

THE NOBLE KARDOUCHOI AND THE BARBAROUS MOSSYNOIKOI: Remembering and Forgetting Ancient Anatolian Peoples

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Abstract

For several hundred years from the mid-first millennium B.C.E. the Mossynoikoi and the Kardouchoi were dominant peoples in their respective regions of Anatolia. While the historical record indicates they were strong militarily and successful at commerce, they were apparently not inclined to express their power or wealth in terms of monumental architecture or durable artwork. In the absence of a material legacy our knowledge of these peoples derives primarily from ancient literary sources, the most important of which is the firsthand account given by the Greek writer Xenophon the Athenian in his *Anabasis*. The aims of this paper are, firstly, to highlight the importance of ancient accounts in so far as they preserve knowledge of peoples who we may otherwise know nothing about and, secondly, to explore how these same texts have a decisive bearing in the process of remembering ancient peoples.

Key Words: *Ethnicity, Anatolia, Xenophon, Anabasis, Memory, Reception.*

SOYLU KARDOUCHİ VE BARBAR MOSSYNOİKOİ:ESKİ ANADOLU TOPLUMLARINI HATIRLAMAK VE UNUTMAK

Özet

Mossynoikoi ve Kardouchoi, M.Ö. ilk bin yılın ortalarından itibaren birkaç yüzyıl boyunca Anadolu'nun kendilerine ait bölgelerinde hâkimiyet sürmüş toplumlardır. Tarihsel kayıtlar bu toplumların askeri açıdan güçlü ve ticarete başarılı olduklarına işaret ederken, güç ya da zenginliklerini gösterişli mimari veya kalıcı sanat eserleri ile ifade etme eğilimi göstermedikleri açıktır. Maddi kalıt bırakmamış olmaları nedeniyle bu toplumlar hakkındaki bilgilerimiz öncelikle, en önemlisi Atinalı Yunan yazar Ksenophon'un *Anabasis*'i olan antik yazınsal kaynaklardan sağlanmaktadır. Bu yazının amacı ilk olarak, antik hikâyelerin, var olmamaları halinde haklarında hiçbir şey bilemeyeceğimiz toplumlar ile ilgili bilgileri günümüze kadar korumuş olmalarının önemini vurgulanması ve ikinci olarak aynı hikâyelerin antik toplumların hatırlanması ve unutulması sürecinde nasıl bir belirleyici rolü olduğunun araştırılmasıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Etnisite, Anadolu, Ksenophon, Anabasis, Hafıza, Kabul.*

Anatolia, it hardly needs to be said, is an extraordinarily wealthy patch of the earth in terms of ancient civilisations.¹ Some of the earliest human settlements, such as Çatalhöyük and Çayönü, are located here, as is what is believed to be the oldest religious

sanctuary yet discovered, at Göbeklitepe in the south-east. Moving into history the number of peoples whom we become aware of through burgeoning travel accounts and histories grows. Many of these, although possibly originating elsewhere, emerged in their historically recognizable forms in Anatolia (Lykaians, Pisidians, Chalybes, Taochoi, Colchians) while others encompassed all or parts of the landmass in their empires

¹ I use the term Anatolia in its broad geographical sense and approximating to the modern territory of the Asian part of the Turkish Republic. All dates are B.C.E. unless stated otherwise.

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(Assyria, Media, Persia, Rome). For these last we typically have considerable quantities of evidence across a range of different sources — literary, archaeological, epigraphical, archival — so enabling us to form detailed pictures of their cultures and societies. Less familiar are, for lack of a better term, the minor civilisations (I hasten to add that the classification between big and small in some cases may be disputed): for some we have essential information, for others only scant references in the literature. It is worth reflecting that there are groups whose existence must be assumed in every epoch even though they are invisible in both the historiographical and archaeological records. My aims in this article are firstly to highlight the critical role played by ancient travellers in preserving knowledge of peoples who existed on the margins of larger entities, and secondly to draw attention to the modern reception of these accounts, and in particular to the way standard responses are modified by the content of the descriptions.

