Symposion and Philanthropia in Plutarch

José Ribeiro Ferreira, Delfim Leão, Manuel Tröster & Paula Barata Dias (eds)
The tyrannos as a sophos in the Septem Sapientium Convivium

Delfim Leão
University of Coimbra

Abstract
The group of the Seven Sages in the Septem Sapientium Convivium includes a number of figures whose presence is problematic due to their association with autocratic power. Although the invitation to the meeting was sent out by the tyrant Periander, he is nevertheless eliminated from the central core of the Sages. This decision may be justified, in the first place, by the fact that he is a tyrant and that there is a deep animosity towards this form of government in the Convivium. Nevertheless, Periander was expected to fulfil a more important function in his capacity as host, but, contrary to this scenario, his presence begins to recede, especially once the eulogy of the democratic system starts, to the point that the honour of closing the banquet falls to Solon. Even so, Pittacus has ruled over the destinies of Mytilene as an aesymnetes and continues to figure among the sophoi, and the same can be said of Cleoboulus, the autocrat of Lindos. Taking these factors into account, I propose to discuss in this paper the reason why Pittacus and Cleoboulus were able to remain as sophoi, while Periander ended up being relegated to a secondary place.

In my earlier work, I argued that the Septem Sapientium Convivium represents, in a certain way, a kind of cosmopolis of different sorts of wisdom¹. Among the sophoi, the dominant profile corresponds, as should be expected, to the masculine, aristocratic and Greek sensibility, as shown in the characters of Solon, Thales, Bias, Cleoboulus, Pittacus and Chilon. The seventh figure of the gallery is occupied by the Scythian Anacharsis, a personality that a long-lasting tradition² used to consider under the double perspective either of a sort of martyr of Greek culture or of a "bon sauvage" still uncorrupted by the vices of civilization and, because of that, apt to deprecate those same vices without being subject to the compromises of social convenience. Besides that, Anacharsis also adds a note of eccentricity to the group of sapientes, as he too ends up representing the nomadic oddness of the northern barbarians.³

The group of the sophoi as a whole is not, nevertheless, the object of the approach I intend to present, which rather deals with the image of the tyrannos as a sophos in the banquet of the Seven Wise Men. Solon, Thales, Bias and Chilon are usually present in the stable nucleus of the Seven but do not correspond to the tyrannos/sophos profile. Accordingly, their example is

¹ The results of these several studies were gathered in a single global analysis, published in D. F. Leão, 2006. See also D. F. Leão, 2008. I would like to express my gratitude to Manuel Tröster, who read an earlier version of this paper and improved a lot on the English.
² Present already in Herodotus, 4.76-77.
³ To this relatively exotic ambience contributes as well Neiloxenos, Amasis’ envoy to the court of Periander, who can be considered, to a certain point, an example of Egyptian sophistication, although he does not belong to the restricted circle of the Seven Wise Men. I shall later return to him and to other secondary figures like the young Cleobouline (or Eumetis), who, along with Aesop, represents a more intuitive knowledge.