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<sup>64</sup> τὴν πρὸς οὕτως ἀπίστους καὶ παρασπόνδους πίστιν εὐήθειαν ἡγούμενος (*Caes.* 22.3).

<sup>65</sup> καταφρονηθῆναι στρατηγῶν, μέχρι οὗ σποράδην ὑπὸ θράσους προσβάλλοντας ἐπεξεληθὼν ἐτρέψατο, καὶ πολλοὺς αὐτῶν διέφθειρε (*Caes.* 24.7).

<sup>66</sup> Pelling (1984b), 91. Italics are his own.

virtues on which Plutarch focuses in other sections of the Life. However, I have argued in this section that Plutarch is indeed concerned with stressing traits and actions that his reader might imitate: not only his charisma and horsemanship, but his decisive action, introspection, and strategic planning as well. Pelling here seems to believe that it is only aspects of moral virtue that Plutarch encourages his readers to imitate, and this appears to be a common belief.<sup>67</sup> However, as is clear from the above discussion of the prologues of the *Aemilius Paulus* and *Demetrius*, Plutarch considers the actions of his subjects to be just as important as their moral virtues; indeed, it is through imitating praiseworthy deeds that one begins to demonstrate particular virtues as well.

Throughout the narrative of the Gallic Wars, Plutarch distills Caesar's military victories into concise, imitable actions for his readers. He identifies specific circumstances in which any general might find himself (such as facing a demoralized enemy, being ambushed, or being considerably outnumbered), and describes Caesar's considered and successful response to each situation. Although each of these examples focuses on a different aspect of Caesar's generalship, the common trend across all of these stories is Caesar's rationality: Plutarch identifies Caesar's foresight after his battle with the Helvetii; his calculated attack against Ariovistus; his introspection and caution after falling prey to an ambush; and his tactical manipulation of the enemy. Individually, each of these lessons could be useful to an interested reader by illustrating an action that might be imitable under similar circumstances; it is not just Gallic tribes that are

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<sup>67</sup> Duff (1999), 30-45, 66-69 also focuses primarily on the imitation of moral virtue rather than practical action.

susceptible to being deceived, for example. Taken as a whole, however, Plutarch's narrative of Caesar's campaigns in Gaul emphasizes the thought process behind his military leadership and characterizes him as a thinking general. The type of military analysis that Plutarch makes in the *Caesar* is thus much the same as his portrayal of virtue throughout the *Lives*. Plutarch provides the same opportunity for his readers to imitate specific aspects of Caesar's generalship as he does for his readers to imitate Fabius' patience or Aristides' incorruptibility.

The *Caesar* is not the only Life in which Plutarch uses extended pieces of military narrative to provide imitable examples of effective generalship: the *Lucullus* is a similarly strong example. Combined, Plutarch's narratives of Lucullus' campaigns against Mithridates (*Luc.* 7.1-19.5) and Tigranes (*Luc.* 24.1-35.7) account for roughly half of the entire Life. While these narratives may not allow the reader to follow the ebb and flow of particular battles, they, like those found in the *Caesar*, illustrate specific examples of Lucullus' superior leadership. Moreover, it is clear that Plutarch crafted his military narratives in the Life to highlight the qualities of Lucullus' generalship that Plutarch found most admirable. The singularity of purpose within the military narrative of the *Lucullus* is best seen by first examining the praise Plutarch relates about Lucullus' generalship after the Roman's first defeat of Tigranes:

Ῥωμαίων δ' οἱ δεινότατοι στρατηγοὶ καὶ πλεῖστα πολέμοις ὠμιληκότες ἐπὶ μάλιστα τοῦ Λευκόλλου τὸ δύο βασιλεῖς τοὺς ἐπιφανεστάτους καὶ μεγίστους δυσὶ τοῖς ἐναντιωτάτοις, τάχει καὶ βραδυτῆτι, καταστρατηγῆσαι· Μιθριδάτην μὲν γὰρ ἀκμάζοντα χρόνῳ καὶ τριβῇ κατανάλωσε, Τιγράνην δὲ τῷ σπεῦσαι συνέτριψεν, ἐν ὀλίγοις τῶν πώποτε ἡγεμόνων τῇ μελλήσει μὲν ἔργῳ, τῇ τόλμῃ δ' ὑπὲρ ἀσφαλείας χρησάμενος (*Luc.* 28.9).

The Roman generals who were most skilful and most acquainted with war greatly commended Lucullus for out-generalizing two great and distinguished kings by opposite means: swiftness and slowness. For he used up Mithridates, who was in his prime, with time and delay, but he crushed Tigranes through haste, being among the few generals ever to use delay for action and boldness on behalf of safety.

Plutarch puts this approval for Lucullus' achievement in the mouths of other Romans, but he surely enjoyed the irony explained within the final clause himself.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, it is clear that Plutarch had this image of Lucullus' rare breed of generalship in mind while he was writing the narrative of Lucullus' campaigns, for by the time the reader has reached this passage in the Life, he has already seen multiple examples of Lucullus' effective use of delay and boldness on the battlefield.<sup>69</sup>

It is Lucullus' patience that Plutarch highlights first, by comparing him with his ambitious co-consul Marcus Cotta. At the start of the campaign, Plutarch describes Mithridates' army as devoid of its previous ostentation and impracticality, instead consisting of, among other forces, one hundred and twenty thousand heavy infantry trained and equipped in the Roman style (*Luc.* 7.4-6). Cotta, eager to defeat Mithridates and earn a triumph of his own, rushed to attack this enormous army, was summarily defeated, and became trapped in Chalcedon. Lucullus, on the other hand, showed great patience and restraint. Recognizing that Mithridates' numerically superior army would be difficult to keep supplied, he interrogated several captives and determined that Mithridates had less than four days of food left, at which point he set out to collect all

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<sup>68</sup> Plutarch also expects his readers to agree with the pronouncement of these generals, as he often does when he provides the viewpoints of anonymous experts in a field: cf. *Flam.* 11. 3-7; *Phoc.* 37.1-2; *Cato Min.* 26.5; *Mar.* 34.6-7. See Pelling (1988b), 40; Duff (1999), 55, 120.

<sup>69</sup> See Keaveney (1992), 75-128 for a detailed narrative of Lucullus' campaigns against Mithridates and Tigranes.



local provisions to deny them to his enemy and then waited for him to act (*Luc.* 8.1-8). Plutarch makes the senselessness of Cotta’s rashness perfectly clear, particularly by describing Mithridates’ impressive army immediately before, but the lesson in this passage is more nuanced than that. By specifically identifying the rationale behind Lucullus’ delay and his reasoned analysis of his enemy’s situation, Plutarch provides a clear counter-example to Cotta’s poor generalship. Lucullus has not actually achieved anything by this point, but his army remained intact while Cotta’s did not because he took the time to consider his enemy. Lucullus’ strategy is immediately justified, as Mithridates soon moved from his position to besiege another city, and Lucullus shadowed his army and encamped in a position that would once again deny the Pontic king easy access to vital supplies (*Luc.* 9.1-2).<sup>70</sup> Plutarch portrays Mithridates as largely ignorant of the danger of famine that Lucullus had created for his grand army by carrying on war “not for theatrics nor display, but, as the saying goes, [Lucullus] was ‘kicking in the gut’, and was busying himself stealing all of his provisions.”<sup>71</sup> Such scorched-earth tactics forced Mithridates to send away all of his extraneous forces when Lucullus was distracted in order to ease the burden on his supplies. However, Lucullus managed to overtake the fleeing force and inflict such a devastating blow on them that Mithridates decided to abandon the siege of Cyzicus altogether, whereupon Lucullus

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<sup>70</sup> Plutarch makes no acknowledgement that Mithridates, by moving his army, gave up the siege of Chalcedon and thus presumably allowed Lucullus to relieve Cotta without bloodshed. Indeed, Plutarch does not mention Marcus Cotta again in the entire *Life*, which, I suggest, emphasizes his role as a foil to highlight Lucullus’ patience. So-called internal *synkrisis* are relatively common in the *Parallel Lives*: see in particular Beck (2002); Xenophon (2012).

<sup>71</sup> ἄτε δὴ μὴ θεατρικῶς μηδ’ ἐπιδεικτικῶς Λευκόλλου πολεμοῦντος, ἀλλὰ τοῦτο δὴ τὸ λεγόμενον εἰς τὴν γαστέρα ἐναλλομένου καὶ ὅπως ὑφαιρήσει τὴν τροφήν ἅπανταπραγματευομένου (*Luc.* 11.2).

once again chased him and, catching him at the Granicus, finally defeated Mithridates' army in detail (*Luc.* 11.1-8). Throughout these chapters, Plutarch emphasizes both Lucullus' constant efforts to deny supplies to Mithridates' army and his readiness to pursue the army and take advantage of any opportunities that presented themselves. Lucullus' caution, as Plutarch portrays it, was by no means idle, as he was continuously engaged in furthering his own position while undermining that of his enemy. Lucullus' ultimate success over a numerically superior army shows this to be an effective model of cautious and considered generalship to follow.

Mithridates soon recovered from his initial losses, forcing Lucullus to resume his campaign against him, but Plutarch does not focus on his generalship nearly so much in the ensuing chapters. Indeed, Mithridates eventually took to flight again not due to Lucullus' actions but because of two disastrous skirmishes with Lucullus' subordinates that drained both his men and resources (*Luc.* 17.1-5). However, Lucullus returns to the fore when the narrative switches to his campaign against Tigranes. Initially, Lucullus' actions appear to contradict his earlier calculated caution against Mithridates: "he seemed to be making a reckless attack, one having neither safety nor calculation, against a warlike nation, many myriads of horsemen, and an immense country" (*Luc.* 24.1).<sup>72</sup> Lucullus proceeded to march deep into Mesopotamia, crossing both the Euphrates and the Tigris with less than fifteen thousand soldiers (*Luc.* 24.1-7). This certainly does seem to be a reckless act, and completely out of character for a general who patiently

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<sup>72</sup> ὄρμη τινι δοκῶν παραβόλῳ καὶ σωτήριον οὐκ ἔχούση λογισμὸν ἐμβαλεῖν αὐτὸν εἰς ἔθνη μάχισμα καὶ μυριάδας ἰπέων πολλὰς καὶ ἀχανῆ χώραν (*Luc.* 24.1).

shadowed Mithridates for so long. Lucullus appears to regain his senses when confronted with part of Tigranes' army sent led by Mithrobarzanes, as he sent a small force of his own to distract the enemy while he personally began to arrange the encampment of his main army; however, this delaying force managed to kill the enemy general, after which the remains of his army fled (*Luc.* 25.3-5). This success caused Tigranes to abandon his city Tigranocerta so as to rebuild his army, and Lucullus, like he had done against Mithridates, exploited the opportunity by dispatching two of his subordinates to harass Tigranes' column and prevent other forces from joining up with him (*Luc.* 25.6-7). Lucullus clearly appears to have regained his rationality at this point, as he invests Tigranes' favored city "thinking that Tigranes would not bear it, but against his judgment and in anger come down and fight" (*Luc.* 26.2).<sup>73</sup> This is the same thoughtful Lucullus who fought against Mithridates, once again establishing himself in a strong position with the clear intention of forcing his enemy into making a mistake. As before, Lucullus' plan was successful, and Tigranes moved to attack him (*Luc.* 26.4-7). Once Tigranes was in sight Lucullus undertook his most daring move yet, leaving a third of his army to maintain the siege of Tigranocerta and attacking Tigranes' army of over two hundred thousand with only ten thousand heavy infantry of his own (*Luc.* 26.6-27.2). Tigranes was so surprised that Lucullus was actually attacking his army that he did not draw up his battle array until the Roman was almost upon him, and consequently left his heavily-armored cavalry in an exposed position at the foot of a hill. Seizing upon

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<sup>73</sup> οὐκ ἀνέξεσθαι τὸν Τιγράνην οἰόμενος, ἀλλὰ καὶ παρὰ γνώμην ὑπ' ὀργῆς καταβήσεσθαι διαμαχοῦμενον (*Luc.* 26.2).

this opportunity, Lucullus sent his own small force of cavalry to attack the flank, and personally led his infantry in a charge against the enemy cavalry from the front; unable to fight effectively due to the length of their spears, Tigranes' seventeen thousand mailed cavalry turned and fled into their own infantry, which started a general rout that soon turned catastrophic (*Luc.* 28.1-28.7). This is certainly the high point of Lucullus' military career and of the Life itself. As Graham Wylie argues, Lucullus' bold attack as Plutarch portrays it was a great tactical move, as the Roman commander not only identified the weak point in Tigranes' line, but also exploited the weakness of the enemy unit in front of him.<sup>74</sup> This is consistent with Plutarch's treatment of Lucullus' actions throughout both of his campaigns against Mithridates and Tigranes: even when Lucullus is taking enormous risks, Plutarch still – for the most part – portrays him as a rational and calculating general. Admittedly, Plutarch sees no reasoning behind Lucullus' initial attack on Tigranes' territory with such a small force (*Luc.* 24.1). However, he does explain Lucullus' thinking for putting Tigranocerta under siege, and he consistently shows Lucullus employing his limited resources effectively, especially his use of his subordinate generals to keep Tigranes off balance (*Luc.* 25.6). Even more than in the case of Caesar's campaigns, it is unlikely that Plutarch ever imagined one of his readers as facing the exact same military situations as Lucullus, or as being able to defeat an army while outnumbered twenty-to-one as Lucullus does (*Luc.* 28.8). Nevertheless, like in the *Caesar*, Plutarch highlights particular acts of generalship throughout his military narrative in the *Lucullus* that could indeed be imitable by a certain part of his readership,

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<sup>74</sup> Wylie (1994), 116.

such as methodically denying supplies in order to starve a larger enemy (*Luc.* 9.1-2), forcing an enemy to leave an advantageous position (*Luc.* 8.7-8, 26.2), or exploiting the weaknesses in an enemy's deployment or equipment (*Luc.* 28.2-4). Moreover, by explaining Lucullus' reasoning behind such imitable actions, Plutarch portrays Lucullus as a rational general who puts deliberate thought into his actions, in clear contrast to others such as Cotta and Tigranes.<sup>75</sup>

Plutarch, then, clearly constructs his military narrative in the *Lucullus* to portray his subject as a thoughtful general who made equally effective use of caution and boldness to achieve success. However, unlike in the *Caesar*, where his subject's military superiority is unquestioned, Plutarch recognises Lucullus' failures as a general as well. At the end of the *Life*, after Lucullus' fortunes had considerably declined, Plutarch says that Lucullus' consistent inability to maintain the affections of his soldiers shows him to have been "either naturally unsuited or unlucky in the first and greatest of all qualities of leadership" (*Luc.* 36.5).<sup>76</sup> This failure of Lucullus to keep his soldiers content and under control is an underlying theme throughout the *Life* (*Luc.* 15.6-7, 24.1, 30.5, 32.2-3), and eventually leads to his army mutinying to the point that he could only just prevent them

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<sup>75</sup> Interestingly, Plutarch does appear to have a degree of respect of Mithridates' generalship. Throughout his early campaign with Lucullus, Plutarch shows Mithridates reacting to and attempting to pre-empt Lucullus' actions in a considered manner (*Luc.* 9.1, 9.3, 11.2, 11.5). It was only because Mithridates' own generals deceived him about the dire supply situation of his army, Plutarch says, that he was forced into making poor decisions. Even later in the *Life*, after the defeat of Tigranes, Plutarch explains Mithridates' absence from the climactic battle as a result of his rational expectation that Lucullus would act with the same caution against Tigranes as he acted against him (*Luc.* 29.1). Plutarch has no such praise for Tigranes' generalship: see Pulci Doria Breglia (1973, 74), 37-67.

<sup>76</sup> ὅτω τις ἦν ἀφυῆς ἢ δυστυχῆς ὁ Λεύκολλος πρὸς τὸ πάντων ἐν ἡγεμονίᾳ πρῶτον καὶ μέγιστον (*Luc.* 36.5).

from completely abandoning him (*Luc.* 35.3-4).<sup>77</sup> Plutarch attributes Lucullus' failure to win the loyalty of his soldiers to his natural disregard for the common people and his belief that anything he did to please his men would simply decrease his authority (*Luc.* 33.2). This, Plutarch says, combined with his haughtiness even towards other nobles, was his only bad quality (*Luc.* 33.3), which clearly suggests that he disagrees with Lucullus' belief that working to please his soldiers would diminish his authority. This, then, is an instance of Plutarch providing an example of generalship for his readers to avoid rather than imitate: a general should not be as oblivious to the cares and concerns of his own soldiers as Lucullus was. Examples of poor generalship such as this are certainly not as common as examples of good generalship, but I would suggest that they are just as important to the overall interpretation of military leadership within the *Parallel Lives*. Specific examples of poor generalship within the *Parallel Lives*, such as Lucullus' failure to control his soldiers, do indeed fit with Plutarch's rationale at the beginning of the *Demetrius-Antony*, as discussed above, because they provide illustrations of actions or viewpoints that generals should avoid. For Plutarch, then, examples of poor military leadership could be just as useful as examples of good military leadership for the betterment of his readers' generalship.

In this section I have examined how Plutarch uses military narrative in the *Parallel Lives* to provide examples of both good and bad leadership for his readers to

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<sup>77</sup> Keaveney's analysis of Lucullus' situation suggests that Plutarch was overstating the insubordination of Lucullus' soldiers at some points: when he describes Lucullus' army as being unwilling to follow him east again after his defeat of Tigranes, Plutarch makes no mention of the proposed expedition being illegal under Roman law (1992, 180). Intentional or not, this omission does serve to highlight Lucullus' poor relations with his soldiers: one imagines that his army might have been more willing to follow him if Lucullus had been a more inspirational leader.

imitate or avoid. It is true that even those of Plutarch's readers who would have had the opportunity to lead large armies for Rome would be unlikely to have run into the exact same battlefield situations as people like Caesar or Lucullus did. Nevertheless, within the extended military narratives found within these and other Lives, Plutarch consistently identifies individual acts of generalship that are applicable to a variety of situations and thus potentially worthy of imitation by his readers. Moreover, by focusing on the reasoning that leads his subjects to make particular actions on the battlefield, Plutarch stresses the importance of a rational style of generalship. From these examples, and from more that we will see as this chapter continues, it is clear that Plutarch considered a general's ability to make appropriate calculations on the battlefield to be one of the most important traits he could possess.

### **Individual Battle Narratives**

It is not just Plutarch's narrative of the Gallic Wars in the *Caesar* or the Mithridatic Wars in the *Lucullus* that provide imitable examples of military leadership. Although not all Lives contain such extended passages that cover entire military campaigns, many other sections of military narrative from both Greek and Roman Lives share similarities with Plutarch's treatment of the longer campaigns of Caesar and Lucullus. As we have seen, the key focus of these military passages is not on the successes themselves, but on the methods of success: Plutarch consistently concerns himself with demonstrating precisely how a general achieved victory in a particular battle or against a particular foe. In this way, military narrative in a Life serves the same

purpose as any other part of the biography: improving the reader through providing examples worthy of imitation. While in much of the *Parallel Lives* these examples are of good moral virtue, in the military narratives these examples are of good generalship.

When discussing Plutarch's military narrative, it is important to remember that Plutarch's primary interest unquestionably lies with the subject of each Life, and that the broader historical significance of his subjects' actions is at best secondary to their character.<sup>78</sup> Even substantial sections of military narrative, then, sometimes contain relatively little in the way of troop movements, battle tactics, and the like; instead, Plutarch focuses heavily on the actions of his subjects before, during, and after a particular battle or campaign. Thus, in the *Alexander*, Plutarch places repeated emphasis on both Alexander's unfailing confidence before battle (*Alex.* 16.1-4; 31.6-32.3) and his recklessness during the fighting (*Alex.* 16.5-11; 16.14; 63.2-5), but makes little comment on the actual tactics and maneuverings of the battles themselves. Hamilton is not wrong to say the reader cannot clearly reconstruct any of Alexander's battles from Plutarch's narrative.<sup>79</sup>

This is not to say, however, that Plutarch was incapable of writing a coherent battle narrative, or indeed that he avoided doing so; in this regard the *Caesar* once again serves as a strong contrast to the *Alexander*. Plutarch dedicates five chapters in the *Caesar* to the battle of Pharsalus, his narrative of which is much more detailed than any of those he provides for Alexander's battles. Most crucially, while the focus of the

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<sup>78</sup> On the biographical relevance of Plutarch's narratives, see especially Pelling (1980); (1990b); (2002), 54-5.

<sup>79</sup> Hamilton (1969), xl.



section is clearly on Caesar, Plutarch makes a point to portray the actions of both Caesar and Pompey. He describes preparations made by both camps before the battle (*Caes.* 42.1-43.7), the order of battle and initial battle plan (*Caes.* 44.1-8), the decisive moments of the battle (*Caes.* 45.1-6), and the aftermath of Caesar's victory (*Caes.* 46.1-4). These details correspond to the basic elements of a standard battle description in ancient historiography, and while Plutarch's narrative lacks much of the detail of Caesar's own account of the battle (*BC* 3.82-99), it is certainly possible for the reader of the *Caesar* to follow the basic flow of the battle.<sup>80</sup> Plutarch's account of the same battle in the *Pompey* is similarly detailed, and must certainly derive from the same source as the *Caesar*.<sup>81</sup> There are a number of other comprehensive descriptions of battles within the *Parallel Lives*, including, as we shall now examine, Plutarch's accounts of the battles of Plataea and Pydna. Significantly, it is clear from these examples that Plutarch's battle narratives are integral parts of the *Lives* in which they are found.

As is the case with his narrative of the battle of Pharsalus in the *Caesar* and the *Pompey*, Plutarch's account of Plataea is significantly less detailed than that found in Herodotus. Even though Plutarch dedicates nearly half of the *Aristides* to the battle of Plataea, that understandably pales in comparison with Herodotus' own treatment of it,

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<sup>80</sup> Ash (2007), 435 lists four standard elements of ancient battle narratives: "(1) general's speeches; (2) fighting order of the armies; (3) battle; and (4) casualty figures". While Plutarch does not provide much evidence of direct speech before the battle, his contrasting pictures of Pompey's and Caesar's preparations for battle serve much the same purpose.

<sup>81</sup> Pelling (2011), 358. Pelling conjectures that the Plutarch's two accounts of the battle are either taken directly from the same source (most likely Pollio) or from the same set of *hypomnemata* that Plutarch composed before writing the actual *Lives*. See Pelling (2002), 1-44 for the likely joint composition of the late republican Roman *Lives*.

both in scope and detail.<sup>82</sup> Much of Plutarch's focus is on the internal conflict between the generals of the different Greek contingents and Aristides' mediating and unifying role, but the chronological progression of the battle itself is clear nevertheless.<sup>83</sup>

Plutarch's account is easily broken up into discrete sections: the choice of the battlefield (*Aris.* 11.5-7); the initial cavalry skirmish (*Aris.* 14.1-6); the confusion and conflict regarding the organization of the Greek battle line (*Aris.* 16.1-17.3); the battle itself (*Aris.* 17.3-19.3); and the final casualties (*Aris.* 19.4-5). While Plutarch's narrative may be significantly compressed when compared to Herodotus', it is still easy to follow despite his focus on the character and actions of Aristides. This emphasis on Aristides allows Plutarch to examine aspects of generalship not often seen in other Lives. Unlike most of the subjects of Plutarch's *Lives*, who tended to be in overall command of their army at the height of their careers, Aristides was not in full command of the forces at Plataea: while he had been elected sole general over the Athenian contingent of 8,000 hoplites, Aristides himself had to answer to the Spartan Pausanias, who was commander-in-chief of the entire Hellenic army (*Aris.* 11.1). Aristides still does demonstrate independence of action, as we shall examine, but he necessarily makes many of his decisions in response to the directions from his commander. Plutarch's narrative of Plataea in the *Aristides*, then, demonstrates to his readers the skills and temperament required to be an effective subordinate general, as well as the importance of such

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<sup>82</sup> Hdt. 9.19-75.

<sup>83</sup> Plutarch gives a much more prominent role to Aristides in his version of that battle than Herodotus does in his, and Plutarch has supplemented Herodotus' account with other sources. See Calabi Limentani (1964), ix-xxxvii; Marincola (2010), 129-32.

generals to the survival and success of a large, diverse army.

For Plutarch, one of Aristides' best qualities as a general was his ability to make his Athenian contingent cooperate with the other Greek soldiers. On two occasions, both before and during the battle, Aristides directly intervenes to keep his soldiers from causing dissent over their place in the battle line. In the first instance, when the Athenians and Tegeans were competing for a place on the left wing of the Greek line, Aristides' speech espousing the importance of cooperation and promising that the Athenians would fight bravely whatever their position impressed the allied leaders and earned the Athenians the honor of the left wing (*Aris.* 12.1-2). Later, when the other Athenian leaders took offense at Pausanias' order that the Athenians and Spartans switch positions in the line to better counter the Persians, Aristides wholeheartedly supported his commander. Rather than supporting dissent at a critical time, Aristides reminded his own subordinates of their recent argument with the Tegeans and successfully convinced them of the honor that the Spartans were offering by finding them their own place in the line (*Aris.* 16.1-4). In Plutarch's eyes, Aristides set a strong example by placing the needs of his commander and the army as a whole over his own personal loyalties, a level of dedication which is clearly worthy of imitation. Plutarch provides several further examples of Aristides' strengths as a subordinate commander. In one, when Aristides learned of an internal plot to betray the Greek cause, he dealt with it discreetly and leniently so that it would not cause too much damage to the allied cause, even though this went against his natural sense of justice (*Aris.* 13.1-3).<sup>84</sup> In another instance,

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<sup>84</sup> Plutarch says that Aristides was concerned about how many people might have been "implicated by a

Alexander of Macedon came to the Athenian camp in secret and told Aristides that Mardonius was planning to attack the next day. When Alexander asked Aristides to keep the information to himself, however, Aristides said that it would not be correct to keep the information from Pausanias, and dutifully brought the information to his commander to act on (*Aris.* 15.2-5). In these instances, Aristides put the interests of the Greek army above both his own sense of justice, as in the former case, as well as his own potential gain, as in the latter. While Plutarch does not speculate on what would have happened had Aristides not put the army's welfare and success above all else, the ultimate Greek victory at Plataea – framed through the narrative to be closely connected to Aristides – makes it clear that he acted correctly. These examples of Aristides' good generalship are more effective because of Plutarch's coherent narrative of the Battle of Plataea, which provides context for both the reasoning and result of Aristides' actions. During his narrative, as we have seen, Plutarch focuses on the confusion and internal conflict within the Greek army; this serves to reinforce the importance of Aristides' ability to foster cooperation between the Greeks by showing how vital his contributions were to each stage of the battle.

As with the narratives of Pharsalus and Plataea that we have already examined, it is certainly possible to form a clear picture of the battle of Pydna based on Plutarch's account. Moreover, Plutarch's portrayal of Aemilius Paulus' generalship during the battle follows the familiar pattern of combining analysis of both his character and

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test which was based on justice rather than expediency" (*Aris.* 13.2). The decision to forgo a just trial in this case must have been particularly difficult for Aristides, who, as Plutarch demonstrates at the beginning of the Life, consistently championed the cause of justice above all else (*Aris.* 4-6).

military decisions seen in the *Caesar*, *Lucullus*, and *Aristides*. Plutarch effectively sets the stage for the battle by explaining the preparations made by both Perseus (*Aem.* 16.4-9) and Aemilius (*Aem.* 17.5-18.4), and vividly describing the Macedonian battle line (*Aem.* 18.5-9). Plutarch's account of the fighting itself, while relatively brief, nevertheless identifies the key stages of the battle: the initial invincibility of the Macedonian phalanx to Roman assault (*Aem.* 20.3-6); the gradual disruption of the phalanx as it moved over uneven ground (*Aem.* 20.7); and the Roman counter-attack that found the gaps in the Macedonian formation and managed to flank the ponderous phalanx (*Aem.* 20.8-10).<sup>85</sup> Throughout his narrative of the Battle of Pydna, Plutarch focuses primarily on Aemilius' reliability and talent for thinking quickly in the face of danger. When first confronted with the Macedonian battle line drawn up in full array, Aemilius prudently withdrew his tired troops to their camp in order to rest despite the protest of his eager junior commanders (*Aem.* 17.1-6). Plutarch reinforces Aemilius' steadfast demeanor several times over the course of his narrative of the battle itself. First, when a skirmish between foragers looked as if it were turning into a general engagement, Plutarch describes Aemilius observing the action "like a helmsman, judging by the present commotion and the movement of the armies the greatness of the coming contest", at which point he left his tent and started encouraging his legionaries to battle (*Aem.* 18.3).<sup>86</sup> The image of a statesman as a κυβερνήτης is a favorite of Plutarch, who describes Pericles (*Per.* 15.4, 33.6), Philopoemen (*Phil.* 17.3), and Cato the

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<sup>85</sup> Again, cf. Ash (2007), 245 for the alignment of Plutarch's account of Pydna with the standard ancient battle narrative.

<sup>86</sup> ὥσπερ κυβερνήτης τῶ παρόντι σάλῳ καὶ κινήματι τῶν στρατοπέδων τεκμαιρόμενος (*Aem.* 18.3).

Younger (*Phoc.* 3.3) in similar terms.<sup>87</sup> It is significant, however, that Plutarch here applies this metaphor to a military situation rather than a political one; the indirect comparison of Aemilius' generalship with the political leadership of some of history's greatest statesmen emphasizes the importance of his actions and reinforces the connection between political and military leadership. Plutarch once again demonstrates Aemilius' control over both his soldiers and his own emotions after the battle had been joined: when Aemilius observed the strength of the Macedonian phalanx and the inability of his troops to break their line of spears, according to Plutarch, "consternation and fear held him, as he had never seen a sight so fearful" (*Aem.* 19.2).<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, Aemilius hid his own fears and rode past his soldiers before the battle without armor and with a cheerful expression on his face (*Aem.* 19.3). Aemilius' ability to overcome troubling emotions for the sake of his army allows them to engage the enemy in high spirits, which gives them an advantage in the battle to come. Plutarch's clear narrative of the opening of the Battle of Pydna, highlighting as it does the ever-increasing threats of battlefield chaos and the Macedonian phalanx, makes it easy for readers to identify Aemilius' self-control, one of his most admirable and imitable qualities as a commander.

From the rest of Plutarch's narrative, it is clear that Aemilius successfully mixes his self-control with an ability to read the battlefield. The initial Roman charge, made "according to no reasoning but with a wild spirit" (*Aem.* 20.4), was easily turned away by the pikes of the Macedonian phalanx, bringing back Aemilius' initial fears at the

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<sup>87</sup> This is originally a Platonic image: cf. Plato, *Rep.* 488a-e. See Stadter (1987), 262, 267.

<sup>88</sup> ἔκπληξις αὐτὸν ἔσχε καὶ δέος, ὡς οὐδὲν ἰδόντα πώποτε θέαμα φοβερώτερον (*Aem.* 19.2).

enemy's strength.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, Aemilius soon saw a way to turn the battle around. After observing that the ground was uneven and causing the Macedonian phalanx to fracture in several places as it moved forward, Aemilius divided up his cohorts and ordered them into the emerging gaps in the phalanx so that they could bring their own weapons to bear and fight “not one battle against everyone, but many separate battles in turn” (*Aem.* 20.7-8).<sup>90</sup> Aemilius' soldiers quickly followed his orders to exploit the holes in the Macedonian phalanx, and by doing so they soon came to grips with and routed the Macedonians. Plutarch makes it clear that Aemilius' leadership – specifically his steadfastness and his ability to read the battlefield – was directly responsible for the Roman victory at Pydna. These qualities, although visible in each individual passage, become much more developed because of Plutarch's coherent narrative of the battle. Aemilius' self-control, for example, is both more apparent and more admirable because the reader is able to see the apparent invincibility of the phalanx increase over several chapters. Likewise, Plutarch's descriptions of the failed frontal assaults by the Romans at the beginning of the battle put Aemilius' ability to read the situation on the battlefield into even sharper relief: his observation and considered action accomplish what brute force cannot.

As has been seen in the *Aristides* and the *Aemilius Paulus*, Plutarch uses the context of a coherent battle narrative to identify and explore key aspects of his subjects' style of generalship. Aristides' tireless work to keep the Athenians from causing strife

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<sup>89</sup> κατ' οὐδένα λογισμὸν ἀλλὰ θυμῷ θηριώδει (*Aem.* 20.4).

<sup>90</sup> μὴ μίαν πρὸς ἅπαντας, ἀλλὰ πολλὰς καὶ μεμειγμένας κατὰ μέρος τὰς μάχας (*Aem.* 20.8).

within the Greek army, even when that came at the expense of his own sense of justice, only becomes apparent because of the clear structure of Plutarch's narrative of the Battle of Plataea. Likewise, Plutarch's narrative of the Battle of Pydna allows the reader to experience Aemilius' dread at the apparent invincibility of the Macedonian phalanx as it stops several Roman advances, which in turn makes Aemilius' steadfast generalship all the more significant. Much of the virtue exemplified by these men in such military narrative is certainly applicable to and imitable by all readers: Aristides' selflessness and Aemilius' ability to control his emotions, for example, are worthy of imitation by private citizens just as much as by local or imperial statesmen. However, I would argue that there are aspects of these narratives aimed primarily, if perhaps not exclusively, to an audience with a practical interest in military leadership. Plutarch's focus on Aristides' role as a subordinate general and his interactions with his superior Pausanias, for example, have considerably more significance for those readers who might find themselves commanding a section of a larger army. Just as Plutarch makes sure to identify the tactical decisions that Caesar and Lucullus made in different situations on the battlefield that led to their victories, he also highlights Aristides' specific responses to both internal and external challenges while in command of the Athenian contingent. Similarly, just as he does in the *Caesar*, Plutarch identifies and explains Aemilius' military decisions at the same time as he is expanding on the general's character. Aemilius' observation and analysis of both the terrain and the enemy's army at *Aem.* 20.7 in order to formulate a successful plan is a simple but clear lesson on how a general should react to a difficult situation. It is also particularly similar to the pattern of



observation and response that Plutarch highlights during Caesar's Gallic Wars.<sup>91</sup> The actions of Aristides and Aemilius that Plutarch highlights in their respective battle narratives are just as imitable by a portion of his readership as the more universal virtues that those leaders display. Moreover, Plutarch's coherent and well-constructed narratives of their key battles serve to emphasize the aspects of their generalship that he found to be most worthy of imitation.

## Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have examined how Plutarch's narratives of military campaigns and battles can be seen to fit with Plutarch's stated purpose for writing the *Parallel Lives*. As we have seen, particularly in the proem to the *Aemilius-Timoleon*, Plutarch intended for his readers of the *Parallel Lives* to have the opportunity to examine the lives of great men and pick out actions and words that they could then use to better themselves. Plutarch was primarily interested in identifying imitable aspects of virtue, whether they were connected to military achievement or not. Nevertheless, as I have argued, Plutarch also expected his readers to imitate good actions, and those include examples of good military leadership. Certainly, only a fraction of contemporary readers of the *Parallel Lives* could have been expected to command soldiers in battle, and thus found examples of good generalship to be of practical use. However, there should be little doubt that there were indeed some people in his audience, exemplified by the *Lives*' dedicatee Sosius Senecio, that would have read Plutarch's military narrative

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<sup>91</sup> See above, p. 35.

with particular interest and with an eye for actions that they might be able to imitate. These readers, moreover, would have been accustomed to interpreting literary works in such a way. Plutarch's practice of providing *exempla* of good generalship was completely in line with the tradition of authors such as Frontinus: military handbooks such as theirs were essentially collections of the actions and stratagems of successful generals. Ironically, despite the paucity of some of Plutarch's military narratives when compared to more complete histories, he nevertheless provides more context for his military *exempla* than many dedicated treatises on generalship at the time. This is not to say, of course, that the generals amongst Plutarch's readership would have necessarily found anything that was actually useful or practicable on the contemporary battlefield. Much the same can be said even for the readers of actual military handbooks, who may well have considered the material within to be largely irrelevant.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, what is important to our discussion is not what use Plutarch's audience made of his military *exempla*, but what imitable examples Plutarch included in the *Parallel Lives* for his readers to discover. This chapter has demonstrated that there is a significant amount of detail within Plutarch's military narratives that is geared towards members of his audience looking for imitable examples of generalship. It is noteworthy that the main theme of generalship that Plutarch highlights in the longer campaign narratives of the *Caesar* and *Lucullus* – namely, the importance of rationality and consideration to a successful general – comes up time and again in the other *Lives* that we have examined. In the *Aristides*, it is the Athenian's ability to reason with his own soldiers (*Aris.* 12.1-2;

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<sup>92</sup> See Campbell (1987), 27.

16.1-4) and exercise his judgment on vital matters (*Aris.* 13.1-3; 15.2-5) that Plutarch identifies as his most admirable and imitable traits as a general. Similarly, while Plutarch's narrative of the Battle of Pydna in the *Aemilius Paulus* focuses on Aemilius' self-control and ability to read the battlefield, it also emphasizes the importance of acting rationally during a battle. The clearest example of this is the way Plutarch portrays the Roman assault on the Macedonian phalanx. As mentioned earlier, the initial Roman attack made with οὐδένα λογισμὸν was soundly beaten back by the Macedonian phalanx; the Roman θυμός, no matter how fierce, proved to be completely ineffective on the battlefield against a competent enemy.<sup>93</sup> On the other hand, when Aemilius made a plan based on his observation of the phalanx's difficulties – a clear example of λογισμὸν even if Plutarch does not specifically name it as such – the Roman attack proved to be successful. The prevalence of this theme is particularly encouraging, because it suggests that Plutarch had put significant thought into what he considered to be an ideal type of general. This type of rational generalship is particularly apt for the *Parallel Lives*, given that those generals who Plutarch might have expected to read the *Lives* would have likely had the same educated background as the dedicatee Sosius Senecio. Plutarch's frequent focus on this rational and thoughtful style of generalship is by no means surprising given his background in philosophy. It is common throughout his military narratives, and indeed, as we will see, occurs in other aspects of his treatment of generalship in the *Parallel Lives*.

Nevertheless, as mentioned above, the treatment of military leadership in the

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<sup>93</sup> *Aem.* 20.4; see above, p. 55.

*Parallel Lives* is not solely limited to the specific lessons of generalship that can be learned by readers with a practical interest in the topic. Military narrative is indeed important to the structure of many Lives and the characterization of many subjects, but there are many other aspects of generalship that are integral to the discussion as well. In the next chapter, I will examine how the discussion of military leadership intersects with Plutarch's vested interest in the character and moral virtue of his subjects, particularly in terms of military education and the morality of military deception. Military narrative within the relevant Lives inevitably forms part of the discussion of these themes, which will further emphasize the importance of military narrative to both the imitation of generalship and to the *Parallel Lives* as a whole.

## Chapter 2

### The Character of Military Leadership: Education and Deception

It is fruitless to examine Plutarch's treatment of generalship in the *Parallel Lives* without discussing its relationship with Plutarch's primary interest in his subjects' character and moral virtue. In the previous chapter I showed how Plutarch used extended pieces of military narrative to add greater nuance and detail to his portrayal of character in many of the Lives. In this chapter I will turn my attention to the influence of military education and military leadership on a statesman's capacity for moral virtue.

First of all, it is important to reiterate that Plutarch saw no moral problem with engaging in military activity. His primary philosophical influences, Plato and Aristotle, certainly saw warfare as an important part of maintaining the integrity of both the state and the individual. Plato's *Republic* in particular, while certainly not advocating war, recognizes its existence and the need for the rulers and protectors of a state to be well-trained in war.<sup>94</sup> Aristotle similarly takes war for granted, and sees it as one of the best ways that men are able to demonstrate the virtue of courage.<sup>95</sup> Plutarch certainly acknowledges the importance of war for both the state and the display of virtue in the individual, as we shall see, but he also sees military achievements as something to be valued in their own right. Such a sentiment can be found in some of Plutarch's miscellaneous essays, such as *Were the Athenians more glorious in war or wisdom?*

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<sup>94</sup> Esp. Plat. *Rep.* 373d-376d. See Craig (1994); Syse (2010).

<sup>95</sup> Arist. *NE.* 3.6.1115a-3.10.1118a.

(*Bellone an pace clariores fuerint Athenienses*), in which he argues that Athens deserves greater recognition for its military successes than its artistic accomplishments.<sup>96</sup>

Nevertheless, it is clear from reading even a selection of the *Parallel Lives* that Plutarch not only accepted his subjects' military careers, but actively celebrated them. As seen in the previous chapter, Plutarch dedicated significant space in many of his Lives to detailed narratives of military campaigns. These narratives do serve an important purpose in the Lives they feature in, as I have argued, but they also demonstrate Plutarch's interest in military matters. Perhaps the clearest sign of this interest can be found in the formal *synkriseis* that conclude eighteen of the twenty-two pairs. In all but three of these *synkriseis*, Plutarch makes a point to specifically compare the military careers of his subjects to each other, at times in significant detail.<sup>97</sup> Often in these *synkriseis*, Plutarch takes the opportunity to explicitly praise one or both of his subjects for their military accomplishments in a way that he rarely does in the individual Lives themselves. As will be discussed in the succeeding chapter, Plutarch also uses the *synkriseis* to encourage his readers to judge one statesman against another.<sup>98</sup> If Plutarch did not see military service as conducive to moral virtue, or if he himself did not have an interest or appreciation for the art of generalship, it is unlikely that Plutarch would have

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<sup>96</sup> Admittedly, Timothy Duff (1999) has recognized that this essay appears to be a rhetorical exercise and may not actually reflect Plutarch's own beliefs: he could well have been able to argue the opposite as well (97-8). Nevertheless, as Duff acknowledges, the positive attitude toward military achievement that Plutarch espouses in *Bellone an pace* is similar to that found across the *Parallel Lives*.

