”Bought, not wed!“
Hesiod and the Aristocratic ‘Peasants’

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I. Introduction*

Hesiod’s poem *Works and Days* offers a unique view of agrarian life in early archaic Greece and is one of the main sources for a social history of this period. Yet much remains open to dispute. One of the central questions concerns the relationship between the world described by Hesiod and the heroic world of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Opinions differ widely on whether Hesiod is referring to a “peasant” class completely different from the supposedly “aristocratic” audience addressed by Homer, or whether both worlds ought to be seen as two sides of the same coin.[1] Yet it is not only these wider issues which have caused controversy, but also single verses. This paper will focus on one such verse, considering the controversies surrounding it, and the ways in which such controversies are relevant for the larger debates on how to situate Hesiod’s text within a social history of archaic Greece.

The passage in question occurs in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* and represents a brief enumeration of the *oikos*’ basic needs:

> First a house, a woman and an ox for ploughing,
> [Bought, not wed be the woman so that she can follow the oxen].[2]

While the first verse is deemed unproblematic, verse 406 which presents the woman as being “bought, not wed”, has caused much dispute: several editions are sceptical about its authenticity.[3] The content is bound to trigger several questions: it is not self-evident why Hesiod should favour a slave woman over a wedded wife. It is also rather mysterious what this woman should be doing by “following the oxen”: the phrase “to follow the oxen” reoccurs a few lines later in the sense of “ploughing”, and is clearly marked out as men’s work.[4]

Of more immediate concern for modern editors, however, is the fact that Aristotle only knows the first line. In the *Politics* he cites Hesiod’s verse about the house, the woman, and the ox, in order to demonstrate that an ox is the poor man’s slave.[5] In the *Oeconomica,* handed down under his name, he cites the same verse again, explaining that the house is needed for subsistence and the woman for begetting legitimate children.[6] Aristotle thus has a very clear picture of Hesiod’s household: Hesiod is a poor man who does not own slaves and who is in need of a wife to beget legitimate children. If Aristotle had been aware of the second line, his whole interpretation would have been open to challenge. Many modern scholars share Aristotle’s interpretation of Hesiod as a peasant farmer. They are, therefore, quite willing to

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* This paper presents a condensed discussion of Meister 2020: 93–114.

[1] For a detailed discussion (decidedly opting for the later interpretation) cf. Meister 2020: 47–114.

[2] Hes. *Op.* 405–406: Οἶκον μὲν πρώτιστα γυναῖκά τε βοῦν τ' ἀροτῆρα, / [κτητήν, οὐ γαμετήν, ἥτις καὶ βουσὶν ἕποιτο].

[3] Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1928: 90–91 deletes the verse. West 1978: 260 is sceptical but favours a deletion too. Mazon 1914: 99–101 offers good reasons for the verse’s authenticity; Hoekstra 1950: 91–98 and Maehler 1967: 69–70 also consider the verse to be original.

[4] Hes. *Op.* 441–447.

[5] Arist. *Pol.* 1252b 9–12: [...] καὶ ὀρθῶς Ἡσίοδος εἶπε ποιήσας „οἶκον μὲν πρώτιστα γυναῖκά τε βοῦν τ' ἀροτῆρα“· ὁ γὰρ βοῦς ἀντ' οἰκέτου τοῖς πένησίν ἐστιν.

[6] Ps.-Arist. *Oec.* II 1. 1343a 20–23: Ὥστε καθ' Ἡσίοδον δέοι ἂν ὑπάρχειν „οἶκον μὲν πρώτιστα γυναῖκά τε βοῦν τ' ἀροτῆρα“. Τὸ μὲν γὰρ τῆς τροφῆς πρῶτον, τὸ δὲ τῶν ἐλευθέρων <δεύτερον>.

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jump to the conclusion that Aristotle had a better text, and that verse 406 is a later addition. The evidence, however, points in another direction. Other ancient authors criticize Aristotle for misinterpreting Hesiod and ignoring the second line.[7] Moreover, the verse in question – although missing on a second century papyrus – appears in all relevant manuscripts and none of the scholia consider it to be problematic at all.[8] The far more probable conclusion should be that Aristotle was citing Hesiod by heart and simply forgot (or chose to ignore) the second verse since it did not correspond to his picture of Hesiod as a poor peasant farmer.

Although the manuscript tradition hardly provides any reason to doubt the authenticity of verse 406, there remain linguistic arguments which cannot be ignored. First, there is the hyperbaton with the "ox for ploughing" separating the γυναῖκά in verse 405 from κτητήν in 406. There are parallels in Hesiod,[9] but the syntactic construction is far from elegant. Another remarkable point is that verse 405 speaks of an ox in the singular, while the following line speaks of oxen in the plural. Consequently, verse 406 seems to be a secondary addition. One must not, however, jump to the conclusion that this addition appeared only after the original poem.

In 1950, Arie Hoekstra argued quite convincingly that several passages in the *Works and Days* consist of popular proverbs the poet integrated into his epic.[10] Verse 405, specifying the basic needs of an *oikos* consisting of a house, a woman, and an ox, might well be such a proverb.[11] The closest parallel, probably based on the same proverb, would be Eumaeus' wish in the *Odyssey* for a house, a land-lot, and a much-wooed wife (in this case, clearly a woman to be wed, not bought!).[12] The fact that Hesiod speaks of an ox in the singular, is a strong argument in favour of this theory. This would make perfect sense in a proverb, while it is completely out of place in Hesiod, who otherwise *always* uses oxen in the plural, as two are needed for ploughing. In this sense the "unhesiodic" verse is not the disputed verse 406, but rather the undisputed verse 405.

This "proverb-theory" would imply that the original proverb spoke of a house, a woman, and an ox as the basic requirement of an *oikos* – the woman being a wife, not a slave. By adding a second line, however, Hesiod changed the original sense in quite a radical way, turning the "wife" into a slave woman that should be "bought, not wed". The question is why?

