

## ANACHARSIS, THE WISE MAN FROM ABROAD

Lucian's dialogue entitled *Anacharsis* begins with a description of the Scythian king's disdain for the arts of the gymnasium and the pursuits of athletes; at the beginning he sees them as mad or imbecilic pursuits, and at the end still sees no justification for them.<sup>1</sup> The dialogue also touches on other customs that were firmly rooted in Greek civilization. In addition to this extremely valuable testimony of Lucian – whom we may nonetheless suspect of putting into the mouths of mythical or historical figures thoughts and comments to serve his own ends – there are other accounts which suggest that, in the Roman period at least, Anacharsis' criticisms of the gymnasium were often discussed. Diogenes Laertius, for example, mentions Anacharsis twice.<sup>2</sup> On the first occasion, he describes the Scythian nobleman's perplexity on learning that the laws of the Greeks punish those who physically assault others, but praise and honour athletes who do so; on the second, he quotes Anacharsis as saying that oil must be a drug that induces madness, because this is the only way of understanding what happens to athletes.

Dio Chrysostom, for his part, admonishes the people of Alexandria for their behaviour in horse races and other public spectacles, quite out of keeping, in his view, with a city of its stature. He finds no more fitting comparison than Anacharsis' comments on sport in Greece:

«He came to Greece, I suppose, to observe the customs and the people. Anacharsis said that in each city of the Greeks there is a place set apart in which they act insanely (μαίνονται) day after day [meaning the gymnasium] for when they go there and strip off their clothes, they smear themselves with a drug (φαρμάκω). “And this”, said he, “arouses the madness in them; for immediately some run, others throw each other imaginary foe, and others submit to blows. And when they have behaved in that fashion”, said he, “they scrape off the drug and straightway are sane again (αὐτίκα σωφρονοῦσι), and now on friendly terms with one another, they walk with downcast glance, being ashamed at what has occurred (αἰσχυνόμενοι τοῖς πεπραγμένοις)”»<sup>3</sup>

Thanks to these later accounts, we know that Anacharsis came to Greece in order to learn; and either he did not understand what he found, or did not like it. So the first point to consider is his interaction with the Greeks: their customs and traditions, their civilization, and their political systems. There are two possibilities: either he went to

<sup>1</sup> Cf. P. Angeli Bernardini, *L'agonismo sportivo dei Greci e lo stupore dei barbari*, in *Lo straniero ovvero l'identità culturale a confronto*, ed. M. Bettini, Roma-Bari 1992, 39-49.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. D. L. 1.103 and 1.104.

<sup>3</sup> D. Chr. 32.44. (translation by J.W. Cohoon-H. Lamar Crosby in *Dio Chrysostom*, III, London-Cambridge 1961).

Greece as an admirer, in order to learn; or, alternatively, he was the bearer of new knowledge, and acted as a master to the Greeks.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, with this confusion at the beginning of our search, practically everything we discover about Anacharsis and what he embodies will be extremely contradictory. Indeed, what he embodies is *otherness*,<sup>5</sup> *oppositeness*: in a word, he embodies *the Scythians*, using the term as a generic concept.

Historically we can affirm very little about Anacharsis. Intriguingly, though, there is one detail on which agreement is total. He was a Scythian, and no ordinary one at that. He was a nobleman: king of the Scythians, in some accounts, the son or brother of kings in others. And the Scythians, in spite of the functional characterization the Greeks made of them, were a real people for whom historical and geographical evidence exists. There may be some doubt about the reliability of the historical evidence, but there is no doubt about the intentions of the writers who provide the descriptions. So let us speak a little of the Scythians.

Our starting point is the *Corpus Hippocraticum*. The treatise *Airs, waters and places*<sup>6</sup> has a medical-geographical focus, and is of particular interest because it describes the differences in the physical and mental characteristics of peoples according to their geographical location, the climate, and the waters they drink. The treatise distinguishes on the one hand between men and women, and on the other between Europeans and Asiatics. It places the Scythians at the limits of Europe and devotes several paragraphs to them;<sup>7</sup> it describes their way of life and their customs (they live in carts, they travel from place to place, they eat meat and drink mare's milk), their physical characteristics (short, flaccid, bowlegged...) and how their way of life influences their behaviour (little given to warfare, indolent) and the consolidation of their race: it appears they have difficulty procreating, and thus, as they become impotent, many men do the same tasks as the women. It is not a very flattering depiction, but, as well as identifying the geographical location of the Scythian desert – roughly speaking, the steppes of the Ukraine – it seems to be a consistent one.<sup>8</sup>

Two features of the Scythians recur in Greek culture: the fact that they live at the very limits of the world (ἔσχατιά), and the fact that they lead a nomadic existence.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. F. Kindstrand, *Anacharsis. The legend and the apophthegmata*, Uppsala 1981, 31-32.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J.-P. Vernant, *Entre mythe et politique*, Paris 1996, 27-29 and 57; cf. also E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, Oxford 1989; and M. Moggi, *Straniero due volte: il barbaro e il mondo greco*, in *Lo straniero*, 51-76.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. also *Morb.* 4.52.

<sup>7</sup> 17 to 22.

