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Kingdom versus Empire in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*

Abstract: This paper examines the role of the distinction between the Persian kingdom and the Persian empire drawn in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* with the view to showing that Cyrus's government of his empire does not lend itself to a darker reading, but rather that his style of rule is based on an aristocratic-meritocratic view of the world.

Keywords: Xenophon, kingdom, empire, *Cyropaedia*

To view complex events through the prism of binary polarisation is dear to the Greek mentality.¹ Xenophon is no exception, as seen in his contrasting the good and the bad in the context of *philia* and his support for the principle that justice is to help friends and harm enemies.² This does not mean that Xenophon habitually perceives complex occurrences and processes through mutually opposed and exclusive factors. His efforts to overcome the *public/private* dichotomy and his rejection of the *vita activa/vita contemplativa* antithesis testify to the contrary. However, presenting certain issues in the form of binary polarisation helps to simplify and explain them.

The *Cyropaedia* is an historical novel, not a faithful account of historical events.³ It is not surprising therefore that Xenophon departs to an extent from what actually took place. In making a distinction between the Persian kingdom and the Persian empire, however, his departure from the factual situation is such

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¹ See P. Vidal-Naquet, *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 10–11; P. Cartledge, *Ancient Greek Political Thought in Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009), 4–5; cf. also H.-J. Gehrke, "Die klassische Polisgesellschaft in der Perspektive griechischer Philosophen", *Saeculum* 36 (1985), 146–147; Ch. Mann, "Politische Gleichheit und gesellschaftliche Stratifikation. Die athenische Demokratie aus der Perspektive der Systemtheorie", *Historische Zeitschrift* 286 (2008), 9–11.

² The good – the bad (Xen. *Cyr.* 2.2.22–7; *Mem.* 2.6.14–27); cf. I. Jordović, "Ksenofont o Erosu i filiji", *Istraživanja* 25 (2014), 9–23; justice is to help friends and harm enemies (Xen. *Cyr.* 1.4.15, 25; 1.6.11, 28–34; 4.5.20, 27–28; 4.6.1–10; 5.1.28; 5.4.32–36; 5.5.13–14; 8.7.6–7, 28; *Mem.* 2.1.19, 28; 2.2.2; 2.3.14; 2.6.35; 4.2.15–16; 4.5.10; *Symp.* 4.3; *Anab.* 1.36; *Hier.* 2.2).

³ Cic. *QFr.* 1.1.23; see D. L. Gera, *Xenophon's Cyropaedia. Style, Genre, and Literary Technique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 1–13, esp. 2–3, 6; Chr. Mueller-Goldingen, *Untersuchungen zu Xenophons Kyropädie*, (Stuttgart/Leipzig: De Gruyter, 1995), XIV, 2.

that it will strike every reader.⁴ Since this deviation cannot be explained by reference to historical facts or any literary tradition, it must have been conscious and deliberate. This has led some scholars to conclude that Xenophon is indirectly criticizing his hero, and imperious behaviour.⁵

What strikes the reader is that Xenophon's depiction of the Persian kingdom bears little or no resemblance to historical Persia.⁶ The Persian king is not shown as a typical autocrat, although in reality he was. The extent of the departure from historical reality becomes even greater if we remember that the Greeks perceived him as the prototype of a tyrant.⁷ Xenophon uses various ways to show us that he does not see the Persian king as a tyrant. To begin with, he seeks to show that the king does not rule all by himself: there are also the laws, officials and the council of elders. The laws, the purpose of which is the common good (*koinon agathon*), prevent people from living as they choose. They not only regulate the raising of children and the grooming of youths, but also very clearly order public life. This is reflected in the existence of the so-called free square (*eleuthera agora*) with its court and public buildings, but without traders or a market. The laws also assign a part of the free square to each of the four age groups (boys, youths, mature men, elders).⁸ Since the aim of the laws is the common good, family background is not a criterion for the right to a public office.⁹ Moreover, the Persian king's officials are not reduced to mere executors of his will, as indicated by the stress placed on their submission to the laws and the common good. They are the ones who, in the schools of justice, teach righteousness to the children.¹⁰ Young men who have passed through the school – mature men too – are at the officials' bidding, so that these may make use of them for the

⁴ See C. Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince: Republic and Empire in the Cyropaedia* (Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2001), 32 n. 18, 121.

⁵ Cf. Gera, *Cyropaedia*, 285–299; D. Johnson, "Persians as Centaurs in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*", *TAPhA* 135 (2005), 177–207, esp. 179–181, 203–205.

⁶ The discrepancy is such that the term Persian republic for the Persian kingdom has become quite widespread in the modern scholarly literature; see Chr. Nadon, "From Republic to Empire: Political Revolution and the Common Good in Xenophon's Education of Cyrus", *The American Political Science Review* 90 (1996), 364; Nadon, *Xenophon's Prince*, 30–1; P. J. Rasmussen, *Excellence Unleashed: Machiavelli's Critique of Xenophon and the Moral Foundation of Politics* (Lanham/Boulder/Plymouth: Lexington Books), 3–13; P. Carlier, "The Idea of Imperial Monarchy in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*", in *Xenophon*, ed. V. J. Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 333, 339.

⁷ See Mueller-Goldingen, *Kyropädie*, 95; C. Dewald, "Form and Content: The Question of Tyranny in Herodotus". In *Popular Tyranny. Sovereignty and Its Discontents in Ancient Greece*, ed. K. A. Morgan (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 33–35, 47–49.

⁸ Xen. *Cyr.* 1.2.2–4.

⁹ Xen. *Cyr.* 1.2.15.

