A Reading on Xenophon’s *Hiero* (2.8-16; 6.7-10): Citizens and War in the Tyrant’s Discourse

Una lectura sobre el *Hierón* de Jenofonte (2.8-16; 6.7-10): los ciudadanos y la guerra en el discurso del tirano

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Abstract

This essay focuses on the role that the theme of the war waged by the citizens plays in the tyrant Hiero’s regret for his lost status as a citizen. By invoking the military commitment that citizens offer to the city when it is engaged in a common war, Hiero underlines those aspects of being a citizen that he misses the most: sharing in the joys of victory, taking part in collective discussions when the community decides to go to war for a common advantage, the protection of the laws afforded to the citizens defending their city, the honor that victory over the enemy brings to the entire community of citizens.

Keywords: Hiero, Simonides, tyranny, citizenship, war, courage, honor.

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Resumen

Este ensayo se centra en el papel que desempeña el tema de la guerra librada por los ciudadanos en el lamento del tirano Hierón por su perdida condición de ciudadano. Al invocar el compromiso militar que los ciudadanos ofrecen a la ciudad cuando ésta se compromete en una guerra común, el tirano pone de relieve ciertos aspectos de la condición ciudadana que le faltan por encima de todo: es la participación en las deliberaciones comunes que tienen lugar cuando la comunidad se pronuncia sobre la decisión de hacer la guerra por el bien común, es la protección que las leyes garantizan a los ciudadanos que se comprometen en la defensa de la ciudad, el honor que la victoria sobre el enemigo aporta a toda la comunidad de ciudadanos.

Palabras-clave: Hiero, Simónides, tiranía, ciudadanía, guerra, valor, honor.

1. The teaching concerning tyranny: setting the context

Hiero the Tyrant (Ἱέρων ἢ Τυραννικός) is one of the most complex of Xenophon's Minor Works. It is the only work of antiquity dealing specifically with the subject of tyranny. It was written by an Athenian with an Athenian public in mind, its language is imbued with democratic ideology, but its protagonists are not Athenians. The interlocutors are Hiero the tyrant of Syracuse in Sicily in the early fifth century BC (478-467) and Simonides the poet from Ceos. At the court of Syracuse the two men converse on the relative virtues of tyrannical and private lives and here Simonides "discovers" from Hiero's assertions that the tyrant, in spite of his great power, is unhappy. The fact is that the tyrant finds himself deprived of pleasures, especially the shared, public pleasures he was able to enjoy when he was a private citizen and which now are permanently denied to him. In the dialogue the two protagonists assume sharply different positions: the tyrant is charged with the indictment of tyranny as a despotic form of rule, while the poet suggests ways of making his tyranny a benevolent rule and his person beloved by his subjects. The dialogue's bipartite structure, how the conversation develops in relation to the themes it deals with and to the changing role of the two interlocutors are aspects that have proven to be the most challenging for scholars to interpret, though it is safe to say that every aspect of the *Hiero* is considered controversial and has been debated by scholars[2]. The problems

[2] Strauss 1948 (1961a); 1961b; Aalders 1953; Sordi 1980; Tuplin 1985; Gelenczey-Mihálcz 2000; Sevieri 2004; Meier 2005; Tedeschi 2005; Cartledge, Waterfield 2006; Gray 1986; 2007: 30-38, 106-145; Tamiolaki 2012; Zuolo 2012; 2017; Lu 2015: 97-122; Dillery 2017: 206-208; Parks 2017; Fertik 2018; Illaraga 2020; Johrdović 2020; Ranum 2020; Bandini, Dorion 2021; Butti de Lima 2023; Unruh 2023.

spotlighted for the first time in Leo Strauss' seminal study *On Tyranny. An Interpretation of Xenophon's Hiero* (1948) are still very much contested[3], particularly with regard to the structure of the conversation between the tyrant and the poet, the prototype of the literary model chosen by Xenophon (a dialogue between a powerful ruler and a sage) and especially controversial, the audience Xenophon had in mind when he wrote the *Hiero*[4].

The structure of the dialogue between the tyrant and the poet does not unfold as an effective exchange of ideas between the two men[5] , rather it is rigidly divided into two sections. In the first part of the dialogue, Hiero says that he feels oppressed by the isolation power has brought on him and that he is therefore unhappy (*Hier*. 1-7). He lists all the pleasures he is deprived of and with lucid self-awareness analyzes himself, isolated from the citizens he governs and deprived of any possibility of being part of the community that is subject to him, and therefore hopelessly unhappy. Hiero draws up a dramatic list of all the joys he must do without, from the most intimate and private, to those that are public and shared, and which represent the renunciations that are hardest for him to bear[6]. Hiero makes the extreme observation that the only escape left for him is suicide. Following this desperate conclusion the conversation takes an unexpected turn. Simonides, who for the first part of the dialogue appeared unable to comfort the unhappy tyrant, now proposes a way out for Hiero, setting him on the path to a completely different idea of his power. (*Hier*. 8-11). The remedy for the tyrant's unhappiness lies in the possibility of transforming his tyrannical power into a form of authority his subjects will welcome. While it may be true, Simonides argues, that Hiero can never be part of the civic community, he could nevertheless choose to govern for the benefit of the citizens and win their goodwill: the tyrant can only achieve personal happiness if he governs in the interests of his subjects. The possibility of attaining happiness while holding on to power means he must transform his despotic regime into a sovereignty "legitimized" by the goodwill of the citizens. This can be realized by adopting concrete measures, including financial ones, aimed at improving his subjects' lives and actions that will arouse their feelings of gratitude. Distributing prizes and rewards to citizens, relieving them of the burden of defending the city militarily (to be entrusted to mercenaries) could, according to Simonides, serve the purpose of a reform program which, ultimately, would encourage people to concern themselves only with their private affairs. Implementing such a program of reform would allow Hiero to

[3] On Strauss' seminal study see Vegetti 2009; Fussi 2011; Johnson 2012; Zuolo 2012: 41-45; Buzzetti 2015; Burns, Frost 2016; García Sánchez 2023: 42, 46-48.

