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THE HISTORIAN OF ANTIQUITY AND THE ART OF TRANSLATION: MARGINAL NOTES TO A TRANSLATION OF PLUTARCH'S *LIVES*

Abstract: The author takes a close look at translating ancient texts from the viewpoint of a historian. He explains why historians of Antiquity are usually against the very idea of translating Greek and Latin literature. He then proceeds to argue that historical knowledge is indispensable if a translation is to be rendered. This argument is supported by a detailed analysis of the standard Polish translation of two biographies by Plutarch, *Life of Aristides* and *Life of Cimon*.

Keywords: translation, ancient Greek literature, Latin literature, historiography, Plutarch, *Lives*

> A statement of the principles of translation in succinct form is impossible and (…) a statement in any form is much more difficult than might be imagined; and, further (…) this difficulty has arisen from the writings of the translators themselves. The truth is that there are no universally accepted principles of translation, because the only people who are qualified to formulate them have never agreed among themselves, but have for so long and so often contradicted one other that they have bequeathed to us a welter of confused thought for which it must be hard to find parallel in other fields of literature (Savory 1957: 48–49).

The situation has not changed much over the fifty years that have elapsed since the above was penned. This is so despite (or perhaps precisely because of) significant development in reflection upon translation; reflection in which ancient literature occupies a place of privilege, in view of both its antiquity (and the resulting length of the translating tradition) and its key role in the emergence of the cultural identity of the West (cf. Domański 2006). It would be quite reasonable to suggest that this is not about to

change in the future, since various people are bound to require translations for a variety of reasons and different postulates are formulated by the translator depending on the reasons, even if fulfilling these demands were to have a negative impact on the other "users" of a translation. The author of this essay neither wishes nor, fortunately, is obliged to present a system of principles for translating ancient literature. To be quite honest, he has not even produced such a translation for his own benefit. If he decides to address the issue, it is with full awareness that this will settle nothing and that it is done solely in his own interest. His voice is, above all, that of a historian of Antiquity, a representative of one of the many groups that deal with translations, that (co-)produce them sometimes and – by the same token – have their own expectations of the translator and the effects of his work. But they also have something to offer.

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A historian – and especially a historian of Antiquity, one who works with texts so far removed from the modern languages in terms of syntax, vocabulary and, above all, cultural roots – usually has ambivalent feelings towards the very idea of translation. To be more precise, there is only one situation in which translation is not only admissible but well-nigh a requisite: whenever a historian quotes a source text in the original, he must append a translation to his quotation so that the reader can verify if any possible discrepancy in his perception of extra-textual reality between him and the historian stems from a different understanding of the text that relates to that reality.[1] But then the translation becomes a commentary to the original text rather than its replacement.[2]

Whenever it is a case of a translation replacing the original, the historian is somewhat dismayed. His interest lies in the reality in which a given text was made and which can be reached through the text, and no "copy" made in another language (i.e. one that fails to describe a particular historical

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[1] This requirement itself and the associated practice is a relative novelty: in studies by historians of Antiquity, for instance, adding translations to quoted source texts only became common practice throughout the latter half of the twentieth century.

[2] It should be noted here that the idea of "explaining" the original by the translation is visible, in the Polish language, in the first sense of the verb *tłumaczyć* (1. to explain; 2. to translate) and the same is true of its equivalents in Greek and Latin: *ἑρμηνεύιν* and *interpuretari* (cf. Domański 2006: 7–16).

reality) and at a different (i.e. later) time can be a valid substitute. A classical philologist who studies the poetry of Pindar or the prose of Cicero also deems the original irreplaceable.[3] Still, a philologist translator might be content with his creation of a new aesthetic quality: *Książę niezłomny*, Słowacki's free translation of Pedro Calderón's *El príncipe constante*, is a masterpiece of Polish literature in its own right, much as the original is a masterpiece of Spanish letters. Tacitus' *Histories* and *Annals* translated into Polish by Seweryn Hammer makes for great reading, irrespective of their fidelity to the original. For the historian, one translation can be better than another (and by this the historian understands its being more faithful to the original) but neither can be good: in contrast to the philologist or the literary scholar, the historian sees nothing in a translation that could compensate for the lost qualities of the original – no independent qualities.[4] Jan Parandowski's *Odyseja* is a stellar translation, but it is a mere shadow of Homer's *Odyssey* as a source of knowledge of Mycenaean or Ancient Greece. Ultimately, the text serves one purpose for the historian: to draw conclusions on the past. A historian discussing Hellenic history by referring to Parandowski's translation rather than to the original would expose himself to ridicule and to the suspicion that he only reads the translated *Odyssey* because he does not know his Greek. Thus a serious historian would sympathise with the eternally malcontent translator – a figure thus described by Parandowski:

> Translators' scruples can be sometimes so precious as to be self-destructive. The species that deems translation an outright impossibility is far from being extinct and is far from a rarity. This pessimism is a result of studying the sentences, words and sounds of a foreign text. Language is no algebra, no perfect means of communication that can transmit a formula from one end of the world to another one in an immaculate and unambiguous purity. What benefit is there in translation, they say, when both words and idioms carry a vast burden of

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[3] My usage of *historian* and *philologist* is not institutional; it does not signify *employee of a historical/philological institute*. What I mean here are labels for two discreet scholarly perspectives which result in slightly different approaches to the text and to the problem of translation.

