

Plurilingualism in Traditional Eurasian Scholarship

Thinking in Many Tongues

Edited by

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Translating Oriental Words into Greek

A Papyrus Glossary from the 1st Century CE

Filippomaria Pontani

No grammars of foreign languages, few mentions of interpreters in literary texts, few translations of literary works (see Chapters 1.3, 1.7 and Part 4): especially after Herodotus, the Greeks were not very interested in codifying or promoting active multilingualism. Even in the numerous contact areas between Greek and other Mediterranean cultures, we hardly ever find evidence of a system of linguistic instruction, much less of the relevant, propaedeutic tools.¹ True, a number of Egyptian papyri from the late imperial era (fourth–sixth century CE) carry word-for-word facing Greek translations of (excerpts from) works by Virgil and Cicero: however, even this school practice of paraphrasing the *Aeneid* or the *Eclogues* was less the fruit of an autonomous cultural interest than subservient to the need to command, if minimally, the language of the ruling power (Egypt had become a Roman province in 31 BCE, although most of the administration was carried out in Greek anyway). Their remote successors in the Latin Middle Ages, the so-called Greco-Latin *Hermeneumata* were not considered as scholarly achievements, were devised for the primary instruction of pupils, and took the shape of simple conversation manuals or jejune lists of words.²

Lexicography flourished remarkably in the Greek-speaking world since the age of Philitas of Cos, the author of the lost *Glosses without Order* (*Ἀτακτοὶ γλῶσσαι*), third century BCE: throughout the Alexandrian and imperial age, specific orthographical, syntactical, or thematic lexica were compiled, and many efforts were devoted either to explain the words of single literary authors, works, or genres (from Homer to Hippocrates, from Plato to Nicander), or else (as in the case of lexica by Zenodotus, Callimachus etc.: the tradition would stretch down to Gregory of Corinth in the twelfth century) to the collection of

1 See the comparatively modest role played by Greek in the recent volume by Mullen and James, *Multilingualism in the Graeco-Roman*, with all previous bibliography on the topic.

2 See Adams, *Bilingualism and the Latin Language*; Dickey, *The Colloquia of the Hermeneumata Pseudodositheana*; Rochette, *Le latin dans le monde grec*.

dialectal glosses and words found mainly in literary works, rather than gathered through an original field-work.³

This tradition is essentially monolingual. In the strikingly vast (if largely lost) array of ancient Greek lexicographical and grammatical works, the traces of a deeper interest for foreign words and speech are surprisingly scanty: in the third century BCE, the obscure Neoptolemus of Parium wrote a lost work *On Phrygian Glosses*; a newly discovered erudite note (see below in the excerpt from our papyrus, note 5) mentions the *Foreign Language* of a certain Heraclides; under Augustus, one Dorotheus of Ascalon wrote a lost treatise *On Foreign Words, in Alphabetical Order* (but the very translation of the title is dubious); the slightly earlier grammarian Philoxenus of Alexandria, one of the most prolific and reputed authors of his time, wrote a treatise *On the Dialect of the Romans*, in which he considered Latin to be a form of the Greek Aeolic dialect. A number of Persian, Phrygian, Lydian, Illyrian, Celtic, Medic, Parthian glosses do appear in the lexicon of Hesychius (see Chapter 3.4), though mainly as poetic rarities or *hapax legomena*.

Among this rather scanty evidence, the glossary preserved in the first-century CE papyrus P.Oxy 1802 + 4812 stands out as an exception: along with items clearly stemming from dialects (Doric, Rhodian, Euboean, etc.), it carries several entries that are said to belong to “Persian” (Old Persian), “Babylonian” (Akkadian), or “Chaldaean” (probably Aramaic). Arranged in strict alphabetical order, and committed to no apparent thematic choice (several items, though by no means all, concern ritual, myth, or natural history), the glossary embraces words occurring in other written sources—indeed, most entries are equipped with the indication of the source-text in which they appear: we are thus not dealing with first-hand material drawn from everyday conversation, but with an erudite piece of work put together in a well-equipped library, probably at Alexandria.

The glossary has been tentatively framed in the lexicographical tradition that goes back to Pamphilus, Vestinus, and Diogenianus (see below on Hesychius). Closer modern investigation has revealed several errors and misspellings in the entries, and to the best of our knowledge, some of the “foreign” words in this glossary lack an exact correspondence in the Near Eastern languages to which they are referred: this makes the problem of the paths by which the sources of our compiler acquired their materials (whether by oral tradition or thanks to a rudimentary knowledge of cuneiform) all the more compelling and fundamentally insoluble. It should just be recalled that the lin-

3 For an overview see Tosi, “Typology of Lexicographical Works.”

Greek Text

P.Oxy 1802 + 4812, fr. 3, col. iii, ll. 5–20.

μήτραι ἐν Ταρσῷ καὶ Σόλοις τὰς δέλτους ἐν αἷς ἀπ[ογράφονται τὰς] οἰκίας μήτρας
 προσαγορεύεσθαι, ἅς καὶ δημ[οσίας. Ἀριστοτέ]λης ἐν τῇ Σολέων πολιτείᾳ.
 μιάστωρ ὁ εἰδὼς ἑαυτὸν μὴ καθαρὸν αἷματο[ς] δει καὶ μαιίνων. Αὐτοκλείδης ἐν τῷ
 ἐπιγρα[φομένῳ Ἐξηγητικῷ]
 μίθοργ γένος τι ἀρμονίας παρὰ Χαλδαίοις περ[ι]
 Μίθρας ὁ Προμηθεύς, κατὰ δ' ἄλλους ὁ ἥλιος παρὰ Πέρσ[αις].
 μιληχ γενναῖον ὑπὸ Ἀλβανίων τῶν ὁμορουντῶ[ν] ὡς Ἡρακλείδης ἐν α Ξένης φωνῆς.
 μινωδολόεσσα ἀριθμῶν σύνταξις παρὰ Χαλδαίο[ις ... ἐν—τῶν] κατὰ Βαβυλῶνα.
 Μινύαι οὐ μόνον Ὀρχομένιοι ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ Μάγνη[τες ... Πε]ρί ποταμῶν.
 μινῶδες ἄμπελοί τινες οὕτω λέγονται παρὰ Ῥοδ[ίοις]?
 μισαὶ {ὁ} παρὰ Χαλδαίοις ἢ τῶν μελλόντων πρόγνωσι[ς ... ἐν—] τῶν κατὰ Βαβυ-
 λῶνα.