[4] Gray 1986; Sevieri 2004; Lu 2015; Zuolo 2012; 2017; Parks 2017; Takakjy 2017.

[5] An aspect pointed out by Sevieri 2004; see also Lu 2015: 98ff.

[6] Zuolo (2012: 13-14) on the other hand states that the pleasures are ranked in order of growing importance, from the most public but least important, to the most private and hidden, but most essential (love and sex).

win the hearts of the community he governs and attain his longed for happiness without incurring envy. The possibility of turning tyrannical power into something positive is explored in Simonides' speech through a series of concrete suggestions that allow no room for the abstract themes of political discourse. Simonides does not discuss the disadvantages of tyranny from a theoretical perspective but offers advice on how to improve this form of government, however defective, in practical terms. The concrete features of Simonides' reform have led several scholars to the view that Xenophon wrote the dialogue with a particular recipient in mind, to whom he was proposing a specific program of reforms: it has been suggested, for example, that this may have been one of his contemporaries, a figure such as Dionysius the Younger, tyrant of Syracuse or Dion[7]. It is, however, unlikely that Xenophon was addressing one particular tyrant, and given the dialogue's uncertain date, it is difficult to identify a historical figure or related events that would have prompted him to write it. As regards the question of dating, prevailing opinion is that the *Hiero* is a later work, published around 358-7. During this latter period of his life, Xenophon was interested in a number of themes that are central to this dialogue and which he deals with in his other so-called minor works (*On Horsemanship*, *Agesilaus* and the *Ways and Means*): among these themes is the problem of using financial resources in order to benefit both public and private interests, the question of education and the problem of leadership[8]. A later date for the work still remains the most plausible, though there have been attempts to assign an earlier date to the *Hiero* based on arguments that one specific contemporary event had been the occasion for Xenophon's composing the dialogue. It has been suggested that the work was written earlier in 388-384 on the strength of a comparison between several excerpts from the *Hiero* and a passage from Diodorus Siculus revolving around the figure of Dionysus the Elder. According to this interpretation, Dionysius' arrogant behaviour at the Olympics of either 388 or 384 was presumably the occasion for Xenophon's composing the *Hiero* with the aim of suggesting that Dionysius adopt a less despotic approach that was more in tune with his citizens[9]. However, we need to recognize that the hypothesis of one particular contemporary event prompting Xenophon to write the *Hiero* is beset with difficulty. Above all we should not underestimate the element in the dialogue that has led scholars to the view that Xenophon was addressing a contemporary tyrant and proposing specific reforms: this is the fact that Simonides is making the case that tyrannical power can be something positive through practical proposals that allow no room for the abstract themes of political theory. It is the fact that, in illustrating the

[7] See Sordi 1980: 6, and Zuolo 2012: 19-22, for a survey of the literature.
[8] See Zuolo 2012: 20; Diller 2017; Humble 2017; Tuplin 2017: 346.
[9] This is an old suggestion by George Grote developed on by Sordi 1980; 2004; Gray 1986; Bonanno 2010: 232-238.

features of his reforms, Simonides disregards Hiero's reflections on political issues that certainly were important for an Athenian audience, such as the prerogatives of a citizen who is part of a *koinonia* and who, as such, is responsible for the decisions adopted to defend the common interest[10]. From this point of view, it is no exaggeration to say that Simonides' profile, his position in the dialogue, makes interpreting *Hiero,* its aims and its intended audience, challenging. The theme also clearly affects the problem of understanding the literary model chosen by Xenophon: a confrontation between a powerful ruler and a wise man. As regards the literary prototype, there is a scholarly consensus that Xenophon was greatly influenced by Croesus encounter with Solon in the first book of Herodotus, and that the *Hiero* depicts a standard scene of the meeting between a wise man and a powerful ruler [11]. But while Xenophon's choice of Hiero as his 'historical' example of a powerful ruler resonates with contemporary memory of the historic Hiero[12], the portrayal of Simonides in the dialogue is harder to understand given he is clearly not up to playing the role of a "sage". It is no exaggeration to say that Hiero comes off as wiser than Simonides and it has been aptly noted that it is more Simonides' wisdom which "appears to be tested" than Hiero's[13]. The tyrant of Syracuse is better acquainted with the characteristics of democratic citizenry than Simonides and his suffering is all the greater as he is keenly aware that the citizens' lives are made up of shared freedoms and responsibilities, which he himself had known before becoming a tyrant. Equally obvious is Simonides' narrow pragmatism who appears not to understand the merit of Hiero's assertions[14]. Simonides' inadequacy is especially clear in the first part of the dialogue when Hiero laments his painful renunciation of the public and private pleasures enjoyed by the citizens: Simonides seems unable to grasp the profundity of Hiero's self-analysis, and instead appears convinced that great power must be accompanied by equally great pleasures (*Hier*.1.8; 2.2). He says he is surprised that a powerful tyrant could be unhappy. Scholars have tried to explain the role assumed by Simonides in the dialogue. Leo Strauss was the first to suggest that Simonides is "pretending" to be less wise than Hiero in order to win his trust[15]. This theme is taken up again and developed by V.J. Gray who argued that the *Hiero* should be viewed as a typical Socratic dialogue in which Simonides

[10] Aristotle in the *Politics* makes the issue of the impossible *koinonein* the center of his treatment of tyranny (see Petit 1993: 84ff.)

[11] Gray 1986; Cartledge, Waterfield 2006: 67-68; Lu 2015: 2ff; Parks 2017: 387, 404; Jordović 2020: 29ff.

[12] Reconstructions of Hiero's historical profile are in Mossé 1969; Sordi 1980; Luraghi 1994; Harrell 2002; Bonanno 2010; Chies 2021.

[13] Gray 1986: 116; Lu 2015: 99.

[14] See Strauss 1961a: 187 on Simonides who "seems to reveal a poor understanding of Hiero's situation or a lack of wisdom". See also 1961b: 197-198.

