

## REVIEW

TRADITIONS ON THE BACKGROUND OF  
THE WAR OF CORINTH

M. Valente, *I prodromi della guerra di Corinto nelle testimonianze delle Elleniche di Ossirinco e delle Elleniche di Senofonte*. Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 2014. Pp. i + 176. Paperback, €17.00. ISBN 978-88-6274-538-3.

The enterprise undertaken by this monograph is essentially defined by Xenophon *Hellenica* III–IV and *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* (henceforth, HO) 9–25 (the London fragments, oddly referred to more than once as ‘i papiri londinesi’) plus the relevant bits of Diodorus XIV. (The final chapter discusses contaminations in post-classical sources and issues a warning about assuming everything in Diodorus was in HO, rather heavily based on what I think is a debatable argument about Conon’s trip to Babylon in 395/4: see below). HO—whose authorship is not Valente’s concern, though he thinks it was written by an Athenian—was produced earlier than Xenophon,<sup>1</sup> but can be regarded as a contemporary source.

The aim of the enterprise, if judged by the concluding chapter, is to debunk Bleckmann.<sup>2</sup> Some readers will find that an activity more readily described as superfluous than essential. But contemplation of the causes of wars is, in any case, a matter of perennial interest to historians, and the collapse of the post-Peloponnesian War settlement was an important moment—even one to rank with much more recent events: for, just as Lewis 1977 invoked the Treaty of Lausanne in dealing with the King’s Peace, so Valente (7) evokes Versailles.

Valente makes some play with offering a separate and holistic examination of each of the two traditions (cf. 8). This could have been done more rigorously, leaving all points at which information from one source is actually used to control discussion of the other for a subsequent section/chapter. It might, for example, be worth essaying a description and discussion of the presentation of

<sup>1</sup> HO attacks a view of the cause of the war involving a different identification of the Persian patron of Timocrates from the one offered in Xenophon, *ergo* HO did not know Xenophon’s account and is earlier (11). This is hardly a watertight argument—though I am content to believe the conclusion.

<sup>2</sup> B. Bleckmann, *Athens Weg in die Niederlage. Die letzten Jahre des Peloponnesischen Krieges* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1998) and *Fiktion als Geschichte. Neue Studien zum Autor der Hellenika Oxyrhynchia und zur Historiographie des vierten vorchristlichen Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 2006).

events in each text without making initial assumptions about absolute chronology: this would involve not putting a Julian number on the ‘eighth year’ of HO 12.1 or on the succession of years visible in the Xenophontic narrative. The end result in terms of the chronological framework that Valente thinks should be accepted might not be different (though, as a matter of fact, I dissent from Valente’s view), but it would make the maximal show of begging no questions and might help to underline Valente’s contentions about the essential similarity of Xenophon and HO (since he could say explicitly that their differing narratives fit conveniently into the same chronological framework<sup>3</sup>) and about the ways in which they diverge.

Xenophon’s account is globally characterised by the claim that the Corinthian War was a reaction to Agesilaus’ Anatolian expedition. This reaction was brought about by Persian bribery and, as a result, the admirable aspiration of causing maximal damage to the Persian empire was thwarted by Greek disunity. What Xenophon offers is primarily a pro-Agesilaan and panhellenist vision of things, not a pro-Spartan one. (It has an analogue in Isocrates 5.62–3 and in Polyaeus 1.48.3). To maintain this involves establishing that various features of the narrative have a pro-Agesilaus tinge (his campaign has to be presented as positively as possible in terms of its conduct, success, and aspirations), and Valente duly indicates a number of ways in which this is so, though the effect is less marked in some respects in *Hellenica* than *Agesilaus*. Valente does *not*, however, think that there is Agesilaus-motivated misrepresentation in the account of the Battle of Sardis—as distinct from its aspirational aftermath—just a significant amount of Xenophontic ignorance. It seems peculiar that, even if he was not present (as Valente assumes), Xenophon did not make more effort to get detailed information about an engagement which he minded to make of such central importance. Valente does not really address this point, but I suppose that he could say that Xenophon genuinely did not realise how ill-informed he was and/but reckoned that what (in good faith) he took to have happened was good enough for the purposes. We are, of course, close here to the Bleckmannian part of the enterprise, since the representations of Sardis by Xenophon and HO are a paradigmatic case of the jarring mismatch between the two authors. Other features of HO that tend to undermine what Valente sees as Xenophon’s heroizing of Agesilaus (the reverses in Mysia and Greater Phrygia, Agesilaus’ march to the Maeander and back to the coast after Sardis, and the comparatively sober aspiration in 394 to reach Cappadocia rather than ‘as far as possible’) are certainly less extreme.

<sup>3</sup> At the same time that can probably be said even if one identifies the *theros* of 12.1 differently. So it might even be better for Valente to insist that his kind of analysis can be conducted independently of the solution to specific chronological problems.

