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ARTICLE

A "Difficult" Woman: Restoring Philosophical Xanthippe

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Abstract

Ancient sources label Xanthippe a "difficult" woman—shrewish, emotional, and hostile to philosophy. While some recent feminist scholars have reinterpreted these sources as being more sympathetic, most stop short of asking about her philosophical life and commitments, assuming that the evidence is simply too sparse to draw any conclusions. This paper argues against this assumption. It establishes that there is a lesser-known ancient tradition, possibly beginning in the works of the ancient Athenian Socratic acolytes and continuing into the fictitious epistolary of the Imperial Greek period, according to which Xanthippe is a philosophical participant, living by philosophical principles, and perhaps even conserving Socratic works after his death. This tradition also suggests that she may have held her own philosophical views which merit future consideration, as she is sometimes associated with topics like moral education, philosophical community, and material well-being.

> Be she as foul as was Florentius' love,
> As old as Sibyl, and as curst and shrewd
> As Socrates' Xanthippe or a worse ...
>
> —Shakespeare, *The taming of the shrew*, 1.2.70–72

It is an understatement to say that Xanthippe has a reputation for being a "difficult" woman. Xenophon's *Symposium* makes her the butt of a joke about educating women. There, Socrates claims that no one should be afraid to teach his wife anything he wants her to know (2.9.1–5), to which Antisthenes retorts that it is funny therefore that Socrates chose to wed Xanthippe, "the most difficult" (χαλεπωτάτη) woman to ever live (2.10.4–5). Socrates rejoins that her character is a useful challenge: an expert horse trainer does not practice on easy horses (2.10.6–10).[1] Likewise, she is sent away in Plato's *Phaedo* for mourning loudly, seemingly too emotional on Socrates' dying day (60a1–8)

[1]The allusion to horse training is a pun on Xanthippe's name which means roughly "fair-haired" (*xanthos*) "horse" (*hippos*) in keeping with the Classical Athenian naming trend where equine names signal

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(Saxonhouse 1976; Le Doeuff 1977; Grosz 1994; Spelman 1988; Cavarero 1995; Tanner 2024). Hundreds of years later, Plutarch's *Moralia* depicts her upending a table in anger, prompting Socrates to joke to Euthydemus "at your house the other day did not a hen fly in and do precisely this same thing, yet we were not put out about it?"[2] (461d10–11). In Diogenes Laertius's *Life of Socrates*, she nags her husband about money (2.5.26), pours water over his head (2.5.36),[3] and rips his clothes to incite a physical fight (2.5.37). This portrayal ends with a nod to her Xenophonic characterization: "Socrates said that he lived with a harsh wife just as horsemen choose spirited horses"[4] (2.5.37).

Later sources preserve Xanthippe's reputation. Shakespeare's *The taming of the shrew* (in the epigraph) names her as an undesirable wife for her "curst and shrewd" nature (1.2.72). Giordano's Baroque painting *Xanthippe pouring water onto Socrates' neck* (another nod to Diogenes) imagines her sneaking up behind the scribbling[5] philosopher with a bowl of water. Worse, a Van Veen (1607) print depicts her about to empty a chamber pot over his head. Nietzsche's *Human, all too human* claims that Socrates would not have chosen Xanthippe "had he known her well" and "credits" her with driving him into the streets to philosophize (Nietzsche 1878, 314). The portrait of Xanthippe that has been passed down through the millennia is a clear one: she is aggressive, brutish, and a thoroughly "difficult" woman.

However, feminist interpreters have questioned the valence of Xanthippe's "difficult" personality, especially in the Classical Athenian sources. Arlene Saxonhouse argues that, whereas most read Antisthenes' joke as about her shrewishness, a more sympathetic alternative is available. Her strong personality might have a positive valence in Socrates' eyes, since "the challenges this shrew poses turn [him] into the expert dialectician whom we find in Plato's dialogues" (Saxonhouse 2018, 615). Feminist readers have also reinterpreted her appearance in the *Phaedo*, thinking Socrates sends her away not for being shrewish, but because her lament symbolizes something like embodiment itself. She may even be a Platonic plant, a subtle foil appearing at the start and finish of the dialogue to challenge Socrates' views on immortality: "For Plato she appears as a qualifier—a question mark, so to speak—that encourages his readers to think more deeply about efforts to cast off the body in order to argue for the immortality of the soul" (Saxonhouse 2018, 619–21).[6] Others have taken her expulsion from the dialogue as evidence of Plato's tendency to exclude "those characteristics associated with femininity" from his work (Grosz 1994, 154)[7] or the fact "that male Western philosophy very often lacks a sense of tenderness" (Kasia 2020, 79).

This paper takes these feminist rereadings of Xanthippe as a jumping-off point. Yet it investigates a substantially different question, one that many of Xanthippe's most ardent

"aristocratic pretensions and breeding." (Camp 1998, 12.) This trend appears often in comedy, cf. Aristophanes, *Clouds* 60–72.

[2]Trans. Helmbold 1939.

[3]Cp. Seneca, *De constantia sapientis* 18.5.7–12.

[4]Trans. Hicks 1925.

[5]Socrates' writing probably symbolizes philosophical activity.

[6]De Gandt 2017 argues that Xanthippe is a symbol of *emotion*. See Tanner 2024, 159 for a counterargument.

[7]Saxonhouse 1976; Le Doeuff 1977; Grosz 1994; Spelman 1988; and Cavarero 1995 offer similar views. However, following Hyland 2012, 8 we should not charge Plato (or Socrates) too hastily, since he frequently introduces or considers women.

defenders have been hesitant to ask. Namely, might Xanthippe be understood as a *philosophical* woman?[8] Could this even be why she is frequently portrayed as so "difficult"? There are two reasons why even feminist readers have hesitated to ask about Xanthippe's possible philosophical life: first, many antique sources depict her as hostile to philosophy—the "cold water" dumped on the philosophical enterprise, so to speak. Second, we have no idea what she might have believed. This is presumably why most avoid even speculation on the topic. Because the evidence is so sparse, it seems that, as Saxonhouse puts it, "Xanthippe cannot stand on her own," and "will always remain a sideshow to Socrates."

This paper, by contrast, argues that Xanthippe's philosophical life and commitments deserve further investigation. It assembles a variety of her ancient testimonia, and argues that, beginning with the Classical Athenian acolytes of Socrates (namely, Xen. *Symp*., *Mem*. and Pl. *Phd*.) and continuing in the epistolary forgeries of Imperial Greek literature (esp. the *Socratic epistles* and Alciphron), there is a lesser-known tradition which treats Xanthippe as a philosophical figure. As we shall see, she appears as a participant in philosophical discourse, a fixture in Socratic circles, a reporter of Socratic doctrines, perhaps even an author, and something of a *grande dame* among other philosophical women of the time. In addition, once the testimonia are assembled, traces of what she may have thought about begin to appear. Both the contemporaneous Athenian accounts and later epistolary forgeries offer up evocative hints about what may have been her general philosophical commitments: she is sometimes associated with moral education, philosophical community, and wealth and material well-being.

1. On scant evidence

Some notes on what some may understand as the speculative nature of this paper's conclusions are in order. First and foremost, the problem of scant evidence routinely thwarts the study of ancient philosophical women, especially since most evidence is transmitted to us through the reports of ancient male authors.[9] We have already seen how this problem stifles Xanthippe scholarship: because our sources are brief second- and third-hand reports by ancient men, it seems that we can know little about what a woman like Xanthippe believed.

This paper begins by noticing that this is really a pseudo-problem or a problem with a solution that has been applied, however imperfectly, to other testimonial traditions. Consider, for example, that much of what we know about certain ancient Greek philosophical men is deduced entirely via reports.[10] Thales of Miletus is a striking case,

[8]With the exception of Saxonhouse 2018, who sees the project as infeasible, and McLain and Schultz 2022, whose reading of the *Phaedo* we shall encounter below, most of the scholarly literature does not take up the question of philosophical Xanthippe. Indeed, this question is not addressed in Waithe 1987, O'Reilly and Pellò 2023, nor Brill and McKeen 2024.

[9]Adamson 2016 puts the problem succinctly "reading ancient women philosophers turns out to be mostly just another opportunity to read ancient male philosophers." See also Waithe's 1987 introduction and Schultz 2021 27.

