

Was Pigres an Interpreter to Cyrus?

Roman Rubtsov

St Petersburg State University,

7–9, Universitetskaya nab., St Petersburg, 199034, Russian Federation; rubtsovrom@gmail.com

For citation: Rubtsov R. Was Pigres an Interpreter to Cyrus? *Philologia Classica* 2022, 17 (1), 22–31. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu20.2022.102>

Ancient authors did not leave us any description of ancient interpreters, and neither their usual functions nor possible social positions are known to us. Although this can be partially restored from written sources, the whole picture remains in the shadows. We are not aware of the ways in which people became interpreters in Antiquity, whether such a profession actually existed, and to what extent it is possible to apply the modern understanding of interpreters to ancient times. Finally, there are many dark corners in our understanding of historical specifics: the functions, social status and ethnic origin of interpreters obviously varied in different cultures and time frames. The use of a word or an expression defining the interpreter is another issue, for Greek ἑρμηνεύς, a traditional lexeme in dictionaries of Ancient Greek (LSJ, GE, DELG, GEW, EDG, Woodhouse), does not, in fact, always denote someone related to this line of work. In Xenophon's *Anabasis* a person named Pigres is described as ἑρμηνεύς and one of the companions of Cyrus the Younger in his belligerent attempt to overthrow Artaxerxes II. Pigres is usually understood as an interpreter (Gehman, Lendle, Rochette, Wiotte-Franz, Stoneman etc.), but is there a solid basis for such understanding? What do we know about him? What does Xenophon tell us about his responsibilities? The study shows that Pigres' identity should be understood in relation to the usage of the word ἑρμηνεύς in V–IV BCE and to the sociocultural context of Asia Minor under the rule of the Achaemenid dynasty.

Keywords: Pigres, ἑρμηνεύς, Cyrus the Younger, Xenophon, ancient interpreters.

Was Pigres really an interpreter¹ to Cyrus the Younger? H. Gehman and C. Wiotte-Franz, who both dedicated their theses to ancient interpreters, as well as many other researchers, would give an affirmative answer to this question.² B. Rochette and Wiotte-Franz even claim that Pigres was a professional interpreter serving Cyrus.³ W. Hoffmann likewise defines him as an interpreter to Cyrus, adding that he needed Pigres to communicate with the Greek mercenary army.⁴ It seems, however, that none of the scholars has previously tried to justify the understanding of the Greek word ἑρμηνεύς as “an interpreter of foreign languages” in relation to Pigres. One of the reasons for this may have been the

¹ From now on I will use the term “interpreter” in the sense of “interpreter of foreign languages” unless specified otherwise.

² This view is favoured by many scholars, see Gehman 1914, 37; Bridgham 1917, 335; Mosley 1971, 6; Franke 1992, 87; Tripodi 1998, 97; Wiotte-Franz 2001, 43–44; Stoneman 2015, 70. The rare exception is Bassett who notes that although Pigres is depicted as ἑρμηνεύς to Cyrus, Xenophon does not mention that Cyrus actually used Pigres as an interpreter. See Bassett 2002, 456.

³ Wiotte-Franz 2001, 199; Rochette 1996, 334. There is, however, no evidence that Pigres or anyone else was a professional interpreter or that there was such a profession in Antiquity in the first place.

⁴ Hoffmann 1950, 1313.

force of the *opinio communis* on allegedly equating, which is commonly implied, Greek ἑρμηνεύς, Latin *interpres* and words for “an interpreter” in several European languages.⁵

Indeed, the modern dictionaries of Ancient Greek (LSJ, GE, DELG, GEW, EDG, Woodhouse) state that the Greek name for an interpreter is ἑρμηνεύς⁶ and in the lexicons to Xenophon, written by E. Crosby and later by J. White, ἑρμηνεύς is clearly explained as an interpreter⁷ which is “an interpreter of foreign languages”. However, it is not entirely true either for the whole corpus of Ancient literature or for Xenophon: the spectrum of meanings of this word is rather broad and it is hard to claim that in every passage ἑρμηνεύς stands for an interpreter of foreign languages; the fact that ἑρμηνεύς can denote all kinds of interpreters and intermediators should be taken into account when we try to determine its connotation within the context. R. Mairs has pointed out that the problem of reconciling different meanings of ἑρμηνεύς has not yet been solved.⁸ There is still a lack of a solid methodology in determining whether the mentioned person is acting as an interpreter or someone else. Without proper discussion on this matter, it is hardly possible to suggest a reasonable hypothesis as to whether Pigres was or was not an interpreter to Cyrus. Although dictionaries provide general information on the potential connotations, the subtleties of the word’s usage in different time frames remain unknown. Hence, to shed some light on the subject and to comprehend what place the connotation “interpreter of foreign languages” takes among others⁹ it seems only reasonable to examine the spectrum of meanings used around Xenophon’s times (V–IV BCE).

