

## REVIEW

### XENOPHON, EDUCATION, AND THE ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY

Matthew R. Christ, *Xenophon and the Athenian Democracy: The Education of an Elite Citizenry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. ix + 214. Hardcover, £75.00/\$99.00. ISBN 978-1-108-49576-9.

In this book, Matthew Christ, well known for his important contribution to Athenian social and intellectual history,<sup>1</sup> makes two claims: first, that Xenophon was primarily addressing an elite audience, and second, that a large part of his corpus is intended to educate his elite peers on the qualities they should acquire in order to succeed as leaders within the democracy. The book consists of the introduction, six chapters, a conclusion, a brief bibliography, and two indexes (an index of ancient citations and a general index). In the Introduction, Christ avers that he distances himself from scholars who have viewed Xenophon as a ‘conservative aristocrat’ (6) and more specifically from S. Johnstone, who has argued in an influential article<sup>2</sup> that in Xenophon’s works only the elite citizens have real access to aristocratic values and lifestyle. According to Christ, on the contrary, Xenophon is interested in criticising elite ignorance and arrogance and urges his peers to morally transform themselves in order to be worthy of leading the democracy.

Christ develops his argument in six chapters, which focus on specific works of Xenophon. The first chapter deals with Athenian history as it is depicted in Books 1 and 2 of the *Hellenica*. According to Christ, the narrative of the Arginusae trial shows that Xenophon was critical of the Athenian *demos* and its excesses, but not of Athenian democracy; Xenophon’s detailed account of (judicial) democratic procedures illustrates, according to this line of interpretation, that the Athenian historian considers the excesses of the *demos* a deviation from normal democratic practices. Christ further posits that Eurypotemus, Theramenes, and Thrasybulus are presented as model leaders working in the interests of democracy and that Xenophon’s overly critical assessment of the Thirty Tyrants contrasts with the balanced picture of democracy before and after. The bulk of the second chapter (37–65) constitutes

<sup>1</sup> Christ (1998), (2006), and (2012).

<sup>2</sup> Johnstone (1994).

a paraphrase of Book 3 of the *Memorabilia*, in which Xenophon recounts Socrates' conversations with his fellow Athenians on issues of leadership. Christ then suggests (65–71) that Xenophon's aim in this work is to instruct his elite readers on the important political role they have to play within the democracy. He also provides an analysis of Socrates' conversation with Critobulus on the topic of friendship, underlining (based mainly on *Mem.* 2.6.24–6) that Xenophon was promoting friendship and collaboration between elite members within the democracy.

Chapter 3 turns to the *Oeconomicus*. Christ interprets this work as offering Xenophon's elite audience 'a down-to-earth critique of aristocratic neglect of work and money-making and challenging them to embrace hard work and pursue profit' (73), in order to secure their own prosperity while serving the interests of the city. He also views the praise of farming as a challenge to aristocrats who occupied themselves more with leisure than with work. Chapter 4 is devoted to the *Symposium*. Christ contends that the Xenophonic *Symposium* serves a similar purpose to the *Memorabilia*, presenting Socrates educating elite Athenians on their role within the democracy; more specifically, he believes that the *Symposium* throws into relief the defects of Callias' sophistic education. Chapter 5 discusses the *Hipparchicus* and the *Poroi*. In a line of argument similar to that put forth concerning the Arginusae trial, Christ maintains that Xenophon's knowledge of the institution of *hipparchia* and his detailed suggestions on the Athenian economy, presented in the *Hipparchicus* and the *Poroi* respectively, demonstrate that he conceived of himself as a reformer of democracy.

The last chapter treats the *Anabasis*. Christ analyses this work through the lens of mass and elite interaction;<sup>3</sup> he underlines Xenophon's role as a skilled and shrewd orator who can adapt his rhetoric according to the different audiences he addresses (e.g., captains/elite, and soldiers/masses). He also proposes that Xenophon's apologetic speeches in this work are influenced by contemporary court practices (e.g., regarding the accusation of deception, *hybris*, the arguments used, and the procedures followed). In the conclusion, finally, Christ summarises his main arguments and makes the claim that 'Xenophon's efforts to address his elite ... peers to engage them in leading the democracy ... set him apart from his contemporary elite writers, none of whom takes up this mission as directly and persistently as he does' (187).

