

## EROS AND MILITARY COMMAND IN XENOPHON

Xenophon's concern with morality in his more philosophical writings is evident. But (as Vivienne Gray has recently argued)<sup>1</sup> that concern embraces also his approach to history. In the *Hellenica* this interest in morality is not to be written off as a matter of marginal comment, but, it may be claimed, is integral to the historian's purpose. He is one for whom the determinants of history are (under the gods) the personalities and actions of great (and not so great) men, and it is natural for him to observe the interaction between personal morality and political and military actions. It is from this standpoint that the present article seeks to illustrate from Xenophon's writings one aspect of his outlook on these matters, – the role of self-control (or lack of it) over homoerotic desire in the context of military history. How far we can go behind his text to determine 'what actually happened' or use his testimony in developing a wider understanding of *erōs* in classical Greece at large are matters for further enquiry.

Xenophon's manifold writings contain an intriguing variety of anecdotes and narratives reflecting erotic relationships between men, and philosophical or ethical discussion about the nature of such affairs. While in the more philosophical writings Xenophon reports Socrates as expressing quite rigorist views, it appears from many of the stories narrated in the historical books that the writer is quite comfortable in recognizing such relationships as a natural part of social life, and not infrequently he implies approval.<sup>2</sup> In military matters, a positive view of the relationship between *erastēs* and *erōmenos* is based on the belief that the presence of his *erōmenos* will inspire a man to valour and, through shame, save him from cowardice. This explanation, put into the mouth of Pausanias 'lover of Agathon' in the 8th chapter of Xenophon's *Symposium*, is immediately rejected by Socrates. Yet Xenophon himself evinces some sympathy for it, when, quite parenthetically, in the treatise *On Hunting*, he takes it as self-evident that 'when any man is within sight of his *erōmenos* he excels himself and avoids saying or doing things which are base or cowardly so that he may not be seen by him'.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, elsewhere in the *Symposium* Xenophon allows Kritoboulos to give an enthusiastic exposition of the principle, and go on to declare that it is madness not to elect handsome men as generals.<sup>4</sup> No doubt some allowance must be made here for dramatic effect, yet the 'Sacred Band' of Thebes was famously organized on the basis of erotic relationships, and as Sir Kenneth Dover has pointed out, the story of Episthenes in Xenophon's *Anabasis* reflects the same belief in stiffening a fighting force with the powerful bonds of *erōs*. The historian himself, it will be remembered, intervened on behalf of this lover of boys and the young man he was seeking to save from execution, and spoke to Seuthes, the local ruler in whose service he then was, sympathetically of the company of fighting youths whom Episthenes had raised, chosen on the basis of their good looks.<sup>5</sup> Even among the

<sup>1</sup> Vivienne Gray, *The Character of Xenophon's Hellenica* (London, 1989). Cf. G. L. Cawkwell, Introduction to *Xenophon: A History of My Times* (Harmondsworth, 1979), pp. 43–6.

<sup>2</sup> Xenophon, *Hellenica* 4.1.40, 4.8.39, *Anabasis* 4.6.1–3, *Hiero* 1.29–38. *Anab.* 5.8.4. presupposes that quarrels over *paidika* were to be expected in army life.

<sup>3</sup> Xenophon, *Cynegeticus* 12.20.

<sup>4</sup> Xenophon, *Symposium* 4.15–16.

<sup>5</sup> *Anab.* 7.4.7–11. Cf. K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London, 1978), pp. 51f, and p. 192.

Spartans, who did not as a matter of policy station lovers together in battle, we find a general, Anaxibios, being faithfully attended by his *paidika* as he courted death on the battlefield.<sup>6</sup>

We may conclude that not only did Xenophon accept the practice of pederasty as a part of life, but that he also recognized the potential of the feelings it aroused to prompt nobility and valour. There is, however, a converse possibility – and one which alarmed Xenophon – that erotic desire might threaten to interfere with the performance of one's military or civic duty, particularly on the part of a man set in authority. Against this destructive *erōs* he sets the virtue of self-control (*enkrateia*), and it is the relationship between these principles, particularly in the exercise of military command, which I wish to examine in more detail in Xenophon's writings.

Self-control for Xenophon does not exclude the satisfaction of bodily needs, but it makes a man the master of such desires, not their slave. Nor is this virtue invoked only in respect of sexual matters. For sexual desire, whether for men or women, is only one of a list of bodily appetites which recurs in one form or another at several points in the *Memorabilia* and elsewhere, and over which the truly good man is expected to exercise self-control – in matters of food and drink, sex, sleep, devotion to work and the disregard of extremes of heat and cold.<sup>7</sup> This aspect of morality is summed up most graphically in Xenophon's retelling of the fable (attributed to Prodikos) of Herakles' choice between Virtue (*Aretē*) and Vice (*Kakia*, also, and interestingly, termed *Eudaimonia*), who, personified as women, set out their alternative life-styles before the hero as he enters upon manhood.<sup>8</sup> Vice offers a life of pleasure, in which Herakles need not concern himself with weighty matters of war and public affairs, but may plan his life around the choice of whatever will delight him by way of the senses, including the love of boys. Nor need he be too scrupulous about the means employed to attain these ends. With this is contrasted the path of Virtue, whose goal (to be a worthy doer of fine and noble deeds) cannot be achieved without toil and effort. After Virtue and Vice have each outlined their prospectuses, Virtue goes on to berate Vice for the more specific sins which the latter's offer entails. She (Virtue) combines two themes: that Vice requires one to make elaborate preparations for the heightening of pleasure, thus (by implication) wasting effort that should be spent on higher things; and that one is then led into excess, not waiting for appetite to arise naturally, but taking one's fill of all things before desire supervenes.<sup>9</sup> This requires the elaborate preparation of sophisticated dishes, snow-chilled wines and the like, to stimulate the jaded appetite. In the case of sexual desire, these themes are expressed in the following words, in which Virtue addresses Vice:

τὰ δ' ἀφροδίσια πρὸ τοῦ δεῖσθαι ἀναγκάζεις, πάντα μηχανωμένη καὶ γυναιξὶ τοῖς ἀνδράσι χρωμένη· οὕτω γὰρ παιδεύεις τοὺς σεαυτῆς φίλους, τῆς μὲν νυκτὸς ὑβρίζουσα, τῆς δ' ἡμέρας τὸ χρησιμώτατον κατακοιμίζουσα.

<sup>6</sup> *Hell.* 4.8.39. Paul Cartledge suggests that the *paidika* in question was not necessarily a Spartan: Paul Cartledge, 'The Politics of Spartan Pederasty', *PCPhS* 207 (n.s. 27) (1981), p. 32 n. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.5.1, 2.1.1, 2.6.1, 4.5.9. For *enkrateia* in general, compare the significant place accorded to control over the bodily pleasures in Michel Foucault's account of 'the moral problematisation of pleasures': M. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, Volume 2 of *The History of Sexuality*, translated from the French by Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth, 1986), Part 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Mem.* 2.1.21–34.

<sup>9</sup> ἥτις οὐδὲ τὴν τῶν ἡδέων ἐπιθυμίαν ἀναμένεις, ἀλλὰ πρὶν ἐπιθυμῆσαι πάντων ἐμπίμπλασαι (Ibid. 2.1.30). For this phrase and the general interpretation of the passage, see Olof Gigon, *Kommentar zum zweiten Buch von Xenophons Memorabilien* (Schweizerische Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft, Heft 7, Basel, 1956).

Before the need arises you force the arousal of sexual desire, employing all kinds of tricks and using men as women; for this is the kind of training you give your friends, indulging in excesses at night and spending the most profitable part of the day in sleep.

The somewhat strange phrase, τὰ ἀφροδίσια . . . ἀναγκάζεις, is to be explained by the context where the emphasis is on the exploration of artificial (and so, it is suggested, demeaning) ways of gaining pleasure. As one may use fancy dishes to tempt a flagging appetite, so the sensualist must turn to more recondite forms of sex to achieve sexual arousal. If so, it is natural to interpret ἀνδράσιν (in the phrase 'using men as women') strictly in the sense of 'adult men'. The reference is not to the accepted customs of pederasty, but to coupling between grown men with anal penetration – a practice which, as Sir Kenneth Dover has shown, was generally regarded as degrading. It is, says the fable, a mark of depravity to resort to such practices as a means of stimulating sexual appetite when desire flags.<sup>10</sup>

For Xenophon the need for self-control and the perils of enslavement to bodily pleasure (above all, sex) are particularly important in those who exercise any kind of authority. Even when it comes to appointing a farm bailiff, he suggests, one should avoid a man who is excessively in love, because concern with his boy lover (*paidika*) may interfere with the punctilious performance of his duties.<sup>11</sup> Not surprisingly, then, the virtue of self-control is seen as essential for those who exercise military command. At *Memorabilia* 1.5.1, control over the bodily appetites is a prime consideration in choosing a military leader. In the world of affairs in which Xenophon had some experience, it is seen as an important element in the success of Iason of Pherai as a commander, a man described in the speech of Polydamas as 'the most self-controlled of all the men I know in regard to bodily pleasures (ἐγκρατέστατός γ' ἐστὶν ὧν ἐγὼ οἶδα τῶν περὶ τὸ σῶμα ἡδονῶν).'<sup>12</sup> It is, above all for Xenophon, exemplified in the career of Agesilaos, to whom I shall return at the end of this article.

