

Damasias and Thales: *stasis* and *sophia* at the term of Solon's *apodemia*

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Abstract: This paper addresses an obscure aspect surrounding Solon's activity, which occurred after his political and legislative activity and before his opposition to Pisistratus' moves towards tyranny. It tackles, more specifically, the way in which Solon may have been indirectly involved (as a politician but also as a *sophos*) in a triangle of interests that would include, besides himself, two personalities associated with a period of *stasis* (Damasias) and with the status of *sophos* (Thales). In order to achieve this goal, the present study combines two different approaches: it first analyses the historical circumstances that marked Athens during the period immediately after Solon's legislation, until the moment when Damasias held the archonship, and then clung to office for a further year and two months; it then discusses the testimony of Demetrius of Phalerum (quoted by Diogenes Laertius, 1.22), according to whom Thales was named for the first time *sophos* during the archonship of Damasias.

Keywords: *stasis*, *sophos*, Solon, Damasias, Thales, Demetrius of Phalerum.

Throughout his life, Solon intervened at different times in the Athenian political scene, usually against a backdrop of great civil instability (*stasis*). His political skills, as well as the image of a serious statesman and the symbolism that went along with some of his gestures, helped to create consistency in the image of the *sophos*—that same image that posterity would use to immortalise him, turning him into one of the most paradigmatic and fascinating personalities of the group of the Seven Sages. It is the intent of this paper to address a lesser-known aspect of Solon's activity, which occurred after his legislative activity and before the opposition he is said to have made to Pisistratus' moves towards autocratic rule. The study approaches, in particular, the way in which Solon may have been indirectly involved (as a politician but also as a *sophos*) in a triangle of interests that would include, besides himself, two personalities associated with a period of *stasis* and with the status of *sophos*, respectively Damasias and Thales.¹

¹ This paper resumes and expands on a first approach to this topic published originally in Portuguese, in Leão (2010a); Ferreira and Leão (2010, 83–91). In its current version, it is framed within the project “Crises (*staseis*) and changes (*metabolai*). The Athenian democracy in contemporary times”, supported by CAPES (Brazil) and FCT (Portugal) (2019–2022), and also within the “Rome our Home: (Auto)biographical Tradition and the

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1. Historical background: *stasis* after Solon's reforms

According to tradition, Solon would have undertaken a long journey (*apodemia*) after finishing his legislative activity.² The accounts of his journeys to the East must be genuine, although not all the meetings recorded by the sources took place. This is the case of the visit to Croesus, in Sardis, and to Amasis, in Egypt, both of which are unlikely in chronological terms.³ Nevertheless, it seems fairly certain that the Greek lawgiver passed through Egypt, as his poetry attests (frg. 28 West). Moreover, according to tradition, Solon would have encountered the myth of Atlantis there, and Plutarch (*Sol.* 26.1) even gives the name of the priests who told it to him. However, there are legitimate suspicions that this information, which comes from Plato (cf. *Ti.* 21–7; *Criti.* 108d, 113a–b), is of no historical value. Theoretically, things may have happened as stated, but there are also strong probabilities that Plato invented the whole episode in order to give more dignity to the *Atlantikos logos*.⁴ As for another encounter, this time with Philocyprus, it seems plausible that it can have occurred, since the chronological difficulties are not insurmountable and the journey finds support in Solon's poetry (frg. 19 West).

However, for the purposes of the present analysis, rather than identifying the places where the legislator travelled, it is more important to make some considerations about the causes that led to the *apodemia*. Herodotus (1.29), the *Athenaion Politeia* (11.1) and Plutarch (*Sol.* 25.6) agree that the journey took place after the legislative activity had ended and that its real motive was the desire to avoid pressure to change the law code that Solon had just implemented.⁵ They also generally

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² In 593 or at the latest in 591, if one admits Hammond's thesis concerning the time lapse between the implementation of emergency measures and the legislative work itself. This proposal is first made in Hammond (1940) and republished, with additions, in Hammond (1973, 145–69). For an analysis of this question, see Leão (2001, 268–75, esp. 272–3).

³ For a recent discussion on those traditions, especially the details respecting the (possible) meeting of Solon and Croesus, see Porciani (2016); Gazzano (2016); Wallace (2016). As highlighted by Leão (2020, 273–4), when discussing the chronological problems in question, “the effecting of such a meeting may be more or less credible from a temporal angle, but its cultural impact does not necessarily stem from the greater or lesser historical accuracy that can be conceded to it: its force actually lies in the fact that it became a civilizational paradigm and, in this viewpoint, its significance even overcomes any constraint that could be imposed from a chronological reconstruction”.

