Phythagorean Women Philosophers

BETWEEN BELIEF AND SUSPICION

Dorota M. Dutsch

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To Flora

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corrections when my wrists failed me. He, our daughter Sophie, and my parents, Zyta Zarębska and Walter Dutsch, deserve the warmest thanks for their loving support.

Note on Cover Illustration

The cover illustration represents a female bust from the *Villa dei Papyri*, dated to the first century BCE/CE. Based on the double fillet hairstyle, the woman is conventionally identified as Sappho (Mattusch, 2005). But as Ruth Allen recently noted (2019), she is most unconventionally dressed: her himation leaves her upper chest and right shoulder bare, an unusual attire for a woman that suggests that she is a philosopher, perhaps the Epicurean Leontion. A man's cloak, sometimes worn without a tunic—to testify to the wearer's philosophical indifference to discomfort and embarrassment—was indeed the distinctive attribute of the female philosopher. It featured in anecdotes about Axiothea the Platonist, Hipparchia the Cynic, Hypatia the mathematician—and Theano the Pythagorean (Chapter 2). In all these accounts, the cloak functioned as a signifier of the wearer's virtues of wisdom and self-restraint. Thus, whether we identify the woman as Sappho, whom Aristotle considered a sage (Chapter 2), Leontion, or an idealized woman philosopher, the bust constitutes material evidence that in antiquity philosophical knowledge was conceptualized as a female, as well as male, domain.

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List of Abbreviations

BNJ	*Brill's New Jacoby*, ed. I. Worthington. Brill Online, 2007–
DK	Diels, H. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. 6th edn. W. Kranz. Berlin: Weidemann, 1951.
DPhA	*Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques,* ed. Richard Goulet. Paris. CNRS Éditions, 1989–
FGrH	Jacoby F. *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*. Berlin: Weidemann; Leiden: Brill, 1923–
FM	*Florilegium Monacense*, ed. A Meineke, Ioannis Stobaei *Florilegium* (vol. 4.) Leipzig, Teubner, 1857, 267–90.
H	Harder, Richard. *Ocellus Lucanus. Text und Kommentar*. Dublin and Zürich: Weidemann. Reprinted 1966.
K-A	Kassel, R. and Austin C. (eds.) 1983–. *Poetae Comici Graeci*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
KRS	Kirk, G.S., Raven, J.E., and Schoefield, M. 1983. *The Presocratic Philosophers*. 2nd edn. Cambridge University Press.
LSJ	Liddel, H.G. and Scott, R. *A Greek English Lexicon*, revised by H. S. Jones and R. McKenzie. Oxford: Clarendon, 1968.
MSCB	*Menandri Sententiae e codicibus Byzantinis*, ed. S. Jäkel, *Menandri Sententiae*, Leipzig, Teubner, 1964, pp. 33–88.
MSP	*Menandri Sententiae et Philistionis*, ed. S. Jäkel.
Ribbeck	Ribbeck, Otto. 1871–93. *Scaenicae Romanorum Poesis Fragmenta*. Leipzig: Teubner.
S	Städele, Alfons. *Die Briefe des Pythagoras und der Pythagoreer*. Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1980.
SSR	Giannantoni, G. 1990. *Socratis et Socraticorum reliquiae*. Naples: Bibliopolis.
Stob. *Anth.*	Stobaeus, Joannes. *Anthologii Libri*, ed. C. Wachsmuth and O. Hense (5 vols.) Berlin, Weidmanische Buchhandlung, 1884–1923/1974.
SVF	von Arnim, H.F.A. 1903–. *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*. Leipzig: Teubner.
T	Thesleff, Holger. *The Pythagorean Texts of the Hellenistic Period.* Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1965.
Wehrli	*Die Schule des Aristoteles: Texte und Kommentare*, ed. F. Wehrli (10 vols. + 2 suppl.) Basel, Schwabe & Co. Verlag, 1944–78.

Introduction

What is at Stake?

L'herméneutique me paraît mue par cette double motivation: volonté de soupçon, volonté d'écoute, vœux de rigueur, vœux d'obéissance.

Paul Ricoeur

In the fifth century CE, Johannes of Stobi, in Macedonia, a father anxious about his son's education, prepared an anthology of the most valuable excerpts from ancient Greek literature. Among those thinkers whose wisdom he was eager for his son to absorb were three ancient Pythagorean women: Theano, Phintys, and Perictione.[1] A contemporary of Hypatia of Alexandria, Johannes believed that these women were philosophers and that their texts and ideas formed a vital part of the intellectual heritage he wished to pass on to his son. When Clemens of Alexandria (150–215 CE) cited Theano's opinion on the immortality of the soul, and in so doing suggested that Theano's opinion influenced Plato's, he was expressing a similar belief.[2] To Johannes, Clemens, and other ancient readers familiar with the treatises, letters, and sayings attributed to Pythagorean women,[3] Theano the Philosopher was a cultural icon comparable to Sappho the Poet.

[1] Theano in *Anth*. 1.1013, Phintys in 4.23.61, Perictione in 3.1.120, 4.25.50, and 4.28.19. See Chapter III.

[2] *Strom*. 4.7.44; see Chapter I: 68–9 and Chapter II: 106–7 below.

[3] Texts and translations most relevant to my discussion are presented in Part III. All Greek texts attributed to women are available in Thesleff (1965); henceforth "T." Brodersen (2010) prints the most important testimonies and texts in Greek with German translation; Montepaone (2011), texts in Greek with Italian translation; Waithe (1987), Plant (2004) and Pomeroy (2013), the English translation of the Greek texts. Possekel (1998) translates Greek and Syriac sayings of Theano. A comprehensive *Anthology of Texts Attributed to Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*,including those attributed to women, in multilingual translation (French, English, and Italian), edited by Constantinos Macris in collaboration with Luc Brisson and Tiziano Dornadi, is currently in preparation and is expected to be published by Academia Verlag (Sankt Augustin) in 2022.

