

Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*: Ischomachus' Management of Slaves

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Abstract

In the *Oeconomicus* the management of slaves presents some very interesting aspects: on the one hand widespread practices, like purchase, sale, leasing and manumission of slaves, are completely ignored; on the other we can find some probably innovative practices as the prevailing tendency to a rewarding system based on merit and especially the attribution of command functions to some slaves, the *epitropoi*. Even more innovative the fact that it is acknowledged that at least some slaves, who hold offices of responsibility (the *epitropoi* and the housekeeper), are endowed with *enkrateia*, which is the foundation of virtue according to Xenophon's Socrates. This seems to some extent to anticipate a view destined to a decisive development in Hellenistic age, according to which virtue is accessible also to slaves.

Key-words: Slaves, *Epitropoi*, Housekeeper (*tamia*), *Enkrateia*, *Kalos kagathos*

Resumen

La gestión de los esclavos en el *Económico* presenta algunos aspectos muy interesantes: por un lado, se ignoran por completo prácticas muy extendidas como la compra, venta, arrendamiento y manumisión de esclavos; por otro lado, se puede encontrar algunas prácticas probablemente innovadoras, como la tendencia predominante hacia un sistema de recompensa basado en el mérito y especialmente la atribución de funciones de mando a ciertos esclavos, los *epitropoi*. Aún más innovador es el hecho de que se reconoce que al menos algunos esclavos, que desempeñan cargos de responsabilidad (los *epitropoi* y la administradora), están dotados de *enkrateia*, que es el fundamento de la virtud según el Sócrates de Jenofonte. Esto parece en cierta medida anticipar una visión destinada a un desarrollo decisivo en la época helenística, según la cual la virtud es accesible también a los esclavos.

Palabras clave: Esclavos, *Epitropoi*, Administradora (*tamia*), *Enkrateia*, *Kalos kagathos*

Introduction

Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, which has been an overlooked and underestimated work for a long time, benefits today from a remarkable interest, partly due to the new attention for Xenophon of these last decades. But the new interest for the *Oeconomicus* arises also from the main themes of this work: the management of the

family and the family property, according to two of the meanings of the term *oikos*¹. The second theme entails also a more general reflection on the economics of ancient societies and accordingly on its components, one of which is undoubtedly slavery. In ancient Greece male slaves were widely employed in agricultural work, mines² and production of goods of various kind³, while female slaves were employed in the activities within the house, especially in the traditional work of weaving. A fundamental text about slaves and in particular slaves employed by a rich landowner in his fields and, in the case of female slaves, in his house is the *Oeconomicus* or, more precisely, the second part of the *Oeconomicus*. This work indeed consists of two distinct parts, two Socratic dialogues: a first dialogue between Socrates and Critobulus (chapters 1-5) and a second dialogue between Socrates and Ischomachus (7-21), while chapter 6 serves as a connection between the two dialogues⁴. In the second dialogue Ischomachus, a wealthy Athenian landowner, a perfect *kalos kagathos* (*Oec.* 6, 17; 11, 3)⁵, explains to Socrates how he runs his *oikos*, *i.e.* his property and his family or, to be more accurate, his marriage⁶. In this paper I will deal only with the management of the property or rather with a fundamental component of its, the slaves.

¹ As is common knowledge, *oikos* means not simply house, but also family and family property.

² Xenophon himself deals with the employment of slaves in the mines in the *Poroi*.

³ Cf. *e.g.* Lys. XII 19: most of those 120 slaves were employed in the production of shields.

⁴ It is not improbable that the two dialogues were written in different periods: DELEBECQUE (1957), 363-376 places the composition of the second dialogue of the *Oeconomicus* (chapters 6-21) between the end of 362 and the beginning of 361; ROSCALLA (1991), 21-30 maintains that the *Oeconomicus* shows, through some significant inconsistencies, that it lacks a final review by his author: if this was caused by Xenophon's death, then the composition of the second dialogue and its fusion with the previous one could be postponed to a period even closer to Xenophon's death, for which, on the basis of *Por.* 5, 9, the year 355-354 seems to be a reliable *terminus post quem*. Anyway, the *Oeconomicus* is almost certainly a late work, chronologically close to the *Poroi*, usually regarded as Xenophon's last work: while the latter deals with the financial resources of Athens, the former deals with the management of the *oikos*, but for Xenophon *polis* and *oikos* differs only from a quantitative point of view (cf. below and n. 30).

⁵ A perfect "gentleman": this is the meaning of *kalos kagathos* in the *Oeconomicus*, where this term is undoubtedly endowed with a strong social and political connotation: cf. ROSCALLA (1991), 118-119 n. 6; 28 and n. 13. See also BOURRIOT (1995), I 316-318 and 325-335; BEVILACQUA (2018b), 48-55.

⁶ Cf. FOUCAULT (1984), 198: «L'Économique de Xénophon contient le traité de vie matrimoniale le plus développé que nous ait laissé la Grèce classique».

1. *The management of slaves*

The *oiketai*, the slaves⁷, are a part of the *oikos*, but not a homogeneous part. Among them a specific role and therefore a particular position belong to the *tamia*, the housekeeper, and to the *epitropos* or better the *epitropoi*⁸, since Ischomachus, from the first time that he mentions them, speaks about them in the plural (*Oec.* 12, 2). But before dwelling on the *tamia* and the *epitropoi* it is advisable to examine the principles that characterize the management of the slaves and, more generally, their treatment. In order to grasp and analyze these principles it is important however to pay attention to what Ischomachus does *not* say, because even omissions are often very significant.

1.1. *Omissions*

It is not difficult to notice that Ischomachus never suggests that his slaves may be sold. There is however a passage that could refer to this possibility: in *Oec.* 7, 41 Ischomachus, addressing his wife, says: “Other concerns of yours will be pleasant for you, wife, when you take a slave who knows nothing of spinning and make her skilled so that she is worth twice as much for you (*soi*); and when you take one who knows nothing of housekeeping or serving and make her skilled, faithful and good at serving so that she is worth a lot”. Ischomachus may refer to the increase in the use value of the slave, but might refer also to the increase in her exchange value⁹, an increase that would become important if the slave is sold. In this case the work of Ischomachus' wife would end up having a strong similarity with the practices of Ischomachus' father: if Ischomachus' father, starting to cultivate an unproductive plot of land, increased its exchange value and therefore could sell it with a remarkable profit margin (*Oec.* 20, 22-26)¹⁰, not otherwise Ischomachus' wife, making an unskilled

⁷ As is common knowledge, the most specific term for slaves is *douloi*, however it seems to me that in the *Oeconomicus oiketai* indicate undoubtedly the slaves (cf. *Oec.* 12, 3): thus also POMEROY (1994). CHANTRAINE (1949) instead translates it with “serviteurs”; not otherwise Lord (in STRAUSS 1970) and WATERFIELD (1990) translate it with “servants”; similarly NATALI (1988), ROSCALLA (1991) and DE MARTINIS (2013) translate it with “servi”.

