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‘THE TYRANTS AROUND THOAS AND
DAMASENOR’ (PLUT. *Q. G.* 32.298c–d)

At *Quaestiones Graecae* 32.298c–d, Plutarch raises the question, *τίνας οἱ ἀειναῦται παρὰ Μιλησίοις*, ‘Who were the Perpetual Sailors among the Milesians?’, he frames the circumstances of his answer using a genitive absolute clause: *τῶν περὶ Θόαντα καὶ Δαμασῆγορα τυράννων καταλυθέντων* (‘when the tyrants around Thoas and Damasenor had been overthrown’). In the absence of any other mention of these men in the extant sources, these words—especially the appellation *τυράννων*—have caused concern among editors and commentators of Plutarch. In the Teubner edition of 1935 Titchener changes *τυράννων* to the accusative *τυράννους*, while Halliday in his Oxford commentary suggests that the word should be deleted as a gloss. Each of these suggested changes to the received text is motivated by the occurrence here of the common idiom *οἱ περὶ* + Accus. *nominis propriae*. This expression is, from the time of Polybius on, frequently used by Greek historians to indicate succinctly a group or faction, especially one centred around an important personage.¹ Furthermore, a rather odd periphrastic usage of this phrase has been identified by scholars of Greek grammar as common from at least the Roman period. In this usage, *οἱ περὶ τινα* serves as the equivalent of the simple proper name. Thus *τῶν περὶ Θόαντα καὶ Δαμασῆγορα* may be a periphrasis for Thoas and Damasenor alone.²

It is the periphrastic meaning of *οἱ περὶ τινα* that is in play for Titchener and Halliday, and the presumption of it underlies both scholars’ manipulations of the text of *Q. G.* 32. In the large majority of occurrences of *οἱ περὶ τινα*—whether periphrastic or not—the noun agreeing with the article *οἱ* is not expressed, but is an implicit *ἄνδρες vel sim.*³ This tendency becomes almost an absolute rule where the construction may be periphrastic: plausible instances of periphrases with the noun explicitly given, such as *οἱ περὶ Φούλβιον καὶ Ἀππιον ὕπατοι* (*Comp. Per. et Fab.* 2.1.3), are extremely rare in Plutarch as in other authors.⁴ It is awareness of this fact that will have led Titchener to change the *τυράννων* of the manuscripts to *τυράννους*, for in those cases where an apparently periphrastic *οἱ περὶ τινα* is further specified by the addition of a substantive, the word agrees with the accusative object(s) of the preposition.⁵ Thus,

¹ For example, Plut. *Tim.* 30.4 *τῶν δὲ περὶ [τὸν] Μάμερκον τὸν Κατάνης τύραννον καὶ Ἰκέτην* (‘those around Mamerkos, the tyrant of Katane, and Hiketes’).

² Kühner and Gerth 1.270; Schwyzer and Debrunner 2.417; LSJ s.v. *περὶ* C.I.2 (with accusative of persons): ‘later *οἱ π. τινα*, periphr. for the person himself’; cf. C.I.3.

³ On this common ellipsis, see Kühner and Gerth 1.269.

⁴ In fact, of examples of this form in Plutarch, the passage cited here is the only instance where the periphrastic interpretation appears to us the most likely.

⁵ For example, Polyb. 5.95.7 *οἱ δὲ περὶ Λύκον καὶ Δημόδοκον τὸν τῶν Ἀχαιῶν ἱππάρχην συνέντες τὴν ἐκ τῆς Ἥλιδος τῶν Αἰτωλῶν ἔξοδον, ἐπισυναγαγόντες τοὺς Δυμαίους . . ., σὺν δὲ τούτοις ἔχοντες τοὺς μισθοφόρους, ἐνέβαλον εἰς τὴν Ἥλειαν* (‘Those around Lykos and Demodokos the Hipparch of the Achaeans, learning of the expedition of the Aitolians from Elis, gathered the Dymaians . . . and, taking in addition the mercenaries, invaded Elis’). Polybius uses the *οἱ περὶ τινα* construction with great frequency in military contexts, where it usually refers non-periphrastically to a leader and his men. However, because the words *οἱ περὶ Λύκον καὶ Δημόδοκον* in this instance are associated with predicates appropriate to commanding

Titchener’s alteration would seem to have the effect of bringing the text into harmony with the expected form of the periphrasis and making it possible to read, ‘when the tyrants Thoas and Damasenor had been overthrown’.⁶ A text with such a meaning would be unobjectionable: our knowledge of the history of archaic Miletos is certainly lacunose enough to allow the possibility of such a tyranny, even if supported by no other evidence.