⁴ So believes Morgan (1998, 108–14), for whom the philosopher's use of the figure of the legislator is part of the dynamics of the *patrios politeia* theme. According to Davies (1971, 325), what Plato really “needed was a bridge-passage which would serve as a natural introduction of the name of Solon and present him as the authority for the myth of Atlantis”. On the tradition, also of Platonic origin (*Ti.* 21c–d), that Solon had begun to compose in verse an account of Atlantis, see the commentary by Manfredini and Piccirilli (1998, 279–80). On the tradition of the Seven Sages and Plato, see Leão (2010b).

⁵ Diogenes Laertius' version (1.50), according to which the *apodemia* took place after the instauration of Pisistratus' tyranny, is improbable, because it clearly serves the idea that Solon

accept that the legislator had justified the journey by invoking secondary motivations, sometimes recreational and cultural, sometimes commercial. Finally, they all set the period of absence at ten years and agree that the Athenians had committed themselves, during that time, to respect the recently enacted laws.⁶ They differ, however, on the period of validity of the laws: Herodotus points out only ten years, the same as the *apodemia*, which makes one think that he had deduced this number from the period of duration of the journey; the *Athenaion Politeia* and Plutarch coincide by holding that the bond extended for one hundred years, which would probably be equivalent to saying that the laws were destined to an unlimited durability. Despite these positions of principle, it is certain that the years following Solon's archonship would continue to be marked by a climate of strong political unrest (*stasis*). The recognition of this reality does not imply necessarily that the reforms had failed, since Solon's constitution and laws would remain virtually unchanged until the deposition, in 510, of Pisistratus's son (Hippias).⁷ Such a scenario shows, however, that social pacification was still far from being achieved and that Athens would not shy away from the experience of autocratic rule.

The sources available for the reconstitution of this period are not very abundant and often raise complex problems of harmonisation of information. It is not within the scope of this study to deal with this complex issue, but only to evoke the circumstances that marked a specific period: the archonship of Damasias and the way in which it can be articulated with the tradition of the Seven Wise Men in general and with the figure of Thales in particular. As a starting point, one can take the moment when the author of the *Athenian Constitution* mentions the social atmosphere in Athens when Solon left Attica (*Ath.* 13.1–2):

τὴν μὲν οὖν ἀποδημίαν ἐποιήσατο διὰ ταύτας τὰς αἰτίας. Σόλωνος δ' ἀποδημήσαντος, ἔτι τῆς πόλεως τεταραγμένης ἐπὶ μὲν ἔτη τέτταρα διήγον ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ· τῷ δὲ πέμπτῳ μετὰ τὴν Σόλωνος ἀρχὴν οὐ κατέστησαν ἄρχοντα διὰ τὴν στάσιν, καὶ πάλιν ἔτει πέμπτῳ διὰ τὴν αὐτὴν αἰτίαν ἀναρχίαν ἐποίησαν. μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα διὰ τῶν αὐτῶν χρόνων Δαμασίας αἰρεθεὶς ἄρχων ἔτη δύο καὶ δύο μῆνας ἤρξεν, ἕως ἐξηλάθη βία τῆς ἀρχῆς. εἴτ' ἔδοξεν αὐτοῖς διὰ τὸ στασιάζειν ἄρχοντας

could not live under an autocratic regime. Moreover, it faces insuperable chronological difficulties by implying too low a dating for the year of the lawgiver's death.

⁶ Herodotus is the most peremptory, stating that "they were bound by solemn oaths" (1.29: ὀρκίοισι γὰρ μεγάλοισι κατείχοντο); the Aristotelian treatise uses the visual term "locked" (*Ath.* 7.2: κατέκλεισεν); Plutarch speaks of "attributed validity" (*Sol.* 25.1: ἰσχύον... ἔδωκε).

⁷ In fact, the sources agree that, although Pisistratus reserved the most important posts for his supporters, he kept the moderate forms of Solon's constitution, while maintaining the existing laws. Cf. Herodotus, 1.59.6; Thucydides, 6.54.6; Plutarch, *Sol.* 31.3. 31.3. The contrasting statement of *Ath.* 22.1 (καὶ γὰρ συνέβη τοὺς μὲν Σόλωνος νόμους ἀφανίσαι τὴν τυραννίδα διὰ τὸ μὴ χρῆσθαι: "for it happened that the tyranny had consigned Solon's laws to oblivion by not using them") may be a sign that the tyrants used their influence to grant that, while keeping Solon's institutions, they were able to get the results they wanted. Here and elsewhere throughout the paper, the English translation of the *Athenaion Politeia* is that of Rhodes (2017).

