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A History of the Proverb in Greece and Rome

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Preface

As early as 2002, I had encountered the fascinating world of the ancient proverb in my studies on Callimachus and Hellenistic poetry. After investigating the presence of proverbs in literary authors, I devoted myself to the creation of the first annotated Italian translation of the paremiographic collections of Zenobius and Diogenianus. Then, starting from 2010, I began to 'contaminate' paremiological studies with folkloric comparison. My book *Proverbi, sentenze e massime di saggezza in Grecia e a Roma* (Milan, 2021) collects ancient and medieval, Greek and Latin authors, often in their first translation and commentary.
This work is its complementary monograph, which summarizes the results of twenty years of study.

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Emanuele Lelli

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1. Proverbs, *sententiae*, and much more

What is a "proverb"? What is a "*sententia*"? What is a "saying"?
To many readers, the question may seem superfluous, and the answer rather obvious, if even one of the greatest scholars of proverbs, namely Archer Taylor, declared that "an incommunicable quality tells us this sentence is proverbial, and this one is not." To all of us, in fact, proverbs, *sententiae*, sayings, and many more (maxims, apophthegms, aphorisms, and so on), seem to be well known and familiar elements of communication.
Yet modern scientific definitions of the concept of proverb are not unanimous, even though an actual discipline, paremiology, has developed and become codified in recent decades, in order to study the heritage of proverbs and *sententiae*, both ancient and modern.[1] The name of this discipline contains a calque from the Greek word παροιμία, in order to avoid using other polysemic (if not ambiguous) modern language terms. However, the heritage of proverbs from all times has been—at almost all times—an object of interest and study in various disciplines, and, consequently, the object of different approaches which have emphasized one aspect or another. Linguistics, history, anthropology, philology, philosophy, and even medicine have looked at the heritage of proverbs *iuxta propria principia* and have provided substantially different analyses. Moreover, the fact that a proverb or a saying can attract the attention of disparate fields of knowledge is already demonstrated in Greek and Roman antiquity, where, as we shall see, historians and rhetoricians, philosophers and antiquarians, lexicographers and actual paremiographers dealt with proverbs and *sententiae*.
Most of the scholars who have proposed a definition of "proverb," especially from the historical and anthropological point of view (from Taylor to Cirese, to Mieder), agree in underlining three fundamental aspects of what we commonly dub a proverb:

- the brevity of its formulation, often made more effective by rhetorical and phonic devices;
- the acknowledged traditionality and shareability of its content;
- the didactic, ethical, and moral function, in other words, the social teaching/judging of its message: in this sense, ancient and modern repertories of proverbs constitute one of the most deeply rooted elements of what is often defined as the "wisdom of the people," and which is, to all intents and purposes, a part of their folklore.

In addition to these fundamental internal (linguistic) and external (communicative and cultural) characteristics, other features are detectable in most of the proverbs of every culture. The most important of these is undoubtedly the metaphorical, allegorical, and allusive aspect of the proverb. A proverb, in other words, is alloglot: it uses the description of a situation X to signify a functional message for a situation Y, through a common denominator that may be a character/qualification or, more often, a similar or identical action. "The hasty cat gives birth to blind kittens," for instance, attested since the 6th century BCE in Greece (in Archilochus) and even earlier in Mesopotamian cultures, certainly does not refer only to the situation indicated by the signifier, but alludes to any behavior or person marked by "haste" in actions, thoughts, words.[2]
Precisely on the basis of the purely and technically metaphorical function of most proverbial expressions, in the last decades, several scholars of linguistics and semiotics (Greimas, Franceschi, Eco, Boggione, Sevilla Muñoz) have proposed a different reading of the meaning and, above all, the function of proverbs and *sententiae*, which are increasingly framed in the wider but effective container of "short forms."

[1] It is not possible to account, even in summary, for the development of the scholarship on short *sententia* forms after World War II. After the earlier work of Archer Taylor, it was mainly linguists, semiologists, and ethnolinguists who opened up avenues of research—sometimes, unfortunately, only parallel ones—that were rich in perspectives. Among the most committed and prolific scholars of contemporary paremiology is W. Mieder. Three international journals are dedicated to proverbs: *Proverbium*, *De proverbio*, and *Paremia*.
[2] An English equivalent might be "haste makes waste."

The allusiveness of proverbs can already be inferred from the etymology of the term "proverb"—*proverbium*: *verbum pro verbo*, "a verbal act that stands for another." The role of metaphors in the formation of proverbs seems highly relevant and is expressed through the various metaphorical typologies of allegory, substitution, simile, and antonomasia. Therefore, rather than the "wisdom of the people," proverbs prove to be a canonized act of communication, "a kind of dialogue between speakers."[3] From this point of view, proverbs constitute a second-rate language, in which words are combined according to the criteria of their memorability and expressive power. As such, they are similar, in some ways, to the language of literature and of poetry in particular, with which they share several phenomena and technical structures (conciseness, poignancy, rhythm, figures of sound, etc.). Yet not all proverbs are metaphorical: thus, the category of "didactic sayings"—useful expressions of an ergological, meteorological, calendrical, or hygienic nature—was differentiated from that of proper "proverbs."

It seems to me that, as often happens, the two different approaches certainly grasp a fundamental aspect of the ancient and modern heritage of proverbs and *sententiae*: that this is both a linguistic and, at the same time, a *cultural* heritage. It is precisely by interweaving these two main approaches—the historical and anthropological on the one hand, and the linguistic and semiotic on the other—that we can try to give a more detailed answer to the question, which is only seemingly simple, with which we started: what are "proverbs," "*sententiae*," and "sayings"?

The immense wealth of proverbial expressions handed down by every culture includes a multifaceted series of "short forms," each with its own peculiarities. Although, as we have said, at an international level, the various schools of paremiology do not always agree on the definitions, certain macro-characteristics do seem to distinguish different kinds of *paremiai* (to employ the general term most widely in use today), or at least to be effective in reflecting on a particular distinction.

In addition to the proper **proverb**—that is, the one bounded by the elements of conciseness, teaching, and tradition—there are, first of all, the so-called "tautological proverbs": expressions of a didactic nature in the proper sense, which are not intended—except in very limited cases—to mean something other than the objective information of an ergological, atmospheric, calendrical, hygienic nature, and so on (e.g. "red sky at night, sailors' delight"). They constitute a sort of encyclopedia of popular knowledge expressed in short forms that have a practical function.

A special place is also occupied by the ***sententia***, a formulation that, in most cases, uses ethical or general concepts as its subject and that, precisely because of its referential generality, can be used in different contexts. A *sententia*, however, is not always universally known: its circulation and tradition are often more linked to the middle-high classes of a given culture (as opposed, in some ways, to the "popular" circulation of the proverb), and sometimes are derived directly from (literary) authors' statements that have become famous ("keep your powder dry"). A synonym of *sententia* is **maxim**, even though the latter is often used to define "short forms" elaborated by philosophers or thinkers.

An even stronger association with authors is held by **aphorisms**, already the title of a Hippocratic text of definitions (ἀφορισμοί). In the modern and contemporary ages, it has become an increasingly popular title for collections of short thoughts of all kinds and by different authors, from Longanesi to Bufalino, from Gibran to Wittgenstein.

Now fallen into disuse, but well attested in the ancient world, as we shall see, is, finally, the term **apophthegm(a)**, from the Greek ἀπόφθεγμα, "answer": a lightning punchline in response to a question, sometimes provocative, sometimes apparently trivial, addressed to a famous person (almost always a philosopher).

A variant of the aphorism, which is quite distinctive because it is anonymous, is now called a **Wellerism**, in homage to a character in Dickens' novel *The Pickwick Papers* (1836). It consists of an interlocutory premise of the type "as someone said…," followed by the actual aphorism.[4] There are a few instances of this in the ancient and medieval world as well.

[3] Boggione 2004:XXXVI.

[4] The great philologist Moritz Haupt coined this term during a lecture given at the University of Berlin in 1876 on Theocritus *Idyll* 15, stating: "anglicis plurimis utitur vel unus ille Dickensii Samuel Wellerus."

A not insignificant part of the ancient and modern proverb imagery is also made up of those *idiomatic and colloquial expressions* which, because of their allusive and ethical potential, are established and consolidated in the linguistic memory of a culture, to the point of transcending the geographical boundaries of the single community of speakers in which they originated (e.g. "a flash in the pan," "caught in the crossfire").

There are also proverb short forms which, because of the singularity and evidence of the rhetorical structure employed, play a particular role and form a well-defined category. See, for instance, the numerous *expressions of comparison* in which a quality—either positive or negative—is hyperbolically highlighted through the comparison with a socially recognized subject who/which is particularly endowed with it ("more talkative than a swallow"). Ancient and then modern paremiography have already assigned to this kind of expression recognition as a proverb.

The last typology must also be combined with all those linguistic formulations based on *antonomasia*, in which characters from myth or history, religion or legend, become general points of reference for qualities—once again, both positive and negative—relevant to this or that particular situation ("the patience of Job"). This typology also includes those characters who were the protagonists of proverbial expressions and whose traces have been lost in the memory—or rather, whose original reason for their proverbiality or the anecdote at the origin of the *antonomasia* has been lost. These are sometimes characters with a clear onomatopoeic or "speaking" name, created by popular imagination.

All the typologies highlighted by modern paremiological approaches can be found, in exact parallels, in the ancient and medieval worlds. Indeed, all the fundamental characteristics of the proverb identified by today's paremiology constitute equally fundamental elements of ancient cultures—and not only Greek and Roman at that. The dominant orality (and, therefore, the tendency to memorize), the almost exclusively educational function of every artistic expression, and the preference given to tradition over the search for originality in the modern sense make the Graeco-Roman—and then the medieval Christian, Western, and Byzantine cultures—fundamentally cultures of proverbs.

In the ancient world, expressing oneself in proverbs and *sententiae* was something profoundly organic to the culture itself: both to the folkloric culture—as can be glimpsed from what we are able to reconstruct, both philologically and comparatively—and to the learned culture—as is clearly evident from our literary documentation. Proverbiality was, on closer inspection, a truly fundamental form of ancient thought and it manifested itself as such in every communicative expression. Knowledge and communication (and the communication of knowledge) were based on the proverb because they were mostly transmitted orally. They were proverbial because they were sanctioned by tradition, which constituted their most effective validation. They were proverbial because, from an early age, people learned to express themselves in this way, from their families, if they were illiterate, or from their teachers, if they were more fortunate.

This study aims to document the dominant proverb nature of ancient culture, both in terms of its direct literary expression, through an overarching analysis of the use and function of the proverb from Homer to the dawn of Humanism, and in terms of its terminological reflection and awareness. This terminological awareness is revealed in the various terms with which, as early as the 5th century BCE, Greeks and Romans defined their proverb and *sententia* universe (παροιμία, γνώμη, ἀπόφθεγμα, τὸ λεγόμενον, ῥῆμα, χρεία, *proverbium*, *sententia*, *verbum*, *dictum*, *adagio*) and, as we shall see, it was much clearer than many scholars have claimed.

For millennia, Western cultures have been proverb cultures. They have thought in proverbs. They have expressed themselves in proverbs, because thinking and speaking in proverbs, or tending to elaborate one's expression with a proverb, was innate to those cultures, was immanent to expression and thought, and was constitutive of one's cultural identity. Proverbs and *sententiae* which were born centuries earlier were adapted both to new cultures and peoples—because of their expressive and pragmatically educational power—and to a continuous literary re-use—because of their canonicity (although, in many cases, this canonicity was ideologically revisited).

Haupt was referring to one of the protagonists of Dickens' novel, who often ended a statement with this stylistic device to introduce a proverb.

Today, a new culture seems to have transcended all national borders—one that is globalized and becoming standardized, as well as being the expression of a "liquid" society now bound to the mechanisms and swirling times of the web, one that is committed to the search for everything that falls (or seems to fall) into the categories of originality and innovation. There seems to be no more room for the millennial heritage of proverbs that was handed down by previous generations. As the most up-to-date paremiological studies point out, the last contemporary descendants of proverbs were the advertising slogans spread by newspapers and television in the final decades of the 20th century. But that culture, which was still broad and, above all, limited to a few major broadcasters, has now been definitively undermined by the fragmentation of communication channels and the hyper-plurality of the web, where everything seems to be born and consumed within a few months, sometimes a few days—although, paradoxically, everything remains archived forever.

The creation of new proverbs, or even just the reworking and use of pre-existing ones, has, in fact, almost ceased. The heritage of proverbs and *sententiae* has become a museum, like so many other intangible inheritances of our Western cultures. Whoever studies or collects proverbs is now, in the collective imagination, an "archaeologist of folklore, a collector of relics that are gradually falling into nothingness."[5] However, it is my contention that the study of the extraordinary and fascinating world of ancient and medieval wisdom can still represent a historical and cultural invitation to reflect on our ways of thinking and communicating, on the relationship between past and present, and on how our cultural identity is being transformed at an ever-faster pace.

2. The Greek and Roman culture of proverbs

Almost all Greek and Roman literary production, with rare exceptions, had an educational function and moral content. In poetry, as in prose—certainly in philosophy, but not only—short, conceptual, incisive forms were among the most preferred structures. This fundamental mode of expression and thought could not but favor the use of *sententiae* and proper proverbs in every literary genre. The presence of *sententiae* was a constant and pervasive quality of ancient texts.

After all, the very first written document of Greek history that has come down to us—the famous and extraordinary "Nestor's cup" (*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 14.604), from the Euboean colony of Pythecousae (Ischia) and dating back to the mid-8th century BCE—offers us the rhythmic and *sententia* testimony of one of the most widespread proverb motifs in the European ancient and modern tradition, that wine dangerously induces love, and both things ruin men:

ὅς δ ἂν τοῦδε πίησι ποτηρίου, αὐτίκα κήνον
ἵμερος αἱρήσει καλλιστεφάνου Ἀφροδίτης.

Whoever drinks from this cup, desire for
beautifully crowned Aphrodite will seize him instantly.

It is a very distant archetype of the widespread and updated Italian, "Bacchus, (tobacco,) and Venus / reduce man to ashes" (Lapucci 2006:b14), which is more generically attested, in different cultures as "wine and women remove judgment from men" (Lapucci 2006:v911). The words of the anonymous poet of the "Nestor's cup" inscription contain in themselves the communicative function typical of *sententiae* and proverbs: to warn and to teach. The first line of the inscription is lacunose, but its simplest and most intriguing reconstruction reads: Νέστορος [μὲν] εὔποτον ποτήριον "Nestor's cup [that of the *Iliad*] was lovely, but ...."[6] According to this interpretation of

[5] Boggione 2004:XXV.

[6] This is Guarducci's hypothesis (1967:226–227), relating it to *Iliad* 11.632–67, which describes a cup (δέπας)—actually a large and engraved krater—in which Nestor prepares wine for his guests. Other

the line and to the imagery of the proverb, the anonymous poet of Ischia seems to allude to another reference which had already been canonized by oral tradition: the Homeric epos.[7]

Everything in ancient Greece stems from **Homer**. Since anthropologists have often (and rightly) attributed to the Homeric poems the category of "tribal encyclopedia," one would expect to find in them a significant element of *sententiae*, proverbs, and γνῶμαι. In fact, real *sententiae* in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, in relation to their 30,000 hexameters, are few, and even debated. For the *Iliad*, Ahrens counted 123 of them,[8] Kirk only 30,[9] Lardinois 154.[10] Is this a sign that the prevailing element of the Homeric *epos* is the narrative itself, and that the "poet" is a narrator with scarce first-person presence, through comments or observations? Probably. Yet, the Homeric diction is inherently made of a typical *sententia* formulation of its lines, the structure of which (even the metrical) tends to a rich-in-thoughts closing of the hexameter. From this point of view, the creation of Homeric *sententiae* seems to have proceeded in parallel with that of Homeric *formulae*. The concentration of *sententiae* in the last part of the verse is a constant feature, and it is precisely the final structure of the hexameter that will become the meter of proverbs *par excellence*, defined as "paremiacus."

It is not by chance, perhaps, that the vast majority of *sententiae* in the poems are found in the protagonists' speeches, in structures that place the γνώμη—a term never used by Homer in this sense and which I only use for convenience—at the conclusion of a speech, or of a mythological *exemplum*, often provided with further explanation (a sort of rhetorically enlarged γνώμη). Generally, γνώμαι are employed by elderly characters, of higher class or rank: this demonstrates that the use of such imagery is already perceived, in the very remote age of the poems' formation, as an element typical of assertive and persuasive communication. From this point of view, the Homeric *epos* does not differ from the paremiological mechanisms of verbal communication studied today by linguists and still typical of our daily conversations—surely a consequence of the oral composition of the poems, but not only that.

The types of *sententiae* that are most attested in Homer are also the same that will characterize, and already characterize, the Western cultural tradition: the constructions (οὐ) χρή + infinitive, "we must (not) ..."; ἄμεινον + infinitive, "better ..."; ὅς + verb 1 (protasis) ... verb 2 (apodosis), "he who ..., then ..."; the simple infinitive with a substantivized neuter adjective; an idiosyncratic structure already named by the scholiasts ὑποθήκη, "recommendation":[11] apostrophe-command-explication.

There are very few cases in which the narrative first-person voice of the poet employs a *sententia* while addressing a character or commenting on a situation:

Iliad 16.688: ἀλλ' αἰεί τε Διὸς κρείσσων νόος ἠέ περ ἀνδρῶν
But the mind of Zeus is always stronger than the mind of men.
(addressed to Patroclus and repeated by Hector at 17.176)

Iliad 20.265–266 οὐ ῥηΐδι' ἐστὶ θεῶν ἐρικυδέα δῶρα
ἀνδράσι γε θνητοῖσι δαμήμεναι οὐδ' ὑποείκειν
The glorious gifts of the gods are not easily broken
by mortal men, nor do they give way before them.
(addressed to Aeneas)

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restorations have been advanced: Pavese 1996 suggests [εἰμί], "I am the cup ...," where Nestor would be the real owner of the object, a homonym of the hero of Pylos. Gerhard 2011 proposes [ἐάσον], "leave the cup ...!", a prohibition not to take possession of the object, which was actually well attested in the ancient world.

[7] On *sententiae* in Homer, see already Ahrens 1937, and, more recently, Lardinois 1997 and 2001, Guevara de Álvarez 2001, Mantzaris 2011, Horne 2018.

[8] Ahrens 1937.

[9] Kirk 1962.

[10] Lardinois 1997.

[11] On this, see Horne 2018.

Iliad 21.264 θεοὶ δέ τε φέρτεροι ἀνδρῶν.
The gods are stronger than mortals.
(addressed to Achilles)

Odyssey 16.161: οὐ γάρ πως πάντεσσι θεοὶ φαίνονται ἐναργεῖς
The gods do not show themselves in all their splendor.
(addressed to Telemachus)

These *sententiae* are, invariably, comments on men's overestimation of themselves, or on their underestimation of the power of chance or of the gods, and half of them are preceded by an apostrophe centered on νήπιος ("foolish man").
In these poems, there are no introductory definitions of the expression (γνώμη, λόγος, and not even ἔπος, which we might have expected): this constitutes a proof, I believe, of the immanence and organic nature of the short forms in the Homeric diction. Sometimes, however, a *sententia* is introduced by a verb which we might term a "sharing" verb:

Iliad 15.204: οἶσθ' ὡς πρεσβυτέροισιν Ἐρινύες αἰὲν ἕπονται
You know how the Furies always side with the elders.

Iliad 23.589: οἶσθ' οἷαι νέου ἀνδρὸς ὑπερβασίαι τελέθουσι
You know which kind of transgressions blossom in a young man.

The Homeric *sententiae*—another peculiarity—seem not to have had any significant reception: very few Homeric formulations have entered the proverb tradition. Nonetheless, Aristotle, at the beginning of the chapter in his *Rhetoric* on *sententiae*, lists three Homeric examples as "widespread and common *sententiae*" (τεθρυλημέναι καὶ κοιναὶ γνῶμαι, 1395a), and the proverb motifs summarized in them are among the most frequent ones in the ancient world. From them, it is worth mentioning ῥεχθὲν δέ τε νήπιος ἔγνω, "once a thing has been done, the fool sees it" (*Iliad* 17.32; 20.198), one of the many formulations of the motif "a foolish man only learns after it has been done." This *sententia* is highly illustrative of the Homeric proverb imagery. It has a rather compact and univocal imagery, unlike, for example, what will emerge from other authors and other eras. As we know, the world of proverbs is contradictory: the same concept or value is often both denied and affirmed. This depends on the mechanism of adaptability of the proverb, which becomes right according to the context. Homer's *sententiae*, on the contrary, seem to be coherent overall. A few radical concepts are conveyed: the sense of moderation that man must have towards the divinities; the honor required between the individual and his community; the respect for status and social hierarchies.
If, in the Homeric poems, the presence of *sententiae* is still limited, with the first historically ascertained figure of a poet in the Greek tradition, **Hesiod**, it becomes pervasive.[12] The *Works and Days*, in particular, is one of the texts most replete with proverbs and *sententiae* which antiquity has bequeathed to us. Almost every eighth line in the poem (which has a total of 828 lines) contains or is a *sententia*: a very high percentage, which makes the *Works* a sort of *summa* of the cultural tradition in a society with a dominant oral tradition. In this sense, the Hesiodic work is, indeed, a work about the wisdom of a people: a pragmatic wisdom, preserved from generation to generation, handed down orally in the memorable structures of the hexameter, originally with an educational function.
Hesiod's proverb repertoire bears witness to various structures, as Ercolani accurately demonstrates:[13]

X [is] Y, ὅς ...: ἄφρων δ', ὅς κ' ἐθέλῃ πρὸς κρείσσονας ἀντιφερίζειν (line 210)
He is stupid who would wish to oppose those stronger than he is.

[12] Hesiod's wisdom elements are discussed in Cantarella 1931 and Hoekstra 1950; other fundamental studies are Pellizer 1972; Fernández Delgado 1978; West 1997; Ercolani 2009.
[13] Ercolani 2009.

δεινόν + infin. (εἰ) ... : δεινὸν γὰρ πόντου μετὰ κύμασι πήματι κύρσαι (line 691)
It is a dreadful thing to encounter a calamity among the waves of the sea.

A: B: ἔργον δ' οὐδὲν ὄνειδος, ἀεργίη δέ τ' ὄνειδος (line 311)
Work is no disgrace at all, but not working is a disgrace.

Formulations with ἀνήρ: οἳ αὐτῷ κακὰ τεύχει ἀνὴρ ἄλλῳ κακὰ τεύχων (line 265)
A man causes harm to himself when he causes harm to someone else.

ὅς + X..., Y: ὃς δ' ἐπ'ἐόντι φέρει, ὃ δ' ἀλέξεται αἴθοπα λιμόν (line 363)
Whoever adds to what is already there wards off fiery famine.

More than half of Hesiod's *sententiae* are placed (as already in Homer) in the last part of the hexameter, thus forming a paremiacus. For the first time, the phonetic and stylistic phenomena that characterize the proverb formula—such as etymological figures, assonance, and alliteration—emerge:

ζηλοῖ δέ τε γείτονα γείτων (line 23)
A neighbor envies his neighbor.

κακὰ κέρδεα ἶσ' ἄτῃσι (line 352)
Evil profit is as bad as calamities.

ἀδώτῃ δ' οὔ τις ἔδωκεν (line 355)
No one gives to a nongiver.

Some expressions have been defined as the "proverbial metremes"[14] of the *Works.* These are, in essence, nothing more than the relics of a Greek wisdom tradition that had already surfaced in the narrative Homeric poems. The wisdom preserved by Hesiod certainly has distant oriental roots, as shown by its numerous possible combinations with the Mesopotamian proverb tradition. It is, above all, a pragmatic wisdom, because it pertains to the activities and salient moments of the cycle of life in a peasant society.
It seems obvious that whoever is organically a part of this late 7th century BCE society does not need a handbook—let alone a *text*—to remind them or even to teach them how to plow a field or when to sow: these are operations that they know extremely well and which they have learned by seeing and by doing since their childhood. Hesiod's *sententiae* about work do not have a didactic function, but rather an identity-building one for an individual in the community. Like a folk song, a belief, or a superstition, like the codified gestures of mourning or agricultural work, Hesiod's *sententiae* offer someone the chance to feel a part of a community, precisely because the *sententiae* are shared and known. This is the meaning of a folkloric trait in the functional context in which it is used; and this was the sense of Hesiod's songs of *sententiae*, in the contexts and occasions on which they were performed. This is revealed, moreover, by the essential role that the wisdom element must have had in at least three other works that the ancient tradition attributed to the poet, of which very few fragments have come down to us: the Χείρωνος ὑποθήκαι (the *Precepts of Chiron*, the centaur who instructed Achilles), possibly on hygienic matters; the Ἀστρονομία, probably containing atmospheric and calendrical precepts; and the Ὀρνιθομαντεία, the predictions deducible from the behavior of birds, again depending on atmospheric forecasts.
But Homer and Hesiod are only at the beginning of what is destined to be a culture with a strong tradition of proverbs and *sententiae*, which assigns a pre-eminent role to *short forms*, in oral communication (and increasingly also in writing). Between the second half of the 7th century and the first part of the 6th, every Greek cultural expression seems to be deeply marked by short

[14] Pellizer 1972:29.

sententiae. Of the first protagonists of this culture, we possess only indirect *testimonia*, which, however, leave no doubt about the predilection for communication of wisdom to be entrusted to precepts, prescriptions, incisive thoughts, and, indeed, γνῶμαι (even if not yet overtly defined as such). These are the most ancient figures of σοφοί, "wise men," who were defined as seven in number, from Plato onwards.

Already in the last decades of the 7th century, thus shortly after the time most plausibly assigned to Hesiod, **Thales** of Miletus, **Periander** of Corinth, **Solon** of Athens, and **Pittacus** of Lesbos were active. Politicians, tyrants, and legislators (certainly from aristocratic families), travelers, thinkers, and scientists are identified by authors of the 5th century BCE and later as wise men who condense their thought into short and often edgy forms. According to doxography, their γνῶμαι arise from concrete episodes (defined, in the gnomic cultural tradition, as χρεῖαι): they are answers (ἀποφθέγματα) that the sages give to those who ask for advice, or to those who come to them with a problem. These answers follow the path of their contemporary religious tradition of oracles, where, sometimes, words are still linked to magical connotations and poetic assonances. Attributed to one sage or another, these maxims will enter, whether associated with an author or not, the ancient heritage of *sententiae*. And it seems obvious that many of them constitute appropriations or re-elaborations of ancient proverb and gnomic motifs, which were handed down orally.

Is this a shared wisdom which has its roots in an oral and educational tradition, or—as one strand of modern criticism has suggested—a wisdom belonging to the aristocratic ruling class, propagated, if not made mystical, as universal, but, on closer inspection, conveying aristocratic ideologies, since aristocrats are its propagators? A sort of "narcotizing" wisdom culture, through which the hegemonic class imposes limiting and reactionary behavioral norms, which tend to avoid social and cultural changes (e.g. "it is better to keep quiet," "working is necessary," "earning too much suggests scam," "do not look for new paths," and more)? This reading is subtle, but perhaps modernizing, and unprovable, given the absence of evidence of a (supposedly) *other* "popular" (and progressive?) culture. After all, as is well known, the culture conveyed by proverbs and *sententiae*, has, in every age, a conservative, pessimistic, even amoral *substratum*. And yet, a comparative glance suggests that this character does not reveal the mystification of the hegemonic culture, but rather the sense of identity of people who, for centuries, had to face a dangerous and murderous sea, and a hostile and unprofitable land, often in solitude and in a continuously migratory way of life. The sense of identity of these people cannot but be little confident in the future and, in turn, attached to concrete goods and mistrustful of others. Daily anguish and fear are also the root of this *sententia* knowledge, just as they are the basis of (almost) every aspect of folklore, from folk medicine to beliefs and superstitions, from fairy tales to work songs. And if these other folkloric aspects seem to be—already in 6th century Greece, and then increasingly more so—connotative of a culture recognized as different from and subordinate to the learned and hegemonic one, the proverb and *sententiae* culture shows (and will show) a much more transversal pervasiveness.

In the dozens of *sententiae* attributed to the first wise men that Greece has given us, the motifs that will be found identical or variously adapted to the whole subsequent Greek and Roman culture (as well as Western culture in general) seem to have already been almost completely preserved.

Θαλῆς Ἐξαμίου Μιλήσιος ἔφη·
Ἐγγύα, πάρα δ' ἄτα.
Μὴ τὴν ὄψιν καλλωπίζου, ἀλλ' ἐν τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασιν ἴσθι καλός.
Οἵους ἂν ἐράνους ἐνέγκῃς τοῖς γονεῦσι, τούτους αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ γήρᾳ παρὰ τῶν τέκνων προσδέχου.
Βαρὺ ἀπαιδευσία. Δίδασκε καὶ μάνθανε τὸ ἄμεινον.
Ἀργὸς μὴ ἴσθι, μηδ' ἂν πλουτῇς.
Κακὰ ἐν οἴκῳ κρύπτε. […]

Thales of Miletus, son of Examyas, said:
Give a pledge, and disaster is near.

Do not beautify your appearance, but be beautiful in your way of living.
What services you did for your parents, such services should you expect in your old age from your children.
The most difficult thing in life is to know yourself.
Laziness is vexatious.
Do not be idle even if you are wealthy.
Conceal evils within the house. [...]

Περίανδρος Κυψέλου Κορίνθιος ἔφη·
Ἐπισφαλὲς προπέτεια.
Αἱ μὲν ἡδοναὶ θνηταί, αἱ δ' ἀρεταὶ ἀθάνατοι.
Εὐτυχῶν μὲν μέτριος ἴσθι, ἀτυχῶν δὲ φρόνιμος.
Φειδόμενον κρεῖττον ἀποθανεῖν ἢ ζῶντα ἐνδεῖσθαι.
Ζῶν μὲν ἐπαινοῦ, ἀποθανὼν δὲ μακαρίζου.
Φίλοις εὐτυχοῦσι καὶ ἀτυχοῦσιν ὁ αὐτὸς ἴσθι.
Δυστυχῶν κρύπτε, ἵνα μὴ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς εὐφράνῃς. […]

Periander of Corinth, son of Cypselus, said:
Gain is disgraceful.
Pleasures are mortal, virtues are immortal.
Be moderate when prosperous, but prudent when unfortunate.
It is better to die saving than to be destitute while alive.
Be praised in life and beatified in death.
Be the same to your friends when they are prosperous, and when they are unfortunate.
Hide your misfortune so you won't cheer your enemies.

Σόλων Ἐξηκεστίδου Ἀθηναῖος ἔφη.
Μηδὲν ἄγαν.
Ἡδονὴν φεῦγε, ἥτις λύπην τίκτει.
Φύλασσε τρόπου καλοκαγαθίαν ὅρκου πιστοτέραν.
Σφραγίζου τοὺς μὲν λόγους σιγῇ, τὴν δὲ σιγὴν καιρῷ.
Φίλους μὴ ταχὺ κτῶ, οὓς δ' ἂν κτήσῃ, μὴ ταχὺ ἀποδοκίμαζε.
Ἄρχεσθαι μαθὼν ἄρχειν ἐπιστήσῃ.

Solon of Athens, son of Execestides, said:
Nothing in excess.
Flee pleasure that begets pain.
Seal your discourses with silence, and silence with the right moment.
Do not acquire new friends quickly, but those that you do acquire, do not reject quickly.
If you have learned how to be ruled, you will know how to rule.

Πιττακὸς Ὑρραδίου Λέσβιος ἔφη·
Ὃ μέλλεις ποιεῖν, μὴ λέγε· ἀποτυχὼν γὰρ καταγελασθήσῃ.
Ὅσα νεμεσᾷς τῷ πλησίον, αὐτὸς μὴ ποίει.
Τὸν φίλον κακῶς μὴ λέγε, μηδ' εὖ τὸν ἐχθρόν· ἀσυλλόγιστον γὰρ τὸ τοιοῦτον.
Δεινὸν συνιδεῖν τὸ μέλλον, ἀσφαλὲς τὸ γενόμενον.
Πιστὸν γῆ, ἄπιστον θάλασσα.
Ἄπληστον κέρδος.

Pittacus of Lesbos, son of Hyrradius, said:
Do not say beforehand what you are going to do: for if you fail, you will be laughed at.
Whatever you rebuke your neighbor for, do not do it yourself.
Speak no ill of your friends, nor even of an enemy: for such a thing is illogical.
It is terrible to see the future, safe to see the past.

The land is reliable, the sea is unreliable.
Gain is insatiable.

The indirect tradition attributes numerous titles of works to such σοφοί, all of which are now lost. Periander, in particular, is said to have *composed* (ἐποίησε) the Ὑποθῆκαι (*Advice*) in verse (Diogenes Laertius 1.97): its title recalls the tradition of the *Teachings* and *Instructions* of many Eastern, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian texts, as well as, of course, Hesiod. The surviving fragments of Solon are also in verse: they are studded with γνῶμαι, which will develop into a kind of repertoire of diction for *sententiae* typical of the hexameter tradition.
If this is the picture of the indirect tradition of the σοφοί, the widespread presence of *sententiae* expressions is the fundamental characteristic that also emerges from the Greek poetic production of the 7th century BCE. However, while γνῶμαι and ἀποφθέγματα are almost exclusively attributed to the contemporary wise men, in the poets we find mainly proverbs. Archaic poetry, as is well known, was group poetry, mainly addressed to fellow political factions, fellow citizens, and friends. These communitarian contexts led to a group lexicon, with sometimes encrypted meanings, or slang expressions that were well understood by an "accomplice" audience, but with more difficulty by us modern readers. Within this pragmatic language, linked to specific things, facts, and contexts, the use of proverbs and *sententiae* stands out. Some lyric authors of the 7th and 6th centuries BCE, therefore, are among the richest in proverbial expressions in their diction. Certainly, the literary genres constituted an important constraint: in hymns and religious songs, but also in funeral laments or victory songs for athletic competitions, one finds *sententiae* (often reworked), and fewer proverbs of popular flavor; in wedding or festive songs, and especially in symposiastic songs, on the other hand, proverbs and colloquial expressions abound.
An enormous reservoir of maxims, proverbs and *sententiae* must have been offered by the ten books of the Alexandrian edition of **Alcaeus**[15]—a fellow countryman and political opponent of Pittacus—if we take into account a simple statistical consideration: about 30 *sententiae* in the almost 600 (readable) lines of our *corpus*—hence, a proverb every twenty lines. This is a paremiographic patrimony that will attract the attention of the Alexandrians, as confirmed by the testimony of an exegetical monograph by Aristarchus on the proverb in fragment 344 Voigt, and as it appears from some precious traces in the *scholia* and *commentaria vetera* to the poet (fragment 71 V., *scholia ad* vv.1-2; fragment 306i, col.II, ll.29ss.). Certainly, even today it is difficult to discern how much is an invention of Alcaeus and how much is material drawn from the collective imagery. Beside the metaphors, which he definitely favored as an effective weapon in the political arena, Alcaeus loved to begin and end his poems with proverbs and *sententiae*.
To the poet, the proverb represents an immediate and indispensable channel of slang communication with his audience, through its pragmatic horizon. The proverb in Alcaeus always has a pragmatically precise referent. Although he later became the standard-bearer of maxims on wine and banquets, Alcaeus applies *sententiae* and proverbs in an almost obsessive way to the political poetry of civil strife. In this way, he signals through them his violent resentment towards the lords of Mytilene, from Myrsilus to Pittacus, who have expropriated from him the (aristocratic) freedom of a πολίτης. Alcaeus uses the proverbs in two original and interconnected ways: as an incisive weapon for his political attacks and as the re-elaboration of traditional expressions known to the audience, in order to accentuate their communicative power, or to divert their meaning (*detorsio*) into aggressive, ironic, and sarcastic functions. This mechanism ultimately reveals how, already by the mid-7th century BCE, the tradition of proverbs and *sententiae* was so canonized that it could be the object of allusion and, as we would say today, rewriting. This rhetorical mechanism of re-creation of the proverb will accompany, from this very moment, its history throughout Western culture.
From the point of view of their contents, if we exclude two expressions with Zeus as protagonist (200 and 39 V.) and an (antonomastic) reference to Ares (400 V.), it must be noted that proverbs containing gods and heroes are virtually absent from Alcaeus. The same could be said in relation to those about historical figures and characters known from anecdotes, of which perhaps a trace has remained in the mysterious Onomacles of fragment 130.9 V. Expressions about peoples and

[15] See my work on Alcaeus, Lelli 2006:23-70.

places are also limited, and almost all of them refer to the more immediate geographical horizon of Lesbos. In addition to *sententiae*, therefore, the real reservoir of Alcaeus' proverbs consists of those based on everyday life, especially the material and natural one.
The world of the sea and sailors on the one hand, and that of popular reality and animals on the other, provided Alcaeus with the tastiest and edgiest materials for his proverbs: storm-tossed ships, hawsers, anchors, waves, sand, wind, crabs, fishermen, pigs, goats, lions, foxes, kids, and octopuses thoroughly populate Alcaeus' proverbs. Among the numerous ones present in his fragments, the proverbs that will have continuity with the Western tradition are not few: "drawing water from the grey sea" (ὡς ἄλος / ἐ<κ> πολίας ἀρυτήμεν[οι·], 305 V.), indicating a useless action; "one should look ahead at the sea from the shore" (ἐ]κ γᾶς χρῆ προΐδην πλό[ον, 249 V.); "painting the lion from a claw" (ἐξ ὄνυχος τὸν λέοντα γράφοντας, 438 V.). And the proverbs about food and wine: "wine is truth" (οἶνος καὶ ἀλήθεια, 366 V.), "wine is the mirror of man" (οἶνος γὰρ ἀνθρώπω δίοπτρον, 333 V.), "wine is the best medicine" (φαρμάκων δ' ἄριστον οἶνον, 335 V.)—pragmatic proverbs for pragmatic poems.[16]
Archilochus, active in Paros and then in Thasos in the second half of the 7th century BCE, was of non-aristocratic origins, probably a long-serving mercenary soldier, and was considered by the ancients to be the inventor of (literary) iambic poetry. Both quantitatively and qualitatively, he offers us equally significant proverbs, which are also very present in modern traditions.[17] Archilochus, for the first time, attests to the very popular "the hasty bitch gives birth to blind puppies" (196a.39–41 W.) and, probably, also the misogynistic "a wife is an evil" (195 W.). A more precise list (17; 25.2–4; 110; 128.7; 178; 184; 185; 195; 201; 216; 223; 232; 235; 248 W.) clearly reveals the conspicuous use of *sententiae* and proverbs, in which, as we have said, some motifs that have become widespread in every Euro-Mediterranean culture stand out:

fragment 13.7 W.: ἄλλοτε ἄλλος ἔχει τόδε
This woe befalls now one now another.

fragment 15.4 W.: ἐπίκουρος ἀνὴρ τόσσον φίλος ἔσκε μάχηται
A mercenary is a friend only as long as he fights.

fragment 23.14 W.: τὸν φιλ[έο]ν[τα] μὲν φ[ι]λεῖν[, τὸ]ν δ' ἐχθρὸν ἐχθαίρειν
Love those who love you and hate those who hate you.

fragment 133.1 W.: κάκιστα δ' αἰεὶ τῷ θανόντι γίνεται
Once dead, no one is respected.

fragment 134 W.: οὐ γὰρ ἐσθλὰ κατθανοῦσι κερτομεῖν ἐπ' ἀνδράσιν
For it is not noble to jeer at the dead.

The passage in which the proverb "the hasty bitch gives birth to blind puppies" is attested, from a papyrus published in 1974 (*P.Col.* 7511), presents for the first time another proverb mechanism that will be much employed in the future:

[16] The number of *sententiae* and proverbs in **Sappho**, Alcaeus' fellow citizen and contemporary poet of 7th-century Lesbos, is very limited. In the little more than 200 undamaged (or almost so) lines that have come down to us—in the light of a large number of texts in which various folkloric elements (motifs of popular songs, beliefs and so on) or expressions that seem clearly colloquial emerge—only three fragments seem to contain proverbs: fragment 50 Voigt (ὸ δὲ κἄγαθος αὔτικα καὶ κάλος ἔσσεται, "he who is good will consequently also be beautiful"), 146 Voigt (μήτε μοι μέλι μήτε μέλισσα, "neither honey nor bee"), 148 Voigt (ὸ πλοῦτος ἄνευ † ἀρέτας οὐκ ἀσίνης πάροικος, "wealth without virtue is no harmless neighbor"), perhaps 145 Voigt (μὴ κίνη χέραδος, "do not move gravel"), and perhaps lines 15–16 of the new *Brothers' Poem* (*P.Obbink*): "calm seas often follow after the squalling of a storm."

[17] There is no comprehensive work on the presence of *sententiae* in Archilochus. Among the latest individual studies, see Bettarini 2009, on fragment 201 W. (πόλλ' οἶδ' ἀλώπηξ, ἀλλ' ἐχῖνος ἓν μέγα, "the fox knows many things, while the hedgehog knows only one big thing").

δέ]δοιχ’ ὅπως μὴ τυφλὰ κἀλιτήμερα
σπ]ουδῆι ἐπειγόμενος
τὼς ὥσπερ ἡ κ[ύων τέκω.

I am afraid that, driven by haste,
I might generate blind and premature offspring,
just like the bitch.

In ὥσπερ ἡ κ[ύων, ‘like *the* bitch,’ there is the allusion to *that* bitch of the proverb, *that* bitch that everyone knows, *the one* that makes blind children. Allusions to proverbs, like rehashing, will become another feature of communication by proverbs and *sententiae*. Finally, as in Alcaeus, Archilochus’ proverb repertoire is mainly populated by animals: ants, cicadas, hares, foxes, hedgehogs, and, indeed, bitches. It is no accident that the employment of “fable,” αἶνος, in the very Archilochean definition (185 W.), is also one of the poet’s most typical features. The cultural histories of proverbs and fables, as is well known, are often intermingled and juxtaposed, and Archilochus offers a first testimony of this too.

From the 6th century BCE, an age of great economic, political, social, and cultural changes, our evidence for *sententiae* in Greek culture becomes even richer. The last figures of σοφοί—**Chilon** of Sparta, **Bias** of Priene, and **Cleobulus** of Lindos, who carried on the traditional wisdom in an apophthegmatic form[18]—were joined by new intellectuals, who were organically involved in the political reality of their communities, but were also speakers of reflections that were openly authorial and personal. Despite this declaration of “originality,” however, the recourse to the short *sententia* form, if not to the actual proverb, was still the privileged instrument of communication.

We have nothing of **Anaximander**, pupil of Thales, and of **Anaximenes**, his continuator, even if, for the former, Diogenes Laertius (2.2) bears witness to an “exposition of his thoughts in brief” (τῶν ἀρεσκόντων ... κεφαλαιώδη). This seems to refer to a collection of aphorisms of a scientific character, as will be the case, soon thereafter, with the medical ones of the Hippocratic school.

In the work of **Heraclitus** of Ephesus—even though it has come down to us in an entirely fragmentary form—we can ascertain the pervasive tendency of Greek culture to express itself in short *sententiae* forms. Almost every fragment of the Ionian thinker, an aristocrat marginalized by his community and “self-exiled,” is made up of brief and conceptual formulas, in a concise and juxtaposed construction, tending to oracular and often enigmatic tones: he was, indeed, defined “the obscure” (cf. Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1407 b11; Diogenes Laertius 9.6). Heraclitus also deployed the whole repertoire of rhetorical and phonic tools that was typical of proverbial formulas:

34 D.-K.: ἀξύνετοι ἀκούσαντες κωφοῖσιν ἐοίκασι—φάτις αὐτοῖσιν μαρτυρεῖ παρεόντας ἀπεῖναι.
Fools, when they do hear, are like the deaf; of them does the saying bear witness that when present, they are absent.

60 D.-K.: ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ ὠυτή
The road up and the road down is one and the same.

73 D.-K.: οὐ δεῖ ὥσπερ καθεύδοντας ποιεῖν καὶ λέγειν
We must not act and speak as if we were asleep.

80 D.-K.: εἰδέναι δὲ χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον ἐόντα ξυνόν
We must know that war is common to all.

111 D.-K.: νοῦσος ὑγιείην ἐποίησεν ἡδὺ καὶ ἀγαθόν, λιμὸς κόρον, κάματος ἀνάπαυσιν

[18] We have elegiac and lyric verses attributed to Chilon; symposiastic poems attributed to Bias; poems and riddles attributed to Cleobulus, a tradition that will apparently be continued by his daughter Cleobulina.

Disease makes health a sweet and pleasant thing; hunger, satiety; and toil, rest.

123 D.-K.: φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ
Nature loves to hide.

While many of the γνῶμαι (Heraclitus—if the term is his own—writes φάτις, "saying," almost "hearsay") present in his fragments seem to clearly descend from the oral wisdom tradition (even that of the already canonized Seven Sages), it seems equally clear that, by highlighting the contradictions that arise from the assimilation between signified and signifier, between logic and ontology, the philosopher of Ephesus gives new meanings to traditional *sententiae*, subjecting them to verification. Thus, in his fragments we find the widespread proverb "eyes are more accurate witnesses than ears" (101a D.-K.: ὀφθαλμοὶ γὰρ τῶν ὤτων ἀκριβέστεροι μάρτυρες), but also its criticism:

107 D.-K.: κακοὶ μάρτυρες ἀνθρώποισιν ὀφθαλμοὶ καὶ ὦτα βαρβάρους ψυχὰς ἐχόντων.
Eyes and ears are poor witnesses to men, if they have souls that understand not their language.

Following in Heraclitus' footsteps, Greek philosophy will use the *sententia* and proverb repertoire for two purposes: to ascertain or criticize its validity, and to assign to traditional expressions a new value, full of speculative meanings. In both cases, philosophical wisdom will grant survival and circulation to traditional wisdom. From this moment on, philosophy started to feel the need to come to terms with the proverb wisdom tradition: it had to do so, in order to engage with a knowledge that was shared by all, and it will continue to do so for centuries, up to and including Christianity. From this point of view, the short formulations that philosophers will increasingly adopt can be read as an imitation of the traditional anonymous and popular short forms. Thus, to put it in Platonic terms, almost a παλαιὰ διαφορά, an "ancient dispute" (Plato *Republic* 607 b6)—like the one between philosophy and poetry—was already looming in the 6th century BCE between philosophy and proverb tradition.
A similar re-semantization of the traditional wisdom heritage seems to have led the other great protagonist of Hellenic culture in the second half of the 6th century: **Pythagoras**. A political exile from Samos who settled in Croton, he created a political regime and a sect/school of disciples which combined mystical and religious elements and ethical and political prescriptions with scientific speculation (particularly related to mathematics), the study of music, cosmological theories, and concepts such as the belief in the reincarnation of souls. A variously defined *corpus* of precepts and *sententiae* has been attributed to him since the 5th century BCE: παραινέσεις, "recommendations"; ὑποθῆκαι, "advice"; παραγγέλματα, "precepts"; ἀκούσματα, literally "things that are heard," which seems to refer to the sectarian and "closed" image of the Pythagoreans; and, finally, the most frequent term, σύμβολα, "secret codes," to which should also be added αἰνίγματα, "riddles," which reveal the cryptic, symbolic and sometimes mysterious character of the *corpus*. As the folkloric comparison shows (and as James Frazer had guessed[19]), in most cases these are ominous precepts from the popular oral tradition, or popular taboos that take on a novel and philosophical meaning in Pythagoras—after all, Diogenes Laertius attributed to Pythagoras the (self-) definition of φιλόσοφος (1.12). See, for instance:

ζυγὸν μὴ ὑπερβαίνειν.
χύτρας ἴχνος συγχεῖν ἐν τῇ τέφρᾳ.
ἐκτὸς λεωφόρου μὴ βαδίζειν.
μὴ ῥᾳδίως δεξιὰν ἐμβάλλειν.
ὁμωροφίους χελιδόνας μὴ ἔχειν.

Don't step over the beam of a balance.
Don't leave the pan's imprint on the ashes.
Don't walk out of the highway.

[19] Frazer 1931.

Don't shake hands easily.
Don't have swallows under your own roof.[20] (Diogenes Laertius 8.1.17)

Alongside Heraclitus and Pythagoras, the world of 6th-century wisdom offers us another figure, partly shrouded in legend: **Aesop**. "Filthy, pot-bellied, with a protruding head, snub-nosed, humpbacked, olive-colored, short, flat-footed, short-armed, crooked": this is how the fictional *Book of Aesop* from the 1st–2nd centuries CE describes him. Originally from Phrygia, Aesop was first made a slave, then became a counsellor at the court of kings and tyrants, and was finally barbarously killed at Delphi. A collection of fables in prose (μῦθοι) circulated under his name already in the classical age, as testified to by Plato's Socrates (*Phaedo* 60c–d). This collection was requested by an important Athenian scholar (and politician) at the end of the 4th century BCE, Demetrius of Phalerum, and, from that moment on, it imposed itself as a reference text on the whole subsequent tradition of the genre of the fable, both written and oral.
In the European and Western cultural perception, the fable has always been considered the literary genre of the people, the one that for centuries, from antiquity to today, through an uninterrupted oral tradition, has somehow represented the values of the lower social strata and the morals of the subordinate classes.[21] This reading of the fable genre is probably not too unproblematic, at least if understood in an unambiguous sense. It is enough to remember that there are numerous examples from antiquity in which kings and rulers—from Periander to Agrippa Menenius—dismiss, precisely with a fable, the expectations of innovation by the humble classes. Neither would it be appropriate, however, to plunge to the opposite end. Certainly, many of the characters of Aesop's fables are rooted in the archaic Greek folklore tradition, starting with their animal protagonists. The proverb, then, often constitutes the condensed moral statement, and places the fable even more decisively within the framework of a popular culture—at least on the basis of its circulation and reception.
It would suffice to list, one after the other, the epimyths (the conclusive "moral") of Aesop's fables to expose the contiguity between fable and proverb. See, for example, these about the wolf:

215 (Chambry 1927 edition): With unity of will and intent against the enemy, all armies achieve victory.
216: The fable teaches that such rewards are obtained by those who betray their country.
217: So, too, those cities which lightheartedly surrender their chiefs will soon fall into the hands of their enemies without their knowing it.
218: The fable shows that no one should deprive himself of his own security by trusting an oath made by irreconcilable enemies.
219: Presumption is the cause of misfortunes.
220: So, too, the wicked, when they carry out their rascalities against those who know them, fail to gain advantage through their deceptions.
221: The fable shows that even the most just defense is useless against those who are inclined to commit injustice.
222: The fable shows that for those who must die, an honorable death is preferable.
224: The fable shows that the greatest reward for favor from the evil is not being offended by them.
225: The fable teaches that those who are of evil disposition, even if they manifest honest intentions, are not believed.