¹⁰ Xen. *Cyr.* 1.2.6–7.

common good.¹¹ Twelve officers at the head of each of the four age groups see to it that all Persians conscientiously fulfil their duties so that they might become the best possible citizens.¹² And finally, the Persian officials are not chosen by the king, but by the elders – citizens of over fifty years of age who have graduated from the schools of justice, served the state for ten years as youths and further twenty-five years as mature men.¹³

Xenophon seeks to show that the Persian king is not a tyrant also by saying virtually nothing about his powers, which is unusual for a work in the mirror-of-princes genre. It is true that Xenophon generally pays little attention to the nature of the Persian constitution, but even so, he is disproportionately terse about the king's powers. He is content to say that the king regularly takes young men hunting, since that is the best preparation for war. The fact that he feels the need to underline that the king is the *hegemōn* in hunting and in war may be interpreted as an indication that the authority of the Persian kings is limited in other situations.¹⁴ As may be seen from Aristotle, the Greeks cited the Spartan kings, and not eastern autocrats, as an historical example of a thus limited kingly power.¹⁵

A third way in which the *Cyropaedia* seeks to show that the Persian king should not be perceived as the prototype of an eastern despot is by comparing him with the Median king. On the one hand, both Cyrus and Cambyses see the role of the king as that of a shepherd and a father who bears the common good in mind and ensures willing obedience and reverence on the part of his subjects by the adept use of reciprocity.¹⁶ The Median king, on the other hand, is shown as the opposite of that ideal. Xenophon's intention to contrast these two models of exercising royal authority is clear from his portrayal of the Median king Astyages, who is shown in a much more favourable light than his father Cyaxares.¹⁷ When Cyrus first meets his grandfather, Xenophon points out that the king wears makeup on his eyes and face, and contrasts the lavish Median dress with the modest garb favoured by the Persians.¹⁸ Shortly afterwards, in the course of

¹¹ Xen. *Cyr.* 1.2.9, 12–13.

¹² Xen. *Cyr.* 1.2.5–14, esp. 4, 15.

¹³ Xen. *Cyr.* 1.2.9, 13–14; 8.5.22.

¹⁴ Xen. *Cyr.* 1.2.10.

¹⁵ Arist. *Pol.* 1285a3–30; Carlier, *Cyropaedia*, 339.

¹⁶ Xen. *Cyr.* 1.1.2–3; 1.6.8, 24–25; 3.1.28; 8.1.1–2, 15; 8.2.9, 13–14; 8.8.1.

¹⁷ See H. Breitenbach, "Xenophon von Athen." *RE* 9.A.2 (1967), 1709–1710; B. Due, *The Cyropaedia. Xenophon's Aims and Methods* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1989), 55–62; B. Zimmermann, "Roman und Enkomion – Xenophons 'Erziehung des Kyros,'" *WJA* (1989), 101; Gera, *Cyropaedia*, 75–76, 103, 155–159; Mueller-Goldingen, *Kyropädie*, 182–186, 202–203.

¹⁸ Xen. *Cyr.* 1.3.2; see also 1.5.1; 1.6.8; 2.4.1, 5–6; 4.5.54; cf. Gera, *Cyropaedia*, 155.

a meal, Cyrus deplors the overly abundant and varied food of the Medes. As the conversation develops, he also condemns the Median attitude towards wine. While Astyages allows himself to be overcome by drink, which leads to his subjects and he forgetting that he is their ruler, the Persian king Cambyses always knows when to stop.¹⁹ The role of the Median king as a contrasting example is vividly expressed in an observation by the Persian queen Mandane. The fact that she is also Astyages's daughter lends additional weight to her words.²⁰ Having spent some time with her young son at her father's court, Mandane decides to return to Persia. Cyrus, however, asks his mother to let him stay longer in Media. He assures her that he has learnt enough about justice in the school of justice, and that if he still has something to learn, his grandfather can teach him. Mandane replies that justice is not understood in the same way in Media and in Persia. The king of the Medes is a despot (*despotēs*) with unlimited power, infamous for his conviction that he should have more than others. The Persian king does what is ordered by the state and accepts what is decreed, since his guiding principle is not his own will, but the law; this is so because the Persians consider equality as justice:

ἀλλ' οὐ ταῦτά, ἔφη, ὦ παῖ, παρὰ τῷ πάππῳ καὶ ἐν Πέρσαις δίκαια ὁμολογεῖται. οὗτος μὲν γὰρ τῶν ἐν Μήδοις πάντων ἑαυτὸν δεσπότην πεποίηκεν, ἐν Πέρσαις δὲ τὸ ἴσον ἔχειν δίκαιον νομίζεται. καὶ ὁ σὸς πρῶτος πατὴρ τὰ τεταγμένα μὲν ποιεῖ τῇ πόλει, τὰ τεταγμένα δὲ λαμβάνει, μέτρον δὲ αὐτῷ οὐχ ἡ ψυχὴ ἀλλ' ὁ νόμος ἐστίν. ὅπως οὖν μὴ ἀπολῆ μαστιγούμενος, ἐπειδὴν οἴκοι ἦς, ἂν παρὰ τούτου μαθῶν ἦκη ἀντὶ τοῦ βασιλικοῦ τὸ τυραννικόν, ἐν ᾧ ἐστὶ τὸ πλέον οἰεσθαι χρῆναι πάντων ἔχειν. ἀλλ' ὁ γε σὸς πατὴρ, εἶπεν ὁ Κύρος, δεινότερός ἐστιν, ὦ μητὲρ, διδάσκειν μείον ἢ πλέον ἔχειν: ἢ οὐχ ὀρᾶς, ἔφη, ὅτι καὶ Μήδους ἅπαντας δεδίδαχεν αὐτοῦ μείον ἔχειν; ὥστε θάρρει, ὡς ὁ γε σὸς πατὴρ οὐτ' ἄλλον οὐδένα οὐτ' ἐμὲ πλεονεκτεῖν μαθόντα ἀποπέμψει.

“Yes, my son,” said she; “but at your grandfather’s court they do not recognize the same principles of justice as they do in Persia. For he has made himself master of everything in Media, but in Persia equality of rights is considered justice. And your father is the first one to do what is ordered by the State and to accept what is decreed, and his standard is not his will but the law. Mind, therefore, that you be not flogged within an inch of your life, when you come home, if you return with a knowledge acquired from your grandfather here of the principles not of kingship but of tyranny, one principle of which is that it is right for one to have more than all.” “But your father, at least,” said Cyrus, “is more shrewd at teaching people to have less than to have more, mother. Why, do you not see,” he went on, “that he has taught all the Medes to have less than himself? So never

¹⁹ Xen. Cyr. 1.3.4–5, 10–11; Mueller-Goldingen, *Kyrupädie*, 91–92.