ἐλέσθαι δέκα, πέντε μὲν εὐπατριδῶν, τρεῖς δὲ ἀγροίκων, δύο δὲ δημιουργῶν, καὶ οὗτοι τὸν μετὰ Δαμασίαν ἤρξαν ἐνιαυτόν. ᾧ καὶ δῆλον ὅτι μεγίστην εἶχεν δύναμιν ὁ ἄρχων· φαίνονται γὰρ αἰεὶ στασιάζοντες περὶ ταύτης τῆς ἀρχῆς.

Solon made his foreign journey (*apodemia*) for that reason. While he was journeying, and the city was still in a state of upheaval, they remained at peace for four years, but in the fifth year after Solon's archonship they did not appoint an archon because of their dissension (*stasis*); and again in the fifth year after that for the same reason they had a year without an archon (*anarchia*). After the same interval of time after that Damasias when appointed archon held office for two years and two months, until he was ejected from his office by force. Then they decided on account of their dissension (*stasiazein*) to appoint ten archons, five from the *eupatridai*, three from the rustics (*agroikoi*) and two from the craftsmen (*demiourgoi*); and these held office for the year after Damasias. From this it is clear that the archon had the greatest power, for it is evident that their dissension (*stasiizontes*) was always focussed on this office.

The atmosphere of unrest recorded in the passage is in line with the idea that Solon—as the legislator himself acknowledges in his poems (e.g. frg. 34 West; cf. *Ath.* 11–2)—had somehow disappointed the expectations that had been placed in him, some because they anticipated more profound changes, others because they felt he had gone too far. After a few years of relative calm, there is a clear sign of instability in the fact that twice the post of eponymous archon was left unfilled. Taking the year of Solon's archonship (594/3) as a reference, these two periods of *anarchia* would have occurred in 590/89 and 586/5. In addition, the author of the *Athenaion Politeia* records the name of a certain Damasias,⁸ who had first held the office of archon legitimately, perhaps in 582/1, but was to remain in that post illegally for two years and two months, thus until the first two months of 580/79. This shows that Damasias was quite likely aspiring to tyranny, taking as a starting point the projection achieved through the archonship, which was at that time a magistracy with great influence, as the author of the treatise points out in the final part of the passage under examination (ᾧ καὶ δῆλον ὅτι μεγίστην εἶχεν δύναμιν ὁ ἄρχων).⁹

⁸ It must be Damasias the Younger, perhaps a relative of another Damasias, archon in 639/8, and therefore it is to be believed that he was of aristocratic origin. See Cadoux (1948, 91, 94 and 102 n. 162). The use of the term ἀρεθεῖς to indicate the manner in which Damasias was appointed to office has led some scholars to admit the hypothesis that, in post-Solon times, archons were elected in a direct manner, thus contradicting the application of the *klerosis ek prokriton*, a mechanism which would have been instituted by this legislator and which combined the drawing of lots with the pre-selection of a small number of candidates (cf. *Ath.* 8.1). Rhodes (1981, 182) does not however see a contradiction between the two statements, holding that terms such as ἀρεθεῖς (and by extension also ἐλέσθαι) can have a sense close to “appoint”, in contexts where it is not specified how this appointment takes place.

⁹ This observation also serves to set the comparison with the loss of political influence that would characterise this magistracy in the mid-fifth century (cf. *Ath.* 22.5).

Although secondary to the topic of this study, it is nonetheless pertinent to underline the way in which the *anarchia* was resolved, through the appointment of ten archons to replace Damasias, according to the following composition: five *eupatridai*, three *agroikoi* and two *demiourgoi*. Apart from the discussion about the significance of this college of magistrates and the exact social nature of the *agroikoi* and *demiourgoi* (who are perhaps to be identified with the occupational classes of “peasants” and “craftsmen” or “merchants”, respectively), one thing at least seems certain: half of the appointed archons did not belong to the *eupatridai* group. It is possible that this corresponded to a momentary concession aimed at calming tempers, but it may also be an indication of the proportion of non-aristocratic citizens who, after Solon’s reform, would at least be among the class of *hippeis*.¹⁰ This being the case, the legislator’s reforms were beginning to bear their first fruit, in terms of the rearrangement of the civic body and access to power, slowly transforming aristocratic exclusivism. The *Athenaion Politeia* is silent as to how the designation of the eponymous archon continued thereafter. From this silence, however, it is not unlikely to deduce that the process prior to Damasias’ attempted coup was resumed. The composition of the ten archons nominated to replace him in power would indicate not that the office of eponymous archon passed to a college of ten members, but rather that the citizens qualified to occupy that magistracy would be divided proportionally among the *eupatridai*, *agroikoi* and *demiourgoi*.

