

PAIDERASTIA: A GREEK PRACTICE RECONSIDERED

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1. Definition

The word *paiderastia* will hereafter be used to describe a particular social phenomenon in Greek Antiquity, i.e. the relationship between two males; an adult, *erastes*, and a non-adult, *eromenos* or *pais*.

1.1. Paiderastia versus Androphile Homosexuality

Paiderastic relationships in Classical Greece have been studied in a scholarly way since Bethe 1907. Recently, abundant Greek material has been offered, with excellent linguistic comment, by Dover 1989.¹ I will follow his ἐραστής and ἐρώμενος² to describe the older and the younger partner in a *paiderastic* relationship. However, Dover uses much of the source-material to make a case for the predominance of a 'homosexual ethos' in the early Classical period. But as he pays insufficient attention, occasionally, to the age of the younger participant³ and, especially, to the duration of the relationship and the heterosexual preferences of most *erastai* before, after and sometimes during it,⁴ his method leads to unacceptable results.⁵

Rather than treating *paiderastic* relationships as a sub-category of androphile homosexual behaviour, which might be appropriate for the

¹ Few competent classicists have devoted their attention to the subject between Bethe and Dover (1st edition 1978), with the exception of W. Kroll, *Realencyclopädie* XI.I (1921) 897-906. I have made use of the work of two outsiders: J.Z.E Eglinton (1971, ch. X), who wrote an encyclopedia on the practice and the psychiatrist T. Vanggaard (1972, ch. 1 & 3), who studied an autonomous homosexual impulse in otherwise heterosexual males.

² Alternatives are Dorian *εἰσπνήλας* (inspirer) and *άιτας* (listener).

³ Dover's view on the age and the physical strength of the free boy protected against rape by the law quoted in Aeschines' *Timarchos* 16 (Dover 1989: 36 "fully-grown youth") leads him to irrelevant speculations. On the age of Plato's Lysis (Dover 1989: 95 "adolescent"), cf. below, section 3.

⁴ Cf. Eglinton 1971: 222; Vanggaard 1972: ch. 1.

⁵ Dover discusses a great number of isolated statements. As for a general context of *paiderastia* and social reaction to it, he lets 'Pausanias' (in Plato's *Symposion*) analyse Athenian public opinion in regard of his ethos, but cf. below, section 1.3.

study of analogous modern sociological phenomena,⁶ the differences between the two kinds of behaviour in Antiquity should be stressed. When the latter does not differ fundamentally from modern practices, it is little attested in Classical Greece,⁷ and when it is mentioned in general, it is usually condemned⁸ or ridiculed.⁹ *Paiderastia*, as will be shown below, was much more common and practised by men who were always the active partners, in other circumstances preferring women.

In the following I will discuss some of the Greek sources,¹⁰ concentrating on the proper definition of the practice, its origin and its social function. A separate study on a commonly neglected aspect of Plato's thoughts on the subject has been included at the end.

1.2. *The age of the pais*

There is some confusion about the age-limits of the younger partner in a *paiderastic* relationship, not in Antiquity, but among certain modern commentators.

A reliable witness in this matter is Xenophon, who can hardly be accused of propagating *paiderastia* or, for that matter, homosexuality. Xenophon's view on androphile homosexual behaviour is somewhat ambiguous. Menon (*Anabasis* II.4.28) is detested for loving a man older than himself, who is bearded when Menon is not, but in *Symposion* IV.10 f. Kritoboulos, to whom the same applies, is not portrayed unfavourably. But, after Xenophon, Menon is a monster and Kritoboulos a nice fellow to have a drink with.

Xenophon rejects physical aspects of *paiderastia* in *Agesilaos* V.4-7 and in Socrates' speech in his *Symposion* (VIII 35). He does the same in his *Lakedaimonion Politeia*, but this text is an important general observation not because of what he says in it about the practice,¹¹ but because of his method in saying it. The first part of the text is well-structured;

⁶ Vanggaard 1972: ch. 2, excluding the junior partners.

⁷ Dover 1989: 16: "... the reciprocal desire of partners belonging to the same age-category is virtually unknown in Greek homosexuality...". He gives but one certain example of a lasting relationship between adults (Pausanias & Agathon, 84). There were, of course, "grown-up *pornoi* like Timarchos" (Dover 1989: 39).

⁸ After Dover 1989: 61, 67-8 a man who was the 'passive' partner of such a duo was considered to be shameful, but the 'active' partner was not; cf. Vanggaard 1972: ch. 5.

⁹ Examples (mostly from Aristophanes' comedies) cf. Dover 1989: 135-48.

¹⁰ The source-material consists mainly of occasional references by almost every author of the Classical and Hellenistic periods, augmented by several hundreds of poems and epigrams and a significant number of early-Classical painted pottery, *kalos*-inscriptions and graffiti.

¹¹ See Dover's translation (1989:190-1) of II.13-14ad.

setting himself the task of comparing Spartan society to Greek society in general, Xenophon summarizes and comments upon Lykourgos' regulations in respect of various stages of life; birth, childhood, youth, full manhood and mid-life (Ch. I-V).¹² The first three sections all start with an introduction and a brief note on customs elsewhere in Greece, which is followed by ample attention for Lykourgos and a conclusion.

The structure is the following: I.1-2 General introduction, I.3 Introduction of Birth; Greece in general; I.4-9 Lykourgos on Birth; I.10 Conclusion of Birth; II.1 Introduction of *Paideia*; Greece in general; II.2-11 Lykourgos on *Paideia*; II.12-14ad *Paiderastia*; II.14ei Conclusion of *Paideia*; III.1 Introduction of the next stage, "when a boy gets beyond childhood";¹³ Greece in general etc.

