

Pyrrhus' Cold Wars (Plutarch *Pyrrhus* 12)

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PLUTARCH'S LIFE OF PYRRHUS focuses heavily on the *πλεονεξία* of the king of Epirus: namely, his constant ambition for new conquests and dissatisfaction with what he already had.¹ A passage of this Life explains a characteristic aspect of the successors of Alexander the Great, including Pyrrhus: their reluctance to interrupt hostilities, even during periods of nominal peace, as a consequence of their ambition. Their restless military activity resulted in peace being even more dangerous than open warfare (*Pyrrh.* 12.1–12):

As Lysimachus appeared, he claimed that the fall of Demetrius had been the outcome of both of them [Pyrrhus and Lysimachus] working together, and required that the kingdom [Macedonia] be divided. Pyrrhus, who did not fully trust the Macedonians and was still skeptical of their loyalty, agreed to Lysimachus' proposal, so they divided the cities and land between them. At the time, this was beneficial to them, and interrupted the war between them, but they soon realized that the division they had made had not put an end to their animosity, but rather had given rise to accusations and disagreements. Indeed, it is impossible to say how men whose inordinate ambition (*πλεονεξία*) is not limited by sea, mountain,

¹ W. W. Tarn, *Antigonos Gonatas* (Oxford 1913) 48 n.23, defined this Life as a treatise on *πλεονεξία*, as quoted by P. Lévêque, *Pyrrhos* (Paris 1957) 64. For the restless ambition of Pyrrhus according to Plutarch see P. Toohey, "Plutarch, *Pyrrh.* 13: ἄλλος ναυτιώδης," *Glotta* 65 (1987) 199–202. The term *πλεονεξία* appears at *Pyrrh.* 7.3, 9.6, and 12.3. For the concept of *πλεονεξία* in Platonic philosophy see F. Frazier, "The Perils of Ambition," in M. Beck (ed.), *A Companion to Plutarch* (Malden 2014) 488–502, at 489.

or inhospitable desert, men whose excessive appetites (*ἐπιθυμῖαι*) are not restrained by the borders that divide Europe and Asia, could stay still when they are in close proximity, could do no harm to each other, and could keep what they have. Instead, they are always fighting, for scheming and envy are innate in them, and they use indifferently either of the two words, war and peace, as if they were coins, because they are not concerned with justice, but with their own advantage (*δυνεῖν δ' ὀνομάτων ὡσπερ νομισμάτων, πολέμου καὶ εἰρήνης, τῷ παρατυχόντι χρῶνται πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον, οὐ πρὸς τὸ δίκαιον*). Surely, they are more honest when they are openly at war than when they call justice and friendship what is in fact suspension and rest from injustice (*βελτίους γε πολεμεῖν ὁμολογοῦντές εἰσιν, ἢ τῆς ἀδικίας τὸ ἀργοῦν καὶ σχολάζον δικαιοσύνην καὶ φιλίαν ὀνομάζοντες*). Pyrrhus made this evident (*ἐδήλωσε δ' ὁ Πύρρος*), as he again dedicated himself to hindering the growth of Demetrius' authority; and in order to obstruct his power, which was recovering, so to say, from a serious illness, he helped the Greeks and reached Athens [...] Then Pyrrhus also made peace with Demetrius (*πρὸς τὸν Δημήτριον εἰρήνην ἐποιήσατο*). As Demetrius departed for Asia shortly after, Pyrrhus, again under the influence of Lysimachus, made Thessaly revolt, in addition to attacking [Demetrius'] Greek garrisons. He also behaved this way because the Macedonians were more submissive towards him when they were in a military campaign than when they were free of military commitments (*βελτίοσι χρώμενος τοῖς Μακεδόσι στρατευομένοις ἢ σχολάζουσι*), and he himself had no inclination whatsoever to tranquility (*ὄλωσ αὐτὸς οὐκ εἶ πρὸς ἡσυχίαν πεφυκώς*) [...] Hence [considering Pyrrhus' loss of Macedonia to Lysimachus], kings should not criticize masses for switching sides for their own advantage. In fact, in behaving this way, the masses imitate the kings themselves, who are their teachers of unreliability and betrayal and believe that the least righteous people are in an exceptionally advantageous situation.

These events belong to the series of conflicts between Pyrrhus, Lysimachus, and Demetrius Poliorcetes for control of

Macedonia.² Pyrrhus had entered a peace agreement with Demetrius in 289. In 288, while Demetrius was preparing a military expedition to Asia, Pyrrhus broke his agreement with him under pressure from Seleucus I, Ptolemy I, and Lysimachus. Pyrrhus and Lysimachus overthrew Demetrius from the throne of Macedonia in 288 and divided the kingdom between them. Pyrrhus departed for Athens to defend it from an attack by Demetrius in the same year. A second peace agreement with Demetrius followed. Soon after, as Demetrius had begun his campaign in Asia, Pyrrhus, pressed by Lysimachus, caused Thessaly to revolt from Demetrius. He then annexed Thessaly to his own kingdom and attacked Demetrius' garrisons in Greece (ca. 287). According to Plutarch, Pyrrhus' attack on Demetrius, by interrupting their second peace agreement, is an example of a much more general phenomenon, the instability of all the peace treaties between the Diadochi.

In 285, after Demetrius was defeated in Asia by Seleucus, Lysimachus decided to take over all of Macedonia and Thessaly. While Pyrrhus was encamped in Edessa, Lysimachus attacked his camp and convinced the Macedonians to abandon him. Pyrrhus thus returned to Epirus, losing all of Macedonia and Thessaly to Lysimachus, with whom he had been sharing Macedonia since 288.

This passage, which focuses on *πλεονεξία* and its consequences, has relevance for the whole *Life*.³ It also has

² Lévêque, *Pyrrhos* 147–168; É. Will, *Histoire politique du monde hellénistique*² I (Nancy 1979) 92–99; G. Wylie, “Pyrrhus Πολεμιστής,” *Latomus* 58 (1999) 298–313, at 302–304; M. Durán Mañas, “Plutarco y la Atenas de los Diádocos,” in A. Casanova (ed.), *Figure d’Atene nelle opere di Plutarco* (Florence 2013) 143–163, at 161. See also Plut. *Demetr.* 41, 43–44, 46 for these events.

