

## XENOPHON'S *CYROPAEDIA* AND MILITARY REFORM IN SPARTA\*

**Abstract:** Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* can be read as a proto-novel, a biography, or as an essay on leadership or constitutional theory. This article argues that the *Cyropaedia* can and should also be read as a pamphlet on practical military reform with special relevance to the Spartan state.

The inclusion of a series of proposals for the reform of the Spartan army in the *Cyropaedia* has not heretofore been recognized because Xenophon presented those proposals in the guise of a reform of the Persian army undertaken by Cyrus. There was no historical basis for this part of the *Cyropaedia*, and there is no trace of a major military reform in either the Greek or the Persian tradition about Cyrus as it existed before Xenophon. Cyrus' military reform was thus an authorial invention that presumably served some important narrative purpose.

Xenophon inserted a military reform into the *Cyropaedia* as a way of presenting a proposal for the restructuring of the Spartan army. When Xenophon wrote the *Cyropaedia*, the Spartans were struggling desperately to maintain their position in the face of a powerful Boeotian army. The Boeotians could put many more hoplites into the field and had a large cavalry force that they were using to excellent effect. The obvious response on the part of the Spartans was to take whatever measures were necessary to increase the number of men in their phalanx and to assemble a sizeable, highly trained group of horsemen. The programme of military reform enacted by Cyrus in the *Cyropaedia* produces just this result. If implemented in Sparta, this programme would have involved the wholesale addition of non-Spartiates to the Spartan phalanx and the conversion of the Spartan *homoioi* into an all-cavalry force.

Xenophon thus used Cyrus' army in the *Cyropaedia* to show what a revamped Spartan military might look like. The use of fictional narrative to explore ideas with immediate application to the real world has long been recognized as an integral part of the *Cyropaedia*. This aspect of the *Cyropaedia* has in the past been explored largely in regard to Xenophon's thinking about leadership and ethics, but it can and should be extended to include military reform in Sparta.

### INTRODUCTION

XENOPHON was a man of many parts, a mercenary soldier and a philosopher, an Athenian who found a second homeland in Sparta, a realist who participated in the *machtpolitik* of the fourth century and an idealist capable of heroizing deeply flawed leaders. The complexity of the man is manifest in much of his *oeuvre*, but most especially in the *Cyropaedia*. As James Tatum has shown, the *Cyropaedia* can be read as 'a pedagogical novel, a historical novel, a romanticized biography, a mirror for princes, an ideal romance, a novel before the novel, or a contribution to Greek constitutional theory'.<sup>1</sup> The goal of this essay is to demonstrate that even the impressive resumé proposed by Tatum is incomplete. The *Cyropaedia* was, in addition to everything else, a pamphlet on practical military reform with special relevance to the Spartan state.<sup>2</sup>

The inclusion of a series of proposals for the reform of the Spartan army in the *Cyropaedia* has not heretofore been recognized because Xenophon presented those proposals in the guise of a reform of the Persian army. Cyrus inherits a Persian army that consists solely of foot soldiers. It contains both nobles, called *homotimoi*, serving as heavy-armed infantrymen, and commoners serving as light-armed troops. Cyrus begins by converting all the light-armed troops into heavy-armed infantrymen. He is subsequently troubled by the lack of horsemen and begins training infantrymen, at first nobles and later commoners, as cavalrymen.

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<sup>1</sup> Tatum (1989) xv. A nearly identical list, also based on Tatum, can be found in Due (2003) 588. See also Tigerstedt (1965-78) 1.177. All translations of ancient sources are those of this author. All dates are BC unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> To my knowledge, this is a novel reading of the *Cyropaedia*. I have been unable to find any trace of such a reading despite a thorough search through the relevant scholarship. The literature on Xenophon is so extensive and complex, however, that it is functionally impossible to carry out an exhaustive search. If this reading has been mooted in the past, it has not become part of the general thinking on the *Cyropaedia*.

There was no historical basis for this part of the *Cyropaedia*, and there is no trace of a major military reform in either the Greek or the Persian tradition about Cyrus as it existed before Xenophon. Cyrus' military reform was thus an authorial invention that presumably served some important narrative purpose. Until recently the favoured interpretive approach has been to take the account of Cyrus' military reform in the *Cyropaedia* as the product of an unabashed admiration on the part of Xenophon for Sparta and for Agesilaus. The conversion of light-armed commoners into heavy-armed infantrymen was understood as a reflection of the Spartan practice of freeing and arming helots, the conversion of infantrymen into horsemen as a reflection of Agesilaus' creation of a cavalry force virtually *ex nihilo* during his expedition to Asia Minor.

This interpretation has been fatally undercut by a spate of recent scholarship that has brought about a reassessment of Xenophon's attitude toward Sparta. Xenophon's close relationship with Sparta has long been seen as the source of a pro-Spartan bias he was incapable of overcoming. A series of works that have appeared in the past twenty years have painted a more convincing picture of Xenophon as an independent thinker capable of both criticizing and idealizing the Spartan *diaita*. It is, in any case, improbable that Xenophon's primary purpose for attributing the rearming of the Persian commoners and the creation of the Persian cavalry to Cyrus was to laud the Spartan military. Spartiates would hardly have seen the freeing and arming of helots as something of which they were particularly proud, and the Spartans showed little interest in their mounted troops, which were notably unspectacular.

Newer work on the *Cyropaedia* has taken a different approach to Cyrus' military reform. This reform is now commonly understood as reflecting and embodying Xenophon's ideas about political structures and leadership. The possible connection to the military realities of Agesilaus' Sparta is ignored completely, noted in passing but left unexplained, or denied outright. While this approach is preferable to perpetuating a flawed reading of the relevant sections of the *Cyropaedia*, it is also something of an overreaction against the problems found in the earlier scholarship. There are numerous, obvious similarities between Cyrus' military reform and Spartan military practice, similarities which merit explanation of some kind.

Xenophon inserted a military reform into the *Cyropaedia* as a way of presenting a proposal for the restructuring of the Spartan army. When Xenophon wrote the *Cyropaedia*, the Spartans were struggling desperately to maintain their position in the face of a powerful Boeotian army. The Boeotians could put many more hoplites into the field and had a large cavalry force that they were using to excellent effect. The obvious response on the part of the Spartans was to take whatever measures were necessary to increase the number of men in their phalanx and to assemble a sizeable, highly trained group of horsemen. The programme of military reform enacted by Cyrus in the *Cyropaedia* produces just this result. If implemented in Sparta, this programme would have involved the wholesale addition of non-Spartiates to the Spartan phalanx and the conversion of the Spartan *homoioi* into an all-cavalry force.

Xenophon thus used Cyrus' army in the *Cyropaedia* to show what a revamped Spartan military might look like. There is, as a result, a notable degree of correspondence between the realities of the Spartan army and Cyrus' fictional forces. At the same time, Xenophon's interests lay in remedying the deficiencies of Spartan forces. Cyrus' military reform inevitably reflects those deficiencies, and so the narrative in the *Cyropaedia* by no means presents or implies a uniformly positive view of the Spartan army.

The use of fictional narrative to explore ideas with immediate application to the real world has long been recognized as an integral part of the *Cyropaedia*. Bodil Due has pointed out that a 'dominant feature in the narrative is the frequent parallels between Cyrus' time and the author's time ... They break the illusion of history and fiction by recalling the reader to the present, and thus serve to stress the paradigmatic importance of the story.'<sup>3</sup> This aspect of the *Cyropaedia*

<sup>3</sup> Due (2003) 597.

has in the past been explored largely in regard to Xenophon's thinking about leadership and ethics, but it can and should be extended to include military reform in Sparta.

### A SUMMARY OF CYRUS' MILITARY REFORMS

The argumentation that follows relies heavily upon a close knowledge of Cyrus' military reform, so it is worth starting with a summary of his actions. The Persia of the *Cyropaedia* is a country with a powerful army spearheaded by a group of nobles, but one completely lacking in cavalry. The Persian *homotimoi* are trained virtually from birth to be infantrymen.<sup>4</sup> When Cyrus goes to Media as a young man to visit his grandfather Astyages, he finds himself in a country where fighting from horseback is the standard practice among the nobility, and he immediately learns how to ride (1.3.3). Cyrus gets his first taste of combat while in Media and distinguishes himself by leading an impromptu cavalry charge (1.4.16-24). When he returns home to complete his education, Astyages gives him a number of horses to take with him (1.4.25). Cyrus' interest in horsemanship, however, remains an anomaly in Persia. Not long after his return to Persia, Cyrus is sent back to Media at the head of a Persian expeditionary force dispatched to support the Medes against the Assyrians. The Persian force consists of 1,000 heavy-armed *homotimoi* and 30,000 light-armed commoners, all of whom are foot soldiers (1.5.5).

Cyrus immediately sets about transforming the army under his command. Upon his arrival in Media, he persuades Astyages' son Cyaxares to supply weaponry so that the light-armed Persian commoners can be equipped in the same fashion as the heavy-armed Persian nobility (2.1.9-10).<sup>5</sup> Cyrus then leads his rebuilt army on a campaign of conquest, ostensibly in support of the Medes though his own ambitions become increasingly obvious as events unfold. He defeats the Armenians, Chaldaeans and Assyrians in quick succession (2.4.18-4.5.58).