[20] "Don't leave the pan's imprint on the ashes" is part of the ominous prohibition against leaving traces that could lead to one's identity, that could constitute a "double," visible to an evil spirit or a personal enemy, and leave one liable to be enchanted or cursed. The symbolic prevalence of the right hand is a fact common to many cultures. But in the Pythagorean precept, there is an evident reference to the traditional gesture of friendship/trust/oath. The ominous symbolism of the swallow, present in some ancient texts, has been preserved in the folkloric memory of the most tradition-ridden areas of Southern Italy (Lelli 2014:161.S.2). See also Lelli 2021:3–4,1387–1393.
[21] For antiquity, La Penna 1961 is still fundamental, but see also Adrados 2001.

226: The fable teaches that in misfortunes, even the pleasure of eating is lost.

The question of whether proverbs or fables were born first is, however, insoluble and, put in these terms, improper. Both fables and proverbs, as the comparison with other ancient and modern cultures reveals, draw from a common folkloric heritage. It is from a common motif, in most cases, that proverbs and fables must have been generated.[22] Together with those of Hesiod, Alcaeus, and Archilochus, the proverbs found in Aesop's fables are among the most ancient, widespread, and vital of Greek culture. It is no surprise that several *sententiae* and proverb collections will be attributed to Aesop—a *corpus* of great cultural interest, as we will see. The first attestations date back to the authors of the 3rd and 4th centuries CE: Dio Chrysostom, Libanius, and other Second Sophists. The oldest direct evidence dates to the 12th century: a Medici codex containing the so-called Παροιμίαι Αἰσώπου (*Aesop's Proverbs*), in alphabetical order, and commented upon in a 14th-century *testimonium* with explanations in Byzantine couplets. Another manuscript hands down 14 other proverbs, with the title Αἰσώπου λόγοι (*Aesop's Words*). Another 14th-century codex attests to another 41 expressions in alphabetical order, with no exegesis, handed down under the title Αἰσώπου κοσμικαὶ κωμῳδίαι, which seems to indicate something along the lines of *Aesop's Worldly Jokes*. A substratum perhaps originally common to these tales can be identified in that (sometimes bitterly pessimistic) popular imagery which has animals and figures of everyday life work as its protagonists. This is precisely the common feature of the "Aesopic" fables. Think of "let a lion eat me, not a fox" (*Proverbs* 15), which combines two of the most common protagonists in the Aesopic *corpora*; think of another inevitable protagonist: "a donkey and its donkey driver have the same fate" (*Logoi* 14); finally, think of "the snail complains when it is cooked" (*Logoi* 25), never attested elsewhere, like many other headwords.[23]

At the same time as the last σοφοί and the first φιλόσοφοι, the poetic production of the 6th century BCE continues to offer us striking evidence of the *sententia* character of Hellenic culture. **Theognis** was an aristocrat from Megara, overwhelmed by political struggles and the advance of the new social classes of which he was a proud opponent. He is one of the authors of archaic poetry who is most dependent on proverbs.[24] His elegies for symposia are full of *sententiae*, often reworked, but sometimes presented in a form that will be (and perhaps already was) canonical. These *sententiae* appear at the end of a thought, as a shared and truthful conclusion. Indeed, they were so sharable that a paradoxical judgment of Dio Chrysostom (*Orations* 2.5) makes the aristocratic Theognis a popular author: "some poems could be defined popular (δημοτικά), as they give advice and exhortations to the mass of citizens, as I believe are those of Phocylides and Theognis." Precisely because of the high frequency of *sententiae* in his texts, Theognis will soon become one of the main protagonists of what has been defined "symposial re-use": the use of passages or verses which were originally part of a text attributed to an author, but which became decontextualized and reworked for new exchanges during banquets. This was a widespread practice in antiquity that again presents deep analogies with the reuse of anonymous folk songs typical of popular cultures studied by ethnologists. However, the popularization of Theognis will become even more radical: a great number of his lines, presented as *sententiae* in themselves (γνῶμαι), will be collected in anthologies called *gnomologi* (which we will shortly explore more deeply), which were extremely widespread in the ancient world and particularly loved in the Hellenistic and Roman age. The same process will be experienced by several other Greek, and also Roman, authors of *sententiae*, such as Euripides, Menander, and Seneca.

Theognis is an important author in the Greek history of the short *sententiae* forms for another reason: in the *corpus* attributed to him, we find for the first time, and in a conspicuous way (19 times), the term γνώμη, which was absent from Homer, Hesiod. and any other previous author. As we will see, in Theognis, the term γνώμη already carries the triple range of meanings that it will possess in the course of its very long history: "judgment" ('"thought") as a *vox media*;

[22] After van Thiel 1971, see Carnes 1988.

[23] See the text in Perry 1952; see also Stefec 2014; and Lelli 2021:37–65, 1400–1409.

[24] The most recent studies on Theognis' γνῶμαι and on the relations between his *corpus* and the gnomological tradition are Maltomini 2003 and Condello 2009: see these for a copious bibliography.

"common sense," in the absolute sense of "shrewd judgment"; and "expression as a result of a shrewd judgment." This last meaning, which will only much later become technically appropriate to ancient thought and to ancient paremiology, emerges in a couplet which constitutes the first *locus* in Greek sources where γνώμη has the value of a *sententia*:

717–718: ἀλλὰ χρὴ πάντας γνώμην ταύτην καταθέσθαι,
ὡς πλοῦτος πλείστην πᾶσιν ἔχει δύναμιν
Everyone must treasure this judgment:
wealth has supreme power for all.[25]

It is perhaps because of Theognis' *usus* that his verses will enter the tradition of the gnomologists' terminology: Plutarch will affirm that the Γνωμολογίαι Θεόγνιδος are very useful to children (*Moralia* 16C). If we look at even just a few of the very numerous γνῶμαι present in the *corpus* attributed to Theognis, we will find:

104–105: Δειλοὺς εὖ ἔρδοντι ματαιοτάτη χάρις ἐστίν—
ἶσον καὶ σπείρειν πόντον ἁλὸς πολιῆς
Doing good to the vile is an extremely vain act of kindness;
it is the same as sowing the grey sea.

115–116: Πολλοί τοι πόσιος καὶ βρώσιός εἰσιν ἑταῖροι,
ἐν δὲ σπουδαίῳ πρήγματι παυρότεροι
Many are your comrades when there's food and drink,
but far fewer when the matter is serious.

696–697: Εὖ μὲν ἔχοντος ἐμοῦ πολλοὶ φίλοι—ἢν δέ τι δεινόν
Συγκύρσῃ, παῦροι πιστὸν ἔχουσι νόον
When I am faring well, many are my friends, but if something terrible
happens to me, few have a trustworthy mind.

It seems evident that these *sententiae* are common to the heritage of almost every Euro-Mediterranean culture. Several of these γνῶμαι also appear in other roughly contemporary authors, such as the mysterious **Phocylides**, who, as we have seen, was mentioned by Dio Chrysostom, and under whose name will circulate another gnomology.[26] In the past, scholars have often questioned the authorship of such expressions in the metrical formulation known to us. This is an issue, as the most up-to-date critics have recognized, that seems out of place in these cases, since the formalization of a proverb or a *sententia*, even with more or less significant variants, cannot be traced back to a single author.[27] The typical mechanism that emerges from Theognis' couplets, and from many other passages of archaic and late archaic elegy, is precisely the pragmatic, personal, and particularizing contextualization of an impersonal and generalizing wisdom element. In this way, all the most typical structures of *sententiae*—the gnomic present, the jussive forms, the oppositional pairs, the generalizing subject—are made to fit, with a few simple devices, a precise performative context. In Theognis, in particular, the context is the

[25] For its *sententia* meaning, see *tr. ad.* 238 K.-Sn.; Men. 181 Jäkel and Publ. S. p9 *pecuniae unum regimen est rerum omnium*; and see Tosi 2017:23–49.

[26] See Monti 2021. Phocylides' persona as an author is very difficult to reconstruct: according to the (few) ancient testimonies, his verses were sung in symposia and learned by heart in schools.

[27] It must be said, however, that no section of the Theognidean *corpus* is ever defined by the term παροιμία at least until the Byzantine age. Theognis' verses are always cited as by him (e.g. by Plato *Meno* 95d; *Laws* 630a; Xenophon *Symposium* 2.4; Aristotle *Eudemian Ethics* 1230a; 1237b; Plutarch *Moralia* 22a); or as anonymous (Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1.2.20). A unique and exemplary case is line 147 ἐν δὲ δικαιοσύνῃ συλλήβδην πᾶσ' ἀρετὴ ἔνι, "all virtue is conteined in justice", which Aristotle introduces with the words (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1129b): καὶ παροιμιαζόμενοί φαμεν. This expression, however, means "speaking proverbially," and not necessarily "employing a proverb."

symposium of a Megarian aristocratic group, in which the speaker addresses a young man of his group for an overtly educational purpose (27–31):

Σοὶ δ’ ἐγὼ εὖ φρονέων ὑποθήσομαι, οἷά περ αὐτός,
Κύρν’, ἀπὸ τῶν ἀγαθῶν παῖς ἔτ’ ἐὼν ἔμαθον.
πέπνυσο, μηδ’ αἰσχροῖσιν ἐπ’ ἔργμασι μηδ’ ἀδίκοισιν
τιμὰς μηδ’ ἀρετὰς ἕλκεο μηδ’ ἄφενος.
ταῦτα μὲν οὕτως ἴσθι- κακοῖσι δὲ μὴ προσομίλει
ἀνδράσιν, ἀλλ’ αἰεὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἔχεο.

It is with good intent to you that I shall give you the advice that I myself,
Cyrnus, learned from good men while I was still a child.
Be wise and do not seize for yourself either honors, success, or wealth
on account of shameful or unjust acts.
Know that this is so and do not associate with bad men,
but always cling to the good.

As we can see, a series of precepts (ὑποθήσομαι, mentioned above), is preceded by a personalizing couplet, which, therefore, contextualizes the message of the *sententia*. This message, it should be noted, is presented as teachings transmitted from fathers to sons, as a cluster of group values in which to recognize oneself and form one’s identity, inserted in that place of formation that is the symposium—a “ritual of belonging,” as it has been aptly defined by Vetta.[28]

The mirror image of the elegiac production is the iamb, the unit of blame and personal attack, also taking place in the symposium, or even in the ἀγορά. Its undisputed protagonist at the end of the 6th century BCE was **Hipponax** of Ephesus. But, contrary to one’s expectations, the iambic poet did not bequeath to us any proverb in his fragments: the process of selection by the sources must have played a decisive role. However, he is likely to have been the author of an iambic couplet which constitutes the first attestation of one of the most widespread and deep-rooted misogynistic proverbs of Euro-Mediterranean folklore (fr. 66 Degani):

δύ’ ἡμέρ˩αι γυναικός εἰσιν ἥδισται,
ὅταν γαμῆι τις˩ κι˩κφέρηι τεθνηκυῖαν
Two days in a woman’s life are sweetest,
whenever she is married and whenever she is carried out dead.

The same expression was then found in the comedians Pherecrates and Philemon, in Chaeremon, in the epigrammatists, and in all modern proverb repertories.

In Syracuse, at the end of the 6th century BCE, a form of theatrical spectacle flourished, which seems to present many traits of Attic comedy known to us. Apart from a few titles, nothing remains, other than the proverbs and *sententiae*—with which those texts must have abounded—attributed to the most famous author of this genre: **Epicharmus**.[29] These γνῶμαι, often of Pythagorean inspiration, are among the first short *sententiae* of Greek culture to have undergone, as a text, that phenomenon of “extraction”[30] for a gnomic anthology, which will be typical of many later authors. Epicharmus’ fame as an author of proverbs and morals was already great only

[28] Condello 2009 suggested that this *sententia* patrimony was prevalently rooted in aristocratic thoughts, and that, through the depersonalization and decontextualization of this material, there has been a (conscious or unconscious) mystification that has progressively painted it as ahistorical “popular wisdom.” This hypothesis, in my opinion, presents some difficulties. The twofold division into hegemonic culture/subaltern culture—a category typical of social studies—probably does not have, for the folklore of the ancient world (and for its *sententiae*), the same utility for analysis and research that it has for the modern and contemporary world, as I made clear above.

[29] See De Cremoux 2011; Mazza 2021.

[30] Eco 2004:19–32.

a few decades after his death, and his σοφὰ ῥήματα (as Theocritus describes them in an epigram, *Palatine Anthology* 9.600) soon cluttered up gnomologies and anthologies. This often happened without any title, and increasingly alongside other figures of wise Pythagoreans and mystics, such as Axiopistus and Alcinous—as legendary and as (probably) fictitious.

We can say little about the presence of proverbs and *sententiae* in the very lacunose *corpus* of **Simonides.** As it seems reasonable to suppose from a number of popular features in some fragments, he, too, must have granted a not exiguous space to figurative language, metaphorically close to folklore: a wrestler named (or nicknamed) Crius who "got himself shorn" (fragment 2 Page); another whom "not even mighty Polydeuces would raise his hands to fight" (4 P.); the remark that "it is difficult to be really valiant with hands, feet, and mind" (37 P.), which was a rewriting of a γνώμη by Pittacus, as Simonides himself affirms, but was soon to become proverbial in his own formulation.

The epinician poetry of **Pindar** and **Bacchylides**, who began their work in the first decade of the 5th century BCE, constitutes one of the noblest literary genres of the time, aimed at celebrating great aristocratic lords in their courts. Pindar's victory odes, above all, do not contain purely proverbial expressions, and submit the heritage of *sententiae* to a profound artistic reworking. Therefore, if the element defined as "gnomic" has accompanied the critical vulgate of Pindar for two centuries now, in the triad *topicality-myth-name* formulated by August Boeckh, it should be noted that in no other author do *sententiae* appear as artistically reworked and, perhaps, even personal as in Pindar. Very few of Pindar's expressions became proverbial, in either the aforementioned collections of γνῶμαι or in those properly paremiographic collections.[31] Certainly, in the very limited fortune of Pindar's (and Bacchylides') *sententiae*, the metrical nature of his utterances, the dorizing dialect, as well as the intrinsic difficulty of reading his epinician writing style, all played at a disadvantage. However, it seems to me very probable that behind Pindar's recherché variations lay a proud desire to be inimitable in this aspect, too.

The very term γνώμη, in fact—which occurs 14 times in Pindar and merely 3 times in Bacchylides—is never employed with the meaning of *sententia*, but always with the neutral or positive one of "judgment"/ "thought" or "common sense." Even the scholia (which condense the long ancient exegetical tradition), in cases where the interpreter underlines a Pindaric proverb motif, insist on the generality of the poet's *sententiae*. Let us consider the *sententia* of *Olympian* 12.14–18:

πολλὰ δ' ἀνθρώποις παρὰ γνώμαν ἔπεσεν,
ἔμπαλιν μὲν τέρψιος, οἱ δ' ἀνιαραῖς
ἀντικύρσαντες ζάλαις
ἐσλὸν βαθὺ πήματος ἐν μικρῷ πεδάμειψαν χρόνῳ

Many things happen for men counter to their judgment—
at times bringing the reverse of their delight, while others
who have encountered grievous storms
exchange their misery for profound happiness in a short time.

The exegete comments on it with the following words: ταύτην δὲ τὴν γνώμην λέγει πολλάκις ὁ Πίνδαρος, ὅτι παρὰ μὲν εὐτυχίαν κακὸν ἐμβαίνειν εἴωθε, παρὰ δὲ δυστυχίαν ἀγαθόν ("Pindar often affirms this *sententia*: it is usual for evil things to happen in prosperity, and good things in misfortune," *scholia vetera* A 16a). In the scholia, the reference—even terminologically explicit—to a παροιμία is even rarer. Ancient or Byzantine exegetes almost always take their cue from a Pindaric passage—sometimes a proper *sententia*, sometimes not—to quote a different (and actual) proverb:

[31] Scarcely fifteen occurrences in Stobaeus, and not even a dozen among Zenodotus, Diogenianus, Gregory, Macarius, and Apostolius.

τίκτει γὰρ κόρος ὕβριν "satiety begets wickedness" (*vetera*) from *Olympian* 2.95–96: ἀλλ' αἶνον ἐπέβασε κόρος / οὐ δίκᾳ συναντόμενος "but praise is trampled by satiety, which is not accompanied by justice."

χωλῷ παροικεῖς, κἂν ἐνὶ σκάζειν μάθοις "he who goes with the lame learns to limp"[32] (*vetera*) from *Nemean* 7.127c: εἰ δὲ γεύεται / ἀνδρὸς ἀνήρ τι, φαῖμέν κε γείτον' ἔμμεναι / νόῳ φιλήσαντ' ἀτενέϊ γείτονι χάρμα πάντων / ἐπάξιον "if a man has any enjoyment of his fellow man, we would say that a neighbor who loved his neighbor with an earnest mind is a joy worth everything to him."

πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζειν "kicking against the goad" (*Triclinius*) from *Pythian* 2.173–175: ποτὶ κέντρον δέ τοι / λακτιζέμεν τελέθει / ὀλισθηρὸς οἶμος "kicking against the goad makes the path slippery."

It should be noted that these are always statements made by the poet-speaker. On closer inspection, moreover, it seems particularly significant that in the only two cases in which Pindar employs *ad verbum* a proverb expression that is codified (and reported in the scholia), these παροιμίαι are presented in a detachedly negative way. In *Olympian* 6.87–90, the poet-speaker asks the chorus trainer whether, by singing the hymn to Hera, he will be able to avoid the ancient reproach that the Boeotians are uncouth, summed up by the proverbial expression "Boeotian pig":

ὄτρυνον νῦν ἑταίρους,
Αἰνέα, πρῶτον μὲν Ἥραν
Παρθενίαν κελαδῆσαι,
γνῶναί τ' ἔπειτ', ἀρχαῖον ὄνειδος ἀλαθέσιν
λόγοις εἰ φεύγομεν, "Βοιωτίαν ὗν."

Now, Aeneas, urge your companions
first to celebrate Hera the Maiden,
and then to know if by our truthful words
we escape the old insult, "Boeotian pig."

The negative popular conception is here ironically scorned, with a conscious and allusive attitude (cf. ἀρχαῖον) towards the folkloric tradition of proverbs. In *Nemean* 7.104–105, the poet criticizes the figure of Neoptolemus:

ταὐτὰ δὲ τρὶς τετράκι τ' ἀμπολεῖν
ἀπορία τελέθει, τέκνοι-
σιν ἅτε μαψυλάκας "Διὸς Κόρινθος."

But to plow the same place three and four times
is a dead-end street, like someone blathering at children,
"Corinth belongs to Zeus."

Once again, the well-known proverb, although differently interpreted, is employed in an ironic and contemptuous way, as if the poet (who is again its speaker) assigned to the material more properly associated with proverbs a lower artistic dignity than the artistically (re-)elaborated *sententiae*. In fact, the only case of an overt quotation of a *sententia* that became a widespread motif—even if pessimistic—is the quotation of the γνώμη of the Argive Aristodemus, already known from Alcaeus (fragment 360 Voigt), introduced by the rare ῥῆμα (*Isthmian* 2.10–11):

νῦν δ' ἐφίητι <τὸ> τὠργείου φυλάξαι

[32] An English equivalent might be "if you sleep with dogs, you will wake up with fleas."

ῥῆμ᾽ ἀλαθείας < . . . > ἄγχιστα βαῖνον,
“χρήματα χρήματ᾽ ἀνήρ”

But now she orders us to heed the Argive’s saying,
which comes … closest to the truth:
“Money, money is man.”

Nonetheless, in spite of the absence of explicit references to codified γνῶμαι, in spite of their continuous re-elaborations, in spite of the author’s probable disdain for the more purely popular παροιμίαι, in spite of their scarce paremiographic fate, Pindar’s odes are still included today among the most *sententiae*-filled—indeed gnomic—texts of Greek poetry.[33] Once again, it is the structure of a thought conveyed by a short form—still a *sententia*, albeit reworked—that prevails in its communication and perhaps more so in the perception of the modern reader than that of the ancient listener. The juxtaposition of short phrases, all of them moral and educational in nature, produces the wisdom effect of Pindar’s poetry. See, for example, what was considered, in one of Lucian’s dialogues, “the most beautiful of all songs” (κάλλιστον τῶν ᾀσμάτων ἁπάντων, Lucian *Gallus* 7), which unsurprisingly opened the Alexandrian collection of epinicians—namely, Pindar’s *Olympian* 1, in honor of the equestrian victory of Hiero of Syracuse in the Olympics of 476 BCE:

Ἄριστον μὲν ὕδωρ, ὁ δὲ χρυσὸς αἰθόμενον πῦρ
ἅτε διαπρέπει νυκτὶ μεγάνορος ἔξοχα πλούτου·
[…]
ἦ θαύματα πολλά, καί πού τι καὶ βροτῶν
φάτις ὑπὲρ τὸν ἀλαθῆ λόγον
δεδαιδαλμένοι ψεύδεσι ποικίλοις
ἐξαπατῶντι μῦθοι.
Χάρις δ᾽, ἅπερ ἅπαντα τεύχει τὰ μείλιχα θνατοῖς,
ἐπιφέροισα τιμὰν καὶ ἄπιστον ἐμήσατο πιστόν
ἔμμεναι τὸ πολλάκις·
ἀμέραι δ᾽ ἐπίλοιποι
μάρτυρες σοφώτατοι.
ἔστι δ᾽ ἀνδρὶ φάμεν ἐοικὸς ἀμφὶ δαι-
μόνων καλά· μείων γὰρ αἰτία.
[…]
ἀκέρδεια λέλογχεν θαμινὰ κακαγόρους.
[…]
εἰ δὲ θεὸν ἀνήρ τις ἔλπεταί
<τι> λαθέμεν ἔρδων, ἁμαρτάνει.
[…]
ὁ μέγας δὲ κίν-
δυνος ἄναλκιν οὐ φῶτα λαμβάνει.
θανεῖν δ᾽ οἷσιν ἀνάγκα, τά κέ τις ἀνώνυμον
γῆρας ἐν σκότῳ καθήμενος ἕψοι μάταν,
ἁπάντων καλῶν ἄμμορος;
[…]
τὸ δ᾽ αἰεὶ παράμερον ἐσλόν
ὕπατον ἔρχεται παντὶ βροτῶν.
[…]

Best is water, and gold, like fire blazing
in the night, shines pre-eminent amid superb wealth.
[20 verses with the proposal of the theme and the beginning of the myth of Pelops]

[33] See Pavese 1997 for a catalog, extended to the whole of choral lyric.

Wonders are indeed many, yet perhaps mortals' talk
beyond the true account is deceptive,
stories adorned with elaborate lies.
For Charis, who fashions all gentle things for mortals,
by bestowing honor she often makes even the unbelievable
believed;
but days to come
are the wisest witnesses.
It is proper for a man to speak
well of the gods, for the blame is less.
[16 lines: the myth of Pelops continues]
Often the lot of slanderers is lack of gain.
[8 lines: Tantalus' fate]
But if any man hopes that any of his deeds
might escape the notice of a god, he is mistaken.
[16 lines: Pelops and the race against Oenomaus; Pelops speaks:]
Great danger does not take hold of a cowardly man.
But since men must die, why should anyone sit
in darkness and cherish an inglorious old age in vain,
deprived of all noble deeds?
[15 lines: conclusion of the myth of Pelops; eulogy of Hiero]
But the good that comes each day
is always the highest for every mortal.
[15 lines: praise of Hiero and conclusion]

In little more than a hundred verses, twelve *sententiae* pile up, sometimes joined by connecting or opposing links, sometimes simply juxtaposed. Each of them could be found in other Pindaric odes or in numerous other Greek and Latin texts—an impressive repertoire of *sententiae* themes and motifs, and a very particular way of drawing from the wisdom tradition, which will find equally original continuators in the Attic dramatists of the same century.

Indeed, the 5th century BCE opens up a new season in Hellenic culture, also with regard to the presence, use, and function of short *sententiae*. On the one hand, there seems to have been an intentional abandonment of the short, wisdom, and philosophical forms in favor of other expressive modes: a simple writing style adopting a new increasingly specialized terminology with **Anaxagoras**, an exile from Clazomenae who was active in Athens between the Persian Wars and the Periclean age; an imaginative language, in more oracular and cryptic tones, rather than depending on *sententiae*, with **Empedocles** of Agrigentum;[34] the search for a rational and technical lexicon, though still conditioned by poetry, with **Xenophanes** of Colophon[35] and **Parmenides** of Elea. For all these φιλόσοφοι, there is no (or only minimal) evidence of apophthegms or sayings.

On the other hand, the tradition of the apophthegmatic short form, the "punchline," χρεία, which stems from the practice of philosophical discussion and preaching, is documented for other charismatic figures of the time, most of all **Democritus** and **Socrates**. A remarkable *corpus* of ethical and political *sententiae* is attributed to the former,[36] a native of Abdera, on the Thracian coast. The *corpus* was transmitted indirectly in the gnomologies of the imperial age, but it

[34] In an introductory passage to Empedocles' poem *On Nature*, there is a significant polemical reference to the motif according to which "the eyes are more faithful witnesses than the ears" (already present in Heraclitus): 3.9–11 D.-K.: "but come, consider with every resource in what way each thing is evident, without holding some vision in greater trust than what accords with hearing, nor a resonating sound as superior to the clarities of the tongue."

[35] The only allusion to a *sententia* is in 18 D.-K.: χρόνῳ ζητοῦντες ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἄμεινον ("in time, by searching, they find something more that is better," from his *Silli*).

[36] See Ruiu 2011.

undoubtedly dates back to the works of the atomist.[37] *Testimonia* of χρεῖαι and ἀποφθέγματα by Democritus abound and create the picture of an ethic centered on certain fundamental values: inner balance, autonomy, anti-legalism, and happiness as man's ultimate goal. See, for example:

45 D.-K. (655 Luria): ὁ ἀδικῶν τοῦ ἀδικουμένου κακοδαιμονέστερος
He who commits injustice is more evil than he who suffers injustice.

171 D.-K. (780 Luria): εὐδαιμονίη οὐκ ἐν βοσκήμασιν οἰκεῖ οὐδὲ ἐν χρυσῷ—ψυχὴ οἰκητήριον δαίμονος
Happiness does not reside in flocks or in gold: the soul is the residence of a divinity.

115 D.-K.: ὁ κόσμος σκηνή, ὁ βίος πάροδος—ἦλθες, εἶδες, ἀπῆλθες
The world is a scene, life is a passage: you came, you saw, you departed.

Although all of them relate to Socrates' oral teaching, even for him we have evidence of numerous sayings and apophthegms:

Diogenes Laertius 2.31: ἔλεγε δὲ καὶ ἓν μόνον ἀγαθὸν εἶναι, τὴν ἐπιστήμην, καὶ ἓν μόνον κακόν, τὴν ἀμαθίαν.
He also said that there is only one good—knowledge, and one evil—ignorance.

Diogenes Laertius 2.34: ἔλεγέ τε τοὺς μὲν ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους ζῆν ἵν' ἐσθίοιεν—αὐτὸν δὲ ἐσθίειν ἵνα ζῴη.
He also said that the rest of the world lived to eat, while he himself ate to live.

Finally, Diogenes Laertius (2.84) attributes three books of χρεῖαι to the Socratic **Aristippus,** books distinguished by their dedicatee.[38] The fact that the short *sententia* form was the protagonist of philosophical speculation and communication is testified to, moreover, by the new figures of masters of truth and rhetoric, that is, the σοφισταί, who came to Athens from different parts of the Hellenized Mediterranean. The predilection for conceptual expressions is evident in **Gorgias**, originally from the Sicilian town of Leontini, who resorted to *cola* of *sententiae*, often replete with assonances and alliterations, in order to provide his writings with an icastic quality. It is also present in **Protagoras** of Abdera, a friend and collaborator of Pericles, who condensed his rationalistic thought into maxims that clearly reworked the *sententia* tradition, attributing new and speculative meanings to it:

1 D.-K.: πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος.
Man is the measure of all things.

3 D.-K.: φύσεως καὶ ἀσκήσεως διδασκαλία δεῖται.
Teaching needs practice and natural disposition.

3 D.-K.: ἀπὸ νεότητος δὲ ἀρξαμένους δεῖ μανθάνειν.
You have to start learning from your youth.

A similar procedure of re-semanticizing already traditional *sententiae* occurs in the sophists of the "second generation" still active in 5th-century Athens. It suffices to read a few fragments attributed to **Thrasymachus** of Chalcedon, the author of a work *On the State*—

[37] Moreover, it is possible that in fragment 35 D.-K. (γνωμέων μευ τῶνδε εἴ τις ἐπαΐοι ξὺν νόῳ, πολλὰ μὲν ἔρξει πράγματ' ἀνδρὸς ἀγαθοῦ ἄξια, "whoever listens to these sayings of mine with intelligence will do many things worthy of a good man") the very term γνώμη had the value of "*sententia* statement," or, at any rate, statement of a wisdom nature.

[38] See Lelli 2021:100–105, 1452–1460.

6a D.-K.: τὸ δίκαιον οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ τὸ τοῦ κρείττονος ξυμφέρον
Justice is nothing else than what is advantageous for the person who is stronger.

8 D.-K.: οἱ θεοὶ οὐχ ὁρῶσι τὰ ἀνθρώπινα
The gods do not notice human affairs.

—or others attributed to **Hippias** of Elis, who is credited with a *Trojan Dialogue* in which a young Neoptolemus asks his father what path to follow in order to achieve fame:

τὸ γὰρ ὅμοιον τῷ ὁμοίῳ φύσει συγγενές ἐστιν, ὁ δὲ νόμος, τύραννος ὢν τῶν ἀνθρώπων
By nature, the like is joined with the like, and the law is tyrannical to men. (Plato *Protagoras* 337c)

If this is the picture of the work that we would not hesitate to define philosophical, the scene of the literary panorama is occupied by the protagonists of the Attic theatre.
There are numerous proverbs and *sententiae* in **Aeschylus**' dramas**.** This is all the more significant since, as the most recent comprehensive study has pointed out,[39] the brevity and rhetorical simplicity of the *sententia* interrupts the extraordinary linguistic variety and artificiality of Aeschylus' style. His proverb culture and expressive vigor merge in an original way. Even the famous "law" proclaimed by the chorus in the so-called "hymn to Zeus" at the beginning of the *Agamemnon (*177, 250)—that of πάθει μάθος, often translated in a solemn way ("learning through suffering")—is nothing but the distant archetype of the popular "learn from your mistakes," which was probably already employed in this form in Aeschylus' time, as Plato implies (*Politics* 264b; *Symposium* 222b). Certainly, the form of the *sententia* prevails:

Agamemnon 1361: δυσμηχανῶ / λόγοισι τὸν θανόντ' ἀνιστάναι πάλιν.
I can see no way of bringing the man back from the dead just with words.

Choephoroi 313: δράσαντα παθεῖν, / τριγέρων μῦθος τάδε φωνεῖ.
For him who does, suffering—that is what the old, old saying states.

Choephoroi 1020: μόχθος δ' ὁ μὲν αὐτίχ', ὁ δ' ἤξει.
Some troubles are here now, some will come later.

Seven against Thebes 601: ἐν παντὶ πράγει δ' ἔσθ' ὁμιλίας κακῆς / κάκιον οὐδέν
In every activity, there is nothing worse than evil company.

Ancient and Byzantine scholia also highlight as proverbial many idiomatic, colorful, and popular expressions, because they turn on metaphors with animals, objects, or traits of everyday life. Real proverbs of popular origin, after all, are not rare in Aeschylus, especially in the mouths of humble characters (servants, nurses, messengers) or in the fragments of satirical dramas—a genre evidently considered less noble and, therefore, more suitable for this type of expression:

Agamemnon 36: βοῦς ἐπὶ γλώσσῃ μέγας / βέβηκεν
A great ox has stepped upon my tongue.

Agamemnon 322–323: ὄξος τ' ἄλειφά τ' ἐγχέας ταὐτῷ κύτει
διχοστατοῦντ' ἂν οὐ φίλω προσεννέποις
If you pour vinegar and olive oil into the same jar,
they will keep apart, and you will call them very unfriendly.

Agamemnon 868: τέτρηται δικτύου πλέω

[39] Grimaldi 2009. See also Fartzoff 2011 on the *Agamemnon*. Other important works are Ahrens 1937 and Pfeufer 1940.

He's got more holes in him than a net does.

Choephoroi 757: παιδὸς σπαργάνων φαιδρύντρια
The immature bowel of small children is its own master.

However, in this history of the proverb element in Greek culture, Aeschylus has a place of absolute prominence: in the Θεωροί—a satirical drama of uncertain date (but certainly not among the poet's last works) which was transmitted to us by a 1941 papyrus (*P.Oxy*. 2162)—we find the term παροιμία attested for the first time in our sources.[40] Dionysus reproaches Silenus for having devoted himself to agons, instead of practicing the art of dance, his previous favorite occupation (fragment 78a, 32–33 Radt):

εἰ δ' οὖν ἐσώζου τὴν πάλαι παρο[ιμία]ν,
τοὔρχημα μᾶλλον εἰκὸς ἦν σ' ἐ[πισκοπ]εῖν.
Well, if you'd stayed faithful to the old proverb
you'd have more likely been practicing dancing.

As chance would have it, this very first attestation of the term "proverb" in European culture is an allusion rather than a quotation: the proverb to which Dionysus alludes is not quoted, because it is evidently so well known that any spectator can deduce it on his own. As Edgard Lobel, editor of the papyrus, rightly understood, Dionysus' allusion is to the ancient and modern proverb motif stating "let each practice the craft he knows" (cf. Aristophanes *Wasps* 1431). But one could also think of "the devil you know is better than the devil you don't." Aeschylus' attestation, in any case, is also significant for another reason: this first occurrence already features a qualification of παροιμία which will become canonical in ancient cultures and which is still canonical in every proverb tradition—the importance of πάλαι, "ancient." The proverb is an "ancient saying" and, for this reason, true. Such a pairing ("ancient" and "true"), we might say, *is born*—for us—with the term "proverb" itself.
In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (458 BCE), the mechanism of allusion to a proverb is repeated (264):

εὐάγγελος μέν, ὥσπερ ἡ παροιμία,
ἕως γένοιτο μητρὸς εὐφρόνης πάρα
As the proverb goes,
may a morning of good tidings be born from this night of good news.

The passage is debated: there is no proverb that corresponds exactly to the Aeschylean text, although some believe that its existence can be postulated on the basis of this passage; others have thought of the proverb motif "like breeds like" (since the day is similar to the night that generated it); others—I believe more justly—starting from a long commentary of the Byzantine scholar Eustathius, who quotes these verses (*ad Iliad* 1.9 p. 22, 33), infer that the proverb alluded to is "the night brings counsel."[41] Certainly, in this case, to the thousands of spectators in the theatre of Dionysus in Athens, the utterance must have sounded absolutely perspicuous.
A recent thorough study has the merit of having systematically highlighted the presence of the *sententiae* present in **Sophocles**' tragedies.[42] The γνῶμαι, in particular, but also the παροιμίαι

[40] The term γνώμη in the sense of *sententia*, on the contrary, is never attested (see below).

[41] On the different positions of the scholars, see Medda 2017 on that passage. Cf. also a usually neglected passage from Libanius which seems to echo this very Aeschylean line—*Progymnasmata* 4.2: ἐντεῦθεν εὐφρόνη καλεῖται παρὰ τῶν ποιητῶν ἡ νὺξ καὶ τὴν παροιμίαν ἐποίησε τὰς βουλὰς τὸν τῆς νυκτὸς ἄγειν καιρόν, "the night is called 'the kindly time' by the poets, and this has generated the proverb 'night-time brings counsel.'"

[42] Cuny 2007. See also Peroni 2009 and Cuny 2011.

(although they are almost always reworked, and only in two cases explicitly introduced[43]), constitute a central element in the linguistic fabric of the poet, much more so than in the other two great tragedians. Entire monologues and numerous dialogues appear almost built, in their argumentation, on *sententiae* which are explicitly underlined. Consider, for instance, the conclusion of Ajax's first monologue (*Ajax* 473–480):

αἰσχρὸν γὰρ ἄνδρα τοῦ μακροῦ χρῄζειν βίου,
κακοῖσιν ὅστις μηδὲν ἐξαλλάσσεται.
τί γὰρ παρ' ἦμαρ ἡμέρα τέρπειν ἔχει
προσθεῖσα κἀναθεῖσα πλὴν τοῦ κατθανεῖν;
οὐκ ἂν πριαίμην οὐδενὸς λόγου βροτὸν
ὅστις κεναῖσιν ἐλπίσιν θερμαίνεται.
ἀλλ' ἢ καλῶς ζῆν ἢ καλῶς τεθνηκέναι
τὸν εὐγενῆ χρή.

For it is shameful for a man to desire a long life
when he has no escape from misfortunes.
What pleasure comes from day following day,
both bringing us near to and taking us back from death?
I would set no value upon a mortal who is warmed by vain hopes.
The noble man must either live honorably or be honorably dead.

From the *Ajax* (an early play) comes another of the very first occurrences of παροιμία which is as significant as the contemporary Aeschylean attestations, because it is accompanied by the second canonical qualification of the ancient and modern proverb—that it is "true" (*Ajax* 664–665):

ἀλλ' ἔστ' ἀληθὴς ἡ βροτῶν παροιμία,
ἐχθρῶν ἄδωρα δῶρα κοὐκ ὀνήσιμα.
But the saying of mortals is true,
that the gifts of enemies are no gifts and not useful.[44]

Indefinite pronouns, parallel or antithetic structures, polyptotons, anaphora, similes and metaphors, impersonal imperative forms, nominal attributive structures ("it is beautiful/ugly, right/wrong..."): these and other stylistic features, typical of the short *sententia* form, characterize Sophocles' maxims, which find many parallels with the ancient and modern paremiographic tradition. His characters use proverbs in a parenetic manner, to emphasize their message; in an apologetic and, above all, self-apologetic way; finally, they use short *sententiae* to reflect on and interpret their own or others' tragic condition. In these cases, they are often used in an unconsciously ironic way, in the typical Sophoclean stage game of tragic irony, in which the spectator, already knowing the conclusion to the mythical story, grasps, in the proverbs spoken by the character, his tragic mistake.
Like Aeschylus, Sophocles does not like to highlight general reflections by means of announcing or closing formulas ("as the proverb goes," "according to the saying"...[45]); the privileged place for a proverbial *tessera* is, in any case, the beginning or the end of a monologue. Finally, one of Sophocles' characteristic features seems to be his choice of assigning proverbs of popular flavor

[43] Fragment 282 (from the *Inachus*): ἴσθι δ', ὥσπερ ἡ παροιμία, / ἐκ κάρτα βαιῶν γνωτὸς ἂν γένοιτ' ἀνήρ ("But know that, as the proverb goes, a man could become well known from very small things"); *Ajax* 664, to which I shall return shortly.

[44] This is one of the best known and most widespread proverbs: see, e.g. Euripides *Medea* 618; Aristophanes *Wasps* 1159–1160; Menander *Monostichoi* 166.

[45] Τὸ λεγόμενον is never attested. Only once do we find the unusual τὸ φατιζόμενον, but, I believe, it refers to an idiomatic expression (φωνῇ ὁρῶ in *Oedipus at Colonus* 139: "In sound is my sight, as the saying goes"). Γνώμη in the sense of *sententia* is never attested. In *Trachiniae* 1, we have Λόγος μὲν ἔστ' ἀρχαῖος ἀνθρώπων φανείς, "There is an ancient proverb people tell".

(with metaphors, animals, plants, everyday objects) mainly to humble characters (servants, nurses, but also the chorus), and *sententiae* on more general concepts to noble characters, that is, the drama's protagonists. By exploiting the well-known apparent contradictory nature of the paremiographic repertoire, at times, these *sententiae* seem to be at odds with—or at least distance themselves from—the proverbs of common morality put into the mouths of speakers of inferior rank. This is the case, for example, with passages such as the conclusion of Creon's monologue in the *Oedipus Tyrannos*, where the widespread proverb according to which only time reveals man has a negative nuance (*Oedipus Tyrannos* 614–615):

χρόνος δίκαιον ἄνδρα δείκνυσιν μόνος,
κακὸν δὲ κἂν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ γνοίης μιᾷ.
Time alone reveals a just man,
but you can discern a bad man in a single day.

In this way, Sophocles implicitly underlines the socio-cultural difference that—already in the 5th-century Athenian world, where sophistry was spreading—was emerging more and more sharply between the popular and the learned culture.

Precisely in the years in which Sophocles and Aeschylus were competing in the Theatre of Dionysus, **Herodotus** arrived in Athens from Ionian Halicarnassus. As a traveler, scholar, and historiographer (already in the modern sense of the term), Herodotus recounted the eastern Mediterranean world to the Greeks and evoked the legendary and historical Hellenic traditions with a critical spirit, but with a very careful eye to oral culture. From his λόγοι emerge folktales and popular traits, as well as the great folkloric reservoir of proverbs. The most recent study has surveyed over 80 of them,[46] which are particularly frequent in direct speeches (mainly in the dialogue between Croesus and Solon[47]), and sometimes marked, when introduced explicitly (although never with παροιμία or γνώμη) by the qualities of "traditionality" and "antiquity" (cf. τὸ παλαιὸν ἔπος, "the ancient saying" 7.51.3).[48] In the mouth of a character, whether historical or fictional, the proverb takes on an emphatic and conative value:[49] a punchline or witticism that resolves a situation and highlights a problem. In this sense, some expressions underlined by ἔπος and ῥῆμα come closer to the status of an apophthegm and the context of a χρεία.

When Herodotus comments on an event with a *sententia*, the wisdom of the narrator and his propensity to investigate the human behaviors that affect the events of history come into play. These are mostly maxims with moral contents, which will contribute to the formation of Herodotus' image as an educator, in that he is the father of history (*pater historiae,* as Cicero defines him in *Leges* 1.1.5) which is, in turn, *magistra vitae* (Cicero *De oratore* 2.9.36).

Moreover, Herodotus is the first to mention a collection of *sententiae* that the Spartan Dieneces had left as warnings (ἔπεα ... μνημόσυνα 7.226.2). He is also the first author known to us to dwell on the genesis of an apophthegmatic expression turned into a proverb: it is the case of the historical (anecdotal) origin of "οὐ φροντὶς Ἱπποκλείδῃ," recorded by paremiographers and lexicographers. According to Herodotus (6.129–130), it arose on the occasion of a symposium in which Hippoclides, betrothed to the daughter of the tyrant Clisthenes of Sicyon, started dancing in a way considered inappropriate by his future father-in-law, and so breaking their nuptial agreement. Thus did Hippoclides comment on the situation: "Hippoclides does not care." The passage must have been well known and important to the ancients, if Plutarch (*De Malignitate de Herodoti* 33 = *Moralia* 867B) alluded to it to criticize Herodotus, accusing him of playing with the truth, "as if he was saying: 'Herodotus does not care.'"

Numerous Herodotean maxims are still widespread in the European tradition:

[46] Shapiro 2000.

[47] On which see Ellis 2015.

[48] Ἔπος is employed again at 3.130.4; 4.143.1; 7.120.2; at 7.162.2, we find ῥῆμα to indicate a "joke" made by Hiero of Syracuse: see Miletti 2009:139–140.

[49] According to Jakobson's model of the functions of language, the conative function engages the addressee directly.

1.5.4: τὴν ἀνθρωπηίην ὦν ἐπιστάμενος εὐδαιμονίην οὐδαμὰ ἐν τὠυτῷ μένουσαν ἐπιμνήσομαι ἀμφοτέρων ὁμοίως
Knowing therefore that human prosperity never stays in the same place, I will make mention of both kinds alike.

1.8.2: ὦτα γὰρ τυγχάνει ἀνθρώποισι ἐόντα ἀπιστότερα ὀφθαλμῶν
Men trust their ears less than their eyes.

1.8.4: ἐν τοῖσι ἓν τόδε ἐστί, σκοπέειν τινὰ ἑωυτοῦ
We, and none other, should see what is our own.

1.32.9: σκοπέειν δὲ χρὴ παντὸς χρήματος τὴν τελευτὴν κῇ ἀποβήσεται
We must look to the conclusion of every matter and see how it shall end.

1.86.6: ἐπιλεξάμενον ὡς οὐδὲν εἴη τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποισι ἀσφαλέως ἔχον
It came to his mind that there was no stability in human affairs.

1.207.2: κύκλος τῶν ἀνθρωπηίων ἐστὶ πρηγμάτων
Men's fortunes are on a wheel.

7.10: ἐπειχθὲν μέν νυν πᾶν πρῆγμα τίκτει σφάλματα
Now haste generates failures in every circumstance.

7.49.5: ἀνὴρ δὲ οὕτω ἂν εἴη ἄριστος, εἰ βουλευόμενος μὲν ἀρωδέοι, ἐν δὲ τῷ ἔργῳ θρασὺς εἴη
He is the best man, who is timid when making decisions, but bold in action.

The third tragedian of the ancient canon is **Euripides**, active on the Athenian stage from the mid-fifties of the 5th century BCE. He was a few years younger than Herodotus and Sophocles, who was his rival for almost fifty years. As a great investigator of man's soul and religiosity, Euripides turned his ruthlessly sophistic gaze towards the interiority of the human condition in relation to the divine and to fate. The traditional and popular culture, in its more secularized and sclerotized aspects, probably already seemed to him, at that time, superstitious, or, in any case, less interesting than the great questions that the sense of religiosity poses to the individual. Even his humble characters are not presented in a popular sense, nor do they use—for the most part—proverbs or popular images,[50] but rather short *sententiae* and philosophical forms: Euripides' intention is, in fact, to ennoble the voice of these social classes, by attributing to them elements of the learned and sophisticated culture.
Yet, on several occasions, the ancient scholia complain that Euripides inserts "useless" or "misplaced" γνῶμαι into his dramas. Indeed, Euripides is the most anthologized author by Stobaeus, precisely because of his *sententiae*: there are about 850 quotations, far more than from Aeschylus and Sophocles. See, for example, the section Περὶ ἔρωτος of Stobaeus' book 1:

2a Εὐριπίδου Οἰδίποδι (fr. 547 K.).
Ἑνὸς <δ'> ἔρωτος ὄντος οὐ μί' ἡδονή-.
οἳ μὲν κακῶν ἐρῶσιν, οἳ δὲ τῶν καλῶν.
Although love is a single thing, its pleasure is not single:
some love what is bad, some what is good.

2b <Εὐριπίδου Σθενεβοίᾳ (fr. 661.24–25 K.).>

[50] There is scarcely one occurrence of παροιμία in the whole of Euripides: fragment 668 Kannicht (from the *Stheneboea*, staged probably before 429 BCE, since it is taken up in a fragment of Eupolis of that same year): ἄνευ τύχης γάρ, ὥσπερ ἡ παροιμία, / πόνος μονωθεὶς οὐκέτ' ἀλγύνει βροτούς ("For without luck, as the proverb has it, misery on its own no longer pains mortals"). The term γνώμη with the meaning of *sententia* is never employed.

Ὁ δ’ εἰς τὸ σῶφρον ἐπ’ ἀρετήν τ’ ἄγων ἔρως
ζηλωτὸς ἀνθρώποισιν—ὧν εἴην ἐγώ.
But the love that leads towards morality and virtue
is enviable for men—among whom I wish I may myself be.

4a Εὐριπίδου Δίκτυϊ (fr. 331 K.).
Φίλος γὰρ ἦν μοι καί μ’ Ἔρως εἷλέν ποτε
οὐκ εἰς τὸ μῶρον, οὐδέ μ’ εἰς Κύπριν τρέπων.
For he was dear to me and then love seized me,
turning me neither towards folly, nor towards Cypris.

4b <Εὐριπίδου Θησεῖ (fr. 388, 1–2 K.)>
Ἀλλ’ ἔστι δή τις ἄλλος ἐν βροτοῖς Ἔρως
ψυχῆς δικαίας σώφρονός τε κἀγαθῆς-.
But there is another kind of love amongst mortals,
which belongs to a soul that is just, moderate, and good.

With Euripides, in fact, in the history of the proverb in elevated literary genres, we witness the definitive shift from the popular παροιμία to the dominant—if not exclusive—presence of γνῶμαι of general, ethical, and conceptual character. The philosophical dimension of Euripides’ dramaturgy, evidently, could not have moved in a different direction, and the ancients had already realized this: Aeschines invites the Athenians to “meditate on the γνῶμαι of the poet” (*In Timarchum* 151, 153); Quintilian defines him as *sententiis densus*, “dense with *sententiae*” (*Institutio Orataria* 10.1.68).
To this date, there is no comprehensive survey of Euripides’ *sententiae* and proverbs.[51] From the studies that have been recently conducted, however, there emerge some phenomena which have now been codified: the γνώμη almost always coincides with the end of a verse; the character who pronounces it is either old or belongs to a low social class (peasant, messenger, servant); the γνώμη is almost always placed either at the beginning or at the end of a monologue and, in dialogues, at their crucial moment; its function is essentially rhetorical, of validation or sharing.[52]
For the philosophical and pithy aspects of his γνῶμαι, as well as for their simple and immediate syntax, Euripides is the most anthologized tragedian of all time: hundreds of his trimeters are included in those *gnomologi* (already mentioned in reference to Theognis) which constitute an important part of the “collection” literature of the ancient world. Thus occurred the transformation that brought Euripides’ verses from being original lines which characterized humble characters, to decontextualized and generalized philosophical expressions, *ad usum* of the schools of rhetoric or of the cultured milieux of the first centuries of the Christian era.[53]
Alongside the tragedians, the Athenian theatrical scene began to be occupied, at least from the third decade of the 5th century BCE, by comedians. The extent to which ancient comedy is permeated by the anthropologically universal motifs of popular culture and folkloric tradition has been stressed on several occasions: from its carnival-like festive spirit to its gastronomic theme, from the motif of the upside-down world to that of the “land of Cockaigne.” The use of proverbs, in all their forms and mechanisms, is also a cornerstone of comic communication. At its foundation, there is certainly the notion that the *proverb* (in this case, more than the *sententia*) is one of the most significant elements of that “language of the square” that Bachtin has clearly outlined in reference to Rabelais’ work: that is, one made up of folklorically connoted and/or literarily popular traits, such as insults, scatological expressions, cries, work songs, and linguistic

[51] We are still relying on Hofinger 1896–1899.
[52] The latest study, with bibliography, is Most 2003.
[53] The study of the reception of Euripides’ γνῶμαι has often been dedicated to the possibility of recovering verses that were lost during their direct transmission, or interesting insights from a textual point of view. However, a cultural approach is now widely cultivated, thanks to the Italian school: see, most recently, Pernigotti 2003; Piccione 2003; Pace 2005.

mispronunciations.[54] However, in Greek comedy, a practice intrinsically linked to the mechanisms of the comic mode also plays a significant role: the *detorsio* of the proverb. Such a practice, already experimented with in Archilochus' iambs and in Alcaeus' icastic poems, assures the comedian, who bends familiar παροιμίαι to unexpected and burlesque scenic gimmicks, the laughter of his audience. If the mechanism of laughter is all the more effective the more the game between the comedian and the spectator is immediately intelligible,[55] the proverb—a common heritage that is deeply rooted in its recipient—opens to the author a channel of communication with his audience that is more direct than ever (although perhaps not entirely original), thus obtaining its sure laughter. This, more generally, is the importance of the fundamental role of proverbs in ancient comedy; hence its very high frequency.

