

## XENOPHON OF ATHENS

Xenophon of Athens (c. 430–354 BCE) has long been considered an uncritical admirer of Sparta who hero-worships the Spartan King Agesilaus and eulogises Spartan practices in his *Lacedaimoniōn Politeia*. By examining his own self-descriptions – especially where he portrays himself as conversing with Socrates and falling short in his appreciation of Socrates' advice – this book finds in Xenophon's overall writing project a Socratic response to his exile and situates his writings about Sparta within this framework. It presents a detailed reading of the *Lacedaimoniōn Politeia* as a critical and philosophical examination of Spartan socio-cultural practices. Evidence from his own *Hellenica*, *Anabasis* and *Agesilaus* is shown to confirm Xenophon's analysis of the weaknesses in the Spartan system, and that he is not enamoured of Agesilaus. Finally, a comparison with contemporary Athenian responses to Sparta shows remarkable points of convergence with his fellow Socratic Plato, as well as connections with Isocrates too.

NOREEN HUMBLE is Professor of Classics at the University of Calgary. She has published numerous articles about Xenophon and the reception of Xenophon and Plutarch in Byzantium and the Renaissance, and is the editor of *Plutarch's Lives: Parallelism and Purpose* (2010), and co-editor (with P. Crowley and S. Ross) of *Mediterranean Travels: Writing Self and Other* (2011).

# XENOPHON OF ATHENS

*A Socratic on Sparta*

NOREEN HUMBLE

*University of Calgary*



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*Tiomnaím an leabhar seo do  
Éilís Ní Choigligh  
Agus a glúin máithreacha Éireannacha  
A chinntigh nach séanfáí ar a n-iníonacha  
Mar a séanadh go minic orthu féin  
Fáil ar ardoideachas.*

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## *Preface*

This book is of long gestation. I first read the *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia* in 1985 as an undergraduate while writing a paper on Plato's *Republic* for a political science class. I had chosen, having one introductory Greek history course under my belt, to argue against the view that Plato's city-in-speech was Sparta in disguise. Soon realising that I knew a lot less about Sparta than I had thought, and needing some firm point of comparison to sustain the argument, I followed a lead which pointed me to somebody called Xenophon, who had written a small treatise describing Sparta in simplistic, glowing terms. Fantastic! Just what I needed. When I sat down to compare Xenophon's description of Sparta with Plato's city-in-speech, however, with no knowledge at all of who this Xenophon was, I soon became completely puzzled: if the *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia* was meant to describe Sparta and to do so in glowing terms, it seemed to me that it failed badly on both counts and so it must be doing something else. After reading my paper, my professor in the class, Leon Craig, directed me to Leo Strauss' article on this work. I had no idea at that time who Strauss was or that there was a theoretical approach to political science which could be termed Straussian, and though I did *not* end up being drawn into that fold, my classes with Leon Craig were formative. Quite simply, no other professor challenged me to think so hard about things. His classes were both terrifying and joyful and there is no doubt in my mind that I am where I am today because of them. To him, then, I owe the first major debt of thanks.

I veered through art history and literary studies before returning to Greek political thought, and that serendipitous path provided me with a different type of training for which I am very grateful: I was fortunate to study Greek and Latin poetry under Paul Murgatroyd at McMaster University and indeed to complete my MA dissertation on Apollonius of Rhodes under his supervision. It would not be an exaggeration to state that that training changed the way I look at all Greek texts and their

literary quality. The strangeness of the *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia* still niggled, however, and so when it came time to embark on doctoral work I returned to it. My supervisor, George Paul†, wisely insisted on a larger study of Xenophon and Sparta which ended up being focused on the *Hellenica* and *Anabasis*, with the *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia* playing only a supporting role. But the germ of the interpretation expounded fully in this monograph (though I still view this way of reading the text as a work in progress) was seeded in that dissertation.

Not long into my doctoral studies, Christopher Tuplin's *Failings of Empire* appeared. To say that after reading his book I realised that he had already said in such a thoroughly exemplary way what I had been thinking in vague terms in respect of the *Hellenica* would be an understatement. The importance of this monograph of his I think has still not been fully appreciated. His thorough and intelligent scholarship has been a model I have striven to emulate, and I have also been fortunate to be on the end of his bountiful generosity, collegiality and support.

I finished off my dissertation at the University of Leeds, where Roger Brock not only helped me see the wood for the trees at a point when I was wondering whether a dissertation would ever emerge but also employed his keen eye to save me from many an infelicity. I was fortunate also at this time to meet Stephen Hodkinson, who was then based at the University of Manchester. His encouragement and interest in my work sustained me through the challenging years of slave-labour teaching, and his own meticulous scholarship, in which he relentlessly embraces multiple theoretical approaches to interrogate the ancient material from all angles, I have likewise striven to emulate. He too has been unfailingly generous with his time, expertise and encouragement, for which I am continually thankful.

Various breaks from teaching along the way helped the gestation process. I am grateful particularly for an Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences post-doctoral fellowship in 2001–2, held at University College Cork, which paradoxically revealed to me that the path I was on was not the correct one. Over a decade later at the University of Calgary, a Calgary Institute for the Humanities Research Fellowship in 2013–14 was instrumental in setting me on the path that led directly to the shape this book has taken. The Institute, under the directorship of Jim Ellis, is a beacon of light at a time when the humanities are under more pressure than they have ever been. Jim, along with my colleagues in the Institute that year (Charlene, Christian, Meaghan, Richard and Shawn), provided a wonderfully collegial and intellectually



stimulating environment, in which the seeds of Chapters 1 and 7 were sown. Indeed, Chapter 7 replicates in large measure arguments which can be found in 2018b ('Sparta in Xenophon and Plato', in G. Danzig, D. Johnson and D. Morrison (eds), *Plato and Xenophon: Comparative Studies* (Mnemosyne Supplement vol. 417) (Leiden: Brill), 547–75), and I am grateful to the editors for allowing me to reproduce much of that article here. Indeed, a number of my previous papers should be seen as background preparation for what appears here now: 1999 and 2002b on *sôphrosynê* and the Spartans, 2002a and 2004b on aspects of Xenophon's biography, 2004a on *Lac.* 14, 2006 on *Lac.* 11, 2007 on the similarities between Xenophon and Aristotle on Sparta, 2008 on Xenophon's standing in Athens in his later years, 2011 on the *Anabasis* as travel literature, 2014 on the *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia* as *politeia* literature, 2018a on what is Socratic about Xenophon's writings, 2018c on Isocrates and Xenophon, 2020a on generic issues and interpretation of the *Agésilau*s, and 2020b on Xenophon as a biographer. This book owes much, therefore, to the many audiences who heard and discussed with me the ideas in these papers when they were in their infancy and to the many editors who included these papers in their volumes, improving them along the way.