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Much later, modern readers integrated these ancient testimonies into their visions of the past and aspirations for the future. Gilles Ménage (1613–2), a contemporary of Madame de Sevigné and Molière, mentioned Pythagorean women in his Latin *History of Women Philosophers*.[4] The classicist Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1805) published an essay in German entitled "Pythagorean Women," including translations of letters and sayings (1789), in a periodical addressed primarily to an educated female readership.[5] Mario Meunier's (1932) translation of the letters and sayings made them available to the French public.[6]

Twentieth-century scholarship relegated, for the most part, the Pythagorean women—along with other women philosophers—to the storage room of classical trivia, in the process revealing much about the forces shaping our research agendas. These same forces have recently brought a radical shift in attitude towards women philosophers in the ancient world. The last twenty-five years have seen attempts to fill in the gap between Plato's theory that women are capable of practicing philosophy and the absence of bona fide female participants in his dialogues. Roger Scruton's tongue-in-cheek *Xanthippic Dialogues* (1998), C.D.C. Reeve's earnest *Women in the Academy: Dialogues on Themes from Plato's Republic* (2001), and Alain Badiou's idiosyncratic "hyper-translation" of Plato's *Republic* (2012), featuring a disciple named Amanda, have conjured imaginary figures to critique, embrace, or update Platonism. In contrast to Plato's imaginary women philosophers, and thanks to biographical notes and texts cited by Stobaeus, Clemens, and Diogenes Laertius, the Pythagoreans appear as more tangible figures, and this apparent tangibility has attracted the attention of historians.

Two attempts to reclaim the Pythagorean women and their philosophy stand out for their divergent conclusions.[7] Claudia Montepaone, in "Teano,

[4] *Historia Mulierum Philosopharum*, published in 1690, and available in English in Zedler's translation (1984), collected references to women philosophers in ancient texts.

[5] "Die Pythagorischen Frauen;" the periodical, *Historischer Kalender für Damen*, was issued for four subsequent years (1789–92); see Brodersen (2010: 12–13) for the historical context.

[6] Meunier's *Femmes pythagoriciennes* received a favorable review from Delatte (1934), who nonetheless cautioned his readers that they should not expect from Meunier's book (1932), addressed to general—predominantly female—readership, a scholarly enquiry into the authenticity of the texts (1934: 354).

[7] Two sourcebooks include texts attributed to Pythagorean women. Plant offers English translations of Theano, Perictione, Myia, Aesara, Melissa, Phintys, and Ptolemais (2004: 68–89). Audring and Brodersen print German translations of the excerpts from Stobaeus' *Anthology* attributed to Phintys (2008: 204–7) and Perictione (2008: 218–23), as well as the longer letters by Theano, Melissa, and Myia (2008: 232–9).

la pitagorica" (1993/2003) reconstructs a "feminine space" within the Pythagorean tradition, admitting that the biography of the famous Theano is simply impossible to recover.[8] Conversely, Sarah Pomeroy in her *Pythagorean Women: Their History and Writings* (2013) reclaims all texts attributed to Pythagorean women as individual women's contributions to the Greek intellectual tradition.[9] That two scholars working on the same material came to such radically different conclusions demonstrates the need for a critical approach that would avoid the traps of too narrowly defined historicity. I propose to shift attention away from the hypothetical authors to the texts that have reached us. As cultural artifacts, these texts will be subject to critique, but will be also granted considerable autonomy as fabricated objects, or even fabrications, that function independently from their makers.[10]

Paul Ricoeur defines "exercise of suspicion" as an interpreter's awareness of the divergence between the conscious representations of the world and the forces that shape representation, and proposes that such awareness should precede attempts to construe meaning.[11] But Ricoeur admits that critical mistrust is insufficient: inherent in the process of interpretation is also the impulse to listen to and trust the testimony of the text.[12] In sum,

[8] Montepaone authored a chapter on Theano in *Grecia al femminile* edited by Loraux (1993) and translated into French in 2003 (2003: 79–111); on feminine space see p. 79, on near-impossibility of finding Theano, see pp. 110–11. Montepaone (2011) also published all extant texts attributed to Pythagorean women with Ida Brancaccio's translation and notes. The women's authorship of the reproduced texts is described as "alleged" (2011: 7), even though Montepaone attempts to reconstruct a historical Theano and how she "must have understood" woman's relationship to knowledge (2011: 15). García González (2009) also attempts to reconstruct a historical reality behind the testimonies and texts.

[9] So Pomeroy (2013: 103–16); on the unity of the Doric texts see Centrone (2014: 320–40).

[10] In an effort to create a mode of thinking that would free us from the obligation to choose between realism and constructivism, Latour postulates that fabricated entities that are objects of belief be treated as independent of their makers and, in a sense, "real" (2009: 52–60; 2010: 21–4).

[11] He arrives at this conclusion by pointing to what the three "masters of suspicion," Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, have in common. Although the forces that condition consciousness are of different nature in the thought of the three thinkers, Ricoeur argues, the exercise of suspicion unites their way of thinking (1970: 26–7 and 32–6). Ricoeur uses the term "hermeneutics of suspicion" for the first time in his introduction to Ihde's *Hermeneutic Phenomenology* (1971: xvii). See Scott-Baumann's insightful chapter on the use and abuse of the term (2009: 58–77). When reflecting on testimonies, Ricoeur speaks of a dialectics of confidence and suspicion (2004: 162–4).

