



## A Reading of Xenophon's *Anabasis*: Historiographical & Narratological Approaches

### I) Introduction:

Xenophon has had perennial appeal and interest for students of the Classics. He has been a staple of elementary Greek language instruction. His Socratic writings, his story telling abilities in the *Anabasis* and his coverage of Greek history have assured him a central place in Classical scholarship and education. At the same time, however, there has been bias against Xenophon from the scholarly perspective. He is seen as inferior to Thucydides as an historian, to Plato as a philosopher, and to both as a prose stylist and intellect. He is seen as an important source, but an unimportant intellect; a clear writer but not a prose stylist of note. There has of late, however, been a resurgence of scholarly interest in Xenophon: new large-scale studies of the *Cyropaedia* and *Oeconomicus*; new school texts of the *Hellenica*; and new translations of *Oeconomicus* and *Memorabilia*. But there has not been the same attention paid to the *Anabasis*, perhaps the most exciting, curious and readable text in Xenophon's corpus.

This study looks to sketch out a reading of the *Anabasis* that will illuminate some of the more interesting aspects of this text. There are, in short, Xenophon's rhetorical purposes in writing, and the manner in which he develops his narrative. The inquiry starts from a question that occurs to the reader when the end of the text is reached and there is a vague sense of uneasiness about the ending, a sense that things have not turned out as we thought they would, that there is still a questions left unsettled of unanswered: what is this story really about? Xenophon does not provide a satisfying sense of closure to his narrative, nor leave the reader with a feeling that the inevitability of the story so far has led irresistibly to finish at this point, with all questions answered and nothing more to be said. This study hopes to show how this is the case, and why it is significant for an understanding of the text as a whole, for an understanding of what the *Anabasis* is really about.

### II) Overview of Narrative of *Anabasis*

A schematic summary and analysis of the plot reveals both clear and significant patterns in the narrative, as well as problems with its ending. In Books III-VII, the story of the retreat of the Greek Cyreans after the defeat of Cyrus at Cunaxa, Xenophon develops a pattern or rhythm in narrative. Each new book (or chapter or scene one might say) begins with a mod of rising action. This is followed quickly by an onset of troubles or difficulties which has the air of optimism and a looking ahead to progress toward the ultimate goal: a homecoming (*nostos*). Xenophon uses nightfall and daybreak as markers to signal a smooth, natural transition between some books, both in the literal temporal sense of night as end and day as beginning, but also figuratively with night representing gloom and difficulty, and day representing clarity and hope. This is the case for the movement from Book I to II and from Book III to IV, while Book II ends at gloomy night and Book III starts with the same time and mood before the literal and figurative movement into light and hope. Books IV and V both end on high notes that are continued at the start of Books I and VI. These are discernable markers in the plot, almost like scene changes, that allow the reader to feel for the gist of the plot as a whole. They serve also to help build dramatic tension as the ultimately false climaxes of Books IV, V, and VI entice the reader to feel that the army is coming closer and closer to its goal of a homecoming. The end of Book VII, however, throws the whole question of the army's goal and the presumed direction of the army and of the plot into question. Simply put, the swift, sketchy conclusion to Book VII leaves the Greek Cyreans without a homecoming and the reader with more questions than answers about what will happen to the army as a whole and what will happen to the character of Xenophon.

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### III) Comparison with other sources for the story of the Ten Thousand:

Xenophon is the most extensive source we have for these events, the only complete text and one of the few we know of from a participant or near contemporary of the events. We do know that others from that time, some who were even involved in these events, wrote about them. We have fragments of these writings and the works of later authors who cite these sources. There are fragments of Ctesias, Sophocles, Deinon, and Euphorus. We have brief comments from Plutarch and Isocrates, as well as more specific remarks from

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Diogenes Laertius, Diodorus Siculus, and a synopsis of the mysterious Themistogenes of Syracuse. There were people out there writing about what Xenophon wrote about, from contemporary times on from different perspectives and backgrounds. An examination of Diogenes, Diodorus, and Themistogenes in particular is helpful for thinking about the *Anabasis* from the perspective of our initial question of why Xenophon ended his narrative where and how he did.

