

HONOUR AS A PRIVILEGE: SLAVE HIERARCHIES AND MASTER–SLAVE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE HOUSEHOLD–MANAGEMENT TEXTS OF CLASSICAL ATHENS

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THIS CHAPTER DISCUSSES THE HONOUR that slaves obtained for their prominent roles in the economy of classical Athens. It deals in detail with passages of two texts on household management (*oikonomia*): Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* and Pseudo-Aristotle’s *Oeconomica*, which are of clear importance both to our understanding of Greek slavery and slavery’s global history more generally in their explicit recommendation that honour (*timē*) be provided as a privilege to trusted slaves in the household. Based on my understanding of the work of this volume’s editors – the fundamentals of which are set out in this volume’s Introduction – I view the concept of *timē* and honour more broadly as an individual’s claim to respect (and forms of preferential treatment which respect accords) from a person or community within it and the interrelated judgement of their actions according to norms of social and ethical behaviour.¹ I speak in this chapter to issues similar to those discussed by Canevaro in this volume, though I approach them predominantly from the perspective of how economic factors influenced the relationships between masters and slaves.

We will begin by examining these texts on *oikonomia* in detail. As we will see, the honour they advise apportioning to slaves is presented in the texts primarily as a slave-holding strategy to gain the loyalty of the enslaved persons who occupied important positions within Greek households. I will then demonstrate, from wider evidence, how the existence of slave hierarchies and slaves in positions of particular trust was not a fiction of these texts but a highly prevalent feature of Athens’ society and economy. I argue in this chapter that the degree of trust on which these forms of exploitation depended was itself reliant on some degree of respect for these slaves by their masters, without which these relationships could not have productively functioned. This argument, moreover, is strengthened by evidence from other slave societies that contained

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¹ Earlier works include Cairns 2011b; Canevaro 2018.

powerful slaves, including that described in Homer's *Odyssey*.² In other words, despite the near-total legal power that masters held over their slaves, it was in their best interest to acknowledge as well as reward the loyalty of these slaves in their relations with them. Moreover, the awarding of particular positions of responsibility to slaves was itself an honour that raised their status and concurrent claim to honour vis-à-vis their masters and others. This, in fact, is what pseudo-Aristotle and Xenophon recognised. In turn, as we will see, whatever honour slaves received from their master was above all dependent on their demonstration of this loyalty. The final section of this chapter will examine the nature of the honour slaves received and the insecure grounds on which it was based. Through a close reading of the *Oeconomicus* and the *Oeconomica* and by situating them in their historical context, this chapter argues that the concept of honour can be used as a productive means of demonstrating how the interpersonal relationships between masters and slaves were affected by the structure of Athens' slave-based economy and how this influenced the position of enslaved persons in society more broadly.

Pseudo-Aristotle and Xenophon on the Honouring of Slaves by Masters

Of the forms of property, the first and most necessary is the kind best and most beneficial to household management: the human chattel. Therefore, it is first necessary to acquire good slaves. There are two types of slaves: the manager (ἐπίτροπος) and the labourer (ἐργάτης). Since, moreover, we know that the character of the young can be moulded by training, when we need slaves whose work is more like that of a free person (τὰ ἐλευθέρια τῶν ἔργων), we have to raise them ourselves. In dealing with slaves we must neither let them act with *hybris* nor cause them undue suffering. A share of honour should be given (τιμῆς μεταδιδόναι) to those whose work is more like that of a free man's, and plenty of food to those who work with their hands. ([Arist.] *Oec.* 1, 1344a23–31)

This passage comprises the first nine lines of a more extended discussion on the correct way to treat slaves found in the late fourth-century *Oeconomica* written by a student of Aristotle, possibly Theophrastus.³ It introduces this discussion by clearly justifying its relevance to the subject of the *Oeconomica* as a whole and by emphasising the importance of slaves to the well-being of the household. In so doing, the author also makes clear the overt purpose of recommending the treatment that he does: that is, to make the most productive use possible of slaves, and not because honouring enslaved persons was morally required or socially desirable.⁴

² See Tandy, this volume.

³ Philodemus in the first century BCE (*On Property Management*, col. VII, 38, 44) ascribed the work to Theophrastus. On the authorship of the text, see Victor 1983: 167–75, who is sceptical of Philodemus' claim.

⁴ See also the remarks of Garlan 1988: 150–3, who discusses the 'kind' treatment of slaves in this and other philosophical Greek texts.

This is significant because these texts cannot be said to approach their subject matter purely from the point of view of profit maximisation as a whole. The ancient Greek subject of *oikonomia* remained heavily linked to ethical issues as well as financial ones.⁵ Pseudo-Aristotle's *Oeconomica* was a text advising moral behaviour, though it is certainly based in a morality that valued the productivity of a household, the generation of surplus and its transfer to heirs, friends and the state.⁶ Within this morality, these texts advise the treatment of slaves that they do, at least explicitly, only as a means of supporting the household's ability to generate wealth.⁷ The reality of master-slave relationships in Athens was more complicated – as indeed this chapter and others in this volume contend – but in the classical Greek household-management texts such as that of pseudo-Aristotle, any fair or 'good' treatment of slaves is justified purely on the grounds of its instrumentality.

