

THE SON OF PHARNABAZOS  
AND PARAPITA, A PERSIAN COMPETING  
IN THE OLYMPIC GAMES: XENOPHON  
*HELLENICA* 4.1.39-40\*

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**Summary:** This article seeks to develop, with some significant change, the arguments put forward by Bresson to show that a Persian boy, the son of Pharnabazos, was allowed to compete in the Olympic Games. It is argued that at Olympia his admission was supported by his older Spartan lover, himself an Olympic athlete, and by the Spartan king Agesilaos who acted as the boy's guardian. These arguments support the view recently advanced by Nielsen and, at greater length, by Remijsen that non-Greeks were not excluded from competing in the Olympic Games.

In recent years the widely held view that only Greeks were allowed to compete in the ancient Olympic Games has been challenged. First, Nielsen (2014: 136) wrote that “the Olympic authorities seem to have taken an inclusive rather than an exclusive view of who was a Greek, and there is no known instance of an athlete denied admission on account of his ethnic identity.” Then, very recently, Remijsen has presented at length arguments that “the so-called ‘Panhellenic’ games never knew a rule excluding non-Greeks from participation” (Remijsen 2019: 1). One case that would be important for this argument, if accepted, is the participation in

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the Olympic Games in the early fourth century of a Persian boy, the son of Pharnabazos. Already in 2002 Bresson had argued that this boy was admitted as a contestant, but his argument has attracted surprisingly little attention.<sup>1</sup> (His article is commented on by Remijsen 2019: 20 with note 61, but not developed as a major argument.) It is the purpose of this paper to support Bresson's arguments, with some modification, and so to agree with Nielsen and Remijsen that the Games were not exclusively for Greeks.

The crucial text is Xenophon's *Hellenica* 4.1.39-40, where Xenophon gives a brief account of the relations between Agesilaos II, king of Sparta, and an unnamed son of the Persian satrap Pharnabazos and his wife Parapita. (Although the boy's parents are both named, his own name is never mentioned: he will be referred to henceforth as "the Son".) The text reads:

καὶ ὁ μὲν Φαρνάβαζος ἀναβάς ἐπὶ τὸν ἵππον ἀπήει, ὁ δὲ ἐκ τῆς Παραπίτας υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, καλὸς ἔτι ὢν, ὑπολειφθεὶς καὶ προσδραμῶν, Ξένον σε, ἔφη, ὦ Ἀγησίλαε, ποιοῦμαι. Ἐγὼ δέ γε δέχομαι. Μέμνησό νυν, ἔφη. καὶ εὐθὺς τὸ παλτόν (εἶχε δὲ καλόν) ἔδωκε τῷ Ἀγησιλάῳ. ὁ δὲ δεξάμενος, φάλαρα ἔχοντος περὶ τῷ ἵππῳ Ἰδαίου τοῦ γραφέως πάγκαλα, περιελὼν ἀντέδωκεν αὐτῷ. Τότε μὲν οὖν ὁ παῖς ἀναπηδήσας ἐπὶ τὸν ἵππον μετεδίωκε τὸν πατέρα. ὡς δ' ἐν τῇ τοῦ Φαρναβάζου ἀποδημία ἀποστερῶν ἀδελφὸς τὴν ἀρχὴν φυγάδα ἐποίησε τὸν τῆς Παραπίτας υἱόν, τὰ τ' ἄλλα ὁ Ἀγησίλαος ἐπεμελεῖτο αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐρασθέντος αὐτοῦ τοῦ Εὐάλκου υἱέος Ἀθηναίου, πάντ' ἐποίησεν ὅπως ἂν δι' ἐκεῖνον ἐγκριθεῖν τὸ στάδιον ἐν Ὀλυμπίᾳ, μέγιστος ὢν τῶν παίδων.