<sup>8</sup> For a comparison of the descriptions in the *Corpus Hippocraticum* and Herodotus, cf. F. Jouanna, *Hippocrate*, Paris 1992, 269ff. and 319ff.; on Scythian iconography, cf. F. Lissarrague, *L'autre guerrier. Archers, peltastes, cavaliers dans l'imagerie attique*, Paris-Rome 1990, 125-49.

Aeschylus sets the action of *Prometheus Bound* in this remote place («To earth's remotest confines – says Power to Hephaestus – we are come, to the Scythian tract, an untrodden solitude...», vv.1-2); the Chorus repeats the idea later («and the Scythian multitude that tenants the uttermost region of the earth bordering the Maeotic lake...», vv. 417-19) and, finally, Prometheus predicts to Io that her wanderings will be long and terrible, and says: «... thou shalt reach the Scythian nomads, who dwell, perched aloft, in wattled houses on strong-wheeled wains, and are accoutred with far-darting bows. Approach them not...» (vv. 709-12).<sup>9</sup>

Other more verifiable historical sources report evidence of the existence of this people at the beginning of the sixth century B.C. They record the presence of a fortified city, on the banks of the lower Dnieper, at the beginning of the fourth century B.C., and note its military power after repelling the attacks of Alexander the Great in 331 B.C.<sup>10</sup> These sources draw attention to the violent character of the Scythians, their nomadic lifestyle, and the fact that they have a king.

As is the case with these accounts, we cannot be confident that the wealth of information that Herodotus provides concerning the Scythians is a reliable reflection of their geographical location and their way of life. Herodotus is the principal source for the Scythians, in the classical age at least – he devotes a substantial part of book 4 to them. The ethnographic description is made with his customary care, and he reports many interesting facts regarding their way of life. As is habitual in Herodotus, his account draws on previous sources, which do not always coincide: this may be the reason for some of the apparent inconsistencies, contradictions or unnecessary repetitions.<sup>11</sup> The logic of his account must of necessity be a Greek logic: that is, a logic that can be understood by a Greek mind; so he gives the impression that the idiosyncrasies of the Scythians are presented on Greek terms.<sup>12</sup> It is on this impression that Hartog<sup>13</sup> bases his theory that the entire description of the Scythians is part of a preconceived plan – namely, to create a vision of a people that are the very opposite of the Greeks –<sup>14</sup> and considerably undermines the text's status as a historical document. As Hartog makes clear throughout the first part of his book (entitled, significantly, *Les Scythes imaginaires*), Herodotus' account is not borne out by the archaeological data; its interest lies in «voir comment les Grecs de l'époque

<sup>9</sup> There are some examples of Scythians as primitive, violent and uncivilized in comedy: Ar., *Ach.* 703ff.; *Th.* 1001ff.; cf. Lissarrague, 125-26.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Arr. *An.* 4.5-6, cf. also on the nomadic character compared with that of the ancient inhabitants of India, 8.7.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. A. Corcella in *Erodoto. Le storie. Libro IV. La Scizia e la Libia*, Vicenza 1993, XIX ff.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem* XXI: «Questo sforzo di tradurre la realtà estranea in termini comprensibili genera talora delle deformazioni».

<sup>13</sup> *Le miroir d'Hérodote*, Paris 1991<sup>2</sup>, especially 18ff.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Lissarrague, 125: «... les Scythes sont en quelque sorte la contre-épreuve de la normalité grecque».

classique s'étaient représentés les autres, les non-grecs (...), d'esquisser une histoire de l'alterité avec son rythme, ses temps forts et ses ruptures». <sup>15</sup> This is the reason for the title of Hartog's book: Herodotus' account, he says, is the mirror the historian uses to reflect, and to reflect on, his own identity. So from the historical perspective and even from a historical-mythical perspective, Herodotus provides history or tradition purely from a Greek point of view: his account offers a translation of the *other* in terms of the shared knowledge of the Greeks. <sup>16</sup> He thus establishes an excessively perfect symmetry between the otherness of the north and the otherness of the south; where in the south there are Libyans and Egyptians, in the north there are Scythians; in both cases, there is a river running through the land: the Nile, and the Ister. And whereas the others of the south personify wisdom and civilized customs to be assimilated and imported, the others of the north personify ignorance and savagery. <sup>17</sup> Though the north is represented by the Scythians in general, at a certain moment different groups of Scythians are required, some of whom are totally ignorant and savage and the others less so; all are nomads – a concept that marks a clear opposition between the οἰκουμένη and the ἐσχατιά, between the πόλις and the outer fringes, the ones that are ἀπολις –, but in some cases, even though they are still defined as nomads, they are less nomadic than before. Herodotus states, for example, that they do not possess nor wish to possess any land or water, with one exception, the burial site of their kings. Though some of their customs qualify them as savages – for example, cutting off the heads of their victims and drinking the blood, using the heads as trophies and even as vessels from which to drink – on the other hand they are monogamous, they eat cooked food, they make sacrifices to their gods... in the manner of the civilized peoples. So what makes them radically opposed to the Greeks in certain cases brings them very close to the Greeks in others. Nomadism symbolizes always *difference* and *oppositeness*, but at one point in Herodotus' account <sup>18</sup> it takes on a positive value and is regarded as an extremely effective strategy in the context of war and invasion: if one has no land, no house and no possessions, the enemy has nothing to sack or occupy. This is what Hartog defines as the Scythian ἀπορία, <sup>19</sup> quoting Herodotus himself: <sup>20</sup> there is no road that leads to them. And if we try to rationalize what this ἀπορία is, we see that it is in fact a strategy of resistance, which the Greeks themselves use in their wars: against the Persians, insularity, the «wood-built wall» of the ships offers an ἀπορία similar to that of having no land for the

<sup>15</sup> Hartog, 18.