The focus of the study is on the Kardouchoi and the Mossynoikoi, two minor populations who flourished in the time of the Achaemenid Empire (6th-4th centuries) and very likely survived in some form for centuries afterward. The Kardouchoi inhabited a mountainous region in the south-east of Anatolia, bounded by the rivers Tigris (Dicle) to the west and the Centrites (Bhotan Su) to the north. They earned a reputation as formidable warriors, a hardy hills-people living among the heights and scattered pastures of their territory. Similarly, the Mossynoikoi lived in highland areas and were known for their martial prowess. Their domain was on the other side of Anatolia, on the southern Black Sea littoral to the west of Trabzon. This people seem to have had homes in trees and their name is said to derive from that given to the turrets in which they dwelt, the 'mosyni'.² Nothing of either of these peoples survives today: there are no traces of settlement, building, language, or cultural practise. We know only of their existence through the writings of ancient authors, notably Strabo, Herodotus (Mossynoikoi) and Xenophon. The latter's

² Strabo C549. The name was probably a local one to which Greeks added *oikos* to render the meaning ('turret dwellers'). But the etymology is disputed: for discussion see Halliday, 1923.

work is the most valuable as he certainly travelled through these remote places himself and, as I show below, his march record in his *Anabasis* is largely accurate.³ This last point is worth emphasising as the writings of a number of Classical authors, such as Ctesias and Herodotus, often show greater concern for the telling of a good story rather than faithfully reporting what they may have seen on their travels; influencing them as well is a polarised view that sees Greeks and barbarians at opposite ends. Xenophon, of course, does not write outside such cultural parameters and is not without an agenda either, but as we'll see, his goals — for instance his wish to impart lessons in good military leadership — are served by a verifiable travelogue. In other words, the successful realisation of his agenda is to a large extent dependent on his rooting of events in a real historical context. I begin the article with some background to Xenophon and his *Anabasis*, our main source for the Kardouchoi and Mossynoikoi, following this with a look at what the text says about the peoples in question, then finally turning to the reception of the accounts.

XENOPHON AND HIS ANABASIS

Xenophon was an Athenian aristocrat born in Erkhia (Attica) probably in the early 420s. He became a follower of Socrates as a young man and was known in antiquity first and foremost as a philosopher. Together with Plato and other of the Socratics, he devoted much of his energy in later life to defending Socrates against the charges laid against him at his trial in Athens in 399 and to promoting his teaching as a paradigm of morality and virtue.⁴ Quite possibly as part of the same purge that saw Socrates tried and sentenced to death, Xenophon was exiled from Athens at some time between 399-393. As well as his association with Socrates, he had been linked

³ Christopher Tuplin (2007: 7) remarks that no surviving classical author is known to have seen more of Anatolia than Xenophon.

⁴ 'The indictment against him was to this affect: Socrates is guilty of rejecting the gods acknowledged by the state and of bringing in strange deities; he is also guilty of corrupting the youth' (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1.1). The trial was probably part of a drive against perceived enemies of the democracy. For an account of the event and its background see Waterfield, 2009.

with the anti-democratic faction which took power for a short but bloody spell at Athens following the end of the Peloponnesian War in 404.