During this campaign Cyrus decides that the lack of cavalry makes the Persian army dangerously vulnerable and persuades the Persian nobility to begin training as horsemen (4.3.1-4.5.58).<sup>6</sup> The need for a Persian cavalry force becomes apparent after Cyrus inflicts a defeat upon the Assyrian army, after which the Median and other allied cavalry units set off in pursuit (4.2.27-33).<sup>7</sup> The Persian soldiers are left behind, and when the Median horsemen begin sending back plunder in large quantities, Cyrus reproaches 'both himself and his men, because the others during this time seemed to be outdoing them and gaining something by it, while he and his men remained idle' (4.3.3).<sup>8</sup> Cyrus proposes that the *homotimoi* learn how to fight from horseback, and the *homotimoi* immediately assent. Cyrus then continues on his campaign of conquest (4.6.1-7.5.86). The final part of the narrative describes how Cyrus organizes his domains and beneficently rules his empire until his death from old age (8.1.1-8.8.8). The work closes on a sour note as Cyrus' descendants prove unequal to the task of maintaining his high standards.

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed summary of the plot of the *Cyropaedia* (and a good general introduction to the relevant scholarship), see Due (2003).

<sup>5</sup> For a good discussion of Cyrus' reform of the Persian infantry in the *Cyropaedia*, see Nadon (2001) 61-76.

<sup>6</sup> On Cyrus' creation of a cavalry force in the *Cyropaedia*, see Nadon (2001) 100-8.

<sup>7</sup> The allied cavalry includes the Hyrcanians, Assyrian subjects, whose forces consist of 1,000 cavalrymen assigned as rearguards of the Assyrian army (4.2.1-27). The Hyrcanians are unhappy because 'the Assyrians

were in the habit of using them just like the Lacedaemonians use the Skiritai, in no way sparing them from suffering or danger' (4.2.1, ... ἐχρῶντο αὐτοῖς οἱ Ἀσσύριοι ὡς περ καὶ οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι τοῖς Σκιρίταις, οὐδὲν φειδόμενοι αὐτῶν οὔτ' ἐν πόνοις οὔτ' ἐν κινδύνοις). They therefore send envoys to Cyrus offering to change sides, and Cyrus happily accepts them as allies.

<sup>8</sup> ... καὶ αὐτὸν καὶ τοὺς σὺν αὐτῷ, εἰ οἱ ἄλλοι τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον ἀκμάζειν τε μᾶλλον ἑαυτῶν ἐκδόκου καὶ προσκτάσθαι τι, αὐτοὶ δὲ ἐν ἀργότερα χῶρα ὑπομένειν.

## CYRUS BEFORE XENOPHON

Xenophon constructed his narrative of Cyrus' life by selecting from among a variety of ancient traditions and by adding freely to those traditions.<sup>9</sup> The military reform that Cyrus undertakes in the *Cyropaedia* shows every sign of being a product of Xenophon's imagination. There was, to begin with, no historical basis for this facet of the *Cyropaedia*. As almost nothing is known about the Persian infantry during the sixth century, the focus here will be on cavalry, about which there is significantly more information. Xenophon portrays Cyrus as learning to ride a horse for the first time when he visits Astyages. He explains Cyrus' ignorance of horsemanship on the grounds that Persia was a mountainous place where 'it was a very rare thing to even see a horse' (1.3.3). The Persians, however, were a semi-nomadic people with a deep familiarity with horsemanship well before the time of Cyrus.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the role of horseman was a particularly important part of the identity of the Persian nobility. This is reflected in an extant seal of Cyrus' grandfather that shows a mounted warrior riding over two fallen enemies.<sup>11</sup> The preponderance of evidence is such that Pierre Briant, in his magisterial history of the Persian empire, specifically rejects the idea that the Persians did not have cavalry forces before the time of Cyrus.<sup>12</sup>

There is also no evidence that a military reform of the sort described by Xenophon was part of the pre-existing traditions, Greek or Persian, about Cyrus. The Greek sources were more important in this regard as Xenophon had only indirect access to Persian material and was writing for a Greek audience. Herodotus' *History* and Ctesias' *Persica* were the key texts to which Xenophon looked for information on Persia.<sup>13</sup> The basic narrative of Cyrus' rise to power supplied by Herodotus and Ctesias differs widely from that found in the *Cyropaedia*. Herodotus and Ctesias portray Cyrus as openly revolting from the Medes, while Xenophon's Cyrus relies on stealth and patience. The rearming of the Persian commoners at the expense of the Medes found in the *Cyropaedia* is inherently incompatible with the overt revolt found in Herodotus and Ctesias.

Both Herodotus and Ctesias, moreover, show no knowledge of the idea that Cyrus introduced cavalry to the Persian army. Herodotus, who recounts Cyrus' early life and later achievements in detail (see especially 1.107-214), notes that the Persians happily imitated foreign customs, and remarks upon the Persian adoption of Median dress, but makes no mention of cavalry (1.135). Herodotus lists horsemanship as one of the three basic components of the training of young Persians (1.136) and assumes that horses were commonplace in Persia (1.133), both of which run counter to Xenophon's portrayal of Persia, at least before Cyrus' time.

<sup>9</sup> On this subject, see, among others, Carlier (1978) and Gera (1993) 1-22.

<sup>10</sup> For a good, brief history of the Persian people through the fifth century, see Cuyler Young (1988). On the history of the Persian military and Cyrus' campaigns, see Briant (2002) 31-61 and Cook (1983) 25-43, 101-12.

<sup>11</sup> This seal is typically designated PFS (Persepolis Fortification Seal) 93. For an illustration and discussion of the iconography, see Garrison (1992). PFS 93 was used on tablets dating to the late sixth century, and some scholars believe that it may have been carved at that time (see, for instance, de Miroschedji (1985)). This view is, however, outside the current scholarly consensus. As Garrison argues, PFS 93 and another seal of the same style also showing an equestrian scene (PFS 51) were carved c. 600 and kept as heirlooms.

<sup>12</sup> Briant (2002) 19-20.

<sup>13</sup> On Xenophon's sources for Cyrus' life, see Breitenbach (1967) 1709-12; Gera (1993) 1-22; Hirsch (1985) 61-97; and Mueller-Goldingen (1995) 1-44.

Antisthenes may have written a life of Cyrus before Xenophon. The extant fragments indicate that Antisthenes used Cyrus to discuss the qualities of the ideal leader. The date of this work is disputed, so it may actually have appeared after the *Cyropaedia*. In any case, it is very unlikely that Antisthenes shared Xenophon's interest in matters military. On Antisthenes' treatise on Cyrus, see the scholarship cited above. Ctesias' account is preserved in a fragment from Nicolaus of Damascus, which is designated as *FGrHist* 90 F 66 in Jacoby's collection. Dominique Lenfant (2004) has recently produced a valuable new edition of all known Ctesias fragments, in which the fragment in question is designated 8d. The citations from Ctesias given here follow Lenfant. Mark Toher (1989) has shown that a detailed reconstruction of the *Persica* on the basis of the fragments of Nicolaus is impossible, but for present purposes all that is necessary is a general sense of Ctesias' narrative of Cyrus' revolt.

Ctesias' *Persica* describes Cyrus as having cavalry forces at his disposal during his revolt against the Medes. In this account, Cyrus asks permission from Astyages to leave Media and return to Persia, ostensibly to perform sacrifices and to tend his sick father, but with the intention of inciting a revolt against Median rule. Astyages learns of Cyrus' true intentions shortly after his departure for Persia and sends 300 horsemen in pursuit, with orders to bring Cyrus back dead or alive (*fr.* 8d, 20-6). When the horsemen catch up with Cyrus, he agrees to return peaceably, but he invites his pursuers to spend the evening feasting with him. They agree, whereupon Cyrus secretly sends a messenger to his father, the satrap of Persia, asking for '1,000 horsemen and 5,000 foot soldiers' (*fr.* 8d, 27).<sup>14</sup> The speedy arrival of these soldiers enables Cyrus to escape and to raise the revolt against Astyages. At the first battle between the two, Cyrus has 5,000 horsemen and 100 chariots at his disposal (*fr.* 8d, 31). Ctesias' account thus did not include the introduction of cavalry to the Persian army by Cyrus.<sup>15</sup>

Like its Greek counterpart, the Persian tradition about Cyrus does not seem to have portrayed Cyrus as the author of a major reform of the Persian army.<sup>16</sup> Xenophon did not read the languages in which this tradition was recorded, so he could not have directly consulted the written sources.<sup>17</sup> He was, nonetheless, well informed about many details of Persian history and customs. It is commonly and quite reasonably held that Xenophon learned a great deal through the Persians he met in the course of his travels and that he heard from them oral tales that circulated in Persia about Cyrus' deeds.<sup>18</sup> The oral tales in question were first written down in the third century AD, so it is difficult to reconstruct their original content in any detail. Some scholars have taken the position that the stories told about Adashir I, the third-century AD founder of the Sassanian dynasty, drew on the pre-existing stories about Cyrus. The Adashir stories are preserved and share a number of features with Ctesias' account of Cyrus. Ctesias resided at the Persian court and presumably heard stories about Cyrus, so the version of events in Ctesias – which is incompatible with a military reform of the sort described by Xenophon – may well reflect the Persian oral tradition as it existed in the fifth and fourth centuries.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, we have already seen that the Persian nobility was proud of its equestrian prowess long before the time of Cyrus, so it is unlikely that a story of Cyrus introducing horses to Persia could have established itself amongst them. In sum, there is no reason to think that Xenophon took the story of Cyrus' military reform from Persian sources.