Damasias’ political purposes were not, therefore, successful, since he was not able to establish a long-lasting tyranny, as Pisistratus would begin to do about two decades later. Moreover, according to a widespread tradition, Solon opposed the first attempt of Pisistratus to install the tyranny, which implies that, although he was old, he was still alive in 561/60.¹¹ There is no major reason to doubt this information, since in his poems the old lawgiver repeatedly warns his fellow citizens against the real threat of tyranny¹², a fact which shows that he was making a correct reading of Pisistratus’ moves at a time when he would have already returned from his decennial *apodemia*. Moreover, if the genuine character of the tradition is accepted, this political resistance on the part of the

¹⁰ Vide Cadoux (1948, 102–3); Wade-Gery (1958, 100–4); Develin (1979, 464–5); Figueira (1984). In this composition of the ten archons, it is not necessary to see a return to the pre-Solonian classes (the nature of which raises serious doubts), but rather the confirmation of the applicability of the criterion of income to the new census classes, as a way of qualifying access to power.

¹¹ Cf. *Ath.* 14.2; Plutarch, *Sol.* 30.6; Diogenes Laertius, 1.49; Valerius Maximus, 5.3. On the ambivalence of the relationship between Solon and Pisistratus, see Leão (2008).

¹² Frgs. 9, 10 and 11 are presented in their testimonies as warnings against the tyranny of Pisistratus, either when it was only a threat or when it was already a reality. Despite this and as Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010, 309–11) rightly states, although the testimonies favour the identification of the threat with Pisistratus, an expression like ἀνδρῶν δ’ ἐκ μεγάλων (frg. 9.3) can designate broadly the aristocrats whom the *demos* has incautiously raised to power. See also Leão (2015, 231–35).

old legislator would have been his last great public gesture, given that Solon would die shortly afterwards.¹³

2. Damasias and Thales: the “aspiring” tyrant and the first “formal” *sophos*

It is a well-known fact that, in the tradition of the Seven Wise Men, Solon occupies a central position, with the famous debate between Solon and Croesus about the notion of happiness—which, although improbable from the historical point of view, had a wide ethical use throughout antiquity—standing out in particular from the range of episodes linked to his figure.¹⁴ For the present study, however, of more interest are the reports that sought to link Solon and Thales, especially when these reports also involved the city of Athens. In fact, Plutarch (*Sol.* 6) uses Hermippus as *Mittelquelle* to narrate an episode that would date back to Pataecus. According to the account, Thales would have given the Athenian legislator the false news of the death of his own son to demonstrate—to a Solon overwhelmed by the anguish of loss—the reason that had led Thales not to marry and not to want offspring, since both were sources of disquiet. Although the story is certainly fictional, it has nevertheless enjoyed a certain fortune, as it contributes to the definition of the *ethos* of a wise man.¹⁵ The episode narrated by Plutarch puts Solon in Miletus, visiting Thales, at a time when, in Athens, the legislator already enjoyed the reputation of being a wise man, who distinguished himself by a sense of justice (*Sol.* 6.5: πολὺς λόγος ἦν αὐτοῦ σοφίας καὶ δικαιοσύνης). Therefore, the most obvious implication would be to suppose that the meeting in Miletus would appear placed during the *apodemia* of Solon. Those journeys made after the legislative activity would give, in fact, the most natural framework for the meeting of the Seven Wise Men and also for the attempt to define which of them would be the most important. This is, moreover, the etiological context that lies at the basis of the well-known episode of the tripod, which was destined for the *sophos* who had the supremacy among the Wise, but which circulated among the sages until it was finally dedicated to Apollo. Although Thales is not always the first recipient of the tripod, he still often appears as the great figurehead among the *sophoi*.¹⁶

It is in this context of the relationship between *sophoi* that the connection to Athens and Damasias finds a somewhat surprising testimony which, for this very reason, is worth discussing in more detail. Diogenes Laertius is responsi-

¹³ Between 560 and 559. Cf. Plutarch, *Sol.* 32.3.

¹⁴ On the afterlife of Croesus’ debate with Solon, from the Herodotean paradigm and its reception and reshaping to the time of Diogenes Laertius, see the discussion by Leão (2020).

¹⁵ Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 1.63, who quotes Dioscorides on the same subject; Tzetzes, *Chil.* 5.359–75.

¹⁶ The testimonies concerning the circulation of the tripod are collected in Martina (1968, 58–66). Martin (1998, 119–20), calls attention to the fact that the dispute over the tripod confirms the existence of an early tradition of the Seven Sages’ stories as “performers of wisdom”, because a competition (even if only symbolic) always demands other players.

ble for the transmission of the information, whose origin would date back to Demetrius of Phaleron, whom he expressly quotes (1.22):

<ἦν δὲ τῶν ἑπτὰ σοφῶν,> καθὰ καὶ Πλάτων φησί· καὶ πρῶτος σοφὸς ὠνομάσθη ἄρχοντος Ἀθήνησι Δαμασίου, καθ' ὃν καὶ οἱ ἑπτὰ σοφοὶ ἐκλήθησαν, ὡς φησι Δημήτριος ὁ Φαληρεὺς ἐν τῇ τῶν Ἀρχόντων ἀναγραφῇ.