<sup>16</sup> As usual in Herodotus, whether he is speaking of the Scythians, the Egyptians or the Indians..., cf. D. Konstan, *The stories in Herodotus' 'Histories': Book I*, Helios 10, 1, 2-22, referring to Hdt. 3.98-101, on the subject of the Indians: «these descriptions tell us more about Herodotus' picture of the world, or that of the Greeks generally, than they do about India», 5.

<sup>17</sup> J. M. Redfield, *Herodotus the Tourist*, CPh 80, 1985, 97-118.

<sup>18</sup> Hdt. 4.46ff.

<sup>19</sup> Hartog, 76.

<sup>20</sup> Hdt. 4.46, 83, 134.

enemies to conquer and occupy. This was also Pericles' strategy in the Peloponnesian war. He saw the *polis* not as a set of buildings or houses but as a body of citizens; they abandoned it and relied on the fleet, as if Athens were an island.<sup>21</sup> So Herodotus admires the pure nomadism of the Scythians, and pauses to evaluate its strategic value as a sort of wisdom;<sup>22</sup> in contrast, when he conceives it as a way of life, he finds it radically *opposite* and inappropriate.<sup>23</sup>

This incursion into the world of the Scythians highlights the points of comparison between their way of life and that of the Greeks. The Scythians are the *opposite* of the Greeks; this appears, at first sight, to be the traditionally held view. But Herodotus shows us that the situation is not so clearcut. The fact that we find inaccuracies and above all historical, ethnological and even ideological contradictions in Herodotus' Scythians does not mean that we should ignore the information he provides, but it does suggest that, though his account contains historical records of the Scythians, the primary interest is the Greek representation of them as a people, and their function as a reference point in Greek culture.

But to return to Anacharsis, we would expect there to be a link of some kind between this Scythian nobleman and these accounts of the Scythian way of life, if only because he is a mythical or legendary name of reference for his people. As we mentioned above, practically all the sources agree that the Scythians have a king, a royal family; we even know the names of the kings: Idantyrus, Saulius... So we would also expect these sources to refer to our Scythian prince or king. Intriguingly, though, there are no points of intersection between what we might call the Greek history of the Scythians and Anacharsis. To be more exact: the myth or legend of Anacharsis draws on the representation of the Scythians, but not the other way around; that is to say, when the Greeks speak of the Scythians it does not occur to them to speak of Anacharsis, but when they speak of Anacharsis they use all the information at their disposal regarding the Scythians, and add other things as well.

This means that we have no historical data on Anacharsis. Any attempt to prove his existence will be in vain, though, as Kindstrand states, in ancient times no one doubted it;<sup>24</sup> as they knew that the Scythians existed, the Greeks probably added Anacharsis to their representation of this nomadic people.

21 Cf. Hdt. 7.140-3 and Th. 1.143.

22 Cf. the main thesis of P. Payen, *Les îles nomades. Conquérir et résister dans l'Enquête d'Hérodote*, Paris 1997, especially 300-02.

23 On the two ways of considering Scythians, cf. Corcella XX-XXI where the sense is the opposite of that in Hartog.

24 J. F. Kindstrand, 13; cf. also R. P. Martin, *The Scythian Accent: Anacharsis and the Cynics, in The Cynics. The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and its Legacy*, edd. R. Bracht-Branham - M. O. Goulet-Caze, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1996, 136-55.

Let us start with the name. Although some scholars claim to see an Iranian origin,<sup>25</sup> there is a Greek etymology. The *Etymologicum Magnum*<sup>26</sup> has an entry Ἀναχάρσις which says:

ὁ Σκύθης· παρὰ τὴν ἀνὰ πρόθεσιν, καὶ τὴν χάρσιν, ὃ σημαίνει τὴν χάριν ἢ τὴν χαράν. Ἔστι καὶ ἰχθύς ποιός.

Or: «The Scythian; from the preposition ἀνά and the χάρσιν (a word that is found nowhere else, evidently), which means either grace (χάρις) or joy (χαρά). It is also a fish.»

Ignoring this curious reference to the fish, the etymology appears a little forced; however, if we should indeed understand ἀναχάρις or ἀναχαρά, this would mean, I think, someone who behaves or goes to places joyfully, with grace, or perhaps with gratitude. So it is not inconceivable, given certain features of Anacharsis' character – especially the later ones, for example the ones reported by Lucian – that underlying the etymology is an allusion to the joy of one who learns in order to improve himself, or who expresses his gratitude for whatever he is taught. I do not mean to overstate the point, because the etymology is, of course, inaccurate. But there is no doubt about the first part of the definition: «the Scythian», which confirms what I said above.