<sup>97</sup> The three pairs whose *synkriseis* do not mention military action are the *Theseus-Romulus*, *Lycurgus-Numa*, and *Demosthenes-Cicero*. The *Theseus-Romulus* does compare their bravery in war (1.3-4), but has no mention of military leadership in particular, and the subjects of the other two pairs were the few in all of the *Parallel Lives* to have little participation in warfare.

<sup>98</sup> See below, pp. 132-159.

featured or praised military accomplishment in the *synkriseis* to the degree that he does.

Despite Plutarch's clear interest in warfare and the military accomplishments of his subjects, he by no means saw war or those who practiced it to be without moral ambiguity. While he praised many generals throughout the *Parallel Lives* for their actions and accomplishments in war, Plutarch also found fault with others. It is impossible to read the *Coriolanus* or the *Marius*, for instance, without seeing the moral failings of these men who dedicated so much of their lives to warfare. Similarly, the lengths that some generals like Lysander and Sertorius go to deceive both friend and foe throughout their military careers raise questions about how much praise these generals deserve for their unorthodox accomplishments. In the first section of this chapter, then, I will examine the role of military education across the *Parallel Lives*, focusing particularly on the impact that such education had on character and the importance that Plutarch placed on a balanced education. In the following section I will discuss Plutarch's treatment of military deception in the *Parallel Lives* and the influence that his subjects' consistent use of deception had on his portrayal in their Lives. I will conclude the chapter with two short case studies on Plutarch's depiction of deception and morality in the *Parallel Lives*. The first, focusing on the Spartan Lives of Lysander and Agesilaus, explores the relationship between the impact of the Spartan education system on a general's use of deception. The second, on the *Sertorius-Eumenes*, illustrates Plutarch's understanding of the potential effectiveness of military deception when used by generals of strong character. Throughout the chapter, I will demonstrate that Plutarch considers military education and the use of deception in war to be not only acceptable, but to be

vital to the demonstration of virtue and the well-being of the state.

### **Military Education and Character**

Throughout the *Parallel Lives*, Plutarch focuses on several statesmen who concentrated primarily – or sometimes exclusively – on military education in their early lives. Men such as Coriolanus and Marius are well-known for lacking a philosophical education, either by circumstance in Coriolanus' case or by choice in Marius', and consequently suffering from unchecked anger or ambition in their old age.<sup>99</sup> Despite these very negative examples of an excessive focus on military education, however, the *Marcellus* and *Philopoemen*, amongst others, demonstrate that Plutarch did not always see a military education as having a catastrophic effect on those who favored it. In the following section I will first explore the connections that Plutarch makes between education and character in the *Parallel Lives*, before examining Plutarch's conception of the impact and value of military education on those who pursue it.

Much of Plutarch's view on education can be seen in his treatise *On Moral Virtue*.<sup>100</sup> Here, in line with the thinking of Plato and Aristotle, Plutarch argues that the soul is divided into two parts: the rational and the irrational, and that the rational part of the soul is responsible for controlling the irrational (*De virt. moral.* 441d-442c).<sup>101</sup> While

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<sup>99</sup> *Cor.* 1.2-5, 21.1; *Mar.* 2.2-4, 28.1-2, 35.6. Coriolanus lacked a Greek education because the Romans had not yet been exposed to Greek culture, but Marius vehemently spurned the Greek learning that was at his fingertips in Rome at the end of the second century BC; nevertheless, they both suffered the same consequences, as will be discussed below.

<sup>100</sup> Timothy Duff gives the most complete overview of Plutarch's educational views, which can be found in Duff (1999), 72-78. Cf. Gill (1983); Pelling (1989); Swain (1989a; 1990b); Gill (2006), 219-38; Duff (2008b), 1-3.

<sup>101</sup> Plutarch's philosophy is unquestionably Platonic in origin, but the degree to which he was influenced



ideally subordinate to the rational part of the soul, however, the irrational is still necessary for the manifestation of vital emotions – it is the role of the rational to ensure that these emotions emerge at the appropriate time and to the appropriate degree (442c-443d). It is indeed this interplay between the rational and irrational parts of the soul, Plutarch argues, that is the basis for a man’s character: one’s inclination to moral virtue is dictated by the influence and control that his rationality has over his emotions (443c). More specifically, he continues, the irrational part of the soul becomes habituated to a resting state of either vice or virtue based on the influence of the rational. If the irrational has been “poorly educated” by the rational then it takes on an acquired state of vice, but if it has been “educated well” by the rational it takes on a state of virtue (443d).<sup>102</sup> The specific word that Plutarch uses to describe the action of the rational upon the irrational, παιδαγωγηθῆ, highlights the connection in his mind between character and education: the rational part of the soul is responsible for the proper development of the irrational just as the Greek παιδαγωγός is responsible for ensuring the correct development of a child’s character through his education. This is a connection which Plutarch makes in several of his other treatises.<sup>103</sup>

While Plutarch frequently makes the link between education and character in many of the *Parallel Lives*, these connections are rarely satisfying to the modern reader. Both Christopher Gill and Christopher Pelling have recognized that despite his clear

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by the original texts of Plato and Aristotle in addition to contemporary Platonic and Peripatetic schools is still debated. Cf. R. M. Jones (1916); Babut (1969), 61-76; Opsomer (1994); Donini (1974), 63-125; Becchi (1975); (1978); (1981).

<sup>102</sup> ἢ δ' ἔξις ἰσχύς καὶ κατασκευὴ τῆς περὶ τὸ ἄλογον δυνάμεως ἐξ ἔθους ἐγγενομένη, κακία μὲν, ἂν φαύλως, ἀρετὴ δ', ἂν καλῶς ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου παιδαγωγηθῆ τὸ πάθος (*De virt. moral.* 443d).

<sup>103</sup> Cf. *De Aud. Poet.* 28d-e; *De auditu* 37d-e; *Prof. in Virt.* 76d.

understanding of character development as seen in many of his essays (discussed above), Plutarch often failed to use details of his subjects' early education to explain the development of their character. Gill argues that Plutarch, like other historians and biographers of his day, was primarily concerned with simply showing the character of his subject rather than explaining what circumstances led to his subject's specific personality.<sup>104</sup> Pelling, also noting the similarity in Plutarch's methods to those of his contemporaries, suggests that while Plutarch does make an effort to individuate his characters in the *Parallel Lives*, his priority lay much more with presenting character than analyzing it.<sup>105</sup> Timothy Duff has recently added more nuance to the discussion of Plutarch's treatment of education and character in the *Parallel Lives*, and has defined two different methods which Plutarch uses to discuss education and character: the 'developmental' model and the 'static/illustrative' model. In the 'developmental' model, Plutarch sees one's character as developing throughout childhood based on education, habits, and other influences, and eventually becoming settled upon reaching adulthood. While this model appears to be closest to Plutarch's actual understanding of character, particularly from his treatises in the *Moralia* (like *On Moral Virtue*, above), it is not very common in the *Parallel Lives*, and only occurs when Plutarch is discussing philosophical ideas or texts. Instead, the dominant model that Plutarch uses to describe character in the *Parallel Lives* is the 'static/illustrative' model, in which Plutarch treats a man's character as essentially unchanging and uses anecdotes about his early education

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<sup>104</sup> Gill (1983), 469-75.

<sup>105</sup> Pelling (1988), esp. 257-63.

to illustrate – rather than explain – his character as an adult.<sup>106</sup> In other words, Plutarch rarely suggests that a subject’s adult character is a direct result of his early education, but rather that the details of his subject’s early education serve to demonstrate aspects of that man’s adult character. These two models are not mutually exclusive, and there is at times ambiguity in a Life about the true relationship that Plutarch saw between a man’s education and character.<sup>107</sup> This distinction between ‘developmental’ and ‘static/illustrative’ models of education helps to inform our own discussion of military education in the *Parallel Lives*. Many of the statesmen discussed below showed an unbalanced preference for military education over literature and philosophy, and almost unavoidably suffered varying degrees of moral failure later in life. Indeed, as Pelling has observed, it is generals who most frequently appear to have one-sided educations in the *Parallel Lives*.<sup>108</sup> As we shall see, however, despite the impression one gets from those Lives with the most extreme imbalance in education, Plutarch’s attitude toward the effects of military education is more nuanced than it seems at first.

Considering the connection between education and character that Plutarch saw, then, it comes as no surprise that Plutarch frequently dedicated space in the *Parallel Lives* to the education of his subjects. As is the case for most themes in the *Lives*, the amount of detail about a particular statesman’s education that Plutarch had at his disposal – or the amount of detail that Plutarch deemed relevant for that particular Life –

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<sup>106</sup> Duff (2008b), esp. 1-3, 18-23.

<sup>107</sup> The *Marius* is a particularly good example of the potential uncertainty here, as we shall see below. See Duff (2008b), 16-18.

<sup>108</sup> Pelling (1996), xxvi-xxix; (2002), 341.

varied considerably depending on the subject. In some Lives Plutarch clearly struggled to find much relevant information about the subject's education, as in the *Eumenes* and *Timoleon*, while in other Lives, such as the *Pericles* or the *Themistocles*, Plutarch knew the names of specific teachers and analyzed their specific impact on the subject.<sup>109</sup> While Plutarch frequently possessed more detailed information on the education of his Greek subjects, Simon Swain has argued that Plutarch often stressed the education of his Roman subjects considerably more than their Greek counterparts. Sometimes, he observes, Plutarch only makes a clear connection between poor education and moral failing in the Roman Life, even when the same failing exists for the Greek counterpart (such as in the *Pyrrhus-Marius* or *Coriolanus-Alcibiades*); at other times, Plutarch simply emphasizes the education of the Roman while largely ignoring the education of his pair (as in the *Pelopidas-Marcellus*, *Timoleon-Aemilius*, and *Cimon-Lucullus*).<sup>110</sup> Plutarch's greater interest in the education of his Roman subjects, Swain suggests, is directly linked to his interest in their character: because a Roman could not necessarily be assumed to have had a Greek education, unlike his Greek pair, a Roman's possession or lack of a good education provided Plutarch with a clear criterion by which to characterize him that he did not have with the Greek counterpart.<sup>111</sup> As we shall see below, Swain's explanation appears to hold true for many of the following Lives, and it is indeed Plutarch's Roman generals who lack a good education more often than their

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<sup>109</sup> Pelling (1990). For an in-depth examination of Plutarch's portrayal of Themistocles' education, cf. Duff (2008), 3-11.

<sup>110</sup> Swain (1990b), 134-5.

<sup>111</sup> Swain (1990b), 145. Plutarch's focus on the Roman acquisition of character is further discussed in Pelling (1989), and Duff (1999), 76-77.

Greek pair. As the assumed ubiquity of education amongst his Greek subjects suggests, Plutarch saw education (*paideia*) as having specifically originated with the Greeks, and consisting primarily of the study of Greek language and literature.<sup>112</sup> For Plutarch, then, it is this appreciation for and knowledge of Greek culture that provides the rational part of the soul with the ability to control the irrational, which is necessary for a balanced character.

There are many statesmen in the *Parallel Lives*, however, who lack a balanced education, and instead received the majority of their training in military leadership. Two of the most famous of Plutarch's subjects with an unbalanced military education are Marius and Coriolanus. Marius' aversion to Greek culture and education is, for Plutarch, perhaps the most extreme out of all the subjects of the *Parallel Lives*. Early in the Life, Plutarch says that Marius, who had a warlike nature, focused on military education and intentionally avoided learning Greek literature or language because he judged them as the worthless products of slaves (*Mar.* 2.1-2). This lack of the "Greek Muses and Graces" in Marius' upbringing, Plutarch continues, directly led to the ignoble end of his political career – and his life – due to his uncontrolled passions and ambition (*Mar.* 2.4); as seen above, it is precisely the literary education that Marius avoided that could have helped him control his irrational side. Throughout the rest of the Life, Plutarch clearly traces Marius' downfall until his dying moments, when he portrays the seven-time consul lamenting that he had never accomplished what he had desired (*Mar.* 45.11-

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<sup>112</sup> Duff (1999), 76-77. Cf. Swain (1990b), 131-136 for Plutarch's perception of how the Romans first came into contact with Greek education and culture thanks primarily to the actions of Marcellus.

12).<sup>113</sup> Coriolanus similarly lacked a Greek education, but as Plutarch acknowledges, that is due more to circumstance than intention, as Rome did not offer the opportunities for a literary education at the time (*Cor.* 1.3-6). Intentional or not, however, Coriolanus' unbalanced education ultimately had the same consequences as Marius'. Coriolanus was prone to great anger, and lacked the reason and education to control it (*Cor.* 15.4). Coriolanus' excessive anger, coupled with his poor ability to communicate with people outside of the battlefield, led to his exile by a popular jury (*Cor.* 21.1) and, ultimately, him marching on Rome at the head of an enemy army (*Cor.* 30).<sup>114</sup> Marius and Coriolanus may have suffered the most for their excessive military education, but they are not the only ones with similar gaps in their upbringing. Flaminius, Fabius Maximus, and Marcellus, confronted as they were by the threat of Carthage, similarly lacked the opportunity to receive a well-rounded education (*Flam.* 1.4; *Fab.* 1.4; *Marc.* 1.1-2). Plutarch saw this as a particular shame for Marcellus, who, although being naturally fond of war, was also a lover of Greek culture and learning (*Marc.* 1.1-2). However, because he lacked the opportunity to temper his impetuous nature with a well-rounded Greek education, Marcellus fell victim to his ambition and threw away his life in ambush (*Marc.* 28.6-29.3).<sup>115</sup> Romans are not the only ones Plutarch identifies as receiving an unbalanced military education: Pelopidas, Pyrrhus, and Philopoemen are similarly guilty, as we shall see shortly. However, Plutarch tends to focus on the

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<sup>113</sup> See Duff (1999), 103-11, 118-21, for a detailed discussion of Marius' moral failings, characterised particularly by his discontent. For a fuller treatment of Marius' military career, see Chapter 4, below.

<sup>114</sup> Duff (1999), 206-221 provides a fuller account and analysis of Coriolanus' moral failings. For Coriolanus' poor rhetorical ability, see Pelling (2002), 339-347.

<sup>115</sup> Swain (1990b), 130; Beneker (2012), 78-80.

consequences of such an education far more in the Roman Lives than the Greek, and so Marius, Coriolanus, and Marcellus provide a much clearer view of the dangers of excessive military education.

The composition and importance of Greek education for Plutarch is clear, but his conception of what constituted a military education is less apparent. In many cases, Plutarch discusses his subjects' military education in terms of physical training, both in terms of the body and of skill with weapons. Coriolanus, whose nature and upbringing in early Rome denied him a literary education, trained in weapons from an early age and specifically worked to strengthen his body so that it too could act as a weapon (*Cor.* 2.1-2). Plutarch similarly describes the military education of Fabius Maximus, Pelopidas, and Marcellus as being centered on physical fitness (*Fab.* 1.4; *Pel.* 4.1) or weapons training (*Marc.* 2.1). Marius' military education is even more vague; Plutarch makes no mention of physical or weapons training, but instead simply states that Marius received a στρατιωτικῆς παιδείας (*Mar.* 2.1). In other instances, however, Plutarch goes into considerably more detail about what constitutes a military education. A good example of this is in the *Pyrrhus*, where Plutarch describes the Epirote as "continually studying and meditating" (μελετῶν ἔοικε καὶ φιλοσοφῶν ἀεὶ διατελεῖν) on the arranging of armies and commanding (τάξεις καὶ στρατηγίας), which he thought were the most kingly branches of learning (μαθημάτων βασιλικώτατον) (*Pyrr.* 8.2-6). The repeated instances of educational vocabulary (such as μελετῶν, φιλοσοφῶν, μαθημάτων) suggest a level of intellectual rigor to Pyrrhus' military education that is markedly absent from the physical training and fitness that characterized the education of Coriolanus, Fabius Maximus,

Pelopidas, and Marcellus. Pyrrhus focused his education, as Plutarch notes, exclusively on these military affairs, but despite the lack of balance with philosophy Pyrrhus' education nevertheless appears thorough and respectable.

The *Philopoemen* provides perhaps the most complete treatment of military education in the *Parallel Lives*. Early in his life, Plutarch says, Philopoemen took up physical training in weapons, horsemanship, and wrestling to prepare himself for war (*Phil.* 3.2). This matches the basic portrayal of military education seen in other Lives, above, but here Plutarch delves into much more detail. Philopoemen, he says, avoided practicing athletics after he was told that it would be detrimental to his military training (στρατιωτικὴν ἄσκησιν) (*Phil.* 3.3-4). As an adult, Philopoemen continued physical exercise to strengthen his body (*Phil.* 4.1), but also, just like Pyrrhus, dedicated much study to the art of generalship. Plutarch says that while Philopoemen avoided literature that lended itself to leisure and idle conversation, he did see the value in that which was devoted to τὰ πράγματα, and so was familiar with the histories of Alexander and read military manuals such as the *Tactics* of Evangelus; even then, however, his practical nature led him to prefer planning tactics himself rather than studying diagrams in books (*Phil.* 4.8-9). As Duff points out, there is implicit criticism of Philopoemen's excessive focus on military education in these chapters, particularly in his shunning of athletics practice and reading for leisure, as this effectively constituted a rejection of traditional Greek *paideia*.<sup>116</sup> Plutarch seems to make a rather more explicit criticism at the end of the passage, saying that Philopoemen "appears to have pursued military matters more

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<sup>116</sup> Duff (2008b), 12.



than necessary” because he considered war as the best way for him to demonstrate virtue (*Phil.* 4.10). Plutarch’s message here that one should not focus on only a single aspect of virtue is clear, but I would argue that it is important not to read any more into this statement as a condemnation of military education. Throughout the rest of the *Life*, Plutarch describes several instances of Philopoemen’s military education paying dividends later in his career. Immediately after explaining his single-minded focus on military affairs, Plutarch describes Philopoemen’s actions in the Battle of Sellasia (222 BC) in which the Achaean fought alongside Antigonos III against Cleomenes of Sparta. During a crucial moment of the battle, Plutarch says, Philopoemen observed that the Spartans had exploited a gap in the line and were threatening their flanks, but when he approached Antigonos’ generals with a way to save the situation he was ignored; instead, Philopoemen took the initiative himself, drove back the enemy incursion, and then led a cavalry charge into the confused Spartans (*Phil.* 6.4-7). Although Plutarch does not specifically attribute Philopoemen’s ability to recognise and respond to a dangerous battlefield situation to his intensive study of military tactics, the relationship between the two is hard to ignore. Further instances of the practical benefits of Philopoemen’s military education appear later in the *Life*, both in and out of battle. Plutarch describes in detail how Philopoemen changed the inefficient way that the Achaeans were arranging their infantry by improving the equipment and formation of the soldiers to better compete with the Macedonian phalanx (*Phil.* 9.1-5). This is a clear example of Philopoemen putting his studied knowledge of military affairs into considered practice, and one which had a significantly positive impact on the morale and

performance of his soldiers (*Phil.* 9.13-14). Plutarch similarly attributes Philopoemen's victories at the Battle of Mantinea in 207 BC (*Phil.* 10) and against the Spartan Nabis in 192 BC (*Phil.* 14.6-12) to his ability to turn difficult tactical situations to his advantage.

The battle against Nabis is particularly significant for its parallels to Plutarch's description of Philopoemen's military education, as Philopoemen's dedication to reading the *Tactics* of Evangelus and to inspecting terrain and troop deployments himself (*Phil.* 4.8-9) directly influenced his actions against Nabis. Finding his army in such a disadvantaged position because of a surprise march by Nabis that his own soldiers began to panic, Philopoemen nevertheless took the time to survey the terrain and alter his order of battle to better suit his circumstances, and his subsequent charge sent Nabis' army into a rout (*Phil.* 14.8-9). By doing this, Plutarch effuses, Philopoemen "demonstrated that the art of tactics is the consummate skill in war" (14.8).<sup>117</sup> That Plutarch provides several examples throughout the *Philopoemen* of the practical benefits of the Achaean's military education suggests that he saw considerable value in such training for aspiring commanders.<sup>118</sup> Of course, as several scholars have observed, for all the benefits of Philopoemen's military education during his career, his lack of a philosophical education leads directly to his φιλονικία getting the better of him at the end of the Life (*Phil.* 17.7).<sup>119</sup> Even in the Life with Plutarch's most clear praise of a military education, the reader is left with little doubt that an unbalanced education will lead to difficulty

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<sup>117</sup> ἐπέδειξε τὴν τακτικὴν τῶν ἄκρων τῆς πολεμικῆς τέχνης οὕσαν (*Phil.* 14.8).

<sup>118</sup> Pelling (1997), 218 n.89, has also observed the parallel between *Phil.* 14.8-9 and *Phil.* 4.9. Cf. Livy 35.28.

<sup>119</sup> Pelling (1985), 84-89; Swain (1988), 343-44; Pelling (1989), 208-9; Walsh (1992), 210-11; Pelling (1997), 125-135; Duff (2008), 11-12.

later in life. Nevertheless, the ultimate lesson in *Philopoemen* is not necessarily so straightforward. In the final chapter of the Life, Plutarch describes the attempt by a Roman to have all of Philopoemen's statues torn down after the fall of Corinth due to his opposition to Rome. Primarily due to the intervention of Polybius, says Plutarch, the judges posthumously defended the actions of Philopoemen, distinguishing "between necessity and virtue, and what was good and what was profitable" and finding "correctly" that benefactors such as Philopoemen should be rewarded for the good that they do (*Phil.* 21.12).<sup>120</sup> Simon Swain has argued that Plutarch thus saw Philopoemen as a genuine benefactor of Greece despite his vices.<sup>121</sup> I would go further, and suggest that this closing sentiment can also be read in terms of the value of military education. Philopoemen's excessive focus on military education did have an adverse effect on his ability to control the irrational side of his character. Nevertheless, it was precisely the understanding and skill he gained from his martial education that allowed Philopoemen to do so much good for the Greek cities. This same contrast can be seen in many of the other Lives whose subjects focused on military education at the expense of all else. Plutarch observes that Fabius Maximus gave into his temper later in life, as seen by his ill-considered opposition to Scipio's plan to attack Hannibal in Africa; similarly, Marcellus' impetuosity caused his senseless death in an ambush set by Hannibal. Both men possessed only a military education and so lacked the ability to control these irrational aspects of their character, but without their military education they could not

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<sup>120</sup> ἀλλὰ τῆς χρείας τὴν ἀρετὴν ἐκεῖνοι καὶ τὸ καλὸν ὡς ἔοικε τοῦ λυσιτελοῦς διώριζον (*Phil.* 21.12).

<sup>121</sup> Swain (1988), 345.

have been in the position to protect Rome from Hannibal. Even Coriolanus and Marius, whose lack of a balanced education allowed their anger and ambition to grow unchecked and led them to cause harm to Rome later in their lives, still used their military ability to do even greater service to their state earlier in their careers. Clearly, Plutarch saw that an unbalanced military education could cause great harm to an individual by denying him the ability to control the irrational side of his character. Nevertheless, he also recognized that an individual's military education was often necessary for the safeguarding and benefaction of the state. A similar contrast between individual and state also appears in Plutarch's depiction of the use of military deception in the *Parallel Lives*.

### **Deceptive Generalship**

For Plutarch, then, neither a military education in its own right nor even an overriding passion for military matters had a negative impact on a man's character in and of itself. In order to fully grasp the moral impact of generalship in the *Parallel Lives*, however, it is also important to examine Plutarch's portrayal of the general at war. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Plutarch fully accepted and even approved of the need for warfare in most circumstances.<sup>122</sup> While he does condemn unnecessary wars at times in the *Lives*, particularly civil strife between Greek cities (*Age.*; *Flam.*) or Roman generals (*Pomp.*), he does not criticize generals for simply doing their jobs. Warfare, by its nature, requires its participants to act in ways that are often not acceptable in civil society in order to achieve victory, and many generals in the *Parallel*

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<sup>122</sup> See above, pp. 62-64.

*Lives* engage in lies, deceit, and treachery at various points in their campaigns. This section will examine Plutarch's understanding and treatment of deception in warfare, in order to identify his views on the characters of those generals who frequently relied on deception.

Classical authors with whom Plutarch was familiar had differing opinions on the use of deception in warfare. Xenophon, for one, had a positive view of deception and discussed it in nearly every one of his works, even those with no relation to warfare.<sup>123</sup> His greatest praise of military deception comes, appropriately, in his training manual for cavalry officers, where he asserts that “on thinking about the successes in war, one finds that the most and the greatest of these have come about by means of deception.”<sup>124</sup> Xenophon's approval of deception is not unequivocal, however: through the character of Cambyses in the *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon acknowledges that teaching deception to youths could lead them to employ deception against friends and enemies indiscriminately.<sup>125</sup> Nevertheless, Xenophon's view of military deception is primarily positive, as can be seen at various places in his other works when he calls deception during war both just (*Ages.* 1.17; *Mem.* 4.2.15) and lawful (*Cyr.* 1.6.34). Not all authors shared Xenophon's feelings for military deception, however. In a well-known passage, Polybius wrote with apparent nostalgia for the times when wars were fought without deceit and the result of a campaign hinged on the outcome of a single battle, and claimed that the ancients

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<sup>123</sup> Krentz (2000), 169. Cf. Hunt (1998), 147, 195-6; Hesk (2000), 122-142; Danzig (2007).

<sup>124</sup> καὶ ἐνθουμούμενος δ' ἂν τὰ ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις πλεονεκτήματα εὖροι ἂν τις τὰ πλείστα καὶ μέγιστα σὺν ἀπάτῃ γεγενημένα (*Xen. Hipp.* 5.11).

<sup>125</sup> Hesk (2000), 122-142.

deliberately avoided deceiving even their enemies (Polyb. 13.3.2-5). While pitched battles certainly did occur in the Archaic and Classical period, they did not define ancient warfare in the way Polybius described. As decisive as the Battle of Plataea may have been, for example, it would never have happened if not for Themistocles' trickery (of both sides) at Salamis.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, those few pitched hoplite battles that did occur during the thirty years of the Peloponnesian war, such as at Delium and Mantinea, did nothing to speed up the conclusion of the overall war. Hans van Wees is understandably surprised that Polybius appears to be as naïve as the orator Demosthenes, who also claimed that older generations exclusively fought battles according to a strict set of rules (*Dem.* 9.48), yet he still takes the historian's claim at face value, to Polybius' detriment.<sup>127</sup> Peter Krentz gives Polybius more credit by arguing that his rhetoric at 13.3.2-6 is directed not against military deception but against Philip V and his treachery, which is the subject of the longer passage.<sup>128</sup> Regardless of Polybius' level of appreciation for military deception, there is no doubt that he recognized its effectiveness: he ends his lament at 13.3.2-6 by claiming that “now they say that only a bad general does anything openly in war.”<sup>129</sup> Plutarch, as we shall see, certainly appreciated the

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Hdt. 8.75-76, 8.110.2-3; Plut. *Them.* 12.3-5, 16.4-5. Themistocles sent a letter to Xerxes urging him to attack the Greek navy quickly so that his own allied contingents would not have the opportunity to abandon the Athenians; after the battle he sent another correspondence that divulged the Greek plan to dismantle Xerxes' bridge over the Hellespont, which encouraged the Persian king to retreat to Asia with the bulk of his army.

<sup>127</sup> Van Wees (2004), 115-7. See also 134, where he denies the existence of “the formal engagements of Polybius' imagination, fought by arrangement at a stipulated time and place.”

<sup>128</sup> Krentz (2000), 178, and 180 n. 18 for his argument that Polybius did not, as Pritchett (1974, 178-9) believed, consider ambushes as violations of honor.

<sup>129</sup> νῦν δὲ καὶ φαύλου φασὶν εἶναι στρατηγοῦ τὸ προφανῶς τι πράττειν τῶν πολεμικῶν (Polyb. 13.3.6). Cf. Polyb. 3.18.9 and 4.8.11-12 for more comments on the effectiveness of deception in warfare.

importance and efficacy of deception in warfare just as much as Xenophon and Polybius did. However, while he may not have lamented its use in a fit of misplaced nostalgia as Polybius and Demosthenes did, his praise of it is not nearly so unequivocal as Xenophon's, and at times Plutarch makes much of the moral ambiguity behind deceptive generalship.

In the *Lives*, it is clear that Plutarch is aware of these distinct styles of warfare. In the *Philopoemen*, for instance, Plutarch directly contrasts the “straightforward and noble warfare” (ἀπλοῦν καὶ γενναῖον πόλεμον) of the Peloponnesians and Arcadians with a type that Philopoemen adopted from Cretan practices, one characterized by “tricks, stolen marches, and ambushes” (σοφίσμασι καὶ δόλοις κλωπείαις τε καὶ λοχισμοῖς) (*Phil.* 13.9).<sup>130</sup> Plutarch does not go into any further detail here about what constitutes straightforward or noble warfare, but its association with the Peloponnesians in particular certainly would have conjured in his contemporary readers' minds the same images of traditional hoplite battles that it does in ours today. While Plutarch's description of standard hoplite battles as γενναῖον in particular suggests an implicit moral judgment between these two types of warfare, especially when compared to the apparently negative vocabulary describing the contrasting style (particularly δόλοις κλωπείαις), his comparison between the two is decidedly neutral. Wheeler argues convincingly for neutral or even positive connotations of words denoting military trickery or deceit in Greek and Roman authors, including Plutarch. Even words such as ἀπάτη, δόλος, and κλοπή, he observes, which were otherwise negative, took on a *vox*

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<sup>130</sup> See Launey (1949), 285-6, for the Cretan reputation for cleverness, cunning, and duplicity.

*media* when describing military action, and frequently needed an accompanying adjective to indicate a negative meaning.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, Plutarch's commentary on Philopoemen's tactics in this chapter focuses on the fact that the Arcadian was able to beat the Cretans at their own game by using their tricks and ambushes against them, even though such tactics were not natural to him (*Phil.* 13.9).<sup>132</sup> The point here is surely to praise Philopoemen for his adaptability and skill rather than to criticize him for his use of unorthodox tactics.

Nevertheless, it is still tempting to see implicit criticism of anything compared to that which is ἀπλοῦν καὶ γενναῖον, especially upon reading the other passage in the *Parallel Lives* that contains that phrase. Early in the *Lysander*, Plutarch uses the same phrase with which he describes Peloponnesian warfare in the *Philopoemen* (ἀπλοῦν καὶ γενναῖον) to describe a type of leadership:

τοῖς δὲ τὸν ἀπλοῦν καὶ γενναῖον ἀγαπῶσι τῶν ἡγεμόνων τρόπον, ὁ Λύσανδρος τῷ Καλλικρατίδῃ παραβαλλόμενος ἐδόκει πανοῦργος εἶναι καὶ σοφιστής, ἀπάταις τὰ πολλὰ διαποικίλλων τοῦ πολέμου καὶ τὸ δίκαιον ἐπὶ τῷ λυσιτελοῦντι μεγαλύνων, εἰ δὲ μὴ, τῷ συμφέροντι χρώμενος ὡς καλῶ. (*Lys.* 7.3)

To those who loved the straightforward and noble character of their leaders, Lysander, compared with Kallikratidas, appeared to be crafty and scheming, a man who wove his many acts of war with deceits and extolled justice when it was to his advantage, but if it was not, proclaimed expediency to be honorable.

Lysander's style of leadership, then, which ranked justice no higher than deception or expediency, is directly contrasted with that of Kallikratides, which, being

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<sup>131</sup> Wheeler (1988), esp. 93-110.

<sup>132</sup> Pelling (1997), 214 n.75, similarly suggests that the dominant focus in *Phil.* 13.9 is on Philopoemen's adaptability, but suggests that Plutarch is also making a point regarding Philopoemen's deviation from the typical Peloponnesian.



“straightforward and noble”, appears to have been more palatable to the Spartan elders. However, it is important to note that this is not necessarily Plutarch’s view as well. For one, the initial τοῖς δὲ serves as focalization, separating the narrator from those he is describing. Moreover, as Timothy Duff has argued, the words that Plutarch uses to describe Lysander, πανούργος and σοφιστής, were no longer necessarily pejorative by Plutarch’s day (although they certainly still could be).<sup>133</sup> Similarly, while the Athenians frequently criticized the Spartans for their use of deception in much of their literature of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, this same use of deception was at times praised, and was still considered an important part of their upbringing.<sup>134</sup> Whether or not Plutarch meant this to be a clear denunciation of Lysander’s use of deception – and it is certainly difficult to take this judgment in any positive way – it is another example of the contrast in the *Parallel Lives* between the use of trickery and deception and that which is ἀπλοῦν καὶ γενναῖον. However, it is also important to note that what Plutarch compares in this passage is not warfare, as he does in the *Philopoemen*, but character. While he includes Lysander’s use of military deception as an example of his πανούργος and σοφιστής character, it is not the central focus of this passage, and so any implicit judgment that there may be in this passage should not automatically be associated with the use of deception in war.

Interestingly, Plutarch does use the phrase ἀπλοῦν καὶ γενναῖον to describe warfare once more in his extant corpus, although it appears in an unlikely source: the

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<sup>133</sup> Duff (1999), 171-74. Cf. Wheeler (1988), 27-8, 33-5, and 107-8.

<sup>134</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Lysander’s character and the importance of deception to Spartan education and identity, see below, pp. 89-111. See Hesk (2000), 20-40, for the portrayal of Spartan deception in Athenian literature.

*Bruta animalia ratione uti*. In this imagined dialogue between Odysseus and a man-turned-pig on Circe's island, the pig, Gryllus, accuses Odysseus of leading astray "by tricks and contrivances" men who once knew only "a straightforward and noble type of warfare", and who had been "unacquainted with deceit and lies" (*Brut. Anim.* 987C).<sup>135</sup> This is only a small rhetorical point within Gryllus' larger argument that animals are more virtuous than men, but is nevertheless noteworthy, especially as Odysseus is traditionally lauded for his cleverness and trickery.<sup>136</sup> Although it can be difficult to identify Plutarch's actual point of view in his rhetorical essays, Judith Mossman and Frances Titchener suggest that because Gryllus' arguments tend to be anti-Stoic throughout the dialogue, the reader is encouraged to associate his arguments with the ideas of Plutarch.<sup>137</sup> This, then, seems to be a more explicit denunciation of military deception than what is found in the *Philopoemen* or even the *Lysander*. Unlike in the *Philopoemen*, in which no moral judgment between ἀπλοῦν καὶ γενναῖον and deceptive warfare exists, and the *Lysander*, in which Plutarch describes types of character rather than types of warfare, in this essay Plutarch's preference for "straightforward and noble warfare" is clear. This opinion, moreover, is in line with Plutarch's views on deception more generally elsewhere in the *Moralia*: in several of his essays he decries politicians who use sophistry in order to trick their own citizens.<sup>138</sup> Nevertheless, it is important not to read too far into this criticism of deceptive warfare in the context of the *Parallel*

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<sup>135</sup> δόλοισι καὶ μηχαναῖσι ἀνθρώπους ἀπλοῦν καὶ γενναῖον εἰδότας πολέμου τρόπον ἀπάτης δὲ καὶ ψευδῶν ἀπίερους παρακρουσάμενος (*Brut. Anim.* 987C).

<sup>136</sup> Duff (1999), 172, suggests that this criticism of Odysseus' most famous trait is part of the humour of this passage.

<sup>137</sup> Mossman and Titchener (2011), 293.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. *De se ipsum laud.* 545C, *Praec. ger. reip.* 802D-E, *Non posse* 1090A.

*Lives*. As we have seen above in the discussion of character and education in the *Lives*, the philosophical ideals that Plutarch puts forward in the *Moralia* do not always translate well into the political and historical reality of the *Lives*. Duff has explored this difficulty extensively, particularly in his case studies of pairs such as the *Phocion-Cato Minor* and the *Lysander-Sulla*, which show Plutarch grappling with conflict between private morality and public service from a variety of angles.<sup>139</sup> The *Lysander-Sulla* is particularly noteworthy for our current focus on deception, as Plutarch depicts both subjects acting in morally questionable (or outright objectionable) ways for the benefit of their respective cities. We shall examine this moral uncertainty further in our discussion on deception and education in the Spartan *Lives*, but the concept that Plutarch often considers the efficacy of his subjects' actions in the *Parallel Lives* as well as their morality is an important one when considering Plutarch's treatment of military deception in the *Parallel Lives* as a whole. He may have argued for the moral superiority of "straightforward and noble" warfare in the *Bruta animalia ratione uti*, but Plutarch's views on military deception in practice are not nearly so straightforward themselves.

The clearest examples that Plutarch appreciated both the utility and importance of military deception in the *Parallel Lives* appear in the *Sertorius*. In the prologue to the *Sertorius-Eumenes*, Plutarch names Sertorius as one of the generals who achieved most by cunning and cleverness, alongside the other one-eyed generals Philip II, Antigonus, and Hannibal (*Sert.* 1.8). This is illustrious company for Sertorius, and such an introduction leads the reader to expect great things from the general; Plutarch does not

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<sup>139</sup> Duff (1999), 131-204.

disappoint. After briefly narrating his early accomplishments, Plutarch explains Sertorius' strengths as a general, calling him “a master of the greatest skill” in all acts of war which require speed, deception, or falsehood (*Sert.* 10.2). This characterization holds true throughout the entire Life, and is perhaps most clear during his campaigns against Metellus. Plutarch introduces Metellus, who was sent to Spain after Sertorius had defeated the local Roman commanders, as “the greatest and most esteemed man in Rome at the time.”<sup>140</sup> As flattering as such a description may be, it says nothing about Metellus as a general, and Plutarch is quick to point out the stark differences between the two men's abilities in that field:

προσπολεμῶν ἀνδρὶ τολμητῆι, πάσης ἐξαναδυομένῳ φανεραῖς μάχης, πᾶσαν δὲ μεταβαλλομένῳ μεταβολὴν εὐσταλείᾳ καὶ κουφότητι τῆς Ἰβηρικῆς στρατιᾶς, αὐτὸς ὀπλιτικῶν καὶ νομίμων ἀσκητῆς γεγωνῶς ἀγῶνων καὶ στρατηγὸς ἐμβριθοῦς καὶ μονίμου φάλαγγος (*Sert.* 12.6-7).

[Metellus] was carrying on a war with a bold man who escaped from every open battle and who shifted all about by means of the light equipment and agility of his Iberian army, while he himself had become practiced in the customary contests of heavily-armed soldiers, and was in command of a heavy and immobile army.

Here Plutarch makes a clear distinction between two contrasting styles of warfare.

Metellus was attempting to bring about the decisive clash of two armies that, as seen above, was considered by many to constitute the ideal. However, no matter how skilled Metellus and his army may have been in a pitched battle, he and his soldiers were ponderous and ineffective when confronted with Sertorius' frequent movements.

Plutarch does not refer to Sertorius' movements in this passage as a stratagem or deception or anything of the sort, but he clearly thought of them in this way, as becomes

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<sup>140</sup> ἄνδρα Ῥωμαίων ἐν τοῖς τότε μέγιστον καὶ δοκιμώτατον (*Sert.* 12.4).

apparent from his description of the same maneuvering in the *Pompey*:

Τοῦ Σερτωρίου παραβόλως καὶ ληστρικώτερον αὐτῷ προσφερομένου, καὶ ταραττοντος ἐνέδραις καὶ περιδρομαῖς ἄνδρα νομίμων ἀθλητῆν ἀγώνων καὶ δυνάμεως στασίμου καὶ βαρείας ἡγεμόνα (*Pomp.* 17.2).

Sertorius attacked [Metellus] boldly and like a pirate, and by ambushes and encirclements disturbed a man practiced in customary battles and who was in command of a heavily-armed but immobile force.

This passage provides names for Sertorius' specific tactics. He is not just escaping from battle and quickly moving his forces, as described in the *Sertorius*; rather, he is conducting ambushes and encirclements. This may be partly due to a change in perspective. In the *Sertorius*, the subject of the sentence is Metellus, and the reader experiences Sertorius' attacks from his perspective. Metellus is clearly unaware of Sertorius' plans; all he observes is that Sertorius refuses to fight a customary battle and instead continuously shifts the position of his army. The passage in the *Pompey*, however, is from Sertorius' point of view. Sertorius would have obviously been well aware of his own actions, and so in this case it better suits the narrative for Plutarch to give names to his particular tactics. Regardless of the specific vocabulary used, the characterization of Sertorius' actions is consistent: he refuses to give battle; he frequently moves his army; and he attacks Metellus without warning. That Plutarch describes the conflict between Sertorius and Metellus in two different ways demonstrates, in my opinion, that he possessed more than just a superficial understanding of the tactics involved. In the *Sertorius*, Plutarch is primarily concerned with the differences between the soldiers of the two armies: it was “the light equipment and agility of his Iberian army” that allowed Sertorius his maneuverability, just as it was Metellus' heavy and

immobile force that hindered his own movements. It was precisely this interplay between these two contrasting types of armies that led to the encirclements and ambushes – the cornerstones of military deception – that he describes in the *Pompey*.

