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*Unconventional Accounting Women in Aristophanes’
Thesmophoriazusae, Lysistrata, and Ecclesiazusae*

Abstract

Women’s economic roles, as depicted in Aristophanes’ comedies, fit the broader gendered *topos* of the moralizing tradition that opposes feminine nature as designed for the home and masculine disposition as oriented to the outside. Women such as market vendors and innkeepers, who work outside the οἶκος and do not belong to the domestic-oriented paradigm, undergo a stereotypic depiction as poor, shameless and aggressive as well. Besides these two clichés, a survey of Aristophanes’ comedies reveals sporadic non-conventional portraits of women involved in businesses. Such evidence is more remarkable in comedies that play with the opposition or reversal of male and female roles. The paper collects relevant passages from Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae*, *Lysistrata*, and *Ecclesiazusae* on not-stereotypic attitudes of female citizens of Athens towards labor and wealth, and interprets them in the frame of Aristophanes’ dramaturgy and in relationship to the targeted male audience.

Nella determinazione dei compiti di carattere economico attribuiti alle donne, le commedie di Aristofane non si allontanano dal più ampio *topos* di gender della tradizione moraleggiante, che oppone la naturale disposizione della femmina per una vita passata all’interno della casa all’indole del maschio, proiettato invece verso il mondo esterno. Donne che lavorano fuori dall’οἶκος e si sottraggono all’ideale della vita domestica subiscono al contrario una rappresentazione stereotipata che le vuole povere, sfacciate e aggressive. Oltre a questi due cliché, l’esame delle commedie di Aristofane rivela tuttavia anche sporadici ritratti di donne coinvolte in attività economiche non convenzionali per i parametri del genere comico, e queste tracce sono tanto più rilevanti nei drammi che giocano con l’opposizione e l’inversione dei ruoli maschili e femminili. L’articolo raccoglie passi significativi per lo studio di comportamenti non convenzionali di donne Ateniesi nei confronti del lavoro e della ricchezza dalle commedie *Tesmoforiazuse*, *Lisistrata* ed *Ecclesiazuse*, e li interpreta nel quadro della drammaturgia di Aristofane e in relazione al destinatario privilegiato dell’autore.

In Aristophanes’ comedies it is common that female characters refer to their typical task as ταμειεύειν, i.e., “dispensing”, “administrating” (domestic) wealth (*Th.* 419, *Lys.* 495, *Eccl.* 600), and to themselves as ταμίαι (*Ec.* 212), i.e., “housewives” and dispensers of domestic resources. Economic activity according to its etymological meaning of “administration of the house” (from οἶκος, “house”, and νέμω, “to distribute”, “to administer”), i.e., of the resources of the household, appears indeed to be deep-rooted in the (male) imaginary about women in dramatic sources from the classical Greek tradition. Already early evidence of the compounds οἰκόνομος (“administrator [of the house/household]”) and οἰκονομέω (“to administer [the household]”) refer clearly to

women, e.g., in Aesch. *Ag.* 155 (Clytemnestra as οἰκονόμος) and Soph. *El.* 190 (Electra referring about her own activity as οἰκονομεῖν)¹. Attributing domestic management to women fits into a broader gendered *topos* of feminine nature as designed for the home and its interior, opposed to masculine temperament as oriented instead to the outside world, which is found in Attic dramas from the Classical time². This view corresponds to the idea found in the fourth-century economic treatises written by Xenophon and Pseudo-Aristotle, that men bring wealth and supplies from the outside, whereas women look after and manage them³. The above-mentioned aspect of self-depiction of aristophanic women, both as individual characters and as choral ensemble, can be therefore easily explained according to this common place, which appears even more consistent in the context of specific features of Old Comedy like exaggeration of stereotypes and conflicts, male-perspective and male-targeting⁴. Women who do not fit into this first conventional formula usually appear in aristophanic comedies as part of a second stereotyped group: market vendors and innkeepers – who work outside the οἶκος, are involved in small business activities, and belong to humble social classes – are characterized by shamelessness and fierceness⁵. This distinction in comedy is – as is typical of the genre – a simplification and exaggeration of reality; however, it reflects the fact that the Athenians applied different standards of appropriate behavior to women, depending on their social and economic class⁶.

