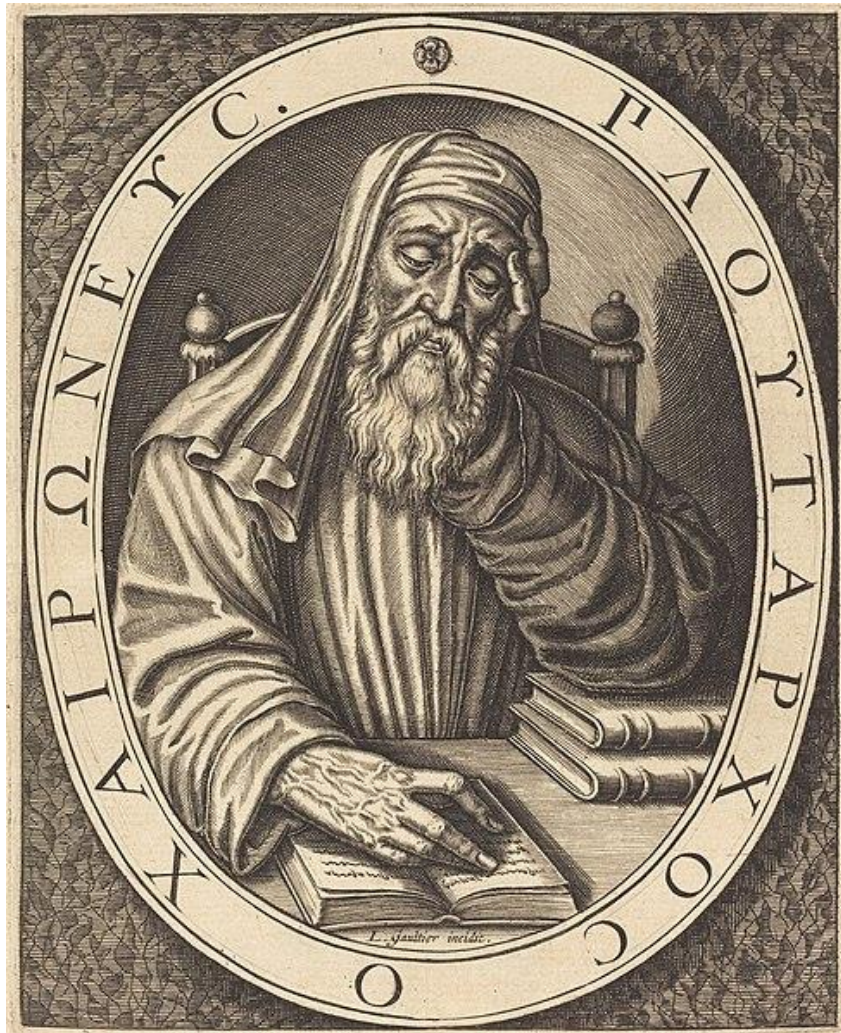


BELLARIA LIX



The Chaironean, Plutarch (engraving, Léonard Gaultier, d.1641)

PLUTARCH IV

ADVICE ON MARRIAGE



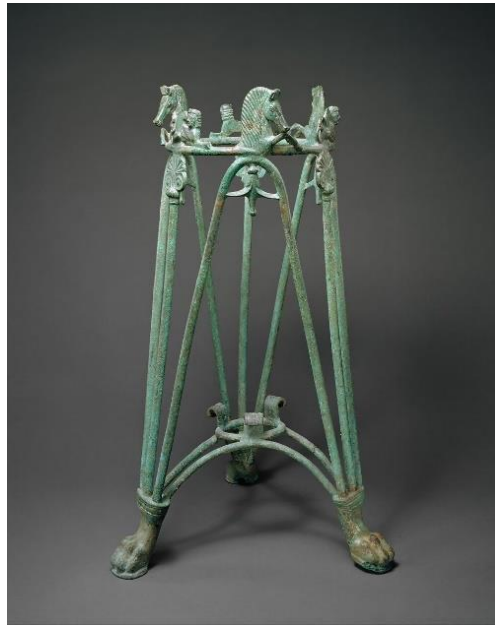
Introduction: *Gamika Parangelmata* (*Moralia* 138 B-146)

There is no other work quite like this in Plutarch—a collection of brief, unargued observations about marriage, usually involving a simile or comparison of some sort. It is addressed to a married couple of philosophical bent but, typically of this genre,

the husband takes the role of teacher and guide. The point is that in the ancient world, elite males were educated, females not so much. It was therefore a perfectly reasonable assumption that a husband was duty-bound to educate his wife (cf. Ischomachus in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*). That did not mean wives did not have their own views on matters.