[4] Theorists of translation associate the concept of fidelity with a variety of aspects of the original (linguistic form, authorial intent, content, etc.). For the historian, the main (yet not exclusive) type of fidelity is to the content, which will not be the discussed here. The opposition of fidelity and beauty hinted at here becomes irrelevant in approaches that see rendering the aesthetics of the original as a criterion of faithfulness or that consider fidelity to the original an aesthetic category.

history, images, associations proper to the nation on whose lips it lives, to the environment that, too, has left its indelible mark? To move the text to another language is to make the text destitute. To borrow a characteristic turn of phrase, a proverb of which something it is but a resemblance – is that not falsehood? (Parandowski 1955: 15)[5]

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And yet, in practice, the historian encourages translations of ancient texts. Indeed, from time to time, he or she allows him or herself an experiment in translation, even though it is, for the historian, neither a duty nor a calling. This is usually done for the benefit of academic teaching: since beginning students have no Greek at all, and only some a smattering of Latin, let them at least have access an imperfect form of "written sources of knowledge of the ancient world" – historians' jargon for the written heritage of Antiquity. It makes even more sense to translate since interest in the past emerges in the young still earlier, in primary and middle school, long before any possible acquaintance with Classical languages; it would be unreasonable to limit their contact with the world of the Greeks and the Romans to text-books. The historian succumbs to the temptation to translate, above all, when there is no translation of an important source text, usually of a docu-mentary or historiographical nature, or whenever an existing translation does not fulfil expectations of fidelity to the original – if fidelity is under-stood as rendering the historical content.[6] This does not change the fact that the very same historian becomes frustrated when, brandishing a Greek or Latin original, he or she can only helplessly watch students debate over a historical problem which is academic in the worst sense of the word: entirely irrelevant and only resulting from the impotence of the translation – and the historian is the only person in the room to realise this.[7]

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[5] All English translations of Polish texts are by Jan Rybicki unless otherwise stated. This is also true of English translations of Polish translations of ancient texts. They were kept as close as possible (without compromising the points in the Polish versions discussed in this paper) to existing direct English translations of ancient texts.

[6] By documentary texts I mean above all various epigraphs or papyri, rarely interesting to the philologist for their lack of the aesthetic value.

[7] I understand the impotence of translation not as translational errors, rather as an objec-tive impossibility to preserve historical information in the very act of translation; as a totality of problems with language (not with a given text!) as carrier of historical information (e.g. by means of etymology, idioms, metaphors, etc.). Benveniste (1969) might serve as a perfect model of the study of language as a historical source.

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The author of this study is among those historians who succumbed to the temptation of trying their hand at translation. Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* – or, to be exact, biographies of two Athenian politicians of the fifth century BCE, Aristides "the Just" and Cimon, son of Miltiades, became the object (or the victim; it is not for me to judge) of this temptation.[8] Both *Lives* have already had their modern Polish translations; irrespective of their literary quality, they are deficient in many ways in how they render historical content.[9] They will now serve as illustrations of the various pitfalls we encounter while translating texts of Antiquity.

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The mere fact of a historian's reconciliation with the art of translation is not tantamount to resigning from his profession. On the contrary: the historian brings his own load of practices and expectations into the translators' realm. His main preoccupation is to preserve as much historical informa-

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[8] The author made his translation (complete with introduction and notes) for the *Biblioteka Antyczna* series, edited by Ariadna Masłowska-Nowak for Prószyński i Ska.

[9] "Żywot Arystydesa" [Life of Aristides] in Plutarch, *Żywoty sławnych mężów* [The Lives of Famous Men], translated and edited by Mieczysław Brożek, fifth edition in the Biblioteka Narodowa series, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk: Ossolineum, 1976; "Żywot Kimona" [Life of Cimon] in Plutarch, *Żywoty sławnych mężów*, translated and edited by Mieczysław Brożek (Biblioteka Przekładów z Literatury Antycznej, Vol. 33, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków: Ossolineum, 1996. *The Life of Aristides* was translated even earlier in *Sławni ludzie i ich porównania. Plutarcha dzieło historyczne, moralne i filozoficzne przekładania X. Filipa Neryusza Golanskiego* [The Lives of Famous Men and Their Comparisons. Plutarch's Historical, Moral and Historical Work in a Translation by Rev. Filip Neryusz Golanski], Vol. 3, Vilnius: Imperialny Uniwersytet Wileński, 1803, 256–368 (cf.: Cato, *ibid.*, 464–481). Golanski's translation, published ten years after Alexander Tytler's *Essay on the Principles of Translation* (Edinburgh 1790), a pioneering treatise for contemporary translation studies, was very modern for its times. Selected Plutarch *Lives* were in fact deemed worth reprinting in the first edition of the Biblioteka Narodowa series of 1928 (with corrections and commentary by Tadeusz Sinko). On the other hand, both adaptations penned by Bishop Ignacy Krasicki can hardly be called translations, despite their many editions (e.g. "Arystyd," in *Dzieła Ignacego Krasickiego. Nowe i zupełne wydanie* [The Works of Ignacy Krasicki. New and Complete Edition], Vol. 8, Wrocław: Wilhelm Bogumił Korn, 1824, 298–315 [cf.: 333–335]; "Cymon," in *Dzieła Ignacego Krasickiego. Nowe i zupełne wydanie*, Vol. 9, Wrocław: Wilhelm Bogumił Korn, 1824, 1–13). In my discussion of the various translational problems below, I shall obviously refer to the Brożek translations, the only ones made at a time when reflection upon the art of translation had somewhat developed-

