

DID ALEXANDER THE GREAT READ XENOPHON?

It has been assumed by writers, ancient and modern, that Xenophon's literary output had a direct influence on Alexander the Great. But is there any evidence to prove that it did? In spite of the paucity of references to Xenophon in the surviving Alexander sources, many writers, both ancient and modern, have no doubts concerning the influence of Xenophon's writings on Alexander. An extreme position is suggested by Eunapius, the sophist and historian born at Sardis c. AD 345, when he says in his *Lives of the Sophists* (VS I, 453): 'Alexander the Great would not have become great if there had been no Xenophon'.¹ However, Eunapius might mean little more than Alexander had heard of, and been inspired by, what Xenophon had done in Asia. We are looking for evidence that Alexander had *read* Xenophon; most modern literature is in no doubt that he did. Almost all the major monographs on Alexander, those by Wilcken, Robinson, Tarn, Hammond and Lane Fox, among others, take it for granted that Alexander had read and learned from Xenophon.²

Did Alexander read Xenophon while being tutored by Aristotle? If he did not read Xenophon at Mieza under Aristotle's guidance, then he surely did so later: it would seem perfectly reasonable for someone preparing for an *anabasis* into Asia to read Xenophon's writings on that very topic. Lane Fox is quite emphatic about it:

No Macedonian had ever seen so far into Asia, and only one Greek general had described it; Xenophon the Athenian, who led the Ten Thousand Greeks through Mesopotamia at the turn of the century, and recorded the march in his memoirs. Faced with the Euphrates he had been shown how to cross it on rafts of stuffed skins; at the Danube, Alexander evidently turned to a trick he had read in a military history.³

Lane Fox is asserting clearly that Alexander not only knew of some of Xenophon's exploits, but that he knew also of major themes in Xenophon's writings and that he absorbed the details of the texts themselves and made use of them.

It may well be the case that Alexander did indeed read the writings of Xenophon, but the simple assumption that he did so needs to be challenged. Can we find evidence to support the hypothesis that Alexander actually *read* Xenophon? Is

¹ I borrow the reference to Eunapius from Due, B., 'Alexander's Inspiration and Ideas', 54. Due is herself obliged to Wayne Dye, J. for this reference to Eunapius, 'In search of the Philosopher King', *Archaeological News* XI (1982).

² See the list and specific references in Due, B., 'Alexander's Inspiration and Ideas', 59 note 3. To this list may be added P. Brunt who says that Alexander 'is likely to have read Xenophon' in *Anabasis Alexandri*, volume 1, 147, footnote 4.

the modern assumption that Alexander read Xenophon simply part of the legacy of Plutarch's general supposition that Alexander had regard for all things Greek? This paper sets out to explore this nexus of problems.

Plutarch informs us that Alexander was indeed well read. He tells us that he was 'devoted by nature to all kinds of learning and was a lover of books'.⁴ Later he adds that Alexander

regarded the *Iliad* as a handbook of the great art of war and took with him on his campaigns a text annotated by Aristotle, which became known as the casket copy and which he always kept under his pillow together with his dagger. When his campaigns had taken him far into the interior of Asia and he could find no other books, he ordered his treasurer Harpalus to send him some. Harpalus sent him the histories of Philistus, many of the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and the dithyrambic poems of Telestes and Philoxenus.⁵

This list in Plutarch makes no specific mention of Xenophon. This does not mean of course that he had not read Xenophon; in fact, it might imply the opposite: he already knew by heart what Xenophon had to say.

The surviving primary source material relating to Alexander makes little explicit mention of Xenophon, with a few notable exceptions. Before the battle of Issus, Arrian informs us that Alexander reminded his troops of the feat of Xenophon and the Ten Thousand in routing the 'Great King and his whole power near Babylon'.⁶ This of course does not prove that Alexander read Xenophon but only that he knew of the Ten Thousand's exploits. Moreover, since this is found in Arrian's history of Alexander, and since Arrian was a devotee of Xenophon, it is not unreasonable for us to be suspicious with regard to the historicity of this incident. Arrian is without doubt our best source for Alexander the Great, but since Arrian clearly modelled himself on Xenophon, any reference to Xenophon, or his writings in Arrian, needs to be treated with caution.⁷

At this point I should note that it would be misleading to suggest that the question of Xenophon's literary influence on Alexander has not been addressed

³ Lane Fox, R., *Alexander the Great*, 83.