He [Thales] was one of the Seven Wise Men, as Plato says too (*Prot.* 343a); and he was the first to be called “Wise” (*sophos*), during Damasias’ archonship at Athens. At that time the Seven Wise Men too got their name, as Demetrius of Phalerum says in his *List of Archons*.¹⁷

This testimony is quite significant because it seeks to define a specific date for the formal investiture of Thales as *sophos*, as well as for the delimitation of the group of Seven Wise Men. Demetrius makes both events coincide with the year of the celebration of the first Pythian Games, as can be deduced from the corresponding entry in the *Marmor Parium*.¹⁸ Given the well-known relationship between Delphic morality and the tradition of the Seven Wise Men, the advantages of associating the first Pythian Games—dedicated to Apollo—with the consecration of the figure of the Wise Men as a group become evident. This dating of 582/1 would thus have some interest for understanding the way in which the wisdom literature was enriched with new details. It is precisely in this respect that the reference to Damasias, in a work in which Demetrius is focussed on reconstituting the official list of Athenian archons, stimulates further reflection. In fact, not only would the date of these events coincide with the year of Damasias’ legitimate mandate, but also the consecration of Thales as *sophos* would have taken place specifically “in Athens” (Ἀθήνησι).¹⁹ This interpretation of the passage is decisive for the reflections that follow. If one understands, on the contrary, that the testimony indicates only that Damasias was at that time archon “in Athens”, then it is merely a detail to establish relative chronology, which does not imply a connection between Thales and Athens. However, if Demetrius of Phalerum, who had been ruler in Athens, was making the *List of Archons*, it would not make sense for him to have to specify that Damasias was archon “in Athens”, because it was already implicit. Therefore, the specification Ἀθήνησι would mean that Thales was invested as *sophos* in Athens, an interpretation that may carry a significant political value, and shed some light on the period of *stasis* that was to follow.

Before moving in that direction, it would be advantageous to examine in more detail the information, conveyed in the above quoted passage of Diogenes

¹⁷ The original text and the translation of the passages are provided according to Fortenbaugh and Schütrumpf (2000, 174–75).

¹⁸ See Mosshammer (1976, 165–66); Busine (2002, 40–1).

¹⁹ Schubert and Weiß (2009, 338) maintain that it was Demetrius who fixed in 582/1 an “Inaugurationsdatum” for the chronology of the *sophoi*.

Laertius, according to which Plato had claimed that Thales was one of the Seven Wise Men (1.22: ἦν δὲ τῶν ἑπτὰ σοφῶν, καθὰ καὶ Πλάτων φησί).²⁰ Diogenes is certainly referring to the passage in which Plato mentions the Sages as a group (*Prt.* 342e–43b):

τοῦτο οὖν αὐτὸ καὶ τῶν νῦν εἰσὶν οἱ κατανεοήκασι καὶ τῶν πάλαι, ὅτι τὸ λακωνίζειν πολὺ μᾶλλον ἐστὶν φιλοσοφεῖν ἢ φιλογυμναστεῖν, εἰδότες ὅτι τοιαῦτα οἷόν τ' εἶναι ῥήματα φθέγγεσθαι τελέως πεπαιδευμένου ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπου. τούτων ἦν καὶ Θαλῆς ὁ Μιλήσιος καὶ Πιττακὸς ὁ Μυτιληναῖος καὶ Βίας ὁ Πριηνεὺς καὶ Σόλων ὁ ἡμέτερος καὶ Κλεόβουλος ὁ Λίνδιος καὶ Μύσων ὁ Χηνεὺς, καὶ ἔβδομος ἐν τούτοις ἔλέγετο Λακεδαιμόνιος Χίλων. οὗτοι πάντες ζηλωταὶ καὶ ἐρασταὶ καὶ μαθηταὶ ἦσαν τῆς Λακεδαιμονίων παιδείας, καὶ καταμάθοι ἂν τις αὐτῶν τὴν σοφίαν τοιαύτην οὔσαν, ῥήματα βραχέα ἀξιομνημόνευτα ἐκάστω εἰρημμένα· οὗτοι καὶ κοινῇ συνελθόντες ἀπαρχὴν τῆς σοφίας ἀνέθεσαν τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι εἰς τὸν νεῶν τὸν ἐν Δελφοῖς, γράψαντες ταῦτα ἃ δὴ πάντες ὑμνοῦσιν, Γνωθὶ σαυτὸν καὶ Μηδὲν ἄγαν. τοῦ δὴ ἔνεκα ταῦτα λέγω; ὅτι οὗτος ὁ τρόπος ἦν τῶν παλαιῶν τῆς φιλοσοφίας, βραχυλογία τις Λακωνική.

