

Opinion

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on the dissertation thesis of Nikolay Todorov Penev,

entitled: “Ancient Thrace in the Works of Xenophon“,

for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)“ in

the field of higher education 2. Humanities,

professional field 2.2. History and Archaeology (Ancient History)

The dissertation submitted for defense addresses a topic of a distinctly source-based nature. In the introduction, the doctoral student justifies the choice of a specific research approach, accompanied by the necessary clarifications regarding the research methodology and the structure of the thesis. The specific methodological challenges inherent in such work are rightly emphasized. These challenges also define the main source-based objective of the study: *to extract from Xenophon’s corpus, comprehensively analyze, and historiographically interpret the information that directly or indirectly concerns ancient Thrace and the Thracians* (p. 8).

The exposition follows the stated objectives but begins “from a distance”, and for this reason, a methodological clarification is provided: first, to present *the life and work of Xenophon*; second, *his literary legacy*; and finally, *the description, analysis, and commentary on the extracted Thracian data* (p. 8). The adopted structure of the dissertation entails a certain risk of shifting the focus of the research from Thracian issues to Xenophon himself, but this risk appears to have been successfully avoided.

The biographical research presented in Chapter One, which seeks to clarify certain controversial and uncertain moments in the life of the Athenian historian, appears to me both appropriate and well executed. This approach undoubtedly contributes to a deeper understanding of Xenophon’s work in terms of themes, perspectives, and value as a historical source on various issues, including ancient Thrace and the Thracians. Building on such a foundation generally yields better analytical results. In particular, it is commendable that the state of the source base has been outlined (pp. 13-15). The collected and commented material gives Chapter One the character of an exceptionally detailed biography of Xenophon (over 60 pages, pp. 16-78), including a substantial number of episodes illustrating both historical

events (I.1.) and his life (I.2.). Nikolay Penev's effort to analyze even seemingly well-established biographical issues in contemporary historiography – and especially Xenophon's own views – deserves positive recognition. Regarding the contributions in this section, it is worth citing the doctoral student himself, who emphasizes that *the revision of Xenophon's year of birth* (to 442/441 BC – my note) *is of paramount importance, as it is closely linked to assessing the disputed authorship of the Athenian Constitution*. A well-founded proposal is also made to adjust the date of his death to around 355 BC. However, it should be noted that the more substantial analytical part is confined mainly to the first and last subsections of the chapter. In a sizable portion of about 30 pages (pp. 35-65), the author provides a detailed retelling of the *Anabasis* regarding Xenophon's actions as leader of the retreating mercenaries, with minimal reference to other source or historiographical studies. Additionally, some subsections consist merely of brief notes referring to other parts of the dissertation, which is an atypical approach (1.1.9 Strategist of Seuthes; 1.2.1 Xenophon and the Political Elite). Ultimately, despite these remarks, it can be concluded that the doctoral student's intention to present Xenophon's personality objectively is clearly evident.

The second chapter is devoted to Xenophon's works, beginning with a brief introduction to him as an author, historian, and philosopher. The second subchapter, *Corpus Xenophonticum* (pp. 81-119), is considerably longer than the other three subchapters. It presents the works of the ancient author in alphabetical order. The inclusion of this chapter aligns with the main objective of the dissertation and fulfills an essential task outlined in the introduction – to examine Xenophon's oeuvre as a whole. Given that references to the Thracians appear in almost all of his writings, this approach seems well justified.

The chosen model for presenting the works fully meets the requirements for a detailed source description and commentary; each work is accompanied by information on its structure and content, dating and subject matter, codices, editions, selected translations, and a selected bibliography. Naturally, this gives the presentation in this particular subsection something of a catalog-like appearance, yet the overall result is clearly positive. Xenophon's literary heritage is presented to the extent necessary and in full accordance with the objectives of the dissertation. All elements of the description and analysis of Xenophon's works are of considerable importance, especially the presentation of the manuscripts and the references to their digitized copies available online. This material will undoubtedly prove particularly valuable in a future publication of the dissertation.