These passages are perhaps most important for what they convey about Plutarch's conception of military deception. As seen above, Plutarch first introduces Sertorius as one of those generals who accomplished most through cunning and cleverness, and later describes him as a master of warfare which requires speed, deception, or falsehood. Sertorius' campaign against Metellus (and later Pompey) demonstrates all of these skills: he uses speed and deception to create and exploit opportunities against the larger and more cumbersome Roman armies. For Plutarch, deception was merely a part of this indirect style of warfare, which was opposed to the traditional clash of two heavily-armed forces. That he saw the value of deception and maneuver is apparent throughout the *Sertorius*. Sertorius' successes against Metellus are clear in the passage cited above (*Sert.* 12.6-7), but Plutarch's strongest acknowledgment of Sertorius' abilities comes after the exile had defeated the combined armies of Metellus and Pompey. By means of ambushes, encirclements, and swift marches, Sertorius isolated the two armies of Metellus and Pompey and forced them to retreat to separate safe havens. Pompey sent a letter to the senate saying he would return home if they did not send him money and supplies, as he had exhausted all of his own in his war in Spain. But, as Plutarch claims, “there was a story in Rome, that Sertorius would arrive in Italy before Pompey; so low had the cleverness of Sertorius brought down the foremost and

strongest generals at that time.”<sup>141</sup> That Pompey especially, who gained such a reputation as a general both before and after the Spanish campaign, succumbed to the ambushes and maneuvering of Sertorius, clearly speaks to the effectiveness of such tactics, an effectiveness that Plutarch understood and appreciated.

Despite Plutarch’s likely moral qualms about the use of military deception, seen particularly in the *Moralia*, he nevertheless appreciates its usefulness for securing victory during war. Most generals in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* display no compunction about using the occasional ambush or trick to help secure a victory, but there are several who show an unusually strong tendency toward the use of deception and stratagems in warfare. Lysander and his fellow Spartan Agesilaus both frequently engage in military deception, as do the pair Sertorius and Eumenes. Plutarch recognized the important role that deception played in the lives of these men. He consistently focuses on their acts of deception not only to establish and describe their respective characters, but also to spark discussion of larger themes throughout the Lives themselves. I will conclude this chapter with two case studies, each of which examining different aspects of Plutarch’s portrayal of military deception in the *Parallel Lives*. First, I will discuss the Lives of Lysander and Agesilaus in greater depth, focusing particularly on their military education in the Spartan system and their use of deception in war. In the *Lysander* and *Agesilaus*, perhaps more than in any other Lives, Plutarch draws important thematic connections between his subjects’ unique education and the morality of their military actions. Secondly, I will

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<sup>141</sup> ἦν ἐν Ῥώμῃ λόγος, ὡς Πομπηίου πρότερος εἰς Ἰταλίαν ἀφίξειτο Σεργώριος· εἰς τοσοῦτον τοὺς πρώτους καὶ δυνατωτάτους τῶν τότε στρατηγῶν ἢ Σεργωρίου δεινότης κατέστησεν (*Sert.* 21.9).

consider Plutarch's portrayal of deception in the *Sertorius-Eumenes*. While Plutarch is less concerned with the impact of education on the subjects of this pair, the correct use of military deception remains an important theme.

### **Education and Deception in the Spartan Lives**

The Spartan Lives, particularly the *Lysander* and *Agesilaus*, make an effective case study of both the impact of military education on character and the morality of deception in warfare. The *Lysander* shares a number of parallels with the *Agesilaus*, as befits the biographies of two contemporary Spartan leaders. Although Plutarch never specifically refers to the *Agesilaus* in the *Lysander* or vice versa, he certainly had each king in mind while writing the other's biography, particularly because they were contemporaries.<sup>142</sup> Both Lysander and Agesilaus were products of the Spartan *agoge* system, which, as Plutarch makes clear early in each of their biographies, educated Spartan youths to be highly obedient and sensitive to public opinion (*Lys.* 2.1-2; *Ages.* 1.1-3). For Plutarch, both Lysander and Agesilaus were particularly influenced by their Spartan education. Early in the *Lysander*, Plutarch makes a point to forestall any criticism of his subject's ambition and contentiousness, saying that because his Spartan education bred those traits into him, Lysander's nature should not be blamed for those flaws (*Lys.* 2.2). Nevertheless, Plutarch accepts that Lysander's character was not

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<sup>142</sup> Plutarch develops the relationship between the two in *Ages.* 3.3-8.3 and *Lys.* 22.3-24.1. Jones (1966), 66-7 places the composition of the *Agesilaus-Pompey* after the *Lysander-Sulla*, primarily due to cross-references between the *Brutus*, *Caesar*, and *Pompey*. Cf. Pelling (2002), 2-11 concerning the simultaneous preparation of the late Republican *Lives*.



completely shaped by his Spartan upbringing, as his obedience to the strong and his willingness to endure burdensome authority in order to more readily achieve what was necessary were greater than what was usually found in a Spartan (*Lys.* 2.3).<sup>143</sup> These two traits would certainly have been brought out by Lysander's education as well, as we will see, but it is clear that Plutarch felt that they particularly characterized Lysander, and they consequently have a significant impact on his actions throughout his Life. As mentioned, Agesilaus had the same upbringing as Lysander, and was even a part of the same "band" as his eventual colleague (*Ages.* 2.1). However, while Plutarch used Lysander's education in the *agoge* to explain away some of his less praiseworthy traits, he thought that Agesilaus greatly benefited from it. Most heirs-apparent were traditionally exempt from the harsh Spartan *agoge*, but because Agesilaus was not expected to become king he went through the usual system. This meant, as Plutarch observed, that Agesilaus "came to rule not uninstructed in being ruled", and so while he was by nature commanding and kingly, his education added popularity and kindness to his character (*Ages.* 1.3). Agesilaus did share Lysander's contentiousness (*φιλονεικότητα*, *Ages.* 2.1), once again likely due to the Spartan system, but in this case Plutarch does not feel the need to justify its existence in Agesilaus' character. This is perhaps due to his aforementioned kindness, which, according to Plutarch, softened his contentiousness and tendency towards violent rage, and produced a "moderation of his nature" that was apparently quite attractive to the older Lysander (*Ages.* 2.1-2). More

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<sup>143</sup> θεραπευτικὸς δὲ τῶν δυνατῶν μᾶλλον ἢ κατὰ Σπαρτιάτην φύσει δοκεῖ γενέσθαι, καὶ βάρος ἐξουσίας διὰ χρεῖαν ἐνεγκεῖν εὐκόλος (*Lys.* 2.3).

importantly, Agesilaus also shared Lysander's great drive for honor and aversion to censure, two traits which become significant in the discussion of their use of deception throughout their Lives.

Some of the most striking parallels between the *Lysander* and the *Agesilaus* are related to the Spartans' use of deception. While Sparta's reputation for military excellence lies primarily in the city's unquestioned effectiveness in straightforward hoplite battles, Spartans are frequently referred to in ancient texts as being equally skilled at deceit and trickery. Thucydides frequently discusses Spartan actions in the Peloponnesian War as being characterized by their duplicity, and Pericles' funeral oration in particular contrasts the natural openness and courage of the Athenians with the secretive closed society of the Spartans (Thuc. 2.39.1).<sup>144</sup> Jon Hesk suggests that the 'tricky Spartan' is very much an Athenian literary and societal construct that helps to reinforce Athens' own self-identity.<sup>145</sup> Unsurprisingly, Plutarch largely follows the traditional literary portrayal of Spartans as valuing deception. His description of the traditional Spartan education system implemented by Lycurgus shows the extent to which he saw deception as being ingrained into Spartan character; from a young age, Spartan boys were taught to steal supplies and food to avoid going hungry, with those who were caught being flogged in punishment (*Lyc.* 17.3-4). Moreover, newly-married Spartan soldiers still lived with their messmates rather than their wives, and were thus only able to see their wives by sneaking into their homes at night (*Lyc.* 15.3-5).<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Powell (1989); Bradford (1994); Hesk (2000), 26-29.

<sup>145</sup> Hesk (2000), 23-40.

<sup>146</sup> Admittedly, as Plutarch acknowledges, these nocturnal conjugal visits were introduced to encourage

Deception of this sort was certainly not the only lesson to be beaten into the Spartan youth, as the Spartan *agoge* also developed the courage, obedience, and endurance needed to succeed in traditional hoplite battles (*Lyc.* 16.4-5).<sup>147</sup> As important as their skill in battle may have been to their mystique, however, Plutarch saw that the Spartans prized victory in any form, martial or otherwise. This is perhaps most clearly seen in the *Marcellus*, when Plutarch compares the Roman tradition of triumphs and ovations to the Spartan practice. According to Plutarch, Spartan generals who gained victory by deception or persuasion sacrificed an ox upon their return while those who had won through a battle sacrificed a cock: “For although they were the most warlike of people, they believed an action accomplished through reasoning and wit to be greater and seemlier for a man than one done with the aid of bodily strength and courage (*Marc.* 22.5).<sup>148</sup> Victory in straightforward hoplite battle was certainly to be praised, but it was the victory that mattered, and if victory could come without excessive loss of Spartan manpower, then all the better.

In Plutarch’s eyes, then, the education of Lysander and Agesilaus prepared both men to use whatever means necessary to improve the Spartan state. Through reading both the *Lysander* and the *Agesilaus*, it is clear that both Spartan leaders took their

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moderation and keep passions fresh between married couples (*Lyc.* 15.5) rather than to specifically teach the values of stealth and deception. Nevertheless, it is another example of the Spartan *agoge* passively encouraging those very traits.

<sup>147</sup> The Spartan *agoge*, was, of course, considerably more dynamic and complex than what Plutarch describes in the *Lycurgus*. For recent scholarship on the Spartan education system see Kennel (1995); Powell (2015).

<sup>148</sup> καίπερ γὰρ ὄντες πολεμικώτατοι, μείζονα καὶ μᾶλλον ἀνθρώπων πρέπουσαν ἡγοῦντο τὴν διὰ λόγου καὶ συνέσεως πράξι ἢ τὴν μετὰ βίας καὶ ἀνδρείας (*Met.* 22.5). Plutarch repeats the same story at *Mor.* 238f. Cf. *Ages.* 33.6 for another reference to Spartan sacrifice after battle.

education to heart, particularly in their use of deception. Duff has correctly identified the difficulty in coming to moral conclusions about the *Lysander-Sulla*. He argues that Plutarch saw the lives of both men as characterized by cunning, deception, and the distortion of reality, and that he deliberately constructed their Lives to mimic these characteristics. In the *Lysander-Sulla*, the reader is led to consider whether Lysander's greater moral virtue is more preferable in a leader than Sulla's greater successes in service to his state.<sup>149</sup> However, while Duff believes that Plutarch's portrayal of Lysander's tendency to use deception is rather ambiguous, I would argue that it is actually clear and consistent.<sup>150</sup> Some of the vocabulary Plutarch uses to describe Lysander is vague, and could be taken either positively or negatively, but Plutarch explains the potential complexities of Lysander's use of deception through a series of anecdotes that clearly delineate between Lysander's appropriate and inappropriate uses of deception.

The most important characterization of Lysander's use of deception occurs early in the Life, during a comparison with his fellow Spartan commander Kallikratidas:

τοῖς δὲ τὸν ἀπλοῦν καὶ γενναῖον ἀγαπῶσι τῶν ἡγεμόνων τρόπον, ὁ Λύσανδρος τῷ Καλλικρατίδᾳ παραβαλλόμενος ἐδόκει πανοῦργος εἶναι καὶ σοφιστής, ἀπάταις τὰ πολλὰ διαποικίλλων τοῦ πολέμου καὶ τὸ δίκαιον ἐπὶ τῷ λυσιτελοῦντι μεγαλύνων, εἰ δὲ μή, τῷ συμφέροντι χρώμενος ὡς καλῶ, καὶ τὸ ἀληθὲς οὐ φύσει τοῦ ψεύδους κρεῖττον ἡγούμενος, ἀλλ' ἑκατέρου τῇ χρεία τὴν τιμὴν ὀρίζων. τῶν δ' ἀξιούντων μὴ πολεμεῖν μετὰ δόλου τοὺς ἀφ' Ἡρακλέους γεγονότας καταγελαῖν ἐκέλευεν. “Ὅπου γὰρ ἡ λεοντῆ μὴ ἐφικνεῖται, προσραπτέον ἐκεῖ τὴν ἀλωπεκῆν” (*Lys.* 7.5-6).

To those who loved the straightforward and noble character of their leaders, Lysander, compared with Kallikratidas, appeared to be crafty and scheming, a man who wove his many acts of war with deceits and extolled justice when it was to his advantage, but if it

<sup>149</sup> Duff (1997); (1999), 161-204.

<sup>150</sup> Duff (1999), 170-176.

was not, proclaimed expediency to be honorable, a man who did not believe truth to be by nature stronger the falsehood, but divided the value of each according to necessity. Mocking those who thought it fit that the sons of Heracles did not wage war by the aid of deceit, he bid that ‘where the skin of the lion does not reach, it must there be stitched with that of the fox.’

This passage emphasizes the centrality of deception and falsehood to Lysander's life.

The characterization opens and concludes with references to deception in war, but

Lysander's attitudes toward expediency and falsehood appear to apply outside the

military sphere as well, and it is these attitudes for which Plutarch first provides

evidence. Immediately after this passage, Plutarch describes Lysander falsely rebuking

oligarchic conspirators in Miletos in order to convince the democratic leaders to stay in

the city where – he hoped – they could be more easily killed. Plutarch concludes: “And

this came to pass; for all who trusted him were slain” (*Lys.* 8.3).<sup>151</sup> This completely

supports Lysander's characterization in the previous chapter, as he hid the truth of his

intentions from the popular leaders in order to further his intentions. Although Plutarch

makes no direct comment on Lysander’s actions in this section, he appears to show his

disapproval of Lysander’s deceptions of the Milesians in the following chapter, by

relating a saying of Lysander’s:

Ἀπομνημονεύεται δὲ ὑπὸ Ἀνδροκλείδου λόγος πολλήν τινα κατηγορῶν τοῦ Λυσάνδρου περὶ τοὺς ὄρκους εὐχέρειαν. ἐκέλευε γάρ, ὡς φησι, τοὺς μὲν παῖδας ἀστραγάλοις, τοὺς δὲ ἄνδρας ὄρκους ἐξαπατᾶν, ἀπομιμούμενος Πολυκράτη τὸν Σάμιον, οὐκ ὀρθῶς τύραννον στρατηγός, οὐδὲ Λακωνικὸν τὸ χρῆσθαι τοῖς θεοῖς ὡσπερ τοῖς πολεμίοις, μᾶλλον δὲ ὑβριστικώτερον. ὁ γὰρ ὄρκῳ παρακρούμενος τὸν μὲν ἐχθρὸν ὁμολογεῖ δεδιέναι, τοῦ δὲ θεοῦ καταφρονεῖν (*Lys.* 8.3-4).

There is also a saying of Lysander’s, recorded by Androkleides, that speaks against his great looseness regarding oaths. Lysander claimed, he said, to deceive boys with knuckle-bones, but men with oaths, imitating Polycrates of Samos, although it is not

<sup>151</sup> ὁ καὶ συνέβη· πάντες γὰρ ἀπεσφάγησαν οἱ καταπιστεύσαντες (*Lys.* 8.3).

correct for a general to imitate a tyrant, nor is it Laconian to attack the gods like one's enemies, but exceedingly insolent. For he who deceives his enemy with an oath admits to fearing him, but to despising the god.

Duff suggests that it is not clear whether Plutarch agreed with the judgment of

Androkleides, or whether he expected his readers to agree as well, but I do not believe that there is any doubt that Plutarch endorsed this verdict of Lysander's deception.<sup>152</sup>

First of all, there is every possibility that the opinion of Lysander's pithy boast is actually Plutarch's: Plutarch only specifies that the 'saying of Lysander' was recorded by Androkleides, so the commentary afterwards may well be Plutarch's own. Even if the harsh judgment of Lysander's indifference to oaths did indeed originate with Androkleides, Plutarch's inclusion of it immediately after his treatment of the Milesians likely signifies his agreement with it, particularly because it concerns oaths. At the beginning of the chapter, Plutarch says that Lysander "promised" (ὑπέσχετο) to his friends and guests that he would help overthrow the *demos* (*Lys.* 8.1). While this is not an oath *per se*, the verb ὑπισχνέομαι could be used for promises to the gods (*Il.* 6.115, 23.195), or even from the gods (*Il.* 12.236); even when not used in a religious sense, the word implied friendship and good intention (*Hdt.* 5.30; *Pl. Ph.* 235D). Given that Lysander would break such a promise to the extent that it led to the deaths of those he pledged to help, it would be surprising for Plutarch to subsequently make a comparison to Polycrates of Samos without believing it. Ultimately, Plutarch criticizes Lysander's actions at Miletus because he harmed people he should not have: the Miletians had put their trust in him and had thus, in a way, considered him a friend. His act of deception,

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<sup>152</sup> Duff (1999), 176.

therefore, was instead one of betrayal. The criticism in this passage is of the same sort, for the stress is on correct relationships: one should not treat friends as enemies, as Lysander does at Miletus, nor should one treat the gods as enemies, as one does by breaking an oath. What increases the impact of Plutarch's criticism is that Lysander acted contrary to how a Laconian should. Plutarch is willing to defend Lysander's character when it coincides with his Spartan education, as seen above (*Lys.* 2.2), but not when he acts contrary to Spartan custom.

Up to this point the portrayal of Lysander seems to be a negative one, but the reader should not yet be completely satisfied with this view of Lysander's character. Plutarch has provided evidence of the Spartan's shifting attitudes to truth and falsehoods, as introduced at 7.5-6, but he has yet to show Lysander's conduct of war, the main focus of the earlier characterization. Returning to the original passage in question, it is clear that for Lysander warfare and trickery were inextricably entwined. Lysander is said to variegated (*διαποικίλων*) his military action with tricks and deceit; this is not just an act of adorning or covering war with trickery, but of blending or weaving the two together and ultimately changing the very appearance of his type of warfare. Lysander's quotation further echoes that sentiment. The fox skin of cunning and deception must be stitched on (*προσραπτέον*) to the lion skin of bravery and open warfare; it is still possible to see the difference between the two skins, but they have been combined into a single whole.<sup>153</sup> From this, then, one would expect to see Lysander's military actions in the Life be

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<sup>153</sup> Duff (1999), 174-5 delves deeply into the many references to cunning in this passage, including the connection between *διαποικίλλε* and the fox.

decided upon his use of trickery. Plutarch had already described Lysander's first battle at *Lys.* 5.1-2, a naval engagement against Alcibiades' commander Antiochus which, while successful, contained no hint of trickery or deception. Lysander's only other real military action was the Battle of Aegospotami, during which he famously lulled the Athenians into overconfidence and fell upon the fleet while most of its soldiers had dispersed to find food. Despite Plutarch's earlier focus on Lysander's use of trickery in war, however, his narration of the battle from *Lys.* 10.1-11.7 conspicuously omits any mention of a trick or stratagem: once the two fleets had anchored opposite one another in the straits, everyone expected a naval battle on the following day; Lysander, however, planned otherwise, and ordered his sailors not to engage the Athenian fleet (*Lys.* 10.1); this plan made rashness and contempt appear amongst the Athenians (*Lys.* 10.3), who on the fifth day sailed out and back very carelessly and contemptuously (*Lys.* 11.1); when they had thus returned to their camp and left their ships, Lysander and the Peloponnesians fell upon them (*Lys.* 11.5) and killed or captured most of the army. Contrary to what one would expect from Plutarch's earlier description of Lysander, the vocabulary he uses to describe the Spartan's actions in this battle is unquestionably neutral. What Plutarch describes is indeed deception: Lysander made the Athenians believe he did not intend to give battle when he was in reality just waiting until he could gain the upper hand. Yet none of the vocabulary hints of any immorality. Lysander does not deceive or contrive to trick the enemy, he simply does not intend to give them the battle they expect.<sup>154</sup> There is

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<sup>154</sup> All of these words of deception are a common part of Plutarch's vocabulary. Some select examples include ἐξαπατάω: *Aris.* 10.8, *Lys.* 8.4, *Lys-Sulla* 4.4, *Pomp.* 59.4, *Caes.* 24.3; τεχνάω: *Fab.* 22.1, *Tim.* 10.2, *Sert.* 21.3, *Caes.* 43.1; μηχανάομαι: *Them.* 16.3, *Cor.* 38.4, *Sert.* 11.1, *Dem.* 36.5.



no hint of criticism here; instead, Plutarch's sole explicit judgment of Lysander's actions in the battle is clearly positive. Plutarch rightly takes the Battle of Aegospotami as being directly responsible for ending the Peloponnesian War, and claims that by Lysander's prudence and cleverness, the Spartan put an end to a war that had cost Greece more generals than all previous wars put together (*Lys.* 11.7).<sup>155</sup>

The positive description of Lysander's military conduct may come as a surprise so soon after the criticism of his deceitfulness only a little earlier in the *Life*, but it is actually in line with those previous anecdotes. Lysander's actions in the battle may not have been blatantly deceitful, but they allowed him the opportunity to gain the upper hand against an otherwise superior force, certainly displaying the cunning that Lysander advocated at 7.6. Furthermore, this portrayal of the Battle of Aegospotami reinforces the moral message concerning deception that was introduced earlier in the *Life*. For Plutarch, Lysander's indiscriminate use of deception, particularly in his dealing with Miletus, is a moral failing because it was done in his self-interest and against Spartan ideals. On the other hand, Lysander's use of deception at Aegospotami was appropriate because it is in accordance with his education; the Spartan *agoge* encouraged Lysander to develop his cunning and stressed the importance of victory and the praise that such victory brings. Plutarch sees no problem with Lysander's use of deception to benefit the state.

Given the widespread acceptance and encouragement of deception within

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<sup>155</sup> While δεινότης can have negative connotations and take a definition of “harshness” or “severity”, its pairing here with the positive εὐβουλία means that δεινότης should be seen in a positive context as well, so “cleverness” is more appropriate.

Spartan culture, then, it is no surprise that Plutarch focuses on Agesilaus' acts of deception just as he did Lysander's. Agesilaus' first military action is against the Persian Tissaphernes, and is characterized by the deception perpetrated by both parties. Tissaphernes originally proposed a treaty with Agesilaus granting the Ionian cities freedom, but subsequently broke his promise and declared war once he had raised a sufficient army. In response, according to Plutarch, Agesilaus declared that he would lead his army against Caria but instead invaded the country of Phrygia, thus “avenging the perjury of Tissaphernes with a just deception”.<sup>156</sup> Plutarch does not specifically explain why Agesilaus' deception was just while Tissaphernes' was not, but consideration of Xenophon's *Agesilaus*, upon which much of this Life was based, provides the missing explanation. In his narration of the same event, at *Ages.* 1.17, Xenophon claims that once war is declared, deception is both divinely sanctioned and just.<sup>157</sup> Tissaphernes' perjury is unjust because he deceived Agesilaus while the two were at peace, while Agesilaus is justified in his deception because war had already been declared. Plutarch no doubt followed the same thought process as Xenophon, as is clear in his subsequent summary of Agesilaus' campaigns:

καὶ πόλεις μὲν εἴλε συχνὰς καὶ χρημάτων ἀφθόνων ἐκυρίευσεν, ἐπιδεικνύμενος τοῖς φίλοις ὅτι τὸ μὲν σπεισάμενον ἀδικεῖν τῶν θεῶν ἔστι καταφρονεῖν, ἐν δὲ τῷ παραλογίζεσθαι τοὺς πολεμίους οὐ μόνον τὸ δίκαιον, ἀλλὰ καὶ δόξα πολλή καὶ τὸ μεθ' ἡδονῆς κερδαίνειν ἔνεστι (*Ages.* 9.3).

He captured many cities and seized plentiful treasures, making very clear to his friends that while it is unjust in the eyes of the gods to despise treaties, in deceiving one's enemies there is not only justice, but much glory and profit mixed with pleasure.

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<sup>156</sup> ἀμυνόμενος ἀπάτη δικάια τὴν Τισσαφέρνους ἐπιπορκίαν (*Ages.* 9.2). See Shipley (1997) for historical commentary on Agesilaus' Persian campaign.

<sup>157</sup> ἐπεὶ πόλεμος προεῤῥήθη καὶ τὸ ἐξαπατᾶν ὄσιόν τε καὶ δίκαιον (*Xen. Ages.* 1.17).

Just as Xenophon, above, Plutarch considers deception in terms of both divine and human justice.<sup>158</sup> It is important to note here that these ideas about deception are ones which Plutarch shares; he is not blindly repeating the words of his predecessor. Donald Shipley has shown the ways in which Plutarch's account of Agesilaus' war with Tissaphernes differ from that found in Xenophon, noting particularly that Plutarch places more emphasis on Agesilaus' responsibility for his original deception.<sup>159</sup> Plutarch was undoubtedly familiar with Xenophon's *Agesilaus*, but even in this short passage demonstrates his practice of rewriting his sources to focus on his own interests.<sup>160</sup> That Plutarch's understanding of the morality of deception is his own becomes particularly clear late in the *Agesilaus*. Late in his life, Agesilaus is sent to aid the Egyptian king Tachos in a campaign against the Persians. When a rival, Nectanabis, induces the Egyptian army to come over to him and attempts to usurp Tachos' position, Agesilaus is forced to choose between the two (*Ages.* 37.5). Under vague orders to see that Sparta benefited from his actions, Agesilaus switches allegiances, an act which Plutarch has a very low opinion of: "Indeed, when this alleged motive [the benefit of Sparta] was taken away, the most just name for his action was treachery."<sup>161</sup> Plutarch's judgment here should not be surprising: Agesilaus was an expressed ally of Tachos, yet he abandoned

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<sup>158</sup> Cf. Xen. *Ages.* 1.13. According to Xenophon, Agesilaus thanked Tissaphernes for breaking his oath because it made the gods his allies in the coming battle.

<sup>159</sup> Shipley (1997), 148-150.

<sup>160</sup> See Pelling (1992) for more on Plutarch's adaptation of sources. Hamilton (1992), 4213-4221 compares several more passages in the *Agesilaus* with Xenophon's respective accounts, demonstrating Plutarch's attempts to provide a more independent and balanced version of Agesilaus' character.

<sup>161</sup> ἐπεὶ ταύτης γε τῆς προφάσεως ἀφαιρεθείσης τὸ δικαιοτάτον ὄνομα τῆς πράξεως ἦν προδοσία (*Ages.* 37.5).

him (and went over to his enemy) in his time of need. Xenophon, however, sees nothing wrong with Agesilaus' actions here. Xenophon is rather vague in his description of the event, and does not name either Egyptian king. In his account, Agesilaus is most concerned with which king would be better able to pay his army's wages and provide a market, and in the end, "having decided which of the two he thought to be a better friend of the Greeks, joined with him."<sup>162</sup> It is still possible to see connections between the two accounts: Plutarch could have easily interpreted Agesilaus' concern for Greek interests in Xenophon's account as having come directly from Sparta (which Xenophon does not mention), for example. It is most important, however, that Xenophon did not consider Agesilaus' actions to have constituted any sort of treachery or deception.<sup>163</sup> Had Plutarch simply been repeating Xenophon's opinions on the correct use of deception, it is unlikely that he would have strayed so far as to contradict Xenophon and denounce Agesilaus for treachery. Rather, this is a strong example of Plutarch's independence of thought. He shared Xenophon's opinions on the justification of deception during war (Plut. *Ages.* 9.2-3; Xen. *Ages.* 1.17), but had his own opinion on what constituted an act of treachery.

Shipley has argued that the distinction between just and unjust deception in the *Agesilaus* is not Plutarch's own view. He cites Plutarch's description of Philopoemen's actions on Crete, in which Plutarch sets the Cretan practice of tricks and stratagems and ambushes in opposition to the straightforward and noble warfare of Peloponnesians

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<sup>162</sup> οὕτω δὴ κρίνας ὁπότερος φιλέλλην μᾶλλον ἐδόκει εἶναι, στρατευσάμενος μετὰ τούτου (Xen. *Ages.* 2.31).

<sup>163</sup> Shipley (1997), 388, claims that Plutarch had "some justification for seeing in Xenophon's presentation evidence for the accusation of treachery." It is not clear what that evidence is, however, and Xenophon certainly makes no moral judgment of Agesilaus' action as Plutarch does.

(*Phil.* 13.6), as being representative of Plutarch's true attitude toward deception.<sup>164</sup> This is problematic on two accounts, however. For one, Plutarch's comments in the *Philopoemen* do not entail a blanket condemnation of military deception. While the common Cretan style of warfare is placed in opposition to the straightforward and noble warfare of the Peloponnesians, Plutarch does not call Philopoemen ignoble for engaging in it. On the contrary, he praises Philopoemen not only for beating the Cretans at their own game through his use of stratagems (*Phil.* 13.6), but also for ambushing the army of Nabis after returning to the Peloponnese (*Phil.* 14.6-15.1). Moreover, in the *synkrisis* to the *Philopoemen-Flamininus*, he equates Philopoemen's success against the Cretans through trickery with his success against the Spartans through valor, as those two groups were the most warlike (*Phil.-Flam.* 2.2). *Phil.* 13.6, then, should not be seen as a moral judgment against the use of deception; rather, it appears to be an attempt to make a distinction between two different cultures of warfare. Even if the passage were an indictment against the use of deception, however, Shipley provides no reason that we should take *Phil.* 13.6 as representing Plutarch's views on the matter more seriously than *Ages.* 9.2, when Plutarch calls Agesilaus' actions “just deception”. Shipley twice refers to the phrase “just deception” as “oxymoronic” and fails to identify it as Plutarch's actual viewpoint; instead, on several occasions he states specifically that it was Xenophon and Agesilaus (and thus, presumably, not Plutarch) who saw deception as just during times of war.<sup>165</sup> While Shipley is right that Plutarch shows some difference of opinion from

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<sup>164</sup> Shipley (1997), 38.

<sup>165</sup> Shipley (1997), 40, 148, on Plutarch's ἀπάτη δικάια being an oxymoron. Shipley (1997), 38, 148, 390 for the belief of Xenophon and Agesilaus on the justness of deception in war.

Xenophon on the moralism of deception, as seen above, there is nothing to indicate that Plutarch disagreed with the basic principal of deception being justified during war. Even limiting the discussion to the *Agesilaus* itself, Plutarch consistently praises Agesilaus' wartime deception not only at *Ages.* 9.2 (and again at *Ages.* 9.4 when he repeats Agesilaus' opinion on the matter), but also at *Ages.* 38-39, when Agesilaus tricks his numerically superior enemy into engaging him on a narrow front. Plutarch's condemnation of Agesilaus' treachery at *Ages.* 37.5 shows that he would not have been afraid to say if he considered all of Agesilaus' deception to be morally wrong. Plutarch, then, clearly approves of the use of deception during warfare, and is in agreement (on basic principal at least) with Xenophon about the actions of Agesilaus.

Plutarch's depiction of deception by the two Spartan generals is consistent. In the *Lysander*, Plutarch makes a distinction between the correct and incorrect uses of deception based primarily on its victim. Lysander is to be blamed for deceiving the Milesian democrats because he went to the city as a friend and ally, ostensibly to help the inhabitants (*Lys.* 8.3). By breaking such ties of friendship, maintains Plutarch, Lysander was demonstrating his insolence towards the gods (*Lys.* 8.5). On the other hand, Lysander's deception of the Athenians at Aegospotami is praiseworthy because it was directed against a declared enemy, and led to the resolution of a long and bloody war. His deception in this case was not hubristic, but demonstrative of his prudence and cleverness (*Lys.* 11.7). Plutarch repeats the same arguments in the *Agesilaus* in more explicit terms. Plutarch describes Agesilaus' deception of Tissaphernes as 'just', because the Spartan had waited to act until war was declared. This is in contrast to the Persian's

perjury, which Tissaphernes committed against Agesilaus during a time of peace (*Ages.* 9.1-3). Just like Lysander, however, Agesilaus was himself guilty of immoral deception because he betrayed his ally, having left the Egyptian king to whom he had pledged his service and joining the king's rival. Plutarch's direct denunciation of Agesilaus' treachery here (*Ages.* 37.5) reinforces the distinction he makes between just and unjust deception throughout the *Lysander* and *Agesilaus*.

Plutarch, of course, wrote three more Spartan Lives: the lawgiver *Lycurgus* and the double pair of *Agis and Cleomenes*. Plutarch is unclear as to whether Lycurgus actually took part in any military campaigns, and there is no mention of the king engaging in any deception during wartime.<sup>166</sup> Nevertheless, deception is a frequent theme in the Life. For one, as mentioned above, the education system instigated by Lycurgus frequently encouraged young Spartans to engage in deception (*Lyc.* 15.3-5; 17.3-4). Moreover, Plutarch framed the Life with two clear instances of deception. The first is an account of Lycurgus' ancestor Soüs, who not only enslaved the helots and gained substantial land for Sparta, but managed to keep captured territory even after his army was surrounded by deceiving the enemy army with a technicality.<sup>167</sup> Plutarch says that Soüs was held in admiration for this and other deeds. Toward the end of the Life Plutarch describes another act of deception, this one perpetrated by Lycurgus himself. In

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<sup>166</sup> *Lyc.* 23.1-2. According to Plutarch, Hippias the Sophist claimed that Lycurgus engaged in many military campaigns, while Demetrius the Phalerean maintained that Lycurgus did not take part in any battles. Plutarch refuses to agree with either source, but does say that the idea of the Olympic truce shows Lycurgus to have had a gentle nature.

<sup>167</sup> *Lyc.* 2.1-2. Soüs agreed to hand over captured territory to the Cleitorians if they allowed him and all of his men a drink of water. After all of his men drank Soüs merely splashed his face with water, and so claimed that he did not have to relinquish his territory because not everyone had drunk water.

an effort to ensure the permanence of his changes to the Spartan laws, Lycurgus extracted a pledge from every Spartan citizen that they would abide by his policies until he returned from a trip to Delphi. Never intending to return, Lycurgus ended his life at Delphi, and the Spartans, as Plutarch relates, did not attempt to change his laws for five hundred years (*Lyc.* 29.1-6). These two passages, particularly the trick which Lycurgus plays on his entire city, reinforce the prominence of deception within Spartan culture that is seen elsewhere in the *Lives*. The *Lycurgus* shows that for Plutarch, deception was ingrained into legend and history of the Spartan *polis*, and so it would come as no surprise that men such as Lysander and Agesilaus would engage in it so frequently.

The theme of deception does not feature in the Lives of Agis and Cleomenes to the same extent that it does in the other Spartan Lives, as the *Agis and Cleomenes* is more concerned with the attempts by the Spartan kings of returning their city to its traditional way of life. Agis did not have the opportunity to engage in battle before he was put to death by his enemies, but Cleomenes did. He clearly shared the same tendency as his predecessors to turn to deception, and Plutarch's comments on his actions are similar to those found in the other Spartan Lives. Perhaps Plutarch's greatest praise for Cleomenes' generalship comes during his account of the Spartan's capture of Megalopolis. Cleomenes deceived Antigonus, who was encamped near the city, by pretending to march against Argos; however, he turned back on himself and sent one of his generals, Panteus, to surprise the city and take control of part of the wall. Panteus did so, and Cleomenes quickly came into possession of Megalopolis (*Cleom.* 23.1-4). Plutarch stresses the unexpectedness of this action twice, at *Cleom.* 23.1 and *Cleom.*



23.2, before he even describes it in detail, and there is no hint of condemnation for Cleomenes' deception.<sup>168</sup> What does draw blame in the *Cleomenes*, however, is an act of treachery committed against Cleomenes during the battle of Sellasia. Plutarch cites the account of Phylarchus, who says that Cleomenes primarily lost the battle due to treachery (προδοσία). Before the battle, Antigonus had ordered his Illyrians and Acarnanians to envelope the army of Cleomenes. When the Spartan noticed their absence from the field, he ordered one of his commanders to look for enemies on the flanks and rear of his army; however, the commander, Damoteles, had previously been bribed by Antigonus and told Cleomenes that all was well, which led to Cleomenes' envelopment and defeat (*Cleom.* 28.1-4). The accusation of treachery here is clearly made against Damoteles, for he is the one guilty of deceiving his commander and ally. While it is specifically Phylarchus, and not Plutarch, who calls the action treachery, based on what we have seen regarding the deception of allies in the other Spartan Lives (particularly at *Ages.* 37.5) there should be little doubt that Plutarch would have agreed with Phylarchus' assessment. It is worth noting here that Plutarch makes no denunciation of Antigonus' use of either encirclement or bribery to achieve his victory. This is consistent with the standard Greek thought, as described by Wheeler, that while blame should fall on one who commits treachery, it is a valid stratagem for a general to bring about such treachery.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Plutarch does not use one of the many words for stratagem or deception, such as στρατήγημα, δόλος, or ἀπάτη, to describe Cleomenes' action here; rather, he calls it an unexpected deed (ἔργον ἀπροσδόκητον) at *Cleom.* 24.1. Nevertheless, the element of surprise is integral to nearly all acts of deception, and so this should clearly be seen as one.

<sup>169</sup> Wheeler (1988), 45.

The *Agis-Cleomenes*, then, reinforces the clear distinction Plutarch makes between just and unjust deception in the other Spartan Lives. Plutarch's interpretation of the morality of deception, particularly the idea of just deception during war, is certainly built on the ideas of his predecessors. However, his own beliefs in what constituted treachery show a clear departure at times from those of his sources, as particularly seen through his implicit contradiction of Xenophon regarding Agesilaus' actions at *Ages*. 38.5. For Plutarch, it is not always morally acceptable for a general to deceive someone with whom he is not actively at war: Tissaphernes was in the wrong for breaking his truce with Agesilaus (*Ages*. 9.1-2), and both Lysander (*Lys*. 8.3) and Agesilaus (*Ages*. 38.5) acted treacherously when they deceived their supposed allies. However, Plutarch supports and praises those generals who use deception appropriately – that is, during war against an established enemy. Lysander's trick against the Athenians at Aegospotami (*Lys*. 10.1-11.7), Agesilaus' deception of Tissaphernes (*Ages*. 9.2-3) and stratagem against the Egyptians (*Ages*. 39.1-5), and Cleomenes' surprise march on Megalopolis (*Cleom*. 23.1-4) are all examples of good generalship in the Spartan Lives.

It is this question about the morality of deception that makes it so important to consider the Spartan Lives together when investigating Plutarch's portrayal of military deception. While there are other pairs of Lives that portray clever and deceitful generals, such as the *Sertorius-Eumenes* discussed below, with few exceptions those Lives do not demonstrate the distinction between moral and immoral deception that Plutarch makes so clear in the Spartan Lives. The non-Spartan generals, on the whole, consistently use deception “correctly”, rather than indiscriminately as Lysander and Agesilaus often

appear to. Plutarch's thoughts on the matter are most clear in the *Agesilaus*, after describing Agesilaus' treachery towards the Egyptians: “But the Lacedaemonians assign the first share of the good to the interest their country, and neither understand nor believe in another justice than that which they think will strengthen Sparta.”<sup>170</sup> This comment appears specific to this circumstance, as Agesilaus had previously justified his treachery by saying he was acting in Sparta's best interest (*Ages.* 37.6). However, this aspect of Spartan character actually appears as an underlying theme throughout most of the Spartan Lives. Plutarch's admonition of Spartan self-interest conforms very well to the initial description of Lysander's use of deception, when Plutarch describes the Spartan as a man who “extolled justice when it was to his advantage, but if it was not, proclaimed expediency to be honorable, a man who did not believe truth to be by nature stronger the falsehood, but divided the value of each according to necessity” (*Lys.* 7.5). After the *Agesilaus*, Lysander no longer appears unique in his attitudes toward deception, but rather in line with standard Spartan practice. Likewise, his betrayal of the Milesian democrats looks to have been an act made for the sake of Sparta rather than for his own self-interest, as it was a part of the Spartan strategy to install oligarchic governments (*Lys.* 8.3). Although Plutarch does not explicitly link this aspect of Spartan character to the actions and laws of Lycurgus, it is not difficult to make the connection. Young Spartans were forced to steal (*Lyc.* 17.3-4) and act stealthily during marriage (*Lyc.* 15.3) not for their own sake, but for the eventual benefit of the Spartan state as a whole. More

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<sup>170</sup> Λακεδαιμόνιοι δὲ τὴν πρώτην τοῦ καλοῦ μερίδα τῆς πατρίδος συμφέροντι διδόντες οὔτε μανθάνουσιν οὔτε ἐπίστανται δίκαιον ἄλλο πλὴν ὃ τὴν Σπάρτην αὐξήσει νομίζουσιν (*Ages.* 37.5).

importantly, Lycurgus deceived the entire citizen body with the welfare of the city in mind, so that it would maintain the laws that he had instituted (*Lyc.* 29.1-6). Plutarch by no means attempts to justify the immoral deceptions committed by Lysander and Agesilaus – he still calls Agesilaus' action against the Egyptians treachery despite his following commentary – but to say that Plutarch makes “a powerful condemnation of Sparta's imperial policies” at *Ages.* 37.6, as Shipley does, may be going too far.<sup>171</sup> Rather, Plutarch appears to see the use of deception in the Spartan Lives as a way in part to demonstrate the difficulties in balancing the morality of one's actions against the necessities of the state. Lycurgus walks a fine line in his Life with his use of deception, but he is ultimately successful in encouraging and using deception appropriately for the benefit of all. Plutarch clearly approved of Lycurgus' ultimate deception, maintaining that Sparta was the first city in Greece for its government and fame for five hundred years because it observed Lycurgus' laws (*Lyc.* 29.6). Plutarch's opinion of the actions of Lysander and Agesilaus, on the other hand, is significantly more mixed. While Lysander and Agesilaus place the welfare of Sparta before all else throughout their respective Lives, like Lycurgus before them, they are unable to find the proper balance that their predecessor did, and often cause great harm to others in their attempts to further Sparta's interests. Nevertheless, while Plutarch identifies instances where Lysander and Agesilaus used deception incorrectly, he does not count them as major stains against their character; as seen at the beginning of the *Lysander*, Plutarch takes into account the unforgiving Spartan education system and its insistence on the importance of the state.