²⁰ Cf. Due, *Cyropaedia*, 55–62; Gera, *Cyropaedia*, 76–77, 103; Mueller-Goldingen, *Kyrupädie*, 12, 95.

fear that your father, at any rate, will turn either me or anybody else out trained under him to have too much.”²¹

Mandane describes Astyages as the Greeks traditionally imagined a true tyrant – a self-centred and self-willed strongman who always wants to have more and puts himself above the law.²² In contrast, Cambyses can hardly be said to be a king, at least not according to Mandane who describes him as a leader of the people (*prostatēs tou dēmou*). In the traditional classification of good constitutions, kingship is a form of government in which the monarch rules with an eye to the common advantage (*koinon sympheron*), in accordance with the will of its citizens and the laws.²³ Mandane's Persian king, however, goes one decisive step further. Not only is his will in accordance with the law and the will of the citizens but it is the polis that determines (*tetagmaena*) what he should do and what he should have. As for Cambyses, we may more readily say that he is, like Thucydides' Pericles, the first citizen (*protos anēr*) of the polis rather than a monarch.²⁴ The decision to enter war, and for Cyrus to lead the Persian forces, is not made by Cambyses, but rather by the Persian state (*to Persōn koinon*) and the so-called elders.²⁵ The democratic inspiration of Xenophon's image of the Persian ruler is also indicated by the equation of justice with equality, a notion usually ascribed to democracy.²⁶

As another indicator of this influence we may take Mandane's words that Cyrus may lose his life if he acts tyrannically upon returning home. The cult of the tyrant slayers (*tyrannoktonoi*) Harmodius and Aristogeiton was an important part of the civic identity of Athens, and the murder of tyrants was considered a patriotic act.²⁷ Accusing political opponents of tyrannical ambitions was fairly common in Athens. On the one hand, the example of Pericles shows that

²¹ Xen. *Cyr.* 1.3.18 (transl. E. C. Marchant).

²² See Mueller-Goldingen, *Kyropädie*, 95–96.

²³ Hdt. 1.97.2–3; 3.80.2–5, 82; Xen. *Mem.* 4.6.12; Arist. *Pol.* 1279a26–1279b10, see also 1285a16–29.

²⁴ Thuc. 2.65.9; see also Xen. *Cyr.* 1.4.25; 1.5.7; 8.7.10.

²⁵ Xen. *Cyr.* 1.5.4–6; see also 1.4.25; 4.5.16–17.

²⁶ Thuc. 2.37.1; 6.35.8; Pl. *Grg.* 508a; *Resp.* 558c, 561e; *Isoc. or.* 7.60–1; Arist. *Pol.* 1280a9–11; 1310a30; 1317b3; see F. D. Harvey, “Two Kinds of Equality”, *C&M* 26 (1965), 101–146, esp. 101, 104, 107, 110–120; E. Schütrumpf, “Aristoteles: *Politik* I–II, Übersetzt und erläutert von E. Schütrumpf”. In *Aristoteles Werke in deutscher Übersetzung*, Bd. IX, Teil II, ed. H. Flashar (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1991), 478.

²⁷ Hdt. 5.55; 6.109, 123; Ar. *Lys.* 631–634; Thuc. 1.20; 6.53.3–59.1, 60.1; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 18.2–6; see J. Ober, “Tyrant Killing as Therapeutic Stasis: A Political Debate in Images and Texts”, in *Popular Tyranny. Sovereignty and Its Discontents in Ancient Greece*, ed. K. A. Morgan (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 216–226.

such defamations did not necessarily entail dire consequences for one's political career.²⁸ On the other hand, Alcibiades' downfall shows the degree to which the behaviour that was construed as tyrannical could mean falling into disfavour with the demos.²⁹ Demophantes' decree of 410 BC shows that tyranny was perceived as the main threat to the democratic order, while in fact the real danger was coming from the oligarchs.³⁰

Xenophon also underlines the differences between the Persian and the Median model of leadership by comparing Cyrus and Cyaxares. Cyrus is reasonable, self-controlled and courageous, cleverly applies the rules of reciprocity and is prepared to endure hardship and difficulty. As opposed to this, Cyaxares exemplifies a ruler who is interested more in the benefits brought by power than in governing. He is a weak, egotistical man who is not in control of himself and has an insufficient grasp of some of the basic principles of leadership.³¹

From what has been said so far, it follows that Xenophon's Persian king bears more similarity to the Spartan kings and Athenian politicians than to a monarch in the traditional sense. This should not be surprising given that the purpose of the *Cyropaedia* was to instruct the Greeks, in fact the higher classes, in the principles of good leadership. The question that arises, however, is how to explain some of Cyrus's methods which are difficult to reconcile not only with the ideals of the Greek polis but also with the image of the Persian king painted above. The methods in question are those that Cyrus resorted to after the conquest of Babylon.

On becoming master of Asia, the first measure introduced by Cyrus in order to rule in the manner he deemed befitting the Great King, or emperor, was to make himself inaccessible. His intention was to appear only on rare and formal occasions but he wanted to achieve that without giving rise to envy and with the consent of his friends.³² So, instead of openly declaring his intention, he resorted to craftiness and began granting an audience to anyone who requested it. As the word spread, people began to line up to see him. Cyrus was therefore able to make time for his friends only in the evening. When parting from them, he would invite them to come again the next day. However, on the following day even more people requested to be received. Thus, Cyrus called a meeting of his friends and commanders, where he complained of the lack of time, of his friends being able to benefit little from him, and he from them. He therefore suggested

²⁸ See I. Jordović, *Anfänge der Jüngerer Tyrannis. Vorläufer und erste Repräsentanten von Gewaltherrschaft im späten 5. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005), 135–139.

²⁹ *Ibid.* *Tyrannis*, 140–171.

³⁰ *Andoc. or.* 1.96–8; cf. Ober, "Tyrant Killing", 222–224; Jordović, *Tyrannis*, 181–182.

³¹ *Xen. Cyr.* 4.1.13–21; 4.5.8–12, 18–21, 27–34, 37–54; 5.1.19–26; 5.5.5–44.