One noteworthy feature of this passage is its binary division between slaves that follows pseudo-Aristotle's introduction of this discussion of household slaves: 'Of slaves there are two kinds: the *epitropos* and the worker' (1, 1344a25–6). The word *epitropos* is used in the context of Athens' private economies to refer (at least in the cases where the status of the *epitropos* can be ascertained) to slaves entrusted with the management of property. The exact capacity in which they did is difficult to discern and probably varied, encompassing a more administrative role in certain cases and a more supervisory one in others.⁸ G. E. M. de Ste. Croix preferred to describe *epitropoi* as 'overseer[s] or manager[s]' rather than using one English term over the other, highlighting his own understanding of the different responsibilities which such slaves could be assigned.⁹ In his translation of the passage above, Armstrong's rendering of *epitropoi* as 'slaves in positions of trust' is perhaps most appropriate in its generalness.¹⁰

This same division between enslaved labourers and managers governs pseudo-Aristotle's recommendations throughout his following discussion of slaves in the *Oeconomica*, though he uses different language to express his dichotomy. He later distinguishes twice between slaves whose work makes them more like free persons and 'those who work with their hands' (1, 1344a30–1, 28–9). The division of slaves into workers and management was clearly a vital distinction in pseudo-Aristotle's

⁵ Leshem 2016. See also the references in n. 6 below and in particular the remarks in Hinsch 2021. The preference for agriculture as a source of household wealth is a good example of the moral basis of the text's economic recommendations (1, 1343a22–b1). This preference is also key to Xenophon's earlier *Oeconomicus* (e.g. 4.4–5.17), discussed below.

⁶ For example, as well as the correct 'use' (χρηστικόν) of wealth, pseudo-Aristotle (1, 1344b22–7) believed that to be a good householder one must be able to continue 'to acquire' (κτᾶσθαι), 'to preserve' (φυλάττειν) and 'to manage productively' (εἶναι κοσμητικόν) one's property. On the importance of wealth generation in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, see Pomeroy 1994: 61–5; Hinsch 2021: 189–93. As Leshem 2013: 58 notes, '*oikonomia* was defined by a sphere in which man, when faced with excessive means, acquires a theoretical and practical prudent disposition in order to comply with his needs and so as to generate surplus that is channelled outside its boundaries'.

⁷ In this respect they are very different from the later text *On the Man's Management of the Estate* by Bryson which is quoted below and which, probably due to Stoic influences, explicitly recognised slaves' humanity and as such accorded them a (limited) measure of recognition and respect (62–3, 69–70).

⁸ Chandezon 2011: 102.

⁹ Ste. Croix 1981: 140; similarly, Klees 1998: 9; Kamen 2013: 23.

¹⁰ Tredennick and Armstrong 1944: *ad. loc.*

mind. It should probably be seen as having an implied influence on other parts of his discussion, such as the text's insistence that slaves should have a sort of timetable for manumission, which might have been meant to be taken as applying primarily or only to his more trusted slaves.¹¹

Either way, the division between workers and trusted slaves has two explicit bearings on the discussion that follows. Firstly, pseudo-Aristotle recommends that these slaves should be raised in his reader's household. Secondly, it is *epitropoi* specifically whom he says should 'receive a share of honour'. This phrase, *timēs meta-didonai*, literally 'to give a share of honour', is reminiscent of the Homeric epics, in which the gods, often Zeus specifically, and in one instance mankind generally, are said to apportion honour (*timēs emmorei*) to particular men.¹² This metaphorical language, like that of pseudo-Aristotle, describes *timē* as a divisible resource that can be gifted in an abstract sense. What did pseudo-Aristotle actually envisage by the behaviour he here recommends? On the basis of studies of the word *timē* in Homer and other Greek literature utilising studies of honour in human relations more generally, pseudo-Aristotle is here best understood as recommending a master show gratitude and (most importantly) perhaps even a certain amount of deference to his slaves for their performance of their independent roles in his household. (As we will soon see, this argument is strengthened by the *Oeconomicus* of Xenophon.)

Thinking specifically of the Homeric parallels to pseudo-Aristotle's language, which indicate that a portion of honour was predominantly a claim to respect from a community more generally, one suspects that pseudo-Aristotle also means that respect for his trusted slaves should be encouraged from other persons too – family members, other slaves and even persons external to the household.¹³ In summary, pseudo-Aristotle believed that honouring some slaves was vital to the economic well-being of a household. The qualifier of 'some', however, is clear from the text. Before we further draw out its implications, we will outline some parallels between this text and that of the earlier Socratic dialogue on household management, the *Oeconomicus* of Xenophon.

Though framed in a very different manner, the *Oeconomicus* bears several similarities to pseudo-Aristotle's *Oeconomica* both in its apparent intention and in the substance of its recommendations for household management. Xenophon's work also contains a section on how to train slaves, though it is many times longer than that of pseudo-Aristotle. Like pseudo-Aristotle, Xenophon puts (in his case repeated) emphasis on

¹¹ If the *Oeconomica* was written by Theophrastus, it may be worth noting that the philosopher's will, while immediately freeing or making provisions for the later manumission of many trusted slaves, kept others in bondage without instruction for their manumission (Diog. Laert. 5.2.55). On the will's authenticity, see Canevaro and Lewis 2014: 103–6.

¹² *Il.* 1.278, 15.189; *Od.* 5.335, 8.480, 11.338. See Cairns 2011b: 41.

¹³ Admittedly, this is a very difficult point to show from the passage itself or our limited evidence. In one instance, after a freedwoman was killed, the court speech against the murderers emphasised that the woman had been 'kind and faithful' (εὖνοῦς καὶ πιστῇ) to her previous owner's family (Dem. 47.55). This appears to be an attempt to elicit anger from the judges. This source suggests, at least, that Athenian masters might take an active role in defending the honour of slaves to whom they were well disposed. From the perspective of slaves (though admittedly as described by a free Athenian), Mazzinghi Gori's chapter in this volume shows how slaves interacting with other slaves in Menander's comedies draw on their attachment to and status within their households to make claims to honour.

the importance of a master's interpersonal relations with slaves and the importance of showing gratitude and respect towards slaves for the work that they do. The most striking example of this advice is the passage below, in which Xenophon claims that his ideal landowner, Ischomachus (the speaker here), honours his slaves as if they were *kaloi kagathoi* – the embodiment of virtuous men who were deserving of the highest respect:

If I learn of [slaves] who are induced to be honest not only because of the advantages they gain through being honest, but because of a desire to be praised by me, I treat them as if they were free men, not only do I make them wealthy, but I even honour them like *kaloi te kagathoi* (τιμῶν ὡς καλοῦς τε κάγαθούς). (14.9, trans. Pomeroy)