Pharnabazos mounted his horse and went away, but his son by Parapita, who was still a handsome boy, remained behind and, running up, said, "Agesilaos, I make you my *xenos*." "And I accept." "Then remember," he said. And immediately he gave his javelin (he had a fine one) to Agesilaos. He accepted, and, since Idaios the secretary had very fine

1 The title of Bresson's article ('Un «Athénien» à Sparte ou Plutarque lecteur de Xénophon') does not reveal the article's important contribution to the study of the Olympic Games.

trappings on his horse, he took them off and gave them to him in exchange. Then the boy jumped on his horse and went after his father. As, during the absence of Pharnabazos, his brother deprived the son of Parapita of his position and made him an exile, Agesilaos took care of him generally, and in particular, after Athenaios son of Eualkes had fallen in love with him, used every effort so that on his account<sup>2</sup> he might be entered for the *stadion* at Olympia, since he was the biggest of the boys.<sup>3</sup>

The interpretation of this passage poses numerous problems, but a very acute and careful analysis by Bresson (2002) has done much to clarify these difficulties. The present article accepts Bresson's conclusions, except on one major issue, namely the nature of the relationship between the Son and Athenaios son of Eualkes.

The Persian boy's story is also presented in a passage of Plutarch (*Ages.* 13.1-4), which ends as follows:

καί τι καί τῶν ἐρωτικῶν αὐτῷ συνέπραξεν. ἠράσθη γάρ ἀθλητοῦ παιδός ἐξ Ἀθηνῶν· ἐπεὶ δὲ μέγας ὢν καὶ σκληρὸς Ὀλυμπίασιν ἐκινδύνευσεν ἐκκριθῆναι, καταφεύγει πρὸς τὸν Ἀγησίλαον ὁ Πέρσης δεόμενος ὑπὲρ τοῦ παιδός· ὁ δὲ καὶ τοῦτο βουλούμενος αὐτῷ χαρίζεσθαι μάλα μόλις διεπράξατο σὺν πολλῇ πραγματείᾳ.

And he also gave him some assistance in matters of love. For he fell in love with a boy athlete from Athens; and, since, because he was big and strong, he risked being excluded at the Olympic Games, the Persian turned to Agesilaos with a request on the boy's behalf; and, since Agesilaos wanted to do him this favour, with great difficulty and much trouble he arranged it.

Some of Plutarch's text will be discussed later, but it is clear (Bresson 2002: 24) that Plutarch's account is taken from that of Xenophon, even if

- 2 Bresson 2002: 39-40 proposed as a translation of *διά* in *δι' ἐκεῖνον* "au même titre que". He now suggests (pers. comm.) for *δι' ἐκεῖνον* the translation "on his account", which I have adopted.
- 3 Xenophon's wording in this passage is brief but dense and complex, which causes difficulties in translation. The most difficult phrases are discussed below.

it gives a rather different tone to some of the story. While Plutarch's account shows how a highly intelligent Greek with strong literary interests (or possibly a reader employed to make preliminary notes and extracts for Plutarch's use) read and understood Xenophon's text, it has no independent authority and cannot be used to correct or supplement Xenophon's version of the events.

Xenophon relates that Agesilaos and the Son first met in Asia Minor, an event that can be dated in 395/4.<sup>4</sup> The Son, then still a boy, made Agesilaos his guest-friend (*xenos*), and Agesilaos accepted a mutual relationship of *xenia*. (Clearly, in addition to the purely personal relationship between Agesilaos and the Son, their mutual *xenia* had considerable political importance,<sup>5</sup> which will have given Agesilaos an additional motive for maintaining the link.) Later, at a time when Pharnabazos was absent, the Son was driven into exile. Bresson argues that, when in exile, the Son made his way to Sparta and entered the *agoge*, the system of education for juvenile Spartiates;<sup>6</sup> there he formed a homosexual relationship with Athenaios son of Eualkes, who was a boy from an eminent Spartiate family; and, when Athenaios entered for the boys' sprint (*stadion*) at the Olympic Games, thanks to the efforts of Agesilaos, the Son was also admitted to the same race. This reading of the Greek differs notably from that of Plutarch (which has been, as Bresson 2002: 26-28 notes, very influential in modern scholarship) because Plutarch takes Xenophon to mean that the Son fell in love with an Athenian boy, and persuaded Agesilaos to intervene in order to have the Athenian boy admitted to the boys' sprint at the Olympics.