Apart from these two manifest stereotypes⁷, the examination of Aristophanes' comedies reveals occasional non-conventional mentions and sketches of women dealing with money or working. Notably, such traces are more striking in dramas whose core is

¹ See ZOEPFFEL (2006, 49f.).

² E.g., Aesch. *Sept.* 200f.; Eur. fr. 521 and 927 K.; comic reversal in Ar. *Eccl.* 464; Xen. *Oec.* 7, 20-25 and 30f. Feminist, women's, and gender's studies, since concerned with the construction of gender stereotypes and their actual occurrence beyond literature, gave a significant contribution to the discussion. See (selection) FOLEY (1981); VERSNEL (1987, 59-62); VERNANT (1988, 162f.); POMEROY (1994, 31-39, 58-61); SCHNURR-REDFORD (1996, with historical perspective); ZOEPFFEL (2006, 314-18).

³ Xen. *Oec.* 7, 39f. (with commentary by POMEROY 1994); Aristot. *Oec.* 1344a (with commentary by ZOEPFFEL 2006).

⁴ On comic (in particular aristophanic) shamelessness, see HALLIWELL (2008, 249-63). On male-perspective and male-targeting, see e.g., HENDERSON (1991, 134f.). The organisation of the dramatic competitions – being a *political* event – was completely entrusted to men, see the evidence in CSAPO – SLATER (1994, 139-64).

⁵ Cf. Ar. *Vesp.* 497-99, 1388-1414; *Lys.* 456-60, 563f.; *Ran.* 857f.; *Pl.* 426-28. See EHRENBERG (1951, 114f.).

⁶ POMEROY (1975, 60). The place of women in classical Athens has been the subject of extensive studies, with a wide range of different interpretations, due both to the choice of sources and to ideological factors. See (selection) JUST (1989); LEWIS (2002); PRITCHARD (2014). For an overview of approaches to the topic, see MCCLURE (2020, 3-18, with further references).

⁷ These stereotypes apply to women citizens, not to female slaves, whose case is not discussed in this paper.

the opposition or reversal of male/female roles, i.e., *Thesmophoriazusae*, *Lysistrata*, and *Ecclesiazusae*. Since interpretations of these plays mainly focus on the aspect of political/utopian criticism⁸, the incidental combination of economic (in its broader sense) aspects and the feminine dimension has not yet been sufficiently considered and has received only scattered attention by critics in the framework of commentaries. It is therefore worth questioning the significance of these few references. Are they unintentional 'intrusions' that breach the comic exaggeration and allow elements of real life to shine through? Reading in Aristophanes' work the unconscious reflection of reality through the veil of comic distortion can be a fruitful approach⁹, which, however, must be supplemented with thorough considerations of aristophanic dramaturgy in the context of comedy as a dramatic – and thus stylized – genre. To better understand these seemingly exceptional textual passages and offer a fresh outlook on aristophanic portrayal of women's attitudes towards labor and wealth, the paper collects and examines relevant sections on not-stereotypic economic¹⁰ knowledge and tasks assigned to female citizens of Athens from the texts of *Thesmophoriazusae*, *Lysistrata*, and *Ecclesiazusae* (i.e. encompassing the years 411-391 BCE), and interprets them in the frame of Aristophanes' dramaturgy.