Many thanks, too, are due to Michael Sharp and his team at Cambridge University Press, as well as to the anonymous referees who had many perceptive observations on where I might improve my text. These I have tried to address in some form here, though some I am viewing, happily, as food for further thought.

I owe many debts of thanks on all sorts of fronts, to students, colleagues and friends, from discussions over the years about matters Xenophonic, Spartan and beyond, to friendship and much-needed encouragement. If I have not fully acknowledged scholarly debts in particular at any point in this book it is not for lack of awareness of the importance of doing so but from the inevitable failings of memory. I regret, also, that I became aware too late of the wonderful work being done on Xenophon by colleagues in ancient philosophy in Buenos Aires. Properly taking on board their scholarship, however, will have to be the work of another day. At any rate, each of the following will, I hope, recognise their contribution: Gifty Ako Adounvo, John Barry†, Ken Belcher†, Jeff Beneker, Susan Bennett, Douglas Cairns, Sylvie Champion, Paul Cartledge, Craig Cooper, Pat Crowley, Elena Dahlberg, Gabriel Danzig, Anthony Ellis, Michael Flower, Anuradha Gobin, Jane Grogan, Kendell Heydon, W. E. Higgins, Roy Humble, David Kiely, Peter

Krentz, David M. Johnson, Bruce Laforse, Lucie Laumonier, Dan Maher, Carmel McCallum-Barry, Murray McGillivray, Laura Milman, Ruth Morello, Don Morrison, Brian O'Connor, Sonya Nevin, Roberto Nicolai, Christopher Pelling, Pierre Pontier, Anton Powell†, Louise Sheehan, Natalie Sheehan, Graham Shipley, Philip Stadter†, Alessandro Stavru, Melina Tamiolaki, Frances Titchener, Matthew Trundle† and Michael Ullyot.

The importance to intellectual thought of excellent espressos pulled by skilled baristas is not acknowledged as often as it should be. So for sustaining caffeine and superb conversation over any number of years now I want to thank in particular Monogram, Nathan from Communita, Adam, Chris and Cindy at The Bicycle Cafe, and Fauzy and the gang at Fuel for Gold.

The dedication, for those whose knowledge of Irish is, like mine, in its infancy, is to my mother, Elizabeth Humble (née Quigley), 'and all the Irish mothers of her generation, who made sure their daughters were not denied, as they themselves so often were, the opportunity for higher education'. I am grateful to Éamon Ó Ciosáin for providing the elegant translation into the language my mother excelled in.

No thanks are enough and no debt is greater, however, than that which I owe to my partner, Keith Sidwell. Without his encouragement and boundless wisdom and help, it is hard to imagine that this book would ever have seen the light of day.

## *Note on Spelling Conventions*

For the most part, for the names of ancient Greek people and places I have endeavoured to use the most familiar anglicisations. I have transliterated certain Greek terms in instances where English translations bring inaccurate modern connotations to mind or are simply inadequate to convey the meaning of the Greek. These choices are discussed in the text.

## *Abbreviations*

For abbreviations, I have followed LSJ for Greek authors and texts, the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* for Latin authors and texts, and *L'Année philologique* for journal titles. For full titles of ancient authors' works I have used the most common iteration for ease of comprehension. So, for example, in the case of Plato I use *Laws* rather than *Leges*. I list below the abbreviations and full titles used of Xenophon's works herein.

### Xenophon

<i>Ages.</i>	<i>Agesilaus</i>
<i>An.</i>	<i>Anabasis</i>
<i>Ap.</i>	<i>Apology</i>
<i>Cyn.</i>	<i>On Hunting</i>
<i>Cyr.</i>	<i>Cyropaedia</i>
<i>Eq.</i>	<i>On Horsemanship</i>
<i>Eq.Mag.</i>	<i>The Cavalry Commander</i>
<i>HG</i>	<i>Hellenica</i>
<i>Hier.</i>	<i>Hiero</i>
<i>Lac.</i>	<i>Lacedaimoniôn Politeia</i>
<i>Mem.</i>	<i>Memorabilia</i>
<i>Oec.</i>	<i>Oeconomicus</i>
<i>Smp.</i>	<i>Symposium</i>
<i>Vect.</i>	<i>Poroi</i>

### pseudo-Xenophon

<i>Ath.</i>	<i>Athênaiôn Politeia</i>
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## *Introduction*

The title of this book is deliberately meant to recall a watershed in Xenophonic scholarship: W. E. Higgins' groundbreaking 1977 study, *Xenophon the Athenian*, in which he argued that Xenophon was a careful thinker and writer, that he was, above all, a Socratic, and that his allegiance, though never partisan, was towards Athens.<sup>1</sup> Higgins' work aimed to challenge the long-standing image of Xenophon as a sort of Colonel Blimp character (a retired general who really should never have taken up writing because he had not much that was not bog standard to say), as a second-rate and uninspiring philosopher, and as a naïve and/or diehard laconophile.<sup>2</sup> He boldly aimed to crisscross Xenophon's large and diverse corpus to support his arguments and to do this he took as his theme 'Xenophon's understanding of the relation between the individual and the *polis*' (p. xii). His work set off a quiet revolution in the field of Xenophonic studies, a revolution which has been building momentum ever since.

