

Conclusion



Although Xenophon begins his *Hellenica* at almost precisely the point where Thucydides' history left off, he did not continue the historiographical tradition inherited from Herodotus and Thucydides but instead represents a transition between the fifth century and the Hellenistic period, in his inauguration of paradigmatic history, which became much more overt in Ephorus and Theopompus and the Hellenistic historians. The concern for the moral exercise of political power that we have seen in Xenophon, Ephorus, and Theopompus can also be found in Socrates, Isocrates, and Plato, largely in reaction to the questioning of traditional morality by the sophists and the reestablishment of the Athenian democracy and its use of the techniques of political rhetoric to manipulate the masses. Although Socrates did not found a school, his views on the importance of morality in public life were extremely influential among the generation of Athenian aristocrats active at the end of the fifth century. Both Isocrates and Plato did found systems of education, each stressing (in very different ways) the importance of providing a moral basis to political leadership. Regardless of the degree of personal attachment, Plato and Xenophon are closely associated with Socrates, while Ephorus and Theopompus are not only part of the same intellectual *milieu* as Isocrates but most likely also students of his (I

have shown direct Isocratean influences upon both historians). It is not surprising therefore that both Ephorus and Theopompus would turn their talent for historical writing to moral purposes. Moreover, prose's usurpation of poetry's didactic function for the elite in the early fourth century made historical works a logical instrument for the propagation of moral virtue, especially in civic life, an idea explicitly stated by Isocrates, who had a heavy influence on later fourth-century historiography (a view that has recently become unfashionable).

The focus upon political virtue in the works of Plato, Xenophon, Ephorus, and Theopompus brings about a necessary corollary: that the specific moral virtues they propound are directed toward the intellectual elite and are therefore oligarchic. As a result, they are all profoundly anti-democratic and make a (hitherto unrecognized, in the cases of Xenophon, Ephorus, and Theopompus) contribution to the literary resistance to Athenian democratic ideology.¹ Plato, Xenophon, Ephorus (by inference from his apparent failure to include the fifth-century Athenian empire in his succession of hegemonies), and Theopompus all undermine Athens's claims to fifth-century achievement, so routinely lauded by the orators. It is telling that Xenophon does not choose to include an account of Athens's fourth-century empire in the *Hellenica*, even though this was a topic that should otherwise have appealed to him, with its illustration of how imperialism begets corruption, which in turn begets failure. Overt hostility to the fifth-century Athenian politicians can be found in Plato's *Gorgias*, Ephorus (at least in the case of Pericles), and in Theopompus's famed *On the Athenian Demagogues*. All four of these writers also exhibit contempt for the unwashed masses, who can easily be manipulated by the rhetoric of demagogic leaders.

Because of their oligarchic and antidemocratic views, it is certainly no coincidence that Xenophon, Ephorus, and Theopompus appear to have political sympathies for the Lycurgan constitution of Sparta, that is, the old regime before Sparta also began to exhibit imperialistic tendencies and became corrupted with power and wealth. In this, they are very much representative of the Athenian elite at this time, in that Sparta was considered a paradigm of virtue by Athenian dissidents,² with the notable

1. Pace Josiah Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 121.

2. For the admiration of things Spartan by the Athenian upper class, see Martin Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty to the Sovereignty of Law: Law, Society, and Politics in Fifth-Century Athens* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 235–36.

exception of Isocrates, who preferred to remain an internal critic.³ It is no surprise that the moral virtues with which these historians are chiefly concerned—courage, self-control, and piety—are stereotypically Spartan. It may also be as a result of these pro-Spartan and oligarchic political sympathies that Xenophon, Ephorus, and Theopompus offer criticism of tyranny, a phenomenon that was becoming common once more in the Greek world. The Spartans, after all, had always prided themselves on their opposition to tyrants. Moreover, some holders of extreme forms of the *physis* doctrine had by now suggested ways of justifying absolute authority, which offered the unscrupulous ample opportunities for acts of utmost tyranny and unrestrained self-indulgence. It is likely as a response to arguments of this sort that the historians show those who acquire power improperly and wield it immorally do not prosper (with the exception of Theopompus's presentation of Philip, whose success in spite of his corrupt morals is attributed to luck).

