

REVIEW

of the dissertation thesis of Nikolay Todorov Penev, a full-time doctoral student in the Department of Ancient History, Thracology and Medieval History, Faculty of History, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, titled “Ancient Thrace in the Works of Xenophon” for obtaining the educational and scientific degree of “Doctor” in Professional Field 2.2. History and Archaeology

Reviewer: Prof. Dr Habil. Mirena Slavova, Department of Classical Philology, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philologies, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (Order RD-38-460 of 18.07.2025)

The dissertation is a substantial study (578 pages) dedicated to source analysis of information about ancient Thrace and the Thracians in the *Corpus Xenophonticum*. The work is structured in three chapters with internal hierarchical organisation, a conclusion, an index, an extensive bibliography, and two appendices in the form of catalogues. The approach itself—to examine all fifteen works of Xenophon in their intertextual context—is ambitious and methodologically justified. The doctoral candidate correctly identifies the main methodological difficulty: most studies focus on individual works or groups of texts, but this approach fails to adequately capture the specificity of Xenophon’s oeuvre, which features internal cross-references, recurring structural patterns, and consistent literary devices. The chosen approach is adequate to the stated goal—comprehensive source analysis of all information about Thrace in the Athenian author’s corpus.

The first chapter, “Xenophon: Life and Activity”, covering 66 pages (pp. 12–77), offers a biographical reconstruction, with the main contribution being the re-evaluation of Xenophon’s birth date. The doctoral candidate advocates for an early date (442/441 BC) in opposition to the established late date in current historiography (around 430 BC). The reasoning is layered: a critical analysis of the use of the adjective νέος in Xenophon, showing its subjective nature through the example of Agesilaus II, called ‘young’ at over 40 years of age; an organisation of the testimonies from Strabo and Diogenes Laertius about Xenophon’s rescue by Socrates at Delium (424 BC); a careful examination of the

data about Xenophon's *floruit* according to Diogenes Laertius, which is dated to 401/400 BC; and a comparison with Lucian's account that Xenophon lived well beyond 90 years. There are still debatable points in this reasoning, such as: the hypothesis that ephebes participated in the battle of Delium based on Thucydides' account of general mobilisation, despite lacking direct proof of the conscription of peripoloi; interpreting Athenaeus's doubt about Xenophon's presence at the symposium at Callias's house (421/420 BC) as a 'rhetorical device,' which is possible but not entirely convincing; and linking Xenophon to the Boeotian captivity after Delium, based only on Philostratus the Elder's testimony, which, however, is chronologically distant from the events. Despite these reservations, the proposed early date deserves serious consideration and provides a more accurate chronological framework for Xenophon's entire work. I could add a piece of information that the dissertator might have overlooked from Ptolemy in the *Tetrabiblos*, that "after assuming the fourth and middle in order young age, the Sun, the lord of the middle sphere, for 19 years (22–41 years) inspires in the soul already a desire for dominion at home and authority in affairs, aspiration for ordering life, for glory and establishment, and for transition from adventurous and uncontrolled errors to careful, respectful and ambitious behaviour." (Ptol. *Alm.* 4. 4.10.9. 9)

The second chapter, "Literary Heritage and Influence," spans 54 pages (pp. 78–131) and presents a systematic review of the *Corpus Xenophonticum*. Each of the fifteen works is examined according to a uniform scheme: structure and content, dating and problems, codices (the earliest manuscripts), and selected translations (Bulgarian, English, Russian). The information about manuscripts, gathered in one place, creates the impression in the reader that it will serve for some text-critical observations, but it is not utilised further in the Third chapter. Nevertheless, this reference section has practical value and can serve as a systematic guide for future research. Important is the discussion of the disputed authorship of the "Constitution of the Athenians" and the arguments for possible authorship by Xenophon, as well as chronological markers in various works and data on manuscript tradition. Here, I would recommend giving a critical assessment of the different editions and translations.

The third chapter, "Ancient Thrace and the Thracians in the Corpus Xenophonticum", spanning 62 pages (pp. 132–203), represents the heart of the source analysis. At its

beginning is a helpful list of passages containing information about Thrace and the Thracians (pp. 133–135). It is structured thematically, which I find to be a successful approach and a valuable contribution to the treatment of source material in Xenophon. It is organised into three main sections, consisting of brief (sometimes too brief) sketches.

“Images and Masks” represents a kind of prosopographic study and examines the Thracian characters in Xenophon’s works: commanders and mercenaries (Miltocythes, Clearchus), kings and aristocrats (e.g., Teres, Maesades, Medocus, Seuthes, Cotys), as well as the problem with Sosias the Thracian. The analysis of the character Sosias is the most in-depth (section 3.1.3); in it, the doctoral candidate for the first time connects the Thracian slave from Xenophon’s economic treatise “On Revenues” with the character from Old Attic comedy. The argumentation sounds convincing and opens new perspectives for understanding the image of Thracians in Athenian society, because the connection with Sosias from Aristophanes’ “The Wasps” and with Theophrastus’ text allows for a reconstruction of the biography of a nouveau riche of Thracian origin in Athens. The doctoral candidate also examines the problem related to Teres, noting the critical question of the translation of Xen. An. 7.5.1. However, he has not taken a categorical position and has not pointed out that the translation in *Fontes historiae Thraciae Thracumque* 2 does not accurately reflect the information in the Greek text in its striving for literalism, nor has he taken a stance on the seclusion of ἀρχαίου τινός in some translations of the phrase Τήρους τοῦ Ὀδρύσου ἀρχαίου τινός (pp. 148–149). The essay on Maesades and illness has also developed unsuccessfully and in a voluntaristic direction (pp. 149–150), since νοσέω has a banal figurative meaning for state affairs “I am in crisis, I am ailing,” cf. ἡ Μίλητος νοσήσασα στάσι (Hdt. 5.28) or νοσεῖ πόλις (S. Ant. 1015). To some extent, the title “Cotys or Otys – a slip of the pen” is also misleading, since the problem requires work with Vat. Gr. 1335, 214v and 215v, where it can be established that these are two separate characters, of whom the name of the Paphlagonian king was not accidentally but specifically, albeit erroneously, supplemented as Cotys. The same applies to “Abrozelmis or Hebrizelmis – lost in translation.” We are not lost in translation, but rather we do not give up and do not damn the alpha-variant of the name Ἀβροζέλμης from the later codices, legitimized by the authority of Ludwig Dindorf, although the form Ἐβοζέλμιον (cf. Vat. Gr. 1335.200v) in the oldest codices of the “Anabasis” leads to the conclusion that most likely the text