Xenophon's statement (repeated by Plutarch) that, when the Son became an exile, Agesilaos took great care of him suggests strongly that the Son came to Sparta. Bresson's demonstration (2002: 30-31) that the name Eualkes, in that form, is well attested in Sparta (and other areas of the Greek world), while at Athens the form Eualkos is found but not Eualkes,

4 For the chronology of Agesilaos' life see Cartledge 1987: 432-60.

5 On the political and diplomatic importance of Agesilaos' *xenia* with the Son see Cartledge 1987: 193, echoed by Bresson 2002: 25-26.

6 The *agoge* normally began at the age of seven, but the Son would presumably join it at a point suitable to his age when he arrived in Sparta. On the *agoge* and the age-categories within it see Kennell 1995: 115-42 and Lupi 2000: 27-46.

strongly supports the argument, put forward by Bresson, that in Xenophon's text the Son's lover is Spartan and so Athenaios is the personal name of a Spartan and not a statement of Athenian ethnic status. There is then the difficulty of knowing whether Eualkes is son of Athenaios or vice versa: Bresson (2002: 32-34) argues persuasively that Athenaios is the Son. Plutarch, who omits the name Eualkes and replaces 'son' by 'boy', evidently understands Athenaios as an ethnic, rendering it in his text as 'from Athens', but that reading, as Bresson observes (2002: 28 with notes 16 and 17), would make Xenophon's original phrase very odd Greek.

Nonetheless, there remain difficulties in understanding what Xenophon's text says about the Son and the Spartan called Athenaios. In particular, the following words need to be read very carefully:

τά τ' ἄλλα ὁ Ἀγησίλαος ἐπεμελεῖτο αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐρασθέντος αὐτοῦ τοῦ Εὐάλκου υἱέος Ἀθηναίου, πάντ' ἐποίησεν ὅπως ἂν δι' ἐκεῖνον ἐγκριθεῖη τὸ στάδιον ἐν Ὀλυμπίᾳ, μέγιστος ὢν τῶν παίδων.

[The translation given above is: *Agesilaos took care of him generally, and in particular, after Athenaios son of Eualkes had fallen in love with him, used every effort so that on his account<sup>7</sup> he might be entered for the stadion at Olympia, since he was the biggest of the boys.* This interpretation of the words depends on arguments that follow.]

Since the verb ἔραμαι takes an object in the genitive case, in the genitive absolute phrase ἐρασθέντος αὐτοῦ τοῦ Εὐάλκου υἱέος Ἀθηναίου every single word is in the genitive case, and so the phrase could mean that the Son (to whom αὐτοῦ clearly refers) fell in love with Athenaios, or that Athenaios fell in love with the Son. Bresson (2002: 39 with note 49) envisages the possibility that Athenaios fell in love with the Son, but rejects it. His main reason is the parallels to be found elsewhere in Xenophon's works for the use of αὐτοῦ in a genitive absolute, although the only example actually cited is a phrase from *Hell.* 3.3.4, where the first word is a participle and the second is αὐτοῦ, referring to Agesilaos who is performing the action. A search in *TLG* shows that Xenophon did indeed use many

7 The phrase "on his account" I owe to Alain Bresson: see note 3 above.

such genitive absolute phrases, beginning with a participle followed immediately by αὐτοῦ as the subject of the phrase. It does not follow, however, that the words ἐρασθέντος αὐτοῦ τοῦ Εὐάλκου υἱός Ἀθηναίου must necessarily be read in the same way. Firstly, any oblique case of αὐτός used as an unemphatic pronoun is usually put second in its phrase, and this would presumably be the case in a genitive absolute whether the pronoun was the subject or the object of the verb;<sup>8</sup> and, secondly, a word search of Xenophon's writings in *TLG* shows no example, other than Xen. *Hell.* 4.1.40, of a genitive absolute including the word αὐτοῦ in which the verb has a genitive object: in other words, there is no parallel case by which the present text can be elucidated. In fact, in Xenophon's work this genitive absolute ἐρασθέντος αὐτοῦ τοῦ Εὐάλκου υἱός Ἀθηναίου is uniquely complex. However, a careful reading of the Greek shows that Xenophon did not write a phrase that was hopelessly ambiguous.