³ P. Lévêque considered the passage from οἷς γὰρ οὐ πέλαγος, οὐκ ὄρος, οὐκ ἀοίκητος ἐρημία πέρας ἐστὶ πλεονεξίας until βελτίους γε πολεμῆν ὁμολογοῦντές εἰσιν, ἢ τῆς ἀδικίας τὸ ἀργοῦν καὶ σχολάζον δικαιοσύνην καὶ φιλίαν ὀνομάζοντες (12.3–5) to be misplaced and inconsistent with the preceding and following passages. According to Lévêque, this was a digression on

correspondences in Plutarch's Life of Marius, which is the "parallel" life to that of Pyrrhus. For instance, the author argues that Marius was not fit for peace and political life. As he had gained his power through wars, he was afraid that inactivity and tranquility (ἀργία καὶ ἡσυχία) would reduce his power and glory, and thus was always seeking pretexts for new conflicts.⁴ Plutarch was convinced that ambitious men found in war a means to glory and hence were addicted to warfare. The unjust attitude for which the successors of Alexander are criticized also consisted in their πλεονεξία, which, according to Plutarch's moralistic view, strongly conditioned Pyrrhus' behavior and provoked him to unsettle the precarious political and military balances of the early Hellenistic world.⁵ Because

justice and personal interests (τὸ δίκαιον and τὸ συμφέρον) in the behavior of Hellenistic kings, and was disconnected from the rest of the chapter. In addition, "Le texte n'est pas bien adapté à Pyrrhos (que viennent faire pour lui les frontières de l'Europe et de l'Asie?) ni spécialement à ce moment de sa carrière (il va intervenir pour libérer les Athéniens) ; il est mal réuni à ce qui suit, par la petite phrase: 'Pyrrhos le fit bien voir' qui nous remène du général au particulier. Surtout son ton diffère totalement du ton uni et objectif du récit dans le reste du chapitre" (*Pyrrhos* 41–42). Clearly *Pyrrh.* 12.3–5 refers to the Diadochi in general. It is a moralistic consideration whose scope is wider than the events related to Pyrrhus. However, moralistic and personal remarks are not at all unusual in Plutarch's Lives: they are the central aspect of these biographies, contrary to what Lévêque seems to imply. Therefore, even Lévêque's objections on the relevance of Europe and Asia to the story of Pyrrhus do not seem justified. The sentence ἐδήλωσε δ' ὁ Πύρρος, taking the reader back to Pyrrhus, refers to the following narrative and connects it to the previous moralizing remarks: Pyrrhus' making a second peace agreement with Demetrius (after visiting Athens) and breaking it immediately thereafter is a clear example of πλεονεξία and thus injustice, on which Plutarch has just expressed his opinion.

⁴ *Mar.* 31.3. Lack of ἡσυχία also characterizes Pyrrhus at *Pyrrh.* 12.8.

⁵ Lévêque, *Pyrrhos* 163, who also stresses that πλεονεξία is the concept Plutarch uses to explain many situations of political instability in the period: he observes that the term appears at *Pyrrh.* 7.3 with regard to the conflict between Pyrrhus and Demetrius and at 12.3 with regard to Pyrrhus' struggle

of their excessive ambition, the Diadochi would sooner or later violate all the peace treaties they had agreed upon.

This passage of the *Life of Pyrrhus* is also consistent with the opinion Plutarch elsewhere gives on the early Hellenistic kingdoms and the balance among these powers. He was well aware of the complicated series of wars of the Diadochi, especially among those whose territorial possessions bordered one another. The idea that neighboring powers are never at peace with each other is also in the *Life of Demetrius* (5.1):

Just as Empedocles' elements are bound to wage war and to be at variance with each other due to quarrels, particularly those elements that touch and are close to each other, so the immediate proximity of affairs and territorial possessions made the continuing and reciprocal wars that were fought among all the successors of Alexander more evident and searing for some of them [...]⁶

Similar remarks can be found in the *Life of Eumenes*, although with a wider scope, as they refer to the moral decline and the internal conflicts among all the Macedonian soldiers, provoked by their leaders (13.10–11):

After Alexander died, they [the leaders] had themselves become dissolute because of their power, and cowardly because of their way of living, and had led their spirits to clash, which were tyrannical and corrupted by barbarian pretensions. Thus, they were hostile to each other and lacked unity. On the other hand, they flattered the Macedonians [the Macedonian soldiers] shamelessly and squandered money on their feasts and sacrifices; hence, in a short time they turned the camp into a hostel of carousing profligacy [...].

With regard to the passage of the *Life of Pyrrhus* οἷς γὰρ οὐ πέλαγος, οὐκ ὄρος, οὐκ ἀοίκητος ἐρημία πέρας ἐστὶ πλεονεξίας, οὐδ' οἱ διαροῦντες Εὐρώπην καὶ Ἀσίαν τέρμονες ὀρίζουσι τὰς ἐπι-

with Lysimachus.

⁶ This passage is also quoted by Frazier, in *A Companion to Plutarch* 495.

θυμίας, there is a parallel in the Life of Aemilius Paulus.⁷ There Plutarch does not reflect on the conflicts among rulers but rather on the internal strife of Roman families of his own day. While most *gentes* at the time of Aemilius Paulus were characterized by poverty, there was a constant conflict among the members of Roman families at the time of Plutarch, as they were always fighting over possessions, and their quarrels were only stopped by physical boundaries. His remarks are connected to a tradition, also represented by Polybius,⁸ stressing that Aemilius Paulus, as well as his son, Scipio Aemilianus, were generous and showed no signs of greed (5.9):

Nowadays brothers and relatives do not stop arguing, unless they limit their common properties through slopes, rivers, and walls, and unless there is plenty of space dividing them.

