The opening chapter of Plutarch’s *Life of Sertorius* introduces the reader to a simple hero. As Plutarch compares Sertorius to famous generals of the past and to his own contemporaries, he describes an impressive but rather one-dimensional figure: a skilled warrior who was ultimately defeated not by his enemies but by fortune. In the course of the *Life*, however, Sertorius’ words and deeds disclose nuances of character that enrich the simple portrait drawn in the introduction. From the eager warrior there gradually emerges a weary but principled general with an aversion to war. Even so, Plutarch provides very little direct commentary to help shape the reader’s changing view of his hero. As a result of this narrative silence, important questions about Sertorius’ character are raised but left unanswered. In this paper, I argue that comparative readings in the *Lives* of other late-Republican statesmen – Lucullus, Marius, Sulla, Pompey, and Caesar – can supply the missing commentary. These other *Lives* help to reveal the character that lay behind Sertorius’ unusual attitude toward war. Moreover, by considering these texts in parallel, the reader develops a more complete understanding of Plutarch’s view of the human factors that produced the civil strife that destabilized Rome in the early first century BC.

As the *Life* opens, Plutarch presents Sertorius’ approach to war as exemplary rather than unusual. He begins with a discussion of how some people ascribe great importance to the superficial similarities that connect the lives of different men. Then he proceeds to a more substantial comparison between the military capabilities of Sertorius and other famous generals:

So we may also add this example to those, that the most warlike (πολεμικωτατοι) of generals and those who accomplished most by trickery combined with cleverness were one-eyed: Philip, Antigonus, Hannibal, and the subject of the present work, Sertorius. One could argue that he was more self-controlled around women than Philip, more faithful to his friends than Antigonus, more gentle toward his enemies than Hannibal, and though
in inferior to none of these men in his intelligence, inferior to all in his fortune (τῦχη). But even as he found fortune in all respects much more difficult to manage than his open enemies, he was still the equal of Metellus in experience, of Pompey in daring, of Sulla in fortune, and the Romans in power, though he fought them as an exile and a foreigner in command of barbarian troops (Sert. 1.8–10).

This is undoubtedly the introduction to a warrior’s biography. Plutarch classes Sertorius among the πολεμικότατοι generals of antiquity then speaks twice of his dominance over his πολέμιοι. Moreover, he has created in the reader’s mind connections between Sertorius’ career and Philip’s conquests, Antigonus’ rivalry with the diadochoi of Alexander, and Hannibal’s invasion of Italy, and he has placed him on par with the generals who will oppose him in the Roman civil war. Plutarch continues this warrior theme in the next section, where he introduces Eumenes by writing that the two men were paired in this book partly because they both employed trickery in waging war (1.11), a trait also shared among the one-eyed generals.1

There are, however, limits to the correspondence between Sertorius and the other generals. While they are all similar in their ability to make war, they are distinguished by their character, with Sertorius having the advantage in each case. They are also distinguished by their τῦχη, in this instance to Sertorius’ general disadvantage, although Plutarch does consider him to have equaled Sulla in this regard. This equivalence creates a small wrinkle in the neat dichotomy that Plutarch is creating (great warrior, bad luck), since he has written that Sulla’s enemies considered him ‘most fortunate’ for his victories in the Social War (Sulla 6.4) and that Sulla himself attributed his success more to τῦχη than to his own skills (Sulla 6.7–13). Clearly Sertorius will enjoy a period of very good fortune before his situation deteriorates. Even so, it is the period of bad fortune that will mark Sertorius’ life. Three times, in fact, Plutarch notes that Sertorius’ prowess as a warrior was eclipsed by his fortune, finding in this bad luck another parallel with Eumenes.2 Nevertheless, his accomplishments in particular categories may still be compared with those of the best Romans of his day.3

Plutarch elaborates his picture of the warrior in the chapters that immediately follow the introduction. In narrating Sertorius’ service in Gaul, Spain, and the Social War, he provides explicit examples of his power, daring, and trickery.4 There is no sign of an opposing τῦχη in these early episodes, as Sertorius earns an excellent reputation (δόξα) and military commands (4.1–2). His performance on the battlefield is so exceptional that it brings him special praise from the Romans:
However, he did not slacken in his soldierly daring when he became an officer, but demonstrating amazing feats in fighting and throwing his body unspARINGLY into the battles, he had one of his eyes knocked out. He constantly took pride in this injury, saying that other men do not always carry around the proof of their great deeds — their collars, spears, and crowns — but put them away, while the signs of his courage endured, since those who saw his suffering saw his bravery at the same time. And the people granted to him a fitting honor, for when he entered the theater, they received him with applause and cheers of the sort that do not come easy to men of even greater age and reputation (4.3–5).

