

Strabo's *Barbarophonoi* (14.2.28 C 661-3): A Note*

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The closest Strabo ever gets to a definition of the term *βάρβαρος* occurs unexpectedly in a long passage of book 14 of the *Geography*, dealing with the Ionian coast (14.2.28 C 661-3). This section is well known and is generally cited in discussions of this word and its evolution.¹

οἶμαι δέ, τὸ βάρβαρον κατ' ἀρχὰς ἐκπεφωνῆσθαι οὕτως κατ' ὀνοματοποιίαν ἐπὶ τῶν δυσκεφόρων καὶ σκληρῶς καὶ τραχέως λαλούντων.

I suppose that the word 'barbarian' was at first uttered onomatopoeically in reference to people who enunciated words only with difficulty and talked harshly and raucously.²

Here the geographer stresses only linguistic criteria in his analysis of this ethnic concept. It is not by chance that he emphasizes language, for what triggers his long treatment is the Homeric *hapax legomenon* *βαρβαρόφωνοι*, used of the Asiatic Carians in the catalogue of Trojan ships: Μάσθλης³ αὐτῶν Καρῶν ἡγήσατο βαρβαρόφωνων | οἳ Μίλητον ἔχον (*Il.* 2.867-8) 'Masthles in turn led the Carians, *barbarophonoi* (of barbarian speech or voice), who held Miletus'.⁴

* I am deeply indebted to Dr Deborah Gera for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper and to the anonymous readers and the editorial board of this journal for valuable suggestions.

¹ E.g. Eustathius, 367.25ff. (Van der Valk 1971, 578-9), where he, as elsewhere, calls Strabo ὁ Γεωγράφος; H. Windisch, 'βάρβαρος', *TDNT* I, 1933, 546-7; T.J. Haarhoff, *The Stranger at the Gate*, Oxford 1948, 51; W. Speyer, 'Barbar' in: *RAC* I, 818-19; T. Long, *Barbarians in Greek Comedy*, Illinois 1986, 130 — to mention but a few.

² All translations of Strabo in this article are taken from Loeb Classical Library.

³ In Homeric MSS *Νάστης* is to be found.

⁴ In one of the Homeric MSS. (T, of the 11th century) the reading *βαρβαρόφωνων* is also found at *Il.* 14.512 in place of *καρπεροθύμων*, said of the Mysians.

In keeping with his usual practice throughout the *Geography*, Strabo makes his point in opposition to one of his scholarly predecessors.⁵ In this case, Thucydides. The Athenian historian claimed that Homer had no knowledge of the term 'barbarians' because the Hellenes were not as yet distinguished from them by one single distinctive name (Thuc. 1.3.3). Strabo sets out to contradict this view twice in the *Geography*. First, from the Greek side (8.6.6 C 370): according to Strabo, Homer did indeed mention the Greeks as a whole, when he spoke of 'Hellas and mid-Argos' (*Od.* 1.344, 15.80), referring to all of Greece. Secondly, Homer could not have been ignorant of the term 'barbarian'. For how could the Carians be called *barbarophonoi* ('of barbarian speech') without ever being called barbarians in the first place (14.2.28 C 661)?⁶

Having won on this front,⁷ Strabo is now left with two difficulties which still require a solution:

(1) Why did Homer employ the word *barbarophonoi* without even once using the appellation *barbaroi*?

5 See D. Dueck, *Strabo of Amaseia: A Greek Man of Letters in Augustan Rome* (forthcoming). R. Munz attributes the passage to Posidonius. One of his stylistic arguments that convinced this reader is the repetition of a stem with variation of the prefix: 'κακοστομία καὶ οἶον βαρβαροστομία ... ἀρτιστομείν'. See 'Über γλώττα und διάλεκτος und über ein Poseidonianisches Fragment bei Strabon', *Glotta* 11, 1921, 85-94. Cf. I.G. Kidd, *Posidonius: The Commentary I*, Cambridge, 1988, 294 (F 59). Another attribution was suggested by E. Schwarz. See *RE* 8, s.v. 'Demetrius', no. 78, 2810, line 28. Nevertheless, it is of little importance whether the following notions are originally Strabonian or not, for the geographer certainly agreed with them.