Enough has been said to sketch the place of self-control in Xenophon's concept of the good man, and in particular the good military commander. The exercise of this virtue (or the lack of it) in respect of *erōs* may be illustrated from three episodes in Xenophon's writings. As will be apparent to anyone acquainted with Xenophon's *Hellenica*, the order of presentation is determined by the logic of the argument, not the historical sequence.

The first episode is brief and, though not quite explicit, unproblematical. Little more is needed than to tell the story. It concerns an incident during Agesilaos' campaign against Thebes in 377 B.C. As a result of Spartan activities in Boiotia the Thebans had been unable to harvest their crops, and were suffering from a severe shortage of grain. They accordingly despatched two triremes up the coast to Pagasai to buy corn. The Spartans at the time had a garrison at Oreos on the island of Euboia under the command of one Alketas. He secretly manned three triremes and succeeded in capturing the Theban ships with their corn and 300 prisoners. Alketas kept his prisoners under guard on the acropolis at Oreos, where he had his own quarters. But not for long. As Xenophon relates,

In close attendance upon him [Alketas] there was, it was said, a boy from Oreos, who was a very fine young fellow. Alketas was in the habit of going down from the acropolis and devoting

<sup>10</sup> In §30 Virtue is on each point *heightening* the depravity which is only hinted at in Vice's opening statement in §24. Thus, taking pleasure in food and drink in §24 becomes, in §30, eating and drinking to excess, while sexual pleasure with boys is converted into treating men as women.

<sup>11</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 12.13–14.

<sup>12</sup> *Hell.* 6.1.16.

himself to this boy. But when the prisoners came to know of his laxity, they seized the acropolis and the city rebelled. As a result, the Thebans secured their corn with ease.<sup>13</sup>

Xenophon does not state in so many words that an erotic relationship was involved, but he often requires us to read between the lines, and there can hardly be any other explanation for Alketas deserting his post to seek out a local boy (παῖς) for no other reason than that he 'had an interest in him,' – *περὶ τοῦτον ἦν*. The use of *περὶ* with the accusative implies a preoccupation with something (less commonly, with people) in which or in whom one has a keen interest. G. E. Underhill suggests, 'was totally wrapped up in him.'<sup>14</sup> It is difficult to determine whether the description *μάλα καλὸς τε κάγαθός* (which I have translated 'a very fine young fellow') also points in this direction. The phrase commonly denotes moral worthiness and is used by Xenophon as a term of general approbation, applicable as well to a slave as to a general.<sup>15</sup> One wonders however whether its application to a youth who has no part to play except as an associate of Alketas, does not bring to the surface an underlying aesthetic reference, in a way which elsewhere requires further specification.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, Rex Warner translates, 'He was a fine attractive boy.' However that may be, Xenophon's narrative seems clearly to imply that the Spartan commander's neglect of his duties in pursuit of this boy had resulted in a significant military reverse.

My second example is as abstruse and debatable as the incident of Alketas was clear and self-explanatory. I refer to the episode of Thibron and the *aulos*-player Thersandros during Sparta's campaign against Strouthas in the Maiandros valley during 391 B.C. It is recounted in *Hellenica* 4.8.18–19. The general course of the brief campaign as it appears in Xenophon's narrative is clear enough. In an attempt to reassert Spartan influence in Asia Minor, Thibron was sent as commander of an expeditionary force to check the behaviour of Strouthas, general of the Great King, whose operations were favouring the Athenian interest. Strouthas, however, (so Xenophon informs us) had observed that Thibron's troops lacked discipline, and he soon succeeded in making a surprise attack which resulted in the deaths of Thibron and his companion Thersandros, and the flight of the Spartan army. For the military or indeed the political historian that account of the debacle may suffice. But the social historian is drawn to ask what Thibron and Thersandros may have been doing which apparently was responsible, at least in part, for precipitating the Spartan defeat. The passage is a longstanding *crux* whose obscurities have led many scholars to resort to emendation, and for which, so far as I am aware, no satisfactory solution has yet been proposed. I wish to argue that, unlikely as it may seem at first sight, the passage is to be understood as another example of the baneful effects of undisciplined *erōs*.

Before entering upon a more detailed discussion, we should recall what Xenophon has already reported about Thibron's earlier career and character. He first appears as the commander of the Spartan force in Asia Minor to which in 399 B.C. Xenophon transferred the veterans of the long march of the Ten Thousand.<sup>17</sup> The decision to join

<sup>13</sup> *Hell.* 5.4.56–7. The incident seems to have been part of a wider struggle for the control of Oreos (Histiaea), involving Iason of Pherai (Diod. XV 30. Cf. N. G. L. Hammond, *A History of Greece* [3rd ed., Oxford, 1986], p. 490). The fact that Xenophon records only the incident of Alketas reflects his interest in the morality of generalship.

<sup>14</sup> *Xenophon: Hellenica*, Text by E. C. Marchant, Notes by G. E. Underhill (Oxford, 1906), p. 214. For *περὶ* with the accusative, Underhill compares Xenophon, *Hell.* 7.4.28. Cf. LSJ s.v.

<sup>15</sup> See K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 41–5. The Xenophon references are *Oec.* 14.9 and *Hell.* 6.1.2.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Dover *ibid.* p. 41, who cites Aeschines 1.134 in this sense.

<sup>17</sup> *Anab.* 7.6.1, 7.7.57, 7.8.20–4.

Thibron was taken after tortuous negotiations between envoys from the Spartan and the court of Seuthes, ruler of Thrace, with whom the Greek mercenaries had taken service. The fact that for much of the time these negotiations seem to have taken place behind Xenophon's back, and that at one point it was put around that Xenophon's life was in danger if he joined Thibron,<sup>18</sup> suggest that from the beginning there was some cause for ill-feeling between Xenophon and the Spartan commander. No more is heard of the death threat, however, and it may have been a fabrication designed to put pressure on Xenophon. However that may be, he in the end personally conducted his force to meet Thibron at Pergamos, and (it seems generally agreed) joined the latter's campaign against the Persian Tissaphernes as commander of the veterans of the long march. As Delebecque has pointed out, Xenophon firmly disliked Thibron, perhaps because he was forced to accept a position subordinate to a man who had far less experience of warfare in Asia than he did himself.<sup>19</sup> Certainly, the brief reports of Thibron's period of command contained in the *Hellenica* are distinctly denigratory.<sup>20</sup> He was, according to Xenophon, laggardly in bringing Tissaphernes to battle; while he gained control of several cities by voluntary submission, those he took by storm were 'weak'; and where resistance was offered (at Larisa) he failed. Because he seemed to be accomplishing nothing, the ephors then ordered him to leave Larisa and campaign against Karia, where he was replaced by Derkylidas. He was then recalled to Sparta, fined and exiled. In addition to this tally of military incompetence, it was said that he allowed his soldiers to plunder their allies – an oppression which his successor sought to avoid. Here as elsewhere the inadequacy (to put it no higher) of Thibron is used by Xenophon to show up the high qualities of his successors.<sup>21</sup>

While Thibron was subsequently appointed to command the campaign against Strouthas which is my immediate concern, it would seem from the background I have sketched, that Xenophon regarded him as a man about whom a highly discreditable story could properly be told, of a kind that he might have suppressed in the case of any other Spartan. That such was the case appears (I believe) from the text which I now wish to examine in some detail – *Hellenica* 4.8.18. As found in the Oxford Classical Text, it runs as follows:

προϊόντος δὲ τοῦ χρόνου κατανοήσας ὁ Στρούθας ὅτι Θίβρων βοηθοίη ἐκάστοτε ἀτάκτως καὶ καταφρονητικῶς, ἐπέμψεν ἰππέας εἰς τὸ πεδῖον καὶ καταδραμόντας ἐκέλευσε περιβαλλομένους ἐλαύνειν ὃ τι δύναντο. ὁ δὲ Θίβρων ἐτύγχανεν ἐξ ἀρίστου διασκηνῶν μετὰ Θερσάνδρου τοῦ αὐλητοῦ. ἦν γὰρ ὁ Θέρσανδρος οὐ μόνον αὐλητῆς ἀγαθός, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀλκῆς [ισχύος], ἅτε λακωνίζων, ἀντεποιεῖτο.

The critical sentences are the last two, and it may be helpful to state at the outset the conclusion for which I propose to argue. My central contention is that *λακωνίζων* here should be recognised as an example (unique, it appears, in prose of the Classical era) of the meaning attributed to it by later lexicographers – to engage in pederasty – probably with the added nuance for which Dover has argued, of referring to anal penetration.<sup>22</sup> I would then propose to translate the passage as follows:

As time went on, Strouthas noticed that Thibron's sorties were on each occasion conducted in an indisciplined and over-confident manner. So he despatched cavalry to the plain with orders to ride down upon the enemy, to surround them and carry off whatever they could. Now, it so

<sup>18</sup> *Anab.* 7.6.43.

