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*In this issue . . .*



## Plutarch and Theseus

While visiting the Isles of the Blest, Lucian was able to ask Homer in person whether he had actually written any of the many lines of his works bracketed by Zenodotus and Aristarchus. Yes, all of them, replied Homer (Lucian, *Verae Historiae* 2.20). This pleasant jibe at the expense of Alexandrian scholarship serves to remind us of a curious state of affairs already recognized by ancient editors.

Perhaps the most famous spurious line in the *Iliad* was 2.558: Ajax stationed his Salaminian ships in the midst of the Athenian contingent. This line was widely held in antiquity to be an insertion by the sixth century Athenians to support their claim to the island of Salamis.[1] But if we discard this line and a few others suspected since Hellenistic times we shall find that the great city of Athens, by far the most distinguished polis of Classical times, was virtually ignored by Homer. What is more, Theseus, the founding hero of the city, was indisputably mentioned just once by Homer and that only in passing (*Od.* 11.322).[2]

Modern scholars have tended to take this obscurity at face value, seeing the small community below the acropolis as one of minor importance from the Bronze Age through the

seventh century and suggesting that only with the beginning of the sixth century did Athenians become concerned with their lack of a proper history and begin to collect and embroider the poor mythological scraps that remained to them.[3]

Plutarch never seems to have doubted the greatness of Athens in all eras. Nevertheless he was well aware of the problems when he came to write the life of the earliest great Athenian, Theseus. Written history started for him, as it does for us, with Herodotus's sketch of sixth century Athens in the first book. The life of Theseus and Romulus lay in a period of marvels and themes for tragedy, a landscape hitherto claimed by poets and mythographers. He hoped, however, to make myth submit to reason and take on the appearance of history, admitting that much would remain that could never be explained (*Theseus* 1.2-5). In analyzing Plutarch's approach in the *Theseus* we may learn something about the nature of the tradition, something about the author's attitude to what he calls "archaeology," and possibly even something about Theseus.

It is generally agreed that Plutarch began writing the parallel biographies in later life. His other works amply demonstrate that by that time he had acquired a superb knowledge of the entire heritage of Greek literature. An earlier generation of scholars distrusted his frequent citations and accused him of borrowing his footnotes from reference works compiled by earlier scholars—which perhaps says more about those professors' graduate students than it does about their understanding of Plutarch. Modern critics are more inclined to accept Plutarch's citations as genuine. First, one assumes that the biographer did not work like a modern researcher, surrounded by books and references. Plutarch's libraries were largely in his memory, as his frequently inaccurate quotation of verse seems to show. We would expect that while he was writing a *Life*, a stream of stories would occur to him first, and their authors' names second, if at all.[4] When writing the *Aristides*, for instance, he relied heavily on Herodotus; the mistakes he made show that he did not have the historian's work open before him. The same can be said for Thucydides in the *Nicias*. This casual attitude to scholarly detail derived from an excellent knowledge of all periods of Greek history, confidence in his memory of all the thousands of works he had read, and the conviction that getting minor details correct was less important than his primary goal of teaching moral virtue through historical examples (*Aem.* 1.1; *Alex.* 1.1). For these reasons one might assume that Plutarch rarely felt compelled to undertake special research into any of his subjects.

But in the *Theseus* he had a different sort of task. As a citizen and frequent resident of Athens, Plutarch was surrounded on all sides by monuments that evoked the Theseus legends and could look forward to an annual calendar containing numerous festivals commemorating some aspect of the hero's career. In addition to this museum-like environment, Plutarch could turn to a wide range of literature about Theseus, from the earliest epic, to some of the best known masterpieces of Attic tragic drama, to popular collections of fantastic stories, to six centuries worth of inquiries that at least attempted a rational, secular approach to the historical reconstruction of a mythological character. The biographer's greatest problem, faced with this mass of often contradictory testimony, was simply one of space. He had to discuss the principal themes, by his day largely canonical: (1) the birth legend and genealogy; (2) the "labors" of Theseus; (3) the journey to Crete and return, including the Ariadne affair; (4) the unification of Attica; (5) the Amazon adventure; (6) the rape of Helen; (7) the descent into the underworld with Peirithous; (8) the hero's death and eventual enshrinement at Athens. We know that all these themes were well developed by the sixth century because of their representation on pottery like the François vase and other early black figure ware.[5] Plutarch could have written a book on any of these subjects with the material at hand. When he does not mention some incident or variant that is found in Apollodorus, or Diodorus, or Pausanias, we should not conclude that he does not know it, only that for some reason he decided to exclude it from his narrative.