tion as possible in translation. It must be said that the idea of considering a text written in another time and culture to be intrinsically historical has not been imposed on translators by a historian's whim. The postulate that anyone translating such a text must become, at least to some extent, a historian, has been best stated by a translator. Jan Parandowski, already quoted above, wrote:

> The translator's knowledge cannot be limited to the knowledge of the language itself; it must encompass the land, the nation, its history and customs, and above all it must enter into the closest possible acquaintance with the author, his character, his interests, tendencies, with the intellectual and emotional atmosphere in which he is immersed and which he himself also creates. … Studies are needed to translate even the simplest of novels if it comes from another era. Clothes, everyday objects, means of transport, habits – all elements of the reality of past times must be understood and visualised by the translator if they are to be adequately rendered (Parandowski 1955: 14).

Making direct reference to translations of ancient literature, Kazimierz Kumaniecki, another eminent translator of ancient literature and a scholar (who had a very firm understanding of the extent to which translating ancient texts must be based on a knowledge of their historical and cultural contexts) was quite ready to spare translators this trouble, yet only on the condition that they sought outside help; in the end, it boils down to the same thing:

> To translate texts from an era that one does not know well, one must seek advice from historians, just as one would do if translating a text from an unfamiliar field of study: a text on astronomy, mathematics, geography, the history of architecture or music (Kumaniecki 1967: 579).[10]

Thus a good translation of an ancient text cannot rely solely on knowledge of the language itself, deprived of its cultural context. If this principle holds good even for literary fiction, it becomes even more imperative in terms of a historiographical text, which reflects historical reality much more directly. An analysis of individual passages from *Life of Aristides* and *Life of Cimon* will allow us to see the various pitfalls for a translator who does not heed this principle, and, at the same time, to observe the impact of historical knowledge on translation studies.

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[10] The mention of specialist consultants must have been the result of Kumaniecki's own work on his translation of Vitruvius' *De architectura*.

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First an obvious reservation must be made: translatorial practice knows no opposition between philological and historical translation. Each translation is naturally philological, first and foremost. The translator must always possess the competence of the philologist, since it is impossible to determine the content of a statement – including content of interest to the historian – without being able to solve linguistic problems. I shall not go into detail here; it is not my aim to preach to the (philological) choir. The major philological problems that plague the translator of Greek prose have been synthetically presented in the above-quoted text by Kazimierz Kumaniecki.[11] They are a result of various characteristics of the Greek language that are difficult to render in Polish. Those of the greatest significance includes abundance of particles, specific structures and idioms (e.g. *φθάνειν + participium* or *dativus ethicus*), untranslatable metaphors, parenthetical clauses, different functions of tenses, multitudes of participle clauses and the length of periods. Let us dwell for a while on two items in this list.

Particles are the adhesive in Greek prose.[12] The language has dozens of them: single, compound and complex.[13] Each imparts a slightly different tone on the relationship between consecutive sentences. The Polish *więc* (so), *bowiem* (because) and *zatem* (thus), less numerous and devoid of all the nuances, can neither render all the subtleties of the Greek nor produce the right counterpart to the narrator's chain of thought.[14] Furthermore, the rules of Polish grammar prohibit even this short repertoire from being used freely. In terms of combining clauses, any Polish translation will seem a simplified or more general version of the Greek text.

Let us now consider what is, in a way, a reciprocal situation. Greek uses fewer subordinate clauses. Instead, it uses such ambiguous participial structures as *genitivus absolutes* or *participium iunctum*. The Polish lan-

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[11] Cf. Kumaniecki 1967. In his analysis of philological problems, Kumaniecki focuses on stylistic effects. However, the way of rendering Greek syntax has its impact on the meaning of the text; see below.

[12] Plutarch's *Lives*, the source of my examples, is Greek narrative prose; I shall limit myself to this mode of literary expression.

[13] The "Index of Combinations" in Denniston 1954 lists 352 of them.