Only once do we encounter ἑρμηνεύς in poetry where it denotes an interpreter of poet’s dreams (Pind. *Ol.* 2.83–88). Thrice in tragedies: an interpreter of unclear sayings (Aesch. *Ag.* 1062–1063)¹⁰, an indicator of inner state (Eur. *El.* 332–335) and a temple servant or a messenger (Eur. *IT.* 1302–1303). ἑρμηνεύς is found four times in philosophy: interpreters of laws (Plat. *Leg.* 907d), of texts (Plat. *Th.* 163c), of gods (Plat. *Ion* 534e), of interpreters (Plat. *Ion* 535a). Once we encounter ἑρμηνεύς in Hippocrates where it denotes an indicator of symptoms acquired by the person due to the bad air (Hippoc. *Morb. sacr.* 16.3).

Most of the mentions of ἑρμηνεύς are located in historiography, namely in Herodotus and in Xenophon — there for the first time we see the meaning “an interpreter of foreign languages”. At least in two passages in Herodotus this interpretation of ἑρμηνεύς is beyond

⁵ Namely English, German, French and Italian. In these languages the difference is usually found between interpreters (oral language mediators) and translators (written language translators). Apparently, such distinction makes no sense neither in Greek nor in Latin, since in these languages there are no exact words for “interpreter of foreign languages” or “translator of foreign languages” without other possible connotations. It is possible that there were people who “specialised” in oral or written translations, but it has yet to be researched. The similarities in meaning between ἑρμηνεύς and *interpres* is a rather intricate subject, but would hardly imply the full correspondence in meanings.

⁶ Liddell-Scott 1996, 690; Montanari 2015, 821; Frisk 1960, 563; Chantraine 1999, 373; Beekes 2010, 462; Woodhouse 1972, 452.

⁷ Crosby 1875, 53; White 1896, 85.

⁸ See Mairs 2019, 3.

⁹ An attempt to sketch the spectrum of meanings of ἑρμηνεύς is not new, it has been undertaken by Wiotte-Franz (2001, 7–11) and Rochette (1996, 328–329). These attempts should be revised, since they do not cover the problematic nature of many passages mentioning ἑρμηνεύς. I should note that in my brief overview a few examples of ἑρμηνεύς have been omitted, but merely due to their lesser representativeness for the whole picture.

¹⁰ I admit that ἑρμηνεύς can be interpreted here as “an interpreter of foreign languages”, but given the fact that Cassandra has a history of not being understood mostly due to the obscurity of her speeches, I tend to understand ἑρμηνεύς as “an interpreter of unclear sayings”.

doubt, since it is part of the formula δι' ἑρμηνέως that we usually see in the passages where a special kind of communication is described — between people who are quite remote from each other in relation to language and customs¹¹: for instance, this is how Darius interacts with the Indians (but not with the Greeks (Hdt. 3.38.3–4)), and Scythians interact with Argippaeans (Hdt. 4.24.1).

Other passages of Herodotus with ἑρμηνεύς appear to be much more difficult to interpret. In the first book of *Histories*, prior to the personal conversation between Cyrus the Great and Croesus, Cyrus sends τοὺς ἑρμηνέας to Croesus in order to clarify the words spoken by him (Hdt. 1.86.4), yet afterwards Cyrus and Croesus communicate in private without any intermediators or interpreters (it is stressed in the text that Cyrus sent everyone away for the sake of this conversation). If Cyrus did not need these ἑρμηνέας for interpreting Croesus, what was their function? The situation seems to be identical to the conversation between Darius and Syloson (Hdt. 3.140.3) where οἱ ἑρμηνεῖς play the role of social buffer-intermediators; this fact, of course, does not eliminate the possibility to see them as interpreters, although the context does not state it as clearly as when the formula δι' ἑρμηνέως appears. The human apparatus of the Persian court consisted of many guardians and trusted men at all doors — their trustworthiness and loyalty to the ruler and the supervisor played a much more important role than exact functions.¹² It is quite possible that these οἱ ἑρμηνεῖς were some kind of palace servants easily replaceable at any moment. Our understanding of their functions is, however, highly influenced by the lack of the original sources — many Persian court titles, not to mention their descriptions, are not known either in Aramaic or in Old Persian and almost always we possess only Greek versions of these titles.¹³ Hence, our actual understanding of ἑρμηνεύς in these passages is largely dependent on the way the sociocultural context is interpreted. In the second book of *Histories* there are three other mentions of ἑρμηνεύς where the sense of it is seemingly always “an interpreter of foreign languages”. In one of the passages some ἑρμηνεύς explains to Herodotus what is written on the outer wall¹⁴ of the Pyramid of Cheops (Hdt. 2.125.6), but who this person actually was remains unclear. In another passage Herodotus tells us a story about the initiative of Psammetichus I to raise a generation of ἑρμηνεῖς (Hdt. 2.154.2), but the details of this story, along with the misleading “seven classes” of Egyptian society (Hdt. 2.164.1), raise a lot of questions as well.¹⁵

¹¹ I agree here with Rochette (2000, 26) who states that the Greek δι' ἑρμηνέως is entirely equivalent to the Latin *per interpretem*. There are many contexts proving that the formula δι' ἑρμηνέως implies some probable difficulties in communication (Plut. *Vit. Cat. Mai.* 12.5, Plut. *Ant.* 27.4, Diod. Sic. 23.16.1 etc.), just as when the formula *per interpretem* is present in the text.