In the *Romulus*, companion piece to the *Theseus*, Plutarch was content to retell traditional stories, pausing only six times to inject a scholarly citation or two. Otherwise he relied on the old standbyes: "most writers," or "they say," or "it is agreed." But in the *Theseus* he

cited 25 authors at 51 separate points. The biographer may also have thought that some special show of erudition was necessary for such a difficult topic involving the founding hero of the Greek world's first city. That he did specific research seems confirmed by a comparison of the content of the *Theseus* with material found in the rest of his extant works. For instance, in the *Themistocles*, at over 100 points, Plutarch said something that appeared elsewhere in the *Lives* or *Moralia*.[6] But in the *Theseus* there are only eight significant correspondences with the rest of the corpus.[7] Since the *Theseus* was one of his last works, this unique material must have been produced by research completed specifically for this *Life*.

There is, moreover, a special character to the works cited in the *Theseus*. A good third of the citations are to the works of the Atthidographers, whose research he rarely used for his other works.[8] Plutarch cited Philochorus six times, for instance, in the *Theseus* but only twice elsewhere in his entire corpus. He turned to the authority of Hellanicus five times for Theseus, only twice in any other extant work. His citation of Cleidemus, Demon, Bion, and Ister bear out this impression.[9] In addition, he consulted the antiquarian writers Pherecydes and Herodorus several times for the *Theseus*;[10] neither is cited anywhere else in the extant corpus. Finally, his citation of the Attic historian Ister "in his thirteenth book" confirms the impression that he looked up this category of information specifically for the *Theseus*. Plutarch's modern commentators know how rarely he referred to an exact book number or other reference.[11]

Besides literary sources, Plutarch seems to have relied on monuments and festivals as historical evidence to an unprecedented extent for the *Theseus*. He mentioned at least eighteen sites connected with the legend at one time or another;[12] many of these were graves of various people, Amazons in particular. Then there were precincts of Theseus—including the Theseion itself—and shrines for the Salaminian sailors who had guided Theseus to Crete and back. Other monuments of interest were the Horcomosion, commemorating the sworn treaty between Amazons and Athenians, and the Araterion in Gargettos, where the exiled Theseus cursed the Athenians on his way to Skyros. In addition, there were many famous paintings and sculptures of Theseus in the Stoa Poikile, in the Cnidian Lesche at Delphi, and elsewhere by such celebrated artists as Silanion, Micon, and Euphranor that were certainly well known to Plutarch, although he does not always specifically mention them.[13]

The Athenian calendar was also full of days which commemorated important episodes in the career of the national hero, from the sacrifice honoring his tutor Connidas to the Synoikia celebrating his unification of Attica. Plutarch referred to at least eleven of these, eight with exact dates.[14] Most of these festivals were described as if Plutarch knew of them personally and had witnessed some of the rites; because of the pomp, display, and even ritual reenactment, these ceremonies must be considered source material as well, as is often clear from Plutarch's discussions. If occasionally there is some confusion or imprecision in his account it is not surprising; anyone investigating the Attic Festivals knows that even by the classical period there was no unanimity over the origins and purposes of some of the most famous holidays.[15]

With this wealth of material with which to tell the story of Theseus there was virtually no point where the biographer could find a uniform tradition. It is useful to review some of the most disputed parts of the legend.

On the question of the Minoan tribute (*Thes.* 15-16), Plutarch first repeated the story offered by "most writers": Minos's son Androgeus was murdered in Attica. Attica was then struck by a famine and plague which the oracle said could only be ended by appeasing Minos. The Cretan king then required fourteen youths as tribute every nine years; they were put in the Labyrinth and were either killed by the Minotaur or became hopelessly lost and starved to death.[16] But Plutarch then turned to Philochorus (F 17a), who we know attempted to reconcile myth with history. In this case he said that the youths were not sacrificed, only kept in the Labyrinth as a prison. The monster, moreover, was really only a general named Taurus. Plutarch noted that Aristotle tended to confirm this, saying that some of these Athenians eventually got away from Crete and settled in Macedon.[17] The biographer seemed to prefer this account (cf. *Quest.graec.* 35, 298F-299A), and as if to explain his rejection of the popular myth he finished the

discussion by saying that it is a difficult matter to get on the bad side of a literary city: Homer (*Od.* 19.179) and Hesiod extoll Minos as a virtuous and just lawmaker, but the Athenian writers of poetry and tragedy turned him into an evil tyrant. This pleasantry is not original but neatly paraphrased out of a combination of Plato's *Laws* (667a) and the Platonic *Minos* (320d-321b).[18]

Plutarch continued to suppress stories he considered too fabulous. Hellanicus had said (F 14) that Minos came to Athens and picked out the youths personally, but Plutarch preferred the tradition that said they were picked by lot and delivered to Minos in Crete. This means that our author was willing to pass over in silence one of the most famous and earliest tales about Theseus, which was probably also in Hellanicus's account: Minos, having picked out the youths and accompanying them back to Crete on the ship, made advances to one of the maidens (Periboea, or Eriboea in some accounts). Theseus protested arrogantly, proclaiming himself the son of Poseidon, whereupon Minos threw his ring into the sea and told Theseus to retrieve it for him if he had such a close relationship with the sea god. Theseus's successful completion of this challenge was the subject of a famous poem by Bacchylides (17 Snell) and had been portrayed on vases at least a century before. The fifth century painter Micon also made the story the theme of one of his murals in the Theseion but Plutarch evidently believed that the tale smacked too much of the supernatural.[19]