[10]Consider the following ancient Greek philosophers for whom we only have "A fragments" (testimonial reports, opposed to "B fragments," or surviving, first-hand writings (Graham 2010, xi): Thales, Leucippus, Protagoras, Antisthenes, Diogenes of Sinope, Aristippus, Euclides, Stilpo, Metrodorus, Timocrates, etc.

as there are *no* extant fragments authored by Thales and his testimonia are from much later sources like Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Aetius, and Proclus between 200 and 1,000 years later.[11] Still, over 2,200 articles have been published mentioning "Thales of Miletus" in the five years preceding this paper's composition.[12] The sparse and purely testimonial textual tradition has not stopped scores of industrious scholars from attempting to piece together Thales's philosophical commitments.[13]

This paper aims to do the same for Xanthippe. It does not ignore that her testimonia are affected by the misogyny of the ancient male authors who composed them, far from it; but it does not let worries about bias or other forms of distortion stop us from assembling the evidence. There is a general sense in studies of ancient philosophical women that the problems of scant and biased evidence are insurmountable. A subsidiary thesis of this paper is that this has become too strong a guiding assumption. It discourages innovative interpretations of the evidence we do have. Of course, the results of a single paper may appear meager when compared to the cumulative effect of the modern scholarship on a thinker like Thales. But philosophical excavations happen piecemeal and collaboratively. Therefore, let us begin to clear away the debris, to do away with the assumptions that have stopped us from starting, in order to get the restoration of Xanthippe's philosophical life (and others like hers) more firmly underway.

Still, someone might object that reports about a thinker like Thales and about Xanthippe are different in one key respect; we know Thales was a philosopher (Ar. *Met.* 983b22) and we know from testimonia precisely what topics he thought about. By contrast, we do not even know *whether* Xanthippe philosophized, let alone what she believed. This objection seems to drive Saxonhouse's counter-historical musings: "If only there had been a writer like Plato, perhaps a female writer, who could have reported on the words she spoke, the actions she took, and the movements she made, and turned them into dialogues of the quality that the acolyte of her husband bequeathed to us" (2016, 622).[14] But, even if it is regrettable that she had no ancient champion (no Plato to her Socrates, no Aristotle to her Thales), we should not let this stop us from employing the extant evidence to investigate further. And, as we shall see, once we do investigate further, we find surprisingly clear proof of a tradition of her philosophical participation—in addition to some vivid hints about topics she might have cared about.

Finally, as with all testimonial traditions, we can never be sure that the reports are accurate.[15] Later testifiers may be inventing details to suit their own purposes. Xanthippe's case is even more complex given her gender and marriage to Socrates. Some scholars have thought that Xanthippe's gender is so significant that her testimonia are fundamentally compromised: "the portrait of Xanthippe in these ancient writings highlights Socrates' qualities rather than giving us clear insights into [her] character" (Saxonhouse 2018, 612; see also Graves 1960; Woodbury 1973; Silva and Anjos 2024). There is certainly a trope in later Socratic biography where Xanthippe's aggressive

[11]Dicks [1959] 2009, 254 claims of Thales's testimonia "most of them [are] the ascriptions of commentators and compilers who lived anything from 700 to 1,000 years after his death—a period of time equivalent to that between William the Conqueror and the present day." See also Wöhrle and McKirahan 2014, 1.

[12]scholar.google.com/scholar?q = Thales+of+Miletus&as_ylo = 2020&as_yhi = 2025.

[13]Cornell 2014 is another good example of this problem overcome, however imperfectly.

[14]Scruton 1998 invents Xanthippic dialogues. See also Osborn 2016.

[15]Reeve 2008, 9–10 and Wolfsdorf 2017, 30 discuss the historical Socrates problem. Dicks 1959 and Wöhrle and McKirahan 2014 discuss the historical Thales problem.

behavior occasions a calm and pithy reply from Socrates, usually a one-liner: she upends a table in Plutarch's *Moralia*, which invites Socrates to joke about the "hen" from the day before. Athenaeus's *Learned Banqueters* describes her smashing a cake sent by Alcibiades, to which Socrates replies: "Well, you're not going to have any of it either" (644a1). The above-mentioned bit of Diogenes Laertius' *Life of Socrates* reports that "when Xanthippe first scolded him and then drenched him with water," he responded, 'Did I not say that Xanthippe's thunder would end in rain?'" (2.5.36) In these cases, her fury appears to be a literary provocation, spurring Socrates' witty remarks and demonstrating his unflappability. As a result, these reports seem like poor evidence of the historical Xanthippe as opposed to being a popular literary *typos*—"the provocative wife," a stock Socratic foil—whose gender is manipulated by male authors to convey to male readers Socrates' own excellent character. However, as we shall see, "the provocative wife" trope does not exhaust Xanthippe's testimonia; she appears in other kinds of reports, as well. While these reports are no doubt distorted by misogyny in other ways, they nevertheless contain a different portrait of Xanthippe—a Xanthippe who participates in philosophy rather than obstructing it.

Whereas we began by asking whether it even makes sense to investigate Xanthippe's philosophical life, we are now asking about the *historicity* of these reports, which is a different challenge. This is good news, though, since problems of historicity are problems that all testimonial philosophical traditions share. Discussions of the "historical Socrates" or the "historical Thales"—while not obviously complicated by gender in the way that Xanthippe's testimonia are—are nevertheless notoriously thorny due to the fact that the surviving authorial reports may, at times, distort these figures to suit their own ends.[16] Thus if, by the end of the paper, readers are concerned about the *reliability* of the reports concerning Xanthippe's philosophical life and commitments, the endeavor will have been a success. This will mean that readers have been persuaded that we ought to treat Xanthippe's testimonia as a body of philosophical evidence sufficiently like other scarce and testimonial philosophical traditions to merit further study. While readers should continually bear in mind that all of Xanthippe's testimonia are filtered through male authors, the restoration of her philosophical life and views will nevertheless be more firmly underway.

This study is important for several reasons, not least of which being that it inches forward the project of restoring women to their rightful place in ancient Greek and Roman philosophical traditions. Women's participation in ancient philosophical circles has been obscured by the lack of primary source material and the biased reports of ancient male authors, in addition to our own stereotypes about the limitations placed on women in the ancient world. If the arguments of this paper are successful, however, then we will have identified a relatively understudied philosophical woman, not on the periphery of the ancient Greek canon but at its epicenter, in the Socratic tradition. The hope is that this paper's methodology might therefore serve as a blueprint for other studies of this kind. While texts *by* ancient philosophical women are truly scarce, texts *about* them are a measure more common. Thus, historians of ancient philosophy committed to the project of restoring women to the canon ought to give greater consideration to fragmentary evidence. In fact, to continue to do otherwise, to persistently and knowingly ignore these bodies of evidence is to permanently relegate antique philosophical women to obscurity.

[16]See n. 15.

2. The Classical Athenian testimonia

This section does not catalogue all ancient reports about Xanthippe.[17] Instead, it begins with Classical Athenian accounts to assess whether they contain evidence for treating her as a philosophical figure. Although these reports are limited—including just three sources,[18] one each from Xenophon's *Symposium* and *Memorabilia*, and one from Plato's *Phaedo*[19]—there are nevertheless hints in the work of Socrates' acolytes that Xanthippe was a philosophical participant. The following section considers later accounts which establish a continued tradition of treating her as a philosophical woman, possibly beginning in the decades following the death of Socrates and continuing in the fictional epistolary of Imperial Greek literature.

2.1 Xenophon's *Symposium*

Xenophon's *Symposium*, composed after Socrates' death from the early 370s or 360s BCE, recalls a dinner for Lycon's (likely the Lycon of the *Apology's*) son Autolycus's win at the pancratium (1.1). Book 2, where Xanthippe is mentioned, discusses educational association. During a playful debate about perfumes, Socrates praises the gymnasium's aromas—olive oil and sweat (2.4.1–8). Lycon asks what scent men who no longer exercise ought to wear (2.4.8–9) to which Socrates replies: "*kalokagathia*, by god" (Καλοκἀγαθίας νὴ Δί', 2.4.10). Pressed on where to find this perfume, Socrates quotes Theognis, "Good men will teach you good; society with bad will but corrupt the good mind that you had"[20] (2.4.15–16). Both parties agree that it is wise to choose good associates since their character and behavior could be a corruptive force.[21]

It is at this point that the symposiasts attend to a dancing girl whose acrobatics elicit Socrates' remarks about educating wives. Given this girl's skill, he claims, no one should be afraid to teach his wife anything he wants her to know (2.9.1–5):

> This girl's feat, gentlemen, is only one of many proofs that woman's nature is really not a whit inferior to man's, except in its lack of judgment and physical strength. So if any one of you has a wife, let him confidently set about teaching her whatever he would like to have her know.

