PLUTARCH AND THE DARK SIDE OF 
SOLON’S POLITICAL ACTIVITY 
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Abstract 

The fame that from an early stage started to surround the figure of Solon caused him to be seen to be involved in accounts without historical basis, as happened in the well-known interview with Croesus. When, during the last quarter of the fifth century, Solon began to be used in ideological disputes, in connection with the rise of the theme of patrios politeia, it is natural that some episodes destined to call into question the ethos of the savant would take shape. In attributing dubious political maneuvering to Solon, certain people might have been attempting to stain the statesman’s traditional image of integrity and impartiality, when he had only been responding to the desire to encounter the salvation of his city. It is not unlikely that this tradition would have begun to circulate in political pamphlets, that it began to figure, afterwards, in some Atthis, and that, in this way, would have influenced the Peripatos, and historiography that was to follow, as we see by the fragments of the oeuvre of Phaenias and of Polyzelus, cited, among other sources, by Plutarch.

One of the most amazing characteristics of Plutarch’s work is the immense volume of authors and studies that he cites, especially throughout the Vitae, though he did apply the same practice to the Moralia. Because of this, over a period of decades the savant of Chaeronea delighted the Quellenforschung, drawing attention not because of his art, but because he provided a fertile field of citations from where each scholar might pick the ‘flowers’ of his own predilection. Plutarch was viewed as a mere collector of testimonia, often incoherent, and as someone who gathered together, without pondering them, sources that varied as much for their pertinence as for their quality. Criticism of his sources has gone much further, to the point of denying that the biographer had really read what he indicated he had; much to the contrary, that he had limited himself to learning a single source (Mittelquelle), where he would rummage information not only about what the author was thinking but as well what his predecessors had said. In citing secondhand, he boasted of erudition that, in truth, he did not possess. Fortunately, in recent decades these exaggerated criticisms have been abandoned and now no serious scholar would defend the notion that Plutarch drew all of his knowledge from a single font. Freed of this specter,