Plutarch was also suspicious of the poet Simonides when he professed to know the name of Theseus's pilot.[20] But Philochorus (F 111), said the biographer, gave the name as Nausithous, son of the Salaminian Scirus; this is confirmed, he says, by the festival of the *kybernesia* and by the pilot's shrine down in Phaleron (17.5-7). What Plutarch does not tell us is that there was a conflicting tradition claiming that Scirus came from Dodona and fought with the Eleusinians against Erechtheus after founding the shrine of Athena Sciras at Phaleron (Paus. 1.36.4). The massive confusion that is evident in Pausanias, scholiasts and lexicographers over what were probably two different Sciroi goes back to the fourth century at least, as Jacoby has shown (ad 328 FF 14-16), and in ignoring all these variant accounts Plutarch was probably taking the easy way out.[21]

As to the final outcome of the Cretan adventure (19) Plutarch once more knew two --the most popular in song and story and a conflicting, less fabulous account. The tale of Ariadne's thread and the slaying of the Minotaur in the Labyrinth was of course well known from both art and literature.[22] But the continuation of Philochorus's account (F 17a) went on to claim that the general Taurus was defeated in the games by Theseus; Ariadne fell in love watching him wrestle; Minos (who had become jealous of his general) was overjoyed by the hero's victory and released the city of Athens from its obligation to pay tribute.[23] Plutarch also supplied a few details from Pherecydes (3 F 150) and Demon (327 F 5), then went on to relate a completely different account of the whole affair by the Atthidographer Cleidemus (323 F 17), illustrating the biographer's tendency to revel in curious and obscure stories even when he didn't believe them.

Despite a great display of erudition, Plutarch threw up his hands over the eventual outcome of Theseus's and Ariadne's love affair because none of the stories agreed with any of the others (20). We are told of two Naxian versions, a peculiar Cypriote version backed up with descriptions of surviving ritual practiced on that island, and even some textual criticism concerning lines edited out of Hesiod by order of Peisistratus.[24]

Another bit of obscure lore is seen in Plutarch's account of Theseus's layover at Delos (21). There, he and the youths made a ritual of their escape from the Labyrinth by dancing a winding dance around the altar called *Keraton* because it was entirely made of horns, and these all from the left side of the head. It is amusing to note that in the *De sollertia animalium* (983E) Plutarch described this same altar as being made of horns all from the *right* side of the head.[25] This is an authentic Plutarchean touch, as we all recognize.

Because he was studiously trying to rescue Theseus from superstition, Plutarch cited numerous authorities at the very beginning of his treatment of Theseus and the Amazons. And in general, Amazons seem to have made him nervous and eager for as much support as possible. One of his most cluttered citations is from the *Alexander* (46.1) where he cited five authors who

said Alexander met an Amazon and nine who said he didn't—as if to absolve himself from any complicity in bringing such a creature onstage. First, Plutarch resolved on the authority of most writers, including Pherecydes (3 F 151), Herodorous (31 F 25a), and Hellanicus (F 16), that Theseus made his voyage to the Black Sea as sole leader, as opposed to Philochorus (F 110) and others who said he went with Heracles. He was also anxious to demonstrate the historicity of the Amazon invasion of Attica. Not only did many writers deal with the episode (Cleidemus even gave the Amazonian battle order, F 18), but place names still in use in Plutarch's day commemorated their camp, the battle site, the place of the treaty, and their graves. In addition, said Plutarch, the date of the battle is known: it was fought on the same day as the Boedromia, that is, the seventh of the month.[26]

After apologizing for the uncertainties of history in a period of such great antiquity, he went on to condemn the *Theseid* as pure fable for attributing the Amazon invasion to Antippe's jealousy over Theseus's marriage to Phaedra. Since the poets and historians are in agreement about the tragedy of Phaedra and Hippolytus, said Plutarch (28), with some relief, that is the way things must have happened.[27]

Where poets and historians disagree, the biographer will approve the historian's account. When the Thebans refused to give back the Argive dead after the famous siege of Thebes, Adrastus asked Theseus to help recover the corpses. In Euripides' exaggerated melodrama the *Suppliants*, Theseus accomplished this only after a long and bloody battle (634-730). But this is wrong, said Plutarch. Philochorus (F 112) had shown that not only did Theseus recover the dead by negotiation,[28] he also claimed that this was the foundation of the Greek custom of a truce to recover the slain. Moreover, Plutarch continued, the graves of the commanders are still shown at Eleusis and the correct version had already been written by Aeschylus in the *Eleusinians*.[29]

The rape of Helen (31) gave Plutarch grave difficulties. He didn't want to believe it, and Hellanicus (F 18) had sought to show that at fifty, Theseus was too old for such shenanigans and was not himself responsible for the kidnapping. But the biographer felt compelled to follow the account having the most witnesses: Theseus and Peirithous were guilty; Theseus himself kept Helen hidden away at Aphidnae under his mother's care while the two heroes went off to find Peirithous a woman. We know the copious literary and iconographic allusions to the adventures of Theseus and Peirithous in the underworld trying to abduct Persephone.

