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THE EXCELLENCE OF WOMEN

Regarding the excellence of women, Clea, I do not hold the same opinion as Thucydides. For he declares that the best woman is the one who is least discussed by others, either with criticism or praise, since he thinks that the name of the good woman—just like her body—ought to be locked away and out of the public eye.¹ To me, Gorgias seems more discerning since he recommends that the reputation, though not the physical form, of a woman be well-known to the masses.² The Romans' custom, however, seems to be the best: It bestows appropriate public praises for women after their death, just as for men.

ΓΥΝΑΙΚΩΝ ΑΡΕΤΑΙ

Διὸ καὶ Λεοντίδος τῆς ἀρίστης ἀποθανούσης,
εὐθύς τε μετὰ σοῦ τότε πολὺν λόγον εἶχομεν οὐκ
ἀμοιροῦντα παραμυθίας φιλοσόφου, καὶ νῦν,
ὥς ἐβουλήθης, τὰ ὑπόλοιπα τῶν λεγομένων εἰς
τὸ μίαν εἶναι καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικὸς
ἀρετὴν προσανέγραψά σοι, τὸ ἱστορικὸν
ἀποδεικτικὸν ἔχοντα καὶ πρὸς ἡδονὴν μὲν ἀκοῆς
οὐ συντεταγμένα. Εἰ δὲ τῷ πείθοντι καὶ τὸ τέρπον
ἔνεστι φύσει τοῦ παραδείγματος, οὐ φεύγει χάριν
ἀποδείξεως συνεργὸν ὁ λόγος οὐδ' αἰσχύνεται

ταῖς Μούσαις
τὰς Χάριτας συγκαταμινγὺς
καλλίσταν συζυγίαν,

ὥς Εὐριπίδης φησίν, ἐκ τοῦ φιλοκάλου μάλιστα
τῆς ψυχῆς ἀναδούμενος τὴν πίστιν.

THE EXCELLENCE OF WOMEN

For this reason, too, when our most excellent friend Leontis died, right then I had a long conversation with you that provided a great deal of philosophical consolation. And now, as you wished, I wrote up for you the remainder of what I was saying about the idea that the excellence of a man and a woman are one and the same—though my essay offers a historical demonstration and has not been composed for listening pleasure.³ If, however, some delight also results from the nature of the examples included in my convincing argument, my account does not avoid charm as an accomplice to proof. My account is not ashamed “to mix together the Graces with the Muses as a most beautiful alliance,” as Euripides says, and to make its credibility hang upon the part of the soul that particularly loves beauty.⁴

ΓΥΝΑΙΚΩΝ ΑΡΕΤΑΙ

Φέρε γάρ, εἰ λέγοντες τὴν αὐτὴν εἶναι ζωγραφίαν ἀνδρῶν καὶ γυναικῶν παρειχόμεθα τοιαύτας γραφὰς γυναικῶν, οἷας Ἀπελλῆς ἀπολέλοιπεν ἢ Ζεῦξις ἢ Νικόμαχος, ἃρ' ἂν τις ἐπετίμησεν ἡμῖν, ὥς τοῦ χαρίζεσθαι καὶ ψυχαγωγεῖν μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦ πείθειν στοχαζομένοις; Ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ οἶμαι. Τί δέ; Ἐὰν ποιητικὴν πάλιν ἢ μαντικὴν ἀποφαίνοντες οὐχ ἑτέραν μὲν ἀνδρῶν ἑτέραν δὲ γυναικῶν οὔσαν, ἀλλὰ τὴν αὐτὴν, τὰ Σαπφοῦς μέλη τοῖς Ἀνακρέοντος ἢ τὰ Σιβύλλης λόγια τοῖς Βάκιδος ἀντιπαραβάλλωμεν, ἔξει τις αἰτιάσασθαι δικαίως τὴν ἀπόδειξιν, ὅτι χαίροντα καὶ τερπόμενον ἐπάγει τῇ πίστει τὸν ἀκροατὴν; Οὐδὲ τοῦτ' ἂν εἴποις.

Καὶ μὴν οὐκ ἔστιν ἀρετῆς γυναικείας καὶ ἀνδρείας ὁμοιότητα καὶ διαφορὰν ἄλλοθεν

THE EXCELLENCE OF WOMEN

Now, if we were claiming that the same art of painting exists for both men and women and we were setting out examples of paintings by women that were of the same caliber as paintings by Apelles or Zeuxis or Nicomachus, would anyone object on the grounds that we were aiming to delight and entertain rather than persuade?⁵ I don't think so. But what if we were demonstrating that poetic skill, or even prophetic expertise, were not one craft for men and another for women but the same craft for both? If we set the verses of Sappho alongside those of Anacreon, or the prophecies of the Sibyl against those of Bacis, could anyone fairly fault our argument because it led the listener to believe it while they also felt joy and delight?⁶ You would not say this either.