Now there are some, both of earlier times and of our own day, who have seen that admiration of Sparta is much more a matter of learning than of gymnastics, and who know that the ability to utter sayings of that kind is the mark of a perfectly educated man. Thales of Miletus was one, Pittacus of Mytilene another, Bias of Priene, our own Solon, Cleobulus of Lindos, Myson of Chen(ae); the Spartan Chilon was counted as the seventh. All of these were admirers, devotees, and students of the Spartan education, and you can see that their own wisdom is of that kind, as each is the author of some brief, memorable sayings. And not only that, but they joined together to make an offering to Apollo at his temple in Delphi of the fruits of their wisdom, and inscribed there those familiar maxims “Know thyself” and “Nothing in excess”. What, then, is the point of all this? The point is that that was the form of expression of the wisdom of former times, a Laconian brevity (translated by Taylor 1976).

The most important thing about this passage is that it provides the first complete list of Seven Wise Men. A possible sign that Plato was innovating in supplying the full *sylloge* in writing is given by the fact that the philosopher presents “l'intégralité des sept noms et leurs ethniques respectifs” (Busine 2002, 33–4). Still according to A. Busine, if this was not the case, it would seem more spontaneous to refer to the Sages by simply using the expression *hepta sophoi*, which would later become the usual designation. This argument has certain pertinence, but is not conclusive by itself: in reality, much later than Plato, Diogenes (1.41–2) provides the name of more than twenty *sophoi* and he sometimes keeps using the ethnic identification and even the patronymic when referring to well-known personalities. Even though, it is an undeniable fact that the earliest surviving

²⁰ This section resumes part of the arguments used in Leão (2010b, 409–13).

reference to the *sylloge* is the passage under discussion, but this does not imply that Plato was himself creating the legend of the Seven Wise Men, as has already been sustained (especially by Fehling 1985, 9–19). On the contrary, Herodotus already mentions these names, with the exception of Cleobulus and Myson, although he presents them in association with other personalities or events, and not as a group. It is a fact that the number seven is present in many other accounts and cultures, whose origin is lost in time, but even in Greek culture there are several examples of the use of this same symbolic figure before Plato. In Homer, an elder warrior who is well-known for the sagacity of his words—Nestor—forms a kind of intimate council around Agamemnon together with other six elite warriors (*II*. 2.402–9). In 467, Aeschylus produced a trilogy that dealt with the house of the Labdacids, to which belonged the surviving drama *Seven against Thebes*. Although not usually mentioned in the context of the Seven Wise Men, an example can be added that is synchronous with the most important Sages: a poem composed by Solon (frg. 27 West) in which the human life is divided in ten periods of seven years. It is worth noting that the traces of this concept are once again present in Herodotus, in the conversation between Solon and Croesus (1.32.2; cf. also Diogenes Laertius, 1.55). This example has the advantage of suggesting that the idea of a *sylloge* of Seven Sages could have had its origins in the use of the hebdomads' structure by one of the most charismatic *sophoi*.

Despite these arguments, it remains a fact that Plato's testimony was influential and that it gave, at least, a definitive contribution in order to provide literary visibility to the notion of the *sylloge*. By the beginning of the fourth century BC, the concept was already canonical and led naturally to the idea of synchronism of the Seven Sages, who were thought to have lived around one hundred years before the Persian Wars. This approximation may have been used as a basis for estimating the *akme* of Thales and the date of other personalities and events, like the establishment of the Pythian Games. As mentioned above, this was possibly the reasoning behind the calculation of Demetrius of Phalerum (see Mosshammer 1976, 177–78).

Another aspect that deserves attention is the detail that the *sophoi* are presented in the *Protagoras*' passage as appreciators or as a product—as Chilon—of the Spartan education, whose brevity of speech (*brachylogia*) is an object of admiration and indirectly opposed to the rhetoric ability of the sophists, the so-called new *savants*. This pro-Spartan presentation may in fact justify the reason why Periander was left aside, because he represented the kind of tyrannical government traditionally opposed by the Spartans.²¹ Nevertheless, Pittacus and Cleobulus were included in the group and this option has probably to do with the fact that, unlike Periander, they both were not marked by the excessive and violent behaviour of the typical tyrants.²² The mistrust towards tyranny is found

²¹ Cf. Herodotus (1.59.2–3), who says that Chilon advised the father of Pisistratus not to have any children, in order to prevent tyranny.

