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From Etymology to Ethnology On the Development of Stoic Allegorism

ABSTRACT: The purpose of the present article is to show that there is a clear line of continuity between the early Stoics' and Cornutus' works, as all of them assumed that the ancient mythmakers had transformed their original cosmological conceptions into anthropomorphic deities. Hence, the Stoics from Zeno to Cornutus believed that the names of the gods reflected the mode of perceiving the world that was characteristic of the people who named the gods in this way. Accordingly, the major thesis advanced in the paper proposes that the Stoics conducted their etymological analyses so as to gather ethnographical information about the origin and development of the existing religion. When doing so, they treated the conventional mythological narratives as sources of information about the early conceptions of the cosmos. Thus, the Stoics from Zeno to Cornutus employed etymology as a certain research strategy: they analyzed the names of traditional deities so as to extract the physical and moral beliefs that constituted the ancients' world picture. Treated as ethnologists, the Stoics seem to equate piety with retrieving philosophical truths obscured under the guise of primitive mythical formulations. Furthermore, when unravelling the original worldview inadvertently transmitted by the poets in their poems, the Stoics reconstruct the history of religion and contribute to the development of ancient anthropology.

KEY WORDS: Stoics • Zeno • Cleanthes • Chrysippus • Cornutus • etymology • ethnology • allegoresis

Etymology is most generally understood as a branch of linguistics that deals with the history of words. Accordingly, the study aims to answer such questions as where the words come from and why they have the form they do. Ethnology, on the other hand, is best characterized as a branch of anthropology that deals with the history of cultures. The study contrasts, therefore, various cultures and civilizations with a view to establishing what constitutes the distinguishing features of humanity. What the two disciplines have in common is that they both seek to reconstruct an aspect of human history. In what follows, Stoic allegoresis will be presented as a unique hybrid of the two disciplines. The major thesis advanced in the present paper is that the Stoics conducted their etymological research so as to obtain ethnographical information about the origin and development of the

existing religion. When doing so, they treated the conventional mythological narratives as a source of information about the early conceptions of the world. Thus, the Stoics from Zeno to Cornutus employed etymology as a certain research strategy: they analyzed the names of traditional deities in order to extract the physical and moral beliefs that constituted the ancients' worldview. Although Stoic anthropology took its point of departure in etymology, it also built on allegorical interpretations. The Stoics believed that etymology would make it possible to understand not only the intricate mechanisms of cultural transmission, but also the allegorical message that the early poets inadvertently passed on. The present article is organized in the following way: section 1 offers an account of the early Stoics' allegorism, section 2 discusses Cicero's interpretation of Stoic allegoresis and section 3 is devoted to Cornutus' approach to Stoic allegorism. Needless to say, the present survey takes into account only certain aspects of Stoic allegorism, covers only some of its representatives and, therefore, does not pretend to be exhaustive.

1. The early Stoics' allegorism

As Stoicism was founded by Zeno of Citium, it seems natural to begin our considerations with this philosopher. Zeno is reported to have authored five treatises on Homeric Problems¹ and to have presented several interpretations of Greek mythical narratives². Among the few extant testimonies there is the one containing Zeno's allegorical reading of the myth of the Titans. Let us quote it *in extenso*:

Zeno claimed the Titans always to have stood for the elements of the universe (τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου). He read *Koios* (Κοῖον) as a quality (ποιότητα) on the basis of the Eolian change of π into κ, *Kreios* (Κρεῖον) as the governing and guiding principle (τὸ βασιλικὸν καὶ ἡγεμονικόν)³, and *Hyperion* (ὑπερίονα) as the upward movement (τὴν ἄνω κίνησιν) on the basis of the phrase «to go upwards»

¹ SVFI 41 (= Diog. Laërt. VII 4).

² An extensive philological discussion of all the preserved fragments aiming in particular at rectifying Von Arnim's edition is to be found in K. Algra, *Comments or Commentary? Zeno of Citium and Hesiod's Theogonia*, "Mnemosyne", 2001 (54), pp. 562–581.

³ Pépin is clearly right when he maintains (*ad loc.*) that the reason for this identification is "la ressemblance de Κρεῖος avec κρεῖων, «souverain», J. Pépin, *Mythe et allégorie: Les origines grecques et les contestations judéo-chrétiennes*, Paris 1976, p. 128. The same point is made by Brisson who also observes (*ad loc.*) that "sans doute faut-il penser à rapprocher *Kreios* de *kreíōn* «souverain», L. Brisson, *Introduction à la philosophie du mythe: Sauver les mythes*, Paris 1996, p. 66.

(ὑπεράνω ἰέναι); lastly, since all light things, when let loose, naturally fall upwards (πίπτειν ἄνω), this part [of the universe] was named *Tarpetos* (Ἰαπετόν)⁴.

This reference to Hesiod's narrative⁵ shows that Zeno clearly went beyond the actual text when interpreting the poet. The testimony makes it clear that the philosopher did not try to defend Greek mythology but rather wanted to use it for the purpose of propagating Stoic physics⁶. At the same time, it has to be emphasized that neither in this fragment nor in any other did Zeno suggest that early Greek poets intentionally made references to the world picture that the philosopher wanted to retrieve⁷. Rather, by presenting a physical exegesis that had been derived from the etymology of the Titans' names, Zeno wanted to elicit the primitive worldview that underlay the narrative. Hence, we can say that although the philosopher evidently did read certain tenets of Stoic cosmology into Hesiod (e.g. his identification of Kreios with τὸ βασιλικὸν καὶ ἡγεμονικόν), this does not necessarily entail that he assumed Hesiod to deliberately have contained in the poem the view that he sought to extract. This is clear from the fact that his allegorization of the Titans' names builds on their etymologies. When Zeno mentions the Eolian change of π into κ, he obviously implies that the development was not actuated by Hesiod. It is also worth noting here that the passage

⁴ SVF I 100 (= *Schol. Hes. Theog.* 134). Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are by the author.

⁵ *Theog.* 134.

⁶ An antithetical opinion is expressed by Blönnigen who finds in Zeno "die ursprünglich apologetische Intention der Allegorese", C. Blönnigen, *Der griechische Ursprung der jüdisch-hellenistischen Allegorese und ihre Rezeption in der alexandrischen Patristik*, Frankfurt am Main 1992, p. 28.

