The History of Interpreting

Christine Adams is on a quest to find interpreter zero.

United Kingdom & Ireland Region.
Published: May 5, 2015 Last updated: December 2, 2015

Experienced conference interpreter and interpreter trainer Christine Adams is writing a series of articles on the history of interpreting. Entitled 'Looking for Interpreter Zero', it outlines the history of the profession by tracing individual interpreters who found their way onto the pages of history. This is no easy task. Although "there is evidence of professional linguists at work from the ancient Fertile Crescent onwards", as the author mentions in the first installment, interpreting and interpreters were mostly overlooked by chroniclers. In spite of the dearth of resources, the articles amply demonstrate that interpreters have been present at, and crucial to, many of the encounters, which defined the world as we now know it. This makes for fascinating reading about history, communication and cultural interaction. Moreover, it sheds light on the choices these linguistic and cultural mediators were faced with, whether they volunteered to interpret or were forced to, and the price many of them had to pay.

The articles are available on the central AIIC website, but you can also access them by using the links below.

1. Christopher Columbus and the 'Indians'
2. Enrique Magellan’s slave interpreter
3. Melchor, Julián, Pedro, Géronimo and Marina
4. Marina/Malintzin/La Malinche
5. Dragomans
6. Tupaia
7. Rodrigues Tcuzzu, a Jesuit interpreter in Japan
8. Wanchese and Manteo
9. Thomas Savage, Henry Spelman and Robert Poole

Recommended citation format: