



Hermes, the logos and the education of a young Roman: an analysis of the Epitome of the theological traditions of the Greeks, Lucius Annaeus Cornutus (1st century AD).

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ABSTRACT. Myths are shared narratives that refer to a cultural memory. The allegory was one of the resources used to validate its plots, which was very useful in the educational process and in the transmission of values that were desired hegemonic. A little-known writer who made use of the myths was Lucius Annaeus Cornutus, from the family of the Stoic philosopher Seneca. In his mythology book *Epitome of the theological traditions of the Greeks*, Cornuto presents a propaedeutic and pedagogical function, in which the writer seeks to teach ideas established among the Stoics through mythology, linking myths and possible etymologies of words. Such epitomes were very common in the Roman Empire and their function was to provide accurate information to the senatorial and equestrian aristocracy, being a manual with ideas present in Roman Stoic circles. The Hermes myth will be analyzed in view of the cultural values nurtured in the formation of a pious Roman citizen. It is a fertile field for historiographic analysis. Worshiped as the merchants and trickster's god, here it is the deity of words that elevates the strong man to occupy decent spaces in society. The pedagogical proposal of this writer connects the comprehension of myths with the philosophical understanding and the ancient narratives kept in the Greco-Roman memory would be the ideal source of knowledge for the formation of the Roman citizen.

Keywords: myth; cornutus; stoicism; roman education; allegory

Hermes, o logos e a educação de um jovem romano: uma análise do Epítome das tradições teológicas dos gregos, Lucius Annaeus Cornutus (Século I d. C.)

RESUMO. Os mitos são narrativas partilhadas que remetem a uma memória cultural. A alegoria foi um dos recursos utilizados para validar seus enredos, o que era muito útil no processo educacional e no processo de transmissão de valores que se desejavam hegemônicos. Um escritor pouco conhecido que fez uso dos mitos foi Lucius Annaeus Cornutus, da família do filósofo estoico Sêneca. Em seu livro de mitologia *Epítome das tradições teológicas dos gregos*, Cornuto apresenta uma função propedêutica e pedagógica, na qual busca ensinar ideias estabelecidas entre os estoicos, por meio da mitologia, ligando os mitos e possíveis etimologias das palavras. Tais epítomes eram muito comuns no Império Romano e tinham como função fornecer informações precisas à aristocracia senatorial e equestre, sendo um manual com ideias presentes nos círculos estoicos romanos. O mito de Hermes será analisado, tendo em vista, os valores culturais cultivados para a formação de um cidadão romano piedoso. Trata-se de um campo fértil à análise historiográfica. Cultuado como deus dos mercadores e dos trapaceiros aqui, é a deidade das palavras, que eleva o homem forte a ocupar os espaços dignos na sociedade. A proposta pedagógica desse escritor vincula a compreensão dos mitos com o entendimento filosófico e as antigas narrativas guardadas na memória greco-romana seriam a fonte de conhecimento ideal para a formação do cidadão romano.

Palavras-chave: mito; cornutus; estoicismo; educação romana; alegoria

Hermes, el logos y la educación de un joven romano: un análisis del Repaso de las tradiciones teológicas de los griegos, Lucius Annaeus Cornutus (siglo I d.C.).

RESUMEN. Los mitos son narrativas compartidas que hacen referencia a una memoria cultural. La alegoría fue uno de los recursos que utilizó para validar sus tramas, lo que resultó de gran utilidad en el proceso educativo y en el proceso de transmisión de valores que se deseaban hegemónicos. Un escritor poco conocido que hizo uso de los mitos fue *Lucius Annaeus Cornutus*, de la familia del filósofo estoico Sêneca. En su libro de mitología *Repaso de las tradiciones teológicas de los griegos*, Cornuto presenta una

función propedéutica y pedagógica, en la que el escritor busca enseñar ideas establecidas entre los estoicos a través de la mitología, vinculando mitos y posibles etimologías de las palabras. Tales epítomes eran muy comunes en el Imperio Romano y tenían la función de transmitir información veraz a la aristocracia senatorial y ecuestre, siendo un manual con ideas presentes en los círculos estoicos romanos. El mito de Hermes será analizado a la luz de los valores culturales cultivados para la formación de un ciudadano romano piadoso. La propuesta pedagógica de este escritor vincula la comprensión de los mitos con la comprensión filosófica y las narrativas antiguas guardadas en la memoria grecorromana serían la fuente ideal de conocimiento para la formación del ciudadano romano.

Palabras-clave: mito; cornutus; estoicismo; educación romana; alegoría

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Introduction

The myths present narratives that concentrate meanings from the most distinct sociocultural orders with very flexible connotations. Thus, their appropriation can provide a basis for sometimes contradictory social positions¹.

We propose to study them, in their collective and historical manifestation, from the discursive formations available in the most different supports. We are interested in treating myths as fundamental elements for the History of Greco-Roman Education, as they transmit social and cultural values, explain phenomena and rites, legitimize norms and establish boundaries for practical life, and sustain diverse political conceptions.