But Plutarch wouldn't hear a word of it. Without even mentioning the popular tradition he tells us they invaded the land of the Molossians whose king only called himself Aidoneus, his dog Cerberus, and his wife Persephone.[30] The king killed Peirithous and imprisoned Theseus at just the time that Castor and Pollux came campaigning into Attica to get their sister Helen back. This episode gave Plutarch the opportunity to demonstrate his great learning once more, quoting an antiquarian writer here, the evidence of place names there, etymology, and even Homer's lines (*Il.* 3.144) locating Theseus's mother as Helen's attendant much later at Troy. He used this passage to prove that Aethra must have been captured at Aphidnae.[31]

Plutarch's attempt to rationalize the career of Theseus is carried out to an absurd extreme in his characterization of the hero's political tendency. In the various passages where he described Theseus's "democratic" tendency[32] the biographer took on the impossible task of defining Bronze Age governments in terms of fourth century Athenian politics. But the image of Theseus as founder of Athenian democracy cannot really be blamed on Plutarch. As usual he was taking his political theory straight from Aristotle[33] and although the beginning of the *AP* is lost one can show with fair confidence that the author of the *AP* had indeed blamed the beginnings of popular government on Theseus,[34] although his student Theophrastus portrayed this concept as a parody of oligarchic rhetoric (*Char.* 26.6). It is interesting that Pausanias in this regard was more skeptical than Plutarch. He condemned the popular tradition linking Theseus with Democracy, which he said the Athenians encountered from childhood in tragedies, choruses, and public monuments (1.3.3).

One of the most prominent monuments in central Athens was the Theseion, to which the hero's bones had been brought from Skyros in the 470s.[35] The story of Theseus's death, the oracle demanding his return, and the final recovery and interrment by Cimon was no doubt

told to the curious at this precinct and it may be here that Plutarch heard the information that the hero's bones had been returned four hundred years after his death (*Cimon* 8.7). This is not an old manuscript error because Favorinus gave the same figure in his *De exilio*.[36] This may mean that Plutarch was totally ignoring all the various chronological canons available to scholars in his day. The *Marmor Parium*, for instance, dated Theseus's *synoikismos* and democratic constitution to 1259. And Plutarch himself had dated Lycurgus by Eratosthenes' and Apollodorus's computations to a time quite a bit before the first Olympiad[37] and had, moreover, shown at the very beginning of the *Theseus* that he knew Theseus to be far earlier than Lycurgus. But these discrepancies are unimportant. We know that Plutarch did not like to argue about chronology and that he was not very good at it even when he tried.[38]

Study of these passages allows a few conclusions about Plutarch's treatment of the myths of antiquity. Early societies have in common a belief that everything grand and important has already happened. They have a simple faith in their creation myth and in the legends of the days when gods and heroes walked the earth, taking it for granted that the present, unworthy generation represents just one more step in the continual decline from a Golden Age (e.g., Hesiod, *WD* 109-201). But at some point, as people become better informed about the world they occupy and begin the never ending process of rational inquiry, they perceive the possibility of human progress instead of decline.

At the same time, by the same logic, they are led to suspect a mythic past dominated by supernatural beings and forces. This does not mean that myth is discarded, only that it henceforth must be explained in rational terms. From our vantage we can argue that an attempt to rationalize legends is actually a rather unreasonable way to deal with human creativity.[39] But the rationalists have been in the majority, from Thucydides to the present (cf. Hdt. 3.122.-2 and Thuc. 1.4, 8) and Plutarch was firmly on their side. In the *Theseus* he has made an honest attempt to treat the period as a historical one; therefore all fable, all marvels, all episodes that smacked too much of the supernatural must be avoided, or at least explained in a logical way.

