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Divinatory Sacrifice (*Hiera*) and Divine Approval in Xenophon's *Anabasis*

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Abstract

Xenophon's *Anabasis* is not merely a military expedition narrative but also a unique source that encompasses numerous cultural and religious motifs of ancient Greece. Various rituals, such as oaths, purifications, and banquets, are present within the dramatic structure of the text; yet, it is the sacrificial rituals that hold the utmost prominence. Sacrifice, particularly the offering of sacrifice for divine consultation and approval (divination), played a vital role in religious, political, and cultural life of ancient Greece as well as in its military tradition. This study examines the divinatory sacrifices offered in the *Anabasis* to obtain the gods' counsel and approval, situating them within the context of the Greek military and war tradition. Furthermore, it will bring to light not only their religious and strategic functions but also their place and significance within the dramatic structure of the text. To this end, the first part of the study will focus on the concepts of *thysia* and *hiera* within the broader sacrificial terminology of ancient Greece, and in this context, the place and significance of divinatory sacrifices in the military tradition will be discussed. In the second part, the divinatory sacrifices in the *Anabasis* will be analyzed in the context of public sacrifices, while in the third part, they will be examined in the context of private sacrifices. The entirety of the seven-book work is studied through the framework of the contexts in which divinatory sacrifices are offered, with particular attention to fundamental questions such as the purpose and timing of the sacrifice, by whom it was performed, and to which god or gods it was dedicated.

Keywords Anabasis · Sacrifice · Divination · Hiera · Thysia

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Introduction

*"And if the soldiers perceive that their commander possesses the knowledge to marshal his forces and the power to make such preparations as would render them superior to their foes; and if, moreover, they are persuaded that he would never lead them against the enemy at random, nor without the sanction of the gods, nor in defiance of the sacred sacrifices (**ta hiera**), then all these things combine to make the governed more trusting, more obedient, and more readily persuaded by their leader."*

(Xen. *Eq. mag.* 6.6.1-6)

Xenophon's *Anabasis* is one of the most important sources reflecting the cultural, religious, and particularly military traditions and warfare culture of ancient Greece (Bowden, 2004, pp. 229-230). As noted by Parker (2009, p. 299), Xenophon's works are among the most informative ancient sources on the various forms of military sacrifice. Indeed, in the *Anabasis*, divinatory sacrifices, banquets and festivals, oaths ratifying alliances with barbarians, as well as votive and victory offerings constitute a central component of the text's dramatic structure.

However, the present study is limited to sacrifices performed specifically for divination—that is, sacrifices offered to obtain the gods' counsel and approval regarding a decision to be made or an action to be undertaken (*hiera* and *thysia*). In contrast, the *sphagia*, which can in one sense be considered a divinatory sacrifice but in many other respects diverges radically from *hiera* and *thysia* (for example, the participants do not consume the flesh of the sacrifice and the internal organs are not burned on an altar), falls outside the scope of this study.[1]

In this study, the scenes featuring divinatory sacrifices are examined within the context of ancient Greek military traditions, focusing on the function of sacrifice as a means of seeking divine will and approval in determining commanders' decisions and, consequently, the army's overall strategy. Furthermore, the study explores whether the divinatory sacrifices in the *Anabasis* served functions beyond boosting soldiers' morale and legitimizing military strategy, and whether the omens derived from the sacrifices directly influenced the commanders' strategic decisions.

The study is structured around the following research questions:

At what points in the *Anabasis* were the divinatory sacrifices offered?

Who performed these sacrificial rituals?

To which gods were the sacrifices dedicated?

What sacrificial omens were used for divination, and by whom and how were they interpreted?

What is the role and significance of these sacrifices within the dramatic structure of the work?

Do the ritual details observed in the Homeric sacrificial scenes also appear in Xenophon?

While this study builds upon previous research on this subject, it complements existing scholarship by focusing specifically on the place of divinatory sacrifices within the dramatic structure of the *Anabasis*.[2]

Divinatory sacrifices performed by seers or commanders prior to critical decisions that directly affected the entire army—such as organizing a campaign, engaging in battle, determining the route of advance, concluding alliances, or

[1] For battlefield sacrifices (*sphagia*) in ancient Greece, see Harrison, 1922, p. 65; Jameson, 2003; Pritchett, 1979; Seaford, 2017.

[2] Pritchett's five-volume *The Greek State at War* (1968–1991), which examines the practice of warfare in ancient Greece in great detail, remains one of the most comprehensive studies in this field. In this context, I frequently drew upon Pritchett's works (1971, 1991) in this study. Part III: *Religion* (1979), in which the author systematically analyzes the religious rituals performed by Greek poleis before, during, and after warfare through literary sources, archaeological evidence, and epigraphic data, served as a primary reference for my research. Jameson's (2003) article, *"Sacrifice Before Battle,"* focuses on the types of sacrifices offered before battle in ancient Greece, their modes of performance, their representation in Greek literature and mythology, and their social and religious functions. In addition, I frequently drew upon Parker's (2009) article, *"Sacrifice and Battle,"* in which he examines the structure and function of pre-battle sacrificial rituals in ancient Greece, their historical development, and their relationship to military behavior, morale, and political authority, evaluating the significance of these rituals in a community preparing for war from both religious and strategic perspectives. Haywood's (2016) study, "Divine Narratives in Xenophon's Anabasis," also constitutes one of the primary sources utilized in my research. It examines the function of divine elements within the narrative, the relationship established between the narrator and the character Xenophon, and their impact on Xenophon's leadership, religious attitude, and character development.

conducting raids to secure provisions—are examined under the heading "Divinatory Sacrifices in the Public Sphere." These sacrifices were intended to secure the consent of both the gods and the community, thereby conferring legitimacy upon collective military action. Indeed, it can be argued that Xenophon endowed the army with a symbolic significance, granting it a polis-like identity; the various military identities within the army represented the Greek people as a whole, and in this context, the army functioned almost as a Panhellenic *polis* (Yarlıgaş, 2011, p. 14). Zaidman and Pantel (1992) have shown that religious acts in the polis were inseparable from civic identity and collective legitimacy. In this sense, Xenophon's sacrificial scenes in the *Anabasis* function as public performances of unity and divine sanction within a community under stress.

Divinatory sacrifices offered prior to the personal decisions of characters in the *Anabasis*, intended to secure individual success and protection, assume responsibility, or confer ritual legitimacy upon the decisions made, are examined under the heading "Divinatory Sacrifices in the Private Sphere."

Divinatory Sacrifices in the Military Tradition of Ancient Greece

In the Greek world, sacrifice was not merely a form of religious worship but a foundational element of the social, political, and cultural order. Detienne and Vernant (2020, p. 13) emphasize that the Greeks placed sacrifice at the center of both dietary practices and politico-religious thought, stressing that the sacrifice itself was the most important act in political religion.[3]

Sacrificial rituals were performed in both private and public contexts in ancient Greece for various purposes, including communication with the gods, protection from harm, offerings of gratitude and atonement, divine guidance for the future through divination, and the confirmation of oaths (Bonnechere 2007a; Burkert 1985; Flower 2016). Sacrifice is the most fundamental ritual at the heart of public and private life (Loraux, 1981, p. 615). It was central to civic assemblies, periods of war and peace, treaties with other city-states or enemies, public festivals, and the establishment of colonial settlements (*apoikiai*); it was also present in virtually every aspect of citizens' daily lives, especially in rites of passage such as birth, coming-of-age,[4] marriage,[5] and death.

Indeed, in ancient Greece, a common expression used to curse someone was "may you offer no sacrifice!" This was considered the gravest curse, since sacrifice established a direct channel of communication between humans and the gods, and to be deprived of it meant the complete severance of contact with the divine (Parker, 2011, p. 133). Consequently, anyone who was denied the right to offer sacrifices, either individually or on behalf of a city, was also deprived of the political rights necessary to participate in prestigious competitions, such as the Olympic Games, or in assemblies that brought together many cities around temple (Detienne & Vernant, 2020, p. 12).

Sacrificial offerings displayed a rich variety, ranging from animal sacrifices—primarily sheep, goats, and cattle—to plant-based offerings[6] such as grain, bread, and fruit, depending on the scope and content of the ritual.[7] Specific portions of animal sacrifices were burned and offered to the gods, while the remaining meat was communally consumed. This practice simultaneously symbolized participation in the divine order and reinforced social solidarity, thereby ensuring the ritual reproduction of the divine bond and communal cohesion (Loraux, 1981, p. 615).

In this respect, sacrifice was a fundamental instrument that supported and safeguarded the functioning of the polis, which transcended individual piety. As a constitutive ritual intertwining religious, social, and political life, sacrifice

[3] In ancient Greece, sacrifice should not be regarded merely as a phenomenon or ritual confined to the religious sphere, for the religious order was invariably interwoven with the social and political order in the city-states. (Loraux, 1981, p. 615).

[4] On initiation rituals and sacrifice see Burkert, 1983, p. 65.

[5] See Seaford, 1994, pp. 30-73.

[6] For detailed information on the Greek military tradition of dedicating a portion of war booty, or valuable military equipment such as arms and armour, to temples that is, military votive practices performed outside the context of animal sacrifice see Jackson, 2003, pp. 228-249.

[7] In the context of sacrificial animal species in ancient Greece and animal sacrifice, vegetal and liquid offerings (libations, blood sacrifices), and other types of sacrificial offerings, see Burkert, 1985, pp. 55–73.

served to reinforce both the bond with the divine and collective identity through the portion offered to the gods and the communal sharing of the sacrificial meal.

