Palamedes’s Pharmacy

1. Cypria
a. καὶ μαίνεσθαι προσποιησάμενον Ὄδυσσεα ἐπὶ τῷ µὴ θέλειν συστρατεύεσθαι ἐφώρασαν Παλαμήδους ὑποθεμένου τὸν ιὸν Τηλέμαχον ἐπὶ κόλασιν ἐξαρπάσαντες. (EpFG p.31, 41-3; Proclus, Chrestomathia 5)
And when Odysseus was pretending to be mad because he did not want to take part in the expedition, they found him out at a suggestion of Palamedes, snatching his son Telemachus for a beating.

b. Παλαμήδην δὲ ἀποπνιγήναι προελθόντα ἐπὶ ιχθύων θήραν, Διομήδην δὲ τὸν ἀποκτείναντα εἶναι καὶ Ὄδυσσεα, ἐπιλεξόμενος ἐν ἔπεισιν οἶδα τὸς Κυπρίως. (EpFG Cypria 20; Pausanias 10.31.2)
That Palamedes was drowned while going on a fishing expedition, and that it was Diomedes who was the killer and Odysseus, I know from having read in the epic Cypria.

2. Eupolis, Unattributed
{ἈΛΚΙΒΙΑΔΗΣ.}  ὃς δὲ πρῶτος ἔξεσαν τὸ πρῶτον παντίνειν;
{Β.} πολλὴν γε λακκοπρωκτίαν ἡμῖν ἐπιστᾶσα εὐρόν.
{ΛΚ.} εἶν. τὶς εἶχεν “ἀμίδα παί” πρῶτος μεταξὺ πίνων;
{Β.} Παλαμήδηκον γε τοῦτο τοὐξοῦσσα καὶ σοφὸν σου (fr. 385; Athenaeus 1.17d)
Alsibiades. I was the first to discover early drinking. B. You know you have discovered much loose behavior, Alsibiades. Granted. Who was the first to say “boy, a basin” in the middle of drinking? B. This was a Palamedic and wise invention of yours!

3. Aeschylus, Palamedes
a. ἔπειτα πάσης Ἑλλάδος καὶ ἐμμάχον
βίον διώκησ’ ὄντα πρὸς πειρωμένον
θήραν τ’ ὄμιον πρὸς πάντοις μὲν τὸν πάνσοφον
ἀρτιθμὸν πόρης’ ἔξοχον σοφισμάτων (fr. 181a, Stobaeus 1.Proem.)
Then I organized the life of all Hellas and their allies, which earlier was confused like that of beasts. First, I invented all-wise number, outstanding among contrivances.

b. καὶ ταξιάρχαις χάκατονταρχαῖς στρατῷ
ἔταξα, στὸν δ’ εἰδέναι διώρισα,
ἀριστα, δείνα δόρτα θ’ αἴρεσθαι τρίτα (fr. 182, Athenaeus 1.11d)
And I appointed taxiaruchs and division commanders for the army, and I divided the meals for them to know, to take breakfast, dinner, and supper third.

4. [Aeschylus], Prometheus Bound
ἠν δ’ οὐδὲν αὐτοῖς οὔτε χείματος τέκμαρ
οὔτ’ ἀνθρώπων ἢρος οὔτε καρπίμου
θέρους βέβαιον, ἀλλ’ ἄτερ γνώμης τὸ πάν
ἐξαρπασσόν, ἔστε δὴ φιλόν ἀντολάς ἔγω
ἀστρον ἐξείλα τάς τʼ ἐνδυκρίτοις ἄσεις.
καὶ µὴν ἀρτιθμόν, ἔξοχον σοφισμάτων,
ἐξήρων αὐτοῖς, γραμμάτων τε συνθέσεις,
µνήμην ἀπάντων, µουσοµήτορ’ ἐργάνην (454-61)
There was not for them any secure indicator of winter, nor of the flowering spring, nor of fruitful summer. But they did all things without thought until I showed them the risings and settings of the stars, hard to discern. And I invented for them number, outstanding among contrivances, and combinations of letters, memory of all things, instrument that is mother of the Muses.
and destroyed by Odysseus. And have you not heard the sufferings of Palamedes? For all sing of him, that he was envied because of his wisdom and destroyed by Odysseus.

Did this man not stop the famine for these [soldiers] here, to speak with the god, and did he not discover the wisest occupations of time for them sitting after the toil of battle, and draughts and dice, a pleasing cure for boredom?

This man devised the wall for the army of the Argives, and the inventions of weights, numbers, and measures, and these formations, and the heavenly signs. And he did this first, discovered how to count from one to ten and by tens in turn to fifty and a thousand. And he showed fire signals to the army, and revealed things that were earlier hidden. And he discovered the measures and revolutions of the stars, reliable signs for the watch during sleep, and, for sea-going shepherds of ships, the turnings of the Bear and the cold setting of the Dog.

I alone set up remedies for forgetfulness, speechless and speaking, creating syllables, I invented letters for men to know, so that a man absent across the plain of the ocean could know well all the matters back there in his house, and that a dying man could leave for his children a written measure of his wealth, and the one receiving it could know. And the evils that befall men in quarreling, a tablet dissolves, and does not allow anyone to speak lies.

And have you not heard the sufferings of Palamedes? For all sing of him, that he was envied because of his wisdom and destroyed by Odysseus.

Josh Billings
Center for Hellenic Studies, 12.5.15
jhbillings@princeton.edu