His conclusions did not, however, find immediate or widespread acceptance. There are many reasons for this, not least the fact that because his assessment was at the time (and indeed in some circles is still considered) a radical one, it was easier to pick at the weaker points than it was to concentrate on the stronger aspects and to try to build further upon them. Problematic, too, for mainstream Classicists, was his acknowledgement of his debt to the work of Leo Strauss, a statement

<sup>1</sup> In his introduction he remarks that 'those who wish may therefore see in the epithet attached to Xenophon in the title the mark of a quiet revisionism'. That the revision on the point of Xenophon's allegiance to Athens has succeeded in some quarters, see, e.g., Badian 2004 and Tuplin 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Promoters of this Xenophon, such as George Cawkwell, who in his introduction and notes throughout the Penguin translation of the *Hellenica* (Cawkwell and Warner 1979) lambasts Xenophon for his biases and shortcomings as a historian, still find much to admire in Xenophon, though it is usually the 'ex-military man, country gentleman' image which escapes their criticism. Indeed, Cawkwell 2004: 47 rather charmingly attributes to himself Xenophono-philia.

which generally still tends to cause all but the hardiest instantly to shut their minds.

Forty plus years on, some of the traditional views of Xenophon still hold significant sway. So in some regards I will be addressing the same general issues as Higgins did but from a different focal point: questioning Xenophon's supposed laconophilia will be my primary goal,<sup>3</sup> though I will be building on Higgins' ideas in different ways to support the argument that Xenophon viewed himself, above all, as an Athenian and as a Socratic.

The question of whether or not Xenophon is a laconophile is important for two reasons. First, where we perceive Xenophon's biases to lie affects how we read all his works (not just those about Sparta). If we think he prefers Sparta to Athens, we read what he says about each *polis* through that distorting lens. The result in its simplest form runs along the lines of 'he loves austere oligarchic Sparta, so he clearly hates licentious democratic Athens'. Quite a different picture results if we think he prefers Athens to Sparta, or if we decide that he is first and foremost a Socratic and that in some way all his works reflect this. We will, of course, disagree about which approach is the truer, but it is always worth exploring new angles when pieces of the puzzle do not seem to fit using existing approaches. And since I do not think that laconophilia is an adequate explanation for describing Xenophon's writings on Sparta, this book is an effort to propose an alternative way of understanding Xenophon, his relationship with Sparta, and his literary project more broadly.

Second, how we perceive the lens through which Xenophon views Sparta affects how we interpret what he says about Sparta. And what he says about Sparta needs to be assessed carefully if only because we have a dearth of information about Classical Sparta: there are no extant literary sources from Spartan hands for the fifth and fourth centuries BCE and all other evidence comes from outsiders, mostly Athenians, who are working during or under the shadow of the long Peloponnesian War at the close of the fifth century BCE or under the Spartan hegemony of the first three decades of the fourth century. It is true that Xenophon belongs to this group, but he differs in two important ways.

First, he is the only author directly and explicitly to address the causes of Spartan hegemony: this is a stated aim of his *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia*

<sup>3</sup> Though this was not specifically one of Higgins' aims, he did provide significant evidence to question Xenophon's supposed Spartan bias.

(1.1–2).<sup>4</sup> Second, as far as we can tell, Xenophon had closer ties to Sparta than any other author of the period who writes about Sparta. What do these ties consist of? We know from his own hand that he gained significant experience of Spartan commanders during the period 401–399 BCE, as described in his *Anabasis*, and that he, along with the remnants of Cyrus' mercenary army, was hired by the Spartan Thibron in 399 BCE to aid the Spartans in campaigning against the Persian satraps Tissaphernes and Pharnabazus on behalf of the Greek cities of Asia Minor (*An.* 7.8.24). He also tells us that in 394 BCE he was with Agesilaus when he returned from campaigning in Asia Minor to fight a coalition of forces drawn from other Greek *poleis*, including Athens, whose express purpose was to challenge Spartan hegemony. We assume reasonably, therefore, that he spent the intervening five years on campaign in the pay of the Spartans in Asia Minor. After he was exiled from Athens (and here Xenophon does not explicitly give the reason, though we might reasonably infer it from his own reportage of the warning Socrates gave him before he set out to join Cyrus in 401 BCE, i.e. that, broadly speaking, campaigning with Cyrus, who had supported Sparta against Athens, would not be viewed favourably in Athens), he was given an estate by the Spartans, near Scillus in the NW Peloponnese (*An.* 5.3.7). Later sources do assert specifically that he was exiled for laconism (D.L. 2.51), that he had his sons educated in Sparta and was in Agesilaus' entourage (D.L. 2.54; Plu. *Ages.* 20.2). These small details are frequently treated as facts by modern scholars and then typically read in the following sort of way: Xenophon consciously chose to follow the Spartans because he admired their military capabilities, particularly the leadership skills of his hero Agesilaus, so much so that he chose to fight on their side at Coronea in 394 BCE, against the Athenians; for this the Spartans rewarded him with an estate and he rewarded them in return with literary works which laud them unconditionally, promoting, in particular, the views of, again, his hero Agesilaus, and also sent his sons to be educated under their system which he so greatly admired. As a result, then, all four of Xenophon's fourteen works in which Spartans figure prominently – the narrative history covering the years 410–362 BCE (*Hellenica*), the autobiographical account of his own time on campaign in Persia in 401–399 BCE (*Anabasis*), the short treatise setting out elements of Spartan life which led to them attaining

<sup>4</sup> Plato examines Spartan hegemony indirectly when he looks at the inception and demise of a timocratic regime in his *Republic*, but this is not the prime aim of the work. Aristotle, too, writes about positive and negative aspects of the Spartan *politeia*, particularly, indeed, the latter in his *Politics*, but again assessing Spartan power is not his prime motivation.

hegemony in the Greek world (*Lacedaimoniôn Politeia*), and the encomium of the Spartan king under whom he campaigned in 396–394 BCE (*Agésilas*) – have been said, and continue to be said in many quarters, to provide uncritical adulation of the Spartans (particularly the latter two).