Xenophon was not in the city when the decree against him was passed.⁵ In 401 he left to join an expedition in Anatolia led by the Persian prince Cyrus the Younger. This ended with the death of Cyrus in central Mesopotamia, whereupon Xenophon found himself stranded with the army of Greek mercenaries which Cyrus had hired to help him win the throne from his brother. Having negotiated a treaty with the Persian King, the Greeks — or the Ten Thousand as they became known in history — set off on their long journey home, travelling up along the Tigris River into eastern Anatolia, eventually in the spring of 400 reaching the Black Sea. Many years later Xenophon wrote an account of the journey, the *Anabasis*, in which he describes peoples and places encountered along the way.⁶ In this regard, the book is a unique repository of ethnographic detail, an important source of information on Classical Anatolia and the Persian Empire, and one of the earliest surviving records of the physical landscapes, climates and natural environments of the regions reported on. For example, the author names, and in many cases provides the dimensions of, major rivers (e.g. Maeander 1.2.5, Kydnos 1.2.23, Psaros 1.4.1, Chalos 1.4.9, Euphrates 1.4.11); he describes in detail the date harvest in Mesopotamia (2.3.14-16) and names animals, such as antelopes and ostriches (1.5.2), which are no longer present in the area. On the Black Sea he reports phenomena such as 'mad honey'⁷, and whistled speech, a practice still alive today in the appropriately named settlement of Kuşköy, 'bird village'.

One of the most distinctive and well-known features of the *Anabasis* is the framework of journey stages which the author provides.

⁵ On Xenophon's exile see Rahn, 1981; Green, 1994; Badian, 2004.

⁶ Xenophon was the author of fourteen complete works. A *Constitution of the Athenians* was also attributed to Xenophon in antiquity but the work, though it is alleged to express his sentiments, is by dint of its early dating almost certainly not his.

⁷ 'Deli bal', a poisonous honey found naturally in Turkey in parts of the Black Sea region. For Xenophon's description of its effects see 4.8-20-21; cf. Diodorus 14.30.

From the outset at Sardis in western Asia Minor these define the march, each stage detailing the number of march days and, more often than not, the number of parasangs or stadia travelled.⁸ The statistical record is supplemented by an assortment of travel detail such as just mentioned: descriptions of landscapes and cities and accounts of peoples encountered on the journey.⁹ In many of its aspects the account can be tested, so allowing a view on its accuracy to be taken. The author's descriptions of ancient cities for instance can be checked against the archaeology or other surviving sources from antiquity in order to verify his autopsy; Larisa (Nimrud) and Mespila (Nineveh) in northern Mesopotamia present two such cases, and the control exercise shows that Xenophon's pictures (3.4.7-11) are largely faithful ones.¹⁰ Another way of testing the record is to check the distances he provides on the route taken by the army. The first half of Book 1, describing the journey across southern Anatolia, a region with a long and continuous settlement history, offers good grounds for this type of control. In his record of these stages Xenophon includes several points on the Royal Road and a number of major cities whose locations are known. If we work on the basis that he assigned 30 stadia to his parasang as Herodotus did (2.6.3, 2.149.3), his travel figures approximate closely with the modern road distances. One of the first to demonstrate this was the 19th century English traveller, William Hamilton, who convincingly reconstructed the stages from Kelainai to Ikonion (1.2.1019) by measuring out the figures given by the author between these fixed points and noting his description of one of the halting places, the unidentified Keramon Agora, as 'the last in this direction before Mysian country' (1.2.10).¹¹

⁸ The parasang was a Persian measure which is not perfectly understood today. Most modern writers think that it was time based, one formula being the distance covered by an army in one hour's marching (Farrell, 1961: 153). The stade, a Greek measure, although certainly spatial did not have a uniform meaning across the Greek world: for instance at Halieis in the Peloponnese it measured 166 meters but at Olympia in the same region it went up to 192.

⁹ On the nature and function of the travelogue, see Brennan, 2012: 308ff.

¹⁰ Tuplin 2003 examines both city descriptions in detail.