This passage is most striking for its compounding of elements related to vision: Sertorius’ ἔργα θαυμαστά demonstrated on the battlefield, the lost eye as testimony to his bravery, the θεαταί who observe his suffering and virtue, and the θέατρον where he receives his acclaim. Plutarch is emphasizing the high visibility of Sertorius’ ἀρετή and the public’s recognition of his accomplishments. Moreover, in focusing on the war wound, Plutarch neatly ties this scene to the introduction, where he placed Sertorius in the same class as the other one-eyed warriors, and we may naturally assume that Sertorius’ daring and pride would be traits common to all of them. This passage, then, must define what πολεμικότατος means: to fight bravely, to value victory more than personal safety, and to take pride in the glory and honors that follow.

But as the chapter continues, Plutarch is quick to show that Sertorius’ career will not always be so glorious. The changes he endures will greatly affect our perception of his warrior nature. After reporting the rare acclaim granted to Sertorius by the people, Plutarch writes in the very next sentence that he stood for tribune of the plebs, but in the face of opposition organized by Sulla, he lost the election.5 This event is followed immediately by the onset of civil war, which is a disillusioning period for Sertorius. After losing the election, he becomes a Marian by default (4.6). He is no admirer of the old general, however, and fearing Marius’ lack of restraint, unsuccessfully opposes his return to Rome (5.1–5). When the faction of
Marius and Cinna is victorious, he declines to participate in the ensuing slaughter and even acts as a moderating influence (5.6). He cannot tolerate the licentiousness of the slaves who became powerful as Marius’ soldiers, and so he kills them in their camp (5.6–7). Finally, after Marius and Cinna are dead, he becomes dissatisfied with the poor quality of the faction’s new leadership and abandons Rome: ‘He gave up entirely on the city and set off for Spain, so that, if he could be the first to establish control there, he might become a refuge (καταφυγή) for his friends who were suffering at home’ (6.4).

The change in Sertorius’ situation, from his glory in the Social War to his permanent abandonment of Rome, is drastic. Although the events described in these two chapters took place over a period of six years, Plutarch’s condensed narrative makes the transition appear very sudden.\(^6\) The quick change in Sertorius’ situation, and his decision to withdraw, problematize his standing as a warrior and its relationship to his character, which can no longer be viewed in the simple terms of the introduction. The complexity injected here is most visible in Sertorius’ intention when he goes to Spain: he is not, according to Plutarch, opening a new front in the civil war or securing a strategic location, but he hopes to create a καταφυγή, a refuge from the suffering in Rome.\(^7\) Although his retirement appears to be the natural result of his reluctant support of Marius and his moderation amidst the general slaughter, we must also notice that Plutarch is adjusting the portrait of his hero. Even if he is πολεμικώτατος, there are apparently limits to his eagerness to fight.

But as he focuses on Sertorius’ actions, Plutarch does little to explain the sentiments that lie behind them. We might be tempted to recall the introduction’s promise of an adverse τύχη and attribute the change in Sertorius’ status to the workings of fortune. But that does not seem entirely appropriate here. Not only does Plutarch never mention τύχη in these passages, he also presents each of Sertorius’ actions as premeditated and voluntary. If anyone is being harmed by fortune, it is the Romans in general.\(^8\) Sertorius clearly dislikes the new course of events and is disappointed by both factions, but he is no more ill starred than any other Roman, and he is more fortunate than many, since during this period he is a member of the winning faction and thus spared from slaughter. Although he will eventually be proscribed by Sulla,\(^9\) he leaves Italy beforehand, on his own terms and with a plan for aiding his friends. In the absence of any overt statements from Plutarch, we are left to infer his motivation: something in Sertorius’ character, perhaps a resurgence of old-fashioned patriotic values in this time of civil strife, must have kept him from participating wholeheartedly in the conflict.\(^10\)
The next several chapters are all related to this theme of withdrawal, beginning with the egress from Italy, which itself is far from easy. Soon after arriving in Spain, Sertorius is driven from the peninsula by one of Sulla’s generals and sails to Africa, but immediately he runs into opposition and is repulsed. Then, joined by some Cilician pirates, he crosses back to Spain, loses a naval battle, and is forced to spend ten days at sea with his few remaining ships. Finally he sails through the straits of Gibraltar and into the Atlantic Ocean. Here Plutarch revives the idea of a καταφυγή. While passing into the Atlantic, Sertorius encounters sailors who are returning from the Isles of the Blessed and who describe for him a paradise (8.2–5).11 ‘When Sertorius heard about this,’ Plutarch writes, ‘he developed a wondrous desire to dwell on these islands and to live in peace (ἐν ἡμιαίασ), delivered from tyranny and unending wars’ (9.1). Sertorius’ desire parallels his recent retirement from the difficult situation in Rome, and Plutarch again provides no explicit commentary. Since nothing in the introduction prepared us to expect this longing for ἡμιαία, we again must rely on our own inferences: once he became embroiled in the civil war, Sertorius’ character must have inspired in him a desire for respite rather than conflict.