One of the results of approaching his works as if they were written by a second-rate thinker, interested only in military matters and prone to uncritical adulation of Sparta, has been the tendency to prefer, automatically and without sufficient critical assessment, information from other sources. In particular, on the narrative construction of historical events, preference has usually been given, since discovery of the papyrus fragments in 1909, to the fragmentary anonymous Oxyrhynchus historian whose work clearly covered the post-Peloponnesian War period and who, the argument runs, is obviously less biased towards Sparta and therefore presents a more accurate account of events. For example, in setting down the battle near Sardis in 395, the Oxyrhynchus historian (II.4–6) describes a much more impressive victory for Agésilas than Xenophon does (*HG* 3.4.21–4). There has been lengthy debate over whose account is more accurate, and though not all, to be fair, prefer the Oxyrhynchus historian's account, almost all arguments for or against suggest that Xenophon's account is favourable to Agésilas.<sup>5</sup> Most gloss over the fact that in Xenophon's account the results of the campaign are quite clearly disproportionately inadequate in view of the massive preparations which preceded it.<sup>6</sup>

For social institutions and the inner workings of Sparta, preference has frequently been given to a work written over four centuries later: Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus*. Because Plutarch had virtually no secure personal information about the traditional Spartan lawgiver (even in Xenophon's day Lycurgus was worshipped at a shrine in Sparta and biographical details were thin on the ground), his biography concentrated on the institutions Lycurgus was said to have set up. Thus, the *Life of Lycurgus* contains information on topics similar to those found in Xenophon's *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia*, and, indeed, Plutarch used Xenophon as one of his main sources. Only on the rarest of occasions,

<sup>5</sup> In favour of the Oxyrhynchus historian over Xenophon: e.g., Bruce 1967; Cawkwell and Warner 1972: 405–6; Cartledge 1987: 215–16; Krentz 1995: 188. In favour of Xenophon over the Oxyrhynchus historian: e.g., Gray 1979; DeVoto 1988. Gaebel 2002: 19 reports all sides without committing himself. Rung 2004, by contrast, examines one event covered by both authors and finds the two versions complementary. For a recent reappraisal of the Oxyrhynchus historian, see Occhipinti 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Tuplin 1993: 58 is an exception. Also Dillery 1995: 114, though he is reluctant to see this as open criticism of Agésilas. Anderson 1974: 158, interestingly, argues in favour of Xenophon's account but notes that if it had been fictitious it 'might have been expected to increase Agésilas' glory'.



however, is Xenophon's view given precedence over Plutarch's when the two present opposing information. For example, until Stephen Hodkinson's magisterial monograph in 2000, *Property and Wealth in Classical Sparta*, Plutarch's portrayal of Sparta as a society where wealth held no importance was repeatedly cited as fact, despite evidence quite to the contrary in Xenophon's treatise. Likewise Plutarch's depiction of the Spartans valuing and inculcating *sôphrosynê* was retrojected onto Xenophon, despite a quite clear avoidance by Xenophon of an association of *sôphrosynê* with the Spartans.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, typical of this approach, which has held sway for a good couple of centuries, is the section on Lycurgan reforms in W. G. Forrest's *A History of Sparta 950-192 BC*, published in 1968. Forrest makes no direct reference at all here to Xenophon's *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia*. Rather, Plutarch (both his *Life of Lycurgus* and *Life of Agis*) and Aristotle are the sources favoured, with Alcman, Tyrtaeus, Herodotus and Thucydides mentioned briefly. The description of the Council of Elders is based entirely on what Plutarch says in his *Life of Lycurgus*, with no attempt at all made even to integrate Xenophon's different take on the institution (let alone explain why the later account has been privileged).<sup>8</sup> Material from Xenophon is used occasionally when it supports the Plutarchan picture of Sparta but, interestingly, without attribution.<sup>9</sup> This is, to be sure, an extreme example of the tendency, but it is, nonetheless, characteristic of an approach which has prevailed for a long time.

The situation is improving in some regards. In the latest general overview of Sparta, Nigel Kennell's *Spartans: A New History*, Xenophon's evidence is given much more prominence. For example, the account of citizen training features Plutarch as a supplement to Xenophon rather than the other way around,<sup>10</sup> though the *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia* is still

<sup>7</sup> Humble 1999 and 2002b.

<sup>8</sup> Forrest 1968: 40–60.

<sup>9</sup> Xenophon's dating of Lycurgus to the time of the Heraclids is ignored in the section dealing with the date of the Lycurgan reforms (Forrest 1968: 55–8), despite the fact that Plutarch himself attempted to make sense of Xenophon's date for Lycurgus in his *Life of Lycurgus*. While it is likely that the reforms did not have such an ancient pedigree as Xenophon suggests, no attempt is made to subject his opinion to critical analysis, because in Forrest's view 'the soldier Xenophon turned to hero-worship of the contemporary Spartan military machine and its military leaders, perfect products of a perfect and unchanging system' (p. 17).

<sup>10</sup> Kennell 2010: 172–3. Somewhat ironically, in view of the traditional approach, in the index under 'citizen training' (p. 207) Plutarch is mentioned, but Xenophon is not. Further, Kennell talks about Xenophon as a soldier and as a historian whose talents have undergone re-evaluation, but if his description were all we had to go on, we would have no idea that Xenophon was Athenian, that he was a follower of Socrates, or that he wrote more than two works which provide significant information on Sparta (e.g., the *Agesilaus* and *Anabasis* are not mentioned at all).

characterised as ‘overwhelmingly positive’, ‘idealised and coloured by nostalgia’, and the *Hellenica* as full of failings by comparison with the fragments of the anonymous Oxyrhynchus historian.<sup>11</sup> But in other ways scholarly opinion remains wedded to the traditional view, particularly in more general scholarship meant for a broader readership. For example, in an introduction to ancient historians Timothy E. Duff’s characterisation of the *Hellenica* as ‘an apologetic for the Sparta which Xenophon admired so much’ and his examples of Xenophon’s failures to deal with supposed anti-Spartan material, such as the alliance which led to the Corinthian War and the Second Athenian League, differ in no significant way from George Cawkwell’s assessment of the *Hellenica*, made nearly a quarter of a century earlier and which still accompanies the Penguin translation of that work.<sup>12</sup>

