EROS IN ARMS: AN EXAMINATION OF PEDERASTIC PRACTICES AND THE *EPHEBEIA* AS SYSTEMS OF CIVIC AND MARTIAL TRAINING IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

BY HARRISON VOSS

Introduction

Coming-of-age institutions within any society elucidate a number of values central to that culture's conception of adulthood and one's transition into it. The *ephebeia* of fifth/fourth century classical Athens proved no exception. The fourth century Ephebic Oath, though with linguistic links to the fifth and potentially earlier, ascribe a number of values pertinent to the coming-of-age Athenian male:

> "I will not disgrace these sacred arms, and I will not desert the comrade beside me wherever I shall be stationed in a battle line. I will defend our sacred and public instructions and I will not hand over (to the descendants) the fatherland smaller, but greater and better, so far as I am able, by myself or with the help of all. I will obey those who for the time being exercise sway reasonably and the established laws and those which they will establish reasonably in the future, if anyone seeks to destroy them, I will not admit it so far as I am able, by myself or with the help of all. I will honor the traditional sacred institutions."[1]

The oath concludes with a call upon divine witnesses, and "the boundaries" of the country, citing a number of chief Attic agricultural items. The tenets ascribed to the oath are of both civic and military value, preparing the young *ephebe* for his transition into a "hoplite citizen." Amongst the chief virtues are: loyalty to stand one's ground, to obey Athens' laws and institutions, and, if possible, to better the *polis*. A concern for virtue is not reserved alone for the *ephebeia* and is discussed at length in textual sources regarding the idealistic form of pederasty. In Plato's *Symposium,* Pausanias explicates that the institution of pederasty, i.e. of a relationship between an adult man and an adolescent boy, should be of chief interest for the *polis* because of its concern with virtue: "Love's value to the city as a whole and to the citizens is immeasurable, for he compels the lover and his loved one alike to make virtue their central concern."[2] Through a concern for virtue, these citizens will implicitly seek to better the state. Pederasty and the later *ephebeia* were both classical Athenian social institutions that served a means of preparing young

---

[1] P. Siewart, "The Ephebic Oath in Fifth-Century Athens," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies,* 97 (1977), 103.

[2] Plato, *Symposium,* trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1989), 185C.

Athenian males for the trials that come with being adult citizens. How did these two institutions connect, if at all? Is there any notion that the virtues and obligations that the ideal *erastes* needed to teach his younger *eromenos* included those outlined by the Ephebic Oath? Were the virtues taught of martial value at all?

Pederastic practice in fifth and fourth century Athens may have served upper-class Athenian youths as a complementary institution to the *ephebeia* by ideologically preparing adolescent *eromenoi* for the formal hoplite-citizen training they would receive when they turned eighteen. Both served as coming-of-age institutions by immersing the adolescent in inverted aspects of adult citizen life. The *ephebeia* upturned qualities of proper hoplite conduct, whereas the passive *eromenos* inverted the active adult man. Pederasty as a form of martial pedagogy can trace its roots to the preceding archaic period, which survived in classical Athens as the ideal paradigm. However, this idyllic formula did not necessarily translate into practice, and thus granted later comics, such as Aristophanes, ground to critique the institution's reality. Regardless of these evaluations, the military pedagogical potential of the pederastic dynamic remained an ardent ideal that satisfied a key function in properly preparing the adolescent Athenian youth for a lifetime of hoplite service and citizenship.

Ephebeia in Context: Adolescent Initiation Rites

Athenian citizens, as in most Greek city-states, were fundamentally soldiers. Between the ages of eighteen to sixty, Athenians served in the phalanx or navy, critically relying on one another either in the phalanx line or as fleet rowers.[3] This reliance warranted discipline on one's "manliness" so as not to let down the larger community, and competition between men so as to see who would be the most "manly" when battle necessitated it.[4] For Athenian boys, their adolescence and all related rites and rituals centered on this transition from boy to citizen-soldier, coalescing in the fourth century's *ephebeia*.[5] Borrowing a definition from M. Eliad, Vidal-Naquet argued that initiation is "a body of rites and oral teachings who purpose is to produce a radical modification of the religious and social status of the person to be initiated."[6] In regards to the *ephebeia,* this function is achieved through a remarkable process of social inversion, which included dressing *ephebes* as girls in various festival

[3] John J. Winkler, "Laying Down the Law: The Oversight of Men's Sexual Behavior in Classical Athens," *Constraints of Desire* (Routeledge: New York, 1990), 48.
[4] Ibid., 47-48.
[5] Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World*, trans. Andrew Szegedy-Maszak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 140.
[6] Ibid., 137.

activities,[7] and, more importantly, serving as a light-armed frontiersman on the fringes of Attica.[8] From an anthropological perspective, the reversal of attributes for the young *ephebe*, whether dressing him in black, forcing him to forage naked as in Sparta, or costuming him as a woman, satisfied the process of the adolescent-to-adult transformation by demonstrating the movement from Nature/Savagery, to Culture and Civilization.[9] The transition depended upon the Greeks' cultural fixation on antithesis, and how an adolescent became a man by transitioning from one undesirable pole to the cherished other.[10] Militarily, Naquet explored this transition from *ephebe* to phalanx-hoplite by examining the Spartan *kyrptos*, which involved young soldiers-in-training to "fight by night, unaided, resorting to tricks of the kind deplored by hoplite and citizen values, skulking on the frontiers."[11] He extended this analysis to the Athenian warrior through examination of the myth of the Black Hunter, Melanthos, who unaided and through trickery kills a Boetotian king on the border between Boeotia and Attica, the same districts where Athenian *ephebes* were sent to garrison.[12] This myth may have been commemorated by *ephebes* themselves who wore a black *chlamys* in potential reference to Melanthos.[13] What Vidal-Naquet's arguments clarify is that the *ephebeia* existed as a socialized institution that excelled beyond its pragmatic military goals. The *ephebe* did not leave the *ephebeia* only as a soldier; he left it as a man.

