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# LANGUAGE ATTITUDE AND PATRIOTISM. Cases from Greek History\*

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## Introduction

The focus of my paper is on language attitude in the ancient Greek world. Language is constantly used as a pawn in the power game associated with various human relationships. These power games may consist of one and the same language, or, perhaps more often, of different languages. In one situation we could think about authority in using one particular language in various speech communities, for example, the use of language in the army, in a hospital, in a kindergarten, etc.<sup>1</sup> In another we might consider situations where one language has more social prestige than another.

One sometimes tends to forget that a person usually has equal intellectual abilities with another even if he or she cannot speak the language another speaks well, or has a less than perfect command of the language which has the higher prestige in a given situation. If one is halting in one's speech, one is simply not taken seriously, and lacks authority in a given situation.

The question of language is, I think, consistently one of the most serious problems among people, as we can see from the negative attitudes of various individuals towards foreigners, refugees and immigrants. In a linguistic situation between different groups it is possible to see an apparent them and us opposition. But how was the situation in the Ancient

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<sup>1</sup> A speech community is a group of people who share certain norms and rules in their use of language. However, they do not necessarily speak the same language, see S. Romaine, *Socio-Historical Linguistics. Its Status and Methodology*, 1982, 3 ff.

world: did linguistic communication have any role in the power game? Was language used for nationalistic or patriotic aims?<sup>2</sup> I shall offer here only a few aspects on this subject, and a more thorough analysis still needs to be done. I shall take examples from Greek and Latin literature to show some examples of language choice and language attitude in Greek history.

### **The Right Genealogy**

What does it mean when a group or a nation claims or is assigned descent from a past community? Very often it has primarily been a matter of glorifying one's own group attaching it to some prestigious name or dominant tradition from the past as opposed to others. In a modern multicultural society it may be an assertion that one's particular ancestors were the most important element in the social mix. We can clearly see in these kinds of claims that statements about the past are really claims about the present.

The early Greeks produced a simple genealogical account of their connection with the past. They supposed that they were descended from a man called Hellen, the separate branches of the Greek people deriving from his sons and grandsons: Doros for the Dorians, Ion for the Ionians, Aiolos for the Aiolians, and so on. The parents of Hellen were simply declared to have been Deucalion and Pyrrha, the only suitable couple, since only they survived the Flood. The assertion here is that all those who were called *Hellenes* were in fact related to each other, and formed one people.<sup>3</sup> Others had no part in their family tree. Some Greeks seemed to think that barbarians were of no significance until they gained some importance in Greek eyes. Diogenes Laertius was definitely a nationalist as he wrote that 'these authors (i.e. barbarian authors) forget that the achievements which they attribute to the barbarians belong to the Greeks, with whom not merely philosophy but the human race itself began.' He then continues some chapters later that the very name *philosophia* cannot be translated

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<sup>2</sup> The terms 'nationalistic, nationalism, nationalist, patriotism, patriotic and patriot' are used in this paper. They should not be mixed with modern connotations. 'Nationalism' etc. refers to the idea that '*Hellenes*' are of one and the same origin and generally better than other people. 'Patriotism' etc. refers in the same way to one's native land or polis.

<sup>3</sup> On the Greek's attitudes towards myths, see P. Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in their Myths?* 1988 (transl. P. Wissing), and P. Georges, *Barbarian Asia and the Greek Experience*, 1994, 2–12.

into foreign tongues.<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes if a foreign people became significant or interesting to the Greeks, it could be attached to the Greek genealogy.<sup>5</sup> Thus at a certain point of time the Latins were said to have descended from Latinus, son Odysseus supposedly had with the enchantress Circe.<sup>6</sup> It was thus recognised that the Latins had some tinge of Greek culture.

The royal house of Macedonia, Argeads, traced their descent to Heracles and their origin to Argos. Therefore, they were admitted to the Olympic Games during the reign of Alexander I, early in the fifth century.<sup>7</sup> This admission gave the royal house irrefutable proof of its partnership in the family of Hellen. Frequently it was just Heracles who with his numerous amorous adventures greatly increased the number of the Greek race.<sup>8</sup> Heracles' loves marked out areas of early and successful Greek infiltration. The Greeks of Pontus, for example, explained the origin of the native peoples by coupling Heracles with the cave-dwelling Echidna. She was part-woman part-snake and forced herself on Heracles by taking his horses ransom. Afterwards she conceived the eponymous ancestors of three native peoples of the region, who were monstrous even at birth.<sup>9</sup>

Some nations who were not Greek but who had some claim to be civilised, at least in the minds of the ancient mythographers, were connected with Troy. The Romans thus gained entry into the prestigious world of Homer and Greek mythology. In the late second century, when the Romans were eager to hold their Greek allies in Magna Graecia against Hannibal, the Fabii claimed descent from Heracles for purely political

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<sup>4</sup> DL 1,3: Λανθάνουσι δ' αὐτοὺς τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων κατορθώματα, ἀφ' ὧν μὴ ὅτι γε φιλοσοφία, ἀλλὰ καὶ γένος ἀνθρώπων ἦρξε, βαρβάροις προσάπτοντες. DL 1,5: καὶ ὧδε μὲν ἀφ' Ἑλλήνων ἦρξε φιλοσοφία, ἧς καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ὄνομα τὴν βάρβαρον ἀπέστραπται προσηγορίαν.