¹¹ See Hamilton, 1842. Kelainai = Dınar (Afyon),

KARDOUCHOI

Repeated across the record, testing of descriptions and distances shows the travelogue to be remarkably accurate, a fact which enables us to place store in its extensive detail. In this article I am looking at two of the peoples whom Xenophon encountered on the journey. The first of these, the Kardouchoi, he describes at some length, the main impression we get being of a war-like and independent people. Notably he writes that a whole army which the Persian King sent to subdue them was vanquished in their mountainous territory: 'a royal army of one hundred and twenty thousand had once attacked them but because of the harsh terrain, not one of them had returned home' (3.5.16). Yet the Kardouchoi evidently also found time for trade and manufacture, and must have been not poor, for the Greeks found plentiful provisions and utensils made of bronze in their houses:

There were plenty of food supplies in the villages to take, and the houses were furnished with large numbers of bronze vessels; but the Greeks did not carry them off, nor did they pursue the people. They spared them in hope that the Kardouchoi might be prepared to let them pass through their country as friends, since they [the Greeks] were hostile to the King. 4.1.8.¹²

This apparent prosperity of the Kardouchoi — we can note that Xenophon says the Greeks didn't take any of the bronze utensils, implying that they were valuable — may be explained by the proximity of their territory to what was one of the major crossing places of the Tigris in antiquity. As we know from the example of the Commagenean Kingdom at Nemrut, which controlled trade across the Euphrates in the Hellenistic era (162 B.C.E. to C.E. 72), this could be very lucrative. This was likely to have been the reason too why the Persian King sought to control the Kardouchoi, sending in an army against them as has been remarked. Yet unlike Commagene, whose King Antiochos left an extraordinary legacy in the form of a great mountain top mausoleum, the Kardouchians do not seem to have been Ikonion = Konya.

¹² Translation of *Anabasis* passages are from D. Thomas' forthcoming Landmark translation.

interested in monumental architectural expression. Neither apparently did they seek to expand their native territory, as from their military feats — destroying a Persian army, and very nearly disabling a Greek one — they clearly had the capacity to do. This inwardness in time and space seems to be a feature of a number, perhaps the majority, of minor antique civilizations.

Several other ancient sources refer to the Kardouchoi, although owing to variations in the name they use (Gordi, Gordaei, Carchi, Carduchi) the identification is not absolutely certain. From their similar character and content, it is quite possible that several of these accounts derive from Xenophon's, but some too are likely to be independent and as such bear out the picture of a remote and hardy people who fiercely protected their territory.¹³

MOSSYNOIKOI

The second population I am looking at is the Mossynoikoi. After the Greeks had arrived at the Black Sea, after an extremely difficult winter in the freezing highlands of the east, they continued their journey along the sea coast, heading west toward Byzantium. Between Kerasos, west of Trabzon, and Kotyora (modern Ordu), they trekked and fought their way through the territory of the Mossynoikoi. Xenophon describes these as the most barbarous of all the peoples the Greeks encountered on their journey:

The soldiers who came back from the expedition used to say that these were the most barbarous people they passed through and the furthest removed from Greek customs, for when they were in a crowd they did whatever others might do in solitude, and when they were by themselves they behaved just as if they were in the company of others: they would talk to themselves and laugh at themselves and stand and dance wherever they happened to be, as if showing off to other people. 5.4.34.

Just to show it isn't a case of Xenophon

¹³ See for instance Strabo, *Geography* 16.1.24; Polybius, *Histories* 5.44; Diodorus 14.27; Pliny the Elder, *Nat. Hist.* 6.15.

exaggerating, we get a similar picture from Strabo, the first century B.C.E. geographer, who additionally reports that 600 of the Roman general Pompey's army were destroyed having drunk 'mad-honey'¹⁴ left out for them by the Mossynoikoi:

Now all these peoples who live in the mountains [of the eastern Black Sea] are utterly savage, but the Heptacomitae are worse than the rest. Some also live in trees or turrets; and it was on this account that the ancients called them 'Mossynoikoi', the turrets being called 'mosyni'. They live on the flesh of wild animals and on nuts; and they also attack wayfarers, leaping down upon them from their scaffolds. The Heptacomitae cut down three maniples [600 men] of Pompey's army when they were passing through the mountainous country; for they mixed bowls of the crazing honey which is yielded by the tree-twigs, and placed them in the roads, and then, when the soldiers drank the mixture and lost their senses, they attacked them and easily disposed of them. 12.3.18.