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[7] Thus Timaeus wrote that Aristotle followed Hesiod's advice by "marrying" a slave woman instead of a wife and that he had a son with her (*FGrH* 566 F 157 = Schol. Hes. *Op.* 405–406]). Philodemus – mistaking Ps-Aristotle for Theophrastus – criticizes the use made of verse 405 in the *Oeconomica* stating that "many" were of the opinion that Hesiod also wrote that the woman should be bought, not wed (Philodem. 9.8.35–40 = *P. Herc.* 1424.8.35–40 [ed. Jensen 1906]: καὶ π[ῶς] δέχε-|τα[ι γ]αμετὴν ὑφ' Ἡσιόδου λέ-|γε[σ]θαι τὴν γυναῖκα, πολλῶν |καὶ φασ[κ]όντων αὐτὸν γε-|γραφένα[ι] "κτητήν, οὐ γαμε-|τήν" [...]).

[8] Cf. Maehler 1967: 69–70; Mazon 1914: 100 even stated that the verse would probably never have been considered problematic, if Aristotle had not ignored it. That the verse is missing in *P. Berol.* 21107 (first published by Maehler in 1967) need not speak against this view: while West 1978: 260 sees it as further evidence that verse 406 is dubious, Maehler 1967: 69–70 argues that the papyrus' second century date clearly shows that verse 406 was not an addition made by Hellenistic editors. The idea that Aristotle had the original version is thus contradicted – apparently, the strange content of verse 406 caused it to drop out of some inferior manuscripts probably for the same reason Aristotle forgot to cite it. Contrary to West, Maehler therefore takes the verse's absence in *P. Berol.* 21107 as evidence for its authenticity.

[9] E.g. Hes. *Op.* 559–560.

[10] Hoekstra 1950.

[11] *Ibid.*: 91–98.

[12] Hom. *Od.* 14.64: οἶκόν τε κλῆρόν τε πολυμνήστην τε γυναῖκα. Hoekstra 1950: 96 proposed that the original proverb might have been something like: οἶκόν έχοις κλῆρόν τε γυναῖκά τε βοῦν τ' ἀροτῆρα.

Hoekstra simply declared that Hesiod apparently thought a slave to be among the basic needs of an *oikos*.[13] If one accepts verse 406 to be Hesiodic, this is certainly true, but it does not explain very much. A more recent and profound explanation has been offered by Winfried Schmitz in his seminal work on neighbourhood and village-community in archaic Greece.[14] Like Hoekstra, Schmitz accepts verse 405 as an old proverb and 406 as an addition made by Hesiod. Unlike Hoekstra, however, Schmitz does not see this addition as meaningful advice. On the contrary, he sees it rather as a misogynist joke not to be taken at face value.[15]

Detecting humour with historical hindsight is difficult since it often means imposing an *a priori*-logic upon a past society in which the alleged joke is illogical and lacking a deeper meaning and, therefore, would have been considered as funny by contemporaries.[16] Schmitz, however, offers a careful reconstruction of Hesiod's world and its internal logic.[17] Making use of comparative data mostly from rural communities of early modern Europe, Schmitz reconstructs a society of farmers with a house, a wife, a pair of oxen, and workers hired on a seasonal basis, who lived in precarious self-sufficiency. An individual's status within the community was determined by the economic capacity of his household: farmers who possessed at least a pair of oxen, formed the village's upper stratum, while the rest were tenant farmers who had to hire themselves out in order to make a living.[18] Just as in the early modern period, Hesiod recommends his readers to marry late and to beget a small number of children, in order to keep the number of possible heirs low and to prevent a division of property.[19] Finally Hesiod, like early modern farmers, also depends on hired labour and help from neighbours. This dependence on the village community, following Schmitz's theory, would have made farmers more conscious of communal issues and many of the later *polis* institutions can plausibly be explained as deriving from the communal values of these village-farmers.[20]

Schmitz differentiates the Hesiodic farmers from the aristocratic world described in the Homeric epics.[21] Aristocratic *oikoi* can, in Schmitz's view, be clearly distinguished from Hesiod's farm. Not only are they larger; they also differ in their internal structure, thus creating a completely different mentality: aristocrats take pride in having as many children as possible and they show little interest in communal values because they are not nearly as dependent on the community as peasant farmers. This is mainly due to their ownership of slaves, which makes them more independent from the hired workforce and the help of neighbours. When seeking the origins of the *polis*, aristocrats, as portrayed by Schmitz, turn out to be a dead end. Aristocrats are also more relaxed concerning the relationship between the sexes. In Hesiod's world, however, the clear division of labour and the precarious situation of the individual household, make the farmer very dependent on his wife's labour potential, which leads to high levels of misogyny.[22] This misogyny can be viewed as a strategy to mask the farmer's dependence on his wife and reinforce masculine authority. This is exactly how Schmitz

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[13] Hoekstra 1950: 98.
[14] Schmitz 2004.
[15] *Ibid.*: 61–62; 86.
[16] Cf. Meister 2014 and Meister 2021.
[17] Schmitz 2004: 26–104.
[18] *Ibid.*: 47–42; 60–62.
[19] Hes. *Op.* 376–377; 695–697; cf. Schmitz 2004: 94–98.
[20] Cf. Schmitz 2004: 184–258 for an illuminating analysis of Solon's laws along this line of thinking.
[21] Schmitz 2004: 105–126; esp. 111–119 and for the marked difference between farmers and aristocrats: 132–140. For the aristocracy in general cf. Schmitz 2008.
[22] Schmitz 2004: 83–94. Cf. Zoepffel 1989: 466–469 who also views misogyny as a lower-class phenomenon („Unterschichtenphänomen“). For a recent take on archaic Greek misogyny cf. Seelentag 2014.

explains Hesiod's verses: by turning the wife from the original proverb into a slave woman, Hesiod makes a misogynist joke that matches the agrarian society he is living in.