⁸ About the different meanings of the Greek term *epitropos* see ROSCALLA (1991), 41-42 n. 29. As we will see later, in the *Oeconomicus* the *epitropoi* are the slaves who control and supervise the slaves employed in agricultural work. I prefer to use the term *epitropoi* without translating it into English, because I find all translations proposed (“stewards” Lord in STRAUSS 1970; “foremen” WATERFIELD 1990 and POMEROY 1994) unavoidably imprecise.

⁹ Much depends on how *soi* is understood, whether dative of advantage or ethical dative. In the former case the slave will be worth twice as much to the advantage of her mistress, because she will be able to work more wool and with a qualitatively superior outcome, therefore it will be her use value that doubles; if instead *soi* is understood as an ethical dative which indicate her mistress' satisfaction for her slave's increased value, then the value may be the market value, that is the exchange value.

¹⁰ On the activities of Ischomachus' father cf. BEVILACQUA (2023), 116-125.

slave skilled in some jobs, increases her exchange value. Therefore, if the slave is sold, it would entail a considerable profit compared to the money spent to buy her or to the money spent to support her until the sale, since she is probably a home born slave because Ischomachus never mentions any purchase of slaves. On the contrary when Socrates asks him whether he prefers to buy his *epitropoi* or to train personally the slaves chosen to become *epitropoi* (*Oec.* 12, 3), Ischomachus answers that he tries to train them himself (*Oec.* 12, 4), an answer that seems to exclude implicitly the purchase of other slaves. It is noteworthy that Ischomachus never dwells on the other possibility of getting new slaves, that is raising the children of his slaves. This possibility is mentioned by Ischomachus only *en passant*, when he maintains that slaves must not have children without their masters' permission (*Oec.* 9, 5). Although this is not said explicitly, to be allowed to have children is regarded as a reward for the good (*chrēstoi*) slaves, the slaves with whom their masters are pleased; moreover, in a kind of virtuous cycle, slaves' children ensure that their parents, grateful for such a reward, become *eunousteroi*, more endowed with good will towards their masters (*ibid.*). On the contrary, as POMEROY (1994), 298 points out, the author of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Oeconomicus* regards slaves' children as hostages in the hands of the master¹¹, as a tool to blackmail their parents.

Another aspect of slaves' condition, never mentioned by Ischomachus, is the possibility of being freed, which instead is proposed as a coveted reward in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Oeconomicus*¹². It is possible that Ischomachus considers enough the various rewards (to have children included) he gives to the slaves who behave properly. Ischomachus' slaves seem to be a closed community, where the number of its members remains tendentially constant: they indeed are not freed or sold and also the purchase of other slaves is never mentioned. Although nothing is said about this matter, the slaves who die are probably replaced by the home born slaves, the children of the *chrēstoi* slaves, presumably destined to become *chrēstoi* they too, following their parents' example. It is therefore a community that seems to be driven towards a qualitative improvement over time, a stable community, exempt from the changes caused by buying, selling or freeing the slaves. A situation very different from that of fourth century Athens, where slaves were bought, sold, rented, freed, as Xenophon

¹¹ [Arist.] *Oec.* I v 5-6, 1344b 12-21.

¹² [Arist.] *Oec.* I v 5-6, 1344b 12-21. Also Arist. *Pol.* VII 10, 1330a 32-33 maintains that it is advisable to propose freedom as a reward for slaves.

did know very well¹³: so we cannot rule out that Xenophon wanted in full awareness to propose an alternative model. We could take a step forward and suppose that perhaps this alternative model was the model that Xenophon himself put into practice (or tried to) in the happy years of Scillus, when after his military adventures he led the life of a country gentleman that he remembered with so vivid and nostalgic words in *An.* V 3, 7-13. Lastly we might wonder if the stable condition of Ischomachus' slaves is to some extent affected by the suggestion of the helot servitude, that Xenophon could see personally in Sparta¹⁴, at least about the fact that helots cannot be bought or sold. It is however a question destined to remain without an answer. Let us confine ourselves to regard the community of Ischomachus' slaves, a closed and stable community, as a model proposed to wealthy landowners.

1.2. Rewards

If now we put aside what Ischomachus does not say about slaves and examine what he *does* say, we should focus our attention especially on chapters 12-14. Ischomachus' guiding principle about the management of slaves is stated bluntly in *Oec.* 13, 12, where Ischomachus says: "I myself, then, by no means think the better workers should get the same as the worse ones and I praise the *epitropoi* when I see that they have distributed the best things to the most deserving workers"¹⁵. Here Ischomachus refers specifically to the slaves who are employed as workers¹⁶ (*Oec.* 13, 10) and for whom he provides the *epitropoi* with clothes and shoes of different quality

¹³ The *Poroi* shows that Xenophon was fully aware of these practices, so much so that he did not hesitate to suggest some of them.

¹⁴ Presumably Xenophon came to Sparta with Agesilaus after the battle of Coroneia in 394 and then moved to Scillus: we do not know how long he stayed in Sparta, probably some years.

¹⁵ Cf. *Mem.* III 4, 8; *An.* I 9, 14-15; *Cyr.* II 2, 18; cf. also *Oec.* 5, 15. In this statement we can grasp an echo of the debate on the two kinds of equality, the arithmetic equality, consisting of giving equal shares to all, and the geometrical (or proportionate) equality, consisting of giving to each according to merit: needless to say that the latter is supported not only by Xenophon, but also by Plato (*Grg.* 508a; *R.* VIII 558c; *Lg.* VI 757a-758a) and Isocrates (*Aerop.* 21-22; *Nic.* 14-15). The problem will be resumed and analyzed by Arist. *Pol.* V 1, 1301b 29-39; cf. also *ENV* 7, 1131b27-1132a6; VIII 9, 1158b30-31.

