Artículo original

Pseudangelia — Pseudangelos: On False Messages and Messengers in Ancient Greece

Pseudangelia – Pseudangelos: Sobre mensajes y mensajeros falsos en la Antigua Grecia

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the concepts of false message (*pseudangelia*) and messenger (*pseudangelos*) in ancient Greece based mainly on the research by Sian Lewis in *News and Society in the Greek Polis* and Everett L. Wheeler's *Stratagem and the Vocabulary of Military Trickery*. The paper deals also with the mythical concept of trickery (*metis*) in the context of Aristotelian ethics. After a short excursus on false messages and messengers at the beginning of World War II, recent research on the society of disinformation by Thomas Froehlich is briefly addressed in the conclusion.

Key Words: PSEUDANGELIA; PSEUDANGELOS; FALSE MESSAGES; FALSE MESSENGERS; ANCIENT GREECE; TRICKERY; METIS; WORLD WAR II; SOCIETY OF DISINFORMATION.

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar los conceptos de mensaje falso (*pseudangelia*) y mensajero falso (*pseudangelos*) en la Antigua Grecia basado en la investigación de Sian Lewis: *News and Society in the Greek Polis* y de Everett L. Wheeler: *Stratagem and the Vocabulary of Military Trickery*. El artículo trata también del concepto mítico de astucia (*metis*) en el contexto de la ética aristotélica. Luego de un excurso sobre mensajes y mensajeros falsos al comienzo

de la Segunda Guerra Mundial se concluye con una referencia a la investigación reciente realizada por Thomas Froehlich sobre la sociedad de la desinformación.

Palabras clave: PSEUDANGELIA; PSEUDANGELOS; MENSAJES FALSOS; MENSAJEROS FALSOS; ANTIGUA GRECIA; ASTUCIA; METIS; SEGUNDA GUERRA MUNDIAL; SOCIEDAD DE LA DESINFORMACIÓN.

1. Mythical Prélude

The muses, daughters of Zeus, warn Hesiod and the shepherds about the ambiguity of their songs with the following words:

> Shepherds of the wilderness, wretched things of shame, mere bellies,
> we know how to speak many false things (*pseudea polla*) as though they
> were true (*etymoisin homoia*);
> but we know, when we will, to utter true things (*alethéa gerúsasthai*).
>
> ποιμένες ἄγραυλοι, κάκ᾽ ἐλέγχεα, γαστέρες οἶον,
> ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,
> ἴδμεν δ᾽, εὖτ᾽ ἐθέλωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι.
> (Hesiod 1914, v. 26-28)

Leaving Helikon:

> Thence they arise and go abroad by night, veiled in thick mist,
> and utter their song with lovely voice (*ossan*),
> praising Zeus the aegis-holder, and queenly Hera
> of Argos who walks on golden sandals
>
> ἔνθεν ἀπορνύμεναι, κεκαλυμμέναι ἠέρι πολλῇ,
> ἐννύχιαι στεῖχον περικαλλέα ὄσσαν ἱεῖσαι,
> ὑμνεῦσαι Δία τ᾽ αἰγίοχον καὶ πότνιαν Ἥρην
> Ἀργεΐην, χρυσέοισι πεδίλοις ἐμβεβαυῖαν
> (Hesiod 1914, v. 9-11)
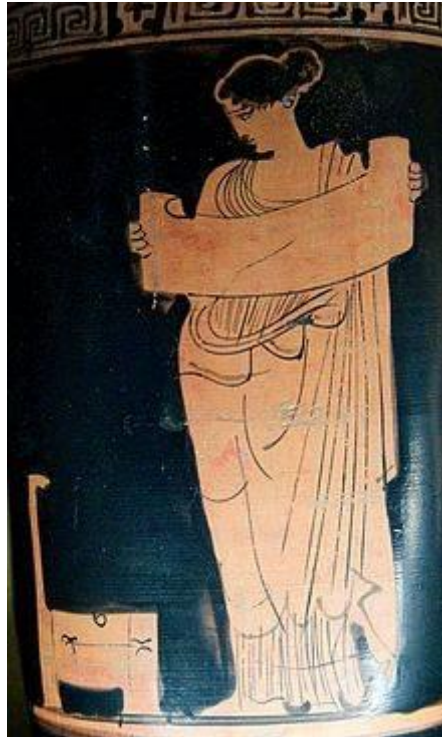
Muse, perhaps Clio, the muse of history, reading a scroll
(Attic red-figure lekythos, Boeotia, c. 430 BC)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muses

Ossa, also called *Pheme*, is the goddess of fame and gossip, Latin *Fama*. Ovid calls her the "tattling Rumor" (*fama loquax*) who is "swollen out of truth from small beginning to a wicked lie" (*veris addere falsa*) (Ovidius 1922, IX, 137-139). Ovidius describes her house as follows:

> There is a spot convenient in the center of the world,
> between the land and sea and the wide heavens,
> the meeting of the threefold universe.
> From there is seen all things that anywhere
> exist, although in distant regions far;
> and there all sounds of earth and space are heard.
> Fame is possessor of this chosen place,
> and has her habitation in a tower,
> which aids her view from that exalted highs.
> And she has fixed there numerous avenues,
> and openings, a thousand, to her tower
> and no gates with closed entrance, for the house
> is open, night and day, of sounding brass,
> re-echoing the tones of every voice.
> It must repeat whatever it may hear;
> and there's no rest, and silence in no part.
>
> Orbe locus medio est inter terrasque fretumque
> caelestesque plagas, triplicis confinia mundi:
> unde quod est usquam, quamvis regionibus absit,

inspicitur, penetratque cavas vox omnis ad aures.
Fama tenet summaque domum sibi legit in arce,
innumerosque aditus ac mille foramina tectis
addidit, et nullis inclusit limina portis.
nocte dieque patet. tota est ex aere sonanti,
tota fremit vocesque refert iteratque, quod audit.
nulla quies intus nullaque silentia parte.
(Ovidius 1892, XII 39-48)

Johann Wilhelm Baur (1607-1640): Ovid. Met. XII, 39-63
J.W. Baur: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Wilhelm_Baur
Ivan Redi: House of Fame: http://ivanredi.com/house-of-fame/fama_baur12/

The myth tells how Theseus after killing the Minotaur and sailing back to Athens, forgot to put up the white sails announcing his success. His father, believing that he was dead, threw himself off a cliff of Sounion into the sea. The following analysis of the concepts of *pseudangelia* and *pseudangelos* is part of a messaging theory or angeletics (Capurro and Holgate 2011). The concepts of *angelia, angelos, angello* (message, messenger, to inform/announce) and the composita *pseudangelia, pseudangelos*, *pseudangeleo* (false message, false messenger, misinformation), documented in ancient Greek (Liddell and Scott 1940)[1], are paradigmatic with regard to the phenomenon of communication in the Greek

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[1] References in (Capurro 2020) and in (Capurro 1978, 46-49) for the New Testament. In modern Greek the word for information is *plerophoria*.

polis. This analysis might help to better understand the kind of message societies we live in today.