There was almost certainly, therefore, no pre-existing basis, historical or literary, for the idea that Cyrus turned the Persian army into a force dominated by heavy infantrymen or that Persians first learned to ride during Cyrus' time. Indeed, the Persian army that Xenophon created for the *Cyropaedia* would undoubtedly have struck both Persian and Greek audiences as rather strange. Persian nobles had been avid horsemen for centuries when Xenophon wrote the *Cyropaedia*.

<sup>14</sup> χιλίους ἰππεῖς κελεύων καὶ πεντακισχίλους πεζοὺς.

<sup>15</sup> Xenophon may, however, have found inspiration in the *Persica* for the idea of a military reform. According to Ctesias, Cyrus' plans for a revolution included providing arms for the young men of Persia (*fr.* 8d, 16, 21, 27). The text of Ctesias as preserved does not make it clear if these men had been disarmed by the Medes or had never served in the army. The provision of weapons to young Persians in Ctesias' version of events may have been a precursor of the military reform found in the *Cyropaedia*.

<sup>16</sup> On the Near Eastern tradition, see Drews (1974); Briant (2002) 13-18; Gera (1993) 13-22; and Tuplin (1997). Gera provides a clear and succinct summary of the issues and is the basis of the discussion found here.

<sup>17</sup> There was some sort of royal chronicle maintained

in the Persian court, but the only access Xenophon could have had to such records would have been through Ctesias, who claimed to have consulted them (*FGrHist* 688 F 5).

<sup>18</sup> Xenophon (1.2.1, 8.5.28) mentions that tales were told by Persians about Cyrus in his own day. Simo Parpola (2003), building on earlier scholarship by Cousin, Hirsch and others, has recently argued that a key source of such tales may have been Cyrus the Younger, who modelled himself on his namesake and with whom Xenophon had considerable contact.

<sup>19</sup> Christensen (1936) 120-40, but *cf.* Frye (1976) 86-7. Herodotus (1.95) claims to have heard four different Persian accounts of Cyrus' life, but these probably pertained to his birth and childhood.

The Greeks, who had long had grave difficulties with Persian cavalry on the battlefield, not unnaturally saw the presence of large numbers of skilled horsemen as a defining feature of the Persian army. The picture that Xenophon paints in the *Cyropaedia* of a Persia devoid of horses and of Persians clumsily learning to ride did not correspond to the Persia that either Persians or Greeks knew.

Even if one wished to assume for the sake of argument that Xenophon took the story of Cyrus' military reform from some unknown source, it would still be necessary to explain why he chose to incorporate this story into the *Cyropaedia* and why he crafted a Persia that would have seemed odd to his contemporaries.

### READING CYRUS' MILITARY REFORM

The traditional explanation for Xenophon's decision to insert a transformation of the Persian army into the *Cyropaedia* has been that Cyrus' military reform is a rewriting of Spartan military practice that pays tribute to Sparta and Agesilaus.<sup>20</sup> The most extreme version of this approach can be found in the work of Wilhelm Prinz, who read the *Cyropaedia* as a *roman à clef* with Cyrus playing the part of Agesilaus.<sup>21</sup> More restrained versions of the same approach take the similarities between Sparta and the Persia of the *Cyropaedia* to be the product of Xenophon's desire to curry favour with his Spartan benefactors or as the result of a conscious or unconscious pro-Spartan prejudice.<sup>22</sup>

There can be no doubt that Xenophon drew on his knowledge of Sparta and Agesilaus when writing about Persia and Cyrus in the *Cyropaedia*. Xenophon felt at liberty to take a considerable amount of poetic licence when crafting the *Cyropaedia* since his Persia and Cyrus are far from accurate reflections of their historical counterparts.<sup>23</sup> Many features of the Persian state as it appears in the *Cyropaedia* clearly echo the Spartan state with which Xenophon was intimately familiar, and Xenophon's Cyrus shares many qualities with Agesilaus. The Persian state is a republic with a king whose powers are primarily military and religious and whose activities are overseen by a council of elders (1.3.18, 1.5.4-5).<sup>24</sup> The Persian nobility, called the *homotimoi*, undergo a rigorous programme of state-run education that emphasizes military training, equality and obedience to the law (1.2.2-1.3.1, 1.3.18, 3.3.70).<sup>25</sup> The *homotimoi* are freed from the need to support themselves and as a group have contempt for money-making (1.2.3). Cyrus' programme of army reform includes the institution of *syssitia* in which everyone is given equal provisions (2.1.25-31). This list of similarities between the Persia of the *Cyropaedia* and Sparta, which could be extended, makes it abundantly clear that Sparta and the Persia of the *Cyropaedia* are alike in a number of significant ways.

Parallels of the same sort exist between Cyrus and Agesilaus.<sup>26</sup> Cyrus goes through the state-run educational system with the rest of his age-mates, as had Agesilaus, something that set him apart from most Spartan kings. Both men are notable for their resourcefulness as commanders,

<sup>20</sup> A summary of the relevant argumentation can be found in Tuplin (1994) 146-50. See also Bizon (1971) 2.60 n.1. The case is made most strongly by Prinz (1911) 1-35.

<sup>21</sup> Prinz (1911) 1-35.

<sup>22</sup> On the idea that Xenophon was trying to curry favour with Sparta, see Luccioni (1949) 9, 32, 35 n.34, 162 and Niebuhr (1828) 1.464-82. On conscious or unconscious prejudices, see Georges (1994) 229 and Tigerstedt (1965-78) 1:159-79.

<sup>23</sup> The degree to which the *Cyropaedia* can be used as a source of information about the historical Persia has been a subject of considerable discussion. For a sceptical

view, see Tuplin (1990). For a more optimistic view, see Georges (1994) 207-43 and Hirsch (1985) 61-97.

<sup>24</sup> Cyrus, however, ultimately transforms Persia into an absolute monarchy (7.5 and 8 *passim*). On the similarities between Sparta and the Persia of the *Cyropaedia*, see Nadon (2001) 29-42 and Tuplin (1994). Further bibliography is cited by Nadon on p. 30 n.12.

<sup>25</sup> On the educational system outlined in the *Cyropaedia*, see Tuplin (1997).

<sup>26</sup> For a good, concise study of the similarities between Xenophon's Cyrus and Agesilaus, see Due (1989) 192-8.

for their care for the soldiers under their command, and for their generosity. The similarities between the two figures are sufficiently close that in his biography of Agesilaus, Paul Cartledge concludes that 'Agesilaos was the prototype for Xenophon's fictional Cyrus the Great.'<sup>27</sup>

In addition to the generic similarities between Sparta and the Persia of the *Cyropaedia*, both phases of Cyrus' military reform respond to the military realities of the Spartan state. The gradual decline in Spartan manpower, the heavy losses suffered during the Peloponnesian War, and the assumption of the Athenian *archê* put immense pressure on the Spartan army. One of the solutions adopted by the Spartan authorities was to offer helots freedom in exchange for service as hoplites. The helots who entered the Spartan military by this route were known as *neodamôdeis*. As many helots seem, like the Persian commoners, to have served as light-armed troops before they were rearmed, the similarity between the two is striking.<sup>28</sup>

The second phase of Cyrus' military reform, the creation of a Persian cavalry force, had a clear parallel in the creation of a cavalry force by Agesilaus during his campaign in Asia Minor in the 390s. Agesilaus had under his command approximately 15,000 infantry, including 5,000 mercenaries who had formerly fought for Cyrus the Younger and 3,000 *neodamôdeis*.<sup>29</sup> The commander of the Cyreans was none other than Xenophon. Soon after his arrival in Asia Minor, Agesilaus found that the only cavalry force at his disposal, 400 men drawn from the Ionian Greek cities, was poorly trained and undersized. After his cavalry suffered a sharp defeat in a skirmish in Phrygia in 396, Agesilaus realized that he needed a strong mounted force in order to operate against the Persians on the plains of Asia Minor.<sup>30</sup> He returned with his army to Ephesus, where he began to recruit and train horsemen.<sup>31</sup> Agesilaus imposed a requirement on the wealthiest citizens in the Greek cities allied with Sparta, in accordance with which they could either report for cavalry duty with the Spartan army or could supply a fully equipped horse and rider in their place. Almost without exception the wealthy Ionians, not notably fond of the rigours of camp life, chose the latter alternative. Agesilaus thus rapidly developed a large force of mercenary cavalry.

The ancient sources do not indicate who oversaw the training of this mounted force, but it may well have been Xenophon.<sup>32</sup> The Spartan army in Greece proper had only the most minimal cavalry, and neither Agesilaus nor the officers on his staff were likely to be past masters in training horsemen. Xenophon, however, was a proven cavalry expert with years of experience in fighting Persian mounted forces. He had been a member of the Athenian cavalry late in the Peloponnesian War and had subsequently assembled and led a scratch mounted force that proved invaluable in covering the retreat of the 10,000.<sup>33</sup> By the time Agesilaus arrived in Asia Minor, Xenophon was a veteran commander and an experienced cavalryman.<sup>34</sup> Further, Agesilaus' cavalry troopers consisted almost entirely of mercenaries, with whom Spartan commanders always had an uneasy relationship, whereas Xenophon had become skilled in leading such men.

<sup>27</sup> Cartledge (1987) 24.

<sup>28</sup> On the similarities between the conversion of Persian commoners into heavy-armed infantrymen and the arming of helots, see Hunt (1998) 203-5. On the military functions of Spartan helots, see Hunt (1998) 13-25, 115-20 and Cartledge (2002) 30. On the *neodamôdeis*, see the bibliography cited at n.66.

<sup>29</sup> On the details of Agesilaus' Asian campaign, see Cartledge (1987) 208-18 and Hamilton (1991) 97-103. For Xenophon's account, see *Ages.* 1.7-38 and *Hell.* 3.1.1-2.20, 3.4.1-29, 4.1.1-2.8.

<sup>30</sup> The problems the Spartans experienced in operating in Asia Minor without a proper cavalry force are highlighted on multiple occasions in the *Hellenica*. See, for instance, 3.1.5, 3.2.1, 3.2.16.

<sup>31</sup> For Xenophon's narrative of the creation of a cavalry force by Agesilaus, see *Ages.* 1.23-8 and *Hell.* 3.4.11-19. See also see Worley (1994) 127-41.

<sup>32</sup> See Hamilton (1991) 97; Rahe (1980); and Worley (1994) 134-5.

<sup>33</sup> On Xenophon's service in the Athenian cavalry, see Delebecque (1957) 61-4 and Georges (1994) 314-15. For discussions of Xenophon's mounted force during the march of the 10,000, see Gaebel (2002) 110-15 and Worley (1994) 123-7. For Xenophon's account, see *Anab.* 3.3.19ff.

<sup>34</sup> Xenophon's knowledge of and admiration for Persian horsemen is clear in a number of places in his corpus. In the *Peri Hippikês* (12.11-12), for example, Xenophon recommends that Greek cavalrymen adopt the

Agesilaus' new cavalry force rapidly proved its valour. The ancient accounts of Agesilaus' victory at the battle of Sardis, fought in 395, diverge sharply from one another.<sup>35</sup> It is clear, however, that his mounted force distinguished itself in combat against the Persian cavalry. When Agesilaus was recalled from Asia Minor in 394, at least some of this cavalry force came with him. He marched his army overland through Macedonia and Thessaly and was delighted when his horsemen inflicted a minor defeat on the Thessalian cavalry. Xenophon comments that Agesilaus was 'greatly pleased ... that he had won a victory over those who give the most thought to their horsemanship, with the cavalry that he himself assembled' (*Hell.* 4.3.9).<sup>36</sup>

There are, therefore, strong correspondences between both phases of Cyrus' military reform and Spartan military practice. Scholars such as Prinz and Bizos, who believed that Xenophon was enthralled by Sparta and that he directly based his Persia and Cyrus on Sparta and Agesilaus, found this easy to explain. This approach can now, however, be shown to be untenable. The long-standing assumptions that Xenophon was an unblushing Laconophile and that the Persia of the *Cyropaedia* is based directly on Sparta have both been called into question. Recent scholarship has produced something approaching a consensus that Xenophon wrote with considerable subtlety and that his evaluation of Sparta was far from uniformly positive.<sup>37</sup> Christopher Tuplin has applied this line of thinking to the *Cyropaedia*. He argues that Xenophon was more interested in contrasting Sparta and Persia than in assimilating the latter to the former. He concludes that:

There is undoubtedly a presentation of Persian and Spartan as distinct and autonomous figures, an absence of knee-jerk claims of Spartan superiority and a willingness to accept the Persian as exemplary in his own right and not as a front for anything Spartan.<sup>38</sup>

This suggests a very different reading of the *Cyropaedia*, one in which Persians as portrayed by Xenophon are as likely to serve as models for Greeks as the other way around.

Moreover, it is far from clear that Cyrus' military reform programme is constructed in such a fashion as to glorify Sparta's armed forces. There is no obvious reason why the Spartans would have been eager to highlight their reliance on freed helots serving as hoplites, and the Spartan cavalry was known more for its failures than for its successes. Agesilaus' troop of mercenary horsemen was soon disbanded, and Sparta was unable to put together an effective cavalry force for decades thereafter. Xenophon himself comments acerbically on the inferiority of the Spartan cavalry at Leuctra (*Hell.* 6.4.10-11). The Persians, on the other hand, had, from their first direct contact with the Greeks in the sixth century down through Xenophon's time, fielded the largest and most feared cavalry units encountered by Greek forces.<sup>39</sup> It would, therefore, have been

offensive weapons used by Persian cavalrymen. On the equipment used by Greek and Persian cavalrymen, see Anderson (1961) 142-50. Later in life Xenophon wrote two treatises specifically devoted to cavalry and horsemanship, one of which opens with the statement that 'we happen to have served for a long time in the cavalry' (*Peri Hippikês* 1.1, τὸ συμβῆναι ἡμῖν πολὺν χρόνον ἰππεύειν). As Salomone notes in her commentary on this passage, 'Il cavallo occupa un posto fondamentale nella vita di Senofonte' ((1980) 108).

<sup>35</sup> For analyses of the sources, see Anderson (1974), Graham (1992) and Gray (1979).

<sup>36</sup> μάλα ἠδόμενος ... ὅτι τοὺς μέγιστον φρονούντας ἐπὶ ἰππικῇ ἐνευικήκει σὺν ᾧ αὐτὸς συνέλεξεν ἰππικῶ. See also *Ages.* 2.1-5.

<sup>37</sup> This view owes much to the work of Leo Strauss, but did not become prominent among classicists until the late 1980s. The relevant scholarship includes, but is not limited to, Due (1989), Gera (1993), Humble (1997), Nadon (2001), Tatum (1989), and Tuplin (1993) and (1994). For a specific reply to Prinz (1911), see Scharf (1919) 25-45.

<sup>38</sup> Tuplin (1994) 134. See also Georges (1994) 207-43 and Nadon (2001) 29-42. Georges sees the Persia of the *Cyropaedia* as the embodiment of Xenophon's ideal state, a place that has only tenuous connections to the historical Sparta. Nadon concludes that, 'What Xenophon does is to purge the Spartan regime of the unnecessary extremism and faults that he identifies in the *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*' (35).

<sup>39</sup> On the effectiveness of Persian cavalry forces, see Rahe (1980).



faintly ridiculous to use the Spartan cavalry as a model for the development of the Persian cavalry under Cyrus. An implicit comparison between the Spartan and Persian cavalry would inevitably work to the detriment of the Spartans. Further, Agesilaus' experiment with cavalry took place 40 years before Xenophon wrote the *Cyropaedia*, had no lasting effect on the situation in Greece, and in any case involved assembling a troop of mercenary horsemen that was very different from the regular mounted force created by Cyrus.

In more recent scholarship, Cyrus' military reform is typically interpreted as an expression of Xenophon's ideas about political structures and leadership. W.R. Newell takes Cyrus' military reform as a call for the abolition of the existing class structure and its replacement with a 'hierarchy of true merit'.<sup>40</sup> Christian Mueller-Goldingen sees the reform as a meditation on political equality.<sup>41</sup> Christopher Nadon reads it as an exploration of a Machiavellian approach to leadership.<sup>42</sup> David Johnson argues that Xenophon wrote Cyrus' military reform into the *Cyropaedia* to help show that 'the pursuit of empire is inherently corrupting'.<sup>43</sup> All four authors evince no interest in a possible connection between Cyrus' reform and the military realities of the Spartan state.<sup>44</sup> Those scholars who do touch on the similarities between Agesilaus' Sparta and Cyrus' military reform either leave those similarities unexplained or deny them any significance. Cartledge, for instance, cites but does not discuss the relevant sections of the *Cyropaedia* in treating the cavalry force assembled by Agesilaus in Asia Minor.<sup>45</sup> Tuplin is overtly sceptical about a connection between Agesilaus' Sparta and Cyrus' military reform. After discussing Cyrus' creation of a cavalry force, he concludes that 'none of this has particularly Spartan overtones'.<sup>46</sup>

While this more restrained approach is preferable to the simplistic readings proposed by Prinz *et al.*, it leaves the similarities between the military realities of the Spartan state and Cyrus' military reform unexplained. Those similarities are too strong to be simply rejected out of hand or to be read as coincidental or meaningless. Some explanation for the overlap between the military realities of Agesilaus' Sparta and Cyrus' military reform is thus in order.

The explanation is to be sought at least in part in Xenophon's concern with the problems confronting the Spartan state when he wrote the *Cyropaedia*. The reform programme carried out by Cyrus in the *Cyropaedia* should be read as part of a proposal for the restructuring of the Spartan military so that it would be more capable of opposing the Boeotian army. Xenophon no doubt drew on a variety of experiences in crafting this proposal, among which was his service with Agesilaus' army in the 390s. Some correspondences between the realities of the Spartan army and Cyrus' forces are therefore to be expected. Those correspondences, however, do not necessarily redound to the credit of Sparta. As Xenophon fashioned Cyrus' military reform programme with the needs of the Spartan army in mind, the relevant sections of the *Cyropaedia* do as much or more to highlight problems in the Spartan armed forces as to extol their virtues.

