VII. CONCLUSION: XENOPHON THROUGH TIME

As Chapter 2 noted, the critical evaluation of Xenophon by scholars has changed over time. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century criticisms of his philosophical and historical writing have now largely been replaced by an appreciation of both the literary qualities of his work and the evidence they provide for the thought of his time, as well as his own contribution. While Chapter 2 examined modern critical readings of Xenophon as historiographer and philosopher, this final section surveys readings and translations from ancient to modern times, and the differing uses to which Xenophon's work has been put. Different works have spoken to different times, as fashions have changed. This chapter offers some key moments in the history of the reading of Xenophon; the diversity of literary and theoretical responses to his work demonstrates the generic breadth and enduring interest of his work.

Ancient emulation

Xenophon's work was widely circulated and read in antiquity. Plato had clearly read the *Cyropaedia* when he wrote about the decline of Achaemenid monarchy in his *Laws* (3.694a–698a), and when he criticized the model of the shepherd king, but developed the importance of kingly knowledge, in his *Statesman*.[1] Aristotle, too, drew on the *Cyropaedia* as a source of exemplars, with elements of his thought on kingship, on equitable distribution, and friendship in the *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* echoing Xenophon's work, and theorizing his narrative.[2]

For Cicero, Xenophon's work provided important models of effective inspiration for leaders, as the speakers in his dialogues observe. 'Xenophon's books are very useful on many topics; keep reading them, as you do, with care', the elderly Cato advises, before citing Cyrus the Younger's approval of land management as an appropriate task

[1] Danzig 2003a; Atack 2018b. See also Chapter 6.
[2] Atack forthcoming.

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for leaders.[3] Cicero was aware of Xenophon's work in shaping his exemplars, writing to his brother that Xenophon's account of Cyrus was 'written…not in view of faith to history but as a model of the just exercise of power'.[4] He shows how ancient readers put Xenophon's work to use, embedding a report of how Scipio Africanus, the general responsible for the Romans' defeat of the Carthaginians, and a great hero of the Roman Republic, used Xenophon's work within a larger philosophical discussion of the rather Xenophontic topic of ways of overcoming pain and hardship. Scipio, Cicero writes,

> always used to have Xenophon in his hands; among the chief points he made in praising him was that he used to say that the same labours were not equally hard for the general and the ordinary solder, because his status (*honos*) made the task lighter for the general.
> (Cic. *Tusc.* 2.62)

Cicero's examples suggest that Xenophon's works, from the *Cyropaedia* to the *Memorabilia*, were well known to the educated elite of the Roman world, including his own circle of correspondents and readers.[5] Xenophon's portraits of Cyrus and Agesilaus fuelled their inclusion in a standard list of founding heroes, kings, and generals.[6]

Xenophon's readers in antiquity also included authors who emulated his work; the writer of exemplars thus became an exemplar himself. Arrian of Nicomedia (*c.*95–175 CE) used Xenophon's writings as a template for a range of works, spanning genres as his predecessor did. These included an account in seven books (like Xenophon's) of Alexander's campaigns in Asia, the *Anabasis of Alexander*, modelled on Xenophon's *Anabasis*, and a hunting manual which echoed and updated the *Cynegeticus*.[7] Where Xenophon began his work on hunting with an account of the origin of hunting with the gods, Arrian started with an explicit acknowledgement of 'Xenophon son of Gryllus'. Arrian felt such a strong connection with his predecessor that he regarded himself as a younger Xenophon, not least because of their

[3] Cic. *Sen.* 59; Xen. *Oec.* 4.4–11.

[4] Cicero *Q Fr.* 1.1.23. Elsewhere (*Leg.* 2.56) Cicero is happy to use the *Cyropaedia* as a source of information about Persian burial practices. See Humble 2020: 31–5. I thank Malcolm Schofield for further suggestions on Cicero's use of Xenophon.

[5] References to Cyrus: Cic. *Fam.* 5.12.3, *Q Fr.* 1.1.23, 1.2.7, *Sen.* 30, 32, 79, 81, *Leg.* 2.56, *Rep.* 1.43, *Off.* 2.16; Choice of Hercules: Cic. *Off.* 1.118.

[6] Cic. *Off.* 2.16.

[7] Phillips and Willcock 1999.