[14] The importance of Greek particles has been fully realised and "honoured" in Denniston's work, quoted in the previous footnote, one of the most monumental (and fascinating) studies to be produced by twentieth-century Classical Philology. The book consists of 740 pages, indices included.

guage cannot bear the burden of this mass of participles and there is no escape, in translation, from converting Greek structures into subordinate clauses. The difference is not only stylistic. The translator is forced, time after time, to take the decision – which may at times seem highly arbitrary – as to whether a Greek structure should be rendered by a causal sentence, a temporal one, or by another type. This decision is always bad; whatever the translator chooses, by the very choice he or she jettisons a significant element of the Greek: its degree of ambiguity, which requires interpretative effort from the reader. For the historian – whose job is to look for causes of things – this translatorial "disambiguation" is particularly painful, since relationships between sentences conceal relationships between events. To limit myself to a single example: it is not immaterial whether the sentence from *Life of Cimon* 1.5, γενομένης δὲ ταραχῆς ἡ τῶν Χαιρωνέων βουλὴ συνελθοῦσα θάνατον αὐτῶν κατέγνω is translated as "**when** the commotion ensued, the council of Chaeroneia met and condemned the murderers to death" or as "**because** the commotion ensued, the council of Chaeroneia met and condemned the murderers to death." The former implies a simple sequence of events, the latter shows quite clearly that one event triggered another.

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In his list of the difficulties in translating Classical languages into Polish, Kumaniecki mentions two others which are, in fact, two aspects of the same issue. At the beginning of his list, Kumaniecki wonders whether the translator should "modernise Antiquity," i.e. translate the reality to which the text refers along with the language. He gives an example: is it legitimate to translate στρατηγός as "general"? (1967: 578–579). Then, at the end of his list, he asks: "can a translator expand the sentences of the original with his own additions for the sake of clarity? And if so, to what extent?" (1967: 586). In fact, "expansion" serves exactly the same function as "modernisation;" only the means are different. Both try to clarify ambiguities resulting from the presence of terms of heavy historical content: names of phenomena and objects of the world of Antiquity are but alien to we moderns.[15] This is a territory where the historian is entitled to speak.

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[15] In the first instance, Kumaniecki's answer is "no, it is not." He is right, for an Athenian στρατηγός was – objectively – no general. What, then, should be done? Kumaniecki sees two solutions. The first is to preserve the Greek term and explain the function in a footnote.

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Anachronism is the eternal enemy of the translator; it is particularly insidious in translations from Classical languages. When anachronism results in a false image of history, the historian is particularly censorious.

Plutarch of Chaeronea lived at the turn of the first and second centuries CE, in an era known to cultural historians as the Second Sophistic. In the Mediterranean world of the first two centuries after Christ, with *Pax Romana* imparting a sense of security, the Greek intellectual elite busied themselves in harmless reminiscences of war, of eminent statesmen and in the flights of human fancy of five hundred years before. These tales, produced in highly rhetoric prose alluding to Classical models, served in fact as the building blocks of its cultural identity. In the non-egalitarian society of *Imperium Romanum*, the reading public became so limited in numbers that literature could attain a fairly high degree of formal and lexical complexity without risk of becoming obscure; its readers graduated from the same rhetorical schools as did the authors. The material and spiritual world of Plutarch was defined by the civilisation of the Greek *polis*, with participation in *Pax Romana* as the ultimate horizon. We are separated from that world by almost 2,000 years of evolutionary and revolutionary change in all aspects of human civilisation. Throughout this time, the language describing this change has also changed and accumulated. For a translation to retain its primary value as historical source, it cannot contain anything that belongs, in historical terms, to the times after Plutarch; in other words, anything that belongs to the last nineteen centuries.

Anachronisms call to mind eras unlike that in which a text has originated. They can relate to eras the translator has already dealt with while translating other works (hence, perhaps, Classical philologists' frequent anachronisms when they speak of Antiquity in the language of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance) or to modernity, if they derive from colloquial language assimilated by the translator. Thus to use terms like *auditing* (*Aristides* 4.4), *public services* (*Cimon* 10.8), *paymasters* (*Cimon* 11.2) would be to suggest to the reader that a Greek *polis* enjoyed the complex system of public finance of the modern state. The sentence *Cleisthenes* (…)

The other would be to find a Polish term broad enough to include στρατηγός, in this example: *dowódca* (commander). In the latter case, Kumaniecki allows overtranslation of the type: Greek word + i.e. + Polish counterpart. This is, in fact, another way of allowing the introduction of (somewhat more concise) footnotes into the text.

gave the state a constitution (*Aristides* 2.1) would imply the existence of a constitution well in advance of the Constitution of the United States of 1787, which was the world's first. In Polish translation, *gród* (*Cimon* 4.7) is too reminiscent of a Medieval fortress town, *rada miejska* (city council, *Cimon* 1.5) of cities of the Middle Ages and thereafter, *kompania* (company) – the rendering of the Greek λόχος (*Cimon* 17.7) – only brings to mind modern armies.[16]

Some anachronisms are more difficult to grasp: to say that Cimon's sister Elpinicé *grzeszyła* (sinned) with Polygnotus the painter (*Cimon* 4.6) seems to be quite correct at first sight; the verb *grzeszyć* (to sin), used to render the original's ἐξαμαρτάνειν, has just the right amount of negative emotional tone. Yet in terms of Classic Greek, ἐξαμαρτάνειν denotes *to err*, *to do wrong*, rather than *to sin*. The very concept of sin only enters the language with Biblical Greek; it is characteristic of Judaeo-Christian rather than Greco-Roman civilisation. In the modern reader, the word *sinned* triggers a chain of associations of doing ill in the eyes of God, while, for the ancient reader, Elpinicé's behaviour only signified a transgression of the social norm, by which a woman of a civic family was only supposed to take her lawfully wedded husband to bed.[17]

