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**Military space and paideia in the Lives of Pyrrhus and Marius**

**Abstract:** In this chapter, I explore the dangers and limitations of an exclusively military education in the light of the *Pyrrhus and Marius*. As I shall argue below, for Plutarch the military sphere is not merely a background setting in which the characters exhibit their valour, but rather a vital environment for the construction and interpretation of the biographical account; it helps to cast light on how the hero behaves in other contexts, e.g., in the family, in politics, philosophy, and rhetoric, which in turn has implications for the hero’s morality and cultural identity.

At the beginning of the *Life of Pyrrhus* Plutarch provides his readers with the mythical narrative explaining the foundation and settlement of Epirus. According to tradition, Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, was the country’s first ruler, but the line of kings descended from him, the Pyrrhidae, soon sank into barbarism in terms both of their power and way of life (*ἐκβαρβαρωθέντων ... τῇ τε δυνάμει καὶ τοῖς βίοις*, *Pyrrh. 1.4*). The situation was ameliorated when Tharrhypas, Pyrrhus’ great-great-grandfather, introduced Greek customs and letters, and administered the cities with humane laws (*Pyrrh. 1.4*).

This mythical account anticipates a key theme arising from the subsequent narrative, namely the contradiction between barbarism and acculturation, and—as so often in Plutarch—the value of Greek education as a means to combat moral depravity. On another level, it is also linked to an incident from Pyrrhus’ infancy, which describes the agonising escape of some native fugitives in an attempt to rescue the baby Pyrrhus from some ill-disposed pursuers. The decisive factor in this episode that ensures the hero’s physical survival is the crossing of a turbulent river. Interestingly, the spatial description of the river as a location where the action takes place involves such terms as ‘forbidding’, ‘savage’, ‘violent’ and ‘dark’ (*Pyrrh. 2.3–5*), while crossing it is only made possible by means of written messages of support that were sent across (*ἐνέγραψεν ... γράμματα, ἀνέγνωσαν ... τὰ γράμματα, *Pyrrh. 2.6–7*). This exciting story surely reflects Plutarch’s creative imagination,¹ and the distanced—and in all likelihood fictitious—geography of the river in full flood becomes a cul-

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¹ The closest parallel is found in Justin, *Epit. Pomp. Trog.* 17.3.17–20, who merely refers to the persecution of the child Pyrrhus by his father’s enemies until he is handed over to the wife of King Glauclus.

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turally charged ‘frame’\(^2\) that shapes the story in a suggestive way: the preservation of the Epirotes and their king is predicated upon the use of letters, an index of civilisation and education.

This central pattern permeates the rest of the *Life* in inverted versions, in which negligence of cultural training brings about the hero’s plights. In this chapter, I wish to look above all at the passages in which Pyrrhus encounters wise advisors and intellectual men, and fails to grasp their deeper lessons. My aim is to examine the dangers and constraints arising from Pyrrhus’ warlike arrogance (*pleonexia*), rather than identify its causes, as has hitherto been the general tendency.\(^3\) In particular, through a comparison with *Marius*, I want to show that whenever the military sphere is untouched by Greek philosophy, rhetoric, and politics, various flaws occur in private and public life, such as neglect of parental duties, political calamities, social isolation, and blind acceptance of divine omens verging on superstition. In line with the aims of the present volume, my analysis of the ‘military space’ in this pair of *Lives* will elucidate that this is a concept far more complex than initially assumed: it denotes not just a background setting in which biographical subjects traditionally perform grand achievements. Rather it is a textual environment where the construction and interpretation of the biographical account takes on new meanings and connotations by linking the hero’s military role to his moral character and cultural identity, both of them central notions in Plutarch’s biographical project. Therefore, considerations of ‘military space’ in Plutarch could cast new light on the purpose and overarching concerns of the *Parallel Lives* more broadly.