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mutual love of hunting and philosophy (Arr. *Cyn.* 1.4). In his *Anabasis*, he presents Alexander the Great as a keen reader of Xenophon, who cites the story of the Ten Thousand to encourage his men (Arr. *An.* 2.7.8–9), and uses it as a source of information on Persian tactics (2.8.11).[8] However, Arrian accepts that the analogy between Xenophon's campaign and Alexander's is imperfect: the latter was a leader, not serving in someone else's force as Xenophon did (1.12.4). Arrian asserts his own social position and experience as a qualification for writing about such a great man, and we might wonder whether he mused on Xenophon's qualifications for writing about Cyrus.[9]

Scenes and elements from Xenophon's work were adapted. The first-century CE poet Silius Italicus modified the story of the Choice of Heracles for a key moment in his epic account of the Punic War, not just making the Roman general Scipio a reader of Xenophon but putting him in Heracles' place.[10] Plutarch, writing around the turn of the second century CE, made more direct use of Xenophon's *Constitution of the Spartans* as a source for his lives of Spartan leaders, but he also drew more obliquely on the *Symposium* as a genre for communicating philosophical ideas.[11] Philostratus of Athens, writing a little later, imagined the sophist Apollonius of Tyana invoking the Choice of Heracles when choosing between philosophical schools.[12]

The late antique biographer Eunapius of Sardis, educated in Athens and writing in the fourth century CE, opens his *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists* with a discussion of Xenophon's writing and its influence, continuing the trend of later authors regarding Xenophon as a model for themselves and comparing his subjects with their subjects. Eunapius takes it for granted that Alexander learned useful lessons from Xenophon, but also considers Xenophon to be a unique model in that his words were matched by his actions.[13] The idealized withdrawal of philosophers from politics to quiet lives of contemplation made Xenophon's life of action impossible for philosophers of Eunapius' time to emulate; and his reportage of both small and great deeds also made him difficult for writers themselves to emulate.

[8] On Arrian's interactions with Xenophon's *Anabasis*, see Miltsios 2022; Strazdins 2022.
[9] Gray 1990.
[10] Sil. *Pun.* 15.68–120; Bull 2006: 97.
[11] C. Cooper; Gengler 2020.
[12] Philostr. *VA* 6.11.3–8. I thank Phil Horky for this point.
[13] Eunap. *VS* 453.

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Exemplarity and esotericism

As Arrian's use of Xenophon might suggest, writers from antiquity onwards provided advice for the powerful by elaborating case studies from the classical past. Xenophon's accounts of leadership stand at the head of a long tradition of instructional works, in a genre often referred to as *speculum principis* ('mirror for the prince'), spanning the period from classical antiquity to early modernity, and the European and Asian worlds.[14] Cyrus was an exemplar idealized across cultures. The Renaissance saw a renewed enthusiasm for including exemplars from classical antiquity in these works, alongside strongly voiced concern that figures from the pagan past were not suitable models for Christian princes.[15] Instruction manuals for the rulers of city states proliferated, filled with examples from the classical literature which was being disseminated more widely both in Greek and, more accessibly, in Latin and vernacular translations.[16]

Scholars inside and outside the Christian churches produced custom editions of translations of Xenophon's work as gifts for the powerful, for both popes and kings. The humanist Francesco Filelfo (1398–1481) dedicated his translation of the *Cyropaedia* to Pope Paul II; in addition to a sumptuous manuscript version, a print edition was published in 1477.[17] Cardinal Bessarion translated the *Memorabilia*, again circulated as a manuscript and a little later as a printed book.[18] A complete Greek text of Xenophon's works was published by the Aldine Press in Venice in 1525, but translations reached a broader elite readership.[19]

The most influential reader of Xenophon, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), the political theorist and administrator in turbulent Florence, was a critical participant in this tradition, using Xenophon's exemplars in his own version of the mirror for princes, *The Prince*.[20] He noted the way in which great leaders used the examples of their predecessors, remarking that Scipio's ethics and actions drew on his

[14] See Tatum 1989: 4–9. On the genre across cultures, see Blaydes et al. 2018; in relation to Cyrus, see Grogan 2014: 37–69.

[15] Grogan 2007: 65.

[16] Humble 2017.

[17] Filelfo 1477.

[18] Bodleian MS. Canon. Class. Lat. 131.

[19] Asulanus 1525. The *Hellenica* had been included in an earlier volume of historical texts: Gemistus 1503.

[20] Machiavelli 1970, 1988.