⁷ The point was already made by Steinmetz who argued that in the early Stoics one cannot find "Allegorische Deutung von Dichtung als Dichtung", P. Steinmetz, *Allegorische Deutung und allegorische Dichtung in der alten Stoa*, "Rheinische Museum für Philologie", 1986 (129), p. 29. The argument was further developed for all Stoic allegoresis by A.A. Long, *Stoic Readings of Homer*, In A. Laird (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Ancient Literary Criticism*, Oxford 2006, pp. 211–237 [Reprinted from: A.A. Long, *Stoic Readings of Homer*, In R. Lamberton & J.J. Keaney (eds.), *Homer's Ancient Readers. The Hermeneutics of Greek Epic's Earliest Exegetes*, Princeton 1992, pp. 41–66] and G.R. Boys-Stones, *The Stoics' Two Types of Allegory*, In G.R. Boys-Stones (ed.) *Metaphor, Allegory and the Classical Tradition: Ancient Thought and Modern Revisions*, Oxford 2003, pp. 189–216. While I have benefited greatly from these papers, I side with Struck's reassessment of the Stoics' allegorism, cf. P.T. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of Their Texts*, Princeton 2004, p. 113. See also T. Tieleman, *Galen and Chrysippus On the Soul: Argument and Refutation in the De Placitis, Books II and III*, Leiden 1996, pp. 221–223 and R. Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition*, Berkeley 1986, pp. 25–26.

clearly shows that Zeno's concern is not merely philological or literary criticism: his etymological analyses of the names of the Titans aim to reveal the ancient conceptions of the world disguised in traditional mythology. That is why Zeno does not embark on the difficulty of interpreting the whole of any poem. If Zeno chooses one motif and uses it as a tool for discovering the covert sense of the mythical narratives that the early poets inadvertently preserved in their works, then the same strategy can be found in Cleanthes.

Cleanthes identified the obscure herb μῶλυ⁸ with reason (λόγος)⁹. Thus, he wanted to show how Circe's fits and passions could be abated (μωλύονται) by reason to rescue Odysseus. The philosopher tried also to establish a relation between the Homeric ἄνα Δωδωναῖε¹⁰ and the verb ἀναδίδωμι so as to support the Stoics' conception of air evaporating from the earth¹¹. Finally, the philosopher postulated a correction of the epithet of Atlas¹² from ὀλοόφρων (i.e. "malevolent") to ὀλοόφρων (i.e., "all-knowing" or "heedful of everything") in order to equate Atlas with "indefatigable and untiring providence" (ἀκάματον καὶ ἀκοπίατον πρόνοιαν)¹³. These three testimonies clearly show that Cleanthes followed Zeno in treating etymology as a certain research strategy. He also read Stoic philosophy into Homer without, however, implying that the poet intentionally contained the ideas which accorded with the basic principles of the Stoic doctrine. An important difference between the two early Stoics is that, contrary to Zeno, Cleanthes allegorized Homer rather than Hesiod¹⁴.

Nevertheless, Cleanthes, similarly to Zeno, seems to have believed that Homer's narratives often reflect certain primitive conceptions about the world that were held by the ancients. Hence, when explaining why Dionysus (Διόνυσος) could stand for the sun, Cleanthes derived the name of the god from the verb "to complete" (διανύσαι), for "in its daily course from rising to setting¹⁵ the sun completes the circle of the heavens, making the day and the night" (*cotidiano impetu ab oriente ad occasum diem noctemque faciendo*

⁸ *Od.* X 305.

⁹ *SVF* I 526 (= Apollonius Soph. *Lex. Homer.* 114).

¹⁰ *Il.* XVI 233.

¹¹ *SVF* I 535 (= Plutarch *De Aud. Poet.* 11 p. 31 d).

¹² *Od.* I 52.

¹³ *SVF* I 549 (*Schol. in. Hom Od. a 52*).

¹⁴ Long, who also discusses the three testimonies, stresses that "in Cleanthes' case, unlike that of Zeno, we have clear evidence of reading isolated words in Homer through Stoic eyes", A.A. Long, *op.cit.*, p. 234. See also F. Buffière, *Les Mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque*, Paris 1956, p. 150.

¹⁵ Or: "from east to west", cf. J. Pépin, *op.cit.*, p. 129 and L. Brisson, *op.cit.*, p. 66. See also F. Buffière, *op.cit.*, p. 200.

caeli conficit cursum)¹⁶. Thus, we can see that apart from reading Stoic doctrine into Homer, Cleanthes searched also for various popular beliefs contained in Greek mythology. In his quest for numerous scientific insights of the ancients, the philosopher followed the method initiated by Zeno and – likewise – conducted etymological analyses of divine names to retrieve the early worldview that provided a major source of inspiration for conceiving of deities. In recapitulation, we can, therefore, observe that what unites the interpretative efforts of the first Stoics is the belief that etymological investigations can reveal the genesis of conventional religion. Accordingly, Zeno and Cleanthes explored Greek mythology in search of any anticipations of their philosophy.

Still, the clearest evidence on the Stoics' keen interest in the origin of all religious beliefs comes from Chrysippus. Indeed, there is a testimony that reports the philosopher to have held views that prove beyond any reasonable doubt that one can safely talk of the germ of ethnology in the first Stoics¹⁷. According to the testimony, when studying the reasons that made people believe in gods, the Stoics distinguished between three sources of veneration for the gods: the physical, the mythical and the legal: “the physical is taught by the philosophers and the mythical by the poets, whereas the legal is established by every city” (διδάσκεται δὲ τὸ μὲν φυσικὸν ὑπὸ τῶν φιλοσόφων, τὸ δὲ μυθικὸν ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν, τὸ δὲ νομικὸν ὑφ' ἐκάστης ἀεὶ πόλεως συνίσταται)¹⁸. The whole study of the origins of cult and worship divides further into seven branches. The first one treats of “natural phenomena and the heavenly” (τὸ ἐκ τῶν φαινομένων καὶ μετεώρων), since the “concept of deity” (θεοῦ ἔννοια) must have emerged from observing the celestial bodies: when seeing that the stars are the cause of the great harmony and orderliness of day and night, winter and summer, sunrises and sunsets, the earth's generation of creatures and crops, “people assumed the heaven to be father and the earth to be mother” (πατὴρ μὲν ἔδοξεν αὐτοῖς οὐρανὸς ὑπάρχειν, μήτηρ δὲ γῆ), the rationale for father being that “the effusions of waters are similar to sperms” (τὸ τὰς τῶν ὑδάτων ἐκχύσεις σπερμάτων ἔχειν τάξι), and the rationale for mother being her “receiving of these and giving birth” (τὸ δέχεσθαι ταῦτα καὶ τίκτειν)¹⁹. As the second and third

¹⁶ SVF I 546 (= Macrobius *Sat.* I 18, 14).

¹⁷ SVF II 1009 (=Aëtius, *Plac.* I. 6 = Ps.-Plutarch, *De plac. phil.* 879 F 9 – 880 D 1). The testimony is discussed by F. Wehrli, *Zur Geschichte der allegorischen Deutung Homers im Altertum*, Borna-Leipzig 1928, pp. 52–53; F. Buffière, *op.cit.*, pp. 139–140; C. Blönnigen, *op.cit.*, pp. 29–30, G.R. Boys-Stones, *op.cit.*, pp. 195–196 and A.A. Long, *op.cit.*, p. 222.