¹⁶ The term *ergastēr* indeed here refers to slave workers, as it is confirmed indirectly in [Arist.] *Oec.* I v 1, 1344a 26 (*ergatēs*). This does not exclude that in periods of intense activity (harvest or vintage) also free workers might be employed, but the fact that here the remuneration for these workers consists exclusively of clothes and shoes (*Oec.* 13, 10) and that there is no hint whatever of a cash pay makes it almost certain that these workers were slaves and slaves owned, not rented, because the latter received a *misthos*, partly destined to their maintenance while the remaining share was intended for the slave's owner. On the debate on free workers in agriculture see POMEROY (1994), 315-317. About rented slaves see VALENTE (2011), 111-114 with bibliography.

so that these things may be distributed according to merit (*ibid.*)¹⁷. Therefore Ischomachus maintains that it is advisable to treat the slaves differently and relies above all on rewarding the better workers¹⁸. It is true however that Ischomachus does not give up punishments, moving from the analogy he establishes between slaves and animals (*Oec.* 13, 6) and keeping in mind the training of colts and puppies,¹⁹ in which the reward and punishment system does not fail to ensure the desired outcome, the obedience (*Oec.* 13, 7-8). Ischomachus does not hesitate to state: “As for human beings it is possible to make them more obedient also by force of argument (*logōi*)²⁰, pointing out that it is to their advantage to obey; but for slaves the education that seems suitable to animals is very effective in teaching obedience²¹: if you indeed gratify their bellies in accordance with their desires, you can get plenty of results” (*Oec.* 13, 9)²². But this so *tranchant* judgement does not apply to all slaves, otherwise it would be very difficult to find slaves who could be educated to take up the role of *epitropoi*. Immediately afterwards indeed Ischomachus adds: “But the ambitious natures are spurred by praise as well: for some natures are hungry for praise not less than others are for food and drink” (*ibid.*).

There are slaves, so Ischomachus says, who are sensitive to praise, a fundamental element in aristocratic ethics. Ischomachus returns to these slaves a little later in a crucial passage of controversial interpretation and to some extent astonishing. These slaves are presumably those who have been chosen and trained to become *epitropoi*. Some of them however, although treated well, try to act unjustly, therefore Ischomachus explains that in this case he removes them from their office (*Oec.* 14, 8). Then he adds: “On the other hand if I learn that some are induced to be just (*dikaious einai*) not only because they obtain advantages through being just (*dia tēn*

¹⁷ In *Oec.* 13, 10 we can see clearly that Ischomachus’ slaves (better: male slaves) are divided in two well distinguished groups: the workers (*ergastēres*), *i.e.* the slaves employed in agricultural work and the *epitropoi*, who control the work of the former and are also able to act for their master in his absence (*Oec.* 12, 2). That the *epitropoi* too are slaves emerges without any doubt from *Oec.* 12, 3.

¹⁸ On slaves’ treatment based on merit cf. [Arist.] *Oec.* I v 1-2, 1344a 25-34; I v 5-6, 1344b 12-21.

¹⁹ Not by chance: Xenophon indeed was a man of great experience in this field, as it is clearly shown by the *On horsemanship* and the *Cynegeticus*. Moreover, even in other writings Xenophon reveals an uncommon attention to the behavior of animals: cf. *An.* I 5, 2-3; *Cyr.* I 4, 4; II 1, 28; IV 1, 17; *Mem.* II 3, 4.

²⁰ From what follows it seems that argument would be ineffective with slaves; *contra* cf. Arist. *Pol.* I 13, 1260b 5-7, where however it is probable that Aristotle’s target is Pl. VI *Lg.* 777e-778a.

²¹ About the education of his wife too Ischomachus resorts to an analogy, albeit much more veiled, with the training of animals (*Oec.* 7, 10): more veiled also because, unlike slaves, his wife had already learnt to control her desires for food and drink (*Oec.* 7, 6).

²² POMEROY (1994), 319 cites in comparison *Cyr.* VIII 1, 43-44, where Cyrus treats his slaves as beasts of burden.

dikaiosynēn), but also because they desire to be praised by me, then I treat (*chrōmai*) them as if (*hōsper*) they were free men, not only making them wealthy (*ploutizōn*), but even honoring them as (*hōs*) *kaloī te kagathoi*” (*Oec.* 14, 9). This passage seems rather surprising not so much because Ischomachus says he treats²³ them as if they were free men: “as if” (*hōsper*) reaffirms actually all the distance between those who are really free and those who are “as if” they were free²⁴. Ischomachus’ slaves indeed not only are not free men, but do not even have the prospect of becoming free in future: as we saw, Ischomachus never mentions (not even by the slightest hint) the possibility for a slave of being freed. If we wonder what Ischomachus refers to when he says he treats these slaves as if they were free men, he probably refers to rewards of economic nature: only free men are entitled to an economic remuneration for their work. Indeed one of the motivations, although not the only one, that induces these slaves to be just (in Ischomachus’ view: to behave according to his desires and orders) is to obtain economic advantages (*pleon echein*): Ischomachus meets precisely this aspiration of theirs *ploutizōn*, making them wealthy, that is remunerating them for the work done as if (*hōsper*) they were free men: we should remember that slaves were entitled only to mere maintenance²⁵.

But the statement which arouses a real bewilderment is that Ischomachus honors these slaves as *kaloī te kagathoi*, that is as gentlemen²⁶. What is the meaning of such a statement? According to WANKEL (1961), 58 regarding and honoring some slaves as gentlemen marks the end of the aristocratic concept of the *kalos kagathos*; POMEROY (1994), 321 instead maintains that here Xenophon extends the concept of *kalos kagathos* to include those who are *kaloī kagathoi* for meritorious behavior. The problem however seems to me more complex: what does Ischomachus refer to? What does this honor consist of? Only of being praised? Or also of something else? We should keep in mind that here, as POMEROY (1994), 321 rightly points out, Ischomachus refers to slaves who hold a position of responsibility in the *oikos*, that is the *epitropoi*, whom Ischomachus himself undertook to educate to rule over other

²³ In *Oec.* 14, 9, *chrōmai* is understood as “to use” by ROSCALLA (1991), whereas CHANTRAINE (1949), Lord (in STRAUSS 1970), NATALI (1988), WATERFIELD (1990), POMEROY (1994), DE MARTINIS (2013) understand it as “to treat”. Personally, I am convinced that Xenophon chose this verb quite because of its semantic ambiguity, even more pronounced in a context of this kind.