The idea of wealth and high status is often very closely linked to the concept *kalos kagathos*, but, interestingly, the term regularly implies evaluation of behaviour rather than the position into which a person was born, and it is in this sense that it is most often used in Xenophon.¹⁴

We can also see the stress that Xenophon repeatedly places on the personal interactions of Ischomachus with his slaves:

When I see [slaves] showing proper concern, I praise them and try to honour them (ἐπαινῶ καὶ τιμᾶν πειρῶμαι αὐτούς), but when they are not, I try to say and do things that will upset them. (12.16)

Those [slaves] who seek honour (φιλότιμοι) become more enthusiastic when praised. For the nature of some people is to hunger for praise as much as others do for food and drink. (13.9)

Honouring slaves, in Xenophon's mind, was a crucial aspect of his slave-management strategy, which was closely linked to the idea of praising them for their work. This is meant to work in tandem with the apportioning of material benefits, a subject well covered by other works which will not be detailed here.¹⁵ Here we can get a better sense of what these authors mean by 'honouring' slaves. Ischomachus planned to encourage diligence, competency and obedience from his slaves and, if they met his expectations, he treated them with respect and open gratitude.

A division between slaves – those who are disposed to be motivated by Ischomachus' praise and those who are not – is also a notable characteristic of these passages. What is absent from them in isolation is a relation of this division of slaves to a division between managerial and labourer roles. We can, however, infer one from Xenophon's discussion on slave management as a whole. While Xenophon's recommendations therein seem to apply to slaves generally, the entire section is essentially an answer to the question of how

¹⁴ Pomeroy 1994: 321–2.

¹⁵ Klees 1975: 91–3; Pomeroy 1994: 65–6; Carlsen 2002; Kamen 2013: 23. On the use of sex and family in Xenophon and pseudo-Aristotle's incentive scheme, see Porter 2021c.

one acquires reliable *epitropoi*.¹⁶ This is the topic of the introduction and the conclusion of this extended discussion on slave management, at 12.3 and 15.1 respectively, and the discussion between Socrates and Ischomachus also repeatedly returns to the issue of training a good *epitropos* between these passages (12.8, 13.1, 14.1). In the ideal households of both Xenophon and pseudo-Aristotle, the need for reliable enslaved *epitropoi* on whom a master can depend is presented as the primary justification for honouring slaves.

Of course, these are only two texts, and that of pseudo-Aristotle was clearly based at least partially on the earlier treatise of Xenophon.¹⁷ Both authors also see their relationships with their slaves through an ideological lens that to a certain extent muddies the reflection of real slavery that we can draw from them. As Canevaro points out in his chapter in this volume, the fact that honouring slaves is presented entirely as the prerogative of masters in these texts and other Athenian remarks on slave management is obviously one-sided when we consider the claims that slaves themselves often believed they had to respect and fair treatment based on their behaviour. Indeed, it seems likely that a degree of reciprocity between masters and slaves was a likely outgrowth of many forms of servile exploitation. Pseudo-Aristotle seems to suggest through his language that only his more trusted slaves should receive honour, and so by extension his 'workers' should not. Again, his formulation is somewhat misleading in that it treats honour as a tangible value that could be held by some and not others and assessed as such at a fixed point in time, rather than something borne out of interactions between master and slave and subject to their ever-developing relationship. That all slaves of a household (including enslaved women, as will be further discussed below) had the *capacity* to be honoured is actually a fair inference from pseudo-Aristotle's statement and is further suggested by his claim that trusted slaves should be raised in the household from their youth (1, 1344a26–9). This is particularly clear from Xenophon's description of a long-term and ongoing process of evaluating his slaves and rewarding or punishing their behaviour appropriately in order to find those who would be good *epitropoi*. Many or most slaves in the households described in these texts could prove their suitability for this role and thus be honoured by their master. There are some further comments on these issues below.

No doubt, as both Plato's *Laus* (6, 777a) and Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* (3.4) claim, the treatment of slaves would have varied from household to household, but there are good reasons for thinking that at least some masters did treat their slaves as honourable. Though it is telling that they felt the need to recommend it at all, both Xenophon and pseudo-Aristotle certainly viewed honouring slaves as vital to maintaining the productivity of their household.¹⁸ They were not the only ancient authors to suggest that slaves might have a claim to *timē* in some sense.¹⁹ They are nevertheless particularly valuable as sources for the clarity with which they tie slaves' honour specifically to a household's economic well-being and to the importance of a particular class of trusted and honoured slaves. A closer examination of the function and importance of

¹⁶ Klees 1975: 70, 75–7.

¹⁷ On the direct relationship between these texts, and their place in a largely lost body of literature on *oikonomia*, see Victor 1983: 187–92.

¹⁸ Cf. [Arist.] *Oec.* 1, 1344b4–6.

¹⁹ See in particular Fisher 1995.

independent slaves in the Athenian economy, situated within a comparative framework, can help elucidate both the circumstances which engendered that honour and its character and extent.

Independent Slaves at Athens and the Logic behind 'Honouring' Slaves

Though our evidence is scarce, we commonly find slaves in positions of trust in Athenian literary sources and, in particular, fourth-century BCE law court speeches. These texts refer to an enslaved workshop manager (Aeschin. 1.97), bank managers (Dem. 36.13; 49.44), a commercial agent in a foreign city (Dem. 36.6–8), and a merchant ship captain (Dem. 34.5, 10), in addition to the agricultural *epitropoi* of the household-management texts.²⁰ Another work by Xenophon mentions an expensive mine overseer (Xen. *Mem.* 2.5.3). In the sphere of agriculture, we know from Demosthenes' *Against Callides* of a case in which a slave was successfully sued for erecting a wall on his master's property (55.31), which further suggests unsupervised slaves in the field of agriculture. In a badly damaged section of Menander's now fragmentary comedy *Phasma*, we can make out a slave organising a wedding with a hired cook (54–67 Arnott).²¹ This demonstrates the kind of individual responsibility which slaves might be imagined exerting over a household's domestic affairs too.²²

