Constructing Periander in Plutarch’s *Symposium of the Seven Sages*

1. Plato, *Protagoras* 343a-b2

Ποιος οὖν ἦν καὶ Θαλής ὁ Μιλήτιος καὶ Πιττακός ὁ Μυτιληναῖος καὶ Βιάς ὁ Πρηνεύς καὶ Σόλων ὁ ἠμέτερος καὶ Κλεόβουλος ὁ Λίνδιος καὶ Μύσιον ὁ Χηνεύς, καὶ ἔβδομος ἐν τούτοις ἐλέγετο Λακεδαιμόνιος Χίλον. οὗτοι πάντες ἤκουσαν καὶ ἔρασαν καὶ μαθηταὶ ἦσαν τῆς Λακεδαιμονίου παιδείας καὶ καταμάθοι ἃν τις αὐτῶν τὴν σοφίαν τοιαύτην οὕσαν, ὡς ἡμᾶτα βραχέα ἀξιωμηνήμωντα ἐκάστῳ εἰρήμενα· οὗτοι καὶ κοινὴ ἐξελθόντες ἀποφηνὴν τῆς σοφίας ἀνέθεσαν τῷ Ἀπάλλωνι εἰς τὸν νεόν τὸν ἐν Δελφοῖς, γράφαντες ταύτα, ἃ δὴ πάντες ὑμνοῦσιν, γνώθι σαυτὸν καὶ μηδὲν ἄγαν.

Such men were Thales of Miletus, Pittacus of Mytilene, Bias of Priene, Solon of our city, Cleobulus of Lindus, Myson of Chanae, and the seventh of this group was said to be Chilon of Sparta. All these were enthusiasts, lovers and disciples of the Spartan culture; and one can recognize that character in their wisdom by the short, memorable sayings uttered by each of them; they assembled together and dedicated these as the first-fruits of their wisdom to Apollo in his Delphic temple, inscribing there those maxims which are on every tongue—“Know thyself” and “Nothing in excess.”

2. Plutarch, *Symposium of the Seven Sages* 146B-C (Diocles)

οὗτε γὰρ μόνων· ὡς ύμεις ἀκηκόατε, τῶν ἐπὶ γέγονε τὸ συμπόσιον, ἀλλὰ πλείων ἢ δίς τοσοῦτον (ἐν οίς καὶ αὐτός ἦμην, συνήθης μὲν ἢν Περιάνδρῳ διὰ τὴν τέχνην, ξένος δὲ Θάλεως παρ’ ἐμοὶ γὰρ κατέλυσεν ὁ ἀνὴρ Περιάνδρου κελεύσαντος), οὕτε τοὺς λόγους ὁρθῶς ἀπεμνημόνευσεν ὅσις ἦν ύμιν ὁ δηγούμενος· ἢν δ’ ὡς ἐσκέκεν οὐδεὶς τῶν παραγεγονότων.

For, in the first place, the dinner was not a dinner of the Seven alone, as you and your friends have been told, but of more than twice that number, and I was among them; for I was on intimate terms with Periander by virtue of my profession, and I was also the host of Thales, for he stayed at my house by command of Periander. In the second place, your informant, whoever he was, did not report the conversation correctly; apparently he was not one of those at the dinner.

3. Dicaearchus, fr. 32 Wehrli (= D.L. 1.41):

Δικαίαρχος δὲ τέσσαρας ὁμολογημένους ἦμιν παραδίδοσιν, Θαλήν, Βιάντα, Πιττακόν, Σόλωνα. ἄλλους δὲ ὀνομάζει ἔξ, ἐν ἐκλέξασθαι τρεῖς, Ἀριστόδημον, Πάμφυλον, Χείλανα Λακεδαιμόνιον, Κλεόβουλον, Ανάχαρον, Περιάνδρον.

Dicaearchus hands down four names fully recognized: Thales, Bias, Pittacus, and Solon; and he adds the names of six others, from whom one has to choose three: Aristodemus, Pamphylus, Chilon the Lacedaemonian, Cleobulus, Anacharsis, Periander.

* When available, I have used the translations of the Loeb series with some modifications.
καὶ Αριστοτέλης μὲν φησὶ τὸν Κορίνθιον εἶναι τὸν σοφὸν. Πλάτων δὲ οὐ φησὶν.

And Aristotle maintains that the Corinthian (Periander) was the sage; Plato, on the other hand, denies it.

5a. Diodorus Siculus, 9.7
ὁν (sc. Μύσωνα) ἀντεισῆξαν εἰς τοὺς ἑπτὰ σοφοὺς, ἐκκρίναντες τὸν Περίανδρον τὸν Κορίνθιον διὰ τὸ τυραννὸν γεγονέναι πικρὸν.

He (i.e. Myson) was included among the Seven Sages in the place of Periander of Corinth, who was rejected because he had turned into a bitter tyrant.

5b. Pausanias, 10.24.1
τὸν δὲ ἐβδομὸν Πλάτων ὁ Ἁριστωνος ἀντὶ Περίανδρου τοῦ Κυψέλου Μύσωνα κατείλοχε τὸν Χηνέα...οὔτοι οὖν οἱ ἀνδρὲς ἀρικόμενοι ἐς Δελφοὺς ἀνέθεσαν τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι τὰ ἀδόμενα “Γνῶθι σαυτόν” καὶ “Μηδὲν ἄγαν”.