<sup>19</sup> Édouard Delebecque, *Essai sur la Vie de Xénophon* (Paris, 1957), p. 134. Cf. H. D. Westlake, 'Individuals in Xenophon's *Hellenica*', in *Essays on the Greek Historians and Greek History* (Manchester, 1969), pp. 210f.

<sup>20</sup> *Hell.* 3.1.4–8, 3.2.1.

<sup>21</sup> Delebecque, *op. cit.* p. 134. Cf. Vivienne Gray, *op. cit.* p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, pp. 187–8.

happened that Thibron was retiring in his tent after the morning meal with Thersandros, the *aulētēs*. For Thersandros was not only a good *aulos*-player, but also made some claim to prowess as the active partner in anal sex.

It was (Xenophon implies) because the commander was occupied in this activity while within range of the enemy that his troops lacked direction and were exposed to surprise attack.

Can such an interpretation be made good?

Two amendments have been proposed for this passage, neither of which appears to rest on any evidence of irregularity in the manuscripts. The first (the excision of *ισχύος*) is of little moment. The word is so obviously a marginal gloss on the somewhat rarer and more poetical *ἀλκῆς* that there need be no hesitation in deleting it. Rieckher's proposal to replace *διασκηνῶν* with *δισκεύων* (accepted in the Teubner text and in Rex Warner's recent translation) is more debatable and takes us to the heart of the problem. Certainly it is very difficult to assign a meaning to *διασκηνῶν* in this context if *λακωνίζων* means, as is generally supposed, 'adopting Spartan ways.' The connective *γάρ* must indicate that the sentence it introduces explains why Thibron was engaging in whatever activity is signified by *διασκηνῶν*. It might, just possibly, be explained as a defence to the charge that it was undignified for a Spartan commander to associate with a mere *aulētēs*, particularly one who was not even a Spartan. This seems unlikely on the part of a writer who has so far said nothing good about Thibron. Nor does this faltering explanation deal with the wider problem, that the whole incident concerning Thersandros seems intended to explain why Thibron was so easily surprised by the enemy.

In favour of the amendment, *δισκεύων*, it can be said that it makes a tolerable connexion with Thersandros' claim to physical prowess – though *ἀλκή* and *ἀλκιμος* elsewhere in Xenophon seem to relate more to prowess in deeds of courage than mere physical strength.<sup>23</sup> It is also true that according to Xenophon Spartan troops were required to exercise regularly while on campaign, though discus is not among the athletic exercises mentioned.<sup>24</sup> But it is doubtful whether the amendment satisfactorily explains why Thibron was so easily surprised by the enemy attack. If engaged in discus throwing or any other open-air activity, he might reasonably be expected to have seen the enemy cavalry approaching. If his real fault was a failure to appoint sentries (though Xenophon does not mention this), then the charming vignette of the game of quoits is not only irrelevant but misleading.

None of these considerations comes into play if the reading of the manuscripts can be satisfactorily explained as it stands. Let us then return to the text, and consider whether by adjusting the interpretation of other parts of the context it is possible to avoid emending *διασκηνῶν*. The key, I suggest, is *λακωνίζων*. One certainly cannot prove beyond doubt that Xenophon had in mind the meaning *παιδικοῖς χρῆσθαι*, or something like it. But a number of considerations may at least make us hesitate before ruling it out altogether.

There are of course a number of instances in Xenophon in which *λακωνίζειν* refers

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Xenophon, *Hell.* 6.1.12, *Agésilas* 10.1, *Cyrop.* 7.5.75, *Hiero* 5.1, 9.6, *Oecon.* 4.15, 6.10. One must however be cautious in generalising about 4th century usage when Aristotle (*Pol.* 1338a 20) makes *ὕγιειαν καὶ ἀλκὴν* the aim of physical exercise.

<sup>24</sup> Xenophon, *Lacedaemonian Constitution* 12.5. This text however requires the exercise to be taken before, not after, the morning meal. Advocates of the amendment *δισκεύων* may also appeal to the fact that an *aulētēs* was sometimes employed to help athletes maintain their rhythm in sports such as discus. Cf. Max Wegner, *Das Musikleben der Griechen* (Berlin, 1949), pp. 100–3.

unambiguously to taking the Spartan side in a political sense.<sup>25</sup> In this it is paralleled by similar verbal forms relating to other states – ἀττικίζειν, βοιωτιάζειν, ἀργολίζειν.<sup>26</sup> Nearly always the grammatical subject is a group of people, a faction within a city, or collectively the city as a whole. I have found only one case in Xenophon where a verb of this type is used of an individual changing his political allegiance.<sup>27</sup> Otherwise, the few examples relating to an individual (apart from the passage under review) seem to refer to speaking the language concerned, or speaking with a certain accent.<sup>28</sup> None of these examples bears upon the present context, where ‘laconising’ has to explain a claim to prowess.

In other examples of the word λακωνίζειν quoted by Liddell and Scott, the context makes its significance clear. In Plato’s *Protagoras* (342b) there is an extended joke at the Spartan expense, suggesting that their boorish customs and addiction to athletic exercise are a façade designed to conceal their true excellence which consists in the practice of philosophy. The purpose, says Plato, is to appear to excel in the military virtues, an aim taken up by those who imitate them (οἱ ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι λακωνίζοντες) in manner of life (with thonged boxing gloves, style of cloak and so on). Similar references to fashions of dress, coupled with glowering looks, mark out the laconisers in Demosthenes 54.34, to which Plutarch (*Alcibiades* 23) adds unkempt hair, addiction to cold baths, barley bread and black sauce. Elsewhere in Plutarch we find laconism in pronunciation and studied brevity of speech.<sup>29</sup>

All these passages give specific descriptions of the sort of behaviour which justifies the use of the term ‘laconising’. *Hellenica* 4.8.18 is unique among the passages so far cited for the non-political sense in not providing any such description. True, the account in the *Protagoras*, with its reference to a pretence of military virtue, is fairly readily applied to Thersandros’ claim to prowess in our passage. But neither this nor any of the elucidations of λακωνίζειν found in the other quoted authorities will provide the explanation of διασκηγῶν which the unamended text of *Hellenica* 4.8.18 requires. There remains however one other meaning for λακωνίζειν where such evidence as is available suggests that the word might be used without further specification – in its reference to pederasty.

The evidence, as presented by Sir Kenneth Dover, is complex. Discussion starts from Hesychius’ statement that λακωνίζειν means ‘to use *paidika*’, supplemented by the Suda, which adds that this meaning is found in a lost play of Aristophanes, referred to as ‘Thesmophoriazousai 2’.<sup>30</sup> This appears to be the only unchallenged occurrence of this meaning in the classical period. In addition, Meineke suggested, somewhat tentatively, that a fragment of Eupolis preserved in Athenaeus might bear the same meaning.<sup>31</sup> Though this Eupolis fragment is not mentioned by Dover, it is perhaps worth reviewing. It runs:

Αλκιβ: μισῶ λακωνίζειν, ταγηνίζειν δὲ κἄν πριαίμην  
 Β: πολλὰς δ’...οἶμαι νῦν βεβηγήσθαι...  
 Α: ...ὅς δὲ πρῶτος ἐξέυρεν τὸ πρῶ ’πιπίνειν;  
 Β: πολλὴν γε λακκοπρωκτίαν ἡμῖν ἐπίστας’ εὐρών.  
 Α: εἶεν. τίς εἶπεν ’ἀμίδα παῖ’ πρῶτος μεταξὺ πίνων;  
 Β: Ἰταλαμηδικόν γε τοῦτο τοῦξεύρημα καὶ σοφόν σου.

<sup>25</sup> *Hell.* 4.4.2, 4.8.28, 5.4.55, 6.3.14, 6.4.18, 7.1.44, 7.4.34.

<sup>26</sup> *Hell.* 1.6.13, 6.3.14, 4.8.34, 5.2.6, 5.4.34.

<sup>27</sup> *Μηδίσας*, used of Gongylos at *Hell.* 3.1.6.

<sup>28</sup> *Anab.* 3.1.26, 4.5.34, 7.3.25.

<sup>29</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia* 150b, 513a.

<sup>30</sup> K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, p. 187.

<sup>31</sup> A. Meineke, *Fragmenta Poetarum Comoediae Antiquae* (Berlin 1839), Pars Prima, pp. 547–8. The excerpt is from Athenaeus 1.17d. The text is cited from T. Kock, *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta* (Leipzig, 1880–8), Eupolis, fragment 351.

The passage is quoted by Athenaeus to illustrate the usage of *άμῖς* (chamber-pot), and the absence of the immediately preceding lines (as well as the possibility of lacunae) makes it impossible to be sure of the interpretation of *λακωνίζειν*. The fondness of the comic poets for making jokes about copulatory and excretory functions, and the presence of such references later in the passage (*βεβινῆσθαι*, *λακκοπωκτία*, *άμῖς*) suggest a reference to pederasty. Kock however rejects this meaning on the grounds that it does not fit with the customary reference of the verb *ταγηνίζειν* ('to fry') to luxurious banqueting. *Λακωνίζειν* may therefore, according to Kock, mean to eat simple food (in Spartan fashion), in contrast to the rich food implied by *ταγηνίζειν*.<sup>32</sup> Kock admits that on this view it is impossible to understand the connexion between the first two lines.