Sacrifice served a similar function in the military.[8] The *Anabasis* is presented not only as a means of seeking divine protection or ensuring victory or as a tool for maintaining army discipline and morale but also as a context in which the collective identity among the soldiers in the phalanx was affirmed and reinforced (Gray, 2011; Flower, 2012).

In ancient Greece, a highly prevalent ritual practice was to consult the gods regarding an intended action and seek their approval by offering a sacrifice; divination was then performed by examining the entrails or movements of the sacrificial animal (Johnston, 2008, p. 3).[9] In the Classical period, the sacrificial signs were always inspected in public sacrifices, and many sacrifices were primarily performed for divination (Parker, 2011, p. 133).

Although sacrificial divination was a ritual frequently practiced in private life, it was particularly prominent in the military context (Flower, 2008, p.155; Pritchett, 1979, pp. 48-83). Xenophon indeed emphasized that no one but the gods could foresee what was to come on a battlefield full of enemy ambushes; yet he also underlined that the gods granted advance signs of future events to those they favored, through sanctuaries, bird omens, oracles, and dreams (Xen. *Eg. mag*. 9.7.1–9.9.5).[10] Military sacrifices were not merely a religious ritual for the participants but also a tangible expression of the effort to comprehend fate and the will of the gods on the battlefield.[11] Pritchett (1979, p. 3) emphasized that sacrificial acts, the omens that arose from them or appeared in various other forms, and their interpretations (oracles/divinations) were recurring motifs in narratives of Greek historians, and that these elements constituted an integral and essential part of Greek life. At the same time, military sacrifices conveyed the desire to secure divine protection and appease the wrath of the gods, while also serving to raise the morale of the soldiers and situate the expectation of victory within a ritual framework. Ancient sources provide a rich repertoire illustrating the functions of sacrifice in the military sphere.[12] Indeed, warfare and animal sacrifice were fundamentally interconnected in Archaic and Classical Greece. No armed conflict between poleis took place without the performance of animal sacrifices (Dillon, 2008, p. 235). In the *Anabasis*, which forms the focus of my study, Xenophon repeatedly refers to the sacrifices made by the army throughout the campaign and demonstrates with numerous examples that the army did not advance without receiving favorable omens.

In the *Anabasis*, a narrative of warfare, sacrificial divination[13] played a decisive role in all vital decisions made by the commanders. In sharp contrast, in the Iliad, another war narrative, divination based on animal sacrifices or other signs appears to have played no such role (Parker, 2009, p. 300). In other words, Homer's commanders neither offered sacrifices for the purpose of divination before engaging in battle nor made decisions during the conflict on the basis of omens obtained through animal sacrifices, dreams, or other means. R. Parker, who examines the historical development of sacrificial rituals in ancient Greece, also emphasizes that in Homer's works, no omens were sought before the army engaged in battle; although entrail divination was occasionally performed for the purpose of prophecy, these practices served no military function (Parker, 2009, p. 300).

[8] Pritchett (1979) provides an extensive discussion of the function of sacrifice within the military practices of the Greek polis.

[9] For a detailed account of divination in ancient Greece, see Bonnechere, 2007b, pp. 145-159; Johnston, 2008.

[10] Xenophon emphasized that commanders would be forewarned by the gods through divinatory signs when facing the enemy, provided they were men who honored the gods not only in times of distress but also in times of prosperity by offering sacrifices (provided they were men who honored the gods not only in times of distress but also in times of prosperity by offering sacrifices, would be forewarned by the gods through divinatory signs when facing the enemy (Xen. *Eg. mag*. 3.1, 6. 6, 7.1, 9.7–9).

[11] In ancient Greece, the rules of warfare were grounded in a religious foundation, and their regulation was entrusted to the authority of the divine sphere. These rules were associated with rituals such as seeking the approval of the gods before engaging the enemy, expressing gratitude after victory, and honoring those who had fallen in battle. On this subject, see Bettalli, 2012, pp. 225–226.

[12] On this subject, see Pritchett,1979. This work is exceptionally comprehensive, encompassing not only literary sources but also a wealth of epigraphic and archaeological evidence.

[13] For a detailed study of the meaning, practices, and epistemological value of divination in ancient Greece and Rome, as well as rich bibliography of recent major works on the subject, see Addey, 2022a, pp. 1–29; Addey, 2022b; and Flower, 2008, pp. 104-131. For discussions of divination and the role of seers in the military tradition, see Flower, 2008, pp. 153-187; Pritchett, 1979.

However, by the Classical period, the situation had fundamentally changed.[14] Numerous ancient sources,[15] foremost among them the works of Xenophon, report that in the Classical period and afterward, commanders in the Greek army performed sacrifices before battle and before setting out from the camp during a campaign; the army would not advance until auspicious signs were obtained if the sacrifices produced unfavorable omens.[16] In Archaic and Classical Greece, every armed conflict in which hoplites fell and human blood was shed began with the spilling of blood through animal sacrifice. In this context, setting aside routine sacrificial rituals such as those performed during festivals, war constituted one of the principal, if not the primary, occasions in Greek religion in which sacrifice was structured and consistently ritualized (Dillon, 2008, pp. 235–251). In military sacrifices, there was also the desire to establish favorable relations with the gods before a campaign, thereby securing their continued support during the expedition, achieving victory, and ultimately returning home safely (Jameson, 2003, p. 209).

Using the example of Sparta, R. Parker (2009, p. 299) identifies six contexts in which divinatory sacrifices—capable of preventing or delaying a planned action if the omens were unfavorable—were regularly performed in the ancient Greek army. Accordingly, the following divinatory sacrifices were performed:

1. Before the king commanding the army, departed from his home.
2. Before the army crossed the state borders.
3. Before leaving the camp each morning while in enemy territory (including expeditions for foraging, which can be considered in this context).
4. Before crossing a river.
5. Before engaging the enemy in battle.

The author notes that sacrifices could also be offered in special circumstances, such as the founding of a colony or the formation of an alliance, and that various types of divination were employed in these contexts. In this regard, Xenophon is seen to have offered a divinatory sacrifice at Sinope to consult the gods on whether or not to establish a colony.

Before turning to the sacrificial scenes in the *Anabasis*, it is appropriate to provide a brief overview of the extensive sacrificial terminology of ancient Greece, particularly in the context of *thysia* and *hiera*.

Detienne and Vernant (2020, p. 49) emphasize that in ancient Greek, no term exists for the mere killing of an animal other than those that explicitly indicate the act is offered to the gods or done on behalf of the gods. In this context, the most common Greek term for killing an animal on behalf of a god is *thuein*, which shares its root with the Latin words *fumus* "smoke" and *thus*/*thuris* "incense" (Naiden, 2013, p. vii). In Ancient Greek *thuein* literally means "*to produce smoke*".[17]

Indeed, the term *thysia*, denoting the sacrificial ritual, shares the root *thu-* with *thuos*,[18] meaning "incense, burnt sacrifice " which also carries the connotation of "perceiving a scent." In effect, the gods are pleased by the aromas of offerings burned on the altars (Carastro, 2012, p. 607). In this context, the term *thysia*, derived from the verb *thuō*, broadly refers to sacrificial rituals, regardless of whether blood is shed (Detienne & Vernant, 2020, p. 49). Altars were furnished not only with sacrificial animals but also with offerings such as incense, small sweets, and cakes intended to be burned.

[14] Parker (2009) linked the absence of divinatory consultation sacrifices and other forms of divination in Homer to the transition to the hoplite system in the Archaic period, parallel to the development of the polis. He further concludes that although the sacrificial and other divinatory elements that played a vital role in the army's decisions in Xenophon varied between cities, they persisted until the Hellenistic period and did not entirely disappear.

[15] Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.18, 7.4.30; Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.49; *Diod. Sic.* 13.97.5, 7; *Thuc.* 6.69.2; Plut. *Nic.* 25.1.

[16] For detailed information on this subject, see Pritchett (1979).

[17] See *Lewis & Short*, 1879, s.v. *fumus*, *thus*; see also *incensum.*

[18] See *LSJ*, s.v θύος.

When *thysia* denotes a blood sacrifice, the term encompasses not only the ritual killing of the animal but also the practice whereby a portion is burned on the altar and offered to the gods, while the remainder is distributed among and consumed by the participants (Carastro, 2012, p. 607). In this context, as emphasized by Detienne and Vernant (2020, p. 49), the verb *thuō*,[19] which serves as the general term encompassing the entirety of the "sacrificial ritual," conveys both the ritual killing of an animal and the subsequent consumption of the meat feast, while also preserving the memory of the offerings burned and the fragrant smoke (Ekroth, 2019, p. 235; Peirce, 1993, p. 221). Concurrently, the term is closely related to words meaning "to banquet" or "to dine well."

