Preface

Until the present century, Xenophon’s account of the victory of Sardis (395 B.C.) won by the Spartan king Agesilaus over Persians, and of foregoing events, was generally accepted — especially as he himself took part in the Greek expedition to Asia. Some recent critics, however, have preferred that of Diodorus Siculus, notably after the discovery (1906) of the Oxyrhynchus manuscript, which seemed to support Diodorus. The two accounts are irreconcilable; and raise fundamental questions which are still in dispute. Which of the two possible routes was taken by the Greek army from Ephesus to Sardis? Were they followed by Persian forces? What was the course of the battle itself? Was it a major victory or merely a minor success? And what were Agesilaus’ real war aims?

A. Xenophon’s Narrative

I. Documentation and Authenticity

The battle of Sardis and events immediately preceding it are described in book 3 of the Hellenica and more briefly in the Agesilaus, which was no doubt based on the larger work and possibly written much later.1 The two accounts are generally consistent with each other — though one wonders how Agesilaus managed to “win over” the Phrygians “with gentleness” (Ages. 1.20) and yet (Ages. 1.18; Hell. 3.4.12) allow his men a free hand in looting? But the training of the army at Ephesus (Ages. 1.25–28; Hell. 3.4.16–19), the march to Sardis and the battle (Ages. 1.29–32; Hell. 3.4.21–25) are described in almost identical words. Episodes missing from the Agesilaus, which is frankly panegyric, were presumably irrelevant or unsuited to the author’s purpose. Thus he says nothing about the king’s mistrust and dismissal of Lysander, or of Lysander’s initially persuading him into the Asian venture; Agesilaus was “eager” from the start to be revenged on the Persians, and to “subdue” Asia (Ages. 1.8). Nor does he mention the

1 E. Delebecque, Essai sur la Vie de Xenophon, Paris 1957, ch. 6, dates book 3 of the Hellenica at 379–378 B.C. and the Agesilaus at c. 355. Others, however, consider that this part if not all of the Hellenica was composed in the 360s or 350s — see C. Grayson, Did Xenophon intend to write history?, in: The Ancient Historian and his Materials, Farnborough 1973; W. E. Higgins, Xenophon the Athenian, New York 1977; W. P. Henry, Greek Historical Writing, Chicago 1967. See also C. E. Sonnini, The authorship of the Agesilaus, in: La Parola del Passato 39 [1984], 264–275, who denies that Xenophon wrote the Agesilaus.
terms of duty of Thibron and Dercylidas, described at length in the Hellenica (3.1.1–3.2.30). The following discussion is based mainly on the Hellenica.

Xenophon was with Agesilaus in Asia (Anab. 5.3.6): whether he saw the battle or was told about it afterwards, his account must surely rank as first-hand testimony. Moreover, he was an experienced commander while Diodorus, as will appear, knew little of military matters. Yet some critics have exercised much ingenuity in explaining why this "prejudiced" witness should be discarded in favour of "P", the unknown author of the Hellenica Oxyrhynchia, or Diodorus, who largely followed him. Xenophon was left behind at Ephesus; hence he knew nothing of the battle. The route of the Greek march to Sardis supposed to be implied in his account is unlikely (in fact he does not specify any route); hence he is unreliable. He had been demoted from command of the Cyreans, so was merely an ignorant observer of the battle. He does not mention the ambush described by P and Diodorus, or Agesilaus’ subsequent march up country to the Meander, described by P; therefore he is unreliable. These points are discussed later. But I would suggest here that more powerful reasons must be advanced for rejecting, in whole or in part, a reasonably coherent account based on first-hand information in favour of other accounts derived from sources quite unknown. “General impressions regarding [P’s] character and approach to history” will hardly suffice.

II. The Background

Sparta had been effectively at war with Persia since 401, when the admiral Samius was sent to Cilicia to help the Persian prince Cyrus (Hell. 3.1.1), who was in revolt against his brother, king Artaxerxes II. After Cyrus’ defeat and death, the satrap Tissaphernes, who controlled the Ionian coastal region, demanded the submission of the Greek cities, who had supported Cyrus. They appealed to Sparta for protection (Hell. 3.1.8), but the harmosts who were sent out, first Thibron and then Dercylidas, avoided major hostilities against the western satraps, and an uneasy truce was patched up in 397. In the same year (397) Agesilaus succeeded Agis as king of Sparta.

In 396 a report reached Sparta that the Persians were assembling a large fleet in Phoenicia, for purposes unknown (Hell. 3.4.1). Thereupon Lysander, who hoped to reinstat e some of his Ionian friends in their decarchies, persuaded Agesilaus to mount an expedition to Asia. Nothing loth, Agesilaus collected an army of 2000 freed helots and 6000 allied troops, and proceeded to Aulis, to sacrifice “where Agamemnon had sacrificed before he sailed to Troy” (3.4.3), but was prevented by the Boeotians. At Ephesus he was at once challenged by Tissaphernes; but on demanding the independence of the Greek cities he was offered and accepted a truce while a decision was obtained from the king. In fact Tissaphernes merely sent to the king for more troops; and when he got them, peremptorily ordered Agesilaus out of Asia (3.4.11).

