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INTERPRETERS AND LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCE IN HERODOTUS AND BEYOND*

Abstract: Herodotus sometimes breaks the general rule in Greek literature by which the whole world converses in effortless Greek. The most notable way he does this is through the presence of linguistic interpreters or other multilingual intermediaries. Less remarked on but similar in effect are situations in which the historian explicitly notes what language (Greek or otherwise) a conversation took place in and episodes in which language barriers prevent communication altogether. This paper examines how such acknowledgements of linguistic difference serve as a distancing device to highlight other kinds of differences between characters, including the political distance between kings and royal subjects, cultural differences between Greeks and others, and, during Croesus' encounter with Cyrus on the pyre, philosophical differences between the wise and the foolish. It considers examples from Herodotus' *Histories* alongside similar episodes in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, with a coda on the reuse and adaptation of the device in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*.

Keywords: interpreters, language, Herodotus, Xenophon, Plutarch, Croesus

Herodotus' *Histories* contain many language interpreters. Perhaps the most famous is the historian himself, who translates many foreign words for his audience, but Herodotus is far from the only interpreter in his narrative.[1] The historian mentions 'interpreters' (*hermēneis*) eight times in the *Histories*, most notably as part of Croesus' encounter with Cyrus on the pyre (1.86.3–6).[2] The explicit communication of Herodotean characters

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[1] For example, Herodotus says that Egyptians call crocodiles χάμψαι (2.69.3). This form stems from the Egyptian *msḥ* plus the plural indefinite article. Compare Coptic ϩⲁⲛ-ⲙⲥⲁϩ (*han-əmsah)* 'some crocodiles'. See Černý (1943). The Egyptian word is also the source of Arabic تِمْساح (*tĭmsāḥ*). On Herodotus' translation of foreign terms in general, see Munson (2005) 55–96; De Luna (2003) 210–12. On other Egyptian glosses, see Lloyd (1976); (1988). They occur at Hdt. 2.30.1, 77.4, 81.1, 92.2, 94.1, 143.4, and 9.32.1.

[2] It should be noted that English 'interpreter' is narrower in sense than ἑρμηνεύς. The English term usually implies both parties are present, while ἑρμηνεύς clearly also applies to bilingual messengers. Cf. Xen. *An.* 4.5.10, 5.34; 7.2.19, 6.43. For an English term that captures this broader sense, see James (2024) 5–7 'bilingual intermediaries'. For the

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through interpreters breaks the regular Greek literary convention, familiar from Homeric epic, in which all characters, Greek and non-Greek alike, communicate unproblematically in Greek without regard for linguistic boundaries.[3] Herodotus' insertion of interpreters into the narrative is only one way to break this convention. The historian also acknowledges the reality of language difference when he explicitly states what language characters use in speaking to one another, that communication was impossible, or that it took place without the use of language, such as in the famous example of silent trade between Carthaginians and Libyans living beyond the pillars of Heracles (4.196). Despite these moments of linguistic clarity, this precision is absent from many other passages where realism would demand it, suggesting that Herodotus' choice to emphasise language difference is not about verisimilitude. Rather, these moments of acknowledged language difference have other narrative functions. Herodotean interpreters often appear in royal audience scenes and military contexts, in both cases linked to royal power and associated with the distance between king and subject. The historian also uses interpreters and examples of failed communication to indicate cultural difference or distrust between characters. Paradoxically, interpreters, whose function in one sense is to provide a linguistic link between speakers, ultimately emphasise the gap that they bridge. The narrative presence of interpreters and other acknowledgments of language difference serves to stress other, non-linguistic differences between characters.

Interpreters have mostly played a subordinate role in studies of language in Herodotus' *Histories*.[4] One approach uses interpreters in Herodotus' narrative as one more index of whether the author is to be trusted on matters of fact. For example, Harrison portrays interpreters' inconsistent presence as a symptom of Herodotus' generally naïve view of foreign languages, noting that they are not present in many situations where we might expect them on purely practical grounds.[5] Harrison argues that 'Herodotus' interpreters … seem to be applied to the narrative like a linguistic panacea' and 'are rather more the products of narrative convenience than of any great experience of the

etymological origins of ἑρμηνεύς, via Carian *armon* 'language interpreter' from Akkadian *targumānu* (whence ultimately also English 'dragoman'), see Janko (2014) 469.

[3] That is, characters in Homer, regardless of origin, speak to each other in Greek without any hint of a language barrier, except perhaps for the Carians' description as βαρβαρόφωνοι at *Il.* 2.867. On the convention also see Lejeune (1950) 51–4; Hall (1989) 117–21. Still, Greeks and Trojans do speak differently from each other in more subtle ways. See Mackie (1996).

[4] Brandwood (2020), which focuses explicitly on Herodotean interpreters, is the exception to the rule. On (foreign) languages in Herodotus, see Campos Daroca (1992a); Harrison (1998); Miletti (2008); Munson (2005); Nolan (2021). See also James (2024) and the brief treatment of Herodotus's interpreters in de Bakker (2007) 63–6.

[5] Harrison (1998) 11–12.

practicalities of language difference'.[6] In contrast, Miletti argues for the *Histories*' value in understanding the presence and use of interpreters in the ancient Mediterranean, despite the somewhat lacunose picture sometimes painted by the *Histories*.[7] Thus, Miletti and Harrison both approach Herodotean interpreters from an empirical point of view but come to very different conclusions.

Such an impasse can be avoided if one investigates Herodotus' aims from a more literary point of view. Harrison already begins to depart from a purely historical approach to the problem of Herodotean interpreters, mentioning Stephanie West's suggestion that Herodotus' interpreters are sometimes meant to mark 'the especially alien nature of the dialogue at issue'.[8] In her book on non-Greek languages in the *Histories*, Rosaria Munson's understanding of Herodotus' metanarrative role as a translator of foreign words provides a helpful paradigm for approaching the *hermēneis* in the narrative itself. Munson sees 'Herodotus *Hermēneus*' not as a translator of mere words but as a cultural interpreter in a broader sense. Herodotus extends 'the linguistic paradigm to non-linguistic paradigms of culture'.[9] Brandwood applies this idea to interpreters, arguing that 'the languages of the barbarians can be understood as language easily enough, but their context and content only achieve their moral effect through Herodotus' careful action as a *hermēneus* on the readers' behalf'.[10] Thus, Brandwood puts Herodotus' *hermēneis* in the context of Herodotus as *hermēneus*. While Brandwood makes an essential move in the right direction, two crucial questions remain unexamined.

First, interpreters are only part of a broader phenomenon that includes other kinds of acknowledgement of linguistic difference between characters.[11] Interpreters are just one way in which Herodotus breaks the literary convention that the whole world speaks Greek.[12] When the cultural distance marked by interpreters becomes too great, such as at the ends of the earth, it

[6] Harrison (1998) 13–14.

[7] Miletti (2008) 46–7.

[8] Harrison (1998) 11.

[9] Munson (2005) 32.

[10] Brandwood (2020) 32.

[11] Cf. Munson (2005) 70–7. On the connection between interpreters and other types of 'bilingual intermediaries', see also James (2024).

[12] When Herodotus' Persians speak to each other in Greek (as, e.g., at 3.80–4), this convention can be compared to what English Literature and Asian Studies scholar Ben Tran (2018a) 154 describes as 'literary dubbing' or a translation in which 'the language that the reader encounters on the page is not the same language that the character thinks and speaks'. See also Tran (2018b).

tends to be marked instead by the inability to communicate.[13] Inversely, the conspicuous absence of interpretation tends to indicate intimacy, as when, for example, a Persian is specified as speaking to a Greek in Greek or a Greek to a Persian in Persian.[14] Including these other acknowledgments of linguistic difference between characters along with interpreters shows how the narrative device fits into a larger picture.

Second, the relationship between Herodotus' use of interpreters and related phenomena and their appearance in other authors remains unexamined. In terms of date and genre, Xenophon's *Anabasis* provides the closest viable material for an extended comparison, because interpreters and other acknowledgements of linguistic difficulties in communication are nearly non-existent in Thucydides' *History* and completely so in Xenophon's *Hellenica*, otherwise natural choices for consideration alongside Herodotus' work.[15] Still, it is only rarely that Xenophon's use of interpreters in the *Anabasis* is compared to Herodotus', and it is usually, not without some justification, to make the former a foil for the latter. For instance, Harrison contrasts the realism of Xenophon's interpreters to the less believable presentation in the *Histories*.[16] Likewise, Dewald and Munson note that interpreters are more frequent in Xenophon than in Herodotus (they appear eleven times in the *Anabasis* and eight times in the *Histories*, while the *Anabasis* is less than half as long).[17] Comparing Herodotus to Xenophon demonstrates that Herodotus is not entirely unique in his use of this literary device, but that he does have some idiosyncrasies, for instance in that Xenophon's interpreters are far more individualised. While each author handles interpreters and similar phenomena in his own way, it will be seen that both authors deploy interpreters and other

[13] On the world's margins in the *Histories*, see among others Fehling (1994).

[14] On the rarity of such moments, see Harrison (1998) 9–10.

[15] Thucydides provides only two examples, one of them relatively minor. At Thuc. 4.109.4, Thucydides notes that Gaulites, a Carian sent as an ambassador by Tissaphernes, was bilingual (δίγλωσσος). At Thuc. 1.138.3, the historian reports that Themistocles learned Persian to better communicate with Xerxes. Cf. James (2024) 7; Harrison (1998) 13. While it lacks any mention of interpreters, Xenophon's *Hellenica* does, however, feature many apparently unmediated conversations between Greeks and non-Greeks, including those between Agesilaus, King Otys, and Spithridates (4.1.5–15) and between Agesilaus and Pharnabazus (4.1.31–40).

[16] Harrison (1998) 13.

[17] Dewald and Munson (2022) 305. Xen. *An.* 1.2.17, 8.12; 2.3.18, 5.35; 4.2.19, 4.5, 5.10, 5.34; 7.2.19, 6.9, 6.43. Hdt. 1.86.4, 86.6; 2.125.6, 154.2, 164.1; 3.38.4, 140.3; 4.24. The related denominative verb ἑρμηνεύω is found nowhere in Herodotus. Though it may mean 'interpret' in the sense 'explain' (as at Soph. *OC* 398) or 'express' (as at Pl. *Leg.* 966b), Xenophon uses it to mean 'translate', once in the *Anabasis* (5.4.4–5) and once in the *Oeconomicus* (11.23). It is used in the metaphorical sense of 'put (an idea) into words' by Pericles at Thuc. 2.60.

acknowledgements of language barriers between characters to emphasise hierarchical, cultural, and geographic distances.

Moreover, while a full comparison of Herodotus' treatment of interpreters with the later tradition is beyond the scope of the current study, it is instructive to trace the reuse of the device in Plutarch *Lives* as a single example.[18] It is the similarity in Plutarch's use of interpreters as a distancing device that makes the author a fruitful inclusion in this study, despite the fact that the *Lives* are not only much later in date than the *Histories* and the *Anabasis*, but also somewhat different in genre, belonging to biography rather than history.[19] The inclusion of the *Lives* shows how some tropes present already in Herodotus and Xenophon developed new meanings in the later tradition, for instance in the use of interpreters to mark the cultural difference between Greeks and Romans.

Deioces and Royal Power: Interpreters and Audience Scenes

Interpreters in Herodotus are frequently linked to kings. In five out of their eight appearances in the *Histories*, interpreters serve a king in some way, and this connection to royal figures is also notable in Xenophon (and, we will see later, Plutarch).[20] Herodotus links interpreters to royal power in two different ways. The first is through audience scenes, particularly in the case of the Persian Great King.[21] One way to approach the connection between Persian kings and interpreters is to begin with the story of Deioces, whom Herodotus

[18] The noun ἑρμηνεύς occurs in the *Lives* at *Ant.* 27.4; *Artax.* 13.6; *Cat. Mai.* 12.5, 12.7; *Sull.* 27.2; *Them.* 6.4, 28.1. The frequently synonymous term δίγλωσσος, which does not occur in Herodotus or Xenophon, occurs referring to a bilingual intermediary at *Them.* 6.3; *Crass.* 28.4, 28.5, and in the sense 'speaking two languages' (without the implication of being an interpreter) at *Alex.* 37.1. The related verb ἑρμηνεύω appears thrice in the *Lives* (*Rom.* 18.9, 21.4; *Cat. Mai.* 22.5). Two of these uses, occurring in the *Life of Romulus*, occur in the formula ἄν τις ἑρμηνεύσειε, '(which) someone could translate (as)', used to explain the meanings of *Jupiter Stator* and *Februarius* in Greek. This use falls outside of the scope of the current discussion. Most other derivatives of ἑρμηνεύς, such as the adjective ἑρμηνευτικός and nouns ἑρμήνευσις, ἑρμήνευμα, ἑρμηνευτής, and ἑρμηνεύτρια do not occur in the works of Herodotus, Xenophon, or Plutarch. Similarly, the noun ἑρμηνεία does not occur in the works of Herodotus, in the *Anabasis*, or in the genuine works of Plutarch, though it does occur at Xen. *Mem.* 4.3, albeit referring to 'expression' rather than linguistic translation.