In ancient Greek, the term *hiera*, derived from the verb *hiereuō*,[20] meaning "to offer a sacrifice and to slaughter an animal for a feast," refers to sacrificial animals and offerings,[21] that is, votive gifts; to internal organs such as the liver, spleen, kidney, and intestines used for divination, as well as to the act of divination itself;[22] and, more generally, to the sacred rituals[23] of the cult (Carastro, 2012, p. 607; Flower, 2016, p. 87; Jameson, 2003, p. 200). The verb *hiereuō* also denotes the act of slaughtering carried out by the person performing the sacrifice. Indeed, the term *hiereion*, derived from *hiereuō*, in Homer refers both to sacrificial and to butchered animals.[24] In this context, *hiereion* evokes not only the meaning of the sacrificial victim whose meat is to be consumed but also the acts of sacrifice and butchery (Detienne & Vernant, 2020, p. 49).[25] As Bonnechere (2007a) and Parker (1996) remind us, Greek sacrificial rituals were as much about constructing social and epistemic order as about pleasing the gods. The divinatory sacrifices in the *Anabasis* thus represent a critical intersection of faith, pragmatism, and narrative coherence, linking Xenophon's text to broader patterns in Greek religious thought.

Publicly Performed Divinatory Sacrifices

The first sacrifice considered under the heading of public divinatory sacrifices in the *Anabasis* is, in fact, not explicitly mentioned in the text. In the first book, Xenophon discusses the tension between Artaxerxes, who ascended the throne after the death of Darius, and the young Cyrus, the latter's ostensible preparations for a major campaign against the Pisidians (who were in reality directed against Artaxerxes), the Greek mercenaries participating in the campaign, and the commanders, most of whom were friends of Cyrus. Interestingly, he remains silent regarding the divinatory sacrifices, customary before the army set out on the campaign.

However, this does not imply that Cyrus and the other Greek commanders did not offer divinatory sacrifices before setting out on the campaign. It is highly unlikely that Cyrus would have embarked on such a large and risky expedition without sacrificing to the gods and consulting them regarding the possible outcomes of the campaign. Indeed, the scene in which the seer Silanus is described as having prophesied that the king would not attack within ten days before the battle of Cunaxa[26] supports this view and demonstrates that Cyrus offered a divinatory sacrifice prior to the engagement.[27] Accordingly, Cyrus offered two sacrifices: a battle-line sacrifice (*sphagia*) and a regular divinatory sacrifice

[19] In the surviving ancient sources, the verb θύω occurs 7,473 times, while the term θυσία appears 4,898 times in these senses, clearly demonstrating that θύω is the most frequently used Greek word concerning sacrifice and sacrificial rituals. For further reference, please see https://www.perseus.tufts.edu. Accessed September 01, 2025.

[20] The verb ἱερεύω meaning "to offer a sacrifice and to slaughter an animal for a feast," occurs 52 times in the surviving ancient sources, more than 27 of which are in Homer. For further reference, please see https://www.perseus.tufts.edu. Accessed September 01, 2025.

[21] See Hom. *Il.* 1.147, 10.571, 23.207; *Od.* 16.184; Hes. *Op.* 336; *Hdt.* 1.59.6; 2.63.3, 8.54.6; Aesch. *Sept.* 1011; Soph. *Phil.* 1033.

[22] *Hdt.* 5.44.12; Xen. *An.* 1.8.15.4; 2.2.3.3.

[23] See *Hdt.* 1.172.9 and 4.33.3.

[24] See Hom. *Il.* 22.159; *Od.* 14.94, 14.250; *Thuc.*1.126.6.5; Xen. *Cyr.* 1.4.17; *OGI* 214. 62.

[25] Parker notes that in the Greek sacrificial context, there is no equivalent of the Latin *victima*, which has been translated into modern languages as "victim" to denote the sacrificial animal. The Greek term ἱερεῖον he observes, refers only to the "object" upon which the priest (ἱερεύς) performs the ritual action (Parker, 2011, p. 129).

[26] See Anderson, 1974, pp. 98-112.

[27] In the text, the participial form θυόμενος derived from the verb θύω, denotes the act of sacrificial offering (1.7.18–20). As noted above, Cyrus' sacrifice is referenced not within the narrative at the immediate moment of its performance but 11 days later. After advancing through Babylon, Cyrus conducted an

(*hiera*). In the scene immediately before the two armies engaged in battle, Xenophon records Cyrus instructing the entire army to be informed that "*ta hiera kala*[28]*, ta sphagia kala*" "the *hiera* are favorable, the *sphagia* are favorable" (1.8.15). This statement provides clear evidence that the Persian prince had performed divinatory sacrifices before the battle. The only instruction given by Cyrus to Xenophon before the battle was to inform everyone that all the sacrifices were favorable (Pritchett, 1979, p. 59). Moreover, Cyrus' army included a commander from Lacedaemon, Clearchus, along with Spartan units. Indeed, no Greek city in antiquity possessed a military tradition as deep-rooted and rigorous as that of Sparta. As Xenophon reports, when a campaign was decided in Sparta, the king who would lead it first offered sacrifices at his home to Zeus Agetor and to other deities associated with him. If the sacrificial signs were favorable, the officer carrying the fire would transport the altar's flame to the state borders. The king would then offer additional sacrifices to the two principal gods, Zeus and Athena, to confirm that divine approval persisted for the army's crossing of the border. If favorable signs were confirmed, the king would cross the border with his army and start the campaign.[29] In this context, Clearchus of Lacedaemon must have also offered sacrifices for the same purpose before joining Cyrus with his troops. Jameson (2003, p. 197) emphasizes that other Greek cities likely observed similar pre-battle divinatory sacrifices, albeit with some flexibility and in ways unique to their own traditions.

Although the traditional precampaign border-crossing sacrifices are not explicitly mentioned in the *Anabasis*, the divinatory sacrifices offered during the campaign are frequently mentioned. In this context, Greek commanders invariably offered sacrifices to consult the gods before making vital decisions regarding the army's fate, and that the signs obtained from these sacrifices (*ta hiera*) played a decisive role in shaping their strategy. One of these divinatory sacrifices—perhaps the most significant within the narrative—occurs in the scene where an envoy sent by the king, who considers himself the victor following the death of the young Cyrus, and Tissaphernes, arrives at the Greek camp. This divinatory sacrifice is pivotal, marking a turning point in the narrative. Following Cyrus' death, Artaxerxes issued an ultimatum to the Greek army, demanding that they lay down their arms and seek his mercy. In response, the Spartan commander Clearchus argued that disarming the victors was contrary to military tradition and instructed the other commanders to give the envoys the most appropriate reply before departing. During these discussions, one of his attendants summoned Clearchus to examine the sacrificial entrails (*ta hiera*).[30] This indicates that Clearchus offered a divinatory sacrifice before the envoys arrived. Indeed, the text further describes that, following the death of Cyrus, the Spartan commander consulted the gods to navigate the precarious situation faced by the Greeks and determine the army's strategy—that is, he performed a divinatory sacrifice.[31] The fact that an attendant summoned Clearchus to examine the sacrificial omens in this scene demonstrates that Greek commanders possessed the skill to interpret the sacrificed animals almost as if they were themselves seers. While there were seers[32] within the army, at such a crucial decision-making moment, Clearchus preferred to personally inspect the sacrificial omens (*ta hiera*) rather than leave the army's fate to the pronouncements of a seer.[33] Indeed, Xenophon (*An*. 5.6.29) notes that the seer was always present at the sacrificial site when the omens were interpreted. The sacrificial animal was slaughtered in *hiera* (divinatory)

inspection of the army and deployed it in battle formation at dawn, anticipating an attack by Artaxerxes. However, the king refrained from engaging and instead withdrew. In response, Cyrus summoned the seer Silanus and handsomely rewarded him. Since the ten-day period indicated by Silanus had elapsed without any hostile action, it was assumed that the king had abandoned the campaign. Accordingly, Cyrus and his forces departed from their battle formation and started a disordered march. However, this strategic misjudgment irrevocably altered Cyrus's fate and the Ten Thousand.

[28]Van Straten (1995, p.1) defines the expression *ta hiera kala* as follows "*ta hierà kala — 'the holy things are beautiful': in ancient Athens, this was the standard formula to acknowledge that the signs observed during the sacrifice of an animal had turned out to be favorable. It is usually translated rather freely as, for instance, 'good things have occurred in the sacrifice' or 'the omens are auspicious,' etc. However, in such translations, we lose something that is implicit in the word kala, that is, that the holy rites could be seen to be good and that there was something visually attractive about them.*"

[29]Xen. *Lac*. 13.2.1-5.1

[30]Xen. *An*. 2.1.9.1–10.1.

[31]In the text, the participial form θυόμενος derived from the verb θύω, is again used to describe the act of sacrifice.

[32]For comprehensive studies on divination and seers in ancient Greece, see Flower (2008) and Johnston (2008). For the role, functions, and significance of army seers in prebattle rituals, see Sina (2019).