### Spaces of action and inaction in the *Pyrrhus*

The *Pyrrhus* is unusual in having a prolonged account of the hero’s childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, and a rather awkward postponement of the account of his education. In the first seven and a half chapters, the reader becomes acquainted with Pyrrhus’ physical valour, plans for expansion, and the ways he distinguishes himself on campaign. The Epirote king is admired for his bellicosity and depicted as a reflection of Achilles and Alexander.\(^4\) Plutarch uses Homeric language to describe...
his subject’s area of action in heroic terms, thus preparing for the military success he encounters later on in his career:

There was a sharp and terrible conflict between the soldiers who engaged (in the battle), and especially also between the leaders. ... and Pyrrhus, who yielded to none of the kings in daring and prowess, and wished that the glory of Achilles should belong to him by right of valour rather than of blood alone, advanced through the foremost fighters to confront Pantauchus. At first they hurled their spears, then, coming to close quarters, they plied their swords with might and skill. Pyrrhus got one wound, but gave Pantauchus two, one in the thigh, and one along the neck, and put him to flight and overthrew him; he did not kill him, however, for his friends hauled him away. Then the Epirotes, exalted by the victory of their king and admiring his valour, overwhelmed and cut to pieces the phalanx of the Macedonians, pursued them as they fled, slew many of them, and took five thousand of them alive. (Pyrrh. 7.6–10, transl. B. Perrin⁵)

This description of Pyrrhus’ military excellence accounts for the stabilisation in his reign and his expedition against Macedon, but it also explains his long-standing commitment to military studies (Pyrrh. 8.3–4). According to Plutarch’s account, Pyrrhus had produced writings on military tactics and leadership (8.6). He seems to have been forever studying and meditating upon military affairs, and made his subjects think only about weapons (16.1–3).

The presentation of successful incidents from his military career, however, is counterbalanced by reports of other activities from which Pyrrhus consciously withdraws. A good example that features early in the Life is the anecdote with the flute-players whom Pyrrhus openly despised at a drinking-party (Pyrrh. 8.7). What stands out in this incident is not merely Pyrrhus’ championing of the public status of a general over that of a flute-player, but rather his failure to conform to the spirit of conviviality.⁶ It is nevertheless true that there are also some more positive examples of his opposition to the symposium, as, for instance, when he magnanimously excuses some young fellows who were castigating him under the influence of wine (8.11–12). Soon after this, Plutarch presents another incident, which reflects other people’s response to Pyrrhus’ one-sided lifestyle. The implication here is that, by accepting Pyrrhus as their leader, the people of Tarentum will themselves have to abandon frivolity and parties in favour of an austere and military life, which is nicely encapsulated in Meton’s warning to the people of Tarentum (Pyrrh. 13.8–10):

Men of Tarentum, you do well not to frown upon those who wish to sport and revel (παίζειν καὶ κωμάζειν), while they can. And if you are wise, you will all also get some enjoyment still out of your freedom (καὶ πάντες ἀπολαύσετε ἐτὶ τῆς ἐλευθερίας), assured that you will have other busi-

⁵ All translations of Plutarch’s texts are taken from B. Perrin (1920) with minor alterations.
⁶ Pyrrh. 8.7: λέγεται γὰρ ὡς ἐρωτηθεὶς ἐν τινὶ πότῳ, πότερον αὐτῷ φαίνεται Πύθων σωληνῆς ἢ καρπίας, εἰπεῖν ὅτι Πολύπερχων στρατηγός, ὡς ταῦτα τῷ βασιλεῖ ζητεῖν μόνα καὶ γινώσκειν προ- σῆκον. (‘For instance, we are told that when he was asked at a drinking-party whether he thought Python or Caphisias the better flute-player, he replied that Polyperchon was a good general, implying that it became a king to investigate and understand such matters only’).
ness and a different life and diet (ὡς ἔτερα πράγματα καὶ βίον καὶ δίαιταν ἔξοντες) when Pyrrhus has come into the city.

Again the description of the sympotic space encompasses forces opposed to those of Pyrrhus’ space of action. In fact, the reference to the withered garland and the torch, the dancing and singing by drunken symposiasts and Meton in particular, and the presence of a flute-girl create a scene characteristic of a κόμος or drunken procession of revellers, something which Pyrrhus prohibits as soon as he assumes power. We learn that he closed the gymnasia and banned drinking bouts (16.2). Plutarch is careful here to present the impressions of both sides: to Pyrrhus’ mind withdrawal from social festivities was a matter of prudent constraint; the Tarentines called it servitude (16.3). This balanced approach is meant to encourage Plutarch’s readers to engage in critical reflection, especially as regards the effects of strict adherence to notions of generalship. The narrator’s description of the sympotic space relates in this instance to the so-called psychologising function of space, meant to elucidate the hero’s character and disposition.