3 Bruce, ibid. 163.
4 Dugas, ibid. 64–65; Bruce, ibid. n. 4.
5 Cornelius, ibid. 29–31.
6 Cawkwell, ibid. 405–406.
7 Bruce, ibid. 163.
Meanwhile Agesilaus had set up his main base at Ephesus, at the mouth of the Cayster river, and was preparing for war. His choice of Ephesus is not surprising. It offered direct access to both Caria and Phrygia; and to two trunk routes to Mesopotamia, should he plan a Drang nach Osten. The more roundabout “Royal Road” from Sardis on the Pactolus, a branch of the Hermus, through Phrygia and Cappadocia to Samosata on the Euphrates, was used by the Persians for military and administrative purposes. Sardis was connected with Ephesus itself by a road up the Cayster over Mt Tmolus into the Hermus valley.

Agesilaus expressed delight that Tissaphernes had “violated his oath” (Hell. 3.4.11) and so alienated the gods by sending for troops during a truce – a rather dubious proposition – and set about raising more troops himself from the Asian Greeks. Realizing, after a disastrous cavalry skirmish with Pharnabazus’ men near Dascylium in the north, that the Persian horsemen far outclassed his own and were better armed and mounted, he organized a better-quality cavalry force (3.4.13–15). And he set up a strenuous fitness and morale-building program for the whole army at Ephesus.

III. The Battle, and After

According to Xenophon, Agesilaus had outwitted Tissaphernes earlier by feinting a move into Caria – ordering the cities along the route to lay in supplies (Hell. 3.4.11) – and then turning northward and invading Phrygia. Tissaphernes, fearing for his estates in Caria, had concentrated all his infantry there; and, “as Caria was unsuitable for cavalry”, he moved his cavalry into the plain of the Meander at the border of the province, to intercept the Greeks as they came south. In spring 395, having trained the army to a high level of fitness, Agesilaus ordered them to march at once, announcing only that he would “immediately lead them by the shortest route to the best parts of the country” (3.4.20). No doubt he also signalled a second southward thrust, for the Persian fell into the same trap as before. He sent his infantry into Caria and stationed the cavalry on the Meander.

By “the best parts of the country”, however, Xenophon apparently meant the neighbourhood of Sardis (Hell. 3.4.21). He says that the army marched there direct, passing for three days through country “bare of enemies” and plundering as they went. Whether they went up the Cayster or northward into the Hermus valley is a matter of dispute (Sec. E II.). But the Persians must have been completely deceived, for it was not until the fourth day, when they had nearly reached their destination, that Persian horsemen appeared.

The enemy cavalry would have appeared on the west bank of the Pactolus, out on the plain near Sardis; their baggage train was ordered back across the river out of danger, while the horsemen proceeded to slaughter the Greek camp-followers who were scattered about looking for plunder (Hell. 3.4.22). Agesilaus then ordered his cavalry to go to their aid, whereupon the Persian cavalry formed line and awaited the attack. Xenophon adds that the enemy infantry were absent, and that this gave the Greeks the advantage (3.4.23). The Greek cavalry charged – not too willingly, for Agesilaus had to reassure

8 H. D. Westlake, Decline and Fall of Tissaphernes, in: Historia 30 [1981], 265.
9 Even if he suspected a trick, he might have been unwilling to risk the strategically important region of Caria. Sardis could withstand a siege if need be; and he would no doubt look on the undefended farms and settlements in between as expendable.
them that the infantry were following. Evidently even the refurbished cavalry were not quite a match for the Persians!

The Greeks then won a victory by tactics very similar to those developed by Xenophon himself against the Persians during the retreat after Cunaxa (Anab. 3.4.1–5) and later used by Caesar against Pompey's cavalry at Pharsalus. Agesilaus ordered the peltasts and the fleetest of the hoplites to advance at a run. This must have been most disconcerting for the Persians. They were used to charging en masse or by squadrons, showering the enemy with javelins or arrows, and then wheeling away. Their speed was their protection. With their splendid mounts, they could cope with any sort of cavalry on its own, and they could massacre unprotected hoplites in the open plain. But when they found themselves surrounded by fast-moving foot-soldiers, stabbing up at their faces with long spears or feeling for joints in their armour — it is no wonder that they broke and fled. Hand to hand combat was not the Persian cavalryman's forte: he had no saddle or stirrups to steady his seat, and only a short sword or scimitar for self-defence.

The Persians, then, broke. Most of them got away across the river to Sardis. Agesilaus made no attempt to storm the city, but contented himself with looting the enemy camp, where he netted 70 talents' worth, including some camels, which he took back to Greece! Presumably he then led the army back to Ephesus, as Xenophon says nothing of any further advance, or of any Persian hostilities.