¹² Briant 2002, 258.

¹³ Briant 2002, 507–510. As the closest to the job of interpreter in the Near East, Greenfield (1985, 707–708) sees the word *sepīru*, a semitic title for royal scribes/secretaries/translators. To my mind, truer would be the different variations of *targumannu/turgumannu*, found in many languages of the Ancient Near East. On discussion of this word see Soden 1989, 353–357. Obviously, it is known more about the usage of the Greek ἑρμηνεύς than *targumannu/turgumannu*, that's why they are hardly comparable to an extent that would clarify their similarities and differences.

¹⁴ Most of the outer walls have been covered with various religious texts and, as many researchers agree, the translation suggested to Herodotus was a mere phantasy of ἑρμηνεύς. For the detailed discussion of this passage see Lloyd 1993, 70–71; Adrados, Shrader 1992, 448; Legrand 1944, 44; the alternative hypothesis is that this inscription was made much later, on the discussion see Lloyd: 1993, 69–71; Asheri, Lloyd, Corcella 2007, 332.

¹⁵ On this problematic subject see Lloyd 1993, 182–185; Asheri, Lloyd, Corcella 2007, 363–364; Adrados, Shrader 1992, 459–460; Legrand 1944, 183.

In *Anabasis* ἑρμηνεύς is found eleven times: eight times as a separate word (including two times along with Pigres) and three times as a part of aforementioned formula δι' ἑρμηνέως. The latter describes the negotiations with various folks rather different from the Greeks: with Carduchi (Xen. *Anab.* 4.2.18), with the comarch of one Armenian village (4.5.34) and with Tissaphernes during the first negotiations (2.3.17). Three of the other eight passages definitively mention an interpreter of foreign languages: in the second book during the negotiations with Tissaphernes (2.5.35), in the fourth when the army advanced through Armenia (4.5.10) and in the seventh an interpreter to Thracian king Seuthes is mentioned (7.6.8–9). In other passages the context does not always imply any language mediation and the meaning of ἑρμηνεύς is less clear: in the fourth book Tiriathes, satrap of the West Armenia, sends τὸν ἑρμηνέα to the Greeks to offer negotiations (4.5.10, 4.5.34); Xenophon does the same when he dispatches τὸν ἑρμηνέα to the Thracian king Seuthes, to express his desire for a meeting (7.2.19); later Seuthes sends τὸν ἑρμηνέα to Xenophon asking him and his army to stay in his country (7.6.43).¹⁶ Here again we face a predicament: ἑρμηνεύς could be understood as an interpreter of foreign languages, a messenger or an intermediary.

To sum up, ancient authors of V–IV BCE provide us with the following spectrum of meanings: interpreter of unclear sayings (Pind. *Ol.* 2.83–88; Aesch. *Ag.* 1062–1063; Plat. *Tht.* 163c; Plat. *Ion* 535a), of gods (Plat. *Ion.* 534e), of laws (Plat. *Leg.* 907d) or of foreign languages (Hdt. 3.38.3–4, 4.24.1; Xen. *Anab.* 2.3.17, 4.2.18, 4.5.34), intermediary (Hdt. 1.86.4, 3.140.3), messenger (Eur. *IT.* 1302–1303), indicator (Eur. *El.* 332–335; Hippoc. *Morb. sacr.* 16.3).¹⁷ However, in some cases the meaning is not clear and the interpretation of the ἑρμηνεύς should be suggested according to the context where the word resides. It is also obvious that “interpreter of foreign languages” is neither a unique nor a dominant meaning of the word ἑρμηνεύς.

Prior to the examination of the passages with Pigres, it seems essential to give fair consideration to the figure of Cyrus the Younger. Before the campaign against his brother and back when his father was still alive, Cyrus ruled over many regions of Asia Minor (Xen. *Anab.* 1.9.7) and, particularly importantly, during the Peloponnesian War the Lacedaemonian state supported Cyrus (*Hell.* 3.1.1–2) and Cyrus supported Lacedaemonians (Thuc. 2.65.12). In the first two books of Xenophon's *Hellenica* we are told that Cyrus acquired many friends among Lacedaemonians and their allies; he had many ξένοι and φίλοι.¹⁸ Could he communicate with them personally? Whether Cyrus had any knowledge of Greek is a problematic issue, since Xenophon and other authors do not express it straightforwardly. However, in

¹⁶ It should be noted that Xenophon, when he wishes to underline the difficulty in interacting with some people and nations, always mentions a language mediator: in the fourth book one of the soldiers helps the army to communicate with his nationals (Xen. *Anab.* 4.8.4), in the fifth book Timesithius (5.4.4), being a proxy of the army of Mossynoeci, translates for Xenophon and the Greek army.