[33]Xenophon reports that the elder Cyrus taught his son the art of divination. In this way, kings and commanders could remain vigilant against potential deceptions by seers, while also being able to interpret omens themselves in the absence of seers, without succumbing to helplessness (Xen. *Cyr*. 1.6.2).

ceremonies, and its internal organs—particularly the liver and the *splankhna* (comprising the kidneys, gallbladder, bladder, and possibly the heart)—were examined according to their appearance. Certain parts were cast into the fire, and the seers observed both their behavior and that of the fire itself (Pritchett, 1979, pp. 73–78). The text does not initially explain the sacrificial omens. However, Clearchus did not wish to assume full responsibility alone for interpreting the omens. Clearchus sought advice from Phalinus, a Greek who had arrived at the camp as the king's envoy, regarding the strategy the army should follow. However, Phalinus delivered an opinion directly contrary to what Clearchus expected, advising that the army lay down its arms. Indeed, the king had explicitly stated that if the Greek army remained in place, there would be peace, whereas if it withdrew or advanced, it would result in war. Clearchus sent the envoy away without giving a definitive answer and informed the other commanders that the divinatory sacrifice he had performed to decide whether to advance against the king had not produced favorable signs, but that this was entirely normal. The reason was that the Tigres River, which separated them from the enemy army, made it impossible for the army to cross without ships. Because the Greek army had no vessels at its disposal, crossing was not feasible. Moreover, the army's provisions were exhausted, and there was no nearby source from which to procure additional supplies. In his speech, Clearchus emphasized the deadlock they faced and noted that waiting was impossible under such circumstances. The atmosphere of despair that had settled over the army was dispelled by news of another divinatory sacrifice, which signaled that the gods had not abandoned them in foreign territory. Indeed, Clearchus explained that the sacrifice he had made regarding whether the army should join Cyrus' allies had produced many favorable omens (2.2.3–6). As is evident from the text, the divinatory sacrifices (likely three, given that multiple questions were posed) offered negative signs concerning whether the Greek soldiers should attack the king or remain in place, while providing positive omens indicating that the army should advance and join Cyrus' supporters. Thus, in accordance with the will of the gods, the Greek army regrouped and moved toward the forces of Ariaeus around midnight. In this section of the narrative, Xenophon presents Clearchus' decision based on the sacrificial omens with well-founded reasoning, framing it within a logical and justified context. In this way, any doubts regarding divine guidance among the other commanders and soldiers were preemptively dispelled.

A similar scene occurs while the army is waiting at Perinthos. This time, it is the Athenian Xenophon, not Clearchus, appears as the commander on stage. Aristarchus, the new governor of Byzantion, who prevented the Greek army from crossing from Perinthos by sea, summoned Xenophon under the pretense of holding a meeting to hand him over to Pharnabazus. Having narrowly escaped death by discovering the trap at the last moment, Xenophon returns to the camp. Since these events made it clear that Xenophon, as a commander, needed to find an alternative solution, he performed a divinatory sacrifice to ascertain the gods' will regarding the proposal of the Thracian king Seuthes—a proposal he had previously dismissed.[34] Given that Aristarchus possessed ships and had threatened to sink them should the army attempt to put them to sea, Xenophon did not consider it safe to try to move the army to Asia. On the other hand, leading the army to Chersonesus risked placing it under the authority of the local governor and confronting a severe shortage of provisions, as the region offered nothing in terms of supplies. Since Xenophon did not wish to trap the army in such a location and cause hardship for the soldiers, he performed a divinatory sacrifice regarding whether to approach Seuthes, which produced favorable omens indicating that they should go to Seuthes, thereby ensuring both his own and the army's security.[35] Subsequently, Xenophon, accompanied by a military delegation composed of trusted commanders and soldiers, moved under the cover of night to join Seuthes' forces (7.2.17–18). Thus, the Greek soldiers' efforts to return home were momentarily hindered by the divinatory sacrifice and the correct interpretation of its omens, yet the path toward their journey's end was shortened by one step.

In the *Anabasis*, divinatory sacrifices were invariably performed as a means of divine consultation and approval whenever a clash with the enemy was deemed inevitable during the army's march. One such sacrificial scene occurred before the unavoidable battle against the, Mossynoeci who refused to allow the Greek soldiers to pass through

[34] In the text, the verb ἐθύετο is used to indicate that Xenophon performed the sacrifice. Xen. *An*. 7.2.15.

[35] Here, Xenophon again uses the phrase τὰ ἱερὰ καλὰ to indicate the favorable nature of the sacrificial omens.

their territory by peaceful means. Xenophon reports that a divinatory sacrifice was performed before the planned engagement, and the army was organized for battle upon the favorable signs obtained from it (5.4.22–24).[36] The omens again proved reliable, and the Greek army defeated the enemy in the ensuing attack. In this context, having captured substantial supplies, the Ten Thousand continued their march, hosted in the territory of the allied Mossynoeci, and subsequently reached the lands of the Chalybes and then the Tibareni (5.5.1–2).

In the *Anabasis*, even when encamped in a specific region, commanders regularly performed divinatory sacrifices to determine whether the army should advance. When Xenophon's unit and the Arcadian contingents assembled at the port of Calpe, the Athenian commander performed a divinatory sacrifice the following day to decide on the army's movement (6.4.9–10).[37] The army had a pressing need for provisions, and at the same time, Xenophon wished to bury the Greek soldiers who had fallen in the battle with the Thracians five days earlier.[38] The sacrificial omens proved favorable, and the soldiers set out, burying most of their fallen comrades where they had fallen, and collecting those bodies lying in the middle of the road to inter them as elaborately as circumstances allowed. For those comrades they could not locate, a large monument was erected before returning to the camp (6.4.9–10).[39] Following these events, it appears that the commanders performed another divinatory sacrifice to determine whether the army should continue its advance (6.4.12–13). Xenophon announced to the entire army that the army had no choice but to march overland because they lacked ships, and because their provisions were exhausted, the commanders themselves would immediately perform a sacrifice. As the enemy began to show signs of boldness, he ordered the soldiers to prepare for battle (6.4.12–13).[40] The chief seer of the Ten Thousand, the Arcadian seer Arexion,[41] accompanied the commanders during the sacrificial rites (6.4.13). However, the omens obtained from the sacrifices regarding the movement of the army were not favorable. The commanders refrained from performing further sacrifices that day due to the unfavorable signs concerning the march (6.4.14).[42] In the Greek sacrificial tradition, no more than three sacrifices could be performed in a single day (Flower, 2016, p. 88). Although the text does not specify, the commanders likely performed sacrifices at least three times at such a critical decision-making juncture in the hope of obtaining favorable omens. Since the omens from the sacrifices proved unfavorable, the army did not advance that day (6.4.14).

In this section of the text, we encounter an accusation directed at Xenophon, claiming that he had purchased the seer responsible for interpreting the sacrifices (6.4.14–15). Some soldiers alleged that Xenophon had done so because he intended to establish a colony city. In response, Xenophon made it clear that the sacrificial ritual to be performed the following day would be open to the entire army, allowing anyone who wished to participate to do so, and that

[36] Here, Xenophon uses the verb θύσαντες to indicate the act of performing the sacrifice, and ἐκαλλιερήσαντο to express that the divinatory omens were favorable.

[37] Here, Xenophon uses the verb ἐθύετο to indicate the act of performing the sacrifice, while he employs the expression τὰ ἱερά ἐγένετο to convey that the divinations obtained through the sacrifice were favorable.

[38] In antiquity, the rules of warfare were grounded in religious principles, and their enforcement was believed to fall under the authority of the gods. The Greek tradition of war was also shaped within such religious frameworks, according to which soldiers were expected to show mercy to prisoners, the wounded, and slaves, but particular care was to be taken with the dead, who had to be properly honored—often with greater attention than that shown to the living (Bettalli, 2012, p. 225). In line with this understanding, Xenophon did not leave fallen soldiers exposed during the campaign; instead, the army buried the dead as thoroughly as circumstances permitted and even erected monumental tombs for comrades whose bodies could not be recovered.

[39] Burial of soldiers who fell in battle was of paramount importance, as Greek religious and martial traditions required commanders to show greater respect for the dead than for the wounded, prisoners, or slaves. Diodorus reports that the Athenian commanders were tried and executed upon their return to Athens following the Battle of Arginusae because they had failed to recover the dead from the battlefield (see Flower, 2008, pp. 167–168).

[40] In this passage, Xenophon employs a range of specific Greek terms to describe sacrificial actions and omens: he uses the verb θύω in the form θυσόμεθα to indicate the act of performing a sacrifice; inthe text, the commanders' act of sacrificing is indicated by ἐθύοντο, while the unfavorable outcome of the divinations following the sacrifice is expressed with the phrases partisip θυόμενοις and οὐκ ἐγίγνετο τὰ ἱερά. When Xenophon describes the gathering of all soldiers for the sacrificial ritual, he uses θυσία in the form τὴν θυσίαν for the sacrifice itself; τὰ ἱερά again denotes the sacrificial omens, and ἔθυε indicates performing the sacrifice. Later, the sacrificial omens are again referred to as τὰ ἱερά . In the subsequent section, Xenophon narrates that, although sacrifices were performed three times, the omens nevertheless remained unfavorable, as expressed in the phrase: θυομένῳ δὲ πάλιν εἰς τρὶς ἐπὶ τῇ ἀφόδῳ οὐκ ἐγίγνετο τὰ ἱερά. Thereafter, he again uses τὰ ἱερά to refer to omens (6.4.13.4–16. 2).

[41] See Roy, 1972, pp. 129-136.