2. News in the Greek Polis

In *News and Society in the Greek Polis* Siam Lewis remarks that all areas of social life in the ancient polis were influenced by "the constant reception and dissemination of information" (Lewis 1996, vii). Whether information is understood as *news* depends on the background knowledge of the receiver and on the credibility of the messenger. This is common to ancient and modern societies but the challenge Lewis deals with is "to indicate the ways in which the ancient Greek concept and exploitation of news differed from twentieth-century conceptions." (Lewis 1996, 3). She quotes a paradigmatic story told by Xenophon in the *Hellenica* about a certain Herodes of Syracuse who in the year 396 BC, staying in Phoenicia, observes war-ships being built:

> After this a Syracusan named Herodas, being in Phoenicia with a certain shipowner, and seeing Phoenician war-ships—some of them sailing in from other places, others lying there fully manned, and yet others still making ready for sea—and hearing, besides, that there were to be three hundred of them, embarked on the first boat that sailed to Greece and reported [*exengeile*] to the Lacedaemonians that the King and Tissaphernes were preparing this expedition; but whither it was bound he said he did not know.

> μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα Ἡρώδας τις Συρακόσιος ἐν Φοινίκῃ ὢν μετὰ ναυκλήρου τινός, καὶ ἰδὼν τριήρεις Φοινίσσας, τὰς μὲν καταπλεούσας ἄλλοθεν, τὰς δὲ καὶ αὐτοῦ πεπληρωμένας, τὰς δὲ καὶ ἔτι κατασκευαζομένας, προσακούσας δὲ καὶ τοῦτο, ὅτι τριακοσίας αὐτὰς δέοι γενέσθαι, ἐπιβὰς ἐπὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἀναγόμενον πλοῖον εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἐξήγγειλε τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις ὡς βασιλέως καὶ Τισσαφέρνους τὸν στόλον τοῦτον παρασκευαζομένων· ὅποι δὲ οὐδὲν ἔφη εἰδέναι. (Xenophon, 1968 3, 4, 1)

What was the impact of the news brought to Sparta by Herodas? Xenophon writes:

> Now while the Lacedaemonians were in a state of great excitement, and were gathering together their allies and taking counsel [*bouleuoménon*] as to what they should do, Lysander, thinking that the Greeks would be far superior on the sea, and reflecting that the land force which went up country with Cyrus had returned safely, persuaded Agesilaus to promise, in case the Lacedaemonians would give him thirty Spartans, two thousand emancipated Helots, and a contingent of six thousand of the allies, to make an expedition to Asia. Such were the motives which actuated Lysander, but, in addition, he wanted to make the expedition with Agesilaus on his own account also, in order that with the aid of Agesilaus he might re-establish the

decarchies which had been set up by him in the cities, but had been overthrown through the ephors, who had issued a proclamation [*paréngeilan*] restoring to the cities their ancient form of government.

ἀνεπτερωμένων δὲ τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων καὶ τοὺς συμμάχους συναγόντων καὶ βουλευομένων τί χρὴ ποιεῖν, Λύσανδρος νομίζων καὶ τῷ ναυτικῷ πολὺ περιέσεσθαι τοὺς Ἕλληνας καὶ τὸ πεζὸν λογιζόμενος ὡς ἐσώθη τὸ μετὰ Κύρου ἀναβάν, πείθει τὸν Ἀγησίλαον ὑποστῆναι, ἂν αὐτῷ δῶσι τριάκοντα μὲν Σπαρτιατῶν, εἰς δισχιλίους δὲ τῶν νεοδαμώδων, εἰς ἑξακισχιλίους δὲ τὸ σύνταγμα τῶν συμμάχων, στρατεύεσθαι εἰς τὴν Ἀσίαν. πρὸς δὲ τούτῳ τῷ λογισμῷ καὶ αὐτὸς συνεξελθεῖν αὐτῷ ἐβούλετο, ὅπως τὰς δεκαρχίας τὰς κατασταθείσας ὑπ᾽ ἐκείνου ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν, ἐκπεπτωκυίας δὲ διὰ τοὺς ἐφόρους, οἳ τὰς πατρίους πολιτείας παρήγγειλαν, πάλιν καταστήσειε μετ᾽ Ἀγησιλάου. (Xenophon 1968, 3,4.2)

Lewis remarks that this important information was brought by an unofficial messenger the quickest way possible. The messenger was considered a trustworthy source. The Spartans had not an own information network although but it is plausible to believe that the messenger did not come to Sparta by chance. Xenophon does not say whether Herodas was sent to Phoenicia by the Spartans. "What is news?" asks Lewis (Lewis 1996, 3). Her answer is that although "there is no Greek word for news as such" (Lewis 1996, 4) the concept can be related to a special kind of information concerning a new and relevant event, the closest Greek word being *aggellô*:

Ta kaina, new things, or *kainoi logoi*, new stories, are reported, but the primary word is *aggellô*, I report, and its cognates. To bring news is to bring a message or report, and the advent of news is described impersonally: *êggeilen*, it was reported. An *aggelma* is both news and a message —— clearly the act of reporting is what creates news. (Lewis 1996, 4)

