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FOR A TIN INGOT: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ORAL INTERPRETATION

Abstract: This paper, based on research conducted by the pioneers of the history of oral interpreting (A. Hermann, I. Kurz) in the 1950s and on modern archaeological evidence, presents the earliest references to interpreters in the Bronze Age, in the Near East and the Mediterranean area (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Crete, Carthage). It discusses a Sumerian Early Dynastic List, a Sumerian-Eblaic glossary from Ebla, the Shu-ilishu's Cylinder Seal, the inscriptions and reliefs from the Tombs of the Princes of Elephantine and of Horemheb, the mention of one-third of a mina of tin dispensed at Ugarit to the interpreter of Minoan merchants and the Hanno's stele, as well as terms used by these early civilisations to denote an interpreter: *eme-bal*, *targumannu*, *jmy-r(A) aw*, and *mls*.

Keywords: interpreting, archaeology, archaeological evidence, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Crete, Carthage, Bronze Age, Near East

The year 1956 saw the publication of the inaugural volume of *Contributions to the History of Oral Interpretation* (*Beitrage Zur Geschichte des Dolmetschens*), a monographic series of the Interpreter School, containing articles by A. Hermann, K. Thieme, and E. Glasser. These three authors, along with I. Kurz, are considered pioneers in the history of oral interpreting. Looking at the state of research in this field fifty years later, I believe that even though archaeology, which provides us with most of the information on ancient times, has brought about an overwhelming increase in knowledge, and the Internet revolution has made this knowledge widely accessible, present-day historians of oral interpretation content themselves with little more than citing their predecessors. This article, therefore, attempts to refresh and revise our knowledge of the beginnings of oral interpretation in the Mediterranean Basin and the Near East in the Bronze Age.

Mesopotamia

Since the collapse of the Tower of Babel, or even earlier – for Yahweh was not the first deity to have muddled human languages – people speaking different tongues have tried to communicate in formal and informal situations, in political, economic, military, religious and private matters, both independently and aided by more or less qualified interpreters. In the Near East, the first mention of this profession comes from Ancient Sumer. One of the typical artefacts of this region – a clay tablet with a list of words in cuneiform from Tell Abū Şalābīkh (Early Dynastic List E), probably dating back to the protodynastic period IIIa, i.e. 2600–2450 BCE – first contains the expression *eme-bal*, "to interpret," literally, "to turn (*bal*) language (*eme*)." The ideogram *eme* consists of two superimposed signs: a stylised head with a mouth (KA) and a sound coming from the mouth (ME). The list contains representatives of various professions working in a temple, and the "interpreter" comes after *kingal* "the one standing above the others" (the overseer) and *sag-du* , "head of cadaster." We do not know the scope of his duties; by analogy to later, better documented epochs, it may be supposed that he mediated in communication with foreign deliverers, workers, pilgrims, etc. The relatively high position on the list – eleventh out of eighteen – may testify to his high rank in the social hierarchy (Piacentini 2003: 13–38).[1]

In the bilingual Sumerian-Eblaic glossary from the important Syrian city-state of Ebla, probably dating back to 2350 BCE, *eme-bala* is also mentioned eleventh in the list, after *gal-unken*, "the great councillor" and *sag -du* , "head of cadaster" (Piacentini 2003: 18). It is also worth mentioning that the Ebla tablets are considered the earliest example of systematic translation of words into a foreign language. At the turn of the second millennium BCE, the Sumerian language was no longer in use over the vast area of Mesopotamia, although for the next two thousand years it continued to be used as a language for teaching the script and conducting liturgy. The bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian glossaries (a typical way of recording knowledge in Mesopotamia) were widely produced and copied by scribes, and with the passing of time new columns were added in dialects or other languages. In Ugarit, a tetralingual glossary was discovered – in Sumerian, Akkadian, Hurian and Ugaritic – from the fourteenth to twelfth

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[1] I am grateful to Dr Danuta Piekarz for the help in reading this document.

centuries BCE (Van Hoof 1994: 8). Translating from Sumerian was an obligatory subject in schools for scribes. There remain tablets with questions: "Can you translate, when Akkadian is above, and Sumerian below, and the other way round?" or "Can you interpret their words while listening to them?" (Piacentini 2003: 26).