⁴ Plutarch, *Alexander*, 8.

⁵ Plutarch, *Alexander*, 8. See Brown, T.S., 'Alexander's Book Order (Plut. *Alex.* 8)' 359-368 for analysis of this passage.

⁶ Arrian, *Anabasis*, 2. 7. 8-9.

⁷ See Bosworth, A.B., *Commentary on Arrian's History of Alexander, Volume I*, 6-7 where Bosworth remarks on the general influence that Xenophon had on Arrian. Bosworth admits that this is not as obvious in Arrian's history of Alexander but

before. One of the first to investigate this topic was Freya Stark in her book *Alexander's Path from Caria to Cilicia*, first published in 1958. Stark highlights what she considers to be the obvious influence of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* on the behaviour of Alexander. The *Cyropaedia* was a semi-fictional account of the life of Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian Empire. Stark, *prima facie*, does put forward a case to suggest that Alexander read at least the *Cyropaedia*. As she notes sagely: 'Anyone with a military or exploring mind would obviously study him [Xenophon] carefully before setting out on the Persian adventure'.⁸ However, in presenting parallels between the behaviour of Xenophon's Cyrus and Arrian's Alexander the Great,⁹ it seems to me that she does not give due recognition to the fact that Arrian was closely modelling himself on Xenophon the writer; Stark is therefore not critical enough of Arrian's references to Xenophon, and Arrian's consequent representation of the Alexander. Some of the parallels between Xenophon's Cyrus and Arrian's Alexander are striking, but are they result of Xenophon's influence on Arrian as opposed to Alexander's imitation of Cyrus?

Prima facie, Stark's methodology here is sound in that she attempts to locate important parallels between Cyrus and Alexander in sources besides Arrian. Sensibly she chooses Curtius Rufus a writer in the vulgate¹⁰ tradition, who is often at odds with Arrian's representation of Alexander. This *modus operandi* is prudent, as Stark attempts to list references to ideas common to both Arrian and Curtius which would help support her view that the original idea came from Xenophon's Cyrus, and was not simply a literary creation of Arrian; but ultimately, she fails in her execution of this. When one checks her references to Curtius one finds that they do not always indicate parallels in Arrian. A number of them are simply inaccurate and make no sense in terms of her argument.¹¹ More importantly, Stark notes herself that many of the parallels between Cyrus and Alexander are not significant evidence that Alexander read the *Cyropaedia* since they describe incidents that would follow on naturally to anyone in command. Many of these incidents are, in her own words, 'a

nevertheless it is a constant in his writings. As Bosworth notes Arrian was celebrated as the 'new Xenophon' and in his work the *Order of Battle* he simply calls himself Xenophon.

⁸ Stark, F., *Alexander's Path*, 203.

⁹ Stark, F., *Ibid.*, 203-5.

¹⁰ The source material for Alexander the Great can be divided into two traditions: the vulgate and the non-vulgate. The vulgate tradition is so called because the writers in this tradition primarily utilised the history of Cleitarchus, written c. 300 BC at Alexandria. This is the common (vulgar) source for writers in this tradition, represented by Curtius Rufus and Diodorus Siculus. The writers in the non-vulgate tradition, represented by Arrian and Plutarch, used a wider range of source material.

¹¹ See the references given by Stark in footnotes 24, 25, 28 and 30 on p. 265 of *Alexander's Path*.

commonplace of general-ship'.¹² Similar parallels then could be found between any two commanders. In addition Stark admits that Alexander's actions were those 'which anyone of that age might have thought of for himself'.¹³