[42] For further discussion, see Naiden, 2013, pp. 176–177.

if a seer were present among the participants, that person would also be able to interpret the omens (6.4.15–17).[43] During the sacrificial ritual attended by many soldiers, Xenophon performed three consecutive sacrifices, yet the omens proved unfavorable (6.4.15–17). The negative results regarding the army's departure considerably dampened the soldiers' morale, as the food supplies had been exhausted and no nearby market could provide provisions. In response, Xenophon informed the soldiers—who witnessed this themselves—that the omens regarding the journey had not been favorable, but that, given the scarcity of provisions, sacrifices should be offered solely to address this issue. One soldier remarked that it was appropriate for the omens concerning the journey to be unfavorable because he had incidentally learned that the governor of Byzantion, Cleandrus, was approaching with both trading and warships. Consequently, while everyone deemed it prudent to wait, they agreed that action was necessary to secure food. The above details in Xenophon's account to underscore that divine omens invariably indicated outcomes advantageous to the Greek soldiers. The text further shows that Xenophon subsequently performed three consecutive sacrifices specifically to obtain provisions (6.4.18–19).[44]

As the text indicates, when sacrifices are offered repeatedly to consult the gods on a particular matter and each time the outcome is unfavorable the commander must reconsider the question being posed. It is possible that an incorrect question was asked to the gods. Xenophon deemed it appropriate to reformulate the question. Nevertheless, the subsequent sacrifices still produced unfavorable signs (6.4.18–19). Even when some soldiers came to Xenophon's tent to report that they had entirely run out of provisions, he emphasized that he would not move the army unless the sacrificial omens proved favorable (6.4.19).[45]

In the military tradition of ancient Greece, one or more sacrifices could be offered to an army on land or at sea, as in the present case. However, decisions based on the outcomes of these sacrifices were made by a single individual—the commander-in-chief (Parker, 2009, p. 300).[46] The text emphasizes the motif of soldiers coming to Xenophon's tent, which not only illustrates the extent of the army's food shortage but also clearly attests to Xenophon's strong faith in the gods. This motif was likely deliberately inserted into the narrative by the author for this purpose (6.4.18–20). Moreover, the scene underscores the importance of divinatory sacrifices in determining the army's course of action.

The following day, Xenophon again performed divinatory sacrifices concerning the army's procurement of provisions. Since the outcome affected nearly all the soldiers, almost the entire army gathered around the sacrificial animal (6.4.20). The text does not explicitly state that the omens from the sacrifice were unfavorable. However, the subsequent emphasis that no animals remained for sacrifice indicates that this offering also produced inauspicious signs. A council was held following the sacrificial scene. During the meeting, Xenophon explained that the army would have to fight given the possibility that enemy forces had assembled. He suggested that if they leave the heavy baggage in a secure position, prepared for battle, and proceeded, the sacrifice's omens might turn favorable.[47] When the soldiers collectively insisted that the army must perform the sacrifice without delay, the army, having no small livestock left, purchased oxen yoked

[43] Pritchett (1979, p. 59) emphasized that because soldiers were in awe and imbued with a strong sense of religious devotion while formally observing the *hiera* (omens), generals sometimes wished for the army to witness the *hiera* (sacred sacrifices). He also reports that Polyainos (*Strat.* 4.3.14) notes how Alexander, after learning from the seers that the *hiera* were favorable, ordered that the sacrifices be displayed before the soldiers; this was done so that the soldiers could approach the impending danger with hope, relying not only on what they had heard but also on what they could see with their own eyes.

[44] Here, Xenophon again uses the verb θυέσθαι and ἐθύετο twice; once ἐθύοντο to indicate the act of sacrifice, and the words τὰ ἱερά twice and τῶν ἱερῶν once to refer to omens or divinatory signs obtained from sacrifice. In the following passage, when the entire army is described as gathering around the sacrificial animals, the word ἱερόν appears in the phrase περὶ τὰ ἱερά, meaning "the sacrificial animal" (6.4.18.1–22.3).

[45] Thucydides reports that when the sacrifices offered by the army during a border crossing proved unfavorable, the Spartans canceled the planned campaign (*Thuc.* 5.54.1.3-2.2; 55.3.1-4.1; 116.1.1-3). To provide an illustrative example, Thucydides reports that the Spartans canceled their planned campaign against Argolis because the sacrifices at the border crossings did not yield favorable omens (*Thuc.* 116.1.1-3): "τοῦ δ' ἐπιγιγνομένου χειμῶνος Λακεδαιμόνιοι μελλή-|σαντες ἐς τὴν Ἀργείαν στρατεύειν, ὡς αὐτοῖς τὰ διαβατήρια | [ἱερὰ ἐν τοῖς ὁρίοις] οὐκ ἐγίγνετο, ἀνεχώρησαν." Just as before the campaign, the army could only advance during the campaign if the sacrifices produced favorable omens.

[46] In Greek military tradition, when a unit separated from the main army, its commander acquired both the right and the duty to perform divinatory sacrifices independently (Parker 2009, p. 300). Xenophon's insistence that cavalry commanders, like the generals, should be sufficiently pious and must not lead their units on campaign contrary to the omens reflects this understanding. Cf. Xen. *Eg. mag.* 3.1, 6.6, 7.1, 9.7, 9.9; Xen. *Hell.* 4.1.22.

[47] The interplay between divinatory signs and the quotidian world constituted a foundational principle of Xenophon's argument: he posited that concrete, tactical adjustments could produce more auspicious omens (Anderson, 2022, p. 97).

to carts and offered them as sacrifices (6.4.20–23). Xenophon requested that the Arcadian Cleanor personally examine whether the omens from the sacrifice had changed; yet, the sacrifices yielded no favorable signs on that day as well (6.4.22).

In the continuation of the text, Xenophon's perspective reflects the principle that those who act against divine will and ignore the omens will suffer misfortune. Indeed, despite the unfavorable signs, the commander Neon, moved by the soldiers' pitiful condition caused by scarcity, announced that he knew of nearby villages where provisions could be obtained. He declared that he would lead anyone who wished to procure supplies, provided that they followed him.

Consequently, approximately two thousand soldiers set out to obtain provisions. However, once they entered the villages and dispersed in search of food, Pharnabazus' cavalry attacked the Greek soldiers, killing over five hundred. The remainder barely managed to escape and took refuge in the mountains. One of the surviving soldiers reported the situation to the army camp. This scene in *Anabasis* represents the only instance in which the soldiers acted contrary to the divine omens despite the unfavorable sacrificial signs.

Xenophon rescued soldiers who had been attacked by Pharnabazus' cavalry and returned to the army camp (6.4.25–26). Later that night, however, a small group of Bithynians assaulted the Greeks. Although no casualties occurred, the army, now compelled to move, set out at dawn the following morning toward a secure position without even taking breakfast. From the text's continuation, it is evident that Xenophon, at first light, performed a divinatory sacrifice to determine whether the army should continue its advance. The first sacrifice produced favorable signs this time. Moreover, toward the end of the ritual, the seer Arexion observed a hawk—a good omen—which reinforced the advisability of Xenophon initiating the march (6.5.2–3).[48] Thus, the army left behind those soldiers over forty-five who had been assigned to protect the populace, the slaves, and the other assets remaining in the camp and set out on their march. Another divinatory sacrifice related to the army's departure is recorded when Cleandrus, the governor of Byzantion, who had arrived at the Calpe Harbor with two warships, performed a sacrifice (6.6.35).[49] After Xenophon's intervention resolved the tensions between Cleandrus and the Greek army, Cleandrus conducted divinatory sacrifices concerning the army's departure. The text does not explicitly state the meaning of the omens obtained from these sacrifices; however, the subsequent narrative indicates that the sacrifices produced favorable signs (6.6.35–37).

In the *Anabasis*, it is also evident that the army offered divinatory sacrifices to the gods to discern their will and obtain their approval before launching a raid. One such sacrificial ritual occurred in the Tibareni territory. Upon reaching the Tibareni plains, the Greek soldiers observed that the local fortifications were weak and considered launching an attack to secure resources for the army. Consequently, they refused the friendship gifts sent by the Tibareni and requested that they be granted time until a formal meeting could be held. The term "holding a meeting" refers to the period required for the army to offer divinatory sacrifices and decide whether to carry out the planned raid according to the *hiera.* The central question is: What do the gods consider launching raid against a land whose inhabitants seek friendship and have offered gifts in that context? Is such an expedition permitted? The text indicates that the Greek army offered multiple sacrifices for this purpose. However, all the omens obtained from the sacrifices were unfavorable, and the priests unanimously reported that the gods categorically did not approve of such a war. Consequently, the army —albeit reluctantly—was compelled to accept Tibareni's gifts of friendship and abandon the planned raid (5.5.2–4).[50] The text's emphasis on the multiple sacrifices underscores the soldiers' persistent desire to perform the raid. Clearly, when the gods did not send the signs they sought, the army repeatedly offered sacrifices, yet upon receiving the same negative outcome, they were ultimately forced to submit to the divine decision.

[48] Here (6.5.2.1–3), the act of sacrificing is expressed with the form ἐθύετο of the verb θύω the sacrificial animal specifically, the victim is referred to by the word ἱερείου, and the omens or signs obtained from the sacrifice are indicated by τὰ ἱερὰ.

[49] In this instance, the verb ἐθύετο is used to indicate the act of sacrifice.

[50] The act of sacrifice is expressed in this passage by ἐθύετο and the participle καταθυσάντων.