But does the appearance of a slave woman in this verse only make sense as a joke? Schmitz seems to be following the logic of Aristotle who considers marriage to a woman as the only possible way of begetting legitimate children and who imagines Hesiod to be a poor man who possesses oxen, but not slaves. Schmitz's comparison with early modern agrarian societies further underpins this logic: in this case, the legal institution of marriage is well established, as is the practice of hiring labourers instead of buying slaves. The absence of slaves in Hesiod's *oikos* is indeed one of the central distinctions that Schmitz uses to set this form of household apart from the slave-owning aristocrats. Thus, he declares authoritatively that there is no evidence in the *Works and Days* for any form of unfree labour.[23] Hesiod's verse about the slave woman does not fit this picture: it would question one of the central assumptions on which Schmitz bases his sharp distinction between aristocratic and non-aristocratic households. But perhaps it is necessary to question this distinction, in order for perspectives and questions raised in his stimulating book to be further developed. For, I propose, Hesiod's recommendation to buy a slave, instead of marrying, has a logic. This logic is appropriate to an agrarian world with a low level of institutionalisation – but it was lost in classical times when the distinction between free and unfree status was legally defined and sanctioned by the *polis* and its institutions and it is completely absent from peasant societies in early modern Europe where the option of buying a woman rather than marring a wife would have made no sense at all due to the lack of slavery. The verse is, therefore, well suited to reveal some of the distinctive features that set early Archaic society apart from comparable agrarian societies of later ages.

II. Unfree women, wives, and *hedna* in the epics

Slaves seem to have been quite common at the beginning of the 7th century when the epics were most likely written down.[24] Homer often mentions unfree women – they can be captured

[23] Schmitz 2004: 37; „Belege für unfreie Bedienstete sind aus den Werken und Tagen Hesiods nicht zu gewinnen". This requires him, however, to argue that the Hesiodic *dmoes* are identical with hired workers normally denoted as *thetes* whom Schmitz sees as a separate class of tenant farmers ("unterbäuerliche Schicht", *ibid.*: 33–38). Wickert-Micknat 1983: 154–159, too, argues that *dmoes* may include all members of a household – hired hands as well as slaves. Yet, while there are good reasons for such a view, the epics (at least at times) do seem to make a distinction: in Hom. *Od.* 4.643–644 the suitors ask whether Telemachus is accompanied by noble Itacans on his journey or only by ἑοὶ αὐτοῦ / θῆτές τε δμῶές τε – both the *thetes* and the *dmoes* are Telemachus' and thus part of his household, yet they are not identical. Hesiod only mentions a *thes* in *Op.* 602 – clearly, in Schmitz's sense, this individual is a *thes* as he is to be hired. However, this need not mean that once the *thes* has been hired, he comes to be viewed as a *dmoes*: Mazon 1914: 131–132 and West 1978: 309–310 rather propose that Hesiod recommends hiring a free man as a trusted overseer, not so much as part of the workforce (which is also consistent with Hesiod's recommendation, in the same passage, to acquire a watchdog). West 1978: 310 points out that in the following lines Hesiod talks about seafaring, so, perhaps hiring a *thes* should be seen in this context: one needs a trusted man guarding the *oikos* while being abroad. Hiring freemen as trusted helpers and overseers was not uncommon in classical times for well-off households as Xen. *Mem.* 2.8.3 shows. The fact that Hesiod declares in *Op.* 370 that one should pay a friend (ἀνήρ φίλος) the wages (μισθός) according to agreement also indicates that the hired *thes*, as a „friend", could lay claim to a position different from that of the *dmoes* mentioned elsewhere in the epic; this argument (though still not decisive) can be further strengthened when considering that Hesiod speaks of *dmoes* in the plural, but of the *thes* and the *erithos* who are to be hired in the singular.
[24] The dating of the epics is of course controversial. For a good discussion of the ancient chronology and the modern scholarship on Hesiod see Kôiv 2011; the debates on the dating of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are discussed by Kullmann 2011: 114–115; Rengakos 2011: 144–146 and West 1995; cf. also Meister 2020: 47–54. The date of the epics, however, is a different issue from the dating of the society they describe: while Hesiod is considered to mirror his own times, 'Homeric society' is a different and more difficult case – the problem is well presented

as booty or given as presents, and appear regularly as servants in heroic households.[25] However, some have been bought like Eurycleia whom Laertes acquired for the equivalent of 20 oxen.[26]

We need not take these prices at face value: Homeric heroes are pictured as being fantastically rich and, consequently, their slaves are fantastically expensive. The prices mentioned in the epics thus can hardly be adduced as evidence that a reasonably well-off farmer like Hesiod, would not have been able to purchase a slave. Nor should Hesiod be seen as a poor peasant: after all, he was able to afford wine imported from Byblos and, in very aristocratic fashion, he dedicated a tripod to the gods.[27] What we can deduce, however, is that a market for slaves existed. The most striking evidence is found in book 7 of the *Iliad,* in which ships sent by Euneus exchange wine for the booty the Greeks had made consisting of iron, cattle, and slaves.[28]

Slaves were certainly available and what is equally important is that, considered from a strictly economic point of view, they were not necessarily more "expensive" than a wife, since it is customary in the Homeric epics to pay bridewealth: the so-called *hedna* consisting of livestock.[29] Thus, in a certain sense, a wife, although "wed", was also "bought". The value of such *hedna* make Eurycleia look cheap: we learn of Iphidamas, who paid 100 oxen to his father-in-law and promised to pay another 1000 pieces of livestock later on.[30]

It was this practice which led Aristotle to call the archaic Greeks "barbaric", because they walked around armed and bought their wives from each another.[31] Giving *hedna* should,

by Raaflaub 1998; for a recent discussion see Ulf 2011 and for a combined view of the worlds of Homer and Hesiod see Ulf 2009 and Meister 2020: 47–114.

[25] For unfree status in Homer cf. Wickert-Micknat 1983 who also points out that the strict dichotomy between free and unfree status was not yet established so that not all servants were necessarily slaves; cf. also Wickert-Micknat 1986. For a more general discussion of Greek slave systems in archaic times cf. Lewis 2018: 107–120 and Lewis' chapter in this volume.

[26] Hom. *Od*. 1.430–434. The price is extraordinarily high even in the context of the epics. The slave woman Achilles offers as a prize in the funerary games is only worth four oxen (*Il.* 23.705); bought women are further mentioned in *Od*. 14.202; 15.428–429.

[27] Wine form Byblos: Hes. *Op.* 589; tripod: *Op.* 656–659. For Hesiod as "semi-aristocrat" cf. Starr 1977: 126–127; Starr 1992: 13. For Hesiod as a "gentleman-farmer" cf. van Wees 2013.

