Pythagorean Women

THEIR HISTORY AND WRITINGS

Sarah B. Pomeroy

CHAPTER FIVE

The Letters and Treatises of Neopythagorean Women in the East

The Greek version of the texts in chapters 5 and 6 is cited as published in Thesleff, *Texts*, followed by page and line numbers. References to Hercher are to the monumental R. Hercher, *Epistolographi Graeci*.[1] The letters of Melissa, Myia, and Theano II have also been published in Alfons Städele, *Die Briefe des Pythagoras und der Pythagoreer*.[2] Städele showed that the manuscripts present the letters in varying sequences. Thesleff arranged the texts alphabetically by the authors' names. The texts are presented here chronologically by author, following Thesleff's dating.[3] Since there is proof that the texts traveled beyond their place of origin, a chronological arrangement will reveal any influences of early authors on later ones. The translations cited in Waithe, *Women Philosophers*, are by Vicki Lynn Harper. Any small changes in the Harper translation are indicated by italics.[4] I have taken the liberty of substituting other English words for "sin" (*hamartano, hamartia*) because the word is anachronistic and misleading. Stobaeus is cited from C. Wachsmuth and O. Hense, *Ioannis Stobaei: Anthologium*.[5] The references introducing particular passages in the Commentaries refer to Thesleff's *Texts* and to the English translation. Further philosophical commentary on many of the letters in chapters 5 and 6 appears in chapter 7, below.

Theano I. "On Piety"

Thesleff, *Texts*, 195, trans. Sarah B. Pomeroy

INTRODUCTION

Theano I was the wife of Pythagoras (see chap. 1), while Theano II was a Neopythagorean, or several Neopythagoreans named Theano, whose works have been collected under the rubric Theano II. Apparently the hypothesis that more than

one woman author bore the name Theano is due to the large number of extant texts by her; no one has detected any differences in style or content among them. Thesleff comments that the dates of the statements attributed to Theano I are indeterminate, and he dates some of these writings or apophthegms to the fourth to the third century BC.[6] Apophthegms from Theano I were quoted by 300 BC.[7] These bon mots could have been authentic quotations, as Diogenes Laertius reports that Theano wrote a few things.[8] Theano lived in the time of some highly literate Greek women, including the lyric poets and wise women; one priestess was said to have instructed Pythagoras and Cleobuline, daughter of the philosopher Cleobulus, who composed riddles in verse.[9] The Pythagorean women are not unique insofar as having their words quoted by later generations. Although Athenian women were a muted group, Spartan women of the classical period were encouraged to speak out and were quoted and their pithy sayings collected.[10] The Spartans were renowned for their excellent memories: for example, they did not have a written law code because they all knew the laws by heart. Theano's writings cover a wide range of subjects, including human morality, proper etiquette, daily conduct, and the numerical structure of the universe.[11] The following fragment shows that in its emphasis on mathematics, Pythagoreanism is akin to Platonism.

TRANSLATION

"I have learned that many Greeks think Pythagoras said everything is created from number. This statement itself raises a question. How can what does not exist think and reproduce? But he did not say everything is derived from number, but everything is generated according to number, that the primary order is in number. By being part of it [the primary order], a first and second and the rest that follow are the order for things that are counted."

COMMENTARY

Pythagoras had observed that women were especially pious: hence, perhaps, the title of Theano's treatise. The extant fragment, however, deals with another key feature of Pythagorean doctrine. It was popularly believed that Pythagoras considered number the origin of everything that exists. W. Emmanuel Abraham, referring to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, explains: "Things are ontic constructs, not number aggregates; as ontic creatures, they exist through relations of numbers and through conformity to those relations."[12] Aristotle, however, who did not believe women were capable of philosophizing, apparently had not read Theano's text or he ignored it, for he reported:

The so-called Pythagoreans, who were the first to take up mathematics, not only advanced this study, but also having been brought up in it they thought its principles were the principles of all things. Since of these principles numbers are by nature the first, and in numbers they seemed to see many resemblances to the things that exist and come into being—more than in fire and earth and water (such and such a modification of numbers being justice, another being soul and reason, another being opportunity—and similarly almost all other things being numerically expressible); since, again, they saw that the modifications and the ratios of the musical scales were expressible in numbers;—since, then, all other things seemed in their whole nature to be modelled on numbers, and numbers seemed to be the first things in the whole of nature, they supposed the elements of numbers to be the elements of all things, and the whole heaven to be a musical scale and a number.[13]

Thesleff, *Texts*, 195.13–14. "How can what does not exist"
Burkert remarks on the noteworthy idea that number does not exist and argues that equating "being and corporal being" suggests a Hellenistic date and disagreement with Aristotle.[14] If Burkert's hypothesis is correct, this passage should be attributed not to Theano I, wife of Pythagoras, but to some later Theano.

Theano I. Apophthegms, trans. Sarah B. Pomeroy

Apophthegm: "If the soul is not immortal, then life is truly a feast for evildoers who die after behaving iniquitously."[15]

COMMENTARY

This apophthegm seems to be directed against philosophers who doubted the existence of the afterlife, including Democritus (5th c. BC) and his atomist theory. Pythagoreans believed in the immortality of the soul and the transmigration of the soul after death to a destiny appropriate to the life that had been lived. Thus a person who had lived a disorderly and amoral life might be reborn as a promiscuous beast. Here Theano considers the order of the world not as numerical concepts but rather in moral anthropocentric terms.

Apophthegm: "There are things which it is fine to discuss; about these things it is shameful to remain silent. There are also things which it is shameful to discuss; about these things it is preferable to remain silent."[16]

COMMENTARY

Theano could also offer practical everyday advice.

Apophthegm: It is better to ride a horse without reins than to be an unreflective woman.[17]

COMMENTARY

"horse": In her letter below, Phintys of Sparta considers the possibility of a woman riding a horse.
"unreflective": Theano also spoke of the necessity for a woman to be thoughtful. That the soul has no sex and that women may be as rational as men is a theme that is repeated in the writings of female Neopythagoreans.

Apophthegm: Being asked what is love (eros), Theano said it is a condition of "an unoccupied soul."[18]

COMMENTARY

In other words, passion and desire will not afflict those who are busy thinking virtuous thoughts. That *eros* could cause irrationality and personal loss of control was a traditional Greek idea. Sappho had written: "Eros, loosener of limbs, whirls me,"[19] and "I'm in love! I'm not in love! / I'm crazy! I'm not crazy!"[20] This concept, however, did not prevent Theano from approving of sexual attraction within the marriage relationship (see chap. 1).

Perictione I. "On the Harmonious Woman"

Thesleff, *Texts*, 142–45, Stob. 4: 688–93, 631–32, trans. Flora R. Levin[21]

INTRODUCTION

Thesleff identifies the dialect as Ionic with a few Doricisms. He also finds that an author named Perictione uses a "fairly consistent Doric" in "On Wisdom" (*Peri Sophias*),[22] and he therefore concludes that there were two traditions for authors named Perictione. "On the Harmonious Woman" was written in the east in the fourth to third century BC, and "On Wisdom" in the third to second century BC in the west.[23] The earlier text was addressed to women, the later treatise was written for both women and men. These authors are referred to in this book as Perictione I and Perictione II. Thesleff dates Perictione I to the fourth to third cen-

tury and believes the author was probably Plato's mother.[24] Upper-class Athenian women married at puberty and could be mothers by the age of fifteen. Since Plato was born around 429 BC, if his mother lived as long as he did, she could well have written philosophical texts even as late as the second quarter of the fourth century; this hypothesis is consistent with Thesleff's earlier date. Perictione would thus be the first Athenian woman to have written not only an extant philosophical text but also any extant literature at all. She may have been influenced by philosophers in the Pythagorean diaspora in Athens or by Plato himself, who visited Sicily and Tarentum, where he was friendly with the Pythagorean ruler Archytas.[25] Judging simply from their respective ages, it is likely that Perictione I wrote her essay before Plato wrote his dialogs. Some upper-class women in the classical period were literate. For example, in Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* (9.10), the wife of the wealthy Ischomachus keeps the household accounts.[26] For female philosophers as predecessors we need look no further than Aspasia, Diotima, Lastheneia, and Axiothea in Plato's circle and works. In quoting from Perictione at such great length, Stobaeus may be paying tribute to Plato's mother. On the other hand, the name Perictione was an obvious one for a Neopythagorean to give to a daughter, since Plato had had links with Pythagoreanism and, like Pythagoras, had had female pupils (see chap. 1 and Theano II to Rhodope, below). Even if the identity of Perictione I is uncertain, it is at least clear that she is not the same woman as the later Perictione, who wrote "On Wisdom" (see chap. 6).[27]

The historical Perictione was born into a very wealthy family and then married well, so her concerns about lavish adornment and expensive jewelry would reflect her personal experience as well as that of her elite audience. While criticizing extravagant and seductive makeup and attire, she does believe harmonious women may bathe and wear adornments and attractive clothing in moderation. She apparently was not one of the scruffy Pythagorean women portrayed in Athenian comedy (see chap. 4).

In this text Perictione I ranges over ethics, religion, dress, adultery, politics, household, and philosophy: these topics will recur in many of the texts written later by Neopythagorean women. She adapts Pythagorean theory to the actual lives of married women, for her treatise is not theoretical, but practical, with goals that could have been achieved by women in the fourth century and the Hellenistic period. Despite serious provocations, the harmonious woman will exercise self-control, will obey her parents, and will be at peace within herself. In such a condition she will be an integral part of the natural order of the universe and will be living the Pythagorean life. *Harmodzo* means "I fit together," as a carpenter might join pieces; thus it came to mean "to accommodate." *Harmonia*

refers to a joint between two parts of a whole and also connotes "temperament," "music," and "order."[28] In a harmonious person, reason and the passions are in total balance and attunement—like the stretched strings of a lyre. Such a person is neither "high-strung" nor "slack" or "loose." In keeping with the musical metaphor, *sophrosyne* has been translated as "temperance," but it also connotes chastity and self-restraint. Traditionally, *sophrosyne* was a virtue of women and as such connoted inhibition, self-restraint, and chastity, but the Pythagoreans and Socratics extended the meaning to include both genders. For Pythagoras *sophrosyne* was not confined to private life but also permeated all aspects of human existence (Iambl. *VP* 6.32, 27.132, 31.195). The Pythagoreans may have influenced Plato's views on *sophrosyne* in the public sphere,[29] and Xenophon's views on *sophrosyne* in both the public and private spheres,[30] and the views of these two Socratics, in turn, may have contributed to Neopythagorean theories. Several of the Neopythagorean letters refer directly to *sophrosyne* as a virtue in both women and men, especially in the context of marriage and education (see, e.g., Theano II to Eurydice, below).

The first three beneficiaries of a woman's virtue (husband, children, and home) are traditional in Greek thought. The one good type of woman listed in Semonides' *Diatribe against Women* (7th c. BC) causes her husband's "property to grow and increase, and she grows old with a husband whom she loves and who loves her, the mother of a handsome and reputable family."[31] That a woman can win acclaim by governing is a more unusual idea, perhaps inspired by contemporary Macedonian queens or by earlier female monarchs, for example, Artemisia I, or (less likely because of the chronology postulated just above) by the female guardians in Plato, *Republic* 5. It should be observed, in contrast, that Phintys, a member of the western group of Neopythagoreans, declared that women should not take part in government (see chap. 6).

The two fragments of this treatise are presented in the order in which they are printed in Thesleff, *Texts*. They are not recorded in a continuous order in Stobaeus (5th c. AD anthologist), where, in fact, Fragment II precedes Fragment I. Stobaeus quotes Fragment II in his chapter on duties toward parents (*hoti chre tous goneis tes kathekouses times*), and Fragment I in his chapter on household or estate management (*Oikonomikos*). Since Fragment I ends with a Pythagorean climax, there is a strong possibility that it constituted the last part of the treatise and that Fragment II came somewhat earlier in the treatise.

TRANSLATION

"We must deem the harmonious woman to be one who is well endowed with wisdom and self-restraint. For her soul must be very wise when it comes to virtue

so that she will be just and courageous [lit., "manly," *andreie*] while being sensible and beautified with self-sufficiency, despising empty opinion. For from these qualities fair deeds accrue to a woman for herself as well as for her husband, children, and home; and perchance even to the city, if in fact such a woman were to govern cities or people, as we see in the case of a legitimate monarchy. Surely, by controlling her desire and passion, a woman becomes devout and harmonious, resulting in her not becoming a prey to impious love affairs. Rather, she will be full of love for her husband and children and her entire household. For all those women who have a desire for extramarital relations [lit., "alien beds"] themselves become enemies of all the freedmen and domestics in the house. Such a woman contrives both falsehood and deceits for her husband and tells lies against everyone to him as well so that she alone seems to excel in goodwill and in mastery over the household, though she revels in idleness. For from all these activities comes the ruination that jointly afflicts the woman as well as her husband. And so let these precepts be pronounced before the women of today.