Lately, the term myth² has been used to refer to certain controversial political actors³, a semantic novelty that encourages us to analyze the concept and reflect on its plasticity⁴. We would like to remember that myths not only narrate glorious events, but also sometimes represent what is most grotesque and disgusting in cultures.

For us, myth is the socially shared narrative (Ginzburg, 2001), transmitted from generation to generation through cultural memory (Assmann, 2010). Its references permeate society and values, its indications allow for building links and propagating information, values, and feelings. We agree with Walter Burkert when he argues that the:

Myth is applied narrative, narrative as the verbalization of complex, supra-individual, collectively important data. [...] Myth in this sense never exists 'pure' in itself, but aims at reality; myth is simultaneously a metaphor at the level of narration. The seriousness and dignity of the myth come from this 'application': a complex of traditional narratives provides the primary means of concatenating experiences and the project of reality, expressing it in words, communicating and mastering it, connecting the present to the past, and simultaneously channeling the expectations of the future (Burkert, 1991, p. 18).

This dialogue between the present, past, and future of mythical narratives is the factor that establishes the elements for our discussion, given that each period, each place or even sociopolitical group will appropriate the myth to legitimize a certain posture, to appropriate it to identify an origin or build a common project. Therefore, we can observe how the analysis of the recurrences of myths is intriguing.

Textualizing myths is not a simple task. Such work depends on meta-narrative elements that organize the selection and transmission of utterances. This is the process of rereading myths, since, as Luís Costa Lima explains, the narrative is not prior to the act of writing, but concomitant with it (Lima, 1989). The act of writing is not naive. One writes to inscribe oneself in the world, one also narrates to mark oneself in life and to overcome the barrier between the mortality of life, to enter the utopia (seen as a possible real) of immortality. For example, the political aspects that are appropriated by political agents to legitimize certain hegemonic postures. Philostratus Lemnius provides an interesting example of how myth can be the vehicle, or rather the strategy, to

¹For example, the myth of Heracles, whose narrative served the most different social interests, both of the Roman plebs and the senatorial aristocracy.

²For a more panoramic view of the History of Greek Myth, it is important to mention the collection *A Companion to Greek Mythology* organized by Ken Dowden and Niall Livingstone (2014). This book brings in its introduction updated elements of studies related to the concept of myth and its place in culture. Organizers claim that the word "Myth" (derived from the Greek mythos, but not always 'myth' as we understand it) refers to a network of Greek stories where it is conventional to apply the term "myth". This is, in fact, an empirical question, not a philosophy or circular definition. We know a Greek myth when we see it, so there is no need for definitions, guidelines, or codes of practice to identify it as such. However, it is not a random network, as it has a strong structure of something systematized (Dowden & Livingstone, 2014, p. 3).

³We highlight the case of Jair Bolsonaro, president-elect of Brazil in 2018, called a myth on social networks and in his public appearances.

⁴The mythical narratives adapt to different sociocultural and political contexts. Jean Pierre Vernant analyzes this theme in several texts, however, we highlight the article *Oedipus without a complex* (Vernant, 1986), in which the French historian analyzes how Freudian psychoanalysis appropriated a version of the Oedipus myth, especially the one that had been eternalized in Sophocles' tragedy, however, this was one of the versions available in antiquity. The political uses of the myth can also vary according to the context, an interesting case is the political use of the myth of Hercules by Roman Generals and Emperors, who approach or distance their images from it depending on the image they want to convey (Schilling, 1979; Jaczynowska, 1981; Arantes Junior, 2011).

position oneself in the face of power. Philostratus quotes a graffiti from the city of Rome that would present the following sentence *Nero, Orestes, Alcmaeon, matricides*⁵ (Philostratus, *Vida dos sofistas*, I, 481).

This phrase, also present in Suetonius and Dio Cassius⁶, accurately places the ambiguity present in mythical statements. Such graffiti can express values that would reveal support for Emperor Nero, since both Orestes and Alcmaeon murder their mothers in traditionally justified contexts. Or, we could accuse the *princeps* of committing a blood crime. These are the subtleties that motivate our analysis. In this way, I will evoke as an analytical strategy the dense description proposed by Clinfford Geertz (1978). In this sense, we believe that each appropriation of myths carries a stratification of meanings that can be understood differently in social interaction, as the sharing of meanings is appropriated and reproduced in a specific way based on the action of each social agent that is part of this network. As Geertz says, referring to the work of the ethnologist, which we extend to every cultural researcher who finds “[...] a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed or tied together, which are simultaneously strange, irregular, and inexplicable, and that one has to, somehow, first learn and then present” (Geertz, 1978, p. 20).

To understand the context of production of these discourses, we start from some premises. Initially, we take myths as socially constructed narratives that express meanings referring to a supposed common past. Cultural expression links this narrative to a past, it is socially felt like part of a past. In this specific sense, mythical discourses are also memory reports, as they are accepted as an expression of another temporality (*Once upon a time...*) (Eliade, 1981).

