

Plurilingualism in Traditional Eurasian Scholarship

Thinking in Many Tongues

EDITED BY

Glenn W. Most, Dagmar Schäfer, and
Mårten Söderblom Saarela



Plurilingualism in Traditional Eurasian Scholarship

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Introduction

Glenn W. Most, Dagmar Schäfer, and Michele Loporcaro

This volume is conceived as a contribution to the growing discussion of plurilingualism, especially in the history of science, translation studies, and related fields. It is comparative in scope and historical in orientation, and it addresses forms of scholarship, particularly as these are expressed in concrete practices and as they are conceived by the local agents themselves. It focuses upon these scholarly practices in a number of pre-modern societies, especially Chinese, Indian, Jewish, Islamic, Mesopotamian, ancient Greek, Roman, and Medieval Latin. We hope that it will be useful for courses on these subjects. But it should also serve for documenting previous reflection and stimulating new research into the variety of ways in which people in a number of older traditions used the plurality of languages they experienced in their world, in order to think about languages and language itself, and to understand other people and themselves.

It is probably a safe bet to suppose that the default situation in most areas of the world and in most periods of human history has been that people were confronted in their daily lives not with a single language but with more than one. Except for the most remote and isolated communities, there are always foreign neighbors who, for whatever reason—war, commerce, curiosity, love—enter into dialogue across linguistic frontiers. And even in those remotest communities, people spend their lives engaging incessantly in transactions across the boundaries of different ways of using what an external observer might define as the same language but what the participants themselves would more likely regard as being fundamentally different ones: the language of the gods is not the same as that of humans, that of women is not the same as that of men, there are professions and sects and more or less formal groups with their own language, there are ancient texts and inherited songs that resist immediate understanding, and even that tiniest of communities, every family, has its own idiolect that not only outsiders can have trouble grasping. Plurilingualism is not a rare scholarly construct: it is a fact of life.

And wherever the reality of plurilingualism has flourished, people have developed various practices in an attempt to avoid misunderstandings and confusions in their dealings with themselves and with others. Some cultures focused their attention on the very fact of language diversity; some on the advantages and disadvantages of writing systems; some traced the changing meanings of individual words or compiled dictionaries in which they described and analyzed word meanings in relation to each other; some identified and

standardized equivalents between two or more languages. For all the differences, modern readers can recognize these practices in the very same topics and procedures used by scholars in linguistics and non-experts alike: plurilingualism, writing systems, etymology, lexicography, and translation.

By presenting primary materials from different regions and periods, this volume offers an approach to the historical dynamics that have shaped these practices locally. The understanding of these scholarly practices nowadays has been deeply influenced by a conventional bias, not always fully conscious, in favor of monolingualism. Researchers on these matters in the sciences and humanities concentrated for a long time on trying to explain what they took to be historically inevitable trends towards monolingualism, an issue of considerable ideological significance in the context of the emergence of nation-states during the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is well known, for instance, that elites and the scholars who often served them exaggerated and idealized the degree of consistency of past languages over time and space by projecting a utopian vision of a pristine monolingualism that allegedly endured unchallenged until some later catastrophe finally produced the plurilingualism that eventually had become evident. Thus an Adamic language of Paradise was hypothesized, together with the fall of a tower of Babel. Or else only a single language was regarded as being fully real while all other, actually spoken and used ones, were considered to be less real or even fully unreal; for instance, the case of Sanskrit. In modern times, the dream of monolingualism has more often been projected into the future as the aspiration for universal political, philosophical, and linguistic goals—the translinguistic language to which many post-Boethian Aristotelians aspired, the *mathesis universalis* that fascinated seventeenth-century philosophers, and, more recently, Esperanto, Ido, Novial, and other linguistic inventions.

And yet, if anything, research on the dream of monolingualism has unveiled monolingualism to be nothing more than a fantasy. The millennial efforts of Chinese empires to facilitate communication among different communities by the officially sanctioned use of a single written script also enabled a regionally heterogeneous landscape of grammars, semantics, and pronunciations. Despite the wide diffusion of a form of simplified English in today's world, driven by globalization, technology, transportation, popular music, and the internet, and the concurrent gradual extermination of numerous small local languages, it does not seem at all likely that there will ever come a time when there will only be one language in the world. Even if that time ever did arrive, it is quite certain, given human nature, that humans—to attain certain goals, to create particular micro-communities, or out of sheer confusion or contrariness—would immediately start to consciously debate about meanings and pronunciations, and

unconsciously modify and pluralize that single language, so that we would be back to plurilingualism once again.

But if all human beings deal with plurilingualism as a datum of their daily experience, it is above all scholars whose principal activities permit and oblige them to practice and reflect upon plurilingualism most intensely and most systematically. And that is why our volume focuses upon scholarly practices. Not all of the authors of the texts included here might at first glance be thought of as being scholars in a restrictive sense—some readers might rather be inclined to call them philosophers or priests or theologians or diplomats or administrators or historians or travelers. They are these things too of course, but the term “scholar” is used here quite broadly, to indicate people whose daily practices involve the study, production, interpretation, and translation of written documents for the use of members of their own and of other institutions and, often, for a wider public, imagined or real. Of course, scholars are and always have been deeply involved in oral activities as well as reading and writing, but speaking and listening cannot be traced in history unless they are documented visually in the form of artistic images or written texts.

Using a broader understanding of scholars allows us to see across cultural frontiers kinds of affinities, and differences, that might be hidden if we used more finely grained categories—not least because the more narrow the categorization, the likelier it is to be influenced by specific cultural formations and to provide a merely local and hence unsatisfactory basis for intercultural comparison. The differences between a Greek who calls himself a philosopher and a Chinese whom other, later people call a philosopher are enormous; so too between a Hebrew priest and a Brahmin. And yet all are scholars in this broader sense, and in their daily dealings with plurilingualism they have much in common with one another.

Various terms have come into use over the years to describe the phenomenon of multiple coexisting languages. Our choice of “plurilingualism” in this English language volume is intended to highlight situations in which people must and can navigate among two or more languages in their lives and work. We have preferred the term “plurilingualism” to “multilingualism,” which is well-established in English and was introduced in the first half of the nineteenth century in order to designate situations in which a number of languages coexist simultaneously: people who are fluent in multiple languages, books that provide versions of texts or translations of words in multiple languages, and societies whose members speak and understand multiple languages.¹ Given

1 In English over the past two centuries, “multilingual” has tended to replace the term “polyglot,” which was introduced much earlier (already in the mid-17th century, from French) but

that “bilingual” is a common English term (coined somewhat earlier than “multilingual”) to describe situations in which only two languages are involved, it makes sense to limit “multilingualism” to those situations in which three or more languages are involved.

If we prefer the term “plurilingualism” in this book, it is not only for the pedantic reason that we consider many cases in which not three or more languages, but only two are involved, so that this term (which derives from Latin *plus, plures*, meaning “more than one”) is more apposite than “multilingual” (which derives from Latin *multus*, meaning “many”). “Plurilingualism” also has the further advantage that it is not already well established in ordinary English usage (it is missing from most dictionaries), and has only recently started to come into use, introduced into current linguistics and public policy to focus upon the capacity of individual speakers to switch between multiple languages depending upon situations. Our own usage of the term is broader and non-technical; it should serve as a reminder that languages are dynamic products and producers of social interactions, formed by different cultures and forming them, and are not just a construct of vocabulary and grammar. We hope that readers will thereby also be reminded that the fact and the recognition of the existence of a plurality of languages are much older than the relatively recent debates about multilingualism as contrasted with a national language and the attendant ideal of monolingualism.

1 The Historical Study of Plurilingualism and Contemporary Approaches

When looked at from the perspective of modern academic disciplines, the scientific study of pluri- and multilingualism is a very recent development that does not go back before the twentieth century. However, this modern interest looks back to a long prehistory. Indeed, some of the earliest extant examples of scholarly interest in language actually bear witness to an interest in a plurality of languages: among the wordlists (a kind of proto-dictionary) written on clay tablets in the later third to early second millennium BCE by Old Babylonian grammarians, this is the case for the bilingual lists from Ebla (ca. 2350 BCE). These display words in the two culture languages of the time, Sumerian and

which, deriving as it does from Greek roots, may have been felt by native speakers to be less transparent in its meaning.

Akkadian, which were unrelated to each other (the former language was possibly no longer in spoken usage by that time).² At times, interest in languages and their diversity was practiced as a means to some higher goal, such as that of discovering whether language is innate, as in Pharaoh Psamtik I's (664–610 BCE) cruel language deprivation experiment as reported by Herodotus, *Histories* 2.2.2: two newborns were given to a shepherd to be nurtured among the Pharaoh's flocks without any words being addressed to them by any human being, because the Pharaoh wanted to see which language they would speak and hoped thereby to discover the "original" one.

To cope with language diversity, intellectual workers of all times shaped different practices, such as translation, language collection, and language comparison. Let us exemplify this with two snapshots from the early nineteenth century. Giuseppe Mezzofanti (1774–1849), appointed in 1833 as the Vatican's chief librarian, was one of the most spectacular cases of *hyperpolyglot* scholars ever recorded: He was reported to be fluent in about fifty languages and could translate from one hundred fifty.³ At the dawn of the same century, J. Ch. Adelung published his *Mithridates, oder allgemeine Sprachenkunde* (1806), a five-hundred-language collection and classification expanding on Conrad Gesner's book with the same title (1555)—both were named after a proverbial polyglot of antiquity, king Mithridates VI of Pontus (120–63 BCE), who was said to have mastered all the twenty-odd languages spoken by his subjects.

The turn of the nineteenth century also witnessed the rise of modern linguistics, which developed out of an interest in historical language comparison and linguistic reconstruction. Early milestones included Sir William Jones's discourse before the Asiatic Society in Calcutta (1786), recognizing that Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and other languages—the Indo-European ones—must have descended from one common source, or Franz Bopp's *Conjugationssystem der Sanscritsprache* (1816), the foundational text in the reconstruction of Indo-European. Scholarly interest in language contact as an object of scientific investigation did not start until the late nineteenth century, with pioneering work by Hugo Schuchardt, who wrote, for example, on *Slawo-Deutsches und Slawo-Italienisches*, on the long-lasting contact between Basque and Latin/Romance,⁴ or on pidgin and creole languages.⁵ Against this background we can understand that Schuchardt's famous dictum "es gibt keine völlig ungemischte Sprache"

2 See Veldhuis, "Ancient Mesopotamia," 12–15.

3 Edwards *Multilingualism*, 34; "Multilingual Individuals," 147.

4 Schuchardt, *Slawo-Deutsches und Slawo-Italienisches*; Schuchardt, *Baskisch und Romanisch*.

5 Le Page, "Hugo Schuchardt's Creole Studies."

(there is no totally unmixed language) was in fact a bold and even subversive statement for its time. In fact, it ran counter to the basic procedure on which the comparative linguistics paradigm was constructed, which involved isolating a consistent and unitary language as the indispensable first step for comparison and reconstruction. Indeed, similar idealizations persist well into twentieth-century linguistics, for example in the form of the “ideal speaker-hearer,” posited as the locus of linguistic competence and the object of investigation by Chomskyan generative linguistics.⁶

After Schuchardt’s brilliant anticipation, the modern systematic investigation of pluri- and multilingualism started with studies in bilingualism in the early twentieth century, which were, however, overshadowed—especially in the USA—by preoccupations about the failed integration of immigrants. These studies mostly came up with negative assessments of the alleged disadvantages of bilingualism for cognitive development: based on such alleged evidence, even influential textbooks by leading linguists, at that time, were replete with claims that a bilingual child “hardly learns either of the two languages as perfectly as he [*sic*] would have done if he had limited himself to one” and that bilingualism “diminishes the child’s power of learning other things, which might and ought to be learnt.”⁷ This was the majority view then, with voices to the contrary limited to very few more enlightened scientists, such as G.I. Ascoli: “condizione privilegiata, nell’ordine dell’intelligenza, questa dei figliuoli bilingui” (a cognitively privileged condition indeed, that of bilingual children).⁸

The turning point was Weinreich’s *Languages in Contact* (1954): since then, it has become generally accepted that previous results were seriously flawed, first and foremost due to a lack of control of relevant variables such as instruction and other factors. An enormous body of literature has grown since, on *Life with two Languages*—the title of an influential book by Grosjean (1982)—focusing on how multiple language competence is acquired by children and adults, stored in their brains, and actively practiced in society. The initial framing concentrated on contact effects, still with a negatively flavored terminology centering on the notion of “interference” (the disturbing effect of one language on the other), while the terminology is now shifting to the more neutral CLIN (cross-linguistic interaction).

Over the past few decades, the negative bias regarding bi-/multilingualism has yielded to a dominant optimism, with influential studies, especially in

6 See e.g., Chomsky, *Theory of Syntax*, 3f.

7 Jespersen, *Language*, 220.

8 Ascoli, “Proemio all’ *Archivio Glottologico Italiano*,” xxviii.

the wake of Bialystok, claiming cognitive benefits and lifelong advantages for bi- over monolinguals.⁹ For instance, much research converges in suggesting that a year-long practice of bi-/multilingualism, crucially involving training in inhibiting one language when using the other(s), may possibly “provide a buffer against the behavioral changes associated with dementing diseases”¹⁰ due to enhanced stimulation of the frontal lobe areas involved in inhibitory and control behavior.

Research in the field has also increasingly focused on qualitative and quantitative differences between multilinguals, who master three or more languages, and bilinguals. The evidence shows that bilinguals outperform monolinguals when acquiring the same (new) language, and there seems to be an advantage for multilinguals over bilinguals too, sometimes labelled the “Matthew effect,” or “rich-gets-richer principle.”¹¹ Currently investigated issues include the ways in which any language beyond the second one is learned, for instance, which of the previously acquired ones (L1 or L2) exerts the stronger influence: relevant factors are both objective (language type) and subjective (age of exposure, amount of usage, proficiency). Also in terms of brain structures, it has become increasingly clear that “experience of managing multiple languages induces plasticity in both the child and adult brain,”¹² with observable neuro-anatomical effects (e.g., increased grey matter density).

It should be noted in conclusion that the focus on the individual in research on multilingualism is not just the product of recent emphasis—in keeping with an increasingly reductionist *Zeitgeist*—on the neurological underpinnings of language. Rather, it has to be kept in mind that contact between languages ultimately occurs in the individual mind/brain. Realistic modelling of all aspects of multilingualism must face this indisputable truth. Everything that is learned about how multilingualism works can then be capitalized on for all purposes including, for instance, that of providing a frame of reference for studying multilingualism in past epochs,¹³ since no evidence so far suggests deviation from the uniformitarian principle according to which “the linguistic processes taking place around us are the same as those that have operated to produce the historical record.”¹⁴ The production of scholarship confronting the coexistence

9 Bialystok, *Bilingualism in Development*.

10 Kadyamusuma et al., “The Neurolinguistics of Multilingualism,” 289.

11 Festman, “The Psycholinguistics of Multilingualism,” 244.

12 Higby, Kim, and Obler, “Multilingualism in the Brain,” 78.

13 Cf., for example, Braunmüller, “Historical Multilingualism.”

14 Labov, “Some Principles of Linguistic Methodology,” 101.

and diversity of languages in past contexts and epochs is one specific case of this general rule.

“Multilingualism” has thus become well established in modern linguistics as a descriptive category to indicate situations of the coexistence of multiple languages. One reason that we prefer to use the term “plurilingualism” instead is that in this volume we wish to emphasize especially the practices of making meaning which those situations enable. Our choice of the texts in this volume is intended to highlight the fact that it is not only in the modern world and during modern world history that a growing awareness of the plurality of languages (for example, written and oral, different linguistic entities, expert and vernacular) has enhanced discussions on how our ways of thinking and our cognitive abilities are related to our handling of different linguistic registers. After all, to share a language has never necessarily meant to share a culture. In this sense the term “plurilingualism” has the advantage that it is also used to indicate that actors use languages and language repertoires in combination with one another, even if often with different functional purposes and social constellations in mind. Along these lines it might make sense to wonder whether, just as the speakers of a single language are largely preconditioned in their thinking by the specific language they have learned, plurilinguals are able to switch back and forth between the various languages that they have mastered—they can “think in many tongues”—and to express and feel their thinking differently in their various languages.

2 Plurilingualism, Knowledge, and Science

Historically, there have been very different reactions to the evident variations that characterize the scholarly practices underlying plurilingual realities. Positive attitudes towards the general phenomenon of plurilingualism, including the explicit and conscious multilingualism of ancient Mesopotamia (Sumerian, Akkadian, and other languages), the Near and Middle East (Arabic, Turkic, Persian, Hebrew) and ancient Rome (Latin, Greek), stand in contrast to hostility to all or most forms of plurilingualism, such as the ancient Greek resistance to acknowledging linguistic variation outside its own dialects, the Sanskrit-only ideology of ancient India, and the concealed plurilingual reality of the expanding empire of early China. And some civilizations are marked not so much by an attitude, be it positive or negative, towards the general phenomenon of plurilingualism, but instead by different attitudes with regard to different specific languages: thus ancient Rome valorized ancient Greek very highly but did not extend this admiration to other languages it encountered. In general, spe-

cific historical and cultural factors, including political and economic relations, must be brought to bear in order to understand fully why a certain civilization viewed different languages differently. In some of the cases of negative valorization, it may be that what actors were primarily concerned about was not language itself but instead the difference between orality and script. This is most evident in the use of Sanskrit, Hebrew, or Latin, for instance, as a prime tool for preserving and disseminating sacred revelation by means of religious texts. It is also apparent in the contrast between the Indian veneration of an unchanging spoken language combined with an indifference toward the proliferation of scripts and the Chinese focus on written characters at the expense of an ephemeral spoken word.

Our own disciplinary self-understanding locates this volume firmly within the history of science, but we have not hesitated to address the phenomenon of plurilingualism with the benefit of recent developments in other fields such as the history of philology and translation studies. A half century ago and earlier, historians of science often looked back to philology and translation studies as an older phase of scholarship on the texts with which they themselves were engaged. Philology could be thought of as addressing only the most minute issues of transmission and edition and as serving the ancillary function of, at best, preparing reliable texts, without worrying very much about what they actually meant in larger terms; and translation studies could be supposed merely to trace the diffusion of what was, at best, an unaltered core of meaning through the various languages in which it came to be disseminated throughout the world. But in the meantime, not only has the history of science developed in important new directions, emphasizing much more than ever before practices and social institutions within the context of knowledge dissemination and transfer. At the same time, the understanding of philology and of translation has also evolved significantly, and in the very same direction: research over the twentieth century focused on power and language hegemonies, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, on translation as a motor of exchange and change, so that translation studies began to expand their remit of problematizing scientific text translation in bilateral cross-cultural encounters and emphasizing instead the role of translators, recipient cultures, and translation practices.¹⁵

The result is that the triangular relation between all three disciplines remains fundamental, but at the same time an awareness has grown that recog-

15 See Montgomery, *Science in Translation*.

nizing the true nature and significance of plurilingualism permits us to understand better the very purpose and historical role of scholarly practices and objects such as etymology, lexicography, translation, language diversity, and writing systems.

Until recently, historians of science who analyzed the transfer and circulation of knowledge have tended to focus on translation and have delegated the study of other aspects of plurilingualism to other fields, like philosophy or linguistics. The history of science, technology, and medicine has also long cherished a kind of positivism that has regarded the sciences themselves as a universal protocol, true beyond the particular rationality of any specific linguistic repertoire. In the second half of the twentieth century, historians of science like Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend, even as they shifted their attention from convergences of contents to divergences in practices and understandings, still suggested that language differences explained incommensurability and non-transmission in historical scientific exchanges.¹⁶ Towards the end of that century, in the context of the rapid rise of computerized language processing, scholars began to debate the role of linguistic variation and alphabetic versus glottographic writing systems for scientific change.¹⁷ To be sure, the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis had already placed language semantics in direct relation to “thought styles” and led scholars to speculate about the relation between specific languages and logics. But the exact nature of that relation has proved difficult to grasp. For example, to claim that “language is something fixed that leaves its mark on the thought activities carried out using it,”¹⁸ seems not to do justice to the fact that language is not only a versatile resource, adaptable to purposes, but also highly dynamic.

Our volume programmatically defines plurilingualism as the normal historical condition, and thereby seeks to overcome the implicit dichotomy that lingers in the very disciplinary distinction between history of science and translation studies. In a plurilingual world, all language practices necessarily involve information exchange, truth claims, and thought styles. Studying such negotiations in different historical and cultural contexts can also help us understand the problems and opportunities facing our society today, in which changing hegemonies of power—for example migration, mixing, growing awareness of

16 Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*; Feyerabend, *Against Method*.

17 Among the languages that were discussed in this context were Greek, Arabic, and Persian on the one hand, and Chinese and Egyptian on the other. See Thomas Mullaney, *The Chinese Typewriter*, for an overview over such debates in a global perspective.

18 This is the characterization of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in Chemla, “Needham,” 115.

the “other,” globalization, and exchange—have a profound impact, and have led to an increased interest on the part of sociologists and scientists in inquiring into plurilingualism’s effects. Within this vast and growing literature, our own aim is to provide a direct view of the role that some historical actors have assigned to different reading and writing practices in their plurilingual lives.

3 Organization and Themes of This Volume

Our collection explores the historical phenomenon of plurilingualism through five fundamental themes. We have chosen these themes because they conspicuously represent interlocking modes of dealing with differences within and between languages, and have left significant traces in a variety of cultures that allow fruitful comparison of similarities and differences. These five themes correspond to the five parts in which the volume is structured:

1. The part on **language diversity** illustrates some of the ways in which various cultures conceived and reacted to their experience of encountering, or imagining, the multiplicity of languages—other peoples who used different languages from their own, or their own culture understood as a diversified, plurilingual space. The story of the tower of Babel explains in mythical and theological terms how it came about that people speak many languages and, as a result, do not understand one another. Greek philosophers who derived human language from nature could explain the multiplicity of language in terms of the variety of local circumstances. Reports by travelers, historians, and geographers in ancient Greece could belie the notion that all foreigners were simply barbarians incapable of coherent speech—or else could provide rich and specific detail to confirm that prejudice. Multiethnic empires like the Chinese offered innumerable occasions for representing or caricaturing the languages of other peoples as one particularly striking aspect of variant social behavior, but could also raise issues of domestic incommunicability and misunderstanding due to the plurality of languages and historical change.
2. The part on **etymology** gives examples of practices that established semantic connections between words of one language or of different languages. Speculating in ways that can seem strange to us today, scholars in many cultures tried to reveal the hidden threads that tied together the words they used. How do words relate to one another and where do they come from? Is their signification revealed through their sounds, as

in ancient India and Greece? Or is the secret to language to be found in its written signs, as in Mesopotamia and China? Often it was the specific nature of the dominant scripts that guided scholars in their search for the interrelations among words. Even when those etymological interrelations remained within the confines of a single language, they tended to pluralize it, creating multiple discourses with complex semantic relations among them.

3. Under the heading of **lexicography**, a collection of texts illustrates the variety of ways in which the elements of language have been itemized and enumerated, be it in order to understand or teach classical texts, to promote one's own sense of the only proper language, or to communicate with strangers encountered in foreign lands. In Greece, we see glosses on poets evolving to become universal lexica, whereas in medieval China traveling monks set out for Central Asia with a collection of Sanskrit words arranged by theme as their guide. Dictionaries came in many forms—including monolingual, bilingual, and indeed multilingual—and they had as many usages as the linguistic encounters that produced them.
4. The part on **translation** investigates the transfer and reinvention of canonical written traditions in a new language from the ancient eastern Mediterranean to medieval Iran and modern China. While translation testifies to the importance of the source text, it has sometimes led to the neglect of the once revered original. Translation was often considered by the translators themselves to be a risky endeavor. How for example could the translation of holy Scripture be permitted, if indeed it was even possible? And yet we see that this happened over and over, be it into Greek in Ptolemaic Egypt or into Latin at the hands of Jerome, or again in the large-scale Central Asian and Chinese Buddhist translation teams in Chang'an, the assembly line from which the dharma spread across East Asia. But if translation was so desirable, why then was darkness said to have befallen the world for two days once the Alexandrian Jews could finally read their Scriptures in a language that they could understand?
5. The texts that discuss **writing systems** focus either on writing in general as opposed to thought or orality, or on specific writing systems in relation to one another. Plato provides a severe critique of the disastrous consequences of writing for human memory, while a Buddhist text takes a far more favorable view of the benefits of writing in Sanskrit. In other cultures, it was the multiplicity of writing systems that attracted most attention. The selection from Ibn al-Nadīm's *Kitāb al-Fihrist* contrasts the languages of Arabic, Persian, and Syriac, focusing on the capacity of their

writing systems. In Chinese and Manchu, what scholars worried about were the origins of the writing system and the dangers to which its multiplication gave rise. Was writing of human or divine origin? What was its relation to spoken languages and how had it developed? What problems and opportunities did it offer?

We are fully aware that these five parts do not exhaust the palette of scholarly practices involving plurilingualism. Others could easily be added, for example historical evolution of languages, monolingual and comparative grammar, or commentary on ancient texts. So too, the number of textual examples drawn from the scholarly traditions represented here could be greatly increased, and so as well could the number of those traditions. We particularly regret that it was not possible in this edition of our volume to include more Hebrew, Persian, Avestan, Zoroastrian, or Manichean materials. But we thought that it was better to make a beginning, however incomplete, so as to suggest the riches that await discovery and analysis in the comparative study of plurilingualism throughout the world. If our book succeeds in this aim, it will stimulate other researchers to enlarge and enrich our own very provisional attempt.

One further aspect of this collection needs to be addressed and explained. We have decided upon reflection to present the texts in each of these five parts in a sequence that is not geographical but rather, as far as possible, strictly chronological. We are aware that some of our readers will be surprised by the resulting separation from one another of certain texts within a single part that come from the same region and that may reflect earlier or later variations on similar or related practices. To be sure, such a separation between texts from the same region is also an artifact of our fundamental choice to organize our material into five distinct but closely related parts. Our rationale for this decision was threefold. First of all, any geographical organization would have meant that some one region would have had to be placed first and the others later, and any such necessarily arbitrary arrangement might have misleadingly suggested to some readers that we were advocating a relative privileging or ranking of one region over another, something that we wished to avoid as far as possible. Second, our purely exploratory collection—the first of its kind ever attempted—could not possibly have harbored any exhaustive or encyclopedic ambitions: by avoiding easy regional groupings, we hope to have made clear that we cannot pretend to have done more than offer a first provisional survey of the huge material that numerous cultures throughout history and throughout the world could provide—and hopefully will provide for future studies. Third, and most important, we wanted to encourage our readers to focus on typological patterns rather than on causal connections: that is, to recognize fundamental strate-

gies, wherever they have been instantiated, for dealing with similar and diverse issues, wherever they have arisen, rather than to explain away similarities or differences in terms of local traditions or regional tendencies. We have made suggestions in the introductions to the five parts for recognizing such patterns of convergence and divergence in the texts gathered in each part, and we invite our readers to use the guidance provided by these introductions as they navigate within and among the five parts.

The present form of our volume reflects its genesis and development. In order to study comparatively a variety of cultures of the ancient and more recent past that conceived of language(s) in terms of “thinking in many tongues,” we decided to convene a series of workshops at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (MPIWG), Berlin. Over the course of two years from 2016 to 2017, various specialists, themselves conversant in multiple language traditions, discussed plurilingualism in a number of lively sessions as a historical phenomenon that needed to be understood and dealt with: the ancient Near East, Judaic, and Arabo-Persian traditions (Markham J. Geller, University College London; Hindy Najman, University of Oxford; Sonja Brentjes, MPIWG); the ancient Greek, Latin, Byzantine, and Romance worlds (Glenn W. Most, Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, retired 2020; Filippomaria Pontani, Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia; Michele Loporcaro, University of Zurich); ancient India (Bill M. Mak, Needham Research Institute, Cambridge; Roy Tzohar, Tel Aviv University); and ancient and imperial China (Wolfgang Behr, University of Zurich; Dagmar Schäfer, MPIWG; Mårten Söderblom Saarela, Academia Sinica). Besides this core group, our discussions were further enriched by specific contributions by Joel S. Baden (Yale University), Johannes Bronkhorst (University of Lausanne), Shervin Farridnejad (Freie Universität Berlin), Florentina Badalanova Geller (Freie Universität Berlin), Cale Johnson (Freie Universität Berlin), Kees Versteegh (University of Nijmegen), and Benjamin G. Wright III (Lehigh University), among others.

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PART 1

Language Diversity



Introduction

Glenn W. Most

This part opens our presentation of the phenomenon of plurilingualism by focusing on the phenomenon itself, and on how the existence of linguistic diversity was acknowledged, in stories, texts, and correspondence, in various cultures and periods. Exemplary texts demonstrate some of the ways in which scholars attempted to devise various kinds of causal explanations in order to account for the ubiquity of plurilingualism. We see that some scholars implied or asserted specific evaluations, which could be moralistic, or more philosophically analytic. Some concentrated on the social ramifications, either divisive or cohesive, to which plurilingualism could be thought to lead, while others were more concerned with the opportunities for amusement provided by the translation process. The following pages provide a brief introduction to a few of the more important themes and contents of the specific texts that are presented in this part; the reader curious to know more about linguistic diversity as a phenomenon in human history and throughout the world is referred to the general introduction of this volume, which provides further material concerning the history and theory of language diversity in general terms.

For the history of reflection on plurilingualism in the Western tradition, the story of the Tower of Babel in the Hebrew Bible (Chapter 1.2) has been an indispensable foundation and an unending source of inspiration. A volume on plurilingualism could hardly begin with a more appropriate text. The diversity of languages is revealed here not to be the original human condition, but a later, vastly inferior state resulting from divine punishment of human arrogance, and it is associated with the spatial dispersal of humankind throughout the world. Earlier than and differently from any available historical experience, humans are imagined to have once lived together and been able to understand one another because they all spoke the same language; by contrast, in the real world that we see and have always known, languages are diverse and distances are vast. Even put in these terms, there are oddities about this story. What exactly is the relation implied between the multiplication of languages and the scattering of peoples? Would it not have been enough, if Jahweh had wanted to be sure of thwarting human ambitions, for him just to have made people incomprehensible to one another, without addi-

tionally dispersing them in space? And for that matter, why should speaking the same language have entailed mutual understanding in the first place? In our world, it is a manifest fact that it very often does not. And why should speaking different languages result necessarily in mutual incomprehension? Are there not interpreters and translators and dictionaries available in abundance?

Part of the effectiveness of this story resides precisely in its sovereign disregard for such everyday considerations. It focuses our attention instead upon what we might call the metaphysical dimension of language as an instrument of social power, and it answers the fundamental but implicit human question of why it is that humans do not have the power of gods, by responding that it is because they live apart from one another and speak different languages. For part of the tradition that arises from this story, spatial dispersion and linguistic diversity are nothing more than challenges to be overcome, contingent handicaps that must and can be vanquished by the very same human effort and presumption that led to their imposition as divine punishments in the first place: ever faster mechanisms of spatial locomotion and ever more encompassing global languages are the technical devices by which many humans have attempted in vain to transpose the fictive mirage of a single monolingual community from a mythic origin to a utopian future. But the capital of Esperanto is always Babel; the name “Esperanto” may mean “hope” but its destiny is always failure.

In fact, the story of the Tower of Babel is only one of two reflections on the origin of language to be found in the Hebrew Bible, and it needs to be read together with that other passage for its full significance to be revealed. In Genesis 2:18, Jahweh decides that the human he has created, Adam, needs a helper. So in the following verse (2:19) He produces out of the ground all the wild animals and birds and brings them to Adam in order to see what he would call them: and whatever name Adam decided to call them, this was to be their name. (In fact, Jahweh had already created all the land animals at Genesis 1:24, and their existence, together with the fish and birds, is presupposed at 1:26.) In the next verse (2:20) Adam gives names to each species of birds and of wild and domestic animals; but it turns out that none of them can be the kind of suitable helper that Jahweh sought for Adam, so He puts Adam to sleep and creates Eve as his suitable helpmate.

Adam’s language is freely invented by human imposition, is apparently limited to the names of the species of living things, and is intended as part of a divine project to provide a social community for the single human being that Jahweh had first created. Of course this attempt fails—animals cannot speak back to Adam, neither can they share his language nor can there be any possi-

bility of translation between them. Adam can call a dog, “dog,” but a dog cannot call Adam anything except “woof.” So Eve will have to be invented as a necessary supplement in order to provide the first human interlocutor for Adam, and all future human linguistic communities will grow out of this first absolutely monolingual family. Is the language of Adam the Hebrew that he seems to have spoken with Jahweh, and if so, is it the same language that would later go on to be spoken by the builders of Babel? Or was Adam’s language a kind of primordial Hebrew, different from all later versions? To put the question differently: was Hebrew one of the languages of the post-Babel babble? The story raises this question, but it does not answer it.

In any case, the story of the Tower of Babel interprets this Adamic primitive language from the perspective of the real inescapability of plurilingualism and from the conviction of the fundamentally hubristic nature of mankind. If the language of Adam was a failed attempt on the part of Jahweh to create a community of all living beings of which man was only a privileged part, the language of Babel is an equally unsuccessful attempt, this time on the part of mankind, to create a powerful dominion in which it is man who will become the ruler over the gods. It is worth noticing in this connection that the story tells of both a city and a tower, and that it mentions them both twice. If the city represents the human ambition to live in one place (which is thwarted by the scattering of humans throughout the world), what does the tower signify? Is it merely symbolic, something to indicate human ambitions that stretch up high above the earth? Would Jahweh have really been so worried about a mere symbol? But a tower can also have a highly practical function: and in fact *migdal*, the word for “tower” in this passage, can also signify a siege tower, of the sort that had been used since the eleventh century BCE by the Babylonians and Assyrians to attack the heavily fortified cities of their enemies. Perhaps then what really worries Jahweh, sitting enthroned in anxious splendor in his heavenly city, is not the city down there on the earth that humans are building in Babel, but the tower that he can see rising up as it grows daily and that threatens someday to loom menacingly above his very own walls.

This Hebrew story is not unique, either in its positing of an original natural monolingualism, out of which the multiplicity of existing languages developed by diversification, or in its negative evaluation of real plurilingualism; but, compared with the other selections presented in this part, it is quite unusual in its drastically moralistic condensation and systematic interweaving of these two themes.

By contrast, the Greek sources presented here tend to employ what we might term historical or philosophical approaches in trying to come to an understand-

ing of the phenomenon of plurilingualism. That is, they attempt to integrate this single phenomenon into the context of a larger account either of the gradual development of human civilizations or of the causal processes that determine observable biological and cultural facts. Of course this does not mean that the conclusions at which these texts arrive can be viewed as being largely acceptable by modern linguistics, history, or other sciences: our own basis of evidence is now much vaster than theirs and over the centuries modern scholarship has tried to develop more highly refined canons of argumentation. And yet the degree to which these Greek accounts tend to eschew drastic moralization in favor of larger explanatory hypotheses is striking.

To be sure, *barbaros*, the Greek term for people who speak languages other than Greek, is generally pejorative. But this common ancient usage does not reflect any sort of condemnation of plurilingualism per se but instead a remarkably complacent Greek sense of pride in what the Greeks themselves, especially after their successful resistance to the Persian invasions of the early fifth century BCE, perceived to be their own cultural superiority compared with the other peoples with whom they came into contact around the Mediterranean. No ancient Greek ever suggested that Greek should become the universal language, nor that world peace would be established or that foreigners would be improved if they were made to learn Greek.

Herodotus (Chapter 1.3) devotes considerable attention to language as an important social institution that provides a crucial contribution to characterizing the peoples he describes in his ethnographic and historical work. Herodotus's world is one that is filled with a fascinating plurality of languages, all different, all remarkable. While his own linguistic interest in other languages (and in his own) tends to be restricted to nouns, and especially to proper names such as those of the gods, it is noteworthy that he does not hesitate to derive Greek words and institutions from non-Greek cultures, and that in his panoramic historical generosity he not only imagines long-term sweeping linguistic developments but can even conceive that the Athenians themselves, autochthonic though they were, might once have spoken not the Athenian language but a different one he calls Pelasgian. We may guess that in at least some of these cases Herodotus wants to astonish his Athenian audiences by uncovering for them the non-Greek roots of their most cherished usages and institutions—and yet the very fact that he did so with such extraordinary success remains an important testimony to the implicit limits of Greek monolingualism. Four centuries later, at the end of the first century BCE, Strabo (Chapter 1.7) shows how the science of ancient geography, which had undergone considerable development in the wake of Alexander the Great's expeditions in the fourth century BCE, continued to discuss the question of what it meant

to speak a 'barbarian' language, still in terms of Homer and now too in those of the Carian people.

If Herodotus and Strabo show the Greeks using the tools of ethnography and history in trying to come to terms with the plurilingualism they perceived all around them, the other Greek sources presented here testify to the attempts of philosophers to explain the existence of language diversity. Plato in his *Cratylus* (Chapter 2.3) had already discussed at length the topics of the origin of language(s) and the source of the validity of words, concluding that the names for things had been established by primordial name-givers but leaving unanswered the question whether they had done so by following nature or convention. Epicurus (Chapter 1.4) develops a complex model for explaining how language(s) originated: a first stage of a primitive language that arose spontaneously from nature (after all, birds and other animals produce sounds too) is followed by a gradual development over the course of various phases guided by convention. Language is a purely human achievement that is ultimately founded entirely upon nature. On this model, linguistic diversity can easily be explained in terms of the variety of natural circumstances that obtained at the beginning of the evolutionary process: every language reflects the natural environment of its speakers. A similar but rather simpler model is provided by Epicurus's Roman follower Lucretius (Chapter 1.4): his account of the development of language is an important chapter in the progress of human civilization, but here what counts exclusively is the ultimate origin of human languages in unreflected natural sounds (in this case, those emitted by infants), and there is no place at all for conventionalist interventions into this natural legacy. By contrast, for the first-century BCE historian Diodorus of Sicily (Chapter 1.6), whose views may well go back ultimately to the fifth-century BCE Presocratic philosopher Democritus, primitive language does indeed arise spontaneously as a fact of nature among the first humans, who are exposed to the dangers of their natural surroundings, but the diversity of languages attested throughout the world is entirely the result of convention, the agreement of local communities to use certain words to designate particular objects. In general, with the sole but important exception of Epicurus, who ascribed different languages to different natural environments, Greek philosophers tended to invoke local convention as their favored explanation for linguistic diversity.

Chinese reflections on the diversity of languages, as evinced in the texts presented in this part, display some noteworthy affinities with the Hebrew and Greek sources we have discussed so far, but also certain characteristic differences in conception and emphasis. In particular, the third-century BCE Chinese scholar Xunzi (Chapter 1.5) devoted considerable attention to the phenomenon of language diversification. He shares with the Greek sources a his-

torical approach to language development as an element within the gradual evolution of human society as a whole; but, like the Hebrew account of the Tower of Babel, he considers the plurality of languages to be a very negative phenomenon which represents a marked decline in the moral, political, and intellectual quality of the human world. Like all the thinkers we have considered, he sees in language an element of social agreement or convention (though he tends to interpret this above all in terms of harmony and cohesion); hence, like the other traditions presented in this part, he identifies in a society's language a crucial element of its social and political order. And he too, like the other authors in this part, is free from any notion of creating a universal language or of establishing a monolingual political system. But he differs from all of the thinkers we have considered in this introduction in certain crucial regards. First, he sees the problem of linguistic diversity entirely within the terms of the realities of East Asia: what matters is not the difference between languages spoken in different parts of the world by independent and autonomous peoples, but between those spoken and used for written communications by different elites of East Asia who wish to communicate with each other. It is the plurilingual reality of the East Asian imperial system, in which Chinese is only one of a number of languages, that worries him most. And second, he views plurilingualism as a problem of communication that can be fixed, at least to a certain extent: that is, he contemplates and recommends certain concrete steps which can mitigate the difficulties arising for his society from the plurality of languages. In particular, he recommends the careful study of existing standards of communication and a thoroughgoing adherence to them—in Greek terms, he is suggesting that thoughtful attention to convention can help to redress the ills of unguided nature. Third, his conception of nature involves not only Nature in the larger sense of the composition and structure of the world as a whole in which humans find themselves but also the particular and specific nature of individual human beings themselves, who speak the way they do not only because of general natural or social constraints but also because of their own innate idiosyncrasies. This individual nature sets a limit on the degree to which any program of rectification of names can hope for total success. And finally, he pays far more attention to the tensions and differences between oral and written language than the other thinkers in this part do—understandably, considering the nature of the Chinese writing system.

In contrast with Xunzi's text, which is rather abstract and prescriptive in nature, so much so that it has often been considered a work of philosophy, the final text selection in this part presents a very concrete historical instance of plurilingualism, Khitan children reciting Chinese poetry in twelfth-century CE China and inner Asia (Chapter 1.8). We see here how the differences between

languages could become an object of reflection, interest, and amusement for scholars—and not only for them. The methods that these local children used in order to understand and enjoy Chinese poetry—methods that Chinese adults could find laughable—were not altogether different from practices familiar from Japanese writing that allowed a whole culture to appropriate the treasures of Chinese culture. These ingenious children and laughing scholars provide a fitting conclusion for a part that considers not only the disadvantages attendant on the phenomenon of plurilingualism, but also the benefits and the opportunities that it can be understood to provide.

The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9)

Joel S. Baden

The biblical tale of the Tower of Babel is not a narrative of the origins of language, but rather of the origins of languages, plural. It seeks to answer a basic question: why do people who live in different places speak different languages? The starting point for both the question and the narrative is the presumption that, at one point, this was not the case: in the beginning, “the whole earth had one language and the same words.”

Central to the story is the claim that unity of language is a source of power, as the deity recognizes: “This is one people, with one language for all of them, and this is them just beginning to act.” Diversity of language is not a result of geographical dispersal; indeed, the two are related only in that they are parallel solutions to a single problem. The story can thus imagine a world in which humanity is geographically dispersed but still speaks one language, or vice versa: that humanity could be geographically centralized but speak many languages. Language diversity is thus not at all a naturally occurring phenomenon.

Though a brief passage of only nine verses, the story comprises a remarkable diffusion of themes. The origin of diverse human languages and the geographical dispersal of humanity are not even the only etiologies present in the text: the passage concludes with a (false, and in fact thoroughly unconvincing) etymology for Babylon (Babel in the Hebrew), and demands to be read as a polemic against, or at least a satire of, what was the greatest city in the known world. The story is at the same time a fable that warns of the dangers of overweening human pride—a tower with its top in the heavens, indeed!—which is the end to which the text has most often been used in the history of its interpretation.

Even within its basic plot, the story feels somewhat overfull. It is traditionally known as the Tower of Babel, but in fact the narrative describes both a tower and a city, with two closely related intentions to accompany the two closely related constructions: to “make a name for ourselves” and to prevent being “scattered over the face of the entire earth.” Some scholars have attempted (somewhat ironically) to separate the story into two original threads: one about a city, the desire for a name, and the confusion of languages; the other about a tower, the fear of being scattered, and the dispersal of humanity. Though such arguments have been (rightly) discredited, they do speak to the close interweaving of multiple thematic lines in these few verses.

One of the major counterarguments to the division of the text has been its intricate wordplay and structure. In the Hebrew we find what one scholar called a “constantly recurring melody”¹ of the sounds *b*, *l*, and *n*, occurring across five of the nine verses. The words “name,” *shem*, and “there,” *sham*, play off each other, culminating in three occurrences in the last verse. Even beyond these two examples, there is paronomasia, alliteration, and repetition throughout. On the structural level, the story holds together from multiple angles. The first four verses describe humanity’s intentions and actions; the fifth, narrating the deity’s descent, acts as the axis; and the last four verses describe Yahweh’s intentions and actions. Alternatively, the first two verses employ indirect discourse; the third and fourth direct; the fifth indirect; the sixth and seventh direct; and the eighth and ninth indirect again. Or one could take a more granular structural approach, seeing a concentric symmetry on the level of individual words and phrases: the balancing of “each ... the other” in vv. 3 and 7, for example, or the two “let’s”-clauses in vv. 4 and 7. There is a sort of harmony in the fact that a story about language is itself such a fine example of linguistic artistry.

Although the passage is comprehensible as a self-contained unit, it exists as part of a larger literary whole with which it interacts. Biblical scholarship has long recognized that there are at least two major literary strands underlying the book of Genesis, most prominently visible to the non-specialist in the two creation stories of Genesis 1 (the magisterial seven-day creation) and Genesis 2–3 (the Garden of Eden). The Tower of Babel belongs to the strand that begins in Genesis 2, and thus to the narrative thread that contains both a series of etiologies (the names of the animals, the existence of woman, mortality, clothing, the legless serpent, agriculture, childbirth, cities, nomadism, musical instruments, metallurgy, and viticulture—all in the first nine chapters of Genesis) and a sequence of examples of human failing (Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit in Eden, Cain murdering Abel, Lamech for violence, the evil of human intentions that led to the flood, and Ham mocking Noah’s drunken exposure).

The Tower of Babel is part of a gradual reduction of human capacity that begins in Eden with the removal of immortality. In these stories we see Yahweh slowly realizing the potential power that his creation might yield if left unchecked; thus in both Eden and Babel we find a similar divine thought: “What if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and live forever?” Yahweh asks in Genesis 3. “Now nothing they do will be prevented to them,” Yahweh says in Genesis 11. This is the same Yahweh who regrets making humanity and thus resolves to bring a flood. In this light, the confusing

1 Cassuto, *Genesis*, 232–233.

of human language in the Tower of Babel story is understood to be part of an ongoing history of human evolution, as it was understood then: the primeval period was one of development (metallurgy!) and also diminishment (mortality). As humans exercised their creative powers, those powers were constantly being restricted. This is the explanation for linguistic diversity: singularity of language, like immortality, is a power that belongs to the divine sphere, not the human.

The historical setting of the story's composition is perhaps impossible to pin down. Even the date of the biblical source of which the story is a part is uncertain, with possibilities ranging from the ninth to the fifth century BCE. Some parts of the story may be much older—there is no obvious date before which humans could not have asked basic questions about the nature of their existence. In the form we currently have it, however, the story presupposes the prominence of Babylon, and within the city its massive ziggurat temple known as Etemenanki, widely acknowledged to be the inspiration for the Tower of Babel. This, however, is only marginally helpful, as Etemenanki stood from the mid-second millennium until the early seventh century BCE, and its ruins remain prominently visible to this day. Trade and diplomacy between Mesopotamia and the Levant similarly extended well back into the second millennium BCE. The most we might say is that the story reflects an internationally engaged context—not only in the allusion to Babylon, but in the very awareness of lands and languages beyond local surroundings. In the end, of course, a story about the origin of human languages hardly requires an overly specific historical setting; it is meant to explain a truth that is universal regardless of time or place.



Hebrew Text

Gen. 11: 1–9, excerpted from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph (Stuttgart, 1983).

(1) ויהי כלהארץ שפה אחת ודברים אחדים: (2) ויהי בנסעם מקדם וימצאו בקעה בארץ שנער וישבו שם: (3) ויאמרו איש אל־רעהו הבה נלבנה לבנים ונשרפה לשרפה ותהי להם הלבנה לאבן והחמר היה להם לחמר: (4) ויאמרו הבה נבנה־לנו עיר ומגדל וראשו בשמים ונעשה־לנו שם פן־נפוץ על־פני כלהארץ: (5) וירד יהוה לראת את־העיר ואת־המגדל אשר בנו בני האדם: (6) ויאמר יהוה הן עם אחד ושפה אחת לכלם וזה החלם לעשות ועתה לא־יבצר מהם כל אשר יזמו לעשות: (7) הבה נרדה ונבלה שם שפתם אשר לא ישמעו איש שפת רעהו: (8) ויפץ יהוה אתם משם על־פני כלהארץ ויחדלו לבנת העיר: (9) על־כן קרא שמה בבל כי־שם בבל יהוה שפת כלהארץ ומשם הפיצם יהוה על־פני כלהארץ:

2 The word translated “same” here is in fact a rare plural form of the adjective “one.” Though when used to modify “days” (three times in the Bible: Gen. 27:44; 29:20; Dan. 11:20) it seems to mean “few,” that rendering works less well here; it is not the paucity of human words that is relevant to this story, but its consistency. Unclear is the distinction between “one language” and “the same words.” It may be that the text alludes here to a lack of dialects: even the small regional differences between speakers of a single language did not yet exist. It is tempting, from a more modern perspective, to read this opening sentence as reflecting an ancient variation of the Saussurian distinction between *langue* and *parole*. In any case, what is emphasized here is the singularity of language that preceded its eventual, and permanent, state of diversity.

English Translation

Translated by Joel S. Baden.

(1) The whole earth had one language and the same words.² (2) When they traveled from the east, they came across a valley in the land of Shinar³ and settled there. (3) Each said to the other, “Let’s mold bricks and harden them by burning.” (Brick served them for stone, while bitumen served them for mortar.⁴) (4) They said, “Let’s build for ourselves a city and a tower whose top will reach the heavens,⁵ and thus make a name for ourselves,⁶ lest we be scattered over the face of the entire earth.” (5) Yahweh came down to see the city, and the tower that the humans had built. (6) Yahweh said, “This is one people, with one language for all of them, and this is them just beginning to act. Now nothing that they intend to do will be prevented to them. (7) Let’s⁷ go down there and confuse their language, so that each will be unable to understand the language of the other.” (8) Yahweh scattered them from there over the face of the entire earth, and they stopped building the city. (9) Therefore its name is called Babel,⁸ for there Yahweh confused the language of all the earth, and from there Yahweh scattered them over the face of the entire earth.

3 “Shinar” is a biblical name for Babylonia. Cf. Gen. 10:10; Isa. 11:11; Dan. 1:2.

4 The comment on the building materials highlights the different construction media and techniques in Israel versus Mesopotamia: stone in Israel, brick in Mesopotamia. The perspective of the text is clearly Israelite.

5 The name of the Babylonian ziggurat on which the biblical tower is based, Etemenanki, means “temple of the foundation of heaven and earth.”

6 One’s “name” was, in ancient Israel as elsewhere, a fundamental part of one’s identity; not just reputation, but also honor, and essence. The irony here is that the “name” that the generation of the Tower of Babel make for themselves is only a negative one. This is compounded by the story that follows, of the call of Abraham, in which Yahweh promises to make Abraham’s name great (Gen. 12:2). There are, in other words, right and wrong ways to gain a name.

7 It is not entirely uncommon for God to speak in the first person plural (see most famously the creation of humanity in Gen. 1:26). There is no *pluralis majestatis* in biblical Hebrew; presumed is a divine court (cf. Isa. 6).

8 The wordplay does not translate into English: *Babel*, the Hebrew name for Babylon, is etymologized here as deriving from the Hebrew word *balal*, “confuse.” Even a non-Hebrew speaker can see that this is a false etymology; the name comes from the Babylonian phrase *bab-ilim*, “gate of the gods.”

Abbreviations

- Dan. Book of Daniel
 Gen. Book of Genesis
 Isa. Book of Isaiah

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A 5th-Century BCE Greek Historian Discusses the Pelasgians and the Origins of the Greek Language

Herodotus, Histories

Filippomaria Pontani

In Homer, heroes and characters of different cities and countries understand each other without the need for interpreters or translators. In the course of his wanderings, however, Odysseus does encounter people “speaking other tongues”; and the same happens during the travels (also mentioned in the *Odyssey*) of other mythical characters such as Mentès, Nestor, and Eumaeus. In the *Iliad*, the plurality of non-Greek languages is evoked by Iris when describing the Trojan army in the following terms (*Iliad* 2.803–804; see also 4.437–438):

full many are the allies throughout the great city of Priam,
and tongue differs from tongue among men that are scattered abroad.

In this somewhat contradictory frame, Homeric poetry leaves only a marginal role to the term and concept of “barbarian,” which then becomes prominent in Greek culture after the great watershed of the Persian wars (492–478 BCE), most notably in fifth-century Attic tragedy.¹ Joining the linguistic aspect with the ethnic and cultural one, *barbaros* now covers a wide range of non-Greek tongues and utterances, which are sometimes rudimentarily reproduced on the Athenian stage by means of cacophony, solecism, or unusual acoustic effects: the monody of the Phrygian slave in Euripides’s *Orestes* is perhaps the best-known case, while Aeschylus’s *Suppliant Women* (119, 130) at Argos probably spoke Greek with a strong Egyptian accent (see also the confused utterances of the drowning *Persians* in the slightly later choral lyric of Timotheos).

In Sophocles’s tragedy *Women of Trachis* (1060) Heracles contrasts Greece with the *aglossos ge*, the “tongueless land,” an undifferentiated ensemble of territories where Greek is not spoken. It is only in comedy (and especially in the late fifth-century author Aristophanes) that inserts of foreign languages acquire a specific function and visibility: plurilingualism is here funny and

1 See Pontani’s discussion of Strabo in Chapter 1.7.

conducive to laughter or sarcasm, sometimes colored by a touch of “tabloid xenophobia.” However, even in these instances, knowledge of the mimicked or satirized language can rarely be assumed: in some cases, scholars still debate if the “strange” words actually reproduce a foreign tongue (e.g., the “Persian” inserts in Aristophanes’s *Acharnians* or the “Triballian” words in his *Birds*) or simply render camouflaged Greek or a sort of incomprehensible gibberish.

This broader context is important as a general frame of reference for the fifth-century historian Herodotus of Halicarnassus, the father of ethnography, who worked and wrote most of his *Histories* at Athens during the acme of its “golden age”: while never developing a full-fledged theory of language, Herodotus did devote an acute interest to the main linguistic features of the numerous populations he mentioned throughout his *Histories*. Herodotus was a native of Caria, and scholars still debate whether he had any knowledge of Carian or Aramaic; he probably used interpreters during his journeys to Egypt and to other parts of the world. On the other hand, we know for sure that his slightly later colleague Thucydides, author of the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, did not know any foreign language, never mentions interpreters, and—focusing on the political history of Greece—displays comparatively little interest in language altogether.² Throughout the fifth century, the only well-known Greek who is credited with proficiency in a foreign language is the Athenian general Themistocles, whether he learnt Persian (the language of his enemies) out of genuine interest or as a purely strategical move.³

Turning to Herodotus, whether we stress the element of the “Greek vs. barbarian” opposition in him, or whether we regard him as *philobarbaros*, especially in his earlier books (this is the object of a long-standing academic quarrel), his *Histories* represent our primary witness for a number of elements:

First, the regular use of interpreters, which is clearly presupposed by the manifold commercial and cultural contacts of the Greek world with the surrounding nations: these men are often slaves, hardly ever Greeks (many of them Carians, Lydians or Lycians; in the whole of Herodotus we only find one Greek speaking a word in Persian, in 6.29.2), and they are rarely presented as meaningful individuals *per se*, but rather as technical “instruments” of communication;

2 In the *History of the Peloponnesian War* 2.68, Thucydides describes how the Ambracians had acquired their Greek; in 3.94.5 the Eurytians “speak a language which is almost unintelligible and eat their meat raw” (trans. Warner).

3 Thucydides 1.138.1; Plutarch, *Life of Themistocles* 29.5. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 8.3 attests that the sixth-century philosopher Pythagoras knew Egyptian, but this information must be handled with caution.

the role of the interpreters will be slightly more relevant in Xenophon's *Anabasis* (early fourth century).

Second, the focus on the problems of the correspondence between Greek and foreign words, both in terms of existence or lack of exact equivalents (etymology is often applied), and particularly when it comes to proper names of places and gods: Herodotus's statement that "almost all the names of the gods came to Hellas from Egypt" (2.50) is debated, but it probably points to an original contact that went beyond the mere onomastic aspect, and involved the main features of the pantheon; in his surprising relativism, Herodotus also tells us that (2.158.5) "the Egyptians call 'barbarians' all those who do not share their language."

Third, the inclusion of language as an integral feature of a foreign culture: India has many different nations and as many different languages (3.98.3); the Gelonoi speak a language half-Greek, half-Scythian (4.108.2); the Ammonians "are colonists from Egypt and Ethiopia and speak a language compounded of the tongues of both countries" (2.42.2); the Aethiopian Troglodytes "speak a language different from all others, it is like screeching of bats" (4.183.4); the Dodonian women "speak like birds" (2.57); the Atarantes "are the only men known to us who have no names" (4.184.1); the Scythians use many metaphors in their language, "it is therefore in a figurative sense ... that the Scythians and their neighbors call the snow 'feathers'" (4.31.2); "all Persian names end in -s" (1.139: a false statement in itself, but the symptom of a "scientific" interest in formal aspects of grammar).

Herodotus has often been charged with a superficial interest in languages in and of themselves, in issues of miscommunication that may arise in interpersonal contact, in the problems and the dynamics of interlinguistic communication. Recent research (Miletti) has demonstrated that, on the contrary, Herodotus writes much about the contribution of language to the definition of every single civilization he encounters, and displays a genuine enthusiasm for the vocabulary (if not the structure) of other tongues—a comparative and open perspective, that will not bear fruit in the fundamentally monolingual speculation on language that will impose itself in Greek quarters after the later fifth century.

In book one of the *Histories*, Croesus, the king of Lydia (a region of Eastern Asia Minor) attempts to gather information on the various populations of Greece in view of future alliances against the Persians: the Athenians are for him a "Pelagic" people, who unlike the Spartans always dwelled in the same place. The historian speculates on the Pelasgians' ethnic origin by dealing first and foremost with their language: this is a remarkable example of ethnographic inquiry that focuses on language as a distinctive feature in order to establish

proximities between different populations. The importance of this step in the use of language as a tool in the Greek construction of ethnicity, and in the reconstruction of a remote past (note the focus on the permanence of fossilized linguistic features in marginal groups), has often been highlighted in modern scholarship.



Greek Text

Herodotus, *Histories* 1.57–58, adapted from Herodotus, *Historiae*, vol. 1, *Libros I–IV continens*, ed. H.B. Rosén (Leipzig: Teubner, 1987), 36–37.

“Ἦντινα δὲ γλώσσαν ἴεσαν οἱ Πελασγοί, οὐκ ἔχω ἀτρεκέως εἰπεῖν· εἰ δὲ χρεόν ἐστι τεκμαιρόμενον λέγειν τοῖσι νῦν ἔτι ἐοῦσι Πελασγῶν τῶν ὑπὲρ Τυρσηνῶν Κρηστῶνα πόλιν οἰκεόντων, οἱ ὄμουροί κοτε ἦσαν τοῖσι νῦν Δωριεῦσι καλεομένοισι (οἴκειον δὲ τηνικαῦτα γῆν τὴν νῦν Θεσσαλιῶτιν καλεομένην), καὶ τῶν Πλακίην τε καὶ Σκυλάκην Πελασγῶν οἰκησάντων ἐν Ἑλλησπόντῳ, οἱ σύνοικοι ἐγένοντο Ἀθηναίοισι, καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα Πελασγικά ἐόντα πολίσματα τὸ οὔνομα μετέβαλε—εἰ τοῦτοισι τεκμαιρόμενον δεῖ λέγειν, ἦσαν οἱ Πελασγοὶ βάρβαρον γλώσσαν ἰέντες. Εἰ τοῖνυν ἦν καὶ πᾶν τοιοῦτο τὸ Πελασγικόν, τὸ Ἀττικὸν ἔθνος, ἐὸν Πελασγικόν, ἅμα τῇ μεταβολῇ τῇ ἐς Ἑλληνας καὶ τὴν γλώσσαν μετέμαθε. Καὶ γὰρ δὴ οὔτε οἱ Κρηστωνιῆται οὐδαμοῖσι τῶν νῦν σφεας περιοικεόντων εἰσὶ ὁμόγλωσσοι οὔτε οἱ Πλακιηνοὶ (σφίσι δὲ ὁμόγλωσσοι) δηλοῦσί τε, ὅτι τὸν ἠνείκαντο γλώσσης χαρακτήρα μεταβαίνοντες ἐς ταῦτα τὰ χωρία, τοῦτον ἔχουσι ἐν φυλακῇ. Τὸ δὲ Ἑλληνικὸν γλώσση μὲν, ἐπεῖτε ἐγένετο, αἰεὶ κοτε τῇ αὐτῇ διαχρᾶται, ὡς ἐμοὶ καταφαίνεται εἶναι· ἀποσχισθὲν μέντοι ἀπὸ τοῦ Πελασγικοῦ ἐὸν ἀσθενές, ἀπὸ σμικροῦ τεο τὴν ἀρχὴν ὀρμώμενον αὔξεται ἐς πλῆθος τῶν ἐθνέων, πολλῶν μάλιστα προσκεχωρηκότων αὐτῷ καὶ ἄλλων ἐθνέων βαρβάρων συχνῶν· ὡς δὴ ὦν ἐμοὶ τε δοκεῖ, οὐδὲ τὸ Πελασγικὸν ἔθνος ἐὸν βάρβαρον οὐδαμὰ μεγάλως αὐξηθῆναι.

4 According to the “Pelagic theory” (which was widespread in ancient times and has found some echo, if in modified versions, even among modern scholars), in ancient times Greece was called “Pelagia,” and the various local populations of Greece were in fact “Hellenized Pelasgians,” i.e., Pelasgians (non-Greeks) who became Greek by adopting the Greek language, originally spoken only by other tribes such as the Dorians.

5 There is a great controversy over the name and the identification of this city: the reading “Creston” (Κρηστῶνα) points to a little-known town in Thrace (North-Eastern Greece), with the “Tyrhenians” being identified with the inhabitants of Lemnos; the alternative reading “Croton” (conjectured by Niebuhr, but already known already to the first-century historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 1.29.3) points to the Italian city of Cortona, with the Tyrhenians being more easily identified with the Etruscans—the focus is thus shifted to the expansion of Grecophone populations in Italy, and to the problematic identification (upheld by several sources) between the Pelasgians and the Etruscans.

English Translation

Herodotus, *Histories* 1.57–58, adapted from Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, vol. 1, *Books I and II*, trans. A.D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library 117 (London, 1920), 65, round parentheses in original.

What language the Pelasgians spoke I cannot say exactly.⁴ But if one may judge by those that still remain of the Pelasgians who live above the Tyrrheni in the city of Kreston⁵—who were once neighbors of the people now called Dorians, and at that time inhabited the country which now is called Thessalotis⁶—and of the Pelasgians who inhabited Plakia and Skylake on the Hellespont,⁷ who came to live among the Athenians, and by other towns too which were once Pelasgian and afterwards took a different name—if (I say) one may judge by these, the Pelasgians spoke a barbarian language. If, then, all the Pelasgian stock spoke so, then the Attic nation, being Pelasgian, must have changed its language, too, at the time when it became part of the Hellenes. For the people of Kreston and Plakia have a language of their own in common, which is not the language of their neighbors; and it is plain that they still preserve the manner of speech⁸ which they brought with them in their migration into the places where they live.

But the Hellenic stock,⁹ as to me seems clear, has always used the same language since its beginning; yet being, when separated from the Pelasgians,¹⁰ few in number, they have grown from a small beginning to comprise a multitude of nations, chiefly because [the Pelasgians and] many other barbarian peoples united themselves with them.¹¹ Before that, as I think, the Pelasgic stock nowhere increased greatly in number while it was barbarian.¹²

6 This is Thessaly, the region west of Olympus and Ossa, often called “Pelasgiotis.”

7 Plakie and Skylake are two cities on the eastern shore of the Propontis (now Marmara sea), east of Cyzicus.

8 More exactly, the “character,” i.e., the shape, the original matrix, the “coinage” of the language.

9 The early Dorians, who spoke Greek from the start, and the Hellenized barbarians.

10 The nature of this separation—whether local or ethnic—is unclear: what emerges, however, is that Herodotus regards both Dorians and Pelasgians as fundamentally close, albeit distinct from each other.

11 The transmitted text (πολλῶν) does not mention the Pelasgians, but Sauppe's conjecture (Πελασγῶν) restores the name in the sentence, and looks plausible under other syntactical aspects too.

12 *Barbaros* (here translated as “barbarian”) means in fact “of foreign speech.”

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Language Arose from Spontaneous Feelings and Reactions to Nature

The Doctrine of Epicurus (4th Century BCE) and Lucretius (1st Century BCE)

Filippomaria Pontani

Some Greek authors, as will be seen below (Chapter 1.6), ascribed the invention of language to the gods; others, to mankind in the course of its development. A particular and influential variant of the latter view was espoused by philosophers belonging to the Epicurean school: the long philosophical inscription set up by the second-century Epicurean Diogenes on the walls of his hometown Oenoanda (Asia Minor) devotes several lines to arguing against the idea of a single creator/teacher of language, whether divine (one of the Epicurean dogmas is the apathy of the gods) or human—this polemic is typical of later Epicureanism and might be primarily addressed against the doctrine of Plato’s *Cratylus* (Chapter 2.3).¹

Epicurus himself (fourth century BCE) insists in his letter to Herodotus (75–76: the letter is preserved in full in Book 10 of Diogenes Laertius’s *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*) that words arose spontaneously and directly from the natural feelings and reactions of humans to nature, which gave rise to an instinctual, rudimentary, but also unequivocal (in terms of word-meaning) primeval language, later codified by human tribes through an appropriate act of naming, and enriched through the willful creation of some words that are not linked to any natural impulse. The variety of nature in different places of the earth (not, as more commonly stated by other thinkers, the intrinsic conventionality of every idiom) thus becomes the reason for the current plurality of languages, which grow from the natural impulse of single populations and only in a second stage rely on a common agreement between members of the same societies.

1 See Diogenes of Oenoanda, *Epicurean Inscription*, 373, fr. 12: “And with regard to vocal sounds—I mean the words and phrases (*onomata kai rhemata*) of which the earth-born human beings produced the first utterances—let us not introduce Hermes as teacher, as some claim he was (for this is palpable drivel), nor let us credit those philosophers who say that it was by deliberate invention and teaching that names were assigned to things, in order that humans might have [distinctive designations] for them to facilitate their communication with one another.”

A similar view is held by the Roman poet Lucretius (first century BCE) in his *De rerum natura* (*On Nature*), a sort of highly refined versified form of the Epicurean doctrine. For Lucretius, the theory about the origin of language is part of a wider survey on the progress of mankind, and it occurs just after the account of how early humans expanded their associations beyond kinship groups: starting from the inarticulate gestures and cries of infants, language moves towards the articulate names used to design objects by grown-up humans—and here again, “it is nature which compelled men to emit the various sounds of speech, and usefulness which fashioned the names of things” (5.1028–1029). No role is here assigned to convention, and the polemic against the Platonic idea of the “namesetter” or “law-giver” is as harsh as Diogenes of Oenoanda’s: on the other hand, the importance of spontaneous reaction to nature also in the process of forming and assigning names to things is highlighted as essential, and paralleled with the similar evolution of cries and noises by the animals, although an element of consciousness creeps into it.

The development of language was pivotal in the Epicurean theory of impiety and injustice (as is evident also from Philodemus’s book *On Piety*, lines 230–270 Obbink), for it was through the first and immediate perception of the *simulacra* of the gods, and of their names—without the false opinions on them that altered their true meaning after the application of reason—that the first humans gained a correct image of the heavens and the world, free of superstition; and language was a positive cohesive force for human society (friendship pacts etc.); on the other hand, it was also through language that fears and false beliefs were instilled and spread among mankind.

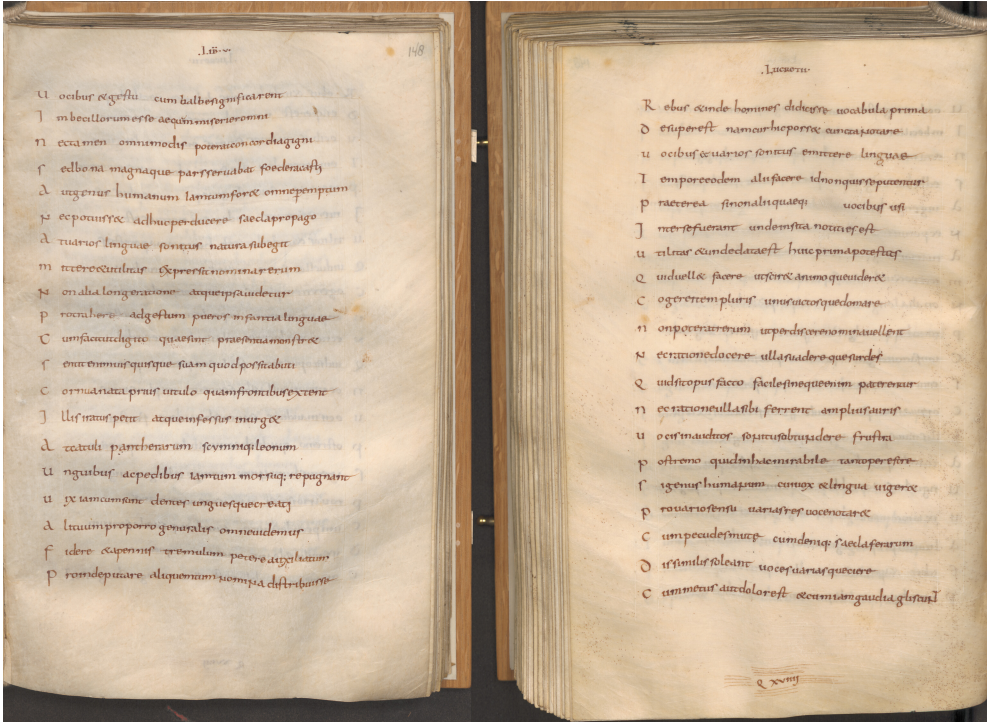


FIGURE. 1.4.1 VLF 30, fols. 148^r–148^v
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Greek Text

Excerpt 1: Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus 75–76

Excerpted from *Epistulae tres et Ratae Sententiae a Laertio Diogene servatae*, ed. Peter von der Mühl (1922; repr., Stuttgart: Teubner, 1996), brackets in the original.

Ἄλλὰ μὴν ὑποληπτέον καὶ τὴν φύσιν πολλὰ καὶ παντοῖα ὑπὸ αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων διδαχθῆναι τε καὶ ἀναγκασθῆναι, τὸν δὲ λογισμὸν τὰ ὑπὸ ταύτης παρεγγυηθέντα ὕστερον ἐπακριβοῦν καὶ προσεξευρίσκειν ἐν μὲν τισι θάττον, ἐν δὲ τισι βραδύτερον καὶ ἐν μὲν τισι περιόδοις καὶ χρόνοις [ἀπὸ τῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀπείρου] <κατὰ μείζους ἐπίδοσεις>, ἐν δὲ τισι κατ' ἐλάττους. Ὅθεν καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα ἐξ ἀρχῆς μὴ θέσει γενέσθαι, ἀλλ' αὐτὰς τὰς φύσεις τῶν ἀνθρώπων καθ' ἕκαστα ἔθνη ἴδια πασχούσας πάθη καὶ ἴδια λαμβανούσας φαντάσματα ἰδίως τὸν ἀέρα ἐκπέμπειν στελλόμενον ὑφ' ἐκάστων τῶν παθῶν καὶ τῶν φαντασμάτων, ὡς ἂν ποτε καὶ ἡ παρὰ τοὺς τόπους τῶν ἐθνῶν διαφορὰ ἦ· ὕστερον δὲ κοινῶς καθ' ἕκαστα ἔθνη τὰ ἴδια τεθῆναι πρὸς τὸ τὰς δηλώσεις ἦττον ἀμφιβόλους γενέσθαι ἀλλήλοισι καὶ συντομωτέρας δηλουμένας· τινὰ δὲ καὶ οὐ συνορώμενα πράγματα εἰσφέροντας τοὺς συνειδόμενους παρεγγυῆσαι τινὰς φθόγγους τοὺς ἀναγκασθέντας ἀναφωνῆσαι, τοὺς δὲ τῷ λογισμῷ ἐλομένους κατὰ τὴν πλείστην αἰτίαν οὕτως ἐρμηνεύσαι.

2 Or “among some (tribes).”

3 In the frame of Epicurus's letter, the rise of language is a paradigmatic case of the complex interplay between nature and reason, both essential to the creation of a suitable, civilized environment for mankind.

English Translation

Excerpt 1: Epicurus, Letter to Herodotus 75–76

Adapted from Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans R.D. Hicks, Loeb Classical Library 185 (London: Harvard University Press, 1925), 2:605–607.

Again, we must suppose that nature too has been taught and forced to learn many various lessons by the facts themselves, that reason subsequently develops what it has thus received and makes fresh discoveries, in some cases² more quickly, in others more slowly, the progress thus made being at certain times and seasons greater, at others less.³

Hence even the names of things were not originally due to convention, but in the several tribes under the impulse of special feelings and special representations of sense, primitive man uttered special cries. The air thus emitted was molded by their individual feelings or sense-representations, and differently according to the difference of the regions which the tribes inhabited.⁴ Subsequently, whole tribes adopted their own special names, in order that their communications might be less ambiguous to each other and more briefly expressed.⁵ And as for things not visible, so far as those who were conscious of them tried to introduce any such notion, they put in circulation certain names for them, either sounds which they were instinctively compelled to utter or which they selected by reason on analogy according to the most general cause there can be for expressing oneself in such a way.⁶

4 This is the first stage: emission of sounds under the impulse of sensations or representations from the outside. This implies the idea that language arises naturally, without any form of human convention or decision (Proclus, in his *Commentary on Plato's Cratylus*, summarizes Epicurus's theory by saying that men "did not impose names knowledgeably, but as being moved naturally, like coughers, sneezers, bellowers, howlers and groaners" [17.13–16]). The proximity or distance of this theory *vis-à-vis* that of Aristotle is a topic that is hotly debated by modern critics. Another unsolved problem is by which channels the vocalizations of feelings and reactions can be controlled, shared, and communicated to all other members of the group.

5 This is the second step: men agree on the correspondence between some sounds and certain meanings, so as to be able to understand one another. It should be remarked that no attention is devoted to the process by which these nouns and names could then be articulated into a fully-fledged speech, i.e., to the rise of syntax.

6 This is the third stage of the development of language: the creation of words designing new (mostly invisible) realities, by mere decision of humans. This means that Epicurus conceived of language as a dynamic organism that could be enriched by new words and concepts.

Latin Text

Excerpt 11: Lucretius, De rerum natura 5.1028–1061

Excerpted from *De rerum natura libri sex*, ed. Joseph Martin (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1969).

At varios linguae sonitus natura subegit
mittere et utilitas expressit nomina rerum,
non alia longe ratione atque ipsa videtur
protrahere ad gestum pueros infantia linguae,
cum facit ut digito quae sint praesentia monstrent.
sentit enim vim quisque suam quod possit abuti.
cornua nata prius vitulo quam frontibus extent,
illis iratus petit atque infestus inurget.
at catuli pantherarum scymnique leonum
unguibus ac pedibus iam tum morsuque repugnant,
vix etiam cum sunt dentes unguesque creati.
alituum porro genus alis omne videmus
fidere et a pennis tremulum petere auxiliatum.
proinde putare aliquem tum nomina distribuisse
rebus et inde homines didicisse vocabula prima,
desiperest. nam cur hic posset cuncta notare
vocibus et varios sonitus emittere linguae,
tempore eodem alii facere id non quisse putentur?
praeterea si non alii quoque vocibus usi
inter se fuerant, unde insita notities est
utilitatis et unde data est huic prima potestas,
quid vellet facere ut sciret animoque videret?

English Translation

Excerpt 11: Lucretius, De rerum natura 5.1028–1061

Adapted from Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, ed. and trans. C. Bailey (Oxford: Clarendon, 1947), 1:487.

But it was nature that constrained men to utter the diverse sounds of the tongue, and utility shaped the names of things,⁷ in a manner not far other than the very speechlessness of their tongue is seen to lead children on to gesture, when it makes them point out with the finger the things that are before their eyes.⁸ For everyone feels to what purpose he can use his own powers.⁹ Before the horns of a calf appear and sprout from his forehead, he butts with them when angry, and pushes passionately. But the whelps of panthers and lion-cubs already fight with claws and paws and biting, when their teeth and claws are scarce yet formed. Further, we see all the tribe of winged fowls trusting to their wings, and seeking an unsteady aid from their feathers.

Again, to think that anyone then parceled out names to things, and that from him men learnt their first words, is mere folly. For why should he have been able to mark off all things by words, and to utter the diverse sounds of the tongue, and at the same time others be thought unable to do this? Moreover, if others too had not used words to one another, whence was implanted in him the concept of their use, whence was he given the first power to know and see in his

7 This is the only passage in Lucretius's theory where the role of *utilitas* (not only "usefulness," but also "awareness or consideration of expediency") is mentioned as a driving force behind the rise of language: for the rest, Epicurus's view (see above) is considerably simplified by focusing on the first stage only, namely that of spontaneous reaction to nature—the real meaning of *natura* in this passage, whether namely it indicates "human nature" or the exterior physical world, is hotly debated.

8 As in Diodorus Siculus and Vitruvius, gesture—as a natural reaction to the world—is the first form of indication: in the Epicurean doctrine it also becomes the origin of spoken language. A similar doctrine on the materiality of sounds can be found in Lucretius 4.549–552: "When therefore we press out these voices from the inmost parts of our body, and send them forth straight through the mouth, the quickly-moving tongue, cunning fashioner of words, joints and molds the sounds, and the shaping of the lips does its part in giving them form."

9 This may look like a "Stoic" view (particularly at home in the illustration of the animal kingdom, see the examples given here), according to which every living being "fulfils" its *telos* by exploiting its innate capacities: the second-century physician Galen (*On the use of parts* 1.3) writes that "each living creature has a perception of the capabilities of its inner nature and of the powers in its limbs." However, scholars are divided on this point, because Lucretius may refer not to a primary, inner knowledge, but to a notion of *utilitas* resulting from the human being's experience of using its abilities.

cogere item pluris unus victosque domare
non poterat, rerum ut perdiscere nomina vellent.
nec ratione docere ulla suadereque surdis,
quid sit opus facto, facilest; neque enim paterentur
nec ratione ulla sibi ferrent amplius auris
vocis inauditos sonitus obtundere frustra.
postremo quid in hac mirabile tantoperest re,
si genus humanum, cui vox et lingua vigeret,
pro vario sensu varia res voce notaret?
cum pecudes mutae, cum denique saecla ferarum
dissimilis soleant voces variasque ciere,
cum metus aut dolor est et cum iam gaudia gliscunt.

mind what he wanted to do?¹⁰ Likewise, one man could not avail to constrain many and vanquish them to his will, that they should be willing to learn all his names for things; nor indeed is it easy in any way to teach and persuade the deaf what it is needful to do; for they would not endure it, nor in any way suffer the sounds of words not comprehended to batter on their ears for long to no purpose.¹¹ Lastly, what is there so marvelous in this, if the human race, with strong voice and tongue, should mark off things with diverse sounds for diverse feelings? For the dumb cattle, yea, and the races of wild beasts are wont to give forth diverse unlike sounds, when they are in fear or pain, or again when their joys grow strong.¹²

10 This second argument against the theory of *nomothetai* or namesetters rests on the epistemological concept of *prolepsis* or “preconception.”

11 This argument is the same that will later be picked up by Diogenes of Oenoanda: “It is absurd, indeed more absurd than any absurdity, as well as quite impossible, that any one individual should have assembled such vast multitudes (at that time there were as yet no kings, and indeed, in the absence of any vocal sounds, no writing; and with regard to these multitudes [it would have been quite impossible, except by means] of a decree, for their assembly to have taken place), and, having assembled them, should [have taken hold of] a rod (?) and proceeded to teach them like an elementary schoolmaster, touching each object and saying ‘let this be called “stone,” this “wood,” this “human being” or “dog.”’” Diogenes of Oenoanda, *Epicurean Inscription*, 373, fr. 12.

12 Lucretius’s fourth argument (the different noises produced by animals give rise to different words and aspects of the language) is then backed by many lines (1062–1087) with examples from the realms of dogs, stallions, and birds. The conclusion (lines 1088–1090) is: “If, then, different sensations compel animals to produce different sounds, although they are dumb, how much more plausible is it that humans could at that time designate different things with one sound or another!” It should be stressed that this theory accounts for the dynamics of verbal vocalization, but stops short of explaining how humans got to use language for communication.

Abbreviations and Symbols

- fr. fragment
 < > editorial insertion

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Language Diversity as a Result of Social Interaction

Xunzi's View on Plurilingualism in 3rd-Century BCE China

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Between the fifth and third centuries BCE, when wars were raging over the central plain and along the coasts of continental East Asia, there emerged a scholarly practice and philosophical debate on how to study, systematize, and disambiguate language at the level of words. A key protagonist in this debate was the scholar Xunzi 荀子. Born in the state of Zhao in North-central China, Xunzi roamed the kingdoms that were battling for control over the Chinese central plain, competing with fellow scholars, military strategists, and ritual masters for the patronage of the ruling elite. Xunzi eschewed the dialogue-style compilations of other *Ru* thinkers such as Confucius and Mencius and preferred instead to transmit his comprehensive philosophy in sustained essays, thirty-two of which are regularly featured in modern editions. In one of these essays, entitled the “Rectification of Names” (*Zhengming* 正名; henceforth: *Rectification*),¹ Xunzi argues for language as the key to social and political order. He suggests a twofold process for rectifying names: first, to be conscious of historical practice, and second, to adhere to customary usage.

No other master of his era deals so elaborately with language change and diversity in this world region. By the last decades of the third century BCE, after the Qin and later Han had unified the Chinese states into an empire, Xunzi's system had become a crucial, if occasionally contradictory, reference point for Chinese scholars when they addressed issues of education, philosophy, politics, rituals, music, or morality. Even today, scholars and philosophers still refer to him when discussing language and logic.

This chapter features a partial translation of the first half of Xunzi's essay, which propounds the idea that language develops as the inevitable outcome of social agreement. The translation highlights the documentary function and ethnographic content of his essay and reads it as communicating on two levels: first, as a reflection of a period that mourned the loss of a common language of communication; and second, as a warning towards fellow-scholars

¹ *Xunzi jijie*, 22.

who were exploring the capacity of Sinographs to reflect multiple tongues. Philosophers and historians nowadays acknowledge that, by the third century BCE, China was a plurilingual Sinosphere. Some identify this plurilingualism as “Sinophone,” seeing that diverse, yet compatible varieties or versions of “Chinese” were spoken and an elite interested in standardizing language was in charge. Others speak rather of a Sinographic region and period, arguing that one writing system was used to communicate across different oralities and languages of quite different natures, perhaps with varying degrees of success.

Early Chinese Philosophy

There is a long tradition of reading Xunzi’s views on language as part of a philosophical scheme rather than as a document about language change.² In this tradition, interpretations of Xunzi lay in the hands of “commentators,” that is, fellow-scholars who saw themselves operating within the same language tradition as Xunzi, using the very same tools of evidentiary text criticism and philology. Non-Chinese scholarship has also favored this approach. Jesuits in the sixteenth century, nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries, as well as European and American historians and philologist-philosophers well into the twenty-first century all emphasized Xunzi’s contributions to early Chinese discourses on human nature (*xing* 性) and capability (*neng* 能) as well as his approach to themes such as education, morality, rites, and humanity. As such analyses have shown, Xunzi approached issues of language and reality, language and logic, and language as a social construct that changed over time.

The main topic of *Rectification* is communication of which, for Xunzi, verbal communication was one component and rituals and customs another. The concept propounded in *Rectification* that is the nearest to our modern idea of a standardized language is “elegant speech” (*yayan* 雅言). This referred to a set of vocabulary and grammar used by elites in poetry, literature, and political debate, which was quite different from “regional” (*fang* 方) or “old” (*gu* 古) languages. The “names” highlighted by the modern titles and headings given to Xunzi’s essay were only one aspect of communicating *with* language. In his essay, Xunzi also addresses diction and phraseology.

Xunzi’s approach to *ming* reflected, and later became subject to, a long tradition of systematic language analysis generally considered to be a Chinese

2 Xunzi belongs to a group of court philosophers discussing classical thought. The title of Xunzi’s essay refers to a singular passage in Confucius’s *Analects*. *Lunyu zhushu*, 13.3.

form of etymology.³ This research discusses the meaning of *ming* as a technical term addressing the level of a “word.” The historical practice differed from the morphological and phonetic focus of modern linguistic etymology in two regards. First, Xunzi’s main focus was meaning-making, not the study of language mechanics per se. He therefore discusses words such as “fate” (*ming* 命) with regard to the interpretation of other thinkers such as Confucius or Mencius, contemporary use, and its use in classic literature of this era such as the *Discourses of the States* (*Guoyu* 國語, fifth–fourth century BCE).⁴ Second, when studying such words, Xunzi was concerned with how the graphic forms and phonetic values or elements developed in relation to each other. Xunzi’s essay has therefore been an important source for the analysis of contemporary tensions between oral and written language—and subject to a methodological debate about the role that phonetic or logographic writing systems play in the study of historical language change. A.C. Graham argued that Xunzi thought of a word’s relation to reality as being “always discussed in terms of the spoken, not the written,”⁵ while Chad Hansen thought that the use of logographic characters “did not incline writers to draw strong distinctions between writing and speaking.”⁶ In the translation of Xunzi in this chapter, I consistently use “name” and “naming,” and later philosophical debates or different interpretations are addressed in the footnotes. This reflects the fact that Xunzi always uses the same term, although he was well aware that people often understood and used the same word differently.

The translation also considers that Xunzi was purposely showcasing different forms of language ambiguities in terms that had central relevance to contemporary philosophical debates (rather than simply discussing philosophical points). Terms such as *xing* (性), he observes, could mean both human nature and Nature, in the sense of the natural world. *Wei* (偽)—which he defines as the opposite concept to nature—had two related, yet qualitatively different meanings: the goodness of innate behavior in one context, socially trained behavior and artifice in another.⁷ For Xunzi, polysemy was always a consequence of sociohistorical change and of rulers who had not taken seriously the task of clarifying and fixing language standards.

3 Behr, “Etymologie von *ren* (仁,” 199–224 and Schüssler, “Multiple Origins,” 1–71.

4 Tian Baoxiang, “You ‘xin’ dao ‘ming.’”

5 Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 228.

6 Hansen, “Philosophy of Language,” 569.

7 *Xunzi jijie*, 23.1a.; *Xunzi jijie*, 8.10. For the philosophical debate around Xunzi’s notion of *wei*, see Constantino, “Pretending to be Good.”

While commentators as well as translators resolve these different understandings by juxtaposing other terms (i.e., semantic fields), in this volume I operate with the *pinyin* romanization system (without diacritics) and indicate varying meanings in square brackets. I do so for reasons of readability and as a way to draw attention to the technical character of Xunzi's interventions. Readers should, however, bear in mind that Xunzi may have attributed different phonetics to each of these words—and also that contemporaries of Xunzi may well have pronounced these written words differently depending on their meaning, so that *xing* in the sense of human nature carried a different pitch tone from *xing* in the sense of Nature (not marked in my transcription). This is suggested in early rhyme dictionaries (which, I should note, postdate Xunzi by several centuries) and is also evident in modern language practice.⁸

During the Warring States Period, as mentioned above, language was diversified and standards of writing were in flux: the Sinographic writing system showed a strong trend towards phoneticization and written language was “desemantized,” that is, stripped of its semantic meaning.⁹ This means that Sinographs were mostly morpho-syllabic by the fifth century BCE, whereas by the third century BCE, a number of graphs were being used mainly for their phonetic value. Or to put it more simply: people might have been experimenting with Sinographs to reflect different tongues, of which Chinese was probably only one, as documented examples of Chinese phonetic transcriptions of technical terms suggest. In this rather radical reading Xunzi was not only a scholar politician who was mainly concerned with language standards. Rather, he was a scholar facing a multilingual oral world attempting to operate with one script. Furthermore, such a reading challenges the idea that spoken Chinese was the dominant language in East Asia.

As Xunzi appears within a linguistically diversified sphere, we can also see how political and social forces further enhanced such diversification. While the three major polities known to Xunzi—Chu, Qi, and Qin—all aimed at emulating the Xia, Shang, and Zhou states, which had ruled over the continental East Asian plain in historical succession, the people of these three states spoke different languages. Mencius, for instance, a learned man and *Ru*-Confucian scholar preceding Xunzi, used the language of Chu to learn Qi language fables.¹⁰

8 An example for a logograph that is pronounced differently also in modern times is 樂, which can be pronounced *yue* meaning music or *le* meaning pleasure.

9 Boltz, “Multilingualism and Lingua Franca.”

10 *Mengzi zhushu*, 6A:11.

Whether the differences between the speech of Chu and Qi were great enough for them to be considered different languages in the modern linguistic sense might be debatable, but clearly Mencius identified them as distinct. Languages drifted apart even as the elites within the major polities of continental East Asia identified themselves as civilized vis-à-vis the barbarians, who followed other standards of conduct and rituals and, in the view of these elites, had no legitimate claim to rule.

The social effort directed towards a common denominator within the civilized world hinged on the aforementioned “elegant speech” (*yayan*).¹¹ Introduced by the Zhou kings as a standard for poetry, it soon came to mean the mastery of rhetoric and ritual regulations in elite social encounters. By the late third century BCE, we can understand *yayan* as the shadow of a unified code, a linguistic standard that was very much in danger of dissolving. Xunzi’s examples identify such dynamics in terms of grammar and sentence structure. Scholars such as Xunzi who earned their living by offering their services to various courts had to master linguistic diversity and the differences between multiple local *yayan* as part of their repertoire. Employed by different courts, they had to learn to bridge stylistic and scriptural variations, if they wished to prevent things from falling apart.

It is therefore not difficult to imagine Xunzi as a master of many tongues in a multilingual environment when he argues for the need to rectify names. He feared that the social diversification of elegant speech, and the diverse attempts to represent different tongues in script, might create misunderstandings, produce chaos and conflict, and cause disunity and war. For Xunzi, as multiple philosophical studies have shown, the catalyst of such confusion was fickle human nature. Names—exemplifying one means of communication—were, he contends, the outcome of social agreement: “there is no such thing as a steadfast suitable name [for things or affairs], rather it is agreed upon by life” (名無固宜·約之以命).¹² Language was not entirely arbitrary, though, because society agreed by convention upon a relation between names and reality and the logic herein. Apart from the notion of social agreement (*yue* 約), Xunzi sees language as a creation or generation (*sheng* 生) produced on principles of suitability (*yi* 宜). Based on this premise, Xunzi elaborates six aspects of names: (1) their definition, (2) how the name is formed, (3) the process of name recognition, (4) different categories of name, (5) the function of names and (6) the principles and methods of naming.

11 Chen Liankai, “Zhongguo, Huayi, Fan Han,” 72–113.

12 *Ying Song Taizhou ben Xunzi*, 22.2 g.

Because human nature is capricious, Xunzi also understands communication as context-specific and historically variable. He suggests that his readers (i.e., the ruling classes and his peers) first consolidate established word-meanings, and second keep track of historical trajectories and changes in rules and regulations. Like many of his contemporaries, Xunzi envisioned a conceptually driven historical trajectory from an ideal past to a confused present, beginning with an era that permitted diversification, and he habitually used Shang names for legal affairs and Zhou terminology for social ranks. A consolidated reality should not “be defied through further changes”; a name was good and suitable when it was the product of history and had been consolidated through use.

While we can assume that Xunzi saw language as the basis of social cohesion, his discourse did not aspire to a fixation of meanings (as this, in his view, was impossible) nor has he anything like a universal language or even a monolingual society in mind (as drifting apart was part of human nature). On the contrary: standards are required because reality is plurilingual. Communication necessitates clarifying meanings *word-by-word* and keeping track of any changes. In this sense his approach must be distinguished from a Greek denial of multiplicity as well as the rule-based approach of Sanskrit grammarians (see, respectively, Chapters 1.7, 2.3, and 2.2). Xunzi considers words and word generation to be part of the intellectual process of becoming aware of things and affairs. His basic assumption is that all people with identical emotional, sensory, and intellectual capacity will come to identical conclusions: “Those [individuals] of an identical kind with identical emotions make sense by way of their faculties in identical ways” (凡同類同情者，其天官之意物也同; see 22.c below). But Xunzi admits that sensory faculties vary. As understanding things and affairs depends on sensory experience, and intellectual capacities are trained by experiencing things and affairs, people diverge in their views of reality—and hence come to name identical things differently.

Xunzi concludes his reasoning about the technicalities of language confusion by identifying different approaches that people take to knowing and not-knowing. He argues that some societies identify knowledge that is not expressed verbally as not-knowing—thus some groups name realities that others do not know. In this context, he sees no need to overcome plurilingualism (i.e., known and foreign names and dictions), noting that chaos is avoided if one allows different names for different realities.

The translation stops here. Any analysis of Xunzi’s approach to language, though, has to observe that in the subsequent sections he ponders the moral implications of communication across ever more socially and culturally diverse worlds as well as the social and political mechanisms that allow this to occur.

Chinese Texts and English Translations

Chinese passages excerpted from *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解, edited by Wang Xianqian 王先謙, annotated by Yang Liang 楊倞, et al., Qing Guangxu shiqi nian [1891] keben 上海古籍出版社藏清光緒十七年 [1891] 刻本 edition. English translations by Dagmar Schäfer.

22.1a¹³

後王之成名：刑名從商，爵名從周，文名從禮。散名之加於萬物者，則從諸夏之成俗曲期¹⁴，遠方異俗之鄉，則因之而為通。

How later kings created names: names for punishments followed Shang [traditions]; titles of rank continued Zhou [traditions]; names in literature and culture followed the [*Book of*] *Etiquette*. Diverse names were attributed to the ten thousand things, following the custom initiated by the various kingdoms of the Xia [era] during regular rhyming gatherings [*qu qi*].¹⁵ Because of this [i.e., the custom of social agreement reached in regular meetings], villages in distant places with divergent customs could communicate with each other.

22.1b

散名之在人者：生之所以然者謂之性；性之和所生，精合感應，不事而自然謂之性。

How diverse names relate to humans: What they are when they are created, is called *xing*, [i.e., (human) nature]. The term *Xing*¹⁶ [i.e., Nature] [is also] used when Nature is in harmony with creation, conforming with its essence and effortlessly, spontaneously, and mutually resonating.

13 The numbering system follows Knoblock, *Xunzi*, indicating chapter and paragraph number.

14 This passage has been underpunctuated quite differently throughout time, reflecting different interpretations of the term *qu qi*. See *Xunzi jijie*. This is because *qu* has several meanings: it can mean “short,” or “small,” which caused modern scholars and philologists Liang Qixiong 梁启雄 (1900–1965) and Liu Nianqin 劉念親 to explain *qu qi* as cyclical meetings. *Qu* also refers to a certain type of music and rhyming prose. Liang Qixiong, *Xunzi jianshi*, 309.

15 See footnote above.

16 *Xunzi* here gives an example of one word having two interrelated meanings, i.e., a polyseme which is resolved in Chinese philological debates by offering homophones or equivalents, while philosophical analyses regularly offer different translations for each case. I here capitalize the second mention to indicate that *Xunzi* in fact exemplifies how one term can be both specific and generic, i.e., [human] nature, and Nature. Modern linguistics distinguishes the former as a hyponym, the later as a hypernym.

22.1C

故王者之制名，名定而實辨，道行而志通，則慎率¹⁷民而一焉。故析辭擅作名，以亂正名，使民疑惑，人¹⁸多辨訟，則謂之大姦。其罪猶為符節度量之罪也。故其民莫敢託¹⁹為奇辭以亂正名，故其民慤；慤則易使，易使則公。其民莫敢託為奇辭以亂正名，故壹於道法，而謹於循²⁰令矣。如是則其迹長矣。迹長功成，治之極也。是謹於守名約之功也。

When, with the institutionalization of names by the kings, names were fixed and realities differentiated, the *dao* was upheld, and the records were comprehensible, so people were cautiously led into unification. Thus, when dictions were analyzed and names produced without authorization, thereby confusing the rightful names; and disarray was caused among the commoners and people became increasingly discriminatory, instigating lawsuits, then it was called a major transgression. Then it was called a major transgression, which was likened to the crime of forging tallies and counterfeiting weights. Our people dared not rely on foreign dictions as this would confuse rectified names. Thus, our people were honest. Since they were honest, they were easily led [i.e., manageable]. As they were easily led, they were a collective [i.e., the public]. Our people dared not confuse rectified names with strange dictions, and therefore they were unified by the rules of the *dao* and sincere in their obedience to commands. In this way, then, the cycles [of rule] were long lasting. Long cycles [of rule] full of achievements were the high point of governance. This was achieved by vigilantly guarding agreed-upon names.

22.2a

今聖王沒，名守慢，奇辭起，名實亂，是非之形²¹不明，則雖守法之吏，誦數之儒，亦皆亂也。若有王者起，必將有循²²於舊名，有作於新名。

17 Traditionally translated as “cautiously,” this term identifies the *Sushen* 肅慎, i.e., the *Ru*-Confucian project of leading and unifying the people through good governance, as Xunzi himself notes in *Xunzi jijie*, 10.6, and Lü Buwei, *Lü shi Chunqiu*, 10, 3a.

18 *Zuantu huzhu Xunzi* exchanges *ren* 人 “people” with *min* 民 “commoners.” This is one indication how commentators made obvious historical shifts in understandings, assuming that by Xunzi’s time rulers mainly addressed commoners, whereas Song scholars would clearly discriminate between humans and the people under their rule.

19 *Zuantu huzhu Xunzi* indicates a grammar change suggesting reading this sentence without *tuō* 託 “rely on.”

20 Varied spelling or meaning: *Zuantu huzhu Xunzi* exchanges this character with *xiu* 脩.

21 Varied interpretations: *Zuantu huzhu Xunzi* exchanges *xing* 形 with *xing* 刑 “punishment.” In this case, the sentence would read: “When the punishments for right and wrong are unclear” Intertextual reading suggests, however, that *xing* means forms, as Xunzi addresses this point again in the following passages.

22 Varied spelling or meaning: *Zuantu huzhu Xunzi* exchanges *xun* 循 “abide by” with *xiu* 脩 “a student’s gift to a teacher.”

Nowadays sage kings are no longer with us. The protection of names has become lax. Strange dictions arise. Names and reality are in chaos. When the **forms** [my emphasis here and below] of right and wrong [i.e., what is and what is not the case] are unclear, then all will be in chaos, even when clerks abide by laws and many *Ru*-Confucians recite learnings from memory. It seems that, whenever a king ascends, inevitably there are old names to which people adhere, even as new names are produced.

22.2b

異形離心交喻，異物名實玄紐，貴賤不明，同異不別；如是，則志必有不喻之患，而事必有困廢之禍。故知者為之分別制名以指實，上以明貴賤，下以辨同異。貴賤明，同異別，如是則志無不喻之患，事無困廢之禍，此所為有名也。

[Imagine that] strange **forms** at odds with one's heart-mind are mutually associated in analogies; in the case of strange things, the link between names and realities is abstruse; the eminent and humble are unclear; similarities and differences are not differentiated. In such cases, the annals will be perilously imprecise, and affairs will inevitably be mis-fortuned by troubles and abrogation. Therefore, knowledgeable men account for a differentiated system of names as a way of signifying reality, directing it upwards [towards high social ranks] to clarify the eminent and humble, directing it downwards [to the low ranks] to distinguish between similarities and differences. [Imagine now that] the eminent and humble are clear and similarities and differences discriminated between. In this case, no ambiguities will exist in the annals. Affairs will not be mis-fortuned by troubles and abrogation. In this case, behavior [and affairs/actions] have names.

22.2c-e

然則何緣而以同異？曰：緣天官。凡同類同情者，其天官之意物也同。故比方之疑似而通，是所以共其約名以相期也。形體、色理以目異；聲音清濁、調竽²³、奇聲以耳異；甘、苦、鹹、淡、辛、酸、奇味以口異；香、臭、芬、鬱、腥、臊、洒酸、奇臭以鼻異；疾、養、滄、熱、滑、鉞、輕、重以形體異；說²⁴、故、喜、怨、哀、樂、愛、惡、欲²⁵以心異。心有徵

23 This term invoked a passionate discourse among later commentators. Yang Liang, for example, identifies Xunzi's notion of *yu* here as a reference to the first of eight tones. See *Ying Song Taizhou ben Xunzi*.

24 *Xunzi jijie* suggests to read *shuo* 說 "speaking" as *tuo* 脱 "leave out."

25 *Zuantu huzhu* leaves out *yu* 欲 "desire, wish."

知。徵知，則緣耳而知聲可也，緣目而知形可也。然而徵知必將待天官之當簿其類，然後可也。五官簿之而不知，心徵之而無說，則人莫不然謂之不知。此所緣而以同異也。

That being so, what are the **reasons** for differences and similarities? I say: the reasons are the heavenly [i.e., human] faculties. Those [individuals] of an identical kind with identical emotions make sense by way of their faculties in identical ways. Therefore, they communicate doubts about comparisons or suspicious analogies and share agreed-upon names for a certain period.²⁶ Forms and bodies, as well as the principles of complexion, differ to the eye. Good and bad sounds or noises, the tunes of a wind instrument or strange phonetics differ to the ear. Sweet, bitter, salty, bland, pungent, sour, or strange tastes differ to the mouth. Fragrant and foul smells, sweet, lush, fishy, repulsive, and acrid odors differ to the nose. For the physical body senses differences in illness, irritation, cold and hot, slipperiness, lightness or heaviness. Neglectful,²⁷ intentional, happy, irate, grieving, pleasing, loving, evil, and wanton are all differences identified by the heart-mind. The heart-mind has verified knowledge [*weizhi*]. With verified knowledge, the ear is the **reason** that we can recognize sounds; the eye is the **reason** that we can recognize forms and bodies. Furthermore, verified knowledge inevitably relies on reports from the human faculties for classification [i.e., identifying categories]. Whenever the five faculties perceive something that they do not recognize, or the heart-mind verifies something and has no words²⁸ for it, then people usually call this not-knowing. These are the reasons for differences and similarities [of names].