As the seventh sage Plato, the son of Ariston, has included in his list not Periander, the son of Cypselus, but Myson of Chenaee...These men, then, (i.e. the Sages) came to Delphi and dedicated to Apollo the celebrated maxims, “Know thyself, and” Nothing in excess.”

5c. Diogenes Laertius, 1.41
Πλάτων δὲ ἐν Πρωταγόρᾳ Μύσωνα (sc. ἔγκρινε) ἀντὶ Περίανδρου Ἐφορος δὲ ἀντὶ Μύσωνος Ἀνάχαρον.
Plato in his Protagoras (accepts) Myson instead of Periander; Ephorus (accepts) Anacharsis instead of Myson.

6a. Plutarch, Symposium of the Seven Sages 147A-C
“...ἄλλ’, ὅπερ ἐφην, διεβλήθης μισοβασιλεύς εἶναι, καὶ τινὲς ύβριστικά σου περὶ τυράννων ἀποφάσεις ἄνεφέροντο πρὸς αὐτὸν, ὡς ἐρωτηθεῖς ὑπὸ Μολπαγόρου τοῦ Ἰανος τί παραδοξότατον εἶπς ἑωρακώς, ἀποκρίναι τὺραννὸν γέροντα’(...)” “Ἀλλὰ τοῦτο μὲν,” εἶπεν ὁ Θαλῆς, “Πιττακοῦ ἐστιν, εἰσημένον ἐν παϊδὰ ποτὲ πρὸς Μυρσίλου(...) διὸ καὶ Σόλωνα σοφώτατον ἠγοράσην οὐ δεξάμενον τυραννεῖν. καὶ Πιτακῶς οὕτως εἰ μοναρχία μὴ προσῆλθεν, οὐκ ἂν εἶπεν ὡς ἑαυτὸς ἐσθιόλον ἐμμελεῖστι. Περίανδρος δ’ ἐσικεν ὡστερ ἐν νοσῆμι πατρῶς τῇ τυραννίδι κατειλημμένος οὐ φαύλως ἐξαναφέτειν, χρώμενος ὁμιλίαις ύγειειαίς ἀχρὶ γε νόν καὶ συνουσίας ἀνδρῶν νοῦν ἔχοντων ἐπαγόμενος, ὡς δὲ Θρασύβουλος αὐτῷ κολούσεις τῶν ἄκρων οὐμός πολίτης ύψητείται μὴ προσεῖμενος.
ἐότε delay, said, “In my opinion either a king, or a tyrant, would best gain repute if out of a monarchy he should organize a democracy for his people.” Next Bias said, “If he should be the very first to conform to his country’s laws.” Following him Thales said that he accounted it happiness for a ruler to reach old age and die a natural death. Fourth, Anacharsis said, “If he should not be the only one to have sound sense.” Fifth, Cleobulus, “If he should trust none of his associates.” Sixth, Pittacus, “If the ruler should manage to make his subjects fear, not him, but for him.” Chilon followed by saying that a ruler’s thoughts should never be the thoughts of a mortal, but always divine thoughts.

6b. Plutarch, Symposium of the Seven Sages 148D (Thales)

“Sixth, Pittacus, “If the ruler should manage to make his subjects fear, not him, but for him.”

But Periander, apparently, in spite of his being afflicted with tyranny as with an inherited disease, is making fair progress towards recovery by keeping wholesome company—at least up to the present time—and by bringing about conferences with men of sense, and by refusing to entertain the suggestions offered by my fellow-citizen Thrasybulus about lopping off the topmost.

But she is also possessed of wonderful sense, a statesman’s mind, and an amiable character, and she has influence with her father so that his government of the citizens has become milder and more popular.

7a. Plutarch, Symposium of the Seven Sages 152A-B

Solon then, after a moment’s delay, said, “In my opinion either a king, or a tyrant, would best gain repute if out of a monarchy he should organize a democracy for his people.” Next Bias said, “If he should be the very first to conform to his country’s laws.” Following him Thales said that he accounted it happiness for a ruler to reach old age and die a natural death. Fourth, Anacharsis said, “If he should not be the only one to have sound sense.” Fifth, Cleobulus, “If he should trust none of his associates.” Sixth, Pittacus, “If the ruler should manage to make his subjects fear, not him, but for him.” Chilon followed by saying that a ruler’s thoughts should never be the thoughts of a mortal, but always divine thoughts.
When these (maxims) had been expressed, we insisted that Periander himself should also say something. And he, not very cheerful, but with a hard set face, said, “Well, I add my view that the opinions expressed, taken as a whole, practically divorce any man who has sense from being a ruler.”

7b. Plutarch, Symposium of the Seven Sages 152C (Solon)
οὐκ ἂν δοκεῖ σοι μετρίωτερον ἄρχοντα ποιεῖν καὶ τύραννον ἑπιεικέστερον ὁ πείθων ὡς ἀμεινων εἰς τὸ μὴ ἄρχειν ἢ τὸ ἄρχειν;

Don’t you think that one could make a ruler more moderate and a tyrant more reasonable if he could persuade them that it is better not to rule than to rule?

8. Plutarch, Symposium of the Seven Sages 154E-F
Τελευταῖος δὲ πάλιν ὁ Περιάνδρος ἐπικρινών ἔφη δοκεῖν ἀυτῶ πάντας ἐπαινεῖν δημοκρατίαν τὴν ὀμοιοτάτην ἀριστοκρατία.

Finally, Periander once more concluded the discussion with the decisive remark, that they all seemed to him to approve a democracy which was most like an aristocracy.

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