When being written, the myth fixes one of the possible interpretations that, gradually, — is raised to the status of canon. Such texts allowed the action of a prolific critique of mythological discourse, especially that exposed through traditional poems. One of the ways in which this process materialized was the use of allegory that intended to see a moral value subscribed to in the narrative. This attitude is driven especially by the Stoic philosophers⁷.

The mythical narrative is a very important element in ancient education, which was noted by Werner Wilhelm Jaeger, in his classic *Paideia: a formação do homem grego*, originally published in 1936. Jaeger emphasizes the normative value of the myth, being important in education through comparison (Jaeger, 2010). However, we observe that the wide dissemination of myths and the possibility of immediate recognition of the told narrative is the didactic element that allows for different uses, according to the need of the message one wishes to convey. Therefore, myths are powerful transmitters of values, images, and meanings, whether through re-elaborated narratives or through independent allusions that seek the benevolence of the listener.

In the horizon of a History of Education, we have to observe that the interpretation that Stoic texts testify about the use of allegory is very fragmentary. Richard Goulet emphasizes three important aspects about Stoicism and the allegorical method: 1) there is well-attested evidence from the analysis of Hesiod’s texts in this way; 2) in a broader context, the Stoics used the etymology of the names of the gods; 3). In general terms, the intention of these writers was not to find Homer’s greatness, but rather to recover his testimony to confirm Stoic doctrines, especially physical and perhaps ethical ones (Goulet, 2005). These elements are very important for the understanding of the educational practice of the Stoic philosophers, considering that the education, both ethical and moral, of the citizen, involved a deep understanding of aspects of physics developed by this philosophical school.

Ken Dowden and Niall Livingstone highlight the importance of myths in consolidating identities and their role as a collective or cultural memory. The authors claim that:

[...] Greek mythology defines what should be Greek and Greeks, by common agreement. The fact that these myths forge a powerful tool of social identity has been explored by Halbwachs (‘Collective Memory’) and, more recently, by Jan Assmann (‘Cultural Memory’). The myths are not, however, remembered in isolation: they are interactive with each other and on countless occasions with every aspect of Greek life and thought. They are a continuous reference point, or frame of reference, and constitute what since the late 1980s has been recognized in the literature under the term ‘intertext’. Anything that can be thought of can best be thought of with the myth, or against its background, or against it entirely (Dowden & Livingstone, 2014, p. 4).

⁵ Νέρων Ὀρέστης Ἀλκμαίων μητροκτόνοι.

⁶ This inscription is also cited in Suetonius (*Nero*, 39) and is also present in Dio Cassius (*History of Rome*, LXII, 16)

⁷ We recommend the book *Introduction to the philosophy of myth*, by Luc Brisson (2014), which analyzes in detail the use of allegory as a way to rehabilitate the use of myths. The author provides the reader with a wide, specialized bibliography to deepen the debate (Brisson, 2014). Another important book is the classic *Mythe et allégorie: les origines grecques et les judéo-chrétiennes contestations* by Jean Pépin (1976). For a broad view of the use of the allegorical method among Stoic philosophers, Richard Goulet (2005) explains that the interpretation practiced by Stoic philosophers is a decisive step in the constitution of the History of allegorical exegesis.

Following this path, myths provide support for the maintenance of identities, as well as the expression of expectations for the future. We can observe, in their different readings, appropriations of a shared past and the representation of an image of the future, desired in that historical moment. In this article, we will analyze how Lucius Annaeus Cornutus, a Stoic, appropriated Greek mythical traditions, adapting them in his own way to Roman Stoicism.

We believe that Roman literary circles were familiar with this debate, as Cicero presents it in Book II of his philosophical dialogue *De Natura Deorum* (*On the Nature of the Gods*) through the Stoic philosopher Balbus. However, it is worth noting that, in addition to the differences between the late republican period and the Roman Empire, especially the government of Nero, Cicero was a citizen engaged with the religious and civic life of the city, and did not want to appear as a professional philosopher, which would go against the Roman *dignitas*, an important differentiating point to understand the *Epitome* by Cornutus, a document that I intend to analyze in this presentation.

Cornutus and the education of a young Roman: Hermes and the *logos*

Lucius Annaeus Cornutus would have been born in Lepsi Magna in Libya, North Africa, however, he spent most of his life in the city of Rome, during the Government of Claudius, in the 1st century AD. Dio Cassius provides information about the proximity of Cornutus to Emperor Nero, who would have sent him into exile, also to weaken his ties with other relevant writers of the period. There is little biographical data in the Dionian *History of Rome*. Nevertheless, this account, however significant and credible it may be, is more relevant for marking the presence of the writer in literate circles of the Neronian period than for the content presented, since the persecution of intellectuals by the tyrannical government of Nero can be understood as part of a literary *topos*, explored by senatorial historiography to mark the characteristics of a bad Emperor.

