

Sociolinguistic Features of Herodas and ‘Herodas’

This paper will consider some socio-linguistic markers in the poetry of Herodas, carrying out a quantitative survey of some markers relating to gender, status and politeness, such as manners of address and orders, before situating the poetic persona’s own voice among his characters.

When Herodas’ *Mimiamb*s were published toward the end of the 19th century, he was at first considered a great realist,¹ due to his low subject matter and conversational style replete with proverbs and parataxis. On the other hand, since then the artificiality of his *Kunstsprache* has been acknowledged, combining as it does East Ionic dialect with Attic forms, and transplanting this hybrid – probably in homage to Hipponax, who may figure in the fragmentary 8th poem – into Doric-speaking Kos.² His work has since come to be thought of as a ‘gioco di manierato verismo’.³ The common man and woman are made to speak in peculiar dialect, their conversational dialogue form moulded into choliambic verse.

Herodas is then something of a double-edged sword in terms of sociolinguistic study. Historical linguistics has been described as ‘the art of making the best use of bad data’,⁴ and Herodas’ data – fragmentary, and artificial in dialect and metre – is very bad data indeed. Herodas’ poetry is hardly a straightforward source from which to reconstruct the everyday speech of 3rd century BCE Greeks. However, there is also a sense that behind the artificialities of dialect and metre, his ‘unpleasant and immoral’⁵ characters draw upon everyday life, and their speech may represent a ‘sub-literary’ register worth exploring.

Through studying sociolinguistic markers in his poetry, this paper will explore how characters within the artificial demi-monde of Herodas – a procuress and a pimp, a dildo-

¹ Reinach (1891).

² For *Mimiamb* 1’s Koan setting, see Reinach (1891) 215; *Mimiamb* 2, see lines 95-100; *Mimiamb* 4, see Sherwin-White (1978) 350-2.

³ Colombo (1934).

⁴ Labov (1994) 11.

⁵ Cunningham (1971) 3.

maker and a delinquent, to invoke but a few – use language to express aspects of their own identity and status, while at the same time the poet uses them to forge an identity for himself, and a voice for his new hybrid-genre. This study would build on that of Redondo-Moyano, which considered sociolinguistic markers in *Mimiamb* 3,⁶ and would start with a quantitative analysis of how linguistic details such as manners of address, orders, politeness strategies, and patterns of convergence or divergence relate to the gender and relative status of the speakers.

The paper will culminate in a study of *Mimiamb* 8. In this monologue the poet's own persona (the 'Herodas' of my abstract's title) heaps abuse on two slaves, before recounting at length a dream to a third. His dream concerns a run-in with an old man, probably to be identified with Hipponax, making the poem itself into a proprietary *sphragis* which symbolises his peculiar sub-genre. Interpreting the language of 'Herodas' here, in the context of his other creations, may then reflect broadly upon the tone and status of his poetry as a whole.

References

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⁶ Redondo-Moyano (2021).