contained the Thracian personal name Εβρυζελμης, and the variant Ἀβροζέλμης is the result of a copyist's error, as Svetlana Yanakieva proves in her work on the name of Seuthes' translator.

In the section "Asia Minor Thrace and Related Communities", data about the Thracians in Anatolia, the Phrygians, Mysians, Paphlagonians, and Mossynoeci are systematised. This section has primarily an informative character, but it is necessary for the completeness of the study.

In the third section, titled "Orchestra", without justification, settlements, economy, religion, and the famous Thracian symposium are examined. Penev traces three episodes from the "Anabasis," drawing attention to details such as the hyporchema, tripod tables, the size of Thracian bread, and the ceremonial breaking and distribution of bread by Seuthes.

What do I see as the shortcomings of the work? Even though the three chapters have relatively equal volume, the reader is left with the impression that all the author's energy is concentrated more on Xenophon's biography and works than on Xenophon in his relation to Thracian problems. Although thematically well-organised, the most important Third chapter is not underpinned by in-depth analysis, but rather sketches problems or retells the content primarily of the "Anabasis." Some of the brief sketches in it (especially 3.2) have a descriptive character and would benefit from more in-depth analysis. Others, which were mentioned above, are not persuasive.

None of my recommendations and corrections, given during the internal discussion in the Department, both in the exposition and in the translation corpus of the dissertation, have been taken into account by Penev, for which I would like to receive an explanation at the public defence. As a result, the text continues to contain erroneous or inaccurate translations (p. 42, note 77; 44, 68), incorrect transliterations of names and lexemes from Ancient Greek, which I signalled in my opinion at the internal defence and whose presence in the submitted dissertation is unprofessional. Here I insist on correcting at least the proposed etymology of the name Xenophon, whose name combines two elements—'guest' and 'shine,' not 'kill' (LGPN-Ling, s.v.). It is not justified precisely in a dissertation on ancient history to have errors in the rendering of toponyms and proper names, sometimes in two different ways, for example, Καῦστριον πεδῖον (the Kauster plain) appears as

Kastrupedion (p. 36) and Kaystrupedion (p. 177), Sinop and Sinope, Menesthenes instead of Menestheus (p. 159), Ister and not Hister (p. 14), etc. The newly created terms by Penev, 'horakon' instead of 'demonym' and 'ochrisi' (from ὀχυρός) instead of 'fortifications', are not correct and should not be used. Although spelling errors are relatively few, they are present and unjustified. After all, a doctor in the humanities must know the rules for line breaks, numerical forms of names and the definite article in Bulgarian.

I share the weaknesses mentioned above only with the hope that Nikolay Penev will learn from them and guard against this type of superficial lapse in his future research, both in his analysis and hypotheses, and also that he will be attentive to language in both ancient texts and his own. Having said this, I must certainly note his lively interest and scholarly curiosity toward problems of ancient history, the clarity of style achieved over time, the ability to highlight features important for historical interpretation of facts, as well as the enthusiasm and scope with which he approached his topic and the desire to supplement his knowledge of ancient literature and culture. As a result, he managed to penetrate deeply into the problems of Xenophon's entire oeuvre, to comprehend his epoch and the genre characteristics of his works, and to understand the information they provide on the topic. Moreover, he has read and become familiar with a large volume of secondary and translated literature. I also note the achieved systematicity in the tables and indices placed in the work, which are very useful for the reader, for example, the index of information about Thrace and the Thracians on pp. 207–214. The bilingual corpus that Nikolay Penev offers as an appendix to his work is useful primarily for gathering and identifying information about Thrace and the Thracians from twelve, not seven, Xenophontic works (as in *Fontes Thraciae Thracumque* 2) and the possibility of comparing the original text with translations. The dissertator does not comment on the criteria by which he selected them, which could help orient the reader to his own principles for assessing the reliability of translated historical sources.

In the brief conclusion on pp. 204–206, nine achievements in the work are highlighted, some of which concern Xenophon's biography and oeuvre. In contrast, others expand the scope of sources for Thrace and the Thracians, focusing attention on hitherto neglected moments. The two catalogues (biographical data and Thracian information) have a valid reference value. The proposed early dating for Xenophon's birth, although debatable, is

well argued and deserves to be included in scholarly discourse. The study on Sosias the Thracian is a contribution to the field of Thracology. On this basis, I recommend to the Academic Council that it award Nikolay Penev the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in professional field 2.2. “History and Archaeology.”

Sofia, October 20, 2025

Prof. Dr Habil. Mirena Slavova