

Xenophon, *The Battle of Cunaxa*
(*Anabasis* 1.8 with omissions)

In his Anabasis Xenophon describes the story of ten thousand Greek mercenaries (of which he was one) who were recruited by the Persian Cyrus in an attempt to overthrow and replace his brother Artaxerxes, the king of Persia. The later books describe the long march which the Greeks had to make to return home after being left stranded in Mesopotamia following the battle of Cunaxa in which Cyrus had been killed. This section describes the immediate build-up to that battle and the narration of the fighting culminating in the death of their leader and employer, Cyrus.

And now it was around the time the market falls and the stopping-place was nearby where Cyrus was intending to take a break, when Pategyas, a Persian man among the trusted attendants of Cyrus, appeared ahead riding at full speed on his horse which was sweating, and he was immediately shouting to all whom he met both in Persian and in Greek that (5) the king was approaching with a great army as if prepared for battle. Then indeed there arose great confusion: for straightaway the Greeks, and in fact everyone, were thinking that he would attack them when they were in disarray; Cyrus after leaping down from his chariot put on his breastplate, and having mounted his horse (10) he took his javelins into his hands, and began ordering all the others to put on their armour and each to get into his own position. Then indeed with great haste they began to get into line, Clearchus holding the right side of the wing next to the river Euphrates, Proxenus coming next, the others after him, and Menon held the left (15) wing of the Greek army. Of the Persian army, up to a thousand Paphlagonian cavalry took up position on the right beside Clearchus together with the Greek light-armed troops, and on the left both Ariaeus, Cyrus' cavalry commander, and the rest of the Persian forces. And Cyrus and his cavalry, about six hundred, were armed themselves with breastplates and (20) thigh-guards and helmets, all except Cyrus (in contrast Cyrus went into the battle with his head unprotected). And all the horses which were with Cyrus had both frontlets and breastplates; and the cavalymen also had Greek sabres.

And now it was the middle of the day and the enemy were not yet visible (25); but when it was becoming afternoon, a cloud of dust appeared just like a white cloud, and some time later like a darkness, stretching far in the plain.

However, as to what Cyrus said when he summoned the Greeks and was encouraging them to put up with the shouting of the barbarians, he was mistaken in this (30): for they were approaching not with shouting, but in silence and calmly as much as possible, in step and slowly. And meanwhile Cyrus himself riding along with Pigres the interpreter and three or four others was shouting to Clearchus to lead his army against the centre of the enemy, on the grounds that the king was there; 'And if we win in this area,' he said (35), 'we have accomplished everything.' But Clearchus, although he saw the dense mass in the centre and heard from Cyrus that the king was beyond the left wing (for the king was so superior in numbers that although occupying the centre of his forces, he was beyond the left wing of Cyrus), nevertheless Clearchus was unwilling to draw away the right wing from the river, fearing that (40) he would be surrounded on both sides, and he replied to Cyrus that it was his

concern that all should go well. And at this critical moment the Persian army was advancing in unison, but the Greek one, still remaining in the same place, was being drawn up from those still moving forward. And Cyrus (45) riding along not too near to the army itself, looking in both directions, was surveying both the enemy and his own forces. And after spotting him from the Greek army, Xenophon the Athenian, after riding up to meet him, asked if he was issuing any order; and he, after halting, said and ordered him to tell (50) everyone that both the omens were favourable and the sacrificial victims were favourable. And while saying this, he heard a noise going through the ranks, and he asked what the noise was. And Clearchus said that a watchword was now being passed along for a second time. And Cyrus wondered who was ordering it and asked what the watchword was (55). And he replied: 'Zeus the Saviour and Victory'. And Cyrus, after hearing it, said, 'Very well, I accept it, and let it be this.' And after saying this, he began to ride off into his own position. And the two phalanxes were now not three or four stades apart from each other, when the Greeks were beginning to sing the paean and were beginning to go to meet the enemy. And when (60), as they advanced, part of the phalanx was surging forward, the part that was left behind began to charge at a run; and at the same time, they all uttered the very sort of cry which they scream to Enyalios, and they all began to charge. And some say that they also pounded with their shields against their spears causing fear in the horses. And before they came within bow-shot, the Persians fell back (65) and fled. And then indeed the Greeks began to pursue at full speed, and they were shouting to each other not to charge at a run, but to follow in good order. And as for the chariots, some were hurtling through the enemy themselves, but others also through the Greeks, empty of drivers. And the Greeks whenever they saw them ahead (70), they would stand apart; and there was one man who was even caught stunned as if on a race-track: and they said, however, that neither did this man suffer anything, nor did any other of the Greeks in this battle suffer anything, except that someone was said to have been shot on the left wing. And Cyrus seeing that the Greeks were defeating and pursuing the section opposite them (75), being delighted and already being worshiped as king by those around him, not even so was he induced to pursue, but keeping the squadron of the six hundred cavalymen with him in close formation he was concerned about what the king would do: for he knew that he held the centre of the Persian army (80). Indeed, all the commanders of the barbarians lead holding the centre of their men, thinking in this way both that they are in the safest position, if their strength is on both sides, and that if they want to issue some order, their army would hear it in half the time. And the king, at that time as well, although he held the centre of his army, nevertheless (85) came to be beyond the left wing of Cyrus. But since no one directly opposite was fighting him nor those who were drawn up in front of him, he began to wheel around with a view to an encirclement. Then indeed Cyrus, fearing that Artaxerxes coming behind him might cut down the Greek army, rode directly at him; and after attacking with his six hundred he defeated those (90) drawn up in front of the king and turned the six thousand to flight, and he is said to have personally killed with his own hand Artagereses, their commander. And when the rout happened, also the six hundred of Cyrus were scattered after rushing off in pursuit, except that very few were left behind with him (95), mainly his so-called table-companions. And while he was with these he caught sight of the king and the mass of men around him; and at once he did not hold back, but saying 'I see the man', he began to charge at him and struck him in the chest and wounded him through the breastplate, so Ctesias the doctor says, and he claims that he himself treated the (100) wound. But, as he was striking him, someone hit Cyrus hard with a javelin beneath

his eye; and there, as they fought, the king and Cyrus and those around them on either side, Ctesias says how many of those around the king were killed; for he was with him; and both Cyrus himself was killed and the eight bravest of those around (105) him lay fallen on top of him. And it is said that Artapates, the most loyal to him of his sceptre-bearers, when he saw that Cyrus had fallen, after leaping down from his horse threw himself upon him. And some say that the king ordered someone to slaughter him over Cyrus, but others that he slew himself (110) after drawing his dagger; for he had a gold one. And he also wore a necklace and bracelets and other jewellery just like the noblest of the Persians: for he had been honoured by Cyrus for his goodwill and loyalty.