1. *Money-making women*

To what extent Athenian women took part in the economic processes of individual households is a debated question¹¹. Even so, it is plausible to accept, on the basis of different sources, that women, albeit unofficially¹², contributed more or less actively (depending on individual economic, social, and personal circumstances) to the material maintenance of their οἶκος¹³. Following this reconstruction, it would then seem legitimate to recognize in a few unconventional passages from Aristophanes the acknowledgement

⁸ See (selection): ZIMMERMANN (1983); MASTROMARCO (1997); ZEITLIN (1999); MORWOOD (2010); ZIMMERMANN (2017); ZANETTO (2020); GRILLI – MOROSI (2020-2021).

⁹ For this approach, see EHRENBERG (1951). On the historical and sociological value of Aristophanes' work as source, see also SPIELVOGEL (2001, 13-26, and 27-30 on the history of studies).

¹⁰ "Economic" should be understood here and in the following in the broader meaning of "relating to the management of domestic or private income and expenditure; relating to (personal) monetary considerations, financial" (*OED* s.v. "economic", <https://www.oed.com>).

¹¹ HARRIS (2014, 186).

¹² On economic rights of women and their limitation, see SCHAPS (1979); JUST (1989).

¹³ To give just one example: textiles were for sure produced by women (and slaves under their supervision), and the surplus could be exchanged/sold for cash. See FOXHALL (1989); HARRIS (1992, 2014). On the other hand, other studies (e.g., DE STE. CROIX 1970; SCHAPS 1979) stress the subordination of women to their male relatives and emphasize their exclusion from public life.

of the economic importance of women. However, a deeper analysis of the passages in their dramatic context challenges this explanation and requires further examination:

Ar. *Eccl.* 236¹⁴

χρήματα πορίζειν <δ'> εὐπορώτατον γυνή

There is nothing more resourceful than a woman when it comes to finding financial resources¹⁵

Ar. *Eccl.* 441f.

γυναῖκα δ' εἶναι πρᾶγμα ἔφη νοβυστικὸν
καὶ χρηματοποιόν

And he said that a woman was a being full of intelligence, and good at raising income¹⁶

The two passages from *Ecclesiazusae* are taken directly or indirectly from the protagonist's speeches supporting the necessity of handing over the power to the women and express the idea that women are good at "making money" (l. 236: χρήματα πορίζειν, l. 442: χρηματοποιόν). Although it has been seen here an allusion to women's ability in managing the household's resources¹⁷, this explanation is not satisfactory, since already at ll. 211f. women are called ταμίαι and ἐπίτροποι (good "managers" and "controllers" of the household), which is the standard lexicon for housewives (see above). Ll. 236 and 442 are instead referring to the typical men's tasks as they are presented in the economical treatises by Xenophon and Pseudo-Aristotle: the verb πορίζειν of l. 236 occurs also in Aristot. *Oec.* 1344a and conveys the meaning of "providing" something – χρήματα/wealth – from the outside, and the adjective χρηματοποιός has the literally meaning of "money-making" (cf. also Xen. *Oec.* 7, 39f.; 20, 15). Why then does Aristophanes attribute to women an atypical capacity according to the economic-moralist imagery?

Rather than a hint of the real situation, this unconventional definition can be better explained as a rhetorical expedient. The presence in ll. 441f. of the two neologisms νοβυστικός and χρηματοποιός confirms the rhetorical and probably euripidean flavor

¹⁴ The Greek texts are taken from WILSON (2007).

¹⁵ Translation by SOMMERSTEIN (1998).

¹⁶ Translation by SOMMERSTEIN (1998).

¹⁷ SOMMERSTEIN (1998, 160 and 179).

of the passage¹⁸. Both lexicon and context hint at parody: to induce men, depicted as greedy for wealth (ll. 176-88), to hand over the power on the city to women, the protagonist Praxagora twists the standard imagery of men providing resources and women looking after them (i.e., in comic degradation, devouring them) through rhetorical (euripidean) strategies. Instead of a serious allusion to a standard skill, the idea of money-making women – expressed by freshly invented compounds – turns out to be a rhetorical construction designed to persuade stereotypical rapacious men.

