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**Time and space in Plutarch’s *Lives*¹**

**Abstract:** Plutarch is a sophisticated narrator. Many years of research have established this beyond question. This chapter focuses on his conscious manipulation of time and space in his narratives of the *Lives*. After setting forth the narratological terminology used in this analysis, the chapter goes on to analyse departures from the normal chronological sequence of events (*analepsis*, *prolepsis*, achronic narratives), variations in the narrative rhythm (acceleration, deceleration), and the reasons behind Plutarch’s deployment of such techniques. The chapter then turns to an analysis of some of the key narratives involving space in the *Lives* with the application of Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope. Plutarch’s chronotopic narratives tie his protagonists’ actions with places, monuments, and physical structures that serve to memorialise the superlative nature of their achievements. In particular, this chapter draws attention to Plutarch’s narrative construction of time and space as it relates to the various modes of characterisation and vivid dramatic portraiture encountered in the *Lives*.

Plutarch, as narrator, finely constructs the narration of individuals’ lives with multiple aims in mind. His overriding aim is the representation of exemplary individuals in a lifelike, fairly detailed way so that we, the narratees, may acquire a vivid and lasting impression that personally motivates us in our own lives to imitate or emulate what we can of the biographical subjects’ great qualities. Exemplarity, *mimesis*, characterisation and moralisation figure strongly in the attainment of this complex and multifaceted end. The narratological construction of time and space thus serves these aims in the *Lives*. Before specifically focusing on these narrative techniques, we should commence our analysis with a brief description of the challenges confronting Plutarch as narrator.

In terms of time we may approach this from the perspective of ‘layers’.² Four layers may be envisioned: material, *fabula*, story, and text. Collection of material for construction of the story and text would constitute the initial layer. The material in this instance would consist of prior narrative accounts, either historiographical or biographical texts of Plutarch’s predecessors (earlier historians and biographers) or ancillary material he might gather himself or witness via, for example, autopsy (particularly important for the construction of space). The *fabula* consists of ‘the aggregate of events reported in a narrative in their chronological order’.³ The restructuring or

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¹ This chapter is based on my two more extensive contributions on time and space in Plutarch published in de Jong and Nünlist (2007) and de Jong (2012a), respectively. In citing Plutarch’s *Lives* I follow the Loeb edition by B. Perrin.

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rearrangement of this tight chronological order that the narrator undertakes in his text is termed the story. The narratee may reconstruct the fabula from the story and the text. The narrator may vary the temporal arrangement (anachrony) by altering the order of events (order), by dwelling to a greater or lesser extent on some events (rhythm), and by relating events once or more than once (frequency).

In characterising the narration of space, we may also distinguish between fabula-space and story-space with fabula-space being a total depiction of the location(s) that come into play in a narrative, whereas story-space refers to the actual place depicted or referred to. Detailed and rich descriptions of space or objects (enargeia, ekphrasis) that assume a greater importance than the simple narration of space as a backdrop to the narration of events engage our attention and usually warrant special interpretive consideration vis-à-vis the work’s narrative strategy as a whole. I view such detailed descriptions as the spatial correlate to a slowing of the temporal rhythm.

**Time**

In most cases Plutarch had access to an abundance of mostly historical sources that afforded him adequate material for the writing of the Lives. The ‘important’ events that Plutarch stressed in constructing his narrative are revealing of character and were incorporated in preference to other events that his historical sources may have magnified. This means that Plutarch gives cursory attention to what he might regard as insignificant detail. The well-known proem to his Lives of Alexander and Caesar articulates this fundamental contrast between the historian’s approach and the biographer’s (Alex. 1.2). The first layer of material collection leaves therefore much on the cutting room floor. The silence of his sources on the personal lives of historical figures would also hinder a complete cradle to grave reconstruction simply because the ancients usually paid little attention to early events in the lives of great individuals prior to their becoming great. Childhood was thus usually overlooked in the chronological sequence. Nevertheless he generally appears to use whatever information he does have about his protagonists’ childhood in constructing the narrative. The fabula for biography comprises an individual’s sequential lifetime experi-

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8 For a different viewpoint on ekphrasis see de Jong (2012) 5–8.
9 On Plutarch’s use of copious historical source material see now Schettino (2014) 417–436.
10 On the major characteristics of the genre of ancient historiography see Marincola (1997).
12 Rosenmeyer (1992) 210. Plutarch frequently displays concern for chronological accuracy, e.g., Them. 2.5.
ences beginning at birth and ending with the inevitability of death. The story is necessarily a much abbreviated account vis-à-vis the fabula, being on average only about 35 pages in length, in which chronologically disparate events, representative of central themes or characteristics, are frequently grouped together or receive elaboration in the narrative not unlike Suetonius’s per species method of categorisation. Both techniques exert a significant influence on the order, rhythm, frequency of the Lives’ narrative structure. The comparative structure of the Parallel Lives itself imposes an organisational principle which dictates to some extent Plutarch’s selection of his source material and construction of the narrative. The concluding analeptic comparative/evaluative postscript (Synkrisis) appended to all but four of the 22 pairs of Lives underscores this structural feature and revisits interpretatively the commonalities and differences.