To close this chapter on anachronisms let us mention two more, both peculiar to translations of ancient literature. First, the legacy of many centuries of assimilating Greek culture through Latin: the tendency to use Latin counterparts (in non-Classical Latin, to add insult to injury) instead of Greek names. This tendency can hardly be described as anachronistic, although the Polish spelling of *Milcjades* instead of *Miltiades* (*Cimon* 4.1, 4; 5.1; 8.1) or *cekropijski* for Cecropian is irritating for the simple reason that there is no /ts/ affricate (spelled as *c* in Polish) in Greek at all. Yet this mannerism can lead to true anachronisms when the translation of the passage where Plutarch quotes the inscription placed by the Athenians in the

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[16] The Polish phrase *kierownicze stanowisko w Atenach* ("leading official in Athens" *Aristides 2.5*) – in fact, a not entirely faithful rendering of the Greek original – while not anachronistic *per se*, in my (perhaps mistaken) opinion betrays overtones of news releases of the Communist era, for that was when this translation was made. For the same historical reasons, θρόνος is not adequately rendered by *fotel* ("armchair," *Aristides 2.5*), although the word made it into the Polish Communist newspeak of the time (*fotel przewodniczącego objął…* = "the office of the chairman was taken over by… ") and might have laid claim to some degree of "timelessness."

[17] NB. For the Greeks, marriage was a legal act rather than a Sacrament, even if it was celebrated with certain ritual elements.

first half of the fifth century BCE changes Ares into Mars (*Cimon* 7.4). This is no mere Latinisation of a god's name; it is a serious historical untruth, suggesting to the inexperienced reader that the Athenians of the Classical era knew (and venerated!) a Roman deity which in fact the Romans only much later identified with the Greek god of war.

Another problem: sometimes the translator uses words of Greek etymology instead of their Polish counterparts, in the belief that this brings the text closer to the original. This is an illusion. A term in colloquial Greek should be replaced with a Polish colloquial term. Words taken from a dictionary of foreign terms and expressions usually have a scholarly sound to them and their use suggests that the original sentence consists of specialist vocabulary, something Greek did not have – with but a few exceptions. And thus, while the adjective *erotyczny* (erotic) and its derivatives have become common (possibly adopted second-hand from English), so that statements like *Kimon* (…) *okazuje się w sprawy erotyczne z kobietami bardzo uwikłany* (Cimon is very much entangled in erotic matters with women; *Cimon* 4.9) or *nieprzyjaźń* (…) *na tle erotycznym* (enmity (…) for erotic reasons; *Aristides* 2.3) are still passable, *mitologiczna wspólnota z czasów Kronosa* (mythological community of the age of Cronus; *Cimon* 10.7) is unacceptable, for it ascribes to Plutarch a nineteenth-century religious-studies type of reflection.

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Anachronism is one of the two fundamental errors that can be committed by a translator with insufficient historical knowledge; it stems, in brief, from the lack of awareness that some things might not have yet existed or might not have existed any more.[18] The other error, more serious from the historian's point of view, as it leads to major distortions of meaning in translation, stems from the lack of knowledge what things were like.

Let us begin with a paradox. In the words of Thomas Gray, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." This might be somewhat controversial, but it might become true with some modification: clearly, it is better to be conscious of one's ignorance than unconscious of the limitations of one's knowledge. At times, isolated information on a historical or cultural

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[18] The latter is obviously less probable in ancient literature since it is, itself, "the literature of the origins."

fact gained from commentaries or from works by another author of Antiquity on the same subject may impede the translator. Once the translator recognises content in the translated text, he or she lowers his or her guard, because he or she knows what the text should contain (or believes as much to be true). This obscures what really is there. Such a phenomenon can be exemplified by the description, in *Life of Aristides*, of the sacrifice made yearly by the Greeks at Plataea to commemorate their dead in the battle against the Persians of 479 BCE. While the original clearly states that the Plataean archon summoned the dead heroes "with prayers to Zeus and Hermes Terrestrial" (21.5), the Polish translation runs: *pomodliwszy się do bogów podziemia, Hadesa i Hermesa* (with prayers to the gods of the underworld, Hades and Hermes). The translator was clearly aware that the Ancient Greeks saw the difference between the celestial (uranic) and the underworld (chthonic) deities. Consciously or subconsciously, the translator transformed the celestial Zeus into the underworld Hades; except that what Plutarch has written, he has written.