Plutarch has, in fact, used this period of transition to Spain to prepare the reader for a more nuanced interpretation of his hero. Separated from the dominating figures of the civil war, Sertorius moves to center stage, and the pace of the narrative slows as Plutarch embarks on a more detailed presentation of Sertorius’ career and character. Having shaded his portrait of Sertorius as a warrior, he next adds complexity to the second major theme, the effects of τίχη. At the start of chapter ten, the Lusitanians invite him to return to Spain and to act as their leader. Plutarch then segues into an extended discussion of his character, reporting Sertorius’ reputation for self-restraint, for boldness and cunning in battle, and for treating his men with generosity and moderation (10.2–4). These are all qualities that accord well with the soldierly Sertorius of the early chapters. As Plutarch concludes this section, however, he admits that the hero’s character also had a darker side:

Nonetheless, the savagery and anger of his treatment of the hostages near the end of his life appears to have shown that his nature was not gentle, but rather that he feigned gentleness in a calculated way as the situation required. It seems to me, however, that there is no τίχη that would push a virtue that is pure and formed by reason to its opposite, although it is not impossible that principles and good natures that have been afflicted by great and undeserved suffering may change a person’s character together with his situation. This is what I think happened to Sertorius: when his τίχη was abandoning him, he became more short-tempered with his enemies because of the terrible things that he was enduring (10.5–7).
Plutarch is raising an important question about the stability of a person’s character, whether it remains fixed following one’s education or may be affected by one’s circumstances. Although he does not provide an extended explanation, Plutarch suggests that character may in fact change, even late in life, and he informs us not only that Sertorius will experience an adverse fortune, as he previewed in the introduction, but also that this adverse fortune will affect his character as well as his circumstances. Thus there is more to the theme of τῆς ἁμαρτίας than we might have supposed. In these two chapters, then, Plutarch is reshaping both of the fundamental themes that he established in the introduction, creating what is essentially a second introduction and laying the groundwork for the more detailed narrative that follows.

Despite devoting several chapters to reforming the image of Sertorius, Plutarch has still said very little about the values or attitudes that tempered his warrior quality. Only twice, at points in the Life relatively distant from Sertorius’ change of course, does he provide any commentary. The first instance coincides with the report of the death of his mother, which reaches Sertorius just as the Lusitanians have invited him back to Spain, although Plutarch has separated these two simultaneous events by a dozen chapters. Upon hearing the news about his mother, Sertorius retreats to his tent in grief and only after several days is he persuaded by his officers to resume command of the army. Plutarch then remarks that this incident convinced many that Sertorius, ‘though by nature a gentle man and suited to a peaceful life (πρὸς ἰδιόμορφον ἔχων ἑλεοκράτοις), on account of his circumstances took on the role of a military commander against his will, and rather than finding protection there, he was driven by his enemies to take up arms and so involved himself in war as a necessary defense’ (22.12).

The second instance in which Plutarch comments on Sertorius’ attitude toward war does not occur until the synkrisis. There, as he compares Sertorius and Eumenes, he develops a terminology to explain the interior motivation behind the actions that he narrated in the Life:

Their acts of generalship were corresponding and comparable, but beyond that, Eumenes was fond of war (φιλοπόλεμος) and eager for victory, while Sertorius was suited to peace (ἡσυχία) and mildness. For when it was possible for Eumenes to live safely and with honor by keeping out of the way, he continued to contend with the leading men and to take risks, but Sertorius, who desired no part in the civil wars, fought for the very safety of his own person against those who would not let him live in peace (ἡσιτήρῃ). For Antigonus gladly would have accepted Eumenes if he had stepped away from the contests for supremacy and been happy with a rank below his own, while Pompey’s men would not allow Sertorius to live quietly (ἀποκρατίσκοντος). And so it happened that the one waged war willingly for the sake of power.
and the other held power unwillingly because war was waged against him. The person who prefers profit to safety is ‘fond of war’ (φιλοπόλεμος), and the one who gains his safety by means of war is ‘warlike’ (πολεμικός) (Comp. Sert.-Eum. 2.1–5).

Both of these analyses fail to address Sertorius’ eagerness to fight prior to the civil war. The implied connection at 22.10–11 between the death of Sertorius’ mother and his distaste for war is intriguing because she played such a significant role in his education and choice of career, as described by Plutarch in chapter two:

Left an orphan by his father, he was raised in the correct fashion by his widowed mother and appears to have been especially fond of her. (They say her name was Raia.) He was, therefore, sufficiently trained in the law and while still a young man held some degree of power in Nursia on account of his oratory.¹⁴ But his brilliant successes as a soldier redirected his ambition toward a military career (2.1–2).