[28] Hom. *Il.* 7.467–475. Cf. Ulf 2011: 267–268.

[29] The *hedna* are always paid to the bride's father and whenever specified they consist of livestock: cf. Hom. *Il.* 11.243–245 (see infra), *Od*. 11.289–290 where Neleus promises his daughter to whomever returns his stolen cattle and *Il.* 18.593 where girls are described as cattle-bringing (ἀλφεσίβοιαι); otherwise *hedna* are used rather in a rather formulaic manner (*Il.* 16.178; 190; 22.472; *Od*. 2.196; 11.282). If the marriage is annulled and it is the wife's fault, *Od*. 8.318 seems to imply that the *hedna* can be reclaimed. Marrying without *hedna* is unusual and thus specially noted as in the case of Othryoneus who gets to marry Cassandra *anaednos* under the condition that he fights for Priam (*Il.* 13.365–369) – an arrangement that causes him to be mocked by Idomeneus at his death (*Il.* 13.377–382); Agamemnon's offer to marry one of his daughters *anaednos* to Achilles belongs to the same category. For *hedna* and Homeric marriage-practices cf. Finley 1955; Vernant 1974; Mossé 1981: 149–151; Wickert-Micknat 1982: 89–94; Wagner-Hasel 1988; Perysinakis 1991; Patterson 1998: 56–62.

[30] Hom. *Il.* 11.243–245.

[31] Arist. *Pol.* 1268b 39–41: τοὺς γὰρ ἀρχαίους νόμους λίαν ἁπλοῦς εἶναι καὶ βαρβαρικούς. ἐσιδηροφοροῦντό τε γὰρ οἱ Ἕλληνες, καὶ τὰς γυναῖκας ἐωνοῦντο παρ' ἀλλήλων. Comparing early Greeks with the barbarians of one's own time was a common trope from Thucydides onwards and should not be seen as a consistent historical theory. Thus Aristotle does not further explore how wives are distinguished from slaves (a distinction clearly present in the epics) – had he been interested in this distinction, it would have been harder for him to ignore the existence of Hes. *Op*. 406 when citing Hesiod as a timeless authority for universal truths on marriage and household-needs.

nevertheless not be regarded as a simple act of purchase.[32] Moses Finley argued that the payment of bridewealth formed part of a larger system of gift exchange, in which gifts flowed in both directions and established a long-term relationship between different *oikoi*.[33] Beate Wagner-Hasel was able to further refine this argument by showing that gifts were connected with gender: while the bride gave and received jewellery and – most importantly – textiles, the groom compensated the bride's father with *hedna,* consisting of livestock, for the loss of his daughter.[34] The terminology is consistent throughout the epics: *hedna* is used only for the "male" gifts given to the bride's father.[35] As Aristotle's statement makes clear, the Homeric practice of paying *hedna* was viewed as "barbaric" by later Greeks, because marriage practices had changed in classical times: the term *hedna* disappeared and the bride's dowry became more important.

However, using the Homeric epics as evidence is, of course, often problematic. The poet pictures an age of heroes that has long passed and that should not be mistaken for historical reality. In many cases, we find an amalgam of old, new, and heroic fantasy.[36] Yet, the society of the epics had to make sense to the poet and his audience and from this point of view the consistency of the wedding practices described is remarkable. It is, therefore, only a reasonable assumption that the tradition of paying *hedna* was common practice in the early 7th century. Hesiod's failure to mention *hedna* in the *Works and Days* should not be overemphasised since he also neglects to mention a dowry or the costs of a wedding feast – in fact, he is instead concerned with the right age for marriage, not with its economic aspects. *Hedna* do, however, appear in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, where the use of the term corresponds precisely with that found in Homer. In both cases, *hedna* are the gifts given to the bride's father.[37] This consistency becomes even more remarkable if one considers later texts. In Pindar and Euripides, the meaning of *hedna* has changed quite radically: it can now signify the woman's dowry and in another case the wedding gifts that are given to the newlywed couple by their guests.[38] Both poets are dealing with the heroic age, so there is no reason why they should not use the term *hedna* in the same sense as Homer or Hesiod. Apparently, the changing nature of marriage practices has left its traces in the way poets imagined the heroic age. This is not surprising; it is precisely the amalgam of old and new that normally causes historians headaches when dealing with Homeric society. The fact that this amalgam occurs in Pindar and Euripides but not in Homer and Hesiod makes it very plausible that in the early 7th century it was still common for a groom to give *hedna* to his father-in-law.

This assumption can be further strengthened if we take into account that paying *hedna* is strangely out of place in the world of the Homeric heroes, since *hedna* were *always* paid in

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[32] However, older scholarship saw it that way, cf. Westrup 1927: esp. 109–119; Erdmann 1934: 207–212; Wolff 1952 15. That *hedna* did not constitute a form of marriage by purchase was first argued by Köstler 1950: 29–64 who was then explicitly followed by Finley 1955: 167 n. 2.
[33] Finley 1955.
[34] Wagner-Hasel 1988; cf. Wagner-Hasel 2012.
[35] Cf. Perysinakis 1991.
[36] Cf. Raaflaub 1998.
[37] Hes. fr. 26.37 MW = 23.37 Most; fr. 43a,21 MW = 69.21 Most; fr. 198.10 MW = 154c.10 Most; 199.9 MW = 154d.9 Most; 200.4 MW = 154e.4 Most; 204.54 MW = 155.54 Most; cf. Ormand 2014: 52–84. Hesiod's authorship of the "catalogue" has been questioned by modern scholars, cf. Ercolani and Rossi 2011: 94–95. For a recent contribution see Ormand 2014: 3–6 who favours a 6th century date.
[38] Dowry: Pind. *Ol.* 9.10 (ἕδνον in the singular!). Wedding gifts given to the couple: Pind. *Pyth*. 3.94. The mentioning of *hedna* in Eur. *Andr*. 2; 153; 873 is inconclusive – the meaning might be "dowry"; it could, however, be consistent with the Homeric usage, cf. Wagner-Hasel 2009: 165–166.

