

“There is no document of civilization that is not also a document of barbarism:” Borders and Boundary Objects in the Croesus *Logos* and Arkady Martine’s *Teixcalaan* Duology

Herodotus’ narrative quickly begins to complicate the idea of a simple opposition between the foreigners and the Greeks (Harrison 2020; Hartog 1990). A major portion of Book 1 is focalized through Croesus. Croesus is simultaneously famous for his wealth and infamous for his misunderstanding of a Delphic prophecy. While he may be more successful in his attempts to control events at a *human* level, once he enters the liminal area between the human and the divine, his approach falls short. Croesus’ hubris prevents him from perceiving his own downfall until it is too late; he remains stuck looking at just one potential future even as his present circumstances are crumbling around him.

In this, the Lydian king resembles an inverted version of Walter Benjamin’s angel of history. The angel is born ceaselessly into the future, able only to gaze upon the past, while Croesus is stuck staring at the future in which he never fails, unaware of the past as it catches up to him. Both have a certain tragic air. This is fitting in the context of Herodotus given his interest in understanding the major conflict of his lifetime, particularly for an examination of the Croesus *logos* and the failure of communication between Croesus and Solon.

Spacefaring empires are a staple trope of science fiction. There has recently been a proliferation of novels, novellas, and short stories that interrogate and challenge long-standing and unexamined assumptions about the form(s) such empires take, including Banks’ *Culture*, Scalzi’s *Interdependency*, Leckie’s *Imperial Radch*, Dickinson’s *Masquerade*, and de Bodard’s *Xuya* universes. My paper focuses on Arkady Martine’s *Teixcalaan* duology, whose first book was published in the spring of 2019 and the second in the fall of 2020.

Due in large part to Martine's work on Byzantine history, Teixcalaan bears many of the hallmarks of that (in)famously bureaucratic empire. Teixcalaan defines itself in much the same way that empires generally define(d) themselves: creation of a barbarian other, and composition of imperial cultural forms including literature (Weller 2014, 2016). Martine's novels do not have any direct ties to the Croesus *logos*, but they can nonetheless reflect, refract, and illuminate elements of Herodotus' text. I shall argue that the experience of Martine's protagonist as a foreign emissary, in the different circumstances of both novels, parallels and interrogates some of the power dynamics inherent in the Croesus *logos*.

Herodotus' *Histories* and particularly the Croesus *logos* shares with the duology an interest in communication and translation. The theoretical concept of a boundary object is key to my interpretation and analysis of speech acts in these texts. The object can be broadly defined as information used in different ways by different communities for collaborative work through scales (Star 2010). Boundary objects are weakly structured in common use, and become strongly structured in individual use; they have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them function as a means of translation. Such objects are not neutral and always already exist within, shape, and are affected by power relations (Huvila 2011). Herodotus' conversation between Solon and Croesus on happiness (ὄλβια) stages *failed* communication (Munson 2005). Martine offers alternative possibilities in which linguistic boundaries are recognized, articulated, and worked through collaboratively. Boundary objects and associated questions of language, vocality, and the borders between them bridge the Croesus *logos* and the Teixcalaan duology. My analysis illuminates aspects of the Croesus *logos* of mistranslation and sensitizes readers to elements of alienation through a close examination of resonances with the Teixcalaan series.

Works Cited

- Harrison, Thomas. 2020. "Reinventing the Barbarian." *Classical Philology* 115: 139–63.
- Hartog, François. 1990. *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*. Translated by Janet Lloyd. The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics, Vol. 5. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Huvila, Isto. 2011. "The Politics of Boundary Objects: Hegemonic Interventions and the Making of a Document." *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 62 (12): 2528–39.
- Munson, Rosaria Vignolo. 2005. *Black Doves Speak: Herodotus and the Languages of Barbarians*. Hellenic Studies 9. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Star, Susan Leigh. 2010. "This Is Not a Boundary Object: Reflections on the Origin of a Concept." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 35 (5): 601–17.
- Weller, AnnaLinden. 2014. "Imagining Pre-Modern Imperialism: The Letters of Byzantine Imperial Agents Outside the Metropole." Dissertation, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.
- . 2016. "Marrying the Mongol Khans: Byzantine Imperial Women and the Diplomacy of Religious Conversion in the 13th and 14th Centuries." *Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 2: 177–200.