

## **Eros in the Physics of Ancient Stoicism (Why did Chrysippus think of a cosmogonal *fellatio*?)<sup>1</sup>**

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First of all it should be acknowledged that a title like this may cause surprise and even astonishment. Those who have done research on Stoicism know perfectly well that Hans von Arnim collected in his *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*<sup>3</sup> only a few fragments about *éros*. Furthermore, if we bear in mind that they deal mainly with the real or imaginary homosexuality of the leaders of the Stoa or, in other words, with the fact that Stoic *éros* was the last “son” of the Platonic one, I must admit that the aim of my article might seem unattainable or even foolish. On the other hand, the presence of the term *éros* is confirmed in those Stoic fragments –only Platonizing?– about the pedagogy of virtue, but what happens when we want to examine its meaning in the realm of Physics? Just the opposite: the term *éros*, if present, is used to express “desire”, thus hardly permitting us to glimpse the important role that Ancient Stoicism gave to it. We suspect, then, that our research will “crash” into serious obstacles, although a final success, if possible, would mean in this case the end of an old mystery.

After these preliminary considerations and in spite of approaching only Ancient Stoicism, I will start by analyzing a text of Dio Chrysostom: the thirty-sixth discourse or *Borysthenitic*. This is the only one which refers to the role of *éros* in the Physics of the Ancient Stoics and, therefore, given the coincidences between the allegory of the myth of the Magi in the *Borysthenitic* and that other allegory in Chrysippus’ *Erotic Letters*, it might be useful to choose the first one as the starting point. I hope, at any rate, that my analysis will succeed in interpreting an erotic act which is similar to the one described by Dio with regard to its protagonists: Zeus and Hera, but different concerning its form: an act of *fellatio*.

Very few scholars have mentioned the influence of Chrysippus’ *Erotic Letters* on Dio’s *Borysthenitic*, specifically Max Pohlenz<sup>4</sup> and David E. Hahm<sup>5</sup>, but neither of them tries to elucidate the “mystery” of the *fellatio*. The results of their research are certainly excellent, but I should dare to point out that, if the Stoic allegorical images, even the most scabrous, must be interpreted taking always into account the Stoic fondness for fantastic etymologies, it is not logical on the other hand that the accurate interpretation of some of those images has always been left aside. I shall approach all these questions later on, but first I would rather examine both the Stoic and Iranian influence on the *Borysthenitic*, emphasizing, however, that even for those who believe that the former prevails over the latter, the Stoic one is in the end unquestionable.

Indeed, after some chapters where we detect Stoic themes, Dio introduces the myth which is sung by the Magi in their secret rites, that is to say, the myth of the “perfect and original driver of the most perfect chariot” (τέλειον τε καὶ πρῶτον ἡνίοχον τοῦ τελειοτάτου ἄρματος)<sup>6</sup>. Of course, Hans von Arnim quotes only those lines which best reproduce the Stoic theory of the

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<sup>1</sup> This article was published in Catalan in *Itaca, Quaderns Catalans de Cultura Clàssica*. Vol. I, Barcelona, 1985, pp. 81-106.

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<sup>3</sup> Stuttgart: Stutgardiae in Aedibus B. G. Teubneri 1968, 4 volumes.

<sup>4</sup> *Die Stoa*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1948, pp. 75-81.

<sup>5</sup> *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology*. Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1977, p. 62.

<sup>6</sup> Paragraphs 38-61, translated by H. Lamar Crosby, Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961.

*diakósmesis* or reordering of the world after the *ekpýrosis* or universal conflagration, but it is worth presenting a summary of the previous chapters.

In the opinion of the Magi, the chariot of Helios, although many have seen it running its daily course, is relatively recent when compared with that of Zeus. The former:

“... has enjoyed a reputation with all mankind, since the poets... are always telling of its rising and its setting... But the mighty, perfect chariot of Zeus has never been praised by any of the poets of our land, either by Homer or by Hesiod; and yet Zoroaster sings of it, as do the children of the Magi... For the Persians say that Zoroaster, because of a passion for wisdom and justice, deserted his fellows and dwelt by himself on a certain mountain; and they say that thereupon the mountain caught fire, a mighty flame descending from the sky above, and that it burned unceasingly. So then the king and the most distinguished of his Persians drew near for the purpose of praying to the god; and Zoroaster came forth from the fire unscathed, and, showing himself gracious toward them, bade them to be of good cheer and to offer certain sacrifices in recognition of the god’s having come to that place. And thereafter, so they say, Zoroaster has associated not with them all, but only with such as are best endowed with regard to truth, and are best able to understand the god, men whom the Persians have named Magi... they maintain for Zeus a team of Nissean horses... but for Helios they maintain only a single horse... For they assert that the universe is constantly being propelled and driven along a single path, as by a charioteer endowed with highest skill and power, and that this movement goes on unceasingly in unceasing cycles of time. And the coursing of Helios and Selene, according to their account, is the movement of portions of the whole, and for that reason it is more clearly perceived by mankind<sup>7</sup>. According to the Magi, that one of the horses which is the highest in the heavens is immeasurably superior in beauty, size, and speed, since it has the outside track and runs the longest course, a horse sacred to Zeus himself... it is a winged creature, brilliant in colour with the brilliance of the purest flame; and in it Helios and Selene are to be seen as conspicuous signs or marks... the other stars also which are visible through that Horse of Zeus, one and all being natural parts of it, in some instances revolve along with it and have the same motion, and in others follow different tracks... the horse that is most brilliant... and dearest to Zeus (fire)<sup>8</sup>... stands first... Next in order... comes one that bears the name of Hera (air), inferior in strength and speed. In colour this horse is of its own nature black, but the portion which receives the light of Helios is regularly bright... Third comes a horse that is sacred to Poseidon (water)<sup>9</sup>, still slower than the second... But the fourth is the strangest conception of them all, a horse both firm and immovable<sup>10</sup>, to say nothing of its having no wings, and is named after Hestia (earth)<sup>11</sup>... for the most part the horses continue in peace and friendship, unharmed by one another. But on one occasion in the past, in the course of a long space of time and many revolutions of the universe, a mighty blast from the first horse fell from on high, and... inflamed the others, and more especially the last in order; and the fire encompassed not alone its mane, which formed its special pride, but the whole universe as well”.

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<sup>7</sup> Paragraphs 38-42.

<sup>8</sup> On the following pages I shall approach in detail the identification Zeus = fire and Hera = air.

<sup>9</sup> On the identification Poseidon = water in the Ancient Stoicism: Philodemus. *De pietate* 15. SVF III Diogenes Babylonius 33; Diogenes Laertius VII 147. SVF II 1021; Philodemus. *De pietate*. 11. SVF II 1076 and Cicero. *De natura deorum* I, 15, 40. SVF II 1077.

<sup>10</sup> Paragraphs 43-47.

<sup>11</sup> Plutarch. *De facie quae in orbe lunae apparet* 6, 3, 923a. SVF I 500.

As seen, it would be unforgivable not to detect in this last circumstance the echo of the Stoic theory of the *ekpýrosis* or universal conflagration, but there are many other details which confirm this hypothesis. Indeed:

“According to the Magi, these rare occurrences are viewed by mankind as taking place for their destruction, and not in accord with reason or as a part of the order of the universe, being unaware that they occur quite properly and in keeping with the plan of the preserver and governor of the world. For in reality it is comparable with what happens when a charioteer punishes one of his horses, pulling hard upon the rein or pricking with the goad; and then the horse prances and is thrown into a panic but straightway settles down to its proper gait... this is one kind of driving of which they tell, attended by violence but not involving the complete destruction of the universe. On the other hand, they tell also of a different kind that involves the movement and change of all four horses, one in which they shift among themselves and interchange their forms until all come together into one being, having been overcome by that one which is superior in power. And yet this movement also the Magi dare to liken to the guidance and driving of a chariot, though to do so they need even stranger imagery... it is as if some magician were to mould horses out of wax, and then, subtracting and scraping off the wax from each, should add a little now to this one and now to that, until finally, having used up all the horses in constructing one from the four, he should fashion a single horse out of all his material”<sup>12</sup>.

