

Latro's Greek

The Urth list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 19 Jun 2003

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James Wynn — 19 Jun 2003, 06:54

Chris speculates:

Hmm. This, combined with some other posts, made me wonder about languages. Our Lucius was fairly fluent in Greek (even if his memory problem leads to some strange interpretation).

Latro does know a lot about Zoroastrianism and perhaps he speaks Persian. But his knowledge of Greek was not formally learned. We know this because while he can speak it fluently ****he cannot write it****. There is only one way people learn foreign languages that way. The following is part of my notes I've been making as I am reading SotM again:

The Silent Country --

Lakedaimonia; the environs ruled by the city of Sparta. The Greek word for Spartan was "Lakon", and for Sparta was "Lakedaimon" The Latin transliteration is "Laconicus". Wolfe's explanation of Latro's calling Sparta "the silent country" is that "he seems to have heard some taciturn person referred to as having Laconic manners and to have concluded that 'Laconia' meant 'the Silent Country'".

Wolfe is correct in saying that the translation of "Spartan" is NOT "silent person". The word "laconic" meant "acting like a Spartan", because Spartans had a historical reputation for being concise. This use of the word is a metaphor, just as the original meaning of the word "stoic" defined as "impassive toward pleasure or pain" meant no more or less than exhibiting the precepts of the philosophy of Stoicism." Eventually, the word "Laconicus" for "Spartan" did enter the Latin language with the same meaning "laconic" has today, but the Spartan code probably did not have a reputation outside of the Peloponense. So Latro must have picked up the word "laconic" by way of a user that understood its meaning, but in a manner in which Latro himself did not previously understand its derivation -- otherwise he would have translated it properly as "having to do with the Lakons".

So where could Latro have heard the word "laconic" in absence of a knowledge of the Spartans? Certainly not during his campaign in Greece. In Egypt? Perhaps. There were a lot of Greek colonies there, but if he learned the word as an adult, he would have recognized the word as foreign and learned been curious about its etymology. The Forward also states that Latro spoke "Greek fairly fluently, but...read it poorly or not at all." This characterization suggests that Latro was neither formally educated in Greek, nor was his knowledge merely "practical" -- picked up during his travels. He must have learned Greek in his childhood, and learned the word "laconic" in the manner in which Yiddish, Cajun, and Spanish words enter the lexicon of New Yorkers, New Orleanians, and Texans. In this case the most likely location of Latro's farm was in Southern Latium, rather than being near the city of Rome in the north. It would have been just north of the Grecian colony Kynai or even Neopolis (modern Naples), both settled around 200 years prior to the beginning of "Soldier of the Mist".

-- Crush

Andrew Bollen — 19 Jun 2003, 06:06 · follows James Wynn

Crush:

So where could Latro have heard the word "laconic" in absence of a knowledge of the Spartans? Certainly not during his campaign in Greece. In Egypt? Perhaps.

I think he may have learned Greek in Egypt, on campaign, from the Greek contingent in the Persian army. Her 3.1: "... Cambyzes the son of Cyrus led an army consisting of contingents from all over his empire, including some Ionian and Aeolian Greeks." I guess Latro's band somehow ends up as a mercenary unit in this army.

But Rome certainly had dealings with Greek communities in Italy and Sicily at this time, so he could have learned it there, I suppose.

James Wynn — 19 Jun 2003, 15:49 · follows Andrew Bollen

Andrew theorizes:

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Crush replies:

If he learned Greek in Egypt, he would either have been formally taught and studied Greek writing or he would have "picked it up" as practical Greek (i.e. he would not be fluent). It is only as children that we become fluent in a language without learning to write it -- that is, without years and years of immersion in the language anyway -- which Latro is not old enough to have had. Also, if he learned it in Egypt, he would have understood the word "laconic" to mean "related to the Spartan code of brevity of speech" -- the proper translation would have been in his mind just as the proper translation of other Greek words were in his mind.

I reiterate: His reversal of "lakodaemonians" to mean "silent people" (rather than "like Spartans who are silent") means he had to have learned the word "laconic" prior to his knowledge of the Spartan code or even Spartans. So he had to learn the word the same way he learned Greek, as a child. But his native language is still Latin. World hellenization had not yet occurred in the 5th century -- it would not have been considered a matter of course for educated people to learn Greek. So he needed to grow up in Latium, but near Greek people. Thus I place his home north of or around Kynai or just north of modern Naples.

-- Crush