

## BOOK REVIEW

*Xenophon the Socratic Prince: The Argument of the Anabasis of Cyrus*. By ERIC BUZZETTI. New York: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2014. Pp. xviii + 337. Hardcover, \$110.00. ISBN 978-1-137-33330-8.

In this book Eric Buzzetti proposes a Straussian reading of Xenophon's *Anabasis*. Following a line of approach familiar from Christopher Nadon's interpretation of the *Cyropaedia*,<sup>1</sup> Buzzetti argues that the *Anabasis* reflects a critique of the political life. But he goes even further than Nadon by suggesting that this work ultimately invites its readers to consider the philosophical life of Socrates as an alternative to politics. Buzzetti sees the *Anabasis* as a philosophical *logos* and an introduction to philosophy in the form of a war memoir (1–7; 295–300).

The book is divided into seven chapters (devoted respectively to the seven books of the *Anabasis*) and is structured around three models of leaders: the Godlike king (represented by Cyrus the Younger, chapter 1), the Pious King (represented by the Spartan general Klearchos, chapter 2) and the Socratic King (represented by Xenophon the character, chapters 3–7). It also contains three appendixes and a short bibliography (121–126). Buzzetti's main assertion, which he unfolds in a linear analysis (often intermingled with too much paraphrasing) throughout his book, is that Cyrus, Klearchos, and Xenophon endeavor but fail to reconcile the noble with the good, or, more specifically, morality with advantage. Consequently, according to Buzzetti, readers who will perceive this failure will be led to consider "the success embodied by Socrates" (299).

Buzzetti offers numerous interesting analyses: he views Cyrus' death as a "cautionary tale" against his recklessness (68–72) and he offers a nuanced analysis of the obituaries of the Greek generals (p. 104–108). He rightly stresses the occasional blurring of boundaries between Greeks and barbarians (152, 222), he underlines the problems posed by the greed-

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Nadon, *Xenophon. The Socratic Prince*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2001.

ness and lack of order of the soldiers (188) and he illuminates the complexity of motives that underlies Xenophon's decision to found a colony in Asia (211–217). Buzzetti also presents subtle analyses of the speeches of Greek leaders (especially of Klearchos, and Xenophon, 96–103, 132–137, 277–289).

The main problem posed by this study is methodological. Buzzetti follows and expands on the methodological principles set by Leo Strauss.<sup>2</sup> Like Strauss, he treats Xenophon as a philosopher who insinuates “the truth” between the lines (the title of the *Anabasis* is also interpreted “philosophically”, as an “ascent” to the noble, to leadership, an interpretation, however, not corroborated by the text itself). This esoteric writing is justified by fear of persecution (Buzzetti goes so far as to compare ancient Athens with “the contemporary Islamic world”, 8). However, this idea would have made sense only if Buzzetti could prove that this work was written *soon after* Xenophon left Athens (around 401 BCE); fear of persecution would have seemed then perhaps a plausible political stance.

But the evidence about the date of composition does not point towards this direction.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Buzzetti's contention about the *Anabasis* being pervaded by a tension between philosophy and politics (113, 201, 228, 299) and his conception of Socrates as an advocate of the “philosophical life” disregards the fact that the Xenophontic Socrates is a political figure *par excellence* who embodies a peculiar combination of philosophy *with* politics, rather than a disjunction between them.<sup>4</sup> A related problematic issue is Buzzetti's view about Xenophon's audience. Buzzetti takes it for granted, without adducing evidence from the text or other sources,

<sup>2</sup> The starting point for Buzzetti's reading is Leo Strauss, “Xenophon's *Anabasis*” *Interpretation* 4 (1975), 117–137, but Strauss' principles are the same throughout all his writings.

<sup>3</sup> The work was probably written in the 360s BCE, a period during which Xenophon was already in exile and hence had no fear of persecution. For the dating of the *Anabasis*, see Michael Flower, *Xenophon's Anabasis*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012: 29–30. Buzzetti overlooks altogether the issue of the date of composition.