Given these goals, Plutarch found himself in over his depth, although he never seems to have realized it. We can see from our knowledge of a great deal of the tradition about Theseus that most of the material can be classified either as myth or as dimly remembered history perhaps only a few centuries old. There were stories of the supernatural left over from Mycenaean times to which the name of Theseus had attracted itself, including divine birth, fabulous monsters, direct intervention of deities, and so forth. But there are also a lot of tales that seem to come from a not so distant and far more believable past: the union of Attica, a tradition of hostility with Dorian Megara, a rugged and randy baron famous for bashing enemies and carrying off other people's women, perhaps even the maritime venture to Crete. Faced with these two traditions, Plutarch failed to reconcile them. Others writers had noticed the same dichotomy of traditions about other mythical heroes and had solved the problem by proposing two separate persons, one early, one late, and thus dividing up the stories. But this option, if only from an artistic standpoint, was not open to the author of the *Parallel Lives*.[40]

Nevertheless, on balance the *Theseus* must be considered a remarkable piece of research and a most ambitious enterprise for an elderly writer admittedly coming to the end of his labors (1.4). The work is unique in the sense that no extant author of antiquity ever attempted to make a reasonable and sensible history out of the corpus of fables surrounding a legendary figure. Plutarch set himself the task of giving his readers all the respectable versions of each part of the legend (when he was silent it was only because some popular version was *too* well known) as well as the main authorities for the various accounts.

If he was unsuccessful it was only because a *Life* of Theseus after this design was no more possible to write than one of Minos, or Cadmus, or Heracles–although Plutarch wrote one of these, too![41] If the work served only to confuse Sossius Senecio and the other readers for whom it was intended, it is at least invaluable for the modern scholar venturing into the virtually unknown history of early Athens, not least for the tantalizing hints that the real Theseus – the Theseus of human race whose exploits were so important for a formative period

of Attic history—actually lived during Geometric times, where we should perhaps continue to look for him.

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## Appendix I

Plutarch and the Atthidographers, cited by fragment number from F. Jacoby; *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* 3.

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| Philochorus (328) | | | | |
| | F | 17a | *Thes.* | 16.1 |
| | F | 18a | *Thes.* | 35.3 |
| | F | 109 | *Thes.* | 14.3 |
| | F | 110 | *Thes.* | 26.1 |
| | F | 111 | *Thes.* | 17.6 |
| | F | 112 | *Thes.* | 29.4 |
| | F | 135b | *Nic.* | 23.8 |
| | F | 222 | *An Seni* | 785B |
| (TT 4,6 = 345E, 403E are just lists of authors.) | | | | |
| Hellanicus (323a) | | | | |
| | F | 14 | *Thes.* | 17.3 |
| | F | 15 | *Thes.* | 25.7 |
| | F | 16a | *Thes.* | 26.1 |
| | F | 17a | *Thes.* | 27.2 |
| | F | 18 | *Thes.* | 31.1 |
| | F | 24b | *Alcib.* | 21.1 |
| | F | 28 | *De Hdt. Mal* | 869A |
| Cleidemus (323) | | | | |
| | F | 17 | *Thes.* | 19.8 |
| | F | 18 | *Thes.* | 27.3 |
| | F | 21 | *Them.* | 10.6 |
| | F | 22 | *Arist.* | 19.5 |
| Demon (327) | | | | |
| | F | 5 | *Thes.* | 19.3 |
| | F | 6 | *Thes.* | 23.5 |
| Anon. ἐν τοῖς Ἀττικοῖς (329) *Q.c.* 724A (Theseus on Delos) | | | | |
| Bion (332) | | | | |
| | F | 2 | *Thes.* | 26.2 |
| Ister (334) | | | | |
| | F | 7 | *Thes.* | 34.3 |
| | F | 26 | *Alex.* | 46.1 |
| Androtion (324) | | | | |
| | F | 34 | *Solon* | 15.3 |
| Phanodemus (325) | | | | |
| | F | 22 | *Cimon* | 12.6 |
| | F | 23 | *Cimon* | 19.1 |
| | F | 24 | *Them.* | 13.1 |

## Appendix II

Sites of historical interest noted by Plutarch in the *Theseus*.

- 5.1 The *Theseia* at Delphi.
- 12.1 Purification at river Kephissos; cf. Paus. 1.37.4.
- 12.6 Delphinium; cf. 14.1, 18.1; Paus. 1.19.1; Pollux 8.19.
- 17.6 *Heroa* for Nausithous and Phaeax, *hieron* of Sciras in Phaleron. Cf. Paus. 1.1.4; 1.36.4; Hesychius s.v. Oschophoria; Jacoby ad *FGrHist* 328 FF 14-16, 111.
- 23.1 Theseus's ship; cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 58A.
- 25.4 Stele at Isthmus; Strabo 9.1.6.
- 27.6 Stele of Antiope; Paus. 1.2.1.
- 27.7 *Horcomosion*.
- 27.8 Amazon graves in Megara, Chaeroneia, Thessaly.
- 29.4 Graves of the Seven near Eleusis; cf. Paus. 1.39.2; Eur. *Suppl.* 1196sq.
- 32.6 Grave of Halychus, son of Sciron in Megara.
- 35.4 Four *Theseia* left in Attica; cited from Philochorus, 328 F 18a.
- 35.5 *Araterion* at Gargettos; Hesych. s.v. *Araterion*; cf. *Et. Mag.* s.v. *Aratesion* (328 F 19).
- 36.4 The *Theseion* in Athens; Paus. 1.17.2; Other testimonia in R.E. Wycherley, ed., *The Athenian Agora* 3 (Princeton, 1957) nos. 339-62.

