

# REVIEW

of a dissertation thesis on the topic  
**“Ancient Thrace in the Works of Xenophon”**  
for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “doctor” (PhD)  
by the regular doctoral student **Nikolay Todorov Penev**

Scientific area **2. Humanities**

Professional field **2.2. History and Archaeology**

Academic supervisor: **Docent Dr Julia Tzvetkova**

Reviewer:

**Prof. Dr Peter Nedelchev Delev**, St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia (emeritus)  
member of the scientific jury by order of the Rector ПД-38-122/27.02.2024

Nikolay Penev was born in 1979. He received his secondary education at the St. Ivan Rilski Seminary in Sofia (1999). In 2006, he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in financial management from the St. Petersburg State University of Economics and Finance in Russia, and then in 2008 received a master’s degree in financial management from the same university. In 2021, he completed a master’s degree in Antiquity and the Middle Ages with a specialization in Thracian Studies at the Faculty of History of the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia with excellent grades in all subjects studied. His MA thesis, which I had the pleasure of reviewing at the time, was devoted to the information about the history and culture of ancient Thrace and the Thracians in the Scripta Minora of Xenophon and also deservedly received an excellent grade. The dissertation presented today, following the successful and prompt completion of a regular doctoral program, represents a development of the good start made with this thesis, expanding the study of the data on ancient Thrace over the entire literary heritage of Xenophon.

The dissertation presented by Nikolay Penev contains 583 pages of digitally formatted text or a total of 1,430,668 characters with spaces, equivalent to some 795 standard 1800-character pages. It is divided into two parts (entitled respectively “Volume I” and “Volume II”), the first of which contains the main text of the dissertation (238 pages), and the second – two extensive appendices (341 pages). The structure of the dissertation is clear and logical and corresponds to the main task set out in the title and specified in the short introduction: to examine in detail all information about ancient Thrace and

related subjects contained in the works of Xenophon, analyzing separately and in detail the known facts of his life and person and his literary production. Thus stipulated, the task of the dissertation has pre-determined its structure with three chapters in the main text: the first one is devoted to the biography of Xenophon, the second – to his literary works, and the third one – to the specific pieces of information these offer about ancient Thrace.

The first chapter, “Xenophon: Life and Work”, contains 65 pages of text. It is divided into two sections, numbered 1 and 2, which also include numbered paragraphs (1.1.1, 1.1.2, etc.). The first section is entitled “Historical Events” and examines the biography of Xenophon. It contains 15 paragraphs, arranged in chronological order and devoted to specific events and other topics connected with his life that have left some traces in the preserved written sources. A somewhat larger space (1.1.1, pages 16–26) is devoted to the controversial issue of Xenophon’s date of birth, the views on which are rather widely discrepant; the doctoral candidate has presented arguments in support of an early date (at the end of the 40s of the 5<sup>th</sup> century) as opposed to the more commonly held view of a date at least a decade later. Over one half of the text in this section (some 32 pages) is devoted to Xenophon’s participation in the campaign of Cyrus the Younger (1.1.7) and the difficult return of the “Ten thousand” after the battle of Cunaxa (1.1.8), of which, thanks to the *Anabasis*, we have a detailed description by Xenophon himself. The last event discussed (1.1.15) is the death of his son Gryllus in the battle of Mantinea in 362 BC. It is a little strange that there is no separate paragraph on the problems surrounding the death of Xenophon and the location of his grave; these are discussed briefly (and out of place) in the paragraph on his birth (pp. 25–26).

The second section of this chapter, named somewhat misleadingly “Xenophon and his anabasis”, is devoted in fact to his personality. Extremely brief (about three pages of text), it contains three numbered paragraphs, the first of which (on Xenophon’s relations with representatives of the political elite) contains only a reference to other places in the text of the dissertation. The second is devoted to Xenophon as a leader and *oikistes*, and the third to his political views. Both the small size of this section and its limited thematic scope have prevented the author from fully realizing his stated intention to present here a complete portrait of Xenophon’s compelling and versatile personality.

The first chapter ends with a brief summary (“Main Conclusions”, pp. 76–77), followed by a chronological table of the main events in Xenophon’s life.