There is no sign of coercion here.¹⁵ Likewise, the statement in the synkrisis that Sertorius ‘held power unwillingly because war was waged against him’ can be applied only to the period of the civil war, and the definition of πολεμικός here is quite different from what was implied by the πολεμικότατος of the introduction.¹⁶ Moreover, the man depicted in the early chapters of the Life would certainly not have been described as wanting to live ἀπραγμόνος or as suited to ἠσυχία and εἰρήνη. There he sacrificed his body for victory and took great pride in his war wound, the permanent mark of his glory. While perhaps not fully φιλοπόλεμος, he did not show any reluctance to engage the enemy or any desire for refuge from war. He also seemed quite willing to convert his military stature to political power when he stood for election to the tribuneship. The problem, therefore, is to explain how Plutarch can at one and the same time characterize Sertorius as a man who wanted peace but was forced to fight, and as a man who was zealous for war.¹⁷ This paradox appears all the more pointed since Plutarch has carefully described the character traits that aroused and sustained Sertorius’ early zeal while omitting any analysis of the qualities or values that made civil war distasteful to him, even as his peers were embracing it wholeheartedly. I believe that Plutarch provides the answer through parallels with other late-Republican Lives.

In identifying a parallel it is important to recall that even after his retreat to Spain, Plutarch’s Sertorius is no peacenik. He is patriotic and loyal in that he is unwilling to sacrifice Rome for his own gain and he hopes to provide a refuge for his friends, but he never appears to be against war in general.¹⁸ Luis García Moreno sees this strictly limited desire for escape as Plutarch’s deliberate attempt to modify Sallust’s portrait of a Sertorius who

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would give up war altogether. He argues that Plutarch is depicting a man who conforms more closely to his own notion of an ideal ruler and so is not unwilling to fight. That is why, for example, he is careful to show that Sertorius’ desire for ἵππια was only a fleeting wish. Whether or not Plutarch is attempting to cast Sertorius as an ideal ruler, García Moreno is certainly correct in stressing that Sertorius’ approach to war is complex, even in the Spanish phase of the Life.

Against this background, I suggest that Plutarch’s Lucullus provides an important interpretive statement that is missing from the Sertorius. The passage appears late in the Life, after Lucullus has led a largely successful campaign against Mithridates but has been replaced as commander by Pompey before he could achieve the final victory. Nonetheless, the Romans receive him back in Rome as a hero and with the expectation that he will convert his fame into political capital:

After giving to the senate great hopes that they had a man who would oppose the tyranny of Pompey and be a champion of the aristocracy, since he came into the situation with a great reputation (δόξα) and power (δύναμις), he abandoned and deserted the state. This was either because he saw that it was hard to manage and diseased, or because, as some say, he was full with glory (μεστὸς ὑπὸ δόξης) and retreated to the very easy and soft life, away from the many struggles and hardships which had not had the most fortunate of outcomes (οὐκ ἐνυπάρχονταν τέλος) for him (Luc. 38.2).

This description of Lucullus on his return from the East could just as easily be applied to Sertorius at the end of the Social War. Both men had demonstrated δύναμις and had acquired δόξα on the battlefield, and both could be expected to take leading roles in the government back home. Sertorius, as we saw, was running for tribune of the plebs as the political situation began to deteriorate, and eventually he, like Lucullus, lost interest in the rampant factionalism. And both of the possible motives given here help to explain Sertorius’ predicament: he found the situation difficult to manage and he instead desired a life, not of ease and softness, but of ἵππια, a more admirable but no less removed condition. So much is clear even from the biography of Sertorius alone. The most illuminating benefit of this parallel reading, however, is the precondition that exists for Lucullus’ decision to withdraw to an easier life: he must have been μεστὸς δόξης. That is, he must have had enough glory already, and this enabled him to forgo the even greater fame that would have followed a confrontation with Pompey. In Plutarch’s presentation of the outbreak of the civil war, the ability to recognize a reasonable limit to δόξα is a rare trait. In fact, the strife at Rome was caused principally by a quest for glory, as Plutarch indicates in the continuation of the passage:
Some praised the great change that Lucullus made, since he had not suffered the hardship of Marius, who, following his victories over the Cimbrians and his other famous accomplishments, which were great and noble, did not wish to retire and enjoy such great honor, but because of a greed for glory (δόξα) and leadership, contended with young men though he was old and ran headlong into difficult labors and even harder suffering. Cicero, too, would have had a better old age if he had withdrawn after the affair with Catiline, as would have Scipio, if he had added Numantia to Carthage and then stopped (Luc. 38.3–4).