Stark's assessment has been commented on before, most recently by Due,¹⁴ who quite correctly notes that Stark is not always accurate and is sometimes confused.¹⁵ Yet one can perhaps find fault with Due also. She, like Stark, in her assessment of the influence of Xenophon's writings limits herself essentially to the semi-fictional *Cyropaedia* and attempts to assess the importance of Xenophon's Cyrus as a precursor to Alexander through an examination in the main of Arrian and Plutarch from among the available source material. But since Arrian was clearly influenced strongly by Xenophon the writer, it is dangerous, as I have suggested, to pay too much attention to simple parallels between the behaviour of Cyrus and Alexander in Arrian. Plutarch is not much better as a source to examine in avoiding the direct influence of Xenophon the writer. Plutarch too belongs to the non-vulgate tradition of Arrian; he is also clearly enamoured of his subject.¹⁶ In the *Life of Alexander* he goes to great lengths to stress the philosophical 'self-control' of his subject.'¹⁷ A more revealing *modus operandi* would involve an attempt to focus on the paralleling of incidents or ideology in Xenophon with incidents or ideology that is common to a variety of Alexander sources, including especially the vulgate tradition of Curtius Rufus and Diodorus Siculus. Incidents or ideology associated with Alexander common to all sources cannot be the literary creation of Arrian. When we can locate incidents or ideology in Xenophon's writings that find a parallel in material common to all or most of the sources for Alexander, then we might say with more certainty that Alexander had read his Xenophon.

I do not think then that either Stark or Due demonstrates convincingly that Alexander read Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and acted on the information therein. On the basis of the more secure methodology noted above, the *Cyropaedia* is a text that yields at least one interesting parallel between Xenophon and Alexander. All sources for Alexander record his adoption of Persian dress and custom.¹⁸ Some give him

¹² Stark, F., *Ibid.*, 204.

¹³ Stark, F., *Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁴ Due, B., 'Alexander's Inspiration and Ideas', 53-60.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁶ Whitmarsh, T., 'Alexander's Hellenism and Plutarch's Textualism', 174-192 suggests that Plutarch was himself strongly influenced through reading Xenophon.

¹⁷ Whitmarsh, T., *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁸ See Curtius Rufus 6. 6. 1-10, Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, 45. 1-4, Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliothèque*, 17. 77. 4-5 and Arrian, 4. 7. 4-5.

different reasons for doing so but none deny that he did. In the *Cyropaedia*, Cyrus adopts Median clothes and customs; he also persuades his associates to wear the Median dress, something Alexander would later do. Indeed the complaint of Artabarus in the *Cyropaedia* might have come word for word, *mutatis mutandis*, from the mouth of any one of Alexander's older Macedonian guards:

We have taken Babylon; and we have borne down all before us; and yet, by Mithras, yesterday, had I not made my way with my fist through the multitude, I would not have been able to come near you (Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 7. 5. 53, Miller tr.).

Is this solid evidence of Alexander having read Xenophon? Perhaps. But there must have been many tales about Cyrus available in the oral tradition. Is this something that Alexander simply heard about?

I began with the *Cyropaedia* because that is the work that both Stark and Due examine, but, in my opinion, to assess the influence of Xenophon's writings on Alexander the most obvious work to consider first is the *Anabasis*. In 401 Xenophon, working as an Athenian mercenary in the pay of Cyrus 'the younger', marched into the heart of Asia as far as Cunaxa, just north of Babylon.¹⁹ Cyrus was attempting to remove his elder brother Artaxerxes from the throne. The plan floundered at the battle of Cunaxa where Cyrus was killed. After the generals of the mercenary Greek army had been murdered, Xenophon led the remnants back up the Tigris valley through the mountains of Armenia to the Black Sea. From there they travelled along the coast back to Thrace. Many years later Xenophon wrote an account of this journey, which has come down to us as the *Anabasis*.

Later in 334 Alexander made a much more successful journey to Babylon. It seems reasonable to assume that Alexander would have read Xenophon's *Anabasis* before setting out on his Asian campaign. But the question remains: is there any evidence to confirm that he did? Let us begin with what is, perhaps, his most obvious reason for doing so: the topography of their respective routes to Babylon. Although on the face of it they might appear to have travelled along two different paths, there are in fact some important overlaps. They both passed through Sardis, Celaenae, Tarsus, Issus and Myriandrus. There is no speculation about this; these places are mentioned in both accounts. At Myriandrus they changed direction. Alexander went south to

¹⁹ Cunaxa was in all probability quite close to where modern Baghdad stands today.

secure the Phoenician coast and then travelled into Egypt, while Xenophon and Cyrus, having crossed the Euphrates, went down its valley straight to Cunaxa. Later, however, their routes overlap again. After his time in Egypt Alexander came north again through Damascus to Thapsacus on the Euphrates. But instead of going south along Xenophon's route he crossed instead to the Tigris, and having traversed it, fought his last major battle against Darius at Gaugamela. Then he turned south along the Tigris to Babylon, the *same route*, though in the opposite direction, that Xenophon took after Cunaxa. So Xenophon knew and does describe the topography of a considerable stretch of the journey that Alexander later set out on.