So, as Kindstrand concludes after a thorough discussion of a range of hypotheses, the name could well be a Greek invention.<sup>27</sup>

Important evidence that the Ancients believed in the historical authenticity of Anacharsis is provided again by Herodotus. And there is more confusion. It is true that the only attempt to link the figure of Anacharsis with a consistent account of the Scythians is found in book 4 of the *Histories*.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, after describing (in this order) the different versions of the origins of this people, their geographical location, their customs and way of life, the figure of the king and the honours he receives (especially the burial honours) and funeral rites of ordinary subjects (different from those of the king), in the final chapters of the Scythian *logos*, Herodotus appears to end with a general statement to the effect that this people of whom he has spoken at such length are characterized above all by a rejection of all foreign customs (4.76). It is precisely at this point that Anacharsis is introduced, as confirmation, together with Scyles, whose story, in a way similar to that of Anacharsis, Herodotus also tells. I will not examine this here; my intention is merely to note that the incorporation of Anacharsis in the Scythian *logos* is totally unconnected with what is said in the preceding paragraphs, and even though it is the only instance that he is mentioned in the same breath as the historical Scythians, the following sentence casts considerable doubt over this happy

<sup>25</sup> F. Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch*, Marburg 1895 (Hildesheim 1963), 15-16.

<sup>26</sup> *EM* 101,5; cf. Hsch., α 4678 *Latte*: ἰχθύς ποιός. καὶ ὄνομα κύριον.

<sup>27</sup> Kindstrand, 13-14 n.27.

<sup>28</sup> From chapter 5 to chapter 82, where it leads into the preparations for the War of the Persians, under Darius, against the Scythians.

coincidence: «And now the Scythians, if they are asked about Anacharsis, say they have no knowledge of him» (4.76), and adds, to demonstrate what had led to the reference to Anacharsis, that the Scythians hate foreigners: «this is because he left his country for Hellas and followed the customs of strangers».

In other words, the man defined as «the Scythian», the man who represents everything that is Scythian, is a complete unknown in Scythia, where we assume Herodotus gathered his information first hand. He is neither a historical, nor a mythical, nor a legendary figure. So Anacharsis the Scythian is Greek, and only Greek.

Given that no Greek source that mentions Anacharsis is describing a real man, what we have is a Scythian sage, a construct of the imagination, who has a specific function, depending on the text and the period, in specific contexts.

The first to consider is perhaps the archaic and mythical-religious context. As Martin states,<sup>29</sup> there are good reasons for understanding «the portrait of Anacharsis as simply [preserving] a generally archaic quality» and for seeing substantial coincidences with epic, didactic and the elegiac poetry.

After travelling to many places, including various parts of Greece, Anacharsis returns home and dies, according to Herodotus (4.76) because he worships the Great Mother, as he had seen others do in Cyzicus. The father of history recounts the introduction of the concept and the figure of the Great Mother, or the mother of gods, into Greek culture – with the obvious parallels between this case and that of Anacharsis. Indeed, as Borgeaud explains clearly,<sup>30</sup> the tradition of this divinity, the mother of gods, originated in Anatolia, passing through Phrygia via Midas, and was introduced into the religious world of Greece and thence to Rome (personified by the name of Cybeles, another import). Hers is an ancient power, primordial, fertile, vengeful; in Greece, she is often identified with Rhea, the mother of Zeus and therefore of the Olympian gods, or with Demeter, or even with Artemis of Ephesus.<sup>31</sup> The Great Mother appears to become established around the sixth century, without a name of its own: it is simply a mother, accompanied by a geographical epithet or named «mother of the gods». Identifying its Eastern origins and establishing the frontier between what is imported and what is autochthonous in the Greek world is extremely difficult: when we hear of the divinity for the first time the fusion is already complete and it is a markedly Hellenized figure, even though its image and some of its attributes seem to have clear, if distant, antecedents in the Near East.<sup>32</sup> It is nonetheless relevant to our analysis of Anacharsis that Herodotus' account uses this episode to demonstrate that

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Martin, 152.

<sup>30</sup> Ph. Borgeaud, *La mère des dieux. De Cybèle à la Vierge Marie*, Paris 1996.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. A. Blomart, *Identité culturelle et religions étrangères: exemples antiques de Mithra, Bendis et la Mère des dieux*, *Itaca* 16-17, 2000-2001, 9-22.

<sup>32</sup> Ph. Borgeaud, 23ff.

the Scythians hate anything that comes from abroad and that Anacharsis dies at their hands for this very reason. In fact, though it is difficult to say to what extent, it is obvious that the Great Mother, albeit firmly established as Greek perhaps in the time of Herodotus, is an imported cult and therefore relatively non-Greek; for this reason Borgeaud states: «Il se peut que ce Barbare avoue sa barbarie en important, de chez les Grecs, ce qui est le moins grec: il n'en demeure pas moins que c'est de la Grèce qu'il l'importe».<sup>33</sup> In this context of positions that are at once diametrically opposed and interrelated, the case of the Greeks and the Phrygian Great Mother bears a certain resemblance to the case of the Greeks and the Scythian Anacharsis, as presented, for example, by Lucian. But again Herodotus' presentation of the facts delivers the expected message, the only change being that it is inverted: the Great Mother who grants salvation causes the death of the one who seeks to introduce her cult.

Going back to Herodotus' account of Anacharsis' return to Scythia, there is another element that fits in neatly with the logic of the Greek mythical imaginary world: the theme of the return of the hero to the homeland, *à la* Odysseus or Agamemnon, and of the hero who seeks to introduce a cult on his return, *à la* Orestes.