The second chapter is devoted to the literary legacy of Xenophon and contains 53 pages of text. It is divided into three parts that are quite unequal both in terms of volume and in the degree of elaboration. The first section is placed under the allegorical title of “Dance with the Muses” and incorporates three paragraphs with a total volume of only about three and a half pages (78–81), devoted respectively to Xenophon as a writer, as a historian, and as a philosopher. The few specific topics covered in them

do not meet the full range of issues in the said areas, and as a result, the characterization of Xenophon as an author remains rather superficial and incomplete. For example, there is no assessment of Xenophon's language and style, which are often considered to have contributed to the later establishment of the Attic dialect as a Hellenistic *koine* and to the adoption of his *Anabasis* in modern times as a traditional introductory text in the teaching of Ancient Greek. There is also no detailed examination of the literary qualities of his works, which were undoubtedly among the main reasons for his enormous popularity already in antiquity. No comparison is drawn between Xenophon and other earlier or later ancient historians, such as his immediate predecessor Thucydides, who certainly exerted a considerable influence on Xenophon (for example in the description of his own participation in historical events in the third person, a manner of expression which according to the questionable opinion of Penev Xenophon rather appropriated from the orator Antiphon (p. 78).

The greater part of this chapter (some 40 pages) is occupied by the second section, placed under the title "Corpus Xenophonticum" and containing a presentation of the 15 works that have survived under the name of Xenophon, arranged in alphabetical order in numbered paragraphs (2.2.1 to 2.2.15). Each of these paragraphs begins with an overview of the structure and content of the respective work; this is followed by the issues of dating, the preserved codices, the most important modern critical editions, the existing translations, and finally a select bibliography, in most cases reduced to only one or two titles. Each of the examined works is thus given several pages of text; the presentation is accurately elaborated and provides a sufficiently detailed picture of the form and content of Xenophon's literary heritage.

The third section of the second chapter is devoted to the influence of Xenophon and the reception of his literary legacy. Like the first section, this one is also quite short (six and a half pages) and contains three paragraphs devoted respectively to the alleged rivalry between Xenophon and Plato and the parallels in their work (pp. 120–121), to the role of the expedition of the "Ten Thousand" and the war of the Spartan king Agesilaus in Asia (in both of which Xenophon personally participated, and then described them in his literary works) as a prelude to the conquest of the Achaemenid Empire by Alexander the Great about seven decades later (pp. 121–124), and to a Byzantine poetic dedication from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, which contains allusions to Xenophon and his work (pp. 124–126). The issues of Xenophon's influence on other authors (e. g. Flavius Arianus!) and the wide popularity of his works in different ages are not discussed in detail in the dissertation, nor have any convincing reasons and explanations been sought for them.

At the end of the second chapter, we meet again some laconic "Main Conclusions" (pp. 126–127, 19 lines of text), followed by a table with basic information about Xenophon's works (pp. 127–130). It would have been a good idea to include in this table some data on the volume of the respective works

(in books and maybe also the total number of characters in the Greek text).

While the first two chapters play a complementary and explanatory role in the structure of the dissertation, the third chapter, entitled “Ancient Thrace and the Thracians in Corpus Xenophonticum” (pp. 131–201, a total of 71 pages) contains the main text on the topic of the dissertation, as indicated by their identical titles. This chapter is similarly divided into numbered sections (four in total) and paragraphs; on page 144, there is an error in the paragraph number (it should have been 3.1.2). The chapter begins with a brief historical overview of publications containing analyses and presentations of the information on ancient Thrace in the works of Xenophon (pp. 131–132): this text noticeably lacks even a mention of the only previous study on the subject in monographic format – the book of J. P. Stronk from 1995. This is followed by a short a list of passages containing information about ancient Thrace and presented in text form in Appendix 2; the passages from the *Anabasis* are the most numerous, followed by those the *Hellenica* (pp. 133–134). Since the same list is repeated in a more expanded form (with annotations on the content of the passages) in the Index on pp. 205-212, it could have been replaced here with a reference.

The main part of the third chapter of the dissertation is conceived in an unorthodox manner. Instead of strictly following the order of the original texts and commenting on each passage in turn, as is customary in modern commentaries on ancient works, Nikolay Penev has allowed himself more freedom with the thematic approach used in this chapter, having selected a suitable structure for arranging the various plots. This has resulted in a text that is much more informative from the point of view of the task at hand, while being also easier to read and understand. However, this approach also has its drawbacks. It results in a lack of primary analyses of all the individual passages, with an assessment of the information each one contains, this being often heterogeneous (relating to different plots) or presenting nuances in relation to other passages.