[12] For an account of dual hermeneutics, of restoration and of demystification, see *On Interpretation* (1970: 26–7); van den Heiden (2014) usefully connects this early discussion to Ricoeur's later concept of "attestation," which also entails both uncertainty and "believing-in" (2014: 135–9).

hermeneutics, as Ricoeur understands it, calls for the twin gestures of critique and compliance:

> *"L'herméneutique me paraît mue par cette double motivation: volonté de soupçon, volonté d'écoute, vœux de rigueur, vœux d'obéissance."* (1965: 46)
>
> Hermeneutics seems to me to be set in motion by this double motivation: willingness to suspect, willingness to listen; a vow of rigor, a vow of obedience.

In the spirit of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, I contend that we have an ethical obligation to engage in a reading of ancient texts about and by women philosophers that is both critical and trusting.[13] I therefore propose to read the testimonies to Pythagorean women with attention to the ideological and cultural trends that shaped them—but also to attend to the possibilities that these testimonies articulate. These possibilities are neither controlled by individual human actors nor articulated in isolation. Crucially, the movement of information that connects Pythagorean texts to other texts, resources, writers, institutions, readers, and interpretations across time creates a complex network that an interpreter may register but cannot control. "Hermeneutics," Bruno Latour proposed, "is not a privilege of humans, but, so to speak, a property of the world itself" (2005: 245).[14] The complex network of jokes, aphorisms, heroic tales, allusions to legendary figures, and writings that this book traces cannot attest to the historicity of individual women philosophers. These accounts of Pythagorean women's achievements can, however, help us to gain a better understanding of how philosophical knowledge was gendered in Antiquity, and of how women might have situated, and might still situate, themselves within the Greek intellectual tradition.[15] These are precisely the two questions this book aims to answer.

[13] See Ricoeur 1965 and 1988. On the benefits of combining Ricoeur's two hermeneutic positions for literary criticism, see Josselson (2004: 20–4).

[14] The discrepancy between Ricoeur's hermeneutics, with its focus on the interpreter's autonomy, and Latour's emphasis on heterogenous communities in which humans are not the only actors is merely superficial. Ricoeur's reader attends to the text's testimony in a way that makes the text partake in the meaning-creation. Felski's proposal for "post-critical reading" usefully presents Ricoeur's and Gadamer's hermeneutics of trust as a position akin to Latour's Actor Network Theory (2015: 171–5).

[15] The concept of the "gender of knowing" goes back to the title of Michèle Le Doeuff 's book *Le Sexe du Savoir* (1998), translated by Hamer and Code as *The Sex of Knowing* (2003). My reading is also indebted to Elizabeth Anderson's concern with ways in which socially constructed norms of gender affect knowledge production (1995: 54).

Were They Real?

A candid entry on "Pythagorean Women" in a hypothetical concise dictionary of the cultural icons of ancient Greece would read:

> Pythagorean women were particularly prominent in texts dating to the first centuries CE. Pythagoras' wife Theano, famous for her witty sayings, and the couple's daughters, Damo, Myia, and Arignote, appeared among idealized figures from the ancient Greek past in the writings of Plutarch, Lucian, Clemens, and Diogenes Laertius.[16] The tradition that women practiced the Pythagorean way of life dates to the fourth century BCE. According to Athenaeus and Diogenes Laertius, several playwrights produced comedies entitled *Pythagorizousa*.[17] According to Porphyry, Dicaearchus claimed that women were among Pythagoras' disciples.[18] Moreover, Stobaeus' fifth-century *Anthology* preserves Theano's sayings, and several excerpts from treatises, including *On Woman's Self-Restraint* by Phintys as well as *On Wisdom* and *On Woman's Harmony* by Perictione.[19] These treatises share ideas and phraseology with numerous other Pseudo-Pythagorean treatises, offering Aristotelian readings of ostensibly Pythagorean moments in Plato.[20] The dates of these Pythagorean pseudepigrapha have been debated, but the most recent assessments agree on a period between the first century BCE and the first century CE.[21] Five fictitious letters, almost

[16] See Plutarch *CP* 145e–f (on Theano); Lucian *Imag.* 17–18 (on Theano); *Musc. Enc.* 11 (Myia); Clemens *Strom.* 4.122–3 (Theano, Myia, and Arignote); Diogenes Laertius (hereinafter: DL) 8.42 (Theano and Damo); See also Iambl. *VP* 28.146 (Theano, Damo, and her daughter Bitale) and 36.265 (Theano).

[17] On Alexis, see Athenaeus 4.161c–d and 4.52.32; on Cratinus, see DL 8.37.2.

[18] Porphyry *VP* 19, citing Dicaearchus (= Mirhady Fr. 42).

[19] Stobaeus cites Phintys in *Anth.* 4.23.61 and Perictione in *Anth.* 3.1.120–1, 4.25.50 and 4.28.19.

[20] See Chapter I: 34–43 and Chapter III: 153–70.