"With regard to the sustenance and natural requirements of the body, it must be provided with a proper measure of clothing, bathing, anointing, hair-setting, and all those items of gold and precious stones that are used for adornment. For women who eat and drink all sorts of extravagant dishes and dress themselves sumptuously, wearing things that women are given to wearing, are decked out for seduction into all manner of vice, not only the bed but also the commission of other wrongful deeds. And so, a woman must merely satisfy her hunger and thirst, and if she is of the poorer class, her chill, if she has a cloak made of goatskin. To be consumers of goods from far-off lands or of items that cost a great amount of money or are highly esteemed is manifestly no small vice. And to wear dresses that are excessively styled and elaborately dyed with purple or some other color is a foolish indulgence in extravagance. For the body desires merely not to be cold or, for the sake of appearances, naked; but it needs nothing else. Men's opinion runs after inanities and oddities. Therefore a woman will neither cover herself with gold or the stone of India or of any other place, nor will she braid her hair with artful device; nor will she anoint herself with Arabian perfume; nor will she put white makeup on her face or rouge her cheeks or darken her brows and lashes or artfully dye her graying hair; nor will she bathe a lot. For by pursuing these things a woman seeks to make a spectacle of female incontinence. The beauty that comes from wisdom and not from these things brings pleasure to women who are well born.

"Let a woman not think that noble birth and wealth and coming from a great city and having the esteem and love of illustrious and royal men are necessities. For if a woman is well off, she has nothing to complain about; if not, it doesn't

do to yearn. A clever woman is not prevented from living without these benefits. Even if allotments be great and marvelous, let not the soul strive for them, but let it walk far away from them. For they do more harm than good when someone drags a woman into trouble. Treachery, malice, and spite are associated with them, so that a woman so endowed could never be serene.

"A woman must reverence the gods if she hopes for happiness, obeying the ancestral laws and institutions. And I name after [the gods], her parents, whom she must honor and revere. For parents are in all respects equivalent to the gods and they act in the interest of their grandchildren. A woman must live for her husband and according to law and in actuality, thinking no private thoughts of her own, but taking care of her marriage and guarding it. For everything depends on this. A woman must bear all that her husband bears, whether he be unlucky or does wrong out of ignorance, whether he be sick or drunk or sleep with other women. For this latter wrongdoing is peculiar to men, but never to women. Rather it brings vengeance upon her. Therefore, a woman must preserve the law and not emulate men. And she must endure her husband's temper, stinginess, complaining, jealousy, abuse, and anything else peculiar to his nature. And she will deal with all of his characteristics in such a way as is congenial to him by being discreet. For a woman who is affectionate to her husband and treats him in an agreeable way is a harmonious woman and one who loves her whole household and makes everyone in it well disposed. But when a woman has no love in her, she has no desire to look upon her home or children or slaves or their security whatsoever, but yearns for them to go to perdition just as an enemy would; and she prays for her husband to die as she would a foe, hating everybody who pleases him, just so she can sleep with other men.

"Thus, I think a woman is harmonious if she is full of sagacity and temperance. For she will not only help her husband but also her relatives, slaves, and her whole household, in which reside all her possessions and her dear kin and friends. She will conduct their home with simplicity, speaking and hearing fair words and holding views on their common mode of living that are compatible, while acting in concert with those relatives and friends whom her husband extols. And if her husband thinks something is sweet, she will think so too; or if he thinks something bitter, she will agree with him. Otherwise, she will be out of tune with her whole universe."

COMMENTARY

Thesleff, *Texts*, 142.20. "courageous" [lit. "manly," *andreie*]

In the works of radical Socratic philosophers, including Xenophon and Plato,

women may share masculine traits and virtues. See below on Theano II to Euboule (Thesleff, *Texts*, 196.17), chap. 6; below on Phintys; Plato, *Resp.*, esp. bk. 5; and Jeremy McInerney, "Plutarch's Manly Women," in *Andreia: Studies in Manliness and Courage in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Ralph M. Rosen and Ineke Sluiter (Leiden, 2003), 320–44, esp. 323–24.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 142.24–143.1. "a woman were to govern cities or people, as we see in the case of a legitimate monarchy."

In Plato's *Republic* women and men of the guardian class are given the same education, and there is no gender difference in the *psyche* (soul). Therefore, theoretically the state may be governed by a Philosopher King or Queen. Perictione I would also have been aware of historical queens, including Artemisia I and II, who ruled their kingdoms on the periphery of the Greek world.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 143.5. "enemies of all the freedmen and domestics in the house."

The loyalties of slaves and freedmen would be compromised since they would know of the adultery and be forced by their mistress to lie to their master.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 143.10. "a proper measure of . . . bathing," 143.26; "bathe a lot."

Before the great baths built by Roman emperors for the general population, Greek men bathed at the gymnasium. Immersion baths for women were a luxury, requiring the services of slaves to fetch and empty the water and fuel to warm it, and demanding that the bather own a bathtub and enjoy sufficient leisure time to bathe and to relax afterwards. Thus, according to Athenaeus (12.519e), the Sybarites had tubs that allowed them to stretch out. In contrast, Pythagoreans discouraged conspicuous consumption as well as the sensual, sexual, and seductive feelings that bathing could arouse.

There were precedents for luxurious bathing for the Neopythagorean women in both the west and the east. Immersion baths and hipbaths were excavated in Magna Graecia from the late fourth century BC and on the Greek mainland from the fifth century BC.[32] Luxurious baths have also been found in private dwellings in Ptolemaic Egypt.[33] In Alexandria, the wealth and imagination of Ptolemaic women allowed them to invent extravagant ablutions like the fabulous asses' milk baths of Cleopatra VII.

Pythagoreans cared about cleanliness. Phintys stresses the importance of washing with water and wearing clean clothes (see chap. 6, below).

Myia advises Phyllis to prevent the nurse from bathing the infant too often because of the enervating effect. See chap. 6, below, Thesleff, *Texts*, 123.31–32. These references to excessive bathing are additional evidence of the high economic status of Neopythagorean women.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 143.18–19. "dyed with purple" [lit. "dipped in dye from the shellfish"]

Purple dye was made from a vein in certain shellfish. The process was invented by the Phoenicians: hence the dye was known as Tyrian purple. Like gold, gemstones, and perfume, mentioned later in this paragraph, purple was extremely expensive and thus a symbol of power, luxury, and even decadence. In the Greco-Roman world purple was worn by people of high status, especially royalty, and by freeborn Roman children (see Pliny *HN* 9.60–63).

Thesleff, *Texts*, 144.9–10. "A woman must live for her husband and according to law and in actuality, thinking no private thoughts of her own, but taking care of her marriage [lit. "bed"] and guarding it."

Plutarch (*Con. Praec.* 14) advises: a wife should have no feelings of her own, but share her husband's seriousness and sport, his anxiety and his laughter. We note, however, that Perictione's emphasis is on sexual fidelity, whereas Plutarch is interested in emotional harmony in marriage. In the fifth century BC Sophocles, *Oedipus* fr. 909 (Nauck, 2d ed = 545A in *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragments*, ed. Kannicht), had written: "It is pleasing too, if her husband has had some bad experience, for a wife to put on a sad face with him and to join in sharing his pains and pleasures. [lacuna] You and I—when you suffer, I will be content to suffer with you." Both passages are clearly consistent with the status quo in the patriarchal Greek world, which endured, despite some significant changes in women's status and education, in the Hellenistic period. Parallel passages like this one about a wife having no private thoughts cannot be used to argue that Perictione I and Plutarch were contemporaries.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 144.12–14. "For this latter wrongdoing is peculiar to men, but never to women. . . . and not emulate men."

Perictione I is the first woman writer in western literature to acknowledge the double standard, the view that sexual relations preceding or outside of marriage are permissible for men, but not for women. Women are taught to perpetuate the double standard: life is over for the woman who has committed adultery. The wife must make the choice to endure a husband's unharmonious behavior in order to preserve harmony in their marriage. *Nomos* can refer to custom or to legislation: in patriarchal societies—where men make the rules—both custom and law conspire to approve chastity only for respectable women and to allow men to be sexually polygynous. Prostitution served as an institution that preserved the chastity of respectable women while allowing men sexual freedom.[34] Pythagoras, however, advocated a strict standard of monogamy for both married women and men and required men to stop consorting with women to whom

they were not married (see chap. 2). By curbing her own sexual desires and jealousy when her husband is a slave to lustful appetite, the wife displays more virtue than he does and shows herself to be a more faithful Pythagorean.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 143.22–23. "stone of India . . . Arabian perfume"

Herodotus (3.107) wrote that Arabia was the only country where frankincense, myrrh, cassia, cinnamon, and ladanum (rock-rose resin) grew. Even after Alexander's campaigns in the East, the idea that aromatics were found only in Arabia survived.[35]

Thesleff, *Texts*, 145.5–6. "Otherwise, she will be out of tune with her whole universe" (*anarmonios*).

Perictione closes with a typical Pythagorean *sphragis*, a reference to [the lack of] harmony.

Perictione I. "On the Harmonious Woman," fr. 2.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 145–46, Stob. 4.25.50, pp. 631–32

INTRODUCTION

Care for parents was traditional in Greek society and even codified at Athens by the laws of Solon.[36] At Sparta the same views prevailed, as is clear from the anecdote about younger men giving their seats to older people, but not to bachelors, because a bachelor would not produce children who would rise in turn for their elders (Plut. *Sayings of Spartans* 227.14, *Lyc.* 15.2). There were no established state or privately run charities to care for the elderly; indeed, a major incentive to produce children was that they would care for their parents when they grew old.

Pythagoras had advised his disciples to respect and obey their parents (see chap. 2). The migrations of the Pythagoreans themselves, however, probably separated many from their extended kinship networks. Hence it was necessary to reaffirm the principle that adults should obey and care for their parents. For sons to care for parents was traditional. That a daughter was obliged to care for her parents too may be attributed to the social upheavals of the Peloponnesian War and subsequent migrations, during which there were fewer constraints on women than had been in force earlier, as well as to the high economic and social status of some women, which enabled them to care for their own parents.[37] In fact, if this Perictione was Plato's mother, she may have been inspired to write this section of the treatise owing to her own experience with her children. Perictione had three sons, including Plato, and one daughter by Ariston, and another

son when she remarried after Ariston's death. After the execution of Socrates, Plato left Athens. He traveled to Sicily and Magna Graecia three times and was held hostage by pirates. In these tumultuous times, we speculate that at least the elderly Perictione could turn to her daughter Potone, who had married and become the mother of Speusippus.

TRANSLATION

"We should neither speak ill of our parents nor do them harm, but obey those who generated us in both trivial and important matters, and in every state of the soul and body, in inner and external matters, both in peace and in war, in health and in sickness, and in wealth and poverty, in fame and obscurity, whether they are private individuals or public officials. It is necessary to keep in step and never desert them, but to obey them even to the point of madness. Such conduct is considered wise and honorable by pious people.

"If someone should have contempt for her parents, plotting any sort of evil in private, her wrongdoing is recorded by the gods whether she is living or dead. People will hate her, and with the impious in their place under the earth forever she will be harmed by evils in behalf of justices and of the gods below who are appointed to supervise these matters.

"Divine and beautiful is the sight of one's parents, so too is the reverence and the care of them, as great as the sight of the sun and all the stars which heaven wears and twirls, and whatever else anyone may consider something greater to view. It seems to me not even the gods are angry when they see this occur. It is necessary to revere them when they are living and when they have departed and never to mutter against them even when they behave senselessly because of illness or deception, but rather exhort and teach and in no way hate them. There is no greater error and injustice among human beings than not to revere one's parents."

Theano II to Euboule

Thesleff, *Texts*, 195–97, Hercher, 603, nr. 4, Theodoret, *De Vita Pythagoras* (1598), 163–65, trans. Vicki Lynn Harper, in Waithe, *Women Philosophers*, 42–43

INTRODUCTION

This letter was written in the Attic *koine*. The advice is consistent with the teachings of Pythagoras concerning childrearing (Iambl. *VP* 51, 201–4; Myia to Phyllis, chap. 6, below; and see chap. 2). It is also consistent with the views of other

philosophical schools and with traditional Greek ideas about the malleability of children. What is missing here is the corporal punishment that parents often used to discipline children.[38] Furthermore, the Pythagoreans are distinctive in their concern about spoiling their children with too much comfort and luxury. The conspicuous consumption and abundance of material goods the Greeks encountered in such places as Hellenistic Alexandria was at variance with Pythagorean ideals. Most Greeks in other places and in other time periods did not enjoy such a surfeit that they needed to worry about giving children too much food or too many baths or keeping them too warm. According to Theano II, children should be trained to be Pythagoreans, to be comfortable with austerity, and to exercise self-control and temperance. This letter also reflects the influence of the Spartan educational system on Pythagorean childrearing. Like Pythagoras himself, the historical Spartans, and the guardian class in Plato's *Republic* (which reflects Spartan practice), the Neopythagorean women authors do not differentiate between boys and girls in such a way as to give the girls an inferior education. The Spartan *agoge* was revived in the Hellenistic period. If Theano II was a member of the group of Neopythagoreans living in Alexandria (see chap. 3), she may have even met Cratesicleia who was the mother of the Spartan king Cleomenes (r. 235 BC). Cratesicleia's and Cleomenes' children were hostages of Ptolemy III Euergetes and killed by Ptolemy IV (Plut. *Cleom.* 38, and see chap. 1).