We continue to think now of the theory of the transformation of the four elements, from fire to earth (fire > air > water > earth) and from earth to fire (earth > water > air > fire), when precisely fire remains as the guarantee of a new and future renewal of the world, although, for the time being, we are attending the second process, i.e. from earth to fire. We are interested, however, in the first movement, from fire to earth or, more exactly, from fire to water (sperm or seed), without whose analysis, step by step and explaining all its “secrets”, it would be impossible to reveal the “mystery” of the *fellatio*. Let us see, then, how this process is described in the allegory of the blessed marriage of Zeus and Hera in the *Borysthenitic*:

“Having arrived at that stage in their myth, the Magi are embarrassed in search of a name to describe the nature of the creature of their own invention. For they say that now by this time it is simply the soul of the charioteer and master; or, let us say, merely the intellect and leadership of that soul. (those, in fact, are the terms we ourselves employ when we honour and reverence the greatest god by noble deeds and pious words). For indeed, when the mind alone had been left and had filled with itself evenly in all directions and nothing in it remained dense but complete porosity prevailed –at which time it becomes most beautiful- having obtained the purest nature of unadulterated light (τὴν καθαρωτάτην λαβὼν ἀγῆς ἀκηράτου φύσιν), it immediately longed for the existence that it had at first. Accordingly, becoming enamoured (ἔρωτα) of that control and governance and concord which it once maintained not only over the three natures of sun and moon and the other stars, but also over absolutely all animals and plants, it became eager to generate (γεννᾶν), and distribute (διανέμειν) everything and to make the orderly universe (δημιουργεῖν) then existent once more far better and more resplendent because newer. And emitting a full flash of lightning, not a disorderly or foul one such as in stormy weather often darts forth, when the clouds drive more violently than usual, but rather pure and unmixed with any murk, it worked a transformation easily, with the speed of thought. But recalling Aphrodite and the process of generation, it tamed and relaxed itself and,

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<sup>12</sup> Paragraphs 50-53.

quenching much of its light, it turned into fiery air of gentle warmth(καὶ πολὺ τοῦ φωτὸς ἀποσβέσας εἰς ἀέρα πυρώδη τρέπεται πυρὸς ἠπίου), and uniting with Hera and enjoying the most perfect wedlock, in sweet repose it emitted anew the full supply of seed for the universe (τὴν πᾶσαν αὖ τοῦ παντός γονήν). Such is the blessed marriage of Zeus and Hera of which the sons of sages sing in secret rites. And having made fluid all his essence (ύγρὰν δὲ ποιήσας τὴν ὅλην οὐσίαν), one seed for the entire world(ἐν σπέρμα τοῦ παντός), he himself moving about in it like a spirit that moulds and fashions in generation (καθάπερ ἐν γονῇ πνεῦμα τὸ πλάττον καὶ δημιουργοῦν), then indeed most closely resembling the composition of the other creatures, inasmuch as he might with reason be said to consist of soul and body, he now with ease moulds and fashions all the rest, pouring about him his essence smooth and soft and easily in every part. And having performed his task and brought it to completion, he revealed the existent universe as once more a thing of beauty and inconceivable loveliness, much more resplendent, indeed, than it appears today<sup>13</sup>.

As said before, we should see if the Iranian influence –which is obvious in the myth- makes us discard the Stoic one or if, on the contrary and without denying the former, the latter is also unquestionable<sup>14</sup>. The main reason for taking us back to Persian sources would be Dio’s will to report specifically Iranian doctrine<sup>15</sup>, so that Cumont<sup>16</sup> maintains that the text follows in fact an hymn belonging to the mysteries of Mithra and is therefore a valuable testimony for all those who study them. Notwithstanding, after this solemn affirmation, Cumont points out more cautiously that he does not deny the Stoic nature of the myth, but simply takes it back to its source, the religion of Mithra, which, in accordance with the syncretic spirit of the age, would have absorbed Stoic elements. In any case, he seems not to be absolutely sincere since, as Pohlenz outlines, there is in him an evident desire to undervalue its Stoic content. For instance, at the beginning Cumont believed that the last part of the paragraph 55 was genuinely Stoic since it has nothing to do with the religion of the Magi, but, some years later, he said that he had discovered in paragraph 56 clear allusions to a Mithraic hymn whose theme was the divine hierogamy<sup>17</sup>. However, even when propounding this hypothesis, he acknowledges that true Zoroastrism never mentions Zeus marrying his sister (Zeus and Hera, fire and air, the two active elements and most alike), while the *hieròs gámos* of Zeus and Hera is one of the important features of Greek religion, which was certainly performed in many mystery rites.

For his part, Pohlenz<sup>18</sup> is not satisfied with these remarks of Cumont’, but for him the allegory of the marriage of Zeus and Hera, used by Dio, must be interpreted in relation to the theory of the *spermatikòì lógoi* and it shows too many coincidences with Chrysippus’ thought (*SVF* II, 1971-75) not to recall a Stoic work such as his *Erotic Letters* rather than of religious mysteries of a foreign folk. As far as I am concerned, I do agree with Pohlenz, though I would add that Dio does not “copy” Chrysippus’ allegory since the former prefers normal coitus to *fellatio*, and it is quite evident that this last “sophistication” hides some secret that neither Pohlenz nor Hahn were interested in elucidating. I do agree with them, however, in holding that Dio and Chrysippus’ intentions are coincident, and I hope I shall be able to prove that the latter also used *éros* to speak about the renewal of the cosmos whenever the fire of the world turned into a holocaust.

<sup>13</sup> Dio Chrysostom. *Or.* XXXIV 54-58. *SVF* II 622.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Pohlenz, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 79-81.

<sup>15</sup> Paragraph 43.

<sup>16</sup> F. Cumont. *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mytra*. Bruxelles, 1896, II, p. 60 and following, and Cumont-Gehrich. *Die Mysterien des Mythras*, p. 64.

<sup>17</sup> Bidez-Cumont. *Les Mages hellénisés*. Paris, 1938, I, p. 91 and following., II, p. 142 and following.

<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 80.

The final aim of the myth is, then, to represent the Stoic *diakósmesis*, that is to say, the successive cosmic periods, the alternation of destruction and reordering, which is extraneous on the other hand to Persian religion. Dio has used a Stoic cosmogony and, in any case, the problem lies in knowing which is the chosen model. Pohlenz believes that Cleanthes is the author or, still better, that it is an eclectic text, whose elements –or a great number of them- come from Cleanthes. Whatever the case may be, he recognizes Dio’s own originality, since Pohlenz knows perfectly well that the Stoa took advantage of ancient myths and was always interested in both explaining and rationalizing what poets had previously said enigmatically<sup>19</sup>.

Many are the themes, of course, that I should now approach in relation to the paragraphs of the *Borysthenitic* quoted by Hans von Arnim such as the Stoic *explicatio fabularum* and the *enodatio nominum*, the elemental transformation and the two principles, *spermatikòs lógos*, and *pneûma*, etcetera. Notwithstanding, given that I aim at elucidating the meaning of the *fellatio* in Chrysippus’ *Erotic Letters*, I would rather follow in my exposition a logical and coherent procedure in order to avoid a hurried accumulation of data which might make unintelligible what it is certainly not. I shall start, therefore, by introducing some considerations on the biological vision of the origin of the cosmos.