[21] Pseudo-Pythagorean texts were collected by Holger Thesleff (1965). In his first attempt at dating (1961), Thesleff divided the texts into two groups; Class I: Early Hellenistic, written in Attic or Ionic *koine*, attributed to Pythagoras and his family, concerned with religion; Class II: written in Doric, Late Hellenistic, attributed to prominent Pythagoreans, on diverse topics. Walter Burkert, finding echoes of post-Hellenistic doctrines in the supposedly early Hellenistic texts, argued for dates after the first century BCE, especially for the Doric treatises (1971: 25–55). In response, Thesleff proposed an alternative model, suggesting that most of the Doric writings were composed in the later part of the second century BCE (1971). Riedweg (2005: 120) follows this dating. Most scholars date the texts between the first centuries BCE and CE; cf. Moraux (1984: 605–83), Macris (2002: 79–85), Kahn (2001: 72–85), Centrone (1996: 148–63 and 2014: 339–40), Bonazzi (2013a: 166–71), and Ulacco 2017. Studies of particular authors have yielded dates between the first century BCE and fifth century CE. Szlezák on Pseudo-Archytas (1972), Baltes on Pseudo-Timaeus (1972), Städele on letters (1980).

> certainly dating to the early Imperial period, offer practical advice to affluent women on selecting a wet nurse (Myia), clothing (Melissa), education of children (Theano), managing slaves (Theano), and tolerating a husband's infidelities (Theano).[22] This literature had an important impact on later Greek culture and beyond. Towards the end of the third century CE, sayings attributed to Theano were translated into Syriac. The tenth-century Suda lists more titles under the name of Theano than under that of Pythagoras himself, so many, in fact, that it divides them between two women of that name.

My (imaginary) entry suggests that the history of the Pythagorean women was multilayered. Its pivotal moment, as measured by the surviving texts, seems to fall in the early centuries of the Common Era, or possibly just before it, thus coinciding with the revival of Pythagoreanism in the Middle Academy.[23] From this pivot point we may go back and forth in time. Through the citations in the Imperial writers we may access Hellenistic references to Pythagorean women. We may also read their treatises and later letters. As I argue in Chapters III and IV, the treatises and letters are pseudonymous.[24] The female personae articulate their programs by incorporating excerpts from Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics (among others), inviting us to situate them within a broader network of social and intellectual exchanges. Instead of being individual and concrete figures, the Pythagorean women philosophers are complex entities assembled from references.

Over the last seventy years, most scholars have responded to this material by rejecting or accepting the historicity of women philosophers. Rejection, manifest in silence, or at best in radical marginalization, was the dominant response of historians of philosophy in the twentieth century. Thus, Walter Burkert in his seminal *Lore and Science* (1972) appears to have made a conscious effort to exorcize all references to Theano from Pythagorean history. He dismisses a treatise attributed to her as "curious" (61), and

[22] These have been dated very carefully by Städele (1980) and Huizenga (2013). Four more letters by "the wisest Theano" are found in the sixteenth-century Codex Vaticanus Graecus 578. Städele dates them between the fifth and the seventh century CE (1980: 351); see Introduction to Part II.

[23] See Dillon (2014: 260–73) for a brief summary of the theories proposed by Eudorus, Philo, Plutarch, Moderatus, and Numenius. On references to Pythagorean women in Imperial literature, see Chapter I.

[24] See Introduction to Part II on authorship of pseudepigrapha.

arbitrarily excises her name from an important fragment of Dicaearchus.[25] Writing in the same vein, Charles Kahn (2001) and Christoph Riedweg (2002/2005) have produced excellent book-length discussions on Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism that fail to mention women. Leonid Zhmud (2012b: 180) addresses the question, but only to insist that Pythagorean women were literary figures in comedy.[26] Attempts at inclusion came late. Carl Huffman's volume *A History of Pythagoreanism* (Cambridge 2014) includes a chapter on Pythagorean elements in Book 5 of Plato's *Republic* by Catherine Rowett and a chapter on women's role in Pythagorean ethics by M. Laura Gemelli Marciano.[27] Likewise, Gabriele Cornelli's *In Search of Pythagoreanism* (2013) assumes that women practiced the Pythagorean lifestyle.[28]

Feminist historians have, in general, responded to the dismissal of ancient women philosophers as "mere" literary figures by embracing all references and texts attributed to them at face value.[29] Mary Ellen Waithe's *A History of Women Philosophers 600 BCE–500 AD* (1987) was conceived as a history of "forgotten women"; the author treats all allusions to ancient women philosophers as historical data and presents pseudepigraphic treatises as their special achievement. Michèle Le Doeuff, who has considered the question of the gender of philosophical enquiry at length in *The Sex of Knowing* (1998/2003), likewise insists on the historicity of female philosophers, though she deplores the systemic misogyny of the extant texts.[30] Marguerite Deslauriers' chapter on education and philosophy in the *Blackwell Companion to*

[25] I refer to the 1972 English translation of Burkert. Burkert alters Wehrli Fr. 33 to include a reference to foreigners, but excludes the name of Theano (1972: 122). On the passage from Dicaearchus, see Chapter I: 53–5 below. This skeptical attitude can be traced farther back to Zeller; see Cornelli (2013: 8–13).

[26] In this respect, historians of Pythagoreanism have been part of a general trend. W.K. C. Guthrie's magisterial six-volume *A History of Greek Philosophy* (1962–5/2000), Vol. 5, reduces the entire history of women philosophers to a single noncommittal sentence in a footnote (446n.1): "If, as several sources state, two women, Axiothea of Phlius and Lastheneia of Mantinea, were of the number [of Plato's disciples], this would accord with his affirmation in *Rep*. and *Laws* of their fitness for political office and military service."

[27] See Bibliography under Rowett (2014) and Gemelli Marciano (2014).

[28] Cornelli considers the addition of female names to Iamblichus' catalogue an argument for its authenticity and discusses women's presence in Pythagorean communities (2013: 57–8; 74–5).