**Narrative deceleration I: The ‘grand scenes’**

Some key instances of narrative slowing or deceleration are induced to some degree by the comparative structure of the Lives, as indicated above. These ‘grand scenes’, to use a term coined by Françoise Frazier, appear as instances of narrative deceleration in the service of greater representational significance vis-à-vis character and personality. One very famous example of these ‘grand scenes’ represents the breaking in of Bucephalas by the young Alexander (Alex. 6.1–5). This anecdote is to be contrasted with an incident in the paired Life of Caesar, his capture by the pirates. Plutarch’s Caesar achieves a certain intellectual dominance over his captors and actually succeeds in winning them over through his insulting, jocular, even contemptuous manner of addressing them (2.3–4). The first significant detail concerns the ransom (Caes. 2.1). Caesar laughingly raises it from twenty to fifty talents stating that they did not know whom they had captured. The salient aspects of Caesar’s personality, his indomitable pride, his ability to charm, his sanguine disposition in the face of adversity are clearly revealed in Plutarch’s version and are paralleled in Alexander’s breaking of Bucephalas. The intuitive psychological control he exerts over the pirates reveals, in the human sphere, what Alexander’s breaking of Bucephalas does on another level. It is apparent that Plutarch employs both of these key scenes of narra-

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tive deceleration to showcase traits associated with brilliant leadership ability. Reading these two Lives together reinforces this lesson.¹⁷

**Narrative deceleration II: Key historical events**

These scenes are to be distinguished from the extended narration of significant historical events which I categorise as another variety of narrative deceleration.¹⁸ In representing these political or military events, Plutarch, as narrator, adapts narratives of these events from historical sources such as Herodotus, Thucydides, Theopompus, Ephorus, Timaeus, Polybius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Sallust, and Livy, by reducing them in size and occasionally supplementing them with additional information and material gleaned from his research (cf. Nic. 1.5).¹⁹ These events which may take up a very large part of the biography may reflect anything from only a few months to several years of the subject’s life. In the Nicias, for example, this major event is the Sicilian expedition. Of the thirty chapters of the Life this event is treated in chapters 12–30, or in other words it takes up 63% of the biography (story time), but the event itself occupies only approximately two years of Nicias’ 57-year lifetime²⁰ (fabula-time). The paired Crassus has a correspondingly long narrative of the equally disastrous and brief Parthian expedition (16–33). Other examples of this type of narrative deceleration include the account of Themistocles’ role in the second Persian War against Xerxes (Them. 7–18)²¹ and Aristides’ involvement in the war against Xerxes’ forces (Salamis and Plataea) (Arist. 8–21).²² In the Lucullus the war against Mithridates is recounted at length (Luc. 7–36). Many more examples of this type could be adduced.²³ It is important to note that Plutarch varies the pace and mode of

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¹⁷ Other notable ‘grand scenes’ include, e.g.: Alex. 30 (Darius and the eunuch), 50–51 (murder of Cleitus), 60 (Alexander and Porus), Caes. 32 (Caesar at the Rubicon), 61 (Caesar at the Lupercalia), 66 (assassination of Caesar), Sol. 27 (meeting with Croesus), Cor. 33 (Valeria and Volumnia), Ant. 77 (the death of Antony and Cleopatra) and 83 (Octavian and Cleopatra), Agis 17 (Chilonis), Brut. 23 (Brutus and Porcia), Aem. 36 (Aemilius on Fortuna), Dem. 29 (death of Demosthenes), Pomp. 78–79 (murder of Pompey), Crass. 31 (death of Crassus), Them. 11 (council of war prior to Salamis), Ca. Mi. 68–70 (suicide at Utica), Fab. 13 (recognition of Fabius’ prudence by Minucius), Pyrrh. 2–3.5 (childhood episode).


¹⁹ On Plutarch’s historical sources, see now Schettino (2014) 417–436.

²⁰ c. 470–413 BCE.

²¹ 480 BCE. The story of Themistocles’ ostracism and life in the Persian Empire might also be included in this category (Them. 23–31).

²² His actions at Marathon receive only one chapter (Arist. 5).