<sup>5</sup> Close parallels to this system can be recognised in historical India as well, where genealogies were of the utmost importance.

<sup>6</sup> Hes. Th. 1011–16.

<sup>7</sup> Hdt. 5,22; 8,137–9; Arr. An. 2,5,9; 4,11,6. See also R. Katičić, *Ancient Languages of the Balkans*. *Trends in Linguistics* 4, 1976, 104.

<sup>8</sup> Georges 3.

<sup>9</sup> Hdt. 4,8. Georges 3–4. Apollonius of Rhodes was fascinated by the mythical genealogy of the Greeks in his *Argonautica*, as the poem unites the Greek world from Italy to Persia by a single web of blood kinship.

reasons.<sup>10</sup> Even the Latin language was deemed a mixture of barbarian language and the Aeolic Greek dialect by Dionysius of Halicarnassus.<sup>11</sup>

The same kind of genealogical procedure was followed in connection with other important nations, usually with the help of other mythological persons such as, for example, Io or Cadmus, but I shall not dwell on those connections here. I shall, however, provide some examples of the situations where the choice of language was important in the relationships of the Greeks, and later, perhaps surprisingly, of the Macedonians, with other nations, and with each other, too. The examples show that there were persons who considered the choice of language to be very important indeed, and their attitude towards language had nationalistic or patriotic roots.

### Language Attitude and Language Choice

In bi- or multilingual societies speech or linguistic communication has to be directed either to our own group or to others. Theoretically, we can call this kind of communication *in-group* and *out-group* communication.<sup>12</sup> The in-group language is the one used in any society for the basic face-to-face relationships with other speakers with whom the individual in question fully identifies. Almost all people living in a speech community have some need for contacting people or groups outside their own community. This language can be called out-group language. In out-group situations the choice of language sometimes reflects the speaker's attitude towards other groups. The wrong choice of language can today, and could also in the ancient world, lead to the speaker's death.

### The Greeks and the Persian Command

My first example is from Plutarch's *Themistocles*. The passage refers to the messengers of Xerxes, who were sent to all Greek cities except Athens

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<sup>10</sup> See F. Münzer, Fabius, RE VI, 1909, 1740. T.P. Wiseman, *Roman Studies*, 1987, 208, and id. 212 'the number of genealogies that depend on Greek etymologies is striking.'

<sup>11</sup> Dion. Hal. 1,90,1; see also 1,89,4: the Greeks are in many ways better than barbarians.

<sup>12</sup> This very appropriate division was first made by A. Nida and W. Wunderley, *Communication Roles of Languages in Multilingual Societies*, in *Language Use and Social Change*, ed. W. Whiteley, 1971, 57–59.

to demand submission to his power. One of those messengers is in question here:<sup>13</sup> ‘Praise was also given to his (Themistocles’) treatment of the interpreter in the company of those who were sent by the King to demand earth and water: this interpreter he arrested, and put to death by special decree, because he dared to adopt the speech of Hellas for Barbarian orders.’

The word Plutarch uses for the interpreter is a noun ὁ δίγλωσσος, which here means ‘a man who speaks two languages’.<sup>14</sup> Plutarch states that Themistocles was praised because he put to death an interpreter who adopted the Greek language (κίχρημι) to give Persian orders to the Greeks.<sup>15</sup> The interpreter obviously used the in-group language of the Greeks, and this was not tolerated by Themistocles in that political situation.<sup>16</sup> Plutarch encourages his hearers and readers to believe that it was a crime towards the *Hellenes* as a nation if a member of a Persian occupation army dared to speak words of command in Greek. To use Greek was to prostitute it.

What, then, was the nationality of this interpreter who was killed because of his choice of language? It is very probable that the man was a Ionian Greek who was used as a messenger, and thus he was considered a traitor from the Greek point of view, although he was a subject of the Great King.<sup>17</sup> We know that Darius III Codomannus could speak Greek and that he used Greeks in his service, and it is probable that was true of

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<sup>13</sup> Plut. Them. 6,2–3: ἐπαινείται δ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ περὶ τὸν δίγλωσσον ἔργον ἐν τοῖς πεμφοθεῖσιν ὑπὸ βασιλέως ἐπὶ γῆς καὶ ὕδατος αἴτησιν. ἐρμηνέα γὰρ ὄντα συλλαβὼν διὰ ψηφίσματος ἀπέκτεινεν, ὅτι φωνὴν Ἑλληνίδα βαρβάροις προστάγμασιν ἐτόλμησε χρῆσαι. The translations are generally those of the Loeb Classical Library, but I have sometimes made revisions of my own.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Arr. An. 3,6,6: (κατέστησεν) Λαομέδοντα δὲ τὸν τούτου (Ἐριγυίου) ἀδελφόν, ὅτι δίγλωσσος ἦν ἐς τὰ βαρβαρικὰ γράμματα, ἐπὶ τοῖς αἰχμαλώτοις βαρβάροις, ...

<sup>15</sup> In some speech communities there is also the need for a language of specialised communication. This is often the language or dialect of higher education or of specialised formal training, see Nida-Wonderley, 59. The story of Plutarch, however, reflects more in-group out-group communication.

<sup>16</sup> We must keep in mind that Themistocles himself learned Persian when he was in exile, see Thuc. 1, 138,1.