22.2f

然後隨而命之，同則同之，異則異之。單足以喻則單，單不足以喻則兼；單與兼無所相避則共雖共不為害矣。知異實者之異名也，故使異實者莫不異名也，不可亂也，猶使異實者莫不同名也。...

Subsequently, names were fated so that like was likened to like and differences were differentiated. When a singular form sufficed, a singular was used for explanations in analogies. When a singular was not enough, a double term, compatible doubles, were used for explanations. When singulars contribute to

26 Xunzi here refers back to the custom of the Xia to meet within short periods (*quqi*) for the purpose of synchronizing meanings. It also implies that names continuously change, so that agreements have to be renewed.

27 Is identified as a typo for *tuo* 脫 “neglectful.”

28 Xunzi here uses a term that is specific for spoken language.

doubles and are not mutually exclusive, they can be [used] together, as bringing them together is not harmful. Different names are for those who understand different realities. Therefore, let different realities have different names, so they cannot be confused. This is perhaps no different from letting different realities have similar names. ...

22.2g

名無固宜，約之以命，約定俗成謂之宜，異於約則謂之不宜。名無固實，約之以命實，約定俗成，謂之實名。名有固善，徑易而不拂，謂之善名。

What is a “suitable” or “appropriate” name is not fixed. It is agreed upon, based on fate.²⁹ It is called appropriate when an agreement has been reached and customs arise. Versions outside the agreement are called inappropriate. The reality of names is constantly in flux. They are agreed upon, based on a fated reality. They are called real names when agreements are made and customs arise. The goodness of naming well is steadfast, keeping track of changes and not acting against them is called good naming.

22.2h

物有同狀而異所者，有異狀而同所者，可別也。狀同而為異所者，雖可合，謂之二實。狀變而實無別而為異者³⁰，謂之化。有化而無別，謂之一實。此事之所以稽實定數也。此制名之樞要也。後王之成名，不可不察也。

We can differentiate between things of an identical manifestation³¹ in different places and those of different manifestations in identical places. Identical manifestations enacted in different places are identifiably two realities [i.e., facts], even though they can be compared to one another. When the manifestation varies and the reality is not discriminated but rather considered as being

29 Xunzi defines *ming* 命 in 22.1b as follows: “encountering an opportunity is called fate.” Fate is thus a stage at which people have verbalized verified knowledge differently and become accustomed to rules of how to use collective or differentiating names etc. Fate is thus the inevitable condition set by a historical trajectory.

30 Different grammar: *Zuantu huzhu Xunzi* adds *shi* “realities”: 狀變而實別為異者。

31 The term *zhuang* refers to a state of affairs, a condition or shape. Philosophy reads it as a generic statement about local mutability. In the context of language use, this passage refers to the quality of language, that is, a thing addressed (i.e., pronounced and written) using the same word. Unlike the *xing* “form” which Xunzi uses above, he here uses *zhuang*, emphasizing its situational character. Both terms were combined in later texts to address a “state/condition” (*xingzhuang* 形狀).

foreign, it is called a conversion [*hua*]. If a conversion exists without any discrimination, it can be considered one reality. This is the affair of fixing numbers, that is, determining fate,³² by inquiring into realities and fixing their number.³³ This is the [administrative] center for the institutionalization of names. The creation of names by the later kings must be scrutinized.

22.3d

凡邪說辟言之離正道而擅作者，無不類於三惑者矣。故明君知其分而不與辨也。

Each and every deviant saying and perverse teaching that departs from the correct path and is a reckless fabrication [of terms] invariably falls under one of these three delusions. For this reason, the enlightened gentleman understands their analysis and does not participate in such disputations.

22.3e

夫民易一以道，而不可與共故。故明君臨之以執，道之以道，申之以命，章之以論，禁之以刑。故其民之化道也如神，辨執惡用矣哉！今聖王沒³⁴，天下亂，姦言起，君子無執以臨之，無刑以禁之，故辨說也。

Well, commoners are easily unified in the *dao*, but one cannot let them participate in such shared events³⁵ [generating names]. The enlightened king oversees such events, using his influence; he leads the people using the way of the *dao*; he makes them understand using the way of fate; he regulates using the way of discourse and prohibits using the way of punishment. In events, the *dao* [i.e., path] of transforming one's people is equal to divinity. But the skill of discrimination can be applied in evil ways. Today, no wise men/sage kings exist, all under heaven is in chaos, and depraved teachings arise. The gentleman has no skills to overlook this, or any [access to] punishment to prohibit such reasonings [over names], therefore there are discriminatory teachings.

32 "Fixing numbers" refers to the process of prognostication using mathematical-astronomical and astrological procedures that create *ming* "fate."

33 Xunzi is here referring back to the Xia custom where people met regularly to agree upon the names for the ten thousand things.

34 In the *Ying Song Taizhou ben Xunzi* ed. this passage reads 今聖人沒，天下亂。

35 Xunzi here connects back to *yuan* 緣, i.e., events of the faculties that generate names upon which humans can agree.



FIGURE 1.5.1 *Xunzi* 荀子. Commentary by Yang Liang 楊倌. [*Xunzi quanshu* 荀子全書 ed.] [s.l.] Kenschiju 肯石居, [明末, between 1621 and 1644], *juan* 16, 1a/b
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Language Is a Collective Product of Mankind

Diodorus of Sicily, Library of History (1st Century BCE)

Filippomaria Pontani

Narratives or debates on the origin of language are not particularly frequent in archaic and Classical Greek literature. In the Homeric poems no strict linguistic divide exists between gods and humans,¹ although the gods are said to use different names for single rivers, winds, or cities. The fifth-century BCE historian Herodotus (*Histories* 2.2) famously tells about a “scientific” trial ordered by the Egyptian pharaoh Psammetichus (seventh century BCE) in order to assess the antiquity of languages and nations: the outcome, surprisingly enough, was that the first, “natural” language is Phrygian. This experience, which was imitated in later centuries by various kings such as Frederick II Hohenstaufen, James IV of Scotland and Akbar the Great of India, starts from a series of underlying assumptions: that a single originary language exists, that it is verbal, that it has been preserved unaltered down to our own day, but also that—once the influence of education is removed—precisely that specific language is innate to all human beings.

That a single originary language once existed is maintained by many Greek writers, but opinions differ as to whether it was innate, or the fruit of divine or human intervention. In Hesiod’s *Works and Days* (seventh century BCE) the god Hermes (later etymologized as “he who devised speech,” *to eirein emesato*, in Plato’s *Cratylus*, 407e), endowed Pandora, the first woman, with an *aude* (voice; lines 61, 79–80), perhaps a language different from the common tongue previously shared by gods and humans during the Golden Age, before their quarrel and separation. In the Egyptian narrative of man’s earliest times the god Theuth/Thoth, identified with Hermes, is said to have articulated “the common language of mankind,” attributing a name “to many nameless objects,” and “inventing the alphabet” (this is the account given by the first-century BCE Greek historian Diodorus of Sicily, 1.16.1).² In an alternative and isolated nar-

1 The first such instance is in the slightly later (seventh–sixth century BCE?) *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (lines 113–116), where the goddess very naturally declares to Anchises her proficiency in both the Trojan and the Phrygian tongue.

2 Similarly in the *Odes* of the Latin poet Horace (1.10.1–3, trans. Bennett): “O Mercury, grandson

rative, perhaps influenced by the Babel story, Hermes divided languages between different groups of men, who were formerly speaking *una lingua*: this multiplicity is presented by Hyginus as conducive to mutual discord (Hyginus *Fabulae* 143, first century BCE).

While cultural heroes such as Palamedes (otherwise identified as the inventor of writing and numbers) and Prometheus (the benefactor of mankind *par excellence*) are rarely presented as the creators of language,³ this role is more frequently ascribed to men, be they the early “namesetter” of Plato’s dialogue on language, the *Cratylus* (388e–390e), or the ancient lawgivers of the age of Kronos who, according to Stoic philosophers, shaped an entirely rational language for living creatures (was this the same ancestral language shared by men and animals in Platonic thought?).⁴ In the great myth of Plato’s *Protagoras*, language (actually: “voice and names”) occurs immediately after religion (and before all other inventions such as houses, clothes, shoes, etc.) in the chronology of man’s achievements:⁵ it is articulated by humans without any external help, much as in the famous choral song of Sophocles’s *Antigone* on the power of man,⁶ and much as opposed to what we see in Euripides’s play *Suppliant Women*, where it appears as a gift of one god, and one of the steps of mankind’s progress.⁷

Three authors of the first century BCE, perhaps all going back to a single, late Hellenistic source, converge in presenting language as the fruit of an original, collective effort of mankind, obtained through a gradual progress from con-

eloquent of Atlas, thou that with wise insight didst mold the savage ways of men just made, by giving speech and setting up the grace-bestowing wrestling-ground.” But the same Horace ascribes this invention to man in his *Satires* (1.3.99–104).

3 A possible exception in the fifth-century play *Prometheus Bound* attributed to Aeschylus: “And indeed I discovered for them number, outstanding among subtle devices, and the combining of letters as a means of remembering all things, the Muses’ mother, skilled in craft.” *Prometheus Bound* 459–461, trans. Gera.

4 As in Plato’s *Politicus* (272b–d); by men, animals, and vegetals in Babrius’s preface to his *Aesopic Fables* (third century CE).

5 See Plato, *Protagoras* 322a, trans. Lamb: “he soon was enabled by his skill to articulate speech and words, and to invent dwellings, clothes, sandals, beds, and the foods that are of the earth.”

6 “And he [man] taught himself speech and wind-like thought and the temper that regulates cities.” 354–356.

7 “I praise that one of the gods who in due measure separated our human life from chaos and the bestial: first he implanted in us intelligence, then gave us language as a means of communication, so that we might understand discourse.” Euripides, *Suppliant Women* 201–204, trans. Morwood.

fused sounds to articulated utterances: the Roman architect Vitruvius⁸ links the rise of language to the taming of fire in the progress of human civilization; the orator and philosopher Cicero⁹ attributes a decisive role to reason, to a *mens* that guided humans and bound them together by separating unformed sounds into classes and assigning words to things—in this view, language is propaedeutic to common life between humans, and to the rise of human society.

On a slightly different note, the historian Diodorus of Sicily presents men as drawn to language by necessity: in his account (probably going back, through the aforementioned Hellenistic source, to doctrines as old as the fifth century BCE), the progress from collective cries uttered by dispersed and primitive men towards a shared set of names is described as the result of a common life prompted by the humans' need to protect themselves from beasts. In this view (much as in the Stoic and Platonic views, and as opposed to what we have seen above in Chapter 1.4 in the Epicurean doctrine), names and language—even if they are indirectly prompted by the context of surrounding nature—remain entirely conventional, and therefore develop differently from one society of men to the other.

8 “They added fuel, and thus keeping it up [viz. the fire], they brought others; and pointing it out by signs they showed what advantages they had from it. In this concourse of mankind, when sounds were variously uttered by the breath, by daily custom they fixed words as they had chanced to come. Then, indicating things more frequently and by habit, they came by chance to speak according to the event, and so they generated conversation with one another.” Vitruvius, *On Architecture* 2.1.1, trans. Granger.

9 “And when it found human beings making, as it were, rudimentary, confused sounds with crude voices, it broke them up by pauses and distinguished them into parts. And when it imprinted words on things like a kind of sign, it bound together previously disunited human beings through the most agreeable bond of conversation.” Cicero, *On the Republic* 3.2.3, trans. Fott.

Greek Text

Diodorus of Sicily, *Library of History* 1.8.1–4, excerpted from *Bibliothèque Historique*, tome I, trans. Yvonne Vernière, ed. Pierre Bertrac (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1993), 37.

Καὶ περὶ μὲν τῆς πρώτης τῶν ὄλων γενέσεως τοιαῦτα παρειλήφαμεν, τοὺς δὲ ἐξ ἀρχῆς γεννηθέντας τῶν ἀνθρώπων φασὶν ἐν ἀτάκτῳ καὶ θηριώδει βίῳ καθεστῶτας σποράδην ἐπὶ τὰς νομάς ἐξιέναι, καὶ προσφέρεσθαι τῆς τε βοτάνης τὴν προσηνεστάτην καὶ τοὺς αὐτομάτους ἀπὸ τῶν δένδρων καρπούς. Καὶ πολεμουμένους μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν θηρίων ἀλλήλοις βοηθεῖν ὑπὸ τοῦ συμφέροντος διδασκομένους, ἀθροιζομένους δὲ διὰ τὸν φόβον ἐπιγινώσκειν ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ μικρὸν τοὺς ἀλλήλων τύπους. Τῆς φωνῆς δ' ἀσήμου καὶ συγκεχυμένης ὑπαρχούσης ἐκ τοῦ κατ' ὀλίγον διαρθροῦν τὰς λέξεις, καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους τιθέντας σύμβολα περὶ ἐκάστου τῶν ὑποκειμένων γνώριμον σφίσις αὐτοῖς ποιῆσαι τὴν περὶ ἀπάντων ἐρμηνείαν. Τοιούτων δὲ συστημάτων γινομένων καθ' ἅπασαν τὴν οἰκουμένην, οὐχ ὁμόφωνον πάντας ἔχειν τὴν διάλεκτον, ἐκάστων ὡς ἔτυχε συνταξάντων τὰς λέξεις· διὸ καὶ παντοίους τε ὑπάρξει χαρακτῆρας διαλέκτων καὶ τὰ πρῶτα γενόμενα συστήματα τῶν ἀπάντων ἐθνῶν ἀρχέγονα γενέσθαι.

English Translation

Adapted from Diodorus of Sicily, *Library of History*, trans. C.H. Oldfather (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 1:31.

Concerning the first generation of the universe, this is the account which we have received.¹⁰ But the first men to be born, they say, led an undisciplined and bestial life, setting out one by one to secure their sustenance and taking for their food both the tenderest herbs and the fruits of wild trees. Then, since they were attacked by the wild beasts, they came to each other's aid, being instructed by expediency, and when gathered together in this way by reason of their fear, they gradually came to recognize their mutual characteristics. And though the sounds which they made were at first unintelligible and indistinct, yet gradually they came to give articulation to their speech, and by agreeing with one another upon symbols for each thing which presented itself to them, made known among themselves the significance which was to be attached to each term.¹¹ But since groups of this kind arose over every part of the inhabited world, not all men had the same language, inasmuch as every group organized the elements of its speech by mere chance. This is the explanation of the present existence of every different kind of language, and, furthermore, out of these first groups to be formed came all the original nations of the world.¹²

10 This sentence ends the section devoted by Diodorus (1, 7) to his cosmogonic account, which is very close to that offered by Ovid in the first lines of his *Metamorphoses*, and probably goes back to a late Hellenistic Stoic source.

11 What is important here is that language is presented as originally created by humans in order to understand one another, under the adverse constrictions of nature. Natural threats (whether the attacks of wild beasts or, as in Vitruvius, the need for fire) represent ideal opportunities for gathering crowds of people.

12 In this view, the plurality of languages is basically the fruit of chance, but the Stoics (possibly Posidonius in Strabo's polemic in *Geography* 2.3.7) also invoked "providence" (*pronoia*) to explain the differentiation from an original language—a process foreign to Diodorus's theory in this passage.

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A 1st-Century BCE/CE Greek Geographer Discusses What a “Barbarian” Language Is in Terms of Homer and the Carians

Strabo, Geography

Filippomaria Pontani

The concept of “barbarian” arose in ancient Greek thought as a primarily linguistic concept (see Chapter 1.3). It seems to be, however, almost entirely foreign to the Homeric epics: there is just one relevant passage in ancient epic, namely the mention of the “barbarian-speaking Carians” (Καρῶν βαρβαροφῶων) in *Iliad* 2.867, which has aroused a hot exegetical debate since antiquity. The fifth-century BCE historian Thucydides, author of the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, argued that Homer did not know of a “barbarian” identity as opposed to a unitarian Hellenic identity; however, the first-century geographer Strabo, when providing the most detailed extant treatment of the etymology and function of the word *barbaros*, explains the line as referring not to the Carian language proper, but—contrary to modern scholarly consensus—to the Carians’ inadequate command of Greek.

As we have seen in Chapter 1.3 on Herodotus, it was in fifth-century BCE Attic tragedy that *barbaros* dramatically changed its meaning and implications, gradually acquiring moral overtones and embodying the Greeks’ dismissive attitude *vis-à-vis* foreign languages and cultures:¹ in Sophocles’s *Ajax* 1263, the Greek hero Agamemnon disdainfully refuses to argue with Teukros, a Greek of foreign origin, “for I do not understand the barbarian language” (my translation); Euripides’s tragedies mention “barbarian screams” or “barbarian prayers” (*Phoenician Women* 679–680, and 1301), “Phrygian screams” (the *Bacchae* in their Dionysiac rites), “mixed barbarian” origin (*mixobarbaros*, in *Phoenician Women* 138: a linguistic definition that refers to the mingling of barbarian and Greek descent).

It may come as a surprise that a similar attitude towards “barbarians” should persist even after Alexander’s conquests (late fourth century BCE), when Greek

¹ See Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*.

became the international language of the “open” and globalized Hellenistic world. The influence of non-Greek languages in Asia Minor hardly ever went beyond onomastics, and even in Egypt the evidence for a real Greek-Demotic bilingualism is rather limited, with few mentions and few clear instances of Greeks learning Egyptian;² polyglossy was confined to a few foreigners,³ and foreign intellectuals were expected to learn Greek rather than vice versa;⁴ there is almost no evidence of lexica or grammars expressly designed for learning other languages (see Chapter 3.3); even Aristotle, who devoted several treatises to the laws and customs of other peoples, hardly ever pointed to a multiplicity of languages.

In the—perhaps too harsh—verdict of Maurice Sartre, “No Greek author felt it necessary to learn Aramaic, Egyptian, or some other language spoken in the world that emerged from the Alexandrian conquest in order to have

2 Among the generals of Alexander the Great only Peukestas is said to have learnt some Persian, see Arrian, *Anabasis* 6.30.3; Laomedon was bilingual *es ta barbarika grammata*, a problematic statement in 3.6.6. The reality of daily verbal communication on the ground is of course a different thing, and a degree of interference between Greek and demotic (then leading to the peculiar case of Coptic) is attested by some papyri, ostraka, and inscriptions (but the very references to translators and *hermeneis* are rare): see Fewster, “Bilingualism” and Torallas Tovar and Marja Vierros, “Languages”.

3 Such as King Mithridates of Pontus, see Quintilian 11.2.50; the second-century physician Galen argues that “this was a miracle, one man speaking two languages well” (*On the Difference of Pulses* 2.44–45; my translation).

4 The epigrammatic poet Meleager of Gadara (Gadara, now Umm Qais, is down to this day on the border between three countries) devoted an epigram to polyglossy (*Palatine Anthology* 7.419.5–6: “Now, if you are Syrian, *Salam*; if you are Phoenician, *Audonis*; if you are Greek, *Chaire*; and answer in the same way”; my translation). The philosopher Zenon of Kition overtly refers to his mother tongue as opposed to the Greek he is writing in; the two most important historians of Babylon and Egypt, Berossus and Manetho (both third century BCE) chose to write in Greek even though they were addressing an audience of fellow elite members of their own ethnos. See Dillery, *Clio's Other Sons*. A certain pride in his own Syrian language and identity is displayed by the prose writer Lucian (second century CE), who is also one of the few to describe humorous multilingual situations in literature, although he writes in pure Attic; see e.g., his *Zeus Rants* 13, trans. Harmon:

Zeus: ‘Hush them up, Hermes, so that they may learn why they were called together, as soon as they have stopped this nonsense.’

Hermes: ‘Not all of them understand Greek, Zeus, and I am no polyglot, to make a proclamation that Scyths and Persians and Thracians and Celts can understand. I had better sign to them with my hand, I think, and make them keep still.’

See also Rochette, “La problématique des langues étrangères,” 217–233. But already in the fourth century CE, under Roman rule, the historian Ammianus Marcellinus and the poet Claudian, both native speakers of Greek, choose to write in Latin instead.

direct contact with the culture that it transmitted.”⁵ This goes hand in hand with the poor attention devoted to translation (see Chapter 4.4) before and after the peculiar enterprise of the Septuagint. Such is the cultural frame in which Strabo of Amasea operates, perhaps the most important geographer of antiquity, and the author of a massive description of the world, almost entirely preserved. This is why the issue of the real meaning of *barbaros* in Homer bears for him a far greater significance than a mere, old philological quarrel: it is part of a wider perception of cultural boundaries between civilized and uncivilized populations, and part of a deeper grounding of Hellenic identity in a common past. The controversial and at times contradictory Greek/barbarian dichotomy is variably based on linguistic, ethnic, or broader cultural foundations, not allowing any room for “mixed” populations but complicating the very nature of Hellenism and barbarism through a process of constant historical evolution and exchange. For Strabo, this dichotomy becomes an essential tool to interpret the world he lives in, and one that he is keen on reading into the Homeric text.

5 Sartre, “Histoires Grecques,” 380. (Also quoted in Dillery, *Clio's Other Sons*, 349.)

Greek Text

Strabo, *Geography* 14.2.28, 661.17–663.5 C., excerpted from *Strabons Geographika*, vol. 4, *Buch 14–17: Text und Übersetzung*, ed. Stefan Radt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2005), 78–82, round parentheses in the original.

Τοῦ ποιητοῦ δ' εἰρηκότος οὕτωςί

Μάσθλης αὐ Καρῶν ἡγήσατο βαρβαροφώνων, (B 867)

οὐκ ἔχει λόγον πῶς τοσαῦτα εἰδῶς ἔθνη βάρβαρα μόνους εἴρηκε βαρβαροφώνους τοὺς Κάραις, βαρβάρους δ' οὐδένας. οὗτ' οὖν Θουκυδίδης ὀρθῶς (1.3.3)· οὐδὲ γὰρ λέγεσθαι φησι βαρβάρους “διὰ τὸ μηδὲ Ἑλληνᾶς πω ἀντίπαλον εἰς ἓν ὄνομα ἀποκεκρίσθαι”· τὸ τε γὰρ “μηδὲ Ἑλληνᾶς πω” ψεύδος αὐτὸς ὁ ποιητὴς ἀπελέγχει (α 334)

ἀνδρός, τοῦ κλέος εὐρὺ καθ' Ἑλλάδα καὶ μέσον Ἄργος

καὶ πάλιν (ο 80)

εἴτ' ἐθέλεις τραφῆναι ἀν' Ἑλλάδα καὶ μέσον Ἄργος·

μὴ λεγομένων τε βαρβάρων πῶς ἔμελλεν εὖ λεχθήσεσθαι τὸ βαρβαροφώνων; οὔτε δὴ οὗτος εὖ οὗτ' Ἀπολλόδωρος ὁ γραμματικός (FGrHist 244 F207), ὅτι τῷ κοινῷ ὀνόματι ἰδίως καὶ λοιδορῶς ἐχρώντο οἱ Ἕλληνες κατὰ τῶν Καρῶν, καὶ μάλιστα οἱ Ἴωνες μισοῦντες αὐτοὺς διὰ τὴν ἔχθραν καὶ τὰς συνεχεῖς στρατείας· ἐχρῆν γὰρ οὕτως βαρβάρους ὀνομάζειν. ἡμεῖς δὲ ζητοῦμεν διὰ τί βαρβαροφώνους καλεῖ, βαρβάρους δ' οὐδ' ἄπαξ. “ὅτι” φησί “τὸ πληθυντικὸν εἰς τὸ μέτρον οὐκ ἐμπίπτει, διὰ τοῦτ' οὐκ εἴρηκε βαρβάρους.” ἀλλ' αὕτη μὲν ἢ πτώσις οὐκ ἐμπίπτει, ἢ δ' ὀρθῆ οὐ διαφέρει τῆς Δάρδανοι

Τρῶες καὶ Λύκιοι καὶ Δάρδανοι. (Θ 173 etc.)

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- 6 A line of the *Catalogue of Ships*, the long and detailed list of the contingents of soldiers deployed at Troy by the Greeks, and of those deployed on the opposite side by the allies of the Trojans (such are, in this specific line, the Carians). Ancient exegetes on this line speculated that the Carians—a population of Western Asia Minor—spoke a bad Greek because they were of Cretan descent, or that they had a very heavy accent, or that they used to speak loudly. The name of the Carian commander-in-chief is given as Nastes by Homeric manuscripts. On this line see most lately Saviano, “Sui ‘Cari barbarofoni’ di Il. II 867,” 81–94.
- 7 The statement of Thucydides is part of the *Archaiologia*, namely of the section devoted to the early populations of Greece (amongst whom the Pelasgians, see Chapter 1.3). According to Thucydides, before the Trojan war there existed among the Greeks no real consciousness of a common ethnic origin. Well before Strabo, the great philologist Aristarchus of Samothrace (second century BCE) already countered Thucydides's observation by referring to the aforementioned line of *Iliad* Book II.

English Translation

Adapted from *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones, vol. 6, *Books XIII–XIV* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 301–307.

When the poet says

“Masthles in turn led the Carians, of barbarian speech” [*Iliad* 2.867],⁶ it is inconceivable how it is that, although he knew so many barbarian tribes, he speaks of the Carians alone as “of barbarian speech,” but nowhere speaks of “barbarians.” Thucydides, therefore [1.3.3], is not correct, for he says that there are no “barbarians” in Homer because “the Hellenes on their part had not yet been distinguished under one name as opposed to them”;⁷ for the poet himself refutes the statement that the Hellenes had not yet been so distinguished when he says:

“of a man whose fame is wide through Hellas and mid-Argos,” [*Odyssey* 1.334]

and again

“and if thou dost wish to journey through Hellas and mid-Argos.” [*Odyssey* 15.80]⁸

Further, if there was no use of the word “barbarians,” how could they properly be called a people “of barbarian speech”? So neither Thucydides is correct, nor Apollodorus the grammarian,⁹ who says that “the general term was used by the Hellenes in a peculiar and abusive sense against the Carians, and in particular by the Ionians, who hated them because of their enmity and the continuous military campaigns”; for then he would have had to call them “barbarians.”

But I raise the question: Why does he call them people “of barbarian speech,” but not even once calls them “barbarians”? “Because,” Apollodorus says, “the plural does not fall in with the metre; this is why he does not call them ‘barbarians.’” But though this case does not fall in with metre, the nominative case does not differ metrically from that of “Dardanians”:

“Trojans and Lycians and Dardanians” [*Iliad* 8.173 etc.].

8 As Thucydides observes, the word *Hellas/Hellenes* is in fact never applied to the whole of Greece in Homer, but regularly employed with reference to the land and the people of Achilles, i.e. to a particular district of Thessaly.

9 Apollodorus of Athens (second century BCE) was one of the most important erudites, philologists, and Homeric scholars of his time, and the author of a monumental geographical and antiquarian commentary to the *Catalogue of Ships*. As elsewhere, Strabo takes his cue from Apollodorus's observations in order to refute them.

τοιούτον δὲ καὶ τὸ

οἶοι Τρώιοι ἵπποι. (E 222, Θ 106)

οὐδὲ γε ὅτι τραχυτάτη ἢ γλωττα τῶν Καρῶν· οὐ γάρ ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ πλείστα Ἑλληνικά ὀνόματα ἔχει καταμεμιγμένα, ὡς φησι Φίλιππος ὁ τὰ Καρικά γράψας (FGrHist 741F1). οἶμαι δὲ τὸ βάρβαρον κατ' ἀρχὰς ἐκπεφωνήσθαι οὕτως κατ' ὀνοματοποιίαν ἐπὶ τῶν δυσεκφόρων καὶ σκληρῶς καὶ τραχέως λαλούντων, ὡς τὸ βατταρίζειν καὶ τραυλίζειν καὶ ψελλίζειν. εὐφυστατοὶ γάρ ἐσμεν τὰς φωνὰς ταῖς ὁμοίαις φωναῖς κατονομάζειν διὰ τὸ ὁμογενές. ἢ δὴ καὶ πλεονάζουσιν ἐνταῦθα αἱ ὀνοματοποιαί, οἷον τὸ “κελαρύζει” καὶ “κλαγγή” δὲ καὶ “ψόφος” καὶ “βοή” καὶ “κρότος,” ὧν τὰ πλείστα ἤδη καὶ κυρίως ἐκφέρεται. πάντων δὴ τῶν παχυστομούντων οὕτως βαρβάρων λεγομένων, ἐφάνη τὰ τῶν ἀλλοεθνῶν στόματα τοιαῦτα, λέγω δὲ τὰ τῶν μὴ Ἑλλήνων. ἐκείνους οὖν ἰδίως ἐκάλεσαν βαρβάρους, ἐν ἀρχαῖς μὲν κατὰ τὸ λοιδορον, ὡς ἂν παχυστόμους ἢ τραχυστόμους, εἶτα κατεχρησάμεθα ὡς ἐθνικῶ κοινῶ ὀνόματι ἀντιδιαιροῦντες πρὸς τοὺς Ἕλληνας. καὶ γὰρ δὴ τῇ πολλῇ συνηθείᾳ καὶ ἐπιπλοκῇ τῶν βαρβάρων οὐκέτι ἐφαίνετο κατὰ παχυστομίαν καὶ ἀφυΐαν τινὰ τῶν φωνητηρίων ὀργάνων τοῦτο συμβαῖνον, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὰς τῶν διαλέκτων ιδιότητος. ἄλλη δὲ τις ἐν τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ διαλέκτῳ ἀνεφάνη κακοστομία καὶ οἶον βαρβαροστομία, εἴ τις ἑλληνίζων μὴ κατορθοίη, ἀλλ' οὕτω λέγοι τὰ ὀνόματα ὡς οἱ βάρβαροι οἱ εἰσαγόμενοι εἰς τὸν ἑλληνισμόν οὐκ ἰσχύοντες ἀρτιστομεῖν (ὡς οὐδ' ἡμεῖς ἐν ταῖς ἐκείνων διαλέκτοις). τοῦτο δὲ μάλιστα συνέβη τοῖς Καρσί· τῶν γὰρ ἄλλων οὐτ' ἐπιπλεκομένων πω σφόδρα τοῖς Ἕλλησιν, οὐτ' ἐπιχειρῶντων Ἑλληνικῶς ζῆν ἢ μανθάνειν τὴν ἡμετέραν διάλεκτον, πλὴν εἴ τινες σπάνιοι καὶ κατὰ τύχην ἐπεμίχθησαν καὶ κατ' ἄνδρα ὀλίγοις τῶν Ἑλλήνων τισίν—οὔτι δὲ καθ' ὅλην ἐπλανήθησαν τὴν Ἑλλάδα μισθοῦ στρατεύοντες. ἤδη οὖν τὸ βαβαρόφωνον ἐπ' ἐκείνων πυκνὸν ἦν ἀπὸ τῆς εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα αὐτῶν στρατείας, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐπεπόλασε πολὺ μᾶλλον ἀφ' οὗ τὰς τε νήσους μετὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ᾤκησαν ἀκακίθεν εἰς τὴν Ἀσίαν ἐκπεσόντες οὐδ' ἐνταῦθα χωρὶς Ἑλλήνων οἰκεῖν ἐδύναντο ἐπιδιαβάντων τῶν Ἰώνων καὶ τῶν Δωριέων. | ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς αὐτῆς αἰτίας καὶ τὸ βαρβαρίζειν λέγεται· καὶ γὰρ τοῦτο ἐπὶ τῶν κακῶς ἑλληνιζόντων εἰώθαμεν λέγειν, οὐκ ἐπὶ τῶν καριστῶ λαλούντων. οὕτως οὖν καὶ τὸ βαρβαροφωνεῖν, καὶ τοὺς βαρβαροφώνους δεκτέον τοὺς κακῶς ἑλληνιζόντας.

- 10 In Greek the form of the nominative plural *Dardanoi* or *Troioi* becomes acceptable in the dactylic hexameter if it precedes a vowel (as in the line quoted here), for it thus acquires the shape of a dactyl.
- 11 Little is known of this Philip of Theangela, a local historian who probably lived between the third and second centuries BCE. The little we know of the Carian language does not chime in with Strabo's praise of its musicality.
- 12 This is the first extant evidence of the use of *onomatopoeia* not for an invented word but for the verbal representation of a sound: the three Greek verbs enumerated by Strabo represent by their very outer form specific faults of pronunciation.
- 13 That Carians were mercenaries is maintained already by Herodotus, and is proved by the frequency of Carian inscriptions of soldiers found in Egypt and Lydia, where these men gave rise to a fertile phenomenon of cultural and linguistic interaction.

So, also, the word "Trojan," in

"of what kind the Trojan horses are." [*Iliad* 5.222 etc.]¹⁰

The reason cannot be, either, that the language of the Carians is very harsh, for it is not, but even has very many Greek words mixed up with it, according to the Philip who wrote *The Karika*.¹¹ I suppose that the word "barbarian" was at first uttered onomatopoeically in reference to people who pronounced words only with difficulty and talked harshly and raucously (like our words *bat-tarizein*, *traulizein*, and *psellizein*);¹² for we are by nature very much inclined to denote sounds by words that sound like them, on account of their homogeneity. Wherefore onomatopoeic words abound in our language, as, for example, *kelaryzei* [gurgles], and also *klange* [howl], *psophos* [noise], *boe* [scream], and *krotos* [clap], most of which are by now used like proper words.

Accordingly, when all who pronounced words thickly were being called "barbarians" onomatopoeically, it appeared that the pronunciations of all alien races were likewise thick, I mean of those that were not Greek. Those, therefore, they called "barbarians" in the special sense of the term, at first derisively, meaning that they pronounced words thickly or harshly; and then we misused the word as a general ethnic term, thus making a logical distinction between the Greeks and all other races. The fact is, however, that through our long acquaintance and intercourse with the barbarians this effect was at last seen to be the result, not of a thick pronunciation or any natural defect in the vocal organs, but of the peculiarities of their several languages. And there appeared another faulty and barbarian-like pronunciation in our language, whenever any person speaking Greek did not pronounce it correctly, but pronounced the words like barbarians who are only beginning to learn Greek and are unable to speak it accurately, as is also the case with us in speaking their languages.

This was particularly the case with the Carians, for, although the other peoples were not yet having very much intercourse with the Greeks nor even trying to live in Greek fashion or to learn our language—with the exception, perhaps, of rare persons who by chance, and singly, mingled with a few of the Greeks—yet the Carians roamed throughout the whole of Greece, serving on expeditions for pay.¹³ Already, therefore, the definition of "barbarous" was frequent for them since their expedition to Greece; and after this it spread much more, from the time they took up their abode with the Greeks in the islands; and when they were driven thence into Asia, even here they were unable to live apart from the Greeks, I mean when the Ionians and Dorians later crossed over to Asia. The term "barbarize," also, has the same origin; for we are wont to use this too in reference to those who speak Greek badly, not to those who talk Carian. So, therefore, we must interpret the terms "speak barbarously" and "barbarously-speaking" as applying to those who speak Greek badly.

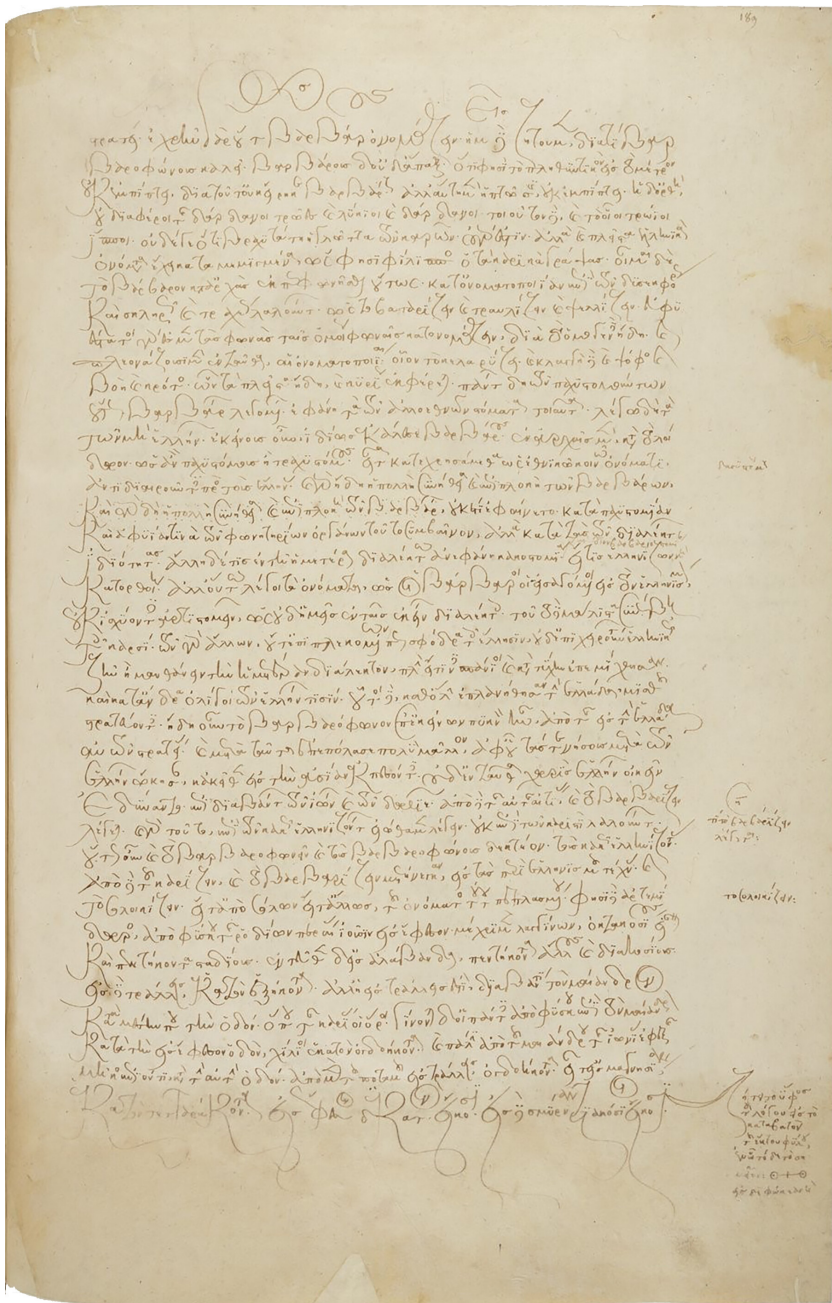


FIGURE 1.7.1 Strabo, *Geography*. MS Grec 1393, fol. 189r
 BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE. DÉPARTEMENT DES MANUSCRITS

Abbreviations

- C. *Strabonis rerum geographicarum libri xvii. Isaacus Casaubonus recensuit ac commentariis illustravit.* Geneva, 1587.

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Plurilingualism in China and Inner Asia in the 12th Century CE

“Khitan Reciting Poetry”

Mårten Söderblom Saarela

The sprawling collection of anecdotes *Record of the Listener* (*Yijian zhi* 夷堅志) by Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123–1202) contains an entry titled “Khitan reciting poetry” (see Figure 1.8.1). The anecdote describes how children of non-Chinese ancestry in the Jurchen empire learned Chinese poetry. To understand the meaning of the classical Chinese, they changed the order of the words and indeed replaced the words themselves. Hong Mai found the practice hilarious. The story presents a rare discussion of plurilingualism in northern China in the twelfth century, but exactly what kind of sociolinguistic situation he described remains debated among specialists. What language were the Khitan speaking, and why did their pedagogy make the Chinese literatus laugh?

In the twelfth century, China and its northern periphery were divided among the Song state in the South and the Jin state in the North. The Song were Chinese. They had once controlled all of China but were pushed out of the northern plain by the Jurchen, ancestors of the later Manchus. The Jurchen ruled the Jin empire, which controlled not only the former northern territories of the Song, but also the Inner Asian forests and steppes that had once been ruled by the Khitan. The Song and the Jin had a tense relationship that needed managing through diplomacy. In 1162, Hong Mai travelled with a Song embassy to Jin territory. Once there, the party was greeted by Wang Bu 王補, a Khitan from Manchuria with a Chinese name. Wang appears to have realized that the Southerners would be unfamiliar with and interested in the culture of this foreign land. He relied on it to joke around with Hong during the long journey.

Hong Mai was the son of an official who had been stranded in the North after the Jurchen invaded and pushed the Song armies out of the Chinese heartland. Upon his arrival in the South, Hong’s father told Mai many stories. The son, the “listener” of the title of *Yijian zhi*, recorded them, and thus began the collection of anecdotes that Hong Mai worked on for many decades until the end of his life.¹ Hong travelled widely in the Song realm and beyond, where he relied on

1 Inglis, “A Textual History of Hong Mai’s *Yijian zhi*,” 292.

informants to supply him with interesting stories, often involving the supernatural. The story of Khitan children reciting Chinese poetry did not contain any ghosts or magic, but a linguistic practice so strange that Hong thought it would amuse his erudite Chinese readers.

Wang Bu told Hong that when Khitan children learned Chinese poetry, they changed the order of the words from the Subject-Verb-Object structure of classical Chinese to one in which the verbs came at the very end of the sentence. In addition, the children replaced the pithy, monosyllabic vocabulary of the classical Chinese original with “vernacular words” that were two or even three times as long. Wang Bu showed an amused Hong several examples, and Hong made a note of one of them in his *Record*.

The object of Wang’s and Hong’s mirth was a version of a plurilinguistic practice documented from across the Sinosphere well into modern times. Its most famous iteration is found in Japan, where it is known as “reading by gloss.” *Sensu stricto*, the phrase refers to Japanese readers appropriating a classical Chinese text by shuffling its components around to accord with Japanese word order, adding grammatical particles, and substituting Chinese words for vernacular Japanese equivalents. In a more general sense, “reading by gloss” is a feature of the Japanese writing system that is as old as the use of Chinese characters in Japan. Chinese characters are frequently read not in an approximation of the pronunciation of the Chinese word they were initially coined to record; rather, a Japanese equivalent of that Chinese word is imputed to the character. Thus, monosyllabic Chinese words are replaced by often polysyllabic Japanese words.²

In recent years, scholars have relied on the Japanese practice as a paradigmatic case to investigate plurilinguistic readings of Chinese texts all over East Asia. Historical records roughly contemporaneous with Hong Mai report that a Korean scholar Söl Ch’ong 薛聰 (see Chapter 5.6) in the seventh century CE read the Confucian classics using “the region’s speech” (*pang’ŏn* 方言) or “regional pronunciation” (*pang’ŭm* 方音). Hong Mai writes that the Khitan children used “vernacular words” (*suyu* 俗語) in the place of the literary expressions. Many scholars have thus assumed that, just as the Korean Söl Ch’ong used Korean to read Chinese texts, the Khitan children in the Jin empire used Khitan, their

2 Curiously, “reading by gloss” in the narrow sense is called *kundoku* 訓讀, where the characters for “gloss” and “read” retain their Chinese pronunciations. In the broad sense, the substitution of Chinese readings for Japanese ones is called *kunyomi* 訓読み, where the second character is read as a Japanese word, indicated in the modern orthography with a third, syllabic sign.

vernacular language.³ But, as has been noted, there are problems with this interpretation.

If the children were speaking Khitan, how would Hong Mai, a Chinese Southerner, understand what they said to the degree that he could identify the changing word order and the fact that monosyllabic literary Chinese words turned into polysyllabic words? And would the fact that Khitan people use Khitan language appear that funny to him? That foreigners would use a foreign language is hardly noteworthy.

Hong Mai could only have understood the Khitan rendering of the poems if they were in some form of Chinese. That is indeed how he represents them in his anecdote. Not only is the word order reversed in the “Khitan” version, the single-syllable classical Chinese words are also replaced by polysyllabic compounds. Monosyllabic *yue* 月 becomes *yueming* 月明, “moon,” just as *seng* 僧, “monk” becomes *heshang* 和尚. Hong’s informant Wang Bu could have translated the Khitan words back into Chinese for Hong Mai’s benefit, which might arguably explain the Chinese vernacularisms here, but why would Wang substitute the original words for vernacular Chinese expressions in the first place, when he could just as well retain them? The different word order of Khitan would emerge in any case. Wang’s account and its comedic effect make more sense if we assume that he recited the Khitan rendering of the poems quite simply in the way the Khitan children recited them.

In fact, Khitan—and presumably other ethnicities—under Jurchen rule probably spoke a kind of vernacular Chinese that, like the Inner Asian language of the rulers, placed the verbs last in a sentence. Hundreds of years of interaction on China’s northern frontier had given rise to a vernacular language shared among the region’s various ethnicities—a kind of creole, as it were.⁴ Thus, a Chinese-speaking population like the Khitan in Hong’s story would have appropriated the classical literary heritage in ways comparable to the Koreans and Japanese, whose languages were unrelated to Chinese. It might have appeared laughable to a Chinese Southerner like Hong Mai, but his anecdote shows that the plurilingual culture of the East Asian periphery extended into China itself.⁵ Even poetry, a key component of Chinese elite sociability, was in the North embedded in a plurilingual, vernacular culture.

3 The preceding paragraphs are based on Kin, “Kanji bunkaken no kundoku genshō,” 176–181. See further Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts*, ch. 6.

4 I find this term more appropriate to this case than pidgin, which is a word that has been used in reference to present-day Chinese vernaculars with features that were probably acquired through contact with Inner Asia. See Hashimoto, “The Altaicization,” 93–95.

5 The previous paragraphs are based on Nakamura, “Kittanjin no Kango.”

Classical Chinese Text

Excerpted from Hong Mai, “Qidan song shi” 契丹誦詩, part of *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志, 清影宋鈔本 ed. Manuscript. Shanghai library, shelf mark: 線善 828608-61.

契丹誦詩

契丹小兒初讀書，先以俗語顛倒其文句而習之。至有一字用兩、三字者。頃奉使金國時，接伴副使秘書少監王補，每為予言以為笑。如“鳥宿池中樹，僧敲月下門”兩句，其讀時則曰：“月明裏和尚門子打，水底裏樹上老鴉坐”。大率如此。補：錦州人，亦一契丹也。

English Translation

Translated by Mårten Söderblom Saarela.

Khitan Reciting Poetry

When Khitan children start learning how to read, they first practice by using vernacular words to flip parts of the sentences around. They might at times even use two or three words [zi] for one word. When I was sent on a mission to the [Jurchen] Jin state, Vice Director of the Palace Library Wang Bu [of the Jin],⁶ who met and accompanied us as deputy emissary, often brought it up with me to make me laugh. For example, [he used the case of] the two lines, “The ravens roost on the trees within the pond/The monk knocks on the door beneath the moon.”⁷ When they [the Khitan children] recite these lines, they say “In the moon brightness, the brother the door taps/On the tree in the water, the old crows sit.” The examples were roughly like this.

[Note:] [Wang] Bu is from Jinzhou [in southern Manchuria]; he too is Khitan.

6 For the title, see Hucker, *Dictionary of Official Titles*, 378 (item 4596).

7 These lines are from the poem “Ti Li Ning youju” 題李凝幽居 by Jia Dao 賈島 (779–843 CE).

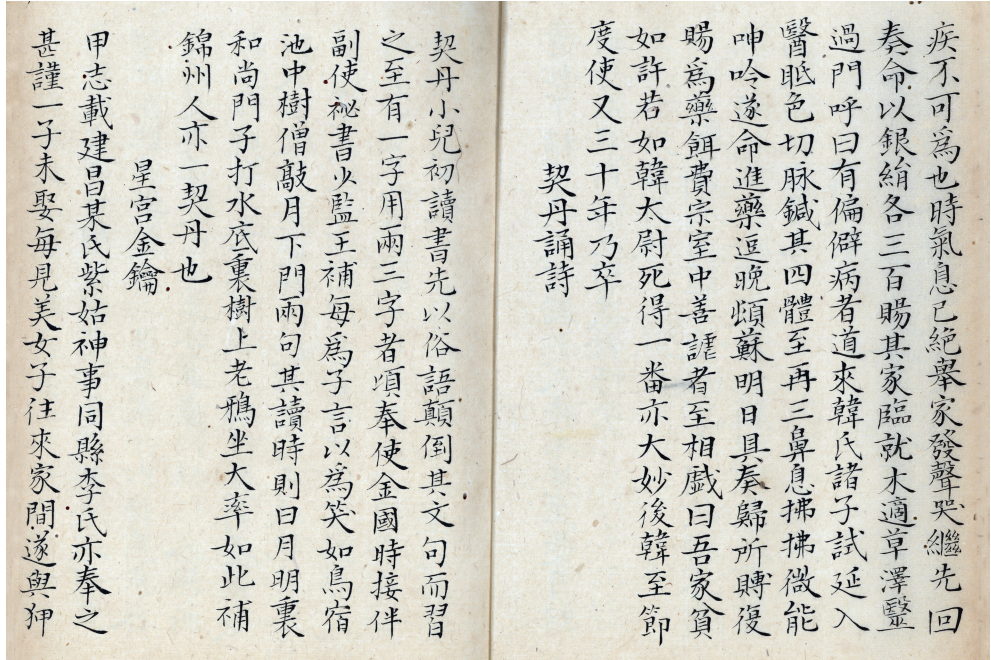


FIGURE 1.8.1 Hong Mai 洪邁, "Qidan song shi" 契丹誦詩 [Khitan reciting poetry]. Part of *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志. 清影宋鈔本 ed. Manuscript
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PART 2

Etymology



Introduction

Glenn W. Most, Dagmar Schäfer, and Michele Loporcaro

The present chapter gathers under the heading “etymology” premodern texts from different ages and places that all had a tremendous and lasting impact on the intellectual life of the countless people who were brought up in the respective cultures. The common denominator of all those texts is that they deal with the subject of the origin and meaning of individual words. The scholarly practice of etymology seems to have been very widespread geographically and historically in earlier times, and it continues to remain an object of great interest for ordinary people throughout the world even today.¹ The different kinds of spoken languages and writing systems that have been involved and the different roles and ambitions of scholars in their cultures have led to considerable variation in the nature of the practice. Moreover, in the past two centuries, as the historical study of language has developed into an academic discipline, at first in Europe but then also in those other parts of the world most influenced by European ideas, a new science of etymology has become established that differs radically in theory and method from all earlier practices.² During the earlier period, plurilingualism played only sometimes, but not always, a decisive role in analyzing and understanding language diversity on the level of the individual word; but in later forms during that period plurilingualism tended to become much more prominent, and it has become an indispensable foundation of more recent scientific practice. The purpose of this introduction is to sketch out briefly a panoramic overview of the changing nature of etymology in the context of the reality of plurilingualism, considering its cultural and linguistic variations and its historical development, especially in premodern times, and thereby to set into a wider context the readings that are provided in this part.

1 For a general orientation, especially on etymology in Western traditions, see e.g., Belardi, *L'etimologia*; Katz, “Etymology”; Nifadopoulos, *Etymologia*.

2 For the rise of scientific etymology and its differences with regard to pre-scientific etymology, see e.g., Baldinger, “L'étymologie hier et aujourd'hui”; Benedetti, “Etymology Between Typology and History”; Herbermann, “Moderne und antike Etymologie”; Davies, *Nineteenth-Century Linguistics*; Tsitsibakou-Vasalos, “Gradations of Science.”

1 What Is Etymology?

The term “etymology” is Greek and dates from the third century BCE: the first scholar to have written a (non-extant) treatise under such a title (*Etymologika* “etymological issues”) was the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus of Soli (ca. 280–207 BCE).³ But the practice of etymology is much older, and is attested in a number of cultures throughout the world. Etymology presupposes the existence of a language as an already established, largely successful semantic and communicative system, and it directs its attention in particular to single words taken as separable from one another, asking why and how they mean what they mean. In fact, there is no self-evident reason in principle why it should even be possible to explain how it is exactly that words convey meaning; whether language works by nature, by convention, by usage, or by fiat, it might be enough just to accept that it does happen to work pretty well and then go on from there. For most practical situations involving language communication, it suffices if I ask my workmate for a hammer and he gives it to me; what the etymology of the word “hammer” is might just as well be a matter of perfect indifference to the two of us, so long as the nail ends up getting beaten into the wood.

But this is not how etymologists look at language. They focus less upon the thing that the word denotes than upon the word that denotes it—that is, less upon the hammer and more upon “hammer”—and ask how that relation of denotation can be satisfactorily explained. This practice involves a series of premises and processes. First, the continuous stream of language must be articulated into a series of individual words which can be examined each for itself and whose meanings are in each case generally taken to be clear. Second, the individual word (we might call it the “target word”) is explained by being linked to one or more other words (its “source words”): the target word’s relation to the source words tends not to be one of morphological derivation from them, for otherwise the link would be obvious and unsurprising (Varro and Isidore, of whom extracts are presented in this chapter, are among prominent exceptions to this tendency), and the meanings of the latter are generally taken to be clear in themselves. Third, these links are simultaneously on the one hand of a semantic nature and on the other hand non-semantic; most often the non-semantic links are acoustic in nature, but in logographic writing systems they can also involve the shape of the written characters. And finally, these links

3 Belardi, *Letimologia*, 1:28–29. One of the excerpted texts comes from a Stoic philosopher (Cornutus, see Chapter 2.5); another one (Varro, see Chapter 2.4) is deeply indebted to the Stoic line of investigation.

between the target word and its source words are taken to explain the former's signification and, in some sense, to yield the "truth" (Gk. *etymos* "true") of the "word" (Gk. *logos* "word, discourse") that would otherwise have remained concealed. Thus, according to the scientific etymology of contemporary linguistics, the modern English word "hammer" turns out to have no connection whatsoever with the English words "ham" or "hummer" or "slammer"; instead it has evolved from the Old English *hamor* or *hamer*, is derived from the Proto-Germanic **hamaraz* from which come such words as Dutch *hamer* and German *Hammer*, and is cognate with the Old Norse *hamarr* which means "stone." So its original meaning was probably "a tool with a stone head." Knowing this does not help me to hammer the nail into the wood any better than I could have done if I were ignorant of this derivation; but it is capable of giving me a comforting sense of where this word comes from, why it means what it means, and how this individual derivation testifies to much vaster developments in the cultural history of mankind. The shiny brand-new object that I hold firmly in my ephemeral hand is a carefully designed and industrially manufactured implement made of hardened steel, but it goes back in its conception and function to crude stone tools first made by rough hands in the Neolithic Age; and, properly understood, the modern word that I hold in my mind and say to my workmate can still be recognized as hinting at this ancient truth even today.

2 Monolingualism and Plurilingualism in Ancient Etymology

The etymology of "hammer" that was provided in the preceding section is a good example of the way in which modern linguistic science moves easily among different interrelated languages in order to establish explanatory links of derivation and affinity between the words in one or more of them.

In the ancient world too, etymology was a widespread scholarly practice concerned with explaining language on the level of the word. It could be used to elucidate the purposes of words or to identify their origins, to find structures and patterns in language, as an argumentative or analytical tool for political or social purposes, and also for rhetoric embellishment. It is always justified by the privileged status attributed to the principal language in a certain region and often by the prestige and difficulty of certain canonical text traditions, and it tends to offer a plurality of explanations, indeed even to cumulate possible explanations. This ancient practice of etymology shares at least three common features across cultures: it claims to reveal hidden truths; the correspondences it establishes between words are one to many; and, relatedly, it elaborates on meaning and is most often guided by meaning correspondences, rather than by correspondences in form.

We have no surviving evidence of texts from non-Greek literate cultures before Plato's *Cratylus* (fourth century BCE; see Chapter 2.3) that explicitly addressed the origin of words, though some kind of etymological practice may underlie much earlier texts such as the Middle Babylonian (late second millennium BCE) *Nabnitu* ("Creation" in Akkadian, from the root *bny* "to build"), a bilingual Akkadian-Sumerian word-list compilation whose "main organizing principle" is "etymological and pseudoetymological associations."⁴ But the evidence for scholarly practices of etymology in other ancient written cultures such as those in Greek, Chinese, or Sanskrit (Latin, as we shall see shortly, is an exception) shows above all one common feature, namely the attempt to remain as far as possible within the compass of a single language system, orienting the explanation of words to the language used by the elite and/or by scholars. Before the advent of modern scientific etymology, the central aim of this older practice was to celebrate and if possible increase the degree of consistency in that single language, rather than to acknowledge a plurilingual world.

Thus, early examples of these ancient modes of etymology are dedicated to revealing the hidden consistency of written language. In ancient Greece and Eastern and Southern Asia, scholars were always pursuing the aim of trying to find underlying structures and patterns in their languages; but they tended to operate thereby in slightly different ways.

In ancient Greece, it was the names of the Greek gods whose obscurity first and foremost caused puzzlement and led to developing the practices of etymology.⁵ This was because Greek parents most often gave their children proper names that were semantically transparent in the Greek language; but because Greek cults mostly either preexisted in Greece the arrival of the people we identify as the Greeks or were imported into Greece in very ancient times,

4 Veldhuis, "Ancient Mesopotamia," 28. In China too, works that purport to explain the origin of words emerge much later, the earliest being *Shìming* 釋名 (Explaining names) by Liu Xi 劉熙 (200 CE), a glossary characterized by "the general use of paronomastic glosses (also called puns or phonetic glosses, 聲訓) in order to clarify the supposed etymology of some 1,500 words." Bottéro, "Ancient China," 58. The logographic writing system of Chinese paved the ground for a peculiar kind of investigation into the origin of (the written shape of) words, sometimes called "graphic etymology" (*ibid.*, 61), which focuses on Chinese logographic characters (*Hanzi* 汉字) as first instanced in *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (Explain the graphs to unravel the written words; around 100 CE) by Xu Shen 許慎, see Chapter 2.6.

5 On Greek etymological practices, see e.g., Lallot, "Etumologia" and "L'Étymologie"; Most, "Allegoresis and Etymology"; Peraki-Kyriakidou, "Aspects of Ancient Etymologizing"; Sluiter, "Ancient Etymology."

only very few of the Greek gods, especially of the most important ones, had names that were transparent in terms of the Greek language. Instead of interpreting the fact that the names of most of their gods were simply not Greek as excellent evidence of the importance of plurilingualism in the development of their culture, the Greeks, starting from the earliest recorded times, tried to explain these names exclusively in terms of their own language. Etymology in Greece was thus in origin an attempt to rescue an appearance of monolingualism in the particularly delicate and fraught case of religion. And even when, as happened comparatively early, Greek etymology moved out from the special case of the gods' names and came to be applied first to other kinds of nouns, and eventually to other parts of speech, it continued to preserve its fundamental monolingualism. Within the privileged domain of the Greek language, which the Greeks regarded as the only truly valuable mode of speech (notoriously they applied the term "barbarians" to all peoples who spoke any language other than Greek), Greek etymologists established relations between source words and target words that acoustically were often astonishingly inventive (to say nothing of being totally arbitrary) in order to justify the target words by connecting them by close semantic links with the source words. Notably, there seems to have been little sense that only one such etymological explanation could be correct: instead, one often has the impression that the more the links that could be established, the richer and more perfect the Greek language would thereby be demonstrated to be. Normativity tended to be sought not so much in the usage or form of particular words, but rather in the preeminence of the Greek language as a whole: the more surprising the etymology proposed for some particularly baffling term, the greater the sense of admiration for the hidden systematicity of ancient Greek.

In South Asia, in contrast, matters were different. Just as Sanskrit philology tended to highlight grammar, so too word analysis was also ultimately more concerned with finding structures and patterns than with explaining meanings. Of the four identifiable word groups—nominal words, verbs, prepositions, and particles—all nouns originated from verbs. Even in Yāska's *Nirukta*, the early post-Vedic etymological treatise of which an excerpt is included in this part, the fundamental assumption is that words have varied origins. Hence, while an analysis on the basis of words in Sanskrit must always be concerned with grammar, such an analysis is not possible in the case of other dialects. Yāska's analysis focuses on words that lacked a regular grammatical derivation and whose meaning was therefore obscure—the frequency of such unintelligible terms in the ancient Vedic mantras was a problem not only for the investigation of language but also for the practice of religion—and it proceeds by using etymology to extend the domain of grammar and to reveal regularities simi-

lar to the ones recognized by grammar, even in terms that are grammatically obscure. The Sanskrit etymological analysis of the underlying structure of language then went on to be appropriated and adapted by Buddhist scholars for the purposes of commentary on their sacred texts.

In the Sinophone world, matters were different yet again. Chinese scholars explained the structures of their words by supposing that their written script combined a meaning-giving element with phonetic indicators. They also recognized that both kinds of elements had developed historically. In the case of the meaning-giving element, scholars sought to correct the kinds of historical developments that had led to what they regarded as being not only linguistic defects, but also political ones: the multiplication of terminology across various regions and inconsistencies and a certain imprecision of meaning. Their aim was to return to what they thought had been an ideal condition in antiquity and to correct names in such a way that they would match reality once again: that is, so that offices, ranks, subjects, and activities would each have one and the same name rather than many different ones. What was called “rectifying names” was the attempt to discover the meaning in “context” of a specific discourse defined by either a social group or a historical trajectory, given that the very concept of language was that of a dynamic system changing all the time. Thus, the focus of etymological studies in China was usually not on explaining the truth of a word, but on rectifying the truth in words by studying their changing meanings.

The study of language on the level of individual words originated in Chinese history in three interrelated scholarly interests: tracking historical changes in meanings; understanding the relation between reality and language; and tracing phonetic variations. Etymology was pursued alongside lexical work and together with commentarial traditions, that is, by means of textual exegesis. In both lexical work and commentarial practices, scholars emphasized that the etymological analysis of words was the key to correct social and political ordering. With the emergence of kingdoms by the eighth to fifth centuries BCE (if not earlier), elites increasingly came to attach importance to the standardization of language and tied writing to political and social power. Thus, for example, Xunzi (see Chapter 1.5) stands at the end of a long period of political disunity, in which languages had drifted apart and writing standards were diverging substantially; and his notion of the “Rectification of Names” (*Zhengming* 正名), which is a combined etymological and historical approach to word meanings together with a lexicographic element, can be interpreted as an ethnography of the language situation in his era. Later too, many works of the Han era attest to a diversity of “regional variations of language” (*fangyan* 方言). For example, during the Western Han, Yang Xiong 楊雄 attempted to survey and document

these regional varieties. So too, Xu Shen 許慎 (*Shuowen jiezi*) and Liu Xi 劉熙 (*Shiming*) regularly pinpoint regional variations of pronunciations in their lexical studies. Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (see Chapter 2.6) stands at the end of an era of unified script, in which scholars looked back onto the period of the Warring States as a time of chaos but also as a source of inspiration: diverse versions and interpretations of texts had existed, of which some may have been “truer” than the standardized versions sanctioned by Han rulers. Within these scholarly and political debates, Zheng Xuan exemplifies a shift from what looks like *ad hoc* reflections on language and reality to the systematic analysis of language and language development, approaching both of these as dynamic processes of connecting oral variations to written forms.

3 The Development of Plurilingual Etymology

Thus, in however many ways ancient Greek, Sanskrit, and Chinese etymologists differed from one another in their ideas and methods, they all shared an approach to the etymological analysis of words that was guided by the central aim of finding coherence and consistency in a single language, their own. But this commitment took different forms in each of these three traditions. Ancient Greek etymologists—unlike their ancient and medieval counterparts in Greek lexicography (see Chapters 3.3 and 3.5)—seem to have displayed a blithe indifference to the existence of other languages than their own and presumed that the Greek language provided sufficient means to explain the derivation and meaning of any Greek word whatsoever. For Sanskrit scholars, the language of the Vedas was of unique religious value—indeed, in a certain sense it was thought to be the only language that truly existed—and it would have been an unthinkable heresy to invoke other languages than Sanskrit in trying to explain an obscure Vedic term. In China, the historical reality was one of numerous quite different spoken languages that could only with very limited success be constrained within the harness of a single writing system, which was itself subject to constant variation and development; but scholars regarded such changes as being not only a defect but even a direct menace to the well-being of the Chinese state and its emperors and people, so that etymology was used normatively in order to reduce variation and reestablish a correct meaning and pronunciation that had begun to decline and were in danger of being lost altogether. To put the matter a bit too simply, we might say that the Greek etymologists were motivated in their avoidance of plurilingualism above all by considerations of linguistic chauvinism, the Sanskrit ones by religious scruples, and the Chinese ones by political anxieties.

In the West, it was above all the ancient and medieval Latin tradition that accepted plurilingualism and integrated it into its etymological practice.⁶ The reason for this might seem obvious: after all, in terms of cultural history, for at least three reasons plurilingualism was simply a fact of life for the ancient Romans and it continued to be one for their medieval successors. First, Latin was originally only one of a number of quite different languages which were spoken throughout the Italian peninsula in the first millennium BCE, including some that belonged to the Italic family such as Faliscan, Umbrian, and Oscan, and others which were more remotely related to Latin or were not even Indo-European, like Etruscan. As Rome rose to dominance in Italy, these competing political and linguistic entities were suppressed or absorbed; by the first century CE they had largely vanished except as an object of antiquarian interest, but they left numerous traces in local idioms and in the names of people and places. Second, during the last centuries BCE Rome underwent a massive influence by Greece which decisively determined many key sectors of its cultural production.⁷ After about the second century BCE until the end of antiquity, to be a Roman man of letters meant to be able to speak, read, and write fluently not only in Latin but also in Greek. And third, after about the first century BCE Rome's empire brought it into close, systematic, and not always hostile contact with a number of other peoples throughout the Mediterranean, and its military, legal, commercial, and educational structures involved frequent interaction with them. Moreover, this daily experience of plurilingualism continued long after the fall of the Roman empire in the West, where it eventually led to the rise of the vernacular languages of Europe alongside medieval Latin (vernacular terms are already documented occasionally in Hugutio of Pisa's *Derivationes*, see the introduction to Chapter 2.9). But before we conclude that the Latin recognition of plurilingualism can be dismissed as having been simply self-evident and inevitable, we should remind ourselves that similar causes did not lead to similar effects elsewhere in the world, notably in South and East Asia, where various strategies were instead devised in an effort to minimize the reality of plurilingualism and to protect the apparent dominance of a single language over the others that were present in a complex political and cultural reality.

Whatever the explanation, Latin etymologists were certainly more inclined to move outside the limits of their own language in attempting to explain the origins and meaning of their words than their Greek counterparts were (so for

6 For an introduction, see e.g., Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*; Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*; Buridant, *L'étymologie de l'antiquité*; Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie*.

7 Feeney, *Beyond Greek*.

example in Varro, see the introduction to Chapter 2.4). To be sure, the explanations they furnish are very often not acceptable in terms of modern linguistic science, and the actual amount of Greek that they really knew declines unmistakably over time. But the effect their treatises communicate is that to understand the Latin language well is to see it as one among a number of languages, above all of course Greek, in a plurilingual world.

So too in the multilingual world of Arabic linguistic scholarship. While there does not seem to have been much systematic study of the etymology of Arabic words in premodern Arabic scholarship—the term *ishtiqāq* means not “etymology” but instead “derivation” and is concerned above all with how new words could be derived from the consonantal roots of the Arabic language⁸—there was widespread recognition of the presence of Iranian loanwords in Arabic, also because a number of early grammarians and lexicographers were Iranians.

4 Modern Scientific Etymology

The term *etymologia* became established in Hellenistic Greece and was borrowed into Latin in ancient Rome (though Varro uses it sparingly, see Chapter 2.4), to then enter the modern European languages through Latin. Thus, when employing *etymology* in English or related terms in other modern languages, we are looking back on twenty-four centuries of uninterrupted usage of the term. But during the course of this period, the nature of the scholarly practice which it denoted has changed radically. The modern understanding of etymology *qua* scientific discipline defines it as a subdiscipline of linguistics (i.e., the scientific study of language) concerned exclusively with the study of the origin of words or, more exactly, with “the search for the relationships—formal and semantic—that link a word with another unit that historically precedes it and from which it derives.”⁹

The history of etymology as a scientific discipline is incomparably shorter than the history of the scholarly study of the origins and meaning of individ-

8 See e.g., El Masri, *Semantics of Qur'anic Language*, 7–50, who contrasts “semantic” (i.e., pre-scientific) etymology in the Arabic tradition, with “historic(al)” (i.e., scientific) etymology. However, also within Arabic studies, Larcher uses the latter label to refer to pre-scientific etymology, and contrasts it with “diachronic” (i.e., scientific) etymology. Larcher, “Derivation,” 575.

9 Zamboni, *Letimologia*, 1, our translation. For some representative modern discussions of scientific etymology, cf. Chambon and Lüdi, *Discours étymologiques*; Durkin, *Oxford Guide to Etymology*; Malkiel, *Etymology*; Thurneysen, *Etymologie*.

ual words. It started in the early nineteenth century, when a line of research initiated by Franz Bopp, Rasmus Rask and Jakob Grimm established a rule-based scientific method, subject to corroboration or refutation by an international community of scholars, that made possible the systematic investigation of regular sound correspondences across related languages and, based on this, regular sound change over time. This paved the way for the modern study of language relatedness—which is why this method is also called the (historical)comparative method—and, by the same token, of etymology.¹⁰ The handbook example of this major innovation is the discovery of the so-called Grimm’s Law (although, as a matter of fact, it was first noted by Rasmus Rask), which describes the relation between the obstruent consonants of the Germanic languages and their counterparts elsewhere in Indo-European, as is still visible to this day within the lexicon of English, where the initial consonants in, for instance, *father*, *tooth* and *heart* are etymologically the same as in *paternal*, *dental* and *cardiac* respectively, the latter mirroring—like all Latinate vocabulary—the sound laws of Latin, or Greek, as in *cardiac* (see Old Greek *kardía* “heart”), not of Germanic.¹¹ Before this crucial step, there was no historical linguistics (or comparative philology), and hence no scientific method for etymology.

This by no means implies that the questions we now ask, in the framework of those disciplines, were not asked earlier as well.¹² Indeed, they often were, but they could not be answered in the same scientifically rigorous way, that is, by a strict method that could be applied to a large number of cases and languages and that could be empirically verified or falsified by the community of scholars. But it does mean that the aspirations and methods of premodern etymology and of its modern successor were very different from one another. Ancient etymological investigation tends to start out in the service of a philosophical and/or religious quest for truth. This is most obviously the case in both

10 The foundational texts in this line were Bopp, *Conjugationssystem*; Rask, *Undersøgelse*; and Grimm, *Deutsche Grammatik*.

11 In this case, Latin preserved the voiceless stops which are reconstructed for PIE, while in Germanic they became fricatives.

12 This point is beautifully made by Philomen Probert in her Gray lectures March 9 and 11, 2021 (University of Cambridge, online event) under the titles “Did the Ancient Greeks Do Historical Linguistics?” and “Did the Romans Do Historical Linguistics?” Her answer is affirmative, as she shows that several ancient sources attest to the observation that language changes over time, as well as to the attempt to describe and understand the changes, sometimes reconstructing previous stages of the language at issue. However, similarities with what historical linguistics does today end here, because, crucially, the method allowing investigators to provide detailed and empirically verifiable or falsifiable answers to whatever question may be asked in this area was not available in antiquity.

Greece and India, the two cultures where this practice emerged first. The following characterization of the fundamental differences between ancient Greek and modern scientific etymology applies as well *mutatis mutandis* to other pre-modern versions of this scholarly practice:

Modern etymology always claims to be looking diachronically for the real attested or postulated historical source of a given word; whereas ancient etymology tends more to search for one word's possible synchronic connections with other words in the language as it is currently used, privileging semantic relations between coexisting lexical units rather than any laws of phonetic change governing the gradual succession of forms over time. The ancient etymologist presupposes language not as a dynamic process of continuous historical development but instead as a stable and coherent system of intelligible and interconnected conceptual meanings; and when he does invoke the past, he usually seems to think of it not as a continuous series of discrete phases passing gradually through the many stages of a coherent evolution but rather as a single radical contrast between some postulated primeval moment and the manifest current state of affairs. Furthermore, modern etymology aims to derive from the examination of real evidence of linguistic usage attested in different historical periods as economical and as broadly applicable as possible a set of mechanisms for explaining language change; and while ancient etymology does tend to respect certain elementary transformative rules like addition, subtraction, and inversion of elements, it derives these rules not from the inspection of linguistic evidence but from general principles of logic, grammar, and rhetoric, applies them haphazardly, and only rarely, if ever, subjects them to analysis and justification by any kind of serious meta-theory. Moreover, ancient Greek etymology tends almost always to search for connections within the confines of the ancient Greek language (Latin etymology, by contrast, is aware that there are at least two languages in the world and often searches for Greek roots for Latin words); whereas modern etymology is oriented no less toward inter-lingual than toward intra-lingual research. Finally, ancient etymology often seeks to establish as many relationships as possible between one word and others, as though it were following the principle of the more relations the better, and does not, like its modern counterpart, attempt to discover the one hypothetical etymology that must be the correct one and that automatically disallows all other proposed ones. In short, ancient etymology attempts, as the name rightly suggests, to demonstrate the truthfulness, in the sense of the appropriateness, of a given term, as it happens by relating

it to other coexisting ones; whereas modern etymology (despite its own etymology) aims not at all at the truthfulness of any particular word but exclusively at its true historical origin.¹³

5 Conclusion

The etymological texts that are translated and introduced in this part offer a few glimpses of the wealth of etymological practices that have been attested from very different times and places. As is explained in the general introduction to this volume, our preference for a strictly chronological arrangement (as far as possible) should help readers focus on similarities and differences among the objects and strategies of pre-modern etymology throughout the world; of course, readers are welcome to use the texts we present in order to explore regional and generic tendencies as well. We include a specimen of an early post-Vedic treatise on the etymological explanation of words in the Veda (2.2); two excerpts from Greek philosophical works, Plato's *Cratylus* (2.3) and Cornutus's *Compendium of Greek Theology* (2.5); selections from three very disparate works in Latin from different historical periods, Varro's *On the Latin Language* (2.4), Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* (2.7), and Hugutio of Pisa's *Derivationes* (2.9); a sample of Zheng Xuan's commentarial etymology (2.6); and extracts from works by Vasubandhu, Sthiramati, and Paramārtha (2.8) that illustrate Buddhist etymologies from first-millennium India and China. These texts illustrate some of the ways that premodern etymology operated and some of the functions it was designed to fulfil. Even the texts that only operate within the terms of a single language may be said to be plurilingual in a larger sense, inasmuch as they postulate earlier stages of the same language. The historical study of prescientific etymology has been stimulated and shaped by the rise of scientific etymology since the nineteenth century; much has already been explored, and much remains to be done.

Abbreviations

Gk. Greek
PIE Proto-Indo European

13 Most, "Allegoresis and Etymology," 65–66.

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An Early Post-Vedic Treatise on the Etymological Explanation of Words

Yāska, Etymology

Johannes Bronkhorst

Nothing much is known about Yāska beyond the fact that he composed the main Indian treatise on etymology, called *Nirukta* (which means *Etymology*). Chronologically he probably belongs to the period between Pāṇini (fourth century BCE), elements of whose grammar he uses, and Patañjali (end of second century BCE).¹ His etymological method proposes analyses of words for which there is no regular grammatical derivation. This method was felt to be particularly useful in interpreting unintelligible words, of which there were many in the ancient Vedic mantras that had been preserved.

Yāska's etymological method draws inspiration from a feature that is frequent in the Vedic Brāhmaṇas. Among other things, these texts bring to light hidden connections between entities on the basis of phonetic similarities between the words that denote them. Superficially, Yāska's *Nirukta* uses a similar procedure, but there are fundamental differences. The *Nirukta* does not bring to light hidden connections between things. It is, unlike the Brāhmaṇas, a "secular" text, much like Pāṇini's grammar. It assumes that regularities similar to those revealed by grammar exist in the case of grammatically opaque words. Etymology extends the realm of grammar and is therefore, in Yāska's words, the "complement of grammar" (*Nirukta* 1.15).

There is no sign of an awareness of plurilingualism in the *Nirukta*. Yāska is aware that different words are used in different circumstances or regions; alternatively, the same words may be used differently. This does not prevent him from deriving nominal words of Old Indo-Aryan from verbal roots of Classical Sanskrit (and vice-versa). He points out that the root *śav* as used among the Kambojas (who inhabited a region in the far northwest of the Indian subcontinent) has a different meaning from that used in Classical Sanskrit. From his perspective, these are all manifestations of one and the same language, presumably the only one he would recognize or be interested in.

¹ Bronkhorst, *A Śabda Reader*, 317.

How does one know whether a given etymological explanation is correct? Meaning is the determining factor. In the case of an unintelligible word, etymological analysis must provide a meaning that fits its context. Yāska deals with unintelligible words that occur in verse-mantras from the *R̥gveda* and makes a point of showing that his proposed etymological explanations provide a satisfactory meaning in that context. Before coming to that, he introduces his *Etymology* with a number of theoretical reflections. The excerpts translated below come from this introduction.

1824

नि. पू. ॐ ओं गं छे प्रायतमः रुः ॐ ३म् समाप्तायः समाप्तातः सव्याख्यातव्यः सन्निमं
 समाप्तायं नि घं व इत्याच क्षते नि घं वः कस्मान्निगमा इमे भवंति छंदोभ्यः समा
 समाहृत्य समाहृत्य समाप्तातास्ते निगंत एवेवंसंतो निगमनात्रिंघं व उच्यंत इत्यौ
 यमन्त्योपि वारुन नादेवस्युः समाहृता भवति यद्वा समाहृता भवंति तद्यान्ये तानि
 चत्वारि पदज्ञातानि नामाख्याते चोपसर्गति याता अतानौ मानि गवंति तत्रैतन्नामा
 ख्यातयोर्लक्ष्यं प्रदि संति भाव प्रधानमाख्यातं सत्त्व प्रधानानि नामानि तच्चैत्रैमे भा
 वप्रधानि भवतः पूर्वा परी श्रुतं भावमाख्याते नाचष्टे प्रजति यच्चौ लुप्यक्रम प्रभृत्यप
 वर्गपर्यंतं सत्त्वश्रुतं सत्त्वनामभिर्ब्रह्मायक्तिरत्युदइति सत्त्वानास्यपदे प्राणो रश्चः उ
 रुधोरुहो गि भवतीति भावस्यास्ते श्रुते ब्रजति तिष्ठतीतीन्द्रियनिर्त्यवचनमो डे वराय

यः ॥ ॥ तत्र च तद्धं नोपपद्यते युगपदुत्पन्नानां वा शब्दानामिदरे तदोपदे शः शा
 ख्यतो योग अत्र्याति सत्त्वात् शब्दस्या एणो यस्त्वा च शब्देन संज्ञाकारां व्यवहारा र्थं लो
 केते वां सत्त्वव्यवदेवनाभिधानं पुरुषविद्यानित्यत्कर्मसंपत्तिर्मत्रो वेदे यद्वा वि
 कारा भवंतीति वा र्थाय लिज्जायते स्विपरिणामते वर्धती य भौयते विनप्रयतीति ज्ञा
 यत इति पूर्वभावस्यादिमाचष्टे नापरभावमाचष्टे न प्रतिषेधाय सौत्पन्नस्य सत्त्वस्याव
 धारणां विपरिणामत इत्यप्रच्यवमानस्य तत्त्वाधिकारं वर्धत इति सांगात्प्रत्ययसंयोगि
 कानां वा र्थानां वर्द्धते विज्जयेनेति वा वर्धते प्रा रौरेणेति वा पधीयत इत्येते नैव व्याख्यातः प्र
 तिलोमं विनप्रयतीत्यपरभावस्यादिमाचष्टे न पूर्वभावमाचष्टे न प्रतिषेधति ॥२॥
 अतो न्ये भावविकारा एते यामेव विकारा भवंतीति हस्माहृते यथा वचनमुद्दि तव्या

FIGURE 2.2.1 Yāska, *Nirukta pūrvaṣaṭka*, ca. 1700–1850, UPenn MS Coll. 390, Item 84, 1^v–2^r
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Sanskrit Text

Excerpted from Yāska, *The Nighaṇṭu and the Nirukta, the Oldest Indian Treatise on Etymology, Philology, and Semantics*, ed. Lakshman Sarup, 2nd repr. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967), 27–28, 29–30, 36–37, 40, 44–47.

- 1.1 *samāmnāyaḥ samāmnātaḥ/ sa vyākhyātavyaḥ/ tam imaṃ samāmnāyaṃ nig-
haṇṭava ity ācakṣate/ ...*
*tadyāni catvāri padajātāni nāmākhyāte copasarganipātās ca tāni imāni bha-
vanti/ tatraitan nāmākhyātayor lakṣaṇaṃ pradiśanti/ bhāvapradhānam ākhyā-
tam/ sattvapradhānāni nāmāni/ tad yatrobhe bhāvapradhāne bhavataḥ pūrvā-
parībhūtaṃ bhāvam ākhyātenācaṣṭe/ vrajati pacatīti/ upakramaprabhṛty apa-
vargaparyantaṃ mūrtaṃ sattvabhūtaṃ sattvanāmabhiḥ/ vrajyā paktir iti/ ada
iti sattvānām upadeśaḥ/ gaur aśvaḥ puruṣo hastīti/ bhavatīti bhāvasya/ āste śete
vrajati tiṣṭhatīti/*
- 1.3 *... na nīrbaddhā upasargā arthān nīrāhur iti śākaṭāyanaḥ/ nāmākhyātayos
tu karmopasaṃyogadyotakā bhavanti/ uccāvacaḥ padārthā bhavantīti gār-
gyaḥ/ ...*
- 1.4 *atha nīpātā uccāvaceṣv artheṣu nīpatanti/ apy upamārthe/ api karmopasaṃ-
grahārthe/ api padapūraṇāḥ/ ...*
- 1.12 *itīmāni catvāri padajātāni anukrāntāni/ nāmākhyāte ca upasarganipātās ca/
tatra nāmāny ākhyātajānīti śākaṭāyano nairuktasamayaś ca/ na sarvānīti
gārgyo vaiyākaraṇānāṃ caike/ tad yatra svarasaṃskārau samarthau prāde-
śikena vikāreṇānītau syātām/ saṃvijñātāni tāni yathā gaur aśvaḥ puruṣo has-
tīti/*
*atha cet sarvāṇy ākhyātajāni nāmāni syuḥ yaḥ kaś ca tat karma kuryāt sar-
vam tat sattvam tathācākṣīran/ yaḥ kaś cādhvānam aśnuvītāśvaḥ sa vacanīyaḥ
syāt/ yat kiṃ cit tṛṇdyāt tṛṇaṃ tat/*
*athāpi cet sarvāṇy ākhyātajāni nāmāni syur yāvadbhir bhāvaiḥ saṃprayu-
jyeta tāvadbhyo nāmadheyapratilambhaḥ syāt/ ...*

English Translation

Translated by Johannes Bronkhorst.

A list of words has been handed down that must be explained. They call this list of words *Nighaṅṭus*. ... 1.1

There are four kinds of words: nominal words, verbs, prepositions, and particles. They declare the definition of nominal words and verbs to be as follows: the verb is about becoming, nominal words are about existing things. Where both are about becoming, one designates a becoming that has sequence by means of a verb, as in “he walks,” “he cooks”; and one designates a becoming that embodies the whole from the beginning to the end by means of nominal words that express an existing thing, as in “going,” “cooking.” The pronoun “that” refers to existing things, as in “cow,” “horse,” “elephant.” The verb “it becomes” refers to becoming, as in “he sits,” “he lies,” “he goes,” “he stands.”

... According to Śākaṭāyana, unconnected prepositions express no meanings. They suggest secondary connections with the activity of nominal words and verbs. According to Gārgya, they have various meanings. ... 1.3

Particles occur (i) in various senses; (ii) also in the sense “comparison”; (iii) also in the sense “bringing together”;² (iv) also as expletives. ...³ 1.4

In this way these four kinds of words have been dealt with: nominal words, verbs, prepositions and particles. 1.12

According to Śākaṭāyana and the general agreement of the Etymologists, all nominal words are derived from verbs. Gārgya and some of the grammarians think that not all of them are thus derived, but only words in which accent and grammatical formation agree with the meaning to be expressed and that have been modified in a way that fits the derivation. Grammatically unanalyzable words such as *go* “cow,” *aśva* “horse,” *puruṣa* “person,” *hastin* “elephant,” are conventional.

[*Objection 1:*] If all nominal words are derived from verbs, the same nominal words should denote any item that carries out the same activity. Anything that would “attain” [*aśnūvīta*] the road should then be called *aśva* “horse.” Anything that “pierces” [*tr̥ndyāt*] should then be called *tr̥ṇa* “grass.”

[*Objection 2:*] If all nominal words are derived from verbs, something should have as many names as there are activities for which it can be used. ...

² The term *karmopasaṅgraha*, here provisionally translated as “bringing together,” is obscure.

³ For this interpretation, see Bronkhorst, “Yāska’s Classification of *nipātas*,” 1.

- 1.13 *athāpi ya eṣāṃ nyāyavān kārmanāmikaḥ saṃskāro yathā cāpi pratītārthāni
syus tathaināny ācakṣīran/ puruṣaṃ puriśaya ity ācakṣīran/ aṣṭety aśvam/ tar-
danam iti tṛṇam/
athāpi niṣpanne 'bhivyāhāre 'bhivicārayanti/ prathanāt pṛthivīty āhuḥ/ ka
enām aprathayiṣyat/ kimādhāraś ceti/
athānanvite 'rthe 'prādeśike vikāre padebhyah padetarārdhānt saṃcaskāra
śākaṭāyanaḥ/ eteḥ kāritaṃ ca yakārādiṃ cāntakaraṇam asteḥ śuddhaṃ ca sa-
kārādiṃ ca/
athāpi sattvapūrvo bhāva ity āhuḥ/ aparasmād bhāvāt pūrvasya pradeśaḥ
nopapadyata iti/
tad etan nopapadyate/*
- 1.14 *yatho hi nu vā etad tad yatra svarasaṃskārau samarthau prādeśikena vikāre-
ṇānvitau syātāṃ sarvaṃ prādeśikam ity evaṃ saty anupāmbha eṣa bhavati/
yatho etad yaḥ kaś ca tat karma kuryāt sarvaṃ tat sattvaṃ tathācakṣīran
iti paśyāmaḥ samānakarmaṇāṃ nāmadheyapratilambham ekeṣāṃ naikeṣāṃ
yathā takṣā parivrājako jīvano bhūmija iti/
etenairottaraḥ pratyuktaḥ/
yatho etad yathā cāpi pratītārthāni syus tathaināny ācakṣīrann iti santy alpa-
prayogāḥ kṛto 'py aikapadikā yathā vratatir damūnā jātya āṭṇāro jāgarūko dar-
vihomīti/*

[*Objection 3:*] Moreover, people should then use words of which the formation is regular, giving rise to nominal words that express the action concerned in such a way that the meaning is understood; they should use *puriśaya* “lying in a city” instead of *puruṣa* “person,” *aṣṭr* “attainer” instead of *aśva* “horse,” *tardana* “means of piercing” instead of *tṛṇa* “grass.” 1.13

[*Objection 4:*] People speculate with regard to fixed expressions and say: the earth is called *pṛthivī* because of spreading [*prathana*]. Who would spread it? And what does it rest on?

[*Objection 5:*] Śākaṭāyana unacceptably formed parts of words out of other words, even where the meaning of the word is not in agreement with its parts and the modification does not fit regular grammatical derivation. To derive the word *satya*, he took as final part the causative form of the root *i*, that is, *āya*, and of that the portion that begins with *y*, that is, *ya*, and the pure form of *as*, that is, *ast*, putting the *s* at the beginning. [This gives *sat+ya = satya*]

[*Objection 6:*] Finally, it is said that an activity presupposes an entity that can be active. The derivation of the name of an earlier entity from its subsequent activity is not appropriate.

All this is not correct.

There is no disagreement that all those words in which accent and grammatical formation agree with the meaning to be expressed and that have been modified in a way that fits regular derivation are correctly derived by grammar. 1.14

[*Response 1:*] With regard to the objection that if all nominal words are derived from verbs, the same nominal words should denote any item that carries out the same activity, we see that certain items that carry out the same activity get the same name, others don't. Examples of the former are “carpenter” [*takṣan*] and “wanderer” [*parivrājaka*], which refer to all those engaged in those activities; an example of the latter is *bhūmija*, “earth-born,” which covers only certain items that are born from the earth, not all.

[*Response 2:*] This also answers objection 2.

[*Response 3:*] As to the objection that people should use words in such a way that the meaning is understood, there are indeed words, of rare occurrence, which, though ending in primary grammatical suffixes, must be treated as grammatically unanalyzable words (so that their grammatical formation does not elucidate their meaning).⁴

4 For this interpretation, see Bronkhorst, “Nirukta, Uṇādi Sūtra, and Aṣṭādhyāyī,” 5.

*yatho etan niṣpanne 'bhivṃyāhāre 'bhivicārayantīti bhavati hi niṣpanne 'bhivṃyā-
hāre yogaparīṣṭiḥ/ prathanāt pṛthivīty āhuḥ/ ka enām aprathayiṣyat kimādhā-
raś ceti/ atha vai darśanena pṛthuḥ/ aprathitā ced apy anyaiḥ/ athāpy evaṃ
sarva eva dṛṣṭāpravādā upālabhyante/*

*yatho etat padebhyaḥ padetarārdhānt saṃcaskāra iti yo 'nanvite 'rthe saṃ-
caskāra sa tena garhyaḥ saiṣā puruṣaḥgarhā na śāstragarhā/*

*yatho etad aparasmād bhāvāt pūrvasya pradēśaḥ nopapadyata iti paśyāmaḥ
pūrvotpannānāṃ sattvānām aparasmād bhāvān nāmadheyapratilambham
ekeṣāṃ naikeṣāṃ/ ...*

1.15 *athāpy idam antareṇa mantreṣu arthapratyayo na vidyate/ artham apratiy-
ato nātyantaṃ svarasaṃskāroddēśaḥ/*

tad idaṃ vidyāsthānaṃ vyākaraṇasya kārtsnyam/ svārthasādhaḥ ca/ ...

1.18 *sthānur ayaṃ bhārahāraḥ kilābhūd adhītya vedaṃ na vijānāti yo 'rtham/*

yo 'rthajña it sakalaṃ bhadram aśnute nākam eti jñānavidhūtapāpmā/

yad grhītam avijñātaṃ nigadenaiva śabdyate /

anagnāv iva śuṣkaidho na taj jvalati karhi cit / ...

2.1–3 *atha nirvacanam/ tad yeṣu padeṣu svarasaṃskārau samarthau pradēśikena
vikāreṇānvītau syātāṃ tathā tāni nirbrūyāt/ athānanvite 'rthe 'pradēśike vikāre
'rthanityaḥ parīkṣeta/ kena cid vṛttisāmānyena/ avidyamāne sāmānye 'py akṣar-
avarṇasāmānyān nirbrūyāt/ na tv eva na nirbrūyāt/ na saṃskāram ādriyeta/ ...
yathārthaṃ vibhaktiḥ sannamayet/ ... athāpi bhāṣikebhyo dhātubhyo naigamāḥ
kr̥to bhāṣyante/ ... athāpi naigamebhyo bhāṣikāḥ/ ... athāpi prakṛtaya evaikeṣu
bhāṣyante/ vikṛtaya ekeṣu/ śavatir gatikarmā kaṃbojeṣv eva bhāṣyate/ ...*

[*Response 4:*] Concerning the objection that people speculate with regard to fixed expressions: the examination of rules cannot but concern fixed expressions. They say: the earth is called *prthivī* because of spreading [*prathana*]. Who would spread it? And what does it rest on? Well, it is clearly spread out, even if others did not spread it out. What is more, if we proceed like you, all statements about what can be seen become objects of disagreement.

[*Response 5:*] Regarding the objection that Śākāṭyāna unacceptably formed parts of words out of other words: he who forms a word even though its meaning is not in agreement with its parts, he should be blamed for that; the blame rests with the person, not with the science of Etymology.

[*Response 6:*] With regard to the objection that the derivation of the name of an earlier entity from its subsequent activity is not appropriate: we see cases where entities are named after activities they perform after they have come into being; other cases are not like that. ...⁵

Moreover, without this there is no understanding of the meaning of mantras. And for someone who does not understand the meaning there will not be ascertainment of accent and grammatical formation. 1.15

This science is the complement of grammar and a means towards one's goal.

...

The man who having studied the Veda does not know its meaning is a blockhead, the bearer of a burden. He who knows its meaning attains what is good and goes to heaven, his sins dispelled by knowledge. What has been grasped but not understood is mere words. Like dry fuel where there is no fire, it will never burn ... 1.18

We now turn to etymology. Words in which accent and grammatical formation agree with the meaning to be expressed and that have been modified in a way that fits the derivation, such words should be explained in agreement with their regular grammatical derivation. But if the meaning is not accompanied by the right accent and formation and the modification is not such as fits a grammatical derivation, in such cases one should look for a derivation based on the meaning and explain the word on the basis of some similarity of behavior in undergoing a phonetic change, that is, similarity with a phonetic change accepted by the grammarians for the explanation of other forms in grammar. If not even such similarity is found, one should explain the word on the basis of similarity in a syllable or in a single sound. But one should not abstain from providing an etymological explanation. In such cases one should not heed the 2.1–3

⁵ This passage also occurs in Bronkhorst, *A Śabda Reader*, 74–76.

*evam ekapadāni nirbrūyāt/ atha taddhitasamāseṣv ekaparvasu vānekaparvasu ca pūrvam pūrvam aparam aparaṃ pravibhajya nirbrūyāt/ ...
 naikapadāni nirbrūyāt/ nāvaiyākaraṇāya/ nānupasannāya/ anidaṃvide vā/
 nityaṃ hy avijñātur vijñāne 'sūyā/*

grammatical formation. ... The divisions of words into syllables and individual sounds should be interpreted according to the sense of the words to be derived. ... Vedic primary nouns are derived from roots of Classical Sanskrit. ... And words of Classical Sanskrit from Vedic roots. ... Only primary forms are used among certain speakers; only secondary forms among others: the verb *śav* in the sense of “go” is only used among the Kambojas. ... This way one should explain grammatically unanalyzed words. In the case of secondary formations and compounds that consist of one or several parts, one should explain them having first divided them into earlier and later portions. ... One should not explain grammatically unanalyzed words to a non-grammarian, or to a non-resident pupil, or to someone who is not conversant with it. For the scorn of the ignorant for knowledge is eternal.⁶

⁶ Part of this passage also occurs in Bronkhorst, *A Śabda Reader*, 73.

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A 4th-Century BCE Greek Philosophical Analysis of the Methods and Limits of Etymology

Plato, Cratylus

Glenn W. Most

Plato's *Cratylus* provides the longest continuous analysis of the practice and theory of etymology, and the most philosophically profound one, that has survived from ancient Greece. But the dialogue is obscure in many regards and modern scholars have disagreed vigorously about its meaning and purpose.

The central topic of the dialogue (and indeed its subtitle in the manuscripts) is “correctness of names,” *orthotēs onomatōn* (also referred to as *orthoepēia*). This was a topic of considerable importance in the intellectual life of late fifth century BCE Athens, as we know from numerous passages from philosophers like Democritus and from intellectuals like Protagoras, Prodicus, and Hippias (often referred to, then and now, as “sophists”), and from an amusing parody in Aristophanes's *Clouds*.¹ Nowadays linguistic correctness is generally understood as a matter of avoiding errors of orthography, lexical choice, and syntax with respect to the established rules of a given natural language. But the participants in these Greek debates had something else in mind: the relation by which words, especially (but not only) proper names and other kinds of nouns—*orthotēs onomatōn* is literally “correctness of names,” but *onoma* in Greek has a much wider range of reference than the English “name,” which designates an individual being, and can include other kinds of nouns that refer to classes of beings and entities, and indeed other kinds of words such as verbs and even, rarely, prepositions²—designated the realities to which they corresponded. Did words indicate things correctly? And if they did, how was this to be explained?

1 The relevant passages can be found in Laks and Most, *Early Greek Philosophy*: for Democritus as ATOM. D2[XI.1] in *ibid.*, 7: 66–67; for Protagoras as PROT. D21 and D22 in *ibid.*, 8: 48–49; for Prodicus as PROD. D5 in *ibid.*, 8: 428–429; for Hippias as HIPPIAS D15 in *ibid.*, 8: 537–539; and for Aristophanes as DRAM. T19c in *ibid.*, 9: 288–293.

This topic is also discussed in numerous other contemporary texts, especially tragedy, historiography, and rhetoric.

2 The terminological distinction between *onoma* as noun and *rēma* as verb is later than Plato.

As the dialogue begins, the proponents of two opposing extreme positions have reached an impasse; in the text provided here as Excerpt I, one of them, Hermogenes, briefly states both of their views. Both Hermogenes (a prominent and deeply loyal friend of Socrates) and Cratylus (a notoriously extreme follower of Heraclitus's doctrine of flux and reportedly an important early influence on Plato) claim that there is such a thing as correctness of words—indeed, they seem to believe not only that there are at least some names that are correct, but even that a name that is not correct is in a certain sense not really a name—but they disagree profoundly about why it is exactly that correct names really are correct. Hermogenes claims that there is no further source and criterion for a word's correctness than the fact that the community of the people who use it happen to have agreed that this is the word they will use for that thing, while Cratylus maintains that if a word is correct it is correct by nature, independently of any merely human convention. We can recognize in their disagreement the application to the specific question of linguistic correctness of the larger opposition between *nomos* (convention) and *physis* (nature) which was one of the fundamental commonplaces of Greek thought at the time.³ It is worth noting that Hermogenes recognizes as an acceptable possible consequence of his conventionalist position that a valid name can be imposed not only by a community but even by an individual (in that case it is valid for him as his own private name for that thing, different from the same thing's publicly agreed name), while Cratylus does not consider that his own naturalistic view is invalidated by the obvious fact of the multiplicity of different given languages, Greek and barbarian (for in each language, words that are correct are correct by nature).

Socrates begins his own intervention into this debate by defending Cratylus's naturalism against Hermogenes's conventionalism, using a series of arguments drawn from the handicrafts and illustrating the nature of correct names on the basis of various analogies with these activities. As the passages in Excerpt II show, Socrates, like both his interlocutors, posits that language originated in the imposition of names by a primeval name-giver or legislator—it is not until Epicurus, a century later, that the theory that language had a purely natural, that is, non-human, origin is first attested (see Chapter 1.4). (It is crucial that the question of the natural correctness of names not be confused with the question of the natural origin of names.) Socrates brings Hermogenes to agree that giving names is a skill or handicraft just like other ones such as weaving, and that, like these, it must make use of the appropriate tools, which in its case are the names,

3 See in general Heinemann, *Nomos und Physis*.

if it is to be performed successfully: names are tools that impart instruction by separating being, just as a shuttle is a tool that helps create a textile by separating threads. A good tool needs to be properly made, and in the case of a name its suitability means that it represents properly the Form or essence that it designates. If it can do so, this must be because the name-giver was guided by expert knowledge of reality and therefore chose names that were correct by nature. And just as a craftsman can make the same tool out of different materials, so too the name-giver in each one of a number of different languages can make the correct name for each language out of different sounds.

This name-giver is of course merely a hypothesis, adopted by all three interlocutors not because they have any real evidence for his existence but presumably because they know of no better hypothesis. However, for the suitability of correct names Socrates must supply proof if his arguments are to be believed; and the proof he supplies takes the form of etymologies. These etymologies—which take up two-thirds of the length of the whole dialogue—are intended to demonstrate, in the case of a very large number of terms, that these can all be analyzed in such a way as to show that, properly understood, they communicate correct information about their referents. Socrates begins with the names found in Homer's epics, then goes on to the names of other gods and proceeds to terms associated with physics, ethics, logic, and ontology, which he interprets as representing everything as being in flux. He concludes by proposing that there are basic names too, out of the combination of which the longer ones are constituted, and that these basic names themselves derive their own meaning from primary sounds (i.e., the individual letters of the Greek alphabet), which imitate their referents acoustically. At the end of this section, Socrates presents the etymological lexicon he has just produced to Cratylus as a gift that confirms the naturalist position, and Cratylus accepts it gratefully.

So etymologies perform an essential evidentiary function in Socrates's argument against Hermogenes's conventionalist view of linguistic correctness. But what exactly is an etymology for Socrates and his interlocutors? The passages in Excerpt III give a small sample out of the very many that Socrates supplies. They show that etymological analysis, in this dialogue, connects the sounds of a word to a longer group of words (usually a phrase) that shares some of these sounds and that expresses a unified meaning which can be asserted to be the true signification of the word itself. Thus the etymological procedure unpacks and expands the word's sounds into a brief definition of that same word; the etymology itself is a definition that has been encapsulated within the word, in Sedley's term an "encoded description" (Sedley 2003); and if the name-giver has chosen the name wisely, that definition or description will be correct. The etymology is not the historical root, present in an earlier phase of the lan-

guage or in an earlier language, which has gradually developed into the form that is present now. Instead, the etymology is, etymologically, an *etymo-logia* (in Greek, a “true discourse”), the truth contained in the word. Sometimes that etymology has been corrupted over time by people’s misunderstandings so that it now takes a philosophical expert to recognize in its present distorted form the message that the original name-giver had enclosed within it; but such corruption is haphazard and follows no laws of historical development. Finally, there are no strict rules that govern the associations between a word and its etymology: just about any likeness, however partial and arbitrary, will do. Some readers have reacted to the brilliant inventiveness of Socrates’s etymologies with astonished admiration, others with exasperated irritation. Hermogenes himself, at the end of Excerpt 111, politely expresses a certain disapproving incredulity (though of course he knows that it is his own position that these etymologies are being used in order to undermine).

So too in modern times, Socrates’s profusion of seemingly capricious etymologies has perplexed many interpreters. For long, the dialogue was taken to be merely comic, intended as a parody or caricature of etymological practices that Plato was thought to have found absurd (principally because his modern interpreters did).⁴ But etymology recurs elsewhere as a serious instrument of philosophical analysis in Plato’s dialogues and in the philosophical writings of Plato’s greatest student, Aristotle. And it would be odd for an author to devote two-thirds of a dialogue to a practice he considered useless. More recent scholarship⁵ has argued instead that Socrates takes etymology seriously in general as a practice possessing philosophical dignity (which is not to say that every single etymology offered in the dialogue is supposed to be taken at face value).