His first name and first name (*praenomen et nomen*) most likely refer to his close relationship with the family of Seneca, possibly having adopted the name of the *gens anneus* with his manumission. G.W. Most, in an article entitled *Cornutus and Stoic Allegoresis: a Preliminary Report* (Most, 1989), points out that there is no trace of Cornutus' proximity to the Stoic philosopher. The author also argues that this distancing would be supported by the theme of Cornutus' manual, since the Senecan objections to the use of allegories would be well attested⁸.

The relationship between Cornutus and the satirical poet Persius is well documented, especially in later sources, which dedicated to him the Satire V. Cornutus was his tutor from the age of sixteen, assuming his education and teaching him Stoic philosophy through which Persius met Lucanus, nephew of the philosopher Seneca. When he died, Persius bequeathed to Cornutus a hundred thousand sesterces and his entire library. As proof of moral rectitude, Cornutus refused the money but accepted the books. This information is contained in a small booklet attributed to Suetonius, *Vita Persii* (Bellandi, 2003), which also informs that the Stoic mythographer would have been editor of the work of the poet Persius after his death.

These examples are enough to attest to his links with influential literary circles. He wrote in Greek and Latin. Regarding Latin, there are small fragments of his texts, present in later authors. Tradition knows this writer well for his work as a grammarian and commentator on Virgil's poems, which we have through scholia (Cugusi, 2003).

Cornutus' most important writing is the *Epitome of the theological traditions of the Greeks*⁹, a treatise on Greek mythology, influenced by Stoicism. The text is not a summary of the mythical narratives, as we find in the Library of Apollodorus, but an allegorical interpretation in the Stoic style.

The Stoics were generally concerned with the governing principle of the *cosmos* that, in some way, could be called 'god' (Algra, 2006). As the Polish author Michal Wojciechowski (2017) states, it is important to bear in mind that the cosmology presented by Cornutus has issues much more related to physics than to philosophy, "[...] interpreting the Greek deities as phenomena and physical notions [...]" (Wojciechowski, 2017, p. 120). In this author's view, Cornutus presents the Gods in a language for science, with mythological names being the starting point for understanding the world (Wojciechowski, 2017). Several Stoics will make use of interpretive elements they seek to find in myths, especially in the epic poems of Homer and Hesiod.

⁸ The debate about the proximity between Cornutus and Seneca thought by these criteria is very fragile, since the use of a certain method of analysis of mythical narratives is a very dubious criterion for thinking about social proximity. In May 2000, in Milan, there was an international congress on the *gens annei* and its place in the culture of Imperial Rome. In the annals of this event an article by Chiara Torre (2003) entitled *Cornuto, Seneca, i poeti e gli dei* was published. I found that the author makes a broad historiographical analysis of the positions that the authors established on the subject, from the subject to the text by Most (1989) mentioned above. He could have been a freedman or a client of the Anneia gens. However, we are clear about his proximity to important intellectual circles of this period.

⁹ There are no translations of this text in Portuguese, the translations are our responsibility. The original text is from the critical edition of the *Compendium de Graecae Theologiae Traditionibus*, published by Torres Guerra (2018). This same specialist is responsible for the Spanish translation published by Editora Gredos (2009).

These interpretations seek hidden meanings in names or words. The allegorical readings search between the lines of the myth, surreptitiously behind the narratives, for an absent, hidden meaning. Mythical speeches would present obscure meanings that required an interpreter. We are interested in this second attitude put into practice by Cornutus.

In volume V of *History of Greek literature*, Maurice Cruzet points out that Cornutus is a grammarian who wrote a long commentary on Virgil's work, as well as a work on pronunciation and spelling. About the *Epitome*, the author states that: "It is a summary without literary value, but rather curious, with etymological and symbolic interpretations placed by the Stoic school on poetic and popular mythology" (Croiset, 1938, p. 418). The division between poetic and popular mythology, proposed by the eminent scholar, is very fragile given that the transmission of mythological accounts in the ancient world was always marked by orality and by the recurrence of ancient texts.

It is a much more complex document since the author starts from an etymological analysis, a common practice among the Stoics and already exposed in Rome by Cicero in *De Natura Deorum*, of the Greek myths, in an attempt to explain their theological dimension. This text does not seek to make only a thematic adaptation, but also an effort of philosophical interpretation, whose knowledge strategy is the analysis of words and their semantic field.

The title of the work in Greek presents thought-provoking information for document analysis: Ἐπιδρομή τῶν κατὰ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν θεολογίαν παραδεδομένων (*Epitome of the theological traditions of the Greeks*). *Epitome* or *compendium* refers to the scholarly character of the text. As Glenn Most points out, this text is an interesting example of a manual aimed at teaching philosophy (Most, 1989). This is expanded by José Bernardino Torres Guerra who "[...] proposes that the Ἐπιδρομή not be considered simply as an example of a didactic manual but, concretely, as an example of an *ad hominem* manual" (Torres Guerra, 2010, p. 101).