In addition to serving as a process of social integration, the *ephebeia* prepared young Athenians for a lifetime of service in the phalanx or navy. Earliest epigraphic evidence for the *ephebeia* survives from 334/3 B.C.[14] A fuller description of the institution is provided by Aristotle. At eighteen, Athenian boys of the ten tribes were confirmed as their citizens and entered a program as "cadets," with supervising instructors, disciplinary officers, and martial trainers conferred upon them via an Assembly vote.[15] Following their first year of training, they performed a drill display in front of the Assembly, and were then granted a spear and shield by the state; thereafter, the "cadets" patrolled the frontiers of Attica for two years, and were exempt from all taxes and being sued, although a handful of caveats remain.[16] This latter rule was in

---

[7] Ibid., 115-117.
[8] Ibid., 118-121.
[9] Ibid., 112-114; 140-141.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid., 141.
[12] Ibid., 110-112.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Siewart, 102.
[15] Aristotle, *The Athenian Constitution*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935) 42.1-4.
[16] Ibid., 42.5.

no doubt meant to ensure the focus of the *ephebes* on fulfilling their service without distraction.[17] Although the only extant narrative of the *ephebeia* survives from the end of the fourth century, there are indications of origins well into the fifth. Thucydides mentions the light-armed *perioploi*, lit. "going the rounds," or patrollers, who lead a night attack against Nicaea in 424 B.C.[18] Notation of the *peripoloi/peripolos* in other early sources indicates a fifth century provenance of connecting "patrolling" or "patrollers" with Athenian adolescents.[19] In addition, the *neotatoi* mentioned by Thucydides as fighting around 457 B.C. are noted as young men between eighteen and twenty, and associated with defending the walls and garrison duty, much like the fourth century *ephebe*.[20] The language of the Ephebic Oath itself suggests familiarity in mid-fifth century Athens as evidenced by striking parallels between the Oath and Pericles' outbreak of war speech, as well as his funeral oration.[21] Ridley summarized best the practicality of an *ephebeia*-type institution in fifth century Athens: "Common-sense is enough to indicate, even in the face of a total silence by our sources, that no Athenian could be expected at the age of eighteen, on becoming a citizen, to be able without further ado to take his place in the phalanx and to carry on this demanding dangerous fighting for another forty-odd years."[22] In addition to training young Athenians as warriors, Aristotle's recount of the *ephebeia* suggests it acted as a means of ideological instruction.

The *ephebeia* served to provide both military and civic ideological training to the Athenian youths. As discussed, the *ephebeia* existed in some sense or another through the late-fifth and early-fourth centuries B.C., but under Epicrates' reforms in 335 B.C. a streamlined "training in citizenship" system formed.[23] The *ephebeia* instituted a hoplite ethos centered on "discipline, bravery, and standing one's ground," as described in the Ephebic Oath.[24] Moreover, Steinbock elaborated a connection between the Oath's invocation of deities to the tour of Athenian shrines in *The Athenian Constitution*, and posited that an education of the *ephebes'* specific tribal heroes coincided as a means of

---

[17] Vidal-Naquet, 143.
[18] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War,* trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 4.67.
[19] Vidal-Naquet, 107-108; R.T. Ridley, "The Hoplite as Citizen: Athenian Military Institutions in their Social Context," in *The Armies of Classical Greece*, ed. Everett L. Wheeler (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 176-180.
[20] Ridley, 177.
[21] Siewart, 104-105, 107-108.
[22] Ridley, 179.
[23] Bernd Steinbock, "A Lesson in Patriotism: Lycurgus' *Against Leocrates*, the Ideology of the Ephebeia, and Athenian Social Memory," *Classical Antiquty* 30, no. 2 (2011), 295.
[24] Ibid., 296.

providing the young men with mythological role models.[25] The use of role models existed to unite a tribal and age-based loyalty system,[26] around which the Athenian phalanx existed, and as represented on a fifth century cup depicting various mythological heroes as respective hoplite age groups.[27] The actual means of ongoing physical training for the *ephebes* in the fifth and late fourth centuries likely centered around the gymnasium, existing as a combined means of professionalism, education, and establishing physical prowess.[28] Such a system, however, altogether lacked virtuous inspiration via another person, but rather acted as a mechanism of self-improvement through competition against peers. It then makes sense that the *ephebeia*, as outlined in the late-fourth century, would seek to provide an ideological, "role model" component of inspiration. Nevertheless, these legendary models that inspired patriotism, loyalty, and bravery functioned in a fashion similar to love in the ideal pederastic relationship.[29]