But at the end of this dialogue, Socrates ends up questioning fundamentally the philosophical value of the etymological gift he has presented to Cratylus. Having dismantled Hermogenes’s conventionalist position in the first part of the dialogue, Socrates goes on to refute Cratylus’s naturalist view in its conclusion. Etymologies turn out after all, for Socrates, not to be the best way to conduct philosophy. For their truthfulness depends upon the degree to which

4 What may be called the vulgate interpretation, which dominated studies of *Cratylus* before Sedley (*Plato’s “Cratylus”*) considered Socrates’s (and by implication Plato’s) attitude towards naturalism as being not only humorous (there are, in any case, a number of evident moments of humor in the dialogue) but as finally negative, so that Socrates’s (and hence Plato’s) position would in the end be conventionalist, or at most some form of compromise or mediation between conventionalism and naturalism. For a recent contribution which considers the question undecidable, see Trabattoni, *Essays on Plato’s Epistemology*, 122.

5 E.g., Sedley, *Plato’s “Cratylus”*; Ademollo, *The “Cratylus” of Plato*.

the name-giver himself knew the truth of the matters he sought to communicate by their means; and this is something that we cannot know from the etymologies themselves, but only from philosophical investigation independently of etymologies. If etymologies cannot tell us on their own whether they are true or false, but only philosophy can, then clearly we must do philosophy first, and perhaps exclusively; and only afterwards, should we care to do so, might we consult etymologies in order to seek in them further corroboration from elsewhere of the truths that philosophy has taught us by itself. In the present case, Socrates is convinced that the doctrine that everything is in flux, which is encoded in many of the etymologies he discusses, is completely mistaken, as it is certainly false at least with regard to the Forms, which are permanent and unchanging. So the etymologies, properly analyzed, do communicate correctly the philosophical understanding possessed by the name-giver; but it turns out that the name-giver might have been deeply mistaken about some of the most important matters. If, as some recent scholars have suggested,⁶ Cratylus himself was persuaded by Socrates's gift to become a radical exponent of the doctrine of constant flux, then he too must have completely misunderstood this dialogue.

6 Especially Sedley, *Plato's "Cratylus"*; Ademollo, *The "Cratylus" of Plato*.

Greek Text

Excerpt I: 383A–B, 384C–D

ΕΡΜΟΓΕΝΗΣ.

Κρατύλος φησὶν ὅδε, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὀνόματος ὀρθότητα εἶναι ἐκάστω τῶν ὄντων φύσει πεφυκυῖαν, καὶ οὐ τοῦτο εἶναι ὄνομα ὃ ἂν τινες ξυνημέμενοι καλεῖν καλώσι, τῆς αὐτῶν φωνῆς μόριον ἐπιφθειγγόμενοι, ἀλλὰ ὀρθότητά τινα τῶν ὀνομάτων πεφυκέναι καὶ Ἑλλησι καὶ βαρβάροις τὴν αὐτὴν ἄπασιν. ἐρωτῶ οὖν αὐτὸν ἐγώ, εἰ αὐτῷ Κρατύλος τῇ ἀληθείᾳ ὄνομα· ὃ δὲ ὁμολογεῖ. “τί δὲ Σωκράτει;” ἔφην. “Σωκράτης,” ἢ δ’ ὅς. ...

ΕΡΜΟΓΕΝΗΣ.

Καὶ μὴν ἔγωγε, ὦ Σώκρατες, πολλάκις δὴ καὶ τούτῳ διαλεχθεὶς καὶ ἄλλοις πολλοῖς, οὐ δύναμαι πεισθῆναι ὡς ἄλλη τις ὀρθότης ὀνόματος ἢ ξυνηθήκη καὶ ὁμολογία. ἐμοὶ γὰρ δοκεῖ, ὅ τι ἂν τίς τῷ θῆται ὄνομα, τοῦτο εἶναι τὸ ὀρθόν· καὶ ἂν αὐθις γε ἕτερον μεταθῆται, ἐκεῖνο δὲ μηκέτι καλῆ, οὐδὲν ἦττον τὸ ὕστερον ὀρθῶς ἔχειν τοῦ προτέρου, ὡσπερ τοῖς οἰκέταις ἡμεῖς μετατιθέμεθα· οὐ γὰρ φύσει ἐκάστω πεφυκέναι ὄνομα οὐδὲν οὐδενί, ἀλλὰ νόμῳ καὶ ἔθει τῶν ἐθισάντων τε καὶ καλούντων.

Excerpt II: 389A, 389D–390A

ΣΩΚΡΑΤΗΣ.

Οὐκ ἄρα παντὸς ἀνδρός, ὦ Ἐρμόγενης, ὄνομα θέσθαι, ἀλλὰ τινος ὀνοματουργοῦ· οὗτος δ’ ἐστίν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ὁ νομοθέτης, ὃς δὴ τῶν δημιουργῶν σπανιώτατος ἐν ἀνθρώποις γίγνεται. ...

ΣΩΚΡΑΤΗΣ.

Ἄρ’ οὖν, ὦ βέλτιστε, καὶ τὸ ἐκάστω φύσει πεφυκὸς ὄνομα τὸν νομοθέτην ἐκείνον εἰς τοὺς φθόγγους καὶ τὰς συλλαβὰς δεῖ ἐπίστασθαι τιθέναι, καὶ βλέποντα πρὸς αὐτὸ ἐκεῖνο ὃ ἔστιν ὄνομα, πάντα τὰ ὀνόματα ποιεῖν τε καὶ τίθεσθαι, εἰ μέλλει κύριος εἶναι ὀνομάτων θέτης; εἰ δὲ μὴ εἰς τὰς αὐτὰς συλλαβὰς ἕκαστος ὁ νομοθέτης τίθησιν, οὐδὲν δεῖ τοῦτο ἀγνοεῖν· οὐδὲ γὰρ εἰς τὸν αὐτὸν σίδηρον ἄπας χαλκεὺς τίθησιν, τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἕνεκα ποιῶν τὸ αὐτὸ ὄργανον· ἀλλ’ ὅμως, ἕως ἂν τὴν αὐτὴν ἰδέαν ἀποδιδῶ, ἐάντε ἐν ἄλλῳ σιδήρῳ, ὅμως ὀρθῶς ἔχει τὸ ὄργανον, ἐάντε ἐνθάδε ἐάντε ἐν βαρβάροις τις ποιῆ. ἢ γάρ;

7 On the ambiguity of the Greek term *onoma*, which can mean “name,” “noun,” and “word,” see the introduction above.

English Translation by Glenn W. Most

Excerpt I: 383A–B, 384C–D

HERMOGENES:

Dear Socrates, Cratylus here says that the correctness of a name⁷ belongs by nature to everything that exists, and that a name is not whatever some people call it who have agreed to call it, applying some piece of their own voice which they utter, but rather a correctness of names exists by nature both for Greeks and for barbarians, the same for all. So I ask him whether Cratylus is his name in truth; and he says that it is. “And what about Socrates?” I ask. “Socrates,” he says. ...

HERMOGENES:

As for myself, dear Socrates, although I have often conversed with this man [i.e., Cratylus] and with many others, I am not able to persuade myself that there is any other correctness of a name than convention and agreement. For I think that whatever name someone might apply to something, this is the right one; and if you apply instead a different one and no longer call it that other one, then the later one is not at all less correct than the earlier one was, just as we change the names of our household slaves; for it is not by nature that any name belongs to any thing, but by the norm and custom of those who have established this custom and who call it this.

Excerpt II: 389A, 389D–390A

SOCRATES:

Then, dear Hermogenes, it is not for every man to establish a name, but only for someone who is a name-crafter; and he, as it appears, is the lawgiver, who out of all the craftsmen among men is the rarest. ...

SOCRATES:

So then, my dear friend [i.e., Hermogenes], must not that lawgiver know as well how to establish in sounds and syllables the name that is suited by nature for each natural object? And must he not have a view towards what is the name in itself when he invents and establishes all the names, if he wants to be an authoritative establisher of names? And if each lawgiver does not establish it [i.e., the name in itself] in the same syllables, then nonetheless we should not forget it: for neither does every blacksmith establish it in the same iron, though they are making the same tool for the same purpose; but all the same, as long as they are reproducing the same idea, even if in a different iron, nonetheless the tool is correct, whether someone makes it here or in barbarian countries. Is that not so?

ΕΡΜ.

Πάνυ γε.

ΣΩ.

Οὐκοῦν οὕτως ἀξιώσεις καὶ τὸν νομοθέτην τὸν τε ἐνθάδε καὶ τὸν ἐν τοῖς βαρβάροις, ἕως ἂν τὸ τοῦ ὀνόματος εἶδος ἀποδιδῶ τὸ προσήκον ἐκάστῳ ἐν ὁποιασοῦν συλλαβαίς, οὐδὲν χεῖρω νομοθέτην εἶναι τὸν ἐνθάδε ἢ τὸν ὅπουοῦν ἄλλοθι;

ΕΡΜ.

Πάνυ γε.

Excerpt III: 394A–C, 394E–396D

ΣΩΚΡΑΤΗΣ.

... ποικίλλειν δὲ ἔξεστι ταῖς συλλαβαίς, ὥστε δόξαι ἂν τῷ ἰδιωτικῶς ἔχοντι ἕτερα εἶναι ἀλλήλων τὰ αὐτὰ ὄντα· ὥσπερ ἡμῖν τὰ τῶν ἰατρῶν φάρμακα χρώμασιν ἢ ὁσμαῖς πεποικιλμένα ἄλλα φαίνεται τὰ αὐτὰ ὄντα, τῷ δέ γε ἰατρῷ, ἅτε τὴν δύνάμιν τῶν φαρμάκων σκοπούμενῳ, τὰ αὐτὰ φαίνεται, καὶ οὐκ ἐκπλήττεται ὑπὸ τῶν προσόντων. οὕτω δὲ ἴσως καὶ ὁ ἐπιστάμενος περὶ ὀνομάτων τὴν δύνάμιν αὐτῶν σκοπεῖ, καὶ οὐκ ἐκπλήττεται εἰ τι πρόσκειται γράμμα ἢ μετάκειται ἢ ἀφήρηται, ἢ καὶ ἐν ἄλλοις παντάπασιν γράμμασιν ἐστὶν ἢ τοῦ ὀνόματος δύνάμις. ὥσπερ ὁ νῦν δὴ ἐλέγομεν, Ἀστυάναξ τε καὶ Ἐκτωρ οὐδὲν τῶν αὐτῶν γραμμάτων ἔχει πλὴν τοῦ τ, ἀλλ' ὅμως ταῦτόν σημαίνει. καὶ Ἀρχέπολις γε τῶν μὲν γραμμάτων τί ἐπικοινωνεῖ; δηλοῖ δὲ ὅμως τὸ αὐτό· καὶ ἄλλα πολλά ἐστὶν, ἃ οὐδὲν ἀλλ' ἢ βασιλέα σημαίνει· ...

ΣΩΚΡΑΤΗΣ.

Ὡσπερ γε καὶ ὁ Ὀρέστης, ὦ Ἐρμόγενης, κινδυνεῖει ὀρθῶς ἔχειν, εἴτε τις τύχη ἔθετο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα εἴτε καὶ ποιητῆς τις, τὸ θηριώδες τῆς φύσεως καὶ τὸ ἄγριον αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ὀρεινὸν ἐνδεικνύμενος τῷ ὀνόματι.

ΕΡΜΟΓΕΝΗΣ.

Φαίνεται οὕτως, ὦ Σώκρατες.

ΣΩΚΡΑΤΗΣ.

Ἦοικεν δέ γε καὶ τῷ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ κατὰ φύσιν τὸ ὄνομα εἶναι.

ΕΡΜΟΓΕΝΗΣ.

Φαίνεται.

8 The term *dunamis* in Greek denotes the efficacy or power of something; applied to a word, it signifies its meaning.

HERMOGENES:

Yes indeed.

SOCRATES:

So then in this way you will consider that the lawgiver here and the one in barbarian countries—as long as he reproduces the appropriate form of the name for each thing, in whatever syllables—is no worse a lawgiver, the one here, than the one anywhere else?

HERMOGENES:

Yes indeed.

Excerpt III: 394A–C, 394E–396D

SOCRATES:

... It is permissible to create variety in the syllables, so that a non-expert would think that names that are really the same were different from one another—just as doctors' medicines, when they have been made to vary in their colors or smells, seem to us to be different although they are really the same, whereas to the doctor who considers the medicines' effectiveness [*dunamis*]⁸ they seem to be the same, and he is not confused by what has been added. In the same way, perhaps so too the man who knows about names considers their effectiveness [*dunamis*] and is not confused if some letter is added or transposed or removed, or even if the effectiveness [*dunamis*] of the name resides in letters that are completely different. So that as we were saying just now [cf. 393A], "Astyanax" [Lord of the city] and "Hector" [Holder] do not have any of the same letters except for *t*, but nonetheless they signify the same thing [i.e., king]. And what letters does "Archeopolis" [Ruler of the city] have in common with them? But all the same it means the same thing. And there are many other names that signify nothing other than "king." ...

SOCRATES:

Just as the name "Orestes" [Mountain dweller] too, dear Hermogenes, is surely correct, whether it was some chance that made this name for him or some poet, indicating by this name the savagery and fierceness and mountainous quality of his nature.

HERMOGENES:

It seems that way, dear Socrates.

SOCRATES:

And it seems that his father's name too belongs to him according to his nature.

HERMOGENES:

It appears so.

ΣΩΚΡΑΤΗΣ.

Κινδυνεύει γὰρ τοιοῦτός τις εἶναι ὁ Ἀγαμέμνων, οἷος ἂν δόξειεν αὐτῷ διαπονεῖσθαι καὶ καρτερεῖν, τέλος ἐπιτιθεῖς τοῖς δόξασι δι' ἀρετήν. σημεῖον δὲ αὐτοῦ ἡ ἐν Τροίᾳ μονή τοῦ πλῆθους τε καὶ καρτερία. ὅτι οὖν ἀγαστός κατὰ τὴν ἐπιμονὴν οὗτος ὁ ἀνὴρ, ἐσημαίνει τὸ ὄνομα ὁ Ἀγαμέμνων. ἴσως δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἄτρεϋς ὀρθῶς ἔχει. ὁ τε γὰρ τοῦ Χρυσίππου αὐτῷ φόνος καὶ ἅ πρὸς τὸν Θυέστην ὡς ὠμὰ διεπράττετο, πάντα ταῦτα ζημιώδη καὶ ἀτηρὰ πρὸς ἀρετήν· ἡ οὖν τοῦ ὀνόματος ἐπωνυμία μικρὸν παρακλίνει καὶ ἐπικεκάλυπται, ὥστε μὴ πᾶσι δηλοῦν τὴν φύσιν τοῦ ἀνδρός· τοῖς δ' ἐπαῖουσι περὶ ὀνομάτων ἱκανῶς δηλοῖ ὁ βούλεται ὁ Ἄτρεϋς. καὶ γὰρ κατὰ τὸ ἀτειρές καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἄτρεστον καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἀτηρὸν πανταχῇ ὀρθῶς αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα κεῖται. δοκεῖ δὲ μοι καὶ τῷ Πέλοπι τὸ ὄνομα ἐμμέτρως κεῖσθαι· σημαίνει γὰρ τοῦτο τὸ ὄνομα τὸν τὰ ἐγγὺς ὄρωντα.

ΕΡΜΟΓΕΝΗΣ.

Πῶς δὴ;

ΣΩΚΡΑΤΗΣ.

Οἶόν που καὶ κατ' ἐκείνου λέγεται τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἐν τῷ τοῦ Μυρτίλου φόνῳ οὐδὲν οἶου τε γενέσθαι προνοηθῆναι οὐδὲ προιδεῖν τῶν πόρρω τῶν εἰς τὸ πᾶν γένος, ὄσης αὐτὸ δυστυχίας ἐνεπίμπλη, τὸ ἐγγὺς μόνον ὀρών καὶ τὸ παραχρῆμα—τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶ πέλας—ἡνίκα προεθυμεῖτο λαβεῖν παντὶ τρόπῳ τὸν τῆς Ἴπποδαμείας γάμον. τῷ δὲ Ταντάλῳ καὶ πᾶς ἂν ἡγήσαιο τοῦνομα ὀρθῶς καὶ κατὰ φύσιν τεθῆναι, εἰ ἀληθῆ τὰ περὶ αὐτὸν λεγόμενα.

ΕΡΜΟΓΕΝΗΣ.

Τὰ ποῖα ταῦτα;

ΣΩΚΡΑΤΗΣ.

Ἄ τέ που ἔτι ζῶντι δυστυχήματα ἐγένετο πολλὰ καὶ δεινά, ὧν καὶ τέλος ἡ πατρὶς αὐτοῦ ὅλη ἀνετράπετο, καὶ τελευτήσαντι ἐν Ἄιδου ἡ ὑπὲρ τῆς κεφαλῆς τοῦ λίθου ταλαντεία θαυμαστῶς ὡς σύμφωνος τῷ ὀνόματι· καὶ ἀτεχνῶς ἔοικεν, ὥσπερ ἂν εἴ τις βουλόμενος ταλάντατον ὀνομάσαι ἀποκρυπτόμενος ὀνομάσειε καὶ εἴποι ἂντ' ἐκείνου Τάνταλον, τοιοῦτόν τι καὶ τούτῳ τὸ ὄνομα ἔοικεν ἐκπορίσαι ἢ τύχη τῆς φήμης. φαίνεται δὲ καὶ τῷ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ λεγομένῳ τῷ Διὶ παγκάλως τὸ ὄνομα κεῖσθαι· ἔστι δὲ οὐ ῥᾶδιον κατανοῆσαι. ἀτεχνῶς γὰρ ἐστὶν οἶον λόγος τὸ τοῦ Διὸς ὄνομα· διελόντες δὲ αὐτὸ διχῆ οἱ μὲν τῷ ἐτέρῳ μέρει, οἱ δὲ τῷ ἐτέρῳ χρώμεθα· οἱ μὲν γὰρ Ζῆνα, οἱ δὲ Δία καλοῦσιν· συντιθέμενα δ' εἰς ἓν δηλοῖ τὴν φύσιν τοῦ θεοῦ, ὃ δὴ προσῆκειν φασὲν ὀνόματι οἴῳ τε εἶναι ἀπεργάζεσθαι. οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἡμῖν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις πᾶσιν ὅστις ἐστὶν αἴτιος μᾶλλον τοῦ ζῆν ἢ ὁ ἄρχων τε καὶ βασιλεὺς τῶν πάντων. συμβαίνει οὖν ὀρθῶς ὀνομάζεσθαι οὗτος ὁ θεὸς εἶναι, δι' ὃν ζῆν αἰεῖ

9 The manuscripts continue this sentence as “for this name signifies that someone who sees what is near is worthy of this appellation.” Most editors omit the last words as an interpolation.

SOCRATES:

For “Agamemnon” [Admirable in remaining] is surely the sort of person who would decide to labor until the very end and to persist, setting a goal to his decisions by means of his virtue. And a sign of this is the remaining of his army in Troy and their persistence. So the name “Agamemnon” signifies that this man was admirable with regard to remaining. And perhaps the name “Atreus” is correct too: for his murder of Chrysippus and the brutal acts he performed against Thyestes were all ruinous and baneful [*atêra*] with regard to his virtue. Well, the derived form [*epônumia*] of his name is slightly deflected and concealed, so that it does not make the man’s nature clear to everyone. But to those who have some understanding about names it makes clear enough what “Atreus” means: for his name is applied to him correctly in every way, with regard to his unyieldingness [*ateires*] and fearlessness [*atreston*] and banefulness [*atêron*]. And I think that Pelops’ name too is applied to him appropriately: for this name signifies someone who sees what is near at hand.⁹

HERMOGENES:

How so?

SOCRATES:

Since it is said about that man in the case of his murder of Myrtilus that he was not capable of thinking ahead or of seeing ahead the more distant effects upon his whole lineage, with how much misfortune it would be completely filled, since he saw only what was near at hand and present—and this is near [*pelas*]¹⁰—when he desired to acquire marriage with Hippodameia in any way possible. And as for Tantalus, anyone would suppose that his name had been established correctly and according to nature, if what is said about him is true.

HERMOGENES:

And what is that?

SOCRATES:

The many terrible misfortunes that occurred to him while he was still alive, including in the end that his whole fatherland was overthrown, and after he died, in Hades, the balancing [*talanteia*] of the stone over his head, in marvelous agreement with his name; and it really seems as if someone who wanted to call him “most miserable” [*talantaton*] called him this in a concealed way and said “Tantalus” instead of that. For him too the chance transformations of oral tradition seem to have turned the name into something like this. And the name of his father too, who is said to be Zeus [*Diî*], seems to have been applied very well; but it is not easy to understand. For the name of Zeus [*Dios*] is really just like a phrase: we divide it into two parts and some

πάσι τοῖς ζώσιν ὑπάρχει. διείληπται δὲ δίχα, ὥσπερ λέγω, ἐν ὄν τὸ ὄνομα, τῷ Διὶ καὶ τῷ Ζηνί. τοῦτον δὲ Κρόνου υἱὸν εἶναι ὑβριστικὸν μὲν ἂν τις δόξειεν εἶναι ἀκούσαντι ἐξαίφνης, εὐλογον δὲ μεγάλης τινὸς διανοίας ἔκγονον εἶναι τὸν Δία· κάρων γὰρ σημαίνει οὐ παῖδα, ἀλλὰ τὸ καθαρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκήρατον τοῦ νοῦ. ἔστι δὲ οὗτος Οὐρανοῦ υἱός, ὡς λόγος· ἢ δὲ αὖ ἐς τὸ ἄνω ὄψις καλῶς ἔχει τοῦτο τὸ ὄνομα καλεῖσθαι, οὐρανία, ὀρώσα τὰ ἄνω, ὅθεν δὴ καὶ φασιν, ὦ Ἑρμόγετες, τὸν καθαρὸν νοῦν παραγίγνεσθαι οἱ μετεωρολόγοι, καὶ τῷ οὐρανῷ ὀρθῶς τὸ ὄνομα κείσθαι· εἰ δ' ἐμεμνήμην τὴν Ἡσιόδου γενεαλογίαν, τίνας ἔτι τοὺς ἀνωτέρω προγόνους λέγει τούτων, οὐκ ἂν ἐπαυόμην διεξιῶν ὡς ὀρθῶς αὐτοῖς τὰ ὀνόματα κείται, ἕως ἀπειράθην τῆς σοφίας ταυτησὶ τί ποιήσει, εἰ ἄρα ἀπερεῖ ἢ οὐ, ἢ ἐμοὶ ἐξαίφνης νῦν οὕτωςι προσπέπτωκεν ἄρτι οὐκ οἶδ' ὀπόθεν.

ΕΡΜΟΓΕΤΗΣ.

Καὶ μὲν δὴ, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἀτεχνῶς γέ μοι δοκεῖς ὥσπερ οἱ ἐνθουσιῶντες ἐξαίφνης χρησιμῶδεῖν.

of us make use of one part, some of the other. For some people call Zeus *Zêna* and others *Dia*: but when these are combined into one they reveal the god's nature, which is what we said a name ought to be able to do. For no one is more the cause of living [*zên*] for us and for everything else than the ruler and king of all. Thus it happens that this god is named correctly, the one through whom [*di' hon*] living [*zên*] always comes about for all living beings. But this name, though it is one, is divided into two parts, as I say: *Dii* and *Zêni*. And on first hearing, someone might think it blasphemous for him to be the son of Cronus, and reasonable that Zeus is the offspring of some great intelligence: for *koron* signifies not "child"¹⁰ but the pure [*katharon*] and undefiled quality of his mind. And he [i.e., Cronus] is the son of Ouranos according to tradition: the gaze at what is upwards is rightly called by this name, *ourania*, "looking at what is upwards" [*horôsa ta anô*], from which the astronomers say, dear Hermogenes, that a pure mind [*katharon noun*] comes about and that Ouranos's name has been applied correctly. If I could remember Hesiod's genealogy, which were the even earlier ancestors of these that he mentions, I would not stop examining how correctly their names have been applied until I had made a conclusive trial of this wisdom which has suddenly come upon me, I know not from where, to see what it will do, whether it will be a failure or not.

HERMOGENES:

And as a matter of fact, dear Socrates, you really do seem to me to be suddenly uttering prophecies just like those people who are divinely possessed.

¹⁰ In fact, *koros* means "child."

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A 1st-Century BCE Roman Polymath's Explanation of the Mysteries of Latin

Varro, On the Latin Language

Glenn W. Most and Michele Loporcaro

Marcus Terentius Varro, the greatest scholar of ancient Rome, was born in 116 BCE, in Reate (modern Rieti) in the Sabine territory northeast of Rome, into a wealthy family of the senatorial class. Freed from the need to earn his living, he could study with the leading professors of his age in Rome (Lucius Aelius Stilo, ca. 154–74 BCE) and Athens (Antiochus of Ascalon, head of the Platonic Academy, ca. 120–68 BCE), and then embarked on a political career with some success (arriving as high as the praetorship, probably in 68 BCE). But he had the misfortune to opt in the Civil War for the losing Pompeian side. The victorious Julius Caesar not only granted him clemency but also appointed him to establish the first public library in Rome. After Caesar's assassination (which thwarted the projected library) he was proscribed by Mark Antony in 43 BCE, but he survived (doubtless because he was not considered a serious enough threat politically), though his villa and private library were pillaged. He spent the rest of his life in dignified and highly productive scholarly retirement, dying in 27 BCE at the age of 89.

Varro's long lifetime coincided with a period of enormous political upheaval that saw the bloody collapse of the Roman Republic and the creation of the Roman Principate under the first Emperor Augustus. The Jugurthine War against the Numidians (112–106 BCE) began when he was four years old and was followed during his lifetime by numerous other wars and battles against foreign enemies (Arausio 105 BCE, Aquae Sextiae 102, and Vercellae 101 against the Teutons, Cimbri, and Ambrones; the First Mithridatic War against Pontus, the Greeks, and Bithynia 89–85, followed by the Second 83–81 and Third one 73–63; Pompey's siege of Jerusalem 63; the Gallic War 58–50; Julius Caesar's invasions of Britain 55 and 54; the disastrous Battle of Carrhae against the Parthians 53; Mark Antony's Parthian War 33), disaffected Italians (Social War 91–87 BCE), local slaves (the Third Servile War of Spartacus, 73–71), and Mediterranean pirates (67–66). Varro himself pursued a military career along with his political one, in association with Pompey; in the war against the pirates, he was awarded the highest honor for courage. But foreign enemies, numerous as they

were, obviously did not suffice for the Romans of this period. In addition, one bloody civil war after another pitted Romans against Romans (Sulla's first and second civil wars, 88 and 83; the Sertorian War 80–72; Caesar's Civil War 49–45; the Liberators' Civil War 42). Political turmoil was caused by bitter rivalry between male protagonists (for example, Marius and Sulla) and their competitive support structures, was intensified by conspiracies (Second Catilinarian conspiracy 63), and was formalized rather than being resolved by uneasy temporary alliances (the First triumvirate of Pompey, Julius Caesar, and Marcus Licinius Crassus 63; the Second triumvirate of Octavian, Mark Antony, and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus 43–33). Varro lived long enough to experience not only the defeat of Pompey at Pharsalus (48) but also the assassination of Julius Caesar (44) and the decisive naval victory by Octavian over Mark Antony and Cleopatra at Actium (31) that marked the end of Rome's Republican civil wars. The year he died, the Roman senate awarded Octavian the titles of *Augustus* (august) and *princeps* (the first of all), thereby formalizing the end of the Roman Republic and the beginning of the Principate.

Other Romans reacted to this turmoil by trying to intervene politically, and many of them ended up paying the highest price for this—so for example Varro's friend Cicero, who was also proscribed by Mark Antony but, being not so lucky (or so innocuous) as Varro, was murdered by Roman soldiers in 43 BCE. Varro instead sought a remedy for the ills of his time by helping the Romans to understand their own cultural institutions, in a concerted and systematic attempt to give them a concrete sense of shared values that could provide a solid foundation for social harmony. If only the bewildering profusion of obscure local customs, words, and beliefs could be analyzed so as to be capable of being understood as particular manifestations of a few simple and universally valid principles, it might be possible to harness the violent energies that political dissension created and exacerbated, and to redirect them instead towards more pacific and constructive ends. As Cicero wrote of Varro,

we were wandering and straying about like visitors in our own city, and your books led us, so to speak, right home, and enabled us at last to realize who and where we were. You have revealed the age of our native city, the chronology of its history, the laws of its religion and its priesthood, its civil and its military institutions, the topography of its districts and its sites, the terminology, classification and moral and rational basis of all our religious and secular institutions, and you have likewise shed a flood of light upon our poets and generally on Latin literature and the Latin language ...¹

1 Cicero, *Academica* 1.3.9, trans. Rackham.

Varro was a polymath of astounding erudition and productivity. As Augustine wrote, “he read so much that we are astonished that he had any free time left to write, and he wrote so much that we can scarcely believe anyone could have read so much.”² By the age of 78 he had already produced 490 books; the titles of 55 of his works have been transmitted; scholars estimate that he probably wrote about 74 treatises comprising 620 papyrus rolls. He is known to have written on almost every conceivable subject: Roman history, geography, the Latin language, literary history, philosophy, music, rhetoric, law, religion, architecture, medicine, and agriculture. As far as we can tell from his surviving works, Varro applied contemporary Greek scholarly concepts and methods to Roman materials in such a way as to produce a synthesis that accorded Rome the dignity among the high cultures of the world that its power and wealth deserved. To what extent Varro’s detailed understanding of Greek philosophy and scholarship can be relied upon remains a subject of controversy; but his reporting of Roman matters (history, institutions, language), except, crucially, for the historical explanation of the origins or words, seems to be by and large fairly accurate from the vantage point of the corresponding modern disciplines.

Of all his voluminous scholarly production, almost everything has been lost. Hundreds of fragments and reports are preserved in the form of quotations, paraphrases, and summaries by other ancient authors whose works are still extant, especially Christian ones like Lactantius (ca. 250–ca. 325 CE), Arnobius (died ca. 330 CE), and above all Augustine (354–430 CE), who is probably our most important source for Varro. But only two of his treatises survived antiquity to be transmitted directly by medieval manuscripts: *De re rustica* (*On Agriculture*), in three books, which has survived complete; and *De lingua Latina* (*On the Latin Language*), originally in 25 books, of which Books 5 and 6 survive wholly and Books 7 through 10 partly.³

In its original entirety, *On the Latin Language* presented a typically Varroian systematic and complete classification of the whole of its subject matter, comprising an introduction (Book 1) and then discussions of “etymology,” the derivations of single words and the relations between words and things (Books 2–7); morphology, the inflectional modifications of single words (8–13); and syntax, the grammatical combinations of words into clauses (14–25). Books 2–4 were dedicated to Septumius, Varro’s quaestor (a kind of administrative assistant), the remaining ones to Cicero; and therefore, the whole treatise must have been published before Cicero’s death in 43 BCE.

² Augustine, *On the City of God* 6.2, our translation.

³ As usual in such cases, we can figure out what the content of the lost books was like from quotations of passages in later authors (grammarians and others).

Varro's analysis of the Latin language is guided, on the one hand, by the principles of Hellenistic Greek linguistics, as these had been developed by philosophers (especially Stoics), grammarians, and textual philologists; on the other, by his profound antiquarian erudition concerning such matters as religious rituals, political and legal institutions, obsolete and regional words, and archaic poetic texts. His discussion of etymology survives only in part, but from the analogy of his expository procedure in his other works and elsewhere in *On the Latin Language*, it seems highly probable that in Book 2 (lost) he argued against the thesis that etymology was a scientific art and in Book 3 (lost) in favor of this thesis, and that, having decided the case in favor, he devoted Book 4 (lost) to expounding the principles of etymology in general terms.⁴

Varro prefers to use Latin technical terminology and so he tends to avoid translating the Greek technical term *etymologia* into Latin (unlike Cicero, for example, who provided it with a Latin calque as *veriloquium*, *Topica* 35), and even the Greek term itself he uses quite sparingly (he introduces and explains it at 5.1.2 as though he were using it for the first time there). In the theoretical pronouncements found in the surviving books, Varro stresses the difficulty of etymological analysis (5.1.3–6, 7.1.4), due in part to the changes in the spelling of words over time, which makes it necessary to add, subtract, or change letters (6.1.2, 7.1.1–3), in part to such other factors as the importation of foreign words, errors in their formation, and forgetfulness about their meanings. He compares the modes of analogical etymology in an ascending order of value, from those performed by ordinary people to those of grammarians, philosophers, and finally mystic initiates (5.1.7–9)—whereby the correct Latin text and meaning of this last category are uncertain.⁵

As for the procedures that Varro himself employs in his etymological practice, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to discern a highly systematic quality

4 "Art" vs. "science" are two labels which occur to this day in discussions of the status of etymology. In contemporary discourse, qualifying it as an "art" is usually tantamount to denial of scientific status: cf. e.g., Zamboni, *Letimologia*, 39. In this connection, one can mention Spitzer's insightful definition of etymology as a "Kunst mit wissenschaftlichem Apparat hantierend" (an "art tinkering with a scientific apparatus," Spitzer, "Werkstatt des Etymologen," 158). This stresses the creative component of etymology or the fact that finding a good etymology "è non 'realizzare un programma' ma 'fare una scoperta'" (is not "implementing a program" but "making a discovery"), as Belardi puts it. Belardi, *Letimologia*, 36.

5 Some linguists (cf. Pisani, "Non solum ad Aristophanis lucernam," 203–204, or Pfaffel, *Quartus gradus etymologiae*, 238) have argued that this is comparative philology, involving inspection of older attested and/or reconstructed forms, as well as cross-linguistic comparison, but this is highly controversial.

in them. Attempts have been made by scholars to distinguish between Stoic, Alexandrian, and historical elements and methods in Varro's etymologies,⁶ but while his method is no doubt eclectic, a strict separation of those components proves difficult. The unifying factor characterizing his own etymological practice with respect to his Greek predecessors can be identified in the shift from a preoccupation with philosophical issues to one mainly directed to language. The quest for the origin of language and the hypothesis of an original intrinsic adequacy of words to their referents, which was initiated by Heraclitus and for which the earliest extant testimony is Cratylus's stance in Plato's homonymous dialogue (cf. Chapter 2.3), was later advocated by the Stoics, at whose school Varro's teacher Aelius Stilo had studied. These philosophical discussions of etymology yielded in Rome to a more praxis-oriented etymology in the service of grammatical analysis: however one understands Varro's "fourth level" (see above, and fn. 5), it is a fact that philosophical etymology is just the third level, hierarchically subordinate to the fourth. Thus, while the procedures stayed largely the same as the ones inherited from the Greek (philosophical) tradition, emphasis was laid on different aspects. For example, for the Stoics, operations on the word sounds (and letters), replacing or displacing them, were a means to restore the original alleged adequacy, still seen transparently (by hypothesis) in onomatopoeia, but not elsewhere. Accordingly, onomatopoeia is appealed to by Varro, but this accounts for a minority of his etymologies,⁷ while his focus is clearly on historical and structural links between words, including those attested somewhere else than in the standard Latin forms he purports to explain. He often refers to loan words from foreign languages, which he identifies as the source for a Latin word and does not trace back any further within those languages themselves, thus aiming at what we now call "immediate/proximate etymology" rather than the remote etymology. He also capitalizes on historical knowledge when he points to older forms of Classical Latin words which he is aware of from his expertise in Roman antiquarian matters. He often derives words by metaphorical extension from other words. However, most of Varro's etymologies are based upon what seem to us to be only very slight similarities between the forms of two words that he claims to be linked with one another by some vague or arbitrary semantic connections that fit the

6 See especially Pfaffel, "Prinzipien," and Pfaffel, *Quartus gradus etymologiae*.

7 Where Varro applies this procedure for the names of animals (5.11.75), like *upupa* "hoopoe," *cuculus* "cuckoo" or *corvus* "raven" (5.11.75), deriving their names *ab suis vocibus* (from the sounds they make), modern philology concurs with him, while this is not the case in most other instances of onomatopoeic explanation, as e.g., for *puls* "porridge" (5.22.105).

proposed formal link.⁸ And, like most ancient etymologists, Varro saw no problem in a word having more than one etymology.

Varro's etymologies are plurilingual in various senses. For one thing, he is very attentive to the introduction into Latin of words from other languages, a preoccupation which attests to the shift from philosophical to purely linguistic focus. Thus, a considerable number of Latin words are said to be derived from Greek ones—not because, as many of Varro's contemporaries believed, the Latin language as a whole was derived from Greek, but because cultural contact led to the importation of a certain number of terms from one language to the other. But Greek is not the only source that Varro mentions: other Italic languages like Sabine also appear often. Again, Varro is very attentive to regional and local differences and to the changes in spelling and meaning of words over time: there is an intrinsic plurilingualism within the Latin language itself, sedimented in its historical development and reflected in its geographical heterogeneity. Because Varro's whole approach is descriptive rather than prescriptive, he regards these anomalies and inconsistencies as important elements, ones that need to be preserved by the linguist rather than being leveled out. This stance also led him to be probably the only one among the scholars of classical antiquity who did not conceive of the change of language over time as language decay, a long-held idea that goes from the *Cratylus* until the early scientific studies of historical linguistics (in particular with August Schleicher) and still remains in the view of many laypeople. In particular, his observation that “the usage of speech is in motion. Thus, better things become worse and worse things, better” (9.11.17), shows that “Varrone ... è ... l'unico antico ad impostare una teoria linguistica che tenga conto della diacronia e della sincronia” (Varro ... is ... the only ancient to construct a linguistic theory that takes into account diachrony and synchrony).⁹

Varro's treatise exercised an enormous influence upon all later scholars working on the history and grammar of the Latin language, from the pagan grammarians and commentators of later Antiquity through the Christian authors of the early and later Middle Ages up to the Renaissance humanists and well into modern times. It was only with the growth of a modern linguistic science of etymology that his work was finally superseded once and for all and came to be recognized for what it is: a supreme example of Roman indigenous

8 This is not to say that he did not proceed with intellectual rigor: quite on the contrary, as Pfaffel, “Prinzipien” convincingly shows. Simply, the method for controlling—in a way that appears scientific to us—such operations on the forms of words was a much later discovery (see Chapter 2.1).

9 Cavazza, *Varrone etimologo e grammatico*, 158.

antiquarianism rather than a transhistorically reliable guide to the etymology of Latin words. It is easy to belittle Varro; but to do so does justice neither to his own achievement nor to his historical significance. The judgment of his most recent editor, de Melo, is finely balanced:

The contrast between ancient and modern etymology is not meant to make Varro look like a dilettante. There are areas where the tools available to Varro would have enabled him to do better, but on the whole he achieved what was achievable in the first century BCE, and for that I cannot help but respect him, even if by modern standards he is mostly right where an etymology is obvious and mostly wrong where it is not. But being wrong does not mean being stupid. Every journey begins with a first step.¹⁰

10 Varro, *De lingua Latina*, ed. and trans. de Melo, 1:36.



Latin Text

Varro, *On the Latin Language*, excerpted from *De lingua Latina*, vol. 1: *Introduction, Text, and Translation*, ed. and trans. Wolfgang David Cirilo de Melo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), round parentheses and angle brackets in the original.; punctuation and capitalization by Glenn W. Most and Michele Loporcaro.

Excerpt 1: 5.1.1–3

- 1 Quemadmodum uocabula essent imposita rebus in lingua Latina, sex libris exponere institui. de his tris ante hunc feci quos Septumio misi, in quibus est de disciplina, quam uocant ἐτυμολογικήν: quae contra ea⟨m⟩ dicerentur, uolumine primo, quae pro ea, secundo, quae de ea, tertio. in his ad te scribam, a quibus rebus uocabula imposita sint in lingua Latina, et ea quae sunt in consuetudine apud ⟨populum et ea quae inueniuntur apud⟩ poetas.
- 2 Cum unius cuiusque uerbi naturae sint duae, a qua re et in qua re uocabulum sit impositum (itaque a qua re sit *pertinacia* cum requi⟨ri⟩tur, ostenditur esse a *perten⟨den⟩do*; in qua re sit impositum dicitur cum demonstratur, in quo non debet *pertendi* et *pertendit*, *pertinaciam* esse, quod in quo oporteat manere, si in eo perstet, *perseuerantia* sit), priorem illam partem, ubi cur et unde sint uerba scrutantur, Graeci uocant ἐτυμολογίαν, illam alteram περ⟨ι⟩σημαινομένων. de quibus duabus rebus in his libris promiscue dicam, sed exilius de posteriore.
- 3 Quae ideo sunt obscuriora, quod neque omnis impositio uerborum exstat, quod uetustas quasdam deleuit, nec quae exstat sine mendo omnis imposita, nec quae recte est imposita, cuncta manet (multa enim uerba li⟨t⟩teris commutatis sunt interpolata), neque omnis origo est nostrae linguae e uernaculis uerbis, et multa uerba aliud nunc ostendunt, aliud ante significabant, ut hostis:

11 Publius Septumius had been Varro's *quaestor* (a public financial administrator in the Roman Republic).

12 Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE), celebrated Roman statesman and philosopher, a friend of Varro's.

13 Ancient grammarians used the term *littera* promiscuously to designate both “letter” and “sound.”

14 The Latin word's polysemy developed, as Varro rightly says, out of an original meaning “foreigner (as guest),” as proven by IE comparison, as cognates such as Russian *gost'* or German *Gast*, both only “guest,” point, formally and semantically, to PIE **ghosti-* “stranger, guest” (EDL 291). Only in Latin did the word develop the “hostile” meaning rightly reported as a secondary one by Varro, which lives on in Romance giving words for “army”: cf. Spanish *hueste*, Romanian *oaste*, Old Italian *oste*, while the modern Italian homophonous *oste* “innkeeper” ultimately comes via Old French *hoste* from Latin *hospitem*, the accusative of *hospes* “guest, host.” The latter, originally a compound of the same PIE base + the root of *potis* “able, master of” (< PIE **pót-i-* “able, master of”), was the Latin word that inherited

English Translation

Translated by Glenn W. Most.

Excerpt 1: 5.1.1–3

I decided to explain, in six books, in what way words have been applied to things
 in the Latin language. Of these, I wrote three, before this one, which I dedicated
 to Septumius,¹¹ in which the discipline they call “etymology” is discussed: in the
 first volume, what is said against it; in the second, what is said in its favor; in
 the third, what is said about it. In the following ones, dedicated to you,¹² I shall
 write from what things words are applied in the Latin language, both those that
 are customary among <the people and those that are found among> poets.

Every single word possesses two natural aspects, from what thing and to
 what thing the word is applied—so for example, when it is asked from what
 thing *pertinacia* “obstinacy” is, it is shown to be from *pertendendo* “persisting,”
 while on what thing it is laid down is stated when it is explained that there
 is *pertinacia* “obstinacy” when someone should not *pertendere* “persist,” and
 yet *pertendit* “persists,” whereas when someone ought to continue, if he *per-*
stat “perseveres” in it, this is *perseverantia* “perseverance.” That first part, which
 studies why words come about and from what source, the Greeks call “etymol-
 ogy”; the second part, “on the things signified.” I shall speak about both of these
 things in the following books without keeping them separate, but less about the
 latter one.

These matters are rather obscure because not every word that has been
 applied is still extant, since the passage of time has eradicated some; and not
 every word that is extant has been applied without an error, nor are all those
 that have been applied correctly still extant (for many words have received a
 new appearance by changes in the letters);¹³ nor has every source for our lan-
 guage been from homeborn words; and many words now indicate one thing
 but previously signified another—like *hostis*,¹⁴ for they used to call with that

the meanings that the outcomes of PIE **ghosti-* preserve in Germanic and Slavic, keep-
 ing these together with the symmetrical one of “host”: this coexistence is probably due
 to *hostis* and *hos(pes)* ultimately coming from a PIE abstract noun meaning “exchange”
 (EDL 291).

nam tum eo uerbo dicebant peregrinum qui suis legibus uteretur, nunc dicunt eum quem tum dicebant *perduellem*.

Excerpt II: 5.1.6–10

- 6 Quorum uerborum nouorum ac ueterum discordia omnis in consuetudine com⟨m⟩uni, quot modis commutatio sit facta qui animaduernerit, facilius scrutari origines patietur uerborum. reperiet enim esse commutata, ut in superioribus libris ostendi, maxime propter bis quaternas causas: litterarum enim fit demptione aut additione et propter earum tra⟨ie⟩ctionem aut commutationem, item syllabarum productione ⟨aut correptione et adiectione aut detractione⟩. ...
- 7 Nunc singulorum uerborum origines expediam, quorum quattuor explanandi gradus. infimus quo populus etiam uenit: quis enim non uidet unde ar⟨g⟩e⟨n⟩tīfodinae et uiocurus? secundus quo grammatica escendit antiqua, quae ostendit quemadmodum quodque poeta finxerit uerbum quod confinxerit, quod declinarit. hic Pacui:
- rudentum *sibilus*,
- hic:
- incuruicercuicum* pecus,
- hic:
- chlamyde *clupeat* b⟨r⟩acchium.
- 8 Tertius gradus, quo philosophia ascendens peruenit atque ea quae in consuetudine communi essent aperire coepit, ut a quo dictum esset *oppidum*,

15 Latin *perduellis* “state enemy” derives from *bellum* “war,” still *duellum* in Plautus (see fn. 29), *Amphitryon* 189, which is in turn of uncertain origin: Pinault, “*Bellum*,” proposed that it comes from earlier **duen(u)lum* “quite good” (*EDL* 70)—and so is ultimately identical with the word that lives on in It. *bello*, Fr. *beau* “beautiful, handsome”—though, as de Melo remarks, the meaning “brave” which this proposal implies is not attested. Varro, *De lingua Latina*, ed. and trans. de Melo, 2:960. (A different proposal in *LEW* 1.100, comparing Greek *déios* “inimical, terrible,” is formally dubious, especially since the Greek word seems to be a loan from some non-Indoeuropean language, see *EDG* 323). Be that as it may, Varro (7.3.49) grasps the relationship between *perduellis* (also attested since Plautus, *Amphitryon*), which preserved original *du-* possibly as fixed juridical terminology, and *bellum*, commenting on the change: “*Perduelles* dicuntur hostes. Vt *perfecit*, sic *perduellis*, ⟨a *per*⟩ et *duellum*. Id postea *bellum*.” (Enemies are called *perduelles*. Just as there is *perfecit* “he accomplished,” so there is *perduellis* “enemy,” ⟨from *per* “thoroughly”⟩ and *duellum* “war.” This became *bellum* later.)

word a foreigner who was subject to his own laws, but now they use it to call someone whom they used to call *perduellis*¹⁵ “enemy.”

Excerpt II: 5.1.6–10

With regard to those words, both new ones and old ones, among which there is every kind of variation in ordinary usage, someone who has considered in how many ways alteration has come about will find it an easier task to study the origins of words: for he will find that they have been altered, as I showed in the earlier books, above all for two groups of four causes. For this can come about by the subtraction or addition of letters and on account of their transposition or alteration; and again, by the lengthening of syllables <or their shortening, and finally by their adding or removal>. ...

Now I shall explain the origins of individual words, of which there are four levels of explanation. The lowest is the one to which even ordinary people arrive: for who is there who does not see where *argentifodinae* “silver-mines”¹⁶ and *uiocurus* “road-overseer”¹⁷ come from? The second is the one to which ancient grammar ascended: it shows in what way poets invented each word that they invented, each one that they distorted. It is here that belongs Pacuvius’s¹⁸ *rudentum sibilus*¹⁹ “the whistling of ropes,” here his *incuruiceruicum*²⁰ *pecus* “crooked-necked flock,” here his *chlamyde clupeat*²¹ *bracchium* “with his cloak he shields his arm.”

The third level is the one to which philosophy ascends and then arrives, where it begins to disclose the secrets of the words that exist in ordinary usage, as for example from what source *oppidum* “town,” *uicus* “village, block

16 *argentifodinae* < *argentum* “silver” + *fodinae* “mines.”

17 *uiocurus* < *uia* “road” + *curo* “to take care of.”

18 Marcus Pacuvius (220–130 BCE), a celebrated early Roman tragic poet.

19 *sibilus* is a widely attested, originally poetic word, derived onomatopoeically from the sound it signifies.

20 *incuruiceruicum* is an invented poetic word occurring only in the passage cited (and then in Varro and the Roman rhetorician Quintilian, who discuss it); it derives from the combination of *incuruus* “crooked” and *ceruix* “neck.”

21 *clipeo* (also spelled *clupeo*) is a rare verb, originally poetic, deriving from the substantive *clipeus* or *clupeus* “shield.”

uicus, uia. Quartus, ubi est adytum et initia regis: quo si non perueniam <ad> scientiam, at opinione aucupabor, quod etiam in salute nostra nonnunquam facit cum aegrotamus medicus.

- 9 Quodsi summum gradum non attigero, tamen secundum praeteribo, quod non solum ad Aristophanis lucernam, sed etiam ad Cleanthis lucubraui: uolui praeterire eos, qui poetarum modo uerba ut sint ficta expediunt. non enim uidebatur consentaneum qua<e>re<re> me in eo uerbo quod finxisset Ennius causam, neglegere quod ante rex Latinus finxisset, cum poeticis multis uerbis magis delecter quam utar, antiquis magis utar quam delecter. an non potius mea uerba illa quae hereditate a Romulo rege uenerunt quam quae a poeta Liuius relicta?
- 10 Igitur quoniam in haec sunt tripartita uerba, quae sunt aut nostra aut aliena aut obliuia, de nostris dicam cur sint, de alienis unde sint, de obliuiis relinquam: quorum partim quid ta<men> inuenerim aut opiner scribam. in hoc libro dicam de uocabulis locorum et quae in his sunt, in secundo de temporum et quae in his fiunt, in tertio de utraque re a poetis comprehensa.

Excerpt III: 5.2.14–15

- 14 Incipiam de locis ab ipsius loci origine. locus est, ubi locatum quid esse potest, ut nunc dicunt, collocatum. ueteres id dicere solitos apparet apud Plautum:

22 Varro mentions these etyma as being not obvious to ordinary people; we know his views on them from other passages in this same treatise: *oppidum ab opi dictum* (the *oppidum* is so called from *ops* “power, wealth”), 5.32.141, and *sic qua uehebant, uiae dictae* (the *uiae* are so called because they used to *uehere* “lead”), 5.6.35. *Vicus* is in turn explained from *uia*: *in oppido uici a uia* (in a town there are *uici* “blocks,” [i.e., so-called] from *uia*), 5.32.145. In terms of modern etymology, *oppidum* is derived from *ob-* “towards” and the same root as *pes* “foot” (< PIE **ped-o-* [n.] “stepped” > “place, step,” EDL 431), while *uia* and *uicus* are in fact unrelated (and there is no consensus as to whether the former is connected etymologically to *uehere* “to carry”). *Vicus*, like its Greek cognate *oikos* “house,” is to be traced back to PIE **weik-o-s* “settlement” (EDL 675), while for *uia* two hypotheses face each other: one connects it to a PIE root **weih₁-* “to strive for” (LEW 2.774f., EDL 673), the other to PIE **wegh₁-* “to carry” (DELL 731) (the same root as found in English *way*). Under the former view, the derived noun PIE **wih₁-eh₂-* must have originally meant “pursuit” (EDL 673), while the latter view converges with Varro in linking a PIE noun **wegh₁-ya-* (DELL 731) or rather **wǵh₁-ya-* (Mancini, *Scrittura*, 256) “vehicle” to the verb *uehere*. Varro’s explanation for *uia* was almost unanimously accepted in antiquity, albeit with two notable exceptions, viz. Augustine and Cassiodorus: the former was uncertain between *uis* “power” and *uitis* “vine,” while the latter pointed to *uiolentia* “violence,” since a person on the road stamps the ground. Varro, *De lingua Latina*, ed. and trans. de Melo, 2: 667.

of houses," *uia* "way" come.²² The fourth is the one where the holiest shrine and the high priest's sacred mysteries are: even if I myself do not succeed in arriving at wisdom there, nonetheless I shall strive for a hypothesis, something that with regard to our health a doctor sometimes does too when we are ill.

But even if I do not attain to the highest level, nevertheless I shall pass 9
beyond the second one, because I have studied by the light not only of Aristophanes's²³ lamp, but also of Cleanthes's²⁴ [that is, I have used the instruments not only of grammar but also of philosophy]. It was my desire to surpass those who only explain how the words of the poets have been created. For it did not seem appropriate for me to seek the cause in some word that Ennius²⁵ created but to neglect one that King Latinus²⁶ had created earlier, given that I derive more delight than utility from many poetic words but more utility than delight from ancient ones. And, as a matter of fact, is it not rather the case that my words are the ones that have come to me as my inheritance from King Romulus²⁷ rather than the ones that were left behind by the poet Livius?²⁸

Therefore, since words are divided into these three groups—they are either 10
our own or foreign or obsolete—I shall state about ours what their causes are, about the foreign ones from what source they come, and the obsolete ones I shall omit (but concerning some of these I shall nonetheless write what I have discovered or suppose to be the case). In this book I shall speak about the words for places and for the things that are located in them; in the following one about those for times and the events that occur in them; and in the third I shall speak about both things as they are expressed by the poets.

Excerpt III: 5.2.14–15

Concerning places, I shall begin with the origin of the word *locus* "place" itself. 14
A *locus* is where something can be *locatum* "placed" or, as they now say, *collocatum* "put." That the ancients were accustomed to use the word in this way is clear from Plautus;²⁹

23 Aristophanes of Byzantium (262–185 BCE), a celebrated Greek grammarian and philologist.

24 Cleanthes of Assos (331–232 BCE), a celebrated Greek Stoic philosopher.

25 Quintus Ennius (239–169 BCE), a celebrated early Roman tragic and epic poet.

26 A legendary king of Rome and father of the Latin people.

27 The (possibly) legendary founder of Rome.

28 Livius Andronicus (284–205 BCE), the earliest recorded Roman poet.

29 Titus Maccius Plautus (254–184 BCE), a celebrated early Roman comic poet.

filiam habeo grandem, cassa⟨m⟩ dote atque *inlocabilem*,
 neque eam queo *locare* cuiquam
 apud Ennium:

O terra Thraeca, ubi Liberi fanum inclutum
 Maro *locaui*⟨t⟩

- 15 Vbi quidque consistit, ⟨st⟩*locus*. Ab eo praeco dicitur *locare*, quod usque idem it, quoad in aliquo constitit pretium. In⟨de⟩ *locarium* quod datur in stabulo et taberna, ubi consistant. Sic *loci* muliebres, ubi nascendi initia consistunt.

Excerpt IV: 7.1.1–2

- 1 <Difficilia sunt explicatu poetarum uocabula. saepe enim significationem aliquam prioribus temporibus impositam> repens ruina operuit, ⟨a⟩ut uerbum quod conditum est e quibus litteris oportet, inde post ⟨si⟩ aliqua dempta est, obscurior fit uoluntas impositoris. non reprehendendum igitur in illis qui in scrutando uerbo litteram adiciunt aut demunt, quo facilius quid sub ea uoce subsit uideri possit: ut enim facilius obscuram operam Myrmecidis ex ebore oculi uideant, extrinsecus admouent nigras s⟨a⟩etas.
- 2 Cum haec amminicula addas ad eruendum uoluntatem impositoris, tamen latent multa. Quod si poetice, ⟨quae⟩ in carminibus seruauit multa prisca quae essent, sic etiam cur essent posuisset, fecundius poemata ferrent fructum; sed ut in soluta oratione, sic in poematis uerba ⟨non⟩ omnia quae habent ἔτυμα possunt dici, neque multa ab eo, quem non erunt in lucubratione litterae prosecutae, multum licet legeret. Aelii hominis in primo in litteris Latinis exercitati interpretationem carminum Saliorum uidebis et exili littera expedita⟨m⟩ et praeterita obscura multa.

...

I have an adult daughter without a dowry and *inlocabilem* “unplaceable,”
And I am not able to *locare* “place” her with anyone

from Ennius:

O Thracian land, where Maro *locavit* “placed”
Dionysus’s famous shrine

Where something comes to a stop is a <st>*locus* “place.” From this an auctioneer is said *locare* “to place,” for he keeps going until the price comes to a stop with someone. From which *locarium* “rent,” which is paid in a habitation or an inn, where people come to a stop. So a woman’s *loci* “places,” where the beginnings of birth-giving come to a stop. 15

Excerpt IV: 7.1.1–2

<The words of poets are difficult to explain. For often some meaning that was applied in earlier times> a sudden disaster has covered up; or because with just which letters a word should be composed has been concealed, since some of these have been removed, the intention of the person who established it becomes quite obscure in this way. Therefore there should be no criticism against those who, when they study a word, add or subtract a letter, so that what underlies that word can more easily be seen: just as people place black hairs under the hard-to-see ivory carvings of Myrmecides³⁰ on the outside so that their eyes can see them better. 1

Even if you apply such aids in order to bring to light the intention of the person who established it, nonetheless many things remain obscure. For if poetry, which has preserved in poems many words that existed in ancient times, had also set down for what reason they existed, poems would bear fruit more fruitfully; but just as in prose, so too in poems, it is not always possible to indicate what the *etyma*³¹ are for words, not even, in many cases, for someone who has not pursued his studies by lamplight, even if he reads a lot. You will see that the interpretation of the *Salian Hymns*³² by Aelius,³³ a man of the greatest experience in Latin literature, has been expedited by his attention to a single little letter and that much would have remained obscure if that had been neglected. 2

...

30 A Greek sculptor celebrated for his tiny carvings in ivory and other materials.

31 On the original meaning of this term, see the introduction to this part (Chapter 2.1).

32 Texts written in archaic Latin that accompanied rituals performed by the Salian priests.

33 Lucius Aelius Stilo Preconinus (154–74 BCE), a famous Roman philologist and Varro’s teacher, is often mentioned as an authority in this treatise.

Excerpt v: 7.1.4

- 4 Igitur de originibus uerborum qui multa dixerit commode, potius boni consulendum, quam qui aliquid nequierit reprehendendum, praesertim quom dicat etymologice non omnium uerborum posse dici causa⟨m⟩, ut qui a⟨c⟩ qua re res u⟨tilis sit⟩ ad medendum medicina; neque si non norim radices arboris, non posse me dicere pirum esse ex ramo, ramum ex arbore, eam ex radicibus quas non uideo. quare qui ostendit *equitatum* esse ab *equitibus*, *equites* ab *equo*, neque *equus* unde sit dicit, tamen hic docet plura et satisfacit grato, quem imitari possimusne ipse liber erit indicio.

Excerpt v: 7.1.4

Therefore one should be content with people who have made many appropriate statements about the origins of words, rather than criticizing those who have not been able to do so with regard to a single issue, especially since the art of etymology states that it is not possible in the case of all words to state the cause—just as medicine states with regard to how and why something is useful as a remedy. And even if I do not possess knowledge about the roots of a tree, I can still say that a pear comes from a branch, the branch from a tree, and that tree from roots that I cannot see. And thus someone who demonstrates that *equitatus* “cavalry” comes from *equites* “horsemen,” and *eques* from *equus* “horse,” but does not say where *equus* comes from,³⁴ nevertheless provides much teaching and satisfaction for a grateful person. This very book will provide evidence whether I myself am capable of imitating such a man.

34 In fact, Latin *equus* derives from an Indo-European root **h₁ek-u-* (EDL 193) found also in Sanskrit *áśvas* and Greek *híppos*. Varro speaks of this word several more times, but always as here in terms of its morphological derivatives, which indicates that he could not venture any etymological hypothesis. Cf. Varro, *De lingua Latina*, ed. and trans. de Melo, 1:38f.

Abbreviations and Symbols

- DELL* Alfred Ernout and Antoine Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine*, repr. of the 4th edn. with additions and corrections by Jacques André, Paris: Klincksieck, 2001
- EDG* Beekes, Robert. *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*. 2 vols, Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- EDL* de Vaan, Michiel. *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the Other Italic Languages*, Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- LEW* A. Walde and J.B. Hofmann, *Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols. 5th ed. Heidelberg: Winter, 1972.
- PIE* Proto-Indo European
- < > editorial insertion

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A 1st-Century CE Stoic Etymological and Allegorical Explanation of Greek Gods

Cornutus, Compendium of Greek Theology

Glenn W. Most

Plato's *Cratylus* (Chapter 2.3) presented one sustained and ultimately skeptical (or at least polemically inconclusive) philosophical attempt to assess the usefulness of etymology as a tool for philosophical research. But etymology—especially the etymology of proper names and other terms connected with the gods—was not killed off by Plato's skepticism about it, nor did it die with Plato. On the contrary, Plato's pupil Aristotle makes sporadic use of such etymological explanations, and they recur prominently and systematically in a number of later philosophical schools, especially among the Neoplatonists of the Roman Imperial Age (third to sixth century CE). But it was above all the Stoa, which was founded by Zeno of Citium (fourth to third century BCE) and consolidated by Chrysippus of Soli (third century BCE) and which remained one of the dominant philosophical systems in Greece and Rome until about the third century CE, that made the broadest, the most sustained, and the most influential use of etymology. The Stoics believed that the universe was constituted, held together, and rendered intelligible by a rational principle (*logos*, identified in the first excerpt here with the god Zeus) which pervaded it through and through in differing degrees; their etymologies were designed to demonstrate that this same principle informed the language (again *logos*) of the Greeks and made it a mutually supportive, reciprocally referential, and cognitively transparent system.

The handbook of the Stoic philosopher and rhetorician Lucius Annaeus Cornutus (first century CE) provides a good example of the ways in which Stoics applied etymology to the names, epithets, and other words connected with the Greek gods. Though we know little of the details of Cornutus's life, he was evidently a figure of some importance in Roman literary culture during the reign of the Emperor Nero (who ruled 54–68 CE): he shares his *gens* (clan) name Annaeus with some of the most prominent literary and philosophical figures of the period, such as the elder and younger Seneca; and he was the tutor and literary executor for the satirical poet Persius, who devoted his fifth satire to a long and loving portrait of his teacher. One sign of his importance was that he was

banished by Nero. Born in Leptis Magna in Libya, he was long thought to have been a Greek slave who was purchased by one of the families of the *Annaeus gens* and was then freed; more recent scholarship¹ has called this into question and suggested that he was instead freeborn and adopted the name *Annaeus* out of gratitude for being sponsored for Roman citizenship by a member of that family. Fragments of a number of his rhetorical writings in Greek and Latin and of a commentary to Virgil survive. Another sign of his importance are the spurious rhetorical and grammatical works that were attributed to him centuries later.

Cornutus's handbook is addressed to a boy who in our manuscripts is left nameless (perhaps there was material damage at the beginning of the archetype); this youth may well have been one of the sons of the *Annaeus* household to which Cornutus belonged. In any case, the dedication establishes that the book belongs to the genre of school textbooks and assigns to Cornutus the authoritative voice of the schoolteacher. It goes through a number of the most important Greek gods, starting with the heavens and moving downwards to end with the Underworld. For each god, it explains the meaning of the personal name, epithets, other associated terms, attributes, and often myths, usually by means of etymological analysis and in terms of the tenets of Stoic philosophy, above all Stoic physics (for which Cornutus is an important source), but also of Stoic ethics and language theory. The style of Cornutus's handbook is dry, terse, definitional: often it gives the impression of being less a theological or physical treatise than an etymological lexicon organized not alphabetically but by a series of topics that coincide with the pantheon of the Greek gods.

Cornutus's etymologies typify scholarly plurilingualism as all etymologies do: they pluralize a language internally, dividing the Greek language into a multiply significant object language and a putatively neutral metalanguage. But the excerpts presented here are notable also because they raise issues of the different dialects of the ancient Greek language and perhaps also, in one case, of a Greek etymology for a Latin word.

However, Cornutus does not limit himself to this etymological approach to the words associated with divinities: instead, he combines etymological accounts of single words with allegorical interpretations of mythic narratives, events, and objects. Allegorical interpretation—which finds beneath the apparently frivolous or impious or implausible surface of traditional stories and characters a deeper level of meaning which is true to nature and morally uplifting—flourished throughout the history of Greek culture from beginning

1 *Greek Theology*, ed. Boys-Stones, 2–5.

to end, attempting to provide a bridge between inherited but troublesome religious data and new times which did not wish (or dare) to reject those data once and for all but had to reinterpret them, often radically and ingeniously, in order to rescue them. Despite their affinities, etymology and allegoresis tended each for the most part to exist in relative independence of one another in ancient Greece and to be favored by different authors and philosophical schools. It was above all in Stoicism that etymological analysis of individual names and other words, and allegorical exegesis of stories and characters, intersected in a grand attempt at redeeming, by rationalizing, the colorful world of Greek religion.

Greek Text

Excerpted and modified from *Cornuti compendium de Graecae theologiae traditionibus*, ed. José B. Torres (Leipzig: Teubner, 2018), 1–2, 21–22, 61–63.

Excerpt 1

- 1 Ὁ οὐρανός, ὡ παιδίον, περιέχει κύκλω τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλατταν καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ γῆς καὶ τὰ ἐν θαλάττῃ πάντα καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ταύτης ἔτυχε τῆς προσηγορίας, οὖρος ὦν ἄνω πάντων καὶ ὀρίζων τὴν φύσιν· ἔνιοι δὲ φασιν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὠρεῖν ἢ ὠρεύειν τὰ ὄντα, ὃ ἔστι φυλάττειν, οὐρανὸν κεκλήσθαι, ἀφ' οὗ καὶ ὁ θυρωρὸς ὠνομάσθη καὶ τὸ πολυωρεῖν· ἄλλοι δὲ αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὀράσθαι ἄνω ἔτυμολογοῦσι. καλεῖται δὲ σὺν πάσιν οἷς περιέχει κόσμος ἀπὸ τοῦ κάλλιστα διακεκοσμηθῆναι. τινὲς δὲ τῶν ποιητῶν Ἄχμηρος ἔφασαν αὐτὸν υἱὸν εἶναι, τὸ ἄκμητον τῆς περιφορᾶς αὐτοῦ αἰνιττόμενοι, ἢ προλαβόντες ὅτι ἀφθαρτός ἐστι τοῦτο παριστάσι διὰ τῆς ἔτυμολογίας· κεκμηκέναι γὰρ λέγομεν τοὺς τετελευτηκότας. ἢ δὲ οὐσία αὐτοῦ πυρώδης ἐστίν, ὡς δῆλον ἐκ τοῦ ἡλίου καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἄλλων ἄστρων. ὅθεν καὶ αἰθὴρ ἐκλήθη τὸ ἐξωτάτω μέρος τοῦ κόσμου ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰθεσθαι· τινὲς δὲ φασιν ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰεθῆν οὕτως αὐτὸν ὠνομάσθαι, ὃ ἔστι ροίζω φέρεσθαι. καὶ τὰ ἄστρα γὰρ οἰοῦναι ἄστατά ἐστιν ὡς οὐδέποτε ἰστάμενα, ἀλλ' αἰεθῆν κινούμενα. εὐλογον δὲ καὶ τοὺς θεοὺς ἀπὸ τῆς θεύσεως ἐσχηκέναι τὴν προσηγορίαν· πρῶτον γὰρ οἱ ἀρχαῖοι θεοὺς ὑπελάμβανον εἶναι οὓς ἐώρων ἀδιαλείπτως φερομένους, αἰτίους αὐτοὺς νομίσαντες εἶναι τῶν τοῦ ἀέρος μεταβολῶν καὶ τῆς σωτηρίας τῶν ὄλων. τάχα δ' ἂν εἶεν θεοὶ θετήρες καὶ ποιηταὶ τῶν γινομένων.
- 2 “Ὡσπερ δὲ ἡμεῖς ὑπὸ ψυχῆς διοικούμεθα, οὕτω καὶ ὁ κόσμος ψυχὴν ἔχει τὴν συνέχουσαν αὐτὸν, καὶ αὕτη καλεῖται Ζεὺς, πρῶτως καὶ διὰ παντὸς ζῶσα καὶ αἰτία οὐσα τοῖς ζῶσι τοῦ ζῆν· διὰ τοῦτο δὲ καὶ βασιλεύειν ὁ Ζεὺς λέγεται τῶν ὄλων, ὡς ἂν καὶ

English Translation

Excerpted and modified from *L. Annaeus Cornutus: Greek Theology, Fragments, and Testimonia*, ed. George Boys-Stones (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature Press, 2018), 53, 55, 57, 81, 83, 135, 137; round parentheses in this edition. The Greek words that explain the etymologies proposed are transliterated and are indicated in italics in square brackets; the corresponding English translations are set in boldface.

Excerpt 1

“Heaven” [*ouranos*], my child, encircles earth and sea and everything on the earth and in the sea, and this is how it acquired its name—being the **upper limit** [or **guardian: *ouros anô***]² of all things and the **limit** [*horizôn*] of nature. But some say that it is called this from the fact that it **cares for** [*ôrein*] or **takes care of** [*ôreuein*] things, that is, guards them. (This is where the word for “door-keeper” [*thurôros*] comes from; also “to treat with care” [*poluôrein*].) Others find its etymology in the words for **looking upwards** [*horasthai anô*]. Considered with everything it embraces, it is called “cosmos” [*kosmos*], from the fact that everything is **arranged** [*diakekosmêsthai*] in the best possible way. Some of the poets said that he was the son of Akmon [*Akmôn*], hinting allegorically at the **unworn** [*akmêton*] nature of its circuit—or else they established this on the basis of the etymology because they assumed that heaven is indestructible; for we call the dead **worn out** [*kekmêkenai*]. Its substance is fiery, as is clear from the sun and the other stars. This is why the outermost part of the cosmos is called “aether” [*aithêr*]: because it **blazes** [*aithesthai*]—although some say that it is named this way because it **always runs** [*aei thein*], that is, is carried along at a rush. And the stars [*astra*] are, as it were, **unstable** [*astata*], since they are never fixed in place but always in motion. It is reasonable to think that the gods [*theoi*] acquired their name from **hurrying** [*theusis*]; for, in the first place, the ancients conceived their notion of gods from those things they saw unceasingly borne along, reckoning that they were responsible for changes in the air and for sustaining the universe. But perhaps the gods are those who **establish** [*thetêres*] and make those things that come into being.

Just as we are governed by a soul, so the cosmos has a soul that holds it together, and this is called “Zeus” [*Zeus*]—who **lives** [*zôsa*] preeminently and in everything and is the cause of **life** [*zên*] in those things that **live** [*zôsi*]. Because of this, Zeus is said to reign over the universe—just as our soul and

² *Ouros* may be the Ionic dialect form of the Attic dialect form *horos*, “limit”; the same word in the Attic dialect means “guardian.”

ἐν ἡμῖν ἢ ψυχὴ καὶ ἢ φύσις ἡμῶν βασιλεύειν ῥηθεῖη. Δία δὲ αὐτὸν καλοῦμεν ὅτι δι' αὐτὸν γίνεται καὶ σώζεται πάντα. παρὰ δὲ τισι καὶ Δεὺς λέγεται, τάχα ἀπὸ τοῦ δεύειν τὴν γῆν ἢ μεταδιδόναι τοῖς ζῶσι ζωτικῆς ἰκμάδος· καὶ ἡ γενικὴ πτώσις ἀπ' αὐτῆς ἐστὶ Δεός, παρακειμένη πῶς τῇ Διός. οἰκεῖν δὲ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ λέγεται, ἐπεὶ ἐκεῖ ἐστὶ τὸ κυριώτατον μέρος τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ψυχῆς· καὶ γὰρ αἱ ἡμέτεραι ψυχαὶ πῦρ εἰσιν.

...

Excerpt II

- 17 Τοῦ δὲ πολλὰς καὶ ποικίλας περὶ θεῶν γεγονέναι παρὰ τοῖς παλαιοῖς Ἑλλήσι μυθοποιίας, ὡς ἄλλαι μὲν παρὰ Μάγοις γεγόνασιν, ἄλλαι δὲ παρὰ Φρυγῶν καὶ ἤδη παρ' Αἰγυπτίους τε καὶ Κελτοῖς καὶ Λίβυσι καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἔθνεσι, μαρτύριον ἂν λάβοι τις καὶ τὸ παρ' Ὀμήρῳ λεγόμενον ὑπὸ τοῦ Διὸς πρὸς τὴν Ἥραν τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον·

ἢ οὐ μέμνη ὅτε τ' ἐκρέμω ὑψόθεν, ἐκ δὲ ποδοῖν
ἄκμονας ἦχα δύο.

ἔοικε γὰρ ὁ ποιητὴς μυθοῦ παλαιοῦ παραφέρειν τοῦτο ἀπόσπασμα, καθ' ὃν ὁ Ζεὺς ἐμυθεύετο κεκρεμακέναι τε ἐκ τοῦ αἰθέρος τὴν Ἥραν χρυσαῖς ἀλύσει τῷ χρυσοφανές τι ἔχειν τὰ ἄστρα καὶ ἐκ τῶν ποδῶν αὐτῆς δύο ἄκμονας ἐξηρηκέναι, τὴν γῆν δηλονότι καὶ τὴν θάλατταν, ὑφ' ὧν τείνεται κάτω ὁ ἀήρ μηδετέρωθεν ἀποσπασθῆναι δυνάμενος. ἐτέρου δὲ μύθου μέμνηται τοῦ κατὰ τὴν Θέτιν, ὡς ὑπ' αὐτῆς σεσωσμένου τοῦ Διὸς,

ὅπποτέ μιν ξυνδήσαι Ὀλύμπιοι ἤθελον ἄλλοι,
Ἥρη τ' ἠδὲ Ποσειδάων καὶ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη.

φαίνεται δ' ὅτι κατ' ἰδίαν ἕκαστος τούτων τῶν θεῶν ἐπεβούλευε τῷ Διὶ συνεχῶς μέλλων ἐμποδίζειν ταύτην τὴν διακόσμησιν ὅπερ ἐγένετο, εἰ τὸ ὑγρὸν ἐπεκράτησε καὶ ἐξυδατώθη πάντα ἢ τὸ πῦρ καὶ ἐξεπυρώθη ἢ ὁ ἀήρ. ἢ δὲ κατὰ τρόπον διαθείσα πάντα Θέτις τὸν ἐκατόγχιρα Βριάρεων ἀντέταξε τοῖς εἰρημένοις θεοῖς, καθ' ὃν ἴσως διανέμονται πανταχόσε αἱ ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἀναθυμιάσεις, ὡς διὰ πολλῶν χειρῶν τῆς εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἀριθμοὺς διαιρέσεως γινομένης· σκέψαι δ' εἰ παρὰ τὸ αἶρειν τὴν ὥσαν βορὰν τῶν τοῦ κόσμου μερῶν ὠνόμασται Βριάρεως. Αἰγαίῳ μὲν γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ αἰεὶ τεθελῶς καὶ γαίῳ· δεῖ δὲ μὴ συγχεῖν τοὺς μύθους μῆδ' ἐξ ἐτέρου τὰ ὀνόματα ἐφ' ἕτερον μεταφέ-

nature might be said to reign over us. And we call him “Dia” [*Dia*] because **through** [*dia*] him everything comes to be and is sustained. Among some people he is called “Deus” [*Deus*] as well, perhaps because he **bedews** [*deuein*] the earth or gives a share of life-giving moisture to the living. (Its genitive is *Deos*, which is quite close to *Dios*.)³ He is said to live in heaven, since that is where the most important part of the cosmic soul is—and indeed, our souls are fire, too.

...

Excerpt II

For the fact that many and various myths about the gods arose among the ancient Greeks, as others among the Magi, others among the Phrygians, and again among the Egyptians and Celts and Libyans and other races, one might take as witness the way Homer’s Zeus speaks when he confronts Hera: “Or do you not remember when I hung you on high, and fixed two anvils to your feet?”⁴ For it seems that the poet hands down this fragment of an ancient myth, according to which Zeus is said to have hung Hera from the aether with golden chains (because the stars have a kind of golden appearance) and fixed from her feet two anvils (clearly the earth and the sea, by which the air was stretched down, unable to be torn away from either). Another myth, the one about Thetis, mentions that Zeus was saved by her “when the other Olympians wished to bind him—Hera and Poseidon and Pallas Athene.”⁵ It appears that each of these gods individually was always plotting against Zeus, intending to prevent the cosmic order that we have—something that would happen if the moist prevailed and everything became water, or if fire prevailed and everything were turned to fire, or if air prevailed. But Thetis [*Thetis*], **disposing** [*diatheisa*] everything in due order, set Briareos [*Briareôs*] with his hundred hands against the gods that were mentioned—perhaps because the exhalations of the earth are distributed everywhere, as it is through many hands that **division** [*diaireseôs*] into all the various items occurs. Or consider whether he is named “Briareos” from **raising up nourishment** [*airein tèn boran*] (so to speak) for the parts of the cosmos. “Aegaeon” [*Aigaiôn*] is he who **always** [*aei*] flourishes and **rejoices** [*gaiôn*]—but one must not confuse the myths, nor transfer

17

3 *Deus* might be the form of *Zeus* in the Aeolian (specifically, Boeotian) dialect, or perhaps the Latin word for “god” (genitive *dei*). *Dios* here is probably the regular genitive form of *Zeus* in the Attic dialect.

4 Homer, *Iliad* 15.18–19.

5 Homer, *Iliad* 1.399–400.

ρειν μῆδ' εἴ τι προσεπλάσθη ταῖς παραδεδομέναις κατ' αὐτοὺς γενεαλογίαις ὑπὸ τῶν μὴ συνιέντων ἃ αἰνίττονται, κεχηρμένων δ' αὐτοῖς ὡς καὶ τοῖς πλάσμασιν, ἀλόγως τίθεσθαι.

...

Excerpt III

- 35 Τελευταῖον δὲ τὸν δεχόμενον τὰς ψυχὰς ἀέρα Ἄιδην, ὡς ἔφην, διὰ τὸ ἀειδὲς προσηγόρευσαν. μὴ φαινομένων δ' ἡμῖν τῶν ὑπὸ γῆν, ἐκείσε χωρεῖν τοὺς διαλλάττοντας διεβόησαν. Κλύμενος ὁ Ἄιδης λέγεται τῷ αἴτιος εἶναι τοῦ κλύειν· ἄηρ γὰρ πεπληγμένος ἢ φωνή. εὐβουλον δὲ καὶ εὐβουλέα κατὰ ἀποδυσπέτησιν ὠνόμασαν αὐτὸν ὡς καλῶς περὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων βουλευόμενον διὰ τοῦ παύειν αὐτοῦς ποτε τῶν πόνων καὶ τῶν φροντίδων. ἐπονομάζεται δὲ ἐπιθετικῶς καὶ πολυδέκτης καὶ πολυδέγμων καὶ πολυ-αρχος πολλοὺς τε δεχόμενος καὶ τῶν λεγομένων πλειόνων ἢ πολλῶν ἄρχων. πυλάρτην δὲ αὐτὸν ὁ ποιητὴς προσηγόρευσεν ὡς ἀκριβῶς ἡρμοσμένης τὰς πύλας ἔχοντα καὶ μηδένα ἀνιέντα. ὁ δὲ Χάρων ἴσως μὲν κατ' ἀντίφρασιν ἐκ τῆς χαρὰς ὠνομάσθη· δύναται δὲ καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ χωρεῖν ἢ τοῦ χανδάνω τὸ ἔτυμον ἔχειν ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ κεχηρῆναι. ὁ δὲ Ἀχέρων ἀπὸ τῶν γινομένων ἐπὶ τοῖς τετελευτηκόσιν ἀχῶν προήχθη καὶ ἢ Ἀχερουσία λίμνη. φανερόν δὲ πόθεν καὶ ὁ Κωκυτὸς καὶ ὁ Πυριφλεγέθων τὴν κλήσιν ἔσχον, πάλαι καιόντων τοὺς νεκροὺς καὶ κωκυτὸν ἐγειρόντων τῶν Ἑλλήνων, διὰ τοῦτο καὶ δαίμονας αὐτοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ κεκαῦσθαι καλούντων. ἢ δ' ἄορνος λίμνη φυσικώτερον ἴσως ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀέρος προσηγορεύθη· καίτοι καὶ τὸν σκότον ἔσθ' ὅτε καὶ τὴν ὀμίχλην ἀέρα οἱ παλαιοὶ ἐκάλουν, εἰ μὴ νῆ Δία οὕτως ἀπεχρήσαντο τῇ τοῦ ἀέρος γλαυκότητι ὡς καὶ τῶν λεγομένων φασγανίων οἷς στέφουσι τὸν Πλούτωνα. στέφουσι δὲ αὐτὸν καὶ ἀδιάντῳ πρὸς ὑπόμησιν τοῦ αὐαίνεσθαι τοὺς τελευτώντας καὶ μηκέτι τὸ διερόν ἴσχειν, στέρεσθαι δὲ τῆς παραιτίας τοῦ διαπνεῖσθαι καὶ θάλλειν ἰκμάδος. ἐντεῦθεν ὑπονοητέον καὶ τοὺς ἀλίβαντας μεμυθεύσθαι ἐν Ἄιδου εἶναι διὰ τὴν τῆς λιβάδος ἀμεθεξίαν τῶν νεκρῶν. οἰκείως δὲ τοῖς κατοικομένοις καὶ ὁ νάρκισσος ἔχειν ἔδοξε καὶ τῶν Ἑρινύων ἔφασαν αὐτὸν στεφάνωμα εἶναι, προσεδρεύσαντες τῇ παραθέσει τῆς νάρκης καὶ τῷ οἶον διαναρκᾶν τοὺς ἀποθνήσκοντας.

6 “Aegaeon” was the name given by humans to the divinity known by the gods as *Briareós* (Homer, *Iliad* 1.403–404)—perhaps an example of the difference between “merely” human cultural accretion and the ancient (“divine”) core.

7 Homer, several times in the *Iliad* (e.g., 8.367) and once in the *Odyssey* (11.277).

the names from one to another, nor set down unthinkingly something which has been made up and added to the genealogies handed down according to them by people who do not understand what they hint at, but use them as they use fictions.⁶

...

Excerpt III

Finally, the air which receives souls is Hades [*Haidês*], as I said, so called because it is **unseen** [*aeides*]: it is because things beneath the earth are not apparent to us that they put it about that the dead go there. Hades is said to be “Famous” [*klumenos*] because this air is the cause of **hearing** [*kluein*]: sound is air that has been struck. Despair led them to call him “Prudent” [*euboulos*] and “the Prudent One” [*eubouleus*]; the idea was that he **plans** [*bouleuomenon*] **well** [cf. *eu* “well”] for men by bringing an end at some time to their toils and cares. His epithets include: “Much-Receiving” [*Poludektês*] and “Receptive of Much” [*Poludegmôn*] and “Ruler over Many” [*Poluarkhos*] because he **receives many** [*pollous dekhomenos*] and **rules over** [*arkhôn*] the so-called majority or the **many** [*pollôn*]. The poet⁷ called him “Gatekeeper” [*Pulartês*] as **holding his gates tightly closed** [*akribôs hêrmosmenas tas pulas ekhonta*] and letting none out. Charon [*Kharôn*] was perhaps named by antithesis from **joy** [*kharas*]; but it might be that its etymology is **contain** [*khôrein*] or **gape** [*khandanô*]—or **yawn** [*kekênênai*]. “Acheron” [*Akherôn*] and the “Acherousian” [*Akherousia*] lake were introduced because of the **sorrows** [*akhôn*] which come to the dead. It is clear where the names of Cocytus [*Kôkutos*] and Pyriphlegethon [*Puriphlegethôn*] come from: the Greeks of old used to **burn** [*kaiontôn*] their corpses and raise a **wail** [*kôkutos*]. Because of this they also called the dead “daemons” [*daimonas*], which comes from burning as well [cf. *daiô* “to kindle”]. The Aornos [*Aornos*] lake perhaps has its name with some regard to science from **air** [*aeros*], although sometimes the ancients called darkness and mist “air” [*aeros*] as well—unless, by Zeus, they were appealing to the gray of the air, which it shares with the so-called gladioli with which they garland Pluto. They also garland him with maidenhair [*adiantôi*], as a reminder that the dead dry out and **no longer hold moisture** [*dieron*], and are deprived of the water that is needed to breathe and flourish. This is why it must be understood allegorically that the myths say that **corpses** [*alibantas*] are in Hades because the dead **lack** a share in the **wet** [*libados*]. The narcissus [*narkissos*] was appropriately associated with the dead, and they said that it was the wreath of the Erinnyes, noting its similarity to **numbness** [*narkês*]—and because the dead grow, as it were, **numb** [*dianarkan*].

Οὕτω δ' ἂν ἤδη καὶ τᾶλλα τῶν μυθικῶς παραδεδοῦσθαι περὶ θεῶν δοκούντων ἀναγαγεῖν ἐπὶ τὰ παραδεδειγμένα στοιχεῖα, ὦ παῖ, δύναιο, πεισθεῖς ὅτι οὐχ οἱ τυχόντες ἐγένοντο οἱ παλαιοί, ἀλλὰ καὶ συνιέναι τὴν τοῦ κόσμου φύσιν ἱκανοὶ καὶ πρὸς τὸ διὰ συμβόλων καὶ αἰνιγμάτων φιλοσοφῆσαι περὶ αὐτῆς εὐεπίφοροι. διὰ πλειόνων δὲ καὶ ἐξεργαστικώτερον εἴρηται τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις φιλοσόφοις, ἐμοῦ νῦν ἐπιτετμημένως αὐτὰ παραδοῦναί σοι βουλευθέντος· χρησίμη γὰρ αὐτῶν καὶ ἡ ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον προχειρότης ἐστί. περὶ δὲ ἐκείνων καὶ περὶ τῆς θεραπείας τῶν θεῶν καὶ τῶν οἰκείως εἰς τιμὴν αὐτῶν γινομένων καὶ τὰ πάτρια καὶ τὸν ἐντελὴ λήψη λόγον οὕτω μόνον ὡς εἰς τὸ εὐσεβεῖν ἀλλὰ μὴ εἰς τὸ δεισιδαιμονεῖν εἰσαγομένων τῶν νέων καὶ θύειν τε καὶ εὐχεσθαι καὶ προσκυνεῖν καὶ ὀμνύειν κατὰ τρόπον καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἐμβάλλουσι καιροῖς καθ' ἣν ἀρμόττει συμμετρίαν διδασκομένων.

In the same way, my child, you will now also be able to refer the rest of what, in mythical form, the tradition has been pleased to pass down about the gods to the elements that have been set out, in the conviction that the ancients were far from mediocre but were capable of understanding the nature of the cosmos and ready to express their philosophical account of it in symbols and enigmas. It has all been said at greater length and in more detail by earlier philosophers, but I wanted now to pass it on to you in abbreviated form: an ability to handle these even to this extent is useful. But as to those traditions, and the service of the gods, and what is appropriately done to their honor, you will thus grasp both your ancestral customs and also a perfect account when the young are led only to piety and not to superstition and are taught to sacrifice and pray and worship and swear in due form, as circumstances demand, and in proportionate manner.

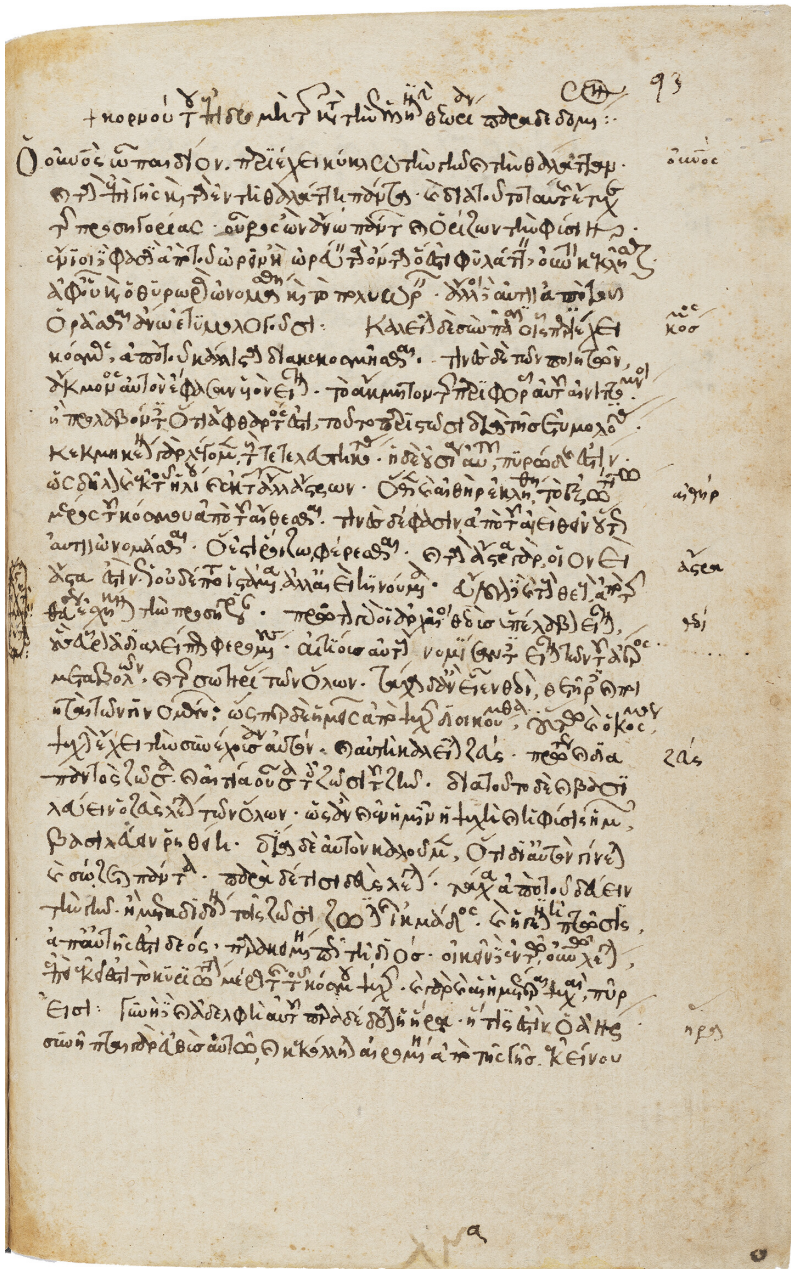


FIGURE 2.5.1 Cornutus, *Compendium of Greek Theology*
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Zheng Xuan and Commentarial Etymology (2nd Century CE)

Dagmar Schäfer

The rules of the Chinese Qin (221–206 BCE) and Han (206 BCE–220 CE) dynasties mark a pivotal turning point for language dynamics in East Asia as both heavily enforced normalizations and standards across their expansive imperial territory and tributary zones. Over the course of the Han dynasty, scholars responded to the political and administrative desire for clear communication in different ways. One group documented “regional variations of language” (*fangyan* 方言). Such documentation could take the form of individual surveys such as those of the scholar Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53–18 BCE) or happen within lexical studies, the method preferred by Xu Shen 許慎 (58–148 CE). Another, considerably larger, group analyzed and discussed words, their histories, morphology, and phonology, mainly by commenting on the imperially sanctioned canon of classics which covered themes as diverse as statecraft, ritual, music poetry and history. Major representatives of this second tradition are Wang Yi 王逸 (89–158 CE), He Xiu 何休 (129–182 CE), Gao You 高誘 (168–212 CE), and Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE).

Both groups shared an interest in explaining the common language of communication, that is “elegant speech” (*yayan* 雅言), which the Confucian *Analects* describe as the language of poetry and documents. In another text included in this volume, the philosopher Xunzi described *yayan* as the combination of linguistic repertoire, facial expressions, attitudes, entering and withdrawing or gait demeanor guided by traditional etiquette.¹ Different to Xunzi’s rather comprehensive philosophical approach to language in general, Zheng Xuan’s main scholarly project is a commentary of the classics. In this context, he refers to *yayan* as the (written) language that he wants his contemporaries to understand properly when reading. In this sense his approach is etymological. Chinese historian Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877–1927) emphasized that Zheng Xuan stands out for his particular appreciation of sound glosses

1 The Confucian Analects *Lunyu zhushu*, 7.18. *Ying Song Taizhou ben Xunzi*, 2.2.

as a way to explain words, his use of paronomasia, and his theory about historical languages.²

Unlike modern etymology that studies the history of words, Zheng Xuan's aim was to understand and regulate language *use* by preserving, circulating, and normalizing literary language. From a historical viewpoint, Zheng Xuan represents attempts to guide an ongoing transition to one standardized written language after the historical rift in scholarship caused by the Qin ruler's burning of books (212 BCE). Although in reality very few books were actually burned, this event spurred a scholarly debate that, almost two millennia later, was earmarked by Qing scholars as a controversy between Old Script (*guwen* 古文) and New Script (*jinwen* 今文) scholarship. The difference between the two schools was marked by writing style and by content. The New Script School embraced a corpus of Five Classics (*Shijing* 詩經, *Shangshu* 尚書, *Yijing* 易經, *Liji* 禮記, and *Chunqiu* 春秋) and consulted Confucius's and Mencius's teachings, whereas proponents of the Old Script School gathered around Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE), collecting and studying apocryphal writings of various earlier schools.³ Old Script referred to scripts that were believed to be in use from antiquity until the late Zhou. The New Script, called Chancery style, comprised the new orthographic norms of the Han rulers.⁴ By the second century, after reflecting on the points of both schools, Zheng Xuan applied his insights on the historical development of script and language to his commentaries.

As a historical figure, Zheng Xuan is a paragon of critical and meticulous scholarship. The scion of an impoverished clan with memories of its heyday of political influence when one of its ancestors served as a minister at the capital court, Zheng spent most of his life in his birthplace. From his father's farm in Gaomi on the Shandong peninsula, he would observe six emperors ascend and descend in rapid succession, all struggling to maintain unified rule. Fourteen official positions were offered to Zheng. He declined them all and instead became a member of the Imperial School (*taixue* 太學) in Luoyang, dedicating his life to "studying all kinds of literature and learning about the language

2 Wang Guowei makes this observation in his study of terms for animals in the *Erya* dictionary. Wang Guowei, *Erya caomu chongyu niaoshou*, *juan* 1, 1a.

3 A sixth classic was the *Book of Music* (*Yuejing* 樂經) which was lost during the era of Qin Shi Huang (247–221 BCE). For a discussion of the controversy and its role in Chinese philology see Lu, *In Pursuit*, 141–149.

4 As Bruce Rusk notes debates around script forms and text contents were formative for language research throughout the imperial period and thoroughly studied by Jesuits and other European philologists as well. Rusk, "Old Scripts, New Actors."

of calendar calculation, geographical mapping, and mathematics.”⁵ Confucian scholars and politicians of later centuries, however, mainly cherished and recognized his works on rites and statecraft.

Building on pre-Qin dynasty views on the origin and development of words, Zheng Xuan’s work marks a step towards the systematic study and use of sound glosses. He identifies relations between phonetics and meaning, systematically suggesting phonetic relations between cognates that also had implications for the meaning of a word. In comparison to his predecessor Xunzi (see Chapter 1.5) who offers a contextual discourse, Zheng Xuan’s explanations are extremely brief, concentrating often almost exclusively on the technical aspects of word derivation. Unlike the names (*ming* 名) that had dominated Xunzi’s approach in the third century BCE and the notion of diverse pronunciations, Zheng’s starting point is the original “written word” (*zi* 字). Still, as Behr cautions, Zheng Xuan’s etymology should not be misunderstood as a practice mainly concerned with written representation; rather, it is the case that Zheng, starting from the graph, “traces the derivation of a word and its phonologically regular congeners (often called *cizu* 詞族, “word families,” in the Chinese scholarly tradition).”⁶ Zheng Xuan’s approach was guided by genealogical principles such as the idea that a word-character had either a common phonetic “mother” (*tong mu xiang xun* 同母相訓) or a mother-son relationship (*muzi xiang xun* 母子相訓).⁷

If Zheng Xuan’s explanations appear abstract to a modern reader, it is partly because he was trying to reconnect something that had drifted apart. As spoken language had changed, graphs had been used mainly for their phonetic value and any relationship to the original “meaning-making” part of the characters had been lost. For example, “elephant” 象 (Old Chinese *s.[d]aŋ?)⁸ had turned into a phonetic loan of the homophonous verb meaning “interpret, translate” (i.e., unknown languages) or “to represent, delineate.” In the translation below, I operate with a modern *pinyin* romanization and indicate the meaning in square brackets to show how Zheng Xuan discusses misleading pairings, such as scholars’ use of the logograph for a wind-reed instrument (*sheng* 笙) for

5 Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, juan 4, 223, Zheng Xuan tackled Jing Fang’s 京房 commentary on the *Book of Changes* (*Jing shi Yi zhuan* 京氏易傳), which offers a reading of said work and divination practices. He worked on the “Gongyang Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals” (*Gongyang Chunqiu* 公羊春秋) and analyzed the “Triple Concordance calendar calculation” (*Santong lipu* 三統曆譜), and the mathematical classic “Nine Paragraphs on Mathematical Procedures” (*Jiuzhang suanshu* 九章算術).

6 Behr, “Inscription Placement,” 111.

7 Qian Huihen. “Zheng Xuan de yuyuanxue sixiang tanxi,” 143.

8 Phonetic reconstruction according to Baxter and Sagart, *Old Chinese*.

the word for creating (*sheng* 生), which he attributes to their similar pronunciation in the “East,” that is, the coastal regions, of the Han empire. In some cases, Zheng Xuan addresses how historical and social dynamics shaped certain understandings. For example, referring to a passage of the *Book of Songs*, he explains that the word arrow (*shi* 矢) could also mean a vow (*shi* 誓) because the concept of a vow implied that it could not be taken back, just as an arrow flies away never to return (see Excerpt 1 below).

Zheng Xuan relies on arguments of consistency when explaining the varied meanings of words. His benchmark and reference frame were the Five Classics. When Zheng includes a select corpus of contemporary literature into his purview, he does so to track historical dynamics of language change, cautioning his contemporaries that the present could not be used to interpret antiquity. Among the examples presented in this chapter are his efforts to correct former scribes who had used homophones and thus caused misinterpretations as well as cases in which he saw his colleagues using an inappropriate pronunciation (e.g., in the case of mourning dress) or meaning equivalences were mistaken as sound equivalences or vice-versa.

Rather than the effort of an individual, Zheng Xuan's comments must be understood as the work of a collective, reflecting late Han approaches to how phonetics were rendered or had changed over time. During the final stage of his life Zheng Xuan “recruited men from the varied schools of learning, erased and sanctioned numerous heretical writings, corrected and changed corrupted texts.”⁹ Zheng's commentary refers to Xu Shen's dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (Explain the graphs to unravel the written words)¹⁰ for the original meaning of a word, assuming that the glyphs/graphs of Chinese characters were continuously corrupted starting in the third century with the attempts of the first Qin emperor to promulgate the Lesser Seal script (*xiaozhuan* 小篆) as the imperial standard. Commentaries refer to the glossary-dictionary *Erya* 爾雅 (Conforming to elegant language) and Yang Xiong's *Fangyan* 方言 (Regional variations) and indicate a lively exchange with the scholarship of the aforementioned Wang Yi, He Xiu, and Gao Yu.

Few scholars would nowadays contest that the world envisioned in the comments ascribed to Zheng Xuan was regionally and historically diverse, although modern linguists hotly debate the extent to which such plurality crossed the boundaries now drawn between groups such as “Sinitic,” “Tibetan,” “Turkmenic” etc. The people of Zheng's birthplace, for instance, spoke the Qi 齊

9 Fan Ye, *Hou Hanshu*, *juan* 35, 1213.

10 This translation of the title follows Bottéro and Harbsmeier. “The ‘Shuowen Jiezi.’”

language which Zheng seems to have applied in his writings, whereas his peers Wang Yi, He Xiu, and Gao You, preferred the Chu 楚 language, which some modern linguists identify as a mixture with elements of non-Sinitic Austroasiatic and Tibeto-Burmese.¹¹ While Zheng Xuan mostly lived on his family's property, he "traveled to study in the capitals of Zhou and Qin. He had contact with the regions of You, Bing, Yanzhou and Yu, went on pilgrimage, and communicated with commoners"¹² Zheng Xuan enrolled as a student of Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166 CE), a famous contemporary scholar of the classics who resided in the central Shanxi plain where the Jin 晉 language constituted one of many denominators within elite and political communication. When Zheng Xuan returned to his home after seven years, several disciples accompanied him. From then on, visitors, merchants, and scholars from all over Han China regularly knocked on his door, all potentially serving as sources for his observation of regional differences in pronunciation and meaning making. Throughout his commentarial work Zheng Xuan identifies Han China as a plurilingual landscape.¹³

Zheng's mapping represents the gist of a life-long engagement with language, as he compiled most of his commentaries at the end of his career, when he, upon one of his regular visits to the imperial court, found himself on the wrong end of a factional turbulence and was banned from the capital.¹⁴ His commentaries reflect firsthand experience and a thorough grasp of his era's methods of exegetical studies. Based on both, Zheng also laid out his theory of language development, noting that

期始書之也，倉卒無其字或以音類。比方假借為之趣於近之而已。受之者非一邦之人。人用其鄉，同言異字，同字異言，於茲遂生矣。¹⁵

at the beginning of writing, Master Cang [Jie, who represents the mythological beginning of writing; see also Chapter 3.6] had no characters [zi], nor could he analogize with sound. He made use of homophones and was mainly interested in approximation. The recipients [of such documents] were not from one region. People used in their village[’s way] and consequently generated same words and different characters; [or] same characters and different words.