This reflection by Plutarch suggests that the theme of the unstable military conditions on the borders found in the Life of Pyrrhus is highly relevant to that biography and to Plutarch's writings in general. It is nevertheless possible that his reflections on the boundaries of kingdoms, on *πλεονεξία*, and on the injustice resulting from it, as well as on the distinction between open and undeclared wars, with the latter judged more dangerous than the former (12.3–5), were prompted by the particular events of this phase of Pyrrhus' life. For all of Pyrrhus' vicissitudes, except for his campaigns in Italy and Sicily and his final expedition to Peloponnese, Plutarch's main source of information was Hieronymus of Cardia.⁹ Hieronymus'

⁷ This parallel is mentioned by R. Flacelière and É. Chambry, *Plutarque, Vies. Pyrrhos – Marius. Lysandre – Sylla* (Paris 1971) 297.

⁸ See Polyb. 18.35, 31.22; Plut. *Aem.* 28.10–11, 38.1, 39.7, 39.10.

⁹ On Plutarch's use of Hieronymus in the Life of Pyrrhus see Lévêque, *Pyrrhos* 64–65, urging that Plutarch's representation of Pyrrhus was mainly based on Hieronymus' narrative, for both Pyrrhus' campaigns in the West and in the Balkans. Hieronymus' attitude was not totally negative towards Pyrrhus; however, he presented him as an extremely ambitious individual. Plutarch's portrait of him as a restless arriviste thus derived from Hieron-

History focused on Pyrrhus in its final books and probably ended with Pyrrhus' death.¹⁰ Hieronymus was a spokesman for the Antigonids, who were notoriously hostile to Pyrrhus.¹¹ Consequently, Plutarch's moralistic remarks may to a certain extent have been influenced by Hieronymus.¹²

ymus. Plutarch also used Hieronymus for his biographies of Eumenes and Demetrius Poliorcetes. D. Zodda, *Tra Egitto, Macedonia e Sparta: Pirro, un monarca in Epiro* (Rome 1997) 102, also cites Plutarch's use of Hieronymus in the Life of Pyrrhus; Flacelière and Chambry, *Plutarque, Vies. Pyrrhos – Marius* 9–10, agree with Lévêque that Hieronymus was the main source for the Life of Pyrrhus, and that Plutarch's portrait of Pyrrhus as an ambitious man derived from Hieronymus. See also J. Hornblower, *Hieronymus of Cardia* (Oxford 1981) 67–71: Plutarch's Lives of Eumenes, Demetrius, and Pyrrhus partially derived from Hieronymus, but perhaps Plutarch came to his History through an intermediary source. Hornblower also stresses that Hieronymus had no sympathy for Pyrrhus. Cf. W. J. Tatum, "The Regal Image in Plutarch's *Lives*," *JHS* 116 (1996) 135–151, at 141, 150. However, Hieronymus was not the only source that Plutarch could use, as Pyrrhus' wars had been narrated by the Annalists, by Pyrrhus' court historian Proxenus, by Timaeus of Tauromenium, and by Phylarchus.

¹⁰ Lévêque, *Pyrrhos* 22; Flacelière and Chambry, *Plutarque, Vies. Pyrrhos – Marius* 9. A. Primo, "Il termine ultimo delle Storie di Ieronimo di Cardia," *Athenaeum* 94 (2006) 719–722, on the other hand, argues that the work ended with the Chremonidean War (267–261). For the role of Pyrrhus in Hieronymus see Hornblower, *Hieronymus of Cardia* 15–17, 140–143.

¹¹ For the connection between Hieronymus' judgement of Pyrrhus and the Antigonids' hostility to him see Lévêque, *Pyrrhos* 22–26; Flacelière and Chambry, *Plutarque, Vies. Pyrrhos – Marius* 10.

¹² Pompeius Trogus/Justin was also influenced by Hieronymus: see Lévêque, *Pyrrhos* 58–59; Zodda, *Tra Egitto, Macedonia e Sparta* 100; M. T. Schettino, "Pirro in Giustino," in C. Bearzot et al. (eds.), *Studi sull'Epitome di Giustino II* (Milan 2015) 69–98, at 73, 89. Like Plutarch, Trogus/Justin portrays Pyrrhus as an ambitious individual who constantly wants more than what he has and is ready to collaborate with anyone in order to fulfill his projects. Lévêque, *Pyrrhos* 59 n.1, cites two passages of Justin: *Epit.* 17.2.12, *qui et ipse spoliare singulos cupiens omnibus se partibus venditabat*; and 18.1.1, *igitur Pyrrus, rex Epiri, cum iterata Tarentinorum legatione additis Samnitium et Lucanorum precibus, et ipsis auxilio adversus Romanos indigentibus fatigaretur, non tam supplicium precibus quam spe invadendi Italiae imperii inductum venturum se cum exercitu*

It seems likely that Hieronymus was the first author to focus intensely on Pyrrhus' ambition, thus influencing Plutarch's view of the king of Epirus. We have seen, however, how constant the themes of ambition, of the unlawful attitude of the Diadochi, and of the violation of boundaries are in Plutarch's Lives. So he did not necessarily rely exclusively on Hieronymus in highlighting these themes. Plutarch may have turned to him as far as the narrative of the events was concerned, and this may thus have caused Plutarch to focus on specific moments of Pyrrhus' life and deeds. These were often ambitious and reckless feats, and Plutarch may have felt the need to say more about their moral consequences. This interest is also manifested through characteristic lexical choices. One keyword for Pyrrhus' ambition in Plutarch is ἐλπίδες, vain hopes, on which Plutarch also focuses elsewhere, as they contribute to Demetrius Poliorcetes' ruin in the Life of Demetrius.¹³

pollicetur. Justin also comments at *Epit.* 25.4.1–3 on Pyrrhus' restless ambition and warlike attitude, which, however, led him only to ephemeral conquests. Remarks on the ambition and hunger for power of the Diadochi (*imperii cupiditas insatiabilis*) are also at *Epit.* 17.1.9–12.