¹⁷ In the later literary sources, the spectrum of meanings remains pretty much the same. It should be noted that even more meanings are found in the papyri where, as it seems, every single mediator can be named ἑρμηνεύς; examples of such papyri: P.Cair.Zen.I. 59065, P.Cair.Zen.III. 59394, P.Ryl.IV. 563. For an interesting and extensive discussion of these and other papyri see Mairs 2019. In the inscriptions, given its specifics, it is often impossible to say who was ἑρμηνεύς; for some typical examples see IGUR. 567.B. 3, CIRB 698, CIRB 1053.

¹⁸ On the topic see Rop 2019, 70–78. I disagree here with Tripodi (1998, 98) who suggested that Cyrus would speak with others only in Persian in order to maintain his dominance. All our sources indicate that Cyrus depended on mutual responsibilities of allied sides and all relationships between him and the Greeks were built upon that, see Rop 2019, 65–70.

the first book of *Anabasis* Cyrus interacts personally with Greek commanders (Xen. *Anab.* 1.4.11–12), Greek soldiers (1.3, 20; 1.4.13, 1.5.15), Clearchus (1.7.9–10) and Xenophon (1.8.15–17). Xenophon consequently points out the desire of Cyrus to maintain and cherish the good spirit of Greek commanders and soldiers. There is good reason to suppose that Cyrus himself possessed some fair knowledge of Greek and could interact with the Greeks on his own.¹⁹ It seems to be true that owing to this ability and to previously formed allegiances he had an opportunity to raise an army for the military campaign.

Apart from Greeks and Persians, there are a few other nationalities mentioned: two Egyptians (Tamos and Glos, father and son), two Cilicians (Syennesis and Epyaxa, a royal couple) and Pigres (his ethnic origin is discussed further below): the position and functions of Tamos, a military commander, and of two Cilicians are perfectly clear, while the same could not be said about Glos, the son of Tamos, and about Pigres. In the first book of *Anabasis* there are only a few people mentioned by name: it seems reasonable to suggest that if Xenophon tells the story this way, then the fate of this person will be revealed further in the narrative or the described events would somehow imply it. All the knowledge possessed about Pigres is what has been narrated by Xenophon²⁰, and it is very little. Where did Pigres come from? Were his parents or relatives some officers in the Persian administration? How close were they to Darius II, Parysatis, Artaxerxes II, Cyrus himself or to other members of the royal family? How did he happen to come into the service of Cyrus? How close was he personally to Cyrus? Due to the deficiency of our sources, only the last of these questions may be answered, and this question seems to hold the key to understanding whether Pigres was an interpreter to Cyrus.

Three passages mentioning Pigres (Xen. *Anab.* 1.2.17; 1.5.7; 1.8.12) are located in the first book of *Anabasis* and in two of them we encounter the word ἑρμηνεύς.²¹ It seems to me that three points have to be kept in mind while reading these excerpts: 1) the sense of the passage that is being analysed; 2) possible interpretations of the word ἑρμηνεύς; 3) the general sociocultural context of the described events. Pigres is firstly mentioned when Xenophon describes the review of the troops that Cyrus organised for Epyaxa, a female Cilician and a lawful wife of Syennesis:

ἐπειδὴ δὲ πάντας παρήλασε, στήσας τὸ ἄρμα πρὸ τῆς φάλαγγος μέσης, πέμψας Πίγρητα τὸν ἑρμηνέα παρὰ τοὺς στρατηγούς τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐκέλευσε προβαλέσθαι τὰ ὄπλα καὶ ἐπιχωρῆσαι ὄλην τὴν φάλαγγα (Xen. *Anab.* 1.2.17).

“When he had driven past them all, he halted his chariot in front of the centre of the phalanx, and sending his interpreter Pigres to the generals of the Greeks, gave orders that the troops should advance arms and the phalanx move forward in a body” (transl. C. L. Brownson).

Scholars usually cite this passage as allegedly indicating the presence of an interpreter. But what does ἑρμηνεύς stand for in Πίγρητα τὸν ἑρμηνέα?²² In order to understand this,

¹⁹ Rop 2019, 71–72.

²⁰ There is no mention of Pigres in other sources on the life of Cyrus the Younger (Diodorus, Plutarchus, Photius etc.).

²¹ Gehman (1914, 37) and Bassett (2002, 456) suggest that we also have to look into the passages where Pigres could be present. Although theoretically this idea seems productive, I was not able to find the passages where the presence of Pigres may have been implied.