Another divinatory sacrifice was performed while the army was encamped at Pergamon to determine the will of the gods regarding plunder. When the Athenian commander Xenophon heard that he could obtain a substantial booty from a very wealthy Persian named Asidates living in the region, he conducted a sacrificial ritual, which included the seer Basias of Elis' participation. The seer reported that the sacrifice produced highly favorable signs and, in this context, that seizing Asidates' possessions would be extremely easy (7.8.10–11).[51] Thereupon, Xenophon, intending to extend favors to trusted army companions, took them along after the evening meal and set out. However, the undertaking proved far more difficult than anticipated. After arduous struggles, Xenophon and his companions managed to escape with difficulty, taking around 200 slaves and sufficient small livestock for the sacrificial ritual (7.8.11–20). The prophecy did not fully come to pass. Consequently, Xenophon performed another divinatory sacrifice the following day and subsequently mobilized the entire army. This time, the plundering operation was successful, and all of Asidates' possessions, including himself and his wife, were seized (7.8.22–23).[52]

In the *Anabasis*, sacrificial rites performed for divinatory purposes also appear to have played a decisive role in determining the direction the army would take. Encamped on a plain along the Tigris River, the army was compelled to continue its march despite arduous engagements with the barbarians, challenging geographical conditions, shortages of provisions, and numerous other difficulties. Surrounding them were towering mountains on one side and an immense, seemingly bottomless river on the other. As the soldiers were overcome with great despair, the commanders consulted with guides regarding the direction the army should follow.[53] Upon concluding that they were compelled to follow the route leading to the Carduchians' territory, the commanders performed a divinatory sacrifice immediately before the army's march to consult the gods and obtain their approval regarding whether the decision would be beneficial for the army.[54] As previously noted, it was a military custom in the ancient Greek world to conduct sacrificial rituals before the army's mobilization to secure divine protection and seek the gods' counsel. Indeed, sacrifices were offered before every river or sea crossing, and such crossings were undertaken only after favorable omens had been received (Parker, 2009, p. 300).

Divinatory Sacrifices Performed in the Personal Sphere

In the *Anabasis*, it is evident that commanders offered divinatory sacrifices before attending to their personal matters to secure individual success, ensure protection, or legitimize a decision within a ritual framework. The first such divinatory sacrifice to be considered here occurs in the scene where Xenophon is offered the position of sole commander of the army. The soldiers proposed that the Athenian commander assume sole leadership of the army. As is clear from the text, Xenophon desired to undertake this role because it would elevate his status in the eyes of his companions and because his renown at home would increase once the news became known. However, while seeking greater fame, he was also aware of the potential risk of losing the reputation he already possessed. Thus, he concluded that the most prudent course of action was to consult the gods. Thereupon, Xenophon offered two sacrifices to King Zeus[55] following the guidance of the god Apollo[56] (6.1.22–25).[57] While performing the sacrifices, Xenophon reflected on the dream he had

[51] Here, the act of sacrifice appears as ἐθύετο, while the favorable outcome of the omens is expressed as κάλλιστα εἴη τὰ ἱερά.

[52] In the text, the verb θύω meaning "to sacrifice, is also used twice in its participial forms: θυσάμενος and τεθυμένος.

[53] Accordingly, the routes leading south were directed toward Babylon and Media; those heading east toward Susa and Ecbatana; the road extending west across the river toward Lydia and Ionia; and the route turning north led to the Karduchians, a fiercely warlike people dwelling in the mountains, whom even the Persian king could not subdue. The commanders did not reveal any intention regarding the direction they wished to take to the guides. However, the captives concluded that they were compelled to follow the route toward the Karduchians' territory, reasoning that if they reached Armenia, they would be able to proceed more easily to any destination they desired (3.5.15-18).

[54] In this passage, Xenophon employs the verb θύω in the form ἐθύσαντο to describe the act of sacrifice (3.5.18.1).

[55] In turn, Zeus delivered an oracle to Xenophon through a dream. Indeed, Xenophon believes that King Zeus sent him the dream he experienced at the beginning of the text, indicating that he should take part in the joint administration of the army. In this scene, Xenophon essentially interprets his dream as a oneirokritēs. Individuals who interpreted dreams were given this title in ancient Greece (Johnston, 2008, p. 7). The practice of deriving oracular meaning through the interpretation of dreams is known as oneiromanteia (Carastro, 2012, p. 611).

[56] Before joining the young Cyrus, Xenophon visited Delphi and inquired which gods he should offer sacrifices to in order for his planned journey to proceed most favorably, to achieve success, and to return home safely. Apollo indicated which deity he should honor with sacrifices (3.1.5–7). However, in the account

concerning the joint command of the army and the moment he heard the cry of an eagle[58] perched on his right side as he set out toward Ephesus. The text makes it clear that, through the sacrificial omens, Zeus conveyed to Xenophon —who was performing the sacrifices with these thoughts in mind—that he should abandon the idea of becoming sole commander and, if selected, must under no circumstances assume this role (6.1.22–25). When Xenophon was nominated for command, he initially addressed the soldiers and, presenting various arguments, declined the offer, as it was evident that he would be chosen. However, when the soldiers persisted with counterarguments, Xenophon explained that he was not to accept the position based on the signs sent by the god through the sacrifices he had performed (6.1.31–32).[59]

As is evident from the text, Xenophon demonstrates considerable skill in interpreting oracles. Notably, the text does not indicate that a seer accompanied the Athenian commander during the sacrifice.[60] Moreover, Xenophon's statement, "But the gods gave me such signs in the sacrifices that even an ordinary person would have concluded that I should refrain from assuming the supreme command," clearly illustrates this point.[61] Following Xenophon's interpretation, Cheirisophus was chosen as commander, and the army set sail toward Heracleia. However, the events that soon transpired confirmed that Xenophon had accurately interpreted the divine omens: he should indeed forgo the ambition of command and not assume the position even if selected. In other words, the supreme command he would have undertaken would not have brought him honor or renown. Indeed, events occurring within just six or seven days demonstrated that the decision to centralize the army's command in a single leader was ill-advised.

In the sixth book of the *Anabasis*, Xenophon offered another personal divinatory sacrifice before the army was divided into separate units. At one point, the Athenian commander considered bypassing the army and returning alone by sea. However, before making this decision, he consulted the guiding deity Heracles (Heracles Hegemon) by offering a sacrifice, seeking divine guidance on whether moving with the remaining soldiers or acting independently would be more advantageous. The omens from the sacrifice indicated that the guiding god Heracles favored Xenophon to remain with his unit (6.2.15–16).[62] The text also indicates that Cleandrus, the governor of Byzantium, performed a divinatory sacrifice concerning the leadership of the Ten Thousand. After resolving his conflict with the army and establishing a friendship with Xenophon, the governor became eager to assume command of the army after observing that the Greek soldiers obeyed his commands and executed them with great discipline. Over the course of three days, he offered sacrifices for divinatory purposes; however, he abandoned his ambition to become commander when the sacrificial omens proved unfavorable (6.6.35–37).[63]

Another divinatory sacrifice regarding the command of the army occurred following the scene in which the army attempted to force its way into Byzantium. Xenophon explained the potentially severe consequences of their actions to the soldiers and persuaded them to agree with Anaxibius. During these events, a Theban named Coiratadas, eager

presented in the third book, no information is provided regarding which god Apollo mentioned. It is only now that we learn that Zeus was the deity whose name Apollo had revealed to Xenophon for the purpose of sacrifice. The deity whose name Apollo had revealed to Xenophon for the purpose of sacrifice was Zeus.

[57] Here, Xenophon employs the terms δύο ἱερεῖα to refer to the sacrificial animals and ἑθύετο to denote the act of performing the sacrifice, respectively. Furthermore, in the continuation of the text, he also uses the term θυομένῳ to indicate the act of sacrifice.

[58] In this instance, the seer guiding Xenophon, Eukleides, employed the technique of ὀρνιθομαντεία -one of the numerous divinatory methods in ancient Greece, which involved interpreting the flight or cries of birds to derive omens (Carastro, 2012, p. 611). Eukleides interpreted the event not as an ordinary occurrence but as a significant one, indicating that the sign heralded considerable effort and hardship alongside fame and renown. He noted that the other birds attacked only the eagle while it was perched. Since eagles capture their prey in flight, he also remarked that the omen did not signify great wealth. In ancient Greece, individuals who interpreted birds in this manner were called ὀρνιθοκρίτης. See Johnston, 2008, p. 7.

[59] Here, Xenophon uses the ἐθυόμην form of the verb θύω to indicate the act of performing the sacrifice and the term ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς to refer to the signs observed in the sacrifices (6.1.31–32).

[60] For a detailed discussion of the divine elements in the *Anabasis* and Xenophon's relationship with the divine, see Haywood (2016), which is manifested primarily through sacrificial divination but also in other forms throughout the narrative.

[61] Yarlıgaş interprets, Xenophon's emphasis in these passages as an indication that the renowned author, having participated in numerous sacrificial rituals, regarded himself as superior to others in his knowledge of interpreting oracles (Yarlıgaş, 2011, p. 427 n.d.).

[62] Here, the participle θυομένῳ of the verb θύω is used to indicate the act of performing the sacrifice, while the term ἱερά appears in the dative form τοῖς ἱεροῖς to refer to the oracular signs obtained through the sacrifice.

