

XX.—Τὰ δέκα ἀφ' ἥβης

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Τὰ δέκα ἀφ' ἥβης is used by Xenophon to designate an age-group of the Lacedaemonian army. This expression should be interpreted as "the first ten year-classes," composed of the men from 20 to 29 years of age inclusive.

Xenophon twice¹ describes an engagement between the Persians and the Lacedaemonian army of Agesilaus in the neighborhood of Sardes. Here Agesilaus met a force of Persian cavalry which was at the moment unsupported by infantry. Desiring to bring the enemy to battle before the arrival of the infantry, he sent ahead his cavalry, peltasts, and part of his hoplites with orders to attack on the run. Meanwhile he followed up with the rest of his army. In both accounts Xenophon uses almost identical language in recounting the order to attack; in the *Agesilaus* the text is as follows: σφαγιασάμενος οὖν τὴν μὲν φάλαγγα εὐθὺς ἤγεν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀντιτεταγμένους² ἱππέας, ἐκ δὲ τῶν ὀπλιτῶν ἐκέλευσε τὰ δέκα ἀφ' ἥβης³ θεῖν ὁμόσε αὐτοῖς, τοῖς δὲ πελτασταῖς εἶπε δρόμῳ ὑφηγείσθαι· παρήγγειλε δὲ καὶ τοῖς ἱππεῦσιν ἐμβάλλειν, ὥς αὐτοῦ τε καὶ παντὸς τοῦ στρατεύματος ἐπομένου.

Two distinct views are held as to what part of the hoplites is meant by the expression τὰ δέκα⁴ ἀφ' ἥβης. For example, the phrase is translated by E. C. Marchant⁵ as the hoplites "of ten years service"; by C. L. Brownson⁶ as "the first ten year-classes." These

¹ *Ages.* 1.31 and *HG* 3.4.23.

² Παρατεταγμένους in the *Historia Graeca*.

³ Τὰ δέκα ἀφ' ἥβης is the emendation of J. G. Schneider (following Leonclavius) for τινὰς ἀφ' ἥβης of the codices. For similar phrases in the *Historia Graeca* the codices give τοὺς τὰ δέκα in 2.4.32; τοὺς and τὰ in 3.4.23 and 4.5.14; τὰ in 4.5.16, 6.10 and 5.4.40. L. Dindorf (*Xenophontis Historia Graeca*, ed. 2, Oxford, 1853) adopted the reading τὰ. Since later editors have accepted this reading, the differences of interpretation that are to be discussed do not arise from a difference of text but may be influenced by the nature of the textual tradition.

⁴ *Sc. ἐτη.* Cf. *X. Lac.* 11.2: οἱ ἔφοροι προκηρύττουσι τὰ ἔτη, εἰς ἃ δεῖ στρατεύεσθαι καὶ ἱππεῦσι καὶ ὀπλίταις.

⁵ *Xenophon, Scripta Minora* (Loeb ed., London, 1925) 75.

⁶ *Xenophon, Hellenica* (Loeb ed., London, 1918) 1.241. In a note on 2.4.32 he defines the phrase more fully as "the youngest ten year-classes, each year-class including those who reached military age (i.e. the age of 20) in the same year." The same interpretation is given in the French translation by J. Hatzfeld (*Xenophon, Helleniques*, Paris, 1936-1939).

translations are representative of the two ways in which this phrase has been interpreted. According to the one view it presumably means hoplites who are in their eleventh year of liability to military service;⁷ according to the other it includes all who are in the first to the tenth year inclusive.⁸ Also, regardless of which view is accepted, the calculation of the age of the group is affected by a difference of opinion concerning the age at which the Lacedaemonian youth became liable to military service (ἡβη).

Liability to military service at Sparta covered a period of forty years,⁹ but there is no direct statement on the age at which it began or ended. Since, however, the Spartan State was organized on a military basis and, with that end in view, Spartans—especially the youth—were classified by age and assigned appropriate training and duties, a solution has been sought by attempting to determine the exact age-limits of the several grades and to fit the forty years of military service into the scheme. Thus, the beginning of liability to military service (ἡβη) has been fixed at either 18 or 20 years of age.