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<sup>171</sup> Shipley (1997), 389.

In the Spartan Lives, then, Plutarch is so concerned with the morality of deception because the Spartans, particularly Lysander and Agesilaus, are not. For Plutarch, there is no debate about the acceptable uses of deception, and his judgment of the actions themselves is swift and concise: it is acceptable – and even praiseworthy – to deceive one’s established enemies, but unacceptable to deceive those who count themselves as friends.<sup>172</sup> It is because the Spartans appear to follow a different value system than his other subjects – and presumably his readers – that Plutarch makes clear to his audience which deceptions are acceptable and which are not. This certainly appears to fall into the category of 'expository' or 'protreptic' moralism, by providing clear advice or examples of proper action. However, as Pelling and Duff have observed, Plutarch's moralism is rarely as simple as that.<sup>173</sup> As discussed earlier, Duff has argued that the *Lysander-Sulla* leads the reader to question “what happens when the demands of personal virtue conflict with the good of one's state.”<sup>174</sup> Plutarch's depiction of deception in the Spartan Lives has shown, however, that he saw no difference between a Spartan's idea of personal virtue and the good of the state. It is not a conflict that Plutarch explores in the Spartan Lives, then, but the results of a complete subservience of moral judgment to the public good.<sup>175</sup> Plutarch's depiction of the individual acts of deception is protreptic: his

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<sup>172</sup> This is very similar to the concerns about deception put forward by Cambyses in Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* during his dialogue with the young Cyrus about military leadership. Cambyses explains to Cyrus that boys should not be taught to deceive men until they are able to understand the difference between the acceptable targets of deception (enemies) and unacceptable ones (friends) (Xen. *Cyr.* 1.6.1-2.1.1). See Hesk (2000), 122-142.

<sup>173</sup> Pelling (1995), 205-220; Duff (1999), 68-71.

<sup>174</sup> Duff (1999), 204.

<sup>175</sup> In his analysis of the *synkrisis* to the *Agesilaus-Pompey*, Hamilton describes Agesilaus as 'presented on the one hand as a model Spartan, brave virtuous, and obedient to the commands of his state, but on the other hand as ambitious beyond measure, hypocritical about justice when it appears to conflict with his

judgment concerning the morality of such acts is consistent and clear. His depiction of a society in which the state comes before personal morality, however, is far more descriptive. The use of military deception acts as a lens through which the reader can observe the positive and negative effects of such a society on the individual and the wider world.

### **Moral Deception in the *Sertorius-Eumenes***

The *Sertorius-Eumenes* demonstrates a different aspect of Plutarch's portrayal of deception. In the Spartan Lives, Plutarch is primarily concerned with the morality of deception, and particularly its appropriate use in military and non-military contexts. However, even though Plutarch portrays both Sertorius and Eumenes as relying on deception to an even greater extent than many of the Spartans, he demonstrates little concern about the morality of deception in their respective Lives. Plutarch leaves any ethical concerns regarding the generals' use of deception in the *Sertorius-Eumenes* implicit, and instead focuses on the practical benefits that deception can bring: the pair functions as an effective case study of how to use deception successfully and appropriately.

Plutarch opens the *Sertorius-Eumenes* by favorably comparing Sertorius with Philip II, Antigonus, and Hannibal, all of whom were known for both their use of deception and their lack of two eyes (*Sert.* 1.8). Not only is Sertorius their equal in

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objectives, and capable of treachery and perfidy on occasion' (1992, 4206). I would argue that for Plutarch, the negatives in Hamilton's description were just as much a part of being a 'model Spartan' as the positives; he certainly saw Lysander in much the same way.

achieving military success through deception, Plutarch claims, he also surpasses each of them in a particular aspect of character: he was more prudent with women than Philip; more faithful to his friends than Antigonos; and more gentle to his friends than Hannibal (*Sert.* 1.9). The individual characteristics that Sertorius possessed over his fellow generals, I would suggest, are unimportant; what matters is that in the first chapter of the pair Plutarch presents Sertorius as a general who both used deception effectively and possessed a sound moral character. This not only introduces the reader to an important theme in the *Sertorius-Eumenes*, deceptive generalship, but also, I would suggest, predisposes the reader to viewing Sertorius' actions in a positive moral light.

We have already examined Sertorius' skill at employing deception while on campaign. Sertorius consistently defeated trained Roman armies under Metellus and Pompey by using trickery and indirect warfare to take advantage of the poor mobility of the Roman infantry.<sup>176</sup> Sertorius' most admired military exploit, according to Plutarch, was forcing the Characitani out of an unassailable system of caves by contriving to have the wind carry an enormous quantity of dust into their hideout, thus “subduing by skill (σοφία) that which could not be taken by arms” (*Sert.* 17.7).<sup>177</sup> This achievement was not so much a matter of deception, but it still clearly falls under the mantle of cleverness and indirect warfare. While Sertorius' use of deception appears to be more strongly rooted in warfare than Lysander's, he does not abstain from using deceit outside of the battlefield. Most notable is Sertorius' trick with the doe, which he makes his soldiers

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<sup>176</sup> See above, pp. 84-88.

<sup>177</sup> ὡς τὰ δι' ὀπλων ἀνάλωτα σοφία κατεργασαμένω (*Sert.* 17.3).

believe to be a gift and messenger from Diana, “knowing”, as Plutarch says, “that the barbarians were by nature easily led to superstition” (*Sert.* 11.3).<sup>178</sup> However, unlike Lysander's deception of his friends, which is soundly criticized, Sertorius' deception of his own soldiers appears to be as praiseworthy as many of his other actions. Plutarch associates this action with Sertorius' mildness (πρᾶος) and efficiency as one of the reasons that the Roman attracted so many followers (*Sert.* 11.1), and the deception has the intended effect of making the barbarians more amenable to his command (*Sert.* 12.1). Plutarch's approval of Sertorius' deception of his own men, as surprising as it may seem, is not the contradiction that it might at first appear. First of all, it is important to note that Sertorius' trick with the doe is not harmful to the barbarians in any way; in fact, it can be seen to have benefited them as much as Sertorius, as it raised their morale and made them a more effective fighting force. This brings to mind Lycurgus' deception of his own people at the end of his life (*Lyc.* 29.1-6), which similarly proved to benefit the deceived as much as the deceiver. More importantly, I would argue, is that while the barbarians whom Sertorius deceives are indeed his own allies and soldiers, they are not, crucially, Romans. Sophia Xenophontos has argued that Plutarch uses the *Sertorius* to explore how a commander might educate and civilize his foreign subordinates, and cites such tricks discussed above as Sertorius' successful methods of improving the morals of his barbarian soldiers.<sup>179</sup> Sertorius' deception of his own soldiers, then, brings them not just a practical benefit but a moral one as well. There is no contrast in the *Sertorius*, as

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<sup>178</sup> γινώσκων εὐάλωτον εἰς δεῖσιδαιμονίαν εἶναι φύσει τὸ βαρβαρικόν (*Sert.* 11.3). The doe reappears from 20.1-3.

<sup>179</sup> Xenophontos (2016), 161-68.



there is in the *Lysander* and the *Agesilaus*, between just and unjust deception: all of Sertorius' tricks, both on and off the battlefield, earn Plutarch's praise. Xenophontos suggests that Plutarch's unambiguous support of Sertorius' deception in his Life can be difficult to reconcile with his views on deception in the *Moralia*, such as those discussed earlier in this chapter, but indicates that Plutarch allows for statesmen to adjust their ethics when confronted with unexpected political or military realities.<sup>180</sup> Plutarch's support for Sertorius' use of deception may indeed clash with his opinions on deception in the *Moralia*, but it is completely in line with his views on military deception in the Spartan Lives. Throughout his Life, Sertorius uses deception appropriately to both achieve victory over his enemies and improve the circumstances of his allies.

Plutarch treats the use of deception similarly in the other half of the pair, the *Eumenes*. While Plutarch does not rank Eumenes with the most warlike, one-eyed generals that he lists at the beginning of the *Sertorius*, he does match him with Sertorius as being "given to command and wars of stratagem" (*Sert.* 1.11). In the Life itself, Eumenes uses deception precisely as Sertorius does: not only against his enemies, but against his own soldiers as well. Although Eumenes' military cunning isn't as prevalent as Sertorius', it still comes into play in the Life, particularly in Eumenes' campaign against Antigonos. When Eumenes learned that Antigonos was making a quick march through uninhabited country, he ordered his limited army to create a false camp with such a large number of fires that Antigonos diverted his march; it was only after

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<sup>180</sup> Xenophontos (2016), 165. This is similar to Duff's argument that the *Parallel Lives* allow Plutarch an opportunity to explore what happens to philosophical ideals when put into practice. See above, pp. 81-84.

Eumenes sent no subsequent army against him that Antigonos realized he had been out-generated (*Eum.* 15.3-7). This is the only clear use of military deception that Plutarch attributes to Eumenes. However, given that it was Antigonos Monophthalmos whom Eumenes tricked, a man Plutarch names at the beginning of the pair as one of the masters of deception, this one example serves as high praise for Eumenes' military cunning.

More relevant to the discussion of ethical deception, the *Eumenes* contains several examples of Eumenes deceiving his allies in a similar manner to Sertorius' trick with the doe. Eumenes' underhandedness is clear from the beginning of the Life, when he conceals money from Alexander and placates the king's wrath after the death of Hephaestion by proposing honors for Alexander's closest friend (*Eum.* 2.2-5). Eumenes' full skill at deception, however, becomes apparent through his actions toward his own soldiers. The first example of this comes after Eumenes had defeated Neoptolemus' attempt to usurp his position as satrap. After the battle, Neoptolemus turned to Craterus for help and persuaded him to attack Eumenes by arguing that Craterus' popularity with the Macedonians would cause Eumenes' soldiers to desert to him at first sight. Plutarch narrates what follows with high praise for Eumenes' generalship:

Τὸ μὲν οὖν προαισθέσθαι τὴν ἔφοδον αὐτοῦ τὸν Εὐμενῆ καὶ προπαρασκευάσασθαι νηφούσης ἂν τις ἡγεμονίας, οὐ μὴν ἄκρας θεῖη δεινότητος· τὸ δὲ μὴ μόνον τοὺς πολεμίους ἀλλὰ καὶ μὴ καλῶς εἶχεν αἰσθέσθαι διαφυγεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς μετ' αὐτοῦ στρατευομένους ἀγνοοῦντας ᾧ μαχοῦνται προενσεῖσαι τῷ Κρατερῷ, καὶ ἀποκρύψαι τὸν ἀντιστράτηγον, ἴδιον δοκεῖ τούτου τοῦ ἡγεμόνος ἔργον γενέσθαι (*Eum.* 6.5-7).

Now, that Eumenes perceived his approach and made preparations, one might regard as sober generalship, though indeed not highest ability; but that he was able not only to keep his enemies from learning things which would be harmful to him, but also to fling his soldiers at Craterus before they learned whom they were fighting, and to hide from

them the enemy general, seems to be a deed characteristic of this general.

Plutarch is not overly impressed that Eumenes learned of Craterus' attack: he specifically stops short of calling it anything more than “sober generalship”, likely because Plutarch would have expected any good general to keep abreast of his enemy's position. What instead stands out to Plutarch is Eumenes' deception not only of Craterus, but of his own troops as well. Calling Eumenes' deception characteristic of him does not on the surface appear to be particularly high praise. However, the  $\mu\epsilon\nu\dots\delta\epsilon$  construction which describes Eumenes' actions puts Plutarch's opinion of Eumenes' deception in clear opposition to his opinion of Eumenes' scouting: his initial actions did not display the “highest ability”, but his deception did, and it is this deception that is particularly characteristic of Eumenes. It is important, here, that Plutarch's praise extends to include Eumenes' deception of his own soldiers. In keeping the presence of Craterus hidden from his army, Eumenes exerted the same sort of control over them that Sertorius maintained over his soldiers by means of the *doe*. Eumenes did not deceive his soldiers in order to do them harm, but in order to preserve his army and achieve victory; his actions, therefore, particularly because they directly led to his success in battle, are praiseworthy despite their deceptiveness.

An even more blatant example of Eumenes deceiving his own men occurs a few chapters later, when he comes across Antigonus' baggage train isolated from its protection. Fearing that his soldiers would become overburdened and insolent if they captured so many spoils, Eumenes secretly informed the enemy commander of his exposed position while his own troops were resting, and pretended to be upset that the

baggage train subsequently escaped before he had the chance to attack (*Eum.* 9.3-5). This could easily be seen to be far worse than Eumenes' first deception of his troops, as Eumenes here is effectively colluding with his enemy. However, once again Plutarch sees nothing negative in this act of deception. This incident immediately follows the story of Eumenes making a special effort to burn and bury the bodies of his fallen soldiers after a defeat, and so serves as another example of the high-mindedness and constancy which Plutarch attributes to Eumenes (*Eum.* 9.1). Plutarch, then, uses this act of deception as an example of Eumenes' good character. Eumenes may have acted out of self-interest instead of kindness (as Antigonus explains to his commanders at *Eum.* 9.6), but by tricking his own men he not only kept his soldiers in a better fighting condition, he also prevented the enslavement of the women and children from the baggage train, which is laudable no matter the motive.<sup>181</sup>

The *Eumenes* highlights a dimension of Plutarch's treatment of deception that, while present in the *Sertorius*, becomes more clear when looking at the pair as a whole. In the *Lysander*, there appears to be a clear distinction between military and non-military deception: Lysander's stratagem against the Athenians at Aegospotami is unquestionably an act of generalship, while his breaking of oaths and his lying to the Milesian democrats are unrelated to warfare. The distinction is even more clear in the *Agesilaus*:

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<sup>181</sup> There is a clear parallel here between Eumenes' actions and those of Themistocles immediately before the battle of Salamis. When it looked as though the Athenians' allies were about to abandon them to protect the Peloponnese, Themistocles sent a message to Xerxes advising him to attack (*Them.* 12.3-4). Themistocles deceived both his allies and his enemies, but in so doing he turned the tide of the Persian War and preserved Greek independence. As is the case in the *Eumenes*, Plutarch finds no fault with Themistocles' actions, and even puts support for his plan into the mouth of Aristides, the most just of the Greeks (*Them.* 12.6; *Aris.* 7.5-6).

Plutarch deemed both Tissaphernes and Agesilaus to have committed treachery when they deceived those with whom they were not at war. In the *Sertorius-Eumenes*, however, the line between military and non-military deception becomes blurred. Sertorius' stratagems during his campaigns in Spain and Eumenes' deception of Antigonos are still clearly military acts, but so too are the tricks that the two generals played on their own soldiers. While the two generals did deceive their own men, their tricks were motivated by a desire to maintain the cohesion and control over their respective armies, with the ultimate goal of strengthening themselves and weakening their enemies. Sertorius was commanding almost exclusively barbarian soldiers, and these had very different standards of discipline and loyalty than the Roman legionaries he would have been accustomed to. Playing on his soldiers' superstitions by means of the doe was Sertorius' way of ensuring the continuing loyalty of his soldiers, which was as important to his military successes as his lauded tactical abilities. The same can be said for Eumenes' actions as well. Eumenes knew that his Macedonian soldiers were likely to desert if they knew they faced the beloved Craterus. By concealing the identity of their enemy, Eumenes was safeguarding the integrity of his army and giving himself the opportunity to fight his old comrade. Later on, he likewise deceived his soldiers to prevent them from capturing Antigonos' baggage train. Plutarch is clear that Eumenes feared his soldiers would become overburdened and insolent had they taken the spoils (*Eum.* 9.3-4); Eumenes' action was motivated by his desire to maintain his army as an effective fighting force. Plutarch commends the deceptions that Sertorius and Eumenes committed against their own troops, and treats them not as acts of treachery, but as

examples of their abilities as generals.

In the *Sertorius-Eumenes*, then, Plutarch treats the generals' use of stratagems separately from their characters. Throughout the *Sertorius*, Plutarch praises the Roman above all for his moderation: he appears as the sole voice of reason in Marius' party, and is the only one of his confederates not to engage in murder after gaining power in Rome (*Sert.* 5.4); he was not easily affected by pleasure or fear (*Sert.* 10.2); he was given to neither anger nor cruelty (*Sert.* 18.6); and “he appeared to indulge his passion less than any other general” (*Sert.* 18.6).<sup>182</sup> Perhaps most importantly to a comparison with Lysander and Agesilaus, when Sertorius had gained control over the city of Tingis, he “did not injure those who were in need of him and those who put their faith in him” (*Sert.* 9.5), a clear contrast to Lysander's actions in Miletus and Agesilaus' in Egypt.<sup>183</sup> Plutarch portrays Sertorius as being even more dedicated to the use of trickery and deception than Lysander and Agesilaus; yet unlike the Spartans, Sertorius' moral character is consistently good, as Plutarch prefaced at the beginning of the Life (*Sert.* 1.9). Plutarch does provide examples of Eumenes' deceptiveness early in that Life, particularly at *Eum.* 2.2-5, in the opening chapters which often introduce a characters' background and character (named by Duff as a 'proemial opening').<sup>184</sup> However, in the proem Plutarch also stresses Eumenes' faithfulness and the trust that his fellows – particularly Alexander – placed in him.<sup>185</sup> This lessens the impact of Eumenes' less noble

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<sup>182</sup> ἐλάχιστα γὰρ δοκεῖ θυμῷ χαρίσασθαι τῶν στρατηγῶν (*Sert.* 18.6).

<sup>183</sup> τοὺς δεηθέντας αὐτοῦ καὶ πιστεύσαντας οὐκ ἠδίκησεν (*Sert.* 9.5). For Lysander's treatment of those who put their trust in him see pp. 94-96, above; for Agesilaus', see pp. 100-101.

<sup>184</sup> Duff (2011), 224-225. For the identification of the proemial opening in the *Eumenes*, cf. Duff (2011), 234.

<sup>185</sup> οὔτε συνέσει τινὸς οὔτε πίστει λείπεσθαι δοκῶν τῶν περὶ Ἀλέξανδρον (*Eum.* 1.2). That Eumenes was

actions, and sets the reader up to expect that Eumenes' future acts of deception will be morally acceptable and not harm those who put their trust in him.<sup>186</sup> There is no indication in the *Sertorius-Eumenes* that Plutarch thought either man to have a worse character for so often engaging in deception. Their frequent use of tricks and stratagems did characterize them, but in a positive way: as clever, resourceful, and successful generals.

## Conclusion

There seems to be little doubt that for Plutarch, who was so concerned with the ideas of harmony and mixing, the ideal education consisted of both philosophical and military training.<sup>187</sup> As we saw in the first section of this chapter, Plutarch considered an education based on Greek language and literature to be vital to the proper development and maintenance of an individual's character. At the same time, many of his subjects also put the skills learned during their military educations to great use in the service of their respective states. The ideal subject in this regard, although one not mentioned in this chapter, may well be Phocion. Early in his career, Plutarch says, Phocion saw that the statesmen of his day had all specialized in their profession: men either spoke in the

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given sole command of a force in India (*Eum.* 1.2), and that Alexander gave Eumenes control of important documents both before and after he caught Eumenes hiding money from him (*Eum.* 2.2-3), testify to the trust placed in him.

<sup>186</sup> It is true that Eumenes plainly deceived Alexander when he hid money from him, but Plutarch does not appear to see this as a serious offense. He makes no explicit judgment of Eumenes' deception, except to say that Alexander knew that Eumenes was lying (*Eum.* 2.2), and relates that Alexander regretted his attempt to catch Eumenes after his tent burned down completely and did not take any of the money owed (*Eum.* 2.3), so the two hundred talents that Eumenes withheld clearly made little difference to the king.

<sup>187</sup> See Wardman (1974), 57-63 and Duff (1999), 89-94 for the importance of harmony in Plutarch.

assembly as politicians or held the office of general, but did not do both. Phocion, however, sought to bring back the type of public service given by men such as Pericles, Aristides, and Solon, who were able to effectively perform both important roles in the same way that their patron goddess Athena was the goddess of both war and statecraft (*Phoc.* 7.5-6). Phocion's desire to balance the roles of both politician and general within his person reflects the theme of mixing 'hard' and 'soft' elements that Duff has identified as running throughout the Life.<sup>188</sup> That Plutarch approved of Phocion's method of leadership – in part exemplified by his traditional role as a politician-general – can be seen at the end of the Life: Phocion's 'trial' after his removal from power is a complete sham, and Athens appears completely bereft of a strong leader without Phocion at the helm (*Phoc.* 34.5-35.5).

While Plutarch might have idealized a figure such as Phocion who successfully performed both jobs of the traditional Greek statesman, this chapter demonstrates that Plutarch recognized that reality was rarely so harmonious. His treatment of military education across the *Parallel Lives* shows a clear understanding of its importance to a well-rounded statesman, and while Plutarch is quick to point out the dangers of a lack of Greek education, he never goes so far as call military education useless or morally damaging in its own right. Indeed, it is often through their military achievements that morally questionable statesmen such as Marius or Lysander demonstrate their greatest virtue through their service to the state.

The importance that Plutarch attributed to public service is also seen in his

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<sup>188</sup> Duff (1999), 145-7.



treatment of military deception. Despite any misgivings he might have about the morality of deception, Plutarch clearly recognized its importance in the Lives of many of his subjects. Throughout the *Lives*, Plutarch shows deception to have been a common and accepted aspect of both Greek and Roman warfare, and one of the most effective tools at a general's disposal. In this sense, he followed the tradition of writing about military deception that had remained relatively unchanged from the time of Homer, but Plutarch was not blindly copying his predecessors. He followed neither Xenophon's zealous praise for military deception nor Polybius' resigned acceptance of its necessity, but rather portrayed the correct use of deception as a clear virtue for any general. Plutarch displayed an interest in the idea of stratagems and deception beyond what one would expect of an author with no military background, and lavished praise on generals like Sertorius who used it appropriately and effectively. Plutarch clearly understood subtleties to the use of deception: one could not properly evaluate it without considering its target and motivation. In the Spartan Lives, Plutarch sees a general's use of deception as closely related to his character and background. According to Plutarch, the Spartan education that Lysander and Agesilaus received not only taught them to value the welfare of their city above all else, but also emphasized the usefulness of deception to achieving their goals. Because of this, throughout their respective Lives they frequently employ deception in ways that appear morally questionable to outsiders. Plutarch's interest in these Lives lay not so much in the acts of deception themselves, but rather in examining the impact that such a narrow understanding of justice had on a subject's actions; military and non-military deception provided an effective framework with clear

moral boundaries from which Plutarch could explore larger moral issues. In the *Sertorius-Eumenes*, Plutarch leaves moral considerations aside to explore the efficacy of military deception. Throughout this pair, both generals continuously struggle against great odds: Sertorius faced the resources of the Roman Republic, while Eumenes fought for survival against some of the greatest of Alexander's successors. Nevertheless, the mastery of deception that both generals displayed brought them numerous victories and ensured their survival longer than one could have reasonably expected. Unlike Lysander and Agesilaus, Sertorius and Eumenes consistently use deception in a way that Plutarch considers morally appropriate: perhaps, although there is certainly nothing in the *Sertorius-Eumenes* that explicitly makes this connection, because the two men were unburdened by Spartan education system. Regardless, these case-studies demonstrate Plutarch's understanding of both the moral complications and practical applications of military deception.

Questions of morality, character, and virtue underpin Plutarch's portrayal of military leadership in the *Parallel Lives*, just as they do other aspects of the work. Plutarch by no means overlooks the moral virtue of his subjects when they are engaged in warfare, and indeed is quick to identify instances when generals exhibit moral failings in their pursuit of victory. At the same time, Plutarch demonstrates considerable respect for those men who were able to further the interests of their state through military achievement, even if their own character may have suffered as a result. Throughout the *Parallel Lives*, Plutarch is willing to bend – though not break – his philosophical ideals in order to recognize virtue wherever he sees it.

### Chapter 3

## *Synkrisis* and Generalship

The formal *synkrisis* that conclude the majority of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* have long been the subject of debate. They explicitly compare a pair's subjects against each other on a variety of topics, often – but not always – drawn from the preceding Lives. Modern scholarship no longer questions the authenticity of the concluding *synkrisis*, as was once done, but many scholars are still troubled by what they see as the crudeness or simplicity of the passages when compared to the *Lives* themselves.<sup>189</sup> Much of the uncertainty over these concluding *synkrisis* stems from the difficulty in determining their purpose in the Lives. Four of the twenty-two extant pairs of *Lives* do not have a *synkrisis*: *Themistocles-Camillus*, *Phocion-Cato Minor*, *Alexander-Caesar*, and *Pyrrhus-Marius*. The lack of a *synkrisis* for every pair makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the purpose of these *synkrisis*, a problem that is compounded because it is not clear why these four particular pairs are missing them. Scholarly opinion on exactly why these four do not have a *synkrisis* is divided between those who believe that Plutarch specifically did not write them and others who attribute their absence to the accident of transmission. I agree with the latter opinion, but it is worth considering both arguments.

Hartmut Erbse was one of the earliest modern proponents for the idea that

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<sup>189</sup> Pelling (1986), 83 ff., though he has since become more receptive: Pelling (2002), 359; Rosenmeyer (1992), 227 n. 42; Mossman (1994), 60.

Plutarch intentionally avoided writing a *synkrisis* for the four pairs which lack one. He argues that Plutarch was not able to identify significant differences in the *Phocion-Cato Minor* to compose an effective *synkrisis*, and that he was unable to find sufficient points of similarity to do the same for the other three pairs.<sup>190</sup> This argument, in my view, does not give Plutarch enough credit. For one, the *Phocion-Cato Minor* is not the only pair whose subjects are unusually similar; as Wardman notes, “Plutarch says of Cicero and Demosthenes (*Dem.* 3.3) that there are so many similarities that one might think that god was trying to make the same man; but this did not stop him from attempting a comparison”.<sup>191</sup> The *synkrisis* to the *Demosthenes-Cicero* contrasts the two men on their range of interests (*Dem.-Cic.* 1.1-3), their effective political power (*Dem.-Cic.* 3.1-4), and their time in exile (*Dem.-Cic.* 4.1-4), so Plutarch clearly had no problem finding a number of differences for such an apparently similar pair. The *Timoleon-Aemilius* provides another counter-example. Plutarch opens the *synkrisis* by saying that a comparison of the two does not show many differences (*Tim.-Aem.* 1.1), and while the *synkrisis* turns out to be one of the shortest, as Larmour notes, Plutarch did still make the effort.<sup>192</sup> If Plutarch wrote *synkriseis* for two pairs which he specifically said were particularly similar, it is likely he could have found sufficient differences between Phocion and Cato Minor as well.

It is equally doubtful that Plutarch would have been unable to find enough similarities between the other three pairs to compose formal *synkriseis*. For one, Plutarch

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<sup>190</sup> Erbse (1956), 404-6.

<sup>191</sup> Wardman (1974), 237.

<sup>192</sup> Larmour (1992), 4176.

would not have written parallel biographies for any of his subjects if they did not have at least some similar traits to link them together. It is true that both the *Themistocles-Camillus* and the *Pyrrhus-Marius* lack the “formal” proem in which, as Stadter observes, Plutarch usually puts forth his reasons for comparing two particular men, and that this proem to the *Alexander-Caesar* provides no more useful similarity than the fact that they both performed illustrious deeds (*Alex.* 1.1).<sup>193</sup> Nevertheless, scholars have identified points of similarity for each pair that could have easily translated into a formal *synkrisis*. Hamilton notes several similarities between Alexander and Caesar, including ambition, a focus on their reputations, generosity towards fellow-soldiers, kindness towards defeated enemies, and eventual tyrannical tendencies.<sup>194</sup> In his discussion of parallels within the *Themistocles-Camillus*, Larmour observes that both men come from undistinguished families, both men became involved in civil strife, and both men saved their cities from a barbarian invader only to be exiled later for their military success.<sup>195</sup> Finally, Duff identifies the important themes of greed and discontent in the *Pyrrhus-Marius*, to which Buszard adds the common themes of hope, severity, military skill, and political failure.<sup>196</sup> So then, just as observation of other Lives shows that the *Phocion-Cato Minor* does not have too many similarities to allow for a *synkrisis*, an analysis of the three other pairs that lack a *synkrisis* demonstrates that they do not have too few similarities to preclude one. There is nothing about any of the four pairings in and of themselves that

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<sup>193</sup> Stadter (1988), 275-95. For more recent work on the beginnings of Lives, see Duff (2008a), 190-191; (2011), 224-225.

<sup>194</sup> Hamilton (1969), xxxiv, n.4.

<sup>195</sup> Larmour (1992), 4177-8.

<sup>196</sup> Duff (1999), 101-30; Buszard (2002), 62-148.

would prevent Plutarch from writing a concluding *synkrisis* for them.

Pelling provides a different explanation for the missing *synkrisis*, one which attempts to draw conclusions from the way the pairs currently end. In Pelling's view, Plutarch decided not to write a formal comparison for these particular pairs because he ended them in such a way that a concluding *synkrisis* would only harm their overall impact.<sup>197</sup> Pelling believes that the *Phocion-Cato Minor* and the *Alexander-Caesar* do not receive a *synkrisis* for two reasons: (1) the richness of the final passage of the *Cato Minor* and the *Caesar*; and (2), the implicit comparisons made with the earlier Life in each ending. He calls the ending of the *Cato Minor* “particularly dramatic” in its description of Cato's final moments, a death scene with many parallels to Phocion's end; for this reason, Pelling “can understand if [Plutarch] was reluctant to compromise so fine an ending with a formal *synkrisis*”.<sup>198</sup> He makes the same argument for the *Alexander-Caesar*. Not only does the *Caesar* end “marvelously” with the narrative of Caesar's guardian spirit taking revenge on Brutus and Cassius, but it also makes many implicit connections with the *Alexander*, most notably through the introduction of the supernatural.<sup>199</sup> That Pelling's argument relies so much on aesthetics detracts from its impact; just because a passage appears particularly striking or dramatic to modern readers does not mean that Plutarch would have felt as strongly about it. As will be seen in greater detail later, the *synkrisis* has several purposes at the end of a pair of Lives, and

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<sup>197</sup> Pelling (2002), 377-82.

<sup>198</sup> Pelling (2002), 377.

<sup>199</sup> Pelling (2002), 278-82.

providing a “pleasing” conclusion is not necessarily one of them.<sup>200</sup> Finally, the *Parallel Lives* bring up a variety of themes and methods of comparison in each pair (Plutarch names ten points of comparison between Demetrius and Antony at *Dem.* 3.4), so it seems unlikely that Plutarch would have found one or two implicit comparisons at the end of the *Cato Minor* or the *Caesar* to be a sufficient replacement for a formal *synkrisis* in which he often discusses multiple such parallels between his subjects.

Pelling's arguments for the other two pairs are even less convincing. He notes that the *Themistocles-Camillus* has one of the most abrupt beginnings of any of the *Parallel Lives*, and maintains that its equally sudden ending without a *synkrisis* might therefore have seemed like an appropriate conclusion.<sup>201</sup> However, such a clipped introduction and conclusion could just as easily suggest that sections have been lost due to transmission, as scholars believe happened to the *Alexander-Caesar*.<sup>202</sup> Even Pelling admits that “it is not clear to a modern audience why [a perfunctory beginning] should have excluded a *synkrisis*”.<sup>203</sup> Finally, Pelling believes that Plutarch's unusually harsh criticism of Marius at the end of his Life (something that is normally reserved for the conclusion) explains the lack of a *synkrisis* after the *Pyrrhus-Marius*.<sup>204</sup> He does, however, count the *Alcibiades* as another Life that ends rather unsympathetically for its subject, yet has no explanation for why the *Coriolanus-Alcibiades* has a *synkrisis* despite this.<sup>205</sup> If there are two pairs of Lives that end with a criticism of their subject, one with

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<sup>200</sup> For a similar argument, see Larmour (1992), 4156.

<sup>201</sup> Pelling (2002), 378, 386 n.70.

<sup>202</sup> Duff (1999), 254.

<sup>203</sup> Pelling (2002), 378.

<sup>204</sup> Pelling (2002), 378.

<sup>205</sup> Pelling (2002), 386 n. 68.

a *synkrisis* and one without one, it is impossible to tell which is the anomaly based on that single criteria.

Arguing for the intentional absence of *synkrisis* on a case by case basis as Pelling does leaves one open to these sorts of contradictions; the *Marius* is not the only Life with a rather unsympathetic ending, and the *Cato Minor* and *Caesar* are not the only Lives with dramatic conclusions (the *Antony* ends with the striking narrative of Cleopatra's death, for instance), but they are the only ones without a formal *synkrisis*. Searching for such exceptions to Plutarch's usual trends has its merits, however, as Plutarch did not rigorously maintain the same structure throughout the *Parallel Lives*. The *Agis and Cleomenes-Tiberius and Caius Gracchus* is probably the most obvious example of Plutarch's flexibility, as it changes the standard formula of treating only one Greek and one Roman per pair. In addition, as Duff notes, Plutarch reverses the usual order of treating the Greek before the Roman in three pairs: the *Coriolanus-Alcibiades*, the *Aemilius-Timoleon*, and the *Sertorius-Eumenes*.<sup>206</sup> Plutarch normally presents the more simple Life first to serve as a base from which to understand the more complex themes in the second, and at least in the case of the *Coriolanus-Alcibiades* the Greek is clearly the more difficult of the two.<sup>207</sup> Regardless of the reason for the switch in order, these three reversals do show that Plutarch was willing to adapt the structure of his *Parallel Lives* to new material. For this reason, it is wrong to say that Plutarch must have written the four missing *synkrisis* simply because all of the other Lives have them; on

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<sup>206</sup> Duff (1999), 254.

<sup>207</sup> Buszard (2002), 84; Duff (1999), 205-240.



the other hand, the individualized arguments which Pelling presents are not strong enough to stand on their own.

Duff expands on Pelling's argument for the *Pyrrhus-Marius*, making it perhaps the most thought-provoking of those that cite unique circumstances for the missing *synkriseis*. Instead of looking at Plutarch's general lack of sympathy for the rather pathetic end of Marius' life, Duff focuses on a final reflective passage that implicitly compares Marius (and by association Pyrrhus) with the philosophers Plato and Antiparos. These two are set as a paradigm for wise men who remember and value the good things that fortune has given them even in bad times (*Mar.* 46.1-2); in contrast to them are “forgetful and foolish” people (Plutarch names neither Marius nor Pyrrhus) who ignore current good fortune and instead dream of greater things in the future, with the result that they fail to consolidate what they have gained and eventually lose everything (*Mar.* 46.3-5). This perpetual discontent is perhaps Plutarch's greatest criticism of Pyrrhus and Marius and is a central theme to both Lives, and Duff suggests that this passage may help explain the lack of a formal *synkrisis* for the pair.<sup>208</sup> There is no doubt that this chapter acts as a fitting conclusion to the pair, not only tying together the main theme of the book but also alluding to the defective education that was most likely responsible for both of their shortcomings (*Pyr.* 2.6, 6.7, 8.6-7; *Mar.* 2.2-4).<sup>209</sup> The fact remains, however, that this is not a true *synkrisis*. It is syncritic in character, but it puts the protagonists on the same side of the comparison instead of against each other,

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<sup>208</sup> Duff (1999), 107-9, 254-5.

<sup>209</sup> Duff (1999), 109.

making a direct comparison of the two impossible. In addition, there is no opportunity for the reader to exercise his own judgment; with the eminent philosophers Plato and Antiparos on one side against the unnamed “forgetful” and “foolish” on the other, Plutarch presents in no uncertain terms who acts correctly and who does not. Therefore this passage raises no difficult questions and prompts no re-evaluation of the major themes of the work – the primary purpose of the Plutarchan *synkrisis*, according to Duff – and instead acts as a sort of glorified summary of the preceding Lives.<sup>210</sup> Duff’s exploration of Pelling’s argument for the unique ending of the *Pyrrhus-Marius* has merit, but even such a rounded conclusion as exists in the pair does not accomplish what a real *synkrisis* would and so is not a fitting substitute for one.

It is impossible to say with certainty whether Plutarch did or did not write the four missing *synkriseis*, but the current arguments which advocate that he intentionally never wrote them fail to convince. Both Erbse and Pelling run into problems because they focus on features of the pairs in question that pairs with *synkriseis* also happen to have. The passage that Duff identifies at the end of the *Pyrrhus-Marius* appears to be a suitable replacement at first glance, but on subsequent observation it lacks several of the defining features of the formal *synkrisis*. It is certainly possible that we have the *Phocion-Cato Minor*, *Alexander-Caesar*, *Themistocles-Camillus*, and *Pyrrhus-Marius* as Plutarch meant them to be, but considering the problems inherent in the transmission of ancient texts, and knowing that other parts of the *Parallel Lives* have failed to last to the modern day (such as the whole of the *Epimanondas-Scipio*), it is safer to assume that the

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<sup>210</sup> Duff (1999), 257.

four missing *synkriseis* have simply been lost to time. Moreover, by starting from the position that Plutarch had originally written a *synkrisis* for every pair, looking for trends amongst the surviving *synkriseis* in an attempt to determine their purpose is far more productive.

### **Rhetorical Purpose of the *Synkriseis***

Another significant difficulty in determining the purpose of the concluding *synkriseis* is that there are no programmatic statements about the *synkriseis* such as those that preface a handful of the *Parallel Lives*.<sup>211</sup> That the *synkriseis* do not invariably follow the themes and tone of the pairs they follow, and that they do not simply summarize the information given in their Lives, have also caused considerable discussion on their proper interpretation. Despite the difficulties, several scholars have developed reasonable explanations of the purpose of the *synkriseis*. In his book on moralism in Plutarch's *Lives*, Duff proposes that Plutarch intended the final *synkriseis* to force the reader to reassess the complex moral issues raised in the biographies and to consider the difficulties of making moral judgments.<sup>212</sup> His argument acknowledges the rhetorical origins of the formal *synkriseis*, a technique with which Plutarch's readers would have been very familiar, and considers that Plutarch's audience would not have been troubled by the dramatic shift in tone and structure between the Lives and the *synkriseis*.

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<sup>211</sup> *Per.* 1.4-2.4; *Aem.* 1.1-4; *Alex.* 1.1-3; *Dem.* 1.3-7. Cf. Duff (1999), 14-51.

<sup>212</sup> Duff (1999), 243 ff.

Duff's treatment is an effective one when reading the comparisons in terms of Plutarch's moralism, as much recent scholarship has done. In terms of the more straightforward consideration of military leadership, however, a recent article by Jeffrey Tatum provides a better base. Like Duff, Tatum builds on an understanding of the place of the *synkrisis* in Greek and Roman rhetorical education. He argues convincingly that Plutarch meant the concluding *synkriseis* to specifically focus the reader's attention on judging which man was better.<sup>213</sup> This helps to explain the common discrepancies between the Lives and *synkriseis*; while the Lives focus on understanding the particular virtues of each man, the purpose of the *synkriseis* is judgment, and so the *synkriseis* will naturally focus on themes that promote critical comparisons of the subjects.<sup>214</sup> This is important for our understanding of Plutarch's depiction of military leadership in the *synkriseis*; in the Lives themselves, Plutarch has the luxury of describing particular campaigns and battles in depth, but in the *synkriseis* he must give his audience criteria by which to judge the generalship of men who were often both geographically and chronologically distinct. The *synkriseis*, then, have the potential to show what specific criteria Plutarch considered to be important when discussing military leadership.

There is difficulty in seeing the *synkriseis* as an invitation to critically judge the two subjects against one another, however, because the typical Plutarchan *synkrisis* is a study in balance and equality. Whether or not Plutarch felt particularly biased towards or against one of his subjects in a pair, he did his utmost to treat both of them equally in the

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<sup>213</sup> Tatum (2010), 10-18.

<sup>214</sup> Tatum (2010), 15-16.