<sup>17</sup> See Hdt. 6, 48–49. D.J. Mosley, *Greeks, Barbarians, Language and Contact*, Ancient Society 2, 1971, 5.

his predecessors as well.<sup>18</sup> Of course we do not know whether Plutarch tells a fact or just a story, but at least we know that he himself thought this to be something worth writing about. Plutarch had an unambiguous attitude towards the choice of language and towards enemies of the Hellenes. According to him, for example, Hippocrates declared that he would never put his skill at the service of barbarians who were enemies of Greece.<sup>19</sup> This suggests that he would put his skill at the service of barbarians who were *not* enemies of Greece. It seems that Plutarch's attitude towards language choice was rigid, and for this we have further evidence.

In his treatise *De defectu oraculorum* he recalls an incident which happened at the oracle of Ptoan Apollo in Boeotia during the Persian wars. Mardonius, the nephew and son-in-law of Darius I, who headed the Persian troops in Greece after the battle of Salamis, sent a Carian messenger to consult this oracle of Apollo. Plutarch's treatise is derived from damaged manuscripts which are very difficult to restore, but I shall follow the text of R. Flacelière.<sup>20</sup>

According to Plutarch, the prophet of Apollo at that time, who previously had always used the Aiolian (i.e. Greek) dialect, now gave his response in a barbarian language, so that nobody but the Carian messenger

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<sup>18</sup> Curt. 5,11,4–5: *Patron se vero, sed remotis arbitris loqui velle cum eo (Dareo) respondit iussusque propius accedere sine interprete – nam haud rudis Graecae linguae Dareus erat –*.

<sup>19</sup> Plut. Cato Maior 23,3.

<sup>20</sup> Plut., *De def. orac.* 412A in R. Flacelière, *Plut. Mor. VI*, Coll. Budé: ὡς <δηλον ἐκ> τοῦ ἐνθουσιασμοῦ <τοῦ προφητοῦ ὅτι τοῖς βαρβάροις οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδέποτε φωνὴν Ἑλληνίδα λαβεῖν τὸ προσταττόμενον ὑπηρετοῦσαν. A. Rescigno, 1995, has compiled the most recent edition. His text runs as follows: ... ὡς <δηλον ἐκ> τοῦ ἐνθουσιασμοῦ <τοῦ προφητοῦ ὅτι τοῖς βαρβάροις οὐκ ἔστιν οὐ(δὲ) δέδοται φωνὴν Ἑλληνίδα λαβεῖν τὸ προσταττόμενον ὑπηρετοῦσαν. Although Rescigno has made a comprehensive analysis of the earlier textual tradition, he fails to demonstrate plausibly the existence of δέδοται, 274–277.



could understand the answer.<sup>21</sup> Plutarch then states that ‘from the divine enthusiasm of the prophet it was clear that it is impossible for barbarians ever to receive a word in the Greek language subservient to their commands.’ Here Plutarch expresses the view that it was Apollo's order that Greek was not to be used for barbarian commands.

Herodotus describes the same event, but the content is different. It seems that Plutarch consciously offers another version, as he was perhaps unsympathetic towards Herodotus (cf. his *De Herodoti malignitate*). Herodotus for his part may have heard the story from a Theban friend of his, and the main difference with Plutarch's narration lies in the nationalistic point of view, which does not exist in Herodotus' account at all. Herodotus tells the story as follows:<sup>22</sup> ‘( the Thebans said that) when the man called Mys entered into this temple (of Ptoan Apollo), three men of the town following him that were chosen on the state's behalf to write down the oracles that should be given, immediately the prophet spoke in a foreign language. The Thebans that followed him stood astounded to hear a foreign language instead of Greek, and knew not what this present matter might be; but Mys of Europus snatched from them the tablet that they carried and wrote on it that which was spoken by the prophet, saying that the words of the oracle were Carian; and having written everything down

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<sup>21</sup> Compare also Plut. Arist. 19,1–2. Barbarian language was used together with Greek in the oracle of Apollo at Didyma near Miletos in Caria, see Clem. Alex. Strom. 5,8,48. The priest-family of Branchidae who presided over the temple descended from a Delphian Machaereus, Str. 9,3,9. When the temple was set on fire by Xerxes the Branchidae gave over the treasures of Apollo to him and accompanied him to escape punishment for the robbing and betrayal of the temple, Str. 14,1,5; Hdt. 6,19–20. They went to Bactria, where their descendants were later executed by Alexander because of the previous crimes, Diod. 17 (res. of the second book); Str. 11,11,4; Curt. 7,5,28–35. See also H.W. Parke, The Massacre of the Branchidae, JHS 105, 1985, 59–68; I.R. Pichikyan, Gorod Branhidov, VDI 1991:2, 168–181 (English Summary).