This remains a fairly rare situation. Ordinarily, knowledge of the reality represented in the text assists rather than impedes a translation. The relationship between understanding a text and the reality it describes is dynamic and reciprocal: the further we move in extricating the linguistic intricacies of a sentence, the better we understand its content. In turn, to discover in a sentence realities known from elsewhere is to be able, ultimately, to decipher the linguistic dilemmas. Thus knowledge on the historical reality to which the text pertains is helpful in its translation. Sometimes when two equally legitimate (from a purely linguistic point of view) interpretations appear, our only aid in choosing the correct one is the extralinguistic reality.[19]

What sort of reality? Plutarch's *Lives* deal with famous people, and no fame was more valuable for his contemporaries than that gained through public deeds, whether in peacetime or in wartime. This is why Plutarch's vocabulary is dominated by terms from politics: names of institutions, procedures, political geography, descriptions of particular historical events, etc. Many traps have been laid for the translator of *Life of Aristides* or *Life of Cimon* who does not know the history of fifth century BCE and who is not well versed in the functioning of the Greek *polis* in general and Athenian democracy in particular.

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[19] The classic example in Greek: the difficulty in discerning between the subject and the genitive when the syntax contains *accusativus cum infinitivo*. In a sentence concerning historical events, help may come from "beyond" the text.

Even single words can be stumbling blocks. All it takes is for a given word to be used in its technical sense, which cannot be deduced from its etymology or context. The result is that the Helots managed to persuade *ziemie sąsiednie* (neighbouring lands; *Cimon* 16.7) to revolt, for this is how the translator renders περίοικοι (literally, those who live around). In reality, this is a technical term denoting a particular social group in ancient Sparta, the Perioeci, i.e. freemen who did not belong to the exclusive group of Spartan citizens, the Spartiates. Persian commanders in coastal regions (οἱ ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν, literally, those of the sea) – another technical term – have become commanders-at-sea or, even worse (the translation is ambiguous here),[20] Persian commanders who were fought at sea (*Cimon* 19.4) while it is otherwise stated that the hostilities were waged on land.

In translating Plutarch, ἄρχων is probably the most troublesome term. This active participle of the verb ἄρχειν (to lead, to rule, to hold an office) can mean, depending on the context: (a) any official; (b) a member of the college of nine archons in Athens; (c) the head of this college, or Archon Eponymus, the official whose name was used in Athens in reference to the year of his office.[21] Polish usage requires meaning (a) to be rendered as *urzędnik* (official), (b) as *dziewięciu archontów* (the nine archons) and (c) as *archont* or, preferably, *archont eponym*. In *Life of Aristides*, Plutarch quotes an anecdote on Aristides being elected overseer of the public revenues (προσόδων ἐπιμελητής) (4.3–8). In this capacity he discovered that the ἄρχωντες, both then in office and their predecessors, including Themistocles, had embezzled public funds. When Aristides made his discovery known, Themistocles unjustly accused him at the auditing of Aristides' accounts of having done the same. This did not prevent Aristides from being re-elected as the overseer (ἄρχων) of the same funds. In his second term of office, however, he preferred to turn a blind eye to the embezzlements, so that the embezzlers themselves pushed for his candidacy for yet another term at the office (ἄρχων). What the translator failed to understand was that the word ἄρχων has two different meanings in this text. The translation consistently uses *archont*/*archonci* (archon/archons) with reference to

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[20] *Prowadzono wojnę z wodzami królewskimi na morzu i nie dokonano nic sławnego, nic wielkiego* (war was waged against the king's commanders at sea and no famous or great deeds were achieved).
[21] The other members of the college included six Thesmothétai, one Polemarchos and one Basileus (King). In translation, the problem becomes more complicated since some Polish versions render *Basileus* as *archont król* (Archon King) and *Polemarchos* as *Archont polemarch*.

both Aristides and his enemies, and thereby suggests that (1) Aristides was elected member of the college of the nine archons; (2) while holding his office, he dealt with finances and reported on his colleagues and their predecessors; (3) was member of the college thrice. This bad translation produces three historical falsehoods in a single paragraph and ascribes them to Plutarch, for the truth is that (1) the archons had nothing to do with overseeing finances; (2) Aristides was Archon Eponymus much later than the events described; (3) membership in the nine archons' college could be held only once in a lifetime. A correct translation of the anecdote should inform the reader that Aristides held some sort of office associated with finances; that it was while performing this function that he accused the acting and the former college members, and that he was elected as overseer of revenues twice again.

Apart from simple misunderstanding, two more contrasting errors can be associated with technical terms. Sometimes a Greek technical term is replaced with a more general Polish one. *Dowódca* stands in for *στρατηγός* (*Aristides* 5.1; *Cimon* 6.1) when the text deals with Athenian troops, while the Athenian army knew many other categories of commanders: hipparchs, phylarchs, taxiarchs; the term *στρατηγός* itself denotes a very concrete function.[22] The Greek *stoa* begs not to replaced by *nakryta hala* (roofed hall, *Cimon* 16.5); if one were to replace it, the Latin synonym *portico* is available. But the other way round is also possible: a colloquial or generic term in the original acquires false precision in the translation. It is not legitimate to translate *διδασκαλία,* or *staging drama* as *wystawienie trylogii tragicznej* (staging a tragic trilogy; *Cimon* 8.8); similarly, *παρὰ τὰς συνθήκας* should be rendered as *wbrew ustaleniom/umowie* (against the terms of contract) rather than *wbrew umowie związkowej* (against the federation agreement; *Aristides* 25.3), as the latter introduces a reference to a document that might have existed, but of which there is no evidence.[23] Thus generalisation robs us of significant information; excessive precision produces phantom information that is not there in the original text.

