

Everyday Life in Classical Greece

BASICS OF SOURCE CRITICISM



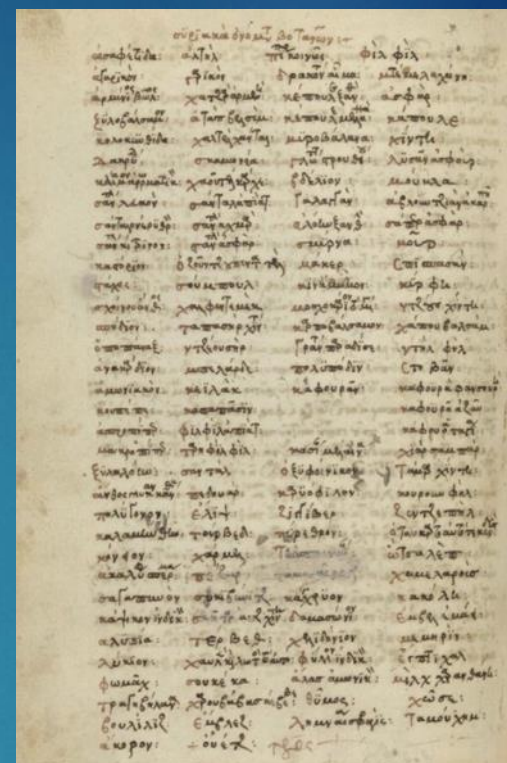
Purpose and main issues covered

Purpose

- ▶ To introduce you to working with ancient sources and evidence
- ▶ To introduce you to **CRITICALLY ENGAGE** with ancient sources and evidence

Main issues

- ▶ Types of ancient sources and different issues re engagement.
- ▶ We will concentrate on literary sources, and then our discussion will cover other types of sources



The literary sources

Literature: Easy... And difficult

- ▶ Critical engagement with literature is both easy and difficult.
- ▶ It is EASY because we can concentrate on the author and their biases/problems/weaknesses/genre; and the world they live in.
- ▶ It is DIFFICULT because applying generalised knowledge on the specific bit of source we are using is often much more difficult.

Who are you?

- ▶ Historians look at sources looking for information about historical events, causality and people.
 - ▶ What does this text tell us about x,y,z?
- ▶ Philologists look at exactly the same sources but they concentrate on the source itself rather than the information it provides.
 - ▶ Why do we feel about the text the way we do?
 - ▶ How did it work for its contemporary audience(s)?

What are YOU looking for?

- ▶ Depending on what you are studying, you may need to concentrate not on the author but rather on the text itself.
- ▶ Consider:
 - ▶ Preconceptions/views of the time that are in literature (often subconsciously on the part of the author)
 - ▶ Literary viewpoint/purpose: What is the author trying to do? What is he influenced by in terms of genre?
 - ▶ And is the author the same as the narrator?

Crossing the boundaries

- ▶ Every ancient text is also a piece of literature.
- ▶ Every piece of ancient literature betrays some of the history of its time.
- ▶ Thucydides is a historian that presents his history not as a dry textbook but as a work of literature (more in common with epic than what we would call history).
- ▶ Lucan writes an epic poem about a real historical event (the civil war between Caesar and Pompey)

Example: Xenophon

Who is Xenophon?

- ▶ Athenian
- ▶ C430-c355
- ▶ Soldier and general
- ▶ Prolific author
- ▶ Student of Socrates
- ▶ Philosopher as well as historian

Influences

- ▶ Oligarch
- ▶ Pro-Spartan
- ▶ Tends to report rather than analyse
- ▶ Religion plays an important part in his world view.

Reading Xenophon

GO THROUGH THE SHORT PASSAGE, AND
SEE WHETHER YOU CAN IDENTIFY PARTS OF IT
THAT WE CAN CONNECT TO XENOPHON'S
POTENTIAL EXPERIENCES AND ISSUES

Xenophon

- ▶ Oligarch
- ▶ Pro-Spartan and very knowledgeable about Sparta
- ▶ Tends to report rather than analyse
- ▶ Religion plays an important part in his world view.
- ▶ Athenian
- ▶ C430-c355
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The aftermath of the defeat of Mantinea (386 BCE)

- ▶ Now the partisans of Argos and the leaders of the popular party expected that they would be put to death, but the father of Agesipolis obtained from him the promise that safety should be granted them as they departed from the city, being sixty in number. So on both sides of the road, beginning at the city gates, stood the Lacedaemonians with their spears, watching those who were coming out. And although they hated them, nevertheless they kept¹ their hands off them more easily than did the Mantineans belonging to the aristocratic party. Let this, then, stand recorded as a striking example of good discipline. Xenophon *Hellenika* 5.2.6

From bias to purpose

- ▶ Sometimes the problem with an author is not that they are biased but rather than they have a specific and clear purpose.
- ▶ That purpose colours the information they provide or how they present it.
- ▶ Think particularly of poets or playwrights – what is their purpose? It is NOT to provide information to us about the ancient world.

Political criticism, exaggeration or merely poking a bit of fun?

- ▶ Still it is the day of assembly; all should be here at daybreak, and yet the Pnyx is still deserted. They are gossiping in the marketplace, slipping hither and thither to avoid the vermillioned rope. The Prytanes even do not come; they will be late, but when they come they will push and fight each other for a seat in the front row. They will never trouble themselves with the question of peace. Aristophanes *Acharnians* 20-25

The grammar of bias

▶ Xenophon is **BIASED** against the Thebans

▶ VS.

▶ Xenophon has an anti-Theban **BIAS**

▶ Don't get it wrong.

Basics to remember

- ▶ All sources have strengths and weaknesses, as well as factors that influenced them.
- ▶ It is NOT ENOUGH to be general about these. You have to connect them to what you are discussing!