

*2500 years ago*  
*(Salamis, 480B.C.-2020 A.C.)*  
*Note from the Editors of Ploutarchos, n.s.*

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Whether because Hellenistic *Tyche* or Roman *Fortuna* wanted it that way, or perhaps better because in them the action of divine providence clearly manifested itself in history, one of those temporal coincidences that Plutarch liked so much to point out occurred when this volume of *Ploutarchos* n.s. was sent to press. Our cover designs have followed the traditional order of Plutarch's *Lives*, starting with volume 11 and the representation of Theseus' deeds at the Isthmus in the *kylix* of Eson in the National Archaeological Museum. The cover of this volume, 17 (2020) follows last year's Publicola, and alludes to the *Life of Themistocles*. Well, as we said, *Fortuna* or the gods

or, for the most stoic, the force of the *Heimarmene* that rules the natural order of things have made this volume coincide with the celebration of the two and a half millennia elapsed since the battle that defined Themistocles' place in history: the Battle of Salamis. To illustrate this feat on both the front and back covers, we have selected for the front *Die Seeschlacht bei Salamis* by the German artist Wilhelm von Kaulbach and for the back the engraving that, alluding to the same event, illustrates the *Life of Themistocles* by Nepos in the Latin edition of the *Lives* of Plutarch and Nepos of 1516.

On the other hand, we would say also that it must have been some of those evil demons to which we readers

of Plutarch are accustomed, pleased and fired-up by this event, not allowing us to enjoy this coincidence with three masters whose approaches to the Chaeronenean have had in one way or another relevant contributions to understanding the politics of Athens and/or the victory of the cunning general. We are referring to Donald Russell (+9.2.2020), Federicomaria Muccioli (+14.5.2020), and Francisco Rodríguez Adrados (+21.7.2020).

The first of these, D. Russell, in the reflections on Plutarch's thought and style contained in *Plutarch* (London, Duckworth 1973, pp. 76-77), underlined the malevolent behavior of the *daimones*, according to him, with words like these:

We saw that, as an interpreter of Plato, Plutarch viewed the cause of evil in the world as psychical and not material. No doubt he was tempted to link this doctrine with the concept of demonic beings, whether disembodied souls or demigods, some of whom might be dangerously spiteful and malicious unless their anger was turned by apotropaic rituals.

As for the battle of Salamis, Muccioli dedicates to the Plutarchean *Themistocles* pages 144-152 of his book *La storia attraverso gli esempi* published by Mimesis Edizioni in Milan-Udine (2012). Thanks to the personal involvement of the Athenian hero in the preliminaries, development, outcome and consequences of the victory against the

Persians, embodied above all in the deed of Salamis, Plutarch, from Platonic, becomes isocratic in his approach and balance of his character, as, although he does not say so expressly, Muccioli suggests in his pages 146-147:

La lettura della sola *Vita di Temistocle*, senza confronti con il suo *alter ego* ateniese, tocca uno dei nervi scoperti del pensiero storico plutarco, quello dell'unità dei Greci, unità che li libera dalle guerre civili e dagli scontri tra città, aspetti questi esecrati dal Cheroneo. L'aspetto positivo di Temistocle è dunque rappresentato, con una sorta di idealizzazione, dalla sua vittoria sul barbaro, che supera anche gli aspetti negativi, sebbene sia evitata nella biografia qualsiasi polemica sulle ridondanti esaltazioni retoriche che ispirano il passo dei *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae* succitato.

On his part, Adrados, in the chapter on *Ilustración y política en la Grecia clásica* (Madrid, Revista de Occidente 1966) dedicated to the importance of the Persian Wars for the political formation of Athens (pp. 122-153), also places due emphasis on the exceptional clairvoyance of Themistocles, as a decisive reason for the Athenian imperialism later promoted by Pericles:

En principio puede decirse que las Guerras Médicas son libradas por los griegos a la manera tradicional, no a la de la política racional de que hablábamos en el

capítulo precedente. Mientras en la guerra del Peloponeso Atenas procede conforme a un plan —en realidad hay dos, el de Pericles y el del ala imperialista—, aquí este elemento está representado fundamentalmente por la actuación de Temístocles, un adelantado del mundo que vendrá luego.

It is true that the prestigious Professor and academician in his analysis of the figure of the victor of Salamis usually follows the guidelines set by Herodotus and Thucydides and, as far as the traditional religious meaning of that victory is concerned, suggests a conciliation of “the features of the traditional aristocratic *areté* —value, glory, success, *sophrosyne*— with a concept of justice, protected by the gods” (p. 131), those of the *Persians* of Aeschylus. Nevertheless, Plutarch is, for him, the one who best outlines the modernity of a Themistocles moved by the sophist principle of the useful, both in Salamis and in his comparison with Aristides’ justice (pp. 144-145):

Nótese que las caracterizaciones de Temístocles por Tucídides y Heródoto no están hechas con hostilidad, como la de Timocreonte de Rodas, sino, al contrario, con admiración profunda y que, sin embargo, presentan los rasgos de la falta de respeto a lo convenido o a la norma tradicional. Puede haber evidentemente exageraciones malévolas, pero existe una completa coherencia entre el es-

píritu innovador, movido solo por el deseo de imponer la conveniencia de Atenas, y la independencia personal del político respecto a la «justicia» tradicional.