²² The group of *sophoi* assembled by Plutarch in his *Septem Sapientium Convivium* is very similar to the list presented in Plato's *Protagoras*. In fact, although Plato has Anacharsis replaced by

in other parts of Plato's work, the best-known passage being *Republic* 335e–36a, where, to the wisdom of figures like Simonides, Bias and Pittacus, he opposes the image of personalities inebriated by wealth, in a group headed precisely by Periander, but where Perdiccas, Xerxes and Ismenias of Thebes are also present.

Similarly significant is the fact that, in the text under analysis, Plato says that the Sages assembled together in the Delphic temple in order to devote to Apollo the first-fruits of their *sophia*.²³ This detail contributes to support the explanation, suggested already at the beginning of this section, that the development of the tradition of the Seven Wise Men was directly linked with Delphic morality, as is shown by the anecdote of the tripod, the story of Croesus or the connection between the Pythian Games and the synchronism of the Sages. As the passage of the *Protagoras* illustrates, some of the most famous maxims inscribed in the atrium of the temple to Apollo were attributed to the Sages who passed through the court of the Lydian king, and thus the advice for moderation that can be seen, for example, turning up in the conversation between the Herodotean Solon and Croesus, became mixed with the moral principles of the oracle.²⁴

Finally, the prominent place given to Solon in the list has probably a symbolic value and demands some further inquiry. In fact, Solon is the only *sophos* whose regional origin is not supplied; rather he is designated by Socrates as “our own Solon” (Σόλων ὁ ἡμέτερος). This detail is in accord with the central position that Solon occupies in the group of the Sages, and suggests that Athenian influence may have played an important role in establishing the main lines of the tradition.²⁵ This was already quite visible in Herodotus and is again confirmed by Plato, in the *Timaeus*, where a significant reference is made to the ancient legislator, who is considered to be “the wisest of the Seven Sages” (20d: ὡς ὁ τῶν ἑπτὰ σοφώτατος). If one takes into consideration that this dialogue was written after the *Protagoras*, then it could be meaningful that, this time, Plato felt that it was no longer necessary to provide the whole *sylloge*, because it became meanwhile established that they were a group of seven (see Busine 2002, 36).

At any rate, in Plato's time Solon was increasingly becoming an object of ideological dispute. Moreover, at least after the last quarter of the fifth century, the old statesman was considered a paradigmatic figure with growing importance at a propagandistic level. This circumstance had the advantage of attracting to him

Myson, both authors include the names of Pittacus and Cleobulus, leaving Periander aside. On the reasons why Pittacus and Cleobulus were kept as *sophoi* in Plutarch's *Convivium*, see Leão (2009, 512–17).

²³ As Diogenes Laertius remarks (1.40), there were other possible places for the meeting.

²⁴ E.g. Plato, *Chrm.* 164d–65a; Pausanias, 10.24.1; Diogenes Laertius, 1.63. Stobaeus, *Anth.* 3.1.172 preserved a listing of “Sayings of the Seven Wise Men by Demetrius of Phalerum” (Δημητρίου Φαληρέως τῶν ἑπτὰ σοφῶν ἀποφθέγματα), in which are sayings by Cleobulus, Solon, Chilon, Thales, Pittacus, Bias and Periander. Greek text with translation available at Fortenbaugh and Schütrumpf (2000, 154–65).

²⁵ A fact still visible in Plutarch's *Convivium*, as shown by the importance attributed in it to the old legislator and to the democratic regime in terms of political discussion.

the attention of many other authors, but conversely it also stimulated legendary amplification. In fact, this propensity to the ideological exploitation of a historical personality was favoured by the ups and downs of the Peloponnesian War, which stimulated the emergence, in the spirit of the Athenians, of a passionate and revivalist vision of their constitutional history, substantiated in the blurred ideology of the *patrios politeia*. Among the personalities (and even institutions) that suffered propagandistic exploitation during the fifth and fourth centuries, the name of the ancient Athenian legislator occurs quite often.²⁶

In this context, it is time to return to Demetrius of Phalerum, who was notorious as a student and associate of Theophrastus, and especially as an eminent politician and philosopher of the *Peripatos*, representing as well the last really significant *nomothetes* in Athens, in the line of Draco and Solon, as he apparently liked to be represented, unfolding his legal activity within the frame of the long-lasting debate over the *patrios politeia*.²⁷ Therefore, if Solon was the most emblematic *sophos* and if there was some kind of “legislative affinity” between Demetrius and him (in the sense of being both representatives of good *nomothetai*), one may wonder why the Phalereus have bothered to maintain that Thales was the first to be considered formally a *sophos*, instead of “our own Solon” (Σόλων ὁ ἡμέτερος), to put in the terms used by Plato.²⁸ A reason for that is that Demetrius intended to be impartial; another perhaps more plausible is that he may have seen a political motivation for the connection between Damasias and Thales. It is the latter possibility that will be further expanded.