In addition, in other criticisms that Anacharsis makes of Greek customs, he follows the same line as the Greek tradition itself. When he says that gymnastics and athletic competitions are pointless he follows Xenophanes and Tyrtæus,<sup>34</sup> as he does when he expresses his distaste for sailing and ships in general; when he is quoted as praising agriculture – in spite of being a nomad – he recalls Hesiod.<sup>35</sup>

On another level, though it is never stated that Anacharsis was a shaman or had any relation with the Hyperboreans, a tradition of Scythian shamanism existed. Its representatives were eunuchs, which is compatible with the report in the *Corpus Hippocraticum* that they become impotent and lose their masculinity, from so much horseriding. Furthermore, Abaris and Aristeas are often depicted as Scythians, and certain parallels can be found in the legend of Anacharsis: the long journeys of the Hyperboreans to collect gifts for Apollo on the one hand, and the civilized mission of Anacharsis' journeys to Greece on the other.

Another key moment, perhaps more interesting but more difficult to explore, is Anacharsis' death, as it is described by Herodotus (4.76):

«Anacharsis, having seen much of the world in his travels and given many proofs of his wisdom therein, was coming back to the Scythian country, he sailed through the Hellespont and put in at Cyzicus, where, finding the Cyzicenes celebrating the feast of the Mother of the Gods with great pomp, he vowed to this same Mother that, if he returned to his own country safe and sound, he would sacrifice to her as he saw the Cyzicenes do, and establish a nightly rite of worship. So when he came to Scythia (...) Anacharsis celebrated the goddess's ritual with exactness, carrying a small drum and

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, 29, cf. also Martin, 139.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. frs. 2 W. and 12, 1-4 W., respectively.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Martin, 151.



hanging about himself images. Then some Scythian marked him doing this and told it to the king, Saulius; who, coming himself to the place and seeing Anacharsis performing these rites, shot an arrow at him and slew him».

There is no more than this: however, some of the ingredients might suggest the attitude of a shaman: the drum, the amulets around the neck, or his being killed by an arrow.<sup>36</sup>

In any case the evidence amounts to little, because the Anacharsis that we know seems to be interested only in profane wisdom. He may have been a member of a group of Scythian shamans, but later he lost this characterization for good, probably due to more rationalist interpretations of the legend presenting him as a longstanding counterpart of Abaris.<sup>37</sup> The Anacharsis of whom we have a reliable picture is more modern; it is not impossible that he originated in an older tradition with a certain religious significance, but there is no way of demonstrating this; if it were so, he was certainly secularized.

The Cynics, a school that began to acquire importance in Greek culture in the fourth century onwards, also exploited the figure of Anacharsis.<sup>38</sup> Ranging from those who made him a sort of Cynic hero, or the example of the Cynic wise man, as Heinze suggested,<sup>39</sup> to those who interpret everything related to him – and in particular the collection of *Letters*<sup>40</sup> included in the *Cynic Epistolary* – as a paradigm of the Cynicism of the third century B.C.,<sup>41</sup> many scholars read the recurrent motifs in the post-Herodotean representation of Anacharsis as characteristic of the Cynics: the exaltation of the Barbarian, the simple life, the primacy of the *physis* over the *nomos*, freedom of speech, and disdain for material possessions. Indeed, one of the *Letters*, number 8, addressed to a certain Trasylachus (otherwise unknown) is a eulogy of man's best friend, the dog.

It is true that this sensible, prudent Barbarian, who wishes to learn in order to improve, but who does not understand the sophistication and the unnatural character of many of the Greeks' most emblematic customs, and above all does not understand how their practices benefit mankind, could appear to be the paradigm of the exaltation of Barbarian wisdom or the natural life. But none of these lines of thought are exclusive to the Cynics; the practice of putting the fiercest criticisms in the mouth of another, and the profound acknowledgement that Barbarian customs offer a legitimate alternative to the habits of traditional thought, had been habitual in Greece since ancient

<sup>36</sup> But the idea seems inconsistent, cf. Corcella, 294.

<sup>37</sup> See Kindstrand, 18ff.

<sup>38</sup> See Martin, 152ff.

<sup>39</sup> R. Heinze, *Anacharsis*, *Philologus* 50, 1891, 458-68.

<sup>40</sup> All dated between 300 and 250 B.C.

<sup>41</sup> See in particular *Letters* 3 and 4 which are compilations of Cynical *topoi*.

times, long before the Cynics: Hesiod is presented as a Boeotian to explain his *παρρησία*, and ancient comedy often introduces foreign or marginal characters when a lesson is to be taught. Furthermore, the Sophists used these methods time after time and do not always argue from a Cynical perspective. So both Cynics and non-Cynics appropriated the legend of Anacharsis, which is doubtless ancient, to make contemporary criticisms in the sense described by Apollonius of Tyana, in his *Letter* 34, glossing verse 485 of Euripides' *Orestes*<sup>42</sup> with a considerable degree of manipulation: «I have become barbarous, not by being away from Greece for a long time, but by being in Greece for a long time».<sup>43</sup>

It is clear then that there is a link between the figure of Anacharsis and the lines of thought of the Cynics. But as Martin rightly suggests, the interesting point is what Anacharsis contributed to the Cynics' self-representation, rather than whether Cynicism affected the tradition of Anacharsis, or even created it.