[19] For a recent approach to the distinction yet connections between Plutarchan biography and historiography see, among others, Chrysanthou (2017).

[20] Hdt. 1.86.4, 86.6; 2.154.2; 3.38.4, 140.3 vs. 2.125.6, 164.1; 4.24. Cf. Plut. *Them.* 6.4, 28.1; *Artax.*13.6; Xen. *An.* 1.2.17, 8.12; 2.3.18.

[21] On the connection between interpreters and the Persian court, see Campos Daroca (1992a) 65–6.

presents as the man who brought the peoples of Asia, including his own Medes, back under a king after they had all thrown off the Assyrian yoke (1.96.1–2). The historian portrays Persian kingship as a Median inheritance, using the Deioces story to explain the origins of the first Persian king, Cyrus (1.95).[22] Among other elements connecting Deioces to Cyrus and his lineage is Herodotus' reference to him as *βασιλεύς* ('King') without the definite article (e.g., at 1.99.1).[23] Deioces isolates himself to create a sense that he is more than human, mirroring Cyrus' opinion of himself later in Book One (1.204.2). While interpreters do not appear in the Deioces story as such, the story serves as useful framework through which to examine the role of *hermēneis* in establishing distance between rulers and the ruled elsewhere in the narrative.[24]

Much of this distancing is literal and spatial. After coming to power through a trick, Deioces' first command is to build him 'a palace worthy of kingship' (*οἰκία … ἄξια τῆς βασιληίης*, Hdt. 1.98.2).[25] At his newly constructed capital, Ecbatana, he orders the construction of seven concentric walls around his palace, the outermost five of which are painted in distinct colours (1.98.5).[26] The sixth is covered in silver and the seventh gilded (1.98.6). The Medes are to live outside his seven walls, which appear in such colourful multiplicity only in the Herodotean account of the city, in contrast to those of Polybius (10.27–31), Diodorus Siculus (17.110.7), Josephus (*AJ* 10.264–5) and Judith (1.2–4). As Dewald and Munson note, seven is 'conventional or symbolic'.[27] For example, Herodotus assigns the Lydian king Croesus seven years of ascent and of decline

[22] See Munson (2009) 459–60; Thomas (2012) 244–52; Provencal (2015) 62–5.

[23] On other ways in which Herodotus uses Deioces as a precursor for later Persian kings, see Munson (2009) 459–60. There seems to have been no real-life Deioces. See Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1988); Wiesehöfer (2004).

[24] On the connection between Deioces, later Persian kings, and the use of intermediaries to communicate with their subjects see de Bakker (2007) 54–5. De Bakker argues that 'Herodotus may have modelled the isolated position of the Persian king in relation to his subjects on the lofty position of Zeus in the Homeric epics'. On Deioces as a prototypical tyrant, see Dewald (2003) 27–8.

[25] Deioces first builds a reputation as a fair judge until the Medes will turn to no other, but then withdraws his services, leading to lawlessness and pillage. In response, the Medes appoint him king (Hdt. 1.96.2–98.1). The use of a trick to obtain tyrannical power recalls Herodotus' story of the Athenian tyrant Peisistratus (1.59–60). On the connection between the two episodes, as well as the Persian constitutional debate in Book Three, see Walter (2004).

[26] Herodotus prefers *Ἀγβάτανα* (1.98.3, 110.2, 153.3; 3.64.4, 92.1) to the more common Greek form *Ἐγβάτανα*, whence the English form used here. The city probably lies under today's Hamadan. See Dewald and Munson (2022) 327.

[27] Dewald and Munson (2022) 327.

and notes that he consulted seven oracles (1.46.2).[28] Deioces' seven walls both create and emphasise his separation from his subjects. The goal, as Herodotus sees it, is to build a sense of difference between Deioces and his former equals to avoid their jealousy (1.99.2). Deioces intends, by distancing himself from his former equals, to convince them that he is not only different but better than them.

The walls are only the most literal of the barriers between Deioces and the Medes. Deioces is 'the first to establish the rule that nobody should come see the king in person but that everything should be done through messengers'.[29] Deioces decides lawsuits as he had previously, but now he receives them in writing, and sends back his response (Hdt. 1.100.1). The messengers (*ἄγγελοι*) here parallel the royal interpreters elsewhere in Herodotus, who themselves can be understood as a specific type of messenger.[30] Deioces' self-isolation can be compared with theories of kingship articulated by anthropologists but with a Herodotean twist.[31] Graeber and Sahlins note that all kings' political power 'generally takes the form of a battle between two principles: divine kingship and sacred kingship', with the former advanced by the king and the latter by the people.[32] Divine kingship is the ability to act godlike, 'the essence of sovereignty', and 'rain favour, or destruction, with arbitrariness and impunity'. In contrast, sacred kingship emphasises the need to hide the king's mortal

[28] For other examples of Herodotus' use of this traditional number, see Fehling (1989) 225–6 and Blom (1936). As Rubincam (2003) correctly points out, Fehling and Blom's arguments are impressionistic and do not show that the overall distribution of traditional numbers is higher than one would expect by random chance in Herodotus (after all, sometimes a grocery bill *does* just come out to $100.00). While Rubincam confirms that Herodotus shows a preference for so-called traditional numbers, this preference is universal among Greek historians, though lower in the historians than in the poets. Moreover, Herodotus' preference is equal to Thucydides' and less than Xenophon's. See also Wallace (2016) 169, who somewhat underplays Rubincam's important contribution. See also Rubincam (2012).

[29] Hdt 1.99.1: *κόσμον τόνδε Δηιόκης πρῶτός ἐστι ὁ καταστησάμενος, μήτε ἐσιέναι παρὰ βασιλέα μηδένα δι' ἀγγέλων δὲ πάντα χρᾶσθαι*. Note the connection between Deioces and later rulers implied by 'first' (*πρῶτος*).

[30] For interpreters as messengers of 'transported speeches', see de Bakker (2007) 63–6. Likewise, Deioces orders the Medes 'to strengthen him with bodyguards' (*κρατῦναι αὐτὸν δορυφόροισι*, Hdt. 1.98.3). On how bodyguards (literally 'spear-bearers') link the Deioces episode with others concerning monarchical power, see Dewald and Munson (2022) 326. Bodyguards form a conspicuous part of the Great King' s entourage later (Hdt. 3.139.2; 5.12.3, etc.), of the games played by the young Cyrus, in which he shows his royal nature (1.114.2, 116.4, 117.1, 120.2), and of the Peisistratus narrative (1.59.5) and those of other Greek tyrants (5.92*η*3; 7.154.1).

[31] On sacred royalty in the Deioces episode, see also Panaino (2005).

[32] Graeber and Sahlins (2017) 7–8.

nature by sealing him off from contact with his subjects, resulting in a diminution of royal power.[33] In the Deioces example, however, the two are mutually reinforcing. Sealing himself off with many barriers, including interpreter-like messengers, is intended to hide the king's merely human nature from his subjects, and it helps rather than hinders Deioces' bid to assume the divine power of kingship over the Medes.

Hermēneis, working analogously to Deioces' messengers, appear as one of many barriers surrounding later Great Kings elsewhere in the *Histories*. For instance, interpreters prevent direct royal access during the story of Syloson, a brother of the Samian tyrant Polycrates.[34] In exile following the death of his brother, Syloson is among the Greeks who accompany King Cambyses during his invasion of Egypt (Hdt. 3.139.1). In Memphis, Darius, then just one of Cambyses' bodyguards, sees Syloson wearing a red cloak and tries to buy it. Instead, Syloson gifts it to him. Upon Darius' ascent to the throne, Syloson decides to go to Susa to request that he return the favour by restoring him to Samos (3.139.2–140.1). The scene that follows paints a picture of the role played by interpreters in the restricted access so crucial to Herodotean kingship, again in the context of a royal palace, here Susa rather than Ecbatana.[35]

First, Syloson arrives at the area before the entrance to the audience room. More literally, he arrives at 'the entrance to the palace of the king' (ἐς τὰ πρόθυρα τῶν βασιλέος οἰκίων, Hdt. 3.140.1), a phrase which echoes other Greek descriptions of visits to the Persian court.[36] Once there, he says only that he is a benefactor of the king (καὶ ἔφη Δαρείου εὐεργέτης εἶναι, Hdt. 3.140.1). The term εὐεργέτης ('benefactor'), while Greek, mirrors the language of Achaemenid inscriptions, and speaks to Syloson's desire to break through the boundaries between him and the king by using the proper conceptual framework.[37] A gatekeeper (πυλουρός)—another middleman figure like a messenger or interpreter—then reports this to Darius, who is shocked that any Greek could be a royal benefactor; after all, he just became Great King (1.140.2). On Darius' orders, the gatekeeper leads Syloson into the king's

[33] See also Richards (1968) on 'adverse sacralisation'.

[34] Polycrates has appeared twice before during Book Three (Hdt. 3.39–47, 120–8).

[35] It was Darius who first had the palace at Susa built. See Boucharlat (1990) 149. The Achaemenids used Ecbatana, first built during the Median period, as a summer palace. See Brown (1998). It reappears as an Achaemenid administrative centre at Hdt. 3.64.4.

[36] For instance, Xenophon describes the Spartan Callicratidas' visit to the Persian prince Cyrus to request for Persian funding for his fleet thus: καὶ ταῖς ἐπὶ τὰς θύρας φοιτήσεσιν (Xen. *Hell.* 1.6.7). See also Xen. *Cyr.* 3.3.13, *An.* 1.9.3, and Plut. *Them.* 27.

[37] On Persian εὐεργεσίη in Herodotus, see James (2024) 14: 'certainly the terminology of εὐεργεσίη in Herodotus is almost exclusively used with respect to the Persians'. So Hdt. 3.67.3, 140.1–3; 4.165.2; 5.11.1; 7.39.2; 9.18.3; cf. 1.69.3 (Lydian), 3.47.1 (Spartan).

presence (1.140.3). By drawing out the audience scene with multiple stages and a back-and-forth between Darius and his gatekeeper while Syloson waits at the door, Herodotus not only builds suspense but also conveys the seclusion of the king and the majesty of his court, a chain of seclusion in which interpreters form the next link.

After Syloson's entrance, interpreters further stress the distance between the king and everyone else. When Syloson finally enters the king's presence, Darius does not address him. Instead, the interpreters are the first to speak (Hdt. 3.140.3):

> *παρῆγε ὁ πυλουρὸς τὸν Συλοσῶντα, στάντα δὲ ἐς μέσον εἰρώτων οἱ ἑρμηνέες τίς τε εἴη καὶ τί ποιήσας εὐεργέτης φησὶ εἶναι βασιλέος.*
>
> The gatekeeper led Syloson in, and he stood in the middle as the interpreters kept asking him who he was and what he said he had done to be a benefactor of the king.

Unlike the gatekeeper, the interpreters are plural (*ἑρμηνέες*). The sense of multiplicity embedded in this noun is also reflected in the imperfect form *εἰρώτων* ('kept asking'). The imperfect tense suggests repetition (and thus likewise plurality), in contrast to Syloson's singular answer in the aorist tense (*εἶπε*).[38] This plurality of barriers recalls Deioces' self-isolation: Deioces has seven walls (1.98.5–6), many bodyguards (1.98.2), and multiple messengers (1.99.1). Even *οἰκία*, the word used for 'palace' in the Deioces passage, is plural, referring to the various buildings forming part of a palace complex (1.98.2). Like the seven walls surrounding Ecbatana, multiple interpreters encircle Syloson while he stands in the middle. Moreover, since, as throughout the examples considered here, the interpreters listen to what each party says before translating it, everything must be told twice.[39] A shared plurality emphasises how, like Deioces' walls, interpreters function as additional barriers between the king and his subjects. So too does the fact that the interpreters constitute part of a long sequence of barriers leading up to the scene.

Just as the presence of interpreters enacts royal power, Herodotus also shows that the ability to communicate without them can thwart it. James characterises the Milesian tyrant Histiaeus' speech as 'linguistically Persian',

[38] Compare van Emde Boas et al. (2019) sec. 33.24.

[39] This staged style of communication is what Becerra Islas (2020) 33 identifies as consecutive interpretation, the dominant mode of ancient interpretation. This style is opposed to simultaneous translation, more common in contemporary settings in part due to modern technology.

showing how he uses 'Persianisms' to deceive King Darius about his planned revolt and then saves his own life by crying out in Persian when he is later captured fighting alongside the Ionians (Hdt. 6.29.1–2).[40] The subversion of royal power through direct communication also occurs in Herodotus' tale of the banquet shared by Thebans and Persians before their defeat at the Battle of Plataea, in which the use of the Greek language allows a Persian noble to communicate a subversive truth. According to Herodotus, Thersander of Orchomenus said that the Theban Attaginus invited the Persian general Mardonius and fifty of the most distinguished Persians to dine before the battle. Each Persian shared a couch with a Theban. Thersander relates how the Persian sharing his couch spoke to him in Greek (Ἑλλάδα γλῶσσαν ἱέντα, Hdt. 9.16.2), predicting the army's defeat and attributing its destruction to divine will: 'it is impossible for a human being to turn aside what is bound to happen on account of the god' (ὅ τι δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀμήχανον ἀποτρέψαι ἀνθρώπῳ, 9.16.4). Although many Persians know their doom, they are bound to follow their leaders (9.16.5).[41] While one explanation for this explicit use of Greek could be to convey a secret kept from the other Persians, the emphasis on additional markers of intimacy suggests a different explanation.[42] Alongside their shared language, Herodotus specifies Thersander's status as one who shares a table and cup with his interlocutor (ὁμοτράπεζός τέ μοι καὶ ὁμόσπονδος ἐγένεο, 16.2). Secrecy also seems obviated by the Persian's statement that many of his comrades share his tragic awareness. Instead, the use of Greek here highlights a closeness and equality between Greek and barbarian, at least for a moment, just as the Great King's use of interpreters elsewhere highlights distance and hierarchy.