Archaic Pederasty – Social and Pedagogical Underpinnings

Pederasty, or the social institution of men aged twenty and above (an *erastes*) courting and loving adolescent boys age typically no older than seventeen (an *eromenos*), has customary origins pointing towards the archaic period.[30] Citing the fourth century historian Ephorus, Strabo in his *Geography* notes a tradition in archaic Crete regarding pederastic custom, albeit in a more violent practice:

> "They have a peculiar custom in regard to love affairs, for they win the objects of their love, not by persuasion, but by abduction; the lover tells the friends of the boy three or four days beforehand that he is going to make the abduction, but for the friends to conceal the boy…After giving the boy presents, the abductor takes him away to any place in the country he wishes; and those who were present at the abduction follow after them, and after feasting and hunting with them for two months, they return to the city."[31]

The lover, or the older abductor in this scenario, is only allowed to seize the boy should the abductee's family and friends deem his captor worthy, emphasizing his importance to the youth's learning and honor. The notion that the abductor

---

[25] Ibid., 297-299.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 304-306.
[28] Ridley, 185-193.
[29] Plato, 178D-179A, 185C.
[30] Eva Cantarella and Andrew Lear, *Images of Ancient Greek Pederasty: Boys were their Gods* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 6-7.
[31] Strabo. *Geography, Volume V: Books 10-12*, trans. by Horace Leonard Jones (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), 484C.

instructed his captive is highlighted by gifting him a set of military arms,[32] similar to the state's gifting of spears and shields to the young *ephebes* in Athens when their martial instruction concludes.[33] In addition, Strabo emphasized that it is a "dishonor" for a handsome or noble boy *not* to receive a lover, as it presupposes that their character is responsible, thus risking social slander against the boy.[34] Nevertheless, when the abducted boy was reintegrated into society he notably received high honors, and even after achieving adulthood wore a distinctive garment that allowed others to know he'd become *kleinos*, "famous."[35] The Cretan pederastic institution is thus one of social transition: not only does the boy receive a presumed education by his lover, but he is also elevated to a new adult role upon return to the social sphere.

Evidence of pederasty as a ritual institution in the archaic period may have existed on the island of Thera as well. Archaeologists discovered inscriptions on the island at the end of the nineteenth century within the proximity of a temple to Apollo, a god associated with eternal adolescence.[36] A number of these engravings refer to male-male sexual relations: "By Apollo Delphinios, Krimon here copulated with a boy, brother of Bathykles," and, "Krimon copulated with Amotion here," along with, "Timagoras and Emperheres and I copulated…"[37] Scholars remain in dispute over whether or not the inscriptions themselves lend evidence to homosexual copulation at the religious site as part of any social ritual. Dover presumed that the inscriptions "should not be regarded as solemn declarations of sanctified erotic relationships," but instead of as a form of boasting, likening them to Pompeian graffiti from a much later period.[38] In contrast, Bongersma, in concurrence with the theory posited by the inscriptions' discoverer Hiller von Gätringen, argued that the writings *did* connote some sort of sacred, or social significance.[39] Bongersma cites that the inscriptions are located on the structural support of a terrace where sacred rites occurred, namely the adopted Spartan *gymnopaideia* in honor of Apollo.[40] Thus the invocation of Apollo would be pious, for if the inscription was slanderous it likely would have been destroyed or covered up. Moreover, the authors did not leave themselves anonymous, but rather wished to preserve for a present or future reader that he had a relationship with a certain

---

[32] Ibid.
[33] See Note 16 above.
[34] Strabo, 484C
[35] Ibid.
[36] Cantarella and Lear, 8.
[37] K.J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Random House: New York, 1978), 123.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Edward Brongersma, "The Thera Inscriptions Ritual or Slander?" *Journal of Homosexuality* 20, no. 1 (1990), 33-35.
[40] Ibid., 38.

boy there. While far from a pedagogical practice, pederasty on Thera may have served, in conjunction with fulfilling sexual desires, as a matter of social or religious rites.

Thera's nearby neighbor Sparta similarly exercised pederasty in a number of social functions, mainly pedagogical. Pederasty in Sparta is attested most notably by Plutarch and Xenophon, with the latter presenting a chaste, idealistic portrait. Although these sources survive from much later periods, Sparta's customs originated in the archaic period, and continued through the following centuries with little to no variation in practice or attitude.[41] Xenophon's *Agesilaus* preserves a snapshot of such practice. *Agesilaus* describes the titular king's relationship with a Persian youth named Megabates, and how he loved Megabates "with all the intensity of an ardent nature," but refused to kiss him, thus insulting the Persian, and in turn losing his respect.[42] One of Agesilaus' companions asked if he would kiss the boy he loved so as to preserve his royal honor, but in an act of profound chastity he refused.[43] Xenophon celebrated the king's restraint, but not to the detriment of pederastic practice: it is not the King's love that is under criticism, but rather the physical temptations that threaten self-control. After all, pederasty was likely an institutionalized practice in Sparta.[44] In his *Lycurgus,* Plutarch documented the training typical of the Spartan youth, and that at twelve he would be "favored with the society of lovers from among the reputable men."[45] An older *erastes* would be assigned to all boys, not just the most handsome as in Crete, and aided their *eromenoi* in stealing and surviving under the surveillance of the *agoge,* with occasionally multiple *erastai* sharing the same beloved, and developing friendships with one another out of common love.[46] The assignment of lovers in Spartan society supported the fundamental project to bind the city communally: rather than being raised by fathers, Spartiates are raised by their instructors and *erastai.*[47] Such relationships may have continued even into the twenties of an *eromenos*, as Plutarch suggests: "Those who were under thirty years of age did not go into the market place at all, but had their household wants supplied at the hands of their kinsfolk and lovers."[48] Thus in Sparta the *erastes* served as both pedagogue and caretaker of his beloved. Pederastic ideals in classical Athens