However, Titchener’s emendation is surely wrong, for it produces unlikely Greek. Since *τυράννους* must be meant as an attribute of *Θόαντα καὶ Δαμασήνορα*, Titchener should have written *τοὺς τυράννους*. The definite article is necessary. Such is the elementary rule of the grammars and the almost invariable practice of Plutarch. That author puts *τύραννος* in apposition to a proper name more than fifty times, and in all but two instances we find the definite article used as expected (e.g. *Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ τύραννος*, *Pel.* 27.6.1).⁷ Furthermore, although the construction *οἱ περὶ τινα* appears very frequently in the pages of Plutarch—some four hundred times in all—he rarely joins adjective or appositional substantive to the object of the preposition. Examples of the form *οἱ περὶ Καρνεάδην τὸν Ἀκαδημαϊκόν* (*Cat. Ma.* 22.1) occur perhaps only in half a dozen passages.⁸ Thus, Titchener’s suggestion runs doubly foul of the norms of Plutarch’s prose and should be dismissed.

Halliday’s identification of *τυράννων* as a gloss, while more sensible than Titchener’s change, also presumes that *τῶν περὶ Θόαντα καὶ Δαμασήνορα* is periphrastic. That Halliday’s glossator would have written the genitive *τυράννων* indicates that this unknown scribe understood *τῶν περὶ κτλ.* in this way. Strangely, although Halliday considers *τυράννων* an element foreign to the text, he nonetheless incorporates—even if diffidently—this addition into his exegesis, and identifies Thoas and Damasenor as ‘candidates for the tyranny after Thrasylbulus’. He does not explain how a glossator

officers—*συνέντες, ἐπισυναγαγόντες, and ἔχοντες τοὺς μισθοφόρους*—they are commonly interpreted as periphrastic, meaning simply ‘Lykos and Demodokos’.

⁶ This has been a preferred rendering of the text since the very first printed translation of the *Q.G.*, the Latin *Problemata* of Ioannes Petrus Lucensis (Venice, c. 1477): ‘damasenore ac thoante tyrannis exactis’.

⁷ The two exceptions are not true counter-examples. Both are cases of the ‘*nominalis Indetermination*’ of the grammar books (Schwyzer and Debrunner 2.23; Kühner and Gerth 1.589). The first occurs at *Rom.* 2.1, where Plutarch is reporting the competing traditions on the source of the name ‘Rome’: *οἱ δὲ Ῥώμιν Λατίνων τύραννον*. The context, set as it is in the legendary past, makes clear that the article is omitted with special point: ‘Some say Romis, a tyrant of the Latins’. Plutarch hereby indicates that little is known of Romis but his name. Compare *οἱ δὲ Ῥωμανόν, Ὀδυσσεως παῖδα καὶ Κίρκης* (‘Some say Romanos, a son of Odysseus and Circe’) which occurs a few lines previously. The indeterminate nature of the expression is certain. The second example comes from *Per.* 20.1, Plutarch’s narration of the Athenian general’s successful campaign in the Black Sea. Perikles, we are told, left ships and soldiers to the Sinopians to be used *ἐπὶ Τιμησίλεων τύραννον*. Again, indetermination is the best interpretation; the name Timesileos appears to be a *hapax* in Greek literature and ‘against a certain tyrant Timesileos’ seems a most appropriate rendering of these words.

On the other hand, indetermination, the effect of Titchener’s *τυράννους*, is not appropriate at *Q.G.* 32.298c–d, since Plutarch uses the clause *τῶν περὶ Θόαντα καὶ Δαμασήνορα . . . καταλυθέντων* to specify the temporal setting of his *aition*.

⁸ In contrast, constructions of the form *οἱ περὶ Σικίνιον καὶ Βρούτον δημαγωγοί* (*Cor.* 13.1), where the substantive belonging with the definite article is expressed, are far more common, with over fifty occurrences. In all these instances (in which the substantive is used attributively) the textbook pattern seen here—article–prepositional phrase–substantive—is in fact found. Thus Plutarch’s normal usage in this regard supports the *τυράννων* of the manuscripts.

annotating a manuscript of the Plutarch would have had reliable information on the affairs of archaic Miletos.