The first section of this chapter is entitled “Images and Masks” and contains four numbered paragraphs. The first of these is devoted to information about mercenaries and military commanders in Xenophon (pp. 135–144); of the latter, Alcibiades, Clearchus and Xenophon himself are discussed individually. The second paragraph examines information about Thracian kings and aristocrats (pp. 144–158); it begins with a couple of passages on the independent Thracians and royal hunting and continues with a gallery of personalities: Teres, Mesades, Medokos, Seuthes (II), Cotys/Otys, Medosades, Abrozelmis/Hebryzelmis, Miltocythes, once more Xenophon, Thrasybulus, Iphicrates and Menestheus (Xenophon and Thrasybulus appear here because of the proffered marriages to daughters of Seuthes II, while Iphicrates was actually married to the daughter of Cotys I, and Menestheus was his son from that marriage). The third paragraph is devoted to the story told by Xenophon and recalled much later by Athenaeus and again by Eustathius of Thessalonica about the Thracian Sozius, who hired

a thousand slaves from the wealthy Nicias to work in the Laurium silver mines (pp. 158–166). The appearance of the name Sozios is followed in Theophrastus and in the new Attic comedy (Menander), from where it was transferred also to Roman comedigraphy, together with the characteristic image of a resourceful slave or servant. The fourth paragraph (pp. 167–168) recalls the philosopher Antisthenes, a student of Socrates and founder of the Cynic school (Diogenes was his student), who was of Thracian extraction on his mother's side. Here again the information in Xenophon is supplemented with information from other authors, bringing to life another interesting figure in a more complete and multifaceted way.

The second section of the third chapter is devoted to “Thrace in Asia” (Bithynia) and some related communities in Anatolia; separate paragraphs present and comment on Xenophon’s information about Bithynia, Phrygia, Asian Mysia, Paphlagonia, and the Mossynoeci (pp. 169–187). The paragraphs follow the same internal order: after a summary overview of the relevant passages, the clues they offer about the geography, the political history, and various other related topics pertaining to the examined areas are discussed in turn. The third section is figuratively titled “Orchestra” (pp. 187–197) and examines in three paragraphs the information about the settlements and the economy in ancient Thrace, the Thracian religion, and the feasts of the ancient Thracians. The fourth section of the chapter presents an annotated list of Thracian geographical realities attested by Xenophon (pp. 197–201), including 12 names arranged in alphabetical order, from Byzantium to Hieron Oros.

The third chapter is followed by a brief conclusion (pp. 202–204), in which Nikolay Penev summarizes in nine points some of the main inferences from the analysis of Xenophon’s information about ancient Thrace. After the conclusion is comes the aforementioned “Index” (pp. 205–212), which lists and briefly annotates in table form all passages from the works of Xenophon which offer data about ancient Thrace and related topics; the passages referring directly to Thrace are distinguished (by colouring) from those about other pertinent ancient communities. It would probably have been appropriate to add here (or alternatively in Appendix 2, where the same passages are presented in full text form) references pointing to the places in the text of Chapter 3 where the information in each individual passage is examined and analysed (by referring either to specific pages or to the the internal numbering of sections and paragraphs in the chapter); the current form of the dissertation does not offer such back-referencing possibilities.

The list of references covers 26 pages (213–238). It begins with a section on ancient authors, including numerous editions of the works of Xenophon, as well as works of other ancient authors used in the dissertation. The names of ancient authors have been transliterated in Latin even in titles in the Cyrillic alphabet, which seems to me rather inappropriate, and are added even when they appear in the genitive case in Latin titles; the use of the English “edited by” in titles in Latin is also not good usage.

For a number of authors, only translated editions are cited (e.g., Aristophanes, Herodotus, Isocrates, Justin, Plato, Thucydides). It would have been more appropriate (including for citation in the notes or elsewhere in the text) to format the titles in this section of the bibliography like those in the main one (the modern literature), with the author's name and year of publication in brackets followed by a colon, for example like that:

Xenophon (1910): *Xenophontis Scripta Minora*. Recensuit T. Thalheim. Leipzig: Teubner.

Xenophon (2014): Ксенофонт. *Лакедемонская политика*. Перевод Л. Печатнова. Санкт-Петербург: Гуманитарная академия.