11 E.g. Schuessler, "Multiple Origins."

12 Fan Ye, *Hou Hanshu*, *juan* 35, 1209.

13 For a survey of Zheng Xuan's references see Li Yuping, "Zheng Xuan de fangyanguan," 165–171.

14 Fan Ye, *Hou Hanshu*, *juan* 67, 2187. Zheng Xuan stayed at home for 14 years.

15 Lu Deming, *Jingdian shiwen*, *juan* 1, 3b.

Zheng Xuan himself mentions five cardinal distinctions for the languages of his own era. Such language distinctions are not analogous to the modern linguistic groupings mentioned above. Rather, they reflect the notion of communities able to communicate with each other. Zheng insists that while neighbors can always communicate with each other, languages diverge in proportion to geographic distance. Zheng Xuan's view on the use of standards resonates with official historiography that describes the languages in the territory of the Han dynasty as an assembly of groups using different tones and pronunciation.¹⁶ Yang Xiong had noted in his regional survey approximately two centuries earlier, that neighboring regions were able to communicate because they shared, if not all, then at least certain practices, emphasizing that since the Han emperor, upon establishing imperial rule, "had ordered the investigation of the refined customs of all eight regions, he realized the similarities and differences between the nine provinces and thus mastered the nine pronunciations in the territories, surrounded by the seas. He made all people living under the shadow of his palace understand the customs of *tianxia* (i.e., imperial rule)."¹⁷ Like his predecessors, Du Zichun 杜子春 (approx. 30 BCE–58 CE) and Zheng Zhong 鄭眾 (?–83 CE), Zheng Xuan explicitly distinguishes between the Qi, Lu, Qin, Chu, and Luoyang languages (the latter being the common language of the *Tongyu* 通語). He also sees differences based on the ancient state system of the Warring States (The Kingdoms of Qi, Lu, Ji, Ju, Lai, Yang, Teng, Xue, Chen, Song, Chu, Yue, Zhou, Qin, Zhao, Wei, Zheng, Yan, etc.) and their reflection in contemporary administrative divisions of districts, and traces county boundaries back to the jurisdiction of the thirteen provinces of the Eastern Han Dynasty.¹⁸ The further removed from the capital, however, the less educational efforts or political efforts to maintain standards were of assistance, becoming increasingly tenuous until differences were insurmountable and communication required mediators.¹⁹ It is from such passages that we can see that, for Zheng Xuan, translation had to operate across a combination of social and linguistic barriers.

We thus see two sides to Zheng Xuan's approach to language: first, a technical view that concentrated largely on the relationship between orality and writing and herein attempted a clarification of phonetic markers in script and the analysis of historical or regional changes; and second, a sociopolitical view, in

16 Ban Gu, *Hanshu*, *juan* 28, 1640.

17 Chang Qu, *Huayangguo zhi jiaozhu*, 708.

18 See Su Tianyun, "Yu shi zhong qiuzhen;" and Li Shuhao, "Zheng Xuan de fangyan."

19 *Liji zhengyi*, *juan* 12, 27a.

which oral linguistic abilities were only one of the elements enabling communication across inevitably diverse communities of ritual, social or intellectual practices. His scholarship shaped and inspired the following two millennia of Chinese scholarship. By the time of the Song dynasty, Jia Changchao 賈昌朝 (998–1065 CE) would rely on the teachings of Zheng Xuan to develop his grammatical understanding of Han-era Chinese as would Ma Jianzhong 馬建忠 (1845–1900 CE) in 1898 when composing his view on Chinese phonetics and its grammar.

1 Chinese Texts and English Translations

Zheng Xuan's commentaries (set in slightly smaller FangSong type) on a selection of the Five Classics excerpted from *Shisanjing zhushu: fu jiaokan ji* 十三經注疏：附校勘記, edited by Ruan Yuan 阮元, Qing Jiaqing kanben 清嘉慶刊本 ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009). English translations by Dagmar Schäfer with reference to the most commonly used standard English and French translations of the full texts (see translations section in the bibliography).

1.1 *Excerpt 1: Commentary on the Book of Songs*

《詩經·衛風·考槃》：考槃在澗，碩人之寬。獨寐寤言，永矢弗諼。

鄭氏箋：矢誓。諼，忘也。²⁰

Book of Songs—Airs of Wei—Inquiring the stone:

Inquiring the rock in the ravine, a great man is at ease,
alone I sleep and awake to words,
an eternal vow cannot be ignored.

Zheng notes: “Arrow” [*shi*] means “vow” [*shi*].²¹ “Forgetting/cheating” [*xuan*] means “ignoring/forgetting” [*wang*].

Context: Zheng Xuan's Commentary in relation to *Shuowen jiezi* and *Fangyan*

《說文解字》：矢，弓弩矢也。²²

Shuowen jiezi: *Shi* is the arrow of bows and crossbows.

²⁰ *Mao shi zhengyi*, juan 3b, 14a.

²¹ It remains implicit that this refers to *shi* 矢 in the above sentence.

《方言》：箭，自關而東謂之矢。²³

Fangyan: in the East of the pass, *jian* “arrow” is also called *shi* “arrow.”

1.2 ***Excerpt II: Commentary on the Rites of Zhou: Homophones with Implications***

《周禮·春官·眡瞭》：眡瞭掌凡樂事播鞀，擊頌磬，笙磬。
鄭氏注：磬在東方曰笙，笙，生也。²⁴

The Rites of Zhou—Spring official—Observing the scalding/burning ritual:

When in charge of all kinds of delightful affairs, broadcast them with drums. Strike the *Song* [i.e., ode] chime stone and the *Sheng* [i.e., reed-wind-pipe] chime stone.

Zheng annotates: In the eastern districts, *Song* chime stones are called *Sheng* [i.e., reed-wind pipes]. Reed-wind-pipe is [homophonous to] *sheng* [i.e., creating].²⁵

1.3 ***Excerpt III: Commentary on the Book of Rites: Mistakes by Other Scholars and Phonetic Derivates/Relations.***

《禮記·雜記》：總冠，綵纓。
鄭氏注：綵，當為澡麻帶經之澡，聲之誤也。謂有事其布以為纓。²⁶

Book of Rites—Miscellaneous Records

The mourning gown, a stitched hem with tassels.

Zheng annotates: “Hem with stitches” is read aloud as the very *zao*, that is, a mourning garment with a hemp-belt. This is a mistake of pronunciation. It means that, at certain times, this cloth functions as a tassel.

22 *Shuowen jiezi gulin*, 1370.

23 Yang Xiong, *Fangyan*, *juan* 9, 1b.

24 *Zhouli zhushu*, *juan* 23, 19a.

25 Shen signifies a reed-pipe and thus a wind instrument, hence the text confused commentators. Zheng Xuan’s explanation of the word as a homophone assumed that the classic text had to make sense and was based on a ritual procedure, as elsewhere the classics argued that the east represented spring and thus the period of creation. Henceforth, Zheng Xuan added that chime stones, called *sheng*, represented the East, that is, the period of creation.

26 *Liji zhengyi*, *juan* 41, 6b.

1.4 *Excerpt IV: Commentary on the Book of Etiquette: Descriptive Etymology*

《儀禮·士冠禮》：爵弁，服纁裳、純衣、緇帶、韎韐。

[鄭玄注]：純衣，絲衣也。餘衣皆用布，唯冕與爵弁服用絲耳。²⁷

Book of Etiquette—Rites for Scholarly Hats

Ceremonial cap, plain clothing, black belts, red pads.

[Zheng annotates]: “Plain [under-] garment” refers to a silken [under-] garment. For all additional garments, use cloth [i.e., of bast/plant fibers]. Silk is used only for the [cloth parts of the] crown and the ceremonial cap.

1.5 *Excerpt v: Commentary on the Book of Etiquette: Historical Origins of Names*

《儀禮·士冠禮》：周弁殷髀夏收。

[鄭玄注]：弁名出於槃。槃大也。言所以自光大也。髀名出於幘。幘，覆也。言所以自覆飾也。收，言所以收斂髮也。其制之異亦未聞。²⁸

Book of Etiquette, Scholarly Capping Ceremony—Ceremonial Cap [*bian*] dress: The round cap of Yin is the Xu-cap for gathering [i.e., dressing hairs] in summer.

[Zheng annotates]: The name *bian* [for the cap] derives from *pan* [i.e., wooden tray]. The *pan*-tray is big. The [spoken] word means by itself/as a standalone glorifying and majestic. The name *xu* [i.e., name for a cap presumably used under Yin rule] derives from *wu* [phonetic here! Also means “veil”]. *Wu* means a cover [*fu*]. The [spoken] word now means by itself/as standalone to decorative coverings. The word “gathering” means by itself the pulling together of hairs. The differences of these systems are also not well known.

1.6 *Excerpt VI: On xiang 象 in the Classics*
Same Character, Different Meanings

《儀禮·燕禮》：主人盥洗象觚。

鄭氏注：象觚，觚有象，骨飾也。取象觚者東面。²⁹

²⁷ *Yili zhushu*, juan 2, 1a.

²⁸ *Yili zhushu*, juan 3, 12b.

²⁹ *Yili zhushu*, juan 14, 11a/b.

Book of Etiquette—Rites of Yan: The master cleaned the “elephant” vessel.³⁰

Zheng annotates: “Elephant” vessel is a vessel with an elephant décor made of bone. The elephant [vessel]/imagery³¹ was adopted from the East.

Different Contexts, Different Meanings

《禮記·樂記》：在天成象，在地成形。

鄭氏注：象，光耀也。³²

Book of Rites—Records on Music: *Xiang* [i.e., portents] are created in the heavens. On earth, forms are created.

Zheng annotates: *Xiang* means shining rays of light.

Identifying Experts for Communication with Other Tongues

《周禮·秋官》：象胥，每翟上士一人。³³

鄭氏注：通夷狄之言者曰象，胥其有才知者也。此類之本名，東方曰寄，南方曰象，西方曰狄鞮，北方曰譯。合總名曰象者，周之德先致南方也。³⁴

Rites of Zhou—Autumn official: For each scholar above the rank of Zhao [there is] one *xiang xu* [i.e., image official, i.e., interpreter].

Zheng annotates: *xiang* are those who understand the words of Yi and Di tribes [i.e., located in the East and North]. The gifted ones are *xu* [i.e., civil servants]. It is the root name for such kinds. Towards the Eastern directions, these [interpreters] are called *ji*; towards southern direction, they are called *xiang*, towards the western direction they are called *didi* and towards the north, they are called *yi*. *Xiang* is the summarizing generic name. The kindness of the Zhou kingdom first reached southwards.³⁵

30 My translation favors the original base meaning of *xiang*, i.e., elephant. But by that time, *xiang* also meant more generally “appearances,” images, or phenomena.

31 The text is ambiguous. It can mean that, for fetching an elephant’s bone one has to go to the eastern direction, or that the design was adopted from the east.

32 *Liji zhengyi*, *juan* 37, 20a.

33 Translation adapted from Behr, “To Translate,” 186–192.

34 *Zhouli zhushu*, *juan* 34, 11a.

35 See also Chapter 4.1.

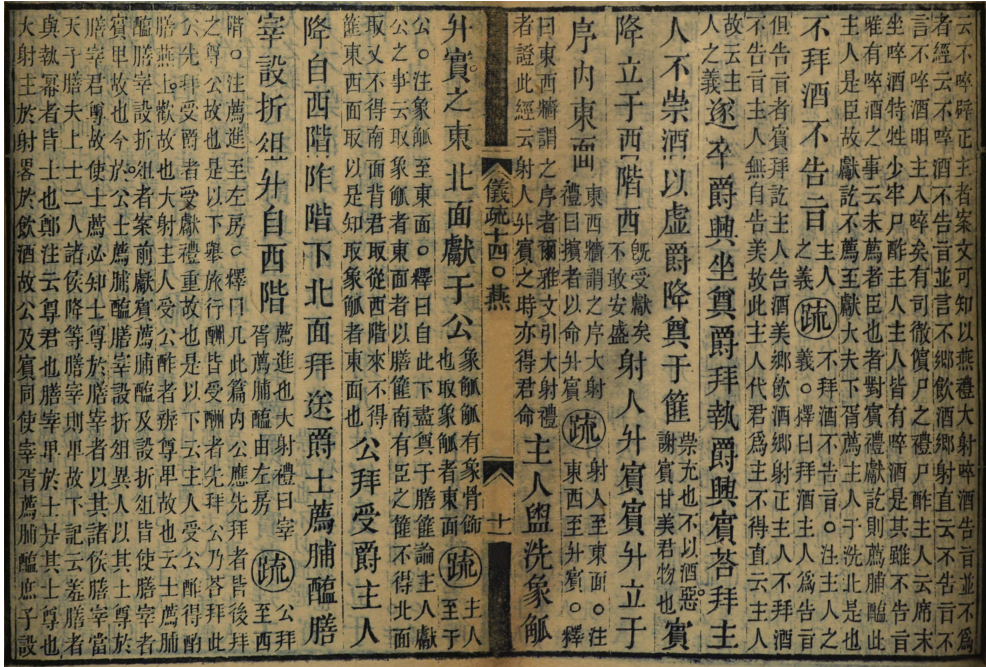


FIGURE 2.6.1 *Songben Yili zhushu* 宋本儀禮注疏 (嘉慶二十年 [1815] 江西南昌府學開雕 ed.). In *Shisanjing zhushu: fu jiaokan ji* 十三經注疏: 附校勘記
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1.7 *Excerpt VII: Commentary on the Rites of Zhou: Identifying Different Languages*

《周禮·考工記·廬人》：是故句兵，棨，刺兵，搏。³⁶
 鄭氏注：齊人謂柯斧，柄為棨。³⁷

Rites of Zhou—Artificer’s record—*Lu* [i.e., cottage people]: For this reason, there are line knives [*jubing pi*], axes [*pi*], and scuffles [*tuan*]. Zheng annotates: Qi people call it *kefu* [i.e., *ke* meaning the handle of an ax; and *fu*, the ax]; the handle [*bing*] is called *pi* [which means “ax” in Zheng Xuan’s pronunciation].

36 Another interpunctuation suggests another meaning: 是故句兵棨，刺兵搏。 For this reason, there are line soldiers with axes and wrestle soldiers with scuffles.

37 *Zhouli zhushu*, juan 41, 21a.

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Etymology in the Most Important Reference Encyclopedia of Late Antiquity (ca. 600 CE)

Isidore of Seville, Etymologies

Michele Loporcaro and Glenn W. Most

Isidore of Seville was born in the Carthaginensis (the region centering on Cartagena, Spain) around 560 and died in 636 in Hispalis (the future Seville), where he had been appointed bishop in 600 or 601 as a successor to his elder brother Leander.^{1,2} The author of a host of diverse works (exegetic, historical, grammatical), he completed in 633 his *opus magnum*, which had been encouraged by the king of Visigothic Spain Sisebut (612–621), a treatise under the title *Etymologiae* (*Etymologies*) which is in fact an all-encompassing Latin encyclopedia providing a summa of knowledge in different areas. This is apparent from the book titles, which range from *Grammar* to *God, Angels and Saints* (both in our excerpts). One of these, Book 10 (*On words*)—possibly originally conceived as an independent work³—is a proto-dictionary with entries ordered by the initial letter (though not in strictly alphabetical order), and linguistic topics take center stage in this work in many respects, as shown by the fact that the section on *Grammar* is Book 1, and that etymology is omnipresent, and therefore promoted to the title. Indeed, Isidore’s work testifies to the view, widespread in his age and later, that words are central to all human knowledge and hence that to understand their true source and meaning is to grasp all that humans can know. In all of his discussions on whatever matters, in fact, Isidore presents the etymology of basic technical terms of the relevant discipline, as seen, for instance, in the opening of Book 3 (*On Mathematics*), excerpted in what follows. His views on language and etymology depend on the classical Latin tradition, represented in this chapter by Varro—as is made clear in the commentary to the etymologies selected in our excerpts. They were to influence medieval culture, for which the etymological method was the one passed on by Isidore, as exem-

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- 1 Thanks to Carmen Cardelle de Hartmann for her suggestions and remarks. Usual disclaimers apply.
 - 2 Biographical information on Isidore is provided by Fontaine, *Isidore*, 5–9; Fontaine, *Genèse et originalité*, 85–143; and Castellanos, “Historical Contexts.”
 - 3 See Elfassi, “Isidore of Seville,” 247 (and the previous literature cited there).

plified for the transmission of the etymology of *vulpes* “fox” in the introduction on Hugutio (see Chapter 2.9), where the latter’s treatment is compared with Varro’s and Isidore’s.

Alongside what in ancient culture was labelled etymology—though modern linguistics would not recognize it as such (see Chapter 2.1)—the other pillar of Isidore’s treatment of language is derivation from grammatically related words. As seen in Chapter 2.4, language professionals from antiquity commented on transparent formal connections among formally related words. Isidore too comments extensively on this, though his conclusions are often not ours, as seen in the passage on *sapientia* excerpted below (*Etymologies* 10.1): “*sapiens* a *sapientia* nominetur, quia prius *sapientia*, deinde *sapiens*” (*sapiens* “a wise person” is called from *sapientia* “wisdom,” because first comes wisdom, then a wise person). Morphologically, it is indeed the other way round: *sapientia* is the derivative.

The thousand or so extant manuscripts of the *Etymologies* attest to the tremendous impact of the work, which was *the* reference work of the Middle Ages (far beyond etymology). In the early fourteenth century Isidore was still an undisputed luminary for Dante, who mentions him in his *Paradise* (10.130–132), but slightly over one century later, he was harshly dismissed by the founder of modern western philology, Lorenzo Valla (in the preface to Book 11 of his *De linguae Latinae elegantia* [*On the Elegance of the Latin Language*], 1444), as the “first and most arrogant of ignoramuses, who does not know anything and nonetheless teaches about everything” (*primus est Hisidorus indoctorum arrogantissimus, qui cum nihil sciat omnia praecipit. Opera omnia* 1 41).⁴

Isidore’s language usage and practices have to be seen against the background of his social and historical context. He was born in the Carthaginensis as a subject of the emperor Justinian slightly after the Byzantine reconquest of southern Spain from the Visigoths. This became the Empire’s *provincia Spaniae* in 552, to which Cartagena belonged until the province disappeared in 625 owing to the Visigothic *Reconquista*, whereas Hispalis was taken back by the Visigothic king Liuvigild much earlier (571). Thus, Isidore’s active life and work were entirely under Visigothic rule, back in the political orbit of the party to which his father Severianus and his family belonged, which has been convinc-

4 This dismissal did not mean the end of his success, as witnessed by the 57 extant manuscripts from the fifteenth century as well as from the fact that the work was constantly reprinted since the onset of print (at least eight times within the fifteenth century; for this comment we are indebted to Cardelle de Hartmann): cf. van den Abeele, “La tradition manuscrite,” 199; Cardelle de Hartmann, “Uso y recepción,” 478; and Cardelle de Hartmann, “Glossaries and Source Material,” 2.

ingly argued to have had linguistic consequences.⁵ In fact, from what Isidore says of his sources and readings, it is clear that he had no first-hand knowledge of Greek himself. Now, while Greek was virtually absent from the linguistic landscape of third- to fifth-century Spain, the abovementioned historical facts show that in the sixth century—with Greek garrisons, officers, and merchants in southern Spain—he could have easily learnt it if he had wanted to do so, or could at least have contracted Greek-speaking collaborators, as other Latin scholars did, such as Martin of Braga, in nearby Lusitania, or, in Calabria one generation before him, Cassiodorus, whose *Institutiones* are the earlier encyclopedia that Isidore largely exploits and replaces.⁶ From this, Fontaine concluded that Isidore's disinterest in Greek might depend on political chauvinism and have been part of a hostile attitude towards Constantinople, which was at the time the enemy of Visigothic Spain and the advocate of heresies (such as monophysism).⁷ A man of his time, Isidore took sides also linguistically for the Visigothic kingdom, which inherited its power from the western Empire and, after the conversion from Arianism of king Reccared in 587 (prompted by bishop Leander, Isidore's brother), was the defender of Roman orthodoxy. In view of this fact, it is paradoxical, as remarked by B. Bischoff, that Isidore's etyma were the main source of information on Greek for the western Middle Ages in the centuries to come.⁸

We are thus left with Latin, and nothing else. Isidore's world is a strictly monolingual one,⁹ not only retrospectively, because he lacked first-hand active knowledge of the other languages of the Holy Scripture, but also prospectively, because at his time Latin was still a naturally acquired spoken language in common use at all levels of society, even if dramatically changed with respect to the language spoken throughout the western Empire some centuries earlier. This is evident, in his works, from many passages, e.g., where he speaks of how to preach to the unlearned (*Etymologies* 6.8.2) or where he uses *lingua nostra*, "our language" (*History of the Kings of the Goths, Vandals, and Suevi* 2), referring to Latin in a context where he clearly has in mind all Spaniards, not just the

5 An in-depth scrutiny of Isidore's attitude towards Greek culture and language is to be found in Fontaine, *Isidore*, 846–854.

6 See Ribémont, *Les origines*. Martin of Braga (ca. 520–580) corresponded with Leander. Isidore praised his doctrine in the chapter he devotes to him in his treatise on literary history (*De viris illustribus* 22).

7 Fontaine, *Isidore*, 859. A biographical reason for this attitude may consist in the fact that the Byzantine conquest of southern Spain in 552 was possibly among the causes for Isidore's family fleeing from the Carthaginiensis (cf. Ubric Rabaneda, "Leander of Seville," 103–104).

8 Bischoff, "Das griechische Element in der abendländischen Bildung des Mittelalters," 30.

9 Banniard, *Viva voce*, 211.

learned.¹⁰ He was of course aware that his language had changed with respect to classical Latin, as he regards the language of his own time as a “fourth Latin,” which he himself calls “mixed”:

Latinas autem linguas quattuor esse quidam dixerunt, id est Priscam, Latinam, Romanam, Mixtam. ... Mixta, quae post imperium latius promotum, simul cum moribus et hominibus in Romanam ciuitatem inrupit, integritatem uerbi per soloecismos et barbarismos corrumpens.

Etymologies 9.1.6–7

Some have said that there are four varieties of Latin, that is, Ancient, Latin, Roman, and Mixed. ... Mixed, which emerged into the Roman state after the wider expansion of the Empire, along with new customs and peoples, corrupted the integrity of speech with solecisms and barbarisms.

In spite of these changes, the break between the vernaculars and Latin that led to the individuation of the Romance languages was still to come, starting in France around 700 CE.¹¹ Consequently, Isidore is linguistically and, in part, culturally at the end of western antiquity, in the same way as Visigothic society in his age was still in full continuity with the western Empire, on the eve of the epochal break determined by the Muslim conquest of northern Africa (late sixth century) and Spain (711–712 CE).¹² Culturally, though, he also represents at the same time the turning point away from antiquity, whose tradition culminates in Cassiodorus’s *Institutiones*, the life-long work of the Calabrian scholar (ca. 490–ca. 584) who served in Italy under Ostrogothic rule. While Cassiodorus knew Greek and still had the complete array of the literature from the Graeco-Roman tradition in his library, Isidore inaugurates the Western Middle Ages in a cultural sense, in that he selects the subset of Latin works and only Latin works that was to survive into western Medieval culture.

10 Banniard’s chapter on “Isidore de Séville et la recherche d’un équilibre stylistique” carefully sifts and discusses all the available evidence. Banniard, *Viva voce*, 181–251.

11 Herman, “The End of the History of Latin.”

12 A turning point in European history analyzed in historical masterpieces such as Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne*; and McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*.

Latin Text

Excerpted from Isidore of Seville, *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi: Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. Wallace Martin Lindsay (Oxford University Press, 1911); square brackets in the original.

Excerpt 1: Liber 1. De grammatica

i. DE DISCIPLINA ET ARTE. 1. Disciplina a discendo nomen accepit: unde et scientia dici potest. Nam scire dictum a discere, quia nemo nostrum scit, nisi qui discit. Aliter dicta disciplina, quia discitur plena. 2. Ars vero dicta est, quod artis praeceptis regulisque consistat. Alii dicunt a Graecis hoc tractum esse vocabulum ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρετῆς, id est a virtute, quam scientiam vocaverunt.

...

xxix. DE ETYMOLOGIA. 1. Etymologia est origo vocabulorum, cum vis verbi vel nominis per interpretationem colligitur. Hanc Aristoteles σύμβολον, Cicero adnotationem nominavit, quia nomina et verba rerum nota facit exemplo posito; utputa “flumen,” quia fluendo crevit, a fluendo dictum. 2. Cuius cognitio saepe usum necessarium habet in interpretatione sua. Nam dum videris unde ortum est nomen, citius vim eius intellegis. Omnis enim rei inspectio etymologia cognita planior est. Non autem omnia nomina a veteribus secundum naturam inposita sunt, sed quaedam et secundum placitum, sicut et nos servis et possessionibus interdum secundum quod placet nostrae voluntati nomina damus. 3. Hinc est quod omnium nominum etymologiae non reperiuntur,

13 For another translation, see Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, trans. Barney.

14 This etymology appears in many passages of Augustine (cf. Spevak’s note on this passage in Isidore of Seville, *Étymologies. Livre 1*, ed. Spevak, 221). When it comes to modern science, *discere* has a well-established etymology from the PIE root **dek-* “to take, accept” (whence “take in,” though the morphological details are controversial: *EDL* 172), and is related to *doceo* “to teach” but, contrary to appearance, not to *discipulus* (from which *disciplina* derives, which has no relationship with *plenus* “full”), on whose etymon there is no consensus yet (different views in *LEW* 1.355 vs. *EDL* 172), the only sure thing being that a suffix *-pulus* cannot be justified, thus ruling out *disc(ere)* as an eligible derivation base.

English Translation

Translated by Glenn W. Most.¹³

Excerpt 1: Book 1. On Grammar

i. ON DISCIPLINE AND ART. 1. *Disciplina* [discipline] receives its name from *discere* [to learn], for which reason it can also be called *scientia* [knowledge]. Now *scire* [to know] is said from *discere*, because none of us knows anything unless he learns it. *Disciplina* is said in another way, because “it is learned fully” [*discitur plena*].¹⁴ 2. But *ars* [an art; genitive *artis*] is said because it is composed of strict [*artus*] precepts and rules. Others say this word [*vocabulum*] is derived by the Greeks from *aretê*, that is, “virtue,” which they called “knowledge.”¹⁵

...

xxix. ON ETYMOLOGY. 1. Etymology [*etymologia*] is the origin of words, when the meaning [*vis*]¹⁶ of a verb [*verbum*] or a noun [*nomen*]¹⁷ is inferred through interpretation. Aristotle called this a *sumbolon* [sign], and Cicero an *adnotatio* [annotation],¹⁸ because it makes known [*notus*] the nouns [*nomina*] and verbs [*verba*] for things by presenting an example: as for instance *flumen* [river], so called from *fluendum* [flowing] because it is by flowing [*fluendo*] that it has grown. 2. Knowing a word’s etymology is often indispensably useful for interpreting it, for when you have seen whence a word [*nomen*] has arisen, you more quickly understand its force [*vis*]. Indeed, the examination of any thing is clearer once its etymology is known. However, not all names [*nomina*] were applied by the ancients according to nature,¹⁹ but some also arbitrarily, just as we too sometimes give names [*nomina*] to our slaves and possessions according to what pleases our inclination. 3. This is why etymologies are not

15 *Ars* and *artus* both stem from the PIE root **h₂(e)r-* “to fit, join” (*EDL* 55f.), as does Gk. ἀρετή, whose etymon is uncertain, according to one proposal (Vine, *Aeolic ὄρπετον*, 61f.; *EDG* 128f.).

16 The term *vis* in Latin denotes the force or power of something; applied to a word, it signifies its meaning.

17 Both *verbum* and *nomen* can mean “word” in general; when they are opposed, the former means “verb” and the latter “noun” or “name.” Often it is not clear just what these terms mean.

18 The relevant passage in Cicero (*Topica* 35) actually has *notatio*, not *adnotatio* (cf. Isidore of Seville, *Étymologies. Livre 1*, ed. Spevak, 318).

19 Cf. Chapter 2.3.

quia quaedam non secundum qualitatem, qua genita sunt, sed iuxta arbitrium humanae voluntatis vocabula acceperunt. Sunt autem etymologiae nominum aut ex causa datae, ut “reges” a [regendo et] recte agendo, aut ex origine, ut “homo,” quia sit ex humo, aut ex contrariis ut a lavando “lutum,” dum lutum non sit mundum, et “lucus,” quia umbra opacus parum luceat. 4. Quaedam etiam facta sunt ex nominum derivatione, ut a prudentia “prudens”; quaedam etiam ex vocibus, ut a garrulitate “garrulus”; quaedam ex Graeca etymologia orta et declinata sunt in Latinum, ut “silva,” “domus.” 5. Alia quoque ex nominibus locorum, urbium, [vel] fluminum traxerunt vocabula. Multa etiam ex diversarum gentium sermone vocantur. Vnde et origo eorum vix cernitur. Sunt enim pleraque barbara nomina et incognita Latinis et Graecis.

...

Excerpt II: Liber III. De mathematica

...

iii. QUID SIT NUMERUS. 1. Numerus autem est multitudo ex unitatibus constituta. Nam unum semen numeri esse, non numerum. Numero nummus nomen dedit, et a sui frequentatione vocabulum indidit. Unus a Graeco nomen trahit; Graeci enim unum ἕνα dicunt ... 4. Dicti autem decem a Graeca ety-

20 Indeed, both *rex* and *rego* come from one PIE root **h₃reg-* “to rule, direct” (EDL 517, 522), and also *homo/humus* are rightly connected (an etymology already occurring in Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria*, I 6, 34), the former having been labelled as PIE **d^hǵ^h(e)m-ōn* “earthling” (based on **d^hǵ^h-ōm* “earth”). By contrast, *lutum*, though resembling its passive perfect participle (*lautus* or *lotus*; and indeed, some editors read the latter, instead of *lutum*, in this passage: see Isidore of Seville, *Étymologies. Livre I*, ed. Spevak, 127, 320), has nothing to do with the verb *lavere* (< PIE **louh₃-* “to wash”), coming from PIE **l(H)u-to-* “dirt” (EDL 331, 355), the same root occurring in *pollutio* and hence in Eng. *pollution*. As for *lucus*, this explanation was popular in ancient Rome, though its success is first attested under the form of an unsympathetic rhetorical question in a passage of Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria* (1.6.32–34) where he finds fault with the etymologists’ “hideous absurdities” (*foedissima ludibria*): “etiamne a contrariis aliqua sinemus trahi, ut *lucus*, quia umbra opacus parum luceat ...?” (Shall we even allow some words to be drawn from their opposites, like *lucus*, because, being opaque because of shade, it has little light ...?). The two words are indeed related, though not in that way, since *lucus* “sacred grove” stems from PIE **louk-o-* “light place” (EDL 350) and so must have developed its classical Latin meaning from that of “clearing (in the woods),” lost in Latin but preserved in cognates such as Old High German *lōh* “clearing”—occurring e.g., as a second stem in the compound Germanic place name *Waterloo*.

found for all words, because some received their designations [*vocabula*] not according to their innate quality but in consequence of the arbitrariness of human inclination. Moreover, etymologies of words [*nomina*] are given either from their cause, like *reges* [kings] from [*regendum* (ruling) and] *recte agendum* [acting rightly]; or from their origin, like *homo* [human] because he comes from the earth [*humus*], or from contraries, like *lutum* [mud] from *lavando* [washing], since mud is not clean, and *lucus* [grove], because it is only slightly illuminated [*luceat*] since it is darkened by its shadiness.²⁰ 4. Some too are made by derivation from nouns [*nomina*], like *prudens* [prudent] from *prudencia* [prudence]; some from sounds [*voces*],²¹ like *garrulus* [talkative] from *garrulitas* [talkativeness]; some have arisen from a Greek etymology and have a Latin declension, like *silva* [forest], *domus* [house].²² 5. And others have derived their designations [*vocabula*] from the names [*nomina*] of places, cities, [or] rivers. Furthermore, many are so called from the languages of different peoples. For this reason, their origin can scarcely be recognized. Indeed, there are many foreign words [*nomina*] that are not understood by speakers of Latin and Greek.

...

Excerpt II: Book III. On Mathematics

...

iii. WHAT A NUMBER IS. 1. Now a number is a multitude that is composed of units [*unitas*]. For “one” is the seed of number, not a number itself.²³ The term “coin” [*nummus*] gave its name [*nomen*] to “number” [*numerus*] and it applied this name [*vocabulum*] because of its frequent usage. “One” [*unus*] derives its name [*nomen*] from Greek; for the Greeks call one ἕνα ...²⁴ 4. Now “ten” is

21 The term *vox* can mean “word” or “sound” in general (see Schad, *Lexicon*, 428–429); often it is not clear just which is meant.

22 Neither *silva* nor *domus* come from Greek, and while the latter has a Greek cognate (δῶμος “house”), the etymology of *silva* is obscure, since the link once assumed to its Greek synonym ὕλη is no longer accepted (*EDL* 1530). As for the adjective to abstract noun relationship, the direction of derivation is actually the reverse, here and elsewhere, than the one assumed by Isidore.

23 The definition comes from the mathematician Nicomachus of Gerasa (ca. 60–ca. 120 CE) via Cassiodorus and Boethius. See Fontaine, *Isidore*, 356 f.

24 Latin *unus* is indeed etymologically related to Greek ὀνή “one (at dice),” whereas Greek εἰς shares the same IE origin with Latin *sin(guli)* “one each,” *sem(el)* “once,” *sim(plex)* “simple.”

mologia, eo quod ligent et coniungant infra iacentes numeros. Nam δεσμός coniungere vel ligare apud eos dicitur. ... 5. Centum vero vocati a cantho, quod est circulum ...

Excerpt III: Liber VII. De deo, angelis et sanctis

i. DE DEO. 1. Beatissimus Hieronymus, vir eruditissimus et multarum linguarum peritus, Hebraeorum nominum interpretationem primus in Latinam linguam convertit. Ex quibus pro brevitate praetermissis multis quaedam huic operi adiectis interpretationibus interponenda studui. 2. Vocabulorum enim expositio satis indicat quid velit intellegi. Habent enim quaedam ex propriis causis nominum rationem. In principio autem decem nomina ponimus, quibus apud Hebraeos Deus vocatur. 3. Primum apud Hebraeos Dei nomen El dicitur; quod alii Deum, alii etymologiam eius exprimentes ἰσχυρός, id est fortem interpretati sunt, ideo quod nulla infirmitate opprimitur, sed fortis est et sufficiens ad omnia perpetranda. 4. Secundum nomen Eloī. 5. Tertium Eloē, quod utrumque in Latino Deus dicitur. Est autem nomen in Latinum ex Graeca appellatione translatum. Nam Deus Graece δέος, φόβος dicitur, id est timor, unde tractum est Deus, quod eum colentibus sit timor. 6. Deus autem proprie nomen est Trinitatis pertinens ad Patrem et Filium et Spiritum sanctum. Ad

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- 25 Lat. *decem* and Greek δέκα “ten” are related (PIE **dekm*), while δεσμός is related to neither.
- 26 Though less transparently than for *decem*/δέκα, here too, as in general, Latin and Greek numerals are etymologically related (Lat. *centum* = Gk. ἑκατόν < PIE **dekm̥tom*, probably in turn derived from “ten”), while *canthus* is an unrelated Hellenism from a Greek word of unclear origin (unrelated to the numerals).
- 27 Just as for Greek (see introduction), Isidore had no first-hand knowledge of Hebrew and depends for information on his sources (a handy list in Fontaine, *Genèse et originalité*, 183), in particular the commentaries on the holy Scripture by Jerome (ca. 347–420)—who translated the bible into Latin (the *Vulgata*) from both Greek and Hebrew—whom he duly credits at the outset (7.1.1). The list of names starting with *El* depends on Jerome’s letter 25 to Marcella *De X Dei nominibus* (On the ten names of God; edn. *CSEL* 54, 218–220; *ML* 22, 428–430), written in 383–384 CE. Jerome comments on the two Greek translations of Hebrew *’el* (’ֵל) occurring in Psalm 90 (Vulgata = 91); that is, “God” in the Septuagint vs. ἰσχυρόν “strong” in Aquila of Sinope (early second century CE). Also, the remark that the latter expresses the etymology of God’s name comes straight from Jerome: *Aquila ἐτυμολογίαν, eius exprimens ἰσχυρόν, id est, fortem interpretatur*. The adjective ἰσχυρός often occurs in the Bible as an epithet of God, also in coordination with “terrible” (see fn. 29): e.g., Deut. 10:17, Neh. 1:5; 9:32. On the formulaic coordination ἰσχυρός καὶ φοβερός see Reiterer, “Praying to God Passionately,” 128.

said from a Greek etymology, because it binds and conjoins the numbers lying below it. For δεσμός [bond] means to conjoin or to bind among them.²⁵ ... 5. But “one hundred” [centum] is so called from *canthus* [iron wheel-tire] because it is circular. ...²⁶

Excerpt III: Book VII. On God, Angels, and Saints

i. ON GOD. 1. The most blessed Jerome, a most erudite man and one who was skilled in many languages, was the first person to translate the signification of Hebrew names [*nomina*] into the Latin language. Out of these I have omitted many for the sake of brevity, but I have taken care to insert some of these into this work together with their significations. 2. Indeed, an explanation of the words [*vocabula*] indicates sufficiently what it means, for some possess the reason for their names out of their own causes. In the beginning, therefore, we set down the ten names [*nomina*] by which God is called among the Hebrews. 3. The first name of God among the Hebrews is spoken as *El*, which some have translated as “God,” and others, expressing its etymology, as ἰσχυρός, that is, “strong,” since he is oppressed by no weakness but is strong and capable of accomplishing all things.²⁷ 4. The second name, *Eloi*. 5. The third, *Eloe*, either of which is said in Latin as *Deus* [God].²⁸ Now the name [*nomen*] *Deus* in Latin has been transferred from a Greek appellation, for *Deus* is said in Greek as δέος, φόβος, that is, “fear,” from which *Deus* is drawn, because those who worship him should have fear.²⁹ 6. Moreover *Deus* [God] is properly the name of the Trinity,

28 Here, Jerome has *Deinde eloim et eloe*. The former is Hebrew *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים) “God,” with a plural suffix *-im*. This noun’s paradigm has two forms without a final *-m*—spelled identically in Hebrew (אֱלֹהִי, <‘lhy>) but vocalized, and hence pronounced, differently—which may lie behind the two variants presented as two different names by Isidore (*Eloi* and *Eloe*). One is אֱלֹהָי *elohay* (‘ēlohāy) “my God” (e.g. Joshua 9:23), which in Mark’s gospel (Marc. 15:34) is spelled *Eloi* (in the Greek original, Ἐλωϊ, as opposed to Ἠλί in Matth. 27:47 which reflects singular אֱלֹהֵי “my God”). The other *m*-less form is אֱלֹהֵי *elohe(y)* (‘ēlohē-), the so-called construct state, occurring when preceding a determination, as in *Elohe elo-him* (אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים, the God of gods, the supreme God) in Deut. 10:17; Ps. 136:2. This is the background of Guillaumin’s remark: “Une grande confusion régnait dans ce domaine, du fait que les formes déclinées de l’hébreu étaient considérées comme différentes les unes des autres” (Much confusion reigned in this area, as the inflected forms of Hebrew were considered to be different from one another). Isidore of Seville, *Étymologies. Livre VII*, ed. Guillaumin, 151. In reporting this, Isidore relies on Jerome, just as usual.

29 While φοβερός “terrible” is a frequent epithet of God (see fn. 27), neither its root nor δέος “fear” have anything to do with Lat. *deus* etymologically. Rather, δέος is an abstract noun from δέιδω “to fear” (EDL 308), ultimately going back to PIE **duwo* “two.”

quam Trinitatem etiam reliqua quae in Deo infra sunt posita vocabula referuntur ...

Excerpt IV: Liber x. De vocabulis

1. ORIGO quorundam nominum, id est unde veniant, non pene omnibus patet. Proinde quaedam noscendi gratia huic operi interiecimus.

DE QUIBUSDAM VOCABVLIS HOMINVM. Licet origo nominum, unde veniant, a philosophis eam teneat rationem, ut per denominationem homo ab humanitate, sapiens a sapientia nominetur, quia prius sapientia, deinde sapiens; tamen claret alia specialis in origine quorundam nominum causa, sicut homo ab humo, unde proprie homo est appellatus. Ex quibus exempli gratia quaedam in hoc opere posuimus. ...

4. Amicus, per derivationem, quasi animi custos. 5. Dictus autem proprie: amator turpitudinis, quia amore torquetur libidinis: amicus ab hamo, id est, a catena caritatis; unde et hami quod teneant. Amabilis autem, quod sit amore dignus. Amasius, eo quod sit pronus ad amorem.

...

279. [Vilis, a villa; nullius enim urbanitatis est.] Versipellis, eo quod in diversa vultum et mentem vertat. Inde et versutus et callidus. Violentus, quia vim infert. Vecors, mali cordis et malae conscientiae. 280. Vagus, quia sine via.

30 *Homo*, deriving from *humus* (as said in fn. 20), is the base of *humanitas*.

31 This phrase is obscure and may well be textually corrupt.

32 The verb *amare* "to love" is the base of *amor*, *amasius* and *amicus*, while none of these nouns have anything to do with *anima* or *hamus* (the latter of unclear origin). Just as bizarre as those comparisons is the appeal to (the initial segments of) *torquetur* and (the final segments of) *libido* in order to "explain" *turpitudō*.

referring to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. To this Trinity are also referred all the other words noted below regarding God.

...

Excerpt iv: Book 10. On Words

1. THE ORIGIN of certain words [*nomina*], that is, where they come from, is not clear to almost everyone. Therefore, we have inserted some into this work so that they can learn them.

ON SOME WORDS [VOCABULA] FOR HUMANS. Although the origin of words [*nomina*], where they come from, receives this explanation from philosophers—such as, by substitution on the basis of a relation, *homo* [a human] is called from *humanitas* [humanity], *sapiens* [a wise person] from *sapientia* [wisdom], because first comes wisdom, then a wise person—nevertheless there is a different, special explanation that is evident in the origin of some words [*nomina*], such as *homo* from *humus* [earth], from which *homo* is properly called.³⁰ Some of these we have put down as examples in this work. ...

4. *Amicus* [friend], by derivation, as though *animi custos* [guardian of the soul]. 5. And *amator turpitudinis* [a lover of depravity] is said properly, because he is tormented by the love of pleasure [*amore torquetur libidinis*]; *amicus* is said from *hamus* [hook], that is, from the connection of fondness, from which come hooks,³¹ too, because they hold fast. *Amabilis* [a lovable person], then, because he is worthy of love [*amor*]. *Amasius* [a lover], for the reason that he is inclined to love [*amor*].³²

...

279. [*Vilis* (lower-class), from *villa* (farm), for he has no urbanity.]³³ *Versipellis* [skin-changing, i.e., devious], for the reason that he turns [*vertat*] his facial expression and mind in different directions. From this also *versutus* [shrewd] and *callidus* [ingenious].³⁴ *Violentus* [violent], because he applies brute force [*vis*]. *Vecors* [foolish], having a feeble disposition [*cor*] and a feeble moral conscience.³⁵ 280. *Vagus* [wandering], because without a path [*via*]. *Vanus* [vain]

33 This is again an etymology involving a negation, as for *lucus*, but in this case there is no relation between *vilis* (PIE **wes-li-*, from a root meaning “to buy,” EDL 678) and *villa*, deriving from *vicus*, on whose etymology cf. Chapter 2.4, fn. 22.

34 The odd one out is *callidus* here, unrelated to *verto* “to turn” (identical to its PIE ancestor), the base of *versi(pellis)* and *versutus*.

35 *Violentus* is derived from *violare* but the suffix, normally forming denominal adjectives (such as *vinolentus* below, which has nothing to do with *lentus* “slow,” see fn. 37), shows that in pre-literary Latin it was indeed connected to *vis* via folk-etymology (EDL 680). *Vecors* and, below, *vesanus* are analyzed correctly.

Vanus a Venere etymologiam trahit. Item vanus inanis, falsus, eo quod memoria evanescat. 281. Vesanus, non probe sanus. Vinolentus, qui et satis bibit et difficile inebriatur. Vexatus, id est portatus; ab eo quod est veho, vecto, vexo, ut vexasse sit portasse. 282. Veneficus, eo quod venenum mortis causa paravit, aut praestitit, aut vendidit. ...

Excerpt v: Liber xv. De aedificiis et agris

...

ii. DE AEDIFICIIS PUBLICIS. ...

5. Oppidum quidam ab oppositione murorum dixerunt; alii ab opibus recon-
dendis, eo quod sit munitum; alii quod sibi in eo conventus habitantium opem
det mutuum contra hostem. ...

6. ... Haec est origo oppidorum, quae quod opem darent, idcirco oppida
nominata dixerunt. Oppidum autem magnitudine et moenibus discrepare a
vico et castello et pago. 7. Civitates autem aut coloniae, aut municipia, aut vici,
aut castella, aut pagi appellantur. 8. Civitas proprie dicitur, quam non advenae,
sed eodem innati solo condiderunt. Ideoque urbes a propriis civibus conditae
civitates, non coloniae nuncupantur. 9. Colonia vero est quae defectu indige-
narum novis cultoribus adimpletur. Unde et colonia a cultu agri est dicta.

...

xvi. DE ITINERIBUS. ... 4. Via est qua potest ire vehiculum; et via dicta a
vehiculorum incurso. Nam duos actus capit, propter euntium et venientium
vehiculorum occursum.

36 While *evanescere* derives from *vanus*, all the other words are unrelated, including *Venus* < PIE **wenh₂-os* “desire” (EDL 663), including the same root as in German *wünschen* “to desire.”

37 Isidore implicitly refers to *lentus* “slow” as though this were a compound, which it is not, as *vinolentus* is an adjective formed with *vinum*, “wine” plus the derivational suffix *-lentus* (see fn. 35).

draws its etymology from *Venus* [Venus]. Again, *vanus*: “empty,” “false,” for the reason that it vanishes [*evanescere*] from the memory.³⁶ 281. *Vesanus* [insane], not rightly sane [*sanus*]. *Vinolentus* [tipsy], who both drinks a lot and only with difficulty becomes drunk.³⁷ *Vexatus* [disturbed], that is, “carried away”; *vexo* [disturb], from what is *veho* [carry], *vecto* [convey], so that *vexasse* [to have disturbed] would be “to have borne.”³⁸ 282. *Veneficus* [a poisoner], for the reason that he prepared or supplied or sold poison [*venenum*] in order to cause death. ...³⁹

Excerpt v: Book xv. On Buildings and Fields

...

ii. ON PUBLIC BUILDINGS. ...

5. Some have said that *oppidum* [town] is from the “opposition” [*oppositio*] of its walls; others, from its storing wealth [*ops*], for the reason that it is fortified; others, because the throng of its inhabitants gives one another mutual help [*ops*] against an enemy. 6. ... This is the origin of towns, which, they have said, are called *oppida* because they give assistance [*ops*].⁴⁰ Moreover, a town differs in its size and walls from a village [*vicus*], a fortress [*castellum*], and a rural district [*pagus*]. 7. Moreover, cities [*civitates*] are called either “settlements” [*coloniae*], or “free towns” [*municipia*], or villages, or fortresses, or rural districts. 8. *Civitas* is properly said for one that was founded not by newcomers but by people born in the same soil [cf. *civis*; citizen, fellow-citizen]. And for that reason, municipalities [*urbes*] that have been founded by their own citizens [*civis*] are named “cities” [*civitates*], not “settlements.” 9. But a settlement [*colonia*] is one that is filled up by new farmers [*cultores*] because of the lack of natives. So *colonia* is also said from the cultivation [*cultus*, past passive participle of *colere*] of a field.⁴¹

...

xvi. ON ROADS. ... 4. A road [*via*] is where a vehicle [*vehiculum*] is able to go, and *via* is said from the rushing of vehicles [*vehicula*]. It contains two lanes, on account of the meeting of the vehicles that are going and coming.⁴²

38 The words are indeed related, all going back to a PIE root **weǵʰ-* (EDL 658).

39 *Venenum* and its derivative *veneficus* share the same root with *Venus* (EDL 660, see fn. 36), while Isidore implicitly connects it to near homophonous *vēnus* “sale,” which however stems from PIE **wes-no-* “price” containing the same root as *vilis* (EDL 663 and fn. 33).

40 On the etymon of *oppidum*, which is not related to *ops* and shares the prefix, not the root, with *oppositus*, see Chapter 2.4, fn. 22.

41 These relations are all correct.

42 For the respective etyma of *via* and *veho*, see Chapter 2.4, fn. 22.

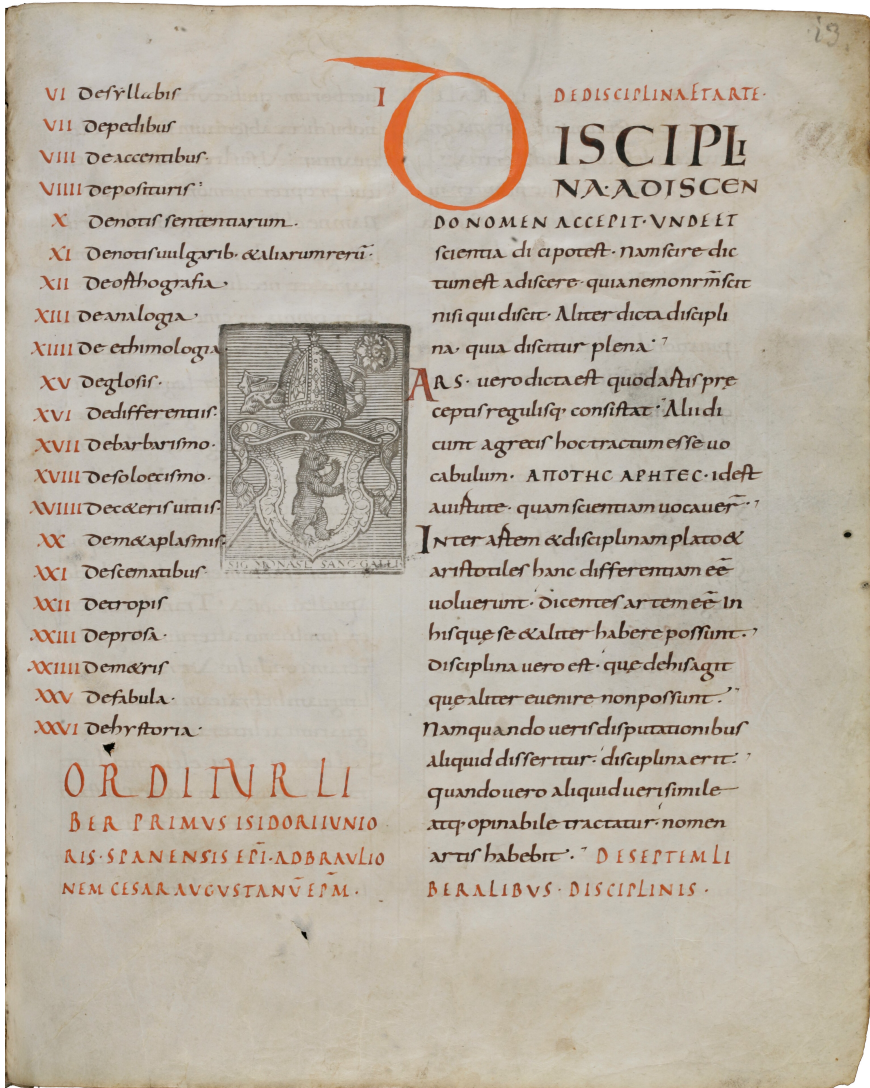


FIGURE 2.7.1 St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 231, p. 13—Isidorus, *Etymologiae*, Books I–X

[HTTP://WWW.E-CODICES.CH/EN/CSG/0231/13](http://www.e-codices.ch/en/csg/0231/13)

Abbreviations and Symbols

CSEL	<i>Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum editum consilio et impensis Academiae Litterarum Caesareae Vindobonensis</i> , Vienna: 1866–.
EDG	Beekes, Robert. <i>Etymological Dictionary of Greek</i> , 2 vols., Leiden: Brill, 2010.
EDL	de Vaan, Michiel. <i>Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the Other Italic Languages</i> . Leiden: Brill, 2008
Gk.	Greek
IE	Indo European
Lat.	Latin
LEW	Walde A., and J.B. Hofmann, <i>Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch</i> , 2 vols. 5th ed. Heidelberg: Winter, 1972.
ML	Migne, Jacques Paul, ed. <i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina</i> , Paris, 1844–1864.
PIE	Proto-Indo European
<	etymological derivation
*	reconstructed form

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Buddhist Etymologies from First-Millennium India and China

Works by Vasubandhu, Sthiramati, and Paramārtha

Roy Tzohar

Indian Buddhist textual production—championed under a missionary ideology that resisted the Brahmanical rhetoric of the exclusivity of Sanskrit—has always conceived of itself as operating within and targeting a diversified multilingual context (of both literary and vernacular languages). This awareness, joined with a nominalistic and conventional view of language, found expression in the development of an array of distinct textual and hermeneutical practices, which persisted even during the growing Sanskritization of the North Indian branch of the tradition from around the second century CE.

One of these practices was the appropriation of Sanskrit etymological analysis (*nirvacana*, *nirukti*) into a primarily *commentarial* technique. Applied in this way, etymology was not about revealing an underlying intrinsic structure of language (as in the case of some Brahmanical schools of thought, see Chapter 2.2), nor was it a means for gaining insight into the temporal dimension of language (as in the case of historical etymology). Rather than a way of excavating semantic meaning, it was utilized as a way to negotiate and create meaning in commentarial praxis. As demonstrated in the text excerpts below, one of the rather unique expressions of this approach was the carrying over of Sanskrit etymologies across languages (in the case before us, into Chinese).

The Buddhist conception of etymology as a largely hermeneutical device differed in an important way from the way in which it was conceived in Sanskrit Brahmanical sources, which understood it—schematically put—as a means for exploring the interconnections of language and uncovering the ontological deep structure that was seen to be embedded in it. This approach was grounded in a language metaphysics that took Sanskrit as consisting of a fixed semantic system corresponding to real existents, and in which the essence of a thing was to be uncovered by identifying the meaning of the term that denotes it (primarily nouns, all taken to be derivations of verbal roots). The method for doing so was therefore etymological analysis, which sought—either through grammat-

ical analysis or by pointing out commonalities—to trace nouns to their verbal roots, and by doing so to identify their decisive meaning.

In opposition to the Brahmanical view of language, Indian Buddhist schools of thought championed a view of language as utterly conventional, a system whose signs do not refer to real existents but are forever mere interpretants of other signs. Under this framework, linguistic structures and interrelations—revealed either by formal analysis or by descriptive practices such as etymological analysis—were seen merely as an intrinsic feature of language as a self-referential realm, and as having no purchase on reality as it truly is. So while Buddhists keenly adopted the Brahmanical Sanskrit etymological techniques (with their reduction of nouns into verbal roots, and as a semantically rather than historically oriented analysis), they saw these techniques as serving not to uncover the deep structure of language but primarily as an interpretative and argumentative tool in the elucidation of Buddhist philosophical and literary texts.

The text excerpts below all focus on Buddhist etymological glosses of the Sanskrit word *śāstra*, a generic term for a treatise (by a human author, in contrast to *sūtra*, i.e. scripture, which is ascribed to a Buddha or a bodhisattva). All the sources before us are from around the first half of the first millennium, and while they vary in their sectarian affiliation (some are affiliated with Northern Abhidharma schools, some with the Mahāyāna Yogācāra school), they nonetheless form a tightly connected intertextual realm insofar as they refer to, explicitly comment upon, and quote each other.

Passages I, II, and III are from treatises traditionally ascribed to the influential Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu (typically dated to around the late fourth to early fifth century CE). According to the traditional biographies, Vasubandhu's life, during the Gupta reign in India, was marked by two acts of conversion: first from the Sarvāstivāda to the Sautrāntika school of Indian Abhidharma, and then to Mahāyāna, into the Yogācāra school, of which he is considered one of the founding figures.

Passage I provides an etymology of the term “treatise” (*śāstra*) that is taken from the opening lines of Vasubandhu's *Commentary on the Treasury of Abhidharma* (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*), an encyclopedic source for Abhidharma doctrinal thought. This etymological gloss is rather straightforward, and in terms of Sanskrit classical grammar, a correct analysis.

Passage II provides an alternative etymology of the term given by a different work by Vasubandhu, *The Proper Mode of Scriptural Exegesis* (*Vyākhyāyukti*, extent only in Tibetan translation), a protocol for the writing of commentaries and exegesis written from a distinctively Mahāyāna perspective. Here Vasubandhu uses a more fanciful etymological gloss to argue that scripture (the Buddha's speech) should be seen as the ultimate treatise.

Passages III and IV demonstrate how both these alternative glosses are then taken up and woven together to form a new commentarial synthesis. Both passages are taken from a thread of commentaries on *Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes* (*Madhyāntavibhāga*). Traditionally, the *Madhyāntavibhāga* is considered to be a revealed work ascribed to Maitreya, who is said to be a Bodhisattva removed from complete Buddhahood by only one birth. According to the tradition, Maitreya pronounced the work in verse form to Asaṅga (ca. fourth to fifth century CE), one of the founding figures of the Yogācāra school, who in turn made it available to Vasubandhu, who composed the commentary (*Madhyāntavibhāga-bhāṣya*). To this chain of commentaries is then added Sthiramati's (ca. sixth century CE) super-commentary (*Madhyāntavibhāga-bhāṣya-Ṭīkā*) on Vasubandhu's commentary.

As is the custom in these works, Vasubandhu opens his commentary with a dedication (Passage III), in which, however, he refers to the revealed work as a "treatise" (*śāstra*). This presents a serious interpretative difficulty for the ensuing super-commentary of Sthiramati, since, as I mentioned above, in Buddhist Mahāyāna lore a treatise is typically used as a generic term for a scholastic work composed by an ordinary human author, whereas revelatory works ascribed directly to the Buddha or bodhisattvas like Maitreya are called *sūtra*. The issue at stake, it should be clarified, is more than just getting the terminology right: it bears on the fundamental question of the text's authority. It is this question, therefore, that Sthiramati addresses in his ensuing super-commentary (Passage IV). For this purpose, he provides a definition of a treatise that uses etymology to reinstate its status and authority as equal to that of any other revelatory text. It is important to note that in this passage, Sthiramati provides two alternative etymologies of *śāstra*, taken from Vasubandhu's sources mentioned above (in Passages I and II), and which constitute two different interpretations, neither of which is exclusive.

This feature, which is ubiquitous in Buddhist Sanskrit lore, emphasizes yet again the foremost *interpretative* function of etymology in the Buddhist context. The Buddhist conception does not view meaning as something that lies in the temporal evolution of language or reflects its deep structure. It is not something to be discovered *in* language, but something to be created *with* language, that is, in the context of its use.

This conception of etymology and meaning, in turn, sheds light on the otherwise rather puzzling instances in which Sanskrit etymological glosses are carried across languages within the Buddhist realm. Passage v is a distinct example of such a case: it is a translation of Passage I from Sanskrit into Chinese by Paramārtha (499–569 CE), an Indian monk who worked in, among other places, the Chinese imperial capital. While Paramārtha faithfully translates Vasubandhu's

original etymological gloss, he also supplements it and synthesizes it with the additional alternative etymology we encountered above (in Passage II, and also in Passage IV).

The crossover of an etymology-derived meaning from one language into another—without any acknowledgment of this transfer or adjustments to the target language—is already something of a peculiarity, as it seems to obliterate the explanatory force of such an analysis. Cases like these—and they are ubiquitous in the translations of Buddhist texts across East Asia—were often explained away by scholars as reflecting either the translator's ignorance of the original etymology, or, more commonly, the translator's reverential treatment of the Sanskrit and the original text. Neither explanation, however, can adequately make sense of the case before us (and many other such cases), in which the translator both knew his Sanskrit well and intentionally altered the meaning in the process of the translation. This move makes perfect sense, however, once we consider it in light of the broader Buddhist approach to etymology outlined above—as primarily an interpretative, tradition-making, commentarial tool.

Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese Texts

Excerpt 1: From the Commentary on the Treasury of Abhidharma (Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya) by Vasubandhu

... *tasmai namaskṛtya kiṃ kariṣyati? ity āha—śāstram pravakṣyāmi.*¹ śiṣya-
śāsanāc chāstram. kiṃ śāstram? ity āha—**Abhidharmakośam** ||²

Excerpt II: From the Proper Mode of Scriptural Exegesis (vyākhyāyukti) by Vasubandhu

sangs rgyas kyi gsung bstan bcos kyi mtshan nyid du 'thad pa'i phyir ro //nges
pa'i tshig tu 'chos pa dang / skyob par byed pas / de'i phyir bstan bcos so //
nyon mongs dgra rnams ma lus 'chos pa dang /
ngan 'gro srid las skyob pa gang yin de /
'chos skyob yon tan phyir na bstan bcos te /
gnyis po 'di dag gzhan gyi lugs la med /
de lta bas na sangs rgyas kyi gsung kho na don dam par bstan bcos yin pas
'chos pa dang skyob pa'i yon tan gyi phyir yang don gzung ba la 'bad pa dang
ldan par bya'o //³

1 In all text excerpts, sections in bold indicate root verses or portions of root verses glossed in commentary.

2 *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 1.1, excerpted from Pradhan, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, 1.22–2.2.

3 TD 4061, *sems tsam, shi* 123a, in Lee, *The Tibetan Text of the Vyākhyayukti of Vasubandhu*, 277.

English Translation

Translated by Roy Tzohar.

Excerpt I: From the Commentary on the Treasury of Abhidharma (Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya) by Vasubandhu

... After having rendered homage [to the teacher of truth], what will the author do? “I shall compose a treatise.”⁴ A treatise [śāstra] is that which instructs disciples.⁵ Which treatise? The “*Abhidharmakośa*.”

Excerpt II: From the Proper Mode of Scriptural Exegesis (vyākhyāyukti) by Vasubandhu

It is tenable to consider the speech of the Buddha as having the characteristics of a treatise [śāstra]. Under etymological analysis, because it overcomes⁶ and provides protection,⁷ therefore it is a treatise:⁸

“That which overcomes the enemies like defilements in their entirety, and protects from lower births and [cyclic] existence, is a treatise, because of its qualities of overcoming and protecting.

These two [qualities] do not exist in any other systems.”⁹

Hence the speech of the Buddha alone is the ultimate treatise, and because it has the qualities of overcoming and protecting one should exert oneself to apprehend its meaning.

4 In this excerpt, quotation marks indicate the portions of the root verse that are glossed by the commentary.

5 The passage glosses the term *śāstra*—according to the etymological procedure described above—by breaking it into the verbal root *śās* (instruct, teach) and a Sanskrit instrumental suffix *tra*. The resulting meaning, then, is “something by means of which one teaches.” In itself, this analysis is rather straightforward and correct in terms of Sanskrit classical grammar. I am grateful to Dan Lusthaus, Harvard University; Meir Shahar, Tel Aviv University; and Shenghai Li, Fudan University, for their knowledge and comments on all things related to Paramārtha.

6 *’chos pa*, *śāsana, “over-comes” but also in the sense of “sets-right.”

7 *skjob pa*, *trāṇa

8 Here Vasubandhu breaks down the term differently than before, into the verbal roots *śās** (to overcome, or to set right), and *trai* (to protect, to rescue). This provides the opening to point out that just like the Buddha’s speech, so too a treatise overcomes (the defilements) and protects (from lower births), and hence the speech of the Buddha should in fact be seen as the ultimate treatise.

9 This verse also appears in other Buddhist sources, for instance in Candrakīrti’s *Prasnnnapadā*, 3.3–4 and Sthiramati’s *Madhyāntavibhāga-bhāṣya-tikā*, passage IV.

Excerpt III: From the Commentary on Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes (Madhyāntavibhāga-bhāṣya) by Vasubandhu
namo buddhāya | śāstrasyāsyā praṇetāram abhyarhya sugatātmajaṃ | vak-
*tāraṃ cāsmadādibhyo yatiṣye 'rthavivecane ||*¹⁰

*Excerpt IV: From the Super-Commentary on Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes (Madhyāntavibhāga-bhāṣya-ṭikā) by Sthiramati*¹¹

... *idam idānīm vaktavyaṃ kīdrśaṃ śāstrarūpam | śāstraṃ kiṃ ceti nāmapa-*
davyaṅjanakāyaprabhāsā vijñaptayaḥ śāstram |atha vā lokottaraṅjñānaprāpa-
kaśabdaviśeṣaprabhāsā vijñaptayaḥ śāstram | kathaṃ vijñaptayaḥ praṇīyanta
*ucyante vā | praṇetrakṛtvijñaptiprabhavatvāt śravaṇavijñaptinām*¹² *nātra*
*doṣa | śiṣyasaśānāc cāstra*¹³ *hi śīlasamādhiprajñāviśeṣotpāditvāt kāyavānmana-*
sām saṃbhārānutpattikarmaṇo nivartate saṃbhārotpattikarmaṇi ca pravartate |

*atha vā śāstralakṣaṇayogāc chāstram*¹⁴ *| tac ca śāstralakṣaṇaṃ yad upadeśe*
'bhyasyamāne savāsanākleśaprahāṇaṃ nirantaradīrghavividhatīvraduḥkha-

10 Nagao, *Madhyāntavibhāga-Bhāṣya*, 17.

11 The following is based on the critical edition by Yamaguchi, *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭikā*, 2.16–3.12. Yamaguchi's edition is based on one incomplete manuscript of the text (discovered by Lévi 1928), and the Sanskrit of the missing portions is reconstructed based on the Narthang and Peking editions of the Tibetan translation. In quoting the Sanskrit I have integrated the corrections suggested in Stanley, "A Study of the Madhyantavibhaga-Bhasya-Tika," 3–4. Stanley's corrections are based on the original manuscript as well as on the Tohoku Derge edition of the Tibetan translation (TD).

12 Tibetan translation: *nyan pa'i rnam par rig pa rnam*. TD190a.5.

13 Yamaguchi, *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭikā*, 2.21: *dhārmiko*. Stanley, "A Study of the *Madhyāntavibhāga-bhāṣya-ṭikā*," 3n10: *saśānāc cāstra*.

14 Following Stanley, 3n11, and the Tib: *yang na bstan bcos kyi mtshan nyid du 'thad pa'i phyir bstan bcos te* (TD 4023, bi, 190a.6); in place of Yamaguchi's reading (*Madhyāntavibhāgaṭikā*, 3.2): *atha vā śāstralakṣaṇasya śāsanāc chāstram*.

15 "The son of the Sugata," that is, the Bodhisattva Maitreya; the "one who expounded it" is Asaṅga, another founding figure of the Yogācāra school, and, according to the tradition, Vasubandhu's half-brother.

Excerpt III: From the Commentary on Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes (Madhyāntavibhāga-bhāṣya) by Vasubandhu

Homage to the Buddha! Honoring the author of the treatise [*śāstra*], the Son of the Sugata,¹⁵ and the one who expounded it to us and to others, I shall strive to examine its meaning.

Excerpt IV: From the Super-Commentary on Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes (Madhyāntavibhāga-bhāṣya-ṭikā) by Sthiramati

... Now it should be explained what is the nature of a treatise, and why it is called a “treatise.” A treatise consists in mental representations¹⁶ appearing as groups of names, words, and syllables. Alternatively, a treatise consists in representations appearing as particular words procuring the attainment of supramundane wisdom. [Objection]: How can mental representations be proclaimed or expounded upon? [Response]: There is no fault here since the hearer’s¹⁷ representations arise from the representations of the author and expounder.¹⁸

It is a treatise [*śāstra*] because it is an instruction for novices [*śiṣya-śāsana*], which in order to generate distinction in morality, meditative concentration, and wisdom, deters them from the actions of body, speech, and mind that do not produce the accumulations of merit and wisdom, and induces them to engage in actions that produce the accumulations.

Alternatively, it is a treatise because it is compatible with the characteristics of a treatise. The characteristics of a treatise consists in the fact that, when the teaching is practiced, one cuts off the moral defilements along with their latent karmic imprints, and is also protected [*trāṇam*] from both becoming¹⁹ and the wretched states of existence²⁰ which are fearful because of their acute, extensive, and perpetual manifold sufferings. Therefore, it has the characteristics of

16 **vijñapti*, *nam par rig pa mams* (TD 190a:4). Broadly speaking, the *Yogācāra* propagates a kind of philosophical idealism (whether epistemic or metaphysical is a matter of contestation), according to which all phenomena—including all types of discourse—can be either known or discussed as mere mental representations (*vijñapti*), the outcome of the ever-developing causal activity of consciousness.

17 Sthiramati is referring here to Vasubandhu, the author of the commentary.

18 Here Sthiramati is referring to the Bodhisattva Maitreya and to Asaṅga, respectively. One way of understanding the objection is as pointing out the fundamental difficulty in attributing intention ascriptions—which are presupposed by any communicative discursive act—to mere mental events, i.e., independently of any intentional agent.

19 That is, from cyclic existence, *saṃsāra*.

20 In Buddhist cosmology, to be a sentient being means necessary to belong to one of the five (and in some schemes six) realms of existence into which one can be reborn. The wretched or lower states are those of animals, ghosts, hell-beings, etc.

*bhītadurgatibhyo bhavāc ca trāṇaṃ bhavati*²¹ | *tasmāt kleśaripuśāsanād bhava-*
*durgatitrāṇāc*²² *ca śāstralakṣaṇam* |
etac ca dvayam api sarvasmīn mahāyāne sarvasmīṅś ca tadyākhyāne
vidyate nānyatreṭi | *ata etac chāstram* | *āha ca/*
yac chāsti ca kleśaripūn aśeṣān
saṃtrāyate durgatito bhavāc ca |
tac chāsanāt trāṇaḡuṇāc ca śāstram
etad dvayaṃ cānyamateṣu nāsti ||

**Excerpt v: From Paramārtha's Chinese Translation of the
 Commentary on the Treasury of Abhidharma
 (Abhidharmakośabhāṣya) by Vasubandhu**

..... 頂禮如理教師已。欲何所作。偈曰。對法俱舍我當說。釋曰。此法通
 名滅濟教。別名云何。阿毘達磨俱舍。²³

21 Following Stanley, "A Study of the *Madhyāntavibhāga-bhāṣya-Tīkā*," 4n12, supported by the Tib: *lung mnos pa goms par byas pas bag chags dang bcas pa'i nyon mong pa spong bar 'gyur ba dang/ bar chad med pa yun ring ba'i sdug bsngal drag po sna tshogs kyis 'jigs pa'i ngan song rnam dang/ srid pa las skyob pa gang yin pa de ni bstan bcos kyi mtshan nyid* (TD190a.6). Yamaguchi (*Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā*, 3.3) reads: [*tac ca śā*]stralakṣaṇam yad upadeśo bhāsamāno [*bhyastah*] savāsanākleśaprahāṇāyā[*padyate*] nirantradīrgha-*vidhativraduḥkhabhitāyās ca durgater bhavāc ca saṃtrāyate* |

22 Following Stanley, "A Study of the *Madhyāntavibhāga-bhāṣya-Tīkā*," 4n13, and in the Tibetan translation: *skyob pas*; while in Yamaguchi (*Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā*, 3.6): *saṃtārāc*.

23 T.29.1559.161c28–62a1.

a treatise [*śāstra*] because it overcomes [*śāsana*] the enemy-like moral defilements and because it protects [*trāṇa*] from becoming and the wretched states of existence. Furthermore, as these two qualities [“overcoming” and “protecting”] are said to be found in all works of the universal vehicle [*Mahāyāna*] and their exegeses, but nowhere else, this work [which belongs to the *Mahāyāna*] is a treatise [*śāstra*]. It is said:²⁴

That which overcomes [*śāsti*] the enemies like defilements in their entirety, and protects [*saṃtrāyate*] from lower births and [cyclic] existence, is a treatise, because of its qualities of overcoming and protecting. These two [qualities] do not exist in any other systems.

*Excerpt v: From Paramārtha's Chinese Translation of the
Commentary on the Treasury of Abhidharma
(Abhidharmakośabhāṣya) by Vasubandhu*

... After rendering homage to the teacher of reality/truth,²⁵ what should I do? The verse says: I shall explain the *Abhidharmakośa*.²⁶ The commentary²⁷ says:

This dharma [teaching] can be generally termed cessation, saving, and teaching.²⁸ It is also known as the *Abhidharmakośa*.²⁹

24 Here Sthiramati seems to quote the verse from Vasubandhu's *vyākhyāyukti* given in excerpt II above.

25 如理 = *yathābhūta*.

26 The Sanskrit word *kośa*, a treasury (of Abhidharma teachings), is transcribed here rather than translated (俱舍).

27 Literally: explanation, interpretation.

28 Paramārtha's translation and interpretation apparently synthesizes several alternative Sanskrit etymologies of *śāstra*: 教, teaching, is derived from breaking the term down into the Sanskrit verbal root *śās* (to instruct, teach), and the instrumental suffix *tra*, whereas 滅 (causing cessation, destroying) and 濟 (crossing over, relieving) are probably derived by breaking the term down into the verbal roots *śas* (to destroy) and either *trai* (to save, rescue) or possibly *tr* (to cross over).

29 阿毘達磨俱舍, *A-pi-da-mo-ko-śa*.

Abbreviations and Symbols

- T *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* [revised *Tripitaka* compiled during the *Taishō* period], 85 vols, edited by Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabe. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1932
- * reconstructed form
- | for Sanskrit
- || for termination of section (when it is marked so in the original text)
- / for Tibetan
- // for termination of section (when it is marked so in the original text)

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An Influential Latin Dictionary and Its Etymologies (12th Century CE) in the Linguistic Landscape of Medieval Europe

Hugutio of Pisa's Derivationes

Michele Loporcaro

In order to exemplify the practice of etymology in the multilingual landscape of Western Europe in the Middle Ages, this chapter presents some excerpts from Hugutio of Pisa's *Derivationes*, which the author—a canonist (i.e., an expert in medieval church law), born in Pisa around 1130 and appointed in 1190 bishop of Ferrara where he died in 1210—wrote, probably starting early in the 1160s.^{1,2} The work was a great lexicographical success, as witnessed by the over two hundred extant manuscripts, and had a great impact, as no lesser a writer than Dante Alighieri used it as a reference dictionary.³ The work stands in a tradition that starts with the *Liber glossarum* (once known as *Glossarium Ansileubi*), possibly written in Carolingian France between 790 and 830, a proto-dictionary which grafts Isidore of Seville's etymologies onto the tradition of glossaries of late antiquity.⁴ Composed at a time when Latin still was a naturally acquired

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- 1 Thanks to Monica Berté and Carmen Cardelle de Hartmann for their advice, without which translating Hugutio's impervious Latin would have been much harder.
 - 2 Biographical information on Hugutio can be consulted in Schizzerotto, "Uguccione (Uguicione) da Pisa." Müller, *Huguccio*, holds that our lexicographer and the bishop and canonist are two different persons, but the arguments do not seem cogent.
 - 3 Dante cites Hugutio only once in his *Convivio* (1304–1307), but the definitions provided in the *Derivationes* lie in filigree behind passages of the *Divina Commedia*, cf. Toynbee, "Dante's Latin Dictionary"; and much subsequent work, some of which is cited in fn. 23 below.
 - 4 This dating and localization ultimately goes back to Lindsay, "The Abstrusa Glossary," 126. In this line (see also Barbero, "*Liber Glossarum*," 151–152; Ganz, "The 'Liber Glossarum,'" 129–130), it has been maintained that the *Liber* was materially realized (in some monastery dependent on the abbey at Corbie in Picardy, Northern France) by disaggregating Isidore's text into a series of index cards: cf. Cardelle de Hartmann, "Uso y recepción," 493. In connection with a digital edition (Grondeux and Cinato, *Liber Glossarum Digital*), Cinato and Grondeux, "Nouvelles hypothèses," recently revert to the earlier dating by Goetz, "Der Liber glossarum," 287–288, who argued for an earlier origin in Visigothic Spain (690–750 CE), much closer to Isidore.

spoken language in common use at all levels of society, these earlier works were pure lists of more or less obscure words. Later, Latin gradually stopped being acquired natively—with a major break around 700 CE in France, as argued convincingly by J. Herman⁵—so that the teaching of Latin, still the only written language in Western Europe for centuries to come, became confronted with new demands. The new formula of the *Liber glossarum*, a broader kind of glossary adding substantial definitions to the word entries, was meant to meet such demands. Around 1040–1050, an otherwise unknown lexicographer named Papias elaborated on the same matter, producing a larger work entitled *Elementarium doctrinae rudimentum*, which, about one century later, Osbern Pinnock of Gloucester (1123–1200) in turn further expanded into his *Liber derivationum* (around 1150). This is the closest and major source of the work of Hugutio, who also draws on the other early dictionaries mentioned, and of course on works on etymology in the tradition from Isidore to Peter Helias (ca. 1100–post 1166).

The success of the work faded out with the end of the Middle Ages, as is witnessed by the fact that it was never printed, contrary to both its predecessor, Papias's *Erudimentum*, of which four incunable editions were published in northern Italy between 1476 and 1496, and to its later competitor, which ousted it, viz. Giovanni Balbi's *Catholicon* (1286), printed at the very dawn of the Gutenberg era, possibly by Johannes Gutenberg himself, in Mainz in 1460.⁶ The latter's success was favored by its strictly alphabetical order, which improved on Papias, who was the first to use this criterion (though he considered only the first three letters of each word). Alphabetical ordering, though it had previously been adopted at times in Greek glosses, had never been applied strictly in Latin antiquity, nor earlier in the Latin Middle Ages.⁷ Hugutio—taking a step backwards with respect to Papias—orders his matter by the initial letter only, which grants him the liberty to start his dictionary from the word *auctor* (author). Also, it is fair to say that Hugutio's work fell victim to the condemnation issued by leading humanists such as Lorenzo Valla (in the preface to Book 11 of his *De Linguae Latinae Elegancia*, 1444) against Isidore and his continuers.⁸

5 Herman, "End of the History of Latin," 375. See the discussion in the introduction to Chapter 2.7.

6 Even Isidore's *Etymologies* reached the age of the new medium, as it was printed repeatedly ever since the fifteenth century (see Chapter 2.7, fn. 4).

7 On the rise of alphabetical ordering in Latin lexicography, see Daly and Daly, "Some Techniques," 237. Miethaner-Vent, "Das Alphabet," 96 argues that Papias renounces applying the "mechanical alphabet" (i.e., strict alphabetical order) due to the problems posed by vacillation in orthography: for instance, he spells *aenormis* "enormous" instead of Classical Latin *enormis*, putting it under Æ-. Only the restoration of the classical orthography in the humanism made consequent application of the alphabetical order possible.

8 See the introduction to Chapter 2.7.

Since the *Derivationes* are a dictionary, they could have been addressed just as well in Part 3 (Lexicography). Their inclusion in this chapter on etymology is justified by what has been said on the role played by Isidore's *Etymologies* in the rise of this textual genre: etymological discussion paved the way for the expansion of word lists into dictionaries, together with the "derivation" method, implying that lexical families were addressed as a whole, discussing words that shared the same root (or that appeared to do so, given the established knowledge of the time).

The dependency of Hugutio's etymological analysis on earlier sources can be exemplified by his discussion of a paramount instance of prescientific etymology, that of *vulpes*, earlier *volpes*, "fox." Hugutio repeats an acronymic etymology, first attested in Varro, *L.L.* 5.20 ("Volpes, ut Aelius dicebat, quod volat pedibus" [*Volpes* "fox," as Aelius used to say,⁹ because it *volat* "flies" with its *pedes* "feet"]¹⁰), via Isidore, *Etymologies* 12.2.29:¹¹

Vulpes dicta, quasi volupes. Est enim volubilis pedibus, et numquam rectis itineribus, sed tortuosis anfractibus currit, fraudulentum animal insidiisque decipiens.

Foxes [*vulpes*] are so named as if the word were *volupes*, for they are "shifty on their feet" [*volubilis* + *pes*] and never follow a straight path but hurry along tortuous twistings. It is a deceitful animal, tricking others with its guile.¹²

Hugutio's more articulated treatment is located under the entry *volvo* "to turn" (U 45.7), and focuses on the word's internal structure to establish the "derivation," analyzing the word as a compound:

Item componitur cum pes et dicitur hec vulpes -pis, idest quasi volupes, est enim volubilis pedibus.

9 Varro is here citing his teacher, Lucius Aelius Stilo Praeconinus (154–74 BCE).

10 Varro, *On the Latin Language*, trans. Kent.

11 Note that the *vol-* strings contained in Latin *volare* "to fly," on the one hand, and *volubilis* "revolving, changing," on the other, happen to be homophonous but go back to two distinct Indo-European roots, respectively **g^welh₁-ie/o-* "to raise arms, throw" vs. **wel-u-* "to wind" (*EDL* 687–690). Needless to say, *vulpes* actually comes from still another Indo-European root.

12 *Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, 253.

And it [i.e., *volvo*] enters composition with *pes* “foot” and one says *vulpes -pis*, as though the word were *volupes*, since it is “shifty on its feet.”

Plurilingualism, in this dictionary and its etymologies, manifests itself along two main dimensions. On the one hand, it appears in the presence of Greek—as exemplified in some of the entries excerpted in the following—surely due not to first-hand knowledge (one example of faulty Greek is provided in fn. 21), but rather to its metabolization in the cultured lexicon of Latin.¹³ On the other hand, one has to keep in mind that in twelfth-century Italy, Latin had long ceased to be a language spoken in everyday usage but, as in the whole of Europe, it still was—and continued to be for quite some time—the only language for all institutional and formal purposes (writing, teaching, science, etc.). The *Derivationes* mirror this diglossic situation in several ways, as they were later used as a reference dictionary by authors who started to write in the vernacular, such as Dante, but who could not yet rely on Italian dictionaries, which became available only in the sixteenth century. Also, several entries contain the earliest documentation of vernacular words unknown to Latin, often highlighted through the formula *quod vulgo dicitur* (which is said commonly/popularly). This is also exemplified in some of the following entries.

13 Isidore of Seville—though not proficient in Greek himself—played a key role in this metabolization (cf. Chapter 2.7).

Latin Text

Excerpted from Ugucione da Pisa [Hugutio], *Derivationes*, critical edition, ed. Enzo Cecchini, Guido Arbizzoni, Settimio Lanciotti, Giorgio Nonni, Maria Grazia Sassi, and Alba Tontini (Florence: Sismel Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2004).

Excerpt 1: Prologus (2.3–4)

1. Cum nostri protoplasti suggestiva prevaricatione humanum genus a sue dignitatis culmine quam longe deciderit ac triplicis incommodi, scilicet indigentie, vitii et ignorantie, non modicam coartationem sumpserit, triplex huic triplici incommodo nobis a Deo suggeritur remedium, scilicet commoditas, virtus et scientia. 2. Nam indigentie molestiam commoditas, vitii corruptionem virtus, ignorantie cecitatem expellit scientia, ad quam quidam longe accedentes, panniculum ab ea diripiendo sibi totam nupsisse credentes, et si quandoque eam in quadam parte possideant, more tamen bestiarum degentes non modo predictam triplicem miseriam aliqua virtute non redimere ut sic honestarum artium exercitio ad pristinae decusationis celticum honorem aliquantillum valeant promoveri, sed etiam singulis diebus cumulare conantur. 3. Nam nec dentium exstantias elimare, nec balbutientium linguarum vituliginis abradere, nec ingenii tarditatem excitare, nec madide memorie obliviam corripere vel negligentiam redarguere, nec maledicta punire, nec sordes ac vitia repellere, sed potius in vitiorum volutabro pro voluti pecuniam congerere ac congeste inservire vel etiam honestis officiis omissis lacunam corporis ingurgitare nituntur; quorum doctrinam, vitam mortemque iuxta extimandum est. 4. Nos vero altius procedentes, ne, si talentum a Deo nobis concessum in terram infoderemus, patenter furti argui possemus, quod nature beneficio nobis denegabatur per famam extendere laboravimus, ut universe carnis generalitas illam licet tenuem una cum corpore ne utiquam dissolveret. 5. Opus igi-

14 No complete translation in any language is available to date.

15 The legal term *praevaricatio* meant “collusion” in Classical Latin and comes to mean “(original) sin” in Christian Latin.

16 It. *suggestivo*, like Eng. *suggestive* lacks any negative connotation today, which was, however, still present in eighteenth-century Italian, when the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* glossed *suggestivo* (and late Latin *suggestivus*, not attested in Classical Latin) as “Che ingannevolmente trae altrui di bocca ciò, che non avrebbe detto” (That deceptively draws from someone else’s mouth what they would not have said). *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, 4th ed., 4: 807.

17 *Protoplastus*, -ī (< Gk. πρῶτόπλαστος), “the one who was molded first,” a scriptural word for Adam (and Eve).

English Translation¹⁴

By Michele Loporcaro and Laura Loporcaro.

Excerpt 1: Prologue

1. After mankind had fallen down, far removed from the height of its dignity by the original sin¹⁵ incurred, upon suggestion,¹⁶ by our first ancestor,¹⁷ and took upon itself the not slight constriction of a triple discomfort, that is of indigence, vice and ignorance, remedy to this triple discomfort is suggested by God, that is adaptability, virtue and knowledge. 2. For adaptability dispels the discomfort of indigence, virtue the corruption of vice, knowledge the blindness of ignorance. But some who approach knowledge from afar and, by tearing a shred of cloth from its garments,¹⁸ believe that she gave itself entirely to them, and, if at some time they possess it in some part, yet they spend their time like beasts and not only do not try to redeem the above mentioned three-way misery with any virtue in order to be able to progress this way just a little bit by the exercise of honest arts towards the noble honor of ancient adornment,¹⁹ but they even strive day by day to increase that misery. 3. Indeed, they neither strive to smooth tooth outgrowths, nor to scrape off the vitiligo of stuttering tongues, nor to prod the laziness of intelligence, nor to stop the forgetfulness of a slippery memory or to reproach negligence, nor to punish slander, nor to repel meanness and vice, but rather, wallowing in the mud of vice, they strain to accumulate money and to attend to that which they have accumulated, or even, having left aside honest occupations, aim to fill the bodily cavity by gorging themselves. These people's knowledge, life and death do not really make any difference. 4. But we who tend towards a higher goal, in order for us not to be patently alleged with theft would we bury underground the talent that God bestowed on us, have strived to extend through fame what had been denied to us by the benefit of nature, so that the general destiny of all human flesh might not dissolve it, however faint it may be, together with the body. 5. We

18 This may be reminiscent of philosophy's torn dress in Boethius's *De consolazione philosophiae* 1.24–25: “Eandem tamen vestem violentorum quorundam sciderant manus et particulas quas quisque potuit abstulerant” (But violent hands had ripped this dress and torn away what bits they could). Boethius, *Theological Tractates*, 133–135.

19 In this Medieval textual tradition, the ethnic adjective *Celticus* (Celtic) has come to mean “noble,” as witnessed by Hugutio himself (C 128.2; “celticus -a -um idest nobilis”). *Decusatio* (adornment) is post-classical Latin too. Since it is the adornment of language which is at stake here, it may not be idle to mention that Grammatica, the character that says “I” in Osborn's dictionary, is introduced (*Prologus* 5) as *celtica ... femina* (Celtic; i.e., noble, woman). Osberno, *Derivazioni*, 6.

tur divina favente gratia componere statuimus, in quo pre aliis vocabulorum significationum distinctiones, derivationum origines, ethimologiarum assignationes, interpretationum reperientur expositiones. Quarum ignorantia latinitas naturaliter indiga quadam doctorum pigritia non modicum coartatur. 6. Nec hoc tantum ut cenodoxie vitream fragilitatem lucri faciamus, adimplere conabimur, quantum ut omnium scientie litterarum invigilantium communis inde utilitas efflorescat; nec cuivis descendat in mentem, nos in hoc opere perfectionem insinuatim polliceri, cum nichil in humanis inventis ad unguem inveniatur expolitur, licet aliis de hac eadem re tractantibus quadam singulari perfectione haud iniuria videri possimus excellere. 7. Nam hic parvulus suavius lactabitur, hic adultus uberius cibabitur, hic perfectus affluentius delectabitur, hic gignosophiste triviales, hic didascalii quadruviales, hic legum professores, hic et theologie perscrutatores, hic ecclesiarum proficient gubernatores, hic supplebitur quicquid hactenus ex scientie defectu pretermisum est, hic eliminabitur quicquid a longo tempore male usurpatum est.

8. Si quis querat huius operis quis autor, dicendum est quia Deus; si querat huius operis quis fuerit instrumentum, respondendum est quia patria pisanus, nomine Uguitio quasi eugetio, idest bona terra non tantum presentibus sed etiam futuris, vel Uguitio quasi vigetio, idest virens terra non sibi solum sed etiam aliis. 9. Igitur Sancti Spiritus assistente gratia, ut qui est omnium bonorum distributor nobis verborum copiam auctim suppeditare dignetur, a verbo augmenti nostre assertionis auspiciis sortiamur.

Excerpt II: G 26 (2.51f.)

1. **GARRIO**²⁰ -ris verbosari, gaudere, blandiri, iocari. Proprie tamen est multa verba dicere, sordide loqui, 2. et hinc **graculus**, non, ut quidam dicunt, quia gregatim volent, cum sit manifestum eum ex vocis garrulitate sic nuncupari: est enim loquacissimum avium genus et vocibus importunum; 3. et hinc **garrulus** -a -u quasi graculus; proprie garrulus dicitur qui vulgo verbosus appellatur,

20 Main entries are boldfaced and in capitals, while subentries are just boldfaced.

21 The Greek loanword *gymnosophista* "(naked) philosopher, gymnosophist," in medieval Latin shifts its meaning to indicate a "teacher," as witnessed by Hugutio himself (G 54.6): "gignosophista -ste, idest doctor, magister in gignasio." This is reported at the entry "GIGNOS grece, latine dicitur nudus," a corruption of Gk. γυμνός.

22 The two interpretations of the name rely respectively on Lat. *euge* "well done!" (a Hellenism) and *vigeo* "I am strong."

23 Departing from alphabetical order, after this *Prologus* the dictionary starts with the entry *augeo*, which in turn contains as a first derivative *autor* (i.e., *auctor*, compare It. *autore*),

therefore decided, with the favor of God's grace, to compose a work in which first of all one will find the distinctions of word meanings, the origins of derivations, the attributions of etymologies, the expositions of interpretations. Due to ignorance of them, the Latin language, naturally poor, is seriously restricted, because of a certain laziness of the learned. 6. And we will not try to accomplish this solely to gain the glassy frailty of vainglory, but rather so that from this, common utility may blossom for all who attend to the humanities. And nobody should think that in this work we surreptitiously promise perfection, since nothing can be found in human inventions which is completely polished, although it may seem, not unjustly, that because of an unusual degree of perfection, we excel others treating the same subject. 7. Here the baby will be nursed more gently, the adult be nourished more abundantly, the educated person be delighted more generously, here the teachers of the trivium [the three core liberal arts],²¹ here the teachers of the arts of quadrivium, here professors of law, here even the investigators of theology, here those in charge of the churches will profit, here whatever so far has been neglected because of some defect of knowledge will be restored, here whatever has been used improperly for long will be eliminated.

8. If anyone asks who the author of this work is, they should be told it is God; if one asks who the instrument of this work has been, it should be answered that it was a man whose homeland is Pisa, whose name is Uguitio, as if the word were *eugetio*, that is "good land" not only for those who are now, but also for those who will be, or Uguitio, as if the word were *vigetio*, that is "verdant soil" not only for himself, but also for others.²² 9. Hence, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit's grace—so that He who is the distributor of all good things may deign to provide us increasingly with abundance of words—we take the beginning of our demonstration from the word *augmentum* "augment, increase."²³

Excerpt II: G 26 (2.511f.)

1. **GARRIO** -ris "to chatter, rejoice, allure, play." But strictly speaking it means "to say many words" or "speak badly," 2. and hence **graculus** "jackdaw," not—as some people say—because they fly in flocks (*gregatim*), since it is clear that it is named after the garrulity of its call: indeed, for it is the most talkative species and importunate in its calls; 3. and hence **garrulus** -a -u "loquacious" as if the word were *graculus*; garrulous is the proper word for a person who is commonly called verbose. When happiness befalls such people they neither can nor will

whose discussion was influential in the culture of the Middle Ages and which is cited by Dante, *Convivio* IV.vi.1–5; cf. e.g., Picone, "Dante e Ugucione," 271; Ascoli, "Reading Dante's Readings," 137.

accedente letitia nec valens nec volens tacere. Et est sumptum nomen a graculis avibus que importuna loquacitate semper strepunt nec umquam quiescunt. ...

13. Item a guttur **gurdus** -a -um ineptus, stultus, inutilis ... ; et hic **gulus** -li genus navigii pene rotundum ad modum gutturis; 14. et hic **gustus** -us -ui, unus de V sensibus corporis; unde **gusto** -as -vi, et hinc **gustito** -as frequentativum: gustare est libare, quod vulgo dicitur **assaiare**.

Excerpt III: I 26 (2.598f.)

1. Hec **YCON** -nis et hec **ycona** -e et hec **yconia** -e, idest imago vel signum, et est **ycon** personarum inter se vel eorum que personis accidunt comparatio, scilicet cum figuram rei ex consimili genere conamur exprimere, ut (Verg. *Aen.* 4.558) “omnia Mercurio similis, vocemque coloremque” et cetera; 2. unde hec **yconisma** -e, idest imago, figura sine pectore ad caput, et hec **eco** indeclinabile, quasi **yco**, sonus aeris vel vallium vel rupium vel montium, idest sonus redivus, quia est imago et representatio vocis. Dicunt tamen quidam quod **eco** saxum est quod, humane vocis sonum captans, etiam verba loquentium imitatur, et dicitur sic quia, ad vocem respondens, alieni efficitur imago sermonis; sed potius videtur hoc evenire natura locorum, sicut convallium et cetera. 3. Unde hic **economus** -mi, idest dispensator proprie familie, unde hec **economia** -e, dispensatio, et **economicus** -a -um, dispensativus, unde hec **economica**, scientia qua instruimur in dispensatione proprie familie; et dicitur **economus** ab **eco**, quod est sonus redivus, quia ad eius sonum et vocem tota familia debet ordinari. 4. Vel potius dicitur **yconomus** ab **ycon**, quod est imago vel signum, et **noma**, quod est lex, vel norma, quod est regula. Inde **yconomus** quasi signatilis lex vel regula, quia ad eius signum et legem vel regulam tota familia debet dispensari; et inde hec **yconomia**, et cetera.

24 The whole passage is taken verbatim from Isidore's *Etymologies* 12.7-45 (§ 2) and 10.G.114 (§ 3), where two distinct derivations are reported, which go in opposite directions; i.e., “Graculus, a garrulitate nuncupatus” (The jackdaw *graculus* is named for its garrulity), in the former, as opposed to “Garrulus ... Sumtum nomen a graculis avibus” (The term is taken from the bird called jackdaw), in the latter passage. The two words are indeed unrelated: the name of the jackdaw, like other Indo-European words such as English *to croak*, *crow*, etc., is most probably onomatopoeic, while the adjective *garrulus* derives from *garrire* “to chatter” < PIE ^s*ǵeh₂r-ie/o-* ‘to shout’ (EDL 255 and 268).

25 This is the very first occurrence of the Italian *assaggiare* “to taste, try,” otherwise attested in Italian texts since the late thirteenth century, which stems from Late Latin *exagiare*, attested in an inscription from Leptis Magna (late fifth/early sixth century).

26 *Icona* “image,” a feminine noun stemming from Gk. εἰκών via the accusative εἰκόνα, as well as its synonymous *iconia* occur in Medieval Latin texts, and so does, if more rarely, *icon*, -is, a direct transposition of the Gk. neuter noun. As for orthography, it must be kept in mind that early in the current era, Old Greek [e:], [e:], [oi] and [y] (spelled <ει, η, οι> and

be quiet. And the name is taken from the birds called *graculi* “jackdaws,” which always chatter with their importunate loquacity and are never quiet. ...²⁴

13. Also, from *guttur gurdus* -a -um “inept, foolish, useless” ... ; and *gulus* -li, a kind of vessel almost round in the shape of a throat; 14. and *gustus* -us -ui, one of the five bodily senses; whence *gusto* -as -vi, and from here *gustito* -as frequentative: *gustare* is “to nibble/taste,” which one popularly says *assaggiare*.²⁵

Excerpt III: I 26 (2.598f.)

1. **YCON** -nis and *ycona* -e and *yconia* -e,²⁶ that is image or sign, and *ycon* is the comparison of persons with each other or of the traits which happen to belong to persons, namely when we try to express a figure of an object with something of a similar kind, as in Verg. *Aen.* 4.558 “omnia Mercurio similis, vocemque coloremque” (in all similar to Mercury, and voice and color) etc.; 2. whence **yconisma** -e,²⁷ that is image, a figure without a bust under the head, and **eco** “echo,” indeclinable, as though the word were *yco*,²⁸ the sound of air or valleys or cliffs or mountains, that is a sound that returns, because it is the image and representation of voice. Some say in fact that the echo is a stone which, capturing the sound of human voice, imitates even the words of those who speak, and it is so called because, as it responds to a voice, the image of somebody else’s speech arises; but this seems to happen rather due to the nature of the places, such as valleys etc. 3. Whence **economus** -mi, that is the bursar of his own family, whence **economia** -e “economy,” that is “distribution/administration,” and **economicus** -a -um “economical,” *dispensativus* “regulative,” whence **economica** “economy,” the science which instructs us in distributing the goods in one’s family; and one says *economus* from *eco* “echo,” that is a sound that returns, because the whole family must be organized at his sound and voice. 4. Or one rather says **yconomus** from *ycon*, that is image or sign, and *noma*, that is law, or *norma*, that is rule. Thence *yconomus* is as though it were a law or rule obeying to a sign, because the whole family must be administered based on his sign and law or rule; and thence *yconomia*, and so on.²⁹ 5. *Ycon* enters

⟨v⟩ respectively) had merged into [i]. This explains the use of graphical ⟨y⟩ for [i], often in words with a Greek flavor.

27 Gk. εἰκόνημα, -ατος “image,” a neuter noun reanalyzed as a class one feminine *yconisma*, -e.

28 From here on, Ugucione adjusts the spelling in order to suit the etymology: thus, non-existing *yco* is spelled this way to support the asserted link of “echo” with “image.”

29 *Œconomia* (from Old Greek οἰκονομία, a derivative of οἶκος “house”) and derived words were normally spelled with *e*- in Medieval Latin, but Ugucione uses *y*- here to adjust it to the “etymology” from *ycon*. Curiously, this produces a spelling that is in line with the pronunciation of οἰκονομία in Byzantine and modern Greek (see fn. 26).

5. Ycon componitur cum pros, quod est ad, et dicitur hoc **prosicum** -ci, idest adimaginatio vel signum, unde Martianus “fissiculatis extorum prosicis viscera loquebantur.” Quidam legunt prosicum pro prima parte extorum, a proseco -as, sed hoc melius in sequenti distinguetur.

Excerpt IV: L 10 (2.642)

1. **LAGOS** grece, latine dicitur cursus vel velocitas, unde apud Grecos lepus vocatur lagos vel lageos, quia velociter currat. 2. Et hinc quedam vitis dicitur **lageos** grece, leporina latine, quia velociter currat ad maturitatem, ut lepus; vel quia vinum eius venas hominum cito transit. 3. Et hec **lagois**, quedam avis habens leporinam carnem, et quidam piscis eadem ratione dicitur lagois, unde Oratius (*sat.* 2, 2, 22). 4. Et hoc **laganum**, quoddam genus cibi quod prius in aqua coquitur, postea in oleo frigitur; et sunt lagana de pasta quasi quedam membranule, que quandoque statim in oleo friguntur postea melle condiuntur, quandoque prius in aqua coquantur postea in oleo friguntur: Illa vulgo dicuntur crustella, ista lasania; et dicuntur sic, quia suavia sunt ad comedendum ut caro leporina.

30 Late Latin *prosicum* (responsum), “*Responsum*, apud Laurentium in Amalthe. ex Papia.” Du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, t. 6, col. 539b.

31 The word *adimaginatio* seems to be a nonce formation.

32 Martianus Capella (flourished sixth century CE), *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*. 19: “fissiculatis extorum prosiciis, uiscera loquebantur ...” (By the separation of entrails [of slaughtered animals], the viscera declared ...). Harris Stahl, Johnson, and Burge, *Martianus Capella*, 8. The quotation, in the same form as in Hugutio, occurs in Osbern. F xl 5, Osberno, *Derivazioni*, 270; and, with “phisiculatis,” in S xxii 24, 634.

33 Gk. λαγώς (Ion. λαγός) means “hare,” not “(a) run” nor “speed.” The artificial creation of these meanings by metonymia becomes clear in the light of *Etymologies* 17.1.23: “Lepus, levipes, quia velociter currit. Unde et graece pro cursu λαγώς dicitur” (The hare, as if the word were *levipes* “swift foot,” because it runs swiftly. Whence in Greek it is called λαγώς, because of its swiftness). *Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, 248. Thus, Isidore established the relation, though in turn “L’explication d’Isidore par *pro cursu* est elle-même inexplicée” (Isidore’s explanation through *pro cursu* is itself unexplained), as Jacques André puts it. Isidore de Séville, *Étymologies*, Book 12, ed. André, 55.

composition with *pros*, that is *ad* “to,” and so one says **prosicum** -ci “answer,”³⁰ that is “imagination-to”³¹ or sign, whence Martianus [Capella wrote] “fisculatis extorum prosicis viscera loquebantur.”³² Some read *prosicum* in the sense of the first part of the entrails, from *proseco* -as “to cut off,” but this will be better distinguished in the following.