<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, it is the Platonic Socrates who consistently underlines his abstention from politics. See L.-A. Dorion, “Socrate et la politique: les raisons de son abstention selon Platon et Xénophon”, in *id.*, *L'autre Socrate*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres 2013, 171–193. Unfortunately, Buzzetti does not cite either Dorion or other scholars who have done recent ground-breaking work on Xenophon's Socrates.

that Xenophon addresses young talented and ambitious people, with an ardent interest in politics. Even if this is true, one can hardly understand how these talented young people, passionate with politics, would eventually come to consider the philosophical alternative embodied by Socrates. Would the reading of the *Anabasis* suffice to make them *negate* their ambitious political nature or turn them into philosophers?

Concerning the analysis of the text, Buzzetti believes, again following Strauss, that the division of the books of the *Anabasis* belongs to Xenophon and that the summaries at the beginning of the books are authentic; he also offers a new (and rather idiosyncratic) interpretation of the manuscript tradition, according to which the “best” manuscript is always the one which attests to a renaming of characters, rivers etc. (19–29). These hypotheses go against a whole tradition of textual criticism and are not adequately justified.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Buzzetti exploits Strauss’ view that what lies “at the center” in a list of items (arguments, speeches etc.) should receive special notice. This principle is questionable for the simple reason that in many cases the number of items in a list is even (e.g. Buzzetti himself talks about the four parts of Xenophon’s speech, 140), in which case there is no “center”. Buzzetti is also confusing about the way of interpretation of what lies “at the center”: on the one hand he claims that what lies “at the center” is the weakest argument (17–19), but in several instances he treats the “central” item as the most compelling (e.g. the “centrality” of book four etc.).

Another Straussian principle is the interest in proper names. Buzzetti’s book abounds in interpretations of proper names as speaking names (e.g. Δαφναγόρας as a “literary stand-in” for Apollo, ἀνὴρ Ἡρακλεώτης as pointing to the aid of the hero Herakles etc.). Yet Buzzetti does not take into account the basic distinction between historical and fictitious characters and the limits posed (to our imagination) by the attestation of specific proper names in inscriptions. For instance, if a proper name is attested and hence common (or if a person is historical), there is no reason for consid-

<sup>5</sup> Buzzetti ignores two fundamental works on textual criticism: A. W. Persson, *Zur Textgeschichte Xenophons*, Leipzig: Harrassowitz 1915, and L. Castiglioni, *Studi intorno alla storia del testo dell’Anabasi di Senofonte*, Milano: Ulrico Hoepli 1932. I thank Tim Rood for his guidance concerning the manuscripts of the *Anabasis*.

ering that Xenophon *deliberately* named (or even renamed) X character, in order to convey a hidden philosophical meaning.<sup>6</sup> Regrettably, Buzzetti never cites the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, the most essential tool for the study of Greek proper names. Consequently, most (if not all) of his hypotheses concerning proper names are far from trustworthy.

Overall, Buzzetti's book invites scholars to reflect on the way we (should) approach Xenophon (and ancient Greek literature more generally). Buzzetti studies Xenophon from the perspective of political philosophy. This prism can bear fruits, provided that it relies on and constructively employs the results of research in the field of classics (in terms of textual criticism, language, culture and historical context). The challenge for Xenophonic studies is to overcome the prejudice against both those whom Leo Strauss considered "philological idiots" and what Vivienne Gray calls "dark readings"<sup>7</sup> and to foster a productive dialogue between these two schools of thought.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See the illuminating study by Simon Hornblower, "Personal Names and the Study of the Ancient Greek Historians", in S. Hornblower and E. Matthews (eds.) *Greek Personal Names. Their Value as Evidence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000, 129-143.

<sup>7</sup> Vivienne Gray, *Xenophon's Mirror of Princes. Reading the Reflections*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011: 54-69.

<sup>8</sup> For this perspective, see now Tim Rood, "Political Thought in Xenophon: Straussian Readings of the *Anabasis*", *Polis* 32 (2015) 143-165.