Xenophon (2015): *Memorabilia*. Translated by A. Bonnette. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

It should also be mentioned that the same editions of ancient texts are repeated once again in the section on contemporary research, where, however, they are arranged according to the names of the editors or translators of the text; I would suggest as more appropriate to include here only references to the titles already mentioned above (e.g., Печатнова, Л. (пер.) (2014): виж Xenophon 2014) or to avoid this repetition altogether and refer to the titles in the section on ancient authors in the footnotes (e.g., in note 119 on p. 75: “Виж Печатнова в Xenophon 2014, 26”).

The modern literature cited on pp. 222–238 includes 102 titles in Cyrillic and 153 in Latin script. Given the vast amount of existing literature, the publications included in the list cannot claim to be bibliographically complete, but they do provide a good basis for the doctoral student's research. The introductory article by B. Bogdanov to the 1984 Bulgarian edition of *Anabasis and Hellenica*, mentioned in the text of the dissertation on p. 132 and cited on pp. 13–14, is missing from the list. Some works that are important in terms of the topic of the dissertation are included in the bibliography, but have not been adequately used: for example, J. P. Stronk's 1995 book “The Ten Thousand in Thrace: An Archaeological and Historical Commentary on Xenophon's *Anabasis*, Books VI.iii–vi – VII” is listed here (on p. 237), but is cited only twice in the text (in note 27 on p. 16, in connection with Xenophon's date of birth, and in note 98 on p. 64 in a general statement about the service of Xenophon and the Ten Thousand under Seithes II in the winter of 400/399 BC). The case with the 2017 edition of “The Cambridge Companion to Xenophon”, edited by M. A. Flower, is similar: it is mentioned in the bibliography on p. 232, and is also cited only twice in the text – in note 3 on p. 5 as an example of collective research on the life and work of Xenophon, and in note 8 on p. 8 for the “different Xenophonts” reconstructed by the post-Xenophontian tradition. The same author's book on the *Anabasis* (M. A. Flower. *Xenophon's Anabasis, or the Expedition of Cyrus*. Oxford 2012) also appears in the list of references, but is not cited at all anywhere in the text of the dissertation. There is no mention also of the most recent study on the *Anabasis* – the collective volume edited by T. Rood and

M. Tamiolaki “Xenophon’s Anabasis and Its Reception”, published by Walter de Gruyter in 2022. And while for some of these publications there may be an excuse in the fact that they are not available in the main libraries in Sofia and are only partially accessible on the internet, at least “The Cambridge Companion to Xenophon” is fully accessible (and easily found) online at <https://archive.org/details/the-cambridge-companion-to-xenophon>, and it features serious and up-to-date essays on all of Xenophon’s separate works and also on many other issues of the life, personality, and work of the ancient author.

The second volume of the dissertation includes two large appendices, which together exceed the volume of the text part of the dissertation; they consist of ancient texts, presented in the original (in Ancient Greek or Latin) with a parallel translation into Bulgarian. The first appendix comprises passages containing information on the life and work of Xenophon (168 pages of text), while the second one (172 pages) includes the passages from the writing of Xenophon which contain direct or indirect information about ancient Thrace, the Thracians, or some topics more or less related to them, like “Anatolia, Paphlagonia, Greater and Lesser (Hellespontine) Phrygia ... and some other ancient communities presumably related in cultural and ethnic terms” (p. 412). This structure seems logical, but it has one significant drawback: the repetition of a number of identical texts in both appendices. Most of these repeated texts are from the *Anabasis* (3.2.23–24; 4.5.34; 5.2.2; 5.4.4–10, 18–21; 5.5.13–23, 5.6.15–16, 19–24; 5.7.7, 15; 6.1.16, 33; 6.2.2; 6.2.6–8, 13–19; 6.3.10–26; 6.4.7, 9, 12, 14, 16, 18–19, 23–26; 6.5.11–25; 6.6.4; 7.1.3–7, 12–32, 38; 7.2.8–38; 7.3.1–48; 7.4.1–24; 7.5.1–16; 7.6.1–44; 7.7.1–57; 7.8.1–24); there is one duplicate passage among the texts from the *Hellenica* (4.3.17) and another one among those from the *Memorabilia* (2.5.1). The total volume of the duplicate texts is significant – about 49 pages (over 2000 lines of text) in each of the two appendices. It should also be noted that some of these repeated texts use different translations into Bulgarian in the two appendices (e. g. *Anab.* 3.2.23–24; 6.2.2; 6.3.10–26; 6.4.7 sqq.; 6.5.11–25). These shortcomings could easily have been avoided by arranging the texts in the appendices differently, for example, if all the passages from Xenophon mentioned in the dissertation (including those with information about the author and his views, and those containing information about ancient Thrace) had been collected in one appendix; in which case only the passages about Xenophon from other ancient authors would remain in the other appendix. The delimitation of the texts with information about ancient Thrace is already ensured by the index placed in the first part after the conclusion (on pp. 205–212); a similar index could be added in a suitable place (for example, at the end of the first chapter) for the texts by Xenophon on himself now included in the first appendix.