Military Interpreters

The second way that interpreters are linked to royal power is through the military. Kings employ interpreters militarily in both the *Histories* and Xenophon's *Anabasis*. However, military interpreters function very differently in the two authors. Whereas Herodotus' military interpreters are a general class involved in articulating the relationship between Egyptian kings and their subjects, in Xenophon, interpreters working for Persian royalty appear as

[40] James (2024) 9–13.

[41] On the Homeric resonances in this passage see, among others, Tuplin (2022) 311–12; Flower and Marincola (2009) 126–33. The Persian seems to speak for Herodotus. As Flower and Marincola (2009) 128 put it, he sums up 'many of the themes found throughout the *Histories*: the gap between human and divine purpose; the working out of divine ordinance; failure to believe warnings'.

[42] Cf. James (2024) 8.

named individuals. In Herodotus, military interpreters are unnamed and impersonal, as befits their treatment as a class rather than as individuals. Unlike in Xenophon, where *hermēneis* appear relaying messages in battle, their Herodotean counterparts are military in the sense that they allow communication between the king and his mercenaries, though we never see this communication in action. There is again a connection to a type of distance, as interpreters highlight the foreign nature of the king's Greek and Carian mercenaries and separate them from his other subjects.

In his Egyptian *logos*, Herodotus twice mentions a hereditary class of interpreters.[43] The first example occurs during Herodotus' history of Egypt (2.99–182), when he explains how the Pharaoh Psammetichus conquered Egypt by befriending some Ionian and Carian pirates (2.151).[44] The historian attributes the origin of a class of Egyptian interpreters to a need for the king to communicate with the Greek and Carian mercenaries whom he settled in Egypt after they helped him secure his rule (Hdt. 2.154.1–2):

> *τοῖσι δὲ Ἴωσι καὶ τοῖσι Καρσὶ τοῖσι συγκατεργασαμένοισι αὐτῷ ὁ Ψαμμήτιχος διδοῖ χώρους ἐνοικῆσαι ἀντίους ἀλλήλων, τοῦ Νείλου τὸ μέσον ἔχοντος … καὶ δὴ καὶ παῖδας παρέβαλε αὐτοῖσι Αἰγυπτίους τὴν Ἑλλάδα γλῶσσαν ἐκδιδάσκεσθαι· ἀπὸ δὲ τούτων ἐκμαθόντων τὴν γλῶσσαν οἱ νῦν ἑρμηνέες ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ γεγόνασι.*
>
> To the Ionians and the Carians who had helped him, Psammetichus gave lands to make their home in, opposite each other with the Nile in the middle … And what is more, he gave them Egyptian children to learn Greek. The current interpreters in Egypt are descended from those who learned the language.

The interpreters are again plural, though of a different kind of plurality than in the case of the audience-scene interpreters. They are plural due to belonging to a general class rather than to emphasise the impressive number of hangers-on at the king's court. Still, like the audience-scene interpreters, the author presents them as a group and links them closely to royal power. The king's goal seems to be to cement the mercenaries' dependence upon him and, therefore, loyalty. He keeps them apart from his other subjects, and even from each other, by placing them in separate settlements. By enabling the Greeks

[43] For the definition of a Herodotean *logos*, see Immerwahr (1966) 14–15, who took the concept from Pohlenz (1937).

[44] On the real Psammetichus, see Spalinger (1976); (1978).

and Carians to communicate with him through interpreters, he discourages them from learning Egyptian. He thus distances them from other Egyptians.[45]

Herodotus mentions these Egyptian interpreters again as part of his account of the reign of Psammetichus' great-grandson Apries. Facing a rebellion led by the future king Amasis, Apries mobilises 30,000 Carians and Ionians (Hdt. 2.163.1).[46] Against him are arrayed all the Egyptians of two different warrior groups, the Hermotybies and the Calasiries, providing Herodotus the opportunity for an excursus on the Egyptian class system. He mentions interpreters among seven other Egyptian classes (Hdt. 2.164.1):

> ἔστι δὲ Αἰγυπτίων ἑπτὰ γένεα, καὶ τούτων οἱ μὲν ἱρέες, οἱ δὲ μάχιμοι κεκλέαται, οἱ δὲ βουκόλοι, οἱ δὲ συβῶται, οἱ δὲ κάπηλοι, οἱ δὲ ἑρμηνέες, οἱ δὲ κυβερνῆται.
>
> There are seven *genea* of Egyptians, and some of these are called the priests, others the warriors, the cowherds, the swineherds, the peddlers, the interpreters, and the pilots.

The word used for these seven categories (*γένος*) is a vital point of interpretation. The term is related to the verb *γίγνεσθαι*, which originally meant 'to be born' before it took its standard classical meaning 'to come into being' or 'become'.[47] The etymological connection with birth is felt in *γένος*' continued use to denote 'kin', 'family', or other groupings ostensibly based on descent, such as ethnic groups.[48]

Thus, what Herodotus catalogues here is not a complete set of Egyptian classes but rather a list of social groups based on descent, a fact underscored when he notes that among the Calasaries, who like the Hermotybies are prevented from learning a trade so they can dedicate themselves to warfare,

[45] On the role the interpreters play in distancing the Greeks and Carians from the Egyptian population, see Donadoni (1986) 204–5. On the possibility that interpreters played in important role in the Greek-speaking communities of the Nile Delta, see Brandwood (2020) 19.

[46] Amasis himself becomes a friend to the Greeks later in his reign, giving them the trading-centre of Naucratis (Hdt. 2.178), allying with Cyrene (2.181), and making dedications at Greek sanctuaries (2.182).

[47] Chantraine (1999) 221–2; cf. Beekes (2010).

[48] Herodotus uses the term both to describe Athenian families like the Gephyraei and Alcmeonidae as well the population of Attica as a whole, since Athenian citizenship was restricted to those of Athenian birth (Hdt. 5.55, 62.2, 91.1). As Hall (1997) 35 notes, the term 'can be applied to a category of any size that recognizes its members to be enlisted automatically by birth'. On the link between descent and citizenship at Athenians, see among others Lape (2010) and Forsdyke (2012a).

son succeeds father (2.165.1–166.2). This explains why Herodotus omits farmers from this list, as well as the craftspeople (*χειρώνακτας*) and traders (*ἀγοραίους*) mentioned at 2.141.4. The passage shows the persistence of interpreters along with the Ionian and Carian mercenaries in the king's employ: they come to Psammetichus' great-grandson's help just as they did Psammetichus himself. Herodotus even cites one such interpreter as a source, via an inscription on Cheops' Great Pyramid at Giza, regarding how much was spent on radish, onion, and garlic for the workers who built it (2.125.6).[49] Herodotus thus imagines that the interpreters not only separate the Ionian and Carian mercenaries from other groups but replicate that distance over generations.

The military use of interpreters, and particularly their role as an intermediary between a royal figure and his mercenaries, is also common in Xenophon's *Anabasis*. However, Xenophon's account focuses on specific details instead of broader practices. For instance, he describes Pigres, who communicates orders between the Persian Cyrus and his Greek mercenaries, as a *hermēneus* in two of the three moments in which he mentions him by name (*An.* 1.2.17, 8.12).[50] Pigres first appears near the beginning of the *Anabasis* when the queen of Cilicia asks Cyrus to exhibit his army to her (1.2.14). After drawing up his forces and riding by them in a chariot, Cyrus orders the Greeks to make a simulated attack (*An.* 1.2.17):

> *ἐπειδὴ δὲ πάντας παρήλασε, στήσας τὸ ἅρμα πρὸ τῆς φάλαγγος μέσης, πέμψας Πίγρητα τὸν ἑρμηνέα παρὰ τοὺς στρατηγοὺς τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐκέλευσε προβαλέσθαι τὰ ὅπλα καὶ ἐπιχωρῆσαι ὅλην τὴν φάλαγγα.*
>
> After he drove by everyone, having stopped his chariot in front of the middle of the phalanx, he sent the interpreter Pigres to the Greek generals and ordered that the whole phalanx lower arms and advance.

[49] For the actual rations, recorded on a recently discovered papyrus, see Stille (2017). Diodorus Siculus (1.64.3), likely drawing on Herodotus but having made his own trip to Egypt, mentions the same inscription. See Burton (1972) 189. As Lloyd (1988) 70 notes, Old Kingdom pyramids do not bear contemporary inscriptions. For this, among other reasons, the reported inscription is surely not genuine.

[50] Rubtsov (2022) 30 argues that 'the particular functions of Pigres are not relevant, and that being an interpreter on occasion is just one of them', since he is entrusted with tasks that are 'more suitable to a highly ranked officer than to an interpreter', but this assumes that being an interpreter is necessarily a lowly position. On the relationship between Cyrus and Xenophon, see *An.* 3.1.4, where Xenophon describes himself as a 'guest-friend' (*ξένος*) of Proxenus, who sent for Xenophon promising to make him a 'friend' (*φίλος*) of Cyrus.

The Greeks shout as they charge towards their camp, striking fear in the non-Greeks and causing them to flee, delighting Cyrus (1.2.18). In marked contrast to the plural anonymity of Herodotus' interpreters, Xenophon's account features an interpreter who is not only singular but named, receiving more emphasis here than the generals who then pass on Cyrus' orders to the Greek soldiers.

Pigres shows up twice more in the *Anabasis*. At 1.5.7, Cyrus orders him to have troops extricate some wagons from a narrow and muddy place in which they have become stuck. Pigres functions again as the transmitter of the king's orders, even if doing so does not involve translating them into Greek. In this passage, Glus, who appears to be a similar figure, serves as Pigres' companion. While Glus, an Egyptian, is never called a *hermēneus*, he serves like Pigres as an intermediary between Cyrus and the Greeks.[51] For example, after the Greek soldiers decide to continue with Cyrus after belatedly learning that their march inland is directed against Babylon and Cyrus' brother, King Artaxerxes II, it is Glus who conveys Cyrus' praise and promise to reward them (*An.* 1.4.16).[52] Like Glus is Pategyas, who shouts to everyone both in Greek and 'in Barbarian' (*βαρβαρικῶς*) that Artaxerxes is approaching with a large army (1.8.1). Pigres is thus not the only named military interpreter in the *Anabasis*, though other figures like Glus or Pategyas may not be called interpreters explicitly.

In Pigres' final appearance, he interprets Cyrus' commands right before his fateful battle with his brother the Persian king. Pigres is one of a small group that rides by the Greek lines before the battle (*An.* 1.8.12):

> *καὶ ἐν τούτῳ* Κῦρος *παρελαύνων αὐτὸς σὺν* Πίγρητι *τῷ ἑρμηνεῖ καὶ ἄλλοις τρισὶν ἢ τέτταρσι τῷ* Κλεάρχῳ *ἐβόα ἄγειν τὸ στράτευμα κατὰ μέσον τὸ τῶν πολεμίων, ὅτι ἐκεῖ βασιλεὺς εἴη· κἂν τοῦτ', ἔφη, νικῶμεν, πάνθ' ἡμῖν πεποίηται.*
>
> At this moment, Cyrus himself was riding by with the interpreter Pigres and three or four others, and he called out to Clearchus to lead his army against the enemy's centre because that was where the King was. 'If we conquer here', he said, 'we have accomplished everything'.

Pigres is one of a group here, but he is still highly individualised. The circle accompanying Cyrus is small. The fact that, besides Pigres and Cyrus, there are only three to four other companions gives the sense not of a large royal entourage but of a few close companions. Of these companions, Pigres is the

[51] Lendle (1995) 42.

[52] Glus appears twice more, at 2.1.3 and 2.4.24.

only one named, elevating him. On the face of it, Cyrus yells out his orders here, not Pigres. Still, the latter likely appears because it is through him that Cyrus' orders reach the Greek commanders.

Just as Psammetichus' interpreters enable his conquest of Egypt using Greek mercenaries, so too do Cyrus' allow his bid for the throne with the help of the Ten Thousand. Nevertheless, Xenophon's Pigres presents a singular face to the *Histories*' anonymous plurality. The three Pigres episodes are suffused with the sort of realistic details that lead Harrison to conclude that, unlike Herodotus' interpreters, Xenophon's 'seem to reflect the real attempt of Xenophon to "get by" in foreign lands'.[53] Military interpreters are indeed quite different in the two authors' works. Interpreters are more abstract in the *Histories*; in the *Anabasis*, they are concrete. But if Xenophon's treatment reflects personal experience, he may still connect interpreters to his personal experience of royal power. Xenophon just describes how this power works in a detailed and individualised way rather than in the generalities favoured by Herodotus.