Had Alexander read Xenophon's *Anabasis*, what might he have learned in terms of the topography and its associated problems? The first parallel that one comes across occurs in the fording of a river. In Xenophon's case this was the Euphrates. He tells us that the soldiers took skins which they had for tent covers, filled them with hay, sewed the edges together and floated across. (Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 1. 5. 10). Alexander, before crossing into Asia, attacked the Getae who had settled on the far side of the Ister (Danube). Arrian tells us that Alexander 'filled the leather tent covers with hay ... and ferried across as much of his force as he could in this way (Arrian, *Anabasis*, 1. 3. 6). However, this was perhaps by then standard military procedure, and Alexander need not necessarily have learned it from Xenophon.

When Alexander crossed the Hellespont into Asia Minor he took the coastal route through Sardis, Ephesus, Miletus and Halicarnassus on through the regions of Caria and Lycia. Interestingly enough Alexander, after the siege of Halicarnassus, sent Parmenion with the cavalry and the baggage train back to Sardis and then to Gordium. Clearly Alexander was well informed about the terrain that he would face in Caria and Lycia, which was not favourable for cavalry.²⁰ This suggests that regardless of Xenophon, local guides were used as reliable sources of information. Alexander then marched through Greater Phrygia to Gordium then south to the Cilician Gates, which was the only route from north to south through the Taurus Mountains. One explicit point of contact between Xenophon and Alexander then is the Gates leading into Cilicia. Did Alexander use Xenophon's account at this point? Our secondary literature takes it for granted that he did. Regarding the passes through Cilicia, Hammond notes:

²⁰ See Hamilton, J.R., *Alexander the Great*, 61.

Alexander was certainly aware of these strategic problems for having read Xenophon's *Anabasis* he knew how Cyrus had passed that way, and he was in touch with the Greeks of the locality.²¹

But in comparing the two passages the only things Alexander would seem to have learned from Xenophon's account is that there *were gates* through the mountains, and that they *were narrow*. Native scouts could easily have told him both of these things. In fact, if one compares the passages one sees that Cyrus had a specific plan:

From there they made ready to try to enter Cilicia. Now the entrance was by a wagon-road, exceedingly steep and impracticable for an army to pass if there was anybody to oppose it; and in fact, as report ran, Syennesis [king of Cilicia] was upon the heights, guarding the entrance; therefore Cyrus remained for a day in the plain. On the following day, however, a messenger came with word that Syennesis had abandoned the heights, because he had learned that Menon's army [Thessalian general in the pay of Alexander] was already in Cilicia, on his own side of the mountains, and because, further, he was getting reports that triremes belonging to the Lacedaemonians and to Cyrus were sailing around from Ionia to Cilicia under the command of Tamos [Egyptian admiral in the pay of Cyrus]. At any rate Cyrus climbed the mountains without seeing any opposition, and saw the camp where the Cilicians had been keeping guard (Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 1. 2. 21-22, Brownson tr.).

First of all Menon was sent by a different route into Cilicia and Cyrus also sent triremes around the coast to by-pass the Gates. Does Alexander prepare in either of these ways? No.

He himself marched to Cappadocia, won over all the country this side of the Halys and much beyond it. He made Sabictas satrap of Cappadocia and pushed on himself to the Cilician Gates. When he reached the camp of Cyrus, who had been with Xenophon, and saw that the Gates were strongly held, he left Parmenio there with the heavy armed foot-battalions, while he himself, about the first watch, took the hypaspists, archers and Agrianians, and marched by night to the Gates, meaning to take the guards unawares. His march was detected, but his daring counted just as much in his favour; the guards, he was leading in person, left their posts in flight. Next day at dawn he passed the Gates with his full force and descended into Cilicia (Arrian, *Anabasis*, 2. 4. 2-3, Brunt tr.).

²¹ Hammond, N.G.L., *Alexander the Great: King, Commander, and Statesman*, 92.