Yet there are good reasons to question the traditional viewpoint. Even for those who approach Xenophon’s works expecting to find, and therefore finding, apologies for Spartan behaviour, accounting for Xenophon’s presentation of certain episodes has always required special pleading. On two occasions, for example, less than brilliant Spartan commanders act on their own initiative in ways that cause multiple problems for Sparta and her international relations: the seizure of the Theban citadel by Phoebidas in 382 BCE (*HG* 5.2.24–36), and the attack of Sphodrias on Athens in 378 BCE (*HG* 5.4.20–33). In both cases Xenophon explicitly and lengthily notes that Agesilaus’ support of the two men saved their lives and was at odds with the majority opinion, first within Sparta (5.2.32) and then on the wider Greek stage (5.4.24). Scholars have deflected attention from Agesilaus’ role in both cases (in the latter case particularly by focusing on the fact that Xenophon does not recount the consequence of Sphodrias’ actions, which are said to have led to the Second Athenian League, because it was an anti-Spartan alliance) by arguing that Xenophon cannot possibly be criticising Agesilaus because in the encomium he considers him ‘a completely good man’.<sup>13</sup> This argument is problematic, however,

<sup>11</sup> Kennell 2010: 12–13. Rahe 2016: 7–35 is also an interesting approach which generally tends to give equal weight to Xenophon and Plutarch, but which does also at times privilege Xenophon’s evidence (e.g., p. 30 with the recognition that private property and family were *not* eliminated in Sparta).

<sup>12</sup> Compare Duff 2003: 41–2 with Cawkwell and Warner 1979: 33–7. At least, however, Xenophon was deemed important enough to be included in Duff’s survey. Two years prior Marincola 2001, a slim volume on Greek historians which was part of an important introductory series (*Greece & Rome: New Surveys in the Classics*), chose not to deal with Xenophon at all.

<sup>13</sup> See Cawkwell and Warner 1979: 279 for a classic statement of this view, the phrasing echoed by Flower 2012: 22 (‘a perfectly good man’), who likewise reads the encomium as proof of the intimacy between Xenophon and the Spartan king.

from two angles: (1) it does not tend to address the very pointed language in the *Hellenica* which implicates Agesilaus in less than admirable behaviour; and (2) it does not take into account the very nature of the encomiastic genre which requires events to be given a positive spin.<sup>14</sup> Another particularly problematic passage is the penultimate section of the *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia* (*Lac.* 14). Here can be found very explicit condemnation of certain aspects of contemporary Spartan behaviour, particularly of leaders abroad. Multiple explanations have been posed, ranging from the rather drastic suggestions of expunging the offending material completely and/or attributing it to someone else, to the less drastic measure of suggesting that *Lac.* 14 was written much later and was originally meant to be at the end of the work and somehow in the manuscript tradition got misplaced,<sup>15</sup> to the still less drastic (only in terms of keeping the section in the penultimate position), though more convoluted, explanation that *Lac.* 14 must have been written much later than the rest of the work (*Lac.* 15 then, of course, under this scenario also has to be a late addition). Almost all explanations rely on some variation of the notion that Xenophon was initially enthralled by the Spartans but over time (possibly after Phoebidas' actions, almost certainly after those of Sphodrias, and definitely after the Spartan defeat at Leuctra in 371 BCE) became disillusioned (thus some minor criticisms of Sparta can be seen to work their way into the parts of his oeuvre written after this point), and/or arguing that he could not possibly have written anything negative about Sparta while his hero Agesilaus was alive, down-dating even further any hints of criticism about Sparta to post-360 BCE and so sometimes resulting in arguments dating most of his literary output, and certainly the part concerned with Sparta, to the last five or six years of his life.

These are only some of the more obvious problems with the laconophile tag and certainly, since Higgins' work, there have been a number of challenges to various aspects of this analysis (hitherto considered watertight) of where Xenophon's bias and loyalty lay. For example, the Spartans may have had other motivations for setting up the exiled Xenophon in Scillus than simply as a reward for his loyalty: the area was of political importance to Sparta and had only recently been acquired as a result of a major war against Elis (403–401 BCE).<sup>16</sup> The evidence for

<sup>14</sup> See Humble 2020a, and further in Chapter 6.2.

<sup>15</sup> A view somewhat surprisingly revived, given significant solid arguments for retaining the manuscript tradition as it is, in the introduction to Hobden and Tuplin 2012b: 27 n. 39.

<sup>16</sup> Tuplin 2004c: 265–7, though he does not go so far as to suggest that this implies any possible tension between Xenophon and the Spartans, or more specifically Agesilaus.

Xenophon educating his sons in Sparta is not as certain as it might appear.<sup>17</sup> Strong cases have been made arguing for considerable criticism of Spartan individuals and the Spartan *polis* throughout the *Hellenica*<sup>18</sup> and the *Anabasis*,<sup>19</sup> and also for not regarding the *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia* as wholly positive even outside the critical penultimate section.<sup>20</sup> But equally there has been considerable resistance to a Xenophon who is not wholeheartedly behind Sparta, and on balance over the past twenty years those who argue for a pro-Spartan stance still outnumber those who do not. Strong reassertions of the pro-Spartan slant to the *Hellenica* continue to be made, particularly focusing on Xenophon's inability to find anything wrong with Agesilaus' behaviour.<sup>21</sup> The latter argument still finds much support in citing the purely positive encomiastic portrait of Agesilaus as factual corroboration and disregarding unsupportive material in the *Hellenica*.<sup>22</sup> The strongest resistance, however, has been to reading the *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia* in anything other than the traditional way: a treatise praising Sparta from the hand of a solid supporter of all things Spartan who – to account for the explicitly critical section – towards the end of his life became disillusioned at the direction Sparta was heading. The four latest commentaries, as well as a number of recent articles and the introductions to recent translations of the work, have all reiterated some version of this view.<sup>23</sup>

Part of the reason for such opposing views is, of course, the perennial difficulty in shifting received traditions. We are remarkably tenacious in clinging to traditional views even in the face of clear evidence pointing in the opposite direction. In Xenophon's case questioning received tradition has been particularly challenging. Because of the vastness of his corpus and the fact that he ranges over so many different genres and topics it requires a particularly hardy soul to address his works *in toto*.<sup>24</sup> What more frequently happens is that the study of Xenophon is carried out by

<sup>17</sup> Humble 2004b.

<sup>18</sup> Proietti 1987; Tuplin 1993; Dillery 1995; Humble 1997: 108–86; Christesen 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Primarily, Humble 1997: 46–107 and Millender 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Proietti 1987; Humble 1999, 2004a, 2007, 2014; see also from different angles Tuplin 1994; Pontier 2006: 394–7; Farrell 2012; Collins 2018.