When Dio and the Stoics in general explain the birth of the cosmos by means of the image of a reproductive act in which both fire and water play an important role, they take advantage in fact of ancient theories<sup>20</sup>. Their goal is to update them by adaptation to their own interests. They believe that they know how to explain the mechanism which originates the world and are convinced that the biological theory is in this case the most suitable. After having chosen the instrument, then, they must define accurately in the first place –as Hahm says- the nature of the seed or sperm of the universe. For them it is both a fluid and life-giving element containing the power of the reproduction; to sum up, it is an element with *pneûma*, soul, vital breath or tempered heat:

“The first fire is in fact as a seed which contains all the reasons and causes of everything that has existed, exists or will exist” (τὸ μέντοι πρῶτον πῦρ εἶναι καθαπερεὶ τι σπέρμα, τῶν ἀπάντων ἔχον τοὺς λόγους καὶ τὰς αἰτίας τῶν γεγονότων καὶ τῶν γιγνομένων καὶ τῶν ἐσομένων –the translation is mine)<sup>21</sup>.

Consequently, if for Zeno and Chrysippus the human sperm is *pneuma* mixed with humidity (τὸ δὲ σπέρμα φησὶν ὁ Ζήνων εἶναι, ὃ μεθίησιν ἄνθρωπος, πνεῦμα μεθ’ ὑγροῦ)<sup>22</sup>, and this *pneuma* (the tempered fire or gentle warmth in Dio’s cosmogony) is a portion of the father’s soul<sup>23</sup>, we must conclude that the cosmogonical sperm is in fact the adaptation to a specific realm of the biological theories on the human sperm..

Investigations into the nature of the human seed were common in Greek Philosophy in the Vth century before Christ<sup>24</sup>. Hahm points out<sup>25</sup> that, in the age of Pericles, the Pythagorean Hippon had already established the wet nature of the semen, so that the soul or vital power with which it is endowed is understood as humidity or water<sup>26</sup>. Hippocrates affirms that the seed is the

<sup>19</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, p. 80; “Plutarchus Schriften gegen die Stoiker”, *Hermes* 74, 1939, p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. D. Hahm, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>21</sup> Aristocles. *Apud Eusebium praep. evang.* XV, 816. *SVF* I 98.

<sup>22</sup> Eusebius. *Praep. evang.* XV, 20. *SVF* I 128.

<sup>23</sup> Eusebius. *Praep. evang.* V, 25. *SVF* I 128.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. H. Balsus. “Die Zeugungslehre und Embriologie in der Antiquè”. *Quellen u. Studien z. Gesch. d. Naturwiss. u. d. Medizin* 5, 1936, 193-274.

<sup>25</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>26</sup> Aristoteles. *De anima.* I 2, 405b (=DK 31 A 4).

humidity of the body turned into foam because of the movement of the penis<sup>27</sup> and, according to Aristotle, sometimes it is held that the breathing or pneuma is the origin of the emission of seed<sup>28</sup>.

The Stoicism, then, incorporates into its cosmogony the results of the enquiries on the nature of the human seed and decides that the hierogamy of Zeus and Hera must logically become the origin of that *spermatikòs lógos* which, in spite of its special mission, shares the same features of human seed: humidity, warmth (pneuma) and life.

However, this is only one of the remarkable aspects of the Stoic *spermatikòs lógos*. Hahm follows the Aristotle's trace<sup>29</sup>. To begin with, there are no differences regarding the two basic elements of the sperm, warmth (pneuma, warm air) and water<sup>30</sup>; but, in addition, when Aristotle maintains that the warmth of the seed is due to the inner one of the body which emits it<sup>31</sup>, we should remember that for Zeno Zeus is fire and possesses all the warmth and life of the new world. Indeed, just before depositing his sperm in Hera, "quenching much of its light, it turns into fiery air of gentle warmth", and thus that great power he needs no longer after the *ekpýrosis* is tempered and acquires, on the contrary, both the smooth and life-giving one of the pneuma. Nevertheless, the question would be: is Hera really passive in all this process? Hahm believes so<sup>32</sup> though, in my opinion, if he does not question the fire-air composition of the Stoic pneuma (καὶ γὰρ ἀέρος καὶ πυρὸς ὑφίστανται τὴν οὐσίαν ἔχειν τὸ πνεῦμα)<sup>33</sup>, it is not logical that Hera's only mission is to receive the life-giving or "pneumatic" sperm which is also made of air –let us bear in mind the identification Hera = air and Zeus = fire.

Hahm considers that a further feature of the biological theory of the Stoic cosmogony is the active role of the agent and the passive one of matter, the Stoic *archai*<sup>34</sup>. The relation between fire and air is the same as the one between agent and matter, that is to say, God transforms matter adapting it for generation:

"God is one and the same with Reason, Fate, and Zeus; he is also called by many other names. In the beginning he was by himself; he transformed the whole of substance through air into water (κατ' ἀρχὰς μὲν οὖν καθ' αὐτὸν ὄντα τρέπειν τὴν πᾶσαν οὐσίαν δι' ἀέρος εἰς ὕδωρ), and just as in animal generation the seed has a moist vehicle (ἐν τῷ ὑγρῷ), so in cosmic moisture God, who is the seminal reason of the universe, remains behind in the moisture as much an agent, adapting matter to himself with a view to the next stage of creation (εὐεργὸν αὐτῷ ποιοῦντα τὴν ὕλην πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἐξῆς γένεσιν). Thereupon he created first of all the four elements, fire, water, air, earth. They are discussed by Zeno in his treatise *On the Whole*, by Chrysippus in the first book of his *Physics*, and by Archedemus in a work *On Elements*. An element is defined as that from which particular things first come to be at their birth and into which they are fully resolved. The four elements together constitute unqualified substance or matter"<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Hippocrates *Genit.* 1, 8-11.

<sup>28</sup> Aristoteles *De generatione animalium.* II 4, 737b 27-31.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. D. Hahm, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-82.

<sup>30</sup> Aristoteles *De generatione animalium* 736a 1-3.

<sup>31</sup> Aristoteles *De generatione animalium* 735b 33-34.

<sup>32</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>33</sup> Alexander Aphrod. *De mixtione* 224, 32. *SVF* II 310 & 442; Galenus. *De plac. Hipp. Et Plat.* V 3. *SVF* II 841.

<sup>34</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>35</sup> Diogenes Laertius VII 135-37. *SVF* II 580 -translated by R. D. Hicks. Loeb Classical Library. William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970.

In Hahm's opinion, then, the texts reproduce Aristotelian biology, according to which the female gives matter (*hýle*, in this case the menstrual blood) to the foetus, while the male gives shape and movement to it –i.e. just as, in the myth of the Magi, Zeus *demiourgei*<sup>36</sup>. However, Hahm might be mistaken on this occasion. As held by himself, there are no differences between Aristotle and the Stoics with regard to the fact of assigning the active role to the male, but they do not think the same thing concerning the function assigned to the female. For Hahm the main difference would be the female's role according to the Stoics' vision: "In the cosmogonical passages (*SVF* II, 580 y 622), the wet material upon which the generative agent works is the fluid vehicle of the male semen; it is not, as in Aristotle, supplied by the female. In the Stoic cosmogony, the female (Hera) is merely an agent inducing the production of the seed"<sup>37</sup>. Hahm says as well that the allegory in the *Borysthenitic* is clearly connected with Chrysippus' *Erotic Letters* and that the Stoics "tried to incorporate into their cosmogony, not only the Zeus-Hera myths and artistic portrayals, but also the assumed etymological connection between Hera (*héra*) and air (*aér*). The result was that Hera received an inconsistent interpretation by the Stoics. In the cosmogonical testimonies Hera's position is determined more by the assumed etymology than by the biological theory, but Chrysippus's interpretation of the Zeus-Hera myths in a noncosmogonical context (he is referring to the fragments in which *fellatio* appears and Chrysippus affirms that Zeus is god and Hera the matter or *hýle*) manifests the Aristotelian theory that the female supplies the matter. Therefore, even the role of the female does not argue against an Aristotelian influence on the biological theory behind the Stoic cosmogony"<sup>38</sup>.