The reader might be guided by the fact that immediately before the genitive absolute there are the words ὁ Ἀγησίλαος ἐπεμελεῖτο αὐτοῦ, in which αὐτοῦ is the object in the genitive of the verb, so that when ἐρασθέντος αὐτοῦ follows immediately αὐτοῦ might again be taken as the genitive object of the verb. (Clearly in both cases the pronoun refers to the Son.) However, the words following the genitive absolute give a clearer indication. The pronoun ἐκεῖνος is defined in the lexicon *LSJ* as a "demonstr[ative] Pron[oun] ... generally with reference to what has gone immediately before".<sup>9</sup> Thus, according to normal usage, in the words quoted the pronoun will refer to Athenaios, the last person previously mentioned. It follows that the subject of the verb ἐγκριθείη is not Athenaios and must be the Son, who is described by the phrase "being the biggest of the boys." Athenaios' role here is significant. In the passage as a whole the two important figures are Agesilaos and the Son, and Athenaios' role must be subordinate to these two leading figures, but Athe-

8 Mastronarde 2013: 6: "The enclitic form of the personal pronouns (and also oblique forms of αὐτός as unemphatic pronoun) are usually found in second position within a colon".

9 This usage of ἐκεῖνος is pointed out by Bresson 2002: 40, citing *LSJ* sv 1-2. The meaning of ἐκεῖνος is of course different when it is contrasted with οὗτος, but that is not the case in the passage under discussion.

naios cannot be insignificant, since in this brief and highly selective account of Agesilaos' dealings with the Son Xenophon takes the trouble to include the homosexual relationship between Athenaios and the Son, and then to refer again to Athenaios in the phrase δι' ἐκεῖνον. Nonetheless, that phrase cannot mean that at Olympia Agesilaos interceded on behalf of the Son "because of Athenaios" (i.e. that Athenaios was somehow the prime reason for Agesilaos' intervention) since Agesilaos was acting for the sake of the Son.<sup>10</sup> However, Bresson (2002: 39-44) has shown that a Greek idiom found in other texts allows us to read Xenophon's phrase differently.

Bresson cites the following two texts:

Demosthenes 20.84:

ὕμεῖς, ὧ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, τιμῶντές ποτ' Ἰφικράτην, οὐ μόνον αὐτὸν ἐτιμήσατε, ἀλλὰ καὶ δι' ἐκεῖνον Στράβακα καὶ Πολύστρατον· καὶ πάλιν, Τιμοθέῳ διδόντες τὴν δωρεῖάν, δι' ἐκεῖνον ἐδώκατε καὶ Κλεάρχῳ καὶ τισιν ἄλλοις πολιτείαν· Χαβρίας δ' αὐτὸς ἐτιμήθη παρ' ὑμῖν μόνος.

You, men of Athens, when on one occasion you were honouring Iphikrates, honoured not only him but also on his account Strabax and Polystratos; and again, when making the award to Timotheos, on his account you granted citizenship to Klearchos and some others; but Chabrias himself was honoured by you on his own.

Demosthenes 23.141:

ὕμεῖς ἐποιήσασθ' ἔν τισι καιροῖς καὶ χρόνοις Ἀριοβαρζάνην πολίτην καὶ δι' ἐκεῖνον Φιλίσκον, ὥσπερ νῦν διὰ Κερσοβλέπτην Χαριδήμον.