However, the theme of kindness, loyalty, understanding, love and affection on both sides is emphasized, as are the couple's duties to each other, in strong contrast to the misogyny apparent in much ancient Greek literature.

The solid vessel



Tripod stand 6th C BC

3. At the outset, married people should beware especially of quarrels and antagonisms, observing that household vessels made of sections are to start with easily broken up for any sort of reason, but over time, as their joints become set, are hardly shattered even by fire or steel.

3. ἐν ἀρχῇ μάλιστα δεῖ τὰς διαφορὰς καὶ τὰς προσκρούσεις φυλάττεσθαι τοὺς γεγαμηκότας, ὁρῶντας ὅτι καὶ τὰ συναρμοσθέντα τῶν σκευῶν κατ' ἀρχὰς μὲν ὑπὸ τῆς τυχούσης ῥαδίως διασπᾶται προφάσεως, χρόνῳ δὲ τῶν ἀρμῶν σύμπηξιν λαβόντων, μόλις ὑπὸ πυρὸς καὶ σιδήρου διαλύεται.

The heat of passion



4. As fire gets easily kindled in chaff, wick and hares' fur, but is easily extinguished again if it finds nothing able to retain it and feed it, so the intense passion of newly-married people, ablaze at physical beauty, must not be considered durable and lasting unless, being rooted in character and taking a grip on the senses, it takes on a spirited frame of mind.

4. ὥσπερ τὸ πῦρ ἐξάπτεται μὲν εὐχερῶς ἐν ἀχύροις καὶ θρυαλλίδι καὶ θριξὶ λαγῶαις, σβέννυται δὲ τάχιον, ἂν μὴ τινος ἐτέρου δυναμένου στέγειν ἅμα καὶ τρέφειν ἐπιλάβηται, οὕτω τὸν ἀπὸ σώματος καὶ ὥρας ὄξυν ἔρωτα τῶν νεογάμων ἀναφλεγόμενον δεῖ μὴ διαρκῆ μηδὲ βέβαιον νομίζειν, ἂν μὴ περὶ τὸ ἦθος ἰδρυθεῖς καὶ τοῦ φρονοῦντος ἀψάμενος, ἔμψυχον λάβῃ διάθεσιν.

Respect your wife



8. Men who through weakness or effeminacy cannot vault upon their horses' backs, teach them to kneel and so receive their riders. Similarly, some men that marry noble or rich wives, instead of making themselves better, cut their wives down to size, with a view to ruling more easily over the humiliated. But one ought to use the rein with an eye to the distinction of a woman as much as to the size of a horse.

8. οἱ τοῖς ἵπποις ἐφάλλεσθαι μὴ δυνάμενοι δι' ἀσθένειαν ἢ μαλακίαν αὐτοὺς ἐκείνους ὀκλάζειν καὶ ὑποπίπτειν διδάσκουσιν. οὕτως ἔνιοι τῶν λαβόντων εὐγενεῖς ἢ πλουσίας γυναῖκας οὐχ ἑαυτοὺς ποιοῦσι βελτίους ἀλλ' ἐκείνας περικολοῦουσιν, ὡς μᾶλλον ἄρξοντες ταπεινῶν γενομένων· δεῖ δ' ὥσπερ ἵππου τὸ μέγεθος φυλάττοντα καὶ τὸ ἀξίωμα τῆς γυναικὸς χρῆσθαι τῷ χαλινῷ.