Excerpt IV: L 10 (2.642)

1. **LAGOS** in Greek, one says in Latin *cursus* “run” or *velocitas* “speed,”³³ whence among the Greeks the hare is called *lagos* or *lageos*,³⁴ because it runs quickly. 2. And from here a sort of vine is called **lageos** in Greek,³⁵ *leporina* in Latin,³⁶ since it grows [lit. runs] fast to ripeness, like a hare; or because the wine made out of it passes swiftly through the people’s veins. 3. And the **lagois**, a sort of bird whose meat is as tasty as the hare’s, and a sort of fish is also called *lagois* “grouse” for the same reason, whence Horace (*sat.* 2, 2, 22).³⁷ 4. And the **laganum**, a certain type of food which is first cooked in water, then fried in oil; and the *lagana* are made of dough like a kind of small membranes, which, at times as soon as they are fried in oil are then seasoned with honey, at times are first boiled in water and then fried in oil: the former are called popularly *crustella* “fritter,” the latter *lasaniana* “lasagna”; and one calls them so (i.e., *lagana*), because they are as delicious to eat as hare meat.³⁸

34 Gk. λάγειος “leporine” is the derived adjective, not a variant of the noun λαγώς.

35 This is the Gk. adjective λάγειος “of hare,” not otherwise documented to refer to a species of vine.

36 *Leporina* as a vine’s name does not seem to be otherwise attested in (Medieval) Latin. The only occurrence of this word as a name for a plant is in Isidore, *Etymologies* 17.9.43, but it concerns a kind of grass that “is also called ‘hare-like’ (*leporina*) because it sends out a supple stalk.” *Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, 352.

37 As a fish name, it is a hapax in Horace’s passage cited by Hugutio, where it occurs in a series with *ostrea* “oysters” and *scarus* “parrotfish.” For the ancient commentaries (*scholia*) to Horace, *lagois* seems to have been familiar as the name of a bird, rather than that of a fish.

38 The passage contains the earliest occurrence of some Italian words. While *lagana* in Classical Latin is the plural of *laganum*, “a kind of unleavened cake made of flour and oil” (from Gk. λάγανον), here the word has become a feminine singular, which denotes a thin dough: formally, *lagana* is still the name of “lasagne” (a layered pasta dish) in the dialects of southern Italy (e.g., Calabrian *lágana e ciceri* “lasagne and chickpeas”). Here, *lagana* are subdivided, according to preparation, into *crustella* “fritter” and *lasaniana*. Neither is a Latin word, and the latter is the earliest attestation of Italian *lasagna*, which dictionaries usually date to the early fourteenth century, when it first occurred in Italian texts. Cf. Riessner, *Die Magnae derivationes*, 135–136. The word is in turn of Greek origin, stemming ultimately from Gk. λάσανον “cooking pot,” borrowed into Latin as *lasānum*, whose derivative **lasānia* is the immediate source of *lasagne*.

Abbreviations and Symbols

col.	column
<i>EDL</i>	de Vaan, Michiel. <i>Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the Other Italic Languages</i> , Leiden: Brill, 2008.
Lat.	Latin
<i>L.L.</i>	Marcus Terentius Varro, <i>De lingua Latina</i>
Gk.	Greek
PIE	Proto-Indo European
t.	tomus
<i>sat.</i>	Horace, <i>Satires</i>
<i>Verg. Aen.</i>	Virgil, <i>The Aeneid</i>
<	etymological derivation
*	reconstructed form

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PART 3

Lexicography



Introduction

Mårten Söderblom Saarela

It is perhaps fitting that an introduction to the part on lexicography should discuss words and their definitions. “Dictionary” and its synonyms and near-synonyms (“lexicon,” “thesaurus”), indeed the word “lexicography” itself, refer to genres of books and the practice of writing such books. They might be straightforward enough for writing their recent history in the West (before the changes brought about by new information technology), but they cannot easily serve to single out a specific body of sources or a certain scholarly practice in earlier periods of European history, let alone in historical societies elsewhere in the world.

The introduction to this part will survey the world history of lexicography—a field that is only now coming into being. It will show that lexicography was common in early cultures as a philological, exegetical tool or as language pedagogy for learning a first or a second language. Thus mono- and bilingual lexicography is very old, even as old as writing. In addition, I will suggest that multilingual lexicography, wordlists including three or more languages, started to become more common in the second millennium CE. The rise of multilingual lexicography as a translational, perhaps global, phenomenon is a topic for further research.

In what follows, I will go through the basic concepts of lexicography and its development from mono- and bilingual wordlists in antiquity to multilingual dictionaries in the early modern period. I will end with a mention of some of the multilingual books we have from East Asia.

1 What Is Lexicography?

Investigations of the vocabulary of the practice and products of lexicography in Western Europe in the medieval and early modern periods, whence stem our current ways of talking about these things, have shown that dictionaries as we know them today were long in the making. The early middle ages had glossaries, which were lists of words drawn from a particular text, not the language as a whole. Most of them were in Latin, but they could be Greek-Latin or Latin-vernacular.

The large compendia that included a lot of lexical material were not really dictionaries. These works include Isidore of Seville's (ca. 560–636) *Etymologiae*, which was early and influential (see Chapter 2.7). One book in the *Etymologiae* "is indeed about words, and is alphabetically arranged," but it is as if "Isidore did not see a difference between discussing words ... and discussing things."¹ But these works also include the much later *Elementarium doctrinae rudimentum* (ca. 1041) by Papias. "On the whole, Papias's work looks like a real dictionary," writes Olga Weijers, but "the whole text is a mixture of very different articles" of different arrangement, some "consisting in lengthy explanations of an encyclopedic character."² John Considine, who has studied the history of the relevant concepts, concludes that "[w]hen we refer to medieval dictionaries, or to medieval lexicography, we are using convenient anachronisms."³ The European concept of the dictionary, expressed through the Latin words *dictionarium* and *lexicon*, dates to the early sixteenth century, with the category of lexicography emerging only in the eighteenth.⁴ Naturally, extra-European cultures have different conceptual frameworks with their own histories. When talking about lexicography historically and across cultures, the most sensible thing to do is what Considine did when he compiled a world history of lexicography: define "lexicography" as "the making of lists of words and their interpretations," with dictionary thus being a "wordlist."⁵

2 Monolingualism in Early Lexicography

With "lexicography" generously defined as the practice of listing words and "dictionary" defined as a wordlist—or lexical list—the history of lexicography is as old as writing itself. Already in the third millennium BCE, Mesopotamian scribes compiled such lists. They could be loosely arranged either according to the spelling of the words in cuneiform or their pronunciation (that is, their graphic form), or by subject matter (that is, their semantic content), or a combination of the two. Thus we have lists of—among other things—domestic and wild animals, trees and wooden objects, plants, metal objects, professions, and mathematical and economic terms.⁶ Such lexical lists "are the earliest schol-

1 Considine, "Concept of Lexicography," 32.

2 Weijers, "Lexicography in the Middle Ages," 141.

3 Considine, "Concept of Lexicography," 34.

4 *Ibid.*, 36–38.

5 Considine, "Introduction," 3.

6 Cavigneaux, "Lexikalische Listen," 612–616.

arly genre in ancient Mesopotamia, and thus they may claim to be the earliest scholarly genre in the history of humanity.⁷ Lexicography, then, has been integral to scholarship since remote antiquity. Ever since, its boundaries have been porous.

In the Mesopotamian wordlists arranged by subject matter, as in many later lists and books written in other places and languages, words are not separated from their meanings. It is not a coincidence that we have lists of fish, birds, or plants. Inventories of the words for the objects of the world were also inventories of the world itself. Thus lexicography from the very beginning was closely linked to encyclopedism and the collection and systematization of knowledge.

Such was arguably the case to an even greater extent in the early cultures with logographic or morphophonetic writing, such as ancient Egypt and China. Individual hieroglyphs and Chinese characters encoded meaning. “So, the natural approach for early Egyptians studying language was classification and encyclopedism: a description of the world they lived in, mirrored also in the hieroglyphic signs.”⁸

The ancient Chinese used wordlists as educational and exegetical tools. Xu Shen, the author of *Shuowen jiezi* (Explain the graphs to unravel the written words), “the first dictionary of Chinese characters” dated to ca. 100 CE,⁹ broke with the earlier tradition of glossing classical texts, but not by making a dictionary in the modern sense. Xu’s “interest was with the writing system of the language,”¹⁰ which he subdivided into semantic categories that reflect a greater cosmological vision. His book is thus not a reference work, or even necessarily a book for learning the meaning of words.

The Egyptian, Chinese, and earliest Mesopotamian wordlists are generally monolingual. Multilingualism is not absent from early lexicography, however. Curiously, it is in China—a cultural area for which scholars “lament the absence of any record of anyone speaking anything other than Chinese”¹¹—that we find the wordlist *Fangyan*, which “collected synonyms taken from different dialects and languages, gathered by court messengers who had been sent to various regions of China.”¹² This text contains multilingual material, but marked (non-standard) vocables are associated with places rather than languages (“In Wu,

7 Veldhuis, “Ancient Mesopotamia,” 11.

8 Feder, “Ancient and Coptic Egypt,” 38.

9 Bottéro, “Ancient China,” 59.

10 Harbsmeier and Bottéro, “*Shuowen Jiezi* Dictionary,” 251.

11 Boltz, “Multilingualism and Lingua Franca,” 401.

12 Bottéro, “Ancient China,” 57.

they say ...”). It is thus very different from the multilingual imperial dictionaries of the early modern period.

In traditions with alphabetic scripts or a strong element of orality, early lexicography is more clearly related to attempts to bridge the growing distance between the language of the canon and that of its readers than with the order of the cosmos as a whole. In India, “the need to prepare a list of obsolete words used in the Vedic texts ... must have arisen from the fact that the language of the hymns differed from that of the next generations, and the cultural context of many words became obscure.”¹³ Similarly, the earliest Greek lexicographical papyri list words from the older Homeric and epic literature, which was studied among the philologists at Alexandria.¹⁴ That is not to say that the study of classical texts was irrelevant for the development of lexicography in early Egypt and China. *Erya*, one of the oldest Chinese wordlists, is a text of this nature, for example.

3 Bilingual Lexicography

Several of the world’s ancient cultures thus engaged in lexicography in order to handle the growing disconnect between the language or vocabulary of a single individual—even an educated one—and those of a lengthening written tradition. Over time, as new languages passed into the realm of writing and other languages fell out of active, spoken use, some bilingual lexicographical traditions emerged. The Mesopotamian tradition, for one, became bilingual as Sumerian ceased to be an everyday spoken language; lists that used to give only the pronunciation of Sumerian logograms now also presented their translation into Akkadian.¹⁵ Early Latin lexicography was related to glossography, as in Greece, but Latin-Greek dictionaries were also written, and they probably influenced later comprehensive dictionaries that were written in Greek only.¹⁶

Bilingualism is, quite naturally, seen in many of the lexicographical traditions that developed within—or in close relationship to—societies that predominantly used another written language. Thus, we have Hebrew-Arabic dictionaries, Sanskrit-Tibetan dictionaries, Tangut-Chinese dictionaries, and glossaries or wordlists of Latin and the emerging vernaculars in the European middle ages.

13 Deokar and Chevillard, “Ancient India,” 69.

14 Ferri, “Greco-Roman World,” 86.

15 Cavigneaux, “Lexikalische Listen,” 616.

16 Ferri, “Greco-Roman World,” 102.

4 From Bilingualism to Multilingualism in Lexicography

Unlike multilingualism, plurilingualism involving two languages (that is, bilingualism) was, then, common already in the lexicography of the ancient world. Naturally, the relative rarity of multilingual dictionaries from this period is not due to societies being somehow more linguistically homogenous. Goods and people moved over great distances in the ancient world, and it stands to reason that commercial and political centers were linguistically diverse. Indeed, alloglottography is attested in some early cultures (notably, but probably not exclusively, in early Japan), in that texts written in one language could actually be read in another.¹⁷ In such cases, a superficially monolingual text actually belongs to a bi- or multilingual context. Furthermore, as in the Byzantine *Suda* introduced later in this part, a multilingual reality is clearly discernable within the monolingual dictionary entries. Finally, certain kinds of texts, such as imperial inscriptions, which were not philological in character and not restricted by the high cost of writing material, were multilingual already in antiquity.

Moreover, if we remain in the realm of lexicography, certain tendencies prevailing at the time tended to marginalize the multilingual wordlists that might actually have existed. For example, within the monolingual Greek tradition, lexicographers “never acknowledge the existence” even of bilingual dictionaries.¹⁸ If that was the case for wordlists including two languages, it holds true for multilingual lists as well. The multilingual wordlist presented later in this part is a case in point; it is an excavated papyrus, not a part of the transmitted tradition.

The existence of the multilingual wordlist papyrus suggests that the impression that multilingual lexicography only really gained momentum after ca. 1000 CE might to some extent be the result of selection bias. I find it hard to believe, however, that an adjustment for these factors would completely overturn the narrative that I am presenting here, the point of which is to suggest that multilingual lexicographies—involving three or more languages—were relatively rare in the ancient world and only became common in the long second millennium CE. I will elaborate.

The philological character of much early lexicography was often not conducive to multilingual scholarship. Yet over time, dictionaries that included several languages were compiled and read in several parts of the world. Cur-

17 Rubio, “Writing in Another Tongue,” 33–70.

18 Ferri, “Greco-Roman World,” 93.

ously, if we remain on the scale of the *longue durée*, it might perhaps be argued that these multilingual collections appeared in greater numbers in the same historical period: the so-called “vernacular millennium,”¹⁹ whose beginnings we, for the sake of convenience, might date to around 1000 CE. If this hypothesis, which I will entertain in this introduction, turns out to be true, then the rise of multilingual lexicography can be linked to the relativization—if not marginalization—of cosmopolitan written traditions that was proceeding at different speeds in this period as societies changed. Furthermore, paper became more accessible, making it economically and technically feasible to write a greater variety of books.²⁰ Crucially, writing was adopted to a greater extent on the peripheries of old civilizations. With more languages, and more words, being committed to writing, information flowed more easily across the old world. Some lexicographers ascended to a new vantage point and endeavored to gather, on one page, as many languages as possible.

5 Multilingual Lexicographies in the Second Millennium CE

These factors were all in evidence in the second millennium CE. With several of the Indo-European and Turkic languages of Central Asia committed to writing as part of state-building and religious (Buddhist, Manichean, Islamic) projects, dictionaries of new languages or language varieties appeared. The earliest wordlist of Persian, *Lughat-i furs* from ca. 1066, is monolingual and best grouped with the philological dictionaries of the first millennium (it was meant to serve the reading and writing of poetry). But the first dictionary of Turkic, *Dīwān Luḡāt at-Turk* from ca. 1077, translates words from several Turkic dialects into Arabic. With time, multilingual Arabic-Persian-Turkish wordlists were compiled in Central Asia, where several written languages were now in contact.²¹ In the fourteenth century, in Yemen, where the trade route from the Indian ocean to the Mediterranean passed, the king sponsored the compilation of multilingual glossaries that covered Arabic, Persian, Turkic, Greek, Armenian, and Mongolian.²²

In India, the Mughal invasion ushered in numerous Sanskrit-Persian wordlists, but this bilingual tradition quickly expanded. According to Audrey Truschke,

19 Pollock, “India in the Vernacular Millennium,” 41–74.

20 This insight is from Considine, *Small Dictionaries and Curiosity*, 19.

21 Stachowski, “Turkic Languages and Persian,” 223–232.

22 Golden, *The King’s Dictionary*.

particularly beginning in the seventeenth century, multilingual dictionaries proliferated that include languages such as Marathi and Gujarati paired with Persian and Arabic. At this time, certain Sanskrit lexicons also began to show a heavy density of vernacular terms. The relationship between Sanskrit–Persian lexicons and texts that incorporate other tongues remains to be worked out, but early modern intellectuals more broadly tried to make sense of their world through words and language.²³

Written multilingualism was making its way into dictionaries, but as Truschke remarks, the phenomenon has rarely been the focus of dedicated historical study. John Considine has tried to pin down what drove the development of new multilingual lexicographies in Europe from about the fifteenth century onward, that is, at a point in time somewhere in between the emergence of multilingual dictionaries in Central and South Asia, judging by the scholarship cited above. Before the fifteenth century, Considine writes, bilingual lexicography in Europe had been motivated by the practical study of languages. But from the second half of the fifteenth century, a new tradition of lexicography emerged that “was driven not by the need to learn a useful or prestigious language but by curiosity.”²⁴ This curious lexicography did not just incorporate languages already written, but brought new ones into the fold of writing. Therefore, the new languages brought into the world of print by European lexicographers of the era cannot, as in the case in some other parts of the world in the “vernacular millennium,” be explained by their availability in writing—quite the contrary. However, the fact that many of the resulting wordlists were multilingual to some extent depended precisely on this fact, as was the case elsewhere in Eurasia. Tri- or quadrilingual wordlists often contained the new language, Latin, and one or two recently codified national vernaculars.²⁵ The latter’s firm establishment in print (if not recent commitment to writing) thus contributed to the multilingualism of lexicography in the new age of curiosity.

After the major European vernaculars, including Russian, had been standardized and codified in monolingual dictionaries under government auspices, Catherine II of Russia herself took up the “curious hobby” of translating wordlists. They became “the backbone for a comparative dictionary claiming to represent all the languages in the world”: *Vocabularia comparativa linguarum totius orbis* from 1787–1791.²⁶ This dictionary was obviously

23 Truschke, “Defining the Other,” 662.

24 Considine, *Small Dictionaries and Curiosity*, 29.

25 Considine, *Academy Dictionaries*.

26 Kim, “Foreign Interests,” 20–21.

a product of empire. As such, it was not unique. In the Qing empire of the Manchus, the court sponsored multilingual dictionary projects at exactly the same time.

The imperial multilingual dictionaries produced in Beijing in the late eighteenth century are inseparable from the Inner Asian imperial project of the Manchus. Yet, just as Catherine II's multilingual dictionary in part stemmed from a curiosity for which the reality of empire alone cannot account, when placed in its broader historical context, the Manchu polyglots appear as part of a historical trend.

The Manchu invasion of China in the mid-seventeenth century brought East Asia closer to the new written multilingualism that was a contributing factor in the emergence of multilingual dictionaries elsewhere in Eurasia as well. The first period of Inner Asian vernacularization in the early second millennium CE did not result in any multilingual lexicography, as far as we are able to tell from the texts still extant; we only know of mono- or bilingual dictionaries from said period. Not so after the Manchu conquest.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, bilingual Manchu-Chinese and Manchu-Mongolian dictionaries were complemented by court-sponsored multilingual dictionaries containing all of these three languages together. In some books, Tibetan was added, and in the imperially sponsored pentaglot of the 1790s, Uighur was added to these four languages. The simultaneity of this book, that is, the Manchu Qianlong emperor's *Yuzhi wuti Qingwen jian*, and Catherine II's collection is suggestive. It also makes the Manchu book look provincial. The Qianlong emperor liked to praise the Manchu language over all the other languages of the world, but his dictionary contained only five of them, all of which were important to the Qing imperial formation. Nevertheless, *Yuzhi wuti Qingwen jian* was part of a broader trend in East Asia at this time, which was further represented at the Qing court through books that have thus far remained much less known than the pentaglot.

Qianlong's project was more closely related to the general written multilingualism of Eurasia than the pentaglot alone might suggest. It was not the only multilingual dictionary compiled in the region. In Chosŏn Korea, the trilingual Chinese-Korean-Manchu *Tongmun yuhae* was compiled on the basis of Qing sources in 1748. Some decades later, in 1778, *Pang'ŏn yusŏk* was finished but never printed. It contained Chinese (with Mandarin pronunciation glosses), Korean, Manchu, Mongolian, Japanese, and Chinese dialect terms.²⁷ The trend toward multilingual lexicography encompassed East Asia as a whole.

27 Söderblom Saarela, "Mandarin over Manchu," 378–382.

Furthermore, although Qianlong's five-language dictionary certainly looks intimately tied to the Qing imperial formation in its coverage, there was a greater interest in the lexicography of foreign languages at the Manchu court. In 1755, when the work on multilingual compilations was underway at the Qianlong court, the Jesuit missionary Antoine Gaubil wrote from Beijing:

*Pekini Imperator voluit habere plurima vocabula sinica, russicé, latiné, italicé, lusitanicé, germanicé et gallicé versa cum sonis earum linguarum exprimentibus sonos sinenses; non parvus fuit labor, et opinor sine ullâ verâ utilitate, sed magnates Sinenses credidere maximo honori fore suo Imperatori Sinicam linguam sic verti in Sinis in tam diversarum Gentium linguas.*²⁸

The Emperor in Peking wanted to have a great number of Chinese words translated into Russian, Latin, Italian, Portuguese, German, and French, with the Chinese sounds expressed in the sounds of these languages [transcribed into the alphabet of these languages?]. This was not a small task, and, I think, one without any real usefulness, but the high Chinese officials thought it a great honor to their Emperor to have the Chinese language thus translated in China into the languages of such diverse Peoples.

Gaubil's letter appears to refer to the voluminous manuscript dictionaries of various foreign languages produced at the Manchu court in the middle of the eighteenth century. These books await further study.

Elsewhere in East Asia, the integration of the languages of the Qing empire with those of Europe likewise advanced. In the early 1820s, scholars in Japan compiled a manuscript dictionary that contained Chinese, Manchu, Dutch, and occasionally English and Russian.²⁹ Thus, by the end of the early modern period, multilingual lexicography covering a great number of languages from different parts of Eurasia was practiced from Europe to Japan.

6 Conclusion

The lexicographical texts translated and introduced in this part offer glimpses of lexicographical practice from very different times and places. They include a section of a lexicon from Mesopotamia (3.2), a multilingual wordlist from

28 Antoine Gaubil to Thomas Birch, May 8, 1755, Beijing, in Gaubil, *Correspondence de Pékin*, 813.

29 Söderblom Saarela, "Mandarin over Manchu," 396–397.

Egypt (3.3), the prefaces to two Byzantine dictionaries (3.4), an encyclopedic dictionary from Byzantium (3.5), and a bilingual Manchu dictionary from Qing China (3.6). The texts evidence several of the functions often filled by lexicography, including as a scholarly, exegetical tool, and as a support for language learning. The texts are plurilingual—and at times multilingual—in their inclusion of both different languages and of earlier stages of the same language. The historical study of lexicography has made great advances in recent years, but while it has answered many questions, it has given rise to many more, which remain to be explored in both philological detail and synthesizing overviews.

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Lexicality and Lexicons from Mesopotamia

Markham J. Geller

In a recent article Glenn W. Most described the topic of “catalogues” within early Greek epic poetry and in the writings of pre-Socratic philosophers in the following terms:

[The catalogue] retains the goals of simplicity and comprehensiveness but tends to be less highly elaborated verbally The items involved are almost never the proper names of individuals but instead are common nouns denoting components of the world as these have been identified by the philosopher; they tend to be grouped in opposing or complementary pairs, and groups of four are especially common.¹

Uncannily, this succinct description of catalogues as examples of *Listenwissenschaften* applies as aptly to Mesopotamia as it does to Greece. In fact, at the earliest archaic stages of writing Sumerians invented the lexical list. Already in the third millennium BCE, records had progressed from pictographs to abstract cuneiform signs on clay tablets, with lists of objects being amongst the earliest written genres along with accounts and transactions. These early lists consisted of names of professions and officials, household ceramics and clothing, objects made of wood and metal, animals and plants, cities and geography, and food-stuffs.² By the beginning of the second millennium BCE lengthy bilingual lists of these and other categories emerged, characterized by Sumerian terms in columns on the left translated by Akkadian equivalent terms on the right. They included lengthy lists of gods, diseases, grammatical forms, legal clauses, and extensive lexical lists of words which are not easy to classify. The continuous and unbroken development of such lists demonstrates an impressive bilingual lexical tradition which was unparalleled anywhere else in antiquity in the Mediterranean and Near East region prior to Byzantium. Like Greek catalogues

¹ Most, “World of Catalogue,” 115.

² The most comprehensive descriptive work on the topic is Veldhuis, *Cuneiform Lexical Tradition*, as well as Boddy, *Composition and Tradition*. The latest work on Mesopotamian lexical lists can be found on a website created by N. Veldhuis, <https://build-oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/corpus>.

but on a much larger scale, many of these extensive lists consist predominantly of common nouns often grouped in opposing or complementary pairs and they formed the basic instruments for creating translations and hermeneutic commentaries. The deft hand of the ancient lexicographers can also be clearly seen in the development from simple registers of objects to complex entries, in which multiple Akkadian terms define a single Sumerian one. We find nuanced translation, synonyms and antonyms, and semantic expansions of meaning.

Lexical lists do not only supply lists of words, but they also address the challenges of polyvalent readings of cuneiform signs and provide reading glosses for individual Sumerian signs combined with corresponding Akkadian terms as “definitions” (in a broad sense). It is not known how such lexical lists were compiled and how they relate to the large collections of bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian translations. To what extent did literature draw upon the lexicon, or did the lexicon mine the literature for its sources? In some cases, the ancient school curriculum provides clues, such as in humorous scholastic disputation texts which incorporate rare expressions drawn from the lexical tradition.³ In other (rare) cases, we can identify a specific literary composition which formed the base-text and frame of reference for terms listed in a lexical text.⁴ Lexical lists could also be expanded to include Hittite in addition to standard Sumerian and Akkadian terminology.⁵

The best way of understanding lexical lists is to view a selection of examples. One elementary type of lexical list consists of thematic lists of objects, dealing with trees and objects made of wood (including furniture and utensils), boats, staffs, wagons, doors, tools for weaving, spinning and agriculture, balances and measuring vessels, maces, boards, aggressive tools (axes, traps, throw-weapons, siege engines), shovels, saddle-knobs, musical instruments, and various other categories of wooden objects.⁶ The usual pattern is that such lists appear in their earliest forms as Sumerian unilinguals and later as Sumerian-Akkadian bilinguals, and in some contexts columns of other languages (Hurrian, Hittite, Ugaritic) were added as well, within the broader periphery of cuneiform writing outside Mesopotamia.⁷

3 See Johnson and Geller, *Class Reunion*, 31–36.

4 Michalowski refers to the lexical text Erimhuš partly reflecting a Sumerian hymn to the goddess Inanna, although Boddy correctly points out that “for most of the list a direct connection to Sumerian literary texts has not been established.” See Michalowski, “Literature as Source,” 72; Boddy, *Composition and Tradition*, 8.

5 See Boddy, *Composition and Tradition*, 273–297.

6 Veldhuis, *Elementary Education at Nippur*, 84–85.

7 See for instance Veldhuis, *Cuneiform Lexical Tradition*, 298 for an example of an Akkadian-Hurrian bilingual. One interesting feature of lexicality at Ugarit is that the local language, nor-

The so-called “agrographic” lists were ordered according to Sumerian signs. Understanding these lists is made more complicated by the fact that combinations of Sumerian signs often had phonetic values which differed from the component signs. Hence the syllabary lexical lists often included glosses on the signs, to indicate the correct phonetic rendering of the sign combination. A simple example is the writing in a lexical equation of SAG = *qá-qá-du-um* (= Akkadian *qaqqadum* “head”), with the next entry reading the more complex signs as: *ú-gu* (Sumerian *ugu*) U.SAG = *mu-úh-hu-um* (Akk *muhhum* “cranium, above”). The phonetic gloss tells us that the combination of signs U + SAG should be read phonetically as /ugu/, the meaning of which corresponds to Akkadian *muhhu*.⁸ Lists became even more complicated as lexicography developed sophisticated forms in later periods, such as a unique tablet on display in a museum in Rome (see Excerpt 1 below).⁹ This tablet lists Akkadian terms (both nouns and verbs) corresponding to the sign combination A + IGI, which corresponds to Akkadian nouns *bikītu* “weeping,” *dimtu* “tears,” *tānīhu* “lament,” *bīkītu* “a musical instrument,”¹⁰ and a verb *bakû* “to weep.” However, other lexical lists inform us that in the first four entries, the signs A.IGI are to be read phonetically as /IR/ (ÍR), and that the final entry should be read /EŠ/ (EŠ₉). Other lexical lists provide additional candidates for Akkadian meanings for the Sumerian signs A.IGI, including *šihū* “weeping,” *nissatu* “mourning,” and *tazzimtu* “complaint.”¹¹ This kind of information indicates that lexical lists often provided exotic or rare readings of signs or meanings which are not identifiable in the literary record, probably suggesting that the “science” of lexicography included more abstract approaches to language which were not necessarily adopted by scribes composing the texts.

The relationship between Sumerian and Akkadian lexicography was further complicated by the fact that the same Sumerian sign could have many different Akkadian correspondents, depending upon the phonetic reading of the sign. For instance, one lexical list glosses the sign ŠID as *še-ed* (ŠID) corresponding to Akkadian *minūtu* “counting,” but also as *la-ag* (LAG) for Akkadian *kirbānu* “clod

mally written in alphabetic characters, was occasionally transliterated by the local scribes into cuneiform characters used for Akkadian and other languages.

8 A term which can refer anatomically to the brain, but also serves as a preposition “above.” Cf. Civil, *Lexical Texts*, 24, with this volume offering a useful survey of different kinds of lexical lists. Note that the usual writing of UGU is U+KA (or GÙ).

9 See Mayer, “Lexikalische Listen,” 159.

10 perhaps making a wailing sound.

11 See Civil, *Lexical Texts*, 33, adding another Akkadian term *tašmandu* which is not in the dictionaries but may have something to do with binding. None of these Akkadian terms are associated with the two signs A.IGI in other non-lexical list contexts.

(of earth),” as *ka-a* (KA₉) for Akkadian *nikkassu* “accounts,” and *a-ka* (AKA) for *itqu* “wad” (see Excerpt II below).¹² Most of the Akkadian correspondences for Sumerian Š1D have nothing to do with each other and are semantically unrelated, while at the same time corresponding to the same Sumerian sign.

One feature of Mesopotamian lexicality is its longevity, since the copying of lexical lists as part of school curriculum persisted into the first century CE, into the twilight period of cuneiform writing. Tablets known as “Graeco-Babyloniaca” show Sumerian-Akkadian bilingual lists being transliterated quite accurately into Greek letters, such as the following equations:¹³

Sumerian	Akkadian	(Sumerian)	(Akkadian)	English
<i>pa₅</i>	<i>pal-gu</i>	[φα]	φαλαγ	canal
<i>pa₅-lal</i>	[a]- <i>tap-pi</i>	φα-λαλ	[α]-θαφ	ditch

It is likely that this extensive lexical list tradition, typical of Mesopotamia’s millennia-long episteme, influenced other written cultures from the same time and later, although the extent of influence remains an objective for future research.

1 Excerpt I

Babylonian tablet from Uruk (322–316 BCE) in the collection of *Museo Nazionale d’Arte Orientale* in Rome.¹⁴

Phonetic gloss	Sign	Akkadian translation	English translation
ÍR	A.IGI	<i>bi-ki-tú</i>	mourning, weeping
	A.IGI	<i>di-im-tú</i>	tears
	A.IGI	<i>ta-ni-hi</i>	lament
	A.IGI	<i>bi-ki-tú</i>	musical instrument
EŠ ₉	A.IGI	<i>ba-ku-ú</i>	to weep

¹² Ibid., 10.

¹³ Geller, “Last Wedge,” 68.

¹⁴ Cf. Mayer, “Lexikalische Listen,” 159.

2 Excerpt II

Babylonian tablet (MS 3178) in the Schøyen Collection.¹⁵

Phonetic gloss	Sign	Akkadian translation	English translation
še-ed	ŠID	<i>mi-nu-tum</i>	counting
la-ag	ŠID	<i>ki-ir-ba-nu-um</i>	clod
ka-a	ŠID	<i>ni-ka-as-su</i>	accounts
a-ka	ŠID	<i>it-qum</i>	wad

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¹⁵ Cf. Civil, *Lexical Texts*, 10, col. 3, 141–145.

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 ὁμορύντω[ν] ὡς Ἡρακλείδης ἐν α Ξένης φωνῆς.
 μινοδολόεσσα 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]?
 μισαί {ὁ} παρὰ Χαλδαίοις ἢ τῶν μελλόντων πρόγνωσι[ς ... ἐν—] τῶν κατὰ Βαβυ-
 λῶνα.

-
- 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 Περύγενης (*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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The Making of Monolingual Dictionaries

The Prefaces to the Lexica of Hesychius (6th Century CE) and Photius (9th Century CE)

Filippomaria Pontani

We have seen above (Chapter 3.3) that Greek lexicography was not much interested in foreign languages. This can be discerned in the prefaces to two of the most important lexica of the Byzantine age, which also yield important information as to the complex paths by which these lexica—the heirs to a long-standing tradition of lexicographical inquiries—were realized.

1 Hesychius

A single fifteenth-century manuscript (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Gr. 622) is the only extant witness of what is perhaps the most complex and important extant lexicon of ancient Greek, composed by a certain Hesychius of Alexandria some time in the sixth century CE. Born at the end of a very productive season for Greek lexicography (the fifth-century *Etymologica* by Orus and Orion, the synonymical lexicon by John Philoponus, etc.), Hesychius's lexicon displays lemmata from a wide selection of literary texts, rather than focusing on one single author, as was more common in the Hellenistic age.

The prefatory letter to a certain Eulogius (the name, just as that of Hesychius himself, points to a member of the then-flourishing Christian community of Alexandria) is a very pregnant text, which explains in detail both Hesychius's goals and methods, and the ultimate genesis of his lexicon, resulting from the revision and expansion of an earlier work by Diogenianus, called *Periergopenetes*, itself the abridgment of the monumental lexicon in ninety-five books produced by Pamphilus in the first century CE (Pamphilus may have been the true initiator of lexica pertaining to a multiplicity of authors). What we have today is the result of a long textual transmission that went through the entire Byzantine age, and had at least three major effects: firstly, into Hesychius's original material were interpolated glosses from the roughly contemporary lexicon that goes under the name of patriarch Cyril of Alexandria; secondly, a heavy textual corruption marred many of the glosses, and this state

of affairs has posed a significant challenge to philologists ever since the *editio princeps* curated by Marcus Musurus for the Venetian press of Aldus Manutius in 1514; thirdly, many entries have been epitomized and mutilated, especially as concerns the naming of the sources, that is explicitly promised in the preface.

Leaving aside these issues, which still partly impair a full understanding of this work, it should be stressed that Hesychius's dictionary also includes a number of glosses that apparently or declaredly belong to Greek dialects, as well as a handful of others that stem from languages different from Greek (most of them however, if not all, found in literary sources): that these "foreign" items are not highlighted in the preface as a special bonus of Hesychius's vocabulary may imply that the intended readership did not perceive them as a particularly indispensable or useful feature.

Greek Text

Hesychius, *Lexicon*, Preface; excerpted from *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, vol. 1, A–Δ, ed. Kurt Latte and Ian Cunningham (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017).

Ἡσύχιος γραμματικὸς Ἀλεξανδρεὺς Εὐλόγιw τῷ ἐταίρω χαίρειν.

Πολλοὶ μὲν καὶ ἄλλοι τῶν παλαιῶν τὰς κατὰ στοιχεῖον συντεθείκασι λέξεις, ὧ πάντων ἐμοὶ προσφιλέστατε Εὐλόγιε· ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν τὰς Ὀμηρικὰς μόνας ὡς Ἀππίων καὶ Ἀπολλώνιος ὁ τοῦ Ἀρχιβίου· οἱ δὲ τὰς κωμικὰς ἰδίᾳ καὶ τὰς τραγικὰς ὡς Θέων καὶ Δίδυμος καὶ ἕτεροι τοιοῦτοι· ὁμοῦ δὲ πάσας τούτων οὐδὲ εἷς. Διογενιανὸς δὲ τις μετὰ τούτους γεγινὼς ἀνὴρ σπουδαῖος καὶ φιλόκαλος, τὰ τε προειρημένα βιβλία καὶ πάσας τὰς σποράδην παρὰ πᾶσι κειμένας λέξεις συναγαγὼν, ὁμοῦ πάσας καθ' ἕκαστον στοιχεῖον συντέθεικε· λέγω δὴ τὰς τε Ὀμηρικὰς καὶ κωμικὰς καὶ τραγικὰς, τὰς τε παρὰ τοῖς λυρικοῖς καὶ παρὰ τοῖς ῥήτορσι κειμένας, οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ <τὰς> παρὰ τοῖς ἰατροῖς τὰς τε παρὰ τοῖς ἱστοριογράφοις. συλλήβδην δὲ {ὁμοῦ} οὐδεμίαν λέξιν ἔσθ' ἣν παρέλιπεν οὔτε τῶν παλαιῶν οὔτε τῶν ἐπ' ἐκείνου γεγενημένων. προέθηκε δὲ κατ' ἀρχὴν ἐκάστης λέξεως τριῶν ἢ τεσσάρων στοιχείων τάξιν, ἵν' οὕτως εὐμαρεστέραν ἔχοι τὴν εὖρεσιν ἧς ἐπιζητεῖ τάξεως ὁ τοῖς βιβλίοις ἐντυγχάνειν προαιρούμενος. καὶ πρὸς τούτοις ὅσας οἶός τε ἦν παροιμίας εὖρεῖν, οὐδὲ ταύτας παρέλιπεν, ἐπιγράψας τὰ βιβλία Περιεργοπένητας, καὶ ταύτη χρησάμενος τῇ διανοίᾳ· ἡγεῖτο γάρ, οἶμαι, μὴ μόνους πλουσίοις, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς πένησι τῶν ἀνθρώπων χρησιμεύσειν τε καὶ ἀντι διδασκάλων ἀρκέσειν αὐτά, εἰ μόνον περιεργασάμενοι πανταχόθεν ἀνευρεῖν ταῦτα δυνηθεῖεν καὶ ἐγκρατεῖς αὐτῶν γενέσθαι.

ἐπαινώ μὲν ἔγωγε τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ τῆς φιλοκαλίας καὶ τῆς σπουδῆς, ὅτι χρησιμωτάτην πραγματείαν καὶ τοῖς σπουδαίοις τῶν φιλολόγων ὠφελιμωτάτην χορηγίαν πρὸς ἅπασαν παιδείαν προεἶλετο παρέχειν. ἐβουλόμην δὲ αὐτὸν μῆτε τὰς πλείους τῶν παροιμιῶν ψιλῶς καὶ ἄνευ τῶν ὑποθέσεων τεθεικέναι, μῆτε τὰς ἐζητημένας τῶν λέξεων οὐκ ἐχούσας τὰ τε τῶν κεκρημένων ὀνόματα καὶ τὰς τῶν βιβλίων ἐπιγραφὰς

1 Apion was one of the leading grammarians of the early imperial age (first century BCE–CE), and the author amongst other things of a precious volume of *Homeric Glosses*—only fragments remain: Neitzel, Linke, and Haas, *Die Fragmente des Grammatikers Dionysios Thrax*. His teacher Apollonius, son of Archibius, also known as Apollonius Sophista, is the compiler of the only Homeric lexicon that is preserved from antiquity, if in abbreviated form: Bekker, *Apollonii Sophistae lexicon Homericum*.

2 Theon was an outstanding grammarian of the Augustan age, and in his *Words* (Λέξεις) he probably devoted a special attention to comic terms. His contemporary Didymus “Chalcenterus” of Alexandria, the most prolific of all Greek grammarians, wrote amongst other things fifty books of *Comic Words* and possibly as many of *Tragic Words*, and these works were very popular in the following centuries.

3 Little is known of this Diogenianus, who must have lived in the second century CE: he abridged the (lost) work *On Glosses and Names* by the first-century lexicographer Pamphilus

English Translation

Adapted from Charles Wall, *An Essay on the Nature, Age, and Origin of the Sanskrit Writing and Language* (Dublin: Graisberry, 1838), 45–47; Francesca Schironi, *From Alexandria to Babylon* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 47–50.

Hesychius, a grammarian of Alexandria, to his companion Eulogius, greeting.

Many others also collected in the order of the letters the words of the ancients, o most beloved Eulogius: some, however, only those of Homer, as Apion, and Apollonius son of Archibius;¹ some, separately those of the comic or of the tragic authors, as Theon, Didymus, and other such compilers;² but none of these all the words together. After them arose a certain Diogenianus, a man of industry and taste, who, having brought together the aforementioned books and all the words dispersed through all, united all of them into one compilation in alphabetic order;³ I mean, the Homeric, the comic, and the tragic terms, as well as those which occur in the lyric poets and in the orators; nor these only, but also such as are to be found in the works of the physicians and of the historians. In short, no word, as far as we are aware of, did he omit, whether of the ancients, or of the writers of his own time. He ordered each word by the three or four letters of its beginning, so that one who chooses to read these books can more easily find what he is looking for.⁴ And on top of this he did not omit any of the proverbs he was able to find, and he inscribed the entire work *Periergopenetes*, meaning the following: he thought, to my mind, that this work would be useful not only for the rich but also for the poor (*penetes*), and that it would serve them instead of a teacher, if only by their curiosity (*periergasamenoï*) they would be able to search for it everywhere and acquire one copy.

I must praise the generosity and the learning of this man, because he has chosen to offer an exceptionally useful work and a precious viaticum towards all instruction for the most serious of scholars. However, I would have wished that he had not simply quoted the majority of the proverbs without giving the context, and that he had not quoted the rare words without the name of those

(or its epitome by Iulius Vestinus), producing first a lexicon in five books called *Expressions of Any Kind* (Παντοδαπή λέξις), then the larger *Periergopenetes* (or *Manual for Those without Means*), as illustrated below in this same preface.

4 Several Hellenistic lexica were arranged thematically, although evidence of alphabetical ordering appears as early as the third century BCE: however, both in lexica attested in papyrus and in those transmitted by medieval manuscripts the ordering was generally by the first two or more rarely three or four letters of the word, a strict alphabetical sequence being the exception rather than the rule.

ἔνθα φέρονται, τὰς τε πολυσήμους αὐτῶν παραδραμεῖν καὶ ἀσαφεῖς παραλιπεῖν, δέον δὲ καὶ ἐν ταύταις ἐκάστης διαφόρου διανοίας τὴν παράστασιν ἀπὸ τῆς τῶν χρησαμένων μνήμης παρασχεῖν. ἅτινα σύμπαντα καὶ τῆς παρ' ἡμῶν ἐπιμελείας δεηθέντα κατὰ δύναμιν τετύχηκε πάσης, ἐν δευτέρῳ κειμένης τῆς τῶν φιλεπιτιμητῶν μέμφεως. οὐ γὰρ ὀκνήσω μετὰ παρρησίας εἰπεῖν ὅτι τῶν Ἀριστάρχου καὶ Ἀππίωνος καὶ Ἡλιοδώρου λέξεων εὐπορήσας, καὶ τὰ βιβλία προσθεῖς Διογενιανοῦ, ὃ πρῶτον καὶ μέγιστον ὑπάρχει πλεονέκτημα δαιτός, ἰδίᾳ χειρὶ γράφων ἐγώ, μετὰ πάσης ὀρθότητος καὶ ἀκριβεστάτης γραφῆς κατὰ τὸν γραμματικὸν Ἡρωδιανόν, λέξιν μὲν οὐδεμίαν παρέλιπον κειμένην ἐν αὐτοῖς, ἀλλὰ καὶ πλείστας οὐχ εὐρῶν προστέθεικα. ἐκείνην δὲ γραφὴν ἠξίωσα, ἥς εὕρισκον καὶ τὴν διάνοιαν τέλος περιέχουσαν καὶ τὴν φράσιν μετὰ τοῦ δοκίμου σαφῆ. ταῖς παροιμίαις ἀποδεδῶκα τὰς ὑποθέσεις· καὶ τῶν πλειόνων λέξεων καὶ σπανίως εἰρημένων οὐ μόνον αὐτῶν τῶν χρησαμένων τὰ ὀνόματα προσγέγραφα, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς ἐπιγραφὰς πάντων μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀντιγράφων προστιθεῖς, οὐδαμοῦ δὲ πονεῖν παραιτησάμενος, ὡς ἂν μὴ καὶ αὐτὸς μέμψιν ὀφλήσαιμι δικαίως τινά, καὶ οἷς ἐγκαλῶ Διογενιανῶ πεπτωκῶς φανείην. καὶ πληρώσας τὴν πραγματείαν, ὅσον εἰς ἀνθρωπίνην ἐλήλυθε κρίσιν τέλος γεγενημένην, εἰ μὴ πού τις ἢ σαφῆς οὐσα λέξις ἢ οὐκ ἀναγκαῖα παραλέλειπται, ἀπέστειλα πρὸς τὴν σὴν ἀναμίλλητον φιλίαν, πεπεισμένος μὲν εἶναι τὸ κτῆμα μέγα, τὴν δὲ <φιλίαν τὴν> σὴν καὶ μειζόνων ἀξίαν ὑπάρχουσαν. εὐχομαι δὲ τῷ Θεῷ σωζόμενόν σε καὶ ὑγιαίνοντα χρῆσασθαι τοῖς βιβλίοις.

who used them or without the title of the works where they occur; and, finally, that he had not run over those of them which have many meanings and leave them unclear, since it is necessary even with these words to exhibit each different meaning by mentioning those who used them. All this needed our care, and received it in full according to our possibilities, in total disregard of the reproaches of the usual fault-finders. I shall not hesitate to state overtly that, having at my disposal the *Words* of Aristarchus, Apion and Heliodorus,⁵ and adding Diogenianus's book (which is the first and most significant delicacy of the banquet), writing in my own hand as correctly and as exactly as I could according to Herodian the grammarian,⁶ I did not omit any single word that was to be found in those books, but I even added many that I did not find in them. I validated the word-form whose meaning I found more accomplished and whose general sense was clear and acceptable. I gave the context of the proverbs, and, for the majority of the words, even those used rarely, I gave not only the names of those who used them, but also the titles of all the works where these words recur, adding them from the editions, without ever shirking hard work, so that I myself would not rightly deserve any blame nor appear to have fallen into the same faults I blame in Diogenianus. Once I finished the book, which achieved accomplishment as far as human judgment could discern (apart from cases of self-evident or useless words that have been omitted), I sent it to your unrivalled friendship, being convinced that, while the enterprise is big, your love deserves even greater goods. So I pray God that you might be alive and well when using this book.

5 Aristarchus of Samothrace, the greatest philologist of antiquity, developed a lively interest in Homer's vocabulary, see Schironi, *Best of the Grammarians*, 217–264; still more active in the lexicographical domain was his teacher Aristophanes of Byzantium. Heliodorus is probably the Homeric scholar often quoted by Apollonius Sophista in his Homeric lexicon, see Dyck, "The Fragments of Heliodorus Homericus," 1–64.

6 Herodian, the most important grammarian of the second century CE, wrote a large number of treatises starting from his (lost, though fragmentarily preserved) *General Prosody* (Καθολικὴ Προσῳδία): due to the success of his handbooks, he represented for centuries the standard norm for orthographical and grammatical correctness, see Dickey, "Catalogue of Works," 325–345; and Dyck, "Aelius Herodian," 772–794.

2 Photius

Perhaps the most learned man of the Byzantine millennium, Photius (810–893) is best known for having served twice, despite being originally a layman, as patriarch of Constantinople (858–867 and 878–886), and for having composed the *Myriobiblos*, a monumental collection of more or less detailed reviews of 280 books he had read. We owe the *Myriobiblos* a great deal of information about lost prose works from the ancient through the early Byzantine period, belonging to genres such as historiography, oratory, medicine, philosophy, theology, etc.

The *Lexicon*, whose fullest manuscript was found in November 1959 by Linos Politis in the monastery of Zavorda in Northern Greece (hence the need for a new edition that is now almost complete), is probably Photius's earliest work (he once ascribed it to the time "when I was quitting the age of childhood"); despite the interest aroused already among sixteenth- and seventeenth-century humanists by the many quotations of ancient literary sources, it is no substantially original achievement, and it rather owes its fame to the loss of most of its sources and predecessors. As so many vocabularies, it depends directly on a series of existing sources (chiefly the so-called *Synagoge*, or *Collection of Useful Words*, itself largely indebted to the sixth-century lexicon of Cyril; but many lemmata stem from rhetorical and Atticistic lexica), with a limited range of additional material.

Photius's lexicon belongs to the category of universal prescriptive lexica, i.e., those that do not aim to merely describe the heritage of a language, nor to discuss the etymologies of words (many such lexica, called *Etymologica*, were produced throughout the Byzantine age), nor to focus on one specific author or genre, but rather function as touchstones of orthographic and grammatical correctness for educated people who wish to write or speak in good Greek. Photius's lexicon thus pursues well into the Byzantine age a long-standing tendency (at work at least since the early imperial age) to codify the usage of fifth- and fourth-century BCE Attic authors as the touchstone for grammatical and stylistic correctness of speech: it runs along the lines of the tradition of Atticistic lexica such as those of Pausanias or Aelius Dionysius. Its interest in ancient words and texts is therefore subservient less to a "humanistic" interest in Hellenic literature *per se* than to the consolidation of a shared linguistic standard for Byzantium's learned elite.

In this frame, it is particularly important that Photius—much like Hesychius, see above—does not in the least refer to multilingualism in his preface, nor to the presence or contribution of lexical items deriving from languages other than Greek. What is at stake here is the stylistic diversity of the words

listed and explained, especially the opposition between those that belong to prose and the more “poetical” ones: Photius states that the study of ancient poetry (above all of Homer, the founding father of Greek culture, and of the comic writer Aristophanes, the most important source for spoken fifth-century Attic) can yield precious gems to interweave in prose discourse, and this is indeed what we find constantly happening in Byzantine rhetoric and prose-writing throughout the centuries.

Greek Text

Photius, *Lexicon*, Preface; excerpted from *Photii Patriarchae Lexicon*, vol. 1: A–Δ, ed. Christos Theodoridis (Berlin: De Gruyter 1982).

ΛΕΞΕΩΝ ΣΥΝΑΓΩΓΗ ΚΑΤΑ ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΟΝ ΔΙ' ΩΝ ΡΗΤΟΡΩΝ ΤΕ ΠΟΝΟΙ ΚΑΙ ΣΥΓΓΡΑΦΕΩΝ ΕΞΩΡΑΪΖΟΝΤΑΙ ΜΑΛΙΣΤΑ

<Φώτιος Θωμά πρωτοσπαθαρίω και ἄρχοντι τοῦ Λυκοστομίου φιλάτῳ μαθητῇ χαίρειν>

Αἱ τῶν λέξεων πλείους, περὶ ἃς τὸ ποιητικὸν νέμεται ἔθνος, εἰς τὸ ὠφελιμώτατον τοῖς βουλομένοις προσέχειν Διογενιανῶ συνέλεγγησαν· εἰ γὰρ καὶ πολλοῖς ἄλλοις ἐπὶ νοῦν ἦκεν τὴν ἴσιν καὶ ὁμοίαν πραγματεῖαν ἐνστήσασθαι, ἀλλ' οὖν, ὅσα γε ἐμὲ εἰδέναι, οὐδενὶ τῶν πρωτείων οὗτος περὶ γε τὸν εἰρημένον πόνον ἐξίσταται. ὅσα δὲ ῥητόρων τε καὶ λογογράφων ἀττικίζουσι γλῶσσαν καὶ ἀπλῶς εἰς τὸν οὐκ ἐθέλοντα λόγον ἐποχεῖσθαι μέτρῳ συντελεῖν εἰσιν εὐ πεφυκυῖαι, ναὶ δὴ καὶ τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς θεοσοφίας ὅσαι δέονται σαφηνείας, ταύτας δὲ ἄρα εἰ καὶ μὴ πάσας—οὔτε γὰρ ῥάδιον οὔτε ἀλαζονείας ἢ ὑπόσχεσις πόρρω, ἅμα δὲ καὶ μείζονος ἢ καθ' ἡμᾶς σχολῆς—ἀλλ' οὖν ἃς μάλιστά γε εἰδέναι προσήκει καὶ ἀναγκαῖον κεχρηῆσθαι συναγαγὼν τὴν ἀναγραφὴν σοι κατὰ στοιχεῖον ἐποισάμην, οὐδὲ τῶν ποιητικῶν παντελῶς ἀποστάς· ἐπεὶ μὴδ' ὅσοι ταύτας συνειλόχασιν τῶν ἀρμοζόντων τῇ χωρὶς μέτρου φράσει παντελῶς ἀπέσχοντο.

ταύτην δὲ σοι ἄρα τὴν ὑπόθεσιν συνεταξάμην μνήμης τε ἅμα καὶ φιλίας ἀφοσίωσιν. διὸ εἰ καὶ τινὰς τῶν λέξεων περιέχει τὸ σύνταγμα, ἐν αἷς ἢ ποιητικῇ διατρίβει μούσα, περιττὸν οὐδὲν οὐδὲ φιλότιμον οὐδὲ νοθεῖον τὴν πρόθεσιν· ἐφ' ὧν τε γὰρ οὐκ ἔστι πολιτικὴν φωνὴν εὐρεῖν δηλοῦσαν καθαρῶς τὸ ὑποκείμενον, οὐ ποιητικὴν μόνον ἀνάγκη λαβεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰ γλώτταν ἀπομάττοιο· τὸ γὰρ ἔχειν ὅτιοῦν ὀνόματι εἰπεῖν τοῦ μὴ ἔχειν χρεωδέστερον. ναὶ δὴ καὶ ὁ λίαν σεμνὸς καὶ τὸν ὄγκον πεποιημένος κόσμον λόγος πολλάς, αἷς τὸ ποιητῶν ἐντείνεται μέτρον, τῇ οἰκείᾳ σπουδῇ φιλεῖ ὑποβάλλεσθαι. καὶ μέντοι καὶ ὅσαι σαφέστεραι μὲν εἰσι τῶν λέξεων, δοκοῦσι δὲ πως μνήμης δεῖσθαι τῆς ἀναγούσης αὐτάς εἰς τοὺς γεγεννηκότας, οὐδὲ τούτων κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν τοὺς πατέρας ἀπεσιωπήσαμεν. ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰ πού τις ἐν τοῖς ἀρχαίοις ἀσάφεια τῇ τῶν λέξεων παραπλεκομένη ἐρμηνεία τὸ τοῦ λόγου διέφθειρε χρήσιμον, οὐδὲ ταύτην λελυμασμένην ἐγκατελίπομεν, ἀλλ' εἰς τὸ σαφέστερον καὶ συνοπτικώτερον ἠρμολογήσαμεθα.

7 Nothing is known of this Thomas: as a *protospatharios* he held a high office at the Byzantine court; the identification of Lykostomion is debated, but it might refer to the Lower Danube and particularly to its estuary.

8 On Diogenianus, the second-century grammarian who realized an epitome (of Julius Vestinus's epitome) of the bulky lexicon in 95 books *On Glosses and Names* by Pamphilus (first century CE), see Hesychius's preface above.

9 This means every kind of prose (but on this topic see immediately below).

English Translation

Translated by Filippomaria Pontani.

Alphabetical collection of the words through which the works of orators and writers are most effectively adorned

⟨Photius greets his dearest pupil Thomas protospatharios, head of the Lykostomion⟩⁷

Most of the words used by the poets were collected by Diogenianus⁸ in a very useful way for those who wish to pay attention: even if many others came to the idea of composing a similar work, to my knowledge he does not yield the first place to anyone in this task. The words that give an Attic flavor to the language of orators and logographers, and are by nature well-suited to contribute positively to the speech that refrains from meter,⁹ as well as the terms of our religion that need clarification.¹⁰ Well, all these words I collected, not all in absolute terms (for such a promise would be neither easy nor free from pretentiousness, and anyway far greater than the time we have at our disposal), but as many as it is useful to know and necessary to use; I registered them alphabetically for you, without staying clear even of the poetic words, for even those who collected poetical words did not entirely abstain from those suitable for prosaic speech.

I wrote to you this memorandum for the sake of memory and devotion. So if the work contains some words inhabited by the poetic Muse, this is nothing superfluous or ambitious or conflicting with my purpose: for in situations where a prosaic word cannot be found to express properly the required meaning, it is not only necessary to pick up a poetic one, even if it should amount to a gloss:¹¹ it is better to be able to say something in words than not to be. Indeed, elevated speech, accustomed to high style, often inserts in its own texture many words bearing the meter of the poets. And even the clearer words seem to need some refreshing of memory that might attribute them to those who have generated them; hence, we did not omit the names of their fathers, as far as we could. And if some obscurity in ancient authors impaired the utility of the speech by interfering with the interpretation of words, we did not leave that mistake either, but we adjusted it for the sake of clarity and for better transparency.

10 This implies that Christian words are also included, and thus figure side-by-side with words from the pagan heritage.

11 A “gloss” means in this context a difficult poetic word that is in absolute need of a lexical explanation.

Symbols

- < > editorial insertion
 { } 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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A 10th-Century CE Byzantine Encyclopedia and Lexicon

Suda, Letter Sigma

Glenn W. Most

The author and date of the *Suda* are unknown and even the meaning of its title is controversial. Internal and external evidence makes it likely that it was composed in the last quarter of the tenth century CE, probably in Constantinople. It is cited by Byzantine scholars starting with Eustathius in the twelfth century as though “Suidas” were the name of its author. But the manuscripts that transmit it give *Souda* as its title and list twelve “wise men” (*andres sophoi*) as the experts in various fields who compiled it (in fact, the names are most likely simply the ones that were attached to the earlier compilatory works from which this one was really or allegedly derived); and *Souda* as the title is also supported by a reference in Stephanus, a twelfth-century commentator on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (*Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* 21.2 p. 285, line 22). Most modern scholars follow this latter interpretation of the title, but no one is sure exactly what it means; among the many suggestions that have been made, *Suda* has been thought to be a Latin term meaning “fortress” or “palisade,” or alternatively “sweat,” or to derive from the Latin *summa*, “a comprehensive summary,” or the Italian *guida*, “guide,” or to be an acrostic, or to be a Greek term meaning “ditch,” referring to the containers in which the preparatory note cards might have been kept.¹

The *Suda* presupposes the tradition of late ancient and Byzantine single-language lexica defining difficult words found in the texts of classical authors (see Chapter 3.4); in particular it depends heavily upon the enlarged *Synagogé* and the still unpublished *Lexicon Ambrosianum*, and to a lesser extent upon a rhetorical lexicon and an abridged version of Harpocration’s lexicon to the Attic orators, and perhaps also upon Photius’s *Lexicon*. These lexicographical sources are supplemented by numerous quotations that may have been taken directly from the classic authors and their scholia—unsurprisingly, for

1 Matthaios, “Suda,” provides a list of the scholarly hypotheses on pages 4–5; see too Mazzucchi, “De compositione.”

example, Homer and the tragedians figure prominently, but so too does the ribald comic poet Aristophanes, astonishingly often (over 15 percent of the total number of entries), and some other poets (Callimachus, Babrius) and prose authors (Marcus Aurelius, Athenaeus) may also have been consulted directly. But what makes the *Suda* unique among Byzantine works of compilatory scholarship is that it uses the structure of a dictionary that explains difficult lexical terms in order to include as well a large number of entries that provide historical, geographical, or biographical information, thus disguising an encyclopedia as a lexicon or, perhaps more fairly, creating a hybrid that combines within a single work both genres that had hitherto been separated. Material of this sort had previously been organized not alphabetically but by subject matter, chronology, geography, or other criteria of content: so, for example in such sources of the *Suda* as the literary biographies of Hesychius of Miletus, the philosophical biographies of Diogenes Laertius, and the *Excerpta Constantiniana*, excerpts of ancient Greek historians made for the Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus somewhat earlier in the tenth century CE. Now it became possible for the first time to consult the same alphabetically ordered work in order to find out about not only words in texts but also people, places, and events in the world. All modern encyclopedias derive from this model.

This explains the considerable success of the *Suda*, which notwithstanding its huge size—it comprises over 30,000 entries, and in its modern printed edition² it fills five hefty volumes with a total of 2785 pages—was copied relatively often by medieval scribes and printed a number of times since the Renaissance. Like other such Byzantine lexica, it was conceived to help medieval Greeks understand better the often recalcitrant texts of their glorious past in the hope that they would succeed in recreating, at least in some measure, an echo of that ancient splendor in their own times. But its vision was enlarged beyond lexemes to encompass as well significant figures of history both pagan and Christian, Greek and Roman—some of the longest articles are those on Homer and Jesus. We may understand the *Suda* not only as a cultural project born out of nostalgia for the past, unease with the present, and hope for the future, but also as a concrete response to the challenge posed by the massive amount of information transmitted in thousands of ancient and recent manuscripts that were housed in the imperial libraries in Constantinople. How was this immense volume of data to be rendered accessible to readers, and hence usable for their cultural orientation, not only in the capital city itself but in schools

2 Adler, *Suidae Lexicon*.

and homes throughout the far-flung reaches of the Byzantine Empire? During the reign of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, a group of scholars, presumably at his direction and certainly at his expense, had created an enormous project to collect, select, classify, excerpt, and coordinate by subject matter the best parts of the surviving histories of ancient Greece and Rome; and the fact that the *Suda* often depends upon their excerpts suggests the likelihood of a shared cultural project (and perhaps even the possibility of the identity of at least some of the scholars involved). Not all the inhabitants of Constantinople had full access to the libraries there (the scholars who had the training and authorization to take advantage of these resources were perhaps a few hundred at the best of times), and even if they were permitted to enter they could easily become lost in the labyrinths of their vast holdings; while outside of the capital, few indeed were the schools, and far fewer the households, that could afford to own all the books they needed if they were to be informed adequately about their past and thereby directed towards their future. The *Suda* was invented for them.

No brief selection of the vast materials supplied by the *Suda* could possibly give a fair impression of its enormous richness and heterogeneity. To provide only the most significant or extensive articles would misleadingly suggest that these were typical or representative. Instead, we have chosen arbitrarily to present the first twenty articles of the letter Sigma in order to give readers some idea of the very diverse kinds of lemmata, and of the equally diverse kinds of explanations, that make the *Suda* so extraordinary, so useful—and so perplexing.



FIGURE 3.5.1 Grec 2625
BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE. DÉPARTEMENT DES MANUSCRITS

Greek Text

Suda, Letter Sigma, Entries 1–20, excerpted from Ada Adler, ed., *Suidae Lexicon*, vol. 4, Π–Ψ (Leipzig: Teubner, 1935), 310–311.

1. Σᾶ τὰ σῶα λέγουσιν μονοσυλλάβως, ἀπὸ τοῦ σῶα συναιροῦντες· καὶ τὸν σῶον σῶν, καὶ σῶοι σοῖ· παρὰ δὲ Θουκυδίδη δισυλλάβως σῶοι.
2. Σαβά τόπος. ἐκ Σαβὰ ἤξει.
3. Σαβάζιος ὁ αὐτός ἐστι τῷ Διονύσῳ. ἔτυχε δὲ τῆς προσηγορίας ταύτης παρὰ τὸν γινόμενον περὶ αὐτὸν θειασμὸν· τὸ γὰρ εὐάζειν οἱ βάρβαροι σαβάζειν φασίν. ὅθεν καὶ τῶν Ἑλλήνων τινὲς ἀκολουθοῦντες τὸν εὐασμὸν σαβασμὸν λέγουσιν· ἔνθεν Σαβάζιος ὁ Διόνυσος. σάβους ἔλεγον καὶ τοὺς ἀφιερωμένους αὐτῷ τόπους καὶ τοὺς Βάχχους αὐτοῦ.
4. Σαβακῶν Διονυσιακῶν. τρυγόνιον, Σαβακῶν ἄνθεμα Σαλμακίδων. τουτέστιν ἑταιρῶν.
5. Σάββατον ἐβδόμη ἡμέρα ἐτύγχανε τοῦ κυκλικοῦ διαστήματος τῆς ἐβδομάδος, τοῦ Ῥωμαϊκοῦ τὴν ἡμέραν γεραίροντος, πόνων ἀνάπαυλαν, αἰδοῖ τοῦ σεβάσματος. ἀντὶ δὲ Ῥωμαϊκοῦ Ἰουδαϊκοῦ γραπτέον. ἀργίαν δὲ εἶχε τὸ σάββατον· ἀλλὰ τὴν πνευματικὴν ἐργασίαν πολλαπλασίονα ἐπετέλουν.
6. Σάββατον ἀργία, κατάπαυσις.
Σάββατον δὲ δευτερόπρωτον, ἐπειδὴ δεύτερον μὲν ἦν τοῦ Πάσχα, πρῶτον δὲ τῶν Ἀζύμων. εἰ οὖν σάββατον εἴρηται, μὴ θαυμάσης· σάββατον γὰρ πάσαν ἑορτὴν ἐκάλουν. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο εἴρηται σάββατον σαββάτων.
ὁψὲ δὲ σαββάτων, καὶ οὐ σαββάτου λέγει ὁ Εὐαγγελιστής, διότι σάββατα πάσαν τὴν ἐβδομάδα ἔλεγον, ἵνα τὴν ἐσπέραν τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης δηλώσῃ. καὶ γὰρ ἔθος ἐστὶν ἡμῖν λέγειν, ὁψὲ τῆς ὥρας ἦλθε· ὁψὲ τοῦ καιροῦ. ἐκ τούτου δηλοῦται τὸ πόρρω καὶ βραδύ τῆς περαιωθείσης ἐβδομάδος. πληροῦται δὲ ἡ ἐβδομάς ἐκάστη ταῖς μετὰ τὸ σάββατον ἡλίου δυσμαίς.
7. Σαββάτου ἔχον ὁδὸν δισχιλίων πήχεων ἦν· τοσοῦτον γὰρ ἡ κιβωτὸς διάστημα προελάμβανε τὴν παρεμβολήν, καὶ ἀπὸ τοσοῦτου διαστήματος ἐκίνουν, οἷς ἐξῆν προσκυνεῖν τὴν σκηνὴν ἐν σαββάτῳ βαδίζειν.

3 Derived from the scholia to Aristophanes, *Birds*, line 873.

4 Salmacis is a district in Halicarnassus in western Asia Minor, associated with effeminate men or, perhaps, with prostitutes.

English Translation

Translated by Glenn W. Most.

1. *Sa* [safe] They say *sôa* [i.e., the neuter plural nominative/accusative of *sôos*, safe] as a monosyllable [i.e., as *sa*], making a contraction from *sôa*; and *sôn* [i.e., the masculine accusative singular or the neuter nominative/accusative singular] as *sôn*, and *sôoi* [i.e., the masculine nominative plural] as *soi*; but in Thucydides [1.74.3], *sôoi* with two syllables.
2. *Saba* [Sheba] A place. “He will come out of Sheba” [cf. Isaiah 60.6].
3. *Sabazios* [Sabazius] He is the same as Dionysus. He received this form of address from the ritual that was performed with regard to him; for the barbarians call *euazein* [i.e., in Greek, to make a ritual shout in honor of Dionysus] *sabazein*. Some of the pagan Greeks too follow this and call the *euasmos* [i.e., the ritual shout] *sabasmos*; in this way Dionysus is Sabazios. They also used to call *saboi* the places that had been dedicated to him, and his Bacchants.³
4. *Sabakôn* [effeminate] Dionysiac. “Little turtle-dove, a dedication of effeminate Salmacids”⁴ [*Greek Anthology* 7.222.2], that is, of courtesans.
5. *Sabbaton* [Sabbath] “The seventh day used to be the recurrent length of the week, as the Roman week honored that day as a rest from work, out of reverence for its holiness” [cf. Theophylactus Simocata, *Histories* 2.2.6–7]. (Instead of “Roman,” “Jewish” should be written). “The Sabbath used to be a day of rest; and they would perform spiritual labor even more” [Theodoret on Psalm 91:1].
6. *Sabbaton* [Sabbath] Rest, pause.
 “Second-first sabbath” [cf. Luke 6:1], since it was the second day of Passover and the first of the feast of unleavened cakes. So, if it is called Sabbath, do not be surprised: for they used to call every holiday Sabbath. And this is why they say “Sabbath of sabbaths” [Isidore of Pelusium, Epistle 3.110].
 The Evangelist says “late in the Sabbaths” [Matthew 28:1], not “in the Sabbath,” because they used to call the entire week Sabbath, in order to indicate clearly the evening of that day. For we too have the custom of saying, “he came late in the day” [cf. Demosthenes 21.84], “late in time.” In this way the lateness and belatedness of the week that has ended is made clear. Each week is completed at the setting of the sun after the Sabbath.
7. *Sabbatou echon hodon* [journey of a Sabbath] It was two thousand cubits [ca. 0.91 km] [cf. Acts 1:12]: for that is the distance that the ark went in front of the procession, and this is the same distance that those people went who were permitted to walk to worship the tabernacle on the Sabbath [cf. Rabbi Akiva, Mishnah (M Sotah 5:3)].

8. Σαβέκ ἄφεςις ἀπὸ τῆς Σύρας.
9. Σαβέλλιος ὄνομα κύριον. ὁ αἰρεσιάρχης.
10. Σάβειροι ὄνομα ἔθνους. νεμεσᾶ τε καὶ ἀγανακτεῖ ὁ Καίσαρ, ὅτι μὴ ἀνέστησαν ἀπαξάπαντας Σαβείρους τε καὶ Ἀλβανούς.
11. Σαβῖνος, σοφιστής, γεγονῶς ἐπὶ Ἀδριανοῦ Καίσαρος. ἔγραψεν Εἰσαγωγὴν καὶ ὑποθέσεις μελετικῆς ὕλης εἰς βιβλία δ', εἰς Θουκυδίδην καὶ Ἀκουσίλαον καὶ ἄλλους ὑπομνήματα, καὶ ἕτερα ἅπαντα ἐξηγητικά.
12. Σάβοι Δημοσθένης ὑπὲρ Κτησιφώντος. οἱ μὲν Σάβους λέγεσθαι τοὺς τελουμένους τῷ Σαβαζίῳ, τούτέστι τῷ Διονύσῳ, καθάπερ τοὺς τῷ Βάκχῳ Βάκχους. τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ εἶναι Σαβάζιον καὶ Διόνυσόν φασιν. οὗτοι δὲ φασὶ καὶ τῶν Ἑλλήνων τινας⁵ τοὺς Βάκχους Σάβους καλεῖν. Μνασέας δὲ ὁ Πατρεὺς υἱὸν εἶναι φησὶ τοῦ Διονύσου Σαβαζίον.
13. Σαγαλλησός πόλις Πισιδίας.
14. Σαγγάριος ποταμὸς Λυδίας καὶ Φρυγίας. ὅτι Γάϊος ὁ ὑπατοῦς Ῥωμαίων διερχόμενος ἐγεφύρωσε τὸν Σαγγάριον ποταμόν, τελέως κοῖλον ὄντα καὶ δύσβατον, καὶ παρ' αὐτὸν τὸν ποταμόν ἐστρατοπεδεύσατο.
15. Σάγαρις κοπίς, ἢ πέλεκυς. λέγεται καὶ σάγαρι χωρὶς τοῦ ς. Ξενοφῶν· ὁ δὲ ἄνδρα συλλαβῶν ἦκεν ἄγων ἔχοντα τόξον Περσικὸν καὶ φαρέτραν καὶ σάγαριν, οἷάν περ αἱ Ἀμαζόνες ἔχουσι.
16. Σάγαρις λυσιφλεβὴ τε σάγαριν θῆκεν. ἢ τὰ ἐκ χειρὸς ὄπλα.
17. Σάγη τὸ τοῦ ὄνου ἐπίθεμα. ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἐτίθει τὸν γόμον τὴν σάγην τε τοῦ κτήνους. Ἰώσηπος· Ῥαχήλα δὲ κατατίθησι τοὺς τύπους εἰς τὴν σάγην τῆς φερούσης αὐτὴν καμήλου.
18. Σαγηνέων ἀνθρώπων.
19. Σαγηνεύω αἰτιατικῆ.
20. Σαγηνεύς ὄνομα κύριον.

5 The ms. reads οὗτος δὲ φησὶ καὶ τῶν Ἑλλήνων τινες; the translation reflects a proposed correction of the text.

6 Translating the text proposed conjecturally.

7 Derived from a gloss to Herodotus 1.215.1.

8 Derived from glosses to Herodotus 1.215.1.

9 Usually this verb is intransitive.

8. *Sabek* [Sabek] Release [cf. Genesis 22:13]. From the Syriac.
9. *Sabellios* [Sabellius] A proper name. The heresiarch [i.e., in the third century CE].
10. *Sabeiroi* [Sabeirians] The name of a nation.
 “The Byzantine Emperor was angry and annoyed, because they did not for the Sabeirians and the Albanians to all emigrate together” [Menander Protector, Frag. 18.6 Blockley].
11. *Sabinos* [Sabinus] Sophist, he lived at the time of the Roman Emperor Hadrian [i.e., in the third century CE]. He wrote *Introduction and Summaries of Material for Rhetorical Exercises* in four books; commentaries on Thucydides, Acusilaus, and others; and some other exegetical works.
12. *Saboi* [Saboi] Demosthenes “On Behalf of Ktesiphon” [18.250]. Some people say that those who have been initiated to Sabazius, i.e., to Dionysus, are called Saboi, just as those initiated to Bacchus are called Bacchoi. They say that Sabazius and Dionysus are the same. These say that some of the pagan Greeks⁶ call the Bacchoi Saboi. But Mnaseas of Patrai says that Sabazius is the son of Dionysus.
13. *Sagallêsos* [Sagallastos] A city of Pisidia [i.e., in southern Asia Minor].
14. *Sangarios* [Sangarius] A river of Lydia and Phrygia [i.e., in west central Asia Minor]; [i.e., one should know] that Gaius [i.e., Gnaeus Manlius Vulso], the Roman consul, went across the river Sangarius on bridges he built over it, because it had very high banks and was hard to cross, and he encamped beside the river itself [cf. Polybius 21.37.4].
15. *Sagaris* [sagaris] A cleaver, or axe. It is also called *sagari* without the *s*. Xenophon [i.e., *Anabasis* 4.4.16]: “He [i.e., Democrates] came leading a man whom he had seized and who held a Persian bow, a quiver, and a sagaris, like the ones the Amazons have.”⁷
16. *Sagaris* [sagaris] “And he put a vein-opening sagaris” [cf. *Greek Anthology* 6.94.5–7]. Or weapons held by hand.⁸
17. *Sagê* [pack-saddle] What is put onto a donkey. “He put the load onto him and the animal’s pack-saddle” [Babrius 7.11–12].
 Josephus [i.e., *Jewish Antiquities* 1.322]: “Rachel puts down the images into the pack-saddle of the camel that is carrying her.”
18. *Sagêneôn anthrôpôn* [people who fish with dragnets].
19. *Sagêneuô* [to fish with dragnets] with the accusative case.⁹
20. *Sagêneus* [Sageneus] A proper name.

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A Dictionary of the Imperial Capital

Shen Qiliang's Da Qing quanshu (1683)

Mårten Söderblom Saarela

In 1683, Shen Qiliang's 沈啟亮 (fl. 1645–1693) Manchu-Chinese dictionary *Da Qing quanshu* 大清全書 (Complete book of the Great Qing) appeared from a commercial publisher in Beijing. It was the first Manchu dictionary to be printed. Beijing at this time was the capital of the still growing Qing empire, which was ruled by Manchus. The Manchus had occupied Beijing in 1644, when they invaded China from eastern Inner Asia. They brought a plurilingual army and its dependents with them to the old Chinese capital. In Shen's time, Beijing was one of the great cities of the world. It housed an ethnically diverse population speaking several languages, of which the most important were the Beijing dialect of northern vernacular Chinese and Manchu. Literary or classical Chinese was widely read and written, including in the extensive government bureaucracy.

On the face of it, Manchu and Chinese could not be less alike. Manchu was related to languages spoken in the mountains and forests that stretched up to what is now the Russian Far East. In the early seventeenth century, the Manchus started writing it using the Mongolian alphabet, which had Near Eastern roots. Chinese, meanwhile, was of a different language family and written using its own morphosyllabic script. Yet centuries of interaction along the frontier region of northern China had made the dialects spoken there, including in Beijing, take on features associated with the languages of Inner Asia. The Manchu invasion of Beijing was an act of war that uprooted hundreds of thousands, but it represented merely one moment in a long history of cross-border interaction. As the center of a new empire, Beijing attracted speakers of languages other than Chinese and Manchu. Mongolian, Tibetan, Russian, Korean, and other languages still could be heard or seen there.

The dictionary that Shen published was, in a sense, a product of this city that spoke in many tongues. Shen was himself a recent immigrant. A southerner from the Yangzi river delta, Shen arrived in Beijing after having fought for the Qing army in the civil war of the 1670s. He studied Manchu in the capital and collected several texts that were used by language students in the city and that circulated in manuscript form. Well-to-do Manchus studied both their

own ancestral language and Chinese, while ambitious and curious Chinese individuals wedded to the Qing cause took an interest in Manchu. The Qing court sponsored translations of classical Chinese literature into Manchu, and both Chinese and Manchu were routinely used in the imperial administration. Shen's dictionary reflects this polyglot culture.

The dictionary that went on sale in 1683 (title page seen in Figure 3.6.1) and then in a second edition in 1713 opened with a Chinese preface and a set of instructions for using what to many readers was an entirely new kind of reference work. Shen anchored the emergence of the Manchu language on the world stage in the legendary invention of writing in Chinese antiquity. He talked about how the new political order required knowledge of both Chinese and Manchu, and argued the advantages of Manchu over classical Chinese. In the following instructions, Shen explained how to locate words in the dictionary. The words were arranged according to their spelling in the Manchu script in a way roughly comparable to alphabetical order.

The excerpts that follow are the first part of the preface and selected entries from the main body of the dictionary (see Figure 3.6.2). I have chosen entries of different types in order to show the variation contained in the dictionary. Taken together, the entries give us a sense of how Shen compiled his dictionary. He took material from pre-existing vocabularies, the Manchu translations of Confucian texts, bureaucratic documents (perhaps intended as model documents for aspiring administrators), and from his daily life as a Beijing resident. The Manchu words are sometimes translated into classical Chinese, but very often the Chinese text represents the Beijing vernacular. The Manchu words are often translated, sometimes described, and sometimes left without any definition at all. A pioneering work, Shen's dictionary shows Manchu-Chinese lexicography—and, by extension, the integration of the Qing world—as a work in progress.

1 Complete Book of the Great Qing (Excerpts)

The Chinese (vernacular and classical interspersed) and Manchu excerpts from the dictionary are transcribed from the critical edition by Hayata Teruhiro 早田輝洋 and Teramura Masao 寺村政男, eds., *Daishin zensho: Zōho kaitei, tsuketari Manshūgo, Kango sakuin*, 3 vols (Fuchū: Tōkyō Gaikokugo Daigaku Ajia Afurika Gengo Bunka Kenkyūjo, 2004). The preface is entirely in Chinese. In the dictionary itself, entries and example sentences are in Manchu, with Chinese translations or definitions following.

Excerpt 1: Chinese Preface

竊惟渾敦作而天地分；三皇立而干支始；太昊造書契，畫八卦，為萬世文字祖。迨倉頡造字之後，聖君、賢士，書法迭興；真草隸篆，各擅名宗。千百年來。傳至我太祖高皇帝，應運龍興，立萬世之綱常，作清字以定政教。暨世祖章皇帝定鼎中原，令漢人並習清字。滿軍亦通漢書。今皇上廓而大之。同文之治，彬彬乎益盛矣。但漢書章句敷衍詞章，有藻麗英華、字字珠玉者，代不乏也；有支離隱遁、言言粉飾者，固亦不少。何如我聖朝清書，文簡詞達，使人一覽朗然。猶曉星秋月，昭昭耳目間。倘漢文中有一字支離，一經翻譯，便豁然滌盡，粉飾無存。此非錯綜不紊，去繁抓要之大道乎！

English Translation

Translated by Märten Söderblom Saarela.

From the primordial chaos, heaven and earth split. The three emperors rose, and initiated [the recording of events in the chronological system of] stems and branches. Taihao invented writing on wooden slips, drew the eight trigrams, and became the progenitor of the writing of ten thousand generations. After Cang Jie created the written characters, sagely lords, worthy servants, and written law arose and flourished. The regular, cursive, clerical, and seal scripts all grew to form illustrious traditions [of calligraphy]. Through hundreds and thousands of years they were transmitted, until our Great Progenitor, the Lofty Emperor [Nurhaci], accepted destiny and followed the rise of the dragon. He established the three bonds and five constant virtues and created Manchu characters in order to establish his doctrine of governance. Then, our Dynastic Progenitor, the Brilliant [Shunzhi] Emperor, established the cauldrons on the central plain [i.e., invaded China and moved his capital to Beijing] and made the Chinese to also study Manchu characters. The Manchu army likewise [learned to] master Chinese documents. The emperor now on the throne promulgated and expanded upon this. The governance of standardized written language prospers even more brilliantly.

Certainly, Chinese literature contains many chapters and verses that are flowery and brilliant; in those, every character is a gem. There is no lack of such writing. There is also Chinese writing that is unclear, where every word is covered with ornamentation. Such writings are definitely not lacking either. Then what about the Manchu writing of our Sagely Dynasty, which is simple and gets the meaning across? It lets people see clearly at first glance, being bright for eyes and ears like the morning star or the autumn moon. Once translated, a character that was obscure in the Chinese version is immediately washed com-

pletely clear; [in the Manchu version,] there is not a smudge of ornamentation left. Is this not the great systematic and ordered way, the way of removing the complicated while transmitting the essential?

Excerpt 11: Entries from the Dictionary (Original and English Translation)

This selection of entries gives an idea of the kind of material contained in the dictionary. The entries comprise quotes from the Manchu translations of the Chinese Confucian canon, elements of Manchu culture that Shen Qiliang explicates for his Chinese audience, common phrases used in everyday conversation, and bureaucratic prose from the imperial administration.

bitumbi 沿邊沿河之沿。尋壑之尋。 (*mederi be bitume julesi lang-yei bade isinaki sembi*) 遵海而南放於瑯琊。¹

bitumbi “Follow” as in “follow the perimeter, follow the river.” “Seek” as in “Seek out the ravine.”²

“I want to follow the sea south to go to Langye.”³

tuibumbi 設其裳衣之設。陳設。滿洲家夜間跳神吹燈祚祝之意。⁴

tuibumbi “Display” as in “display the robes.”⁵ Lay out and display. It is used to refer to the nightly dance to arouse the spirits in Manchu homes, when they blow out the lights and perform blessings and good wishes.⁶

1 Hayata and Teramura, *Daishin zensho*, 1:84 (0543a3).

2 “Seek out the ravine” is from a poem by early medieval poet Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365–427 CE). “Seeking out the ravines | Traversing the hills” (*xunhuo jingqiu* 尋壑經丘), a truncated version of a passage from one of Tao’s poems, was used as a fixed expression meaning to explore natural scenery and enjoy the great outdoors. The word used for “ravine” here is a rare Chinese character. Either a Manchu translation of Tao’s poem was in circulation at this time, or the Chinese expression had been translated into Manchu.

3 This is a quote from Mencius, King Hui of Liang, part 2. See Legge, *The Works of Mencius*, 158. Some of the classical Confucian texts had been translated from Chinese into Manchu by the time Shen Qiliang published his dictionary. He used passages from these translations to illustrate the use of certain Manchu words. Everyday words and elevated literature thus coexisted in the dictionary.

4 Hayata and Teramura, *Daishin zensho*, 1:152 (0927a4).

5 This is a quote from the *Doctrine of the Mean*, another of the canonical Confucian texts. See Legge, *The Four Books*, 378.

6 In the second half of this entry, Shen shifts from associating Manchu words with the translations of the Confucian canon to his own observation of Manchu life in Beijing. Shen says that

jeke 曾吃了。 *jeke se* 使其應吃之意。 | *jeke bihe* 曾吃過來。 *jekekû* 不曾吃。 *jekene* 令人吃去。 *jekeneki* 欲去吃。應人欲去吃之意。 *jekenerakû* 不去吃。 *jekenehekû* 未曾去吃。 | *jekenu* 叫人來吃之意。 *jekenjirakû* 不來吃。 *jekeo* 曾吃過麼。 | *jekengge* 吃過的。 *jekele* 凡吃。 *jeke* 吃了。 | *jekekûle* 凡不吃。 *jekenggeo* 問人吃的麼。 *jekekûnggeo* 問人不曾吃的麼。 | *jekenjimbio* 問人來吃麼。 *jekenjirakûn* 問人不來吃麼。 *jeke* 欲吃。請吃之詞。 | *jeke sembi* 欲要吃。⁷

jeke [I] already ate. *jeke se* It is used to make someone agree to eat food that is offered. *jeke bihe* [I] ate before coming over. *jekekû* [I] did not eat yet. *jekene* To tell someone to eat more. *jekeneki* To want to go eat. It is used to answer someone that you [also] want to go eat. *jekenerakû* To not go eat. *jekenehekû* To not have gone to eat yet. *jekenu* It is used to call someone over to eat. *jekenjirakû* [I am] not coming to eat. *jekeo* Have you already eaten? *jekengge* [Yes, I] already ate. *jekele* N [I] ate all [of it]. *jeke* [I] ate. *jekekûle* [I] did not eat all [of it]. *jekenggeo* To ask if someone already ate. *jekekûnggeo* To ask if someone did not already eat. *jekenjimbio* To ask someone to come eat. *jekenjirakûn* To ask someone if they will not come eat. *jeke* To want to eat. Used to tell someone to please eat. *jeke sembi* [I] want to eat.⁸

genggedembi 搖晃着走。倦而欲盹。無力行走之貌。病人走動不得之狀。⁹

genggedembi To walk with a swaying motion. To be tired and want to nap. The look of someone walking without any energy. The appearance of a sick person who tries to walk but fails.¹⁰

the word *tuibumbi* refers to the enactment of what in Chinese is called “the ritual of turning away from the lamp” (*beideng ji* 背燈祭), or praying in the dark. See Stary, “Praying in the Darkness,” 15–30.

7 Hayata and Teramura, *Daishin zensho*, 1:191 (1130a5–31a1).

8 This series of forms of the verb *jembi*, “to eat”—itself not listed—is unusual in the dictionary because of its great length. Among the many forms Shen lists expressions that were probably used as greetings in Manchu Beijing, just as the corresponding Chinese expressions are today in Beijing Mandarin. The list of different forms suggests a pragmatic approach to Manchu grammar, according to which the reader can pick and choose, depending on the situation. As in other entries, direct translations and metalinguistic commentary are mixed in the explanations. I thank José Andrés Alonso de la Fuente for his help translating two of the expressions.

9 Hayata and Teramura, *Daishin zensho*, 1: 212 (1234b3).

10 Here Shen is trying to describe the meaning of a Manchu word without an obvious equivalent in Chinese.

faksi 百工之工。匠人。巧言巧用之巧。(loho *faksi*,) 刀匠。(dushure *faksi*,) 銀匠。(teišun *faksi*) 銅匠。| (sele *faksi*,) 鐵匠。(toholon *faksi*) 錫匠。(beri *faksi*,) 弓匠。(niru *faksi*,) 箭匠。| (enggemu *faksi*,) 鞍兒匠。(ulme *faksi*,) 針匠。(hangnara *faksi*,) 銅匠。(nirure *faksi*,) 畫匠。| (jodoro¹¹ *faksi*,) 機匠。(šurure *faksi*,) 鑊匠。(šoro *faksi*,) 籃匠。(hûre *faksi*,) 繅匠。| (wehe *faksi*,) 石匠。(icere *faksi*,) 染匠。(derhi *faksi*,) 席匠。(gûlga *faksi*,) 皮匠。| (bithe foloro *faksi*,) 刻字匠。(jafu birere *faksi*) 氈匠。(hungkerere *faksi*,) 鑄爐匠。¹²

faksi “Workmen” as in “the hundred [kinds of] workmen.”¹³ Craftsman. “Clever” as in “Cleverly [but deceitfully] said and done.” loho *faksi* Knife craftsman. dushure *faksi* Silver craftsman [silversmith].¹⁴ teišun *faksi* Copper craftsman. sele *faksi* Iron craftsman. toholon *faksi* Tin craftsman. beri *faksi* Bow craftsman [bowmaker]. niru *faksi* Arrow craftsman. enggemu *faksi* Saddle craftsman [saddler]. ulme *faksi* Needle craftsman. hangnara *faksi* Mending craftsman. nirure *faksi* Painting craftsman. jodoro *faksi* Weaving craftsman. šurure *faksi* Spinning craftsman [lathe operator]. šoro *faksi* Basket craftsman. hûre *faksi* Silk sash craftsman. wehe *faksi* Stone craftsman [mason]. icere *faksi* Dying craftsman [dyer]. derhi *faksi* Mat craftsman. gûlga *faksi* Boot craftsman [shoemaker]. bithe foloro *faksi* Printing block carver. jafu birere *faksi* Blanket craftsman. hungkerere *faksi* Smelting craftsman.

wala 房東。下首。滿洲室內以西為尊。¹⁵

wala The eastern part of a house. Right-hand seat. In Manchu buildings the Western side is honored.¹⁶

tungse kamcifi jihe, 重譯通使。重譯來朝。 *tungserembi* 通傳譯語。¹⁷

tungse kamcifi jihe Interpreter official. The interpreters come to court.¹⁸
tungserembi To communicate a translation.

11 jodoro here is Hayata and Teramura's emendation, the original has *jotoro*.

12 Hayata and Teramura, *Daishin zensho*, 1: 236 (1356b3–1357a3).

13 This is an old Chinese expression attested in Confucian texts.

14 Literally “embossing craftsman.”

15 Hayata and Teramura, *Daishin zensho*, 1: 251 (1439b3).

16 Another example of ethnographic commentary on Shen's part.

17 Hayata and Teramura, *Daishin zensho*, 1: 152 (1928a4).

18 The Manchu lemma literally means “The interpreters arrived together.” The word *tungse*

fujiyang 副將。 | *fujiyang de takûrafi alanjihangge ba-jeo, cang-ping ni*
 | *dooli-i amasi unggihe bithede, wan-ping, dai-hing* | *ere juwe hiyan ci*
acafi beidefi benjihebi, kemuni | *angga acabume beidere oyonggû weilengge*
*niyalma bici, | ne niyalma takûrafi ganabuha urunakû inenggi baibumbi*¹⁹
 | *sehe be dahame, bilagan inenggi saniyareo sehebi.* | 行據副將呈准霸昌
 道覆據宛大兩縣會審詳解尚有對質要犯現在差提必需時日詳請寬限前
 來。²⁰

fujiyang Colonel ... [long example sentence in Manchu] ... In the Bazhou and Cangping circuits' communication sent back to inform the colonel, it said: "The two counties of Wanping and Daxing jointly examined and delivered [him]. Now, this person is suspected of a serious crime and testimony should be taken before sentencing. It will take one day for someone to go and get him." Given this situation, can the term be extended?²¹

is a loan that ultimately comes from the Chinese *tongshi* 通事, which is the word used in the definition as well. Interpreters commonly accompanied foreign (e.g., Korean) delegations to the Qing court.

19 *baibumbi* here is Hayata and Teramura's emendation, the original has *beibumbi*.

20 Hayata and Teramura, *Daishin zensho*, 1: 246–247 (1427a5–1428a2).

21 The meaning of this example sentence is not entirely clear to me in the Manchu and even less so in the more elliptic Chinese; it is clearly taken from a bilingual communication sent among the authorities in the Beijing area, where Wanping and Daxing counties were located. The fact that this kind of material was available to Shen Qiliang suggests that administrative prose was used by prospective officials as study material for learning Manchu and, perhaps, bureaucratic Chinese.

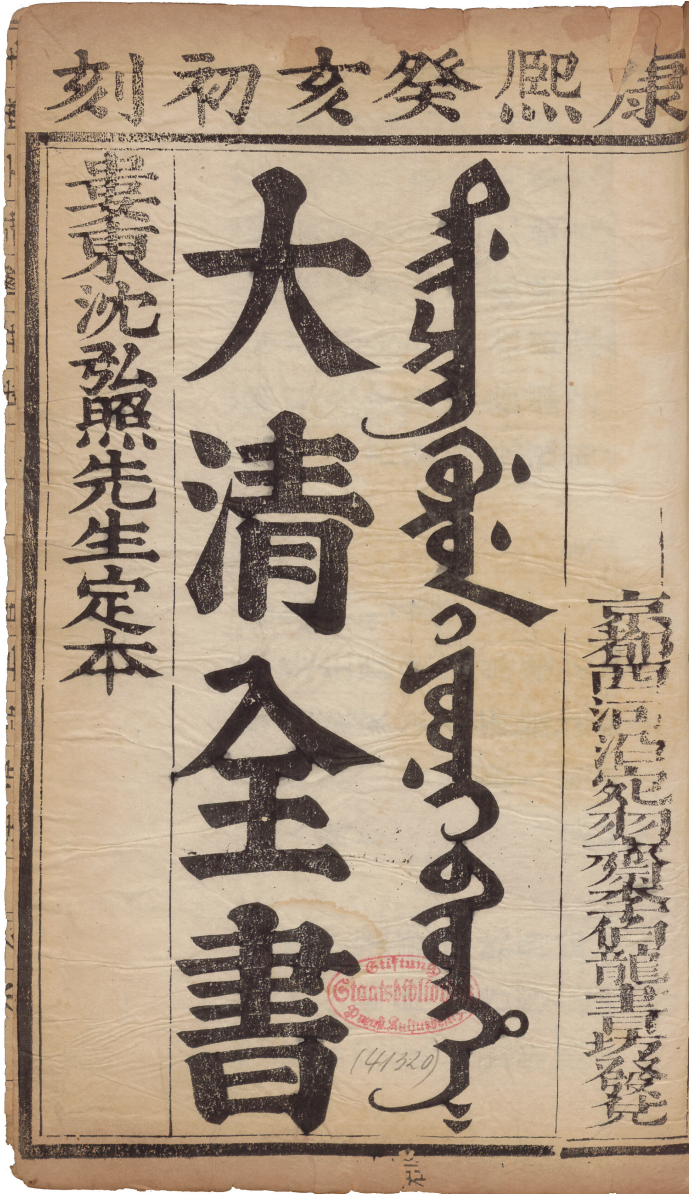


FIGURE 3.6.1 Title page of Shen Qiliang 沈啟亮, *Daqing gurun-i yooni bithe* | *Da Qing quanshu* 大清全書 [Complete Book of the Great Qing], blockprint (Beijing: Wanyu Zhai, 1683)
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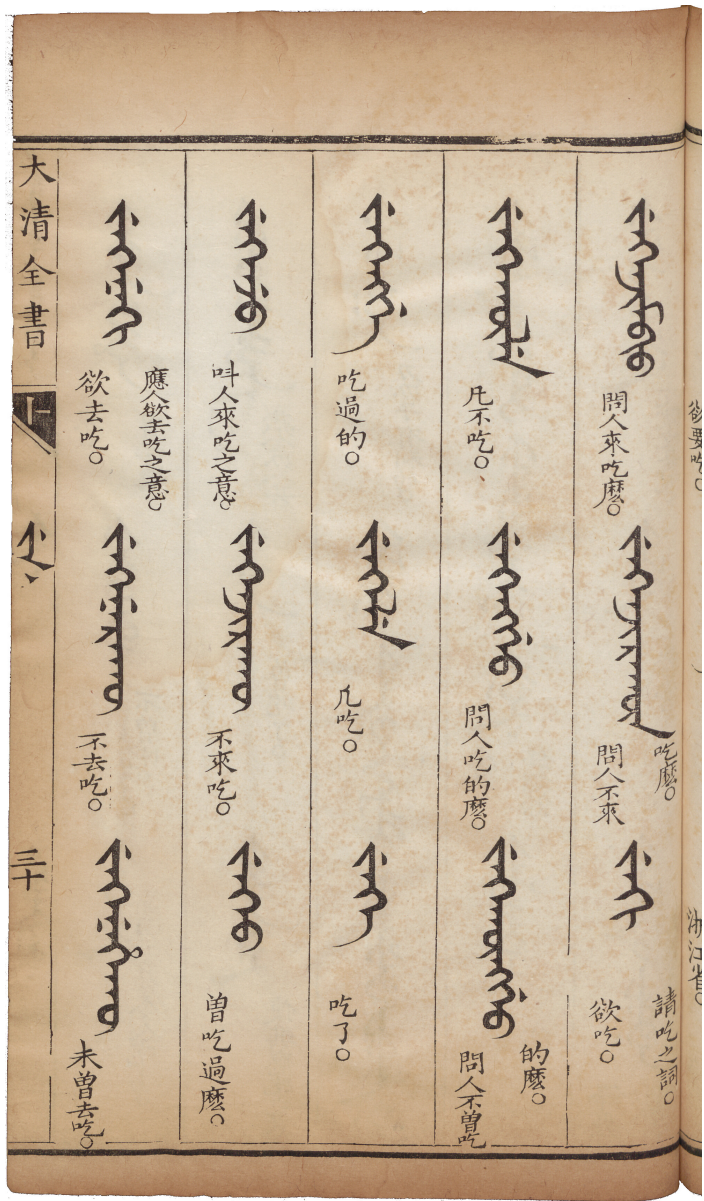


FIGURE 3.6.2 Lemmata from the main body of the dictionary. Note the several forms of the verb *jemi* “to eat.” Shen Qiliang 沈啟亮, *Daicing gurun-i yooni bithe* | *Da Qing quanshu* 大清全書 [Complete Book of the Great Qing], blockprint (Beijing: Wanyu Zhai, 1683), 11:30b
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Symbols

| column break in the original

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Critical Edition

Hayata Teruhiro 早田輝洋 and Teramura Masao 寺村政男, eds. *Daishin zensho: Zōho kaitei, tsuketari Manshūgo, Kango sakuin* 大清全書: 增補改訂・附滿洲語漢語索引 [Expanded and emended edition of the *Complete book of the Great Qing*, with appended Manchu and Chinese indexes]. 3 vols. Fuchū: Tōkyō Gaikokugo Daigaku Ajia Afurika Gengo Bunka Kenkyūjo, 2004.

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PART 4

Translation



Introduction

Dagmar Schäfer and Markham J. Geller

For historians, the textual practice of translation, whereby two (or more) languages are put into a semantic or functional relation with one another orally or in writing, provides the most compelling evidence of plurilingualism. This part presents some historical texts that exemplify how actors have approached translation and thereby understood and managed language diversity. Over the last two decades a growing literature has called attention to the broad range of oral and written practices that accompany and facilitate translation.¹ Some of these practices, such as lexicography and etymology, are discussed in other parts of this volume. In this part, we concentrate on translation as a practice that uses and produces texts. This—admittedly narrow—definition of translation (and its aims) brings into sharp relief how a scholarly practice for converting from one or more languages into one or many others promoted plurilingualism and, at the same time, regularly informed (ideals of) monolingualism.

This introduction begins with some thoughts on the formation of words and concepts for translation. We then introduce a *longue-durée* view on translation practices to help the reader situate the text selections in this volume within a global past. Finally, we discuss how these selections reveal some of the ways in which secular and sacred, large and small projects, expert translators and theories and rules of translation have informed the historical plurality of languages.

1 What Is Translation?

Let us begin by stating the obvious, namely that translation would be inconceivable if everyone spoke only one language (in a fully monolingual society), and unnecessary if everyone knew all of the various languages being spoken (in a truly plurilingual society). In either case: why engage in translation? However,

1 Peter Burke discussed the role of cultures of translation in his famous 2007 essay, “Cultures of Translation in Early Modern Europe.” For an overview over different narratives about translation see Baker, *Critical Readings*. Baker reframes in this context translation and translators in terms of conflict and dominance. See also Bermann and Porter, *Companion to Translation Studies*, 3.

as it is most unlikely that every single member of a plurilingual society would be master of every language within it, it is far more likely that people would develop methods to facilitate exchange between languages.² To be sure, translation activities have also always existed in purely oral contexts; but for the purposes of this introduction, we specify this as the technical term for this process of exchange after the appearance of writing. Concepts of translation varied, therefore, depending on whether the individual or communities in question envisioned themselves as chiefly monolingual, bi-, or pluri-lingual and on how orality and writing were related in their respective societies. Some cultures, for instance, accepted written translation for some languages and content, but not for others. At close sight, translation was a nuanced negotiation between (two or more) languages in which actors addressed the content and form of written language(s) and tackled word-for-word meaning-transfer as well as employing less rigid forms of paraphrase or interpretive and scholastic applications such as explanatory discourses, glosses, or commentaries.

A case in point for a culture that conceptualized translation within one dominant written tradition is China. Early sources frame interactions between those countries or courts that agreed on (some form of) Chinese and those “other” communities that lived in regions North, East, South and West, far beyond the center of the civilized world (*zhong* 中). In such descriptions, different eating and drinking customs, clothing styles, gestures and rituals are highlighted, while only one passage in the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) comments explicitly on language, noting that

the people of the Five Regions differ in words and languages, as well as in their predilections and desires. To make comprehend their will and communicate their desires is called “to confide” in the eastern regions, “to represent” in the southern regions, “to *didi*” in the western regions, [and] “to *yi*” in the northern regions.³

According to this passage, which has attracted an enormous amount of attention in the history of translation, Chinese speakers transliterated regional terms

2 A particularly well studied case for a plurilingual community in which researchers have studied such conversion as a mainly oral exercise is the case of Papua New Guinea. Sankoff, *Social Life of Language*, ch. 5.