Despite their aversion to democracy and those who pander to it, these fourth-century prose writers do not hesitate to borrow techniques intended to appeal to the masses. Both Ephorus and Theopompus resort to the techniques of comedy and political invective. Moreover, the influence of rhetoric is apparent in all three historians, although the relationship is uneasy. The preference for more “rhetorical” techniques over explicit condemnation is a feature of fourth-century historical writing and is also part of Plato's method, as is the case in the *Menexenus*, where he does not challenge the flattery of political rhetoric directly but parodies it instead. Although both Isocrates and Plato deliberately set their systems of education in opposition to the training in rhetoric offered by the sophists, both found it necessary to borrow some of the techniques of rhetoric to persuade others of their views in their written works. Whereas political oratory, the aim of which is the persuasion of the mob, is a great evil, the techniques of rhetoric, put to proper use, can be beneficial in the instruction of moral virtue. The message that Isocrates and Plato have passed to our historians is that the primary purpose of rhetoric, when it is properly used, is not to persuade but to educate. It is not surprising, therefore, that the influence of rhetoric varies greatly between Xenophon, who was writing earlier in the century, and Ephorus and Theopompus, who had the

3. Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens*, 282; cf. Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 13–59.

opportunity to avail themselves of the writings of Isocrates and Plato. Xenophon disapproved of rhetoric, because of its frequent use by demagogues to lead the masses away from the better path. Ephorus and Theopompus, however, were quite willing to borrow the techniques of rhetoric, including the use of a system of praise and blame, to achieve their ultimate goal of moral education of the elite. In Theopompus in particular can be seen the influence of Gorgias. Nevertheless, these fourth-century prose writers do not want to be seen as pandering to the masses and emphasize their insistence on the aristocratic concept of moral virtue. In contrast to the use of historical examples by the oratorical tradition to create the official Athenian democratic version of the past, they develop an alternative aristocratic version.

The influences of rhetoric and the sophists can further be seen in the use of examples and models (used also, notably, by Socrates and Isocrates), but turned, of course, to a moral purpose. We also find an emphasis on specific motifs, such as the culture bringer in Ephorus, used as a justification for imperialism. In fact, in Xenophon, Isocrates, and Ephorus, just as in the orators, moral superiority is touted as the justification for the acquisition of power, although when imperialism engenders corruption, success quickly falls away. In Theopompus, the emphasis is on the unjustifiable nature of Philip's imperialism because of his immorality. Surprisingly, however, the relativistic approach to moral virtue, characteristic of the sophists, is still present, for underlying the work of Xenophon and Ephorus is the notion that the reason to engage in moral behavior is to ensure military or political success. Because it was not in the Greek character to practice moral virtue for its own sake, both Socrates and Isocrates provide arguments of the utility of moral behavior, and their legacy is evident. In Xenophon and Ephorus in particular, success in civic life is explicitly linked with moral virtue, and Theopompus too was concerned with practical benefit (*ὠφελεία*). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the historiographical tradition of the fourth century has not really progressed philosophically beyond the relativistic view of moral virtue attributed to the sophists, but has just applied it to a new kind of terrain.

As I have previously demonstrated, Xenophon, Ephorus, and Theopompus have a common aim in their use of the past to educate the elite in aristocratic virtue and employ similar techniques, such as digressions, anecdotes, speeches, praise and blame, positive and negative exempla, and *peripeteiai* (explicitly in the case of Xenophon and by inference from the frequent use of negative exempla in Ephorus and Theopompus) to shape