[15] Lu 2015: 99ff, for a discussion of Strauss' interpretation.

assumes the role of Socrates: his attitude resembles that of Socrates when he expresses himself ironically (in Plato's dialogues and in the Socratic works of Xenophon)[16]. According to this interpretation Simonides initially pretends that he knows nothing in order to put Hiero's knowledge to the test, and it is only in the second part of the dialogue that he reveals his wisdom by offering advice to the tyrant. The limit to this interpretation is the claim by Gray (but also by other scholars) that one can really detect a transformation in Simonides from "a listener showing hardly any wisdom in the first half of the dialogue to that of an eloquent teacher in the second half"[17]. This view does not take sufficiently account of the fact that Simonides shortcomings are visible not only in the first part but also in the second[18]. While Hiero refers to Simonides as wise, the poet rarely appears to be equal to the task of grasping the tyrant's arguments: they are themes and reflections that Simonides either does not grasp or does not adequately pursue[19]. Although this trait is particularly noticeable in the first part of the dialogue, where Hiero describes aspects of civic life irrevocably lost to him, it should be emphasized that in the second part of the dialogue, where Simonides outlines how he would reform the tyranny, any kind of ethical concern is completely absent[20]. Simonides' proposals remain in the sphere of narrow pragmatism. He argues that a tyrant would be popular if he sent his mercenary guards to maintain public order but makes no mention of civic responsibility and civil laws which are the arguments used by Hiero with reference to the military defense of the city and the public order[21]. In fact, Hiero's arguments are totally abandoned. One could think of this as a reform guided by a practical sense and lacking Socratic morality, as some have suggested[22], but the problem remains of how to explain the unresolved character of the themes Hiero has made the focus of his bitter reflection and which Simonides does not appear to understand and therefore disregards. It is hard to deny that Simonides' inadequacy is largely due to the difficulty of resolving the tension between collective responsibility and monocratic power, a tension Hiero brings sharply into focus as the reason for his unhappiness: the absence of *koinonein*. This is one of the themes that most indicates Simonides' inadequacy and which led Leo Strauss to consider Simonides as less able than Hiero to interpret the civic dimension and that therefore his position is that of someone who views the city understood as *koinonia* from an external

[16] Gray 1986: 118.
[17] Lu 2015: 99.
[18] Zuolo 2012: 103.
[19] Strauss 1961a: 55-57; Fussi 2011: 197-198, 284, 286; Buzzetti 2015: 238.
[20] Strauss 1961a: 55-77, and 94 on "the amazingly amoral nature of the tyrannical teaching embodied in the second part of the *Hiero*"; ibid. 100-101, 108-110, 116-119, 132; Zuolo 2012; 2017; Fussi 2011: 278-282, 284-288; Buzzetti 2015: 236, 243-248, 252-254.
[21] Lu 2015: 107. See also Strauss 1961a: 187.
[22] Zuolo 2012: 94; 2017.

perspective: while Hiero is animated by "citizen spirit"[23], Simonides is a "stranger, a man who does not have citizen responsibilities"[24]. That this tension between *koinonia* and tyrannical power remains unresolved in the dialogue is obvious and has led some scholars (including Strauss himself) to the view that Xenophon intentionally left the dialogue as an open reflection and chose not to reconcile the quandary between *koinonia* and monocratic power[25]. Simonides' arguments are the reason for that humiliating representation of the civic community governed by the tyrant, a community that Eric Voegelin has defined as a "mass" seen as "somewhat nondescript, washed-out creature": a creature that "can be handled by […] prizes for good conduct and by persuasion"[26]. A representation that is problematic when it is compared with the democratic city (the kind of city that in the *Hiero* only figures in the tyrant's speeches) but which significantly ceases to be problematic when we look at the work's subsequent literary fortunes. The fortune of the *Hiero* in humanist culture and the Renaissance was due to interest in the theme of actions proposed to reform the tyranny instead of the problem of the dramatic tension tyrannical power generates when compared with a community of citizens who are responsible for their own decisions[27].

It is this tension I aim to discuss in the present chapter with reference to the role played by war in the arguments of the two interlocutors. It has been observed that the impetus or thrust of the dialogue pushes citizens towards the private sphere and the tyrant towards the public[28] which is quite comprehensible given the tradition this impetus derives from[29]. There has, however, been little discussion of the fact that it is the context of war that best allows this impetus to be recognized. By calling to mind the shared military exertions of citizens

[23] Strauss 1961a: 76 "The ultimate reason why the very tyrant Hiero strongly indicts tyranny is precisely that he is at bottom a citizen".

[24] Strauss 1961a: 76. See Buzzetti 2015: 236, 238, 244, 245, 256 n. 26.

[25] Strauss 1961a: 29-30, 76-77. According to Strauss, the aim of the *Hiero* is to convince the reader that it would be better to renounce tyranny in any form before even having tried to establish it and that Xenophon thus appear to reject the very idea of tyrannical government (see Buzzetti 2015: 252-254) and to consider "that the good tyranny is a utopia" (Strauss 1961b: 188).

[26] Voegelin 1949: 244.

[27] On the fortune and legacy of the *Hiero* in humanist culture cf. Canfora 1998; De Nichilo 2013. As regards the comparison with Machiavelli cf. Newell 1988; Zuolo 2012: 35-41; Humble 2017. Voegelin has correctly asserted that in the *Prince* "the mass-man" is also seen as "incapable of self-government", but that Machiavelli's observations were made in a context when "the final breakdown of the republican constitutional order" had already taken place (Voegelin 1949: 242-243).

[28] Zuolo 2012: 17, 101.