<sup>22</sup> Hdt. 8,135: ἐς τοῦτο τὸ ἱρὸν ἐπεῖτε παρελθεῖν τὸν καλεόμενον τοῦτον Μῦν, ἔπεσθαι δὲ οἱ τῶν ἀστῶν αἰρετοὺς ἄνδρας τρεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ κοινοῦ ὡς ἀπογραφομένους τὰ θεσπιέειν ἔμελλε, καὶ πρόκατε τὸν πρόμαντιν βαρβάρῳ γλώσση χρᾶν. καὶ τοὺς μὲν ἐπομένους τῶν Θηβαίων ἐν θώματι ἔχεσθαι ἀκούοντας βαρβάρου γλώσσης ἀντὶ Ἑλλάδος, οὐδὲ ἔχειν ὅ τι χρήσονται τῷ παρεόντι πρήγματι· τὸν δὲ Εὐρωπαϊά Μῦν ἐξαρπάσαντα παρ’ αὐτῶν τὴν ἐφέροντο δέλτον, τὰ λεγόμενα ὑπὸ τοῦ προφήτεω γράφειν ἐς αὐτήν, φάναι δὲ Καρίην μιν γλώσση χρᾶν, συγγραψάμενον δὲ οἴχεσθαι ἀπιόντα ἐς Θεσσαλίην.

he went away back to Thessaly.’<sup>23</sup>

Here we find no hint of the nationalistic attitude, but instead Mys, who was of Carian origin, wrote down the prophesy, and went away quite content. The same story emerges once again, and this time it is told by Pausanias who wrote his description of Greece some decades after Plutarch's death. When speaking of the sanctuary of the Ptoan Apollo, he tells that ‘Once too a man of Europus, of the name of Mys, who was sent by Mardonius, inquired of the god in his own language, and the god too gave a response, not in Greek but in the Carian speech.’<sup>24</sup> It seems evident that Pausanias recalls the version of Herodotus, but somehow believes, or had heard from somebody, that the language used in the original inquiry was also Carian. In their commentary on this particular section of Herodotus, W. How and S. Wells (Oxford 1928) wrote that ‘Pausanias spoils the story by making Mys inquire of the god in Carian.’ Herodotus does not say which language Mys used when he uttered his inquiry. He only states that an extraordinary thing happened which was told by the Thebans (τότε δὲ θῶμά μοι μέγιστον γενέσθαι λέγεται ὑπὸ Θηβαίων, Hdt. 8,133). The use of Greek is, however, implicit in the description, because the Thebans are with Mys, and they are supposed to have understood the question, but not the answer. But when Mys wrote down the answer, we do not know whether he used Carian or Greek. If we consider historical linguistic facts, it seems apparent that a Carian person could usually speak some Greek. Many of them as well as many other peoples in the south-western corner of Asia Minor were bilingual.<sup>25</sup>

Plutarch is the only one of these three ancient authors who has a nationalistic attitude towards the Greek language. To me this seems a little strange, but Plutarch was a priest of Apollo at Delphi, and that may have had some influence on his conception about oracles and the Greek language as an in-group language. His attitude is, however, interesting, and needs further research.

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<sup>23</sup> On Mys, see J. and L. Robert, *Le carien Mys et l'oracle du Ptôon*, *Hellenica* 8, 1950, 23 ff.

<sup>24</sup> Paus. 9,23,6: καί ποτε ἄνδρα Εὐρωπέα - ὄνομα δέ οἱ εἶναι Μῦν - τοῦτον ἀποσταλέντα ὑπὸ Μαρδονίου τὸν Μῦν ἐπερέσθαι τε φωνῇ τῇ σφετέρᾳ καί οἱ χρῆσαι τὸν θεόν, οὐχ ἑλληνίσαντα οὐδὲ αὐτόν, διαλέκτῳ τῇ Καρικῇ.

<sup>25</sup> Georges 13–17; Many inhabitants of Asia Minor knew Greek, and some even consulted the oracle at Delphi, see Mosley, 2–3. *Thuc.* 8,85,2.

### Macedonia, *sermo patrius* and δίγλωττοι

My second example comes some hundred and fifty years later. When Strabo, who wrote approximately in the Augustan period, describes Macedonia in the seventh book of his *Geography*, he makes some interesting comments. First, he writes that the geographical area as a whole, which he calls Epeiros and in part Macedonia, is composed of many different peoples, of which he has a long list. He also adds: 'But the Illyrian tribes which are near the southern part of the mountainous country and those which are above the Ionic Gulf are intermingled with these peoples' (Str. 7,7,8).<sup>26</sup>

According to Strabo some of these peoples were ruled by men of native stock but the others were not. Finally, he states that 'because one tribe or another was always getting the mastery over others, they all ended in the Macedonian dominion, except a few who dwelt above the Ionic Gulf. And in fact the regions about Lynceus, Pelagonia, Orestias, and Elimeia used to be called Upper Macedonia, though later on some also called them Free Macedonia' (Str. 7,7,8). After that comes the most interesting passage, as Strabo says that 'some go so far as to call the whole of the country Macedonia, as far as Corcyra, at the same time stating as their reason that in tonsure, language, short cloak, and other things of this kind they are similar. But some of them speak two languages as well.'<sup>27</sup>

The passage stimulates several questions. Who are the 'some' mentioned by Strabo? Does he refer to his own time, as he often does, or to his sources? It seems that there were sources which called the whole geographical area Macedonia, and these same sources claimed that the spoken dialect as well as the hair-fashion and clothes of this area, which contained many different peoples, were very similar. This remark of Strabo seems to refer to the Macedonia of the Antigonids,<sup>28</sup> and in that case the common language cannot be anything else but a dialect of Illyrian or Greek, because otherwise there would have been some traces of another shared language. Nevertheless, many of the small tribes in that region were

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Str. 7 F 11 and Thuc. 2,99.