The statement that ἡβη was "attained at Sparta at 18" is found in Liddell and Scott (Jones-McKenzie) and can be traced back through all the editions to the first (1843). This age is also given in the American Edition of 1846. No supporting testimony is given. This definition of the age of ἡβη was not taken from the fourth edition (1831) of F. Passow's *Wörterbuch*, upon which the first edition of Liddell and Scott was based.¹⁰ Perhaps an explanation of

⁷ H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1925-1940) s. v. "ἡβη"; H. Stephanus, *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae* (ed. 3, Paris, 1831-1865) s. v. "ἡβη"; F. Passow, *Handwörterbuch der griechischen Sprache* (ed. 5, Leipzig, 1841-1857) s. v. "δέκα"; W. Pape, *Griechisch-Deutsches Handwörterbuch* (Braunschweig, 1880) s. v. "ἡβη"; A. Bauer, in Müller, *Handbuch der klassischen Altertums-Wissenschaft* 4.1.2 (ed. 2, München, 1893) 310; K. Thiemann, *Wörterbuch zu Xenophons Hellenica* (ed. 3, Leipzig, 1893) s. v. "ἡβη"; G. Busolt, *Griechische Geschichte* (ed. 2, Gotha, 1893-1904) 1.538, note 3; later (*Hermes* 40 [1905] 421) he quotes — apparently with approval — a statement of Ringalda in which τὰ τριάνοντα ἄφ' ἡβης is interpreted as "die Leute bis zum 35. Jahre"; U. Kahrstedt, *Griechisches Staatsrecht* 1 (Göttingen, 1922) 294, note 2. This view was held generally before the establishment of the present text and is still supported by the preponderance of lexicographical authority.

⁸ G. Grote, *History of Greece* (London, 1869-1870) 2.459, note 2 and 9.175; Thalmey, *RE* s. v. "ἡβη"; A. J. Toynbee, *JHS* 33 (1913) 263.

⁹ X. *HG* 5.4.13; cf. 6.4.17.

¹⁰ But apparently Passow (s. v. "δέκα") was the source of Liddell and Scott's interpretation (s. v. "δέκα") of the phrase οἱ δέκα (ἐτη) ἄφ' ἡβης as "those who are ten years past 20, the age of military service." Here ἡβη is placed at 20. This definition of ἡβη, as well as the one that places it at 18 (s. v. "ἡβη"), appears in all the editions of Liddell and Scott.

the choice of 18 as the age of ἥβη may be found in the definition of the Spartan Eiren. Liddell and Scott (1843) define εἶργον as "a Lacedaemonian youth from his 18th year, when he was entitled to speak in the assembly . . . and to lead an army, like Att. ἐφηβος."¹¹ It seems probable that through a confusion of terms the lower age-limit of the Athenian Ephebus was applied to the Spartan Eiren and that the assumption was made that military majority (ἥβη) was attained upon entrance into this class.¹² At any rate, in this instance Liddell and Scott afford an interesting example of a definition that was adopted as a surmise and perpetuated as a positive error.¹³

The view now generally held places ἥβη at the age of 20, but this conclusion was first reached through a questionable interpretation of evidence. Herodotus¹⁴ says that the Spartan Eirens who had been killed in the battle of Plataea were given a separate burial. Plutarch¹⁵ speaks of the duties of the 20-year-old Eiren. On the assumption that 20 was the lower age-limit of the class the conclusion was drawn that the Eirens were fighting-men in their twenties.¹⁶ Since the Melleirens, who formed the next lower class, were certainly below military age, ἥβη was placed at the age of 20, the point of transition between the two classes.¹⁷

Further evidence has caused a shift of opinion on the age of the Eiren, but has confirmed the conclusion that ἥβη was reached at 20. A gloss on Herodotus 9.85 enumerates the grades in the Spartan system of education. The accuracy of this classification has been shown by a comparison with Spartan inscriptions that record the

¹¹ Here Liddell and Scott cite K. O. Müller (*Dor.* 4.5 ¶2, note), but the latter says that "mit dem achtzehnten Jahre trat der Jüngling aus den Knaben heraus; im zweiten darauf heiss er Eiren."

¹² When Liddell and Scott in their third edition (1848) shifted the lower age-limit of the Eiren from the 18th to the 20th year, they assigned the Melleiren to the period "from the 18th to 20th year" and unaccountably retained ἥβη at 18.