From the earliest evidence known to us, which dates back to the years after the Persian Wars, in the fragmentary texts of 5th-century comic poets, we find a very high rate of proverb use: one παροιμία in **Magnetes** (active between 480 and 450 BCE), but out of the only seven lines that have survived to our times; six in the little more than forty rhyming verses of **Crates** (?–ca. 425 BCE); about ten in about 250 lines of both **Pherecrates** and **Plato Comicus**[56] (active from about 440 BCE); almost thirty out of more than 500 lines of **Eupolis** (ca. 450–410 BCE); more than sixty in the not even 400 lines that we can read of **Cratinus** (ca. 485–420 BCE), by far the most proverbial comic poet of all time—an almost obsessive presence. In the fragments of Crates, Pherecrates, Eupolis, and Cratinus, we can observe an articulated (and comical) zoological sample of proverbs: donkeys, pigs, mice, dogs, oxen, and many more. In Cratinus (35 K.-A.), we find the first attestation of one of the most widespread proverbs still in use today, "one swallow does not make a summer" (μία χελιδὼν ἔαρ οὐ ποιεῖ). Another great sphere for proverbs is that of daily life: cooking and agricultural work, in particular. Then there are the geographical expressions which thematize negative characteristics of peoples and places: the Carian slaves (18 K.-A.: ἐν Καρὶ τὸν κίνδυνον, "there is danger in Caria"), the Lesbian musicians (263 K.-A.: μετὰ Λέσβιον ᾠδὸν, "after the Lesbian singer"), the stingy Mykonians (365 K.-A.: τὸν γοῦν γλίσχρον Ἰσχόμαχον Κρατῖνος Μυκόνιον καλεῖ, "At any rate, Cratinus calls the stingy Ischomachus a Mykonian"), and so on. An important role, in ancient comedy, is given to expressions centered on flaws or peculiar anecdotes of common citizens which were known to the public and then became proverbs. However, they often constitute no more than mere names to us, as they are never attested again: "Buthus wanders about" (262 K.-A.: Βοῦθος περιφοιτᾷ), for clueless persons; "it is no longer the time of Charixena" (153 K.-A.: τάδ' οὐκετ' ὄνθ' οἷα τὰπὶ Χαριξένης), for situations compared to times past. Proverbs about gods and heroes, especially Heracles, also abound. Amongst all the proverb material, as has been said, the comic *detorsio* of the most disparate and well-known short forms stands out. It is also implemented by the mechanism of substitution of a term in a burlesque and ironic *aprosdoketon.*

From 427 BCE, and for over forty years, **Aristophanes** was the absolute protagonist of the Athenian comic scene. Aristophanes turned his greatest folkloric attention to the immense Greek proverb heritage: he is the Greek author who, more than any other, provides us with evidence of proverbs and *sententiae*, in all typologies and functions. His older rival, Cratinus, even coins for him a compound name, γνωμοδιώκτης, "a maker of maxims" (fragment 342 K.-A.), which perhaps should be understood precisely as a joke on Aristophanes' excessive pursuit of sententiousness.

To this date, there has been no proper comprehensive study of proverbs in Aristophanes: a substantial work could bring into even sharper focus the numerous nuances of this extremely important element of Aristophanes' poetry and would also be rich in ideas from a comparative point of view.[57] By playing with different levels of reception and with the comic *detorsio* of the

[54] Bachtin 1979:158–214.

[55] Propp 1988:109–124.

[56] The only one where the term παροιμία occurs: fragment 188 K.-A. In Cratin. Br. 182 K.-A., we find the formula ὡς ὁ παλαιὸς λόγος, "as the old saying goes."

[57] There are hundreds of proverbs in Aristophanes that can be compared to modern expressions, especially those having objects, animals and plants, gestures and moments of everyday life as their

proverb, Aristophanes offers us hundreds of exhilarating proverbs. Even a few examples are significant.
At the beginning of the *Birds*, Tereus introduces the chorus of birds. An owl was certainly among them, but as soon as Tereus introduces it, Euelpides, the comic sidekick of the scene, exclaims (301):

τίς γλαῦκ' Ἀθήναζ' ἤγαγεν;
Who brings an owl to Athens?

The joke plays, of course, on the gap between the literal meaning of the expression (on stage there is a real owl) and the metaphorical value of the famous proverb "to bring owls to Athens" (i.e. to do something useless), amplified by the breach of the scenic illusion.[58]
In the *Women at the Thesmophoria*, the chorus of women who are judging Euripides for his faults against the female gender, at the end of Mnesilochus' defense speech, comments on his quibbling in the following way (527–530):

ἀλλ' ἅπαν γένοιτ' ἂν ἤδη
—τὴν παροιμίαν δ' ἐπαινῶ τὴν παλαιάν—
ὑπὸ λίθῳ γὰρ παντί που χρὴ
μὴ δάκῃ ῥήτωρ ἀθρεῖν.

Now I guess anything is possible,
and I praise the old proverb:
you ought to look under every rock,
or a politician may bite you.

The joke, immediately grasped by the audience, is with the proverb "under every rock there is a scorpion ready to bite" (registered by all paremiographers: Zenobius 6.20 ὑπὸ παντὶ λίθῳ σκόρπιος εὕδει): the very simple substitution of the term triggers the mechanism of laughter.
At the beginning of the *Frogs*, Dionysus and Xanthias are going towards the Acheron with a great load. Although Xanthias is riding on a donkey, he does not place the load on the animal's back, but comically carries it on his shoulders with great effort: this offers the opportunity for numerous jokes, culminating in a double entendre based on a proverb when Dionysus exclaims to have sighted the "mysteries," i.e., the initiates of the underworld. At this point, Xanthias comments (159):

νὴ τὸν Δί' ἐγὼ γοῦν ὄνος ἄγω μυστήρια.
Then, by Zeus, I play the donkey in the mysteries!

The joke, which was very clear to the spectators, is based on the proverb "to act like the donkey in the mysteries," used to indicate a useless and even burdensome action, just as the donkeys that carried loads from Athens to Eleusis on the occasion of the mysteries, but which obviously did not participate or benefit from them. In this scene of the *Frogs,* it is the servant Xanthias who plays the part of the donkey: even more comically, given that he is actually sitting on a donkey, and that, in another game between signifier and signified, they are staring precisely at the mysteries.
A particular form of the proverb tradition, the so-called *Wellerism* (mentioned above), also appears for the first time in Aristophanes' *Wasps* (725–726):

ἦ που σοφὸς ἦν ὅστις ἔφασκεν, "πρὶν ἂν ἀμφοῖν μῦθον ἀκούσῃς,
οὐκ ἂν δικάσαις."

protagonists, given their folkloric matrix. In several cases, the folkloric comparison clarifies the sense of an ancient proverb, little known or unknown to us, and, with it, clarifies the sense of a scene: see Lelli 2007.

[58] On the presence of proverbs in the *Birds* see Schirru 2009b.

“Don’t judge before hearing both sides of the story”:
whoever said that was pretty wise.

The richness of the proverb repertoire of Attic comedy is, in some ways, comparable to that which emerges from the limited evidence of the only other form of poetry that has come down to us (by indirect tradition): the *skolia*, a lyrical, more popular, and anonymous version of the elegy of the archaic and late archaic age. These short poems, recited in the aristocratic (and antidemocratic) symposia of the 5th century, are full of proverbs, often reminiscent of Aesop (892):

ὁ δὲ καρκίνος ὦδ’ ἔφα
χαλᾷ τὸν ὄφιν λαβών-.
εὐθὺν χρὴ τὸν ἑταῖρον ἔμ-.
  μεν καὶ μὴ σκολιὰ φρονεῖν.

The crab, seizing the snake
in its claws, said:
“A friend should be straightforward
and not think crooked thoughts.”

With **Thucydides**, however, we find the first documentation of another fundamental development in the history of short s*ententiae* in Greek culture: the characteristic brevity of the *sententia* tradition that is diluted—and, in fact, lost—in an increasingly broad and articulate rhetorical elaboration.[59] Those of Thucydides are no longer γνῶμαι, except in very rare cases, nor παροιμίαι (a term never used by the historian), but complex reflections based on *sententia* motifs. The term γνώμη, on the other hand, by now definitively assumes, with Thucydides, the technical value of “counsel,” in the sense of a “decision taken by an assembly” or an “opinion expressed in an assembly context.”[60] Never, in Thucydides’ work, does the term possess the sense of a “moral judgment” or a “maxim.”
Moreover, Thucydides almost never employs such elaborations of *sententiae qua* author, but rather reserves them for the speeches of the protagonists of the events which he narrates. Thus, of the more than 150 *sententiae* that can be found in Thucydides, only five are first-person remarks made by the author. Three of these appear in the very first chapters of the narrative, in the linkage between the ἀρχαιολογία and the first events of the war, where Thucydides still presents himself as programmatically inclined to converse with his audience:

1.20.1: οἱ γὰρ ἄνθρωποι τὰς ἀκοὰς τῶν προγεγενημένων, καὶ ἢν ἐπιχώρια σφίσιν ᾖ, ὁμοίως ἀβασανίστως παρ’ ἀλλήλων δέχονται.
For men accept hearsay reports of previous events from one another, even if these events belong to their own country, without examining them just the same.

1.20.3: οὕτως ἀταλαίπωρος τοῖς πολλοῖς ἡ ζήτησις τῆς ἀληθείας, καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἑτοῖμα μᾶλλον τρέπονται.
So not painstaking is the search for truth for most men, and so eager are they to turn to what lies ready at hand.

1.21.2: τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐν ᾧ μὲν ἂν πολεμῶσι τὸν παρόντα αἰεὶ μέγιστον κρινόντων, παυσαμένων δὲ τὰ ἀρχαῖα μᾶλλον θαυμαζόντων
When they are engaged in a war, men always consider the present one the greatest, but, once it is over, they think of past events with greater wonder.

[59] To this day, the only work of Thucydides’ gnomics is Meister 1955.
[60] Daverio 1967; Huart 1973.

Numerous re-uses and quotations confirm that these *sententiae* became part of the Greek cultural heritage.[61] But two elements show that the vast majority of these particular Thucydidean γνῶμαι did not represent short forms analogous to those of contemporary sophists, philosophers, or poets: first, the total absence of Thucydides from later paremiographic collections; second, his relatively scarce presence even in gnomological anthologies. Consider, in this regard, that in Stobaeus, Thucydides only appears about 30 times, and all of the occurrences refer to γνῶμαι pronounced by historical personalities, as the anthologist himself appropriately and rigorously clarifies, with the formulas accompanying the indication Θουκυδίδου: δημηγορίας Ἀθηναίων, "orations of the Athenians" (8.20.1 = Thucydides 1.75.4); δημηγορίας Λακεδαιμονίων, "orations of the Spartans" (3.5.17 = 4.18.4); δημηγορίας Περικλέους, "Pericles' orations" (3.7.18 = 2.63); δημηγορίας Κνήμου, "Cnemus' orations" (7.34.1 = 2.87.4), and so on.
Finally, we can date back to Thucydides the first attestations of a stylistic pattern that will be typical of the following *sententia* tradition and that constitutes one of the basic forms of proverbs in several ancient and modern cultures: the use of the generalizing "men" as the proverb's subject. There are more than twenty *sententiae* in the Athenian historian, where the syntagm οἱ ἄνθρωποι (or even the abstract τὸ ἀνθρώπειον) is present. See, for example:

1.77.4: ἀδικούμενοί οἱ ἄνθρωποι μᾶλλον ὀργίζονται ἢ βιαζόμενοι.
Men get angrier if you wrong them than if you harm them.

1.78.3: ἰόντες τε οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἐς τοὺς πολέμους τῶν ἔργων πρότερον ἔχονται, ἃ χρῆν ὕστερον δρᾶν, κακοπαθοῦντες δὲ ἤδη τῶν λόγων ἅπτονται
When they go to war, men turn to blows first, although that should be the last resort, and then, when they are in distress, they fall to reasoning.

2.54.3: οἱ γὰρ ἄνθρωποι πρὸς ἃ ἔπασχον τὴν μνήμην ἐποιοῦντο.
Men direct their memory to what they have suffered.

4.19.4: μᾶλλον πρὸς τοὺς μειζόνως ἐχθροὺς τοῦτο δρῶσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἢ πρὸς τοὺς τὰ μέτρια διενεχθέντας.
Men are more inclined to act thus toward their greater enemies than toward those with whom they have had but slight differences.

The same characteristics of the *sententia* element present in the speeches of the politicians who are the protagonists of Thucydides' historiography will be found in the subsequent historical works of **Xenophon**. They reveal, most likely, the function assigned to *gnomics* in the 5th-century oratorical practice, of which we have no direct testimony. This is, moreover, the result of the conspicuous oratorical documentation of the 4th century BCE, starting with Isocrates and Lysias, the two authors we know best and who belong to the older generation.
In the speeches for private trials written on commission by **Lysias**, who had been working in Athens at least since the final two decades of the 5th century,[62] the presence of *sententiae* is very limited, and, in some orations, nonexistent.[63] The few cases of reworking of *sententia* motifs (in the forms already documented by Thucydides) follow a rather fixed form, which emphasizes the assertive function of the utterance, making explicit its shareability with the audience by means of formulas such as "you know that ..." (3.4: εἰδότας ὅτι ...), "I know that you know that ..." (1.28: ἀλλ', ὦ ἄνδρες, οἶμαι καὶ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ὅτι ...), "you all agree that ..." (7.33: πάντες ἂν ὁμολογήσαιτε ...). This will be apparent in Dionysius of Halicarnassus' treatise on Lysias, when

[61] The *sententia* of 20.1 is taken up by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Roman Antiquities* 1.13.4), Libanius (*Orations* 59.126) and various Church fathers and Byzantine authors.
[62] We have no certain chronological references for almost any of the λόγοι handed down in the *corpus* that goes by his name.
[63] In orations 4 (*On a wound by premeditation*), 9 (*For the soldier*), 10 (*Against Theomnestus*), 12 (*Against Eratosthenes*), 13 (*Against Agoratus*), 14 (*Against Alcybiades*), for example, it is completely absent.

he comments on the rhetorical devices at the beginnings of Lysias' orations: "sometimes he presents some facts as common to all ... making use of γνῶμαι εὐκαίροι, and then hastens on to his statement of the case" (*Lysias* 17).[64] Nor, for that matter, is there any trace of reflection on gnomic forms in the treatises dedicated by Dionysius to Lysias, Demosthenes, Dinarchus, or to ancient oratory in general. Lysias is practically absent even from Stobaeus' *Anthologion*: it only includes three excerpts, more rhetorical than *sententiae* in nature.[65]

The lack of preference for proverbs and *sententiae* on the part of Lysias, the Syracusan speechwriter who emigrated to Athens, is revealed, on the other hand, by the absence of the terms παροιμία and τὸ λεγόμενον, and by the use of γνώμη in the exclusive sense of "counsel" in the judicial sphere. Evidently, the use of *sententiae* was not deemed a winning trait in the ethopoeia of the client. And it is no coincidence that, among the various orations which were certainly not written by Lysias, but were transmitted in his *corpus*, the sixth one, *Against Andocides* (from the last years of the 5th century or the very first of the 4th), features a much more significant use of reworked *sententiae* made by the unknown author (6.4, 6.6, 6.20, 6.32, 6.55). The presence or absence of *sententiae* becomes here, in a sense, an indicator of the authorship of a text.

However, the fact that not only in the style of Lysias' speechwriting, but more generally in the private oratory of the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, the use of maxims and proverbs was not conventional is also proved by the very limited rate of *sententia* use in the many other orations that have come down to us, from **Antiphon** to **Andocides** (still active in the last decade of the 5th century), from **Aeschines** to **Demades** and **Dinarchus**, to **Hyperides** and **Lycurgus**, all born after 390 BCE. This also holds true for the judicial orations of Isocrates and Demosthenes. Indeed, in the *Lexicon of the Ten Orators* attributed to Harpocration, a grammarian of the 2nd century CE, there are merely eight occurrences of expressions explicitly defined as παροιμίαι: of these, five are from Demosthenes,[66] two from Hyperides, one from Lycurgus.[67] Finally, in the *corpus Demosthenicum*, we find the only two explicit occurrences of παροιμίαι: in his *Against Aristocrates* (1.89 τὸ τῆς παροιμίας, ὁρῶντας μὴ ὁρᾶν καὶ ἀκούοντας μὴ ἀκούειν, "as the proverb

[64] Τότε δὲ ὡς κοινὰ τὰ πράγματα καὶ ἀναγκαῖα πᾶσι καὶ οὐκ ἄξια ὑπὸ τῶν ἀκουόντων ἀμελεῖσθαι λέγει, τότε δὲ ἄλλο τι κατασκευάζεται τῶν δυναμένων αὐτὸν μὲν ὠφελῆσαι, τὸν δὲ ἐλαττῶσαι. ταῦτα δὲ συντόμως καὶ ἀφελῶς διανοίαις τε χρησταῖς καὶ γνώμαις εὐκαίροις καὶ ἐνθυμήμασι μετρίοις περιλαβὼν ἐπὶ τὴν πρόθεσιν ἐπείγεται, δι' ἧς τὰ μέλλοντα ἐν ταῖς ἀποδείξεσι λέγεσθαι προειπὼν καὶ τὸν ἀκροατὴν παρασκευάσας εὐμαθῆ πρὸς τὸν μέλλοντα λόγον ἐπὶ τὴν διήγησιν καθίσταται. "Sometimes he says that his case is common and necessary to all, and not worthy of being neglected by the jury, and sometimes he elaborates any argument which can help his case and weaken that of his opponent. He presents these arguments concisely and simply, covering them with noble thoughts, appropriate sayings, and fitting arguments, and then hastens onto his statement of the case, in which he gives a preview of the future arguments to be put forth in the proofs. Having made his audience aware of what he is going to say, he proceeds to his narrative."

[65] Stobaeus 3.12.20, 3.2.22, 4.5.17.

[66] Two from *Against Ctesiphon*, one from the *Philippics*, and perhaps two from the apocryphal *Proemia*.

[67] Harpocration α 245 Ἀρχὴ ἄνδρα δείκνυσι—Δημοσθένης Προοιμίοις δημηγορικοῖς, "'Office shows the man': quoted by Demosthenes in his *Exordia to Public Speeches*." α 246 Ἀρχὴν ἰᾶσθαι πολὺ λώϊον ἠὲ τελευτήν—ἄλλη παροιμία, "'Much better to heal a beginning than an end': Another proverb." α 277 Ἀφεὶς τὴν ὑπέραν τὸν πόδα διώκει—Ὑπερείδης ἐν τῷ Περὶ τοῦ ταρίχους α′. Παροιμία, "'Having released the brace, he chases the sheet': Hyperides in his *On the Salt Fish* 1. Proverb." ε 130 Ἔργα νέων—τοῦτο καὶ Ὑπερείδης ἐν τῷ Κατ' Αὐτοκλέους Ἡσιόδου φησὶν εἶναι. παροιμία τίς ἐστιν, "'Deeds belong to the young': Hypereides in *Against Autokles* says that this is also attributed to Hesiod. It is a proverb." μ 46 Μυσῶν λείαν—Δημοσθένης ἐν τῷ Ὑπὲρ Κτησιφῶντος. παροιμία τίς ἐστιν οὕτω λεγομένη, "'Mysians' plunder': Demosthenes in *For Ktesiphon*. It is a proverb, so said." ο 48 Οὐκ ἐπὶ τῆς αὐτῆς ὁρμεῖ τοῖς πολλοῖς—Δημοσθένης ἐν τῷ Ὑπὲρ Κτησιφῶντος. παροιμία ἐστὶν ἐλλιπῶς λεγομένη, "'He is not moored at the same as the many': Demosthenes in *For Ktesiphon*. It is a proverb, said elliptically." π 54 Περὶ τῆς ἐν Δελφοῖς σκιᾶς—Δημοσθένης Φιλιππικοῖς, "'Concerning the shadow in Delphi': Demosthenes in the *Philippics*." τ 4 Τὰ τῶν φωρῶν κρείττω—Ὑπερείδης ἐν τῷ Κατ' Ἀθηνογένους β′. παροιμία ἐστὶ, "'The lot of thieves is better': Hypereides in *Against Athenogenes* 2. It is a proverb." τ 19 Τοὺς ἑτέρους τραγωιδοὺς ἀγωνιεῖται—Λυκοῦργος ἐν τῷ Πρὸς Δημάδην. Δίδυμός φησιν ὅτι παροιμία ἐστὶν, "'He will compete with the other tragic actors': Lykourgos in *Against Demades*. Didymus says that it is a proverb."

says, whoever sees does not see and whoever hears does not hear"), and in the spurious Περὶ συντάξεως (*Oration* 13.1).
A greater (though always limited) presence of short *sententiae* and, sometimes, of proverbs is found in the public and political orations starting from about 380 (the possible date of the composition of **Isocrates**' *Panegyric*)**.** As previously mentioned, the prevalent forms are "you know that …" (*Panegyric* 78, 95), "it is clear to all that ..." (12), as well as the enthymematic procedure "if it is true that ... [*sententia*], then ... [statement] (21, 102)." Thus, from the *Plataicus* (371 BCE) to the *Areopagiticus* (355 BCE), from *On the Peace* (355 BCE) to the *Panathenaicus* (339 BCE), it is possible to trace in public orations—if not actually or completely read on public occasions, at least imagined for that function—several elaborations of *sententia* motifs. There are very few, in any case, if compared to the length of text taken into consideration. A low percentage—sometimes extremely low—is also found in the *demegories* of Aeschines and Hyperides. Slightly more are found in **Demosthenes**: a few dozen *sententiae* appear, in total, in the oration *On the Navy Boards* (354 BCE), the *Olynthiacs* and the *Philippics*,[68] and the other public speeches handed down to us, which were accurately reported in gnomologies, starting from Stobaeus (where there are about 40 occurrences from Demosthenes). The form, which by now seems to have become canonical, is still the assertive "you know that ..." Even the famous case of the proverb "over a donkey's shadow" (περὶ ὄνου σκιᾶς)—rewritten by Demosthenes as a trial strategy to draw the attention of the judges, and varied into the political "over Delphi's shadow" against Philip (περὶ τῆς ἐν Δελφοῖς σκιᾶς, from Didymus: fragment 5 Schmidt = Zenobius 6.28)—seems to reveal the little love of the orator for the great reservoir of proverbs, a reservoir indeed confined almost exclusively to a few reworkings or to sarcastic and ironic functions.
The panorama offered to us by classical oratory, in sum, is extremely poor in (if not lacking) short *sententiae* and proverbs. According to the evidence of our documentation, 5th- and 4th-century orators and rhetoricians did not identify in this element a fundamental instrument for argumentation, as is, by contrast, too often affirmed by scholars. This is perhaps due to an improper attribution of the reflections subsequently put forth in other treatises on rhetoric (beginning with Aristotle,[69] after the mid-4th century) to this period. All this, as we shall see, is important to dispel a deep-rooted commonplace about short forms in ancient Greek culture: namely, the notion that the first collections of γνῶμαι and παροιμίαι arose in the rhetorical field, with stylistic and rhetorical purposes and with the students of the rhetoric schools as their addressees. While the presence of gnomic collections in the schools of rhetoric from the 3rd century CE seems to be established, along with the presence of similar collections in all other fields of knowledge (from geography to history, from poetry to grammar), it seems anachronistic, in my opinion, to transfer this gnomic circulation back to the 4th century BCE. Collections of γνῶμαι and παροιμίαι began to circulate in other areas, especially the philosophical and the historical/antiquarian. Orators and rhetoricians, at least until the end of the 3rd century BCE—if not beyond—did not see, in the short *sententia*, either a refined or a productive tool: the numbers bear witness to this.
Within this framework of 5th- and 4th-century oratory, the *corpus* of the so-called "paraenetic" Isocrates stands out: it is autonomous in the manuscript tradition, and is constituted by the three encomiastic and epistolary orations *Nicocles*, *To Nicocles*, and *To Demonicus* (definitely spurious).[70] In these three works—two of which are addressed to the young sovereign of Cyprus, Nicocles, and one to the son of a friend of the orator, Demonicus—precepts and *sententiae* of an educational nature are heaped up, often without a real common thread. Of the more than 40

[68] *Olynthiacs* 1.16, 1.23, 2.14, 2.22, 2.26, 2.28, 3.19; *Philippics* 1.5, 1.49.
[69] Although Aristotle, too, attributes to proverbs and *sententiae* a rather marginal role, in comparison to other rhetorical instruments.
[70] On aspects of the manuscript transmission of these texts, and, in particular, of some gnomological papyrus evidence, see *Corpus dei Papiri Filosofici* II.2, Isocrates. It must be said that the gnomic intent is not always evident in the anthologists' selection: there are often excerpts from texts that are rhetorically effective in themselves, not because of their gnomic character.

occurrences from Isocrates excerpted by Stobaeus and then later by the gnomological tradition, two-thirds derive from these works.[71]
In Isocrates' *To Nicocles* (40–44), we find a very significant passage for the history of *gnomics*, not only in the oratorical field. After listing for two-thirds of the text a series of precepts and words of wisdom, Isocrates explains that the importance of his work lies not in proposing new concepts, but in collecting what has been said in the past about education. Hesiod, Theognis, and Phocylides have left important teachings (ὑποθῆκαι) that are still valid, which unfortunately men prefer to ignore:

Καὶ μὴ θαυμάσῃς, εἰ πολλὰ τῶν λεγομένων ἐστὶν ἃ καὶ σὺ γιγνώσκεις—οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐμὲ τοῦτο παρέλαθεν, ἀλλ' ἠπιστάμην ὅτι τοσούτων ὄντων τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἄλλων καὶ ἀρχόντων οἱ μέν τι τούτων εἰρήκασιν, οἱ δ' ἀκηκόασιν, οἱ δ' ἑτέρους ποιοῦντας ἑωράκασιν, οἱ δ' αὐτοὶ τυγχάνουσιν ἐπιτηδεύοντες, (41) ἀλλὰ γὰρ οὐκ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις χρὴ τούτοις < τοῖς> περὶ τῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων ζητεῖν τὰς καινότητας, ἐν οἷς οὔτε παράδοξον οὔτ' ἄπιστον οὔτ' ἔξω τῶν νομιζομένων οὐδὲν ἔξεστιν εἰπεῖν, ἀλλ' ἡγεῖσθαι τοῦτον χαριέστατον, ὃς ἂν τῶν διεσπαρμένων ἐν ταῖς τῶν ἄλλων διανοίαις ἀθροῖσαι τὰ πλεῖστα δυνηθῇ καὶ φράσαι κάλλιστα περὶ αὐτῶν. (42) Ἐπεὶ κἀκεῖνό μοι πρόδηλον ἦν, ὅτι τὰ συμβουλεύοντα καὶ τῶν ποιημάτων καὶ τῶν συγγραμμάτων χρησιμώτατα μὲν ἅπαντες νομίζουσιν, οὐ μὴν ἥδιστά γ' αὐτῶν ἀκούουσιν, ἀλλὰ πεπόνθασιν ὅπερ πρὸς τοὺς νουθετοῦντας—καὶ γὰρ ἐκείνους ἐπαινοῦσι μέν, πλησιάζειν δὲ βούλονται τοῖς συνεξαμαρτάνουσιν, ἀλλ' οὐ τοῖς ἀποτρέπουσιν. (43) Σημεῖον δ' ἄν τις ποιήσαιτο τὴν Ἡσιόδου καὶ Θεόγνιδος Φωκυλίδου ποίησιν—καὶ γὰρ τούτους φασὶ μὲν ἀρίστους γεγενῆσθαι <u>συμβούλους</u> τῷ βίῳ τῷ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ταῦτα δὲ λέγοντες αἱροῦνται συνδιατρίβειν ταῖς ἀλλήλων ἀνοίαις μᾶλλον ἢ ταῖς ἐκείνων ὑποθήκαις. (44) Ἔτι δ' εἴ τις ἐκλέξειε τῶν προεχόντων ποιητῶν <u>τὰς καλουμένας γνώμας</u>, ἐφ' αἷς ἐκεῖνοι μάλιστ' ἐσπούδασαν, ὁμοίως ἂν καὶ πρὸς ταύτας διατεθεῖεν—ἥδιον γὰρ ἂν κωμῳδίας τῆς φαυλοτάτης ἢ τῶν οὕτω τεχνικῶς πεποιημένων ἀκούσαιεν.

And do not be surprised that I have uttered many things which you yourself know. It did not escape me, for I have realized that, among so great a multitude both of mankind and their rulers, there are some who have uttered one or another of these precepts, some who have heard them, some who have seen other people put them into practice, and some who are carrying them out themselves. But it certainly not in discourses of this sort that we should seek novelties, for in these discourses, it is not possible to say what is contrary to expectations or incredible or alien to accepted beliefs; but, rather, we should consider that man the most admirable who can collect the greatest number of ideas scattered among the thoughts of others and present them in the best form. This was clear to me, that while everyone think that the works in verse or prose which counsel us how to live are the most useful ones, yet it is certainly not to them that they pay heed with greatest pleasure; on the contrary, they feel about these just as they feel about the people who admonish them; for while they praise the latter, they wish to associate with those who share in, rather than those who would turn them away from, their vices. As an example, one might cite the poetry of Hesiod and Theognis and Phocylides; for these, they say, are the best <u>counsellors</u> for human conduct; but despite what they say, people prefer to spend their time with each other's follies rather than with the precepts of these poets. Besides, if one were to extract from the eminent poets <u>what we call</u> their <u>*sententiae*</u>, in which they have put their greatest effort, men would display the same attitude toward them anyway; for they would rather listen to the humblest comedy than to such carefully crafted works.

This passage of Isocrates, datable between 373 and 370 BCE, is the first text in which the term γνώμη appears clearly and indisputably in the sense of a "maxim," a *sententia* of an author. This is all the more significant because the context leaves no doubt as to the sense intended by Isocrates: the γνῶμαι of which he speaks are "collected" (ἐκλέξειε), with a verb that will become technical for the anthologies. Isocrates, moreover, with the equally significant καλουμένας, hints that this value of γνώμη is not his own definition, but a widespread way of understanding the

[71] See Vallozza 2003.

word, perhaps derived from everyday language. Such γνῶμαι, after all, seem to be the object of a collection—perhaps already widespread in the Athenian library scene of the first decades of the 4th century BCE—in the educational and philosophical area, as seems evident from these three Isocratic and pseudo-Isocratic oratorical exceptions (Isocrates, after all, prefers to define himself as a φιλόσοφος, not as a rhetorician).

During the same period, but in a completely different context, we find another piece of evidence for the development of the term γνώμη in the sense of *sententia*. For if between the 5th and 4th century BCE γνώμη had taken on the specific value of "counsel"/"deliberation" in the legal and political context, it then assumed a similarly technical specialization in a new field that, in those very decades, was taking its first rationalistic steps, breaking free from its millennia-old magical and religious tradition: medicine. In the texts of the Hippocratic school, γνώμη becomes the doctor's judgment on his patient, his indication of the cure: basically, his prognosis. In the proem of one of the certainly ancient Hippocratic treatises, *De diaeta in morbis acutis*, we find a further development. The author mentions those who wrote the so-called Cnidian γνῶμαι before him: οἱ ξυγγράψαντες τὰς Κνιδίας καλεομένας γνώμας, ὁκοῖα μὲν πάσχουσιν οἱ κάμνοντες ἐν ἑκάστοισι τῶν νουσημάτων ὀρθῶς ἔγραψαν, "those who composed the so-called Cnidian *sententiae*, on what the sufferers feel in each pathology." Euryphon of Cnidus may have been the one who had a role in arranging a *corpus* of medical observations circulating under that name, as Galen seems to testify (17a 886). But the Hippocratic passage is important precisely because it bears witness to the existence of such a *corpus*, which goes under the term of Κνίδιαι γνῶμαι: "judgments," authoritative medical *sententiae*, which could constitute a repertoire of useful therapeutic indications. The practice of drawing up medical *sententiae* will have an enormous effect on the Greek and Latin tradition—another aspect of the incisiveness of the short *sententia* in ancient culture and beyond.[72]

We have mentioned the excerpts of *sententiae* from the 5th- and 4th-century orators that will flow into the gnomological tradition from the first centuries of the Christian era. Such a tradition gives us evidence of another aspect that involves the two most important orators of the ancient canon: Isocrates and Demosthenes. For they are the protagonists of a huge number of χρεῖαι transmitted by the most ancient gnomic papyri in our possession, and by Stobaeus, until the Byzantine gnomologists.[73] Isocrates and Demosthenes are thus juxtaposed, on the one hand, to the archaic and late archaic σοφοί and, on the other, to the contemporary figures of Socratic and post-Socratic philosophers.

The Socratics, in the 4th century BCE, began to frequently summarize the meaning of their speculations in short *sententiae*, which they—or others for them—define as χρεῖαι (never παροιμίαι[74]). *Chreiai* are attributed, especially by Diogenes Laertius, to **Socrates**[75] (2.30–35), **Stilpo** (2.117-119), **Menedemus** (2.128-130), **Plato** (3.38ff.), **Xenocrates** (4.10), **Arcesilaus** (4.34), and **Bion of Boristhenes**, who, according to Diogenes Laertius, wrote "apophthegms that offer a pragmatic utility" (ἀποφθέγματα ... χρειώδη πραγματείαν περιέχοντα, 4.47). As with the Seven Sages, the evidence for these figures, too, has to be understood as referring to oral preaching. But, as mentioned above, three *books* of Χρεῖαι, differentiated by their dedicatee, are attributed to **Aristippus** (2.84). The same holds true for **Diogenes of Sinope**, to whom three more *books* of Χρεῖαι are attributed (6.80). Therefore, if one is to give credit to the ancient sources, the first decades of the 4th century BCE[76] had already witnessed, within the philosophical field, a

[72] It would suffice to think of the *sententiae* of the Medical School of Salerno.

[73] Isocrates and Demosthenes, together with Epictetus, are the protagonists of an entire Byzantine *Gnomologium*, containing 270 maxims, including quotations and apophthegms.

[74] This is a central point that cannot be underestimated. Contrary to what will happen in the Middle Ages in the Latin world, where the term *proverbium* will also be used to define *sententiae* that were considered (or at least presented as) by an author, in the Greek world, until the late antique lexicography and scholiasticism, παροιμία is never given an *authorial* meaning, even less so for philosophers.

[75] An anthology of anecdotes about Socrates is attested in *P.Hib*. II 182.

[76] Aristippus and Diogenes were born in the 5th century and die in 366 and 323 BCE.

shift from collections of short forms realized "by extraction" to collections realized "by creation."[77]

In this period, the practice of writing *sententiae* and proverbs emerged most clearly in the two most important authors (not least because they were extremely prolific and have survived to our times) of the first half of this crucial 4th century BCE: Plato and Xenophon. **Plato**, active between the very last years of the 5th century and 347 BCE, from Athens to Syracuse, is the Greek prose writer in whom we find, in proportion, the greatest number of proverbs, *sententiae*, and idiomatic expressions ever.[78] The imitation of the spoken Attic language in his dialogues, the liveliness of his dramatization, the traces of colloquial and *sententia* models such as comedy and mime make Plato's works an extraordinary reservoir of proverbs. This information is all the more relevant if we think that, in Plato's poetics, the re-foundation of a philosophical and conceptual system goes hand in hand not only with the re-foundation of the πόλις, but also with the reform of writing and of literary genres. The Platonic reorganization of poetry and mime, however, does not seem to concern the use of *sententiae* and proverbs—an aspect evidently so pervasive in Greek culture that it could not be attacked even by Plato, who apparently considered it essential to philosophical communication, despite the absence of any explicit reflection on this short form.

To be sure, the authority of the proverb as a repository of truths and ethical models is, at times, questioned by Plato, particularly through the mouth of Socrates, who not infrequently submits numerous well-known proverbs and *sententiae* to distortions, adaptations, and allusions. As evidence of this particular Platonic (and Socratic?) practice, it would suffice to mention the famous game conducted by Socrates on the proverb hexameter αὐτόματοι δ' ἀγαθοὶ ἀγαθῶν ἐπὶ δαῖτας ἴενται "of their own accord the honest go to dinner with the honest" (perhaps already in Hesiod, fragment 264* M.-W.), alluded to as early as *Iliad* 2.408 (αὐτόματος δέ οἱ ἦλθε βοὴν ἀγαθὸς Μενέλαος, "of his own accord came Menelaus, master of the war-cry"), in the renowned beginning of the *Symposium* (174b–d):

Καὶ τὸν εἰπεῖν ὅτι Ἐπὶ δεῖπνον εἰς Ἀγάθωνος. χθὲς γὰρ αὐτὸν διέφυγον τοῖς ἐπινικίοις, φοβηθεὶς τὸν ὄχλον—ὡμολόγησα δ' εἰς τήμερον παρέσεσθαι. ταῦτα δὴ ἐκαλλωπισάμην, ἵνα καλὸς παρὰ καλὸν ἴω. ἀλλὰ σύ, ἦ δ' ὅς, πῶς ἔχεις πρὸς τὸ ἐθέλειν ἂν ἰέναι ἄκλητος ἐπὶ δεῖπνον;

Κἀγώ, ἔφη, εἶπον ὅτι Οὕτως ὅπως ἂν σὺ κελεύῃς.

Ἕπου τοίνυν, ἔφη, ἵνα <u>καὶ τὴν παροιμίαν διαφθείρωμεν μεταβαλόντες</u>, ὡς ἄρα καὶ Ἀγάθων' ἐπὶ δαῖτας ἴασιν αὐτόματοι ἀγαθοί. Ὅμηρος μὲν γὰρ κινδυνεύει οὐ μόνον διαφθεῖραι ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑβρίσαι εἰς ταύτην τὴν παροιμίαν—ποιήσας γὰρ τὸν Ἀγαμέμνονα διαφερόντως ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα τὰ πολεμικά, τὸν δὲ Μενέλεων "μαλθακὸν αἰχμμητήν," θυσίαν ποιουμένου καὶ ἑστιῶντος τοῦ Ἀγαμέμνονος ἄκλητον ἐποίησεν ἐλθόντα τὸν Μενέλεων ἐπὶ τὴν θοίνην, χείρω ὄντα ἐπὶ τοῦ ἀμείνονος.

Ταῦτ' ἀκούσας εἰπεῖν ἔφη Ἴσως μέντοι κινδυνεύσω καὶ ἐγὼ οὐχ ὡς σὺ λέγεις, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἀλλὰ καθ' Ὅμηρον φαῦλος ἐπὶ σοφοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἰέναι θοίνην ἄκλητος. ὅρα οὖν ἄγων με τί ἀπολογήσῃ, ὡς ἐγὼ μὲν οὐχ ὁμολογήσω ἄκλητος ἥκειν, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ σοῦ κεκλημένος.

And Socrates replied: "To dinner at Agathon's. For I avoided him at the victory celebrations yesterday, fearing the crowd; but I agreed to be there today. So I have made myself handsome like this in order to go as one handsome man to another handsome man. But what about you," he said, "how would you feel about wanting to come to a dinner uninvited?"

And I said—he continued—"whatever you may bid me do."

"Then follow," said Socrates, "<u>so that we can also corrupt the proverb by twisting it</u>: 'Good men go to dinner at Agathon's of their own accord.' Homer then runs the risk not only of ruining it, but also of doing violence to this proverb; for after portraying Agamemnon as an eminently good man in warfare, and Menelaus, instead, a 'spiritless spearman,' when Agamemnon was offering sacrifice and feasting, he made Menelaus go to the banquet uninvited, as an inferior going to the banquet of a superior."

[77] I am here employing the terminology proposed by Eco 2004.

[78] A survey is found in the works of Tarrant 1946, 1951, and 1958.

When he heard this, Aristodemus said he replied: "Perhaps I too shall run the same risk, not as you say, Socrates, but according to Homer, and I, being a man of little consequence, shall be going to an accomplished man's dinner uninvited. Consider, therefore, what excuse you will make if you bring me, since I shall not confess to coming uninvited, but invited by you."

The equally famous passage from the *Republic* (335e–336b) is also illustrative: Socrates argues with Polemarchus on the inaccuracy of the saying (ῥῆμα) according to which "it is just to benefit friends and to harm enemies" (δίκαιον εἶναι τὸν μὲν φίλον εὖ ποιεῖν, τὸν δ' ἐχθρὸν κακῶς), since the good man must harm no one. The saying is wrong, and whoever attributes it to Simonides, Bias, Pittacus, "or any other of the wise and blessed men" is wrong, since, Socrates affirms, it must be attributed to Periander, Perdiccas, Xerxes, or Ismenia (all negative figures in the political imaginary of 5th century BCE), "or to some other rich man believed to be very powerful."
Plato, therefore, did not hesitate to criticize—albeit semi-seriously at times—the truthfulness of the heritage of *sententiae* bequeathed to him. However, at the same time, he could not do without it in his writings: as we have said, the protagonists of Plato's dialogues use hundreds and hundreds of short forms, of every kind and in every field. Plato, moreover, fully establishes the *iunctura* παλαιὰ παροιμία,[79] which will become a constant feature in the Greek, Latin, and Western cultural tradition in general. The author in whom proverbs abound the most will also be the one most frequently quoted in paremiographic collections and the one most anthologized in the gnomologies of the Byzantine age.
Xenophon, who lived at least until the mid-4th century, was a contemporary of Plato, an Athenian, a Socratic, and a prolific and versatile author. In him, two of the main strands of the prose of his time converged: historiography and philosophy. Although he never employed the term παροιμία, nor γνώμη with the meaning of "*sententia*," in his historical and biographical works (the *Hellenica*, the *Anabasis*, the *Agesilaus*, the *Cyropaedia*), the frequency of short *sententiae*, especially in dialogues, is high, as was the case in Thucydides. In Xenophon's Socratic works—the *Apology*, the *Memorabilia*, the *Oeconomicus*, and the *Symposium*—it is as high as in Plato's writings, and in the gnomological tradition it is very high, too (more than one hundred occurrences in Stobaeus alone). It is no coincidence that, precisely in a passage from the *Memorabilia* (1.6.14), Xenophon mentions Socrates' habit of "extrapolating the treasures of the ancient wise men" from his readings—our first attestation of a practice that will become fundamental in ancient and medieval civilization, and that was probably already important and widespread:

καὶ τοὺς θησαυροὺς τῶν πάλαι σοφῶν ἀνδρῶν, οὓς ἐκεῖνοι κατέλιπον ἐν βιβλίοις γράψαντες, ἀνελίττων κοινῇ σὺν τοῖς φίλοις διέρχομαι, καὶ ἄν τι ὁρῶμεν ἀγαθὸν ἐκλεγόμεθα.

And the treasures that the wise men of old have left us in their writings I open and explore with my friends. If we come on anything good, we extract it.

Parallel to the blossoming of *sententia* philosophical writing of the time, right around the middle of the 4th century, a book explicitly entitled Περὶ παροιμιῶν appeared. It was attributed to a rather obscure figure: **Demon**, an Atthidographer and antiquarian, but not a philosopher. His prevailing interest was erudite, historical, cultic, and mythographic: in his many fragments, there are no apophthegms of authors, no poetic verses, and, above all, no χρεῖαι.[80] The proverbs which the indirect tradition assigns to Demon's collection are mainly historical, local, antiquarian, or

[79] *Cratylus* 384a8; *Lysimachus* 216e6; *Republic* 329a4; *Leges* 741d6; 374a8. There are more than twenty explicit occurrences of παροιμία; about ten occurrences of ῥῆμα, mainly defining maxims by wise men or lines of Simonides; no occurrence of ἀπόφθεγμα. Plato must not have particularly liked the term γνώμη either, if we compare its very low frequency to the impressive production of the philosopher: it is never used in the sense of a "short form" (*sententia*), and always in that of "opinion." To Plato, however, is attributed the first attestation of the term γνωμολογία, in the sense of "speaking by maxims" (*Phaedrus* 267c), referring to the style of Polus of Agrigentum.
[80] See Lelli 2021:120–129, 1474–1479.

popular. But the extraordinary novelty of this work lies in another feature, destined to become canonical forever, in ancient and modern paremiography: the presence, after the archived short form, of an explanation, a comment, a reconstruction of the genesis, or a discussion on the meaning of the expression. Hence, an important cultural tradition begins: the *reflection* on one of the most meaningful elements in (written and oral) communication, namely the proverb. Paremiography was indeed born.

The destinies of παροιμίαι, γνῶμαι, χρεῖαι, and ἀποφθέγματα, which had had a fairly autonomous tradition until the 4th century BCE, seem to intertwine at this very moment. It is now, it seems, that even with a substantial awareness of the different nature of these short forms, the ancients began to collect and/or anthologize in a single container the *sententiae* found both in past texts and in the oral tradition, and to reflect on it.

The comparison with other cultures reveals interesting analogies regarding the birth and development of paremiographic activities. From the 1st century BC, there arose, in China, collections of proverbial sayings and *sententiae* from the so-called *Four Books* (*Szu-shu*) attributed to Confucius, and from the Five Classics (*Wu-ching*), that is, the texts on which young people practiced for their bureaucratic career. The formulas with which proverbs and *sententiae* are introduced in these collections are mainly "it has long been said that ...," "it is true that ...," and the like. In Arabic culture, as early as the 7th century CE, interest in proverbs appears in collections made by historians and scholars: the expressions are accompanied by an exegesis, and the collections often contain proverbs that date back to pre-Islamic times. Among them, the most important is the *Book of Proverbs* (*Kitab al-amthal*) by Mufaddal Ibn Salamah al-Dabhi, a scholar and a poet: his work will be continued by several scholars and became a *corpus* circulating throughout the Middle Ages.[81]

Alongside the lesser known (and often unjustly overlooked) Demon, the protagonists of this new genre are once again the philosophers.[82] A book entitled Παροιμίαι is attributed to **Aristotle** (Diogenes Laertius 5.26), a Περὶ χρειῶν to **Chrysippus** (Diogenes Laertius 7.169), a Περὶ παροιμιῶν, πρὸς Ζηνόδοτον to **Cleanthes** (Diogenes Laertius 7.200), a Περὶ παροιμιῶν to **Clearchus**, another Περὶ παροιμιῶν to **Dicearchus**, and another one, as it seems from a fragment of Philodemus,[83] to **Epicurus**, the Περὶ παροιμιῶν καὶ τῶν ὁμοίων. It is significant, in this context, that both a Περὶ παροιμιῶν (Diogenes Laertius 5.45) and an ἀποφθέγματα χρειώδη are attributed to **Theophrastus**.

In particular, Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric*, put forth interesting reflections on *sententiae* at a theoretical level. The use of proverbs, first of all, can constitute evidence in the rhetorical and judicial spheres, due to their typical shareability (1376a). The orator must know how to exploit παροιμίαι and γνῶμαι especially in the enthymemes, that is, the syllogistic reasonings aimed at convincing the audience of a particular thesis through general statements, such as the *sententia*. These are particularly suitable διὰ γὰρ τὸ εἶναι κοιναί, ὡς ὁμολογούντων πάντων, ὀρθῶς ἔχειν δοκοῦσιν "because they are common, and seem to be right, since they are recognized by all" (1395a10–12). Another significant element characteristic of proverbs and *sententiae* is their ethicality, firmly reiterated (1395b). In the third book, dedicated to the form of discourse (*elocutio*), the proverb is counted among the expedients of stylistic elegance, as μεταφοραὶ ἀπ' εἴδους ἐπ' εἶδος"metaphor from species to species" (1413a). Yet, in spite of the *Rhetoric*'s sections dedicated to παροιμίαι and γνῶμαι, *sententiae* appear as neither constitutive nor prevalent in Aristotle's rhetoric, as was the case in Athenian rhetoric of the 5th and 4th centuries. Short forms perceived as proper παροιμίαι, in particular, must have been considered too close to colloquial language, which ought to be employed only in limited cases, rather than being noble forms of speech. This is why, as already mentioned, it is not possible to say that the paremiographic interest was born within the rhetorical field: the attention to proverbs and

[81] See Webster 1986.

[82] See Lelli 2021:8–18 on Aristotle and the philosophers of the 4th century BCE.

[83] Philodemus *Πρὸς τοὺς [ἑταίρους]* X (*P.Herc*. 1005): πρός γε | μὴν τὰ κατηγορούμενα [...] περὶ τὸν Ἐπίκουρον [...] ὡς Περὶ γραμματι|κῆς καὶ ἱστορίας καὶ | Περὶ παροιμιῶν καὶ τῶν | ὁμοίων καὶ λ[έ]ξεως | καὶ Περὶ ποιημάτων χρή||[σεως κ]αὶ Περὶ εὐσεβε[ίας, "regarding the works attributed to Epicurus… such as *On grammar and history*, *On proverbs, similes and language*, *On the use of poems* and *On piety*.

sententiae developed almost exclusively from historical/antiquarian and philosophical/moral interests. Aristotle himself, who made extensive use of proverbs,[84] employed them, above all, in his *Constitutions* and his *Ethics,* thus offering clear testimony of it.[85]
The students of the Aristotelian school continued and developed the interest and research of their master, who—according to Athenaeus' testimony (2.60d–e)—had encouraged them, attracting the criticism of the Isocratic school: Cephisodorus, a rhetorician and grammarian, had harshly criticized Aristotle for having devoted himself to proverbs, probably because they were judged too humble a linguistic level to justify an scholarly interest.
The Aristotelians pursued various lines of investigation. From our scanty evidence, it seems that **Theophrastus** was interested in the distinction between apophthegms and actual proverbs. In his work *On the Ridiculous*, according to Athenaeus 8.348a, Theophrastus focused on one of the most interesting and intricate problems in the use of ancient proverbs: the *detorsio*, in those literary genres—comedy, satirical drama, iamb, or parody—which are keener to accept proverbial expressions and to modify parts of them for satirical purposes.
Clearchus focused on the distinction between παροιμίαι and γρῖφοι, "riddles" (Athenaeus 10.457c), as well as on the χρεῖαι. He was among the most quoted Hellenistic scholars in the paremiographic collections. His observations on popular customs are notable and many of them relate to expressions with gods and heroes as their protagonists, especially Heracles. An extraordinary discovery occurred in 1966, among the ruins of a Greek colony on the banks of the Oasse, in Bactria (present-day Afghanistan): a fragmentary stele engraved with an epigram presenting a list of *sententiae* of the Seven Sages, traces of which actually remain in five maxims readable on another fragment from the same site. The epigram reads:

Ἀνδρῶν τοι σοφὰ ταῦτα παλαιοτέρων ἀνάκειται
ῥήματα ἀριγνώτων Πυθοῖ ἐν ἠγαθέαι.
ἔνθεν ταῦτα Κλέαρχος ἐπιφραδέως ἀναγράψας
εἵσατο τηλαυγῆ Κινέου ἐν τεμένει.