These sources demonstrate the dependence of free Athenians on a class of moderately independent slaves who performed important roles in their households. They only describe, however, the structure of elite Athenian households, which are vastly over-represented in our literature. It is worth commenting on the slim evidence for households with only one or a handful of slaves. In a play of Aristophanes, the slave of a more middling Athenian family is sent to fetch another who is working on the family vineyard, presumably unsupervised (*Pax* 1146–8). This statement in the context of the play serves simply to set the scene of a banquet. There is no reason to assume this would be depicted in an inherently unrealistic way to a contemporary audience. Another piece of evidence comes from the first of Lysias' speeches, in which the speaker, Euphiletus, states that, had he premediated the murder he was accused of, he would have brought slaves with him in order to help carry it out (1.42).²³ There is some disagreement amongst scholars regarding the identity of these slaves, but it is at least a feasible possibility, if not the most likely, that they were owned by Euphiletus.²⁴ Importantly,

²⁰ On the prominence of slave *epitropoi* in Athenian society, see also the comments in Aristotle's *Politics* below (p. 171). For the merchant ship captain as a probable slave trader, see Lewis 2022a.

²¹ Although this discussion between a slave and cook appears mainly to have served an expositional function within the play, a heated back and forth between the two (68–74) and a well-preserved question about a choice of menu (73–4) support this interpretation.

²² Kamen's chapter in this volume provides further discussion of 'privileged slaves' and their position in wider Athenian society.

²³ Euphiletus' moderate means are suggested by his small city house and the single enslaved girl he keeps there, as described throughout the speech.

²⁴ Some commentators believe that these slaves may also have been rented or borrowed from friends (Carey 1989: 84; Todd 2007: 141). Hunter (1994: 211 n. 5) is more certain they were owned by Euphiletus.

these other slaves do not feature in the action of the speech centred around Euphiletus' town house and must have been living and often working alone on his farm, which we hear of in the speech (1.11, 20). It would appear from these sources that slaves could work surprisingly independently in smaller households too.

The level of independence exerted by certain Athenian slaves must have represented something of a problem for those attempting to exploit their labour. This appears to be reflected in our literature on *oikonomia*, which (as we have seen) consistently stresses the importance of loyal slave *epitropoi*. The threat of violence was undoubtedly an important tool in ensuring such slaves did as masters intended, but it would only have ensured that slaves did the absolute minimum, and even then not reliably so, unless one could guarantee a way to be sure of a slave's actions at all points. It also would impede a slave's risk-taking, which might be vital to their work as a manager or a commercial agent. 'Nor should anyone take advantage of his servant when he sees that there is no alternative for him but to accept his orders', a Greek text on *oikonomia* from the first century CE claimed.²⁵ 'Rather, he will seek to ensure that [the servant's] work for him is done with affection, zeal, and keenness for the task' (Bryson, *On the Man's Management of the Estate* 70, trans. Swain). Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* similarly identifies loyalty to himself in various specific forms as a crucial characteristic he attempts to train into his *epitropoi* through various means, one example of which, as we have seen, was by treating them as if they had a claim to *timē*. Why not take him and pseudo-Aristotle seriously? Unlike material benefits, providing honour to slaves cost nothing in a material sense. Though this chapter has focused largely on privately owned slaves, it is worth noting that state-owned Athenian slaves (*dēmosioi*) played a crucial and often largely unsupervised role in Athens' governance. A number of inscriptions recording the honouring of *dēmosioi* by public bodies for their services have survived to the present day, as also commented on by Canevaro in this volume.²⁶

The Honouring of Powerful Slaves in Athens: A Comparative Perspective

So far, we have looked at the historical context in which ancient Greek writers on *oikonomia* viewed honour as an important part of their relations with trusted slaves and that these trusted slaves were a crucial facet of the society in which these writers lived. Historians of other societies in which slaves held large amounts of power have recently begun to emphasise the honour accorded to these slaves. Sean Stilwell's article on slavery and honour in the Sokoto Caliphate, for example, points out that 'the heads of royal slave households were most certainly "honoured" by others in the palace community because . . . they were known to be knowledgeable, influential and capable'.²⁷ Obviously important here are considerations of status, particularly the status attached

²⁵ On the date of the text, see Swain 2013: 33–4.

²⁶ Ismard 2017: 71–3. The best example is an inscription set up to honour a public slave in charge of military finances; see Oliver 2009.

²⁷ Stilwell 2000: 407 and *passim*. On the elite slaves of the Ottoman Empire, see the similar arguments in Toledano 1998; 2016.

to the title of a head royal slave. Without knowing anything else about them an individual would probably be expected to show a degree of deference to such slaves, as one might to a known *epitropos* or *tamia* of a respectable Athenian household. The different statuses of Athenian slaves are dealt with in more detail in Kamen's chapter in this volume and in her earlier work.²⁸ However, the evaluative nature of honour is also important here and is well noted in the quotation from Stilwell above; the position that these slaves held allowed them to be acknowledged for their considerable expertise and competency. That is, to borrow the language of Stephen Darwall, these slaves received from the free people around them recognition respect for their position and its inherent authority but also appraisal respect for how they conducted their important and challenging role.²⁹

Not many slaves were able to achieve anything like this level of esteem. Stilwell, for his part, draws a clear distinction in this regard between honoured royal slaves and enslaved labourers.³⁰ We might also consider again pseudo-Aristotle's suggested restriction of honour to slaves whose work was 'more free', which probably made up a far smaller group of slaves. Except in forms of exploitation where slaves could be supervised more or less permanently, it seems likely that masters would have seen benefit in honouring those slaves who stood lower in a household hierarchy should they prove themselves useful and loyal.³¹ As we have already discussed, that slaves who were lower down the hierarchy in their household could be honoured is evidently part of Ischomachus' strategy in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, which never stipulates explicitly that only *epitropoi* receive honour or any other of the rewards it advocates for 'good' slaves and rather suggests that promotion and honour might be offered to those of his slaves who are judged to have *philotimia*.