Although this book contains some useful insights (for instance, I found the analysis of the *Anabasis* particularly perceptive), I confess I am bewildered by its overall argument and methodology. First, concerning Xenophon's audience: it is true that Xenophon's works would have probably had a great(er)

<sup>3</sup> Overall, influenced by Ober (1989). For an analysis of the *Anabasis* in terms of constitutions, see also Waterfield (2011).

appeal to elite readers; yet there is no evidence that he was primarily addressing an elite audience, and the author himself admits (II n. 5) that Flower is ‘more cautious’ (than the author?) when he states that Xenophon’s audience included his fellow Athenians as well as Greeks from other cities. Second, concerning democracy: it is regrettable, in my opinion, that the author does not comment on the two crucial Xenophontic passages which offer definitions of democracy (*Mem.* 4.2.36–7, 6.12). Neither does he provide an overview of the vocabulary devoted to democracy in Xenophon’s corpus. In fact, a simple search in the TLG reveals that *δημοκρατία* and *δημοκρατοῦμαι* appear only twenty-three times in Xenophon’s works.<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, references to *ἄρχων* (ruler) and *ἀρχή* (rule) are abundant. This difference is important, since it indicates that Xenophon did not have a *specific* interest in democracy (let alone a ‘mission regarding the Athenian democracy’, as Christ suggests) but a *broad* interest in issues of leadership. The same image is clearly conveyed, among other passages, by Socrates’ assertion that leaders are not those who hold sceptres or are appointed by lot, but those who know how to rule (*Mem.* 3.9.10), and also by the proem of the *Cyropaedia* which emphasises the (actual and potential) failure of *all* regimes, democracy included. Xenophon, in fact, provocative though this may seem, envisions good leadership under every regime, even under tyranny and monarchy (as the *Hiero* and the *Cyropaedia*, also conspicuously absent from Christ’s analysis, illustrate).

Related to the lack of attention to Greek vocabulary is the fact that Christ often infers elements that are absent from the ancient text. For instance, he states that Xenophon ‘characterizes the behavior of the Athenian *demos* in the Arginusae as atypical’ (27), although this characterisation is nowhere attested in the *Hellenica*. Concerning *Mem.* 2.24–6, Christ claims that ‘Socrates sketches out how the city’s elite can exercise political power within the city not by overthrowing the democracy but by cooperating and collaborating with one another ...’ (67). However, the focus of this conversation is not democracy, its stability, or overthrow (again none of these terms occurs in the passage of the *Memorabilia*): the conversation opens (*Mem.* 2.6.1) with an investigation of what a good friend is; then, according to Xenophon’s usual practice of blurring the boundaries between the private and the public sphere, there is a *shift* to political matters.<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, regarding the *Hipparchicus* and the *Poroi*, Christ posits (127) that ‘Xenophon suggests that good citizenship on the part of the elite entails not simply embracing democratic institutions, but working

<sup>4</sup> There are also other terms related to democracy in Xenophon’s corpus, such as *δῆμος*, *δημηγόρος*, *δημηγορικός*, *δημαγωγός*, and *δημαγωγῶ*, but for the purposes of this review I mention *δημοκρατία* and *δημοκρατοῦμαι* as more directly relevant.

<sup>5</sup> For the blurring of boundaries between the public and the private sphere in Xenophon, see Azoulay (2009) and Azoulay–Pontier (2012). For friendship in the second book of the *Memorabilia*, see recently Tamiolaki (2018).

to make them better'.<sup>6</sup> Again this claim is not sufficiently substantiated by Xenophon's writings, which scarcely mention democracy, Athenian democracy, or any embrace of democratic principles.

Christ's interpretation sometimes arises from an inaccurate translation. For example, Henderson in the Loeb translates *Oec.* 21.3 (οἷον καὶ ἐν τριήρει, ἔφη, ὅταν πελαγίζωσι, καὶ δέη περᾶν ἡμερινούς πλοῦς ἐλαύνοντας, οἱ μὲν τῶν κελευστῶν δύνανται τοιαῦτα λέγειν καὶ ποιεῖν ὥστε ἀκονᾶν τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπὶ τὸ ἐθελοντὰς πονεῖν) as follows: 'For example, in a trireme, when the ship is on the high seas and *the rowers must toil* all day to reach port, some coxswains can say and do the right thing to sharpen the men's spirits and make them work hard ...' (my emphasis).<sup>7</sup> From this Christ infers (88 n. 5) that '*ponos* is used for lower class rowers'. However, neither the word 'rowers' nor the word *ponos* (toil) occurs in the first part of Xenophon's text.<sup>8</sup> A similar lack of attention to Greek vocabulary betrays Christ's assertion (in the same note) that *ponos* is used for slaves in *Oec.* 13.11 and 14.10.<sup>9</sup> However, in the first passage Ischomachus is not referring to slaves in general, but to those he trains as *epitropoi* (who have a privileged position among slaves within the household, acting, in a sense, as rulers of slaves),<sup>10</sup> while the second passage constitutes a generalised maxim which Ischomachus employs as a concluding observation of his previous analysis on the punishment and reward of slaves: 'I think an ambitious man differs from a greedy one in that, for the sake of praise and honour, he is willing to work hard (*πονεῖν*) and to run risks when necessary and to abstain from dishonest gains' (translation Pomeroy (1994) *ad loc.*).

