

## Music and Politics

[Topic] Music and Politics

[Source] Plut. (?) *De unius in republica dominatione* 827a-c

[Period] 400-350 BC

[Text] «Ὡσπερ οὖν ὁ ἁρμονικὸς καὶ μουσικὸς ἀνὴρ παντὶ μὲν ὀργάνῳ χρήσεται προσωδῶ τεχνικῶς ἁρμοσάμενος καὶ λόγῳ κρούων ἕκαστον, ὡς πέφυκεν ἐμμελὲς ὑπηρεῖν· ἤδη μέντοι συμβούλῳ Πλάτωνι χρησάμενος, πηκτίδας, σαμβύκας καὶ ψαλτήρια πολύφθογγα καὶ βαρβίτους καὶ τρίγωνα παραπέμψας, τὴν λύραν καὶ τὴν κιθάραν προτιμήσει· τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ὁ πολιτικὸς ἀνὴρ εὖ μὲν ὀλιγαρχίαν Λακωνικὴν καὶ Λυκούργειον μεταχειριεῖται, συναρμολογούμενος αὐτῷ τοὺς ἰσοκρατεῖς καὶ ὁμοτίμους ἄνδρας, ἡσυχῇ προσβιαζόμενος· εὖ δὲ πολυφθόγγῳ καὶ πολυχόρδῳ συνοίεται δημοκρατία, τὰ μὲν ἀνιῖς τὰ δ' ἐπιτείνων τῆς πολιτείας, χαλάσας τ' ἐν καιρῷ καὶ καρτερῶς αὖθις ἐμφύς, ἀντιβῆναι καὶ ἀντισχεῖν ἐπιστάμενος· εἰ δ' αἵρεσις αὐτῷ δοθείη, καθάπερ ὀργάνων, τῶν πολιτειῶν, οὐκ ἂν ἄλλην ἔλοιτο πλὴν τὴν μοναρχίαν, Πλάτωνι πειθόμενος, τὴν μόνην δυναμένην τὸν ἐντελῆ καὶ ὀρθιον ἐκεῖνον ὡς ἀληθῶς τῆς ἀρετῆς τόνον ἀνασχέσθαι καὶ μήτε πρὸς ἀνάγκην μήτε πρὸς χάριν ἁρμόσαι τοῦ συμφέροντος. αἱ μὲν γὰρ ἄλλαι πολιτεῖαι τρόπον τινὰ κρατούμεναι κρατοῦσι καὶ φερόμεναι φέρουσι τὸν πολιτικόν, οὐκ ἔχοντα τὴν ἰσχύον βέβαιον ἐπὶ τούτους, παρ' ὧν ἔχει τὸ ἰσχυόν, ἀλλὰ πολλάκις ἀναγκαζόμενον τὸ Αἰσχύλειον ἀναφωνεῖν, ὃ πρὸς τὴν τύχην ἐχρήτο Δημήτριος ὁ πολιορκητὴς ἀποβαλὼν τὴν ἡγεμονίαν

σύ τοί με φουσᾷς, σύ με καταίθειν μοι δοκεῖς».

[Critical apparatus] τρίγωνα Turbèbe Xylander: τρίβωνα codd.; αὐτῷ Duebner: αὐτῶ codd.; τούτους Méziriac: τούτου codd.; μοι *Vit. Demetr.* Codex Parisinus gr. 1679 Xylander : om. UaA αὖ Mette.

[Translation] «So, just as a real musician will make use of every instrument harmoniously, adapting it skilfully and striking each one with regard to its natural tunefulness, and yet, following Plato's advice [*Resp.* 399c-e], will give up guitars, banjos, psalteries with their many sounds, harps and string triangles and prefer the lyre and the cithara; in the same way the real statesman will manage successfully the oligarchy that Lycurgus established at Sparta, adapting to himself the colleagues who have equal power and honour and quietly forcing them to do his will; he will also get on well in a democracy with its many sounds and strings by loosening the strings in some matters of government and tightening them in others, relaxing at the proper time and then again holding fast mightily, knowing how to resist the masses and to hold his ground against them. But if he were given the choice among governments, like so many tools, he would follow Plato's advice [*Pol.* 302b-e] and choose no other than monarchy, the only one which is able to sustain that top note of virtue, high in the highest sense, and never let it be tuned down under compulsion or expediency. For the other forms of government in a certain sense, although controlled by the statesman, control him, and although carried along by him, carry him along, since he has no firmly established strength to oppose those from whom his strength is derived, but is often compelled to exclaim in the words of Aeschylus which Demetrius the City-stormer employed against Fortune after he had lost his hegemony,

Thou fanst my flame, methinks thou burnst me up. [fr. 359 R.]»

[Transl. Henderson 1911]

[Commentary] In this passage, drawn from the pamphlet *De unius in republica dominatione, populari statu et paucorum imperio*, attributed (not unanimously) to Plutarch, the author proposes an interesting comparison between the expert in musical theory and practice on the one hand (ὁ ἁρμονικὸς καὶ μουσικὸς ἀνὴρ) and the politician on the other (ὁ πολιτικὸς ἀνὴρ). The author repeatedly uses technical musical vocabulary to describe, by means of metaphors, the work of the politician within the various forms of regime, among which the author himself does not hide his preference for monarchy. Democracy is defined as πολύφθογγος and πολυχόρδος, adjectival compounds with negative connotation, according to the sources of the 4th century, in particular with reference to the detractors

of the so-called New Music (cf. the diametrically opposed term, with positive connotation, *oligochordia*, for example in [Plut.] *De mus.* 1137a). It should also be remembered that Plato uses the adjective πολύχορδος in reference to the αὐλός – an instrument that will be excluded from the *politeia* – in *Resp.* 399d. In general, the (pseudo-)Plutarchian passage clearly echoes some positions both in a political key and in an ethical-musical sense, set out by Plato in various dialogues. It is interesting to note how, in the *Republic* itself, the *poikilia* of democracy – here too, like the *polychordia*, connoted in a negative sense – is explained by Socrates to Adeimantus through a visual metaphor: «[a]s a variegated cloak embroidered with flowers of every sort, so too this, which is a true mosaic of characters, may appear most beautiful. And most beautiful, I continued, will perhaps be judged by many, similar to children and women who contemplate objects of various colors». [Plat. *Resp.* 557c].

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