¹⁸ SVF II 1009 (33–34).

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, (35–42).

topics gods were divided “into harmful and beneficial” (εἷς τε τὸ βλάπτον καὶ τὸ ὠφελοῦν), with Poinai, Erinyes, Ares representing the former and Zeus, Hera, Hermes, Demeter the latter²⁰. The fourth and fifth topics were devoted to “things and passions” (τοῖς πράγμασι καὶ τοῖς πάθεσι), with Hope, Justice, Eunomia standing for the former and Eros, Aphrodite, Pothos for the latter²¹. “The fabrications of the poets” (τὸ ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν πεπλασμένον) were accepted as the sixth topic, which is called mythical, since Hesiod²², wanting to establish fathers for the created gods²³, introduced such forefathers for them as Koios, Krios, Hyperion and Iapetos²⁴. Finally, the seventh topic comprises such deified (ἐκτετιμημένον) men as Heracles, Dioscuri and Dionysus²⁵.

This testimony nicely summarizes the position of the first Stoics who investigated the cultural mechanisms that are responsible for the emergence of every religion. If ethnology is understood as a branch of anthropology that studies the development of cultures and their fundamental assumptions, then the above passage makes natural classifying the early Stoics as ethnologists, precisely because they were so interested in social production of ideas that are typical of every human society. That the Stoics tried to formulate generalizations about human culture and civilization is clear from Chrysippus’ considerations how people observed the celestial bodies, how they discovered the harmony and order of nature, how they evaluated various phenomena as harmful and beneficial and so on. When pointing to such origins of the gods as deification, the first Stoics contributed to the study of humanity. Their interest in unraveling the primitive worldview concealed in religion is testified not only by Chrysippus but also by Cicero.

2. Cicero’s account of Stoic allegoresis

In the *De natura deorum*²⁶, Balbus, an advocate of Stoic theology, offers a fourfold exposition of the sources of the genesis of the gods which sum-

²⁰ Ibidem, (43–47).

²¹ Ibidem, (47–49).

²² *Theog.* 134.

²³ I follow Long’s emendation from θεοῦς to θεοῖς, cf. A.A. Long, op.cit., p. 222.

²⁴ *SVF* II 1009 (49–53).

²⁵ Ibidem, (53–55).

²⁶ The credibility of Cicero’s testimony has been disputed. Brisson bases his entire account of the Stoics’ allegorism on *De natura deorum*, since the scholar believes Cicero to have described the philosophical schools of his time “de façon systématique”, L. Brisson, op.cit., p. 59. The necessity to include Cicero is also advocated by J. Pépin, op.cit., p. 125, C. Blönnigen, op.cit., p. 31 and P.T. Struck, op.cit., p. 111. Long, on the other hand, shows skepticism regarding the reliability of Cicero (A.A. Long, op.cit., p. 220), although, he

marizes the aforementioned account of the gods. On Balbus' account people have come to deify: 1) all useful things (e.g. *Ceres*), 2) many abstract concepts (e.g. *Fides*), 3) some eminent individuals (e.g. *Hercules*) and 4) various natural phenomena (e.g. *Caelus*)²⁷. Thus, Cicero confirms the observation that the Stoics sought to reconstruct the history of religion so as to bring out its underlying world picture. When investigating the intricate mechanisms of cultural transmission that result in the emergence of religious systems, the philosophers regarded mythology as ethnographical material that could provide insight into the mind of primitive man. What is particularly interesting is that the Stoics equated such an approach to religion with piety: discovering profound cosmological truths obscured under the guise of primitive mythical formulations was for the philosophers by no means tantamount to disrespecting the gods and/or neglecting the cults.

This is evident from Balbus' famous allegorical interpretation of Hesiod's narrative²⁸. Balbus presents an allegorical reading of how *Caelus* (i.e., *Ouranos*) was castrated by his son *Saturn* (i.e., *Kronos*), who, then, was chained by his son *Jupiter* (i.e., *Zeus*) with a view to showing that behind all sorts of such superstitions one can find sophisticated scientific truths. He puts it in no uncertain terms that in such "impious stories (*impias fabulas*) a subtle physical theory (*physica ratio non inelegans*) is contained"²⁹. In Balbus' account, the castration of *Caelus* by *Saturn* receives the following reading: the highest, celestial and ethereal nature which "produces everything by itself" (*per sese omnia gigneret*) needs no organ for the act of generation; *Saturn*, on the other hand, owes his name to the fact that he is "filled to repletion with years" (*saturaretur annis*) and, as the Greek language testifies (*Κρόνος – χρόνος*), the god stands for time. While time consumes the years insatiably, as *Saturn* devours his children, *Jupiter* had to restrict his immoderate flow by "the chains of the stars" (*siderum vinclis*)³⁰. Just as *Caelus* is the Stoics' "fiery nature" (*natura ignea*) that governs the whole physical universe and directs all natural processes, so are all other conventional gods nothing but allegories of the forces of nature. Accordingly, the gods of conventional religion are revealed as personified elements of the universe and the forces

also makes reference to it in his analyses (*Ibidem*, p. 222). I do not see any reasons why we should discard Cicero's testimony. As a matter of fact, I take Balbus' exegetical efforts to be consistent with the work of Cornutus. For a justification of this opinion see D. Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria*, Berkeley 1992, pp. 52–53 and P.T. Struck, *op.cit.*, p. 144.

²⁷ *De nat. d.* II 60:5–64:1.

²⁸ *Theog.* 176–182

²⁹ *De nat. d.* II 64:1–2.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, II 64:2–15.

of nature. Balbus shows this by analyzing their Latin and Greek etymologies. Thus, he wants to appropriate conventional religion for the purpose of proving the overall consistence of Stoic teachings. Hence, air, being placed between the sea and heaven, is called Juno, because of the “similarity to the sky and its close conjunction with it” (*similitudo est aetheris et cum eo summa coniunctio*). The name itself derives from helping (*a iuvando*). The name Neptune, i.e., the sea or water, originates from swimming (*a nando*). The earth became the realm of a god, whose name, both in Latin (*Dis* or *Dives*) and Greek (Πλούτος) signifies wealth, for everything falls to the earth and arises from it. His wife Proserpine, whose Greek name is Περσεφόνη, is the seed that was buried in the earth. Ceres, the mother of Proserpine, looks for her daughter. Her name derives from bearing fruit (*a gerendis frugibus*), for Ceres is the same as *geres*, the first letter being changed here in accordance with how the Greeks derived the corresponding name Δημήτηρ from γῆ μήτηρ, i.e., mother earth³¹.