²⁴ On the meaning of *hōsper* in this passage cf. STEVENS (1994), 232-233 and n. 46.

²⁵ Cf. [Arist.] *Oec.* I v 3, 1344b 4, who maintains that for slaves the *misthos*, the remuneration, consists of food (*doulōi de misthos trophē*).

²⁶ Cf. “gentlemen” Lord (in STRAUSS 1970) and POMEROY (1994); not otherwise “hommes de bien” CHANTRAINE (1949); “uomini nobili” NATALI (1988); “gentiluomini” ROSCALLA (1991); “galantuomini” DE MARTINIS (2013).

human beings, in their case other slaves, the workers (*Oec.* 13, 3-4). Ischomachus has just acknowledged that if they act unjustly he removes them from their office (*Oec.* 14, 8). It is then a fair assumption that to be honored as *kaloī kagathoi* implies not only to be praised by Ischomachus but also to maintain the position of responsibility assigned²⁷, a position that entails to rule over other human beings, although only in the *oikos* and not in the *polis*. In the *polis* indeed it is the real *kaloī kagathoi*, obviously free men, who should hold all public offices: such is the message of a key passage in the *Memorabilia*, where in a dialogue with Critobulus Socrates presents a political plan of an openly oligarchic nature, in which public offices are exclusive prerogative of the *kaloī kagathoi*, regarded as the opposite pole of the *dēmos* (*Mem.* II 6, 22-27)²⁸. However, as it emerges in all Xenophon's writings, the art of ruling is always the same, independently of the field where it is exercised²⁹, a view that is confirmed also in the *Oeconomicus*: when Ischomachus explains that, in addition to diligence and technical skills concerning his work (*Oec.* 13, 1-2), an *epitropos* must learn to rule over the workers (that is the slaves under him) and adds that he himself tries to educate the *epitropoi* to carry out this task (*Oec.* 13, 3-4), Socrates states that the art of the man who rules over human beings in the *polis* is the same as the art of the master who rules over his slaves in the *oikos* as well as the art of the king who rules over his subjects (*Oec.* 13, 5). That it is the very same art is even truer about the *oikos* and the *polis*, which differ only from a quantitative point of view, as is reiterated also in the *Oeconomicus*³⁰. Therefore even those who, in the name and on behalf of their master, rule over slaves in the *oikos*, as *epitropoi* do, are to some extent similar to the man who rules over free human beings in the *polis*. Accordingly the *epitropoi* about whom Ischomachus speaks in *Oec.* 14, 9 are comparable to the *kaloī kagathoi* both for their desire for praise, which reveals a typical attitude of aristocratic culture, and for their command role. And as *kaloī kagathoi* they are honored by Ischomachus, who praises them and keeps them in their position of command (even if subordinate). But that they are not real *kaloī kagathoi* is confirmed by what Ischomachus says immediately before: they are treated "as if" they were free men, but they are *not* free men. All the more so they are not real *kaloī kagathoi*, because only free men can be real *kaloī kagathoi*: they are only pretended, fictional *kaloī kagathoi*, as is paradoxically shown

²⁷ Cf. [Arist.] *Oec.* I v 1, 1344a 24-25 about the *timē* for some slaves, presumably the *epitropoi*; see also Arist. *Pol.* I 7, 1255b 35-37, who calls *timē* honor, the office of the *epitropos*.

²⁸ On this political plan cf. BEVILACQUA (2018a), 470-477.

²⁹ Cf. especially *Mem.* III 4, 6.; cf. also *Mem.* I 2, 48; I 2, 64; III 6, 15; IV 1, 2; IV 2, 11; IV 4, 16.

³⁰ Cf. *Oec.* 8, 22; cf. also *Mem.* III 4, 12; III 6, 4; III 6, 14.

precisely by the kind of honor Ischomachus reserves for them, a honor that consists of being praised and being kept in a position of command over other slaves. The only real *kalos kagathos* in the *Oeconomicus* is indeed the undisputed master of the *oikos*, Ischomachus.

1.3. *Punishments*

In his management of slaves Ischomachus relies above all on a rewarding system, but does not give up punishments: on this matter it seems to me advisable to distinguish between penalizations and punishments. With penalizations I mean to be deprived of a possible advantage or an advantage or good granted in enjoyment. For instance, about what Ischomachus says in *Oec.* 13, 10 we are facing some penalizations: the better workers receive the better clothes and shoes, the worse ones the worse clothes and shoes. We could regard as a penalization also the removal from their office of the slaves (presumably *epitropoi*) who, although well treated, behave unjustly (*Oec.* 14, 8).

In *Oec.* 14, 4-7 Ischomachus speaks instead about punishments, that is penalties. He begins saying he uses partly the laws of Draco and partly the laws of Solon to lead his slaves to justice (*Oec.* 14, 4), but the laws he mentions immediately afterwards seem to be heavily punitive (*Oec.* 14, 5): assuming that they aim at teaching justice, they do so exclusively through their deterrent effect, since they impose very harsh penalties. These penalties concern theft, certainly a fearsome crime especially for those who, like Ischomachus, strive to keep, better to increase their own assets³¹. Ischomachus' mention of the two Athenian lawgivers about the penalties for theft is almost certainly inaccurate, but ideologically interesting. It is inaccurate because, according to Aristotle (*Ath.* 7, 1), Solon repealed Draco's laws except the homicide laws. Therefore the laws of Solon on theft did not coincide with those of Draco. But, beyond the fact that at the time of Xenophon even for the Athenians it was not easy to have a detailed knowledge of the laws of Solon and even more so of the laws of Draco³², it is interesting that Ischomachus not only brings together two so different lawgivers, according to a rather widespread trend in the fourth century, but praise their laws, in tacit opposition to more recent laws, enacted in a different political

³¹ FOUCAULT (1984), 198 grasped with his usual sharpness the socially and politically well connoted environment Ischomachus belongs to: «C'est le petit monde des propriétaires fonciers qui ont à maintenir, à accroître et à transmettre à qui portent leur nom les biens de la famille».