Paiderastia is presented as a complete sub-section within the *paideia*-section (II.12 Introduction; Greece in general; II.13 Lykourgos on *P.*; II.14ad Conclusion). Thus Xenophon makes it very clear that it has to do with a younger boy, not with an older boy or a youth. It appears from his choice of words in Ch. III that, for his next age-category, he has in mind a boy of about 16-17, not older,¹⁴ so one may conclude that the author regards *paiderastia* as something that ends when the younger partner reaches this age.

Xenophon does not actually say at what age a *pais* made his first introduction into society, but for this we may compare his statements on the Spartan *paideia* with those by Plutarch in his *Lykourgos*. Although writing much later, Plutarch apparently uses Xenophon among his sources, quotes from Aristotle's lost work on the Spartan constitution and probably also draws on other earlier works now lost, e.g. those of Xenophon's contemporary Kritias.

Plutarch starts discussing *paideia* as a new subject in Ch. XIV and, beginning "at the very source", he includes the position of Spartan women (XIV) and marriages (XV). It must not be neglected that, according to his view, a Spartan had better not remain unwed.¹⁵ Children first appear in XVI; 1-3 deals with infants and 4-6 with the state-education of the age-group 7-11. He has a lot more to say about boys of 12 and older (XVI.6-XVIII.4) and here Plutarch can be compared to Xenophon:

¹² For old age see X.1-3.

¹³ "Οταν γε μήν ἔκ παιδων εἰς τὸ μειρακιοῦσθαι ἐκβαίνωσι.

¹⁴ E.g. "*paidiskos*" in the conclusion.

¹⁵ After telling how Lykourgos stimulated marriages he adds (XV.1) οὐ μήν ἀλλά καὶ ἀτιμίσιαν τινὰ προσέθηκε τοῖς ἄγαμοις "this was not all, but he made the unmarried get used to be (considered) shameful". In XV.1-2 he describes the social discomforts to those persisting; cf. Xenophon *Lak.*IX.5 on special taxation for unmarried men.

	Xenophon	Plutarch
Boys are supervised by a <i>paidonomos</i> with his staff of <i>eirens</i> who chastise them	II.2 II.2,5 II.2	XVII.2 XVII.2, XVIII.2 XVIII.3
They wear one cloak throughout the year and get little to eat which makes them grow tall but induces them to steal	II.4 II.5 II.6 II 6-9	XVI.6 XVII.4 XVII.4 XVII.3-4

Because of these parallels¹⁶ Plutarch likely makes use of earlier authors as well when he says that this stage of life started when a boy turned 12 (XVI.6) and that he could expect the attentions of *erastai* at that age (XVII.1). Plutarch adds that the *erastai* were young men of good reputation; on their age see below, section 2.2. They were not left alone to educate their *eromenoi*; apart from the *paidonomos* and his *eirens* the boys were supervised by "all the elderly men" who collectively acted as fathers to all (XVII.1).

The age of 12 is not arbitrary as it generally coincides with a marked physical change, i.e. the first signs of puberty. The upper limit of the age of the *pais* is less easily demonstrated, because it depended on the personal views of those involved. There seems to be a general consensus in Greek Antiquity, however, about the moment when deep emotional involvement should start giving way to plain friendship. It appears from casual statements¹⁷ and, notably, in poems, to have been another physical change, that of boyhood into manhood.

When Xenophon and Plutarch were 'uncommitted' in respect of boys, Straton of Sardis (2nd century AD) might be called a paedophilic poet in the modern sense. One does not have to work through all of the 259 poems of the *mousa paidika* (94 are attributed to him) to get a fair idea of the preferences expressed by these poets, but bodily hair was not among them.¹⁸

The age-group 12-16, not older, was the target of Stratons affections, as appears clearly from one of his poems which has been misunderstood by some nevertheless (Pal.Ant. XII.4):

¹⁶ The only aspect of Spartan *paideia* mentioned by Xenophon (II.3), but related by Plutarch to the age-group 7-11 (XVI.6), is that children went bare-foot.

¹⁷ A well-known example is the introduction of Plato's *Protagoras*. A friend supposes Socrates has been "out with the hounds" (cf. Dover 1989: 87) after Alkibiades and continues politely that Alkibiades is handsome indeed, but "nevertheless a man, Socrates, and, between ourselves, he has a beard" (309a). Socrates defends himself by appealing to Homer, probably Od.X 277-9, and by telling that he has found even greater beauty in Protagoras' wisdom (309b).

¹⁸ The appearance of bodily hair is detested by Straton (13 & 21) and nine other poets (24-7, 30, 31, 33, 35, 36, 39, 41, 71). For Straton's disgust of beards cf. 186, 191 and 220, "a torment to Zeus".

The bloom of 12 pleases me, but
13 I prefer more.
Yet two times 7 is a sweeter flower
And even more agreeable is early 15
The 16th year is of the gods
17 does not belong to me, but to Zeus alone
He who wants older ones is beyond playing;
He wants to be "returned in the same way".