Afterwards Agesilaus was bought off by Tithraustes, the chief of the king's bodyguard (Nepos 9.3.2), who was sent down to liquidate and replace Tissaphernes. For 30 talents, he agreed to leave Lydia alone and go back to marauding in Pharnabazus' province of Phrygia (Hell. 3.4.26). His depredations there must have been extensive, for in two years he amassed enough to consecrate over 200 talents as tithe to the god at Delphi (Ages. 1.34). But we may doubt Xenophon's assertion that he "designed and expected to crown his achievements by dissolving the empire that had attacked Greece in the past" (Ages. 1.36) — or even that "the Greeks in Asia mourned his departure" (1.38).

B. The Narrative of the Hellenica Oxyrhynchia

1. The Battle, and After

The relevant portions of P's narrative (H.O. 11(6), 12(7)) deal only with the battle (or skirmish) and subsequent events, but appear to form the basis for the longer account of Diodorus. In this version the Greeks did not have a clear march for three days before meeting any opposition but were constantly harassed by Persian troops close behind them.

10 In the Anabasis (3.4.1–5) Xenophon describes how he beat off a Persian force after an earlier attack in which the Greeks suffered severely, having no cavalry. He organized a troop of horsemen, and in a second attack the Persians were put to flight by a combined charge of cavalry and infantry. The horsemen were assured that "an adequate force would follow at their heels" (3.4.3), and "the foot-soldiers, under orders, rushed upon the enemy" (3.4.4). One wonders whether Xenophon suggested these tactics at Sardis (cf. Hipparch. 8.19).

11 Xenophon himself deposited a substantial sum with the priest of Artemis at Ephesus, presumably his share of plunder collected under Agesilaus or during his march with the Ten Thousand (P. J. Rahn, The Date of Xenophon's Exile, in: Classical Contributions in Honour of M. F. McGregor, New York 1981, 107), which he afterwards used to buy his house and estate at Scillus (Diog. Laert. 2.52).

P tells us that Agesilaus sent back “Xenocles”\(^\text{13}\) with a mixed force of hoplites and peltasts by night to hide themselves until the main body were some distance ahead. His intention was to shake off the irregulars who were harassing his rearguard, by laying an ambush for them. He led off the army at dawn, and “as usual the barbarians followed closely. Some engaged the Greeks in combat, some rode round them, and others pursued them along the plain in a disorderly fashion.” When they had passed, Xenocles roused the men from ambush and charged at a run. The Persians fled in terror “right across the plain”. Agesilaus, ahead with the main army, sent his cavalry and peltasts to join in the pursuit and they killed about 600, but most of the enemy escaped, being horsemen and light-armed troops. The Greeks then captured and looted the enemy camp, while the fugitives presumably shut themselves up in Sardis with Tissaphernes.

Agesilaus and the Greeks remained in the region three days. He granted a truce to the enemy for taking up the bodies of the dead, set up a trophy, and ravaged the countryside. He then led the army eastwards across the Lydian plain. The soldiers “were allowed to ravage the country as much as they pleased”, but apparently got little opportunity, for they were marching in the close plinthion (hollow square) formation, and were dogged for many miles by Persian troops under Tissaphernes! Crossing the mountains, the Greeks came down into Phrygia, and went on until they reached the Menander opposite Celaenae.\(^\text{14}\) Agesilaus debated whether to attack Celaenae, but as the omens were unfavourable he turned back.

II. Problems — and Sources

P’s description of the battle is beset with difficulties. First, where did the battle take place — in the Hermus valley or along the Pactolus? The Hermus flows through an open plain, the Pactolus valley above Sardis is a glen hemmed in by rugged mountains.\(^\text{15}\) A priori, one would expect such an ambush to be more effective in a narrow gorge, where an enemy could be entrapped between two forces. But P clearly had the Hermus in mind, since the Persians were galloping about the plain, and fled across the plain when pursued. Why then should Persian horsemen in open country be so alarmed at a charge from hoplites and peltasts, whom they could easily evade? They were not undisciplined amateurs, but about the best cavalry in the ancient world. The main Greek army was between them and the river, but they had the whole plain to manoeuvre in. Incidentally, P does not mention the river, and his description of the battle makes one wonder whether he knew anything of the topography of the area. Where, for instance, were some hundreds of armed men supposed to be hiding?

Secondly, were the Greeks coming or going? Were they on their way to Sardis,\(^\text{16}\) or returning home laden with spoils as in Diodorus’ version (14.80.2); or had they temporarily turned back?\(^\text{17}\) On their way there, one would think, for the plundering of camp and countryside came later. The Persians would have been following them for at least a day or two, since they would surely have been watching Ephesus. So why did Agesilaus

\(^{13}\) Cf. Xen., Hell. 3.4.20. Xenocles was one of the two cavalry commanders — a rather improbable choice as leader of a charge of infantry from ambush!

\(^{14}\) Celaenae was actually on the Lycus, a branch of the Meander.


\(^{16}\) Bruce, ibid. 150.

\(^{17}\) Anderson, ibid. 45 n. 7.
delay his ambush until the fourth day, when he was close to Sardis on an open plain where it could not be really effective? True, he killed some enemies and chased the rest away. But this was not a victory warranting a trophy\textsuperscript{18} – it was more like slapping at a swarm of mosquitoes. They were around him again as soon as he left Sardis.