²³ See, e.g., also Fab. 2–27 (Second Punic War against Hannibal), Cim. 6–14 (leadership role in allied activities), Cam. 15–30 (repulsion of Gauls under Brennus), Ca. Ma. 12–14 (war against Antiochus), Lys. 3–21 (final phase of Peloponnesian War and postwar activities), Sull. 11–24 (Mithridatic War), Cic. 10–22 (conspiracy of Catiline), Ages. 6–19 (campaigns in Asia Minor and Greece), 27–35 (Agesilaus vs. Epaminondas, incl. Leuctra and Mantinea), 36–40 (service in Egypt), Pomp. 24–29
the narrative continuously within these sections as he develops some scenes and employs both singulative (an event is told once) and iterative (repeated events are told only once) narrative modes. Very often these episodes of narrative deceleration approach the ‘grand scenes’ in terms of their density and dramatic portraiture.

**Narrative acceleration**

Plutarch often consciously abbreviates his narration of some events which he judges to be inconsequential to his main purpose of depicting character and moral attributes. This renders the rhythm of his narrative much faster-paced in some places, especially when compared to historical sources. His narratives of some of the great battles in his biography of Alexander provide excellent examples of this. For example Plutarch’s account of the actual battle of Issus is very brief, only one sentence (Alex. 20.8). Instead, he focuses on relatively minor incidents that display the trust Alexander placed in Philip (Alex. 19.4–9), Alexander’s cool response to the amenities of Darius’ captured camp (Alex. 20.11–13), and his treatment of the captured Persian women, a demonstration of his great restraint (Alex. 21.1–11). It is not surprising that he transports into this narrative sequence, in the form of an internal *prolepsis*, the story of Barsine, the widow of Memnon, whom he takes as his mistress and who is ‘the only woman he was intimate with prior to his marriage’ (Alex. 21.7–9).

**Ellipses**

Sometimes this narrative acceleration takes the form of *ellipsis*. Plutarch regularly hastens through uneventful periods of his subjects’ lives by mentioning only notable offices or a few major acts, while silently skipping over years at a time, a very common narrative technique in the biographies that lends them their episodic quality. Ellipsis frequently occurs in his accounts of childhood and youth, and may be due to lack of information, but this is often difficult or impossible to verify.

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25 The battle of Issus took place in November of 333 BCE, the capture of Damascus, at which time Barsine fell into Parmenio’s hands, occurred in December of that year.  
26 Genette (1980) 43: ‘... ellipsis or leap forward without any return is, obviously, not an anachrony but a simple acceleration of the narrative ...’.  
In the *Crassus*, for example, we first hear a report about his father Publius Licinius Crassus who was accused of corrupting a vestal virgin out of avarice (*Crass*. 1). The theme of avarice is then continued proleptically in the account of Crassus’ acquisitiveness in adulthood and the questionable ways in which he accumulated his enormous fortune (*Crass*. 2). This section, which contains some rough chronological indicators, is followed by a chronologically indefinite passage in the iterative mode that relates his adult habits and pursuits (*Crass*. 3). When Plutarch then returns to a chronologically dateable event, the seizure of power by Cinna and Marius in 87 BCE, we encounter a Crassus who is now nearly 20 years old (*Crass*. 4.1). In other words Plutarch has ushered us through nearly two decades of his subject’s lifetime in three chapters without having told us really anything that Crassus said or did before the age of 19. Such cursory or lacunose treatments of childhood and youth in which the narrator accelerates through the first third or half of his subject’s life abound in the *Lives*.²⁸

Later on in the *Life*, when narrating the events of Crassus’ and Pompey’s joint consulship, Plutarch is compelled to admit that ‘their contentiousness rendered their consulship barren politically and without achievement’, thereby absolving himself of the need to narrate at length the events of the year 70 BCE (*Crass*. 12.3). After an ellipsis of 4 years Plutarch feels obliged to mention his uneventful censorship (65 BCE), which ‘passed without any results or achievements whatever’ (*Crass*. 13.1). Another silent ellipsis of one year brings us to the eventful narrative of the Conspiracy of Catiline (63–62 BCE) (*Crass*. 13.3). The next event mentioned, Caesar’s return to Rome to canvass for the consulship, occurs in 60 BCE (*Crass*. 14.1).

**Internal and external analepses**

Usually *analepses* serve to introduce past events that have been suppressed (*paralipsis*) into a context later in the narrative which enhances their significance. The episode of Pompey’s dealings with Metellus on Crete, which reflects negatively on Pompey and tarnishes somewhat his triumph over the pirates, analeptically concludes the narrative of the *bellum piraticum* (*Pomp*. 29). This is a typical example of the use of an internal completing *analepsis* to set off for thematic purposes an event from a prior sequence. We are, for example, encouraged to assess in a different light Agesilacus’ desire to gratify his son’s wishes in the Sphodrias affair when we learn that he was exceedingly fond of children and used to join in his children’s play when they were very young and was seen riding ‘about on a stick at home pretending that it was a horse’ (*Ages*. 25.11).