livestock.[39] This certainly makes sense for marriages contracted at a local level. Homeric heroes, however, tend to marry across vast distances, where an exchange of large herds would have posed considerable difficulties. Hesiod, on the other hand, recommends marrying a girl who comes from nearby – a marriage custom much more appropriate for the payment of *hedna* as described by Homer.[40] Perhaps, then, the *hedna* should be seen as a compensation given to the father for the loss of his daughter as workforce. For even in the households of rich *basileis* daughters are obliged to work.[41] Apparently, Homer was unable to imagine a society where noble women could afford to live a life of leisure, and if we take into account that even fantastically rich Homeric heroes at times paid their *hedna,* not only in oxen, but also in sheep and goats,[42] then this all starts to make perfect sense when seen in the context of the rural world described by Hesiod.[43]

We must presume, therefore, that a reasonably well-off farmer like Hesiod had to take into account that marrying a woman of equal standing would have obligated him to compensate the bride's father with *hedna*. Of course, he would have gotten something in return, but getting married did require an investment – and this investment had to be made in livestock. This is where Hesiod's recommendation to buy a woman starts to make sense, simply because, while *hedna* are always paid in livestock, Laertes acquired Eurycleia for the *equivalent* of 20 oxen.[44] This means that the commodities used to buy slaves were flexible, and this flexibility was a great advantage because livestock is a capital that tends to reproduce and grow over time. For a young farmer who just inherited his *kleros*, built his house and bought his oxen, it would have made sense to wait for his herds to grow before getting married. In the meantime, a slave-woman was a good interim solution, especially because she could be bought with commodities other than livestock – valuable heirlooms, for instance – that were not essential for the economic functioning of the newly established *oikos*.

A bought woman, also, had a second advantage over a wedded wife, because there was a relationship between status and labour. The epics of Homer and Hesiod both document a division of labour along gender lines. It was necessary to have a woman in the household to take care of the "feminine" work unsuitable for a man.[45] Of course, a slave woman could do this just as well as a wedded wife. The point of Hesiod's recommendation is, however, that a bought woman could "follow the oxen". The phrase "to follow the oxen" usually means "to plough", and for Hesiod this clearly was the work of men. Some scholars have jumped to the conclusion that this supposed inconsistency proves verse 406 to be a later addition, but this completely misses the point, since for Hesiod it went without saying that a slave woman would

[39] Cf. n. 29.
[40] Hes. *Op.* 700.
[41] Even in the fairyland of Phaeacia described in *Od.* 6 princess Nausicaa has to do the laundry while her brothers tend her cart and the animals (*Od.* 7.4–6); for a detailed discussion see Meister 2020: 54–65.
[42] Hom. *Il.* 11.244–245.
[43] Ormand 2014: 52–84, following Morris 1986: 104–115 argues that *hedna* are an „aristocratic" practice that became out of fashion with the triumph of the „middling ideology". Anthropological data, however, suggests that bridewealth is a common custom in less stratified societies in which the workforce of women is more important in the fieldwork, whereas a dowry-system is typical of stratified societies with intense agriculture; cf. Goody 1973: 45–47; 51–52. The "aristocratic" form of marriage is thus a marriage with dowry, not with bridewealth, or, as Jack Goody put it, *ibid.*: 47: "Dowry differentiates, just as bridewealth tends to homogenize."
[44] This important point is stressed by Finley 1955: 174.
[45] For feminine *erga* in the epics cf. Wickert-Micknat 1982: 38–80 and for division of labour in the Archaic period in general Zoepffel 1989: 448–469; for an overview of recent scholarship cf. Scheer 2011: 9–101. Wagner-Hasel 2020: 155–169 discusses female *erga* as part of the reciprocal relationship between men and women within the domestic sphere.

perform women's work within the *oikos*. But, in addition to this, – and that is the poet's point – she could also perform men's work and follow the oxen. As Walter Scheidel has demonstrated, there is much evidence from antiquity showing that, despite a division of labour between the sexes, necessity often forced women to perform masculine tasks.[46] Being consistent with normative gender-roles was something one had to be able to afford, and thus was a marker of status, which is precisely the meaning of Hesiod's verse: a wife was of higher status than a slave woman and would thus be entitled to treatment that was in keeping with her female role. A slave woman, on the other hand, was able to perform all of the tasks of a wife, but she was also able to perform men's work, without compromising her status.

For a young farmer who was just establishing his *oikos,* buying a woman instead of marrying a wife thus made sense on two levels: first, he was flexible concerning the forms of payment, and not obligated to pay bridewealth in the form of livestock, and, second, a slave woman could perform all the tasks of a wife, but, due to of her inferior status, she could also be used for men's work, like following the oxen.

Regarding the somewhat slippery statement that a slave can "perform all the tasks of a wife", a third argument can be deduced. The Homeric epics show quite clearly that it was customary for slave women to be sexually available to their masters, and thus, a slave woman could be an interim solution, not only in terms of her ability to work. In this context, it is interesting to note that the boundaries between wedded wives – usually denoted with the term *alochos* – and unfree concubines, appear at times to be rather fluid.[47] Laertes is said to have honoured Eurycleia like a wife, but he did not sleep with her, so as not to offend his real wife.[48] Achilles, on the other hand, compares his relationship with the unfree Briseis to that of Menelaus and Helen, while speaking of her as his *alochos*, his wife.[49] In book 19 Briseis weeps over the body of Patroclus, remembering that he once promised to give her to Achilles in marriage once they got back to Thessaly.[50] A slave woman, thus, could be raised to the status of a legitimate wife, but this could not be done arbitrarily. Briseis is referring to a public wedding feast that would have been necessary to demonstrate her new status to the wider community. But, technically, there existed indeed the option of "upgrading" a slave woman to a wife.

It was, of course, an option with severe disadvantages, for it meant relinquishing the opportunity of forming an alliance with another *oikos* and acquiring prestige by marrying a wife of status.[51] Nevertheless, if we imagine once again our young farmer who was just about to establish his *oikos*, then this too was a good perspective: a slave woman could be an interim solution for the first few years while one waited for the *oikos* and its herds to prosper. If things went well, one could marry at around the age of 30, just as Hesiod recommends. If, however, things should have gone bad, one would always have the option of transforming one's slave woman into a legitimate wife. This certainly was not the rule, nor was it the best-case scenario

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[46] Scheidel 1990; Scheidel 1995/96.