When presenting his allegorical interpretation of conventional religion, Balbus assumes a clear distinction between *superstition* and *religion*. This differentiation builds on the assumption that etymological analyses uncover the authentic physical conceptions of the world that inspired the names of the deities. Balbus’ approach aims to show that *genuine* religiousness consists precisely in finding theological and moral truths hidden in the form of crude and anthropomorphic mythology. Similarly to the early Stoics, Balbus points to the correlation between “physical phenomena and useful inventions” (*physicis rebus bene atque utiliter inventis*) on the one hand and “imaginary and fictitious deities” (*commenticios et fictos deos*) on the other, repudiating with disdain the vulgar anthropomorphism of conventional religion and acknowledging the god that is “diffused throughout nature” (*pertinens per naturam*)³². This is closely connected with the difficult task he undertakes: to demonstrate that “the world is governed by the providence of the gods” (*deorum providentia mundum administrari*)³³. Evidently then, Balbus also reads Stoic philosophy into mythology: religious narratives must be interpreted allegorically so that the gods be shown to stand for natural phenomena. Seen through the eyes of Stoic theology, all natural processes are directed toward a definite end and have an ultimate purpose. The world is accordingly endowed with reason and, therefore, natural phenomena are determined not only by purely mechanical causes but by an overall design

³¹ Ibidem, II 66:1–67:4. It is noteworthy that Balbus, similarly to Zeno, justifies his interpretation with a recourse to a supposed phonological change.

³² Ibidem, II 70:1–71:3.

³³ Ibidem, II 73:1–2.

or purpose in nature. While the intelligence of the universe manifests itself under various names (Zeus, Jupiter, Poseidon, Neptune etc.), etymology is the tool that makes it possible to interpret the naïve mythical formulations in such a manner that profound theological insights are uncovered. Hence, as already mentioned, piety is nothing else but eliciting various philosophical, religious and moral truths camouflaged under the guise of primitive mythical formulation. Consequently, the upshot of this pious account is that the traditional gods transpire to be, in fact, useful inventions, abstract concepts and natural phenomena.

While Balbus mentions the early Stoics as the proponents of such allegorism³⁴, Velleius rejects the whole tradition of Stoic allegoresis, due to its impious ramifications. The Epicurean castigates the first Stoics' allegorism, pointing to its blasphemous nature. Thus, Zeno is reported not only to have identified the divinity with the law of nature³⁵ and god with aether³⁶, but he is also said to have interpreted Hesiod's theogony in such a way that he "completely abolished the established notions of the gods" (*tollit omnino usitatas perceptasque cognitiones deorum*)³⁷. The allegoresis of Cleanthes³⁸ and Chrysippus³⁹ is criticized in a very similar manner. The bottom line of all these charges is that the Stoics simply overinterpret the poets: Velleius flatly rejects all attempts to read Stoic metaphysics into the poetic stories of Homer, Hesiod, Orpheus, or Musaeus and to present these most ancient poets as Stoics although they "never even dreamed" (*ne suspicati quidem*)⁴⁰ of such conceptions as the idea that the physical world is the manifestation of universal reason and that the reason is, in fact, aether rather than Zeus. The charge is that Stoic allegoresis is far-fetched and preposterous. In a similar vein Cotta, an Academic, characterizes Stoic interpretative strategy as "dangerous" (*periculosa*)⁴¹ and repudiates the Stoics' etymological analyses, declaring that the idea to derive the name Saturn from "being satiated with years" (*se saturat annis*) and all other such strained interpretations "must be seen as pitiable" (*miserandum sit*)⁴².

Velleius and Cotta agree that Stoic exegesis distorts the meaning of the text and ridicules its author. What these (and many other) critics of Stoic

³⁴ Ibidem, II 63:4–6.

³⁵ Ibidem, I 36:2 (SVF I 162).

³⁶ Ibidem, I 36:7 (SVF I 154).

³⁷ Ibidem, I 36:14–15 (SVF I 167).

³⁸ Ibidem, I 37:6–13 (SVF I 530).

³⁹ Ibidem, I 39:1–41:6 (SVF II 1077).

⁴⁰ Ibidem, I 41:5.

⁴¹ Ibidem, III 62:10.

⁴² Ibidem, III 62:6–7.

allegoresis fail to see is that the Stoics practised their etymological exegesis so as to discover the early conceptions of the world. In all probability, the philosophers would therefore dismiss the criticisms of Velleius, Cotta and the likes of them by explaining that it is the nature of their object of investigation that is to be blamed for any possible naivety of their interpretations. After all, the Stoics could retort, what seems ridiculous and naïve to more philosophical minds is not likely to appear as such to the mind of primitive man. Thus, when reconstructing the cultural mechanisms that resulted in the particular mythical formulations, the Stoics investigated the ways of thinking that made the first men conceive of the gods in this particular manner. True, their etymological analyses are frequently absurd, but their quest for the social sources of religion was much more than just discarding the traditional polytheism and/or anthropomorphism. In the final analysis, it is most fortunate that the criticism that was levelled at Stoic allegoresis did not prevent other philosophers from continuing their exegetical efforts. The far-reaching cultural consequences that their approach had for the subsequent development of Greek thought can be seen clearly in the case of Cornutus.

3. Cornutus' approach to Stoic allegorism

Cornutus was a Stoic philosopher who lived in the first century A.D. and who authored a *Compendium of the Traditions of Greek Theology*⁴³ – a philosophical treatise that is deeply influenced by Stoic philosophy⁴⁴. Cornutus continues the tradition initiated by the early Stoics and employs etymology as a serious research strategy. Again, sophisticated and often strained etymological readings of Greek mythology are supposed to help in the process of reconstructing the complex mechanisms of cultural transmission. Cornutus believes that the wise ancient name-givers contained various theological and cosmological truths in the names of conventional gods. In this way, his etymology also becomes a study of humanity: the philosopher assumes that revealing the origin of the names of the gods will provide information about the ancient understanding of the word. Cornutus' treaty is founded on two important assumptions. Firstly, the philosopher states that:

⁴³ The text was edited by C. Lang, *Cornuti theologiae Graecae compendium*, Leipzig 1881 (hereafter cited as *Comp.*). The English text is to be found in R.S. Hays, *Lucius Annaeus Cornutus' Epidrome (Introduction to the Traditions of Greek theology): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, (diss.) Austin 1983. I felt free to modify this translation.

⁴⁴ According to a rather standard characterization, Cornutus' work is "a survey of the popular mythology as expounded in the etymological and symbolical interpretations of the Stoics", J.E. Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship. From the Sixth Century B.C. to the End of the Middle Ages*, Cambridge 1903, p. 290.