Finally, the whole story of an advance into Phrygia seems rather improbable,\textsuperscript{19} and is not confirmed by Xenophon or Diodorus. The Greeks never liked going far from the sea; and would a prudent commander have advanced into the interior, leaving an untaken city and powerful enemy cavalry and infantry forces, almost unscathed, behind him? Would Tissaphernes have let them go so easily, contenting himself with cutting off a few stragglers? It was not thus that he had hounded the Ten Thousand out of Mesopotamia.

The question of \( P \)'s sources is easily answered: none are known and little can be deduced. Bruce\textsuperscript{20}, who unquestioningly accepts the ambush as fact – it is unlikely to have been "invented or conjectured by an historian such as \( P \)" – can only suggest that \( P \) consulted a camp journal. Busolt\textsuperscript{21} finds the account of the ambush suspiciously conventional, and dismisses it as fiction. Gray\textsuperscript{22} points out that \( P \) wrote at a time when military manuals like that of Aeneas Tacticus, consisting largely of stratagems, were in vogue, and that stratagems comprise a large part of the Hellenica Oxyrhynchia. She agrees with Anderson (s. note 15) that the descriptions given of the battle by \( P \) and Xenophon are irreconcilable; and that \( P \)'s must probably be rejected.

\textit{C. The Narrative of Diodorus/ Ephorus}

\textbf{I. The Background}

Diodorus' account of events in Asia up to the arrival of Agesilaus' expedition in 396 (14.35–39) is similar to Xenophon's though much less detailed, but contains interesting new facts. Thus, Sparta in 400 had thrown down the gauntlet by warning Tissaphernes not to interfere with the Greek cities (14.35.6), which she was evidently beginning to look on as part of her empire. A Persian fleet was already being organized by Pharnabazus in 397, under Conon the Athenian as admiral, who was then in Cilicia with 40 ships, "preparing for war", but later moved to Caunus in Caria (14.79.4–8). These ships no doubt formed the nucleus of the large fleet in Phoenicia which alarmed the Spartans in the following year. Xenophon was apparently prejudiced against Conon, and avoids mentioning him. The ephors would have had better reasons for ordering an invasion of Caria than to devastate Tissaphernes' private estates! Carian harbours could well serve as forward bases for naval operations in the Aegean.

In 397 the Spartans, "foreseeing how great their war with the Persians would be" (14.79.1), gave the command to Agesilaus, who took the field with 10,000 infantry and 400 cavalry, accompanied by a "throng of no less number which provided a market and was intent on plunder" (14.79.2). He traversed the plain of Cayster and laid waste the

\textsuperscript{18} The business of a trophy and a truce to collect bodies, while common in Greek warfare, seems somewhat inappropriate after a skirmish between Greeks and barbarians.

\textsuperscript{19} Anderson, ibid. accepts it. Xenophon, he considers, would not have bothered to mention it, as it achieved nothing.

\textsuperscript{20} Bruce, ibid. 155.

\textsuperscript{21} G. Busolt, Der Neue Historiker und Xenophon, in: Hermes 63 [1908], 255–285.

\textsuperscript{22} V. J. Gray, Two Different Approaches to the Battle of Sardis in 395 B.C.: Xenophon Hellenica 3.4.20–24 and Hellenica Oxyrhynchia 11(6), 4–6, in: Calif. Stud. Class. Antiq. 12 [1979], 196.
territory held by the Persians until he reached Cyme, which he used as a base for ravaging Phrygia and neighbouring regions during most of the summer. When his army was “sated with pillage” (14.79.3), he returned to Ephesus.

This part of Diodorus’ account appears simply silly. Agesilaus was sent out to fight a “great war” against Persia. Yet we hear nothing of the negotiations with satraps described by Xenophon, nothing of military preparations, nothing of war aims. What did he and his army do? Spent most of the first campaigning season in sporadic plundering, attended by a crowd of camp-followers, and then returned to base. Had he found out what the Persian satraps were doing, or where their armies were? Was he still content to have only a handful of horsemen to put up against the formidable Persian cavalry arm? Diodorus does not tell us. Even if he was summarizing a longer account, probably that of Ephorus, he seems to have done it poorly, with little appreciation of military strategy.

Meanwhile Conon, the Persian admiral, had built up his tiny fleet into a powerful naval force which had penetrated into the Aegean as far as the Chersonesus; and with the Rhodians, whom he had probably talked into breaking with Sparta, had seized a large shipment of grain sent by the king of Egypt as a gift to the Spartans (14.79.6–8).

It seems as if Diodorus intended to hold up Conon in favourable contrast to Agesilaus.