[47] Cf. Wickert-Micknat 1982: 80–84 and for the fluid "legal" status of marriage in the Homeric world in general: Finley 1955: 187–193; Vernant 1974: esp. 68: „Le statut des femmes comme celui des fils, légitimes ou bâtards, dépend donc une large mesure de la *timé*, de l'honneur qui leur est reconnu par le chef de famille".

[48] Hom. *Od.* 1.432; that this could be seen as a threat to the wife's status is made clear by a passage in the *Iliad* (*Il.* 9.449–452) where Phoenix' mother sees herself dishonoured because her husband sleeps with a concubine.

[49] Hom. *Il.* 9.336–343. Agamemnon too claimed that he preferred Chryseis over his *alochos* Clytemnestra; he refrained, however, from actually calling her his *alochos* (*Il.* 1.113–115).

[50] Hom. *Il.* 19.297–299. Cf. Wickert-Micknat 1982: 84 who sees this as a promise for an elevation of status – a conclusion that seems self-evident.

[51] For the prestige involved with marriages cf. Duplouy 2006: 79–117.

– it was rather a backup option. However, in an agrarian world in which the future is uncertain, it can be wise to have a backup option, which in this case was made possible by the availability of slaves and by the rather fluid boundaries between free and unfree status. These fluid boundaries, however, did not only concern slave women, but also the potential children of these women. This leads to the fourth reason why buying a woman instead of marrying made sense in Hesiod's world.

III. *Nothoi* and *gnesioi*

The Homeric epics feature a considerable number of bastards. Both Medon and Teucer were bastard heroes, fighting on the Greek side,[52] Medon even led his own warrior band.[53] On the Trojan side, we hear of several bastard sons of Priam and Antenor.[54] There are numerous individuals all clearly denoted as being bastards by the Greek term *nothos,* and as such they are set apart from their legitimate half-brothers, who are referred to as *gnesioi*.[55] The difference between these two groups becomes apparent in the two cases where a *gnesios* and a *nothos* fight alongside one another: Hector's bastard brother functions as his charioteer – clearly an inferior position – as does Isos, the bastard brother of another of Priam's legitimate sons.[56] It is certainly no coincidence that the bastard is named "Isos", whoever gave this name to him clearly had hoped that, even though he was a bastard, he would be treated as an "equal".[57] In Homeric society, bastards could indeed hope for equal treatment, but contrary to *gnesioi*, they were not entitled to it. Thus, Teucer is reminded that he should be brave and do honour to his father who had accepted him into his *oikos,* although he was a bastard.[58] And, when referring to a bastard of Antenor, the poet states that Antenor's wife had accepted him into the *oikos* and had raised him as an equal with her own children.[59] Equal treatment was thus possible, but the fact that it needs to be mentioned shows that it could not be taken for granted.

In the *Odyssey* the term *nothos* is missing. There are, however, two stories from the *Odyssey*, which help to complete the picture one gets from the *Iliad*. In book 14, Odysseus lies about his identity by pretending to be the son of a Cretan called Castor.[60] Castor had many sons with his legitimate wife, his *alochos*, but Odysseus pretends to have been born by a bought woman whom his father had used as a concubine.[61] In the *Iliad,* we never learn whether bastards were born by free women or slaves, but apparently this is of no importance, since Castor nonetheless honoured his bastard son equally (*isos*) as his other children. Only on Castor's death did the difference between the *nothos* and the *gnesioi* become apparent, for Odysseus claims that his half-brothers left him only a small share of the inheritance. Yet, he did get a share, and later on

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[52] Medon: Hom. *Il.* 2.727; 13.694–697; 15.333–336; Teucer: *Il.* 8.284. For bastards in the epics cf. Odgen 1996: esp. 21–26.
[53] Hom. *Il.* 2.716–728.
[54] Hom. *Il.* 4.499; 5.69–70; 11.101–103.; 11.489–490; 16.737–738.
[55] Cf. Ogden 1996: 14–21.
[56] Hom. *Il.* 16.737–738 and 11.101–103: αὐτὰρ ὃ βῆ Ἶσόν τε καὶ Ἄντιφον ἐξεναρίξων / υἷε δύω Πριάμοιο νόθον καὶ γνήσιον ἄμφω / εἰν ἑνὶ δίφρῳ ἐόντας· ὃ μὲν νόθος ἡνιόχευεν.
[57] Cf. Ogden 1996: 24.
[58] Hom. *Il.* 8.283–284: πατρί τε σῷ Τελαμῶνι, ὅ σ' ἔτρεφε τυτθὸν ἐόντα, / καί σε νόθον περ ἐόντα κομίσσατο ᾧ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ.
[59] Hom. *Il.* 5.69–71: Πήδαιον δ' ἄρ' ἔπεφνε Μέγης Ἀντήνορος υἱὸν / ὅς ῥα νόθος μὲν ἔην, πύκα δ' ἔτρεφε δῖα Θεανὼ / ἶσα φίλοισι τέκεσσι χαριζομένη πόσεϊ ᾧ.
[60] Hom. *Od.* 14.199 ff.
[61] Hom. *Od.* 14.200–203: πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ ἄλλοι / υἷες ἐνὶ μεγάρῳ ἠμὲν τράφον ἠδ' ἐγένοντο / γνήσιοι ἐξ ἀλόχου· ἐμὲ δ' ὠνητὴ τέκε μήτηρ / παλλακίς, ἀλλά με ἶσον ἰθαιγενέεσσιν ἐτίμα [...].

he even was able to make a very profitable marriage.[62] A bastard heritage thus was a handicap, but did not bring social stigma.