3 “Wu fang zhi min, yanyu butong, shiyu butong. Da qi zhi, tong qi yu, dongfang yue ji, nanfang yue xiang, xifang yue didi, beifang yue yi” 五方之民，言語不同，嗜欲不同。達其志，通其欲，東方曰寄，南方曰象，西方曰狄鞮，北方曰譯。 *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義, *juan* 12, quoted in Behr, “To Translate,” 187. Translation adapted from *ibid*.

used to describe an oral exchange across language differences into their writing system. The translation above emphasizes different approaches to translation on the word level. The meaning of the Chinese characters *ji* 寄 and *xiang* 象 resembles that of translation, but, primarily, both may have been a phonetic rendering of non-Chinese languages (or words for translations) used by the respective speakers, as is the case for *didi* 狄鞮 and *yi* 譯.⁴ This case illustrates how important it is to distinguish between monolingual peoples and monoliterate ones, as those concerned clearly recognized more than one language, even as they transferred them all into one written form.⁵

Tracing terms over time, we can see that with the arrival of Buddhist texts (some in Sanskrit, some in Prakrit) in China, translation came to be defined as an encounter between two languages, each with its own writing system. At the same time, written Chinese increasingly became detached from spoken Chinese. The Northern *yi* increasingly served to distinguish a technical process used to “alter and change the words of languages to make them mutually understandable.”⁶ Over the following centuries, we can see how the written language of Chinese was not only pronounced differently in different regions of East Asia, but also had its own distinct (and very much standardized) syntax, and morphology and how this written language, as it was both used to communicate across different oralities and was developing at a slower pace than such oralities, remained the major reference point of translation even after Tibetan, Tangut, Uyghur, or Mongolian actors had invented writing systems for their languages.

In the Chinese case, terminological dynamics point to an increased significance of textual translation that, as a practice, increased the social, intellectual, and political recognition of language diversity and plurality, but, at the same time, undergirded the hegemony of a single written language. The lack of a specific technical term for translation in historical cultures should be taken not to signal its absence but rather as an indication that in hegemonial approaches to languages, translation is performed mainly unidirectionally and is denied

4 In Chinese Classics *ji* means converting, *xiang* representing, and *yi* interpreting words. The phonetic transcriptions chosen for these “foreign” terms were associated with translating and interpreting. The two words *di di* characterize a social group (a kinship) and signify the use of leather shoes.

5 There is hence a need to distinguish between translation in plurilingual societies and translation practices in multilateral societies. Even finer lines need to be drawn when considering cultural distinctions between written and oral language, the use of certain scripts and their relation to orality, as elaborated in the part on writing.

6 “... wei huan yi yanyu shi xiang jie” 謂換譯言語使相解. Commentary on *Liji zhengyi*, *juan* 12, quoted and translated in Behr, “To Translate,” 195.

textual visibility. An extreme case is the Sanskrit cosmopolis that accredited its own language as the only suitable tool to resolve any language diversity. More commonly though, actors describe a plurilingual world in which translation is intrinsic to processes of communication and actors therefore interpret, explain, comment, convey, or transport meanings and contents from one language into another.

2 Plural Languages of Translation

A rich array of textual traces attests to diverse and nuanced translation practices since early times. In Mesopotamia, for instance, translation was already in full bloom by the second millennium BCE, including the realms of Sumerian and (Semitic) Akkadian scholarship, curricula, and literary invention.⁷ Mesopotamia, for much of its history, was a Belgium-style (Sumerian-Akkadian) *Sprachbund* with minority languages (e.g., Hurrian, Aramaic). At a later stage, the range of languages showing evidence of translation expanded to include Hittite (Luvian, Palaic, etc.) in Anatolia and Ugaritic in Syria, while Aramaic gradually and eventually became the *lingua franca* throughout the Near East, to the extent that even Greek never quite replaced it.⁸

Many translation techniques such as lexical glossaries or debates about word equivalents can be found in Mesopotamia. Independent unilingual parallel versions of the same composition (e.g., *The Gilgamesh Epic*) exist in both Sumerian and Akkadian, and literal line-for-line bilingual translations of the same text (*Gilgamesh Epic*, Tablet XIII, in interlinear Sumerian and Akkadian versions) show how translations were put into practice. These sources address questions such as how one should translate a text idiomatically into another language; whether the translation was intended to reproduce or explain a text; or when a paraphrase of a text was preferable to a word-for-word translation. From such documents we can infer that the process of translation is much more complex than the simple transfer of cross-linguistic data from one text to another, since context plays a major role.

The Mesopotamian case suggests that the scholarly practice of translation influenced the development of written (and oral) language, as is discussed in more detail in the part on writing systems. Important to note here is that such developments also affected the choice as to the direction of translations.

7 Akkadian translations of Sumerian are attested in the 3rd millennium BCE, but these increased dramatically in the 2nd millennium BCE school curriculum.

8 Kitazumi, "Übersetzungstätigkeit."

There was no tradition of translating Sumerian and Akkadian into Aramaic, nor were there Aramaic libraries of translated Akkadian texts, despite the fact that Aramaic was the household vernacular of the entire region. These examples of plurilingual scholarship set the stage for translation techniques and methods which reverberated throughout the Mediterranean and Near Eastern intellectual traditions for the remainder of antiquity and beyond. Furthermore, Akkadian translations became popular in the early 2nd millennium BCE, as Sumerian came to be less widely spoken, although for the next two millennia Sumerian retained its prestige as the classical medium of scholarship, *belles lettres*, and liturgy.

What distinguishes the Mesopotamian translation culture from many others is the continuous engagement with language plurality and adjacent practices of multiliteracy in written culture. Such continuity over centuries may not be unique, but it stands in contrast to cultures that managed language plurality in other ways, for instance by favoring one language when translating texts. Historically we can connect such favoritism to a canonical literature that, originating in one language, came to represent the cornerstone of fundamental social, political, intellectual, or social “truths” or rationalities. At some point elites then equated such written canons, their contents, language, and its logic with truthfulness. From an epistemic and intellectual point of view, translation could even be seen as a dubious enterprise, as in the aforementioned case of the Sanskrit cosmopolis, or in the case of China, in which actors considered the mastery of its written language the highest goal and therefore rarely acknowledged other languages as the standard for their translation efforts.⁹ In the Christian-Judaic world, by comparison, communities over time competed not only over Hebrew, Greek, or Latin but also Coptic, Syriac, Ethiopian, Slavonic, Armenian, etc. versions of their classical canon. In this later definition, translation, especially in the context of large text projects, generated monolingual worlds at each end and gave plural languages their standards and form.

3 Translating into Monolingualism: Sacred Texts and Faithfulness

The most obvious historical evidence for translation practices is derived from canonical text projects such as the Bible, the Chinese Five classics, or Bud-

9 Pollock, *Language of the Gods*. For the idea of Chinese written language as epistemic standard before the turn of the nineteenth century see Sela, *China's Philological Turn*.

dhist Sutras. Such projects seem to promote notions of monolingualism (and occasionally ones of monoliteracy):¹⁰ a plurilingual (oral or written) reality is translated into one (more or less) monolingual target text; or a monolingual text corpus is used as a source for further translations into one other (written) language. In this process, translations also regularly redefine or reconfigure the relation between oral and written language at each end, e.g., writing Greek in Arabic (this issue will be discussed further in the Part on writing systems). Language (and its logic) were associated with the truth and reliability of the content, and translations were supposed to be highly accurate and faithful to the original text. In this way, translation often helped to establish and re-affirm (ideals of) monolingualism at both ends of the process.

When looked at from a plurilingual past, it becomes clear that translation promoted certain language hierarchies and hegemonies rather than securing monolingual worlds. We have included in this volume, for instance, an account of the Septuagint Greek version of the Old Testament, which exemplifies the production of a key translation into a minority but authoritative language within a plurilingual society. It is not quite clear whether the motivation for this translation was political or religious, since there was a substantial Greek-speaking Jewish community in Alexandria who supported Ptolemaic rule, and they may have required a translation for their own liturgical and educational needs if they did not understand Hebrew. In fact, the manuscript tradition reveals that there was more than one Septuagint, characterized by such translation decisions as between literally adhering to Hebrew syntax or choosing idiomatic representations of koine Greek.

The Septuagint, possibly the earliest rendering of Semitic languages into Greek, was accompanied by its own historical narrative, even if a somewhat fictionalized one, as is explained by Wright in this collection. The fact that the Septuagint was translated in Alexandria, and was officially commissioned by its famous Library, contrasts with the situation in Judea itself, where Greek was the administrative language of the Roman province but no Greek educational institutions were established in Jerusalem or the Galilee. This may explain why no Greek literary or philosophical texts were translated into Hebrew or were even paraphrased in the Talmud or rabbinic writings. It is also unclear whether the Septuagint itself was widely read in Judea in the centuries after its composition, before the spread of Christianity. It may be that the Bible, as well as important apocryphal texts like Enoch and Jubilees, were translated into Greek

10 Here meaning the ability to write and read one language in one specific writing system. See further in the Part 5 on writing systems.

for the benefit of a Western readership, for Jewish and later Christian communities that were proliferating throughout the Mediterranean region.¹¹

The history of the Bible as a translation project, then, is also the prime example of how translations helped disseminate an orthodoxy of thought while promoting at the same time a standard language within and across language groups. Through this history, we can see a tendency to alter or explain the meaning in order to make the text more comprehensible. It is important to recognize the role of code switching in all translations of the Hebrew Bible, since two books (Daniel and Ezra) are written either entirely or partially in biblical Aramaic. Furthermore, there is a distinct possibility that Bible translations (from Hebrew into Aramaic, Greek, Latin, etc.) could have influenced each other. As regards orthodoxy of thought, every translation offered an opportunity to convey important truths and simultaneously created intellectual space either to challenge standard interpretations of important truths and rationalities or to reveal how adaptable these truths were to the recipient context.

In the case of the Bible we can see additionally that by the turn of the first millennium, as the canon was stabilized, a new group of scholars emerged who, rather than engaging with the religious content, or identifying themselves mainly as scribes, authorized themselves as experts of the technical process of transferring meanings, word by word, sentence by sentence, meaning by meaning. Stepping out of the shadows of canonical works, such translators regularly attempted to establish rules for their trade.

4 Experts of Translation

Among the case studies in the present Part, three contributions from the Hellenistic to Islamic period offer insights into how translators professionalized the exchange between languages and thereby also contributed to the pluralization of languages in written culture—or else helped suppress languages. One of the most famous translators is Cicero, who turned to less literal (word-for-word) but more accurate translations, as a “stylistically refined enterprise, oriented on the target language.”¹² Another set of three contributions illustrates how, in the wake of the Buddhist expansion between South and East Asia, translators developed procedures for translation on the one hand and, on the other hand, defined the limits of translation. In all six cases we see how translators

11 See Barclay, *Jews*.

12 Pontani, Chapter 4.4.

worked within ideals of language hegemonies that identified “one” language as the standard for all translation efforts: Greek in the Mediterranean world and Classical Chinese in East Asia.

Greeks were not known for being polyglots, as Pontani points out in this volume, and pre-Hellenistic Greeks made little effort to translate foreign literature into their own language. Within the Roman setting, by contrast, translation was a preferred practice on the part of key learned individuals, such as Cicero. At this point the readership question becomes relevant: while educated Romans were competent in Greek, translation of Greek into Latin was often treated as a civic obligation and a means of disseminating foreign literature.¹³ The first centuries CE witnessed a series of translations of Greek philosophical and scientific texts into Latin, at least sometimes responding to the needs of emerging Christianity.

Prior to the dominance of Rome in the region, there is no evidence of a *Sprachbund* between these two “classical” languages, and this situation persisted even when Greek (rather than Latin) remained the *lingua franca* of the Eastern Roman Empire. In Republican Rome, a version of Homer’s *Odyssey* appeared in Latin, and while major theatrical works of Greek tragedy and comedy, as well as epic and lyric poetry, may have inspired Latin literature, only a relatively meager selection of Greek comedy appeared in Latin versions (Plautus, Terentius, and Caecilius Statius), nor were these highly accurate or literal translations. However, while educated Latin speakers were accustomed, in academic or school contexts, to confront Greek as the primary idiom of literature, philosophy, and science, the Roman curriculum does not appear to have produced or disseminated standard translations from Greek into Latin.

Nevertheless, familiar issues of translation style were raised; translations should capture the spirit and sense of the source text as well as its lexical equivalents in the target language. In any case, the record of which texts were translated or not translated from Greek into Latin shaped the curriculum of Late Antiquity. In all cases we see actors grappling with general issues, such as whether there are equivalences, in terms of style, content, grammar, or individual words, and how these should be expressed.¹⁴

As described by Wolfgang Levèfre, Buddhist translations into Chinese profited from the support of imperial rulers and powerful elites.¹⁵ By the fourth century, a growing number of Buddhist Sutras had reached China and their transla-

13 Similar statements could also be made for the nature of translation in the Sinophone world when it comes to the translation of Buddhist writings. See Chapter 3.5.

14 See Chapter 4.4.

15 Bassnett and Lefevre, *Constructing Cultures*, 23.

tion demanded collaboration among translators and a division of labor—and they required one person to take the lead. Dao'an 道安 institutionalized various stages of verifying the faithfulness of the translation and securing its consistency. During the mature stage of translation, the chief of translation (*yizhu* 譯主) first had to organize translators who recited the foreign text and translated it into Chinese (*duyu* 度語). A second peer group would then verify the meaning in the Sanskrit text (*zhengfan* 證梵). Scribes would write the translation in Chinese (*bishou* 筆受). Another person verified the meaning of the written Chinese (*zhengyi* 證義). Only then was the style polished (*runwen* 潤文), a proof-reading initiated (*canyi* 參譯), and finally all Chinese characters were corrected or copy-edited (刊定). This institutionally sophisticated set-up finds its match in the Arab centers of scholarship and translation in places such as Toledo which distinguished translators, revisers (*enmendador*), writers of glosses (*glosadors*), and organizers into chapters (*capituladors*) as it managed text corpora with medical, mathematical as well as philosophical, religious, or political contents in a broad range of languages including Latin, Syriac, Greek, Persian, and various Indian languages.¹⁶

In the preface to the Chinese translation of the Indic Buddhist *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (see Chapter 4.5), Dao'an emphasized how each individual decision in a long line of scholarship could potentially lead to a misinterpretation of the original religious message. His remarks address the role of faithfulness for stylistic concerns: in order to appeal to the target audience translations should consider changing a plain into an elaborate or metaphorical style, but also that the formulaic style of a mathematical explanation required reflection in the target text. Translators furthermore had to authenticate the original text and document those interpretations that were subject to change. Over time these demands lead to a large body of commentary literature.¹⁷

Faithfulness was a concern expressed and addressed quite differently depending on whether it was directed to the source or to the target of translation. This volume includes three major sets of rules that illustrate these differences in the creation of guidelines for Chinese translations of Sanskrit Buddhist texts: Zhi Qian's preface to the *Dharmapade*, Monk Xuanzang's 玄奘 (604–664) view on untranslatability, and a canon of rules developed by Qutan Xida 瞿曇悉達 in the eighth century CE. Xuanzang identified five untranslatables (*wu bufan* 五不翻): esoteric meanings, words with multiple implications, things unknown to a region (such as fruits or crafts), generated loan-words, or novel philosoph-

16 Somers, "Machine Translation, Methodology," 143; see also Burnett Charles, "Toledo."

17 See also Chemla and Most, *Mathematical Commentaries*.

ical contents.¹⁸ He preferred a phonetic transliteration to a replacement with a “Chinese” term because this method would alert the reader to the newness of a meaning: this highlights the role of translation as a major source of intellectual enlightenment and learning. The individual initiatives of Zhi Qian and Qutan suggest the limits of André Lefevre’s observation that the state dominated Asian translation projects.¹⁹ Finally, all texts on Buddhist translation projects evince the dominance of the classical Chinese language in East Asia. Sanskrit was translated into Chinese, not only because this helped spread the gospel to commoners. Chinese monks and literati emphasized that the prosaic and simple styles of Sanskrit or Prakrit were no match for the refined and elegant language of written Chinese.²⁰

As these examples illustrate, translators were powerful agents as experts who both negotiated between principal languages and other languages and held major power in the creation of standards at both ends, the source of translation and its target. By foregrounding their mediating role and the technical character of their task, translators not only eschewed the snares of contemporary political and intellectual debates, but also promoted the scholarly nature of their work. Translators furthermore helped pave the way for an increased awareness of the plurality of languages by transferring them into writing. A case in point is the Oxford theologian John Wycliffe (1330–1384) who made sure to mention that he had compiled a translation of the Bible into Middle English by drawing from multiple *Vulgata* and in due course also simplified its language, adapting it to contemporary styles. So did Martin Luther, who converted the Bible into German in 1530, as he himself explained in his *Circular Letter on Translation*.

Wycliffe and Martin Luther not only altered the contents of texts, they also addressed existing hegemonies of translation languages. Wycliffe’s version “vulgarized” scholarly language by using simple everyday idioms. He also used familiar tropes, simplified metaphors, and a limited vocabulary to enhance accessibility. Translating with a Germanized (*verdeutschen*) style, Luther used similar methods as he attempted to broaden the circulation of biblical literature. Looking across topographies and times, we can see that such projects had the effect of multiplying written languages.

18 Xuanzang cooperated like his predecessors with a large group of experts. For a description of these processes and Xuanzang’s legendary work ethic see Brose, *Xuanzang*, 77.

19 Bassnett and Lefevre, *Constructing Cultures*, 23.

20 The latter reflects faithfulness as a significant concern regarding the universal and reliable world of facts, as defined by modern science. For Yan Fu’s thoughts, see Yen Fu, “General Remarks on Translation.”

Translators who converted Greek on an industrial scale (chiefly into Syriac and Arabic, as well as Middle Persian and Sanskrit) engaged not only with the nature of language or the desire to convey information. They also approached translation as a scholarly technique of comprehension and as a way to introduce new things and ideas. In this volume, Brentjes takes up the engrossing tale of literature reintroduced into Europe mostly through Latin translations of Euclid's works on mathematics, which one might think *a priori* would have posed few problems for translators, as mathematics is such a precise discipline. This turns out not to have been the case. As Brentjes points out, "this highly competitive space of mathematical literature" stimulated controversy and disagreement on how Euclid's text was presented in Arabic translations, in terms of the sequences of examples and diagrams and the ordering of the books. Moreover, typical disagreements appeared regarding whether translations of Euclid were faithful to the requirements of Greek or Classical Arabic syntax. The importance of the translations of Euclid's *Elements* then, is that they offer yet another insight into why texts were translated, since one might think that, in this instance, the motivation was neither politics nor religion, but the objective of pure learning.²¹ In such efforts translators could not remain mere technicians, but had to delve deeply into different knowledge fields and their conventions. We can see throughout all the examples given in this volume how over the course of time translators repeatedly defined their roles within this tension between their language capability and disciplinary knowledge, and how carefully they navigated their roles as transmitters and preservers of old and new contents.²²

5 Conclusion

Whereas Georg Steiner in *After Babel* still periodized the development of practices and theories of translation within a Western European tradition, more recently an increasingly global view illustrates how translation impacts the historical view on mono- and plurilingualism. When translating, we reflect on

21 Other examples are the medical writings of Galen, the natural philosophy of Aristotle, Al Biruni's *Book of Nature*, or Li Shizhen's *Materia Medica* 本草 (*Bencao* in Chinese, Japanese *Honzugaku*) that scholars repeatedly translated, revised, and re-translated. See Marcon, *Knowledge of Nature*. Pingree, "Brahmagupta."

22 For more on the introduction of the languages of the sciences (such as chemistry or biomedicine) to China see Amelung, Lackner, and Kurtz, "Introduction," 11; as well as Reardon-Anderson, *Study of Change*.

language bodies and define them.²³ When translators such as Cicero or Horace stressed aesthetic criteria, and were selective or judgmental, they enforced a consistency in both the source and target language, making visible the existence of different languages. Juxtaposing languages in translation solidified two distinct entities, sometimes even carved them in stone in the case of the Rosetta Stone, an Egyptian decree etched in two different scripts and in Greek establishing a cult in Memphis in honor of Ptolemy V (196 BC). When Tangut, Mongols, and Vietnamese rulers wished to converse in their languages and requested and issued translations of administrative and state-related contents, the ensuing documents gave visibility to the plurality of languages.²⁴ Even if such efforts were regularly used to uphold the primacy of one language, the process of translation challenged existing hegemonies and documented the reality of plural languages for future worlds.

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23 See Steiner, *After Babel*.

24 Carla Nappi, *Translating Early Modern China*.

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Translators of Sumerian

The Unsung Heroes of Babylonian Scholarship

Markham J. Geller

An unresolved issue among scholars working on Sumerian *belles lettres* which were translated into Akkadian is to what extent one can rely upon the accuracy of the translations and the extent of knowledge of Sumerian among later scribes and scholars. Although the process of translation is already noticeable from the early second millennium BCE, especially in the form of Akkadian glosses on Sumerian, the proliferation of fully-fledged interlinear translations from Sumerian into Akkadian became a commonplace feature of first-millennium libraries, scholarly archives, and school text extract tablets.

The issue poses problems for modern translators of Sumerian literature (which includes incantations and prayers), since texts often have early and late versions dating from second and first millennium sources, and variant readings can frequently offer somewhat different meanings for the same passages. Editorial decisions are required to decide whether to translate the Sumerian text independently from its Akkadian translation, assuming that modern philology can get closer to the original meaning of a Sumerian text than could the ancient scribes. Another approach is simply to ignore late editions and translations of Sumerian as *spät und schlecht* by limiting modern editions and translations to second millennium recensions of Sumerian literature, which are usually considered to be more authoritative.¹

No matter which argument prevails, there is a certain amount of circular logic behind such decisions. Since Sumerian has no cognates among other languages of Mesopotamia, it was therefore only capable of being deciphered through the ancient glossaries, translations, and grammar-paradigms of Babylonian scribal schools, the Akkadian-speaking students of which were compelled to study Sumerian as a classical language. So although modern scholarship is entirely dependent upon ancient bilingual glossaries to establish the basic meaning of Sumerian words, serious attempts have been made, by using

¹ Editors of the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL) opted not to use first millennium BCE sources in reconstructing Sumerian literature.

tried-and-true painstaking philological methods, to interpret Sumerian independently of Akkadian, through collecting all usages and contexts of Sumerian within an extensive corpus of many different genres. This endeavor is unfortunately hampered by the lack of a modern Sumerian dictionary.

By way of making a probe into the mechanics of history's first systems of translation, we will investigate a popular Sumerian myth known as *Lugale*, describing a battle between the god Ninurta and a fierce demon, Asag (Asakku). The myth is well preserved, known from numerous sources from both the second and first millennia BCE, from major tablet archives primarily in the cities of Nippur, Sippar, Assur, Nineveh, and Babylon. The standard critical edition of the text by van Dijk,² providing a full reading of all manuscripts, was followed by Seminara's study of bilingual translations in *Lugale*.³

The present study is based on two recently published tablets of *Lugale* that probably originated in Babylon's schools in the mid-first millennium BCE: BM 38896⁴ and BM 48053.⁵ Both texts (giving the Sumerian text and Akkadian translations from three different passages of *Lugale*) will be used to decide how effectively scholar-scribes from ca. 500 BCE transmitted and interpreted this classical text. Each line of this probe will reproduce an eclectic text drawn from the older (2nd millennium) recension of *Lugale*, with late readings from the two first millennium school texts from Babylon given in round brackets as variants. Two translations will be given for each line: the first is from ETCSL, which is a translation based solely on second millennium sources,⁶ while an alternative translation is based upon the Akkadian of late Babylonian school texts. Comments are added to any line with significant differences in grammar or semantics between older and later recensions, as reflected in variant readings in the Sumerian and in the Akkadian translation as well.

A cursory overview of the two translations (a modern one from ETCSL and an ancient one from late Babylonian tablets) indicates that both early and late recensions of the myth are relatively close to each other, suggesting that later

2 van Dijk, *LUGAL UD ME-LÁM-bi NIR-[G]ÁL*.

3 Seminara, *La versione accadica del LUGAL-E*. See also the comments on Seminara's work in Crisostomo, *Translation as Scholarship*, 115–117, accepting the position that Akkadian translations in *Lugale* reflect new political and theological points of view not found in the original Sumerian. This approach is not reflected in the selections of *Lugale* cited in the present article.

4 Geller, "Late Babylonian *Lugale*," 93–100.

5 Mirelman, "A New Manuscript of *Lugal-e* Tablet IV," 155–162.

6 The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature is widely quoted for its translations of Sumerian literary texts and considered to be reliable, although it is badly in need of updating.

scholar-scribes were translating the same Sumerian text, faithfully transmitted for more than a millennium via a conservative Mesopotamian curriculum. The challenge will be to see how later scholars interpreted earlier Sumerian and what kind of editorial processes were deemed necessary to redraft or even correct classical versions of the same text. This process, once clearly understood, can also be used to test whether modern translators of Sumerian reflect the same nuances and basic meanings as did their ancient predecessors, and to what extent the ancient translations should be taken into account by modern text editions.

Text Passages

Excerpt 1: Lugale, Lines 48–62 from BM 38896

Sumerian and Akkadian from Geller, “Late Babylonian *Lugale*,” 96–97. The English translation from Sumerian is excerpted from ETCSL, “Ninurta’s exploits: a *šir-sud* (?) to Ninurta,” t. 1.6.2. The English translation of the Akkadian text is mine.

Context The text picks up at the point where the god Ninurta is told that his enemy, the Asakku-demon, is gathering intelligence regarding his capabilities as a combatant, as well as warning Ninurta about the prowess of his demonic adversary.⁷

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 48 | ur-sag a-a-zu-šè èn mu-e-ši-tar | <i>qar-rad ana ab-bu-ti-ka iš-tal-lu₄</i> |
| | “Hero! They have appealed to you,
because of your father; | O hero, inquiries have been made
regarding your father, |

Comment There is a recurrent pattern in the late recension of this text, which converts a Sumerian verbal form with a 2. p. s. indirect object (lit. “one has asked you”) into an impersonal plural verb to represent a passive voice (lit. “they asked” = “it is asked”). The same pattern is found in the following two verses of the myth.

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 49 | dumu ^d en-líl-lá en á mah-zu-šè ki
mu-e-ši-íb-kin | <i>ma-ri ^dMIN be-lu ana e-mu-qí-ka ši-
ra-a-ti iš-te-né-’u</i> |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

⁷ The translation by Jacobsen is recommended for consultation: Jacobsen, “The Ninurta Myth Lugal-e,” 233–272.

son of Enlil, Lord, because of your superior strength they are looking to you here; Lord, son of Enlil, it is being investigated (by the demon) regarding your mighty power.⁸

Comment The Sumerian verbal form literally means, “one has searched regarding you,” converted by the Akkadian into an impersonal passive.

lugal-mu kala-ga-zu-šè ad mu-e-ši-íb-gi₄ *be-lí ana da-na-ni-ka im-tal-li-ku-ka* 50

since you are strong, my master, they are calling for your help, My Lord, advice is being taken (by the demon) about you, about your being strong (or not).

Comment The Sumerian verbal form literally means, “one gave advice concerning you,” which has been reworked in the Akkadian translation.

^dnin-urta zag-zu ur-sag-diš nu-tuš-a ba-ab-du₁₁ ^dMIN *ul-la-nu-uk-ka iš-tin ul a-šib iq-bi* 51

saying, Ninurta, that not a single warrior counts except for you! It is said: “Ninurta, apart from you, not one (hero) is present.”

Comment The Akkadian translation apparently opts to omit the word for “hero” (Sum. ur-sag) as unnecessary. The Akkadian also adheres to a close translation of Sumerian tuš “to sit, or dwell” with Akkadian *āšib*, literally meaning “seated”; in both cases, the idiomatic meaning is “to be present.”

téš-bi-ru-šè á mu-e-ši-íb-ág *mit-ha-riš um-ta-’i-ir* 52

They wanted to advise you about ... He (Ninurta) was unanimously instructed.

Comment The Sumerian verb is impersonal, literally meaning “one instructed regarding you” (i.e., Ninurta), with an unspecified subject. The Akkadian text makes Ninurta the subject of the clause, simplifying the syntax and ignoring the indirect object “you,” as in line 50 above.

8 Cf. Jacobsen, “The Ninurta Myth Lugal-e,” 239: “son of Enlil, it has gathered intelligence about you, about your august power.”

- 53 ur-sag nam-lugal-zu túm(-mu)-dè *qar-ra-du šar-ru-ut-ka a-na ta-ba-lu*
 (èn-)tar-tar-ra mu-un-gál *ši-tul-tu₄ šak-na-at*

Hero, there have been consultations with a view to taking away your kingship. O Hero, consideration was given (whether) to take away your rule.

Comment The older Sumerian recension, tar-tar-ra mu-un-gál, literally, “one instituted decisions,” implies that a definitive answer was taken regarding Ninurta’s status. The late variant, èn-tar-tar-ra mu-un-gál, literally “one posed queries,” allows for a nuanced open question. The subject of the Akkadian translation is the counsel (*šitultu*) to be taken, rather than the vague personal subject of the Sumerian text. The Akkadian translator has no difficulty with altering the syntax of the line.

However, in both Sumerian and Akkadian versions, the idea is that kingship is to be physically taken away (Sumerian *túm* // Akkadian *tabālu*) as if a material object, rather than a more abstract meaning of authority being removed or cancelled.

- 54 ^dnin-urta me-abzu-zu (var. -a) šu si- ^dMIN *par-šu-ka šá ap-si-i ana qa-ti-šú*
 si-ba giskim (i-)im-ti *mul-li-i ta-ta-ti*

Ninurta, it is confident that it can lay hands on the powers received by you in the Abzu. O Ninurta, you discovered your powers of the Apsû are to be handed over to him (the Asakku-demon).

Comment The later version of the Sumerian text irons out some difficulties. The older text reads “me abzu-zu,” “your Abzu-powers,” referring to the body of subterranean sweet waters considered to be a source of divine authority, most often associated with Enki, god of wisdom. Since Ninurta, however, has a less obvious association with the Abzu in late periods, the questionable meaning of “your” is easily resolved in the late Sumerian text by omitting the pronoun. Nevertheless, the Akkadian translation for “authority” (Sumerian “me”) is *paršu*, which usually refers to “rites” or rituals, as well as to divine authority. For an Akkadian speaker, this could mean that cultic rites associated with the Apsû (also a term for the netherworld) were being transferred from Ninurta to the demon.

The Sumerian expression /giskim-ti/ (literally “entrust”) is treated differently in the Akkadian translation, interpreting the Sumerian verb giskim im-ti as “you received a sign,” translating this expression idiomatically as “you discovered” (*tat-*

tati). This means that the subject of the Akkadian clause shifted to a direct second person address to Ninurta, which presented no problem for the translators.

Finally, the Akkadian expression for “to hand over to him” (*ana qātišu mullī*) literally means “to fill his hand” and conforms quite closely to the Sumerian *šu si-si-ba*, indicating a shared idiom between the two languages.

igi im-sìg-sìg ki-tuš im-kúr-re (var. *pa-na mu-nar-ri-iṭ šub-tu₄ ut-ta-nak-* 55
ba-ni-íb-kúr-re) *kar*

Its face is deformed, its location is He (Asakku) scowls (lit. shakes the
continually changing. face) as he changes dwellings.

á-sàg-e u₄-šú-uš-e ki-sur-ra á-ba (var. *a-sak-ku ki-sur-ra-a ana i-di-šú u₄-mi-* 56
-bé) mi-ni-íb (var.-íb)-ku₄-ku₄ *šam ut-ta-na-ar*

Day by day, the Asag adds territories Each day Asakku turns the boundary
to its domain.” to (be under) his control.

Comment The Sumerian verbal root /ku₄(-r)/ normally means “to enter,” which was conveniently interpreted by the Akkadian translators as a homonym /gur/ “to turn,” in order to make better sense of the clause. This is a common scholastic practice in late periods.

gi^{is}rab dingir-re-e-ne na(-an)-dur₂-en *rap-pi ilī(DINGIR.MEŠ) la áš-bat* 57
(var.-ru)

But you will force it into the shackles (But) there’s no neck stock for gods!
of the gods.

Comment The same translation for Sumerian *dúr* (Akkadian *ašbu*) is used here as in l. 51 above, with the basic meaning of “to dwell” used idiomatically for “be present.” The Sumerian, however, is more complicated, using a second person verbal form, “you do not allow (s.t.) to be present.” The difference between the translations is based on the polysemy of the cuneiform writing system: the sign KU can either be normalized as /dab₅/, “to seize, grasp,” or /dúr/, “to sit, dwell, be present.” ETCSL reads /dab₅/, while the late version reads /dúr/.⁹ One puzzle is that Akkadian *rappu* “neck stock” is a masculine noun, incongruent with a feminine verbal form *ašbat*.

⁹ It is evident that the late version reads /dúr/, not only indicated by the Akkadian translation

58 dá-ra-an-na kur umbin-bi ba-an-si-si-ke ta-ra-ah ^da-nim šá šá-da-a i-na šu-up-ri-šú i-sap-pa-nu

You, Antelope of Heaven, must trample the Mountains beneath your hooves,

An ibex of Anu (god of heavens) who tramples the mountain under his hooves

59 ^dnin-urta en dumu ^den-líl-lá-ke₄ a-na(-àm) zi-ga mu-un-gi ^dMIN be-lu ma-rù ^dMIN mi-na tu-uš-ha-ra-ar

Ninurta, Lord, son of Enlil. Who has so far been able to resist its assault?

is Lord Ninurta, son of Enlil. Why are you dazed (with fear)?

Comment Although both translations are possible, the late version (and Akkadian translation) recognizes a homonym (si-ga for zi-ga meaning “silent”), which is behind the translation accusing the god Ninurta of being dazed by fear (*tušhar-rar*; lit., “you are silent”). This not only subtly changes the basic meaning but also the syntax, by having Ninurta as the subject of both clauses. Without the Akkadian translation, it would not be possible to anticipate this interpretation of the Sumerian verse.

60 á-sàg zi-ga-bi šu la-ba-an-gi dugud-da-bi im-gu-ul a-sak-ku ti-bu-su ul im-mah-har ka-ab-ta-su ma-’a-dat

The besetting Asag is beyond all control, its weight is too heavy.

Cannot the Asakku’s rise be opposed, is his weight so excessive?

61 ugnim-bi-ta ka íb-ta(-an)-tùm érin-bi(-šè) igi la-ba-ab-te-gá um-ma-ni pi it-ta-nap-pal a-na ša-bi-šú i-nu ul [i-teh-hi]

Rumors of its armies constantly arrive, before ever its soldiers are seen.

Of (the demon’s) army, it is always reported that no eye can [approach] its soldiers,

but also because the late scribes employed a phonetic complement, writing ku-ru for dúr-ru. Jacobsen translated it as “may you not sit (idly by)!” Jacobsen, “The Ninurta Myth Lugal-e,” 239.

- 138 en mè mah-a la-ba-e-du-un (var. gen-na) (gìri) na-ab-ul₄-en gìri-zu ki-a si-bí-ib *be-li a-na ta-ha-zi ši-ri a-lik la tuš-teb-bir še-ep-ka ina eršeti(κI-ti) ki-i-ni*

Lord, do not go to such a great battle as this! Do not rush; fix your feet on the ground My lord going to a mighty battle: do not rush (but) fix your foot on the ground.¹²

Comment The late Sumerian recension unabashedly omits the confusing first clause, “you will not be going!” (la-ba-e-du-un); this is not a negative imperative but a declarative sentence. The late versions avoid the difficulty by replacing the phrase with a simple participle, Sumerian /gen-na/ = Akkadian *ālik*, “going.” Another interesting variant is the late reading g_ìri -ul₄, literally, “to hasten the foot”; the Akkadian translation employs the verb *šutēberu* (< *ebēru*), “to pass back and forth,” referring to moving (the feet) in a walking gait.

- 139 ^dnin-urta á-sàg-e kur-ra g_ìri mu-e-šì-ni-gub-gub (var. mu-e-šì-íb-gub) ^dMIN a-sak-ku ina šad_ì(κUR-i) ú-qa-a-ka

Ninurta, the Asag is waiting for you in the mountains Ninurta, the Asakku-demon awaits you in the mountains.

- 140 ur-sag men-na gal sig₇-ga-na *qar-ra-du šá ina a-gi-i ra-bi-iš ba-nu-u*

Hero who is so handsome in his crown the hero who looks great in a crown,

- 141 dumu-sag ^dnin-lil-le hi-li-a nu-til-e *mar₅ ^den-líl šá ku-zu-ub-šú la qa-tu-u*

firstborn son whom Ninlil has decorated with numberless charms the son of Enlil whose charm never ends.

Comment Later versions of this line refer to the god Ninurta as son of Enlil rather than the older (and surprising) statement that his mother Ninlil was responsible for his sexual prowess.

12 Jacobsen translates, “Lord, go not into battle, be not hasty, keep the feet on the ground!” See Jacobsen, “The Ninurta Myth Lugal-e,” 243.

en-zi en-ra nun-e (ù-)tu-ud-da *be-lu kun-nu-ú šá ana be-lu ru-ba-tu₄ ul-du-šú* 142

good lord, whom a princess bore to
an en priest the cherished lord whom a princess
bore to a lord,

Comment Sumerian /en/ has the meanings of both “lord” (Akkadian *bēlu*) and “priest” (Akkadian *enu*), and it can be difficult to distinguish between the two offices. The Akkadian translation assumes the same meaning for both instances of /en/.

ur-sag ^dsuen-na-gin₇ si mú-mú *qar-ra-du šá ki-ma ^dsin qar-ni ba-nu-u* 143

hero who wears horns like the moon the hero who grows horns like the
moon(-god),

lugal kalam-ma-ra ti-la u₄-sù-ud-da *šar-ri ma-a-ti ba-laṭ u₄-me ru-qu-tu* 144

who is long life for the king of the
Land the long-lived king of the land,

Comment The Akkadian translation of the epithet “long-lived” (*balāṭ umē rūqūti*) adheres closely to the Sumerian “life(time) of a distant day” (ti-la u₄-sù-ud-da).

usu mah an-na-ra an bad-rá (var. bad-
bad-da) *e-mu-qan ši-ra-a-ti šá ^da-nim pe-tu-ú* 145
šamê(AN-e)

who opens the sky by great sublime
strength, the sublime strength of Anu (god of
heaven) opening the skies,

Comment The Akkadian simplifies the syntax by having “sublime strength” as the subject, which is unclear in the Sumerian.¹³

a-ur₄-ra-ka peš₁₀ ì-ur₄-ra (var. ì-ur₄-
ur₄) *bu-tuq-ti mu-ha-am-mi-mat kib-ri* 146

inundation who engulfs the banks ... the inundation which brings the
riverbanks together,

13 The complexity of the Sumerian can be seen in Jacobsen, “The Ninurta Myth Lugal-e,” 243: “who has it in him to open up for some out of heaven’s august powers.”

Comment Sumerian /a-ur₄-ra-ka/, corresponding to Akkadian *butuqtu*, is not the usual expression for “flood,” but normally refers to a type of stone (a-ur₄-a). ETCSL assumes that the flood is an epithet for the god Ninurta, but this interpretation ignores grammatical difficulties. In the Akkadian translation, the flood (as subject) “unites” (and obscures) the riverbanks.

147 ^dnin-urta en ní-huš ri-a kur-ra sag ^dMIN *be-lu šá pu-luh-tú [ez-ze-tu ra]-*
sum-mu *mu-ú šadī(KUR-i) la i-hi-iš-ši-šú*

Ninurta, lord, full of fearsomeness,
who will hurry towards the Moun-
tains.

Lord Ninurta, invested with fear-
someness, whom the east wind does
not rush towards.

Comment Since it is unlikely that mountains (*šadū*) would rush towards the god, we opt for the homonym *šadū*, “east wind” (Sumerian /(*im*-)kur-ra/), as the subject of the clause.

*Excerpt III: Lugalē, Lines 175–181 from BM 48053 Reverse*¹⁴

Context This section of the myth is describing the Asakku-demon’s fierce attack against the god Ninurta.¹⁵

175 muš-sag-kal-gin₇ kalam-ma šeg₁₀ bí- *ki-ma šar-ša-ri ina ma-a-tu₄ iš-gu-um*
in-gi₄

like a gigantic snake, it roared at the
Land

It (the Asakku-demon) made noise
like a *locust* in the land,

Comment The usual translation for Akkadian *šaršaru* (*šāšīru*) is a “locust” or similar noisy insect, used here to translate Sumerian /muš-sag-kal/, usually thought to be a type of snake.¹⁶ Likewise, although Akkadian *šagāmu* can mean “to roar,” it can also refer to an appropriate sound made by an animal. This suggests that

14 Mirelman, “A New Manuscript of *Lugal-e* Tablet IV,” 159–160.

15 See Jacobsen, “The Ninurta Myth Lugal-e,” 245.

16 The usual understanding of Sumerian /sag-kal/ is “foremost” (corresponding to Akkadian *ašarēdu*), but since a sag-kal stone is mentioned elsewhere in the Lugalē myth, it may be that this snake is named after a type of stone. The verse translation of Jacobsen attempts to reconcile these questions: “like a formidable serpent it hissed from among its people.” Jacobsen, “The Ninurta Myth Lugal-e,” 245. One lexical text listing different types of snakes gives a /muš-sag-kal/ corresponding to Akkadian *šaršarru*, but this does not rule out a

the ancient and modern translators may have had very different images in mind for this verse, with the Akkadian translation imagining the threatening sounds made by a destructive attack of locusts on the landscape.

kur-ra mi-ni-ib-lah ^{giš}sinig mi-ni-ib-ur *ina šadî (KUR-i) me-e ub-bil-ma bi-i-
na im-šu-ur*¹⁷ 176

It dried up the waters of the moun- it dried up the water on the moun-
tains, dragged away the tamarisks, tain and dragged away the tamarisk.

ki-a su(-bi) bí-ib-dar sim_x(GIG)-ma *er-se-tum zu-mur-šú il-le-ti-ma sim-
(var. sim_x gig-ga) bí-ib(var. in)-gar* 177

tore the flesh of the Earth and cover- On the earth its body was split open
ed her with painful wounds. and it (the Asakku-demon) brought
about severe lesions.¹⁸

Comment This late Akkadian version makes a clear distinction between the first clause, with its verb in the passive (*illeti*), “was split,” corresponding to an impersonal Sumerian verb (*bí-ib-dar*), and an active verb *iškun* “he (the demon) established,” corresponding to a personal Sumerian verb *bí-in-gar*. Sumerian /*ki-a*/ is a locative, “on the earth,” which could also be applied to Akk *eršetum* as a locative form. The meaning would be that the lesions originated in the Asakku’s own body while on earth, infecting mankind.

giš-gi izi ba-ab-sum an-e múd-a bí-ib- *ana a-pi i-šá-a-tú id-di-ma šamê(AN-
tu₅* *e) da-mu ur-tam-mi-ik* 178

It set fire to the reedbeds, bathed the It (the demon) set fire to the
sky in blood, reedbeds, bathed the sky in blood.

Comment The Akkadian translation provides a highly literal translation of the Sumerian, since in both versions, fire is “put” (Sumerian /*sum*/ = Akkadian *iddi*) onto the reeds and the sky is “bathed” in blood.

cricket or locust in the present context, since snakes are not known for making any noise other than hissing.

17 For the reading, see Geller, “Notes on Lugale,” 217–218.

18 Cf. Jacobsen, “The Ninurta Myth Lugal-e,” 245: “it gashed the earth’s body, made painful wounds.”

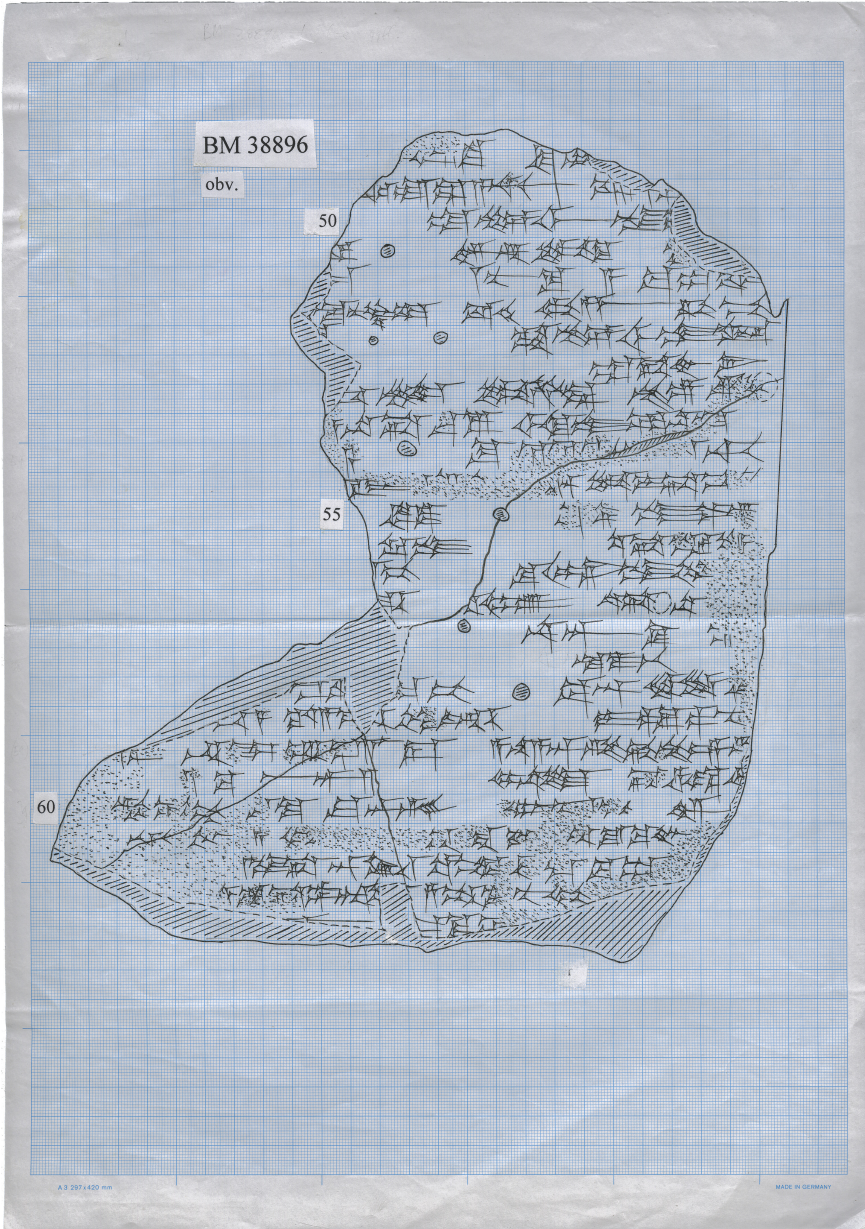


FIGURE 4.2.1 BM 38896 obverse
COPY BY MARKHAM J. GELLER

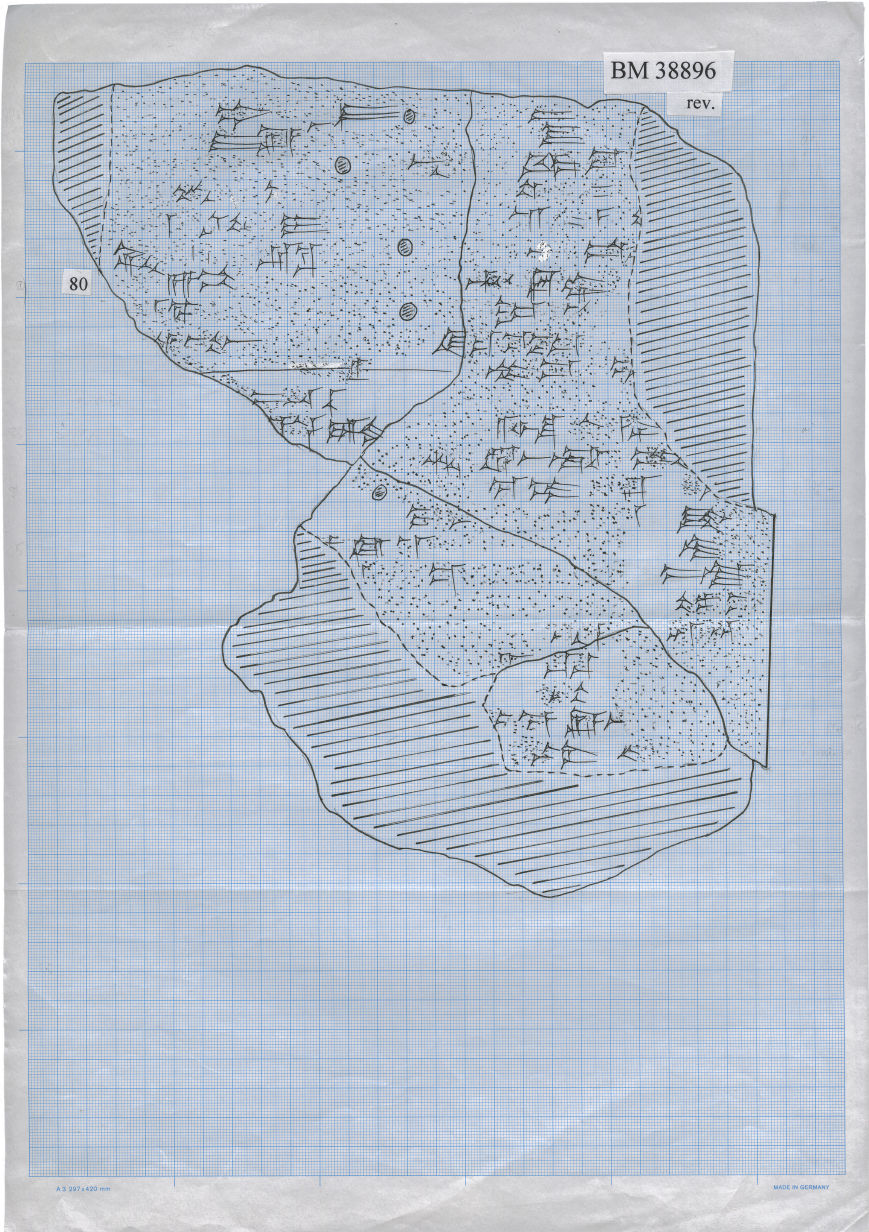


FIGURE 4.2.2 BM 38896 reverse
COPY BY MARKHAM J. GELLER

- 179 šà-ge-ti(var. túm) ba-ab-bal (var. ì-bal-bal) un-bé (var. kalam-ma) ság ba-ab-du₁₁ *qer-bé-e-tú uš-bal-kit-ma ma-a-ta šu-a-ta is-pu-un*

turned it inside out; it dispersed the people there

it (the demon) transformed the pastures and levelled that landscape,

Comment The late Sumerian version takes a different view of this line, based on the ambiguity of “flattening” (< *sapānu*) the inhabitants, but since the cuneiform sign for “people” (/un/) and “land” (/kalam/) is the same, it was easy to reinterpret the meaning accordingly.

- 180 i-ne-éš u₄-da a-ša-ga ùh gi₆ *i-na-an-na u₄-mu e-qel id-ra-ni šal-mu*

At that moment, on that day, the fields became black scum

now, on the day, (land was) a field of black potash,

Comment The translation has altered the basic meaning of the Sumerian term /ùh/, literally “louse” or alternatively “spittle,” often referring metaphorically to sulfur found by river banks. The usual Sumerian equivalent to Akkadian *idrānu* is /nimur/, which is not found here. The term *idrānu* can refer to the salinity of the soil which hinders agriculture and is a highly interpretative translation for Sumerian /ùh/.

- 181 me-da(var. dè) úr(-ra) an-na (síg)-hé-me-da-gin₇ sú-a(var. sa₅)-šè ur₅ hé-en-na-nam-ma-àm(var. me) *ma-ti-ma i-šid šamê(AN-e) ki-ma na-ba-si ša-rip ši-i lu-ú ki-a-am*

across the whole extent of the horizon, reddish like purple dye—truly it was so.

(and) the horizon was always like red-dyed wool; it was actually so!

Conclusion

The extracts from the myth known as Lugale taken from two bilingual sources from the British Museum’s Babylonian Collection are useful test cases for indicating how scholar-scribes from around 500 BCE managed to translate and interpret a myth known from sources dating to ca. 1800 BCE. It would be incorrect to assume that classical Sumerian was no longer correctly understood or

could no longer be translated idiomatically by the first millennium BCE. On the other hand, it appears that scholar-scribes were free to emend and interpret the text being copied and translated, usually attempting to iron out difficulties and ambiguities in the older text in favor of a more lucid meaning and less complicated syntax, with an impressive degree of sophistication. While modern scholars grapple with the complexities of translating an ancient literature without the help of close cognate languages, one could do worse than consult how Sumerian was interpreted and understood in ancient Babylonian schools. Moreover, like modern translators who often remain unnoticed and unappreciated, the Babylonian savants responsible for these impressive translations of Sumerian should be regarded as the unsung heroes of ancient scholarship.

Abbreviations and Symbols

Akk.	Akkadian
BM	British Museum
ETCSL	Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature
<	etymological derivation

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The Earliest and Most Complete Story of the Translation of the Pentateuch into Greek (2nd Century BCE)

The Letter of Aristeas

Benjamin G. Wright III

Somewhere in the third century BCE, a group of unknown Jews, presumably in Alexandria, Egypt, translated the Hebrew Pentateuch into Greek. These translations, known as the Septuagint or Translation of the Seventy (LXX), became the foundational scriptural corpus for many, if not most, Greek-speaking Jews in the Hellenistic period. Eventually all of the books that would become the Hebrew Bible were translated and included in the scriptural corpus of Jews and early Christians along with others, such as the Wisdom of Solomon or 4 Maccabees, that were composed in Greek (LXX/OG). In the latter part of the second century BCE, an anonymous Alexandrian Jew composed a narrative that relates the fullest version of the story of the translation of the Hebrew Pentateuch into Greek, which formed the basis for almost all subsequent retellings in both Jewish and Christian sources. The text purports to be the work of a certain “Aristeas,” a Gentile courtier in the court of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (r. 283–46 BCE), addressed to his “brother” Philocrates. In it he narrates his deputation at the behest of the king to the Jewish priest Eleazar in Jerusalem to fetch authoritative scrolls of the Jewish law and scholars equipped to make the translation, and upon their arrival in Alexandria, the subsequent carrying out of the translation.

The reason for the translation and its execution frame the narrative, and in between, the author, often conveniently called Ps.-Aristeas (pseudo-Aristeas), inserts a series of scenes that are undergirded by the story of the Exodus. After an introductory preface, Ps.-Aristeas relates that Ptolemy wanted to collect all the books in the world for the Alexandrian Library. Since the Jewish law was missing and needed to be translated, Ptolemy determines to undertake the project. Aristeas observes that it would not be politic to send for translators while many Jews are enslaved in Egypt, and he convinces Ptolemy to free them. Ptolemy writes to Eleazar informing him of this mass manumission and requests translators to come to Alexandria. Eleazar replies and accedes

to Ptolemy's request. Before Aristeas leaves, however, Ptolemy requisitions a grand table and bowls to be sent as gifts to Eleazar for ministering in the Temple. Aristeas and several others form a delegation to Eleazar, and Aristeas provides a long travelogue that describes, among other things, Jerusalem and its environs, the Temple, and its priestly ministrations. Eleazar bids farewell to the translators and then offers an extended, largely allegorical, *apologia* for Jewish law. When the translators arrive in Alexandria, Ptolemy makes accommodations for them and hosts seven banquets at which he questions each of the seventy-two translators (six from each tribe) individually. The translators excel in their answers. Finally, the translators do their work, which makes up only a brief few paragraphs. Upon completion of the translation, Demetrius reads it to the gathered Jewish community who approve of it with great fanfare, and he presents it to the king. At the end, Ptolemy sends the translators back to Jerusalem with gifts.

We know nothing about the Jewish author of this work, but it is evident that he had a decent Greek education. He incorporates several Hellenistic literary genres: for example, the travel narrative and the *diêgêsis*. He employs the LXX as well as Greek sources, such as Aristotle's *Politics* Book VII and the so-called *peri-basileus* literature. He utilizes a number of rhetorical forms, like *ekphrasis*, *synkrisis*, *chreiai*, and *ethopoeia*, and literary devices, such as *paraphrasis*, *homoiooteuton*, *litotes*, and *asyndeton*. He is also familiar with official Ptolemaic bureaucratic practices, and he adapts authentic Ptolemaic decrees (*prostagmata*).

Ps.-Aristeas's narrative provides no evidence that he knew Hebrew, and the likelihood is that he was a native Greek speaker. He does bear witness to plurilingualism in Hellenistic Alexandria, however. Most obviously, he knows that the LXX was translated from a Semitic language, although his terminology for Hebrew as a language can be vague. In addition, his terms for translation range from Greek verbs that usually mean "translate" to those that connote "transcribe" or "interpret." More to the point, however, are the translators themselves. Ps.-Aristeas constructs these men as being experts both in Hebrew and in Greek. They know Jewish literature, and thus, they have the requisite skills to understand the Hebrew text they are to translate. They have also studied Greek literature, and so they are qualified to render their parent text into good Greek. In their answers to the questions posed in the symposia, they are more accomplished than the king's philosophers, and the king greets every answer with approbation. We have in these men the consummate translators. Even if Ps.-Aristeas's translators represent an idealization, the fact that the translations were made in Alexandria testifies to knowledge of Hebrew in the great Hellenistic city at least on the part of some educated scholars.

The *Letter of Aristeas* (henceforth: *Aristeas*) presents a picture of the LXX at odds with the character of the actual translations, however. In the narrative, the king inaugurates the project to fill out the collection of the Alexandrian Library. The translations, then, seem intended primarily for a Greek audience and would replace the Hebrew originals. When the Jewish community accepts the translations as scripture, they supplant the Hebrew for the Jews as well. Even more, *Aristeas* gives the impression that the translated Jewish law would fit comfortably within a Greek literary environment as Greek literary texts. Yet, when one looks to the translations themselves, although their Greek could generally be characterized as comporting within the *koine* of the period, they frequently exhibit unidiomatic Greek due to the translators' method of close translation and to interference, both positive and negative, from the Hebrew source text. This disparity suggests that the function of the LXX, when it was produced in the third century BCE, differed from its function at the time of composition of *Aristeas* in the second. As one of its purposes, *Aristeas* constructs a myth of origins for the translation that accounts for its function as a scriptural corpus within Alexandrian Judaism in the latter part of the second century BCE.

Greek Text

Excerpted from André Pelletier, ed., *Lettre d'Aristée a Philocrate* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1962).

Excerpt I: [The Library Project]

- 9 Κατασταθείς ἐπὶ τῆς τοῦ βασιλέως βιβλιοθήκης Δημήτριος ὁ Φαληρεὺς ἐχρηματίσθη πολλά διάφορα πρὸς τὸ συναγαγεῖν, εἰ δυνατόν, ἅπαντα τὰ κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην βιβλία· καὶ ποιούμενος ἀγορασμοὺς καὶ μεταγραφὰς ἐπὶ τέλος ἤγαγεν, ὅσον ἐφ' ἑαυτῷ τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως πρόθεσιν. 10 παρόντων οὖν ἡμῶν ἐρωτηθεὶς· Πόσαι τινὲς μυριάδες τυγχάνουσι βιβλίων; εἶπεν Ὑπὲρ τὰς εἴκοσι, βασιλεῦ· σπουδάσω δ' ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ πρὸς τὸ πληρωθῆναι πεντήκοντα μυριάδας τὰ λοιπά. προσήγγεται δέ μοι καὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων νόμιμα μεταγραφῆς ἄξια καὶ τῆς παρὰ σοὶ βιβλιοθήκης εἶναι. 11 Τί τὸ κωλύον οὖν, εἶπεν, ἐστὶ σε τοῦτο ποιῆσαι; πάντα γὰρ ὑποτέτακται σοὶ τὰ πρὸς τὴν χρεῖαν. ὁ δὲ Δημήτριος εἶπεν Ἑρμηνείας προσδεῖται· χαρακτηρῶσι γὰρ ἰδίους κατὰ τὴν Ἰουδαίαν χρῶνται, καθάπερ Αἰγύπτιοι τῆ τῶν γραμμάτων θέσει, καθὸ καὶ φωνῆν ἰδίαν ἔχουσιν. ὑπολαμβάνονται Συριακῆ χρῆσθαι· τὸ δ' οὐκ ἔστιν, ἀλλ' ἕτερος τρόπος. Μεταλαβὼν δὲ ἕκαστα ὁ βασιλεὺς εἶπε γραφῆναι πρὸς τὸν ἀρχιερέα τῶν Ἰουδαίων, ὅπως τὰ προειρημένα τελείωσιν λάβῃ.

Excerpt II: [Demetrius's Report]

- 28 Ὡς δὲ κατεπράχθη ταῦτα, τὸν Δημήτριον ἐκέλευσεν εἰσδοῦναι περὶ τῆς τῶν Ἰουδαϊκῶν βιβλίων ἀναγραφῆς. πάντα γὰρ διὰ προσταγμάτων καὶ μεγάλης ἀσφαλείας τοῖς βασιλεῦσι τούτοις διωκεῖτο, καὶ οὐδὲν ἀπερριμμένως οὐδ' εἰκῆ. διόπερ καὶ τὸ τῆς εἰσδόσεως καὶ τὰ τῶν ἐπιστολῶν ἀντίγραφα κατακεχώρικα, καὶ τὸ τῶν ἀπεσταλλένων πλῆθος καὶ τὴν ἐκάστου κατασκευὴν, διὰ τὸ μεγαλομερεῖα καὶ τέχνη διαφέρειν ἕκαστον αὐτῶν. τῆς δὲ εἰσδόσεως ἐστὶν ἀντίγραφον τόδε· 29 Βασιλεῖ μεγάλῳ παρὰ Δημητρίου. προστάξαντός σου, βασιλεῦ, περὶ τῶν ἀπολειπόντων εἰς τὴν συμπλήρωσιν τῆς βιβλιοθήκης βιβλίων, ὅπως ἐπισυναχθῆ, καὶ τὰ διαπεπτωκότα τύχη

1 Demetrius was exiled from Athens in about 307 BCE. He ended up in Alexandria where he served under Ptolemy I. Most scholars think that Ptolemy II Philadelphus banished him. Although Demetrius likely helped found the Mouseion and Library, his service to Ptolemy II is unlikely.

2 Demetrius refers here to copying texts, presumably in Greek.

3 The Greek term can refer to translation or interpretation. Here it means translation.

4 The Greek *Syriaké* is rare, and indicates Aramaic.

5 This section is somewhat obscure. Egyptians and Jews have their own languages and styles of writing, hence the need for translation. While many think Jews use Syrian characters, they do not. Is Ps.-Aristeas perhaps aware that Jews used what we call Paleo-Hebrew letters?

English Translation

Excerpted from Benjamin G. Wright III, *The Letter of Aristeas: "Aristeas to Philocrates" or "On the Translation of the Law of the Jews"* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015).

Excerpt I: [The Library Project]

After he had been appointed over the king's library, Demetrius of Phalerum¹ 9
was furnished with much money in order to collect, if possible, all the books
in the world, and making purchases and transcriptions [*metagraphas*],² he
brought to completion, as much as he could, the king's plan. 10. Thus, while
we were present, he was asked, "How many thousands of books have been
obtained?" He said, "More than two-hundred thousand, O King; I will hasten
in a short time to fulfill the remainder of five hundred thousand. But it also
has been reported to me that the laws of the Jews are worthy of transcription
[*metagraphês*] and of inclusion in your library." 11. "What is there, therefore,
to prevent you from doing this?" he said. "For everything that you need has
been provided to you." But Demetrius said, "Translation [*hermeneias*]³ is still
required; for in Judea they use their own characters [*charaktêrsi*], just as the
Egyptians use their own arrangement of letters [*têi tôn grammatôn thesei*], inas-
much as they also have their own language [*phônên*]. The Judeans are supposed
to use Syrian.⁴ This is not so, but they use another style [*tropos*]."⁵ After being
informed of these things, the king proposed to write to the high priest of the
Judeans so that Demetrius might bring to completion the aforementioned mat-
ters.

Excerpt II: [Demetrius's Report]

Now when these matters had been accomplished, he commanded Demetrius 28
to make a report on the copying [*antigraphês*] of the Jewish books [*bibliôn*].⁶
For these kings used to administer everything through edicts and with great
caution, and nothing was done negligently or without purpose. Therefore, I
have also placed in the record a copy of the report and copies of the letters,
and the quantity of the objects sent and the condition of each, because each of
them excelled in magnificence and artistry. Herewith is a copy of the report. 29.
"To the Great King⁷ from Demetrius. As you commanded, O King, concerning
the books that are wanting for the completion of the library, how they are to be

6 Here Ps.-Aristeas recognizes that more than one text is at issue, likely referring to the Penta-
teuch.

7 I.e., Ptolemy II Philadelphus.

τῆς προσηκούσης ἐπισκευῆς, πεπονημένος οὐ παρέργως τὴν ἐν τούτοις ἐπιμέλειαν, προσαναφέρω σοι τάδε. 30 τοῦ νόμου τῶν Ἰουδαίων βιβλία σὺν ἑτέροις ὀλίγοις τισὶν ἀπολείπει· τυγχάνει γὰρ Ἑβραϊκοὶς γράμμασι καὶ φωνῇ λεγόμενα, ἀμελέστερον δέ, καὶ οὐχ ὡς ὑπάρχει, σεσήμανται, καθὼς ὑπὸ τῶν εἰδῶτων προσαναφέρεται· προνοίας γὰρ βασιλικῆς οὐ τέτευχε. 31 δέον δέ ἐστι καὶ ταῦθ' ὑπάρχειν παρὰ σοι διηκριβωμένα, διὰ τὸ καὶ φιλοσοφώτεράν εἶναι καὶ ἀκέραιον τὴν νομοθεσίαν ταύτην, ὡς ἂν οὖσαν θείαν. διὸ πόρρω γεγόνασιν οἱ τε συγγραφεῖς καὶ ποιηταὶ καὶ τὸ τῶν ἱστορικῶν πλῆθος τῆς ἐπιμνήσεως τῶν προειρημένων βιβλίων, καὶ τῶν κατ' αὐτὰ πεπολιτευμένων [καὶ πολιτευομένων] ἀνδρῶν, διὰ τὸ ἀγνήν τινα καὶ σεμνήν εἶναι τὴν ἐν αὐτοῖς θεωρίαν, ὡς φησὶν Ἑκαταῖος ὁ Ἀβδηρίτης. 32 ἐὰν οὖν φαίνηται, βασιλεῦ, γραφήσεται πρὸς τὸν ἀρχιερέα τὸν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις, ἀποστείλαι τοὺς μάλιστα καλῶς βεβιωκότας καὶ πρεσβυτέρους ὄντας ἀνδρας, ἐμπείρους τῶν κατὰ τὸν νόμον τὸν ἑαυτῶν, ἀφ' ἑκάστης φυλῆς ἕξ, ὅπως τὸ σύμφωνον ἐκ τῶν πλειόνων ἐξετάσαντες καὶ λαβόντες τὸ κατὰ τὴν ἔρμηνειαν ἀκριβές, ἀξίως καὶ τῶν πραγμάτων καὶ τῆς σῆς προαιρέσεως, θῶμεν εὐσήμως. εὐτύχει διὰ παντός.

Excerpt III: [Eleazar's Farewell to the Translators]

121 ἐπιλέξας γὰρ τοὺς ἀρίστους ἀνδρας καὶ παιδείᾳ διαφέροντας, ἅτε δὴ γονέων τετευχότας ἐνδόξων, οἵτινες οὐ μόνον τὴν τῶν Ἰουδαϊκῶν γραμμάτων ἕξιν περιεποίησαν αὐτοῖς, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν ἐφρόντισαν οὐ παρέργως κατασκευῆς 122 διὸ καὶ πρὸς τὰς πρεσβείας εὐθετοὶ καθεστήκεισαν, καὶ τοῦτ' ἐπετέλουν ὅτε δέοι, καὶ πρὸς τὰς ὁμιλίας καὶ τὰς ἐπερωτήσεις τὰς διὰ τοῦ νόμου μεγάλην εὐφυΐαν εἶχον, τὸ μέσον ἐζηλωκότες κατάστημα—τοῦτο γὰρ ἀλλιστόν ἐστιν—, ἀποτεθειμένοι τὸ τραχὺ καὶ βάρβαρον τῆς διανοίας, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τὸ κατοίεσθαι καὶ νομίζειν ὑπερφρονεῖν ἑτέρους ὑπερβεβηκότες, τὴν δ' ὁμιλίαν καὶ τὸ συνακοῦειν καὶ πρὸς ἕκαστον ἀποκρίνεσθαι δεόντως παραδεδεγμένοι, καὶ πάντες ταῦτα συντηροῦντες καὶ μᾶλλον ἐν τούτοις βουλόμενοι ὑπερφέρειν ἕτερος ἑτέρου, καὶ τοῦ καθηγουμένου πάντες ἄξιοι καὶ τῆς περὶ αὐτὸν ἀρετῆς.

8 That is, they have not had proper supervised curation. Later authoritative scrolls will come from Jerusalem.

9 Ps.-Aristeas now distinguishes the language of the Judeans from Syrian in both manner of writing and spoken language.

10 This Greek verb has generated much discussion. Some have rendered it as “translated,” referring to previous translations. In the context it more easily refers to Hebrew manuscripts and should be translated as “written” or “copied.”

11 Likely meaning Jewish scholars, who presumably knew Hebrew and could evaluate the accuracy of the manuscripts.

12 Here referring to properly curated Hebrew manuscripts. An authoritative translation requires exact or accurate originals.

13 A third-century BCE writer whose *Aegyptiaca* is preserved in fragments through Diodorus Siculus. Josephus knows two works that he attributes to Hecataeus. Many scholars reject the authenticity of these two works and refer to them as Pseudo-Hecataeus.

collected, and those that have by chance fallen away from proper repair,⁸ paying more than incidental attention to these matters, I submit a report to you here. 30. The books of the law of the Judeans along with a few others are wanting. For it happens that they are expressed in Hebrew letters and language [*hebraïkois grammasi kai phônêi*],⁹ but they have been written rather carelessly [*sesêmantai*]¹⁰ and not as is proper, just as it has been reported by the experts.¹¹ For they have not attained royal curation. 31. Now it is necessary that these books, having been made exact [*diêkribômena*],¹² be with you, because this legislation is both very philosophical and uncorrupted, inasmuch as it is divine. Therefore, both writers and poets, as well as the mass of historians, have avoided a mention of the aforesaid books and of the men who have been governed and those that are being governed by them, because what is beheld in them has a certain holiness and sanctity, as Hecataeus of Abdera¹³ says. 32. If, therefore, O King, it seems good, it shall be written to the high priest in Jerusalem to send men who have lived exceedingly good lives and are eminent, skilled in matters pertaining to their own law, six from each tribe, so that after examining the agreement of the majority and obtaining exactitude in the translation, we may place it conspicuously, worthy of the affairs of state and of your purpose. Farewell always.”

Excerpt III: [Eleazar’s Farewell to the Translators]

Thus, Eleazar selected excellent men who excelled in education [*paideiai*],¹⁴ inasmuch as indeed they were the product of parents of high distinction. These had not only acquired skill in the literature [*grammatôn*]¹⁵ of the Judeans, but also, not incidentally, they had given heed to preparation in Greek literature. 122. Therefore they were well suited to be appointed to embassies, and they discharged them whenever it became necessary. They possessed a great natural disposition for conversations and questions about the Law, being zealous for the middle way¹⁶—for this is the best state—and avoiding coarse and rude thought. And similarly, they rose above being conceited and believing that they could despise others, but they engaged in conversation both listening and answering each question appropriately. They all observed these matters strictly, and they even desired to surpass each other in them. All were worthy of their leader and the virtue that he possessed.

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14 The Greek term indicates the educational system, which inculcated specific cultural values that characterized citizens of Greek cities.

15 Along with letters or alphabetic characters, the plural can mean a piece of writing or even documents, which suits the context here.

16 A reference to the Aristotelian idea as expressed in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. The translators are constructed as philosophers. Later they excel the king’s philosophers during the seven banquets.

Excerpt iv: [The Execution of the Translation]

301 Μετὰ δὲ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ὁ Δημήτριος παραλαβὼν αὐτοῦς, καὶ διελθὼν τὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ σταδίων ἀνάχωμα τῆς θαλάσσης πρὸς τὴν νῆσον, καὶ διαβάς τὴν γέφυραν, καὶ προσελθὼν ὡς ἐπὶ τὰ βόρεια μέρη, συνέδριον ποιησάμενος εἰς κατεσκευασμένον οἶκον παρὰ τὴν ἡίονα, διαπρεπῶς ἔχοντα καὶ πολλῆς ἡσυχίας ἔφεδρον, παρεκάλει τοὺς ἄνδρας τὰ τῆς ἔρμηνείας ἐπιτελεῖν, παρόντων ὅσα πρὸς τὴν χρεῖαν ἔδει καλῶς. 302 οἱ δὲ ἐπετέλουν ἕκαστα σύμφωνα ποιοῦντες πρὸς ἑαυτοῦς ταῖς ἀντιβολαῖς· τὸ δὲ ἐκ τῆς συμφωνίας γινόμενον πρεπόντως ἀναγραφῆς οὕτως ἐτύγχανε παρὰ τοῦ Δημητρίου. 303 καὶ μέχρι μὲν ὥρας ἐνάτης τὰ τῆς συνεδρείας ἐγένετο· μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα περὶ τὴν τοῦ σώματος θεραπείαν ἀπελύοντο γίνεσθαι, χορηγουμένων αὐτοῖς δαιφιλῶς ὧν προηροῦντο πάντων. 304 ἐκτὸς δὲ καὶ καθ' ἡμέραν, ὅσα βασιλεῖ παρεσκευάζετο, καὶ τούτοις ὁ Δωρόθεος ἐπετέλει· προστεταγμένον γὰρ ἦν αὐτῷ διὰ τοῦ βασιλέως. ἅμα δὲ τῇ πρωτῆ παρεγίνοντο εἰς τὴν αὐλὴν καθ' ἡμέραν, καὶ ποιησάμενοι τὸν ἀσπασμὸν τοῦ βασιλέως, ἀπελύοντο πρὸς τὸν ἑαυτῶν τόπον. 305 ὡς δὲ ἔθος ἐστὶ πᾶσι τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις, ἀπονιψάμενοι τῇ θαλάσῃ τὰς χεῖρας, ὡς ἂν εὐξωνται πρὸς τὸν θεόν, ἐτρέποντο πρὸς τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν καὶ τὴν ἐκάστου διασάφησιν. 306 Ἐπηρώτησα δὲ καὶ τοῦτο Τίνος χάριν ἀπονιζόμενοι τὰς χεῖρας τὸ τῆνικαὐτα εὐχονται; διεσάφουν δέ, ὅτι μαρτύριόν ἐστι τοῦ μηδὲν εἰργάσθαι κακόν· πᾶσα γὰρ ἐνέργεια διὰ τῶν χειρῶν γίνεται· καλῶς καὶ ὁσίως μεταφέροντες ἐπὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην καὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν πάντα. 307 καθὼς δὲ προειρήκαμεν, οὕτως καθ' ἐκάστην εἰς τὸν τόπον, ἔχοντα τερπνότητα διὰ τὴν ἡσυχίαν καὶ καταύγειαν, συναγόμενοι τὸ προκειμένον ἐπετέλουν. συνέτυχε δὲ οὕτως, ὥστε ἐν ἡμέραις ἑβδομήκοντα δυοὶ τελειωθῆναι τὰ τῆς μεταγραφῆς, οἶονεὶ κατὰ πρόθεσίν τινα τοῦ τοιοῦτου γεγενημένου.

Excerpt v: [The Proclamation of the Translation]

308 Τελείωσιν δὲ ὅτε ἔλαβε, συναγαγὼν ὁ Δημήτριος τὸ πλῆθος τῶν Ἰουδαίων εἰς τὸν τόπον, οὗ καὶ τὰ τῆς ἔρμηνείας ἐτελέσθη, παρανέγνω πᾶσι, παρόντων καὶ τῶν διερμηνευσάντων, οἵτινες μεγάλης ἀποδοχῆς καὶ παρὰ τοῦ πλήθους ἔτυχον, ὡς ἂν μεγάλων ἀγαθῶν παραίτιοι γεγονότες. 309 ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ τὸν Δημήτριον ἀποδεξάμενοι παρεκάλεσαν μεταδοῦναι τοῖς ἡγουμένοις αὐτῶν, μεταγράψαντα τὸν πάντα νόμον.

17 Later tradition identifies the island as Pharos, where the famous lighthouse stood; see Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.35.

18 Unlike later versions of the legend, the translators in *Aristeas* work collaboratively and decide on a final version.

19 Dorotheus is introduced in §181 as the steward responsible for the translators' needs.

20 The Greek term is rare and means "interpretation" or "explanation." Some scholars argue that the translators' work is modeled on Homeric textual scholarship in the Museion and Library. Here, however, rather than the more usual term *exégēsis*, Ps.-Aristeas chose *diasaphēsis*.

Excerpt iv: [The Execution of the Translation]

After three days, Demetrius took them to the island,¹⁷ passing over the break-water, which was seven stadia long, and crossing the bridge, he went towards the northern sections, having made a meeting-place prepared by the beach in a house, which was magnificent and in a very quiet location. He called upon the men to complete the work of the translation [*hermeneias*], since everything that they needed had been well provided. 302. And they accomplished it, making each detail agree by comparisons [*antibolais*] with each other.¹⁸ And that which came out of the agreement Demetrius thus suitably set in writing. 303. The work of their sessions would last until the ninth hour, and afterwards they disbanded to look after the care of their bodies, everything that they preferred having been supplied plentifully for them. 304. As well, each day Dorotheus¹⁹ also supplied for them the same things that he prepared for the king. For this was the order that the king gave to him. And each day at the first hour they came into the court, and when they had made salutation to the king, they departed to their own place. 305. And as is the custom of all the Jews, when they had washed their hands in the sea in order that they might offer prayer to God, they turned to reading [*anagnôsin*] and explication [*diasaphêsin*]²⁰ of each detail. 306. And I asked them also about this, why they washed their hands at the time they offered prayer, and they explained that it is a testimony that they have done no wrong. For every action happens by the hands. So excellently and piously they refer everything to righteousness and truth.²¹ 307. So just as we have said previously, in this way each day they gathered together at this spot, which was delightful due to its quietness and brightness, in order to complete their appointed task. And thus it happened that the work of transcription [*metagraphês*] was completed in seventy-two days, appearing as if this circumstance happened according to some plan.²²

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Excerpt v: [The Proclamation of the Translation]

And when it was complete, Demetrius assembled the people of the Judeans at the place where the translation [*hermeneias*] had been executed, and read it aloud to all, since the translators were also there. These got great approbation from the multitude, since they were the cause of great good. 309. So they also approved of Demetrius and requested that he give their leaders a copy, since he had transcribed [*metagrapsanta*] the entire Law. 310. And when the rolls

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21 The translators' piety positions them to render the meaning of the sacred text.

22 This passage, in which the translation is accomplished in the same number of days as the number of translators, is the only place in *Aristeas* that even hints that God might have been involved in the enterprise.

310 καθώς δὲ ἀνεγνώσθη τὰ τεύχη, στάντες οἱ ἱερεῖς καὶ τῶν ἑρμηνέων οἱ πρεσβύτεροι καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ πολιτεύματος οἱ τε ἡγούμενοι τοῦ πλήθους εἶπον Ἐπεὶ καλῶς καὶ ὁσίως διηρμηνεύεται καὶ κατὰ πᾶν ἡκριβωμένως, καλῶς ἔχον ἔστιν, ἵνα διαμείνη ταῦθ' οὕτως ἔχοντα, καὶ μὴ γένηται μηδεμία διασκευή. 311 πάντων δ' ἐπιφωνησάντων τοῖς εἰρημένοις, ἐκέλευσαν διαράσασθαι, καθὼς ἔθος αὐτοῖς ἔστιν, εἴ τις διασκευάσει προστιθείς ἢ μεταφέρων τι τὸ σύνολον τῶν γεγραμμένων ἢ ποιούμενος ἀφαίρεσιν, καλῶς τούτο πράσσοντες, ἵνα διὰ παντὸς ἀέννα καὶ μένοντα φυλάσσηται. 312 Προσφωνηθέντων δὲ καὶ τούτων τῷ βασιλεῖ μεγάλως ἐχάρη· τὴν γὰρ πρόθεσιν, ἣν εἶχεν, ἀσφαλῶς ἔδοξε τετελειώσθαι. παρανεγνώσθη δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ πάντα, καὶ λίαν ἐξεθαύμασε τὴν τοῦ νομοθέτου διάνοιαν. καὶ πρὸς τὸν Δημήτριον εἶπε Πῶς τηλικούτων συντετελεσμένων οὐδεὶς ἐπεβάλετο τῶν ἱστορικῶν ἢ ποιητῶν ἐπιμνησθῆναι; 313 ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἔφη Διὰ τὸ σεμνὴν εἶναι τὴν νομοθεσίαν καὶ διὰ θεοῦ γεγονέναι· καὶ τῶν ἐπιβαλλομένων τινὲς ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πληγέντες τῆς ἐπιβολῆς ἀπέστησαν. 314 καὶ γὰρ ἔφησεν ἀκηκοέναι Θεοπόμπου, διότι μέλλων τινὰ τῶν προηρμηνευμένων ἐπισφαλέςτερον ἐκ τοῦ νόμου προσιστορεῖν ταραχὴν λάβοι τῆς διανοίας πλεῖον ἡμερῶν τριάκοντα· κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἄνεσιν ἐξιλάσκεσθαι τὸν θεὸν σαφὲς αὐτῷ γενέσθαι, τίνος χάριν τὸ συμβαῖνόν ἐστι. 315 δι' ὄνειρου δὲ σημανθέντος, ὅτι τὰ θεῖα βούλεται περιεργασάμενος εἰς κοινούς ἀνθρώπους ἐκφέρειν, ἀποσχόμενον δὲ οὕτως ἀποκαταστήναι. 316 καὶ παρὰ Θεοδέκτου δὲ τοῦ τῶν τραγωδιῶν ποιητοῦ μετέλαβον ἐγώ, διότι παραφέρειν μέλλοντός τι τῶν ἀναγεγραμμένων ἐν τῇ βίβλῳ πρὸς τι δρᾶμα τὰς ὄψεις ἀπεγλαυκώθη· καὶ λαβὼν ὑπόνοιαν ὅτι διὰ τοῦτ' αὐτῷ τὸ σύμπτωμα γέγονεν, ἐξιλασάμενος τὸν θεὸν ἐν πολλαῖς ἡμέραις ἀποκατέστη.

23 The Greek term has a range of meanings from an ethnic political organization to a voluntary association. How to render it into English is difficult in this case. This passage is the only witness to a *politeuma* in Alexandria. Other cities did have Jewish *politeumata*, such as the one evidenced in the papyri from Heracleopolis. Not every Jew necessarily would have belonged to the *politeuma*.

[*ta teuchê*] were read, the priests and the elders of the translators and some from the *politeuma*²³ and the leaders of the people stood and said, "Since the exposition has been made [*diêrmêneutai*] well, piously and accurately in every respect, it is good that it remain just as it is and there be no revision at all."²⁴ 311. And then all assented to what had been said. They ordered that there be a curse, just as is their custom, upon anyone who might revise by adding or changing anything at all of what had been written or by making a deletion [*aphairesin*].²⁵ They did this well so that it would always be preserved everlastingly and permanently. 312. And when these matters were announced to the king, he rejoiced greatly. For he supposed that his plan had been securely completed. And everything was also read to him, and he marveled greatly at the mind of the lawgiver.²⁶ And he said to Demetrius, "How have none of the historians and poets undertaken to make mention of these enormous achievements?" 313. And that one said, "Because the legislation is sacred and has come about through God, and God struck some of those who did undertake it, and they ceased the attempt." 314. For also he had heard Theopompus²⁷ say that when he was about to narrate some things that had been translated previously [*proêrmêneumenôn*],²⁸ dubiously, from the Law, he suffered a confusion of his mind for more than thirty days. And after it abated, he propitiated God to make clear to him why this event had occurred. 315. And when it was indicated in a dream that it was his meddling desire to bring divine matters [*theia*] to common people, he desisted and thus recovered. 316. And also of Theodektes,²⁹ the tragic poet, I understood that when he was about to cite something in a play that had been recorded in the book, he suffered cataracts in his eyes. And having a suspicion that this was why the calamity had happened, he propitiated God for many days and recovered.

24 Reading the text aloud to the people and their subsequent corporate assent is modeled on biblical passages where the people accept a text as scripture. Cf. Exod. 24:3–7; 4 Reigns 23; 2 Esdr. 18:1–8 (= Neh. 8:1–8).

25 Putting a curse on textual changes is not found in the Jewish scriptures. The passage re-emphasizes the accuracy and authoritative status of the text.

26 Ps.-Aristeas consistently represents Moses as the lawgiver of the Jews on the model of Gentile lawgivers.

27 A fourth-century BCE historian from Chios and student of Isocrates who was expelled from Chios and found refuge in Egypt under Ptolemy I.

28 Ps.-Aristeas's purpose in this section is to show that divine realities cannot be accessed by inappropriate persons. Piety must accompany linguistic skill in order to use the text.

29 A fourth-century BCE rhetorician and tragic poet, also a student of Isocrates.

Abbreviations

- LXX The Septuagint / Translation of the Seventy
 OG Old Greek
 Ps. pseudo-

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“Faithful” and “Unfaithful” Translations

The Greco-Latin Tradition in Jerome’s Letter to Pammachius (395/396 CE)

Filippomaria Pontani

Despite its early, continuous, and fruitful contacts with neighboring cultures (one need just think of the Oriental influence on the Homeric epics), ancient Greek civilization was remarkably reluctant vis-à-vis the idea of translating literary works from foreign languages: virtually no instances are known from the archaic and Classical period (8th–5th c. BCE; a possible exception is Hanno’s *Periplous*, from the Phoenician), and even in Hellenistic times we can hardly find any examples of true linguistic appropriation beyond the gigantic and by all means exceptional enterprise of the Septuagint at Alexandria (see Chapter 4.3; Herennios Philo in the first century BCE translated some of Sanchuniathon’s mythical tales, again from the Phoenician).

In Roman times (1st c. BCE–4th c. CE), Latin was taught in schools of the Eastern part of the empire, but beyond some official inscriptions and some isolated cases of Virgilian translations attested in scholastic papyri (Virgil and some works of Cicero may indeed have been translated in full into Greek), throughout Greece, Egypt, Anatolia, and the Near East the dominant language of the cultivated elite remained Greek. In Late Antiquity, while the role of Latin even as an administrative language rapidly decreased (esp. during the fifth century), Greek translations were produced of some works of the Latin Church Fathers, and of Justinian’s *Corpus Iuris*; but it was not before the ripe Byzantine age (13th–14th c.) that scholars such as Maximos Planudes and Demetrios Kydones attempted to translate into Greek substantial parts of the Latin literary heritage (Cicero, Ovid, Boethius, Augustine etc.).

On the other hand, translation from Greek played a substantial role in the shaping of Latin culture, not only because the first known work of Latin literature was a version of the *Odyssey* (Livius Andronicus, 3rd c. BCE), but chiefly because virtually all Latin genres, from theater to epigram, from epic to lyric poetry, from historiography to rhetoric, were inspired by and modelled after Greek prototypes. Since the second century BCE, the Roman elite (as opposed to the Greek one, even under Roman rule) always regarded bilingualism as essential, and translation as a substantial act in the formation and the *otium* of an accomplished intellectual.¹ This kind of translation—known as *vertere*—

not only enriched the vocabulary and the conceptual span of Latin language, but also implied a tendency towards the emulation rather than the faithful rendering of the source text.

The most influential and theoretically most explicit evidence for Latin translations of Greek literary works comes from Cicero (1st c. BCE), who tackled works of Plato, Demosthenes and Aratos, and also developed the most interesting, if not systematic, reflection on the topic: he insisted that translation from Greek was not only a stylistic aid, but also a sort of civic obligation for Latin men of letters. In several statements (some of which are quoted in Jerome's letter), Cicero insisted that the goal of literary translation (as opposed to a merely "technical" *ad verbum* translation, which he conceived of and indeed sometimes produced himself, but deemed often incapable of rendering even the bare meaning of the original) was not a word-for-word transposition of the single words,² but rather a stylistically refined enterprise, oriented on the target language. This stance will be followed by most later Latin writers, from Quintilian to Gellius and beyond.

In Late Antiquity, translation from Greek into Latin embraced scientific, narrative, and philosophical prose, and in Christian times also theological and liturgical writings (Church Fathers, hagiographies etc.). The style of these translations slowly evolved, so that the "free" rendering propounded by Cicero was gradually flanked by a more careful and respectful technique, which shaped Latin language and syntax by depriving it of its literary embellishments and by transforming it into a *Wissenschaftssprache* (which it was to remain for centuries). We occasionally encounter statements that justify this choice, and overtly conceive their mission as a divulgation of a foreign text rather than a feat of stylistic and rhetorical *aemulatio*: if in technical texts this could prove sometimes useful, in hagiographical and liturgical texts it could prevent the

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- 1 See Pliny the Younger (first–second century CE, Rome), *Letter 7.9.3–4*, translated in McElduff, *Roman Theories of Translation*, 174: "The most useful activity and one which many people suggest is to translate (*vertere*) from Greek into Latin or from Latin into Greek. This form of exercise produces ownership (*proprietas*) and brilliance in language—and by imitating the best writers you gain a like ability for invention. And also, what has escaped someone who is only reading, cannot flee the grasp of someone translating. In this way understanding and judgment is acquired. It doesn't harm, after you have read through something sufficiently to keep its main argument in your mind, to write as if in competition with it, and then compare your efforts with the original and consider carefully where your version is better or worse."
 - 2 Cicero, *On Moral Ends* 3.15, translated in McElduff, *Roman Theories of Translation*, 115: "It is not necessary to squeeze out [a translation] word by word, as ineloquent interpreters do, when there is a more familiar word conveying the same meaning. Indeed, I usually use several words to expose what is expressed in Greek by one, if I am unable to do anything else."

risks of haeretical misunderstandings, though it could also occasionally obfuscate the meaning, as some translators overtly state.³

Most important in the frame of late antique culture was the activity of two outstanding translators of Christian works (both biblical and Patristic), namely Rufinus of Aquileia and above all the Church Father Jerome (both 4th/5th c. CE): the latter’s epistle to his old friend Pammachius—also known by the title of *Liber de optimo genere interpretandi* (“On the best type of translation”)—is probably the most advanced theoretical reflection on translation from the ancient world, both for what it says and for the sources it quotes in support of its arguments.

Written in 395/396, the letter is above all a defense from the attacks levelled against Jerome by anonymous critics (we deduce that foremost amongst them was his former friend Rufinus) with respect to alleged mistakes in his translation of an epistle of Epiphanius of Salamis (4th c. CE). After claiming that his translation was not intended for public circulation and had therefore been unduly stolen, Jerome insists that in refraining from a dull and literal version he had simply followed the traditional method of translation (so-called *ad sensum*), consecrated by a long tradition stretching from Cicero down to his own day (these are chapters 5–6, reproduced below). Jerome also claims that this method—as long as it does not significantly alter the meaning of the source text⁴—is by far the best, with the only exception of the Holy Scriptures, for which a literal translation (*verbum de verbo*, a locution that will become standard down to the present day for describing this kind of translation) recommends itself because it can help avoid dangerous misunderstandings. The latter principle, however, is often disregarded by Jerome himself in his capacity as a translator of the Bible; and, as he argues in his letter to Pammachius, this ideal had been legitimately violated not only by the authors of the New Testament (who often quote biblical passages rather freely), but also, for instance, by the translators of the Septuagint.

3 Marius Mercator, preface to the translations of Nestorius’s sermons (early fifth century, Rome): “In these sermons I have attempted to translate word for word, as best I could, so that I may not later appear as a forger rather than a true translator. Therefore I beg your pardon, pious reader, if the style is less eloquent, or if your ear will be struck by the strangeness of words chosen throughout the text: I have preferred to expose myself to the tongues of critics rather than to stray far from the task of expressing the truth of meanings, in which lies the danger of falsehood.” Eduard Schwartz, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, 1.5, 29, my translation.

4 See also Jerome, *Letter 84.11 to Pammachius and Oceanus, sub fine* (400 CE, Rome): “To change something from the Greek is not the work of translation, but of destruction [*non est vertentis, sed evertentis*], and to express the Greek word by word is not the work of someone who would like to conserve the charm of the speech”; my translation.

Latin Text

Jerome, *Letter 57*, §§ 5–6, excerpted from *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi epistulae. Pars I: epistulae I–LXX*, ed. Isidorus Hilberg, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 54, (1910; repr., Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), 508–551.

57.5 Ego enim non solum fateor, sed libera uoce profiteor me in interpretatione Graecorum absque scripturis sanctis, ubi et uerborum ordo mysterium est, non uerbum e uerbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu. habeoque huius rei magistrum Tullium, qui Protagoram Platonis et Oeconomicum Xenofontis et Aeschini et Demosthenis duas contra se orationes pulcherrimas transtulit. quanta in illis praetermiserit, quanta addiderit, quanta mutauerit, ut proprietates alterius linguae suis proprietatibus explicaret, non est huius temporis dicere. sufficit mihi ipsa translatoris auctoritas, qui ita in prologo earundem orationum locutus est [Cicero, *de optimo genere oratorum* 13–14]: “putaui mihi suscipiendum laborem utilem studiosis, mihi quidem ipsi non necessarium. conuerti enim ex Atticis duorum eloquentissimorum nobilissimas orationes inter seque contrarias, Aeschini et Demosthenis, nec conuerti ut interpres, sed ut orator, sententiis isdem et earum formis tam quam figuris, uerbis ad nostram consuetudinem aptis. in quibus non pro uerbo uerbum necesse habui reddere, sed genus omnium uerborum uimque seruaui. non enim me ea adnumerare lectori putaui oportere, sed tamquam adpendere.”

5 Jerome notoriously translated the Old Testament in Latin (the so-called *Vulgata*), and in his numerous exegetical works on the various books of the Bible he often comes back on the mystic purport of every single word in the holy scripture. It should be stressed, however, that both in his praxis as a translator and in some other theoretical statements, Jerome insisted on a much freer approach to the version of the Bible.

6 Marcus Tullius Cicero (first century BCE), one of the greatest Roman orators and intellectuals, translated several works of Attic writers, notably the philosopher Plato (fifth century BCE), the historian Xenophon, and the two orators—rival to each other—Aeschines and Demosthenes (fourth century BCE). In other works, Jerome quotes (and occasionally criticizes) Cicero's translations (none of which extant to the present day), which shows that he was familiar with them and by and large consented with their theoretical approach to translation, though remaining in practice slightly more faithful than Cicero to his models.

English Translation

Adapted from St. Jerome, *Letters and Select Works*, trans. William H. Fremantle (New York, 1893), 117–118.

For I myself not only admit but proclaim with free voice that in translating Greek authors (with the exception of the holy scriptures, where even the order of the words is a mystery) I render sense for sense and not word for word.⁵ My teacher in this course of action is Tullius [Cicero], who has translated Plato's *Protagoras*, Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, and the two magnificent orations which Aeschines and Demosthenes have delivered against each other.⁶ This is not the time to indicate how much he omitted, how much he added and altered in those texts in order to explain the idioms of another tongue through those of his own. I shall content myself with the authority of the translator, who has spoken as follows in the prologue to the orations:⁷ “I have thought it right to embark on a labour useful for scholars, albeit not necessary for myself. I have namely translated the most noble speeches (one delivered against the other) of the two most eloquent Attic orators, Aeschines and Demosthenes; and I have not rendered them as a translator but as an orator, keeping the same sense and the figures of speech and thought, but altering the words to suit our own usage. I have thought I should not give back to the reader the same number of words, but—so to speak—the same weight.” And again at the close of his treatise he

7 All we have of Cicero's translations of the orations by Aeschines and Demosthenes (*Against Ctesiphon* and *On the Crown* respectively, both delivered at Athens in 330 BCE) is the preface, known in manuscripts as *De optimo genere oratorum* (On the best kind of orators): Jerome quotes some paragraphs of this text, namely those devoted to the issue of literary translation, insisting particularly on Cicero's claim to have translated not as a *Dolmetscher* (*interpretes*), but as an orator dealing with fellow orators, and thus refraining from using odd calques or words not familiar to the usage of the target language. Furthermore, when Jerome speaks of the *proprietas* of each language, he must also have in mind the case of the Bible, and particularly the idioms of Hebrew that made their way into the Greek of the Septuagint, and finally into the later Latin versions.

rursumque in calce sermonis [23]: “quorum ego,” ait, “orationes si, ut spero, ita expressero uirtutibus utens illorum omnibus, id est sententiis et earum figuris et rerum ordine, uerba persequens eatenus, ut ea non abhorreant a more nostro, quae si e Graecis omnia conuersa non erunt, tamen, ut generis eiusdem sint, elaborauimus” (et cetera). sed et Horatius, uir acutus et doctus, hoc idem in *Arte poetica* erudito interpreti praecipit [Horace, *Ars Poetica* 133–134]: “nec uerbum uerbo curabis reddere fidus interpres.” Terentius Menandrum, Plautus et Caecilius ueteres comicos interpretati sunt: numquid haerent in uerbis ac non decorem magis et elegantiam in translatione conseruant? quam uos ueritatem interpretationis, hanc eruditi *κακοζήλιαν* nuncupant.

unde et ego doctus a talibus ante annos circiter uiginti et simili tunc quoque errore deceptus, certe hoc mihi a uobis obiciendum nesciens, cum Eusebii *χρονικὸν* in Latinum uerterem, tali inter cetera praefatione usus sum [Eus. *chronicon*, p. 1.8 Schoene]: “difficile est alienas lineas insequentem non alicubi excidere, arduum, ut, quae in alia lingua bene dicta sunt, eundem decorem in translatione conseruent. significatum est aliquid unius uerbi proprietate: non habeo meum, quo id efferam, et, dum quaero implere sententiam, longo ambitu uix breuis uiae spatia consummo. accedunt hyperbatorum anfractus, dissimilitudines casuum, uarietates figurarum, ipsum postremo suum et, ut ita dicam, uernaculum linguae genus: si ad uerbum interpretor, absurde resonant; si ob necessitatem aliquid in ordine, in sermone mutauero, ab interpretis uidebor officio recessisse.” et post multa, quae nunc persequi otiosum est, etiam hoc addidi: “quodsi cui non uidetur linguae gratiam interpretatione mutari, Homerum ad uerbum exprimat in Latinum—plus aliquid dicam—, eundem sua in lingua prosae uerbis interpretetur: uidebit ordinem ridiculum et poetam eloquentissimum uix loquentem.”

8 The great Latin poet Horace (first century BCE) wrote amongst other things the *Ars poetica*, an epistle in verse concerning style, elegance, literary genres and the debt of Rome towards the Greek heritage: the lines quoted here describe in a short *gnome* the task of the ideal translator.

9 Jerome refers to the Latin translations of Greek comedy (Plautus, Terentius, and Caecilius Statius, third and second century BCE; their Greek models are Menander [fourth century BCE], and the *veteres comici*—perhaps Aristophanes and his colleagues are intended), which numbered to the first literary achievements of Latin literature and were “recreations” rather than faithful translations—this is meant by the idea of *uertere*. The technical term *kakozelia* belongs to rhetorical vocabulary.

says: “If, as I hope, I have been able to render their speeches by employing all their merits, that is, the ideas, the figures and the general arrangement, and following the actual wording only so far as it did not deviate from our taste, even if not all the words will result translated from the Greek, we have tried our best to make them appear of the same style.” Horace too, such an acute and knowledgeable author, in his *Art of Poetry* gives the same prescription to the learned translator:⁸ “You will not care to render word for word, as a faithful translator.” Terence has translated Menander, while Plautus and Cæcilius the old comic poets: do they ever stick at words, or don’t they rather preserve in their versions the beauty and elegance of the original? What you call exact interpretation, the learned term it *kakozelia* [pedantry].⁹ About twenty years ago, as I translated Eusebius’s *Chronicon* into Latin, instructed by such teachers and deceived by such an “error” (I could not guess that you would soon reproach me precisely this), I wrote in my preface, amongst other things:¹⁰ “It is hard, when following lines traced by others, not to diverge from them in some places, and it is difficult that what has been said perfectly in one language may preserve the same elegance in another. Something has been expressed appropriately by one specific word: I have no word of mine to express this, and trying to complete the sentence, I make a long detour covering with difficulties a short distance. To this must be added the windings of hyperbata, the differences in the use of cases, the diversity of the rhetorical figures, and finally the peculiar and, so to speak, inbred character of the language: if I render word for word, the words will sound absurd; if, compelled by necessity, I alter anything in the order or wording, I shall seem to have departed from the translator’s duty.” And after many considerations, which it would be tedious to follow out here, I added: “If anyone does not believe that the beauty of a language is transformed by translation, let him render Homer word for word into Latin—I shall say more, let him translate Homer in his language in prose, and he will see the ridiculous style and the most eloquent of poets scarcely able to speak.”

10 Jerome translated the *Chronicon* of Eusebius during his stay in Constantinople in 380/81. This passage of the preface echoes several ideas and terms used by Quintilian, especially as far as rhetorical figures and stylistic peculiarities are concerned. When talking of the pedestrian translation of Homer’s epics, he might be thinking of Attius Labeo; a version of Homer in inadequate Latin prose was to be realized many centuries later (ca. 1366) by the Greco-Calabrian scholar Leonzio Pilato at the request of Petrarch and Boccaccio: Leonzio’s achievement was to mark the “return” of Homer to the West after centuries of neglect.