---

[41] Vidal-Naquet, 147, 151.
[42] Xenophon, *Agesilaus,* trans. E.C. Marchant and G.W. Bowerstock (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 5.4.
[43] Ibid., 5.5.
[44] Paul Cartledge, "Politics of Spartan Pederasty," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 207, no. 27 (1981), 22.
[45] Plutarch, *Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1914), 17.1.
[46] Cartledge, 21-22.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Plutarch, 25.1

likened similar attributes.

Pederasty in Classical Athens – Ideal Views

Pederasty's practice in classical Greece is perhaps best preserved through Athenian literary and archaeological sources. In regards to the former, the writings of philosophers often remain in high esteem, and are sought after for conjecturing an accurate physical or mental reality of the institution within a classical context. This remains a mistake. While certain realities may be gleaned from these sources, especially Plato, it is important to annunciate at the outset that philosophers' perspectives and views on pederasty reflected a distinct population's view of the practice,[49] and that such sources should not necessarily be taken at face value to extrapolate a universal ideal. That does not mean that none of the perspectives or ideals posited in Plato's *Symposium,* or any other philosophical writings, were not shared by wider audiences; for example, Pausanias' speech likely demonstrated the prevailing social ideals for pederasty of his day.[50] A number of these ideals are shared in surviving visual arts from the period found in vase paintings. Nevertheless, pederasty certainly existed to satisfy the sexual desire of Athenian adult men.[51] The institution's pedagogical capabilities to transmit civic and martial virtues served a deeper purpose to complement the practice's baser, pleasure-seeking realities.

Pederastic relationships existed along a fundamentally asymmetrical paradigm between an older, typically unmarried man, and an adolescent youth younger than eighteen.[52] The older *erastai* didn't possess free reign, however. A number of legal rights and protections shielded the adolescent boys from rape by slaves, abusive teachers or coaches, and even their fathers' friends.[53] These conventions limited courters primarily to the middle or upper class man between twenty and thirty[54] who had both the time and expenditure to win the affections of younger lads.[55] These younger *eromenoi* often remained the point of attack by

---

[49] For a more thorough critique see John J. Winkler, "Unnatural Acts: Erotic Protocols in Artemidoros' *Dream Analysis*," in *Constraints of Desire* (Routeledge: New York, 1990), 18-19.
[50] Cantarella and Lear, 19; Dover 82-83.
[51] David M. Halperin, "The Democratic Body: Prostitution and Citizenship in Classical Athens," in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek* Love (Routledge: New York, 1990), 91-92.
[52] David M. Halperin, "Two Views of Greek Love: Harald Patzer and Michel Foucault," in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek* Love (Routledge: New York, 1990), 55; Cantarella and Lear, 2-5.
[53] Halperin, "The Democratic Body," 93.
[54] Ibid., 92-93.
[55] Ibid., 94; Dover, 150-151.

contemporary comics, typically from characters of lower classes,[56] thus amplifying the cultural tension of beloveds being viewed as *kinaidoi,* i.e. effeminate men. Winkler contended that in ancient Athens, "Male life is warfare, that masculinity is a duty and hard-won achievement, and that the temptation to desert one's side is very great."[57] An adolescent, who would one day be a man and citizen in Athenian society, needed to protect his reputation even at such a transitional age by evading actions that could be perceived as "effeminate." Thus the paragon of the "frigid lover" took hold, described by Sokrates in Xenophon's *Symposium*: "For a boy does not share in the pleasure of intercourse as a woman does, but looks on sober at another intoxicated by love."[58] By displaying indifference or displeasure in his submissive role, the boy does not warrant a legitimate criticism of effeminacy, and in a sense preserves his masculinity. An adolescent presenting himself as a sexually lustful could shame not only himself, but even his lover, as Theognis relates: "Boy, because of your lustful behavior, you have lost your good sense, and you have become a source of shame to my friends."[59] More importantly, an adolescent's loose behavior risks reflecting a deeper covetous character, as in the case of the fourth-century citizen Timarchos.[60] Timarchos was put on trial for allegations of prostituting himself in youth, and if guilty this meant all the laws and policies he passed when an adult in the Assembly would have been deemed legally null.[61] Lustful behavior by an adolescent thus had devastating social and political repercussions for his future. These challenges and responsibilities required the genesis of certain social ideals as a means of protecting them. These ideals catered towards instructing the youth on the proper character of an Athenian citizen of his status, e.g. that it is womanly, and therefore un-citizen like, to display pleasure at domination of another man, but that pleasure in dominating another is perfectly respectable. Pederasty therefore served as an adequate institution for informing adolescent Athenian males of the requisite customs and expectations for an adult citizen. Military life being central to the Athenian citizen, it is of little surprise that martial virtues would ideally be transmitted as well.