As suggested before, this time the Professor at The University of Ohio might be victim, in my opinion of course, of the results of his own research. It is logical that in a book entitled *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology* he presents the sources of which we should think concerning the ruling principles of the Stoic universe. In this respect, he is certainly right when remembering how much Stoicism took from Aristotle, but he might be in error when referring this great debt to concrete aspects of Aristotelian philosophy, even to those in which it would be advisable to mark clear limits between Stoicism and Aristotle. It is not completely true, for instance, that the female's role (*hýle*) shows Aristotelian influence, since, as he says, the wet element is supplied by Zeus' sperm and not by Hera. Hera's role as *hýle* shows only Aristotelian influence *lato sensu*, that is to say, the classical duality matter-form –about which Diogenes Laertius wrote–, thus transforming the four elements into the unqualified substance or passive principle in opposition to the active one or god, but there is not Aristotelian influence in the biological terms mentioned by Hahm. On the other hand, there are no data which permit us to suppose that the allegory in the *Erotic Letters* is extraneous to the cosmogonical context, since, given the role of *éros* in Dio's text, it is probable that in the *Erotic Letters*, at least indirectly, the reordering of the world or *diakósmesis* was mentioned. At any rate, I belong to those who admit the interdependence of the images in both works and, therefore, it is not coherent in my opinion to consider that Hera is matter or *hýle* in one place and merely an agent inducing the production of seed in the other. Furthermore, I ask myself if, according to his own thesis, Hera's role in the cosmogonical realm is much more determined by her etymology than by the biological theory. Indeed, one of the properties of air is its cool nature<sup>39</sup> and, just before making love to Hera in order to deposit in her the *spermatikòs lógos*, the Zeus in the myth of the Magi "quenching much of its light, it turns into fiery air of gentle warmth". The question would be, then, if this "quenching much of its light" is due precisely to his contact with the cool air and the "fiery air of gentle warmth" the result of the warm fire mixed with the cool air, i.e. the result of the blessed

<sup>36</sup> Aristoteles *De generatione animalium* I 20, 729a 22-31; I 21, 730a 26-28; II 4, 738b 11-14; 4, 771 b 18-23; 4, 772b 27-34.

<sup>37</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 71 and 62.

<sup>38</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>39</sup> Later on I shall comment in detail this aspect.

marriage of Zeus and Hera. I ask myself if they both create together the life-giving or “pneumatic” element of the new world. What difference does it make if Chrysippus said that Zeus was god and Hera matter? If we bear in mind -and Hahn points it out- that the Stoic cosmogony “involves much more than a simple transformation of elements”<sup>40</sup> and that this is precisely “the only process used to explain the origin of the cosmos”<sup>41</sup>, should we not abandon the radical opposition Zeus / Hera (*théos / hýle*) and admit instead that the “two active elements”, fire and air, are the most similar and present in the soul or pneuma of the universe? It might well be that, instead of being merely an agent inducing the production of seed, Hera shares with Zeus the privilege of the active generation of life. And, finally, it might well be also that the *fellatio*, the mouth and the breathing have something to do with all this. I believe so and my hope is that the following pages will prove it.

Let us read now the fragments about that *fellatio* which caused such a great scandal. Neither Diogenes Laertius, nor Clemens Romanus I, Theophilus Antiochensis or Origen accept that allegories must be free of any limit. On the contrary, they all agree: images can be used to illustrate whatever any ingenious philosopher may conceive, but regarding a goddess, even a Greek goddess, it is inadmissible to think of her mouth, and rather than her vagina, receiving her husband’s seed. It is not, of course, normal seed but the *spermatikòs lógos* containing the reasons and causes of what has existed, exists and will exist and its mission is to generate a new world after the latest *ekpýrosis*. They do not care for either this significant detail or the fact that this seed needs a certain degree of sophistication in order to acquire its pneumatic nature, a mixture of fire and air, which in the end will give life to a new cosmos. No, they do not care, they seem to hold that any birth must follow certain orthodox rules and that the Physics of the Stoics must follow them as well. To sum up, there is no reason for abandoning the realm of sexuality and entering capriciously that of pornography.

Here are, then, the fragments as presented by Hans von Arnim. Diogenes Laertius appears in the first place:

“There are people who run Chrysippus down as having written much in a tone that is gross and indecent. For in his work *On the ancient Natural Philosophers* at line 600 or thereabouts he interprets the story of Hera and Zeus coarsely, with details which no one would soil his lips by repeating. Indeed, his interpretation of the story is condemned as most indecent. He may be commending physical doctrine; but the language used is more appropriate to street-walkers than to deities” (Εἰσὶ δὲ οἱ κατατρέχουσι τοῦ Χρυσίππου ὡς πολλὰ αἰσχρῶς καὶ ἀρρήτως ἀναγεγραφότος. Ἐν μὲν γὰρ τῷ παρὶ τῶν ἀρχαίων φυσιολόγων συγγράμματι αἰσχρῶς τὰ περὶ τὴν Ἥραν καὶ τὸν Δία ἀναπλάττει, λέγων κατὰ τοὺς ἑξακοσίους στίχους ἃ μηδεὶς ἠτυχηκῶς μολύνειν τὸ στόμα εἶποι ἄν. αἰσχροτάτην γὰρ, φασί, ταύτην ἀναπλάττει ἱστορίαν, εἰ καὶ ἐπαίνει ὡς φυσικὴν, χαμαιτύπαις μᾶλλον πρόεπουσαν ἢ θεοῖς... –translated by R. D. Hicks<sup>42</sup>).

In Diogenes’ opinion and “thanks to” Chrysippus, Hera resembles a prostitute rather than a goddess but, on the other hand, we should be interested in the analysis of all the necessary data in order to elucidate the meaning of Chrysippus’ “bright ideas” and, furthermore, we should also take into account in this respect that he lets his imagination run away with him in his treatise *On the ancient Natural Philosophers*. Consequently, these images –the same as those in his *Erotic Letters*- must be explained in the context of Stoic Physics. Chrysippus remakes the story of Zeus and Hera and gives a new form to the divine hierogamy, and not capriciously but trying to prove

<sup>40</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>41</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>42</sup> Diogenes Laertius VII 187. *SVF* II 1071.



once more that the Physical ideas of Stoicism were already present –though hidden- in ancient myths. Stoic truths are validated in this simple way by old traditions and legends which are not rejected but reinterpreted. Did Chrysippus invent artistic sources with the help of which he could sanction his thesis? It is impossible to know with certainty, but, at any rate, the centuries-old tradition tells us that sexual relations between Zeus and Hera were always “canonical”, so to speak. After Chrysippus, Dio opts for his part for normal coitus and, finally, Diogenes Laertius adds: “and it is moreover not even mentioned by those who wrote on paintings (*pinákon*). What Chrysippus makes of it is not to be found in Polemo nor Hypsicrates, no, nor even in Antigonus. It is his own invention”<sup>43</sup> -the text is referring to some paintings whose content he allegorised, but it is impossible to know if they ever existed or are the result of his interested imagination.

Thanks to Clemens Romanus I, on the other hand, we know finally what exactly degrades Hera so much:

“So what? Did not the most famous wise men choose pleasure as well and make love to the women they wanted? The first of them all (Socrates), the master of Greece, about whom Apollo himself said: of all men Socrates is the wisest, did he not propose that in the best ruled city, in Sparta, women should be shared and hide under his cloak the beautiful Alcibiades? The Socratic Antisthenes, for his part, wrote about the necessity not to reject so called adultery... Did not Epicurus choose the pleasure?... Does not Zeno say, suggesting that it is indifferent, that what is divine is in everybody so that those who are intelligent understand that... it is useless proscribing adultery or intercourse with mother, sister or children? Chrysippus... in his Erotic Letters mentions the painting in Argos and locates Hera’s face close to Zeus’ private parts (πρὸς τῷ τοῦ Διὸς αἰδοίῳ φύρῳν τῆς Ἥρας τὸ πρόσωπον –the translation is mine)”<sup>44</sup>.