The modest wife (i)



9. We see that the moon, when it is far from the sun, shines bright and glorious, but disappears and hides itself when it is near. A modest wife, on the contrary, ought to be most visible in her husband's company, and to stay at home and hide away in his absence.

9. τὴν σελήνην, ὅταν ἀποστῆ τοῦ ἡλίου, περιφανῆ καὶ λαμπρὰν ὁρῶμεν, ἀφανίζεται δὲ καὶ κρύπτεται πλησίον γενομένη: τὴν δὲ σώφρονα γυναῖκα δεῖ τούναντίον ὁρᾶσθαι μάλιστα μετὰ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς οὔσαν, οἰκουρεῖν δὲ καὶ κρύπτεσθαι μὴ παρόντος.

The modest wife (ii)



10. Herodotus was not right in saying that a woman puts off her modesty with her clothes. On the contrary, the modest woman puts on her modesty instead, and they both use the greatest respect for each other as a sign of their great love.

10. οὐκ ὀρθῶς Ἡρόδοτος εἶπεν ὅτι ἡ γυνὴ ἅμα τῷ χιτῶνι ἐκδύεται καὶ τὴν αἰδῶ· τούναντίον γὰρ ἡ σώφρων ἀντενδύεται τὴν αἰδῶ, καὶ τοῦ μάλιστα φιλεῖν τῷ μάλιστα αἰδεῖσθαι συμβόλῳ χρῶνται πρὸς ἀλλήλους.

The sensible wife



12. The Sun won a victory over the North Wind. For when it tried force a man to remove his cloak and blew briskly against him, he only tightened his grip and held his cloak round him, but when the Sun came out with its warm rays, at first warmed and afterwards scorched, he stripped himself of coat as well as cloak. Most woman act similarly: if their husbands try to curtail by force their luxury and extravagance, they are vexed and fight for their rights, but if they are convinced by reason, they quietly drop their expensive habits, and keep within bounds.

12. ὁ ἥλιος τὸν βορέαν ἐνίκησεν. ὁ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος, τοῦ μὲν ἀνέμου βιαζομένου τὸ ἱμάτιον ἀφελέσθαι καὶ λαμπρὸν καταπνέοντος, μᾶλλον ἔσφιγγε καὶ συνείχε τὴν περιβολήν, τοῦ δ' ἡλίου μετὰ τὸ πνεῦμα θερμοῦ γενομένου, θαλπόμενος εἶτα καυματιζόμενος, καὶ τὸν χιτῶνα τῷ ἱματίῳ προσαπεδύσατο. τοῦτο ποιοῦσιν αἱ πλεῖσται γυναῖκες· ἀφαιρουμένοις τοῖς ἀνδράσι βία τὴν τρυφήν καὶ τὴν πολυτέλειαν, διαμάχονται καὶ χαλεπαίνουσιν· ἂν πείθωνται μετὰ λόγου, πράως ἀποτίθενται καὶ μετριάζουσιν.

Debauched husbands



16. The kings of Persia have their wedded wives at their side at banquets and entertainments; but when they have a mind for a drunken debauch they send them away, and call for singing-girls and concubines, rightly so doing, for so they do not mix up their wives with licentiousness and drunkenness. Similarly, if a private individual, dissolute and ill-disciplined, goes astray with a courtesan or slave, the wife should not complain or become angry, but consider that it is in respect of her that he bestows upon another woman all his drunkenness, licentiousness and depravity.

16. τοῖς τῶν Περσῶν βασιλεῦσιν αἱ γνήσiai γυναῖκες παρακάθηνται δειπνοῦσι καὶ συνεστιῶνται. βουλόμενοι δὲ παίζουσιν καὶ μεθύσκεσθαι, ταύτας μὲν ἀποπέμπουσιν, τὰς δὲ μουσουργοὺς καὶ παλλακίδας καλοῦσιν, ὀρθῶς τοῦτο γ' αὐτὸ ποιοῦντες, ὅτι τὸ συνακολασταίνειν καὶ παροινεῖν οὐ μεταδιδόασιν ταῖς γαμεταῖς. ἂν οὖν ἰδιώτης ἀνὴρ, ἀκρατὴς δὲ περὶ τὰς ἡδονὰς καὶ ἀνάγωγος, ἐξαμάρτη τι πρὸς ἑταίραν ἢ θεραπαινίδα, δεῖ τὴν γαμετὴν μὴ ἀγανακτεῖν μηδὲ χαλεπαίνειν, λογιζομένην ὅτι παροινίας καὶ ἀκολασίας καὶ ὕβρεως αἰδούμενος αὐτὴν ἑτέρα μεταδίδωσιν.