The conclusion that Cyrus' military reform in the *Cyropaedia* should be read as a proposal for the restructuring of the Spartan army finds support in four distinct lines of evidence: (1) the military reform undertaken by Cyrus in the *Cyropaedia* shows every sign of responding to the problems Sparta faced in opposing the Boeotian army in the years after Leuctra; (2) Cyrus' military reform reflects Spartan military practice and resources; (3) the objections Cyrus anticipates and overcomes from the Persian *homotimoi* are precisely those that one might have expected to come from the Spartan *homoioi*; and (4) at roughly the same time he was writing the *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon was also writing about ways Athenian cavalry forces could be raised and trained so that they would be capable of opposing the Boeotians.

<sup>40</sup> For his discussion of Cyrus' army reform, see Newell (1981) 66-76. The quote comes from p. 68.

<sup>41</sup> Mueller-Goldingen (1995) 134-49.

<sup>42</sup> Nadon (2001) 61-76, 100-8.

<sup>43</sup> Johnson (2005) 202.

<sup>44</sup> Johnson briefly mentions the possible connections to Spartan military practice in a footnote on p. 194 of his article, but rapidly dismisses them as unfounded.

<sup>45</sup> Cartledge (1987) 214; *cf.* Due (1989) 196.

<sup>46</sup> Tuplin (1994) 148.

## SPARTA AND BOEOTIA

In order to explore the overlap between Cyrus' military reform and the situation in Sparta when Xenophon wrote the *Cyropaedia*, it is first necessary to establish a date for the composition of the *Cyropaedia*. The dates of most of Xenophon's works are the subject of vigorous debate, but there is a *communis opinio* that the *Cyropaedia* was written some time after 362.<sup>47</sup> A *terminus post quem* is provided by the mention in the final chapter (8.8.4) of the reprehensible behaviour of Mithridates and Rheomithres during the satraps' revolt that began in 362. Although the final chapter of the *Cyropaedia* has sometimes been seen as a later addition by Xenophon or by another author, it is now generally taken to be an integral part of the work. Xenophon seems to have died in the mid 350s, so the date of the *Cyropaedia* can be established within relatively narrow bounds. Delebecque places the composition of the *Cyropaedia* in the years 360-358, and this cannot be far off.<sup>48</sup>

When Xenophon wrote the *Cyropaedia*, the Spartans were under immense pressure from a Boeotian army that had a decided advantage in terms of numbers of hoplites and in terms of numbers and quality of cavalry. If the military reform programme carried out by Cyrus in the *Cyropaedia* had been implemented in Sparta in the 350s, it would have entailed incorporating a substantial number of helots into the Spartan army<sup>49</sup> and converting the Spartan *homoioi* into a mounted force.<sup>50</sup> This pair of measures would have significantly increased the size of the Spartan phalanx and would have provided a large and highly trained cavalry force, precisely what Sparta needed in order to oppose the Boeotians.

The problems the Spartans were experiencing with a lack of men in their phalanx are evident from the relative sizes of the Boeotian and Spartan armies. When Epaminondas in 370 led the first of what turned out to be four Boeotian expeditions to the Peloponnese, the Boeotian and allied contingents in his army totalled at least 30,000 men.<sup>51</sup> When he returned in 362, his army

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion of the difficulty in dating Xenophon's works, see Humble (1997) 22-45.

<sup>48</sup> For the date of the *Cyropaedia*, see Delebecque (1957) 384-410; Gera (1993) 23-6; and Mueller-Goldingen (1995) 45-55 and the bibliography cited therein. On the authenticity of the final chapter, see the previously cited section of Delebecque as well as Due (1989) 16-22; Gera (1993) 299-300; Nadon (2001) 139-46; and Sage (1994/5). For the opposite point of view, see Hirsch (1985) 91-7. On the date of Xenophon's death, see Delebecque (1957) 495. Georges (1994) 234-5 dates the *Cyropaedia* to 368-362, which is unlikely given the contents of the final chapter. A re-dating of the *Cyropaedia* would require minor changes in the argumentation presented in this essay, but the basic points would stand unchanged, provided that it post-dates the outbreak of hostilities between Sparta and Boeotia in 395. Given that Xenophon did not return to Greece until 394, he virtually certainly wrote the *Cyropaedia* after 395. One of the anonymous reviewers for *JHS* suggested that the *Cyropaedia* might fit more comfortably with the situation in the 390s, when the Spartans had recently enjoyed direct and indirect military support from the Persians and thus might be persuaded to look to Persian models. This is possible, but the military situation in Sparta in the 390s was sufficiently strong that it seems unlikely that serious reforms seemed necessary or even desirable.

<sup>49</sup> The *perioikoi* attached to the Spartan state had long been an integral component of the Spartan hoplite phalanx, and so the helots were the only numerically significant group in the Spartan state that was not part of the phalanx. The helots, like the Persian commoners, served as light-armed troops in the Spartan army from a very early period. On this subject, see Hunt (1998) 203-5.

<sup>50</sup> Although Cyrus ultimately ends up mounting both nobles and commoners on horses, he begins with the *homotimoi*, and it is clear that he imagines the Persian cavalry as being dominated by nobles. After the *homotimoi* agree to start training as cavalry, Cyrus proposes that henceforth they go everywhere on horseback and all the *homotimoi* agree. Xenophon notes that, ὥστ' ἔτι καὶ νῦν ἐξ ἐκείνου χρῶνται Πέρσαι οὕτω, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἂν τῶν καλῶν κάγαθῶν ἐκὼν ὀφθείη Περσῶν οὐδαμῆ πεζὸς ἰών ('from that time even to this day, the Persians follow this practice, and no one among the better classes of the Persians would willingly be seen going anywhere on foot') (4.3.23). The correspondence between the Persian *homotimoi* and Spartan *homoioi* is clear. Xenophon thus seems to have in mind the incorporation of large numbers of helots into the Spartan phalanx and the retraining of the Spartan *homoioi* as cavalrymen.

<sup>51</sup> Cartledge (1987) 384. Plutarch (*Ages*. 31) states the Boeotians and their allies had 40,000 hoplites in total, Diodorus (15.62.5) says 70,000 (some versions of the text give the number as 50,000).

included some 30,000 infantrymen and 3,000 cavalry.<sup>52</sup> The number of Spartiates fell from roughly 8,000 in the early fifth century to no more than 1,500 just before Leuctra, at which some 400 Spartiates were killed.<sup>53</sup> The Spartiates increased the size of their phalanx through the use of *perioikoi* and *neodamôdeis* and relied heavily upon their allies, but they were still at a significant numerical disadvantage when fighting the Boeotians.

The Spartans also found themselves at a disadvantage when facing the Boeotians because the latter possessed a large number of highly trained horsemen that Boeotian commanders employed with great skill. By the time Xenophon wrote the *Cyropaedia*, the Spartans had a long and frequently troubled history with Boeotian horsemen. The Peloponnesian War brought about a number of changes in Greek military practice, among which was the growing importance of cavalry. In the years before the outbreak of the war the Athenians assembled a 1,200-strong cavalry force that greatly impaired the ability of the Peloponnesian troops to disperse into the Attic countryside and pillage.<sup>54</sup> The only cavalry force capable of fighting the Athenians on equal terms came from the Boeotian Confederacy. During the Peloponnesian War the Confederacy fielded a force of 1,100 cavalry on a regular basis and was able to assemble 2,000 horsemen if necessary.<sup>55</sup>

The Spartans did not have a formal cavalry force of any size before the Peloponnesian War. When the Athenians began raiding the Spartan coast on a regular basis after the seizure of Pylos in 425, the Spartans assembled a troop of 400 horsemen that was used as a rapid reaction force.<sup>56</sup>

This troop was not, however, properly integrated into the Spartan army, as is evident from the fact that it played a peripheral rôle at the first battle of Mantinea (418).<sup>57</sup>

The Spartans were thus dependent upon the Boeotians when they invaded Attica. The Athenians were well aware of this. Thucydides writes that when Hippocrates exhorted the Athenian army before fighting began at the battle of Delium, he told his soldiers that, 'If we are victorious, the Peloponnesians will never again, without the support of the Boeotian cavalry, invade your land' (4.95.2).<sup>58</sup> There can be no doubt that the Boeotians were also fully aware of their importance to Sparta, and this accounts in part for the hard line the Boeotian Confederacy adopted in dealing with the Spartan government as the war progressed.<sup>59</sup>

The outbreak of hostilities between Sparta and Boeotia in 395 meant that it was the Spartans rather than the Athenians who had to worry about Boeotian cavalry forces.<sup>60</sup> The Spartan cavalry was, however, in no way ready to meet this challenge. The ultimate fate of the mercenary cavalry force that Agesilaus brought with him from Asia Minor in 394 is unknown, but it seems to have been disbanded at an early date, probably because the cost of maintaining a large number of mercenary horsemen was prohibitive.<sup>61</sup> This left the Spartans dependent upon their own, hopelessly inferior mounted forces. Xenophon's comments on the Spartan cavalry at the battle of Leuctra in 371 are revealing:

<sup>52</sup> Buckler (2003) 347.

<sup>53</sup> On the decline of Spartiate numbers, see Cartledge (1987) 37-43 and (2002) 263-72.

<sup>54</sup> On the activities of the Athenian cavalry during the Peloponnesian War, see Bugh (1988) 79-119 and Worley (1994) 63-87. Since the Peloponnesian strategy for winning the war relied upon exhausting the Athenians through repeated, damaging invasions, the ability of Athenian horsemen to prevent pillaging was of considerable strategic importance.