In Athens mothers looked after daughters until they left their parents' house to be married; but mothers raised sons only until the age of seven, when they entered the father's milieu and were turned over to male tutors, pedagogues, and relatives. As in Sparta, the Pythagorean mother's contribution to the education of her children of both sexes and her continuing responsibility for the adults that they become is emphasized. We would expect the role of the mother to be discussed in a letter from one woman to another, but it is interesting to note that the role of the father is not mentioned at all.

TRANSLATION

"I hear that you are raising your children in luxury. The mark of a good mother is not attention to the pleasure of her children, but education with a view to temperance. Look out lest you accomplish not the work of a loving mother, but that of a doting one. When pleasure and children are brought up together, it makes the children undisciplined. What is sweeter to the young than familiar pleasure? One must take care, my friend, lest the upbringing of one's children become their downfall. Luxury perverts nature when children become lovers of pleasure in spirit and sensualists in body, mentally afraid of toil and physically

soft. A mother must also exercise her charges in the things they dread—even if this causes them some pain and distress—so that they shall not become the slaves of their feelings, greedy for pleasure and shrinking from pain; but rather, shall honor virtue above everything and be able both to abstain from pleasure and to withstand pain.

"Don't let them be sated with nourishment, nor gratified in their every pleasure. Such lack of restraint in childhood makes them unbridled; it lets them say anything and try everything; especially if you take alarm every time they cry out, and always take pride in their laughter—smiling indulgently even if they strike their nurse or taunt you—and if you insist on keeping them unnaturally cool in summer and warm in winter, giving them every luxury. Poor children have no experience of such things; yet they grow up readily enough. They grow no less, and become stronger by far. But you nurse your children like the scions of Sardanapalus, enfeebling their manly natures with pleasures. What would one make of a child who, if he does not eat sooner, clamors; who, whenever he eats, craves the delights of delicacies; who wilts in the heat and is felled by the cold; who, if someone finds fault with him, fights back; who, if someone does not cater to his every pleasure, is aggrieved; who, if he does not chew on something, is discontent; who gets into mischief just for the fun of it, and stutters about without living in an articulate way?

"Take care, my friend—conscious of the fact that children who live licentiously become slaves when they grow to manhood—to deprive them of such pleasures. Make their nourishment austere rather than sumptuous; let them endure both hunger and thirst, both cold and heat, and even shame before their peers or their overseers. This is how they turn out to be brave in spirit no matter whether they are exalted or tormented. Hardships, my dear, serve as a hardening-up process for children, a process by which virtue is perfected. Those who have been dipped sufficiently in them bear the tempering bath of virtue as a natural thing. So look out, dear, lest, just as vines which have been improperly tended are deficient in fruit, your children produce the evil fruit of licentiousness and utter worthlessness, all because of luxury. Farewell."

COMMENTARY

Thesleff, *Texts*, 196.7–11. "A mother must also exercise her charges in the things they dread—even if this causes them some pain and distress . . . and to withstand pain."

These lines evoke the Spartan *agoge*, which was revived in the late third century BC. Boys were hardened to endure heat and cold, were whipped, and competed

in contests displaying endurance of pain: Xen. *Sp. Const.* 2.2–9, see further Nigel M. Kennell, *The Gymnasium of Virtue: Education and Culture in Ancient Sparta* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995).

Thesleff, *Texts*, 196.14. "even if they strike their nurse"

Wealthy Greek children were served by slaves from the moment of birth. Like their parents, children might regularly hit slaves and otherwise treat them as subhuman. See Theano II to Callisto; below chap. 6; and see further Keith Bradley, "Images of Childhood. The Evidence of Plutarch," in *Plutarch's "Advice to the Bride and Groom" and "A Consolation to His Wife,"* ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy (New York, 1999), 183–198, esp.188.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 196.17. "their manly natures"

This phrase does not necessarily indicate that Theano II has been writing about the rearing of boy children exclusively. Greek masculine pronouns and nouns may apply to women (see chap. 2, above). The Spartan educational system was quite detailed and specific concerning the rearing of Spartan girls: see further Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Spartan Women* (New York, 2002), chap. 1. As in Xen. *Oec.* 10.1, a woman may have a masculine intelligence (see further Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Xenophon Oeconomicus: A Social and Historical Commentary* [Oxford, 1994], 303). Perictione I, "On the Harmonious Woman" (this chapter, above), notes that a woman may be courageous [lit. "manly," *andreie*].

Thesleff, *Texts*, 196.19–23. whenever he eats, craves the delights of delicacies; who, . . . if he does not chew on something, is discontent."

Spartan boys were taught to eat moderately so that their girth would not increase and to persevere with their responsibilities when hungry: Xen. *Sp. Const.* 2.5–6.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 196.25. "children who live licentiously become slaves when they grow to manhood"

Consequently mothers have a grave responsibility: they can raise their children to be virtual slaves or to be harmonious and temperate as adults.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 196, 29–30. "tempering" (*anateinomena e epiteinomena*)

The education of a child is analogous to the tempering of a lute string, being extended or stretched until it is finely tuned. For the application of harmony to human beings, see also Perictione I, "On the Harmonious Woman," above, and Theano II to Callisto, below.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 196, 32–33. "just as vines which have been improperly tended are deficient in fruit—your children produce the evil fruit"

Plutarch (*De Educ.* 3) also uses an analogy between agriculture and education.

Theano II to Euclides, the Doctor

Thesleff, *Texts*, 196–97, Hercher, 607.9, trans. Vicki Lynn Harper, in Waithe, *Women Philosophers*, 53

According to Thesleff this letter is written in an "affected" Attic *koine* and "perhaps intentionally ridiculous."[39]

As in her letter about Cleon (see below), Theano II does not hesitate to write intimately about a man who is not her kinsman and (in the case of Euclides) to communicate with him. This constitutes additional evidence that women in the Hellenistic period enjoyed more social freedom than, say, their counterparts in classical Athens. See further Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York, 1975, with a new Preface, 1995), chap. 7.

This letter is unique among the Neopythagorean letters in its specificity. It asks the perennial serious, but amusing, question we still ask in the form of: "Why do the children of a psychiatrist need to be treated by a psychiatrist?" Though there is nothing noticeably philosophical about the following letter, the Pythagoreans were very concerned about health: the lack of good health signaled a lack of spiritual and physical balance and harmony. Pythagoras himself made recommendations about diet, exercise, and self-control that were conducive to good health, and various medical theories were attributed to him and to other Pythagoreans.[40] In its teasing tone, the letter suggests a message sent to a good friend to cheer him up. This letter is also further evidence that these Neopythagorean texts were actually written by women, for who would bother to forge a letter like the following?

TRANSLATION

"Yesterday when someone had dislocated his leg and a messenger had gone to summon you (I myself was there, for the injured party was a friend of mine), the messenger came back quickly, declaring that the doctor himself was ailing and physically unwell. And I—I swear it!—cast away all thought of my friend's pain, and thought only of the doctor's. I prayed to Panacea and to Apollo, the Renowned Archer, that nothing grievous should have happened to the doctor! Now, in spite of my despondency, I inscribe this letter to you, anxious to learn how you are: lest, perhaps, your gastric orifice is in ill plight, or your liver has been damaged by fever, or some organic harm has befallen you. Thus—

disregarding the innumerable limbs of my friends—shall I fondly cling to your dear health, my good doctor."

Thesleff, *Texts*, 197.5. "Panacea"

Panacea was a warrior daughter of Asclepius, god of healing. Apollo was associated with Asclepius.

Theano II to Eurydice

Thesleff, *Texts*, 197.3, Hercher, 606, nr. 7, trans. Sarah B. Pomeroy

INTRODUCTION

In the two letters that follow and in her letter to Nicostrate (below) Theano II shows herself to be an expert on women's issues, especially on counseling women married to unfaithful husbands. The advice she offers is in keeping with Pythagorean views advocating virtuous and harmonious conduct and suggests that the injured women are Pythagoreans, though they may simply have consulted Theano because of her expertise. The adulterous husbands are certainly not abiding by the conduct prescribed by Pythagoras.

Analogies between music and human emotions are common in the Neopythagorean texts. They indicate that, like other upper-class women in the Hellenistic world, the Neopythagoreans were well educated in the musical arts.[41] Women and their families were proud of this accomplishment: they are portrayed in sculpture, including terra-cotta figurines and grave stelae, with musical instruments, in particular stringed instruments such as lutes and citharas (fig. 10).[42] Wind instruments—flutes and shepherd's pipes—were considered inferior and associated with lower-class women, such as *hetairai*. In the musical education of Neopythagoreans and other elite women, the emphasis was different. As the numerous references to harmony as well as the writings of Ptolemaïs indicate (see below), the Neopythagoreans were steeped in musical theory, for that was traditional among Pythagoreans. Other Hellenistic women were proud of their ability to play music, but, although poetry by Hellenistic women is extant, there is no written evidence that they understood, or cared to understand, the intricacies of esoteric musical theory.

TRANSLATION: THEANO TO EURYDICE

"What grief clutches your soul? Are you disheartened for no other reason than that the man with whom you are united [*sunoikeo*] visits a *hetaira* and gets bodily pleasure with her?

Figure 10. Grave stele of Nico from Alexandria, ca. 250 BC. A slave offers a lyre to an upper-class woman. Cairo. Egyptian Museum, C. G. 9259. Courtesy of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Cairo.

But it ought not to engross you thus, O admirable among women, for don't you see that when the ear is filled with pleasure from the melody of an instrument and song, when it is satiated with this it is well-pleased to hear a flute and shepherd's pipe? What is the connection between the flute and musical chords and the amazing sound of an instrument of the most honeysweet quality? Consider that it is the same with you and with the *hetaira* with whom your husband is united [*sunoikeo*].

"Your husband is thinking of you because of his disposition, nature, and reason. But when he becomes satiated he unites [*sunoikeo*] with a *hetaira* casually. Thus those in whom there is a destructive taste have some desire for sustenance that is not good."

Theano II to Callisto

Thesleff, *Texts*, 197–98, Hercher, 604.5, trans. Vicki Lynn Harper, in Waithe, *Women Philosophers*, 47–48

INTRODUCTION

This long letter was written in the Attic *koine*.[43] The letter or treatise of advice from an older, successful person to a younger person was traditional, normal, and common. Older people do appear to have the habit of offering advice that has not been requested. Thus, for example, Plutarch, in the *Advice to the Bride and Groom,* characterizes himself as a mature husband with wisdom to impart to a new bridegroom. In Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* a mature Ischomachus tells Socrates about his early days of marriage, providing an example and comparison to the thoughtless and wasteful Critobulus. One of the topics Ischomachus covers in detail is the management of slaves in order to keep them productive, cooperative, and loyal. Letters of advice from woman to woman, however, are found in Greek literature only among these Neopythagorean documents. In her opening sentences Theano II asserts that household management is indeed women's business.

A daughter usually learned household management from her mother as she grew up. Then, when she was married and moved into her husband's house, her mother-in-law would instruct her. Demographic factors, including deaths in the older generation and marriage around the age of fifteen, could well leave the young bride in need of advice about managing a large household. Though she will have been familiar with slaves from the day she was born, she might be living far apart from her natal family, in an unfamiliar urban or rustic neighborhood, and in a household with slaves of a different ethnicity and training from those she had known in her parents' home. In Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* the husband himself tells his young bride how he wishes his household to be managed.[44] For a man, Ischomachus seems to have been unusually involved in the details of household organization.[45]

Theano II may have been familiar with Xenophon's treatise. Their conclusions are compatible, but some of their arguments, observations, and emphases differ. Xenophon's treatise is far longer and deals with the economy of a large, wealthy estate, as well as with the relationship between husband and wife. In the *Oeconomicus*, Ischomachus wastes no time in pondering whether slaves are naturally different from free people. He chooses the most trustworthy of the slaves to assume the responsibilities of the mistress and master when the latter are unavailable. Ischomachus's goal in advocating that slaves be treated decently and rewarded for their good work is ultimately to increase the profitability of his estate. In contrast, Theano's goal is to maintain a harmonious, trouble-free household. Moreover, the woman in authority is to manage the slaves rationally,

not be influenced by her passions and emotions. Like other Neopythagoreans, Theano II uses an analogy to a stringed instrument: she advises Callisto to keep the slaves "in tune," with neither too much tension nor too much slack.