External *analepses* are more interesting and less common because of their potential significance. Plutarch often incorporates external *analepses* into the early sections of the *Lives* that usually recount events or family histories preceding and leading up to the birth of the biographical subject (I understand the *fabula*-time in biography to begin with the birth of the subject and to end with his or her death). Some notable examples of this practice include the story of Pittheus, the grandfather of Theseus, and Aegeus, Theseus’ father, that relates how Theseus came to be conceived from Pittheus’ daughter Aethra and how Aegeus left a sword and a pair of sandals tucked under a rock for his future son, if she bore a male (*Thes*. 3). In the *Life of Romulus* Plutarch recounts the diverse traditions surrounding the foundation and naming of Rome, until finally concluding with the majority view recounted by Diodorus of Peparethus and Fabius Pictor that contains the story of the birth and exposure of the twins Romulus and Remus, and their suckling by a she-wolf, etc. (*Rom*. 1–3).

Plutarch recounts the early history of the Thesprotians and Molossians leading up to the birth of Pyrrhus in his *Life* (1). The family of the Fabii receive brief narrative treatment in the prologue to the *Life of Fabius Maximus* (1.1–1.2), as do the Marcii in the *Life of Coriolanus* (1.1), the Aemilii in the *Life of Aemilius Paulus* (2.1–2.4), and the Antonii in the *Life of Antony* (1.1–1.3). The Cicero traces the origins of the family back to Tullus Attius, ‘an illustrious king of the Volscians who waged war upon the Romans with great ability’ (*Cic*. 1.2). In the *Agis* the king’s lineage is traced back six generations to Agesilaus ‘who crossed into Asia and became the most powerful Greek of his time’ (*Agis* 3).

Occasionally external *analepses* are employed to foreshadow future events or inherited characteristics. The story of the father’s (Marcus Antonius Creticus’) cowardly submissiveness towards his wife, Julia, foreshadows Marc Antony’s own fateful docile submissiveness towards Cleopatra (*Ant*. 1). In the *Life of the Elder Cato*, Plutarch cites the Censor’s report (employing him as a secondary narrator) about his father and grandfather (1). His hard-charging grandfather apparently had five horses killed under him in battle. The grandson too appears to have displayed a certain callousness with regard to living creatures that had served their purpose, including the horse that he left in Spain even though it had served him well during his consular campaign (*Ca. Ma*. 5).

**Foreshadowing and proleptic references**

In the proems or early sections of the *Lives*, Plutarch often inserts references that foreshadow future events or behavior. The *Life of Alexander* provides some excellent exam-

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29 Genette (1980) 40 suggests this term as preferable to the more subjectively loaded term ‘anticipation’ and defines it as ‘any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later’. The ‘evoking in advance’ part of this definition is crucial for my pur-
amples of this technique as indicated above in the external analeptic narrative that contain several references presaging future greatness which precede and accompany Alexander’s birth (Alex. 2.2–3.9). Other Lives exhibit this structural feature to some degree.

Very often Plutarch incorporates early in the Life information drawn from a chronologically later period to explain or illuminate physical appearance, education, and other attributes that become fully manifest in adulthood. The Pericles incorporates citations of comic poets to describe humorously the physical anomaly of the mature Pericles’ elongated head shape (Per. 3.3–7). The account of Pericles’ education contains numerous chronological dislocations of a proleptic nature that are for the most part concealed, as Plutarch collapses the information he has about Pericles’ association with Damon, Zeno the Eleatic, and Anaxagoras into one compact, chronologically obscure section (Per. 4–6). The Life then continues with the narration of Pericles’ youth, early military service, prior to his involvement in politics, and his political ascent that is causally related to the death of Aristides (c. 467 BCE) and Cimon’s removal from Athens due to his foreign campaigns (476–463 BCE) (Per. 7.1–5).

The Crassus, as noted above, incorporates information deriving from later periods in the statesman’s life and transfers it to the beginning sections in discussing Crassus’ avaricious behavior (Crass. 2–3). Similarly the proem of the Cicero contains two anecdotes referring to the time of his entry into politics and his quaestorship in Sicily (Cic. 1.5–6). The prologue of the Aristides begins with a striking statement which cites sources who claim that the statesman was of modest means, during his lifetime, and his daughters, after his death, could not marry for a very long time because of their indigence (Arist. 1.1). In the ensuing discussion Plutarch examines the credibility of this assertion in light of the known details of Aristides’ adult life. The proem of the Cato Major launches into a description of the Censor’s appearance and behavior that is clearly taken from his adulthood, since it contains references to his military service and oratorical ability. The proem of the Sulla contains an anecdote that refers to a time after the war with Jugurtha and flashes forward from there to another anecdote concerning a freedman, and former fellow lodger, whom he had executed during the proscriptions, when he ‘had at last become absolute in power’ (Sull. 1).

