

## Cowards and Slaves: Greeks on the Periphery in the *Cyropaedia*

This paper argues, first, that Cyrus and the narrator of the *Cyropaedia* both express a condescending attitude towards all Greeks, dismissing them as a barbaric people living on the periphery of the civilized Persian world and, second, that the ironic tension between text and (Greek) readership created by this attitude serves to alienate the readers from the narrator's stated purpose of depicting Cyrus' leadership as ideal.

There have been numerous attempts to identify relationships between the *Cyropaedia's* Persia and Greece. Greece has been seen both as a model for Xenophon's Persia and as the target of Xenophon's critique: for example, the degree to which the constitution of Xenophon's Persian republic is based on (Luccioni 1948), criticizes (Tuplin 1994), or proposes reforms for (Christesen 2006) the historical Spartan constitution has been much contested. Despite this focus on the role of Greece in the *Cyropaedia*, a discussion of the Greeks that actually appear in the text has never been attempted.

This paper examines how Greeks are described by the narrator and by Cyrus. It notes that, eight of the nine times Greeks are mentioned—barely more than the text's eight mentions of Phrygians—the mention is deprecating to the Greeks. Five times the Greeks are presented as inferior people in the same category as Phrygians or Cilicians; in three other instances, Greek behavior is noted as barbaric, even risible. The paper then contextualizes the narrator's and Cyrus' condescension of the Greeks in their similar treatment of other small nations outside of Persia. I argue that Cyrus and the narrator are, by condescending Greece, treating it as one of many minor nations on Persia's periphery, giving it attention in accordance with its lack of significance to Persia in the sixth century. In other words, the narrator presents, and himself often mirrors, Cyrus' ethnocentric Persian worldview that not incorrectly understands the minor

nations of his day, including Greece, as unimportant beyond their potential to become Persian subjects someday. From this ethnocentric perspective, the Greeks are indeed a backwards and minor tribe living at the margin of the sophisticated Persian world.

This paper then identifies the tension created between the Persian belief in Greece's insignificance and the Greek readership of the text. While basic nationalism would cause many Greek readers to be alienated, the narrator himself emphasizes the irony of Cyrus' belief once before the end of the text. In the epilogue wherein the narrator performs an about face to roundly condemn contemporary Persia, he makes a ninth and final mention of Greece (8.8.26). He notes that the Persians of his own day have grown so cowardly that they are too terrified to ever fight Greeks directly. Persia's contemporary fear of Greece ironically emphasizes the chronological gap between Cyrus' sixth-century assumptions about Greece and the narrator's post-Marathon, post-Salamis fourth century. Cyrus'—and the narrator's—condescension of Greece is revealed to be caused by their sixth-century perspective and sixth-century way of thinking. This underestimation of Greece exposes a flaw in the thinking of Cyrus, the narrator's ideal ruler. It is one of Xenophon's narratological strategies that subtly hint to the reader of the need for a critical reappraisal of Cyrus' allegedly ideal manner of thinking.

#### Bibliography

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