³² *Xen. Cyr.* 7.5.37.

that they should receive the supplicants instead of him.³³ His proposal was accepted to everybody's satisfaction, as confirmed by Artabazus' and Chryantas' speeches which followed Cyrus's.³⁴

This trickery recalls the cunning to which Deioces resorted in order to become king of the Medes.³⁵ The story of the establishment of a monarchy in Media is one of the most detailed descriptions of the emergence of this particular system of government in Herodotus. This account is distinguished by abstractness, rationality and absence of both divine and novelistic elements.³⁶ The importance of this *logos* may be seen in the fact that the *pater historiae* uses it to begin his narration about Cyrus the Great.³⁷ Herodotus characterises Deioces as a wise man (*anēr sophos*) who, from the outset, secretly yearned for absolute power (*erastheis tirannidos*). Since at that time lawlessness reigned in Media, Deioces strove to increase his reputation among his compatriots by exhibiting his love of justice. Serving as a judge in his birthplace, he became famous throughout Media on account of his just decisions. More and more Medes began pleading their cases before him, until all of Media relied on him alone for administering justice. Deioces then publicly announced his wish to retire from office because it had made him neglect his personal affairs. His announcement stirred up a debate among the Medes, and it was in that atmosphere that the friends of Deioces suggested that he should be made king, arguing that it would put an end to the state of lawlessness in Media. Their suggestion was widely approved by the Medes, and Deioces was elected king.³⁸

There is no doubt that there are differences between these two narratives. But Cyrus and Deioces are similar in one respect – they both make a manipulative use of their concern for the wellbeing of ordinary people by deliberately encouraging an ever larger number of people to petition them for help, and then

³³ Xen. *Cyr.* 7.5.37–47.

³⁴ Xen. *Cyr.* 7.5.48–56.

³⁵ Hdt. 1.95.2–101; see also J. G. Gammie, "Herodotus on Kings and Tyrants: Objective Historiography or Conventional Portraiture?", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45 (1986), 178; Gera, *Cyropaedia*, 287–288.

³⁶ Cf. K. H. Waters, *Herodotus the Historian. His Problems, Methods and Originality* (London/Sydney: Routledge 1985), 131; U. Walter, "Da sah er das Volk ganz in seiner Hand – Deiokes und die Entstehung monarchischer Herrschaft im Geschichtswerk Herodots", in *Deiokes, König der Meder. Eine Herodot-Episode in ihren Kontexten*, eds. M. Meier et al. (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2004), 78–79; P. Barceló, *Basileia, Monarchia, Tyrannis. Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung und Beurteilung von Alleinherrschaft im vorhellenistischen Griechenland* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 1993), 167.

³⁷ Hdt. 1.95–96.2; see P. Georges, *Barbarian Asia and the Greek Experience. From the Archaic Period to the Age of Xenophon* (Baltimore/London: The John Hopkins University Press 1994), 176.

³⁸ Hdt. 1.96–98.2.

declaring that they are overwhelmed as a ruse to establish autocratic rule or to organise it the way they want. And they both have the support of their friends in that.

The influence of Herodotus' story about Deioces becomes even more obvious when we consider the measures the Mede took to fortify his power. Three measures may be taken as commonly practised by autocrats: the construction of a palace, the institution of a personal guard force and the creation of a network of spies.³⁹ All three were also taken by Cyrus.⁴⁰ Two more taken by Deioces were not so common: one was that no one should come into the presence of the king, but everything should be done by means of messengers; the other was that it should be a disgrace for anyone to laugh or to spit in the king's presence. The idea was to prevent the friends who had grown up with him and were also of noble birth from becoming envious or rebellious, and to lead them to believe that Deioces was different.⁴¹ As already stated, Cyrus's first measure betrays a similar way of thinking. Herodotus' influence can also be seen in Cyrus's decision to introduce Median dress and make-up at court, together with his ban on spitting, nose-blowing or turning around to look at anything in public, all motivated by the desire to bewitch (*katagoëteuein*) his subjects.⁴²

Besides similarities with Deioces, there are other circumstances which indicate that Cyrus followed the Median model of rule. The decision to make Median pomp mandatory at his court is perhaps the most obvious but certainly not the only one. Just before he began to set up his system of power, Cyrus ordered the Persians and his allies to assume the attitude of masters (*despotai*) towards the Babylonians.⁴³ Recognition that he is to rule over the largest of all famous cities, and that that city is as hostile to him as any city can be to a man, underpins his need for bodyguards and ten thousand spearmen.⁴⁴ The attitude of a victor resurfaces in Cyrus' announcement to his friends and allies that even though the conqueror is entitled, by a law established for all time among all men, to take it all, they should nevertheless refrain from taking everything away from the vanquished population.⁴⁵

³⁹ Hdt. 1.98.2–6, 100.2.

⁴⁰ Palace: Xen. Cyr. 7.5.56–57; body guard: Xen. Cyr. 7.5.58–70; spies: Xen. Cyr. 8.2.10–12; 8.6.16.

⁴¹ Hdt. 1.99–100.1; see V. Azoulay, "Xenophon and the Barbarian World", in *Xenophon and his World. Papers from a conference held in Liverpool in July 1999*, ed. C. Tuplin (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2004), 151–153.

⁴² Xen. Cyr. 8.1.40–42; see also 8.3.1; cf. Mueller-Goldingen, *Kyrupädie*, 90; Azoulay, "Xenophon", 147–148, 150.

⁴³ Xen. Cyr. 7.5.36.

⁴⁴ Xen. Cyr. 7.5.58–70, esp. 58.

⁴⁵ Xen. Cyr. 7.5.73.