This is certainly another context where pleasure (*hedoné*) and those who adore it are condemned. For Clemens Romanus Greece knew all kind of vices: women who were shared by different men, adultery, incest, homosexuality. There were also many pleasure-adorers: Socrates, Antisthenes, Cynics, Epicureans, and even Stoics. In any case, Clemens Romanus I could not read such a “logical” justification of incest without becoming scandalized, though it must be borne in mind that these audacities were intended by Zeno only for an ideal *pólis* and not for contemporary cities where human beings have not understood yet that *areté* is the most important thing and that sexuality does not belong to the realm of what is good or bad, i.e. to Ethics, but to the realm of what is indifferent (*adiáphoron*). On the other hand, incest would only be justifiable if a wise man and his daughter, after the extinction of the human race, should feel obliged to save it, and, regarding Stoic homosexuality, we only know of a few isolated cases and usually “homoeotism” would be the fittest term<sup>45</sup>. However, it should be acknowledged that the remark “only for intelligent people” is highly provocative.

To sum up, Chrysippus dares to put Hera’s face close to Zeus’ private parts -Clemens Romanus, of course, prefers *prósopon* to *stóma*-, that is to say, interprets allegorically a real or perhaps imaginary painting in Argos but, as suggested by the extant fragments, in accordance with what he maintains in his treatise *On the ancient Natural Philosophers*. Leaving aside, then, the erotic content of his *Erotic Letters*, in them the Stoic philosopher must have approached once again the theme of the successive renewal or reordering of the world after the *ekpyróseis* and the role played by *éros* in all this process. If so, the *Erotic Letters*, in opposition to what Hahn

<sup>43</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>44</sup> Clemens Romanus *Homil.* V 18. SVF II 1072.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. P. Gilabert. *Plutarco. El Erótico. Diálogo filosófico sobre Eros o la confrontación de los amores pederástico y conyugal*. Barcelona: PPU, 1991.

holds, would not be extraneous to the cosmogonical context. Our imagination, with the help in this case of Dio's *Borysthenitic*, may perfectly well think of a "sophisticated" hierogamy, for, as Pohlenz says, very probably Dio's text is based not only on Cleanthes but also on a treatise of Chrysippus.

Now comes the turn of Theophilus Antiochensis, whose aim seems to be to confront the inconsistency of Greek poets, historians and philosophers with obviously the great consistency and high morality of the law, the prophets and the *Gospels*:

"One must therefore pay attention and understand what is said, critically examining the remarks of philosophers and of poets as well. For after denying the existence of gods they admit it once more, and have said that they perform unlawful actions. Notably in the case of Zeus the poets sing of his wicked deeds most euphoniously. And did not Chrysippus, who uttered so much nonsense, indicate that Hera with impure mouth had intercourse with Zeus? (σημαίνειν τὴν Ἥραν στόματι μιαρῶθ συγγίνεσθαι τῷ Διῷ)"<sup>46</sup>.

Antioch's criticism is more indulgent than the previous ones. In his opinion, Chrysippus is above all –or must be– a *phlýaros* as proved by his special vision of the hierogamy performed by Zeus and Hera. He does not interpret the *fellatio*, but the truth is that he provides us with the keyword: *stóma*. In fact, everything seems to revolve around this term, but its analysis implies some previous phases. One of them is the one devoted to allegories and fantastic etymologies. Origen is now our "reporter" and for him Chrysippus is neither an indecent philosopher nor a *phlýaros* but a man who does not respect the gods, for, when interpreting myths and all kinds of fictions in search of their meaning, he does not keep his interpretation free from indecencies:

"Afterwards, (Celsus), completely devoted to his hate and aversion to the doctrine of Jews and Christians, says that even the most reasonable of them explain allegorically these things and, without feeling ashamed of it, they take refuge in the allegory. Nevertheless, if we must really call worthy of shame in their first sense the doctrines of myths and fictions which have been written allegorically or in any other sense... what stories but the Greek ones must be called worthy of shame?... is it necessary that I mention the stories of the Greeks about their gods, absurd stories and, as a consequence, shameful and explained allegorically (ἀλληγορουμένας)? For at least Chrysippus..., who is considered to have honoured the Stoa with his numerous and intelligent treatises, interprets the painting in Samos in which Hera commits an indecency to Zeus (ἐν ἣ ἀρρήτοποιούσα ἢ Ἥρα τὸν Δία ἐγέγραπτο). The illustrious philosopher says in his treatises that matter, after having received the spermatikòs lógos, keeps it inside itself for the rearranging of the whole (τοὺς σπερματικὸς λόγους τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ ὕλη παραδεξαμένη ἔχει ἐν ἑαυτῇ εἰς κατακόσμησιν τῶν ὅλων). Hera, then, is matter in the painting of Samos and Zeus God... we adopt Plato's words in his *Philebus* when he refused to accept pleasure as a god... we truly respect the name of God and his beautiful actions, so that not even under the pretext of figurative language do we accept any myth (*hos medè prophásei tropologías mython*)"<sup>47</sup>.

According to Celsus the indecent stories whose protagonists are the Greek gods and goddesses are intolerable, even when written allegorically. Chrysippus interprets allegorically (*parermeneúei*) the painting in Samos; he is, then, worthy of being censured. But why should

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<sup>46</sup> Theophilus Antiochensis *Ad Autolyicum* III 8. SVF II 1073, translated by Robert M. Grant in *Theophilus of Antioch. Ad Autolyicum*. Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1970.

<sup>47</sup> Origen. *Contra Celsum* IV 48. SVF II 1074.

Origen be worried about this interpretation, that is to say, about the fact that Zeus is God and Hera the matter? Is it not reasonable that, in this erotic text which also seems to allude to a cosmogony, Hera receives her husband's *spermatikòs lógos* for the renewal of the world? The origin of the world conceived in biological terms may not scandalise him but the fact that it is Hera's mouth and not her vagina –though he does not mention the term *fellatio* but indecency– which receives the divine sperm. Would his criticism have been so severe if, instead of creating an indecent Hera, Chrysippus had simply repeated Zeno's words: *διὰ ταύτης δὲ διαθεῖν τὸν τοῦ παντός λόγον, ὃν ἔνιοι εἰρμαρμένην καλοῦσιν, οἷόνπερ καὶ ἐν τῇ γονῇ τὸ σπέρμα?*<sup>48</sup> Not at all. Origen agrees with Dio: if it is necessary to use a divine hierogamy, he would rather imagine Hera, matter, receiving the *lógos* which is going to fecundate her just as the vagina receives the male sperm, but he will never be willing to imagine it in the goddess' mouth<sup>49</sup>. However, Origen lets us know only a part of Chrysippus' interpretation, the cosmogonical and biological one, i.e. Zeus fecundates and Hera is fecundated, he is the active principle and she is the passive. But, as said before, we must bear in mind that all this process is seen at the same time in terms of elemental transformation and that, even for the generation of the *spermatikòs lógos* which will operate on the unqualified matter, it is necessary that by means of the cool air the warm fire turns into water, this latter acquiring life or pneuma –in other words, as we shall see later on, water (sperm) must appear in Hera's mouth.

Origen has truly made an effort to understand Chrysippus and his words reproduce almost verbatim those of Diogenes Laertius:

“They hold that there are two principles (ἀρχὰς) in the universe, the active principle and the passive one (τὸ ποιοῦν καὶ τὸ πάσχον). The passive principle, then, is a substance without quality, i.e. matter (τῇ ἄποιον οὐσίαν, τὴν ὕλην), whereas the active is the reason (λόγον) inherent in this substance, that is God (θεόν). For he is everlasting and is the artificer (δημιουργεῖν) of each several thing throughout the whole extent of matter (διὰ πάσης αὐτῆς). This doctrine is laid down by Zeno of Citium in his treatise *On Existence* (περὶ οὐσίας), Cleanthes in his work *On Atoms* (περὶ τῶν ἀτόμων), Chrysippus in the first book of his *Physics* towards the end (ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ τῶν φυσικῶν πρὸς τῷ τέλει)<sup>50</sup>.