[29] On the plight of feminist philosophy and the potential of the figures of ancient philosophers as paradigms for legitimacy, see Walker (2005).

[30] Le Doeuff compares the female Pseudo-Pythagorica in their acceptance of the tenet that woman's "subordination [to man] is required by divine order," to Irigaray's engagement with Heidegger, Derrida, and Nietzsche, which she finds insufficiently critical (2003: 64–5). For a similar insistence on historicity, see Pietrà:"On ne s'en doute généralement pas, mais il y eut dans l'Antiquité des femmes philosophes" (1997: 7). (Contrary to general belief, there were women philosophers in the ancient world.)

Women in the Ancient World (2012) is a welcome change. Deslauriers rightly cautions against enthusiastic attempts to recuperate ancient philosophy by women.[31] Peter Adamson in the volume on classical philosophy of his recent *History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps* (2014) takes a similar position. Adamson inserts a dose of skepticism into the chapter "Anything You Can Do: Women and Ancient Philosophy;" presenting Theano's *chreiai* as potential pearls of Presocratic wisdom, he nonetheless acknowledges the historicity of the women philosophers (if not their authorship of the extant texts).[32]

The most detailed discussion of Pythagorean material to date, Sarah Pomeroy's *Pythagorean Women: Their History and Writings* (2013), epitomizes the trend of accepting all references to Pythagorean women philosophers at face value. Renouncing all skepticism about Pythagoras, Pomeroy begins her book with the bold assertion, "Pythagoras was the first Greek philosopher to include women among his disciples" (2013: XV). She further postulates, against scholarly consensus, an early Hellenistic revival of the Pythagorean school, during which historical women, who, "[l]ike Pythagoras himself," "were sympathetic to the women's point of view," produced philosophical writings.[33] Also against consensus, Pomeroy reads, as original, treatises that display the same ideas and phraseology as the larger body of texts of which they are an integral part. As Pomeroy herself expertly demonstrates, many female intellectuals were indeed active throughout the Hellenistic period (2013: 42–9).[34] It is therefore possible that women composed Pythagorean texts—including, I would argue, pseudepigrapha. Trust in the text's testimony, however, is in itself insufficient to construe complex meanings. For example, Pomeroy relies on the testimony of Iamblichus (third to fourth century CE) to reconstruct Pythagoras' original teachings from the sixth century BCE and then to comment on Neo-Pythagorean

[31] "We are perhaps better off acknowledging how difficult it is to know what women in the ancient world thought about philosophy, or achieved in philosophical terms" (2012: 349).

[32] 2014, vol. 1: 298–300.

[33] Pomeroy argues that sympathy is manifest in the *acousma* that a wife should be treated as a supplicant (2013: 24–5).

[34] Following Thesleff's (1961) early Hellenistic dating of the Pseudo-Pythagorean texts, rejected by Thesleff himself (1971), Pomeroy places the texts between the fourth and third centuries BCE (2013: 42–3). On the current dating of the texts, see above p. 5 n.21 and below Introduction to Part II: 126–7. Pomeroy does not engage with the essential scholarship on the texts, including Städele's edition of Pythagorean letters (1980) and Moraux's magisterial analysis of the philosophical tenets of the Pythagorean treatises (1984).

writings as reflective of these same teachings on women.[35] Through this circular process she reduces the many layers of the Pythagorean tradition to an improbably simple schema, in which all testimonies bear witness to the Pythagorean virtue of being "sympathetic to women." In the end, the assumptions Pomeroy makes—that texts attributed to women are necessarily authored by and sympathetic towards women—result in a reading that glosses over the texts' pervasive misogyny.

In his influential 1994 book chapter, "The Problem with Women Philosophers," Richard Hawley has taken the opposite approach to textual testimonies.[36] The chapter, written as a literary critic's "corrective" to Waithe's *History of Women Philosophers* (1987), aims to recover the meaning and function of the portraits of women philosophers—with special attention to Theano—as literary artifacts. Since, as Hawley points out, the ancient male writers' literary agendas determine the portrayals of women philosophers, it is impossible to offer "even an approximate estimate of their intellectual abilities."[37] Therefore, he proposes, while women were theoretically not excluded from the pursuit of philosophy, there is little evidence that they did practice philosophy. In other words, Hawley seems to dismiss the importance of ancient literary texts and philosophical theories.

More recently, in an article analyzing collections of women's sayings as rhetorical explorations of femininity, Hawley concludes that it would be "illusory" to treat this material as "a rare example of 'women's experience.'"[38] In rejecting the idea that literary representations of women philosophers correspond to specific events in the outside world, Hawley's position differs radically from Waithe's (or Pomeroy's). However, in interpreting apophthegms as reflecting the male author's agenda rather than open to interpretation, he seems to limit the heuristic importance of texts *qua* texts:

[35] Chapter 2 relies on Iamblichus to reconstruct Pythagorean practice (2013: 19–39). Pomeroy's comment on the title of *On Piety*, attributed to Theano, illustrates the pitfalls of this approach: "Pythagoras has observed that women were especially pious: hence, perhaps, the title of Theano's treatise" (2013: 67). Without a reference to Pythagoras' speech to women in Iamblichus (*VP* 11.56), where this claim comes from, it may seem that a hypothetical line can be drawn from the treatise back to Pythagoras. In fact, Iamblichus' Pythagoras participates in the reception of the Neo-Pythagorean writings, so our hypothetical line should be drawn in the opposite direction: from the treatise's title to Iamblichus, while the relationship of both the treatise and Iamblichus to the historical Pythagoras cannot be established.