In this letter Theano II may also be reacting against popular theories, such as Aristotle's views on natural slavery. Like Xenophon, she considers slaves to be intact human beings, different from free people only in their civil status. Both point out that proper treatment of slaves will curb their desire to run away and will render them easier to exploit. Aristotle, in contrast, had argued that slaves were inherently inferior to free males, for slaves (like children and women) lacked the rational element of the mind (*logos*: *Pol.* 1254b.1.2.13). Therefore, although Aristotle views the slaves' tasks as domestic, he can conceive of the master only as male (*despotes*, *Pol.* 1255b. 1.2.23). Aristotle (*Pol.* 1255a.1.2.16–17) also discusses the use of force: is it an incitement to virtue and therefore good, or is it merely a demonstration of the power of the stronger over the weaker?

TRANSLATION

"To you younger women, just as soon as you are married, authority is granted by law to govern the household. But, to do well, instruction about household management is needed from older women, a continual source of advice. It is well to learn what you do not know ahead of time and to deem most proper the advice of older women; in these matters a young soul must be brought up from girlhood. The primary authority of women in the household is authority over the slaves. And the greatest thing, my dear, is good will on the slaves' part. For this possession is not bought along with their bodies; rather, intelligent mistresses bring it about in time. Just usage is the cause of this—seeing to it that they are neither worn out by toil nor incapacitated by deprivation.

"For they are human in nature. There are some women who suppose the profitable to be what is most unprofitable: maltreatment of their slaves, overburdening them with tasks to be done, and depriving them of the things they need. And then, having made much of an obol's profit, they pay the price in enormous damages: ill-will and the worst treacheries. As for you, let there be ready at hand a measure of food that is proportionate to the amount of woolwork produced by a day's work. With respect to the diet of your slaves, this will suffice. As for undisciplined behavior, one must assist to the utmost what is fitting for you, not what is advantageous to them. For it is necessary to estimate one's slaves at their proper worth. On the one hand, cruelty will not bring gratitude to a soul; on the other hand, reasoning, no less than righteous indignation, is an effective means of control. But if there is too much unconquerable vice on the part of

the slaves, one must send them away to be sold. Let what is alien to the needs [of the house] as well be estranged from its mistress as well [lit. "Let what is alien to the need be estranged from the (female) proper judge as well"].

"Let proper judgment of this take precedence so that you will determine the true facts of wrongdoing in keeping with the justice of the condemnation, and the magnitude of wrongdoing in proportion to the proper punishment. But sometimes the mistress' forgiveness and kindness towards those who have erred will release them from penalties. In this way, too, you will preserve a fitting and appropriate mode of life. There are some women, my dear, who because they are cruel—brutalized by jealousy or anger—even whip the bodies of their slaves as if they were inscribing the excess of their bitterness as a memorandum. In time, some of these [female slaves] are used up, utterly worked out; others procure safety by escaping; but some stop living, withdrawing into death with their own hands. In the end, the isolation of the mistress, bewailing her lack of domestic consideration, finds desolate repentance. But, my dear, likening yourself to musical instruments, know what sound they make when they are loosened too much, but that they are snapped asunder when stretched too tight. It is the same way for your slaves. Too much license creates dissonance in the matter of obedience, but the stretching of forceful necessity causes the dissolution of nature itself. One must meditate on this: 'Right measure is best in everything.' Farewell."

COMMENTARY

Thesleff, *Texts*, 197.31–32. "in these matters a young soul must be brought up from girlhood."

Myia's letter to Phyllis (below) concerning the employment of a wet nurse indicates that children might well be accustomed to the services of a slave from the day of birth (see chap. 6, below).

Thesleff, *Texts*, 197.31. "The primary authority of women in the household is authority over the slaves [*therapainon*]."

Servants might be free women forced by economic necessity to work outside their homes, but it is far more likely that they were slaves. (See commentary on Myia's letter to Phyllis, below, chap. 6.) Moreover, the specific content of Theano's letter leaves no doubt that the servants she is discussing are slaves. Female slaves, ranging from children to adults, were more likely to work indoors and thus be under the mistress's authority. Their tasks included cleaning, carrying water and firewood, grinding grain, and other food preparation. They also provided personal care for their owner's family, such as nursing, cleaning and folding clothing, assisting at the toilette, and sexual services for the men in the household.

They often produced all the clothing worn by their owners and slaves in the household, and in their spare time they were expected to spin. A comfortable urban Greek household usually employed many more female than male domestics. Male slaves would work outdoors, farming, gardening, doing yard work, delivering messages, and accompanying their master or his sons in their daily routines.[46] Gender roles might be altered in times of need, especially at harvest time, when women could be deployed outdoors. We note that in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* the husband is the supreme authority in the household, but he delegates command to his wife after he has trained her to manage affairs as he would. In contrast, Theano II assumes that the young wife will take up the reins in the household immediately. Both Xenophon and Theano II emphasize the importance of winning the good will of the slave. Xenophon offers material rewards, such as a share in the profits and better clothing, Theano II simply recommends not using corporal punishments for slaves, as in her letter to Euboule (above), and she does not advise using such harsh measures for disciplining children.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 198.5–6. "a measure of food that is proportionate to the amount of woolwork produced by a day's work."

The reference to woolwork as the means of calculating a slave's food allowance makes it clear that the domestic slaves are female. Papyrus accounts from Hellenistic Egypt show that food rations were allocated according to the age, sex, and intensity of the job performed, while sometimes the quality of the food was gauged according to the status of the slave.[47]

Thesleff, *Texts*, 198.10. "reasoning [*logismos*], no less than righteous indignation, is an effective means of control."

We may contrast Aristotle's view that women possessed the rational part of the soul, but it was dormant, while slaves did not possess it at all (see above).

Thesleff, *Texts*, 198.17–21. "women, my dear, who because they are cruel—brutalized by jealousy or anger—even whip the bodies of their slaves as if they were inscribing the excess of their bitterness as a memorandum. In time, some of these [female slaves] are used up, utterly worked out; others procure safety by escaping; but some stop living, withdrawing into death with their own hands."

Slaves constituted a large capital investment. The prudent owner would keep them healthy, well fed, and willing to work, guarding lest they become ill, malevolent, unsalable, or in other ways prove to be an unprofitable investment. She would not punish them when she herself had lost self-control or was angry. The Pythagorean Archytas of Tarentum also cautioned against punishing slaves in anger. Thus he said in response to the negligence of his steward: "I would have beaten you to death by now, if I were not angry."[48]

Thesleff, *Texts*, 198.23. "musical instruments"

Ta organa may refer to organs of the human body or to musical instruments: *LSJ*, s.v. *organon*.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 198.23–27. "likening yourself to musical instruments, know what sound they make when they are loosened too much. . . . One must meditate on this: 'Right measure is best in everything.'"

Theano closes with a distinctively Pythagorean *sphragis*, the analogy between the harmonious human being and the well-tempered musical instrument. We may compare the sentiments with those expressed by Perictione I in her treatise "On the Harmonious Woman."

Theano II to Nicostrate

Thesleff, *Texts*, 198, Hercher, 604.5, trans. Vicki Lynn Harper, in Waithe, *Women Philosophers*, 44–46

INTRODUCTION

This letter was written in the Attic *koine*. Much of Theano's advice concerning coping with a philandering husband is similar to that given by Perictione I. The betrayed wife should not demean herself by being jealous or taking revenge. She should not lower herself to the level of her husband, who is enslaved by sexual passion and in thrall to a shameless woman. His madness accentuates, by contrast, the wife's reasonable, noble demeanor. By their behavior such a husband and wife belie Aristotle's view (*Pol.* 1.5.6–7 [1260a]) that, though both women and men possess the deliberative part of the soul, only men can exercise it. In fact, even the courtesans are rational and calculating; though they enslave men, unlike the men they themselves are not slaves to passion and sexual appetites (see below). Theano's advice foreshadows the common statement of psychologists in the modern Western world: You cannot change other people; in coping with difficulties created by others, you must change yourself.

Hetairai advertised their financial success and ability to command high prices by displaying their lucre in the form of gold and precious stones. Of course, they wore cosmetics. Wealthy respectable wives who were not Pythagoreans regularly wore jewelry and cosmetics, too, as we can see in Apulian vase painting (fig. 1, and see chaps. 1 and 2). Nevertheless, Pythagoras preferred that his female disciples distinguish themselves from all other women by eschewing precious jewelry and cosmetics.

The men of Croton in the days of Pythagoras and the philandering husbands of Neopythagoreans did not err merely by occasionally hiring a *porne* (common prostitute). Although Pythagoras did not approve of any infidelity, a few hours with a *porne* in a brothel would have constituted a brief "fling," a one-time expense.[49] Rather, the licentious husbands were supporting or contributing to the support of the entire household of a concubine or *hetaira*, including children, slaves, clothing, the house and its furnishings, religious expenses, in short, all the needs of daily life.[50] Exclusive access to a desirable and expensive *hetaira* or concubine in the highly competitive Greek society increased a man's amour propre. (Among all the available suitors she had chosen *him*.) A woman in the sex trade was not modest, like a respectable wife; thus she served as a display of conspicuous consumption. Perhaps the household of the *hetaira* was less expensive than that of the husband and legitimate wife; perhaps not. In any case, the wife's dowry had contributed to the economic foundation of the marital *oikos*, and her work and management skills assured its continuing prosperity, while the "kept" woman could no longer ply her trade and was dependent on one man for her livelihood.

In the *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, Lucian (born ca. AD 120) offers a realistic dramatic sketch of the lives of classical and Hellenistic courtesans and their swains, one that complements the picture painted in the Neopythagorean letters. The courtesans in Lucian are usually mercenary, though they may accept some lovers because they are handsome or pleasing. If they bear a child they tend to rear a boy and either expose a girl baby or raise her to be a *hetaira* (*DMeretr.* 1.281, 14.320). Most of their clients are unmarried youths, and the women are concerned that they will be deserted when their swains do marry (*DMeretr.*1.281–83). In one case a client is a married man; his wife said the courtesan had driven him crazy by means of drugs, but the only drug was his own jealousy of another lover (*DMeretr.* 8.301). The husband finally paid a talent (a huge price) for the courtesan's exclusive services for eight months. Competition among men for a desirable courtesan is a frequent theme, as well as competition among women for a wealthy lover.[51] Resort to witchcraft (including charms, spells, curses, and magical devices) to attract men is common (*DMeretr.* 1.281, 3.287–89). Courtesans are also available to wealthy female clients for lesbian relationships, although one courtesan terms these liaisons "unusual" (*allokoton*: *DMeretr.* 5.289). Athenaeus (ca. AD 170–230) also portrays *hetairai* as witty, sophisticated, and entertaining.[52] Most of the historical women who are featured in Athenaeus and Lucian lived in the classical and early Hellenistic period and illustrate the authors' belief that

human nature does not change over time.[53] Thus the scenarios described in the letters are perennial in the lives of courtesans and do not indicate that the Neopythagorean letters were written in Lucian's day.

Interestingly enough, the wives do not complain about the expenses involved when their husbands support other women. Perhaps they may not have been fully aware of the extravagant sums involved, though Theano points out that the errant husband may perceive the diminution of his livelihood and of his reputation. Rather, they bemoan their husband's sexual infidelity and mental and emotional servitude to another woman.

TRANSLATION

"Greetings. I hear repeatedly about your husband's madness: he has a courtesan; also that you feel jealous anger toward him. My dear, I have known many men with the same malady. It is as if they are hunted down by these women and held fast; it is as if they have lost their minds. But you are dispirited by night and by day, you are sorely troubled and contrive things against him. Don't you, at least, be that way, my dear. For the moral excellence of the wife is not surveillance of her husband but companionable accommodation; it is in the spirit of accommodation to bear his folly.

"If he associates with the courtesan with a view towards pleasure, he associates with his wife with a view towards the beneficial. It is beneficial not to compound evils with evils and not to augment folly with folly. Some faults, dear, are stirred up all the more when they are condemned, but cease when they are passed over in silence, much as they say fire quenches itself if left alone. Besides, though it seems that you wish to escape notice yourself, by condemning him, you will take away the veil that covers your own condition.

"Then you will manifestly err. You are not convinced that love of one's husband resides in conduct that is noble and good. For this is the grace of marital association. Recognize the fact that he goes to the courtesan in order to be frivolous, but that he abides with you in order to share a common life; that he loves you on the basis of good judgment, but her on the basis of passion. The moment for this is brief. It almost coincides with its own satisfaction. In a trice it both arises and ceases. The time for a courtesan is of brief duration for any man who is not excessively corrupt. For what is emptier than desire whose benefit of enjoyment is unrighteousness? Eventually he will see that he is diminishing his life and slandering his good character.

"No one who understands persists in self-chosen harm. Thus, being summoned by his just obligation towards you and perceiving the diminution of his

livelihood [he will take notice of you]. Unable to bear the outrage of moral condemnation, he will soon repent. My dear, this is how you must live: not defending yourself against courtesans, but distinguishing yourself from them by your orderly conduct towards your husband, by your careful attention to the house, by the calm way in which you deal with the servants, and by your tender love for your children. You must not be jealous of that woman (for it is good to extend your emulation only to women who are virtuous); rather, you must make yourself fit for reconciliation. Good character brings regard even from enemies, dear, and esteem is the product of nobility and goodness alone. In this way it is even possible for the power of a woman to surpass that of a man. It is possible for her to grow in his esteem instead of having to serve one who is hostile to her.