The extant tablets with business content from the third millennium BCE mention interpreters from the city of Gutium under the rule of Sargon, as well as from Drehem, Marhasi (present-day Iran), and Amurru (Syria) dating back to the Third Dynasty of Ur. A business text from Lagash, produced ca. 2100 BCE, mentions fourteen interpreters belonging to three categories: the aforementioned *eme-bala*; *ugula eme-bala* "overseer of interpreters," and *eme-bala-kaskal* "caravan interpreters." The latter were probably assigned to large caravans; the text suggests that they received food rations, which means they were treated like royal officials.

A cylindrical seal hails from the time of Sargon's Empire (2334–2279 BCE); it is probably an official seal of a translator, marked in cuneiform, as owned by Shu-ilishu, EME.BAL.ME.LUH.HA.KI, i.e. "Meluhha language translator," and containing his portrait – according to the current state of knowledge, the earliest image of a translator in the history of mankind.[2] The place the Sumerians called Meluhha is located by modern researchers in the Indus Valley, where Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, the major Indian cultural centres of the Bronze Age, could be found, from which the Sumerians and Akkadians imported mostly copper, as well as lapis lazuli, gold and other goods (Possehl 2006: 42). Meluhha tradesmen and craftsmen working with copper lived in the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia, e.g. in Mari or Lagash.

The scene presented on the seal remains in many aspects incomprehensible. In the centre, there is a large, long-haired figure in a long tunic and a headdress sitting on a stool. Above, or sitting on his lap, there is a bearded man, half the size of the figure, with his face turned towards the figure and with his right hand raised, perhaps imitating the greeting gesture of the man on the right. The man on the right is standing with another person. He is wearing a long robe and his right hand is raised; he is carrying an animal, probably an antelope, on his left shoulder. The other person, probably a woman, with no beard and wearing a similar robe, is holding a vessel in her right hand. The antelope, in Sanskrit *mlekh*, may confirm the man as

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[2] At present it is housed in the Louvre Museum, Paris, AO 22310, Collection De Clercq. High-quality photographs of the seal can be found in Possehl (2006: 42–43).

a speaker of Meluhha, in Sanskrit *mleccha* (Kalyanaraman 2006: 6). In the space between the cuneiform inscription and the sitting dignitary, there is a man kneeling in front of three vases.

Most scholars read the scene from the seal as a meeting of two representatives of the Meluhha culture with an Akkadian dignitary, in which the communication is provided by Shu-ilishu, an Akkadian as the name suggests, although with facial features identical to that of the foreign visitor. The atypical position of the interpreter, however, raises some doubts. Neither iconography nor the history of interpreting records an instance of the interpreter sitting on the lap of one of the speakers. My insufficient knowledge of ancient art and history excludes the possibility of my own interpretation of this exceptional scene; nevertheless, I would like to put forward a hypothesis that the interpreter only *seems* to be sitting on the dignitary's lap: this false impression results from the lack of space on the cylindrical surface of the seal; in fact, the interpreter is seated in the background, which additionally points to his high social rank. On the other hand, equally convincing is a religious reading of the scene, by which the figure sitting on the stool is goddess Ishtar (Richter Ushanas 1997). This reading is supported by the fact that the scene of a keeper presenting the seal to a local deity was a frequent motif in the Mesopotamian glyptic art at the turn of the third millennium BCE (Glassner 2006: 2).

The above data provides an image of the interpreter as vital for the temple and court economy of Ancient Sumer, whose trade and political contacts were numerous. It is supposed that interpreting was initially the domain of scribes, some of whom then specialised in this activity. The lack of mention of diplomatic interpreters by no means testifies to the lack of such a profession. It is true that some rulers – on account of their interests, genealogy or marital ties – were polyglots, such as Shulgi (2094–2047 BCE), who, in a hymn in his own honour, boasts not only of his strength, writing abilities, dream and symbol interpretation skills and intelligence, but also of his knowledge of the languages of neighbouring peoples:

> Also I know the Martu language as well as I do Sumerian. (...) mountain people walking in the hills (...), they greet me and I reply to them in the Martu language. Also I know the Elamite language as well as I do Sumerian. (...) in Elam (...), they greet me and I reply in Elamite (Shulgi 2000: A 115–142).