Besides the incidental information contained in his judgement on this people, Xenophon provides us with other detail about the Mossynoikoi leaving us with quite an intimate picture of their lives and culture:

The children of their elite were fattened up and fed on boiled nuts. They were white and soft to an extraordinary extent, and not far short of the same size in both height and girth. Their backs were painted in many colours, while all over the front they sported flower tattoos. The Mossynoikoi also kept trying to have sex in public with the kept women whom the Greeks brought with them...Pickled slices of dolphin-meat were also found in two-handled jars and in other containers they found dolphin-fat, which the Mossynoikoi use just as Greeks use olive-oil. On the upper floors there were lots of nuts, the flat kind without any division in them. This they used for what was actually their main

food, boiling them and baking them into loaves. Wine was also found which, taken neat, seemed to be sharp because of its roughness, but when mixed with water had a good bouquet and a pleasant taste. 5.4.28-29, 32-33.

It is clear from Xenophon's account too that they were also a difficult adversary to overcome in the field. A Greek raiding party was destroyed by defenders and it was only with the help of a disgruntled Mossynoikoi faction that they succeeded in defeating the Mossynoikoi who opposed them. Showing that savagery is not the preserve of modern barbarians, Xenophon describes the reaction of their warriors after they had repelled an attack:

At that, they turned away and went back, and they cut off the heads of the corpses [of the Greek soldiers] and displayed them to the Greeks...all the time dancing and singing to a kind of tune. 5.4.17.

As with the Kardouchoi, again there are no surviving traces of this people outside the pages of Classical literature. As we have seen, the Mossynoikoi were militarily formidable and capable of conquest, and they must have at least had the capacity to acquire wealth, as they had rudimentary boats (5.4.11) and could exert some control over sea traffic along the coast; indeed Herodotus (3.94) reports that as their tribute to the Great King they contributed gold talents to the Persian treasury. Nonetheless, it seems that out of their material wealth, they did not choose to fashion durable artworks or construct memorial architecture or otherwise seek to preserve their own memory for posterity.

REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING THE PAST

For several hundred years beginning in the mid-first millennium, quite possibly earlier, the Mossynoikoi and the Kardouchoi were dominant peoples in the south-eastern Black Sea and south-eastern Anatolian regions respectively. From the surviving historical accounts we can infer that both were strong militarily and successful at commerce. However, they were apparently not inclined to express their power or wealth in terms of elaborate architecture or artwork; at least,

¹⁴ Refer note 7 above.

no evidence of their material cultures has been preserved down to the present day. How can we explain the fact that they did not leave behind traces of their civilisation? There are any number of reasons we should suppose, and probably anthropologists are better placed to provide answers than archaeologists or historians, but it is apt to say that the question itself may owe too much to a materialist, or Western-centred conception of history. While it is surely a truism that all people in all periods were interested in the past, posterity may not have exerted the same pull — or have pulled in the same way — across the cultural spectrum. The proper explanation for the absence of a tangible legacy in these cases could be simply the absence of an impulse to produce one: that these peoples felt no need to have their memory preserved in perpetuity as the builders of the pyramids in Egypt, the acropolis at Athens, and the tomb on Nemrut Dağ clearly did. Alternatively, and referring again to the Western experience, it is conceivable that at some level they believed their deeds would endure in the world of memory, as the Spartans it seems considered theirs would. In comparing the Athenians and the Spartans Thucydides tellingly writes:

Suppose, for example, that the city of Sparta were to become deserted, and that only the temples and foundations of buildings remained, I think that future generations would as time passed find it very difficult to believe that the place had really been as powerful as it was represented to be. Yet the Spartans occupy two-fifths of the Peloponnese and stand at the head not only of the whole Peloponnese itself but also of numerous allies beyond its frontiers. Since, however, the city is not regularly planned and contains no temples or monuments of great significance, but is simply a collection of villages, in the ancient Hellenic way, its appearance would not come up to expectation. If, on the other hand, the same thing were to happen to Athens, one would conjecture from what met the eye that the city had been twice as powerful as in fact it is (1.10).