[29] In the *logos tripolitikos* (Herod. 3.80.2-6), the argument in favor of democracy over tyranny uses the idea of political power shifting to the center of the city, where all the citizens will be engaged in controlling it and where all decisions will be "taken in common". Here popular government (*plethos archon*) is defined through its contrast with government by a tyrant which in Herodotus' version shows it has absorbed all the features already conferred to it by the gnomic tradition and by lyric poetry (see Tedeschi 2005: 247ff.). Very revealing is the statement the tyrant Pisistratus is made to utter in the Aristotelian *Athenaion Politeia*, in which (15.4) he notifies the citizens of Athens that "they must return to their personal affairs", while he "will personally take care of all public business".

when their city is engaged in a war, Hiero underlines those aspects of being a citizen that he misses the most: sharing in the joys of victory, taking part in collective discussions when the community decides to go to war for a common advantage, the protection of the laws afforded to the citizens defending their city, the honor that victory over the enemy brings to the entire community of citizens. This civic dimension is dealt with particularly in chapters 2 and 6 in several brief but densely packed passages, but they are also implicitly referred to in chapter 10 when the dialogue considers the role played by mercenaries not only in guarding the tyrant but in defending the entire city which, as Simonides argues, would allow the citizens to return to their personal concerns rather than public affairs.

2. "Sharing in the planning of the war" (*Hier*. 2.8-16)

The second chapter introduces the theme of the pleasures the tyrant is deprived of because he is outside the community of citizens. This theme continues on until the eighth chapter through detailed arguments that allow Hiero to illustrate the many reasons he has for being unhappy as against the illusory kind of happiness Simonides superficially attributes to the pleasures a tyrant enjoys through the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and through sex. The pleasures are ranked on two scales: public and private. The approach of making comparisons we find in chapter two temporarily shifts away from a discussion of individual pleasures which, as Hiero observed, are no different for tyrants and for ordinary citizens to a discussion of the shared pleasures derived from belonging to a community. Simonides had just placed the discussion on an economic footing, a framework he never abandoned: pleasure understood quantitatively. If the tyrant has much power than it must follow that he has much pleasure. Hiero rejects this assumption and is surprised at Simonides' lack of insight. He proceeds to recall all the pleasures of community life that he now regrets since he lost the condition of being an ordinary citizen. With regard to the pleasures of sight, the first regret he expresses is for the spectacles that citizens can all attend together[30], but his most painful regret, one he dwells on some chapters later, is the role citizens assume when the city is fighting a war decided for the common good.

[30] Citizens are free to visit both cities and solemn festivals where everything that people consider most worthy of admiration may be found. The tyrant, however, has to do without this. The public aspect of pleasure marks a crucial passage, even if scholars do not always consider it (Zuolo 2012: 14, 101): indeed it is clear that we need to shift attention to the collective dimension in order to understand the reasons for the deep distress experienced by anyone who is excluded from it (Tedeschi 2005: 247).

The most important passages are in paragraphs 8-16 of the second chapter.

> (8) For, to begin with, it is possible for private men, unless their city is engaged in fighting a common war, to take a journey wherever they wish, without being afraid that someone will kill them. But the tyrants, all of them, proceed everywhere as through hostile territory. They themselves at least think it necessary to go armed and always to be surrounded by an armed bodyguard. (9) Moreover, if private men go on an expedition somewhere into enemy country, they believe they are safe at least after they have returned home. But the tyrants know that when they reach their own city they are then in the midst of the largest number of their enemies. (10) Again, if others who are stronger attack the city, and those outside the wall, being weaker, think they are in danger, all believe they have been rendered safe, at least after they have come within the fortifications. The tyrant, however, not even when he passes inside his house is free from danger; he thinks it is there that he must be particularly on his guard. (11) Furthermore, for private men, relief from war is brought about both by treaties and by peace. Whereas for tyrants peace is never made with those subject to their tyranny; nor could the tyrant be confident trusting for a moment to a treaty. (12) There are wars which cities wage and wars which tyrants wage against those they have subjected to force. Now in these wars, everything hard which the man in the cities undergoes, the tyrant too undergoes. (13) For both must be armed, must be on their guard, and run risks; and if, being beaten, they suffer some harm, each suffers pain from these wars. (14) Up to this point, then, the wars of both are equal. But when it comes to the pleasures which the men in the cities get from fighting the cities, these the tyrants cease to have. (15) For surely when the cities overpower their opponents in a battle, it is not easy to express how much pleasure [the men] get from routing the enemy; how much from the pursuit; how much from killing their enemies; how they exult in the deed; how they receive a brilliant reputation for themselves; and how they take delight in believing they have augmented their city. (16) Each one pretends that he shared in the planning and killed the most; and it is hard to find where they do not make some false additions, claiming they killed more than all who really died. So noble a thing does a great victory seem to them[31].

Thus, in the first section of chapter two (8-11) a series of examples are adduced which are always to the disadvantage of the tyrant: the freedom citizens enjoy when a war that is fought outside the city's borders does not involve them directly (8); the safety experienced by citizens upon returning to the city after taking part in an expedition outside the polis' territory along with the fact that inside the city they are protected from the threat of external attacks (9-10); the rest that awaits them in time of peace (11). In this first part, Hiero points out that none of these feelings (freedom, safety, rest) can be experienced by the tyrant who has enemies not only outside the city but also within its walls: indeed the citizens are protected by the city while the tyrant needs to protect himself

[31] The translation is from the book *On Tyranny* by Leo Strauss.

even from those he governs as well as from external enemies. But it is the next section (12-16) that tells us the most about how important the theme of sharing is in Hiero's arguments: sharing is the feature that most plainly distinguishes the condition of being a free citizen.