<sup>27</sup> Str. 7,7,8: ἔνιοι δὲ καὶ σύμπασαν τὴν μέχρι Κορκύρας Μακεδονίαν προσαγορεύουσιν, αἰτιολογοῦντες ἅμα, ὅτι καὶ κουρᾶ καὶ διαλέκτῳ καὶ χλαμύδι καὶ ἄλλοις τοιοῦτοις χρῶνται παραπλησίως· ἔνιοι δὲ καὶ δίγλωττοὶ εἰσι.

<sup>28</sup> See Arr. An. 7,2–5.

Greek-speaking.<sup>29</sup>

It does not appear from the text that Strabo had any personal connection with the area, and he clearly borrows from others. He knew Italy, parts of Asia Minor, and especially Egypt well, but his knowledge of Greece was vague. Nevertheless, he claims that some of the inhabitants of Macedonia were δίγλωττοι. Is the word supposed to mean that they spoke two languages? It would appear so, as before the Christian era the word is connected with persons who know Greek and some other language, and it seems that especially the barbarians who knew Greek were generally so called, though on one occasion a Greek (Laomedon, see above) is said to be bilingual, δίγλωσσος ἦν ἐς τὰ βαρβαρικὰ γράμματα (Arr. An. 3,6,6).<sup>30</sup> So in Macedonia one language was Greek, but what was the other? I shall return to this question, but first Strabo's other point. Should we rely on Strabo's assertion that the hair (κουρά) and way of dressing of the various peoples inhabiting the area were similar? Concerning hair, or perhaps Strabo thinks about a hair-dress, there is an interesting Persian inscription where king Darius I records peoples who at that time paid taxes to him, and among them a distinction is made between Ionians, *Yauna*, and Ionians 'wearing a *petasos* or a shield', *Yauna takabara*.<sup>31</sup> These peoples are listed in geographical order, and, as Persians used to call all Greeks Ionians,<sup>32</sup> and as some Macedonian coins reveal a hair-dress just like a shield, some scholars connect these sources and think that *Yauna takabara* meant the Macedonians.<sup>33</sup> The word *takabara*, however, does not refer to hair but to a broad-brimmed *petasos* hat, or a broad-brimmed helmet like a *petasos*, which was general in Thessaly, central and northern parts of the Balkan

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<sup>29</sup> See N.G.L. Hammond, CAH III<sup>2</sup> 3, 1982, 284–285.

<sup>30</sup> See Diod. 11,60,4; 12,68,5; 17,68,5; DL 1, 101 (a Greek mother); Dion. Hal. 1,25,3; Plut. Alex. 37,1; Polyain. 3,11,7; 7,14,4 (probably barbarian interpreters); Thuc. 4,109,4; 8,85,2. The Christian writers usually use the word to mean 'deceitful'. It then derives its meaning from the tongue of snakes, 'he who speaks with forked tongue', e.g. LXX Prov. 11,13; Sir. 5,9; 5,14; 28, 13. Dio Chrys. still has the earlier meaning, Or. 10, 24 (about Homer); 53,6.

<sup>31</sup> R. Kent, Old Persian. Grammar, Texts, Lexicon, rev. 2nd. ed. 1953, DNa 28–29. *Yauna takabara* also DSm 10–11 (D=Darius I), and A?P26 which is a relief from Persepolis (A?=unknown Artaxerxes. Perhaps he was Artaxerxes III, see Walser, Die Völkerschaften auf den Reliefs von Persepolis, 1966, 34).

<sup>32</sup> This was the habit among other eastern people as well.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. M. Sakellariou, in Macedonia, 4000 years of Greek History and Civilization, ed. M. Sakellariou, Athens 1993, 49.

peninsula and Thracia, as well as on Macedonian coins.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, the *Yauna takabara* are interpreted to mean the Macedonians, since Persian domination did not include Thessaly.<sup>35</sup> If Strabo writes of the Macedonia of the Antigonids, this Persian evidence, however, provides no support to his views. Naturally, Strabo may have composed his narration from different chronological sources, as he did, for example, in his description of Naples, which, however, is based on solid personal knowledge.<sup>36</sup>

Be that as it may, the question of language is more interesting. We may tackle this problem by recalling a very cruel episode from the time of Alexander the Great. It is the famous description of the fall of Philotas, the cavalry commander in Alexander's army. The version of the story which is of interest here, is told by the Roman historian Quintus Curtius Rufus.<sup>37</sup> At this point it is not important whether we consider Curtius a good and reliable historian or not; the essential thing is what he writes, and by that I mean what is his own attitude towards the story he describes.<sup>38</sup> Curtius' story in short is as follows: Philotas is accused of a conspiracy, Alexander interrogates him and then leaves him to the Macedonians. Philotas speaks to the Macedonian soldiers, and is finally condemned and tortured to death.