²² I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for the thought that Xenophon’s choice of words, “Πίγρητα τὸν ἑρμηνέα”, leaves an impression that Pigres could be considered by the Greeks as some official. I briefly discuss this possibility elsewhere in the text.

one has to imagine the potential actions of Pigres, of which there are two: firstly, he receives a message from Cyrus that is to be delivered to the Greeks, and, secondly, he carries out his task and delivers the message to the other party.

It is obvious that Cyrus would have addressed Pigres in a language that they both had an active command of. The languages of Cyrus were Old Persian, his mother tongue,²³ and, quite possibly, Aramaic and Greek. Speaking of Pigres, it is generally and reasonably thought that he was a Carian,²⁴ so Carian supposedly was his mother tongue, and as he has been dispatched to interact with the Greeks, it is legitimate to assume he had some Greek knowledge.²⁵ In addition, it is also quite likely that he knew some Aramaic, a widely used language in Asia Minor and the Near East since 10-9 BCE,²⁶ and even some Old Persian, Cyrus' mother tongue — all this makes Pigres trilingual or even quadrilingual. Wiotte-Franz states that the only language in which Cyrus could have addressed Pigres is Aramaic, since he could not use Greek due to his social status and prestige.²⁷ The main objection to this statement is that we should not confuse political means used by Achaemenid rulers for administrative unification with daily communication: the historians agree that Aramaic in Asia Minor was a language of administration and official documentation rather than a vernacular²⁸ and with equal success Cyrus would have communicated with Pigres in Greek, Old Persian or Aramaic.²⁹ Moreover, by keeping in mind how Cyrus has been tied to the Greeks by numerous bonds, it is difficult to see how speaking the Greek language would damage the social status of Cyrus and jeopardise his position among the Persians.

How exactly Pigres transmits the message is quite hazy, though the context provides an overall impression that his job has been merely to give a signal — a simple task that could be performed without demonstrating any language skills. Given this fact it is hard to agree with Rochette who suggests that Cyrus dispatches Pigres to communicate with the Greek commanders as an interpreter.³⁰ Lendle suggests that Pigres assembled Greek commanders to give them a message,³¹ but the whole context implies that the performance

²³ On this topic see Folmer 2011, 591.

²⁴ There are two facts proving this assumption: firstly, this name is frequently documented throughout the South-West part of Asia Minor and has the common Anatolian root *pikre-/pikra-*, so the onomastics alone would allow us to see Pigres as a Carian or a Lycian or a Lydian or another Anatolian national. On the topic see Adiego 2006, 352; Unwin 2017, 32. Secondly, there are a few other individuals named Pigres who are known by scholars as Carians. Carians are known to hold some positions in the Persian administration, see Unwin 2017, 42–51.

²⁵ Apart from the context of the first cited passage, it should be noted that many Carians possessed some knowledge of Greek due to inevitable contacts with the Ionian and Doric colonies. There are, for instance, two famous Carians who benefited from their language knowledge: Mys (Hdt. 8.133) and Gaulites (Thuc. 8.85.2). On the topic see Unwin, 2017, 37–39; Hoffmann 1950, 1313.

²⁶ On the use and distribution of Aramaic in Asia Minor in V-IV BCE see Greenfield 1985, 698–713; Folmer 2011, 587–598; Gzella 2015, 195–198; Folmer 2020, 386–391.

²⁷ Wiotte-Franz 2001, 43.

²⁸ On this problematic topic see Folmer 2020, 386–390. Our knowledge of the use of Aramaic in V-IV BCE in Asia Minor (and in the Achaemenid Empire in general) is mostly based on the bi-/tri-/quadrilingual inscriptions, see Gzella 2015, 195–198. The complex multilingual environment of Asia Minor of the earlier period, in which Aramaic was never present as much as in the Near East (Northern Syria, Palestine, Babylonia etc.), allows us to suggest that as a medium of communication local languages were used, along with the Greek in south-western part of Asia Minor.

²⁹ Although some scholars claim that Aramaic was not extensively used in Asia Minor, see Greenfield 1985, 702; Gzella 2015, 196.

³⁰ Rochette 1996, 334.

³¹ Lendle 1995, 23.

expected of the Greek phalanx is a very typical practice for them, and as such there would not be a need for such a gathering. What the context does not imply is active participation of an interpreter of foreign languages, since there is no evidence that Pigres had to explain something to the Greeks. It seems more likely that Pigres has delivered an order from Cyrus succinctly.

