

Ethical Investing in *oikos* and *polis*: Theodote and Ischomachus' Wife

Cicero ascribes to the Socratic Aeschines an intriguing marriage counselling session, in which the *hetaira* Aspasia counsels Xenophon and his wife (*De Inventione* I.31.51-52). The anecdote brings wife and courtesan into contact and discloses affinities between them, the wife assumed to possess a businesswoman's eye for value and price (cp. *pretii maioris*), the courtesan understanding how the wife thinks, and invested with a moral authority traditionally the wife's privilege. Latin *bonum* leaves productively unsettled whether Aspasia in the Greek original prioritized moral exemplarity, emotional companionship, or practical excellence as a partner in increasing the *oikos*, all of which combined in Xenophon's thinking on marriage. I take the sketch as reflecting contemporary acknowledgment of a constellation of ideas in Xenophon: his valorizing characterization of Athenian women of contrasting statuses as effective and morally exemplary businesswomen and friends – two aspects shown to be closely interrelated.

The *hetaira* Theodote's (*Memorabilia* 3.11) capacity for friendship is the foundation of her economic success. Though initially presented as a dangerous enticement, she is shown to *regulate* the men's desires, aligned with Socrates, artlessness, and truth. Unlike the prostitutes employed for short-term consumption, she trains her clients in the long-term discourse of *philia* (3.11.10, van Berkel 2019). The virtuous economic productivity of Ischomachus' wife (*Oeconomicus*) is underscored in the image of Queen Bee (7.32-4), with the image of the Danaids' leaky jar (a metaphor of economic waste) applied to *husbands* to convey the fruitlessness of their provision of supplies in the absence of a wife to look after them (7.40). As Theodote's economic transactions are guided by ethical concerns, so *sophrosune* is instantiated in the ethical increase of the *oikos* (7.15), of which the wife is prime agent (3.10).

Theodote has been made a star witness in arguments about historical *hetairai* and their relationship to the economy of gift-giving v. commodification (Davidson 1998, Kurke 1999), while social history textbooks continue to paint Ischomachus' wife as representing Classical Athenian views. This overlooks the place of these women *in Xenophon*: their depiction in relation to other female agents and his Socrates, who recognizes economics and the morality of material needs. The accounts suggest a different historical truth: how during the Peloponnesian and Corinthian wars more women presumably entered the workforce in Athens, now 'in the city' like Theodote, and managed solo the *oikoi* that constituted the *polis* (*Mem.* 3.6.14).

These serious, innovative theorizations of women's economic value are not undermined by the ironies generated in the paradoxical alignment of courtesan and wife, which likely served to destabilize readers' assumptions or 'final vocabularies' (Rorty 1989). Uncovering how far the women themselves are committed to, and gain satisfaction from, hard work that grows the *oikos* may be Xenophon's most compelling strategy for countering old stereotypes of women as detrimental to economic interests.

Works Cited

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