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The economics of friendship : changing conceptions of reciprocity in classical Athens

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The Economics of Friendship
Changing conceptions of reciprocity
in Classical Athens

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Preface

ALTHOUGH one never really seems to be prepared for the moment something is actually finished, one does occasionally indulge in writing prefaces. I have long been planning to point out the sheer irony of my dissertation topic: “Money and friendship,” I would say in a typically self-deprecatory vein, “whereas in my own life I seem to have neither!” The deeper irony is that it took me years of scholarship to realize that this would not only make my audience feel awkward and perhaps question my mental stability, but that it would also be very *ungrateful*.

Ingratitude, as I have come to understand, is a failure to acknowledge the truth of a situation—or other, equally relevant, truths of the same situation. It is the inability to see oneself as part of a larger whole. It is the behavior of a Compulsive Grumbler or a Generic PhD-student doomed to see the downside of things, weighed down by the idea that pessimism and cynicism are academic virtues, but momentarily forgetting that it is a privilege to have the opportunity to earn one’s living by exploring the ancient world and to be part of a flourishing and inspiring academic community. Throughout my graduate years I have greatly benefited from being part of this community—as part of a research community in OIKOS, but also as a full colleague and employee at the Leiden Department of Classics endowed with teaching responsibilities. It is uniquely characteristic of the Dutch university system that PhD-students are regarded as employees and I believe this to be an investment in human capital that deserves to be valued as more than an economic liability that can be abolished lightly in times of austerity measures.

In many cultures verbal expressions of gratitude are regarded as shallow substitutes for a deeper sense of obligation. In ancient Greek, however, verbal expressions of thanks are not substitutes for reciprocation, but signs that communicate that generosity and grace are acknowledged and will be

PREFACE

remembered until a suitable occasion for reciprocation arises. They are token and promise in one. It is in this spirit that I would like to express my gratitude: to my senior colleagues without whom it would have been impossible to write this dissertation; to my fellow PhD-students in Leiden and at OIKOS; to the undergraduate students for being eager to learn but prone to question everything I try to teach them; to Albert, Casper, Chiara, Christina, Lina and Lucien for being my sparring partners; to my fellow fellows at NIAS, especially Arjo, Erik, Jan H. and Joy, for telling me that it is OK to be a classicist and that my research matters; to my friends; to my “paranymphs” Han and Saskia for being my brothers in arms; to my family, especially my parents for teaching me that curiosity is not just a rover on Mars; to Jan, who never stopped being a kind and generous friend; to Mathilde, for teaching me that sometimes curiosity *is* a rover on Mars; to Anne, who was always there for me, who kept the music in my life and reminded me that it has never been my duty to remake the world at large.

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