*synkrisis*. This manifests itself most clearly in the structure of the *synkriseis*. In some, such as the *Theseus-Romulus*, Plutarch favors one of his subjects in all matters for the first half of the *synkrisis* before completely praising the other for the second half; in others, such as in the *Demetrius-Antony*, Plutarch will change the subject he currently prefers several times over the course of the *synkrisis*.<sup>215</sup> In both cases the subjects receive relatively equal treatment. Neither one will appear to be a better man overall, but rather each will come across as more praiseworthy in some aspects and less in others. In some cases, Plutarch's opinion on a particular comparison is clear. There is little doubt, for instance, as to what one should think about the respective deaths of Cimon and Lucullus: Plutarch explains that Cimon died in the field at the head of his army, “not exhausted, nor perplexed, nor making feasts and dinner parties the prizes of arms and campaigns and trophies” as Lucullus did (*Cim.-Luc.* 1.2).<sup>216</sup> Plutarch clearly sees Cimon's death to be much more laudable than that of Lucullus, and he expects his readers to have the same view.<sup>217</sup> His opinion in other instances, however, is not so apparent. In his comparison of Demetrius' and Antony's ultimate downfalls, Plutarch claims that Demetrius “caused his soldiers to be hostile towards him”, while Antony “left behind the goodwill and confidence” of his troops (*Dem.-Ant.* 6.2).<sup>218</sup> Plutarch

<sup>215</sup> See Duff (1999), 257-262 for more on Plutarch's equal treatment of his subjects in the *synkriseis*. On the *synkrisis* to the *Theseus-Romulus* in particular, see Larmour (1988). For the *synkrisis* to the *Demetrius-Antony*, see Pelling (1986b), 89-90; (1988b), 19-20; Duff (1999), 278-281.

<sup>216</sup> ἄλλ' ἀκμῆν ἔχόντων ἐτελεύτησεν, ἐπὶ στρατοπέδου μέντοι καὶ στρατηγῶν, οὐκ ἀπειρηκῶς οὐδ' ἀλύων, οὐδὲ τῶν ὀπλῶν καὶ τῶν στρατηγιῶν καὶ τῶν τροπαίων ἐπαθλον ποιούμενος εὐωχίας καὶ πότους (*Cim.-Luc.* 1.2).

<sup>217</sup> See Pelling (2002), 371-376 for the deaths of Cimon and Lucullus in Plutarch.

<sup>218</sup> ὥστε τοῦ μὲν ἐγκλημα εἶναι τὸ δυσμενεῖς οὕτω πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀπεργάσασθαι τοὺς μαχομένους, τοῦ δὲ τὸ παρεσκευασμένην εὖνοιαν τοιαύτην καὶ πίστιν ἐγκαταλιπεῖν (*Dem.-Ant.* 6.2).

gives no indication of his own opinion in the matter, and leaves the reader little in the *synkrisis* itself on which to form his own judgment. It appears, then, that Plutarch is tacitly acknowledging that Demetrius and Antony are equally to blame for their eventual downfalls. At times, Plutarch takes this tendency towards equality even further and argues both for and against his subjects on a particular point. In the *Dion-Brutus*, for instance, Plutarch originally censures Brutus for plotting against Caesar when Caesar was still friendly towards him; Dion, on the other hand, only fought against Dionysius after being wronged by him (*Dion-Brut.* 3.3). Plutarch immediately backtracks, however, claiming that this same point proves Brutus' hatred of tyrants to be consistent and sincere, whereas Dion's was only brought about by resentment (*Dion-Brut.* 3.4-6). Plutarch does not limit himself to interpreting an episode a single way; by acknowledging that Brutus's hostility towards Caesar despite the man's friendship can count both for and against him Plutarch allows for more flexibility in his discussion and encourages his readers to consider their own interpretations of other events. The *Aristides-Cato Major* contains another example of this: after criticizing Aristides for his poverty and the harm it caused to his descendants Plutarch turns the argument around, admitting that Aristides' poverty was not due to any bad qualities and criticizing Cato for esteeming the acquisition of wealth in his writing (*Aris.-Cato* 3-4). This sort of balance appears to make any attempt to successfully judge between Dion and Brutus or Aristides and Cato an exercise in futility, as Plutarch guides the reader into accepting that a perceived fault can just as easily be called a virtue.

This balance in the Plutarch *synkrisis* appears to dissuade any attempts at judging one man superior to another. Indeed, Duff argues that Plutarch's tendency of focusing on the equality of his subjects “prevents the *synkrisis* from becoming a mere exercise in grading or ranking, a ritual prize-giving to whichever of the subjects might be judged superior”, and that the equality instead serves to turn the reader's attention away from the characters themselves and towards the virtues and vices which they demonstrated in their lives.<sup>219</sup> This is an understandable reaction to the balance of the *synkrisis*. It is difficult to read Plutarch's comments about Dion and Brutus, quoted above, and not reflect on the enormity of the choice each man made between loyalty to one's friend and loyalty to one's city. However, Tatum suggests that the equality of the Plutarchan *synkrisis*, regardless of its opportunities for introspection, does not necessarily preclude ritualized judgment. He cites a discussion of *synkrisis* attributed to Hermogenes of Tarsus, in which the rhetorician explains that it was a common exercise for skilled orators to present balanced *synkrisis* of two unequal things. These falsely balanced *synkrisis*, as Tatum notes, did not encourage moral debate, but rather served to test both orator and audience; they required significant skill on the part of the orator to give an impression of equality and close attention by the audience to make an accurate judgment on which subject is superior.<sup>220</sup> Plutarch was certainly a skilled author and rhetorician, and no doubt capable of arguing for the equality of two unequal things. It is true that the rhetorical *synkrisis*, according to ancient authors, could indeed intentionally argue for

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<sup>219</sup> Duff (1999), 262.

<sup>220</sup> Tatum (2010), 12-13.

the equality of two subjects rather than the superiority of one over the other; however, Tatum regards a warning by Menander Rhetor against comparing two families at a wedding with a *synkrisis* as evidence that the common reaction to a *synkrisis* was indeed a critical evaluation of superiority.<sup>221</sup> Menander advises his reader against συγκρίνων, but to instead link the two families κατὰ ἀντεξέτασιν, “so that you do not seem to diminish one and glorify the other”.<sup>222</sup> That Menander specifically uses ἀντεξέτασιν for ‘comparison’ in opposition to συγκρίνων suggests that he considered the *synkrisis* to be a completely different form of comparison. Moreover, that he was concerned that an audience could interpret a *synkrisis* as a judgment for or against a particular subject, regardless of the author’s intentions, suggests that *synkriseis* were often used for such a critical purpose. It seems likely that Plutarch would have been aware of this reaction to *synkriseis*, and would have used it to his advantage in his writing.

That Plutarch did indeed intend his concluding *synkriseis* to elicit such judgments finds confirmation in the endings to several *synkriseis*. The *Philopoemen-Flamininus*, for example, ends with this pronouncement: “After this examination, since the difference is hard to define, consider whether we shall make this judgment fairly if we award the Greek the crown for military experience and generalship, and the Roman the crown for justice and goodness” (*Phil.-Flam.* 3.5).<sup>223</sup> Plutarch concludes the

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<sup>221</sup> Tatum (2010), 10-13. Menander warns to link the two families κατὰ ἀντεξέτασιν rather than with a *synkrisis*, “so that you do not seem to diminish one and glorify the other” (Men. Rh. 2.402.26-28).

<sup>222</sup> ἢ γὰρ γένος γένει συνάψεις οὐ συγκρίνων, ἵνα μὴ δοκῆς τὸ μὲν ἔλαττοῦν, τὸ δὲ αὖξιν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ ἀντεξέτασιν προάγων τὸν λόγον, ὅτι ὅμοιον ὁμοίῳ συνάπτεται (Men. Rh. 2.402.26-28).

<sup>223</sup> ἐπεὶ δ' οὕτως ἐξεταζομένων δυσθεώρητος ἢ διαφορά, σκόπει μὴ τῷ μὲν Ἑλληνι τὸν ἐμπειρίας πολεμικῆς καὶ στρατηγίας στέφανον, τῷ δὲ Ῥωμαίῳ τὸν δικαιοσύνης καὶ χρηστότητος ἀποδιδόντες, οὐ φάυλως διαιτᾶν δόξομεν (*Phil.-Flam.* 3.5).



*Lysander-Sulla* similarly, claiming that Sulla was a better general and had more successes, while Lysander had more self-control and had fewer failings (*Lys.-Sulla* 5.5).<sup>224</sup> These synopses oversimplify the comparisons made in the *synkriseis*, let alone the Lives themselves, yet Plutarch clearly expected his reader to judge the superiority of one man against the other. Furthermore, it does not follow that Plutarch would expect his readers to make such comparisons in some *synkriseis* and not others, so Plutarch would have likely written the other *synkriseis* with the assumption that his readers would make similar comparisons without his explicit direction. However, it is important to note that in the *synkriseis* to both the *Philopoemen-Flaminius* and the *Lysander-Sulla*, Plutarch judges the two men across a range of different criteria. He does nothing to suggest that he or his readers should judge one man's ultimate superiority to the other. I would argue, then, that Plutarch does not invite his reader "to judge *which is the better man*", as Tatum argues, but to judge which man was superior in several different aspects of comparison.<sup>225</sup> I do not mean to say that Plutarch expected readers to judge between the two men in terms of *every* comparison; the simplicity of Plutarch's summaries suggests that he passed judgment on only a handful of issues, and Plutarch's reluctance to comment on some of the more complex and ambiguous issues (like those from the *Dion-Brutus* and *Aristides-Cato Major*, above) supports Duff's argument that some comparisons required serious introspection. At the same time, there are some themes, such as that of military leadership, that are straightforward enough to allow consistent

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<sup>224</sup> Cf. *Cor.-Alc.* 5.2 and *Ag./Cleom.-Gracchi* 5.7. See Duff (1999), 200-204 for the *synkrisis* to the *Lysander-Sulla*.

<sup>225</sup> Tatum (2010), 13; his emphasis.

judgment. In this chapter I will examine Plutarch's treatment of military leadership in the *synkriseis* in an attempt to judge, as Plutarch appears to have intended, whether the Greek or the Roman was the superior general in each pair. As one would expect, Plutarch does not explicitly declare the superior general in many of the *synkriseis*; rather, in many cases Plutarch's treatment of his subjects' military careers appears on the surface to be balanced. However, I intend to show that, by a careful reading of generalship in the *synkriseis*, it is possible to judge the superior general even in those cases where the two men appear to be equal. I will begin by identifying many of the key ways by which Plutarch assesses generalship in the *synkriseis*, after which I will apply those aspects of generalship which Plutarch judges most important to the more troublesome *synkriseis* in order to better understand Plutarch's true assessment of the pair. I will conclude by considering the relationship of Plutarch's depiction of generalship in the *synkriseis* to that in the Lives themselves.

### **Assessment of Generalship in the *Synkriseis***

In the *synkriseis*, then, Plutarch guides his reader in a direct comparison of his subjects in order to judge each man's strengths and weaknesses in relation to a number of particular themes. Military leadership is a particularly common topic, occurring in fifteen of the eighteen extant *synkriseis*, and Plutarch examines this theme in a number of different ways.<sup>226</sup> Three of the most common criteria Plutarch applies to his

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<sup>226</sup> The *Theseus-Romulus*, *Lycurgus-Numa*, and *Demosthenes-Cicero* are the only three *synkriseis* not to discuss generalship. *The.-Rom.* 1.3-4 compares their bravery in war, but has no mention of military leadership in particular.

comparisons of military leadership are the number of victories, the strength of opponents, and responsibility for success. Plutarch takes all three of these into account during his comparison of the generalship of Pelopidas and Marcellus, so that particular *synkrisis* will serve as a start to our investigation of Plutarch's methods.

Perhaps the most basic comparison of military leadership Plutarch makes in the *synkriseis* is the number and magnitude of a general's victories and defeats. He compares Pelopidas and Marcellus in this way after discussing conflicting reports of Marcellus' career: "Since, then, Pelopidas was not defeated in a single battle as general, and Marcellus won more victories than any Roman of his day, it would seem, perhaps, that difficulty of conquering one is made equal to the invincibility of the other by the great number of his victories" (*Pel.-Marc.* 2.1).<sup>227</sup> For Plutarch, Marcellus' larger number of victories makes up for the defeats he suffered in his career and makes him equal to Pelopidas, who never lost a battle but presumably fought far fewer. There is no sign here that Plutarch takes into account any other aspect of the careers of the two men; his comparison of their victories is independent of his judgments about other aspects of generalship, a trend we will see continue throughout the *synkriseis*. Also evident here is the tendency towards equality that was discussed earlier.<sup>228</sup> Plutarch, as will become apparent, does have strong opinions on the superiority of one general over the other in several pairs, but when he does not, as appears to be the case here, he often attempts to

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<sup>227</sup> ἐπεὶ τοίνυν Πελοπίδας μὲν οὐδεμίαν ἡττήθη μάχην στρατηγῶν, Μάρκελλος δὲ πλείστας τῶν καθ' αὐτὸν Ῥωμαίων ἐνίκησε, δόξειεν ἂν ἴσως τὸ δυσνίκητον πρὸς τὸ ἀήττητον ὑπὸ πλῆθους τῶν κατωρθωμένων ἐπανισοῦσθαι (*Pel.-Marc.* 2.1).

<sup>228</sup> See pp. 132-135.

place the two men on equal footing.

Plutarch counts victories in the *Pericles-Fabius Maximus* as well, but his judgment in that pair is more complex. Plutarch opens his comparison of the two generals' leadership by assessing the specific battles of each man: “In pitched battle, Fabius seems to have won no victory except that for which he celebrated his first triumph; whereas Pericles set up nine trophies for his wars on land and sea. However, no such exploit is recorded of Pericles as that by which Fabius snatched Minucius from the hands of Hannibal and preserved an entire Roman army” (*Per.-Fab.* 2.1-2).<sup>229</sup> Plutarch here addresses both quantity and quality of victories: Pericles had many more victories than Fabius did, but Fabius had a more impressive victory than any of Pericles'. Taken on its own, Plutarch's comparison of the quantity and quality of military victories in the *synkrisis* of the *Pericles-Fabius Maximus* appears rather balanced and straightforward. The “winner” of each category is clear, and on the surface this comparison seems as balanced as that seen above in the *Pelopidas-Marcellus*. When examined in the context of a close reading of the associated Lives, however, Plutarch's implicit judgment of the two men's generalship becomes far more decisive. For one, while comparing the number of victories the two men fought Plutarch only considers “pitched battles”, those fought ἐκ παρατάξεως. Therefore, interestingly, the battle in which Fabius saved Minucius is not the single victory that Plutarch compares against Pericles' nine. Rather, the battle for

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<sup>229</sup> ἐκ δὲ παρατάξεως Φάβιος οὐ φαίνεται μάχη νενικηκώς, πλὴν ἀφ' ἧς τὸν πρότερον εἰσήλασε θρίαμβον, Περικλῆς δ' ἑννέα τρόπαια κατὰ γῆν καὶ κατὰ θάλατταν ἔστησεν ἀπὸ τῶν πολεμίων. οὐ μὴν λέγεται τοιαύτη πρᾶξις Περικλέους οἷαν ἔπραξε Φάβιος Μινούκιον ἐξαρπάσας Ἀννίβου καὶ διασώσας ἐντελὲς στρατόπεδον Ῥωμαίων (*Per.-Fab.* 2.1-2).

which he celebrated his first triumph was fought against the Ligurians in his first consulship, which Plutarch describes in a single sentence before narrating the arrival of Hannibal into Italy (*Per.* 2.1). The battle in which Fabius saved Minucius was a large battle by any standards, as the two generals had four legions between them (*Fab.* 10), but as Plutarch describes it, the battle was not fought ἐκ παρατάξεως. Instead, Hannibal had initially led Minucius into a devastating ambush, and when he saw what had befallen his colleague Fabius had quickly marched his troops straight from camp to the battle and so turned defeat into victory (*Fab.* 11-12). Since this action began organically rather than by a mutual agreement as pitched battles typically did, Plutarch clearly considered it to be of a different sort than the majority of those fought by Pericles. That Plutarch can make such a technical distinction between types of battles speaks to his familiarity with military narrative, but it also demonstrates Plutarch's tendency to be selective in his characterization of his subjects: by only comparing Pericles and Fabius in their battles fought ἐκ παρατάξεως, he knowingly omits the many skirmishes and ambushes that characterized Fabius' campaigns against Hannibal. This in turn contributes to the *synkrisis* clearly favoring Pericles' generalship, as we shall see later.<sup>230</sup>

Furthermore, after praising Fabius' single victory, Plutarch lessens its impact by stating that Pericles likewise never had such a defeat as Fabius did when he was tricked by Hannibal's stratagem with the oxen (*Per.-Fab.* 2.2). In this instance, Fabius had managed to trap Hannibal's army in a narrow defile by occupying the only exits with his

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<sup>230</sup> For Plutarch's comparison of Pericles and Fabius Maximus across the entire pair, see Stadter (1975). Stadter (1989) provides the best commentary on the *Pericles* itself, while Xenophon (2012) is an excellent source for Plutarch's treatment of Fabius' generalship in the *Life*.

infantry without Hannibal noticing. Once Hannibal had realized the perilousness of his situation, however, he ordered his troops to tie torches to the horns of 2,000 captured cattle and drive them at the Roman positions in the middle of the night. The Roman sentries who saw this thought that they were being attacked by an entire army and fled, and Fabius, fearing an ambush in the night, hesitated long enough that Hannibal was able to gain the high ground almost unopposed and thus escape from a very serious plight. Plutarch says that Fabius suffered much scorn after this defeat, specifically because in trying to defeat Hannibal through judgment and foresight he instead was completely out-generaled (*Fab.* 6.1-7.2). What Plutarch leaves unsaid, but what would not be lost on most of his readers, is that this particular failure of Fabius' cost Rome its best chance of defeating Hannibal early in the war. In contrast to the *synkrisis* of the *Pelopidas-Marcus*, then, Plutarch's comparison of the quantity and quality of victories in the *Pericles-Fabius Maximus* is neither simple nor balanced. Plutarch's decision to only compare number of victories in pitched battles rather than all military engagements subtly tips the balance of generalship in favor of Pericles by ignoring Fabius' successful skirmishes against Hannibal. Moreover, Plutarch immediately counters any impact of Fabius' more impressive victory with his mention of his more humiliating defeat. By his subtle manipulation of details, then, Plutarch leads his readers to see Pericles as both a more prolific and a more consistent general.<sup>231</sup>

The comparison of the quality of a general's victories is unavoidably far more

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<sup>231</sup> We have already examined many examples of Plutarch's manipulation of details to support his own conclusions about generalship throughout Chapters 1 and 2. For more on this practice in Plutarch's Lives more completely, see Pelling (1980); Larmour (1992).

subjective than the comparison of quantity, and this ambiguity is often compounded when Plutarch compares generals from different cultures and time periods. The same *synkrisis* of Pelopidas and Marcellus from which we started appears to demonstrate the internal struggle Plutarch could face when comparing military leadership:

καὶ μὴν οὗτος μὲν εἶλε Συρακούσας, ἐκεῖνος δὲ τῆς Λακεδαιμόνος ἀπέτυχεν. ἀλλ' οἶμαι μεῖζον εἶναι τοῦ καταλαβεῖν Σικελίαν τὸ τῆ Σπάρτη προσελθεῖν καὶ διαβῆναι πρῶτον ἀνθρώπων πολέμῳ τὸν Εὐρώταν, εἰ μὴ νῆ Δία τοῦτο μὲν φήσει τις τὸ ἔργον Ἐπαμεινώνδα μᾶλλον ἢ Πελοπίδα προσήκειν, ὥσπερ καὶ τὰ Λεῦκτρα, τῶνδὲ Μαρκέλλῳ διαπεπραγμένων ἀκοινώνητον εἶναι τὴν δόξαν (*Pel.-Marc.* 2.1-2).

[Marcellus], it is true, took Syracuse, while [Pelopidas] failed to take Sparta. But I think to have reached Sparta, and to have been the first of men to cross the Eurotas in war, was a greater achievement than the conquest of Sicily; unless, indeed, it should be said that this deed belongs rather to Epaminondas than to Pelopidas, as well as the victory at Leuctra, while Marcellus did not share the glory of his accomplishments.

This passage brings up the two other major aspects of generalship that Plutarch examines. The first is the comparison of a general's enemies. Plutarch here compares 4<sup>th</sup> century Sparta with 3<sup>rd</sup> century Sicily, and believes that Pelopidas' successes against Sparta, even though he failed to take the city itself, were more impressive than Marcellus' defeat of Syracuse and subjugation of Sicily. For Plutarch, then, Sparta was a more dangerous enemy than Syracuse and Sicily, but he gives no evidence to back up his opinion. Like so often in the *synkrisis*, he leaves it to his readers to develop their own conclusions based on their own background knowledge of the subject.

The second aspect of generalship that this passage considers is agency:

Pelopidas' exploits against Sparta are meaningless if Epaminondas was in fact primarily responsible. Unlike his belief in the strength of Sparta over Syracuse, Plutarch's opinion on Pelopidas' contribution to the battle of Leuctra is unclear in both the *synkrisis* and the

Life itself.<sup>232</sup> Compounding the difficulty is Plutarch's statement in the previous chapter that Pelopidas' defeat of the Lacadaemonians at Tegyra and Leuctra is “certain” (*Pel.-Marc.* 1.7). If Pelopidas' victories are certain, why call his contribution into question a few sentences later? There appears to be no easy answer to this question, and inconsistencies such as this are one of the reasons scholars have been so troubled by the *synkriseis*. It could simply be a symptom of Plutarch's desire for a balanced portrayal – he may have considered his praise of Pelopidas' successes against Sparta too strong of a point on which to end the comparison of two generals he believed equal to one another, and so introduced the possibility of doubt in order to re-balance the *synkrisis*.<sup>233</sup> While the question of responsibility serves to balance the comparison of Pelopidas' and Marcellus' generalship, Plutarch uses the theme to a more conclusive effect in many other *synkriseis*, and we shall examine it in more depth after returning to Plutarch's comparisons of antagonists.

Just as Plutarch believed that the Sparta of Pelopidas' time was greater than Sicily in Marcellus', he had clear opinions on the relative strengths of other adversaries as well. In the *Cimon-Lucullus*, for instance, Plutarch claims that Cimon's achievements

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<sup>232</sup> Plutarch highlights Pelopidas' boldness in blocking a Spartan flanking attempt during the battle of Leuctra, and says that he gained as much glory for the victory as Epaminondas, who was in command (*Pel.* 23). Both were *boeotarchs* after the battle and both voted to cross the Eurotas and take the war to Sparta (*Pel.* 24.1-2), but Plutarch does not assign either man ultimate responsibility for the Theban successes. See Georgiadou (1997), 32-37 for the *synkrisis* of the *Pelopidas-Marcellus*, and a discussion of Plutarch's uncertainty concerning Pelopidas' agency. Despite the impact that this uncertainty has on Plutarch's judgment of his generalship, she suggests that Lucullus appears better in comparison to Marcellus because of his internal *synkriseis* with Epimanondas.

<sup>233</sup> The closest parallel to this is the end of the *Coriolanus-Alcibiades*. Plutarch spends nearly the entire *synkrisis* praising Alcibiades at the expense of Coriolanus, but concludes the final sentence by declaring that all the rest of Coriolanus' attributes were brilliant and far exceeded Alcibiades. See Duff (1999), 281-3 for more on this *synkrisis*.



are less impressive because the Persians of his time had already been humbled by Greek victories at Salamis and Plataea, whereas Lucullus defeated Mithridates and Tigranes when they were at their height (*Cim.-Luc.* 3.5). When the issue of agency is not in doubt, as it was in the case of Pelopidas and Marcellus, Plutarch finds the strength of a general's opposition to be an effective method of comparison. Similar comparisons occur in the *Lysander-Sulla*, *Agesilaus-Pompey*, and *Timoleon-Aemilianus*, and in each case Plutarch finds that the Roman fought against superior opponents. The *Lysander-Sulla* gives Plutarch's most vivid portrayal of the matter:

τρυφήν γὰρ οἶμαι καὶ παιδιὰν πρὸς Ἀντίοχον διανουμαχεῖν τὸν Ἀλκιβιάδου κυβερνήτην, καὶ Φιλοκλέα τὸν Ἀθηναίων ἐξαπατᾶν δημαγωγόν, Ἰδοξον, ἄκραν γλῶσσαν ἠκονημένον· οὐς οὐκ ἂν ἵπποκόμῳ Μιθριδάτης οὐδὲ ῥαβδούχῳ Μάριος ἠξίωσε παραβαλεῖν τῶν ἑαυτοῦ (*Lys.-Sulla* 4.4).

For I think it is the merest child's play to win a sea-fight against Antiochus, Alcibiades' pilot, and to deceive Philocles, the Athenian demagogue, 'Inglorious one, who provokes with a sharp tongue', such men as these Mithridates would not have though fit to compare with his groom, nor Marius with his lictor.

It is no surprise that the scale of wars between the Classical Greek *poleis* cannot compare to that of wars fought by Roman generals at the height of the Republic, and Plutarch readily acknowledges the military strength of the later states. At the same time, Plutarch places less significance in pure numbers than one might expect from an author without a military background. For example, Plutarch claims that while Pompey was far superior to Agesilaus in terms of number of victories and scale of battles, Pompey's abandoning of Rome to Caesar and his many blunders at Pharsalia make him inferior to Agesilaus in actual generalship (*Age.-Pomp.* 3-4). For all that Plutarch praises the scale and scope of Pompey's earlier campaigns, he is just as ready to see Pompey's failings as

a general during the civil war with Caesar. Duff, then, seems to overreach when he says that Plutarch generally favors the Roman leader for generalship because his campaigns were on a larger scale.<sup>234</sup> We will examine later whether Plutarch prefers Greek or Roman generalship more often, but Plutarch's evaluation of a leader's military abilities did not solely depend on the scale or strength of his opponents.

Related to the comparison of the relative strengths of generals' antagonists is the question of agency and responsibility for success. This is a common theme in the *synkriseis*, and one that Plutarch often addresses outside of a military context as well. In the *Pericles-Fabius Maximus*, for example, Plutarch claims that Pericles owed some of his successes to good fortune because he was in charge at the height of Athens' power and benefited from the actions of its earlier leaders, while Fabius took charge of Rome as it was beset by disaster and raised the city back up again (*Per.-Fab.* 1.1-3). Similarly, Plutarch opens the *synkrisis* of Demetrius and Antony with praise for the Roman, because while Demetrius acquired power and fame directly from his father, Antony achieved his through his own successes (*Dem.-Ant.* 1.1-3).<sup>235</sup> For Plutarch, personal responsibility is important. He does not begrudge anyone good fortune, but he is much more ready to praise the man who did not have advantages bestowed by birth.<sup>236</sup> In terms of military leadership, these advantages normally came from the army a general had available to him. In the *Philopoemen-Flaminius*, Plutarch says that Flaminius was

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<sup>234</sup> Duff (1999), 269 n.98.

<sup>235</sup> Cf. *Thes.-Rom.* 4.1-2; *Aris.-Cato* 1.1; *Ag./Cleom.-Gracchi* 1.1-2; for other instances of the theme in a non-military context.

<sup>236</sup> See in particular Swain (1989c).

able to make use of Rome's growing strength while on campaign, whereas Philopoemen's Greek cities were fully in decline (*Phil.-Flam.* 2.1). Therefore, “the one [Flaminius] commanded good soldiers, but the other [Philopoemen], as commander, made his soldiers good” (*Phil.-Flam.* 2.1). Moreover, Flaminius won victories with the established armor and tactics of the Roman army, while Philopoemen had to reform these aspects of his army to be effective, “so that in the one case what was most essential for victory did not exist and had to be discovered, while in the other it lay ready for service” (*Phil.-Flam.* 2.3). Plutarch is rarely so pithy in his judgments, but the clear vision in his mind between the resources each general had at his disposal makes the comparison rather lopsided for him. This method of comparison also allows Plutarch to comment indirectly on other aspects of generalship, such as Philopoemen's ability to train his troops and introduce military innovations.<sup>237</sup>

The other aspect of this theme relates more to personal responsibility rather than fortune of birth. We have seen this already in the *Pelopidas-Marcellus* when Plutarch introduces doubt in Pelopidas' responsibility for the Theban victories over the Spartans, and it appears in other *synkriseis* as well. In the *Aristides-Cato Major*, Plutarch maintains that Aristides was not the first man in any of the battles he was involved in, whereas Cato was primarily responsible for his two victories in Spain and at Thermopylae (*Aris.-Cato* 2.1-3). There is no question in Plutarch's mind about their roles in their respective victories, and this judgment follows Plutarch's descriptions of the battles in the Lives themselves. The same criterion appears in the *Demetrius-Antony*:

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<sup>237</sup> Cf. *Tim.-Aem.* 1.-2 for a similar comparison on the quality of troops.

“And again, Demetrius was himself the author of his successes; Antony, on the contrary, won his greatest and fairest victories through his generals, on fields where he was not present” (*Dem.-Ant.* 5.5).<sup>238</sup> This comparison of the two generals appears to lack strength because of its brevity, especially when compared to the *Aristides-Cato Major*, which specifically mentions the battles in question, but it is in fact consistent with the *Lives*.<sup>239</sup> Thus Plutarch is sensitive to a general's responsibility for success on several levels: not only does he consider advantages a general gained from fortunate birth, but he also takes into account how responsible a leader was for the victories he was associated with.

For all of the potential difficulties of comparing generals across time and culture, Plutarch approaches his judgments from a variety of angles. Plutarch's method of counting victories may be a bit simplistic at times, but his comparisons of antagonists and his judgments of fortune and responsibility can show considerable depth, and often contain analyses of other more specialized aspects of generalship. It is difficult, then, not to disagree with Alan Wardman, who took Plutarch's disparagement of Marcellus' campaigns in Sicily as symptomatic of the author's lack of enthusiasm for the general's art.<sup>240</sup> The quality of Plutarch's military analysis notwithstanding, it is clear from the previous examples that Plutarch had more than a passing interest in generalship. He could very easily have condensed judgment of each pair's military careers into a single

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<sup>238</sup> πάλιν δὲ τῶν μὲν κατορθωμάτων αὐτουργὸς ὁ Δημήτριος γέγονε, καὶ τοῦναντίον ὁ Ἀντώνιος ἐν οἷς οὐ παρῆν καλλίστας καὶ μεγίστας διὰ τῶν στρατηγῶν ἀνηρεῖτο νίκας (*Dem.-Ant.* 5.5).

<sup>239</sup> *Ant.* 34.5-6. This is actually the only direct comparison of military leadership in the *synkrisis* of Demetrius and Antony, which is surprising given the fame of both men as generals. This is likely due to the focus of this pair on the moral character of the two, though the *synkrisis* as a whole is troublesome. See Duff (1999), 278-81. See below, pp. 160-167.

<sup>240</sup> Wardman (1974), 239.

sentence, as he does in the *Demetrius-Antony*; instead, as we have seen, he often devotes significant space to comparing military leadership across several different criteria.

After examining many of the specific aspects of generalship that Plutarch addresses in the *synkriseis*, it should come as no surprise that Plutarch does not always declare a particular subject to be a superior general. We have seen that Plutarch seeks equality in his discussions of generalship just as he does with non-military themes; his back-and-forth in the *Pelopidas-Marcellus* is a clear example, and the *Coriolanus-Alcibiades*, *Agesilaus-Pompey*, and *Timoleon-Aemilianus* show similar attempts at balance.<sup>241</sup> In some instances, however, Plutarch does indeed pass clear judgment on who he felt to be the better general. As discussed above, Plutarch declares Sulla to be both a better general and more brave than Lysander (*Lys.-Sulla* 5.5), and judges Philopoemen to “win the crown for military experience and generalship” over Flamininus (*Phil.-Flam.* 3.3). This sort of final decision is rare in the *synkriseis*; the only comparable endings occur in the *Nicias-Crassus*, *Coriolanus-Alcibiades*, and *Agis/Cleomenes-Gracchi*, but none of those contain judgments about military superiority.<sup>242</sup> In theory, these explicit final judgments on generalship could help to define Plutarch’s opinions on particular aspects of military leadership, particularly in those instances where Plutarch’s implicit judgments are less clear. Unfortunately, however, the two *synkriseis* which end with clear statements of military superiority are

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<sup>241</sup> *Pel.-Marc.* 1.2-3, 2.1-2; *Cor.-Alc.* 1.1-2; *Age.-Pomp.* 3.1-5; *Tim.-Aem.* 1.1-2. Plutarch shows the most balanced evaluation of generalship in the *Pelopidas-Marcellus*. In the *Agesilaus-Pompey* and *Timoleon-Aemilianus*, he praises each general in turn for different abilities, but in both cases finds one general to be superior to the other.

<sup>242</sup> *Nic.-Cras.* 5.2; *Cor.-Alc.* 5.2; *Ag./Cleom.-Gracchi* 5.6.

also two of the least troublesome comparisons that we have. There is no question in the *synkrisis* itself whom Plutarch favors as the better general, and so his explicit judgment in favor of Sulla's military leadership at the end of the *synkrisis* is unsurprising.<sup>243</sup> Similarly, Plutarch finds in favor of Philopoemen over Flamininus in every comparison of their generalship in the *synkrisis*, so his final evaluation only confirms his opinion on the military leadership of the two men. Timothy Duff suggests that these final judgments in the *synkriseis*, particularly in the case of the *Lysander-Sulla*, can be interpreted as providing pleasing complexity to the end of a pair by suggesting that neither subject should be seen to excel in every category of statesmanship.<sup>244</sup> Such an interpretation of the final judgments as a whole is certainly valid, but is surely not the case when one looks specifically at the judgments on military leadership; these instead provide pleasing closure by confirming and reinforcing Plutarch's evaluation earlier in the *synkrisis*.

Because Plutarch only explicitly passes a final judgment on the generalship of his subjects in the *Lysander-Sulla* and the *Philopoemen-Flamininus*, it is necessary to look elsewhere in the *synkriseis* to determine which skills or attributes Plutarch considered important for a military leader. Fortunately, in several *synkriseis* Plutarch indeed explains his opinion on various aspects of generalship. An example of this, albeit

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<sup>243</sup> Duff disagrees, instead calling this final judgment in favour of Philopoemen's generalship "crude and surprising", because he finds it paradoxical that the Greek Philopoemen is judged superior to the Roman general who conquered Greece (1999, 269). This observation, however, fails to take into account the actual military actions of these two men, treating them instead as inseparable from their native cities. Indeed, one of Plutarch's greatest praises of Philopoemen's generalship, as we have seen, is that he was able to accomplish what he did with only the limited resources of the Achaean League at his disposal (*Phil.-Flam.* 2.1). That being the case, that Plutarch believes Philopoemen to be the better general should be in no way surprising.

<sup>244</sup> Duff (1999), 204-5; 267-269. For more on the *synkrisis* to the *Philopoemen-Flamininus* (and the entire pair), see Pelling (1997).

a short one, can be found in the *Timoleon-Aemilianus*. After suggesting that it is possible to find in favor of Aemilius' military accomplishments because his main opponent Perseus was at the height of his power while Timoleon's main opponent Dionysius was at his weakest, Plutarch attempts to balance out the comparison by considering the resources of the two men. While Aemilius had experienced and disciplined soldiers, he argues, Timoleon found success with disorderly mercenaries, and "when equal successes follow on unequal equipment, the greater credit accrues to the commander" (*Tim.-Aem.* 1.2). This is the same concept that underpins Plutarch's comparison of Philopoemen and Flamininus, in which Plutarch praises Philopoemen's generalship because he accomplished what he did without the use of trained Roman legions.<sup>245</sup> This is hardly the most groundbreaking insight, yet it shows that Plutarch was willing to make broad statements about generalship that could be applied beyond a particular *synkrisis*. That is not to say that what Plutarch says in one *synkrisis* should be blindly applied to his other works; the *synkriseis* are, after all, rhetorical pieces first and foremost. Nevertheless, these parallels do show that Plutarch's conceptions of what make a good general are consistent across several different *synkriseis*.

The *Timoleon-Aemilianus* is not the only *synkrisis* in which Plutarch comments on a specific aspect of generalship. In the *Pericles-Fabius Maximus*, Plutarch passes judgment on the foresight of the two leaders: "And if it is the part of a good general not only to improve the present, but also to judge correctly of the future, then Pericles was such a general, for the war which the Athenians were waging came to an end as he had

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<sup>245</sup> *Phil.-Flam.* 2.1. See p. 148.

foreknown and foretold” (*Per.-Fab.* 2.3).<sup>246</sup> Once again, Plutarch's focus here goes beyond the scope of this particular pair of leaders and describes the “good general”. He is not only comparing Pericles and Fabius against each other, but also against an idealized leader who demonstrates foresight, a trait which Plutarch clearly associates with good generalship. Unfortunately, foresight is not a particularly common theme in the *synkriseis*; the other general who was equally known for his foresight was Themistocles, but the *Themistocles-Camillus* lacks a *synkrisis* that might allow a comparison with the *Pericles-Fabius Maximus*. Nevertheless, this pronouncement, like the one in the *Timoleon-Aemilianus*, gives just as clear a picture of Plutarch's verdict on the particular pairs as his final summaries in the *Lysander-Sulla and Philopoemen-Flaminius*. Moreover, Plutarch’s high opinion of foresight in military leaders parallels his preference for the thoughtful and considered generalship, as seen in Chapter 1.

Plutarch makes similar broad statements of generalship in two other pairs, the *Agesilaus-Pompey* and the *Cimon-Lucullus*. As mentioned earlier, despite the greater scale of Pompey's victories, Plutarch finds Agesilaus to be a better general, almost entirely because of Pompey's actions during the civil war.<sup>247</sup> The first point in Agesilaus' favor is that he did not abandon Sparta to the Theban army after Leuctra, while Pompey gave up Rome to Caesar's small army without a fight (*Age.-Pomp.* 3.3-4). Plutarch follows that comparison with a strong statement about generalship: “Therefore the most

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<sup>246</sup> εἰ δὲ δεῖ μὴ μόνον χρῆσθαι τοῖς παροῦσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τεκμαίρεσθαι περὶ τοῦ μέλλοντος ὀρθῶς τὸν ἀγαθὸν στρατηγόν, Ἀθηναίους μὲν ὡς Περικλῆς προέγνω καὶ προεῖπεν ἐτελεύτησεν ὁ πόλεμος (*Per.-Fab.* 2.3).

<sup>247</sup> See Hillman (1994); Duff (1999), 275-278 for the *synkrisis* to the *Agesilaus-Pompey*.



important job of a good general is to force his enemies to fight when he is superior, but not to be forced to fight when he is inferior in power” (*Age.-Pomp.* 4.1).<sup>248</sup> Agesilaus did this, Plutarch says, and so should be considered a “good general”, but Pompey did not, and forced the battle of Pharsalia on land, where his forces were inferior to Caesar's (*Age.-Pomp.* 4.1). To drive home his judgment of Agesilaus' superiority, Plutarch further condemns Pompey for succumbing to the agitation of his bad advisers rather than following his own instincts (*Age.-Pomp.* 4.2-3).

Plutarch's comment on generalship in the *Cimon-Lucullus* seems less like an axiom of good generalship and more like a clever way to sum up an argument, but still bears repeating for its indication of Plutarch's opinion on this particular pair. Plutarch's main argument is that Lucullus did significantly more damage to the Persians than Cimon, because while after Cimon's death the Persians were able to stem the tide of Greek victories against them, after Lucullus' victories against Mithridates and Tigranes neither ruler even attempted to fight Pompey (*Cim.-Luc.* 3.1-4). “Therefore”, Plutarch says, “greater is the general, as is the athlete, who hands over his antagonist to his successor in a weaker plight” (*Cim.-Luc.* 3.3).<sup>249</sup> Like Plutarch's other pronouncements on generalship, there is nothing in the statement to suggest that Plutarch held a particularly nuanced knowledge of military leadership. However, these comments do serve to demonstrate that Plutarch believed not only that generalship could be qualified

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<sup>248</sup> Ὁ τοίνυν ἔργον ἐστὶν ἀγαθοῦ στρατηγοῦ μάλιστα, κρείττονα μὲν ὄντα βιάσασθαι τοὺς πολεμίους μάχεσθαι, λειπόμενον δὲ δυνάμει μὴ βιασθῆναι (*Age.-Pomp.* 4.1).

<sup>249</sup> μείζων οὖν στρατηγὸς ὥσπερ ἀθλητῆς ὁ τῷ μεθ' ἐαυτὸν ἀσθενέστερον παραδοὺς τὸν ἀντίπαλον (*Cim.-Luc.* 3.3).

in certain ways, but also that one could identify a good general based on his actions. His praise of Lucullus in the *synkrisis* is consistent with his positive portrayal of Lucullus' victories over Mithridates and Tigranes in the *Life* itself.<sup>250</sup>

In most of the other pairs, Plutarch's preference for the generalship of one leader over the other is equally clear, primarily because he only judges the pair on one aspect of military leadership. Plutarch finds Alcibiades more effective than Coriolanus because he won several sea battles (*Cor.-Alc.* 1.1-2); he judges Dion to be a superior general to Brutus because of better planning (*Dion-Brut.* 3.1-2); Demetrius was more responsible for his victories than Antony (*Dem.-Ant.* 5.5); Publicola had a greater series of victories than Solon (*Sol.-Pub.* 4.1); and Cleomenes is the only leader out of the four in his pair whom Plutarch credits with achieving military victories as a general (*Ag./Cleom.-Gracchi* 3.2). Plutarch compares a few different aspects of the generalship of Sertorius and Eumenes, but they all revolve around Eumenes having fewer resources and more hardships than Sertorius, so the Greek appears to be the stronger general (*Ser.-Eum.* 1.1-3).