The only fact that the above cited passage certainly contains is that Pigres stays by Cyrus' side while Cyrus is commanding his subjects, and Pigres is entrusted with conveying a message to the Greeks. Therefore, the passage cannot be used as evidence to proclaim Pigres an interpreter of foreign languages. The word *ἐρμηνεύς* appears to have a meaning "a messenger"³² and there is another proof justifying this understanding: the same way as Pigres, Cyrus uses Glos sending him with a message to the army of Menon (Xen. *Anab.* 1.4.16). Glos is not defined as *ἐρμηνεύς*, although the situation is clearly identical, as has been noted by Lendle.³³ In his commentary to *Anabasis* Lendle claims that Glos has been used by Cyrus as Pigres due to his knowledge of Greek,³⁴ though Xenophon does not qualify Glos as *ἐρμηνεύς* as he does Pigres. What is the difference then between Pigres and Glos? Despite the rather common opinion, the text does not prove that either Glos or Pigres were interpreters of foreign languages. What the text does confirm is that Glos, the same as Pigres, could be understood as a highly-ranked messenger from Cyrus. While any details of Pigres' biography are unknown to us, we do know some facts about Glos: as has been anteriorly noted, he was a son of Tamos (Xen. *Anab.* 2.1.3) who was one of the trustworthy commanders (Xen. *Anab.* 1.4.2) and, if Diodorus is to be believed, friends of Cyrus (Diod.Sic. 14.19.6) — it might imply that in the social hierarchy of the Persian society Glos may have been rather close to Cyrus.³⁵ I agree with Lendle's assessment of the similarity of Glos' and Pigres' social position,³⁶ more so because of the information that can be extracted out of the second passage mentioning Pigres:

καὶ δὴ ποτε στενοχωρίας καὶ πηλοῦ φανέντος ταῖς ἀμάξαις δυσπορεύτου ἐπέστη ὁ Κύρος σὺν τοῖς περὶ αὐτὸν ἀρίστοις καὶ εὐδαιμονεστάτοις καὶ ἔταξε Γλοῦν καὶ Πίγηρα λαβόντας τοῦ βαρβαρικοῦ στρατοῦ συνεκβιβάζειν τὰς ἀμάξας (Xen. *Anab.* 1.5.7).

"Once in particular, when they came upon a narrow, muddy place which was hard for the wagons to get through, Cyrus halted with his train of nobles and dignitaries and ordered Glos and Pigres to take some of the barbarian troops and help to pull the wagons out." (Transl. C. L. Brownson.)

The whole scene is militarily picturesque: Cyrus, traversing a swampy terrain σὺν τοῖς περὶ αὐτὸν ἀρίστοις καὶ εὐδαιμονεστάτοις, has instructed Pigres and Glos together to assemble a troop and push the carts through the swamp; when they fail to do so, the noble and notable Persians, who happened to be nearby, abandoned whatever they were doing and joined them (Xen. *Anab.* 1.5.7–8). It has been shown clearly in *Anabasis* that the close circle of Cyrus is always by his side and eats from his hand. Pigres and Glos seem to have belonged to this circle. Cyrus entrusts Glos and Pigres with the command and

³² Wiotte-Franz (2001, 43) recognises this function of Pigres, but claims that he used the time of going between Cyrus and the Greeks "um die Wörter in Ruhe zu überlegen". To my mind, the simple message sent by Cyrus, from one military man to others like him, was barely hard to transmit.

³³ Lendle 1995, 42.

³⁴ Ibid. 42.

³⁵ On the detailed biography of Glos see: Ruzicka 1999, 22–43.

³⁶ Lendle 1995, 34.

organisation of an important endeavour for the better advancement of the army — this task seems appropriate for an officer with some military experience and hardly a task for an interpreter or a messenger. Thus, this passage allows us to make an assumption that even if Pigres has served as an interpreter to Cyrus, we may argue with confidence that the range of his functions was far more extensive.

The last mention of Pigres occurs in the following context:

καὶ ἐν τούτῳ Κῦρος παρελαύνων αὐτὸς σὺν Πίγρητι τῷ ἑρμηνεῖ καὶ ἄλλοις τρισὶν ἢ τέτταρσι τῷ Κλεάρχῳ ἐβόα ἄγειν τὸ στράτευμα κατὰ μέσον τὸ τῶν πολεμίων, ὅτι ἐκεῖ βασιλεὺς εἶη: κὰν τοῦτ', ἔφη, νικῶμεν, πάνθ' ἡμῖν πεποιήται (Xen. *Anab.* 1.8.12).

“At this moment Cyrus rode along the line, attended only by Pigres, his interpreter, and three or four others, and shouted to Clearchus to lead his army against the enemy’s centre, for the reason that the King was stationed there; ‘and if,’ he said, ‘we are victorious there, our whole task is accomplished.’” (Transl. C. L. Brownson.)