Socrates' advice concerns both the nature of women (γυναικεία φύσις, 2.9.2) and their ability to acquire knowledge (ἐπισταμενη, 2.9.5).[22] This contention about educating wives[23] directly precedes Antisthenes's mean-spirited joke about Xanthippe, glossed in the introduction and printed below (2.10.1–4):

[17]For her collected testimonia, see Hamil *et al.* (in progress).

[18]She does not appear anywhere in Aristophanes (Saxonhouse 2018, 612); however, *Clouds* 60–72 jokes about Strepsiades's wife who wanted add "*hippos* to the name" of their son (see n. 1), considering "*Xanthippus*, or Charippus, or Callipides." Strepsiades objects because of his lower social class. This may echo aristocratic Xanthippe and lower-class Socrates.

[19]She appears twice, as the women return (116b).

[20]Trans. Marchant and Todd 2013 here and below.

[21]This resonates with the charges against Socrates.

[22]Saxonhouse 2018 and De Gandt 2017 see this as an affirmation of women's intellectual abilities.

[23]The remark by Xenophon's Socrates may not be so progressive: the scene tinged with comic elements. Also, Socrates thinks women are lacking judgment and strength (γνώμης δὲ καὶ ἰσχύος δεῖται, 2.9.3) (Huss 1999, 137–38; Johnson 2024, 143). Furthermore, a wife will only be permitted to know what a husband wants (ὅ τι βούλοιτ', 2.9.5) her to know.

> "If that's your view, Socrates," asked Antisthenes, "how does it come that you don't practice what you preach by yourself educating Xanthippe, but live with a wife who is the hardest to get along with of all the women there are—yes, or all that ever were, I suspect, or ever will be?"

Antisthenes jokes that, despite claiming that one should educate his wife as he sees fit, Socrates himself does *not* educate (οὐ … παιδεύεις, 2.10.2) Xanthippe. After all, Antisthenes reasons, Xanthippe is "the most difficult" (χαλεπωτάτη, 2.10.4) woman "of all who have ever or will ever exist" (καὶ τῶν γεγενημένων καὶ τῶν ἐσομένων, 2.10.3–4). Of course, the joke rests on the misogynistic assumption that her "difficulty" implies a lack of education. Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* is instructive on this point: there, Socrates and Ischomachus also speak of educated women as appropriately "submissive" (χειροήθης) and "domesticated" (ἐτετιθάσευτο) (7.10). Because Xanthippe is so hard to deal with, so unsubmissive, she doesn't behave as an "educated" woman should. *Ergo*, according to Antisthenes's misogynist logic, Socrates can't have tried to educate her, not at least in the typical fashion expected of women.

Crucially, however, Socrates' rejoinder indicates that he has attempted to educate his wife, not perhaps as an Athenian man would expect a husband to "educate" a wife, but in the characteristic Socratic fashion, by engaging her in philosophical exchange (2.10.4–11):

> "Because," he replied, "I observe that people wishing to become expert horsemen do not acquire the most docile horses but rather those that are high-spirited, believing that if they can manage this kind, they will easily handle any other. My course is similar. Humankind at large is what I wish to deal and associate with; and so I have got her, well assured that if I can endure her, I shall have no difficulty in my relations with all the rest of humankind."

Socrates wishes "to associate" (ὁμιλεῖν, 2.10.9) with all of humankind (ἀνθρώποις); and, it is for this reason that he doesn't practice on the most docile (εὐπειθεστάτους, 2.10.6) subjects.[24] It stands to reason that the sort of "association" to which Socrates aspires, which he practices with his wife, is none other than philosophical exchange (cf. Pl. *Ap.* 22e–23b, 30e–31a, *Rep*. 532a–534e). Put simply, then, Socrates seems to be claiming that he has engaged his wife in philosophical discourse.[25] The two of them have discussions of the sort that Socrates is known for. And, as is implied by the metaphor of horse training, they do so regularly.

However, a challenge looms. Socrates not only claims that he engages Xanthippe in philosophical discussion but that she is one of his toughest and most "spirited" (θυμοειδεῖς, 2.10.6) sparring partners. Another of Socrates' infamously spirited combatants is Thrasymachus,[26] whom Plato's *Republic* even labels "difficult" in the very

[24]Socrates says "horses" (ἵπποις) instead of "subjects" in yet another pun on Xanthippe's name (see n. 1). Interestingly, Socrates uses horse taming metaphors to describe education elsewhere (cf. *Ap* 25a–c; *Phdr.* 246a–254e is also about training horses). *Oe.* 7.9–10 uses horse metaphors for women's education in particular.

[25]Plutarch, *Moralia* 90a7–e7 and Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 17 give a different interpretation of why Socrates trains.

[26]Johnson 2024, 143 gestures toward this comparison: "Socrates also believes that dealing with his difficult wife has helped him learn how to deal with other people. Xanthippe, for all of her harshness, must

same terms as Xanthippe (χαλεπὸς, Pl. *Resp*. 336e3; see also ἢ χαλεπαίνεσθαι, 337a2, and χαλεπαίνων, 354a9) for the way that he argues passionately, rudely, and unrelentingly against Socrates. Thrasymachus is ill-mannered, insulting, and resistant; at one point, he even resorts to calling Socrates infantile by asking about his wetnurse and runny nose (343a4–8). But Thrasymachus's excessive spiritedness appears as an obstacle to Socrates' philosophical pursuits; at least by the lights of the *Republic,* then, it seems to follow that Socrates' excessively spirited wife must be similarly obstructive and anti-philosophical.

A pair of responses are available. First, following Saxonhouse, we must not overlook that Xenophon's Socrates finds Xanthippe's spiritedness valuable, since training with her makes him a stronger philosopher. Furthermore, considering how this discussion is prefaced, by a conversation about whether one's associates are an instructive or corruptive force, it would appear that Socrates is not training with Xanthippe because she is difficult in a corruptive sense. Socrates is not looking for a wife that makes him a worse philosopher. He recognizes that Xanthippe's "unbridled" philosophical talent makes him a stronger teacher. It seems possible, therefore, that Xanthippe holds very strong commitments and argues ably. This is further hinted at by the fact that Xenophon's Socrates, in keeping with the horse training metaphor, uses verbs of strength and ability (δύνωνται κατέχειν, 2.10.7–8; χρήσεσθαι, 2.10.8; and ὑποίσω, 2.10.10) in the above passage to describe just how *hard* it is to practice with her. Presumably, it is not her lack of opinions or argumentativeness which requires so much strength and skill on his part. Thus, while Xenophon's Xanthippe is likely not without her own Thrasymachean faults (e.g., using insults, failing to concede, general belligerence, making *ad hominem* arguments), she is nevertheless cast as a significant philosophical opponent.

Second, we ought to pause to consider whether ancient philosophical women must be sanctioned as such by their male reporters. Must Xenophon or Xenophon's Socrates recognize Xanthippe as a philosophical woman for us to recognize her as such? Certainly, by Plato's standards in the middle dialogues, this Xanthippe would appear to have an overabundance of *thumos*; like Thrasymachus, she would not be counted among the ranks of those whose reason rules the soul. But we ought to ask whether Plato's standard for "philosophicalness" is a fair standard; after all, it is hardly the standard of the history of philosophy, more generally.[27] Consider the long list of thinkers whom historians of philosophy deem "philosophical" or at least generally worthy of philosophical study, who would be disqualified by Plato's standard: Aristippus, Epicurus, Bentham, and Mill would arguably be discounted for giving too much moral weight to pleasure, pain, and suffering (which by Plato's lights are the provenance of the wayward *epithumia*). Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Nietzsche might also be struck from the list (for giving too much weight to *thumos*). However, by a more commonsense disciplinary standard, a "philosophical person" is just someone who engages in philosophical activities, runs in philosophical circles, holds philosophical views, lives in accord with considered philosophical principles, and/or so forth. This paper proposes that it is only fair to apply this commonsense disciplinary standard to Xanthippe. Thus understood, we have already hit on certain key bits of evidence for treating her as a philosophical woman: in our very first bit of Classical Athenian testimony, Xanthippe is portrayed as one of her renowned husband's most spirited philosophical combatants. While she may

thus have a good deal in common with the other people Socrates deals with—people who will generally have been men."

[27]Henderson 1970 argues that we ought to take Thrasymachus seriously as a philosopher.

be, like Thrasymachus, excessively spirited, it nevertheless seems to follow that she regularly participates in philosophical debate.