Nonetheless, I will make a brief comment on the first of the collection of Anacharsis' *Letters* since it touches on an important question in the Cynical agenda.

*Letter* 1 is addressed to the Athenians. It goes straight to the point: «You laugh at my speech (τὴν ἐμὴν φωνήν) because it does not say the Greek letters correctly (Ἑλληνικὰ γράμματα), but remember this: Anacharsis speaks incorrectly for the Athenians, but the Athenians speak incorrectly for the Scythians. It is not the sound of the words that make men more important or less, but their thought (γνώματις)». And later: «devote yourselves to seeking melodious sounds in those who play the flute and those who sing, and criticize the poets who compose in metre if they do not complete the verses well with Greek words. But of those who speak, pay careful attention (θεωρεῖτε) to what they say», and finally: «for it is better to obtain salvation by trusting in those with poor pronunciation than to suffer great misfortunes by listening to those who speak pure Attic».<sup>44</sup>

This is a fierce attack on Greek rhetoric – the only means the Greeks used to express their ideas. Anacharsis is particularly critical of the Athenians, because the letter also says that the Spartans are different; although they do not speak perfect Attic, they are illustrious and famous for their actions. And this is even truer of the Scythians, because for them «a speech cannot be bad (κακός) if it has good intentions (βουλαί) and if fine actions (ἔργα καλά) accompany the words». *Logos* and *ergon* are counterposed again, but with the emphasis on the latter. However, without the *logos*, how is the spread of ideas possible in the Greek world? This must have been a concern of the Cynics, at least the early ones. They found two possible

<sup>42</sup> Eur. *Or.* 485: βεβαρβάρωσαι, χρόνιος ὦν ἐν βαρβάροις.

<sup>43</sup> Ἐβαρβαρώθην οὐ χρόνιος ὦν ἀφ' Ἑλλάδος, ἀλλὰ χρόνιος ὦν ἐν Ἑλλάδι, cf. R. J. Penella, *The Letters of Apollonius of Tyana*, Leiden 1979, 49.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Anacharsi Scita. Lettere*, ed. G. Cremonini, Palermo 1991; cf. on these letters also P. Gómez, *Cartes des d'Escitia*, Actes del XIII<sup>e</sup> Simposi de la Secció Catalana de la S.E.E.C., Tortosa 1999, 191-95.

responses: that of Diogenes, a clearly anti-intellectual position – no *logos*, only *erga* – and that of Antisthenes, who sought to adopt the more intellectual Socratic method, but who feared that the Platonic discourse would drown the Cynical message. Anacharsis, in this first letter in the *corpus*, seems to participate in this polemic and supports the position of Antisthenes.<sup>45</sup>

Thus far I have focused on one part of the title of this paper, the second part. Anacharsis is from abroad, an outsider; he is the Scythian *par excellence*, and therefore very much the foreigner, from the antipodes. But he is also an insider: nothing about him has any meaning except with reference to Greece; he forms as much a part of the Greek cultural heritage as anyone else, with the difference that his principal function is as an outsider. This function inevitably makes him a wise man. So what does his wisdom consist of? What does it contribute, and how is it explained?

Herodotus certainly does not present him as a wise man. Nothing to do with the Scythians –who are linked to the figure of Anacharsis, in spite of everything– is presented as possessing specific wisdom, or as a model of anything for the Greeks. A little contradictorily, Herodotus also states that in the area of the Euxine Sea there are no wise men except for the Scythians and Anacharsis, but in fact he only admires one feature of their lives: that no one who goes against them is allowed to escape (4.46). What interests the historian in this case is warfare and defence.

The first to mention Anacharsis as a wise man in the company of another wise man, and acting as befits a wise man, is Plato. In book 10 of the *Republic*, Socrates, trying to convince Glaucus that Homer was not a wise man, asks him: «Or of a number of ingenious inventions and technical contrivances, which would you show that he [Homer] was a man of practical ability like Thales of Miletus or Anacharsis the Scythian?» (600a4).

Not long afterwards, Ephorus includes Anacharsis in the list of the Seven Wise Men and mentions his inventions: billows for the fire, the double anchor, and the ceramist's wheel.<sup>46</sup> These civilizing inventions are totally in keeping with the Greek model of the wise man; but they are hardly consistent with a nomadic character.

After his inclusion as one of the Seven Wise Men – and according to Strabo, Ephorus puts him in the place of Myson, but does not say clearly whether he was the first to do so – he often reappears in the list. At that time the number of wise men began to increase and so it is impossible to establish whether they were considered permanent or not: Hermippus, for example, lists 17, including Anacharsis, and Hippobotus lists 12 and also includes him.<sup>47</sup> Diodorus of Sicily also mentions him

<sup>45</sup> Cf. D. Dudley, *A History of Cynicism from Diogenes to the Sixth Century A.D.*, London 1937, on these two trends in Cynicism which conflicted with each other from the beginning.

<sup>46</sup> Ephor. fr. 42 (cf. Str. 7.3.9).