<sup>55</sup> On the Boeotian cavalry, see Worley (1994) 61-3 and Salmon (1978) 178-85.

<sup>56</sup> The 300 *hippeis* at Sparta may originally have been a cavalry force, but they were simply an élite infantry force by the Classical period. On the development of a cavalry force in Sparta, see Lazenby (1985) 10-12 and Worley (1994) 24-6, 89-91, 183.

<sup>57</sup> On Spartan cavalry forces at Mantinea, see Worley (1994) 96-100.

<sup>58</sup> καὶ ἦν νικήσωμεν, οὐ μὴ ποτε ὑμῖν Πελοποννήσιοι ἐς τὴν χώραν ἄνευ τῆς τῶνδε ἵππου ἐσβάλωσιν.

<sup>59</sup> On the relationship between Boeotia and Sparta between 431 and 371, see Buck (1994) 9-114. See also Cloché (1952) 76-164 and Salmon (1978) 178-96.

<sup>60</sup> On the long struggle between Sparta and Boeotia that began with the end of the Peloponnesian War, see Cartledge (2002) 228-59.

<sup>61</sup> A mercenary cavalryman could cost up to four times as much to support as a hoplite. On the cost of maintaining a cavalry trooper and his horse, see *Hell.* 5.2.21 as well as Spence (1993) 272-86 and Worley (1994) 70-3.

ἦν δὲ τὸ μὲν τῶν Θηβαίων ἵππικὸν μεμελετηκὸς διὰ τε τὸν πρὸς Ὀρχομενίους πόλεμον καὶ διὰ τὸν πρὸς Θεσπιᾶς, τοῖς δὲ Λακεδαιμονίοις κατ' ἐκείνον τὸν χρόνον πονηρότατον ἦν τὸ ἵππικόν. ἔτρεφον μὲν γὰρ τοὺς ἵππους οἱ πλουσιώτατοι· ἐπεὶ δὲ φρουρὰ φανθείη, τότε ἦκεν ὁ συντεταγμένος· λαβὼν δ' ἂν τὸν ἵππον καὶ ὅπλα ὅποια δοθείη αὐτῷ ἐκ τοῦ παραχρῆμα ἂν ἐστρατεύετο· τῶν δ' αὖ στρατιωτῶν οἱ τοῖς σώμασιν ἀδυνατώτατοι καὶ ἥκιστα φιλότιμοι ἐπὶ τῶν ἵππων ἦσαν. (*Hell.* 6.4.10-11)

The cavalry of the Thebans was well trained on account of both the war against the Orchomenians and the war against the Thespians, while the cavalry of the Lacedaemonians was very poor at that time. For, on the one hand, the richest men kept the horses. When, on the other hand, the ban was called out, then the man who had been given the assignment came. Taking the horse and whatever weapons were given to him, he immediately would go on campaign. Moreover, it was those among the soldiers who were least strong and least ambitious who served as horsemen.

The weakness of the Spartan cavalry turned out to be a serious problem. Xenophon ascribes the near annihilation of a Spartan hoplite regiment near Lechaeum in 390 in part to the initial absence of a cavalry force that could have protected the hoplites from peltasts, and to the incompetence of the horsemen when they finally did arrive (*Hell.* 4.5.11-17). The inability of the Spartans to field an effective cavalry force subsequently led to the disastrous defeat at Leuctra<sup>62</sup> and another near defeat at Mantinea less than a decade later.<sup>63</sup>

Echoes of the problems experienced by the Spartans due to Boeotian cavalry can be found in the narrative of the *Cyropaedia*. When Cyrus speaks to his officers about the necessity of forming a cavalry force (4.3.3-22), he points out that the Persian infantrymen are vulnerable to attack by enemy cavalry and light-armed troops (4.3.5). In addition, the allies who supply cavalry are aware of their importance to the Persians and behave accordingly. If the Persians had a cavalry force, however, 'we would be able, even without them, to do the very things to the enemy that we are now doing with their assistance, and we would then find them less presumptuous towards us' (4.3.7).<sup>64</sup> Cyrus' speech about the need for a Persian cavalry force, which highlights the importance of cavalry in protecting heavy-armed infantrymen and the dangers of relying on allies for horsemen, would have resonated strongly with anyone familiar with the pattern of relations between Sparta and Boeotia during the Peloponnesian War and the opening decades of the fourth century.

Xenophon constructed Cyrus' military reform in such a way as to show how the Spartans could increase the size of their phalanx and assemble an effective cavalry force. This, in turn, required a Persia whose military capabilities bore a close resemblance to those of Sparta in the 360s and 350s. The decrepit state of the Spartan cavalry meant that the Spartans needed to start virtually from scratch if they were going to assemble a large number of well-trained horsemen. Xenophon had seen Agesilaus do just that in Asia Minor in the 390s and so had every reason to believe that it was possible. In order to sketch the process of introducing cavalry forces to a state dominated by a warrior élite habituated to fighting as infantrymen, he fashioned a rather odd Persia, a place where the nobility fights exclusively on foot and where cavalry is non-existent. This Persia would have been strange to Xenophon's audience, but was necessary to create a good fit between his fictional Persia and the real-world Sparta with which he was familiar.

<sup>62</sup> On the hostilities between Boeotia and Sparta in the period between 371 and 362, see Buckler (1980) *passim*. On the battle of Leuctra, see Buckler (2003) 289-93; Hamilton (1991) 204-11; Hanson (1988); and Worley (1994) 141-5. Hanson emphasizes that Boeotian commanders had been using cavalry in an innovative way at least since the time of Delium. For Xenophon's account, see *Hell.* 6.4.1-17.

<sup>63</sup> On the (second) battle of Mantinea, see Buckler (2003) 347-9 and Worley (1994) 146-52. For Xenophon's account, see *Hell.* 7.5.1-25.

<sup>64</sup> τοὺς τ' ἂν πολεμίους δυνάμεθα καὶ ἄνευ τούτων ποιεῖν ὅσα περ νῦν σὺν τούτοις, τούτους τε ἔχομεν ἂν τότε μετριώτερον πρὸς ἡμᾶς φρονούντας.

## THE SPARTAN MILITARY AND CYRUS' REFORM

Another connection between Cyrus' military reform and the realities of the Spartan state at the time when the *Cyropaedia* was written can be found in the close correspondence between the details of that reform on the one hand and Spartan military practice and the resources at the disposal of the Spartan state on the other. The implementation of the reforms Xenophon had in mind would have entailed incorporating substantial numbers of helots into the Spartan army and the conversion of the Spartan *homoioi* into cavalrymen. Although the idea of freeing and arming a significant number of helots may seem radical, it was well-established practice in Sparta long before Xenophon wrote the *Cyropaedia*.

During the Persian Wars, hoplites from the perioikic communities of Laconia and Messenia were brigaded separately from the Spartiates, while helots served as light-armed troops. Some time after 479, probably after the earthquake of 464, Spartiates and perioikic hoplites were brigaded together, at the level of the smallest standard unit in the Spartan army (the *enômotia*, typically 40 men). The Peloponnesian War brought new stresses and further, more radical measures. In 424, 700 helots were armed as hoplites and dispatched to Thrace under the command of Brasidas. This seems to have been an experiment, and its success led the Spartans to begin freeing helots and incorporating them into the regular Spartan phalanx.<sup>65</sup> The *neodamôdeis* were part of the Spartan forces that fought at Mantinea in 418, and in the decades that followed they became an integral component of the Spartan army.<sup>66</sup> In the 390s there were often more *neodamôdeis* on active duty than Spartiates.<sup>67</sup> When the Spartans had to face the massive army Epaminondas brought into Laconia in 370, they were so desperate to increase the size of their forces that they freed and armed 6,000 helots.<sup>68</sup>

The peculiar socio-political situation in Sparta meant that there were substantial, untapped reserves of manpower within the boundaries of the Spartan state. This is evident from Aristotle's statement in the *Politics* about Sparta's military potential as opposed to the actual number of Spartiates:

... δυναμένης τῆς χώρας χιλίους ἰππεῖς τρέφειν καὶ πεντακοσίους, καὶ ὀπλίτας τρισμυρίου, οὐδὲ χίλιοι τὸ πλῆθος ἦσαν. (1270a29-31)

... although the country is capable of supporting 1,500 cavalrymen and 30,000 hoplites, they did not even number a thousand.<sup>69</sup>

Aristotle is probably referring here to the Spartan state as it existed before the loss of Messenia in 370/69, but even if the numbers are halved, it would seem that Laconia was capable of supporting a much larger army than the Spartans in fact fielded in the first half of the fourth century.

<sup>65</sup> On changes in Spartan army organization after the Persian Wars, see Cartledge (1987) 37-43.

<sup>66</sup> On *neodamôdeis*, see Cartledge (1987) 170-7; Hamilton (1991) 74-8; Hunt (1998) 53-82, 115-20, 70-5; and Talbert (1989).

<sup>67</sup> Hamilton (1991) 78 and Talbert (1989) 26.

