

VIII.—Age-Classes in Spartan Education

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The generally accepted interpretation of the age-classes of the Spartan educational system assigns them to the eighth to twentieth years of life. The conflicting evidence of a gloss found in Strabo's *Geography* is invalid. The definitions of the Spartan classes in the new edition of Liddell and Scott should be revised.

The problem of the nomenclature and the age-limits of the classes of the Spartan ἀγωγή, or educational system, seemed to reach a reasonable solution in the conclusions drawn by M. P. Nilsson¹ and H. Swoboda² from inscriptional and literary evidence. Inscriptions³ furnish the names of some of the classes, a gloss⁴ on Herodotus 9.85 gives the names and the sequence of the classes, and Plutarch⁵ states that a Spartan boy entered the first class at the age of seven. Unfortunately these conclusions were not incorporated in the new edition of Liddell and Scott (Jones-McKenzie).⁶ More recently the subject has been further confused for the student by the evidence of another gloss⁷ — or another form of the above-mentioned gloss, found in Strabo's *Geography*. This gloss has been published and interpreted by Aubrey Diller.⁸ The purpose of this paper is to inquire whether the evidence of the gloss in Strabo affects the now generally accepted view, based upon the gloss in Herodotus, and to point out the inadequacy of the relevant definitions in Liddell and Scott.

¹ "Die Grundlagen des spartanischen Lebens," *Klio* 12 (1912) 308–325.

² In Müller, *Handbuch der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 4.1.1.2 (ed. 3, München, 1926) 696–697.

³ *IG* 5¹.252–356; H. J. W. Tillyard, "Inscriptions from the Artemisium," *ABSA* 12 (1905–1906) 351–393, "Inscriptions," *ibid.* 13 (1906–1907) 174–196; A. M. Woodward, "Inscriptions," *ibid.* 14 (1907–1908) 74–103, 15 (1908–1909) 40–52.

⁴ Ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ ἐνιαυτῷ ὁ παῖς ῥωβίδας καλεῖται, τῷ δευτέρῳ προκομιζόμενος, τῷ τρίτῳ μικιζόμενος, τῷ τετάρτῳ πρόπαις, τῷ πέμπτῳ παῖς, τῷ ἕκτῳ μελλείρην· ἐφηβείη δὲ παρ' αὐτοῖς ὁ παῖς ἀπὸ ἑτῶν ιδ' μέχρι καὶ κ'.

⁵ *Lyc.* 16.4.

⁶ H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1925–1940).

⁷ Ἐφηβείη μὲν γὰρ παρὰ Λακεδαιμονίους ὁ παῖς ἐπ' ἑτῶν ιδ' μέχρι κ' καλεῖται δὲ τῷ μὲν πρώτῳ ἐνιαυτῷ ῥωβίδας, τῷ δὲ δευτέρῳ προκομιζόμενος, τῷ τρίτῳ μικιζόμενος, τῷ δὲ πρόπαις, τῷ ε' παῖς, τῷ ζ' μελλείρην, τῷ ξ' εἰρήνη.

⁸ "A New Source on the Spartan *Ephebia*," *AJPh* 62 (1941) 499–501.

The following comparative table gives the names of the classes of the ἀγωγή and three interpretations of the ages to which they apply. Column 1 gives the current view, based on Nilsson-Swoboda's interpretation of the gloss in Herodotus; column 2 is the interpretation of the gloss in Strabo; column 3 contains the definitions of Liddell and Scott, as far as they bear on the Spartan ἀγωγή.

Name of class	Col. 1	Col. 2	Col. 3
	Gloss in Her. (Nilsson-Swoboda)	Gloss in Strabo	L. & S.
	Year of boy's age		
	(παῖδες)	(ἐφηβοί)	
ῥωβίδας	8th	14th	1st
προκομιζόμενος (gloss)	9th	15th	Probably = sq.
[προμικκ(ιχ)ιδόμενος]	9th	15th	2nd
μικιζόμενος (gloss)	10th	16th	3rd
μικιχιζόμενος (inscr.)	10th	16th	Under age
πρόπαις (gloss)	11th	17th	4th
πρατοπάμπαις (inscr.)	11th	17th	Chief of the πάμπαιδες
παῖς (gloss)	12th	18th	No reference
ἀτροπάμπαις (inscr.)	12th	18th	Dub. sens.
μελλείρην	13th	19th	About to become an εἶρην
εἶρην	(ἐφηβοί) 14th to 20th inclusive	20th	At completion of 20th

The gloss in Strabo names seven age-classes and includes them all in an ephebic system, which extends from the fourteenth to the twentieth year inclusive. Thus, a youth "in the first year" is in the first year of ephebic training, i.e., the fourteenth year of his age. Also, the period of the class of εἶρηνες is reduced to one year. No mention is made of the classes from the age of seven to thirteen. Let us briefly examine the validity of this arrangement.

