HIST 40003 Democratic Athens
Paper 1 (1600-1800 words)
Due September 21 by 5pm

An important problem that historians of the ancient world must deal with is evaluating different accounts of the same event. For example, we have accounts by Herodotus and Plutarch of the Battle of Salamis in 480. Herodotus was writing roughly from 440-420 BCE, and talked with many people who had been, or had known people who had been, involved in the battle. Plutarch was a priest of Apollo at Delphi who wrote in the early 2nd century CE. He was very widely read, and knew Herodotus as well as other accounts of the battle. Unlike Herodotus, who wrote a narrative history, Plutarch was writing biographies, in this case a life of the Athenian admiral Themistocles.

For this paper you will compare the two authors' accounts of one particular aspect of the battle, the trick that Themistocles used to force the reluctant Greeks to engage the Persian the navy off the island of Salamis, described at Herodotus 8.56-63 & 74-82 and in a passage of Plutarch's life (below). Some aspects you may want to consider include:

- Differences in detail - does one author stress particular points more than the other? How does this contribute to their depiction of Themistocles?
- Does Plutarch's inclusion of or rejection of details in Herodotus reveal anything about what aspects of history he considers important? Does he alter any details?
- How does the role of the divine differ and what does this show about how the two writers understand the gods and their role in historical events?
- How do the two authors portray the character of Themistocles differently? What does this reveal about traits they find admirable (or otherwise)?
- How do the two authors use the other characters to better reveal Themistocles and his qualities?

Armed with this evidence, explain some of the similarities and differences of the two accounts, and what they reveal about Plutarch and Herodotus, their purposes, and how they understand Themistocles. Note that while comparing and contrasting is your tool for understanding the two writers, it is not enough to simply point out places where they are different. Explain why and what it means, and why the authors portray things the way they do! Avoid being judgmental towards the two authors and do not try and determine who is more accurate. Limit your analysis to the ancient texts themselves – do not look at modern scholarship. I want to read what you have to say, not what someone else has to say. Looking at other sources or using AI will result in an automatic F on the paper and may result in additional academic sanctions.

Use direct quotes sparingly and when they will specifically illustrate the point you are trying to make. Whenever you are quoting, paraphrasing, or simply referring to something an author says cite the particular passage in you paper. For Plutarch's account, cite by chapter and sentence numbers. For Herodotus, cite by chapter number; e.g. "As Plutarch says at 11.5…" or "as explained by Herodotus (80)" Don't forget to put a page number at the bottom of the page. Papers should double-spaced, with 1" margins. Use 12 point Times New Roman or a similar font.

Papers are due on September 21 by 5pm. Upload your papers on BlackBoard. Late papers will not be accepted without prior approval except in cases of documented emergencies.

Plutarch, Life of Themistocles 11-12

11 2 When Eurybiades, who had the command of the fleet on account of the superior claims of Sparta, but who was faint-hearted in time of danger, wished to hoist sail and make for the Isthmus, where the infantry of the Peloponnesians had been assembled, it was Themistocles who spoke against it, and it was then, they say, that he uttered these memorable sayings. When Eurybiades said to him, "Themistocles, at the games those who start too soon get a caning," "Yes," said Themistocles, "but those who lag behind get no crown." 3 And when Eurybiades lifted up his staff as though to smite him, Themistocles said: "Smite, but hear me." Then Eurybiades was struck with admiration at his calmness, and asked him to speak, and Themistocles tried to bring him back to his own position. But when a certain one said that a man without a city had no business to advise men who still had cities of their own to abandon and betray them, Themistocles addressed his speech especially to him, saying: 4 "It is true, you wretch, that we have left behind us our houses and our city walls, because we refuse to be enslaved for the sake of such lifeless things; but we still have a city, the greatest in Greece, our two hundred triremes, which now are ready to aid you if you choose to be saved by them; but if you go off and betray us for the second time, straightway many a Greek will learn that the Athenians have won for themselves a city that is free and a territory that is far better than the one they cast aside." 5 When Themistocles said this, Eurybiades began to reflect, and was seized with fear lest the Athenians go away and abandon him. And again, when the Eretrian tried to argue somewhat against Themistocles, "Indeed!" said he, "what argument can you make about war, who, like the cuttle-fish, have a long pouch in the place where your heart ought to be?"

12 1 Some tell the story that while Themistocles was thus speaking from off the deck of his ship, an owl was seen to fly through the fleet from the right and alight in his rigging; wherefore his hearers espoused the opinion most eagerly and prepared to do battle with their ships. 2 But soon the enemy's armament beset the coast of Attica down to the haven of Phalerum, so as to hide from view the neighbouring shores; then the King in person with his infantry came down to the sea, so that he could be seen with all his hosts; and presently, in view of this junction of hostile forces, the words of Themistocles ebbed out of the minds of the Greeks, and the Peloponnesians again turned their eyes wistfully towards the Isthmus and were vexed if any one spake of any other course; nay, they actually decided to withdraw from their position in the night, and orders for the voyage were issued to the pilots. 3 Such was the crisis when Themistocles, distressed to think that the Greeks should abandon the advantages to be had from the narrowness of the straits where they lay united, and break up into detachments by cities, planned and concocted the famous affair of Sicinnus.

This Sicinnus was of Persian stock, a prisoner of war, but devoted to Themistocles, and the paedagogue of his children. 4 This man was sent to Xerxes secretly with orders to say: "Themistocles the Athenian general elects the King's cause, and is the first one to announce to him that the Greeks are trying to slip away, and urgently bids him not to suffer them to escape, but, while they are in confusion and separated from their infantry, to set upon them and destroy their naval power." 5 Xerxes received this as the message of one who wished him well, and was delighted, and at once issued positive orders to the captains of his ships to man the main body of the fleet at their leisure, but with two hundred ships to put out to sea at once, and encompass the strait round about on every side, including the islands in their line of blockade, that not one of the enemy might escape.

6 While this was going on, Aristides the son of Lysimachus, who was the first to perceive it, came to the tent of Themistocles, who was no friend of his, nay, through whom he had even been ostracized, as I have said; and when Themistocles came from the tent, Aristides told him how the enemy surrounded them. Themistocles, knowing the tried nobility of the man, and filled with admiration for his coming at that time, told him all about the Sicinnus matter, and besought him to join in this desperate attempt to keep the Greeks where they were, — admitting that he had the greater credit with them, — in order that they might make their sea-fight in the narrows. 7 Aristides, accordingly, after bestowing praise upon Themistocles for his stratagem, went round to the other generals and trierarchs inciting them to battle. And while they were still incredulous in spite of all, a Tenian trireme appeared, a deserter from the enemy, in command of Panaetius, and told how the enemy surrounded them, so that with a courage born of necessity the Greeks set out to confront the danger.