This poem is typical of Stratton, the "sweeter flower" is paralleled by various other fruit- and plant-similes.¹⁹ "16" appears to be "of the gods" in more than one sense. It is the culmination of the poet's appreciation, but one has to be a god, more or less, to make a 16-year old look up in adoration. Many a father, I think, would agree on this with Stratton. But at 16 he draws the line.²⁰ The end, "*tòv δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος*", is a formula in Homer, but Stratton uses it to define a man who is not a *paiderastes*.²¹

From this and other related evidence the age of an *eromenos* can be defined as the transitory stage between childhood and manhood; from the onset of puberty to other clear signs of physical change; e.g. the breaking of the voice, the appearance of bodily hair, the first growing of the beard and, finally, a general change in stature, from 'roundishness' to 'manliness'.

It should not have been necessary to point out what is obvious. However, many authors, some of whom had no scientific pretensions²² or were rather pre-occupied,²³ have argued that a *pais* was (or should be) much older. A representative of the last category is Licht 1925, who had some influence on the previous generation.²⁴ Attempting to prove a Greek *pais* to be a young man in disguise (98-9), Licht also quoted Stratton's above-mentioned poem, but held that the final line was its

¹⁹ E.g. 197 (cucumber), 205 ('unripe' fruit), 234 (rose).

²⁰ In no. 255 a man who loves 'big boys' (*φιλοβούπταις*) is reproached: "Unsociable man! those whom I reject and remove from the list you receive, as competitors". The same view is expressed elsewhere (16, 197, 215, 224, 234). Stratton can be warmed by the "setting sun", not "set on fire" (178). Other poets occasionally praised older boys (16-18), cf. Skythinos (22) and Meleagros (125); Damoxenos in Athenaeus I.15bc.

²¹ The word 'homosexual' was invented in the 19th century AD.

²² E.g. Mary Renault in her excellent novel "The Last of the Wine" (1956).

²³ Perhaps the earliest was the 19th-century poet Walt Whitman. His poems and statements were influential, although they did not express a scholarly view on Greek Antiquity, cf. Eglinton 1971: 369-70.

²⁴ Licht is used as a source by both Eglinton 1971: 230 f. and Kitto 1957: 220.

culmination rather than a pun, explaining the quotation as referring to 'real' love (100 "bereits" and n.1). A typical error of his (Licht 1925: 96) is corrected by Dover 1989: 66; "φιλέφηβος" (loving young men) is said of a girl.^{24a}

Surprisingly, Dover holds the same idea. He expresses his belief that the age-group 16-17 was preferred by "the Athenians of the Classical period" in his introduction (15 n.30). What he says here about Stratón is obviously based on Pal.Ant. XII.4 and certainly as erroneous as Licht's view. Realizing that "the beard, appearing on the *eromenos*, liberates the *erastes* from the tyranny of *eros*" (86), he wonders on the same page whether in "homosexual relationships between co-equals" one of the partners may have called himself *pais*. He goes on to say: "One could be *erastes* and *eromenos* at the same stage of one's life, but not both in relation to the same person" (87). The evidence produced for this is the statement about Kritoboulos in Xenophon's *Symposion* VIII.2. But throughout the *symposion* jokes are made when Kritoboulos is involved, cf. IV.27-8 and especially his 'contest of beauty' with Socrates (V passim). If all the statements about him are serious it follows that Kritoboulos was almost everything at the same time; homosexual (cf. IV.10 f.), devoted husband (cf. IX.7), *erastes* and *eromenos*.

Finally, when Dover says "'Education' is the key-word in Xenophon's evaluation of a chaste homosexual relationship" (202), in my view Xenophon's classification of *paiderastia* as an aspect of *paideia* is turned upside-down.

1.3. *The preferences of the erastes*

In his discussion of Aeschines' *Timarchos* 138 f. Dover leaves open the question of the age of the boys who are protected by the law.²⁵ When he returns to this subject, Dover's authority on the minimum-age of socially accepted *eromenoi* is Pausanias in Plato's *Symposion* (81-4; 91). Dover suggests in his introduction that Pausanias may represent Plato's own ideas as well (12-3), but this last view is obviously untenable. It silently by-passes Plato's subtle ironic comments to Pausanias' speech²⁶ and what follows it, a burlesque scene in which the comedian Aristophanes suffers from a 'sudden' attack of hiccoughs and which is concluded by three recipes for its cure (185c7-e5). I suggest that in this

^{24a} Add Artemis Philomeirax, so surnamed because her shrine in Olympia was near the Gymnasium; Pausanias VI.138.

²⁵ Dover 1989: 48-9. Cf. below, section 1.4.

²⁶ Rosen 1968: 75, 82-3, 88-9.

way Aristophanes, who was to be the next speaker, more or less prudently refrained himself from bursting out laughing.²⁷

Be this as it may, in his speech Pausanias distinguishes 'good' or 'heavenly' (Uranian) *eros* from 'bad' or 'vulgar' (Pandemic) *eros* (180d8-e4). He defines his 'good' *eros* as a relationship starting only after the younger partner had grown his first beard (181c9-d3). And even after that the 'good' *erastes* should restrict himself to courting for "a certain interval of time" (184a7-9), he says, to show himself more 'worthy' than the 'vulgar' *erastes*, who "flutters off and is gone" (183e3-4)²⁸ when a boy is no longer a boy. He despises the 'vulgar' *erastai* who, "in the first place, have no less desire for women as they have for boys".²⁹

When Pausanias' point of view is not that of a *paiderastes* but of an androphile homosexual³⁰ and therefore irrelevant to the subject of this study, his observation of what he calls 'vulgar' *erastai* deserves some attention. Other examples of individual *erastai* making little distinction, in their preferences, between boys and women are known from poetry,³¹ but to show that this attitude was quite common I will return to Xenophon, who makes some interesting observations on the behaviour of the Greek soldiers in his *Anabasis*.