The root of the problems raised by Christ's analyses lies, in my view, in that they adopt (and adapt) the rhetoric of modern democracies, thus often appearing anachronistic. For example, Christ repeats time and again that Xenophon (or Socrates) did not desire to overthrow the democracy, and

<sup>6</sup> Cf. also the statement: 'Xenophon embraces the basic democratic principle that elite Athenians should deploy their wealth in the service of the city ...' (145).

<sup>7</sup> Henderson (2013) *ad loc.* The phrase 'the rowers must toil' is the original translation of Marchant in the 1923 Loeb, left unchanged by Henderson.

<sup>8</sup> Christ notes in his introduction that he uses Henderson's as his standard translation for Xenophon's Socratic works although he does not quote this passage in full. See, however, the accurate translation by Pomeroy (1994) *ad loc.*: 'For example, when men are crossing the open sea in a trireme, and they have to row all day long to complete their journey, some of the coxswains have the ability to speak and act in such a way that they rouse the morale of their men so that they are keen to work hard ...'

<sup>9</sup> Johnstone (1994) 236 n. 78 also misinterprets these passages.

<sup>10</sup> See Pomeroy (1994) 319: 'the household of Ischomachus is a meritocracy operating on principles of hierarchy rather than equality. Clothing will not only serve to punish or reward slaves but will announce their ranking *vis-à-vis* one another ...' Cf. Tamiolaki (2010) 331–5 for the privileged position of the *epitropos*.

concludes that Xenophon ‘supports the democratic city ... because he sees no good alternative to democracy’ (187). These statements sound defensive<sup>11</sup> and do not find support in Xenophon’s works. To be sure, Xenophon does envision the overthrow of democracy: see, for example, the *proem* of the *Cyropaedia* (*Cyr.* 1.1.1: “Ἐννοιά ποθ’ ἡμῖν ἐγένετο ὅσαι δημοκρατίαι κατελύθησαν ὑπὸ τῶν ἄλλως πως βουλομένων πολιτεύεσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ ἐν δημοκρατία ...”) and the beginning of *Agesilaus* (*Ages.* 1.4.8: τοιγαροῦν ἄλλη μὲν οὐδεμία ἀρχὴ φανερά ἐστι διαγεγενημένη ἀδιάσπαστος οὔτε δημοκρατία οὔτε ὀλιγαρχία οὔτε τυραννὶς οὔτε βασιλεία). More intriguingly, although Xenophon in the *Memorabilia* (*Mem.* 1.2.9–10) presents a twofold accusation against Socrates (that he taught his companions to despise established laws (i.e., democratic laws) and that he led them to violence), he then chooses to respond only to the second aspect of the accusation, concerning the cultivation of violence, thus implicitly admitting (or leaving it open to readers to ponder?) that Socrates was not so favourable to democracy.<sup>12</sup> Of course, these passages do not suggest that Xenophon (or Socrates) *promoted* the overthrow of democracy, but neither do they indicate that he was a democrat or that he saw no good alternative to democracy. In any case, Xenophon’s works do not rule out that he might have felt more at ease under another regime than democracy.

Christ’s enthusiasm for democracy (ancient and modern) leads him to some interesting, though in my view unconvincing, hypotheses. The fact that Xenophon details or displays knowledge of democratic procedures is not evidence that he embraced democratic institutions. In fact, Xenophon displays knowledge of many constitutions and even of the psychology of the tyrant. Does this make him an advocate of tyranny, too? In the episode of the Arginusae trial, more specifically, these details serve to make the narrative more vivid and realistic. Xenophon was also aware that many members of his audience lived and operated under the democracy; hence he adapts his

<sup>11</sup> It is as if the author constantly feels the need to defend democracy. This concern is rather modern. Cf. also the following statement (25): ‘Xenophon does not characterize democratic institutions as inherently flawed and doomed to operate dysfunctionally’. I also find anachronistic Christ’s characterisation of Xenophon’s programme in the *Poroi* as ‘socially and politically conservative’ (144) due to the lack of interest in the poor and metics, which again seems to reflect modern democratic concerns about the value of inclusiveness.