Power and Cultural Difference

While the above analysis of Herodotus' audience-scene interpreters, beginning with the Deioces episode, explains part of their function, not all audience-scene interpreters serve solely as a barrier between the king and others. Another type of distancing effect is also at work in Darius' well-known 'seminar on comparative funerary practices' at the Persian court.[54] Herodotus embeds the episode within his account of the conquest of Egypt by Darius' predecessor, Cambyses. While in Memphis, Cambyses disrespects sacred Egyptian customs, even 'opening up old tombs and examining the bodies' like a modern archaeologist.[55] Most importantly, he kills the sacred Apis Bull (3.29.1–3).[56] In his disregard for others' sacred customs, Herodotus finds proof of Cambyses' madness, since every people regards its own customs as the best and would choose them over everyone else's (3.38.1). Herodotus introduces an experiment

[53] Harrison (1998) 13.

[54] I take the phrasing from Harrison (1998) 11, who attributes it to Stephanie West.

[55] Hdt. 3.37: *θήκας τε παλαιὰς ἀνοίγων καὶ σκεπτόμενος τοὺς νεκρούς*. On Cambyses' behaviour in Egypt, which is not born out by Egyptian sources, see among others Wojciechowska (2008). The desecration of corpses is one of the behaviours by which kings mark themselves as 'sacred monsters', outside the bounds of normal morality. See Graeber and Sahlins (2017) 70; de Heusch (2000).

[56] On Cambyses' murder of Apis, see Irwin (2023) 49–58.

by Darius as a piece of evidence (*τεκμήριον*) for this claim.[57] Interpreters play a crucial role in the scene that ensues.

The scene takes place at the Persian court. According to Herodotus, Darius asked certain Greeks at the court 'how much money it would take for them to eat their dead fathers' (Hdt. 3.38.3).[58] When they tell him that you could not pay them to do such a thing, the king makes a demonstration (Hdt. 3.38.4):

> *Δαρεῖος δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα καλέσας Ἰνδῶν τοὺς καλεομένους Καλλατίας, οἳ τοὺς γονέας κατεσθίουσι, εἴρετο, παρεόντων τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ δι' ἑρμηνέος μανθανόντων τὰ λεγόμενα, ἐπὶ τίνι χρήματι δεξαίατ' ἂν τελευτῶντας τοὺς πατέρας κατακαίειν πυρί· οἱ δὲ ἀμβώσαντες μέγα εὐφημέειν μιν ἐκέλευον.*[59]
>
> After this, Darius summoned those of the Indians who are called Callatians, who devour their parents, and asked them, while the Greeks were present and were learning what was said through an interpreter, how much money it would take for them to cremate their dead fathers: but crying out loudly they kept urging him not to speak impiously.

The most obvious takeaway is a type of cultural relativism often associated with Ionian sophists.[60] That is, impiety is culturally specific, so what might seem pious to the Greeks could be unspeakably impious to the Callatians.[61] Still, there is an implied human universal hidden behind the relativism here: funerary customs vary but are invariably sacred.[62]

[57] On the term *τεκμήριον*, see Hollmann (2011) 15. See also Thomas (2000) 169, 181–2, 185, 191–7, 220. Kingsley (2018) 49; (2024) 65 notes that the term recalls the wording of the poem by Pindar that Herodotus is about to cite: *τεκμαίρομαι | ἔργοισιν* ('I judge by the deeds', F 169a.4–5 Maehler).

[58] *Δαρεῖος … εἴρετο ἐπὶ κόσῳ ἂν χρήματι βουλοίατο τοὺς πατέρας ἀποθνήσκοντας κατασιτέεσθα.*

[59] On the phrase *δι' ἑρμηνέος*, see Rochette (1996) 26.

[60] See, e.g., Thomas (1998) 128–48; (2000) 18.

[61] This relativist sentiment also occurs in a court scene in the *Life of Themistocles*, where the Chiliarch Artabanus tells Themistocles that 'it is good for all to honour and preserve their own customs' (*Them.* 27.3).

[62] Cf. Irwin (2023) 67–8, who argues that Herodotus attempts 'to secure from readers … their commitment to some notion of a universal morality', namely the idea that one should respect customs generally, including those of others. She further shows that Herodotus' argument is sophistic, because he uses the narrative to render his message compelling even though it is based on incomplete logic. After all, there is no need to conclude that, just because everyone values their own customs most, they should all also value others'. Irwin

The passage also illustrates the dynamics of Herodotean kingship. As Christ shows, Darius is just one of many kings who function as inquirers with interests like the historian's own but whose arbitrary power allows them to undertake experiments that Herodotus never could.[63] There is a hint of arbitrary royal power in Herodotus' experiment reflected in the king's apparent intimidation of the Callatians, evidenced by how they cry out loudly, as Christ notes.[64] After all, Darius could easily go beyond speaking impiously and compel the Callatians to commit impious acts if he chose to do so, as suggested by Cambyses' sacrilegious behaviour in the frame narrative.[65] Following this line of explanation, the use of an interpreter is again connected to royal power, as befits the palatial setting.

Herodotus' wording is crucial. He claims that the episode is proof that, just as Pindar says, 'custom is king of all' (*καὶ ὀρθῶς μοι δοκέει Πίνδαρος ποιῆσαι, νόμον πάντων βασιλέα φήσας εἶναι*, Hdt. 3.38.4).[66] In Pindar's original context, *βασιλέα* most naturally just means 'king'.[67] However, reinterpreted in its Herodotean frame, the usage of 'king' without a definite article recalls its use to refer to the Persian king specifically, as a shortening of *βασιλεὺς ὁ μέγας* ('Great King').[68] According to this reading, Darius discovers that the 'real' Great King is custom, just like Cambyses in the frame narrative, who violates not only Egyptian customs but also Persian ones, by such acts as killing his

suggests, however, that the temptation to demand strict logic here is part of a long series of traps Herodotus embeds in the Cambyses *logos* to lure unwary readers into recognising themselves in Cambyses.

[63] Christ (1994) 187. On Darius as an inquirer, see also Demont (2002), published in English as Demont (2009). On the relationship between knowledge and power in Herodotus, see also Campos Daroca (1992b).

[64] Christ (1994) 188.

[65] As another Persian king, Artaxerxes, makes clear via a messenger to the Spartan Eucleidas, who has spoken rudely to the king: 'you can say what you want, but I can both say and do' (*σοὶ μὲν ἔξεστιν εἰπεῖν ἃ βούλει, ἐμοὶ δὲ καὶ λέγειν καὶ ποιεῖν*, Plut. *Art.* 5.1).

[66] Pindar F 169a Maehler.

[67] Asheri notes that 'Pindar probably meant that mortals and the gods themselves are ruled by an irrational and arbitrary "law" (*νόμος ὁ πάντων βασιλεὺς θνατῶν καὶ ἀθανάτων*), which there is no sense opposing, even when it justifies acts of violence repugnant to universal moral sense: e.g., the violence of Heracles against Geryon and Diomedes' but claims that 'Herodotus is not interested here in the original meaning of Pindar's text'. See Asheri–Lloyd–Corcella (2007) 437. Kingsley, on the other hand, shows convincingly that we should take the Pindaric hypotext seriously here. See Kingsley (2018); (2024) 65–7, who shows that, if we consider Herodotus' Pindaric intertext, it is also possible to unpack a more complex set of meanings here, including a criticism of how royal violence is legitimatised as tradition.

[68] See Kingsley (2018) 53. For the usage see Dewald and Munson (2022) 328 and van Emde Boas et al. (2019) sec. 28.8 n2.

sister (Hdt. 3.31.1) whom he had earlier married (Hdt. 3.31.2–5).[69] He learns the hard way of his folly when he dies from an accidental wound received in the same place where he had struck the sacred Apis Bull (3.64.3).[70] This negative portrayal of kingship means that, unlike in other audience scenes, here Herodotus subtly undermines the hierarchy emphasised by the royal interpreter. Herodotus and Darius, though both inquirers, are not as aligned as they first appear.

Nevertheless, this interpreter (here singular rather than plural) is doing more than just emphasising royal power. Despite the apparently open-minded nature of Herodotus' relativism and its couching within an episode where the historian advocates for respecting foreign customs, the interpreter here also responds to the perceived distance between Greek and Callatian funerary practices. While anthropological orthodoxy is that actual cannibalism is non-existent or very rare, it occurs frequently in imagined spaces on the edge of the earth for the same reason that it appears here, as a cultural practice perfectly opposed to the Greek ideal of cremation.[71] As Redfield notes, the Greek practice of cremation destroys the natural body, leaving nothing but 'memory and monument', while on the contrary, the Callatian practice of cannibalism returns 'the natural man to nature'.[72] The presence of an interpreter is one way for Herodotus to mark this kind of extreme cultural distance. Close attention to the directionality of translation also supports this reading. As Demont has noted, the interpreter translates for the benefit of the Greeks.[73] The Callatians are not informed of the Greek views, establishing not just a distance between the two peoples but a hierarchy of understanding whereby Greeks are the knowers and the Callatians are the known.[74] This passage is just one of those in Herodotus' *Histories* in which interpreters serve to highlight

[69] On Cambyses' incest and Persian *nomoi*, see Kingsley (2024) 56–64.

[70] He dies, as prophesised by the oracle in Buto, at Ecbatana, but not the Median city where he had previously supposed he would die of old age but at a different Ecbatana in Syria (3.64.4).

[71] Graeber and Sahlins (2017) 42 is characteristically contrarian: 'Although some anthropologists have been known to debate whether cannibalism even existed, it is hardly a rare condition—even among peoples who profess not to practice it themselves. As already noticed, in many societies known to anthropology, especially those where hunting is a mainstay, the people and their prey are involved in a system of mutual cannibalism. For even as the people kill and consume "people like us", these metaperson-alters retaliate more or less in kind, as eating away human flesh by disease or starvation'.

[72] Redfield (1985) 105.

[73] Demont (2013) 39.

[74] For diagrams describing various interpretation setups, with one or more interpreter, that could fit the situation described in the passage, see Wiotte-Franz (2001) 217–18.

cultural distance, usually but not always with an accompanying cultural hierarchy.

Another example is found in Herodotus' depiction of the Argippaei, one of several peoples on the world's edge. They are all bald from birth and, as if the Golden Age never ended, they make their homes under trees and live off their fruit (Hdt. 4.23.2).[75] They do not need arms, nor do they carry them. Because they are sacred, nobody tries to harm them. The Argippaei are remote even to their neighbours the Scythians, who are already marginal from a Greek perspective. Herodotus leans on language to mark the Argippaei as different from other peoples and demonstrate their marginality (4.23.2). It is difficult even for the Scythians to communicate with them (Hdt. 4.24):

> Σκυθέων δὲ οἳ ἂν ἔλθωσι ἐς αὐτοὺς δι' ἑπτὰ ἑρμηνέων καὶ δι' ἑπτὰ γλωσσέων διαπρήσσονται.
>
> Whichever Scythians come to them, they transact their business through seven interpreters and through seven languages.

Harrison takes the number of interpreters in this passage as evidence of Herodotus' ignorance of foreign languages.[76] A seven-interpreter chain exceeds even the one operating across five or six languages described in the journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition.[77] The idea of a seven-member game of telephone is indeed incredible.

However, focusing on these seven interpreters primarily as evidence of Herodotus' linguistic naïveté means missing the resonance between this passage and others in Herodotus featuring the number seven, such as the seven Persians who rise against the false Smerdis (3.76.1, 140.1). The phrase 'through seven interpreters and through seven languages' most closely recalls two other instances in the *Histories* featuring the double use of this traditional number. When Darius is in pain after an Egyptian doctor treats his wounded foot, he cannot sleep 'for seven days and seven nights' (ἐπ' ἑπτὰ … ἡμέρας καὶ ἑπτὰ νύκτας, Hdt. 3.129.3). Likewise, when Xerxes' massive army crosses the Hellespont, it crosses 'in seven days and seven nights' (ἐν ἑπτὰ ἡμέρῃσι καὶ [ἐν]

[75] The historian also tells us that the tree that they depend on is called *pontikos* and that the dark juice that they extract from its fruit is called *askhu* (4.23.3).

[76] Harrison (1998) 4.

[77] Clark et al. (2002). Journal entries from the Lewis and Clark expedition record that on September 5, 1805, in the present-day US State of Montana, the expedition conducted business with Salishan speakers through six languages. As the editor of the journals, Moulton, notes, historians think the number was really five: Salishan, Shoshone, Hidatsa, French, and English.