In IV.1.12 f. the hard-pressed army had to abandon everything that held up its speed, including recently captured civilian prisoners. Apparently love-affairs had developed between individual soldiers and prisoners; a few *boys and women* were smuggled through in spite of the order (IV.1.14). The soldiers did not protest as they frequently did when they disapproved of an order. Their consent implies that the boys involved were young and, as the women, expected to fall behind on the rough march facing them. If these boys had been over 16, their fleeing *erastai* would have given them weapons to incorporate them with the peltasts, or, had they been too unexperienced for this, at least would have expected the boys to be able to follow them through the mountains.

But the Greeks could not get very far without company. Seven days later there were enough women again to make their number a point of consideration when a river had to be crossed under enemy fire (IV.3.30). Symposia were held when the soldiers had found some safety in Armenia; they showed the Armenian boys how to serve them by making signs

²⁷ Rosen 1968: 90-1 interprets the hiccoughs as referring to what is following, not as a comment on Pausanias.

²⁸ In Iliad II 71 "οἴχεται ἀποπτάμενος" refers to Agamemnon's dream.

²⁹ "ἐρῶσι δὲ οἱ τοιοῦτοι πρώτον μὲν οὐχ ἥπτον γυναικῶν ή παίδων" (181b3-4).

³⁰ Rosen 1968: 74: "The fact that Pausanias is in love with Agathon is extremely important for an understanding of his speech".

³¹ E.g. Meleagros, Pal.Ant. XII 86 & 90; Anonymus, *ibid.* V.65.

(IV.5.33). They took some boys with them as well, the story of one of them is told in IV.6.1-3.³² Games were organized when the army had reached the Black Sea; the boys performed in it in the short-track race³³ and the women encouraged the athletes (IV.8.25-28).

Xenophon has not noticed any desire among his soldiers for little girls or men. When the profits from the sales of *prisoners* were divided (V.3.4), the *boys and women* had already been put on ships with the sick and the veterans (V.3.1).

Finally, Xenophon mentions a very noble deed inspired by this kind of love in VII.4.7-11. When the remaining soldiers had entered the service of the Thracian Seuthes and had won a battle for him, a certain Episthenes of Olynthos, a *paiderastes*, spotted among the prisoners to be executed a handsome boy, "who was strong enough to fight like a man".³⁴ Intervening on his behalf, Xenophon told Seuthes that Episthenes was a hero; he had once formed a company of 'handsome young men' and had been brave among them. However, when this is compared to IV.1.27, where another captain claimed to be the best volunteer for a dangerous mission, saying "many young men will follow me, when I lead", Episthenes' heroism seems to have been inspired by his sense of honour, not by his sexual desire.

Seuthes asked him if he would "give his life for this one, too" and the Greek immediately agreed, "if the boy would order it and show gratitude". But when the young Thracian was asked if Episthenes should die in his place he begged Seuthes to spare both their lives, and so it happened.

In all of this Xenophon has been a neutral observer. We are not informed about the colour of the boy's hair, but about the size of his shield, as the army-commander was noticing the unusual recruitment of an extra peltast. Xenophon could imagine himself to be involved in an argument about a boy (V.8.4), but it is not very likely that he ever was.

³² This boy, who is explicitly called quite young, was the son of an Armenian village-chief, who served as a guide. The son was put under guard to guarantee his father's loyalty, but when the father fled after an argument the guardian fell in love with the boy, took him to Greece and later employed him as his servant.

³³ The maximum-age to partake in the boys' contests varied, but "boys against men" was held unfair nevertheless. So one Nikasylos of Rhodes, aged 18, was excluded from the boy's pankration and won the adult's contest instead (Pausanias VI.14.1). The youngest recorded victor is the Messenian Damiskos, aged 12 (Ib. VI.2.10).

³⁴ ἔχοντα μέλλοντα, cf. Dover 1989: 51 "just in the first years of maturity"; D. Lotze, *Anabasis* (Reclam), 1963 "eben mannbar werdender Knaben".

1.4. Paiderastic behaviour in Greek Law.

Plato lets his Pausanias plea for a general law against those preferring beardless boys to bearded ones (*Symposion* 181d7-e3). It has been argued from Aeschines' *Timarchos* 139 that such a law existed in the 4th century BC, or that Solon's law³⁵ was interpreted in this way by that time. It should be noted that when Aeschines says the law restricts *erastai* until "the age at which a boy has a more mature intelligence"³⁶ he is not quoting from the law, but interpreting it.³⁷

There is no doubt that Athenian children were protected from undesirable approaches by severe laws. The punishment for the rape of a child (or of a woman) was a heavy fine or instant execution³⁸ and a man who trespassed into a school with bad intentions was always put to death.³⁹

However, Aeschines, who would have accused Timarchos of anything likely to be considered as 'bad conduct' in attempting to show that his opponent had committed a crime by addressing the Athenian Assembly (21 f.), said he would by-pass "sins as a boy committed against his own body" (39). Nor could he incriminate Timarchos very much for living, *as a youth*, with 'noble Misgolas' (41-3; 51), but Timarchos' subsequent taking abode, *as an adult*, with many other men (52 f.), made him "a creature with the body of a man defiled with the sins of a woman" (185).⁴⁰

It follows that no general law confronted the *erastes* who did not go after pre-pubescent boys⁴¹ and who had the consent of his *eromenos* and of those responsible for him; Aeschines, writing love-poems and "making a nuisance of himself in the gymnasium" (55), had nothing to fear. The *pais* might suffer legal impediments after having reached maturity, but only if he was an Athenian citizen who had been making a living out of his affections.