"If he has been properly prepared for it by you, he will be all the more ashamed; he will wish to be reconciled sooner and, because he is more warmly attached to you, he will love you more tenderly. Conscious of his injustice towards you, he will perceive your attention to his livelihood, and make trial of your affection towards himself. Just as bodily illnesses make their cessations sweeter, so also do differences between friends make their reconciliations more intimate. As for you, do resist the passionate resolutions of your suffering. Because he is not well, he invites you to share in his plight; because he himself misses the mark of decency, he invites you to fail in decorum; having damaged his own life he invites you to harm what is beneficial to you. Consequently you will seem to have conspired against him and, in reproving him, will appear to reprove yourself.

"If you divorce yourself from him and move on, you will change your first husband only to try another and, if he has the same failings, you will resort to another (for the lack of a husband is not bearable for young women). Or else you will abide alone without any husband like a spinster. Do you intend to be negligent of the house and to destroy your husband? Then you will share the spoils of an anguished life. Do you intend to avenge yourself upon the courtesan? Being on her guard, she will circumvent you; but, if she actively wards you off, a woman who has no tendency to blush is formidable in battle. Is it good to fight with your husband day after day? To what advantage? The battles and reproaches will not stop his licentious behavior, but they will increase the dissension between you by their escalations. What, then? Are you plotting something against him? Don't do it, my dear. Tragedy teaches us to conquer jealousy, encompassing a systematic treatise on the actions by which Medea was led to the commission of outrage. Just as it is necessary to keep one's hands away from a disease of the eyes, so must you separate your pretension from your pain. By patiently enduring you will quench your suffering sooner."

COMMENTARY

Thesleff, *Texts*, 198.33. "hunted down by these women"

Courtesans were free to pursue men and choose their sexual partners. Respectable wives, in contrast, were given in marriage to bridegrooms chosen by their parents.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 200.7–8. "if she actively wards you off, a woman who has no tendency to blush is formidable in battle."

A virtuous wife would be ill-equipped to contend with a *hetaira* who has long given up her innocence ("blush").

Thesleff, *Texts*, 200.12. "Medea"

Medea was notorious for the revenge she took on her husband, Jason, when he discarded her in favor of a new wife. In Euripides' *Medea* (431 BC), Medea killed not only the wife but also the two children Medea had borne to Jason. Her speech to the women of Corinth offers a valuable insight into the position of the Greek wife and the reasons why an unfaithful husband causes immeasurable pain:

> My whole life was bound up in him, as he well knows;
> Yet my husband has proved to be the worst of
> of all beings who breathe and have intelligence.
> We women are the most miserable creatures.
> First we have to buy a husband at a steep price,
> then take a master for our bodies.
> This second evil is worse than the first, but
> the greatest struggle turns on whether we get a bad
> husband or a good one. Divorce is not respectable
> for a woman and she cannot deny her husband. . . .
> If we work things out well and the husband
> lives with us without resisting his yoke,
> life is enviable. Otherwise it is better to die.
> A man, when he is tired of being with those inside,
> goes out and relieves his heart of boredom,
> or turns to some friend or contemporary.
> But we have to look to one person only.[54]

In the Hellenistic period, Euripides was the most popular of the classical tragic poets. Although there were variants of the Medea myth, there can be no doubt that Theano II is referring to the story as told by Euripides. Representations of Medea in the visual arts in the fourth century BC portray her murdering her

innocent children, a crime that was regarded as much more serious and more grievous to her husband and to herself than killing her husband's new wife.[55] The Stoic Chrysippus (second half of 3rd c. BC) used the example of Medea to illustrate the conflict between reason and anger in the soul, and Medea continued to be cited in discussions of human psychology by later philosophers.[56]

Thesleff, *Texts*, 200.13. "necessary to keep one's hands away from a disease of the eyes"

Theano II shows her knowledge of disease and infection. The Pythagoreans were particularly interested in health (see above on Theano II to Euclides). Eye infections were common and are frequently discussed in the medical papyri from Roman Egypt. See further R. P. J. Jackson, "Eye Medicine in the Roman Empire," in W. Haase, ed., *ANRW* 2.3, vol. 37.2.*Philosophie, Wissenschaften, Technik* (Berlin, 1995), 2228–52, esp. 2228–29.

Theano II to Rhodope the Philosopher

Thesleff, *Texts*, 200, Hercher, 606.8, trans. Vicki Lynn Harper, in Waithe, *Women Philosophers*, 53

INTRODUCTION

This letter was written in an "affected" Attic.[57] The reference to Plato's *Parmenides* makes it clear that the author lived after the mid-fourth century BC. As we have seen above, Perictione I personified the link between Platonism and Pythagoreanism.

It is difficult to believe that this letter was not written by a woman philosopher named Theano II to another female philosopher, who would understand the contents. That it is brief enough to be what we would classify as a "note" adds to the aura of authenticity. Why would a pseudonymous writer even bother to compose it?

It is interesting to observe that Theano does not hesitate to write of her fondness and admiration for a man who is evidently a stranger to her.

TRANSLATION

"Are you dispirited? I myself am dispirited. Are you distressed because I have not yet sent you Plato's book, the one entitled "Ideas or Parmenides"? But I myself am grieved to the greatest extent, because no one has yet met with me to discuss Cleon. I will not send you the book until someone arrives to clarify matters concerning this man. So exceedingly do I love the soul of the man—on the grounds

that it is the soul of a philosopher, of one zealous to do good, of one who fears the gods beneath the earth. And do not think the story is otherwise than it has been told. For I am half mortal and cannot bear to look directly on the star that makes day manifest [the sun]."

COMMENTARY

Thesleff, *Texts*, 200.20. "Cleon"

Iamblichus (*VP*, 267) lists a Cleon among the Pythagoreans from Tarentum. Theano may be referring to someone who was named for this man. Of course, Cleon is a common name, occupying some two columns in Fraser and Matthews (*LGPN* III.A, pp. 250–51), who cite Iamblichus, and *FVS*I, p. 446 for Cleon of Tarentum. Diogenes Laertius (10.84) also mentions a Cleon who was a contemporary of Epicurus.

"Ideas or Parmenides"

Plato asserts in the *Parmenides* that the Ideas exist and are unchangeable.[58] Diogenes Laertius (3.58) gives the two names of the *Parmenides*. Thus the title in the Loeb Library edition is "Parmenides [Or on Ideas: Logical] (*Parmenides e peri ideon: logikos*).[59] Though it has been argued that the second title goes back to Plato himself, the scholarly consensus is that it is Hellenistic.[60]

Theano II. Epistle to Timareta

Thesleff, *Texts*, 200.26, Waithe, *Women Philosophers*, 55, Poll. *Onom.* 10.21

This fragment is quoted by Pollux: "'Master of the house' and 'mistress of the house'—I found both these terms in the letter written by Theano the Pythagorean woman to Timareta."

Theano II to Tim(ai)onides

Thesleff, *Texts*, 200.30–35, Hercher 606, 8, trans. Vicki Lynn Harper, in Waithe, *Women Philosophers*, 55

This letter was written in the Attic *koine*. In tradition and in all texts attributed to Theano I and II, the women named Theano are portrayed as wise, moderate, and harmonious. The letter below is an indication that such adulation was not universal. Theano II was the object of scandal. Like other Pythagorean women, however, she restrains herself from taking revenge by behaving as Timaionides did. Instead, she defends herself and humiliates Timaionides by publishing this letter.

TRANSLATION

"What fellowship is there for you and me? Why do you continually slander us? Or do you not know that we praise you before everybody, even if you do the opposite? Then, again, do realize that even though we praise there is no one who believes, and even though you slander there is no one who listens. And I rejoice on this account: this is how the god sees it and the truth most certainly determines it to be."

Ptolemaïs of Cyrene

Thesleff, *Texts*, 242–43, trans. Andrew Barker, *Greek Musical Writings*, vol. 2, *Harmonic and Acoustical Theory* (Cambridge, 1989), 239–40

Neopythagorean women writers often refer to harmony, concord, attunement, and the proper tension of the strings of a lyre or kithara as a means of describing human emotions and relationships. To be sure, as educated Pythagoreans, these women would have understood not only how to tune and play a stringed instrument but also at least some of the musical theory underlying their practice. Ptolemaïs is particularly interesting in this context, for she writes of musical theory per se, rather than using musical concepts metaphorically.

The following passages by Ptolemaïs are quoted by Porphyry (232/33–ca. 305 AD) in his commentary on Claudius Ptolemy's *Harmonics* (*In Ptolemaei Harmonica Commentarium*). Ptolemy (who is better known as an astronomer) wrote in Alexandria during the first half of the second century AD. Porphyry quotes Ptolemaïs as an authority on canonic theory and remarks that the scholar Didymus (1st c. BC) adopted some of Ptolemaïs's views. Knowledge of the canonic theory indicates that Ptolemaïs had a firm grasp of mathematics. "Canonic" refers to straightness: a stretched string may thus be understood as a straight line and music seen as an expression of mathematical ratios and intervals that can be measured. Ptolemaïs's vocabulary shows that she was familiar with other sciences that were studied in the Hellenistic period.[61] For example, she uses such terms as *parapegmata*, a word used by astronomists to denote the movable pegs placed in a stone to indicate astronomical and meteorological events.

The treatise of Ptolemaïs deals with the philosophical issue of reason and perception in Pythagorean harmonics and in the theories Aristoxenus of Tarentum (4th c. BC) discussed in his *Elements of Harmony*.[62] Her detailed discussion of Aristoxenus indicates that she owned copies of his texts or perhaps read them in

the great library at Alexandria; in any case, she must have had them unrolled in front of her while she wrote. The argument among commentators in this period may be viewed as the familiar conflict between mind and body fought in the arena of musical theory. Pythagorean musical theory was based on mathematical principles, while other theorists favored using empirical sensory data. Although the title of her treatise seems to suggest otherwise, Ptolemaïs prefers the more moderate position of Aristoxenus, who considered both hearing and reason as the basis of the science of harmonics.[63]

Porphyry, in his *Commentary on Ptolemy's Harmonics*, describes Ptolemaïs's work as an "introduction" (*eisagoge*). He quotes the following passages from her *Pythagorean Doctrine of the Elements of Music*. In his *Commentary* Porphyry states: "A canon measures the attunements among musical notes—those differences which are studied as numerical ratios; these measurements may be used to correct the senses' perceptual deficiencies." But Ptolemaïs of Cyrene also writes about this matter (i.e., the use of the *kanon*) in her *Pythagorean Doctrine of the Elements of Music*, as follows:[64]

> The science of *kanonike* [canonics] of whom is it mainly characteristic? In general, of the Pythagoreans; for what we now call *harmonike* [harmonics] they used to name *kanonike*. From what do we derive the term *kanonike*? Not, as some people think, by transference from the instrument called the *kanon*, but from straightness, on the grounds that it is through this science that reason [*logos*] discovers what is correct, and discovers the *parapegmata* [i.e. "markings on a ruler positioned next to a string," see above] of what is well attuned.
>
> They also call *kanonike* the investigation that employs syrinxes [panpipes] and *auloi* [flutes] and the rest, though these are not strictly canonic; but they call them "canonic" too because the ratios and theorems fit them. Hence it is rather that the instrument was named "*kanon*" by derivation from the science of *kanonike*. A *kanonikos*, in general, is a harmonic theorist [*harmonikos*] who constructs ratios in connection with attunement [*to hermosmenon*]. *Mousikoi* and *kanonikoi* are different; for "*mousikoi*" is the name given to the harmonic theorists who begin from perceptions, while "*kanonikoi*" is that given to the Pythagorean harmonic theorists. But each of the two groups is in the generic sense *mousikoi*.

To this she adds, in the form of question and answers once again:

> The theory that uses the *kanon*—of what does it consist? Of the things postulated by the *mousikoi* and those adopted by the *mathematikoi*. The things

> postulated by the *mousikoi* are all those adopted by the *kanonikoi* on the basis of perceptions, for instance that there are concordant and discordant intervals, and that the octave is compounded from the fourth and the fifth, and that the excess of a fifth over a fourth is a tone, and similar things. Those adopted by the *mathematikoi* are all those which the *kanonikoi* study theoretically in their own special way, only beginning from the starting points given by perception, for instance that the intervals are in ratios of numbers, and that a note consists of numbers of collisions, and other things of the same sort. Hence one might define the postulates of *kanonike* as lying both within the science concerned with music, and within that concerned with numbers and geometry.