Brazen Hussy (*ficaria verna*)



18. A Lacedæmonian maiden, when someone asked her if she had yet had dealings with a man, replied, 'No, but he has with me.' This, in my view, is the line of conduct a mistress of the household should pursue, neither to decline nor be annoyed by the embraces of a husband when he takes the initiative, nor to provoke them herself; for the one is brazen and savours of the courtesan, the other is dismissive and unnatural.

18. Λάκαινα παιδίσκη, πυνθανομένου τινός εἰ ἤδη ἀνδρὶ προσελήλυθεν, 'οὐκ ἔγωγ' εἶπεν, ἀλλ' ἐμοὶ ἐκεῖνος.' οὗτος ὁ τρόπος, οἶμαι, τῆς οἰκοδεσποίνης, μήτε φεύγειν μήτε δυσχεραίνειν τὰ τοιαῦτα τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἀρχομένου μήτε αὐτὴν κατάρχεσθαι· τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἑταιρικὸν καὶ ἰταμόν, τὸ δ' ὑπερήφανον καὶ ἀφιλόστοργον.

The knot of love



20. Plato says that is a happy and fortunate state, where 'mine' and 'not mine' are least heard, because the citizens (as much as they can) regard all matters of real importance as common property. Far more essential is it that from marriage such words should be removed. Except that, as the doctors say that blows on the left shoulders affect sensations on the right, so is it good for husband and wife to sympathize mutually with one another, so that, just as ropes gain strength from the interweaving with each other, the marriage knot with each interchanging mutual affection may be confirmed for both of them.

20. ὁ Πλάτων φησὶν εὐδαίμονα καὶ μακαρίαν εἶναι πόλιν, ἐν τῷ ἐμὸν καὶ τὸ οὐκ ἐμὸν ἦκιστα φθεγγομένων ἀκούουσι, διὰ τὸ κοινοῖς (ὡς ἐνὶ μάλιστα) χρῆσθαι τοῖς ἀξίοις σπουδῆς τοὺς πολίτας, πολὺ δὲ μᾶλλον ἐκ γάμου δεῖ τὴν τοιαύτην φωνὴν

ἀνηρῆσθαι. πλὴν ὥσπερ οἱ ἰατροὶ λέγουσι τὰς τῶν εὐωνύμων πληγὰς τὴν αἴσθησιν ἐν τοῖς δεξιοῖς ἀναφέρειν, οὕτω τὴν γυναῖκα τοῖς τοῦ ἀνδρὸς συμπαθεῖν καλὸν καὶ τὸν ἄνδρα τοῖς τῆς γυναικὸς, ἵν' ὥσπερ οἱ δεσμοὶ κατὰ τὴν ἐπάλλαξιν ἰσχὺν δι' ἀλλήλων λαμβάνουσιν, οὕτως ἐκατέρου τὴν εὐνοίαν ἀντίστροφον ἀποδιδόντος ἡ κοινωσία σῶζεται δι' ἀμφοῖν.

He's got your paunch



20. What's more, nature unites through the mingling of our bodies so that, by taking and mingling a common part from each pair, it provides offspring common to both so that that neither husband nor wife can discriminate or discern which part of the child is theirs. So, too, it is especially fitting for married persons to share their money, throwing all their property into one common stock, and mixing it up, not to regard part of it as 'mine', part as 'yours', but hold everything in common and separate. And just as we call it 'wine', even it shares much more in water, so we must say that that the house and property belongs to the man, even though the wife contribute most of the money.