10 Since Athenaios was clearly a leading Spartiate athlete, it is highly likely that Agesilaos was personally acquainted with him before the question of the Son's admission to the Olympic Games arose, and may have been moved by friendship for Athenaios as well as by concern for the Son when he intervened to have the Son admitted to the Games. Nonetheless Xenophon clearly states that Agesilaos acted at Olympia in the interests of the Son, and makes no mention of any desire to help Athenaios as a motive for Agesilaos' action.

Once, on a certain occasion, you made Ariobarzanes a citizen, and, on his account, Philiskos, just as now Charidemos on account of Kersobleptes.

The idiom is evidently used when an award is made to a leading figure, and, on account of that leading figure, a similar or comparable award is also made to some other less prominent person(s) associated with him. The final phrase of the second passage cited shows that an abbreviated version of the idiom could be used: in that text an award to Kersobleptes is not explicitly mentioned, but clearly he received one and, on account of Kersobleptes, Charidemos also received an award. These examples allow us to interpret the words of Xenophon about Agesilaos' intercession, where the abbreviated version of the idiom is used. At Olympia a privilege was granted to Athenaios but is not explicitly stated by Xenophon, and, on account of Athenaios, a similar grant was made to the Son. The privilege received by Athenaios must be evident from the context, since Xenophon does not think it necessary to specify it, and it must therefore be admission as a competitor for the *stadion*. Then, on account of Athenaios, with whom he was clearly known to be associated, the Son was also admitted to the *stadion*. Since, however, there were two such races, one for boys and one for men, there remains the question of which race, or races, Athenaios and the Son ran in. Bresson (2002: 34-40), after a long discussion, concludes that both ran in the boys' *stadion*, but that raises a major difficulty about the nature of their relationship.

If at the time of the Olympic Games at which they competed both were still teenagers,<sup>11</sup> their relationship would be very different from the typical homosexual relationship of an adolescent Spartiate. The role of pederasty in Spartiate education has often been discussed by modern scholars.<sup>12</sup> The prevailing view is that typically a young Spartiate man in his

11 On the age-category of boys at the Olympic Games see Frisch 1988: 179-85 and Crowther 2004: 87-92. See also Bresson 2002: 34-35 on the age-categories in Greek sport and the fact that a distinction between boys and men must have depended largely on physical appearance, since there would be no documentary attestation of age. On the procedures for the admission of boys see Remijsen 2019: 19-23.

12 See for example Lupi 2000: 192-94; Cartledge 2001: 91-105; Ducat 2006: 196-201; and Hodkinson 2007: 55-58. See also Lear 2014: 246-57 on pederasty in Greek sport.

twenties (the *erastes*) formed a relationship with a boy in his teens (the *eromenos*). This relationship was publicly acknowledged and accepted and was extremely important in preparing the *eromenos* for his role in Spartiate society. The behaviour of Spartiate adolescents was kept under observation by Spartiates generally, and any failure by a boy to live up to expectations could damage his reputation and his future prospects (Hodkinson 2007: 55-58). Since Xenophon, in his account, takes the trouble not only to mention the relationship between the Son and Athenaios but also to link it directly to Agesilaos' intervention at Olympia to help the Son, we can assume that the relationship between the two was, by Spartan standards, thoroughly respectable. It is certainly possible that occasionally two Spartiate adolescents undergoing the *agoge* were sexually attracted to each other, though there does not appear to be a known example; but it seems very unlikely that such a relationship would have met with public approval.<sup>13</sup> The situation described by Xenophon would be much easier to understand if Athenaios and the Son had the normal Spartiate relationship between *erastes* and *eromenos*, one being in his twenties and the other an adolescent.