[63] Here, the act of performing the sacrifice is expressed using ἑθύετο and θυομένῳ, while the sacrificial omens are indicated twice by the term τὰ ἱερά.

to assume command, approached the soldiers and claimed that if elected as commander, he could lead the army to the area of Thrace known as the Delta, where they would acquire substantial booty, and that he would also provide for the army's food and drink needs during the journey (7.1.33–34). At this time, envoys from Anaxibius informed him that he would do everything in his power for the army should the soldiers obey him. Consequently, the soldiers began to move outside the city walls and announced that they had accepted Coiratadas as their commander, who had made them very favorable offers. Coiratadas then declared that he would join the soldiers the following day with the sacrificial animals, a seer, and the necessary provisions for the army. As promised, he arrived the next day with the animals and a seer to join the troops. Coiratadas began to perform the sacrifices. The provisions he brought with him were extremely limited. This scene in the *Anabasis*—in which a commander arrives for a campaign with sacrificial animals and a seer and begins the sacrificial rites prior to the expedition—is noteworthy in terms of its reflection of Greek military tradition, highlighting the rituals performed before setting out and the commander's duties. The fact that Coiratadas brought a seer with him also underscores the importance of seers who interpreted sacrificial signs and other omens within Greek military practice (7.1.35–39). However, the sacrifices performed by Coiratadas did not yield favorable omens on the first day. Consequently, he distributed no provisions to the soldiers. The following day, as the sacrificial animals stood beside the altar, Coiratadas placed a wreath[64] on his head and prepared to perform the sacrifices. The commanders warned him not to perform the sacrifices in vain and informed him that he would be unable to command the army if he failed to distribute provisions to the soldiers. In response, Coiratadas began distributing the provisions; however, he took the sacrificial animals with him and withdrew from the command as the stock was far insufficient to meet the soldiers' daily needs. Indeed, the text indicates that the sacrificial omens he observed regarding his potential command were also unfavorable (7.1.40–41).[65]

Another divinatory sacrifice to be examined in this section occurs in the episode following the army's encounter with Seuthes. Seuthes began to renege on the promises he had made to Xenophon and the other Greek soldiers, which created a rift between him and the entire Greek army, particularly with Xenophon. Meanwhile, dissent arose within the army, and Xenophon was blamed for the soldiers' unpaid wages. After most of the soldiers received their pay from Seuthes through the Lacedaemonians, they decided to join the Lacedaemonians, who were preparing an expedition against Tissaphernes and Pharnabazus. At this juncture, Seuthes offered Xenophon the opportunity to remain with him along with a thousand heavy infantry, promising to fulfill what he had previously pledged. Simultaneously, Xenophon began to hear reports that if he fell into the hands of the Lacedaemonians, Thibron would execute him. In response, the Athenian commander offered a sacrifice with two sacrificial animals to consult Zeus Basileus regarding whether it would be more advantageous for him to remain with Seuthes or to set out with the army. The sacrificial omens indicated that Zeus Basileus' will favored Xenophon leaving Seuthes and joining the army (7.6.44).[66] Consequently, the Athenian commander informed Seuthes that it was impossible for him to accept the latter's offer, asserting that he would gain honor in the places he intended to go and that this acquired honor would be beneficial both to himself and to Seuthes (7.7.50–53). Another instance of a personal sacrifice performed by Xenophon occurred at Lampsacus, where he offered a sacrifice to the god Apollo in conjunction with the gifts of friendship he had received (7.8.3).[67] The seer Eukleides was present during this sacrificial ritual. Although the text does not explicitly state that the omens were unfavorable, they were highly probable. Upon observing the sacrificial signs, the seer concluded that Xenophon had no money at all. Eukleides then asked the Athenian commander whether he had recently, as he had always done in his homeland, offered

[64] Xenophon, when describing Coiridatas placing a wreath on his head for ritual purposes during the sacrificial ceremony, employs the participial form ἐστεφανωμένος.

[65] Here (7.1.35–42), the act of performing the sacrifice is expressed using ἐθύετο, θύσων, and μὴ θύειν. Sacrificial animals are referred to twice as ἱερεῖα and τὰ ἱερεῖα. The text (7.1.40) indicates that the sacrificial omens were unfavorable with the phrase οὐκ ἐκαλλιέρει.

[66] The act of performing the sacrifice is expressed using ἐθύετο while the two sacrificial animals are referred to as δύο ἱερεῖα.

[67] Here, the act of performing the sacrifice is expressed with ἔθυε while the sacrificial omens are indicated by the term τὰ ἱερά.

the entire sacrifice to Zeus Meilichius.[68] When the answer was negative, the seer informed Xenophon that his financial situation would improve if he offered a sacrifice to the god as soon as possible. According to the seer, Zeus Meilichius[69] prevented the improvement of Xenophon's material condition. Consequently, when Xenophon went to Ophrynion, he offered pigs to Zeus Meilichius and burned them according to ancestral customs, and the sacrifice produced favorable omens (7.8.4–6).[70] Following this scene, the text narrates how Xenophon's financial situation improved.

The fifth book records two other personal divinatory sacrifices performed by Xenophon. At Cotyora, the Athenian commander considered that, with such strong and capable soldiers gathered together, establishing a city there would be a good idea to add land to Hellas and strengthen its power (5.6.15–17). Consequently, he summoned Silanus, who had also served as a seer for Cyrus, and offered a sacrifice.[71] However, the text does not address whether the sacrificial omens observed by Xenophon in his role as an *oikistes*—that is, the founder of the city he planned to establish—were favorable. Instead, it mentions that the seer Silanus slandered Xenophon because the seer was carrying the large sum of money given to him by Cyrus and wished to return to Hellas as soon as possible. According to the text, Silanus, fearing the fulfillment of Xenophon's words, spread the rumor that the renowned commander sought to halt the advance of the troops and establish a city there solely for his own benefit, in order to gain prestige and power (5.6.17–19). Subsequently, Xenophon was accused of secretly performing a sacrifice without the army's knowledge (5.6.22–23).[72] In response to these accusations, Xenophon, speaking as a commander, defended himself with statements emphasizing his piety[73], his consistent efforts to act for the benefit of both himself and his soldiers, and his practice of offering sacrifices for this purpose. (5.6.28–29).[74] At this point, it is apparent that Xenophon performed another divinatory sacrifice. He explicitly told the soldiers that he had already offered a sacrifice to determine whether it would be better to act on the idea of founding a city in that territory or to set the matter aside (5.6.28–30).[75]

Subsequently, Xenophon emphasized that the sacrificial omens reportedly observed by the seer Silanus regarding the founding of a city were favorable, noting that Silanus could not deceive him because he had always been present at such rituals. He further stated that there was deceit in Silanus' divinations and that a plot had been set against him, as he was fully aware of the schemes Silanus had devised to portray him unfavorably to the soldiers (5.6.29–30).[76] Nevertheless, despite the favorable omens, Xenophon abandoned the idea of founding a city after learning that the army could set sail thanks to ships sent by Sinope and the Heracleians, and that some individuals had promised the soldiers their monthly pay along with other profitable incentives.

[68] See Paus. 1.37.4, 2.20.1; Thuc.1.126.

[69] Non-bloody sacrifices were performed during the Diasia festival in Athens, held in honor of Zeus Meilichius. During this festival, votive offerings dedicated to the god were burned on the altars (Anderson, 1974, pp. 35-36; Carastro, 2012, p. 607).

[70] When describing his sacrifice to Zeus Meilichius, Xenophon does not employ the verb θύω, which he most frequently uses to denote the act of sacrifice, but instead uses the infinitive ὀλοκαυτεῖν, meaning "*to offer the entire sacrifice by burning*." In Ancient Greek, ὀλοκαύτωσις is a ritual term referring to "*a wholly burnt offering*." In this type of sacrifice, the entire animal—or occasionally a grain offering—was completely burned for the god, leaving nothing for human consumption. In contrast, in standard sacrificial rituals called θυσία, only the internal organs (σπλάγχνα) of the animal were burned, while the remainder was shared among the participants. Typically, wholly burnt offerings were dedicated to chthonic deities and gods associated with death. For further information on this topic, see Nock, 1944; Scullion, 1994. For references to this sacrifice ritual practice in ancient sources, see also Strabo 4.4 and Xenophon *Cyr.* 8.3.

[71] The act of performing the sacrifice is expressed in the text using ἐθύετο.

[72] In this passage, the verb θύεσθαι is used to indicate the act of performing a sacrifice. Furthermore, in the same section, when two soldiers accuse Xenophon of secretly offering a sacrifice to found a city, the verb θύεσθαι is employed (5.6.27).

[73] See Flower, 2016; Haywood, 2016, pp. 91-92, 103, 105-106.

[74] Here, Xenophon first uses θύομαι and subsequently ἐθυόμην both forms of the verb θύω, to describe the act of sacrifice.

[75] Here, Xenophon employs θύομαι and ἐθυόμην to indicate the act of sacrifice. The favorable outcome of the sacrificial signs is expressed with τὰ ἱερὰ καλὰ, while the religious rituals (here clearly referring to sacrificial rites) are indicated by τοῖς ἱεροῖς and the divinations are likewise expressed using τοῖς ἱεροῖς (5.6.28–30).

[76] From this passage, it is evident that Xenophon, as a commander, possessed knowledge of divinatory sacrifice interpretation. In Ancient Greece, commanders were familiar with the interpretation of omens derived from the behavior of animals or their entrails, since a commander would consult divinatory sacrifices before making critical decisions. To avoid being deceived by malicious seers, a commander must be knowledgeable in this art. For further discussion, refer to Xen. *Cry.*1.6.2.