2.2 Xenophon's *Memorabilia*

The *Memorabilia* is a collection of Socratic dialogues likely composed from 371–362 BCE. Book 2 focuses on Socrates' friends and family, and the second chapter reports a conversation between Socrates and his eldest son Lamprocles—who most think is Xanthippe's son[28]—who is irritated with his mother on account of her "difficulty" (χαλεπαίνοντα, 2.2.2). Notably, Xanthippe is here chastised by her son *in the very same terms* as Antisthenes's joke.

In the rest of the conversation, Socrates attempts to defend Xanthippe, beginning by establishing that men like himself select wives best suited to raising a family (2.2.4). He also establishes that fathers and mothers share parenting duties, though mothers bear and nurse children selflessly (2.2.5). Then, in a passage crucial for our present purposes, he adds to her defense (2.2.6):

> Nor are the parents content just to supply food, but as soon as their children seem capable of learning something they teach them whatever good lessons for life they have, and if they think that someone else is more competent to teach them something, they send them to him at a cost, and do their utmost that the children may turn out as well as possible.[29]

Lamprocles responds: "Yes, but even if she has done all this and many times more than this, no one could put up with her difficulty (τὴν χαλεπότητα)" (2.2.7). Like in Xenophon's *Symposium*, Socrates doesn't disagree with Lamprocles's assessment, but sees Xanthippe's difficulty as a positive trait.[30] Also notable is that this exchange insinuates that Xanthippe is a competent moral educator of her children. Socrates claims that she, like all parents, "teaches" (διδάσκουσιν) their children "good things for life" (ἀγαθὰ πρὸς τὸν βίον, 2.2.6). This suggests that she serves as something of an ethical guide. (Notice that Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* uses similar language in its programmatic characterization of the project of ethics, asking whether knowledge of the good (τἀγαθὸν) is necessary for life (πρὸς τὸν βίον) (1094a23).) Even more remarkably, Socrates claims that Xanthippe takes part in the evaluation of her children's prospective teachers, weighing whether they are indeed "more competent" (ἱκανώτερον, 2.2.6) than themselves.

It is telling that Xenophon's Socrates seems to praise his wife for a combination of knowledge and humility which echoes Xenophon's portrayal of Socrates *himself* in the *Memorabilia*. As part of the project of apologizing for Socrates, Xenophon claims that he was a moral guide to his associates: "he openly tried to reform them and exhorted them to desire the fairest and noblest virtue" (1.2.64). In Xenophon's eyes, Socrates is praiseworthy—and undeserving of the charges he faced—because he attempted to lead his associates down a virtuous path. He later adds that, in fact, Socrates only attempted to guide

[28]Diogenes Laertius, *Life of Socrates* 2.26 alleges that Aristotle reported that Socrates took two wives: the first, Xanthippe the mother of Lamprocles, the second, Myrto the daughter of Aristedes and mother of Sophroniscus and Menexenus. See Woodbury 1973 for whether Xanthippe was a wife or concubine.

[29]Trans. Marchant and Todd 2013 here and below.

[30]Saxonhouse 2018, 615 argues that Socrates believes Xanthippe's traits make her a good wife and mother (2.2.4).

his disciples "so far as his own knowledge extended; if he was not entirely familiar with a subject, he took them to those who knew" (4.7.1). So not only was Socrates a worthy moral guide, he also deferred to those with the appropriate expertise when his knowledge had gaps. It is striking, therefore, that in the above passage, Socrates defends his wife in parallel fashion: Xanthippe is praiseworthy for serving as a moral teacher to their children and for employing experts when she judges them more capable than herself. Xenophon's wife of Socrates appears to have the same praiseworthy combination of ethical expertise and awareness of her limitations as the philosopher himself.

It may also be useful to note, as an aside, that Socrates' defense of Xanthippe mentions *precisely* the kinds of activities—moral tutelage and the selection of teachers—which Plato's Socrates sees as requiring philosophical contemplation and expertise.[31] Plato's Socrates frequently inquires how moral virtue is taught (cf. *Ap.* 24d–26a, *Men.* 86cff., *Prot.* 313cff., *Grg.* 449bff.) and considers how to determine the expertise of teachers—i.e., sophists, musicians, trainers (cf. *Lach.* 186e–190d, *Grg.* 449b–450c, *Prot.* 319a–328d, *Euthyd.* 272c–275c). These topics converge in the *Apology*, where Socrates reports interrogating Callias about whether he ever found a moral educator with sufficient knowledge of virtue (20b4) to educate his son (cf. *Men.* 96b1). When Callias replies that he sent him to Evenus who charges 5 minas, and Socrates balks (b8–9), the implication is that Socrates, in all his searching, has never encountered a qualified moral educator (cf. *Men.* 89e6–7, 93a5–94e3; *Grg.* 514a–515b). The *Meno* further hints at why this may be: successful education requires a teacher to possess either "true opinion or knowledge" (δόξα ἀληθὴς καὶ ἐπιστήμη, 99a4–5). That there are few if any qualified moral educators in Athens implies that there are not many people who possess either. Furthermore, Plato's Socrates seems to think that the appraisal of experts requires careful judgment, perhaps knowledge on the part of the appraiser. As Socrates of the *Laches* puts it, if someone appraising a prospective teacher isn't able "to understand" (ἐπαΐειν, 186e1) the matters at hand then they will be unable to discern whether the teacher is qualified. It is striking, therefore, given Socrates' strong opinions on moral education and the appraisal of teachers elsewhere in the Socratica, that Xenophon's Socrates defends Xanthippe in this way in the *Memorabilia*.

Still, Socrates' tone in the *Memorabilia* passage is quite general; he speaks about *all* parents (οἱ γονεῖς, 2.2.6) as moral educators and appraisers of expertise. Thus, one might wonder whether his remarks are anything more than a description of what *any* ancient caregiver does to educate her charge. Plato's *Protagoras* attributes this sort of morally formative role to *all* of a child's early influences (325c6–d4):

> as soon as [a child] grasps what is said to him, the nurse, the mother, the tutor, and the father himself strive hard that the child may excel, and as each act and word occurs they teach and impress upon him that this is just, and that unjust, one thing noble, another base, one holy, another unholy, and that he is to do this, and not do that.[32]

[31]We should be careful when combining Xenophonic and Platonic reports. There are important differences concerning their depiction of Socrates' views on moral education and the selection of experts. For instance, Xenophon does not explicitly suggest that knowledge is requisite for teaching or for selecting teachers; instead, works like the *Cyropedia* appear to suggest a theory of education via exemplar. See Lu 2014.

[32]Trans. Lamb 1977.

It may be, therefore, that Socrates' defense of Xanthippe to Lamprocles suggests little more than her aptitude for the kind of moral instruction that all mothers, fathers, nurses, and tutors engage in.[33] If all parents attempt what Xanthippe does, however, then it looks like Socrates' defense of her in the *Memorabilia* is less about how she is uniquely philosophically adept and more about the fact that she is succeeding by the parenting standards of the day. If so, then all this passage suggests is that Xanthippe is a good mom, not that she is a philosophical woman.

Three responses are available. First, we should not underestimate just how much genuinely philosophical work goes into the moral education of children. Second, most sources suggest that, at least according to ancient Greek literary ideals, women did not regularly take part in the education of their sons; they were instead charged with their care until around the age of 5, at which point a boy began to study with a tutor (Ar. *Pol.* 1336a23). If this was the norm, then, Xanthippe of the *Memorabilia* plays an *exceptional* role in Lamprocles's education. Third, we should not overlook that Socrates' defense of Xanthippe insinuates that she is *fairly good* at moral education and the appraisal of experts. Lamprocles confirms this, saying she does "everything" (πάντα) that Socrates praises her for and "many times more" (πολλαπλάσια) (2.2.6). It is no small feat that Xanthippe appears as a positive force in these endeavors. As we have seen, these tasks are central to both Xenophon's defense of Socrates and are thought by Plato's Socrates to require serious contemplation and/or knowledge. Thus, to be doing these tasks well enough that Xenophon's Socrates praises her efforts is quite suggestive; indeed, Socrates rarely pays such a high compliment to anyone anywhere in the Socratica.[34]

2.3 Plato's *Phaedo*

While its compositional date is unknown, the *Phaedo* was composed after the trial and death of Socrates in 399 BCE. Feminist scholars have tended to focus on Xanthippe's dismissal at the start of the dialogue, with some tempted to view the way she is treated as indicative of Plato's or Socrates' sexist views: she is too loud, too emotional, so she has to go. Yet, as we saw above, others have thought that, given the way that Socrates emphasizes her embodiment and emotion, she may be an authorial plant intended to question the dialogue's conclusions about the disembodied immortal soul. Our present aim is not to assess these possibilities, nor to give a thorough interpretation of the *Phaedo*. Instead, the goal is to investigate whether the *Phaedo* contains any further evidence of a philosophical Xanthippe.