ἑπτὰ εὐφρόνῃσι, Hdt. 7.56.1).[78] In all three cases the number seven serves as a generically big number. In the Scythian example, Herodotus uses the number to stress the multiplicity of intermediate languages required to communicate with the Argippaei. In the other two examples, he uses the number to stress how long a state or action lasted. The seven walls of Deioces (1.98.5–6) also have notable parallels with the seven interpreters from the Argippaei passage. Both interpreters and walls indicate boundaries, one physical and the other symbolic. In both cases, Herodotus describes something that most commonly occurs in a single layer, blown up to a fanciful seven. As seven walls elongated the distance and emphasised the difference between the king and his subject, seven interpreters serve symbolically as a final set in a list of linguistic elements separating the Argippaei from other peoples. Herodotus' use of the number seven in all these passages may borrow from Near Eastern literary traditions in which the number represents completeness.[79] If so, using seven interpreters to communicate with the Argippaei symbolises their complete remoteness.

Language Breakdown

Much like interpreters, the notable lack of interpreters, that is, the failure to communicate linguistically, can also emphasise cultural and geographic distance. An example of language breakdown at the edges of the world occurs when Herodotus discusses the source of the Nile. The historian relates a story attributed to some men from Cyrene, who supposedly heard it from King Etearchus of the Ammonians (2.32.1). Some Nasamones, a people who live in the Libyan desert, visited the king. When the king asked them what they could tell him about the uninhabited Libyan desert, they related the story of five young men who set out to explore the Sahara, traveling far to the west (Hdt. 2.32.2). After traveling across the sands for many days, they finally came to some trees on a plain. When they tried to pick the fruit, small men kidnapped them and led them off. Crucially, neither the Nasamones nor their captors knew anything of the others' language.[80] The small men take the youth back

[78] A second ἐν is present in all manuscripts, but absent from the quotation of this passage in the Suda s.v. Ἐλινύειν (E 861 Adler). This absence has led both Hude (1927) 169 and Wilson (2015) 613 to exclude the second ἐν. Retaining it, the passage would resemble 4.24 even more closely, due to the shared use of parallel prepositions.

[79] On the symbolism in Near Eastern literary traditions, see Meyers (2005) 55.

[80] Hdt. 2.32.6: φωνῆς δὲ οὔτε τι τῆς ἐκείνων τοὺς Νασαμῶνας γινώσκειν οὔτε τοὺς ἄγοντας τῶν Νασαμώνων.

to their town, which sits upon a sizable river (2.33).[81] The strangeness of these small men is expressed in various terms, including through the fact that they are all wizards (*γόητας*, 2.33.1), but their language stands out. Just as the Argippaei are so distant from other peoples that even the Scythians need seven interpreters to communicate with them, so too are these people so isolated that even the desert-dwelling Nasamones recognise nothing of their language. That language breakdown here evokes the same isolation as the seven interpreters above shows the rhetorical similarity between Herodotus' use of interpreters and other ways that the author acknowledges language difference.

Another Herodotean example of unusual communication at the edges of the earth occurs in a Carthaginian story about 'silent trade' with a Libyan people who dwell beyond the Pillars of Heracles and thus at the ends of the earth.[82] The Carthaginians have a method for trading with these people silently (that is, without language) and even without coming into direct contact with them. The Carthaginians simply offload their cargo on the beach, then return to their ships and signal with smoke that they have arrived (Hdt. 4.196.1). The Libyans then set out some gold, withdraw themselves, and allow the Carthaginians to decide whether the gold is enough. If not, the Carthaginians return to their ships and let the Libyans bring more gold, and the process is repeated until everyone is satisfied (4.196.2). What is most striking is the fairness with which the two parties treat each other. Though there is ample opportunity for cheating, neither party takes the gold or the cargo until the other indicates that they agree to the trade (4.196.3). While the lack of language in the passage fits with other examples of linguistic oddity at the edges of the earth, the lack of language notably does not result in an inability to communicate or cooperate.

In Xenophon's *Anabasis*, the focus on difficulty in communication likewise complements the general sense of an arduous journey through a particularly unfamiliar and unhospitable country far from home. The mountains and snow of Armenia represent a particularly harrowing and challenging stage of the march of the 10,000. Many of the army fall ill due to hunger and cold (*An.* 4.5.7–8). When they finally reach an Armenian village, the army's interpreter lies in Persian to some women gathering water outside the wall, saying that they are on their way from Artaxerxes to the local satrap (*An.* 4.5.10). They then enter the village to speak to the village head (*κώμαρχος*). The emphasis on

[81] Etearchus reasons that the river, which flows west to east, is the Nile, an idea that Herodotus finds credible since he thinks that the Nile's course should be parallel with the Ister in Europe. On parallelism at the edges of the earth, see Romm (2013) 34.

[82] For a reading of the passage that uses other examples of 'silent trade', 'the phenomenon whereby two parties … exchange goods without any wider social contact', see Harrison (2022) 1–22.

communication difficulties continues when Xenophon describes Greek soldiers being served by Armenian youths whom they communicate with by gesture (*An.* 4.5.33). The Greeks are unaware of where they are even on a regional level, as it is only by asking the village chief in Persian where they are that they learn they are in Armenia (*An.* 4.5.34). The need to use an intermediary language, Persian, to communicate provides an extra layer of linguistic distance, reminiscent in a reduced way of Herodotus' seven interpreters. However, as characteristic of Xenophon's approach to language, the incident is more detailed and realistic than those in Herodotus.[83]

Interpreters and Distrust

The concept of the interpreter as traitor is, as Mairs notes, 'as old as the profession itself'.[84] Since interpreters move between factions, are 'privy to sensitive information', and are 'frequently called upon to pass on unwelcome news', they become 'natural target[s]'.[85] Both Xenophon and Herodotus use interpreters to suggest suspicion: whatever the interpreter says is not to be trusted. Still, interpreters are not necessarily explicitly treasonous in Herodotus and Xenophon, and it is important not to overstate the connection between interpreters, translation, and deception in these authors. In Xenophon's *Anabasis* the distrust indicated by interpreters mostly results from their delivery of messages from figures like Artaxerxes and Tissaphernes who are hostile to the 10,000, not from the act of translation itself. Herodotus likewise sees translation in general as largely unproblematic, trusting it more than it deserves to be, as evident from the example of the seven Scythian interpreters.[86] Nevertheless, he too sometimes associates interpreters with deceit.

Despite the overall sense of realism to Xenophon's interpreters, their presence or absence in communication appears to relate to the trustworthiness

[83] For other passages in Xenophon where an acknowledgement of language difference emphasises difficulty in communication, cf. *An.* 4.8.4; 5.4.4 and Rubtsov (2022) 25 n. 16.

[84] Mairs (2011) 65. Mairs' article on the concept of interpreter as traitor in Greek and Roman sources follows Alarcón (1989) in repurposing the Italian saying *traduttore, traditore*, originally about the inevitable betrayals of the original language involved in the act of translation itself, to apply instead to this motif of interpreter as traitor. Alarcón's article reappraises the indigenous female slave Malintzin Tenepal, interpreter for Cortés and famous emblem of treachery.

[85] Mairs (2011) 65.

[86] Cf. James (2024) 5–7. Contrast Herodotus' faith with the understandable difficulties in coordinating an army through interpreters in Polybius (e.g., 1.67.9), on which see Wiotte-Franz (2001) 93–4.

of interlocutors. Except when Xenophon is recording in detail how manoeuvres were ordered and carried out, the Persian royal usurper Cyrus, for whom Xenophon seems to have especially warm feelings, speaks with his Greek soldiers without mention of an interpreter.[87] Xenophon contrasts this with the disingenuous offers of a truce by Cyrus' brother King Artaxerxes after his death, which ultimately leads to the betrayal and murder of the original leaders of the 10,000 Greek mercenaries with whom Xenophon was serving (*An.* 2.5.31–2). The king's offer is doubly distanced, delivered both through Artaxerxes' satrap Tissaphernes and through an interpreter (*An.* 2.3.17). Though the interpreter in this passage is singular, he is part of a large retinue that accompanies Tissaphernes, recalling the plurality of the audience-scene interpreters. The explicit presence of an interpreter is part of a more general feeling, before the betrayal, that Artaxerxes is not to be trusted, later bolstered by information sent by friends of Cyrus (*An.* 2.4.16) and a general sense of suspicion in the Greek camp (*An.* 2.5.17). Later, Tiribazus, a close friend to the king and satrap of Western Armenia, sends forth interpreters (*An.* 4.4.5) to make a truce that is likewise not to be trusted, since he secretly plans to attack the Greeks later (4.4.18). Interpreters are again associated with deception much later in the *Anabasis*, when Spartan delegates come to speak to the remnants of the 10,000 in the service of the Thracian Seuthes, seeking to obtain their loyalty. Seuthes listens from a distance, using an interpreter even though he does not need one (*An.* 7.6.9–10). Overall, when Xenophon associates interpreters with suspicion and trickery, this presentation usually reflects an attitude towards the specific character communicating through interpreters.

Shifty linguistic intermediaries occur in Book Three of the *Histories*, when King Cambyses decides to launch three expeditions, one against the Carthaginians, another against the Ammonians, and a third against the 'long-lived Aithiopians' (*μακροβίους Αἰθίοπας*, Hdt. 3.17.1).[88] Before marching

[87] See Xenophon's obituary of Cyrus, including Xenophon's description of the Younger Cyrus as the Persian 'most kingly and most worthy of rule' after Cyrus of the Elder (*βασιλικώτατός τε καὶ ἄρχειν ἀξιώτατος*, *An.* 1.9.1). In reading Xenophon's remarks unironically and consonant with the rest of the *Anabasis* and Xenophon's writings more generally, I agree with Vivienne Gray in rejecting the 'esoteric' understanding of Xenophon advanced by Leo Strauss. See Gray (2011) 71–9; Strauss (1983). For a recent defence of the Straussian view, see Buzzetti (2014).

[88] On the spelling 'Aithiopia', which more closely reflects the Greek *Αἰθιοπία*, see Derbew (2022) 11–12: 'As part of my ongoing opposition to anachronistic vocabulary, I denote the ancient region spanning two countries, the southern region of modern Egypt and the northern region of Sudan, as "Aithiopia" … and I describe the modern country located in the Horn of Africa as "Ethiopia". … I refer to "Aithiopia" as an eternal land and "Nubia" as a historical region that is in contact with Greece and Rome. My definitions

against the Aithiopians, he decides to send spies under the pretext of giving gifts to their king, trying to verify their possession of the Table of the Sun, a miraculous meadow that supposedly spontaneously produces a full variety of meats (3.17–18).[89] Needing to find speakers of the Aithiopians' language to transmit his duplicitous message of friendship and report back to him, Cambyses sends for some of the 'Fish-eaters' (Ἰχθυοφάγοι) of Elephantine (3.19.1). Herodotus pointedly calls these Fish-eaters 'spies' (κατασκόποι and κατόπται) repeatedly throughout the episode, but never 'interpreters'.[90] Their mission is defined by the future participle κατοψομένους ('in order to spy out'). The use of κατασκόποι and κατόπται instead of ἑρμηνέες in Herodotus emphasises the Fish-eaters' 'real' purpose.

While these Fish-eaters are not called *hermēneis*, they serve an equivalent role. As Derbew notes, 'in addition to being masters of subterfuge, the Fish-eaters resemble authoritative translators who speak both the Persian and the Aithiopian language', since they 'navigate interpersonal situations with an impressive level of fluency without joining the communities with whom they are in close contact'.[91] Just like interpreters, these Fish-eaters are an interface between the Persian king and a foreign people. As Longo has noted, their fish-eating diet allows them to communicate between grain-eating Persians and meat-eating Aithiopians.[92] Like audience-scene interpreters, the Fish-eaters also always appear in the plural. It might also seem that Aithiopia, situated on what Herodotus describes as the edges of the earth, would demand 'interpreters', as would the military context.[93] Thus, while the Fish-eaters are not explicitly called 'interpreters', they still provide an example of untrustworthy linguistic intermediaries.

The Fish-eaters also bring speaking objects whose real meaning they conceal.[94] Purportedly as gifts of friendship, they bring a purple garment, a

mirror those of modernity, in that literary scholars use the term "Aithiopia", whereas historians and museum curators generally prefer "Nubia".'

[89] Herodotus (3.18) does not believe that the Table of the Sun really produces meat on its own: it is a ruse by Aithiopia's rulers, who supply the meat themselves.

[90] Compare Xenophon's Glus, who clearly plays the role both of interpreter (at *An.* 1.4.16) and scout (at *An.* 2.4.24).

[91] Derbew (2022) 108–9.

[92] See Longo (1987) 13. The Fish-eaters are what Bosak-Schroeder (2020) 85 calls 'mono-foragers', that is hunter-gathers dependent on a single food source.

[93] In rashly making war on the Aithiopians, Cambyses fails to consider that he is invading the ends of the earth (οὔτε λόγον ἑωυτῷ δοὺς ὅτι **ἐς τὰ ἔσχατα γῆς** ἔμελλε στρατεύεσθαι, Hdt. 3.25.2).