As for other cities, only general statements can be made because of the lack of evidence. When in some parts of Greece, notably Boeotia and Elis, *erastai* appear to have been encouraged, in others they were prevented from even speaking to minors. After Xenophon, many cities

³⁵ Bethe 1907: 458.

³⁶ Dover 1989: 49.

³⁷ "He (sc. the legislator) did not say..."; cf. Dover 1989: 48.

³⁸ Aeschines, *Timarchos* 16.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 12.

⁴⁰ When Timarchos' age at the time of Aeschines' respective accusations is taken into account it is unnecessary to consider, as Dover 1989: 60-1 does, whether Aeschines thought 'homosexuality' was unnatural.

⁴¹ The age of 12 seems to have been a lower limit indeed; preferences for pre-pubescent boys are not attested except in a few Hellenistic poems (cf. Eglinton 1971: 263, 270-1).

did not prosecute bodily consummation.⁴² Plutarch tells how the law (or public opinion) was changed in Chalkis after the bravery shown by one Kleomachos in the Lelantine War, inspired by his non-combattant *eromenos*: "formerly they had frowned on *paiderastia*, but now they accepted it more than others did".⁴³

2. Origin and social reaction

It is fruitless to investigate how the practice came into being when following Goethe, who said in 1830 that it is as old as mankind.⁴⁴ But some explanation must be offered for its prominence in Classical Greece for more than 250 years, since in the present western civilisation it is considered an abominable aberration.

2.1. Myths

As a social institution *paiderastia* was likely derived, in spite of Dover's doubts, from primitive beliefs and rites similar to those that have been studied by modern anthropologists. The changes in the body of a young male both at the beginning and at the end of the transitional period as described above are quite obvious. Generally speaking, a boy experiences two corresponding periods of rapid physical growth whereas a girl has only one, before she is sexually mature. When a 13-year old is capable of producing off-spring, hardly any culture would welcome him actually doing so and consequently some form of social control is necessary, whether a rigid school-system, a series of 'rites-de-passage' or otherwise.

In 1907 Bethe could not produce analogies from primitive societies for his view on the beliefs of the Dorians regarding the transmission of the adult's *arete* to the boy, which he argued from the Dorian verb *eispnein*,⁴⁵ and he met with severe criticism from his contemporaries.⁴⁶ However, later studies showed the West-Irian Marind to hold quite similar beliefs and practices as those argued by Bethe for the Dorians.⁴⁷

Dover 1989: 195 has a strong point in the absence of allusions to the practice in Dorian poetry of the 7th century BC. Likewise, changed

⁴² Xenophon, *Lak.* II.14bd, "desire for boys".

⁴³ Plutarch, *Erotikos* 17 (= *Moralia* 760E-761A); cf. Athenaeus XIII 601 f.

⁴⁴ Quotation in Eglinton 1971: 473, n. 308.

⁴⁵ Bethe 1907: 461 f.

⁴⁶ A. Semenov, "Zur dorischen Knabenliebe", *Philologus* LXX (1911), 146-50; A. Ruppertsberg, Εἰσπνήλας, *ibid.* 151-4. Ruppertsberg's case for the spiritualness of *eispnein* is unconvining as his examples are almost exclusively drawn from Homer.

⁴⁷ On the Marind see J. van Baal, *Dema* (The Hague 1966).

attitudes in the 6th and 5th centuries BC could result in the 'adjustment' of earlier myths, e.g. that of Poseidon & Pelops by Pindar⁴⁸ or the evaluation of a local *heros*, e.g. Iolaos in Thebes, whose alleged grave played a part in a ritual performed by the members of the Theban Sacred Band of hoplites.⁴⁹ But such changes could never have taken place, in my view, if not at least one early myth had found social acceptance before the end of the 7th century BC.

Considering some early myths, that of Laios & Chrysippus⁵⁰ ended in disaster, although Laios' principal crime was not the abduction of the boy, but the violation of his father's hospitality. The myth of Apollo & Hyakinthos is restricted to the area occupied by Dorian-speaking Greeks,⁵¹ but it may reflect a fairy-tale only⁵² and ended with the death of the beloved. Lastly, the origin of the Orphic Mysteries, as held by Eglinton,⁵³ is too gruesome.

A more likely candidate for a myth functioning as a tool for the social acceptance of *paiderastia* is the myth of Zeus & Ganymede. It is attested in several early variants⁵⁴ and ended happily, the boy's father being comforted by a splendid gift. Perhaps this myth can be rationalized as a consolation to someone who's son had become the victim of an eagle; certain species, notably the Alpine *Lammergeier*, are still feared for their capacity of transporting a child when hungry. A youth might have been killed by an eagle, not abducted, although Ganymede must have been older than the infant painted by Rembrandt.

Homer does not say explicitly that Zeus had a sexual desire for the boy, but at least as early as the 7th century BC the myth was understood in this way. Anyone who would have wished to reject the practice as such, sanctioned by the supreme deity, in *Antiquity*, might have found no better argument than "*quod licet Iovi, non licet bovi*". It is somewhat naive to hold that Ganymede had been selected for his wisdom only.⁵⁵ As

⁴⁸ Pindar, *Olympian Ode I*. Although Pelops was sent out of heaven before his beard had first shown itself, and later asked the god, in return for his past favours, to lend him his divine horses for the pursuit of a girl, this "homosexualisation" of myth", according to Dover 1989: 198, contributed to his ethos as well. However, the principal theme of this part of the Ode is not Poseidon's rare *paiderastic* adventure (in Clemens Alexandrinus' catalogue Pelops is his only *paidika*; Apollo has 14), but his common patronage of horse-breeding.