HO's account is globally characterised by rejection of a (presumed Spartan) claim that the war was caused by Persian bribery; the real cause was existing hatred of Sparta and a fear of her inclination to interfere in the politics of other cities. It provides quite a circumstantial narrative across a wider range of theatres of activity than Xenophon (thus with plenty of interest in Conon's activities as well as Agesilaus', not to mention a greater concern with the internal politics and institutions of Greek polities)—and narrative that is for the most part not obviously untruthful. But HO is not infallible, for its author jumped to wrong conclusion about which Locrians were involved in the events of early summer 395, applying an ethnographic stereotype about Western Locrians to a *datum* that was actually about Eastern ones. (It is not necessary for Valente's purpose to go further into these events. But there is more to be said about the identity of the *amphisbêtêsimos khôra* of *Hellenica* 3.5.3—once we reject HO's claim that it was *peri Parnasson* (21.3)—and I hope to return to this one day in another place).

The most telling difference between the two accounts is that, although they agree that there was Persian bribery of Greek politicians (with a subsidiary disagreement about the case of Athens), they ascribe it to different Persians and different dates, as well as taking a different view of its relative importance in explaining the war. Xenophon's version is wrong, and so wrong (*errore talmente macroscopico*) that it cannot result from genuine confusion—contrast the Battle of Sardis—and must be ascribed to propagandistic manipulation, the purpose being to elevate the status of Agesilaus' campaign as a cause of the war.

The wrongness consists not in there being any intrinsic improbability about Tithraustes behaving in such a way but in the fact that he could not have bribed Greeks early enough to cause the Phocian-Locrian conflict by early summer 395. Strictly speaking, of course, that depends, not on anything that now appears in Xenophon or HO, but on the reference to *akmazonta siton* in Pausanias 3.9.9. Pausanias combined strands of both the HO and Xenophon traditions (as Valente 116–18 indicates), so perhaps there was something somewhere in the now lost parts of HO that justified this phrase. But *prima facie* it has nothing to do with the situation envisaged in HO 21.3, leaving open the possibility of a third source (but who?) or a piece of groundless Pausanian elaboration. Still, it must be allowed that, if one is not going to affirm that Xenophon is right about Tithraustes and HO wrong about Pharnabazus (or take the desperate remedy of affirming that they were both right and there were two Timocrates missions), Valente's assessment of the effect of Xenophon's false version is fair enough: Xenophon wanted it to be the panhellenist Agesilaus, not the more modestly ambitious Thibron and Dercylidas, who prompted a Persian counter-intervention that might be represented as the cause of the war. Whether this necessarily proves that, in Xenophon's view, panhellenist aspirations were an uncomplicatedly good thing (and Agesilaus a

good man cruelly thwarted) is another matter—and one that Valente does not consider.

Amidst the essential skeleton of the argument, there are points of details along the way that attract attention. At 67 Valente proposes to retain the reading *kateskeuasmēnon kakôs* (not *kalôs*) in reference to Gordium in HO 24.6, one effect of which is to underline Agesilaus' failure in capturing the place. The author of HO is not a particularly elegant writer, but even he would surely have constructed the whole sentence a little differently if he had been trying to make the point Valente imagines. At 86 it is suggested (after Tsitsiridis) that the reference in *Menexenus* 245C to Corinth, Argos, and Boeotia taking money from the king (in a 387/6 context, when Athens still wanted to resist the king) might be an indirect hint at their having done so in 395—and at Athens not having done so. This may be correct, and it is also good to note the symbolic quality of the use of the Artemis Astyra temple (in the plain of Thebe at the foot of Ida) as the starting point for an expedition into the heart of Anatolia (99) and the fact that Diodorus' failure to mention Timocrates and his gold at all is an implicit sign of the comparative marginalisation of the topic in HO (113). On the other hand, the suggestion on 95 that Xenophon's failure to mention the Spartan embassy to Thebes in 395 (the one seeking to find a diplomatic solution to the Locris-Phocis conflict) is due to his hatred of Thebes is hard to follow. It is better to admit that Xenophon was prepared to accept—what he, after all, states explicitly in speaking of the seizure of a *prophasis*—that Sparta was happy to go to war. Valente is aware that Xenophon is not a straightforwardly pro-Spartan author and this is a case in point.

Deserving of slightly longer discussion is the claim (122–33) that Conon's trip to see the king in Babylon in 395/4 (Diod.14.81, Just.6.2.11–16, Oros.3.1.10) never happened. The objections are essentially (i) a claim that it is improbable that HO would have written the celebrated passage (22.2) about the king's financial meanness towards those fighting for him if Conon had received money not only from Tithraustes but also from king, and (ii) the existence of a divergent version in Nepos *Conon* 3–4, locating the trip at an earlier date.

