

While the idea that moral decadence induced by luxury is an important cause of events is taken as a distinguishing characteristic of much Hellenistic historiography, it is generally thought to have received its main impetus from Classical sources (Kurke 1992; Hall 1989; Raaflaub 1987; Lateiner 1989; Bernhardt 2003). A key term in this interpretation is *tryphē*, but its meaning is misunderstood and renders many literary passages confusing or opaque. Thus the whole historiographical tradition is cast into doubt and requires reexamination. This study argues that *tryphē* in *all* its Classical occurrences indicates an attitude of entitlement, an expectation that one will be the object of solicitous concern, and with this definition, many Classical passages become more vivid.

The new meaning is illustrated overtly in Eur. *Suppl.* 195-218, which is also the first datable occurrence of the word. This passage is not consistent with the current definition of weakness, softness, or effeminacy (*LSJ* s.v. *tryphē*: I. “softness, delicacy, daintiness”; “II. luxuriousness, wantonness”; “III. daintiness, fastidiousness”; s.v. *trypheros*: “effeminate, luxurious, voluptuous”), but indicates an expectation that the gods will supply whatever one wants. Similarly the old definition fails to explain Euripides *IA* 1303-7, where, e.g., Athena demonstrates *tryphē* in her spear: she expects to emerge with her desires met from the Judgment of Paris.

One would expect Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* to be a prime instance of *tryphē* in its second principal meaning of licentiousness or wantonness, and, indeed, the *LSJ* uses passages from it to define the verbal form, *tryphaō* (section II: “to be licentious, run riot, wax wanton, Ar. *Lys.* 405 etc”; s.v. τρυφή, section II: “luxuriousness, wantonness, τῶν γυναικῶν ἡ τ. Ar. *Lys.* 387.”). Yet *Lysistrata* and her companions are not seeking sexual gratification, but rather have embarked on a breathtakingly audacious act of *tryphē* in the sense of using their sexual attractiveness to impose their bidding on their men and force them to end the war. The women are expecting to get their own way by disrespecting the men around them and bending their husbands to their will. At Dem. 19.197, the word is used of a freeborn and modest woman who, once enslaved, refuses to join in improper behavior at a symposium. Likewise at Xenophon, *Mem.* 3.11.10, the courtesan Theodote turns away a man of *tryphē*, not because he is wanton, but rather because Theodote’s goal is to attract a man who will take care of her needs (*epimelomenon*), while the man of *tryphē* will demand that she attend to his, a frequent contrast that reinforces the revised definition of the word.

The definition of entitlement offers a far preferable translation for other passages, including: Ar. *Vesp.* 551, 688, *Nub.* 48, *Eccl.* 900-905, *Ran.* 21; Eur. *Troides* 996-7 and 1020-21, and *Or.* 1110-15.

In sum, the textual evidence demonstrates that *tryphē* does not indicate a softness that is effeminate or delicate in the sense that it is easily imposed on, weak, or yielding. Neither is it a wantonness or lack of self-control. Rather, if it is softness, it is the softness of one who need not toil, in the confident belief that one’s needs and desires will be met. It is a softness that controls others. Like the related term, *hybris*, which indicates the activity of disrespecting another (Fisher 1992), *tryphē* indicates an active expectation that one’s desires will be seen to by others. Both terms, which often occur in collocation, devalue the needs of others and overvalue one’s own.

The definition of *tryphē* must be corrected. The idea of decadent luxury in the historiography of the Classical period is a complex and nuanced idea which bears much more careful reexamination.