⁴⁹ Cf. Dover 1989: 199.

⁵⁰ Cf. Bethe, *Thebanische Heldenlieder* (Leipzig 1891), 12 f.

⁵¹ *Realencyclopädie IX* (1916), 8.

⁵² To explain why one could read "ατ ατ" on the flower; cf. R. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, Penguin 1977 (reprint of 1960 edition), 81.

⁵³ Eglinton 1971: 465-6, n.173a.

⁵⁴ Iliad V 265-7, XX 232-5; Little Iliad Fr. 7; Hymn to Aphrodite 202-17.

⁵⁵ Xenophon's 'Socrates' in his *Symposion*, VIII 31.

might be expected, the theme was still very popular among the poets of the *mousa paidika*.⁵⁶

2.2. Social function

The reason why *paiderastic* behaviour was considered, at least in parts of Greece, beneficial to society as a whole, was not a 'general contempt for women',⁵⁷ but its usefulness as a training-stage for the battlefield, in particular after the general change to hoplite tactics in the 7th century BC. This is shown most clearly in Ephoros' description of a Cretan ritual,⁵⁸ in which the adult announced his plans to kidnap his intended *eromenos* from among the boy's male relatives. These always presented the boy to show him 'worthy' of the honour, but prevented the kidnapping if the man was considered 'unworthy', or put up a mock-fight if they agreed. The age of the boy is not indicated, but his opinion was not asked for and he was not supposed to participate in the fighting either way.

If the 'kidnapping' was consented to the adult made some expensive customary presents to the minor. The boy received a bull for sacrifice to Zeus (and to prepare a feast for his co-operative relatives), a drinking-cup (for libations?), and a suit of armour for later use as the adult's *parastates*, "he who stands besides", i.e. in the line of hoplite warriors. The costliness of the presents limits the social value of the ritual, restricting it to the nobility, but Ephoros adds that a boy of noble birth who could not find an *erastes* was despised for his apparently low character.

There was no 'noble class' in Sparta, since every Spartan citizen belonged to it, in contrast to *perioikoi* and subjugated neighbouring peoples. The Spartan way of life had been made possible by the conquest of Messenia after twenty years of war in the later 8th century BC. But as the Spartans were heavily outnumbered⁵⁹ their yoke was never secure; a lost battle in 669 BC started a second Messenian War and any other catastrophe, as e.g. the earthquake of 464 BC, was likely to instigate a new revolt. This resulted in the continuation of the system of training described above, with the result that Sparta could bring into the field a relatively great number of young soldiers without risking to lose too many of them because of their lack of experience.

⁵⁶ Four on Zeus & Ganymede are by Straton (194, 220, 221, 254), five by Meleagros (65, 68, 70, 101, 133) and four by others (37, 67, 69, 230).

⁵⁷ E.g. Kroll, *Realencyclopädie* 897-8. This idea is most convincingly rejected by Kitto 1957: 219-36.

⁵⁸ Ephoros (Fr. 149) in Strabo 10.4.21; cf. Bethe 1907: 447 f.

⁵⁹ The only reliable figures are in Herodotus IV 28; against the Persians Sparta could muster 5,000 citizens, 5,000 *perioikoi* and 35,000 helots.

Here, as in Crete, the *erastes* was supposed to select an *eromenos* for his character and his talents as a future soldier, not because of his pretty face.⁶⁰ The resulting relationship was strictly supervised by the State and the *erastes* was held responsible for any improper behaviour of his *eromenos*.⁶¹ On the other hand, a well-qualified man who avoided this social obligation risked punishment also.⁶² The idea was to combine, eventually, an experienced hero with a less muscled, but perhaps more eager younger warrior, thus making a team of two unequal partners who could trust each other blindly.⁶³ This puts an age-limit to the social acceptability of an *erastes*⁶⁴ and explains why the boy could not be trained, with the same effect, by his own father, as one might expect. The father would have been over 35 and exempt from serving in the first line at the moment when the youngster could fight his first battle. When comparing the physical efforts of a fighting hoplite to those of a modern athlete or soccer-player it is easy to see why putting a father next to his son would result in a weak spot in the line.

For this reason I must object to Dover's explanation of his 'homosexual ethos'. He sees it resulting from military circumstances as well, but more specifically he argues that youths were introduced into the 'society of men', as soldiers mattered more than other people (201-2). But 12-year olds are not very useful in hoplite fighting; moreover, the soldiers were, effectively, restricted to the age-group 20-35, so a great number of men, otherwise important members of society, did not actually belong to this group. If they all had been part of a general 'society of men', one would expect good relations between father and son to be sufficient as an introduction.⁶⁵

In attempting to translate the pressing military situation of the 8th and 7th centuries BC into a social 'system' still functioning in the Classical period and acceptable to every Spartan male, even if he was exclusively

⁶⁰ Xenophon, *Lak.* II.13.

⁶¹ Plutarch, *Lykourgos* XVIII.4.

⁶² Claudius Aelianus, *Varia Historia* III.10. He also says that a boy was fined who gave his friendship to an unworthy rich *erastes* rather than to a poor worthy one.

⁶³ Xenophon, *Kuropaidia* VII.1.30 and *Lak.* V.5; cf. Athenaeus XIII 561ef.