Of the slaves, however, who sought the approval of their master and could demonstrate competency as well as loyalty, some were elevated to particular positions of trust as managers, supervisors or agents. The training of *epitropoi*, as Xenophon describes it, amounts to the recognition of virtues (which, in ancient Greek, are expressed as *tīmē*) in household slaves, though specifically virtues that made them valuable to Ischomachus. In other words, the promotion of a slave to a position of trust was itself an honour by their master – a sign of trust and of respect on their part. Moreover, placing slaves at the top of a household hierarchy elevated them to a position where an increase in their individual autonomy and responsibility expanded their capacity to earn appraisal respect from their master, and his economic well-being became dependent on them to a far greater extent. It also allowed them to operate with the authority of their master in wider Athenian society. Outside of their household, trusted slaves might be business partners with free persons on behalf of their master or supervise

²⁸ Kamen 2013. See, though, the remarks of Davies 2017, who shows that status is often more complicated and dependent on a host of interrelated factors including an individual's talents, virtues and behaviours more generally.

²⁹ Darwall 1977; Darwall 2013b: 18–20.

³⁰ Stilwell 2000: 404–6.

³¹ For evidence of closely monitored and brutally exploited slaves, most clear in sources for Athens' milling industry, see Porter 2019b: 38–43.

and even employ hired free persons. The opportunity for reciprocity and respect to develop in these relationships should be obvious.

To reiterate, it is important to recognise that all slaves would at points have been regularly appraised on their behaviour by their master, specifically on their willingness to submit themselves to their masters' interests (as discussed in more detail in the following section). Any slave might receive acknowledgement for their deference and obedience to their master, as well as for their competency at their work. Nevertheless, and though few if any Athenian slaves possessed power comparable to (for example) the royal slaves of the Sokoto Caliphate, not all were powerless labourers from whom their masters and other free persons only ever sought submission and deference. The power wielded by the enslaved but largely independent managers of elite property, in particular, must have allowed them greater scope to both engage in relationships of reciprocity and further demonstrate individual capacities and virtues deemed worthy of respect by their masters and by the men and women around them. Even in poorer households, wherein slaves could never wield the same economic power, the relationship between masters and their slaves must also have been similarly governed in part by the degree to which the former sought to depend on the independent faculties of the latter. It was this difference between the positions of these more autonomous slaves and others whose value was not recognised to the same extent by their master and whose work was more closely supervised, I would argue, that explains pseudo-Aristotle's characterisation of slaves who should have honour and those who should not. The level of appraisal respect that slaves could gain as *epitropoi* or independent agents of their master – in particular for their autonomy in these roles – was of a level and form more similar to that between free men and more easily recognisable as governed by *timē* to an ancient Greek. Pseudo-Aristotle and Xenophon do not go so far as to explicitly say that such slaves were due respect for their roles, but we can read their advice as suggesting that masters adhere to the natural social considerations that would have arisen from these relationships. Both texts unfairly situate all of the power in their ideal household with its head, yet both implicitly recognise, in their recommendations, that masters were to some extent dependent on *epitropoi* (or at least, the productivity of their household was).³² Many ancient Greek masters probably came to honour slaves as an *unconscious* development of the inter-reliance between the two rather than as a deliberate strategy.

Though relationships between free men are obviously problematic to compare to those between masters and slaves, interesting comparative material can be found in the better-documented relationship between plantation owners and their lower-class (though not enslaved) overseers in the American South. As we will see, these relationships also raise interesting questions about the nature of American slavery in comparison to that of other societies, including ancient Greece. The image of overseers generally in the literature of America's upper class was decidedly negative. As a group, they were frequently characterised as cruel, selfish and dishonest. But these

³² In fact, this dependence was problematised in philosophical discourse. David M. Lewis has pointed out to me a story told of the Athenian philosopher Diogenes the Cynic, whose slave Manes supposedly 'ran away because he could not endure to live with [Diogenes]'. When some people urged Diogenes to look for him, he said: "Wouldn't it be shocking that Manes has no need of Diogenes while Diogenes needs Manes?" (Ael. *VH* 13.28).

stereotypes do little justice to the actual relationships between plantation owners and overseers, as an essay by Laura Sandy argues.³³ In the first place, overseers were vital to the upkeep of plantations, which in many cases they essentially ran.³⁴ As might be expected, overseers became highly valued for experience, skills and work ethic. In fact, they frequently gained significant financial and social advantages from their positions, arising primarily from the benefactions of their elite employers.

Particularly striking is the following personal correspondence of a plantation owner named Henry Laurens who lent his overseer money in order for him to buy his own slaves. When this overseer, John McCulloch, sought to leave his position and settle his remaining debts, Laurens responded:

I am willing to give McCulloch every reasonable indulgence for his debt – let him have every opportunity of attempting to improve for his own benefit the Talents put into his hands. I believe him a very honest man & am desirous of befriending him.³⁵

Sandy argues that relationships of this kind arose from the frequent dependence on hired overseers throughout the plantations of the American South. In this respect, they were very similar to the trusted slaves of ancient Greece. In fact, Laurens practically draws this comparison himself by equating his loans to the biblical parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30), in which a master entrusts money to his independent slaves. As Sandy notes, the dependence of plantation owners on hired overseers was due to an aversion to slave-managed properties in the US South.³⁶ These existed, though they were rare, frequently derided, and were even criminalised in South Carolinian and discouraged in Virginian law.³⁷ Part of the impetus behind this legislation and the aversion towards independent slaves was surely to keep slaves and persons of African descent generally from occupying positions that might give them power. In this respect, the US slave system was decidedly different from ancient Greece and many other historical slave systems. This is a point that bears remembering, since so much of our contemporary collective image of slavery, in the English-speaking world in particular, is drawn from that of the Antebellum South.

