

Dorota M. Dutsch, *Pythagorean Women Philosophers. Between Belief and Suspicion*, Oxford Studies in Classical Literature and Gender Theory. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, xiv + 306, ISBN 9780198859031.

The Greek historiographer Timaeus of Tauromenius (ca. 350-after 264 BCE) – probably referring to Philochorus' *Collection of Heroines or Pythagorean Women* (III c. BCE) – tells that a daughter of Pythagoras' lead a maiden chorus when she was unmarried, and one of women after she got married (*FGrHist* 566 F 131 = Porph. *VP* 4; cf. also Iambl. *VP* 170). Timaeus does not name this figure, but the fragment sets itself at an early stage within the long tradition concerning Pythagorean women, whose roles, tasks and moral standing is affirmed in the famous discourse that Pythagoras himself would have addressed to the Crotonian women (Iamb. *VP* 54-7; a brief reference, without contents, in Porph. *VP* 18, whose source seems to be Dicaearchus of Messana, fr. 40 Mirhady = 33 Wehrli).

In the last few decades, Pythagorean women and their intellectual status have aroused the interest of some scholars (C. Montepaone, *Teano* 1993, and S. Pomeroy, *Pythagorean Women* 2013, among the most well known; on the musical side, E. Rocconi on Ptolemais of Cyrene, 2003), towards which the present book turns out as a most welcome, innovative and indispensable instrument for scholars interested in Pythagoreanism and in women in Antiquity, for it deals with the Pythagorean women philosophers (hence Pwphs) between 'critique and compliance' (pp. 3-4) – that is, as the subtitle says, with both suspicion and belief –, the two foundations of hermeneutics highlighted by P. Ricoeur (*De l'interprétation*, 1965, p. 46; *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 1981, pp. 145-64). Such a critical positioning induces Dutsch to analyze anecdota and pseudepigrapha – which 'offer a critique of the dominant discourse' – in search for a possible identity of Pwphs at the margins of official discourses and texts.

The book is divided in three parts: the first part, *Portraits*, is focused both on the evidence concerning Pythagoreanism and women in Plato's dialogues and the Hellenistic tradition, and on *chreiai*, anecdotes reporting sayings and/or meaningful and relevant actions attributed to specific

female characters; the second, *Impersonations*, deals with pseudepigraphic treatises – texts which redefine, with their combination, selection and rewriting of existing material (p. 153) in a context of ‘distributed authorship’, the ‘archaic’ Pythagorean system in relationship with Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, leaving room for the women’s intellectual potential to be highlighted –, and letters attributed to Pwphs, which emerge as authoritative figures giving advice to other women in texts presenting a clear contamination of practical advice with philosophical principles; the third part presents *Texts and Translations* relevant for the author’s discussion.

With a rigorous effort to establish a chronology of the evidence taken into account, and a clear cut and engaging style, the author succeeds both in showing the shaping of female sages against the background of the Pythagorean ethics and thought, and in highlighting the influence of ideological and cultural trends, of time and gender on the Pythagorean woman sage’s *Fortleben* as a “philosopher”, the highly significant title she was granted in later tradition – for instance by Philo of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa and Johannes of Stobi (5th c. CE) – through the lens of female figures in Plato’s dialogues, and also on Aristotle’s footsteps (Sappho as a philosopher in *Rh.* 1398b29-30, 1367a7-15 = fr. 137 L&P).

D. shows, on one side, how *chreiai* – a fully Pythagorean product, for their “memorability” – and pseudepigrapha, while illustrating a ‘Pythagorean catechism’ (p. 157) for women, grant them an illusion of agency in accepting standard precepts. On the other side, her most significant merit consists in going beyond the relationship between religion and the social role of the Pythagorean women acknowledged in testimonies, for she delineates with originality and vitality the figure of the Pythagorean woman sage that lurks behind the *chreiai*, and explores in detail female voices within pseudepigrapha.