But he does not take into account that Chrysippus mentions two principles towards the end of his *Physics*. Might it not well be that earlier, in any other place in the book, when approaching specifically the theory of the transformation of the elements, he did not speak yet about Zeus and Hera as “god and matter” but as “the two active elements” *par excellence*, those which are similar in constitution and nature? Should we continue to think that Hera is merely an agent inducing the production of Zeus' seed? Obviously I do not believe so, since, if Chrysippus chooses a concrete image –and he might even have invented it–, we should discover its meaning especially when everybody has recognized the exegetic skills of the Stoicism.

The previous texts lead us, as a consequence, towards the Stoic *explicatio fabularum* and *enodatio nominum*. Cicero's *De natura deorum* is now our key-text. It tells us that Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus and the Stoics in general were not poets but philosophers. So they understood and revealed the true meaning of the myths and legends created by poets<sup>51</sup>. The fable

<sup>48</sup> Stobaeus *Eclog.* I, 11. 5a, p. 132, 26 W, *SVF* I 87.

<sup>49</sup> Origen only says that he interprets the painting in Samos, but, at any rate, very probably its images, real or not, were not different from the ones in the painting of Argos bearing in mind that they approach the same theme (*cfr.* Hahm., *op. cit.*, pp. 84-5.)

<sup>50</sup> Diogenes Laertius VII 134. *SVF* II 300 –translated by R. D. Hicks.

<sup>51</sup> Cicero. *De natura deorum* II 24, 63. *SVF* II 1067 and I 166.

is a story whose tradition is respected but only in order to proclaim not only that the mythical patrimony of the Greeks does not invalidate their doctrines but also that these are confirmed by them. Stoicism is certainly fascinated by the idea of only one God –why not Zeus?- and their mission is to teach for evermore that gods and goddesses are but the different manifestations of a sole Power unfolding throughout the Whole. In order to accomplish their mission the Stoics take advantage of the ancient fables and of the etymological interpretation of the names of their protagonists -the above mentioned (Hahn) identification Hera = air- and also establish the association of the elements with the god or goddess who has traditionally “reigned” over them: Poseidon = water, for instance. They probably even invented some etymologies. It does not matter. People –the crowd- must understand the reality as it is, if necessary with their gods and goddesses, images and myths, but they must finally understand. Traditions must be respected but at the same time they must be refuted with serious arguments: “Zeno, when explaining that Juno is air, Jupiter the sky, Neptune the sea, Vulcan fire and when teaching in the same way that the rest of the popular gods are elements, refutes the crowd and opposes its error” (*Idem (Zeno) interpretando Iunonem aera, Iovem caelum, Neptunum mare, ignem esse Vulcanum, et ceteros similiter vulgū deos elemento esse monstrando, publicum arguit graviter et revincit errorem* –the translation is mine)<sup>52</sup>. Needless to say, this kind of interpretation is not free of risks. It is quite clear that the exegetic skills of the Stoics when adapting the Greek fables to the exigencies of their Physics would lead us to think that the poets who created them were already Stoics *stricto sensu*, but this would be, so to speak, the “virtuosity” of a necessary practice<sup>53</sup>.

In the myth of the Magi, the fable of the blessed marriage of Zeus and Hera seems to hide a concrete symbolism with no further elements, but this is not the case of the “indecent act” in the *Erotic Letters* where the symbolism is the same but a new element intervenes, the *fellatio*, i.e. Hera’s mouth (*stóma*). For my part I do not understand why this important detail has always been omitted, since it is not logical to admit that it was simply Chrysippus who in his treatises went beyond the limits and not the critical spirit of his censors.

With regard to the fantastic etymologies, it is once again Cicero in his *De natura deorum* who shows the ridiculous petulance of those who believed that they have discovered the origin of a word on the basis of only one letter<sup>54</sup>. Indeed, we should not accept –Cicero seems to hold- that the Stoics explain the name of everything by saying that “Saturnus is so called because he is ‘sated with years’ (*saturat*), Mavors because he ‘subverts (*vertit*) the great’, Minerva because she ‘diminishes’ (*minuit*)”, etcetera. Following this method nothing is impossible and they dare to say that Neptune comes from *nare*, swim, so that all names can be taken back to their origin.

The Stoic interpretative system, then, must be discarded on many occasions<sup>55</sup>, but this does not mean that, on others, the Stoa was not extremely careful. In the case of Zeus and Hera, for instance, the Stoics do not start from scratch again concerning their significance and the meaning of their names. Indeed, what is –to begin with- Zeus throughout the Physics of the Stoics? Zeus is ether and fire<sup>56</sup>.

Ether is the supreme god, the lord of the reason which rules the whole<sup>57</sup>. It is also providence when the time for *ekpýrosis* arrives and, after the death of the body and not of the soul of the universe, Zeus falls back into himself in order to survive and enable the regeneration of a new world (Dio said that when all Zeus’ horses become one, “it is simply the soul of the charioteer

<sup>52</sup> Minucius Felix. *Octav.* 19, 10. SVF I 169. Cf. as well Lactantius. *De ira Dei* 11. SVF I 164 and Cicero *De natura deorum* I 14, 36. SVF I 165 and 167.

<sup>53</sup> Cicero *De natura deorum* I 15, 39. SVF II 1077. Cf. Pohlenz, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>54</sup> Cicero *De natura deorum* III 24, 62, 63. SVF II 1069

<sup>55</sup> Macrobius. *Saturn.* I 18, 14. SVF I 546; Plutarchus. *Amatorius* 757 B. SVF II 1094.

<sup>56</sup> Diogenes Laertius VII 147. SVF II 1021; Philodemus. *De pietate.* 11. SVF II 1076; Cicero *De natura deorum* I 15. SVF II 1077 and SVF II 1067.

<sup>57</sup> Cicero *De natura deorum* I, 36. SVF I 154; *Acad. Priora.* II 126. SVF I 154.

and master; or, let us say, merely the intellect and leadership of that soul”)<sup>58</sup>. Endowed with a transcendental nature for the retention of life and the generation of a new cosmos, ether is undoubtedly the purest, the brightest, and moves very easily (like the divine charioteer in the myth of the Magi, who “had filled with itself immeasurable space, since it had poured itself evenly in all directions and nothing in it remained dense but complete porosity prevailed”)<sup>59</sup>. Ether is also the home of providence and father of *diakósmesis*, for, like the *spermatikòs lógos*, it possesses the origin of the four elements (Zeus in Dio’s text, “becoming enamoured of that control and governance and concord which it once maintained not only over the three natures of sun and moon and the other stars, but also over absolutely all animals and plants, became eager to generate and distribute everything and to make the orderly universe...”) <sup>60</sup>.

According to his etymology, Zeus is the first and total cause of life, so that the rest of the divinities are different manifestations of a sole divinity: “They give the name Dia (*Día*) because all things are due to (*dià*) him; Zeus (*Zena*) in so far as he is the cause of life (*zên*) or pervades all life; the name Athena is given, because the ruling part of the divinity extends to ether; the name Hera marks its extension to the air; he is called Hephaestus since it spreads to the creative fire; Poseidon, since it stretches to the sea; Demeter, since it reaches to earth”<sup>61</sup>. According to Diogenes Laertius, Zeus unfolds throughout the universe just as the soul unfolds throughout our body, and the universe is like an animal endowed with life and reason (*zôion êmpsychon kai logikón*) -for, as we shall see when analyzing the term *stóma*, its “animality”, its “life”, its “soul” (*psyché*) comes from the fire turned into pneuma after having been cooled and tempered by air (Hera)<sup>62</sup>.

Fire and ether –the ether which sometimes is seen as “that remote all-surrounding fiery atmosphere”<sup>63</sup>- are the same thing. Dio, for instance, holds that ether was often called fire by the Stoa<sup>64</sup>. Fire is in the origin of the creation, it is also the sperm which is received by matter after *ekpýrosis* and causes *diakósmesis*<sup>65</sup>. Fire is “sperm”, is “life”, is the “artificer god which moves on towards the genesis of the cosmos (just like Zeus in the myth of the Magi “having made fluid all his essence, one seed for the entire world, he himself moving about in it like a spirit that moulds and fashions in generation (*demiourgoûn*)...”)”<sup>66</sup>. We should only add that if the ether was identified with Zeus and, therefore, it was god, this also happens with fire, its twin brother<sup>67</sup>.