According to Lewis there was no clear distinction between truth and falsity in ancient Greek. She writes:

phême, common report, is not intrinsically less trustworthy than *logos* (story) or *epistolê* (message); the distinction is one of source. A newsmonger, someone who makes up news, is in Greek a *logopoios*, a fabricator of stories. This word also denotes a poet, but this is less surprising when placed in a Greek context. There is no correlation between history and truth as opposed to poetry and fiction; on the contrary the Homeric poems, for instance, were treated by historical writers as legitimate history. The tales of poets and dramatists, equally, were drawn from myth, and hence true, as opposed to invented stories. A *logopoios*, then, is not necessarily a liar; as Demosthenes makes clear in his condemnation of newsmongers, it is because they are able to be plausible and authoritative that they are so dangerous. (Lewis 1996, 4-5)

Lewis refers to Demosthenes (Lewis 1996, 80) who in the *First Philippic* writes about the "circulating" (*periechometha*) of "invented stories" (*logous plattontes*) on supposed negotiations between Philip and the Spartans sent by himself, Demosthenes, to the Persian King Artaxerxes:

> Some of us spread the rumor that Philip is negotiating with the Lacedaemonians for the overthrow of Thebes and the dissolution of the free states, others that he has sent an embassy to the Great King, others that he is besieging towns in Illyria; in short, each of us circulates his own piece of fiction.

> ἡμῶν δ᾽ οἱ μὲν περιιόντες μετὰ Λακεδαιμονίων φασὶ Φίλιππον πράττειν τὴν Θηβαίων κατάλυσιν καὶ τὰς πολιτείας διασπᾶν, οἱ δ᾽ ὡς πρέσβεις πέπομφεν ὡς βασιλέα, οἱ δ᾽ ἐν Ἰλλυριοῖς πόλεις τειχίζειν, οἱ δὲ λόγους πλάττοντες ἕκαστος περιερχόμεθα. (Demosthenes 1903, 4, 48)

But, in fact, this is what he, Demosthenes, thinks about Philip, in contrast to the stories disseminated by the "stupid rumor-mongers" (*anoetotatoi logopoiountes*) that help Philip based on their pretended knowledge:

> Truly, men of Athens, I do think that Philip is drunk with the magnitude of his achievements and dreams of further triumphs, when, elated by his success, he finds that there is none to bar his way; but I cannot for a moment believe that he is deliberately acting in such a way that all the fools at Athens know what he is going to do next. For of all fools the rumor-mongers are the worst.

> ἐγὼ δ᾽ οἶμαι μέν, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, νὴ τοὺς θεοὺς ἐκεῖνον μεθύειν τῷ μεγέθει τῶν πεπραγμένων καὶ πολλὰ τοιαῦτ᾽ ὀνειροπολεῖν ἐν τῇ γνώμῃ, τήν τ᾽ ἐρημίαν τῶν κωλυσόντων ὁρῶντα καὶ τοῖς πεπραγμένοις ἐπηρμένον, οὐ μέντοι μὰ Δί᾽ οὕτω γε προαιρεῖσθαι πράττειν ὥστε τοὺς ἀνοητοτάτους τῶν παρ᾽ ἡμῖν εἰδέναι τί μέλλει ποιεῖν ἐκεῖνος· ἀνοητότατοι γάρ εἰσιν οἱ λογοποιοῦντες. (Demosthenes 1903, 4, 49)

What should be done? Demosthenes tells the Athenians not to give credit to such rumors and "idle words" (*logon mataion*) and to follow reason (*ton noun*):

> But if, putting rumors aside, we recognize that this man is our enemy, who has for years been robbing and insulting us, that wherever we once hoped to find help we have found hindrance, that the future lies in our own hands, and if we refuse to fight now in Thrace, we shall perhaps be forced to fight here at home—if, I say, we recognize these facts, then we shall have done with idle words and shall come to a right decision. Our business is not to speculate on what the future may bring forth, but to be certain that it will bring disaster, unless you face the facts and consent to do your duty.

ἀλλ᾽ ἂν ἀφέντες ταῦτ᾽ ἐκεῖν᾽ εἰδῶμεν, ὅτι ἐχθρὸς ἄνθρωπος καὶ τὰ ἡμέτερ᾽ ἡμᾶς ἀποστερεῖ καὶ χρόνον πολὺν ὕβρικε, καὶ ἅπανθ᾽ ὅσα πώποτ᾽ ἠλπίσαμέν τινα πράξειν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν καθ᾽ ἡμῶν εὕρηται, καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς ἡμῖν ἐστί, κἂν μὴ νῦν ἐθέλωμεν ἐκεῖ πολεμεῖν αὐτῷ, ἐνθάδ᾽ ἴσως ἀναγκασθησόμεθα τοῦτο ποιεῖν, ἂν ταῦτ᾽ εἰδῶμεν, καὶ τὰ δέοντ᾽ ἐσόμεθ᾽ ἐγνωκότες καὶ λόγων ματαίων ἀπηλλαγμένοι· οὐ γὰρ ἄττα ποτ᾽ ἔσται δεῖ σκοπεῖν, ἀλλ᾽ ὅτι φαῦλα, ἂν μὴ προσέχητε τὸν νοῦν καὶ τὰ προσήκοντα ποιεῖν ἐθέλητε, εὖ εἰδέναι. (Demosthenes 1903, 4, 50)

What were the criteria for evaluating whether the news and the messenger were trustworthy? Lewis points to the following ones: 1) identity (credentials), 2) class (status), 3) autopsy (eye-witness), 4) motive (financial gain, official herald). The *polis* had several possible responses with regard to the credibility of messages and messengers:

> There were thus several ways to test the credentials of a messenger. An individual known to the polis, or who could make himself known, was more likely to be believed than a stranger; some attempt was made by Greek poleis to integrate such unknown messengers into the structure of the polis. A noble or wealthy individual was considered more credible than a poor or low status one, and an eye-witness was more convincing than a messenger with a second-hand account. Proof of disinterested or benevolent motive, as opposed to a purely mercenary one also raised the credibility of a messenger. A range of responses to adventitious news on the part of the state existed. Broadly, three reactions were possible — to reject the news as untrue, to make attempts to verify it, or to accept if as true and act on it. By far the most common reaction to an adventitious messenger was to seek further information, sometimes keeping the original informant as a hostage. [...] But it was not often that a situation could be treated in this way; news more usually necessitated a quick response. (Lewis 1996, 93)

According to Lewis the relation between public and private as well as of news and gossip "flowed ceaselessly in the ancient polis." (Lewis 1996, 9). This was particularly the case with regard to women:

> The image of women as over-talkative, and as gossips in a harmful sense, is present in Greek literature from the poetry of the seventh century to the rhetoric of the fourth. [...] Clearly women's gossip could be used to good effect in exposing areas of private behaviour to public view. [...] The function of gossip is imposing a common moral standard on the community is well-documented [...] The female role was thus a dual one: as wives and daughters they had a duty to prevent potentially harmful information leaving the oikos; as neighbours and fellow citizens they needed to circulate information about others in order to impose collective moral standards. (Lewis 1996, 11-12).