As follows from the quoted lines, Cyrus himself addresses Clearchos giving him an order to lead the Greeks towards the middle of the enemy army (1.8.12) and, as it has been rightly noticed by Franke, it is not clear if Cyrus uses Pigres for linguistic purposes.³⁷ It seems that Xenophon merely states that Pigres was by the side of Cyrus right before the battle. Cyrus rides σὺν Πίγρητι τῷ ἑρμηνεῖ καὶ ἄλλοις τρισὶν ἢ τέτταρσι in front of his army and again, Pigres is among the few by the side of Cyrus: we may surmise that the social position of Pigres and of others, presumably noble Persians, had to be equal — similarly as in the passage quoted above. What if the presence of Pigres in this company is not a coincidence? Xenophon in *Cyropaedia* mentions that the functioning of the Palace of the Great King served as the model for other royal courts (8.6.10) and it seems likely that Cyrus the Younger also organised his court this way. In the usual circle of Persian kings (and also, logically, of princes and satrapes) only loyal, devoted subjects would have been admitted³⁸: aside from the Greek commanders, for whom he cared (Xen. *Anab.* 1.1.5) and with many of whom he was connected by the bonds of hospitality (1.1–2, 1.3.3), he has had in his inner circle οἱ φίλοι, οἱ συγγενεῖς (1.6.10), Πέρσαι οἱ ἄριστοι τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν ἑπτὰ (1.6.4), different ὁμοτράπεζοι accompanying him during the campaign (1.5.7–8; 1.5.15; 1.6.4), on the battlefield (1.8.25–26), where ὀκτῶ οἱ ἄριστοι τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν died with him (1.8.27–29).³⁹ Perhaps Pigres likewise died fighting beside him, since Xenophon mentions that all who were truly close to Cyrus have died with him on the battlefield (1.9.30–31). However, nothing of Pigres’ fate is known to us.

Now I would like to make a conclusion on the hypothesis on whether Pigres was an interpreter to Cyrus by collating everything that is known of him. It is likely that Pigres was a Carian national and, most probably, multilingual. The “title” ἑρμηνεύς alone, as has been shown in literary examples from V–IV BCE, can define different kinds of interpreters, not necessarily those who translated from and into foreign languages — only in some passages we can argue that this is the case. The traditional view seems to be largely based on the first

³⁷ Franke 1992, 88.

³⁸ We would be able to understand his role better if we knew whether he was present at the Cyrus’ hunts and how close he sat to him during the dinners, but it is unfortunately unknown. On the topic see Briant 2002, 320–330. On the role of one’s position at the king’s table see Ibid. 286–297.

³⁹ By Cyrus’s side probably also were other typical representatives of the Persian court. See Briant 2002, 255–301; Podrazik 2019, 95–111.

mention of Pigres where he allegedly communicates with the Greeks. However, as has been previously noted, Cyrus could communicate with the Greeks on his own; if this was true, one question inevitably arises: if Pigres really was an interpreter to Cyrus, what are the possible scenarios where his abilities could have been used apart from in communication with the Greeks? We might suggest that if Xenophon really meant an interpreter of foreign languages, we would see in the text something that strongly confirms it.

In the text of *Anabasis* Pigres is described as a person that Cyrus kept close and considered trustworthy, though the evidence that his main skill was one of an interpreter is quite vague. Somehow he managed to gain a certain footing in Cyrus' inner circle. Hence, he could do anything Cyrus would ask: carry out the message (1.2.17), assemble troops and solve the problem with the advancing of an army (1.5.7), accompany Cyrus during the campaign and maybe even on the battlefield (1.8.12) or anything else, since all tasks seem to be compatible with each other. This observation, along with the assumption that the Persian background of the story has been rightly interpreted, might lead to an idea that the particular functions of Pigres are not relevant, and that being an interpreter on occasion is just one of them. It is clear that the social position of Pigres is revealed as more significant than the position of a mere interpreter — as the most evident proof for this serves the passage where Pigres is mentioned without the title *ἑρμηνεύς* (1.5.7) and entrusted with the task which is more suitable to a highly-ranked officer than to an interpreter; the task is definitively a challenging one and it does not leave an impression of some simple assignment that every interpreter could perform. Xenophon mentions Pigres thrice and, apparently, this fact might underline the importance of this person to Cyrus and to the whole story. The question is, why did Xenophon use the term *ἑρμηνεύς* to describe Pigres? I argue that it was the best Greek word that Xenophon could come up with by describing Pigres: in many cases *ἑρμηνεύς* denotes a mediator and this word could point out Pigres' ability to be a trusted assistant to Cyrus. If we see it this way, the use of *ἑρμηνεύς* is completely justifiable; however, the title *ἑρμηνεύς* alone cannot be a sufficient proof that Pigres was just an interpreter to Cyrus.