While Meineke's proposal cannot be decisively affirmed, the objection to it advanced by Kock can I think be removed. In a society where slaves were regarded as readily available to their masters and could, it seems, be presented as gifts to an important personage,<sup>33</sup> the following hypothetical context for the disputed lines seems quite possible. Suppose that the conversation is about the purchase of a (male) slave cook (and *πρίαμαι* seems often to be used for the purchase of slaves), B could have suggested that A's purpose is to secure a handsome sexual partner. A replies that he has no taste for anal intercourse with his own sex, even though he might buy the man for his cooking. Not to be cheated of his sexual jibe, B. rejoins, 'That's all very well, but plenty of *women*, I think, have been entered [by you].' It seems therefore quite possible that we have here a second example from the classical era of a sexual meaning for *λακωνίζειν*.

Whether or not this passage of Eupolis be taken to have a sexual reference, Sir Kenneth Dover calls upon the term *κυσολάκων* and a number of references to the use of women to argue that *λακωνίζειν* may well have meant originally 'to have anal intercourse, irrespective of the sex of the person penetrated.' This more specific meaning might well explain the rarity of the usage. Once however the possibility of a sexual reference in the Xenophon passage is admitted, the reference to anal intercourse would make the word peculiarly applicable to the relationship between Thibron and Thersandros. Whatever they did together, their relationship can hardly have been that between *erastēs* and *erōmenos*, for the age of the participants would rule that out. Thibron, certainly, was a mature man. He had been experienced enough to be appointed Spartan harmost in Asia Minor first in 400 B.C., and the text under discussion refers to a period some nine years later, when he had been appointed to a second command. Less certainty attaches to Thersandros, but he is generally regarded as identical with the *aulētēs* of that name referred to in Polyaeus 6.10. Polyaeus records that a certain Alexandros had been phrourarch of the lands

<sup>32</sup> T. Kock, op. cit. I, p. 351.

<sup>33</sup> It is doubtful whether a slave could claim the protection of the law against anything done by his owner. According to Demosthenes XXI 47, the law on *hybris* prohibited violence against a slave, but this probably operated only as a ban on assaulting someone else's slave (which was in effect an offence against that slave's owner). See David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (New York and London, 1990), p. 185 n. 70. My argument requires no more than a recognition that the master-slave relationship must have afforded easy opportunities for seduction. On the availability of slaves to their masters in the ancient world generally, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London and Boston, 1988), p. 23. The giving of slaves as gifts is observed by Xenophon in *Anab.* 7.3.27 and *Cyrop.* 5.5.38-9. The gifts offered to Kyaxares on the latter occasion included a handsome winewaiter and a good cook. Neither instance relates to Athenian society, but Xenophon's account shows no sign of surprise or criticism.



around Aiolis, where he devised an ingenious scheme for raising money. He organized a theatrical spectacle in order to inveigle the inhabitants of neighbouring towns into the theatre, where he held them, surrounded with soldiers, with a view to extracting ransom money for their release. Having done this, he handed over his territories to Thibron and departed. Among the artists whose reputation attracted the populace to the event was the *auletes* Thersandros. The location, Aiolis, attaches this narrative to Thibron's first campaign in Asia, which, according to Xenophon, involved a number of Aiolian cities, as well as Pergamos of Mysia, on the borders of Aiolis.<sup>34</sup> Thus, if Polyaeus is to be believed, even before Thibron's first appearance in Asia in 400, Thersandros had achieved sufficient reputation as an *auletes* to attract quite a following. He could hardly have been less than a mature adult when in 391 he was travelling in Thibron's company on the plain of the Maiandros.

If then the word *λακωνίζων* here carries a sexual connotation, it probably refers to anal intercourse between two adult men. One must then ask whether such an interpretation can accommodate the words, *ἀλκῆς ἀντεποιεῖτο*. The middle use, *ἀντιποιέομαι*, though not common, has broadly speaking two meanings in Xenophon. It may denote contending with someone else for the possession of something, such as rule over cities or empire.<sup>35</sup> Elsewhere however, it means to lay claim to something or, perhaps, strive to possess it. In the latter category mention is made of rule, money and the craft of cookery,<sup>36</sup> and the last named provides a close parallel to the sense required in our passage. *Ἀλκή* is a human ability or quality which Thersandros 'professes' or 'lays claim to', but the basis of his claim to prowess is expressed in *ἀτε λακωνίζων* – inasmuch as he plays the active role in anal intercourse.

Granted the sexual reference in the passage, it is natural to read the description of Thersandros' claim as ironical: his prowess is with the phallus, not the sword. That such a turn of phrase might come readily to Xenophon is suggested by the positive response to ironic wit which he shows elsewhere. One recalls the oft-quoted *bōn mot* of Theramenes, as he tossed away the dregs of the hemlock – *Κριτὰ τοῦτ' ἔστω τῷ καλῷ* – where Xenophon adds an aside to indicate his appreciation of the witticism. While the saying is attributed to Theramenes, the placing and significance accorded to it, as Vivienne Gray has argued, reveals the shaping hand of the historian.<sup>37</sup> For a further example of irony, one may recall Pharnabazos' speech at his parley with Agesilaos, where one may feel with some confidence that the formulation is due to Xenophon himself. It includes the satrap's ironic reproach to Agesilaos for the injustice he has suffered, with the words, 'If I do not know either what is holy or what is just, will you please demonstrate to me in what way such deeds are appropriate to men who understand how to return favours.'<sup>38</sup> One may also refer to the extended use of irony in the successive speeches in Xenophon's *Symposium*, in which (from Socrates' claim to be a procurer to Antisthenes' claim to wealth) the true meaning of

<sup>34</sup> *Hell.* 3.1.4–7. Of the cities named by Xenophon, Larisa, Myrina and Gryneia are included in Herodotus' list of Aiolian cities (1.149). Xenophon alone calls Larisa 'Egyptian', but it is probably to be identified with the town of that name mentioned by Herodotus, owing its sobriquet to the presence of Egyptian settlers. See J. K. Anderson, *Military Theory and Practice in the Age of Xenophon* (California, 1970), pp. 167–8 and p. 314 n. 12–13.

<sup>35</sup> *Anab.* 2.1.11, 2.3.23, *Hell.* 4.8.14.

<sup>36</sup> *Mem.* 2.1.1, *Lac. Pol.* 1.9, *Mem.* 3.5.8, 3.14.6. The latter reads: *καίτοι πῶς οὐ γελοῖόν ἐστι παρασκευάζεσθαι μὲν ὀφιοποιούς τοὺς ἀριστα ἐπισταμένους, αὐτὸν δὲ μὴδ' ἀντιποιούμενον τῆς τέχνης ταύτης τὰ ὑπ' ἐκείνων ποιούμενα μετατιθέναι;*

<sup>37</sup> *Hell.* 2.3.56. V. Gray, *The Character of Xenophon's Hellenica*, pp. 26–8.

<sup>38</sup> *Hell.* 4.1.33. Another ironic turn of phrase is found when Agesilaos, after having devastated parts of Korinthia, suggests that the Boiotian ambassadors may wish to see 'the good fortune of their friends', knowing full well that what they will actually see is disaster (*Hell.* 4.5.9).

each speaker is at variance with the superficial signification of the virtue he claims. The schematism here surely suggests the art of Xenophon the author, rather than an exact recollection of what was said on a particular occasion.<sup>39</sup>

The irony in the description of Thersandros' claim to prowess is in keeping with the rest of the passage which is otherwise controlled by a degree of innuendo and euphemism. It also accords with the fact that elsewhere in Xenophon ἀλκή does not simply mean physical strength, but is associated with courageous deeds. In the field headquarters of a campaign supposedly dedicated to military valour, Thersandros is distinguished by valour of a different kind, and in thus characterising the company he keeps, Xenophon directs what for him is another insult at the despised Thibron, who is by implication the passive object of Thersandros' 'prowess'.<sup>40</sup>

I go on to ask how the conclusion to which the arguments so far advanced seem to point illuminates, or may perhaps be supported by, the disputed διασκηνών. Clearly the statement that not only was Thersandros a good *aulētēs* but he professed prowess as a 'laconiser', is intended to explain the fact that after the morning meal Thibron happened to be 'διασκηνών' in his company. While the primary meaning of σκηνή is 'tent', in Xenophon's narratives the word and its derivatives are not limited to accommodation in tents, but can mean any kind of billets or quarters – in ships, for example, or houses.<sup>41</sup> Σκηνή and its verbal derivatives can also mean 'banquet',<sup>42</sup> and it is relevant to note that in both the passages quoted for this meaning from the *Cyropaedia*, 'bringing the feast to an end' or 'breaking up the party' is signalled by a compound with διά:

διαλύσαντες τὴν σκηνὴν ἀνεπαύοντο.  
τὴν σκηνὴν εἰς κοίτην διέλυον.