To this end, let us reconsider the passage in which she first appears, spoken by Phaedo to Echecrates at the start of the narrative (60a1–8):

> So we went in and found Socrates who had just been unfettered and Xanthippe—well, you know her—sitting beside him with his young son. Now when Xanthippe saw us, she cried out and said the kind of things that women usually do, such as: "Socrates, this is the very last time your friends will be speaking with you, and you

[33]Protagoras remark is from the hand of Plato, who is notorious for giving women credit where others do not (see Hyland 2012). Thus, the *Protagoras* may itself express a nonstandard view, as other sources suggest it was customary to begin to educate young boys later, around the age of 5 (Ar. *Pol.* 1336b). See Reeve 2008, 21. For other views of the age at which education commences, see Beck 1964, 95ff and Reeve 2008.

[34]He is also complementary to Diotima; see Nally 2024.

> with them." And Socrates looked at Crito and said: "Crito, get someone to take her home." Some of Crito's men led her away shouting and wailing.[35]

Some feminist readers have found it significant that, when Socrates' friends arrive first thing in the morning, Xanthippe is already at the jail (Saxonhouse 2018, 617; McLain and Schultz 2022, 362). Saxonhouse remarks "it is Phaedo and his friends entering the prison who disrupt this communing—on what level, we do not know—of husband and wife" (2018, 617). Similarly, McLain and Schultz think that Xanthippe's early morning appearance at the jail is a possible indication that "she and Socrates practice philosophy together without his students present" (2022, 359). McLain and Schultz further argue that we should consider Xanthippe and Socrates' relationship in the Pythagorean context suggested by the dialogue's frame. The conversation between Phaedo and Echecrates is set in the Pythagorean community of Phlius and contains repeat allusions to Pythagorean "listeners" (ἀκουσωματικοί) (e.g., ἤκουσας, 57a2; ἀκούσαιμι, 57a5; ἀκούοντα 58d6). Since Pythagorean women are part of the philosophical community, it might have appeared to the dialogue's purported audience in Phlius that Socrates and Xanthippe were, on the eve of his death, engaged in their last philosophical exchange.

Not only might there be hints of a philosophical Xanthippe in her appearance in the wee hours of Socrates' dying day, but this passage may also contain a subtle indication of a Xanthippic philosophical value. Phaedo remarks that it is only "when she saw us" (ὡς οὖν εἶδεν ἡμᾶς, 60a4) that she began to lament, something he finds typical of women. It is easy to read Phaedo's judgment of Xanthippe's cry as dismissive of women's presumed emotionality. However, as we shall see below, this judgment may simply indicate that wailing is part of the proper mourning behavior for Athenian women (Fantham et al. 1994; Goff 2004). What is more, there is an alternative way to view the fact that Xanthippe starts crying when Socrates' friends arrive: perhaps she is sad about the cessation of such a vibrant philosophical community. She says as much in her sole spoken line, which laments the loss of Socrates' friendships: "Oh Socrates, this is the very last time your friends will be speaking with you and you with them" (ὦ Σώκρατες, ὕστατον δή σε προσεροῦσι νῦν οἱ ἐπιτήδειοι καὶ σὺ τούτους, 60a6–7). Xanthippe *herself* claims that she is sad about the end of the philosophical friendships which Socrates has cultivated with his disciples. That *this* is what makes her despair intimates that she (at least in Plato's rendering) values this kind of philosophical community.

Understood thus, "well, you know her" (γιγνώσκεις γάρ) is a remarkable aside. Saxonhouse thinks that this passing comment establishes Xanthippe's renown. Because both Phaedo and Echecrates are non-Athenian, it seems to follow that she "is spoken of such that even those outside of Athens 'know' her." (Saxonhouse 2018, 617). McLain and Schultz think this aside would have had a particular resonance to the dialogue's Pythagorean audience; that she is known by Echecrates, "a member of a Pythagorean community far removed from Athens," would suggest that she is involved in Socratic circles in the same ways that women were in Pythagorean communities (they practiced philosophy alongside men, in addition to enacting philosophical principles within the household) (Pomeroy 2013). This aside may also subtly indicate Xanthippe's continued involvement with Socratic philosophical circles after her husband's death. After all, the *Phaedo* is narrated by the titular character, a follower of Socrates present on his dying

[35]Trans. Fowler 2014. N.B. we might prefer this to Grube 2002 which suggests that Xanthippe is "holding their baby."

day (57a3), to Echecrates[36] who is interested in hearing about Socrates' last moments (57a4–5). This may therefore indicate her notoriety following Socrates' death in Athens writ large but *especially* among those with a burgeoning interest in the Socratica ('Socratiphiles' so to speak).

Later reports appear to bolster the hypothesis that Xanthippe remained active in philosophical circles after Socrates' execution. An anonymous Imperial Greek epistolary forgery, titled *Aeschines to Xanthippe* (see below for a longer discussion of this letter), likely a fiction written several hundred years later, is part of a genre that hews closely to known biographical details. This forgery depicts Aeschines—a close companion of Socrates whom Plato claims was present on his dying day (*Phd*. 59b6) and who supposedly wrote Socratic dialogues rivaling Plato in their clarity (Burnet 1928, 21–22)—composing a philosophical letter to Xanthippe about practicing Socrates' principles in her widowhood. Aeschines encourages her not to reject Socrates' ideas, to examine his contentions for herself, and attributes to her at least one philosophical stance of her own (see below). Similarly, Diogenes Laertius's *Life of Aeschines* indicates Xanthippe's continued participation in Socratic circles: it reports a malicious rumor "that most of the dialogues which Aeschines passed off as his own were really dialogues of Socrates obtained by him from Xanthippe" (ὡς τοὺς πλείστους διαλόγους ὄντας Σωκράτους ὑποβάλλοιτο, λαμβάνων παρὰ Ξανθίππης, 2.60, 8–9). Diogenes attributes this rumor to Menedemus of Eretria, who lived in roughly 339–260 BCE and studied at both Plato's Academy and was part of the Megarian school, also founded by the disciples of Socrates (2.17).[37] If the rumor were genuine (a big if), it would originate in the decades after Socrates' execution (Döring 2011, 27). The report ends with a list of Aeschines's seven Socratic works, the *Miltiades*, *Callias*, *Axiochus*, *Aspasia*, *Alcibiades*, *Telauges*, and *Rhinon*.[38] Socrates famously did not write, however, so the logic of the rumor implies either that Aeschines used Xanthippe's reports as source material, or possibly that Xanthippe authored them *herself* (after all, the rumor is intended to insult; and, by misogynist reasoning, it's more insulting if a woman wrote them).[39] The rumor may therefore imply that Xanthippe not only remained active in Socratic circles, but was familiar enough with Socratic philosophizing to either recount or author dialogues after his death.[40]

When viewed in light of these later reports, γιγνώσκεις γάρ takes on an evocative resonance. The evidence is slim and the connections are weak, but it is suggestive that Phaedo, an old Socratic hand, and Echecrates, someone outside the circle with an

[36]Diogenes Laertius *Lives* 8.46 dubs Echecrates a Pythagorean.

[37]The Megarian school, perhaps not a "school" in the traditional sense, was a group of philosophers in and around the town of Megara who were influenced by the likes of Parmenides, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. See Döring 1972; Sedley 1977; Allen 2019.

[38]None survive; for reconstructions of *Alcibiades* and *Aspasia* see Döring 2011.

[39]Details of the rumor weaken other possible readings. First, Vlastos 1991, 103, n. 87, hypothesizes Socrates wrote these dialogues himself. However, DL states without qualification that Socrates did not write (*Lives*, Prologue 16.6). Second, maybe Xanthippe passed someone else's Socratic dialogues to Aeschines. But this is a more complicated way of reading λαμβάνων παρὰ Ξανθίππης. One also wonders why DL would not mention another author.

[40]Diogenes Laertius's interest in philosophical women strengthens this reading: he dedicates the *Lives* to a female addressee (3.47). Moreover, the *Lives* appears to ultimately take a pro-Epicurean stance, culminating with Epicurus and discussing various Epicurean women, including Themista and Leontium (10.5). As Gordon 2012, 72–108 argues, Epicurean women were not merely sexual companions but played an active philosophical role.

interest in the Socratica, both seem to be on familiar terms with Xanthippe after Socrates' execution. Perhaps they know of her as Socrates' outspoken, brutish widow; however, given that Plato never speaks of her in this way, it is perhaps more plausible to think that he means Xanthippe was known for her participation in ancient philosophical circles both before and after Socrates' death. As we shall continue to see below, a number of studied Imperial Greek Socratic forgeries certainly insinuate as much.