6 Strabo was not the only one to hold this view. He explicitly mentions 'others' opposed to Thucydides' opinion. He may have had in mind the well-known Homeric exegete Aristarchus of Samothrace. One of the fragments attributed to him reminds one of Strabo's words: ὅτι Θεουκιδίδης λέγει τὴν ὀνομασίαν τῶν βαρβάρων νεωτερικὴν εἶναι. ἐλέγχεται δὲ ἐντεῦθεν: 'Thucydides says that the name of the barbarians is late. He is refuted by this', i.e. by *Il.* 2.867. Cf. K. Lehrs, *De Aristarchi Studiis Homericis*, Hildesheim 1964, 225; H. Erbse, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem (Scholia Vetera)*, Berlin 1969, ad loc. Interestingly, Aristarchus rejects the opinion of Thucydides with regard to the barbarians, but accepts what he has to say about the Greeks. Aristarchus even excludes a few lines in Homer as a panhellenic interpolation; cf. Lehrs, *De Aristarchi Studiis Homericis*, 225; *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Odysseam*, ed. W. Dindorf, Oxford 1855, 232.

7 Thucydides presumably had no knowledge of this line, or else doubted its authenticity. See *Scholia in Thucydidem ad Optimos Codices Collata*, ed. K. Hude, New York 1973, 6.

(2) Why, of all the barbarian peoples whom Homer certainly knew, did the Carians alone gain the designation *barbarophoni*?⁸

Strabo rejects the answers given by the grammarian Apollodorus to these two questions. When Apollodorus suggested that the word *barbaroi* was not suitable here metrically, Strabo retorts that Homer could have used the nominative case βάρβαροι elsewhere, e.g. in place of Δάρδανοι⁹ or even Τρώιοι¹⁰ — words whose metre is exactly the same. Another idea of Apollodorus, designed to resolve the second problem, was that the Hellenes, and especially the Ionians (to whom Homer supposedly belonged), applied the word *barbaroi* scornfully to the Carians in particular because of the animosity felt towards them and their continuous warfare (14.2.28 C 661). Here, Strabo's reply to Apollodorus can only be reconstructed. He seems to believe that the Carians are called *barbarophoni* by reason of some peculiarity of their speech (φωνή), and not because of their behaviour. Apollodorus had already addressed this matter, declaring that the language (γλῶττα) of the Carians was extremely harsh (τραχυτάτη). Citing a treatise on the Carians,¹¹ Strabo is able to refute this remark easily. He insists that the language spoken by the Carians was not rough, and even contained many Greek words.

In his effort to resolve the first puzzle, Strabo justifies the unique use of the word *barbarophoni* by pointing out that the term *barbaroi* originally referred to raucous and strident voices. It was used onomatopoeically of all those who spoke harshly and thickly (ἐπὶ τῶν δυσεκφώρας καὶ σκληρῶς καὶ τραχέως λαλούντων), much like the words used for 'stuttering' (βατταρίζειν), 'lispings' (τραυλίζειν), and 'speaking inarticulately' (ψελλίζειν). In time, Strabo continues:

⁸ This has special bearing on the role Strabo assigns to Homer as initiator (ἀρχηγέτης) of the scientific activity of geography (1.1.2 C 2; cf. 1.1.11 C 7). For Strabo, the poet is the most reliable source of information; cf. 8.3.3 C 337. Consequently, if Homer was not acquainted with the term *barbaros* or, conversely, if he employed the word *barbarophoni* arbitrarily, his authority is seriously undermined. On Strabo's attitude towards Homer see also G. Aujac, *Strabon, Géographie* I, Paris 1969, 11-23; W.R. Kahles, *Strabo and Homer*, Chicago 1976; D.M. Schenkeveld, 'Strabo on Homer', *Mnemosyne* 29, 1976, 52-64; on the question of Homer's relevance to contemporary geographical descriptions, cf. 8.1.1 C 332, 8.3.23 C 348, 8.3.8 C 341, 12.3.26 C 553.

⁹ Cf. *Il.* 11.286.

¹⁰ Cf. *Il.* 5.222.

¹¹ τὰ Καρικὰ (*On Carian Matters*), attributed to Philip, probably of Theangela; see R. Laqueur, 'Philippos' *RE* 38, 2349, no. 40; F. Jacoby, *FGrH*, 741 F 2-3.

πάντων δὴ τῶν παχυστομούντων οὕτως (i.e. κατ' ὀνοματοποιίαν) βαρβάρων λεγομένων, ἐφάνη τὰ τῶν ἀλλοεθνῶν στόματα τοιαῦτα, λέγω δὲ τὰ τῶν μὴ Ἑλλήνων.