57.6 Uerum ne meorum parua sit auctoritas—quamquam hoc tantum probare uoluerim, me semper ab adulescentia non uerba, sed sententias transtulisse—qualis super hoc genere praefatiuncula sit, in libro, quo beati Antonii uita describitur, ipsius lectione cognosce [Euagrius Ponticus, *in vitam S. Antonii, Patrologia Latina*, 26.834]: “ex alia in aliam linguam ad uerbum expressa translatio sensus operit et ueluti laeto gramine sata strangulat. dum enim casibus et figuris seruit oratio, quod breui poterat indicare sermone, longo ambitu circumacta uix explicat. hoc igitur ego uitans ita beatum Antonium te petente transposui, ut nihil desit ex sensu, cum aliquid desit ex uerbis. alii syllabas aucupentur et litteras, tu quaere sententias.” dies me deficiet, si omnium, qui ad sensum interpretati sunt, testimonia replicauero. sufficit in praesenti nominasse Hilarium confessorem, qui homilias in Iob et in psalmos tractatus plurimos in Latinum uertit e Graeco nec adsedit litterae dormitanti et putida rusticorum interpretatione se torsit, sed quasi captiuos sensus in suam linguam uictoris iure transposuit.

But in order to prevent the authority of my writings from being inadequate (though I only wanted to demonstrate that since my youth I have always translated meanings rather than words), learn what says the book carrying the life of St. Antony, and read its preface on this topic:¹¹ “A word-for-word translation from one language into another conceals the sense, and chokes the fields with luxuriant grass. If it follows slavishly the cases and the figures, it fails to explain by a long circumlocution what it could have signified by means of a short sentence. In order to avoid this fault, I have translated at your request the life of St. Antony in such a way that nothing may lack in the sense, even if something lacks in the words. Let others hunt for syllables and letters: you will look for meanings.” 57.6

11 Evagrius of Antioch's translation of this *Life of Antony*, commanded by and dedicated to Innocentius presbyter († 373), replaced an earlier version that has been handed down to us anonymously. The metaphor of the choked fields comes from Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria* 8, pro. 23), who applies it to style in general.

Abbreviations

pro. prohoemium/prooemium

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A 4th-Century CE Buddhist Note on Sanskrit-Chinese Translation

Dao'an's Preface to the Abridgement of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra

Bill M. Mak

A large-scale translation project of Buddhist texts from the Indic languages to Chinese began in China in the early centuries of the Common Era and lasted nearly a thousand years. The outcome of this project was a large body of Chinese translations, which forms a part of the collection known as the *yiqiejing* 一切經, literally “all sūtras,” or the Chinese Tripiṭaka (*sanzang* 三藏, “three baskets”), referring to the three main genres of Buddhist texts according to the Indian Buddhist tradition: Sūtra (Buddhist teaching), Vinaya (monastic codes), and Abhidharma (exegeses). These translated texts, conveniently found in the first thirty-two volumes of the modern Taishō edition,¹ each have a unique history of composition and transmission, and are diverse in content and style. Furthermore, their Indic originals often contain multiple layers of interpolation as they travelled from different parts of India via Central Asia and other intermediaries before reaching China, resulting in a large body of source materials with a bewildering amount of textual variants. From the first century CE (Eastern Han) to the eleventh century CE (Northern Song), these texts were translated by translators of diverse linguistic backgrounds and under varying circumstances. In some cases individuals translated such texts as a means to propagate the Buddhist faith among the locals. Other translations were products of teamwork, sponsored by court elites or even the Chinese emperors as Buddhism emerged as a major religion and social-economical force in China. The history of translation of the Buddhist texts as well as the texts themselves were closely connected to the formation and evolution of Chinese Buddhism and Buddhist translators played an important role in the religious narratives of medieval China.²

One example is Dao'an 道安 (314–385 CE), a Chinese monk of exceptional religious zeal active during the Northern and Southern Dynasties when Chi-

1 Subsequent references to the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 are indicated by “T,” followed by text number in parenthesis, volume and page.

2 Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest of China*, 184–204, 387–394.

nese Buddhist translations proliferated to the extent that there arose an urgent need within the Buddhist community to understand where the texts came from and how the translations were produced. He attempted to tackle textual and linguistic problems such as translation, redaction of the source texts in Indic languages, multiple translations and sometimes retranslations of similar texts of different recensions, and a large body of still unstandardised technical vocabulary. Although Dao'an appears not to have translated any Buddhist texts himself and thus may not be considered a translator, his theories on translation were among the earliest and most influential in China.

The undated text of the *Mohe boluoruo boluomi jing chao xu* 摩訶鉢羅若波羅密經抄序 (Preface to *Abridgement of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*) attributed to Dao'an is found in Sengyou's 僧祐 (445–518 CE) *Chusanzang jiji* 出三藏記集, a collection of catalogues and bibliographical essays anthologized some time between 510 and 518 CE. The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā* is known to the later Chinese Buddhists as the *dapin bore* 大品般若, or the *Large Perfection of Wisdom sūtra* in 25,000 ślokas, a work of considerable doctrinal importance in early Mahāyāna Buddhism.³ According to Dao'an, two Chinese translations of the same sūtra were in circulation in his time: the "Light-praising" *Guangzan* 光讚 and the "Light-emitting" *Fanguang* 放光. These two works, which are extant in the Chinese Tripiṭaka as *Guangzan jing* 光讚經 (T222) and *Fanguang bore jing* 放光般若經 (T221), were translated by Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 in 286 CE and by Mokṣala 無叉羅 in 291 CE respectively. According to Dao'an, a new recension of the text, viz. the "Abridgement," was jointly produced by the "text-holder" Dharmapriya, the interpreter Buddharakṣa 佛護, and the scribe Huijin 慧進, based on the two earlier translations by Dharmarakṣa and Mokṣala.⁴ In his "Preface" (Excerpts I–III), Dao'an was keen to demonstrate how the latest recension of the *Large Perfection of Wisdom* was a significant improvement on the earlier ones despite some irreconcilable difficulties. He appears to have adopted a reductive approach to texts by considering the abridged work

3 A *śloka*, or a verse, consists of 32 syllables. Although the Mahāyāna Buddhist sūtras are composed almost exclusively in prose, the number of *ślokas* is given as a measurement of the length of the texts as Dao'an explained in the text. According to him, this recension of the Indic "Larger Wisdom Sūtra" contains only 20,000 *ślokas*.

4 In all likelihood based on later descriptions, the "text-holder" is a ceremonial role conferred on a senior foreign monk who read the text aloud and was often considered the chief translator. In practice, the translations were most likely jointly produced by a bilingual foreign monk who interpreted orally the phrases and a Chinese scribe who rendered the oral translation into proper written Chinese. On the different setups of collaborative translation according to historical Buddhist records, see Cao Shibang, "Lun Zhongguo fojiao."

based on the two translations as a way to extract the original meaning of the text.⁵ The last part of the preface (Excerpts IV–V) appears to be glosses and annotations to this new Chinese abridgement. It should be noted that this text is no longer extant and is not to be confused with another text with a very similar title.⁶

In this preface, Dao'an gives at first a general description of the Indic text (*hujing* 胡經) of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā*, followed by his theories on Indic-to-Chinese Buddhist translation. His remarks are specifically directed towards this latest translation and in comparison to preceding Chinese translations. He attributed some of the characteristics of Indic texts such as repetition and prolixity not as general traits of Indian literature, but rather, exceptional features of certain Mahāyāna texts such as the *Prajñāpāramitā*. Dao'an was confronted with an unusual situation when multiple Indic recensions of an extremely repetitive text were successively brought to China; furthermore, the style and content of these foreign works had no precedents in Chinese literature, thus posing serious challenges to translators.

Among his best-known observations on the difficulties of translation are the “Five Losses of the Original” and “Three Things not to be Changed.” Among the former is the loss of original word order, an observation of the generally verb-ending SOV sentence structure in Indic languages in contrast to the predominantly SVO structure in Chinese. Somewhat more elaborate are his ideas in the latter as the “Three Things not to be Changed,” which were nonetheless inevitably changed. The word *yi* 易, “change,” which also means “easy,” has caused some confusion to later scholars, who interpreted Dao'an's expression to mean “Three not-easy Things.”⁷ In addition, Dao'an remarked on the difficulties in striking a balance between faithfulness to the original and comprehensibility

5 On the practice and literary form of abridgement (*chao*), see Tong Ling, “‘Chao,’ ‘xie’ you bielun.”

6 According to Sengyou, elsewhere in his *Chu sanzang jiji*, T(2145)55.10b, a translation titled *Chang'an pin jing* 長安品經 or *Mohe bore boluomi jing* 摩訶般若波羅蜜經 was produced by Dharmapriya 曇摩婢 and Zhu Fonian 竺佛念 in 382 CE, in five fascicles. The extant *Mohe bore chao jing* 摩訶般若抄經 (T226) is however not an abridgement of the Chinese *Large Perfection of Wisdom*, but rather one of the *Small Perfection of Wisdom*. The mismatch of these titles and content of these references has led to some confusion among scholars in the past. At any rate, it is clear that Dao'an was referring to the “Large Perfection of Wisdom” and not the *Small Perfection of Wisdom*.

7 As Ōchō points out, there is nothing difficult about the three examples given in the text. I follow here his suggestion that *yi* 易 should be interpreted as “change” and *buyi* 不易 refers to something that ought not be changed. See Ōchō, “Chūkoku bukkyō shoki no honyakuron,” 251.

to the readers. While he was outraged by some of the alterations past translators had made to the original sacred text, he deplored at the inevitability of some of these changes.

Behind all his philological dilemmas, in particular those concerning the deplorable “Three Things not to be Changed” (but nonetheless changed), Dao’an was preoccupied with the progressive degeneration of human goodness and the dissolution of Buddhist teachings in the current cosmic cycle, a belief commonly held by the Buddhists of his time. The recovery and protection of Buddha’s sacred words were considered an urgent duty tasked to Buddhists after the worldly passing of the Buddha. Ironically, it was seen also as an uphill struggle that was bound to fail in the age of *mofa* 末法, “end-of-age dharma,” as prophesied by the Buddha himself. Additionally, the fact that we are born in a time and space far removed from the Buddha’s, with spiritual merits and intelligence far inferior to our predecessors, suggests our own karmic failings and inferiority. Dao’an remarks on the five losses and three deplorables were made against this background of inevitable changes in translation in an age of cosmic karmic decline.



Chinese Text

The source text is based on the Taishō edition with some emendations based on variant readings from other block-print editions of the Chinese Tripiṭaka as indicated in the footnotes. Interlinear notes (*jiazhu* 夾注), which appear in double columns and smaller print in the original text, are set in slightly smaller FangSong type in the Chinese edition and smaller type in the English translation.

Excerpt I: 52b10–23

昔在漢陰十有五載，講放光經歲常再遍。及至京師，漸四年矣，亦恒歲二，未敢墮息。然每至滯句，首尾隱沒，釋卷深思，恨不見護公叉羅等。會建元十八年正車師前部王名彌第來朝，其國師字鳩摩羅跋提，獻胡大品一部四百二牒言二十千失盧。失盧三十二字，胡人數經法也。即審數之，凡十七千二百六十首盧，殘二十七字，都并五十五萬二千四百七十五字。天竺沙門曇摩婢執本，佛護為譯，對而檢之，慧進筆受。與放光光讚同者，無所更出也；其二經譯人所漏者，隨其失處，稱而正焉；其義異不知孰是者，輒併而兩存之，往往為訓其下。凡四卷。其一紙二紙異者⁸，出別為一卷。合五卷也⁹。

Excerpt II: 52b23–c12

譯胡為秦，有五失本也。一者胡語盡倒，而使從秦。一失本也。二者胡經尚質，秦人好文。傳可眾心，非文不合。斯二失本也。三者胡經委悉，至

8 紙二紙異者出別為一卷 szQ(T^z): 紙二異者出別為一卷 K₁: 經 JK_{2[14c]}T.

9 合五卷也 K₁szQ: 五卷也 JK_{2[14c]}(T): 合為五卷 (T^z).

10 Around 364–379 CE. See Hurvitz and Link, “Three Prajñāpāramitā Prefaces,” 446; Nakajima, *Shutsusanzōkishū jōkan yakuchū*, 90.

11 A Central Asian kingdom in the Turpan basin of today’s Xinjiang region, active from first century BCE to mid-fifth century CE.

12 The word *hu* 胡 in later texts refers to Central Asia, as distinct from *fan* 梵, which refers to India, or the Brahmanical and Sanskrit world. In terms of the source language itself, Dao’an made no distinction between Sanskrit and various Indian *prākṛits* such as Gandhārī, in which the early Prajñāpāramitā text was likely written.

13 The correct number of *ślokas* should be 17,264.

14 The contrast between the two styles, “prosaic” (*zhi* 質) and “elaborate” (*wen* 文) are well known in Chinese literature as noted in the Analects (*Yong ye* 雍也). Ideally one should strike a balance between the two.

English Translation

Translated by Bill M. Mak

Excerpt I: 52b10–23

In the past fifteen years in Hanyin,¹⁰ I have preached the *Fangguang jing* [lit. Radiant Light Sūtra] repeatedly every year. For nearly four years since I arrived at the Capital [Chang'an], I have continued [preaching of the sūtra] twice a year without a break. Yet whenever I encounter an awkward phrase where the [syntactic] relation is obscure, I put down the scroll and reflect, regretting not being able to meet in person [its translators] Venerable [Dharma]rakṣa, Mokṣala, and others. In the eighteenth year of Jianyuan [382 CE], on the occasion of the king of Anterior Cheshi¹¹ by the name *Midi* paying homage [to the king of Former Qin], Kumārabuddhi, his State Preceptor, offered [to the king of Former Qin] the Indic¹² Large Sūtra [of *Prajñāpāramitā*], consisting of 402 folios in 20,000 ślokas. The śloka, consisting of thirty-two letters, is how the Indic people measure the sūtras. If one counts precisely, there are 17,260 ślokas plus twenty-seven letters [sic], making 552,475 letters in total [in the Indic text of the Large Sūtra of *Prajñāpāramitā*].¹³ The Indian śramaṇa Dharmapriya presented [lit. held] the text. Buddharakṣa interpreted and cross-checked it [against the original]. Huijin was the scribe. No retranslation was made for the parts that were identical to the *Fangguang* and the *Guangzan*; for the parts left out by the two [former] translators of the sūtra, each of the faulty instances was duly corrected. As for the parts whose meanings diverged, not knowing which one was correct, both were kept next to each other, supplied with annotations below. This amounted to four fascicles. As for the case of differences of one sheet [or] two sheets, [passages] were translated separately in one fascicle, totalling thus in five fascicles.

Excerpt II: 52b23–c12

There are five losses of the original when one translates from an Indic language to Chinese. Firstly, the Indic language, having an entirely inverted [word order], is made to conform to the Chinese [word order]. That is the first loss of the original. Secondly, the Indic sūtra has preference over prosaicness while Chinese prefers an elaborated style.¹⁴ As the transmission [of the text should] appeal to the mind of the audience, [a text] lacking in style would be inappropriate. Thus, this results in the second loss of the original. Thirdly, the Indic sūtra goes into details, especially with laudatory passages which go on repeatedly, three or four times tirelessly. In our case, [such passages] have been edited out. Such is the third loss of original. Fourthly, the Indic [text] contains glosses

於嘆詠，丁寧反覆，或三或四，不嫌其煩，而今裁斥。三失本也。四者胡有義說¹⁵，正似亂辭。尋說向語，文無以異，或千五百，刈而不存。四失本也。五者事已全成，將更傍及，反騰前辭，已乃後說，而悉除此。五失本也。然般若逕¹⁶三達之心，覆面所演。聖必因時，時俗有易，而刪雅古以適今時。一不易也。愚智天隔，聖人叵階。乃欲以千歲之上微言，傳使合百王之下末俗。二不易也。阿難出經，去佛未久，尊大迦葉令五百六通迭察迭書。今離千年，而以近意量裁¹⁷。彼阿羅漢乃兢兢若此，此生死人而平平若此，豈將不知法者勇乎？斯三不易也。涉茲五失，逕¹⁸三不易，譯胡為秦，詎可不慎乎？正當以不開異言，傳令知會通耳，何復嫌大匠之得失乎？是乃未所敢知也！

15 說 szQ(T^L)(T^X)(T^Z): 記 κJ.

16 逕 K₁J(T^Z): 經 K₂zQ(T)(T^L)(T^X).

17 裁 szQ(T^L): 截 κJ(T^X)(T^Z).

18 逕 K₁: 經 Jκ₂Q(T)(T^L)(T^X).

19 This refers to the use of an absolutive phrase to recap the final verb of the previous sentence, a common feature in Sanskrit Mahāyāna text. *Shi* here refers to a syntactic unit in Chinese, viz. a group of words governed by the same topic. This contrasts with Sanskrit where a syntactic unit is always governed by a main conjugated verb.

20 One of the thirty-two marks (*dvātriṃśallakṣaṇāni*) of the Buddha to symbolise his powerful speech and eloquence.

[*yishuo*] which look just like displaced phrases [without proper annotation]. If one searches for explanation and looks for the words [in connection, one will find that] the content [of the word and its gloss] is the same. As much as a thousand or five hundred [words] could have been deleted and removed. This is the fourth loss of the original. Fifthly, [in an Indic text] whenever a “topic” [*shi*] is completed, thus moving on to another [topic], the previous phrase is repeated before the text continues on.¹⁹ [In the translation,] all such [repetitions] have been removed. This is the fifth loss of the original.

The Prajñāpāramitā, reaches into the mind of the [Buddha], the One of Triple Knowledge. Yet it was made manifest by the Buddha, [the One whose Tongue] covers His Face.²⁰ The Holy One must abide by [the convention of] his time. As convention changes over time, the classical and archaic expressions are removed, and one adapts to the contemporary style. This is the first thing not to be changed [but was changed nonetheless].²¹ The foolish and the wise are by nature different and the saints cannot be reached by any degree. Thus, the second thing that is not to be changed occurs when one tries to deliver the meaning of the sublime words thousands of years old to cater to the vulgar taste under the reigns of the hundred kings. When Ānanda issued [that is, recited] the sūtras shortly after Buddha’s passing away, Venerable Mahākāśyapa asked five hundred [Arhants who had attained the] six supernormal powers [*ṣaḍ-abhijñās*] to cross-check and write down the text repeatedly. Now a thousand years have passed, we nonetheless try to evaluate its meaning through contemporary ideas. Even the Arhats were cautious at doing so; now that ordinary beings of the *saṃsāra* were [handling the problem] so casually. Would that not be foolhardiness for those who do not know the Dharma? This is the third “not-to-be-changed.”

As one would inevitably experience these five losses and the three “not-to-be-changed” while translating from the Indic into Chinese, one cannot afford any negligence. Precisely, one should not invent different words and one should just try to interpret them to make sense out of them. How could one therefore criticize [the translations of] the great craftsmen in terms of their merits and demerits? Such was unimaginable to me.

21 This reading echoes the earlier mentioning of the “changes in terms of time and custom” 時俗有易. Some commentators and later scholars interpret the expression to mean “three not-easy things,” translating *buyi* as “not easy,” hence “difficult.” See discussion in the introduction.

Excerpt III: 52c12–21

前人出經，支讖世高，審得胡本，難繫者也；又羅支越，斲鑿之巧者也。若夫以詩為煩重，以書²²為質朴，而刪令合今，則馬鄭所深恨者也。近出此撮，欲使不雜，推經言旨，唯懼失實也。其有方言古辭，自為解其下也。於常首尾相違句不通者，則冥如合符，厭如復折。乃見前人之深謬，欣通外域之嘉會也。於九十章蕩然無措疑處，毫芒之間泯然無微疹。已矣乎！

Excerpt IV: 52c22–24

南摸一切佛，過去未來現在佛，如諸法明。天竺禮般若辭也，明智也。外國禮有四種：一罽耶、二波羅南、三婆南、四南摸。南摸，屈體也。此跪，此四拜，拜佛、外道、國主、父母，通拜耳。禮父母云南摸薩迦。薩迦供養也。

Excerpt v: 52c25–26

摩訶大也，鉢羅若智也，波羅度也，蜜無極，經抄天竺經無前題。前題皆云吉法，吉法竟是也。道安為此首目題也。

22 SYM; 尚書 QZ; 書尚 K₁; 尚 JK₂ (T).

23 Zhi Yue 支越 or Zhi Qian 支謙 (early third century CE.), a lay Buddhist of Yuezhi 月氏 descent.

24 Literally, “the chiseling was realized, but *Hundun* died,” referring to the episode in *Zhuangzi* 莊子, where Shu and Hu bored seven apertures out of the aperture-less face of their friend *Hundun*, resulting in the latter’s death.

25 Notable commentators of Han dynasty on Confucian texts including *Shijing* and *Shangshu*.

26 The preface seems to end here, followed by a commentary on the benedictory verse and the title which could possibly be part of a commentary no longer extant. Hurvitz and Link, “Three Prajñāpāramitā Prefaces,” described the following part as a “postscript.”

27 A common benedictory phrase which appears in many manuscripts of Prajñāpāramitā texts.

28 The attempt to analyze a Sanskrit nominal compound here is noteworthy. The gloss for *mita* (Skt. “measured”), *wuji*, a Daoist term borrowed by some early Buddhist translator to refer to the ultimate reality in Buddhism, is certainly incorrect. The way *pāramitā* was analysed suggests a grammatically impossible reading of *pāra* + *amita*. Another possibility is, that Dao’an mistakenly understood *pāram* and *ita* to mean “infinity” and “crossing” respectively.

29 As the last sentence of the preface suggests, *Mohe boluore boluomi jing chao* 摩訶鉢羅若波羅密經抄 was the full title of the translation according to Dao’an. Hurvitz and Link, “Three Prajñāpāramitā Prefaces,” misconstrued the last two characters as part of the gloss to [a]*mita*.

Excerpt III: 52c12–21

The translations of our predecessors, Lokakṣema and [An] Shigao, are difficult to supersede when translating the Indic texts. [Mo]kṣala and Zhi Yue²³ were skilful in their craftsmanship. Skilfulness is skilfulness! But I am afraid it is just like boring the apertures out of Hundun, resulting in his death!²⁴ If one were to find the *Shi*[*jing*] annoyingly prolix, and the [*Shang*]*shu* prosaic and astute, and were to emend the text to suit contemporary tastes, Ma [Rong] and Zheng [Xuan] would resent such act exceedingly.²⁵ Now, [if] one were to issue this abbreviated text with the intention to make it not look confusing, and to propose [new] meaning by mere speculation on the sūtra, the result would inevitably be deviation from the original. Wherever there is a dialectal and archaic expression, I shall give an explanation below. Those frequent sentences of syntactic incongruity, obscure as broken keys, become satisfactory once construed together. By seeing the profound errors of [our] predecessors, one fortunately appreciates the [Buddha's] joyous assembly in the foreign land [i.e., India]. In the ninety chapters [of *Prajñāpāramitā*], places of doubt were completely dispelled. As far as the finer points are concerned, there should not be any blemish [of faulty interpretation] whatsoever. Consider this the best I could do!²⁶

Excerpt IV: 52c22–24

Namo [viz. homage] to all Buddhas, Buddhas past, future, and present, to Tathatā and the Revelation of All Dharmas [viz. *sarvajñā*].²⁷ In India, this is a phrase to pay homage to Prajñā. Revelation [*jñā*] is wisdom. In the foreign land, there are four ways of paying homage: Kāya [bodily [prostration]] 2. Praṇāma [salutation] 3. Va[nda]nam [obeisance], 4. Namō. Namō means bending the body, that is, kneeling. These four ways of paying homage are the universal ways to pay homage to the Buddha, the members of heterodox sects, kings, and parents [respectively]. The homage towards [one's] parents is called **namosatkā*[*ra*]. *Satkā*[*ra*] means worship.

Excerpt V: 52c25–26

Mahā means great. *Prajñā* means wisdom. *Pāra* means crossing. [*A*]*mita* means infinity.²⁸ Sūtra abridgement.²⁹ Sūtras in India do not carry a prefatory title in the beginning.³⁰ [In place of a] prefatory title, a benediction is always placed. A benediction is all that it is. It was Dao'an who put this title at the beginning.

30 Indian sūtras place titles at the end, e.g., *iti aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā samāptā*, "thus ends the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand [Ślokas]."

Abbreviations and Symbols

- K₁ First edition of Korean Tripiṭaka (1011)
 K₂ Second edition of Korean Tripiṭaka (1236–1251)
 Q *Qishazang* 磧砂藏 (1225–1322)
 S Song edition or *Siqiban* 思溪版 (1239)
 T *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* [revised *Tripiṭaka* compiled during the *Taishō* period], 85 vols, edited by Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabe. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1932.
 T^L *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶記, T(2034)49.76c
 T^X Daoxuan 道宣, *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳/彥琮傳 T(2060)50.438a
 T^Z Shanzhu 善珠, *Yinming lun shu mingdeng chao* 因明論疏明燈鈔, T(2270)68.250c
 Z *Zifuzang* 資福藏 (1132)
 * Uncertain Sanskrit reconstruction based on Chinese transliteration

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Further Reading

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An 8th-Century CE Indian Astronomical Treatise in Chinese

The Nine Seizers Canon by Qutan Xida

Bill M. Mak

The *Nine Seizers Canon* (*Jiuzhi li* 九執曆) is a Chinese treatise on Indian astronomy in the format of a practical manual.¹ The author Qutan Xida (*Gautamasiddhārtha) 瞿曇悉達 included it in the *Treatise on Astrology of the Kaiyuan Era* (*Kaiyuan Zhanjing* 開元占經, fasc. 104), an ambitious compilation of old and new astral texts commissioned by the Tang Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 in 718 CE. Qutan Xida originated from an expatriate Sino-Indian family who had settled in Chang'an (near modern Xi'an) for multiple generations. The Qutans (Gautamas) are known as one of the three schools of Indian astronomy during the Tang period at its height of cosmopolitanism, the other two being the Jiashes 迦葉 (Kāśyapas) and the Jumoluos 拘摩羅 (Kumāras). Starting with Qutan Luo 瞿曇羅, the father of the author, members of the Gautama family had occupied various positions in the Tang Astronomical Bureau for four generations, all working with advanced Sanskrit astral treatises or translating them into Chinese. The *Nine Seizers Canon* is the only extant trace of this practice.

Although described in the text itself as a translation commissioned by the emperor, it contains extensive remarks in both the main text and the interlinear commentary, giving it the character of an original composition. The language of the preface suggests that its author was familiar with the Chinese classics as some phrases (Excerpt 1) were modelled on those found in the *Analec*t*s* (*Lunyu* 論語) and the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經). References to earlier Chinese translations of Indian astronomical terminology in the *Nine Seizers Canon* suggest that its author was familiar with an older body of astronomical literature in translation, and was sensitive to the problem of a foreign technical vocabulary that was not yet standardized.² The author appears to have an excellent command of classical Chinese, but uses a large number of foreign terms and

1 The title is occasionally reconstructed as **navagrahakaraṇa*, an unattested and unlikely reconstruction *Karaṇa* is a genre of a practical astronomical manual.

2 For example, see Excerpt v in the translation for the Chinese translation of the “sign” of thirty degrees.

concepts. In 733 CE, Qutan Zhuan 瞿曇讖, son of Qutan Xida, accused the Chinese Buddhist astronomer Yixing 一行 posthumously of having plagiarized the *Nine Seizers Canon*.³ The Tang Court never declared the *Nine Seizers Canon* as an official astronomical system (*li* 曆) although it was certainly known to its author's contemporaries and other Chinese astronomers. It was known also to some Buddhists outside the court, as it was cited in Yang Jingfeng's 楊景風 recension of Amoghavajra's *Treatise on Lunar Mansions and Planets* (*Xiuyao jing* 宿曜經) in 764 CE.⁴ Later generations of Chinese scholars generally held a negative view of the work, considering it bizarre and confused in style before it was forgotten and lost sometime after the eighth century CE. In 1616, the Anhui scholar Cheng Mingshan 程明善 discovered a copy of the *Treatise* in a Buddhist statute, and Chinese scholars could study the text again.

As far as we can tell from extant sources in Chinese, the *Nine Seizers Canon* is amongst the most advanced works on post-Āryabhaṭa classical Indian mathematical astronomy translated into Chinese. It deals mostly with calendrics and eclipse computation. On some occasions the author reflects also on the differences between Chinese and Indian astronomical terminology and theories, and illustrates the superiority of Indian numerals, the place-value system, and zero, when compared to Chinese rod numerals, due to the former's simplicity and clarity (Excerpt 11). He further highlights the division of the celestial sphere into 360 degrees rather than the Chinese practice of representing the daily motion of the Sun as one *du* 度 and hence 365.25 *du* in one revolution. Despite such leaning towards Indian methods, the author appropriated the Chinese term *du* for degree, rather than using a new term that he had coined himself.⁵ The readers had to tacitly accept this new definition of a familiar term and the geometric (rather than temporal) assumption that underlies it. Later Ming Islamic astronomers and Jesuit astronomers followed the same practice adopting the old term, disregarding any confusion it may have caused.

Unusually for an Indian astral text, it opens with calendrical computation as the first topic. In the classical Sanskrit astronomical treatises such as the

3 At the court hearing, the *Nine Seizers Canon* was found to be inaccurate and inferior in content. The case was dismissed and the losing party was banished from court. See Chen Jiujiu, "Qutan Xida he ta de tianwen gongzuo," 321–327; Sen, "Gautama Zhuan," 202–203.

4 See Chapter 4.7.

5 Elsewhere in the text while explaining the Indian method of computing the mean longitude of the Sun, the author comments, "The degree is called *bhāga* (*bojia*) in Sanskrit. In the past it was translated as *dafen* [lit., 'greater division']; now *du* is used." See Excerpt v; also, Yabuuti, "Researches on the *Chiu-chih li*," 15–16.

Āryabhaṭīya, the *Sūryasiddhānta*, or the *Pañcasiddhāntikā*, the topic known as *ahargaṇa*, “counting of days,” is generally considered less important than the astronomical, or even astrological topics, and is often relegated to a later place in the text. This section on “Accumulated Days” is analogous to a standard practice in Chinese astronomy since the Han period, where one establishes various astronomical parameters and constants in terms of the number of days that have lapsed from a distant, often fictional epoch known as *lìyuán* 曆元 or *shangyuán* 上元 up to the current day. The epoch used in many *siddhānta* texts in India, such as the one associated with the Kali Yuga of 4,320,000 years noted in the fifth-century work of Āryabhaṭa, is similarly distant. The epoch used in the *Nine Seizers Canon* is surprisingly recent (March 20, 657 CE) and is comparable to those noted in the more recent Indian works such as Varāhamihira’s *Pañcasiddhāntikā* (505 CE) or Brahmagupta’s *Khaṇḍakhādya* (665 CE).⁶ For the author of the *Nine Seizers Canon*, the most important purpose of this day count was to calculate the planetary weekday using the division of seven, a Greco-Indian concept that was completely foreign to the Chinese. Similarly, the sexagenary stem-branch day can be determined. This latter concept, however, is known only to the Chinese and not to the Indians.

The algorithms involved in the computation in the *Nine Seizers Canon* are standard in all Sanskrit astronomical treatises, including the uniquely Indian concept of *tithi*; that is, an artificial time unit that amounts to one-thirtieth of a synodic month, which is generally less than a day. The author of the *Nine Seizers Canon* renders this important concept as *ri* 日 and thus obscures the difference between the artificial time unit and the ordinary day. This appears to be an oversight in a text that otherwise concerns itself very much with technical terminology. The computation, designed to be practical, remains correct and is therefore not affected by this confusion between *tithi* and day. This suggests that although the author is proficient in astronomical computation and was aware of some of the linguistic issues involved in translation, he did not manage to make the source materials completely transparent and comprehensible in their own terms. The author did manage to prioritize his Chinese readers and the target language, while at the same time pushing the translation to its limit of comprehensibility by introducing a large amount of foreign technical terminology and concepts.

⁶ Ibid., 15.



Chinese Text

Original text by Qutan Xida, Fasc. 104 of *Kaiyuan Zhanjing* 開元占經, *Wenyuan ge Siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書 edition (1782), with modifications based on Chen Jiujin 陳久金, ed., “Tang Kaiyuan Zhanjing / Tianzhu Jiuzhi li jing” 唐開元占經/天竺九執歷經, in *Zhongguo zaji Zhongnan Ya shiliao huibian* 中國載籍中南亞史料匯編 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1994). Page numbers of the two sources are indicated in parentheses after each excerpt heading. Original double-column interlinear notes in small type (*jiazhu* 夾註) are set in slightly smaller FangSong type in the Chinese edition and in slightly smaller type in the English translation.

Excerpt 1: Fasc. 104.1a–b; 283

筭法

臣等謹案：《九執曆》法，梵天所造，五通仙人承習傳授。肇自上古白博叉，二月春分朔子時。於時曜躔婁宿，道齊景正，日中氣和，庶物漸榮，一切漸長，動植驩喜，神祇交泰，耀茲令節，命為曆元。竊稽：開設法數，建立章率，述而不作，信而好古。竊簡易之智陳，得希夷之妙術。河帶山礪，久而逾新。藏往知來，挹而靡竭。嘗試言之，蓋以其國人多好道，苟非其器，雖曰子弟，終不傳也。臣等謹憑天旨，專精鑽仰，凡在隱秘，咸得解通。今削除繁冗，開明法要，修仍舊貫，緝綴新經，備列筭術，具標如左。 自作口訣，並題目，附本章。

English Translation

Adapted from Kiyosi Yabuuti, “Researches on the *Chiu-chih li*—Indian Astronomy under the T’ang Dynasty,” *Acta Asiatica* 36 (1979): 7–48.

Excerpt 1: Method of Calculation

We, officers of His Majesty, humbly present the teaching of the *Astronomical Treatise of the Nine Seizers*, composed by the God Brahmā, received and transmitted by the sages of five [supernatural powers].⁷ Beginning from the distant past, in the bright *pakṣa* [i.e., fortnight], at the Spring Equinox, on the New Moon day of the second month at midnight, all luminaries were present at that moment in the asterism Lou [*Aśvini*].⁸ The paths [of the Sun and the Equator] converged, and the shadow [casted by the gnomon] was perfectly aligned. The Sun was in the middle [position of the heaven] and the *qi* was fair. All things prospered, and the animals and plants rejoiced. The gods were in harmony. Glorifying this auspicious moment, they made [this moment] the Epoch [*liyuan*]. In my humble opinion, one may follow tradition without unnecessary innovation when furnishing methods for calculation, adopting constants, and establishing astronomical cycles. With a simplified method, I have obtained [the essence of] the excellent method of old. Like a flowing river eroding a mountain, it is old but exceedingly new; it conceals the past but informs our future. It is reserved but never expires. Let us try to describe it: Although in its country of origin [i.e., India] many are keen on learning, the teachers would not pass [their knowledge] even to those who are called disciples if [the latter] are deemed incapable. We, officers of His Majesty, humbly studied it under His Majesty’s divine will. We unraveled and elucidated all that was obscure with utmost focus and studiousness. Now we have removed the complicated and redundant, and elucidated a summary of the method. We emended the old text and compiled a new treatise, furnished with mathematical formulae, stated in full as follows. We have produced our own axioms, included in this chapter following the topic headings.

7 *Wutong* as the five supernatural powers and ascetics known as *wutong xianren* 五通仙人 are found in early Chinese Buddhist translations. Other interpretations include the five treatises in Varāhamihira’s *Pañcasiddhāntikā* (Yabuuti, “Research on the *Chiu-chih li*,” 11), and the five planets (Chen Jiujin, “Tang Kaiyuan Zhanjing,” 283).

8 $\alpha/\beta/\gamma$ Ari.

Excerpt II: Fasc. 104.1b-2a; 283

筭字法樣

一字、二字、三字、四字、五字、六字、七字、八字、九字。 點。

右天竺算法，用上件九箇字乘除。其字皆一舉札而成。凡數至十，進入前位。每空位處，恒安一點。有間咸記，無由輒錯。運筭便眼，述須先及。

Excerpt III: Fasc. 104.2a; 284

曆度

右天竺度法，三百六十，確符管律，更無奇賸。 中國賸五度四分度一，積而成日為沒日。今合兩家術源。天竺則棄沒日，不入曆度；中國則收沒日，總曰曆度。由是度數不同，彼此有異。……然天地所產，人最靈焉，骸骨之數，咸有法象，既同管律，理亦詳矣。

Excerpt IV: Fasc. 104.2a-3a; 284

推積日及小余章 閏、及甲子、筭七曜直等，在術中。

*Excerpt II: Method and Form of the Mathematical Characters*⁹

dot

one two three four five six seven eight nine [zero]

The aforementioned Indian method of mathematics utilizes the above nine symbols [zi] for multiplication and division. All such symbols are formed with one pen stroke [yijuzha]. When the counting reaches ten, [the numeric character] enters the next space. Wherever there is an empty space, a dot is always placed. As the gap is always marked, there is no room for error. Mathematical operation is visually clear. This should be described before anything else.

Excerpt III: Degrees in the Astronomical System

The Indian system of 360 degrees agrees exactly with the tuning tubes with no odd surplus values [fractions]. In the Chinese system, there is a remainder of five and a quarter degrees, which accrues to one [full] day [known collectively as the “Elided Days” [mori 沒日]. Here we compare the underlying principles of the two systems. The Indian system has abandoned the “Elided Days,” and they are not subsumed under “astronomical degrees.” The Chinese system recognizes the “Elided Days,” treating them collectively as the “astronomical degrees.” A difference exists because the value of the “degree” is not identical. ... Among the creation of Heaven and Earth, humans are supreme. For everything, even the number of [human] bones, manifests faxiang;¹⁰ similar to the tuning tubes, whose principle [li] is clear.

*Excerpt IV: Chapter on the “Accumulated Days” and the “Small Remainder”*¹¹

Intercalation [adhimāsa], [the computation of] the sexagesimal days and the computation of seven planetary weekdays are included in the method [here]

9 The actual Indian numerals are missing in the extant recensions of the *Siku quanshu*, but were certainly present in the original and may be considered one of the earliest descriptions of Indian numerals, including the symbol of zero as a dot rather than a circle. See Cœdès, “Chiffres Arabes,” 323–328. In Xu Youren’s edition, Chinese counting rod symbols are wrongly supplied in the blank spaces, reflecting an interest among nineteenth-century Chinese mathematicians to revive a practice that was current in twelfth- and thirteenth-century China. In Chen’s edition (“Tang Qutan Xida,” 284), the suggestion of Persian numerals was also wrong as all Indian numerals from the Gupta Period onward would fit the description of using “one stroke.”

10 A term used in the *Book of Changes* to describe the totality of the phenomenal world: 是故法象莫大乎天地，變通莫大乎四時。 *Zhouyi zhengyi*, *juan 7*, 29a.

11 Known as *avamaśeṣa* in Sanskrit in Indian calendrical computation, the “small remainder” is an arbitrary variable unique in Indian intercalation for the computation of “accumulated days.”

上古積年，數太繁廣，每因章首，遂便刪除，務從簡易，用捨隨時。今起顯慶二年丁巳歲二月一日，以為曆首，至開元二年甲寅歲，置積年五十七筭。……又置積日，以六十除棄之。餘從庚申筭命之，得甲子之次。又置積日，以七除棄之，餘從熒惑日命之，得七曜直日次。一筭為熒惑，二筭為辰星，三筭為歲星，四筭為太白，五筭為填星，六筭為日，筭空為月。其七曜直用事法，別具本占。

Excerpt v: Fasc. 104.3a-b; 285

推中日章

凡在梵曆，大例，分積滿六十成一度，其度積滿三十成一相，其相積滿十二棄之。他皆仿此。其相，梵音呼為羅施，是聚義也。承前或譯為次，或譯為辰，今從相也。其度，梵音呼為薄伽，承前譯為大分，今從度也。其分，梵音呼為立多，承前譯為小分，今從分也。

The “Sum of Years” [*jinian*, *abdagana*] from the Ancient Epoch is of too large a value. By discarding the integral numbers of the calendrical cycles [from the “Sum of Years”], [the computation] is made simple, as one adopts or abandons something depending on the occasion. Now we reckon from the first day of the second month in the second year of Xianqing [March 20, 657 CE], the year of *dingsi*. This date is taken as the Epoch. From this Epoch to the second year of Kaiyuan [714 CE], the year of *jiayin*, the number of the “Sum of Years” is calculated to be 57. ... Again set aside the “Accumulated Days,” and subtract the integral multiples of 60. Count the remainder from *gengshen* to obtain the sexagesimal day in order. Again, set aside the “Accumulated Days,” and subtract the integral multiple of 7. Count the remainder from the day of Mars [Tuesday] to obtain the weekday of the seven planets in order. Number one is [the day of] Mars [Tuesday], two Mercury [Wednesday], three Jupiter [Thursday], four Venus [Friday], five Saturn [Saturday], six the Sun [Sunday], and “nothing” [zero, *kong*] the Moon [Monday]. The rituals for the seven planetary weekdays are described in a different text for divination.

Excerpt v: Chapter on the Calculation of the “Mean Solar Longitude”
[zhongri, madhyasūrya]

As a general rule in Indian astronomy [*fanli*], 60 minutes [*fen*] become one degree [*du*], 30 degrees become one sign [*xiang*].¹² Signs beyond 12 are discarded. All other cases are similar. The sign [of 30 degrees] is called *rāśi* [*luoshi*] in Sanskrit pronunciation, which has the meaning of “heap.” In the past some people translated it as *ci* [Jupiter station] or *chen* [Branch division].¹³ Here we translate as *xiang*. The degree is called *bhāga* [*bojia*] in Sanskrit. In the past it was translated as *dafen* [lit., “greater division”]. Here we translate as *du*. The minute is called *liptā* [*liduo*] in Sanskrit.¹⁴ In the past it was translated as *xiaofen* [lit., “lesser division”]. Here we translate as *fen*.¹⁵

12 Neither the zodiacal signs nor the sexagesimal units such as degree and minutes are known to early Indians, as they are not attested in the early Vedic sources. The Hellenistic connection is evident in the Sanskrit loanword for minutes, *liptā* (see fn. 14).

13 *Ci* and *chen* are the Chinese terms for the twelve Jupiter stations, a concept comparable to the zodiacal sign. The two terms are noted in earlier Buddhist Chinese sources. *Xiang* appears to be a newly coined term and is not attested elsewhere.

14 From Greek λεπτόν.

15 The earlier translations “greater division” and “lesser division” for degree and minute are clearly attempts to differentiate the Indian units from the Chinese ones. The way the author appropriated the Chinese *du* for the Greco-Indian degree is a subtle but daring innovation.

Abbreviations and Symbols

- fasc. fascicle
Ch. Chinese

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Two 8th-Century CE Recensions of Amoghavajra's Buddhist Astral Compendium

Treatise on Lunar Mansions and Planets

Bill M. Mak

The *Treatise on Lunar Mansions and Planets as Proclaimed by the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī* (Ch. *Wenshushili pusa suoshuo xiuyao jing* / Jp. *Monjushiri bosatsu shosetu sukuyōkyō* 文殊師利菩薩所說宿曜經), or in short, *Treatise on Lunar Mansions and Planets* (Ch. *Xiuyao jing* / Jp. *Sukuyōkyō*), is an astral compendium based on sources from India, Central Asia, and China.¹ The reception history is convoluted, making it an interesting case to show the complex relationship between source texts, translations, editions, and their transmission in India and East Asia (Figure 4.7.1).² The text is attributed to Amoghavajra, or Bukong 不空 in Chinese (705–774 CE), a Buddhist monk born in Samarkand of Indian heritage. He is considered one of the patriarchs of Esoteric Buddhism in China and was both a prolific translator and a politically influential figure in the Tang court. Amoghavajra's exact role in the formation of the text is uncertain, though the preface attributes it cryptically to the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī and possibly other sages, identifying Amoghavajra as the translator. There is no known exemplar of this work and it could well be Amoghavajra's own compilation of astral materials from various sources, including works attributed to Mañjuśrī and other Indian authors. As explained in Excerpt 1, a first draft was made by the “scribe” Shi Yao 史瑤 in 759 CE under the supervision of Amoghavajra, who later deemed it unsatisfactory due to its unidiomatic and awkward phrasing. Five years later in 764 CE, the court astronomer Yang Jingfeng 楊景風 produced a second translation. The two recensions of the text were subsequently transmitted together to become, respectively, the “second” and “first” fascicles of a single text, which has been subsequently preserved as such in all extant sources in China and Japan. The *combined* text was included in all known canons of the Chinese Tripiṭaka with varying degrees of

1 The title in some Chinese recensions is considerably longer: “Treatise on the auspicious and inauspicious time and day, good and bad lunar mansions and planets as proclaimed by the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī and the sages.” See edition below.

2 See Yano, *Esoteric Buddhist Astrology*, 7–11.

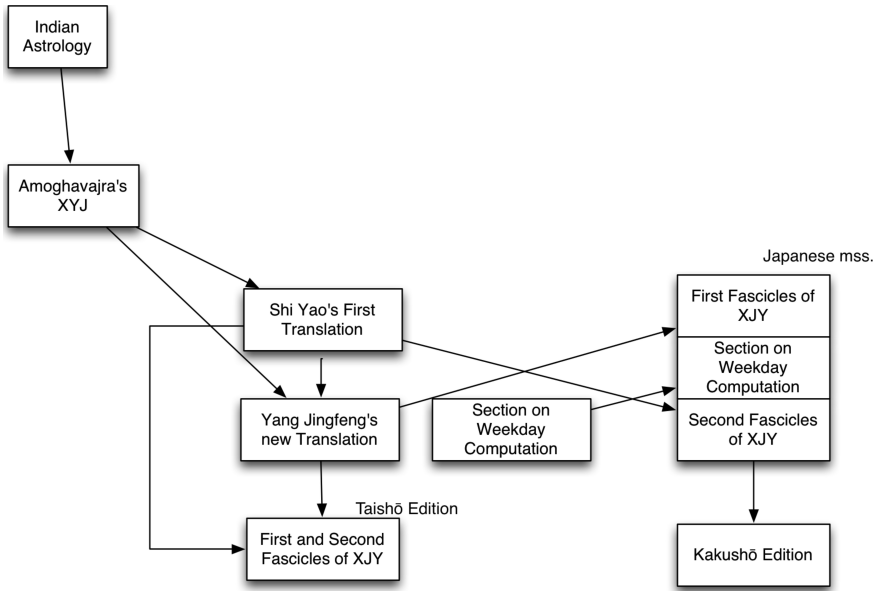


FIGURE 4.7.1 Transmission of the *Treatise on Lunar Mansions and Planets*

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loss and corruption. The Japanese redactions of the text are considerably better in quality and more complete, as exemplified by the edition presented here.

A comparison of the two recensions by Shi and Yang reveals considerable differences in content and style. Shi's translation has a distinct Indian flavor, while Yang's is noticeably sinicized.³ It appears that Shi struggled with many new concepts and ideas with no Chinese precedents or equivalents. In Excerpt 11 on the topic of "seven planetary weekdays," to help the readers understand the unfamiliar concept of the cyclical seven-day week and find out which day it is, Shi furnishes the text with a multilingual glossary and instructs his readers to consult one of the foreigners who should know the planetary weekdays and which day it is. The glossary is given in Sogdian, Middle Persian, and Sanskrit, all transcribed in Chinese characters. Such plurilingual practice attests to the high degree of cosmopolitanism in eighth-century China in urban centers such as the capital Chang'an and the southern coastal city of Guangzhou. It attests also to the existence of an expatriate network of foreigners of different ethnicities and religious affiliations, who contributed to the plurilingual practice in medieval China, a topic yet to be fully explored.

3 Ibid.; Mak, "Greco-Babylonian Astral Science," 27.

TABLE 4.7.1 Sinicization of the *Treatise on Lunar Mansions and Planets*.
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Shi's first translation	Yang's revised translation	↓ Sinicization
Japanese recension	Japanese recension	
Shi's first translation	Yang's revised translation	↓ Sinicization
Chinese recension	Chinese recension	
→ Sinicization		

Unlike Shi whose recension focuses more on the Indic source than the Chinese expressions, Yang's interest is clearly target-oriented and Sinocentric. Thus in Excerpt III, based largely on Shi's earlier translation (Excerpt II), Yang rephrased a number of passages, applying a literary Chinese style, with ubiquitous four-character expressions. This Sinicization interfered significantly with the original style. The outcome is a text that is more comprehensible, or indeed, respectable to the Chinese reader. In addition, Yang or possibly other later scribes deleted and rearranged contents that were deemed unbecoming or unnecessary, such as Shi's multilingual glosses. For both fascicles, the Chinese recensions are noticeably inferior to the Japanese ones. For example, the original order of the planetary weekday: Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn 日月火水木金土, was obscured by the last five planets being glossed as "five stars" 日月五星. Such intervention inadvertently results in the loss of technical content, which was one of the key features of the astral text.⁴

Unlike Shi's recension, which was described as a "scribal transcription" (*bishou* 筆受), Yang's recension is a "revised and annotated edition" (*zaijia-xiuzhuben* 再加修注本). Yang not only excised or changed parts of Shi's text, he also added new material including his own comments. In the Chinese recension of Excerpt III, one finds occasionally the expression "according to Jingfeng," followed by annotations or comments placed in double interlinear columns.⁵ As this is not always found in the Japanese recensions, it is not clear when, where, and by whom these variants were made. What is certain is

4 Note, however, that the expression "Sun, Moon, and five stars" is found in Shi's own translation (Excerpt II) in all recensions.

5 This is possibly either an addition by Yang himself or an interpolation by a later scribe who tried to separate the commentator's words from Amoghavajra's text.

the progressive Sinicization noted among all the extant recensions, from Shi's translation to Yang's, and between the Japanese and Chinese recensions (see Table 4.7.1).

The most significant intervention Yang made, which may be considered an improvement to the technical sophistication of the text, is his addition of the chapter on weekday computation. In Excerpt III, he made a reference to this chapter which is to be included as the seventh, or the last section of the work. This last section, found only in the Japanese recension but not the Chinese one, contains mathematical formulae that are excerpted from the *Nine Seizers Canon* (*Jiuzhi li* 九執曆), composed by the Sino-Indian astronomer Qutan Xida (*Gautamasiddhārtha) 瞿曇悉達 in 718 CE. Through this we learn how knowledge of Indian astronomy circulated within the confine of the Tang Astronomical Bureau was later transferred to the Chinese Buddhists outside the court. However, the loss of this important section as well as the overall corruption of foreign and technical content in the Chinese recension indicates the vicissitudes of Buddhist learning in China. From the ninth century onwards, there was a gradual decline of interest in foreign knowledge and Buddhism itself became progressively sinicized as the Indian religion entered into its second millennium in China.

The *Treatise on Lunar Mansions* is included in all official Chinese Buddhist canons in block prints, in spite of a total absence of references to the Buddha or any Buddhist teaching. This inclusion resulted in the wide dissemination of the astral compendium as an authoritative text in the East Asian tradition of astral beliefs and practices, in particular in Japan where it is taught and practiced up to the present day.



Chinese Text

The Japanese and Chinese editions of the text are represented by K and T, respectively. The Kakushō 覺勝 edition (K) used here is based on at least two manuscripts from Kōyasan 高野山 in the “Collection of Muryōjuin” 無量壽院, with one dated to 1160 CE, and another from the “Heian Period.”⁶ In some places, reading from different Chinese block-print recensions (T) diverges too greatly for a full apparatus to be included here.⁷ Both edition and translation follow the Japanese edition unless otherwise indicated. Interlinear comments are set in slightly smaller FangSong type.

Excerpt 1: Fasc. 1.1a; 387a

文殊師利菩薩所說宿曜經序⁸

特進試鴻臚卿大興善寺三藏沙門大廣智不空奉詔譯本⁹

和上以乾元二年翻出此本。端州司馬史瑤，筆受纂集，不能品叙¹⁰，使文義煩雜，學者難用。於是弟子¹¹楊景風，親奉¹²指揮，再¹³為修注，起草以畢¹⁴，敬¹⁵寫奉行。凡是門人，各持一卷。于時歲次甲辰¹⁶，大唐廣德二年春¹⁷也。今此經文，見有兩本：一是史瑤初筆受本，二是楊景風再加修注本。¹⁸

6 Yano, *Esoteric Buddhist Astrology*, 7–8, 13–14.

7 An unpublished, critical edition of the *Xiyao jing* together with an annotated translation in English was made with the support of Ho Family Foundation Grants for Critical Editions and Scholarly Translations in 2019 and will be included in my forthcoming book, *Indian Astral Science in China*, published in the Routledge series Scientific Writings from the Ancient and Medieval World.

8 文殊師利菩薩所說宿曜經序 K; 文殊師利菩薩及諸仙所說吉凶時日善惡宿曜經卷上 T

9 特進……譯本 K; 開府儀同三司特進試鴻臚卿肅國公食邑三千戶賜紫贈司空諡大監正號大廣智大興善寺 T

10 叙 K; 序 T

11 弟子 K; 草澤弟子 T

12 親奉 K; 親奉和尚 T

13 再 K; 更 T

14 起草以畢 K; 筆削已了 T

15 敬 K; 繕 T

16 甲辰 K; 玄枵 T

17 春 K; om. T

18 今此經文……加修注本 K; om. T

English Translation

Translated by Bill M. Mak.

Excerpt 1: Fasc. 1.1a; 387a

Preface to the *Treatise on Lunar Mansions and Planets as Proclaimed by the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī*

Translated as per royal decree by the monk of [the learning of the] Three Collections [*Tripitaka śrāmaṇa*], “Great and Vast Wisdom” Amoghavajra of *Daxingshan* Temple, Specially Advanced Probationary Chief Minister of the Court of State Ceremonial.

Venerable Monk [Amoghavajra] translated and issued this text in the second year of *Qianyuan* [759 CE]. Adjunct officer Shi Yao of Duanzhou transcribed and edited it. However, it could not be read properly. The meaning of the text was muddled and unclear. Those who studied it found it difficult to use. Therefore, I, disciple Yang Jingfeng, received the instruction [from Amoghavajra] to prepare another annotated edition. After the draft was prepared, it was duly copied out. All members of the school [of Esoteric Buddhism] were given a fascicle. It was the sexagenary year of Jiachen [41], in the spring of the second year of Guangde [764 CE] of the Great Tang. This text has two versions: one is the initial draft version by Shi Yao; the other is the revised, annotated version by Yang Jingfeng.

Excerpt II: Fasc. II.19a–21a; 398a–c

七曜直日曆

夫七曜者，所謂日月五星，下直人間。一日一易，七日而周，周而復始。其所用各各於事，有宜者不宜者，請細詳用之。忽記不得，但當問胡及波斯，并五天竺人，總知。尼乾子、末摩尼，常以蜜日持齋，波斯亦事此日為大日。此等事持不忘，故今列諸國人呼七曜名如後。

日曜太陽。胡名蜜。波斯名曜森勿。天竺名阿 上 你 泥以反 底耶 二合。

月曜太陰。胡名漠¹⁹。波斯名婁禍森勿。天竺名蘇 上 摩。

火曜熒惑。胡名雲漢²⁰。波斯名勢森勿。天竺名盎 平聲 哦囉迦盎²¹。

水曜辰星。胡名啞 丁 逸反。波斯名掣森勿。天竺名部 引 陀。

木曜歲星。胡名鶻勿²²。波斯名本森勿。天竺名勿哩訶 上 娑跋底 丁以反。

金曜太白。胡名那歇。波斯名數森勿。天竺名戌羯羅。

土曜鎮星。胡名枳浣。波斯名翕森勿。天竺名賒乃²³以室折羅。

右件七曜，上運行於天，下直於人間。其精靈神驗，內外典籍具備。自南西北三方諸國，一切皆悉用之。出入行來，用兵陣²⁴，學藝及一切舉動，無不用其宿曜時日。唯東大唐一國，未堪知委其曜。……

19 漠 K; 莫 T

20 漢 T; 漢 K (*furigana* カン)

21 盎 平聲 哦囉迦盎 K; 糞盎聲哦囉迦盎 T

22 鶻勿 T; 鶻[口+鳩]勿 K

23 乃 T; 及 K

24 陣 K; 出陣 K'

25 This section from the second fascicle of the received text, though not explicitly identified in the text itself, should belong to Shi Yao's draft version as described in Yang Jingfeng's preface.

26 The middle Indic expression *niganthaputta* (Skt. *nirgranthaputra*, Ch. *niqianzi* 尼乾子) referring often to the Jains and sometimes more generally to non-Buddhists. *Mār māni*, or "Lord Mani" in Syriac, refers to the founder of Manicheism. I have taken them to refer to the followers in general. See also Paul and Chavannes, "Un traité manichéen" 172.

27 The correct forms in Sogdian, Middle Persian, and Sanskrit based on those attested in original sources are used here as far as possible. While some Chinese transcriptions especially for Sanskrit are exact, others often do not give the exact pronunciation.

28 In the Chinese text (K), various remarks on the pronunciation of the transcribed foreign terms are given. In the case of *āditya*, *shang* 上 as the tone for *ā* indicates long vowel, *ni-yi-fan* 泥以反 is likely a *fanqie* attempt to indicate the voiced dental plosive followed by a high vowel, and finally *erhe* 二合, lit. "two combined," indicates a conjunct consonant. I have given here in the translation only the Sanskrit transcription without these remarks.

*Excerpt II: Fasc. II.19a–21a; 398a–c*Almanac of the Seven Planetary Days²⁵

The seven planets are Sun, Moon, and the Five Stars, presiding over humankind. Each day there is a change and the cycle of seven days repeats itself. On each [day], please note carefully things ought or ought not to be done. If one does not recall [which planetary weekday it is], ask a Sogdian, a Persian, or someone from the five India-s, all of whom would know. The Niganthaputta [*Niqianzi*, i.e., Jains] and Mar Mani [*Momoni*, i.e., Manichaeans]²⁶ perform religious ablutions on the day of Myr [Sunday]. The Persians too consider this day to be an important day. Such matters are never forgotten. Thus here are the seven planets listed, as they are named by the people of various countries:²⁷

[Sunday] Luminary of Sun. Sun [*taiyang*]. *Myr* in Sogdian. *Ēw-šambat* in Persian. *Āditya* in Sanskrit.²⁸

[Monday] Luminary of Moon. Moon [*taiyin*]. *Mʿx* in Sogdian. *Dwō-šambat* in Persian. *Soma* in Sanskrit.

[Tuesday] Luminary of Fire. Mars [*yinghuo*]. *Wnxʿn* in Sogdian. *Sě-šambat* in Persian. *Āṅāraka* in Sanskrit.

[Wednesday] Luminary of Water. Mercury [*chenxing*, “morning star”]. *Țyr* in Sogdian. *Ča[hār]-šambat* in Persian. *Būdhā* [sic]²⁹ in Sanskrit.

[Thursday] Luminary of Wood. Jupiter [*suixing*, “year star”]. **Wrmzʿt* in Sogdian.³⁰ *Pan[ǰ]-šambat* in Persian. *Bṛhaspati* in Sanskrit.

[Friday] Luminary of Metal. Venus [*taibai*, “great white”]. *Nʿxy* in Sogdian. *Ša[š]-šambat* in Persian. *Śukra* in Sanskrit.

[Saturday] Luminary of Earth. Saturn [*zhenxing*]. *Kywʿn* in Sogdian. *Haf[t]-šambat* in Persian. *Śanaīścara* in Sanskrit.

The seven planets revolve above in heaven and preside over the humans below. Their spiritual powers are described in great detail in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist texts. They are used in all countries in the South, the West, and the North. For military expeditions, learning, and all other endeavors, one never fails to consult the time [of the day] and the day of the mansions and the planets. Only in the Great Tang, the country of the East, are the planetary [weekdays] unknown.

29 The correct Sanskrit word for Mercury should be *budha*.

30 The reconstruction from the Kakushō reading would be *wzmt*. Curiously a Ming edition reading gives 鶻勿斯, which would be *wmtz*. The metathesis cannot be accounted for.

七曜占
太陽直日

其日宜冊命拜官，受職，見大人，教旗鬪戰，申³¹威，及金銀作，持咒，行醫，遊獵，放群牧。王公百官，東西南北遠行，及造福禮拜，設齋供養諸天神，所求皆遂。合藥服食，割甲洗頭，造宅種樹，內倉庫，捉獲逃走，入學，經官，理當。並吉。其日不宜諍競作誓，行奸必敗。不宜先戰。不宜買奴婢。此日生者，足智端正。身身³²長大，性好功德，孝順父母，足病短命。若五月五日得此曜者，其歲萬事豐熟。其日若日月蝕，及地動者，其處萬物不生。

Excerpt III: Fasc. I.23ab; 391c

宿曜經³³序七曜直日品第四

七曜者³⁴，日月火水木金土³⁵也。其精上曜於天，神³⁶下直于人。所以司善惡，而主理吉凶也。其法一日一當直，七日一周，周而復始³⁷。推求七曜直日法，入此經卷末《第七曆籌法》中³⁸。

日精曰太陽。胡名蜜，波斯名曜森勿，天竺名阿佉底耶。太陽³⁹直日，宜策命拜官，教兵習戰，持真言，行醫⁴⁰，放群牧，遠行，造福，設齋，祈神，合藥，內倉庫，入學，論官。並吉。不宜爭競，作誓，行姦。對陣不得先起。若人以此日⁴¹生者，法合足智，端正美貌，孝順短命。若五月五日得此曜者，則其歲萬事豐熟。若日食地動，則萬物不生，大旱⁴²。

31 申 T; 甲 K

32 身 K; 貌 T

33 宿曜經 K; 宿曜曆經 T

34 七曜者 K; 夫七曜 T

35 日月火水木金土 K; 日月五星 T

36 神 K; 其神 T

37 周而復始 K; 周而復始直神善惡言具說之耳 T

38 推求……第七曆籌法中 K; 景風曰推求……第七曆籌法中 T

39 胡名蜜……太陽 K; om. T

40 醫 K; 醫藥 T

41 日 K; 曜直日 T

42 則萬物不生大旱 K; 則萬物莫實不千日為殃 T

43 Note that the last five planets were conflated as “Five Stars” in the Chinese recensions.

44 This mathematical chapter is found only in the Japanese manuscripts and is lost in all extant Chinese recensions. It consists of largely verbatim citations from the *Nine Seizers Canon*. See Yano, *Esoteric Buddhist Astrology*, 95–106.

Seven-Planet Divination

Sun-presiding day

On this day one should appoint officials, accept official appointments, meet dignitaries, train armies in combat, display military prowess, make metalware (lit., gold-and-silver making), recite mantras, practice healing, go hunting, herd livestock. Make expeditions with nobles and ministers to the east, west, south, and north. Perform meritorious deeds, conduct worship, prepare purification rites, propitiate the gods, and the desired result will be granted. Prepare and administer medicine. Cut nails, wash hair (lit. head), build houses, plant trees, enter warehouses, capture the escaped, engage in studies, appoint officials, and take care of business. [These are] all auspicious. On this day one should not start a quarrel or make vows. Evil schemes are doomed to fail. One should avoid initiating a war. One should not buy male and female slaves. A person born on this day is endowed with intelligence, comely in demeanor, and grand in stature. Keen on virtuous deeds and dutiful to his parents, he is [however] sickly and short-lived. If one encounters this planet on the fifth day of the fifth month, there will be great abundance and success in myriad things in this year. If there is a solar or lunar eclipse or an earthquake on this day, nothing will grow in this place.

Excerpt III: Fasc. 1.23ab; 391c

Treatise on Lunar Mansions and Planets, Section Four, List of Seven Planetary Days

The seven planets are Sun, Moon, Fire [= Mars], Water [= Mercury], Wood [= Jupiter], Metal [= Venus], and Earth [= Saturn].⁴³ Their essence shines upwards to the heavens, while their divinity descends upon human. As such they are in charge of good and evil, and decide on good and bad fate. It operates as follows: each [planet] presides over a day, seven days in a cycle, and the cycle repeats itself. The method to compute and obtain the presiding day of the seven planets is included in “[Chapter] Seven—Astronomical Computation” at the end of the fascicle of this treatise.⁴⁴

The Sun-essence is known as the Sun [*taiyang*], *myr* in Sogdian, *ēw-šambat* in Persian, and *āditya* in Sanskrit. On the Sun-presiding day [i.e., Sunday], best appoint officials, train armies, perform military practices, recite mantras, practice healing, herd livestock, travel, perform meritorious deeds, prepare purification rites, worship gods, prepare medicinal formulae, take stock, engage in studies, and appoint officials. These are all auspicious. It is not suitable to enter into quarrels, make vows, or do evil. In a situation of conflict, do not take the first step. A person born on this day is destined to be endowed with intelligence, comely in demeanor, and beautiful in appearance. He is dutiful to his parents

but short-lived. If one encounters this planet on the fifth day of the fifth month, then there will be great abundance and success in myriad things in this year. If there is an eclipse or earthquake [on a Sunday], nothing will grow, there will be a great drought.

Abbreviations and Symbols

- Ch. Chinese
 Jp. Japanese
 K Kakushō edition of the *Xiyao jing*
 Skt. Sanskrit
 T *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* [revised *Tripitaka* compiled during the *Taishō* period], 85 vols, edited by Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabe. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1932.
 * Uncertain Sanskrit reconstruction based on Chinese transliteration

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Arabic and Arabo-Latin Translations of Euclid's *Elements*

Sonja Brentjes

Islamicate societies were of different sizes and different demographic compositions. The large territorial states like the caliphates from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries or the main empires from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries consisted of many different population groups speaking different languages in different registers for different purposes. They were in a double sense plurilingual: horizontally by encompassing at different times and in different regions people who spoke as their daily-life languages various dialectal forms of Arabic, Aramaic, Greek, Coptic, Berber, Turkic, Persian, Slavonic, Romance, Indic, and other members of diverse linguistic families; vertically by using more literary or so-called classical registers of some of those languages in prayer, preaching, court procedures, petitions, diplomatic protocols, poetry, literary prose, or scientific, religious, medical, philosophical, and other intellectual writings, teachings, or public debates. Translating occurred side by side with communicating in more than just one language, depending on specific socio-cultural settings like dynastic courts or scholarly circles and schools. While plurilingual scholarly, literary, mercantile, or commercial communication happened in many urban centers crossed by major trade or pilgrimage routes or sea routes between ports in at least four seas (Indian Ocean, Arabian, Red and Mediterranean seas), translations as a formal act of rendering a text in one language as a spoken or written composition in another language on a daily basis are often less well documented. Nonetheless, there were several major phases in which interlingual translation was a widespread cultural activity. One such phase occurred between the seventh and the twelfth centuries in the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates. Religious, historical, diplomatic, mathematical, medical, philosophical, alchemical, and other types of texts were transferred from one, two, and in rare cases also three source languages into one or two target languages: Greek, Syriac, Middle Persian, Sanskrit, Arabic. Many translations were made from Greek into Syriac and from Greek into Arabic, followed by translations from Syriac into Arabic. Translations from Syriac or Greek into Middle Persian and from there into Arabic or from Middle Persian or Sanskrit into Arabic took place less often or are less well documented. This plurilin-

gual environment of translating was enabled by the presence of people speaking, writing, and thinking concomitantly in two or three of those languages. Traces of this plurilingualism permeate even translations where only two languages were involved. An example of this situation can be found in the extant Arabic copies of Euclid's (third century BCE) *Elements*, called translations or corrections of translations. The people involved as translators and correctors were three members of three different faith communities (Islam, Christianity, Sabian astral religion)—al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf ibn Maṭar (d. after 827), Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn (d. 911), and Thābit ibn Qurra (d. 901). The first knew Arabic and Greek, perhaps also Syriac, but may not have been fluent in the second and third languages, while Ishāq and Thābit were equally well versed in all three languages. In addition to some twenty copies of an Arabic text attributed in about half of the copies as a translation to Ishāq but corrected by Thābit, reports in narrative sources, mostly of a bio-bibliographical nature, and in editions of the *Elements* by scholars skilled in the mathematical sciences about the translation history and some of the properties of the work of the three men were compiled from the late ninth to the late thirteenth century and are available in modern editions or in manuscript form. According to these reports, al-Ḥajjāj translated the *Elements* first in the late eighth century, either for Caliph al-Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809) or for his Barmakid vizier Yahyā ibn Khālid (d. 803). He is said to have retranslated the Greek book a second time for Caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 813–833), probably in the 820s.¹ Another report claims that this second version was not a new translation but an edition in which the translator adapted the language and the content of his first translation to suit the taste and interests of the intended, probably courtly audience, deleted superfluties and filled in gaps.² Ishāq is said to have translated the *Elements* anew at some time in the 870s, possibly for the vizier Ibn Bulbul (in office between 885 and 892; d. 892). But due to some unspecified reason, Thābit was charged with the task of correcting or editing this translation.³ Modern historians or Arabists have assumed that this division of labor reflected Ishāq's inferior mathematical competence in comparison with Thābit who was indeed a leading, if not the leading scholar of the mathematical sciences during the entire century.

The scholarly reports are occasionally contradictory. But they agree that the two textual traditions derived from those translations differed substantially. Al-Ḥajjāj was described as having reordered the sequence of propositions in several books, having presented various propositions either as a sequence of

1 Dodge, *Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, 2: 634.

2 *Codex Leidensis 399,1*, Pars 1, 2, 4–5.

3 Dodge, *Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, 2: 634.

separate special cases, for instance a right-, obtuse- and acute-angled triangle instead of an arbitrary triangle, or as a simpler, less general case, for instance a triangle or a square instead of a parallelogram, and included a lesser number of propositions, for instance in Books I, III, VIII, or X. Ishāq's and Thābit's work was described in the opposite manner—as treating the general instead of particular cases, having substantially more propositions, and having ordered several books differently. Some versions attribute numerical examples and simplified diagrams to al-Ḥajjāj.

These scholarly comments on specific manuscript instantiations of the different translations contradict the claim of the tenth-century book trader and erudite Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 990) that al-Ḥajjāj's work had receded into the background and Ishāq's and Thābit's collaborative work dominated scholarly engagement with the *Elements*. During the thirteenth century, several new editions of the *Elements* in Arabic were produced by scholars in Syria, Iraq, and Iran. The one compiled by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī outshone all others and also pushed to the back of scholarly as well as educational lives the versions representing in some manner the translations. Nonetheless, modern researchers have concluded that Ibn al-Nadīm's evaluation and the descriptions by other scholars until the early fourteenth century meant that al-Ḥajjāj's work has been lost to us, except for very limited extracts included in some copies of the edited translation attributed to Ishāq and Thābit, some fragments in the texts or margins of some editions, and certain translations into Latin during the twelfth century and into Syriac done at an unspecified time.

But various other Arabic editions as well as translations into Persian survived in this highly competitive space of mathematical literature. One of those singular versions, produced by an anonymous scholar in all likelihood in the ninth century, in communication with the then-dominant translations and some of the editorial versions already under way since the early ninth century, surprisingly turned out to be the ultimate challenge for understanding the surviving copies of the translations, the practices adhered to by translators and editors of Euclid's *Elements* in the late eighth and throughout the ninth centuries, and the various historical accounts produced by different actors (book traders, philosophers, scholars of the mathematical sciences, administrators, physicians, literati) between the ninth and the fourteenth century. This incomplete edition, bought in the late nineteenth century by a Zoroastrian *mobed* "priest" from Mumbai as a potential tool for reorganizing the ritual calendar of the Parsee community in that town, indicates that everything the surviving sources—whether mathematical, bio-bibliographical, or historical—present as reliable information and source-based evaluation is actually profoundly erroneous. It offers strong evidence that all surviving forms of the translations

either represent or derive from al-Ḥajjāj's work. Hence, the efforts to understand the process of translating Euclid's *Elements* into Arabic stand once again at the very beginning.

The things that we do know, however, independently of such issues as who produced them why, where, when, and for what purpose, concern linguistic features of the extant textual variants, among them a small number of items that testify to the plurilingual environment in which the translations took place and the multiple levels of skills and qualifications that stimulated different textual choices. In the following, cases that exemplify such translational practices are presented.

Translations of Euclid's *Elements*

The extant Arabic texts acknowledged as translations and various fragments show that al-Ḥajjāj had translated a Greek text. Traditionally, it was argued that he used a very literal style of translation. This has recently been shown to be wrong. In contrast, Ishāq was believed to have rendered the mathematical content according to the grammatical rules of Classical Arabic. But if indeed any of the extant texts includes a part of his translation in the edition of Thabit, this too seems to be wrong, and Ishāq seems to have followed much more closely Greek syntax. If, however, none of the extant specimens does contain a part of Ishāq's translation, then al-Ḥajjāj used two different styles when translating and/or editing the *Elements*. One of the two is much Arabicized, is translated not *ad verbum* but *ad sensum*, and includes terms from other parts of the mathematical sciences, Syriacisms, and at least one word that might be an allusion to the vivid debates among different Muslim factions in the early ninth century about whether God has a body and, if so, whether it is of blood and flesh like the human body. The second mode of translation documented in the extant Arabic versions is noticeably closer to Greek style and grammar, translates Greek technical terms often literally, has no Syriacisms, nor alien or practical terms, and no allusions to religious and political debates.

In the twelfth century, Euclid's *Elements* were translated by three different translators from Arabic into Latin and by a fourth translator from Greek. Here, only the translators of an Arabic version are represented—Adelard of Bath (d. ca. 1149–1150), Hermann of Carinthia (active 1138–1143), and Gerard of Cremona (d. 1187). It is widely believed that Adelard of Bath translated one of al-Ḥajjāj's texts, that Gerard of Cremona translated Thabit's edition of Ishāq's translation with additions from some alternative version, and that Hermann of Carinthia translated one of al-Ḥajjāj's versions and heavily abbreviated it. In contrast, it

seems more likely that Adelard translated a later Arabic edition of one of al-Ḥajjāj's texts, that Gerard translated one of al-Ḥajjāj's versions adding extracts from a later edition of one of them and that Hermann translated a later Arabic edition, possibly again of one of al-Ḥajjāj's versions, which might already have been heavily abbreviated, and abbreviated it further.

Explanation English translations are used if they exist and a further translation, as literal as possible, is added. If none exists, only the latter is provided. At times it was very difficult to achieve such a literal translation. The purpose is to allow the reader to recognize the differences between the variants in the three languages and hence some of the difficulties the translators may have faced.

Examples

Excerpt 1

- a. Greek (VII, def.1):

μονάς ἐστίν, καθ' ἣν ἕκαστον τῶν ὄντων ἐν λέγεται.⁴

A unit is that by virtue of which each of the things that exist is called one.
[literally: the unit is (that) according to which each of the existing (things) is called one.]

- b. Arabic 1 (VII, def. 1):

الوحدة هي الشيء الذي يقال لكل واحد من الموجودات واحد.⁵

The unit is the thing by which every one of the things in existence is called one.⁶

[literally: the unit is the thing (according to) which one says for each one of the existing (things) one.]

- c. Arabic 2 (VII, def. 1):

الوحدة هي التي يقال بها لكل موجود واحد.⁷

The unit is that by which every existing [thing] is called one.⁸ [literally: the unit, she is that (according to) which one says for each existing (thing) one.]

4 *Euclides Elementa* II, 103.

5 De Young, *Arithmetic Books of Euclid*, I.1, 2.

6 De Young, *Arithmetic Books of Euclid*, II.1, 4.

7 De Young, *Arithmetic Books of Euclid*, I.2, 318.

8 De Young, *Arithmetic Books of Euclid*, II.2, 285.

- d. Adelard of Bath (VII, def. 1):
*Unitas est qua dicitur omnis res una.*⁹
 The unit is [that] by which each thing is called one.
- e. Gerard of Cremona (VII, def 1):
*Unitas est qua dicitur omnis res una.*¹⁰
 The unit is [that] by which each thing is called one.
- f. Hermann of Carinthia (VII, def. 1):
*Unitas est qua dicitur omnis res una.*¹¹
 The unit is [that] by which each thing is called one.

Excerpt II

- a. Greek (VII, def. 12):
 πρῶτοι πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἀριθμοί εἰσιν οἱ μονάδι μόνῃ μετρούμενοι κοινῶ μέτρῳ.¹²
 Numbers prime to one another are those which are measured by a unit alone as a common measure. [literally: ... those being measured by the unit alone as a common measure.]
- b. Arabic 1 (VII, def. 16):
 الاعداد المتباينة هي التي ايضا يعدها عدا مشتركا الواحد فقط.¹³
 Mutually incommensurable numbers are those which only a unit measures as a common measure.¹⁴ [literally: the numbers that are mutually different are those that also only the one measures as a common measure.]
- c. Arabic 2 (VII, def 13):
 الاعداد التي يقال لبعضها اول عند بعض هي التي ليس لها شيء مشترك يعدها الا الواحد.¹⁵
 Numbers, some of which are called prime to others, are those which do not have anything common which measures them except the unit.¹⁶ [liter-

9 Adelard of Bath, *First Latin Translation of Euclid's Elements*, 196.

10 Gerard of Cremona, *The Latin Translation*, c. 165.

11 Hermann of Carinthia, *Translation of the Elements*, 21.

12 *Euclides Elementa* II, 104.

13 De Young, *Arithmetic Books of Euclid*, I.1, 4.

14 De Young, *Arithmetic Books of Euclid*, II.1, 6.

15 De Young, *Arithmetic Books of Euclid*, I.2, 320.

16 De Young, *Arithmetic Books of Euclid*, II.2, 286.

ally: the numbers, of which one calls one prime to another one, are those to which there is not a common thing by which the two are measured except the one.]

- d. Adelard of Bath (VII, def. 10):

*Numeri incommunicantes quorum uterque ad alterum primus sunt illi qui nullum habent communem numerum se numerantem preter solam unitatem.*¹⁷

Numbers not in communication, of which one of the two is prime to the other, are those which have no common number measuring them except the unit alone.

- e. Gerard of Cremona (VII, def. 13):

*Numeri ad invicem primi sunt quibus non est numerus communis numerans eos communiter nisi unitas tantum.*¹⁸

Numbers mutually prime are those for which there is no common number measuring them together, but only the unit.

- f. Hermann of Carinthia (VII, def. 10):

*Numeri contra se primi dicuntur qui nullo numero excepta sola unitate communiter numerantur.*¹⁹

Numbers are called prime against themselves, which are measured jointly by no number except by the unit alone.

Excerpt III

- a. Greek (VII, theorem 27):

ἐὰν δύο ἀριθμοὶ πρῶτοι πρὸς ἀλλήλους ὦσιν, καὶ πολλαπλασιάσας ἑκάτερος ἑαυτὸν ποιῆ τινα, οἱ γενόμενοι ἐξ αὐτῶν πρῶτοι πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἔσονται, καὶ ἂν οἱ ἐξ ἀρχῆς τοὺς γενομένους πολλαπλασιάσαντες ποιῶσίτινας, ἀκακίνοι πρῶτοι πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἔσονται {καὶ αἰεὶ περὶ τοὺς ἄκρους τοῦτο συμβαίνει}.²⁰

If two numbers be prime to one another, and each by multiplying itself make a certain number, the products will be prime to one another; and, if the original numbers by multiplying the products make certain numbers, the latter will also be prime to one another {and this is always the case

17 Adelard of Bath, *First Latin Translation of Euclid's Elements*, 196.

18 Gerard of Cremona, *The Latin Translation*, c. 165.

19 Hermann of Carinthia, *Translation of the Elements*, 21.

20 *Euclides Elementa* II, 133–134.

with the extremes}. [literally: if two numbers are prime to each other, and each one, having made itself multiple, makes some (number), the ones, having come into being from that, are prime to each other; and when the ones that have been made multiple from the ones that came into being at the beginning make some (numbers), the (numbers) also are prime to each other {and this always happens around the farthest points}.]

b. Arabic 1 (VII, theorem 27):

كل عددین متباینین یضرب کل واحد منهما فی مثله فإن مربعیہما متباینان. وكذلك إن ضرب المربعان فی جذریہما وهما العددان الاولان کل مربع فی جذره فإن المکعبین ایضا متباینان. وكذلك لا یزال فی الاطراف والاعداد الاواخر.²¹

When any two mutually incommensurable numbers are multiplied, each one of the two into its equal, the squares of the two of them are mutually incommensurable, and, likewise, if the two squares are multiplied into their roots, namely the original numbers, each square into its root, the cubes also are mutually incommensurable, and likewise [this] does not change in the case of the extremes and the last numbers.²² [literally: Each two mutually different numbers, each one of them of the two is beaten (= multiplied) with itself, then their two squares are indeed mutually different. Likewise, if the two squares are beaten with their two roots, which are the two first numbers, each square with its root, then the two cubes are indeed also mutually different. Likewise, this does not stop at the extremes, which are the last numbers.]

c. Arabic 2 (VII, theorem 27):

إذا کان عددان وكان کل واحد منهما اولاً عند الآخر وضرب کل واحد منهما فی مثله فإن کل واحد من مربعیہما اول عند الآخر. وكذلك إن ضرب المربعان فی العددین الاولین کل واحد منهما فی جذره فإن کل واحد من العددین المجسمین ایضا اول عند الآخر. وكذلك لا یزال فی الاطراف الاواخر.²³

If there are two numbers, and one of the two of them is prime to the other, and each of the two of them is multiplied into its equal, then each one of the squares of the two of them is prime to the other; likewise, if the two squares are multiplied into the two original numbers, each one of them

²¹ De Young, *Arithmetic Books of Euclid*, I.1, 80.

²² De Young, *Arithmetic Books of Euclid*, II.1, 71.

²³ De Young, *Arithmetic Books of Euclid*, I.2, 392.

into its root, then each one of the two resulting numbers is also prime to the other; likewise, this does not cease in [the case of] the furthest limits.²⁴ [literally: If there are two numbers, where each one of the two is prime to the other, and if each one of the two is beaten with itself, then each one of their two squares is indeed prime to the other. Likewise, if the two squares are beaten with the two first numbers, each one of the two with its root, then each one of the two solid numbers indeed is also prime to the other. Likewise, this does not stop at the last extremes.]

- d. Adelard of Bath (VII, theorem 27):

*Cum propositi fuerint duo numeri uterque ad alterum primi ducaturque uterque eorum in seipsum, erunt qui ex eis producentur uterque ad alterum primi. Itaque si in hos principia ipsa ducantur, erunt quoque ex eis producti ad invicem primi, eodemque modo infinite omnium in se ductorum extremitates.*²⁵

When two numbers have been proposed, each one being prime to the other, and each one of them is prolonged into (= multiplied with) itself, the ones that will be produced from them will be prime each one to the other. And so, if the beginnings (= first numbers) themselves are prolonged into these, the products from them will also be mutually prime, and in the same way the extreme limits of all that were prolonged into themselves forever.

- e. Gerard of Cremona (VII, theorem 27):

*Si fuerint duo numeri quorum unusquisque sit ad alterum primus et multiplicetur unusquisque eorum in se ipsum, quisque duorum quadratorum ipsorum est ad alterum primus. Et similiter si duo quadrati multiplicentur in numeros primos scilicet quisque eorum in radicem suam, quisque duorum cubicorum etiam erit ad alterum primus. Et similiter incessanter in extremitatibus postremorum erunt incommunicantes sicut qui multiplicantur in numeros primos.*²⁶

If there have been two numbers, of which each one is prime to the other and if each of them is multiplied into itself, each of the two squares of themselves is prime to the other. And similarly, if two squares are multiplied into the first numbers, that is each of them into its root, each of the

²⁴ De Young, *Arithmetic Books of Euclid*, II.2, 355.

²⁵ Adelard of Bath, *First Latin Translation of Euclid's Elements*, 215.

²⁶ Gerard of Cremona, *The Latin Translation*, c. 180.

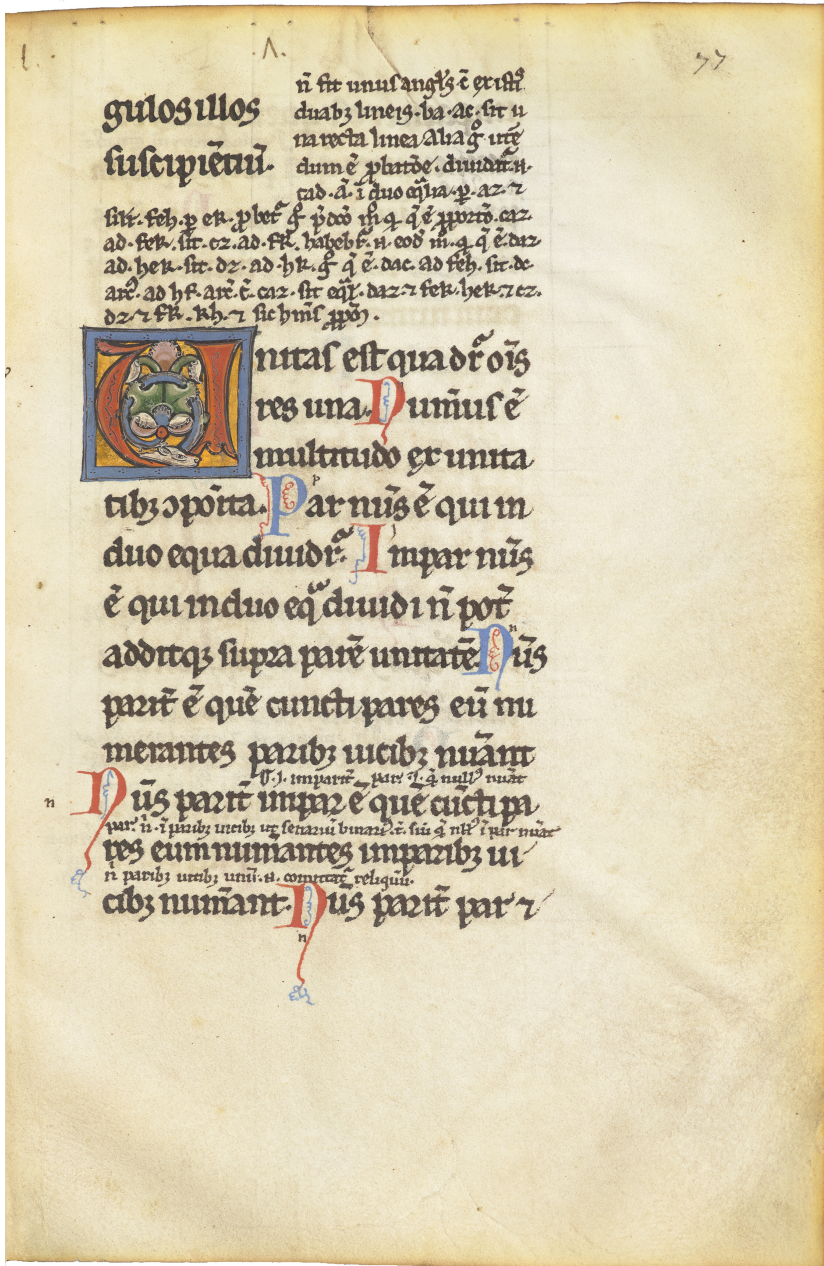


FIGURE 4.8.1 Euclides, Geometria, Definition VII, 1; MS Paris, Latin 7374, fol. 77r; 13th century, a version related to Abelard of Bath's translation BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE. DÉPARTEMENT DES MANUSCRITS

two cubes also will be prime to the other. And similarly, incessantly, (those that are multiplied) in the extreme limits of the last (ones) will be not in communication, like the ones that are multiplied into the first numbers.

- f. Hermann of Carinthia (VII, theorem 27):

*Si duo numeri ad invicem sunt primi, quos uterque in se ipsum ductus producunt similiter ad invicem erunt primi. Itemque si in utrumque productorum suus utriusque submultiplex ducatur, ad invicem primos producent. Eoque pacto infinite eorum extremitates constabunt.*²⁷

If two numbers are mutually prime, those that they produce when each one of the two has been prolonged into itself will similarly be mutually prime. And equally, if each submultiple is prolonged into both of their products, they will produce mutually primes. If this is done infinitely, the extreme limits of them will be stable.

Symbols

- { } 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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PART 5

Writing Systems



Introduction

Dagmar Schäfer, Markham J. Geller, and Glenn W. Most

This part addresses the role of writing systems in the plurilingual past. As Ignaz Gelb observed in 1952, in general “there are no limitations as to the use of one writing system for any number of languages.”¹ When considered in the context of the global past, however, we can see that writing systems were invented and operationalized in ways that promoted either mono- or plurilingualism. For instance, some writing systems are applied to many languages, others remain exclusive to one language. Historically writing systems have come to characterize language identity, as in the case of Yiddish that is written in Hebrew script, although rooted in Judeo-Slavic and lexified in German.² Uyghur, Tangut, Mongolian or Manchu are examples for writing systems in Asia that were specifically invented against the background of the dominance of the Chinese empire of writing.

The text selection in this volume shows past voices discussing the evolution, invention, and purpose of writing systems in the context of political, social, or intellectual concerns about language diversity. These voices reverberate in modern views on plurilingualism, but find no echo in linguistic analyses that study pluri- and monolingualism in writing systems as a question of how multiple linguistic codes using one script or scripts were switched within one linguistic system, or explore how scriptural systems were used for information storage entirely independent of speech. The purpose of this introduction then is to illustrate historical dynamics between writing systems and language in the *longue durée*, considering both cultural and linguistic aspects.

1 What Is a Writing System?

One way in which scholars since early times have attempted to define a writing system is by delineating when and how writing actually began. Early Chinese sources, for instance, place the invention of writing in a mythological origin

¹ Gelb, *Study of Writing*, 228.

² Paul Wexler suggests that Arabic Jews had heavily influenced Yiddish before it relexified to German vocabulary from the ninth century on. Wexler, *Silk Road Linguistics*, 25–26.

of society and statecraft and suggest that humans observed and replicated the footprints of birds and beasts for the purpose of accounting and documentation. Archaeological excavations have found early pottery etched with individual graphs for personal names, places, events, or objects. Systematically developed sets of graphs first appeared on bones and shells used for divination and for the recording of political, economic, and social events. It is at this point, when rule-based, morphologically related graphs appeared within syntactical relationships, that modern researchers speak of a writing system.³

Research today recognizes numerous early approaches to writing and four dominant, independently developed writing systems: the Mesopotamian, which is the oldest known; the Chinese, which is the only one still in use today; the Egyptian; and the Mesoamerican.⁴ The traditions of these four regions matter, because, as Gelb suggested, “the cultural predominance of a certain country frequently results in the borrowing of its writing by its culturally less developed neighbours.”⁵ Or to put it another way: these regions drew associations between language and writing systems that have crucially informed the role writing systems play in language identities.

Another approach to writing systems addresses the relationship between them and oral language or thinking: what came first, language or writing? Linguists such as Peter T. Daniels suggest that, even if script developed from pictures or graphs, writing only begins when the visuals of a socially (and historically) conventionalized system of communication incorporate aspects of language and meaning making that cannot be represented by images.⁶ Once writing systems were in place, they influenced scholarly approaches to languages. For the Greek thinker Aristotle, for instance, written words were mainly symbols for spoken words and writing a supplement to spoken language.⁷ He was thinking of the Greek alphabet that, similar to the Aramaic, Phoenician, or Arabic writing systems, uses a distinct number of phonograms to render the sound of words. While the French reformer and philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau

3 A stricter definition of writing as “a conventionalized system of visual communication representing speech” is given by Stauder, “Earliest Egyptian Writing,” 137.

4 See also Daniels, “Study of Writing Systems.” Melka suggests a fifth one on Easter Island: Melka, “*Rongorongo* Tablet ‘Mamari.’”

5 Gelb, *Study of Writing*, 228. Researchers usually see later writing systems as being at least influenced by these early systems, rather than fully independent developments. See e.g., Gardner, *Philippine Indic Studies*.

6 Daniels, “Study of Writing Systems,” 3.

7 Linguists explore writing systems and their dynamics as a science of linguistic descriptions and semiology, and as a science of script graphs and grammarology. This shift from semiology to grammarology is attributed to the 1960s and the work of Derrida.

(1712–1778) would follow the Aristotelian concept, other European philosophers, such as Gottfried W. Leibniz (1646–1716) or Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), pointed to written Chinese, the languages of mathematics, and notational systems for music to draw attention to the fact that written languages can function independently of oral/natural language/speech.⁸

Whenever writing exists it not only lends historical visibility to (oral) languages but affects language dynamics and diversity, as exemplified by Mesopotamia. In this region, early forms of writing indeed attempted to take into consideration both meaning, through meaning-giving graphs (i.e., picto-, ideo-, or logograms/graphs), and sound—through phonograms/graphs working with alphabets. This second form uses a smaller number of graphs to represent individual sounds or syllables. Some phonetic systems leave out certain sounds (vocals or consonants), or are adapted in ways that, as Brentjes (Chapter 5.4) points out with reference to Arabic, can also make an association with a specific language group difficult. In logographic systems, the graph is the smallest unit, but some words are formed by combining two or more graphs. In Hieratic, graphs represent syllables, while Egyptian hieroglyphics combine alphabetic, syllabic, and logographic elements. Unless we include formal languages such as mathematics, no writing system related to spoken language, including written Chinese, works entirely without phonetic indicators.

From a historical point of view then, the Aramaic alphabet was a radical departure from earlier Mesopotamian approaches to writing and its use had an impact on how knowledge was transmitted, since there were no established procedures for communication between syllabic and alphabetic writings until almost the very end of cuneiform's functionality. There was no Mesopotamian equivalent to the Coptic script in Egypt, which conveyed the local language (Egyptian) in a transliterated alphabetic format. Despite these obstacles, oral Aramaic translations may have played a mediating role in communicating technical data (astronomy, medicine, magic, etc.) from cuneiform tablets to wider audiences, as cuneiform declined in popularity.

8 See Feigelfeld, "Chinese Whispers." Leibniz framed written Chinese as a self-explanatory system that offers signifying principles for multiple scripts. This relates to Derrida and his view that semiology must clear the space for grammatology. This assumption builds on the idea that writing is structured signs (which again reflect the structure of psyche). Signs must be understood also always as inhabited by the traces of another sign and not in the sense of a semiology that sees the sign as a homogeneous unit bridging an origin referent and an end meaning.

2 Plurilingualism and Monolingualism in Early Writing Systems

How then did Mesopotamian society develop writing systems related to plurilingualism? Mesopotamian writing, impressed on either clay or incised on stone, appeared approximately at the turn of the third millennium BCE. Although the archaic pictographic script appearing on these clay tablets provides few phonetic clues to the related language, the hypothesis that the underlying language was Sumerian is likely to be the best option. Within a few centuries, both Sumerian and Semitic Akkadian were being written phonetically in cuneiform, with some regard to the original pictographs by assigning phonetic values to individual signs using the rebus principle (e.g., SAG “head” > /šak/). The development from pictographic to phonetic characters allowed cuneiform to be applied to other languages in the region, including Hittite (and other local languages) from Anatolia,⁹ Elamite from Iran,¹⁰ Hurrian from Mesopotamia, and Urartian from Armenia, all inscribed on clay tablets. None of these languages were cognates and they all exemplify the principle of one script being used for a variety of different languages. The common key feature, however, is that these languages were normally written in characters impressed into wet clay with a stylus or incised into stone for monumental inscriptions.

It is remarkable that essentially the same writing system could be adapted for so many different languages which had otherwise nothing in common. In order to reflect in a recognizable form incongruent phonologies while producing meaningful written representations, the script had to be relatively easy to master but at the same time capable of being adapted to numerous linguistic scenarios. It was soon obvious that a pictographic script was not up to the challenge; this can be seen from Egyptian hieroglyphs, which remained in use throughout antiquity for a language that never became a lingua franca and was virtually useless for writing foreign words or texts. The earliest known writing system, from Mesopotamia, abandoned its pictographic form early on for a limited but large number of abstract characters, which often retained a visual echo of the original pictographs but soon attracted phonetic values that could be used universally for all languages in the region.

This is not the place to explain all of the complications of the polyvalence of cuneiform signs, since the shift from writing tablets in Sumerian to writing Semitic Akkadian involved a complex process of adapting signs with original pictographic meanings to purely phonetic ones. The important point is that

9 Also using hieroglyphic characters for Luwian.

10 Also written in a pictographic Proto-Elamite script.

cuneiform writing was deciphered first through Akkadian, since this latter language has close cognates with Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, Ethiopic, and other less well-known Semitic languages. This meant, however, that whereas Akkadian orthographies such as *bi-tu* could be easily identified as Hebrew *bayit* or Aramaic *beit* “house,” Sumerian was much more problematic, since it lacked a cognate language that could be used to decipher it. Fortunately, Sumerian remained throughout the history of cuneiform writing a prestige language of literature, scholarship, and liturgy, which meant that the school curriculum preserved on durable clay tablets produced a very large number of glossaries, grammatical paradigms, and bilingual translations. Modern scholars were in the unique position of being able to learn one ancient language through the written instructions of a second ancient language.

But Mesopotamian writing was not exclusively recorded on clay tablets, since by the first millennium BCE languages were being painted with a brush onto smooth surfaces, such as leather, papyrus, or clay ostraca, almost exclusively in alphabetic scripts. There are some exceptional cases of painted cuneiform signs, but these are rare. Alphabetic writing, however, did not suddenly appear in this form, but for the first few centuries of its existence, characters were impressed in clay in a modified cuneiform alphabet but with many fewer signs. The best-known examples are from the city of Ugarit in Syria, which left numerous examples of alphabetic cuneiform dating from ca. the fourteenth to thirteenth centuries BCE, but these are not the only ones. Painted stone surfaces with pictographic alphabetic characters also appeared in the Sinai from approximately the same period, indicating a parallel development of alphabet signs generated from pictographs (aleph meaning “bull,” bet meaning “house,” etc.). The main difference was in the number of characters—thirty or fewer instead of the usual range of ca. six hundred different characters for writing Sumerian and Akkadian (and other languages).

There are popular misconceptions about these alphabets which need to be addressed. First, although used by many different languages, there is only one alphabet, whether we know it as alpha-beta or aleph-bet, and the characters usually appear in a fixed order, since each letter had an associated number.¹¹ The fact that the alphabet in its original form consisted of 30 characters also meant that it could be used for lunar calendar reckoning, which made it a remarkably versatile tool for both writing and calculation. The key development in the history of the alphabet was the adaptation of certain consonants

11 Classical Arabic changed the order of the alphabet but kept the original numerical associations with each character.

(glottal stops and laryngeal *ayyin*) for vowel characters /a/, /i/, /e/, /u/ and /o/, which was not the case with the original Semitic alphabet. On the other hand, many languages employing the alphabet lost the original distinctions between emphatic and non-emphatic consonants (e.g., /t/ and /ṭ/, or /z/ and /ṣ/), although /k/ and /q/ often remained distinctive but phonetically indistinguishable.

The alphabet existed side-by-side with traditional syllabic cuneiform writings of Sumerian and Akkadian and other languages for nearly two millennia, which relates to a second misconception. There is a general perception that alphabets increased literacy by introducing a simpler and in fact superior orthographic system with far fewer characters, which became increasingly popular and spread to many different languages. This view grossly misunderstands the complex relationship between language and script. For a native speaker of Akkadian, the use of six hundred characters posed few problems, since it meant that decoding of phonetic writings of letters and administrative documents was relatively easy, since characters consisted of CV, VC, or CVC combinations which could reproduce the consonants and vowels with considerable accuracy. Thus, the script could mimic the language with considerable success. On the other hand, alphabetic writings of Semitic languages such as Ugaritic, and later Aramaic and Hebrew and other ancient languages of the region, were mostly consonantal orthographies lacking most of the vowels, which could potentially render texts grammatically unclear and ambiguous. For this reason, languages traditionally written in alphabetic scripts were usually avoided for international correspondence, since they could pose problems for non-native speakers. Aramaic, for instance, only came to be used for official correspondence within the Persian Empire after 500 BCE, a millennium after the invention of alphabetic writing. In the very latest period of cuneiform writing, a fascinating small group of tablets known as Graeco-Babyloniaca were recovered as school texts from Babylon: these tablets recorded cuneiform texts (in both Sumerian and Akkadian) on the obverse and transliterations into Greek on the reverse. It seems clear that Greek (rather than Aramaic) script was chosen because it could successfully reproduce the vowels.

Over centuries stakeholders, including traders, states, scholars and elites, impacted the development of writing. Mesopotamia as a society embraced plurilingualism by developing multiple writing systems, sometimes for specific purposes but also leaving room for experimentation and mixing. In both ancient Egypt and Mesoamerica, writing was a tool for powerful elites. Ancient Egyptian was mainly operational for specific elite (religious and political) purposes, written in pictographic hieroglyphs and in cursive but closely associated hieratic, then in a later Demotic script with an expanded set of characters, and

finally in a modified alphabet as Coptic.¹² Coptic was not used phonetically to transliterate texts in other languages. The Mesoamerican systems include the hieroglyphic language of Olmec, which was in use from 1500–400 BCE. Other languages developed for religious purposes and taxation operated on similar principles.

One final point remains to be considered. While writing systems were clearly promoted by elites, levels of literacy in antiquity are usually underestimated, based as they are on medieval models from Europe. One crucial factor influencing literacy in antiquity was the cheapness and availability of writing materials, in the form of papyrus in Egypt and clay in Mesopotamia. In the latter case, writing materials were not only readily available but virtually free, since all that was needed to write was a lump of clay and a reed stylus. If one compares this to the effort and expense required to create parchment, the picture becomes quite clear. A merchant would only require familiarity with a few cuneiform signs to write a rudimentary receipt for goods, or to read one, without having to solicit the services of a professional scribe. Certainly scribes were required for more sophisticated contracts or official correspondence, and these skills would have been acquired in scribal schools, as evidenced in virtually every site where substantial numbers of cuneiform tablets are found by archaeologists. These finds confirm that the school curriculum was standardized, since the same texts appear to have been studied in different cities, and traditional texts from earlier periods continued to be studied (and commented upon) in later periods. The history of Chinese writing reflects similar phases of development but is distinguishable from Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Mesoamerican systems, because here the curriculum and the strong influence of the state and its elite led to a written language that, closely amalgamated with the Sinographic script, came to dominate views on language and its diversification. Furthermore, this written language still influences notions of literacy today.