Sometimes Plutarch openly acknowledges chronological displacements. For example, he concludes his discussion of the Younger Cato’s divorce of Marcia, in a section devoted to Cato’s relationship with women, with the remark: ‘This incident occurred at a later time, it is true, but since I had taken up the topic of the women of

pose here since Plutarch’s narrative strategy is more often allusive than explicit. Tim Rood has suggested the term ‘implied prolepsis’ for those instances in the narrative which allusively adumbrate future events.

31 See, e.g., Ca. Mi. 2–3, Caes. 1.4, Alc. 1–16, Cic. 2, Per. 1–2 (building programme), Cim. 1–2 (theme of euergetism).
32 The return to a more chronologically oriented narrative is signaled by ‘alla tauta men hysteron’.

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Cato’s household I decided to anticipate it’ (Ca. Mi. 25.11–13). Sometimes he simply flashes forward to complete a topic, as in the narration of Agesilaus’ future aid to the exiled Megabates (Ages. 13.3–4). Both of these examples as well as the example of Barsine in the Alexander cited above display Plutarch’s tendency to bring related information together thematically, even if this disrupts the chronological framework of the Life.

**External prolepses**

Plutarch also incorporates external prolepses into the narrative, as when he narrates the fate of the protagonist’s descendants (see Ca. Mi. 73, Ca. Ma. 27.7, Ant. 87). The Aristides contains an external proleptic reference that recounts how Alexander the Great, many years later when he was King of Asia, rewarded the valour and munificence of the Plataeans (who had voluntarily ceded a portion of their territory to the Athenians so that they might defend Greece on their own soil) by building the walls of Plataea (Arist. 11.9). In the Cato Maior Plutarch rebukes the Censor’s anti-Hellenic remark that ‘Rome would lose her empire when she became infected with Greek letters’ with the terse observation that ‘time has certainly shown the emptiness of this ill-boding speech of his, for while the city was at the zenith of its empire, she made every form of Greek learning and culture her own’ (Ca. Ma. 23.2–3). In the Lycurgus he recounts the stability of Lycurgus’ laws for 500 years after the statesman’s death until their eventual abrogation in the reign of Agis (Lyc. 29.6–30.2).

**Achronic narration of habitual or characterising behaviours**

When describing the general characteristics of an individual’s behaviour Plutarch abandons a strictly chronological presentation in favour of iteratively recounting habitual behaviours occurring in various stages of life (childhood, adolescence, adulthood, senescence). The Themistocles, for example, contains long sections of iterative narrative usually composed with the imperfect tense. The section recounting Themistocles’ childhood contains several proleptic references presented iteratively in the context of his early education that serve to adumbrate the statesman’s future rhetorical ability and pragmatic intelligence (Them. 2.1–7). The personal qualities of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus are compared at length in the beginning of their double Life (Ti. and C. Gracch. 2–3). Agesilaus’ habitual behaviour as king, especially the way he dealt with the Ephors, is discussed at length by Plutarch (Ages. 4.2–5.4). Plutarch, in his account of Pericles’ early political successes, frequently discusses in a timeless

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33 Cf. also Ca. Mi. 30.9–31.1.
iterative way his powerful oratorical ability, unflappable nature, and other tactics he employs to consolidate his power (*Per.* 5.1; 7.5–8.6; 9.2–5; 11.2–12.3).³⁴

Plutarch employs another technique in which he strings together various anecdotes without any distinct chronological markers. The *Alcibiades* is one such case in which presumably the relative opaqueness of the chronology in the first half of the *Life* directly follows from the biographer’s desire to accentuate his portrayal of Alcibiades’ complex character.³⁵ After describing the influence of *eros* in Alcibiades’ relationship with Socrates and his other lovers, a time period extending through Alcibiades’ late adolescence and early manhood presumably (*Alc.* 6), Plutarch returns to Alcibiades’ early boyhood (*Alc.* 7). The *Life of the Elder Cato* also posed some challenges for Plutarch which he resolves by selectively grouping his discussion of the statesman’s career and private life. In particular, it is the Censor’s famous sayings which attract his attention due to their characterisation potential. These he presents randomly without, in the majority of cases, any temporal reference points and some he presents as habitual statements, introducing them with the imperfect ἔλεγε (*Ca. Ma.* 8–9).³⁶

**The analeptic *Synkrisis***

The comparative structure of the *Parallel Lives* is underscored in the analytical postscript or *Synkrisis* appended to all but four³⁷ of the 22 pairs of *Lives*. In these brief analeptic essays Plutarch weighs the positive and negative sides to the two protagonists’ conduct and reiterates the deeds (repeating internal analepses) that are significant in this evaluative process, occasionally in a more critical way.³⁸ The emphasis is placed sharply on moral instruction in the *Synkriseis*.