We now leave behind the Classical Athenian testimonia. At this point, it is worth pausing to ask why, if this paper is correct, is Xanthippe mentioned only once and in passing by Plato, someone seemingly unafraid to depict philosophical women? If Xanthippe ought to be regarded as a philosophical woman, why is she never featured in an extended dialogue or discussion by the Socratic acolytes?

In response, note that the historical Xanthippe would likely have still been alive when Plato wrote. As such, and given women's sequestration in fifth- and fourth-century Athens, Plato could be respecting her and her family by *not* depicting her exchanges with Socrates. In fact, this might further explain why Plato, who seems aware of philosophical women, never chooses to depict any contemporaneously living Athenian women doing philosophy.[41] (That Xenophon's characters discuss Xanthippe *at all* might be taken as a sign of disrespect given the cultural standards of the day: cf. Thuc. 2.45.2.) This suggestion is further supported by the fact that when Plato does depict her in the *Phaedo*, she is doing *exactly* what the Athenian cultural norms proscribe for mourning women: crying, wailingly loudly, and attending to her husband's corpse.[42] To depict her otherwise—especially to stage her having a surprisingly jolly[43] philosophical conversation—would be to accuse her of violating some of her most culturally significant wifely duties. Consider also that Xanthippe actually shows up in works by *all* of the extant Socratic acolytes. To be sure, this is somewhat trivial, since only the works of Plato and Xenophon survive; no texts by Aeschines, Antisthenes, Aristippus, or other known Socratics have been preserved (Döring 2011, 24). However, our sense of her unimportance may therefore be inflated by the fact that so much Socratic philosophy did not survive. Had it, we may have a very different idea of her today.

Finally, we should not overlook what we *have* discovered. From even a cursory examination of these ancient vignettes, we have found evidence suggestive of Xanthippe's heated philosophical combat with her husband, her prowess as a moral educator, and hints of her possible participation in Socratic philosophical circles before and after her husband's death. A faint but discernible portrait of a philosophical woman has begun to emerge.

3. The Imperial Greek testimonia

3.1 Socratic letter 21

We turn now to the Imperial Greek period, where Xanthippe sometimes appears in fictitious Socratic epistolary. The letter which provides the strongest evidence for her inclusion amongst the ranks of philosophical women is *Socratic epistle 21*, *Aeschines to*

[41]Aspasia dies in the late fifth century. Diotima, whether real or fictional, is non-Athenian.

[42]For gendered mourning, see Fantham et al. 1994; Goff 2004. McLain and Schultz 2022, 362 ff. give a similar reading, suggesting that "she is bound by social customs and laws of Athenian gendered identity that demand she perform the proper public response."

[43]Tanner 2024 argues for the comic tone of the *Phaedo*.

Xanthippe, the wife of Socrates. This composition belongs to a group of 35 letters preserved in a collection of Cynic epistles.[44] Several are attributed to Socrates, but the majority (letters 8–27 and 29–34) are Socratic disciples. The collection is thought to be largely fictitious and pseudonymous, their true authorship and dates unknown. If we assume (and this is very much an assumption[45]) that the letters of the Socratic disciples have a single pseudonymous author, then a likely date for the group—based on the fact that certain letters may draw on Plutarch and Seneca as source material—is sometime in the late first or early second century CE.[46]

However, despite being 500 or more years removed from their subjects, it is thought that the letters of the Socratic disciples hew closely to known historical, biographical, and geographical details.[47] As Patricia Rosenmeyer puts it, "to succeed in his enterprise" the author of these and other pseudonymous letters of the period had to "present a consistent characterization and keep within the bounds of biographical accuracy and historical probability" (Rosenmeyer 2006, 99). Certain of the compositions may have even used genuine letters as sources, possibly even original Classical Athenian compositions still in circulation (Malherbe 1977, 21). Additionally, many include detailed source information from earlier works, especially the Platonic letters, Xenophon, and perhaps an earlier "handbook on Greek philosophy which is similar to that of Diogenes Laertius but more extensive in content" (Malherbe 1977, 28).

Because the text of the *Socratic epistles* is relatively hard to find and because letter 21 is short and hard to excerpt, it is reproduced in full below:

[Aeschines] to Xanthippe, the wife of Socrates

> I gave Euphron of Megara six dry quarts of barley for you, the sum of eight drachmas, and a new coat to help you through the winter. Please accept these gifts. I'm sure you know that Eucleides and Terpsion are both good, honest men who have the best intentions towards you and Socrates. If the children ever want to come to visit us, don't discourage them, since Megara isn't so far away. It's enough, my dear, that you've cried so many tears already; crying won't help, and it might even hurt you. Remember what Socrates used to say and try to follow his habits and advice, since grieving all the time won't do you or the children any good. I like to think of them as Socrates' baby birds: we must try to feed them and also stay alive ourselves for them. Because if you or I or someone else who cares about the children of Socrates (may he rest in peace) should die, they'll be the ones to suffer, without anyone to help raise them. So try to stay alive for their sake. But you can't do this without providing for your own basic needs. Grief seems to stand in opposition to life, since the living are harmed by it. Apollodorus (the so-called "madman") and Dion sing your praises because you don't take handouts from anyone but still claim to be rich. You're doing the right thing there, because as long as I and your other

[44]Malherbe 1977, 27 addresses their origin in the *Codex Vaticanus Graecus* 64.

[45]Rosenmeyer 2001, 202 argues that the *Socratic epistles* contain a plurality of authorial voices. See Malherbe 1977 for the possibility of some genuine Classical epistles intermingled.

[46]Malherbe 1977, 28 suggests letters 22 and 23 might draw on Plutarch's *Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur* (67 CE) and letters 11 and 27 on Seneca's *De tranquillitate animi* (c.60 CE) as source material.

[47]Malherbe 1977, 28 claims that, in contrast to the Socratic attributions which tend to be more didactic in nature, the letters of the disciples "show greater interest in historical detail" and "individuals appear and act in them in keeping with what is known about them from the biographical tradition." See also Rosenmeyer 2006, 99.

> friends are able to help you, you'll have everything you need. So cheer up, Xanthippe, and don't reject any of Socrates' good ideas, since you know what a great man we think he was. Focus on how he lived and how he died. I think that even his death was great and good, if one examines it in the right way. Farewell.[48]

This letter strongly supports treating Xanthippe as a philosophical woman. While the opening lines are about her material needs following Socrates' execution, the letter quickly establishes her membership in a broader social circle, treating her as a figure known to Socrates' followers after his death. The addressor of the letter is Aeschines, who was himself a disciple of Socrates and allegedly wrote a number of Socratic dialogues (including, we have seen, the *Aspasia*, named for another philosophical woman in Socrates' orbit). Aeschines opens by reminding Xanthippe, the addressee, that both Terpsion and Eucleides of Megara are willing to support her. This pair were also disciples of Socrates who appear in the frame of Plato's *Theaetetus*, with Eucleides[49] allegedly recording the conversation (143b5–6). Eucleides is present in the *Phaedo* (59c1) and founded the Megarian school,[50] known for combining Socratic and Cynic teaching and spawning intellectual descendants like Zeno of Clitium, credited as the father of Stoicism (Bénatouïl and Ierodiakonou 2018, 23–25). Later in the composition, Aeschines reports that Xanthippe also associates with Apollodorus and Dion, another pair of Socrates' followers,[51] who by the logic of the letter have independently informed Aeschines, probably through correspondence, about her well-being. The sheer number of Socratics mentioned, while probably a pseudonymous flourish demonstrating the true authors' knowledge of the time period, nevertheless evinces that Xanthippe ran in Socratic circles following her husband's death.

Additionally, despite Aeschines's concern with Xanthippe's material necessities—food (ἀλφίτων χοίνικας, 1), money (δραχμὰς ὀκτὼ, 2), clothing (ἐξωμίδα καινὴν, 2), and childrearing (τρεφειν, 14)—and her emotional state—her persistent crying (δακρύων, 8) and grief (λυπουμενη, 11 and Λύπη, 20)—he also depicts her engaged in various philosophical activities. First, he encourages her to remember Socrates' views, implying her familiarity with them, before urging her to try to follow his teachings and actions (Ἀναμιμνήσκου γὰρ ὧν ἔλεγε Σωκράτης καὶ τοῖς ἤθεσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῖς λόγοις πειρῶ ἀκολουθεῖν, 9–11). Second, near the end of the letter, he entreats her not to reject any of Socrates' good ideas (καὶ μηδὲν καταβάλῃς τῶν Σωκράτους καλῶν εἰδυῖα, 27), suggesting both that Xanthippe is aware of Socrates' principles and that she thinks for herself about how best to live. Third, Aeschines hopes she will observe Socratic principles for the sake of herself and her children. She is again portrayed as someone whose philosophical commitments guide her childrearing practices. The cumulative effect is that Xanthippe appears concerned with leading a philosophical life, especially within her household.[52] Fourth, and remarkably, Aeschines reports that Xanthippe frequently expresses an anti-materialistic philosophical stance. Apollodorus and Dion "sing [her]

[48]Trans. Malherbe 1977 here and below.