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imitation of the model provided by Xenophon's Cyrus. The latter becomes one of Machiavelli's core examples; he represents the kind of ruler who expands his domain through conquest. He also appears along with Caesar and Alexander as a ruler who could be generous with goods acquired through conquest, and along with Moses and Theseus as a liberator of his people.[21] Machiavelli's use of Xenophon has been particularly influential on later interpreters, because it has led political theorists to read Xenophon through a Machiavellian lens and to see the latter's often brutal *realpolitik* lurking beneath Xenophon's descriptions of virtuous rulers.[22]

However, Machiavelli's use of Xenophon is not representative of the early modern response to his work; more conventional accounts of courtly virtue also drew on Xenophon's philosophy of good leadership. Beyond Italy, Xenophon's work circulated in the Tudor and Stuart courts in various translations; it was translated into English by William Barker, a tutor to the powerful Howard family, who dedicated two versions, in 1552 and 1567, to powerful men whose patronage he sought.[23] Admirers sought out depictions of the Choice of Hercules.[24]

The novelist Sarah Fielding's English translation of the *Memorabilia* and *Apology*, *Memoirs of Socrates*, was first published in 1762 and went into multiple editions.[25] Fielding wrote in her preface:

> That the Memoirs of Socrates, with regard to the greatest part, are held in the highest estimation, is most certain; and if there are some passages which seem obscure; and of which the use doth not so plainly appear to us at this distance of time, and from the dissimilarity of our customs and manners; yet, perhaps, we might not do amiss, in taking Socrates himself for our example in this particular, as well as in many others...

Her translation, described by Edith Hall as 'graceful, lucid, and accurate', achieved continuing commercial success, and her rendering of the *Apology* was republished by the Everyman library, aimed at a wide general readership, over a century later.[26]

Among the founding fathers of the USA, Xenophon's Socratic works were seen as the best source for Socrates and the educational tradition

[21] Machiavelli 1988: chs 6, 16, 26.
[22] Rasmussen 2009.
[23] Grogan 2007, 2020.
[24] Rood 2017a.
[25] Fielding 1762.
[26] Hall 2016: 128.

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he represented.[27] Thomas Ricks, exploring the founding fathers' reading of Xenophon, notes the importance of farming to both readers and author.[28] But another overlap between the early USA and classical Athens was the problematic question of chattel slavery. One might question whether the moral lessons the young nation's leaders took from Xenophon incorporated the ready acceptance of slavery and the equation of enslaved status with lack of virtue featured in the Socratic works.

As a young man, Benjamin Franklin (1706–90) bought and read 'Xenophon's *Memorable Things of Socrates*', in Edward Bysshe's 1712 English translation.[29] He was following up a mention of the Socratic method in an English grammar book. Having read the text, he was moved to change his whole approach to speaking; he wrote: 'I was charmed with it, adopted it, dropt my abrupt contradiction and positive argumentation, and put on the humble inquirer and doubter'.[30] Early in his career, Franklin translated the discussions on leadership between Socrates, Glaucon, and Charmides (*Mem*. 3.6–7) as 'Public Men', and published his own dialogue 'Concerning Virtue and Pleasure' in imitation.[31] Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) also found inspiration in the *Memorabilia*, as a means of accessing the thought of Socrates: 'Of Socrates we have nothing genuine but in the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon,' he wrote, criticizing Plato for attributing his own 'whimsies' to his teacher.[32]

But not everyone took Xenophon quite so seriously. Laurence Sterne invoked the *Cyropaedia* as an example misused by the father of the protagonist of his rambling novel *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67), who begins, and fails to complete, a '*Tristrapaedia*' about his son's upbringing.[33] While Sterne's novel is shot through with classical learning, it offers a counter-example to Xenophon's exemplary account of personal development.

[27] Humble 2017.
[28] Ricks 2020: 81–2.
[29] Bysshe 1712, with many subsequent editions; the volume drew on François Charpentier's 1650 French translation and included the latter's short biographical sketch.
[30] Franklin 1887: 50.
[31] Franklin 1887: 383–404.
[32] Thomas Jefferson, 'Letter to William Short, 31 October 1819', cited in Ricks 2020: 82.
[33] Sterne 1967, e.g. vol. 5, chs 16, 26; Tatum 1989: 3–4, Humble 2017: 431–2.

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Xenophon, classics, and colonialism

In the nineteenth century and the era of colonial expansion, the *Anabasis* spoke to British imperialism and to American westward expansion.[34] Both location and situation resonated with those being educated to administer and control annexed and occupied territories, both in the American west and in the world east and south of Europe. Classical languages and literature remained an important part of elite education, and Xenophon's Greek was treated as particularly useful for learners, while his subject matter remained relevant. The *Anabasis* became the text which combined linguistic pedagogy and imperial aims, replacing the *Cyropaedia* and the *Memorabilia* as the author's key work. School editions proliferated, and it was excerpted and adapted for teaching purposes.[35]

As the precise region of Xenophon's travels became the focus of a global geopolitical crisis, contemporary writers picked up the idea of the 'march upcountry' as a framework for narratives of invasion – and of retreat. Writers of speculative fiction have taken Xenophon's ideas beyond the geography of this planet to encompass military narratives set in imagined communities across space.