Xenophon, in contrast to others who told of the Cyreans, never signs a end (tollow) to his story of the journey of the Cyreans. He had narrated a few episodes that seemed like climaxes, that could have marked a tolow, especially the yalatta yalatta ("the sea! The sea!" scene and his arrival at Chrysopolis. Not only were these not conclusions, however, they were, in fact, ironic reminders that these soldiers were still far from home. That Xenophon could have marked a tolow, as others had, but chose not to, indicates that his text, unless completely open-ended and lacking closure, must have some other focus, must be 'about' something other than the Cyreans. A comparison, then, with the other sources for the Cyreans (both the fragmentary and the more complete accounts) indicates that Xenophon's shaping of his narrative in the *Anabasis* was unique. In both the scope of its narrative (where he begins and ends his story) and in its details, the

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*Anabasis* stands as one man's original and idiosyncratic appreciation of the adventures of the Cyreans. The ramifications of this fundamental insight for an understanding of the text as a whole are tremendous.

### IV) Xenophon's Exilic Rhetoric: Author and Audience:

Xenophon's *Anabasis* has received much scholarly attention from both historical and literary perspectives. Both approaches, however, have been limited. Historical studies see elements of apologia as distorting historical "fact", while literary studies view such personal intrusions into the text as mere *Tendenz*. What has been overlooked, however, is the complex (and, for its period, unique) relationship between three characters: Xenophon the author, Xenophon the figure in his text; and the historical Xenophon. A thorough analysis of the narrative, combining a literary with a historical approach, reveals how this relationship shapes the text in a fundamental way, as well as how this text gives insight into the contemporary world of intra-Greek and Greek-Persian politics/

In this study I analyze Xenophon's rhetorical strategy as he

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manipulates this relationship between author, historical figure, and literary figure, and, consequently, the author/audience relationship. Central to this strategy is the way Xenophon as author creates dramatic tension by emphasizing Xenophon the character's unflagging patriotic desire for a homecoming, while simultaneously signaling to the reader that exile rather than home awaited him in real life after the journey. He does this by framing his narration of the Cyreans' retreat in Books 3-7 with three key passages that provide the reader with backward glances to his pre-expedition life in Athens and forward glances to his exile from Athens. In Book 3.1.2-14, a flashback to Xenophon's meeting in Athens with Socrates, his motives in leaving home to follow the expedition are carefully portrayed as religious scruple following upon youthful indiscretion rather than a traitorous lack of patriotism. The lengthy digression in Book 5 on Scillus (5.3.4-13) previews and emphasizes Xenophon's exile/the pleasant aspects of this fair place of refuge' ('epostrof'kal'', 7.6.34) are set in terms of Xenophon's fulfillment of his religious devotion to Artemis, while his own life there is portrayed as the life of a resident-alien rather than of a resident of his own home. Near the end of Book 7 another mention of the impending exile (7.7.7) is juxtaposed ironically to a scene in which the character Xenophon and his friend Eucleides recall fondly Xenophon's pre-expedition life in

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Athens and look ahead in vain to a happy conclusion to his wanderings (7.8.1-4). It is through this interplay of shifting perspectives that Xenophon invites his reader to share his own privileged perspective as author. The reader is thereby accustomed to view the *Anabasis* not just as a story of the Cyreans' adventures, but as a personal odyssey of one man that was not limited by the chronological boundaries of the narrative, and did not end the way the character Xenophon thought it would, but as the reader knew it would.

A study of the persona of Xenophon the character that emerges from narrative, as well as the portrayal of the other main characters, reveals a marked pro-Athenian bias in Xenophon's authorial posture. His subtle handling of the issues behind the exile, combined with the emphases on his unflagging desire for a *nostos*, contributes to this Athenocentric focus. These elements of the narrative, along with Xenophon's exploitation of the unique confluence of author, character, and historical figure in one text, contribute to a rhetorical strategy that can be characterized as an exilic rhetoric designed to catch the sympathetic attention of an Athenian audience.

V) Conclusion:

This approach reveals how Xenophon exploits this unique tension between what the character Xenophon wants and where the plot seems headed, and what the author Xenophon knows will happen and which he signals to the reader. This can be described succinctly as the tension between Xenophon the character's desire for a homecoming and the author's and audience's knowledge that an exile will prevent this homecoming. The audience is granted the privileged perspective of the author, but is only told what the author wishes to reveal. What the author does choose to reveal indicates his rhetorical purposes and suggests who target audience is. Such an approach, such a reading of that recognizes the workings of Xenophon's exile rhetoric in the *Anabasis* reveals the text as more interesting, involved, creative, and valuable from literary, rhetorical, and historical perspectives.

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