Occasionally Plutarch inserts in the *Synkrisis* important information that he has omitted in the *Life* proper (completing internal analepses). He acknowledges, for example, his neglect to mention that Crassus struck Lucius Annalius in the face with his fist and ‘drove him bleeding from the forum’ (*Comp. Nic. et Crass.* 2.3). His reference to Crassus’ maltreatment of women in the *Synkrisis* (*Comp. Nic. et Crass.* 1.2) is also not supported in the *Life* even though the story of his father’s corruption of the vestal virgin Licinia in the proem (*Crass.* 1.4–5) appears to foreshadow this theme (along with avarice).

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³⁴ Habitual activities ushered in by powerful statesmen such as Romulus, Lycurgus (Spartan *agogé*) and Numa also fall under this timeless iterative category.

³⁵ See above.

³⁶ The exceptions being the reference to King Eumenes’ visit to Rome and Scipio’s solicitation of aid for exiles from Achaia at the instance of Polybius.


Motif of reference to the narrator’s own time

Not infrequently Plutarch makes reference to his own time in the Lives. This occurs in those situations when he refers to what he has seen with his own eyes (autopsy). Plutarch has witnessed the whipping to death of the Spartan youths at the altar of Artemis Orthia (Lyc. 18.2). He has seen Agesilaus’ spear still on display in his own day in Sparta (Ages. 19.11) and the statue of Lysander on display at Delphi (Lys. 1). Plutarch apparently visited the sanctuary of the Nymphs at Mieza, ‘where even now people point out the stone seats and shady walks Aristotle used to frequent’ (Alex. 7.4) and, in Chaeronea, he has seen ‘Alexander’s Oak’, located near the communal grave of the Macedonian dead, against which Alexander pitched his tent (Alex. 9.2). When tracing the descendants of Antony, Plutarch has harsh things to say about Nero who came to the throne in his time (Ant. 8.79).

Sometimes the reference to the narrator’s own time reflects the impact of a past action on present circumstances. This includes for instance aetiological explanations of customs, laws, names, etc., that are still in use in Plutarch’s day, such as the origin of the military term ‘maniple’ (Rom. 8.7–8) and the wedding salutation ‘Talasio’ (Rom. 15.1–4). These references all mark the interpenetration of the historical past in the narrator’s present.

Space

As an individual’s life unfolds not just in a temporal but also in a spatial dimension, it seems reasonable to consider the question as to under what circumstances and to what end Plutarch incorporates the discussion of space, buildings, and other physical objects into his narrative, such as the examples of autopsy cited above, Agesilaus’ spear and Lysander’s statue. They fall within the narrator’s time, but they memorialise the past. The ancient historian John Buckler, in a study entitled ‘Plutarch and Autopsy’, has clearly demonstrated that Plutarch very often was on site and strove to collect data for his Lives whenever his travels took him to those locations.40 By leaving Chaeronea he also was able to gain access to the holdings of libraries and archives in large cities on these journeys and during his years as a student. We know that he lived in Athens for a time, and visited Sparta, Rome, Africa, and Asia Minor.41 His association with Delphi as priest at that sanctuary availed him of various important documents and inscriptions.42 In the proem to the Life of Demosthenes (1–2), Plutarch himself acknowledges that his trips to Italy enabled him to experience first-hand monuments and battle sites and thus facilitated comprehension of his Roman

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39 Translation by R. Waterfield. See also Frazier in this volume.
40 Buckler (1992) 4788–4830. See also Frazier and Alcalde Martin in this volume.
sources. It is apparent that Plutarch’s travels influenced his composition of the Lives in a significant and positive way.

The chronotope

Mikhail Bakhtin formulated an important concept that seems to be applicable to Plutarch’s most striking narratives of space. He coined the term ‘chronotope’ in reference to the periodic intersection or fusion of time and space that appears to take place in literary texts. This term, in Bakhtin’s words, expresses ‘the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships’ in literature and he defines it as follows:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterises the artistic chronotope.