¹³ To Mr. Howard L. Adelson, Miss Anne Freidus, and Mr. Torsten Petersson I am indebted for checking the definitions of δέκα, εἶργον, and ἥβη in the first to sixth editions of Liddell and Scott.

¹⁴ 9.85. Ἰπείρας and ἰπείρας are the emendations of L. K. Valckenaer, but the reading is doubtful.

¹⁵ *Lyc.* 17.2-3.

¹⁶ The prevailing view for the past one hundred years. The upper age-limit of the Eirens, when given, is usually placed at 30, but U. Kahrstedt (*op. cit.* [see above, note 7] 301, note 1) puts it at 22.

¹⁷ But in many instances no clear distinction is made between the 20th year and age 20.

names and class-designations of the victors in the boys' contests.¹⁸ The gloss enumerates six year-classes, then defines the seventh and last class as follows: ἐφηβείη δὲ παρ' αὐτοῖς ὁ παῖς ἀπὸ ἐτῶν ἰδ' μέχρι καὶ κ'. Although the writer of the gloss had in mind a class of ἐφηβοῦ—a term not used officially at Sparta, yet the position of the class at the end of the series and immediately after μελλείρην seems to indicate clearly that Spartan Eirens are meant. Since the Spartan boy entered the first class at the age of 7,¹⁹ he became an Eiren at the age of 13²⁰ and remained in this class until the age of 20.²¹

Since the Eirens were under twenty years of age, they can no longer carry the role of fighters attributed to them in the doubtful text of Herodotus. Other characteristics of the class point to the same conclusion. For example, Xenophon²² says that Spartans who had passed the age of ἥβη were permitted to let their hair grow long; and Plutarch,²³ when mentioning the fact that young warriors made a practice of beautifying their hair in times of danger, states that they let their hair grow long εὐθὺς ἐκ τῆς τῶν ἐφήβων ἡλικίας. From this it may be inferred that Ephebi, or Eirens, did not wear their hair long, were not warriors, and consequently were below the age of ἥβη. Thus, at the age of 20, the upper age-limit of the class of Eirens, the Spartan youth became liable to military service.²⁴ At the end of forty years of service the Spartan was sixty years old and no longer subject to military service outside of his native land. This ties in well with the fact that at the age of 60 the Spartan became eligible to the Council of γέροντες.²⁵

¹⁸ M. P. Nilsson, "Die Grundlagen des spartanischen Lebens," *Klio* 12 (1912) 309-310.

¹⁹ Plu. *Lyc.* 16.4.

²⁰ H. Swoboda, in Müller, *Handbuch* 4.1.1.2 (ed. 3, München, 1926) 696, note 3.

²¹ A new quotation of the above-mentioned gloss is found in the Codex Parisinus 1397 of Stobaeus' *Geography*. The points of difference between this source and the old one have been noted by Aubrey Diller ("A New Source on the Spartan *Ephebia*," *AJPh* 62 [1941] 499-501). They are the following: (1) all seven grades of the system are included in the ephebic training, not merely the seventh; (2) the term Eiren is specifically applied to the seventh class; (3) a Spartan youth became an Eiren at the age of 19, instead of 13, and remained in this class for one year only. Notwithstanding these differences, both sources agree in placing the upper age-limit of the Eiren at 20. This is the essential point for the present discussion.

²² *Lac.* 11.3.

²³ *Lyc.* 22.1.

²⁴ H. Swoboda, in Müller, *Handbuch* 4.1.1.2 (ed. 3, München, 1926) 696, 705; C. A. Forbes, *Greek Physical Education* (New York, 1929) 21.

²⁵ G. Busolt, in Müller, *Handbuch* 4.1.1.1 (ed. 3, München, 1920) 578, note 1.

