



*The “Landmark” Xenophon’s Anabasis* ed. Shane Brennan and David Thomas.

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Translations of Xenophon’s Eastern Adventure with the Pretender Cyrus II (401–400 BCE), abound. More recent travelers in parts of Anatolia and Mesopotamia try to retrace in their books the nearly circular route that the Greeks took into the heart of the Persian Empire and out again. Xenophon’s account of a haphazard polis on the move was the first of its kind. In the “Landmark” edition of Xenophon’s *Anabasis*, an unusually knowledgeable editorial team has produced a valuable guide to a rich text. Coeditor Shane Brennan has taught in Turkey and Dubai and his personal trekking and photographs in the footsteps of the Greek army inform his account of terrains and possible routes (Editors’ Preface §18–22). David Thomas is responsible for the translation, historical notes, and summary.

Reduced from thirteen thousand to less than ten thousand Greek men and stripped of their leaders, they blundered through hostile societies searching for a safe path to the sea. A coast was the key to getting back alive—*thalatta, thalatta*, “the sea, the sea”—their famous shout of relief. Their march has been imprinted in the imagination of the West from generations before Alexander of Macedon to Lawrence of Arabia, and even further. European mercenaries’ spears hired for a Near Eastern coup d’état produced surprising admiration. Self-confidence and a sense of laughable superiority turned into a bitter struggle among Greek factions and a battle for survival against the “locals” and weather.<sup>1</sup> The traumatized men suffered windburn, numbness, blindness, frost-bite, and apathy. Some just gave up on the trail.

Fantasies of “the Other,” Hellenic Orientalism, captivated the gentleman adventurer Xenophon. His fantasies feature prominently in his didactic novel the *Cyropaideia*, the *Education of [the Elder] Cyrus*, the paradigmatic Father of his country who lived 150 years earlier. As a wealthy cavalryman, he was persona non grata in the Athenian democracy restored after the murderous oligarchy of the greedy Thirty. The Athenian Xenophon exhibited serious interest (three essays worth) in the hoplite and polis gadfly Socrates,<sup>2</sup> who irritated big-shots during Athenian supremacy and ultimate military defeat in the fifth century BCE. He also admired the Spartans’ regime and wrote a biography of their ambitious, lame king Agesilaus. During a pause in the Greek interstate wars, he signed up with Cyrus’s Hellenic recruiter, Proxenos the Boeotian, to overthrow Cyrus’s older brother Artaxerxes, the duly consecrated Persian Shah.

The mixed Greek and barbarian army had mustered, marched inland, and routed Artaxerxes’s loyal troops at the battle of Cunaxa—a settlement in present-day Iraq (book 1); Cyrus, having charged his brother too precipitously, was killed. As he predicted, the team that lost its head, lost everything (1.8.12).

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1. See, esp., Tim Rood, *The Sea! The Sea! The Shout of the Ten Thousand in the Modern Imagination* (NY: Overlook Pr, 2005).

2. Xenophon, not always an objective reporter, records that Socrates tried to dissuade him from joining this Foreign Legion (3.1.5-7 = 82). Since he ignored this good advice, this anecdote may be mere “name-dropping.” His law-court defense and reminiscences of his philosophical hero Socrates attest to his hero worship.

The remaining Hellenic unit-leaders of the privately assembled foreign invaders had immediately lost its *raison d'être*. After agreeing to a parley with the King's commanders, they were seized as bandits and marauders (2.5). After their hollow victory (Jan. 400 BCE), the Greeks lacked a supply chain, cavalry, guides, and ships waiting at the coast; they faced thousands of enemy troops and an unfriendly or indifferent countryside. Klearchos the Spartan took control, but he too was seduced into talks. His positive "obituary" (2.6) is one of many in which Xenophon rates his colleagues for better and worse. Xenophon tells us that he was present in the force but not as an officer or even an ordinary soldier. He became one of the remnant, headless army's commanders by a democratic vote, replacing Proxenos of the arrested generals, soon to be beheaded (3.1).

Xenophon records (in the third person)<sup>3</sup> the Greeks stumbling retreat through Assyria, Armenia (book 4), and Anatolia, north to the Black Sea, where they trudged along its southern coast (books 5–6) to Kotyora—ca. 4000 miles. Their trip likely lasted from spring 401 to spring 399. The anti-climatic seventh and final book records the Greeks's subsequently straighter route to European Byzantium and—unexpectedly—back east to coastal Anatolia to fight for Sparta's military interest. At Pergamum, Xenophon handed over his uncertain command to the authorized Spartan general Thibron. What had begun as a would-be profitable march to gold and glory ended with as a straggling body of exhausted men barely disciplined and repeatedly mutinous—if that word suits unpaid free agents.