Plutarco, que recoge materiales procedentes de los atidógrafos y de la tradición peripatética, contribuye a precisar este cuadro, en su biografía de nuestro personaje, con diversas anécdotas. No vamos a insistir en el tópico de la «sabiduría» de Temístocles, que le enfrenta directamente a Aristides. En cambio conviene notar cómo Plutarco subraya su conducción impecable de la guerra y la política en busca de lo «conveniente» (*συνφέρον*) para Atenas y para él mismo

Remembering the dedication to Plutarch of the eminent Oxford Professor and the judgments on Themistocles of these two valued scholars of 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Athenian politics, all three of them separated by the temporal distance with which Clotho began to weave their lives (born respectively in \*1920, \*1965 and \*1922), but which have been equalized by Atropus’ trap for the careless Lachesis of Muccioli — it has seemed to us fair, therefore, to add these tributes. With this we, the Plutarchists, vindicate with more emphasis the importance of an event that was transcendental for the relations between East and West; and that, throughout these two thousand five hundred years, has served as a military, political and ideological model for diverse generations of Europeans (in

the sense that the term now has) whose differences have been opportunely erased in decisive moments.

Salamis had many readings and the role and prominence of Themistocles were the subject of diverse interpretations during these past two thousand five hundred years, according to the accounts of the ancient authors. But among those ancient texts none has resulted and still results in such richness of nuance (political, economic, religious, mythical, ethical, human, in short) as that of our Plutarch. It is in his story, as in that of Herodotus and the speech of the herald of the *Persians* (with which the National Theater of Greece commemorated in Epidaurus last 25th July 2020 the ephemeris of the battle) that we find the inspiration for the iconography of the battle. For example, in the fresco by Felice Giani that decorates the Severoli palace in Faenza (1811) we see the general trying to convince the old Athenians to board the ships in the direction of Troezen during the preliminaries of the battle. And in

the impressive oil painting by Wilhelm von Kaulbach (1805-1874) that covers the wall of the Senate Hall of the Maximilianeum in Munich (*Die Seeschlacht bei Salamis*, 1868) the German romantic painter recreates characters and themes that he probably read in the three authors mentioned above. The reader can see them identified in the chapter Stefano Amendola dedicated to Paola Volpe Cacciatore as part of the tribute paid by her closest disciples<sup>1</sup>. On this occasion the Plutarchist from Salerno looks for the influence of Aeschylus on the painting; but the detail of the sacrifice by the priests in the boat of Themistocles and the phantasmagoric appearance of the Eacids (the latter also pointed out by Amendola and before that by Dumont<sup>2</sup>) are without any doubt the fruit of a concrete reading of Plutarch. Likewise, perhaps, are the arrows and javelins directed by a Persian warrior and by Artemisia against the figure of Themistocles, who stands victorious in the bow of his ship<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> STEFANO AMENDOLA, “Il mare nemico di Serse: i *Persiani* di Eschilo e *Die Seeschlacht bei Salamis* di Kaulbach”, en S. Amendola e G. Pace (eds), *Charis. Studi offerti a Paola Volpe dai suoi allievi*, Trieste, EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste 2016: 23-54.

<sup>2</sup> LÉON DUMONT, “La Peinture contemporaine en Allemagne. — Kaulbach et l’École réaliste”, *Révue des deux mondes*, 56 (1865) 628-659: 649.

<sup>3</sup> My hypothesis (Aurelio Pérez-Jiménez) is that the painter adapts the indication of Plutarch in *Them.* 14.3 about the Persian Admiral Ariamenes who was throwing arrows and javelins against Themistocles from his ship (to give entry to Artemisia in his painting). In this case, von Kaulbach may have taken advantage of the news of the biographer to place in Artemisia’s ship the latter pointing his bow at the Athenian and another warrior (Ariamenes?) in the ship next to that of Themistocles standing and wielding a javelin with the intention of throwing it at him.

The journal *Ploutarchos* n.s. in this way contributes its grain of sand to the commemoration of the battle of 480 BCE to which with all certainty the culture of the West owes the fact that it is more Greek than Asian. For our humanists, that was the story which was completed almost two thousand years later, and

became all the bigger for it after the victory captured by D. Juan of Austria in the waters of Lepanto (1571). This is how it was perceived a century later by the Roman poet Francesco Maria Lorenzini (1683-1743) in this sonnet (*Poesie*, Venice, Simone Occhi 1755: 48), which puts the finishing touch to our brief memory:

O Navi, o d'Asia, o dell'Egèò spavento,  
Che già full'Appenin quercia, ed abete  
Foste, ed or pinte i rostri il mar fendete  
A provocar sotto altro aspetto il vento;  
Dall'arene dell'Adria al gran cemento  
Spronando il corso l'ancore togliete;  
Poichè pugnare, e trionfar sapete:  
Che'l primiero valor non è anco spento.  
Non vi ricordo le già antiche, e conte  
Gesta, ch'Europa feo per questo mare.  
Non Salamina, nè di Serse il ponte:  
Lepanto sì: che le memorie, amare  
Faranno all'Asia impallidir la fronte,  
E a voi le vostre opre emular più chiare.

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