"Here are consecrated the wise words of wise men of old,
in the sacred Pytho.
From there, Clearchus transcribed them carefully
and splendidly decorated the temple of Cynea."

All the evidence suggests that this refers to the Peripatetic Clearchus.
Dicearchus paid particular attention to proverbs derived from historical facts and anecdotes, and to those related to popular customs and traditions.
The Peripatetic school probably also produced one of the oldest attempts at etymology of the term παροιμία, although it was only attested much later in rhetorical and grammatical treatises. It consists in a para-etymology that links παροιμία to ὅμοιον, the "similar," the parameter at the basis of the relations of analogy and metaphor. This interpretation, with no scientific foundation, accentuates a trait that is peculiar to the formal aspect of the proverb. Moreover, it is significant to understand the role of "rhetorical tool" that ancient culture assigned to παροιμία, in both oral and written communication, in order to achieve stylistic grace and effectiveness. These will be very frequent considerations in late antique and Byzantine rhetorical treatises on proverbs.
Another contemporary etymology, probably dating back to **Chrysippus** and the Stoic school, connects παροιμία to the term οἶμος, "road." For its teaching value, the proverb deserves to be engraved on stelai placed at the edges of much-frequented streets—a practice that seems to be testified to by a Platonic passage and by precious Greek and Roman archaeological evidence.[86]

[84] Although fewer than Plato: over 120 *sententiae* of every kind are counted in the Stagirite.
[85] Aristotle quotes many proverbs about friendship in his two *Ethics*: see Ieraci Bio 1978; McEvoy 1995; and, most recently, Curnis 2009.
[86] *Hipparchus* 228b–c mentions the herms, engraved with wise inscriptions, placed by Hipparchus along the road from the Piraeus to Athens; the existence of these statues is confirmed by archaeology.

Nevertheless, it is obviously highly unlikely that this constituted the basis of the linguistic explanation of the term. From this point of view, however, the proverb is, metaphorically, the saying that follows man during his life, teaching and admonishing him, like a tradition-based memory that stays active forever, accompanying (and commenting on) the course of his life: παρ' οἶμον.[87]

During the same time as the generation of Aristotle and Theophrastus, of Demosthenes and Xenophon, of Clearchus and Chrysippus (or shortly after), for historical and cultural reasons about which I will shortly make some hypotheses, most of the "new" philosophers—Socratics, Epicureans, Cynics, and Stoics—also begin to *compose* their own collections of *sententiae*. Books of Χρεῖαι are attributed to the Stoics **Zeno** (four, according to Diogenes Laertius 7.17) and **Ariston** (eleven, following Diogenes Laertius 7.163). In Zeno's Χρεῖαι, the philosopher himself is the protagonist, as evidenced by one of them (6.91), where Zeno responds to Crates with an apophthegm. Particular importance should be given to the Stoic school, with a line of thought that will have its greatest representative in Marcus Aurelius.[88]

The increasing diffusion and democratization of the scroll, the progressively more evident predilection for the short forms of literary culture (in which the epyllion and the epigram predominated), and maybe other reasons that escape us, contribute to the explosion, between the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd century BCE, of what I would not hesitate to define as an actual paremiological boom—one that will remain unprecedented, I believe, in the future of European culture. The production of collections of proverbs and γνῶμαι, on the one hand, and of apophthegms and authorial *sententiae*, on the other, abounded.

A further sign of this renewed way of philosophical communication is, obviously, the Κύριαι δόξαι (*Principal Doctrines*) of **Epicurus**.[89] The founder of the Κῆπος himself, in the *Letter to Herodotus* (35), clarified the pedagogical presuppositions of the new mode of philosophical communication he intended to promote:

Τοῖς μὴ δυναμένοις, ὦ Ἡρόδοτε, ἕκαστα τῶν περὶ φύσεως ἀναγεγραμμένων ἡμῖν ἐξακριβοῦν μηδὲ τὰς μείζους τῶν συντεταγμένων βίβλους διαθρεῖν, ἐπιτομὴν τῆς ὅλης πραγματείας εἰς τὸ κατασχεῖν τῶν ὁλοσχερωτάτων δοξῶν τὴν μνήμην ἱκανῶς αὐτοῖς παρεσκεύασα, ἵνα παρ' ἑκάστους τῶν καιρῶν ἐν τοῖς κυριωτάτοις βοηθεῖν αὐτοῖς δύνωνται, καθ' ὅσον ἂν ἐφάπτωνται τῆς περὶ φύσεως θεωρίας.

For those who are unable, Herodotus, to carefully analyze each of the works I have written on nature, or to examine the major books which I have composed, I have prepared for them an epitome of the whole doctrine, in order that they may keep adequately in mind at least the most general notions, in order that on each occasion they may be able to help themselves on the most important points, insofar as they undertake the study of nature.

Clearly, this choice goes in the direction of popularizing the philosophical message and, as the ancient sources already reiterate (e.g. Diogenes Laertius 10.13), identifies σαφήνεια with expositive clarity, another fundamental prerequisite. The dissemination of philosophy, more generally, aims at being as universal and socially undifferentiated as possible. And it is precisely

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Examples of such herms, also depicting the Seven Sages, have been found in the Roman context: see Moretti 1973–1974. One could also think of the famous inscription "know thyself" (placed on the pediment of Apollo's temple in Delphi) and of the Delphic maxims engraved by Clearchus in an inscription in the temple of the Bactrian city on the Oasse, mentioned above. Proverbial expressions are also found as graffiti on the walls of Pompeii.

[87] From this idea, Antonino Pagliaro started to develop a fascinating juxtaposition between the terms παροιμία, οἶμος, and οἴμη ("tale"): the "proverb," in this sense, coincides with the wisdom saying that comments on the unfolding of the ancestral epic tale of the gods and men (as προοίμιον was the "greeting to the god *before* the tale"): cf. Pagliaro 1953:34–40, with the reflections of Di Donato 2011. On the two para-etymologies, see, again, Ieraci Bio 1979 and now also Ruta 2020:5–8.

[88] See Moretti 1995 and Tosi 2011:97–99.

[89] On which see Di Girolamo 2021:106–119, 1460–1473.

on this point that the use of expressive modes already used in popular and proverbial wisdom comes into play:

Sententia 8: Οὐδεμία ἡδονὴ καθ' ἑαυτὴν κακόν—ἀλλὰ τὰ τινῶν ἡδονῶν ποιητικὰ πολλαπλασίους ἐπιφέρει τὰς ὀχλήσεις τῶν ἡδονῶν.
No pleasure is in itself evil, but the things which produce certain pleasures bring annoyances many times greater than the pleasures themselves.[90]

17: Ὁ δίκαιος ἀταρακτότατος, ὁ δ' ἄδικος πλείστης ταραχῆς γέμων.
The just man is the least disturbed. The unjust man is full of the greatest disturbance.[91]

In the same period, once again from the genre most filled with proverbial short forms—comedy—comes the most significant evidence of the prominent place of *sententiae* in Greek culture. **Antiphanes** staged a comedy entitled *Proverbs* (Παροιμίαι); proverbs and *sententiae* abound in the fragments of the 3rd-century comedians **Philemon** and **Alexis**;[92] but the author who employs proverbs more than any other is **Menander**. In the last study dedicated to the presence of παροιμίαι and γνῶμαι in his fragments (and in the few comedies that have come down to us almost complete), more than 350 *sententiae* and proverbs were counted.[93] Παροιμίαι and γνῶμαι, moreover, seem to be quite distinct in Menander.[94] Proverb short forms are mainly introduced by such expressions as τὸ λεγόμενον, τὸ τοῦ λόγου, ῥῆμα; only once does παροιμία appear (*Dis exapaton* 27). Most of the proverbial expressions, however, are employed without any signposting, thus demonstrating their organic nature in the discursive fabric. All the formal structures of proverbs are found in the great Menandrian heritage, as well as several phonic and rhythmic elements, such as alliteration, assonance, and chiasmus. The proverbs are either drawn from the fable tradition, or have, as their protagonists, proverbial characters from the popular imagination, historical figures, peoples, and countries.
If proverbs are a dominant characteristic, *sententiae* are a constitutive element of Menander's theater. In a scene from his Δύσκολος (797–818), one of his best preserved comedies, the young Sostratus explains to his father his own convictions about wealth, weaving at least five *sententiae* into his brief monologue of some fifteen lines. His father Callippides, replies with two *sententiae*:

Κα. οἶσθ' οἷός εἰμι, Σώστραθ'—ἃ συνελεξάμην
οὐ συγκατορύξω ταῦτ' ἐμαυτῷ—πῶς γὰρ ἄν;—
σὰ δ' ἐστί. βούλει περιποήσασθαί τινα
φίλον δοκιμάσας—πρᾶττε τοῦτ' ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ.
τί μοι λέγεις γνώμας; † πόριζε βάδιζε †
δίδου, μεταδίδου—συμπέπεισμαι πάντα σοι.

Callipides. You know how things are, Sostratus. What I've saved up,
I will not take to the grave with me—How could I?
It's all yours. You wish to make someone
a friend, now that you've tested them—Do it, good luck to you.
Why are you quoting maxims to me? Go on, hurry up,
give, share. I've been completely convinced by you.

[90] The motif is attested as far back as the sayings of the Seven Sages (Solon): Euripides fragment 362.23 K.; Alexis 297 K.-A.; Menander *Monostichoi* 302 J. Ἡ δὲ παράκαιρος ἡδονὴ τίκτει βλάβην, "inappropriate pleasure begets harm"; Horace *Epistles* 1.2.56; Publilius Syrus 144; and many others.

[91] The pair justice/fear is not found elsewhere in the proverbial tradition, nor, explicitly, in the philosophical one: cf. on the other hand *Septem Sapientes, Sententiae* 12 φοβερὸς λόγος καρδίαν ταράσσει ἀνδρὸς δικαίου, "a fearful word upsets the heart of a just man."

[92] About 20 cases in the 200 or so fragments of Philemon; more than 30 in the 300 of Alexis. Moreover, both are frequently cited in the gnomologies.

[93] That is, the monumental three-volume work by Martina 2016: much of the third volume is devoted to Menander's proverbs and *sententiae*. See also Cusset-Lhostis 2011.

[94] This has been most recently highlighted by Schirru 2009.

The elder Callippides ironically retorts to his son that he certainly has no need for γνῶμαι—precisely he who, like every old man, knows the *sententiae* heritage all too well. Aristotle had already pointed out that γνωμολογεῖν was, above all, a characteristic "of old men" (πρεσβυτέρων, *Rhetoric* 1395a); Menander makes it explicit in another fragment (714): ὅταν γέρων γέροντι γνώμην διδοῖ, / θησαυρὸς ἐπὶ θησαυρὸν ἐκπορίζεται, "When an aged man offer some advice to an aged man, he provides a store of treasure piled on treasure."[95] His writing, in dialogues, monologues, and even in single lines, is deeply textured with *sententiae*: thinking with *sententiae* now seems a necessary *forma mentis.* Hundreds and hundreds of *sententiae* can be identified in his comedies and fragments, many of them enclosed in a single trimeter. Of these, a nucleus of several dozen, perhaps not many years after the poet's death, formed the basis for a collection destined for an immense fortune: the Μενάνδρου μονόστιχοι (*Menandri sententiae*). Indeed, together with Euripides, Menander is the most anthologized author in the entire ancient and medieval world. The *Menandri sententiae*, from its original nucleus, will experience a process of agglomeration and enlargement, from collection to collection, among numerous rivulets of a crossed, contaminated, and often active manuscript tradition, and will constitute a fundamental chapter of the ancient and medieval Greek culture of proverbs.[96]

Despite being taken out of context (of which the γάρ of so many monostichs is often a trace), the hundreds of Menandrian *sententiae* still tell us something of their original message: in an Athens now fallen into the Macedonian political orbit, deprived of a real democracy, and afflicted, between 320 and 280 BCE, by wars, pestilence, and famine, Menander's γνῶμαι reveal the sense of transience into which the average Athenian man was plunged; they underline the social conflicts and the disparities between rich and poor; they dramatically mark the sense of war and poverty, but they find hope in the ability to face the events with a sense of moderation and, above all, with the help of friendship.

While Athens was on its way to becoming the center (almost exclusively) of philosophical culture, with the schools of Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and the Stoics, the new pole of attraction for most intellectuals, poets, and authors, as well as for scientists and artisans, was, from the first decades of the 3rd century BCE, Alexandria. Two of the most significant authors of this period, which we now define as the "Alexandrian age," give us further evidence of the extraordinary cultural role that continues to be assigned to the short *sententiae* and proverbs, both in literary practice and in critical speculation and reflection. Through their multifaceted work, the Alexandrians give us the possibility of understanding, in a differentiated way, the use of proverbs and *sententiae* in several literary genres.

As far as the proverb imagery is concerned, **Callimachus** offers us the image of a scholar-poet.[97] Well aware of the flourishing of studies on proverbs, the Cyrenaic author exploits the variegated proverb tradition, selecting it carefully, indirectly explaining it, and commenting on it, precisely as a scholar-poet. His fundamental interest is undoubtedly the aetiological aspect of proverbs, which often subtly appears in his lines. For the first time, we can perceive in Callimachus an author of πολυείδει ("many genres")—as he defines himself—and a calibrated and diversified attention to the employment of the short forms.

On the basis of his own idea of a popular element, Callimachus devotes a special treatment to γνῶμαι and παροιμίαι: he shows himself to be attentive to the *convenient* placement of this and that short form in the axiological scale of ancient literary genres, whose norms were by now being codified. It is a matter of τὸ πρέπον, "appropriateness," then, which induces the poet to assign γνῶμαι and ῥήματα reminiscent of Homer or Hesiod to the high genres of his work (such as the *Hymns*) and, on the other hand, more properly popular παροιμίαι to less noble genres such as epigram and iamb. Unsurprisingly, there is no lack of deviation from the system, which can be

[95] See also *Sententiae* 158 Γνῶμαι δ' ἀμείνους εἰσὶ τῶν γεραιτέρων, "but the judgments of the elders are better"; *Sententiae* 164 Γνώμη γερόντων ἀσφαλεστέρα νέων, "the judgments of the elders is firmer than those of the young."

[96] See Pernigotti 2008.

[97] See Lelli 2006:135–185.

well framed in the general Alexandrian tendency to contravene those very generic rules that were being canonized at the same time.
Even in the "revolutionary" Callimachus, epic (the *Hymns* and the *Hecale*) remains the highest genre among the various poetic forms: popular proverbs (featuring animals or natural elements, *Realien*, peoples or places) are extremely rare and only employed with specific functions.[98] Though equally scant, the use of more formally gnomic expressions and *sententiae* of Homeric and Hesiodic descent is more evident.[99] Similarly, in the almost 6000 lines of the only epic poem we can read from this age, the *Argonautica* of the aristocratic and refined **Apollonius of Rhodes**—described, in his ancient *vita*, as pupil and then "rival" of Callimachus—short *sententiae* comparable to Homeric gnomic utterances are basically absent. Rather, there are echoes of *sententia* motifs, such as the unpredictability of the gods (1.298 πήματα γάρ τ' ἀίδηλα θεοὶ θνητοῖσι νέμουσιν, "the gods mete out unforeseen woes to mortals") or the inexorability of divine punishment (2.250 ἀρίζηλοι γὰρ ἐπιχονίοισιν ἐνιπαί / ἀθανάτων, "rebukes from the immortals are obvious to earthly men"; 2.1180 Ζεὺς ἐτεὸν τὰ ἕκαστ' ἐπιδέρκεται, "Zeus truly beholds everything"), all referring to the relations between man and the divine, and all in direct speeches.[100]
Going back to Callimachus, proverbs and proverbial expressions are prominent in the *Aetia*, where they are employed for very specific functions. First of all, as a scholar, he is interested in the origin of a proverb, often shrouded in mystery or linked to a particular anecdote: rites, almost unknown characters, and minor legends recovered by him in search of the truth abound. Such is the case for the proverbial "sacrifice at Lindus" (Λίνδιοι τὴν θυσίαν, fragment 7.22), "more terrible than Hippomenes" (ἀσεβέστερος Ἱππομένους, 95.4–5 Pf.), and "Tenedian human" (Τενέδιος ἄνθρωπος, 98–99 Pf.)—all expressions recorded in the paremiographic tradition, whose *argumenta* were the subject of many Callimachean elegies. In many other passages from the *Aetia,* proverbs and *sententiae* make their expected appearance, always with an (explicit or implicit) aetiological intent (fragments 23–25; *SH* 276.7–10; 75.13–15 Pf.). This is also the case in at least two iambs: in *Iamb* 11, which is entirely dedicated—it seems—to the exegesis of the proverb "the goods of Cinnarus" (ἁρπαγὰ τὰ Κιννάρου, fragment 201 Pf.); and in *Iamb* 14, which begins with the proverb about the "evils of Lemnos," the island where women took power and drove men away (Λήμνιον κακόν, 226 Pf.).[101] The poet also employs the reservoir of proverbs and *sententiae* to position his text in a particular way: in the dream at the beginning of the *Aetia,* a reference to one of Hesiod's *sententiae* (fragment 2.5 Pf. = *Works* 265) aims to emphasize the hypotext of the *Works*; Simonides, in the elegy dedicated to him (fragment 64 Pf.), is characterized by *sententiae*; Berenice's hair uses a popular proverb, the famous "ox on the tongue" (βοῦς ἐπὶ γλώσσῃ, fragment 110.71–2 Pf.).
Besides being the literary genre in which, more than any other, the poetic "I" is the protagonist, the iamb is also the genre of the popular world, humble characters, fables, and everyday life: the genre of folklore. Callimachus is well aware of these aspects and, as a poet and scholar from Alexandria, he searches for expedients that could characterize the text of his *Iambs* as popular: antiquarian, gastronomic, and customary elements, magical and superstitious practices, and, indeed, proverbs and colloquial expressions carefully chosen from the lowest of *sententiae*, starring animals and *Realien*, anecdotal characters, and geographical peculiarities, often with a hint of complacency for their erudite rarity. Callimachus employs them to provide his *Iambs* with a folkloric nuance which could recall the popular coloring of the archaic iamb, and, at the same time a tone appealing for the public of scholars-poets (-anthropologists?) of the Museum. The

[98] The "infraction" occurs in the *Hymn to Demeter* in the lighthearted section on Erysichthon, whose nonchalantly grotesque character has been pointed out several times. It is here that we find low proverbial and idiomatic expressions: cf. *Hymns* 6.93, 6.116–117.

[99] *Hymns* 1.1; 1.8; 1.79; 1.87–88; 2.25; *Hecale* fragment 282 Pf.

[100] Apollonius of Rhodes also seems to reject the possibility of alluding to the many ethnic proverbs about the peoples the heroes encounter on their journey, such as, for instance, the shadow of Athos over Lemnos (1.601-604), or the famous "evils of Lemnos" themselves (1.609-619). It should also be noted that no *sententiae*, let alone proverbs, are found in the (albeit few) fragments of Hellenistic Greek epics.

[101] Three other proverbs, too, have an etiological character: one again in the iambs (217 Pf.), one in the epigrams (1 Pf.) and one in the work dedicated to the *Barbarian customs* (405 Pf.).

poet, in targeting this or that adversary, in ridiculing malevolent critics or opposing schools of thought, finds, in the use of proverbs, a formidable instrument, highly congenial to his polemics. More than twenty proverbial expressions are present in the little more than 200 total verses of the *Iambs*:[102] a very high percentage which is also reflected in the contemporary iambography (for us completely fragmentary) of the 3rd century BCE, from **Phoenix** of Colophon to **Cercidas** of Megalopolis.

The extensive recourse to proverbs and idiomatic expressions in the epigrams seems to confirm that this genre, for Callimachus, served as a ground for his refined literary exercise, rather than constituting a fundamentally noble genre. The epigram in those decades was gradually becoming the privileged expressive mode for numerous purposes. The substantial presence of proverbial elements distinguishes Callimachus' epigrams from those of his Alexandrian contemporaries (such as **Asclepiades** and **Posidippus**) but also from **Leonidas** of Tarentum. This is probably because Callimachus was neither an ἐπιγραμματοποιός, "epigrammatist," by profession like Posidippus, nor an (almost) exclusively epigrammatic author like Asclepiades or Leonidas. For the Cyrenaic poet, the epigram merely constituted a refined πάρεργον, if compared to more scientific and literary works such as the *Aetia* or the *Hymns*. Another record should be granted to Callimachus: he sensed and exploited the enormous potential that the proverb—by nature σύντομος, "short," and effective—possesses in its encounter with the epigrammatic genre, especially to conclude this short form of poetry in a concise and witty way. This is all the more relevant if one considers—contrary to what we might have expected—that the use of proverbs and *sententiae* in epigraphic epigrams is scarcely relevant: a proof, it seems to me, of the intentionality of the abundant recourse to proverbs in Callimachus' epigrams. Indeed, this constitutes yet another literary experiment which reveals the poet's will to personalize one of the most common genres of his time, thus distancing himself both from his more refined Alexandrian colleagues—perhaps concerned with raising the epigram to more prestigious stylistic levels—and from the many (for us anonymous) local epigrammatists, who inserted Homeric phrases to ennoble their commissioners, but hardly ever use *sententiae* or proverbs.[103]

The proverbs in Callimachus' epigrams are mainly found in erotic contexts (25, 43, 44, 45, 52 Pf.), but also in the poetological and metaliterary ones (28 Pf.). Once again, Callimachus must be assigned the role of archegetes. He is certainly among the authors of Greek literature who speaks the most about himself, his poetic world, and his relationships with others. This is almost always filtered through the ever-present metaphors, allusions, literary plays, and the disguise of the *persona loquens*. At times, however, the poet allows his inmost personality to come forth, without veils or masks. These are the moments in which the narrator openly and ironically reveals himself to his audience, the moments in which he recalls heartfelt experiences, and in which the "true" Callimachus emerges, as in one's most intimate confessions. In these passages, the poet who speaks of himself does not seek bold metaphors or unusual images; rather, he indulges in the most natural forms of conversation, in the most usual and popular stylistic elements of communication: in a word, in proverbs. Thus, we discover a proverbial Callimachus, who opens up a new horizon on himself which seems different from the revolutionary (and aristocratic) experimenter to whom we are accustomed: a Callimachus (*senex*?) who speaks (mainly about himself) in proverbs, perhaps in a humble tone, but certainly an effective one. Callimachus, once again, understood how to strike a chord with his readers, offering them an image of reassuring and disenchanted wisdom.

One of these is the famous passage of the banquet of Pollux, studded with proverbial expressions about friendship, food, and everyday life (fragment 178 Pf.). However, the dimension of proverbs, though allusive, also manages to open up an interesting interpretative key to one of the most famous Callimachean passages: the *Prologue* to the *Aetia* (fragment 1 Pf.), one of the most studied passages in ancient Greek culture, and, perhaps, also one of the most filled with proverbs.

[102] Fragment 191:2, 7, 27, 37, 78–79, 82, 83, 93; fragment 194:46–48, 57–59; fragment 195:1–2, 19, 22–26, 34; fragment 196:22; fragment 203:52, 61; fragment 227:6.

[103] Some gnomic motifs in the epigraphic (funerary) epigram have been found by Garulli 2010. These are very few, however, if we consider the huge amount of documentation in our possession, and if we compare them to the absence (or quasi-absence) of *sententiae* and, even less, of proverbs, in our epigraphic *testimonia* in votive or celebratory verses.

It does not escape the careful eye of the paremiologist that, if Pfeiffer's suggestion is correct—that is, φῦλον ἀ[κανθές (1.7), "thorny lineage" is supported by intertextual references—Callimachus could allude to the well-known proverb Ἀκάνθιος τέττιξ, "a cicada among thorns" (Zenobius 1.51; Diogenianus 1.49). This would be extremely suitable for the insensitive and ἄμουσοι Telchines, and even more congenial, if pronounced by someone who, in a few lines, will refer to himself as the "cicada of the Muses." It is my contention that, even in the very personal (so much so that it is partly *adhuc ignota*) metaphor of the opposition evoked in line 10 (δρῦν] πο□λὺ τὴν μακρὴν ὄμπνια Θεσμοφόρο[ς, "the great oak and bountiful Demeter"), a proverb background might have been at least familiar to most readers, who will have remembered the βύβλου δὲ καρπὸς οὐ κρατεῖ στάχυν, "the papyrus-fruit does not conquer the wheat-ear" (already in Aeschylus and then in the paremiographers). Moreover, the expression βροντᾶ□ν οὐκ ἐμόν, ⌊ἀλλὰ⌋ Διός, "it is not mine to thunder: that belongs to Zeus" (line 20) might conceal the proverbial ἀπήντησε κεραυνοῦ βολὴ πρὸς ὑπέρτατον ἄτης, "the thunderbolt comes upon the uppermost evil" (Zenobius 2.8), to support the author's *recusatio*. Apollo advises him to "tread a path which carriages do not trample; do not drive your chariot upon the common tracks of others, nor along a wide road, but on unworn paths" (lines 25–28). It is likely that behind his precept, in addition to an undeniable literary tradition (from Pindar. *Olympian* 6.22–27; *Paean* 7B 10–20), might also lie a programmatically distorted version of the proverbial "leaving the old path for a new one only leads us astray" (i.e. "the devil you know is better than the devil you don't"), which is also attested in several ancient variants. Furthermore, almost *naturaliter*, the donkey called into question as a symbol of artistic inexperience (lines 30–31) undoubtedly suggests the well-known ὄνος λύρας, "a donkey and a lyre," and perhaps—if the motif is indeed ancient—the equally pertinent "the braying of a donkey never reached heaven"—a widespread proverbial motif in European cultures. Finally, the desire to shed old age like the cicada (lines 32–36) finds significant points of contact with the imagery of proverbs, both in relation to γυμνότερος ληβηρίδος, "more naked than spoils"—explained in terms of the cicada stripping itself of its membrane, and employed as συνόλως ἐπὶ τῶν ἀποδυομένων τὸ γῆρας, "for he who strips himself of old age" (Zenobius 2.95)—and with respect to the proverbial Τιθώνου γῆρας, "the old age of Tithonus" (Zenobius 6.18). It is suggestive to think that these allusions were present to Callimachus' mind—a Callimachus who, around the middle of the 3rd century, was surely *senex* … and, thus, all the more proverbial in Aristotle's terms! One of the most famous passages not only of Callimachus, but in the entire Greek literature, would then acquire a different flavor, an unprecedented and perhaps unsuspected coloring, a surprising proverb fabric that, with the strength of the shareability deriving from its tradition, corroborates the argument of the Alexandrian revolutionary poet.

Another revolutionary author of the time, a little younger than Callimachus, but equally imbued with proverb culture, was **Theocritus**.[104] A native of Syracuse, Theocritus began his poetic career around 280 BCE under the banner of a courageous experimentalism, proposing a type of poetry derived from the pragmatic tradition of popular pastoral songs, but, at the same time, artistically elaborated (*Idylls* 5, 10, 4, 3): traits of everyday pastoral life, beliefs, stylistic features and structures of popular song, and, obviously, proverbial expressions are the fundamental elements of this poetry, an *unicum* destined to become the archetype of an important literary tradition—the bucolic genre. Perhaps in order to escape the upheavals that struck Sicily and Magna Graecia at the beginning of the 270s, Theocritus landed in Cos, where some of the most important contemporary poets (and scholars) were active. Here, Theocritus sojourned so much that he progressively assimilated forms (intertextual allusions, *aetia*, lexical preciousness) and motifs (especially the myths) proper to the most famous literary trends of the time, which probably resulted in his *Idylls* 6, 1, 11, 13, and 7. The pragmatic attention to the pastoral world, the folkloric character of his poetry, including proverbs and idiomatic expressions, are the constant features of each of his poems, although they are quantitatively reduced in the last compositions of this phase (*Idylls* 11, 13, and 7), in favor of either mythical or poetological contents. After 275/4 BCE, after a failed attempt to return to Syracuse under the protection of the tyrant Hiero (*Idyll*

[104] For what follows I refer to my work Lelli 2017. On proverbs in Theocritus, and on some expressions considered "proverbial" by ancient scholiasts, but perhaps not actually so, see Meliadò 2010.

16), Theocritus resolved to try his luck in Alexandria (*Idyll* 14), by now the undisputed cultural capital of the Mediterranean. After two very happy attempts, in which he still showed that he was permeated by a pragmatically folkloric approach (*Idylls* 15 and 2), Theocritus sanctioned the abandonment of that literary manner with a pompous and Homeric *Encomium to Ptolemy* (*Idyll* 17). His attention to the popular world became more and more stylized, and gradually rarer, in the poetic production that, in all probability, must be placed in the following decades: that is, the poems of epic subject and style (*Idylls* 18, 22, 24) and those that take up the Aeolian literary tradition (*Idylls* 29 and 30).

In the path that leads Theocritus from the literary transformation of the folk songs of his native lands to the Alexandrian court of the scholar-poets, we can also observe the trajectory of the proverb. Like Callimachus, Theocritus adapts and employs short *sententiae* according to the contexts and literary genres of his *Idylls*. Thus, in his bucolic poetry, proverbial expressions abound, especially from the pastoral sphere, featuring animals (10.11: χαλεπὸν χορίῳ κύνα γεῦσαι, "it's bad that a dog should get a taste of guts") and everyday objects (10.13: ἐκ πίθω ἀντλεῖς, "draw wine from the cask"), beliefs and superstitions (6.39: ὡς μὴ βασκανθῶ δέ, τρὶς εἰς ἐμὸν ἔπτυσα κόλπον, "to avert bad luck, I spat on my breast three times") or seriocomic mythical anecdotes (5.23: ὗς ποτ᾽ Ἀθαναίαν ἔριν ἤρισεν, "a pig once challenged Athena"; 10.19: τυφλὸς δ᾽ οὐκ αὐτὸς ὁ Πλοῦτος, "Pluto is not the only blind god"). For many of them, which are often misunderstood, a folkloric comparison with modern popular traditions can provide an appropriate exegesis. In the poem addressed to his fellow citizen Hiero, of humble origins and often presented in the sources as a barely educated man, the presence of proverbial expressions is relevant (16.6–12, 18, 60, 62, 71–72). There are numerous short *sententiae* and proverbs again in the autobiographical poem 14, in which Theocritus decides to emigrate to Alexandria: here, however, the landscape has already become urban, and the proverbs pertain to the urban imaginary (51: μῦς γεύμεθα πίσσας, "the mouse that's tasting pitch"), or to the general (22: οὐ φθεγξῇ; λύκον εἶδες; "aren't you going to speak? have you seen a wolf?", related to the future *lupus in fabula*). The same holds true for the compositions set in Ptolemaic Alexandria (the so-called "urban mimes"), such as the *Women at the Adonia* (26: Ἀεργοῖς αἰὲν ἑορτά, "every day's a holiday for people with nothing to do"; 28: αἱ γαλέαι μαλακῶς χρῄσδοντι καθεύδειν, "cats love to sleep on soft beds"; 64: πάντα γυναῖκες ἴσαντι, "women know everything"), in which we find, as stated above, one of the earliest Wellerisms of Greek culture (77: 'ἔνδοι πᾶσαι', ὁ τὰν νυὸν εἶπ' ἀποκλάξας "'all inside,' as the man said when he locked in the bride"). Neither proverbs nor *sententiae* appear, instead, in Theocritus' poems of mythical subjects, nor in the paederotic poems which literarily imitate Aeolian poetry.

A special mention in the literary panorama of 3rd-century authors active in Alexandria must be devoted to **Macon.** Born in Sicyon, he soon emigrated to the Ptolemaic capital. He is credited with a work in verse entitled Χρεῖαι, in which parasites and gluttons pronounce sarcastic *sententiae* and maxims. This very distinctive text gives us a glimpse of how the tradition—which, by now, was almost a fashion—of composing or gathering collections of *sententiae* of philosophers and others was so general and, by then, certainly longstanding, that it could be mocked.

The mimes of the unknown **Hero(n)das**, contrary to one's expectations, offer us little evidence of proverbs. The ten preserved compositions, handed down to us a little more than a century ago by an Egyptian papyrus, are replete with realistic everyday contents and partly folkloric traits. They are spoken by (slightly) humble characters conversing in a middle style and with idiomatic expressions, but with few παροιμίαι (not even 10 out of more than 500 lines).

While, in Greece, philosophers and scholars contributed to such a boom in short *sententiae*, and Alexandrian culture definitively canonized the literary use of παροιμίαι and γνῶμαι, in terms of genres and contexts, the culture of late 4th-century Rome appears to be still developing. There are only a few *testimonia* known to us which can be dated back to the first centuries of the republican age, although in recent decades there has been a rediscovery and re-evaluation of this distant Roman cultural period, especially from historical, religious, and anthropological points of view.[105] The so-called *carmina convivalia*, songs sung during patrician symposia, recalling the

[105] See Warmington 1940.

deeds of the noble *gentes* and of the republican heroes, were an exclusively oral tradition—not dissimilar, it seems, from the Attic *skolia* of the 6th and 5th centuries BCE, which featured many proverbs and *sententiae*. This tradition of folk songs, according to Cicero,[106] was still in vogue in the 1st century BCE and, if we think in a comparative way, it probably must have contained numerous proverbs and *sententiae*.
However, among the most reliable sources, which we can trace back to the most ancient centuries of Rome, there is evidence—certainly not by chance—of wisdom and proverb material. The greatest Roman scholars, expert collectors of antiquarian and linguistic curiosities, have fortunately preserved some very interesting *formulae*, whose genuine (and anonymous) popularity can hardly be doubted. Varro, one of the most versatile politicians and scholars in Roman culture, has recorded, in his work *On agriculture*, an exorcism for sore feet, which he read (along with many other superstitious practices) in the ancient agronomic treatise of the Sasernae (2nd century BCE). They, in turn, cited the authority of the legendary founder of the Etruscan city Tarquinia (1.2.27–28):

Cum homini pedes dolere coepissent, qui tui meminisset, ei mederi posse: "ego tui memini, medere meis pedibus, terra pestem teneto, salus hic maneto in meis pedibus." Hoc ter noviens cantare iubet, terram tangere, despuere, ieiunum cantare.

When a man's feet begin to hurt, he may be healed, if he thinks of you: "I am thinking of you, heal my feet, put my pain in the ground, and let health reside in my feet." He orders you to chant this 27 times, touch the ground, spit on it, and fast while you chant.

The form of this exorcism finds continuity in practices which were still alive in southern Italy's folklore of the last century.[107] In his other work readable in its entirety, the treatise *On the Latin language*, Varro mentions the custom of tasting new wine for good luck, specifically celebrated in Rome with a festival, the *Meditrinalia*, on October 3rd: "On this day, it was customary to pour an offering of new and old wine to the god and to taste it in order to be healed. Many are accustomed to do this even now, when they say: 'Wine new and old I drink, of sickness new and old I am cured.'" (*hoc die solitum vinum <novum> et vetus libari et degustari medicamenti causa; quod facere solent etiam nunc multi cum dicunt: novum vetus vinum bibo, novo veteri morbo medeor*, 6.21). Perhaps another agricultural proverb dates back to very ancient times, namely the one handed down to us by Macrobius, a great scholar of the 5th century CE: "From winter's dust, from spring's mud, my boy, you will reap copious amounts of wheat." (*hiberno pulvere, verno luto*, / *grandia farra, camille, metes*, *Saturnalia* 5.20.18). This was later echoed by Vergil in his *Georgics* ("with winter's dust, most fertile is the wheat," *hiberno laetissima pulvere farra*, 1.101) and is still present today in Italian proverbs: "gennaio polveraio / empie il granaio" ("dusty January fills the barn," *Proverbi Italiani* g 372) and "aprile piovoso / anno fruttuoso" ("rainy April, fruitful year," *Proverbi Italiani* a 1089).
Livy (25.12.2) attributes to a certain **Marcius Vates**, probably a *pontifex* and an expert in oracles, a collection of prophecies on the dramatic events of the Punic Wars after the battle of Cannae in 216 BCE. The late antique grammarian Isidore of Seville also assigns to Marcius a collection of *praecepta*, pairing him with Moses precisely because he was "the first to compose precepts" (*primus ... praecepta componere*, *Etymologiae* 6.8.7.12). Among these, Isidore mentions *postremus dicas, primus taceas*, "let the last speak, the first be silent": this is one of the most widespread motifs in the ancient world (and in folk culture even today), attested ever since the maxims attributed to the Seven Sages, such as φιλήκοον εἶναι μᾶλλον ἢ πολύλαλον, "enjoy listening and don't talk a lot" (by Cleobulus), and other formulations, including Pythagorean ones. The term used by Isidore to define the maxim attributed to Marcius Vates is *praeceptum*: a term that encompasses both the value of wisdom teaching and that of social and ritual prescriptions.

[106] Cf. Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 4.2.3; 1.2.1; *Brutus* 19.75.
[107] Dorsa 1884:143; Lelli 2014:150.M.1.

Another term which will have more currency in the Roman proverb tradition is *sententia*, also used by several sources to define another collection of maxims dating back to the very first decades of the 3rd century BCE (if not to the last decades of the 4th). This is the first real gnomic collection known to us from the Roman world, the *Sententiae* of **Appius Claudius "the Blind,"** a famous and very important political and cultural figure who lived between the 4th and 3rd century BCE. He was a contemporary of Menander, Callimachus, Epicurus, and Chrysippus, consul in 307 and 296, a protagonist of the Samnite wars, and then, as an 80 year old, a proud opponent of Pyrrhus. First of all, however, Appius Claudius was a great orator, remembered in many sources (even though only a few fragments of his texts are quoted). The information we have about him offers us a mix of erudition and folkloric culture, thus revealing what a turbulent and dynamic situation there was in Roman culture of the time. It is within this framework that we should place Appius Claudius' *Sententiae*, of which we fortunately possess three fragments, two of which are cited simply for lexicographical reasons. If indeed the title assigned by Appius to his collection was *Sententiae*, the term would indicate, for the first time in the Roman world, paremiographic material. This is perhaps related to the Greek word γνώμη, but, I believe, it is mostly due to the influence—I would say "contamination"—of the use of the term *sententia* in the legal sphere: it is no coincidence that Appius Claudius was also a jurist and legal writer. As we have seen, in Greek culture, the term γνώμη had begun to assume a wisdom (and authorial) meaning precisely because of its use in the technical, juridical, and political spheres. This was certainly not unknown to the Romans, who, already in the 5th-4th century BCE, were familiar with Greek legal texts and the collections of laws and decrees of various Greek cities. Therefore, the title *Sententiae* could derive from these two sources, rather than from a direct familiarity with the gnomologies that were already circulating in the first decades of the 3rd century BCE, as it has been repeatedly assumed. Menander, after all, died after 291 BCE; Philemon died even later, and we should exclude the possibility that collections of gnomologies from Menander (and/or Philemon) had already been compiled while they were still alive, and that they might have reached the Roman public in less than a decade (Appius died no later than 271 BCE). One would also have to postulate that Appius did indeed write his *Sententiae* at an advanced age, such as over 70 (he was certainly born no later than 350 BCE). The acquaintance with Greek comic (and gnomological) material in Rome dates back at least 50 years after Menander's death, from Livius Andronicus onwards. Therefore, if all three fragments of Appius' *Sententiae* can be compared to fragments from New Comedy (two directly, one indirectly), as has been suggested, the attentive paremiologist should underline their differences rather than their similarities: while the latter belong to a cultural imagery common to the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean (and beyond), the differences clearly indicate that there are no elements sufficient to hypothesize a derivation or even an artistic translation from Greek material. Appius could certainly have absorbed Pythagorean and Greek influences in Rome and in the Samnite world, which he frequented during the long years of his military campaigns.[108] His culture, however, remained Roman, open to the new *humanitas* of Greek reflections, but still "hard" and genuinely archaic.

In order to understand their character, it would suffice to compare the first fragment of Appius (*Sententiae* 2 Büchner) with its supposed model, a fragment of Philemon (108 K.-A.: οὕτως, ἐπάν τις τυγχάνῃ λυπούμενος, / ἧττον ὀδυνᾶται, φίλον ἐὰν παρόντ' ἴδῃ, "thus, one who is sick / suffers less when he sees a friend"). Whereas in the Greek comic poet, the motif according to which "even just seeing a friend is a relief" is embedded in a larger passage (recorded by Stobaeus 4.48.25 and, not by chance, entitled "For those who, when they suffer, benefit from those who pity them"), Appius' *sententia* plays on the contrast between *amicus* and *inimicus*, and has nothing (or almost nothing) of the sense of *humanitas* of Philemon's text (fragment 2 Büchner [Prisc. GL 2,384 Keil):

amicum cum vides,	*obliscere miserias.*
inimicum si es commentus	*nec libens aeque*
when you see a friend,	forget your misfortunes,

[108] Humm 2000 and Dupraz 2008 have insisted on this point. On Appius Claudius, see Lelli 2021:180–181, 1509–1514.

but if you thought he was an enemy, don't do it as willingly.

The moral of the *sententia*, in short, is not positive at all, but bitter. Even *Sententia* 2, usually juxtaposed to Menander's fragment 742 K.-A. (again from Stobaeus 3.20.21, from a section "On wrath," but absent from the *Menandri sententiae*, like the previous one), has little connection with the sense of the Greek expression. In Menander's fragment, in fact, a character addresses his interlocutor in the following way:

εἰ καὶ σφόδρ' ἀλγεῖς, μηθὲν ἠρεθισμένος
πράξῃς προπετῶς—ὀργῆς γὰρ ἀλογίστου κρατεῖν
ἐν ταῖς ταραχαῖς μάλιστα τὸν φρονοῦντα δεῖ.
Even if you are deeply grieved, when much
excited, do not act hastily in anything. For the wise man
ought to master irrational anger, especially in the midst of trouble.

As is evident, in the albeit brief Greek text, philosophical terminology and concepts (προπετῶς, ὀργὴ ἀλόγιστος, ταραχή ...) pile up: none of these appears in Appius Claudius, where not only is there no nuance to the situation, but, in place of the Greek philosophical concepts, we find legal terms (*fraus*, *stuprum*) and, in place of the Greek ὀργή, a term of quite different and harsh meaning, *ferocia*:

<ae>here	*animi compotem esse,*
ne quid fraudis stuprique	*ferocia pariat.*
to be the master	of a righteous soul,
so that ferocity	does not breed fraud and violence.

The *Sententiae* of Appius Claudius "the Blind," in sum, present us, for the first time, with a Roman wisdom tradition which is still immersed in the hard and concrete republican world of the 4th century BCE—a world that, shortly afterwards, with the irruption of Greek culture and the developments of Roman society, will be deeply transformed, as will be evident from the refined and Hellenizing *sententiae* of Publilius Syrus, two centuries later. We will not have a direct attestation of the term *sententia* to indicate the short *sententiae* for another two centuries; nonetheless, we shall continue to use it as a convention.

If the Roman-Italic culture already manifested a marked tendency for the short *sententiae* and proverbs, both in its oral tradition and in its first literary manifestations, Rome's encounter with Greek culture after the conquest of Tarentum and Magna Graecia, between 275 and 240 BCE, saw the arrival of intellectuals and authors of Greek origin, and the definitive grafting of the Greek gnomic tradition onto Roman ways.

The first to arrive in the city was **Livius Andronicus**, from Tarentum, who translated and re-elaborated Greek works from three of the most famous and important canonical literary genres: *epos*, tragedy, and comedy. With him, Latin literature officially began, conventionally in 240 BCE, the year of the first performance of one of his works. In the very few fragments that have come down to us, thanks to quotations mainly from grammarians, we can grasp the modality of *vertere*, "to translate," through which the Roman world will appropriate the Greek models. In an uncertain fragment of comedy (6 Warmington), the proverbial expression "you are a hare, and you seek meat" (*lepus es, et pulpamentum quaeris*) is used for those who seek in another what they already have. The reworking of a gnomic motif already present in the Greek Sophoclean model (ὡς ταχεῖά τις βροτοῖς / χάρις διαρρεῖ, *Ajax* 1266–1267) is contained in the drama *Aiax mastigophorus* (fragments 16–17 W.): "we praise valor, but this praise dissolves faster than frost in spring" (*praestatur laus virtuti, sed multo ocius verno gelu tabescit*).

The tendency to concentrate a short *sententia* in an incisive and concise verse appears in the second author who arrived in Rome from Campania a few years after Livius, **Gnaeus Naevius**, also an author of tragedies, comedies, and an epic poem on the first Punic war, the *Bellum Poenicum*. In the fifty or so tragic fragments attributed to him, there are two *sententiae*

(fragments 50–51 W.), and only one in the uncertain other verses that have come down to us (fragment Inc. 37 W.):

pati necesse est multa mortalem mala.
Mortals must endure many ills.

This seems to take up, with an accentuation of the phonic expedients that will become usual in the archaic Latin poets, the γνώμη attested in Philemon (fragment 133 K.-A.):

τὸν ζῶντ' ἀνάγκη πόλλ' ἔχειν ἐστὶν κακά.
Mortals must meet with many evils.

In contrast, no γνώμη is found in the epic poem fragments of Livius and of Naevius (containing, in total, about 100 lines); this is perhaps too little to assume a difference with the Homeric *epos* and an influence of the less *sententia*-dependent Hellenistic *epos*.
Greek culture, and, with it, the remarkable critical work that Alexandrian philology had been producing for a century, were, however, penetrating Rome in a decisive and irreversible way. A fundamental witness to this is the most important literary figure who arrived in Rome at the end of this crucial 3rd century BCE: **Quintus Ennius**, from Graeco-Oscan Rudiae. As a tragic, epic, satirical, and philosophical author, and much more, he offers us every modality of the literary use of proverbs and *sententiae* experimented with in the centuries-old Greek tradition.
In the two hundred surviving tragic verses of Ennius, we find more than a dozen *sententiae*; of these, some reproduce the γνῶμαι of their Greek models, already famous in themselves:

tacere opino esse optumum (fragment 54 Goldberg-Manuwald)
I think silence is the best thing.

nimium boni est cui nil malist <cottidie> (fragment 155 G.-M.)
Too great is the good that happens to him to whom nothing bad happens each day.

amicus certus in re incerta cernitur (fragment 166 G.-M.)
A true friend is discerned in a precarious situation.

Others, instead, constitute reworkings of gnomic motifs, intentionally reformulated with a greater and more incisive shape:

male volentes famam tollunt, bene volentes gloriam (fragment 8 G.-M.)
Those with bad intentions raise notoriety, those with good intentions glory.

saeviter suspicionem ferre falsam futtilum est (fragment 114 G.-M.)
It is a sign of useless people to bear a false suspicion fiercely.

Perhaps from one of Ennius' comedies comes an interesting fragment, transmitted by Cicero (*De oratore* 2.221) about the use of *brevia dicta*—precisely the short forms—of witty character, defined as *salsa*, "salacious," by the orator (*Inc.* 148 G.-M.):

Flammam a sapienti facilius ore in ardenti opprimi
quam bona dicta teneat.
It is easier for a wise man to put out a flame within his burning mouth
than to keep words of worth to himself.