¹³ Pyrrhus' ἐλπίδες: *Pyrrh.* 6.2, 14.14, 22.1, 23.3, 26.1, 26.14, 30.3; cf. 22.6 (ἤλπισεν), 26.5 (ἐλπίσας), 33.1 (ἤλπιζε). See S. Cioccolo, "Enigmi dell'ἦθος: Antigono II Gonata in Plutarco e altrove," *Studi Ellenistici* 3 (1990) 135–190, at 174–175. For Demetrius' ἐλπίδες, *Demetr.* 30.2, 35.6, 43.3, 45.4, 46.1, 50.6; cf. 49.7 (ἐλπίζοντες). The meaning of ἐλπίδες as vain or ambitious hopes is also found in other Lives (*Nic.* 14.1, *Alc.* 17.2–3). Ambition and restlessness of the soul are also central themes in the biography of Marius, and in several other Lives: Plut. *Mar.* 2.4 (φιλαρχία and πλεονεξία), 4.1 (ἐλπίδες), 10.2 (κατορθώματος δόξα), 34.6 (φιλοτιμία, πλεονεξία, φιλοδοξία), 45.10–11 (φιλοτιμία, φιλαρχία, ζηλοτυπία), 46.3 (ἐλπίδες). Eumenes is condemned by Plutarch for his warmongering attitude at *Comp. Sert.-Eum.* 21[2].1–5. See *Eum.* 12.1 for Antigonus Monophthalmus' hunger for supreme power; cf. *De Alex. fort.* 1.9 (330E) for his injustice and greed. *Demetr.* 28.3: Antigonus shows an excessive love of power (φιλαρχία). *Demetr.* 32.7–8: Seleucus I is flawed by an inordinate hunger for conquest, which leads Plutarch to reflect on ἀπληστία and φιλοπλουτία. *Demetr.* 47.4: Demetrius is the most violent and ambitious of all the kings (βιαιότατος καὶ μεγαλο-

In most of the passages that we have analyzed, Plutarch focuses on the Diadochi. He appears to be indeed interested in the age of the Successors and in the Hellenistic age in general. Although the lives of Eumenes, Demetrius, and Pyrrhus are the only biographies by Plutarch that deal with the Successors directly, there are other Greek lives that refer to the Hellenistic age (the lives of Agis, Cleomenes, Aratus, and Philopoemen), in addition to references in the treatise *De Alexandri Magni fortuna aut virtute*.¹⁴ His low esteem of warmongering Hellenistic kings,

πραγμονέστατος βασιλέων). Flamininus was characterized by φιλοτιμία and φιλοδοξία (*Flam.* 1.3, 3.3, 7.2, 20.1–2). For the theme of Caesar’s ambition see *Caes.* 1.3, 11.3–6, 58.4–5 (τὸ μεγαλοργὸν καὶ φιλότιμον ... ζῆλος αὐτοῦ ... φιλονικία), 60.1 (βασιλείας ἔρωσ). At *Caes.* 41.3 Plutarch mentions Pompey’s φιλαρχία. *Ant.* 2.8: Antony is characterized by φιλοτιμία; *Ant.* 6.3: Cyrus, Alexander, and Caesar had an insatiable lust for power and an irrational desire for standing out among their peers. See also *Nic.* 4.1 for Nicias’ φιλοτιμία; 9.2 and 12.4 for that of Alcibiades; *Lys.* 4.6 for that of Lysander; *Pyrrh.* 30.1 for that of Pyrrhus; and *Sull.* 4.6 for that of Marius and Sulla. Overall, φιλοτιμία is one of the most common characteristics in Plutarch’s biographies: see A. Wardman, *Plutarch’s Lives* (London 1974) 115–124; P. A. Stadter, *Plutarch and his Roman Readers* (Oxford 2014) 261–262. On the concepts of φιλοτιμία, φιλονικία, and πλεονεξία in Plutarch see B. Buszard, “Caesar’s Ambition: A Combined Reading of Plutarch’s *Alexander-Caesar* and *Pyrrhus-Marius*,” *TAPA* 138 (2008) 185–215, at 186.

¹⁴ According to R. Martínez Lacy, “La época helenística en Plutarco,” in I. Gallo et al. (eds.), *Teoría e prassi politica nelle opere di Plutarco* (Naples 1995) 221–225, at 223–225, Plutarch despised the Hellenistic age, as he thought that the Hellenistic kingdoms were the degeneration of the glorious kingdoms of Philip II and Alexander the Great, and Pyrrhus was the only one among the Diadochi who had been worthy of Alexander in the military sphere. See also Tatum, *JHS* 116 (1996) 140: for Plutarch, Hellenistic monarchy was an instrument for the analysis of the ideal ruler. Cf. M. Durán Mañas, “Plutarco y las monarquías helenísticas: *ethos* y *pathos* de los Antigonidas,” in A. Casanova (ed.), *Plutarco e l’età ellenistica* (Florence 2005) 39–61, at 41–44, 52–53, and 59–60, for the Hellenistic kings with whom Plutarch deals and their moral characteristics, with particular reference to the Antigonids. Finally, see E. Almagor, “How to Do Things with Hellenistic Historiography: Plutarch’s Intertextual Use(s) of Polybius,” in T. S.

which, in the Life of Pyrrhus, in that of Demetrius, and in *De Alexandri Magni fortuna*, leads him to describe Pyrrhus' ambition as "beastly" and the Hellenistic kingdoms as a large rotting corpse, does not make him any less interested in the ethical and historical problems of that age.¹⁵ According to Plutarch, Philip Arrhidaeus, Lysimachus, Demetrius Poliorcetes, Antiochus I, and Ptolemy II did not obtain their power due to their merits, but thanks to fortune and as a result of what their predecessors had accomplished. On the other hand, the megalomania of Demetrius and Lysimachus was ridiculous, as their kingdoms were not comparable to the empire of Alexander.¹⁶

Hellenistic kings, according to Plutarch, could not tolerate peace. Plutarch stresses with nearly identical words, in Pyrrhus' and Demetrius' Lives, that neither had any inclination to tranquility (ἡσυχία).¹⁷ Each time there was σχολή, a period of rest, Hellenistic rulers immediately started a new war, out of a sort of *horror vacui*.¹⁸ This attitude goes all the way down to

Schmidt et al. (eds.), *The Dynamics of Intertextuality in Plutarch* (Leiden 2020) 161–172, at 161: Plutarch stood out among his contemporaries for his interest in the Hellenistic age, and regularly used historical sources from that time period.