This attitude may explain why Xenophon directly links his hero to the Median model of rule, on which he passes negative judgment in the preceding parts of the *Cyropaedia*. In describing how Cyrus structures his imperial authority, Xenophon tells us that the conquest of Babylon led to an important change in Cyrus's style of leadership.⁴⁶ Explaining why it would be desirable for his friends to take on the receiving of petitioners, Cyrus makes a clear distinction between the time when he was a military commander and the moment when he became the Great King.⁴⁷ However, the essential difference is not in that he has become a ruler, since he was predestined for the position by birth,⁴⁸ but in that he has become the ruler of an empire. This is confirmed by Cyrus himself when he exhorts his friends and allies to continue nurturing virtue, since it is a great feat to win an empire (*archē*) but it is an even greater one to keep it.⁴⁹ Another point in favour of this is that Xenophon, at the beginning of the *Cyropaedia*, suggests that his hero differs from other kings not because he has inherited power or won it, but rather because he has subjugated numerous foreign peoples, i.e. created an empire.⁵⁰

That Cyrus's becoming ruler of an empire is a key to resolving apparent contradictions is also reflected in his differentiation between two categories of subjects.⁵¹ It is strongly present in his speech following the establishment of his bodyguard force and ten thousand spearmen. Aware that these forces are insufficient to maintain the empire (*archē*), Cyrus turns to those with whose support he achieved military successes and rose to power, and these are the Persian *homotimoi*, the commanders and all those with whom he shared both hardship and success.⁵² In his speech, he urges his friends and allies to continue to cultivate their virtue (*aretē*) and abilities. This is necessary because rulers must be better than their subjects, and the conditions for that are temperance (*sōphrosynē*), self-mastery (*enkrateia*) and diligence (*epimeleia*).⁵³ Laws of warfare entitle the victorious side, Cyrus's friends and allies, to the spoils of war, but they nonethe-

⁴⁶ See Gera, *Cyropaedia*, 184, 286; Azoulay, "Xenophon", 147.

⁴⁷ Xen. *Cyr.* 7.5.45–47; see Mueller-Goldingen, *Kyrupädie*, 217.

⁴⁸ Xen. *Cyr.* 7.2.24; 8.5.26.

⁴⁹ Xen. *Cyr.* 7.5.76, see also 7.5.70; 8.1.8, 45; 8.6.17; cf. Mueller-Goldingen, *Kyrupädie*, 219–220.

⁵⁰ Xen. *Cyr.* 1.1.4–5; see Mueller-Goldingen, *Kyrupädie*, 59.

⁵¹ See also Azoulay, "Xenophon", 160; H. Lu, *Xenophon's Theory of Moral Education* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 133.

⁵² Xen. *Cyr.* 7.5.70–71. This was why Cyrus did not appoint satraps to govern some regions that had joined his campaign against Babylon (Xen. *Cyr.* 8.6.7).

⁵³ Xen. *Cyr.* 7.5.70, 74–76, 78, 80–81, 83, 84–85 cf. *Mem.* 2.1.1–7; *Isoc. or.* 2.9–16, 21, 27, 36–37; 3.14–15, 38–39, 43–44, 48–52. *Epimeleia* is an important concept to Xenophon, by which he understands the conscientious fulfilment of one's duty and the execution of the as-

less should show love of their fellow humans (*philanthropia*) and refrain from taking everything from the conquered.⁵⁴ Cyrus thus shows that he expects them to behave as he himself does. He therefore intends for them the same position in his empire that the *homotimoi* enjoyed in Old Persia – that of a ruling elite. Cyrus obviously has no intention of essentially changing his behaviour towards them. This is seen in the fact that he avoids simply ordering them to cultivate virtue, but rather strives in his speech to convince them that it is the best thing for them.⁵⁵ Referring to these friends and allies of Cyrus, Xenophon uses the word “associates” (*koinōnes*), and not “peers”, i.e. men of equal honour (*homotimoi*). This means that they represent the elite of the newly-formed Persian empire, not of the Persian kingdom, and that their relative ranking depends on their loyalty to the Great King.⁵⁶

The position intended for the vanquished population is the same as that enjoyed by the subjects of eastern despots – they are free but politically disempowered. Theirs is to tend to the land and pay tribute,⁵⁷ as evidenced by the fact that they and their property belong to the victors, and that Cyrus twice likens them to slaves (*douloi*).⁵⁸ The comparison with slaves should not, however, be taken to imply the deprivation of all rights, as is shown by the account of Cyrus’s actions when he first conquered a territory and its population in the fourth book of the *Cyropaedia*. Cyrus announces to the prisoners that they have saved their lives by submitting. They will continue to live in the same houses and cultivate the same land, but will not have to wage war. If someone does them harm, Cyrus will defend them, and in return they must surrender their arms. All this shows that the subjugated population is only deprived of their rights in political terms, even though Cyrus also uses the term *doulos* for them.⁵⁹ The fact that the terms *archē* and *douleia* are used in reference to Cyrus’s rule is also significant since they constitute an important conceptual pair, or dichotomy, in Athenian democratic ideology.⁶⁰

signed task; see K. Meyer, *Xenophons “Oikonomikos”. Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Marburg: P. Kaesberger Westerburg, 1975), 104–106.

⁵⁴ Xen. Cyr. 7.5.72–73.

⁵⁵ Xen. Cyr. 7.5.71, 85; see also 8.6.4–5; cf. Mueller-Goldingen, *Kyrupädie*, 218.

⁵⁶ Xen. Cyr. 8.1.16, 25, 36, 40; see Azouley, “Xenophon”, 159–160; Johnson, “Centaur”, 188.

⁵⁷ Xen. Cyr. 7.5.78–79.

⁵⁸ Xen. Cyr. 7.5.72–73, 78–79, 83–84.

⁵⁹ Xen. Cyr. 4.4.8–12. A terminology of servitude is applicable to the subjugated population because Cyrus remarks that those who show goodwill by their actions or by supplying useful information will be treated as benefactors (*euergetēs*) and friends (*philos*), and not as slaves (*doulos*).