It is more difficult to determine Plutarch's preference in the three remaining pairs, however, and to attempt to do so we must apply Plutarch's judgments from his more straightforward *synkriseis*. We have seen that Plutarch believes Cato to be solely responsible for his successes, while Aristides was only one of many generals in his victories against the Persians. In the second half of the *synkrisis*, however, Plutarch praises Aristides because he was involved in some of the most important victories of the

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<sup>250</sup> See above, pp. 41-47.

Greek cities, whereas Cato's victories gained little for Rome (*Aris.-Cato* 5.1). Plutarch makes no other comment on the generalship of the two men, and so on the surface ends the *synkrisis* with a point in each man's favor. The emphasis Plutarch places on being responsible for one's victories in other *synkrisis*, such as the *Timoleon-Aemilianus* and *Lysander-Sulla*, appears to tip the scales in favor of Cato, however, despite the significance of the Persian Wars. The *Nicias-Crassus* is a more difficult case. Plutarch thinks poorly of Nicias for giving up command against the Lacadaemonians to Cleon, but to an extent forgives Crassus' rashness against Spartacus (*Nic.-Cras.* 3.1-2). On the other hand, Plutarch praises Nicias' foresight in predicting his failure at Sicily, condemns Crassus for completely underestimating the Parthians (*Nic.-Cras.* 4.1-2), and thinks that Nicias deserves significantly more credit for his actions on Sicily than Crassus does for his in Parthia (*Nic.-Cras.* 5.1). Once again Plutarch makes points for both men in turn, and comes to no clear consensus. Plutarch does show Nicias, however, as possessing the foresight of the “good general” that he describes in the *Pericles-Fabius Maximus*, in stark contrast to Crassus' complete failure to show the same trait, so in this case Plutarch's preference appears to be with the Greek.

This returns us to the *synkrisis* of Pelopidas and Marcellus. Plutarch's full treatment of the two leaders' generalship is more than twice the length of the two passages quoted earlier, so a summary of all the arguments he makes will help to put his points in order. Firstly, Marcellus routed a much larger number with a small number of horsemen, while Pelopidas failed in a similar battle and paid with his life (*Pel.-Marc.* 1.2); Pelopidas' victories at Tegyra and Leuctra can be compared with Marcellus'

victory, and Marcellus accomplished nothing by stealth or cunning to match Pelopidas' slaying of the tyrants of Thebes (*Pel.-Marc.* 1.3); Hannibal was a great adversary of the Romans, but so was Sparta for the Thebans (*Pel.-Marc.* 1.4); Pelopidas' victories at Tegyra and Leuctra are fact, but Polybius says that Marcellus never actually defeated Hannibal in battle (*Pel.-Marc.* 1.4); Plutarch agrees with many other authors that Marcellus achieved many small victories against Hannibal, even though they had little effect on the outcome of the war (*Pel.-Marc.* 1.5); Marcellus gave the Romans the courage to stand up to Hannibal and keep fighting despite their many defeats (*Pel.-Marc.* 1.6-7); Pelopidas never lost a battle and Marcellus won more victories, and this makes them equal (*Pel.-Marc.* 2.1); Pelopidas failed to take Sparta, but Marcellus captured Syracuse (*Pel.-Marc.* 2.1); failing to take Sparta is more impressive than capturing Sicily, unless Epaminondas deserves credit for the Theban victories, because Marcellus took Syracuse, defeated the Gauls, and stood up to Hannibal all on his own (*Pel.-Marc.* 2.2). Plutarch's comparison of military leadership in this *synkrisis* is likely more convoluted than that in any other. A few, such as the *Lysander-Sulla* or *Agesilaus-Pompey*, are longer, but neither of those addresses as many different aspects of generalship, or alternates which man is favored so often as this one. The difficulty in choosing the superior general should not lead the reader to trust too much in Plutarch's statement of their equality in victories at *Pel.-Marc.* 2.1; rather, one should apply that balance only to that particular aspect of their generalship. Plutarch does not always explicitly name the superior general, but it has been possible to determine one in all of the other *synkriseis*, so there is no reason to suppose that Plutarch would not expect his

readers to also pass judgment on one of these men. The equality at *Pel.-Marc.* 2.1 just means that the comparison will not hinge on Pelopidas' invincibility or Marcellus' greater number of victories, but on a different aspect of their generalship. Which aspect that is, in this case, will be up to the individual reader; Plutarch has provided many options, but the decision will likely come down to the final point. If the reader agrees with Plutarch's estimation of the strengths of Sparta and Sicily he will likely judge Pelopidas to be the better general; if, however, the reader disagrees with that, or believes that Epaminondas was the one truly responsible for the Theban victories, he will favor Marcellus. The decision could go either way, but it seems more convincing to find in favor of Marcellus. Plutarch introduces doubt in the final point about Pelopidas' responsibility for the battle at Leuctra, which invites the reader to think back about the preceding Life. Plutarch praises Pelopidas' role in the battle, but does not deny in the end that it was Epaminondas who was the commanding general and responsible for the plan that led to Theban victory (*Pel.* 23). Moreover, given Plutarch's positive feelings about Epaminondas, it is likely that he would agree with giving him more credit for the Theban victories. In the end, as we have seen throughout the *synkriseis*, Plutarch values personal responsibility for victories quite highly when comparing two generals, and if Marcellus won his greatest victories on his own then he should be considered to be a greater general.

Plutarch wrote his *synkriseis* in order that his reader would compare the subjects from the preceding Lives and determine who was more praiseworthy in a variety of subjects. The man whom Plutarch favors – and would expect his reader to favor – in any

particular aspect is not always readily apparent, but by applying Plutarch's judgments from the more straightforward *synkriseis* we have been able to identify the better general in every *synkrisis* which discusses military leadership. It is safe to say that Plutarch judges the Greek general superior to his Roman counterpart in two-thirds of the *synkriseis*: Pericles, Nicias, Alcibiades, Agesilaus, Dion, Timoleon, Eumenes, Demetrius, Cleomenes, and Philopoemen are the superior Greeks, while Publicola, Cato, Lucullus, Sulla, and Marcellus are the praiseworthy Romans. It is of course unlikely that Plutarch meant this discrepancy as a larger commentary that Greeks made better generals than Romans.<sup>251</sup> Just as he considers each theme in the *synkriseis* and each aspect of generalship separately, he likely considered each pair to stand on its own, even if it was composed at the same time as others.<sup>252</sup> Given the rhetorical nature of the *synkriseis*, attempting to discern Plutarch's judgments about military leadership in them is an appropriate task, and one that has illustrated many parallels between the *synkriseis* and the military narratives in the Lives themselves. That being said, it is important not to read too much into which man Plutarch judges more highly in any particular *synkrisis*. Just because Plutarch may rate one general lower than another in the pair in no way means that his generalship was not worthy of praise, study, or imitation. Many of the criteria Plutarch uses to compare generals, as we have seen, are quite subjective, and in nearly all circumstances are ultimately down to interpretation. The act of forming judgments from the *synkriseis*, in my opinion, is important for its own sake, because it

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<sup>251</sup> For the *Parallel Lives* as a form of cultural resistance: Duff (1999), 301-309; Whitmarsh (2001), 117 ff.; Goldhill (2002), 254 ff.

<sup>252</sup> Pelling (2002), 1-44, argues convincingly that Plutarch wrote most of the Civil War Lives concurrently.

compels the reader to re-evaluate his own views on generalship. This self-reflection, in turn, improves the reader's own understanding of the subject.

### **The Unity of the Lives and *Synkriseis***

The *synkriseis*, however, and the judgments within them, do not stand on their own. In an extensive recent article, Timothy Duff argues for the unity of the Plutarchan "book", and that the prologue, Lives, and *synkrisis*, although clearly distinct units, should be read together as a whole.<sup>253</sup> This encompasses both a structural unity and a thematic one. The *Theseus-Romulus* is widely recognized as the best example of this thematic unity: Plutarch lists six reasons for comparing the two leaders in the prologue, addresses those parallels within the two Lives, and then directly compares Theseus and Romulus according to five of those six themes in the *synkrisis*.<sup>254</sup> The *synkrisis* of the *Theseus-Romulus* is rare for following the themes of its prologue and narrative so precisely, and Larmour attributes the close thematic unity of the pair to Plutarch feeling less constrained by a need for historical accuracy.<sup>255</sup> Most pairs, however, while not as polished and precise as the *Theseus-Romulus*, demonstrate at least some consistency between *synkrisis* and Lives. We have examined the potential that *synkriseis* provide by their focus on comparison and judgment, but have at the same time seen the difficulties of gaining much insight into Plutarch's understanding of generalship from the limited format of the *synkriseis* alone. Some of the judgments of military leadership in the

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<sup>253</sup> Duff (2011).

<sup>254</sup> See Wardman (1974), 238; Larmour (1988); Duff (1999), 258; Duff (2010), 239-40, 254; for more discussion of the *Theseus-Romulus*.

<sup>255</sup> Larmour (1988), 361-2.

*synkriseis* are based on so little that it is not unreasonable to question how well those judgments follow from the details in the preceding Lives. It is worthwhile to investigate, then, whether the thematic unity of the Plutarchan book that Duff proposes is equally valid for Plutarch's depiction of generalship. In the remainder of this chapter I intend to examine one of Plutarch's more limited comparisons of generalship in the *synkriseis* alongside the Lives which it follows and assess the consistency of Plutarch's depiction of generalship across the books as a whole.

My focus in this section is on the *Demetrius-Antony*, which contains one of the briefest comparisons of military careers in the *synkriseis*. We have already seen that there is some level of consistency between Plutarch's judgment in the *synkrisis* and the Lives: Plutarch names Demetrius the better general in the *synkrisis* because he was more responsible for his victories than Antony (*Dem.-Ant.* 5.2), and Plutarch declares that “it was generally said of Antony” that he won his best successes through the agency of his generals in Antony's *Life* (*Ant.* 34.5-6). This agreement between Life and *synkrisis* is encouraging, but does little to change the appearance that Plutarch bases his entire comparison of the generalship of these two men on a single sentence from the one of the Lives.<sup>256</sup> The lack of detail about generalship in the *synkrisis*, however, appears to belie the treatment of the subject in the Lives themselves. In the *Demetrius*, Plutarch portrays the military career of the Macedonian king as a turbulent one. His first taste of command

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<sup>256</sup> This is not the only instance where Plutarch assigns a surprising amount of importance in the *synkrisis* to a brief point in one of the preceding Lives. Plutarch glosses over Fabius' single *παρτάξεως* battle, which he compares in the *synkrisis* to Pericles' nine, in a single sentence at the beginning of Fabius' *Life* (*Fab.* 2.1); similarly, Tiberius' taking of the walls of Carthage, which Plutarch compares with Cleomenes' many victories, is in an equally obscure passage in the *Life* and does not even mention Carthage by name (*Tib.* 4.4-5).



unfortunately came against Ptolemy in Syria, and Demetrius suffered a convincing defeat; however, Plutarch says that despite his inexperience he acted like a “dignified general acquainted with reversals of fortunes” and immediately began rebuilding his army (*Dem.* 5.6).<sup>257</sup> Demetrius certainly endured several reversals in his military fortunes over the course of his career, and Plutarch balances his brief mentions of many of Demetrius’ successes with more detailed descriptions of Demetrius’ more high-profile losses, such as his failed siege of Rhodes (*Dem.* 21-22), his defeat at the battle of Issus (*Dem.* 28-29), and the loss of his entire army to the generalship of Agathocles (*Dem.* 46.3-5) and Seleucus (*Dem.* 49.1-3).

Plutarch's characterization of Demetrius' military career in the *Life* does not contradict the *synkrisis*. Demetrius was very much involved in his campaigns, to what one could easily call an excessive degree; not only did he personally take part in the assaults of cities, twice leading to severe injury, but he also led the successful yet reckless cavalry charge that led to his defeat at Ipsus. For Plutarch, Demetrius' most impressive victory was likely his defeat of Ptolemy in the naval battle off Cyprus. Plutarch describes it as a “fair and brilliant” victory (*Dem.* 17.1), and his description of the battle shows Demetrius making quick tactical decisions and leading the decisive charge. Demetrius was indeed “the author of his successes” (*Dem.-Ant.* 5.5), as well as his failures.

It is time now to turn to the *Antony*. According to Plutarch, Antony showed great promise early in his career. He took part in campaigns in Egypt as Master of Horse under

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<sup>257</sup> ἐμβριθοῦς στρατηγοῦ κεχηρμένον πραγμάτων μεταβολαῖς (*Dem.* 5.6).

Gabinus, and demonstrated “many deeds of bold and perceptive leadership” on several occasions, especially when he completely outflanked an enemy army (*Ant.* 3.9-10).<sup>258</sup>

The first time Plutarch describes Antony in command of an army is at Mutina, a battle which he lost to the combined forces of Pansa and Hirtius (*Ant.* 17). He recovered from his initial defeat as well as Demetrius, however, and managed to gain control of Lepidus' camp by subverting his soldiers (*Ant.* 18). The description of Philippi is an important one for our understanding of Antony's generalship. Plutarch initially claims that Antony was “everywhere victorious and successful” in the battle (*Ant.* 22.1). His description of the first day of the battle follows:

τῆ μὲν γε προτέρα μάχῃ Καῖσαρ ὑπὸ Βρούτου κατὰ κράτος ἠττηθείς, ἀπέβαλε τὸ στρατόπεδον καὶ μικρὸν ἔφθη τοὺς διώκοντας ὑπεκφυγών· ὡς δ' αὐτὸς ἐν τοῖς ὑπομνήμασι γέγραφε, τῶν φίλων τινὸς ὄναρ ἰδόντος ἀνεχώρησε πρὸ τῆς μάχης. Ἀντώνιος δὲ Κάσσιον ἐνίκησε· καίτοι γεγράφασιν ἔνιοι μὴ παραγενέσθαι τῇ μάχῃ τὸν Ἀντώνιον, ἀλλὰ προσγενέσθαι μετὰ τὴν μάχην ἤδη διώκουσι (*Ant.* 22.2-3).

In the earlier battle, at least, Caesar was defeated by the strength of Brutus, lost his camp, and barely escaped his pursuers by fleeing; although he himself wrote in his Memoirs that he withdrew before the battle after hearing of a friend's dream. But Antony conquered Cassius; although some have written that Antony was not present at the battle, but came up after the battle when his men were already in pursuit.

We have here a number of conflicting accounts of the battle. The first shows Antony successful and his temporary colleague utterly routed. Plutarch then cites Octavian's memoirs and other unnamed sources that place both Octavian and Antony away from the battle, which, if true, would wipe away the glory of Antony's victory and the shame of Octavian's defeat.<sup>259</sup> Plutarch does not seem to favor either of these alternate stories,

<sup>258</sup> πολλά καὶ τόλμης ἔργα καὶ προνοίας ἡγεμονικῆς ἀποδειξάμενος (*Ant.* 3.9).

<sup>259</sup> See Pelling (1988), 26 for Plutarch's use of Octavian's memoirs. As is clear in this passage, Plutarch did

however, so his primary account supports his claim of Antony's successes in the battle.<sup>260</sup> As Pelling notes, Plutarch's comment about Antony's use of his subordinates to gain successes (*Ant.* 34.5) sets up a contrast with the subsequent Parthian campaign, in which Antony plays a major role.<sup>261</sup> Antony's impressive preparations for the Parthian War (*Ant.* 35.1, 37.3, 38.2) echo Demetrius' penchant for building ships and siege engines, but Plutarch criticizes Antony's management of the campaign, blaming his haste on a desire to return to Cleopatra (*Ant.* 38.1). Despite this, however, Plutarch portrays Antony's actions during the campaign in a positive light, especially when he saved the whole army from defeat after the overzealous actions of one of his commanders (*Ant.* 42-3), and Antony was still an inspiring figure for his soldiers (*Ant.* 43.2). In his summation of the campaign, Plutarch attributes to Antony eighteen victories, and lays the reason for defeat not on Antony but on his lack of skilled horsemen to pursue the fleeing Parthians and capitalize on his successes (*Ant.* 50.1-2).

Like Demetrius, then, Antony's military career was mixed. He had his successes, both as soldier and commander, he acquitted himself well during the failed Parthian campaign, and Plutarch gives him the benefit of the doubt at Philippi. He lost at Mutina and Actium, however, and it is true that his subordinate Ventidius, who avenged Crassus in the eyes of the Romans (*Ant.* 34.2) and was the only man up to Plutarch's time to

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not seem to have been notably biased by his use of the source and does not necessarily take Octavian's version of events as fact.

<sup>260</sup> Pelling (1988), 172. Pelling notes that Plutarch presents Antony's absence as truth during his longer description of Philippi in *Brut.* 42.3, but that this slanderous account possibly derives from Livy or Messalla. Appian *BC* 4.110-12 describes Antony as being active in the fighting and responsible for the final victory.

<sup>261</sup> Pelling (1988), 212.

celebrate a triumph over the Parthians (*Ant.* 34.5), achieved much greater success against the Parthians than Antony did.<sup>262</sup> Upon closer inspection, then, the *Antony* supports Plutarch's judgment of their generalship in the *synkrisis* as much as the *Demetrius* does: Antony gained credit for many victories that he was not responsible for, while Demetrius was actively involved in all of his battles, and for Plutarch that is enough to judge in favor of Demetrius. While the Lives may support the *synkrisis*, however, the limited comparison of their generalship in the *synkrisis* is even more disappointing and surprising after reading their respective Lives. Firstly, the comparison is more a judgment of their military careers rather than their generalship itself; not being present at the battles of Ventidius, Sossius, or Canidius does not detract from Antony's actual abilities as a general, and is merely the symptom of achieving such a level of power and responsibility as he did in the last days of the Republic. Secondly, the Lives illuminate a number of additional (or alternate) ways that Plutarch might have contrasted the military abilities of the two men. That both Lives have a maritime theme is widely acknowledged, and the comparison of their experiences as naval commanders would be a straightforward one: Demetrius won his most brilliant success in his naval battle against Ptolemy near Cyprus (*Dem.* 16), whereas Antony's naval defeat at Actium spelled the end of his military fortunes (*Ant.* 64-67).<sup>263</sup> Plutarch might also have compared how each man's vices affected his military campaigns, as he makes clear

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<sup>262</sup> Plutarch also cites two more of Antony's commanders, Sossius and Canidius, for respective victories in Syria and Iberia (*Ant.* 34.6).

<sup>263</sup> See Pelling (1988), 22 on the maritime theme of the *Demetrius-Anthony*. Plutarch makes a similar comparison at *Cor.-Alc.* 1.2, where he claims that Alcibiades' successes at sea as well as on land show him to be a more well-rounded general.

statements on the subject in both Lives: Demetrius left his luxurious life behind him while on campaign (*Dem.* 19.3), but Antony let his desire to be with Cleopatra distract him from his initial management of the Parthian campaign (*Ant.* 38.1). Either one of these would have been a much more satisfying method of comparison in the *synkrisis*, building as they do on the themes of the Lives, while providing more of a comment on the actual generalship of the two men and still favoring Demetrius.

The discussion of generalship in this *synkrisis* may be disappointing, but it is not completely superfluous. Plutarch's judgment of Demetrius and Antony's military careers, as limited as it may be, still engages the reader and invites him to think back to the preceding Lives and consider other aspects of their generalship. And while Plutarch's judgment of the two seems to be based on their careers rather than their actual abilities, his narrative is skillful enough that his favored Demetrius still appears to be the superior general. Antony has his strengths, most notably the much stronger relationship with his soldiers that his boldness and care engendered.<sup>264</sup> Plutarch's narrative of Demetrius' career, however, highlights the general's ability to recover from defeats, his competency on land and sea, and the many victories he earned against the other Hellenistic kings. The judgment in the *synkrisis* in Demetrius' favor, even if it only acknowledges their military careers, is equally valid when compared to their actual abilities as generals.

While there is consistency between Plutarch's depiction of generalship in the Lives of Demetrius and Antony and their attendant *synkrisis*, the *synkrisis* itself adds few

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<sup>264</sup> Especially *Ant.* 18, when he takes over Lepidus' camp, and *Ant.* 43.2 during the Parthian campaign, in contrast to Demetrius' soldiers deserting him to Pyrrhus and Seleucus (*Dem.* 44, 49.1-3).

factual details to our understanding of the generalship of the two men. The comparison of their generalship in the Lives themselves is clear, and the short judgment of their careers at the end of the *synkrisis* still appears to be little more of an afterthought. Nevertheless, I would argue that by its nature the *synkrisis* promotes a more complete understanding of the military leadership of the two men than is possible through reading the individual Lives alone. The small contrasts in the military careers of Demetrius and Anthony, for instance, are easy to overlook in the Lives themselves because of both the frequent parallels between them and the numerous other themes that make up each Life. The *synkrisis*, however, by its brief but direct judgment of their military careers, prompts the reader to re-examine the details of Demetrius' and Anthony's campaigns and to evaluate whether they agree with Plutarch's own analysis. This can in turn be applied, as we have seen, to every *synkrisis* that addresses the military leadership of its subjects.

## Conclusion

It is not a surprise that the *synkrisis* contain only a limited treatment of the military careers of their subjects, as the details, of course, belong in the Lives themselves. The *synkrisis* are only one small part of the *Parallel Lives*, and so our picture of generalship from the *synkrisis* will be a correspondingly small one; yet however small, it must not be dismissed. The formal *synkrisis* that conclude most pairs of Lives often contain significant comparisons of their subjects' generalship across a range of criteria. These comparisons demonstrate the degree to which Plutarch analyzed his subjects' actions on the battlefield, and serve to reinforce the more detailed examples

of effective generalship found in the preceding pairs. Throughout this chapter, we have seen that Plutarch's judgments frequently revolve around the more intangible aspects of military leadership. Simple measures like the number or scale of victories certainly play a part of the comparison between some generals, as in the *Pelopidas-Marcellus* or *Pericles-Fabius Maximus*. More frequently, however, Plutarch considers less quantifiable measures, such as the foresight of Pericles and Fabius Maximus or how much Philopoemen or Flamininus are personally responsible for the success of their armies. The *synkriseis* provide an opportunity to understand Plutarch's own thought-process in a way not often possible in the Lives themselves.

More importantly than what we as modern readers can learn about generalship from the concluding *synkriseis*, however, is the impact that these comparisons would have had on Plutarch's contemporary audience. By demonstrating that Plutarch was actively engaged in judging the superiority or inferiority of his subjects' abilities and career based on their actions, the *synkriseis* implicitly encourages his readers to do the same. Plutarch does not always name one general to be superior to the other in a pair, but his explicit judgments are clear and consistent enough that one can accurately apply them to pairs which otherwise appear to be equal. As discussed above, these formal *synkriseis* were a common rhetorical technique at the time, and Plutarch's readers would have been very familiar with reading or even composing these types of formalized comparisons. The process of making the judgments between generals that Plutarch encourages in the *synkriseis* requires that the reader both re-examine the preceding Lives and reflect on what he himself considers to be effective military leadership. Whether or

not the reader comes to the same conclusions as Plutarch (when such conclusions are even known), the process involved in judging specific acts of generalship is a significant aspect of the self-improvement that Plutarch expected from his readers of the *Parallel Lives*. Even if there is little of immediate value to an aspiring general in a particular pair, the evaluation prompted by the concluding *synkriseis* is nevertheless a valuable learning experience and integral to a successful reading of the *Parallel Lives*.



## Chapter 4

### Case Study of the *Pyrrhus-Marius*

Over the previous chapters, I have examined Plutarch's treatment of military narrative, military education, and the use of deception in the *Parallel Lives*, and have observed how Plutarch uses both internal and concluding *synkriseis* to effectively compare the military leadership of his subjects. In this chapter, I apply these themes to the examination of military leadership in a single pair: the *Pyrrhus-Marius*. Pyrrhus and Marius were neither the most famous nor the most successful generals to feature in the *Parallel Lives*: Alexander and Caesar are surely their superiors in both of these respects. Nevertheless, there is arguably no other pair of statesmen in the *Lives* so defined by their military accomplishments as Pyrrhus and Marius. Plutarch appropriately dedicates a significant amount of space in both Lives to the detailed narratives of his subjects' most important military campaigns, through which it is possible to trace many themes that provide a more nuanced interpretation of the pair than is usually seen.

In terms of its moral message, the *Pyrrhus-Marius* is an uncomplicated pair: both caution strongly against the dangers of excessive hope, greed, and ambition.<sup>265</sup> The first third of the *Pyrrhus* covers the Epirote's struggles to secure his small kingdom and expand it into Macedon. Although he achieves initial success against Demetrius, Pyrrhus is soon driven back to Epirus by Lysimachus, another opportunistic Hellenistic king. It is

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<sup>265</sup> Esp. *Pyrrh.* 13.1-2, 14.1-14, 26.1; *Mar.* 2.4, 28.1-2, 34.6, 45.11-12. See Duff (1999), 101-130; Buszard (2002).

at this point that Pyrrhus has the opportunity to live a quiet, comfortable life as king of Epirus, a point which Plutarch makes clear in a dialogue between Pyrrhus and his adviser Cineas.<sup>266</sup> Instead, Pyrrhus accepts an invitation from Tarentum to assist the city against the encroachment of Rome, and sails to Italy on the first of a series of progressively unsuccessful campaigns. After nominal victories against the Romans at Herculaneum and Asculum, Pyrrhus is left with such a depleted force that he crosses over to Sicily to take advantage of a seemingly easier opportunity for glory. In Sicily, Pyrrhus is once again unable to consolidate his initial gains, and is forced to retreat to Italy after alienating his allies; a disastrous battle against the Romans at Beneventum then drives Pyrrhus back to Greece. Still unable to endure peace, Pyrrhus launches yet another campaign, this time against Antigonus Gonatas, which follows the same pattern as the others. Finally, after a successful battle against Antigonus, Pyrrhus attempts to capture Sparta while its king and army are absent, but is driven back by its small garrison, losing one of his sons in the process. Pyrrhus meets his own end shortly thereafter: when Antigonus refuses to engage him in another pitched battle, Pyrrhus attacks the city of Argos instead, but is killed in the confused street-to-street fighting which ensues. Pyrrhus' fortunes are cyclical. Throughout the *Life*, every success is followed by a defeat that leaves him in a worse position than he started from.

The *Marius*, on the other hand, follows a different pattern. In contrast to the constant fluctuations of Pyrrhus' life, Marius' career, as Plutarch describes it, centers on

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<sup>266</sup> See Duff (1999), 112-3 for a detailed discussion of the significance of this passage to the rest of the *Pyrrhus*.

a single dramatic change of fortune. Marius begins his political career after earning the favor of Scipio while serving under him in Spain, and eventually gains a reputation for being a staunch defender of Rome for his actions as tribune and his victory over Jugurtha. Marius' subsequent defeat of the invading Germanic tribes increases his popularity and influence even more, and leads to five successive consulships. Even after achieving such unparalleled success, however, Marius is not satisfied; as Plutarch succinctly puts it, “he desired his sixth consulship more than anyone desired their first” (*Mar.* 28.1). It was this unrelenting ambition that leads to his ultimate downfall and disgrace: not only does Marius ally with dubious politicians like Saturninus and Sulpicius in order to oppose the nobles, but he also becomes cowardly in public affairs because of his desperation to please the multitude. From this point on Marius' career suffers a steady decline, and even further military success during the Social War is unable to counteract the damage from his frequent political failures. Marius' ambition to gain the command of the subsequent war against Mithridates, even after giving up his command at the end of the Social War due to his physical infirmities, drives him into an even greater downward spiral. Despite having achieved a seventh consulship shortly before his death – admittedly through no political acumen of his own – Marius dies discontented and delusional, believing that he had finally achieved the command which he so coveted (*Mar.* 45.10).

Although the danger of excessive ambition and discontent is Plutarch's main ethical focus in the pair, the military leadership of both Pyrrhus and Marius plays a central role in both Lives. For one, the generalship of Pyrrhus and Marius contributes

much to the characterization of both men. Relatively early in the *Pyrrhus*, Plutarch explains that Pyrrhus showed no interest in anything except the art of generalship, which Pyrrhus saw as the only pursuit worth of a king (*Pyrrh.* 8.3). Pyrrhus' scholarly yet blinkered focus on military matters is an important theme in the *Life*: most significantly, it prevents him from putting his actions into perspective, a problem particularly clear in his conversation with his adviser Cineas, and ultimately leads to him jumping from one ill-fated military campaign to another.<sup>267</sup> While in the end it is Pyrrhus' ambition that leads to his lack of real success and untimely death, Plutarch makes clear parallels between Pyrrhus' ambition and his excessive focus on military matters throughout the *Life*. Just as with Pyrrhus, much of Plutarch's early characterization of Marius revolves around the Roman's warlike nature and military education. As discussed in Chapter 2, Marius' lack of a political education left him with a harsh temper, and he displayed a strong distaste for the study of Greek language and literature (*Mar.* 2.1-2). Although Marius' outstanding military achievements gave him the opportunity to retire from public life at the height of his influence and reputation, his absolute focus on military affairs without the benefit of a rounded education meant that he continued to pursue opportunities for military glory until his ignoble death.

While their militaristic natures do have a demonstrably negative impact on their respective lives, at the same time, as we shall see, it is in the military sphere that both Pyrrhus and Marius demonstrate their greatest virtue. Pyrrhus established a great reputation for his generalship among the Hellenistic kingdoms from an early age, and his

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<sup>267</sup> See n. 264, above. See also pp. 73-76 for the impact on excessive military education in Greek Lives.

physical courage and prowess in battle drew comparisons to Homeric heroes. Marius, as well, was at his best on the battlefield, and protected Rome from a potentially catastrophic Germanic invasion. It is this contrast between failure and success, as it is played out on the battlefield, that will form an important theme in this chapter. I will examine Plutarch's portrayal of each of their major military campaigns in turn, and identify how each of these victories or defeats reflects on the respective general's military leadership. Over the course of each Life, it becomes clear that Plutarch identifies both Pyrrhus and Marius as exemplifying a particular and contrasting style of military leadership: while Pyrrhus practiced a heroic and personal style of generalship in which his own fighting ability played an integral part, Marius' leadership was characterized by effective preparation and planning rather than the direct intervention of the general. Although Plutarch does not explicitly pass judgment on either of these styles of generalship, I will argue that a combined reading of the *Pyrrhus-Marius* calls into question the validity of Pyrrhus' vaunted military reputation and clearly portrays Marius as the superior general.

### **Pyrrhus' Military Leadership**

From the beginning of the *Pyrrhus*, Plutarch builds up high expectations of Pyrrhus' military ability. Pyrrhus acquits himself well while fighting under Demetrius at the Battle of Ipsus (*Pyrrh.* 4.3), and when he later comes into conflict with Demetrius in Macedonia he defeats Demetrius' general Pantauchus in single combat (*Pyrrh.* 7.4-5).<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> This fight is the first of many in the *Pyrrhus* that contains clear Homeric parallels. See Mossman

Plutarch uses Pyrrhus' victory against Pantauchus as an opportunity to focus on Pyrrhus' generalship. As mentioned above, Plutarch observes that Pyrrhus dedicated a significant portion of his time to studying military affairs:

τῆς δὲ περὶ τάξεις καὶ στρατηγίας ἐπιστήμης αὐτοῦ καὶ δεινότητος ἔνεστι δείγματα λαβεῖν ἐκ τῶν γραμμάτων ἃ περὶ τούτων ἀπολέλοιπε. ... καὶ ὅλως τοῦτο μελετῶν ἔοικε καὶ φιλοσοφῶν ἀεὶ διατελεῖν ὁ Πύρρος, ὡς μαθημάτων βασιλικώτατον (*Pyrrh.* 8.4, 8.6).

Concerning his knowledge of and shrewdness in arranging and commanding troops, it is possible to acquire evidence from the writings on the subjects that he left behind. ... And really, Pyrrhus always seemed to continue to be studying and attending to this subject, considering it to be the most kingly branch of learning.

There are several important points here. First of all, as discussed in Chapter 2, Plutarch's vocabulary in this passage (ἐπιστήμης, φιλοσοφῶν, μαθημάτων) suggests a decidedly academic interest in military affairs, something not seen to the same degree in any other Life.<sup>269</sup> This further builds the audience's expectations of great military achievements from Pyrrhus in the future, coming immediately on the heels of his victory over Pantauchus: not only was he physically powerful in battle, but he was well-versed in the arts of generalship as well. However, I would suggest that this passage is actually more ambiguous than it initially seems. First of all, this appears to be a mere statement of fact rather than explicit praise of Pyrrhus' knowledge of generalship: Plutarch does not actually qualify the degree of Pyrrhus' experience or ability, he just says that it exists. More strikingly, perhaps, is that even though the rest of the Life is filled with narrative

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(1992), 95; Fenik (1968).

<sup>269</sup> While Philopoemen expressed a similar interest in military education and writings, Plutarch attributes to Philopoemen a greater interest in observation and practice than literary pursuits, and the description of Philopoemen's military education lacks the same specific vocabulary of learning that is seen here. See pp. 65-76, above, for a discussion of Plutarch's conception of military education.

of Pyrrhus' most important military campaigns, Plutarch directs the reader to look for proof of Pyrrhus' military abilities in his writings rather than his actions.<sup>270</sup> One would expect that if Pyrrhus was as knowledgeable about military tactics and leadership as Plutarch implies, the reader would be able to see proof of it in his actions as well; as we shall see, however, Plutarch may have had good reason to direct the reader to examine his writings rather than his actions. It could well be, of course, that Plutarch points toward Pyrrhus' writings to further the point made by the vocabulary that Pyrrhus had a particularly academic interest in the subject. Either way, by focusing so much on Pyrrhus' study of the subject, Plutarch appears to be implying that Pyrrhus had difficulty applying his knowledge to real-world situations.

Nevertheless, Plutarch follows his statement of Pyrrhus' interest in military affairs by relating the contemporary consensus of Pyrrhus' military abilities. Macedonian soldiers, Plutarch says, greatly admired Pyrrhus, and compared his swiftness and strength in battle to Alexander.<sup>271</sup> Plutarch then quotes two generals who are also full of praise for Pyrrhus' abilities: "It is said also that Antigonos, when asked who was the best general, replied, "Pyrrhus, if he lives to be old" (*Pyrrh.* 8.5).<sup>272</sup> This verdict of Antigonos applied only to his contemporaries. Hannibal, however, declared that the foremost of all generals in experience and ability was Pyrrhus, that Scipio was second, and he himself

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<sup>270</sup> Plutarch is referring to Pyrrhus' *Hypomnemata*, which he cites again after the battle of Asculum at 21.12. The *Hypomnemata* are not extant, and our only other account of the work comes from Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*A.R.* 20.10; *FgrH* 229.1). See Leveque (1957), 20; Buszard (2002), 108.

<sup>271</sup> The frequent connections between Pyrrhus and Alexander in the *Pyrrhus* have received considerable attention, particularly by Mossman (1992) and Buszard (2008). I will discuss the significance of these connections with regard to their similar military leadership later in the chapter.

<sup>272</sup> Although Plutarch does not specify which Antigonos this quote comes from, I agree with Buszard that it is most likely Antigonos Monophthalmos. See Buszard (2002), 109 n.122.

third, as I have written in my Life of Scipio” (*Pyrrh.* 8.5). While this praise initially appears impressive, on further examination it is problematic. Buszard has observed that the comparison to Alexander's military ability draws attention to the fact that Pyrrhus lacked many of the other positive traits that characterized Alexander, particularly his self-control and rationality.<sup>273</sup> Buszard has also suggested that the qualification in Antigonus' praise, “if he lives”, implies that Antigonus saw the character flaws that would lead to Pyrrhus' untimely death.<sup>274</sup> I would argue that the quotation from Hannibal raises an even larger question about Pyrrhus' generalship, because it is noticeably different than other extant accounts of the story; not only do Livy and Appian give a conflicting record of the conversation between Scipio and Hannibal, but Plutarch himself does so as well in the *Flamininus*. In the version found in these three sources, Hannibal rates Alexander the greatest general in history, Pyrrhus the second greatest, and himself third.<sup>275</sup> Whether this was an innocent mistake of Plutarch's based on conflicting sources or an intentional alteration is, of course, impossible to know, especially since the *Scipio*, in which Plutarch claims to have also included the anecdote, is not extant. I would suggest, however, that this is indeed a case of Plutarch changing a familiar story to better suit this particular Life.<sup>276</sup> The most telling piece of evidence for this, to my mind, is the absence of Alexander from Hannibal's list. If Plutarch were simply repeating the same story found in Livy and the *Flamininus*, it is almost inconceivable that Plutarch

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<sup>273</sup> Buszard (2008), 200.

<sup>274</sup> Buszard (2002), 108-110.

<sup>275</sup> *Flam.* 5; Livy 9.16.19 ff.; Appian *Syr.* 2.10.

<sup>276</sup> Cf. Pelling (1980); Larmour (1992); for Plutarch's adaptation and manipulation of his source material.



could have momentarily forgotten Alexander, whose specter is so prevalent throughout the *Pyrrhus*.<sup>277</sup> Even if Plutarch is actually discussing a different story than the one which appears in other sources by qualifying the generals as 'best in experience and ability', rather than just 'the best', there is no way that Alexander would not be at the top of those categories as well. I would suggest, rather, that Plutarch's alteration of this anecdote is meant to make the reader question this praise from Hannibal. Throughout the *Pyrrhus*, as we will see, there is a frequent disconnect between the praise of Pyrrhus' military ability by his contemporaries and Pyrrhus' actual military accomplishments. It is in this chapter, particularly through the references to Antigonus and Hannibal, that Plutarch first introduces this important theme. Buszard points out that the two generals that Plutarch cites regarding Pyrrhus' generalship were themselves both defeated in battle, and that this suggests that Pyrrhus' military ability, like their own, would not be enough on its own to guarantee success.<sup>278</sup> I would further argue that the failures of these two generals, along with the ambiguities in the anecdotes themselves, actually call into question the real effectiveness of Pyrrhus' generalship. Antigonus' praise contains the important qualification "if he lives", and Hannibal's praise, particularly because of its inconsistencies with other versions of the story and because of the absence of Alexander from his list of history's best generals, appears to be ingenuine.

Plutarch's introduction to Pyrrhus' generalship, then, is troubling on two levels. Firstly, Plutarch refuses to pass his own judgment on Pyrrhus' military abilities, instead

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<sup>277</sup> See above, n. 271.

<sup>278</sup> Buszard (2002), 109-110.

directing the reader to examine examples of it on his own. Plutarch's refusal to comment directly on Pyrrhus' generalship contrasts strongly with a similar passage in the *Caesar*, in which he lavishes praise on Caesar's military abilities: he says that Caesar “showed himself as good a warrior and commander as any of history's greatest and most respected generals” (*Caes.* 15.2). There is no ambiguity here, and no reliance on the opinions of others, much unlike the passage from *Pyrrhus*. That Plutarch instead focuses on contemporary opinions of Pyrrhus' generalship would not be problematic on its own, if the anecdotes themselves did not pose such difficulties. However, because the anecdotes from Antigonus and Hannibal cast doubt on to both Pyrrhus' lasting potential and the validity of such praises in general, this introduction of Pyrrhus' generalship is not as positive as it might immediately seem.

The reader's first chance to truly observe Pyrrhus' generalship comes during his battle against the Romans at Herculaneum. While still waiting for reinforcements from Tarentum, Pyrrhus encamped his army near Herculaneum, and went to observe the disposition of the Roman army stationed on the other side of the river Siris. Famously, Pyrrhus was both amazed and discomfited by the discipline of the soldiers and the order of the camp, as he expected the Romans to be little more than barbarians.<sup>279</sup> Wishing to preempt the arrival of Pyrrhus' allies, the Romans soon crossed the river in force despite the guard that Pyrrhus had left, and Pyrrhus was obliged to give battle (*Pyrrh.* 16.8-10). Plutarch depicts Pyrrhus in glowing terms at the beginning of the battle:

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<sup>279</sup> Mossman (2005) has a detailed discussion of this early meeting between Greeks and Romans, and examines its significance both for the *Pyrrhus-Marius* and Plutarch's methodology in the rest of the *Parallel Lives*.

καὶ τὴν δόξαν ἐπιδεικνύμενος ἔργοις οὐκ ἀποδέουσιν αὐτοῦ τῆς ἀρετῆς, μάλιστα δ' ὅτι τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τὸ σῶμα παρέχων τῷ ἀγῶνι καὶ τοὺς καθ' αὐτὸν ἀμυνόμενος ἐρρωμένως, οὐ συνεχεῖτο τὸν λογισμὸν οὐδὲ τοῦ φρονεῖν ἐξέπιπτεν, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἐξωθεν ἐφορῶν διεκυβέρνα τὸν πόλεμον, αὐτὸς μεταθέων ἑκασταχόσε καὶ παραβοηθῶν τοῖς ἐκβιάζεσθαι δοκοῦσιν (*Pyrrh.* 16.11).