After quoting Ptolemy, Porphyry continues:[65]

> Pythagoras and his successors wish to accept perception as a guide for reason at the outset, to provide reason with a spark, as it were; but they treat reason, when it has set out from these beginnings, as working on its own in separation from perception. Hence if the system [*systema*] discovered by reason in its investigation no longer accords with perception, they do not retrace their steps, but level accusations, saying that perception is going astray, while reason by itself has discovered what is correct, and refutes perception.
>
> An opposite position to this is held by some of the *mousikoi* who follow Aristoxenus, those who applied themselves to a theoretical science based in thought, while nevertheless setting out from expertise on instruments. For they treated perception as authoritative, and reason as attending on it, for use only when needed. According to these people, to be sure, it is only to be expected that the rational postulates of the *kanon* are not always concordant with the perceptions.

Porphyry then introduces his final and longest quotation from Ptolemaïs:[66]

"Concerning these matters Ptolemaïs of Cyrene wrote briefly about these subjects in her introductory treatise, and Didymus entered on them at great length in his *On the Difference between the Aristoxenians and the Pythagoreans*. We shall write out what each of them says, altering a few things for the sake of brevity. Ptolemaïs, then, writes as follows:"

> What is the difference between those who are distinguished in the field of music? Some preferred reason by itself, some perception, some both together. Reason was preferred by those of the Pythagoreans who were especially keen on disputing with the *mousikoi*, arguing that perception should be thrown out completely, and that reason should be brought in as an autonomous criterion

in itself. These people are wholly refuted by their practice of accepting something perceptible at the beginning, and then forgetting that they have done so. The instrumentalists [*organikoi*], on the other hand, preferred perception: they gave no thought at all, or only feeble thought, to theory.

What is the distinction between those who prefer the combination of both? Some accepted both perception and reason in the same way, as being of equal power, while others accepted the one as the leader, the other as the follower. Aristoxenus of Tarentum accepted both in the same way. For what is perceived cannot be constituted by itself apart from reason, and neither is reason strong enough to establish anything without taking its starting points from perception, and delivering the conclusion of its theorizing [*theorema*] in agreement with perception once again. In what way does he want perception to be in the lead of reason? In order [*taxis*], not in power [*dynamis*]. For when the perceptible thing, whatever it may be, has been reviewed by perception, then, he says, we must put reason in the lead, for the theoretical study of this precept. Who are those who treat both together alike? Pythagoras and his successors. For[67] they wish to accept perception as a guide for reason at the outset, to provide reason with a spark, as it were; but they treat reason, when it has set out from these beginnings, as working on its own in separation from perception. Hence if the system [*systema*] discovered by reason in its investigation no longer accords with perception, they do not retrace their steps, but level accusations, saying that perception is going astray, while reason by itself has discovered what is correct, and refutes perception. Who are in opposition to these? Some of the *mousikoi* who follow Aristoxenus, those who applied themselves to a theoretical science based in thought, while nevertheless setting out from expertise on instruments. For they treated perception as authoritative, and reason as attending on it, for use only when needed.

CHAPTER SIX

The Letters and Treatises of Neopythagorean Women in the West

Aesara on Human Nature

Thesleff, *Texts*, s.v. Aresas, pp. 48–50, Stob. 1.49.27, pp. 355–57, trans. Vicki Lynn Harper, in Waithe, *Women Philosophers*, 20

INTRODUCTION

Stobaeus, the only source, identifies the author as Aesara, a Pythagorean of Lucania. According to some biographical traditions, Pythagoras had a daughter named Aisara; hence this name would be a likely one for a Neopythagorean woman. Thesleff places the author in the third century BC and identifies the dialect as Doric. He argues that the author is a man, Aresas of Lucania (who is mentioned by Iamblichus (*VP* 266), noting his ties to the school of Archytas, though he reports other scholarly views about the attribution.[1] This Aresas was a contemporary of Gorgias and therefore dates to the late fifth century BC.[2] It is difficult to follow Thesleff's arguments because they are presented in the highly condensed style appropriate to an apparatus criticus. He seems to base his identification of the author as male on two emendations.[3] Thesleff is not persuasive here: Mary Ellen Waithe with Vicki Harper,[4] Sister Prudence Allen,[5] and Ian Plant[6] take Stobaeus at face value and identify the author as Aesara of Lucania, as I do.

A long fragment of the text is preserved. It is a philosophical treatise that offers no clues about the author's gender. As all Greek philosophers do, Aesara uses masculine pronouns and words when writing about human beings in general and about concepts, like the soul, that apply to both women and men. Like Perictione's treatise *On Wisdom*, Aesara's text is written for both women and men.

Aesara discusses natural law as it concerns individual morality, the family,

[1] See the introductory paragraph of Chapter 5.

and society.[7] The tripartite soul, comprising mind, spirit, and desire, is Platonic, and common to both women and men.[8] The sphere of mind is thought and judgment; spirit encompasses courage and strength; and friendship, love, and kindness correspond to the third of the soul that is desire. All three components need to be in balance and to work together in harmony. Understanding human nature is essential for understanding law and morality.[9] As Harper and Waithe explain, law and justice are analogous to the spirited element of the soul. Finally, mind (*noos*) creates harmony between such dissimilar things as sweetness and seriousness and pleasure and virtue.

TRANSLATION

"Human nature seems to me to provide a standard of law and justice both for the home and for the city. By following the tracks within himself whoever seeks will make a discovery: law is in him and justice, which is the orderly arrangement of the soul. Being threefold, it is organized in accordance with triple functions: that which effects judgment and thoughtfulness is [the mind], that which effects strength and ability is [high spirit], and all that effects love and kindliness is desire. These are all so disposed relatively to one other, that the best part is in command, the most inferior is governed, and the one in between holds a middle place; it both governs and is governed.

"The god thus contrived these things according to principle in both the outline and completion of the human dwelling place, because he intended man alone to become a recipient of law and justice, and none other of mortal animals. A composite unity of association could not come about from a single thing, nor indeed from several which are all alike. (For it is necessary, since the things to be done are different, that the parts of the soul also be different, just as in the case of the body [the organs of touch and] sight and hearing and taste and smell differ, for these do not all have the same affinity with everything.)

"Nor could such a unity come from several dissimilar things at random, but rather, from parts formed in accordance with the completion and organization and fitting together of the entire composite whole. Not only is the soul composed from several dissimilar parts, these being fashioned in conformity with the whole and complete, but in addition these are not arranged haphazardly and at random, but in accordance with rational attention.

"For if they had an equal share of power and honor, though being themselves unequal – some inferior, some better, some in between—the association of parts throughout the soul could not have been fitted together. Or, even if they did have an unequal share, but the worse rather than the better had the greater share,

there would be great folly and disorder in the soul. And even if the better had the greater, and the worse the lesser, but each of these had not the proper proportion, there could not be unanimity and friendship and justice throughout the soul, since when one is arranged in accordance with the suitable proportion, this sort of arrangement I assert to be justice.

"And indeed a certain unanimity and agreement in sentiment accompanies such an arrangement. This sort would justly be called good order of the soul, whichever, due to the better part's ruling and the inferior's being ruled, should add the strength of virtue to itself. Friendship and love and kindliness, cognate and kindred, will sprout from these parts. For a closely-inspecting mind persuades, love desires, and high spirit is filled with strength; once seething with hatred, it becomes friendly to desire.

"Mind having fitted the pleasant together with the painful, mingling also the tense and robust with the slight and relaxed portion of the soul, each part is distributed in accordance with its kindred and suitable concern for each thing: mind closely inspecting and tracking out things, high spirit adding impetuosity and strength to what is closely inspected, and desire, being akin to affection, adapts to the mind, preserving the pleasant as its own, and giving up the thoughtful to the thoughtful part of the soul. By virtue of these things the best life for man seems to me to be whenever the pleasant should be mixed with the earnest and pleasure with virtue. Mind is able to fix these things to itself, becoming lovely through systematic education and virtue."

COMMENTARY

Thesleff, *Texts*, 49.1. "both for the home and for the city."

Like Pythagoras himself, Aesara sees the *oikos* not merely as a component of the city but as a realm equal to the city. Although Aesara does not mention that *oikoi* function under the authority of a woman (see below, on Myia to Phyllis), the Hellenistic reader will have understood that the sphere of women is here considered to be equal to men's sphere.[10]

Thesleff, *Texts*, 49.9. "*The* god"

Waithe, *Women Philosophers*, and Plante translate *ho theos* as "god," but "the god" is not only a more accurate translation but also more appropriate to a polytheistic religion.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 49.21–23. "For if they had an equal share of power and honor, though being themselves unequal—some inferior, some better, some in between—the association of parts throughout the soul could not have been fitted together."

Here too is a reflection of the Platonic doctrine that justice is the harmonious

and equal balance of the components of the tripartite soul and likewise of law and justice. Like Plato, Aesara does not differentiate between the souls of women and men.

Melissa to Cleareta

Thesleff, *Texts*, 115–16, Hercher, 607, *P. Haun.* (3rd c. AD, no provenance, where the letter is paraphrased from Doric into the Attic *koine*), trans. Sarah B. Pomeroy.

According to Thesleff, Melissa's letter should be dated to the third century BC.[11]

INTRODUCTION

Melissa's letter is consistent with the views on women's wisdom and virtues expressed by Perictione I, Theano II, and Phintys. Melissa differs from Pythagoras in that she believes respectable women may wear some cosmetics, whereas Pythagoras banished them entirely.

Melissa's name, a common women's name, means "honey bee." In Greek thought, the woman who is like a bee is virtuous, industrious, clean, and a good housekeeper.[12]

TRANSLATION

"You appear to have the majority of virtues all by yourself. Your enthusiastic wish to hear about women's adornment offers good hope that you will perfect yourself as far as virtue is concerned. It is necessary for the woman who is chaste and free to live with her lawful husband, quiet, having made her face beautiful inexpensively, wearing clean white simple clothing, but not overly costly or elaborate. She must avoid sheer, gold, or purple clothing. These are useful for *hetairai* ensnaring more men. Her character, not her dresses, is the adornment of a woman who is pleasing to her own husband, not to her neighbors.

"She should wear the red blush of modesty instead of rouge on her face, and honor, decorum, and chastity instead of gold and emerald. She must direct her love of beauty not toward expensive clothing but toward chastity, household management, and pleasing her own husband, by accomplishing what he wants. For to a woman of decorum the wishes of her husband are an unwritten law by which she must live her life.

"She must consider that the most beautiful and greatest dowry she has brought with her is orderliness. She should trust in the beauty and treasure of her soul, rather than in that of her face and possessions. Jealousy and sickness take away

the latter, but for the woman who has them the former are possessions until death."

COMMENTARY

Thesleff, *Texts*, 115. "white simple clothing."

The original Pythagoreans also wore white: see chap. 1, above.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 115.27–116.1. "It is necessary for the woman who is chaste and free . . . but not overly costly or elaborate."

In *Advice to the Bride and Groom* (29), Plutarch gives similar instructions concerning the moderate use of adornment and the need for a wife to deploy enough charms, both artificial and natural, to please her husband, without resorting to the meretricious and ostentatious displays deployed by courtesans.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 116. "the red blush of modesty"

Cf. Theano II to Nicostrate (chap. 5) who describes a *hetaira* as a woman who has no tendency to blush.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 116.3–4. "She must avoid sheer, gold, or purple clothing. These are useful for *hetairai* ensnaring more men."

As the remarks of Theano I about not baring her arm in public and about nudity in the husband's presence makes clear, Pythagorean women approved of seductive dress and behavior, but only in private and only to enhance their relationship with their husband.[13]

Thesleff, *Texts*, 116.13. "For to a woman of decorum the wishes of her husband are an unwritten law by which she must live her life."

The unwritten law may be seen as higher and more immutable and universal than written laws (see, inter alia, Xen., *Mem.* 4.4.19).

Phintys of Sparta. "On the Moderation of Women," Fragment I

Thesleff, *Texts*, 151, Stob. 4.23.61, pp. 588–91, trans. Vicki Harper, in Waithe, *Women Philosophers*, 26–28

INTRODUCTION

There are several possibilities for the date, lineage, and even the name of Phintys. Thesleff suggests that she is the same as the Philtys, daughter of Theophris of Croton, mentioned in Iamblichus's catalogue.[14] He also suggests that her father was Callicratidas, who died in 406 BC at the battle of Arginusae.[15] This genealogy would place Phintys in the last quarter of the fifth century BC and beginning of

the fourth. Stobaeus (4.23.61, p. 588), however, who preserves her writings, states that Phintys is the daughter of Callicrates.[16] The name Callicrates is attested in fourth–third century Tarentum, where a Callicrates was a mint official or some sort of administrator in 235–238 BC.[17] Therefore it seems most likely that Phintys was a Neopythagorean in Tarentum in the third to second century BC, and of Spartan descent, like other Tarentines.[18] The use of names from classical Sparta was characteristic of the Spartan revival in the Hellenistic period.[19] Phintys writes in Doric. The title of her essay is *Peri gynaikos sophrosynas. Sophrosyne* is translated here as "moderation." It may also be construed as "self-control," a virtue traditionally ascribed to women in Greek thought (see chap. 3). Phintys goes on to define the virtues suitable to women and men, respectively, and the virtues that are appropriate to both. Both women and men should study philosophy in order to understand their specific virtues. Though much of her advice is conventional, her view that women should philosophize is found in other texts of Pythagorean women, and it was decidedly not the opinion of most Greeks. In fact, Aristotle thought women were innately incapable of rational thinking (see chap. 5, above).