## Appendix III

Festivals and other dates mentioned in the *Theseus*. Detailed discussion in L. Deubner, *Attische Feste* (Berlin, 1932); H.W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (London, 1977); Erika Simon, *Festivals of Attica: An Archaeological Commentary* (Madison, 1983).

- 4.1 Sacrifices for Connidas (7 Pyanepsion).
- 12.2 Theseus entered Athens (8 Cronius = Hecatombaion).
- 18.2 He departed for Crete (6 Mounichion).
- 20.3 Ariadne's childbirth on Cyprus (2 Gorpaios).
- 21.2 Delian games (discontinued, cf.. Paus. 8.48.3).
- 22.4-5 Oschophoria, return from Crete (7 Pyanepsion).
- 24.4 Metoikia (16 Hecatombaion).
- 27.2 Amazon battle (7 Boedromion).
- 36.1 The archonship of Phaedon (476/5).
- 36.4 Theseia (8 Pyanepsion).
- 36.5 Theseus arrived from Troizen (8 Hecatombaion).

## NOTES

*Introductory note:* This study is focused on Plutarch's outlook and method and does not pretend to comment in any meaningful way on the complexities of the Theseus-legend except where required by the direction of the inquiry. The fundamental work is now Hans Herter, "Theseus," *RE* Suppl. 13 (1973) 1045-1238; his earlier analyses of the relationship between the legendary Theseus and the Athenian hero are still valuable, "Theseus der Jonier" *RhM* 85 (1936) 177-239; "Theseus der Athener," *RhM* 89 (1939) 244-326, although some of his conclusions have not survived the last four decades of archaeology and the deciphering of Linear B. H. Steuding, "Theseus," in W.H. Roscher, *Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythlogie* 5 (1924) 678-760, is particularly useful for iconographic references.

[1]Strabo 9.1.10; Plutarch, *Solon* 10.1-2; schol. Hom. *Il.* 2.558.

[2]*Il.* 1.265 is omitted in most mss (= Hesiod, *Shield of Heracles* 182); *Od.* 11.631 was inserted by Peisistratus according to Heras of Megara, in F. Jacoby, *FGrHist* 486 F 1 (Plut. *Thes.* 20.2).

[3]E.g., L.H. Jeffery, *Archaic Greece* (New York, 1976) 83-89; a summary of the archaeological evidence in Homer, A. Thompson and R.E. Wycherley, *The Agora of Athens*, the Athenian Agora 14 (Princeton, 1972) 10-20. W.R. Connor, "Theseus in Classical Athens," in Anne G. Ward, ed., *The Quest for Theseus* (New York, 1970) 143-160; Jenifer Neils documents the sudden emergence of an iconography of youthful exploits after 520, *The youthful deeds of Theseus* (Diss. Princeton, 1981), *DA* 41A (1981) 2808; cf. C. Dugas, "L'évolution de la légende de Thésée," *REG* 56 (1943) 1-24. Frank Brommer, "Theseus und Minotauros in der etruskischen Kunst," *MDAI(R)* 88 (1981) 1-12, because of the early and disproportionate frequency of Theseus-Minotaur scenes in Etruscan art believes that that the Minotaur legend was known in Etruria before it was in Attica.

[4]On Plutarch's methods see Frost, *Plutarch's Themistocles, A Historical Commentary* (Princeton, 1980) 40-59, esp. 51.

[5]See Neils, *loc. cit.* (n.3); Steuding, Roscher, *Lex.* V 678ff.; C. Dugas and R. Flacelière, *Thésée, images et récitis* (Paris, 1958) 75ff.

[6]See the *index auctorum*, A. Bauer, F.J. Frost, *Themistokles Testimonia* (Chicago, 1967) 151-53.

[7]This is not an exact science, of course, but I believe the following list is reasonably complete: 5.4 (*Mor.* 180B); 15.2 (520C); 16.2-3 (298F sq.); 21.1 (983E); 21.3 (724A); 31.5 (96C); 35.5 (607A); 36.1-4 (*Cimon* 8).

[8]See Appendix I. Although Herter, *RE* Suppl. 13 1047f., believes that Plutarch used a "biographische Mittelquelle" for other *Lives* (I do not), he admits that Plutarch followed a different method for the special goals of the *Theseus*.

[9]He did, however, use Androtion and Phanodemus only for later, historical periods although the latter, *FGrHist* 325 F 26, schol. Ar. *Vesp.* 1239, did say that Admetus and Alcestis took refuge with Theseus; this story was evidently too contrary to tradition (e.g., Eur. *Alc.*; Apollodorus 1.9.15) for Plutarch to accept.