Turning now to the expression $\tau\acute{\alpha} \delta\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\alpha \acute{\alpha}\phi' \eta\beta\eta\varsigma$, we may best make a comparison of the two interpretations by dismissing the variations in the age assigned to $\eta\beta\eta$ and placing it at the age of 20. The phrase, then, refers to men who were either 30 years old, or 20 to 29 inclusive. The first meaning makes the phrase equivalent in sense to $\tau\circ\upsilon\varsigma \tau\acute{\alpha} \delta\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\alpha \acute{\alpha}\phi' \eta\beta\eta\varsigma \gamma\epsilon\gamma\omicron\nu\omicron\tau\alpha\varsigma$.²⁶ The numeral states the number of years that have elapsed since these soldiers reached military age, its article indicating that the given number is the definite part of a whole — here understood, as “the (first) ten” of the forty years of military service. This interpretation of what has been called a “locutio brevis Laconica” is certainly made from the Athenian point of view²⁷ and still under the influence of the rejected variant reading with the masculine article $\tau\circ\upsilon\varsigma$. The second meaning is obtained by interpreting $\tau\acute{\alpha} \delta\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\alpha$ ($\xi\tau\eta$), “the ten (years),” in terms of soldiers taken in groups by years as they attain their military majority, i.e., “the ten (year-classes).” Here, too, the article denotes the part, as “the (first) ten” of the forty year-classes. The phrase, when read without verbal amplification as the direct object of $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\epsilon$, is quite intelligible in a military sense.

Further, the two interpretations may be compared in the light of the circumstances in which orders were issued to $\tau\acute{\alpha} \delta\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\alpha \acute{\alpha}\phi' \eta\beta\eta\varsigma$, or to a group of similar designation. In every instance these hoplites were ordered to close quickly with the enemy and usually they charged along with the peltasts and the cavalry.²⁸ Under such circumstances they would be picked for their speed and agility in heavy armor. In one instance, when the Acarnanians were hurling javelins and wounding many of the Lacedaemonians, the order to charge them was given to $\tau\acute{\alpha} \pi\epsilon\upsilon\tau\epsilon\kappa\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\kappa\alpha \acute{\alpha}\phi' \eta\beta\eta\varsigma$,²⁹ who were either

²⁶ F. G. Sturz, *Lexicon Xenophonticum* (Leipzig, 1801–1804) s. v. “ $\eta\beta\eta$.” As applied to the Spartan levy, $\tau\acute{\alpha} \delta\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\alpha$ and similar phrases are explained as follows: Delectus primus erat eorum, qui $\delta\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\alpha$, secundus eorum, qui $\pi\epsilon\upsilon\tau\epsilon\kappa\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\kappa\alpha$, tertius, qui $\tau\tau\acute{\alpha}\kappa\omicron\nu\tau\alpha$, quartus, qui $\pi\acute{\epsilon}\nu\tau\epsilon \kappa\alpha\iota \tau\tau\acute{\alpha}\kappa\omicron\nu\tau\alpha$, quintus et postremus, rebus in summum discrimen adductis, eorum qui $\tau\epsilon\tau\tau\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\kappa\omicron\nu\tau\alpha \acute{\alpha}\phi' \eta\beta\eta\varsigma$ erant.

²⁷ Cf. Aeschin. 2.133: $\psi\eta\phi\iota\sigma\alpha\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omega\upsilon \delta' \hat{\nu}\mu\omega\upsilon \dots \tau\circ\upsilon\varsigma \mu\acute{\epsilon}\chi\tau\iota \tau\epsilon\tau\tau\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\kappa\omicron\nu\tau\alpha \acute{\epsilon}\tau\omega\upsilon \xi\acute{\iota}\nu\epsilon\alpha\iota$.

²⁸ A. J. Toynbee (*JHS* 33.263) points out that “these year-classes were not merely mobilisation machinery; they were the tactical basis of the line of battle. If a sally from the ranks were required, to repulse attacking cavalry or light infantry, the commanding officer ordered so many $\xi\tau\eta \acute{\alpha}\phi' \eta\beta\eta\varsigma$ to charge.” Toynbee, Thalheim (see note 8), and U. Kahrstedt (*op. cit.* [see note 7] 308) explain how the enomoties may have been organized to make such operations possible in battle without disorganizing the ranks.

²⁹ X. *HG* 4.6.10.

the hoplites 35 years old, or those of 20 to 34 years inclusive. The latter group seems better qualified by age for the task.