Lewis refers to the ambivalent concept of *phêmê*. She writes:

> Phêmê represented more than simply rumour for the Greeks: it was a personification which had been current since the time of Hesiod, and, according to Aischines, the personification of Rumour had an altar in Athens. It is interesting that the Greeks chose to see Rumour as something divine, rather than mundane, information which is passed on by quasi-supernatural means, rather than from person to person. Phêmê, in the time of Homer, meant a divine of ominous utterance, and developed from this to mean 'reputation' or 'report'. Hesiod characterizes phêmê as divine because it cannot be stopped by human means once abroad, emphasising its self-generating nature. [...] It was good to find out about others, but bad to reveal about yourself and your family. The role of women in his as disseminators of news and gossip is thus either valuable or harmful, depending on one's standpoint. But without gossip it would have been impossible to establish reputations. (Lewis 1996, 12-13)

According to Lewis, the Agora with all kinds of shops was the main place where information was circulated (Lewis 1996, 14-15). But individual travels were no less important with regard to economic, military or religious information (Lewis 1996, 25-50). Official announcements were done by heralds (*kêrux*) as different from unofficial news coming from the storyteller (*logopoios*) (Lewis 1996, 96, 100-101) The Assembly (*ekklêsia*) was the place where official and unofficial news were dealt with. The Council (*boule*) took decisions about keeping some matters secret in order "to prevent information reaching the enemy." (Lewis 1996, 116)

Herodotus describes with admiration the Persian information network that builds a contrast to the Greek way of sharing news. He writes:

> While Xerxes did thus, he sent a messenger (*angeleonta*) to Persia with news of his present misfortune. Now there is nothing mortal that accomplishes a course more swiftly than do these messengers (*angelon*), by the Persians' skilful contrivance. It is said that as many days as there are in the whole journey, so many are the men and horses that stand along the road, each horse and man at the interval of a day's journey. These are stopped neither by snow nor rain nor heat nor darkness from accomplishing their appointed course with all speed.
> The first rider delivers his charge to the second, the second to the third, and thence it passes on from hand to hand, even as in the Greek torch-bearers' race in honor of Hephaestus. This riding-post is called in Persia, *angareion*.
>
> ταῦτά τε ἅμα Ξέρξης ἐποίεε καὶ ἔπεμπε ἐς Πέρσας ἀγγελέοντα τὴν παρεοῦσάν σφι συμφορήν. τούτων δὲ τῶν ἀγγέλων ἐστὶ οὐδὲν ὅ τι θᾶσσον παραγίνεται θνητὸν ἐόν: οὕτω τοῖσι Πέρσῃσι ἐξεύρηται τοῦτο. λέγουσι γὰρ ὡς ὁσέων ἂν ἡμερέων ᾖ ἡ πᾶσα ὁδός, τοσοῦτοι ἵπποι τε καὶ ἄνδρες διεστᾶσι κατὰ ἡμερησίην ὁδὸν ἑκάστην ἵππος τε καὶ ἀνὴρ τεταγμένος: τοὺς οὔτε

νιφετός, οὐκ ὄμβρος, οὐ καῦμα, οὐ νὺξ ἔργει μὴ οὐ κατανύσαι τὸν προκείμενον αὐτῷ δρόμον τὴν ταχίστην.

ὁ μὲν δὴ πρῶτος δραμὼν παραδιδοῖ τὰ ἐντεταλμένα τῷ δευτέρῳ, ὁ δὲ δεύτερος τῷ τρίτῳ· τὸ δὲ ἐνθεῦτεν ἤδη κατ᾽ ἄλλον καὶ ἄλλον διεξέρχεται παραδιδόμενα, κατά περ ἐν Ἕλλησι ἡ λαμπαδηφορίη τὴν τῷ Ἡφαίστῳ ἐπιτελέουσι. τοῦτο τὸ δράμημα τῶν ἵππων καλέουσι Πέρσαι ἀγγαρήιον. (Herodotus 1921, 8, 98)

The map of Achaemenid Empire and the section of the Royal Road noted by Herodotus

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Road

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As Lewis remarks such a system belongs for the Greeks to tyrannies (Lewis 1996, 62). She refers to Aristotle who writes in the *Politics*:

> in fact the close watch upon all things that usually engender the two emotions of pride and confidence, and the prevention of the formation of study-circles and other conferences for debate, and the employment of every means that will make people as much as possible unknown to one another (for familiarity increases mutual confidence); and for the people in the city to be always visible and to hang about the palace-gates (for thus there would be least concealment about what they are doing, and they would get into a habit of being humble from always acting in a servile way); and all the other similar devices of Persian and barbarian tyranny (for all have the same effect); and to try not to be uninformed about any chance utterances or actions of any of the subjects, but to have spies like the women called 'provocatrices' (*potagogides*) at Syracuse and the 'sharp-ears' (*otakoustas*) that used to be sent out by Hiero wherever there was any gathering or conference (for when men are afraid of spies of this sort they keep a check on their tongues, and if they do speak freely are less likely not to be found out); and to set men at variance with one another and cause quarrels between friend and friend and between the people and the notables and among the rich. And it is a device of tyranny to make the subjects poor, so that a guard may not be kept, and also that the people being busy with their daily affairs may not have leisure to plot against their ruler.