their material. Nevertheless, there are significant differences among these three historians and their conceptions of what a moral history should be. Xenophon is particularly concerned with courage, piety, and the exercise of moral military and political leadership. His conception of moral virtue is more strictly military than that of the other historians as a result of his aim of getting the aristocrats back into the army and politics. For the most part, he avoids direct statements of praise and blame, and tends to indicate his opinion more indirectly by way of positive and negative exempla. As has often been noticed, Xenophon is reluctant to express blame directly and tends to use negative exempla for this purpose, a more congenial method for the first historian to make the paradigm the central focus of his work. Xenophon's inauguration of paradigmatic history is indeed the most important contribution he made to the historiographical tradition, and the influence of the *Hellenica* upon subsequent historians has until recently been underrated (largely) because of modern scholars' general dislike of his approach to history. Ephorus concentrates rather on the maintenance of a simple and moderate way of life promoting military valor, which in turn leads to a harmonious and secure society. His interest in *paideia* at the societal level leads him to focus upon the rise and fall of hegemonies rather than that of individual leaders. This desire for a larger scope may have been the impetus for his inauguration of universal history, an important legacy to the historiographical tradition. Theopompus, on the other hand, in the *Philippica* directs his attention upon the individual. The surviving fragments and *testimonia* reveal a vituperative tone of moral self-righteousness particularly directed against those who exhibit a lack of self-control and a penchant for conspicuous consumption. Theopompus's particular vehemence against self-indulgence can probably be explained as his attempt to show how those afflicted with this vice play into the hands of autocrats (of whom Philip is naturally the supreme example) who use others' lack of self-control to seize power.

Another important difference between Xenophon and his counterparts later in the fourth century is their reaction to the unsettled political conditions of contemporary Greece. It is important to note that all three were debarred from participation in active politics (like Herodotus and Thucydides before them)—Xenophon by his exile, and Ephorus and Theopompus by residence abroad. Whereas Xenophon, possibly as a result of his military background, offered a prescriptive solution to the troubles of Athens, Ephorus and Theopompus, both of whom were criticized for their lack of actual military experience, turned instead to an ideal of what the perfect

society would be if one could restore the Sparta of yore or escape to some distant utopia (inspired perhaps in this by Plato). Possibly this is also why Xenophon, like Thucydides, chose a confined subject consisting of events of his own lifetime, but Ephorus and Theopompus extended their narratives in both space and time far beyond their own direct experience. This breadth would provide fertile terrain for moralizing, especially if the moralizing to be done was meant to be in the abstract, from hindsight, and without prescriptive purpose.

Perhaps to the minds of Xenophon, Ephorus, and Theopompus, the moral purpose of their histories excuses some of their deficiencies, which are really very similar to the distortions of history in the political orations, satirized by Plato in the *Menexenus*. The most obvious deficiency of Xenophon's *Hellenica* is its omissions, although Ephorus and Theopompus may also be guilty of this fault (particularly if, as it seems, Ephorus did not deign to include the fifth-century Athenian empire in his succession of hegemonies), but the fragmentary condition of their histories makes it more difficult to detect. In the works of all three historians, we find underemphasis, exaggeration, and even suppression of facts in order often to provide a better moral contrast for a system of praise and blame or paradigms, both positive and negative. Digressions and anecdotes in the fourth-century historians take on a role similar to that of mythological and historical allusions in oratory, although the aim is once again the promotion of aristocratic virtue rather than democratic ideology. In general, these fourth-century historians subordinate historical accuracy to the moral education of the elite, the sort of manipulation of strict historical truth that would be deemed acceptable by both Plato and Isocrates because it is sanctioned by a higher calling.

In their use of the past as a source of moral exempla, however, our historians are very much products of their own day. For Plato and Isocrates, it is acceptable to misrepresent the past as a vehicle for moral instruction; Xenophon, Ephorus, and Theopompus are clearly working within the same tradition. Not only do the fourth-century prose writers represent a moral viewpoint somewhere between the popular morality of the orators and the dedicatory inscriptions and the moral philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, but they also play an important *paideutic* function, because they replace the poets in their traditional function of providing moral advice to aspiring political leaders. Moreover, their infusion into historical works of the moral views of the educated elite represents an important transition point in the history of historiography. These fourth-century historians not

only introduce a personal and moral interpretation of the past, but they also usher in such innovations as paradigmatic history, praise and blame, *peripeteiai*, vituperation, and universal history, which prove to exert a great influence upon subsequent historians. Indeed, it is fair to say that one cannot achieve a full insight into the later historians of the Greek and Roman period without a proper understanding of the historical works of Xenophon, Ephorus, and Theopompus.