⁶⁴ Compare Bethe's 'Nachwort' (Bethe 1907: 475) on an Albanian practice observed in 1855 and still existing in Bethe's own time. In Albania a "trim" (hero) was between 15 and 25 and his "dasure" (darling) between 12 and 17. Another example is that of the south-Sudanese Arande (summary by R. Banserman, *Paidika* 2.1 (1989), 29-30), where unions of unmarried warriors (18-30) and their pupils (12-18) were valued as normal marriages. The man was supposed to work for his family-in-law in peace-time and to supply the boy with a set of arms upon reaching manhood.

⁶⁵ More to the point is Murray's *kouroi*-explanation (Murray 1986: 207).

interested in women, I suggest the following estimated and perhaps over-rigid scheme:⁶⁶

Infant (0-6)

Child (7-11; receiving first general training)

Eromenos (12-16; of limited military value and trained by his
Eraestes/Philetor)

Younger Warrior (17-19; still in need of some guidance)

Full Citizen and *Eraestes/Philetor* (20-29)

Older *Eraestes/Philetor* and Husband (30-35)

Veteran and Father (35+).

Here only, *Eraestes* stands for “(competitive) wooer” and *Philetor* for “(exclusive) trainer”. The men outnumbered the boys, so a boy could have had several *erastai*⁶⁷ and an unwilling Spartan could have met the social obligation by acting as a competitive wooer, without much enthusiasm for transferring his *arete* in a non-spiritual way.

When this system was intended, as has been argued above, to guide a boy through puberty, another beneficiary effect, as the Dorians saw it, was the postponement of the *eraestes'* marriage until he was 30.⁶⁸ Thus he was able to devote his early manhood to the interest of his city, training a successor for his place in the line as well.

When the *eromenos* had turned into a warrior, the partners were supposed to have ended the physical part of their relationship (if it ever had developed)⁶⁹ and, at the proper age, to marry, thus integrating into society rather than remain outside of it as a self-centred pair of war-machines. The military organisation of 5th-century BC Athens had nothing to do with a rigid system of training as in Sparta, but it encouraged the final separation of *erastai* and *eromenoi* in its own way, especially in wartime. The Athenian *ephebes* (aged 18-19) were encamped with their age-mates only; they were not to serve outside Attica.

One may conclude, without over-simplifying the matter, that the partners in a *paiderastic* relationship were mostly (or would turn out to be) heterosexuals who, for a short period only, acted otherwise.

The above may be regarded as an ‘ideal’ representation of the practice. It corresponds with the Classical idea of *kalokagathia*; having

⁶⁶ On the age-groups (without mention of *paiderastia*) cf. Murray 1986: 167-9.

⁶⁷ Plutarch, *Lyk.* XVIII.4.

⁶⁸ A man younger than 30 was not allowed to marry, but was not prosecuted if he did and kept it a secret for some time. Hence the practice of “seizing” the bride (cf. Plutarch, *Lyk.* XV.3; Murray 1986: 169). Solon thought a marriage proper when a man was between 28 and 35.

⁶⁹ Xenophon (*Lak.* II.13) says that in Sparta it did not, but he “is not surprised when people do not believe this” (II.14ab).

a good-looking body made one a useful member of society. But the social basis of *paiderastia* slowly disappeared in the later 4th century BC, when growing professionalisation of soldiers and athletes generally outmoded the need of training all male citizens. Firmly rooted as it had been, it took several centuries before the practice was finally abolished and out-lawed in the early Christian era, but I see little need in giving full attention to the period of decline, in which, generally speaking, *erastai* did not bother to make someone *agathos*, but surrendered themselves to someone who was *kalos*. This rightly has been judged a 'degeneration' of the ideal.⁷⁰

Instead, I will point to a late author, Athenaeus, who, in his *Deipnosophistai* VI 265b-266e, seems to challenge the common explanation in Antiquity of Solon's law, which said that slaves were excluded from *paiderastia* because a slave had no *arete* of his own to transfer to a free boy.

Quoting earlier historians, Athenaeus tells how a slave by the name of Drimakos (possibly a Thracian) ran away from his master on the island of Chios and, like Spartacus, organized a guerrilla. He was successful for a number of years, but, having grown old with a prize on his head, he sent for his *eromenos*. Explaining to the boy that he had loved him above all others, but had nothing else to give him, he asked his *eromenos* to cut off his head and present it to the Chians, so that the boy could become a wealthy man. The boy refused at first, but in the end acted as Drimakos had requested.

3. Plato on *Paiderastia*

Plato's view on Socrates' restraint as an *erastes* is well-known. It is a principal theme in the *Phaidros* and appears e.g. in Socrates' and Alkibiades' speeches in the *Symposion*. It is confirmed by Xenophon's presentation of Socrates in his *Symposion* and *Memorabilia*. There is little doubt that this restraint expresses Socrates' personal view indeed, for, if the philosopher had practised bodily consummation, this would not have been left unmentioned by Aristophanes, who did not hesitate to mock him.⁷¹ Whether Socrates dissented to all physical love between the *erastai* and *eromenoi* around him is another matter.⁷²

⁷⁰ Cf. Eglinton 1971: 243 f. He distinguishes 'Dorian' from 'Oriental' boy-love.

⁷¹ In an occasional reference he calls Socrates "unwashed" (*Birds* 1555). Socrates' pupils are called half-starved (*Clouds* 184-9); not *katapugon*.

⁷² Plato's *Euthydemos* 282b is too vague, for we do not know what Socrates meant when he wanted the *eromenos* to return "honourable favours" only. Xenophon's *Memorabilia* I.2.29-30 is too specific; Kritias, who 'scratched himself like a pig' was not wanted by the particular boy he annoyed.