From the mid second millennium onwards Akkadian became the official diplomatic and trade language in the Near East. However, there were

still many situations in which heads of states surely made use of services of those who were more or less fluent in foreign languages.

In this period, the term *eme-bal* was replaced by *inim-bal*, literally "word turner," and then by *targumannu*, a word of unclear origin, first recorded in Old Assyrian, possibly derived from the Hittite *tarkummai*: "to announce, interpret, translate" (Gelb 1968: 92–103). From this Akkadian term comes the Hebrew *meturgeman*; the Arabic *tarjuman*; *trujaman*, *truchement*, *turcimanno* in Romance languages; the Greek *dragoumanos*; *dragoman* in English and many other European languages (including Polish, from Turkish).

Egypt

The first mention of linguistic mediators in Ancient Egypt comes from the time of the Sixth Dynasty (twenty-fourth to twenty-second centuries BCE). Among the numerous titles of the princes in the tombs of the Princes of Elephantine on Qubbet el-Hawa, a hill near Aswan, one finds the term *jmy--r(A) aw*, "overseer/chief of interpreters" (Hermann 2002: 16; Kurz 1985: 213–218; Benderitter 2007). It appears for the first time in the account of Harkhuf's life (inscribed on his tomb, no. 34 N), and its reappearance in accounts of Harkhuf's successors suggests that this was a hereditary function. The exact meaning of the term is not known. The meaning "overseer of dragomans," proposed by A. Gardiner and customarily used in Egyptological literature, does not cover all the duties of the person carrying this title. The term *aw* could refer to any "barbarophone," i.e. to any person speaking a foreign language and doing different tasks connected with this skill, e.g. a scout, spy, or messenger; when used in reference to a foreigner, it signified the knowledge of Egyptian. The title *jmy-r(A) aw* can also be translated as "chief of mercenaries or other foreigners, or Egyptianised Nubians." It probably denoted a person maintaining various contacts with foreigners, from an ambassador to commercial attaché and commander of mercenary troops to interpreter (Benderitter, private correspondence). Other titles of Harkhuf's carved in the walls of the tomb, e.g. "secret advisor for all business concerning the South of Upper Egypt" or "the Steward of the southern lands of Upper Egypt," "who has brought back the produce of all foreign lands for his royal Lord and who spreads the fear of Horus (= the king) in foreign lands," confirm his considerable competences in contacts with lands abroad.

The etymology of the hieroglyph denoting the interpreter is not clear. According to A. Hermann, it is an apron with strings,[3] which would relate to an ancient non-verbal form of communication, and more precisely, to the "silent trade" described by many ancient authors; one of them reports that Asiatic Serians, leaving the trade goods in an agreed location, would indicate the price of the items on sackcloth. According to Hermann, this hypothesis seems to be supported by the yellow hue of the apron, which means it was made not of linen, as was the typical Egyptian garment, but of coarse sackcloth (Hermann 2002: 16–17). This etymology, although imaginative, seems insufficiently documented. However, contemporary Egyptologists have yet to put forward any other hypothesis.