Some points are of interest here. Alexander comes to Philotas: 'And now the king, looking intently at him, said: "The Macedonians are about to pass a judgement upon you; I ask whether you will use their native tongue in addressing them. Then Philotas replied: "Besides the Macedonians there are many present who, I think, will more easily use the same language which you have employed, for no other reason, I suppose, than that your speech might be understood by the greater number." Then the king said: "Do you not see how Philotas detests even his mother tongue. For he alone scorns to learn it. But let him by all means speak in whatever way he desires, provided that you remember that he dislikes our customs as much

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<sup>34</sup> See C. Saatsoglou-Paliadeli, *Aspects of Ancient Macedonian Costume*, JHS 113, 1993, 128–130. On Macedonian coins, see G. Le Rider, *Le monnayage d'argent et d'or de Philippe IIe*, 1977, 5, figs. 1–2.

<sup>35</sup> See Walser 47; Cf. Hdt. 3,90.

<sup>36</sup> See Leiwo, *Neapolitana*, *Comm. Hum. Litt.* 102, 1994, 16 ff.; Str. 5.4.7.

<sup>37</sup> On the different versions, see P.A. Brunt, *Arrian*, Loeb Classical Library, 1976, Appendix XI, p. 517

<sup>38</sup> Curtius seems to have been interested in linguistic communication, and he sometimes mentioned languages, e.g.; 4,9,16; 5,11,7; 7,5,29; 9,1,5.

as our tongue." After this comment Alexander leaves the place.<sup>39</sup>

Philotas then speaks to the soldiers, and among other things he says 'It is even charged against me that I scorn association with my mother tongue, that I disdain the customs of the Macedonians. So then I aspire to the rule of something which I hold in contempt. The native tongue has gone out of use long ago through communication with other nations; a foreign language has to be learned as well by the victors as by the subjugated.'<sup>40</sup> After Philotas' speech the soldiers stood still, and everything was about to go well for him, when a commander in the army – I quote directly from Curtius (6,11,1) – *manu strenuus Bolon quidam, pacis artium et civilis habitus rudis, vetus miles, ab humili ordine ad eum gradum in quo tunc erat promotus* – starts to speak. He says among other things that 'He (i.e. Philotas)' has always made fun of rustic men, and called them Phrygians and Paphlagonians – he who, though born a Macedonian, did not feel shame to hear men of his own language through an interpreter.'<sup>41</sup>

As we can observe, Curtius makes much of the distinction between the *sermo patrius* or *nativus*, the in-group language, and the out-group language, *lingua*, which, of course, is Greek. To him the choice of language is a question of patriotism. In addition, he does not always seem to make a clear distinction between *sermo* and *lingua*, so that the meaning

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<sup>39</sup> Curt. 6,9,34–36: *Iamque rex intuens eum: "Macedones," inquit, "de te iudicaturi sunt; quaero, an patrio sermone sis apud eos usus." Tum Philotas: "Praeter Macedonas", inquit, "plerique adsunt, quos facilius quae dicam percepturos arbitror, si eadem lingua fuero usus qua tu egisti, non ob aliud, credo, quam ut oratio tua intellegi posset a pluribus." Tum rex: "Ecquid videtis adeo etiam sermonis patrii Philotan taedere? Solus quippe fastidit eum discere. Sed dicat sane utcumque ei cordi est, dum meminertis aequae illum a nostro more quam sermone abhorrere." Atque ita contione excessit.*

<sup>40</sup> Curt. 6,10,23–24: *Mihi quidem obicitur quod societatem patrii sermonis asperner, quod Macedonum mores fastidiam. Sic ergo imperio quod dedignor, immineo! Iam pridem nativus ille sermo commercio aliarum gentium exolevit; tam victoribus, quam victis peregrina lingua discenda est.*

<sup>41</sup> Curt. 6,11,4: *Ludibrio ei fuisse rusticos homines, Phrygasque et Paphlagonas appellatos, qui non erubesceret, Macedo natus, homines linguae suae per interpretem audire.* The translation in LCL is as follows: '...by one who, though born a Macedonian, did not blush that men of his own language heard his words through an interpreter.' There seem to be no good grounds to translate in this way but rather 'to hear men of his own language through an interpreter'. This interpretation is accepted in French (Coll. Budé, H. Bardon 1947) and German translations (Tusculum, H. Schönfeld 1954) as well.

can be either 'regional dialect' or 'language'.<sup>42</sup> According to Curtius' account Alexander used Greek, probably the Attic dialect when addressing Philotas. Curtius does not say whether Alexander knew the *sermo patrius*, but at least he makes its use a patriotic act. Some other sources do mention that Alexander was capable to speak μακεδονιστί when he became angry and swore.<sup>43</sup> In similar situations – swearing or praying – speakers of certain (dialects or) languages usually choose their native language if they want to add emphasis to their speech. It also seems that Philotas could not, or did not want to, speak it. He even used an interpreter, if we believe Bolon, the angry commander and a man of humble origin. Curtius puts great weight on this fact, which finally turns all the soldiers against Philotas: he did not speak the language of his forefathers, he considered his native land and compatriots so inferior to other nations that he claimed that everybody, even the conquerors, had to learn a foreign language. In addition, he assured his listeners that the Macedonian language was long ago forgotten. The soldiers could not approve of this, and the whole assembly was inflamed, and the bodyguards shouted that the traitor should be torn pieces with their own bare hands.