[10]Pherecydes, *FGrHist* 3 F 150 (19.2); F 151 (26.1); Herodorus, 31 F 25a (26.1); F 26 (29.3); F 27 (30.4); cf. Andron, 10 F 6 (25.6).

[11]K. Ziegler, *Plutarchos von Chaironeia* (Stuttgart-Waldsee, 1949) 290 (= *RE* 21, 928).

[12]See Appendix II.

[13]See Pausanias 1.15.2, 3; 5.19.2-3; on the artists, *Thes.* 4; Paus. 1.3.3; 1.17.2-3; Pliny, *NH* 35, 128.

[14]See Appendix III.

[15]E.g., *Thes.* 22.7; cf. F. Jacoby, *Atthis* 144f.; H.W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* 15f.

[16]"Most writers," e.g., the tradition represented in Diodorus 4.60.4-61.3; Apollodorus 3.209-14; see literature and iconography cited by Steuding, Roscher, *Lex.* V 690-92.

[17]Strabo 6.3.2; Conon, *FGrHist* 26 F 25, in Photius, *Bibl.* 186. On the general tendency to historicize the whole Minoan episode, see Herter, *RE* Suppl. 13, 1128 33.

[18]As noted by my colleague Robert Renehan, "Poet or Plato in Plutarch?" *CP* 79 (1979) 244f.

[19]Paus. 1.17.3; Hyginus *Astron.* 2.5; portrayed, *inter alia*, on a cup by Euphronius in the Louvre and a crater in Bologna (Beazley, *ARV* 214.10, 804.4), see Dugas and Flacelière, *Thésée* pls. 9, 18; Jacoby ad *FGrHist* 323a F 14; Roscher, *Lex.* V 693-97.

[20]In *Thes.* 17.5 Plutarch also cited Simonides as saying that Aegeus gave Theseus a red, instead of a white sail to indicate good news on his return.

[21]Strabo 9.1.9; *Suda* s.v. Scirus; Steph. Byz. s.v.; schol. Ar. *Eccl.* 18; schol. Ar. *Thesm.* 834; etc.

[22]E.g., Pherecydes, *FGrHist* 3 F 148, schol. Hom. *Il.* 11.322; Diod. 4.61.4; Apollodorus, *Epit.* 1.7-9. The essential elements of the story are portrayed on the Rayet skyphos (2nd qtr.6) in the Louvre. On one side Theseus is stabbing the bull-headed monster while on the other side the anxious cloaked figures of the fourteen youths look on; behind Theseus stands Ariadne with the coiled cord; see Dugas and Flaclière, *Thésée* 59 and pl. 1. Even earlier (1st qtr. 6) may be the "Polledrara hydria" in the British Museum, Brommer, *MDAI(R)* 88, 2-3.

[23]Eusebius, *Chron.* ed. Schoene 2.48, in Syncellus (308, 17 Bonn) also cites Philochorus for this rationalizing account (F 17b), contributing the extra detail that this is what "the Knossians say." John of Antioch had more or less the same version, Mueller, *FHG* 4 539.16, possibly reading Plutarch and following his tendency to rationalize, as we shall see again below, ad *Thes.* 31.4 (see n. 30).

[24]According to Hereas of Megara, *FGrHist* 486 F 1.

[25]Probably noted from Aristotle's *Constitution of Delos*, cited by Diogenes Laertius 8.13; cf. Callimachus, *Ap.* 62-64; see Flacelière, "Sur les vies de Plutarque. I. Thésée-Romulus," *REG* 61 (1948) 79f; S. Marinatos, "Le temple géométrique de Dréros," *BCH* 60 (1936) 241-44 describes a similar altar. The remaining horns are mostly from the left side.

[26]*Thes.* 27.2; but the celebration of the date was probably not associated with the Boedromia, which was a festival of Apollo Boedromios; see Parke, *Festivals* 53. Dugas, *REG* 56,16,

shows that there are no extant Attic Amazonomachies involving Theseus prior to the metopes of the Athenian treasury at Delphi, c. 490.

[27] E.g., Euripides, *Hippolytus* and the source of Diod. 4.62; Apollodorus, *Epit.* 1.18-19.

[28] This was the Theban tradition, said Paus. 1.39.2.

[29] *Thes.* 29.4-5. But Plutarch cites his own *Heracles* here to show that Heracles was the first to return the slain under truce; cf. Flacelière, *REG* 61, 82f.

[30] As in Paus. 1.17.4-5 (who said that Thesprotia only looked like Hell); Aelian *VH* 4.5; John of Antioch, Mueller *FHG* 4, 538.1; the traditional version was in Diod. 4.63; Apollodorus, *Epit.* 1.23-24; etc. In ignoring the popular tradition Plutarch uncharacteristically avoided retelling the amusing story about Theseus being tricked into sitting on a certain rock, not knowing it was a magic trap devised by Hades. He immediately stuck to the rock and remained there until finally Heracles tore him away. But much of his buttocks remained stuck to the rock (ouch), and Athenians have ever since had tiny behinds; schol. Ar. *Eq.* 1368; *Suda* s.v. *lispoi*.