Philosophical critics of Xenophon often focused on what they saw as his lack of philosophical acuity and originality, compared with Plato's works, which were taken to contain the more accurate depiction of Socrates' thought. Friedrich Schleiermacher, writing in the early nineteenth century, was one of the first to express this view, which became an unexamined commonplace among scholars of ancient philosophy.[36] John Burnet cast doubt on Xenophon's knowledge of Socrates' thought, and pointed to his dependence on Plato's work.[37] Despite damning Xenophon in his earlier work, Gregory Vlastos later pointed to the *Symposium* and the account of Theodote (*Mem.* 3.11) as evidence of the sophistication of Xenophon's Socrates.[38]

The political philosopher Leo Strauss played a large part in Xenophon's mid-twentieth-century rehabilitation. Strauss had a specific agenda, seeking 'timeless' wisdom from ancient writers in

[34] Rood 2010.
[35] Rijksbaron 2002; Rood 2004b: 43–50.
[36] Schleiermacher 1987, originally published 1815, with English translation in Hare 1832–3: ii.538–55.
[37] Burnet 1911: xiii–xxiii.
[38] Vlastos 1957: 498–500, 1991: 30; see Morrison 1987.

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preference to what he saw as a decadent modernity.[39] However, he regarded this wisdom as obscured from general view; because philosophers like Socrates were persecuted by the state, they hid their wisdom, so that it was only communicated to readers with the training and knowledge to uncover the true account beneath the text's surface. This reading developed a version of Xenophon who could easily be seen as a predecessor of political theorists such as Niccolò Machiavelli.[40]

Virtue and leadership reunited

As the earlier chapters have shown, the revival in scholarly interest in Xenophon has led to a flowering of insight and interpretation. One aspect of reading Xenophon which has enjoyed a recent surge is his interest in leadership, and the personal qualities which made Cyrus and others successful and popular as generals and rulers. While political theorists have often framed Xenophon as a realist in the manner of Machiavelli, social scientists and philosophers have connected his thought with another resurgent strand of theory drawing on classical antiquity: virtue ethics. Xenophon's work has even been incorporated into management studies, a discipline in which exemplarity continues to be an important method. Episodes from his work, from Clearchus' generalship to the Choice of Heracles, feature in a series of case studies in 'Ancient Leadership'.[41] Xenophon's Cyrus has been invoked here for his Socratic, ethical approach to leadership.[42]

These strands intersected in the later work of the theorist Michel Foucault, whose 'genealogical' method involved exploring the long history of concepts and identifying moments of structural change, as well as a concern with ordering and organization.[43] His *History of Sexuality* sought to understand how an individual's sexuality became their defining characteristic; during the course of researching it, Foucault turned to classical antiquity as the location of a distinctive

[39] L. Strauss 1959; see also Dorion 2001.
[40] Rasmussen 2009.
[41] For example Tamiolaki 2019, 2020a.
[42] Sandridge 2012.
[43] Foucault 1977.

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culture.[44] He found Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* important for its depiction of ancient married life, in which 'the husband's self-restraint pertains to an art of governing – governing in general, governing oneself and governing a wife who must be kept under control and respected at the same time'.[45] But Foucault's use of Xenophon's framework extended more broadly across his later work, in which the idea of the 'care of the self' (*souci de soi*) draws heavily on Xenophontic ideas of self-control and *epimeleia*.[46] Foucauldian ideas of governmentality as applied to the self can be seen as a development of Xenophon's orderly structures.[47]

These recent readings show that, despite his apparent conservatism and adherence to convention, Xenophon's thought can inspire a wide range of responses. Contemporary readers have used his writings productively to gain a better understanding of the societies within which he lived, and to generate reflections on their own lives and times in different political circumstances around the globe, where democracy and tyranny remain in tension.

[44] Foucault 1984–6. See Jarratt 2014; Elden 2016: 134–63.
[45] Foucault 1984–6: ii.165. See Foxhall 1994.
[46] Foucault 1984–6: iii.50.
[47] Foucault 1984–6: vol. 2; Elden 2016.

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