Outside of Athens, our evidence for slave hierarchies in ancient Greece is sparse. One good example of a similar class of particularly honoured slaves is nevertheless evident in the description of Odysseus' household in the much earlier *Odyssey*. As Nick Fisher writes:

[The slave] Eumaios . . . is the most notable of a number of exceptions in the [*Odyssey*] . . . he is a *dmōs*, a bought slave, who retains a remarkable capacity for displaying the proper *aretē* of a trusted and relatively independent slave, and he will be rewarded for it at the end. Slaves like Eumaios and Eurycleia [another of Odysseus' slaves], therefore, who do their duty, make the best of their slavery and can judge securely the failings of others, deserve to be honoured appropriately.³⁸

³³ Sandy 2017. Excluding the handful of 'gentleman overseers' who were sons of plantation owners.

³⁴ Sandy 2012.

³⁵ Sandy 2017: 465.

³⁶ Sandys 2012 *passim*.

³⁷ On the marginally more comfortable position of supervisory enslaved drivers, see Van Deburg 1979: 29.

³⁸ Fisher 1995: 49–55 (quotation: 54–5).

I have little to add to Fisher's argument, except to put a little more emphasis on how this statement applies chiefly to a higher status of slave. The male slaves who feature most heavily in the *Odyssey* – Eumaeus, Philoetius and Melanthius, are essentially archaic prototypes of *epitropoi*, separable from the many other unnamed slaves who work Odysseus' estate.³⁹ They are responsible for commanding the labour force that maintained Odysseus' herds, as is explicit within the text with regard to Eumaeus (14.24–8) and Melanthius (17.214, 223–4) and suggested by the epithet *orchamos andrōn*, 'commander of men', which both Eumaeus (14.121) and Philoetius (20.185, 254) are given. They are all raised from childhood in Odysseus' household.⁴⁰ As Fisher notes, whereas Eumaeus and Philoetius are honoured for their loyalty to their master, Melanthius suffers a grim fate for his betrayal (21.474–9) which is earlier emphasised partially by reference to his economic mismanagement (17.240–6). The interrelated economic importance of these slaves and their close relationship to the heads of the household are important facets of their role in the poem.⁴¹ This, in turn, gives us an important impression of the relative social standing of slaves such as these in comparison to others in Greek society more broadly. Only Eumaeus and Philoetius, of all his slaves, are worthy to stand by Odysseus' side in his battle against the suitors and eventually receive rewards for their loyalty.

Another interesting case is the character Eurycleia, an enslaved woman who features regularly in the poem, is also raised in the household from her childhood, and occupies an important position within the household's domestic sphere.⁴² Eurycleia raises interesting questions about the relation of gender to slave hierarchies and honour. It is unclear whether or not pseudo-Aristotle's division between slaves should be taken as implicitly applying to female as well as male slaves. The reference to *epitropoi* may imply he had specifically male slaves in mind, since this is usually used of men. On that point, however, we might note a fragment of Aristophanes in which the poet metaphorically represents the disruption of farming during the Peloponnesian War by having the personification of agriculture describe herself as various subordinate familial relations of peace: 'a faithful nurse, housekeeper (*tamia*), helper, *epitropos*, daughter and sister' (fr. 255 KA).⁴³ It may well be significant that we find an *epitropos* listed here alongside generally female-gendered members of the household.

This passage is also good evidence of various servile positions within an *oikos*, the holders of which could be construed as both intimately connected to its free members and worthy of their acknowledgement. One of these, the *tamia*, is the classical equivalent of the Homeric *tamiē*, the position of authority that Eurycleia and Eurynome occupy. Xenophon also discusses the training of a *tamia* in an earlier section of the *Oeconomicus* as a crucial concern of the domestic work of the household supervised by Ischomachus' wife.

When we appointed our housekeeper we looked for one . . . who seemed to have memory and the foresight both to avoid being punished by us for negligence and to

³⁹ Many other slaves working on the estate are described in passing at 17.297–99. See also Tandy in this volume.

⁴⁰ Eumaeus: 15.361–5; Philoetius: 20.209–10; Melanthius (inferred by reference to his sister): 18.22–4.

⁴¹ Cf. Tandy in this volume.

⁴² Thalmann 1998b: 64.

⁴³ (Γε.) τῆς πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποισιν Εἰρήνης φίλης πιστὴ τροφός, ταμία, συνεργός, ἐπίτροπος, θυγάτηρ, ἀδελφή.

consider how, by pleasing us in any way, she might be rewarded by us in return . . . We instilled a sense of justice in her by giving more honour (τιμωτέρους τιθέντες) to the just than to the unjust, and showing her that the just live lives that are richer and better suited to a free citizen than the unjust. (9.11–13, trans. Pomeroy)

This discussion bears several similarities to the training of *epitropoi* discussed above. Most notably, the idea of honouring slaves who deserve it is repeated here, as something that needs to be instilled in the *tamia*. Positions of particular responsibility appear to have been much less frequently awarded to female, as opposed to male, slaves.⁴⁴ However, there were a few female slaves, such as the *tamiai* discussed above, who occupied important roles in Athenian property management and, through these positions, may well have acquired honour on similar terms to their male counterparts.⁴⁵

The ‘Dishonour’ of Slavery?

Aristotle took a different view of the position of *epitropoi* to that articulated by his student and by Xenophon. Some fifty years after the *Oeconomicus*, he wrote:

The supervision of slaves has no great importance or dignity (οὐδὲν μέγα ἔχουσα οὐδὲ σεμνόν), as it consists in knowing how to direct them to do the tasks which they should know how to do. Therefore, those who are able employ an *epitropos* to take this office, while they engage in statecraft or philosophy. (*Pol.* 1, 1255b33–8)

Here Aristotle derides one of the chief roles occupied by privileged slaves as of a lesser ‘importance’ and ‘dignity’ to participation in government and philosophy. Indeed, Ismard sees in this statement a direct challenge to the writings of Xenophon, who (as we have seen) never played down the importance of his slaves’ work and referred to his most trusted slaves as *kaloí kagathoi* – not equals necessarily but certainly deserving of distinction and respect.⁴⁶ We might also note that politics, one of the more dignified pursuits according to Aristotle, was a sphere of activity from which slaves were barred. Few would have taken part in philosophy either.⁴⁷ Though it is not mentioned by Aristotle, athletic training and competitions, as well as various religious and military roles, were other honourable activities from which slaves were excluded.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Glazebrook 2017.