Although Plutarch here cites three examples in support of the argument for retirement, his extended discussion of Marius reveals his special interest in the relationship between δόξα and the outbreak of civil war at the end of the Republic. This interest was present in the Life of Sertorius as well, when the hero opposed Marius’ return to Rome, fearing that he would appropriate all δόξα and δύναμις for himself (5.2). And in the Lives of Marius and Sulla, the war’s two principal antagonists, Plutarch explains in even greater detail how the desire for glory served as the impetus to civil strife. Moreover, performance in the Social War is critical for defining the abilities and reputations of both these men, just as it was for Sertorius, and it leads directly to their impending conflict. Thus in the Life of Sulla we read that their rivalry was provoked by an imbalance in their δόξα and was fueled by Sulla’s ambitions and Marius’ desire for new glory even in his extreme old age:

In the Social War, a great and fluctuating conflict that brought innumerable evils and the gravest dangers to the Romans, Marius was not able to perform any great deed, but he proved that military excellence demands youth and strength. Sulla, on the other hand, accomplished much that was worth reporting and gained a δόξα as a great leader among the citizens, as the greatest leader among his friends, and as the most fortunate even among his enemies. ... And then, regarding the consulship as a minor thing compared with what the future held, he was excited by thoughts of war against Mithridates. But Marius opposed him, influenced by madness for glory (δοξομανία) and ambition, passions that never grow old; though overweight and having declined to take part in recent campaigns because of his age, he longed for foreign wars across the sea (Sulla 6.3–4, 7.1–2).

In Marius 33–34, Plutarch depicts the rivalry in precisely the same way, writing, for example, that the Social War increased Sulla’s δόξα and δύναμις in the same proportion that it reduced them for Marius (33.1).25

We see in this cluster of Lives a focus on glory and ambition as root causes of the civil war. Plutarch is not criticizing the acquisition of glory in general, but he faults δοξομανία and an inability to recognize the proper season and venue for building a reputation. These passages help the reader
to understand the sort of pressure that Sertorius must have endured in the period following his acclaimed performance in the Social War. He even starts down the same path, as he takes pride in his conspicuous war wound and seeks political office. But as the civil war progressed, Plutarch’s Sertorius must have decided that he too was μετόχος δόξης, if not in an absolute sense, then at least relative to the cost of increasing his glory. This gave him the freedom to retire, and in this way he sets himself apart from Sulla and especially Marius. Thus in this comparative reading the patriotism to which we ascribed his unwillingness to fight takes on an added dimension, being derived not only from his love of country but also from his ability to restrain the passion for glory that was driving others to destroy Rome. Plutarch clearly valued this sort of restraint, as can be seen also from his criticism of two figures from a later round of the civil wars, in the *Life of Pompey*. Just before Pompey and Caesar clash at Pharsalus, Plutarch remarks that if they had wished to satisfy their desire (ἐρως) for trophies and triumphs, they could have fought foreign foes rather than their fellow Romans (*Pomp. 70.3*). This, of course, is just what Sertorius attempted to do by withdrawing to Spain, and so his *Life* also provides a counterexample even to the heirs of Sulla and Marius. By a comparative reading, then, we discover a Sertorius who is more nuanced than the simple man who loved peace but was forced into war.

As the narrative continues, questions related to patriotism and glory comprise an important theme even after Sertorius’ transition to Spain, becoming in fact the basis for one of the *Livre*’s most important lessons. After chapter ten, Sertorius soon finds himself drawn back into the factional conflict, and much of the remaining biography is devoted to his war against Metellus and Pompey. In describing the battles and strategies, Plutarch continues to reveal various aspects of Sertorius’ character, following up especially on the traits he marked earlier, such as faithfulness, clemency, and cunning. In chapter 22, Plutarch takes the opportunity to comment on his patriotism, but not before describing the fear that he engendered in Metellus. One proof of this fear was the great pride Metellus took in defeating Sertorius even though he claimed to have only scorn for him:

And even once, after defeating Sertorius in a battle, Metellus was so delighted and enamored with his good fortune that he was proclaimed imperator (αὐτοκράτωρ), and cities received him as a visitor with sacrifices and altars. It is even said that he allowed himself to be fitted with crowns and to be received at formal banquets, where he wore triumphal clothes while he drank, where Victories, lowered by means of ropes, distributed golden trophies and crowns, and where choirs of boys and women praised him with victory hymns (*Sert. 22.2–3*).
Although Plutarch has based this scene closely on a passage from Sallust, he has also integrated it carefully into his own narrative.\textsuperscript{28} The extravagant celebration by itself reflects poorly on Metellus,\textsuperscript{29} but as the reader recalls Sertorius’ earlier rejection of superficial prizes (present here in the crowns, trophies, and altars), Metellus appears to be inferior to his opponent even in victory. More importantly, however, Plutarch has returned the question of δόξα to the foreground, relating it here to patriotism and making Sertorius express his devotion to Rome in terms that engage the value of glory and respond directly to Metellus’ title, αὐτοκράτωρ:

He loved his homeland and had a strong desire to return from exile. Even when defeated he showed his bravery and was never timid before his enemies, but after victories he would send word to Metellus and to Pompey, saying that he was ready to lay down his arms and live as a private citizen if he could return home. For, he said, he would rather be the most undistinguished citizen in Rome (ἀσημιώτατος ἐν Ῥώμῃ πολίτης) than be proclaimed imperator (αὐτοκράτωρ) of all the rest of the world but live in exile from his own home (22.7–8).