The title *jmy-r(A) aw* was used mainly in the period of the Old Kingdom, most frequently in the context of contacts with Nubia. The geographical location of Elephantine explains why the title was carried by Elephantine princes. The island lies on the River Nile, at the First Cataract, forming a natural border of Egypt. Further south was Nubia, and then the countries of Yam and Kush (present-day Sudan), the source of valuable goods: incense, ebony, leopard skins and ivory. Elephantine princes, living on the border and speaking local languages, perhaps of Nubian origin themselves, led trade and war expeditions to these faraway lands on commission from the Pharaohs of the Sixth Dynasty. In the text inscribed on his tomb, Harkhuf describes four such expeditions. In describing the second and third he emphasises that there has been "no other Sole Companion, Chief of interpreters who has strove (so far) into the land of Yam" (Kurz 1985: 215; Benderitter 2007: 2–4). The most precious trophy from the fourth expedition was a Pygmy. The prospect of having this exotic dwarf as a dancer in his court delighted the eight-year-old Pepi II. The young king expressed his enthusiasm in a private letter to Harkhuf, which the latter proudly cited on his tomb. Another Elephantine prince, Sabni, announced on the walls of his tomb that he had gone to Nubia to find the body of his dead father, emphasising he had done this personally, without sending "a desert guide, interpreter or Nubian" (Hermann 2002: 16).

On account of their experience, valour and stamina, Elephantine princes were often sent by kings to faraway places, e.g. to Byblos or Punt (Hermann 2002: 16). Eighteen centuries later, Herodotus mentioned that the spies of Cambyses originated from Elephantine, when the Persian king,

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[3] Cf. *Ancient Egypt Dictionary*.

having conquered Egypt, followed by taking Ethiopia. Herodotus calls them *Ichthyophagoi*, i.e. Fish-Eaters (Herodotus 1890: III, 19).

Interpreters probably participated in every Ancient Egyptian expedition abroad. A text from the time of King Neferirka-Re, being an account of an expedition of a Temple superintendent to a copper mine on the Sinai Peninsula, contains, next to the list of miners and sailors, a list of interpreters (Hermann 2002: 16). Interpreters were also members of multinational armies. Weni, a prince of Upper Egypt from the time of the Sixth Dynasty, lists among his successes his command of an army of mixed peoples led by officers and interpreter overseers against the "Sand-dwellers" (Lybians).

At the royal court there were diplomatic interpreters. The duties of the "Overseer of Dragomans, Head of Missions, Keeper of the White Bull and Courtier" (Hermann 2002: 16) was to convey the king's decisions to representatives of foreign peoples and tribes. If an official knew a given foreign language, he could do this personally; if not, he made use of an interpreter. Horemheb, a powerful vizier in the court of three Pharaohs, and then a Pharaoh himself (1333–1306 BC), had a portrait painted of himself serving as an interpreter. Even before he ascended to the throne, as "governor of the Two Lands as the King's deputy" and "Supreme Chief of the land," Horemheb had ordered a large tomb for himself in Memphis, the administrative centre of Egypt. When, after his ascension to the throne, he received the right to be buried in the royal necropolis in Thebes, the construction of the tomb in Memphis was interrupted, but the tomb was not dismantled. Discovered by tomb robbers at the beginning of the nineteenth century CE, the tomb was then buried again for the next one hundred years, and the most beautiful and most easily accessible parts of the bas-relief were cut out and sold; today, they can be found scattered around several European museums. The scene presenting the interpreter is in three pieces, now housed in Leiden, Vienna, and Berlin (Kurz 1986: 73–77).

The scene presents the Pharaoh receiving ambassadors from conquered and feudal areas in Syria, Libya and Nubia. The envoys are kneeling before the Pharaoh and pleading for help, since – as the hieroglyphic inscription explains – "they have nothing to live on (…) their lands are starving and they are living like animals in the wild" (Kurz 1986: 74).[4] The Pharaoh himself is not in the picture. Horemheb, with gold chains sumptuously wrapped around his neck and holding the insignia of power in his left hand, is pre-

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[4] I would like to thank Monika Auriga for the translation of this text.

sented as a double figure. Turned left, towards the Pharaoh, he is raising his open right hand; turned to the right, he is bending over the much smaller figure of an interpreter, lowering his right hand towards him. The interpreter is also presented as a double figure. The one turned to the left is making a respectful bow before Horemheb; the one turned to the right, facing the ambassadors, seems to be more upright, although this may be just an illusion.