<sup>47</sup> Cf., for both Hermippus and Hippobotus, D.L. 1.42.

but does not present a list.<sup>48</sup> Nor does Nicolaus of Damascus.<sup>49</sup> Plutarch, on the other hand, says that he is one of the habitual participants in the banquet of the Seven Sages<sup>50</sup> – among others – and Clement of Alexandria says that he is one of the candidates for the seventh position.<sup>51</sup> So he is a firm contender for the seventh place, but always alternating with Myson of Chen and Periander the Corinthian. It is difficult to know whether this was the situation in the sixth century B.C. The great question is whether he was one of the possibles from the beginning –he was definitely not one of the ever presents (such as Thales, Bias, Cleobulus, Pittacus and Solon)– or whether he was brought in later. This does not necessarily mean that Ephorus pulled him out of thin air. Some say that his incorporation may have been due to a particular group or school, and mention, of course, both the Cynics and the Sophists. All this is possible: what is clear is that the tradition of Anacharsis is ancient, that Cynics, Sophists and others drew on this tradition, and very probably the qualification of wise man was bestowed on him via an interpretation of his dual status of learner from, and critic of, the Greeks; beyond this, nothing more can be stated regarding his position in the list of the Seven Wise Men.

Moving on from the rather unpromising question of the list of the Seven Wise Men, it is interesting to examine the *characteristics* of the wise man that have reached us through the tradition of Anacharsis.

First, as we mentioned above, just as there is a Scythian *myth*, there is also a kind of Scythian *wisdom*. The opposite pole, the nomadism that is the antithesis of the autochthonous way of life and the *polis*, is initially and primarily appraised as savagery. However, it cannot be denied that the Scythians are attractive in spite of their lack of civilization; nomadic but not entirely so (according to Herodotus) – thanks to which they do not have *nomoi* and live in accordance with nature – and finally, the same elements can be considered as the source of ignorance or the source of wisdom. In so far as Anacharsis is always defined as a Scythian, these are the features that characterize him.

Second – and importantly: if Philostratus is right (in the *Lives of the Sophists*<sup>52</sup>) when he says that anyone who can rival the Sophists can be considered a sophist himself, in the same way we can say that anyone who can rival the wise men can himself be considered a wise man. This applies perfectly to Anacharsis. We mentioned the reference in Plato that classes him alongside Thales; but above all it is the company and friendship of Solon that contribute to the consideration of Anacharsis as a wise

48 D.S. 9.26.2.

49 Cf. Stob. 3.1.200.

50 Plu. *Mor.* 148C5.

51 Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.14.59.

52 Cf. *VS* 491.

man. Not only in Lucian is the relation between Anacharsis and Solon recurrent: we find it in Diogenes Laertius (1.101-05), in Himerius (29), in Plutarch (*Life of Solon*, 5). What is more, Anacharsis' *Letter* n° 2 is addressed to Solon. Between the two the relations are not always simply of courtesy. There are also divergences of opinion, and very often it is Solon who learns from Anacharsis. An illustrative anecdote is mentioned by Plutarch in the *Life of Solon*, quoting Hermippus as his source, and in the *Letter* I have just mentioned. Anacharsis says, speaking of himself first in the third person and then in the first, and addressing Solon: «when Anacharsis went to your house, desiring to be your guest, you rejected him and answered me that I should find a host in my homeland». Plutarch completes the story. Anacharsis answers «Then you that are at home make friendship with me»; Solon was so astonished by Anacharsis' intelligence that he paid him all the tributes worthy of an honoured guest, in spite of being occupied with affairs of state.

Curiously, the two works of Lucian's that speak of him, the *Scythian* and the *Anacharsis*, offer diverging views of this issue of his friendship and absolute respect for Solon. In the *Scythian*, Solon is praised to the skies; Anacharsis is described as a characterless shadow who follows Solon everywhere, and learns. There is no mention of any argument or any differences of opinion. Anacharsis, through his proximity to Solon, becomes the only foreigner to merit initiation in the Eleusinian Mysteries.<sup>53</sup>

In the *Anacharsis* the situation is completely different. Solon cuts a rather sorry figure as he fails to convince Anacharsis that what he teaches him as characteristic of the great Athenian civilization is of any use; Anacharsis' acute observations continually catch him out.<sup>54</sup> Poor Solon is obliged to modify his argument. He began with an ardent defence of the values of the gymnasium (which Anacharsis sees as worthless pursuits); initially Solon is sure of himself, responding that gymnastics helps to make bodies perfect. Then in reply to the Barbarian, he argues that athletics helps to maintain the political regime of the *polis*. By the end, he holds that they are preparing for war; Anacharsis pounces: «Then if the enemy attack you, Solon, you yourselves will take the field rubbed with oil and covered with dust, shaking your fists at them, and they, of course, will cower at your feet and run away, fearing that while they are agape in stupefaction you may sprinkle sand in their mouths (...). Or else you will then assume those panoplies of the comedians and tragedians, and if a sally is proposed to you, you will put on those wide-mouthed headpieces in order that you be more formidable to your opponents by playing bogey-man and will, of course, wear those high shoes, for they will be light to run away in, if need be, and hard for the enemy to escape from, if you go in pursuit, when you take such great strides in chase of them...».<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *Scyth.* 8.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. G. Anderson, *Lucian. Theme and variation in the Second Sophistic*, Leiden 1976, 115f. and Martin, 150ff.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Anach.* 31-32.

