**CHAPTER THREE**

**A DELIGHTFUL RETREAT: XENOPHON AND THE PICTURESQUE**

Tim Rood

Serious and ambitious designs often have a purple patch or two sewn on to them just to make a good show at a distance—a description of a grove and altar of Diana, the meanderings of a stream running through pleasant meads ... but the trouble is, it’s not the place for them.

Horace, *Ars Poetica*

Things were not going well for the ancient republics of Greece as William Mitford (1744–1827) neared the end of the third volume of his *History*. Mitford, an English landowner and MP, was attempting a history that would be more scholarly than the works of his predecessors and that would also undermine the appeal that the Greek idea of liberty had to some of his contemporaries. His first volume had closed in 446 with Pericles at the height of his power in Athens—‘a power that could only be maintained by still cultivating the democratical interest’, with a result that was ‘ultimately most pernicious to the commonwealth’. The second volume, published a year after the French Revolution, had brought the story down to Athens’ defeat in the Peloponnesian War in 404, when ‘the aristocratical, or rather the oligarchical, triumphed over the democratical interest, in almost every commonwealth of the nation’. Now, seven years later, Mitford had reached the Battle of Mantinea in 362—the battle that led to ‘the depression together of the aristocratical and democratical interests, and the dissolution of the antient system of Grecian confederacy’.

---

1 Hor. *Ars P.* 14–17, 19; translated by D. Russell in Russell & Winterbottom 1989: 98 (*incep-tis gravibus plerumque et magna professis / purpureus, late qui splendeat, unus et alter / adsui-tur pannus, cum lucus et ara Dianae / et properantis aquae per amoenos ambitus agros / ... sed nunc non erat his locus*). For comments that helped to improve this paper I would like to thank the editors, the participants in the Liverpool conference, colleagues at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study in 2007–2008 (especially Giorgio Bertellini and Carla Mazzio), audiences at Yale, Harvard, and Oxford, and (not least) Andrea Capovilla.

2 Mitford 1789–1818: i. 590, ii. 695, iii. 429. The publication history of Mitford’s work is
As Mitford pondered the state of Greece, he could not but quote with sympathy the gloomy assessment given by Xenophon at the end of his *Hellenica*: ‘indecision, and trouble, and confusion, more than even before that battle, pervaded Greece’. While Xenophon made the Battle of Mantinea the end of his work (‘thus far suffice it for me to have related: following events perhaps will interest some other writer’: 7.5.27), Mitford continued for a few years, and then ended his third volume by pausing to digress on the ‘memorials of Xenophon’: ‘it is impossible’, he wrote, ‘for the compiler of Grecian history not to feel a particular interest in ... the soldier-philosopher-author, who has been his conductor, now through a period of nearly half a century’—and so ‘the supposition will naturally follow, that the reader will not be wholly unimpressed with a similar sentiment’.

Looking back over the evidence for Xenophon’s life, Mitford quoted in full the long passage where Xenophon described the rustic estate he bought for Diana of Ephesus (*Anabasis* 5.3.8–13; like Mitford, I will here use Roman Diana rather than Greek Artemis). This is the passage that has been most instrumental in promoting the once popular image of Xenophon as a (quasi-English) country gentleman living an idyllic life in Scillus—an image that still has a lingering hold on some readings of Xenophon’s thought. Mitford himself showed both through his decision to quote the Scillus passage in full and through his broader description of Xenophon’s life there that he found it hard to resist the attractions of the estate. But, as we shall see, his idealised image of the estate stood in tension with the critical stance he took towards many aspects of Greek culture and with the overt political aims of his historical project.

This chapter will start by exploring through the lens of the eighteenth-century vogue for the picturesque the underpinnings of Mitford’s fascination with Xenophon’s Scillus and the ideological complications that this fascination introduced into his work. The discussion of Mitford’s picture of Xenophon’s estate will then be enriched by comparison with the accounts of a number of early nineteenth-century travellers who (unlike Mitford) had ventured close to Scillus itself and who left equally striking recreations of

---

complicated (the data in the *ODNB* are wrong). The first volume, originally published in 1784 with 479 as its end, was extended to 446 in a second edition published in 1789, before the second volume was published in 1790. In 1797, the year in which the third volume was published, the material contained in the new volume was published as volumes five and six of a new octavo edition, the first four volumes of which (covering volumes one and two of the original edition) are dated 1795. The most detailed treatment of Mitford is by Taylor 1984, with 167–168 on Mitford’s affinity with Xenophon.

---

3 Mitford 1789–1818: iii. 503 (indecision), 518–539 (memorials), 518 (conductor).