He showed by his deeds that his excellence was not inferior to his fame; and this most of all because, while offering his hands and body in the fight and vigorously repelling his assailants, he did not confuse his calculations nor lose his presence of mind, but, guiding the battle as if he were surveying it from a distance, he himself ranged hither and thither and brought aid to those whom he thought to be overwhelmed.

This is exactly what the reader would expect of Pyrrhus after his initial successes and the praise of his generalship earlier in the *Life*, and is one of the clearest manifestations of Pyrrhus' virtue. It certainly invokes the image of Alexander, who similarly demonstrated an ability to direct his soldiers from horseback in the midst of the fighting.<sup>280</sup> The most important thing to note from this depiction of Pyrrhus' generalship is the emphasis on his own personal action. His calculations and presence of mind during the battle, unquestionably good traits for any commander, were directed solely to identifying which part of the line was in the most danger and required aid. He did not give orders or formulate new plans in order to help his soldiers, however, but instead considered that his own presence, and particularly his own fighting ability, were enough to render aid to any of his soldiers who were hard pressed.<sup>281</sup> This is by no means unreasonable,

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<sup>280</sup> While Plutarch's depictions of Alexander's battles are too short to contain such parallels, Alexander's ability to command during battle can be seen in more detailed sources, where he is shown observing the battle, receiving messages, and issuing orders during the fighting. Cf. Arr. 3.13.3-4, 3.14.1, 3.15.1; Q. Curt. 3.11.2-4, 4.15.6-9, 4.16.3.

<sup>281</sup> Mossman (1992), 100 cites this passage as evidence that Pyrrhus had an intellectual approach to warfare, in contrast to Alexander's unceasing boldness, because he was able to maintain a clear view of the battle even while in the thick of the fighting. I would argue, however, that Pyrrhus' understanding of the battle is not enough to make him an intellectual commander. If Pyrrhus did use his clear perception of the battle to issue orders or develop plans to take advantage of the enemy's weakness, then I would agree with Mossman's assertion. However, because Pyrrhus is solely concerned with identifying where he should

particularly given the superb fighting skills that Pyrrhus demonstrated earlier against Pantauchus, and we should hesitate to see this portrayal of Pyrrhus' generalship as anything other than praise it is meant to be. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that even here Plutarch acknowledges the connection – and possibility of doubt – between Pyrrhus' δόξα and ἀρετή. This is only the beginning of the battle, and the next section of Plutarch's narrative, I suggest, demonstrates the limitations of this individualistic style of generalship.

One of Pyrrhus' companions, Leonnatus the Macedonian, noticed that an Italian was mirroring Pyrrhus' actions as he went back and forth across the line of battle, and appeared to be intent on attacking him. This soon came to pass, as the Italian charged upon Pyrrhus and threw him from his horse. Although Pyrrhus was saved by his companions and the Italian killed, the Epirote began to show caution after his brush with death, and gave his conspicuous cloak and armor to another companion so that he might avoid being so targeted by other Roman soldiers (*Pyrrh.* 16.8-17.1). Pyrrhus' uncharacteristic caution here, according to Plutarch, although it preserved his life, nearly cost him the battle; for Megacles, who received Pyrrhus' armor, became the new target of the Roman assaults, and when he was killed and the armor of Pyrrhus paraded through the Roman ranks, Pyrrhus' soldiers lost heart and likely would have fled the field had Pyrrhus not rode along the line with his face bare to show that he was still alive

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personally be fighting, I believe that his style of generalship is no more intellectual than, and indeed not dissimilar to, Alexander's. A true example of an intellectual general in this pair, I would suggest, is Marius, as shall become clear in the discussion of his Life.

(*Pyrrh.* 17.2-3).<sup>282</sup> After this event, relates Plutarch, the outcome of the battle was very much uncertain, and it was only after Pyrrhus' elephants had crowded back the Roman infantry and frightened the Roman horses that Pyrrhus was able to order a decisive charge by his Thessalian cavalry and finally route the Romans (*Pyrrh.* 17.3). This victory, as Mossman suggests, is marred not only by Pyrrhus' excessive casualties and the loss of his best troops, but also his failure to live up to the actions of his models Alexander and Achilles in similar circumstances.<sup>283</sup> I would further argue that Herculaneum demonstrates some of the limitations of Pyrrhus' generalship. Pyrrhus' conspicuous armor and frequent interventions on the battlefield led him to be targeted and nearly killed by observant Romans. Moreover, Pyrrhus appeared entirely reactive during the battle. He was so busy “darting hither and thither himself” to aid his own soldiers that he never took the opportunity to use his superlative fighting ability in a decisive way against the Romans, by means of which Alexander won each of his famous victories against the Persians and Indians.<sup>284</sup> Most tellingly, despite Pyrrhus' personal heroics, it was ultimately Pyrrhus' elephants that proved decisive in the battle, and it was a cavalry charge which he ordered – not a cavalry charge which he personally led – that finally routed the Romans.

The battle of Asculum plays out differently than Herculaneum, but the end result

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<sup>282</sup> Mossman (1992), 99-100 expands upon the clear Homeric parallels with Pyrrhus' exchange of armor, and notes that Pyrrhus' motive for giving his armor to Megacles – self-preservation – falls far short of Achilles' reasoning for giving his armor to Patroclus.

<sup>283</sup> Mossman (1992), 100.

<sup>284</sup> While the melee that erupted around Alexander at the Granicus means that his charge across the river there could hardly be called decisive, his charges against Darius at Issus and Granicus broke through the Persian infantry and directly led to the rout of both the king and his army on each occasion. See Bosworth (1988), 41-3, 61-2, 83-4.

of the battle is the same, and Plutarch focuses on many of the same aspects of Pyrrhus' generalship. In the first day of the battle of Asculum, Plutarch says, Pyrrhus was forced to fight in regions where his cavalry and elephants could not operate effectively, and after a day's fighting on uneven ground the battle was inconclusive. The following day, Pyrrhus attempted to regain control of the battlefield by stationing his light troops on the uneven ground and placing the rest of his forces in a dense array. This, as Plutarch says, gave the Romans “no opportunity for sidelong shifts and counter-movements, as on the previous day”, and so they were obliged to fight in the open against Pyrrhus' elephants and cavalry (*Pyrrh.* 21.6). The fighting was consequently fierce, as the Romans tried in vain to rout the Greek infantry before the elephants could overwhelm them. Eventually, however, the Romans were driven back at the point where Pyrrhus was, but Plutarch maintains that the elephants caused the greatest havoc among the Roman forces (*Pyrrh.* 21.7). Once again driven back by Pyrrhus' elephants, the Romans retreated to their camp, and this gave Pyrrhus a second costly victory. On the one hand, even though Pyrrhus was forced into unfavorable terrain on the first day of Asculum, just as he was forced to fight at Herculaneum before his allies joined him, Pyrrhus did demonstrate a level of initiative before the battle on the second day so that he could make use of his cavalry and elephants. On the other hand, even though Plutarch singles Pyrrhus out as successfully pushing the Roman line back, by grammatically juxtaposing Pyrrhus' effect on the Romans with the much greater effect of the elephants, Plutarch once again demonstrates that it was ultimately the elephants who proved decisive in the battle rather than Pyrrhus himself.

Although technically victorious at Herculaneum and Asculum, Pyrrhus suffered such major casualties in these two battles that he lost nearly all confidence in ever actually defeating the Romans. Consequently, when Pyrrhus was presented with the opportunity to secure a power base in Sicily by helping the Greek cities there drive out the Carthaginians, he immediately established a token garrison in Tarentum and brought the rest of his army to the island (*Pyrrh.* 22.1-2). Plutarch's narrative of Pyrrhus' time on Sicily is brief, but it follows the same pattern as the rest of the *Pyrrhus*. Immediately upon Pyrrhus' arrival in Sicily he gained the support of several cities, which allowed him to quickly assemble an army and achieve an early victory against the Carthaginians (*Pyrrh.* 22.4). Plutarch focuses on Pyrrhus' attack on Eryx, which was the strongest Carthaginian fortress on the island. In the frontal assault, Plutarch says, Pyrrhus was the first to scale the ladders and mount the walls, and of the many enemies who attacked him:

ἀμυνόμενος τοὺς μὲν ἐξέωσε τοῦ τείχους ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρα καὶ κατέβαλε, πλείστους δὲ περὶ αὐτὸν τῷ ξίφει χρώμενος ἐσώρευσε νεκρούς. ἔπαθε δ' αὐτὸς οὐδέν, ἀλλὰ καὶ προσιδεῖν δεινὸς ἐφάνη τοῖς πολεμίοις, καὶ τὸν Ὅμηρον ἔδειξεν ὀρθῶς καὶ μετ' ἐμπειρίας ἀποφαίνοντα τῶν ἀρετῶν μόνην τὴν ἀνδρείαν φορὰς πολλάκις ἐνθουσιώδεις καὶ μανικὰς φερομένην (*Pyrrh.* 22.10-11).

Defending himself, he pushed some from the wall on either side and hurled them to the ground, but he heaped most corpses around him with the using his sword. He himself suffered nothing, but was a terrible sight for his enemies to look upon, and proved that Homer explained correctly and with experience that valor, alone of the virtues, often displays motions due to divine possession and frenzy.

Aside from the explicit Homeric reference in this scene, Pyrrhus' actions at Eryx have strong parallels to Alexander's battle against the Malli, and this is perhaps the one

comparison between Pyrrhus and Alexander in which Pyrrhus appears superior.<sup>285</sup> Both men scattered their enemies with missiles and were the first to climb the walls, but while Pyrrhus defeated all of his foes from the top of the wall and remained uninjured, Alexander became isolated after jumping into the city and was nearly killed after suffering several wounds (*Alex.* 63.3-10).<sup>286</sup> Pyrrhus' success at Eryx, then, appears as a form of redemption after his strategic failure in Italy. Unlike at Herculaneum and Asculum, where Pyrrhus failed to live up to the heroic ideals portrayed by Achilles and Alexander, at Eryx he met and even surpassed the achievements of his predecessors. Eryx is the first battle since Pyrrhus' victory over Pantauchus that actually seems to validate the high praise for Pyrrhus by his contemporaries. At the same, just like in that earlier battle, Pyrrhus' victory hinges entirely on his own fighting ability. The actions of his soldiers at Eryx appear to be immaterial, even their existence is only made implicit by Pyrrhus' signal to sound the trumpets and his leading forward of the scaling ladders.<sup>287</sup> Otherwise, it is Pyrrhus personally who scatters the defenders with missiles, scales the ladder, and defeats the many enemies who dared confront him on the wall.<sup>288</sup> This exceptional valor and apparent invincibility, which Plutarch compares with the

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<sup>285</sup> Cf. *Iliad* 5.185; 6.101; 9.238. Cf. *Alex.* 63.

<sup>286</sup> The precise vocabulary in the two passages does differ, and Pyrrhus does order trumpets to sound before the assault, which Alexander does not do. Nevertheless, the imagery of their primary actions (scattering the enemy, bringing up ladders, and being the first to scale the walls) is so similar that I believe the parallel to be intentional. Compare τῆ δὲ σάλπιγγι σημήνας καὶ τοῖς βέλεσι τοὺς βαρβάρους ἀνασκεδάσας καὶ τὰς κλίμακας προσαγαγόν, πρῶτος ἐπέβη τοῦ τείχους (*Pyrrh.* 22.9) with τοὺς μὲν γὰρ ἀνθρώπους βέλεσιν ἀπὸ τῶν τειχῶν ἀπεσκεδάσα, πρῶτος δὲ διὰ κλίμακος τεθείσης ἀναβάς ἐπὶ τὸ τεῖχος (*Alex.* 63.3).

<sup>287</sup> τῆ δὲ σάλπιγγι σημήνας ... καὶ τὰς κλίμακας προσαγαγόν (*Pyrrh.* 22.9).

<sup>288</sup> That Pyrrhus was “the first to climb the wall” (*Pyrrh.* 22.9) also implies the existence of other soldiers, but Pyrrhus' own actions nevertheless appear to be solely responsible for his victory at Eryx.



Homeric heroes, is clearly Pyrrhus' strength. However, Eryx also demonstrates the negligible impact that Pyrrhus' soldiers – and thus his leadership of them – have on his victories. This becomes increasingly relevant in Pyrrhus' later campaigns, during which he consistently has difficulties in leveraging his own physical abilities during battles.

Plutarch reinforces the image of Pyrrhus' individual martial prowess again on the Epirote's retreat from Sicily. After crossing back over to Italy Pyrrhus was set upon by a host of Mamertines, which threw his army into such confusion that Pyrrhus was forced to fight in the rear-guard as his army withdrew. Already wounded by one enemy, he responded to the challenge of another, who, although “huge in body and resplendent in armor”, Pyrrhus nevertheless cleaved in half with one blow “so that at one instant the parts of the sundered body fell to either side” (*Pyrrh.* 24.1-3). This feat of strength and personal heroics goes beyond anything that even Alexander had done, and invites comparisons to the Homeric heroes.<sup>289</sup> Indeed, Plutarch says that the Mamertines checked their advance at this point, thinking that Pyrrhus was “some superior being” (*Pyrrh.* 24.4). This is Pyrrhus at his best: just as he also demonstrated against Pantauchus and at Eryx, Pyrrhus is unbeatable in single combat, apparently bordering on superhuman.

Plutarch, however, is once again quick to put Pyrrhus' military prowess into its proper context. Having reached Tarentum unmolested after his heroic bisection of a Mamertine, he once again set out against the Romans. Facing two consular armies, Pyrrhus likewise split his own force in half, and marched against Manius Curius at

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<sup>289</sup> See Mossman (1992).

Beneventum. Pyrrhus' attempt to surprise the Roman army by means of a night march, which itself is a rather uncharacteristic move by the normally straightforward Pyrrhus, fails utterly after his lights went out and his soldiers became lost on a long circuit through the woods. This left his army disorganized and in full view of the Roman camp when dawn broke, and the Roman commander immediately sallied into the field to take advantage of the situation. This blunder, tellingly, is the last the reader hears of Pyrrhus during Plutarch's narrative of the battle of Beneventum, as the rest of the action is told from the point of view of the Romans. After capitalizing on Pyrrhus' mistake and routing the vanguard of the Epirote's army, Manius engages the rest of Pyrrhus' force in a pitched battle. Despite their initial success, the Romans are almost overwhelmed by Pyrrhus' elephants, so that Manius has to commit his camp guards to the battle; these fresh troops, however, drive the elephants back into their own ranks, which causes great confusion among the Greek soldiers and gives victory to the Romans (*Pyrrh.* 25.1-5). By switching to Manius' viewpoint for the main narrative of the battle immediately after Pyrrhus' failed night march, Plutarch not only contrasts the failure of Pyrrhus' generalship with the success of Manius' but also shows Pyrrhus to have been a complete non-entity during the battle itself. In Plutarch's narrative, Manius does not appear to even be aware of Pyrrhus; rather, it is Pyrrhus' elephants that cause the Roman army the most difficulty, much as they did at Herculaneum and Asculum. Beneventum, then, serves to lessen the significance of Pyrrhus' outstanding personal heroics at Eryx and against the Mamertines. As those instances demonstrated, and as was also apparent from Herculaneum and Asculum, Pyrrhus' style of generalship was heavily predicated on his

own individual skill and prowess on the battlefield. When he was not able to leverage his physical strength in individual combat, as was the case at Beneventum, he was consequently unable to have a noticeable impact on the course of the battle. This serious limitation to Pyrrhus' generalship, although visible in his earlier battles against the Romans, was much more apparent at Beneventum, which was his first clear failure on the battlefield.

Plutarch follows his narrative of Beneventum with a concise explanation of Pyrrhus' failures in Italy and Sicily, referring once again to the opinions of Pyrrhus' contemporaries. This time, it is not illustrious generals like Antigonus or Hannibal whom Plutarch cites, but the general opinion at the time:

καὶ νομισθεὶς ἐμπειρία μὲν πολεμικῇ καὶ χειρὶ καὶ τόλμῃ πολὺ πρῶτος εἶναι τῶν καθ' αὐτὸν βασιλέων, ἃ δὲ ταῖς πράξεσιν ἐκτᾶτο, ταῖς ἐλπίσιν ἀπολλύναι, δι' ἔρωτα τῶν ἀπόντων οὐδὲν εἰς ὃ δεῖ θέσθαι τῶν ὑπαρχόντων φθάσας (*Pyrrh.* 26.1).

Men believe that in military experience, strength, and daring, he was by far the first of the kings of his time, but that what he won by his actions he lost by indulging his hopes, since through passionate desire for what he did not have he always failed to establish securely what he had.

The second part of this evaluation is consistent with the overall moral message of the *Pyrrhus-Marius*: Pyrrhus failed because he gave in to his excessive hopes and ambition.<sup>290</sup> The first part of this evaluation is much more relevant to Plutarch's understanding of military leadership, and reinforces the conclusions drawn from Plutarch's narrative of Beneventum. It is telling, but at this point not surprising, that the anonymous “men” in this quotation make no mention of Pyrrhus' rational generalship.

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<sup>290</sup> Duff (1999), 101-130; Buszard (2002).

They do not praise his cleverness or adaptability or foresight, but instead his military experience (ἐμπειρία πολεμικῆ), his hand (χειρὶ), and his daring (τόλμη). One would expect that significant military experience would have imparted Pyrrhus with the adaptability of Caesar or the foresight of Pericles, but his poor tactical decision-making at Herculaneum, Asculum, and Beneventum, and his failure in strategic planning that led to his expulsion from Sicily and Italy, show that this is not the case. Instead, Pyrrhus' strength as a general comes from both his boldness (as seen in his storming of the walls of Eryx), and, taking χειρὶ in a figurative sense, from his ability in close combat (as seen particularly at Herculaneum and against the Mamertines).<sup>291</sup> This contrast between two types of generalship forms the basis of Plutarch's evaluation of Pyrrhus' military leadership. Pyrrhus is at his best when he is in the thick of the fighting, where his physical strength both drives back the enemy line and inspires his own troops. Plutarch does not make any explicit criticism of this type of generalship, and indeed refers to it by means of the praise of others, but his narrative nevertheless demonstrates its weakness. Plutarch's description of Beneventum makes clear that Pyrrhus was unable to control the battlefield enough to put himself at the most critical place in the fighting, and so his brilliant physical strength proved inconsequential.

Plutarch's depiction of Pyrrhus' generalship in the second half of the Epirote's career largely mirrors that of the first. Upon returning to mainland Greece, Pyrrhus raised a new army and once again ventured into Macedonia, where he came into conflict

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<sup>291</sup> Of course, it is also possible to take χειρὶ in its literal sense as the strength in his hand cutting the Mamertine in half.

with its new king, Antigonus Gonatas. Pyrrhus gained an initial victory against Antigonus' army after falling upon it in a narrow pass; as a result of this, “consulting his good fortune rather than his judgment”, Pyrrhus advanced upon the main phalanx of Antigonus' army (*Pyrrh.* 26.4). Pyrrhus, however, did not suffer for his lack of judgment, and actually induced all of Antigonus' demoralized infantry to join his own army without even fighting a battle. This is a strong parallel with Pyrrhus' initial success against Antigonus' father, when much of Demetrius' army defected to Pyrrhus and proclaimed him king of Macedonia early in the *Life* (*Pyrrh.* 11.4-6).<sup>292</sup> The charisma necessary to effectively steal an opponent's army away from him is consistent with Plutarch's representation of Pyrrhus' leadership: the adulation and awe that Pyrrhus generated in Greek soldiers is something that Plutarch identifies early in the *Life* as stemming from Pyrrhus' resemblance to Alexander's style of generalship (*Pyrrh.* 8.1). However, the limits of this heroic style of generalship are just as apparent in the second half of the *Pyrrhus* as they are in the first. Once again jumping from one opportunity to another, Pyrrhus set his sights on Sparta soon after his victory over Antigonus. The Spartan king Areus was away with his army on Crete, and although Pyrrhus thus had the opportunity to enter the city unopposed on the night he arrived, he decided to wait until daylight because he feared he might lose his soldiers to looting in this darkness. Because of the absence of the king Pyrrhus did not expect any difficulty in occupying the city the next day, but over the course of the night those Spartans who remained in the city, led by

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<sup>292</sup> The account in the *Demetrius*, although acknowledging the admiration that the Macedonian troops had for Pyrrhus, attributes their defection more to their distaste of Demetrius than to Pyrrhus' military brilliance (*Dem.* 44.5-7).

many of the wives of the absent soldiers, managed to fortify their city with both a trench and a makeshift wall of wagons. These fortifications, as Plutarch observes, completely negated the effect of Pyrrhus' frontal assault when he attacked the next morning (*Pyrrh.* 28.1). An attempt by Pyrrhus' son to flank the new trenches was also beaten back, albeit with great difficulty, by the bravery of the Spartan king's son Acrotatus, and Pyrrhus was forced to call off his assault at nightfall. He attacked again the next morning, despite an ominous dream the previous night, but was once again repelled by the combined efforts of the Spartans. Before Pyrrhus could launch a third attack, two groups of reinforcements arrived, one led by the Spartan king and another by one of Antigonus' generals, and Pyrrhus was forced to abandon yet another of his many hopes.

At Sparta, as in other battles, Pyrrhus appears unable to adapt to situations that do not match his initial expectations. After finding his entry into Sparta opposed, Pyrrhus launched himself frontally at the Spartan fortifications for two days despite his lack of progress. While Pyrrhus realistically would have been aware of – and likely would have ordered – his son's single flanking attempt early on the first day, Plutarch narrates the battle in such a way as to divorce Pyrrhus from his son's actions:

Αὐτὸς μὲν οὖν ὁ Πύρρος ἐβιάζετο κατὰ στόμα τοῖς ὀπλίταις πρὸς ἀσπίδας πολλὰς τῶν Σπαρτιατῶν ἀντιπαρατεταγμένας καὶ τάφρον οὐ περατὴν οὐδὲ βάσιν ἀσφαλῆ τοῖς μαχομένοις παρέχουσαν ὑπὸ χυνότητος. ὁ δὲ παῖς Πτολεμαῖος ἔχων δισχίλιους Γαλάτας καὶ Χαόνων λογάδας ἐξελίξας τὴν τάφρον, ἐπειρᾶτο κατὰ τὰς ἀμάξας ὑπερβαίνειν (*Pyrrh.* 28.1-2).

Pyrrhus himself, then, forced himself against the front with his soldiers towards the shields of the Spartans held against him, and over a trench which was not passable and which supplied no secure base for the fighters because of its looseness. His son Ptolemy, on the other hand, having two thousand Gauls and chosen Chaonians, maneuvered around the trench, and made an attempt to pass through the wagons.

Through the use of a  $\mu\epsilon\nu\dots\delta\epsilon$  clause, Plutarch contrasts Pyrrhus' futile head-on assault with Ptolemy's attempt to find a weakness in the Spartans' defenses, which would have succeeded if not for the bravery of the Spartan Acrotatus. There is no indication of any such creative generalship from Pyrrhus, who forced an attack against the most heavily-defended point. Certainly, Pyrrhus' actions here do not come as a surprise to the reader at this point in the Life; all of Pyrrhus' victories up to this point were as a result of the direct application of force, whether his own or his elephants', to a single point in the enemy's line. Plutarch gives much credit to the Spartans for resisting Pyrrhus' assault, but this further highlights Pyrrhus' inability to come up with an alternate way into the city.

Pyrrhus' fortunes increasingly decline after his defeat at Sparta. Invited to support one of the competing factions at Argos, Pyrrhus withdrew from Sparta, but was constantly ambushed and harassed by the Spartan king Areus, and even lost his son Ptolemy in a rearguard action. This loss, according to Plutarch, drove Pyrrhus to an even greater feat of daring and might than he had yet displayed, and he summarily confronted and destroyed the band of Spartans who had killed his son (*Pyrrh.* 30.5-6). This is a very similar situation to the one that sparked Pyrrhus' bisection of a Mamertine: in both cases Pyrrhus' army was on the retreat, and in both cases Pyrrhus' superhuman strength was a manifestation of his intense anger. While Pyrrhus' great strength and daring did allow him to capture the citadel of Eryx on Sicily, such a positive application of his prowess now appears to be the exception rather than the rule. Unlike at Eryx, his impressive actions against the Mamertines and Spartans did nothing to change the strategic

situation: their only tangible benefit in both cases was to allow his army to finish its retreat in relative safety. This can be seen as another manifestation of Pyrrhus' reactive leadership that was on display at Herculaneum: while his impressive abilities in single combat may be able to preserve the existence of his army, they are not enough to have a significant impact on the forces of his enemies.<sup>293</sup>

When Pyrrhus finally arrived in Argos, he found Antigonus and his army encamped on a hill commanding the surrounding plain and challenged him to come down and fight. Antigonus refused, saying that “his own generalship was characterized by opportunities rather than arms” (*Pyrrh.* 31.2). This succinct contrast between two types of generalship is at the core of Plutarch's depiction of generalship in the *Pyrrhus-Marius*. Pyrrhus' generalship, as Plutarch has shown consistently throughout the *Life*, was indeed characterized by arms. It was Pyrrhus' own physical strength in arms that led to his clear victories against Pantauchus and at Eryx, and it was the physical strength of his elephants that granted him tactical victories against the Romans at Herculaneum and Asculum. At the same time, Pyrrhus consistently proved to be unable to create or capitalize upon important opportunities in battles when his strength of arms was insufficient: his attempt to make a surprise attack at Beneventum was an abject failure, and he failed to improvise when he ran into unexpectedly stiff resistance at Sparta. Based on Pyrrhus' generalship throughout the *Life*, his reaction to Antigonus' challenge comes as no surprise. Lacking the initiative to force Antigonus from a strong defensive position, Pyrrhus simply ignored him, and entered the city of Argos that night under the

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<sup>293</sup> See above, pp. 179-182.



cover of darkness.<sup>294</sup> This proved to be the Epirote's final mistake. In the delay caused by trying to fit Pyrrhus' elephants through the narrow gate the Argives within the city had the chance to call for reinforcements, and both Antigonus and Areus sent forces to confront Pyrrhus within the city. Although at dawn Pyrrhus recognized his dire situation and began to retreat, confusion caused by miscommunication with his troops outside the city led to Pyrrhus becoming trapped within the narrow streets of Argos. It was in the ensuing melee that Pyrrhus met his end, but in a fitting irony the invincible warrior was felled by a roof tile thrown by a woman watching the battle from above; this crushed Pyrrhus' vertebrae and sent him to the ground, where an enemy soldier delivered the final blow (*Pyrrh.* 34.1-3).

By the end of the *Pyrrhus*, the reader is left with a conflicted view of Pyrrhus' military leadership. On the one hand, Pyrrhus was an unquestionably ferocious warrior on the battlefield and achieved two victories against the Romans, "Pyrrhic" as they may have been. On the other hand, Pyrrhus' victories were arguably as much due to his elephants as his own actions, and his frequent tactical mistakes led to a series of defeats and his own untimely death. Pyrrhus practiced the same type of daring and physical generalship that Alexander did, an observation that Plutarch makes early on in the *Pyrrhus* (*Pyrrh.* 8.1). Throughout the rest of the Life, however, Pyrrhus achieves neither the decisive tactical victories nor the strategic success that Alexander won in his brief

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<sup>294</sup> Antigonus Gonatas' perceptive understanding of Pyrrhus' generalship in this instance, I would suggest, supports the argument that the Antigonus whose praise Plutarch cites at 8.2 was Antigonus Monophthalmos. That Gonatas clearly understood the limitations of Pyrrhus' leadership, in particular his lack of creativity and initiative, makes it seem unlikely that he would have ever rated Pyrrhus' generalship so highly.

life. With that comparison in mind, it is easy to see Pyrrhus' unsuccessful career as a result of his failure to live up to Alexander than to a failure of his style of generalship. This view, however, becomes far less tenable after reading the *Marius*. I would argue that Plutarch portrays Marius as having practiced a far different style of generalship than Pyrrhus, one which focused much more on a general's planning and decision-making than his physical prowess. The contrast between these two styles of generalship, first made explicit in the final confrontation between Antigonos and Pyrrhus, becomes increasingly pronounced throughout the *Marius*. As we shall see, Marius, who dismisses Greek language and literature at the beginning of his Life, consistently appears to be a more thoughtful and considerate general than his Greek counterpart in the pair.

### **Marius' Military Leadership**

On account of the unique careers of the two men, the *Marius* reads very differently from the *Pyrrhus*. While Pyrrhus spent much of his adult life as a Hellenistic king on military campaign, Marius' military activity made up a much smaller proportion of his long career. Nevertheless, Plutarch dedicates significant space to Marius' campaigns in the Life, particularly his war against the German tribes, and there are many points of comparison between his generalship and Pyrrhus'.

Marius' first opportunity to act as a general came after his praetorship, when Metellus invited him to Africa as legate during the war against Jugurtha. During his time there, Plutarch says, Marius not only “made a display of every sort of bravery”, but also “surpassed officers of his own rank in giving good counsel and foreseeing what was

advantageous, and vied with the common soldiers in frugality and endurance” (*Mar.* 7.2-3).<sup>295</sup> This is the first of many clear differences between Pyrrhus' and Marius' styles of leadership. While Pyrrhus' first experience as a general sees him defeating a renowned general in single combat, Marius' sees him excelling at planning and foresight; while Pyrrhus' actions elevate him above his soldiers and elicit comparisons with the legendary Alexander, Marius takes great pains to connect with and endear himself to the soldiers under his command. Of course, when considering the relationship of the two generals with their soldiers it is vital to be mindful of their very different political circumstances. As a Hellenistic king, especially one who so clearly sought to imitate both Alexander and his heroic ancestor Achilles, it would have been necessary for Pyrrhus to encourage this distance between himself and his men in order to best maintain his legitimacy as a king and – especially given his proximity to Macedon – a true successor to Alexander. Likewise, because Marius had to rely on popular elections in order to secure both political and military power, it was in Marius' best interest to gain popularity with his soldiers by sharing in their toils. Indeed, it was the fame that Marius gained in Africa, both from his deeds and from letters written by soldiers encouraging those at home to support him, that secured his first consulship (*Mar.* 7.3-9.1). The differences in their treatment of their soldiers, then, may have been due to necessity rather than actual preference, but it is still a marked difference between their styles of generalship. There are others as well, even at this early stage in their careers. Though Marius did not have a

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<sup>295</sup> ἐπεδείκνυτο πᾶσαν ἀνδραγαθίαν (*Mar.* 7.2); ἀλλὰ τοὺς μὲν ὁμοτίμους εὐβουλίᾳ καὶ προνοίᾳ τοῦ συμφέροντος ὑπερβαλλόμενος (*Mar.* 7.3).

defining heroic moment like Pyrrhus did against Pantauchus, he was brave nevertheless, and, more importantly, demonstrated an early aptitude for careful observation and planning. It is indicative of Plutarch's understanding of the military careers of these two men that Marius' military foresight, which Plutarch introduces so early in the Life's narrative, plays just as large a role in his Life as Pyrrhus' physical invincibility plays in his.

Plutarch has little more to say of Marius' war against Jugurtha after achieving the consulship, as the war was effectively over by the time Marius returned from Rome. Instead, after identifying the first seeds of enmity between Marius and Sulla resulting from the capture of Jugurtha, Plutarch advances the narrative to the invasion of the Teutones and Cimbri. The ensuing narrative of Marius' campaigns against the Germanic tribes, which occupies a full seventeen chapters, is certainly the apex of the Life, and shows the best side of Marius. Early in the narrative, Plutarch makes much of Marius' preparations for the upcoming war, which was fortunately delayed when the German tribes advanced into Spain before Italy (*Mar.* 14.1). Marius spent the resulting reprieve training his soldiers through long marches, runs, and other physical activity, which not only raised their spirits and courage, but also gave the soldiers an opportunity to become accustomed to Marius as their commander (*Mar.* 13.1-14.3). There is a clear link between this initial training and the subsequent success of Marius' soldiers against the Germans. Once word had come that the enemy was drawing near, Marius built a fortified camp along the Rhone river and excavated a canal to facilitate the delivery of vital supplies, as Plutarch says, "so that he might never be forced by lack of provisions

to give battle contrary to his better judgment” (*Mar.* 15.1-3).<sup>296</sup> And indeed, when the Germanic tribes turned back toward Italy and the Teutones challenged Marius to battle, the Roman refused. Instead, he kept his soldiers waiting inside their fortifications, and had them observe the barbarians from the walls so that they might be accustomed to their unusual size, battle cries, and equipment. This his soldiers did, and after a short time they became both dismissive of their enemies and eager for battle, just as Marius had intended (*Mar.* 15.5-16.5). This focus on Marius' successful preparation and foresight is consistent with Plutarch's initial characterization of the Roman's generalship. It is also a significant contrast to the depiction of Pyrrhus' generalship in the previous Life. Pyrrhus demonstrated little inclination toward planning before his battles, and tended to be at mercy of the preparations that his enemies made.<sup>297</sup> Even before the narrative of the battle begins, then, it is readily apparent to the reader of the *Pyrrhus-Marius* that the Roman practiced a very different type of generalship than his Greek counterpart.

The true extent of Marius' patience became clear as the campaign progressed. The Teutones made several attempts to storm Marius' camp, but were driven back each time and decided instead to bypass Marius and advance toward the Alps. Marius followed the barbarian army as it moved, always making sure to heavily fortify his encampment each night. According to Plutarch, when the two armies had nearly reached the Alps, at a place called Aquae Sextiae, Marius intentionally chose a campsite with

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<sup>296</sup> ὡς μηδέποτε παρὰ τὸν τοῦ συμφέροντος λογισμὸν ἐκβιασθεῖη δι' ἔνδειαν τῶν ἀναγκαίων εἰς μάχην καταστῆναι (*Mar.* 15.1-2).

<sup>297</sup> Especially against the Spartans and Antigonus (*Pyrrh.* 28.1-2; 31.1-2).

little access to water in order to incite his soldiers to fight (*Mar.* 18.3). However, while his soldiers were beginning to entrench their camp, their idle servants went to gather water from the only source in the area, and came into conflict with barbarians who were doing the same. The ensuing noise attracted soldiers from both sides, and the initial skirmish soon turned into a full battle. While the Romans were able to drive the barbarians back to their camp, likely capitalizing on their sluggishness after having just finished feasting, Plutarch makes it clear that this battle was not the one that Marius had intended to fight (*Mar.* 19.1-7). Although Plutarch does say that the battle was brought on by the gradual escalation of a skirmish rather than at the instigation of the commander, I would argue that he does not intend this as a slight against Marius' planning and preparation. For one, Marius had indeed intended to fight a battle at Aquae Sextiae, and had also expected the battle to be fought over access to drinking water; he had apparently just not considered that his camp followers would go off on their own. Secondly, it is clear that the effort that he put into training his soldiers and inuring them to their fearsome opponents paid off, as his men showed no hesitation before joining the battle and fought well even after a day's march. Although this battle shows Plutarch's understanding of the potential impact of fortune on any military campaign, it also demonstrates his recognition that good preparation can allow one to still achieve victory in the face of the unexpected.

This initial success, however, did little to weaken the barbarian army, and the Teutones remained a serious threat. Consequently, Marius and his soldiers spent a sleepless night after the battle erecting the fortifications that were neglected during the

fighting (*Mar.* 20.1-2). The barbarians had spent the intervening time marshalling their forces, and so Marius once again began preparing for another battle. Observing that the ground between the two armies was uneven, Plutarch says, Marius ordered 3,000 troops to lie hidden in ambush and attack the rear of the enemy after the fighting began. He then drew up his army on the high ground outside his camp, and the barbarians, who “could not wait for the Romans to come down and fight with them on equal terms”, charged up the hill at Marius' army (*Mar.* 20.8). As the barbarians were advancing, Marius sent his officers all along his line to relay advice to his soldiers, that after throwing their javelins they should methodically push the enemy back with their shields, because the barbarians would be on uneven ground and unable to stand up to their advance (*Mar.* 20.9). Plutarch's subsequent comment is brief, but nevertheless significant to a complete understanding of generalship in the *Pyrrhus-Marius*: “This was the advice he gave his men, and they saw that he was the first to act accordingly; for he was in better training than any of them, and in daring far surpassed them all” (*Mar.* 20.10).<sup>298</sup> In the *Pyrrhus*, the basis of Pyrrhus' generalship was his individual strength and daring, which surpassed not only that shown by his own troops, but that shown by his enemies as well. According to Plutarch's narrative, Pyrrhus did not prepare extensively before his battles, nor did he give tactical advice to his soldiers; victory or defeat for Pyrrhus often hinged on whether he was personally at the decisive part of the battle. Just like Pyrrhus, Marius surpassed his soldiers in daring and ability. However, Marius' physical

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<sup>298</sup> ταῦθ' ἅμα παρήνει καὶ δρῶν ἐωρᾶτο πρῶτος· οὐδενὸς γὰρ ἦσκητο χεῖρον τὸ σῶμα, καὶ πάντας πολὺ τῆ τόλμη παρήλαττεν (*Mar.* 20.10).

superiority appears here almost as an afterthought, because it has such a small impact on the outcome of his battles. Rather, it is Marius' preparation and planning that take up the bulk of Plutarch's narrative, because it is these strengths, mental instead of physical, that are the hallmark of Marius' generalship.

Indeed, Plutarch's narrative of the ensuing battle demonstrates just how effective Marius' generalship was. Following Marius' advice, his soldiers stopped the initial charge of the barbarians and crowded them back down the hill into the plain. Before the barbarians could take advantage of the level ground to reform their lines, the ambush that Marius had set in place fell upon their rear. Attacked from both sides, the barbarian army soon broke and fled, and in the ensuing rout, according to Plutarch, the Romans killed or captured over a hundred thousand of the enemy (*Mar.* 21.1-4). To a reader of the *Pyrrhus-Marius*, Marius' victory in this battle alone makes Pyrrhus' limited successes pale in comparison. Pyrrhus' limited victories against the Romans at Herculaneum and Asculum came at a notoriously high cost, and neither of them proved to be remotely decisive. Here, however, Marius not only defeated a significantly larger army, but also kept his own army intact so that it could be effective for his next campaign.

Equally relevant to the evaluation of their respective styles of generalship is the way in which Pyrrhus and Marius achieved their victories. Pyrrhus defeated Pantauchus' army because of his superiority in single combat, and the Epirote owed his limited success against the Romans primarily to the overwhelming power of his elephants. Only Pyrrhus' initial victory against Antigonos can legitimately be attributed to his tactical skill, since he surprised the Macedonian army in a narrow pass; Plutarch, however,



makes little of this tactical victory of Pyrrhus, presumably because it is so out of character with the rest of his achievements. In the *Marius*, on the other hand, as we have seen, Plutarch not only identifies Marius' thought process and preparations before his battle against the Teutones, he also narrates the battle in such a way as to demonstrate the efficacy of Marius' foresight. It is clear that unlike Pyrrhus, Marius does not have to be at the decisive point in the battle in order to achieve victory; his careful training and preparation of his own soldiers ensured that they would be able to carry out his instructions regardless of his own actions during the battle.

Marius' victory over the Teutones was by all accounts the high point of his military career, but his campaign against the German tribes was not yet over. The Cimbri had split from the Teutones before their advance towards Italy, and were causing significant problems for Marius' colleague Catulus. Although Catulus had, according to Plutarch, shown good sense in retreating to a fortification behind the river Atiso with his whole army, rather than dividing his forces to defend the various passes of the Alps, the Cimbri showed such impetuous and daring in their advance that much of Catulus' army left its camp and began to retreat (*Mar.* 23.2-4). Catulus, who “like a good and accomplished commander, placed less regard for his own reputation than for that of his countrymen” (*Mar.* 23.5), seeing that he could not stop his army from fleeing, abandoned his fortifications and took his place at the head of the army so that he would suffer the disgrace of retreat instead of his soldiers.<sup>299</sup> Catulus' selflessness foreshadows

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<sup>299</sup> ὥσπερ χρῆ τὸν ἀγαθὸν καὶ τέλειον ἄρχοντα, τὴν αὐτοῦ δόξαν ἐν ὑστέρω τῆς τῶν πολιτῶν τιθέμενον (*Mar.* 23.5).

and contrasts with Marius' improper regard for his own reputation during the upcoming battle against the Cimbri, the one flaw which Plutarch appears to identify in Marius' military leadership.<sup>300</sup> It was after this point that Marius was able to join his army with Catulus' and confront the Cimbri, who had not known about the defeat of their allies until Marius produced the king of the Teutones in chains. The Romans and the Cimbri nevertheless agreed upon a time and a place for the upcoming battle, and Plutarch once again identifies specific preparations that Marius made before the fighting. According to Plutarch, it was said that at this time Marius introduced an innovation into the Roman javelin: he replaced one of the two iron nails that attached the shaft to the head with a wooden one, which would break on impact and both impede the enemy's movement and prevent the enemy from reusing the javelin (*Mar.* 25.1). Marius' other preparation for the battle was to station Catulus' army in the center of the line and his own soldiers on the wings, where he expected the fighting to be heaviest, so that he would gain credit for the victory instead of Catulus.<sup>301</sup> Unlike Marius' preparations before his battle with the Teutones, neither his alteration to the *pilum* nor his organization of the battle line appear to have had any impact on the ensuing battle, and do not factor into Plutarch's narrative of the battle itself. Instead, the Battle of Vercellae appears much like the first battle

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<sup>300</sup> Carney (1960), 28, observes that the figures that Plutarch contrasts Marius with in the *Life* exemplify the good qualities which Plutarch believes Marius lacks.