Furthermore, Pyrrhus’ commitment to military affairs undermines his approach to his parental responsibilities, as it produces a distorted image of how a father is supposed to behave. It is interesting that Plutarch glosses over in silence any non-military rapport between Pyrrhus and his sons, and the only lesson that Pyrrhus appears to be transmitting to them is that of the importance of military prowess with a view to the imposition of crude authority (Pyrrh. 9.4 – 6). Such military paideia puts at risk the morality of his male children: he is going to bequeath his kingdom to the son who demonstrates that he has the most powerful weapon (Pyrrh. 9.3 – 6, Reg. et imp. apophth. 184C). Pyrrhus impels his successors towards a brutal competition that could potentially lead to fratricide. Indeed that is the outcome of such a contest in Euripides’ Phoenician Women, a play which provides a sub-text for a reading of the Pyrrhus and highlights the connection between power and distorted familial

7 Pyrrh. 13.6 – 7: εἰς δὲ τις ἄνηρ ἐπεικῆς, Μέτων ὄνομα, τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης ἐν ἧ τὸ δόμιμα κυροῦ ἔμελλον ἐντάσσει καὶ τοῦ δήμου καθεξομένου, λαβὼν στέφανον τῶν ἐώλων καὶ λαμπάδιον, ἀντὶ στὶς μεθόδους, αὐλητρίδος ψηφισομένης αὐτῆς πρὸς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν ἐκώμαζεν. οί δὲ ἐν ὧμι μῆμος κρατὰς κόσμον ὡς ἑχοὺς οἰ μὲν ἐκροτοῦν ἠδόντες, οἱ δὲ ἐγέλω, ἐκάλεσε δὲ ὤδεις, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ γύναιον αὐλείν κάκειν ἄδειν ἐκέλευον εἰς μέσον προελθόντα: καὶ τοῦτο ποίησον ἐπίδοσος ἦν. (‘But there was a certain worthy man, Meton by name, who, when the day on which the decree was to be ratified was at hand and the people were taking their seats in the assembly, took a withered garland and a torch, after the way of revellers, and came dancing in behind a flute-girl who led the way for him. Then, as will happen in a throng of free people not given to decorum, some clapped their hands at sight of him, and others laughed, but none tried to stop him; nay, they bade the woman play on her flute and called upon Meton to come forward and give them a song; and it was expected that he would do so’).

ties.9 Braund justifiably stresses Pyrrhus’ ‘very limited concern for his sons’, suggesting that ‘their education serves merely as a ploy in the king’s pleonexia’.10

The case of Marius resembles that of Pyrrhus in that the former is once again the type of the fierce general who has been well equipped with a purely military training, and whose identity as a man of power outweighs his role as a father. At one point Marius had even abandoned his son to save himself (Mar. 35.9–11). The ineffectual parenting of powerful fathers is compensated for in the life-pair by the presence of Antigonus in chapter 34 of Pyrrhus: the moralising programme that Antigonus wished to transmit to his son was founded on the virtues of humanity (philanthrōpia) and mildness (praotēs), and not on self-assertive authority. Antigonus rebukes his son, Alcyoneus, for bringing him the head of Pyrrhus, considering this an impious and barbaric act, while he praised him for treating Pyrrhus’ son, Helenus, with compassion. The story of the hero’s death survives in several versions, but Plutarch follows the basic core found in Strabo (8.6.18), and augments it with dramatic details and emotional effect:11 the mighty king is wounded by a tile thrown by a distressed mother in her attempt to save her son (Pyrrh. 34.1–3). Although Pausanias (1.13.8) too follows the traditional line of the story, he refers only vaguely to a woman but not specifically to a distraught mother. Plutarch’s version of the story might simply be the result of his creative imagination as influenced by other versions he consulted, but in case it is not, could it have been informed at least to some extent by Plutarch’s general emphasis on Pyrrhus’ inadequate performance in the parental sphere, suggestively portraying how this brought about his final catastrophe?