References

- Adrados F.R., Shrader C. (ed., comm.) *Historia. Libro II Euterpe*. Madrid, Editorial Gredos, 1992.
- Adiego I.J. *The Carian Language*. Leiden, Brill, 2006.
- Asheri D., Lloyd A., Corcella A. *A Commentary on Herodotus Books I–IV*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Bassett S.R. Innocent Victims of Perjurers Betrayed? The Arrest of the Generals in Xenophon's "Anabasis". *The Classical Quarterly, New Series* 2002, 52 (2), 447–461.
- Beekes R, van Beek L. *ἑρμηνεύς*, in: *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*. Leiden — Boston, Brill, 2010, 462.
- Briant P. *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*. Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, 2002.
- Brownson C.L. (ed.) *Xenophon: Anabasis Books I–VII*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1960.
- Bridgham J.M. Xenophon's *Anabasis* i. 8. 13. *The Classical Journal* 1917, 12 (5), 334–35.
- Chantraine P. *ἑρμηνεύς*, in: *Dictionnaire etymologique de la langue grecque: histoire des mots*. Paris, Klincksieck, 1999, 373.
- Crosby A. *A Lexicon to Xenophon's Anabasis*. New York and Chicago, Potter Ainsworth & Co, 1875.
- Folmer M. Imperial Aramaic as Administrative Language of the Achaemenid Period, in: M. P. Streck, S. Weinger, G. Khan, J.C.E. Watson (eds) *The Semitic Languages: An International Handbook*. Berlin — New York, De Gruyter Mouton, 2011, 587–598.
- Folmer M. Aramaic as Lingua Franca, in: R. Hasselbach-Andee (ed.) *A Companion to Ancient Near Eastern Languages*. New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, 2020, 373–399.

- Franke P.R. Dolmetschen in hellenistischer Zeit, in: C. W. Müller, K. Sier, J. Werner (eds.) *Zum Umgang mit fremden Sprachen in der griechisch-römischen Antike*. Stuttgart, Steiner, 1992, 85–96.
- Frisk H. ἑρμηνεύς, in: *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Heidelberg, Carl Winter, 1960, 563.
- Gehman H. *Interpreters of foreign languages among the ancients*. Lancaster, Intelligencer Printing Co, 1914.
- Greenfield J. C. Aramaic in the Achaemenian Empire, in: I. Gershevitch (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 2. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, 698–713.
- Gzella H. *A Cultural History of Aramaic*. Leiden, Brill, 2015.
- Hoffmann W. Pigres, in: *RE* 1950, XX/2, 1313–1316.
- Legrand E. (ed., comm.) *Histoires. Livre II. Euterpe*. Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1944.
- Lendle O. *Kommentar zu Xenophons Anabasis: Bücher 1–7*. Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995.
- Liddell H. G., Scott R., Jones H. S. ἑρμηνεύς, in: *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford, Clarendon, 1996, 690.
- Lloyd A. B. *Herodotus, Book II*. Leiden, Brill, 1993.
- Montanari F. ἑρμηνεύς, in: *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*. Leiden, Brill, 2015, 821.
- Mosley D. J. Greeks, Barbarians, Language and Contact. *Ancient Society*, 1971, 2, 1–6.
- Mairs R. Hermēneis in the Documentary Record from Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: interpreters, translators and mediators in a bilingual society. *Journal of Ancient History*, 2019, 7 (2), 1–53.
- Podrazik M. The Court of Cyrus the Younger in Anatolia: some remarks. *Studies in Ancient Art and Civilization* 2019, 23, 95–111.
- Rochette B. Πιστοὶ ἑρμηνεῖς. La traduction orale en Grèce. *Revue des Études Grecques* 1996, 109 (2), 325–347.
- Rochette B. Remarques sur le vocabulaire grec de la traduction. *Revue belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 2002, 80 (1), 25–34.
- Rop J. *Greek Military Service in the Ancient Near East, 401–330 BCE*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Ruzicka S. Glos, Son of Tamos, and the End of the Cypriot War. *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 1999, 48 (1), 23–43.
- Stoneman R. How Many Miles to Babylon? Maps, Guides, Roads, and Rivers in the Expeditions of Xenophon and Alexander. *Greece & Rome* 2015, 62 (1), 60–74.
- Tripodi B. Parlare con l'altro. La comunicazione verbale e il ruolo dell'interprete nell'Anabasi di Senofonte, in: E. A. Arslan (ed.) *La parola delle immagini e delle forme di scrittura. Modi e tecniche della comunicazione nel mondo antico*. Messina, Dip. Scienze dell'Antichità, 1998, 93–110.
- Unwin N. C. *Caria and Crete in Antiquity*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- White J. W., Morgan M. H. *An Illustrated Dictionary to Xenophon's Anabasis*. Boston, Ginn & Company, 1896.
- Wiotte-Franz C. *Hermeneus Und Interpres: Zum Dolmetscherwesen in Der Antike*. Saarbrücken, Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag, 2001.
- Soden W. Dolmetscher und Dolmetschen im alten Orient, in: L. Cagni, H.-P. Müller (eds) *Sprache, Geschichte und Religion Babyloniens: Gesammelte Aufsätze*. Neapel, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989, 351–357.
- Woodhouse S. C. ἑρμηνεύς, in: *English-Greek Dictionary: A vocabulary of the Attic language*. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972, 452.

Received: 12.09.2021

Accepted: 05.04.2022