Lane Fox, who takes Alexander's knowledge of Xenophon for granted, suggests that:

From his readings of Xenophon's works, he could reason that he would shortly be faced by the defile of the Cilician Gates, impassible if obstructed by the enemy. There are ways over the surrounding shoulders of the Golek-Boghaz hills which do avoid the extreme narrows of the pass, but Alexander decided to force it. Either he made no reconnaissance, in the absence of native guides, or he reckoned like Xenophon, he could scare the defenders into withdrawal.²²

But that is not what happens in Xenophon's *Anabasis*. Cyrus had already, as was noted above, made plans to circumvent the Gates. Alexander made no such plans. He arrived to find the Gates blocked; he left the heavy infantry with Parmenio and with light-armed troops prepared a *night attack*. No pre-planning is evident and no thought is given to any circumventing manoeuvres. He seems to arrive at the Gates without any thought concerning the difficulties that Cyrus had faced here. Curtius also describes this event and gives much the same version as Arrian. In Curtius' version the Gates are abandoned because only a few are left to guard them while the rest finally follow Memnon the Greek's²³ plan of laying waste the land, originally suggested at the Granicus. When the few guards left behind to hold the Gates realise they are being abandoned, they flee also. Both sources then agree that Alexander simply showed up and was able to force the pass through good fortune as much as anything else.

So far, then, there is, in terms of topographical knowledge, little to suggest that Alexander learned anything from Xenophon's *Anabasis*. Soon after this incident the battle of Issus was fought and then Alexander went south with his policy of thalassocracy while Xenophon crossed the Euphrates and headed for Babylon. Almost two years later Alexander returned via Damascus to Thapsacus, having taken control of Egypt. What happens after this may be of significance. Alexander did not follow Xenophon's route down the Euphrates valley. Why? In the first place, the journey by Xenophon resulted in catastrophic conditions for the army:

Thence Cyrus marched thirteen stages through desert country, ninety parasangs, keeping the Euphrates on the right, and arrived at Pylae. In

²² Lane-Fox, R., *Alexander the Great*, 154-155.

²³ Memnon the Greek was, as his epithet suggests, a Greek mercenary fighting on the Persian side, as a great many Greek mercenaries did.

the course of these stages many of the baggage animals died of hunger, for there was no fodder and, in fact, no growing thing of any kind, but the land was absolutely bare; and the people who dwelt here made a living by quarrying mill-stones along the river banks, then fashioning them and taking them to Babylon, where they sold them and bought grain in exchange. As for the troops, their supply of grain gave out, and it was not possible to buy any except in the Lydian market attached to the barbarian army of Cyrus (Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 1. 4. 5-6, Brownson tr.)

By contrast, Alexander's route aimed to circumvent such difficulties:

Thence he continued inland through the country called Mesopotamia, keeping on his left the Euphrates and the mountains of Armenia. On setting out from the Euphrates he did not take the direct route for Babylon, since by going the other road all supplies were easier to obtain for the army, green fodder for the horses and provisions for the country, and the heat was less intense (Arrian, *Anabasis*, 3. 7. 3, Brunt tr.).

This at least seems to be a topographical/logistical element in Xenophon's *Anabasis* of which Alexander might well have utilised.²⁴ But once again both Arrian and Curtius inform us that at this point that Alexander heard that Darius was at the Tigris and so to the Tigris Alexander went. His concern was to defeat Darius and not simply to take Babylon. Xenophon's logistical information, if it was considered at all, lies unused. Alexander and Darius faced up to each other at Gaugamela where Darius was soundly defeated and never again faced Alexander in the field. So much then for the topography in Xenophon's *Anabasis*. Alexander seemingly makes little use of it.

Perhaps it is not really surprising that there is so little direct evidence in Arrian or Curtius to suggest that Alexander read Xenophon if we are only discussing topography or logistics. Whatever Alexander might have read he would still have used his own scouting system to determine the geography ahead of him and the logistics required to cross these regions. He was also surely better off with recent eyewitness accounts than an account written by Xenophon years before.