There are further insights into the weaknesses resulting from Pyrrhus’ short-sighted military agenda, which, as we have seen, ignores vital areas of human life and activity. In the Lives of dedicated generals, Plutarch tends to contrast the military hero with other

9 On the Phoenician Women as a sub-text for the Pyrrhus, see Braund (1997) 1–10.
11 Polyaeenus, Strat. 8.68, refers to a group of Argive women—and not specifically to a mother—who were throwing all sorts of solid objects: Πῦρρος Ἡπειρώτης ἐνέβαλεν εἰς Ἀργος καλέσαντος αὐτόν Ἀριστέως Ἀργείου. οἱ μὲν Ἀργείοι συνέδραμον ἐς τὴν ἄγοραν μετὰ τῶν ὀπλῶν, αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες αὐτῶν προκαταλαμβάνει τὰ τέη τοὺς Ἡπειρώτας ἄνωθεν βάλλουσαν ἀναχωρήσας βαζόνται, ὡστε καὶ Πῦρρος, ὁ δεινότατος τῶν στρατηγῶν, αὐτὸς ἔπεσεν ἐμπεσοῦσης ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ κεραίδος. αἱ δὲ Ἀργολίδες μεγιστόν κλέος ἐν τοῖς Ἐλληνες ἤραντο Πῦρρου τοῦ πολεμικῶτατοῦ μιθῆ ὑπ’ ἄνδραν, ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ γυναικῶν Ἀργολίδων πεσόντως. Justin, Epit. Pomp. Trog. 25.5.1–2, reports that Pyrrhus was killed outside the wall of Argos by stones thrown by the army of Antigonus: Repulsus ab Spartanis Pyrrhus Argos petit; ibi dum Antigonum in urbe clausum expugnare conatus, inter confertissimos violentissime dimicans saxo de murisictus occiditur. Caput eius Antigono refertur, qui victoria mitius usus filium eius Helenum cum Epitrois sibi dedidit in renum remisit eique insepultī patris ossa in patriam referenda tradidit. Finally, Zonaras (Hist. Epit. 8.VI, vol. II, p. 90, II. 22–28 Dindorf 1869), reports that Pyrrhus was killed by a woman who lost her balance and fell onto his head: Πῦρρος... ἐπὶ τὴν Ἐλλάδα στρατεύσας οὐ πολλῷ ὠτερον ἐν Ἀργεὶ ἀπέθανεν. γυνὴ γὰρ τις, ὡς λόγος ἔχει, παρόντα αὐτὸν ἰδεῖν ἀπὸ τοῦ τέγους ἐπιθυμήσασα ἑσφαλῆ καὶ ἐμπεσοῦσα διέφθειρεν αὐτῶν.
figures, who normally exhibit a more varied range of *paideia*. These have been called 'foil figures' (*Folienfiguren*), and we get two apt examples of that confrontational technique in Pyrrhus’ interaction with Cineas and Fabricius in chapters 14 and 20–21, respectively. Although Cineas is sketched as Pyrrhus’ political counsellor, his contribution is not just aimed at strengthening Pyrrhus’ kingship, but more at improving his moral condition. For that reason, he employs his rhetorical eloquence—otherwise a vital tool of political success—in order to lead Pyrrhus to some degree of self-awareness through a series of dialectical questions. This Socratic scene is omitted from both Dio Cassius’ corresponding account ([*Hist. Rom.*], 40.5) and Appian’s *History of Rome* (‘The Samnite War’, 17–18, 22–30), presumably because the moralising strands of the confrontation would have been of less interest to the two historians. Cineas exposes the vanity of Pyrrhus’ *pleonexia*, trying to rectify his political aspirations through a better regulated moral outlook, yet to no avail; in the end, rather than changing his mind, Pyrrhus is simply disquieted.

