The sociological aspects of Pythagoreanism have lately become a matter of academic interest. Several scholars, from Walter Burkert in the early seventies to Christoph Riedweg and Leonid Zhmud today, have wondered about the social structures that establish and maintain Pythagorean communities, and more recently authors such as Sarah Pomeroy and Catherine Rowett have turned their attention to a more specific and distinctive feature of these organisations: the presence of women as both members of the community and adherents of the philosophical doctrines. Yet the history of the Pythagorean women seems nothing but a black box whose content is hardly known and difficult to specify. Although we may assume that there were Pythagorean women, we cannot positively state who they were, to what extent they took part in the community, and in what their place and function consisted. It is in light of such lack of information that even the least sceptical among the scholars seems to turn her nose up at Pomeroy’s study of these women philosophers.

The first available evidence for female membership to Pythagorean circles goes back to Dicaearchus and is thus considered relatively reliable. What follows is, however, rather blurred and fuzzy. Iamblichus lists up to seventeen Pythagorean women (VP 267, 146.17–147.6, DK 58 A): the well-known Theano and Myia, Timycha of Sparta, Lastheneia of Arcadia, Philtys of Croton, the Leukanian Okkelo and Ekkelo, Cheilonis of Sparta, Cratesicleia of Laconia, Habroteleia of Croton, Echekrateia of Phlius, Tyrsenis of Sybaris, Peisirrhode of Taras, Theadusa of Laconia, Boeo of Argos, Babelyka of Argos, and the Laconian Cleaehma. As Pomeroy herself notices in her detailed prosopography, only the first four names are also attested in earlier sources on Pythagoreanism; as for the others, they are exclusively mentioned by later authors, and their reliability is thus entrusted to the possibility that Iamblichus’ catalogue may have been extracted from Aristoxenus. Furthermore, it is debatable what being included in such catalogue truly means, since Iamblichus refers to these female philosophers as the ‘most famous’ among the Pythagoreans, but nevertheless fails to mention other allegedly illustrious and prominent Pythagorean women, such as Pythagoras’ daughters Damo, Arignota and Aesara, and granddaughter Bitale. Strictly speaking, we do not even know whether all those mentioned in the list were philosophers – for instance, this may not have been the case for the Krotonian athlete Milon.

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2 In Fr. 33 Wehrli, quoted in Porph. VP 18, Dicaearchus reports that not only men, but also youths and women were granted entry to Pythagorean communities and admitted as an audience to the master’s lectures.

3 Milon of Kroton was a renowned wrestler (Ebert ‘Gr. Sieg’. 61; Paus. 6 14.5–8) as well as a member of a restricted circle of Pythagoreans (D.L. 8.49; Porph. VP 55), on the evidence of Neanthes FGrHist 84 Fr. 30; Lamb. VP (104, 60.6, 249, 134.4–9), on the evidence
the Pythagorean women, Pomeroy makes these female figures the kernel of her most recent work with the aim of bridging a gap left open by scholars of Pythagoreanism and finally examining «the social history of women who were Pythagoreans» (p. xvi).

‘Pythagorean Women: Their History and Writings’ discusses the letters and treatises attributed to female Pythagoreans, and revolves around four primary questions: who were the Pythagorean women? How did they live? Who were the Neopythagorean women? And lastly, what did they write?

In Chapter 1 Pomeroy works through the seventeen names reported by Iamblichus, manoeuvring within the paucity of ancient sources concerning not only women, but even the Pythagorean tradition as a whole, and without sparing intriguing suggestions about these women’s identities. Among these, it is worth noting, some may appear as rather curious and rash, such as identifying the early Pythagorean Cratesicleia as the progenitress of the 3rd century BCE Cratesicleia of Sparta, mother of Cleomenes III, in virtue of their homonymy, whereas others are quite thought-provoking proposals, such as equating Lastheneia with one of the few female disciples reputed to have attended Plato’s lectures disguised as men. Chapter 2 offers a more in-depth analysis of the Pythagorean women’s way of living as mothers, wives and daughters of Pythagorean philosophers, and then focuses on the interestingly substantial number of female deities worshipped in the Pythagorean cultic tradition. The reason for such female presence in the community is that the Pythagorean ἑταιρεῖαι shaped their members’ βίος as a whole – from the public to the private sphere, and thus from the male to the female gender. What is distinctive and specific about Pythagorean societies is that they were social-ethical-political-philosophical-and-religious organisations and provided an all-embracing lifestyle which regulated morality as well as politics, mindset as well as eating habits, pedagogy as well as domesticity. These circles did not exclusively affect the adherents’ public activities, but also their private lives; therefore, their influence was even extended to the domestic sphere, which was traditionally considered to be the realm of women. Family ties, marriage, childcare and household management were included as integral components of this all-encompassing Pythagorean βίος, which ensured that women also took part in such a way of life. This much we can know with a fair amount of certainty regarding the female gender among early Pythagoreans. Yet, although the texts Pomeroy is investigating purport to have been written by women who lived in the early 5th century BCE, they are far more likely to have been composed during the Hellenistic and Post-Hellenistic renaissance of Pythagoreanism, between the 3rd century BCE and the 2nd century CE. Consequently, in Chapter 3 Pomeroy turns to this second group, the Neopythagorean women, and outlines the scholarly debate arisen over their works’ dating and, above all, authenticity. Many scholars, from Richard Bentley to Carl Huffman, have assumed that these

