

Be wise, keep it simple, keep it balanced:
δίαιτα in the *Septem Sapientium Convivium*

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Abstract: Although *δίαιτα* is used with some parsimony throughout the *Septem Sapientium Convivium* (the term appears only seven times), it nevertheless provides a significant contribution to the characterization of the guests that participate in the banquet. This paper intends to analyse the way those occurrences are connected to the ideological or professional stances of the characters portrayed, to their literary references (in particular Hesiod), and to the general way in which they understand life itself and the balance of the world. Special attention is devoted to the physician Cleodorus and to the way doctors and medicine contributed to the general framework of the topics approached in the literature dealing with a symposiac setting, and the kind of intellectual input that doctors were expected to bring into convivial gatherings of this kind.

Keywords: Plutarch; *diaita*; feeding; medicine; Wise Men;

1. *Sept. sap. conv. 148E:* “Εἶεν,” ὁ Νειλόξενος ἔφη, “καὶ φαίνεται βλέποντι πρὸς τὴν λιτότητα καὶ ἀφέλειαν αὐτῆς· Ἀνάχαρσιν δὲ πόθεν οὕτω τημελεῖ φιλοστόργως;” “Ὅτι,” ἔφη, “σώφρων ἀνὴρ ἐστὶ καὶ πολυμαθῆς, καὶ τὴν **δίαιταν** αὐτῇ καὶ τὸν καθαρόν, ᾧ χρῶνται Σκύθαι περὶ τοὺς κάμνοντας, ἀφθόνως καὶ προθύμως παραδέδωκε. καὶ νῦν οἶμαι περιέπειν αὐτὴν τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ φιλοφρονεῖσθαι, μαθάνουσάν τι καὶ προσδιαλεγομένην.”

“Yes”, said Neiloxenus, “that must be apparent to anybody who observes her simplicity and lack of affectation. But what is the reason for her loving attentions to Anacharsis?” “Because,” replied [Thales], “he is a man of sound sense and great learning, and he has generously and readily imparted to her the **system of diet** and purging which the Scythians employ in treating their sick. And I venture to think that at this very moment, while she is bestowing this affectionate attention on the man, she is gaining some knowledge through further conversation with him.”

2. *Sept. sap. conv. 157C-D:* ὑπολαβὼν ὁ Κλεόδωρος, “ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς σοφούς,” εἶπεν, “ὕμῃς ὀρθῶμεν ἀνίσοις μέτροις τὰς κτήσεις νενεμημένας πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἔχοντας.” Καὶ ὁ Κλεόβουλος, “ὁ γὰρ τοι νόμος,” εἶπεν, “ᾧ βέλτιστε ἀνδρῶν, ὡς ὑφάντης ἐκάστῳ τὸ πρέπον ἡμῶν καὶ τὸ μέτριον καὶ τὸ ἀρμόττον ἀποδίδωσι. καὶ σὺ καθάπερ τῷ νόμῳ τῷ λόγῳ τρέφων καὶ **διαιτῶν** καὶ φαρμακεύων τοὺς κάμνοντας οὐκ ἴσον ἐκάστῳ, τὸ δὲ προσῆκον ἀπονέμεις ἅπασιν.”

Cleodorus took up the conversation and said: “But we see that the possessions which even you Wise Men have are distributed by unequal measure, if you be compared one with another.” And Cleoboulus replied: “Yes, for the law, my good sir, like a weaver, assigns to each one of us so much as is fitting, reasonable, and suitable. And you, using reason as your law in

prescribing nutrition, **diet**, and remedies for the sick, do not apportion an equal amount to each one, but the proper amount in all cases.”

3. Sept. sap. conv. 157E: Ὁ δὲ Σόλων ἔφη θαυμάζειν τὸν Ἄρδαλον εἰ τὸν νόμον οὐκ ἀνέγνωκε τῆς **διαίτης** τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἐν τοῖς ἔπεσι τοῖς Ἡσιόδου γεγραμμένον· ἐκεῖνος γάρ ἐστιν ὁ πρῶτος Ἐπιμενίδη σπέρματα τῆς τροφῆς ταύτης παρασχὼν καὶ ζητεῖν ὁ διδάξας

ὅσον ἐν μαλάχῃ τε καὶ ἀσφοδέλω μέγ' ὄνειαρ.¹

Solon said that he was surprised at Ardalus if he had not read the regulations governing the **manner of living** (*diaita*) of the man in question, which are given in writing in Hesiod's verses. For Hesiod is the one who first sowed in the mind of Epimenides the seeds of this form of nourishment, inasmuch as it was he who taught that one should seek to find

How in mallow and asphodel lies an immense advantage.

4. Sept. sap. conv. 158A-B: Καὶ ὁ Κλεόδωρος “ὀρθῶς,” ἔφη, “λέγεις. ἰατρικὸς γὰρ Ἡσιόδος, ὡς δῆλός ἐστιν οὐκ ἀμελῶς οὐδ' ἀπείρως περὶ **διαίτης** καὶ κράσεως οἴνου καὶ ἀρετῆς ὕδατος καὶ λουτροῦ καὶ γυναικῶν διαλεγόμενος καὶ συνουσίας καιροῦ καὶ βρεφῶν καθίσεως. ἀλλ' Ἡσιόδου μὲν ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ δικαιότερον Αἴσωπος αὐτὸν ἀποφαίνειν μαθητὴν ἢ Ἐπιμενίδης· τούτῳ γὰρ ἀρχὴν τῆς καλῆς ταύτης καὶ ποικίλης καὶ πολυγλώσσου σοφίας ὁ πρὸς τὴν ἀηδὸνα λόγος τοῦ ἱέρακος παρέσχηκεν. ἐγὼ δ' ἂν ἠδέως ἀκούσαιμι Σόλωνος· εἰκὸς γὰρ αὐτὸν πεπύσθαι, πολὺν χρόνον Ἀθήνησιν Ἐπιμενίδη συγγενόμενον, ὃ τι δὴ παθὼν ἢ σοφίζόμενος ἐπὶ τοιαύτην ἦλθε **δίαιταν**.”

“You are quite right,” said Cleodorus; “for it is clear that Hesiod has knowledge of medicine, since there is no lack of attention or experience shown in what he has to say about the **daily course of life**, mixing wine, the great value of water, bathing, women, the proper time for intercourse, and the way in which infants should sit. But it seems to me that Aesop with better right than Epimenides can declare himself the pupil of Hesiod. For the words of the hawk to the nightingale first suggested to Aesop the idea of this beautiful and ingenious wisdom uttered by many different tongues. But I should be glad to listen to Solon; for it is likely that he, having been associated with Epimenides for a long time at Athens, has learned what experience of his or what sophistical argument induced him to resort to such a **course of living**.”

5. Sept. sap. conv. 159F-160A: καὶ γὰρ ἡ τροφή λιμοῦ φάρμακον προσάγεται, καὶ θεραπεύειν ἑαυτοὺς λέγονται πάντες οἱ τρεφόμενοι **δίαιταν**, οὐχ ὡς ἡδὺ τι καὶ κεχαρισμένον ἀλλ' ὡς ἀναγκαῖον τοῦτο τῇ φύσει πράττοντες.

¹ *Op.* 41.

The fact is that food is taken as a remedy for hunger, and all who use food in a **prescribed way** (*diaita*) are said to be giving themselves treatment, not with the thought they are doing something pleasant and grateful, but that this is necessary to comply with Nature's imperative demand.

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