Considering the historical identity of Pwphs (a catalogue of seventeen in Iambl. *VP* 267 – discussed on pp. 47-50 – modified over time; cf. C. Huffman, *Two Problems in Pythagoreanism* 2008, pp. 293-300) ‘an unanswerable question’, and clearly distancing herself (p. 216) from both L. Zhmud’s (*Philologus* 2018, p. 11) ‘dismissive position’ (female authorship as a forgery aimed at

bending the genuine tradition towards a more persuasive *admonition* [italics in D.'s text] of women in Pythagorean communities) and Pomeroy's fideistic approach, that takes historicity of Pwphs at face value, D. thoroughly examines the positioning of women philosophers within the 'pluralistic' (Cornelli, *In Search of Pythagoreanism* 2013, p. 51) image of Pythagoreanism, considering the continuous remodelling of iconic women in the long Pythagorean tradition and its changing epistemic paradigms over time, which dictate the different possible roles for women. In fact, independently from literary genres, Pythagorean women seem to be conceived as 'nomadic subjects' (Braidotti 1994, p. 6; quoted by D. on p. 28), which we can encounter as icons existing in a shared imaginary space, as 'photoshopped' (p. 30) – that is, contrived so as to fit specific 'agendas' of historians and biographers (p. 43) – paradigms resulting from the manipulation of literary references, characters and beliefs, and from the creation for the propaganda of ideas, values and features of the Pythagorean way of life.

Therefore, I would assert that the Pythagorean woman sage seems to result in a kind of cyborg, a composite from diverse entities (male and female) responding to Pythagoras' excentricity: if he blurs the categories human and animal (puppy anecdote, p. 19), he might plausibly have done the same with male and female, so that Pythagorean women were requested to make their male part – courage, determination and silence – prevail over the female one, as in the figure of the pregnant Timycha, who bites off her tongue in order to deny the tyrant Dionysus II access to the Pythagorean knowledge, considering the group she belongs to prominent to her own family (the model is Plato, as thoroughly illustrated on pp. 55-8).

It seems to me worth noting in *chreiai* – whose characters D. convincingly compares to the Hellenistic *hetaerae* – a sort of over-exposure of women for what concerns the sexual sphere, aimed at identifying a specific field in which a peculiarly female *ethos* is shaped: happiness and wisdom for the Pythagorean woman consists in fidelity to her husband. If such an aspect, on the one hand, can be linked with sexual ethics associated with procreation and eugenetics (Aristoxenus, fr. 39 Wehrli; Plato, *Laws* 783b etc., discussed on pp. 45-7), the central importance of marriage, on the other side,

can be put in relationship with Aristotle (*Pol.* 1252a26-31, *EN* 1158b13-35, 1161a22-5, 1162a17-9; cf. also *Plat. Leg.* 840d-841e), and – more – with Stoicism (pp. 201-3).

On the other hand, marriage involves for women a kind of superimposition of the public sphere on the private one. In fact, although women's independent thought is discouraged, they preserve wit and intelligence in accepting their role, that is, in consciously fitting in the Pythagorean template of marriage, and in the program attached to it: a woman can achieve in marriage moral perfection in the performance of her duties towards her husband, children and household, thus offering her proper contribution for the sake of the whole community, as D. shows through the relationship between the two treatises ascribed to Pythagorean women, and male voices on women's virtues in Ocellus', Callicratidas' and Bryson's treatises, in which the Aristotelian architecture of husband and wife as ruler/ruled remains inalterate (p. 152). Furthermore, she shows the affinities between topics and perspectives in Pythagorean letters ascribed to women and in Stoicism, especially Musonius, delineating very accurately their cultural and ideological context and emphasizing (in Theano's letter to Euboule: Text 3, pp. 242-4 D. = vol. 5.166, 168 Städele; 195-6 Thesleff; 603 No. 4 Hercher) the maternal role in the education of little children (the influence of mothers' ethical teachings at an early stage of one's life is highlighted in *Plat. Prot.* 325c-326a, and also lurks in Aristotle, *EN* 1161b27, where the maternal special affection is highlighted; cf. Sherman, *The Fabric of Character* 1989, pp. 151-6).

In conclusion, I highly recommend this book, for it fully succeeds in showing that Pythagorean women sages – independently from their real, historical identity – set out a strategy for teaching other women in their group that family is the space in which they can achieve outstanding moral value, the precinct in which they can give their 'philosophical' contribution.

I am reporting hereafter the oversights I have noticed: p. 1 n. 3: Dornadi instead of Dorandi; p. 32: *hetairia* instead of *hetaireia*; p. 64: *παραδίδόμεν* instead of *παραδίδομεν*, and *ἀποδίδοσθαι* without accent; p. 68: *μαθήτεριαν* instead of *μαθήτρια*; p. 83 n. 40: 'the fragment comes'; p. 85 n. 49: Alexis, fr. 223 K.-A., *οὐκέτι...ἔμψυχον*; p. 147: *ἄρχειν*; p. 160 n. 68: Myrriha instead of

Myrrhina; the translation from Greek at the beginning of p. 181 is lacking the first part; p. 185: ‘the letters imply’.

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