The dramatic structure of the *Anabasis*, a divinatory sacrifice offered by Xenophon before the narrated events (*analēpsis*/*ἀνάληψις*) is mentioned. This was not a sacrifice performed by Xenophon in his capacity as a commander, but rather a ritual conducted as a civilian before the expedition.[77] Xenophon received an invitation letter from his friend Proxenus to join the young Cyrus's campaign. The letter promised Cyrus' friendship to Xenophon if he participated in the campaign. Xenophon shared the situation with his teacher, Socrates, who advised him that befriending Cyrus—who was thought to have incited the Lacedaemonians to wage war against the Athenians—might bring trouble upon his student and could provide Athens with a pretext to blame him. Therefore, Socrates recommended that Xenophon consult the god Apollo at the oracle of Delphi to seek divine guidance regarding the journey. Accordingly, Xenophon went to Delphi and, through the sacrifices he offered there, consulted Apollo regarding which deity he should honor to ensure that the journey he planned would proceed in the most favorable manner, and to achieve success on the campaign while returning home safely.[78] Subsequently, following Apollo's response, Xenophon offered sacrifices[79] to the gods and sailed to Sardis, where he met his friend Proxenus and was introduced to the young Cyrus, who was preparing to embark on the campaign (3.4.10).

Evaluation and Conclusions

In Xenophon's *Anabasis*, divinatory sacrifices (*hiera*) appear throughout the narrative as tangible expressions of the search for divine will and approval, accompanying the challenging homeward journey of Greek mercenaries stranded in unfamiliar barbarian territories. Pierre Bonnechere (2007a) offers a comprehensive reassessment of Greek sacrificial practice, emphasizing its cognitive and communicative dimensions. Xenophon's references to divinatory sacrifices exemplify what Bonnechere identifies as the 'multi-layered" nature of Greek sacrifice that is simultaneously religious, epistemic, and social. Gray (2011) interprets Xenophon's treatment of divine approval as an extension of political authority. From this perspective, the divinatory sacrifices in the *Anabasis* operate not only as theological devices but also as part of Xenophon's broader didactic agenda concerning leadership and moral legitimacy. Similarly, Flower (2012, pp. 159, 203-204) stresses the strategic use of religious language in Xenophon's narrative. For Flower, divination in the *Anabasis* serves a psychological as well as a political function, reinforcing the commander's authority and the army's morale. Dillery (1995) argues that Xenophon's religious scenes should also be read as rhetorical and narrative constructs rather than purely historical reportage. Thus, the recurring *hiera* motifs mark moments where divine approval organizes the moral logic of the narrative. The most fundamental factor shaping military strategy and the army's morale throughout the text is the divinatory sacrifices offered to discern the gods' will. Whether to engage in battle, whether to embark on a plundering expedition despite severe shortages of provisions, whether to form alliances with encountered barbarians or Greeks, and even the determination of the army's route and direction—all these decisions depended primarily on divinatory sacrifices. The sacred signs that emerged during these rituals were interpreted either by army seers, such as Silanus, Eukleides, and Basias, or by commanders, such as Clearchus and Xenophon, thereby legitimizing the military decisions and framing them within a divine context. In this context, in the *Anabasis*, divinatory sacrifices occupy a central position not merely as religious rituals but as pivotal elements in the success of the military expedition, the maintenance of army discipline, the morale of the soldiers, and the reinforcement of their collective identity.

In the *Anabasis*, divinatory sacrifices function not only as public ceremonies conducted before critical decisions affecting the entire army but also as rituals to which characters frequently resort regarding their personal concerns, such as whether to assume command. Xenophon, as well as figures like Cleandrus and Coiratadas, are depicted offering

[77] Xenophon explicitly emphasizes that he did not join the campaign in the capacity of a commander. At the beginning of the third book, when referring to himself, he underscores that he participated in the expedition at the invitation of his friend Proxenus, who valued Cyrus above his own homeland, and also through his friend's mediation, to establish a friendship with Cyrus (3.4–5).

[78] When Xenophon recounts the Delphi consultation to his teacher Socrates, he describes Socrates as scolding him. Indeed, Socrates instructed Xenophon to consult Apollo on whether it would be more advantageous for him to undertake the journey or remain at home. However, Xenophon failed to pose these questions and independently decided to join the expedition, asking Apollo only how the journey could proceed in the most favorable manner (3.1.5.1-9.1).

[79] In this passage (3.1.6.2-8.1), the act of performing sacrifices is again expressed through the verb θύω, in the forms θύων, θύειν and θυσάμενος.

sacrifices to the gods before addressing their individual matters, seeking divine guidance. In this context, it is evident that Xenophon, the author of the text and, after the third book, the main character and driver of the events, offered sacrifices to the gods and acted according to their signs at critical moments, both regarding his personal affairs and the concerns of the community. Xenophon characterizes himself as a devout citizen and ideal commander who respects the gods and acts consistently under their guidance. The Athenian Xenophon consistently offered divinatory sacrifices both before and during the campaign. According to Xenophon, sacrifices should be presented only by devout hands that obey the laws of the gods and show them proper reverence. Only in this way do the gods genuinely stand by and protect humans and guide them in times of distress. The central emphasis in the *Anabasis* is that sacrifices or other forms of divine guidance (divinations) never fail, provided they are interpreted correctly; defeats and disasters, by contrast, are understood as consequences of human error. Despite the favorable omens (*ta hiera kala, ta sphagia kala*), Cyrus' army was defeated. Because Cyrus acted hastily, he fell to his brother Artaxerxes and was killed. In contrast, the Greek army achieved victory over Artaxerxes. Indeed, the auspicious *ta hiera* had foretold success for the Greeks, and in this context, the Greek army was able to overcome the enemy by applying correct tactics.

When examining the recipients of the divinatory sacrifices (*hiera*) discussed in our study of the *Anabasis*, there is no information in the text regarding the specific deities to whom the public sacrifices affecting the entire army were offered. However, in a military context of ancient Greece, the gods most frequently invoked were those associated with war, such as Zeus, Athena, Ares, Enyalios, Hermes, and Artemis. Although the text does not specify this, it is likely that in the rituals associated with *hiera*, the army offered sacrifices to one of these deities—most probably to the protective Zeus, as well as to the guide god Hermes and others. However, it is evident that the commander Xenophon personally offered sacrifices to Apollo, Zeus Basileus, Hermes Hegemon, and Zeus Meilichius regarding his own affairs. However, Xenophon makes no mention of the ritual details of these sacrifices throughout the text containing the divinatory sacrifices (*hiera*) examined in this study, with one exception. Only the scene in which Coiratadas offers a sacrifice regarding his potential command is partially detailed (7.1.40). As Coiratadas prepared to sacrifice, he placed a wreath on his head. Based on this limited information, it can be inferred that the ritual was likely conducted by either the commanding officer or a seer during a military divinatory sacrifice (*hiera*), who also performed the other customary elements of the sacrificial rites. Indeed, in the army's regular sacrificial rituals (*thysia*), various grains, such as barley—traditionally thrown over the animal's head—were already present. On the other hand, since *hiera* were performed over a broader span of time than the battlefield sacrifices (*sphagia*) and the sacrificial meat could be consumed among the participants, it is conceivable that a meat-based feast also took place within the army following the sacrifice during a military campaign. However, Xenophon does not depict any of these sacrificial rituals in the dramatic structure of the *Anabasis*. In other words, the detailed sacrificial scenes followed by feasts, as observed in Homer (*Od*.3.430-463; *Il.* I.447–475), are absent in Xenophon.

Within the narrative, Xenophon mentions the divinatory sacrifices only in terms of "Xenophon sacrificed, and the *ta hiera* were favorable/unfavorable," limiting his account to the mere fact that the sacrifice was performed. This narrative technique appears to be a deliberate choice, designed to preserve the dramatic structure of the *Anabasis* within its densely unfolding events, without overwhelming it with ritual details.

In the *Anabasis*, looting expeditions served not only to provide the army with general provisions but also to secure sacrificial animals. The text notes that the captured provisions always included animals suitable for sacrifice when the army ventured into surrounding areas for supplies, highlighting the religious and nutritional significance of sacrificial offerings in Greek military tradition (4.4.9). Indeed, when the supply stocks were depleted and no animals remained for sacrifice, the army either slaughtered oxen yoked to carts or purchased sacrificial animals locally to conduct the ritual. In this context, the divinatory sacrifices (*hiera)* performed before nearly every military action can be considered one of the army's primary ritual sources of food, fulfilling both religious and dietary functions. In the *Anabasis*, sacrificial offerings categorized as *hiera* primarily consisted of small domestic animals, such as sheep. However, in instances where no small livestock remained, oxen yoked to carts were also sacrificed. Furthermore, pigs were offered as sacrifices to Zeus Meilichius. The text also indicates that a portion of the booty acquired by the soldiers in battle, as well as gifts of

friendship (*ksenia*), were dedicated to the gods as offerings. This practice is exemplified by Xenophon's sacrifice to the god Apollo, made with the *ksenia* gifts provided by the people of Lampsacus. In conclusion, Xenophon's *Anabasis* stands as one of the principal sources demonstrating the role of *hiera* in Classical Greek military tradition: sacrificial offerings occupied a central position in the army, shaping military conduct, legitimizing decisions, and guiding the course of operations, while strategic decisions ultimately remained the prerogative of the commander.

Abbreviations List

Aesch. Aeschylus

Sept. Septem adversus Thebas

Hom. Homerus

Il. Ilias

Od. Odyssea

Hdt. Herodotus

Hes. Hesiodus

Op. Opera et dies

Diod. Sic. Diodorus Siclus

Plut. Plutarchus

Nic. Nicias

Soph. Sophocles

Phil. Philoctetes

Paus. Pausanias

Polyaenus, Strat. Polyaenus, Strategemata

Thuc. Thucydides

Xen. Xenophon

An. Anabasis

Cyr. Cyropaedia

Eq. mag. De equitum magistro

Hell. Hellenica

Lac. Respublica Lacedaemoniorum

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