What Diodorus/Justin propose is not an intrinsically impossible scenario. Valente himself notes (61) that Conon was inactive in Rhodes between spring/summer 396 and summer 395 in part because of an increasing lack of money. One actual injection of cash from Tithraustes and the possibility (how reliable?) of more from Ariaeus/Pasiphernes was hardly a decisive solution. The comment in 22.2 on how things were during the Decelean War (except inasmuch as Cyrus changed it) and had been in the period immediately preceding the present moment would actually serve well as a foil not just to Tithraustes' 220 talents and the possibility of more from Ariaeus/Pasiphernes but also specifically to visiting the king and establishing a new funding model. HO has said (22.2) that it was *the king* who was responsible for the financial problem and one may assume that the original arrangements (made by

Pharnabazus) that brought Conon into play in the first place had not been accompanied by robust on-going financial arrangements. The whole point is that Conon took a remarkable initiative to make a fundamental change, and (in essence) to guarantee a situation comparable to that created by Cyrus in 407–404. (Note that, *pace* 127, a difference between Lysander’s situation and Conon’s was that Lysander had a brother of the king at hand, whereas Conon did not: it is invalid to argue that Conon did not have to go to the king’s court because Lysander did not do so.) The demand for a single *ministerium impensae* (Justin: in Diodorus we have both a *tamias* and the nomination of Pharnabazus as fellow-leader) makes sense in the light of HO 22, where Conon travels inland from Caunus to meet Pharnabazus and Tithraustes, actually meets only Tithraustes, and then (presumably) discovers that Tithraustes has returned east leaving other people in his place (allegedly with 700 more talents). In the aftermath of the subsequent mutiny, he could reasonably (a) go to the king and (b) say he wants a single point of contact, that being his original patron/collaborator Pharnabazus (perhaps working through a dedicated but subordinate finance-officer).

So: the story is not simply improbable and it could perfectly well fit into HO. Does the existence of Nepos 3–4 undermine it fatally? What Nepos offers is a story that incorporates some elements of the Diodorus/Justin story (Conon goes to the King; there is an issue about *proskunêsis*; Tithraustes is involved; Conon, invited to choose someone *ad dispensandum pecuniam*, advises the King to give this role to Pharnabazus) but locates them at the moment of Conon’s original entry into the story. But it is not a credible version of that moment (Pharnabazus did not launch the naval strategy by despatching Conon as his spokesperson), whereas Diodorus/Justin provide what is an intrinsically reasonable story about something happening some two years later. In these terms it makes more sense to set Nepos aside and accept the other story than to use Nepos as a reason to incriminate Diodorus/Justin and declare that all the texts are versions of a false story calqued upon Conon’s meeting with Tithraustes in (presumably) Sardis. (This is especially true since it is not only Nepos *Conon* 3–4 but also the preceding chapter that offers a curious version of the history of 399–394).

As I observed at the outset, the topic dealt with in this monograph is an important one and has generated much discussion, especially since the discovery of the HO London papyrus in the early years of the last century. Published in 2014 but (publication delays being what they are) presumably completed a good deal earlier, Valente’s monograph does not register another relatively recent return-visit to the events of 395 and their hinterland, viz. G. Schepens, ‘Timocrates’ Mission to Greece—Once again’, in F. E. Hobden and C. J. Tuplin edd., *Xenophon: Ethical Principles and Historical Enquiry* (Leiden, 2012) 213–42. (He does, of course, note some of Schepens’ earlier germane studies). Schepens’ discourse, being much briefer, naturally explores a much narrower

range of narrative detail than Valente—though he does take time to discuss the Theban speech in 3.5.8–15 and argue for its unreliability as a witness to Xenophon’s views about the causes of the war, whereas Valente says little about it but apparently takes it at face value. But Schepens does identify the author of HO as an Athenian (214), date him before Xenophon while regarding them as contemporary sources for the present purposes (217), aim to ‘take Xenophon’s and [HO’s] accounts at face value, look at their most salient features and try to understand them in the larger historiographical context of their works’ (217), think HO responded to post-King’s Peace Spartan propaganda as circulating in general discourse and not in written form (237), date Timocrates’ mission to 397 or at the very latest early 396 (223), believe that Agesilaus did not really entertain the extravagant plans that Xenophon attributes to him (220–1, noting specifically the contrast between the precise Cappadocia of HO and the Xenophontic ‘as far as he could’), and see the association of Timocrates with Tithraustes as a conscious error on Xenophon’s part prompted by the desire to make a consequence of (and, in the event, fatal impediment to) Agesilaus’ proto-panhellenist success in Anatolia (234). In all these respects he and Valente are singing from a similar song-sheet. That the state of the question as of the start of the 2010s (plus the special provocation represented by Bleckmann) has prompted partly similar reactions from two quite different quarters is worthy of note. Whether Valente and Schepens are taking us back to the middle ground (compared with Bleckmann) or towards an opposite extreme is a moot point; and, given the contrast between Valente’s inclination to see Xenophon and HO as having at least some things in common and Schepens’ greater inclination to stress their divergences (226–7), they may not be in entirely the same place anyway. In any case, the modern authors’ consensus is no more a proof that they are both right in all respects than the ancient author’s disagreements are a proof that only one of them contains contributions to the truth. What both Valente and Schepens (like other modern discussions) do remind us of is that the terms of the argument around 395 have not really fundamentally changed in recent times—and that there may be no sort of entirely new epigraphic or papyrological material remotely likely to appear that would actually make much difference.

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