The mouths of the figures in the bas-relief are all closed, and it seems that the whole scene of "interpreting" or "conveying the words" is rendered through poses and gestures: Horemheb is evidently receiving the Pharaoh's answer from on high in his right hand and then handing it down, into the interpreter's hand who, in turn, is carefully handing it down to the envoys. The interpreter's clothes and lack of beard indicate his Egyptian nationality. His size shows that he stood much lower in society than the vizier, and perhaps even lower than a foreign ambassador (we cannot, however, exclude another hypothesis, that the smaller size of the interpreter indicates his youth). It is a pity that the stone above the two heads of the interpreter is empty and contains no inscription: no citation or commentary. The unfinished bas-relief can be appreciated as an example of the talent of Old Egyptian artists, able to combine realist, expressionist and symbolic elements in one scene. The scene created by the artists is based not only on observation, but on an logical analysis of the event and its participants, with emphasis on key aspects. The doubling of the figures, being a synthesis of the two moments of communication, also serves as an excellent metaphor for the dual nature of interpreting and the interpreter's situation.

A good illustration of interpreters' constant presence in the Pharaoh's court, crucial because of the frequent contacts with foreigners, is provided by the Biblical story of Joseph, who was sold into Egyptian slavery. On meeting his brothers as the Pharaoh's vizier, he does not wish to be recognised by them and speaks to them through an interpreter (Genesis 42:23). Perhaps a similar situation of language mediation is presented in an Egyptian fresco showing Hebrews asking for permission to enter Egypt. A long row of pale-skinned people is preceded by two Egyptians, one of them holding a roll of papyrus inscribed with something, probably a petition (Roberts 2002).

Egyptian civilisation may have been the only one to consider the question of foreign-language communication after death. If a foreigner was to stand before Osiris, the judge of the dead, his interpreter would be Thoth (Piacentini 2003: 14).

Even though much is known about other professions of the Ancient Egyptians – priests, scribes, warriors, or farmers – little is known about the interpreter. We do not know if there were schools for interpreters, as there were for scribes. Herodotus is the first to write of the custom, practised in the time of Psammetichus I (663–610 BCE), of sending young Egyptian boys to Hellenic settlers in the Nile Delta to learn a foreign language; in the fourth century BCE, their successors formed a caste which occupied a place between traders and seamen in the social hierarchy. Even earlier, in the time of Ramses II (1304–1237 BCE), young Asiatics were taught Egyptian in Fayoun (Hermann 2002: 17). This practice should not be mistaken with acculturation practices commonly used on children of defeated rulers across continents and historical periods, as described in the Old Testament's Book of Daniel, where Jewish youth are made to learn the Chaldean language at Nebuchadnezzar's court after his capture of Jerusalem in 597 BCE:

> Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility – young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service (Daniel 1:3–5).

The Mediterranean

A good knowledge of foreign languages was required for trading and maritime nations, the great mediators of the Mediterranean Sea. The earliest of these came from Crete, an island on the wine-dark sea, a beautiful and fertile land teeming with people, with ninety cities abuzz with a mixture of tongues. The Cretans played a leading role in trade in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Basin: they maintained regular contacts with the Cyclades, Cyprus, Egypt and Mesopotamia (Sieroń 1995: 28–30).

From the Cretan thallassocracy in the second millennium BCE, I have come across only one mention of verbal communication: "One-third a mina of tin to the translator, chief merchant among the Cretans, dispensed at Ugarit" (Sasson 1995: 1501–1521). This passage concerns Minoan mer-

chants on the tin trade route, doing business or perhaps even permanently residing in the Hittite Ugarit, in the early Old Palace period, i.e. around the twentieth century BCE. I will not try to establish how high the interpreter's remuneration was. It is hard to draw any far-reaching conclusions from this single mention; nevertheless, I think it reflects a tendency characteristic of this profession, clearly visible later in history and till this day: the tendency to learn foreign languages rather than to use the services of interpreters from the outside.