But in other areas, Lane Fox continually asserts that Alexander learned much from Xenophon's *Anabasis*, especially Persian habits.²⁵ He also suggests that Alexander's father, Philip, learned about 'oriental hazards' in general from the literary

²⁴ In general see Engels, D., *Alexander the Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army*, who argues that logistics limited and conditioned Alexander's strategies.

works of Xenophon.²⁶ But can these suppositions be substantiated? In fact, Alexander seems at times wilfully to ignore the information available in Xenophon's *Anabasis*. For instance Xenophon notes:

Furthermore, one who observes closely could see at a glance that while the King's empire was strong in its extent of territory and number of inhabitants, it was weak by reason of the greatness of the distances and the scattered condition of its forces, in case one should be swift in making his attack upon it (Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 1. 5. 9, Brownson tr.).

Yet after Issus Alexander chose instead to secure the East Coast of the Mediterranean giving Darius almost two years to regroup for Guagamela. Xenophon's *Anabasis*, the text that we might have expected to be most influential, yields little concrete evidence to support that Alexander did in fact read it since he does not use the information contained in it, in fact, he acts in a complete opposite way to that found in Xenophon's account. Xenophon's blitzkrieg is ignored in favour of a much more cautious approach.

But Xenophon's writings on Persia contained other kinds of information besides those just discussed. Most importantly, he records also his experiences of interaction with the Persians: how they behaved, what they believed, how they fought. This sort of information might have been of greater use to Alexander, but is there any concrete evidence to suggest that he made use of it? One episode that may be examined is the crossing of the Granicus river: unfortunately the source material that covers the battle at the Granicus river tantalisingly conflicts. If Alexander had read his Xenophon he would have known what to do at the Granicus:

As soon as it came to be late in the afternoon, it was time for the enemy to withdraw. For in no instance did the barbarians encamp at a distance of less than sixty stadia from the Greek camp, out of fear that the Greeks might attack them during the night. For a Persian army at night is a sorry thing. Their horses are tethered, and usually hobbled also to prevent their running away if they get loose from the tether, and hence in the case of any alarm a Persian has to put a saddle and bridle on his horse, and then has also to put on his own breastplate and mount his horse – and all these things are difficult at night and in the midst of confusion. It was for this reason that the Persians encamped

²⁵ Lane Fox, R., *Alexander the Great*, 122, 138.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

at a considerable distance from the Greeks (Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 3. 4. 34-35, Brunt tr.).

Xenophon argues that it is best to attack the Persians at night. According to Arrian, however, Alexander attacked immediately on reaching the Granicus and was successful after a fierce struggle in which he came close to losing his life. Arrian records also that Parmenio had suggested that an immediate attack would be an error. For this suggestion he found himself on the end of a put-down by Alexander. To Parmenio's objections about fighting at once Alexander says:

All this I know, Parmenio, but I should feel ashamed if after crossing the Hellespont easily, this petty stream (by this epithet did he belittle the Granicus) hinders us from crossing, just as we are (Arrian, *Anabasis*, 1. 13. 7, Brownson tr.).

Interestingly Parmenio's objections to an immediate attack, and his desire to postpone the assault until the following morning, seem indeed to be based on the sort of knowledge to be found in the Xenophon passage quoted above. Parmenio wanted to postpone an immediate attack because the Macedonians had superior numbers in terms of infantry and *knowing that the Persians would not camp close to the riverbank at night*, he thought it wiser for the Macedonians to attempt to cross early in the morning and make full use of their numerical advantage. Had he, and not Alexander, read his Xenophon?

The vulgate tradition though, preserved in Diodorus Siculus, gives a different version of events to that in Arrian. In Diodorus, Alexander does indeed wait and cross the Granicus at dawn, unopposed, presumably, because the Persians had withdrawn a sufficient distance to make camp at night. It may well be that Arrian chose a version of the events that allowed him to continue with a theme that runs throughout his history, namely the timid behaviour and limited thinking of Parmenio contrasted with Alexander's decisive and courageous mentality.²⁷ If the vulgate tradition contains the truth of what actually happened, it may indeed provide evidence that Alexander had read his Xenophon.

Another feature of Alexander's military technique was his speed of movement. This tactical feature was particularly important considering the size of the Persian

²⁷ See Arrian, *Anabasis*, 1. 18. 6-9 and 2. 24. 25 for other examples of Parmenio receiving a put down from Alexander.

empire. His speed was possible because he travelled lightly. This can actually be traced back to Philip II. But where did the inspiration for this come from? It can indeed be found in Xenophon:

‘In the first place then, then’, Xenophon proceeded, ‘I think we should burn up the wagons which we have, so that our cattle may not be our captains, but we can take whatever route may be best for the army. Secondly we should burn up our tents also; for these, again, are a bother to carry, and no help at all either for fighting or for obtaining provisions. Furthermore, let us abandon all our other superfluous baggage, keeping only such articles as we use for war, or in eating and drinking, in order that we may have the largest possible number of men under arms and the least number carrying baggage’ (Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 3.2.27-28, Brownson tr.).