[94] On gift-objects as 'bearers of encoded messages', see Hollmann (2011) 210–18. On speaking objects in Herodotus, see also Dewald (1993).

necklace and bracelets of gold, a container of myrrh, and a jar of palm wine (3.20.1). The Aithiopian king sees through Cambyses' gifts and the claim that he wants to be his guest-friend (ξεῖνος, Hdt. 3.21.2).[95] Unlike the Athenians, he does not throw his guests into a pit. Instead, he tells the Fish-eaters that he knows what they are up to. They are lying, and Cambyses is not a just man, 'for if he were just, he would not have wanted to possess a land other than his own, nor would he have enslaved people by whom he had not been harmed' (Hdt. 3.21.2).[96] He sends Cambyses his own speaking gift, a bow, and warns him not to invade Aithiopia until the Persians can draw it easily, and even then, that they should come in greater numbers (Hdt. 3.21.3). Afterwards, with the Fish-eaters serving as cultural interpreters telling the king what each of Cambyses' gifts is and how it was made, he perspicaciously unpacks their real meaning (Hdt. 3.21.1–3). The dyed garment and perfume indicate people who look and smell different than they really are, and are hence deceptive (δολερούς, Hdt. 3.22.1). The necklace and bracelets are really a collar and shackles (Hdt. 3.22.2). Only the wine meets with royal approval, and the king credits it with extending the short lives resulting from the Persians' diet of bread, which he refers to as κόπρος or 'dung' (Hdt. 3.22.3–4). Rather than behave inhospitably to the Fish-eaters, the Aithiopian king uses their linguistic faculties for his own purposes, both to better understand Cambyses' gifts and to transmit a message back to the Persian king. Cambyses fails to heed the warning, sets out to Aithiopia without provisions, and is forced to retreat when the expedition runs out of food and his men resort to cannibalism (Hdt. 3.25).[97] There does seem to be a cultural distance here, but the hierarchy between the centre and the periphery has been turned on its head. Unlike Xenophon's interpreters, who are associated with untrustworthy foreigners, it is the representatives of the centre who are deceitful in the Fish-eater episode.[98]

[95] The Aithiopian king remains unnamed in the *Histories*, but Morgan (1982) 237–8 and Elmer (2008) 422–5 identify him with the sixth century BCE king Hydaspes, who is also a character in Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*. On the Aithiopian king as historian and stand-in for Herodotus, see Demont (2002); (2009); Christ (1994). On the Homeric elements in the passage, see especially Irwin (2014) 50 as well as Hartog (2001) 3–13. Other important analyses of the passage are those of Bosak-Schroeder (2020) 87–92; Derbew (2022) 98–128; Hollmann (2011) 210–14. Derbew's reading highlights the tale's resistance to hierarchies and the breakdown of 'foreignness' within it.

[96] Εἰ γὰρ ἦν δίκαιος, οὔτ' ἂν ἐπεθύμησε χώρης ἄλλης ἢ τῆς ἑωυτοῦ, οὔτ' ἂν ἐς δουλοσύνην ἀνθρώπους ἦγε ὑπ' ὧν μηδὲν ἠδίκηται.

[97] Bosack-Shroeder (2020) 208 connects the punishment to 'popular Greek desire for stories in which enslaved people and other subordinates outwit enslavers and other social superiors' such as described by Forsdyke (2012b) 90–113.

[98] A similar inversion is found in the story of the gifts that the Scythians give to Darius at Hdt. 4.131–2. See Hollmann (2011) 214–17.

Ultimately, the Aithiopian king shows more disapproval of Cambyses than he does of the Fish-eaters. Derbew notes an important contradiction in previous scholarship when she writes that 'somehow, the trilingualism of the Fish-eaters increases their efficacy and does not lead to their demise', despite the 'perverse affiliation between bilingualism and death' that Harrison sees in the *Histories*.[99] Nevertheless, the Fish-eaters episode still shows that interpreters may be associated with deceit in the *Histories*, even if they are not punished for it. It is helpful to compare Herodotus' attitude to language to his presentation of signs more generally. While, as Hollmann has shown, Herodotus' *Histories* is full of characters who manipulate signs deceitfully, most such tricks involve the encoding and transmission of signs.[100] Only five of the thirty-three instances of semiotic trickery identified by Hollmann involve the decoding or interpretation of signs, the stage of communication most analogous to linguistic interpretation. It is thus not surprising that, while linguistic interpretation is not entirely free from duplicity in Herodotus' *Histories*, it is not a main locus of a trickery.

Pulling it All Together: Croesus and Solon

Possibly the richest incident featuring interpreters in the *Histories*, which weaves together strands seen in previous passages, such as interpreters' association with royal power and use to mark symbolic difference, occurs in the context of the first Persian king Cyrus' defeat of the famously wealthy Lydian king Croesus. Having defeated Croesus, Cyrus intends to burn him alive on a pyre. As Hollmann and Brandwood have already pointed out, interpreters play an essential role in the ensuing scene.[101] Herodotus' story of Croesus' miraculous rescue from the pyre is not the only version, but it is the only one that includes interpreters.[102] These interpreters resemble the

[99] Derbew (2022) 114; Harrison (1998) 6–7. For a refutation of this supposed association, see also James (2024). Other supposed examples of this affiliation include the Scythian Scyles, who transgresses his people's xenophobic belief (4.78–80), the Median children killed by Scythians to get revenge on a Scythian ruler (1.73), and the Lemnian fathers who murder their children with Athenian mothers for their arrogance developed along with their mothers' instruction in the Greek language (6.138). On tragic elements in the Scyles tale, see Agnolon (2020). These episodes are more about the fierce and xenophobic attitudes of the ones committing the crimes than a problem with bilingualism itself. In Herodotean terms, Plutarch's Themistocles has more in common with Scyles' Scythian murderers than the magnanimous king of the long-lived Aithiopians.

[100] Hollmann (2011) 345–6, 371–7.

[101] Hollmann (2011) 483–5; Brandwood (2020) 24–7.

[102] The most famous alternative version occurs in Bacchylides *Ode* 3. See West (2003); Evans (1978). For a list of the other versions of the story, with bibliography, see Dewald and

audience-scene interpreters seen earlier. They are notably plural (*τοὺς ἑρμηνέας*, 1.86.4). At one point in the narrative the interpreters give Croesus trouble, with the word for 'trouble', *ὄχλος*, also meaning 'crowd' and therefore suggesting the mob of interpreters surrounding Syloson later in the *Histories* (Hdt. 1.86.5; 3.140.3). Their mass underlines the power differential between the victorious Cyrus and the defeated Croesus.

The interpreters also emphasise another kind of metaphorical distance between Croesus and Cyrus. Bound and set atop the pyre alongside 'twice seven sons of the Lydians' (*δὶς ἑπτὰ Λυδῶν … παῖδας*, 1.86.2), Croesus recalls too late his earlier conversation with Solon (Hdt. 1.30–2), in which the wise Athenian angered the prosperous monarch by telling him to count no man blessed before his death.[103] Croesus finally sees that despite his former power and wealth, he could not count himself fortunate (*ὄλβιος*) until he had ended his life well, 'for god having shown wealth to many has then upturned them roots and all' (*πολλοῖσι γὰρ δὴ ὑποδέξας ὄλβον ὁ θεὸς προρρίζους ἀνέτρεψε*, Hdt. 1.33). Following this realisation, Croesus intrigues Cyrus by calling out 'Solon' three times (Hdt. 1.86.3). Cyrus sends his interpreters to investigate who this Solon is.[104] They receive only the cryptic reply that Solon is he whom Croesus would prefer coming to talk to all kings over great wealth (Hdt. 1.86.4). This reply is 'unintelligible' (*ἄσημα*) to the interpreters, who, as Hollmann notes, are *hermēneis* 'not hermeneuts'.[105] They can translate Croesus' words from Lydian to Persian but cannot unpack their deeper meaning to bridge the fundamental divide between Croesus and Solon.[106] They can only transfer 'messages from one code to another'.[107] The interpreters emphasise the distance between Cyrus and Croesus' mental states at this point in the narrative. Whereas Croesus has finally internalised Solon's message for kings, Cyrus still displays typical royal arrogance.[108]

Munson (2022) 302–3. The Babylonian Nabonidus Chronicle might also include a short reference to Croesus' downfall. See Wallace (2016).

[103] The number is another example of Herodotus' fondness for seven. Note that Herodotus has just related that Croesus ruled 14 years and that Cyrus besieged Sardis for 14 days before taking the city (1.86.1).

[104] On the role of curiosity and investigation in the episode, see Brandwood (2020) 24–5.

[105] Hollmann (2011) 483.

[106] As is typical of Herodotean interpreters, linguistic detail is scanty, and we are left to assume that they must be interpreting from Lydian to Persian. On this question see Hollmann (2011) 484; Brandwood (2020) 27.

[107] Hollmann (2011) 484.

[108] Examples include Cyrus' punishment of the river Gyndes for carrying away one of his horses (Hdt. 1.189–90.1) and attempted conquest of the Massagetae, leading to his death (Hdt. 1.201–16).

Nevertheless, the divide set up between the two kings by the interpreters does not last through the whole episode.[109] After the interpreters cannot make sense of Croesus' initial answer, they keep asking him about what he said (Hdt. 1.86.5). Eventually, Croesus explains to the interpreters that Solon had held him in no higher regard than any other human being despite his fortune. When the interpreters relay this message to Cyrus, he has a change of heart (Hdt. 1.86.6):

> *καὶ τὸν Κῦρον ἀκούσαντα τῶν ἑρμηνέων τὰ Κροῖσος εἶπε, μεταγνόντα τε καὶ ἐννώσαντα ὅτι καὶ αὐτὸς ἄνθρωπος ἐὼν ἄλλον ἄνθρωπον, γενόμενον ἑωυτοῦ εὐδαιμονίῃ οὐκ ἐλάσσω, ζώοντα πυρὶ διδοίη, πρός τε τούτοισι δείσαντα τὴν τίσιν καὶ ἐπιλεξάμενον ὡς οὐδὲν εἴη τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποισι ἀσφαλέως ἔχον, κελεύειν σβεννύναι τὴν ταχίστην τὸ καιόμενον πῦρ καὶ καταβιβάζειν Κροῖσόν τε καὶ τοὺς μετὰ Κροίσου.*
>
> After hearing from the interpreters what Croesus said, Cyrus repented and understood that although he was a human being himself, he was burning alive another human being no less fortunate than himself. In addition, he began to fear comeuppance and consider that no human matter is secure, so he gave orders to put out the fire as quickly as possible and to get Croesus and those with him down from the pyre.

Cyrus' realisation repeats the language of Solon's warning to Croesus, showing that he now shares some of Solon's wisdom with the Lydian, overcoming the distance that previously prevented him from understanding Croesus. Ultimately, Cyrus remembers that he is just a human being, despite the sense of difference from others brought about by interpreters and other trappings of royal power.[110]

Interpreters here serve one other new role. They slow communication to increase suspense and drama. Herodotus effectively adds suspense to the story of Croesus on the pyre by setting up a tense situation and withholding a resolution. After Croesus first vocalises 'Solon', which itself only happens after a long pause (*ἐκ πολλῆς ἡσυχίης*, Hdt. 1.86.3), the resolution is first delayed by Cyrus sending a third party, his interpreters, to find out what Croesus means. Their interrogation turns out to be a long process. At first, Croesus keeps silent, but then, after he is compelled to speak, his first answer about Solon is unintelligible. Getting a clearer answer requires much effort from Cyrus'

[109] Cf. de Bakker (2007) 63–6, who argues that interpreters in Herodotus serve as intermediaries to symbolise a conceptual gap between two characters, vanishing as soon as this gap has disappeared.

[110] On failure to learn within the Lydian *logos*, see Pelling (2006).

interpreters. They must persist and give him trouble, and when he finally gives a clearer explanation, the pyre is already starting to burn (Hdt. 1.86.5). By the time Cyrus repents, it is already too late for him to save Croesus. However, Apollo hears his prayer at the eleventh hour and saves the former Lydian king (1.87.1–2). Throughout the story, the interpreters slow down the narrative to add suspense and drama.

The verbal aspect used for the interpreters' actions also contributes to their narrative role, slowing down the action. Whenever the interpreters ask Croesus anything, the verb always has imperfective aspect (*ἐπειρέσθαι*, *εἰρωτώμενον*, *ἐπειρωτᾶ*, *ἐπειρώτων*). Most of these verbs are infinitives because Herodotus has abruptly entered into indirect statement at 1.86.3 to remind the audience that he is reporting somebody else's miraculous tale, not taking full responsibility for its veracity himself. Usually, the aspect of infinitives in indirect statement effectively represents time relative to the main verb. However, in this passage the present infinitives in indirect statement simply correspond to what would be the imperfect tense in direct speech.[111] Therefore, the imperfective aspect of these verbs indicates repeated or perhaps even unsuccessful actions, highlighting the difficulty in communication that the interpreters represent.[112] The same is true for the imperfective aspect used of all their other actions (*λιπαρεόντων*, *παρεχόντων*, *ἀπηγέεσθαι*) in contrast to the many aoristic actions of Cyrus (*μεταγνόντα*, *ἐννώσαντα*, *δείσαντα*). While the use of interpreters to draw out a scene is later hinted at in the Syloson episode, nowhere else is it so fully evident. This role can still be seen as another type of distancing in that interpreters slow down the interaction between other characters by getting in the way of direct communication. The use of interpreters as a narrative delaying tactic is thus the final strand in a passage that also acknowledges language difference to highlight the distance between conqueror and conquered as well as the wise and the foolish.