Both noun and verb are also used of ordinary meals – the common messes of the Spartans, where the Spartan συσκήνια are contrasted with Greek habits elsewhere, where they eat at home (οἴκοι σκηνοῦντας).<sup>43</sup>

The compounds of the verbal form (other than with διά-) are used logically and consistently in Xenophon. The commonest is συσκηνέω – share a tent or a mess, with its offshoot σύσκηνος – messmate. Συσκηνέω may also, occasionally, mean 'banquet

<sup>39</sup> Not only does Socrates boast of being a 'procurer' (*Symp.* 3.10), but the claims of other speakers turn out to be similarly ironical: Kallias claims 'to make men better' – by giving them money; Kritoboulos boasts his good looks – largely because of the power they give him over others; Charmides admires 'poverty' – as a means of avoiding the impost of *leitourgia*; Antisthenes claims 'wealth' – in the fewness of his needs and the richness of his soul.

For the ironic suggestion that the strength appropriate to a soldier may be exhibited in sexual dominance, a comic parallel is provided by Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 591–2, where Dikaiopolis jeers at the (fully-armed) general, Lamachos. Dover, 204, translates the line: 'If you're such a mighty man, come on, bare my knob' (εἰ δ' ἰσχυρὸς εἶ, τί μ' οὐκ ἀπεψώλησας;). The comparison with Xenophon is particularly apt if, as Professor Dover suggests, Dikaiopolis's words imply that the active partner penetrates the other anally while stimulating his penis. Both Dikaiopolis and Lamachos are, of course, grown men.

<sup>40</sup> For ἀλκή in Xenophon, cf. note 23 above.

For the shame of the passive role, cf. K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, pp. 103–5. D. M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (pp. 30–1), emphasises the asymmetry of penetrative relationships, and the subordinate status of the one penetrated. Cf. also, Eva Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World* (transl. by Cormac Ó Cuilleánáin, New Haven and London 1992), pp. 44–8.

That the criticism of Thibron remains somewhat indirect is probably due to Xenophon's pro-Spartan bias. Despite his personal dislike of Thibron he is reluctant too openly to criticise a Spartan commander. He felt no such inhibition about the Thessalian, Menon (*Anab.* 2.6.21–8).

<sup>41</sup> *Hell.* 5.1.20, *Cyrop.* 8.3.34.

<sup>42</sup> *Anab.* 4.5.33, *Cyrop.* 2.3.1, 3.2.31.

<sup>43</sup> *Lac. Pol.* 5.2, 15.4.

together', with σύσκηνοι as 'fellow-banqueters'.<sup>44</sup> παρασκηνάω is to camp alongside, and ἀποσκηνέω, to encamp at a distance from.<sup>45</sup> κατασκηνάω or κατασκηνόω are commoner, but show a less clear-cut meaning. They seem however, rather like the English 'camp down' to shift the emphasis to pitching tent or taking up quarters,<sup>46</sup> rather than dwelling in or being encamped at a certain place.

As for διασκηνέω, apart from *Hell.* 4.8.18, there are six occurrences of the verb (whether in -έω or -όω) to be found in Xenophon. Four of them occur in the *Anabasis*, within a few paragraphs of each other, in the course of a description of conditions during one of the most testing times of the great march. The army is struggling to progress through snow in the mountains of what we now know as Kurdistan. The mood of the local inhabitants is uncertain, and the likelihood of surprise attack hard to gauge. The question, debated on more than one occasion, is whether to disperse the troops to spend the night in various neighbouring villages, where they will have protection against the bitter weather, or to sleep together in one spot, despite the extreme cold, so as to be ready to meet a surprise attack. The word for the dispersal strategy is διασκηνεῖν (or, once, διασκηνοῦν), where διὰ is manifestly used in its distributive sense, 'in different directions'.<sup>47</sup> It is not clear whether any difference in meaning is intended between the form in -έω and that in -όω.<sup>48</sup> In *Anab.* 4.4.10, the meaning of διασκηνοῦν is clarified by its contrast with the alternative strategy - συναγαγεῖν τὸ στράτευμα. The words seem to be used throughout intransitively, - 'to take up one's quarters separately, or in a dispersed fashion.' Possibly the present infinitive at 4.4.10 means 'to spend time in dispersed quarters' - the situation otherwise expressed by διασκηνήσαντες οὕτως ἐκοιμήθησαν (4.5.29), which divides the sequence into the act of dispersal to quarters and the period of sleeping.

The other two occurrences are in quite different contexts, and refer to guests or simply participants, dispersing after a meal. The first of these refers to the conclusion of communal meals among the Spartans. The second (from the *Cyropaedia*), is found at the end of a long description of Cyrus' dealings with the King of Armenia and his son Tigranes.<sup>49</sup> The Armenian had reneged on his obligation to pay tribute, and was being held captive by Cyrus. The latter however is dissuaded from putting the Armenian to death by a long philosophical discourse from the king's son, Tigranes. Tigranes had been Cyrus' companion in his youth, and such is his eloquence that the Persian King is persuaded to commute a substantial portion of the Armenian's debt, and make a most generous settlement. He there and then invites the Armenian king and his family to a meal. The story continues, Διασκηνοῦντων δὲ μετὰ δείπνον, ἐπῆρετο ὁ Κῦρος..., and his question to Tigranes launches another philosophical discussion.

The use of διασκηνεῖν in these two passages has been variously interpreted. The Loeb translator, assuming that the meaning of σκηνή as banquet predominates, makes both passages refer to the 'break-up' of the dinner party, without any reference to 'tents'. A second type of interpretation however is to be found in Liddell and Scott, which gives for the first passage, 'separate and retire each into his billet (σκηναί)', 'go into billets', and for the second, 'leave another's tent.'

<sup>44</sup> *Cyrop.* 2.2.29, 3.2.25.

<sup>45</sup> *Anab.* 3.1.28, 3.4.35.

<sup>46</sup> *Anab.* 3.4.32-3, 7.4.11, *Hell.* 4.2.23, 4.5.2, *Cyrop.* 4.5.39, 6.2.2.

<sup>47</sup> *Anab.* 4.4.8, 4.4.10, 4.4.14, 4.5.29.

<sup>48</sup> For the simple verb, Liddell and Scott gives σκηνέω (σκηνάω) = 'dwell in a camp', and σκηνόω = 'pitch camp.' But the distinction is not clearcut, and σκηνόω can take on either meaning (see LSJ s.v.).

<sup>49</sup> *Lac. Pol.* 5.3, *Cyrop.* 3.1.38.

The first view derives, presumably, from Stephanus, who says that Xenophon uses *διασκηνεῖν* here (and, incidentally, in *Hell.* 4.8.18) to signify what he elsewhere refers to as *διαλύειν τὴν σκηνήν*.<sup>50</sup> But despite this authority, *διασκηνεῖν*, by analogy with the other compounds of *σκηνέω* should surely mean 'camp separately' (as in the *Anabasis* passages) or, if the *σκηνή* element is taken to refer to a banquet, the compound should mean 'dine separately' (a translation which would make nonsense of both passages). Besides this etymological point, it can be said in favour of the second type of interpretation that it is natural in the *Lac. Pol.* passage to assume that the diners at the end of the communal meal return to their homes or billets, thus reversing the procedure which brings them out of their homes to join the communal meal in the first place.

The interpretation 'dispersing to quarters' is more difficult to bring to bear on the description of Cyrus' entertainment of the Armenian king. I have described this a little more fully to bring out the point that it is not just a matter of Cyrus entertaining in his tent (which he was accustomed to do)<sup>51</sup> officers or others from his own camp, who would have tents of their own to retire to. This was not true of the Armenian king and his entourage. For (lacking in verisimilitude as it may be), Xenophon represents the sequence of events from surrender, through captivity to trial (and discussion with Tigranes) as all occurring within the space of one day, and Cyrus' hospitality clearly did not extend to offering his vassals a bed for the night. On the other hand, Cyrus does conclude his offer of dinner (to a family who were still technically his captives) with the remark that having dined they would be free to go wherever they wished.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, grammatically *διασκηνοῦντων* refers to something which occurs *after* the meal. It may naturally be taken to refer to the Armenian and his family preparing to depart for their chosen destination – their own homes, or elsewhere. This view would preserve us from the necessity of entering into rather different territory for the meaning of *διά* here: 'withdrawing from someone else's tent,' as Liddell and Scott translates.

My conclusion is that in all its uses elsewhere in Xenophon *διασκηνεῖν* can, and probably should, be taken to mean either dispersing to separate tents/quarters, or spending time in separate tents/quarters. It may therefore be expected to carry the same meaning at *Hell.* 4.8.18. A certain flexibility however may be allowed in view of the unique characteristics of this passage. Assuming that Spartans on campaign (as at home) followed the custom of eating together, the passage is aligned with *Lac. Pol.* 5.3 in that the dispersal to quarters takes place after a meal – though the meal in question is *ariston* not *deipnon*. Nowhere else, however, is the subject of the verb an individual person, nor in other passages is companionship between individuals alluded to. Occasionally the simple verb *σκηνοῦν* takes a singular subject to denote the place where an individual commander has his quarters (as with Agesilaos and Alketas).<sup>53</sup> But in *Hell.* 4.8.18 it is not just a question of locating the commander's quarters, or retiring to one's billet for the night, but of something passing between Thibron and Thersandros which needs to be explained by Thersandros' claim to prowess. These considerations taken together would, I think, suggest the translation: 'Thibron happened to be spending time apart in his tent with Thersandros after the morning meal.'