Why certainly, it is impossible to thoroughly understand the similarity and difference of

ΓΥΝΑΙΚΩΝ ΑΡΕΤΑΙ

καταμαθεῖν μᾶλλον, ἢ βίους βίοις καὶ πράξεσι
πράξεις ὥσπερ ἔργα μεγάλης τέχνης παρατιθέντας
ἅμα καὶ σκοποῦντας, εἰ τὸν αὐτὸν ἔχει χαρακτῆρα
καὶ τύπον ἢ Σεμιράμεως μεγαλοπραγμοσύνη
τῇ Σεσώστριος ἢ ἡ Τανακυλλίδος σύνεσις τῇ
Σερουίου τοῦ βασιλέως, ἢ τὸ Πορκίας φρόνημα
τῷ Βρούτου καὶ τὸ Πελοπίδου τῷ Τιμοκλείας,
κατὰ τὴν κυριωτάτην κοινότητα καὶ δύναμιν.
Ἐπειδὴ διαφορὰς γέ τινας ἐτέρας, ὥσπερ χροιάς
ιδίας, αἱ ἀρεταὶ διὰ τὰς φύσεις λαμβάνουσι καὶ
συνεξομοιοῦνται τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις ἔθεσι καὶ
κράσεσι σωμάτων καὶ τροφαῖς καὶ διαίταις·
ἄλλως γὰρ ἀνδρεῖος ὁ Ἀχιλλεὺς ἄλλως ὁ Αἴας, καὶ
φρόνησις Ὀδυσσέως οὐχ ὁμοία τῇ Νέστορος οὐδὲ
δίκαιος ὡσαύτως Κάτων καὶ Ἀγησίλαος, οὐδὲ
Εἰρήνη φίλανδρος ὡς Ἄλκηστις οὐδὲ Κορνηλία
μεγαλόφρων ὡς Ὀλυμπίας. Ἀλλὰ μὴ παρὰ
τοῦτο πολλὰς καὶ διαφόρους ποιῶμεν ἀνδρείας

THE EXCELLENCE OF WOMEN

men's and women's excellence in any other way except by setting lives beside lives and deeds beside deeds, just as with the works of any great craft, and at the same time examining whether

- the lofty ambition of Semiramis has the same imprint and pattern as that of Sesostris;⁷
- Tanaquil's intelligence is the same as King Servius's;⁸
- Porcia's resolve is the same as Brutus's;⁹
- Pelopidas's spirit is the same as Timocleia's;¹⁰

that is, we should make the examination regarding the most important shared features and properties because the excellences at any rate take on certain other variations—their own

ΓΥΝΑΙΚΩΝ ΑΡΕΤΑΙ

καὶ φρονήσεις καὶ δικαιοσύνας, ἂν μόνον τοῦ
λόγου τοῦ οἰκείου μηδεμίαν αἱ καθ' ἕκαστον
ἀνομοιότητες ἐκβιάζωσι.

THE EXCELLENCE OF WOMEN

colorings, so to speak—on account of our natures, and they become adapted to one's underlying habits, bodily temperament, upbringing, and lifestyle. For example,

- Achilles is courageous in one way, and Ajax in another;
- Odysseus's judgment is not the same as Nestor's;
- Cato and Agesilaus are not righteous in the same manner;¹¹
- Eirene is not devoted to her husband in the same way Alcestis is;¹²
- Cornelia is not self-confident just as Olympias is.¹³

But let us not, for this reason, create many different definitions of courage and judgment and justice, provided that the specific dissimilarities

ΤΡΩΙΑΔΕΣ

Τὰ μὲν οὖν ἄγαν περιβόητα καὶ ὅσων οἶμαί σε
βεβαίως βιβλίοις ἐντυχοῦσαν ἱστορίαν ἔχειν καὶ
γνῶσιν ἤδη παρήσω· πλὴν εἰ μή τινα τοὺς τὰ κοινὰ
καὶ δεδημευμένα πρὸ ἡμῶν ἱστορήσαντας ἀκοῆς
ἄξια διαπέφευγεν. Ἐπεὶ δὲ πολλὰ καὶ κοινῇ καὶ
ιδίᾳ γυναιξιν ἄξια λόγου πέπρακται, βραχέα τῶν
κοινῶν οὐ χεῖρόν ἐστι προῖστορησαι.

I. Τρωιάδες

Τῶν ἀπ' Ἰλίου περὶ τὴν ἄλωσιν ἐκφυγόντων οἱ
πλεῖστοι χειμῶνι χρησάμενοι, καὶ δι' ἀπειρίαν τοῦ
πλοῦ καὶ ἄγνοιαν τῆς θαλάττης ἀπενεχθέντες εἰς

TROJAN WOMEN

do not exclude any example from its proper consideration.