As seen in the first section of this study, Damasias probably aspired to tyranny, as can be perceived from the fact that he remained in power a year and two months beyond the normal duration of his term as archon. This may lead one to speculate why Damasias was not deposed as soon as he showed signs of wanting to prolong his mandate, illegitimately, leading to a situation of *stasis*. The sources say nothing about it, but one can perhaps imagine that this happened because Damasias somehow enjoyed great popularity at the end of his term, an aura which

²⁶ Fuks (1953, 33–83) launched in systematic terms the discussion of this topic; Cecchin (1969) and Witte (1995) provide useful comprehensive approaches. For the most relevant sources and secondary literature regarding this propagandistic ideal, see Leão (2001, 43–72). On this same topic, see also the contribution of Correa, *infra*, p. 25.

²⁷ Faraguna (2015, 154) thinks that the possible institution of the *nomophylakes* by Demetrius may be an expression of the discussions motivated by the *patrios politeia*. The *Marmor Parium* (B 15–6, *Ep.* 13) states that Δημήτριος νόμους ἔθηκεν “Demetrius made laws” and Georgius Syncellus (*Ec. Chr.* p. 521) says that Demetrius was the third “lawgiver” (*nomothetes*), implying probably that the other two predecessors were Draco and Solon.

²⁸ Busine (2002, 66) thinks that “cette mise à l’avant-plan de la figure de Thalès pourrait être attribuée à l’influence d’Aristote sur les autres philosophes péripatéticiens: si Aristote considérait Thalès comme le premier des philosophes, il paraissait logique pour un de ses disciples d’en faire aussi le premier des Sept Sages”. This hypothesis may be considered, but does not explain why the recognition as *sophos* should be made specifically in Athens.

he would later for some reason alienate, forcing his expulsion from power.²⁹ If this possibility is accepted, there is a certain relevance to the hypothesis that during his first year in office he did something extraordinary that would have made the Athenians particularly proud of his services. The consecration of Thales in Athens as a *sophos* could perhaps correspond to this remarkable achievement. Moreover, there are several accounts that indicate that figures like Epimenides and Anacharsis passed through Athens during the period surrounding Solon's archonship, perhaps to the same effect in terms of public image.³⁰

On the other hand, if Solon's absence caused by the *apodemia* lasted for ten years, then he could have been returning to Athens at precisely the same time when these events referred to by Demetrius would have taken place. Expanding the hypothesis a little further, it would not be entirely unlikely to imagine that Solon might somehow "sponsor"³¹, in his own homeland, the formal investiture of Thales as *sophos*, even though the Athenian legislator was equally in a position to claim the same distinction. This kind of abnegation among true *sophoi* is what motivates, as analysed above, that the tripod is successively sent from sage to sage, until it returns to its starting point and is then dedicated to Apollo. Finally, one could also consider the idea that, when Solon finally understood Damasias' real intentions, he withdrew his support, even helping to depose the usurper—a little like he would try to do later with Pisistratus, although without an identical success.

While recognising the speculative aspect of this interpretation, the nexus of events could perhaps have been as follows: the value initially given by Damasias to *sophia*, though genuinely justified by the character and reputation of Thales, would serve above all the political purpose of giving public visibility to Damasias himself, aiming to open the way to tyranny for him, as a means of controlling the risk of *stasis* and *anarchia* that had been experienced prior to his archonship. When his intentions became clearer, a serious situation of *stasis* was once again generated, the complexity of which would require a compromise solution like the one described in the passage from the *Athenaion Politeia* (13.1–2) that motivated this analysis in the first place: a provisional rule of ten *archontes*.

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²⁹ Figueira (1984, 448 and 466–69) ranks Damasias among a "populist" tradition that was prone to political agitation.

³⁰ On the problem of dating these visits, see Leão (2001, 265–67 and 272–73). For the ancient testimonies concerning the meetings between Solon, Epimenides and Anacharsis, see Martina (1968, 67–8 and 71–5, respectively).

³¹ Rossetti (2010, 35) is prone to accept that "Solone possa aver preso l'iniziativa di proporre che si onorasse il grande Talete e che Atene gli tributasse un riconoscimento pubblico e significativo", and even that the same may have extended to the other *sophoi*, but this latter possibility seems rather unlikely.

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