¹⁵ Plut. *Pyrrh.* 9.6, the "beastly nature of ambition" (θηριώδης ἡ τῆς πλεονεξίας υπόθεσις); *Demetr.* 30.1 and *De Alex. fort.* 2.4 (336F–337A), the Hellenistic kingdoms as a rotting corpse; *Demetr.* 5.1, moral considerations on the continuing wars among the Diadochi (see above). Cf. F. Muccioli, "Ruler Cult and Ancient Biography," in F. Cairns et al. (eds.), *Ancient Biography: Identity through Lives* (Prenton 2018) 131–146, at 137 and 145, on Plutarch's criticism of Demetrius' deification.

¹⁶ *De Alex. fort.* 2.3–5, 2.9 (336D–E, 337D–E, 338A–B, 341A).

¹⁷ *Pyrrh.* 12.8: Pyrrhus had by nature no inclination whatsoever to tranquility (ὅλως αὐτὸς οὐκ εἶν πρὸς ἡσυχίαν πεφυκός); *Demetr.* 41.1: Demetrius had by nature no inclination to tranquility (μήτ' αὐτὸς ἄγειν ἡσυχίαν πεφυκός). See also *Mar.* 31.3.

¹⁸ For σχολή see Plut. *Pyrrh.* 10.6, 12.5 (τῆς ἀδικίας τὸ ἀργοῦν καὶ σχολάζον), 12.8–9, 13.2, 13.4, 14.4, 14.12–13; cf. 31.4. Its opposite, ἀσχολία, also appears frequently in this biography. At *Pyrrh.* 6.6 ἀσχολία prevents

Perseus, the last Antigonid king, who set up a military campaign against the Dardani only because he thought he had some spare time (*Aem.* 9.5, ὡς σχολάζων). Peace is seen, in these passages, merely as the absence of war, and thus, for the Hellenistic rulers, it had no right to exist.

Plutarch's reflections on the age of the Diadochi in the *Life of Pyrrhus* are thus in line with his general perspective on the period following the death of Alexander, and with his overall moral views. The insights he offers in that biography on the relations between war and peace seem to be especially fitting for the Hellenistic age. The rule of Alexander's heirs had been full of intrigue as well as open conflicts. Long periods of peace were nearly impossible, because, as is implied by a passage of the *Life of Pyrrhus* (26.3), armies needed to be at war in order to make a living.

Further passages show that Plutarch was aware of the complex military conditions that fostered the wars of the Diadochi. One of these, for Eumenes, Demetrius, and Pyrrhus, was the difficulty of managing the volatile Macedonian armies. The main way they could keep the soldiers under control was through money and banquets (*Eum.* 13.10–11). They could also cajole them into obedience by impressing them with large amounts of weapons and the splendor of the military equipment available (*Eum.* 13.9, πλήθος ὀπλῶν καὶ λαμπρότης παρασκευῆς). Otherwise, obtaining their loyalty could prove to be a nearly impossible task. Demetrius never had a peaceful relationship with the Macedonian soldiers, except when war

Lysimachus from helping Antipater. At 10.5, Demetrius enters a peace agreement with Pyrrhus only because he has no time (μὴ ἐσχόλαζε) to wage war against him. Another instance of ἀσχολία is at 26.13: Pyrrhus is too busy to punish his Galatian mercenaries, who have robbed the tombs of the Macedonian kings at Aigai. At 22.3, an episode confirms Pyrrhus' restless attitude to war: he is unhappy because he has been asked to intervene in two different wars, and has to opt out of one of them.

distracted them from internal conflicts, and he eventually lost control over them because of Pyrrhus' tactical superiority and greater charisma.¹⁹ Likewise Pyrrhus, who did not trust the Macedonians, managed to avoid conflicts with them for a while by keeping them busy with wars, but finally lost control over them due to the intrigues of Lysimachus.²⁰ It is understandable that the age of the Successors, so full of tumultuous political and military events, could inspire Plutarch's comments on ambition and war.

Plutarch tried to understand Pyrrhus' unstoppable military activity and provide a moral interpretation of it. He was impressed by the deeds of Pyrrhus, Demetrius, and Lysimachus, a complex series of hidden and open conflicts, constant rivalries, truces, and short-lived treaties.²¹ *Pyrrh.* 12.3–5 showcases the idea of an apparent peace that was actually a situation of political hostility without open warfare.²² Plutarch stresses the innate envy and insidiousness of the Diadochi, and the meaninglessness and interchangeability of the words “war” and “peace” for these individuals, who always used the one that best fit their goals. For Plutarch, they were more honest when they fought openly than when they pretended that the inter-

¹⁹ Plut. *Demetr.* 41.1, 44.7–11; *Pyrrh.* 11.8–14.

²⁰ Plut. *Pyrrh.* 12.1, 12.8–11.

²¹ The political situation of Macedonia in the early Hellenistic period was particularly chaotic. This lack of stability has been reasonably explained by Lévêque, *Pyrrhos* 158, as a series of political crises due to the disappearance of the national dynasty of the Argeads, which provoked unquiet among the Macedonians. Trogus/Justin (*Epit.* 16.3.1) also moralized on the war between Lysimachus and Pyrrhus: *sed inter Lysimachum et Pyrrum regem, socios paulo ante, adsidium inter pares discordiae malum bellum moverat.*

²² ἀλλὰ πολεμοῦσι μὲν αἰεὶ, τὸ ἐπιβουλεύειν καὶ φθονεῖν ἔμφυτον ἔχοντες, δυεῖν δ' ὀνομάτων ὡσπερ νομισμάτων, πολέμου καὶ εἰρήνης, τῷ παρατυχόντι χρῶνται πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον, οὐ πρὸς τὸ δίκαιον· ἐπεὶ βελτίους γε πολεμεῖν ὁμολογοῦντές εἰσιν, ἢ τῆς ἀδικίας τὸ ἀργοῦν καὶ σχολάζον δικαιοσύνην καὶ φιλίαν ὀνομάζοντες.

ruptions of their wars were signs of justice and friendship.