Is Ennius (i.e. the *persona loquens* of the fragment) perhaps targeting precisely that fashion of the short form that had spread in Greek culture since the previous century, and was penetrating an increasingly Hellenizing Rome? The speaker, in fact, seems to target those χρεῖαι that had become canonical in the philosophical communication of the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE: Cicero's

brevia dicta (*salsa*). Moreover, even if Ennius' verse should derive from a Greek comic model of the previous century, the poet could not have used it except in a cultural situation similar to it.
More properly proverbial and popular expressions are found, again, in Ennius' production of less solemn style: the *Saturae*,[109] which record, for the first time, the phrase *quod soliti dicere* for the *adýnaton* "to look for a knot on a bulrush"; the *Sotadei*, inspired by the sarcastic poet Sotades;[110] the *Hedyphagetica* or "Gastronomic delicacies";[111] a work entitled *Praecepta*, according to the grammarian Priscianus (I, 532 H.), which probably contained reworkings of Pythagorean teachings, as was also the case in his work *Epicharmus*, inspired by the (legendary) author who, as we have seen, was heavily dependent on *sententiae*. Most likely, it is precisely with Ennius that collections of tragic and, perhaps, comic γνῶμαι began to circulate in Rome, but always with a moral, not a rhetorical aim. It is evident, after all, how Ennius' artistic production is never devoid of a moral intent.
Ennius constitutes a turning point for the *epos* too: it is not by chance that almost every *sententia* traceable in his *Annales* (almost 400 lines have come down to us) concerns the unpredictability of fate, in the context of the endless wars that the Romans were experiencing in those decades. In addition, almost all of them, it seems, appear in direct speeches, imitating the rhetorical connotation that the short *sententia* form had assumed in Greek *epos* and historiography.[112]
Between the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd century BCE, drama was the literary form which developed the most in Rome. Comedy in particular, especially of Greek subject matter (*palliata*), saw some of the most significant authors of these first centuries of literary Latin flourish in the space of fifty years.
Originally from the Umbrian town of Sarsina, conquered a few decades earlier by the Romans, **Plautus** arrived in the city in the same years as Naevius and Ennius. A comic poet and an actor himself, he led an apparently adventurous life and was the author of numerous *palliatae*: 20 of them remain, for a total of about 30,000 lines. Of these, more than a thousand contain proverbs and *sententiae*: it would not be wrong to declare that Plautus himself, like Aristophanes for classical Greece, is the most proverbial theatrical author in Rome. Certainly, in Plautus the imitation of everyday speech plays an important role, but it must be said that all his characters, of every social level, young and old, rich and poor, servants and masters, men and women, speak in proverbs at the same rate. Therefore, his use of proverbs, on closer inspection, is profound and organic, developing even beyond the boundaries of the *sententia* proper to influence the communicational fabric in almost every sentence and every line.[113] The search for effective games onstage, in this sense, finds an indispensable and portentous instrument in the short form, and the ample heritage of proverbs and *sententiae* of both Greek and Roman tradition (Plautus draws on them in equal measure) provides him with extraordinary material.
The presence of a proverb in Plautus is often marked by a signpost, but, as yet, neither the term *proverbium* nor *sententia* is attested. The most employed is *verbum* ("word"), basically corresponding to the Greek ῥῆμα, which, however, had been scarcely used in poetry. The term is often accompanied by the two qualifications of the short form: *vetus* ("old") and *verum* ("true"). Several times, these two signposts also appear independently to introduce proverbial expressions: *vetus est* ... ("it is an old saying that …"), *verum est* ... or *verum hoc* ... ("it is true that …"), next to another characterization, that of "popular": *auditavi saepe hoc volgo dicier* ("I have often heard people saying that ...," *Stichus* 167), *aiunt* ("they say," *Mercator* 296). Some occurrences of *sapientia est* ..., followed by a *sententia* are very remarkable. The form *scio/scin/scitis* ("I/you

[109] Fragment 18 G.-M.
[110] In fragment 4 G.-M. we find the well-known Greek proverb "a Cypriot ox" (*bos Cyprius*, see Diogenianus 3.49).
[111] Fragment 1.7 G.-M., where the proverbial expression "the brain of Zeus" (*Iovis cerebrum*) is used (see Zenobius 3.41).
[112] Fragments 96, 233, 258, 312 G.-M.
[113] A real "sententious trend of Plautus' sentences," as it has been appropriately defined by Paponi 2010. In this sense, sometimes it is not easy to decide whether an impersonal and general utterance is a traditional *sententia* or a Plautine creation. Recent studies on single aspects are Filoche 2011 and Delignon 2011.

know that") + proverb is also significant: it recalls the stylistic features present in the Attic oratory of the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, and could perhaps refer to an imitation of oratorical schemes. Other times, the *sententia* is linked to the previous context through *nam*, similar to what happens with γάρ in many Menandrian *sententiae*. The link with the context is a very marked feature of Plautus' use of proverbs: the utterance is, in most cases, inserted within a longer line, or it is an amplification of a previous line, or even of a single word from which it takes its cue. Its initial or concluding position in a monologue is, of course, well attested. The proverbial expression, in turn, often gives rise to developments of various kinds: an explanation, a contingent or general comment, another proverb line, and again, in a more refined way, a negation, an allusion, or a pun. The swirling development of Plautus' proverbiality could be documented by dozens and dozens of passages. See, for example, in the *Stichus*, the exchange between Antiphon and his daughters, to whom the father, almost *ad magistras* (103), asks for advice on which woman he should remarry (108–125). Pamphila, in particular, the more judicious one, answers each of her father's questions with a proverb or a *sententia*:

ANT. Pol ego uxorem quaero, postquam vostra mater mortuast.
SOR. Facile invenies et peiorem et peius moratam, pater,
quam illa fuit: meliorem neque tu reperies neque sol videt.
ANT. At ego ex te exquaero atque ex istac tua sorore. SOR. Edepol pater,
scio ut oportet esse: si sint—ita ut ego aequom censeo.
ANT. Volo scire ergo, ut aequom censes. S. Vt, per urbem quom ambulent,
omnibus os opturent, ne quis merito male dicat sibi.
ANT. Dic vicissim nunciam tu. PAN. Quid vis tibi dicam, pater?
ANT. Vbi facillime spectatur mulier, quae ingenio est bono?
PAN. Quoi male faciundi est potestas, quae ne id faciat temperat.
ANT. Hau male istuc. age tu altera, utra sit condicio pensior,
virginemne an viduam habere? SOR. Quanta mea sapientiast,
ex malis multis malum quod minimumst, id minimest malum.
ANT. Qui potest mulier vitare vitiis? SOR. Vt cottidie
pridie caveat ne faciat quod pigeat postridie.
ANT. Quae tibi mulier videtur multo sapientissuma?
PAN. Quae tamen, cum res secundae sunt, se poterit noscere,
et illa quae aequo animo patietur sibi esse peius quam fuit.

ANT. By Pollux! Ever since your mother died, I've been looking for a wife.
PAN. Father, you'll easily find one who is worse and has a worse character than her; one better than her you will not find, nor can the sun see one.
ANT. But I'm asking you and your sister there.
PAN. By Pollux, father! I know what they ought to be like, if they are to be such as I think right.
ANT. I want to know then how you believe they ought to be.
PAN. When they're walking through town, they should shut everyone's mouth, so that no one may slander them with good reason.
ANT. Now you must speak in turn.
PAN. What do you want me to tell you, father?
ANT. How is a woman most easily distinguished, who is good-natured?
PAN. If a woman has the opportunity to act badly and refrains from acting so.
ANT. Not bad, that! Come on, you other one, which choice is preferable, to have a virgin or a widow?
PAN. As far as my knowledge extends, of many evils, that which is the least evil is the least an evil.
ANT. How can a woman avoid faults?
PAN. By being careful, day by day, not to do anything the day before that she would regret the next day.
ANT. What woman seems by far the wisest to you?

PAN. The one, when everything is prosper, will still be able to know herself, and the one who will endure it calmly when she's in a worse situation than she was.

The proverb is often used to launch a scene, with a lightning punchline which attracts the curiosity of the spectator; other times, it constitutes a lapidary line destined to conclude a contradiction. The range of modalities and functions in which Plautus employs proverbs and *sententiae* is as complete and kaleidoscopic as the variety of contents and protagonists of Plautus' world of proverbs: animals, everyday objects, peoples and countries, heroes and divinities, characters unknown to us, and apotropaic gestures. Between the 3rd and 2nd century BCE, Plautus, alongside Ennius, powerfully opened the road of *sententiae* to *Romanae litterae*.
But while Ennius and Plautus were by now increasingly drawing the motifs of both the proverb and, above all, the *sententia*[114] from the heritage and texts of Greek culture, there were those who, in the same decades, opposed Hellenization in every way. **Marcus Porcius Cato** from Tusculum, consul in 195 and censor in 184 BCE, perpetually linked his name to this last magistracy, going down in history as the Censor *par excellence*. Alongside his conservative political activity, Cato's literary production also aimed to enhance the Roman-Italic traditions (as in his lost historical work *Origines*), and to attribute to the *pater familias* the exclusive task of children's education (as in the equally lost *Libri ad Marcum filium*, which seem to have been a sort of encyclopedia of family precepts). The defense of the *mos maiorum* also involved the defense of the traditional economic system, based on the economy of the *villa rustica*, the self-sufficient agricultural farm of the medium-large Roman and Italic landowners, which was increasingly being challenged and endangered by the new commercial economy of the *equites* and the emerging classes, to which many patrician *familiae* were also converting. Therefore, Cato wrote his *De agri cultura*, the first Latin work in prose to have come down to us in its entirety.
The treatise—which initiated a tradition of agronomic texts that was very popular in Rome and destined to become very successful in the Middle Ages and modern times—is a repertory of advice on how to manage one's *villa rustica*, ranging from breeding to specialized crops (wine and oil), from the construction of agricultural equipment (wine press and oil mill) to treatises on buying and selling, from cooking to folkloric medicinal and apotropaic *remedia.* From the first to the last chapter, numerous agricultural proverbs and *sententiae*, organically inserted into the fabric of Cato's incisive and laconic prose, permeate the treatise. It would suffice to read a few lines of the *liber*'s first chapter to understand the pervasiveness of Cato's heritage of proverbs (1.4–6):

Siet in his agris qui non saepe dominum mutant: qui in his agris praedia vendiderint, eos pigeat vendidisse. Uti bene aedificatum siet. Caveto alienam disciplinam temere contemnas. De domino bono bonoque aedificatore melius emetur. Ad villam cum venies, videto vasa torcula et dolia multane sient: ubi non erunt, scito pro ratione fructum esse. Instrumenti ne magni siet, loco bono siet. Videto quam minimi instrumenti sumptuosusque ager ne siet. Scito idem agrum quod hominem, quamvis quaestuosus siet, si sumptuosus erit, relinqui non multum.

Your farm should lie among those lands which do not often change owners; those who have sold their farms in these lands should be sorry to have done so. It should be well furnished with buildings. Be careful not to rashly despise the methods of management adopted by others. It will be better to buy from an owner who is a good farmer and a good builder. When you reach the *villa*, observe whether there are numerous oil presses and wine vats; if there are not, know that the amount of the yield is in proportion. The equipment should not abound, but should be well located. See that there be as little equipment as possible, and that the land be not expensive. Know that a farm is like a man—however great the profit, if it is expensive, not much remains.

Often setting up his advice with signposts such as *caveto*, *scito*, *vide*, and others, Cato handed down to us countless proverbs of an ergological, calendrical, and atmospheric nature: in short, the

[114] In the comic poet, we find, among others, proverbs featuring figures from classical Athens or local Greek history, which probably might have puzzled a large part of the Roman public.

enormous wisdom heritage of Roman agricultural and pastoral culture. In this way, the Censor seems to set up—we cannot say how intentionally—a Roman-Italic proverb tradition in opposition to Greek γνῶμαι.[115] Who knows what other *dicta* we might have read in the numerous orations which Cato, deemed the best orator of his time by Cicero (*De oratore* 1.171; *Brutus* 68-69, composed and published throughout his long life, which have only come down to us in fragments? Even from these fragments, however, we can still get an idea of what must have been the profound and structural nature of the *sententiae* in Cato's prose, which preserved the modality of juxtaposed, assonant, and phonetically rhythmic *cola* (sometimes with a hypothetical premise, similar in many ways to the legal prose of the *XII Tables*, and perhaps even dating back to the first oral forms of Indo-European public and religious precepts).[116] Let us consider some of his *sententiae* (which later became very famous), such as:

Rem tene, verba sequentur (*Ad filium* 15)
Know the content, the words will follow.

Χαλεπὸν πρὸς γαστέρα λέγειν ὦτα οὐκ ἔχουσαν. (Plutarch *Cato* 8.1)
It is a hard task to talk to the belly, since it has no ears.

Aliud est properare, aliud festinare. Qui unumquodque mature transigit, is properat; qui multa simul incipit neque perficit, is festinat. (Aulus Gellius 14.15.2)
It is one thing to hasten, another to hurry. He who finishes some one thing in good season, hastens; he who begins many things at the same time but does not finish them, hurries.

Saepe audivi inter os atque offam multa intervenire posse. (Aulus Gellius 13.18.1)
I have often heard it said that many things may happen between the mouth and the morsel.

Cato's *sententiae* will often be remembered by later authors (not only by agronomists) as famous precepts (*illud Catonis*) and even as *oracula*: this bears witness to the Censor's cultural incisiveness. This incisiveness and fame will contribute to the attribution to Cato of a *corpus* of *sententiae dicta*, circulating perhaps already in the last century of the *res publica*. We owe this information to Cicero (*De officiis* 1.104), who, while discussing Socratic writings, cursorily states that "they are full of many witty sayings, such as those that were collected by Cato, when he was old, which they call *apophthegmata*" (*multa ... facete dicta, ut ea quae a sene Catone conlecta sunt, quae vocant apopthegmata*).[117] Probably assuming a canonical form between the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE, the *Disticha Catonis* were destined to a great success in the Latin Middle Ages.
The Hellenic cultural penetration into Rome, despite Cato, was by then unstoppable. The main witnesses to this are the other authors of the time, almost all pertaining to the theatrical scene. Among the fragmentary authors, both comic and tragic, the one most dependent on *sententiae* is undoubtedly **Caecilius Statius**. Of Insubrian origins, he arrived in Rome perhaps as a slave and was freed by the *gens* Caecilia. He devoted himself to the production of *palliatae* under the guidance of the impresario Ambivius Turpio. The Hellenizing character of his *sententiae* clearly emerges from his fragments, in both form and content. These *sententiae* recall their Greek models (Menander, Philemon, Apollodorus of Carystus): they are never defined as such nor introduced by signposts, they never concern animals or everyday objects; they are always centered on moral concepts and almost always concentrated in a single verse, like Menander's monostichs. See, for instance:

Audibis male, si male dicis mihi (24 Ribbeck[3])

[115] Yet, according to Plutarch *Cato* 8.2, the Censor is said to have borrowed from Themistocles one of his famous sayings: πάντες' […] 'ἄνθρωποι τῶν γυναικῶν ἄρχουσιν, ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντων ἀνθρώπων, ἡμῶν δ' αἱ γυναῖκες "all other men rule their wives; we rule all other men, and our wives rule us."
[116] See Calboli 2004:21–23.
[117] Cicero's testimony is not unanimously accepted with reference to the so-called *Disticha Catonis*, handed down to us by manuscript tradition. See Calboli 2004:17-18; and Balbo 2021:710–727, 1714–1738.

You will hear bad things about you, if you say bad things about me.

Opulento famam facile occultat factio (168 Ribbeck[3])
The faction of the rich conceals their ill fame.

Diu vivendo multa quae non volt videt (171 Ribbeck[3])
By living long, one sees much he does not wish to see.

Vivas ut possis, quando non quis ut velis (177 Ribbeck[3])
Live as you may, since you can't as you would like.

Homo homini deus, si suum officium sciat (264 Ribbeck[3])
A man is a god to man, if he knows his duty.

In Caecilius, as is deducible from many fragments, there is no lack of allusions to Greek *sententiae* and proverbs which could perhaps be understood mainly by cultured and Hellenized spectators[118]—a further sign of the transformation that comedy was undergoing in those decades, and which would find its climax with another cultural immigrant of the time, a dramatist from Carthage: Terence. Having arrived in Rome as a very young man in the retinue of the senator Terence Lucanus, from whom he would be freed and receive his name, **Publius Terentius Afer** came into contact with the Hellenized Scipios, who, in those years, were the protagonists of cultural developments in Rome. Scipio Aemilianus, Gaius Laelius, and other intellectuals welcomed the young man, who, between 166 and 160 BCE, began to stage *palliatae* of great cultural depth, though not always appreciated by the public. Six of them remain intact, after the premature death of the poet (not even 30 years old) during a trip to Greece, perhaps in search of new comic texts.
In the approximately 8,000 lines that we have from Terence, there are more than 230 proverbs, *sententiae*, and similar utterances.[119] As in Plautus, in his texts, too, we can notice a typical and generalized trend, a tendency to construct the senarius almost always in a closed and incisive way, just like a *sententia*. In the Hellenizing Terence, however, there are few properly popular proverbs starring animals and objects, whereas moral and general *sententiae* abound, featuring themes dear to the cultural reflection of the time: friendship and affection, wealth and poverty, happiness and fate, women, the condition of slaves, the relationship between fathers and sons, justice and injustice, anger and backbiting, prudence, rationality, hope, deception, and, in general, man's behavior. Servants and masters, young and old, men and women: in Terence, as in Plautus, they all speak with proverbs.
As in Menander (and, presumably, in the comedians of the Νέα), indications or signposts introducing proverbs and *sententiae* are rare. There are significant expressions such as *vetus verbum* ("old saying," *Adelphoe* 804), *id ... utile* ("this is useful," *Andria* 60), *verum illud verbumst* ("it is true what they say," *Andria* 426; *Eunuchus* 732), *verum illuc… dicunt* ("it is true what they say," *Heauton timorumenos* 795, *Adelphoe* 28), *hoc scitumst* ("it is known," *Heauton timorumenos* 209), *aiunt* ("they say," *Phormio* 419; 506, 768; *Heauton timorumenos* 719, *Andria* 804), *quod dici solet* ("as they say," *Heauton timorumenos* 520). The insistence on *verba dicendi*, moreover, seems to retrace very closely the widespread Menandrian signpostings τὸ λεγόμενον and τὸ τοῦ λόγου. Again, the terms *proverbium* and *sententia* are rare: as in Plautus, the somewhat technical nuance of *verbum* appears. Precisely in one of the *loci* where *verbum* is used (*Andria* 426), the grammarian **Donatus**, author of a commentary on Terence that we can still read, notes: *id est proverbium et sententia*, "that is at the same time a *proverbium* and a *sententia*" to underline its meaningful value. Then, in the margins, the grammarian writes on the use of *aiunt* in *Phormio* 419 (the saying is: *actum ne agas*, "do not go back on what has already been done"): "*aiunt*" *dicimus, cum proverbium significamus*, "we say 'they say' when we want to

[118] See the full study in Cipriani 2010:117–159. For allusions to proverbs and language games, see *Com.* 25, 60, 61, 68–69, 163 Ribbeck[3], and the *Appendix* section.
[119] For an extensive overview see Giovini 2010; Bureau 2011.

indicate a proverb"; and in his *Ars grammatica*, Donatus states (3.6): *paroemia est accomodatum rebus temporibusque proverbium*, "the *paremia* is a proverb adapted to situations and times." Donatus is, for us, a very important witness to ascertain the nature of the proverb of many lines in Terence (*hoc proverbiale*, *proverbium*, *sententia*, as well as παροιμία are the most frequently used definitions), and an extraordinary source of further quotations of proverbs from fragmentary authors.[120] Terence reveals all his conscious art with proverbs when he makes the protagonist of his *Heauton timorumenos* ("the punisher of himself") say (420–422):

Aut ego profecto ingenio egregio ad miserias
natus sum aut illud falsumst quod volgo audio
dici, diem adimere aegritudinem hominibus.

Either I've been born with a marked predisposition to unhappiness
or it is false what I hear people say,
that time heals men's pain.

The proverb motif, attested (not by chance) in Diphilus, Philippides, and Menander, is ironically denied by the protagonist (*falsum*), precisely by explicating its proverbial nature (*quod volgo audio dici*).
Terence's *sententiae*, like Menander's, will be destined to an enormous fate, even if they will not constitute an autonomous *corpus*. From Cicero to the Fathers of the Church, Terence will be among the most frequently quoted authors, precisely for his *sententiae*, which, via the Christians, will often pass into the Middle Ages and the European Renaissance. In this way, many of his formulations will become common heritage of modern cultures, such as:

obsequium amicos, veritas odium parit (*Andria* 68)
Obsequiousness brings you friends, the truth brings you hatred.

Amantium irae amoris intergratiost (*Andria* 555)
Lovers' quarrels are love's renewal.

Ius summum saepe summast malitia (*Heauton timorumenos* 796)
The greatest law is often the greatest wrong.

The fact that the high rate of *sententiae* was a fundamental characteristic of Roman theatre is also testified to by the numerous other comedies and tragedies of the 2nd century BCE, of which we can only read fragments. One of the tragic authors most dependent on *sententiae* is **Lucius Accius**, a native of Pesaro, who arrived in Rome shortly after the middle of the century, and author of over 40 dramas. In the 700 or so fragments attributed to him, we find about 20 *sententiae*. Almost all of them are monostichs, moral and general, rich in phonic and rhetorical devices, not infrequently introduced by *nam*, often linked to Euripidean and Sophoclean models. They focus on the themes of fortune and virtue, of the dialectic between inner nobility and social position, of power and how it is achieved and exercised—themes which must have been extremely topical in the republican *civitas*, torn by the political struggles of the second half of the 2nd century BCE.[121]
What has gone down in history as the "Scipionic Circle" significantly contributed to the definitive transformation of Roman culture in a Hellenizing sense. Besides Ennius (who had written the encomiastic poem *Scipio*) and Terence, two other important personalities of the time gravitated to the orbit of the Scipios. **Gaius Lucilius,** from Sessa Aurunca, a noble and wealthy citizen, dedicated his entire life to literary *otium*, becoming a sort of archetype of one of the most autochthonous genres of Rome, the *satura*. Born from the literary transformation of originally popular and improvised performances, the *satura* was perceived by the Romans as a national

[120] See Hallik 2007:100–101.
[121] On Accius' *sententiae* see Barabino 1992 and Scafoglio 2010.

genre and was defined as *tota nostra*, as Quintilian underlined (*Institutiones* 10.1.93). Yet, already in Lucilius, who documented its (literary) beginnings, the Greek influences, both formal and content-related, are quite evident. Among these, it must be said, is the use of *sententiae*.[122] Proverbs and *sententiae*, in the thousands of Lucilian lines that have come down to us, are not only rare, but also reveal all their strategically rhetorical literary connotation. Indeed, from a genre of popular origin, one might have expected a quantitatively relevant and qualitatively valuable body of proverbs. Instead, except for a few idioms, there are only about ten proverbial expressions to be found in Lucilius' satires. Among these, several *sententiae* became famous for being used by authors canonized as "classics" (Vergil, Cicero, and others), such as *non omnia possumus omnes*, "we cannot all do everything" (5.36 Marx), on which Macrobius commented (*Saturnalia* 6.1.35) *vice proverbiorum in omnium ore funguntur* "in the list of proverbs that are on everyone's lips"; *summa omnia fecerim ima*, "I could make of everything nothing" (27.12 M.) or *stulte saltatum te inter venisse cinaedos*, "like a fool you went among the low debauchees to dance" (1.26 M.). Only a few others seem to draw on proverb material from the oral tradition, such as *hoc aliud longe est, inquit, qui cepe serebat*, "'this is quite another thing,' said the man who was planting onions" (16.8 M.), the first Wellerism of Latin literature; *nodum in scirpo insanu facessere vulgus*, "foolish people make a knot in a bulrush" (1.36 M.), also already used by Ennius; *mordicus petere aurum e caeno expediat, ec flamma cibum*, "it may be worthwhile to pick out with the teeth gold from flame, food from filth" (26.21 M.), identified as *antiquum verbum* by the grammarian Donatus, who comments on it in line 490 of Terence's *Eunuch* (the antecedence of one or the other cannot be ascertained). Two expressions seem to derive from fables reminiscent of Aesop: *exurienti leoni ex ore exculpere praedam*, "to pull the prey from the lion's open mouth" (7.17 M.) and *ut si litteras doceas lutum*, "so that you might teach mud how to read and write" (28.16).

The impression, in sum, is that—despite what Horace will affirm more than a century later—Lucilius' satire is understood more as a linguistic and expressive *pastiche*, than as a desire to give literary dignity to the popular Roman-Italic world, perhaps under the banner of the ever more accentuated Hellenizing elegance promoted by the Scipios, which included the proverbial material.

In 168 BCE, **Polybius** was officially expatriated to Rome as a hostage to guarantee peace with the Achaean League. He had held important political positions in Megalopolis, then became a tutor and a friend of Scipio Aemilianus and entered the orbit of the Scipios. During his more than thirty years in Rome, Polybius wrote 40 books of *Histories*, which covered the whole period of the epochal clashes between Rome and Carthage, from 264 to 146 BCE. Only the first five have come down to us, together with fragments. His "pragmatic history," as Polybius defines it (1.2.8), does not seek pathetic effects or artistic elaborations: it must serve, above all, the politician and man in general. In this respect, Polybius might seem to hark back to the model offered by Thucydides. Nonetheless, he did not borrow the use of *sententiae* in speeches from the Athenian historian at all: these were a canonical tradition of historiography, but, in Polybius, they are very rare, meager, and almost non-existent in speeches. *Sententiae* and actual παροιμίαι abound, however, in completely different sections of the work. Polybius, in fact, is the ancient historian who, more than any other, wrote the narrative in the first person, commenting, reflecting, underlining significant events—in essence, educating the reader. It is here, in reflections as the author, that Polybius deploys a remarkable series of proverbs and *sententiae*, sometimes in their canonized short forms, sometimes reworked. See, for example, his reflection on the affairs of Marcus Atilius Regulus in Africa, with its significant distinction between gnomic motifs and authorial statements (1.35.2–6):

καὶ γὰρ τὸ διαπιστεῖν τῇ τύχῃ, καὶ μάλιστα κατὰ τὰς εὐπραγίας, ἐναργέστατον ἐφάνη πᾶσιν τότε διὰ τῶν Μάρκου συμπτωμάτων—ὁ γὰρ μικῷ πρότερον οὐ διδοὺς ἔλεον οὐδὲ συγγνώμην τοῖς πταίουσιν παρὰ πόδας αὐτὸς ἤγετο δεησόμενος τούτων περὶ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ σωτηρίας. καὶ μὴν τὸ παρ' Εὐριπίδῃ πάλαι καλῶς εἰρῆσθαι δοκοῦν ὡς ἓν σοφὸν βούλευμα τὰς πολλὰς χεῖρας νικᾷ τότε

[122] There is no specific study on Lucilius' proverbial expressions: the investigation stopped at Otto's repertory, which also presents several questionable inclusions.

δι' αὐτῶν τῶν ἔργων ἔλαβε τὴν πίστιν. [...] ἐγὼ δὲ τούτων ἐπεμνήσθην χάριν τῆς τῶν ἐντυγχανόντων τοῖς ὑπομνήμασι διορθώσεως.

For the precept to distrust Fortune, and especially when we are enjoying success, was most vividly clear to all by Regulus' misfortunes on this occasion. One who a short time before had refused all pity or mercy on those in distress was now, almost immediately afterwards, taken prisoner to implore pity and mercy for his own salvation. And again Euripides' saying—so long recognized as well said, that "one wise decision conquers many hands"—was then proved true by the actual events. [...] I mention this for the improvement of the readers of this history.

There are numerous first-person incursions of the author into events to comment on their meaning in the light of a *sententia*, introduced by periphrases such as "then it was clear that …," "it proved true that ...," or linked by οὕτως and especially γάρ. Equally common are the παροιμίαι: there are several dozen of them, about twenty of which are made explicit by formulas such as κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν, κατὰ τὴν κοινὴν παροιμίαν, ὅμως ἐν ταῖς παροιμίαις, ὡς ἡ παροιμία φησί.[123] These are general expressions, such as "it is possible for man to live well, not to live well for a long time" (23.12.4) or "fools think foolish things" (38.16.11), but, above all, proverbs of popular origin, evidently very widespread, such as "the natives know the winds" (9.25.3), "let the risk be for the Carian" (10.32.11), "the pacts of Locri" (12.12a), or "I took the wolf by the ears" (30.4.7). Whilst the (fragmentary) historians of the previous century, **Ephorus**, **Theopompus**, and **Philochorus**—predecessors who were often criticized by Polybius—cited anecdotal and historical proverbs exclusively for aetiological purposes,[124] it is clear that Polybius uses the *sententiae* material—and, indeed, does not disdain the proverbial—to give a universal, moral (in the Herodotean sense), and pragmatic value to his historiography. By contrast, he resorts to other devices for characterization of the historical protagonists: Aemilius Paulus, Scipio Africanus, Hannibal, and Scipio Aemilianus really seem to almost scorn *sententiae* and proverbs in the speeches they deliver.

In fact, although it was extremely rich in politicians who were, at the same time, great orators, the panorama of the *sententiae* and proverbs that emerges in the fragmentary authors of public and private orations between the end of the 3rd and the middle of the 1st century BCE is very poor. We know of numerous funeral *laudationes* for relatives publicly pronounced in the Forum by well-known figures, such as **Quintus Fabius Maximus** or **Scipio Africanus**, **Quintus Caecilius Metellus** or **Lucius Aemilius Paulus Macedonicus**, and many others.[125] We know the names, titles of some famous speeches and trials, and some portions of the texts of numerous orators (and sometimes politicians) of the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE, especially thanks to the fascinating and valuable picture drawn by Cicero in the *Brutus* (45 BCE): **Marcus Cornelius Cethegus**, quoted by Ennius and defined as the "quintessence of persuasiveness" (*suadae medulla*); **Gaius Sulpicius Gallus**, expert in Greek literature; **Servius Galba**, among the first to have had a technical approach to oratory; **Gaius Laelius Minor**; **Marcus Aemilius Lepidus Porcina**; **Tiberius** and **Gaius Gracchus**; **Marcus Aemilius Scaurus** and **Publius Rutilius**; **Quintus Lutatius Catulus**, able to speak in a pure Latin and elegant Greek; the two undisputed princes of

[123] From a terminological point of view, there is a very interesting passage (31.13.11–13) in which Polybius recalls when he, while ill, sent a secret message to Demetrius, through a tablet: τὸ δὲ πιττάκιον περιεῖχε τὰς γνώμας ταύτας· "ὁ δρῶν τὰ τοῦ μέλλοντος οἴχεται φέρων." / "ἴσον φέρει νύξ, τοῖς δὲ τολμῶσιν πλέον." / "τόλμα τι, κινδύνευε, πρᾶττ', ἀποτύγχανε, / ἐπίτυχε, πάντα μᾶλλον ἢ σαυτὸν προοῦ." / "νᾶφε καὶ μέμνασ' ἀπιστεῖν—ἄρθρα ταῦτα τᾶν φρενῶν." These are four quotations (a-c: iambic trimeters; d: trochaic tetrameter) that, according to Walbank III, on this passage, Polybius may have taken from a gnomic anthology: trimeter b is a verse from Euripides' *Phoenissae* (726); the tetrameter is quoted in 18.40.4 as being attributed to Epicharmus. The passage is relevant precisely because it is Polybius himself who tells of himself, and who defines a series of verses of *sententiae* as γνῶμαι.

[124] This, at least, is what appears from the numerous fragments: for Ephorus: 70 F 27, 37, 50, 63, 119, 183; for Theopompus: 115 F 43, 110, 235; for Philochorus: 328 F 44, 78, 113 Jacoby.

[125] Cicero, in his *De oratore* (2.44), lingers on these *laudationes*, recalling that of Quintus Lutatius Catulus for his (adoptive) mother Popilia—a historical *laudatio*, being the first one recited for a woman. See also *Brutus* 61–62.

the forum, at the turn of the century, chosen by Cicero as the protagonists of his *De oratore*, **Marcus Antonius** and **Lucius Licinius Crassus**; **Quintus Hortensius Hortalus**, protagonist of the post-Sullan decade. In almost none of their fragments, however, do we read *sententiae*, although the selection made mainly by grammarians may have influenced our information. **Metellus Numidianus,** as a censor (131 BCE), exclaimed about women (Gellius 1.6): *natura tradidit ut nec cum illis satis commode, nec sine illis ullo modo vivi posset*, "nature has ordained that we can neither live very comfortably with them nor at all without them." **Scipio Aemilianus**, against one of his most stubborn opponents, a certain Tiberius Claudius Asellus (*Asellus* means "little ass" in Latin), plays with the proverb εἰ μὴ δύναιο βοῦν, ἔλαυνε ὄνον, "if you cannot drive an ox, drive an ass" (attested in the Greek paremiographers, Zenobius 3.54), by quoting only the beginning (*agas asellum ...*) and perhaps directly in Greek, if Cicero, our witness, translated the expression. It is precisely from Cicero's testimony, especially in his *Brutus* and *De oratore*, that a very scanty picture emerges regarding the use of *sententiae* in oratory. According to the orator, his predecessors prefer *argutiae* and *exempla*, that is "jokes"/" "puns," and "similes," often sarcastic, as when Cato defines Marcus Fulvius Nobilior, his undecided opponent, as *Mobiliorem*, or when Gaius Titius, to ridicule the opulence of the *pontifices*, says that their dinner is a *Porcus Troianus*, because it is filled with every delicacy, like the Trojan horse filled with Greek heroes.[126]

Alongside (and following) Polybius, historiography was also undergoing an intense development in Rome. However, one would look in vain for traces of proverbs or even *sententiae* in the Latin historians born in the 2nd century BCE (**Caelius Antipater**, **Sempronius Asellio**, **Cornelius Sisenna**, and **Claudius Quadrigarius**, all fragmentary) and in the authors of memoirs, autobiographies, and monographs of a historical nature (**Lutatius Catulus** and **Lucius Cornelius Sulla**). And yet, in these historians, other elements of folkloric culture—such as dreams, omens, apotropaic events—are frequently present. Evidently—though this is merely a hypothesis—the newborn Roman historiography in Latin was still very much linked to the annalistic tradition: the official reports that the pontiffs drew up, year by year, from ancient times. Rhetoric was already being introduced in this genre too, which will become, according to Cicero's well-known definition, *opus maxime oratorium*. Nevertheless, the impression of the paremiologist, if our data are not distorted by the selection of fragments, is that these authors did not yet identify in proverbs and *sententiae* an effective tool of artistic characterization (as instead happened with phonic games and other rhetorical devices), nor did they find a suitable space for moralizing reflections in which they could have used elements of *sententiae* (as was the case in Polybius).[127] This tendency, I believe, seems to be confirmed by the only work that can be traced back to this more properly Roman annalistic tradition (even though it is dated about 50 years later) that we can read in full: that of **Gaius Julius Caesar**.

In his *Commentarii de bello Gallico* and *de bello civili,* written in the 50s and 40s of the 1st century BCE, there seems to be no room for *sententiae* linked to a comment of the author—who, nonetheless, narrates the events in the third person and frequently enters the narrative—let alone

[126] In Cicero's opinion (*Brutus* 167), "the orations of Titius are so rich in *argutiae*, *exempla*, and *urbanitas,* that they would seem almost to have been written by an Attic pen."

[127] Very significant, in this sense, is the passage that Cicero (through the mouth of the orator Marcus Antonius) devotes to Greek and Latin historiography in the *De oratore* (2.51-55): Antonius states that, compared to the Greeks, Latin historiographers reveal a reduced formal elaboration. "But nevertheless, the Greeks themselves also used to write, in the beginning, just like our Cato, Pictor, and Piso. For history began as a mere compilation of annals, (...) and they regarded conciseness (*brevitas*) as the historian's single merit. (...) No wonder, then, if this subject has never yet been brilliantly treated in our language [the dialogue takes place in September 91 BCE]. For not one of our own folk seeks after eloquence if not to shine in the forum and in the trials." The style of the historiographer, moreover, according to Antonius, must avoid "alike the rough speech we use in court and the advocate's stinging *sententiae*" (*sine hac iudiciali asperitate et sine sententiarum forensibus aculeis*, 2.64). Even in the *Brutus* (45 BCE), therefore, once Caesar and, especially Sallust (!) had already been published, Cicero will pronounce heavy words about Sisenna: "His ability can best be seen from his history, which while surpassing all its predecessors, yet reveals how far from perfection this type of writing is with us, and how inadequately as yet it has been cultivated in Latin letters" (228).

for real proverbs. Only one is counted in the account of the Gaul campaigns: *fere libenter homines id quod volunt credunt*, "men readily believe what they wish" (3.18.6), introduced as an explanation (*quod*) of the soldiers' behavior; a few more in his *De bello civili*, again as an explanation or a justification of *milites* or generals (1.21; 2.8; 2.27, which repeats *De bello Gallico* 3.18; 3.38). A resounding exception appears to be Curio's speech in the middle of book 2: Caesar, who rarely inserts speeches in his *Commentarii*, allows here, in the oratory of his faithful (but incautious) general, a very high rate of *sententiae*. During the council of war in Africa, Curio, in order to decide whether to attack the Pompeians led by Cato and perched in Utica, elaborates in a few lines at least a dozen reasons of *sententiae*, mainly related to the valor shown in one's actions, to fortune, and to trust; almost all of them are signposted by rhetorical questions such as "is it not true that ...?" (*nonne* ...?, e.g. *De bello civile* 2.32). In none of Caesar's speeches could one find any direct or indirect discourse of such kind. Did Caesar, an orator himself, perhaps want to characterize Curio in a particular way? Or are *sententiae* by now penetrating Latin historiography too (we are in 45 BCE)?

This latter possibility is apparently suggested by what emerges from the historical works of another protagonist of the time, **Gaius Sallustius Crispus**, written in the years immediately following Caesar's death. In his *Bellum Iugurthinum* and *De Catilinae coniuratione*, we see Sallust deploying a powerful repertoire of *sententiae*, often reworked: either in the manner of Polybius (in the author's numerous first-person utterances, commenting on events or characteristics of the protagonists), or recalling Herodotus and Thucydides. However, he does so in a new way, compared to what has come down to us of earlier Latin historiography: in the speeches that enrich the narrative, which stand out all the more because they are not particularly numerous. It must have been so in Sallust's lost *Historiae* too, judging from the extracts that have come down to us, almost all of which are monologues. There are dozens of *sententiae* in the speeches of Gaius Memmius (*Bellum Jugurthinum* 35) and Marius (*Bellum Jugurthinum* 84), Catiline (*De coniuratione Catilinae* 20 and 58) and Cato the Younger (*De coniuratione Catilinae* 52), as well as—indeed especially—of Julius Caesar (*De coniuratione Catilinae* 51): do they give us an idea of how the oratory of that last century of the *res publica* was developing? Fortune, the uncertainties of a war, the differences between rich and poor, and between powerful and submissive are the main themes of their *sententiae*.

Less reworked, and therefore more incisive, are the *sententiae* that Sallust reserves for himself, as the author and the direct witness of the events. These are the ones that strike the reader the most and that are destined to a great fortune, up to the Middle Ages and beyond:

Dux atque imperator vitae mortalium animus est (*Bell. Iugurthinum* 1)
The leader and commander of mortals' life is the mind.

Suam quisque culpam auctores ad negotia referent (*Bell. Iugurthinum* 1)
Each, though they brought it on themselves, shifts the blame onto the events.

Corporis et fortunae bonorum, ut initium, sic finis est (*Bell. Iugurthinum* 2)
Positive qualities of the body and of fortune have an end as well as a beginning.

Omnia orta occidunt et aucta senescunt (*Bell. Iugurthinum* 2)
Everything that rises falls, and everything that increases ages away.

Animi imperio, corporis servitio magis utimur (*Con. Catilinae* 1)
We use the mind to rule, the body rather to serve.

Rectius videtur ingeni quam virium opibus gloriam quaerere (*Con. Catilinae* 1)
It seems to me more appropriate to seek renown with the resources of intellect than of physical strength.

In magna copia rerum aliud alii natura iter ostendit (*Con. Catilinae* 2)
Amid a great abundance of opportunities, nature points out different paths to different people.

The accumulation of *sententiae*, juxtaposed and implicitly linked, is sometimes insistent and almost dominant, particularly in the proems of Sallust's two monographs. His use of *sententiae* is, in many ways, similar to Cato's and it will influence, I believe, later historiography, from the end of the century onwards. With Sallust, who adopted the lesson of Polybius, moralism was irreversibly linked to historiography and found, in the gnomic tradition, an indispensable and effective instrument for its own genre's style.

While Polybius and, with him, several other Greek intellectuals were one after another entering Rome's area of influence, the cultural center of the Hellenized Mediterranean, between the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE, was still Alexandria. Here, the students of Zenodotus and Callimachus had given birth to a powerful line of studies, founding what would become a real discipline: textual criticism. Among the greatest representatives of Alexandrian scholarship is **Aristophanes of Byzantium,** who worked until 180 BCE as chief librarian. Editor of Homer, Hesiod, the lyric poets, comedians, and tragedians, he gave impetus to lexicographical studies, a real "pet project" of his. It is probably in this context that the 6 books of Παροιμίαι were born—a work that will be fundamental for the development of later paremiography, judging by our evidence.[128] Aristophanes collected in two books the metrical παροιμίαι; in four books, the unmetrical ones. His work must have been more akin to a list than to a commentary: in most of the quotations about his work, in fact, he is featured not for having explained, but for having recorded (the verb is ἀναγράφει, which appears very often) a proverb, or a more extended form of it (authorial variants, that is literary variants, of a basic form). Aristophanes' fragments are almost always presented in this way, such as the famous account of an equally famous (metrical) proverb:

fragment 358 Slater = 4 Nauck [Harpocration p. 85.14]: "Ἔργα νέων." τοῦτο καὶ Ὑπερίδης ἐν τῷ κατ' Αὐτοκλέους Ἡσιόδου φησὶν εἶναι. παροιμία τίς ἐστιν, ἣν ἀνέγραψε καὶ ὁ γραμματικὸς οὕτως ἔχουσαν—"Ἔργα νέων, βουλαὶ δὲ μέσων, εὐχαὶ δὲ γερόντων."
fragment 358 Slater = 4 Nauck [Harpocration, p. 85.14]: "deeds of the young": Hyperides, in his oration against Autocles [fragment 57 K.] states that such words come from Hesiod [fragment 321 M.-W.]; but it is a proverb, which Aristophanes the grammarian also recorded in the following form: "deeds of the young, counsels of the middle-aged, prayers of elders."

Many other Alexandrian scholars, in the 2nd and perhaps in the 1st century BCE, embarked upon the study of proverbs. Only a few fragments remain, mentioned both in the paremiographers and in the scholiasts. An **Aeschylus**, perhaps of Alexandria, dealt with the "Sardonius rice" (Σαρδόνιος γέλως), as famous as it is obscure (Zenobius 5.85); a Περὶ παροιμιῶν is attributed to a **Dionysodorus**, mentioned several times in the Theocritean scholia. An **Aristides**,[129] also author of a Περὶ παροιμιῶν, in at least three books, was often quoted in connection with proverbs about peoples and cities; he combined his paremiographic interest with geographical and antiquarian interests, a practice also followed by the contemporary (and equally fragmentary) **Polemon of Ilion**, an antiquarian, who handed down and commented on many proverbs related to historical anecdotes or places. Polemon will be followed by the great geographer Strabo, in whose complete work we can read numerous references to proverbs about places and peoples.

Nothing can be said about **Mylon**, another mysterious scholar, ὁ Μύλων ὁ παροιμιογράφος, mentioned by Zenobius (2.45) for his very popular "strife and friendship admit no pretexts," ἀγὼν πρόφασιν οὐκ ἐπιδέχεται οὔτε φιλία. Paradoxically, however, the term παροιμιογράφος appears here for the first and only time in all Greek literature known to us. To whom do we owe this lucky coinage, which, on the one hand, establishes a terminological recognition of a field of research now widely attested, and, on the other, constitutes the distant classificatory archetype of all modern scholars of παροιμίαι?

The interest in short forms of *sententiae* also emerges in other protagonists of Greek culture of the time. Five books of Δόξαι of philosophers, which probably followed the tradition of the χρεῖαι, are attributed to **Meleager** of the Cynic school, who was born in Gadara around 130 BCE

[128] See Lelli 2021:186–191, 1521–1527.
[129] On Aeschylus, Dionysodorus and Aristides, see Lelli 2021:1517–1520.

and lived during the Roman conquest of the Seleucid kingdom. Meleager also composed satires, but nothing of these has come down to us. In his epigrams, however, we can witness an intense use of proverb and *sententia* material, generally reworked, in the manner of Callimachus, in the last verse of the composition (*Palatine Anthology* 12.109 = Meleager LXI Gow-Page):

Ὁ τρυφερὸς Διόδωρος ἐς ἠιθέους φλόγα βάλλων
ἤγρευται λαμυροῖς ὄμμασι Τιμαρίου,
τὸ γλυκύπικρον Ἔρωτος ἔχων βέλος. ἦ τόδε καινὸν
θάμβος ὁρῶ· φλέγεται πῦρ πυρὶ καιόμενον.

Delicate Diodorus, casting fire at the young men,
has been caught by Timarion's bold eyes,
and bears the bittersweet dart of Love,
This is indeed a new miracle I see; fire is burning, scorched by fire.

Little can we say, unfortunately, about the presence and function of the short *sententiae* in **Posidonius**, a native of Apamea, one of the most important Stoic intellectuals at the turn of the 2nd to the 1st century BCE, author of treatises on philosophy, science, and geography. Several fragments, in which traditional gnomic motifs are reworked, testify that, in his philosophical (and especially ethical) works, short *sententiae* were an important element of his philosophical writing:

Τὸ μέγιστον ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἀγαθὸν εἶναι πλοῦτον καὶ ὑγείαν.
The greatest good for man is his wealth and health. (A 224)

Unus dies hominum eruditorum plus patet quam imperitis longissima aetas.
A single day lived by educated people is worth more than a lifetime lived by ignorant people. (A 239)

In the *Histories after Polybius*, Posidonius probably recalled the historian for his insistence on the moral and pedagogical function of history, as revealed by the fragments that have come down to us. Posidonius, too, must have given relevant space to moral and gnomic considerations, mostly expressed by the author in the first person (no speech made by historical figures has been handed down to us).
The same picture emerges from another important historical work of the first half of the century, the *Library* of **Diodorus Siculus**, born in Agyrium (Agira), near Enna. Convinced that history was "the guardian of the qualities of important men, the witness of the wickedness of ignoble ones, the benefactor of the entire human race" (φύλακα μὲν τῆς τῶν ἀξιολόγων ἀρετῆς, μάρτυρα δὲ τῆς τῶν φαύλων κακίας, εὐεργέτιν δὲ τοῦ κοινοῦ γένους τῶν ἀνθρώπων, 1.2.2), Diodorus sprinkled his universal narrative, from the origin of the world to his own day (there remain 10 of the total 20 books) with moral observations and γνῶμαι, drawn from the traditional heritage, sometimes also explicitly defined as παροιμίαι.[130] *Sententiae* are less frequent in the speeches, which are themselves very rare (at least in the text in our possession):[131] even in this, Diodorus, who was a contemporary of Sallust, reveals himself to be a faithful follower of Polybius.

[130] Surveyed by Ambaglio 1995:109-110. Passage 7.12.5 is interesting for its terminology, since it features the expression ἐν παροιμίας μέρει μνημονευόμενον: "The same Lycurgus received an oracle from Delphi regarding love of money, which is handed down to memory in the form of a proverb: 'Love of money, and nothing else, will destroy Sparta," ὁ αὐτὸς Λυκοῦργος ἤνεγκε χρησμὸν ἐκ Δελφῶν περὶ τῆς φιλαργυρίας τὸν ἐν παροιμίας μέρει μνημονευόμενον "ἁ φιλοχρηματία Σπάρταν ὀλεῖ, ἄλλο δὲ οὐδέν." Thus, there is a clear distinction between the origin of the expression and its subsequent proverbial use. Other formulas of introduction are κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν, "as a proverb", and καθάπερ ἡ κοινὴ παροιμία φησίν, "as common proverb says".

[131] Only eight cases are attested: 8.12; 10.34; 13.20–32 and 52.53; 14.65–69; 21.21; 27.13–18; 31.3.

Next to the elder Posidonius, the most important figure who constituted a link between Alexandrian culture and the development of erudition in Rome was **Didymus**.[132] Born around 80 BCE, he worked between Alexandria and Rome until 10 BCE, the year of his death, dealing with many fields of knowledge (the sources tell us of over 3,000 works, perhaps scrolls). He was an enormously significant collector of all the exegetical tradition from the 4th century BCE onwards, from philology to science, from history to antiquarianism. Author of numerous commentaries, of two very important lexicographical works (Λέξεις τραγικαί and κωμικαί, in several books), Didymus also wrote a Περὶ παροιμιῶν, to which, however, very few fragments can be ascribed with certainty. Didymus' interest in proverbs and *sententiae* was manifested not only—or not so much—in this treatise, but in his numerous works dedicated to the exegesis of hundreds of Greek authors of every age, from Homer to Hellenistic poetry.
In these commentaries we must trace Didymus' numerous exegeses of proverbial expressions, later included in the scholia. The problems related to identifying the origin of the fragments and Didymus' paremiographic exegeses reveal many pitfalls, often generated in the later stages of epitomization. In **Harpocration**'s *Lexicon of the Ten Orators*, for example, Didymus is mentioned 37 times, often accompanied by the reference to the title of his commentary on this or that orator. Such indications are omitted in the later scholiographic tradition. Let us see one obvious case:

Harpocration γ 2: Γαμηλία: Δημοσθένης ἐν τῇ Πρὸς Εὐβουλίδην ἐφέσει καὶ Ἰσαῖος. καὶ Δίδυμος ὁ γραμματικὸς ἐν μὲν τοῖς Ἰσαίου ὑπομνήμασί φησιν εἶναι γαμηλίαν τὴν τοῖς φράτορσιν ἐπὶ γάμοις διδομένην, παρατιθέμενος λέξιν Φανοδήμου, ἐν ᾗ οὐδὲν τοιοῦτον γέγραπται. ἐν δὲ τοῖς εἰς Δημοσθένην ὁ αὐτὸς πάλιν γαμηλίαν φησὶν εἶναι τὴν εἰς τοὺς φράτορας εἰσαγωγὴν τῶν γυναικῶν, οὐδεμίαν ἀπόδειξιν τῆς ἐξηγήσεως παραθέμενος.
Gamelia (wedding feast): Demosthenes, in his oration *Against Eubulides*, and Isaeus. Even Didymus the grammarian, in his commentaries on Isaeus, states that a *gamelia* was offered to the members of the phratry on the occasion of a wedding, quoting a passage from Phanodemus, in which nothing similar appears. Instead, in the commentaries on Demosthenes, the same Didymus affirms that the *gamelia* was the women's ceremony for the female companions of their phratry, without citing any testimony.

To be compared with:
Photius γ 48 Γαμηλία: ἡ διδομένη τοῖς φράτορσιν ἐπὶ γάμοις. ἢ τῶν γυναικῶν ἡ εἰς τοὺς φράτορας εἰσαγωγή. οὕτως Δίδυμος ὁ γραμματικός. καὶ παροιμία. Γαμηλίαν εἰσενεγκεῖν.

Gamelia: the feast given for the members of a phratry on the occasion of a wedding; or the women's ceremony for the female companions of their phratry. Thus Didymus the grammarian. There is also the proverb: "to prepare a *gamelia*."

It seems reasonable to think that, with his many other mentions in the lexicographic tradition, the citations that are attributable with some certainty to Didymus' paremiographic treatise are those contained in the Greek paremiographic tradition—especially those found in the treatise of Zenobius, who will explicitly call himself the "epitomizer of Didymus' work," as we shall see.
The title and subtitle of Didymus' paremiographic treatise are peculiar. Photius, in his summary of the *Chrestomathy* of the rhetor Helladius (4th century BCE), gives us our only information about the title and the dimension of the treatise (*Bibliotheca* 279): Δίδυμος περὶ παροιμιῶν δεκατρία βιβλία συντέταχε, πρὸς τοὺς περὶ παροιμιῶν συντεταχότας ἐπιγράψας αὐτά ("Didymus composed 13 books *On Proverbs*, addressing them to those who composed a treatise *On Proverbs*"). This seems to me the most correct way of understanding the meaning of the title.[133]

[132] See Lelli 2021:342–345, 1556–1562.
[133] An even later testimony comes from Tzetzes, a 12th-century grammarian, who, in his scholarly and anecdotal work *Chiliades*, places Didymus next to a later paremiologist, Lucillus of Tarrha (under the influence of the epitomizer of these two, Zenobius) in a line from which one could perhaps infer the title Παροιμίαι (*Proverbs*): Ἐν παροιμίαις γράφουσι Δίδυμος καὶ Ταρραῖος ("Didymus and the Tarrhaean write

The verb συντάσσω in Photius always means "to compose":[134] therefore, in this case, it does not seem to have the meaning "to collect" or "to archive." But συντάσσω is always constructed with the accusative (as in writing a βιβλίον, ἐπιστολάς, ἱστορίας, and others); we must therefore understand both the first and the second περὶ παροιμιῶν of Photius' quotation as a real title: "Those who composed a Περὶ παροιμιῶν." The verb ἐπιγράφω, again, is employed in Photius' *Bibliotheca* to indicate the title of a volume: we are thus perhaps faced with a subtitle. The final problem is the preposition πρός: if it is true that in other classical and Hellenistic sources, πρός has the polemical meaning of "against" (a predecessor or a rival), Photius' use and the works cited by the patriarch containing the preposition are clearly not to be understood in a hostile sense.[135] If this was the sense of πρός in Didymus' title, too, a polemical—at least overtly polemical—stance towards the preceding paremiographers should be excluded. One hypothesis is that, in the 13 volumes of his treatise, Didymus had addressed each book to a single previous paremiographer: certainly, even at his age, there would have been no lack of such a large number of authors. Didymus may have indeed debated with some of them, but perhaps, as the few direct fragments and the very many indirect fragments (i.e. placed in other works) reveal, the Alexandrian grammarian seems to have hardly ever proposed his own exegesis in opposition to others' interpretations. Thus, Didymus should probably be regarded as a compiler, not as a polemicist. With him, a new phase of paremiography begins: a phase of preserving different exegeses, in addition to the proverbs themselves. Shortly thereafter, this phase will undergo yet another transformation: like all other erudite genres of the ancient world, it will be affected by the epochal phenomenon of epitomization, the selection and reduction of texts into works that would often save their existence, but radically transform their appearance.