<sup>21</sup> E.g., Riedinger 1991 and Schepens 2005. On the *Anabasis*, see Stronk 1995. More generally, see Cuniberti 2007 and Richer 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Schepens 2005 is a good example.

<sup>23</sup> Luppino Manes 1988; Rebenich 1998; Lipka 2002; and Gray 2007. Collins 2018 is an important exception to this rule though her reading draws heavily on that of Strauss 1939.

<sup>24</sup> As Azoulay 2008 notes too. Delebecque 1957; Breitenbach 1967; Higgins 1977; and Gray 2011a should be singled out for their inclusive approach. Hobden and Tuplin 2012a is also perhaps the most overarching collection of essays to be published on Xenophon's corpus.

different groups who deal only with portions of his corpus, for specific reasons, and who are not always in conversation with one another. Ancient historians concentrating on Sparta, therefore, tend just to focus on one or more of the four works which deal with Sparta without always contextualising them within Xenophon's corpus as a whole. Xenophon is judged as an historian and frequently found wanting in comparison with others, typically viewed as inferior to Thucydides and/or the fragmentary Oxyrhynchus historian, and, as noted (p. xx), frequently also inferior as a source on Sparta to Plutarch, whose vast distance from the actuality of Classical Sparta somehow confers upon him a more objective standing. The *Anabasis* is less often treated than the *Hellenica* for what it has to say about Xenophon's view of Sparta, perhaps because it has tended to attract the attention most of those interested in military history and so on its own has spawned a huge body of scholarship.<sup>25</sup> Ancient philosophers can be broken into groups as well, depending upon their manner of reading Xenophon's Socratic works. The larger group has tended to privilege Plato and thus almost inevitably to judge both Xenophon's portrait of Socrates and his philosophical acumen wanting,<sup>26</sup> but there has also been a steadily increasing number judging Xenophon with care and on his own terms who are continuing to illuminate aspects of his philosophical thought.<sup>27</sup> Though this latter group rarely touches on Xenophon's approach to Sparta, these re-evaluations of Xenophon as a philosopher are important not least because they treat Xenophon seriously as a thinker but also because of their examination of the core values and principles of Xenophon's thought.

There is one other distinct group of scholars who work on Xenophon: namely political scientists and philosophers who have been particularly influenced by the scholarship of Leo Strauss.<sup>28</sup> Strauss himself published widely on Xenophon (1939, 1963, 1970, 1972, 1975) and indeed while he

<sup>25</sup> E.g., Nussbaum 1967; Dalby 1992; Waterfield 2006; and Lee 2007 on various aspects of social organisation, logistics and the practicalities of the journey. Intrepid scholar-explorers have set out to recreate the route of the journey: Prevas 2002; Manfredi 1986 and 2004; Mitford 2000; Brennan 2005; and Waterfield 2006. Other works of Xenophon have been subject to this type of isolation too: ancient economists, for example, have frequently plucked Xenophon's *Poroi* out of his corpus and dealt with it on its own.

<sup>26</sup> E.g., Vlastos 1991 and Kahn 1996.

<sup>27</sup> L.-A. Dorion has been central in this revival; see Dorion and Bandini 2000, 2011a, 2011b, and Dorion 2013a (a collection of his essays on Xenophon). Morrison (e.g., 1994, 2008, 2010); Danzig (e.g., 2005, 2010); and Johnson (e.g., 2005a, 2005b, 2009) have also been instrumental in this movement (combining forces indeed to edit the recent volume *Plato and Xenophon: Comparative Studies*, 2018). See also Johnson's 2021 monograph, *Xenophon's Socratic Works*.

<sup>28</sup> E.g., Nadon 2001; Buzzetti 2008; and many of the contributors to Gish and Ambler 2009.

focused most of his attention on the Socratic works, his earliest foray into Xenophontic scholarship was on the *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia*. Strauss had many acute observations to make about Xenophon's treatise on Sparta, and was alone, in a period dominated by scholarship treating Xenophon as a military memoirist and good old country gentleman, in insisting that Xenophon be read carefully and with seriousness. His conclusion, however, that the treatise was entrenched satire, resulted in his work being either treated with scorn or roundly ignored by Classicists.<sup>29</sup> There is no doubt that his conclusion is problematic, partly because of his insistence on covert messages concealed in the narrative and partly because he tended to read Xenophon ahistorically, but because of his determination to view Xenophon as worthy of study he also made many trenchant observations, and I will come back to address these throughout my reading of the *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia*.

Contemporary Straussian interpreters of Xenophon tend to follow the same approach, reading him in an ahistorical manner as a deeply ironic writer and reading so far between the lines that they sometimes lose sight of the actual text itself. Their approach has been used recently to criticise other scholars who do not fall into the Straussian camp but who argue that Xenophon needs to be read with more care and subtlety. So whereas in actuality there are three broad camps into which scholars can be put in terms of their understanding of Xenophon's literary style – (1) simple and straightforward, (2) subtle and demanding of active reading, (3) so subtle that his real message is something entirely different to the surface message (i.e. the Straussian approach) – those in the first camp of late have been arguing against those in the second camp by lumping them into the third camp and deeming that grounds for not addressing their arguments seriously.<sup>30</sup> Yet there is a considerable difference between the approaches

<sup>29</sup> Dorion 2010 is unusual both in acknowledging the role Strauss' scholarship played in the slow rehabilitation of Xenophon as an important thinker, and in addressing Strauss' arguments in depth, even as he comes down decidedly in opposition. Johnson 2012, who also could hardly be regarded as Straussian, likewise treats Strauss' views with care.