This section which scholars consider obscurely expressed and highly artificial, contains clear references to the theme of sharing, especially in the use of the verb *metechein* which expresses the idea of participation. Hiero's line of reasoning starts from the observation that the citizens of a polis may be engaged in waging wars that closely concern them and which are therefore dangerous (12-13). In this case, Hiero observes "the hardships incidental to these wars that fall on the citizen fall also on the despot". The risk of defeat is common to both (13). But Hiero soon abandons the analogic procedure of comparison when he declares that only citizens can experience the joy of fighting for their own city (14): it is the pride of victory, the honor of having fought for the polis (15). Hiero's words evoke the feeling of shared joy: "It's impossible to capture in words how they glory in their achievement, how they bask in the brilliance of their fame, how they are cheered by the thought that they have enhanced the power [16] of their community". Especially conspicuous is his regret for the joy that comes from sharing in having made a successful decision: Everyone is crying: 'I had a share in the plan', Hiero affirms (16). The text is uncertain in this last paragraph. The most common translation is based on the codices which have the same text τῆς βουλῆς μετεσχηκέναι. If we respect the tradition, the text can only be interpreted as meaning participation in a decision taken by the city. On the other hand, the recent edition of the *Hiero* edited by E. Bandini and L.A. Dorion for *Les Belles Lettres*, accepts the conjectural emendation (Castiglioni) of βουλῆς into συμβολῆς: the term is translated as "combat" thus linking the feeling of sharing to the experience of being in battle together[32]. The aspect of collective engagement by citizens is not diminished by this different interpretation of the text. It should, however, be said that if we accept the codices (βουλῆς), the theme of sharing appears to be more effectively expressed by the reference to a common choice, a decision taken by citizens who together resolved to wage war[33]. This sentiment is, in fact. a distinctive feature of the ideology of the Greek poleis, as recently shown by M. Canevaro who correctly pointed out that the common and distinguishing feature in the Greek idea of courage is the notion of a conscious decision to act for the good of the community[34]. There is much common ground in how courage was conceptualized by the Athenians and Spartans: the idea we find in Athenian democratic ideology (especially in the funeral orations given by Pericles and

[32] Cf. Bandini, Dorion 2021: 15.

[33] Gray 2007: 122, on the other hand, states that "each man claims to have had a hand in formulating the successful battle plan".

[34] Canevaro 2019: 195-199

Demosthenes) is akin to that of the Spartans; the idea of courage as defined by Pericles (2.37, 2.39, 2.40, 2.43) is the same we find in the speech Thucydides gives the Spartan king Archidamus (1.84)[35]. At the heart of this concept is the conscious choice made to sacrifice one's life for the common good and the salvation of the city. It is a choice not only made consciously but taken along with the rest of the citizens and therefore carried out in compliance with the laws that the political community has endowed itself with. The motivational forces behind courageous behavior are common to all the Greeks[36]. I think this is how we can interpret Hiero's argument when he tries to explain to Simonides what his most painful regret is about no longer being a private citizen: the decision a citizen takes to fight heroically to defend his city, a decision he has taken part in along with his co-citizens, the choice to wage war for the common good. This notion of the brave citizen who is aware of the value in having participated in deliberations to fight a war for the preservation of the city and who "chooses" to engage himself in a war decided in common, is precisely what distinguishes free citizens from those who are ruled by a tyrant. Hiero's words make it clear that the condition of the citizen who deliberates with his compatriots on the war to be waged is a feature shared by all the cities not governed by a tyrant. We find the same view of courage expressed in the works of the philosophers[37]: Socrates, for example, in *Laches*, recognizes that the essence of courage lies in the decision to do what is honorable, in other words, what serves the defense of the entire community[38].

Hiero's choice of this theme is therefore remarkable: he evokes a key and distinctive motif in democratic ideology, that of the city that fights for its salvation. The importance of this theme in Athenian democratic ideology has been fittingly highlighted by S. Forsdyke who recognized the preeminence in democratic ideology of the association between civic strength expressed through military prowess and the political values of wisdom and justice (which therefore remain implicit in the *Hiero*) as well as by R. Balot who specifically refers to the value of the theme of courage in antityrannical

[35] Canevaro 2019: 195-199. On the other hand, Balot 2014: 199-211, 244-249 insists on the special way courage was conceptualized in Athenian democratic ideology. In Athenian authors he identifies a distinctive view of shame "an intellectual complex emotion shot through with self-chosen commitments and aspirations" Balot contrasts this with the Spartan conception defined as "a simpler, less self-aware emotion that embodied the traditional view of one's culture and one's authority figures, taken over more or less without any criticism or self-consciousness". Discussion of this position in Canevaro 2019: 192-193.

[36] Canevaro, 2019: 199-201. See also Landauer 2023: 376: "In Sparta, ordinary Spartan citizens in the assembly played a key role in such decisions as whether or not to go to war". Raaflaub (1999: 139-140) considers, first in Sparta and then in Athens, how the conditions ripened that made it necessary for citizens to assume "a permanent military responsibility".

[37] Cfr. Canevaro 2019: 199.

[38] Santas 1969. See also Schmid 1985, 1992; Poddighe 2024.

discourse[39]. The city is made up of citizens who freely decide to fight for its salvation and democracy emerges when the idea is superseded that only the few and the best defend the city[40]. It is not without significance that the vocabulary of sharing takes center stage in this long section. The theme of sharing is evoked by reference to the theme of the common war (*koinon*). Again, the citizens are referred to twice as *sunontes tais poleis*[41] therefore as "citizens of a state"[42]. Use of the verb *metechein* and of the paraphrase *metechein tes boules* is also indicative.

It seems to me that the reading just proposed resolves many of the interpretative difficulties scholars have raised with regard to Hiero's arguments in this section of the second chapter, a section that continues to be considered omissive and insufficiently clear. Strauss was the first to point out that at this point in the dialogue Hiero's statement about peace and war doubtless serves the purpose of drawing our attention to the particularly close connection between tyranny and war[43]. According to Strauss, Hiero is only speaking about the value war assumes for the tyrant. Strauss later returns to the point again when he remarks that this is obviously a disingenuous and omissive line of argument because "Hiero fails to mention […] above all the victory of the citizens governed or led by their tyrannical ruler over their foreign enemies: he forgets his own victory in the battle of Cumae". In other words, Hiero does not at all consider "the obvious possibility that a tyrant, who takes the chief responsibility for the outcome of a war, might be more gratified by victory than might the ordinary citizen; for it was the prudent counsel and efficient leadership of the tyrant that brought about the

[39] Forsdyke 2001: 345; Balot 2014: 11. In Alcibiades' speech to the assembly in response to Nicias' proposal that the Athenians abandon their plan to invade Sicily, he argues that the island will be easy to conquer because defending it are not citizens from its various cities but mercenaries: "In those cities people of different races throng and there is a frequent traffic of citizens leaving and new inhabitants arriving. Because of this continual changing, the patriotic feeling is extinguished: so that neither the private citizen takes up arms in defense of a country that is not dear to him, nor does the state, as a whole, have orderly defensive installations. […]. Can one think that a flock like this […] will act together for a common purpose?" (Thuc. 6.17). Cfr. Adkins (1960: 32, 74-78) who traces the evolution of the meaning of *arete* from Homer to Aristotle and shows how the term first only meant military prowess and success in war and only later included other virtues, such as wisdom and justice.