Turning from this grammatical and lexical analysis, we should ask briefly what can be learned from a study of the relevant social and military background. From

<sup>50</sup> *Cyrop.* 2.3.1, 3.2.31. Cf. above, p. 356.

<sup>51</sup> *Cyrop.* 2.1.30.

<sup>52</sup> *Cyrop.* 3.1.37.

<sup>53</sup> *Hell.* 4.6.7, 5.4.56.

Xenophon's account in *Hell.* 4.8.17–19 the general picture of the campaign is fairly clear, with Thibron's army based on the cities of the Maiandros plain, sending out raids into the surrounding countryside. Encampments were presumably of the rough and ready kind described by J. K. Anderson – unfortified, frequently moved, bivouacs rather than entrenched positions, in which the *σκηναί* would consist of rough shelters of timber and brushwood, rather than tents proper.<sup>54</sup> At first Thibron had some success, until Strouthas observed the indisciplined nature of his operations and began making harrying attacks on the Spartans. The sequence of events in the final and decisive episode in these operations is, however, less clear. Xenophon's brief narrative begins somewhat abruptly *in mediis rebus* with Thibron and Thersandros in their 'tent.' The clue to the situation is, it seems, reserved until the concluding lines of paragraph 19: it was an example of Thibron's habit of setting out on a foray against the enemy without giving proper orders to his troops. It would seem that he had gone out on this raid with only a portion of his army, and was presumably occupying a temporary bivouac, while the rest of the Spartan force, being uninformed of the raid, was left behind at the main encampment.<sup>55</sup> Ill-disciplined and heedless of danger in his preoccupation with Thersandros, Thibron was exposed to attack by Strouthas' sizeable body of well-ordered cavalry.

The crucial moment occurred 'after the morning meal.' There are frequent references to meals in Xenophon's narratives, and the common pattern is for the evening meal to be followed by sleep, while following the morning meal preparations are made for marching, preparing for or engaging in battle.<sup>56</sup> There are of course exceptions, particularly when in the interests of tactical surprise, forced marches or attacks are undertaken at night. But I have found no example of a general retiring to his tent during the day for any purpose other than to take counsel of a military or judicial kind.<sup>57</sup> It is no doubt the difficulty of understanding the purpose for which Thibron and Thersandros might have retired to their 'tent' that has prompted scholars to eliminate *διασκηνῶν* by emendation. But the stronger the arguments for declaring such a withdrawal from company to be unprecedented, and inexplicable under the normal routines on campaign, the more powerful the support for the view

<sup>54</sup> Cf. J. K. Anderson, *Military Theory and Practice in the Age of Xenophon*, pp. 60–6.

<sup>55</sup> A significant number of Spartans were saved from destruction, *διὰ τὸ ὀψέ αἰσθῆσαι τῆς βοηθείας* (*Hell.* 4.8.19).

<sup>56</sup> The sequence is illustrated in the manoeuvres before Aigospotamoi (*Hell.* 2.1.20–2), where both sides follow the pattern: *ariston*, action, *deipnon*, the night passes, *ariston*, further action. Cf. *Cyrop.* 6.3.37–6.4.1. For *ariston* followed by action, see *Hell.* 4.5.3, 5.4.38, 6.5.20, *Anab.* 3.3.6, 4.6.8–9, 5.4.22, 6.3.24. Xenophon is not afraid to point out the truism that a meal fortifies one to fight (*Anab.* 6.5.21), and it is exceptional for a body of soldiers to go forward 'ἀνάριστοι' (*Hell.* 4.5.8). On the other hand, rest and sleep follow *deipnon*: *Hell.* 4.3.20, 4.6.7, 7.2.23, *Anab.* 6.3.20–1, 6.4.10. Other examples could be given, but while the rule of sleep following *deipnon* is often broken in order to achieve tactical surprise, I have not found any place (except the present passage) where soldiers take it easy after *ariston*. Curiously, rest and relaxation during the afternoon is, according to Xenophon, prescribed by Lykourgos (*Lac. Pol.* 12.6), though a military historian could hardly be expected to record so unredeemably banal a piece of routine. But if this account does reflect the practice of a Spartan army at base camp, one may doubt whether it would have applied to a skirmishing or expeditionary force in an advanced position close to encounter with the enemy.

<sup>57</sup> The use of tents for purposes other than sleeping (or, in the case of senior commanders, feasting) is rarely reported. For the most part, Xenophon's reports (apart from notes of individuals going to their tents) fall into two groups: as we should expect, commanders at all levels hold council in their tents (*Hell.* 1.1.30, *Anab.* 1.6.4, 3.5.7, *Cyrop.* 2.2.21; or the tent is the place for a banquet (*Cyrop.* 2.1.30, 2.3.19). At *Cyrop.* 5.3.46, army commanders depart to their tents after receiving orders. There is nothing in all of this to prepare us for the holding of a tête à tête between a Spartan commander and an Ionian *auleētēs*.

here proposed: Thibron was flouting the norms of expected behaviour and that was the cause of his undoing.

Xenophon does not describe in detail exactly what went on, but follows the rule of polite society, that in sexual matters language should be imprecise and reticence observed.<sup>58</sup> The word *λακωνίζειν* itself may be regarded as a euphemism, and without explicitly stating that the two men indulged themselves sexually, Xenophon leaves his readers to draw this inference from the fact that they went apart (a degree of privacy was required for sex<sup>59</sup>) and that Thersandros had a reputation for 'laconising'.<sup>60</sup>

My conclusion, then, is that the incident of Thibron and Thersandros provides another example of a military commander's failure to control his erotic desire bringing disaster upon his troops. Not only did Thibron fail to give proper orders, but, instead of taking due precautions while within range of the enemy cavalry, he spent the prime time for action (after the morning meal) disporting himself in his tent with his companion. Thus engaged, when the enemy struck, he was in no position either to direct his troops or defend himself, and in consequence he and Thersandros were the first to be killed, while the army was routed, with many casualties.

This view of the incident has it seems to me all the arguments of coherence in its favour. Once the possibility of a sexual meaning for *λακωνίζων* is accepted, it readily accounts for all the linguistic elements in the passage, and provides a smooth and intelligible connexion of thought without the need for emending the text. It offers a clear explanation of why Thibron's activity made him so vulnerable to surprise attack, and the plausibility of such an explanation is enhanced by the episode of Alketas discussed earlier. Finally, the proposed interpretation is consistent with all that is said elsewhere about Thibron's laxity and incompetence, a point strikingly developed by one passage yet to be examined.

A few paragraphs after recording the death of Thibron, Xenophon comes to describe his successor in the Spartan command. This man, a certain Diphridas, was, says Xenophon, no less charming (*εὔχαρις*) than Thibron, but a better organised and more enterprising general, for he was not at the mercy of his bodily pleasures (*οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐκράτουν αὐτοῦ αἱ τοῦ σώματος ἡδοναί*).<sup>61</sup> The implied contrast is obvious, yet, apart from the passage which I have analysed at such length, there is nothing in Xenophon's previous narrative to suggest that Thibron's shortcomings included an inability to control his bodily appetites. In mentioning this characteristic, Xenophon is surely high-lighting the prime cause of Thibron's downfall in the incident he has just described.

More generally, this judgment on Thibron's lack of *enkrateia* reflects Xenophon's wider interest in the morality of self-control noted at the beginning of this article. Indeed, the incident of Thibron and Thersandros shows an interesting affinity with

<sup>58</sup> So K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, pp. 53–4.

<sup>59</sup> So D. M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, pp. 91 and 182, n. 28.

<sup>60</sup> Quite apart from what is given in Xenophon's text, one is tempted to speculate on what an Ionian *aulētēs* was doing in the camp anyway. The *aulos* had, it is true, a recognised role in Spartan military life. *Aulētai* were members of the royal entourage, and were required to play on ceremonial occasions and in celebration of victory (Xenophon, *Lac. Pol.* 13.8, *Hell.* 4.3.21, *Ages.* 2.15). But one may well ask why, if Thibron required a professional *aulētēs*, he did not bring one with him from Sparta, and why Thersandros, first heard of in Aiolis at the time of Thibron's first Asian campaign (though no meeting between them is reported), appears again in the Spartan commander's company (and, it seems, as his tent partner) 9–10 years later. Was this in fact a long-standing liaison of a more intimate kind?

<sup>61</sup> *Hell.* 4.8.22. At least in some quarters it was by his subservience to bodily pleasures that Thibron was remembered: Aristides (C. A. Behr) III, *To Plato, In Defence of the Four*, 202 (W. Dindorf, XLVI 2.176).

the example of sexual self-indulgence of which Vice is accused in Prodikos' fable. Not only does it involve using a grown man as a woman: Thibron also confounds the proper uses of day and night, spending the prime time of the morning, not, perhaps, in sleeping, but in what most Greeks would have regarded as a shameful form of sexual indulgence. Taken as a whole, the incident, like that of Alketas, illustrates Xenophon's moral concern with the dangers posed by *erōs* for a military commander. One might even argue that, given this interest, Xenophon's statement that Thibron and Thersandros were the *first* to be killed sounds more like an expression of moral retribution than a report of historical fact.