This story is definitely patriotic. It seems that in Alexander's time the Macedonians themselves did not wish to be regarded as Greeks. Arrian, following his main sources, who were Macedonians by birth (Ptolemy) or by a kind of adoption (Aristobulus, Nearchus), is normally careful in distinguishing and even in contrasting Macedonians and Greeks.<sup>44</sup> But if we reconsider historical facts, what can we say of that? Nothing much, I think. The question of the origin and language of Macedonia still divides scholars into three main groups. The first recognises the Macedonians as Greeks, the second denies that they were Greek, and the third is somewhere in the middle. The same views have been proposed with reference to the Macedonian language. It is impossible for me to give a full account of the discussion here, but I shall try to show how complicated the subject is.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *sermo*: 5,11,7–8; 6; 6,9,34; 6,9,36; 6,10,23; 7,5,29; 9,1,5; *lingua*: 3,12,6; 5,4,4; 5,11,5; 6,9,35; 6,10,24; 6,11,4.

<sup>43</sup> Hist. Alex. A 3,32,14; Plut. Alex. 51,4.

<sup>44</sup> Arr. An. 2,7,4; 2,10,7; 4,11,8; 5,26,6; 5,27,4–9.

<sup>45</sup> On Macedonia, its geography and languages, see R.A. Crossland in CAH III<sup>2</sup> 1, 1982, 845 ff.; Katičić 100–116.

First mythology and the right genealogy which I mentioned at the beginning of this paper: Hellanicus, who wrote in the fifth century BC, connects the Macedonians with the Hellenes by making them children of Macedon, son of Aiolos, son of Hellen,<sup>46</sup> whereas Hesiod does not include them in the stemma of Hellen, but makes them instead offspring of Zeus and Thyia, daughter of Deucalion in the Hesiod fragment, and one of the less-known women of Zeus.<sup>47</sup>

The official view of the royal house can be seen in a letter of Alexander to Darius after the battle of Issus. According to Arrian he begins the letter: ‘Your ancestors came to Macedonia and the rest of Greece and did us much harm, though we had done them no prior injury’.<sup>48</sup> Alexander led the army in Asia as Hellen, as leader of the Hellenic army to revenge the injustice done to his Greek forefathers by the Persian king. This much is clear. The same formula ‘Macedonia and the rest of Greece’ also occurs in the treaty between Philip V and Hannibal, described for us by Polybius.<sup>49</sup> Livy also puts words into the mouth of a Macedonian representative of the same episode which clearly show the official view of Macedonians as Hellenes.<sup>50</sup>

Thucydides considered Macedonians barbarians,<sup>51</sup> and Isocrates stated that while he considered Philip Greek the Macedonians were to him not of the same ethnic group. Isocrates also makes a distinction between Greeks, Macedonians and barbarians which seems to mean that he did not consider them to be barbarians either.<sup>52</sup> Demosthenes' view was, of course, full of propaganda, and he considered all Macedonians

<sup>46</sup> F. Jacoby, FGrHist 4 F 74

<sup>47</sup> Hes. Ἡοῖαι Fr. 7. Thyia was a nymph whose descent is not definable, as she has various father-candidates in Greek mythology, see K. Preisendanz, Thyia, RE VI A, 1936, 679–680.

<sup>48</sup> Arr. An. 2,14,4.

<sup>49</sup> Polyb. 7,9,5 and 7.

<sup>50</sup> Liv. 31,29,15: *Aetolos Acarnas Macedonas, eiusdem linguae homines, leves ad tempus ortae causae diiungunt coniunguntque: cum alienigenis, cum barbaris aeternum omnibus Graecis bellum est eritque.*

<sup>51</sup> Thuc. 2.80.

<sup>52</sup> Isoc. Philip. (Or. 5) 108 μόνος γὰρ τῶν Ἑλλήνων οὐχ ὁμόφυλον γένος ἄρχειν ἀξιώσας; 122.



barbarians.<sup>53</sup> But Macedonia is also accounted part of Greece by Polybios and Strabo, whereas Appian seems to adopt the idea that Macedonians were not Greek, but not barbarians either.<sup>54</sup> A short rhetorical speech attributed to Herodes Atticus called *περὶ πολιτείας* which is addressed to Thessalians at the end of the fifth century presents king Archelaus of Macedonia († 399) as a barbarian. The speaker tries to raise a great Greek expedition against him.<sup>55</sup> This speech is very difficult to date, so that the propaganda it contains remains without a proper historical context. None of these testimonies can be considered outside of their chronological or political context, and therefore it is not possible to decide from this evidence whether the Macedonians were originally ethnically Hellenes or not.

Linguistically, the question is no less problematic. Above I quoted Strabo who wrote that some of the Macedonians were bilingual. Did he intend that those who were not bilingual spoke only Greek, or that they did not speak Greek but Illyrian?<sup>56</sup> Or was there a distinction between the Attic dialect and some regional Greek dialect called Macedonian? The earliest Macedonian written documents contain only names, and when writing becomes more frequent, the Macedonians used the Attic dialect.<sup>57</sup> When Greek writers refer to the language of the Macedonians they usually use the words *μακεδονιστί*, *μακεδονίζειν* or similar, for example, *μακεδονιστὶ τῆ φωνῆ* (Plut. Eum. 14,5) and *μακεδονίζοντας τ'οἶδα πολλοὺς τῶν Ἀττικῶν διὰ τὴν ἐπιμιξίαν* (Athen. 3,122A). But it is not at all apparent what this really means. It may mean that the language differed from Greek or it could mean simply that Macedonian was just another Greek dialect when compared with expressions like *αἰολίζειν*, *αἰολιστί*, *ἀττικιστί*, *δωριστί*, *πελοποννασιστί* etc.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, Ctesias used the word *Ἰνδιστί* of a totally different language to *ἑλληνιστί*.<sup>59</sup> Dio

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<sup>53</sup> For example, Dem. 3,16–17 and 24, and several times in his speeches against Philippus, e.g., 9,31.

