The Herodotos Project:
Identifying and Mapping Ancient Peoples and Languages

WHAT?
An ongoing project, based at Ohio State with connections to other institutions, to develop a catalogue with identification and mapping of the ancient peoples, their languages and customs as presented in Herodotos, and ultimately other ancient sources (inscriptions, Thucydides, Strabo, FGH, Stephanus of Byzantium, etc.) This may be extended into a visual/mapping project including Greek dialects as well as languages of the ancient world.

WHY?
Gathering data into a single database to document ancient languages and peoples, providing information on language death, language contact, and other linguistic phenomena.

VALUE OF HERODOTUS:
Although the languages attested in Herodotus have not been catalogued or mapped up to now, recent scholarship has emphasized his thematization of language. Where other ancient authors tend to represent foreign languages stereotypically (Colvin, 1999; Lejeune 1948), Herodotus shows an unusual interest in languages Greeks stigmatized as barbarian. Harrison (1998), Daroca (1992), Holman (2011), Gera (2003), Mopurgo Davies (1987ab), Woodard (1997), Mosley (1971) and Werner (1989) look to Herodotus as a source for understanding Greek thinking on language and dialect. Munson (2005) has shown that for Herodotus barbarian languages have their own intrinsic value. Linguistic diversity and language contact are Herodotean themes.

LANGUAGE DEATH:
Pelasgian, the language of a pre-Greek people who transmitted the names of the gods from the Egyptians to Greece—while conceding autochthony to the Athenians, Herodotus makes them descendants of Hellenized non-Greek speaking Pelasgians. Herodotus attests the survival of certain Pelasgian peoples such as the Aegialians in Sicyon.

CONTACT LANGUAGES:
— the Gelonian language resulted from contact of the originally Greek-speaking Gelonians with their neighbors the Budini; farmers, apparently living on the Don, they maintained Greek religion and customs while altering their language. — The Sauromatae, a nomadic culture notable for the high status of women, living east of the Don, developed their own language, an ungrammatical form of Scythian, by contact with the Amazons 4.57. — Originally emigrants from Egypt and Ethiopia, the Ammonians spoke a hybrid language of Egyptian and Ethiopic.

LANGUAGE OBSERVATIONS:
The language of the Garamantes included bat-like squeaks. The Atarantes were a tribe of Elephantine on the Red Sea, served as interpreters for Cambyses to the Ethiopians.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES:
• Is Herodotus reliable as a source of information?
• Language observations in the Histories are scattered and impressionistic
• Most ethnonyms have little or no mention of language at all—how many of these groups had separate languages, or dialects of Greek?
• Some of the groups he mentions are clearly unreal/mythological, e.g. the one-eyed people (such as the Arima

How?
Surveying texts and digital resources for Herodotus, other ancient authors, and inscriptions, with the help of NER (Named Entity Recognition), an algorithm developed for this project for Latin and now Greek

Who?
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PROJECT SPONSORS:
• The OSU College of Arts and Humanities
• Linguist List (linguistlist.org)
• National Endowment for the Humanities