[49]N.B. this is not Euclid of Alexandria (the mathematician).

[50]See n. 37.

[51]Apollodorus of Phaleron appears in *Symp.* 173a5ff. and *Ap.* 34a3. A Dion appears in *Mx.* 234b9 (not the Dion of Syracuse of the Platonic epistles).

[52]The themes of philosophy as a "way of life" and as a part of childrearing are quite common among depictions of ancient philosophical women; see O'Reilly and Pellò 2023, 19. See also Pomeroy 2013 for the fact that Pythagorean women were central to enacting philosophical commitments within the household.

praises because [she doesn't] take handouts from anyone but still claim[s] to be rich" (φὴς δὲ πλουτεῖν, 24). Consider the full force of this report: Xanthippe is credited with expressing a philosophical view, namely, about the impact of material goods on well-being. In the eyes of pseudo-Aeschines, then, Xanthippe is very much a philosophical woman: she is familiar with Socrates' views, engages in contemplation about how to live, and expresses her own considered philosophical stance.

This paper will not discuss precisely what Xanthippe's view is—again, she claims that despite taking nothing from anyone, she is rich.[53] Nor will it comment on the similarity of this view to Socrates' (or Plato's) views about wealth (cf. *Rep.* 421–23). Nor will it discuss its relationship to the propagandistic project of the *Socratic epistles*, which often demonstrate Cynic asceticism (Rosenmeyer 2001, 202). Nor will it explore why in other late depictions Xanthippe has the opposite tendencies, seemingly obsessed with material goods and luxuries (cf. Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 8.11; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 2.34). These topics merit future investigation, but would obscure the far simpler conclusion of this study: in *Socratic letter 21*, part of a body of works that stick closely to known biographical details, Xanthippe is cast as a philosophical woman. She runs in Socratic circles, considers whether and how to live by Socratic principles, and—most importantly—has philosophical views of her own. By the lights of this studied antique forgery, then, a philosophical Xanthippe is entirely believable.

3.2 Socratic letter 27

Traces of philosophical Xanthippe appear elsewhere in the *Socratic epistles*.[54] Letter 27 is addressed from *Aristippus to his daughter Arete of Cyrene*. The letter opens with dying Aristippus—yet another well-known Socratic disciple turned founder of the opposing, ethically hedonistic Cyrenaic school—urging his daughter Arete not to worry about her material welfare.[55] (Again, the view of material necessities expressed in the letter's opening coheres with the *Socratic epistles*' Cynic tendencies.) Following this, Aristippus claims:

> If, after I have departed this life, you wish to do my will, go to Athens, after you have given Aristippus the best possible education, and hold in the highest esteem Xanthippe and Myrto who often urged me to bring you to the mysteries. If you then live a pleasant life with them, let the officials in Cyrene commit any wrong they wish (for they will not wrong you to the point that you die), and try to live with Xanthippe and Myrto as I was pleased to do with Socrates; you are arraying yourself all the more through your friendship with them ... But above all I urge you to care for little Aristippus so that he may be worthy of us and of philosophy. That is the real inheritance I leave him, for in the other aspects of his life he will have the officials in Cyrene as his enemies. But concerning philosophy you have not written to me that anyone has robbed you of it. So, my good woman, rejoice

[53]To name two possible interpretations: she may express a moderate form of asceticism, something like 'true wellbeing does not depend on the accumulation of wealth.' Or else, her asceticism could be more radical, as in 'true wellbeing does not depend on material goods *whatsoever*,' in which case hers is a view opposing Aristotle's in *NE* I.8, 1099a31–1099b8.

[54]Letter 4, one of the compositions attributed to Socrates himself, also mentions her.

[55]O'Reilly 2023, 105 ff. discusses letter 27 as a source for Arete.

> greatly in the wealth which you have accumulated and make your son, whom I would like to have as my own, its possessor. Since I shall die without enjoying him, I trust you will guide him on a course of life that is customary for good men. Farewell, and do not be distressed about us.[56]

Perhaps most telling is that Aristippus instructs his daughter Arete to go to live with Xanthippe[57] and Myrto in Athens, in order to build a "friendship" (φιλίας, 37) with them "as [he] was pleased to do with Socrates" (ὡς ἐμοὶ φίλον μετὰ Σωκράτους, 35–6). We know what kind of friendship Aristippus had with Socrates; in Xen. *Mem* 2.1 and Ar. *Rhet*. 1398b12 he is a Socratic follower engaged in regular philosophical exchange.

Furthermore, it appears that Xanthippe, like Socrates, would serve as the elder, more established figure in this philosophical friendship, suggesting that pseudo-Aristippus understands Socrates' wife as a teacher in her own right.[58] That Aristippus recommends a tutelage is further evidenced by the fact that Arete is to go to Athens so that her son, Aristippus the younger, might receive the strongest education (κράτιστα παιδεύσασα) possible. He asks his daughter to pass philosophy (φιλοσοφίας, 15) to his grandson, calling this Aristippus the younger's true inheritance (τὴν ὄντως κληρονομίαν, 12) and wealth (πλοῦτον, 16). If there were doubts what role Arete plays in her son's education,[59] Aristippus the elder reports: "But concerning philosophy you have not written me that anyone has robbed you of it" (*Π*ερὶ φιλοσοφίας δὲ οὐδεν μοι γεγραφας, ὅτι ταύτην σοῦ τις ἀφήρηται, 13–14). However bad things are going for Arete in Cyrene, whatever else she has been "robbed" of, she still possesses the ability to philosophize, an ability which her father passed on to her after studying with Socrates. That Arete is a Socratic philosophical descendant in her own right makes her father's encouragement to befriend Xanthippe all the more suggestive. One gets the distinct impression that Aristippus intends for Arete to go to Athens to continue her studies with this *grande dame* of the Socratic tradition: as Aristippus once studied with Socrates, acquiring his true wealth in life—philosophy—which he passed to his daughter, Aristippus hopes that Arete will seek out Xanthippe in order to more fully inherit her own philosophical "fortune" and pass it to her son.

While this evidence is long removed and details are surely invented, one still gets the sense that the authors and audiences of these Imperial Greek forgeries are familiar with a network of Socratic disciples, both men and women, who supported one another in the effort to ensure that Socratic philosophy survived Socrates' execution. Letter 27 insinuates that Xanthippe is central to this endeavor, a fixture in the effort to bequeath Socratic philosophy—that true wealth which Socrates left to the world—to future generations.

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[56]Trans. Malherbe 1977.

[57]Xanthippe's dates are unknown. Antoni and Döring 2006 puts her eldest son as "a *meirákion* and therefore 15–20 years old in 399." Assuming he is her eldest child, she therefore may have been born as late as the late 420s or early 430s BCE. Arete was active in the 350s BCE (O'Reilly 2023, 96). Thus, the letter is not completely implausible in staging them as contemporaries; however, Xanthippe would have been much older.

[58]O'Reilly 2023, 103 ff. argues that Aristippus may conceive of her as a "mother-teacher" and her philosophy as one that is "transmitted as much via a way of life as by doctrine."

[59]O'Reilly 2023, 106 questions whether Aristippus "means for her to teach the young boy philosophy or . . . more basic childrearing."

3.3 Alciphron's letter 17

Alciphron's *Letters of the courtesans* is another collection of fictional epistles, likely composed during the Imperial Greek period (Granholm 2012, 15).[60] This collection, known for its "convincing realism,"[61] mentions Xanthippe in a letter addressed from *Leontium to Lamia*. While all the Alciphronian letters are pseudonymous, "epistolary impersonations" (Rosenmeyer 2006, 2), there is one crucial difference between the four books: whereas characters in the other books are invented, with names that are just so (the *Letters of the fishermen* contain characters like Εὐκόλυμβος "Divewell" (1.8) and Ναυσίβιος "Boatlife" (1.15)), the *Letters of the courtesans* are addressed from and to actual, historical Athenians, "persons well known from classical literature," who lived from the fourth to the third centuries BCE (Granholm 2012, 19).