ἀλλὰ πάντα φυλάττειν ὅθεν εἴωθε γίγνεσθαι δύο, φρόνημά τε καὶ πίστις, καὶ μήτε σχολὰς μήτε ἄλλους συλλόγους ἐπιτρέπειν γίγνεσθαι σχολαστικούς, καὶ πάντα ποιεῖν ἐξ ὧν ὅτι μάλιστα ἀγνῶτες ἀλλήλοις ἔσονται πάντες (ἡ γὰρ γνῶσις πίστιν ποιεῖ μᾶλλον πρὸς ἀλλήλους): καὶ τὸ τοὺς ἐπιδημοῦντας αἰεὶ φανεροὺς εἶναι καὶ διατρίβειν περὶ θύρας (οὕτω γὰρ ἂν ἥκιστα λανθάνοιεν τί πράττουσι, καὶ φρονεῖν ἂν ἐθίζοιντο μικρὸν αἰεὶ δουλεύοντες): καὶ τἆλλα ὅσα τοιαῦτα Περσικὰ καὶ βάρβαρα τυραννικά ἐστιν (πάντα γὰρ ταὐτὸν δύναται): καὶ τὸ μὴ λανθάνειν πειρᾶσθαι ὅσα τυγχάνει τις λέγων ἢ πράττων τῶν ἀρχομένων, ἀλλ᾽ εἶναι κατασκόπους, οἷον περὶ Συρακούσας αἱ ποταγωγίδες καλούμεναι, καὶ οὓς ὠτακουστὰς ἐξέπεμπεν Ἱέρων, ὅπου τις εἴη συνουσία καὶ σύλλογος (παρρησιάζονταί τε γὰρ ἧττον, φοβούμενοι τοὺς τοιούτους, κἂν παρρησιάζωνται, λανθάνουσιν ἧττον): καὶ τὸ διαβάλλειν ἀλλήλοις καὶ συγκρούειν καὶ φίλους φίλοις καὶ τὸν δῆμον τοῖς γνωρίμοις καὶ τοὺς πλουσίους ἑαυτοῖς. καὶ τὸ πένητας ποιεῖν τοὺς ἀρχομένους τυραννικόν, ὅπως μήτε φυλακὴ τρέφηται καὶ πρὸς τῷ καθ᾽ ἡμέραν ὄντες ἄσχολοι ὦσιν ἐπιβουλεύειν. (Aristotle 1957, V, 1313 b)

According to Lewis, "the official spreading of news from city to city for its own sake, was virtually unknown in Greece." (Lewis 1966, 66). Each polis had its own government and laws. They interacted with each other in cases of war or religious celebrations, the last ones since the late fourth century with Philip of Macedon were the occasion for the dissemination of official news (Lewis 1996, 73). News circulated in written form since end of the fifth century. Lewis remarks that "the oral and the written remained interdependent. The polis, however, never adapted itself totally to writing and publication, because the ideology of writing was at odds with its conception of public life." (Lewis 1996, 153). Media revolutions such as printing and digital technology lead not only to a "structural transformation of the public sphere" (Habermas 1962) but also of the relation between the public and the private (Capurro 2003, Buchmann 2012).

3. Pseudangelía and Pseudángelos

In *Stratagem and the Vocabulary of Military Trickery* Everett Wheeler remarks that the concepts of *pseudangelos* and *pseudangelia* in the sense of false messenger and false messages were used particularly in a military context (Wheeler 1988, 38-41).[2]

Pseudangelos in mentioned in Book 15 of the Iliad in the following context. Hera allows Poseidon to help the Greeks while she seduces Zeus to sleep. As Zeus

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[2] For an analysis of the concept of lie from the perspective of linguistics and communication science see (Knobloch 2014) and (Schottlaender 1927) with regard to lie in the ethics of Greco-Roman philosophy.

awakes, he is enraged by Poseidon's intervention. He, Zeus, tells Hera to send him Iris, the messenger between the gods (*theoisi metangelos*) (Homer 1920, XV, 144) to Mount Ida in order to command Poseidon as quickly as possible to stop the fighting. Zeus warns Iris not to be a false messenger (*pseudangelos*) and to inform (*angeilai*) Poseidon everything he, Zeus, has told to her.

> And to Iris first he spoke winged words:
> "Up, go, swift Iris; unto the lord Poseidon
> bear all these messages (*angeilai*), don't be a false messenger (*pseudangelos*)"
>
> Ἶριν δὲ προτέρην ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα:
> 'βάσκ᾽ ἴθι Ἶρι ταχεῖα, Ποσειδάωνι ἄνακτι
> πάντα τάδ᾽ ἀγγεῖλαι, μὴ δὲ ψευδάγγελος εἶναι.
>
> (Homer 1920, XV, 157-159)
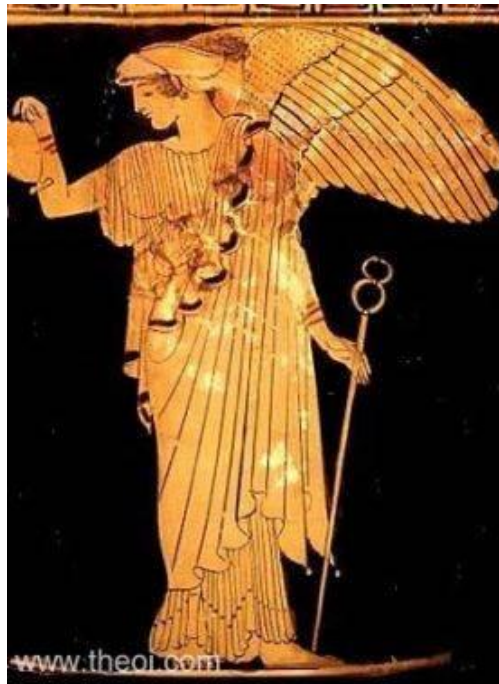
Iris, Athenian red-figure lekythos C5th B.C.
Rhode Island School of Design Museum
http://www.theoi.com/Pontios/Iris.html

The other messenger of the gods is Hermes, the protector of human messengers, travellers, thieves, merchants, and orators.
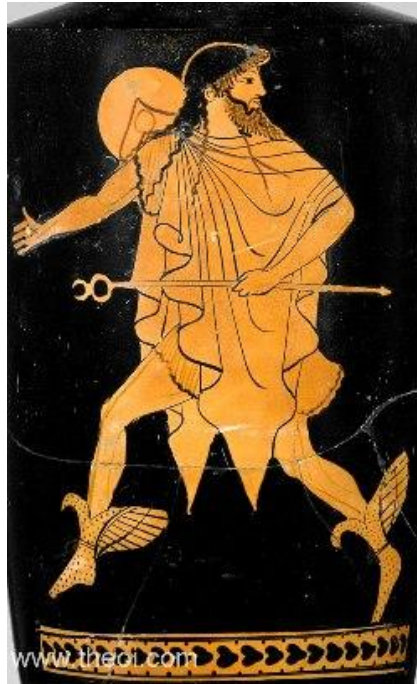
Hermes, Athenian red-figure lekythos 5th BC.