The ancients were not random investigators of the nature of the world but highly proficient, and inclined to philosophize about it through symbols and riddles (οὐχ οἱ τυχόντες ἐγένοντο οἱ παλαιοί, ἀλλὰ καὶ συνιέναι τὴν τοῦ κόσμου φύσιν ἱκανοὶ καὶ πρὸς τὸ διὰ συμβόλων καὶ αἰνιγμάτων φιλοσοφῆσαι περὶ αὐτῆς εὐεπίφοροι)⁴⁵.

In this passage, Cornutus clarifies that the task he undertakes is to extract the profound theological wisdom that the ancient investigators of the universe expressed in the form of symbols and enigmas. Secondly and relatedly, Cornutus discloses that the key to elicit the ancient knowledge is poetry. Hence, when embarking on the difficult task of deciphering the symbols and riddles that hide the wisdom of the ancient theologians and cosmologists, Cornutus makes use of the poets (especially Hesiod) on the assumption that it is the early poets who have preserved the most significant insights about the universe. Thus, with regard to Hesiod's genealogy Cornutus remarks that "some parts of it were taken by Hesiod from the ancients" (τὰ μὲν τινα [...] παρὰ τῶν ἀρχαιοτέρων αὐτοῦ παρεληφότος), whereas "other parts were added by him in a more mythical way" (τὰ δὲ μυθικώτερον ἀφ' αὐτοῦ προσθέντος)⁴⁶. Importantly, Cornutus stresses that it is "in this way" (ᾧ τρόπῳ) that "most of the ancient theology has been corrupted" (πλεῖστα τῆς παλαιᾶς θεολογίας διεφθάρη)⁴⁷. Obviously then, Cornutus' treaty will aim to retrieve the theological and cosmological wisdom of the ancients⁴⁸. What is especially interesting here is that in the spirit of Stoicism the philosopher will employ etymology not only in the service of obtaining ethnographical information about the ancient world picture, but also in the service of deciphering the allegorical message that the poets inadvertently passed on.

In what follows, I will try to interpret certain statements of Cornutus with the aid of another important treaty that has fortunately been preserved to our days: Heraclitus' *Homeric Problems*⁴⁹. At the outset, however, three

⁴⁵ *Comp.* 76.2–5.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 31.14–16.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 31.16–18.

⁴⁸ The above quoted passages are crucial for all accounts that aim to show Cornutus to have been an ancient ethnographer. Cf. G.R. Boys-Stones, *op.cit.*, pp. 197 and 209; A.A. Long, *op.cit.*, pp. 226–227; D. Dawson, *op.cit.*, pp. 25 and 30; and P.T. Struck, *op.cit.*, pp. 146 and 149–150.

⁴⁹ The text was edited by F. Oelmann, *Heracliti quaestiones Homericae*, Leipzig 1910 and F. Buffière, *Héraclite, Allégories d'Homère*, Paris 1962. Although I did consult these editions, throughout the article I especially relied on the latest edition which also contains a very good English translation: D.A. Russell and D. Konstan, *Heraclitus: Homeric Problems*, Atlanta

important provisos must be made. First of all, while Cornutus surely was a Stoic philosopher, Heraclitus, who probably lived in the first or second century A.D, cannot be classified as a Stoic *sensu stricto*, but rather as an allegorist, who only made use of Stoic philosophy⁵⁰. Subsequently, the two treaties differ with regard to their purpose. Heraclitus begins his treaty by putting it in no uncertain terms that he is motivated by the desire to exonerate Homer from all the charges of impiety: the allegorist says that Homer “would be totally impious, if he did not speak allegorically” (πάντα γὰρ ἡσέβησεν, εἰ μὴδὲν ἠλληγόρησεν)⁵¹. Accordingly, his objective is to show that what *prima facie* may seem shocking and abominable in the poet conceals *de facto* profound scientific knowledge. Cornutus, on the other hand, does not seek to exculpate Homer, Hesiod or any other poet, but rather – as we have seen – aims to elicit the ancient theology that has been inadvertently transmitted (albeit in a somewhat distorted form) by the poets. Finally, different ends require different means and that is why Cornutus and Heraclitus opt for different interpretation techniques: Heraclitus chooses allegory, whereas Cornutus makes use of etymology. Having said all this, it has to be emphasized that it is rather difficult (if possible at all) to always clearly demarcate between allegory and etymology as the ancient modes of interpretation. Thus, in the case of the two hermeneutists we should observe that various allegorical explanations offered by Heraclitus complement many etymological analyses put forward by Cornutus, and the other way round. Furthermore, Cornutus may not avail himself directly of allegory, but – as we shall see below – the etymology he employs serves also the purpose of discussing larger portions of text. Hence, similarly to the early Stoics, the author of *Compendium* also quests after the allegorical message that the poets inadvertently contained in their works⁵².

This can be illustrated by Cornutus’ discussion of Homer’s narrative about Thetis’ saving Zeus from the rebellion of the gods⁵³. With regard to this story, Cornutus clarifies:

2005, (cited as *Quaest. Hom.*). Again, I took the liberty of modifying this translation.

⁵⁰ For an extensive justification why there are no reasons to regard Heraclitus as a Stoic, see F. Buffière, *Héraclite, ...*, pp. xxii–xxxix. In his monumental study on Greek allegoresis the scholar draws the conclusion that “Héraclite n’est pas un Stoïcien accordant Homère aux théories de l’école, c’est un rhéteur de bonne volonté préoccupé du triomphe d’Homère sur toutes les écoles”, F. Buffière, *Les Mythes d’Homère ...*, p. 70. Cf. also D. Dawson, *op.cit.*, p. 263; A.A. Long, *op.cit.*, pp. 217–218 and P.T. Struck, *op.cit.*, p. 151.

⁵¹ *Quaest. Hom.* 1.1.

⁵² Pépin rightly observes that similarly to the early Stoics Cornutus “met au service de l’allégorie les subtilités étymologiques”, J. Pépin, *op.cit.*, p. 159.

⁵³ *Il.* I 397–406.

It seems that privately each of these gods was incessantly conspiring against Zeus (κατ' ἰδίαν ἕκαστος τούτων τῶν θεῶν ἐπεβούλευε τῷ Διὶ συνεχῶς), intending to hinder the ordering of the universe (διακόσμησιν). And this would have occurred, if the moist had dominated and everything had become watery, or if fire [had dominated] and everything had become fiery, or if air [had dominated]. Yet, Thetis, who systematically arranges everything (διαθεῖσα πάντα Θέτις), placed the hundred-handed Briareus against the aforementioned gods⁵⁴.