With regard to Hera, the Stoa repeats what is read in Plato’s *Cratylus*: “But perhaps the lawgiver had natural phenomena in mind, and called her Hera (*Héra*) as a disguise for air (*aér*), putting the beginning at the end”<sup>68</sup>. But, in order to endow her with a really active role –denied by Hahm- it is especially useful to see her as Zeus’ sister, since the elements they incarnate respectively, fire and air, are the most similar because of their thinness. This does not mean, of course, that Stoicism does not accept Hera as Zeus’ wife; on the contrary, in spite of being his sister because of the just mentioned reason, Hera continues to be his wife and, as such, occupies the celestial sphere just under that of Zeus, fire<sup>69</sup>. However, the active role of air may be not only

<sup>58</sup> Minucius Felix. *Octav.* XIX 10. SVF I 532; Plutarchus. *De com. not.* 1077E. SVF II 1064.

<sup>59</sup> Arius Didymus. *Epit. Phys.* Fr. 29 D. DG p. 465. SVF II 642; Diogenes Laertius VII 137. SVF II 644.

<sup>60</sup> Servius. *Ad Aeneid.* X 18. SVF II 1061.

<sup>61</sup> Diogenes Laertius VII 147. SVF II 1021.

<sup>62</sup> Diogenes Laertius VII 138. SVF II 634.

<sup>63</sup> Cicero. *De natura deorum* I 14, 37. SVF I 530.

<sup>64</sup> Dio Chrysostomus *Or.* XL 37. SVF II 601.

<sup>65</sup> Eusebius. *Praep. evang.* XV 18, 3. SVF II 596.

<sup>66</sup> Aetius. *Placita* I 7, 33. SVF II 1027, 774, 1133, 1134 and I 171.

<sup>67</sup> Saint Agustinus. *De civ. Dei* VII 5. SVF II 423; *Adv. Acad.* III 17, 38. SVF I 157. Aetius *Placita* I 7, 23. SVF I 157.

<sup>68</sup> Platon *Cra.* 404c.

<sup>69</sup> Servius. *Ad. Aened.* I 47. SVF II 1066.

inferred from its similarity with fire but also from their radical difference for the former is cool and the latter is warm. Indeed, the air seen as the cool element is essential in my opinion to understanding the painting in Samos –or the one in Argos- and the divine hierogamy of Zeus and Hera in Dio’s myth. The fire (warmth) –Zeus- needs the air –Hera- in order to generate the water –sperm- which sooner or later will appear through the phase of water vapour. And I should dare to add that this vapour (breathing, mouth, *fellatio*) is “vital”, that is to say, “gives pneuma” to the fluid coming from its condensation. Fire and air are certainly similar and one is located next to the other, but they also need to be opposite poles in order not to stop the chain of the elemental transformation. It is true that very probably the confusion of air and water vapour was a constant in the Stoa, but this fact does not deprive the former of its cool nature but reveals the extraordinary importance in Stoic Physics of the mixture fire-air, warmth-coolness –i.e., the pneuma- to the extent of being considered the fifth element<sup>70</sup>.

The confusion of air and water vapour is the result of the chosen simile: water when boiling and emitting its vapour, resembles the process of the elemental transformation from earth to fire of *ekpýrosis*. Diogenes Laertius mentions the process of genesis (fire > air > water > earth) and that of cosmic dissolution (earth > water > air > fire) both held by Zeno, Chrysippus and Posidonius<sup>71</sup>. In any case, although the Stoics often turned their attention to the mixture fire-air and not to air alone –which is perfectly understandable given the high mission of the pneuma-, the characteristic of air is always coolness<sup>72</sup>. Plutarch also writes on the fifth element, the pneuma<sup>73</sup>, in his treatise *De primo frigido*, but, though his doctrines do confuse and air is seen as water vapour, the latter is a mixture of coolness and darkness<sup>74</sup>.

To sum up, for a correct interpretation of the painting in Samos –or the one in Argos- we should bear in mind that: a) Hera is air and its main feature is its coolness; b) Zeus is fire and “reigns” in the realm of warmth; c) Zeus needs Hera in order to transform his own essence into water –sperm-; d) the role of the *spermatikòs lógos* is to generate the new cosmos; e) Hera collaborates in a very active way in this cosmogonical process by means of cooling the still indomitable fire of the last *ekpýrosis*; f) Hera’s mouth tempers and receives the vapour which is the result of its own contact with fire (I should like to point out once more that, in the myth of the Magi, Zeus, just before making love to Hera, “quenching much of its light, it turned into fiery air of gentle warmth” –it is quite obvious that Dio cannot imagine for Hera’s vagina the same role as Chrysippus imagines for Hera’s mouth -), and g) the vapour, the pneuma, the breathing which in the end is a clear sign of life becomes water –sperm- coming from its drops, thus being itself endowed –pneumatic sperm- with what is most needed to give life in its turn. Soon after fire has become sperm, Zeus and Hera are no longer brother and sister and become, as held by Origen, god and matter, husband and wife.

The next stage of our study would correspond, therefore, to the analysis of the cosmogonical sperm and the theory of the elemental transformation. I agree with Hahn<sup>75</sup> when he affirms: “The doctrine of the principles or *archaí* is usually discussed at or near the beginning of an account of Stoic cosmology, presumably because the *archaí* are felt to be logically, if not temporally, prior to the rest of the cosmological doctrines. This practice goes back to the Hellenistic doxographies, which conventionally began with a discussion of *archaí*”. But Diogenes Laertius states that, although Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus maintained that the principles of the universe were two, the active and the passive (*tò poioûn kaì tò páschon*), conceiving of the passive as the unqualified substance or matter (*ápoios ousía, he hýle*) and the

<sup>70</sup> Cicero. *De natura deorum* ND 10, 27.

<sup>71</sup> Diogenes Laertius VII 142. *SVF* I 102.

<sup>72</sup> Plutarchus. *De primo frigido*. 17, 952c. *SVF* II 429.

<sup>73</sup> Plutarchus. *Op., cit.*, 951c, d, e.

<sup>74</sup> Plutarchus. *Op., cit.*, 948d. *SVF* II 430; *De Stoicorum repugnantis* 1053f. *SVF* II 429.

<sup>75</sup> *Op., cit.*, p. 29.

active as the reason or god in it (*ho en autêi logos, ho theos*), Chrysippus approached all these questions towards the end of the first book of his *Physics*. We should conclude, then, that in spite of the importance of the doctrine of the principles, it seems not to have been prior to the enunciation of the cosmogony but simultaneous or perhaps even a bit later, bearing in mind that, as already said, the origin of the universe is explained in terms of elemental transformation. Let us see, consequently, how this transformation takes place:

“For he says in the first book concerning Nature: “The transformation of fire is like this: by way of air it turns into water; and from this, as earth is precipitated, air evaporates; and, as the air subtilized, ether is diffused round about” (Λέγει γὰρ ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ περὶ Φύσεως “ Ἡ δὲ πυρὸς μεταβολὴ ἐστὶ τοιαύτη· δι’ ἀέρος εἰς ὕδωρ τρέπεται· καὶ τούτου γῆς ὑφισταμένης ἀῆρ ἀναθυμιᾶται· λεπτυνομένου δὲ τοῦ ἀέρος, ὁ αἰθήρ περιχεῖται κύκλῳ –translated by Harold Cherniss. Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976)<sup>76</sup>.