In this text, Cornutus specifically addresses a young student, differently from what Cicero does, since the latter was involved with the religious practices of the city of Rome and, for this very reason, writes a text for the aristocracy. Cornutus' text is then a study one, aiming to teach already established ideas, which are already part of the teachings of the social group in which both would be inserted. The writer himself addresses a student in the first line of the text: 'ο young man' (ὁ παῖδιον, Cornutus, *Epitome*, I, 1). Common in the Roman Empire, the epitomes were intended to provide accurate information to young members of the senatorial and equestrian aristocracy. The author has no desire to propose unpublished reflections, but for his text to be a manual, whose opinions would condense premises established among the Roman Stoics. Guerra Torres emphasizes that the use of the vocative is structural, as it denotes the idea of arousing the disciple's attention and possibly establishing a channel of communication (Torres Guerra, 2010).

Since Zeno of Citium, Stoic theology was concerned with the governing principle of the cosmos, possibly this starting point was often confused with the idea of a God (Algra, 2006).

In this context, Cornutus starts from the premise that the cosmos is animated and rational, therefore, there is a deity. The gods, in the plural, would be the allegories referring to the rationality of the sensible world. Mythology, expressed in the works of poets, mainly in Hesiod's *Theogony*, would be the symbolic expression of this world¹⁰.

Cornutus dialogues with Hesiod in an attempt to correct the Boeotian poet's faults. His posture identifies in myths the testimony that the ancients understood in various ways the relationship between myths and nature. The author rejects the current view that traditional gods had human forms and feelings. However, the mythographer must maintain what Jan Assmann calls *textual coherence*, his interpretation must show how the tradition already presented the signs for his understanding. Mythical discourse may, in its new recollection, contain new meanings. Interpreting tradition, as well as repetition, is a way to guarantee the production of cultural coherence (Assmann, 2010).

The entire document aims to characterize the cosmos, based on mythology, etymologically linking the gods to a rational principle that would be behind everything. For example:

The sky (*ouranós*), young man, surrounds the earth, the sea and all things on the earth and the sea in the circle, so it acquires this name, being the upper limit (*oúros*) of everything and also the boundary (*horízōn*) from nature. Others say that it is called that for caring for (*ōreín*) or taking care (*ōreúein*) of the things that exist, that is, for protecting them¹¹ (Cornutus, *Epitome*, I, 1).

¹⁰ This theological stance was not unanimous among the Stoics. Stoa philosophers ranged between atheism and these allegorical postures.

¹¹ Ὁ οὐρανός, ὦ παιδίον, περιέχει κύκλῳ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλατταν καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ γῆς καὶ τὰ ἐν θαλάττῃ πάντα καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ταύτης ἔτυχε τῆς προσηγορίας, οὐρός ὡν ἄνω πάντων καὶ

This small passage reveals the explanatory procedures mobilized by the mythographer. We must not forget that Cornutus was a highly regarded grammarian in the city of Rome. The writer's knowledge of the Greek language supports his investigation of the myths. Notice how his appreciation prioritizes the sounds of the word, the way it is heard. Cornutus could not act differently, ancient societies were oral societies, which suggests care for the performative universe that each word presented in Greco-Roman culture.

In this excerpt, we must highlight two procedures that complement each other, but which cannot be confused, the allegory of an order interior to the cosmos and how it is organized and the analysis of the etymologies of words. We cannot confuse allegory with etymology, metaphor, or personification, as they relate to different explanatory actions, but they can go together, as in this case. Allegory is the exegesis of a narrative, apprehended in the analysis of its plot, observing the characters and actions. Cornutus studies the etymology of divine names, their epithets to understand their physical significance, as expected of a Stoic philosopher (Pià-Comella, 2012).

These are the elements that make up the memory regime in which Cornutus' text is inscribed. It is a document aimed at instruction, teaching. Cornutus concludes his treatise with the vocative ὦ παῖ, (XXXV, 78), which can be translated as 'son', as a mark of affection. However, the text is mainly aimed at training young people and not at disseminating ideas among citizens. The mythographer goes on to explain that the ancient poets understood the nature of the cosmos, therefore, they philosophized about it through symbols and enigmas that hid the truth with words in elaborate plots. Cornutus' aim, at the time, was simply to reinterpret these narratives into a useful format. Relationships with the gods were an important issue for the formation of a young man, so the writer advises the student in the following way:

In relation to the gods and their cults and all that has arisen for their honor, [one should] accept the native traditions and the immaculate narrative about them, so that it is directed only to piety and not to superstition; let the youth instruct themselves and learn to sacrifice and supplicate, to revere and take oaths in a right manner, according to the sense of measure taken for them, at the appropriate time¹² (Cornutus, *Epitome*, XXXV, 76).

The transmission of philosophical knowledge about the gods cannot confront the established order. The young person receiving this instruction must know that honoring the gods is a civic act that binds him to the community. In this sense, the mythographer presents a body of knowledge socially familiar in the cultivated circles of the city of Rome. The enunciative validation model throughout the document is based on an etymological and semantic analysis of words, on a way of thinking about terms in their spelling and sound.