We might relate such nihilist/enlightened

outlooks to the eventual disappearances of these peoples, though it seems as likely that this end came about because they failed to evolve their identities and thus became either assimilated to others or simply died out as a culture. In this regard, the comparative case of the Yezidis may be instructive. Like the two peoples we have looked at the Yezidis, who live mostly in northern Iraq (or did so up until the genocidal Islamic events of 2014), are a minor population in terms of size and influence; outside of their spiritual centre at Lalesh, which houses the shrine of their most important saint, Sheikh Adi, they have no enduring monuments or architecture to speak of albeit their roots go back into Achaemenid times. Possibly originally adherents of Zoroastrianism, their culture exhibits a high degree of syncretism, being a coherent but flexible structure capable of incorporating elements from elsewhere: within its beliefs and practices Iranian, Muslim, Christian, and even Gnostic elements can be distinguished. Thus they have changed to adapt to their host environments but have successfully retained core tenets of their religion, culture, and social practice. One suspects that the absence of this adaptive quality in a people equates with a comparatively short life span for their civilization.¹⁵

I'd like to turn finally to consider how the representations of the Kardouchoi and Mossynoikoi in the Classical literature have influenced the way they are remembered today. By this I mean that through association with familiar ancient cultures a certain expectation normally exists about past peoples, however, that perception or stereotype is subject to modification, or even upending, depending on the nature of the sources. First a few words on the veracity of Xenophon's ethnic descriptions. I have said that we can take his account to be largely accurate, but also that he had a substantial agenda. It's necessary therefore to keep in mind important underlying factors when reading the text. One is his engagement with panhellenism, a doctrine current in fourth century Greece which argued for a united Greek attack on Persia. In highlighting the independence of the Kardouchoi, he may be

¹⁵ On the Yezidis see Allison, 2014, and Açıkyıldız, 2010.

speaking to the panhellenist in the audience: this people have resisted the Great King, why can't we? So his representation builds up, or amplifies martial qualities and attributes. In the same way, the Mossynoikoi could be taken to represent the barbaric face of the empire, an embodiment of its moral depravity. While there is then almost certainly a degree of authorial exaggeration in the descriptions of both peoples, in light of Xenophon's keenness for accuracy I consider that the essential detail is faithful to the experience of his encounters with these people. As a related point what seems noteworthy as well is that in evaluating a people from the past where our evidence for them is slight it is important that the original context of authorship is appreciated and its impact factored into the assessment.

the Kardouchoi are best remembered today. In large part thanks to Xenophon's account, they are widely claimed as descendants by nationalist-minded Kurds across the Middle East, though in fact, aside from geography, there is no real evidence for a link between the two.¹⁶ Xenophon's description of an independent, proud, and war-like people mirrors their own image of themselves and notwithstanding the absence of evidence for a link has been seized on by nationalist historians and politicians alike. The exploit of defeating an entire imperial army is a particularly attractive one. Memory of the Mossynoikoi has also come down to us in considerable measure through Xenophon; their appearance in Rose Macaulay's classic 20th-century story *The Towers of Trebizond* is a notable testimony to the enduring quality of the *Anabasis*. In contrast, this people, fond of sliced dolphin, outdoor sex and talking aloud to themselves are unclaimed by any of the recent inhabitants of the lands where they once lived, these to include Turks, Laz and Georgians. It seems that the chance to make a claim for long residence, or even to be autochthonous, has not been enough to compensate for having such recalcitrant forebears as the Mossynoikoi. Ironically, while Xenophon's account has ensured the Mossynoikoi are remembered, for those for whom this might matter, they are best forgotten.

Of the two populations we have looked at,

¹⁶ On the pre-Islamic history of the Kurds see Brennan, 2015.

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