There is also the significance of the verb used by Xenophon about admission to the *stadion*, namely ἐγκριθείη. As shown by Remijsen (2019: 19-23) in an extended analysis, the verb ἐγκρίνω and the related noun ἔγκρισις referred to the process by which organisers of athletic contests decided whether a candidate could be admitted to the boys' category. In addition to the passages analysed by Remijsen, there are in fact others where *enkrisis* might be taken to refer to athletes of all ages: Aristides, *Or.* 29(40).18 says: "we make *enkriseis* of athletes so that whichever of them is bad (*phaulos*) departs having put himself to shame", and Lucian, *Pro imaginibus* 11 has: "many say that ... even at the Olympic Games victors are not allowed to erect statues greater than life-size, but the Hellanodi-

13 Bresson 2002: 37-38 refers to the relationship between Kleonymos son of Sphodrias and Archidamos son of Agesilaos (*Xen. Hell.* 5.4.25-33) as an example of "amitiés entre garçons", but, at the time of the incident discussed by Xenophon (the notorious trial of Sphodrias), Kleonymos was still a boy but Archidamos was a young man (Cartledge 1987: 146-48, 157-58): Archidamos was clearly the *erastes* in this relationship – note the word ἐρῶν at *Xen. Hell.* 5.4.25.

kai see to it that not one exceeds the true size; and that the scrutiny (*exetasis*) of the statues is stricter than the checking (*enkrisis*) of the athletes.” Neither of these two passages explicitly says that *enkrisis* referred to men as well as to boys, but both are much more effective as arguments if taken to refer to all athletes. It thus appears that the term *enkrisis* was occasionally used by some writers more loosely (even if possibly incorrectly) to refer to the admission of both men and boys to athletic competitions. However, it is likely that in recounting Agesilaos’ intervention at Olympia on behalf of the Son, a context where precise adherence to Olympic practice was at stake and the issue concerned the age and maturity of the Son, Xenophon would use the technical terminology with care. In that case the use of ἐγκριθείη would mean that the Son was being assessed for admission to the boys’ *stadion*. It is important to note that, as Remijsen (2019: 21) has pointed out, the *enkrisis* was not an assessment of whether a candidate should be admitted to the boys’ category or to the men’s: it was simply an assessment for admission to the boys’ category, and exclusion (*ekkrisis*) did not in itself give admission to the men’s category. That explains why Agesilaos went to such trouble to ensure that the Son was accepted at the *enkrisis*: if rejected he might have been excluded completely from competition at the Games.

We thus have three pieces of evidence bearing on the relative ages of the Son and Athenaios. The normal pattern of homosexual relationships between young Spartans was between an adult *erastes* and an adolescent *eromenos*. The Son was admitted to the Olympic *stadion* ‘on account of’ (διά) Athenaios: in other words, Athenaios was a more prominent figure at Olympia than the Son. The Son was subject to *enkrisis*, i.e. he was assessed for admission to the boys’ *stadion*. In the light of that evidence we can conclude that Athenaios was the *erastes* and the Son, still adolescent, was the *eromenos*. It follows that Athenaios would have been too old to run in the boys’ race and must have competed with the men, while the Son will have run in the corresponding race for boys.

The relationship between Athenaios and the Son must have been evident to the Olympic officials, and no doubt to the wider public at Olympia, and Agesilaos’ acknowledgement of the relationship must have been equally evident. Xenophon certainly makes it very plain in his account.

However, general awareness of the relationship would have been an advantage rather than a disadvantage to the Son since at Sparta relations between *erastes* and *eromenos* were normal, even desirable, and publicly acknowledged, and the Eleians (according to the speaker Pausanias in Plato's *Symposium*) approved of paederastic relationships<sup>14</sup> The Son would have been seen as the *eromenos* of a Spartan athlete who was himself good enough to compete in the Olympic Games, and as the protégé of a Spartan king. In other words, although he was Persian the Son clearly had standing in the Greek world. In fact, Agesilaos presumably acted as the boy's guardian. Whereas adult athletes at the Olympics took an oath at the statue of Zeus Horkios, in the case of boy competitors the oath was taken for them by an accompanying adult (Paus. 5.24.9, Remijsen 2019: 30): presumably Agesilaos, who was clearly present at Olympia, will have taken the oath for the Son. A Spartan king should have had no difficulty in getting access to Olympic officials, but Agesilaos will in any case have been in direct contact with the officials over the admission of the Son as a competitor. In the period that followed Sparta's decisive victory over Elis around 400,<sup>15</sup> a Spartan king could speak with great authority to Eleians, but Agesilaos could also speak as the Son's *xenos* and as his *de facto* guardian. Whether Agesilaos could offer clear evidence about the Son's precise age would hardly matter if he used his considerable influence to urge the Eleian officials to treat the Son as a boy. Agesilaos evidently used the argument – no doubt among others not mentioned by Xenophon – that since there was a close personal relationship between Athenaios and the Son, and since Athenaios had been admitted to the men's *stadion*, the Son should therefore be admitted to the boys' *stadion* “on account of” Athenaios. Admitting the Son on that basis would avoid an all-too-obvious Eleian capitulation to pressure from a Spartan king.