In his treatise, we always have the reference to the ancients, that is, Hesiod and Homer, which serve as common literary *topos*. As the German philosopher Hannah Arendt well points out, ancient man is aware that the past is better (Arendt, 1992). Of course, the term "ancient man" is very vague, what we want to emphasize is that this regime of historicity predominated in Mediterranean cultures, to use an expression established by François Hartog (2003). In this sense, the Stoics were very careful to point out that the legends told by the ancients had elements of their truth. The comment cannot break order, but it can promote coherence.

Cornutus writes in Rome, whose culture expressed another important premise, the *mos maiorum* (way of the ancestors). As Maria Helena da Rocha Pereira says: "The Romans had tradition as a fundamental support and model for their common living, in the sense of observing the customs of their ancestors" (Pereira, 2009, p. 357)¹³.

In this way, Cornutus needs to dialogue with the ancient authorities. At various times, the author refers to the canons. He is probably referring to the many mythographic texts available contemporaneously. The enunciative validation itself is constructed through images of the cosmos, to which the gods are related. The etymological investigation mentioned above is also intended to build the veracity of the text. There are two processes used by the author, the description of the images and the reference to the ancients.

However, Cornutus establishes a more accentuated dialogue with Hesiod, emphasizing the importance of this writer for the transmission of myths, but criticizing the fact that he initiated the degeneration of myths. See how he refers to the genealogy present in Hesiod's *Theogony*:

ὀρίζων τὴν φύσιν: ἔνιοι δὲ φασὶν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὠρεῖν ἢ ὠρεῦειν τὰ ὄντα, ὃ ἔστι φυλάττειν.

¹² Περὶ δὲ ἐκείνων καὶ περὶ τῆς θεραπείας τῶν θεῶν καὶ τῶν οικείων εἰς τιμὴν αὐτῶν γινόμενων καὶ τὰ πάτρια καὶ τὸν ἐντελῆ λήψην λόγου οὐτὸν μόνον ὡς εἰς τὸ εὐσεβεῖν ἀλλὰ μὴ εἰς τὸ δεῖσιδαιμονεῖν εἰσαγομένων τῶν νέων καὶ θύειν τε καὶ εὐχεσθαι καὶ προσκυεῖν καὶ ὀμνυεῖν κατὰ τρόπον καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἐπιβάλλουσι καιροῖς καθ' ἣν ἀρμόττει συμμετρίαν διδασκομένων.

¹³ The example of Emperor Augustus illustrates well that all the changes made in his government are accompanied by a discourse of restoration and permanence. He would not be creating anything new, but just ordering social life in the already existing molds.

Still, there could be for you a fuller exegesis [of the genealogy] of Hesiod, who took some things, I believe, from those older than he and added for himself even more mythical subjects, so that most of the ancient theology was corrupted. Now, we must examine what resonates among the majority¹⁴ (Cornutus, *Epitome*, XVII, 31).

Cornutus cannot completely break with the Hesiodic *Theogony*, since it needs to be the starting point for his analysis, even though he sees in it the beginning of the degradation of ancient theology. For the mythographer, myths are just a starting point for understanding theology, the highest point for understanding the relationship between man and the world, the last stage for training in philosophical knowledge.

The mythographer constructs analogies that insert a regulating, guiding principle into the cosmos. Cornutus states that: “Since we are ruled by one soul, the cosmos also has a soul that holds it together. This one is called Zeus (*Zeús*)” (Cornutus, *Epitome*, 2, 6-7). Zeus would be the cause for which they live and preserve all things. The author relates it to primordial fire (ether), a classic theme for Stoic physics. Hera, in turn, will be related to air (Cornutus, *Epitome*, III, 4); Poseidon is the liquid element (Cornutus, *Epitome*, IV, 4); Hades “is the air composed of the densest particles, the one closest to the earth” (Cornutus, *Epitome*, V, 5). The writer unravels the myths, in an orderly manner, following Stoic physics.

By presenting mythology through his physics, Cornutus responds to a political demand of his time, namely, to contribute to the formation of Roman citizens cultivated in Hellenic knowledge and aware of their public responsibility. He positions himself as a foreign educator of the Roman elite.

The author of the compendium analyzes Hermes as the Olympian god linked to logos, which leads us to the epithets available, for example, in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*. In analyzing this deity, Jean-Pierre Vernant states that: “There is nothing fixed, stable, permanent, circumscribed, nor closed in him. He represents in space and in the human world, movement, passage, change of state, transitions, contact with foreign elements” (Vernant, 1990, p. 192). His epithets link him to assaults, for crossing walls and closed doors; he resides in roads and crossroads, leads the souls of the dead; the messenger of the gods; present in the commercial exchanges and in the Agora debates, in the competitions; the witness of the agreements, truce, and oaths; the mediator between men and gods. When a dialogue falls into silence, it was customary for the Greeks to say: Hermes passes (Vernant, 1990).