Finally, the fact that Plutarch is one of those authors – alongside Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Cassius Dio – who wrote in Greek about Roman institutions is a special problem in translating technical terms. Many of

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[22] See above, note 15.

[23] Additionally, the translator committed a factual error in the phrase *wystawienie trylogii tragicznej*, for the drama competition in question involved each author presenting a tetralogy of three tragedies and a comedy.

these, especially references to administrative matters, are Greek calques of Latin words. To understand them well one must access them through the translated author. For instance, the Greeks used the term στρατηγός to denote several Latin names of various offices: *consul*, *proconsul*, *praetor*. Only the context helps us to ascertain which of these is meant in a given fragment. The lack of knowledge of Roman political institutions might lead the translator to produce non-existent functions, such as the *praetor* of Macedonia and the *praetor* of Greece instead of *namiestnik* (governor) of Macedonia and *namiestnik* of Greece/Achaia (*Cimon* 2.1).

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There are technical terms and there are technical phrases. Anyone familiar with the problems of Greek chronology knows well this structure: the preposition ἐπὶ + proper noun/pronoun in the genitive form is a frequent Greek way to refer to dates in years; the noun in genitive is the name of the "eponymous official" (cf. the Latin *ablativus absolutus* performing the same function: *Tullio et Antonio consulibus*, or "during the consulate of Tullius and Antonius"). Ignorance of this principle or simple oversight might both be why the Polish translation of *Life of Aristides* states *po Ksanthippidesie, który zadał klęskę Mardoniuszowi pod Platejami* (after Xanthippides, who defeated Mardonius at Plataea) instead of *po Ksanthippidesie, za którego Mardonios został pokonany pod Platejami* (after Xanthippides, in whose year of office Mardonius was defeated at Plataea; 5.10).

While the above error could have been avoided by pure philological analysis (the preposition ἐπὶ + proper noun in the genitive structure followed by a verb in passive voice cannot denote the author of the action, since this would require the pronoun ὑπό), a philologist lacking historical and geo-historical knowledge would be rendered helpless in the following example. In a passage of *Life of Cimon* that describes Cimon's actions after subduing the revolt of Thasos, we read: *zdobył dla Aten i kopalnię złota po drugiej stronie* (the adverb πέραν – A.W.) *miasta, zagarnął tereny należące do miasta* (he also captured the gold mines on the other side of the city for Athens and took possession of the territories that belonged to the city; 14.2). The translator decided that the city in question was in both cases that of the Thasians, but failed to wonder why one side of the city should be referred to as "other." What is more, there is the strange reference to the "territory" which seemed to have to be captured separately, even though the city had already been captured… The problem is solved

when one consults Thucidides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (101.3), where the same events are described. This is how one learns that the mines were located on the Thracian coast of the mainland opposite the island. Thus instructed, the reader will quickly notice, in any dictionary, the particularly oft-reported usage of πέραν (in the sense of "on the other side of a body of water") and the riddle is solved. The correct translation should run: *zagarnął dla Aten kopalnie złota położone na lądzie stałym naprzeciw wyspy i przejął kontrolę nad obszarami* (*na lądzie stałym* – A.W.), *którym Tazyjczycy dotąd władali* (acquired the gold mines on the opposite mainland for Athens and took possession of the territory which the Thasians had theretofore controlled there).

Obviously, an insufficient historical knowledge also causes translation problems whenever more complex phenomena are involved. Let us consider two: ostracism and proxeny.

Ostracism (ὀστρακισμός, literally: potsherding) was a procedure strongly associated with Athenian democracy. Each year, after an initial vote to determine whether ostracism should be performed at all, citizens would gather at the Agora to decide who of their number should be banned from the city. Everyone would write the candidate's name on a potsherd (ὄστρακον in Greek, hence the name of the procedure). If at least six thousand votes were cast, the vote was valid and the person whose name was written on the greatest number of potsherds had ten days to leave the city for ten years. Translators whose historical knowledge is inadequate, when working on texts that deal with ostracism, often describe it in terms proper for court proceedings; to begin with, it is now common practice to refer to ostracism in Polish as *sąd skorupkowy* (judgement by potsherds).[24] The same is true of the translation of Plutarch's *Lives*: *Kimona skazano sądem skorupkowym na dziesięć lat wygnania* (Cimon was condemned by the judgement of potsherds to ten years of banishment), *wymiar kary przewidziany dla każdego skazanego na ostracyzm* (the usual penalty for anyone condemned to ostracism; *Cimon*, 16.7), *wygnanie wyrokiem ostracyzmu/sądu skorupkowego* (banishment by a verdict of ostracism/judgement by potsherds; *Aristides* 1.2; 7), *przez ostracyzm skazali Arystydesa na wygnanie* (they condemned Aristides to banishment; *Aristides* 7.2), *ukarany* (…) *drogą ostracyzmu* (punished through ostracism; *Aristides*, 7.3), *usunięty* (…) *wyrokiem ostracyzmu* (removed by a verdict of ostracism; *Aristides* 25.10). Yet, in the Greek original, there