Alexander seems to have been well aware that the Persian Empire was made up of independent satrapies which were slow to come together. Certainly he understood the importance of speed, and used it to his advantage a number of times during his campaigns. Yet it might be argued that he used his speed only in a localised way; that is, he allowed Darius in general terms to re-establish himself after his army had twice been defeated. One could argue further that he was pursuing a different policy, that of thalassocracy, but for the purposes of this paper I can say that once again Xenophon’s information given in the *Anabasis*, if read, did not directly influence his strategic choices.

If, in spite of the few apparent overlaps with the *Anabasis*, anyone wishes to argue for the influence of Xenophon’s writings on Alexander the Great it seems to me that they would find the text of the *Agésilais* a more fruitful place to begin. This is a text that provides more support for the view that Alexander had indeed read his Xenophon. In this context its importance has gone unnoticed. The *Agésilais* was written in honour of the Spartan king, Agesilaus II. Agesilaus was the first Spartan king to be sent on campaign in Asia, where his aim was to liberate the Greek cities from Persian control. In this he achieved some degree of success in 396-5, before he had to return quickly to Greece to face a coalition of Sparta’s Greek enemies, which resulted in the battle of Coronea in 394. What is important for us is that Xenophon, having survived the retreat from Cunaxa; then enrolled as a mercenary under, among others, Agesilaus. He formed a very strong bond with him and actually returned from Asia to fight at Coronea with Agesilaus against his native city Athens, for which he

was exiled. The *Agesilaus* is similar to the *Cyropaedia* in that its purpose is to praise its subject. But before Xenophon gets into the praise aspect he does give a brief summary of Agesilaus' campaign in Asia and in particular he notes Agesilaus' attitudes to, and methods of, dealing with the Persians. Since Agesilaus was quite successful in this we might assume there was much Alexander might have learned.

In military terms Alexander's behaviour, first in Asia Minor and then beyond, has often been thought strange. Sparing the enemy, giving them back their land and giving them positions of importance within his own army certainly flew in the face of the customary view 'to the victors, the spoils'; it went directly against the advice of his former teacher, Aristotle, and against the views of that supreme Panhellenist, Isocrates. Both of these educators advised against treating the barbarians with any kind of leniency. Alexander clearly paid scant attention to this:

He [Alexander] banned his men from pillaging Asia, telling them they should spare their own property and not destroy the things which they had come to possess (Justin, *Epitome*, 2. 6. 1., Yardley tr.).

His relationship with the people he conquered was also far from traditional:

Alexander then made Calas satrap of the territory Arsites ruled, ordering the inhabitants to pay the same taxes as they used to pay to Darius; natives who came down from the hills and gave themselves up were told to return home (Arrian, *Anabasis*, 1. 17. 1-2, Brownson tr.).

Although Hammond suggests that at this point Alexander 'was fortunate in having no ideology'²⁸ it might be reasonable to suggest that he did have, at least, some kind of inchoate philosophy given his deliberate and consistent behaviour regarding the peoples and the lands, which he conquered. He allowed many natives to return to their farms. He took many of the conquered troops into his army, giving some of them positions of high command, greatly to the resentment of his own troops. All sources attest to this. In addition, he seldom laid waste the land he conquered; in fact he made it abundantly clear why he would not do so after his first victory at the Granicus. Where did Alexander get these ideas? From his reading of Xenophon perhaps?

²⁸ Hammond, N.G.L., *Alexander the Great: King, Commander and Statesman*, 78.