For the Son to compete at the Olympics he would need to be familiar with Greek sport. Xenophon's account of the first meeting between the

14 Pl. *Symp.* 182B. There may have been an élite Eleian military unit composed of homosexual lovers like the Theban Sacred Band: Xen. *Symp.* 8.34, see Ogden 1996: 115 and Alonso & Freitag 2001: 211.

15 I have argued elsewhere (Roy 2009) that the war was fought from 402 to 400, but, whatever the precise date, the war clearly ended some few years before the Son sought admission to the Olympics.

Son and Agesilaos shows the Son already familiar with at least some Greek customs. He may have spoken Greek: in the whole episode of Agesilaos' meeting with Pharnabazos, at the end of which the Son spoke to Agesilaos (Xen. *Hell.* 4.1.29-40), Xenophon never mentions an interpreter, and the Son runs up to Agesilaos and speaks to him directly. Xenophon's account also requires that the Son be familiar with the Greek custom of *xenia*, since it is the Son who first says "I make you my *xenos*, Agesilaos" (Xen. *Hell.* 4.39). The Son's knowledge of the institution is not surprising, since he would have seen his father's ties of *xenia* with Greeks. The meeting between Agesilaos and Pharnabazos was set up by Apollophanes of Kyzikos, who had long been a *xenos* of Pharnabazos, and during the discussion, when Agesilaos touched on the fact that in Greek cities *xenoi* might find themselves fighting on opposite sides if their cities were at war, he was aware that Pharnabazos already knew that (Xen. *Hell.* 4.1.29, 34). The Son even knew in detail the words and actions needed to establish a tie of *xenia*, as Herman (1987: 58-61) has shown. Nonetheless, despite the Son's familiarity with at least some Greek customs, the Persians, as presented by Xenophon in this encounter, are very different from the Greeks. Agesilaos and his companions arrived first at the rendezvous and lay down on the grass to wait. Pharnabazos then arrived wearing clothes "worth much gold" and his servants spread out the embroidered rugs on which Persians liked to sit in comfort, but Pharnabazos, seeing Agesilaos' simplicity, also lay down on the grass (Xen. *Hell.* 4.1.30). Xenophon chooses here to show the contrast between the normal luxury of the Persians and Agesilaos' austerity (praiseworthy in Xenophon's view). The Son is thus depicted at that point as familiar with Greeks and at least some Greek customs, but still far from having adopted entirely a Greek life-style.<sup>16</sup>

To compete in the Olympics the Son must have trained as an athlete in the Greek manner and must also have accepted Greek athletic nudity.<sup>17</sup> The simplest explanation of the Son's thoroughgoing assimilation of Greek patterns of behaviour is to assume, as Bresson (2002: 41) does, that

16 Bresson 2002: 42 points out that the Son's family, the Pharnacids, had numerous contacts with Greeks over several generations.