An inconsequential number of errors are found at various places in the dissertation, mainly such of a technical nature or resulting from carelessness. On p. 69, the name of one of the two Lacedaemonian royal families is spelled *Agidae* instead of *Agiadae*. On pp. 157–158, the name of

Iphicrates' son is misspelled as Menestenes (instead of Menesteus, in Greek Μενεσθεύς). On p. 178 in the text of chapter three and on p. 504 at the end of the second appendix, in the passage added at the end of *Anabasis* about the governors of the Persian satrapies (7.8.25) Dernes is incorrectly listed as the governor of *Phrygia* and *Arabia*, instead of “*Phoenicia* and *Arabia*” (Φοινίκης καὶ Ἀραβίας Δέρνης) in the text of Xenophon (which automatically discredits this phrase as having any relations to Thrace). On p. 181, in the paragraph on Anatolian Mysia, *Daskion* should be corrected to *Dascylium*, and 397 BC to 395 BC. In the list of geographical realities on p. 200, the passages mentioning the Thracian Chersonesos should be supplemented with Anab. 7.1.13, 7.2.15, 7.3.3, and 7.6.14. On p. 205 (Index), in the title of work No 2 (*Anabasis*), the Greek and Latin forms have been replaced with those of the previous work (*Agesilaus*). The same mistake is repeated on p. 127 in the list of Xenophon's works at the end of Chapter 2. However, the correct Greek and Latin forms (Ἀνάβασις; *Anabasis*) are used on pp. 85, 133, and elsewhere in the text of the dissertation. On p. 221, in the section of the bibliography for online resources, the link to the Encyclopedia of Ancient Thrace and the Thracians leads instead to an online edition of dictionary of Harpocrates. On p. 228, again in the bibliography, the 1993 Concise Encyclopedia of Thracian Antiquity is cited inaccurately: the names listed are those of three (of the five) editors of the publication, but they are not identified as such. Two articles in the same encyclopedia (Boteva 1993 and Orachev 1993) are also cited incorrectly: their titles (“*Medosades*” and “*Thracian Delta*”) are not mentioned at all, neither are the corresponding pages in the publication. On p. 504, the last passage from the second catalog (Appendix No 2) has incorrect numbering: Xen. Anab. 7.8.24–26 instead of the correct 7.8.25–26. The errors mentioned are not significant and do not lead to a change in the assessment of the dissertation.


As clearly seen in the preceding text, the dissertation of Nikolay Penev is not one without any shortcomings and problems. I would like to state clearly that these are far outweighed by the positive aspects of this study, which overall elicits a clearly positive response. The work of Nikolay Penev is not only original and the fruit of the author's personal efforts (there are no indications of plagiarism or any other dependence on existing texts), but it also contains significant achievements in the approach to structuring and presenting the material, as well as in the scientific contributions made. For the first time, this dissertation brings together and analyzes all passages about ancient Thrace in the best-preserved classical author to date – Xenophon. The chosen method of thematic presentation of the information about ancient Thrace extracted from the texts of Xenophon allows new nuances and plots to be discovered in them, enriching and refining the source base for one of the key periods in the history of ancient Thrace. The submitted dissertation fully meets the basic requirements for a doctoral thesis – it provides convincing evidence of serious scientific achievements and potential, presenting its author as an established scholar in the field of ancient historiography and Thracian studies. The submitted

documentation shows that all other regulatory requirements have been met. The abstract corresponds to the content of the dissertation and presents it in sufficient detail and clarity.

In conclusion, I confidently give my vote for awarding Nikolay Todorov Penev with the educational and scientific degree “doctor” (PhD).

Sofia, October 11, 2025

Reviewer:

  
(prof. Peter Delev)