When all who pronounced words thickly were being called barbarians onomatopoeically, it appeared that the pronunciations of all alien races were likewise thick, I mean those that were not Greek.

These alien peoples were called distinctively 'barbarians'. At first the label was utilised with contemptuous intent (κατὰ τὸ λοῖδορον), referring to their harsh pronunciation, but later on this word was put to a different use, as a general ethnic term (ὡς ἐθνικῶ κοινῶ ὀνόματι) to set them apart from the Greeks (14.2.28 C 662).

This paragraph is one of the rare instances in ancient literature which explains the etymology of the word βάρβαρος, and links it explicitly with inarticulate speech. However, the theme of the roughness of foreign speech itself is, of course, not new and appears already in the Greek literature of the fifth century B.C.E.¹² In Strabo's description, the obscure sounds made by non-Greeks justly won them this onomatopoeic name. Moreover, the geographer goes on to indicate another feature of foreign tongues, and that is their peculiar character.¹³ Strabo is saying in effect that linguistic criteria formed the key factor in the ancient ethnic separation of Hellenes from the rest of the world.¹⁴ He also seems to assert that pejorative overtones accompanied the use of the term right from the start, and were not a later addition.

Yet Strabo complicates matters when he tries to vindicate Homer's curious application of the word *barbarophonoi* solely to the Carians. In contrast with modern scholarly consensus¹⁵ and seemingly contrary to common-sense

¹² Aesch. *A.* 1050-1; Soph. *Ant.* 1000-2; Ar. *Av.* 199-200.

¹³ τῇ πολλῇ συνηθείᾳ καὶ ἐπιπλοκῇ τῶν βαρβάρων οὐκέτι ἐφαίνετο κατὰ παχυστομίαν καὶ ἀφύϊαν τινὰ τῶν φωνητηρίων ὀργάνων τοῦτο συμβαῖνον, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὰς τῶν διαλέκτων ιδιότητας (14.2.28 C 662): 'through our long acquaintance and intercourse with the barbarians this effect was at last seen to be the result, not of a thick pronunciation or any natural defect in the vocal organs, but of the peculiarities of their several languages'.

¹⁴ Cf. E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, Oxford 1989, 4-5, 8-9, 12-13, 177-9.

¹⁵ E.g. G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary I*, Cambridge 1985, 260: 'The Kares are βαρβαροφώνων, which means on any interpretation of βάρβαρος that they do not speak Greek ...'; J. Juethner, *Hellenen und Barbaren*, Leipzig 1923, 2: 'fremdsprachig' cf. *ibid.* 125 n. 8; V. Losemann, 'Barbaren', *Der Neue Pauly II*, Stuttgart and Weimar 1997, 439-43: 'barbarisch redend'; cf. Haarhoff (above, n. 1), 6. An interesting debate developed based on the assumption that the Carians were non-Greek speakers. D.L. Page (*History and the Homeric*

terms, Strabo takes the expression to mean not ‘speakers of a foreign language’ but rather speakers of Greek in a foreign voice, or a foreign accent, as it were. Strabo relates that in earlier times, the Carians alone chose to live in accordance with the Hellenic way of life and to learn Greek. Serving as hired mercenaries, they wandered throughout all of Greece, and lived close to the Greeks, both in the islands and later in Asia. Under those circumstances, the barbarous element in their tongue (τὸ βαρβαρόφωνον) was prevalent. Presumably, whenever they spoke Greek, their accent was noticed, and their pronunciation was unintelligible to the Hellenes. One could almost say that Carian Greek was ‘barbarian’ to them.

Strabo supports his argument by bringing up the use of the verb βαρβαρίζειν. It connotes speech in faltering Greek, not some foreign barbarous language.¹⁶

The importance of this passage lies also in the ethnological scheme it conveys. The upshot of Strabo’s exposition seems to be a novel partition of humanity along linguistic lines. On the one hand we have the Hellenes, who speak Greek. On the other, barbarian peoples, whose utterances suffer from rough enunciation and whose language is obscure. The disparity between these two groups is completely symmetrical, as Strabo clearly states:

ὡς οἱ βάρβαροι οἱ εἰσαγόμενοι εἰς τὸν Ἑλληνισμόν, οὐκ ἰσχύοντες ἀρτιστομεῖν, ὡς οὐδ’ ἡμεῖς ἐν ταῖς ἐκείνων διαλέκτοις.

like barbarians who are only beginning to learn Greek and are unable to speak it accurately, as is also the case with us in speaking their languages.