II. The Battle, and After

In the following campaigning season (395) Agesilaus again led his army into the plain of Cayster and the country around Sipylus and ravaged it (14.80.1). Tissaphernes followed them closely with 10,000 cavalry and 50,000 infantry and cut down any stragglers he found plundering. Agesilaus formed his soldiers into a square and “clung to the foothills of Mt Sipylus, awaiting a favourable opportunity to attack the enemy”. Nevertheless, they were able to ravage the countryside all the way to Sardis, including Tissaphernes’ own estates. He then turned back, and midway between Sardis and “Thybarnae”, sent Xenocles with 1400 men to lay an ambush “in a thickly wooded place”. At dawn next day, he moved off with the main army, followed by the Persians, and when he had passed the place of the ambush he turned on the enemy. A “hard battle” (καρτερά μάχη) ensued, until he gave the signal to the men in ambush, who charged and put the enemy to flight. Agesilaus pursued them some distance and killed over 6000, took numerous prisoners and pillaged the enemy camp. He was about to attack satrapies further inland, but as the omens were unfavourable he led his army back to the sea (14.80.5).

Artaxerxes, alarmed at the defeats and blaming Tissaphernes for starting the war, sent Tithraustes to arrest him and take over command. Finding him at Colossae in Phrygia, Tithraustes arrested and beheaded him, and then made a six-month truce with Agesilaus (14.80.6–8).

Diodorus’ version raises so many difficulties that it is hard to take it seriously, especially as, like P, he apparently knew little of the topography of the region. He makes Agesilaus on both campaigns lead his army into the plain of Cayster, which he would merely have crossed in the first few miles of his march from Ephesus. Agesilaus’ transfer of his base from Ephesus to Cyme seems quite pointless, since Cyme, in north-west Lydia, was further away from Phrygia and no nearer to Sardis than was Ephesus. And he appears

Like P, Diodorus does not explain why Agesilaus found no favourable opportunity for setting an ambush until he was halfway back to Ephesus – when followed closely all the way by an enemy army.
to think that Mt Sipylus bordered the Cayster valley, and that Agesilaus avoided Persian attacks on his march to Sardis by “clinging to the foothills of Mt Sipylus” — which in fact he would have left behind him on starting up the Hermus valley.

The Greek army would certainly have needed to march to Sardis in close formation (14.80.1) if they were followed by an enemy army six times as strong as their own — or by any enemy army. How then could they have plundered (80.2) — which would necessarily have involved spreading out and scattering? It would be military lunacy for a commander to let troops disperse who might be needed for instant action. Both Ρ and Diodorus, it seems, imagined that Persians were so terrified of the Greeks that they would never dare to attack them in force. This, of course, was nonsense. The Persians were shy of hand to hand combat with the more heavily armed hoplites; but Thibron and Dercylidas were equally afraid of the Persian cavalry, and even Agesilaus realized that without adequate cavalry he would be restricted to “skulking warfare” on the plains (Xen., Hell. 3.1.5, 3.2.17, 3.4.15; Diod. 14.37.3; Nepos 17.3.6; Front., Strat. 1.8.12). Why was the Persian army there, if not to fight the Greeks, or at least stop their pillaging? Why was Tissaphernes himself there? A detachment of cavalry would have sufficed to cut off stragglers, without his supervision.

Diodorus’ description of the ambush differs little from that of the Hellenica Oxyrhynchia, except that he provides a “densely wooded place” for the men to hide in, and Agesilaus now makes the initial attack while the men in ambush attack the Persian rear. The number of enemy dead is multiplied by 10, and Tissaphernes is reported to have escaped to Sardis.

III. The Sources

Diodorus’ (or Ephorus’) only identifiable sources appear to be Xenophon and the Hellenica Oxyrhynchia. Diodorus mainly follows Xenophon for the years 400–397 which provide the lead-up to Agesilaus’ expedition, though with additional facts; but his narrative is heavily condensed, probably through the intermediate account of Ephorus. He shows little understanding of politics, military strategy or warfare. His description of Agesilaus’ operations in Asia is unsatisfactory and puts the general in a very poor light. In contrast, Conon is shown as active and enterprising. This may reflect Ephorus’ pro-Athens, anti-Sparta outlook.

His story of the march to Sardis and the defeat of the Persians is hopelessly improbable. He has blown up what was possibly a mere skirmish into a major battle, perhaps because Ephorus liked set-piece battles. And he has made no attempt to explain the strategy or objectives of either of the combatants. Probably he did not know how.

D. Other Sources

Several other ancient writers confirm that Agesilaus, when marching on Sardis, first made a pretence of attacking Caria in order to mislead Tissaphernes as to his objective (Nepos 17.3.2; Front. 1.8.12; Polyen. 2.1.9; Plut., Ages. 9, 10). All agree that the stratagem was successful, and that Agesilaus was able to plunder the territory around Sardis before Tissaphernes arrived — in contradiction to the versions of Ρ and Diodorus. None of these authors describes the actual battle except Plutarch (Ages. 10), whose account is clearly derived from Xenophon. Both Frontinus (1.8.12) and Nepos (17.3.6) indicate that Agesilaus recognized the Persian superiority in cavalry, and Nepos remarks that “he joined
battle in places where infantry were more effective". None of these authors mentions any ambush – not even Frontinus, who devotes an entire chapter to ambushes (bk 2 ch. 5).