20. καὶ γὰρ ἡ φύσις μίγνυσι διὰ τῶν σωμάτων τῶν ἡμᾶς, ἵν' ἐξ ἐκατέρων μέρος λαβοῦσα καὶ συγχέασα κοινὸν ἀμφοτέροις ἀποδῶ τὸ γεννώμενον, ὥστε μηδέτερον διορίσαι μηδὲ διακρίναι τὸ ἴδιον ἢ τὸ ἀλλότριον. τοιαύτη τοίνυν καὶ χρημάτων κοινωσία προσήκει μάλιστα τοῖς γαμοῦσιν εἰς μίαν οὐσίαν πάντα καταχεαμένοις καὶ ἀναμίξασι μὴ τὸ μέρος ἴδιον καὶ τὸ μέρος ἀλλότριου ἀλλὰ πᾶν ἴδιον ἡγεῖσθαι καὶ μηδὲν ἀλλότριον. ὥσπερ γὰρ τὸ κρᾶμα καίτοι ὕδατος μετέχον πλείονος οἴνον καλοῦμεν, οὕτω τὴν οὐσίαν δεῖ καὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ ἀνδρὸς λέγεσθαι, κἂν ἡ γυνὴ πλείονα συμβάλληται.

Tight fitting



22. The Roman who was taken to task by his friends for repudiating a chaste wealthy and handsome wife, showed them his shoe and said, 'Although this is new and handsome, none of you know where it pinches me.' A wife ought not therefore to put her trust in her dowry, or family, or beauty, but in matters that more vitally concern her husband, namely, in her conversation, character and companionship, not to make every-day life vexatious or annoying, but harmonious and cheerful and agreeable.

22. ὁ Ῥωμαῖος ὑπὸ τῶν φίλων νουθετούμενος ὅτι σώφρονα γυναῖκα καὶ πλουσίαν καὶ ὠραίαν ἀπεπέμψατο, τὸν κάλτιον αὐτοῖς προτείνας; 'καὶ γὰρ οὗτος' ἔφη 'καλὸς ἰδεῖν καὶ καινός, ἀλλ' οὐδεὶς οἶδεν ὅπου με θλίβει.' δεῖ τοίνυν μὴ προικὶ μηδὲ γένει μηδὲ κάλλει τὴν γυναῖκα πιστεῦειν, ἀλλ' ἐν οἷς ἄπτεται μάλιστα τοῦ ἀνδρός, ὁμιλία τε καὶ ἦθει καὶ συμπεριφορᾷ, ταῦτα μὴ σκληρὰ μηδ' ἀνιῶντα καθ' ἡμέραν ἀλλ' εὐάρμοστα καὶ ἄλυπα καὶ προσφιλῆ παρέχειν.

Jealous mother-in-law



35. At Leptis, a town in Libya, it is the custom for the bride the day after marriage to send to her mother-in-law's house for a pot, but she does not lend her one, but says she has not got one, so that from the first the daughter-in-law may understand her mother-in-law's stepmotherly mind and, if afterwards she should be harsher still, should be prepared for it and not take it badly. Knowing this, the wife ought to guard against any cause of offence, for the bridegroom's mother is jealous of her son's affection to his wife. But there is one cure for this condition of mind, to conciliate privately the husband's affection, and not to divert or diminish his love for his mother.

35. ἐν Λέπτει τῆς Λιβύης πόλει πάτριόν ἐστι τῇ μετὰ τὸν γάμον ἡμέρᾳ τὴν νύμφην πρὸς τὴν τοῦ νυμφίου μητέρα πέμψασαν αἰτεῖσθαι χύτραν. ἢ δ' οὐ δίδωσιν οὐδέ φησιν ἔχειν, ὅπως ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἐπισταμένη τὸ τῆς ἐκυρᾶς μητριῶδες, ἂν ὕστερόν τι συμβαίη τραχύτερον, μὴ ἀγανακτῆ μηδὲ δυσκολαίη. τοῦτο δεῖ γινώσκουσιν τὴν γυναῖκα θεραπεύειν τὴν πρόφασιν· ἔστι δὲ ζηλοτυπία τῆς μητρὸς ὑπὲρ εὐνοίας πρὸς αὐτήν. θεραπεία δὲ μία τοῦ πάθους—ἰδίᾳ μὲν εὐνοίαν τῷ ἀνδρὶ ποιεῖν πρὸς ἑαυτήν, τὴν δὲ τῆς μητρὸς μὴ περισπᾶν μηδ' ἐλαττοῦν.