Fabricius is a very similar case. He is a Roman ambassador whom Pyrrhus approaches with compliments and attempts to bribe (*Pyrrh. 20.2–4*). Here Pyrrhus is naive in his political actions that might have caused some mild laughter among spectators: despite his failure to get Fabricius to accept gold, the very next day he offers him an elephant, which Fabricius once again rejects. Pyrrhus does not seem to understand the priorities of a politically-informed person, and mistakenly confuses the things that might have attracted a general with those potentially more appropriate to a politician. The remarks which conclude Fabricius’ conversation with Pyrrhus (20.9) also have a bearing on the latter’s lack of philosophical awareness. In this episode a discussion on Epicureanism takes place, which, interestingly, is launched and articulated by Fabricius and Cineas, not Pyrrhus, who is uninterested in intellectual topics. This discussion—which is omitted in Dio Cassius—dwells, *inter alia*, on the Epicurean view of public retirement that Pyrrhus and his followers appear to have espoused, despite the fact that they seem to have devoted little attention to the true essence of this doctrine. Plutarch is the only source to refer explicitly to the name of Epicurus in relation to this episode (cf. Cic., *De Sen*. 43, Val. Max. 4.3.6), and this reflects the biographer’s concern to stress Pyrrhus’ limitations in philosophical contemplation, an area which might have allowed the hero’s natural abilities to flourish.

Plutarch is also interested in looking at Pyrrhus’ behaviour in the religious sphere, and at how this might have affected his military choices. A recurrent motif throughout the hero’s polemical exploits is his loyalty to the gods (*Pyrrh. 3.4, 12.7, 29.3, 30.5, 32.10*) and fortune (*tyche*) (26.7), the attention he pays to dreams (29.2–4),* omens (31.7), and prophecies (30.5, 32.8), and his decision to dedicate

13 Buszard (2008) 203–205 compares Pyrrhus’ dialogue with Cineas to Socrates’ dialogue with Alcibiades in *Alcibiades I*.
14 For dreams in Tacitus and Plutarch, see Pelling (1997b).
his military spoils to the gods (26.9). One has to reflect upon the implications of such commitment to the divine, especially in instances when Pyrrhus trusts to fate rather than his reason in military campaigns (καὶ τῇ τύχῃ μᾶλλον ἡ τοῖς λογισμοῖς χρώμενος, 26.7).\(^{15}\) In Plutarch the limits between reverence and superstition are often blurred and I would suggest that Pyrrhus shows the signs of a superstitious man that are probably consistent with his lack of proper \textit{paideia}.\(^{26}\)

The most famous description of the superstitious man can be found in Theophrastus’ \textit{Characters} (Δεισιδαιμονία).\(^{16}\) Yet where Theophrastus mocks,\(^{17}\) Plutarch analyses and ponders.\(^{18}\) Plutarch classifies \textit{deisidaimonia} as a barbarian and not a Greek characteristic, considering it fitted only to uncivilised men,\(^{19}\) and in his \textit{On superstition} he offers practical instructions for distinguishing the superstitious man from the atheist.\(^{20}\) Pyrrhus shares a number of common features with the superstitious figure of the essay. To begin with, ignorance stimulates superstition in feeble and pliable characters (\textit{De superst.} 164E). Pyrrhus’ lack of political and philosophical knowledge leads him to vacillate between his military toughness on the one hand and his mildness and humanity on the other hand. Secondly, if emotion (\textit{pathos}) is added to that psychological state, then something very bad happens (164E). Pyrrhus’ \textit{pathos} is his \textit{pleonexia}, which eventually causes him some serious problems on a number of levels, as we have observed. Thirdly, the \textit{deisidaimōn} is agitated by dreams (165E ff.),\(^{21}\) and is constantly preoccupied with seers and omens (168F); so too, as we have seen, is Pyrrhus. Furthermore, in 167B Plutarch cites Plato in support of the claim that music can control the ‘troubled’ part of the soul that lacks sophistication and refinement; Pyrrhus’ aversion to both music and leisure could explain his deficiencies in this respect. Finally, the \textit{deisidaimōn} dislikes politicians and philosophers (167E); one might recall Pyrrhus’ encounter with Cines and Fabricius and his poor grasp of Epicurean doctrines.

\(^{15}\) This is reminiscent of the portrayal of Marius in Sallust’s \textit{Jugurtha}, esp. 91–95, where similar issues arise; in 92.6–7 Marius’ success is presented as the result of chance rather than of skill. In 94.6 Marius has some good fortune and gains glory through an error of judgment. In 92.2 Marius’ circle believed that he was either possessed of divine insight or everything was revealed to him by the favours of the gods.

\(^{16}\) On Plutarch’s predecessors and the use of the superstitious character, see Moellering (1963) 80–88.