So far, this corresponds to the classical taxonomy. However, in Strabo’s scheme, there appears to be a middle ground, which the *barbarophonoι* occupy. Although they speak Greek, they do it rather badly. Homer’s Carians

Iliad, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1959, 137-9) was convinced that the Homeric catalogue is genuine, that is, ‘of Mycenaean origin’, and that it contains information from the actual campaign against the Trojans. He used as evidence the fact that Miletus was mentioned as the home of Carian *barbarophonoι*, a state of affairs no longer true in the eighth century; Kirk (*The Iliad*, 262) replied that Miletus was inhabited by Greek-speakers from the fourteenth century, and that the reference to non-Greek speaking Carians must be a deliberate archaism.

¹⁶ Here the geographer implies one particular vice noted by Greek grammarians, viz. barbarization, or violation of the laws of speech; cf. Arist. *SE* 165b21: τῆ λέξι βαρβαρίζειν. See also Plb. 39.1.7; Plato, *Tht.* 175D codd. BT; cf. Diodorus the Babylonian in D.L. 7.59 (SVF 3.20): ὁ δὲ βαρβαρισμός ... λέξις ἐστὶ παρὰ τὸ ἔθος τῶν εὐδοκίμουτων Ἑλλήνων.

give the impression that they differ from both groups equally: unlike other barbarians, they speak Greek, but unlike the Greeks, they mispronounce it. They have the appearance of a *tertium quid* in the ethnological classification of mankind, and do not belong fully to either side of the polarity. These *barbarophonoi* impress one as a definite group, with its own particular linguistic characteristics: hence their unique designation and separate identification.¹⁷

The post-classical period saw the emergence of some revisionist attitudes towards ethnicity. These sought to make room for groups which were problematic in terms of the traditional dichotomous world view: one obstacle was the reluctance of some races and peoples (such as Romans or Jews) to be regarded as belonging to either group.¹⁸ Hellenized peoples caused another difficulty, as they were no longer barbarians, but still could not be considered entirely Greek.¹⁹ It seems that while Strabo is ostensibly interpreting Homer in our passage, he is in fact alluding to the Hellenized nations of his own day, who adopted the Greek language and mode of life. Strabo appears to give them a special place, alongside Greeks and barbarians. If this interpretation is correct, then his attitude can be regarded as one of the revisionist approaches mentioned above.

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¹⁷ When it comes to Greek, then, the geographer arrives at a threefold division of mankind. However, he produces quite a different notion in the case of Latin. Here, latinization affects the ethnic identity of the barbarians. For instance, the Cavari in Gaul adopted the language and manners of the Romans and were transformed into their type (4.1.12 C 186: μετακειμένους τὸ πλεον εἰς τὸν τῶν Ῥωμαίων τύπον καὶ τῇ γλώττῃ καὶ τοῖς βίοις). The Turditanians in Iberia have changed to the Roman mode of life, and lost their native tongue (3.2.15 C 151: τελέως εἰς τὸν Ῥωμαίων μεταβέβληνται τρόπον, οὐδὲ τῆς διαλέκτου τῆς σφετέρας ἔτι μεμνημένοι). Cf. 12.4.6 C 565: Under the Romans, most of the peoples in the Troad have lost their languages (Ῥωμαῖοι, ἐφ' ὧν ἦδη καὶ τὰς διαλέκτους καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα ἀποβεβλήκασι οἱ πλείστοι). It appears that whereas our Carians, though speaking Greek, are not considered Hellenes, latinized nations could become Romans.

¹⁸ Philo (*Spec. Leg.* 2.165f.) contrasts Ἕλληνες καὶ βάρβαροι with τὸ Ἰουδαίων ἔθνος. Cicero (*De Fin.* 2.4.9) divides the world into three parts: *Non solum Graecia et Italia, sed etiam omnis barbaria commota est*; cf. *Pro Lig.* 11. See also Quintil. 5.10.24: *nec idem in Barbaro, Romano, Graeco probabile est.*

¹⁹ Eratosthenes' answer was to draw the dividing lines anew, and to divide humanity into two wholly new departments, 'bad' (κακοί) peoples, and 'refined' or 'civilized' (ἀστεῖοι), resulting in the inclusion of several barbarian nations (e.g. Indians, Carthaginians and Romans) in the latter group (apud Strabo, 1.4.9 C 66).