[36] Hawley's position informs Adamson's skepticism about Pythagorean women's texts: "The ideas of women ancient philosophers are, of course, always preserved by men [...], and the quotations often tell us more about the men doing the quoting than the women being quoted" (2014 vol. 1: 298–9 with 298n.1).

[37] 1994: 70–87. [38] 2010: 161–9.

"Moreover, it is ultimately ironic that just as the male connections and relatives were allowing women to become philosophers, the male sources that recorded various aspects of their lives were driving them back inexorably into the dangerous shadows of anecdotal sources."[39] This forecloses not only female authorship but also the possibility that interpreters—ancient and modern—might dare retrieve what an author has "driven back." It is in exploring these "dangerous shadows" that I am interested. The marginal spaces of anecdotes (and pseudepigrapha), I argue, offer a critique of the dominant discourse and an articulation of new possible identities.

In place of the unanswerable question about the narrowly defined historical reality of women philosophers, I propose a series of questions raised by the texts themselves: How do fourth-century BCE texts define the intellectual horizons of Pythagorean women philosophers? How do Imperial texts? (Surely the two cannot be identical.) What kind of philosophical program might the famous sayings of Theano propose? What kind of readership/audience can we imagine for the Pythagorean letters? Towards what ethical goals did this audience aspire? What does it really mean that some of the Pythagorean pseudepigrapha are attributed to women—and composed in the same manner as those attributed to male philosophers? Last, and most important: what do we learn from these texts about the gender of knowing in the ancient Greek world?

It is unproductive to ask of the Hellenistic and Imperial texts questions about the intellectual output of the sixth-century Pythagorean women they mention. That these texts provide no firm answers should not surprise us, given that the historical Pythagoras also very much eludes us.[40] Nor is it productive to argue that the ancient names must have served as pseudonyms for individual women active in Hellenistic or Imperial times. (Possibly, they did, but this cannot be demonstrated.) Instead, the brief literary portrayals and the texts attributed to the legendary Pythagorean women enact in writing female agency and authorship. In particular, the pseudonymous texts model for readers and audiences tactics that would allow female intellectuals to navigate the Greek philosophical tradition. These texts are valuable not for their recounting of the past, but for the possibilities that this

[39] 1994: 84.

[40] Lloyd begins his recent discussion of Pythagoras with the claim that, because of lack of trustworthy sources, "Pythagoras eludes interpretation" (2014: 24) and concludes that "modern reconstructions often reflect personal preconception about the nature of early Greek thought in general" (2014: 45). The Prologue examines the earliest testimonies for potential insights into women's place in Pythagoras' *sophia*.

recounting outlines for their contemporary audiences (and for us). In this sense, the Pythagorean woman evidently was, and still is, "real," but as an entity whose numerous and interconnected literary revivals and modes of existence cannot be reduced to unique and precise historical events. In order to grapple with this kind of existence, we may wish to think harder about belief as a mode of engagement with cultural artifacts. The belief in question would by no means be naïf, but rather the sort of acknowledgment of different modes of existence that Bruno Latour defines in *On the Modern Cult of Factish Gods* as "the most complex, sophisticated, critical and subtle reflective activity there is" (2010: 42).

Ricoeur's Hermeneutics: Possible Worlds, Possible Lives

Although the work of Paul Ricoeur has not received as much attention from feminist theorists as that of other twentieth-century continental thinkers,[41] his hermeneutics shares with feminist theory the interest in critique of ideologies. In a recent article, Annemie Halsema has compellingly demonstrated parallels between Ricoeur's view on how the self is articulated in discourse, and the views of Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, and Rosie Braidotti.[42] Granted, Ricoeur does not share the feminist philosophers' explicit concern with discursive exclusions and erasures.[43] He instead sees discourse as a place of possibility and variation for the subject. Through this focus on what is possible but not actual, his hermeneutics draws attention to what is excluded from articulation elsewhere.[44] In his essay "What is a text?" Ricoeur distinguishes between "explanation" and "understanding,"[45]

[41] See Halsema (2013: 21n.2) for exceptions.

[42] See Halsema (2013 *passim*), but especially pp. 22–4 on self and discourse, and 28–9 on the difference between the feminists' critique of discourse as normative and Ricoeur's validation of text.

[43] For example, Irigaray (1995: 186) insists that a woman should resist models imposed on her by others; Butler (1993: 111–12) argues that heterosexual subject positions are normative within the dominant symbolic order, which entertains the possibility of homosexual subjectivity only as a failure. Braidotti (1994: 118–19) argues that women "have been both physically and symbolically dispossessed of place whence to speak." These are but token examples of the feminist critics' deep mistrust towards all the foreclosures and erasures of language and discourse.

[44] On Ricoeur's view of text as place of variation, see especially "What is a Text?" (1970/1981) and "The Model of the Text" (1986/1991).

[45] In the citation below (p. 12) the square brackets indicate Ricoeur's lack of interest in the position of the female subject. See, however, Hanselma and Henriques and their introduction suggesting that Ricoeur's work creates multiple possibilities for feminist interpretations (2016).

defining the first as an analysis of the text apart from its world, allowing a critical distance, and the second as an intuition about how the writer's or the reader's mind might work.[46] Ricoeur's "hermeneutic arc" thus reconciles the method of objective explanation and the subjective reading, critique, and intuition. He advises the interpreter to insert or orient [herself] within the text in the way suggested by the circumstances of production before actualizing the text for here and now. Ultimately, this undertaking allows the exegete to recognize [herself] through reflection on what is alien (1981: 145–64).[47] In an important essay rejecting ideological critique as "paranoid reading," Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick drew on Ricoeur's subjective understanding to advocate a "reparative" critical stance. In contrast to a critic focused on ideological biases, Sedgwick's "reparatively positioned reader" does not assume that ideology determines all but allows herself to hope and to be surprised by the meanings she discovers (2002: 146).