E. What Really Happened?

I. Which route did the Greeks take from Ephesus to Sardis?

To reach Sardis Agesilaus’ force would have had to cross the formidable Tmolus range lying to the north of the Cayster valley. Most of the passes were mere mountain tracks, very high, and unsuitable for the passage of an army, but there were basically two possible routes.

One route led ENE. up the Cayster valley, from which the Hermus valley and Sardis could be reached by way of several passes northward across Mt Tmolus. Two of these passes were never of much commercial or military importance, but the easternmost and highest (3500 ft = 1065 m), north of the city of Hypaepa (modern Odemis), opened on to the gorge of the Pactolus river, which descended to the plain close to Sardis; the river in fact ran through the city. This was the route taken by the Ionian rebels who captured and burned Sardis in 499 (Herod. 5.100–1) and was also used in Roman times.

The other route ran north from Ephesus for a few miles before turning eastwards to cross Karabel, the Black Pass, the most westerly and lowest (1500 ft = 450 m) of the passes across the Tmolus range. This led to the country around Mt Sipylus and Nymphaeum and into the lower Hermus valley. It was used in the fifth century B.C. (Herod. 2.106) and was probably the continuation of the Persian Royal Road.

Which route, then, did the Greeks take? Diodorus indicates that they took the Karabel route, since he says that they ravaged the country round Mt Sipylus, to which the Hypaepa route would not give access. Xenophon simply states that they took the “shortest route”.

Dugas24 totally rejects Xenophon’s account, interpreting him as implying that the Greeks took the Cayster valley route. This road, he says, was the “normal” and “direct” route to Sardis, and well known to Xenophon, who would have gone that way to join Cyrus at Sardis in 401. And this was the shortest route – a three-day journey according to Herodotus (5.54). If, as Dugas suggests, Xenophon had not taken part in the campaign, he would naturally have assumed that the Greeks used that road; whereas P and Diodorus, specifying a non-normal route, must have had good reason for doing so.25 Moreover, the Cayster valley route was more dangerous because it was more exposed to Persian attack, and therefore less likely to have been used.

Most commentators agree that the Karabel route was safer. A northerly departure from Ephesus might herald an advance to northern Lydia or Phrygia as well as to Sardis, whereas an eastward march up the Cayster could only lead to Sardis – or Caria! There was nowhere else to go. And if the Persian cavalry was stationed on the Maeander, as Xenophon states, they would certainly be watching the Cayster valley, which could be quickly reached from the Meander by a low pass over Mt Messogis. But Dugas’ argument cuts both ways. Xenophon says the Greeks went the more dangerous way and were not followed by the enemy; this is improbable, therefore Xenophon is

24 Dugas, ibid. 64–65.
25 Dugas fathers Diodorus’ statement about the route on P; but P does not corroborate it; the only relevant geographical name mentioned is the Cayster valley in 5(8) – cf. Dugas p. 60.
wrong. But Dugas also says that according to P and Diodorus, they went the safer way and were not followed! A more likely alternative, surely, is that they went the safer way and were not followed! In fact, the Karabel route happens to be slightly the shorter of the two – 64 miles (103 km) as against 65 miles (105 km). And unless Agesilaus was taking a route other than the “normal” Cayster one, why would he comment on it at all?

II. Were Persian forces following the Greeks?

While accepting the view that the Greeks took the Karabel route, we may doubt whether Agesilaus would have risked delaying his march to ravage the Sipylus region. It seems more likely that he marched direct to Sardis as Xenophon asserts – perhaps doing a little plundering en route – and was rewarded by meeting no opposition until the fourth day. The Greeks could hardly have been so lucky on a long two-day march up the Cayster, which would have taken them across the Persian front.

If the Persian forces were not following the Greeks, where were they? A plausible explanation can be drawn from Xenophon. They were hoping to forestall the Greeks by using the other route. The cavalry were in the Meander valley, probably opposite Tralles (modern Aydin), and the infantry south of the Meander in Caria. When the Greeks did not appear in the Cayster valley and Tissaphernes, rather belatedly, discovered that they were advancing up the Hermus, he would have gone ahead himself with the cavalry in the hope of intercepting them before they reached Sardis, and ordered the infantry to follow as quickly as possible. Crossing the ridge opposite Tralles into the Cayster valley, the Persians would have passed Hypaepa, ascended 3500 feet to the high pass and then gone on down the Pactolus, passing through or near Sardis on its spur, and coming out on the level Hermus plain below, on the west bank of the river. The cavalry were evidently just in time to confront the advancing Greeks. Tissaphernes himself would probably have remained in Sardis to organize the city’s defences, counting on the cavalry to hold the Greeks in check until the infantry arrived. However, the battle was fought and lost before they appeared.

III. How was the victory won?

The battle, or skirmish, probably took much the course described by Xenophon. The Persians, hampered by the river in their rear, would have had an unpleasant shock at finding that the Greeks had cavalry capable of meeting them in combat, even temporarily; and they seem to have miscalculated the speed at which the Greek foot-soldiers were able to come to the support of their cavalry. Without infantry support, they were thrown into confusion and fled. Possibly only a part of the Persian cavalry was engaged, the rest being still on their way down the Pactolus. A Greek victory under such conditions would seem credible, without the need to import a Diodoran ambush – which indeed would be hardly imaginable on an open plain 3 miles wide.