In any event, an evaluation of the text of *Q.G.* 32 which includes the premise that τῶν περὶ Θόαντα καὶ Δαμασῆνορα was written periphrastically is seriously compromised by the findings of recent scholarship which demonstrate that occurrences of the periphrastic meaning of οἱ περὶ τινα are much less frequent than previously thought. These studies, drawing on a wide range of evidence, show that in the large majority of cases the context will reveal that the commentators and translators have assumed periphrasis unnecessarily.⁹ Given the infrequency of the periphrastic usage, to admit it to *Q.G.* 32, a passage devoid of any context that may support that interpretation, is extremely bad method: less a plausible suggestion than a shot in the dark.

Thus, the efforts of Halliday and Titchener to improve the text of this passage are seen to be misguided. However, if we are to retain the reading of the manuscripts, a satisfactory meaning for 'the tyrants around Thoas and Damasenor' must be found. As it is the presence of τυράννων that has led to dissatisfaction with the text, that word must be the focus of our investigation. Proper attention to the nuances conveyed by τύραννος reveal two interpretations of the text that accord with Plutarch's usage.

Although a tyrant was originally any powerful ruler,¹⁰ the later, more specialized meaning of τύραννος, referring to a one-man rule obtained illegally—Peisistratos at Athens, Polykrates at Samos, Thrasyboulos or Histiaios at Miletos, or many others from the so-called 'Age of Tyrants'—is perhaps the most common.¹¹ If this is the meaning of the word at *Q.G.* 32, then τῶν περὶ Θόαντα καὶ Δαμασῆνορα τυράννων must refer to a series of tyrants. It is in just this way that Plutarch uses οἱ περὶ τινα at *De sera numinis vindicta* 553a: ἀλλὰ Σικυωνίους μὲν Ὀρθαγόρας γενόμενος τύραννος καὶ μετ' ἐκείνον οἱ περὶ Μύρωνα καὶ Κλεισθένη τὴν ἀκολασίαν ἔπαυσαν ('But upon becoming tyrant of Sikyon, Orthagoras, and after him those around Myron and Kleisthenes, put a stop to the licentiousness'). The rule of the Orthagorids at Sikyon, established c. 630/20, was famous in antiquity for its longevity, lasting for over a century.¹² Perhaps, then, *Q.G.* 32 likewise refers to an extended tyranny held by several men in succession.¹³

⁹ The most extensive study is that of Michel Dubuisson, *OI AMPHI TINA, OI PIEPI TINA: l'évolution des sens et des emplois* (Dissertation, Liège, 1977). Scepticism about the periphrasis was already expressed by A. Traina, 'J. Humbert e la sintassi greca', *Atene e Roma* NS 1 (1956), 201–2. These works constitute only an important first step in the reevaluation of οἱ περὶ + Accus. Our own investigations, based on the study of over a thousand examples of the construction, lead us to believe that there are many fewer cases of periphrasis in historical narrative than even Dubuisson will allow. Much further research must be done before the use of this expression and its historical development are confidently understood.

¹⁰ See the famous lines of Archilochos (Diehl 22).

¹¹ For tyranny in general, see now Victor Parker, 'Τύραννος: the semantics of a political concept from Archilochos to Aristotle', *Hermes* 126 (1998), 145–72; basic are still: A. Andrewes, *The Greek Tyrants* (London, 1956) and H. Berve, *Die Tyrannis bei den Griechen*, 2 vols (München, 1967).

¹² *Ar. Pol.* 5.1315b12–14: πλείστον γὰρ ἐγένετο χρόνον ἢ περὶ Σικυῶνα τυραννίς, ἢ τῶν Ὀρθαγόρου παίδων καὶ αὐτοῦ Ὀρθαγόρου: ἔτη δ' αὕτη διέμεινεν ἑκατόν ('The tyranny at Sikyon—of the children of Orthagoras and Orthagoras himself—lasted the longest time. It endured for a hundred years'). For a discussion of the relevant evidence, see Fritz Schachermeyer, *RE* 18.2, 1430–2.