Reuse of the Device in Plutarch's Lives

It is natural to wonder whether the use of interpreters and similar acknowledgements of linguistic difference as a narrative device also occurs in later Greek historians, as well as in other genres that show substantial historiographical influence, such as biography. While a full consideration of this question is beyond the scope of the current study, it is instructive to take Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* as one example. While Plutarch resembles Herodotus more than Xenophon in that his interpreters are anonymous figures, like both

[111] van Emde Boas et al. (2019) sec. 51.26.

[112] van Emde Boas et al. (2019) sec. 33.24–5.

historians Plutarch uses interpreters as a narrative device emphasising various kinds of distance. Like his predecessors, the biographer uses interpreters to mark the gulf between the Persian king and his subjects and to emphasise cultural differences and hierarchies. He also signals interactions with particularly alien characters through language breakdown and associates interpreters with distrust. These similarities aside, Plutarch's use of the device shows two key adaptations to his own historical context. Firstly, he uses the cultural power and hierarchy suggested by interpreters to explore tensions between Greek and Roman identity. Secondly, the vitriol in his presentation of untrustworthy interpreters goes far beyond either Herodotus or Xenophon, revealing a distinct linguistic ideology of Greek purity, under which the very act of translation can be seen as a betrayal.

Like Herodotus' *Histories*, Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* also feature interpreters as part of audience scenes that highlight the restricted access characteristic of Persian kingship. In the *Life of Themistocles*, the eponymous Athenian politician, in exile and accused of treason, flees to the Persian king, either Xerxes or his son Artaxerxes (*Them.* 23.4–27.1).[113] As in Herodotus, interpreters are again only a subset of the many officials surrounding the Great King. Before speaking to the king, Themistocles meets with Artabanus, one of two different court officials he meets called chiliarchs (*χιλίαρχοι*) or 'captains over a thousand', a title that again evokes a connection between plurality and royal power (*Them.* 27.2, 29.1).[114] Artabanus informs Themistocles that visitors need to ceremonially prostrate themselves before the king, performing what the Greeks termed *proskynesis*, 'which physically expressed … recognition of the king's supreme status'.[115] The alternative to *proskynesis* is communicating with the king through messengers, much like Herodotus' Deioces requires of all his subjects.[116] When Themistocles agrees to *proskynesis* and addresses the king during a tense audience scene, an interpreter is present, though in contrast to Herodotus here there is only one, in keeping with the more individualised treatment of officials in Plutarch's account, including the named chiliarchs

[113] Plutarch notes that Thucydides and Charon of Lampsacus relate that Xerxes' son Artaxerxes was king at the time, but Ephorus, Dinon, Cleitarchus, and Heracleides say that Xerxes was still king. While Thucydides' account is likely more accurate here, an encounter between the erstwhile victor and vanquished of the Battle of Salamis is certainly more dramatic.

[114] The LSJ identifies *χιλίαρχος* as the title of a Persian court official based on passages in Plutarch's *Life of Artaxerxes* (5) and in the *Varia Historia* of the Severan-era sophist Claudius Aelian (1.21). See also Diodorus Siculus (18.48). Aelian notably makes it explicit that the Chiliarch addresses his Hellenic interlocutor, Ismenius the Theban, in Persian speaking through an interpreter (*ἔλεγε δὲ ταῦτα περσίζων δι' ἑρμηνέως*, 1.21).

[115] Kuhrt (1988) 96.

[116] *Them.* 27.3: *εἰ δ' ἄλλο τι φρονεῖς, ἀγγέλοις ἑτέροις χρήσῃ πρὸς αὐτόν.*

(*Them.* 28.1).[117] After his initial audience, Themistocles is anxious to remove the middleman, which he does by quickly learning Persian to converse with the king alone, without the onlookers involved in a formal audience (*Them.* 29.3).[118] In the end, despite being singular, the interpreter in Plutarch's *Life of Themistocles* is, like the interpreters in Herodotus' story of Syloson, one in a series of barriers associated with a royal audience.

As in Herodotus' stories of the Nasamones and of silent trade beyond the Pillars of Heracles, as well as Xenophon's description of linguistic troubles in Armenia, the inability to communicate also expresses a type of distance in Plutarch's *Sulla*, when the biographer relates a strange encounter between Sulla and a satyr. According to Plutarch, while the Roman general and soon-to-be dictator was waiting to cross the sea from Dyrrachium to Brundisium, his soldiers came upon a strange creature at a sacred precinct called the Nymphaion in nearby Apollonia (Plut. *Sull.* 27.2):

> ἐνταῦθά φασι κοιμώμενον ἁλῶναι σάτυρον, οἷον οἱ πλάσται καὶ γραφεῖς εἰκάζουσιν, ἀχθέντα δὲ ὡς Σύλλαν ἐρωτᾶσθαι δι' ἑρμηνέων πολλῶν ὅστις εἴη· φθεγξαμένου δὲ μόλις οὐδὲν συνετῶς, ἀλλὰ τραχεῖάν τινα καὶ μάλιστα μεμιγμένην ἵππου τε χρεμετισμῷ καὶ τράγου μηκασμῷ φωνὴν ἀφέντος, ἐκπλαγέντα τὸν Σύλλαν ἀποδιοπομπήσασθαι.
>
> They say that a satyr was caught sleeping there, one like sculptors and painters depict, and after he was brought to Sulla, they kept asking through many interpreters who he was. When he produced no intelligible sounds but let out a harsh cry between the neighing of a horse and the bleating of a goat, Sulla was frightened and chased him away.

Once again, the interpreters show up in the plural. Here, they are an implicit representation of the many different languages to which Sulla has access as he moves closer to becoming, as Plutarch puts it, 'the lord of everything' (κύριος ἁπάντων, *Sull.* 2.4). Still, this power still has some natural limits and is frustrated in his attempt to communicate with the satyr, despite the satyr's earnest attempt to emit a sound Sulla and company are capable of understanding.

The passage's satyr is an unclean vision that does not belong in the human world. The verb translated as 'chase away' here, ἀποδιοπομπήσασθαι, is notable because of its use elsewhere to describe purification rights (e.g., Onasan. 5.1; Pl. *Leg.* 877e; Lys. 6.53) and its connection to the noun ἀποδιοπόμπησις, meaning 'expiatory sacrifice' or 'exorcism' (e.g., Pl. *Leg.* 854b). While this encounter takes place far from the edges of the world, it

[117] On singular and plural in Plutarch's *Lives*, see Prandi (2005).

[118] See also Thuc. 1.137.4–138.1. On bilingualism in Thucydides, see James (2024) 13–17.

echoes the animal-human linguistic hybridity characteristic of those distant places. The harsh sound emitted by the satyr is described as a *φωνή*, a word that often refers to human language but can also describe animal sounds.[119] Herodotus' animalistic troglodytes of the distant Libyan desert, who feed on snakes and lizards, similarly use a language that resembles no other but sounds like the cries of bats (Hdt. 4.183.4). If anything, the troglodytes are somewhat less bestial than the satyr since they do have a language, albeit a bat-like one. Unpossessed of language, the satyr is a brutish and frightening creature and is ultimately removed from Sulla's presence. The distance between this beastly creature and the humans that it partly resembles is indicated most prominently by the inability to communicate with it, even using interpreters.[120]

Plutarch also uses the device in ways that adapt old tropes to address cultural tensions between Greece and Rome. For example, in Plutarch's *Life of Cato the Elder*, interpreters again delimit a cultural hierarchy, a practice we have seen already in the *Histories*. However, in Plutarch they express a different hierarchy in a different historical context. They occur amid Plutarch's rejection of the story that Cato praised the virtue of the Athenians' ancestors in a Greek speech. As proof, Plutarch notes that Cato the Elder dealt with the Athenians through an interpreter, even though he could speak Greek (*ἀλλὰ δι' ἑρμηνέως ἐνέτυχε τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις, δυνηθεὶς ἂν αὐτὸς εἰπεῖν*), because he stood by the ways of his fatherland (*ἐμμένων δὲ τοῖς πατρίοις*) and derided those who marvelled at Greek things (*καταγελῶν τῶν τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ τεθαυμακότων*, Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 12.5). Thus, Plutarch suggests that Cato avoided Greek for ideological reasons, marking his abstention with interpreters.[121] By explaining the reason behind Cato's decision to use interpreters, this passage is unique in making explicit the distancing role that is implicit elsewhere.[122]

[119] In his study of metalanguage in Herodotus, Miletti (2008) 61 defines the term as 'la voce nel suo aspetto materiale è ben distinta dalla lingua in quanto codice'. Examples of animals that produce *φωναί* include pigs (Hdt. 2.70.2), hippopotami (Hdt. 2.71), and donkeys (Hdt. 4.129, 135.3).

[120] It is important to note that Plutarch argued that animals were rational and that humans should take account of their interests. See Newmyer (2013).

[121] Plutarch avoids another possible explanation for Cato's behaviour, based on his own statement at *Cat. Mai.* 3.4 that Cato was said to have been late to learn Greek. Alternatively, Plutarch's 'late to learn' (*ὀψιμαθής*) could just mean later than when many Romans of Plutarch's own day learned Greek, that is, from the very beginning of their education (cf. Quint. *Inst.* 1.1.12–14).

[122] Cato's behaviour has parallels in non-literary sources about Roman governance. For example, in the admittedly much later *P. Ross.-Georg.* 5.18 (213 CE), a record of a hearing before the Roman official Baebius Iuncinus in Egypt, the prefect and advocate's speeches are both given in Greek, but the prefect's speech is introduced in Latin. The papyrologist Coles (1966) 37 noted that 'in this particular case … the use of Latin must be simply a stylistic method of emphasising the distance between presiding officials and parties'. Cato's use of

Cato's use of an interpreter has specific political significance in its narrative context. In the passage, Cato is in Athens as a military tribune under the consul Tiberius Sempronius. The Hellenistic king Antiochus has declared war on the Romans, trying to win over the Greeks through the promises of demagogues (*Cat. Mai.* 12.1). Antiochus ostensibly fights for the cause of Greek freedom (*ποιησάμενος αἰτίαν τοὺς Ἕλληνας ἐλευθεροῦν*), which Plutarch says was unnecessary because the Romans had already freed the Greeks (12.3).[123] When Cato says with brevity in Latin what the interpreter has said at length in Greek, the Athenians are struck by the speed (*τὸ τάχος*) and the sharpness (*ὀξύτης*) of his Roman speech (12.7). They are thus convinced of Cato's opinion 'that on the whole the Greeks' words are produced from their lips, but the Romans' from their heart' (*τὸ δ' ὅλον … τὰ ῥήματα τοῖς μὲν Ἕλλησιν ἀπὸ χειλῶν, τοῖς δὲ Ῥωμαίοις ἀπὸ καρδίας φέρεσθαι*). That is, Cato convinces the Athenians that Romans are more trustworthy than (other) Greeks like Antiochus, a politically helpful conviction.

In the *Cato the Elder*, the use of interpreters again relates to empire as well as cultural difference. Two other passages in the *Life* even hint at a connection between Cato and the Great King of Persia. First, Plutarch explains Cato's fear of Greek doctors through his knowledge of Hippocrates' famous refusal to treat King Artaxerxes because he had sworn not to treat barbarian enemies of Greece and his presupposition that other Greek doctors must have sworn similar oaths (*Cat. Mai.* 23.3).[124] This implies that Cato is, like Artaxerxes, a barbarian enemy of Greece. Second, the centrepiece of Cato's military achievement in Plutarch's *Life* is his imitation of the Persians' nocturnal circumvention of a Greek force guarding the pass at Thermopylae over two centuries earlier. But Cato is no Herodotean Great King. Only one interpreter accompanies Cato. More importantly, Plutarch elsewhere explicitly casts Cato's opponent Antiochus in the Persian position, praising how Cato 'drove Asia from Greece' (*ἐξήλασε τῆς Ἑλλάδος τὴν Ἀσίαν*, *Comp. Arist. Cat.* 2.3).[125]

interpreters likewise responds to his desire to emphasise the difference between himself and his interlocutors and to heighten the performance of his Roman identity. See also Adams (2003) 205: 'From time to time, Romans asserted their Romanness, particularly in dealings with Greeks, by forcing Latin on their hearers in circumstances in which Greek might have been expected'.

[123] The Roman proclamation is recorded in Plutarch's *Life of Flamininus* (10.4). On Plutarch and the Roman 'liberation' of Greece, see among others Bremer (2005); Swain (1988); Walsh (1996).

[124] In the *Life*, the Persian king is anonymous but is said to have been Artaxerxes in other versions of the story. For the various sources for the legend, see Pinault (1992) 79–93.