<sup>30</sup> Thus, e.g., Schepens 2005 considers Tuplin and Azoulay Straussians; Hobden and Tuplin 2012b: 4 n. 5 place my work in this camp. Gray 2011a *passim* categorises all sorts of scholars as belonging to this group, citing, e.g., many of the essays in Tuplin 2004a. Most recently Christesen 2016: 378–81 has suggested that there are three main camps of thought regarding Xenophon's view of Sparta in particular: (1) that he is 'straightforwardly and consistently pro-Spartan'; (2) that his opinion, initially positive, became disillusioned over time; and (3) that he was consistently negative and even satirical, a view derived from Strauss 1939. Christesen puts my work in this third camp, yet it belongs in a fourth group, one that allows for both praise and criticism at the same time (and not chronologically driven as is argued by those in the second group) and does not rely on viewing Xenophon's criticism of Sparta as hidden (see also Hodkinson 2005 for this view of Xenophon on Sparta).

followed by the latter two groups (not to mention variations of approach within both groups).<sup>31</sup>

Favourite techniques which Xenophon employs and which require his reader to pay attention include the following: juxtaposition of opposing issues without explicit commentary, unanswered open-ended questions, competing lines of narrative and undiscussed paradoxes. Thucydides and Plato can be shown to be using these techniques without anyone who points them out being accused of over-interpretation,<sup>32</sup> but there is more resistance when it is suggested that Xenophon employs them – either as if he is not capable or as if he is to be regarded apart from his contemporaries in this regard. But the more examination there is into how the ancients read, the more it can be shown that they expected their readers to read actively and to respond to the challenges deliberately posed by the texts.<sup>33</sup> Indeed Xenophon himself, no less than Plato, shows awareness of the limitations of the written text.<sup>34</sup>

It is not likely that we are all going to come to complete agreement on the complexity of Xenophon's writing any time soon, though a number of recent volumes reflect the increasing breadth and depth of current Xenophontic scholarship, showing overall that more care is being taken with his texts and opening up new and exciting lines of enquiry.<sup>35</sup> I unabashedly fall solidly into the second group of scholars noted above – those who think that Xenophon is a careful writer who expects his texts to be read actively – and I will argue in this book that the traditional assertion of Xenophon's preference for Sparta over Athens and his championing of Spartans' ways and in particular of the Spartan king Agesilaus misses the mark.



To do this I am going to start, in Chapter 1, by asking some questions about the nature of and motivation for Xenophon's large and generically diverse literary project. Rather than attempt yet another set of arguments about the chronology of the works, however, I will focus instead upon the way in which Xenophon presents himself as a character in the *Anabasis* and in one vignette in the *Memorabilia*, on the grounds that he does so for a specific purpose (since, for example, there are events in the

<sup>31</sup> As Johnson 2012 well sets out.

<sup>32</sup> E.g., Yunis 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Konstan 2006. More specifically on Xenophon, see Johnson 2018b: 86–7 especially.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter 1.5 and n. 99 there.

<sup>35</sup> E.g., Hobden and Tuplin 2012a; Danzig, Johnson and Morrison 2018; Tamiolaki 2018.

*Hellenica* in which we are certain he took part but into the narrative of which he does not insert himself). I will suggest that the combined portrait shows him examining his life in a Socratic fashion at a point when the soundness of Socrates' advice to him has become apparent, i.e. *after* the consequences of his actions have led to his exile from Athens, when it is too late for him to turn back the clock. I do not think for a moment that he thought, as he was heading off with his friend Proxenus to join Cyrus, that he would end up in exile, but I do think that, finding himself in just that situation, he made the best of it, expediently cultivating support where he could find it. Further, his situation caused some soul-searching, the result of which he presented in the *Anabasis*, which, I argue, is in its own way heavily influenced by what Xenophon finally learned from Socrates. His headstrong younger self refused to heed the advice of Socrates and once he found himself in exile he had cut off all paths to the kind of political life he was aiming at before. His self-examination led to the decision that the way he could be most useful and beneficial to others, following Socrates' example, was to help those who aspired to the political life to which he himself could no longer aspire. This he proceeded to do by composing philosophical and didactic treatises designed to help others to become better political beings themselves, both as citizens and as rulers. Because Sparta was *the* hegemonic power for the majority of his lifetime, the way that *polis* and her citizens handled such power was naturally of interest.<sup>36</sup> The unexpected path Xenophon's life had taken had even given him considerable material for analysis in regard to individual Spartans (those Xenophon campaigned with and under) and he did not scruple to examine their behaviour critically. Thus this chapter essentially argues that Socrates and Athens were more central to Xenophon than Agesilaus and Sparta, and that his literary output bears all the hallmarks of what he had learnt from Socrates. His writings about Sparta, therefore, need to be read and interpreted through this lens, as analytical and philosophical, not as encomiastic and naïve.

<sup>36</sup> And so, while leadership is not the only issue of concern to Xenophon, it is of central interest in his discussion of Sparta and individual Spartans. I do not here, however, follow the general approach to be found in, e.g., Gray 2011a and Buxton 2016b. Not wishing to downplay the importance of noticing patterns of behaviour or narrative patterning across Xenophon's corpus (indeed narrative patterning in the *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia* is going to be a key element in my interpretation), I still do not regard Xenophon's leadership model as 'universal' (Gray 2011a: 44–51) or 'monolithic' (Buxton 2016b: 335) and reasserted through various of his 'heroes' across his corpus. Nor do I think that either Lycurgus or Agesilaus are, for him, positive paradigmatic figures as will become clear (*contra* Gray 2011a: 30–4).



In Chapter 2, I begin to narrow the focus onto the *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia*. Here I will tackle, first of all, the theories of other scholars, in particular the general assumption that the work was composed in order to praise Sparta. The first part of my analysis focuses on passages in the text which have been deemed problematic by those subscribing to the praise theory. I argue that it is not the text that is difficult to understand, but the praise hypothesis itself that causes the difficulties. I then look at the theory of Leo Strauss that the treatise is actually constructed as a satire, and show that this approach also does not resolve the interpretative problems adequately, and that the greater sensitivity he paid to the way Xenophon structured his narrative is often undermined by his tendency to treat the material in an ahistorical manner. This leads me into the last portion of this chapter, which consists of a discussion about what we can assume Xenophon means when he speaks of Sparta's power and renown, as far as we can reconstruct it from the material available. A surprising disparity of views exists on this point and it is not negligible for interpretation of the treatise as a whole.