With Posidonius and Didymus, Alexandrian scholarship had definitively penetrated Rome. The interest in language and in antiquarianism gave rise to the studies of Latin lexicography, which also paid attention to proverbs, especially those studies carried out by Marcus Terentius Varro and Verrius Flaccus.

Varro, born in Rieti in 116 BCE, was the greatest Roman scholar, not only of his period, but probably of all time. He was the owner of *villae rusticae* and a politician supporting Pompey, but, in fact, was allied first with Caesar, then with Octavian. His long life spans nearly a century: he died in 27 BCE, a year that symbolically marks the beginning of a new era. Especially after the year of his retirement from public life (48 BCE) until his death, Varro compiled an incredible series of works, ranging over almost every field of knowledge, in an extremely similar manner to that of his contemporary Didymus. Among the hundreds of works attributed to him, none is definable as paremiographic; yet the interest in proverbs and *sententiae* emerges in every area pursued by Varro, beginning with lexicography.

In a passage of Varro's monumental *De lingua Latina*, in 25 books (of which only 5 remain now), one of the terms—albeit the least frequent—with which the Romans indicated the short form of the *sententia* appears for the first time (7.31):

Apud Valerium Soranum: "*Vetus adagio est, o Publi Scipio," quod verbum usque eo evanuit, ut Graecum pro eo positum magis sit apertum: nam idem est quod paroimian vocant Graeci, ut est:* "*Auribus lupum teneo*"*;* "*Canis caninam non est." Adagio est littera commutata ambagio, dicta ab eo quod ambit orationem, neque in aliqua una re consistit sola.*

In Valerius of Sora we read: "It is an old adage, Publius Scipio." This word (*adagio*) has gone out of use to such an extent that the Greek word used for it is more easily understood: for it is the

in the *Proverbs*," 8.159). More probably, the quotation was not intended to allude to the title of the works of the two.

[134] There are over 150 occurrences; see, e.g. 34, 7a; 36, 7b; 41, 9a; 52,13a.

[135] See, for example, 36, 7b (the books of an anonymous *Book of the Christian*, which "were dedicated to no individual by him," οὐ πρός τι πρόσωπον αὐτῷ συνετάγησαν) or 158, 101a (Phrynichus dedicating the tenth book of the *Sophistic Preparations*, "again dedicated to Aristotle," πάλιν ἐπαναστραφείς πρὸς Ἀριστοκλέα): these books/works were dedicated, or rather, "addressed" to someone. Only the preposition κατά, in Photius, is employed to express an opposition in the titles of works.

same as that which the Greeks call παροιμία "proverb," as for example: "I am holding a wolf by the ears"; "a dog doesn't eat dog flesh." Now *adagio* is nothing but *ambagio* with a letter changed, which is said because "it goes around" (*ambit*) the discourse and does not stop at some one thing only.

In the fragment of the more or less contemporary poet Valerius Soranus (perhaps to be identified with Valerius Aedituus), the term *adagio*, *-onis,* appears: Varro offered a para-etymology, combining it with the term *ambagio*, "to turn around," in the sense of an ambivalent, if not ambiguous, expression. In this way, Varro underlined one of the canonized and universally recognized characteristics of the proverb: its metaphorical nature. After *verbum*, *dictum*, and other periphrases, the term *adagio* (note: with the equally canonical adjective *vetus*) is the first term attested in Latin to indicate a short *sententia*, as the other two examples given by Varro make clear. Present only in the archaizing authors of the 4th and 5th century (Ausonius 340A; Symmachus *Epistulae* 1.3.2), *adagio* will soon be replaced by *adagium* (first by Gellius), which will enjoy a great popularity from the Humanism onwards, thanks to Erasmus of Rotterdam's choice to name his paremiographic collection *Adagia*. Varro made considerable use of *adagiones*—as he would have called them—or, perhaps better, of παροιμίαι throughout his *De lingua Latina*, particularly in the moments when he reflects in the first person, that is, in the proems. These are mainly general gnomic motifs, such as

Quem puerum vidisti formosum, hunc vides deformem in senecta (5.5)
Whom you saw beautiful as a boy, him you see disfigured in his old age.

Tertium saeculum non videt eum hominem quem vidit primum (5.5)
The third generation does not see a person such as the first generation saw him.

Nesciunt docere quam discere quae ignorant (9.1)
Some teach what they do not know, rather than learning what they ignore.

Here and there, however, we find Varro using proverbs relating to animals and objects. This is the great reservoir of proverbs from the pastoral and everyday spheres, which clearly emerges in the only other work of Varro that has been preserved: *De re rustica*, another important phase in the Roman agronomic tradition (after Cato), written when Varro was 80, therefore after 36 BCE. Concentrated, once again, in the proemial sections of the three books, the proverbs are almost always introduced by formulas using *verba dicendi* (*ut dicitur, si est homo bulla*, "if man is a bubble, as they say": 1.1.1; *ut aiunt, dei facientes adiuvant*, "the gods help those who call upon them, as they say": 1.1.4; *nemo omnia potest scire*, "no man can know everything": 2.1.1; *diceres ... tecum duceret serram*, "if you should say … he would pull a saw with you": 3.6.1); and they almost always have an assertive value. Finally, this treatise features the term *proverbium* (1.2.2 *vetus*; 2.9.9 *antiquum*), which had already made its first appearance in Latin texts (known to us) a few decades earlier, as we shall see.
The place where Varro parades an impressive repertoire of proverbs and *sententiae* is in a literary genre quite different from his technical and erudite treatises: namely, the *Saturae Menippeae*. Following in the footsteps of the Cynical tradition of the 3rd-century philosopher Menippus of Gadara, of whom nothing has come down to us, Varro composed numerous *saturae* in prose and verse, commenting on the events of the *civitas*, pillorying politicians and philosophers, and targeting the vices and fashions of the society of the time. Like the sonnets of Giuseppe Gioachino Belli, Varro's compositions grew disproportionately: at the time of his death, they reached the number of 150 books. More than 600 fragments remain, and here numerous proverbs are used. Sometimes, the very title of a *satura* consists of a proverb, such as *Caprinum proelium*, "goat battle"; *Cras credo, hodie nihil*, "tomorrow I give credit, not today"; *Mutuum muli scabunt*, "one donkey scratches the other." Most likely, from this enormous Varronian reservoir (and certainly from other works of his), a series of *sententiae* will be excerpted in the first centuries of

the empire to constitute a small *corpus* circulating with the name of *Sententiae Varronis*[136]—a further testimony of the recognized proverbiality of the Sabine author.
Alongside Varro, in mid-1st century BCE Rome, lexicography became the work of another scholar, **Verrius Flaccus**, a native of Praeneste. He was honored in his home town for having composed the *Fasti Praenestini*, a sort of calendar of festivals and agricultural work that was even engraved in a public inscription (discovered in 1779). As a scholar of *Res Etruscae* and antiquarian traditions, and chosen by Augustus to educate his nephews, Verrius was the author of the first lexicon in Latin of which we have knowledge, entitled *De verborum significatu.* The work has come down to us in two later epitomes: that of Festus, a 2nd-century CE grammarian, and that of Paul the Deacon, from the 6th century CE. Despite these rehashes, we can get a clear idea of the massive amount of information contained in Verrius' text, which featured thousands of headwords in alphabetical order: rare words or terms which were already obsolete in the 1st century BCE; mythical, legendary, and historical figures; proverbial expressions provided with exegeses and authorial quotations.
Among the first lemmas, Flaccus deals with the etymology of *adagio* (p. 12), to be explained, unlike Varro, as *ad agendum apta*, "an expression that invites one to do something." It is highly likely that the lemma *proverbium* could not have been missing from his dictionary, although we have no proof of it. However, we have more than thirty proverbs, often signposted by periphrases such as *in proverbio fuit antiquis* ("it became a proverb among our ancestors," p. 372), *in proverbio dici solet* ("it is usually said in a proverb, p. 290), *in proverbium abiit* ("it became a proverb," p. 310), *proverbium est* ("it is a proverb," p. 165). As is evident, his lemmas follow the structure, lexicon, and *formulae* of Greek paremiography (εἴρηται ἡ παροιμία ἀπὸ τοῦ ... to indicate the origin of the saying; ἐπὶ τῶν ... λέγεται to indicate the addressees; ταύτης μέμνηται for the mention of a *locus*), which must have been, by this time, already canonized by Didymus:

Non omnibus dormio: proverbium videtur natum a Cipio quodam, qui Pararenchon dictus est, quod simularet dormientem, quo impunitius uxor eius moecharetur. Eius meminit Lucilius [fragment 65 M.] (p. 173)
"I am not asleep for all": is a proverb which seems to have arisen from a certain Cipius, who was called Pararhenchon (Alongside-snorer) because he pretended to be asleep in order that his wife might commit adultery with more impunity. Lucilius mentions him.

Osculana pugna: in proverbio, quo significatur victos vincere, quia in eadem et Valerius Laevinus, imperator Romanus, a Pyrrho erat victus, et brevi eundem regem Sulpicius ... item imperator noster. Eius rei meminit Titinius hoc modo: "haec quidem quasi Osculana pugna est, hau secus, quia qui fugere polsi, hinc spolia colligunt" (181 Ribbeck) (p. 197).
"Battle of Asculum": proverbial, to signify that those who are vanquished win, for in that same battle Valerius Levinus, a Roman commander, had been vanquished by Pyrrhus, but at the same time Sulpicius, another of our commanders, had vanquished the king. Titinius mentions it in the following way: "this is almost a battle of Asculum: those who are forced to flee, gather the spoils from the other side."

Sutrium quasi eant: utique in proverbium abiit ex hac causa: Gallico tumultu quondam edictum est, legiones Sutrii ut praesto essent cum cibo suo, quod usurpari coeptum est in is, qui suis rebus opibusque offici quid praestarent quibus deberent. (p. 310)
"As if they were going to Sutrium": it became a proverb for this reason: once, during an assault of the Gauls, it was ordered to the legions to go to Sutrium as soon as possible, with their own provisions; this began to be used for those who had to secure at their own expense what they were due.

Flaccus is the first Roman paremiographer, although his is not an exclusively paremiographic work. Lexicography, after all, had already included paremiographic interests (and lemmas) in its sphere, ever since Aristophanes of Byzantium; and so was it received in Rome. On the other

[136] See Barbieri 2021.

hand, there is very little information about the titles of the works of Latin grammarians and scholars, and, therefore, we cannot exclude *a priori* that more explicitly paremiographic texts were also being produced, as was the case with collections and commentaries on law or *praecepta*. It is likely that the headwords of *De verborum significatu*—attributed to the 1st-century grammarian **Sinnius Capito**—derive from a paremiographic work (or at least from another *lexicon* of antiquarian nature). We know hardly anything about him, but he is repeatedly quoted by Verrius Flaccus:

Multi Mani Ariciae: M. Manius Egeri lucum Nemoraensem Dianae consecravit, a quo multi et clari viri orti sunt; unde et proverbium multi Mani Ariciae. Sinnius Capito longe aliter sentit; ait enim turpes et deformes significari, quia Maniae dicuntur deformes personae, et Ariciae genus panni fieri, quod mania appelletur. (p. 145)
"Many Manii in Aricia": Marcus Manius had consecrated to Diana the forest of Nemi, from which many illustrious men were born; hence, the proverb was also born: "Many Manii in Aricia." Sinnius Capito is of a very different opinion; in fact, he says that "Manii" means "ugly and deformed," because deformed masks are called *Maniae*, and in Aricia there is a kind of cloth, which is called *mania*.

Quot servi, tot hostes in proverbio est, de quo Sinnius Capito existimat errorem hominibus intervenisse praepostere plurimis enuntiatibus. Vero enim similius esse dictum initio: quot hostis, tot servi. (p. 261)
"As many enemies as slaves," is in a proverb about which Sinnius Capito thinks an error has occurred, as many people have been saying it in the wrong order. In fact, in the beginning it was said more naturally: "as many slaves as enemies."

Rideo, inquit, Galba cantherio: proverbium est, quod Sinnius Capito ita interpretatur, si qui principio rei alicuius inchoatae deficiunt animo (p. 282, the episode follows)
"I laugh, says Galba to his gelding": is a proverb which Sinnius Capito interprets in the following way: those who lack spirit at the beginning of undertaking some enterprise.

As is clear, Verrius also records different exegeses of the same proverb: there must have been, therefore, an erudite debate within the paremiographic field. The same Sinnius is credited with particular exegeses—for the expressions *Sardi venales, alius alio nequior*, "the Sardies are venal, one worse than the other" (p. 322) and *Sabini quod volunt, somniant*, "the Sabins dream what they want" (p. 325)—and explicitly opposed to others (of which the author is not mentioned). We can also glimpse, between the lines epitomized by Verrius, a controversy with Varro (which perhaps dated back to Sinnius?), concerning the expressions *Sus Minervam,* "a pig (faced) Athena" (p. 310) and *Sexagenarii de ponte*, "sixty years old off the bridge" (p. 334).
The category of proverbs preferred by Verrius—or the one mostly selected by Festus and then by Paul the Deacon—seems to be that of antiquarian and historical anecdotes. Almost all the proverbs preserved in his *De verborum significatu*, as well as those deduced by Sinnius Capito, refer to folkloric gestures or formulas, such as:

Arse verse: averte ignem significat. Tuscorum enim lingua arse averte, verse ignem constat appellari. (p. 18)
"*Arse verse*": it means "drive away the fire." For it is certain that in the language of the Etruscans *arse* means "drive away," and *verse* "fire."

Herbam do, cum ait Plautus, significat victum me fateor quod est antiquae et pastoralis vitae indicium; nam qui in prato cursu aut viribus contendebant, cum superati erant, ex eo solo, in quo certamen erat, decerptam herbam adversario tradebant. (p. 99)
"I am giving you grass," as Plautus says, means "I admit defeat," and is a feature of ancient pastoral life; someone who lost in the race or in the fight would pluck grass from the ground where the competition had been held and give it to the winner.

or to historical episodes, even from the chronicle of the city, then turned into proverbs:

Muli Mariani dici solent a C. Marii instituto, cuius milites in furca interposita tabella varicosius onera sua portare assueverant. (p. 149)
"Marius' mules": it was customary to say this from the exercises of Gaius Marius, whose soldiers were accustomed to carrying very heavy weights.

Naeviam silvam vocitatam extra urbem ad miliarium quartum, quod Naevi ciuisdam ibi domus fuerit ... quam opprobrii loco obici ab antiquis solere, quod in ea morari adsuescent perditi ac nequam homines, testis est M. Cato in ea, quam composuit in M. Caelium si se appellavisset ... a porta Naevia ... Unde dicunt proverbium natum esse: e nemoribus Naeviis, quod refertur a Verrio. (p. 169)
"Naevian woods": it was a much talked about wood at the fourth mile outside the city, due to the fact that there was the house of a certain Naevius there, which was usually employed as an insult by the ancients, since evildoers lived there; this is attested by Marcus Cato in that oration he composed against Marcus Caelius: "if he had defined himself ... from the Naevian gates ...." Hence, they claim that the proverb was born: "from the Naevian woods," as reported by Verrius.

The latter constitute the Roman parallel of the numerous proverbs about many unknown protagonists of classical Athens, known to us almost exclusively from comedy, then flowing into the paremiographies, and often (unjustly) considered spurious. Verrius Flaccus, moreover, seems also keen to point out the Greek origin of a proverb, as in the case of *manum et mentum* (p. 149): *proverbium est ex graeco ductum, quod est* πολλὰ μεταξὺ πέλει κύλικος καὶ χείλεος ἄκρου, "it is a proverb derived from the Greek: 'there is a big gap between the cup and the tip of the lip.'"
From the quotations of the authors in which Verrius finds a proverbial expression—all of whom are comedians or mimographers (there is only one orator: Cato)—and from the folkloric, religious, historical, and anecdotal context of the expressions themselves, it emerges clearly, as in Varro, that the interest in studying the world of proverbs in Rome was developing more in an antiquarian and scholarly environment than in a rhetorical one. This process resembles the one that probably took place in 4th-century Greece with Demon and the Stoics. All this is evident in the most important author of Latin prose that has preserved the largest number of proverbs and *sententiae* ever: Cicero.
The undisputed protagonist of one of the most turbulent periods of Rome—"the night of the republic," as he himself would call it (*Brutus* 330)—**Marcus Tullius Cicero** is a fundamental witness for us to the history of Latin proverbs and *sententiae*, on two levels: practice and, for the first time, theory.[137] First in his *De oratore* (55 BCE), then in his *Brutus* (45 BCE), Cicero considered the strategies and devices of Roman oratory, offering us the first evidence of a critical and technical reflection on the use of the so-called *sententia*. However, next to the two Ciceronian works—or rather chronologically before them—we should place a treatise dating from the late 80s of the century, which was for a long time attributed to the very young Cicero, whereas other scholars assigned it to an otherwise unknown rhetorician called Cornificius. Because of its dedicatee, the four-book treatise goes by the name of ***Rhetorica ad Herennium***. In this work, if we adhere to the absolute chronology, we find, for the first time in Rome, a reflection on the *sententia*, understood in the paremiological sense. In the section on *exornatio verborum*, on the figures of speech used in the *elocutio*, we read (4.17.24):

Sententia est oratio sumpta de vita, quae aut quid sit aut quid esse oporteat in vita, breviter ostendit, hoc pacto:
Difficile est primum bonum virtutes revereri, qui semper secunda fortuna sit usus.
Item: Liber is est existimandus, qui nulli turpitudini servit.
Item: Egens aeque est is, qui non satis habet, et is, cui satis nihil potest esse.

[137] After Swoboda 1963, the most recent (but rather synthetic) work on proverbs and *sententiae* in Cicero is Achard 1999. These studies, however, focus on the use of the short forms, and not on the reflection and theory, for which see, instead, Calboli Montefusco 1999, in general, and Hallik 2001:67-69.

Item: Optima vivendi ratio est eligenda; eam iucundam consuetudo reddet.
A *sententia* is a saying drawn from life, which shows concisely either what happens or ought to happen in life, for example:
"It is difficult to give reverence to the virtues for he who has always enjoyed the favors of fortune."
Again: "He is to be considered a free man, who is a slave to no wickedness."
Again: "As poor as the man who has not enough is the man who cannot have enough."
Again: "We ought to choose the noblest way of living; habit will make it enjoyable."

The definition of *sententia* as *oratio sumpta de vita*, "expression deduced from life," though destined to remain an *unicum*, is clarified in its moral value (*aut quid sit aut quid esse oporteat in vita ... ostendit*) and in its quality of brevity (*breviter*). There is no doubt that the four maxims cited as examples are *sententiae*, i.e. γνῶμαι. However, the author adds:

Huiusmodi sententiae simplices non sunt inprobandae, propterea quod habet brevis expositio, si rationis nullius indiget, magnam delectationem.
Simple *sententiae* of this sort are not to be rejected, because, if no other reason is needed, the brevity of the statement has great charm.

We can understand, I think plainly, that the employment of *sententiae* in a speech is taken into consideration more as an exhortation not to exclude them than to recommend them. These gnomic "brief" (*simplices*) utterances "are not to be despised," says the author—which is equivalent to saying that others (perhaps many) despise them: a proof, it seems to me, of the exiguous use of maxims in the oratory of the time, as has emerged from the admittedly scanty evidence.[138] The matter will become more complicated in the following section.
After the *sententiae simplices*—that we can thus identify with the γνῶμαι—the author adds a second *genus sententiarum*, which implies the addition of a *ratio*, "reason," and yet another kind, which is expressed in a twofold manner (*dupliciter*). The long clauses given as examples definitely do not sound like *sententiae* to modern paremiologists. The conclusion of the very short space devoted to *sententiae* (one paragraph out of the nearly 190 in the treatise) is itself significant:

Sententias interponi raro convenit, ut rei actores, non vivendi praeceptores videamur esse: cum ita interponentur, multum afferent ornamenti. Et necesse est animi comprobet eam tacitus auditor, cum ad causam videat adcommodari rem certam, ex vita et moribus sumptam.

We should insert *sententiae* only rarely, so that we may look like patrons of a case, not teachers of life. When so interspersed, they will add much ornament. Moreover, the listener ought to give it his tacit approval when he perceives that an indisputable principle drawn from life and customs is being applied to a cause.

If the second part of the consideration—the sympathetic shareability of the γνῶμαι with the audience—is clearly derived from the Greek rhetorical tradition (especially Aristotle's *Rhetoric*), the premise to such a characteristic is preceded by a reference to the cautious use (*raro*) of the gnomic element in oratory: in Rome, one should appear to be an advocate of a cause, not a master of life. It seems to me that in this observation lies the key to understanding the extremely scarce presence of maxims and proverbs in Roman oratory until the 1st century BCE, and the relegation of the gnomic element mainly to other literary genres and other areas, where the need of a moral function was more strongly felt (*praeceptores*). Unsurprisingly, the very term *sententia* reveals, in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, all the semantic ambiguity with which it is still permeated: in

[138] Marcus Antonius, a contemporary of the author of the *Rhetorica*, affirms this in Cicero's *De oratore* (2.153): "I always considered that a speaker would be more pleasing and acceptable to a nation like ours if he were to show, first, as little trace as possible of any artifice, and secondly none whatever of things Greek."

most of its occurrences in the first three books, and in the second part of the fourth, *sententia* is, in opposition to *verbum*, the technical term indicating the "figures of thought," *sententiarum exornationes*. Thus, it is employed to define metaphors (*aliud verbis, aliud sententia demonstrans*), *loci communes*, and much more.[139]

The observations and the spirit of the author of this first Latin treatise on rhetoric[140] are entirely analogous to what Cicero expressed, some thirty years later, in his dialogues on oratory. In his *De oratore*, Cicero compared, especially through the mouth of the two protagonists, the famous orators of the late 2nd and early 1st century BCE: Marcus Antonius and Lucius Crassus.[141] They symbolize two ways of looking at oratory—one based almost exclusively on practice and natural gifts, and one that does not disdain the theoretical contribution of rhetoric (including Greek rhetoric) and philosophy. Cicero himself recalls that, when he was still a child, orators not only did not make use of rhetorical devices, but almost despised them (2.1). And it is precisely to a philosophical context that he ultimately links the use of those motifs *de vita et moribus* (1.69) that are defined, in some passages, with the term *sententiae*. The orator, Antonius observes, is now required to have *acumen dialecticorum* and *sententiae philosophorum* (1.128) in addition to several other qualities: this is why oratory has become one of the most difficult disciplines, but also the one richest in *gloria* (the most gratifying one, as we would say today). Beyond the obvious Ciceronian (self-)celebration of his own craft, in Antonius' words, one can clearly read a development of the concept of oratory from the 2nd to the 1st century BCE, and, in parallel, a development of the semantic value of *sententia*. When Antonius, Crassus, and the others who took part in the discussion in Crassus' villa speak of *sententiae*, they are clearly referring to those figures of "thought" that constituted, already in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the almost exclusive meaning of the term. Thus, in the fundamental definition of an *orator* given by Antonius —*qui et verbis ad audiendum iucundis et sententiis ad probandum accomodatis uti possit*, "a man who can use language agreeable to the ear and arguments suited to convince" (1.213)—we can discern the opposition of *verbum/sententia* that will be typical of Roman rhetorical discourse. *Sententiae* and *verba* are juxtaposed in numerous passages:[142] here, *sententia* can only have the technical meaning of "thought," not the paremiological sense. Even when a reference is made to Greek orators and historians (especially Thucydides in particular), the value of excerpts such as *ita creber est rerum frequentia ut verborum prope numerum sententiarum numero consequatur* ("so dense is the richness of concepts, as to almost equal the number of words with the number of thoughts," 2.56) or *sententiis magis quam verbis abundantes* ("full of thoughts rather than words," 2.93), clearly relates to the level of conceptual richness of those already "classical" authors and to their use of philosophical thoughts. In this sense, the value of the *sententiae* is analogous to that of the *loci*, "which may be useful to the expert orator" (2.130).

Does Cicero, then, neglect the short form, the *sententia* in its paremiological meaning (or something else that is defined as such)? Approximately halfway through Antonius' long speech, which occupies almost the entire second book of Cicero's *De oratore*, he addresses the theme of the efficacy of the ironic element in oratory: that is, the theme of *iocus et facetiae*, "humorous manner and strokes of wit" (2.217). According to Antonius, these are natural gifts which do not need precepts (*neque ullam artem desiderant*). At this point, Gaius Julius Caesar Strabo, half-brother of Quintus Lutatius Catulus and a skilled orator of the time, intervenes.[143] Caesar Strabo remembers that there are *quosdam Graecos inscriptos libros ... de ridiculis*, "some Greek books entitled *On jesting* ," where he himself found *ridicula et salsa multa Graecorum*, "many sarcastic and salacious jests of the Greeks." However, even Caesar Strabo is of the opinion that this matter is mainly related to natural gifts and goes on to clarify how two types of *facetiae* should be

[139] See Hallik 2007:65-67.

[140] If we give credit to Cicero's *Brutus* (163), no one in Rome had written manuals on Latin rhetoric before Antonius and Crassus (who died in 91 and 87 BCE, respectively).

[141] Marcus Antonius (143–87 BCE)—consul in 99, censor in 97, opponent of Marius, and, for this reason, killed in the riots of 87 BCE—was Cicero's teacher. Lucius Licinius Crassus (140–91 BCE), also a teacher of Cicero, with an openly Asian style, was consul in 95 and censor in 92.

[142] 2.34, 36, 56, 73, 93, 148, 184; and many more; in most, the opposition *sententiae/verba* is present.

[143] He was born in 130 BCE, and he, too, will be killed in 87, during the Marian riots.

distinguished: a general one, which pervades an entire speech, the *cavillatio*; and a more precise one, *peracutum et breve*, the *dicacitas*. Both should be used sparingly, in the opinion of everyone present, who invite Caesar to expound his point of view *de risu* in a more extended manner (2.235–290), although they recognize that the crown in this field should be awarded to Lucius Crassus.[144] Caesar's "theory" on laughter draws on a well-established tradition: *locus ... ridiculi ... turpitudine et deformitate quadam continetur*, "the origin from which ridicule springs is moral flaws and physical ugliness" (236); and again: *materies omnis ridiculorum est in iis vitiis quae sunt in vita hominum*, "all laughing matters are found among those blemishes noticeable in the conduct of people" (238). There are two *genera facetiarum*: the first consists of "anecdotes" (*fabellae*), the second of "sayings" (*dicta*). The examples adduced by Caesar for the first type come very close to the χρεῖαι of the philosophical tradition. It is no coincidence, then, that Scaevola attributes precisely to Crassus a sort of collection of "examples, gathered from statutes and senatorial ordinances, and also from everyday life and conversation" (*multa conligeres et ex legibus et ex senatus consultis et ex vita ac sermone*, 1.243), and in his *Brutus*, Cicero will recall that Crassus' speeches had "much wit but were always dignified" (*multae et cum gravitate facetiae*, 158). "Laughter in sayings, on the other hand," continues Caesar, "is aroused by something pointed in a word or *sententia*" (*in dicto autem ridiculum est id, quod verbi aut sententiae quodam acumine movetur*, 2.244).

This is the space devoted by the protagonists of the dialogue (and Cicero himself) to the proper *sententia* (note the use of the singular), paremiologically understood as a short form, to be used almost exclusively in an ironic, and not moral, function. Caesar himself seems to clarify that this is a real *sententia*, when he affirms that the orator must be very careful because "whatever subjects I may touch upon, as being sources of laughing matters, may equally well, as a rule, be sources of serious thoughts" (*quoscumque locos attingam unde ridicula ducantur, ex isdem locis fere etiam gravis sententias posse duci*, 248). It is not by chance that Caesar warns the orator not to lower himself to the level of mimes and "imitators" (*mimi et ethologi*), in the use of *verba* or *sententiae*: mime is precisely the literary genre that, between the end of the 2nd and throughout the 1st century BCE, will offer the widest use of *sententiae*, originally in an ironic and mocking function, then excerpted and anthologized in a moral function, such as those of Publilius Syrus or Decimus Laberius. The examples of *ridiculum* given by Caesar in the section on *verba* already include some expressions, evidently popular, playing on double entendres, *aprosdoketon* or other phonic and rhetorical effects typical of the tradition of proverbs and *sententiae*, such as *ubi est vetus illud: "num claudicat? At hic clodicat*" ("Where is that old saying—Can he be hobbling? Nay, but he is wobbling," 249).[145]

In the section on *sententiae* (not explicitly signposted as such, but only by the conclusion of the section on the *verbum*: *haec omnia verbo continentur*, "all of this is based on words," 257), we also find the use of lines which have evidently become famous (authorial sayings), and of *proverbs*: *in hoc genus coniciuntur etiam proverbia* ("proverbs also fall into this genre," 258).

Caesar's only example is the aforementioned pun of Scipio Aemilianus against Tiberius Claudius Asellus (*asellus*, "little ass"), based on the proverb "if you cannot drive an ox, drive an ass," εἰ μὴ δύναιο βοῦν, ἔλαυνε ὄνον (cf. Zenobius 3.54). After this example, Caesar unsurprisingly goes on to discuss metaphor, allegory, *subabsurdia* jokes typical of mimes, and again anecdotes—all falling within the scope of *risus*. Thus, only one paragraph out of the almost 900 of the dialogue is explicitly dedicated to *proverbs*, and exclusively in an ironic function. The conclusion that emerges from Cicero's *De oratore* is, I believe, evident: oratory, according to the principles of the 2nd- and 1st-century forum, must make an absolutely moderate use of proverbs and *sententiae*, and limit this use to an ironic function.

Ten years later, having retired (out of necessity) from political activity, Cicero wrote the *Brutus*, an extraordinary history of Roman (and Greek) oratory. More than five centuries of oratory and rhetoric are embraced in his narrative, which repeats the terminology canonized in his *De oratore*

[144] Although in his *Brutus* (177), Cicero will affirm that "for his liveliness and facetiousness (*festivitate et facetiis*) Gaius Julius Caesar Strabo surpassed all predecessors and all contemporaries."

[145] Based on the interplay between the plebeian and noble pronunciation of the diphthong *au/o*, and the metaphorical political value of *claudicare*, "having your feet in two stirrups."

regarding the short *sententiae* and proverbs. Thus, 5th-century Athenian politicians—as they appear, above all, from the writings of Thucydides—are "stately in the choice of words, rich in thought, from compression of matter brief" (*grandes erant verbis, crebri sententiis, compressione rerum breves*, 29).[146] The opposition *verba/sententiae* returns many times in the dialogue, always with the binary meaning "language/thought": for instance, it is not possible to find anyone who is more elevated than Demosthenes *vel verborum gravitate vel sententiarum*, "in nobility of language or thought" (35); Gaius Gracchus is *grandis verbis, sapiens sententiis*, "elevated in diction, wise, and thoughtful in ideas" (126); Marcus Antonius is superior to all his contemporaries and equal to Demosthenes not only *in verbis eligendis ... verum multo magis ... in sententiarum ornamentis et conformationibus*, "in choosing his words … but all the more … in embellishing and structuring his thoughts" (140); Lucius Philip was *creber in reperiendis, solutus in explicandis sententiis*, "resourceful in inventing concepts, unconstrained in explaining them" (173); Marcus Claudius Marcellus had "carefully chosen words and a wealth and variety of ideas," *et lectis utitur verbis et frequentibus sententiis* (250); Aurelius Cotta was *remissus et lenis et propriis verbis comprendens solute et facile sententiam* "relaxed and quiet, expressing his thoughts smoothly and easily" (317). The meaning of *sententia* as "thought" also emerges from passages containing more technical reflections: Theopompus, an Isocratean rhetorician, has obfuscated the *concisae sententiae interdum etiam non satis apertae* of Philistus and Thucydides ("concise and sometimes not too clear thoughts," 66); the "figures, which the Greeks call σχήματα, are effective not so much in giving color to words (*in verbis pingendis*) as in giving light to thoughts (*in inluminandis sententiis*," 141). That the opposition *verba/sententiae* is to be understood in this way, moreover, is confirmed, a few years later, by Dionysius of Halicarnassus' use of the same juxtaposition, with the Greek ὀνόματα/νοήματα (*De compositione verborum* 3.1; 4.12; 25.31; etc.).

Approaching his contemporaries, Cicero (and Pomponius Atticus and Brutus with him) now makes explicit the division between Asiatics and Atticists, presenting himself as an effective, and better, "middle ground" (Rhodian). In the exposition of Hortensius' *Asiaticum* style, Cicero distinguishes two *genera Asiaticae dictionis* (*Brutus* 325):

unum sententiosum et argutum, sententiis non tam gravibus et severis quam concinnis et venustis, qualis in historia Timaeus, in dicendo Hierocles (...), aliud autem genus est non tam sententiis frequentatum quam verbis volucre atque incitatum, quali est nunc Asia tota, nec flumine solum orationis sed etiam exornato et faceto genere verborum, in quo fuit Aeschylus Cnidius et meus aequalis Milesius Aeschines. In his erat admirabilis orationis cursus, ornata sententiarum concinnitas non erat. Haec autem, ut dixi, genera dicendi aptiora sunt adulescentibus, in senibus gravitatem non habent. Itaque Hortensius utroque genere florens clamores faciebat adulescens. Habebat enim et Meneclium illud studium crebrarum venustarumque sententiarum, in quibus, ut in illo Graeco, sic in hoc erant quaedam magis venustae dulcesque sententiae quam aut necessariae aut interdum utiles.

The one sententious and witty, with sentences not so much weighty and austere as elegant and symmetrical, such was Timaeus in historiography; in oratory Hierocles (…) the other type, instead, is not so much dotted with sentences as swift and impetuous in language—a trait that is now in vogue all throughout Asia—it is characterized not only by this rapid flow of speech, but also by a choice of refined and facetious words. This is the manner of which Aeschylus of Cnidus and my contemporary Aeschines of Miletus were representatives. In them, the smoothness of their sentences was to be admired, although there was no elaborate symmetry of sentences. However, both of these styles, as I have said, are better suited to young men: in older men they lack solemnity. Thus Hortensius, expert in both manners, received great applause as a young man, for he had the taste, typical of Menecles, for frequent and elegant sentences, as in that Greek author, so with him, they were more graceful and of pleasant sound than necessary nor always useful.

[146] The nexus *creber sententiis* returns in *Brutus* 264, again in opposition to *verbum*, for Gaius Visellius Varro, a cousin of Cicero.

The passage, which makes extensive use of *sententiae* and their derivatives, has given rise to many problems and two different authoritative interpretations, precisely in relation to the meaning to be assigned to *sententia*: either "thought" or "*sententia*" with a paremiological meaning. In the first case, the passage would refer, as in all of Cicero's other discussions of oratory, to the Asian style's abundance of concepts. In the second case,[147] Cicero would refer here—but only here—to Asianism's richness of short *sententiae*, using *sententia* in the technical way that we have seen in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (4.17), in the sense of γνώμη. The observation that this *sententiosum* style is more suited to the young than to the old, and especially the juxtaposition of the *argutiae* and *facetiae*, it must be said, would seem to lean towards this second interpretation. Yet, even in this passage, the use of *sententiae*—which must therefore be imagined to have a predominantly, if not exclusively, ironic function—seems to be scarcely appreciated by Cicero, who stresses its risk of being inappropriate by stating that, even in the great Hortensius, "some *sententiae* were more elegant and sweeter than necessary or useful." Again, *sententiae* (and, most likely, *proverbia*) appear to be an expedient that must be used sparingly and limited to a function that has to do with *risus*, *facetum*, *argutum*. This is Cicero's theoretical judgment on the short *sententiae*, and his almost forty years of oratorical practice offer indisputable evidence of it.

Since the *Pro Quinctio* and the *Pro Roscio Amerino,* the first orations known to us (from 81 and 80 BCE respectively), a 25-year-old Cicero was pronouncing idiomatic expressions with a clearly ironic flavor, such as "not even worth a penny" (*assem se negat daturum*, *Quinctio* 5.19), "he sees the final act of his own funeral" (*huic acerbissimum vivo videntique funus duciturm*, *Quinctio* 15.50), "messengers faster than Pegasus" (*qui eiusmodi nuntios seu potius Pegasos habeat*, *Quinctio* 26.80), "a battle of Cannae" (*clades Cannensis*, *Roscio Amerino* 32.89), and real proverbs, such as "it is much easier for a buffoon to become rich than a good head of a household" (*de scurra multo facilius divitem, quam patrem familias fieri posse*, *Quinctio* 17.55, introduced by *vetus est* ...), "to have no one to accuse but your own ill luck" *(crura quidem vobis nemo suffringet*, *Roscio Amerino* 20.57), "to take two things with one payment" (*una mercede duas res assequi velle*, *Roscio Amerino* 29.80: "two birds with one stone," as we say today), "to throw men of sixty from the bridge" (*sexagenarios de ponte deicere*, *Roscio Amerino* 35.100), "to treat a whitlow" (*reduviam curare*, *Roscio Amerino* 44.128)—all of them being clearly ironic.

After Cicero's trip to Greece and Asia in 79–76 BCE, the irony from proverbs becomes more acute in his orations at the end of the decade, namely *Pro Roscio comoedo*,[148] and, above all, *In Verrem* (70 BCE). Here we find an abundance of proverbs and colloquial expressions, either ironic in themselves or employed in an ironic way: "no fortress too strong for money to capture it" (*nihil esse tam sanctum quod non violari*, 1.1.2.4), "among friends all things are in common" (*omnia inter eos esse communia*, 2.2.36.89, used sarcastically), "not even animals could endure it" (*ne bestiae quidem ferre possent*, 2.3.9.23 introduced by *ut aiunt*), "with not even hope remaining" (*ne spem quidem ullam reliquam*, 2.3.19.48), "better buy than beg" (*malo emere quam rogare*, 2.4.6.12), "fix the nail to a beam" (*trabali clavo figeret*, 2.5.22.53), "the honors of our nation are bestowed even to those who sit still" (*quibus omnia populi Romani beneficia dormientibus deferuntur*, 2.5.70.180), and many more.

The examples—from the later private orations of the 60s, to *Ad Catilinam*, from the *Pro Fonteio* and *Pro Murena* to the *Pro Flacco* and the *Pro Caelio*, up to, and above all, the *Philippics*—could continue at length. They would document with dozens of examples the consistently—I would say almost exclusively—ironic use devoted by Cicero the orator to the short forms of proverbs. This *usus*, as we have seen, is perfectly in line with those rare observations and rhetorical reflections present in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, in Cicero's *De oratore*, and, probably, in his *Brutus*. An *usus* that, to the overarching glance of the paremiologist, is very reminiscent of the use of proverbs as a political weapon employed by Alcaeus in 7th-century Mytilene, as well as of the implicitly political use of Aristophanes.

[147] For a discussion, see Calboli 1999.
[148] On which see Bonsangue 2010.

But Cicero, other than being an orator (and, in some ways, a rhetorician), was also a philosopher and an epistolographer. And from the comparison between his oratorical production and the other genres in which he ventured, we can clearly understand the different use, function, and contents of the short forms of proverbs and *sententiae* employed by him, often introduced or indicated by a simple *ut aiunt* or *ut dicitur*. Between 52 and 50 BCE, Cicero devoted himself to the composition of *De republica* and *De legibus:*

Quis divitiorem quemquam putet, quam qui ... ea possidet, quae secum, ut aiunt, vel e naufragio possit ecferre. (*Republica* 1.17.28)
True wealth is only what one can carry away with him out of a shipwreck.

Conscientia ipsa factorum egregiorum amplissimum virtutis est praemium. (*Republica* 6.8.8)
The consciousness of the worth of his deeds is the noblest reward of virtue for a wise man.

nosce teipsum (*Legibus* 1.22.58)
Know yourself.

Legem ... mutum magistratum (*Legibus* 3.1.2: *vere dici potest*)
The law is a silent magistrate.

The *sententiae* material goes in one direction only: that of ethics, of moral concepts. No animals or objects,[149] no puns or legendary characters. The same holds true for the dense philosophical production of the years of Cicero's retirement from the public scene, between 46 and 44 BCE: from his *De finibus bonorum et malorum* to his *Tusculanae disputationes*, from *De natura deorum* to *De senectute*, from *De amicitia* to *De officiis*, the examples could go on. In these (latter) works, on the other hand, it seems significant that Cicero not infrequently introduces the expressions in a more pronounced way: *vetus illud*, *verum illud*, and, increasingly explicitly, *tritum*, *contritum*, *verum*, *vetus*, *vulgare*, as well as *graecum* or *Graecorum ... proverbium*. Never, however, does he call a short form a *sententia*.
Alongside the *sententiae* and maxims of the philosophers, another type of *sententia* short form is widely used in this production: those poetic elaborations of *sententia* concepts and motifs that in Cicero's *De oratore* (2.257), not surprisingly, were already placed on the same level as *proverbs*, as rhetorical devices (albeit with an ironic function). Thus, there are numerous quotations of *sententiae* from Latin theater and epic, which Cicero's political and philosophical production contributes to enrich in a decisive way.
However, it is in Cicero's epistolary production—a powerful monument of the political, social, and cultural life of Rome at the end of the *res publica*—that we can find an equally powerful repertoire of every sort of *sententia* and proverb that the Roman tradition has left us.[150] The array of occasions, addressees, and tones of each epistle offers a kaleidoscopic use of every paremiographic level: idiomatic expressions, proverbial antonomasias, more or less famous Greek proverbs, ancient Roman sayings, lines that had become proverbial. It is here that we can really appreciate a "proverbial" Cicero, who probably reveals the rate of proverbiality in the spoken communication of the *civitas* of the time (if, indeed, his letters were not the subject of heavy literary reworkings). That of Cicero, in conclusion, appears to be an extraordinary and precise testimony on the spread and functions of the short *sententia* forms in different areas of Latin literary production of the 1st century BCE: a mocking and ironic function in orations; a moral function in politics and philosophy; a multifaceted function in epistolography.
Cicero's letters, in these central decades of the century, share the primacy of proverbiality with another author's highly individual text, belonging to a form of entertainment that was extremely widespread and appreciated at the time: the mime. Pliny the Elder reports that, in 83 BCE, a certain Publilius set sail from Antioch to seek his fortune in Italy with his mimes. After reaping

[149] A partial exception is "a storm in a wine ladle, as they say" (*fluctus in simpulo, ut dicitur, Legibus* 3.16.36), which, however, has philosophical affiliations, as witnessed by Athenaeus 8.19, 338A.
[150] See Manzo 1969.

successes for a long time, he landed in Rome during the years of Caesar's dictatorship, under the name of **Publilius Syrus**.[151] In Rome, mime had probably already grafted Greek models (from Epicharmus to the New Comedy) onto the popular Italic tradition, as the few fragments of authors from the end of the 2nd and the first half of the 1st century BCE seem to document (**Titinius**, **Atta**, **Decimus Laberius**), in which, however, the use of proverbs is rather limited. A turning point, in this sense, seems to be Publilius Syrus himself: a few decades following his death (that is, from the work of Seneca the Elder), and then in the writings of Seneca the Younger, many senarii with *sententiae* began to be quoted under his name, with the antonomastic label of *Publiliana* or *Publilianae sententiae*. It is likely that, shortly afterwards, real collections of such *sententiae*, quoted by rhetoricians and philosophers, pagans and Christians, start to circulate. The *sententiae* of Publilius Syrus grow larger and larger in number, thus forming an autonomous medieval tradition that will reach the impressive number of over 600 senarii. It seems clear that only a limited part of these belonged to the original nucleus of Publilius' mimes—of which, ironically, only two titles have survived. From a philosophical point of view, the picture that emerges from these *sententiae* is not univocal: every attempt to see in Publilius an advocate of Epicureanism or Stoicism does not seem convincing.[152] As Seneca reiterated (*Epistulae* 33.2),[153] the concepts expressed by this kind of *sententia* "belong to everyone": they are part of that canonized, transversal, and popular repertoire—sometimes even contradictory, as in every repertoire of proverbs—which is ultimately the reason for their fortune. This enormous fortune seems to demonstrate, once again, that in Rome, the moral *sententia* vein was by then inseparably welded to the ironic and comic dimension of literary communication, and to those genres that highlighted its potential the most, namely judicial oratory and mime.

If the theatre, once again, proved to be the privileged space for proverbs and *sententiae*, other poetic fields also offered significant evidence in mid-1st century Rome.

Gaius Valerius Catullus arrived in Rome from Verona, perhaps around 60 BCE, at a very young age, and consummated his intense, yet brief experience of life and poetry in a few years, since he probably died shortly before 50 BCE. He brought to completion that process of Hellenization of Roman poetry begun two centuries before and developed in the last two generations of poets of the *civitas*—not coincidentally defined νεώτεροι (by Cicero)—of which we have only a few but clear fragments. The Alexandrian style and taste entered powerfully into all poetic genres, from epyllion to epigram, from lyric to elegy: the Roman tradition of proverbs—but by now, and increasingly so, also the Greek tradition—was no exception.[154]

Catullus' *Liber* abounds, first and foremost, in those idiomatic expressions and proverbial antonomasias which, in the perception of the ancients, have always been juxtaposed with proper short *sententiae*. The great number of idioms such as *plus quam oculos amare* ("to love someone more than your own eyes"), *dicere ventis* ("to talk to the wind") or *pili facere* ("not even worth a hair") have the clear function of lowering the poetic tone, especially in Catullus' *Nugae* and *Epigrammata*, just as in the epigrammatic production of Callimachus and the other Alexandrians. Sometimes Catullus points out their idiomatic value with *quod dicitur* (98.1; 100.3), probably reproducing the technical τὸ λεγόμενον of so many Greek poets. However, any other signaling term is still absent (*verbum*, *dictum*, *proverbium* ...). The real proverbs can be found in the very first section of the *Liber*, the one considered—by Catullus' own admission/literary invention—to be of a less elevated tone and style: the *Nugae*. Some short forms were already canonized, such as

Suus cuique attributus est error (22.20)

[151] See Lelli 2021:1544–1551.

[152] Flamerie de Lachapelle 2011:xviii–xix. See also Morgan 2007:339–340.

[153] See also *Epistulae* 8.9, where Seneca says: "how many of Publilius' lines are worthy of being spoken by buskin-clad actors, as well as by wearers of the slipper!" then gives an example of *variatio* from one of Publilius' *sententiae* (*alienum est omne quidquid optando evenit*, "whatever you obtain by coveting is not truly yours").

[154] Except for the dated Pascal 1917, there are no overall recent studies of proverbs in Catullus. I refer, however, to Fo's monumental 2018 edition.

Everybody has his own delusion assigned to him.

Risu inepto res ineptior ulla est (39.16)
There is nothing sillier than a silly laugh.

Mulier cupido quod dicit amanti,
in vento et rapida scribere oportet aqua (70.4, from the elegies)
What a woman says to her ardent lover
should be written in wind and running water.

Alongside these, Catullus seems to record some precious pieces of popular Roman proverbs that are unattested elsewhere, such as:

Neque servus neque arca (23.1; 24.5 and 10)
Neither a servant nor a money-box.

Hoc est quod dicunt: ipsa olera olla legit (94.2)
It's just what they say: the pot finds its own herbs.[155]

Catullus' refined Alexandrianism, however, is most strongly expressed in his allusive reworking of the heritage of proverbs. Thus, on closer inspection, famous Catullian images, such as *quod vides perisse, perditum ducas* ("what you have seen lost, consider it lost," 8.2 and 10) and *cecidit velut prati ultimi flos* ("it fell like a flower at the edge of a meadow," 11.22), have other canonical proverb images behind them, such as, respectively, *quod periit, perit* ("what is lost, is lost")—*bis* in Plautus, and then in Publilius—and *tam perit quam extrema faba* ("it fell like a bean at the edge of a field")—listed by Verrius Flaccus (Fest. p.363 M.), and certainly less poetic than the Catullan *flos*.[156] There is also room—and perhaps it could not have been otherwise—for a proverbial *oppositio in imitando* of his model, Callimachus. Let us compare an excerpt of Catullus' artistic translation of the elegy dedicated to the catastrophe of Berenice's lock to the original (fragment 110 Pf.).

Παρθένε, μὴ κοτέσῃς, Ῥαμνουσιάς, οὔ τις ἐρύξει
βοῦς ἔπος
Do not be vexed, O Virgin of Rhamnus: no ox
shall stop my word (lines 70 ff.)

Pace tua fari hic liceat, Rhamnusia virgo;
namque ego non ullo vera timore tegam
Under your sufferance, let me say this, O Virgin of Rhamnus;
for no fear shall make me hide the truth. (66.71–72)

Almost as if he were correcting his master while hinting to his cultured reader, precisely in the words that the hair addresses to Aphrodite, Catullus removes the ancient Greek expression "to

[155] The otherwise unattested expression is certainly proverbial: it is characterized by the use of phonic games, as well as the signpost *quod dicunt*. Varro's observation is interesting in this sense (*Lingua latina* 5.108): *ab olla olera dicta, quod earum macerare cruda olera*, "from *olla* 'pot' the *holera* 'vegetables' were named, because it is the task of *ollae* 'pots' to soften the raw *holera* 'vegetables.'" Varro was probably aware of the popular proverb.