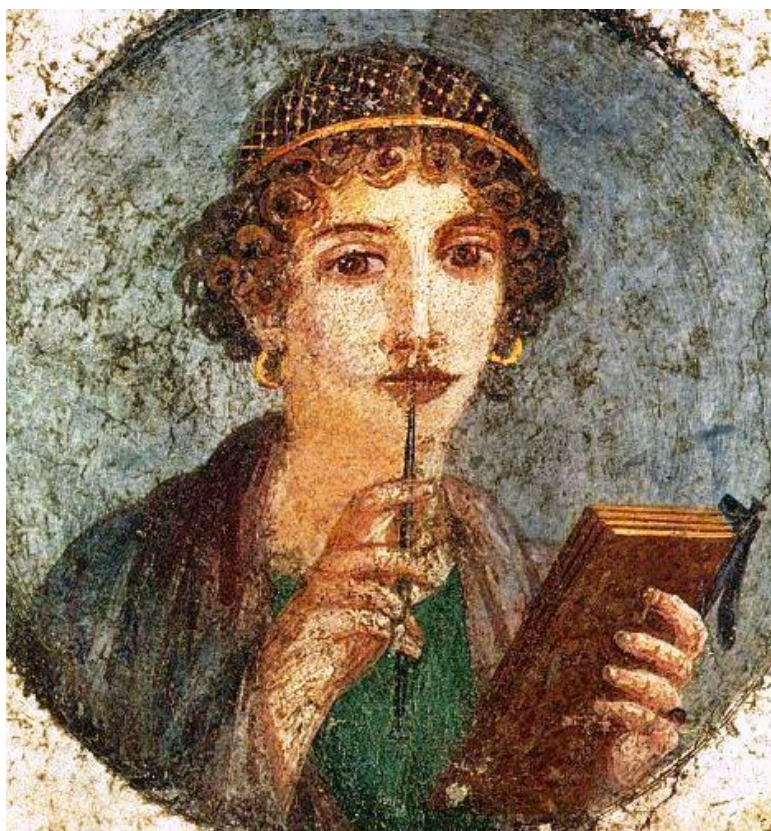
Fathers and daughters, mothers and sons



36. Mothers seem to love their sons best as able to help them, and fathers their daughters as needing their help; perhaps also because of the honour accorded to one another, each prefers to show that they love and favour what is more characteristic in the other. This, however, is a matter perhaps of little importance, but it is civilised if the wife inclines with greater respect to her husband's parents than to her own, and if she is distressed over anything, to confide it to them rather than to her own parents. For seeming trust begets trust, and love love.

36. τοὺς υἱοὺς δοκοῦσι μᾶλλον ἀγαπᾶν αἱ μητέρες ὡς δυναμένους αὐταῖς βοηθεῖν, οἱ δὲ πατέρες τὰς θυγατέρας ὡς δεομένας αὐτῶν βοηθούτων. ἴσως δὲ καὶ τιμῇ τῇ πρὸς ἀλλήλους, ὁ ἕτερος τὸ μᾶλλον οἰκεῖον τῷ ἑτέρῳ βούλεται μᾶλλον ἀσπαζόμενος καὶ ἀγαπῶν φανερὸς εἶναι. καὶ τοῦτο μὲν ἴσως ἀδιάφορόν ἐστιν, ἐκεῖνο δ' ἀστεῖον, ἂν ἡ γυνὴ μᾶλλον ἀποκλίνασα τῇ τιμῇ πρὸς τοὺς γονεῖς τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἢ τοὺς ἑαυτῆς βλέπῃται, κἂν τι λυπῆται, πρὸς ἐκείνους ἀναφέρουσα, τοὺς δ' ἑαυτῆς λανθάνουσα. ποιεῖ γὰρ τὸ πιστεύειν δοκεῖν πιστεῦεσθαι, καὶ τὸ φιλεῖν φιλεῖσθαι.