If Cornutus derives Thetis' name from the verb διατίθημι and bases his account on the doctrine of the four elements, then his exegesis clearly illustrates how ancient etymology and allegory interact with each other. In a similar vein, the same narrative is explained by Heraclitus. The allegorist makes reference to “the most esteemed philosophers” (οἱ δοκιμώτατοι φιλόσοφοι)⁵⁵, i.e., the Stoics, who are reported to have explained the story in terms of the harmony of the four elements. Thus, Heraclitus presents an allegorical reading that corresponds to Cornutus etymological interpretation. According to the account proposed by Heraclitus, Zeus is “the most powerful element (δυνατωτάτη φύσις) who becomes the object of a conspiracy (ἐπιβουλεύεται) by other gods: Hera (i.e., air), Poseidon (i.e., water) and Athena (i.e., the earth)”⁵⁶. Both accounts build on Stoic physics and cosmology: fire (symbolized by Zeus) is the most powerful element in the universe. Heraclitus and Cornutus concur that it must dominate all other elements, for if these are not subordinated to him or if they mix together, they may defeat Zeus and, thereby, shake the cosmic balance. Evidently then, both Cornutus and Heraclitus read Stoic philosophy into this religious narrative. Furthermore, both thinkers agree that it is Thetis who is responsible for arranging of the elements in its particular sphere. Interestingly though, Heraclitus identifies Thetis with “providence” (πρόνοια), as he explains that the providence which comes to the rescue was named by Homer Thetis, since she undertook “seasonable settlement” (εὐκαιρον ἀπόθεσιν) and that Thetis was aided by “massive and many handed power” (βριαρὰ καὶ πολύχειρ δύναμις)⁵⁷, which is naturally an allusion to Briareus.

If we compare the two interpretations, we may draw two interesting conclusions. First of all, both accounts make clear use of Stoic physics. Most

⁵⁴ *Comp.* 27:7–14

⁵⁵ *Quaest. Hom.* 25.2.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 25.7.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 25.10–11.

conspicuously, the fundamental cosmological tenet about the crucial role of fire in the universe is pivotal to both readings. Secondly, both exegeses rely on etymology (in the case of Cornutus it is the verb διατίθημι, whereas in the case of Heraclitus it is the noun ἀπόθεσις), showing, thus, the interrelationship between etymology and allegory in Stoic hermeneutical activity. Having made these observations, we must immediately point out that for Heraclitus etymological analyses are always secondary, for, as noted above, his primary objective is to exempt Homer from the charges of impiety and blasphemy, by eliciting the philosophical wisdom that the poet intentionally contained in his poems under allegorical guise. For Cornutus, on the other hand, etymology is the fundamental strategy for extracting the early conceptions of the world that the ancient mythmakers developed and the early poets (Hesiod in particular) inadvertently preserved in their poems. Thus, while Heraclitus always presents an allegorical interpretation and only occasionally supports it with an etymological analysis, Cornutus invariably starts with an etymological analysis and only sporadically offers an allegorical reading. On the whole, Cornutus begins with a simple etymological analysis and as the analysis unfolds, he makes use of extensive cultural knowledge so that his interpretations become more and more complex. We can further illustrate the difference between the two approaches by contrasting Cornutus' exegesis of the myth of Athena's birth from Zeus' head with Heraclitus' exposition of the narrative.

When interpreting the myth, Cornutus begins by explaining that Athena is "Zeus' intelligence" (Διὸς σύνεσις), for she is the same as his "providence" (προνοία)⁵⁸. Cornutus equates here the goddess with the Stoics' concept of divine intelligence that arranges and orders everything in the cosmos. Then, he moves on to hypothesizing that she is said to have been born from the head of Zeus either because the ancient ones believed that "the governing part of our soul (τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν τῆς ψυχῆς ἡμῶν) is there" or because:

as aether is the highest portion of the cosmos so is the head the highest portion of the human body, where its governing part and the very substance of thought are located (τοῦ μὲν ἀνθρώπου τὸ ἀνωτάτω μέρος τοῦ σώματος ἡ κεφαλή ἐστι, τοῦ δὲ κόσμου ὁ αἰθήρ, ὅπου τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν αὐτοῦ ἐστι καὶ ἡ τῆς φρονήσεως οὐσία)⁵⁹.

While Cornutus clearly accommodates his explanation of Ath-

⁵⁸ *Comp.* 35.7–8.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 35.9–15.

ena's name to Stoic philosophy, an interesting parallelism is to be found in Heraclitus, who identifies the goddess with "intelligence" (σύνεσις)⁶⁰ and "wisdom" (φρόνησις)⁶¹. The context of Heraclitus' interpretation is quite different, since he tries to account for Homer's narrative about Athena's gripping of Achilles by his hair⁶² in terms of the poet's "psychological theory" (τὸ περὶ τῆς ψυχῆς δόγμα)⁶³. Consequently, Heraclitus identifies Athena with individual intelligence: when anger engulfed Achilles and his reason located in the head was totally eclipsed by the passions from his breast, Athena intervened and changed the state of his heart. Thus, Heraclitus explains the story of Athena's being born out of Zeus head by pointing out that the head "is the mother of rational thought" (λογισμῶν εἶναι μητέρα)⁶⁴. On Heraclitus' reading, Athena, the symbol of individual rationality, controls the frenzied passions of Achilles by taking hold of his head. This contrasts with Cornutus' interpretation which equates Athena with the "global" intelligence of the world (i.e., providence). However, both philosophers offer highly comparable etymological interpretations. Heraclitus bases his identification of Athena with intelligence on the goddess' being a "seer" (ἀθρηναῖα) who "sees through" (διαθροῦσα) everything with "the keenest eyes of rational thought" (λεπτοτάτοις ὄμμασιν τῶν λογισμῶν)⁶⁵. Cornutus offers a very similar etymological explanation, when he clarifies that the goddess can be Athrena, since she "perceives everything" (ἀθρεῖν πάντα), or "Athela", since she "has absolutely no share in femininity or feebleness" (ἦκιστα θηλύτητος καὶ ἐκλύσεως μετέχειν), or "Aitheronaia", since her "virginity is a symbol of purity and clarity" (παρθενία αὐτῆς τοῦ καθαροῦ καὶ ἀμιάντου σύμβολόν ἐστι)⁶⁶. Naturally, Cornutus' analyses are quite different from Heraclitus', particularly since he offers more than just one etymological explanation. Yet, both exegeses point to the Stoic view of rationality: just as there is an affinity between Athena and Zeus, so is there a relationship between every person's individual reason that is responsible for controlling their passions and the world's global reason that is responsible for guiding the universe (the latter being obviously identical with providence).

The Stoic emphasis on rationality is also evident in Cornutus' and Heraclitus' interpretations of Hermes. Cornutus identifies Hermes with

⁶⁰ *Quaest. Hom.* 19.8.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 20.1.

⁶² *Il.* I 197.

⁶³ *Quaest. Hom.* 17.4.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 19.9.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 19.8.