From now on -and not before- the theory of the principles plays its role, since the origin of the world is attributed to an agent which operates on its patient. Nevertheless, the former is compared with the human sperm and, before it starts operating, it must be obtained. How? By means of the same process thanks to which water, the fluid *par excellence*, is obtained. And how do we obtain matter? Given that the transformation of fire into water has been a “strategy” to create the *spermatikòs logos* and this one is in its turn the fire which must accomplish again its mission, the four elements, altogether, those which will generate the new world from the metamorphosis of fire, become now matter or the unqualified substance. To sum up, before speaking about the active principle or god –the sperm- which operates on matter, this principle must be created by means of the elemental transformation. And now yes, now Chrysippus can speak about the principles, the active and the passive, in some way just as Aristotle speaks about form and matter. Although the Stoics -like the Ionian physicians before Parmenides- explain the origin of the universe as the transformation of a sole substance –fire in their case-, they also adapted hylemorphism to their system understanding as form the first element and its subsequent transformation as the matter on which the form operates.

And, finally, here is the etymology of the term *stóma*, which can be inferred from some texts dealing with the soul (*psyché*). Indeed, this is how Chrysippus explains, according to Plutarch, its origin in the foetus of the animals:

“(Chrysippus) believes that the foetus in the womb is nourished by nature like a plant but that at birth the vital spirit, being chilled and tempered by the air, changes and becomes animal and that hence the soul has not inappropriately been named after this process. On the other hand, he holds soul to be vital spirit in a more rarefied and subtle state than nature” (Τὸ βρέφος ἐν τῇ γαστρὶ τρέφεσθαι νομίζει καθάπερ φυτὸν· ὅταν δὲ τεχθῆ, ψυχόμενον ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀέρος καὶ στομούμενον τὸ πνεῦμα μεταβάλλειν καὶ γινεσθαι ζῶον· ὅθεν οὐκ ἀπὸ τρόπου τὴν ψυχὴν ὠνομάσθαι παρὰ τὴν ψῦξιν -*idem*)<sup>77</sup>.

Consequently, if for the Stoics the soul is called *psyché* because the pneuma or inner warmth of the foetus is chilled and tempered by the outer air at its birth, why could not the animal’s mouth be called *stóma* because it is precisely in their mouth where the “tempering” of the inner warmth of their body takes place when coming into contact with the coolness of the outer air?

<sup>76</sup> Plutarchus. *De Stoicorum repugnantis* 1053a. SVF II 579.

<sup>77</sup> Plutarchus. *Op., cit.*, 1052f. SVF II 806.

In fact, the refreshing function of the inhaled air comes back to Aristotle<sup>78</sup> and, furthermore, might have meant a theory of respiration according to which the air refreshes the inner warmth of the body<sup>79</sup>. And the birth of the soul is not the only detail to be outlined but also the fact that, thanks to its presence, the foetus gives up being nourished in the womb like a plant, thus acquiring its animal nature. What happens with the cosmos whose origin both the myth of the Magi and the *Erotic Letters* explain? The cosmos is also an animal, a being endowed with reason (*zōion émpsychon kai logikón*), and one day it gave up being in the *spermatikòs lógos* in order to become what it is now, a world or cosmos endowed with life or *psyché (émpsychon)* since the fire from which it comes was cooled and at the same time brought to life by the air in the mouth or vital breathing, that is to say, by the *pneuma*<sup>80</sup>.

At any rate and regarding again the term *stóma*, we must only add that the three fragments in the *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* dealing with it enable an *enodatio nominis* like the one suggested. Indeed, the soul appears in the foetus –we read with slight changes-, when at its birth the *pneuma* comes into contact with the cool outer air, thus becoming more subtle and turning from vegetable into animal by “tempering” (*stómosis*):

“In his account of the generation of soul the demonstration is in conflict with the doctrine, for, while he says that the soul comes to be when the foetus has been brought to birth, the vital spirit having changed under chilling as if under tempering” (ὁ περὶ ψυχῆς γενέσεως αὐτῷ λόγος μαχομένην ἔχει πρὸς τὸ δόγμα τὴν ἀπόδειξιν. Γίνεσθαι μὲν γὰρ φησι τὴν ψυχὴν, ὅταν τὸ βρέφος ἀποτεχθῆ, καθάπερ στομῶσει τῇ περιψύξει τοῦ πνεύματος μεταβαλόντος –*idem*)<sup>81</sup>.

“The Stoics also affirm that in the bodies of infant children the breath is tempered by cooling and, from being a physical substance, becomes a soul” (Οἱ δὲ Στωϊκοὶ καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα λέγουσιν ἐν τοῖς σώμασι τῶν βρεφῶν τῇ περιψύξει στομοῦσθαι καὶ μεταβάλλον ἐκ φύσεως γίνεσθαι ψυχὴν -translated by William C. Helmbold. Loeb Classical Library. London. William Heinemann Ltd., Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968)<sup>82</sup>.

“... for the soul is surely most hot and most subtle and they produce it by chilling and condensation of the body which by tempering, as it were, changes the vital spirit that out of vegetable is become animal” (τὸ θερμότατον περιψύξει καὶ πυκνώσει τὸ λεπτομερέστατον γεννῶντες. ἡ γὰρ ψυχὴ θερμότατόν ἐστι δήπου καὶ λεπτομερέστατον· ποιοῦσι δ' αὐτὴν τῇ περιψύξει καὶ πυκνώσει τοῦ σώματος, οἷον στομῶσει τὸ πνεῦμα μεταβάλλοντος, ἐκ φυτικῶ ψυχικὸν γενόμενον -translated by Harold Cherniss. Loeb Classical Library. London. William Heinemann Ltd., Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976)<sup>83</sup>.

Needless to say, the soul is for animals what the *pneuma* is for the world –leaving aside the fact that the world is also a *zōion émpsychon*-, but, if we prefer to rest on evidence, there are other fragments which confirm that the soul and the *pneuma* are the same thing: “Zeno of Citium

<sup>78</sup> Aristoteles. *De generatione animalium* I 1, 642b.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Hahn, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>80</sup> See e.g. S. Sambursky in *Physics of the Stoics*, London, 1931, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> Plutarchus *De Stoicorum repugnantis* 1053d. SVF II 806.

<sup>82</sup> Plutarchus *De primo frigido*, 946 C. SVF II 806.

<sup>83</sup> Plutarchus *De com. not.* 1084e. SVF II 806.



... defines the soul as a warm breath (*pneûma énthermon*)”<sup>84</sup>. And spirit (*spiritus*) –or pneuma-, soul (*anima*) and life (*vita*) are identical:

“Chrysippus also says: we breathe and live undoubtedly because of one and the same thing. We breathe because of the natural spirit, hence we live as well because of the same spirit. But we live because of the soul: then, the natural spirit turns out to be the soul” (*item Chrysippus: una et eadem, inquit, corte respiramus et vivimus. Spiramus autem naturali spiritu: ergo etiam vivimus eodem spiritu. Vivimus autem anima: naturalis igitur spiritus anima esse invenitur* –the translation is mine)<sup>85</sup>.

These are the data thanks to which, in my opinion, the interpretation of the *fellatio* is finally possible. In this case it is not the foetus’ warmth which comes into contact with the coolness of the outer air but Zeus’ warmth which meets or looks for Hera’s coolness. At any rate, the process is practically the same: Hera’s cool mouth refreshes and tempers (*psychroî kai stomoî*) Zeus’ warm penis, and there, in Hera’s mouth, is generated the life-giving breath or pneuma, so that the cosmogonical sperm which is about to appear becomes the true active principle in order to “inform” the matter. At this final stage, Hera will be Zeus’ wife but, previously, she has been his sister and best collaborator.

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<sup>84</sup> Diogenes Laertius VII 157. SVF I 135. Cfr. as well Galenus. *Phil. Hist.* 24. SVF I 136; *De plac. Hip. Et Plat.* II 8. SVF I 140. Nemesius. *De nat. hom.* 2, 38. SVF II 773; D. L. VII 156. SVF II 774; Gal. *De simpl. medicam. temp. et fac.* SVF II 777.

<sup>85</sup> Calcidius. *Ad Timaeum* 220. SVF II 879.