⁶⁰ See K. Raaflaub, *The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 128–141; U. Kästner, “Bezeichnungen für Sklaven”, in *Soziale Typen-*

After Cyrus, it is Chrysantas' turn to speak and he essentially gives the same counsel as his ruler. It is apparent that he does not consider Cyrus a despot; otherwise he would not say of him that he is a good ruler because he is seeing to it in a fatherly way that they lead a happy life.⁶¹ Chrysantas' speech focuses on the importance of obedience in achieving and maintaining success. This is substantiated by a reference to the importance of obedience to the military leader and its significance for the success of the Persians and their allies in war.⁶² The Persian nobleman points out that a major change has occurred. Many of those present have never commanded anyone but only carried out orders, while from now on every one of them, depending on his duties, will have a certain number of men under his command. Therefore, just as they expect their subordinates to carry out their orders, they too must obey their superiors. According to Chrysantas, however, those present must be distinguished from slaves: while the latter serve their masters against their will, those who claim to be free (*eleutheroi*) do so because they hold it to be of the utmost importance.⁶³

Since Chrysantas' words met with general approval, it was decided that the nobles (*entimoi*) should be always in attendance at court. Military commanders, satraps, superintendents etc. were appointed from their ranks.⁶⁴ Cyrus centralised his government administration on the model of the army.⁶⁵ Having ensured leisure (*scholē*) for his friends and associates, he believed that those of them who even then failed to spend time at court were intemperate (*akrateia*), unrighteous (*adikia*) and negligent (*ameleia*).⁶⁶ Cyrus used diverse means to force such individuals to make their appearance at court. He would order one of his closest friends to seize some of their estates and when they came to court seeking justice, Cyrus deliberately delayed judgement in order to accustom them to pay their court, but without subjecting them to penalties. A second measure was to give the regular attendees the easiest and most lucrative assignments and nothing to the truants. From those who remained impervious, he confiscated all possessions and gave them to those who responded immediately when summoned. These measures cannot be identified with tyrannical arbitrariness, since they correspond to the logic of reciprocity, as Xenophon himself points out

begriffe im alten Griechenland und ihr Fortleben in den Sprachen der Welt, vol. 3: Untersuchungen ausgewählter altgriechischer sozialer Typenbegriffe, ed. E. Ch. Welskopf (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1981), 297.

⁶¹ See Mueller-Goldingen, *Kyropädie*, 223.

⁶² Xen. Cyr. 8.1.1–3.

⁶³ Xen. Cyr. 8.1.4–5.

⁶⁴ Xen. Cyr. 8.1.6–12.

⁶⁵ Xen. Cyr. 8.1.14–15.

⁶⁶ Xen. Cyr. 8.1.16.

when he says that in this way Cyrus replaced a useless friend with a useful one.⁶⁷ Notwithstanding his demand for total obedience, Cyrus's attitude towards his friends and associates was not tyrannical.⁶⁸ Xenophon points this out when he describes Cyrus's endeavour to be a model of virtue to his courtiers, his piety, how he made it plain how important he held it to be not to wrong any of his friends or allies, his effort to inspire in all respect for others, to be a model of temperance (*sōphrosynē*) even though he more than anyone was able to indulge himself to excess (*hybrizein*), how he trained himself and others in self-mastery (*enkrateia*) and to endure toil (*ponos*). Furthermore, Cyrus differentiates between considerateness (*aidōs*) and temperance (*sōphrosynē*). A considerate person avoids behaving disgracefully in public, but a temperate person also avoids that which is shameful even if it goes unseen.⁶⁹ Finally, one more indication that Cyrus's rule was devoid of tyrannical features is that he instructed the satraps to emulate his style of rule. Here he says that his instructions (such as temperance, endurance, skill in the martial arts, and attendance at court) are not intended for slaves, and that he himself will strive to act in the way he has recommended to them.⁷⁰ All this shows that Cyrus and his associates (*koinōnes*), notwithstanding their embracing of the Median ceremonial, remained true to the Persian ideal of firmness and restraint.⁷¹

According to Xenophon, Cyrus believed that the greatest danger did not come from the vanquished population but from individuals he deemed powerful. They were well armed, well organised, had military units at their disposal and came into contact not only with Cyrus's bodyguards but also with him, and some even imagined that they were competent to rule. And yet, he neither disarmed them nor openly showed his distrust. Had he done the former, he would have done an injustice which might lead to the break-up of his *archē*; had he done the latter he believed it might lead to (a civil) war. Therefore Cyrus, now as Great King, decides instead to forestall danger by enticing the powerful into becoming greater friends to him than they are amongst themselves.⁷² Xenophon then cites examples of Cyrus's kindness, philanthropy and deft use of reciprocity.⁷³

While seeking not to weaken his associates (*koinōnes*) even at the cost of risking his own authority, Cyrus opted for an entirely different approach to

⁶⁷ Xen. Cyr. 8.1.17–20, 29.

⁶⁸ An argument in favour of this claim is that Cyrus heeded his father's suggestion that the best obedience is voluntary obedience (Xen. Cyr. 1.6.20–4; 2.4.10).

⁶⁹ Xen. Cyr. 8.1.21–37; cf. Mueller-Goldingen, *Kyrupädie*, 227–228.

⁷⁰ Xen. Cyr. 8.6.10–14; see also Isoc. or. 2.31.

⁷¹ See Azoulay, "Xenophon", 163–169.

⁷² Xen. Cyr. 8.1.45–48.

⁷³ Xen. Cyr. 8.2.1–28; 8.4.1–26.

the subjugated population. Instilling fear into them was obviously one.⁷⁴ Furthermore, not only did he not encourage those he intended should serve (*douleuein*) to practise virtue and skills, he did not permit them to practise any of the exercises of freemen (*eleutheroi ponoï*) or to possess weapons. Yet, he took care that they should not suffer any deprivation in food or drink on account of their service to the freemen in order to forestall their discontent and lead them to endure the fate of slaves (*andrapoda*) unquestioningly. Thus ensuring that the subjugated population remained weak and disorganised, Cyrus took care that it should not become a source of danger for his rule.⁷⁵

From the speeches of Cyrus and Chrysantas as presented in Xenophon and from his depiction of the measures taken by Cyrus, it may be deduced that there were two kinds of subjects. One comprises Cyrus's friends and associates, who constitute the elite of the empire. They are subordinated but they also exercise authority; they are free, have leisure, pursue their virtues and military skills.⁷⁶ The Persian model of exercising authority applies to them. To the other kind belong the rest of the population, personally free but politically deprived. They have no leisure and do not practise virtue or skills. For these subjects, the terminology of servitude is used, although obviously they are not personally unfree. To them, the Median model of exercising authority applies. The question arises as to why Xenophon makes this distinction. It is hardly likely that he wished to synchronise the account of the Persian empire with historical reality; in the *Cyropaedia*, he does not hesitate to depart from it whenever it suits him. More importantly, the distinction does not match historical reality in any way. However, it is probable that Xenophon's motive for first emphasising the difference between the Persian and the Median model was to be able to demonstrate that his hero applies both to his empire.