⁶⁶ *Comp.* 36.3–9.

reason (λόγος) that “the gods have sent to us from Heaven” (ἀπέστειλαν πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἐξ οὐρανοῦ οἱ θεοί), thereby “making man the only rational animal on earth” (μόνον τὸν ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἐπὶ γῆς ζώων λογικόν)⁶⁷. Having deciphered the name of the god, Cornutus proceeds to analyze the origin of the name so as to retrieve its underlying conception of reason. The philosopher derives Hermes’ name “from contriving what to say” (ἐρεῖν μῆσασθαι), which he equates with “speaking” (λέγειν) only to suggest that the god may also be named in this way since he is “our fortress (ἔρυμα) and sort of stronghold” (ὀχύρωμα)⁶⁸. At first sight, Cornutus’ line of reasoning may seem rather bizarre, but what his analyses are supposed to establish is a connection between reason and language. The existence of such a connection is testified by Heraclitus, who identifies Hermes with “wise speech” (ἔμφρων λόγος), since the god is an “interpreter of everything conceived in the mind” (παντὸς τοῦ νοουμένου κατὰ ψυχὴν ἐρμηνέα τινὰ ὄντα)⁶⁹. The currency of this interpretation is also confirmed by Plato’s *Cratylus*. Having suggested that the name Hermes has to do with “speech” (λόγον) and signifies that the god is an “interpreter” (ἐρμηνέα), Socrates posits a connection between such words as εἶρειν, ἐμήσατό, λέγειν and μηχανήσασθαι so as to derive the name Εἰρέμης from the fact that the god “invented language and speech” (τὸ λέγειν τε καὶ τὸν λόγον μῆσάμενον) and, thus, “became the contriver of tales and speeches” (τὸ εἶρειν ἐμήσατο)⁷⁰. While Cornutus’ etymological analyses may *prima facie* seem to echo those of Platonic Socrates, his approach is nonetheless quite different, as it is thoroughly holistic⁷¹. Cornutus’ holism is clear in his assumption that the object of his investigation (the wisdom of the ancients) is best comprehended in the widest possible cultural context. Accordingly, Cornutus seeks to take into account not only the language of the ancient culture he investigates, but also its practices, rites, rituals, etc.

To cite an example, Cornutus suggests that one of the reasons behind the practice of heaping up stones beside Herms could be “to symbolize that the spoken word is composed of many small parts” (πρὸς σύμβολον τοῦ ἐκ μικρῶν μερῶν συνεστάναι τὸν προφορικὸν λόγον)⁷². By mentioning

⁶⁷ Ibidem, 20.18–21.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, 20.21–23.

⁶⁹ *Quaest. Hom.* 72.4–5. Somewhat earlier in his treaty (28.2.) Heraclitus characterizes also Hermes as the “explicatory” (ἐρμηνεύοντα) word

⁷⁰ *Crat.* 407e–408a.

⁷¹ Thus, I take issue with Dawson who finds Cornutus approach “relatively atomistic”, see D. Dawson, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

⁷² *Comp.* 24.11–25.2.

προφορικός λόγος, Cornutus makes a clear reference to Stoic conception of language and rhetoric⁷³. Generally speaking, προφορικός λόγος is the *logos* that is physically expressed in language. As such, it is opposed to ἐνδιάθετος λόγος, whose domain is thought and the mind. The Stoics' expression-thought opposition appears also in Heraclitus, who differentiates between the heavenly and the chthonic Hermes in Homer⁷⁴ in order to prove that the poet anticipated Stoic distinction between the human (i.e., προφορικός) and the divine (ἐνδιάθετος) λόγος. Thus, Heraclitus explains that Homer assigned Hermes two kinds of honor at two different times: the one "chthonic, below the earth" (ὑπὸ γῆν χθονίαν) and the other "heavenly, above us" (ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς οὐράνιον), since "speech is also of two kinds" (διπλοῦς ὁ λόγος)⁷⁵. The allegorist elucidates that the philosophers call one kind "internal" or "conceived" (ἐνδιάθετον) and the other "overt" or "spoken" (προφορικόν), for the former is the "reporter of our inner thoughts" (τῶν ἐνδον λογισμῶν ἐστὶ διάγγελος), whereas the latter is "held within our breasts" (ὑπὸ τοῖς στέρνοις καθεῖρεται)⁷⁶. In Heraclitus' account, Homer "called internal speech chthonic, since it is hidden in the dark depths of the mind" (ἀφανῆς γὰρ ἐν τοῖς τῆς διανοίας βυθοῖς ἀπεσκοτάται), while "he located overt speech in heaven, since it is plain from afar" (προφορικόν, ἐπειδὴ πόρρωθέν ἔστι δῆλος, ἐν οὐρανῷ κατόκισεν)⁷⁷. If both Cornutus and Heraclitus support their etymological analyses with Stoic philosophy, then the uniqueness of the former's approach manifests itself in his taking into consideration much broader cultural context: most conspicuously Cornutus enriches his exegesis with a discussion of the gods' epithets that is based on references to various cultural practices.

For instance, having posited a correlation between Hermes' being called "patron of the public assembly" (ἀγοραῖος) and his being a "guardian of those who speak in public" (ἐπίσκοπος γὰρ τῶν ἀγορευόντων), Cornutus observes that:

⁷³ Cf. *SVF* II 223 (= Sext. Emp., *Adv. math.* VIII 275). We can see clearly here that Cornutus' primary goal is not only to extract the ancient world picture but also to show it to be a *prefiguration* of Stoic philosophy so that naïve mythology could actually be interpreted as an anticipation and/or allegory of Stoicism.

⁷⁴ Let us recall that Hermes was a messenger from the gods to humans on the one hand and a guide of the souls or an escort for the dead to the Underworld, on the other (e.g. *Il.* XXIV 153, 182, 461). Cornutus associates (*Comp.* 22.7–9) the description of Hermes as a "soul-conductor (ψυχοπομπός)" with the activity of "leading the soul (ψυχαγωγεῖν).

⁷⁵ *Quaest. Hom.* 72.14.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, 72.15–16.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 72.18.

This was extended from the market to those who buy or sell (ἀπὸ τῆς ἀγορᾶς διατείνει καὶ εἰς τοὺς ἀγοράζοντάς τι ἢ πιπράσκοντάς), since everything should be done with reason (πάντα μετὰ λόγου ποιεῖν δέοντος), consequently upon which Hermes became the custodian of commerce (ἐμποριῶν ἐπιστάτης) and was named Trade (ἐμπολαῖος)⁷⁸.