⁴⁵ A similar argument on the power held by certain enslaved women to negotiate for familial and sexual relationships can be found in Porter 2021c.

⁴⁶ Ismard 2019b: 244–5.

⁴⁷ The philosopher Phaedon is a rare exception in our classical Athenian evidence, if the account of Diogenes Laertius is to be believed (2.105). What is more, he only became a philosopher after being manumitted.

⁴⁸ On the exclusion of slaves from athletics, Crowther (1992) provides a survey of evidence across ancient Greek history. In classical Athens, slaves were banned from the gymnasia (Aeschin. 1.38; Plut. *Sol.* 1.3; Xen. *Symp.* 2.4). On the circumscribed role of both male and female slaves in Athens’ civic religion, see Klees 1998: 264–72, 379–87; Bremmer 1999: 3; Mikalson 2005: 157. The participation of slaves in warfare is a more complicated issue, on which see Hunt 1998; 2006. Certainly, at times and arguably regularly, slaves were used in the armed forces of Greek states. However, their roles therein may have been limited and further minimised in contemporary accounts of conflicts for similar ideological reasons.

By denigrating the honour accorded to work in Athens' economic sphere, in which slaves played a vital role, Aristotle was either consciously or unconsciously reminding his reader of the citizen methods of obtaining honour that were denied to slaves. The position of female slaves was also commonly associated with dishonour, though for different reasons. In the study of Roman history, numerous authors have noted how slave women, like their counterparts in ancient Greece, were forcibly denied the paths to honour on which Roman women chiefly depended: chastity outside of marriage and the birthing of family heirs.⁴⁹ Stilwell refers to 'a system of honour' from which even royal Sokoto slaves were isolated by their exclusion 'from the rights, duties, and obligations that integrated "free" individuals into a shared social world'.⁵⁰ The same was clearly true of even the most privileged of Greek slaves. These are important observations, and we should take seriously the idea that they had a negative effect on both the personal identities and the social relations of slaves.

However, just as a negative discourse on overseers in the American South disguised the often familiar relationships between them and their elite patrons as discussed above, neither should we deny the honour that slaves could earn from the prominent part they played in household and city management detailed in the evidence above. Moreover, as Ismard points out, Aristotle's line of argument strengthens his infamous and highly flawed 'theory of natural slavery' detailed throughout Book 1 of his *Politics*, which justified slavery by pointing to the supposed inferiority of those enslaved.⁵¹ Since he was therefore invested in portraying the work of slaves as fit only for inferiors, we might suspect his judgement of unfairly underplaying the respect one could accrue in such a role.⁵² In his book on honour, Appiah notes that rather than possessing or not possessing honour, different groups in a society are more regularly simply accorded it on different grounds; 'one way that identity matters is that it determines what the codes of honor require of you . . . what behavior on your part commands (or loses) respect'.⁵³ That more equal honour codes existed between slaves and between slaves and freed persons outside their household is more than probable.⁵⁴ Specifically in their relations with their masters and in other relations on which their relationship with their master had a bearing, however, slaves in Athens were judged according to a specific 'code of honour' based primarily on their loyalty to their master that is especially clear from the sources we have examined.⁵⁵ Simply put, slaves loyal to their masters' interests (in, for example, Xenophon's opinion)

⁴⁹ Saller 1998; Harper 2011: 424–41; 2016b; Perry 2014.

⁵⁰ Stilwell 2000: 400, 398.

⁵¹ Ismard 2019b: 244–5. See, however, Roth in this volume, who shows that intrinsic to the logic of Aristotle's model is the notion that not all slaves are naturally suited for slavery and that they may attain freedom accordingly.

⁵² In contrast to Xenophon, who looked for concern for productive work (*Oec.* 12.8–9) and leadership skills (*Oec.* 13.4) in his *epitropoi*, Aristotle seems to have believed that both leadership and self-moderation were found exclusively in free men, on which see Deslauriers 2006: 55–6. Here also we can see how Aristotle's theory of natural slavery led him to ridiculous conclusions, causing him to overlook some of the very qualities that made slave *epitropoi* so valuable to their owners.

⁵³ Appiah 2010: 62.

⁵⁴ See in particular Mazzinghi Gori's and Vlassopoulos' chapters in this volume.

⁵⁵ Showing due respect in turn to their masters and other free persons was no doubt also expected of slaves. Pseudo-Aristotle, for example, stated that slaves should not be allowed to act with *hybris* in the passage quoted at the beginning of the chapter (1, 1344a29).

should be honoured or (in, for example, the *Odyssey*) are presented as honourable, and the opposite is true of slaves who act against their master's interests.⁵⁶

A translation of Katia de Queiros Mattoso's *To Be a Slave in Brazil* eloquently describes, in a different historical context, the development of master and slave relationships and its bearing on the slave's position in their household and (by extension) the wider community. These extracts capture well the terms on which a slave's social standing and honour are often based:

The slave's social being, his acceptance by free men . . . depended almost entirely on whether or not he proved to be loyal, obedient and humble . . . the slave who possessed [these] could acquire the competence, the know-how that brought power sufficient to regain some sense of identity . . . [Slaveholders] sought to make the slave a servant, a member of the extended family, to involve him in a *modus vivendi* that saved owners the expense of surveillance and diminished the risk of attacks on his person or property. The slave, for his part, acquired a certain social identity. He was assigned specific social roles and even gained some social influence, some importance in the eyes of free men, thanks to his master's backing and protection . . . In fact, the master struck a bargain with the slave: 'Give me your loyalty and I shall give you protection and my family's identity.'⁵⁷

Though de Queiro Mattoso does not refer to honour explicitly, it is closely tied to the social identity and social standing to which she refers. Though she is here speaking of slaves generally, she shortly goes on to note that the slaves who received the highest standing in their master's household became overseers, stewards and group leaders. In other words, the slave hierarchy that is integral to our Greek writer's recommendations that honour be provided to slaves is reflected in this social context too.