It may be pertinent to note here that Xenophon's introduction of two models of leadership (Persian and Median) matches Isocrates' differentiation between two categories of citizens in his *To Nicocles*.⁷⁷ A comparison with some of Aristotle's political categories may be useful for better understanding the motive for introducing two models of authority or two kinds of subjects in the account of Cyrus's empire.⁷⁸ The *Politics* distinguishes between the virtue of a

⁷⁴ Xen. *Cyr.* 1.1.5.

⁷⁵ Xen. *Cyr.* 8.1.43–5; cf. 7.5.78–9; 8.6.13. The term *doulos* can denote slavery but it can also signify political submission or the subjugation of a land, see Kästner, "Bezeichnungen für Sklaven", 297. The term *andrapodon* could denote both a slave and a prisoner of war, and was used as a synonym for *doulos*, see *ibid.* 290, 313–314.

⁷⁶ Isoc. *or.* 3.62.

⁷⁷ Isoc. *or.* 2.16; cf. 3.14–15; see also Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.1–7.

⁷⁸ This comparison is not meant to suggest any kind of equivalence between Xenophon's and Aristotle's political views.

good man (*aretē andros agathou*) and the virtue of a good citizen (*aretē politou spoudaiou*). While the virtue of the good citizen is geared towards the constitution of which he is a member, the good man possesses virtue which is not relative to any particular constitution.⁷⁹ Given Xenophon's idealisation of his hero and the fact that the main aim of the *Cyropaedia* is to present the principle of good leadership regardless of the form of constitution, Cyrus may be said to possess the virtue of Aristotle's good man.⁸⁰ In the *Politics*, a distinction is also made between despotic and political exercise of authority.⁸¹ Despotic authority (*despotikē archē*) is rule over slaves for the benefit of the master in order to acquire the necessities of life, so the ruler knows how to govern, but not how to perform these (slave's) tasks. Aristotle, it is true, believes that this kind of authority is characteristic of the *oikos*, but at the same time admits that in reality it is also a political phenomenon, an unnatural anachronism and a degenerate form of a true political system.⁸²

Political authority (*politikē archē*) is rule over people who are equal and free by virtue of birth. It is learned by first being ruled (*archesthai*), and then ruling (*archein*). To illustrate his point, Aristotle offers the example of military leadership – the military leader first serves as a soldier, taxiarch and lochage, and only then takes command. A similar reflection arises in Chrystantas when he tells how Cyrus's associates once only were given orders whereas now they will exercise authority; since they are free, they should voluntarily give their obedience to those whom it is their duty to obey.⁸³ Aristotle believes that the good citizen should have the ability both to be ruled and to rule, and holds this to be a

⁷⁹ Arist. *Pol.* 1276b29–35.

⁸⁰ Cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1277a14–23.

⁸¹ Arist. *Pol.* 1277a33–b16; see K. Raaflaub, "Zum Freiheitsbegriff der Griechen. Materialien und Untersuchungen zur Bedeutungsentwicklung von *eleutheros/eleutheria* in der archaischen und klassischen Zeit", in *Soziale Typenbegriffe im alten Griechenland und ihr Fortleben in den Sprachen der Welt*, vol. 4: *Untersuchungen ausgewählter altgriechischer sozialer Typenbegriffe und ihr Fortleben in Antike und Mittelalter*, ed. E. Ch. Welskopf (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1981), 308–309; Schütrumpf, *Politik I–II*, 428–429; A. Winterling, "Aristoteles' Theorie der politischen Gesellschaft". In *Philosophie und Lebenswelt in der Antike*, ed. K. Piepenbrink (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003), 70, 79.

⁸² Aristot. *Pol.* 1255b16, 1259a37, 1277a33–35, 1278b30–36; 1279a17–21, 1279b4–10, 1324a35–38, 1325a28–30, 1333a3–6, 1333b27–29; see E. Schütrumpf, "Politik. Buch I: Über die Hausverwaltung und die Herrschaft des Herrn über Sklaven, Übersetzt und erläutert von E. Schütrumpf", in *Aristoteles Werke in deutscher Übersetzung*, vol. IX/I, ed. H. Flashar (Darmstadt: Akademie Verlag, 1991), 126–128, 256–257; Schütrumpf, *Politik I–II*, 435, 441, 455, 457–458; F. Ricken, "Platon: *Politikos*, Übersetzung und Kommentar von F. Ricken", in *Platon Werke*, vol. II.4, eds. E. Heitsch and C. W. Müller (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 252–253.

⁸³ Arist. *Pol.* 1277b7–13; Xen. *Cyr.* 8.1.2–5.

virtue. This is basically what Cyrus expects from his satraps when he tells them that they should model their authority on his example. Cyrus himself had first learnt to submit himself, as shown by his schooling at the school of justice, his sojourn at Astyages's court and his discussion with Cambyses. Only after that was he appointed military commander.⁸⁴

Aristotle further says that the best-ordered state will not make citizens out of artisans and day-labourers. Should it happen nonetheless, they will not have the virtue of truly free (good) citizens since they do not have the leisure required for exercising public offices (*archai*). This reflection, too, finds an analogy in the account of the "imperial" *koinōnes*. They have the leisure to exercise authority, they practise virtue, practise any of the exercises of freemen (*eleutheroi ponoi*), and Xenophon calls them the *eleutheroi*.⁸⁵ Cyrus's *koinōnes*, therefore, essentially correspond to the good citizens in the *Politics*, from which it follows that Xenophon's Persian model of exercising authority corresponds to Aristotle's *politikē archē*. This eliminates vagueness and inconsistency, since it shows that Xenophon pursues the aristocratic-oligarchic concept of the *truly free citizen*, as represented from the late fifth century onward by many authors who certainly were not advocates of rule by the demos.⁸⁶ Accordingly, freedom is equated with the right to rule, but this right is not enjoyed by all free individuals within the community, only by those who are not pressed by the necessity to work for their living, or those who have the necessary *scholē* time to cultivate virtue and participate in political life. As against the truly free citizens are those who do not share in political life (artisans, day-labourers, metics, women, children and slaves). Although some of these groups (e.g. artisans and day-labourers) also have citizen status, they are still held to be incomplete citizens (*politai ateleis*).⁸⁷