I would like to adapt Segdwick's reparative stance, but nonetheless maintain the balance between critical distance to the text and the desire to listen, essential to Ricoeur's hermeneutics.[48] Suspicion is a useful stance in the study of ancient epistemic regimes, and Ricoeur's twin critical moves integrate two recent scholarly approaches to Pythagorean women. While Hawley (1994/2010) has focused on the circumstances in which the texts have been produced, Pomeroy (2013) has derived from the same texts ideas akin to modern sensibilities, such as "sympathy" towards women (2013: 60, 62). Neither of these interpretive moves is sufficient in isolation. Ricoeur's hermeneutics, as formulated in "The Model of the Text," proceeds from a critical exegesis of textual patterns to the recovery of possible meanings (or worlds) that the text opens up to the interpreter.[49] These meanings, Ricoeur insists, must be based on the specific exegesis rather than on general assumptions about the world behind the text.[50] This two-step hermeneutical

[46] 1981: 150. Attempts to read the Pythagorean women either as purely literary figures (Montepaone 1993/2003; Hawley 1994, 2010) or as historical philosophers whose ideas are easily read in their texts (Pomeroy 2013) are oriented towards these two opposed interpretive directions: Hawley identifies patterns in the texts; Pomeroy is interested in texts as evidence of the achievements of historical women.

[47] This inclusion of critical distance distinguishes Ricoeur's hermeneutics from that of Gadamer, who insists that understanding is historically situated in and conditioned by the interpretive tradition within which it functions. Ricoeur criticizes Gadamer's hermeneutics precisely for its failure to include a moment of alienation, necessary for critique (1991: 263–99).

[48] 1991: 297. [49] 1981: 202.

[50] Ricoeur makes the point that understanding must be informed by the earlier analysis (1981: 220).

technique validates fiction as a possible locus of critique. Ricoeur's belief in a text's capacity to articulate and include what is not—but could be—can be contrasted with the feminist thinkers' suspicion of discourse as the mirror (Irigaray) or matrix (Butler) of the exclusionary order of things.[51] To Ricoeur, however, imagination functions as a form of critique: texts have the liberty of articulating both what is present in the world and what is possible. This approach to the text is ideally suited to examining Greek literature's attempts to include women in the history and writings of philosophers.[52]

I propose a reading that validates the heuristic potential of texts, independent of their precise referential value as historical testimonies. In this book, texts are alternately subject to critique and restorative reading. The latter process entails connecting texts to other texts. Pythagorean women function within multiple networks of texts in (restored) dialogue with Hipparchia the Cynic, Spartan women, Plato, Aristotle, medical writers, and the Stoics, and women's letters preserved on papyri. Dedications of philosophical works to female patrons connect the stories of Pythagorean lives with social practice.[53] The process of recovering all this potential begins with exercising suspicion upon the ideological assumptions about knowledge and knowers in the Greek texts about Pythagorean women.[54]

Reception

As Gabriele Cornelli has recently observed, Pythagoreanism is a multifaceted historical phenomenon, whose numerous strata "do not admit of a

[51] For Irigaray, see, e.g. "Power of Discourse" in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985: 68–87); for Butler, see, e.g., the chapter "Critically Queer" in *Bodies That Matter* (1993: 223–42), especially her comments on *Paris Is Burning* (1993: 240–1).

[52] As Macé (2006) argues, Ricoeur proposes that fictional texts do not invite readers to move away from the world of action, but, on the contrary, invite them to insert fictional inventions into the world of action.

[53] Despite Ricoeur's postulate that the original dialogue is completely eclipsed by the written text that has come to replace it (1981: 146–9), I think of reconstructed practice as yet another restored world. This is particularly useful in relations to *chreiai*, whose composition, I argue, reveals traces of practice (Chapter II: 79–82 below).

[54] Ricoeur correlates suspicion with bias (in Reagan and Stewart 1978: 214–15). Social epistemology, see especially Goldman (1999), has formulated a framework for investigating epistemic conditions for social groups; see Anderson (1995) on the effect of socially constructed gender norms on production of knowledge.

single interpretation."[55] Each revival and the literary responses to it inflected the notion of female wisdom differently. Nearly a thousand years of radical political and intellectual transformations separate the earliest references to the elusive sixth-century BCE Greek aristocrat Pythagoras of Samos, active in Italian Croton, from third- to fourth-century CE writers such as the Roman citizen Iamblichus of Apamea (in Syria), and Porphyry of Tyre, who (ironically) offer us the most detailed accounts of Pythagoras' views on women's role in society, including fictional speeches. Pythagoras himself left no writings.[56] In the absence of a canonical script, Pythagoreanism inspired numerous reinventions.[57] Plato's allusions to Pythagorean motifs, including his gendered account of creation in the *Timaeus* and references to wise women in the *Meno*, have been the most famous and influential.[58] The reception of Pythagoreanism in the Old (fourth century BCE) and Middle Academy (ca. first century CE) preceded the late Imperial revival of the writings of Porphyry and Iamblichus. Within this series of competing creations, entangled in diverse historical moments, some are linked together, directly through citations or indirectly through striking parallels. Scholarship continues to add new embranchments to this ancient network.[59] Like other iconic figures, the wise women are constantly being remodeled. Over time they play different roles, from aristocratic wives to philosophers and teachers. They embody diverse epistemic paradigms that alternately create and foreclose the spaces within which a female intellectual can operate.[60]

Signposts

This book traces a network of connections across texts which construct the lives and works of Pythagorean women. As the material is heterogenous,

[55] In a recent study of Pythagoreanism as a historiographical category, Cornelli concludes that one must "consciously follow the paths of different interpretations and different strata of the tradition in search of a sufficiently pluralistic image of Pythagoreanism" (2013: 51).