The reverse picture, the cost and the achievement of a triumphant *enkrateia*, is seen (in somewhat sycophantic light) in the famous incident of Agesilaos and Megabates, to which I now turn.

The story is told in chapter five of Xenophon's life of Agesilaos. Megabates was the handsome son of the Persian nobleman, Spithridates, whom Agesilaos had encountered on his campaign in and around Phrygia in 396–5 B.C. That the king's infatuation with Megabates was a well-remembered fact about him is attested by its appearance in the sober and economical pages of the Oxyrhynchus historian as well as in Xenophon.<sup>62</sup> But my interest is not so much in what may or may not have transpired between them as in the significance that the incident, as reported by Xenophon, has for the historian's view of the ideal leader. At first sight, the essential facts are that on some unspecified occasion Megabates approached Agesilaos to kiss him, but that with enormous effort Agesilaos rejected the approach, thus demonstrating his almost super-human self-control. Modern commentators seem generally to have taken the story at what seems to us to be its face-value as an illustration of Agesilaos' principles of personal morality. As Xenophon remarks later in his biography, Agesilaos' desires were directed to fine deeds rather than to fine bodies.<sup>63</sup> Such a view can appeal to the statement in Xenophon's *Lacedaemonian Constitution* that Lykourgos himself had forbidden Spartans to indulge in any physical expression of pederastic love, though it is doubtful how far these words reflect actual practice.<sup>64</sup> One may also recall the reflection on the dangers of yielding to the kiss of a beautiful boy which Xenophon attributes to Socrates.<sup>65</sup>

Yet, as in the case of Xenophon himself, whose narratives frequently fail to tally with his philosophical pronouncements on this subject,<sup>66</sup> there is evidence to suggest that Agesilaos did not hold to any simple and absolute condemnation of physical *erōs*. Xenophon twice tells us that he took pleasure in love stories about *paidika*.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>62</sup> *Hell. Oxyrh.* XXI 4. In addition, Xenophon informs us (*Hell.* 3.4.10) that Spithridates' defection from Pharnabazos had been brought about by Lysandros, who was operating in the Hellespont under Agesilaos' orders. The son is again mentioned.

<sup>63</sup> *Ages.* 11.10: *καλῶν ἔργων μᾶλλον ἢ τῶν καλῶν σωμάτων ἐπιθυμῶν*. As a psychological description these words seem at the very least to gloss over the reality reflected in the graphic language of *Ages.* 5.4: *παῖδος ἐρασθέντα* (sc. τὸν Ἀγησιλάου) ὥσπερ ἂν τοῦ καλλίστου ἢ σφοδροτάτῃ φύσει ἐρασθείη.

<sup>64</sup> *Lac. Pol.* 2.13. Cf. the somewhat equivocal comments of K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, pp. 191, 193–4. P. Cartledge has argued that whatever the status of the Lykourgan 'nomos' on pederastic chastity may have been (and Xenophon does not state that physical relationships were illegal), it was probably not observed in practice ('The Politics of Spartan Pederasty', pp. 19–22). Cf. G. Proietti, *Xenophon's Sparta: An Introduction* (Leiden, New York, Köln, 1987), p. 50.

<sup>65</sup> *Mem.* 1.3.8–13.

<sup>66</sup> Even in the discussion of Kritoboulos' kiss, Xenophon distances himself from Socrates with the comment that he himself might well take the risk of indulging.

<sup>67</sup> *Hell.* 5.3.20, *Age.* 8.2. That the phrase *παιδικοί λόγοι* means stories (or gossip) about *paidika* is indicated by *Cyrop.* 1.4.27. Cf. V. Gray, *The Character of Xenophon's Hellenica*, pp. 62f.

Such an interest is not in itself incompatible with personal abstention from, or indeed theoretical condemnation of, such *erōs* on the part of the interested person, though such a stance might imply a degree of hypocrisy. But the idea that Agesilaos was opposed to *erōs* of this kind simply on grounds of personal morality is hard to maintain in the face of the Spartan king's continued interest in the son of Pharnabazos, satrap of Phrygia. This interest arose out of an incident related by Xenophon in *Hellenica* 4.1.39–40.<sup>68</sup> Not only did Agesilaos exchange gifts with the young man as a token of guest-friendship, but at a later date, when the Persian had taken an Athenian youth as a lover, Agesilaos used his influence to bend the rules at Olympia to enable the young Athenian to be admitted to the *stadion* race. One can hardly apply the Lykourgan ideal of abstinence to relationships between a Persian and an Athenian, and the natural inference is that Agesilaos exerted himself to meet a request made by Pharnabazos' son, notwithstanding the latter's acknowledged relationship with his Athenian *paidika*.

But even without recourse to such inferences, a fuller reading of the text relating to Megabates' attempted kiss requires more than a moral objection to pederasty to explain it. For the story does not end with Xenophon's commendation of Agesilaos' self-control after his initial rebuff to Megabates. It moves on to a set of negotiations, in which Megabates demands a kiss for compliance, which Agesilaos refuses, affirming with an oath that he would rather fight again the same battle with his desire for the youth, than gain a miraculous cure for his lameness or find everything within sight turned to gold.

To set the stakes as high as that suggests, in terms of fourth century morality, that something more is involved than abstention from homoerotic indulgence. Megabates was no casual local beauty, but the son of Spithridates, a turn-coat Persian nobleman, who had entered a military alliance with Agesilaos against his former overlord, Pharnabazos, Persian satrap of Phrygia. Moreover, the incident of the kiss, with the involvement of courtiers in the negotiations, was not played out in private. For, says Xenophon, it was the Persian custom to kiss those whom they honour,<sup>69</sup> and honour is a matter of public recognition. Against this background, the Megabates incident takes on a strong political and diplomatic colouring, a conclusion which, I would argue, is borne out by a review of what Xenophon tells us elsewhere of Spithridates and his family.

According to Xenophon, Spithridates had formerly served under Pharnabazos, the satrap. The latter however had insulted him by seeking to take Spithridates' daughter as his concubine, while courting the hand of the Great King's daughter in marriage.<sup>70</sup> In consequence, Spithridates transferred his allegiance to Agesilaos, taking with him his daughter and also a handsome son, Megabates. The youth's beauty was one of the first things to attract comment from Agesilaos, and according to the Oxyrhynchus historian was the prime reason for Agesilaos giving a friendly welcome to Spithridates.<sup>71</sup> Seeking to build up a wider alliance against the Great King, Agesilaos proceeded to negotiate a marriage between Spithridates' daughter and the king of the neighbouring territory of Paphlagonia, Otys. Part of the bait, explicitly dangled by

<sup>68</sup> The incident occurred shortly after Agesilaos' break with Spithridates and his son Megabates (whose encounter with Agesilaos is discussed below), at a time when Agesilaos was seeking to develop a new alliance with Pharnabazos against the Great King.

<sup>69</sup> *Ages.* 5.4.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 3.3. The wording (*Φαρνάβαζος... ἄνευ γάμου λαβεῖν ἐβούλετο*) might be taken to imply that Spithridates had been frustrated in an attempt to achieve a marriage alliance with Pharnabazos.

<sup>71</sup> Xenophon, *Hell.* 4.1.6, *Hell. Oxyrh.* 21.4.



Agesilaos, was the political advantage to Otys of an alliance, not merely with Spithridates, who was a powerless exile, but with Agesilaos and through him with the Spartans and with the rest of Greece which, Agesilaos claimed, was under Spartan control.<sup>72</sup> We are here firmly in the territory of the political marriage, and from Spithridates' point of view, living as he was in a dispossessed state of exile, a link by marriage with Otys would be politically a most welcome prize.<sup>73</sup>

If Spithridates was thus willing to use his daughter in furthering his political aims, may he not have been equally willing to foster a pederastic liaison for his son with similar motives? There are precedents for such a policy elsewhere in the world of the fourth century, since, as Paul Cartledge has argued, the seeking of political advantage through a pederastic liaison was not unknown in Sparta. It was probably a factor in Lysandros' position as *erastēs* to the young Agesilaos, as reported by Plutarch, and in the development of the liaison between Agesilaos' son, Archidamos, and Kleonymos, son of Sphodrias.<sup>74</sup> Xenophon's account of this relationship in connexion with the Sphodrias affair, though later in date than Agesilaos' Asia campaigns, is worth examining for the light it throws on the historian's view of such liaisons.

Sphodrias, a Spartan commander, was, it will be recalled, charged with a capital offence for damaging Sparta's interests by leading an unauthorised raid into Athenian territory.<sup>75</sup> He failed to appear to stand trial, thereby admitting his guilt, but was nevertheless acquitted through the intervention of Agesilaos. To account for that intervention, Xenophon provides a circumstantial narrative to the effect that Agesilaos' son, Archidamos, was the *erastēs* of Sphodrias' son, Kleonymos, and that Archidamos had been thereby led to intercede with the king on behalf of his *paidika*'s father. The story ends with Sphodrias acquitted, and Kleonymos in gratitude pledging eternal fidelity to Archidamos, redeeming that pledge with his life at the battle of Leuctra. The reason for Agesilaos' intervention, however, is 'not unambiguously clear, and his position changes in the course of the narrative. Having at first opposed Archidamos' plea for acquittal, he later (according to the report of a third party, Etymokles (§32)) let it be known that in his view Sparta could not afford to lose the services of a soldier with Sphodrias' distinguished record and qualities, and this was taken as a signal for acquittal. As Sphodrias belonged to the circle of the Agiad king, Kleombrotos, one might then see in the incident an example of Agesilaos seeking to nullify domestic political opposition by the shrewd deployment of patronage, while discounting the part played by the love affair in the story.<sup>76</sup> But while this interpretation may represent the historical reality behind the narrative, it can hardly without more ado be taken to represent Xenophon's view of the matter.