Cornutus' analyses of Hermes' epithets are particularly interesting here, since they show how he combines Stoic philosophy with his ethnographic approach. Thus, Cornutus equates Hermes with Stoic *logos*, when he explains that the god is believed to be "herald" (κηρῦξ)⁷⁹, because "in a loud voice he presents to the listeners the things signified according to *logos*" (διὰ φωνῆς γεγωνοῦ παριστᾶ τὰ κατὰ τὸν λόγον σημαινόμενα ταῖς ἀκοαῖς) and "messenger" (ἄγγελος)⁸⁰, because "we know the will of the gods from the concepts which have been bestowed upon us according to *logos*" (τὸ βούλημα τῶν θεῶν γινώσκομεν ἐκ τῶν ἐνδεδομένων ἡμῖν κατὰ τὸν λόγον ἐννοιῶν)⁸¹. Furthermore, Cornutus explains that Hermes is also called "leader" (διάκτορος)⁸² either "since he is piercing (διάτορος) and clear (τρανός)" or since "he leads our thoughts into the souls of our fellow men" (διάγειν τὰ νοήματα ἡμῶν εἰς τὰς τῶν πλησίον ψυχάς), which is also why "they sacrifice the tongue to him" (τὰς γλώττας αὐτῶ καθιεροῦσιν)⁸³. We can see that Cornutus is simultaneously an etymologist and an ethnographer: while his etymological analyses lead him to the conclusion that the ancients must have perceived reason as piercing and clear (if it were to fulfil its communicative functions effectively), he also supports his exegesis by a reference to a particular cultural practice⁸⁴.

Finally, in order to ascertain the origin of Hermes' name, Cornutus makes also use of the god's image. When accounting for Hermes' being sculpted "four-square in shape" (τετράγωνος τῷ σχήματι), Cornutus points out that due to the gods' "being firmly seated and secure" (ἔδραϊόν τι καὶ ἀσφαλὲς ἔχειν), even his "falls" (or: "cases": πτώσεις) can be "bases" (βάσεις)⁸⁵. Cornutus suggests then that the motive behind presenting Hermes in four-square

⁷⁸ *Comp.* 25.2–7. For the epithet ἐμπολαῖος see Aristophanes, *Plut.* 1155

⁷⁹ Cf. *Hom. Hymn* IV 331.

⁸⁰ Cf. *Ibidem*, IV 3.

⁸¹ *Comp.* 21.20–22.3.

⁸² Cf. *Il.* II 103, XXI 497, XXIV 339, 378, 389, 410, 432, 445 and *Hom. Hymn* IV 392.

⁸³ *Comp.* 21.1–4.

⁸⁴ While Heraclitus also makes reference (*Quaest. Hom.* 72.19) to this practice, explaining that tongue is the "sacrifice" (θυσία) to Hermes, since it is "the sole organ of speech" (τὸ μόνον λόγου μέρος), the evidence for it is also to be found in Aristophanes (*Pax* 1060).

⁸⁵ *Comp.* 23.11–14.

shape is that reason has always been believed to be solid and infallible. An analogical account is offered by Heraclitus, according to whom Hermes is presented as a square figure, since “every upright discourse has a stable basis and does not slip and roll from one side to the other” (πᾶς ὀρθὸς λόγος ἐδραΐαν ἔχει τὴν βάσιν οὐκ ὀλισθηρῶς ἐφ’ ἐκάτερα κυλινδούμενος)⁸⁶. When explaining why Hermes “wears winged sandals”⁸⁷, Cornutus observes that the god is borne through the air in accordance with the common phrase “winged words”⁸⁸. In Heraclitus, on the other hand, the wings of Hermes symbolize “the speed of speech” (λόγου τάχος)⁸⁹ and Hermes comes from Olympus “in the likeness of a bird” (ὄρνιθι)⁹⁰ for “words are «winged» in Homer, and nothing among men flies swifter than a word” (πτερόεντα γὰρ τὰ ἔπη κατὰ τὸν Ὀμηρον καὶ τάχιον οὐδὲν ἐν ἀνθρώποις λόγου)⁹¹.

We may conclude our confrontation of Cornutus’ and Heraclitus’ exegeses of Hermes with an observation that both accounts show how hard it is to actually draw a clear line that would separate etymology from allegory in ancient hermeneutical activity. If both modes of interpretation often coalesce, then the work of Cornutus’ approach seems to be more holistic: the philosopher takes his point of departure in a simple etymological analysis and then embarks on more elaborate interpretations in which he makes use of extensive cultural knowledge. In other words, the philosopher endeavors to reconstruct the cultural mechanisms that have resulted in the particular mythical formulations and in his reconstructions he employs knowledge about the ancient mythmakers’ cosmological beliefs, rites, rituals, images, values, etc. As a result of this, Cornutus leans towards a very modern vision of culture, for he seems to treat it as a complex whole that comprises multifarious types of discourse: art, myth, religion, philosophy, custom, morality and so on. Since etymology is his basic research strategy, it is evident that Cornutus follows the early Stoics in their assumption that etymological analyses will lead to the primitive beliefs that motivate every theogony. Thus, etymology again serves here the purpose of unraveling the ancient world picture allegorically contained in various religious narratives. Used as a tool for gathering data on the culture of the ancients, Cornutus’ etymology is (as it was for the first Stoics) a study of humanity.

⁸⁶ *Quaest. Hom.* 72.6.

⁸⁷ Cf. Ovid, *Metam.* XI 312.


⁸⁸ *Comp.* 22.3–5. For the phrase ἔπη πτερόεντα see for example *Il.* I 201

⁸⁹ *Quaest. Hom.* 72.7.

⁹⁰ *Od.* V 51.

⁹¹ *Quaest. Hom.* 67.6–7.

4. Conclusions

All things considered, there seems to be a clear line of continuity between the early Stoics' and Cornutus' hermeneutical works, since all those thinkers believed the ancient mythmakers to have transformed their original cosmological conceptions into anthropomorphic deities. It was their surmise that the names of the gods reflected the mode of perceiving the world that was typical of the people who named the gods in this particular way. The Stoics' etymological analyses aimed to retrieve the original conceptions of the world from the works of the early poets on the assumption that although the poets have misrepresented a lot, beneath the veneer of their fabrications and distortions there are numerous valuable insights and scientific truths that can be extracted through etymological readings. The present paper argued that if etymology is defined as a linguistic discipline that investigates the origin of words and if ethnology is treated as a part of anthropology that studies the origin of cultures, then Stoic allegorism can be regarded as a unique combination of the two. The article aimed to make a case that the Stoics' etymological analyses were not conducted on an entirely *ad hoc* basis, as they were rather carefully designed to provide ethnographic information about the origin and development of the existing religion. The Stoics from Zeno to Cornutus employed etymology as a tool for understanding the complex mechanisms of cultural transmission. Although Stoic anthropology was based primarily on etymology, it also included allegorical interpretations: for the Stoics, etymology allowed not only to grasp the intricate mechanisms of cultural transmission, but also the allegorical message that the early poets inadvertently transmitted. 

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