F. The War Aims of Agesilaus

What were Agesilaus’ aims in Asia – if he had any? Did he, as Xenophon believed (Ages. 1.8, 1.36) and his excursion to Aulis would indicate, plan a great crusade and a march up country “to destroy the empire that attacked Greece in the past”? If he was a

26 Anderson, ibid. 39; figures quoted from Kaupert, Schlachtfelder 278.
Panathenian, he was no inspired one. He failed to unite the Greeks. Corinth and Thebes refused point-blank to participate, and Athens sent only a handful of malcontent knights whom she was glad to get rid of. The Asian Greeks wanted to be free of Persian overlordship, but not to join in a crazy scheme to take over the Persian empire. And despite Xenophon, Agesilaus was capable only of jackboot diplomacy. He arranged a marriage to win over two allies, then let the blundering Herippidas send them off mortally offended (Hell. 4.1.3–28). Elected, as it were, on a platform of “liberating” the Greek cities of Ionia, he seemed more interested in amassing vast quantities of loot (Xen., Ages. 1.16, 18, 34; Plut., Ages. 9, 11). Lysander had been responsible for setting up the puppet oligarchies under which the worst abuses occurred (Plut., Lys. 13, 21), but we cannot find that Agesilaus did much to rectify them. He was no more successful in mainland Greece. It was his “hawkish” attitude towards any member of the Spartan Alliance showing signs of self-will, and his disregard of the interests of the other partners, which led ultimately to the rise of Thebes (Plut., Ages. 26).

The whole project of an Asian expedition was in fact beyond him. He was a good military tactician; but his capacity for conceiving or pursuing any wider strategy was limited. A Philip or Alexander would have first defined his objectives, filled his war chest, and taken precautions against disruption at home. He would have systematically reduced cities and consolidated occupied territory as he went; and above all, conciliated local populations. Alexander punished indiscriminate looting by death. Agesilaus did none of these things. He had no siege-train, so had to bypass fortified cities. Like Montrose with his Highlanders who went home with their booty after every victory, he could never permanently occupy the ground he won. Nobody wanted to stay behind on garrison duty when the main army was ahead plundering. He had no money, so let his soldiers pay themselves by looting where they pleased. He is never recorded as punishing troops for outrages against civilians. Suffering local populations must have seen him, not as a possible Great King, but as the roving bandit he was. Satraps knew that he could be bribed to go away and raid someone else’s territory.

But having said this, one may still ask what else the man could have done. He was not Philip or Alexander, with Thracian gold mines and a powerful and loyal national army behind him. Only a tiny fraction of his army were native-born Spartans. One-fifth were ex-slaves, the rest were mostly half-hearted Peloponnesian levies, or Ionian Greeks who would not have been there at all if they could have bought their way out. How could he win the loyalty of such a motley lot, other than by offering them loot? His government and his own inclinations had pressured him into showing the Hellenic flag on the Asian mainland — but with quite inadequate funds and manpower. He could only become a leader of mercenaries with a roving commission, even if that meant making himself hated by local populations. But such operations could have had no permanent effect, despite Plutarch’s panegyrics (Ages. 14, 15).

Another general, indeed, might well have received a blistering reprimand from the ephors back in Sparta for disobeying orders. If he had done what he was told, and in-

27 Cf. Cawkwell, Agesilaus and Sparta, in: CQ 26 [1976], 62–84, rejects the view of “moralizing” modern historians that Agesilaus’ Machtpolitik “was bound to prove disastrous”: only violence used consistently could have ensured compliance with Spartan wishes. But how much longer could so oppressive a regime have lasted — even without the Leuctra disaster? Far from serving a common ideal, Spartan policy was recognized as naked imperialism, e.g. by Polybius (9.23.7), Ephorus (Diod. 15.19.4), and even Xenophon (5.3.27–5.4.1, 6.3.8), who is claimed to have “a complete concord of political outlook” with Agesilaus.
vaded Caria and Cilicia with military and naval forces, he might have defeated the growing Persian fleet or confined it to Phoenician waters. He might have saved the Greeks around the Aegean from half a century of Persian interference and intrigue, and substituted a Spartan peace for the King’s Peace. But nobody had wanted to go campaigning in those sparsely populated southern parts where there was little loot to be had.

One critic considers that Agesilaus realized that the conquest of Persia was a “pipe-dream”, but hoped to bring the king to the conference table by using military pressure – as if the king was likely to give up hereditary claims to overlordship going back to the foundation of the empire, to prevent a few raids on outlying satrapies! But we may doubt whether Agesilaus ever had a clear purpose in mind. He seems to have been a typically unimaginative Spartan who liked campaigning and fighting, no matter where, and lived almost from day to day. He was disgusted at being recalled from Asia (Ages. 1.36), where he was enjoying himself; but pace Xenophon, what had he accomplished? When the satrap Tithraustes found him a nuisance, he got rid of him by providing funds to create a diversion in mainland Greece (Hell. 3.5.1). Ionia then reverted to the status quo ante; the Asian Greeks remained unfree; and in due course Sparta sold out to the Persians.