Metropolitan Museum of Art

Source: http://www.theoi.com/Olympios/Hermes.html

Any messenger can be a true or a false one. Wheeler remarks:

> From Homer the word passed to Athenian comedy of the fifth century B.C.
> and Aristotle cites a play of unknown author and date entitled Odysseus the
> False Messenger. The function of pseudangelos or pseudangelia, which first
> appears   in   Xenophon,   is   basically   identical   to   that
> of pseudoprodosia or pseudoautomolia: dissemination of false information or
> luring the enemy into a trap or false move. (Wheeler 1988, 40)

In the *Poetics* Aristotle deals with the different kinds of recognizing (*anagnorisis*)
a human being in the context of the representation of an action. One of them is
recognition based on false inference (*paralogismou*). He writes:

> There is also a kind of fictitious discovery which depends on a false
> inference on the part of the audience, for instance in Odysseus the False
> Messenger (*to Odussei to pseudangelo*), he said he would recognize the bow,
> which as a matter of fact he had not seen, but to assume that he really would
> reveal himself by this means is a false inference (*paralogismos*).
>
> ἔστιν δέ τις καὶ συνθετὴ ἐκ παραλογισμοῦ τοῦ θεάτρου, οἷον ἐν τῷ Ὀδυσσεῖ
> τῷ ψευδαγγέλῳ· τὸ μὲν γὰρ τὸ τόξον ἐντείνειν, ἄλλον δὲ μηδένα,
> πεποιημένον ὑπὸ τοῦ ποιητοῦ καὶ ὑπόθεσις, καὶ εἴ γε τὸ τόξον ἔφη
> γνώσεσθαι ὃ οὐχ ἑωράκει· τὸ δὲ ὡς δι᾽ ἐκείνου ἀναγνωριοῦντος διὰ τούτου
> ποιῆσαι παραλογισμός. (Aristotle 1966, 1455 a 14-15)

The false inference is based on the presupposition that the observer believes that he recognizes someone with a bow as being Odysseus while this is not necessarily the case.

Red-figure Skyphos of the Penelope Painter, 450-435 BC.

Berlin, Staatliche Museen

https://www.swisseduc.ch/altphilo/antike/realien/as/gallerie/myth/odysseus/od_pages/od_
86.htm

We don't know exactly the Aristotelian reference to the play "Odysseus the False Messenger" (Karamanou 2019, 68-69), but we know the context in which Aristotle uses related terms in the *Nicomachean Ethics* when analyzing the relation between prudence (*phronesis*) and wisdom (*sophia*). Prudence means the capacity of choosing between different options related to happiness (*eudaimonia*) while wisdom (*sophia*) concerns the knowledge of what is permanent (Aristotle 1894, 1143 b 20). Aristotle distinguishes prudence from skill (*deinotes*) which is to be praised in case the goals are good, otherwise it is just cunning (*panourgia*). But, he adds, while prudence implies cunning the opposite is not the case because good goals can only be through virtue (*arete*). Wickedness (*mochtheria*) and falsehood (*diapseudesthai*) distort (*diastrephei*) the judgement of reason (Aristotle 1966, 1143 b 23-36).

Relating prudence (*phronesis*) to skill (*deinotes*) Aristotle takes a critical distance from Socratic ethics based on reason (*logos*) alone. He refers to the saying that some animals have the capacity of previewing (*dynamin pronoetiken*) which is the reason why "some people go so far to say that certain species of animals have prudence (*phronima*)" but he does not make this saying his own (Aristotle 1894, 1141 a 27). The distinction between living beings without logos (*aloga zoia*) and human beings is in danger of becoming problematic for, as Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant make clear, human intelligence interferes with animal intelligence (Detienne and Vernant 1974, 305-306). Prudence in connection with skill (*deinotes*) and reason (*logos*) characterizes human virtue (*arete*). In this regard, Aristotle gives conjectural knowledge a positive value (Detienne and Vernant 1974, 306) in contrast to Plato who devalues knowledge based on probability with regard to the ethical value of temperance (*sophrosyne*) (Detienne and Vernant 1974, 304). For Aristotle, sagacity (*anchinoia*) implies a certain flexibility of the soul in contrast to the quietness (*hesuchia*) of temperance (*sophrosyne*). Socrates relativized the quietness of temperance with regard to bodily activities such as writing and reading, playing the lyre, boxing, wrestling, and running (Plato 1974, 150a-160b; Detienne and Vernant 1974, 294-295). Skill (*deinotes*) as amoral cleverness whose goals can be good or bad was called *metis* in Greek mythology. Originally an Oceanide, Metis was a daughter of the Titans Oceanus and Tethys who could change her appearance (Detienne and Vernant 1974).

A winged goddess depicted under Zeus' throne, possibly Metis.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metis_%28mythology%29

In the first verse of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is said to be cunning (*polutropon*)

> Tell me, O Muse, of the man of many devices, who wandered full many ways after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Troy.
>
> ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ
> πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσεν:
> (Homer 2016, 1,1)

Detienne and Vernant point out that Odysseus was *polimetis* and *polumechanos*, always able to find a means to extricate himself from hopeless situations (*aporoi*). Athena and Hephaistos, who are both *metis* gods, were his teachers. He was able to make all kinds of crafty devices (*panourgos*) (Detienne and Vernant 1974, 25-27). Also, it is worth noting, Hermes was called *polumetis* (Detienne and Vernant 1974, 266).