<sup>54</sup> Polyb. 7,9,1; 9,37,7–10; Str. 7 F 9; Appian in, for example, 9,9,1–2 and 4. Usually Appian tries to express the speaker's attitude.

<sup>55</sup> See U. Albini, <Erode Attico>, *περὶ πολιτείας*, 21–23; 34–37. Cf. Clem. Alex. Strom. 6,2,17, where Clemens writes that Thrasymachus of Chalcedon, in the second half of the fifth century, called king Archelaus a barbarian as opposed to Thessalian Hellenes.

<sup>56</sup> See N. Hammond, CAH VI<sup>2</sup>, 1994, 423.

<sup>57</sup> Katičić 108; cf. IG IX2 517.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Katičić 106.

<sup>59</sup> Ctesias, FGrH 688, F 45,4 and 28.

Chrysostomus follows the same usage, when he states ... οὐ περσίζων, οὐ μηδίζων τῇ φωνῇ, καθάπερ οἶμαι Δαρείος, ἀλλὰ μακεδονίζων τε καὶ ἑλληνίζων (Or. 4,55). Here a distinction is made between different languages in the same way.<sup>60</sup>

The Attic comedians generally made their non-Greeks speak bad Greek with a mixture of barbarian words (of which some were invented some real), while the Greek tribes usually spoke their own dialect, for example, Boiotic, Laconic, and so on.<sup>61</sup> Strattis, an Attic comedy writer, wrote in the year 402 BC a play called *Μακεδόνες*. A couple of fragments from this play have fortunately been transmitted to us, and one of them is especially interesting. An Athenian says: ἡ σφύραινα δ' ἔστι τίς; and a Macedonian replies: κέστραν μὲν ὕμμεσ ὠττικοὶ κικλήσκετε.<sup>62</sup> The idea is that the Athenian does not know what is a *sphyraina*, and the Macedonian says that 'you Attics call it *kestra*'. The word means a kind of fish.<sup>63</sup> The Macedonian's answer is written with a perfectly (to us) understandable and correct Greek dialect, which is perhaps a little old-fashioned but contains no barbarisms.

It is possible and even probable that uneducated Macedonians were unable to follow fluently spoken Attic with its phonetic and lexical differences, neologisms, etc. On the other hand, there were Thracians, Illyrians, Phoenicians and many other peoples in the Macedonian army who were able to understand Attic, but who were not so fluent in Greek that they would have been able to follow certain Greek, for instance Macedonian, dialects.<sup>64</sup> Unfortunately, we do not have more fragments from this play, so that it is difficult to draw any definite conclusions.

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<sup>60</sup> The distinction between language and dialect is complex, and it is not analysed in this paper.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Schol. Ar. Ran. 681 (Plato Comicus, PCG F 61) where the mother of the politician Cleophon, who was a Thracian, speaks broken Greek.

<sup>62</sup> Strattis, PCG F 29.

<sup>63</sup> The word *sphyraina* is used as a scientific name of a species of fish called *sphyrænidae* of which Barracuda is perhaps the most well-known. It is interesting that *kestra* has vanished without a trace.

<sup>64</sup> Modern societies abound in regional dialects which are not understandable to out-group speakers. Dialect speakers, however, are normally able to understand the standard language of their country because of the school system (cf. Schwyzer Dutch vs German, some Italian dialects, standard English vs regional dialects). For example, the famous film *L'Albero degli zoccoli* by Eduardo Gualino had Italian subtitles in Italy, since the old northern Italian dialect was incomprehensible to the average modern Italian.

Finally, several Macedonian words are listed in different contexts.<sup>65</sup> The majority of these words are Greek, but there are several which are not. I am afraid, however, that this does not prove anything either. The Greek words could be loan-words, so too could the non-Greek words. In almost every occasion an alternative explanation is possible.

Nevertheless, I believe that it is conceivable to find a plausible answer to this question, but it requires a scholar who is familiar with modern historical linguistics, and who has a good knowledge of ancient history and philology as well as modern anthropology. Archaeological skills would be of use, too. But above all this scholar or group of scholars must be without modern nationalistic *a priori* presumptions.

To conclude, I shall answer the questions which I posed at the beginning of this paper. The questions were: did linguistic communication play any role in the power game in the ancient Greek world and was language used for nationalistic or patriotic aims? The answer to both is affirmative.

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<sup>65</sup> A collection of 154 Macedonian words is listed by Kalléris, *Les anciens macédoniens I*, Athens 1954, 66 ff. which, however, has been severely criticised because of its methodology, see Crossland 845 ff. Crossland states that Macedonian appears to have one phonological feature which tells against regarding it as a Greek dialect (the variation of the letter β in Macedonian with φ in Greek), 846. He does not, however, discuss the distinction between graphemes and phonemes which can be significant; see also Katičić 108 ff.; Sakellariou 54–59.