

Names in Soldier Series Again

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 07 Sep 2000

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Jeremy W. Crampton — 07 Sep 2000, 20:48

Hi,

The following authoritative list of names from the Soldier series was posted by alga a while back (I also discussed other names, including people's names, in my fanzine *The Book of Gold* in 1988-89). If you examine the translations carefully, you can see some of the strategies Wolfe took. The premise is that "Latro" an early Latin farmer-mercenary can understand spoken Greek but not read it (he writes in proto-Latin which Wolfe has himself translated into English).

The first strategy is to more or less literally translate names from Greek to Latin so that "Boeotia" becomes "Cowland." There is some additional leeway here because of Wolfe's own translation (not remarked upon much in reviews). So for example, my favorite is "Clay" from Plataea ('broad' or flat, L. *platus* "plate"). Wolfe has imaginative fun with some of these so perhaps "literally" is not the right word--quirkily? For example Eurykles = "well reported" but who is doing the reporting (or boasting)?

Anyway, the second strategy is to translate based on some characteristic of the place or person. What this shows is that Latro (or the fictional "Wolfe" who translated these scrolls) can use some additional background knowledge of the geography and culture. Take "Tieup" for example, which is the name given for Piraeus, the port near Athens. Someone spoke of this in enough detail within the last 12 hours (length of Latro's memory) or he remembers passing through it and seeing the boats tied up. Or, the fictional Wolfe is adding in information, depending on what level you want to work at:

1. Spoken word (Athenian Greek)
2. Translations by "Latro" into proto-Latin (written down)
3. Translations by "Gene Wolfe" who obtains scrolls, into English
4. Real Gene Wolfe creating above three
5. Translations into French, Italian, Greek (etc.) for foreign editions of the Soldier series by third party translators, perhaps in conjunction with Wolfe (foreign readers can operate at this level)

You can see that Wolfe is really problematising the question of translation! I think it would be especially lovely if there was a Greek edition of these books.

Here are my votes for translations most in need of tracing through:

Advent--Eleusis (Advent is the coming of Christ, Eleusis is where Demeter/Persephone's return [rebirth] from Hades was celebrated; is Wolfe making a connection to pre-Christian worship?). Latro must go here (?) to be healed; he offended her in her temple at Clay during the fight.

Thought--Athens (explained by Wolfe as a corruption of a-thanatos, or not-dead, immortal, ie "thought", two and two is always four even if the man dies. But Orwell might dispute this.)

"House of the Sun"--Temple of Apollo (Apollo gives the prophecy around which the books revolve). An epithet of Apollo was lukeios or wolf-killer. So Apollo is both "Sun" and wolf-slayer, two aspects of life-giving. Wolfe makes him a Good Guy in the series.

"The wolf's tooth"--? I speculated in BoG 1 that this was a symbol of amnesia, but we don't know much about it. More likely, perhaps it's just a reference to his real name Lucius Cassius (lukeios). He bears the mark of the wolf(e), ie his name.

Other names not listed by alga:

Boat--Lemnos

Circling Isles--The Cyclades

Copais--an ancient lake in Attica, now dried up

Euxine--the Black Sea

Alga gives Redface Island as Achaia (actually spelled Achaea) but I prefer to equate it with the whole Peloponnesus island.

From: "Alice Turner" <al at interport.net>

Subject: (urth) SOLDIER-Place Names

Date: Thu, 2 Oct 1997 09:21:02

[Posted from URTH, a mailing list about Gene Wolfe's New Sun and other works]

PLACE NAMES

AdventEleusis

BearlandArcadia

ClayPlataea

CowlandBoeotia

Crimson Men--Phoenicians

DolphinsDelphi

Fennel FieldMarathon

Goodcattle IslandEuboea

HillThebes

HorselandThessaly

Hot GatesThermopylae

Hundred EyedArgos

Long CoastAttica

PeaceSalamis

Redface IslandAchaia

RiverlandEgypt

RopeSparta

Sign-of-ThraceSamothece

Silent CountryLaconia

ThoughtAthens

TieupPiraeus

Tower HillCorinth