The idea of cold wars existing during periods of seeming peace does not appear to be very frequent in ancient historiography.²³ However, Polybius, who amply explained the complex military and diplomatic relations between the Romans and other Mediterranean peoples during the expansion of Rome, seems to have conceptualized this kind of situation in this way.²⁴ Plutarch made much use of Polybius for information on the Greek world during the age of Roman expansion. Although Polybius did not narrate events as far back as Pyrrhus' wars, he may have inspired Plutarch in formulating general political and moral reflections.²⁵ There are several hints at the concept of 'cold war' in Polybius. Of course, we must bear in mind that only a part of Polybius' *Histories* survives, although it is a substantial part. We may be missing other episodes of this kind because of the loss of large portions of the text.

Polybius sometimes mentions wars that are fought openly.²⁶

²³ On Plutarch's general view of war and peace see A. Bravo García, "El pensamiento de Plutarco acerca de la paz y la guerra," *CFC* 5 (1973) 141–191, with 179 citing the Life of Pyrrhus on Pyrrhus' unstoppable ambition.

²⁴ For Polybius, diplomacy was complementary to war and was an essential element during the initial and final phases of conflicts, as argued by G. Zecchini, *Polibio. La solitudine dello storico* (Rome 2018) 98.

²⁵ The extent to which Plutarch read Polybius is still an open issue. However, according to Zecchini, *Polibio* 199, Plutarch used Polybius as a source for Greek events of the third and second centuries. For the biographies of Roman individuals of that age Plutarch preferred to use Latin sources. Cf. Almagor, in *The Dynamics of Intertextuality* 162: in Plutarch's extant writings, Polybius is mentioned by name 26 times.

²⁶ Polyb. 1.70.6: the mercenaries of the Carthaginians were in a declared war (φανερῶς) against them. 2.46.6: the Achaean League entered a conflict against the Spartans in an open way (φανερῶς). 3.34.7: Hannibal was openly (φανερῶς) urging his troops to wage war against the Romans (cf. Thuc. 5.25.3: Athens and Sparta ἐς πόλεμον φανερόν κατέστησαν). Polyb. 4.53.2: the inhabitants of Eleutherna carried out a series of reprisals against the Rhodians, after which they declared war openly (πόλεμον ἐξήνεγκαν). At

He needs to specify which wars are openly declared because there are in fact instances in which deception is used by commanders instead of open warfare. According to Polybius (9.12.2), the history of previous wars taught that what is accomplished openly and by force (τὰ προδήλως καὶ μετὰ βίας ἐπιτελούμενα) in military operations is far less successful than what is accomplished through deception and at the right moment (τῶν μετὰ δόλου καὶ σὺν καιρῷ πραττομένων). He is considering here military strategy. These general insights show that he understood that the unfought phases of a war are more insidious and dangerous for the contestants, as well as more fruitful for the winner, than the phases in which battles take place.²⁷ Polybius' narrative is consistent with these considerations: in fact, hiding military preparations and delaying attacks appear to be very effective in several instances.²⁸

7.13.1, Polybius describes events following Philip V's first intervention in Messenia (between 216 and 214, F. W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* II [Oxford 1967] 56, 60): Aratus dissuades Philip from seizing Ithome, as he understands that Philip intends to openly start a war with the Romans (ὁμολογουμένως τὸν τε πρὸς Ῥωμαίους ἀναλαμβάνοντα πόλεμον), on the eve of the First Macedonian War. Cf. Plut. *Pyrr.* 12.5: βελτίους γε πολεμεῖν ὁμολογοῦντές εἰσιν.

²⁷ Walbank entitled the series of chapters to which this passage belongs (9.12–20) “On generalship” and argued that, although the context of this digression is unclear, it belonged either to the *res Italiae* of 210 or to the Spanish or Greek events of 211, and was thematically connected to Polybius' lost work on *Tactics*: *Historical Commentary* II 138.

²⁸ Polyb. 2.9.2: the Illyrians under Teuta, on the pretext of stocking up on water and provisions, were planning to attack Epidamnus. 5.63.2–3: during the conflict between Ptolemy IV and Antiochus III, Ptolemy's advisors decided to work on the preparations for the war, and in the meantime to slow Antiochus' preparations by means of diplomatic missions, so as to reinforce Antiochus' opinion that Ptolemy would not go to war and instead try to convince Antiochus to leave Coele Syria by means of diplomacy. 5.63.4–10: Ptolemy's advisors were sending and receiving diplomatic missions, but were preparing war against Antiochus in the meantime. 5.74.9: Garsyeris granted the Selgians a truce (ἀνοχαί), but dragged out concluding the peace

In another passage Polybius explains that in his day it was generally held that carrying out a military action without subterfuge denoted the ineptitude of a commander; in the past, however, subterfuge had not been used (13.3.5–6). In addition, in the debate over the legitimacy of attacking Carthage in the Third Punic War, Polybius notes that according to some, the Romans were, in general, a civilized people, and their peculiarity, of which they were proud, was that they fought their enemies openly and fairly, without resorting to night attacks and ambushes, as they despised any action carried out by fraud and deception. However, according to these same people, the Romans had nevertheless conducted the Third Punic War precisely with fraud and deception (36.9.9–10).²⁹

In addition to stratagems and deception, Polybius argues that words can be more effective than open warfare in subduing an enemy. For instance, he recounts that Scipio Africanus, during a meeting with the Numidian king Syphax, conversed with him in such a courteous and circumspect manner that Hasdrubal later confessed to Syphax that Scipio frightened him more when he conversed than when he was at arms (11.24a.4). Plutarch and Polyaeus were also aware of the warlike power of words: they report that Pyrrhus claimed to have conquered more cities through the speeches of his advisor, Cineas, than through weapons; Pyrrhus had also acknowledged the superiority of diplomacy over war.³⁰

agreement (συνθήκαι) by continually raising objections over details, in order to give Achaeus time to arrive.