The speeches by Pausanias and Phaedrus in Plato's *Symposium* allude to the pederastic transmission of military virtue. Plato's view of pederasty as a pedagogical institution is a clear adoption of the archaic mindset. A hundred

---

[56] Dover, 146-149.
[57] Winkler, "Laying Down the Law," 50.
[58] Xenophon, *Symposium,* trans. by E.C. Marchant, O.J. Todd (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 649.
[59] Theognis, *Greek Elegiac Poetry: From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC,* trans. Douglas E. Gerber (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 369.
[60] Winkler, "Laying Down the Law," 56-57
[61] Halperin, "The Democratic Body," 95.

years earlier, Theognis of Megara related the lover's mission from his own perspective: "It is with kind thoughts for you that I shall give you advice such as I myself, Cyrnus, learned from noble men. Be sensible and do not, at the cost of shameful or unjust acts, seize for yourself prestige, success or wealth…do not seek the company of base men, but always cling to the noble."[62] His remarks on adoring what is noble and shunning what is "base" shares a similar line of thought to Plato's Phaedrus and Pausanias, who clarify that pederasty is a means at attaining that which is "virtuous." Phaedrus proclaims that the greatest good for an adolescent is "a gentle lover," and for a lover, "a boy to love."[63] What perfects this good is that it provides guidance for the beloved, and "nothing imparts this guidance as well as love." According to Phaedrus' paradigm, the ideal *erastes* must teach his *eromenos* what is and is not shameful.[64] The *erastes* achieves this by refusing to act cowardly at the risk of being embarrassed in front of his beloved, and through reproaching his *eromenos* for cowardice, thus teaching his beloved resolute courage.[65] Phaedrus concludes this summation of virtue by decreeing it would create the most powerful army:

> "If only there were a way to start a city or an army made up of lovers and the boys they love! Theirs would be the best possible system of society, for they would hold back from all that is shameful, and seek honor in each other's eyes. Even a few of them in battle side by side, would conquer all the world, I'd say. For a man in love would never allow his loved one, of all people, to see him leaving ranks or dropping weapons. He'd rather die a thousand deaths!"[66]

An additional factor to forming this perfect army is that a true lover would not abandon his beloved should he be found in danger,[67] i.e. in the heat of battle, thus there would never be a threat of soldiers breaking the phalanx line out of fear. The Sacred Band of Thebes, an army of three hundred professional soldiers, was composed of pairs of *erastai* and *eromenoi* under the same presumption that lovers would fight harder to protect their beloved, whereas the latter would do the same to avoid shaming their lovers.[68] Plutarch suggested the Band never lost a battle until Chaeronea in 338 B.C.[69] The Sacred Band existed at the same time as Plato, although there is minimal indication that either was aware of the other. Nevertheless, Thebes' manifestation of Plato's idealism indicates a correlation between pederasty and a successful military. Phaedrus'

---

[62] Theognis, 19-38.
[63] Plato, 178C.
[64] Ibid., 178D.
[65] Ibid., 178E.
[66] Ibid., 179A-179B.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Plutarch, *Lives That Made Greek History*, trans. Pamela Mensch (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2012), 200-201.
[69] Ibid.

remarks alone hearken on the first lines of the martial Ephebic Oath: "I will not disgrace these sacred arms, and I will not desert the comrade beside me wherever I shall be stationed in a battle line."[70] Thus the proper lover not only teaches his beloved the proper conduct to avoid shame and cowardice, i.e. to maintain one's position in the phalanx lines, but if hypothetically fighting beside one another, he would inspire this assurance. Pausanias' speech enlivens another notable civic-martial virtue that the *erastes* would impart on his *eromenos*: loyalty.

Pausanias' description of divine love elucidates how it teaches the young *eromenos* the ways and means of loyalty. The speaker first divides love into a vulgar variant and an ideal form.[71] The vulgar lover "loves the body rather than the soul," and once the *eromenos* either grows too older or ugly the *erastes* "flies off and away."[72] Although writing in a far later period, the Greek poet Strato provides numerous exempla of what may have been "vulgar" love, composing epigrams about abandoning boys for acquiring hair on their chins, thighs, or buttocks, and speaking nothing of their character.[73] According to Pausanias, this sort of lover is a weaker man than one who loves loyally: "How different from this is a man who loves the right sort of character, and who remains its lover for life, attached as he is to something that is permanent?"[74] As was common in Athenian practice, the virtuous lover engaged in prolonged courting and chasing of a beloved, and the latter would resist as a test of the lover's character.[75] Loyalty and subservience to the *erastes* would only be granted when the youth deemed him an appropriate teacher of wisdom and virtue.[76] Teaching an adolescent to appropriately evaluate a lover's character overlaps with the evaluative responsibilities of Athenian citizens, including the scrutiny test of public officials, and the electing and examination of effective military generals.[77] Moreover, the loyalty that the *eromenos* devotes to his lover after the test's conclusion is also fundamental to the Ephebic Oath. Pausanias charges that the beloved who accepts a lover believing he is a virtuous man that may impart wisdom, although "in reality the man is horrible," the beloved is still admirable because he took on the lover out of a desire for virtue.[78] By the same token, the young *ephebe* swears to "obey those who for the time being exercise

[70] See Note 1 above.
[71] Plato, 183E.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Lear and Cantarella, 6.
[74] Plato, 183E.
[75] Ibid., 184A-E.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ridley, 513-514.
[78] Plato, 185B.

sway reasonably and the established laws"[79] despite neither necessarily establishing those laws nor electing those in power. The *ephebe's* loyalty remains to something deeper, to the city, much like the ideal *eromenos* is loyal not to the lover, but to the virtue he may teach.