³² About the persisting confusion between the laws of Draco and the laws of Solon cf. POMEROY (1994), 319-320.

situation. It is an attitude of a *laudator temporis acti*, an attitude that is not (nor can be) without ideological relevance.

But let us examine the penalties that, according to Ischomachus, were established by the laws of Draco and of Solon, penalties which Ischomachus imposes on his slaves, at least partly (*Oec.* 14, 4). Unfortunately the passage (*Oec.* 14, 5) is not clear at all and poses interpretative and textual problems which cannot be dealt with in this paper³³. This controversial passage anyway allows us to safely assume that the penalties mentioned by Ischomachus were very harsh and even death was provided for at least in one case.

This however is not surprising nor should throw a sinister light on Ischomachus, suggesting a dark, ironic reading of this perfect *kalos kagathos*. For Xenophon indeed the harshness or even cruelty of punishments is not in contrast with the image of the charismatic leader who aims at the willing obedience of his subjects and tries to achieve it especially through his benefits. Just think of one of Xenophon's heroes, Cyrus the Younger. In the *Oeconomicus* he is enthusiastically praised by Socrates, who stresses above all his outstanding qualities as a leader who avails himself of the willing obedience of his soldiers (*Oec.* 4, 18-19). Socrates' praise sounds as an authoritative confirmation of the praise we read in *An.* I 9³⁴, where there is passage in which Xenophon, arousing some bewilderment in modern readers, shows his appreciation for the atrocious punishments Cyrus did not hesitate to inflict (*An.* I 9, 13). This appreciation appears all the more remarkable because such punishments, not uncommon in the Persian empire, did not fail to arouse horror and repulsion in the Greeks: Herodotus, although he does not express his opinion explicitly, highlights their atrocity³⁵, while Aeschylus in *Eu.* 186-190 expresses his indignation with great strength. So one of Xenophon's heroes does not shrink from cruel and ruthless punishments. But this does not shed a sinister light on him and does not suggest either an ironic reading of the praises we read both in the *Anabasis* and in the *Oeconomicus*. Consequently, we can safely say that the punishments that could be inflicted by Ischomachus on his slaves do not provide a convincing clue for an ironic reading of this character and his actions.

Besides we should not forget that Ischomachus adds that he employs not only the laws of Draco and the laws of Solon, but also those of the king of Persia (*Oec.* 14, 6),

³³ For the different possible solutions cf. CHANTRAINE (1949), 118; ROSCALLA (1991), 190-191 n. 2; DE MARTINIS (2013), 789 n. 196.

³⁴ Cf. *Oec.* 4, 18-19 and *An.* I 9, 29-31.

³⁵ Hdt. III 69, 5; III 118, 2; III 154, 2; VII 18, 1; IX 112.

because, so he says, whereas the former laws only punish the wrongdoers, the laws of the king of Persia not only punish those who act unjustly but also reward the just (*Oec.* 14, 7). In sum Ischomachus mentions and praises the laws of the king of Persia in support of his main policy towards his slaves, which relies largely on rewarding.

2. *Some special slaves*

In Ischomachus' *oikos* there are some slaves who hold a position of responsibility: we already mentioned the *epitropoi* and there is also another slave who holds a special position, a female slave, the housekeeper (*tamia*). The *epitropoi* and the *tamia* can be regarded as special slaves: they are entrusted with specific tasks and enjoy a particular treatment.

2.1. *The housekeeper*

The housekeeper, as a slave provided with particular tasks and consequent prestige, was a familiar figure to the Greeks, starting from the *tamiē* of Homeric poems³⁶. However the *tamia* of the *Oeconomicus* is the object of a precise definition with regard not only to her tasks, but also to the characteristics she should have and to the education she should receive.

The short *excursus* on the housekeeper (*Oec.* 9, 10-13) follows Ischomachus' speech on the possibilities and the spaces of the house (*Oec.* 9, 2-5) and on the well-ordered subdivision by classes of all the objects and their collocation in the most suitable place for each one of them (*Oec.* 9, 6-9). Then Ischomachus explains the tasks of the housekeeper to maintain order in the house: so the figure of the housekeeper is introduced in relation to keeping in order some things, precisely not the everyday things but those less frequently used and presumably of greater value (*Oec.* 9, 10). This is not surprising since the housekeeper is a kind of duplicate of the wife and it is the wife who is appointed in the first instance to keep order in the *oikos* (*Oec.* 9, 14-17). Immediately afterwards Ischomachus enunciates the criteria for choosing a housekeeper: first of all she must be *enkratestatē*, the most endowed with *enkrateia*, self-mastery, about food, drink, sleep and intercourses with men³⁷;

³⁶ Cf. *e.g.* *Il.* VI 381-390; *Od.* I 139-140; II 345-347.

³⁷ Although male and female slaves live in rigorously separated areas so that they could not have sexual intercourses without their masters' permission, the housekeeper, like Ischomachus' wife, may move freely within the house and therefore she could have sexual intercourses with male slaves: hence she must be *enkratēs* about sex. As we will see (cf. below, n. 50) about the *epitropoi*, who are to some extent the male equivalent of the housekeeper (they are entrusted with positions of responsibility but on the contrary devoid of free movement within the house), the *enkrateia* demanded of them about sex

moreover she must have a good memory, be diligent and eager to please her masters in order to be rewarded by them (*Oec.* 9, 11). Undoubtedly the most significant element is that the housekeeper must be endowed with *enkrateia*: we should not forget that according to the Socrates of the *Memorabilia enkrateia* is the foundation of virtue (*Mem.* I 5, 4) and Socrates himself is an unmatched model of *enkrateia*, since he is *enkratēs* more than any other human being and to the highest degree³⁸. Also Ischomachus and his wife are endowed with *enkrateia*³⁹: therefore the fact that the housekeeper must give evidence of *enkrateia* is another point of contact with Ischomachus' wife. However, as we will see, *enkrateia* is an element that associates the housekeeper also with the *epitropoi*, who must be self-controlled about wine, sleep and sex (*Oec.* 12, 11-14). The education of the housekeeper requires first of all the acquisition of good will (*eunoikōs echein*) towards her masters, an attitude that Ischomachus proposes to obtain by involving her in the emotions of her masters, that is sharing with her joys and sorrows (*Oec.* 9, 12). As we will see, good will towards masters is regarded by Ischomachus as an indispensable requirement also for his *epitropoi* (*Oec.* 12.5), but he tries to obtain it by different means, means of an admittedly economic nature (*Oec.* 12, 6-7)⁴⁰. Secondly the housekeeper must be educated to be eager to increase the assets of the *oikos* together with her masters (*Oec.* 9, 12). This is another point of contact with the wife, who is asked to increase the assets of the *oikos* (*Oec.* 7, 15-16)⁴¹. About the means to make the housekeeper eager to do so, Ischomachus is somewhat vague. He indeed says: "And we educated her to