Leontium, the addressor of the letter in question, is an Epicurean philosophical woman who published *Against Theophrastus* sometime around 300 BCE.[62] The letter shows clear familiarity with Leontium's status as a member of the Epicurean philosophical school. She lives in the Garden; associates with many known Epicureans (4.17.10); is familiar with Epicurus's treatises and doctrines (17.2, 5, 7); is concerned with living a moral life (17.3); and expresses several philosophical views all her own, especially about nature (17.2) and pleasure (below). Without a doubt, Leontium is cast as a philosophical woman in her own right.[63] It is extremely telling, therefore, that Alciphron's Leontium seems to regard Xanthippe as a kindred spirit.

Xanthippe is named during Leontium's description of Epicurus's romantic advances. The letter establishes a complicated and comic narrative in which Leontium is in love with another, younger philosopher Timarchus (who allegedly left the Lyceum to live in the Garden). Epicurus blocks this relationship using his philosophical proclamations about pleasure, but also because he wants Leontium for himself. It is in this context that Leontium mentions Xanthippe:

> I swear by Aphrodite that if he were an Adonis—he's already nearly eighty—I would not put up with him, a louse-ridden valetudinarian all wrapped up in fleeces in place of woolens. How long is a girl to endure this "philosopher"? Let him keep his *Principal Doctrine*s about Nature and his distorted *Canons*; and let him allow me to be mistress of myself, as Nature intended, the object neither of his anger nor of his insolence. Such is the greybeard who is laying siege to me: I find him a real besieger, but not like your Demetrius, my Lamia: indeed because of him is it possible to lead a virtuous life? He wants to be a Socrates and to talk on and on and to feign ignorance, and he regards his Pythocles as an Alcibiades and counts on making me his Xanthippe.[64]

[60] See also Benner and Fobes 1949, 6 and Bowie 1970, 3–9.

[61] This quote is from the blurb of Benner and Fobes 1949, 6: "[We] are dealing with a kind of literature that was based upon literature. And in spite of insincerities, frigidities, moral commonplaces, and sophistic *quisquiliae* Alciphron has not infrequently succeeded in drawing pictures that make the fourth century seem real."

[62] Cicero, *De nat.* 1.33.93. Whereas many reports of Leontium have portrayed her as a sex-worker, she may have had a different social status, as indicated by her marriage to Metrodorus. See Hamil forthcoming.

[63] For women in the Epicurean school, see Gordon 2012 and Arenson 2023.

[64] Trans. Benner and Fobes 1949.

Epicurus is depicted as repugnant for several reasons, not least of which is that he "wants to be a Socrates, talking endlessly and feigning ignorance" (καὶ σωκρατίζειν καὶ στωμυλεύεσθαι θέλει καὶ εἰρωνεύεσθαι, 17.3). Furthermore, Leontium claims, Epicurus tries to turn her into "a Xanthippe" (καὶ Ξανθίππην ἐμὲ οἴεται ποιήσειν, 17.3). This follows on a complaint that Epicurus foists his philosophical doctrines (his *Principles Doctrines* and *Canons*) onto her in order to control her, when she would rather live a free life, according to "nature" (φυσικῶς, 17.3). It would appear then, that Leontium finds an affinity between herself and Xanthippe because they are both philosophically controlled: Leontium, we shall see, has her own convictions which are overshadowed by those of her more famous and powerful suitor.

It is easy to mistake Leontium's dislike for Epicurus as a distaste for philosophy *itself*. After all, Leontium scorns philosophical letters and books.[65] Perhaps, then, *this* is why she evokes Xanthippe, because both women have a disdain for intellectual life. Yet, as the letter progresses, it emerges that Leontium is not uninterested in philosophy. She is especially interested in hedonism (the view that the primary aim of a life well lived is pleasure) and forcefully disagrees with Epicurus about what sorts of pleasures ought to be indulged. Leontium desires a relationship with Timarchus, but Epicurus prevents this, as he is "the kind of lover about whom Epicurus says 'shut him out and don't let him come near you'" (17.5). Epicurean doctrine holds that certain pleasures ought to be avoided, since they are too intense and disturb the tranquility of the soul (τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀταραξίαν, *LM* 128). Epicurus's advice to "shut out" Timarchus might therefore be viewed as a lesson about which pleasures to avoid (in addition to being a ploy to keep Leontium to himself). Leontium's response is, by contrast, that of a pure hedonist: satisfying her intense sexual desire for Timarchus—in addition to other bodily pleasures that they enjoy together, including food and luxuries (17.2)—is *obviously* more choiceworthy than Epicurus's studied recommendation of abstinence. As she puts it: "It is not doctrine that warms me, but the object of my desire, and I desire Timarchus, by Demeter!" (17.6). Leontium's critique of Epicureanism is simple: it is less *satisfying* than pure hedonism. She later caricatures Epicurus chanting his "windy" (ὑπηνέμους) principles alongside his followers (17.7). By pitting "windy" Epicureanism against her own intense desires, Leontium again emerges as a champion of a purer form of hedonism—indulging one's desires for food, luxuries, and sex is a more obviously choiceworthy vision of what is good.

Because both she and Timarchus live in the Garden, however, they cannot indulge in a more hedonistic existence. This is plausibly why Leontium feels controlled by Epicurus: rather than enacting her own vision of what is good, she is forced to live according to Epicurus's doctrines. It stands to reason that this is why she feels an affinity with Xanthippe—because Xanthippe, too, whatever her own convictions may have been, was forced to live by her more famous husband's philosophical commitments. While this portrait of Xanthippe may not reveal much about what sorts of philosophical beliefs she held, it does suggest that—at least by the lights of another careful antique forgery—she was likely a woman with her own convictions about how to live.

Finally, we might be tempted to ask whether, given the analogy between Leontium and Xanthippe, the latter might also have had a reputation as something of a hedonist.

[65]For an analysis of what she is being sent, see Gordon 2013, 151.

As mentioned in passing above, Xanthippe is frequently associated with material welfare and wealth (cf. *Socratic epistle 21*).[66] Aulus Gellius, *Attic nights* 8.11 suggests that she had a taste for the lavish, asking to "spend more money for their dinners during the Dionysiac festival."[67] Similar themes accompany the 'provocative Xanthippe' trope, as in Diogenes Laertius's *Life of Socrates* 2.34, where, in reply to Xanthippe's embarrassment at a dinner they threw, Socrates replies "the rest of the world lived to eat, while he himself ate to live." Aelian's *Historical miscellany* 9.29.7–14 claims she planned to keep presents sent by Alcibiades, to which Socrates replied: "It is a great thing to obtain what one desires ... But it is still greater not to have desires in the first place." Socrates' responses have a decidedly anti-hedonistic ring to them. While Xanthippe's materialistic leanings are (again) likely literary provocations intended to occasion Socrates' own ascetic responses, these reports might subtly hint that views about materiality, wealth, pleasure, and luxury ought to be counted among her likely philosophical concerns. Still, Xanthippe seems to voice an opposite view in *Socratic letter 21* where she appears firmly ascetic. What, then, is her view—hedonism or asceticism (or some combination of both?)? Or are these reports merely inventions? This paper will refrain from drawing any conclusions beyond noting that these are topics with which Xanthippe is frequently associated.

4. Conclusions

We began by asking whether it even makes sense to investigate a philosophical Xanthippe. After all, in so many of her ancient sources she appears hostile to the philosophical enterprise. It should now be clear that a range of Xanthippe portraits have been preserved. While a great many depict her as an angry, rude, anti-intellectual, this paper has been tracing a lesser-known tradition—a tradition that is rooted in the works of the ancient Athenian Socratic acolytes and continues into the fictitious epistles of the Imperial Greek period—which testifies to a Xanthippe with a philosophical life and possibly even views all her own. More specifically, we have seen her portrayed as a Socratic philosophical combatant, a moral educator, someone who values philosophical community, expressing anti-materialist values, and maybe even acting as a teacher, author, and matriarch to other philosophical women of the time.

Some of these findings are more steadfast than others. The evidence is scattered and many questions remain. However, one thing is certain: once the evidence is assembled, we are left with a sketch of a philosophical woman and her possible commitments, which might be further restored by future intrepid historians of philosophy applying the same methods that are routinely applied to other fragmentary testimonial traditions.

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[66]Not mentioned below are Dio Chrysostom, *Discourse 54,* 3.1–6; Synesius of Cyrene 14.35, and Aelian 7.10.

[67]Trans. Rolfe 1927.

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