2. *Women and wage labor*

A comparison between literary sources and other types of sources (e.g., epigraphs, iconographic sources) shows a particularly strong conflict between ideology, expressed by the former, and facts, disclosed by the latter, with regard to the evaluation of women's wage labor¹⁹. One should therefore expect the comedy, as a (although critic) mirror of Athenian ideology, to share a negative and demeaning image of manual labor performed by women. This assumption seems to be confirmed only partly by a passage from Aristophanes, where, however, the negative connotation of labor is not a means to demean anyone, but actually creates pathetic dramatic effects:

Ar. *Th.* 446-52, 456-58

ἔμοι γὰρ ἀνήρ ἀπέθανεν μὲν ἐν Κύπρῳ
παιδάρια πέντε καταλιπών, ἀγὼ μόλις
στεφανηπλοκοῦσ' ἔβοσκον ἐν ταῖς μυρρίναις.
τέως μὲν οὖν ἀλλ' ἡμικάκως ἐβοσκόμην·
νῦν δ' οὗτος ἐν ταῖσιν τραγωδίας ποιῶν 450
τοὺς ἄνδρας ἀναπέπεικεν οὐκ εἶναι θεούς·
ὥστ' οὐκέτ' ἐμπολῶμεν οὐδ' εἰς ἡμισυ.

...

ἀλλ' εἰς ἀγορὰν ἄπειμι· δεῖ γὰρ ἀνδράσιν 456
πλέξαι στεφάνους συνθηματιαίους εἴκοσιν.

My husband met his end in Cyprus, leaving behind five young children, whom I kept fed, just about, by plaiting garlands in the myrtle market. Well, for quite a time I made – well, only a *half*-miserable living. (450) But now that man, composing away

¹⁸ See USSHER (1973, 107) and VETTA (1989, 189): derivatives in -ικός and new compounds characterize in Aristophanes' comedies intellectuals (some examples in *Eq.* 1378-80; *Nub.* 1172f.; *Th.* 54-56), and the psychological characterization of feminine characters recalls euripidean passages like *Med.* 1085f. or *Andr.* 85.

¹⁹ Particularly striking is the contrast between the depiction of nurses in Demosth. 57 and the evidence from tombstones, where nurses are defined with adjectives as φίλη or χρηστή. See BROCK (1994, 336f.).

in the tragedy district, has got all the men believing that there aren't any gods, and the result is we're not doing even half the amount of business now. [...] (456) Now I'll be off to the Agora; I've got to fill an order for plaiting garlands for a party of twenty men²⁰.

In the passage from *Thesmophoriazusae* an Athenian woman is claiming in front of the other Athenian women²¹ gathered in assembly during the Thesmophoria festival against the tragedian Euripides for the disastrous consequences of the impious contents of his tragedies (ll. 451f.). In l. 449 the orator presents herself as στεφανηπλοκουῖσα, a woman who plaits garlands. She carries out her activity outside the house, in the marketplace²² (l. 448: ἐν ταῖς μυρρίναις, the myrtle market, which has to be a specific spot in the *agora*; l. 457: εἰς ἀγορὰν ἄπειμι). However, the woman begins her speech with a preamble on how she ended up in the situation she finds herself in, namely the death of her husband and the need to feed her children. The woman is thus presented in the traditional role of wife and mother. Conducting – albeit of necessity – an activity in the marketplace nonetheless brings her closer to the denigrated category of saleswomen and mistresses²³ and thus violates the *topos* of female honorable citizens as better suited for domestic life. Although most commentators usually interpret this anonymous character as a garland vendor²⁴, she identifies her job two times as the manual activity of στεφανηπλοκεῖν (l. 448), πλέξαι στεφάνους (l. 458)²⁵, whereas the verb for “dealing” appears at l. 452 in the first plural form ἐμπολῶμεν. The passage does not provide precise indications on the organization of the business: the woman presents herself explicitly as engaged in manual labor and makes a generic plural reference to the actual business activity. This suggests that she could be better identified instead of an independent vendor as a hired laborer in a broader business. There are hints of organized workshops in at least other sectors (e.g., tanning, cf. Ar. *Eq.* 744 and *schol. vet.* (VEΓΘM) Ar. *Eq.* 744a Jones – Wilson), so that it is plausible that this figure is to be better understood as a paid laborer²⁶.