<sup>68</sup> The number 6,000 comes from Xenophon (*Hell.* 6.5.28-9). Diodorus (15.6.63-6) puts the number at 1,000. There is no record of further *neodamôdeis* being created after Leuctra. Cartledge (1987) 175 argues that *neodamôdeis* were no longer needed after 371 because 'Spartiate *oliganthropia* could by then no longer be compensated by this expedient'. The reverse is more obviously true, and the lack of evidence for *neodamôdeis* after

Leuctra may be a simple source problem. Alternatively, Xenophon may have been urging a revival of a recently lapsed practice. The rôle of mercenaries in Spartan campaigns is clearly a relevant issue, but one that cannot be examined here.

<sup>69</sup> The source of the numbers Aristotle cites in this passage is unclear. Cartledge (1987) 37 argues that the number of Spartiates might have been known from a hoplite muster-list. The 30,000 potential hoplites must be linked to the tradition that Lycurgus created 30,000 lots of land for the *perioikoi* (Plut. *Lyc.* 8.3), though the source of that tradition is unknown. Ephoros is the most obvious possible candidate. See Tigerstedt (1965-78) 1.213-14.

It is striking that the numbers Aristotle suggests are virtually identical to the number of soldiers in the expeditionary force initially sent to Media in the *Cyropaedia*, which consists of 1,000 *homotimoi* and 30,000 commoners. One might also note that both the potential size of the Spartan army according to Aristotle and the size of Cyrus' expeditionary force in the *Cyropaedia* are roughly equivalent to the size of the army the Boeotians could put into the field.

Xenophon had first-hand experience with *neodamôdeis* since there were approximately 3,000 such men in the expeditionary force Agesilaus brought to Asia Minor.<sup>70</sup> He was also fully prepared to consider using slaves in a community's armed forces. In the *Poroi*, written in the 350s, Xenophon proposes that Athens acquire a significant number of publicly owned slaves for use in the silver mines.<sup>71</sup> Among the advantages that would accrue from the possession of these slaves, Xenophon mentions their possible service as rowers and infantrymen (4.42).<sup>72</sup> The first part of the military reform programme that Xenophon proposes in the *Cyropaedia* thus accords well with established Spartan military practice and with Xenophon's own views on the use of slaves as soldiers.

The more novel part of Xenophon's ideas about military reform in Sparta was the conversion of the *homoioi* into cavalymen. The Spartan *homoioi*, like the Persian *homotimoi* in the *Cyropaedia*, had been trained as élite infantrymen for generations, so there was bound to be resistance to a proposal to change completely their military rôle. Here again, however, Xenophon seems to have had the realities of the Spartan state in mind. The Spartans needed a large and highly trained force of horsemen. Mercenaries were the obvious solution, but the expenses involved in supporting cavalry troopers were heavy and beyond the limited financial resources at the disposal of the Spartan state.<sup>73</sup> Xenophon suggested an alternative way of bringing such a force into being: rearm and retrain the *homoioi*.

This was not as unlikely a suggestion as it may seem at first glance. Although the Spartans never assembled an effective cavalry force, they were enthusiastic equestrians. Pausanias remarks that after the Persian Wars the Spartans 'were more zealous about rearing horses than all the rest of the Greeks' (6.2.1).<sup>74</sup> This statement is borne out by the fact that Spartans won seven of the eight four-horse chariot races at Olympia between 448 and 420. After a twenty-year ban springing from a conflict with the Eleans, the victories in the four-horse chariot races at Olympia in 396 and 392 once again went to a Spartan.<sup>75</sup>

The owner of the four-horse chariot that was victorious at Olympia in 396 and 392 was Agesilaus' sister Cynisca.<sup>76</sup> She could not have competed without the support of her male relatives, and Xenophon explicitly states that Agesilaus encouraged her to send her team to Olympia:

ἐκεῖνό γε μὴν πῶς οὐ καλὸν καὶ μεγαλογνώμων, τὸ αὐτὸν μὲν ἀνδρὸς ἔργοις καὶ κτήμασι κοσμεῖν τὸν ἑαυτοῦ οἶκον, κύνας τε πολλοὺς θηρευτὰς καὶ ἵππους πολεμιστηρίους τρέφοντα, Κυνίσκαν δὲ

<sup>70</sup> It is also quite possible that there were *neodamôdeis* settled around Xenophon at Skillos. On this subject, see Hunt (1998) 174-5.

<sup>71</sup> On the date of the *Poroi*, see Delebecque (1957) 470-6 and Gauthier (1976) 2-6.

<sup>72</sup> There was good precedent for the use of slaves by the Athenian military, most obviously at Arginusae. On this subject, see Hunt (1998) 83-95. On this passage from the *Poroi*, see Gauthier (1976) 176-8 and Hunt (1998) 175-7. Hunt argues (147-53) on the basis of *Cyropaedia* 7.5.78-9 that Cyrus does not favour the arming of slaves, but this seems to be a mistaken interpretation. See Nadon (2001) 66 n.12.

<sup>73</sup> On the expense of maintaining mercenary cavalry forces, see the bibliography cited in n.61. The Spartan

state was notoriously incapable of raising funds (see, for example, Aristotle, *Politics* 1271b12-17). Sparta was in such bad financial straits in the 360s that Agesilaus felt compelled to go to Egypt as a mercenary general in 360, at the age of 84. He did not make it back alive. On this part of Agesilaus' life, see Cartledge (1987) 314-30.

<sup>74</sup> διετέθησαν πάντων φιλοτιμότεατα Ἑλλήνων πρὸς ἵππων τροφάς.

<sup>75</sup> On Spartan hippotrophy, see Hodkinson (1999) and (2000) 303-34. In the *Cyropaedia* Cyrus acquires horses from the spoils taken from defeated enemies, starting with the Assyrians (4.5.55, 7.4.16, 8.3.16-17).

<sup>76</sup> On Cynisca's victory, see Kyle (2003), though see also the comments on the Spartan exclusion from Olympia in Hornblower (2000).

ἀδελφὴν οὖσαν πείσαι ἀρματοτροφεῖν καὶ ἐπιδείξει νικώσης αὐτῆς ὅτι τὸ θρέμμα τοῦτο οὐκ ἀνδραγαθίας ἀλλὰ πλούτου ἐστι. (*Ages.* 9.6)

He at any rate did something that was in no way anything other than a good and high-minded thing in adorning his home with deeds and possessions fit for a man, raising many hunting dogs and warhorses. But he persuaded his sister Cynisca to raise chariot horses and showed by means of her victory that such a stable is a mark not of manly virtue, but of wealth.

Agesilaus was clearly concerned about the resources that wealthy Spartans were willing to expend in pursuit of equestrian victories at Panhellenic festivals.<sup>77</sup> There is every reason to think, therefore, that the Spartans could have located the horses to mount a considerable fraction of the *homoioi*, even after the loss of Messenia, and that many Spartiates were skilled horsemen.

Xenophon's experience in Asia Minor in the 390s had shown him that it was possible to assemble an effective cavalry force with considerable speed, and this experience was definitely on his mind during the time he wrote the *Cyropaedia*. Xenophon penned the *Hipparchikos* in the early 350s.<sup>78</sup> In this treatise Xenophon advises the Athenians to add mercenaries to their cavalry force because 'the cavalry of the Lacedaemonians began to enjoy a good reputation when they recruited foreign [mercenary] horsemen' (9.4).<sup>79</sup> This must be a reference to Agesilaus' mercenary cavalry force.<sup>80</sup> In addition, the training methods that Cyrus employs for his newly created cavalry in the *Cyropaedia* (6.2.4-6) are identical to those Xenophon describes Agesilaus as using for his cavalry force in Asia Minor (*Hell.* 3.4.16-18). Xenophon thus had good reason to be optimistic about the possibility of creating a cavalry force in Sparta.

#### ANTICIPATING OBJECTIONS

Sparta clearly had both the need and potential for military reform along the lines carried out by Cyrus. A major impediment existed, however, in the resistance of the *homoioi* to change of any kind, and Xenophon seems to anticipate the objections that might be raised by Spartiates. The Persian *homotimoi* welcome the conversion of the commoners to heavy-armed infantrymen (2.1.11-12), and a similar practice was sufficiently common in Sparta that Xenophon does not seem to have felt the need to justify it. The conversion of the *homotimoi* to cavalry, however, is the subject of extended discussion in the *Cyropaedia*.

When Cyrus broaches the subject with the *homotimoi* he addresses two possible objections. First, he acknowledges that 'someone will perhaps say that we do not know how to ride' (4.3.10).<sup>81</sup> He counters this by arguing that the Persians will be able to learn quickly, since they are already experienced warriors and have abundant leisure at their disposal. He then acknowledges another possible problem, 'if it is necessary for us to fight on horseback before we have thoroughly mastered this task, then we will no longer be infantrymen and not yet competent cavalrymen' (4.3.14).<sup>82</sup> Cyrus meets this objection by stating that 'whenever we wish, it will be possible for us to fight immediately on foot; for in learning how to ride we will in no way be unlearning our infantry skills' (4.3.14).<sup>83</sup> One can easily imagine that Xenophon had discussed his ideas

<sup>77</sup> Hodkinson (2000) 303-34 has shown that equestrian victories were an important source of prestige among Spartiates.

<sup>78</sup> For the date, see the bibliography in n.85.

<sup>79</sup> Λακεδαιμονίοις ἰππικὸν ἀρξάμενον εὐδοκιμεῖν, ἐπεὶ ξένους ἰππέας προσέλαβον.