But subsequently the Persians affairs began to look even more bleak, while Agesilaus went from strength to strength. Every tribe and every nation sent envoys to seek his friendship, and a number of places longed for freedom so much that they went so far as to rebel against Persia and seek his protection instead, with the result that Agesilaus found himself becoming the leader not only of Greeks but of large numbers of non-Greeks. He behaved in these circumstances in a way that deserves an extraordinary degree of admiration. He was now the ruler of a great many communities on the mainland, and a great many of the Aegean islands too, since the state had attached the fleet to his command as well; his fame and power were on the increase, there was nothing to stop him doing as he wanted with all the advantages available to him, and on top of everything he was intending and hoping to overthrow the empire which had in the past invaded Greece (Xenophon, *Agesialus*, 1. 35-36, Waterfield tr.).

The situation that Agesilaus found himself in on his arrival in Asia Minor bears a remarkable similarity to the circumstances of the young Alexander in 334 B.C.

Agesilaus appreciated that a devastated and depopulated land would be unable to support an army for long, whereas an inhabited and cultivated land would be a permanent source of nourishment, so he took care to win some of his enemies over with leniency, as well as defeating others by force of arms. It was a frequent injunction to his men not to treat prisoners-of-war as criminals to be punished, but as human beings to be guarded; and if ever he noticed, when shifting camps, that any small children had been abandoned by the dealers (who would commonly try to sell the children because they doubted that they would be able to support them and feed them), he took care that they were rounded up and taken off somewhere. He also gave orders that any prisoners who were abandoned because of their old age were to be provided for, to prevent their being killed by dogs or wolves. Consequently, he came to be regarded with goodwill not just by those who heard about this behaviour of his, but even by his prisoners-of-war. Whenever he brought a community over to his side, he refused to let the inhabitants serve him as slaves serve their masters and required from them only the obedience due to a ruler from free subjects; and his kindness gained him control even of strongholds which were impervious to brute force' (Xenophon, *Agesilaus*, 1. 20-22, Waterfield tr.).

There are a striking number of parallels between the behaviour of Agesilaus, as described by Xenophon, and Alexander while in Asia. Not the generalities of the *Cyrpoadia*, but specifics: the treatment of conquered peoples and the treatment of conquered land; their attempts to present themselves as shelters against Persian aggression. The parallels seem too close to me to suggest mere happenstance. Did

Alexander absorb the lessons of the Spartan king? Did he read the *Agesilaus*? Perhaps. The *Agesilaus* probably presents the most interesting parallels, and yet, by and large, it is neglected by those who write with some conviction that Alexander knew his Xenophon. My main point then is that the case is far from clear and those who argue that Alexander read Xenophon still have a case to prove. I want to finish by examining why so many have been drawn to make that assumption in the first place.

Is there the possibility that Alexander has been redrawn as Greek rather than as a Macedonian hero? In assuming that he read his Xenophon we are assuming that he had regard for things Greek. But is this the case? We must not be misled by Plutarch where Alexander is represented as the new Achilles, the ideal warrior.²⁹ How inspired was Alexander, a Macedonian, by Greek literature and how much is that assumption the result of a literary invention of the Greeks? What makes us assume that he would have read Xenophon in the first place (an assumption made by numerous writers). As Eduard Zeller pointed out, the famous story that Aristotle took charge of the education of Alexander lacks support from any reliable or near contemporary source. Aristotle was of course a Macedonian anyway. The wonderful anecdotes wherein Alexander and his companions recite snatches from Greek tragedies, especially Euripides, a resident at the Macedonian court in his final years, may well tell us more about the style, techniques and aspirations of our sources than it does about Alexander's actual interest in Greek literature. Some of what Plutarch says is simply not credible. Plutarch was influenced by the record of Onesicritus, Alexander's helmsman. Onesicritus was a Cynic philosopher and those traits are therefore passed on to Alexander. In Plutarch we are presented with the idea that Alexander was spurred on by Greek ideals and achieved his success through these and not through the lessons that he learned from his father Philip:

For who has ever put forth with greater or fairer equipment ... Yes, the equipment he had from Aristotle his teacher when he crossed over into Asia was more than what he had from his father Philip (Plutarch, *Moralia*, 327e-f)

This is nonsense. The idea that Alexander the Great led his forces with a spear in one hand and Greek literature in the other (Xenophon, and, Homer, of course) is simply

not tenable. Yet because of appropriation by the Greeks many writers have gone looking for Alexander in Xenophon and have found him there regardless of the evidence.

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²⁹ See Mossman, J., 'Tragedy and Epic in Plutarch's *Alexander*' 83-93.

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