[40] Cf. Arist. *Pol.* 4.13.1297b 16-28. On this relationship between civic identity and combat cf. Raaflaub 1999: 139-140.

[41] It is noteworthy that Xenophon mostly refers to the citizens ruled by the tyrant as *idiotai*, while he uses the paraphrase *oi sunontes tais polesin* (or *oi sun tais polesin*) when Hiero's speeches consider the specific prerogatives of the citizens who "decide" to fight a war (*Hier*. 2.14). The expression ὁ σὺν ταῖς πόλεσι at *Hier.* 2.12 (as well as the expression ὁ συνὼν ταῖς πόλεσι, emended according to a conjecture proposed by Steph., see Bandini, Dorion 2021: 14) is translated as "the citizen". Similarly, at *Hier.* 2.14, the translated reading οἱ συνόντες πόλεσι (which some editors, accepting Erbse's conjecture, correct to οἱ σὺν ταῖς πόλεσι) is translated as "the citizens of a state" (Cartledge, Waterfield 2006: 84). See Gray 2007: 121-122.

[42] This translation is from Cartledge, Waterfield 2006: 85.

[43] Strauss 1961a: 90. See also Strauss 1961a: 126 n. 64: "The emphasis in this passage is certainly on war".

happy issue, while the ordinary citizen never can have had more than a small share in the deliberations concerning the war. Hiero fails to consider that this great pleasure might fully compensate the tyrant for the lack of many lesser pleasures"[44]. This interpretation insisting on the omissive character of Hiero's speech is also reiterated (but independently) by Lu: "There are also certain omissions in contrast here. During a war, the tyrant, as commander of the whole army, is protected by his best soldiers, while the common soldiers exposed in the front line must suffer greater dangers and are more likely to be killed than their military leaders". Lu goes on to observe: "Once again Xenophon chooses to omit such obvious facts[45]. And Hiero becomes even more unreasonable when he says that poverty is rarer among private persons than among despots (Xen. *Hier*. 4.8-9), as the social reality shows just the opposite. Although tyrants do have to deal with a larger sum of expenditure, they are supported by a variety of financial resources. But private persons have far fewer means to manage their finance if their income is inadequate. In conclusion, the statement of Hiero is highly rhetorical". Lu thus concurs with the reading of the passage given by W.R. Newell, that is, Hiero "in omitting the compensations of tyranny and the drawbacks of citizenship, gives a very one-sided diagnosis"[46]. It seems to me that all these interpretations fail to recognize what in the *Hiero* essentially distinguishes war decided by the tyrant from war decided by citizens in a free polis. Above all, I think these interpretations do not sufficiently highlight the role this distinction played in democratic ideology which, in my view, is the contextual backdrop to Hiero's words. I believe, on the contrary, that by choosing a key theme, Hiero intentionally plays the part of someone wishing to draw attention to the critical issues of tyranny (while Simonides should defend it). Significant in this context is Hiero's silence about his victory at Cumae which the historical Hiero, in fact, attributed to the valor of the citizens of Syracuse, when he chose to omit from the dedicatory inscription (which still survives) the title of *tyrannos*[47]. We cannot rule out that Xenophon was familiar with this inscription[48] and that this provided him with the idea that Hiero was actually aware of the importance of victory in war in civic identity. The relationship that unites the citizens responsible for the city's defense is dealt with again in the sixth chapter with the reference to the laws' protection of those fighting to defend the city.

[44] Strauss 1961a: 46-47.

[45] See also Gray 2007: 122 "Hiero's account of his war against the citizens systematically denies the tyrant-ruler the pleasure of 'increasing' his *polis*".

[46] Lu 2015: 106; cf. Newell 1988: 114.

[47] See *infra* p. 261 and n. 56.

[48] See Sordi 1980: 10.

3. “The laws of the State stand watch over the guards “(*Hier*. 6.10)

In chapter six the theme of war again takes center stage in the dialogue. Hiero uses it to contrast the isolation experienced by the tyrant when he fights a war against his enemies with the protection enjoyed by the citizens of a free polis when they are engaged in fighting for it. Once again Hiero shows that he is familiar with the condition of citizens of a State who, while suffering privations and fear in war, nonetheless know that they can count on the protection of their city. For this reason Hiero laments the solitude and vulnerability of his position: that of a foreign body within the city. Hiero is unhappy because he knows the protection the city provides its citizens during a war that involves them directly. Unlike Hiero, Simonides seems to underestimate and not understand what protects and unites the members of a *koinonia*, on the one hand, and what isolates a tyrant: these are arguments that Simonides simply ignores. A clarification needs to be made in this regard: in an earlier point in the fourth chapter, Hiero had already touched on the theme of the protection the political community affords its citizens. Here besides evoking a term laden with meaning the concept of political community (*xunousia*), Hiero affirms that solidarity among citizens is nourished by mutual trust. The value of the polis also appears to be emphasized (always and only by Hiero), also in relation to the safety guaranteed to its citizens: “citizens act as a bodyguard to one another against slaves, and against evil-doers, without pay” says Hiero who then adds “because of their homelands, citizens enjoy security” (*Hier*. 4.1-4).

It is, however, only in the sixth chapter, when the theme of war is reprised that the notion of solidarity uniting all the citizens is contrasted with the tyrant’s isolation. Once again, the arguments of the two protagonists appear to be as distant as ever and the overtones in the language used by Hiero seem to emphasize that distance.