Several examples will serve to show that young men were chosen for operations which required rapidity of movement. When Brasidas was campaigning against Arrhabaeus, a situation arose in which he decided to retreat before the enemy. To do this with as little loss as possible he arranged his hoplites in a square and placed the *youngest* men in position to charge from the ranks in case of attack.³⁰ Again, during the retreat of the Ten Thousand, Xenophon wished to occupy a very steep hill from which the enemy had just withdrawn. For this purpose he took the *youngest* men and ordered the rest to follow.³¹ Upon another occasion, when the Greeks were serving with Seuthes in Thrace, the cavalry and the peltasts were sent ahead to attack the enemy's villages, while Xenophon advanced as rapidly as possible with a supporting force composed of active hoplites *up to 30 years of age*. The rest of the Greeks followed more slowly.³²

Finally, upon the occasion of the attack on the Lacedaemonian regiment of hoplites by Iphicrates' peltasts outside of Corinth,³³ the two interpretations give an astonishing difference in the numerical strength of the Lacedaemonian counter-attacks, as well as in the age of the soldiers involved. The first order to pursue the annoying peltasts was given to τὰ δέκα ἄφ' ἡβης. Their charge proved fruitless, since the more lightly armed peltasts merely retired before them. As the Lacedaemonian hoplites straggled back to their main body the peltasts turned about, hurled javelins, and darted in and out to the attack. With his troops once more under heavy pressure the Spartan polemarch gave a second order to pursue, this time directing it to τὰ πεντεκαίδεκα ἄφ' ἡβης. By the one interpretation the first Lacedaemonian charge was made by the hoplites of the eleventh year-class, i.e., the 30-year-olds; the second, by those of the sixteenth year-class, i.e., the 35-year-olds. In this case the older group was sent out to meet a situation that was rapidly becoming more critical, and it is difficult to explain why the men of 31 to 34 were not used.³⁴

³⁰ Th. 4.125.3.

³¹ X. *Anab.* 4.2.16.

³² *Ibid.* 7.3.46.

³³ X. *HG* 4.5.14-16.

³⁴ This point may be met by assuming that τὰ δέκα ἄφ' ἡβης include men of 30 to 34 inclusive, and τὰ πεντεκαίδεκα ἄφ' ἡβης those of 35 to 39 inclusive (E. Cavaignac,

By the other interpretation the first charge was made by the first ten year-classes, i.e., all hoplites between the ages 20 and 29 inclusive, the second, by the first fifteen year-classes, i.e., all hoplites between the ages 20 and 34 inclusive. Thus, the younger men participated in both charges, assisted in the second by the next five year-classes of older men. The contrast in numerical strength is equally striking. The number of hoplites in the regiment is given by Xenophon as about 600. A reasonable estimate would place its effective strength at about 576, as at Leuctra,³⁵ and this numerical strength justifies the belief that the first thirty-five year-classes were represented. Whether these year-classes were represented equally in the regiment, or proportionally to their relative number in the whole body of Lacedaemonian hoplites, in either case the 20 to 29-year-olds would have been at least ten times the number of the 30-year-olds, and the 20 to 34-year-olds fifteen times the 35-year-olds. In fact, unless the men of 30 and 35 were present in disproportionately large numbers, the force they could have mustered for the charges would have been pitifully small. Despite the inexactness of this comparison, the conclusion seems inescapable that the interpretation which yields the larger number for the two attacks is the more probable.

In the cited passages of Xenophon, therefore, the phrase *τὰ δέκα ἀφ' ἡβης* should be translated as "the first ten year-classes." Since the Spartan youth became liable to military service at the age of 20, these ten year-classes were composed of the men from 20 to 29 years of age inclusive.³⁶

"La population du Péloponnèse aux V^e et IV^e siècles," *Klio* 12 [1912] 263). By this interpretation the disparity in numerical strength is reduced but not eliminated.

³⁵ G. Busolt, "Spartas Heer und Leuktra," *Hermes* 40 (1905) 420.

³⁶ If this conclusion is accepted, the following corrections should be made in Liddell and Scott (Jones-McKenzie):

S. v. "*δέκα*," lines 3-4, for 'those who are *ten* years past 20 (the age of military service)' read 'the first *ten* year-classes, i.e. men of 20 to 29 inclusive.'

S. v. "*ἡβη*," I.1c, for 'at Sparta at eighteen, *τὰ δέκα ἀφ' ἡβης* (sc. *ἔτη*), i.e. men of twenty-eight' read 'at Sparta at 20 (the age of military service), *τὰ δέκα ἀφ' ἡβης* (sc. *ἔτη*), i.e. men of 20 to 29 inclusive.'