Phintys writes in hyperbole. Whereas other Neopythagorean women are concerned about adultery of both husbands and wives, Phintys fulminates only about the consequences of adultery in women. She warns that it is worse than crimes that merit the death penalty, that it is an offence not only to the family, but to gods, ancestors, and country. True to Spartan tradition she thinks in absolutes—no nuances, no extenuating circumstances—advocates stringent ethical standards, and contemplates the most drastic penalties for moral transgressions.

TRANSLATION

"A woman must be altogether good and orderly; without excellence [*arête*] she would never become so. The excellence appropriate to each thing makes superior that which is receptive of it: the excellence appropriate to the eyes makes the eyes so; that appropriate to hearing, the faculty of hearing; that appropriate to a horse, a horse; that appropriate to a man, a man. So too the excellence appropriate to a woman makes a woman excellent. The excellence most appropriate to a woman is moderation [*sophrosyne*]. For, on account of this virtue, she will be able to honor and love her husband.

"Now, perhaps many think that it is not fitting for a woman to philosophize, just as it is not fitting for her to ride horses or speak in public. But I think that some things are peculiar to a man, some to a woman, some are common to both, some belong more to a man than a woman, some more to a woman than a man. Peculiar to a man are serving in battle, political activity, and public speak-

ing; peculiar to a woman are staying at home and indoors, and welcoming and serving her husband. But I say that courage [*andreia*] and justice and wisdom are common to both. Excellences of the body are appropriate for both a man and a woman, likewise those of the soul. And just as it is beneficial for the body of each to be healthy, so too, it is beneficial for the soul to be healthy. The excellences of the body are health, strength, keenness of perception, and beauty. Some of these are more fitting for a man to cultivate and possess, some more for a woman. For courage and wisdom are more appropriate for a man, both because of the constitution of his body and because of his strength of soul, while moderation is more appropriate for a woman.

"Therefore one must discover the nature of the woman who is trained in moderation, and make known the number and kinds of things which confer this good upon a woman. I say this comes from five things: first, from piety and reverence concerning her marriage bed; second, from decency with respect to her body; third, from the processions of those from her own household; fourth, from not indulging in mystery rites and celebrations of Cybele; and fifth, from being devout and correct in her sacrifices to the divine.

"Of these, that which most of all causes and preserves moderation is being incorruptible in respect to her marriage, and not getting mixed up with a strange man. For, first, a woman who thus transgresses does an injustice to the gods of her race, providing not genuine, but spurious, allies to her house and family. She does an injustice to the natural gods by whom she swore, along with her ancestors and kin, to share in a common life and the lawful procreation of children. She also does an injustice to her fatherland, by not abiding among those who were duly appointed for her. Then she is wont to err over and above those for whom death, the greatest of penalties, is determined. On account of the magnitude of injustice to do wrong and commit outrages for the sake of pleasure is unlawful and least deserving of mercy. The issue of all outrage is destruction."

Phintys of Sparta, "On the Moderation of Women," Fragment 2

Thesleff, *Texts*, 153, Stob. 4.23.61a, p. 591–93, Waithe, *Women Philosophers*, 30

TRANSLATION

"One must consider this too, that she will find no purifying remedy for this fault, so as to be chaste and loved by the gods when approaching their temples and altars. For in the case of this injustice most of all, even the divine spirit is merciless. The noblest honor and the chief glory of a married woman is to bring witness of

her virtue with respect to her husband through her own children, if, haply, they should bear the stamp of likeness to the father who sired them. This sums up the subject of moderation with respect to marriage.

"My thoughts on moderation with respect to bodily decency are as follows: The woman of moderation must be clad in white, simply and plainly dressed. She will be thus if, indeed, she does not wear transparent or embroidered robes, or those woven from silk, but, rather, garments that are decent and plain white. The main thing is that she be decent and avoid luxury and display; then she will not arouse ignominious envy in other women. As for gold and emeralds, she simply will not deck herself out in them, for then she would display characteristics of wealth and arrogance towards ordinary women.

"But the well-regulated city, arranged throughout with a view to the whole, must be based on sympathy and unanimity. One must even debar from the city the craftsmen, who make such ornaments. The woman of moderation must embellish her appearance not with imported and alien ornaments, but with the natural beauty of the body; washing clean with water, she must adorn herself with modesty rather than these. Thus she will bring honor to the man with whom she shares her life, and to herself.

"Next, women must make public processions from the house in order to sacrifice to the founder-god of the city on behalf of themselves and their husbands, and entire households. Moreover, it is not when the evening star has risen, nor in darkness, that a woman must make her expeditions to attend the theatre or to purchase wares for the house, but rather, as market-time approaches, just so long as it is light. This she must do guided by one handmaid, or at the most, two.

"Next, she must offer prayers of sacrifice to the gods to the extent to which she is authorized to do so, but must refrain from secret rites at home, and celebrations of Cybele. The common law prevents women from celebrating these rites, because among other things, such religious practices lead to drunkenness and derangement. But the mistress of the house, even presiding at home, must be temperate and untouched in the face of everything."

COMMENTARY

Thesleff, *Texts*, 152.2, 6. "it is not fitting for her to ride horses"

Since the archaic period Spartan women were familiar with horses and drove chariots. Figurines excavated in Sparta depict female divinities as riders. Agesilaus II used to play "pony on a stick" with his son and two daughters (Plut. *Ages.* 25.6, *Sayings of Spartans*, 213.70). This report is further indication that girls played at riding astride. In 220/219 BC the heroic wife of Panteus fled on a gal-

loping horse (Plut. *Cleom.* 38). The Spartans Cynisca and Euryleonis were the first women whose chariots were victorious at Olympia.[20] Sparta was not the only city where an equestrienne might be seen. In central Rome, at the eastern end of the Forum, a statue honoring the heroine Cloelia riding a horse had been on display probably since the fourth century BC.[21] Since riding and owning horses were also a means of displaying wealth, Phintys may have been advising women to be more modest.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 152.2, 6. "it is not fitting for her to . . . speak in public."

Spartan women played a role in politics by praising the brave and jeering at cowards and bachelors. When a member of the Gerousia (Council of Elders) was elected, he was followed by throngs of young men who praised him and many women who sang of his excellence and congratulated him on his good fortune.[22] Phintys, however, does not approve of these practices of her countrywomen, which were unique in the Greek world.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 152.11. "courage" (*andreia*).

See Perictione I, chap. 5, above. Compare Thesleff, *Texts*, 142.20. "courageous" [lit. "manly," *andreie*] on courage as a virtue of women as well as of men.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 152, 1.12–15. "Excellences of the body are appropriate for both a man and a woman. . . . It is beneficial for the soul to be healthy."

Attention to the physical welfare of women as well as of men was part of the Spartan tradition, widely attested in literature including Xenophon, *The Spartan Constitution*, the poetry of Alcman and Aristophanes, Plutarch, *Life of Lycurgus*, as well as in sculpture.[23] Pythagoras included a private morning walk and an afternoon walk with fellow disciples as part of the recommended daily regimen (Iambl. *VP* 96– 97).

Thesleff, *Texts*, 152–53, 25–28, 1–2. "and not getting mixed up with a strange man. . . . By not abiding among those who were duly appointed for her."

Phintys here reflects the well-known Spartan xenophobia. Spartans were concerned not so much about adultery per se but rather about liaisons with a non-Spartan. The Spartans practiced husband-doubling and wife-lending for the purposes of reproduction, but the wives were permitted to have intercourse only with another Spartan, never with a foreigner.[24]

Thesleff, *Texts*, 153, fr. 2.16–19. "white, simply and plainly dressed. She will be thus if, indeed, she does not wear transparent or embroidered robes, or those woven from silk, but, rather, garments that are decent and plain white."

Pythagoras himself had urged the women of Croton to dedicate their elaborate clothing to Hera Lacinia, to dress simply, and to come to hear his homily without an entourage of slaves (see chap. 2). Such advice, echoed through the let-

ters of women writers beginning with Perictione I, is a continuing reminder not only of the wealth of the Pythagoreans but also of their constant desire to avoid conspicuous consumption (see below).

Thesleff, *Texts*, 153.13–14. "they should bear the stamp of likeness to the father who sired them."

This statement concerns the legitimacy of the child, but it is interesting also to discuss why Phintys does not note that, of course, the child may resemble the mother, or both parents, as well. Children belonged to the family (*oikos*) of their father and remained with him in case of divorce or with the father's family in case of the father's death.[25] As a result of these legal arrangements and the more private lives of women, the child was seen more frequently with his or her father and paternal relatives than with the mother and maternal relatives. Therefore the observer was more likely to perceive resemblances (or the lack thereof) on the father's side. Nossis (ca. 300 BC) states that it is also good for a girl to resemble her mother.[26]

Thesleff, *Texts*, 153.27. "washing clean with water."

See chap. 5, Perictione I, on bathing.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 153.26–28. "The woman of moderation must embellish her appearance not with imported and alien ornament, but with the natural beauty of the body; washing clean with water, she must adorn herself with modesty rather than these."

Pythagoras had advised women not to wear cosmetics. Doubtless he was influenced by the prohibition on the wearing of cosmetics attributed to Lycurgus. In Sparta cosmetics, perfumes, and other bodily adornments were banished, and the legendary beauty of Spartan women was a natural result of good health and exercise.[27] With the exception of Ovid, no male Greek or Roman author approves of cosmetics. They are variously described as deceptive, condemned as a needless expense, associated with drugs and magic, and suitable only for prostitutes and other women seeking adulterous relationships.[28] A treatise on cosmetics, however, is attributed to a Cleopatra who probably lived in the first century BC. Her work includes medical remedies as well as advice on improving one's appearance with hair dyes, etc.[29] Xenophon, who admired much about the Spartan way of life, preferred that his wife not wear cosmetics because they were deceptive.[30] Nevertheless, the visual arts in the Greek world as early as Bronze Age frescoes from Cnossus and Thera indicate that most respectable women—even those of the highest rank, including priestesses—used cosmetics liberally, with no attempt to render their appearance as natural. They dyed their eyebrows, applied

rouge made of alkanet, and exaggerated the pallor of their skin with white lead carbonate (which is nowadays known to be toxic).[31] Melissa and Perictione I also advise women against using cosmetics (see above and chap. 5).

Thesleff, *Texts*, 154.1–3. "Next, women must make public processions from the house in order to sacrifice to the founder-god of the city on behalf of themselves and their husbands, and entire households."

Pythagoras believed women were especially pious. Here Phintys states that a woman is responsible for sacrificing not only on behalf of herself but also for her husband and entire *oikos*. Throughout antiquity, even when their public role was otherwise diminished, women always played an important role in religion. Their participation was essential to the religious well-being of the polis. The citizenry celebrated the cult of the founder each year. In Tarentum (known as Taras to the Greeks), Phintys celebrated the cult of Taras. Taras, originally a river, became anthropomorphized into Taras, son of Poseidon and a local nymph, Satyrion. According to other mythological traditions, Satyrion was a son of Poseidon.[32] Tarentum also had a human founder named Phalanthos, who was heroized. By the time of Phintys the cult of Taras overshadowed the cult of Phalanthos. See further Irad Malkin, *Myth and Territory in the Spartan Mediterranean* (Cambridge, 1994), 127, 129.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 154.5–6. "guided by one handmaid, or at the most, two."

The female slaves would both carry packages and serve as chaperones and bodyguards; they were a means of advertising and preserving a woman's respectability. Slaves embodied a capital investment; thus, they were also used to display the owner's wealth. Consistent with the lack of ostentation favored by the Pythagoreans and Neopythagoreans, the number of slaves visible in public was limited to one or two. Thus this recommendation echoes the earlier advice to avoid luxury and display in order not to arouse envy in other women. Such envy would cause a lack of harmony in society.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 154, 6–8. "Next, she must offer prayers of sacrifice to the gods to the extent to which she is authorized to do so, but must refrain from secret rites at home, and celebrations of Cybele. The common law prevents women from celebrating these rites, because among other things, such religious practices lead to drunkenness and derangement."

Among the Asian cults and mystery religions that spread through the Greek world in the Hellenistic period, the cult of Cybele was one of the most popular.[33] Women were attracted to the cult and were particularly visible in the cult ceremonies. Critics railed against the frenzied orgiastic state, the uninhibited danc-

ing, the wild tossing of the head, the percussive Asian music, and the nocturnal setting of many of the cult ceremonies. In a word, the cult of Cybele was totally anathema to the Pythagorean ideal of decorum, moderation, and temperance.