concerns homosexual intercourses, the only ones in which they could indulge. It is interesting that regarding the housekeeper the possibility that she may have sexual intercourses with other female slaves is not even envisaged.

³⁸ Cf. especially *Mem.* I 2, 1; I 2, 14; I 3, 5-6; I 3, 14-15; I 5, 6; I 6, 8-9; IV 5, 1; IV 8, 11; cf. also *Ap.* 16; 18. Besides we should not forget that *enkrateia* characterizes also exemplary kings like Cyrus (cf. especially *Cyr.* VIII 1, 32; VIII 1, 37; cf. also VI 1, 47) and Agesilaus (cf. *Ages.* 5, 4; 10, 2).

³⁹ On Ischomachus' *enkrateia* cf. *Oec.* 10, 12; 11, 14; 11, 18; on his wife's *enkrateia* cf. *Oec.* 7, 6; 10, 9; 10, 13.

⁴⁰ It is noteworthy that, whereas Ischomachus resorts to economic rewards to obtain the good will of the *epitropoi*, in order to obtain the good will of the housekeeper Ischomachus relies on sharing with her the emotions of joy and sorrow their masters experience (*Oec.* 9, 12). Is it perhaps due to the fact that she lives very close to her masters within the house, the place where emotions and feelings unfold, while the *epitropoi* live mainly outdoors, in the fields where they supervise agricultural work (*Oec.* 12, 2)? Or is it due to the fact that a woman is considered, unlike men, particularly sensitive to the emotional aspects of life? The former hypothesis seems to me more plausible, but it is a question which deserves further attention.

⁴¹ In both passages we find the same verb *synauxein* (literally: "to increase together with"); but it is the person *syn* refers to that is different: whereas in *Oec.* 7, 16 *syn* refers to Ischomachus, with whom his wife should increase the *oikos*, in *Oec.* 9, 12 *syn* refers to both masters, Ischomachus and his wife, with whom the housekeeper should increase the *oikos*.

be eager to increase the *oikos*, by making her aware of its situation and by sharing its successes with her” (*Oec.* 9, 12). This last sentence, although implicitly, refers almost certainly to economic rewards, in money or in kind: Ischomachus is instead more explicit, as we saw, about the *epitropoi* who have proved their worth, since he says forthrightly he makes them wealthy (*Oec.* 14, 9). The last step of the educational path for the housekeeper consists of instilling a sense of justice (*dikaiosynē*) in her (*Oec.* 9, 13), just as it happens with the *epitropoi* (*Oec.* 14, 2-3). However, whereas regarding the latter Ischomachus is convinced that the laws of Draco and the laws of Solon are a great tool to teach *dikaiosynē*, regarding the housekeeper Ischomachus appeals to strictly utilitarian considerations: “We instilled also a sense of justice (*dikaiosynēn*) in her, by honoring the just more than the unjust and by showing her that the just live richer and freer lives than the unjust” (*Oec.* 9, 13).

These elements show that the housekeeper has several points of contact not only with Ischomachus' wife⁴², but also with the *epitropoi*, a far as she holds a position that gives her prestige, authority as well as material advantages. In other words she is a privileged slave, also because of her physical and emotional closeness to her masters. But she remains anyway a slave, a thing: Ischomachus' speech about the housekeeper ends, not by chance, with these words: “And this is the place where we installed her” (*Oec.* 9, 13). ROSCALLA (1991), 156 n. 4 rightly notices that the housekeeper has a specific place (*chōra*) of her own within the order of the house like any other object. And as the place of every object is well-defined and stable so it is also for the place of the housekeeper.

2.2. *The epitropoi*

Ischomachus runs his *oikos* personally: he does not entrust it to an *oikonomikos* / *oikonomos*, a free citizen paid for this professional service (*Oec.* 1, 3-4)⁴³; however, in compliance with a traditional practice, he resorts to specialized slaves, the *epitropoi*, to replace him when he is absent (*Oec.* 12, 2) and to help him by supervising the works of other slaves, especially agricultural work (*Oec.* 13, 3). Besides the fact that the *oikonomikos* / *oikonomos* is a free citizen while the *epitropos* is a slave, their tasks are not the same: whereas the *oikonomikos* / *oikonomos* is invested with management autonomy and therefore management responsibility, the *epitropos* must only put into

⁴² It is not by chance that the short section about the housekeeper is inserted in the long tale of the education of Ischomachus' wife.

⁴³ Although the term *oikonomos* does not occur, it is to this new professional figure that Socrates refers in the dialogue with Eutherus in *Mem.* II 8: cf. BEVILACQUA (2010), 475-478 nn. 5-7, 9.

practice the directives of the master of the *oikos*. His autonomy is confined to a merely executive sphere. It is not by chance that, as we said above, from the first mention of this character (*Oec.* 12, 2) Ischomachus speaks about the *epitropoi* in the plural, because it is clear that several people are necessary to supervise the agricultural work (or more generally the works) of other slaves, while the autonomous management of an *oikos*, as in the case of the *oikonomikos* / *oikonomos*, can be entrusted only to a single person who takes responsibility for it. Let us examine what Ischomachus says about the *epitropoi*. His speech, often interrupted by Socrates' questions, is of a considerable extension to highlight the relevance of this character⁴⁴.