**G. Was Xenophon Prejudiced?**

We have argued that, on grounds of probability alone, there is no reason why Xenophon’s account of the campaign and the battle of Sardis should not, in general, be accepted. It all hangs together, and while light on details – even omitting some essential facts – contains nothing that seems unlikely on the face of it. We must now ask whether there are any factors which should be allowed for in assessing Xenophon’s reliability – not as a historian in general, but as a recorder of these particular events. The most obvious factor is his well-known partiality for Agesilaus.

Xenophon’s friendship with Agesilaus was one of the dominant influences of his life. His admiration and affection for the Spartan king, whom he saw as “the perfect embodiment of goodness” (Ages. 10.1), shine through the Agesilaus. Offhand, then, one might expect a tendency for him to magnify Agesilaus’ achievements and cover up anything discreditable. But the question is, did he do so in this instance? Could he have done so? And if so, how?

His critics would scarcely deny that Agesilaus was in command of the Greeks, and that they did win a victory over Persians at Sardis. Why else did Tissaphernes lose his head? But Xenophon reports a defeat of Persian cavalry only, a mere skirmish with Tissaphernes himself absent; while Diodorus describes a major victory with 6000 Persian casualties. If Diodorus is right, why should Xenophon play down his hero’s success? Again, why does Xenophon not mention an ambush, if there was one? There was nothing dishonourable about ambushing an enemy. Xenophon himself did it repeatedly during the Anabasis (4.1.22; 4.7.22). Nobody has so far produced an adequate, or indeed any, motive for these falsifications. Agesilaus really was a good general, and his achievements spoke for themselves. They did not need to be distorted or watered down to make them credible (Ages. 3.1).

Another line of criticism is based on the “hypothesis” that Xenophon, after being replaced by Herippidas as leader of the Cyreans (Hell. 3.4.20), was left behind at Ephe-
sus during the Sardis campaign. Therefore his account suffers from “lack of first-hand knowledge and the uncertain memory of his informants”. This is simply a hypothesis, backed by no hard evidence whatever; we do not even know for certain when Xenophon gave up the command of the Cyraeans.\textsuperscript{30} The brevity of Xenophon’s account of the campaign, “when compared with P or Diodorus”, is contrasted with his long description of Agesilaus’ military preparations at Ephesus, “which reads like that of an eye-witness”. One might comment that P tells us nothing, except about the ambush and later events. Diodorus’ account too is shorter than either of Xenophon’s.

In any case, it is hazardous to draw conclusions as to Xenophon’s knowledge of a subject from the amount of space he devotes to it. His descriptions of military operations are a case in point. They are invariably terse in the extreme, matter-of-fact, and devoid of rhetoric – unlike those of Diodorus. Because of Xenophon’s military expertise, perhaps, he assumed more background knowledge in his readers. Another commentator\textsuperscript{31} explains Xenophon’s lengthy treatment of Agesilaus’ campaign preparations on the theory that his main purpose in writing history was “to present paradigms of the good commander”.

Much of the criticism levelled at Xenophon, and purporting to show that his “high esteem as a reliable historian is a thing of the past”,\textsuperscript{32} seems to be based mainly if not entirely on his disagreement with P – springing apparently from a conviction that the fragmentary P is the more reliable historian, no matter what he is writing about.\textsuperscript{33} So extremist an approach is hardly scholarly. There remains the possibility that while A may be more reliable than B on most subjects, B’s testimony is to be preferred on those where he happens to have special knowledge. And on this count Xenophon seems to me to win hands down.

Summary

Rival accounts of the victory won by the Spartan king Agesilaus over the Persians in 395 B.C. near Sardis and of foregoing and subsequent events, due respectively to Xenophon, Diodorus Siculus, and the Oxyrhynchus historian, are examined and compared. That of Xenophon, which is irreconcilable with the others in some respects, is considered the most credible, especially as it is probably based on first-hand testimony; nor is it likely to have been distorted by his partiality for Agesilaus. Some fundamental problems still in dispute are discussed. Despite his successes, Agesilaus’ war policy in Asia seems to have been somewhat nebulous and opportunist, with little evidence of a coherent plan.

\textsuperscript{30} Rahn, ibid. 106, concludes that Xenophon remained as \textit{strategos} until late 396 or early 395, when he handed over the army to Agesilaus (Diog. Laert. 2.51). He suggests, however, that Xenophon was released from this position so that he would be more available for developing or training the new cavalry.

\textsuperscript{31} Gray, ibid. 187ff.

\textsuperscript{32} Cawkwell, Introduction to Xenophon’s Hellenica 16.

\textsuperscript{33} Cf. A. W. Gomme, Historical Commentary on Thucydides 1, Oxford 1945, who set up Thucydides as the final authority on every aspect of the Peloponnesian War, as against any other evidence.