An educated woman



Pompeii fresco c. AD 50

48. But do you, Eurydice, study to make yourself acquainted with the sayings of wise and good women, and ever have on your tongue those sentiments which as a girl you took from us, that so you may make your husband's heart glad, and be admired by all other women, being in yourself so wonderfully and splendidly adorned, without price.

σὺ δ', ὦ Εὐρυδίκη, μάλιστα πειρῶ τοῖς τῶν σοφῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν ἀποφθέγμασιν ὁμιλεῖν καὶ διὰ στόματος ἀεὶ τὰς φωνὰς ἔχειν ἐκείνας ὧν καὶ παρθένος οὔσα παρ' ἡμῖν ἀνελάμβανες, ὅπως εὐφραίνης μὲν τὸν ἄνδρα, θαυμάζη δ' ὑπὸ τῶν ἄλλων γυναικῶν, οὕτω κοσμουμένη περιπτῶς καὶ σεμνῶς ἀπὸ μηδενός.

Virtue unadorned



Spartan woman, c. 500 BC

48. As for the jewels of this or that rich woman, or the silk dresses of this or that foreign woman, one cannot take or put them on, except at great expense, but the virtues that adorned Theano, and Cleobuline, and Gorgo the wife of [Spartan] Leonidas, and Timoclea the sister of Theagenes, and the ancient Claudia, and Cornelia the sister of Scipio, and all other such noble and famous women, these one may array oneself in without money and without price, and so adorned lead a happy and famous life.

48. τοὺς μὲν γὰρ τῆσδε τῆς πλουσίας μαργαρίτας καὶ τὰ τῆσδε τῆς ξένης σηρικὰ λαβεῖν οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲ περιθέσθαι μὴ πολλοῦ πριαμένην, τὰ δὲ Θεανοῦς κόσμια καὶ Κλεοβουλίνης καὶ Γοργοῦς τῆς Λεωνίδου γυναικὸς καὶ Τιμοκλείας τῆς Θεαγένους ἀδελφῆς καὶ Κλαυδίας τῆς παλαιᾶς, καὶ Κορνηλίας τῆς Σκιπίωνος καὶ ὅσαι ἐγένοντο θαυμασταὶ καὶ περιβόητοι, ταῦτα δ' ἔξεστι περικειμένην προῖκα καὶ κοσμουμένην αὐτοῖς ἐνδόξως ἅμα βιοῦν καὶ μακαρίως.

Sappho



John William Godward (1904)

48. For if Sappho plumed herself so much on the beauty of her lyrical poetry as to write to a certain rich woman,

‘You shall lie down in your tomb, nor any remembrance
of you will there be, for you have no part in the roses
of Pieria’

how shall you not have a greater right to plume yourself on, if not in sharing in the roses but in the fruits which the Muses bring, and which they freely bestow on those that admire learning and philosophy?

48. εἰ γὰρ ἡ Σαπφῶ διὰ τὴν ἐν τοῖς μέλεσι καλλιγραφίαν ἐφρόνει τηλικοῦτον ὥστε γράψαι πρὸς τινα πλουσίαν

καθάνοισα δὲ κείσεται, οὐδέ τις μναμοσύνα σέθεν
ἔσεται: οὐ γὰρ πεδέχεις ῥόδων
τῶν ἐκ Πιερίας,

πῶς οὐχί σοι μᾶλλον ἐξέσται μέγα φρονεῖν ἐφ’ ἑαυτῇ καὶ λαμπρόν, ἂν μὴ τῶν ῥόδων ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν καρπῶν μετέχης, ὧν αἱ Μοῦσαι φέρουσι καὶ χαρίζονται τοῖς παιδείαν καὶ φιλοσοφίαν θαυμάζουσιν;

Next week: Superstition.