Lucian obviously enjoys making Solon a bad sophist who loses the argument with the most Barbarian of all the Barbarians in the tradition.<sup>56</sup> In fact, this is not the only time that Lucian presents a dialectic confrontation between a Barbarian and a Greek: in the *Toxaris*, a dialogue on friendship between Toxaris, a Scythian descended from the legendary Anacharsis, and Mnesippus, a Greek, the latter wins the rhetorical battle, but is considered to have cheated, as he did not respect the rules agreed on beforehand. Toxaris, in contrast, is too «simple», too primitive, not to be honest.<sup>57</sup> But Lucian is not the first to make Anacharsis a critic of Athens, obliging poor Solon to use Sparta as an example when he fails to convince him with Athens; the Scythian's preference for Sparta is also a recurrent feature, even if it is only to reject Athens. In his support for Sparta, Anacharsis coincides on a number of points with the established Wise Men.

In this regard, Diodorus of Sicily reports that Hermippus (fr. 14), also gives us illustrative information. Anacharsis goes to Delphi to ask if there is anyone wiser than he. The oracle responds firmly that Myson of Chen (Sparta) is wiser.

Indeed, we know from a fragment of Hipponax (fr. 63.1W) that Apollo said of Myson that he was *σωφρονέστατος*. The anecdote concerning Anacharsis is in keeping with this tradition as it highlights the slight difference in nuance between the terms *σοφός* and *σώφρων*. Furthermore, in the definition of the character of Anacharsis it is customary to find the adjective *σώφρων*,<sup>58</sup> especially referring to his well-founded criticisms of the Greek customs. Finally, Anacharsis realizes that it is also *σώφρων* to understand that a Spartan peasant such as Myson is more *σοφός* than he. The conclusion is that Anacharsis, after failing to find anything of interest in Athens, travelled around Greece; in Sparta he found real wisdom, that of Myson and his simple life. Finding and recognizing it makes him even more deserving of the qualification of wise man than Myson.<sup>59</sup>

But Anacharsis' disappointment with the political systems of the Greeks is also described by the prudent Plutarch: his Solon is also at pains to persuade Anacharsis of the excellence of Athenian legislation, but he too is unsuccessful. The Scythian rejects the idea astutely –perhaps without the sarcasm of Lucian– and firmly. An example: according to Anacharsis, the Greeks have an institution, the *ἐκκλησίαι*, that is

56 On the procedures Lucian adopts in this type of fictitious representation, cf. F. Mestre, *Civilització i ficció*, Actes del XIII<sup>e</sup> Simposi de la Secció Catalana de la S.E.E.C., Tortosa 1999, 235-38; cf. also P. Angeli Bernardini, *Luciano. Anacarsi o su l'atletica*, Padova 1995, and R. Bracht Branham, *Unruly Eloquence. Lucian and the Comedy of Traditions*, Cambridge (Mass.)-London 1989, 82ff.

57 Cf. especially *Tox.* 35 where, in addition, it is clear that the skill that the Scythian lacks is the use of words in order to deceive: he says the *erga* and nothing but the *erga*.

58 Cf. *Plu. Mor.* 148D-E, for example.

59 Cf. *Max. Tyr.* 25.1.

imperfect: the wise men speak there, but it is the ignorant who decide.<sup>60</sup>

So Anacharsis is *the Scythian* – even though the Scythians know nothing of him. Nor does he seem to know much about the Scythians, as in the texts in which he criticizes the Greek systems we may find it frustrating that he does not describe the Scythian system, with the exception of a few standard details, the same as those we find described by the Greeks. The Scythians represent the opposite pole, and that is the end of the matter. The standard image is entirely negative; no alternative is presented.

Anacharsis' wisdom, then, depending on the particular moment and opinion, lies either in going to Greece to learn, or in being capable of making intelligent criticisms that lead the Greeks to question things that they take for granted, things that they assume are perfect. The tension between these two extremes is related to the function that the figure of Anacharsis represents at each moment and in each context.

A wise man from abroad, bringing elements of a simple anthropology, may have been of interest in the late archaic period because of his otherness. Indeed, many of the other wise men are marginal, from the outside. But in the fourth century, in the middle of the crisis of the *polis*, Anacharsis has an unusual knowledge<sup>61</sup> which, both from the outside and the inside, allows him to see everything clearly. In the Roman period, on the other hand, the emphasis is on the past, in an attempt to rationalize the errors – and successes as well, depending on the particular writer's capacity for nostalgia – with the desire to know what it is to be Greek, going beyond a mechanical repetition of traditional customs which no longer made sense. This is why the Scythians say that Anacharsis is not one of them, because he has left his country. And the Greeks see in him a foreigner, who always speaks of them.

The fact that the Greeks name him and consider him a wise man suggests that they are considering the limits between nature and culture. A good illustration of the fact that, from the Greek perspective, he is an outsider, but is absolutely necessary, precisely because he is an outsider, is found again in Plutarch<sup>62</sup> in the *Dinner of the Seven Wise Men*: at the moment that the conversation begins a girl, Cleobuline, combs Anacharsis' hair and Thales says to her: «Go and make our visitor beautiful, so that we may not find him terrifying and savage in his looks, when he is, in reality, most civilized».\*

Barcelona

Francesca Mestre

<sup>60</sup> *Sol.* 5. 6.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. A. Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: the limits of Hellenization*, Cambridge 1975, 3 (on Egyptians and other non-Greeks).

<sup>62</sup> Cf. 148C.

\* My thanks to Michael Maudsley for helping with the English version.