

# Xenophon

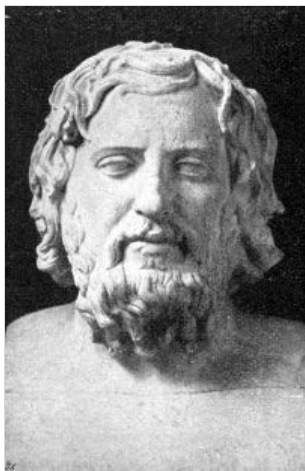
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*For the later Greek writer see  
Xenophon of Ephesus.*

**Xenophon** (In Greek Ξενοφῶν, ca. 431 – 355 BC), son of Gryllus, of the deme Erchia of Athens, was a soldier, mercenary and an admirer of Socrates. He is known for his writings on the history of his own times, the sayings of Socrates, and the life of Greece.

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Xenophon, Greek historian

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## Life and writings

Xenophon's birth date is uncertain, but most scholars agree that he was born in 431 BC around Athens, Greece. Very little is known about his childhood and

family. While a young man, Xenophon participated in the expedition led by Cyrus the Younger against his older brother, the emperor Artaxerxes II of Persia, in 401 BC. Xenophon says that he had asked the veteran Socrates for advice on whether to go with Cyrus, and that Socrates referred him to the divinely inspired Delphic oracle. Xenophon's query to the oracle, however, was not whether or not to accept Cyrus' invitation, but "to which of the gods he must pray and do sacrifice, so that he might best accomplish his intended journey and return in safety, with good fortune." So the oracle told him which gods to pray and sacrifice to. When Xenophon returned to Athens and told Socrates of the oracle's advice, Socrates chastised him for putting the wrong question to the oracle, but said, "Since, however, you did so put the question,

you should do what the god enjoined."



Route of Xenophon and the

In his advance against the Persian king,

Cyrus the Younger used many Greek mercenaries left unemployed by the cessation of the Peloponnesian War. Cyrus fought Artaxerxes II in the Battle of Cunaxa. The Greeks were victorious in that battle, but Cyrus was killed. Shortly thereafter, the Greek general Clearchus of Sparta was invited to a peace conference, at which he was betrayed and executed. The mercenaries, known as the Ten Thousand, found themselves without leadership deep in hostile territory, near the heart of Mesopotamia, which was far from the sea. They elected new leaders, including Xenophon himself, and fought their way north through hostile Persians, Armenians, and Kurds to Trapezus on the coast of the Black Sea. They then sailed westward back to Greece. On the way back, they helped Seuthes II make himself king of Thrace. Xenophon's

record of the entire expedition against the Persians and the journey home was titled *Anabasis* ("The Expedition" or "The March Up Country"). It is worth noting that the *Anabasis* was used as a field guide by Alexander the Great during the early phases of his expedition into Persia.

Xenophon was later exiled from Athens, most likely because he fought under the Spartan king Agesilaus against Athens at Coronea. (However, there may have been contributory causes, such as his support for Socrates, as well as the fact that he had taken service with the Persians.) The Spartans gave him property at Scillus, near Olympia in Elis, where he composed the *Anabasis*. However, because his son Gryllus fought and died for Athens at the Battle of Mantinea while Xenophon was still

alive, Xenophon's banishment may have been revoked. Xenophon died in either Corinth or Athens. His date of death is uncertain; historians only know that he survived his patron Agesilaus II, for whom he wrote an encomium.

Diogenes Laertius says Xenophon was sometimes known as the "Attic Muse" for the sweetness of his diction; very few poets wrote in the Attic dialect.

Xenophon is often cited as being the original "horse whisperer", having advocated sympathetic horsemanship in his "On Horsemanship". He also reports that Xenophon had a young eromenos whom he loved and of whom he said: "Now I look upon Clinias with more pleasure than upon all the other beautiful things which are to be seen among men; and I would rather be blind as to all the rest of the world, than as to Clinias. And



I am annoyed even with night and with sleep, because then I do not see him; but I am very grateful to the sun and to daylight, because they show Clinias to me."

Xenophon's standing as a political philosopher has been defended in recent times by Leo Strauss, who devoted a considerable part of his philosophic analysis to the works of Xenophon, returning to the high judgment of Xenophon as a thinker expressed by Shaftesbury, Wincklemann, and Machiavelli. Strauss's reading has been heavily criticized, notably by classicist Myles Burnyeat, as attempting to force Socrates into the mould of Strauss's own philosophical views.

## **List of works**

Xenophon's writings, especially the *Anabasis*, are often read by beginning students of the Greek language. His *Hellenica* is a major primary source for events in Greece from 411 to 362 BC, and his Socratic writings, preserved complete, are the only surviving representatives of the genre of Sokratikoi logoi other than the dialogues of Plato.

## **Historical and Biographical works**

- *Anabasis*
- *Cyropaedia*
- *Hellenica*
- *Agesilaus*

## **Socratic works and dialogues**

- *Memorabilia*
- *Oeconomicus*
- *Symposium*
- *Apology*
- *Hiero*

## Short treatises

- *On Horsemanship*
- *The Cavalry General*
- *Hunting with Dogs*
- *Ways and Means*
- *Constitution of Sparta*

In addition, we have a short treatise once thought to be by Xenophon, but which was probably written when Xenophon was about five, on the Constitution of Athens. This is found in manuscripts among the short works of Xenophon, as though he had written it also. The author, often called in English the "Old

Oligarch", detests the democracy of Athens and the poorer classes—but argues that the Periclean institutions are well designed for their deplorable purposes.

Leo Strauss has argued that this work is in fact by Xenophon, whose ironic posing he believes has been utterly missed by contemporary scholarship.

## Notes

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## **External links**

- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Xenophon
- Graham Oliver's Xenophon Homepage
- Xenophon's Education of Cyrus (Cyropaedia) Web directory
- Xenophon's Socratic Works
- Xenophon's Works at The University of Adelaide

## **Project Gutenberg e-texts**

- Works by Xenophon at Project Gutenberg

- Agesilaus
- Anabasis
- The Apology
- The Cavalry General
- Cyropaedia
- The Economist
- Hellenica
- Hiero
- The Memorabilia
- On Horsemanship
- On Revenues
- The Polity of the Athenians and the Lacedaemonians
- The Sportsman
- The Symposium

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