This becomes even more evident in the second story, found in the fourth book. When Telemachus comes to Sparta, Menelaus is celebrating a double wedding: his daughter Hermione is to be married to Neoptolemus in Thessaly, while his son Megapenthes is to be married to a Spartan girl.[63] The poet tells us that this son was

> (…) born of a slave woman; for to Helen the gods vouchsafed issue no more after she had at the first borne her lovely child*,* Hermione*,* who had the beauty of golden Aphrodite.[64]

This case is particularly interesting, for it shows that a bastard son could not only be honoured like a legitimate son and inherit a small share of the property, but that, in fact, with a legitimate male heir lacking, the bastard could even assume his place. It is quite evident that Megapenthes is designed to be the successor of Menelaus, given that Hermione is bound to be married off in a patrilocal marriage. The other solution, which is common in many societies, would have been to contract a matrilocal marriage by taking Hermione's husband into the *oikos* of Menelaus, in order to fill the place of the lacking (legitimate) son. This strategy was not unknown in Homeric society – we encounter it, for instance, among the Phaeacians.[65] But Menelaus resorted to a different strategy to secure his succession: apparently it was possible, and socially acceptable, to have a bastard son take the place of a legitimate heir, even if born from a slave.

What made sense in Homer's world of heroes, made even more sense in the "peasant" world of Hesiod. As Winfried Schmitz has shown, Hesiod's recommendation to beget only one son, must be seen as a deliberate strategy to prevent the *oikos* from being divided among multiple heirs.[66] The recommendation to marry around the age of thirty – which is rather late – is part of this strategy: the later in life one marries, the less likely one is to produce multiple heirs.[67] Hesiod, however, faced a dilemma, for only a few lines later he states that having more sons would cause more worries, albeit more profit.[68] There probably was no shortage of land in the early 7th century, so that the workforce of extra-sons could be used to cultivate more land.[69] The situation was thus different from that of early modern Europe, where land was limited and a greater workforce did not necessarily produce more profit. Furthermore, there was always the risk that if one had only a single son, this son might die prematurely and leave the father unattended in his old age.

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[62] Hom. *Od.* 14.108–111.

[63] Hom. *Od.* 4.1 ff.

[64] Hom. *Od.* 4.12–14 (trans. from LCL): ἐκ δούλης· Ἑλένῃ δὲ θεοὶ γόνον οὐκέτ' ἔφαινον, / ἐπεὶ δὴ τὸ πρῶτον ἐγείνατο παῖδ' ἐρατεινήν, / Ἑρμιόνην, ἣ εἶδος ἔχε χρυσῆς Ἀφροδίτης.

[65] Hom. *Od.* 7.63–68: Alcinous married his niece because his brother had no sons. According to the classical tradition this solution prevailed in Sparta too – contrary to Menelaus' plans: thus, Neoptolemus was slain by Hermione's cousin Orestes who then married her and became king in Sparta instead of the bastard Megapenthes, cf. Paus. 2.18.6.

[66] Hes. *Op.* 376–377; Schmitz 2004: 94–98.

[67] Hes. *Op.* 695–697.

[68] Hes. *Op.* 380: πλείων μὲν πλεόνων μελέτη, μείζων δ' ἐπιθήκη. Cf. Schmitz 2004: 95.

[69] Link 1990 argued that apart from the land divided into *kleroi*, we should reckon with large portions of uncultivated land in Archaic times; the surveys of Lohmann 1993 (1): 121–123 also indicate that at least in Attica there was no land shortage (which does not exclude land-conflicts). Thus, Hesiod's father could, as a foreigner, acquire land in Ascra (Hes. *Op.* 635–640) and Laertes is said to have made the land arable on which his farm stands (Hom. *Od.* 24.206–207); for this possibility cf. Schmitz 2004: 95.

Hesiod's recommendations are thus contradictory: on the one hand, the option of limiting one's offspring to only one son seems preferable because the inheritance will be passed on undivided. On the other, more sons mean a greater workforce, and, thus, more profit. Finally, more sons guarantee that one is taken care of in old age. In light of this dilemma, bastards must have appeared as an excellent solution: they offered all the advantages of legitimate sons, and could even replace them, but they did not need to be treated as equals in the succession, if legitimate sons were available.

Having bastard sons had yet another advantage. Jochen Martin has pointed out that the status of old fathers in Greece, contrary to that of the *pater familias* in Rome, was precarious.[70] Hesiod is very concerned about children who mistreat their elderly parents, and later laws inflicted punishments on persons who neglected their parents.[71] Winfried Schmitz argued that this precarious situation is connected to the practice of handing over the *oikos* to one's sons while the father is still living. This practice was unthinkable in Rome, but quite common in Greece.[72] The evidence, however, remains unclear as to whether this practice was the cause, or rather the effect, of the weak position of the old father *vis-à-vis* his grown-up sons.

A key reason for the precarious status of old fathers in Greece seems to be the lack of testamentary freedom: while a Roman *pater* was free to disinherit an insubordinate son, this option does not exist in the world of the epics, where legitimate sons seemingly dispose at will of their father's inheritance.[73] In this case, having bastard-sons can be a great advantage since they had no automatic access to an inheritance, but by honouring them and treating them as equals, a father could bring his bastard-sons into a position in which they could lay claim at least to some part of the inheritance. Bastard sons were, therefore, a potential threat to the claims of legitimate sons, and offered the father the possibility of disciplining his sons, at least to some degree, and to keep his authority even in old age. This would have worked even better if the bastard sons had been older than the legitimate sons. In fact, this would have been the logical consequence, if one had started by first buying a woman, and marrying later, just as Hesiod advises.

The poet does not explicitly mention this. Instead, he only points out that a bought woman can follow the oxen. However, his recommendation makes sense on various other levels, and although this might not have been part of a conscious strategy, it nonetheless would have worked to one's advantage. Hesiod's verse about buying, but not wedding, a woman, thus made perfect sense in a society of reasonably well-off farmers, and there is no need to see it as a later addition, or as a joke.

