CHAPTER SIX
TIMOCRATES’ MISSION TO GREECE—ONCE AGAIN

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INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to think of any aspect of the task of writing history that would be more open to subjective assessment, or more susceptible of partial or even partisan discussion, than the treatment of historical causes. The ancient historiographical controversy over how the Corinthian War (395–386) came about is an apt example to illustrate this proposition. Hardly ten years after their victory in the Peloponnesian War, which had secured them a position of supremacy in the Greek world, the Spartans had to face the combined attacks of the Persian navy (Cnidus, 394) and of a formidable Greek coalition, involving the major cities Thebes, Athens, Corinth, and Argos. In one view, the war was stirred up by the Persians in response to the war the Spartans were conducting in Asia Minor on behalf of the freedom of the Greek cities there. Xenophon tells us how the Persian chiliarch Tithraustes sent the Rhodian Timocrates with an amount of fifty talents to Greece, ordering him ‘to distribute it among the leaders of the cities on the condition that they start a war against the Lacedaemonians’. According to the anonymous author of the Hellenica Oxyrhynchia such an explanation cannot stand: those, he argues, who say that the money from Timocrates was responsible for the creation of war-parties at Athens, in Boeotia and elsewhere, do not know that all had been ill-disposed towards the Spartans ‘already a long time before they had dealings with Timocrates and took the gold’. He gives it as his view that ‘the cities’ hated the Spartans because of their interference in their internal affairs.

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1 Xen. Hell. 3.5.1.
In addition to disagreement over the root cause of the war, there are three further points on which our two surviving contemporary fourth-century historical accounts differ: (a) the author of the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*—hereafter called ‘P’—implies a much earlier date for Timocrates’ mission than the one which is attested by Xenophon; (b) in close connection with the foregoing, P names Pharnabazus, not Tithraustes, as the satrap who commissioned the Rhodian; and (c) P’s list of recipients of the money includes, next to the Thebans, Corinthians and Argives, the Athenians as well; Xenophon denies that the Athenians had any share in the gold, and provides them with a specific motive for taking action against Sparta: ‘they were anyhow, eager for war, since they thought it was their right to rule’.

The ancient Greek debate on the causes of the Corinthian War still continues in modern scholarly variance of opinion over the proper weight that should be assigned (admittedly in a complex interplay of reasons) to such factors as Persian involvement and Greek economic versus strictly political motives for waging war against Sparta. Regarding the question as to which of the two contemporary accounts deserves to be trusted (or to be trusted more), historians today tend, at least up to recent times, to subscribe by and large to the views defended by the Oxyrhynchus historian.

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3 For some more recent surveys of the divergences, see e.g. Buckler 2004: 397–398; Rung 2004; Bleckmann 2006: 91–100.

4 Although I believe that a strong case can be made for identifying the author as Cratippus (see Schepens 1993 and 2002), it is preferable not to prejudice, from the very start, the ensuing discussion by whatever a priori assumption regarding the authorship of the Oxyrhynchus history.

5 *Hell.*, 3.5.2. Xenophon and P are the only contemporary fourth-century authorities available to us. All later versions (Paus. 3.9.8; Plut. *Art.* 20.4–6; Lys. 27.3; *Ages.* 15.1–4; Polyaen. 1.48.3) seem ultimately indebted, directly or indirectly, to either one of the primary authors or represent some combination of their accounts. In this paper the later tradition will only be occasionally considered for the light it may throw on some of the features of the original accounts.

6 For a succinct, yet fairly balanced treatment, see Hornblower 1983: 181–201. Fuller discussions, with reference to previous literature, will be found in Hamilton 1979: 182–208; Cook 1981: esp. 92–195; Urban 1991: 25–58; Lendon 1989: 300–313. Cook 1990 argues, against Kagan 1961, that ‘50 talents was a ludicrously inadequate sum when compared to the actual cost of even a single season of war’.

7 The bibliography is extensive: see, among others, Grenfell and Hunt 1908: 204–206; Jacoby 1926: 9 stresses that P gives the correct view and adds the following comment well worth quoting: ‘das ist wichtig, weil man P so häufig als ‘Spartanerfreund’ bezeichnet hat’ (‘that is important, because P has so often been described as “friend of Sparta”’). Compare Cartledge 1987: 290. Urban 1991: 47–48 considers P’s version far superior to Xenophon’s ‘ziemlich plumpen, monokausalen Erklärung’ (‘rather clumsy single-cause explanation’); McKechnie and Kern 1988: 135; Lendon 1989: 300–313 defends P’s sound judgement against the criticism of Bruce 1967: 11.