[156] The less famous *non videmus manticae quod in tergo est* ("we do not see the saddlebag that hangs on our back," 22.21), instead, is a re-elaboration (we do not know whether it was already present in previous authors) of the Aesopic fable of the two saddlebags.

have an ox on one's tongue" (already in Aeschylus: see above), replacing it with a periphrasis which is no longer proverbial and which seems to explain its meaning. This exegetical translation was certainly not necessary for Catullus' educated audience, but the poet may have considered it appropriate to distance himself from the model in matters of tone and style: his *Coma,* in fact, as has been repeatedly pointed out, appears much more elegant and refined than Callimachus'.

Another protagonist of the poetry of those turbulent decades, alongside the *poetae novi*, is **Titus Lucretius Carus**. According to ancient biographical information, which is very scarce, Lucretius was born in 95 and died in 54 BCE; he was probably Roman and frequented the Epicurean circles in Campania, embracing the doctrine with enthusiasm. In the wake of the traditional Greek poems *On Nature*, Περὶ φύσεως, he devoted himself to the writing of the first extraordinary Roman philosophical poem, *De rerum natura*, in hexameters, perhaps unfinished. In 6 books, he expounds the Epicurean theories on matter and atoms, on cosmology and human evolution, on natural phenomena, and on the greatest fear of mortals: that of death. If Epicurus himself, more than two centuries before, had given a decisive turn to the use of short forms in philosophical preaching, and if it is true that handbooks of Epicurean precepts were by now circulating widely, even in Roman circles, Lucretius could not but draw the conclusions. In the imaginative—and at times difficult—language of the poem, full of neologisms and technicalities, an important role is assigned to what we can rightfully define Lucretius' *sententiae.* In order to introduce a topic starting from a common belief, or, more often, in order to synthesize Epicurus' reasoning, Lucretius makes extensive use of *sententiae*. Some of them rework other Epicurean γνῶμαι, others reinterpret traditional motifs (philosophical or not), still others seem to be original utterances (we do not know whether it is because their original models have not survived), which became quoted and well known.

Many proverbs are employed in the course of Lucretius' philosophical demonstrations: the inexorable change of atoms, among other numerous examples, is explained with the well-known "the fall of drops hollows a stone" (1.313: *stilicides casus lapidem cavat*); the nature of solar light and heat with the equally famous "like fire covered in a heap of ashes" (4.926: *cinere ut multa latet obrutus ignis*); the origin of sovereignty in human life, and the struggles that followed, with "envy, like the thunderbolt, usually scorches the summits" (5.1127: *invidia quoniam, ceu fulmine, summa vaporant*).

There are significant Epicurean reinterpretations of traditional *sententiae*, which are placed in the wake of the dialogue between philosophy and popular knowledge—attested since the pre-Socratics, with different attitudes and tones, and anticipating, in many ways, numerous Senecan passages. The philosopher, when faced with proverbs that express a consolidated and widespread conviction, adapts it or interprets it, uses it as evidence for his own reasoning, corrects it or criticizes it, and even radically denies it, at times, as *vana superstitio*. To the motif according to which "nothing is created from nothing," Lucretius adds *divinitus*, "by divine power" (1.150: *nullam rem ad nihilo gigni divinitus umquam*). The well-known "it is better to gaze at a shipwreck from the land" is reread in the Epicurean light of someone who, after overcoming human fears, contemplates the troubles of others, in the famous *incipit* of book 2: "pleasant it is, when on the great sea, the winds trouble the waters, to gaze from shore upon another's great tribulation" (2.1–2: *suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis, / e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem*). The Epicurean precept of abstaining from passionate love is synthesized by resemanticizing the motif according to which "to avoid being lured into the snares of love is not so difficult as, when you are caught in the toils, to get out and break through the strong knots of Venus" (4.1147–1149: *vitare, plagas in amoris ne laciamur, / non ita difficile est quam captum retibus ipsis / exire et validos Veneris perrumpere nodos*) on the one hand, and, on the other, the one according to which "habit breeds love" (4.1283: *consuetudo concinnat amorem*).

The examples could go on, if we consider Lucretius' deeply argumentative style and his tendency to structure his hexameters, especially the conceptually significant ones, as *sententiae*. From this point of view, it seems to me, his philosophical poem is among the most *sententiae*-laden texts in Latin literature, precisely because it is philosophical.

Between the 50s and 40s of the 1st century BCE, all the protagonists of the time disappear, from Caesar to Cicero, from Sallust to Lucretius and Catullus. After the tormented decade in which Caesar's nephew and adopted son, Octavian, was pitted against Mark Antony, from the waters of

Actium, where the final battle took place in 31 BCE, a new period began, with new protagonists, and a culture guided by the *princeps* who had put an end to the *res publica*: Gaius Julius Caesar Octavian, by now **Augustus**. Assisted by his faithful friend, the learned Gaius Cilnius Maecenas, a veritable talent scout of the age, in only a few years' time, Augustus surrounded himself with the best intellectuals and poets, and the ones most willing to celebrate his glory. Augustus and Maecenas left a wide margin of freedom to these authors, but, on some points, the "directives" of the *princeps* were rather binding.

According to his biographers, especially Suetonius, Augustus himself, like almost every other Roman politician of all times, cultivated literary studies: he composed speeches, an autobiography, epigrams, *Exhortationes ad philosophiam* (Suetonius *Augustus* 85); he practiced a kind of eloquence that was *elegans et temperatum, vitatis sententiarum ineptiis atque concinnitate*, "chaste and elegant, avoiding the vanity of attempts at epigram and an artificial order" (*Augustus* 86: note, again, the meaning of "concept" for *sententia*). Among the most interesting observations that Suetonius offers us is the testimony that, in his letters, Augustus "often and significantly employed everyday language," (*cotidianus sermo,* 87). The examples cited by the biographer, who would have had the opportunity to read the autographs of the *princeps*, leave no doubt as to how to understand the observation: "when he wishes to indicate that certain men will never pay, he says that they will pay 'on the Greek kalends'; (...) to express the speed of a hasty action, he says 'quicker than you can cook asparagus!'" These idiomatic expressions have a clear and canonized proverbial character. Suetonius continues (*Augustus* 89):

In evolvendis in utriusque linguae auctoribus nihil aeque sectabatur, quam praecepta et exempla publice vel privatim salubria, eaque ad verbum excerpta aut ad domesticos aut ad exercituum provinciarumque rectores aut ad urbis magistratus plerumque mittebat, prout quique monitione indigerent.

In reading the authors of both languages, there was nothing for which he looked so carefully as precepts and examples that could be instructive to the public or to individuals; these he would often copy word for word, and send to the members of his household, or to his generals and provincial governors, or to magistrates of the city, according to the admonition each required.

This testimony is extremely important and refers to that practice of extracting *praecepta* and *exempla* (we could say χρεῖαι), attested since Xenophon for Socrates, and widespread in the ancient world. Some Greek and Latin papyri of private gnomic collections (for which see below) provide exceptional documentation of it. The *princeps*' passion for and practice of collecting exemplary *sententiae* and anecdotes are, I believe, linked to another peculiar feature of his political project: the moral restoration that was meant to open a new age for the *civitas* after the bloody and wretched times of the civil wars. Among the first measures recalled in his little official autobiography, the *Res gestae Divi Augusti*, the *princeps* points out:

Legibus novis me auctore latis multa exempla maiorum exolescentia iam ex nostro saeculo reduxi et ipse multarum rerum exempla imitanda posteris tradidi (8)

By passing new laws, I restored many traditions of our ancestors which were falling into disuse in our age and I myself handed down examples in many things for posterity to imitate.

In a society that had been transformed in a few generations, Hellenized, and by now "globalized," Augustus sought to base his political action on the appeal to traditional values, in every field. Even the search for *praecepta* and edifying *sententiae*, pursued personally and publicly, seems to be linked, I think, to his political and cultural projects. It is perhaps no coincidence that the authors who gathered around Augustus and Maecenas use *sententiae* at a high rate. Between the end of the 1st century BCE and the beginning of the 1st century CE, the (already strong) moral and *sententiae* character of Roman culture was enhanced by the impulse of Augustus' inclinations, which led to an intensification of *sententiae* in every field of literary production, even in those genres that had previously not been strongly permeated by it.

Among the first poets to arrive in Rome at the court of Augustus and Maecenas was **Vergil**. Originally from Mantua, he attended a philosophical school in Campania, and, around the end of

the 40s, he came to the fore with a collection of poems inspired by the Theocritean idylls, the *Eclogues*. The difference between the tendency to pragmatic imitation of the pastoral songs of his model (in the sense clarified above) and Vergil's elegant reinterpretation can be discerned, among many other aspects, in the dimension of proverbs. If, in Theocritus' pastoral work, expressions of everyday life and rural tradition abounded, in Vergil's *Eclogues*, this feature is almost absent. Certainly, Meliboeus' bitter recognition that he has sown for the soldiers who will appropriate his fields (1.73: *his nos consevimus agros*) refers to the well-known proverb "one sows, another reaps." However, the other *sententia* short forms all belong to the purely conceptual and moral sphere, as we can see from some famous examples:

Trahit sua quemque voluptas (2.65)
Each is led by his pleasure.

Non omnia possumus omnes (8.63)
We cannot all do everything.

Qui amant, ipsi sibi somnia fingunt (8.108)
Lovers fashion their own dreams.

Omnia vincit amor (10.69)
Love conquers all.

It seems no coincidence that Servius, the author of the most famous ancient commentary on Vergil, regarding *trahit sua quemque voluptas* (inspired, it seems, by Lucretius 2.258 *quo ducit quemque voluptas*, "where pleasure guides each of us"), will record how this verse had been criticized by some readers, as "extraneous to the law and the limits of bucolic poetry" (*supra bucolici carminis legem aut possibilitatem*). In any case, the moral *sententiae* of Vergil's shepherds (often pointed out by ancient commentators, such as Donatus and Servius), will soon become well known and widespread. Already in Vergil's first work, the search for concise formulations appears evident and will have significant developments in his two other masterpieces. As early as 38 BCE, it seems that Maecenas and Octavian "asked" Vergil for a poem that would fit into the economic and political program of repopulation and revalorization of the countryside, which had been oppressed by years of civil strife. While Varro was publishing his *De re rustica*, Vergil was working on the four books of his *Georgics*, published in 29 BCE. The link between Octavian's cultural policy and Vergil's poetry is by now organic: if, as we have seen, Augustus, in his *Res gestae*, said *multa exempla maiorum reduxi* ("I have restored many examples of our ancestors"), Vergil also programmatically proclaims, at the beginning of the first book, *possum multa tibi veterum praecepta referre*, "I can repeat for you many precepts of the ancients" (1.175). Those *praecepta* that he promises his readers (and his patrons) re-elaborate, always in an original way and often with signs of deep humanity, proverbs from the ergological, atmospheric, and calendrical spheres. Some of them were already present in Hesiod's *Works and Days* (another important intertext of the work); others, it seems, came from a more autonomously Roman-Italic tradition, such as:

Humida solstitia atque hiemes orate serenas, / agricolae (1.100–101)
Pray for moist summers and sunny winters, farmers!

Et dubitant homines serere atque impendere curam?[157] (2.433)

[157] On 1.100, see above, regarding the culture of archaic Rome. See also: *quid quaeque ferat regio* ("what each land can produce," 1.53), defined by Pliny as the old *oraculum* ("oracle"), derived from the popular *quid quaeque regio patiatur* ("what each land can stand") and circulating *vice proverbii* ("*qua* proverbs") already in the 5th century, as Macrobius attests; *nec vero terrae ferre omnes omnia possunt* ("all the lands cannot produce everything," 2.109), a "rewriting" of *non omnia possumus omnes* ("we cannot all do everything"), as if to humanize the *terrae*; *laudato ingentia rura, exiguum colito* ("praise large estates, till a

And can men be slow to plant and bestow care?

And yet, even in the *Georgics*, there are other more general and more intimate *sententiae* which are destined to enter the European cultural tradition as the author's re-elaborations:

Labor omnia vincit improbus (1.145)
Steady work conquers all.

Fugit irreparabile tempus (3.284)
Time flees irreparably.

The success of his agronomic poem was followed by Vergil's definitive consecration as an "Augustan" poet with the commission to compose the *Aeneid*, which kept him at work until his death in 19 BCE. Here, it really seems that Vergil, in the wake of the *reductio ad maiorum exempla* advocated by Octavian, intentionally imbued the epic fabric with a rate of *sententiae* that was unprecedented both in Greece and (as far as we know) in Rome. Numerous hexameters are clear reworkings of gnomic motifs; countless of them will shortly afterwards enter the Western cultural memory for the depth and thoughtfulness of their contents, for the incisiveness and brevity of their formulation, for their simple and immediate lexicon. It would suffice to think of some universally known examples of *sententiae*, such as:

Forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit (1.203)
Perhaps even this pain will someday be a joy to recall.

Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes (2.49)
I fear the Greeks, even when bearing gifts.

Quid non mortalia pectora cogis, auri sacra fames? (3.57)
To what crime do you not drive the hearts of men, accursed hunger for gold?

Varium et mutabile semper femina (4.569)
A woman is always a fickle and changeable thing.

Superanda omnis fortuna ferendo est (5.710)
Endurance must master every fortune.

Audentis fortuna iuvat (10.284)
Fortune aids the daring.

Stat sua cuique dies, breve et irreparabile tempus / omnibus est vitae (10.467–468)
Each has his day appointed; the span of life is short and irretrievable for all.

Nulla salus bello (11.399)
There is no safety in war.

The immense gnomic wealth of the *sententiae Vergilianae* was already documented on the walls of Pompeii, on which many of them appear as graffiti, starting with *vincit amor*. Since the 1st century CE, in the funerary epigrams, too, both in Italy and in other Latinized areas, many proverbs were quoted in Vergil's formulation.[158] More than a hundred hexameters constitute the *corpus* of *sententiae* that Vergil bequeathed to the subsequent European cultural tradition.

small one," 2.412), on which Servius notes: *hoc etiam Cato ait in libris ad filium de agricultura* ("Cato, too, stated this in his books on agriculture, dedicated to his son").

[158] See Hoogma 1959. For the *Vergilian sententiae* see Polara 1984.

Much has been written—and rightly so—about the emotional transformation of epic that Vergil accomplished in Rome with the *Aeneid*, and about the inspiration that Apollonius' *Argonautica* may have provided him. Yet, from the point of view of *sententiae*, Vergil's operation appears to be much more radical than that of the Alexandrian poet: the poetic memory of 5th-century Attic drama lent Vergil's epic not only tragic patterns and motifs but also, and structurally, that tendency towards short gnomic forms which, in Apollonius, was almost absent. It is perhaps precisely this constant presence of *sententiae* that gave the *Aeneid* the quality of universality that placed it next to Homer.

Having come to Rome from Venusia (Venosa), **Horace** was among the first to enter, at a very young age, the orbit of Maecenas and Octavian. He would become the "Augustan" author who, more than any other, would leave in the Western cultural tradition an extraordinary patrimony of *sententia* formulations: his are the phrases which can still be read on commercial slogans and t-shirts, on politicians' tweets and on Whatsapp statuses. These are, again, proverbs of ancient attestation and diffusion, which Horace made famous in his own formulation through his incisive ingenuity. *Difficile est proprie communia dicere*, "it is difficult to express common concepts with one's own words," says the poet in his *Ars Poetica* (128): and no observation better than this line—which, in turn, has become proverbial—explains the mechanism, as well as the spirit, behind the artistic creation of a *sententia* in Greece and Rome. Just as the author of a tragedy, an elegy, or a poem does not strike his audience by *what* he says—nor could he: the myth was already known, and there was no expectation for the conclusion of the story—but for *how* he says it and *how* he reworks a common heritage, so the *ars* of every other author, especially a poet, does not consist in striking the reader or the listener with *the sententia* motif he employs, but with the formulation in which he has reworked and made "his own" the "common" heritage of proverbs.[159]

And yet, in Horace's first poetic work, the *Epodes*, composed from the end of the 40s and published in 30 BCE, we do not find proper *sententiae* or—as one would have expected, due to the nature of the work—popular proverbs. It is true that proverbial antonomasias (all of mythical matters) and idioms abound, but the poet's tendency seems rather to show his own erudition and technique, avoiding, precisely, what is perceived as commonplace.

Horace's moral, *sententia* nature emerges, instead, in his *Sermones*, published between 33 and 30 BCE. He mixes expressions taken almost exactly from the popular (and probably oral) heritage of proverbs with maxims reworked from the philosophical tradition of every school—a pattern which will become characteristic of him. Thus, in the same work we find *tanti quantum habeas sis*, "you get your rating from what you have" (1.1.62) and the previously Aristotelian (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1106a) *est modus in rebus*, "there is measure in all things" (1.10.106). In the mouths of peasants and strangers, but also of the poet himself, we read Epicurean and Stoic maxims, proverbs from the Roman and Greek heritage. Nonetheless, in Horace's whole oeuvre, the terms *proverbium*, *dictum*, or *sententia* are never used to indicate the short forms, and (*ut*) *aiunt* and *dicitur* are very rare too.

In the first three books of his *Carmina*, published in 23 BCE, the poet, or the *persona loquens* for him, reflects on the world and on life in incisive formulas which, as we said, often gained an undying fortune. In this case, too, there is certainly an evident philosophical tradition, but in Horace's elegant elaborations one can ultimately see a heritage of popular proverbs. One term is enough for the poet to transform a well-known proverb into a very specific *sententia.* Thus, the motif according to which death is "equal for everyone" (and "makes everyone equal"), becomes *omnis una manet nox* (1.28.15), with the more poetic *nox* in place of *mors* (already in Catullus 5.6). Again, the pessimistic popular motif "a friend is only a friend as long as you give him something" (cf. i.e. Hieronimus, *epistulae* 148,30: *ut vulgo dicitur, facile ex amico inimicum facies, cui promissa non reddas*; Plautus, *Stichus* 521 *si res firma est, itidem amici sunt; si res labat, itidem amici conlabascunt*) widespread through the concrete proverb image of "pot boils, friendship lives" (cf. Zenobius 4.12 ζεῖ χύτρα, ζῇ φιλία), becomes *diffugiunt cadis / cum faece siccatis amici*, "friends drain the jars to the dregs and then disappear" (1.35.26–27). The

[159] The only general work on Horace, though synthetic by nature, is the *Gnomica* entry in the *Encyclopedia Oraziana* (Grimal 1997). On *carpe diem* see Traina 1973; on the *Epistles* see Guglielmo 2010.

examples could go on and on: the aristocratic Horace, who has no particular sympathy with the *vulgus*—and the proverbial *odi profanum volgus et arceo* ("I hate common masses and avoid them," 3.1.1) would be enough to bear witness to this—reworks its popular philosophy in light of the parallel tradition of the "true" philosophers, and, above all, in the clear and incisive language of his own poetry. Thus, he enriches, with his touch, the tradition: *proprie communia dicendo*.
If the fundamental topics of the *Sermones* were man's insatiability and vices, and those of the *Carmina* were the reflection on human limits, on death, and on fate, Horace's last collection, the *Epistulae*, reveal a *summa* of the themes dearest to the poet, and an extraordinary reservoir of short *sententia* forms. Its moral intent is more openly declared than ever by Horace, who wants to clarify to himself (and to others) those *elementa* (1.1.25) of real ethical teaching, which almost constitute the formulas of a handbook. Indeed, the different epistles, one after the other, do look like a handbook, featuring dozens of incisive *sententiae* and recording proverbs from the daily, animal, agricultural, and medicinal spheres. Horace often gives these expressions the definitive formulation that remain for centuries.
The third great protagonist of this culture, although less prominent than the other two, is **Livy**. We know very little about his life and studies: originally from Patavium (Padua), he came to Rome, where he frequented the circle of Augustus, without—it seems—being an organic part of it. He conceived the ambitious project of narrating the history of the *civitas* from its foundation to his own times: thus were born the original 142 books *Ab Urbe condita*, a monumental narration, year by year, of over seven centuries of Roman history. 35 of them remain: a more than sufficient number to ascertain the treatment accorded to proverbs and *sententiae*.
If Diodorus had already said that history was the "guardian" (φύλαξ) and "witness" (μάρτυς) of the good and evil deeds of men, as well as the "benefactor of the entire human race" (εὐεργέτις δὲ τοῦ κοινοῦ γένους τῶν ἀνθρώπων, 1.2.2); if Cicero had reiterated in his *De oratore* (2.9.36) that history is "witness of times, light of truth, life of memory, and teacher of life" (*testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae*); and Sallust had granted the historian the role of sententious commentator on human events, the program of returning the public (and private) life to an earlier morality by Octavian Augustus finds, in the historiography of Livy, an extraordinary interpreter.
In the numerous speeches scattered throughout the work, as well as in the author's brief intrusions, *sententiae* constitute one of the distinctive characteristics of Livy, who rarely uses the term *proverbium* (23.47.6 *rusticum*; 40.46.12 *vulgatum, quia verum erat*), but never *sententia*. Similar to what happens in Vergil's and Horace's poetry, the synthetic and incisive structure of Livy's prose offers an ideal context to the short *sententia* form. The themes are the ones most typical of historical reflection: power, fortune, glory, war. Some formulations became the heritage of the subsequent cultural (and not only literary) tradition:

Avitum malum regni cupido (1.6.4)
The greed of kingly power is an ancestral curse.

Ostendite modo bellum, pacem habebitis (6.18.7)
Only make a show of war and you shall have peace.

Melior tutiorque est certa pax quam sperata victoria (30.30.19)
Certain peace is better and safer than hope of victory.

Compared to Polybius and Sallust, the spirit is always more inclined to a severe and, at times, gloomy pessimism. With Livy, Latin historiography seems to have really found the *sententia* tone that will mark it for the remaining centuries.
Alongside the more organic figures of Augustan culture, the pervasiveness of the *sententia* element in these decades also emerges in other literary fields. At the end of the 1st century BCE, an extraordinary season of love poetry in elegiac couplets flourished in Rome. The work that is usually defined as "Latin love elegy"—which is less committed to, although not free from eulogistic references to the Augustan principate—offers a surprising aspect of *sententiae*.

In the poems of **Tibullus**, probably a native of the Roman countryside, **Propertius**, from Assisi (Umbria), and **Ovid**, from Sulmona—all born in the 50s—published in a very short span of years (between 28 and 16 BCE), there is an impressive repertoire of proverbs on love. In this case, too, as for Vergil and Horace, the tendency to read in a moral key what happens to the poet (whether real or *fictum*) and to structure the line in an incisive and conclusive way, makes the more than one hundred elegies of the three authors that have come down to us a real encyclopedia of *sententiae* on erotic matters. Besides the more direct ones, many other *sententiae* are adapted to erotic meanings. The *sententiae* are often introduced by *nam* or *quoniam*, and, in some cases, by *dicitur* or *dicunt*. This aspect, I think, has not been adequately emphasized—it is true that there is no global study on the matter[160]—but, in fact, it tightly links the elegiac poets to the other protagonists of the Augustan period. The whole range of the sentiments of love is represented in these couplets, a veritable *summa* of Western erotic gnomics, from "love is blind" to "all in love is fair," from "I can live neither with you nor without you" to "out of sight, out of mind":

Obsequio plurima vincet amor (Tibullus 1.4.40)
Love wins most by compliance.

Donis vincitur omnis amor (Tibullus 1.5.60)
Every love is won by gifts.

Sera tamen tacitis poena venit pedibus (Tibullus 1.9.4)
Yet at last comes Punishment on silent feet.

Nudus amor formae non amat artificem (Propertius 1.2.8)
Love is naked and does not love beauty gained by artifice.

Scilicet insano nemo in amore videt (Propertius 2.14.18)
Naturally, no one uses his eyes when he is madly in love.

Quantum oculis, animo tam procul ibit amor (Propertius 3.21.9)
Love will be as far from my mind as you are from my eyes.

Militat omnis amans (Ovid *Amores* 1.9.1; also in a Pompeian graffito)
Every lover is a soldier.

Non sine te nec tecum vivere possum (Ovid *Amores* 3.11.37)
I can live neither with you nor without you.

Res est solliciti plena timoris amor (Ovid *Heroides* 1.2)
Love is a thing ever filled with anxious fear.

Successore novo vincitur omnis amor (Ovid *Remedia amoris* 462)
Every love is vanquished by the following love.

Ut ameris amabilis esto (Ovid *Ars amatoria* 2.107)
That you may be loved, be lovable!

There is no lack, in such erudite poets, of games of intertextuality with proverbs and the gnomic tradition, as when Tibullus states that *fortes adiuvat ipsa Venus*, "Venus herself aids the stouthearted" (1.2.16), replacing the Fortune of the gnomic tradition with Venus; when he adapts to the events of love the motif according to which "the gods strike those who are more haughty": *deus crudelius urit / quos videt invitos subcubuisse sibi* (1.8.7–8); when Propertius adds, to the *omnia vertuntur*, "everything changes" (2.8.8) of the wisdom tradition, the hemistich *certe*

[160] Harmon 1975 exclusively concerns one proverbial antonomasia. McKeown 1995 is also very focused.

vertuntur amores, "and certainly loves change" in the same hexameter. Some of these *sententiae* will experience an autonomous circulation in the Middle Ages: being extrapolated from the original context, they will form anthologies of *sententiae*, such as the *Proverbia Ovidii* (from the *Amores*), quoted from the 11th century.
Ovid and Propertius are not only love poets; but whereas in the "aetiological" elegies of Propertius' book 4, proverbs and *sententiae* become rare, in the three non-erotic works of Ovid, the presence of short forms of gnomic character is extremely frequent. In the *Metamorphoses* and in the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, the motifs on fortune are particularly exploited; in the *Fasti*, the motifs of patriotism, such as *omne solum forti patria est*, "every land is to the brave his country" (1.493) appear, and, obviously, the calendrical expressions, such as

Si te proverbia tangunt, mense malas Maio nubere vulgus ait (5.489)
If you give weight to proverbs, the people say bad women wed in May.

where the proverbial nature is explicitly mentioned. The term *proverbium* appears here for the first time in Latin poetry, around 8 CE.
In the meantime, Augustan Rome was being populated by Greek intellectuals. Among the first to arrive in the *urbs* and to work there permanently was Didymus, who had established a very important cultural link with Alexandria. In 30 BCE, at the age of thirty, another protagonist of those decades arrived in Rome: **Dionysius of Halicarnassus**. Welcomed by the prestigious family of Aelius Tubero, a friend of Cicero, he became part of the debate on the two main rhetorical trends of the time, taking a clear position in favor of Atticism. Dionysius devoted his writings especially to the great orators of the past, but, in his works *On Lysias*, *Demosthenes*, and *Dinarchus*, no reflection is made on the element of *sententiae* and proverbs. So too in Dionysius' most famous treatise, *On the composition of words*: no mention of παροιμίαι or γνῶμαι (in the technical sense which, as we have seen, had already become widespread). The rhetorician of Halicarnassus does not seem to appreciate proverbial expressions, if it is true that, even in his mighty *History of Archaic Rome*—a period that, as we have seen with Livy, could have provided numerous ideas on the style of *sententiae*—very rare cases of γνῶμαι appear, and almost none of παροιμίαι, neither in the speeches of the protagonists, nor in Dionysius' first-person utterances. It would suffice to say that in one of the densest sections of contrasting speeches, those between Tullus Hostilius and Mettius Fufetius, in the fratricidal war between Rome and Alba Longa (3.7–16), there is merely one instance of a *sententia*: the traditional "do good to your friends and harm your enemies" (3.11.9). From this point of view, then, Dionysius on the one hand and Sallust and Livy on the other are at opposite ends. Yet, the moral intent of the work, in line with the times, is repeatedly stressed by the author.
The only case of an aetiology of a proverb concerns the legendary and famous episode of the vestal Tuccia, accused of having lost her virginity and subjected herself, after invoking Vesta, to an ordeal consisting in drawing water from the Tiber with a sieve. If successful, the test would have denied the accuser and Tuccia would have become a symbol of integrity for centuries, in literature and art.[161] From none of the sources known to us (Livy, Valerius Maximus, Pliny) is it clear what exactly the proverb was: even Dionysius is vague, stating that the virgin τὸ παροιμιαζόμενον ἐν τοῖς πρώτοις τῶν ἀδυνάτων τόλμημα ὑπομεῖναι, "was so hardy as to undertake the task which, according to the proverb, is among the most impossible of achievement" (2.69.2): it seems clear that the rhetorician and historian has here in mind the famous *adynaton* "to draw up water with a sieve" (Plutarch *Adynata* 8), related, in Greek culture, to the Danaids.
In those years, a Stoic and Homeric scholar arrived in Rome from the distant Amaseia, a town in the inner Pontus: **Strabo**, born around 64 BCE. Of him we have 17 books of *Geographica*: a description of all the countries and peoples bordering the Mediterranean, clockwise, starting from Iberia, not only from the geographical and topographical point of view, but also from the cultural

[161] The iconography of the Vestal Tuccia is very rich, from the early Italian Renaissance to the 18th century, from Mantegna to Corradini. Even Elizabeth I had herself portrayed with a sieve in her left hand, perhaps inspired by Tuccia, in a famous painting by Quentin Metsys the Younger (ca. 1583).

and historical, and, in a sense, the ethnographical one, according to the classical reference point of Herodotus. Strabo's work offers an interesting sample of the category of geographical proverbs that was widespread in ancient and modern cultures, linked to historical or legendary episodes and anecdotes of cities and peoples. The author's information refers almost exclusively to cities and territories of Hellenic culture or colonization, or, at most, to the image that the Greeks had of this or that people. No mention is made of local proverbs for Iberia and Gaul (books 3–4), all the territories of northern Italy (book 5), or Egypt and Libya (books 13–17). Nevertheless, we find more than forty mentions of aetiological proverbs commented on by the author, sometimes critically with respect to different exegeses. It seems clear that the scholar draws his information from historians (especially Ephorus and Antiochus) and antiquarians (especially the Atthidographers), and, perhaps, the repertoire of Didymus.[162] The hypothesis that Strabo included these paremiographic inserts to vary the literary monotony of his prose is not entirely convincing.[163] The ones mentioned by Strabo, and always introduced by formulas such as "from here they say that a παροιμία was born ..." (i.e. 6,1,10: ἀφ' οὗ τὴν παροιμίαν … ἐκπεσεῖν φασιν) and the like, are among the most famous geographical and ethnic proverbs of the ancient world, quoted by historians and poets (from whom the author often takes the literary formulation, which has become more famous than its original form)—few of his readers could have ignored them. It would have been much more interesting if Strabo had actually linked such proverbs with locations, in the wake of the Hellenistic periegetes Polemon of Ilium; but Strabo worked almost exclusively with texts, and his geographical proverbs have mainly a literary and bookish flavor, placed here and there in the territories covered by his geographical itinerary. Strabo's interest, therefore, is perhaps a personal one, not a common one in this genre, as can be seen by comparing it with his (almost) contemporary colleague, the geographer **Pomponius Mela**, who came to Rome from Iberia and wrote a similar work in Latin, the *Chorographia*, where no paremiographic insert can be found.

We have some news of other authors of these decades who deal with *sententiae*. First of all, a very famous and important grammarian of the time, **Tryphon,** also from Alexandria, who wrote treatises on accentuation and pronunciation, orthography, and rhetorical figures. To this last field seems to belong—or rather to date back—a fragment handed down in Byzantine grammar codices under his name, where we read one of the first definitions of παροιμία (Περὶ τρόπων 25). This takes into account the basic concepts of the mechanism of the proverb, that is the metaphor:

Παροιμία ἐστὶ λόγος εἰρημένος ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς ἕτερον, λεγόμενος δὲ ὑφ' ἡμῶν κατὰ ἀνακύκλησιν πρός τινα τῶν ὁμοηθῶν, ὡς παρὰ Σαπφοῖ, "μήτ' ἐμοὶ μέλι, μήτε μέλιττα."

A *paroimia* is a phrase originally said in a different context, analogically employed by us in relation to a similar situation, as in Sappho [fragment 146 V.] "neither honey nor bee for me."

Perhaps we should also date to the beginning of the 1st century CE another rhetorical and grammatical work that has come down to us with a spurious attribution (to Demetrius of Phalerum) and with the Latin title ***De elocutione***, *On style*. The anonymous author, besides quoting some proverbs in his discourse (28.129), considers the παροιμία as a stylistic element. From a proverb, "elegance in speech" can arise (ἐν δὲ τοῖς πράγμασι λαμβάνονται χάριτες ἐκ παροιμίας), since "by nature" the proverb has something pleasant in it: φύσει γὰρ χάριεν πρᾶγμά ἐστιν παροιμία. The example he chose is Sophron, a favorite author, from whose mimes one could collect almost all the proverbs in existence (156: σχεδόν τε πάσας ἐκ τῶν δραμάτων αὐτοῦ τὰς παροιμίας ἐκλέξαι ἐστίν). The anonymous author's remark on the stylistic use of παροιμία in epistolography is significant:

[162] According to Keim 1909, the first complete work on the παροιμίαι present in Strabo, the author may have drawn on a paremiographic collection very close to the Athoa recension; Ruta 2020:46–47 is of the same opinion.

[163] Dueck 2004.

Κάλλος μέντοι αὐτῆς αἵ τε φιλικαὶ φιλοφρονήσεις καὶ πυκναὶ παροιμίαι ἐνοῦσαι—καὶ τοῦτο γὰρ μόνον ἐνέστω αὐτῇ σοφόν, διότι δημοτικόν τί ἐστιν ἡ παροιμία καὶ κοινόν, ὁ δὲ γνωμολογῶν καὶ προτρεπόμενος οὐ δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἔτι λαλοῦντι ἔοικεν, ἀλλὰ μηχανῆς.

Friendly pleasantries and numerous proverbs also give [the epistolary genre] a certain beauty. This indeed should be its only permitted element of wisdom, since the proverb is a popular and common expression. And the man who utters *sententiae* and gives exhortations seems to be no longer chatting in a letter but preaching from the pulpit.

Schools of rhetoric headed by famous cultural figures were multiplying in those very years and were becoming increasingly institutionalized, not only in Rome. From these and other reports dating from the 2nd century CE, we know for certain that, by this time, παροιμίαι, γνῶμαι, and ἀποφθέγματα have been canonized as materials for the instruction of pupils. Lists of moral *sententiae* were employed from the middle level of education, from written specimens, and probably also under dictation. Proverbs, *sententiae*, and apophthegms were later used, at a higher level, to make short compositions that contextualized the saying, accompanying it with a protagonist and a story, either real or invented: it is the χρεία, of which we have already spoken, and which will assume an increasingly important role in the practices of style and composition, both in Greek and Latin, as will soon become evident. However, it also retained—and will retain for a long time—probably above all, the moral function of teaching and cultural education.
A witness of this is one of the authors who crossed the junction between the principate of Augustus and that of Tiberius, the first successor to the dynasty: the Italic, perhaps Roman, **Valerius Maximus**, active in the first three decades of the 1st century CE, and author of 10 books (of which 9 remain) of *Dicta et facta memorabilia*, a powerful repertory of *exempla* of vices and virtues. The almost one thousand short texts collected feature both illustrious historical figures and unknown characters who had become proverbial. They are organized (certainly by the author) by themes: *de patientia* ("on patience"), *de fiducia sui* ("on self-confidence"), *de constantia* ("on perseverance"), *de moderatione* ("on self-control") .., and again divided between the Roman world and the Greek (and "barbarian") world; they are concluded, in most cases, by a saying pronounced by the protagonist, or by a reflection of the author—in any case, a *sententia*.
This is indeed the first thematically structured collection of χρεῖαι that has come down to us, the moral intent of which is explicitly stressed by Valerius Maximus at the beginning of almost every book. A rhetorical use of this text is probably conceivable—even though it was not its main function—from the increasingly gnomological epitomizations to which it will be subject in the following centuries. Almost every apophthegm and every proverb of and about famous historical figures of the ancient world, is present in this work, which will enjoy an enormous fortune, from the Middle Ages to the modern age.
Definitely less fortunate is the image of another *sui generis* personality of the time: **Velleius Paterculus**. A cavalry commander in the retinue of Tiberius, and then a friend and flatterer of Lucius Aelius Sejanus, the powerful *praefectus* of the *urbs*, Velleius retired into private life at the age of 40. He wrote a very special historical work entitled *Historiae Romanae* in just two books (of different sizes), in which he follows the events of Rome from its mythical foundation to the year 30 CE. His work includes traces of an aristocratic devaluation of every protagonist on the progressive or popular side, and a questionable praise of the more ruthlessly patrician figures first, and of the imperial family next. Velleius' style, which seems to be affected by some Asian rhetorical devices in vogue in those decades, makes little use of *sententiae*, which are almost all centered on two themes dear to the author (perhaps in an autobiographical way): fortune and envy.[164] The same limited use of *sententiae* can be found in the singular *History of Alexander the Great* by **Curtius Rufus**, an author of whom we know nothing, who shares the Hellenistic biographical interest: his style, both novelistic and fictional, leaves no room for morals and

[164] See, for example: 1.96; 2.30.3; 2.31.4: *raro invidetur eorum honoribus, quorum vis non timetur* ("seldom do we envy the honors of those whose power we do not fear"); 2.40.4: *numquam eminentia invidia carent* ("power roles are never without envy"); 2.57.3: *ineluctabilis fatorum vis* ("the force of fate is ineluctable"); 2.118.4; 2.92.5.

sententiae. A similar observation can be made for the *Anabasis of Alexander,* in Greek, by the slightly younger **Arrian** of Nicomedia, author of other technical and geographical writings in which the gnomic element is almost absent.
Fortune and *envy*—understood as rivalry in social ambitions, and, by now, more and more in the graces of what had become the imperial court—return as protagonists in the first-person prefaces which the fabulist **Phaedrus** attaches to the five books of his work.[165] Our very limited biographical data on him—his Thracian origin, his status as a freedman perhaps under Augustus, the trial suffered and lost against the powerful Sejanus—make him as historically nuanced as he is symbolically fascinating. Considered the bearer of a widespread morality in the lower classes, like the legendary Aesop, Phaedrus himself nourishes the image of the *fabula* as a genre in which (3, *Prologue*)

servitus obnoxia,
quia quae volebat non audebat dicere,
affectus proprios in fabellas transtulit

The slave, liable to punishment,
since he dared not say what he wished to,
projected his personal sentiments into fables.

In the *prologues* and *epilogues* of several books, Phaedrus often deals with the themes of envy (in the artistic and social spheres) and of fortune (as the arbiter and slow repairer of human injustices), closing his reflections in senarii with *sententiae* that recall the traditional motifs of proverbs. But it is in the more than eighty *fabulae*—both Aesopic and not—that the author offers a wide repertoire of *sententiae*, mostly enclosed within the space of a single verse, and almost always at the opening or closing of the tale. As already mentioned regarding the Aesopic *corpus*, the intricate paths that lead, and had led, from a proverb to a fable, and vice versa, remain unknown to us, and often even to the ancient fabulist. Certainly, the contiguity between the two genres was accentuated by fundamental characteristics, such as brevity, allegory, and morality, in common. It is no coincidence that Quintilian will assert: [*fabulae*] *confine est παροιμίας genus illud quod est velut fabella brevior et per allegoriam accipitur*, "close to the fable is the genre of *paroimia*, which is a sort of abbreviated fable understood allegorically" (5.11.21). Phaedrus himself declares that he does not wish to point out faults in a particular individual, but rather *vitam et mores hominum ostendere*, "to show the life and customs of men" (3, *Prologue*, 50). Proverbs and *sententiae*, from this point of view, become formidable tools, and there seem to be many cases in which the poet takes his cue from a popular saying. Gnomic and folkloric motifs are introduced by locutions such as *traditum est*, *fertur*, *ut aiunt*, or by passages in which a reference is made to the *vulgus*, to an anonymous apothegm. In two cases, moreover, the maxim that closes or opens the apologue is introduced precisely by the term *sententia* (3, *Epilogue*; 4.13). The occupation of the scholastic environment does not seem alien to Phaedrus (perhaps, once freed, he was a *magister*), and even his collection, though different in genre, is and will be, over the centuries, a repertory of *exempla*, with interesting developments.
The gnomic element appears rhetorically and conceptually canonized in Phaedrus' Greek counterpart **Babrius**, author of *Mimiambs* in which fables of the Aesopic tradition (and not only) are reworked, and almost always opened or concluded by gnomic promyths and epimyths. Several trimeters of Babrius will later flow into gnomological and paremiographic collections, as evidence of the fortune of this sylloge, especially in schools (1.11):

Ἀλώπεκ' ἐχθρὴν ἀμπέλων τε καὶ κήπων
ξένη θελήσας περιβαλεῖν τις αἰκείῃ,
τὴν κέρκον ἅψας καὶ λίνου τι προσδήσας
ἀφῆκε φεύγειν. τὴν δ' ἐπίσκοπος δαίμων
εἰς τὰς ἀρούρας τοῦ βλαβόντος ὠδήγει 5

[165] The most updated study is Mordeglia 2010, with an extensive bibliography.

τὸ πῦρ φέρουσαν. ἦν δὲ ληίων ὥρη,
ποίη δὲ καλλίκαρπος ἐλπίδων πλήρης.
ὁ δ' ἠκολούθει τὸν πολὺν πόνον κλαίων,
οὐδ' εἶδεν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἅλωα Δημήτηρ.
Χρὴ πρᾶον εἶναι μηδ' ἄμετρα θυμοῦσθαι. 10
ἔστιν τις ὀργῆς νέμεσις, ἣν φυλαττοίμην,
αὐτοῖς βλάβην φέρουσα τοῖς δυσοργήτοις.

Someone caught a fox, the enemy of his vines and gardens. Wishing to punish him with a new kind of outrage, he set his tail on fire, tied some rope to it, and let him loose to run. But the spirit that watches over such acts led the fox carrying his fire into the fields of the man who had hurt him. It was the season of crops, and the grain was rich in fine fruits and full of promise. The man ran after the fox, bewailing his hard work, and the crops never saw his threshing floor.
One must be calm and not immoderate in one's anger. There is a certain retribution for anger—and may I guard against it—which brings loss upon men who lose their tempers.

That the cultural climate was changing in the first decades of the Christian era, and that the institutionalization of the rhetorical *curriculum* was shaping new generations not only of orators, but also of poets and prose writers of various genres, including philosophers, is testified to by the multiplication of information which has come down to us on the number of schools of rhetoric in all the cities of the empire and on the influx, in Rome, of numerous rhetoricians from every part of the Hellenized and Romanized Mediterranean.
Among them, **Lucius Anneus Seneca**—called **Father** or **the Elder**, to distinguish him from his more famous and homonymous son Seneca—arrived in Rome at a very young age from Iberian Cordoba. During his long life, he collected examples of typical motifs used in judicial and declamatory orations in a work as singular as it is important: *Oratorum et rhetorum sententiae, divisiones, colores* (*Sentences, divisions, and colors of the orators and rhetoricians*), divided into ten books of *Controversiae* (*Fictitious lawsuits*) and one of *Suasoriae* (*Fictitious speeches of persuasion)*. The *sententiae* of the title do not refer to the paremiological term, but to the typical "concepts" that ought to be available to the orator for a specific case. However, the role acknowledged by Seneca the Elder to the short *sententiae* forms, even in the absence of explicit theoretical reflections on them, and of any definition of the terms *proverbium* and *sententia*, is relevant.[166] Indeed, in the only passage in which the term *proverbium* appears, Seneca implicitly emphasizes its moral and formative value, as well as its fundamental aspects of brevity and shareability. There are more than fifty proverbs and *sententiae* in the work: almost all of them have a clear and strong moral value for the topical themes of the time (and not only): fortune, law, virtue, hope. From a strictly rhetorical point of view, the *sententia* has a reinforcing function, as it strengthens the argumentation; an epigrammatic function, at the end of a speech; a paradoxical function, to bring about the *aprosdoketon* effect; a definitory function, as a cardinal element of the argumentation. The picture that emerges from Seneca the Elder's testimony is one of a changed interest in the *sententia* from the oratory of the first decades of the 1st century CE, which was now increasingly less political and increasingly more rhetorically declamatory.[167] The short form, the catchphrase, the prose increasingly rich in incisive poetic and philosophical insertions is now becoming the most fashionable style—*temporis eius auribus accomodatum* ("which suited the ears of his time"), as Tacitus would later affirm (*Annals* 13.3.1). The death of Claudius in 54 CE and the rise to power of the young Nero, unscrupulous and innovative in every artistic field, could only accentuate this trend, as will become clear from the most important authors of these decades, starting with the homonymous son of the Cordoban, **Lucius Anneus Seneca,** and his nephew (son of the latter's brother) **Marcus Anneus Lucan**.
Nothing can emphasize the pervasiveness of the *sententia* in these two authors better than the judgment of their contemporaries, or of those who could read them a few decades later.

[166] The most up-to-date and complete study on Seneca the Elder is Balbo 2011, with an extensive survey of *sententiae* and proverb material. See also Di Capua 1946.
[167] See again Balbo 2015, on the presence of *sententiae* and *proverbia* in Latin declamation.

Quintilian, himself an Iberian rhetorician, offers us the clearest and most incisive portrait of Seneca, completely dependent on *sententiae* (10.1.129–130):

Multae in eo claraeque sententiae, multa etiam morum gratia legenda, sed in eloquendo corrupta pleraque, atque eo perniciosissima quod abundant dulcibus vitiis. Velles eum suo ingenio dixisse, alieno iudicio: nam si aliqua contempsisset, si +parum+ non concupisset, si non omnia sua amasset, si rerum pondera minutissimis sententiis non fregisset, consensu potius eruditorum quam puerorum amore comprobaretur.

In his work, there are many brilliant *sententiae*, and much of it is worth reading because of its moral content; but his style is mostly decadent, and particularly dangerous because of the seductive vices with which it abounds. One could wish that he had expressed himself with his own talent, but with other people's judgment. Because if he had rejected some things, if he had not desired things that were not right, if he had not loved all his own thoughts, if he had not broken up his weighty ideas into very short periods, he would have obtained the general approval of the learned rather than the admiration of boys.

As is evident, Quintilian does not appreciate Seneca's style at all, and it is precisely the overabundance of striking *sententiae* and the prose broken up into hundreds of short sentences (which are often elaborations of traditional philosophical and gnomic motifs) that he least appreciates. And yet, by the age of Quintilian, but also as early as that of Nero, one must face the existence of this new style, which finds in the juxtaposition of short s*ententiae* forms its most profound artistic feature, distancing itself from the past, whether it be Ciceronian or Atticist (8.5.13 and 31–34):

Nunc aliud volunt, ut omnis locus, omnis sensus in fine sermonis feriat aurem.
Nowadays, however, people want something else, namely that every passage, every sentence, should strike the ear with its final phrase.

Nec multas plerique sententias dicunt, sed omnia tamquam sententias. huic quibusdam contrarium studium, qui fugiunt ac reformidant omnem hanc in dicendo voluptatem, nihil probantes nisi planum et humile et sine conatu. Ita, dum timent ne aliquando cadant, semper iacent. Quod enim tantum in sententia bona crimen est? Non causae prodest? non iudicem movet? non dicentem commendat? "Sed est quoddam genus quo veteres non utebantur." Ad quam usque nos vocatis vetustatem? Nam si illam extremam, multa Demosthenes quae ante eum nemo. Quo modo potest probare Ciceronem qui nihil putet ex Catone Gracchisque mutandum? Sed ante hos simplicior adhuc ratio loquendi fuit. Ego vero haec lumina orationis velut oculos quosdam esse eloquentiae credo. Sed neque oculos esse toto corpore velim, ne cetera membra officium suum perdant, et, si necesse sit, veterem illum horrorem dicendi malim quam istam novam licentiam. Sed patet media quaedam via, sicut in cultu victuque accessit aliquis citra reprensionem nitor. Quare, sicut possumus, adiciamus virtutibus: prius tamen sit vitiis carere, ne, dum volumus esse meliores veteribus, simus tantum dissimiles.

Many speakers do not use many *sententiae*, but they deliver everything as if it was a *sententia*. Some, on the other hand, apply the opposite strategy: they avoid and shun all this pleasure in speech, approving nothing that is not plain, common, and undemanding. They are so afraid of a possible fall that they always stay on the ground. For what is the crime in a good *sententia*? Does it not help one's cause? Does it not impress the judge? Does it not make the speaker likeable? "But it is a sort of thing the ancients did not use." To what antiquity are you appealing? For if it is a distant one, well, Demosthenes did many things which no one had done before him. How can one appreciate Cicero, if one believes that nothing should be changed since Cato and the Gracchi? Yet before them, the art of speaking was even simpler. For my part, I think these ornaments of speech are, so to speak, the eyes of eloquence. But I would not want there to be eyes all over the body, lest the other organs lose their function, and, if necessary, I would rather have the old uncouthness of speech than this modern license. However, there is a sort of middle

course open to us, just as in dress and diet a certain elegance has developed which escapes reprehension. So let us add this to the virtues, as far as we can; but the first thing must be to get rid of faults, for fear that, in attempting to be superior to our predecessors, we succeed only in being unlike them.

By the beginning of the 2nd century, when Quintilian writes, the rich style of *sententiae* will have won its rhetorical battle against the dry style and Cicero's *concinnitas* (12.10.48):

Hoc, quod vulgo sententias vocamus, quod veteribus praecipueque Graecis in usu non fuit (apud Ciceronem enim invenio), dum rem contineant et copia non redundent et ad victoriam spectent quis utile neget? Feriunt animum et uno ictu frequenter inpellunt et ipsa brevitate magis haerent et delectatione persuadent.

But as for what we commonly call *sententiae*, which the ancients, and particularly the Greeks, did not use (as I indeed find in Cicero), who could deny their usefulness, so long as they are pertinent to the matter, are not overabundant, and aim at winning the case? They strike the mind and often knock it over with a single stroke; because of their brevity, they are more memorable, and because of the pleasure they give, they persuade.

In the Neronian decades, however, the choice of Seneca (and of many others) appears extraordinarily revolutionary. The prevalence of the style centered on the artistic unit of the *sententia* certainly has a philosophical ancestry related to the Stoics and the Cynics, but also to the Epicureans, as we have seen. Contrary to Cicero's philosophical prose—the only possible genre of comparison—Seneca's prose rediscovers the short forms which, as we have seen, had played such a large part in the Hellenistic philosophy of the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE. As Seneca himself states in a famous passage (*Epistulae* 108.10–11), the same concept, if expressed in prose, has less effect; if concentrated in a *sententia*, it comes, as it were, "hurtling with a fuller fling," *velut lacerto excussiore*.