²⁹ See Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius III* (Oxford 1979) 663–670, for this debate.

³⁰ Plut. *Pyrrh.* 14.3, Polyaeus. 6.6.3. On Cineas, the Thessalian orator and advisor of Pyrrhus, see A. D’Alessandro and G. De Sensi Sestito, “Cinea Tessalo e la strategia di Pirro in Grecia e in Occidente,” in L. Breglia et al. (eds.), *Ethne, identità e tradizioni: La “terza” Grecia e l’Occidente* (Pisa 2011) I 457–487.

All this seems to blur the boundaries between peace and conflict in Polybius. In his narrative there are also several instances of uncertainty between war and peace, in which it is not clear whether two forces are at war or not.³¹ He moralizes against this kind of ambiguity by stressing that treaties are often deceptive and can conceal enmity from one side. While focusing on Hannibal's hatred for the Romans, he advises those in power to be careful about the true intentions of those who end hostilities or make alliances. In fact, those who enter these agreements are sometimes yielding to circumstances, or are just desperate; for this reason, they will wait for the first good opportunity to strike (3.12.5–6). Peace is therefore an ambiguous matter: if it is obtained with justice and decency, it is an extremely useful asset, but if it is obtained with malice or cowardice, it is despicable and harmful (4.31.8). These opinions reflect Polybius' view of human beings, whom he judges good at dissimulating their feelings and intentions (3.31.7). Thus, as in Plutarch's *Life of Pyrrhus* (12.3–5), agreements with enemies can be insincere and often are bound to be soon violated.

Episodes in which truces and treaties are violated are in fact quite frequent in Polybius.³² In particular, the members of the Aetolian League are described often as breaching agreements. Polybius, in his strong dislike of the Aetolians, thought that they had an inclination to fight in peacetime.³³ A lengthy

³¹ E.g. Polyb. 18.50.8–9, in which a Roman ambassador, while parleying with Antiochus III, wonders what the king's intentions are in moving his infantry and naval forces to Europe, and finally observes that there is no other explanation than Antiochus' intention to clash with Rome.

³² Polyb. 4.27.4–6 lists a series of hostilities committed by the Spartans in peacetime in the course of their history. 7.12.5–9: Philip V is ready to violate the agreements established with the Messenians, but Aratus dissuades him from doing so.

³³ Polyb. 4.3.5: the Aetolian Dorimachus violated the truce of the festival of the United Boeotians. 4.3.8–9: Dorimachus, despite the Common Peace, allowed robbers to plunder the cattle of the Messenians, who were then

passage is devoted to this attitude. The Aetolians had elected Skopas as their στρατηγός, who had been responsible for several violations of treaties. Polybius confesses that he finds this decision abominable. Declaring by an official decree not to go to war, and then fighting and plundering neighbors without punishing any of those responsible, is to him a demonstration of wickedness. Electing those who led these raids as στρατηγοί and conferring honors upon them was equally despicable to him (4.27.1–2). He remarks that there is no boundary (ὄρος) between peace and war for the Aetolians, as in both conditions they carry out their plans by violating the common customs of men (4.67.4). While parleying with Flamininus, Philip V stresses that to the Aetolians, any occasion was good for plundering the lands of both friends and enemies. The Aetolians knew no clear boundaries (ὄροι) between friendship and enmity, and were ready to become the enemies of anyone at any moment (18.5.2–3). Polybius' moralizing on the disregard of peace in passages such as these has evident affinities with the Plutarch passage on the relativity of the value of peace for Pyrrhus and the other Diadochi, and on the falseness of their agreements.

All these cases strongly suggest that Polybius, with his careful distinction between declared and undeclared wars, may have influenced Plutarch. In fact, Plutarch's remarks on the nature of war and peace are the product of considerations he developed from his readings, and are linked to an older and continuing debate. Thucydides was an even earlier predecessor than Polybius for these reflections.³⁴ Of Plutarch's predecessors, it was especially Thucydides who had focused on an unstable

friends and allies of the Aetolians. 4.25.2: the Boeotians claimed that the Aetolians had plundered the temple of Athena Itonia in peacetime. 4.25.2–4 lists other crimes and hostilities committed by the Aetolians in peacetime.

³⁴ For the extent to which Polybius read Thucydides see L. Porciani, "Polibio dinanzi al testo di Tucidide," *Ricerche Ellenistiche* 1 (2020) 93–104.

peace during which war was prepared (and according to Thucydides, actually fought).

Thucydides makes similar points in the famous passage portraying the years following the end of the Archidamian war as an undeclared war. In fact, he held, the Peace of Nicias (421) had no real effect, and it was soon followed by war (5.25.1–5.26.2):³⁵

After the treaty and the alliance between the Spartans and Athenians [...] there was peace for those who had accepted these terms. However, the Corinthians and some Peloponnesian cities tried to change those conditions, and suddenly other difficulties arose against Sparta caused by its allies. Meanwhile, as time passed, the Athenians became suspicious of the Spartans, as in some cases the Spartans did not carry out what the treaty had established they would do. The Spartans and Athenians restrained themselves from attacking each other's lands for six years and ten months; on the other hand, outside the territories of Sparta and Athens there was an unsteady truce and the Spartans and Athenians damaged each other as much as they could. Then, however, having no choice but to break the treaty that had been agreed upon after the first ten years of war, they again waged open war. [...] If anyone does not consider it appropriate to think that the treaty that existed between those two stages of war was in fact a period of warfare, their assessment will be incorrect.

Did Plutarch have this text in mind as he wrote the passage of the Life of Pyrrhus under examination? Relations between Plutarch and Thucydides are complex. There appears to be no reference to Thuc. 5.25–26 in Plutarch's Life of Nicias or the Life of Alcibiades, where we might reasonably expect a discus-

³⁵ This passage has been much discussed, especially in relation to the question of the stages of composition of Thucydides' History. See A. W. Gomme, A. Andrewes, and K. J. Dover, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* IV (Oxford 1970) 5–11; S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides* III (Oxford 2008) 41–48.

sion of the ‘conflictual’ Peace of Nicias. In those biographies this peace is mentioned (*Nic.* 9, *Alc.* 14), but nothing is said about the possibility that it was only nominal. However, as Plutarch declared in the introduction to the Life of Nicias, he had no intention to measure himself against Thucydides’ skills (*Nic.* 1), so he may have intentionally avoided discussing Thucydides’ interpretation of the Peace of Nicias.³⁶ Plutarch admired Thucydides’ historiographical vision and literary style too much to tackle it critically.