17 On Hellenic athletic nudity see Christesen 2007: 63-65 and Nielsen 2007: 22-28. On sport at Sparta see Christesen 2014.

as an exile the Son had followed the Spartiate *agoge*. Non-Spartan boys, including Xenophon's sons, were admitted to the *agoge*, and Agesilaos could presumably have arranged the admission of the Son, as he must have arranged the admission of Xenophon's sons, having invited Xenophon to send his sons to Sparta (Plut. *Ages.* 20.2). Indeed the Son, as a *xenos* of Agesilaos, could have been treated as a member of Agesilaos' household.<sup>18</sup> Such a process of assimilation would however have taken time, as Bresson notes, and more time must be allowed for the (unknown) period between 395/4, when Agesilaos and the Son first met, and the beginning of the Son's exile.<sup>19</sup> Given that the Son first met Agesilaos in 395/4, and that he could still be described at Olympia as a boy ("the biggest of the boys"), the Games at which the Son could have competed were those of 392, 388, and 384. The short period between 395/4 and 392 leaves little time for all that must have happened in the Son's life before he competed at the Olympics. To be still considered a boy in 384, the Son would have had to be less than ten years old in 395/4, and Bresson (2002: 41) favours that solution. However, it seems questionable that Xenophon would have described the Son at the time of the first meeting as "still *kalos*" (καλὸς ἔτι ὢν) if he was so young,<sup>20</sup> and one might also wonder whether Agesilaos would have taken seriously an offer of *xenia* from a small boy. For these reasons there is a strong possibility that it was in the Games of 388 that the Son competed.

It is noteworthy that, as Bresson observes, Xenophon's account of what happened at Olympia avoids drawing attention to the fact that the

18 On non-Spartan boys in the *agoge*, and *xenoi* acting as foster-parents, see Hodkinson 2000: 342 with n. 11. Herman 1987: 152 supposes that the Son became a member of Agesilaos' household. There is no reason to think that education in the *agoge* made a non-Spartan boy a Spartan citizen: after the *agoge* Xenophon's son Gryllos returned to Athens and died fighting in the Athenian cavalry near Mantinea in 362 (Ollier 1959).

19 Bresson 2002: 41 notes that assimilation would take time, and (45-53) examines carefully the evidence for events in the family of Pharnabazos: however, given the limited evidence, it is difficult to date the beginning of the Son's exile with any confidence.

20 Bresson 2002: 41 n. 56 argues that "still *kalos*" should be interpreted in comparison to "biggest of the boys" later in the text and describing the boy years later: the point is valid, but hardly suggests a difference of about ten years.

boy admitted to the Games was Persian, a barbarian.<sup>21</sup> What is stressed instead is that, when Agesilaos interceded with the Olympic authorities on the Son's behalf, he made every effort to secure the Son's admission to a particular event. In fact, concentration in Xenophon's account on whether the Son was qualified by age and physique to enter the boys' *stadion* would divert readers' attention away from any question of ethnicity. As Bresson observes, Xenophon had no interest in presenting the Son as a barbarian at the Olympics, and that may explain the clearly deliberate failure to give the Son's name (though in this short passage Xenophon names both the Son's father and his mother, twice each). At any rate Xenophon says nothing to suggest that in the Son's admission to the Olympic Games his ethnicity was a subject of discussion, let alone a matter of controversy.

To conclude. It appears that in the early fourth century a Persian boy, the son of a famous Persian father, was allowed to compete in the Olympic Games. Arguments that non-Greeks were not excluded from the Olympics are therefore strengthened. When he competed the Son had clearly adopted much of the Greek way of life, and in particular much of the Greeks' athletic culture, and moreover in seeking admission to the games he had the support of his Spartan *erastes*, himself an Olympic athlete, and of a Spartan king acting in effect as his guardian. Xenophon writes of the Son's presence at the Games not as a matter of controversy at Olympia but as an interesting event – caring for the exiled son of a leading Persian – in the life of Agesilaos, to whom Xenophon devoted great attention. There may have been other non-Greek athletes at Panhellenic games in the classical period, though it seems unlikely that many non-Greeks would have become sufficiently adept in any Greek sport to compete at the highest level. Nonetheless, there is good reason to challenge the widely held view that the ancient Olympic Games were exclusively Greek.

21 Bresson 2002: 44. The same point is made by Remijsen 2019: 20 n. 61.

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