> (7) If you too have experience of war, Simonides, and have ever before now been posted near the enemy line, recall what sort of food you took at that time, and what sort of sleep you had. (8) The kind of pain you suffered then is the kind the tyrants have, and still more terrible. For the tyrants believe they see enemies not only in front of them, but on every side. (9) After he heard this, Simonides interrupted and said, “I think you put some things extremely well. For war is a fearful thing. But nevertheless, Hiero, we at any rate post guards, when we are on a campaign, and take our share of food and sleep with confidence”. (10) And Hiero said, “Yes, by Zeus, Simonides, for the laws stand watch over the guards, so that they fear for themselves and in your behalf. But the tyrants hire guards, like harvesters, for pay”.

Of note is the reference to the laws that protect citizens and literally act as guards for them: the laws stand watch over the guards. The laws, according

to Hiero, are vigilant that everyone in battle do what he must, that is, what the law requires, in this case, performing the function of guard. The tyrant, on the other hand, can only count on the protection of mercenaries who defend him in exchange for pay. Equally noteworthy is Simonides' silence who seems not to grasp the difference between the kind of vigilance free citizens entrust to their laws (in this case the laws of war) and the role assigned to mercenaries. For that reason Strauss considered Simonides' remarks in this context to be superficial. The distance between the two points of view is obvious and may be seen again at another point in the dialogue, in chapter ten, when Simonides counsels Hiero to relieve the citizens from the burden of fighting for the city and to appoint the mercenaries their guardians. The expression used here to define the role of mercenaries is akin to that used in chapter six to define the function of vigilance entrusted to the laws: the mercenaries, according to Simonides, should "stand guard for the citizens" (*Hier*. 10.6). His use of this expression reveals what separates him from Hiero: Simonides seems unaware of the link between the condition of being a citizen and shouldering the burden of defending one's polis, a task regulated by the laws. But Hiero is keenly aware of this, which is why he regrets the loss of this condition and envies those who enjoy it.

S. Brown Ferrario has drawn attention to the relationship between what Hiero declares in chapter six and what Simonides proposes in chapter ten, observing that Simonides proposal "that the tyrant should turn the services of his personal guard over to the protection of the entire populace (*Hier.* 10.2–8)" in effect refers to "a complaint by Hiero earlier in the dialogue that his guards cannot be trusted, in contrast to the watchmen of Greek military camps (*Hier.* 6.9-11). Hiero argues that the laws of their states shield the watchmen, with the result that they are concerned both for themselves and for their fellow-citizens, but that his guards are prevented from killing him only by their dubious loyalty to the money that they are paid. Law, then, is a literal protector of those who live under it (Hiero goes so far as to use the verb *prophulattousin*, saying that the laws "stand guard before" people (*Hier.* 6.10), and its lack not only endangers civic stability, but affects the value placed upon people's lives"[49]. In addition to these very endorsable considerations, there are other aspects also worth emphasizing. First of all is the fact that this is the only reference to the city's laws to be found in the entire dialogue and it is significant that it occurs as part of a meditation on the theme of war. It has sometimes been observed that in the *Hiero* Xenophon chose to refrain from making any reference to democratic ideology, to its key words[50], and in particular to the laws, but the theme of war

[49] Brown Ferrario 2017: 64.

[50] See Gelenczey-Mihálcz 2000: 115 on the fact that "key expressions of Athenian public life such as 'people', 'law', 'constitution' do not appear since they are all characteristic of the state of law". See also Tuplin 2004: 351.

is obviously an exception and reveals that there is not a total disconnection between the contents of the dialogue and Athenian democratic ideology[51].

The question of the text requires some further consideration. There is general agreement on the reading of the codices which tends to be adopted in editions and translations of the *Hiero*: it is the laws (*oi nomoi*) that protect the citizens. However, in the most recent edition of the *Hiero* Bandini and Dorion emend the text and read σύννομοι (fellow soldiers) instead of νόμοι (laws)[52]. Thus, it is their fellow soldiers and not the laws that stand watch over citizens engaged in combat. The argument supporting the choice to emend the manuscript tradition is that the laws cannot be the subject of the verb "to fear"[53]. However, the text can easily be read even in the version of the codices: the subject of the verb *phobeo* is not, in fact, the laws, but the guards who, fearing the laws, perform their duty: "the laws stand watch over the guards, so that they (the guards!) fear for themselves and in your behalf"[54]. The contrast in question is that between fear of the laws (fear on the part of the citizens who are acting as guards and so carefully perform their duty) and money, which is the motivation of the mercenaries who assume the same role. We should not underestimate the strength of the relationship Hiero recognizes between respecting the law and fearing it: this is a theme that lies at the very heart of Athenian democratic ideology. Pericles in his funeral oration says it is the citizens' fear of the law that is the distinctive mark of the Athenian constitution and he does this during a celebration of the public virtues of those fighting for the city[55]. A reference to a key theme of democratic ideology is clearly present in the *Hiero*. What a great distance lies between this view and Simonides' proposal to free the citizens from the duty of fighting for their city by entrusting their defense to mercenaries. The program, as we have seen, is found in chapter ten and contains the suggestion to assign to the tyrant's mercenaries as first duty the task of acting as the bodyguard of the whole community and rendering help to all. In this case Simonides affirms "if they were under orders to guard the citizens as well as the depot, the citizens would know that this is one service rendered to them by the mercenaries". Again, the mercenaries would be "competent to afford the citizens leisure for attending to their private affairs by guarding the vital positions" besides supporting them in common battles. Indeed, Simonides argues "when the citizens go campaigning, what is more useful to them than mercenaries? For these are, as a matter of course, the readiest to bear the brunt of toil and danger and watching (8). Further, when the citizens get it into their

[51] Cf. Tuplin 2004: 351, for the view that Xenophon was disconnected from the world of the democratic city in the *Hiero*.

[52] Bandini, Dorion 2021: 24.

[53] Bandini, Dorion 2021: 81.

[54] See Gray 2007: 131 "the guards fear 'about themselves', apparently because they fear the penalty if they do not do their duty according to the law".