Pericles and the adornment of Athens

The narration of Pericles’ adornment of the acropolis is one of the most important examples of a ‘chronotope’ in the Lives. The prologue to the Lives of Pericles and Fabius Maximus (Per. 1–2) alludes to the building program instituted by Pericles and echoes parts of Pericles’ funeral oration transmitted to us by Thucydides (esp. 2.41–43). The deeds (erga) referred to in the prologue include not just statements and actions worthy of imitation, but also physical monuments attesting to past greatness. This connection is reprised in the body of the Life of Pericles describing the building project (13). In this section of the Pericles we have one of Plutarch’s rare descriptions of buildings (Parthenon, Odeum, Propylaea) interwoven with a discussion of the architects and artists who were directly involved in various aspects of their planning, construction, and adornment. His description betrays an intimate familiarity with the architectural wonders of Athens. Plutarch’s own assessment of the

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43 See also his comments on the inconvenience of living in a small city in De E 384E. See the Life of Demosthenes (1–2): ‘But as for me, I live in a small city, and I prefer to dwell there that it may not become smaller still; and during the time when I was in Rome and various parts of Italy I had no leisure to practice myself in the Roman language, owing to my public duties and the number of my pupils in philosophy. It was therefore late and when I was well on in years that I began to study Roman literature. And here my experience was an astonishing thing, but true. For it was not so much that by means of words I came to a complete understanding of things, as that from things I somehow had an experience which enabled me to follow the meaning of words’ (Translation by B. Perrin, Loeb).

44 Bakhtin (1981) 84.
magnitude of Pericles’ achievement in the Synkrisis of the Pericles/Fabius Maximus is glowing to say the least (Comp. Per. et Fab. 3).  

This example of a chronotope serves a twofold purpose. A physical structure such as the Parthenon represents on one level the enduring legacy of Pericles’ virtue (and not that of Phidias or any other artisan or craftsman working on that building, on this Plutarch is clear). On another level the monument (or deed) has didactic significance for the reader who derives inspiration and moral guidance from the representation (mimesis) of superlative achievements and is then moved to thoughtful and considered acts of emulation and imitation (mimesis). The bivalent nature of both of the Greek words erga and mimesis, adumbrated in the prologue, are thus realised in the text.  

The Theseus, Romulus, and Numa also contain significant chronotopes that are too extensive to undergo analysis here.

Solon and Lycurgus:  
Culture heroes and foundational figures

Solon and Lycurgus are two statesmen whose actions left an indelible impression on their respective cities. Both men left monuments to commemorate their significant activities. We are informed, for example, that Solon founded a temple to commemorate a victory over Megara, a victory that continued to be reenacted by the Athenians:

There is also a dramatic reenactment of events which seems to corroborate this version. An Athenian ship used to sail up to the island, with the crew initially keeping quiet, but then charging into the attack yelling and screaming, while one man in full armor used to run to cape Sciradium and fetch the men on land. Also nearby is a temple to Enyalius founded by Solon to commemorate his defeat of the Megarians (Sol. 9.4).

The continued reenactment of this victory in the same spatial location in which it took place is important. It functions as a dynamic memorial. The site of the victory became the site of the commemorative act for some indefinite time. As so often, a recurring ritual, especially when tied to a physical structure such as a temple, anchors collective or cultural memory. Plutarch himself does not seem to know how long this ceremony had been conducted. The nearby temple served as the anchor point. As we have seen, chronotopes such as these commemorate the virtue of the

45 Translation by B. Perrin, Loeb.  
46 This is made abundantly clear in the prologue (Per. 1.4 – 2.1).  
47 The bivalent nature of these two words employed in the prologue is well discussed by Duff (2001) 351 – 363.  
49 Translation by R. Waterfield.
individual concrete incarnation. Space is tied via achievements to character and for this reason is incorporated into the narrative.⁵⁰

Similarly Plutarch reports that Lycurgus founded a temple (Lyc. 11). The story of how this came about is related in an anecdote that records how Lycurgus, owing to the unpopular nature of one of his reforms, the sisyitia, among the wealthy, is forced by an angry mob of fellow citizens in the agora to flee for his life (Lyc. 11). One of his pursuers, a certain Alcander, succeeds in overtaking him and knocks out his eye with his staff. Alcander is punished for this by being placed in Lycurgus’ personal custody where domestic servitude and his close association with the Spartan lawgiver are meant to encourage Alcander to reform his future behaviour. Plutarch concludes his narrative of these events by recording that Lycurgus founded a sanctuary in honour of Athena with the epithet of Optilletis to commemorate his loss. We know that Plutarch visited Sparta and he most likely encountered this story when he toured the temple.⁵¹ The actions of Lycurgus, his character, and the physical memorial erected in commemoration of these events intersect in a chronotope.