Yet another similarity with the *Politics* points to Xenophon's espousal of the aristocratic-oligarchic idea of the *truly free citizen*. Having presented the reasons why artisans cannot be considered citizens in the fullest sense, Aristotle cites examples of when and where they were or were not. As one instance of their deprivation of political rights he cites Thebes, where a law decreed that public

⁸⁴ Arist. *Pol.* 1277b11–16; Cyrus: Xen. *Cyr.* 1.3.1, 16–18, 1.4.13; 1.5.1; 1.6.3, 6, 8, 12–16, 21–23, 27–37; satraps: Xen. *Cyr.* 8.6.10–14.

⁸⁵ Arist. *Pol.* 1277b33–1278a39; Xen. *Cyr.* 8.1.13–14, 16, 43–44, 8.6.13–14; see Raaflaub, "Zum Freiheitsbegriff", 309, Schütrumpf, *Politik* I–II, 435.

⁸⁶ See Raaflaub, *Discovery*, 243–247; S. Johnstone, "Virtuous Toil, Vicious Work: Xenophon on Aristocratic Style". In *Xenophon*, ed. V. J. Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010), 155.

⁸⁷ Arist. *Pol.* 1277b33–1278a6–13; 1337b5–14; see Raaflaub, "Zum Freiheitsbegriff", 301–313, esp. 307–308; D. Rössler, "Handwerker", in *Soziale Typenbegriffe im alten Griechenland und ihr Fortleben in den Sprachen der Welt*, vol. 3: *Untersuchungen ausgewählter altgriechischer sozialer Typenbegriffe*, ed. E. Ch. Welskopf (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1981), 229–230.

office could only be taken by persons who had kept out of the trade at the agora (*apeschēmenon tēs agoras*) for ten years.⁸⁸ A similar rule is also mentioned by Xenophon in his *Oeconomicus*. Interestingly, immediately after that he cites the Persian emperor and Cyrus the Younger as examples of engagement in honourable occupations – art of war and husbandry. It is clear from this that being engaged in agriculture does not imply personally tilling the land, but rather seeing to it that others work in the correct manner.⁸⁹ Furthermore, in the *Symposium* the illiberal arts (*banausikai technai*) constitute the exact opposite of the *kalo-kagathia* ideal.⁹⁰ Of all the similarities, however, the most striking is that, in the *Cyropaedia*, the Persian model of exercising authority is directly related to this kind of ban. In his brief description of the Persian system, Xenophon points out that the Persians have a so-called free square (*eleuthera agora*), supposed to prevent citizens from even thinking of committing wicked or disgraceful acts, and so the tradesmen and their goods have been removed from it. The square houses the royal palace and government buildings, and serves as a gathering point for those undergoing the Persian educational system or who are already in public service, i.e. fully-fledged citizens.⁹¹ All this shows that Xenophon embraced the concept of the *truly free citizen*. The concept originated in critical response to the democratic ideology of freedom, but still does not make Xenophon an adamant oligarch, which may be seen from two observations made by Aristotle. One is that of all types of democracy, the participation of artisans (*banausoi*) in government appears only in democracy's ultimate form; the other is that *banausoi* may be citizens in an oligarchy too.⁹² Xenophon says that all the Persians may send their children to the schools of justice, but only those do send them who are in a position to support their families without working.⁹³ Xenophon, therefore, does not cite low origin or mental and physical inferiority as reasons for the non-participation of Persian commoners in government. Moreover, his Cyrus points out that the Persian commoners lag behind the peers neither in body nor in spirit, except that they have to work for their livelihood.⁹⁴ Finally, there is the

⁸⁸ Arist. *Pol.* 1278a25–26; see W. L. Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle, With an Introduction, Two Prefatory Essays and Notes Critical and Explanatory*, vol. III: *Books III, IV, and V* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), 178; Schütrumpf, *Politik* I–II, 441.

⁸⁹ Xen. *Oec.* 4.2–25; 6.5, 9, esp. 4.2–4; 6.9; see also *Lac.* 7.1–2; cf. Meyer, *Oikonomikos*, 111–112; Rössler, “Handwerker”, 241–242; L. Kronenberg, *Allegories of Farming from Greece and Rome. Philosophical Satire in Xenophon, Varro and Virgil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 42–44; Johnstone, “Virtuous Toil”, 155, 159–166, esp. 159–160.

⁹⁰ Xen. *Symp.* 3.4; cf. Rössler, “Handwerker”, 242.

⁹¹ Xen. *Cyr.* 1.2.3–4, 15.

⁹² Arist. *Pol.* 1277b1–3, 1278a21–25.

⁹³ Xen. *Cyr.* 1.2.15.

⁹⁴ Xen. *Cyr.* 2.1.15–19, esp. 15; cf. Nadon, “Education”, 364–365.

example of Pheraulus, a Persian commoner whom Cyrus considers one of his most capable and trusted friends.⁹⁵ This goes to show that Xenophon linked the concept of the *truly free citizen* to meritocracy. The binding nature of this principle for the *koinōnes* is manifest in Cyrus's belief that no one is worthy of ruling who is not better than his subjects, and in the fact that Cyrus himself always rewarded those who distinguished themselves, and expected his satraps to surround themselves with able individuals and to reward ability and good service.⁹⁶

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⁹⁵ Xen. Cyr. 2.3.7–16; 8.3.2; 8.3.5–8; 8.3.28–32; 8.3.35–50.

⁹⁶ Xen. Cyr. 8.1.12, 37, 39, 8.6.11–12; see also 2.1.22–24; 7.5.35; 7.5.78–81; 7.5.83–85; 8.2.26–28.

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