\(^{17}\) Despite the moralising purpose of Theophrastus’ \textit{Characters} (Diggle [2004] 12, obvious also from the \textit{Preface} of the work), the comic strand in the delineation of characters cannot easily be overlooked. Diggle (2004) 349 observes that whereas \textit{deisidaimōn} used to be a neutral or even approbative term, with Theophrastus it acquired negative connotations.

\(^{18}\) On superstition as a feature that Plutarch’s politician should moderate in his behaviour, Wardman (1974) 84–93.


True, there is more to Pyrrhus’ portrayal than this. He neither hates nor blames the gods (168C; 170E), nor does he remain idle for fear of divine retribution (168C). Still, we do find substantial indications in his conduct of superstition,²² which are consistent with the emphasis usually given to the superstitious conduct of other military heroes. Even Nicias (Nic. 23–24), who is not an exclusively military figure, is confounded by his superstitious nature when on campaign. The anecdote in Pericles 6, on the other hand, about the educated response to popular deisidaimonia, reflects how reasoned explanation can eliminate unfounded impressions, and thus set the limits within which consulting the divine is supposed to operate in the military and political sphere.

**Military space and paideia in the Marius**

In turning to Marius, I wish to explore how Plutarch adjusts some common elements in the spaces of action of the two heroes, and comment on the significance of this readjustment for Plutarchan notions of culture. Unlike Pyrrhus, from the very beginning of his Life Marius’ education is the focus of attention, with forceful references to his rejection of Hellenic culture in favour of its Roman, military counterpart (2.1–2): it would be completely absurd, Marius thinks, to be educated by teachers who were the slaves of the Romans. His resistance to Greek paideia is also manifested in a dictum ascribed to Plato that highlights his opposition to the Muses and the Graces,²³ thus explaining the many hasty changes in his behaviour, quite unlike what happens in the Pyrrhus. That trait becomes critical in the ensuing narrative and is recurrently stressed throughout: in 3.2 we encounter Marius’ change and adaptability to a new way of life; in 4.7 and 5.3 we get two instances of quick changes of a political resolution; in 28.1–2 there is a superficial change in his character, when he pretends to be mild and democratically inclined in order to please the people; in 29.1 he is detested by the patricians for changing his political position; finally, in 34.3–7 we see Marius succumbing to luxury in his old age, despite his hitherto unsophisticated lifestyle.

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²² Alex. 75.1–2; cf. Fab. 4.4.
²³ Mar. 2.3–4: ὠσπερ οὖν Ξενοκράτει τῷ φιλοσόφῳ σκυθρωποτέρῳ δοκοῦντι τὸ ἥθος εἶναι πολλάκις εἰώθη ἐλέγειν ὁ Πλάτων· ὅ μακάρε Ξενόκρατες, θεύ ταῖς Ἱάρισιν, οὕτως εἰ τις ἔπεισε Μάριον, θεύειν ταῖς Ἑλληνικαῖς Μούσαις καὶ Χάρισιν, οὔκ ἐν έκπρεστάταις στρατηγίαις καὶ πολιτείαις ἀμορφοτάτην ἔπέθηκε, ὑπὸ θυμοῦ καὶ φιλαρχίας ἄφρου καὶ πλεονεξίων ἀπαρχηγήτων εἰς ὑμότατον καὶ ἀγνιώτατον γῆρας ἐξοκέλας, ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἐπὶ τῶν πράξεων αὐτῶν εὐθὺς θεωρεῖσθω. (‘Accordingly, just as Plato was wont to say often to Xenocrates the philosopher, who had the reputation of being rather morose in his disposition, “My good Xenocrates, sacrifice to the Graces,” so if Marius could have been persuaded to sacrifice to the Greek Muses and Graces”, he would not have put the ugliest possible crown upon a most illustrious career in field and forum, nor have been driven by the blasts of passion, ill-timed ambition, and insatiable greed upon the shore of a most cruel and savage old age. However, his actual career shall at once bring this into clear view’).
In chapter 29 the presence of Metellus is designed to highlight a contrast between the political practices of the two men, to shed light on Marius’ lack of proper paideia and ultimately demonstrate Marius’ perverted form of statecraft: the general considers public dishonesty an element of political virtue, whereas Metellus embraces the Pindaric axiom which is in line with the principle of political morality. Metellus is a typical ‘foil figure’ and it is interesting that he is philosophically educated (Mar. 29.12), which is why Plutarch thinks very highly of him.