What has been christianized as ‘Platonic Love’ is commonly summarized as leading one from the chaste admiration of a beautiful person to the admiration of beauty itself and, consequently, to philosophy. I wonder whether this can be interpreted as a consolation for an *erastes* who sees his love fade away with the passing of time. However, there is another less ascetic side to the matter, which is quite clearly expressed by Plato in his *Lysis*. After Brandwood (1990: 252) stylistic criteria can provisionally attribute this dialogue to Plato’s middle years. Plato’s view on *paiderastia* in it is quite different from that expressed in his *Nomoi*, when he was an old man.

One may call any boy a ‘young man’ in a conversation, not vice-versa. In Plato’s *Lysis*, the representation of the leading character alternatively as a *pais* and as a *neaniskos* should not lead to vagueness about his age.⁷³ Lysis was younger than 14; the Hermes-feast offered a rare opportunity to his would-be *erastes* Hippothales to meet him in public without his *paidagogos* (206d-e).

One may expect Plato to lecture the *erastes* on restraint, for Hippothales, even murmering Lysis’ name in his sleep (204d), seems to be in need of a lesson in morality as in *Phaidros* 250e, 253d-254e. Indeed, at a superficial level it can be argued that Socrates’ conversation with the boy prevents Hippothales from even speaking to him; when Socrates discusses with Lysis and his age-mate Menexenos Hippothales “does not want to annoy Lysis” and prudently hides himself behind the backs of the other spectators (207b, 210e). He does not even show himself when the slaves appear at the end to take the boys home (223ab).

But Plato is not moralizing Hippothales at all. On the contrary, Socrates shows him to be a bad lover, who by praising Lysis’ family in conventional poems (204d, 205cd) makes the boy “harder to catch”. Hippothales is compared to a hunter, who “scares the game” (206a-b). The philosopher shows him the right way by making Lysis look up to him (210e-211a); he is satisfied with the result and thinks himself “a good hunter” (218c).⁷⁴ Even so, Socrates’ high moral standards appear from Plato’s description of Lysis (207a), which is rather dull compared to e.g. that of Charmides.⁷⁵ But Socrates cannot be impressed personally by Lysis’ appearance, for he acts as go-between for Hippothales.

Plato rejects the very idea of a fixed ‘age of consent’, leaving no doubt that the subject of Hippothales’ adoration is a young boy, a child (204d-

⁷³ Dover 1989: 85 on 205bc, “adolescent”.

⁷⁴ Cf. Dover 1989: 87, on the sexual implications of “hunting”.

⁷⁵ Plato, *Charmides* 154b-d; 155c-e.

e,206e,208d,209a,211a,223b). By asking Lysis what he is allowed to do at home and what not (207d-209b), Socrates lets the boy conclude that his parents have forbidden him to do most things for the time being, but gradually he will be allowed to do all of them, as soon as he has shown to possess greater knowledge of them than they have. In this *his age does not matter* (209c). Likewise, others, his neighbours and even the "King" (of Persia) will thrust him to do anything he is supposed to know better than anybody else (e.g. preparing meat), even if he makes a mess of it (by using too much salt; 209de).

Later in the discussion Socrates calls Lysis and Menexenos "experts on friendship" (212a), because they are friends, although neither of them fully understands Socrates' theories about friendship. His provisional conclusion, "a true and unpretending *erastes* is necessarily loved by the boy",⁷⁶ is confirmed by the boys and pleases Hippothales (222b-c). It does not matter that this conclusion is replaced by another at the end,⁷⁷ for it is, apparently, what both Hippothales and Lysis wanted to hear. Menexenos, who simply loves discussing, notices nothing special in the provisional conclusion, but Lysis' 'shyness'⁷⁸ implies that he is aware of the consequences.

Obviously, Plato holds that no one can forbid Lysis to become Hippothales' *eromenos* if he wants, *and knows what he is doing*, for in regard of his choosing friends and in regard of his own body he already is the only expert. Although Lysis is unable to speak to Hippothales, of whose presence and affection he is aware (the same 'shyness' appears in 207a), Socrates invites him to continue the discussion on a later day,⁷⁹ which he gladly accepts (211b), knowing that Hippothales will be present among Socrates' pupils.

GREEK LITTERATURE (APART FROM HOMER AND ANONYMI)

Aelianus	Varia Historia.
Aeschines	Contra Timarchus.
Aristophanes	Birds, Clouds.
Athenaeus	Deipnosophistai.
Ephorus	Fr. 149 (in Strabo).
Herodotus	Histories.
Pausanias	Description of Greece.
Pindar	Olympian Ode 1.

⁷⁶ Ἀναγκαῖον ἄρα τῷ γνησίῳ ἐραστῇ καὶ μὴ προσποήτῳ φιλεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν παιδικῶν.

⁷⁷ The final conclusion is, as usual, that the subject needs further investigation.

⁷⁸ Cf. Dover 1989: 84.

⁷⁹ As this is said in a normal conversation it is to be interpreted literally, not e.g. "when you are old enough".

Plato	Charmides, Euthydemos, Lysis, Nomoi, Phaidros, Protagoras, Symposium.
Plutarch	Erotikos, Life of Lykourgos, Life of Solon.
Straton e.a.	Mousa Paidika.
Xenophon	Agesilaos, Anabasis, Constitution of the Lakedaimonians, Kyropaidia, Memorabilia, Symposium.

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