Sertorius’ overtures probably reflect an actual desire to end his struggle with the party of Sulla, which was unquestionably in control of Rome by this time, and to return home under a negotiated amnesty.\textsuperscript{30} But read against the backdrop of his glorious early career, which has just been called to mind by Metellus’ celebration, his preference to be the most undistinguished citizen takes on an even deeper meaning. Early in the \textit{Life}, Plutarch remarked that Sertorius came from a family that was ‘not undistinguished’ (οὐκ ἀσημιώτατον) in the Sabine city of Nursia (2.1). Then he narrated how Sertorius built his own reputation in Rome, drawing particular attention to the war wound that was a visible and indelible witness to his great deeds. But when Sertorius is pressed to continue building his δόξα at the expense of his fellow citizens, Plutarch reveals in him a patriotic self-restraint that allows him to withdraw rather than fight. Now, forced to continue the war in Spain against his will, Sertorius rejects even the honorable δόξα that he earned in the Social War and the good reputation of his family. In an ironic twist on the τις καὶ theme, Plutarch shows how the good fortune of Sertorius’ early years played a critical role in his later exile, for certainly he is drawing a contrast between this passage and the earlier scene in the theater, setting the highly visible acclaim received there against Sertorius’ present desire for complete anonymity.

Sertorius can, of course, never be unmarked or anonymous, and thus he can never return to a Sullan Rome. This fact suggests a comparison with the famous, and equally futile, complaint of Achilles in the underworld.\textsuperscript{31} The hero’s words come in response to Odysseus’ suggestion that the honor
he had accrued in life made his death worthwhile. To this notion Achilles replies:

I would rather be a serf, serving another man
who is landless and has barely any livelihood,

than to be lord over all the withered dead (Od. 11.489–91).

Achilles’ regret is tragic in that he was allowed to choose between a life that was short and glorious or long but anonymous.32 Only after his early death does he realize that he chose incorrectly. As Sertorius utters a like sentiment, he seems to confess that he enjoyed the citizens’ applause too rashly, without understanding where his glory might lead him. But just as the slayer of Hector could never retire quietly to the countryside, so the one-eyed hero cannot remain a bystander in the Roman civil wars.

As was the case with his wish for ἵππον, Sertorius’ late preference for an apolitical life is paralleled in another of Plutarch’s texts. In this instance, the Caesar offers an important point of comparison that reinforces and enriches the readings of both Lives. While exiled in Spain, Sertorius says, in effect, ‘I would give up everything – all my δοξα – if I could only live in Rome.’ But Caesar, in an anecdote that, I believe, encourages a joint reading of the two biographies, expresses just the opposite sentiment.33 While traveling across the Alps to take up a command, Caesar and his party pass a small village. His companions mock the inhabitants by scornfully wondering if in that insignificant place, as in Rome, the politicians fight over elected offices and are jealous of one another. Caesar, however, sees nothing humorous in the question: ‘I would rather be first among these people,’ he says, ‘than second man in Rome’ (Caes. 11.1–4).34 This is, of course, the sort of prophetic statement that is easy to ascribe to a man who actually did become first in Rome.35 But it also represents an attitude that pervades Plutarch’s depiction of Caesar, and by way of contrast, provides a further glimpse into Sertorius’ character.

Caesar, for example, has his own encounter with Sulla, who deliberates about killing him. When his advisors suggest that Caesar is not worth the trouble, Plutarch reports Sulla’s well-known response, that ‘they were foolish if they did not recognize many Mariuses in the boy’ (Caes. 1.4).36 At a basic level, Sulla’s statement means simply that Caesar will eventually be an adversary many times more dangerous than Marius. But Marius, as we have seen, suffered from δοξομανία, and so Plutarch is also hinting that Caesar will be many times more eager for glory than his uncle, and thus even more relentless in his pursuit of power. Then, after narrating Caesar’s long career, his defeat of Pompey, and his acquisition of sole rule, Plutarch returns to this point with a much more direct statement:
Since he possessed in his nature great achievement and ambition, his many accomplishments did not move him to rest from his toils, but they were fuel and encouragement and inspired plans for greater achievements in the future and a desire (ἐρωτήσεως) for new δόξα, as if he was unsatisfied by the glory he already had. This passion was nothing other than an envy of himself as if of someone else and a sort of rivalry between what he was about to do and what he had already done (Caes. 58.4–5).

Caesar has not only assumed the previous generation’s desire for glory, but he even carries on within himself a rivalry like that between Marius and Sulla. Thus he becomes the perfect foil for Sertorius, embodying the δόξομανία that provoked Rome’s civil wars and destroyed the Republic. Caesar would reject Rome, and in a sense did when he crossed the Rubicon, in order to gain unlimited glory; Sertorius would reject all his glory, even that won rightly against the enemy, in order to gain Rome. Sertorius, once again, is to be admired not merely because he wished for peace, but because he was free of the unrestrained, rivalrous passion for glory that dominated his times. He in turn becomes a foil for Caesar, who, Plutarch writes, never really understood where his passion was leading him:

Caesar died having lived a full fifty-six years, but he outlived Pompey by not more than four. From the absolute power that he barely acquired after pursuing it at great risk throughout his whole life, he derived nothing but a reputation (δόξα) and a δόξα that was envied by his fellow citizens (69.1).