<sup>12</sup> *Mem.* 1.2.9–10 (translation Henderson (2013), adapted): ‘But, said the accuser, he taught his companions to despise the established laws [Ἀλλὰ νῆ Δία, ὁ κατήγορος ἔφη, ὑπερορῶν ἐποίει τῶν καθεστώτων νόμων τοὺς συνόντας] by calling it folly to appoint the rulers in the city by lot, when none would choose a pilot or builder or piper by lot, nor any other craftsman for work in which mistakes are far less disastrous than mistakes in statecraft. Such talk, he argued, led the young to despise the established constitution and made them violent [τοὺς δὲ τοιούτους λόγους ἐπαίρειν ἔφη τοὺς νέους καταφρονεῖν τῆς καθεστῶσης πολιτείας καὶ ποιεῖν βιαίους]. But I hold that they who cultivate prudence and think they will be able to guide the people in expedient policy are the least violent ...’

narratives accordingly. I also doubt that Xenophon's audience would interpret Xenophon's approval of both persuasion and compulsion in the *Hipparchicus* as a 'mirror of the Athenian practice regarding the hoplites' (131), not least since this practice is also approved by the Persian monarch Cyrus (*Cyr.* 5.2.19).<sup>13</sup> Concerning the complaints of the aristocrats about the burden of the liturgies, Christ argues that they are incidental and hyperbolic (112, 114); yet he focuses only on the *Symposium*, failing to take into account all the passages in which these ideas occur.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, and more importantly perhaps, it is not clear to me what Christ considers Xenophon's attitude towards democracy to be. In the first chapter (26, 29) he talks about Xenophon's 'ambivalence' towards democracy and his attraction to the idea of moderate oligarchy. The rest of his analysis, however, assumes that Xenophon consciously and consistently writes with Athenian democracy in mind and that he is especially concerned with it (as he is with his elite audience). In the conclusion, then, Christ states that 'Xenophon *came to accept* the city's democratic constitution and *became* a strong advocate of the elite working within it to advance the common good', but also that 'he is not an avid democrat' (187) (my emphasis). So, does the author see an evolution in Xenophon's stance? From ambivalence towards support of democracy? I did not find arguments in support of this thesis throughout his analysis. Christ's interpretation seems indeed closer to the representation of Xenophon as an avid democrat, since only an avid democrat would care as much about Athenian democracy as Christ's Xenophon. This impression is also reinforced by the fact that Xenophon's associations with Sparta and Persia are downplayed in this book. Consequently, an average or unknowing modern reader (e.g., a young student who has no idea about Greek culture or Xenophon, or an amateur in Classics) might cherish the idea of a democratic Xenophon, but the image they would acquire of the author and his world would be one-sided and quite misleading.

<sup>13</sup> Christ makes a similar suggestion concerning the *Oeconomicus* and the *Anabasis*: 'Ischomachus' successful household mirrors the Athenian democracy ... Ischomachus fosters a collaborative community' (98); 'Indeed, his energetic work as manager and leader of his *oikos* mirrors the role played by successful political leaders within a polis and prepares him to step into this role, as befits a man of status within the city, should the opportunity present itself' (100); 'the *Anabasis* ... provides a sort of mirror to Athens as Xenophon depicts the need for, and challenges of, elite leadership in the quasi-democratic setting of the Cyrean army' (153).

<sup>14</sup> Other passages include *Mem.* 2.1.8–10; *Oec.* 2.6–7; 7.2–3; *Cyr.* 8.35–48. See Tamiolaki (2013) 35–6 and n. 11.

The bibliography is far from complete, including mainly English-language titles,<sup>15</sup> while the author's treatment of Xenophonic scholarship is rather perfunctory, rarely engaging with specific arguments.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, Christ's book leaves a lot to be desired. An updated systematic treatment of Xenophon's attitude towards democracy (and constitutions in general) remains a *desideratum*.

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<sup>15</sup> Some important titles missing from the non-English-language literature are Duploy (2006), Pontier (2006), and Stoll (2010).

<sup>16</sup> Examples are numerous, but I confine myself to a few. For example, in the Introduction (6), Christ, basing himself on Tamiolaki (2013), classifies me among scholars who have viewed Xenophon as 'a conservative aristocrat and oligarch who opposed the Athenian democracy', although I have never in my writings characterised Xenophon as conservative and although in the article cited I treat Xenophonic evidence as reflecting 'more widespread views about democracy' (43) and not simply as an illustration of Xenophon's aristocratic inclinations. Moreover, Christ states (88) that 'Xenophon does not distinguish between the toil (*ponos*) of the aristocrat and the work (*ergon*) of common men, as Johnstone (235–6) maintains', without addressing Johnstone's careful analysis about the distinction of these terms, and also overlooking the fact that Johnstone, too, notes possible exceptions to this distinction (Johnstone (1994) 236–7 n. 78). For his analysis of *ponos*, Christ limits himself to the *Oeconomicus*, which he treats as authoritative (see his statement (88) that 'Johnstone's hypothesis 'is not borne out by Xenophon's treatment of work in the *Oeconomicus*'), failing to comment on the expression ἐλευθέριοι πόνοι, found in the *Cyropaedia* (*Cyr.* 8.1.43) which clearly points to aristocratic toil. Finally, Christ also posits that Callias falls short of the ideal of *kalokagathia*, but does not address Danzig's arguments (122 n. 46) to the contrary (Danzig (2017) 146).

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