The Platonic quotation mentioned above, demonstrating Plutarch’s view of Marius’ rejection of the Muses and the Graces, recalls its deployment in On superstition, where helps classify Pyrrhus in the category of superstitious men. This makes it tempting to start searching for similar elements in Marius as well. Indeed, one finds numerous references there too to the role of the gods (4.1, 8.5), the significance of tyché (7.2, 14.1, 23.1, 19.10), of prophets, consultation of omens and celestial signs, and sacrifices (17.2, 22, 26.2–4, 36.8–10, 38.7–10, 40.13). Moreover, in 42.7 Plutarch suggests that prophecies are a disease and considers it a paradox that whereas Marius was saved thanks to using them, Octavius was destroyed by them. What is more, in 45.5 Marius sleeps badly and is agitated by nightmares. Just like Pyrrhus, Marius too crosses the boundary between reverence and superstition, though in this case it does not contribute directly to his downfall. In general, his rejection of culture keeps him focused on war, and his natural inclination towards peace and political participation (31.3) fails to develop due to lack of suitable didactic influences. In Marius one can also see how the same qualities may be shown to have positive effects in warfare, but turn out disastrously in politics.

24 Mar. 29.5: αὐτὸς μὲν γὰρ εἰς ἄρετής καὶ δεινότητος μερίδα τὸ ψεύδοσθι τιθέμενος, λόγον οὐδένα τῶν πρὸς τὴν σύγκλητον ὄμολογημένων ἔξειν ἔμελλε, τὸν δὲ Μέτελλον εἰδὼς βέβαιον ἄνδρα καὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἀρχὴν μεγάλης ἄρετής κατὰ Πίνδαρον ἤγομενον, ἐβοῦλετο τῇ πρὸς τὴν σύγκλητον ἀρνήσει προληφθέντα καὶ μὴ δεξάμενον τὸν ὄρκον εἰς ἀνήκεστον ἐμβάλειν πρὸς τὸν δήμον ἐχθραν. (For he himself regarded lying as part of a man’s excellence and ability, made no account of his agreements with the senators, and did not intend to keep them; whereas he knew that Metellus was a steadfast man, who thought with Pindar that “truth is the foundation of great excellence”, and he therefore wished to bind him beforehand by a statement to the senate that he would not take the oath, and then have his refusal to do so plunge him into a hatred on the part of the people that could never be removed. And this was what came to pass’).

25 Consider Buszard’s apt distinction between Metellus’ personal virtue and his political effectiveness. It is true that Metellus, despite his ‘admirable figure’ and ‘noble behaviour’, does succumb to political mistakes. This, however, does not undermine his political feasibility: his mistakes, unlike Marius’, do not derive from his uncultured character, (2005) 491. Metellus is a foil for Marius in Sallust too, but education does not feature in the discussion so much. A compare-and-contrast with Sallust would be interesting, though Plutarch might not have known the Jugurtha directly (unlike the Histories). On Metellus and Marius in Jugurtha, see also Syme (1964) 142–151.

Conclusions: Military space and cultural identity

In his Lives of Pyrrhus and Marius Plutarch emphasises the heroes’ engagement with military affairs, and their lack of interest in intellectual, social, and familial activities. However, their devotion to military affairs is justified for different reasons. Pyrrhus acquires a very complex cultural identity in the text; he is certainly not a Roman, but then again not a pure Greek either. And this remains unresolved partly because Plutarch does not explicitly associate his military greed specifically with his unfamiliarity with Greek culture. The biographer is keen to play down any direct links with Hellenism. For Marius, by contrast, the hero’s sense of Romanitas is clearly in play from the start of the biography and is explicitly related to his aversion to Greek paideia. This might have to do with Plutarch’s general tendency to evaluate and comment upon the Hellenic affiliations of his Roman heroes in particular; yet one of the consequences of his references to cultural categories is that Plutarch is not interested in determining the identity of his heroes simply on the basis of origin, but more in the light of their ethical behaviour. As we have seen, in Plutarch’s biographical project, the heroes’ successes are heavily dependent on their performance in the cultural and moral sphere.²⁷

²⁷ See also discussion in Xenophontos (2016).