Xenophon offers dramatic scenes among many pages of slogging through mud or deserts, up and down mountains. For instance, early on Klearchos faces a mutiny when the soldiers realize they are headed for a war against the King of Persia, not an easy foray against backward Pisidian mountaineers. The men start throwing things at their commander who calls an assembly. In (feigned) tears, the tough Spartan addresses his angry crew (1.3). He pledges loyalty to his Hellenes—not to his Persian commander and paymaster—while secretly messaging Cyrus to hold tight in his nearby tent. He addresses them again, expressing shame and fear, and asks the men what they should do next. He breaks off, and his cronies, as prompted by him, point out the difficulties of turning back. One shill, pretending to be keen on returning home, makes preposterous suggestions for how to do so. Klearchos pledges loyalty to whomever they choose to govern, other than himself. When the political drama is over, one of many moments of duplicity, the men decide to continue with Klearchos and Cyrus—at a higher rate of pay. Leadership lessons seem to require such performance art.

This new, accurate, 200-page translation of a Greek text<sup>4</sup> overshadows its predecessors in its copious ancillary material. Like Xenophon's Greek original it is generally plain in style. The annotated text follows seventy pages of introduction to the author and his agenda, the Athenian and larger Greek context, and the Persian imperial situation. The editors recognize Xenophon's attention to leadership, not only Cyrus's and the original generals' but also his own. Illustrations dot the pages; they range from photographs<sup>5</sup> of vases showing such common practices and equipment as sacrifice and hoplite armor to maps that clarify the discussion of contested portions of the route. The thorough notes rarely leave the uninitiated puzzled, although many will wonder how

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3. Xenophon's own *Hellenica* (3.1.2) puzzlingly records the author of *Anabasis* to have been Themistogenes the Syracusan, not Xenophon. The anonymous author in this text mentions Xenophon over 230 times.

4. For many decades, the *Anabasis* was the basic text for second-year Greek students.

5. Esp. welcome are century-old photographs of "landmarks" of Xenophon's journey such as the Cilician gates (fig. 1.2.22) and the Kentrites river (fig. 4.3.1).

many villages had to be taxed to supply the Queen Parysatis's "girdle" (1.4.9). (This obsolete English term refers to an elaborate royal cincture or *zoné*.)

Xenophon paints himself (again, in the third person) as resourceful, approachable, and honest but capable of cunning; he was a pious Hellene, attentive to dreams, omens, and sacrifices), as well as a team player (see, e.g., 7.2.29). He likely kept notes during the march as the details of daily advances suggest he did. He did not want the chief command and did not accept it when offered (6.1.25–33). His flattering self-portrait has impressed most readers, including scholars.

Twenty-four appendixes occupy 200+ pages, some written by the editors and others by scholars on three continents. They include "Divinity and Divining" (Michael Flower), "The Route of the Ten Thousand" (Shane Brennan), and "Brief Biographies" (David Thomas). The editors provide relevant excerpts from Plutarch's *Artaxerxes*, Photius's *Synopsis of Ctesias's Persica*, and Diogenes Laertius's *Life of Xenophon*. The editors include an annotated list of ancient authors, a glossary, an up-to-date (mostly English) bibliography, and a fifty-page index of persons, places, significant objects, practices, emotions ("fear" gets two columns), and concepts (e.g., prudence). Ten serviceable reference maps—the last with all troop halts indicated—close the volume. Plentiful footnotes often indicate unresolved issues, such as whether "parasang" was a measure of time, distance, or some combination (cf. App. O). Every paragraph provides the ancient month, year, and location (e.g., "Late October 400, Byzantium"). Battle maps illustrate the account of description of Cunaxa (38–39).

Cyrus's death ended the campaign. Although Artaxerxes's troops plundered the enemy's camp briefly, the Greek troops commanded the battlefield—but erected none of their usual trophies (1.10.4, 13–2.1.23). A five page summary by book and chapter establishes the Ten Thousand's progress and setbacks month by month.

This large format, beautifully printed and bound volume is reasonably priced. A forthcoming paperback version may serve university classes in ancient history and/or military history, as well as leadership seminars and anyone interested in the political and social habits of unregulated male Hellenes.