The idea of paid work as something demeaning is attested some decades later by Demosthenes²⁷; presenting it as a result of compelling circumstances was probably a way

²⁰ Translation by SOMMERSTEIN (2001²).

²¹ On the identity of the gathered women in *Thesmophoriazusae* as Athenian female citizens, cf. ll. 293f., 329f., 540f.

²² On the agora as one of the Athenian trading areas, see SPIELVOGEL (2001, 132-43).

²³ See above.

²⁴ SOMMERSTEIN (2001², 185); PRATO (2001, 53); AUSTIN – OLSON (2004, 191).

²⁵ See the translation by SPIELVOGEL 2001, 135: «Blumenbinderin».

²⁶ On wage-labour see SCHAPS (1979, 18). Against the idea of an organised production sector – that went beyond the individual craftsman – is EHRENBURG (1951, 123-36). On production and sales in the agora of Athens, see BETTALLI (1985, 31, 33); HARRIS (2014).

²⁷ Demosth. 57, 31. 35. 45. On women and labour in classical Athens, see BROCK (1994).

to make it acceptable. And indeed, the woman had explained that her husband is dead – maybe in a war-related event in Cipro²⁸ – and she has five young children (παιδάρια πέντε) to bring up. The lines are full of *pathos*: the sympathetic dative ἐμοί at l. 446, the pathetic diminutive παιδάρια and the adverb μόλις (“just about”) at l. 447, the verb ἐβοσκόμην (usually used for animals) at l. 449²⁹.

In the light of prejudicial understanding of wage-labor, the speech of the garland plaiter turns out to cover two main rhetorical functions. On the one side, Aristophanes exploits the *pathos* of a well-known (probably war) situation, i.e., the widowed woman forced to work for raising up her children, and whose already low (l. 449: ἡμικάκως) income is undermined by Euripides’ poetic activity, to enhance with a poignant portrait the women’s complaint against the tragedian. On the other side, the speech of a woman working outside the οἶκος consents to broaden the claims against Euripides beyond the plane charge of misogyny, which has already been developed in the long intervention of the first orator at ll. 383–432, and to introduce the other big reproach typical for intellectuals at the end of the 5th century BCE, i.e., the accusation of impiety³⁰.

3. *Women as money lenders and borrowers*

Lending money at interest is another economic activity that is not canonical for literary female depiction, since it is aimed at multiplying capital and is neither limited to its administration, nor is a kind of small business activity. Not only ideology denied women financial independency, but also Athenian laws in force at the time of Aristophanes limited women in their legal and economic conduct to a great extent³¹. Nevertheless, in reality the sources attest to several cases in which women were able to take part in economic activities that went beyond what was permitted by law³². Lending is an example of the contradiction between legal limitations and the actual handling of loans by female agents, even though they had to operate with permission of their *kyrios*³³ – the man who was legally in charge of them. The question then arises, whether the few mentions of loans to or by women in Aristophanes’ “female” comedies reflect real practices of this

²⁸ For the identification of the event, see SOMMERSTEIN (2001², 185); PRATO (2001, 243); against the identification of a war-related event, AUSTIN – OLSON (2004, 191).

²⁹ For the rhetorical construction of *pathos* here, see AUSTIN – OLSON (2004, 191-93).

³⁰ Cf. for example Socrates in Ar. *Nub.* 367.

³¹ JUST (1989, 13-39); financial transactions had to not exceed the value of a medimnus of barley, cf. the comic reversal of Ar. *Eccl.* 1025 with commentary by VETTA (1989).