[55] Poddighe 2019: 32-34.

heads that these troops do no harm to the innocent and hold the would-be malefactor in check, come to the rescue of the wronged, care for the citizens and shield them from danger, surely they are bound to pay the cost of them with a right good-will". Hiero shows interest but does not explicitly accept the advice and his silence, as Strauss noted, is ambiguous[56]. It may be helpful here to remember that the historical Hiero, not the "character" in the dialogue, after the victory of Cumae over the Tyrrhenians chose to share the merit of victory with the citizens of Syracuse. The reference is to the dedication of Tyrrhenian spoils to Zeus in the sanctuary of Olympia by Hiero after his naval victory at Cumae over the Etruscans (Tyrrhenians) who were attacking the city (474-473 BC). The inscription reads: Hiero, son of Deinomenes, and the Syracusans (dedicated) to Zeus the Tyrrhenian spoils of Cumae (Meiggs, Lewis n. 29) The communicative strategy adopted by Hiero to convey his message in a Panhellenic context after the Persian wars is clear: the tyrant does not refer to his political or military titles. The omission of the political title may indicate a desire to avoid the explicit mention of tyranny in a Panhellenic context such as Olympia and the overlap between the figure of Hiero the "citizen" and that of the tyrant. It is noteworthy that Hiero does not appear to be solely responsible for the sacrifice to Zeus, and that the Syracusans are therefore associated with him. That is, he does not appear to be solely responsible for the victory, which is deliberately shared with the entire city community. Hiero here presents himself as a "private citizen"[57]. In the dialogue, moreover, Hiero appears to be aware that for a citizen service performed by mercenaries in battle is something reprehensible and therefore he affirms "no burden presses more heavily on the citizens than that, since they believe that these troops are maintained not in the interests of equality, but for the despot's personal ends" (*Hier.* 8.10).

In conclusion, how are we to understand Xenophon's decision to have Hiero pronounce speeches about war fought by citizens and so evoke a key theme of democratic ideology? How to explain the dialogue's emphasis on the theme of war: from the deliberation by decision makers, to the laws that regulate the roles of citizens in battle, and the honor that comes from victory? And how should we account for the reverse perspective from which Simonides views citizens' military service: a burden they need to be relieved of in order to devote themselves to private affairs? The scholarship has suggested that Simonides' proposal, so distant from the values Hiero has evoked, should be understood as a program of reform without any moral component and for this reason Xenophon chose Simonides to represent the role of the sage rather than

[56] Strauss 1961a: 123 n. 35: "Whether the things Simonides teaches are the best things will depend on whether the instruction that he gives to the tyrant is gratifying to the latter. The answer to this question remains as ambiguous as Hiero's silence at the end of the dialogue".

[57] On this point see Luraghi 1994: 354-36; Harrell 2002; Chies 2021: 84-88.

Socrates. According to this view, the *Hiero* is essentially a *speculum principis* in which Xenophon did not wish to assign the role of "magister" to Socrates[58]. This view would account for the purely technical and practical nature of Simonides's proposals to reform the tyranny in the concluding chapters when Simonides explains to the tyrant how he can obtain both the advantages of absolute power and popularity (*Hier*. 9-11). One example is when he suggests that the tyrant should leave to others the job of punishing while reserving for himself the distribution of rewards that engender gratitude: especially by encouraging emulation, giving prizes to those who distinguish themselves through their industriousness and innovativeness. The prospect of winning a prize would induce many to perform their work more enthusiastically and would stimulate them to invent useful things. Or when he advises Hiero to lavish money, not on himself but on the city, to provide it with walls, ports, temples, porticoes so as to earn the goodwill of the citizens he governs. In short, they view the *Hiero* as a technical work. Compatible with this reading is the theory (according to V. Gray) that Xenophon's intention in the *Hiero* was to set up the image of an enlightened tyrant which he carries out by demolishing popular (Athenian) representations of tyranny[59]. But if this was Xenophon's aim, the problem remains of explaining why he gave Hiero the task of evoking a theme so representative of democratic ideology like the relationship between the citizen and war[60]: a theme whose importance Simonides is clearly unable to downplay. How should we explain the evocation of this theme before an Athenian audience? The only audience Xenophon could have been targeting was that of Athens. Like his contemporary Isocrates, it was Athenian public opinion which he hoped to influence. The entire body of his work is destined for Athens. What purpose was there in proposing the contents of the *Hiero* to the Athenians? If his aim was to accustom Athenian attitudes, so sensitive on this point, to the emergence and consolidation of other forms of government, then it is hard to explain his choice to raise a key theme in Athenian democratic ideology such as citizens' military function without effectively demolishing it. If, as has been suggested, Xenophon's intent was to address the question of enlightened monarchy (of which the Hellenistic dynasties would become the glaring incarnation) it is highly unlikely the Athenian public in the mid fourth century would have viewed such contents positively. Strauss has effectively shown that not only do Simonides's speeches lack any concrete references to the potential reformability of the tyranny[61], they also clearly espouse a utilitarian

[58] Zuolo 2017.

[59] Cf. Gray 1986: 123.

[60] On democratic ideology in which the citizen at war serves his community and the contrast with the selfish motivation of the tyrant in the *Hiero* see Seager (2001: 385-386 n. 5) who rightly observes that Hiero "may try to make his city great, but only because to increase his city is to reinforce his own power (*Hier*. 11.13)".

[61] Strauss 1961a: 105-107; see Fussi 2011: 196-199, 200, 283-284; Buzzetti 2015: 246-254.

ethic that relegates those who are governed into subjects while the solutions Simonides proposes are essentially incompatible with an effective policy of legitimizing tyranny. Hence Strauss' opinion that the dialogue was dealing with a theoretical question[62] and should not be read as a practical manual for an enlightened tyrant. Certainly Hiero's silence on the quality of Simonides' reforms is a pregnant one, as Strauss noted. And Xenophon's choice to have Hiero pronounce speeches on war fought by citizens, speeches that contain key words of democratic ideology, should not be underestimated.

[62] *Supra* n. 25.

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