Pithos of Mykonos
with the earliest picture of the Troyan Horse (670 BC)
https://www.flickr.com/photos/travellingrunes/2949254926/, CC BY-SA
2.0 https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10603596

Odysseus and his men blinding Polyphemus.
Laconian black-figure cup, 565-560 BC.
https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odysseus#/media/Datei:Odysseus_Polyphemos_Cdm_Paris_190.jpg

According to Detienne and Vernant, Western metaphysics, particularly Plato and later on Christianity, gave the primacy to truth, overshadowing other kinds of understanding such as cunning, emphasising the separation between humans and other animals (Detienne and Vernant 1976, 318).

Pseudángelos and *pseudangelía* belong to *métis* and *panourgia* particularly in a war context. Wheeler writes:

> If the stratagemic vocabulary could borrow from the language of sophists and philosophers, such as sophia, techne, and phronesis, as well as panourgia from the theater, a term from the arena of sport would not be peculiar, especially since the language of war and sport often coincide. [...] Of greater significance, however, are pseudos (lie) and its adjective pseudes (false). Certainly lying to the enemy or to one's own forces can be a stratagem (cf. Xen., Mem. 4.2.15-17), but Greeks much preferred to use apate rather than pseudos. In fact the two words, as noted earlier, are closely linked: pseudos is the objective aspect of the subjective process of apate, and if apate's tone is neutral, much the same applies to pseudos and pseudes. In archaic Greek thought the opposite of pseudes is not alethes (true) but apseudes (not false, without deceit), and the antonym of aletheia (truth) is lethe (forgetfulness). Pseudos falls into the same context of deceit and delusion as dolos, metis, and apate, none of which precisely corresponds to "lie." Its meaning is either "something which seeks to deceive" or "something without fulfillment or realization. (Wheeler 1988, 38-39)

In the *Hipparchikos*, a treatise on the tasks of the cavalry commander, Xenophon writes:

> He must also have sufficient ingenuity to make a small company of horse look large, and conversely, to make a large one look small; to seem to be absent when present, and present when absent (*paronta men apeinai, aponta de pareinai*); to know how to deceive, not merely how to steal the enemy's possessions, but also how to conceal his own force and fall on the enemy unexpectedly.
>
> The means to employ for scaring the enemy are false ambuscades (*pseudenedras*), false reliefs (*pseudoboetheias*) and false information (*pseudangelias*). An enemy's confidence is greatest when he is told that the other side is in difficulties and is preoccupied.
>
> χρὴ δὲ μηχανητικὸν εἶναι καὶ τοῦ πολλοὺς μὲν φαίνεσθαι τοὺς ὀλίγους ἱππέα ς, πάλιν δ᾽ ὀλίγους τοὺς πολλούς, καὶ τοῦ δοκεῖν παρόντα μὲν ἀπεῖναι, ἀπόντ α δὲ παρεῖναι, καὶ τοῦ μὴ τὰ τῶν πολεμίων μόνον κλέπτειν ἐπίστασθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ ἱππέας ἅμα κλέπτοντα ἐξ ἀπροσδοκήτου τοῖς πολεμίοις ἐπι τίθεσθαι.
> φοβεῖν γε μὴν τοὺς πολεμίους καὶ ψευδενέδρας οἷόν τε καὶ ψευδοβοηθείας κ αὶ ψευδαγγελίας ποιοῦντα. θαρσοῦσι δὲ μάλιστα πολέμιοι, ὅταν ὄντα τοῖς ἐν αντίοις πράγματα καὶ ἀσχολίας πυνθάνωνται. (Xenophon 1969, 5, 2, 8)

4. Excursus: Fake News at the Beginning of World War II

The *US Department of Navy – Naval Historical Center* describes the scuttling of the German cruiser *Admiral Graf Spee* in December 17, 1939 as follows:

At dawn on 13 December 1939 the German armored ship (or "pocket battleship") Admiral Graf Spee, cruising toward South America's Rio de la Plata (River Plate) in search of enemy merchantmen, sighted distant masts. She had been operating in the south Atlantic and Indian Oceans for three months on a successful campaign to disrupt allied shipping and tie up British and French Naval forces. Twenty-three major warships were actively hunting for her. Now the two sides were about to meet, for those masts belonged to three British cruisers, Exeter, Ajax and Achilles (the latter part of the Royal New Zealand Navy). Initially thinking these were merchant vessels, Admiral Graf Spee's Captain Hans Langsdorf headed for them, continuing his approach once their true nature was known.

British Commodore Henry Harwood, on board Ajax, also steamed toward his enemy. The opposing ships closed rapidly to gunfire range, with shooting beginning at just under 20,000 yards. Harwood divided his force, complicating Langsdorf's gunnery, but both sides began hitting early. Exeter was very seriously damaged by the German's eleven-inch guns: both of her forward eight-inch gun turrets were knocked out, her bridge crew was largely killed or wounded and fires raged amidships. She gamely remained in action until her remaining turret would no longer function. Admiral Graf Spee had also been repeatedly struck by Exeter's shells, and by six-inch projectiles from the other two cruisers. She laid a smoke screen and turned away, firing on Ajax and Achilles, and disabled two of the former's gun turrets.

An hour and twenty minutes of intense combat was followed by a long day's pursuit as Admiral Graf Spee headed for Montevideo, Uruguay, harried by Ajax and Achilles. She arrived just after midnight on 14 December and requested time to make repairs, reporting to the Uruguayans that she had been hit some seventy times. The British decided to keep the German warship in port as long as possible so they could bring up reinforcements. To this end they resorted to diplomatic trickery and broadcast misleading reports that the carrier Ark Royal and battle cruiser Renown were nearby. Captain Langsdorf, with much of his ammunition expended and his ship damaged, was soon persuaded that escape was impossible. After consulting with the German Government, in the early evening of 17 December he took his ship out into the broad river and blew her up, completely demolishing Admiral Graf Spee's after portion and leaving her a sunken, burned-out wreck.