<sup>301</sup> This is Marius' selfishness that was foreshadowed by Plutarch's earlier praise of Catulus. Plutarch relied on the accounts of Sulla and, indirectly, Catulus, for Marius' motivation for his organization of the Roman line, and it is true that both of these sources would have been hostile to Marius. However, Plutarch was by no means beholden to his sources, and would not have included implied or direct criticism of his subject from a source if it conflicted with his own view of the subject. Marius' selfishness here is consistent with the excessive ambition that he demonstrates throughout the *Life*. See Carney (190), 27-8; Buszard (2002), 9.

against the Teutones, in that from the beginning it progressed beyond Marius' direct control. Just before the two large armies met, a giant cloud of dust obscured the view of both sides and caused Marius and his soldiers to miss the enemy formation in their advance. The infantry of the Cimbri thus encountered Catulus' troops, who, because of their intense training, their being accustomed to the intense summer heat, and their inability to see the true extent of the barbarian army, were able to defeat the Cimbric army and drive them back to their camp (*Mar.* 26.3-27.3). Even though Catulus thus claimed credit for the victory against the Cimbri, Plutarch acknowledges that the overall success of the campaigns against the Germanic tribes was awarded to Marius on account of his higher rank and his victory against the Teutones.

The Battle of Vercellae is difficult to compare to any of the battles in the *Pyrrhus*. Although Marius was in nominal command, his ultimate responsibility for the victory was disputed because of internal politics that Pyrrhus never had to contend with. Plutarch's narrative of the Cimbric campaign certainly does not show Marius in a particularly good light, but despite the problems associated with Marius' ambition there is nothing in the narrative that discredits his actual ability to lead soldiers. The existence of Catulus' army, presumably raised and trained by him, makes it difficult to credit Marius with even indirect responsibility for the success of the Roman soldiers as was possible for the initial battle at Aquae Sextiae: Marius' own soldiers, according to Plutarch, made no appreciable contribution to the fighting. While Plutarch attributes some credit for the Roman victory at Vercellae to the effective training of the Romans, he focuses more on the inability of the Cimbri to cope with the intense heat of the

summer solstice, with which the Romans were well acquainted. For Plutarch, then, because the cloud of dust precluded any sort of tactical intervention by either of the Roman generals, Vercellae was very much a victory won by the Roman soldiers themselves.

After successfully repelling the incursions of the Tuetones and the Cimbri, Marius returned to the political arena in Rome, where he quickly found himself out of his depth. Throughout the last two-thirds of the Life Marius struggled to secure another military command, particularly against Mithridates, so that he might regain the power and influence that he enjoyed during the Germanic campaigns. His last command, however, came during the Social War, before the war with Mithridates began and before the worst of the conflict with Sulla. Although Plutarch only dedicates a single chapter to Marius' actions during the Social War, this brief account is particularly significant when compared to the end of the *Pyrrhus*. This passage is nevertheless challenging, because it initially appears contradictory. Plutarch prefaces his narrative of the Social War by saying that Marius' age made him slow to act and prone to hesitation and delay, so that the war both decreased his own reputation and increased Sulla's (*Mar.* 33.1). However, Plutarch then goes on to praise Marius for not only winning a great victory during the war but also refusing to be drawn into battles when he was in unfavorable positions (*Mar.* 33.3-4). These two conflicting images of Marius are of course two sides of the same coin: Marius' refusal to engage the enemy could alternately be called hesitation or prudence depending on the attitude of the observer. It would be easy to see this as a contradiction stemming from Plutarch's desire to soften the blow of criticism from a

hostile source, of which he used several during the composition of the *Marius*.<sup>302</sup> Plutarch's strong tendency to show his subjects in a positive light is well-documented, and it could be argued that this is why he apparently contradicts himself by first criticizing and then praising Marius' slowness to act.<sup>303</sup> However, such an abrupt shift would be uncharacteristically clumsy of Plutarch; moreover, he has already shown himself ready to provide an unflattering picture of Marius' military actions when appropriate, so there would be nothing stopping him from sticking to the criticism in this instance as well. Rather, I would suggest that there is in fact no contradiction here, and that this is instead consistent with Plutarch's portrayal of the differences between military and political success. The key point here, one which Plutarch has identified in earlier parts of the *Marius*, is that in the Roman Republic appearances could be more important than actual military success.<sup>304</sup> Marius won a great victory and kept his army alive when confronted by superior forces, but because he owed these accomplishments to his passivity they diminished rather than enhanced his reputation (and consequently his influence).

A strong parallel to the unpopularity of the slowness of Marius' generalship at the end of his career can be found in the *Fabius Maximus*. The unpopularity of Fabius' delaying tactics against Hannibal, as effective as they were, is a common theme in his Life. Fabius' strategy of wearing down Hannibal by shadowing his army without giving

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<sup>302</sup> Especially the accounts of Sulla and Catulus. See Buszard (2002), 9-11.

<sup>303</sup> Duff (1999), 53-65.

<sup>304</sup> Particularly *Mar.* 10, with the infighting between Metellus, Marius, and Sulla to gain the honour of defeating Jugurtha, and *Mar.* 25, with similar recriminations between Marius, Sulla, and Catulus over credit for victory over the Cimbri.

battle made him despised by his countrymen, to such an extent that he even suffered abuse in his own camp; only Hannibal recognized and respected Fabius' cunning (*Fab.* 5.2-3). Instead, the Roman people much preferred far more reckless generals like Minucius and Terentius Varro, who advocated a more aggressive policy against Hannibal. It was only after such an aggressive policy led to the disaster at Cannae, according to Plutarch, that the Romans had a change of heart: “that which was called cowardice and sluggishness in Fabius before the battle, immediately after the battle was thought to be no simple human reasoning, but rather, some divine and wonderful intelligence” (*Fab.* 17.5).<sup>305</sup> It was the effective destruction of two consular armies, rather than any actual success on Fabius' part, that changed the popular opinion of Fabius' cautious strategy against Hannibal. For Plutarch, military success in the Rome of Fabius' time, just like Marius', could easily be overlooked by the Roman people.

Plutarch provides few specific details of Marius' actions during the Social War, but that which Plutarch focuses on is particularly important to our understanding of military leadership in the *Pyrrhus-Marius* as a whole. After his initial mention of Marius' unpopularity at the time, Plutarch records an exchange between Marius and Pompaedius Silo, whom he erroneously calls Publius Silo, the leader of the Marsi.<sup>306</sup>

The confrontation between the two generals is worth quoting in full:

λέγεται δὲ Ποπαιδίου Σίλωνος, ὃς μέγιστον εἶχε τῶν πολεμίων ἀξίωμα καὶ δύναμιν, εἰπόντος πρὸς αὐτόν “εἰ μέγας εἶ στρατηγὸς ὦ Μάριε, διαγώνισαι καταβάς”, ἀποκρίνασθαι “σὺ μὲν οὖν, εἰ μέγας εἶ στρατηγός, ἀνάγκασόν με διαγωνίσασθαι μὴ βουλόμενον” (*Mar.* 33.4).

<sup>305</sup> ἢ γὰρ πρὸ τῆς μάχης Φαβίου δειλία καὶ ψυχρότης λεγομένη μετὰ τὴν μάχην εὐθὺς οὐδ' ἀνθρώπινος ἐδόκει λογισμός, ἀλλὰ θεῖόν τι χρῆμα διανοίας καὶ δαυμόνιον (*Fab.* 17.5).

<sup>306</sup> Perrin (1920), 555 n.1; cf. *Cato Minor* 2.1-4.

It is said that Publius Silo, who had the greatest authority and power among the enemy, once said to him, “if you are a great general, Marius, come down and fight us”; to which Marius answered, “No, but you, if you are a great general, force me to fight you against my will.”

This anecdote has the immediate purpose of supporting Plutarch's claim just before, that Marius demonstrated great patience during the Social War and was not “unduly irritated by the insults and challenges” (*Mar.* 33.3) of his enemies. I would suggest, however, that this brief exchange between Silo and Marius also provides significant insight into Plutarch's conception of generalship in the *Pyrrhus-Marius*. Marius' refusal to fight against an apparently superior enemy, despite his advanced age and the implications of cowardice in this section, is completely in character with his earlier military career. Throughout the *Life*, Marius had been particularly adept at dictating the terms of battle, and this skill formed the basis of his strategy against the Germanic tribes.<sup>307</sup> While this exchange thus provides little new information about Marius' character or leadership, it does recall a similar scene from the end of the *Pyrrhus*. After his retreat from Sparta, Pyrrhus confronted Antigonus, who was encamped upon a hill outside Argos with his army; Pyrrhus insulted Antigonus and challenged him to come down and fight, but Antigonus refused, and Pyrrhus saw no alternative but to march against Argos (*Pyrrh.* 31.1-2). It was already clear in the *Pyrrhus* that the Epirote's failure to dislodge Antigonus represented a significant military mistake, as Antigonus' army subsequently trapped Pyrrhus in the streets of Argos, causing his death. However, that the encounter between Pyrrhus and Antigonus could be interpreted as a failed test of Pyrrhus'

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<sup>307</sup> Especially at the beginning of his campaign against the Teutones (*Mar.* 15.1-3).

generalship only becomes clear upon reading the *Marius*. Marius' retort to Silo not only reinforces his status as a good general, but causes the reader to question Pyrrhus' generalship in the same situation. Moreover, I would suggest that it is significant that such a parallel comes at the very end of Plutarch's narrative of Marius' military career. By this point in the *Life*, the reader has seen multiple proofs of Marius' military ability, and has no reason to believe that Marius is anything but a great general. Not only, then, does the reader see Silo's taunt as patently false – Marius has no need to prove his ability as a general – but he is also much more willing to accept what Marius says as an accurate assessment of the situation because it is coming from a successful general. By prompting the reader to trust in Marius' military analysis throughout his *Life*, Plutarch lays the groundwork for the reader to understand Marius' criticism of Silo's generalship as a criticism of Pyrrhus' as well. Indeed, that Marius and Pyrrhus were on opposite sides of their respective engagements (Marius the defender; Pyrrhus the attacker), makes the parallels of this scene even stronger. Their opposing roles in such similar situations make it easy for the reader to conflate the two episodes in his mind, thus imagining Pyrrhus unable to dislodge Marius from an advantageous position and suffering Marius' stinging criticism of his generalship as a result. Marius' demonstrated superiority to Silo and implied superiority to Pyrrhus is an appropriate way for Plutarch to finish his discussion of Marius' military achievements, as it shows Marius to be as successful at the end of his military career as he was at the start.

Plutarch's brief account of Marius' actions during the Social War is the last military narrative in the *Life*. Unlike in the *Pyrrhus*, of course, there is substantially



more narrative in the *Marius* after the end of his military career, and so Marius' successful military career is removed from his own ignoble end. Despite the uncertainty that remains over Marius' actual responsibility for the final defeat of Jugurtha and the victory over the Cimbri at Vercellae, Plutarch portrays him as a skilled and successful commander. Marius' strengths lay in his planning, his patience, and the thorough training of his soldiers, which Plutarch consistently highlights in each of his major military campaigns.

### **Comparison of Generalship in the *Pyrrhus-Marius***

As addressed at the beginning of this chapter, there is no concluding *synkrisis* to the *Pyrrhus-Marius*, and so there is consequently no direct comparison by Plutarch regarding their military careers. The consistency and detail with which Plutarch treats their generalship throughout the pair, however, does allow readers to draw their own conclusions. Many of the extant *synkriseis* that address the military careers of their subjects focus on relatively simplistic criteria. Plutarch frequently compares numbers of victories earned or losses sustained, degree of bravery, available resources, quality of opponents, and scale of achievements.<sup>308</sup> It is certainly possible to compare the generalship of Pyrrhus and Marius in these ways as well. To start with perhaps the crudest method of comparison, Pyrrhus decisively lost battles at Beneventum (*Pyrrh.* 25.1-5), Sparta (*Pyrrh.* 27.1-30.1), and Argos (*Pyrrh.* 31.1-34.6), whereas Marius

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<sup>308</sup> Number of victories: *Cim.-Luc.* 2.1; *Per.-Fab.* 2.1-2; *Pel.-Mar.* 2.1; bravery: *The.-Rom.* 1.3-4; *Age.-Pomp.* 3.3-5; *Phil.-Flam.* 2.3; resources: *Phil.-Fla.* 2.1-2; quality of opponents: *Cim.-Luc.* 3.5; scale of victories: *Lys.-Sulla* 4.4; *Age.-Pomp.* 3.1-2; *Ari.-Cato* 5.1-2.

remained undefeated throughout his entire career. In terms of quantity, Marius crushed a barbarian force of more than 100,000 men (*Mar.* 21.2), far more than Pyrrhus ever faced. On the other hand, Pyrrhus fought and won against Romans and Greeks, while Marius primarily fought against uncivilized barbarians except for a few small battles during the Social War (*Mar.* 33.1-3).<sup>309</sup> Both men were excellent and brave soldiers before they became generals, as seen by Pyrrhus' actions at Ipsus (*Pyrrh.* 4.3) and Marius' against the Celtiberians (*Mar.* 3.2-3) and Numidians (*Mar.* 8.1-2). However, while Plutarch describes Pyrrhus' bravery and prowess in battle at every occasion (*Pyrrh.* 7.4-5; 16.7-8; 22.6; 24.2-4; 30.5-6), he only speaks of Marius taking part in combat once after becoming general, saying simply that he was in better shape than his soldiers and that he surpassed them all in bravery (*Mar.* 20.6).

According to just these criteria, while Marius may appear to have an edge in the number and scale of his victories, it would be difficult to argue outright that Marius was the superior general. However, as we have seen, Plutarch's treatment of their generalship throughout the pair is far more detailed and nuanced than such a limited comparison. Throughout the *Pyrrhus*, Plutarch consistently identifies Pyrrhus' generalship as based almost entirely on his own individual abilities in combat. Although his martial prowess did indeed grant him victory against Pantauchus and at Eryx, this proved to be the exception rather than the rule. When he was out-manuevered by his opponents, as he was at Beneventum, Sparta, and Argos, Pyrrhus proved unable to deal with the

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<sup>309</sup> Although Marius's most significant victories were against barbarians, Plutarch dedicates an entire chapter to building up the threat that the Teutones and Cimbri posed to Rome (*Mar.* 9.1-9).

unexpected situation. Only at Asculum did Pyrrhus demonstrate some of the sound generalship that one would expect from him, making sure to choose a battlefield appropriate for his cavalry after an inconclusive first day of fighting, but even there, as at Herculaneum, it was only the blunt force of Pyrrhus' elephants that granted him some semblance of victory. This is a clear and consistent theme throughout the Life, yet it is also one that is not only surprising, but often difficult for a reader to accept. At *Pyrrh.* 8, as we have seen, Plutarch focuses on Pyrrhus' sterling reputation among his contemporaries. Both Macedonian soldiers and famous generals compared Pyrrhus with Alexander and considered him one of the foremost generals of history; moreover, Pyrrhus had written and read extensively on military affairs, considering it the only kingly branch of study (*Pyrrh.* 8.1-3). Similarly, Plutarch's effusive praise of Pyrrhus' actions at the beginning of the Battle of Asculum (*Pyrrh.* 16.11) leads the reader to expect the Epirote to show similar skill and dynamism in battles throughout the rest of the Life. It is indeed surprising, then, that someone as highly-regarded and well-versed in military affairs as Pyrrhus would so often appear to be as reactive and unimaginative on the battlefield as he proves to be.

The *Marius*' portrayal of its subject's generalship is equally surprising. While Plutarch does mention Marius' military education at the beginning of the Life, his lack of detail on the subject (referring to it simply as στρατιωτικῆς παιδείας, *Mar.* 2.1), particularly compared to the detail with which he treats Pyrrhus' academic interest in military science, does not suggest that Marius will be a particularly thoughtful or considered general. This is compounded by the reference to his warlike nature (*Mar.*

2.1) and his total disregard for Greek learning (*Mar.* 2.2-4). Nevertheless, it is Marius, far more than Pyrrhus, who appears to have mastered the art of generalship. He trained and prepared his soldiers effectively before the Germanic campaigns, adapted to changing circumstances at Aquae Sextiae when the battle began accidentally, and kept his army largely intact by demonstrating eminent patience against both German and Italian opponents. Such qualitative differences in the generalship of Pyrrhus and Marius are difficult to bring out through the comparison of simple statistics that Plutarch often makes in concluding *synkriseis*, as seen above, but they are nevertheless visible in the military narratives that Plutarch constructs in the pair.

Another important point of comparison that Plutarch brings out within the military narratives of the *Pyrrhus-Marius* is the contrast between each man's reputation and actual military success. The importance and impact of reputation is most clearly seen in the *Pyrrhus*. Plutarch twice relates detailed praise of his military ability: first the praise of specific generals such as Antigonus and Hannibal (*Pyrrh.* 8.5), then the praise of anonymous commentators (*Pyrrh.* 26.1). I have already discussed the difficulties of taking such praise for his reputation at face value, above, but however Plutarch expects a reader of the Life to interpret these passages he makes it clear that Pyrrhus did indeed possess a sterling reputation among men at the time. As mentioned above, the common Macedonian soldiers clearly looked up to Pyrrhus, and saw him as exhibiting several of the characteristics of Alexander (*Pyrrh.* 8.1). This admiration, unlike the praise of contemporary or later generals, actually had a practical benefit for Pyrrhus during his career. After Pyrrhus invaded Macedonia at the behest of the other *diadochoi*, he was

confronted by Demetrius, who thought that he could more easily defeat him than Lysimachus. However, when Demetrius had encamped near Pyrrhus' army, both local Beroreans and some of Pyrrhus' own men infiltrated Demetrius' camp, and by describing Pyrrhus' irresistibility in battle, vigor, and love of his soldiers, convinced so many of Demetrius' soldiers to defect to Pyrrhus that Demetrius was forced to withdraw (*Pyrrh.* 11). An even more impressive display of the strength of Pyrrhus' reputation comes after the Epirote was forced to retreat from Italy, when he induced Antigonos' phalanx to come over to his army by stretching out his hand and calling out the infantry's officers (*Pyrrh.* 26.8). Even though he had no lasting achievements to show for his years in Italy and Sicily, Pyrrhus' reputation was still such that the common Macedonian soldiers flocked to his banner. The strength of Pyrrhus' reputation, however, only highlights the reality that his military achievements routinely fail to live up to the reader's expectations throughout the *Life*. As discussed above, while Pyrrhus' heroic style of individual leadership, reminiscent as it was of Achilles and Alexander, inspired admiration across the Greek world, it translated into neither lasting military success nor even significant individual victories.

Military reputation is less of a theme in Marius' *Life* than it is in the *Pyrrhus*, but it becomes apparent in a comparison between the two. On the one hand, Marius saw even more practical benefit from his reputation for military skill than Pyrrhus did. Unlike Pyrrhus, Marius needed popular support in order to maintain his political and military command, and he was able to translate the fame from his achievements in the Jugurtine War and the impending threat of Germanic invasion into his first four

consulships (*Mar.* 9.1, 11.1, 12.1, 14.6-14). His resounding victory over the Teutones similarly brought about his fifth (*Mar.* 22.4). On the other hand, while Pyrrhus kept his reputation for military skill even after being forced to retreat in failure from Sicily and Italy, Marius began to lose his reputation while still achieving military successes.

Plutarch attributes much of Marius' subsequent fall from public grace to his fear of losing the favor of the multitude and his poor choices of political allies (*Mar.* 28-31).<sup>310</sup> His loss of reputation for his military ability during the Social War, however, as discussed above, comes despite yet another impressive victory and more examples of his considered patience (*Mar.* 33.2). Moreover, the criticism of Marius' generalship that Plutarch relates, that he was slow in making attacks and given to hesitation (βραδύς γὰρ ἐφάνη ταῖς ἐπιβολαῖς, ὄκνου τε περὶ πάντα καὶ μελλήσεως ὑπόπλεως, *Mar.* 33.1), is even more jarring because it is simply a negative way of viewing his patience, which was responsible for so much of his success. This is admittedly a small point within the entire Life, and when read on its own appears to have little significance. When taken with Plutarch's portrayal of military reputation in the *Pyrrhus*, however, I would suggest that it can be seen as part of a warning by Plutarch about putting too much faith in a general's military δόξα. Just as the effusive praise of Pyrrhus' generalship overshadowed his actual accomplishments, so did later criticism of Marius' leadership fault him for one of his greatest assets. Neither is completely wrong: Pyrrhus was a tremendous fighter in single combat, and Marius often delayed significantly before he made an attack. As the parallel treatments of reputation in the *Pyrrhus-Marius* suggest,

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<sup>310</sup> Duff (1999), 118-121.

however, and as is borne out by the *Parallel Lives* themselves, it is necessary to observe a man's actions and not rely solely on his reputation.

A comparative reading of leadership in the *Pyrrhus-Marius*, then, allows for a significantly more nuanced understanding of their military abilities than can be seen from either Life on its own. Important themes concerning generalship, the value of military education, and reputation run across both Lives, and provide avenues for a direct comparison of two generals' successes and skills. Pyrrhus' reputation for generalship is significant, but despite his physical similarities to Alexander the Great and his single-minded focus on military education, he achieved neither the immediate nor lasting successes that Marius achieved. Upon finishing the *Pyrrhus-Marius*, the reader is left to conclude that Plutarch considered Marius' style of generalship to be clearly superior to Pyrrhus'.

## **Conclusion**

The *Pyrrhus-Marius* provides an excellent opportunity to apply many of the lessons in the previous chapters. In the first chapter I examined how Plutarch uses extended military narrative in order to highlight key aspects of his subjects' unique styles of generalship, and this pair is one of the best examples of that. Throughout the *Pyrrhus*, Plutarch spends a significant portion of the Life describing Pyrrhus' military campaigns across Greece, Italy, and Sicily. As we have seen, each part of the narrative contributes to Plutarch's portrayal of Pyrrhus as a general in the style of Alexander who can never quite match the success of his predecessor. Plutarch's praise of Pyrrhus'

battlefield control at Herculaneum (*Pyrrh.* 16.11), discussed in detail above, stands out in large part because it contrasts with this picture of Pyrrhus' individualized leadership that characterizes his actions in the rest of the Life. Plutarch uses military narrative in the Marius to similar effect, consistently characterizing his generalship during both the Germanic invasions and the Social War as being marked by foresight and prudence. He is shown to anticipate the actions of both his own soldiers (*Mar.* 16.1-17.1) and those of the enemy (*Mar.* 20.5-21.1), and to be unperturbed by the intimidation (*Mar.* 15.5-16.2) or taunts (*Mar.* 33.2) of others while on the battlefield.<sup>311</sup> The contrast between these two styles of leadership is a clear stimulus for the reader to judge between the generalship of Pyrrhus and Marius, an exercise which Plutarch is shown to have valued and which is even more important in the absence of a concluding *synkrisis*.

In addition to the judgment on their military leadership, Plutarch also invites the reader of the *Pyrrhus-Marius* to consider the effectiveness of military education in the pair. In Chapter 2, I examined the importance of military education to the ability of many statesmen in the *Parallel Lives* to benefit their cities despite their moral failings. Interestingly, however, while Marius is one of those whose military education has a clear impact on his service to Rome, Pyrrhus' military education appears to have benefited neither him nor his kingdom of Epirus. Indeed, as we have seen throughout this chapter, there is clear irony in the relationship between military education and military success in this pair. Pyrrhus, whose academic interest in the art of war was such that he wrote on

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<sup>311</sup> As Plutarch observes, Marius' steadfast bravery completely abandoned him on the political stage (*Mar.* 28.3).



the subject, is consistently unable to translate his knowledge into practical success on the battlefield; Marius, on whose military education Plutarch provides no real detail, proves himself to be a thoughtful and considered commander who wins battle after battle. That Plutarch provides more detail about Pyrrhus' military education than Marius is mostly due to the availability of sources, as Plutarch tended to possess considerably more information on the education of his Greek subjects than his Roman ones.<sup>312</sup>

Nevertheless, it remains striking that whatever Marius' στρατιωτικῆς παιδείας (*Mar.* 2.1) actually entailed, it was certainly more effective than Pyrrhus' academic interest in military affairs. That both Pyrrhus and Marius suffered heavily throughout their careers because of their sole focus on military education and lack of Greek παιδεία is well-established.<sup>313</sup> At the same time, as we can see by comparing the military narratives from both Lives, only Marius appears to have gained any practical benefit from the military education that they both valued so highly. It is possible to see the ineffectiveness of Pyrrhus' military education as a further warning against the dangers of ignoring Greek παιδεία, but I do not believe that to be the case. Plutarch makes that point clearly enough in the *Pyrrhus-Marius* as it is, and, as seen in Chapter 2, it is a common theme in many other Lives.<sup>314</sup> Instead, I would suggest Plutarch is warning against a purely literary study of military science, advocating instead a more practical, hands-on approach to it, and possibly to education in general. Plutarch's portrayal of

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<sup>312</sup> Pelling (2002), 306. Cf. Buszard, (2002), 7-11, on Plutarch's sources for the *Pyrrhus-Marius*. Although, as Swain (1990), 132, has argued, Plutarch's lack of sources on a subject's education do not stop him from making education a relevant theme in the *Life*.

<sup>313</sup> The importance of παιδεία – more significantly the consequences of its absence – to the pair has received considerable comment from Duff (1999), 101-130; (2008), 16-18; Buszard (2002), 156-161.

<sup>314</sup> Particularly the *Coriolanus*, *Pelopidas*, and *Marcellus*. See above, pp. 70-73.

military education in the *Philopoemen* supports this well. In his Life, Philopoemen appears just as focused on military education as Pyrrhus, eschewing even those physical aspects of παιδεία such as athletics and wrestling that conflicted with his military training (*Phil.* 3.3-4). Like Pyrrhus, Philopoemen read treatises on military tactics and leadership, but, apparently unlike Pyrrhus, he preferred to “get his proof and make his practice on the grounds themselves” (*Phil.* 4.9).<sup>315</sup> Plutarch specifically reinforces Philopoemen’s military practicality later in the Life, noting that Philopoemen physically observed the terrain before a successful battle (*Phil.* 14.8). Philopoemen was unequivocally successful throughout his military career, and even made significant modifications to the equipment and tactics of the Achaean phalanx (*Phil.* 9.1-14), which similarly suggests a practical and familiar understanding of the art of warfare. Philopoemen’s work to change the way his army fought brings the discussion back to Marius, who similarly made his soldiers more effective by changing both how his army marched (*Mar.* 13) and the structure of the *pilum* (*Mar.* 25.1). Marius’ use of the terrain to create an ambush against the Teutones (*Mar.* 20.5) also suggests parallels to Philopoemen’s tendency to plan ahead and inspect the terrain of a possible battlefield. Obviously, Plutarch does not provide enough information about Marius’ military education to draw any conclusions about what it entailed, even with these parallels to Philopoemen’s military habits. Nevertheless, I do believe that these parallels between the military contributions and habits of Marius and Philopoemen, when seen against the

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<sup>315</sup> ἐπὶ τῶν τόπων αὐτῶν ἐλάμβανεν ἔλεγχον καὶ μελέτην ἐποιεῖτο (*Phil.* 4.9).

failure of Pyrrhus' own military education, advocate the need for statesmen to apply their study to the real world. Pyrrhus may have fought plenty of battles, but was consistently unable to employ his tactical or strategic knowledge on the battlefield.

Not all pairs of Lives have such clear parallels between their military narratives; the military narrative in the *Alexander-Caesar*, for instance, as discussed in Chapter 1, is so grossly imbalanced towards the *Caesar* that there are few comparisons to make between their military careers. Such can also be said for other pairs, such as the *Aristides-Cato Major* or *Fabius Maximus-Pericles*, where Plutarch puts considerably more emphasis on one of his subject's military careers than the other, and it is more fruitful to look at military narrative in a single Life than to compare it across the pair as I have done in the *Pyrrhus-Marius*. However, the *Pyrrhus-Marius* is not the only pair that that is amenable to an in-depth comparison of military narrative. The *Sertorius-Eumenes*, as discussed in Chapter 2, also contains strong parallels between military narrative, particularly in terms of the use and effectiveness of military deception.<sup>316</sup> Similarly, the *Philopoemen-Flamininus* provides a good contrast between the respective military abilities and achievements of its subjects, many of which Plutarch points out in the concluding *synkrisis* of the pair.<sup>317</sup> Nevertheless, the *Pyrrhus-Marius* stands out amongst the *Parallel Lives* for the significance of the military narrative to a thematic reading of the pair and the importance of military achievement to the lives of its

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<sup>316</sup> See above, pp. 111-119.

<sup>317</sup> Indeed, Plutarch's comparison of Philopoemen and Flamininus' military successes in the *synkrisis* is one of the most nuanced there is, and considers far more than just their number of victories. See Duff (1999), 267-269.

subjects. As flawed as they were in other aspects of their lives, both Pyrrhus and Marius achieved their greatest ἀρετή on the battlefield. Pyrrhus' generalship might not have lived up to its high reputation, but the Epirote was nevertheless an irresistible individual on the battlefield; Marius, for his part, showed the patience and foresight of a great general while on campaign, even though those traits failed him completely in the political arena of Rome.

## Conclusion

Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* are an invaluable source of information about some of the most important Greek and Roman figures in history, the majority of whom earned their fame on the battlefields of the ancient world. It comes as no surprise, then, that Plutarch dedicates a significant portion of many Lives to the generalship and military accomplishments of his subjects. As we have seen, his consistent inclusion of military narrative in the *Parallel Lives* goes beyond mere interest in the topic: Plutarch integrates discussion of military leadership into the portrayal of his subjects' characters so that his readers might improve themselves, a theme which lies at the very heart of the *Parallel Lives*.

Plutarch's military narrative, as seen in Chapter 1, forms a significant part of the structure and characterization of many Lives. His descriptions of battles and campaigns throughout the *Parallel Lives*, particularly those seen in the *Caesar* and *Lucullus*, demonstrate a clear understanding of the military accomplishments of his subjects. Moreover, Plutarch frequently arranges these narratives in such a way as to highlight specific examples of good generalship that he considered worthy of imitation, a practice consistent with his broader goal of improving the character of his readership by providing illustrations of virtue from the political and military careers of his subjects. These examples of good generalship embedded throughout the *Parallel Lives* do tend to be specific to the particular circumstances in the Lives in which they are found, but it is nevertheless possible to see a clear pattern in what Plutarch considered to be generalship worthy of imitation. For Plutarch, a general's ability to plan, issue orders, and act

rationality is consistently the most important factor in his success on the battlefield. In his narrative of the Battle of Pydna in the *Aemilius Paulus*, Plutarch not only highlights Aemilius' observation of the deterioration of the Macedonian phalanx during the battle, but also the chain of orders from Aemilius to subordinate officers to soldiers that enabled the Romans to exploit the gaps in the phalanx and achieve victory (*Aem.* 20.7-10). In Plutarch's eyes, then, Aemilius owes his success not only to his ability to analyze and react to an unexpected situation, but also to his ability to relay his plan effectively to those who most needed to implement it. Many other generals in the *Parallel Lives* demonstrate the same rationality and thoughtfulness that Aemilius does: Plutarch similarly highlights the successful generalship of Caesar, Fabius Maximus, Philopoemen, and Marius, among others, throughout each of their individual Lives. Despite the frequency of this theme in many Lives, however, Plutarch was quick to identify its absence as well. He explicitly criticizes the rashness of Pelopidas and Marcellus that led the two generals to throw away their own lives in ill-considered battles; indeed, this similarity between the two men appears to have been the primary reason for their pairing.<sup>318</sup> I would argue that Plutarch's greatest disapproval of unthinking generalship, however, appears in the *Pyrrhus-Marius*. Plutarch never condemns Pyrrhus' generalship in the Life outright, but as we have seen, the implicit comparisons between the contrasting generalship of Pyrrhus and Marius throughout the

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<sup>318</sup> Plutarch frames the *Pelopidas-Marcellus* with the theme of their wasteful deaths. His proem to the pair begins with a series of apophthegms on the importance of a general's survival (*Pel.* 1-2), and concludes the final *synkrisis* with a criticism of their wasteful deaths (*Pel.-Marc.* 3). See Ingenkamp (2008) for a close discussion of this theme in the pair.

pair emphasize the ultimate ineffectiveness of Pyrrhus' style of leadership. No aspiring or established general, after reading the *Pyrrhus-Marius*, would chose to imitate Pyrrhus over Marius; despite a few close-fought tactical victories, Pyrrhus' impetuous and blunt leadership lead to one strategic defeat after another, while Marius' patient and considered generalship bring him a string of brilliant military successes. The *Pyrrhus-Marius* thus confirms Plutarch's preference for rational generalship that is seen throughout the *Parallel Lives*, while also providing a counter-example of what style of generalship should be avoided.

It is Plutarch's evident disapproval of brash generalship that might help explain the relative lack of military narrative in the *Alexander*, perhaps the one Life in which descriptions of battles and campaigns are most conspicuously lacking. It is of course important to take Plutarch's own words at face value here, as he does say specifically that he "is leaving for others the magnitudes and battles" of Alexander's career (*Alex.* 1.3).<sup>319</sup> Plutarch is clearly content to let other authors take on the admittedly numerous details of Alexander's military accomplishments so that he can focus, as he says, on other aspects of the man's life that illustrate his character (*Alex.* 1.1-3). There is a clear parallel here with the proem of the *Nicias*, where Plutarch explains that while he will be describing some of the same events that Thucydides and Philistus have, he will do so only "briefly and by necessity", so that he does "not appear to be altogether negligent and lazy".<sup>320</sup> Instead, he intends to focus on revealing details about Nicias that he has

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<sup>319</sup> ἐάσαντας ἑτέροις τὰ μεγέθη καὶ τοὺς ἀγῶνας (*Alex.* 1.3).

<sup>320</sup> ἐπιδραμῶν βραχέως καὶ διὰ τῶν ἀναγκαίων, ἵνα μὴ παντάπασιν ἀμελεῖς δοκῶ καὶ ἀργὸς εἶναι (*Nic.* 1.5).

found from a variety of different sources and that have not been suitably discussed by other authors (*Nic.* 1.5). It is likely that much of Plutarch's cursory treatment of Alexander's famous battles of the Granicus, Issus, and Gaugamela stems from a similar desire to avoid re-treading familiar narratives while still doing his due diligence as an author. Nevertheless, I would suggest that Plutarch's relative quiet about Alexander's generalship throughout the *Life* may also be in part due to his disapproval of the Macedonian's style of generalship. It is clear from what military narrative Plutarch includes in the *Alexander* that he considered his subject's generalship prone to rashness. Indeed, Plutarch lays this charge against him twice just during his description of the Battle of the Granicus, saying that in his attack across the river "appeared to be frenzied and leading according to madness rather than judgement", and that his rush against the Greek mercenaries at the end of the battle was "influenced by anger more than reason" and led to his horse being killed from underneath him (*Alex.* 16.4-16.14).<sup>321</sup> Plutarch is less critical of Alexander's generalship elsewhere in the *Life*, and even praises it in his brief accounts of Issus and Gaugamela; nevertheless, Plutarch also frequently mentions other instances in which Alexander's penchant for fighting at the front leads to his injury or near-death.<sup>322</sup> It is significant that Plutarch, who tends to avoid overtly criticizing the subjects of his *Parallel Lives*, is as disparaging as he is about Alexander's generalship,

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<sup>321</sup> ἔδοξε μανικῶς καὶ πρὸς ἀπόνοιαν μᾶλλον ἢ γνώμη στρατηγεῖν (*Alex.* 16.4); ὁ δὲ θυμῷ μᾶλλον ἢ λογισμῷ πρῶτος ἐμβαλὼν (*Alex.* 16.14).

<sup>322</sup> Plutarch acknowledges the importance of Alexander's generalship to his victory at Issus (20.7-8), and praises his confidence and calculation in the midst of the fighting at Gaugamela (32.4). Nevertheless, he appears to be more interested in highlighting Alexander's injuries in battle at Issus (*Alex.* 20.8-9) and against the Malli (*Alex.* 63.1-14); Plutarch also comments on Alexander's propensity to court danger more generally on two other occasions (*Alex.* 41.1, 58.1).



especially considering the Macedonian's fame and unquestioned success in battle. Alexander's impetuosity in battle is just one manifestation of his excessive *θυμός*, which forms an important theme throughout the *Life*.<sup>323</sup> It also, however, clearly parallels the rashness exhibited in battle by Pyrrhus, a rashness which brought the Epirote no lasting success and which we have seen Plutarch discourage in the *Pyrrhus-Marius*. Indeed, the pattern of military leadership that Plutarch discusses in the *Pyrrhus-Marius* is largely similar to that in the *Alexander-Caesar*. While it is certainly true that Alexander's individualistic style of generalship led to considerably more military success than Pyrrhus achieved, I would suggest that Plutarch's mixed portrayal of Alexander's generalship within the *Life* leads the reader to see Caesar as the superior general of the pair. Caesar may have had a slower start to his military career, as Plutarch highlights with the story of the Roman weeping at the thought of how much more Alexander had achieved at the same age (*Caes.* 11.5-6). However, as we examined in depth in Chapter 1, shortly after this anecdote Plutarch begins the first of several in-depth analyses of Caesar's military campaigns, throughout which he portrays Caesar's generalship in an unequivocally positive manner.<sup>324</sup> Plutarch's relative disregard of Alexander's military accomplishments, especially in comparison to his detailed narratives of Caesar's, has the effect of magnifying the Roman's own generalship. Plutarch certainly had other reasons for not focusing more heavily on Alexander's generalship in his *Life*, as discussed above, and he still portrays the Macedonian king

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<sup>323</sup> Cf. Mossman (1988), 85; Duff (1999), 85-6.

<sup>324</sup> See above, pp. 34-40, for details.

positively. Nevertheless, in the *Alexander-Caesar*, just as in the *Pyrrhus-Marius* and across the rest of the *Parallel Lives*, Plutarch's treatment of his subjects' military leadership demonstrates a clear preference for rational and considered generalship.

These parallels reinforce the importance of *synkrsis* to the deeper understanding of generalship in the *Parallel Lives*. Even though both the *Pyrrhus-Marius* and *Alexander-Caesar* are missing their customary concluding *synkriseis*, we have seen that the internal comparisons both within and between pairs make it possible to infer Plutarch's judgments about his subjects' military careers. For the majority of pairs which do have extant formal *synkriseis*, however, these internal comparisons serve to reinforce the emphasis that Plutarch often places on the generalship of his subjects. The frequent discussion of military leadership in the concluding *synkriseis* demonstrates Plutarch's consistent interest in the military accomplishments and careers of his subjects, and the criteria by which he judges military success in the *synkriseis* show how thoroughly he analyzes his subjects' generalship. He is interested not just in the scale of battles or the number of victories a general may have accumulated, but also in the influence of fortune on a general's career, the impact of his military innovations, and his ability to make productive use of his victories. Moreover, the judgments that Plutarch makes between the military careers of his subjects in these final *synkriseis* incentivize the reader to reconsider the individual Lives themselves; this, in turn, serves to reinforce the lessons of generalship that Plutarch integrated into the military narratives of the Lives.

Plutarch wrote the *Parallel Lives*, he says, so that his readers could better themselves through observing and emulating the virtuous deeds of great past statesmen

(*Per.* 1-2; *Aem.* 1). Due to Plutarch's expressed interest in demonstrating the character of his subjects, the *Parallel Lives* are frequently read today for their insight on the moral virtues of their featured statesmen; virtuous actions are observed not so that they can be imitated, but so that they provide insight into good character and correct behaviour. There is, of course, nothing inherently wrong with this trend: modern readers are in no position to imitate the political or military deeds of classical statesmen, but many of the moral lessons contained within the *Parallel Lives* have a timelessness that encourages self-reflection even today.

This current focus is, however, limited, and does not do justice to the breadth of Plutarch's interest and knowledge that is represented in the *Parallel Lives*. The majority of statesmen who are subjects of a Life either began their careers as generals or were known for little else, and with few exceptions individual Lives reflect the significance that the art of generalship played in their subjects' careers. Plutarch was not merely concerned with the morality of military success, but also with the specific methods and resources employed by generals to achieve their victories on the battlefield. Moreover, in keeping with his stated purpose of the *Parallel Lives*, Plutarch expected that at least some of his readers would be able to improve their generalship through reading the Lives of great military leaders in the same way that others would be able to improve their character. This thesis has demonstrated that Plutarch's portrayal of military leadership is more considered, consistent, and integral to the *Parallel Lives* than has been traditionally recognized, and that it is worthy of further study in its own right.

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