Therefore, I will pass over the overly famous examples and however many I suppose you may already know and understand since you read books constantly—except if something worth hearing has escaped the notice of our predecessors who narrated the commonly published accounts. Since many deeds worth telling have been done by women, both individually and collectively, it's just as well to begin by telling briefly the stories of their collective actions.

Trojan Women

Most of the refugees from Troy at the time of its capture faced a storm, and because of their inexperience with sailing and their ignorance

ΤΡΩΙΑΔΕΣ

τὴν Ἰταλίαν καὶ περὶ τὸν Θύμβριν ποταμὸν ὄρμοις
καὶ ναυλόχοις ἀναγκαίοις μόλις ὑποδραμόντες,
αὐτοὶ μὲν ἐπλανῶντο περὶ τὴν χώραν φραστῆρων
δεόμενοι, ταῖς δὲ γυναιξὶν ἐμπίπτει λογισμός, ὥς
ήτισοῦν ἴδρυσις ἐν γῇ πάσης πλάνης καὶ ναυτιλίας
εὖ τε καὶ καλῶς πράττουσιν ἀνθρώποις ἀμείνων
ἐστί, καὶ πατρίδα δεῖ ποιεῖν αὐτούς, ἀπολαβεῖν
ἣν ἀπολωλέκασιν μὴ δυναμένους. Ἐκ δὲ τούτου
συμφρονήσασαι κατέφλεξαν τὰ πλοῖα, μιᾶς
καταρξαμένης ὥς φασι Ῥώμης. Πράξασαι δὲ
ταῦτα τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἀπῆντων βοηθοῦσι πρὸς
τὴν θάλατταν, καὶ φοβούμεναι τὴν ὀργὴν αἱ μὲν
ἀνδρῶν, αἱ δ' οἰκείων ἀντιλαμβανόμεναι καὶ
καταφιλοῦσαι λιπαρῶς, ἐξεπράυναν τῷ τρόπῳ τῆς
φιλοφροσύνης. Διὸ καὶ γέγονε καὶ παραμένει ταῖς
Ῥωμαίων γυναιξὶν ἔτι νῦν ἔθος ἀσπάζεσθαι μετὰ
τοῦ καταφιλεῖν τοὺς κατὰ γένος προσήκοντας
αὐταῖς. Συνιδόντες γὰρ ὥς ἔοικε τὴν ἀνάγκην
οἱ Τρῶες καὶ ἅμα πειρώμενοι τῶν ἐγχωρίων,

TROJAN WOMEN

of the sea, they were driven off course to Italy. Near the Tiber River, they just barely ran under the shelter of a much-needed safe harbor. While the men were wandering around the countryside looking for local guides, the women happened to reflect that for a people to be happy and successful, any kind of settlement on land is better than every wandering voyage, and that they should create a new fatherland since they were unable to recover the one they had lost. Consequently, the women agreed to burn down their ships, and the one woman who ignited them—so they say—was named Roma.¹⁴ After the women did this, they ran to meet the men who were running to the shore to rescue the ships. Fearing their wrath, some women embraced their husbands, others their family, and they kissed them insistently and soothed them with this display of affection. For this reason, it became

ΦΩΚΙΔΕΣ

εὐμενῶς καὶ φιλανθρώπως προσδεχομένων,
ἠγάπησαν τὸ πραχθὲν ὑπὸ τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ
συγκατώκησαν αὐτόθι τοῖς Λατίνοις.

II. Φωκίδες

Τὸ δὲ τῶν Φωκίδων ἐνδόξου μὲν οὐ τετύχηκε
συγγραφέως, οὐδενὸς δὲ τῶν γυναικείων
ἔλαττον εἰς ἀρετὴν ἐστὶ, μαρτυρούμενον ἱεροῖς τε
μεγάλοις, ἃ δρῶσι Φωκεῖς ἔτι νῦν περὶ Ἰάμπολιν,
καὶ δόγμασι παλαιοῖς, ὧν τὸ μὲν καθ' ἕκαστον τῆς
πράξεως ἐν τῷ Δαϊφάντου βίῳ γέγραπται, τὸ δὲ
τῶν γυναικῶν τοιοῦτόν ἐστιν.