1 On Lastheneia see D.L. 3.46 and 4.2, on the evidence of Dicaearchus Fr. 44 Wehrli.
2 E.g. on the Pythagorean devotion to Demeter see D.L. 8.40 and Porph. VP 4, on the evidence of Timaeus FGrHist 566 Fr. 131, as well as Porph. VP 57, on the evidence of Dicaearchus Fr. 35a–b Wehrli.
texts were not in fact authored by Neopythagorean women, but rather by men writing under female pseudonyms; however, Pomeroy offers interesting arguments as for why these texts should be attributed to female authors, and even goes as far as to ascribe some of them to Pythagoras’ female contemporaries. The most substantial section of the book centres on the translation and analysis of the writings themselves, the treatises attributed to Theano, Perictione, Ptolemaïs, Aesara and Phintys, and the letters of Theano, Melissa and Myia. These texts are composed under the names, or pseudonyms, of Neopythagorean women, some of whom are in turn named after past female personalities, such as Pythagoras’ wife Theano, his daughters Myia and Aesara, and Plato’s mother Perictione. Their primary purpose is to discuss female morality and virtues, and teach women how to apply these to domestic life. Of particular interest is the last chapter, ‘The Neopythagorean women as philosophers’, in which Vicky Lynn Harper discusses the philosophical outlooks of the Neopythagorean women’s letters and treatises by comparing the moral theory developed in these works to Aristotle’s ethical writings. According to Harper, the points of contact between the Neopythagorean women and Aristotle are fourfold: the practical application of ethics, the responsiveness to particular cases, the importance of individual moral characters and the attention to psychology. For these texts are teeming with examples gleaned from everyday life that illustrate how to put virtues into practice, and exhibit the same flexibility that distinguishes Aristotle’s ethics in that virtuous behaviours are also described so as to be adequate to the characters of the texts’ addressees – whether these be wives dealing with their husbands’ infidelity, mothers raising their children, or mistresses running their households. Noteworthy is also the importance of the virtue of σωφροσύνη, moderation or balance, depicted as the primary female virtue, which Harper connects with the fundamental Pythagorean concept of harmony.

On the whole, there is a conceptual merit and a methodological fault in Pomeroy’s treatment of the Pythagorean women. The author should be given credit for whetting her colleagues’ appetite, as well as the public’s curiosity, for Pythagoreanism by drawing attention to a lesser-known and hitherto unexplored aspect of Pythagorean societies. What we gain from reading Pomeroy’s book is both a general understanding of the questions, controversies and puzzles surrounding the Pythagorean women, and an awareness that more work needs to be done in order to shed light on the fascinating and mysterious history of these women philosophers. That of the Pythagorean women is the first, and perhaps most enlightening, case of female engagement in ancient philosophy, and the texts composed under their names constitute a unique example of prose written, at least allegedly, by women in antiquity. Hence, the necessity for further scholarship to focus on these figures and their works. That being said, Pomeroy ushers in this research from a rather challenging point of view – for investigating the historicity of the Pythagorean women in spite of the lack of reliable documentary evidence seems a relatively bold attempt. More fruitful would instead be to consider what the attested female adherence to Pythagoreanism may tell us about Pythagorean philosophy, society and way of life as a whole. It would be interesting to understand why this doctrine was seen as sympathetic to the female gender, what made Pythagorean organisations so unique as to open their doors to
female members, and in which kind of activities women were more likely to be involved. The same goes for the Pythagorean women’s writings: the scholarly concerns over the texts’ authenticity have overshadowed their philosophical significance. This does not imply that the question of authenticity makes no difference at all – for indeed it does, since on the one hand we would be reading letters and treatises written by women, for women and about women, whereas on the other hand a male report on female morality. Rather, the suggestion here is that the starting point of the investigation into these texts, and perhaps the key to comprehend them, should be the analysis of their philosophical content and relation to other currents in ancient thinking about women and about virtue, on the path started by Harper. In other words, although these writings may have not been composed by women, they are unquestionably written about women and, as such, they offer gendered considerations on the nature of life, society and virtue, as well as ethical reflections on women. Along similar lines, Karen Warren, Voula Lambropoulou, Julia Ward, as well as Mary Ellen Waithe have taken the philosophical weight of these works into account, and Annette Huizenga has built her discussion of the Pythagorean women’s letters around a study of ancient rhetoric.¹ At the end of the day, what seems most problematic in Pomeroy’s strategy is to approach the question of the Pythagorean women from a primarily historical and philological, rather than philosophical and sociological, standpoint. Her research remains, nonetheless, ground-breaking – the first step indeed, but already a major step towards opening the lid of the black box of the Pythagorean women.

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It is a pleasure to review this new edition of the speeches of Isaeus by Pietro Cobetto Ghiggia (CG). Renewed interest in Isaeus in recent years owes much to his 2002 commentary on speech 5, and CG has published a series of excellent works on both the Attic orators (notably his 2007 edition of Demosthenes 27–31) and Athenian law. The book under review here maintains those high standards and will become a standard work on this orator.