[31] *Thes.* 32.2-34; cf. *comp. Thes.-Rom.* 6.1. Some of the complexity of this episode can be appreciated in Herter's analysis, *RhM* 85, 193-98.

[32] 25.3, cf. 35.4, *comp. Thes.-Rom.* 2.1.

[33] See my comments in *Historia* 13 (1964) 387; *CSCA* 1 (1968) 110; Flacelière, *Plutarque, Vies* 2 (1961) 6f.; Zeigler, *Plutarchos* 284; there were earlier hints of Theseus the democrat-king in tragedy and art, Herter, *RE* Suppl. 13, 1217f.

[34] See P. Rhodes, *Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia* (Oxford, 1981) 74f.

[35] *Thes.* 36.4; the site of the Theseion is still a matter of dispute, J. Travlos, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Athens* 578f.; Thompson and Wycherley, *Agora* 14, 124-26.

[36] *De exilio* 8.22 (M. Norsa and G. Vitelli, eds., *P. Vat.Gr.* 11, Vatican, 1931): τετρακοσίοις ὕστερον ἔτεσιν νεκρὸν ἐκ Σκύρου κατήγαγον, i.e., a date of c. 876 instead of, say, 1276. Herter, *RE* Suppl. 13 1198 says that Favorinus was following Plutarch but there is no evidence for this, particularly since Plutarch gave the date in the *Cimon* and not the *Theseus*, where Favorinus would presumably have turned first for information.

[37] *Lycurgus* 1.3; cf. Flacelière, *REG* 61, 391-93.

[38] E.g., *Solon* 27.1; *Themistocles* 27.1-2; see my remarks ad loc in *Plutarch's Themistocles* 213-15.

[39] The classic criticism is that of Socrates, Plato, *Phaedrus* 229c-e; Eratosthenes' scornful dismissal of those who learnedly dispute the route of Odysseus's wanderings (Strabo 1.2.15). This is an enormously complex question and I evade it by referring to Jasper Griffin's review of Paul Veyne, *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leur mythes*? (Paris, 1983) in *TLS* 22 Apr 83: 398.

[40] Timaeus had once proposed two Lycurgi, in Plut. *Lyc.* 1.4, *FGrHist* 566 F 127; see also two Minoes in *Thes.* 20.8; Diod. 4.60.3.

[41] *Thes.* This lost *Life* also included an ingenious calculation of Heracles' physical measurements, Aulus Gellius *NA* 1.1.

# Plutarch's Pythagorean Friends

Whatever Pythagoreanism's fate after the fourth century B.C., some three centuries later Pythagoreans or individuals interested in Pythagorica began to appear again. According to Cicero, it was the Roman P. Nigidius Figulus who renewed Pythagorean teaching which, after flourishing for some generations in Italy and Sicily, somehow became extinct.[1] Varro was buried in "Pythagorean fashion" (Plin. *N. h.* 35. 160); King Juba II of Mauretania collected Pythagorean writings and was thus exploited by clever forgers; the Alexandrians Eudorus and Sotion took great interest in Pythagoreanism; in the first and second centuries A.D. figures such as Thrasyllus, Moderatus, Apollonius of Tyana, and Numenius of Apamea appear as Pythagoreans.[2]

Since Plutarch lived (ca. A.D. 45-125) when Pythagoreanism was once more in vogue, it is not surprising that some of his friends or possible acquaintances were Pythagoreans. In his discussion of Plutarch's "circle of friends" ("Freundeskreis"), K. Ziegler refers to several as Pythagoreans: Alexicrates, Boethus (in his youth), Erato, Hermeias, Lucius of Etruria, Menelaus, Moderatus, and Philinus.[3] Some scholars would also consider Plutarch's own teacher, Ammonius, a Pythagorean, or at least influenced by Pythagorean doctrines.[4] The list seems impressive. Yet Ziegler himself remarks that Alexicrates and Moderatus appear only "in the background" ("im Hintergrund") of Plutarch's works.[5] Moreover, Menelaus, "the mathematician," appears only in *De fac. in orb. lun.* as someone addressed by Lucius at 930A, and otherwise takes no part in the extant dialogue.

There also seem to be no convincing reasons to regard Boethus, Erato, and Hermeias as "Pythagoreans." Boethus appears consistently as an Epicurean at *Quaest. conviv.* 673C and 720E-F where in the latter passage he mentions his youthful interest in geometry, hardly a reason for considering him a former Pythagorean. The "musician" Erato appears in several symposia (3.102 and 9.1 and 14), but again there seems nothing especially Pythagorean about him or his beliefs. Evidence that Hermeias, "the geometer,"

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