³² HUNTER (1989).

³³ SCHAPS (1979, 63-65); HARRIS (1992).

activity, or the poet pursues a deliberate dramaturgical purpose in breaking the ideological construct of the comic world:

III.a. Ar. *Th.* 839-45

... τῷ γὰρ εἰκός, ὦ πόλις,
τὴν Ὑπερβόλου καθῆσθαι μητέρ' ἡμφιεσμένην 840
λευκὰ καὶ κόμας καθεῖσαν πλησίον τῆς Λαμάχου,
καὶ δανείζειν χρήμαθ'; ἢ χρῆν, εἰ δανείσειέν τινι
καὶ τόκον πράττειτο, διδόναι μηδέν' ἀνθρώπων τόκον,
ἀλλ' ἀφαιρεῖσθαι βία τὰ χρήματ' εἰπόντας τοδί,
"ἄξια γοῦν εἶ τόκου τεκοῦσα τοιοῦτον τόκον." 845

[...] How can it be fair, you citizens, (840) for the mother of Hyperbolus to sit there, dressed in white and with flowing hair, close to the mother of Lamachus, and for her to be lending money too? What *ought* to happen if she dared lend to anyone and demand interest, no one at all should pay her any, but they should forcibly seize her capital with these words: (845) "You're a fine one to be making interest-bearing loans, after bearing a son like the one you bore!"³⁴.

The passage appears at the end of the parabasis – when the chorus breaks the plot's flow to address the audience – of *Thesmophoriazusae* (ll. 785-845). The whole parabasis plays with the comparison between men and women and provocatively aims at proofing women's excellence in matter of public usefulness. The depiction of roles and the different tasks and behaviors assigned to the two groups matches the well-known ideological stereotypes and reflects of course the male poet's point of view as well as gaze³⁵. Following argument is brought: while men do exploit public careers to increase their wealth and show off (ll. 811-20), women do not. Instead, the latter offer the State its best resources, i.e., their sons – but of course, this applies only if the sons are excellent ones (ll. 830-35).

At ll. 839-45 the chorus focuses on a concrete example of bad woman as mother of a bad son, i.e., Hyperbolus, the city's leading politician after Cleon's death in 422 BCE until his ostracism in 416³⁶. The chorus addresses its blame to the audience for letting

³⁴ Translation by SOMMERSTEIN (2001²).

³⁵ «Instead, women as depicted here spend their time having parties in one another's houses (esp. 795–6, cf. 792) or attending festivals (834–5), richly dressed, if possible (840–1, cf. 823); and when they are at home, they peep out into the street (790, 797) and pilfer food from their husbands (812–13). Alternatively, they are prostitutes (805 with n.). The values the parabasis invokes and supports, meanwhile, are almost exclusively masculine and public, even when the women claim them for themselves. What matters is to serve bravely in battle (804–7, 824–9) and do one's official duties honestly and completely (808-9, 811–12), and the only positive thing a woman can do is to produce a good son» (AUSTIN – OLSON 2004, 263).

³⁶ Though he continued to carry out his business in the city through his relatives; see AUSTIN – OLSON (2004, 275).

Hyperbolus' mother exhibit in public signs of great wealth (ll. 840f.: ἡμφιεσμένην / λευκὰ καὶ κόμας καθεῖσαν)³⁷ and sit near the mother of the honored commander Lamachus³⁸, and for letting her lend money (l. 842: δανείζειν χρήμαθ') at interest (ll. 843, 845: τόκον, τόκου)³⁹. The comicality of the section does not exploit the comic reversal of feminine and masculine roles, in contrast, e.g., to Ar. *Lys.* 488-92; *Eccl.* 442, 461f. The clue of the passage is clearly the double meaning of τόκος at ll. 843-45, "childbirth" and therefore "offspring", but also metaphorically "interest": the woman deserves to receive a τόκος/interest worth of the τόκος/child she gave the city, and since it would have been better for the city that Hyperbolus had never been born, she doesn't deserve any payment back.