Thus a comparative reading brings Plutarch’s view of the character of these two heroes, and the character of their era, into stark relief.

Despite his special understanding of the dangers of δόξα, however, Sertorius never achieves his wish to return to Rome. When he is eventually betrayed by his own men, the introduction’s promise of an adverse τύχη is fulfilled. But the trajectory of his career and the character that inspired his unique attitude toward war are more complex than what was forecast at the start of the Life. The informative parallel readings found in other Roman Lives provide the missing insight into the characterization of Sertorius and demonstrate, I believe, the cohesion of Plutarch’s project with regard to the figures of the late-Republic. If we treat Sertorius as part of this group, then we are compelled to consider how he reacted to the δόξομανία of his times, in addition to following the more overtly stated themes of the warrior and τύχη. In return we develop a richer interpretation of the hero and a better understanding of how Plutarch conceived of the decline of the Roman Republic.
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Notes
1 The first chapter of the Sertorius also serves as the introduction to the Sertorius–Eumenes pair, one of three books in the series of Parallel Lives for which the Roman biography precedes the Greek; see Geiger 1981 and 1995, and Pelling 1986.
2 Plutarch’s full justification for this pairing further demonstrates how tightly he has integrated the themes of warrior and fortune: ‘To Sertorius we can closely compare from among the Greeks Eumenes of Cardia, since both men had the qualities of leadership and of making war with trickery (ὡμοφόρων γάρ ἄρρητοι καὶ σίγου δόλω πολέμικοι), both were exiled from their homeland, commanded foreigners, and experienced a violent and unjust fortune at the end of their lives (τυγχάνει καὶ ἐχθροφόροι βιασώ καὶ ἀδίκω περὶ τὴν τελευτήν), for the men with whom they were defeating their enemies plotted against and killed them’ (Sert. 1.11); cf. Stadter 1988, 285. For a critical look at Plutarch’s comparison of Sertorius and Eumenes, see Bosworth 1992.
3 Commentators are generally skeptical of Plutarch’s idealized and simplified presentation of Sertorius; cf. Flacelière and Chambry 1973, 6; Gruen 1974, 17; Konrad 1994, xxxv.
4 In some cases Plutarch demonstrates a consistency of vocabulary as well as of theme: Sertorius was equal to the Romans in δύναμις and τολμή (1.10), and he demonstrates these qualities again at 2.2 (δύναμις) and 3.4 & 4.3 (τολμή). His first trick is described in 3.2–3.
5 The transition between 4.5 and 4.6 is very abrupt. After describing Sertorius’ triumphant reception in the theater, Plutarch bluntly writes: ‘Nonetheless, when he stood for tribune he was defeated because Sulla organized opposition to him; this appears to have made him an enemy of Sulla.’
6 See the discussions of chronology ad loc. in Konrad 1994.
7 Konrad 1994, 87, explains that Plutarch, either ignorant of or ignoring the political and strategic concerns of the Marian leadership, presents Sertorius as making his own decision to go to Spain; cf. the related discussion at Spann 1987, 37–9.
8 Cf. 5.6, where Plutarch writes that the evils of war seemed attractive to the Romans (literally, ‘appeared as gold’) when compared with the violent excesses of the Marian faction.
9 Alluded to at 7.1 but not reported as such; see Konrad 1994, ad loc., for the ancient evidence for Sertorius’ proscription.
10 García Moreno 1992, 133–4, argues that Sertorius was ‘the last representative of the old Roman generals’ who were leaders ‘on the basis of the force of their personal morality and virtue.’
11 See Spann 1977, and García Moreno 1992, 143–6, on the debate over the identification of these islands and for a discussion of Plutarch’s sources.
12 See Konrad 1994, 120–1, for discussion and bibliography. Plutarch raises the
same question at *Sulla* 30.6 but leaves it unresolved. The question posed there, when the kind-hearted Sulla suddenly turns vicious rather late in life, is whether the
instability of his character is the result of a change in his nature or reflects a hidden
cruelty that has finally been unmasked. It seems, however, that Plutarch did not think
that a person’s nature could change, but that his character could. Gill 2006, 412–21,
argues that Plutarch, taking a Platonic-Aristotelian approach, viewed a stable character
as arising from a good nature that was ‘harmonized’ by education and reason. Thus
the inconsistencies demonstrated by Sertorius and Sulla were the result of ‘a failure to
develop – or to develop fully – the stability and coherence of character that depend
on virtue,’ which left them susceptible to a change in character when their
circumstances changed. See also Gill 1983 and Duff 1999, 72–82.