Military ideals surrounding pederastic relationships are also found in visual evidence. Surviving fifth and fourth century Greek vase paintings preserve certain ideals, and perhaps moments of reality, through depictions of pederastic courtship.[80] A notable aspect of courtship iconography includes depictions of hunting and athletics, either separate or as one.[81] Such scenes include gift giving on the part of the *erastes* to his *eromenos*, e.g. laurels in the case of athletics,[82] and various game, such as hares, from hunts.[83] Hunting scenes in particular, especially of a lover gifting his beloved a hare, have been interpreted as metaphoric transmission of hunting skills in contrast to the ambivalent notion that it is a meta-view on pederastic relationships being hunts themselves.[84] Hunting as a means of military training survives in a number of ancient literary sources across the fifth and fourth centuries.[85] More importantly, such sources present hunting "as central to social cohesion and as part of the fabric of the *polis*."[86] Thus if the metaphorical iconography of an *erastes* teaching his *eromenos* hunting is to be believed, such depictions render the pederastic relationship as a means of teaching the adolescent military and civic assets. Despite the widespread survival of hunting courtship scenes, direct visual manifestations of military instruction survive in sparser numbers.

Lear and Cantarella identified seven vases of particular note of explicit pederastic couples integrated in a heroic military context.[87] However, the writers also make an important and agreeable note that many vases utilizing war iconography may involve "pederastic implications," but that inexplicit evidence surrounding the relationship between the scene's figures renders it challenging to reach such a conclusion.[88] Amongst the overtly pederastic martial vases are a number of conventions that correspond with literary notions of pederasty and military virtue. Paintings include arming scenes in which the older *erastes* converses with a dressing *eromenos*, or in some cases hands him his

---

[79] See Note 1 above.
[80] Lear and Cantarella, 39.
[81] Ibid., 97.
[82] Ibid., 95-96.
[83] Ibid., 39-40.
[84] Ibid., 86-87.
[85] Ibid., 97; Judith M. Barringer, *The Hunt in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University, 2001), 11-15.
[86] Barringer, 14-15.
[87] Lear and Cantarella, 97.
[88] Ibid.

equipment.[89] Such iconography is reminiscent of Strabo's Cretan anecdote regarding coming-of-age rituals in which the older *erastes* imparts military equipment to his younger beloved.[90] Whether or not the vase scenes are depicting a similar ritual, i.e. gifting rather than mere handing of the equipment, remains ambiguous, although it is worth noting that *erastes* gift-giving scenes are amongst the most common type of pederastic iconography.[91] Two other martial scenes of note are vases depicting winged Eros in arms.[92] Both images depict Eros as a nude, beardless youth, in one scenario carrying spear and shield in a manner of delivery, while in the other he is explicitly blowing a war-trumpet. Moreover, Miller cites three scenes, two of which derive from the late-fifth to mid-fourth centuries of Eros, or multiple Erotes, delivering weaponry to Achilles in reference to Homer's *Iliad.*[93] Miller contends that the inclusion of these erotic deities in the scene, which are absent in Homer's poem, serves as a nod to the erotic relationship between Achilles and his deceased companion Patroklos;[94] the pair would've been conceived as such by Athenian audiences in the late-fifth century when the craters in question were created.[95] Both the delivery of arms and the blowing of the trumpet by Eros, god of desire, invoke the language of Phaedrus' speech of an elite army of lovers fighting beside one another: only Eros can lead a man to perform at his best in battle.[96]

Pederasty's function as a means of social pedagogy has thus far been described, with additional emphasis on the instruction of martial mores to the younger *eromenos.* Needless to say, this form of the pederastic relationship has been set forth as a prescriptive, ideal variant, as localized in fifth and fourth century Athens. However, in order to fully flesh Athenian pederasty's comparison to the *ephebeia* as an ideological training ground, it must be explored as enacting the same notion of social inversion expectant of the *ephebes.*

Pederasty as an Adolescent's Rite of Passage

Pederasty as an institution predated and coexisted with the Athenian *ephebeia* and may have functioned alongside as both an adolescent and military transitional social system. As already discussed, the virtues laid out by Phaedrus

---

[89] Ibid., 98-100.
[90] See Note 31 above.
[91] Lear and Cantarella, 39, 72-87.
[92] Ibid., 103-105.
[93] Stella G. Miller, "Eros and the Arms of Achilles," *American Journal of Archaeology* 90, no. 2 (1986), 160-161.
[94] Ibid., 165-170.
[95] Plato, 180A-180B; Lear and Cantarella, 101-103; Dover, 41.
[96] See Note 66 above.

and Pausanias in Plato's *Symposium* can be highlighted against the military virtues set forth in the Ephebic Oath: courage, standing one's ground, and loyalty. However, the installation of these virtues into the Athenian *eromenos* likely would have predated their swearing of the oath given that boys would be courted anywhere between thirteen and seventeen,[97] and *ephebes* swore at eighteen.[98] Ideally, a function of pederastic practice in classical Athens was to satisfy the adolescent's transition not only by imparting on him certain virtues central to the hoplite ethos, but also by subjecting him to a transitional ritual.