The evidence of etymology throws some light on the comparative age of the class called, variously, in the inscriptions, μικ(κ)ιχι-

ζόμενος, μικ(κ)ιχιδ(δ)όμενος, μικκιχιτόμενος and μιχιχιδδόμενος.⁹ These forms are related to μικ(κ)ός (Doric for μικρός).¹⁰ It seems inappropriate to designate a class of boys in their sixteenth year as "little." Another word that offers some help is παῖς. This term is used not only as a class-name, but also in a general sense for boys from childhood up to a somewhat indeterminate age. It will be assumed without argument that the year-class to which the name παῖς is applied should fall within the general period in which boys are called παῖδες. Writers on Spartan education furnish some information on the upper age-limit of παῖδες as applied to boys in general. In his *Lycurgus* (16.1-6), Plutarch uses παῖδες consistently for boys from the beginning of their education up to the age of twelve. At some point they cease to be παῖδες, but whether the change occurs at twelve or in the teens cannot be determined. Xenophon, in his *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* (2.2-11), uses the word παῖς up to the point where his description suggests Plutarch's twelve-year-olds. Then comes the transition ἐκ παίδων εἰς τὸ μερακιῦσθαι. After that the youths are called οἱ ἡβώντες. Xenophon places this change at about the time when boys in other states stop school. No specific age can be obtained from this reference because the schooling to which Xenophon refers was private. Although Athenian boys who had the will and the means could continue their studies throughout their youth, yet it is safe to assume that the majority quit school in their early teens. This general indication of age, taken into consideration with the meaning of ἡβάω, makes it probable that in the educational system of Sparta the transition from οἱ παῖδες to οἱ ἡβώντες was set at a fixed age consistent with the period of puberty.¹¹

⁹ IG 5¹.256, 276, 286, 294, 310, 314, 322.

¹⁰ Theodor Preger, "Müsische Knabenwettkämpfe in Sparta," *MDAI(A)* 22 (1897) 338.

¹¹ The period of ἡβη was reached at puberty. From then on through adolescence boys were called οἱ ἡβώντες or οἱ ἐφ' ἡβης. After passing through the period of ἡβη (ἡ ἡβητικὴ ἡλικία), they attained full manhood. At Sparta this point was reached at the age of 20. Now that the young men were beyond the hebetate age (X. *Lac.* 4.7, 11.3), they were liable to military duty, and the years of service were reckoned from the end of the hebetate period (τὰ ἔτη ἀφ' ἡβης). Since the end of the period of ἡβη was fixed by the state, it is altogether likely that the beginning, too, was set at a definite age, which served to distinguish some step in the relation of the boy to the state. The following is a case in point. An inscription found at Tegea (IG 5².159) records the conditions of the payment of money deposited by a certain Xuthias, who was probably a Laconian. If the depositor dies, the money is to belong to his children "five years

One fact is clear, however. The youth are regarded as divided into two general groups. Plutarch¹² calls boys *παῖδες* through all the early years of training up to and including *μελλείρες*, who are the oldest of the *παῖδες*. Above these are the *εἴρες*. He also points the distinction by saying that the *εἴρες* supervise and, if necessary, punish the *παῖδες*. As stated previously, Xenophon gives two general groups: *οἱ παῖδες* and *οἱ ἡβῶντες*. Also, in his *Cyropaedia* he prescribes a system of state supervision of education reminiscent of Spartan practice. Here the youth below military age are divided into two distinct classes: *οἱ παῖδες* and *οἱ ἔφηβοι*.¹³ Since the first term of each pair is *οἱ παῖδες*, we can equate the second terms: *οἱ εἴρες* = *οἱ ἡβῶντες* = *οἱ ἔφηβοι*. Since *οἱ παῖδες* is distinct from *οἱ ἔφηβοι*, it follows that the year-class called *παῖς* in the gloss, as a component of *οἱ παῖδες*, cannot be included in *οἱ ἔφηβοι*. In fact, the whole sequence of classes from *ῥωβίδας* to *μελλείρην* must be placed below the age of *οἱ ἔφηβοι*. Failure to make this distinction is the fundamental error of the gloss in Strabo.¹⁴ The gloss in Herodotus is still the best basis for the sequence and ages of the classes of the Spartan *ἀγωγή*.