IV. Conclusions: marriage, bastards and aristocratic farmers

If we accept this verse as authentic, and, further, as appropriate to the customs and culture of the early 7th century, this has two consequences for our picture of Hesiod's society. First, the peasant world of Hesiod is not a perfect parallel for early modern Europe. While Winfried Schmitz is certainly right in pointing out the analogies between Hesiod's world and early modern peasant societies, there are also considerable differences. The access to slaves as

[70] Martin 1984.
[71] Hes. *Op.* 185–188; 331–332.
[72] Schmitz 2004: 94–98.
[73] Martin 2009: 315–318 emphasized the Roman *pater*'s right to disinherit his sons as one of the main reasons (apart from the lifelong *patria potestas*) for his dominating position.

workforce, and the possibility of begetting bastard children one could or could not raise as equals, is one such difference. Verse 406 clearly shows that Hesiod was aware of the possibilities this offered to a moderately rich farmer, and so it seems that slaves were not a phenomenon that was limited to supposedly aristocratic households. The clear distinction Schmitz sees in the structure of peasant households and aristocratic *oikoi,* thus, needs to be regarded as much more fluid. In a sense, then, Hesiod would have been much more aristocratic than Schmitz admits, and Homeric heroes much more peasant-like.[74] Such a perspective enables us to modify Schmitz's innovative approach and to apply it to a study of archaic elites by asking how this peasant-aristocracy evolved during the following centuries.

One such historic development is the second conclusion we can draw from verse 406. The recommendation to buy a woman, instead of marrying one, does not make sense in all readings of this passage. Certainly, in a world with limited trade and limited wealth, a market for slaves would be nearly non-existent. In such a world, women could be acquired by conquest, as gifts, or by marriage; in fact, all three options are well documented in the epics. The original proverb Hesiod cites is well-suited for such a world because the woman in the proverb is clearly a married wife. However, Hesiod himself lived in a changing world, where trade flourished and wealth increased. Slave women were now available as commodities which could be bought, and this opened up new possibilities.[75] It now made sense for a moderately wealthy peasant-aristocrat of the 7th century to first buy a woman and to marry later. This is the reason why Hesiod found it necessary to add a second line to the old proverb, to make it fit for the 'modern age' of his own period.

However, slaves could not replace wives, and the social expectation that eventually one had to marry was not questioned. And yet, given the option of buying slave women, marriage became less attractive. The only advantage a *real* wife had to offer was the prestige of a marriage and the ties it established with another household. For the basic needs of an *oikos* marriage was no longer necessary, and the "misogyny" of many archaic poets could reflect just this. In fact, they usually do not portray women in general, but represent wives specifically as costly and lazy.[76]

A conflict emerges here between the interests of the individual farmer and those of the community as a whole, since a community consisted not only of bridegrooms, but also of fathers. Hesiod himself offers a rather charming picture of a young daughter who was bathed, anointed, and kept warm within the house.[77] A father certainly would have wished to have such a daughter enter into a good marriage, and not to have her status menaced by slave women who were honoured like wives. Moreover, the wife's family would hardly have been pleased by the prospect of bastards made "equal" to their grandchildren or nephews. What made sense for the individual farmer at a certain stage of his lifecycle led to diverse problems for society as a whole.

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[74] For the social foundation of Homeric heroes in an agrarian world cf. also Strasburger 1953 and Meister 2020: 54–82. There remains, however, one striking difference in the household structure among the heroes themselves: *really* rich aristocrats possess several wedded wives, as does Priam (Hom. *Il.* 8.304–305; 22.48); a practice still common among later tyrants such as Dionysus of Syracuse and (probably) Peisistratus of Athens, cf. Gernet 1982.

[75] For slavery as a relatively new phenomenon in the epics cf. Wickert-Micknat 1983: 144–149; the general increase of wealth in the course of the 8th century that formed the basis for such a market is beyond doubt: cf. Morris 2009. For a recent discussion of archaic slavery within a broader Mediterranean context (arguing that slavery was common in the world of the epics) cf. Lewis 2018: 107–120.

[76] The luxury loving "horse-woman" in Simonides fr. 7 West 57–70 mirrors this problem. On Simonides fr. 7 West in general see Seelentag 2014.

[77] Hes. *Op.* 519–523.

During the next two centuries these problems came to be addressed. The practice of paying bridewealth soon went out of fashion because a wife's labour no longer formed part of the *oikos*' basic needs. Instead, the dowry became more important, and this made marriage more attractive from an economic point of view, while at the same time enhancing the status of the bride. Equally important is the fact that marriage, and the fluid status of bastards, became subject to legislation: the laws of Solon contain several measures that discriminate *nothoi* and protect the rights of legitimate children, especially concerning their inheritance.[78] The laws of Solon also feature a *nomos agamiou* – a law directed against the unmarried – and similar laws used to enforce marriage are reported for other *poleis*.[79] The new options opened up by the possibility to buy women were thus constrained by communal legislation.

In the world of Hesiod, however, such regulations were not yet in force, and so it made perfect sense for him to add a new verse to the old proverb that advises his readers first to buy a woman, and to wait until later before marrying. For Aristotle, however, living in new circumstances, the old proverb made sense again, but in a different way. In fact, in fourth century Athens it was inconceivable that bastard children born to a slave woman could be treated as equal to legitimate heirs and Hesiod's 'modernisation' of the original proverb became obscure. What had made sense in Hesiod's world had become foreign to the world of Aristotle. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the philosopher, citing Hesiod by heart, simply 'forgot' the addition the poet once made.

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[78] F 50 a-b Ruschenbusch = Aristoph. *Av*. 1660–1663; Dem. *Or*. 43.51 bars bastards from inheritance and F 57 Ruschenbusch = Plut. *Sol*. 22.4 frees children from non-legitimate unions from the obligation to take care of their parents; F 48 a-b Ruschenbusch = Poll. 3.33; Dem. *Or*. 46.18 guarantees the *engye*-marriage and the rights of children acknowledged as *gnosioi*; for a discussion of the fragments cf. Ruschenbusch 2010: *ad loc*.; Ogden 1996: 37–44; Patterson 1998: 89–90. For the status of *nothoi* in Athens in general cf. Patterson 1990; Ogden 1996: 32–212; Kamen 2013: 62–70. In Gortyn (Ogden 1996: 263–271) bastards do not feature in the laws (*gnesioi* however do) and in Sparta too indications for legal discrimination of bastards are mostly absent (*ibid*.: 217–262); both cases, however, differ from Athens as women are able to inherit property. Their status and that of their children is therefore secured through female inheritance and not so much through the discrimination of bastards.

[79] Plut. *mor*. 493e is the main source, for further discussions cf. Schmitz 2004: 210–213. The law is considered unhistorical by most scholars; Schmitz 2004: 210–213, however, makes a strong case for its authenticity.

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