[125] When Plutarch later says that 'Antiochus is not fit to be compared with Xerxes', this is mainly determined by the comparison of Cato's life with Aristides', since Aristides fought

Thus, compared to the explicit criticism of haughty Persian kings in the *Histories*, Plutarch's criticism of Cato is muted.[126]

Ultimately, the passage is indicative of the relationship between Greece and Rome in Plutarch's works. Plutarch sees the world from a Greco-Roman point of view. While he is a proud Greek, he is dependably hostile towards Hellenistic enemies of Rome who profess to champion Greece.[127] But while Plutarch honours Cato as a great Roman, he also criticises the attitude towards Greeks shown by Cato's use of an unnecessary interpreter. While Plutarch does not censure Cato explicitly in the passage, the biographer shows elsewhere that in the end Cato was wrong about the need to keep the Greeks at a distance. Plutarch implies that Cato's distrust of Greek doctors led to the death of his wife and son (*Cat. Mai.* 25.1) and notes that Rome, contrary to Cato's warnings, flourished after embracing Greek learning and culture (*Cat. Mai.* 23.3).[128] Like the Callatian example, Cato's use of interpreters establishes a hierarchy, this time between Romans and Greeks. However, in the Catonian example, this hierarchy is later subverted within the same work.

Likewise drawing on but adapting earlier precedents is Plutarch's use of the trope of the untrustworthy interpreter. It is in Plutarch's *Lives* that the depiction of interpreters most corresponds with Mairs' 'translator, traditor' framing. While in Xenophon's *Anabasis* communication via interpreters is typical of untrustworthy interlocutors and Herodotus' Fish-eaters are themselves duplicitous, it is only the biographer, in his *Life of Themistocles*, who depicts a *hermēneus* as a traitor based on the act of translation itself.[129] Near the beginning of his account of Themistocles' generalship during Xerxes' invasion of Greece, Plutarch lauds Themistocles' harsh behaviour towards this *hermēneus* (*Them.* 6.3–4):

in the Persian Wars. But it also furthers the equation between Hellenistic and Persian kings made earlier (*Comp. Arist. Cat.* 5.1).

[126] Plutarch's avoidance of a more direct equation of Rome and Achaemenid Persia perhaps recalls his advice to contemporary Greek politicians not to excite the many against Rome with talk of Marathon, Eurymedon, and Plataea (*Prae. ger. reip.* 814c). See also the use of *σάτραπαι* to denote Roman officials, not seen in Plutarch's writings, on which cf. Bowie (1970) 33.

[127] Hostility to Hellenistic kings: *Flam.* 9.9, 9.6–7, 10.2, 15.1, 15.4; *Aem.* 8.10, 9.1, 12.3; *Luc.* 7.4, 7.31; *Sull.* 24.7. He also uses *βάρβαρος* in contrast to both Greeks and Romans to refer to those outside the empire: *Cat. Mai.* 10.1–2, 12.2; *Luc.* 29.6; *Aem.* 4.3; *Mar.* 14.1; *Sull.* 15.3, 15.4, 21.8; *Pomp.* 70.4. See Jones (1971) 124.

[128] *Cat. Mai.* 23.3. See Stadter (2013) 22.

[129] On the passage see among others Brandwood (2020) 15–16; Mairs (2011) 68–70; James (2024) 5; Wiotte-Franz (2001) 36–8. James (2024) 8 interprets the passage as one of many that reflect 'the distrust of lower-status bilingual intermediaries, so evident in Plutarch and other Roman-era authors'.

> ἐπαινεῖται δ' αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ περὶ τὸν δίγλωσσον ἔργον ἐν τοῖς πεμφθεῖσιν ὑπὸ βασιλέως ἐπὶ γῆς καὶ ὕδατος αἴτησιν. ἑρμηνέα γὰρ ὄντα συλλαβὼν διὰ ψηφίσματος ἀπέκτεινεν, ὅτι φωνὴν Ἑλληνίδα βαρβάροις προστάγμασιν ἐτόλμησε χρῆσαι.
>
> His deed is also praised regarding the bilingual among those sent by the King to demand earth and water. For he arrested him as an interpreter and put him to death by decree of the assembly because he dared to use the Greek language for barbarian commands.[130]

Plutarch initially refers to the interpreter using the term δίγλωσσος, literally 'bilingual' but frequently with the sense 'interpreter', a relatively rare term that neither Herodotus nor Xenophon uses but that does occur three other times in Plutarch's *Lives* and twice in Thucydides.[131] While James convincingly argues that the term has no negative connotation in Thucydides, the other three uses in Plutarch's *Lives* all involve deception or betrayal.[132] Notably, among all those sent to demand earth and water as a token of the Athenians' submission to Xerxes, only the δίγλωσσος is punished.[133] The circumstantial participle clause (ἑρμηνέα … ὄντα), literally 'being an interpreter', but here rendered 'as an interpreter' due to its causal force, links being an interpreter directly to this man's death and execution, with the crime being further specified as that of rendering the demands of a barbarian tyrant into Greek. Not only is the interpreter a traitor, but it is this act of translation (cultural and political as well as linguistic) that makes him one.

The contrast between Plutarch's account of Themistocles' punishment of the Persian interpreter and a similar story in Herodotus helps illustrate the distinctive features of Plutarch's account. Herodotus explains that, while at Sardis on his way to invade Greece, Xerxes sent heralds to demand earth and water from many Greek cities who had not already submitted to give them an opportunity to avoid war, and many of them accepted the demand. However, Xerxes sent no ambassadors to Athens and Sparta because of how they had

[130] Aelius Aristides (*Or.* 46.184) and Aelian's *Varia Historia* (1.21) also record the same event. See also Pausanias's version (3.12.7), with interpreters but without Themistocles.

[131] Plut. *Alex.* 37.1; *Crass.* 28.4–5 (twice); Thuc. 4.109.4; 8.85.2. It also occurs in the Septuagint, where its literal meaning 'two-tongued' can take on the metaphorical sense 'deceitful' (LXX *Si.* 5.9).

[132] James (2024) 7. At. *Alex.* 37.1, the δίγλωσσος is a half-Persian guide who helps Alexander against his own people, while the δίγλωσσος in *Crass.* 28.4–5 appears as part of a trick used against the Romans.

[133] On the practice of demanding earth and water as a sign of submission, see Kuhrt (1988).

behaved towards his previous heralds (Hdt. 7.131–3).[134] This hook allows Herodotus to give his version of the story of the earlier Persian embassy to the Athenians: After demanding the Athenians' submission, the heralds are thrown into a gorge to find the water that they demanded.[135] A critical distinction between the two accounts is that, in Herodotus' account, the messengers are 'heralds' (*κήρυκες*), protected by custom.[136] In contrast, in Plutarch's version, the punished messenger is a vilified *hermēneus*, a linguistic traitor.

Whereas Plutarch praises the Athenians' behaviour towards the Persian ambassadors, Herodotus takes an unfavourable view. He entertains the possibility that the Athenians' treatment was the reason for the Persian sack of Athens. However, he rejects it, possibly because he attributes that punishment instead to the Athenians' burning of Cybele's temple at Sardis.[137] However, Herodotus records that the Spartans, who, like the Athenians, threw Persian heralds down a well, did receive a more specific divine punishment (7.134.1). They felt the wrath of the dead hero Talthybius, Agamemnon's herald, who had a shrine in Laconia. Because the Spartans could not obtain favourable omens from any of their sacrifices, they sent two wealthy and aristocratic Spartan volunteers, Sperthias and Bulis, to the Great King to be punished for the death of the heralds (7.134.2). Darius responded that he would not disrespect the universal custom against killing heralds, as the Spartans did, or release them from their guilt by killing them in return. Thus, the Spartan heralds go home alive. What accounts for the differences between Herodotus' and later versions? How and Wells already noted that Plutarch's version appears to respond to the desire to 'connect famous men with a famous (or

[134] The sending of earth and water as a token of surrender to Persia is connected specifically to Herodotus and sources dependent on Herodotus, indirectly or directly. For instance, Corcella (1999) and Gera (2013) 32, 142 use the demand for earth and water in Judith to argue that its author knew Herodotus. The demand for earth and water first appears in Herodotus' narrative during Darius' campaign against the Scythians (Hdt. 4.126, 4.132), then later as a demand of the Macedonian king Amyntas (Hdt. 5.17.1). Athenian envoys sent to Sardis seeking an alliance with Persia through the satrap Artaphernes offer earth and water at 5.73. The phrase occurs once at 6.48 when Darius demands it of cities throughout Greece and later at 7.32, 132–3, 138, 163, 233, and 8.47.

[135] This gorge is 'The Pit' (*τὸ βάραθρον*), where criminals were put to death for grave crimes against the people of Athens. See Ar. *Nub.* 1450; Pl. *Grg.* 516d; *Resp.*4.493e; Xen. *Hell.* 1.70.20; Plut. *Arist.* 3.2; *Them.* 22.2; *Mor.* 869c–d; as well as Lalonde (2006) 114–16, and Cantarella (2018) 208–22. Themistocles' punishment of the interpreter by decree of the assembly (*διὰ ψηφίσματος*) account echoes the democratic connection implied by the punishment in Herodotus' version.

[136] On the customary prohibition against harming heralds, see Mosley (1972).

[137] Hdt. 5.102; 7.133.2; How and Wells (1928) 179; Vannicelli and Corcella (2017) 453.

infamous) act'.[138] This explains the addition of Themistocles, but not the presence of the interpreter and the positive spin put on the Athenians' actions. Both additions rather betray a desire to assert the appropriate use and status of the Greek language.

The attitude to foreign languages motivating Plutarch's depiction is apparent not just from the difference between Plutarch's and Herodotus' accounts of the Persian embassy but also in the differing versions given by each author of the story of the response that Apollo gave to Mys, a Carian sent by the Persian general Mardonius to test various oracles (Hdt. 8.133.1).[139] As a Persian agent in Greece, Mys is presumably at least trilingual, knowing Greek, Carian, and Old Persian or Aramaic, the diplomatic language of the Persian empire.[140] Mys is thus comparable to explicitly named interpreters as a multilingual servant of royal power. Mys travels to various oracles, including that of Apollo Ptoos, whose temple was near Acraephium under the summit of Mt. Ptoum.[141] In visiting the oracle, three chosen Thebans accompany Mys. Everyone is surprised when the oracle prophesises in a foreign tongue, which Mys recognises as Carian, the contents of which Herodotus leaves tantalisingly unreported (Hdt. 8.135.2–3). Herodotus presents this event as a great marvel (*θῶμά … μέγιστον*, 8.135.1). The passage may be compared to Herodotus' attribution to Delphi of a pun on the Libyan word *battus* (4.155). In both cases, Herodotus emphasises Apollo's ability to command any human language he chooses, whether to create a pun appropriate for someone about to found a colony in Libya or speak to Mys in his native language from atop a mountain in Boeotia. The passages also recall Apollo's claim, speaking through the Pythia, to understand even the silent (Hdt. 1.47.3). Plutarch, however, reads the Mys incident differently, taking it as another example of how the Greek tongue should not be made to serve barbarian commands (*De def. or.* 412a).[142] Whereas one might read in Herodotus' account the story of how Mys' multilingualism allows Apollo to showcase his linguistic agility, Plutarch turns Mys into another treacherous interpreter.

[138] How and Wells (1928) 179.

[139] Herodotus says Mys was from the city of Europeus, an apparent variant for Euromeus. See Bowie (2007) 231. On Mys' being a Carian, see Robert (1950); Rochette (1997). For an opposing view, see Picard (1952).

[140] On the Aramaic language under the Achaemenids see Altheim and Altheim-Stiehl (1963).

[141] On the shrine's location see Paus. 9.23.5–6; Strabo 9.2.34; Schachter (1981) 52–73.

[142] On the passage see Flacelière–Chambry–Juneux (1961) 219; James (2024) 6.

Conclusion

A literary approach to the narrative presence of interpreters and other acknowledgments of linguistic difference in Herodotus' *Histories*, Xenophon's *Anabasis*, and Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* shows that all three authors have in common the use of language difference to highlight different kinds of distance between characters. Indeed, while the present investigation concerns only these works, this thesis seems to hold true in at least some passages from other authors and genres of Greek literature, suggesting a broader applicability whose proof is beyond the scope of the current investigation.[143] Distance itself has different associations and functions. Distance is often hierarchical. Interpreters appear as part of audience scenes, where their presence underscores the gulf between the Persian king and his subjects, and their plurality emphasises his power. Likewise, in all three authors, interpreters can suggest cultural distance, which may come with its own hierarchy between Greeks and non-Greeks, including, in Plutarch's case, Romans.

However, this should not detract from the uniqueness of each author. Hierarchies are not always present, nor is it easy to connect every instance of interpreters to some kind of distancing. While the acknowledgment of linguistic differences in communication by Herodotus, Xenophon, and Plutarch has important underlying motivations, each author's unique voice and concerns are only made more appreciable through a thorough comparison of the three authors. For instance, Plutarch treats interpreters and multilingualism with greater suspicion than the other authors. Likewise, the military interpreters in Xenophon, who, unlike Herodotus' plural and nameless interpreters, appear named and singular. They often seem to be fully-fledged characters rather than literary devices, even if they are still vested with some of the same untrustworthiness associated with interpreters in general.

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[143] See, e.g., the interpreter present during Alexander's companion Onesikratos' meeting with some Indian sophists, who according to Strabo (15.1.64 C715–16) refused to talk to him through three interpreters since that would be like thinking water could flow pure through mud. Cf. also the Coryphaeus and Cassandra's initial doubts about whether Cassandra can speak Greek, and the later gap in understanding when she proceeds to do so at Aesch. *Ag.* 1035–71.

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