That Aristophanes refers to a real episode is very likely, otherwise the tirade would fall short of efficacy: commentators assign some real basis to it⁴⁰ and recognize a kind of informal activity⁴¹. Nevertheless, the target here is not the woman herself as performing an illegal or indecorous activity; Aristophanes might exploit a behavior that was considered not honorable for women by his audience to strengthen the abusing effects of the parabasis against the politician Hyperbolus and ultimately to reproach male political agents, i.e., the citizen sitting in the theatre. The underlying claim against the audience is to treat in the same manner the mothers of worthy and unworthy citizens, and thus not to punish those who damage the city instead of doing the city's good. Departing from all comic clichés about women and showing up in the critical core of the play, the portrait of Hyperbolus' mother publicly lending money is a powerful image of shamelessness aimed at striking the civic pride of the audience.

III.b. Ar. *Lys.* 1048-56

ἀλλ' ἐπαγγελλέτω πᾶς ἀνὴρ καὶ γυνή,
εἴ τις ἀργυρίδιον
δεῖται λαβεῖν, μνᾶς ἢ δύ' ἢ
τρῆϊς· ὡς ἔσω 'στὶν κᾶχομεν βαλλάντια.

1050

³⁷ AUSTIN – OLSON (2004, 276).

³⁸ On Lamachus, see AUSTIN – OLSON (2004, 276).

³⁹ On lending, borrowing and usury (in particular as depicted in Aristophanes), see SPIELVOGEL (2001, 58-64).

⁴⁰ SOMMERSTEIN 2001², 209–210; AUSTIN – OLSON (2004, 276f.). SCHAPS (1979, 65) is instead of the opinion that «nothing can be made of this», since Aristophanes is interested only in the pun with τόκος, see below.

⁴¹ See above, and in particular SCHAPS (1979, on lending and borrowing 63-67); HARRIS (1992, 309f., 319-21); CANTARELLA (2005, 247-49). Another aristophanic passage from *Ecclesiazusae* (ll. 446-49) hints at informal lending, although in this last case the lending must be understood as a kind of private favors' exchange (l. 446: συμβάλλειν πρὸς ἀλλήλας; l. 448: μόνας μόναις, οὐ μαρτύρων ἐναντίον) without economic significance.

κᾶν ποτ' εἰρήνη φανῆ,
ὅστις ἂν νυνὶ δανείσῃται παρ' ἡμῶν, 1055
ἂν λάβῃ μηκέτ' ἀποδοῶ

So let every man and woman notify us, 1048/49
Whoever needs to have a spot 1050
Of money, two or three minas, because it's in our homes
And we've got purses for it.
And if ever peace makes its appearance,
Anyone who takes out a loan from us now 1055
Will no longer have to repay it – if he's had it!⁴²

The choral song of *Lysistrata* 1044-71 is performed by the reunited chorus of men and women (l. 1042: κοινῆ) and is a kind of satirical song (*Spottlied*) not related to the plot⁴³. Women, as like as men, are invited by the chorus to take out a loan (l. 1055: δανείσῃται – it is the verb for loans and implies the charging of an interest) in case they need money (ll. 1050f.: ἀργυρίδιον and μνᾶς), and are promised not to have to pay it back (l. 1056: μηκέτ' ἀποδοῶ) in case the war will end (l. 1054). However, there are many signals that the promise is not to be taken seriously⁴⁴, like the contrast between the diminutive ἀργυρίδιον (l. 1050) and the generous amount of money promised (ll. 1051f.: μνᾶς ἢ δύ' ἢ / τρεῖς)⁴⁵, the protasis ἂν λάβῃ (l. 1056) expressing contingency, and later the final *aprosdoketon* (l. 1071: ἡ θύρα κεκλήσεται, “the door will be – shut”)⁴⁶.