These are the attributes upon which Cornutus builds his analysis. The need to provide cultural coherence, based on the Stoic worldview, makes him approach or distance himself from this interpretation. However, it is clear that both Vernant and the Stoic grammarian think of the figure of Hermes in view of the *Homeric Hymn* dedicated to this deity, the main textual source about this deity since the attributes present in the *Hymn* are repeated in the mythographer, therefore there is a link with this source, even if indirectly (Guerra Torres, 2016). However, a diversity of mythical traditions probably existed and did not reach us.

Hermes is the god who grants favors (*charízesthai*) in a reasonable manner (*eulogistōs*) to those who deserve it. “Hermes is the reason (*logos*)” (Cornutus, *Epitome*, XVI, 20). The identification of Maia’s son with *logos* is already present in the Stoic tradition, but not only in it¹⁵. The gods sent him to men, the only rational beings (*logikón*) on earth.

He who teaches man to question and to speak rationally (*légein*) in his defense. Hermes is a god of words, of good speech, a deity of symbolic and material exchanges. Wherever there are human encounters, he will be there. Cornutus analyzes his epithets, verbs, and utterances related to his functions, showing the proximity between the meaning and sound of words. He is the *diaktoros* (messenger), he is *diatoros* (penetrating, acute). On this path, *diaktoros* comes closer to *diagéin* (to makes it pass, cross from one side to the other). He is the messenger precisely because his voice is present in the ears through the *logos*. At this point, the author links the etymological analysis with the allegorical interpretation as expressed above, since he would be the herald of the gods, as we only know their will because of the notions (*énnoiai*) that agree with the *logos*, which he awakens in men (Cornutus, *Epitome*, XVI, 21-22). Note that the concept of *énnoiai* is fundamental to the Stoic tradition, it can be translated into notions or conceptions, which express precisely the knowledge acquired by careful, attentive observation and instruction (Hankinson, 2006).

Hermes is called the *akákēta* (one who does no harm, the benefactor) since the *logos* does not exist to do evil, to do harm. His existence turns to the good, to save people and homes (*sōtēr tôn oikōn*). He is known as *argifonte*, slayer of Argos. It was he who murdered the hundred-eyed giant who watched over Io. However,

¹⁴ Ἀλλὰ τῆς μὲν Ἡσιόδου [γενεαλογίας] τελειότερα ποτ’ ἂν ἐξήγησάς σοι γένοιτο, τὰ μὲν τινα, ὡς οἶμαι, παρὰ τῶν ἀρχαιστέρων αὐτοῦ παρεληφτός, τὰ δὲ μυθικώτερον ἀφ’ αὐτοῦ προσθέντος, ᾧ τρόπῳ καὶ πλείστα τῆς παλαιᾶς θεολογίας διεφθάρη· νῦν δὲ τὰ βεβοημένα παρὰ τοῖς πλείστοις ἐπισκεπτέον.

¹⁵ See note 4.

Cornutus builds another explanation for this epithet: “It is Argifonte (*argeiphóntēs*) by Argefante (*argephantēs*), because he shows (*phaínein*) everything in a luminous way and clarifies it – it is that the ancients called what was luminous shining (*argon*) – or by the speed of the voice – for what is fast is also called *argon*” (Cornutus, *Epitome*, XVI, 21)¹⁶. An approximation between light and *logos*, that is, only with *logos* will men be able to clear their path.

About his origin, the Stoic states that:

They said that Hermes was engendered by Zeus in Maia (*Maías*), thus implying again that *logos* is a product of reflection and inquiry: those who help in the birth (*Maioumenai*) of women are called midwives (*maiai*) who, as in inquiry, bring something to light, the fetuses¹⁷ (Cornutus, *Epitome*, XVI, 23).

Here, we return to the famous Socratic meaning of the sage as a midwife of knowledge, since, in this epistemological conception, knowledge is not produced, but remembered. It already exists within every human being and only needs a sage to help him ‘birth’ the *logos*. This step implicitly echoes the notion that the good is innate to man since it is the result of reflected, thoughtful actions.

Cornutus proposes an allegorical analysis for the images of the god, who is represented without hands and feet, in a square figure. The statues are square to show the firmness of character, since the character, even fallen, remains firm. And if he lacks hands and feet, it's because he doesn't need them. This god would still be represented in two ways: young and old. The young representation has a sparse beard on the chin and a flaccid penis, while the old representation would have beards and an erect phallus. The author associates the virility of the elderly with the mature use of reason that is ‘fertile and perfect’ (Cornutus, *Epitome*, XVI, 23).

For the grammarian, Hermes is the god who presides over the assemblies (*Agoraiós*) and watches over everyone who speaks in public (*agoreuóntōn*). Through the *logos*, he would be present in the commercial activity, as well as at all times when meetings take place.