13 Plutarch narrates the invitation to return to Spain in 10.1 and the death of
Sertorius’ mother in 22.10.

14 For the location of Sertorius’ success as a speaker, Plutarch writes simply ἐν τῇ

15 Indeed, Sertorius’ mother, by seeing to her son’s education, provided the
foundation upon which Sertorius could have built his later political career, had he not
been derailed by Sulla; see Spann 1987, 3, for a description of how Sertorius would
have been trained. In contrast, Plutarch depicts the orphaned Coriolanus as having
been raised well by his mother but without a proper education, which left him ill-
equipped for political life in Rome (*Cor. 1.2*); on the *Coriolanus*, see further Duff 1999,
206–7.

16 Plutarch most likely did not intend this terminology to be applied outside the
present *Life*, and perhaps not even beyond the *synkrisis*. At *Marc. 1.2* he calls Marcellus
both πολεμωτικός and φιλοτόλωτικός without implying any special, technical meanings for
the words or any contradiction in Marcellus’ character.

17 Flacelière and Chambry 1973, 5–6, reflect the force of Plutarch’s characterization
when they make reference to the *synkrisis* and 9.1 in describing Sertorius as a man ‘qui
passa toute sa vie à guerroyer aurait bien préféré, au dire de Plutarque, vivre en paix’
(‘had passed all his life in warfare [but] would have preferred, according to Plutarch,
to live peacefully’).

18 When the Cilician pirates oppose his retreat to the Isles of the Blessed, Sertorius
immediately dismisses the idea and begins a military action in order to keep his men
battle-ready (9.2–3). Likewise, he returns to Spain at the invitation of the Lusitanians
(10.1), a move that puts him back at odds, if not into direct conflict, with the Sullan
troops that control the peninsula. If he had been interested only in peace, he could
have remained at Tingis in Mauretania, where he had defeated a force sent by Sulla
(9.5) and established himself as a fair master of the local population (9.11). Perhaps
this is why Plutarch separates his description of a peaceful Sertorius from the general’s
free acceptance of the Lusitanians’ offer.

19 For Plutarch’s dependence on Sallust’s *Histories* as a source for his *Sertorius*, see

20 García Moreno 1992, 147–8; cf. König 2000, 443. See also the criticism of

21 Though Sertorius, raised in Nursia, was no aristocrat.

22 He had already been military tribune (3.5) and quaestor (4.1).

23 Konrad 1994, 109, suggests the parallel with Lucullus as well as further parallels
with Cleopatra and Antony after Actium. These latter comparisons are weaker, in my opinion, since the couple were not simply weary of their civil war but had just lost one of the most decisive battles in Roman history. Sertorius’ disillusionment is hard to compare with the hopelessness of Antony’s and Cleopatra’s situation as they fled to Alexandria.

24 Plutarch’s only other use of the phrase μεστὸς δόξης is found in the Marcellus, where being ‘full of glory’ brings credibility. After Plutarch describes Marcellus’ great desire to attack Hannibal, he quickly adds, ‘And if he were not already full of much glory (εἰ μὴ πολλῆς μὲν ἡπὶ μεστὸς ὑπήρχε δόξης) and had not had long experience in acting as serious and as sensible as any of the generals, I would say that he was beset with a youthful and ambitious passion that did not match his mature age’ (Marc. 28.6).


26 Plutarch’s Phocion advises Alexander along similar lines, telling the king ‘if he desires peace (ἡπίουξη), to stop making war; but if he is after glory (δόξη), to take up war somewhere else and turn himself against the barbarians instead of the Greeks’ (Phoc. 17.6). This bit of sage advice earned him Alexander’s longstanding friendship; see Tritle 1988, 118.

27 An emphasis on patriotism is an important part of Plutarch’s effort to present Sertorius as a loyal Roman; see Flacelière and Chambry 1973, 4–5.

28 On Sallust as a source, see Flacelière and Chambry 1973, 270.

29 Cf. Konrad 1994, 183. In the next section (Sert. 22.4), Plutarch relates how others mocked Metellus for so lavishly celebrating a victory over a minor figure.


31 Cf. Schulten 1926, 161 (‘Who would not think about Achilles’ complaint in the underworld?’) and Stenten 1969, 92. Plutarch already set the Homeric backdrop to Sertorius’ desire for peace when, after reporting the sailors’ description of the Isles of the Blessed, he added that these islands were believed to be the Elysian Field and home of the Blessed ‘which Homer mentioned’ (Sert. 8.5). The reference is Od. 4.563 ff., as noted in Ziegler’s text. Thanks to Judith Mossman for her helpful comments on the connection between Sertorius and Achilles.

32 Cf. Il. 9.412–16.

33 Konrad 1994, 189, calls the correlation between these statements ‘interesting’ but does not elaborate.

34 Also found at Ps.-Plut., Reg. et imp. apophb. 206b.


36 Also reported by Suetonius, Div. Iul. 1.

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