A Drunken Brawl at Panactum: *Ataxia* in Demosthenes 54

This paper argues that a passage in Demosthenes provides several important insights into the unregimented nature of Athenian military life.

Xenophon makes Socrates declare in the *Memorabilia* that the Athenians pay no attention to moral discipline (*sophrosyne*), good order (*eutaxia*), and obedience (*peitharchia*), despite the importance of these martial qualities for success in contemporary warfare (3.5.21). Though Xenophon’s blunt assertion should not be taken to mean that the citizen-soldiers of Athens degenerated into an armed mob whenever they undertook military service, the literary evidence does suggest that they, along with the amateur militias conscripted in other Classical *poleis* (Spartans excepted), were generally lenient in their observance of discipline in comparison to modern armies (e.g. Pritchett 1974; van Wees 2004; Lendon 2005).

A well-known example of this laxity is found in Demosthenes’ *Against Conon*, a speech perhaps dating to 355 or 341 B.C. (Carey and Reid 1985), where the youthful Ariston vividly recounts being abused verbally and physically by Conon’s drunken sons at the border fortress of Panactum, even if there is reason to doubt his claim of innocence concerning his personal conduct (3-5). In particular, Ariston’s account demonstrates the difficulty the *strategos* had in imposing his authority upon his egalitarian-minded compatriots. Reluctant to enforce discipline by imprisoning, expelling, or fining disobedient citizens (Hamel 1998), he had to employ extra-legal methods to prevent an escalation of violence in the camp, suggesting that public opinion played an important role in determining how he reacted to disorder (*ataxia*) at Panactum.

The unwillingness of the *strategos* and other officers to act as strict disciplinarians also resulted in the bivouacking citizens having the freedom to spend their time in whatever activities they had the inclination to pursue. Given the characterization of youths as arrogant and thoughtless individuals and the disposition of the *demos* to overlook their socially disruptive behavior at home (Fisher 1998), it is likely that the quarrel between Ariston and Conon’s sons would have been tolerated by their neighbors until their disorderly conduct threatened to throw the encampment into confusion. Finally, the interrelationship of the military and civilian spheres can not only be seen in how the Athenians perceived *ataxia* while on campaign, but also when they returned to Athens, since Ariston had the right to bring a suit (*diken* *lachein*) against Conon’s sons for assaulting him during his stint of garrison duty.

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