A connection between pederasty and the *ephebeia* is that both functioned as adolescent inversion rituals for the transitioning adult. As the *ephebe* is an inversion of the ideal hoplite, pederasty inverts the ideal adult man's status as a dominant figure into a submissive character. Although the ideal of a secluded woman in ancient Athens manifested, if ever, only amongst the upper classes, the wider social reality produced laws that prevented men from sexually assaulting or seducing wedded or unmarried women.[99] In a similar vein, Athenian youths were also protected from seducing men via laws and social dicta, but unlike a woman could be courted freely without a guardian's permission. This freedom required greater initiative on the part of the Athenian youth: in an ideal setting, he would submit to the advances of a lover, and subject himself to passivity if and only if he deemed said lover worthy.[100] The social perception, though not always the reality, was that the youth had no sexual motive in this relationship: in theory a respectable Athenian male would not desire to be sexually submissive.[101] Displaying such desire meant slipping into the role of a womanly man, a *kinaidos*, which existed at a pole opposite to the model Athenian man.[102] However, willfully partaking as a submissive partner, but distancing oneself from presenting carnal desire, is a social paradox perhaps parallel to the dressing up of Athenian *ephebes* as women. As Vidal-Naquet clarifies: "Dressing up as a woman, as in the procession at the Oschophoria, was a means of dramatizing the fact that a young man had reached the age of virility and marriage."[103] This notion is reflected in myth when Achilles is disguised as a girl yet reveals his true identity "at the sight of a weapon," as well as in the Cretan custom of the man abducting and "raping" a coming of age boy: both stories reflect the transition from womanly character/subjection to the receiving of arms.[104] Quoting Vernant, Vidal-Naquet

---

[97] See Note 30 above.
[98] Ridley, 155.
[99] Halperin, "The Democratic Body," 92.
[100] Plato, 184C-184E.
[101] Halperin, "The Democratic Body," 93-94.
[102] Winkler, "Laying Down the Law," 50.
[103] Vidal-Naquet, 116.
[104] Ibid., 117.

argued the purpose of the Athenian adolescent's rites of passage were to mark "his accession to the condition of a warrior;" in order to become a soldier one first needs to masquerade as the opposite.[105] Pederasty functioned along the same masquerading technique. By submitting to an older lover, the *eromenos* is in semblance of a woman when ideally the relationship is a means of benefiting himself by accruing martial and civic virtues via a lover who already exists as a hoplite and citizen. Thereafter, the young Athenian enters the *ephebeia* and exists in another inverted system that upon completion grants him entry into a lifetime of phalanx service.[106] Whereas perfect pederasty teaches the Athenian youth virtues, the *ephebeia* cements them in practice and oath, both systems resulting in the full hoplite citizen.

Despite pederasty's ideal dimensions, the custom in practice strayed and thus warranted ridicule and criticism. Aristophanes' comedies tend to point their attacks of the practice on the *eromenoi* rather than the *erastai*,[107] under the assumption that "all homosexual submission is mercenary."[108] Such attacks ignore the virtuous possibilities extant in Plato,[109] likely because Aristophanes sourced his comedy and criticism on active reality of Athenian life rather than its theoretical aspirations. The playwright's *Clouds* perhaps best illustrates this criticism through his debate between Better Argument and Worse Argument. Better Argument claims that boys in the past acted with modesty and prudence, and that, "Not a sound, not even a mutter, should be heard from a boy."[110] It is worth noting this attribute's similarity to the silence that ideal women are commended for in Pericles' funeral oration,[111] further strengthening the connection between coming of age boys and women. The notable aspect of the old boys' modesty manifested in their conduct around their trainers, in which they would "cross their thighs when sitting, so they wouldn't reveal anything that would torment the onlookers; and when they stood up again, they had to smooth the sand and take care not to leave behind an image of their pubescence for their lovers to find."[112] What's more, boys used to not oil themselves or simper in order to sexually arouse their lovers, or waste their days in bathhouses instead of exercising.[113] Worse Argument prevails by exposing Better Argument for what it is, a thing of the past, and that everyone from the politicians to the

---

[105] Ibid., 140.
[106] Ibid., 141; Ridley, 179-180.
[107] Dover, 135-153.
[108] Ibid., 147.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Aristophanes, *Clouds*, trans. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 965.
[111] Thucydides, 2.46.
[112] Aristophanes, 971-976.
[113] Ibid., 977-983; 1052-54.