Scholars have analyzed the relations between Thucydides and Plutarch’s biographies of individuals appearing in Thucydides’ History.³⁷ But the possible presence of Thucydidean themes in other Lives seems understudied. To my knowledge, there are few exceptions. Pelling mentioned that Plutarch’s narrative of the Battle of Actium in the Life of Antony is “verbally closer to Thucydides’ Great Harbour battle than the *Nicias* account of the Great Harbour itself”; and Stadter observed that when Plutarch came across Hannibal’s plan to spare Fabius Maximus’ fields, he saw a resemblance to Pericles’ pledge to the Athenians that he would not save his own lands from the devastation carried out by the Spartans, and that he would give them to the Athenians if the Spartans decided not to plunder them, as told by Thucydides.³⁸

³⁶ On this passage see C. B. R. Pelling, “Plutarch and Thucydides,” in P. A. Stadter (ed.), *Plutarch and the Historical Tradition* (London 1992) 10–40, at 10–11. On relations between Thucydides and Plutarch see also J. de Romilly, “Plutarch and Thucydides or the Free Use of Quotations,” *Phoenix* 42 (1988) 22–34.

³⁷ De Romilly, *Phoenix* 42 (1988) 22–34; Pelling, in *Plutarch and the Historical Tradition* 10–40; M. Beck, “Pericles and Athens: An Intertextual Reading of Plutarch and Thucydides,” in T. S. Schmidt et al. (eds.), *The Dynamics of Intertextuality in Plutarch* (Leiden 2020) 98–110.

³⁸ Pelling, in *Plutarch and the Historical Tradition* 17, with reference to *Plut. Ant.* 66.3, 77.4, *Nic.* 25; cf. *Thuc.* 7.70–71. P. A. Stadter, “Plutarch’s Compositional Technique: The Anecdote Collections and the *Parallel Lives*,”

There is a further hint that Plutarch's Life of Pyrrhus has some Thucydidean traits. *Pyrrh.* 12.4–5, ἀλλὰ πολεμοῦσι μὲν αἰεὶ, τὸ ἐπιβουλεύειν καὶ φθονεῖν ἔμφυτον ἔχοντες, δευεῖν δ' ὀνομάτων ὡσπερ νομισμάτων, πολέμου καὶ εἰρήνης, τῷ παρατυχόντι χρώνται πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον, οὐ πρὸς τὸ δίκαιον· ἐπεὶ βελτίους γε πολεμεῖν ὁμολογοῦντές εἰσιν, ἢ τῆς ἀδικίας τὸ ἀργοῦν καὶ σχολάζον δικαιοσύνην καὶ φιλίαν ὀνομάζοντες, explaining the relativity of the terms war and peace for ambitious rulers, and adding that they often define as justice and friendship what is actually their weariness in committing injustice, can be compared to Thucydides 3.82 on the alteration in understanding words describing values during internal conflicts in the Greek cities.³⁹ This parallel is even more compelling given the presence of the vocabulary of ambition (πλεονεξία, φιλοτιμία, φιλονικεῖν) in the passage (Thuc. 3.82.4–8):⁴⁰

People changed their ordinary understanding of words in relation to the actions that they now judged to be appropriate. Irrational audacity was considered to be courage in fighting for comrades, cautious delay was thought to be specious cowardice, moderation was seen as a pretext for lack of courage, and being intelligent in any circumstance seemed to be absolute laziness [...] Kinship became less advantageous than comradeship, because the latter implied an unhesitating and more rapid boldness; in fact, such factions do not respect the existing laws,

GRBS 54 (2014) 665–686, at 685, with reference to Plut. *Per.* 33.3, *Fab.* 7.4–5; cf. Thuc. 2.13.1.

³⁹ This parallel has been stressed by J. M. Mossman, “Plutarch, Pyrrhus, and Alexander,” in *Plutarch and the Historical Tradition* 90–108, at 97 and 106 n.14: the perversion of the ideas of war and peace at Plut. *Pyrrh.* 12.4 recalls Thucydides' reflections on the corruption of the meaning of positive terms during the στάσις in Corcyra. On this capital passage of the History see A. W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides II* (Oxford 1956) 372–382; S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides I* (Oxford 1991) 477–488, esp. 485 for πλεονεξία and φιλοτιμία in Thucydides.

⁴⁰ For the sake of brevity, the quotation is abridged, thus excluding several instances of ethical inversion mentioned by Thucydides.

which aim at the public good; with their excessive ambition, they rather fight the established laws [...] The reason for all this was the power that comes from excessive ambition and love of honors; and deriving from them, the eagerness typical of people who have set out to win every fight.

As during civil strife citizens altered their normal perception of words to suit their own advantage (Thucydides), so the Diadochi, who were not concerned with justice, but rather with their own benefit, used the two terms, war and peace, interchangeably, as if they were coins, and gave a perverse interpretation of justice and friendship (Plutarch). In both cases, this attitude was connected to ambition, contentiousness, and greed. It is likely that Thucydides provided Plutarch with tools that were useful to analyze these vices, even beyond the biographies of characters who lived during the Peloponnesian war.

To these Thucydidean aspects and perspectives of the Life of Pyrrhus I believe that we may now add Pyrrhus' undeclared wars. These cold wars derived from his unstoppable desire to increase his own power (*πλεονεξία*), a desire that constantly prevented him from living in tranquility and abiding by peace treaties. Thus, the concepts of ambition and of undeclared war in the middle of supposed peace connect Plutarch's biography of Pyrrhus to the genre of pragmatic historiography and to its political themes.⁴¹

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⁴¹ This article has greatly benefited from suggestions by its anonymous reviewers.