WOMEN OF PHOCIS (I)

and remains even now the custom for Roman women to greet their kin with kisses. For, as it seems, the Trojan men, once they understood the crisis and also had gotten to know the locals, who welcomed them kindly and generously, appreciated what the women did and settled there together with the Latins.¹⁵

Women of Phocis (II)

The deed of the Phocian women hasn't gained a famous chronicler, but it is inferior to none of the deeds of women in its bravery (*arete*).¹⁶ Ancient decrees and the great rites that the Phocians conduct still to this day near Hyampolis bear witness to it. I have written a point-by-point account of the fighting in the *Life of Daïphantus*, but the story about the women is as follows.¹⁷

ΦΩΚΙΔΕΣ

Ἄσπονδος ἦν Θετταλοῖς πρὸς Φωκέας πόλεμος· οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἄρχοντας αὐτῶν καὶ τυράννους ἐν ταῖς Φωκικαῖς πόλεσιν ἡμέρα μιᾷ πάντας ἀπέκτειναν, οἱ δὲ πεντήκοντα καὶ διακοσίους ἐκείνων ὁμήρους κατηλόησαν. Εἴτα πανστρατιᾷ διὰ Λοκρῶν ἐνέβαλον, δόγμα θέμενοι μηδενὸς φεῖδεσθαι τῶν ἐν ἡλικίᾳ, παῖδας δὲ καὶ γυναῖκας ἀνδραποδίσασθαι. Δαΐφαντος οὖν ὁ Βαθυλλίου, τρίτος αὐτὸς ἄρχων, ἔπεισε τοὺς Φωκεῖς μὲν αὐτοὺς ἀπαντήσαντας τοῖς Θετταλοῖς μάχεσθαι, τὰς δὲ γυναῖκας ἅμα τοῖς τέκνοις εἰς ἓνα που τόπον συναγαγόντας ἐξ ἀπάσης τῆς Φωκίδος, ὕλην τε περινῆσαι ξύλων καὶ φυλακὰς καταλιπεῖν, πρόσταγμα δόντας, ἃν αἰσθῶνται νικωμένους αὐτούς, κατὰ τάχος τὴν ὕλην ἀνάψαι καὶ καταπρῆσαι τὰ σώματα. Ψηφισαμένων δὲ ταῦτα τῶν ἄλλων, εἷς ἐξαναστὰς ἔφη δίκαιον εἶναι ταῦτα συνδοκεῖν καὶ ταῖς γυναῖξιν· εἰ δὲ μή, χαίρειν ἔαν καὶ μὴ προσβιάζεσθαι. Τούτου τοῦ λόγου διελθόντος εἰς τὰς γυναῖκας, αὐταὶ καθ’

WOMEN OF PHOCIS (I)

The Thessalians waged a relentless war against the Phocians.¹⁸ The Thessalians, for example, massacred all the rulers and tyrants in the Phocian cities in a single day, and the Phocians beat to death 250 Thessalian prisoners of war. Then the Thessalians invaded with their entire army by way of Locris, having decreed that no adult man be spared and the women and children be enslaved. So, Daïphantus, the son of Bathyllus, himself in this third term as the chief officer of the Phocians, persuaded the Phocian men to meet the Thessalians in battle again and to gather together the women with their children from all over Phocis in a single place, pile up a heap of wood around them, and leave behind guards with orders to swiftly light the wood and incinerate the bodies if they heard that the men were being defeated. The rest of the men voted to approve these measures, but one man stood

ΦΩΚΙΔΕΣ

ἐαυτὰς συνελθοῦσαι ταῦτὰ ἐψηφίσαντο καὶ τὸν Δαΐφαντον ἀνέδησαν, ὥς τὰ ἄριστα τῇ Φωκίδι βεβουλευμένον. Τὰ δ' αὐτὰ καὶ τοὺς παῖδας ἰδίᾳ φασὶν ἐκκλησιάσαντας ἐπιψηφίσασθαι.

Πραχθέντων δὲ τούτων, συμβαλόντες οἱ Φωκεῖς περὶ Κλεωνὰς τῆς Ὑαμπόλιδος ἐνίκησαν. Τὸ μὲν οὖν ψήφισμα Φωκέων Ἀπόνοιαν οἱ Ἕλληνες ὠνόμασαν· ἐορτὴν δ' ἐκ πασῶν μεγίστην τὰ Ἐλαφηβόλια μέχρι νῦν τῇ Ἀρτέμιδι τῆς νίκης ἐκείνης ἐν Ὑαμπόλιδι τελοῦσιν.

WOMEN OF PHOCIS (I)

up and said that it would be the right thing for the women to also agree to them, and that if they did not, the women should be permitted to leave and not be compelled to comply. When this account came through to the women, they assembled among themselves and voted to approve the proposal, and they presented Daïphantus with a crown for advising the best course of action for Phocis. They say that even the children assembled on their own and voted in favor of the same measures.

After these things were settled, the Phocians attacked and were victorious near the Cleonae district of Hyampolis. The Greeks called this vote the “Desperation of the Phocians,” and even to this day they celebrate the greatest festival of all—the Elaphebolia for Artemis—in Hyampolis because of this victory.