<sup>80</sup> There is no evidence that Sparta maintained a mercenary cavalry force after Agesilaus' troop of horsemen was disbanded, and Xenophon had first-hand experience with those mercenaries.

<sup>81</sup> ἐρεῖ τις ἴσως ὅτι οὐκ ἐπιστάμεθα.

<sup>82</sup> εἰ δεήσει ἐφ' ἵππου κινδυνεύειν ἡμᾶς πρότερον πρὶν ἀκριβοῦν τὸ ἔργον τοῦτο, κάπειτα μήτε πεζοὶ ἔτι ὦμεν μήτε πω ἰππεῖς ἱκανοί.

<sup>83</sup> ὅπου γὰρ ἂν βουλώμεθα, ἐξέσται ἡμῖν πεζοῖς εὐθὺς μάχεσθαι· οὐδὲν γὰρ τῶν πεζικῶν ἀπομαθησόμεθα ἰππεύειν μαθάνοντες. Xenophon recounts an interesting and possibly relevant skirmish that took place during the Corinthian War, in which Spartan horsemen voluntarily dismounted and took up infantry weapons (*Hell.* 4.4.10).

about cavalry reform with Spartan *homoioi*, had listened to their responses, and shaped Cyrus' arguments accordingly. Cyrus' discussion of cavalry reform with the *homotimoi* seems to be an implicit dialogue between Xenophon and the Spartan *homoioi*.<sup>84</sup>

#### MILITARY REFORM IN ATHENS: THE *HIPPARCHIKOS*

During the period when he wrote the *Cyropaedia* Xenophon was giving active thought to the creation of a cavalry force capable of opposing the horsemen fielded by the Boeotians. The political realignment that took place after Leuctra made Boeotia the common enemy of Sparta and Athens, so that the welfare of the two states to which Xenophon felt loyalty was closely linked and tied to opposition to Boeotia. During the early part of the 350s he produced two treatises on cavalry and horsemanship, the *Hipparchikos* and the *Peri Hippikês*.<sup>85</sup> The *Hipparchikos*, which outlines the duties of a cavalry commander, was written with an eye toward improving the effectiveness of the Athenian cavalry. In this treatise he specifically notes the threat posed by Boeotian horsemen:

Παντὶ μὲν οὖν προσήκει ἄρχοντι φρονίμῳ εἶναι· πολὺ μὲντοι τὸν Ἀθηναίων ἵππαρχον διαφρένειν δεῖ καὶ τῷ τοὺς θεοὺς θεραπεύειν καὶ τῷ πολεμικὸν εἶναι, ᾧ γε ὑπάρχουσι μὲν ὄμοροι ἀντίπαλοι ἵππεῖς τε παραπλήσιοι τὸ πλῆθος καὶ ὀπλίται πολλοί ... ἵππεῖς τε γὰρ σὺν θεῷ ἀμείνους, ἦν τις αὐτῶν ἐπιμελήται ὡς δεῖ ... καὶ μὴν ἐπὶ γε τοῖς προγόνοις οὐ μείον Ἀθηναῖοι ἢ Βοιωτοὶ φρονοῦσιν. ἦν δὲ ἡ μὲν πόλις τρέπεται ἐπὶ τὰ ναυτικὰ καὶ ἀρκῆ αὐτῇ τὰ τεῖχη διασφάζειν, ὥσπερ καὶ ὅποτε Λακεδαιμόνιοι σὺν ἅπασιν τοῖς Ἕλλησιν ἐνέβαλον, τοὺς δὲ ἵππεας ἀξιώσει τά τε ἐκτὸς τοῦ τεύχους διασφάζειν καὶ αὐτοὺς μόνους διακινδυνεύειν πρὸς πάντας τοὺς ἐναντίους, ἐνταῦθα δὲ θεῶν μὲν οἶμαι πρῶτον συμμαχῶν ἰσχυρῶν δεῖ, ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ τὸν ἵππαρχον προσήκει ἀποτετελεσμένον ἄνδρα εἶναι. (7.1, 3-4)

It beseems every commander to be prudent. It is necessary, nonetheless, for the cavalry commander of the Athenians to excel greatly, both in attending to the gods and in being ready for war. He has an enemy on his border with horsemen equal in numbers to his own and many hoplites ... Our cavalry, with the help of the gods, will be better than theirs, if someone shows the concern for them that is necessary ... And besides, the Athenians do not take less thought of their ancestors than the Boeotians. But if the *polis* turns to her navy and is content to guard its walls, just as when the Lacedaemonians invaded with all the other Greeks, and expects the cavalry both to guard the things outside the walls and to put themselves at risk alone by themselves against all the enemy, then I think it is necessary in the first place for the gods to be strong allies, and second it is essential that the cavalry commander be a highly skilled man.<sup>86</sup>

The conflict between Athens and Boeotia created a situation in which the Athenians needed to be concerned about invasions by a superior force of infantrymen. This meant that the strength of the Athenian cavalry *vis-à-vis* the Boeotians was of critical importance. In this sense, Athens and Sparta found themselves in very much the same situation.

<sup>84</sup> Cavalry service in other Greek *poleis* was a source of some distinction. In Sparta, however, the tradition of infantry was powerfully rooted and the cavalry markedly inferior. (Xenophon specifically notes (*Hell.* 6.4.10-12) that only the weakest and least ambitious Spartans became cavalrymen.) The result was that the sort of objections that Cyrus discusses were much more likely to be encountered in Sparta. In addition, we have already seen that Cyrus' military reform is connected in numerous ways to Sparta. There is, therefore, every reason to think that Cyrus' speech to the *homotimoi* about training

as horsemen was specifically shaped with the situation in Sparta in mind.

<sup>85</sup> On the dates of these treatises, see Delebecque (1957) 425-60; Delebecque (1973) 19-29 and (1978) 8-12. Delebecque believed that the *Peri Hippikês* was written in two phases, one dating to the 380s and another dating to the 350s (after the *Hipparchikos*, to which Xenophon refers at the end of *Peri Hippikês* (12.4)).

<sup>86</sup> On this passage, particularly Xenophon's fixation with the Boeotians, see Delebecque (1973) 104-5.



## CONCLUSION

When Xenophon surveyed the political and military scene in Greece in the late 360s and early 350s, he saw a powerful Boeotia that threatened the position of both Athens and Sparta. A soldier to the end, he was moved to offer proposals as to how the Athenian and Spartan militaries might be reformed so as to better confront their Boeotian foes. The proposals for the Athenian military appeared in the *Hipparchikos*. The proposals for the Spartan military appeared in the *Cyropaedia*. The Spartans needed more men in their phalanx and horsemen that could fight on equal terms with their Boeotian counterparts, and the programme of military reform enacted by Cyrus in the *Cyropaedia*, if implemented in Sparta, would have made this possible.

One might wonder why Xenophon did not simply write a treatise that contained overt proposals for the reform of the Spartan military instead of working indirectly via the *Cyropaedia*. There were good reasons for Xenophon to take the more subtle approach. He had already written a treatise on the Spartan *politeia*, and so he may have had neither the desire nor the material to produce another work solely on Sparta. In addition, it may have been more politic for him to use the *Cyropaedia* as a medium for making his ideas about the Spartan military known. He probably returned to Athens in the 360s after a long exile, which put him in a rather different position *vis-à-vis* both Athens and Sparta than he had been earlier in his life when he resided at Skillos on an estate provided by Sparta.<sup>87</sup> The *Cyropaedia* gave him the opportunity to make his thinking about the Spartan military known in a diplomatic fashion. The similarities between Cyrus' Persia and Sparta would not have been lost on his contemporaries.

It is worth noting that the reform that Cyrus carries out in the *Cyropaedia* cannot be read as a simple blueprint for military reform in Sparta. The narrative in the *Cyropaedia* had its own trajectory and demands. The full range of themes that are played out in the *Cyropaedia* remains the subject of discussion, but it need hardly be said that it is a complex work in which a number of different threads are woven together. It seems beyond doubt, for instance, that some details of Cyrus' military reform are shaped by the realities of Persia as Xenophon knew or imagined them to be. The rearmed Persian commoners are, for example, given standard Persian infantry weapons, not hoplite arms and armour.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, the inclusion of a military reform subserved other facets of the *Cyropaedia*, such as the portrayal of an ideal leader responding to a variety of challenges.

If Xenophon indeed intended Cyrus' military reform to be read as a proposal for restructuring the Spartan army, he deserves to be accorded credit as something of a visionary. Xenophon lived to see Philip take the throne of Macedon, and the reforms Philip enacted bear more than a passing resemblance to those carried out by Cyrus in the *Cyropaedia*. Philip converted a badly trained, lightly armed force of commoners into a highly trained, heavily armed infantry force and assembled a powerful cavalry force comprised largely of nobles that he used as the key striking arm on the battlefield. As Xenophon neared the end of his life, he performed the remarkable feat of envisioning the future of Greek military practice.

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<sup>87</sup> On Xenophon's return to Athens, see Delebecque (1957) 335-9. For a more sceptical view, see Humble (1997) 3-21. Although it is nearly certain that Xenophon left Skillos at some point before his death, the ancient sources do not make it clear where he settled thereafter.

Corinth and Athens are the two prime candidates. Given that he was writing extensively about Athens in the last years of his life (the *Hipparchikos* and *Poroi* both date to this period), it seems more likely that he was in Athens.

<sup>88</sup> Anderson (1970) 84.

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