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[24] This error was avoided by Ludwik Piotrowicz in his translation of Pseudo-Aristotle's *Athenian Constitution*; but then Piotrowicz combined the competences of a philologist and those of a historian.

is no "judgement," no "punishment," no "conviction," and no "verdict," despite there being terms in the language to refer to all of the above. The correct translation should run: *Kimon został ostracyzowany na dziesięć lat. Taki bowiem okres wygnania był ustanowiony dla ostracyzowanych* (Cimon was ostracised for ten years. For this was the period decreed for all those ostracised) in the first passage, *wygnany na drodze ostracyzmu* (banished in ostracism) in the second, *usunięty przez ostracyzm* (removed by ostracism) in the third, etc. Objectively, ostracism had little to do with court proceedings; subjectively, it was not even seen as a court procedure by the Ancients themselves. Still, Polish translations have been dominated by *sąd skorupkowy* with all consequences thereof, thus presenting a false image of an institution of such great import for understanding the entire Athenian democracy. The translator has the right and the duty to resist a tradition founded in such a grave factual error.

Let us now discuss the problem with the institution of proxeny (προξενία). Proxeny was a specifically Greek phenomenon, and most modern languages lack a proper counterpart. A proxenos (πρόξενος) was not unlike an honorary consul. *Polis* X that maintained contacts with *polis* Y would appoint as their representative a citizen of *polis* Y. The citizen of Y had the duty to represent the interests of the inhabitants of city X in his home town and often enjoyed much privilege in city X. *Life of Cimon* relates that on the protagonist's return from his war expedition against Thasos, his local enemies accused him of neglecting to carry the war over to Macedonia for a bribe received from its king. The story continues in Brożek's translation: *Broniąc sie przed sędziami, mówił, że nie występuje w sprawach bogatej Jonii czy bogatej Tessalii, jak niektórzy inni, żeby im się przypodobać za łapówki, ale idzie wzorem Lacedemończyków, szanując wstrzemięźliwość i roztropność, nad które żadnego nie przenosi bogactwa* (In making his defence before his judges he said he did not further the interests of rich Ionia and Thessalia, as others did, to court them with bribes, but that he follows the example of Lacedaemonians, respecting their temperance and reasonableness, counting no wealth above it; *Cimon* 13.4). Yet this rendering does nothing to explain Cimon's line of defence. Key to this misunderstanding is the institution of proxeny, to which Cimon refers to in his speech: for proxeny is implied by the verb προξενίζειν, replaced by the translator as "to further the interests" of someone. In reality, the reasoning presented by Cimon is as follows: "I have been accused of accepting bribes. Yet I have decided to become a proxenos of the Lacedaemonians,

who are famed for their temperance and reasonableness. Had I truly been greedy for money (= had I truly had a greedy nature), I would have become a proxenos of the Ionians or the Thessalians, for they are wealthy and can (and want to) care for their proxenoi for representing their interests." The correct translation should read: *Broniąc się przed sądem, mówił, że nie jest proksenosem majętnych Jonów czy Tesalów, jak ci, którzy liczą na względy i pieniądze, ale Lacedemończyków, miłuje bowiem i naśladuje panującą u nich prostotę* (εὐτέλεια) *i umiar, i nie przenosi nad nie żadnego innego bogactwa* (In making his defence before his judges he said he was no proxenus of rich Ionians and Thessalians, as others were, counting on honours and money, but rather of Lacedaemonians, for he loves and imitates their simplicity and temperance, counting no wealth above it). The translator lost his bearings due to his lack of understanding for the institution of Greek international law referred to in this passage.

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This classification of translation errors due to lack of knowledge of history and, in a broader sense, of the work's cultural context, could of course be made more detailed and developed further.[25] I hope, however, that what has been presented here will suffice as an apology for historical knowledge in the translation of ancient texts. Every translator must be a philologist. Only a bad translator can turn his back on the historian.

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trans. Jan Rybicki

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[25] This could be done, among other things, by listing the errors that result from inserting false extra information into the text, as is sometimes done by a translator who does not see that this produces an expansion of the statement. The great painter Polygnotus was to paint the Stoa Poikile free of charge, for *pragnął sławy w swoim mieście* (he desired fame in his city; *Cimon* 4.7). In comparison to the Greek text, the translator has added the possessive pronoun *swoim* (his). A small detail, it would seem. The problem is that Polygnotus was a native of Thasos and had the status of a foreigner while working on the Painted Porch; Athens was *not* his city, although, according to tradition (Harpocration, *Lexicon*, s.v. Polygnotus), it later became just that (NB. he is supposed to have obtained Athenian citizenship in return for painting the Stoa Poikile and yet another building, the Anakeion). *Euthippus of Anaphlystus* becomes *Euthippus of the Anaphlystus phyle*, the translator ignoring the fact that Anaphlystus was a **deme** rather than a **phyle** (*Cimon* 17.6).

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