Her crew went to Argentina where, on the night of 19-20 December 1939, Captain Langsdorf took his own life. The Battle of the River Plate, first of World War II's many great sea battles, greatly boosted British prestige and morale, but at considerable cost. The badly injured Exeter, initially thought not worth repairing, was out of the war for fifteen months. Repairs to Ajax lasted until mid-1940. (Department of the Navy 2006)

The scuttling of Admiral Graf Spee
https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Admiral_Graf_Spee

The role of trickery in war is analyzed by Carl von Clausewitz in a chapter on "Messages in war" ("Nachrichten im Kriege") as follows:

> A great part of the information [Nachrichten] obtained in War is contradictory, a still greater part is false, and by far the greatest part is of a doubtful character. What is required of an officer is a certain power of discrimination, which only knowledge of men and things and good judgment can give. The law of probability must be his guide. This is not a trifling difficulty even in respect of the first plans, which can be formed in the chamber outside the real sphere of War, but it is enormously increased when in the thick of War itself one report [Nachricht] follows hard upon the heels of another; it is then fortunate if these reports in contradicting each other show a certain balance of probability, and thus themselves call forth a scrutiny. It is much worse for the inexperienced when accident does not render him this service, but one report supports another, confirms it, magnifies it, finishes off the picture with fresh touches of colour, until necessity in urgent haste forces from us a resolution which will soon be discovered to be folly, all those reports having been lies, exaggerations, errors, &c. &c. In a few words, most reports [Nachrichten] are false, and the timidity [Furchtsamkeit] of men acts as a multiplier of lies and untruths. (Clausewitz 2019, Chapter VI)

> Ein großer Teil der Nachrichten, die man im Kriege bekommt, ist widersprechend, ein noch größerer ist falsch und bei weitem der größte einer ziemlichen Ungewißheit unterworfen. Was man hier vom Offizier fordern kann, ist ein gewisses Unterscheiden, was nur Sach- und Menschenkenntnis und Urteil geben können. Das Gesetz des Wahrscheinlichen muß ihn leiten. Diese Schwierigkeit ist nicht unbedeutend bei den ersten Entwürfen, die man auf dem Zimmer und noch außer der eigentlichen Kriegssphäre gemacht werden, aber unendlich größer ist sie da, wo im Getümmel des Krieges selbst eine Nachricht die andere drängt; ein Glück noch, wenn sie, einander widersprechend, ein gewisses Gleichgewicht erzeugen und die Kritik selbst herausfordern. Viel schlimmer für den Nichtgeprüften, wenn ihm der Zufall diesen Dienst nicht erweist, sondern eine Nachricht die andere unterstützt, bestätigt, das Bild mit immer neuen Farben ausmalt, bis die Notwendigkeit uns in fliegender Eile den Entschluß abgedrängt hat, der – bald als Torheit

erkannt wird, so wie alle jene Nachrichten, als Lügen, Übertreibungen, Irrtümer usw. Mit kurzen Worten: die meisten Nachrichten sind falsch, und die Furchtsamkeit der Menschen wird zur neuen Kraft der Lüge und Unwahrheit. (Clausewitz 1990, 75-76)

Conclusion: The Society of Disinformation

The information scientist Thomas Froehlich has done extensive research on the society of disinformation (Froehlich 2019, 2020). Froehlich describes a taxonomy of false messages which include:

- Lies per se: While in earlier ages, we might expect lies to gain no traction (with some exceptions, e.g., Bill Clinton's "I did not have sex with that woman"), one of Trump's achievements is to make the lie a hallmark of his leadership style. [...]
- Ignorance per se: Lacking knowledge or awareness, being uninformed about a specific subject or fact. Unfortunately, Donald Trump provides another strong example: his lack of knowledge of the Constitution and how it forms the nature of our democracy, how government works, the separation of powers, or the role of the first amendment seems to elude his understanding. [...]
- Disinformation: Supplying misinformation or lies with the deliberate aim to mislead. The promoters of such untruths can include foreign governments, government agencies, corporations, or political parties, movements or candidates. [...]
- Misinformation: Providing information that is incorrect or inaccurate. The difference between misinformation and disinformation is that the former does not have the intent to deceive. Misinformation may be just a mistake, such as getting the time of a movie wrong, or a false rumor, such as frequently appears on Facebook [...]
- Missing Information: Omitted information that makes it impossible to understand facts and make decisions. Its absence may be due to negligence, incompetence, or the desire to mislead; if it comes from a desire to mislead, it is disinformation.
- Paltering: An attempt to mislead by telling the truth, but not the whole truth. [...]
- Doxing: searching for and publishing private or identifying information about an individual or group on the Internet, typically with malicious intent, such as shaming, extortion, coercion, or harassment. The publication is against their will, and often deliberately distorts the meaning of that private information. [...]
- Fake news: Another common form of disinformation, a type of "yellow journalism" (news stories with catchy headlines but with little or no factual basis) that consists of deliberate disinformation, hoaxes or fraudulent stories, spread in traditional media, cable news, or online social media. [...] (Froehlich 2020)

Today's society of disinformation is similar to the house of the *Fama* described by Ovidius and quoted in the introduction. This is the other part of the description:

There is no clamor; but the murmuring sound
of subdued voices, such as may arise
from waves of a far sea, which one may hear
who listens at a distance; or the sound

which ends a thunderclap, when Jupiter
has clashed black clouds together. Fickle crowds
are always in that hall, that come and go,
and myriad rumors—false tales mixed with true—
are circulated in confusing words.
Some fill their empty ears with all this talk,
and some spread elsewhere all that's told to them.
The volume of wild fiction grows apace,
and each narrator adds to what he hears.
Credulity is there and rash Mistake,
and empty Joy, and coward Fear alarmed
by quick Sedition, and soft Whisper—all
of doubtful life. Fame sees what things are done
in heaven and on the sea, and on the earth.
She spies all things in the wide universe.

nec tamen est clamor, sed parvae murmura vocis,
qualia de pelagi, siquis procul audiat, undis
esse solent, qualemve sonum, cum Iuppiter atras
increpuit nubes, extrema tonitrua reddunt.
atria turba tenet: veniunt, leve vulgus, euntque,
mixtaque cum veris passim commenta vagantur
milia rumorum confusaque verba volutant.
e quibus hi vacuas inplent sermonibus aures,
hi narrata ferunt alio, mensuraque ficti
crescit, et auditis aliquid novus adicit auctor.
illic Credulitas, illic temerarius Error
vanaque Laetitia est consternatique Timores
Seditioque recens dubioque auctore Susurri.
ipsa, quid in caelo rerum pelagoque geratur
et tellure, videt totumque inquirit in orbem.
(Ovidius 1892, 49-63)

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