audience is a *euruproktos*: lit. a wide-assed (i.e. sodomized) man, a conclusion that Better Argument concurs with.[114] The issue at hand is not only that boys are necessarily submitting themselves to a passive role, but that *everyone* is, including adult citizen men. Moreover, the young have abandoned the ideal, "frigid" stance of a beloved as in the past, and thus overstepped the bounds of ritual adolescence. No longer do they *seem* as women by being silent and modest, but instead they are publicly behaving womanly through lustfully approaching lovers, a sharp point of distinction between a respectable *eromenos* and a true woman.[115] This is to say that Aristophanes' critique of pederasty is not so much of the institution itself, as of the carnal form present to him, which had forsaken the pedagogical, virtuous model of the past.[116] Curiously, vase painting contemporary to the *Clouds'* writing began to emerge depicting same-aged youths engaged in the typical pederastic setting. This convention became the norm in vase artwork starting around the mid-fifth century.[117] Although vase paintings should not necessarily be used as manifestations of social reality,[118] this trend in convention may nevertheless reflect Athenian pederastic practices and preferences shifting away from social pedagogy.[119] These scenes do not corroborate Aristophanes' explicit criticisms of the sexually wanton youths of his day, but they do evoke the notion that even adult men might be *euruproktoi* through destruction of the traditional pederastic practice. An *erastes* no longer needed to be a bearded, older citizen, but could be a smooth-faced *ephebe*; who's to say a bearded citizen could not act as a passive *eromenos*? Both Aristophanes' critiques and the shift in vase painting suggest a collapse of traditional pederastic conventions that pinned themselves to a pedagogical civic-social function in favor of the institution's sexual foundations. Without this pedagogical focus, the "modern" practice of pederasty that both Aristophanes and vase paintings depict harmed the adolescent citizen and the state by withholding from the youth a virtue education that supplemented his ephebic training. Instead of teaching boys to be courageous, stand their ground, maintain a critical eye, and loyalty,[120] they behave womanly to their fellow *ephebes*, and learn of pleasure only.

Conclusion

Pederasty as an institution served as means of pleasure for the benefit of

[114] Ibid., 1080-1100.
[115] Winkler, "Laying Down the Law," 54; Halperin, "The Democratic Body," 93-97.
[116] Lear and Cantarella, 20-21.
[117] Ibid., 67.
[118] Ibid., 23-25.
[119] Ibid., 67.
[120] Plato, 178D-179B, 184A-185C.

the older *erastes*, while the *eromenos'* pleasure or displeasure remained subordinate. Nevertheless, the Greeks were too pragmatic to illustrate a sexual institution without a legitimate social function, and the pedagogical opportunities in relationships between adult and coming of age men proved too promising to ignore. Any military society, whether ancient or modern, necessitates a physical and ideological dimension of training;[121] pederasty in ideal form, and in practice during the archaic period, seemed able to produce the latter.

Pederasty in classical Athens served as both an adolescent rite and a means at martial pedagogy reserved to the middle and upper classes of society. The money required of an *erastes* to court a boy, and the time required by a boy in order to be courted, meant that it served as a practice best suited for the hoplite class of citizens.[122] While hypothetically a pederastic relationship between members of the lower classes is not impossible, the institution's harsh treatment by comic writers, especially as a custom of the wealthy, paints the notion that in public consciousness it was a practice associated with the rich.[123] Moreover, even its treatment in philosophical texts indicates it as a reservation of the hoplite-citizens: Phaedrus' speech specifically indicates references to phalanx warfare, not naval combat,[124] which was predominantly constituted by the Athenian poor.[125] The lower classes consistently held those above with a critical eye,[126] and in the Athenian democracy such surveillance was a paramount principle,[127] thus the need for pederasty to legitimate itself as a system beneficial to the city-state, if at the expense of the relationship's fundamentally corporeal and gratifying pleasures.[128] In contrast, the *ephebeia* applied to all citizens regardless of wealth.[129] Thus pederasty's martial ideals were focused to apply to a specific type of soldier, i.e. the hoplite, who would have such mores transplanted into him again in the *ephebeia's* generalized setting.

Pederasty and the Athenian *ephebeia* shared a number of attributes that accentuated the martial focus of the former's pedagogical ideals. Both institutions could be viewed as a form of adolescent rites via social inversion: with the *ephebeia*, the young warrior serves as a form of "anti-hoplite," whereas

---

[121] Steinbock, 312-313.
[122] Dover, 149-150.
[123] Ibid., 145-149.
[124] Plato, 178C-179B.
[125] Pseudo-Xenophon, *The Constitution of the Athenians*, translated by Robin Osborne (London: London Association of Classical Teachers, 2004), 1.2.
[126] Ibid., 1.4-1.5.
[127] Ridley, 514-515.
[128] Halperin, "The Democratic Body," 91-92.
[129] Vidal-Naquet, 147.

as an *eromenos*, a boy behaves passively, perhaps in semblance of a woman, in opposition to the virile, dominant man he is later meant to be. Both the *ephebe* and the *eromenos* engage in these inversions as a means of grasping proper citizen and soldier values by experiencing and transitioning from a state of what is improper to one that is not. These institutions fundamentally impart on the hoplite-to-be a warrior ethos expectant of them in the phalanx, and as a citizen at large. Such virtues include loyalty, courage, the will to stand firm in combat, and in the case of pederasty, vigilance. Nevertheless, the warrior ideals that pederasty in classical Athens aspired for, as adopted from archaic practice, in a way prove contradictory. The vigilant eye expected of the *eromenos* and the Athenian citizen could just so easily be placed on homoerotic pairs. Comics such as Aristophanes could pinpoint the hypocrisy of an institution that espouses divine ideals but is fundamentally a means at bodily pleasure reserved for the well to do, and which even threatens the masculinity of the adolescent party.

Allowing this hypocrisy to become so blatant, whereas Sparta and Thebes masterfully hid it as a means to a successful military machine, may be seen as an Athenian shortcoming, or perhaps as a testament to their freedom to critique and improve their society.