The writer refutes the idea that this god would be linked to thieves. He claims that:

They wanted to show his power even through inconsistencies and transmitted the tradition that he was a thief (*kléptēn*) and some raised an altar to ‘Hermes the Trickster’. It turns out that he stealthily subtracts the beliefs held by men and sometimes steals (*kléptōn*) the truth with persuasion, that's why they say he uses mischievous words (*epiklópois*): in fact, the use of sophistry belongs to whoever know the *logos*¹⁸ (Cornutus, *Epitome*, XVI, 25).

As we can see, Hermes is also the god of rhetoric, which would legitimize his links with cheating, since they are linked to the use of the word. Characteristically, he echoes in this step Platonic objections to the sophists. This divinity is not linked to material theft, but to the ability to persuade, to convince. “He wears winged sandals and moves in the air like winged words (*épēpteróenta*)” (Cornutus, *Epitome*, XVI, 22)¹⁹.

The author concludes the chapter that analyzes this deity, with a surprising approximation, by recalling that the son of the nymph Maia is worshiped in lectures along with Heracles, to mark the use of force accompanied by *logos*. Everyone who only exercises the body and forgets the *logos* should be reproached. He concludes by quoting the Homeric Andromache when she turns to Hector and says: “Wonderful man, it is your courage that will kill him!” (Homer, *Iliad*, VI, 407). Cornutus decontextualizes the quote since the links between the Trojan princess and her lover are more complex, but the Homeric hexameter is valid in itself in this regime of memory, the Stoic author saying only that having a body similar to heroes, unaccompanied by *logos*, will lead men to ruin.

Final considerations

The plasticity of the myth allows for the conciliatory exegesis of Cornutus where it harmonizes ancient narratives with philosophical precepts. We believe that this source allows us to investigate not only this dialogue, but to unravel subliminal mechanisms of the Roman appropriation of Stoicism. Hypothetically, we can note the increased interest in this doctrine, seen not only in its moral aspects but in its logic and

¹⁶ In Greek: “Αργειφόντης δὲ ἔστιν οἶον ἀργεφάντης ἀπὸ τοῦ λευκῶς πάντα φαίνειν καὶ σαφηνίζειν – τὸ γὰρ λευκὸν ἀργὸν ἐκάλουν οἱ παλαιοὶ – ἢ ἀπὸ τῆς κατὰ τὴν φωνὴν ταχυτήτος – καὶ γὰρ τὸ ταχὺ ἀργὸν λέγεται”

¹⁷ Ἐκ δὲ Μαίας ἐφασαν γεγενῆσθαι Διὶ τὸν Ἑρμῆν ὑποδηλοῦντες πάλιν διὰ τοῦτου θεωρίας καὶ ζητήσεως γέννημα εἶναι τὸν λόγον· καὶ γὰρ αἱ μαιούμεναι τὰς γυναῖκας ἐντεῦθεν εἰρηναὶ μαῖαι τῷ ὡσαν ἐξ ἐρεῦνης προάγειν εἰς φῶς τὰ βρέφη.

¹⁸ Παραστήσαι δὲ αὐτοῦ τὴν δύναμιν καὶ διὰ τῶν ἀπεμφαινόντων θέλοντες κλέπτῃν αὐτὸν παρέδωκαν καὶ Δολιῷ Ἑρμοῦ βωμῶν ἔνιο ἐνιδρύσαντο· λανθάνει γὰρ ὑφαίρουμένος τὰ προδεδογμένα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ κλέπτων ἔσθ' ὅτι τῇ πιθανότητι τὴν ἀλήθειαν, ὅθεν πινὰς καὶ ἐπικλόποις λόγοις χρῆσθαι λέγουσι· καὶ γὰρ τὸ σοφίζεσθαι τῶν εἰδῶτων λόγῳ χρῆσθαι ἴδιόν ἐστι.

¹⁹ In Greek: “Τέδιλα δὲ φέρει πτερωτὰ καὶ δι' ἀέρος φέρεται συμφώνως τῷ καθὼς εἰρηται τὰ ἔπη πτερρόντα.”

physics, since the author of the *Epitome* mobilizes all his knowledge of Stoicism to produce harmony between the Stoic and ancient texts. As Jordi Pià Comella says, Cornutus understands that knowledge of myths can:

[...] be decisive in the religious education of young people: because it is the myth that guarantees piety and eradicates superstition. This is because we shall perceive gods as benevolent physical powers and not as beings endowed with passions that we will not fear. However, Cornutus does not restrict two notions in the spiritual field: he extends its application to the civic religious space. In the Roman religion, piety consists in performing the rites, strictly following the rules prescribed by religious law and common tradition, or by obedience to an order emanating from religious authority (Pià Comella, 2012, p. 18).

In general, the analysis of Cornutus' *Epitome* allows us to contextualize a pedagogical proposal for the Roman elite, in which religious education was a fundamental element and should ensure that young people fulfilled their religious duties with the city, being pious, observing the importance of rites to preserve order. This should guarantee the formation of a citizen who is conscientious of his obligations to the deities, especially those of the homeland and the family.

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