¹³ Thoas, Damasenor, and at least one other. It must be noted that the tyrant Thrasyboulos, mentioned as he is by Herodotos, cannot be a member of a series indicated by these words. It is the norm for the οἱ περὶ τινα construction that the name of the most prominent member of the group be given as the object of the preposition. Of course, τῶν περὶ Θόαντα καὶ Δαμασῆνορα

However, there is another pertinent meaning of *τύραννος*. In a usage that represents a point of view distinctly hostile to one-man rule, the word may characterize a harsh, selfish, and violent ruler. Furthermore, and this is a crucial point here, *τύραννος* in its pejorative sense need not refer to monarchy, but may be applied to the misrule of any number of people. Recall, for example, the harsh oligarchy of the Thirty Tyrants at Athens.¹⁴ In the same vein, the phrase ‘the tyrants around Thoas and Damasenor’ may indicate an oligarchy, not a tyranny, as the following parallels will make clear.

The historian Hippias of Erythrai, telling of the fall of King Knopos of that same city, writes, as quoted by Athenaios (6.259b–c):

καὶ καταληφθέντος τοῦ ἄσπεος ὑπὸ τῶν περὶ τὸν Ὀρτύγην πολλοὶ μὲν ἀναιροῦνται τῶν τοῦ Κνωποῦ φίλων καὶ ἡ Κλεονίκη μαθοῦσα φεύγει εἰς Κολοφῶνα. οἱ δὲ περὶ τὸν Ὀρτύγην τύραννοι ἔχοντες τὴν ἐκ Χίου δύναμιν τοὺς ἐνισταμένους αὐτῶν τοῖς πράγμασι διέφθειρον καὶ τοὺς νόμους καταλύσαντες αὐτοὶ διεῖπον τὰ κατὰ τὴν πόλιν . . .

When the city had been taken by those around Ortyges, many of the friends of Knopos were killed and Kleonike, learning this, escaped to Kolophon. With the force from Chios *the tyrants around Ortyges* killed everyone who opposed their actions and, after setting aside the laws, they ran the city’s affairs . . .

Here we find the phrase, ‘the tyrants around Ortyges’, but to whom do these words refer? Not, as one might guess, a tyrant named Ortyges and his faction—for the plural of *τύραννος* sometimes has this use. In a previous passage Hippias makes the matter clearer. There Knopos, still on the throne, sets out to Delphi to consult the oracle because he is worried about his personal safety (Ath. 6.259a):

καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ὀρμήσαντος αὐτοῦ εἰς Δελφοὺς οἱ τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτοῦ καταλύσαι βουλόμενοι, ἢ ὀλιγαρχίαν καταστήσωσιν (ἦσαν δ’ οὗτοι Ὀρτύγης καὶ Ἴρος καὶ Ἐχαρος, οἱ ἐκαλοῦντο διὰ τὸ περὶ τὰς θεραπειῶν εἶναι τῶν ἐπιφανῶν πρόκυνες καὶ κόλακες) συμπλέοντες . . .

And afterwards, when he set out for Delphi, sailing with him went the very men who wanted to overthrow his kingship in order to establish an oligarchy (these men were Ortyges, Iros, and Echaros, who are called the Lap-Dogs and the Flatterers, because they attended famous people) . . .

Hippias is describing a situation where a king is deposed in favour of an oligarchy. *Οἱ περὶ τὸν Ὀρτύγην τύραννοι* are thus a narrow oligarchy, hostile to both the laws and the *demos*.

Plutarch himself uses this form of expression when he describes the oligarchy which, with Spartan help, took over at Thebes in 382 B.C. He calls the oligarchs in question *τύραννοι*,¹⁵ and both *οἱ περὶ Λεοντίδαν* (*Pelop.* 6.2) and *οἱ περὶ Ἀρχίαν* (*Pelop.* 9.2). *Pelopidas* 6.1 is particularly telling, for there both parts of the troublesome phrase of *Q. G.* 32 occur together:

τυράνων could refer to a succession of relatively minor tyrants before or after Thrasyboulos. In this case, the duration of this period of tyranny, including the rule of Thrasyboulos, will have been less than the eighteen years allotted by *Politics* 5.1315b34 to the tyranny *περὶ Ἰέρωνα καὶ Γέλωνα περὶ Συρακούσας* (the fourth longest—after the tyrannies of the Orthagorids, the Kypselids and the Peisistratids—known to the author of this passage).

¹⁴ The connection in partisan discourse of oligarchy and tyranny was common at Athens before the Thirty. For example, referring to the reactions of the Athenians to the Mutilation of the Herms and the Profanation of the Mysteries, Thucydides says (6.60.1) *πάντα αὐτοῖς ἐδόκει ἐπὶ ξυνωμοσίᾳ ὀλιγαρχικῆ καὶ τυραννικῆ πεπράχθαι* (‘it seemed to them that everything had been done for an oligarchical and tyrannical conspiracy’). For more on this connection, see Roger Brock, ‘Athenian oligarchs: the numbers game’, *JHS* 109 (1989), 160–4.

¹⁵ *Pelop.* esp. 6 and 9; *Comp. Pelop. et Marc.* 1.6; *Ages.* 24.2; *De gen. Soc.* 109.576b, 586d, etc.

καταδεδουλωμένοις ὑπο τῶν περὶ Ἀρχίαν καὶ Λεοντίδαν οὐδὲ ἐλπίσαι περιτὴν ἀπαλλαγὴν
τινα τῆς τυραννίδος.

[the Thebans] being enslaved by *those around Archias and Leontidas*, had no hope that they could find any escape from this *tyranny*.

A little earlier, Plutarch revealed the line of thought that led to such a choice of terminology, calling these same men: ἄνδρες ὀλιγαρχικοὶ καὶ πλούσιοι καὶ μέτριοι οὐδὲν φρονοῦντες ('oligarchical men, wealthy, and intending nothing moderate', *Pelop.* 5). Thus, rulers who recognize no measure, whether they be one or several, can accurately be styled tyrants. As Plutarch says about Archias and Leontidas in his life of *Agesilaus*: ἔργῳ μὲν τυράννου, λόγῳ δὲ πολεμάρχους ὄντας ('In fact they were tyrants, in name polemarchs', *Ages.* 24; cf. *Pelop.* 7.3).

Clearly, then, the transmitted text of *Q.G.* 32 preserves Plutarch's words and should not be altered: *τυράννων* yields plausible sense supportable by parallels, it is the reading of all of the manuscripts, and, given the admitted obscurity of the expression, it is the *lectio difficilior* as well.

On the other hand, choosing between the two interpretations offered here is less straightforward. The wording of the genitive absolute gives us no clues, for while *καταλύω* is admittedly the *mot juste* for describing the overthrow of a tyranny,¹⁶ it is also used of oligarchy and democracy.¹⁷ A decision must rest on a thorough sifting of all the evidence on the polity of Archaic Miletos, a procedure that would transgress the bounds of this study.¹⁸ It is nonetheless clear that whatever solution is reached, it must not seek to alter Plutarch's words, but must find an appropriate historical context for 'the *tyrants* around Thoas and Damasenor'.

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¹⁶ For example, Thuc. 1.18.1: ἐπειδὴ δὲ οἱ τε Ἀθηναίων τύραννοι . . . καταλύθησαν ('And after the Athenian tyrants . . . had been overthrown'); Plut. *Per.* 3.2, ὃς ἐξήλασε Πεισιστρατίδας καὶ κατέλυσε τὴν τυραννίδα ('[Kleisthenes,] who drove out the Peisistratids and overthrew the tyranny').

¹⁷ The Athenian law of Demophantos (410/9 B.C.) anathematized 'whoever should overthrow the democracy at Athens or hold any office if the democracy be overthrown' (ἐάν τις δημοκρατίαν καταλύῃ τὴν Ἀθήνησιν, ἢ ἀρχὴν τινα ἀρχῆ καταλελυμένης τῆς δημοκρατίας [*Andoc. Myst.* 96.8]); the expression is very common. With oligarchy the verb is rarer, but still well-attested, e.g. Arist. *Pol.* 2.1273b35: Σόλωνά δ' ἔνιοι μὲν οἴονται νομοθέτην γενέσθαι σπουδαῖον· ὀλιγαρχίαν τε γὰρ καταλύσαι λίαν ἄκρατον οὖσαν ('Some think that Solon was an excellent lawgiver, for he overthrew an oligarchy that was excessively absolute'); Plut. *Per.* 25.2: ὁ Περικλῆς τὴν μὲν οὖσαν ὀλιγαρχίαν ἐν Σάμῳ κατέλυσεν ('Perikles overthrew the oligarchy that existed in Samos').

¹⁸ See V. B. Gorman, *Miletos, the Ornament of Ionia* (Ann Arbor, forthcoming), ch. 3.