Although the ironically alleged opportunity for women to take a loan is granted exactly in the same way as for men, it shouldn't be seen here any implication about women's actual economic autonomy⁴⁷. The equal treatment of men and women beyond the usual gender stereotypes can be explained in the frame of the dramatical action: the

⁴² Translation by SOMMERSTEIN (1998²).

⁴³ ZIMMERMANN (1985, 186f.).

⁴⁴ On this kind of invitations to spectators, see HENDERSON (1987, 190). Cf. Ar. *Eccl.* 1144-49.

⁴⁵ On the value of a mina, see HITZL (2000).

⁴⁶ The passage has also been interpreted as the only explicit acknowledgement in ancient comedy of the presence of women in the audience (SOLOMOS 1974, 300 n. 11; SOMMERSTEIN 1998², 208). The explanation, however, is not satisfactory (see HENDERSON 1987, 191: «Not necessarily indicating the presence of women among the spectators»), since in l. 1044 the audience is addressed directly as ὄνδρες, whereas the exhortation to πᾶς ἀνὴρ καὶ γυνή in ll. 1048f. appears in the 3rd person (ἐπαγγελλέτω) and doesn't imply the presence of the addressees. In the surviving plays, the poet addresses explicitly only to men, but there are hints to women's presence in the audience, see (selection) PICKARD-CAMBRIDGE (1968, 264f.); DOVER (1972, 16f.); HENDERSON (1991); CSAPO – SLATER (1994, 286f.); GERÖ – JOHNSON (2001); ANDRISANO – PAVINI (2006); ROSELLI (2014, 243-46).

⁴⁷ E.g., SOMMERSTEIN (1998², 208) suggests that the poet is addressing intentionally financially independent women.

unification of the two choirs, male and female, has just taken place, and the song should celebrate the restored harmony between them (l. 1042)⁴⁸.

Conclusions

Even in plays like *Thesmophoriazusae*, *Lysistrata* or *Ecclesiazusae*, where women take up a prominent role and succeed in seizing political competences reserved in the actual community to men, lexicon and imaginary still play the most time within the οἶκος stereotype (e.g., *Lys.* 493-97, 567-70; *Eccl.* 673-76). The very few exceptions – apart from saleswomen, who also conform to the cliché of shamelessness and aggressiveness – are then even more remarkable.

Starting from general statements about money-making women, the paper analyzed textual passages attributing non stereotypical economic activities to women, i.e., cases of wage-labor and lending activities. Among the examined examples, the passages from *Ecclesiazusae* (ll. 236 and 441f.) about women and money making do not refer to a concrete situation, but are part of rhetorical stratagems, as the lexical features of the passages prove. The invitation to both women and men to take out a loan at ll. 1048-56 of *Lysistrata* is also a pure verbal formula meant to celebrate the reconciliation of the two choirs in the frame of the choral *Spottlied*. The passages from *Thesmophoriazusae*, respectively on hired labor (ll. 446-52, 456-58) and moneylending (ll. 839-45), refer instead to concrete imagines strengthened by evocative narrative (ll. 446-52, 456-58) or lexicon (ll. 839-45). They aim to awaken emotions of pity or shame in the audience. Their emotional strength resides precisely in the fact that they present situations not tolerable by the ethics implied in aristophanic comedies, where the standard female citizen has her place inside the home to manage family resources, whereas outside the home it is only the poor, impudent woman who operates and conducts small business. The violation of the cliché therefore endorses the cliché itself and suggests that Aristophanes exploits basic assumptions rooted in moralizing traditions and dominated by a male perspective, in order to better address the part of the audience that shares such prejudices and point of view, as the judgement of this specific audience segment is particularly relevant for determining the outcome of the competition.

⁴⁸ See also HENDERSON (1987, 190); ROBSON (2010, 49-51).

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