The definitions of Liddell and Scott (Jones-McKenzie) fail to utilize the results of the correlation of the evidence on the subject. All of the specific ages given for the classes are open to the following criticism. The first four class-names of the gloss in Herodotus are assigned to the first four years of the boy's life, when he was still below the age at which public education began. The fifth class-name (*παῖς*) has no relevant definition. Then, adherence to an obsolete definition¹⁵ of the age of the *εἶρην* causes the ages of the sixth (*μελλείρην*) and seventh (*εἶρην*) classes to be advanced so far

after they reach the age of puberty" — *ἐπεὶ κα πέντε ἔτεα ἡβῶντι*. The determination of the time at which this provision shall become effective presupposes a legally fixed age for ἡβη.

¹² *Lyc.* 17.2.

¹³ *X. Cyr.* 1.2.8.

¹⁴ A secondary point is the impression that the period of one year, which is assigned to the class of *εἴρες* by this gloss, is too short. Although no sharply defined age-divisions are known to have existed within this class, yet there are sufficient indications of differences in age to justify the belief that the period was longer. The *σιδεῖναι* were the youngest of the *εἴρες*, and the *σφαιρεῖς* were just entering manhood. Of the states whose corresponding group of boys might be expected to show some parallel, Crete had an ephebia of at least three years, and Thuria in Messenia had a class of *τριτῆρες* (*IG* 5¹.1386), who were probably *εἴρες* in their third year (C. A. Forbes, *Greek Physical Education* [New York, 1929] 47–48, 189).

¹⁵ Cf. H. Swoboda, in Müller, *Handbuch* 4.1.1.2 (ed. 3, München, 1926) 696, note 3.

that the latter part of the gloss in Herodotus, which refers to the fourteenth to twentieth years, is practically ignored. Thus, with the exception of the vague statements that a *μικιχιζόμενος* is "under age" and that a *μελλείρην* is "about to become an *εἶρην*," no designation is made to apply to any of the years of Spartan training from its beginning at the age of seven to the age of twenty. The apparently continuous sequence of years in the gloss is broken, and the terms have almost no official meaning.

A few words of explanation should be given on the definitions of the second and third class-names. Because of their etymological relationship, *μικίζόμενος* and *μικιχιζόμενος* are generally explained as variants of the name of the same (third) class. In the inscriptions, *μικιχιζόμενοι* are represented as participating in musical and athletic contests, while the gloss states that a *μικίζόμενος* is "in the third year." Liddell and Scott's interpretation of "in the third year" as in the third year of the boy's life makes it virtually impossible to associate both names with the same year-class. As a result, *μικίζόμενος* is explained as "a male child in his third year," and *μικιχιζόμενος* as a "boy under age." The class-name *προμικκ(ιχ)ιδδόμενος* (for *προκομιζόμενος* of the gloss), which should apply to the year before *μικιχιζόμενος*, is defined as a "boy in his second year." Apparently, since no contests are associated with boys of the second class, their youthful age is acceptable.

The following revisions are suggested for Liddell and Scott (Jones-McKenzie).

- S.v. "*ῥωβίδας*," line 1, for 'boy of less than one year old' read 'boy in the first year of public education, i.e. in the eighth year of his age.'
- S.v. "*προμικκ(ιχ)ιδδόμενος*," line 1, for 'boy in his second year' read 'at Sparta, boy in the second year of public education, i.e. in the ninth year of his age.'
- S.v. "*μικιχιζόμενος*," line 2, for 'boy under age' read 'boy in the third year of public education, i.e. in the tenth year of his age'; lines 3-4, for 'is expld. as a male child in his third year' read '= foreg.'
- S.v. "*πρόπαις*," line 1, for 'boy in his fourth year' read 'boy in the fourth year of public education, i.e. in the eleventh year of his age.'
- S.v. "*πρατοπάμπαις*," for 'chief of the *πάμπαιδες* (v. Addenda)' read '= *πρόπαις*, at Sparta (q.v.).'
- S.v. "*παῖς*," II fin., add 'At Sparta, boy in the fifth year of public education, i.e. in the twelfth year of his age, *Λέξεις Ἡροδότου* in Stein Hdt. ii p. 465 (Berol. 1871).'
- S.v. "*ἀτροπάμπαις*," line 1, for 'dub. sens. in *IG* 5(1).278,279 (Sparta)' read '= *παῖς*, at Sparta (q.v.), *IG* 5(1).278,279.'

- S.v. "μελλείρην," after 'at Sparta,' substitute '*boy about to become an εἴρην, in the sixth year of public education, i.e. in the thirteenth year of his age, Plu. Lyc. 17, Λέξεις Ἡροδότου in Stein Hdt. ii p. 465 (Berol. 1871).*'
- S.v. "εἴρην," substitute '*Lacedaemonian youth in the fourteenth to twentieth years of age inclusive, i.e. in the seventh to thirteenth years of public education, Λέξεις Ἡροδότου in Stein Hdt. ii p. 465 (Berol. 1871), X. Lac. 2.11, Plu. Lyc. 17, IG 5(1).279.*'