3 The Development of Plural Languages and Literacy

Historical sources in Chinese and about China emphasize a confluence between political and scholarly forces that underwent different phases. Over the course of time, the Chinese writing system was repeatedly applied to dif-

12 Except when attempting to write foreign names, in which case it used a rudimentary orthography resembling a consonantal alphabetic script, which was never adopted for classical Egyptian. One very unusual exception is Amherst Papyrus 63, a Persian period papyrus in Aramaic in Demotic script.

ferent language groups until, by the third century CE, a strong imperial state enforced a standardized written language and associated it with a certain Sino-phone elite language variation. Successive rulers continued this approach over the following two millennia, while continuously enforcing the written language and curricula on tributary states. In due course, we can see how literacy in this written language came to function across societies using multiple tongues.

Unlike Leibniz, who relied on his imagination, Chinese scholars and politicians were well aware of different phases in the development and use of their script. They saw how Chinese rulers had continually relied on writing for state-building, as well as how varied efforts “to accommodate the records of many odd places [*Sheren neng da yifang zhi zhi* 舌人能達異方之志] with people of different tongues”¹³ had sometimes led to crucial misunderstandings and social upheaval. This volume contains excerpts from the writings of Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 300–230 BCE), a scholar and political advisor who bemoaned the loss of an ideal past in which elites had all been able to read and write the same language. As William Boltz among others has shown, Chinese writing by the third century was marked by a trend towards phoneticizing,¹⁴ to which scholars such as Xunzi reacted by offering a set of rules that, aiming at consistency, could help when adapting the script to different tongues.

The range of tongues involved was extensive, as research has emphasized, including Turkic-Perso-Arabic and Tibetan-Burmese and Miao as well as Austroasiatic groups (see Chapter 1.5). Yet in Xunzi’s world, unlike Mesopotamia, the struggle over semantics and phonetics did not see the rise of alternative phonetic scripts. Instead, we see a growing dominance of Sinographs and a situation in which scholars, in cooperation with social and political elites, developed a language with invariable words (inflectional morphology) written in a logographic script.¹⁵ As Li Zehou noted, with the unification of Qin-Han rule, the logographic approach gained the support of the ruling elite who used the writing system to “control, dominate, and regulate language, and not to record it.”¹⁶ Standards were enforced by a curriculum that endorsed the canonical writings of China’s early antiquity, so that, as Ming Dong Gu has emphasized, Chinese after the Han became “not a case in which ‘a language was invented to suit the written characters after they were formed,’ but a case in which a writing system is adopted to represent the meaning of a language system with differ-

13 Original in Dong Cengling, *Guoyu zhengyi*, j. 2, 21a. The source also identifies such translators within the official ranking system of the Zhou court as interpreters (*xiangxu* 象胥).

14 Boltz, “Multilingualism and Lingua Franca.”

15 Haudricourt, “How to Reconstruct Old Chinese,” 3.

16 Li, *Zhongguo gudai sixiang shi*, 27.

ent dialects."¹⁷ In this vein, Chinese was introduced to tributary countries so that actors not able to speak Chinese were able to write and communicate in it—similar to the way Latin was used across European languages.¹⁸

That curricula matter can be seen in the fate of the Sanskrit writing system in China. Buddhist learning itself suggests, as Roy Tzohar emphasizes in this part (see Chapter 5.3), “that words lack any real referential ontological grounding and their meaning is thus merely conventional.” Therefore, the Sutras should be repeated continuously in their original form. A fragment now held in Florence presents rare testimony that Indian children learned the script by repeatedly copying graphs.¹⁹ Pupils were hence trained not to learn the language, but to comprehend it by way of repeated writing. This approach affected also the transmission of Sanskrit to China. Xuanzang 玄奘 (see also Chapter 4.1), the Chinese monk who travelled to India to find the original Buddhist texts, had nothing to say about learning Sanskrit, while he described in detail the pedagogical paradigm used to teach children to read and write in Chinese. This absence of a curriculum seems to be one additional reason why, despite the transmission of Buddhism, Sanskrit did not take root in Chinese society, and Sanskrit was translated into Chinese, but no serious efforts were made to transpose the Chinese textual legacy into Sanskrit.

Chinese descriptions of the history of writing in India are presented as narratives of decline, in which the writing system was originally more copious and only later came to include fewer elements (and thus became less like the Chinese writing system). The Chinese also wrote grammatical descriptions of Sanskrit/Palavi, in which they had to invent new terms to explain properties of Sanskrit that were not usually featured in descriptions of Chinese (e.g., passive and active voice). The descriptions of these grammatical features had no discernible influence on Chinese in the long term. Indian phonological learning, in contrast, had an enormous influence on Asian languages up until the end of the imperial period. With the spread of Buddhism, cultures without writing across Central, South East, and East Asia increasingly used the religious canon to develop their own writing systems. Starting in the third century CE

17 See Gu, “Sinologism in Language Philosophy,” 703.

18 Substantiating Chinese as the countermodel to phonetic language developments and against language hegemonies, historians, philologists and even linguists from the nineteenth century onwards have occasionally overemphasized how written Chinese remained stable and firm and uninfluenced by other languages. While this might be true on the level of the highest stratum of literary learning, linguists nowadays have a much more sophisticated view of language development and see that different variations and intonations could have an effect on grammar and writing styles. See Handel 2019.

19 Mak, “Magical Alphabet,” 211–212 (fig. 14.2).

and long into modern times we can see how both Sanskrit/Palavi as well as written Chinese constituted important reference points for the invention of new literacies.

4 Multiliteracy and Plural Languages

There is not enough space in this introduction to delineate the multiple scripts and writing systems in use at any point in time and place in Asia from the fifth century BCE onwards. Sanskrit and Palavi derived from earlier Kharoṣṭhi and Brahmi scripts of the third quarter of the first millennium BCE, and even after the Sanskrit cosmopolis was consolidated, these scripts would continue to inform the invention of new writing systems in Central and much of Southeast Asia over the subsequent centuries.²⁰ Often here too, religious or social elites took the initiative. Tibetan, for instance, was invented in the style of Sanskrit during the reign of Emperor Khri Srong btsan (died 649; known to later histories as Srong btsan sgam po, Srong btsan “the wise”). Sources emphasize this was done to enhance the administration of the empire, but clearly the elite’s affinity for Buddhism and their familiarity with the traditions of northern India and Nepal provided enough motivation for them to adapt a late Gupta script. In contrast, Central Asian contemporaries to the Tibetans, the Mi nyag people (Tibetan for what would later become the Tanguts; Chinese: Dangxiang), who also used a Tibeto-Burman language, chose to invent a writing system referencing the Sinitic script.

These cases illustrate how in Asia elites increasingly identified writing as a tool of state power and, in due course, increased the status of their language by recording it in writing. When existing writing systems were adopted, the new language was given visibility by introducing new additional graphs, or a new (sometimes exclusive) writing system was invented. In all such cases, plurilingualism is to be distinguished from multiliteracy. The Tanguts, for instance, were plurilingual and multiliterate, as they grounded their interpretation of the Sutras on Tibetan and Uyghur translations.²¹ An uneven power relation, however, continued to inform the invention of new writing systems in this region despite such diversification. The Jurchen Jin in the eleventh century, well aware of the power of writing, adopted Chinese for their administration

20 Daniels, “Indic Scripts.”

21 Nishida Tatsuo, *Seikabun Kegonkyō*, 3:3–59. For an overview of Tangut, see also Kornicki, “History of the Tangut Book.”

after conquering the Chinese Song Dynasty but then invested heavily in creating their own script (see Chapter 5.5). Similar to the Mongolian rulers a century later, they rejected Sinographs and instead took inspiration from Turkic-Persian-Arabic writing systems, Tibetan, Palavi and Sanskrit. In the seventeenth century the Manchu then rooted themselves in Jurchen-Jin and Mongolian traditions and formed their script to reflect this heritage.²²

We can see how, over the course of two millennia, the dominance of the Chinese writing system, combined with an expansion of curricula, absorbed Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and China into a “Sinosphere” in which a standardized form of written Classical Chinese served as a lingua franca for administrative, political, and elite social correspondence and in scholarly discourse.²³ Thus 水 was recognized as signifying water, whether pronounced *shui* (i.e., Chinese), *mizu* (Japanese), *nuoc* (Vietnamese) or *mul* (Korean). Leibniz explains this approach to Chinese logograms as being similar to the modern use of numerals: The numbers 1, 2, or 3 can be uniformly understood whether pronounced in English, French, Hindi, or Tamil. However, it is also true that Sinographs worked with phonographs and that scholars throughout Chinese history were particularly keen on emphasizing how the Chinese script could reflect and absorb phonetic changes. The grand polymath of the Song dynasty Shen Kuo 沈括 (1031–1095 CE), by contrast, emphasized the phonographic capacity of the Chinese script, noting that it could even be used to represent Sanskrit.²⁴ Therefore, both were right in the sense that they were just addressing different properties of the writing system.

By the Qing dynasty, the study of how historical or regional sound changes were reflected in Chinese script, that is, phonology, was one of the most vibrant fields of scholarly research.²⁵ This deep interest of Chinese scholarship in phonology reflects the fact that written languages were regularly challenged by oral languages so that scholars had to renew rules and canons to keep writing understandable, consistent, and intact. The history of Chinese writing in Japan or Korea exemplifies the fact that this encounter with oral language dynamics also regularly inspired new literacies. In Choson-Korea, Yu Tukkong (1748–1807)

22 Daniels, “Writing Systems.”

23 Historians see various degrees of overlap. Denecke and Nguyen, “Shared Literary Heritage,” emphasize corresponding genres and scholarly practices in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Handel, *Sinography* favors the term Sinographic sphere indicating the different demographics of using the Chinese writing system and Sinophone languages.

24 For Xunzi, see Chapter 1.5. For Shen Kuo, see his remarks on Xiong Ansheng 熊安生: Shen Kuo, *Mengxi bitan: Bu Bitan*, j. 1, 11b.

25 See Klöter and Söderblom Saarela, *Language Diversity*, esp. Söderblom Saarela, “Manchu, Mandarin” for the role of official Chinese Guanhua.

points to the development of a Korean writing system used by ordinary people for mundane things, whereas he himself notated a Korean pronunciation of literary Chinese (see Chapter 5.6). Even as Japanese scholars were trained in written Chinese, they developed an additional phonetic script for reading purposes, thereby not only giving their language a voice, but also pluralizing written languages. As Coulmas noted, “the practice of using one language in writing and another in reading,”²⁶ that is, when speakers vocalized the same written form along different phonetic registers within a curriculum of classical Chinese texts, reached beyond Edo-Japanese and Choson-Korean, to Uyghur and Nguyen-era Vietnamese groups.

5 The Alphabet, Writing Systems, and Logic

When philosopher-sinologists such as A.C. Graham, Eric Hutton, or Peng Chuanhua ponder whether Xunzi’s *ming* referred to names, spoken or written “words,” they are continuing a passionate twentieth-century debate about the importance of Chinese logographs as compared with European linguistic hegemony.²⁷ In due course Chinese was promoted as a concept-driven language and countermodel to the European “phonocentrism.” In this battle, historians, philologists, and even linguists have suggested that written Chinese was not only used regularly to communicate between different oral language groups but also became a standard in itself, heavily influencing oral language development.

As a matter of fact, though, Chinese is only one of many examples of language strategies in which writing systems have come to play a role, whether they were essentially pictographic or abstract, in the form of syllabaries or alphabets. Many of the characteristics of these writing systems share common or closely related origins but display radically different approaches to representing language, in terms of both sound and meaning. Finally, it is instructive to see how the alphabet as a writing system developed within major linguistic writing systems. The very last alphabets to be developed within the European realm were two Slavonic scripts, the Glagolitic in the ninth century CE, traditionally attributed to the brothers Cyril and Methodius, and the Cyrillic script, which soon replaced it. The names of the Slavonic characters were common

²⁶ Coulmas, *Blackwell Encyclopedia*, 8.

²⁷ Graham, *Later Mohist Logic*. Graham subsequently became more critical of his approach, see Graham, “Conceptual Schemes.” See also Hutton, *Xunzi* and Peng Chuanhua, *New Discourse*.

to both scripts and differed from those in the traditional alphabet (i.e., aleph “bull”; bet “house,” etc.), and the names for Glagolitic and Cyrillic letters were rooted in Slavonic religious and cultural contexts. Like other alphabets, each of the Glagolitic and Cyrillic characters had associated numerals, but crucial differences in these occasionally caused confusion.²⁸ Although adopted and adapted by Slavonic phonologies, these scripts adhered to the basic models of the traditional Semitic alphabet which had been adopted by Greek and Latin and numerous other languages. Even in modern times, one alphabet has been known to replace another, as when Atatürk insisted on replacing the Arabic script with Latin (both of them alphabets) in written Turkish, which meant that Turkish readers are frequently unable to read their own Ottoman literary heritage in its original form. Similarly, Polish was not alone among Slavonic languages in its decision to adopt Latin script.

The present discussion is not intended to be a comprehensive survey of all syllabic and alphabet writing systems, but rather to point out certain parallel developments that made writing crucial for pluri- and monolingualism in the past and thereby to contextualize the text selection presented in this part.

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28 See the script table in Badalanova Geller, “Poetics of Errors,” 218.

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A 4th-Century BCE Greek Philosophical Myth about the Egyptian Origins of Writing

Plato, Phaedrus

Glenn W. Most

Ancient readers were undecided about what exactly was the central theme of Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus*; and many modern readers have been no less perplexed. The ancient catalogue of Plato's works compiled by Thrasyllus of Mendes (first century BCE–first century CE) lists this work as *Phaedrus* or *On Love*, but almost all the medieval manuscripts give it the subtitle *On the Beautiful*. Indeed, Hermias, a late ancient Neoplatonic philosopher (ca. 410–ca. 450 CE) whose lectures comprising a commentary on this dialogue are partially preserved, goes so far as to mention five subtitles he knows of that have been proposed for it by previous readers: *On Love*, *On Rhetoric*, *On the Soul*, *On the Good*, and *On the First Beautiful*—he himself prefers the last one, which he attributes to his Neoplatonic predecessor Iamblichus (ca. 245–ca. 345 CE).

It is not hard to see why *Phaedrus* has baffled so many of its readers. Uniquely among Plato's dialogues, it takes place outside the walls of the city of Athens in which Socrates shows himself to feel quite at home, staging his not infrequently vexatious conversations with his fellow citizens and with occasional visitors about the ethical and political matters that ought to concern deeply all those who live in cities (that is, for the Greeks, all human beings). After a prelude introducing the uncharacteristic natural setting, the dialogue begins with Socrates's severe scrutiny of a speech allegedly written by the famous orator Lysias in order to persuade a beautiful boy to yield himself not to a lover but instead, paradoxically, to a man who does not love him, and it concludes with Socrates's expression of his fervent hopes for the glorious future career of the young (and later famous) orator Isocrates. But along the way between these two oratorical bookends the dialogue passes through a variety of other topics, including, among others, a speech offered by Socrates as an improvement on Lysias's, Socrates's repudiation of his own speech as an offense against the god of love, a second speech by Socrates in which he classifies kinds of divine madness, explains and justifies the immortality of the soul, discusses the soul's primordial vision of true Being, its subsequent fall, incarnation, reincarnation,

and eventual liberation, its continuing memory of that primal vision, the effect of love on the soul, and the kinds of love and of lovers, and then a close examination of the details and terminologies of various contemporary theories and techniques of rhetoric, the best method of philosophy and rhetoric, and the proper relation between these two discursive practices. And besides all this, the dialogue recounts, and in some cases interprets, a series of mythic narratives.

Given the subject and purpose of our volume on plurilingualism, the present part is obviously not the right occasion to elaborate in systematic detail a unified interpretation of Plato's *Phaedrus* as a whole—fortunately, perhaps, given that such an account would have to reach a considerable length and complexity if it were to be both convincing to readers and worthy of this extraordinary text. Instead, we shall have to content ourselves with a few general remarks that can indicate in bare outlines one possible direction that such an interpretation might take. The most plausible starting point might well be the assumption that the topic of the dialogue is not exclusively love or the beautiful or rhetoric, these three being taken in isolation from one another, but instead precisely the systematic interrelation between all three of them. The human soul, according to this dialogue, is by its nature full of desires for what it considers to be beautiful: desire and the beautiful are necessarily interdependent, because we desire what we think to be beautiful and we consider to be beautiful what we desire. The desires that fill the human soul are multiple, intense, and diverse, and as a result, the soul itself is irreducibly complex and self-contradictory. Anyone who wishes to influence that soul must take account of its fundamental nature rather than trying in vain to change what is inalterable: as a consequence, such a person must appeal to the soul in such a way as to respect its nature if he wishes to be successful in persuading it to adopt a certain view or course of action. Traditionally, philosophers have directed their discourses only to the rational component of the soul, and rhetoricians and orators have aimed theirs at its irrational components alone. But a discourse addressed to the soul, if it is to be fully successful, must target all its constituent parts—not only the irrational impulses, but also the rational desire for knowledge, which itself is a form of desire, only differing from these lower impulses in that it is a desire for a higher and more permanent version of beauty than the ones at which they aim. This can only mean that philosophy and rhetoric, rather than being opposed to one another, must cooperate in attempting to persuade the human soul to achieve virtue and knowledge, insofar as it is possible for a human being to attain these goals. So rhetoric must become more philosophical, and philosophy must become more rhetorical, if the aims of each are to be accomplished successfully. Lysias's failure was both a rhetorical and a philosophical failure;

and the hopes Socrates expresses for Isocrates envision his successful future as a perfect synthesis of philosophy and oratory.

So it is after all not surprising that Plato's philosophical dialogue on the soul and its desires ends up paying so much attention to rhetoric. Plato's many detailed references to rhetoricians and orators and to their theories and practices show the remarkable extent to which he had studied this tradition and reflected upon it. In the course of the dialogue, Socrates discusses the reputation of "speech-writers" (*logographoi*), and the relation between them and the politicians who deliver speeches orally; he considers what features make writing and speaking good and bad; he defends the importance of the speaker's knowledge of the truth of the matter about which he is speaking against those who claim that the speaker need know only what will seem true to his listeners; he examines the epistemological status of rhetoric; he defines rhetoric as a method for leading men's souls in a certain direction by means of arguments opposed to one another; he critically inspects the arrangement of Lysias's speech and reconsiders the methodology exemplified by his own two speeches; and he surveys a large number of technical terms that were commonly presented in rhetorical manuals, questioning their utility.

At the very end of this extended examination of rhetoric, Socrates raises the question of the circumstances under which writing might in general be considered proper or improper. This was a topic that was the subject of vigorously controversial discussion in Plato's time. Oratory, like most public and private forms of the production of discourse in ancient Greece, especially in this period but also for long afterwards, was essentially an oral activity: orators spoke to their listeners spontaneously or from memory, and anyone who needed to read out loud from a written text or even only to refer to written notes was scorned as incompetent. But writing was gradually becoming more widespread and more important in Greek culture of this period. And with regard to oratory in particular, not everyone who wanted or needed to speak in public had the necessary skills of voice, delivery, quick-wittedness, and memory to achieve success in the arena of oral competition; moreover, written texts could reach a wider audience and achieve a longer-lasting effect than an oral performance could possibly hope for. In the fifth century BCE, the historian Thucydides contrasts, much to his own advantage, his own practice of historiography, presented to its readership exclusively in written form, to another mode (which we can easily identify with Herodotus's) that consisted in the first instance of an orally delivered performance (1.22.4). In the first quarter of the fifth century BCE, Isocrates on the one hand defended the use of writing (and had exemplified it in numerous written speeches and essays), while Alcidas

on the other hand attacked writing and preparation in favor of orality and spontaneity. Within this controversy, Plato's discussion takes a clear position in favor of orality and against writing: Socrates argues that writing can serve at best as a reminder of what people know anyway and otherwise is at best a mere pastime that is not worth taking very seriously at all, since the true knowledge that can only be provided by philosophy is written on people's souls, not in their books.

Socrates begins his account by telling a myth (presented in the excerpt here) about the origin of writing in Egypt: once upon a time, the Egyptian god Theuth (otherwise known as Thoth) presented a series of his cultural inventions to King Thamus (better known as Ammon) for his approval; and Thamus accepted or rejected them one by one on the basis of their utility or harmfulness. When they came to writing, Theuth praised its merits enthusiastically—and Thamus rejected it out of hand, saying it would not be a remedy for human memory, as Theuth had claimed, but instead a poison for it.

Egypt was considered by many Greeks to have possessed a far more ancient civilization than Greece and to have been the source of many kinds of handicrafts, sciences, and other forms of cultural achievement—in Plato's *Timaeus*, an aged Egyptian priest famously tells the great Athenian lawgiver Solon, "Oh Solon, Solon, you Greeks are always children, no old Greek man exists" (22B). Plato presupposes the cultural prestige of Egypt to place within this setting a myth that is surely Plato's own invention, though its characters were well known before him: he transposes into a fabulous Egyptian locale a traditional story of the invention of writing, which in Greek legend was associated with such cultural heroes as Palamedes and Prometheus. Indeed, Phaedrus's rejoinder at the end of the story suggests his own skepticism about it. Nonetheless, Plato's account has continued to reverberate throughout the history of Western culture. Not the least of its fascination is due to the obvious contradiction between Plato's unsparing condemnation of writing as unworthy of a serious person, and the fact that Plato himself composed it in writing, with extraordinary care, in a written text of irresistible beauty.

Greek Text

Plato, *Phaedrus* 274C–275B, excerpted from *Platonis Opera*, vol. 2, *Tetralogiae III–IV*, ed. Burnet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1901).

ΣΩΚΡΑΤΗΣ.

Ἀκοήν γ' ἔχω λέγειν τῶν προτέρων, τὸ δ' ἀληθές αὐτοὶ ἴσασιν. εἰ δὲ τοῦτο εὐροιμεν αὐτοί, ἀρά γ' ἂν ἔθ' ἡμῖν μέλοι τι τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων δοξασμάτων;

ΦΑΙΔΡΟΣ.

Γελοῖον ἤρου· ἀλλ' ἂ φῆς ἀκηκοέναι, λέγε.

ΣΩΚΡΑΤΗΣ.

Ἦκουσα τοίνυν περὶ Ναύκρατιν τῆς Αἰγύπτου γενέσθαι τῶν ἐκεῖ παλαιῶν τινὰ θεῶν, οὗ καὶ τὸ ὄρνεον τὸ ἱερόν, ὃ δὴ καλοῦσιν ἴβιν· αὐτῷ δὲ ὄνομα τῷ δαίμονι εἶναι Θεῦθ. τοῦτον δὲ πρῶτον ἀριθμὸν τε καὶ λογισμὸν εὑρεῖν καὶ γεωμετρίαν καὶ ἀστρονομίαν, ἔτι δὲ πεττείας τε καὶ κυβείας, καὶ δὴ καὶ γράμματα· βασιλέως δ' αὖ τότε ὄντος Αἰγύπτου ὅλης Θαμοῦ περὶ τὴν μεγάλην πόλιν τοῦ ἄνω τόπου, ἣν οἱ Ἑλληνες Αἰγυπτίας Θήβας καλοῦσι, καὶ τὸν θεὸν Ἄμμωνα, παρὰ τοῦτον ἐλθὼν ὁ Θεῦθ τὰς τέχνας ἐπέδειξεν, καὶ ἔφη δεῖν διαδοθῆναι τοῖς ἄλλοις Αἰγυπτίοις. ὁ δὲ ἤρετο, ἦντινα ἐκάστη ἔχοι ὠφελίαν, διεξιόντος δέ, ὃ τι καλῶς ἢ μὴ καλῶς δοκοῖ λέγειν, τὸ μὲν ἔψεγε, τὸ δ' ἐπήνει. πολλὰ μὲν δὴ περὶ ἐκάστης τῆς τέχνης ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρα Θαμοῦν τῷ Θεῦθ λέγεται ἀποφήνασθαι, ἀ λόγος πολὺς ἂν εἴη διελεθῆν· ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἐπὶ τοῖς γράμμασιν ἦν, τοῦτο δέ, ὦ βασιλεῦ, τὸ μάθημα, ἔφη ὁ Θεῦθ, σοφωτέρους Αἰγυπτίους καὶ μνημονικωτέρους παρέξει. μνήμης τε γὰρ καὶ σοφίας φάρμακον ἠύρεθη. ὁ δ' εἶπεν· ὦ τεχνικώτατε Θεῦθ, ἄλλος μὲν τεκεῖν δυνατὸς τὰ τῆς τέχνης, ἄλλος δὲ κρῖναι, τίν' ἔχει μοῖραν βλάβης τε καὶ ὠφελίας τοῖς μέλλουσι χρῆσθαι· καὶ νῦν σύ, πατήρ ὢν γραμμάτων, δι' εὐνοίαν τούναντίον εἶπες ἢ δύναται. τοῦτο γὰρ τῶν μαθόντων λήθην μὲν ἐν ψυχαῖς παρέξει μνήμης ἀμελετησίᾳ, ἅτε διὰ πίστιν γραφῆς ἔξωθεν ὑπ' ἄλλοτριῶν τύπων, οὐκ ἔνδοθεν αὐτοῦς ὑφ' αὐτῶν ἀναμιμνησκομένους· οὐκ οὐκ μνήμης ἀλλ' ὑπομνήσεως φάρμακον ἠύρες· σοφίας δὲ τοῖς μαθηταῖς δόξαν, οὐκ ἀλήθειαν πορίζεις· πολυήκοοι γὰρ σοι γενόμε-

English Translation

Translated by Glenn W. Most.

SOCRATES:

I am able to tell you what I have heard from men of former times: about its truth, only they themselves know. But if we ourselves could discover that, then why would we still care at all about the suppositions of men?

PHAEDRUS:

Your question is ridiculous. Go ahead and tell me what you say you have heard.

SOCRATES:

Well then, I heard that at Naucratis in Egypt there was one of the ancient local gods, whose holy bird is the one they call the ibis; and the name of the god himself is Theuth. They say that he was the first to have discovered number and arithmetic and geometry and astronomy, and also board games and dice, and above all letters. Now Thamus was the king of all of Egypt at that time, and he lived in the great city of the upper region that the Greeks call Egyptian Thebes, and they call that god Ammon. Theuth came to him and displayed his technical inventions and said that they should be distributed to the other Egyptians. Thamus asked what utility each one had, and as Theuth explained, Thamus censured the one and praised the other, according as he thought that what he said was good or not. They say that Thamus made many pronouncements, in the one direction or the other, about each invention, which would make for a long story to tell in detail. But when he came to letters, Theuth said, "Knowledge of this, O King, will make the Egyptians become wiser and have a better memory: for I have discovered a curative for memory and wisdom." But the king said, "Theuth, you who are most skilled in technical inventions, it is one man who is capable of bringing technical skills into the world, but another one who can judge what degree of harm and of utility they possess for those who are going to use them. So too now, since you are the father of letters, on account of your affection for them you say the opposite of what their real efficacy is. For they will cause forgetfulness in the souls of those people who learn them, because people will stop exercising their memory: they will remember things on the basis of their trust in an external writing, by means of figures that do not belong to them, rather than remembering internally themselves by themselves. And so it is not for remembering that you have discovered a curative, but for reminding; and you are providing the appearance of wisdom for those who learn it, but not the truth. For having heard a lot through you,

νοι ἄνευ διδαχῆς πολυγνώμονες εἶναι δόξουσιν, ἀγνώμονες ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλῆθος ὄντες
καὶ χαλεποὶ ξυνεῖναι, δοξόσοφοι γεγονότες ἀντὶ σοφῶν.

ΦΑΙΔΡΟΣ.

ᾠ Σώκρατες, ῥαδίως σὺ Αἰγυπτίους καὶ ὀποδαπούς ἂν ἐθέλῃς λόγους ποιεῖς.

but without instruction, they will appear to know a lot, though for the most part they will in fact know nothing and will be difficult to get along with, since they will have become wise in appearance instead of wise.”

PHAEDRUS:

Dear Socrates, you can easily invent stories about Egypt and anywhere else you want.

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A Buddhist Mahāyāna Account of the Origin of Language

The Descent into Laṅkā Scripture (Laṅkāvatārasūtra)

Roy Tzohar

Buddhist schools of thought are characterized by a deep devaluation of language as means for representing, describing, or reaching reality. This view is an offshoot of a more fundamental Buddhist understanding of human suffering as emerging out of a deep discord between the way we ordinarily perceive reality and its true nature, while a major factor in maintaining this discord is the way in which our conceptual schemes parse and attempt to fix as permanent (in essentialist and objectified terms) what is by true nature a fleeting and fluctuating stream of events.

While Buddhist schools of thought vary in the degree to which they take language to be removed from reality, they all seem to subscribe to a nominalistic view of language, and see words as lacking any real referential ontological grounding and their meaning is thus merely conventional.

The generality of this framework—the fact that it characterizes all linguistic activity—also shaped the Buddhist consideration of the question of the origin of language. While Buddhist thinkers were keenly attuned to the variegated multilinguistic context surrounding them (and indeed endorsed this multilingualism under a missionary ideology), their main interest lay not in recounting the origin of any particular language,¹ but in explicating the deep psychological and epistemic mechanisms that underlie concept formation and linguistic activity in general.

The text excerpts at hand are taken from the *Descent into Laṅkā Scripture (Laṅkāvatārasūtra)*, a Buddhist Mahāyāna scripture from around the third to fifth century CE,² written mostly in prose form as a dialogue between the Bud-

1 However, grammatical works on various Indian languages endorsed by the Buddhists, such as Sanskrit and Pāli, were of the highest importance.

2 The work's date is in dispute, with very little conclusive evidence to go by (as is the case with many other Mahāyāna scriptures). The work is probably not earlier than the third century CE, and was composed sometime before its first extant translation from Sanskrit into Chinese by Guṇabhadra in 443 CE (the first known translation of the work into Chinese, by Dharmakṣema, allegedly between 412–420 CE, is not extant).

dha and his disciple, Mahāmati. The work is of particular interest to us since it exhibits an exceptional emphasis on the issue of language and its role in the falsification of reality and in the construction of phenomena. While the text is permeated by various doctrinal influences,³ this contribution draws attention in particular to its view of all phenomena as empty—that is, interdependent and lacking any real essences—and by extension, the view of ordinary language as self-referential and utterly conventional. Another important premise of this text is the understanding of conceptual-linguistic activity as a causal phenomenon itself. Traced to the deepest and subliminal levels of our mental activity, conceptual-linguistic activity is considered to be causally induced and causally effective, and as such, actively involved in the construction of the life world.

The excerpts are a selection of verses from the tenth chapter of the text,⁴ which, grouped together, provide a narrative of sorts of how language develops from the pre-embryonic stage, through gestation, and finally to its manifestation as linguistic behavior. Pivotal in this account is the notion of speech as stemming from *vikalpa*—conceptual discrimination—which is seen as responsible not just for manifest discursive thought and behavior, but also for deeper epistemic distinctions and fundamental concept formation.

Under this account, our experience, which is initially an undifferentiated causal mental flux, necessarily passes through certain conceptual filters. At the most fundamental level of our (subliminal) mental activity, this manifests in a basic discrimination that separates all experience into the categories of a subjective aspect (a grasper) and an objective aspect (what is grasped). This first and most basic distinction is the original sin, so to speak, after which many other conceptual categories are imposed on our otherwise undifferentiated experience so as to organize it into meaningful units. Eventually these manifest—shaped by habit and convention—in overt linguistic activity and communication.

Within this process, *vikalpa*—as conceptual discrimination—is not merely responsible for the individuation and differentiation of phenomena, but is also

3 Apart from the doctrine of emptiness, these influences also include theories of the “Buddha embryo” (*Tathāgatagarbha*) and other doctrines and theoretical models, such as the “storehouse consciousness” (*Ālayavijñāna*) and the “three natures” (*Trisvabhāva*)—all of which are tightly linked to the early Yogācāra school of thought; as well as doctrines from Brahmanic schools such as the Sāṃkhya.

4 The chapter, summarizing in verse form the entire *sūtra*, is possibly a later addition to the work, and its date can be set within more definite limits: while the translation of the *sūtra* into Chinese in 443 by Guṇabhadra does not include this chapter, a later translation, by Bodhiruci from 513 CE, does.

seen as a reality-making activity. It is, as the excerpts below indicate, the process of imagination by which concepts are erroneously reified into entities and taken to be real.

Another noteworthy point regarding this process is its recursiveness. As we will see in the excerpts below, while ordinary language is understood to be created through *vikalpa*—that is, via these structural conceptual “filters”—the contingent content of these conceptual filters is in turn causally influenced by previously acquired linguistic habits and conventions (acquired in past lives as well). This process, as part of the overall causal matrix which is karma, is said to have been ongoing from time immemorial. While it has no beginning (or a primary first cause, for that matter, as it has always been there), it can reach an end. As the text excerpts below tell us, terminating it begins by identifying the role that language plays in constructing and imagining phenomena. By understanding its underlying causal conditions, one is able to put a stop to the discursive-constructive activity of the mind and transcend the range of speech and thought.

Sanskrit Text

Excerpted from Parasurama Lakshmana Vaidya, ed., *Saddharmalāṅkāvatārasūtram*, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, no. 3 (Darbhanga, India: Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1963), which generally follows the critical edition by Nanjio Bunyiu, ed., *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (Bibliotheca Otaniensis, vol. 1. Kyoto: Otani University Press, 1923), 285–288.

- 10.157 *mātāpitṛsamāyogād ālaya⁵manasaṃyutam |*
ghṛtakumbhe mūṣikā yadvat saha śukreṇa vardhate ||
- 10.158 *peśīghanārbudaṃ piṭakamaśubhaṃ karmacitritam |*
karmavāyumahābhūtaiḥ phalavat saṃprapadyate ||
- 10.159 *pañcapañcakapañcaiva vraṇāś caiva navaiva tu |*
nakhadantaromasamchannaḥ sphuramāṇaḥ prajāyate ||
- 10.160 *prajātamātraṃ viśthākṛmiṃ suptabuddha eva mānavaḥ |*
cakṣuṣā sphurate rūpaṃ vivṛddhiṃ yāti kalpanāt ||
- 10.161 *tālvoṣṭhapuṭasaṃyogād vikalpenāvadhāryate |*
vācā pravartate nṛṇāṃ śukasy eva vikalpanā ||
- ...
- 10.169 *... abhidhānaṃ sarvabhāvānāṃ janmāntaraśataiḥ sadā |*
abhyastamabhyasantaṃ ca parasparavikalpayā ||

5 Variation: *Ālayaṃ*, see Nanjio, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, 285n13.

6 In some cases, the translation is compared with the critical edition by Nanjio, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, and the Tibetan translation found in the *Lhasa Bka'-gyur*, H 110, *mdo sde*, ca 87b–307a, the e-text version by the Asian Classics Input Project (ACIP).

7 The Yogācāra school traces the construction of both the life world and the subject to the function of the most fundamental and subliminal level of awareness, the “storehouse consciousness” (*ālaya-vijñāna*). This level of consciousness is the locus of what the Yogācāra refers to, metaphorically, as karmic causal “seeds” (*bīja*) and their “impressions” (*vāsanā*)—that is, their karmic consequences. The general contours of this account are that any past experience leaves a certain “impression” in the storehouse consciousness, which then serves as a karmic, causal “seed” that will ripen and give rise to a certain experience, which will in turn leave its own impression on the storehouse consciousness, and so on, recursively. Included among these causal factors are also conceptual distinctions manifesting as particular “impressions of speech” (*abhilāpa-vāsanā*), which are understood to be causally efficacious and responsible for the intersubjective nature of our experience and to manifest linguistic behavior.

English Translation

Translated by Roy Tzohar.⁶

- From the union of the parents, the storehouse consciousness,⁷ in tight connection with the afflicted mind, expands along with the semen,⁸ like the way a mouse [trapped] in a jar of ghee, [grows]. 10.157
- [That storehouse-consciousness] develops—like a fruit—into a reviling sore fashioned by karma [in the form of] a fleshy mass, a compact lump, a long round bulk,⁹ by means of the [combination of] the basic elements driven by the karma-wind.¹⁰ 10.158
- [Then,] multiple sets of five [breaths, limbs, senses, etc.] and nine orifices [are formed.] Covered by nails, teeth, and body hair—quivering—one is born. 10.159
- [Like] a worm in excrement, newly born, the human being is awakened from sleep. 10.160
Form springs into view by means of the eye; through imagination he proceeds to develop.
- From the joining of the palate, lips and oral cavity and determined through conceptual discrimination— 10.161
Human imagination is set forth by means of speech, just like a parrot.
- ... The naming of all things through hundreds of lifetimes, continuously, has been repeated and is being repeated by means of reciprocal¹¹ conceptual discrimination. 10.169

8 Though the literal meaning is “semen,” this probably stands for the mixture of the male seed (semen) and the female seed (blood), which according to Buddhist traditional sources is a necessary condition for the conception of an embryo.

9 According to some Buddhist and Indian medicinal texts, these stand for different fetal stages of development during gestation. See Kritzer, “Life in the Womb,” 73–89.

10 The four elements as well as bodily winds have an important role in the development of the fetus, and here karma is included among the latter. See the *Descent into the Womb Sūtra* (*Garbhāvākṛāntisūtra*) in Langenberg, “Fetal Suffering,” 43.

11 This refers to the recursive way by which discrimination both causes and is affected by manifest verbal activity and thought.

- 10.170 *akathyamāne saṃmohaṃ sarvaloka āpadyate |
tasmātkriyate nāma saṃmohasya vyudāsārtham ||*
- 10.171 *trividhena vikalpena bālair bhāvā vikalpitāḥ |
bhrāntir nāmavikalpena pratyayair janitena ca ||*
- 10.172 *aniruddhā hy anutpannāḥ prakṛtyā gaganopamāḥ |
abhāvasvabhāvā ye tu te vikalpitalakṣaṇāḥ ||*
- 10.173 *pratibhāsabimbamāyābhamarīcyā supinena tu |
alātacakragandharvapraśrutkāsamudbhavāḥ ||*
- 10.174 *advayā tathatā śūnyā bhūtaḥ ca dharmatā |
nirvikalpaś ca deśemi ye te niṣpannalakṣaṇāḥ ||*
- 10.175 *vākcittagocaraṃ mithyā satyaṃ prajñā vikalpitā |
dvayāntapatitaṃ cittaṃ tasmāt prajñā na kalpitā ||*
- 10.176 *asti nāsti ca dvāvantaḥ yāvaccittasya gocaraḥ |
gocareṇa vidhūtena samyak cittaṃ nirudhyate ||*

-
- 12 That is, conventionally. In the following verses the *sūtra* moves on to discuss how this convention, which is contingent in terms of its content, is regulated and conditioned by conceptual discrimination.
- 13 In Yogācāra lore, the three kinds of conceptual discrimination are seen as parallel to three different modes of the activity of consciousness, which bring about the illusion of both an objective external world and the self. See Tzohar, *Yogācāra Buddhist Theory*, 168.
- 14 In the latter part of this verse and up to 10.174, the text aligns the three kinds of conceptual discrimination with another important scheme of the Yogācāra, that of the three natures (*trisvabhāva*). This scheme provides an account of reality as an interplay between three different aspects or points of view—the “imagined” stands for the mistaken way in which reality ordinarily appears to us in essentialist and objective terms (in these verses compared to various kinds of illusions); the “dependent” stands for the real causal nexus that brings about these false appearances; and the “perfected”—the ultimate state—is understood as simply the absence of the imagined from the dependent—that is, the dependent as seen once our misconceptions of it have been understood and removed.

- Without communicating, everyone would fall into confusion. 10.170
Therefore, in order to be rid of confusion, names are created.¹²
- Things are conceptually discriminated by the naïve by means of three 10.171
kinds of conceptual discrimination.¹³
It is an error that is borne out of conceptual discrimination of names
brought about by causal conditions.¹⁴
- Unperishable, unborn, by nature like the open sky, 10.172
Those things whose essential nature is non-existent, are but of imagined
characteristics.¹⁵
- As mirage-like reflected images, as in a dream, these [things whose 10.173
essential nature is non-existent], arise like a fire brand,¹⁶ an imagi-
nary city, an echo.
- “Suchness”—non-dual and empty; “the limit of existence;” “reality,” 10.174
“non-conceptuality”—these I instruct to be of the characteristics of the
perfected [nature].
- Wisdom¹⁷ is erroneously fabricated as truth [so long as the latter’s] 10.175
range is speech and thought.
[While] the mind has fallen within the boundary of these two [speech
and thought], wisdom [however] is not constructed by this.
- The two extreme [distinctions] “existence and non-existence” mark the 10.176
range of such a mind. Through the removal of this range, the mind is
completely stopped.

15 Things in fact lack essences and are interdependent, hence their lingering identity and characteristics are merely imaginary constructs (an example of which is given in the next verse).

16 A classic example of a mental construct, as the spinning of a firebrand is cognized as a continuous revolving circle of fire, while in truth there is no such phenomenon.

17 “Wisdom” (*prajñā*) here refers to knowledge stemming out of a true insight regarding the nature of reality.

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Stories of Origin

Ibn al-Nadīm, Kitāb al-Fihrist

Sonja Brentjes

Stories of origin can be found in numerous genres of literature from Islamicate societies. I will focus here on one set from such stories from an important historical source from the tenth century CE. This source is called the *Book of the Catalogue* or simply *Catalogue* (*Kitāb al-Fihrist*). Its compiler was the well-educated stationer (*warrāq*) and member of Buyid courtly circles Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 990). The *Catalogue* consists of ten books, starting from the origins of scripts and languages, with some excursions on the origins of people, and ending with books on story telling.

The *Catalogue* has been used extensively by historians of mathematics and other sciences since the nineteenth century for biographical and literary data. Only since the latter part of the twentieth century have the more narrative parts of the books on philosophy, medicine, and the mathematical sciences found more interest. The most often asked question concerns the truth value of the stories, which, as a rule, is considered low. In the last two decades, some attention has been paid to one of the cultural backgrounds of the various stories, namely pre-Islamic Iranian traditions. Some of these can be found in the passages on the origin of the Persian language quoted below. The proposed interpretation of such elements in current literature suffers, however, from the lack of care paid to the highly mixed cultural character of the stories which contain biblical components, and possibly ancient Mesopotamian traces, as well as elements reflecting the times of the narrators identified by Ibn al-Nadīm and the compiler's own times.

I have selected one type of origin story to focus on here—those that discuss the origins of languages and scripts. So far, this topic has not drawn the attention of historians of science. A first reading shows that three features link this first book to several of the later books: (1) many of the books of Ibn al-Nadīm start with some kind of origin story or stories; (2) one or two actors of three possible classes—divine, super-human, human—are responsible for the act of origin; (3) a concerted effort is made to establish the reliability of the submitted information by providing scriptural and human sources. A second reading highlights the conflicting nature of the information that Ibn al-Nadīm

has picked up from his diverse sources. He was clearly aware of the problematic nature of the material he presents, as he also refers to deviating opinions about who, when, and where a language or a script was invented or introduced. A comparison of Ibn al-Nadīm's information with current research positions regarding the history of the people and languages mentioned by him reveals the continued uncertainties about many of the points found in his stories. This is why I cannot annotate all the names mentioned in the selected stories. Too many gaps remain in our knowledge of the history of the topics, which I elaborate on in the following.

From my perspective, the greatest problems with regard to the three languages I have chosen from among Ibn al-Nadīm's origin stories in the first book of his *Catalogue*—Arabic, Persian, and Syriac—concern Arabic and the various other terms linked to it and the people who are said to have or have not spoken this language, or have done so badly and had to learn it from others. These problems encompass linguistic, historical, and sociocultural issues.¹

The linguistic issues concern first the question of what those different terms meant at a certain point in time and for different groups of actors. Second, they are linked to the highly fragmented knowledge available even today on the linguistic development of the language called Arabic in the *Catalogue* and the sources Ibn al-Nadīm used. This very fragmented knowledge reflects the materiality of the textual sources (stone inscriptions) and the indirect nature of their information with regard to a language considered by linguists sufficiently close to the Arabic documented in textual witnesses known from the time of the emergence of the Muslim *umma* and the caliphate in the seventh century and thereafter. This means that, although references to Arabs and Arabic can be found from the ninth century BCE on in a variety of terms in sources from the Near East, the Greco-Roman world, the empires of South Arabia, the oasis kingdoms in Syria and stations along the trade routes, most of the linguistic content and scriptural form of these sources belong to other Semitic and non-Semitic languages and different, non-Arabic writing systems.² The often mixed linguistic properties of the brief Arabic terms (mostly personal names) do not support the claim that the people called Arabs in those sources did indeed all speak the same language.³

1 An extended discussion of these multiple problems studied since the nineteenth century has been recently offered by Retsö, *Arabs in Antiquity*.

2 Versteegh, *Arabic Language*, 26, 28, 31–32, 35.

3 *Ibid.*, 29–34; for a discussion of the linguistic features of pre-Islamic inscriptions in different writing systems using Arabic, see al-Jallad, "Earliest Stages," 322–327.

The historical problems concern the views on how to date the various sources and their meanings, as well as their contexts.

As for the sociocultural problems, institutions, social forms of life and equipment need to be considered. Depending on the historical period, researchers distinguish between three different possible meanings for the linguistic terms. Firstly, the word “Arabs” relates to some kind of institution expressing a specific status in a sociopolitical hierarchy (mercenaries, allies, enemies). Secondly, it can describe people with a specific form of social life (nomads and/or settlers, urban people, or people living outside the confines of cities). Thirdly, it identifies the use of particular types of equipment (animals, weapons). This distinction takes into account that the various sources provide conflicting information.

For the earliest times before the Common Era researchers argue that this conflicting information suggests that Arabs were mostly men who served as auxiliary troops. Thus, the term depicts a kind of institution.⁴ The camel is believed to have been domesticated in South Arabia in about the second millennium BCE. It came to the North via the incense trade around 1200 BCE. Since about the ninth century BCE the Assyrians fought either against or with people from a land called *Arbi* or *Arbāya* who rode camels. Slightly later, Assyrian and Babylonian sources name groups of people *Arabu* or *Aribi*. Not all of them were apparently Arabic speakers, as some spoke other Semitic languages.⁵

At some time, the precise dating of which is contested, groups using Semitic languages left their previous settled state and started to live in the desert. Together with changes in weapons and camel-saddles those moves inaugurated processes of tribal organization. The newly emerging nomadic groups are believed to have developed the language now identified as Arabic.⁶ But the scarcity of linguistic material does not allow us to ascertain the number, geographical distribution, and organization forms of those newly emerging nomadic groups on the Arabic Peninsula.⁷ Apparently only the name of one such group that appears in the early sources of the early Islamic period, namely *Thamūd*, can also be found in pre-Islamic inscriptions.⁸ But in this case, the tribe (or social group)⁹ did not survive into the Islamic period and is thus mentioned in Ibn al-Nadīm’s sources as one of the “lost” tribes. This corresponds to

4 Retsö, “Arab,” 127–128.

5 Versteegh, *Arabic Language*, 26.

6 *Ibid.*, 15–16, 27.

7 Retsö, “Arab,” 127.

8 Versteegh, *Arabic Language*, 27.

9 al-Jallad, “Earliest Stages,” 321.

the disappearance of the term Arab itself from the North Arabian sources in the fourth century CE. Retsö interprets this to mean that until then the term Arab had not specified a people defined by either living style or genealogy—the two main defining criteria in Ibn al-Nadīm's stories—but some social or religious institution.¹⁰ In contrast, so-called classical Bedouin culture—as known from pre-Islamic poetry and Islamic narratives like the quotes transmitted by Ibn al-Nadīm, which apparently emerged only after the third century CE—represents a new meaning of the terms Arab and Arabic that was tied to tribal confederations and language.

The narrative bits and pieces on Arabic and the Arab and Arabized tribes provided in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Catalogue* thus contain small elements reflecting the older highly fragmented image and some components linked to the changing conditions after the third century CE. Examples of the older layer are the Qur'anic name Thamūd, thought to mean the "lost tribe" or the social group Tamudi, the idea of the disappeared tribes, the belief that Arabic speaking tribes had lived in some parts of Iraq, and the claim that there were geographical differences between various groups across the Arabian Peninsula speaking one or the other kind of Arabic. Examples of the newly emerging tribalized population of the Arabian desert and its new forms of social and economic lifestyle are the claims about the many genealogically grounded "new" tribes, their areas of settlement, and their relationship to Arabic as a language.

A third kind of layer in Ibn al-Nadīm's stories concerns information about the early Islamic centuries. Here again, legendary, literary, and historical elements are all interwoven.

This is not surprising since the sources he had access to were almost all written long after the events had taken place. Beside Arab and Arabic, terms such as "the real [or genuine] Arabs" (*al-ʿarab al-ʿarība*), the "Arabized Arabs" (*al-ʿarab al-mustaʿriba* or *al-mutaʿarriba*) or the apparently untranslatable *aʿrāb* in Ibn al-Nadīm's stories reflect the continued multivalence of the terminology used to identify people, geographical area, social standing, and cultural evaluation. According to research since the nineteenth century, most of the claims about genealogical linkages between the named tribal confederations and single tribes, their differences and conflicts in Ibn al-Nadīm's source material were invented in the early eighth century during the Umayyad caliphate (r. 661–750).¹¹ The tribal groups from Yemen identified themselves against all historical plausibility as the "real Arabs," while the Quraysh, the tribe of Prophet Muḥam-

10 Retsö, "Arab," 128.

11 Ibid., 130.

mad, the four right-guided caliphs Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī, as well as the Umayyad caliphs, accepted being identified as “Arabized.” This seeming defect was compensated for by linking the process of Arabization to Abraham’s son Ishmael who had gone to Mecca and learned proper Arabic there from the Banū Jurhum, a “lost” Yemeni tribe. Another identification of the “real” or “genuine Arabs” are the ten tribes who had allegedly disappeared (*al-bā’ida*). The idea of the Umayyad origin of these classifications was first proposed in the nineteenth century by Julius Wellhausen. There is a substantial literature on this question and different opinions on its multiple aspects.¹² Since there is no antecedent of such identifications in the Qur’ān and other late pre-Islamic or early Islamic source material, these stories of identification, legitimation, and valorization are today interpreted as results of political ambitions and their ideological underpinnings.

While some groups, believed not to have spoken Arabic as their mother tongue, were integrated into the different versions of the narrative on the language’s origin, others were explicitly excluded. They were described as *‘ajam*. The root of this noun, the verb *‘ajama*, means to speak indistinctly, to mumble. It is the antonym to *‘araba*, to speak clearly. The person called *‘ajam* could thus designate a non-Arab speaker. A recent study has shown that both words were used in multiple contexts and could refer to different people. They were also connected with ideas about ethnic or cultural identities and used to compete for cultural or political precedence.¹³

Ibn al-Nadīm’s stories about the first speakers of Persian and Syriac and writers of their scripts are less challenging than his reports on Arabs and Arabic. The reports about Syriac are taken mostly from written Syriac sources, as Ibn al-Nadīm claims. They are historically more or less sound, disregarding a few minor mistakes. The claims about the first Persian speaker and writers all stem from myths probably mostly derived from Zoroastrian sources. In my view, the truly interesting aspect of his summary of the Persian case is that he has nothing to say about the various Iranian languages in which these Zoroastrian doctrines and the historical narratives of his ancestors had been expressed. Persian is for him a single language with no changes from Old to Middle to New Persian. His orthography of Middle Persian names seems to suggest that he might have gathered his information from one or more Arabic translations of Middle Persian sources.

12 Retsö, *Arabs in Antiquity*, chap. 2.4; Orthmann, *Stamm und Macht*, 10–20; Toral-Niehoff, “Nebukadnezar,” 234n15.

13 Retsö, *Arabs in Antiquity*, chap. 2.

Arabic Text

Excerpted, with minor modifications, from Muḥammad ibn Ishāq ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist lil-Nadīm*, edited by Reza Tajaddod (Tehran: Marvi Offset Printing, 1393 sh./1973), 3, 7, 8, 14, 15.

Excerpt 1

هذا فهرست كتب جميع الامم، من العرب والعجم، الموجود منها بلغة العرب وقلمها في اصناف العلوم، واخبار مصنفها، وطبقات مؤلفيها، وانسابه، وتاريخ مواليدهم، ومبلغ اعمارهم، واوقات وفاتهم، واماكن بلدهم، ومناقبيهم، منذ ابتداء كل علم اخترع الى عصرنا هذا وهو سنة سبع وسبعين وثلاثمائة للهجرة.

الفن الأول من المقالة الأولى

في وصف لغات الأمم، من العرب والعجم، ونعوت اقلامها وانواع خطوطها، واشكال كتاباتها.

الكلام على القلم العربي

اختلف الناس في اول من وضع الخط العربي. فقال هشام الكلبي: اول من وضع ذلك، قوم من العرب العاربة نزولوا في عدنان بن اد. واسماؤهم ابو جاد، هواز، حطى، كهون، صعفض، قريسات. هذا من خط ابن الكوفي، بهذا الشكل والاعراب وضعوا الكتاب على اسمائهم. ثم وجدوا بعد ذلك حروفاً ليست من اسمائهم وهي: الثاء والحاء والذال والطاء والشين والغين. فسموها الروادف. قال: وهؤلاء ملوك مدين، وكان مهلكهم يوم الظلة في زمن شعيب النبي عليه السلام. ...

14 987/8 CE; cf. Dodge, *Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, 1:1.

15 Hishām ibn al-Kalbī (d. 204 or 6/819 or 21) from Kufa. See Toral-Niehoff, "Nebukadnezar," 233.

16 Or, as below, Udad. According to Muslim genealogical recording, 'Adnān ibn Udd was the fourth in line after Ismā'īl, the son of Abraham and a member of Prophet Muḥammad's line of descent (<https://portalislam.org/index.php/muhammad-early-life>).

17 It is believed that all the names here signify a sequence of alphanumeric letters in Semitic alphabets. Gilliot, "Alphabet," 1:41–42.

English Translation

Translated by Sonja Brentjes, in comparison with Bayard Dodge, ed., trans., *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm. A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

Excerpt 1

This is a catalogue of the books of all communities (*umma*), of the Arabs and the non-Arabs, existing in the language of the Arabs and its script, on the types of the fields of knowledge, the news about their composers, the generations of their compilers, their lineages, their birth dates, the length of their lives, the times of their death, the places of their settlements, and their achievements since the beginnings of each field of knowledge, [ever] created, until this our age, which is the year seventy-seven and three hundred after the Hijra.¹⁴

The First Section of the First Chapter

On the Description of the Languages of the Communities (*umma*), of the Arabs and the non-Arabs, the Characteristics of Their Scripts, the Types of Handwritings and the Forms of Their Penmanship.

Sayings about the Arabic Script

The people differ on who was the first who set up the Arabic handwriting. Hishām al-Kalbī¹⁵ said: The first who set that up was a group (*qawm*) of “genuine” Arabs who encamped with ‘Adnān ibn Udd.¹⁶ Their names are Abū Jād, Hawwāz, Ḥuṭṭī, Kalamūn, Ṣa‘faḍ, and Qurusa‘at.¹⁷ This is from Ibn al-Kūfī’s¹⁸ own hand: In this form and manner, the Arabs set up the written [form] according to their names. Afterwards they found letters, which are not in their names. Those are: thā’, khā’, dhāl, zā’, shīn, and ghayn. They called them “those that followed.” He said: Those [men] were the kings of Midian.¹⁹ Their destruction happened at the day of the black cloud,²⁰ at the time of the Prophet Shu‘ayb,²¹ Peace be upon Him. ...²²

18 This author might be Ibn A‘tham al-Kūfī (first half fourth/tenth century), see Lindstedt, “Ibn A‘tham al-Kūfī.”

19 As a person, Midian is the name of a son of Abraham.

20 al-Qur‘ān, 26:189: “And they denied him, so the punishment of the day of the black cloud seized them. Indeed, it was a punishment of a terrible day” (<https://quran.com/26/189-195>).

21 Shu‘ayb, meaning “He who shows the right path,” is believed to have lived in the fourth generation after Abraham and have come as a prophet to the Midianites.

22 Cf. Dodge, *Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, 1:6.

قرأت بخط ابن أبي سعد على هذه الصورة وبهذا الإعراب: ابجاد. هاوز. حاطي. كلهان. صاع فض. قرست.

قالوا هم الجبلّة الاخرة. وكانوا نزولاً في عدنان بن ادد واشباهه، فلما استعربوا وضعوا الكتاب العربي، والله اعلم.

وقال كعب: انا ابرئ من قوله، ان اول من وضع الكتابة العربية والفارسية وغيرها من الكتابات، آدم عليه السلام. وضع ذلك قبل موته بثلاثمائة سنة (وكتبه) في الطين وطبخه، فلما اصاب الارض الطوفان، سلم. فوجد كل قوم كتابتهم بها.

وقال ابن عباس: اول من كتب بالعربية، ثلاثة رجال من بولان. وهى قبيلة سكنوا الانبار، وانهم اجتمعوا فوضعوا حروفاً مقطعة وموصولة. وهم مرامر بن مروّة، واسلم بن سدرّة، وعامر بن جذره. ويقال مره وجذله. فاما مرامر، فوضع الصور. واما اسلم، ففصل ووصل، واما عامر، فوضع الاعجام. وسئل اهل الحيرة ممن اخذتم العربي، فقالوا من اهل الانبار. ويقال: ان الله تبارك تعالى انطق اسميعيل بالعربية المبيمة، وهو ابن اربع وعشرين سنة.

قال محمد بن اسحاق: فاما الذي يقارب الحق وتكاد النفس تقبله فذكر الثقة، ان الكلام العربي بلغة حمير وطسم وجديس وارم وحويل. فهؤلاء هم العرب العاربة. وان اسميعيل لما حصل في الحرم ونشأ وكبر، تزوج في جرحهم، الى معاوية بن مضاض الجرهمي، فهم احوال ولده، فعلم كلامهم. ولم يزل ولد

23 *al-jibilla al-ukhra* means literally: another crowd or of another nature, disposition or temperament. Dodge interpreted it as: foreign peoples. Dodge, *Fihrist of al-Nadim*, 1:7.

24 Eponymic ancestor of the so-called northern Arab tribes called 'Adnāniyya, English Adnanites. They are allegedly the Arabized Arabs and it is said the Quraysh belong to them. Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad*.

25 He was born in 619 in Mecca and died in 687/8 in Ta'if.

26 According to early Muslim genealogists, Bawlān was the grandson of al-Ghawth, the head of one of the two tribal groups that formed one of the main tribal confederations in southern Arabia.

27 The orthography of the manuscripts Tajaddod worked with had a "short tooth" endowed with two diacritical points below it, which represents either y or ī. But it should rather be understood as *mater lectionis* for ā, which in Ibn al-Nadīm's times had already been replaced by *alif*. This suggests that Ibn al-Nadīm worked with much older sources, from before this orthographical shift had taken place. In discussions about the language/s of the Qur'ān and in particular its earliest written version/s, such an orthographic representation of ā has been taken to indicate an orthographic loan from another Semitic language. See Donner, "The Qur'ān," 37–38.

And I read [it] in the [following] form and inflection from the hand of Ibn Abī Sa‘d: Abjād, Hāwwiz, Ḥātī, Kalamān, Šā‘ faḍ and Qurusat. They said: They are the best [kind of people (*al-jibilla al-ukhra*)].²³ They camped with ‘Adnān ibn Udad²⁴ and those like him. After they were Arabized, they set up the Arabic written [form], but Allāh knows best.

Ka‘b said, but I am not responsible for his statement, that Adam, Peace be upon Him, was the first who set up the Arabic, Persian, and any other writing. He set this up three hundred years before his death, [writing] on clay and baking it, so that when the Deluge would befall the earth, it would remain unharmed. Then, each group (*qawm*) found its writing and wrote accordingly.

Ibn ‘Abbās²⁵ said: The first who wrote in Arabic were three men from [the Banū] Bawlān,²⁶ a tribe living in al-Anbār, who came together and set up the separated, as well as the connected letters. They are Murāmīr ibn Murū’a, Aslam ibn Sidrah and ‘Āmir ibn Jidhrah. It is also said: Murah and Jidhla. As for Murāmīr, he set up the forms. As for Aslam, he separated and connected. As for ‘Āmir, he set up the diacritical [signs].

When the people of al-Ḥīra were asked: From whom did you take Arabic, they said: From the people of al-Anbār.

It is [also] said that Allāh, Blessed and Almighty, [enabled] Ismā‘īl²⁷ to pronounce a pure²⁸ Arabic when he was twenty-four years old.²⁹

Muḥammad ibn Ishāq said: He who is near to the truth and [whose] soul comes close to accept it, he thus recalls confidently that the Arabic speech is the language of Ḥimyat, Ṭasm, Jadīs, Iram, and Ḥawayl.³⁰ Those are the “genuine” Arabs. And when Ismā‘īl had arrived at the Ḥarām,³¹ he grew up there and became an adult. He married into [the Banū] Jurhum,³² [linked] to Mu‘āwiya ibn Muḍāḍ al-Jurhumī, and they are the uncles of his children, so that they learned their speech. In the course of time, the children of Ismā‘īl did not

28 *mubīn*. Traditionally, this participle active of the fourth root of *bāna* is understood in the context of the Qur’ān to mean clear or pure, allegedly describing the Arabic spoken by the Bedouins of the Hijaz. But for several decades now there has been an academic discussion about the meaning of the word and its grammatical form, as well as the nature of the language of the Qur’ān and its various kinds of acquisitions from other, mostly Semitic, languages, their orthographies and their pronunciations. See, for instance, Donner, “The Qur’ān,” 36; and Gilliot, “Reconsidering.”

29 Cf. Dodge, *Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, 1:7.

30 These are names of the legendary so-called “lost” Arabic tribes (*al-‘arab al-bā‘ida*). These tribes are genealogically derived from biblical genealogies and are believed to precede the split into Northern and Southern Arabs, symbolized by the eponyms ‘Adnān and Qaḥṭān. Heinrichs, “Ṭasm,” 10:359–360.

31 The Ka‘ba in Mecca.

32 Watt, “Djurhum,” 603–604.

اسماعيل على مرّ الزمان يشتقون الكلام بعضه من بعض. ويضعون للاشياء اسماء كثيرة، بحسب حدوث الاشياء الموجودات وظهورها. فلما اتسع الكلام، ظهر الشعر الجيد الفصيح في العدنانية وكثر هذا بعد معد بن عدنان. ولكل قبيلة من قبائل العرب لغة تنفرد بها وتؤخذ عنها وقد اتركوا في الاصل. قال: وان الزيادة في اللغة، امتنع العرب منها مذ بعث نبيه عليه السلام لاجل القرآن. ومما يصدق ذلك، روى مكحول عن رجاله ان اول من وضع الكتاب العربي، نفيس ونصر وتيما ودومة، هؤلاء ولد اسماعيل، وضعوه مفصلاً، وفرقه قادور ونبت بن هميسع بن قادور. قال: وان نفراً من اهل الانبار، من اباد القديمة وضعوا حروف الف، ب، ت، ث، وعنه اخذته العرب.

قرأت في كتاب مكة لعمر بن شبة وبخطه: اخبرني قوم من علماء مضر، قالوا الذي كتب هذا العربي الجزم، رجل من بني يخلد بن النضر بن كنانة، فكتبت حينئذ العرب. وعن غيره: الذي حمل الكتابة الى قريش بمكة، ابو قيس بن عبد مناف بن زهرة، وقد قيل حرب بن امية. وقيل انه لما هدمت الكعبة قريش وجدوا في ركن من اركانها حجراً مكتوباً فيه: السلف بن عبقر يقرأ على ربه السلام، من رأس ثلاثة آلاف سنة.

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- 33 Makḥūl al-‘Abdī al-‘Allāf (ca. 135–ca. 227/752–842), from al-Yamama; a transmitter, a philologist and poet.
- 34 Name of an ancient oasis settlement in northwestern Arabia; inscriptions in imperial Aramaic in a northern Arabian language, before called Thamudic A and now Taymanite, from the early Christian period have been found there. The name appears in pre-Islamic poetry. Buhl and Bosworth, “Taymā,” 10: 401–402.
- 35 Perhaps an Aramaic word. As in the case of Taymā’, there are also localities on the Arabian Peninsula that carry this name in slightly different spellings. The name Dūmah also appears in the Hebrew Bible. Vagliero, “Dūmat al-Djandal,” 2:624–626.
- 36 Abū Zayd ‘Umar b. ‘Abīda b. Rayṭa (Rā’iṭa) al-Numayrī al-Baṣrī (173–262/789–878) was born in Baṣra as a client (*mawlā*) of the Banū Numayr, that is a non-Arabic native speaker. Shabba is a nickname after a song sung by his paternal grandmother in his childhood. Leder, “‘Umar b. Shabba,” 10: 826–827; first published online: 2012 (accessed 21 October 2019). Ibn al-Nadīm also mentions him later in his book and provides a list of his works. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, 125–126.

stop to derive one word from the other. They set up many names for things according to the occurrences of the existing things and their appearance. And after the speech had expanded, excellent, flawless poetry appeared among the ‘Adnānites and became even more after the time of Ma‘add ibn ‘Adnān. Each tribal confederation among the Arabs had a language by which it was singled out and according to which it made [words], although they shared the lineage.

It is said: Indeed, the Arabs ceased to add to the language since their prophet, Peace be upon Him, was sent on account of the Qur’ān. Among [the things] that give credence to that is the [information] transmitted by Makḥūl³³ from his men that the first who set the Arabic writing were Nafis, Naṣr, Taymā³⁴ and Dūma,³⁵ those being children of Ismā‘īl. They set it up in great detail. Then Qādūr and Nabt ibn Hamaysa‘ ibn Qādūr dispersed it. It has [also] been said that a group (*naḡar*) from the people of al-Anbār in the long-gone times of the ancients set up the letters *alif, bā’, tā’, thā’*, and the Arabs learned it from it.

I read in the book *Makka* by ‘Umar ibn Shabba³⁶ and in his handwriting: A group of scholars from Muḡar³⁷ informs me: They said that al-Jazm, a man from the Banū Yakhḡud ibn Naḡr ibn Kināna, is the one who wrote this Arabic.³⁸ Then the Arabs [began to] write. And according to something else: He who brought [the art of] writing to the Quraysh³⁹ in Mecca was Abū Qays ibn ‘Abd Manāf ibn Zuhra.⁴⁰ It is [also] said that it was Ḥarb ibn Umayya.⁴¹ [Furthermore,] it is said that when the Quraysh tore down the Ka‘ba they found in one of its corners a stone on which [the following] was written: al-Siluf ibn ‘Abqar⁴² extends greetings to his Lord, [going back] about three thousand years.⁴³

37 Muḡar was one of the two most powerful tribal confederations in ancient northwestern Arabia. Kindermann, “Rabī‘a and Muḡar,” 8: 352–354; Toral-Niehoff, “Nebkudnezar,” 239.

38 The Naḡr are the first and perhaps most important of the six main sub-tribes of the Kināna b. Khuzayma confederation. Watt, “Kināna b. Khuzayma,” 5: 115.

39 The Meccan tribe to which Prophet Muḡammad belonged. Two different etymologies are given to the name, one its being a diminutive of *qirsh* (shark)—in which case it would be a totemic name—the other a derivation from *taqarrush* (a coming together, association), in which case it would be a nickname. The tribe is counted among the northern Arabic tribes and as a descendant from Ma‘add ibn ‘Adnān. Watt, “Quraysh,” 5:434–435.

40 Someone from the clan and generation of Muḡammad’s great-grandfather. Watt, “Hāshim b. ‘Abd al-Manāf,” 3:280; Bosworth, “Zuhra,” 564–565.

41 The leader of the Quraysh clan ‘Abd Shams and father of Abū Sufyān in the times before the rise of Muḡammad as a prophet. Lewis, “Ḥarb b. Umayya b. ‘Abd Shams,” 203; Watt, “Abū Sufyān,” 1:151.

42 Possibly one of the legendary demons from the valley of ‘Abqar, some of whom are regarded as the muses of poetry. Fakhreddine, “Two Modernisms,” 42n11.

43 Cf. Dodge, *Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, 1:8.

Excerpt II

الكلام على القلم السرياني

ذكر تيادورس المفسر، في تفسيره للسفر الأول من التوراة، ان الله تبارك وتعالى خاطب آدم باللسان النبطي وهو افصح اللسان السرياني، وبه كان يتكلم اهل بابل. فلها بلبل الله الالسنة تفرقت الامم الى الاصقاع والمواضع وتبقى لسان بابل على حاله. فاما النبطي الذي يتكلم به اهل القري، فهو اهل سرياني مكسور غير مستقيم اللفظ. وقال غيره: اللسان الذي يستعمل في الكتب والقراءة وهو الفصيح، فلسان هال سوريا وحران. وانخط السرياني، استخرجه العلماء واصطلحوا عليه وكذلك سائر الكتابات. وقال آخر: ان في احد الأناجيل او في غيره من كتب النصارى، أن ملكاً يقال له سيمورس، علم آدم الكتابة السريانية على ما في ايدي النصارى في وقتنا هذا. وللسوريانيين ثلاثة اقلام وهى: المفتوح، ويسمى الاسطرنجالا وهو اجلها واحسنها ويقال له انخط الثقيل. ونظيره قلم المصاحف والتحرير، المحقق، ويسمى اسكولثيا ويقال له الشكل المدور. ونظيره قلم الوراقين. والسرطا، وبه يكتبون الترسل ونظيره في العربية، قلم الرقاع.

Excerpt II

Saying about the Syriac Script

Theodore,⁴⁴ the Commentator, reported in his exegesis of the first book⁴⁵ of the Torah that God, Blessed and Almighty, addressed Adam in the Nabataean⁴⁶ language, which is the clearest Syriac language. The people of Babel used to speak it. After God got the languages mixed up, the communities (*umma*) became dispersed to the areas and locations, while the language of Babel remained as it was. But the Nabataean which the people of the villages speak is an irregular Syriac, not proper in [its] pronunciation.

Someone else said: The language which is used in writings and in liturgy and which is the clear [language], is the language of the people of Syria and Ḥarrān. [In relation to] the Syriac handwriting the scholars extracted it and adopted it, and the same [happened] with the remaining [kinds of] writing.

Another [person] said that in one of the Gospels or another book of the Christians [it is said] that an angel called Saymūrus taught Adam the Syriac handwriting in accordance to what is in the hands of the Christians in our own times. The Syriac [people] have three [modes] of writing: the open one (*maftūḥ*), which is called Estrangelo.⁴⁷ This is the most venerable and the most beautiful one of them. It is designated the heavy (*thaqīl*) script. It corresponds to the *masāḥif* script and the *tahrīr*. [The second is] the solid one (*muḥaqqiq*).⁴⁸ It is designated the scholastic⁴⁹ one and it is [also] called the rounded form.⁵⁰ It corresponds to the script of the copyists.⁵¹ [The third one is] the Serto.⁵² With it they write letters. It corresponds in Arabic to the *riqā'*⁵³ script.⁵⁴

44 Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350–428).

45 *sifr*, probably from the Syriac *sefrā* = scripture or book. Payne Smith, ed., *Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 2707.

46 This Nabataean language is Syriac, not the (spoken Arabic) language of Palmyra. Hämeen-Anttila, *Last Pagans of Iraq*, 16.

47 *iṣṭranjālā* (Arabic) = transliteration of *estrangēlā* (Syriac).

48 According to Dozy, *Supplément*, 1: 307, there is a style of writing called *qalam al-muḥaqqiq*, which is characterized by big characters/letters.

49 *iskūlathiyā* (Syriac), derived from Greek σχολεῖον.

50 This actually should explain Estrangelo, because one of its etymologies is στρογγύλη (rounded).

51 The Arabic word *warrāq* is often translated as stationer or book trader. According to Dozy, *Supplément*, 2: 805, it can also mean copyist.

52 *sartā* (Arabic) = transliteration of *serṭā* (Syriac) = line.

53 *riqā'* is the plural of *ruq'a* = a patch or piece of cloth. The script was named thus because it was often written on small pieces of paper to petition a ruler or other courtly official.

54 Cf. Dodge, *Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, 1:22.

Excerpt III

الكلام على القلم الفارسي

يقال ان اول من يتكلم بالفارسية، جيومرث ويسميه الفرس، الكيل شاه ومعناه ملك الطين. وهو عندهم آدم ابو بشر. وقيل اول من كتب بالفارسية، بيوراسب بن وندسب المعروف بالضحاك صاحب الاجدهاق. وقيل افريدون بن اثبيان لما قسم الارض بين ولده سلم وطور وايرج، خص كل واحد منهم بثلاث المعمورة وكتب كتاباً بينهم.

Excerpt III

Sayings about the Persian Script

It is said that the first who spoke in Persian was Jayūmarth.⁵⁵ The Persians called him Gīl Shāh, which means King of Clay. He is for them Adam, father of mankind. It is said that the first who wrote in Persian was Bīwarāsb,⁵⁶ son of Wandāsab,⁵⁷ known as al-Ḍaḥḥāk,⁵⁸ the Lord of Ajdahāq.⁵⁹ It is said that Afrīdūn⁶⁰ ibn Asbīyān,⁶¹ when he divided the earth among his children Salm, Ṭūr and Īraj, allotted to each of them a third of the inhabited [world] and drew⁶² up a contract between them.⁶³

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- 55 Middle Persian: Gayōmart or Gayōmard; he is “the sixth of the heptad in the Mazdean myth of creation, the protoplast of man, and the first king in Iranian mythical history.” Shaki, “Gayōmart”; Cereti, “Gayōmard.”
- 56 Middle Persian: bēvarasp. West, *The Bundahishn* “Creation,” chap. 12, no. 28 and chap. 29, no. 7; Anklesaria, *Zand-Ākāsīh*, chap. 29, 9. Compound of bēvar (myriad, ten thousand) and asp (horse) = the master of ten thousand horses. Brinner, *History of al-Ṭabarī* 2:111.
- 57 Al-Ṭabarī gives Arwandasb as the Arabic form of the name. Brinner, *History of al-Ṭabarī*, 2:218. The Middle Persian form, as given in the *Bundahishn*, compiled in the ninth century, is: Virafsang or Avirafshang. West, *The Bundahishn* “Creation,” chap. 31, no. 6.; Anklesaria, *Zand-Ākāsīh*, chap. 35, no. 7.
- 58 Ḍaḥḥāk or Ḍaḥāk; a tyrannical king in Middle Persian mythology. Skjærvø, Khaleghi-Motlagh, and Russell, “Aḏdahā.”
- 59 This is a misunderstanding on the side of Ibn al-Nadīm. Ajdahāq is the Arabicized form of Pahlavi Az[i]dahāg, a dragon with three heads on the side of the powers of Evil. The dwelling of the Snake-man was believed to have been in Babylon. Pahlavi texts shortened the form to Dahāg, which in Arabic became Ḍaḥḥāk, and identified him as one of the legendary Pēšdādīān kings.
- 60 Pahlavi and Manichaean Middle Persian: Frēdōn; New Persian: Fereydūn or Farīdūn; Iranian mythic hero. Tafazzoli, “Ferēdūn.”
- 61 Pahlavi: Āswiān or Āsbīān. Tafazzoli, “Ābtīn”; Tafazzoli, “Ferēdūn”. Dodge chose instead al-Kayān. Dodge, *Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, 1:23.
- 62 The basic meaning of *kataba* is to write or put down in writing.
- 63 Cf. Dodge, *Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, 1:22.

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Inventing or Adapting Scripts in Inner Asia

The Jin and Yuan Histories and the Early Manchu Veritable Records Juxtaposed (1340s–1630s)

Mårten Söderblom Saarela

There are good reasons to include the Inner Asian empires of the twelfth to nineteenth centuries CE in what in reference to Europe and India has been called the “vernacular millennium.”^{1,2} After the collapse of the Tang empire in the early tenth century, a power vacuum formed on the Chinese periphery which was filled by new polities, including those of the Khitan, Jurchen, and later, the Mongols, who eventually conquered all of China and large parts of Asia. Jurchen, Mongols, and other powers in the region successively invented or adopted new scripts as a way to distinguish themselves from their neighbors. Establishing an official script was very much a conscious act of state building, in which the ruler himself was involved.

Several of the new scripts—including one of the scripts invented by the Jurchen—were inspired by Chinese characters. Others, like the ‘Phags-pa script that was made a state script in the Mongol empire, were based on the Indian and Tibetan tradition. The Uighur script that eventually prevailed among the Mongols, meanwhile, was ultimately of Near Eastern origin. Around the turn of the seventeenth century, this script was borrowed from the Mongols by the emerging Manchus (descendants of the Jurchen), who, with a few modifications, used it for their own language. The scripts and the languages that they recorded thus differed between states, but the ambition behind their adoption was similar. The new scripts should record the (sometimes multiple) languages of the empires and thus relativize, if not displace, classical Chinese and the country with which it was associated. The emergence of new written languages, closely tied to peoples recently organized into states, as a challenge to classical Chinese is what invites us to compare this story to the more familiar vernacularization processes of Europe and India.

1 This contribution is largely based on Söderblom Saarela, *Early Modern Travels of Manchu*, chap. 1. However, the translation of the Chinese source texts has been improved in many instances with guidance from Xiujie Wu, whom I thank for her help.

2 Pollock, “India.”

The following three accounts of how new Inner Asian states introduced new writing systems were written centuries apart. Yet all three share notable similarities. The earliest text, which describes the invention of one of the two Jurchen scripts, dates from 1343–1345. It is an excerpt from the dynastic history of the Jin, an official work of historiography consisting of annals, biographies, and treatises. Dynastic histories had been written in China since the fall of the Han empire in antiquity. It was a distinctly Chinese genre, and like other works of its kind, the Jin history was written in classical Chinese. The Chinese scholar Ouyang Xuan 歐陽玄 (1283–1357) was charged with its compilation. At that time, the Jin empire's defeat to the Mongols lay more than a century in the past. Ouyang and his colleagues, however, probably had original documents at their disposal when writing the history. They described the Jurchen script as invented, sometime before 1119, directly on order of the Jurchen emperor—referred to by his temple name the Great Progenitor (*taizu* 太祖) in the text. The script is presented as a key institution of the new state.

The next text described the invention of the 'Phags-pa script under the Mongol leader Kublai Khan, the Secular Progenitor (*shizu* 世祖) of the Yuan, around 1269. The text dates from 1370. Like the first text, this one is taken from a dynastic history. Mongol Yuan rule in China ended in 1368, and the Chinese Ming regime that succeeded it quickly commissioned a dynastic history, thus confirming the finality of the Mongol defeat. The Chinese scholar Song Lian 宋濂 (1310–1381) headed the work. Like the history of the Jin, that of the Yuan was written in classical Chinese. The text is presented as an edict issued by Kublai, in whose voice the text is cast. Like the Great Progenitor of the Jin, Kublai directly orders a scholar to invent a script for the new state in order to complete its institutions.

The third and last text dates from 1636. Unlike the others, it is not written in classical Chinese, but in Manchu. The Manchu script had been in use for a few decades at this time (the text itself dates its introduction to 1599, but there is no independent evidence for this claim). The text is a court chronicle of a type ("veritable records") that at this time had long been maintained in the Ming empire, in Chinese, and which the Manchus mimicked in their own language. While not a dynastic history, the chronicle is similar to the dynastic histories in that chronicles were finalized upon a ruler's death on the basis of primary documents. The chronicle records the deeds of Nurhaci, whose temple name was the Great Progenitor. Like the Great Progenitor of the Jurchen Jin and the Secular Progenitor of the Yuan, the Great Progenitor of the Qing (the name of Qing being introduced only after his death) was presented as directly involved in the adoption of a new writing system, even exerting his will over that of his scribes.

The similarity of these three records of script creation or script adoption is no coincidence, nor is it merely due to the similarity in genre. While I have little knowledge of the reading program of Song Lian, compiler of the Yuan history, I assume he was familiar with the history of the Jin. What I know for sure, however, is that both the Jin and Yuan histories were read and discussed by the Manchu leadership precisely around the time that the Nurhaci chronicle was compiled in 1636.³ Regardless of their veracity, then, these three records constitute a tradition of imagining the introduction of new scripts in Inner Asia as part of state-making. In this part of the world, the vernacular challenge to the regional cosmopolitan language—classical Chinese—was a highly political project.

3 Elliott, "Whose Empire," 1:265, 266–276.



Classical Chinese and Manchu Texts

The first and second texts are written in classical Chinese and taken from the standard (collated and punctuated) edition of the dynastic histories published in the People's Republic of China. The third text is written in Manchu and is taken from a photographic reprint of an eighteenth-century illustrated manuscript. The manuscript is trilingual; in addition to the Manchu, there are also Chinese and Mongolian versions, which I have not considered for the English translation below.

Excerpt I

完顏希尹本名谷神，歡都之子也。自太祖舉兵，常在行陣，或從太祖，或從撒改，或與諸將征伐，比有功。金人初無文字，國勢日強，與鄰國交好，迺用契丹字。太祖命希尹撰本國字，備制度。希尹乃依仿漢人楷字，因契丹字制度，合本國語，制女直字。天輔三年八月，字書成，太祖大悅，命頒行之。⁴

Excerpt II

朕惟字以書言，言以紀事，此古今之通制。我國家肇基朔方，俗尚簡古，未遑制作。凡施用文字，因用漢楷及畏吾字，以達本朝之言。考諸遼、金，以及遐方諸國，例各有字。今文治寢興，而字書有闕，於一代制度，實為未備。故特命國師八思巴創為蒙古新字，譯寫一切文字，期於順言達事而已。自今以往，凡有璽書頒降者，並用蒙古新字，仍各以其國字副之。⁵

4 Ouyang Xuan, *Jin shi*, 1684 (chap. 73).

5 Song Lian, *Yuan shi*, 4518 (chap. 202).

6 It is tempting to read *zishu* 字書 as “book of characters,” referring to a reference work of some sort. By the Qing period at least, the term *zishu* was used as a bibliographical category for certain kinds of linguistic reference works and language primers (in this sense, the term contrasted with *yunshu* 韻書, “book of rhymes,” referring to phonologically arranged Chinese dictionaries; see *Yingyin Wenyuan ge Siku quanshu*, vol. 233, 1, lower panel). Some scholars have treated *zishu* here in such a fashion. For example, Mu Hongli treats *zishu* in this passage as a book title, setting it off in double angle brackets (Mu Hongli, “Wanyan Xiyin,” 79). By contrast, Kane, *Sino-Jurchen Vocabulary*, 3, translates *zishu* as “the composition of the new script,” thus retaining the verbal character of *shu*, “to write.” I have translated in the same spirit, taking *shu* to refer to the writing up of the script in some form.

7 My interpretation of this sentence follows Cheng, *Ancient Chinese*, 148n15: “It has no time for creating social institutions.” I should point out, however, that Poppe translates it as “They [the Mongols] did not yet have the leisure to create [a script].” Poppe, *Mongolian Monuments*, 5. I have also followed Cheng in some other instances in translating this text.

8 The translation of this sentence follows Coblin, *Handbook*, 5.

English Translation

Translated by Mårten Söderblom Saarela.

Excerpt I: Invention of the Jurchen Script

Wanyan Xiyin was originally named Guši [“thirty”]. He was the son of Huandu. After the Great Progenitor [of the Jin] rose in arms, he was constantly on campaign, following either the Great Progenitor, Sagai, or going on the offensive with the various generals, proving his worth every time.

The Jin people did not originally have a writing system [*wenzi* 文字]. As the power of the [Jin] state grew stronger by the day and friendly relationships were established with the neighboring states, they still used the Khitan characters. The Great Progenitor ordered Xiyin to create characters for their own state and create a complete system [*bei zhidu* 備制度]. Xiyin then relied on the regular script of the Chinese as a model, followed the system of the Khitan characters, matched them to the language of his own state, and created the Jurchen characters. In the eighth month of the third year of Heavenly Assistance [1119], the writing of the characters [*zi shu* 字書] was finished.⁶ The Great Progenitor was greatly pleased and ordered it promulgated.

Excerpt II: Invention of the ‘Phags-pa Script

I [Kublai Khan] think that using characters to write down language, and using language to record events has been the order throughout history. Our state has its origins in the north. Our customs are still simple and ancient. We have not yet had the time to create new institutions.⁷ The scripts we use to express the language of our court [i.e., Mongolian] have therefore been the regular characters of the Chinese and those of the Uighurs. I have examined this matter in the states of the Khitan, Jurchen, and those further away [in western Asia]: as a rule they all have their characters. Now our civil administration is slowly coming to flourish, but we are not yet equipped with a system for our age in terms of characters and writing. For that reason, I have explicitly ordered Preceptor of State ‘Phags-pa to create new Mongol characters and use them to transcribe [*yixie* 譯寫] all scripts, my expectation being simply to facilitate smooth communication.⁸ From now on, whatever documents are handed down for distribution carrying the imperial seal are all to use the new Mongol characters [i.e., the ‘Phags-pa script] and, as before, to contain versions in the respective script of the country alongside.⁹

⁹ The interpretation of this sentence follows Poppe, *Mongolian Monuments*, 5.

Excerpt III

juwe biya de taidzu sure beile monggo bithe be kûbulime manju gisun-i araki seci, erdeni baksi g'ag'ai jargûci hendume be monggoi bithe be taciha dahame sambi dere. julgeci jihe bithe be te adarame kûbulibumbi seme marame gisureci, taidzu sure beile hendume nikan gurun-i bithe be hûlaci nikan bithe sara niyalma sarkû niyalma gemu ulhimbi, monggo gurun-i bithe be hûlaci bithe sarkû niyalma inu gemu ulhimbi kai. musei bithe be monggorome hûlaci musei gurun-i bithe sarkû niyalma ulhirakû kai. musei gurun-i gisun-i araci adarame mangga, encu monggo gurun-i gisun adarame ja seme henduci g'ag'ai jargûci erdeni baksi jabume, musei gurun-i gisun-i araci sain mujangga. kûbulime arara be meni dolo bahanarakû ofi marambi dere. taidzu sure beile hendume a sere hergen ara, a-i fejile ma sindaci ama wakao. e sere hergen ara, e-i fejile me sindaci eme wakao. mini dolo gûnime wajih, suwe arame tuwa, ombi kai seme emhun marame monggorome hûlara bithe be manju gisun-i kûbulibuha, tereci taidzu sure beile manju bithe be fukjin deribufi manju gurun de selgÿehe.¹⁰

10 *Da Qing Manzhou shilu*, 108–110.

Excerpt III: Invention of the Manchu Script

When the Great Progenitor, the Wise Prince [Nurhaci], in the second month of the year of the yellow pig [February 25–March 25, 1599] expressed the wish to change Mongol writing and write in the Manchu language, Preceptor Erdeni and Judge G'ag'ai spoke, protesting and answering: "Because [we, the Manchus] have learned the writing of the Mongols, [we] are expected to know it. Why now change the script that has come from antiquity?"

The Great Progenitor, the Wise Prince, answered:

"When [one] reads the writing of the Chinese state aloud, people knowing Chinese writing and people not knowing it all understand. When [one] reads the writing of the Mongolian state aloud, those who know and those who do not know the writing of the Mongolian state also all understand! When [we] read our documents as Mongols, people who have not studied the documents [produced in Mongolian in] our state will not understand! If we [would instead] write in the language of our state [that is, in Manchu], why would it be difficult? Why would only the language of the Mongolian state be easy?"

Judge G'ag'ai and Preceptor Erdeni protested and answered:

"If [we] write in the language of our state, it would be good indeed. [But] because within ourselves, [having already learned to write in Mongolian,] we are unable to change to writing in Manchu, we are prone to resisting [the change]."

The Great Progenitor, the Wise Prince, said:

"Write the letter called *a*! If [you] put *ma* under *a*, is it not *ama* [father]? Write the letter called *e*! If [you] put *me* under *e*, is it not *eme* [mother]? I have made up my mind; try and write it yourselves—it works!"

By that sole objection, the documents that had been read in the manner of the Mongols were changed using the Manchu language. Thus the Great Progenitor, the Wise Prince, brought Manchu documents into existence for the first time, and promulgated them in the Manchu state.

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Further Reading

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An Essay on the Use of Chinese and Korean Language in Late 18th-Century CE Chosŏn

Yu Tŭkkong, “*Hyang’ŏ pan, Hwa’ŏ pan*”

Mårten Söderblom Saarela

The essay “*Hyang’ŏ pan, Hwa’ŏ pan*” 鄉語半，華語半 (One Half Local Expressions and One Half Sinitic Expressions) by Yu Tŭkkong 柳得恭 (1748–1807), a scholar most known for his work on the history of what is now Northeast China, describes the complicated linguistic situation in Chosŏn Korea (1392–1905). The essay is from a collection of jottings (Ko. *p’ŭlgi*, Ch. *biji* 筆記), a genre used by scholars in both China and Korea to record observations or ideas on various matters. Late Chosŏn Korea, where Yu lived, was a politically independent kingdom in which literary Chinese was the language of scholarship, belles lettres, and non-ephemeral official documents such as the court chronicles. The Korean language, which is entirely unrelated to Chinese, was an addition written using several writing systems. It could be written using Chinese characters (as in the case of the words for “heaven,” “moon,” or “star” in Yu’s essay) or using the Korean alphabet, which was officially called the “correct sounds for the instruction of the people” (*hunmin chŏng’ŭm* 訓民正音) and informally “direct/vernacular [writing]” (*ŏn[mun]* 諺[文]). Vernacular Korean written using the Korean alphabet had a variety of applications, including as a vehicle for Confucian and Buddhist translation, letter writing, songs and literary prose, and wills, land deeds, and book-keeping.¹ Furthermore, texts written in literary Chinese could be marked up in various ways to allow them to be read in a “Koreanized” form. In the eighteenth century, when Yu was writing, there was a widespread awareness that the vernacular Chinese language of Qing China was different from spoken Chinese in the past and from Chinese as used in Korea.² Yu’s essay reflects this situation.

¹ Cho, *Power of the Brush*, 13–23.

² The Chinese language had changed substantially since antiquity, when the texts of the Confucian canon were written. Eighteenth-century writers in both China and Korea realized, for example, that words that had once rhymed in Chinese antiquity no longer rhymed in contemporary vernacular Chinese. The Chinese pronunciation on which the Korean readings were based were not those of Chinese as used in antiquity, however, but as used in the medieval

In this piece, Yu lists a few facts to substantiate the claim in the title that in Korea, “one half” of expressions used are local and the other half Sinitic. First, Yu shows that Korean vernacular vocabulary only extends to everyday things, whereas learned words are all of Chinese origin. The examples he mentions are from the heavens and from counting. He contrasts this situation with that of neighboring non-Chinese peoples, noting that they have a complete vocabulary for all things (Yu does not know that Mongolian has a lot of learned vocabulary from Tibetan, and that the Uighurs—Turkic-speaking Muslims on China’s periphery—have words from Arabic and Persian). The difference is explained by Korea’s historically close relationship with China.

Second, Yu discusses Chinese and Korean expressions used in the Chosŏn military, tracing them to the Imjin war in the 1590s. Finally, he talks about Chosŏn record-keeping and reading practices. He points out that basic communications in the bureaucracy make use of a special clerical style that is distinct from proper literary Chinese and that contains vernacular Korean morphemes and phrases written in Chinese characters. He links this way of writing to how Koreans read literary Chinese texts: in the eighteenth century, when Yu was writing, Chinese word order was respected (unlike in Japan) by Korean readers, but the sentence was parsed through the introduction of Korean grammatical markers (see Chapter 1.8). Yu describes but does not illustrate the practice with an example. He disapproves of it. He probably preferred to read the literary Chinese text as is, which is how literary Chinese is read by scholars in Korea today.

Nothing in his essay suggests that literary Chinese was a spoken language in Chosŏn Korea. Yet the use of Chinese vocabulary, which Yu mentions, might have reached a point where one could talk of diglossia. A Japanese observer from the period remarked that Korean officials tried to avoid vernacular vocabulary to the greatest extent possible, using only Chinese words when they spoke.³

Yu’s essay is written in literary Chinese. The Korean words in the text are not marked in any way. They are written in Chinese characters that are supposed to be read for their sound. Yu does not use the Korean alphabet to write Korean words in the essay. Instead he uses the Chinese script as a kind of phonetic notation.

period. These medieval Chinese pronunciations had changed further after their adoption in Korea, so that Chinese as pronounced in Korea in Yu’s time sounded neither like medieval Chinese nor like contemporary vernacular Chinese.

3 Hideto, “Chōsen hantō ni okeru gengo sesshoku,” 84.

Sino-Korean Text

Excerpted from *Kyogam p'yochŏm Koundang p'ilgi* 校勘標點古芸堂筆記 [Jottings from Old Rue Hall, critical punctuated edition], edited by Kim Yunjo 金允朝, Kim Chong'ae 金鐘泰, and Kim Sŏng'ae 金成愛 (Seoul: Han'guk Kojŏn Pŏnyŏgwŏn, 2020), 189. The Korean translation, Yu Tŭkkong 유득공, *Koundang p'ilgi* 古芸堂 필기, trans. Kim Yunjo 김윤조, Kim Chong'ae 김중태, and Kim Sŏng'ae 김성애 (Seoul: Han'guk Kojŏn Pŏnyŏgwŏn, 2020), 473–475, helped resolve difficult points in the text. I have modified the punctuation, mostly for stylistic reasons.

鄉語半，華語半

我東之人，鄉語半，華語半。試以天部言之，「天」曰「漢捺」，「日」曰「捺」，「月」曰「闔」，「星」曰「別」。此則鄉語也。五星二十八宿之名，純用華語。惟昴星有「單音上」及「藁鞋翁」之號，太白星有「狗飯瞭」之號，事物稱謂皆此例，不能悉舉。滿洲、蒙古、回子，事事物物莫不有渠國語。倭人亦然。此曷故哉？我東漢唐時爲內服，學習華語。其鄉語似太平忘之也。然其所謂華語皆古音，與今多不合。余所云半忘鄉語者，亦非臆料，數目部自一至十，皆有鄉語。百千萬億兆無鄉語。古者，百曰「濫」，今不用此語。千萬億兆之鄉語，豈非忘卻者耶？半鄉、半華

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- 4 I would like to thank Jongtae Lim and Sixiang Wang for their help with the translation of Yu's essay.
 - 5 Yu's readers would have been familiar with the structure of Korean reading primers such as *Hunmong chahoe* 訓蒙字會 (Collection of Characters for the Instruction of Children; 1527), which arranged vocabulary items by topic (e.g., the heavens). Children using such books to read were taught to associate each Chinese character with a native Korean word. In *Hunmong chahoe*, the character 煖, "warm," for example, is glossed in Korean, using the Korean alphabet, as "warm *uk*" (*tŏul uk* 더울옥), with *uk* being the Sino-Korean reading of the character. See the image reproduced with a description in Shinpei, *Zōtei hochū Chōsen gogakushi*, 195 ff. Yu presents his Chinese/Korean word pairs in a similar way, but he does not use the Korean alphabet to write the Korean words.
 - 6 Yu is using the Chinese technique of syllabic spelling (*fanqie*) to write a vernacular Korean word: two syllables are merged to write a third syllable. In Yu's case, *chom*, the first syllable of the first Korean name for the Pleiades, is the product of a syllabic spelling of two syllables. According to the reprinted manuscript, both syllables should be read with their Sino-Korean pronunciation: *cho* 罩 + *ŭm* 音. A manuscript held at the Harvard-Yenching library, which was not used by Kim et al., has *cho* 者 where the other manuscripts have *ŭm* 音. The character used in the Harvard-Yenching manuscript implies that the first of the syllables is to be read in its Sino-Korean pronunciation and the second in the pronunciation of a native Korean word that is synonymous with the literary Chinese word normally associated with the character: *cho* 罩 + *nom* 者. I am tempted to conjecture that the Harvard-Yenching manuscript's work-

English Translation

Translated by Mårten Söderblom Saarela.⁴

One Half Local Expressions and One Half Sinitic Expressions

We Easterners [use] one half local expressions and one half Sinitic expressions. Let us try discussing it using the category of the heavens: *ch'ön* 天, “heaven” is called *han[ũ]l, il* 日, “day [lit. sun]” is called *nal, wöl* 月, “moon” is called *tal, sǒng* 星, “star” is called *pyöl*.⁵ These are local expressions. [However, for] the names of the five planets and the twenty-eight mansions, pure Sinitic expressions are used. Only the Pleiades are called *chomsaeng[ʔ]*⁶ and *chipsin harabi*, “grandfather with straw shoes,” and Venus is called *kae pap paragi*, “the dog expecting food.” The same is true for the names of all matters and things; there is no need to enumerate them all.

The Manchus, Mongols, and Uighurs have expressions proper to their own states for everything, and the Japanese do as well. What is the reason for this? Under the Han and the Tang, our Eastern [country] was an inner dependency and learned and practiced Sinitic expressions. It seems that the local expressions of that [time] were in large part forgotten. However, what are called Sinitic expressions in this case refers to ancient pronunciations, which often do not correspond to those of today.

When I say that they half forgot their local speech, I am not just expressing my own unfounded opinion. Considering the category of numbers, “one” to “ten” all have local expressions, [but] *paek* 百, “hundred”; *ch'ön* 千, “thousand”; *man* 萬, “ten thousand”; *ök* 億, “hundred million”; *cho* 兆 “one thousand billion” do not have local expressions. In the past, “hundred” was called *on* 濶, but this expression is no longer used. Would not the local expressions for *ch'ön*, *man*, *ök*, and *cho* have been forgotten and lost [too]?

One half local expressions and one half Sinitic expressions are notably found in military rituals. To the call to kowtow and greet [the officer], they shout *a*,

ing represents a copyist's error. Regardless, in both versions, the second and last syllable of the word as Yu writes it, *saeng*, is indicated by the Chinese character 上, which is to be read here for its Sino-Korean pronunciation (*sang* in modern standard Korean; Yu might have read it somewhat differently).

語，尤可見於軍禮時唱「叩頭起居」，喏「啊！」，可謂華也。及呼巡令手則喏「曳！」，此則鄉也。點鼓行軍唱來⁷，又可謂華也。及有別般號令，次次傳警，不得以鄉語了當。似是學得於萬曆東援時而其於素不能為華語何哉。不特其語也，文移亦然。某職為某事，須至關者，請照驗施行右關某衙門，莫非中國之式，而中間卻用許多方言，謂之「吏讀」。不特文移也，讀書亦然。章句之外，別作剩音，謂之「吐」。兢兢遵守，不敢差誤，似源於薛弘儒侯以方言解經也。在新羅以上，初學經史時，則或可也。今不必然。

7 An alternative interpretation of this phrase would be 點鼓行軍唱「來！」，which Kim et al. did not choose.

“OK!” This can be called Sinitic. As for when they respond to the general’s attendant, shouting *ye*, “yes, sir!,” this is local. [The words that they] chant to the drum beat when they come marching can also be called Sinitic.⁸ Then there are special kinds of commands said one after the other when they clear the road of passers-by [during a royal procession], which can only be carried out using local expressions. It appears that this was acquired during the Wanli [period] relief [campaign] in the East.⁹ What if they had not been able to use Sinitic expressions then?

It is not only speech. Written communications between government offices are like that as well. “Such and such official in such and such matter,” “The relevant office is asked to investigate and implement,” and “Such and such bureau of your esteemed office”; [such standard phrases of official communications] are always in the Chinese manner. Yet within [the document] a fair amount of regional language will be used. This is called *idu* 吏讀, “clerk readings.” They are not only [used in] written communications between government offices. Reading aloud is also like that. Outside the chapters and phrases [of the original Chinese text], superfluous sounds are separately introduced. These are called *to* 吐.¹⁰ This is carefully followed and maintained out of fear of making a mistake. It appears that [this practice] originated with the Marquis for the Advancement of Classicism Söl [Ch’ong] 薛[聰], who “interpreted the [nine] classics using the local language.”¹¹ Before the Silla,¹² when the classics and histories were first studied, it might have been permissible to do it that way; nowadays there is no need for it.

8 If one would follow the alternative interpretation of the original classical Chinese sentence that I gave in the notes to the original text, then it would translate as “*Rae*, [Here we] come!,” chanted to the drum beat during marches, can also be called Sinitic.”

9 Yu is referring to the Imjin war of the 1590s, when the Chinese Ming army entered Korea to repel a Japanese invasion.

10 Korean marks parts of speech using postpositional particles (e.g., for subject or object), but literary Chinese does not. The expression *to* refers to the addition of such particles in order to aid Korean readers to parse a Chinese sentence. For a description of two systems historically used to produce (more or less) vernacular renderings of literary Chinese sentences in Korea, see Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, 168–171. See further on the related Japanese practice of *kundoku*: Lurie, *Realms of Literacy*, 178–180.

11 This is a paraphrase of a passage in the *Samguk sagi* 三國史記 (Historical record of the Three Kingdoms; 1145), a historical chronicle. Modern editions of the text have *tok* 讀, “read” where Yu has “interpreted.”

12 Silla was a Korean kingdom (one of the aforementioned three) that was defeated in 935 C.E. Söl Ch’ong was a Silla scholar.

Abbreviations

Ch. Chinese

Ko. Korean

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Was plurilingualism the exception or the norm in traditional Eurasian scholarship? This volume presents a selection of primary sources—in many cases translated into English for the first time—with introductions that provide fascinating historical materials for challenging notions of the ways in which traditional Eurasian scholars dealt with plurilingualism and monolingualism. Comparative in approach, global in scope, and historical in orientation, it engages with the growing discussion of plurilingualism and focuses on fundamental scholarly practices in various premodern and early modern societies—Chinese, Indian, Mesopotamian, Jewish, Islamic, Ancient Greek, and Roman—asking how these were conceived by the agents themselves. The volume will be an indispensable resource for courses on these subjects and on the history of scholarship and reflection on language throughout the world.

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