As we saw, there is no doubt that the *epitropoi* were slaves, as it is indirectly confirmed by the pseudoaristotelian *Oeconomicus*⁴⁵, which often follows, sometimes blindly, Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*. Therefore it is not astonishing that Ischomachus dwells on the education he gives to the slaves chosen to become *epitropoi*. First of all Ischomachus tries to make them endowed with good will (*eunoian echein*) towards their masters (*Oec.* 12, 6), a goal that is common also to the education of the housekeeper. But, unlike what happens with the housekeeper, the tool to obtain their good will does not consist of sharing the joys and sorrows of their masters⁴⁶, but of economic advantages⁴⁷, as Ischomachus himself explicitly affirms answering Socrates' questions (*Oec.* 12, 6-7). The following step of the education of the *epitropoi* is to teach them to be diligent (*epimeleisthai*, 12, 9)⁴⁸, even if Ischomachus himself acknowledges that it is not possible to teach it (*epimeleis einai*) to all without exception (12, 10).

To learn to become diligent requires some specific features, which imply an accurate selection. Those who appear devoid of *enkrateia* cannot learn to be diligent. Ischomachus mentions in particular those who lack self-mastery (*akrateis*) about wine (*Oec.* 12, 11)⁴⁹, sleep (12, 12), sex (12, 13-14)⁵⁰. The lack of *enkrateia* is therefore

⁴⁴ POMEROY (1994), 317 notices that in the Oxford edition 184 lines are devoted to the *epitropoi* and only 14 to the housekeeper.

⁴⁵ See [Arist.] *Oec.* I v 1, 1344a 25-26.

⁴⁶ Cf. above and n. 40.

⁴⁷ However also for the housekeeper Ischomachus hints at economic rewards, although not in relation to the goal of acquiring her good will: cf. *Oec.* 9, 12.

⁴⁸ The theme of diligence (*epimeleia* and other terms of the same family) is undoubtedly one of the recurring and fundamental motifs of the *Oeconomicus*.

⁴⁹ About slaves' consumption of wine cf. also [Arist.] *Oec.* I v 2, 1344a 31-34.

⁵⁰ As it can be deduced from *Oec.* 12, 14 (where Ischomachus speaks of *paidika* and *erōmenoi*), the reference is only to male homosexual relationships: given the strict separation between sexes, male slaves may have heterosexual relationships only with the permission of their masters (*Oec.* 9, 5) and therefore

decisive to exclude a slave from any position of responsibility, in full agreement with the view of the Socrates of the *Memorabilia*, who maintains that a slave *akratēs* cannot be entrusted with tasks of responsibility (*Mem.* I 5, 2). But what instead is rather surprising and decidedly interesting is Ischomachus's answer to the following Socrates' question: when Socrates asks him if it is not impossible to educate to diligence those who are in love with profit (*hoitines au erotikōs echousin tou kerdanein*) (*Oec.* 12, 15), Ischomachus answers that on the contrary it is very easy to induce them to be diligent, it is enough to show them that to be diligent is profitable (*ibid.*). As ROSCALLA (1991), 182 n. 4 points out, the appreciation of those who are in love with profit reveals a polemic intent towards Plato⁵¹. Not just this: the appreciation of love of gain as a motivation to diligence is in line with Ischomachus' positive assessment of his father's behavior (*Oec.* 20, 22-26), who was motivated not so much by his love of farming, as Ischomachus maintains (*Oec.* 20, 25-26), but by his love of gain, as instead Socrates suggests, who compares the alleged love of farming of Ischomachus' father to the improbable love of grain of grain merchants (*Oec.* 20, 27-28).

Once established which slaves can be educated to be diligent and therefore to become *epitropoi*, Ischomachus affirms that the fundamental tool to induce to be diligent is praise or blame (*Oec.* 12, 16). The theme of praise will be resumed in *Oec.* 13, 9 and especially in *Oec.* 13, 12, where Ischomachus, in an explicit reference to the *epitropoi*, says that he praises the *epitropoi* who behave properly with the slaves under them, giving a better treatment to those who deserve more. Praise however is not the only tool: another very effective tool is example. According to Ischomachus if a master appears careless, it is difficult for a slave to become diligent (*Oec.* 12, 18), a statement fully in line with the great educational value Xenophon attaches to example: in the *Memorabilia* it is a real *Leitmotiv*⁵², that can be found also in other Xenophon's writings, especially in the *Cyropaedia* and the *Agesilaus*. Indeed not only Socrates, but also other Xenophon's heroes, like Cyrus⁵³ and Agesilaus⁵⁴, improve all those around them through their example. But the master should not confine himself to set a good example, he should also exercise the necessary control (*Oec.* 12, 19), as

the only sexual relationships male slaves can have unknown to their masters are those with partners of the same sex.

⁵¹ In the *Republic* Plato maintains that those who are in love with profit (or more generally with wealth) despise virtue and undermine the foundations of a good constitution: cf. *e.g.* *R.* VIII 550d-551b.

⁵² Cf. *Mem.* I 2, 3; I 2, 17-18; I 3, 1; I 5, 6; I 6, 3; IV 3, 18; IV 4, 1; IV 4, 10-11; IV 4, 25; IV 5, 1.

⁵³ Cf. *Cyr.* VIII 1, 24-33; VIII 1, 37-39; VIII 6, 10; VIII 6, 13.

⁵⁴ Cf. especially *Ages.* 7, 2; 10, 2.

Ischomachus does not fail to do (*Oec.* 11, 16). However the education of the *epitropos* is not yet finished, because neither good will towards the masters nor diligence is enough: the future *epitropos* must be endowed, like a physician, with specific skills concerning his work (*Oec.* 13, 2). Moreover, as we saw, he must learn to rule over the workers, that is other slaves (*Oec.* 13, 3). These last requirements, specific skills and ability to command, are the same that are indispensable for the politician, as it emerges clearly from the dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon in *Mem.* III 6. In their exercise of command the *epitropoi*, as a kind of duplicates of Ischomachus, must behave with those under them following the same rules of conduct Ischomachus says he follows to induce his slaves to be obedient (*Oec.* 13, 6-12). In particular the *epitropoi* must apply the criteria of merit, giving a better treatment to the better workers, that is those who work with greater diligence, without avoiding toil or dangers (*Oec.* 13, 10-11)⁵⁵. By doing so the *epitropoi* will be praised by Ischomachus (*Oec.* 13, 12).