About five centuries later, a ship loaded with goods from all around the Mediterranean sank on the sea-route from Ugarit to Egypt (Mikołajczak 2008).[5] It was carrying about ten tons of copper, tin, ebony, elephant and hippopotamus ivory, amber, ostrich eggs, gold, silver, a ton of terebinth resin, acorns, almonds, figs, olives, pomegranates, vessels and jewellery, including a bronze pin probably hailing from Central Europe and an Egyptian gold scarab bearing the name of Queen Nefertiti. Could there have been any interpreters on board? Most probably there were. In the depths of the Mediterranean are thousands of shipwrecks, whose crews and passengers rest forever on the bottom of the sea. Long-distance sea expeditions were always highly dangerous. Would the interpreters go on expeditions for a mere tin ingot? The sphere of personal freedom in the Bronze Age was incomparably lower than it is today; nonetheless, I think that apart from the sense of obligation and the wish to earn, there was also curiosity, the desire to see the world and the call of adventure that drove them out to sea.

After the conquest of Crete, in the mid fifteenth century BCE, the seaways went into the possession of the Mycenaean peoples. Less than three centuries later, the political changes in the region, mainly the invasion of the Sea Peoples ca. 1200 BCE, caused the Mycenaean power to break and enabled the expansion of the Phoenician cities scattered along the Levantine coast: Byblos, Ugarit, Sidon, Tyre, later also Carthage. The first record of a Phoenician sea voyage is an Egyptian fresco painting from 1475 BCE, showing a ship sailed by people of Semitic features (Sieroń 1995: 31). The period of the highest commercial and colonial success (where the colonisation was mainly commercial; it did not assume conquests, establishing settlements or the mass migration of peoples [Moscati 1971: 120]) was be-

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[5] The wreck discovered near the southern coast of Turkey has been examined by archaeologists since 1984. The hypothesis as to its place of departure was put forward on the basis of the analysis of the jawbone of a house mouse found in the ship's hold (Cucchi 2008: 2953, quoted in Mikołajczak 2008).

tween 1000–700 BCE. The range and nature of this phenomenon is well-illustrated by Chapter 27 of Ezekiel, where Tyre is presented as a huge ship, and the list of trading partners and goods covers the whole world known to the author of the Book. In Carthage, a melting pot where members of around sixty peoples lived alongside one another, a caste of interpreters emerged. They were exempt from obligatory physical work. Their skulls were shaved and they carried a symbol of their profession: a parrot tattoo. If its wings were folded, it meant the interpreter knew only one language, if they were spread, the interpreter was a polyglot (Van Hoof 1991: 9).[6]

Even though it was the Phoenicians who simplified writing by making it alphabetical, which contributed to its spread in society, they left few primary sources; they were interested in creating profit, not culture. One of the few extant documents touching upon the question of interpreting is an account of the reconnaissance and colonising expedition along the west coast of Africa in 425 BCE, inscribed by the head of the expedition, a Carthaginian named Hanno, on a tablet offered to the temple of Ba'al Hammon, written in the Punic language, but only known from a Greek translation of the following century, which probably expanded on the original. Hanno set off "with sixty ships of fifty oars each, and a body of men and women to the number of thirty thousand, and provisions and other necessaries" (Heeren 1832: 493, cf. also Moscati 1968). On the River Lixus (today's Draa), south of the Hercules Pillars, he took on some shepherds, who were to serve as interpreters, but who never managed to communicate with any of the inhabitants of the lands discovered by Hanno, i.e. the lands between the present-day Morocco and Guinea. This should not be surprising, for it is rather improbable that the Berber-speaking shepherds of the Atlas Mountains should have known the languages of indigenous peoples from the tropical rain forest. The main function of the "Lixitae" might have been to provide information about the proper names, customs and curiosities of Africa (Mollat du Jourdin, Desange 1988: 47).[7] It is also worth noting that – probably due to the exploratory and colonising charac-

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[6] I provide this information with some skepticism; Van Hoof fails to provide its source, and his history of interpreting contains inaccuracies, pointed out e.g. by Santoyo (2006: 33–34).

[7] It is they who gave us the word *gorillas*, which in Hanno's account refers to wild people, and which in mid-nineteenth century was used by American zoologists to refer to an enormous monkey spotted in Gabon (Mollat du Jourdin, Desange 1998: 47; Hoyos 2010: 52–53). A full English text of Hanno's account can be found at http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/Hanno.html

ter of the expedition – Hanno befriended the Lixitae, whose service as his interpreters was voluntary.