**Themistocles and the Persian War**

In Plutarch’s other biographies the availability of abundant historical sources that provide the biographer with ample material for his narrative may be the cause of infrequent references to space, as the challenge becomes one of selection from and condensation of a multitude of events. In addition, his heavy reliance on written sources rather than autopsy undoubtedly sets limits on what aspects of the physical location he could confidently describe. On occasion, however, he does display in the narrative his awareness of the tangible past presence of an individual whose most notable actions are tied to a location he himself has visited. One example of this occurs in the Life of Themistocles. Plutarch felt an especial affinity for Themistocles. He was personally acquainted with his distant relative as he reports at the end of the Life (Them. 32).⁵² The great Athenian’s involvement in the Second Persian War is subjected to a lengthy treatment in the Life (Them. 7–18). He presents detailed information about important locations in the war that may not be familiar to all of his readers, locations visited by Plutarch himself. The most vivid example of this, containing both visual and olfactory sensory information, is his description of Artemisium and a temple of Artemis located there:

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⁵⁰ See also the report of Solon’s encounter with Croesus (Sol. 27) that differs quite radically from Herodotus’ version. Stadter (2015) 173–176 gives an intriguing interpretation of Plutarch’s account of this meeting vis-à-vis Herodotus.

⁵¹ On Plutarch’s visit(s) to Sparta in general, see Buckler (1992) 4814–4815. Buckler does not mention this sanctuary, however.

⁵² Translation by R. Waterfield.
Artemisium is a north-facing beach in Euboea, past Hestiaea; it lies more or less opposite Oizon, which is in the land once ruled by Philoctetes. There is at Artemisium a small temple of ‘East-looking’ Artemis, as she was known there, which stands in a grove of trees, surrounded by blocks of white marble fixed on the ground. Rubbing this marble on one’s hands yields a saffron-like color and smell. One of the blocks of stone has been inscribed with the following elegiac poem:

There was a time when on this stretch of sea the sons of Athens
In battle overcame a varied host of men of Asian stock;
To mark their destruction of the army of the Medes,
They erected these tokens in honor of the maiden Artemis.

One is shown a part of the beach where in the middle of all the surrounding sand the depths throw up a dark, ash-like dust which looks as though it is the result of fire; it is believed that the wrecked ships and bodies of the dead were burnt on this spot (Them. 8).

Because of the sensory information he presents that would appear to lend an almost supernatural aura to the place, I think that this description of this temple is one of the most striking chronotopes in all of Plutarch. There can be no doubt that Plutarch was there, rubbing the marble with his hands and smelling the saffron smell. The naval battle of Artemisium and the defense of the pass at Thermopylae was part of a two-pronged strategy to stop or delay the Persian invasion and Themistocles was the author of this strategy. Plutarch knew this and his description of this place honours the man and commemorates his achievement.

Conclusion: Time and space in the Lives

From our examination of Plutarch’s literary technique in the Parallel Lives it is evident that they are symmetrical compositions with unifying themes that serve to modulate the narrative representation and referencing of time. Plutarch generally foreshadows his major concerns quite early in the proem or early chapters of the first Life in the form of anecdotes, for example, which foreshadow future greatness, abilities, traits, persistent behavioural patterns, or problems. These themes are most vividly emergent in the ‘grand scenes’ of the Lives, sections in which the narrative is greatly slowed. Longer episodes of narrative deceleration often showcase the main protagonist’s specific involvement in major historical events. Plutarch tends to accelerate the narrative through, or omit from it altogether, long presentations of battles. He rarely presents speeches of any length. Plutarch often clusters chronologically disparate events for thematic purposes or he presents such information achronically, by employing the iterative mode of narration, to facilitate characterisation. Another technique involves the retrojection or displacement of information derived from adult-

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53 Translation by R. Waterfield.
54 See also Them. 19. For other narratives involving space in the Lives, see Beck (2012).
hood into the narrative of childhood and youth to supplement the lack of information on these phases of his biographical subject’s life. External and internal prolepses and analepses are often used to highlight behaviour by re-contextualizing it or clustering similar instances thematically. Plutarch concludes most of the pairs analeptically with a brief retrospective essay (Synkrisis) in which the major accomplishments and characteristics of the two heroes are recalled and evaluated instructively in an impartial way.

Plutarch’s inclusion of descriptions of places, buildings, monuments, and other objects in the narrative serves multiple purposes. The narrative intersection of time and space in the form of chronotopes, for example, functions as a focalising device in his Lives reflective of the character and achievement of the biographical subject. From Plutarch’s perspective one appropriate task of politicians in leadership positions is to act as patron of the arts. The beautification of Athens is therefore an achievement that reflects on Pericles more so than on Phidias. The Lives are meant to serve as behavioural paradigms and their students are to become active patrons themselves in their own communities. Cimon’s philanthropic acts and beautification of Athens also deserves mention here, even if done on a more modest scale than Pericles’, they were directly funded by his own resources. The significance of foundational figures is discernable from the monuments they left behind or the ones erected to commemorate their service to the city. While my discussion of Plutarch’s use of space in the Lives is by no means exhaustive, it does show that descriptions and discussions of space, especially man-made space, is a significant narratological component of Plutarch’s biographical technique.