Perictione II. "On Wisdom"

Thesleff, *Texts*, 146, Stob. 3.1.120, pp. 85–87, trans. Vicki Harper in Waithe, *Women Philosophers*, 55–56

INTRODUCTION

Perictione II bears the same name as Plato's mother. Her text has some affinities with Platonism, especially in its emphasis on geometry and arithmetic. She writes in an "affected" Doric and is therefore discussed in this chapter, whereas Perictione I, who writes in Ionic, is discussed in chapter 5.[34] Thesleff points out similarities between this treatise and another *On Wisdom* attributed to Archytas II, but these similarities are not close and are largely confined to one paragraph of Archytas.[35]

Perictione II recommends philosophizing as a goal for both women and men because it brings human beings closer to the divine. That the soul has no sex is also a Platonic concept and appropriate to a woman who bears the name of Plato's mother and who is herself an example of a female philosopher.

TRANSLATION

"Humanity came into being and exists in order to contemplate the principle of the nature of the whole. The function of wisdom is to gain possession of this very thing, and to contemplate the purpose of the things that are.

"Geometry, therefore, and arithmetic, and the other theoretical studies and sciences are also concerned with the things that are, but wisdom is concerned with all the genera of these. Wisdom is concerned with all that is, just as sight is concerned with all that is visible, and hearing with all that is audible. As for the attributes of things, some belong universally to all, some to most things, some to individual things as such.

"It is appropriate to wisdom to be able to see and to contemplate those attributes which belong universally to all things; those that belong to most things are the business of natural science, while separate sciences are concerned with the more individual and particular. On account of this, wisdom searches for the basic principles of all the things that are, natural science for the principles of natural things, while geometry and arithmetic and music are concerned with quantity and the harmonious.

"Therefore, whoever is able to analyze all the kinds of being by reference to one and the same basic principle, and, in turn, from this principle to synthesize and enumerate the different kinds, this person seems to be the wisest and most true, and, moreover, to have discovered a noble height from which he will be able to catch sight of the god and all the things separated from him [the god] in seried rank and order."

COMMENTARY

Thesleff, *Texts*, 146.17. "the harmonious" (*to emmeles*)

Thesleff, *Texts*, 146.18. "one and the same basic principle"

As we have seen, according to the Pythagoreans, *harmonia* is the principle of everything, including (as Perictione II states here) geometry, arithmetic, and the musical arts.[36]

Myia to Phyllis

Thesleff, *Texts*, 123–24, Hercher, 608, trans. Vicki Harper, in Waithe, *Women Philosophers*, 15–16

INTRODUCTION

The name Myia appears in Iamblichus's catalogue of Pythagorean women (*VP* 267). Myia was the name of one of the daughters of Pythagoras and Theano I. She became the wife of Milo of Croton.[37] This treatise was written in the third or second century BC by a woman named for the original Myia, who was (like her mother Theano I) a paragon among women. Like Theano II, in her letter to Euboule, this Neopythagorean Myia gives advice on childrearing. Myia means "carrion fly, bluebottle."[38] The name Phyllis refers to greenery and is common in bucolic literature (e.g., Verg., *Ecl.* 3.76, 78, 5.10, 7.14, 10.37). Thus the two women are naturally well matched.

Myia was also the name of a Spartan poet who wrote hymns.[39] Thesleff determined that this letter was written "in an inconsistent Doric."[40] He therefore classifies Myia among the western authors and dates her to the third or second century BC.[41] Like Theano, in her letters to wives married to philandering husbands and in her writing on childcare, Myia offers useful, practical advice. Her present subject is baby care and the choice of a wet nurse, but she ends by promising to give more advice when the child is older.

Myia directs her advice on the selection of a wet nurse to Phyllis alone, rather than to both the mother and the father. Though the mother was not going to

nurse her infant, mothers were in charge of young children. The sexual division of labor was thought to be natural. As Xenophon (*Oec.* 7.24–25) writes: "The god was aware that he had both implanted in the woman and assigned to her the nurture of newborn children, he had measured out to her a greater affection for newborn babies than he gave to the man."[42] Plato (*Laws* 7.806 A, E) also considers the nurturing of children a basic function of women. Aristotle (*Gen. an.* 3.759b7) formulates the same thought negatively: "No male creatures customarily trouble themselves about children."[43]

In a well-to-do household, wet nurses were considered a normal part of a baby's retinue of caretakers. Wet nurses are discussed in papyrus letters found in Egypt.[44] According to Plutarch (*Eroticus*, 9) nurses are part of the natural hierarchy: the nurse rules the child. Plutarch may have written a treatise titled "The Wetnurse."[45] His own wife, Timoxena, nursed some of her children herself, and employed a wet nurse for the others.[46]

In the first and second centuries AD, male moralists—for example Tacitus, Frontinus, Plutarch, and Pseudo-Plutarch—urged mothers to nurse their own babies, though they recognized that, despite the presence of breasts, nursing was not always possible (e.g., Ps. Plut. *On the Education of Children*, 2c, 3c, d). Therefore it is important to observe that here, in the only extant ancient text on nursing by a woman to a woman, the possibility of the mother nursing her baby is not even raised. This was not yet the La Leche League era, when women supported and instructed nursing mothers in their efforts to feed their babies themselves. Myia has no doubt that Phyllis will not nurse her baby herself but will employ a wet nurse.

Numerous reasons for a postpartum woman to prefer a wet nurse come to mind: the obvious one is that the new mother does not want the responsibility and inconvenience of nursing. Fifty percent of infants of all classes in antiquity died in their first year; the mother who employed a wet nurse would bond less with her baby than a mother who nursed her baby herself. Moreover, in this era of high infant mortality the nonlactating new mother could become pregnant again more quickly. Furthermore, if she had given birth to a girl, she might produce a boy sooner. As we can see from Myia's letter, the woman who nursed was advised to avoid sexual contact with her husband. Therefore we may conjecture that the baby's father would have supported his wife's decision not to nurse. Wet nurses were ubiquitous conveniences for those who could afford them.

Soranus of Ephesus, who was the leading gynecologist in Rome during the reign of Hadrian (AD 117–138), also prefers that babies be fed mother's milk, but he nevertheless gives much more extensive advice concerning the selection

of a wet nurse and her care of the baby. Myia's advice, though more concise, is consistent with that given by Soranus.[47] The general belief that the nursing infant would imbibe the personal characteristics of the nurse along with her milk permeates the thinking of both Myia and Soranus. The nurse must be orderly and temperate herself in order to transmit these virtues to the nursling. We therefore deduce that these virtues are not confined to the freeborn but may be found in lower-class women.

There was no Dr. Spock to change childcare in classical antiquity. The uniformity of views on childrearing found in literature and in documents from classical Athens to Roman Egypt and imperial Rome makes it impossible to draw any conclusion based only on the content about when and where Myia wrote her letter to Phyllis.

TRANSLATION

"Greetings. Because you have become a mother of children, I offer you this advice. Choose a nurse who is well disposed and clean, one who is modest and not given to excessive sleep or drink. Such a woman will be best able to judge how to bring up your children in a manner appropriate to their free-born station—provided, of course, that she has enough milk to nourish a child, and is not easily overcome by her husband's entreaties to share his bed. A nurse has a great part in this which is first and prefatory to a child's whole life, i.e., nurturing with a view to raising a child well. For she will do all things well at the appropriate time. Let her offer the nipple and breast and nourishment, not on the spur of the moment, but according to due consideration. Thus will she guide the baby to health. She should not give in whenever she herself desires to sleep, but when the newborn desires to rest. She will be no small comfort to the child. Let her not be irascible or loquacious or indiscriminate in the taking of food, but orderly and temperate and, if at all possible, not foreign, but Greek.

"It is best to put the newborn to sleep when it has been suitably filled with milk, for then rest is sweet to the young, and such nourishment is easy to digest. If there is any other nourishment, one must give food that is as plain as possible. Hold off altogether from wine, because of its strong effect, or add it sparingly in a mixture to the evening milk. Don't continually give the child baths. A practice of infrequent baths, at a mild temperature, is better. In addition, the air should have a suitable balance of heat and cold, and the house should not be too drafty or too closed in. The water should be neither hard nor soft, and the bedclothes should be not rough but falling agreeably on the skin. In all these things nature yearns for what is fitting, not what is extravagant. These are the things it seems useful to

write to you for the present: my hopes based on nursing according to plan. With the help of the god, we shall provide feasible and fitting reminders concerning the child's upbringing again at a later time."

COMMENTARY

Thesleff, *Texts*, 123.12–13. "a mother of children"
If Phyllis is already a mother and has not yet hired a wet nurse, she must have begun by nursing her babies herself. Thus the newborns would have received the colostrum that is now recognized to be especially beneficial. On the other hand, the opening sentence may merely be a device Myia adopted to open her discussion of wet-nursing.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 123.13–16. "Such a woman will be best able to judge how to bring up your children in a manner appropriate to their free-born station"

The civic status of the wet nurse varied. She was ideally a slave in the infant's household who had given birth and was still lactating. A lactating slave might be available within Phyllis's household. A relative might lend a lactating slave when needed.[48] Otherwise a lactating slave could be rented from another owner or purchased for this purpose. A freedwoman or a freeborn woman, compelled by economic circumstances to wean her own baby and work outside her own home, might seek this job as a source of income.

The nurse's own baby would usually be abruptly weaned from its own mother's milk. Perhaps the slave infant would be passed to another lactating slave in the household, who would nurse the infant along with her own baby. Otherwise a crude cup with a spout would be used to give babies their nourishment. A wet nurse often continued to be a member of the household and to look after the child even after weaning. Hence it was important to choose a nurse whose characteristics were consistent with the educational ideals of the parents.

When the duties of the wet nurse continued even after the baby was weaned, she cared for the child until, in the case of a boy, he went to school. In the case of a girl, the nurse might become part of the dowry and accompany her to her husband's home. A grateful nursling might manumit a faithful nurse.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 123.15. "and not given to excessive . . . drink." See below on Thesleff, *Texts*, 123.29.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 123.17–18. "is not easily overcome by her husband's entreaties to share his bed."

Thus Soranus advises that the wet nurse be "self-controlled" so as to abstain from coitus, "for coitus cools the affection toward [the] nursling by the diversion of sexual pleasure and moreover spoils and diminishes the milk or suppresses

it entirely by stimulating menstrual catharsis through the uterus or by bringing about conception."[49] Lactation does not inevitably cease in a pregnant woman, but it may, and eventually the wet nurse would have to be replaced. The celibacy restriction is common in wet-nursing contracts from Roman Egypt.[50] Such contracts stipulate a period of one to three years, most usually two—a long time for a husband and wife to abstain from intercourse. Both partners or the woman's owner, however, would have been concerned about losing the income accruing from wet-nursing. That Myia refers to the nurse's male partner as her "husband" does not necessarily indicate her social status. Even though slaves could not contract a legal marriage, they often informally referred to their commitment to another person as a "marriage" and called their partner "husband" or "wife."

Thesleff, *Texts*, 123.20–22. "Let her offer the nipple and breast and nourishment, not on the spur of the moment, but according to due consideration."

Similarly, Soranus (38 [107]) warns the nurse not to offer the breast at all times or just because the child cries (39 [108]). The Pythagorean character of this piece of advice appears in Myia's admonition that the nurse be thoughtful.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 123.22. "She should not give in whenever she herself desires to sleep"

The nurse must adhere to the Pythagorean ideal of self-control, subordinating her natural appetites for sex, sleep, and wine, and thinking instead about what is good for the baby.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 123.25–26. "not foreign, but Greek."

This criterion, in addition to the reference to "free-born station" in line 16, above, draws attention to the civic status of the wet nurse: freeborn, slave, or freedwoman. A barbarian was likely to be a slave, a Greek more likely to be a free working woman. Greek slaves, however, were also available from time to time. Greeks were thought to be the best baby-tenders because they were considered civilized and could speak to the baby in Greek without an accent. Thus Soranus recommends that the wet nurse "should be self-controlled, sympathetic, and not have a bad temper, a Greek, and neat."[51] Ps.-Plutarch insists that nurses be Greek, neither barbarians nor prisoners of war (*Education of Children*, 3d–e, 7a).

Thesleff, *Texts*, 123.29. "Hold off altogether from wine"

Soranus writes that at first the nurse should abstain from drink because the wine passes to the milk, and the nursling becomes sleepy.[52] Soranus does allow the nurse to drink a little white wine later on as the baby grows older.[53] Here we see that a nurse might be tempted to go further and mix some wine into the baby's evening milk in order to ensure a restful night for herself.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 123.31–32. "Don't continually give the child baths. A practice of infrequent baths, at a mild temperature, is better."

Soranus also cautions against frequent bathing of the newborn, who becomes weak and vulnerable to illness and head injury.[54] Nurses, however, are tempted to bathe infants too often so that they will become sleepy.

Thesleff, *Texts*, 123.31–124.5. "balance of heat and cold, and the house should not be too drafty or too closed in. The water should be neither hard nor soft. . . . What is fitting, not what is extravagant."

The rearing of a baby should be consistent with the Pythagorean doctrine of harmony, seeking balance and avoiding excess.[55]