Apart from Hanno's tablet we know of five other mentions of interpreters in the Punic language. Three come from Cyprus: one can be found on a piece of a white marble votive vessel owned by a person called "the court interpreter" (MLS [H] KSYM; it may refer to a Cretan interpreter); another on a tomb stele possibly raised for the same court interpreter; and another on an unidentified statue. In Egypt, on the stairs leading to the Osiris temple in Abydos, there is a graffiti containing a translator's account of his pilgrimage. Two mentions in the Punic language are to be found in votive inscriptions from Carthage and Cirta; the latter city, today in modern Algeria, was, at the turn of the third and second centuries BCE, the capital of the Kingdom of Numidia. It was in ongoing contact with other northern African states and with Greek and Roman traders (Piacentini 2003: 21–24).

Also from the Phoenician linguistic circle comes an interesting use of the noun *mls* "interpreter": in the bilingual Phoenician-Hittite inscription found near Karatepe this term denotes "a person who draws attention to themselves due to their way of speaking," "a braggart," or "an enemy, a conspirator" (Piacentini 2003: 24).

In the eighth century BCE hundreds of Greek cities appeared on the coasts of the Mediterranean and Black Sea. Four centuries later, the language of their inhabitants, *koine*, would become the common language of the whole basin.

The annals say nothing about mixed marriages and interpreting in private life. I think one anecdote cited by Herodotus many centuries later may be treated as symptomatic. It concerns the Amazons' raid on the land of Scythians, who decided to defend themselves by putting a settlement of young warriors close to the Amazons':

> Now the Amazons at midday used to scatter abroad either one by one or by two together, dispersing to a distance from one another to ease themselves; and the Scythians also having perceived this did the same thing: and one of the Scythians came near to one of those Amazons who were apart by themselves, and she did not repulse him but allowed him to lie with her: and she could not speak to him, for they did not understand one another's speech, but she made signs to him with her hand to come on the following day to the same place and to bring another with him, signifying to him that there should be two of them, and that she would bring another with her. (…) and after this they joined their camps and lived together, each man having for his wife her with whom he had had de-

alings at first; and the men were not able to learn the speech of the women, but the women came to comprehend that of the men. (Herodotus 1890: IV, 113–114)

The last sentence of the above fragment perfectly reflects, I think, the essence of communication in private life: it is handled by women…

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Methodical research into the history of interpreting is called for by such translation and interpreting scholars as A. Pym (Pym 1992: 1–11), J.C. Santoyo, P.F. Bandia, R. Meylaerts, S. Adamo, J. Baigorri-Jalon, G.L. Bastin, C. Foz (Bastin, Bandia 2006). The best example of the practical application of method that I know of is the research done by the team led by Professor E. Martinell Gifre from the University of Barcelona (Martinell Gifre, Cruz Pinol 1996; Martinell Gifre, Erlendsdottir 2005). The team have listed a corpus of situations and contacts between users of different languages and analysed them (*Corpus de testimonios* 1996). I consider the structure of their database – citation, title, date, author, page, author's language, text type, topic; within the topic: gestures, interpreters, knowledge of a foreign language, reproduction of a foreign language, written language, ethnolinguistic reflections, communication strategies, linguistic description of a foreign language – to be a model for such research. I also think that expanding the research into further areas of literature and standardising the corpus at the same time is a useful and urgent task. However, it is impossible to apply the Barcelonian method to the period discussed in this article, since the testimonies of this period are too scarce and fragmentary to build a corpus, and the temporal and cultural distance makes interpretation difficult. I think that all human communities solved their problems of verbal communication in a similar way, but when I try to shed light on particular persons or facts, they remain blurred. I am not an expert in academic research on Antiquity, which is why the aim of this article was modest: to gather items hitherto discovered, by myself or other scholars, in a single room of the Museum of Oral Interpretation, waiting for the collection to grow and for other scholars to shed more light on particular exhibits.

trans. Magdalena Buchta

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