Chapter Two should be evaluated as having a significant role in the overall presentation of the dissertation. However, the conclusions presented at its end are rather brief.

In this section, Nikolay Penev emphasizes Xenophon's importance as an author and revisits the question of the authorship of "The Constitution of Athens". It would seem logical for the conclusions of this chapter to focus not only on the state of the manuscript tradition but also on the quality of the available translations – or the lack thereof in Bulgarian – which are otherwise excellently examined in the exposition. Such an approach would have more clearly highlighted the doctoral student's own contribution to the comprehensive analysis of Xenophon's work.

Chapter Three (pp. 131-201) examines essentially heterogeneous information about the Thracians, which Nikolay Penev has attempted to organize systematically, including through the use of terms from Greek theater; these terms serve *a purely structural and artistic function*, which is not typical for historical work. The chapter begins with two pages of discussion on contemporary Bulgarian historiography, related to some extent to Xenophon's work, briefly mentioning authors and titles (pp. 131-132), without detailed commentary on their content. Another two pages provide a list of works and relevant passages containing information on the Thracians (pp. 133-134). This is followed by nearly 70 pages of text (pp. 135-201), which form the core of the dissertation. It is important to note that virtually no information about Ancient Thrace and the Thracians has been omitted: Thracian mercenaries; personalities and commanders; kings and aristocrats; Thracian regions in Asia and Europe, with their populations; settlements and economy; data on Thracian religion; feasts; and a list of geographical realities. However, these topics are not treated uniformly or with the same depth. The sections offering in-depth analysis, drawing on additional sources and contemporary research, leave an excellent impression. For example, the discussion of mercenary service (pp. 135-139), the story of Sosias the Thracian and his slaves (pp. 158-167), the text on Antisthenes (pp. 168-169), the sub-section on the Thracian feast (pp. 194-197), etc. In other sections, however, the text primarily retells Xenophon's writings descriptively. For instance, the presentation of Alcibiades, Clearchus, and Xenophon as "strategists by necessity" contrasts with the more precise designation in Chapter One as "strategists of Seuthes". A similar approach is evident in the sub-section "Kings and Aristocrats", specifically regarding independent Thracians and the royal hunt. The analysis becomes more substantial from the exposition on Teres onwards, where contemporary research is more consistently employed, though even here the commentary could be further expanded. In some cases, the exposition merely acknowledges the existence of modern research without providing detailed discussion or critical engagement. For example, regarding the Medocus/Amedocus debate arising from Xenophon's information and relations with

Seuthes, the study by Prof. M. Tacheva is cited, but her position or alternative perspectives are not discussed. By contrast, in the discussion of Kotys/Otys, Nikolay Penev offers a more in-depth analysis, engages with historiographical debates, and even takes a position. Such sections provide opportunities for the doctoral student to express critical judgment and should ideally be applied consistently throughout. Ultimately, Chapter Three presents Xenophon's direct and indirect information about Ancient Thrace in detail, but in some areas it could more fully engage with contemporary historiography and contentious issues.

The conclusion of the dissertation focuses primarily on the content of Chapter Three, emphasizing nine main conclusions in terms of source studies and historiography, based on *the collected texts and their analytical interpretation*. These conclusions are well-considered, clear, and fully acceptable.

The second volume is also an essential part of the dissertation. It contains two appendices of approximately equal length (around 330 pages), which illustrate the thesis. Some of the texts included represent the first translations into Bulgarian.

The extended abstract of the dissertation accurately and faithfully presents the main issues and topics addressed in the study. The self-assessment of the dissertation's contributions objectively reflects the author's scientific achievements and his contributions to the study of Xenophon's biography, his works, and his knowledge of Ancient Thrace.

In conclusion, I note that my overall assessment of the work is positive. The main goals and objectives have been successfully achieved. The dissertation submitted for defense constitutes a significant contribution and fully meets the requirements for the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)". For these reasons, I am pleased to express my positive opinion and recommend that the Scientific Jury award Nikolay Penev the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)".



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Plovdiv, 16.10.2025