[56] See Prologue to Part I. Historians of philosophy have built out of excerpts from writings of Philolaus and Archytas rigorous and persuasive reconstructions of early Pythagoreanism. Examples of such tour-de-force reconstructions include Huffman's *Philolaus* (1993) and *Archytas* (2005) and Zhmud's *Pythagoras and the Early Pythagoreans* (2012b).

[57] On the process, see Introduction to Part II.

[58] See Chapter I below.

[59] See Butler's Introduction to *Deep Classics* (2016: 9–10), commenting on Freud's simile in *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

[60] Richard Martindale's reception theory provides a framework (2006 and 2013), for the numerous instantiations of the motif of the wise woman in the Pythagorean tradition and their transhistorical interconnections. See Martindale on multiple traditions (1993: 23–9) and on the notion of transhistorical connections (2013: 173).

I have arranged texts into clusters, according to two (overlapping) criteria: 1) whether or not the authorial voice is identified as female; and 2) the degree of interconnectedness. The book moves from various accounts in male voices which mention or allude to Pythagorean women, through Theano's short *chreiai* (sayings), which introduce her in third person and briefly "cite" her words, to treatises and letters composed in female voices. While the literary evocations of Pythagorean women and the *chreiai* show certain "family resemblances,"[61] the treatises and letters are closely interwoven. I invite readers to treat this arrangement as provisional and make their own connections across my categories of assorted references, collectible sayings, and the network of longer texts. Playfully anachronistic subtitles call attention to the artificiality of this layout.

Part I: "Portraits" offers glimpses of Pythagorean women from a distance. It begins with a short exposé on accounts alluding to Pythagoras' interest in women's wisdom "A Portrait of the Master as a Young Woman." Chapter I: "Between Utopia and History: Ten Snapshots from a Pythagorean Family Album" draws on Lucian's (125–180 CE) *Portraits* to propose a reading practice in which images of famous figures are constructed by bricolage by readers extrapolating from various literary portraits. The portraits of Pythagorean women that emerge from the extracts cited in the works of Imperial writers lend themselves perfectly to this type of reading. They are shaped by several competing ideologies and cannot be reduced to concrete figures. Next to Timaeus of Tauromenium's saintly figure of Pythagoras' daughter, we find Iamblichus' catalogue of famous Pythagorean women and Dicaearchus' claim that female disciples joined Pythagoras.[62] From this loose assemblage of references, we move to collections of sayings. Chapter II: "Pictures from an Exhibition: The Making of a Female Sage" situates the persona of Theano in the gallery of sages and clever women represented and repeatedly performed through *chreiai*. Theano articulates her program within a greater network of sayings and anecdotes (including sayings of clever courtesans) ready to be deployed in intellectual games by men—and women. I draw attention to the tactics of appropriation, allusion, and citation that connect Theano's aphorisms to that network. The sayings allude to tensions between the Pythagorean and Cynic or Stoic ideas about

[61] On the notion, see Wittgenstein (2009: 67–77); cf. below Chapter I: 30.

[62] This latter tradition might constitute an integral part of a Peripatetic history of philosophy that presented Pythagoras as a Platonist before Plato.

sex, marriage, and women's education, and reveal a debate on women's role as defined by the teachings of the three schools.

Part II: "Impersonations" enters the world of pseudepigrapha to examine longer texts that circulated under the names of Pythagorean women. These interconnected pseudonymous texts form a text-network, a concept I explain in the Introduction to Part II. Chapter III: "Ladies of Bygone Times: Women and the Pythagorean Time Machine" explores the strange mechanical world of the Pseudo-Pythagorean treatises in which women play the virtuous guardians of a Pythagorean doctrine as reconstructed from the writings of Plato and Aristotle. Like Aristotle—but unlike Plato's Socrates in the *Meno*—these female thinkers maintain that women's intellectual potential is essentially inferior to men's. Women, the Pseudo-Pythagorean texts suggest, may practice philosophy, on the condition they announce that it is not necessarily their place to do so. And yet, their views notwithstanding, the treatises crucially associate women with the imagined origins of Greek philosophical thought. Chapter IV: "*Ipsa Dixit*: Letters of Pythagorean Women" comments on five letters from the early Imperial period. These letters offer a subtle critique of medical and philosophical texts on a number of topics, including infant care and relationships with slaves, from a woman's point of view. This strategy is particularly prominent in Myia's letter about hiring a wet nurse, which goes against the advice of medical writers and Stoic philosophers, but corresponds to the practice and advice preserved in Greek letters from Egypt from this same period.[63] The conclusion brings together the various threads of the argument so that we can reflect on what Pythagorean women's lives and writings reveal about the gender of knowing and the place of the female philosopher in the Greek intellectual tradition. Finally, an Epilogue gives a glimpse of Pythagorean women philosophers from the later perspective of a medieval manuscript including fictitious letters by Theano among religious texts. The Appendix provides the texts (and translation) most relevant to my discussion.

Our exploration of Pythagorean literature begins with a commentary on the early accounts of Pythagoras' opinions on wisdom.

[63] Printed in Bagnall and Cribiore (2006).

PART I

PORTRAITS