

The Cultural Triumph of Martial Dance in Xenophon's *Anabasis* 6.1.1-14

In Xenophon's *Anabasis*, the Ten Thousand treat Paphlagonian envoys to a veritable Greek symposium, complete with entertainment. The amusements are limited to martial dances, all described in detail by Xenophon and almost entirely performed by various soldiers from within the army itself (6.1.1-13). I argue that the sequence of performances is purposefully crafted to create a choreographic narrative, which substitutes for actual battle; the Greek army 'defeats' the Paphlagonians with dance, not war. Scholars have noted that the episode differentiates Greek and non-Greek in order to display the former's social supremacy (L'Allier 2004, Flower 2012: 184-5, Ceccarelli 1998: 21, Lesky 2000: 8, Buzzetti 2014: 224), but recent work on ancient dance and its profound socio-cultural value suggests that there is deeper relevance to the scene (e.g. Kurke 2012, Peponi 2013, Kowalzig & Wilson 2013). The result of the dance-battle simulation is, I argue, a triumph of culture and *mousikē* that adds a new dimension to the Ten Thousand's constantly fluctuating status in the *Anabasis* as a quasi-*polis*.

The programmatic description of the dances hypothetically projects the successive stages of combat between the Greeks and Paphlagonians. Initially, the reader is led to associate the natives with the 'losing' side in a confrontation between two performers, for they cry out when one 'dies' (6.1.6). The next performance re-enacts the successful pillaging of their region when a robber (*lēistēs*) steals a farmer's property (cf. the army "pillaging", *lēizomenoi*, at 6.1.1). Then, after a virtuoso display in which a mercenary soldier is victorious in mimetic combat and celebrates jubilantly (6.1.9-10), select soldiers appear to offer dutiful prayers of thanks for the victory with a dance originating from festive processions (6.1.11). The message of the evening's entertainment is inescapable, and the Paphlagonians duly accept peace (6.1.14). The episode and its dancing warriors indeed showcase the cultural superiority of the Ten Thousand, and their

martial prowess. But the various dances are all performed by soldiers of different ethnicities from within the Ten Thousand, producing a whole that is diverse yet unified: the product of a cohesive and (pan-)hellenic community (cf. Ma 2010: 512). This communal victory of *mousikē* brings the army extraordinarily close to behaving as a *polis*. Their ‘political’ affectations are well noted in scholarship (see esp. Dalby 1992), but by emphasizing the army’s particular brand of exclusively martial *mousikē*, Xenophon is able to develop a markedly cultural facet of their anomalous society. The performative aspects of the soldiers’ dances correspond to and reinforce the army’s socio-cultural ideologies (cf. Peponi 2013; Pl. *Laws* 653c-75c, 798d-817e). As such, the scene in *Anabasis* deserves to be recognized not only as an important moment in the development of one of the work’s central themes, but also as a response and testament to the centrality of dance to Greek cultural values.

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