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- 5 Clarifications in round brackets from Schironi's translation.
 - 6 Tarsus and Soli are cities of Cilicia in Asia Minor, and both have links with Eastern populations (Soli was originally a Phoenician foundation and remained long under Persian rule; excavations in Tarsus have brought to light cuneiform tablets and coins inscribed in Aramaic). However, it is more likely that the word *metra* has an Indo-European background, cf. Latin *matrix* which also can mean “public register.” The source here is the great philosopher Aristotle (fourth century BCE), whose studies in politics resulted *inter alia* in a number of *Constitutions* of different cities of the Greek world.
 - 7 The papyrus carries *miester* (μειστηρ), but the correction in μιάστωρ is guaranteed by the parallel gloss in the lexicon of Photius (μ 441) and by the occurrences of the word in Attic tragedy. The source of the glossary is here the lost work on Athenian rituals by the obscure Autokleides (perhaps third century BCE).
 - 8 As suggested by John Huehnergard (see Schironi, *From Alexandria to Babylon*, 102), the word at stake might be Akkadian *mithurtu* (conflict, correspondence), which would imply in the gloss the non-musical sense of *harmonia*. The name of the source is lost in the lacuna at line-end, unless one follows Schmidt in writing Περργένης (*Perigenes*; no author of this name is known, however). K.F.W. Schmidt, rev. of *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. xv, by Arthur Hunt.
 - 9 This Persian gloss occurs in a similar form in the lexicon of Hesychius (see below), μ 1335 and 1336, but the identification of the well-known oriental deity with Prometheus is not attested elsewhere, and might rest on Mithra's current association with fire and on his demiurgic activity.
 - 10 This gloss refers to the language of the Albanians, in ancient Greek doctrine the inhabitants of a region of the Caucasus near the Caspian Sea and Iberia, present-day Georgia. Although these peoples spoke a Caucasian language, the gloss most likely derives from the Semitic root *mlk*, see Aramaic *melek* (king): Aramaic was for centuries the *lingua franca* of

English Translation

Adapted from Francesca Schironi, *From Alexandria to Babylon* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 61.⁵

metrai in Tarsus and Soli, the writing tablets on which they register houses are called “metrai”: they also call them “demosiai” [public]. Aristotle in the *Constitution of Soli*.⁶

miastor one who is aware of not being pure of bloodshed ... and is polluted. Autoclide in the (book) entitled *Exegetikon*.⁷

mithorg a kind of harmony among the Chaldaeans. ...⁸

Mithras Prometheus, according to others the sun among the Persians.⁹

milech noble by the Albanians, those who are neighbors of ..., as Heraclides in Book One of *Foreign Language*.¹⁰

minodoloessa a numerical system among the Chaldaeans ... (of the work?) *On Babylon*.¹¹

Minyans not only the inhabitants of Orchomenus, but also the Magnetes ... *On Rivers*.¹²

minodes some grape-vines have this name among the Rhodians(?)¹³

misai the fore-knowledge of the future among Chaldaeans ... (in Book ...) of the work *On Babylon*.¹⁴

the Caucasian area. Heraclides and his *Foreign Language* are otherwise unknown, though we do know a fourth-century Heraclides who wrote a monograph on the “Persian idioms” (Περσικὰ ἰδιώματα).

11 A similar entry (with the spelling *mindaloessa*) occurs in Hesychius μ 1391: there might be a link with the Akkadian nouns *minitu* or *minutu* (number, amount), but the derivation of the second part of the word is obscure. A work *On Babylon* was notoriously written by the third-century historian Berossus, but his text is quoted elsewhere in the same papyrus under the current title of *Babyloniaka*.

12 A similar entry occurs in the lexicon of Hesychius (μ 1396): according to the first-century geographer Strabo (see Chapter 1.7), the Boeotian population of the Minyans, living close to Orchomenus, was connected with the Thessalian tribe of the Magnetes (settled near Iolcus, present-day Volos), the ancestors of the Argonauts. The source of our lexicon is here a work *On Rivers* (such were written by many Greek erudites, including the outstanding Hellenistic poet Callimachus of Cyrene), which perhaps tackled in this section the explanation of river Minyeios, mentioned in *Iliad* 11.722.

13 A similar entry occurs in Hesychius μ 1417: no other attestation of this word exists, and the connection with the Rhodian dialect rests on a highly uncertain reading (and supplement) of the papyrus.

14 Hunt thought of Sumerian *me-zu* (to divine), but if we have to look for an Akkadian word there are not many suitable candidates (Schironi thinks of *mesu* “rituals”). Hunt and Grenfell, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 162. For the indication of the source, see above note 10.

Abbreviations and Symbols

col.	column
fr.	fragment
P.Oxy	Oxyrhynchus Papyri
{ }	found in the extant manuscript tradition but rejected by the editor as spurious, that is, as not belonging to the genuine text

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