

Ancient Greek soldiers are more often mentioned as objects rather than sources of humor; think Lamachus in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* or the braggarts of New Comedy. Nor is Xenophon, with his reputation as the ultimate straight guy, high up on most scholars' lists of funny Greeks. This paper explores soldiers' humor in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, using perspectives both from classical scholarship and from modern psychological and sociological research on humor in military contexts. Although the *Anabasis* is of course the literary construction of a highly self-conscious author, Xenophon's narrative reflects a real intimacy with the actual conditions of ancient soldiery and therefore provides unique insight into the production and reception of humor in a Classical Greek army.

In the army of Xenophon's *Anabasis*, soldiers' humor serves manifold purposes. Some are the common currency of warriors across the ages: jesting in the face of danger to prove one's courage, mocking the cowardly other, and denigrating the capabilities of a formidable foe. Others are more specific to antiquity: quelling incipient panic, and justifying the domination of captives.

Soldiers' humor in the *Anabasis*, moreover, sheds light on Xenophon's narrative technique. Xenophon relates men's quips as a way of portraying their characters. He also highlights his own use of humor, often as a way of defusing opponents' criticisms and exaggerating his own capabilities. An extended joke (*An.* 4.6.10-21) about "stealing a mountain" occupied by enemy forces offers Xenophon the opportunity to present humorous send-ups of both Spartan and Athenian values, in the process shedding light on popular comic stereotypes about Athens and Sparta held by the army's ordinary soldiers.

The paper closes by reviewing some differences between ancient and modern military humor. While modern combat humor is often sardonic and physical, ancient soldiers' humor did not much play with the physical wreckage of war, partly because the weapons of antiquity could not rend human flesh as modern bombs and shells do.