But the education of the *epitropos* is still lacking one final step (*Oec.* 14, 1-2): as it happens with the housekeeper, it is necessary to teach him a sense of justice (*Oec.* 14, 2-3). According to Ischomachus, this sense of justice must show itself in the honesty of the *epitropoi* towards their master and his property: the *epitropos* must “keep his hands off his master’s things and not steal” (*Oec.* 14, 2). At the end of the passage on the laws of Solon and of Draco and on the laws of the king of Persia (*Oec.* 14, 4-7) Ischomachus reaffirms that to be lovers of gain is not a negative character trait: if the just are rewarded and become wealthier than the unjust, even the lovers of gain refrain from acting unjustly (*Oec.* 14, 7). Lastly Ischomachus explains which consequences the *epitropoi* will face⁵⁶, both those who did not learn a sense of justice and those who instead prove to be just (*Oec.* 14, 8-9). The former, although well treated, still try to

⁵⁵ It is not clear to which dangers Ischomachus refers: probably here Xenophon employs a standardized expression (*mēte ponēin mēte kindyneuein*, literally: “neither to toil nor risk dangers”), which is more appropriate to other contexts, especially to the case of military expeditions.

⁵⁶ It is true that immediately before (*Oec.* 14, 6) Ischomachus speaks generically of *oiketai*, slaves, but from the context of the whole chapter, which is focused on the sense of justice to be instilled in the *epitropoi*, it is reasonable to infer that in *Oec.* 14, 8-9 Ischomachus refers to the *epitropoi* again. Ischomachus affirms he removes from their office those who, albeit well treated, try to act unjustly and so prove to be incorrigibly greedy (*Oec.* 14, 8), which entails that they must be removed from a position where they can get their hands on their masters’ property (cf. *Oec.* 14, 2): therefore it seems to me almost certain that the slaves Ischomachus is speaking about are some *epitropoi*. In the following paragraph (*Oec.* 14, 9) Ischomachus explains how he behaves with those who are induced to be just not only by material advantages but also by their desire to be praised by him and he affirms he treats them as if they were free men and honors them as *kaloï kagathoi*: also in this case it is evident that these slaves are slaves entrusted with a position of responsibility, that is the *epitropoi*.

act unjustly, in other words to steal their master's things: therefore, as we saw, Ischomachus can do nothing but remove them from their office (*Oec.* 14, 8). On the contrary regarding those who are just not only in view of material rewards but also because they desire to be praised, Ischomachus says he treats them as if they were free men, not only making them wealthy but even honoring them as *kaloï kagathoi* (*Oec.* 14, 9): we already examined this statement and realized that a careful reading reduces its implications considerably. We can only add that, since the *epitropoi* are vicarious figures of Ischomachus albeit with merely executive powers, it is not too astonishing that Ischomachus states he honors them as *kaloï kagathoi*: he can do nothing but honor as *kaloï kagathoi* these duplicates, albeit on a small scale, of the perfect *kalos kagathos* he himself is.

Conclusions

The *Oeconomicus* on the whole appears as a work under the sign of duplicity, not only because it is both a Socratic dialogue and a treatise⁵⁷, but also because more generally it presents innovative views as well as traditional ones. This is true also about slaves. On the one hand Xenophon proposes a management of slaves that disregards completely practices by then widely developed: he overlooks that there was a flourishing slave trade⁵⁸, so that slaves could be bought, sold or rented, and he keeps silent on the equally widespread practice of manumission. On the other hand, however, the management of slaves described by Ischomachus shows also some interesting innovative elements. First we could regard as innovative the preeminent role assigned to the rewarding system, in line with the general tendency we find in Xenophon's writings: who is in command in any field (*oikos* or *polis* or empire) should aim at the willing obedience of those under him, which in turn is the outcome of the leader's ability to arouse and foster this kind of obedience, especially by rewarding those who deserve it. Second we could suppose that, as ROSCALLA (1991), 185 n. 1 maintains, Xenophon's readers of the fourth century regarded it as a revolutionary statement when Ischomachus affirms that the *epitropoi*, who are slaves, must learn to rule, although only over other slaves (*Oec.* 13, 3), therefore performing a task that was *par excellence* the task of free men.

However the more innovative element is probably the following one: if it is true that slaves are associated with animals (*Oec.* 13, 9), it is also true that slaves or at least

⁵⁷ Cf. BEVILACQUA (2015), 99-112 and 123-132.

⁵⁸ Of course, this is due to a deliberate choice, because Xenophon was perfectly aware of the existence of a developed slave trade: see above and n. 13.

some of them are endowed with *enkrateia*, which is the foundation of virtue (*Mem.* I 5, 4): it is on the grounds of *enkrateia* that the housekeeper is chosen (*Oec.* 9, 11). *Enkrateia* is the requirement with which slaves must comply to become *epitropoi* (*Oec.* 12, 11-14). This entails that virtue is accessible to everyone, as it is confirmed by the fact that Ischomachus undertakes (although with a view to his own profit) to ensure that both the housekeeper (*Oec.* 9, 13) and the *epitropoi* (*Oec.* 14, 3) acquire *dikaiosynē*, a traditional virtue of Greek ethics. Moreover, regarding the *epitropoi* Ischomachus does not hesitate to acknowledge that some of them are really endowed with *dikaiosynē* (*Oec.* 14, 9). This seems to be a prelude to the revolution that in Hellenistic age will remove any limitation concerning the moral subject: if according to Aristotle it was identifiable with the *spoudaios* citizen (a free, male, adult human being), afterwards a request for universality will emerge, as it will be summarized later by Seneca: “Virtue is not precluded to anybody, is accessible to everyone: it accepts everyone, calls everyone, free people, freed slaves, slaves, kings, exiles” (*De ben.* III 18, 2).

Did Xenophon realize how innovative⁵⁹, not to say subversive, it was to attribute *enkrateia* and therefore the possibility of virtue to slaves (or at least to some of them)? This question can only remain unanswered in this paper, but it brings to light the most interesting, innovative and problematic aspect of the statements about slaves we read in Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*.

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⁵⁹ We should keep in mind that the *Oeconomicus*, if we accept the lower dating implicitly suggested by Roscalla (cf. above, n. 4), was written around 355-354: in this year and even more in the immediately previous years, if we are inclined to a more probable higher dating, Xenophon’s view on this matter was deeply innovative.

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