<sup>72</sup> Xenophon, *Hell.* 4.1.8. I. A. F. Bruce has argued that the marriage may not have had as great a political importance as Xenophon suggests (I. A. F. Bruce, *An Historical Commentary on the 'Hellenica Oxyrhynchia'* [Cambridge, 1967], p. 144). But it is Xenophon's view of the matter which is relevant for my argument.

<sup>73</sup> Xenophon, *Hell.* 4.1.4.

<sup>74</sup> P. Cartledge, 'The Politics of Spartan Pederasty', pp. 28–9.

<sup>75</sup> The story of the raid and subsequent negotiations over Sphodrias' acquittal is told in considerable detail in Xenophon, *Hell.* 5.4.20–33.

<sup>76</sup> So Cartledge argues, *op. cit.* p. 29. In his book *Sparta and Lakonia* (London, 1979), p. 295, Cartledge also points out that shortage of manpower is given as a reason for suspending the law under which those guilty of cowardice at Leuctra might have been punished, citing Plutarch, *Agesilaos* 30.6 and *Moralia*, 191C, 214B.

Vivienne Gray (*The Character of Xenophon's Hellenica*, pp. 61–2) sees the love between Archidamos and Kleonymos and the loyalty which it engenders as the main point of the story, while recognising the conflict between that love and the demands of just administration of the law.

To begin with, Xenophon introduces the episode with the statement that many people considered that this was 'the most unjust verdict given in a Spartan court.'<sup>77</sup> While not presenting this as his own view, he does nothing to dissociate himself from it. He then passes to his lengthy exposition of the love affair with the words, 'this was the reason for it.' A similar phrase ends the narrative. On each occasion, the close association of these phrases with the account of the pederastic affair suggests that the latter provided the explanation of the acquittal. The narrative does not require us to believe that Agesilaos was uninfluenced by the lover's plea: merely that he arranged that no such influence should be apparent. The king's first reaction is, of course, to reject the plea: he might forgive Archidamos for asking, but the city would never forgive him (Agesilaos) for yielding (§30). Nothing is said subsequently to modify his condemnation of Sphodrias, as a man who had made money by causing harm to the city.<sup>78</sup> Yet, in response to Archidamos' second approach Agesilaos begins to waver, saying, 'Very well, provided that the affair is likely to turn out well for us' (§31). Archidamos takes this as a refusal – since, presumably, the condition seems incapable of fulfilment. Alternatively, it suggests that Agesilaos is looking for a face-saving formula. It is this, I would suggest, that represents the underlying intention of the word spread about by Agesilaos' friends (without, it appears, any formal declaration by the king) that Agesilaos had been heard to say that Sparta could not afford to lose a man of Sphodrias' calibre, despite his acknowledged guilt. Finally, the impassioned commitment of Kleonymos never to besmirch Archidamos' honour, surely reflects the debt of gratitude which Kleonymos is represented as feeling as a result of Archidamos' intercession.

The conclusion would seem to be that for Xenophon, at least, the story was what it appears on the surface to be: an illustration of family pressure arising from a pederastic liaison, leading to a shameful political decision. That he was embarrassed by having to acknowledge such behaviour on the part of his paragon, Agesilaos, is shown both by the very indirect way in which it comes out that Agesilaos had acquiesced in Sphodrias' acquittal, and by the fact that the incident is entirely omitted from Xenophon's life of the king.

If, in Xenophon's view, a pederastic affair might be a source of improper political pressure, must not the acknowledgement of *erōs* between Agesilaos and Megabates have been seen to carry just such risks, to the great detriment of Sparta? Would not such a relationship, from Spithridates' point of view, have seemed as potentially advantageous as the marriage of his daughter to Otys? Such a hypothesis seems to me to account for the nuances of the exchange between Agesilaos and Megabates as Xenophon presents it.

The story is introduced to illustrate Agesilaos' iron self-control in refusing the attractions of Megabates, and that indeed it does. But if it were solely a question of personal morality, it is very difficult to explain why Agesilaos was not willing to bring the incident to a close with his refusal of the kiss. The young man might feel slighted, but why should his sulking reaction concern the king and lead him, apparently, to seek a continuance of the relationship (albeit, presumably, on fresh terms), and expose himself again to the temptation which he had repudiated at some cost? The answer must lie in the political implications of the situation. For Agesilaos to accept

<sup>77</sup> *Hell.* 5.4.24.

<sup>78</sup> *Hell.* 5.4.30. The reference is to the charge of bribery which Xenophon had previously reported merely as a suspicion (*Ibid.* §20), but here seems to accept as well-founded. Furthermore, even Agesilaos' reported support for clemency is prefaced by the statement that there is no way of denying Sphodrias' guilt (§32).

a rebuff from the son of his new-found Persian ally would undermine his authority within the alliance. He must therefore exact a recognition of his position from Megabates. In this way we can understand Agesilaos' reaction, and indeed the fact that he is prepared to use a courtier as intermediary to negotiate.

But at this point the hidden agenda of Megabates (and behind him, one may suppose, Spithridates) becomes apparent. Supposing, asks the courtier, Megabates agreed to pay him honour, would Agesilaos kiss him? The kiss is now the price of Megabates' being willing to restore the honour due to the king. The most obvious explanation of this manoeuvre, particularly when we remember that in such affairs the *erōmenos* is not expected to reciprocate the passion of his *erastēs*, is that Megabates is seeking to attain a political end. The kiss would signify an acknowledgment of the youth as Agesilaos' *paidika*, which might well open the way for the dispossessed Persian exile, Megabates' father, to exert influence upon the Spartan king.<sup>79</sup> It is this possibility which explains the quasi-political process of negotiation and the strong language with which Agesilaos resists for the second time: his honour and authority as king and commander of his city's army is more important than the healing of his lameness or the acquisition of the Midas touch (let alone the pleasure of sleeping with Megabates).

This analysis requires some reading between the lines. But the traditional view, which sees here nothing beyond a judgment on the morality of pederasty is obliged simply to ignore substantial elements in the narrative. In offering an alternative analysis I do not wish to imply that Agesilaos was not deeply attracted to the young man, or that he did not indeed exercise remarkable, even heroic, self-restraint in refusing to accept him as a lover. What is at issue is the motivation for this stand. It was not, I suggest, based upon a moralistic condemnation of pederastic love, but on the perceived duties of a commander in chief, who must avoid rendering himself open to improper pressure. The morality involved is a morality of military and political duty, not a morality of sexual acts *per se*. Thus understood, the incident of Megabates' kiss fits well into the framework provided by our earlier examples, while without some such hypothesis it seems very difficult to explain the extraordinary amount of self-conscious negotiation which the story records.<sup>80</sup>

The opportunities for homoerotic pleasure available to Greek armies and their commanders in the field must have been many, and the resulting relationships complex. As I have argued at the outset. Xenophon recognised that such relationships might well be honourable, and motivate men to valour in battle. But experience also taught him that situations could well arise where to indulge in *erōs* was fraught with military or political danger. In such situations, he had no doubt that the welfare of the city should take precedence over individual impulse, and for him the ability to resist

<sup>79</sup> Further speculation is provoked by the curious discrepancy between what Xenophon says about Persian etiquette at *Ages.* 5.4 and at *Cyrop.* 1.4.27–8. In the former passage we are told that it is customary for Persians to kiss those whom they honour; but in the latter, the Persian kiss is reserved for kinsmen. Could it be that Megabates was seeking to assert a relation of kinship, or quasi-kinship, which Agesilaos might find even more embarrassing? If so, Xenophon might have understandably glossed over the full implication of the proffered kiss, by substituting 'honour' for 'kinship' as the motivating principle.

<sup>80</sup> It is more than likely that another instance of gaining advancement through a pederastic liaison is to be found in the story of the infamous Thessalian, Menon. Xenophon records of him that it was public knowledge that while still in the bloom of youth he got Aristippos to put him in command of the mercenaries: *παρὰ Ἀριστίππου μὲν ἑπὶ ὥραιος ὢν στρατηγεῖν διεπράξετο τῶν ξένων*. When in the same sentence Xenophon refers explicitly to Menon's other love affairs, it is natural to infer that his youthful beauty is what persuaded Aristippos to give him the command (*Anab.* 2.6.28. For Aristippos, see *Anab.* 1.1.10).

erotic desire where necessary ranked high among the qualities required by a military leader. Some failed the test, and, like Alketas and Thibron, brought military reverses upon their city. Others, like Agesilaos in his relations with Megabates, survived the test with honour, and this was not the least of Xenophon's reasons for according him high praise.

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