Part II consists of a detailed reading of the *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia*, divided into three chapters. My reading will move through the treatise in a linear fashion, noting, as I go, the ways in which Xenophon appears to create two separate but interlocked lines of argument, one of which illuminates his initial answer to his opening question, about how a *polis* so under-populated as Sparta could have gained such power and renown, while the other draws the reader into further reflections upon the likely – and more negative – outcomes of the Lycurgan practices being described. My first point is that the opening of the treatise uses recognisably philosophical language to mark the enquiry not as any sort of eulogy but rather as intellectual enquiry. Given Xenophon's Socratic credentials, then, such an enquiry is likely to follow Socratic methods and reflect shared Socratic values. In each of the sections dealt with here (begetting of children, education of boys, provisions for youths, for young men and for men over 30, i.e. *Lac.* 1–4), Xenophon focuses upon broad matters of principle and the unique aspects of the Spartan system but without giving many concrete details. What is notable about his narrative technique is the way in which he appears to show Lycurgan practices battling against human nature and, therefore, being constantly in need of adjustment for their successful implementation. Various questions addressed to the reader and unanswered by Xenophon tend to push the reader to consider further their implications: was the thinking behind this or that law sound or does the reader's own experience and comparison with other

systems suggest rather that the Spartan *politeia* was missing something vital? For example, was the tendency to focus narrowly on obedience through constraint rather than through inculcating the basic principles of justice a fatal flaw, as one might infer from the behaviour of real Spartiates described in Xenophon's other works?

In Chapter 4, the next six sections of the treatise (*Lac.* 5–10) come under scrutiny. These sections encompass Xenophon's treatment of the Lycurgan *diaita* ('daily life'), including the common messes, sharing of goods, wealth (most especially measures to discourage its accumulation), obedience to the laws, legislation against cowards, and the practice of virtue into old age. My examination of these sections again underlines how Xenophon employs various different narrative strategies in order both to highlight aspects of the system which have contributed to Sparta's power and renown and, at the same time, to call some of them into question: for example, strategically placed engagement with an imaginary audience and the repeated use of the schema whereby an initial Lycurgan measure has to be propped up by further more stringent ones suggest the inadequacy of the first to counter normal human behaviour patterns. Further, Xenophon's engagement with other readings of Sparta, where we can see these, tends to show how much more negative an approach he is employing: for example, Critias on drinking practices and Tyrtaeus on fighting to the death. In general, this part of the treatise continues to underscore how much public conformity enforced by an elaborate system of shaming and punishments underpins the Lycurgan system, while suggesting a critique to the reader's mind of the inadequacy of such a regime for the making of individuals who can practise virtue willingly just as much in private.

Chapter 5 covers the third and final part of the treatise (*Lac.* 11–15), the sections on various aspects of the Spartan army, the problems created for Sparta by its failure to adhere strictly to Lycurgus' laws, and the honours given to the kings in times of peace, the last being the only aspect of the original system which in Xenophon's view remains unchanged. My analysis starts by showing how closely all these sections are linked, both thematically and logically, with each other and *Lac.* 1–10 (reaffirming belief in the unitarian nature of the work). Once more, the criticisms inherent in the narrative presentation of the Lycurgan measures are teased out. Why is it that camps are set up to protect against 'friends'? How flexible in response to emergencies was the well-oiled Spartan military machine? In what sense could the Lycurgan rule that kings were to lead military campaigns be reconciled with the increasingly imperialistic need for extra

military leaders and harmosts, whose role was not, it appears, defined by the ancestral customs? Though comparative material from various parts of Xenophon's own corpus has featured in my analysis to this point, it is here that Xenophon's account of actual Spartan behaviour in the *Anabasis* and *Hellenica* begins to play an increasingly larger role, providing strong support for this new reading of the treatise as a considered and critical account of the strengths and weaknesses of Sparta's *politeia* and the relationship of those weaknesses to its failure as a hegemonic state.

In Part III, then, I turn back to Xenophon's other writings about Sparta in order to place this philosophical treatise in its proper context. Chapter 6, therefore, examines depictions of Spartans in the *Anabasis*, *Hellenica* and *Agésilau*s. How far Xenophon intended these works to be read in conjunction with the *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia* is not a point that can be definitively resolved, but I argue that it is not unlikely that his thoughts about the workings of the Spartan *polis* are reflected in his depiction of Spartan leaders and, in turn, that his observation of Spartan leaders in the field (which I think can, with confidence, be placed before his literary career) to some degree influenced his analysis of the Sparta *politeia*. Thus, I first suggest that the ambivalence displayed in the treatise generally and the criticism made in *Lac.* 14 in particular are consistent with Xenophon's depiction of Spartan behaviour in his *Hellenica* and *Anabasis*. This is substantiated by a close examination of Xenophon's portrayal of harmosts and other Spartan leaders in those two works in light of the key points highlighted by him in the *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia*. Next I turn to the *Agésilau*s, and, after comparing the ways in which the king is depicted in the encomium and in the *Hellenica* – encomiastically (of course) in the first, but critically in the second – I show that the *Agésilau*s is following norms for the encomiastic genre already in place by this period and argue that no contemporary would have been deceived into preferring this account to the one in the *Hellenica* were they looking for Xenophon's true assessment of Agesilaus' life, character and achievements. Finally, I show how tightly Xenophon's treatment of real individuals in the *Anabasis* and *Hellenica* fits with his philosophically structured investigation in the *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia*. Not only is the treatise very far from reflecting Agesilaus' vision of all that is good in Sparta but Xenophon's portrayal of Agesilaus and Lysander in particular reveals that both of them embody the nature of the system as described in the treatise.

In the final chapter, I situate Xenophon's view of Sparta more broadly within fourth-century BCE political thought and speculate a little about the audience for whom Xenophon was writing. My approach here is to

examine the possibility of literary conversations between Xenophon and Plato and Xenophon and Isocrates, by comparing the attitudes of all three towards Sparta and noting the close agreements we can detect – whichever way round the conversations are seen as going – on major points of importance. These intersections of interest and viewpoint, I shall argue, strongly suggest that Xenophon's *Lacedaimoniôn Politeia* (and by extension, in all probability his whole corpus) was aimed at and read in Athenian intellectual circles, and in particular, that the slight distance between Xenophon and Isocrates, measured against the closeness of viewpoint between Plato and Xenophon – notably their striking agreement on major internal deficiencies in the Spartan system – argues for the most important reception to be located among the Socratic circle.