One should observe that the positions held by those at the top of Brazil's slave hierarchy were reserved for enslaved men. Gender is a factor that usually has an immense impact on the 'honour code' an individual is expected to follow, as is evident from the summary of male and female spheres of honour discussed above. For Greek slaves, too, gender dictated the roles they were assigned in the Greek household and kept enslaved women from entering into a managerial class of slaves and increasing their ability to negotiate for honour in any great number. In my opinion, however, the similarly limited terms on which both male and female slaves were accorded honour according to mainstream social norms (exclusively by showing loyalty to the interests of their master) also bears out the contention of Glazebrook that slaves had a 'lack of a recognised gender identity'.⁵⁸ This, however, is an issue there is not the space here to adequately discuss.

⁵⁶ On 'good' and 'bad' slaves as defined by their loyalty to their master and the respective treatment of these slaves, see Thalmann 1998b: 1996: 98, 137–9; and (comparing the *Odyssey* to the *Oeconomicus* specifically) Porter 2021b: 261–74.

⁵⁷ De Queiros Mattoso 1986: 88–9.

⁵⁸ Glazebrook 2017: n.p. Thalmann 1998a: 33 notes that though the gender of female slaves in the *Odyssey* is important to their presentation in the poem to a degree, 'female slaves are granted gender within only narrow limits, when it is convenient for rationalizing their subjection'. Spelmann 1988: 41–3, 52–4 points out that though gender governs the place which Aristotle assigns to free persons in his *Politics*, it is significant that it does not govern the position of slaves in his work.

De Queiro Mattoso also notes, in the pages following the above quotation, the ample evidence for violent responses to slave resistance that we also find in a Brazilian context. It is reminiscent of the stark contrast between the rewards offered to Eumaeus and Philoetius and the brutal execution of disloyal slaves in the *Odyssey*, which similarly portrays in the most extreme of fashions how a slave's honour was dependent on their cooperation with a master's goals and to be immediately withdrawn if they felt their interests to be at risk. In the Sokoto Caliphate, similarly, royal slaves' 'social esteem was located in their office, position and responsibilities (which were dramatically determined by individual ability, personality, and relationship with the emir)'. Consequently, 'slave honour was both transitory and precarious'.⁵⁹ One might argue that this form of honour cannot fairly be counted as such, because a master extended it and could easily withdraw it at any point. Xenophon, for his part, believed the treatment of slaves with honour to be commensurate with their being treated as citizens, in other words as not of their status. By pairing his statement that slaves should be honoured and treated as *kaloí kagathoi* with the claim that he treats them *as if* (ὥσπερ) they were free persons (14.9), he implies that, ideologically, any honour shown them was more than a slave was owed. Hypothetically speaking, however, the recognition of any individual's claim to honour can be revoked at any time. An individual's choice to do so would depend at least partially on the perceived morality of such an action and its consequences. Slaves are not any different in this most general of respects, even if the consequences for them of losing honour were likely to be more severe and more regularly include extreme forms of violence.

In short, I am not arguing that slave status had no effect on Athenian slaves' honour but rather that the honour system in which Greek slaves operated was not the same as that of free persons and depended to an extent on the economic function they performed for their master. The core thing to recognise is that relationships between masters and slaves were interpersonal relationships between humans and were (in certain historical and intra-societal contexts) governed by normal social considerations as a consequence, regardless of the legal and social factors that made the relationship highly unequal. Just as recent studies have analysed honour not only as the impetus for antagonism in society but a force that stabilises peaceful social relations at times, so too might it be seen to do so within the sphere of the household. Perhaps an obvious point, but one worth making that is especially clear from this discussion and this volume as a whole, is that the stabilisation of social relations may well benefit one group to the disadvantage of the other.

Conclusion

Supervision, forcible restraint, violent coercion and the provision of mere sustenance no doubt kept many slaves in a position where the capacity for independent action on which honour was often based rarely if ever factored into their relationships with their

⁵⁹ Stilwell 2000: 410. For evidence of the honour received by enslaved *actores* – private financial managers – and the perpetual threat of violence hanging over their heads in the Roman Empire, see Aubert 1994: 190.

master and other free people.⁶⁰ This chapter, however, has examined evidence that Athens' economy created the conditions in which many slaves were shown respect because it was in the interest of their master or others to do so. More specifically, I have argued that the independent work of other slaves in Athens and other parts of the Greek world necessitated the reciprocation of some form of honour from their master for their work. This honour was particular in that it was based predominantly or even entirely on the benefits they provided to their master, but it does qualify as honour, derived as it was from their position as trusted members of the *oikos* and their actions – by which they demonstrated loyalty to their master.

If we want to understand more fully the relationship between masters and slaves, the way to progress is probably to look in more detail at societies in which these relationships are better documented, some of which have been referred to above. Nevertheless, by their explicit apportioning of honour to slaves according to their relative value to their master, the writings of pseudo-Aristotle and Xenophon are extremely important to our understanding of human bondage. It is clear to me, at least, that to describe the relationships of slaves, even with their master, as by definition without any honour, is an oversimplification that overlooks the complexity of slavery's history and the humanity of slaves. Dishonour and degradation were very real aspects of slavery in Athens. But the true tragedy of Athenian slavery is not that slaves were categorically denied all honour, but rather that they lived in a system willing to honour them for their complicity in their own exploitation.

⁶⁰ The honour they managed to accumulate for themselves in networks of other slaves (including the supervisors under whom they worked) is discussed in other chapters of this volume, in particular that of Vlassopoulos.

