Civic Education and Social Control in Classical Athens: The Case of the *Ephebeia*

There are few questions in Classical Athenian history as frustrating and fascinating as those surrounding the *ephebeia* of the 4th century BCE. The *ephebeia* was a training program for ephebes (18-20 year old Athenian male citizens) in which they learned military skills and lessons in civics. There is little scholarly agreement as to when the *ephebeia* was first formed and implemented, who participated in it, and what its purpose was in both formal and practical terms. What we do know with relative certainty is that around 336/5 BCE, in the wake of Athens' loss to Macedon at the Battle of Chaeronea, the so-called "Lycurgan" *ephebeia* was formally established. The contours of this specific iteration are detailed in the Aristotelian *Athenaion Politeia* (42). Attic oratory, philosophy, and about thirty inscriptions concerning ephebes and their trainers provide the scant, remaining contemporary evidence. This paper revisits this evidence and examines it through the lens of social control theory to shed more light on how the *ephebeia* functioned as an institution of civic education. Social control is "all those mechanisms and practices in society by which persons and groups are compelled…to conform to some standard of conduct" (Chriss 2011). In view of this, I argue that the *ephebeia* served to enforce normative political behaviors by strictly limiting the ephebes' exposure to potentially deviant models of political behavior.

Two recent books (Henderson 2020 and Friend 2019), both published after the discovery of new ephebic inscriptions, revisit fundamental questions about ephebic education but arrive at starkly different conclusions. Friend sees the purpose of the *ephebeia* as primarily military, its creation being a response to Boeotian incursions into northern Attica. The civic education aspect, in his analysis, is secondary. Henderson, on the other hand, sees moral and ethical education as

primary. I suggest that military training and civic education were two sides of the same coin. Athens needed a reliable fighting force but in equipping their youth with weapons and training created a potential threat to the city. The education of the ephebes thus aimed at ensuring the preservation of Athens in a politically uncertain time by training them as hoplites but reducing their exposure to "deviant" behaviors, i.e. those that do not serve the interest of the democracy, so that they do not use violence against Athens.

My focus then is not so much on what kind of civic lessons the ephebes were learning in the *ephebeia*, but rather what they were *not* learning from the city and its people. Once the ephebes were removed from the city and placed in the Piraeus and borderland outposts, they were not allowed to return except in extraordinary circumstances. Exposure to differing ways of thinking and behaving in the political sphere was thus significantly limited and perhaps discouraged. Their absence from the political sphere in the city meant the first significant political exposure they gained was at the end of their service, when they received honors from their demes, tribes, and the Demos and Council. These honorific inscriptions show that the *ephebeia* prioritized behaviors such as self-control, obedience, and order, all of which are vital to both military and political organization. Such an arrangement also associated the various levels of Athenian government explicitly with the bestowal of rewards, encouraging the ephebes to reproduce their learned behaviors and feel goodwill toward the city. Finally, fears over the potential for (especially aristocratic) youth to cause trouble for the democracy through violence or apathy (cf. Christ 2006) after the Battle of Chaeronea may have influenced the structure of the *ephebeia*. The *ephebeia* thus served to control the behaviors of young men who might be inclined or persuaded to aid a pro-Macedonian overthrow of Athens, or to simply desert Athens in its time of need.

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