Every page, every period of Seneca's work is profoundly interwoven with *sententiae*: elaborations of philosophical maxims, poets' formulations (especially from mime), autonomous creations that tend towards a fulminating final concept. It is precisely the theatre—or, rather, we should say theatricality—that ultimately constitutes the dimension with which Seneca contaminates his style, which, with a definition that is now classic, has been rightly dubbed "dramatic."[168] Apart from the *sententiae* which seem to us to be autonomous creations, there are hundreds of short forms scattered throughout Seneca's works, so it is easy to understand why a general and complete survey of Seneca's proverbs and *sententiae* is still lacking.[169]

The presence of *sententiae* (and proverbs, although to a much lesser extent) is constant from his earliest works (Seneca's chronology is rather obscure) as Nero's tutor: the *Ludus de morte Claudi*, or *Apocolocyntosis*, "pumpkinification," which the philosopher wrote as a sarcastic funeral speech, parallel to his official eulogy. In relation to such a short text, the percentage of idiomatic expressions and lines by the author that have become proverbial is very high: over thirty. Their presence is concentrated in some sections, thus revealing the author's stylistic consciousness, in a connotative function. They mainly appear in the proem, where the protagonist is Augustus, who, as we have seen, loved to use slang expressions (Suetonius *Augustus* 86–88). The very first proverb, *verum proverbium*, is famous: "a man ought to be born either a king or a fool" (*aut regem aut fatuum nasci oportere*), which provides a common thread to the whole work on the "foolish" emperor.

Seneca was committed to the composition of the most purely philosophical works throughout his whole life, from the *Consolationes*—from the time of his first exile under Claudius—to the most demanding moral treatises during the years in which he was tutor to the *princeps*, to his veritable

[168] Traina 1987; but see also Calboli 1999 for Seneca in Quintilian's judgment; Calboli 2004:32–37 for the meaning of *sententia*; Citti-Neri 2001 for the reception of Seneca's *sententiae* in the 20th century.

[169] However, some studies on individual works are up-to-date: Bonandini 2011, for the *Apocolocyntosis*; Casamento 2011, for the *De beneficiis*; Iulietto 2011, for the epigrams.

spiritual testament, the *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, composed in his last years, after his forced retirement from Nero's court. In all these works, the presence of *sententiae* from the philosophical tradition or from poetry read in a moral key is impressive. In the *Epistulae,* in particular, Seneca untangles a quantity of *sententiae* that is unparalleled in Latin literature and in the ancient world in general. He himself states that he wants to give his disciple Lucilius a daily *flosculus* of wisdom, either Stoic or Epicurean: they are the maxims that stud his passages, and whose origins are often difficult to trace, given the loss of most of the Hellenistic philosophical prose. Another protagonist of Seneca's gnomological extraction is Publilius Syrus, from whom the Cordoban author quotes numerous *sententiae*, codifying him as one of the most gnomic poets of the Roman tradition.[170] A *sententia* line, a proper *sententia*, or even a popular proverb explicitly quoted (although in much more limited cases: about 20) often also serve as starting points for philosophical reflections—and this could give a glimpse into the way of reasoning and proceeding in the philosophical (and perhaps rhetorical) schools of the time. Moreover, Seneca frequently makes explicit the proverbial aspect of some formulations, indicating them with the terms *proverbium*, *praeceptum*, *dictum*, *sententia*.
Another important field offers Seneca a more than appropriate dimension for *sententiae*, because it was already traditionally associated in this sense: the theater. Seneca's tragedies, aside from the age-old question of their suitability for being staged, are also a treasure trove of *sententiae* on man's great ethical issues.[171] Here, Seneca becomes a continuer of Publilius' gnomic tradition in Latin senarii. Every place is exploited by the author to fix in a striking line his reflections on passions and virtues, from the proems to the beginnings, from the choruses to the monologues, and above all, to the tight stichomythias. A single example—the first dialogue of the *Trojan Women*, between Pyrrhus and Agamemnon—demonstrates the pervasive and structural function of *sententiae* in Seneca's tragedies (327–336):

P. *Est regis alti spiritum regi dare*.
A. *Cur dextra regi spiritum eripuit tua?*
P. *Mortem misericors saepe pro vita dabit.*
A. *Et nunc misericors virginem busto petis?*
P. *Iamne immolari virgines credis nefas?*
A. *Praeferre patriam liberis regem decet.*
P. *Lex nulla capto parcit aut poenam impedit.*
A. *Quod non vetat lex, hoc vetat fieri pudor.*
P. *Quodcumque libuit facere, victori licet.*
A. *Minimum decet libere, cui multum licet.*

P. It is the act of a great king to grant life to a king.
A. Then why did your right hand deprive the king of life?
P. A merciful man will often grant death rather than life.
A. And now, as a merciful man, you seek a virgin for the tomb?
P. So nowadays you think sacrificing virgins is a crime?
A. It is fitting for a king to put his country before his children.
P. No law spares a prisoner, or prevents punishment.
A. What law does not forbid, a sense of shame forbids.
P. The victor is allowed to do whatever he pleases.
A. He who is allowed much should please himself least.

In only ten lines, we find six senarii of *sententiae*, codified by numerous sources and traditions: almost a *sententia cento*, a sort of amoebaean composition of proverbs that engages the two

[170] The relationship between Seneca and the *corpus* of *sententiae* attributed to Publilius is analyzed in Paré-Rey 2011: Seneca blames the practice of those who devote themselves exclusively to *captare flosculi* of wisdom (*Epistulae* 33.7), because the *sententia* must always be directed to an ethical and philosophical education.
[171] See Paré-Rey 2012.

interlocutors and the *ars* of the author. From these stichomythias, in late antiquity and then in the Middle Ages, a tradition of contrasts between vices and virtues will develop, which will condense, in alternate sayings, the ancient and Christian moral traditions.
Probably because of Seneca's immensely favorable reception, numerous epigrams transmitted in the Vossian codex and known as *Anthologia Latina* were attributed to him. Beyond the question of authorship, these hundreds of epigrams of the imperial age present a style and content which entirely resemble Seneca's: in some of them, the chain of *sententiae* seems almost an anthology of the philosopher's fragments on the themes most dear to him, such as time, fortune, death. These texts, too, will contribute to Seneca's reception in the following centuries, and many of them will flow into medieval *proverbia* collections.
Again Quintilian, in book 10 of his *Institutio oratoria*, reveals the profound *sententia* nature of the other Anneus, **Lucan**, the author of the historical poem on the civil war between Caesar and Pompey (10.1.90):

Lucanus ardens et concitatus et sententiis clarissimus et, ut dicam quod sentio, magis oratoribus quam poetis imitandus.
Lucan is ardent, passionate, particularly distinguished for his *sententiae*, and, if I may say what I think, more to be imitated by orators than by poets.

This testimony would be enough to put the young poet on the same level as his uncle's programmatic quality of *sententiae*. Moreover, in an anonymous epitaph, placed in many manuscripts of the poem, Lucan presents himself in this way:

Continuo numquam direxi carmina ductu,
quae tractim serpant: plus mihi comma placet.
I never directed my verses in a continuous flow,
winding along in a long-drawn-out manner. I prefer short sentences.

Lucan brings to its extreme consequences the (already Vergilian) tendency to formulate verses with a gnomic aspect, accentuating their pathetic and pessimistically philosophical sense. The whole course of Lucan's discourse is fractured and full of *sententiae*: in it, like *fulmina* to strike the reader—as his epitaph states—the author inserts his reworkings of traditional gnomic motifs, often condensed into less than one verse, or even in only three elements:

in se magna ruunt (1.81)
Great things come crashing down upon themselves.

nulla fides regni sociis (1.92)
There is no loyalty between sharers in tyranny.

non cepit fortuna duos (1.111)
Fate did not allow two contenders.

rumpunt fata moras (1.264)
Fate breaks all delays.

The examples could go on and on, testifying to an epoch in the two decades between Claudius and Nero—that identified in the *sententiae* style, from declamation to poetry, from theatre to philosophy, the privileged instrument to amaze the public: *feriunt animum* (...) *et delectatione persuadent*, to use again the words of Quintilian.
To these decades, which I would not hesitate to define as the most dependent on *sententiae* in Latin literature, belong two other protagonists of the short form in the Roman world, who interpret in a very special way the gnomic fashion of the time, portraying it in a sarcastic and ironic key: Persius and Petronius. An Etruscan from Volterra, **Aulus Persius Flaccus**, who died very young at the age of 28 in 62 CE, left six satirical compositions in hexameters on themes

typical of Stoic preaching. Extremely refined from a formal point of view, rich in allusions that are sometimes cryptic and with disparate literary inlays, Persius' poetry also contemplates the use of numerous *sententiae* and proverbs, all of which are always elaborated and distorted, and never quoted directly, but in an allusive way. Thus, the proverb according to which "hunger sharpens the wit"—in Seneca *artificia docuit fames* (*Epistulae* 15.9)—appears, in the prologue in senarii: *magister artis ingenique largitor venter*, "master of expertise, bestower of talent: the belly." Some expressions constitute an *unicum* for us and perhaps preserve proverbs and sayings never attested elsewhere, such as "scraping away with your finger at the salt cellar" (*regustatum digito terebrare salinum contentus perages*, 5.139). The scholia, which date back to ancient times, often indicate the *sententia* nature of an extract, as in 4.46 *egregium cum me vicinia dicat, non credam?* "When the whole neighborhood tells me I'm wonderful, can't I believe them?" where the anonymous scribe notes: *vetus est praeceptum, ne aliis de se quisquam plus quam sibi credat,* "an ancient precept is not to entrust something of oneself to others more than we entrust it to ourselves." Alongside the literary pieces, in Persius even the tradition of proverbs becomes an instrument of allusiveness and a playful *tour de force* with the reader.

At the opposite end from Seneca, in the dialectic proverb/*sententia* typical of the Roman world, is **Petronius**. In the same decades in which the Cordoban philosopher produced the works most filled with *sententiae* in the Latin tradition, the brilliant—and, in many ways, unknown—personality of Petronius composed one of the most singular masterpieces of the ancient world, the *Satyricon*. A mixture of prose and verse that is difficult to classify in a specific literary genre—Menippean satire, strictly speaking; or "novel"?—the *Satyricon* seems to respond to the philosophy advocated by the hundreds of Seneca's *sententiae* with the popular philosophy of the enormous amount of proverbs and colloquial expressions uttered by its protagonists.[172]

It would be wrong, however, to consider the work an indiscriminately confused treasure trove of proverbs and popular expressions. Petronius carefully studies the language of each of his characters, from the enriched freedman to the *scholasticus*, from the learned poet to the brothel women. At the top of the scale of proverb use are the uncultured characters, slaves, freedmen, and harlots: their speeches, of low (if not vulgar) content, sometimes seem to be constructed as a collage of fragments of popular wisdom. The educated characters rarely use proverbs, and, in most cases, they indicate their popular nature (*proverbium*, *ut aiunt*, *dicunt*); *sententiae*, also based on traditional philosophical maxims, are more often found in their speech and always with the function of a comic distortion. The same holds true, in an even more accentuated way, in the text of the narrator, who, with a towering and elegant contemptuousness, limits himself to employing lapidary *sententiae* to sketch situations or characters, but never uses strictly popular proverbs. The presence of proverbs and *sententiae*, therefore, in this very interesting *pastiche* that is the *Satyricon*, is clearly and accurately linked to mimetic and characterizing functions, perhaps as in no other work of the Latin tradition.

Petronius' lowest characters are the freedmen: in the few chapters of the *Cena*, in which they are the protagonists, there are almost two hundred proverbial expressions—more than 80% of the entire work. The themes of the knowledge from proverbs rattled off by them, Trimalchio *in primis*, derive from the world of values in which they were born and raised: material wealth, which becomes a veritable obsession (*bene emo, bene vendo,* "I buy well, I sell well," 75.9); money, the only guarantor of social promotion (*assem habeas, assem valeas*, "have a penny and you will be worth a penny," 77.6); the exaltation of the *self-made man* and of resourcefulness (*ab asse crevit*, "he started out with a penny," 43.1); social envy and ostentation (*noluisses de manu illius panem accipere*, "you wouldn't have taken a piece of bread from her hand," 37.3); the precariousness of the human condition (*minores quam muscae sumus*, "we are less than flies," 42.4). The protagonists of Petronius' proverbs are animals and everyday objects: dogs, cocks, chickens, pigs, hay, dung, coins, and, above all, bread, the primary staple of food and an absolute indication of "popularity."

Women are always represented negatively, characterized by lechery and fickleness: almost all their expressions are sexual double entendres (*posse taurum tollere, qui vitulum sustulerit*, "the

[172] The most up-to-date study is Vannini 2011. The works of Salanitro 1986; 1988; 1989; 2002; 2008 are also dedicated to proverbial expressions in the *Satyricon.*

one who can carry a calf, can carry a bull," 25.6), or come from the everyday world of cooking (*et operam et sudorem perdidisti*, "you wasted all your efforts and sweat," 134.2). Woman, in the perception of the low characters, is a *milvinum genus*, "a race of kites" (42.7), greedy and dangerous.

The *scholastici*, Encolpius, Ascyltus, and Giton, guests at the *Cena*, also express themselves in a frequently popular tone, but in a less colorful way, and, above all, with idiomatic phrases, rather than proper proverbs. When they tell stories, *fabellae*, or narrate episodes, they tend to raise their eloquence: here, proverbs become scantier, even in Trimalchio's speeches, but other signs of folkloric culture appear, such as beliefs, superstitions, figures of popular imagination like werewolves, witches, and orcs. In this context, it should be noted that there are many cases of Petronian proverbs that reveal contiguity with (or derivation from) the fable tradition (not only Aesopic), and that sometimes legitimize the hypothesis of seeing, behind synthetic formulations, the existence of folktales unknown to us.

Among the rare, cultured characters, Eumolpus is the only one who resorts to the *sententiae* of the philosophical and para-philosophical tradition: an element that characterizes him as *sapiens*, although often in an ironic way. The poet/rhetor employs proverbs, but in a guarded manner, almost by allusion, thus revealing, once again, the absolute mastery of Petronius, and the studied variety of his kaleidoscopic work.

This age, so rich in authors who depended on *sententiae* and proverbs also witnessed a very special protagonist who should not escape the paremiologist's investigation: **Junius Moderatus Columella**, from Cadiz, active between Claudius and Nero, and author of *De re rustica* in 12 books. Following in the footsteps of the Roman agronomic tradition of Cato and Varro, his work too—though to a lesser extent—is rich in proverbs from the rural sphere, often pointed out by the author: see, for instance, *quare vulgare illud de arborum positione rusticis usurpatum: serere ne dubites!* "Wherefore let the bailiff hold that opinion about the planting of trees common on the lips of husbandmen, 'never hesitate to plant'" (11.1.29), a motif that already appeared in Cato and was elegantly reworked by Vergil (*Georgics* 2.433: *et dubitant homines serere atque impendere curam?* "and can men be slow to plant and bestow care?"). About twenty proverbs can be found in Columella's work, among which, perhaps, the rural archetype of the famous *errando discitur*, "one is taught by his own mistakes"—widespread throughout the Latin Middle Ages and even today—is found in the formulation *in peccando discitur* (1.1.16).[173]

No proverbial dimension, by contrast, is found in the work of the last author of that time, **Calpurnius Siculus**, of whom nothing is known. Seven eclogues are ascribed to him: the first are reminiscent of Vergil and contain praises of Nero, but they offer no mimetic element of rural proverbs—perhaps due to the author's tendency to a much more rarefied and academic style than the model, or because of the often allegorical nature of his subjects, in a laudatory key.

After the turbulent year of struggles for the succession to Nero, in 69 CE, the Rhaetian Titus Flavius Vespasian took power and succeeded in passing it onto his two sons, Titus and Domitian. Domitian accentuated the despotic character of the principate until 96 CE: thus, the literary culture abandoned the more socially and philosophically committed genres, and with them, in part, also the use of the Roman moralistic *sententia* tradition, liable to be suspected of criticizing the regime. Erudition, occasional casual poetry, and epics on mythological subjects or archaic history, with various encomiastic additions, were the areas most cultivated by the authors of this time.

The most extraordinary work of the Flavian decades is the *Natural history* by **Pliny the Elder**, an esteemed administrator under Claudius, Nero, and Vespasian, a collector of curiosities and doxographer in various fields of knowledge, who fell victim to his scholarly passion during the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE, while trying to collect data on the phenomenon. The 37 books of his monumental work are really an "inventory of the world,"[174] an archive of knowledge, scientific and popular, of almost every aspect of ancient culture, from geography to biology, from zoology to technology, from art to mineralogy. A certain moralistic vein is not alien to Pliny, and often, in the preface or in the numerous digressions, the author takes the opportunity to reflect on

[173] See Lelli 2008b.
[174] Conte 1982.

the vices and degeneration of man in relation to man himself and nature. But one would look in vain for *sententiae* or proverbs as criticism or moral teaching, except for the preface to book 7, which harks back to the motif according to which nature (the day) can be *mater*, but also *noverca*, stepmother. The many *sententiae* in the work are, instead, all—or almost all—present in an aetiological context. From a territory, from a city, from the description of an animal or a plant, Pliny takes the cue to recall a proverb, explicitly signposted as such (*proverbium*, but also *dictum* or *praeceptum* or *oraculum*)—a procedure quite similar to the one already highlighted in Strabo. Thus, regarding two cities destroyed by Diomedes in Apulia: *in proverbii ludicrum vertere, Apinam et Tricam*, "their names have passed into a proverbial joke, Apina and Trica" (3.104); regarding the spectacular African exotic animals: *unde etiam vulgare Graeciae dictum "semper aliquid novi Africam adferre*," "this is indeed the origin of the common saying of Greece that 'Africa is always producing some novelty.'"

No fewer than three epic poems (plus an unfinished one), composed in the brief span of two decades, show a radical change from the *sententia* style of the model from which they were explicitly inspired. In the *Argonautica* of **Valerius Flaccus**, an author from Campania not otherwise known, every form of poetic *sententia* seems to be excluded, as much in the speeches of the protagonists as in the voice of the narrator.[175] In the second poem of the time dedicated to the second Punic war, by another author of whom we know almost nothing, **Silius Italicus**, the picture is the same, except for some elaborations of a few *sententiae*, contextualized in single scenes. The valor of the Roman soldiers fighting in the marshes of the Trebbia, for instance, is commented on with the motif of "difficulty leading to virtue" (4.603–604: *perque aspera duro / nititur ad laudem virtus interrita clivo*, "valor climbs unterrified the rocky path and difficult ascent that leads to glory"); the beginning of Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio's speech to his son (the future Africanus) in the episode of the evocation of the souls of the dead by the Cumaean Sibyl is underlined by a philosophical maxim (13.663: *ipsa quidem virtus sibimet pulcherrima merces*, "virtue is indeed its own noblest reward"). But these are exceptional inlays in over 12,000 hexameters.

The third poet of the Flavian decades is again from Campania, **Publius Papinius Statius**. He was a rhetorician and the author of commissioned poems, the figure of a man of culture who was about to become typical in the Roman world. Bound to the imperial court and lavish with praise for Domitian, he composed a mythological poem on the saga of Oedipus, the *Thebaid*, and began a second one dedicated to Achilles, the *Achilleid*, interrupted in the second book. In the rhetorically charged style of Statius, the *sententiae* reminiscent of Vergil become rhetorical *fulminae*, more akin to those of Lucan, always in asides that break the narrative with the intervention of the poet. Think of *olim dolet altera vinci*, "one of the twain is long since sad to be surpassed" (*Achilleid* 1.16); *dant gaudia vires*, "pleasure gives strength" (1.122); *quis divum fraudibus obstet?* "who should resist divine deceits?" (1.364); and a few others. An even more limited number of *sententiae*—and even less so of proverbs—can be found in the collection of occasional poems, especially celebratory, which goes by the name of *Silvae*: here we find almost exclusively antonomastic *iuncturae*, of rhetorical matrix, to dot the pompous stylistic apparatus of the poet.[176]

A figure similar to that of Statius, from the point of view of his social and cultural role, although less fortunate, is the greatest Latin epigrammatist, **Marcus Valerius Martial**. He came to Rome from the Iberian city of Bilbilis in the last years of Nero's principate, but he did not succeed in becoming part of the most important circles and began to write poetry late in life, amidst ups and downs (he was also forced to work as a *cliens*). In 80 CE, Martial published his first *libellus*, on the occasion of Titus' inauguration of the Colosseum. In the following years, another 12 books of epigrams followed, all centered on anecdotes, characters, and everyday features of the *civitas* of the time, which were read and appreciated. These gave the poet a certain fame and well being, until the early years of the 2nd century when, tired of the whirlwind of that opulent society

[175] The three *loci* pointed out by Otto 1890 (1.163; 4.127; 7.596) are inappropriate, since they are all rhetorical antonomasias.

[176] There is a list in Otto 1890: these are almost always mythical characters or places that have become proverbial for some characteristic.

(which, however, he will not fail to regret), he retired to a villa in his native Bilbilis, where he died in 104.
Following in the footsteps of Petronius' poetics, albeit in what clearly appears to be a greater stylization, Martial, too, sets out to represent the reality of his time—*hominem pagina nostra sapit,* "our page has the taste of man"—far from the pompous rhetoric of the epics, which he often targeted. The repertoire of proverbs and the inexhaustible wealth of popular expressions offered the poet an indispensable instrument of characterization. Martial employed an enormous amount of proverbs, sometimes indicated by *aiunt* or *dicunt*, in all the mechanisms and functions now codified by half a millennium of epigrammatic poetry: at the beginning of a piece, to ironically comment on or deny a particular case; at the end, to stigmatize another—in an assertive, hyperbolic, sarcastic, distorted key. Animals, objects, and body parts, together with mythical characters, are the most frequent protagonists of Martial's proverb archive (of which the absence of a comprehensive study is to be lamented).[177] Some of his formulations will become famous in the following centuries and used as *sententiae*:

Cineri gloria sera venit (1.25.8)
Glory comes late to the grave.

Quod tegitur, maius creditur esse, malum (3.42.4)
Trouble that has been concealed is believed to be greater than it is.

Laudant illa sed ista legunt (4.49.10)
That they praise, but this they read.

Toto notus in orbe (1.1.2)
Known all over the world.

This constitutes a further proof of a contiguity between short *sententia* forms and the epigrammatic genre, which is a constant feature of our ancient and modern poetic tradition.

As already mentioned, in the second half of the 1st century CE, Rome and the Hellenized Mediterranean saw the definitive institutionalization of a system of higher education centered, alongside the traditional values conveyed by poetic readings and philosophical culture, on rhetoric. Two extraordinary figures, in many ways very different from each other, embody this phenomenon, which has much to do with the history of short *sententiae* and proverbs.
In the *civitas* of the Flavian dynasty, from 70 CE to the end of the century, another Iberian author was active as a rhetorician and lawyer, becoming the first professor of rhetoric paid by the principate, that is, by the state: **Marcus Fabius Quintilian**. After twenty years of teaching, as he himself states in his *praefatio*, Quintilian devoted himself to writing a work that was both pedagogical and rhetorical: the *Institutio oratoria*, in 12 books. It is the most complete Latin treatise on rhetoric that has come down to us—a very important tool for reconstructing the nature of primary and secondary education at the time. Significant space is also reserved for *sententiae* and *proverbia*.
In the very first chapters of his *Institutio*, Quintilian addresses the question of elementary education, an indispensable basis for adolescence. Literacy, and then the teaching of grammar, must never be separated from moral intent. With this in mind, he suggests that, already in the exercises for copying that the child needs to learn how to write (1.1.35–36), the lines "should not contain meaningless maxims, but should convey some moral lesson" (*non otiosas sententias habeant, sed honestum aliquid monentis*). He continues: "the child may also be allowed to learn, as a game, the sayings of famous men (*dicta clarorum virorum*)." This testimony is fundamental, it seems to me, for grasping the still inseparable link between gnomic and proverbial tradition on the one hand, and moral and civic education on the other, in the ancient world. Quintilian returns to the subject in chapter 9 of book 1, about the "preparatory exercises" (*primordia dicendi*)

[177] A survey is found in Fabbrini 2011.

typical of the school of a *grammaticus*. This is what was called *progymnasma* in the Greek educational path, and that, according to the Iberian rhetorician, begins with the *fabellae* of Aesopic type and continues with the exercise of compositions and variations of *sententiae* and χρεῖαι (1.9.3-5):[178]

Sententiae quoque et chriae et aetiologiae subiectis dictorum rationibus apud grammaticos scribantur, quia initium ex lectione ducunt: quorum omnium similis est ratio, forma diversa, quia sententia universalis est vox, aetiologia personis continetur. Chriarum plura genera traduntur: unum simile sententiae, quod est positum in voce simplici: "dixit ille" aut "dicere solebat"; alterum quod est in respondendo: "interrogatus ille," vel "cum hoc ei dictum esset, respondit"; tertium huic non dissimile: "cum quis dixisset aliquid" vel "fecisset." Etiam in ipsorum factis esse chrian putant, ut: "Crates, cum indoctum puerum vidisset, paedagogum eius percussit," et aliud paene par ei, quod tamen eodem nomine appellare non audent, sed dicunt chreiodes, ut: "Milo, quem vitulum adsueverat ferre, taurum ferebat." In his omnibus et declinatio per eosdem ducitur casus et tam factorum quam dictorum ratio est.

Sententiae, *chreiae*, and *ethologiae* may also be written under the *grammatici*, if the arguments are supplied, since the themes can be drawn from reading. The principle of all these exercises is similar, but their forms are different: a *sententia* is a universal statement, *ethologiae* depend on persons. As to *chreiae*, several types of these have been handed down: one is similar to *sententiae* and rests on a simple statement ("he said" or "he used to say"); another includes an answer ("being asked" or "when this was said to him, he answered"). There is a third type, not unlike this: "when someone said," or "did," "something." Some believe that a *chreia* may also consist only of the subject's action, such as, for instance: "When Crates saw an ignorant boy, he beat his pedagogue." A very similar example—which they do not venture to call a *chreia* but say it is "of the *chreia* type"—is "that bull Milo used to carry as a calf, he was still carrying as a grown bull." For all these examples, the declension is carried out through the same range of cases, and the principle applies to *chreiae* based on actions as well as those based on words.

But the term *sententia* had by then taken on a double meaning. Quintilian deals with the problem in the context of the treatment of stylistic elements (8.5.1):

Sententiam veteres quod animo sensissent vocaverunt. Id cum est apud oratores frequentissimum, tum etiam in usu cotidiano quasdam reliquias habet: nam et iuraturi "ex animi nostri sententia" et gratulantes "ex sententia" dicimus. […] *Sed consuetudo iam tenuit ut mente concepta sensus vocaremus, lumina autem praecipueque in clausulis posita sententias*.

The ancients called *sententia* what they felt in their minds. This is very common in the orators, and there are some sort of traces of it in everyday usage: when we are about to take an oath, we say *ex animi nostri sententia*, "in accordance with the feelings of our heart," and when we congratulate someone, we say *ex sententia*, "in accordance with our feelings." […] However, the practice that has now become established is to call mental concepts *sensus*, and brilliant thoughts, especially if placed at the end of a clause, *sententiae*.

We have already seen how Quintilian does not appreciate the immoderate use of *sententiae* (understood in this way) that was occurring "in his time" (*nostris temporibus modo carent*): the rhetorician refers above all to Seneca and his imitators, as is evident, and as he himself later reveals (10.1.129). He then goes on to trace a sort of brief history of the *sententia* in the Roman world, beginning with those "most ancient, which should properly be called *sententiae*" and "which the Greeks call *gnomai*," because—an interesting remark—"they present similarities both with opinions (*consilia*) and with decrees (*decreta*)." A *sententia*, also used outside of oratory,

[178] On this passage, and more generally on the relationship between Quintilian and the world of primary education, see Henderson 1991; Luzzatto 2004. For the concept of *sententia* in Quintilian, see Hallik 2007:69ff.

continues Quintilian, can be simple, with the addition of a motivation, or double: these are, in his opinion, the three main forms of *sententiae*, although "some have come to classify even ten, and more." Quintilian refers to Greek grammarians, whom he does not name and who, in his opinion, have excessively theorized on γνώμαι: he reveals to us the intense critical reflection that must have emerged in those decades from the schools of rhetoric, of which we have limited evidence. The fashion of the *sententiae* style is attacked again by Quintilian in the following paragraphs (8.5.8–14): *sententiae* should not be too frequent, nor should they be placed in the mouth of any personality—"the most appropriate speaker is a man of authority" (*magis enim decet eos in quibus est auctoritas*) and not, for example, "a young man or even a low-class man (*adulescentulus aut etiam ignobilis*)." "Nowadays, however," he laments again, "the rhetoricians demand that every passage, every sentence, should strike the ear with its final phrase" (*nunc aliud volunt, ut omnis locus, omnis sensus in fine sermonis feriat aurem*) [...] Hence [there are] a lot of little sentences, fragmented and irrelevant (*inde minuti corruptique sensiculi et extra rem petiti*)." Quintilian then reviews various types of *sententiae* used by his contemporaries: all are more or less "degenerate" (*corruptae*). Finally, he returns to the question of the use of this instrument of communication, suggesting a halfway solution between those who exalt its use and those who totally despise it: "these highlights are in a sense the eyes of eloquence" (*haec lumina orationis velut oculos quosdam esse eloquentiae credo*, 8.5.34), and as such they must shine, but not hide the beauty of the rest of the body.

In the *Institutio*, there is also room for *proverbia*, but, significantly, only in a comic key. The perception that emerges from Quintilian's testimony strongly distinguishes between *sententiae*—"moral maxims" or, by now, punchlines devised by orators (and poets) through known rhetorical mechanisms—and *proverbs*—παροιμίαι, proper "proverbs," based (in the Aristotelian way) on metaphors (8.6.57) and close to the *fabella* (5.11.21), of popular matrix and of ancient tradition (*vetus*), which can be used in *de risu* contexts, together with *dicta* and *facetiae* (6.3.15–16), parodies (6.3.98), poetic quotations, and *ioci* (9.2.104). In this respect, therefore, Quintilian still appears very close to the position of Cicero, relegating the *proverbium* to the almost exclusive role of comic effect. Proverbs and *sententiae*, on the other hand, seem well separated, and clearly distinct in their areas of literary application, as in all the Roman tradition examined so far.

Consistent with his reflections, Quintilian's use of *sententiae* and proverbs is very limited and related almost exclusively to quotations from other authors: we are, after all, in a treatise, not in an oratorical context. His testimony, however, makes it a very important piece for understanding the historical and cultural moment between the 1st and 2nd century CE, and reveals to us the debate and the formative role that the short forms were increasingly assigned at every level of education. A confirmation of the picture traced by Quintilian is what emerges from the powerful and significant production of another teacher of the time, **Plutarch** of Chaeronea.

Even in the Greek world, in the middle and advanced levels of education, the gnomic material of a tradition now almost a millennium old had been codified as one of the privileged grounds for exercise and learning. Lists of γνῶμαι are attested on papyri and school *ostraka* as early as the 1st century. The χρεία, in particular, was one of the most important didactic vehicles, because it contained philosophical, rhetorical, and linguistic potentialities.[179] The grammarian **Aelius Theon**, a contemporary of Quintilian, defines the χρεία as follows (p. 96, 19–21 Sp.):

> Χρεία ἐστὶ σύντομος ἀπόφασις ἢ πρᾶξις μετ' εὐστοχίας ἀναφερομένη εἴς τι ὡρισμένον πρόσωπον ἢ ἀναλογοῦν προσώπῳ.
>
> a *chreia* consists of a statement in a concise form or in an action referred with a precise aim to a specific character or having a similar function to a character.

Many other definitions can be found in the rhetorical *corpora* of the 2nd century: Aphthonius, Pseudo-Hermogenes, and others all refer to three fundamental aspects:

(1) the χρεία contains a saying or gesture narrated in a short form (σύντονος), usually in a single sentence;

2) the protagonist must be quick-witted;

[179] See again Luzzatto 2004; Hallik 2007:85-95.

3) the protagonist is a specific character, usually famous.
Generally, in Theon's *Progymnasmata*, the rhetoricians also make explicit the instructions on how to carry out exercises based on the χρεῖαι, the first of which, in the *cursus* of the higher studies in the Hellenistic-Roman age, according to Theon, consists in the "declension" (κλίσις) of a given χρεία (p. 101, 16ff. Sp.). Thus, the phrase "Isocrates said that highly gifted pupils are children of the gods," becomes, in turn: "Of Isocrates it is remembered that he said ...," "To Isocrates it seemed that ...," "They say that Isocrates said ..." and so on. And again, as Nicolaus relates (*Progymnasmata* pp. 17, 15ff. F.)

μόνην ἐνόμισαν τοῖς νέοις <ἄρτι> τῶν ποιητῶν ἀφισταμένοις καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ῥητορικὴν ἰοῦσιν ἀρκεῖν πρὸς τὴν τοῦ πολιτικοῦ λόγου μελέτην καὶ ἐχρῶντο αὐτῇ οὕτως· οἷον Πιττακὸς ὁ Μιτυληναῖος ἐρωτηθείς, εἰ λανθάνει τις τοὺς θεοὺς φαῦλόν τι ποιῶν, ἔφη· ἀλλ' οὐδὲ διανοούμενος. καὶ πρῶτον μὲν κατ' εὐθεῖαν προέφερον, τὸ δ' ἐντεῦθεν καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἐφεξῆς. οἷον <κατὰ> γενικήν· Πιττακοῦ <τοῦ> Μιτυληναίου ἐρωτηθέντος, εἰ λανθάνει τις τοὺς θεοὺς φαῦλόν τι ποιῶν, λόγος ἀπομνημονεύεται· ἀλλ' οὐδὲ διανοούμενος. κατὰ δοτικήν· Πιττακῷ τῷ Μιτυληναίῳ ἐρωτηθέντι, εἰ λανθάνει τις τοὺς θεοὺς φαῦλόν τι ποιῶν, ἐπῆλθεν εἰπεῖν· ἀλλ' οὐ<δὲ> διανοούμενος. κατὰ αἰτιατικήν· Πιττακὸν τὸν Μιτυληναῖον ἐρωτηθέντα ...
[some rhetoricians] have considered that in the case of boys who have just finished the study of the poets and are initiated into rhetoric, the presentation of the text case by case and number by number is appropriate to the oratorical exercise, and they have employed the *chreia* in this way. For example, Pittacus of Mytilene, when asked whether it was possible to do anything evil without the knowledge of the gods, replied, "do not even think about it!" First they presented him in the nominative, then in the other cases below. In the genitive: "Of Pittacus ... they remember the answer..."; in the dative: "To Pittacus ... it came to answer ..."; in the accusative: "They say that Pittacus ...."

Some school papyri of the 3rd century CE have preserved these extraordinary exercises that through the χρεῖαι aimed to teach pupils philosophical and moral knowledge and linguistic skills.
A contemporary of Quintilian was **Plutarch**, also a teacher and pedagogue, but, at the same time, also a priest and deeply rooted in the Delphic religious tradition. The χρεία, which, as we have seen, originally came from the realm of Hellenistic philosophical movements, in Plutarch's eyes, presented a particular charm and nobility, a level of philosophical and ethical quality that placed it in the wake of the Hellenistic wisdom literature, which ultimately goes back to the Seven Sages. Through its diffusion in the scholastic environment, the χρεία proves to be an excellent pedagogical vehicle: nothing better, then, for an author like Plutarch, so preoccupied with the theme of education. Finally, because of the obligatory presence of a protagonist (as we have seen), the χρεία met Plutarch's fundamental cultural interest, manifested in almost every literary genre and sub-genre he ventured in, and, obviously, made particularly explicit in his *Parallel lives*: biography.
The "master of Chaeronea" chose to dwell on the χρεῖαι concerning sovereigns and generals, consuls and emperors—i.e. politics and history—welding the paremiographic tradition to the historical and biographical. More than once, in the *Parallel lives*, Plutarch asserts that the sayings of a historical figure clarify the sense of his character better than the narration of many battles. And Plutarch's *Lives* are full of memorable sayings: in essence, of χρεῖαι. With two other works that go by his name—the *Sayings of kings and commanders* and the *Sayings of Spartans*[180]—Plutarch intended to give the value of a genre to this paremiographic tradition. In the prefatory epistle to the *Sayings of kings and commanders*, he states:

Τῶν μὲν πράξεων αἱ πολλαὶ τύχην ἀναμεμιγμένην ἔχουσιν, αἱ δὲ γινόμεναι παρὰ τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὰ πάθη καὶ τὰς τύχας ἀποφάσεις καὶ ἀναφωνήσεις ὥσπερ ἐν κατόπτροις καθαρῶς παρέχουσι τὴν ἑκάστου διάνοιαν ἀποθεωρεῖν.

[180] See Lelli 2021:502–625, 1669–1687.

Most of their actions have an admixture of chance, whereas their assertions and utterances that arise in connection with what they did or experienced or chanced upon offer the possibility of observing, as in clear mirrors, the thought process of each man." (172d)

Plutarch's sources, as in most of his other works, are historical—from Thucydides to Ephorus, from the Atthidographers to Philistus of Syracuse. The image of Plutarch as an enthusiast of gnomic tradition, and, in some ways, as a paremiographer, was probably the cause, still in ancient times, of the inclusion, in his *corpus*, of three paremiographic collections, certainly apocryphal, but perhaps contemporary: the *Sayings of the Lacedaemonian women*, the *Alexandrian proverbs*, and the *Proverbs on impossible actions*.[181] These constitute further evidence of the rhetorical and scholastic diffusion of παροιμίαι.

Nonetheless, within the almost endless production of Plutarch, there are dozens and dozens of proverbs and *sententiae* (especially famous sayings, as we have seen) scattered in every subgenre, declined in every mode and function extensively examined so far. In his *Parallel lives*, the ἀποφθέγματα dominate and are often explicitly defined as such (*Lycurgus* 20.6; *Themistocles* 18.9; *Cato Maior* 2.6, and others) and are quite distinct from the παροιμίαι, which are chiefly the subject of aetiologies (*Themistocles* 29.3; *Camillus* 28.7; *Timoleon* 26.2; *Pelopidas* 10.10).[182]

A veritable treasure trove of παροιμίαι, γνῶμαι, and ἀποφθέγματα is filed in that polyphonic *corpus* which goes by the name of *Moralia*, and which includes works of a philosophical, pedagogical, scientific, anecdotal, and literary-critical character.[183] Here we find again the usual formulas (such as ἡ παροιμία φησίν, κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν, and others), modes, and functions of the short form, always used—it must be stressed—in a way that, when made explicit, distinguishes the boundaries and perceptions of each type. Thus, in *De Pythiae oraculis* 399a, Plutarch does not specifically define as παροιμία the antonomastic *iunctura* ἄριστος μάντις ("the best diviner"), which was employed by a great many authors (from Homer to Euripides and beyond), distinguishing it from the Euripidean line which offered its most widespread formulation (973 K.); thus, in *Quaestiones convivales* 616c, the well-known "friends go to friends' banquet even without invitation" (implied in *Iliad* 2.408) is called παροιμιώδης, not παροιμία.

The aetiological aspect is relevant, and in both the *Quaestiones convivales* and in the *Quaestiones Graecae et Romanae*, several chapters are devoted to the interpretation of a proverb or a *sententia*. Plutarch's sources here are, again, historical and antiquarian. Probably, however, he

[181] See, respectively, Berti 2021, Tufano 2021, Fabiano 2021.

[182] An interesting excerpt from *Aratus* 1: Παροιμίαν τινὰ παλαιὰν ᾧ Πολύκρατες, δείσας μοι δοκεῖ τὸ δύσφημον αὐτῆς, ὁ φιλόσοφος Χρύσιππος (*SVF* III 202) οὐχ ὃν ἔχει τρόπον, ἀλλ' ὡς αὐτὸς ᾤετο βέλτιον εἶναι, διατίθεται—"τίς πατέρ' αἰνήσει, εἰ μὴ εὐδαίμονες υἱοί;" Διονυσόδωρος δ' ὁ Τροιζήνιος ἐλέγχων αὐτὸν ἀντεκτίθησι τὴν ἀληθινὴν οὕτως ἔχουσαν—"τίς πατέρ' αἰνήσει, εἰ μὴ κακοδαίμονες υἱοί;" καί φησι τοὺς ἀφ' αὑτῶν οὐδενὸς ἀξίους ὄντας, ὑποδυομένους δὲ προγόνων τινῶν ἀρετὰς καὶ πλεονάζοντας ἐν τοῖς ἐκείνων ἐπαίνοις, ὑπὸ τῆς παροιμίας ἐπιστομίζεσθαι. ἀλλ' οἷς γε φύσει "τὸ γενναῖον ἐπιπρέπει ἐκ πατέρων" κατὰ Πίνδαρον (*Pythian* 8.44) ὥσπερ σοί, πρὸς τὸ κάλλιστον ἀφομοιοῦντι τῶν οἴκοθεν παραδειγμάτων τὸν βίον, εὔδαιμον ἂν εἴη τὸ μεμνῆσθαι τῶν ἀπὸ γένους ἀρίστων, ἀκούοντας περὶ αὐτῶν ἀεί τι καὶ λέγοντας. "The philosopher Chrysippus, Polycrates, quotes an ancient proverb, not as it really is,—fearing, I suspect, that it sounded slanderous—but as he thought it would run best: 'Who will praise a father, except his happy sons?' But Dionysodorus of Troezen proves him wrong, and restores its true form in the following way: 'Who will praise a father, except unhappy sons?' And he says that the proverb stops the mouths of those who, having no merit of their own, take refuge in the virtues of certain ancestors and are excessively praising them. But surely for a man in whom, as Pindar has it, 'the noble spirit is by nature displayed as inherited from ancestors,' and who, like you, molds his life after the fairest examples of his family line, — for such men it will be good fortune to be reminded of their noblest ancestors, both by hearing their stories by others, or by telling them themselves."

Plutarch hands down to us an ancient paremiographical discussion: Chrysippus (in the work *On Proverbs*?) records a hexameter, called παροιμία, and Dionysodorus criticizes it by quoting it in the form he considers correct. The hexameter is only found here and, thereafter, in all the paremiographers, from Diogenianus 8.46, but in the form of Dionysodorus.

[183] On proverbs in Plutarch's *Moralia*, see Fernandez Delgado 1991a and 1991b. In general, see also Beardslee 1980. All the *Moralia* can now be read in Italian in Lelli/Pisani 2017.

still had access to the paremiographic sylloge of Didymus, which will soon be epitomized, or even to older collections, perhaps by the Stoic authors Clearchus and Chrysippus. The way in which Plutarch alludes to exegeses, sometimes intertwined with literary *loci*, seems perhaps to presuppose also in his readers a familiarity with commentaries on poets and authors where paremiographic *interpretamenta* were already present.[184]

With Quintilian, Plutarch, and the codification of the short *sententia* as a rhetorical tool, a crucial point in the history of the ancient culture of proverbs was reached at the end of the 1st century. Almost 700 years have passed since Homer and Hesiod fixed the oldest proverbs and *sententiae* in the Hellenic literary tradition; more than 500 years since the first attestation of the terms γνώμη (Theognides, mid-6th century BCE) and παροιμία (Aeschylus, 458 BCE); more than 400 years since the first scientific collections *of* and studies *on* proverbs and *sententiae* in the Greek world (Demon and Aristotle), but also since the first wisdom works in the Roman world (Appius Claudius); finally, more than 200 years since the widespread diffusion of *proverbia* and *sententiae* in Latin literature. What we can rightly call the Greek and Roman "proverb civilization" has by now canonized, codified, and institutionalized at every level the forms, functions, and mechanisms of creation and regeneration of the short form of gnomic character.

Every literary genre has been codified, from drama to oratory, from historiography to epic: with them, in a consistently (πρέπον) taxonomic way, the use of the short form has been codified, according to the dialogical or narrative, proemial or concluding sections; according to the low or high, comic or solemn modes; according to the *persona loquens*—young or old, woman or man; the mechanism of creation and re-creation of *sententiae* and χρεῖαι, punchlines, and even proverbs has been codified; the possibilities of *detorsio* and the reverse, of ennoblement, have been clarified and widely determined; all the possible literary uses of proverbs, *sententiae*, apophthegms, and categories that appear, even at this time, absolutely distinct and defined from every point of view have been examined. On the threshold of the 2nd century, at least twenty collections of short authorial forms were circulating, mainly by philosophers (Pythagoras, the Seven Sages, Aesop, Phocylides, Epicharmus, Democritus, Chares, Aristippus, Aristotle, Demetrius of Phalerum, Diogenes, Metrocles, Bion, Zeno, Perseus, Ariston, Cleanthes, Epicurus, Menander, Appius Claudius, Publilius Syrus), and at least a dozen collections realized "by extraction" were equipped with exegesis and comparisons, made by scholars, *literati*, rhetoricians, and, perhaps, even simple enthusiasts (Demon, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Clearchus, Chrysippus, Theaetetus, Aeschylus, Dionysodorus, Milo, Aristophanes of Byzantium, Aristides, Didymus).

By now, solid foundations had been laid, in Greece and Rome, for the development of this civilization of proverbs in the centuries to come: a development which remained absolutely in touch with the past and which will cross the centuries of the Middle Ages to reach the Humanistic rebirth—with another fundamental junction, constituted by the *Adagia* of Erasmus of Rotterdam—in an uninterrupted way. There will be continuity in the functions and mechanisms of the proverb short forms, as well as in the taxonomic scale of literary genres; there will be continuity in the forms and contents—the latter being certainly largely revised or expanded by the Christian message, but always in the wake of the ancient proverb tradition.

Therefore, if, up to now, we have tried to follow every stage of this fascinating chapter of the cultural history of the ancient world, from the 2nd century onwards, we shall trace in a more streamlined way the presence of proverbs and *sententiae* in authors and works, paying attention, above all, to other fundamental moments of cultural junction. Everything, in sum, has already been codified and made canonical in terms genres and contexts, and keeps moving on well-defined tracks.

A separate discourse, however, somewhat parallel to the one conducted so far for literary texts, must be reserved for a series of papyrus documents which offer direct evidence of the dissemination of ancient proverb culture. These documents, dating back to a period between the 2nd century BCE and the 4th century CE, show physical characteristics that suggest that they were books simply set up for personal use, for studying or for individual ethical training—products hardly destined for normal book trade (P.Köln 246 = GNOM. 34, in the *CPF* collection; P. Mich.

[184] Ruta 2020:48–50.

430 = GNOM. 36; P. Schub. 27 + P. Berol. 21312 = GNOM. 49; PSI 120 = GNOM. 51).[185] From a material point of view, these papyri are written in cursive handwriting, with erasures, but not by such uncertain hands as to be attributable to the writings of schoolboys (GNOM. 34, 49 and 51). Sometimes they have *paragraphoi* and traces of titles (49), but never indications of the possible author of the extracts recorded. The sentences are almost never separated into new paragraphs.
These material peculiarities correspond to the peculiarity of the contents of these papyri. Most of the recorded *sententiae* do not, in fact, belong to texts with authors identified. In some cases, it is possible to trace analogies with Menander's monostichs, but rarely *ad litteram*: they are, for the most part, autonomous elaborations of widespread proverb motifs. The motifs of these *gnomai*, whether in prose or in verse (always iambic—the most frequent proverb typology), often offer only content-based matches with known Greek (or Latin: GNOM. 36) texts, highlighting their common proverb imagery, not a direct derivation. What, then, is the nature of these texts?
A comparative look at the deep-rooted modern practice of private writing dedicated to the archiving of maxims, aphorisms, *sententiae,* and proverbs of a tradition, carried out by women (above all) and men of even modest literacy, opens a perspective for framing these documents, often labelled as "school exercises," or, in any case, encompassed in the school sphere. These texts, on the contrary, seem to belong to "diaristic" works in which, as in numerous modern testimonies, the memory of the anonymous author has led him to compile lists of *sententiae* and maxims, *chreiai* and anecdotes, to be kept and circulated within the family, or at least in a private context. This happens not with the intention of making an anthology, however, as is the case with texts conceived as collections of edifying passages for study and work (as the material characteristics of these documents prove), but with the intention of collecting and preserving short proverb and *sententia* forms. This resembles the "sayings" and "proverbs" sections of modern semi-erudite diaries, in a parallel way to what we have seen for Socrates and Augustus.
The proverb material contained in these papyri, for the most part, does not derive from other texts, and so it was not copied from other papyri. The writer's personal memory was the source—the only one, I believe—of what was fixed in a text. Hence, we are not dealing with an operation of *collection* and *selection*, but with a *transcription* of oral and popular tradition. This is what happened, as is amply documented, in the case of the paremiographic private writings of the modern world. This is what must have happened in the ancient world—a world in which, as we know, memorization skills were much more developed than in the modern world.
A contemporary of Plutarch and Quintilian, **Dion of Prusa**, known as Chrysostom, "golden mouth," for his rhetorical skills, is another emblematic figure of the time. A notable representative of his hometown, first exiled under Domitian, then friend and "ambassador" of the first adoptive emperor, Trajan, Dion is the author of almost 80 works, mainly public speeches, of a political, civil, and pedagogical character, but also celebratory, and narrative pieces, in which the Greek gnomic tradition is the object of re-elaborations and re-writings. Never is a *sententia* mentioned as such, and very rarely are real παροιμίαι employed.[186]
If we consider, for example, the very first paragraphs of the *Euboean Discourse*—among the most famous and most appreciated writings of Dion—we will notice that the *incipit* is, in fact, proverbial, but disguisedly so (*Oratio* 7.1):

Τόδε μὴν αὐτὸς ἰδών, οὐ παρ' ἑτέρων ἀκούσας, διηγήσομαι. ἴσως γὰρ οὐ μόνον πρεσβυτικὸν πολυλογία.

"I shall now relate something I have seen in person; not merely something I have heard from others. Perhaps, indeed, it is not only old men who are garrulous".

In his first lines, the Euboean hunter states,

[185] See Lelli 2021:196–201, 1531–1535.
[186] The term occurs only once, in *Oratio* 48.11: λέγων τὸ τῆς παροιμίας "εἷς ἀνὴρ οὐδεὶς ἀνήρ" ("saying the proverbial expression 'one man, no man'"). For γνώμη, cf. 18.7, where it is Homer who γνώμας πρὸς ἅπαντα ὠφελίμους καταμίγνυσι τοῖς ποιήμασιν ("mingles, in his poems, *sententiae* that are useful for every occasion").

βουλοίμην δ’ ἂν ἔγωγε καὶ μετὰ πέντε ἡμέρας λῆξαι τὸν ἄνεμον· ἀλλ’ οὐ ῥᾴδιον, εἶπεν, ὅταν οὕτως πιεσθῇ τὰ ἄκρα τῆς Εὐβοίας ὑπὸ τῶν νεφῶν ὥς γε νῦν κατειλημμένα ὁρᾷς.

“I should be content to have the wind die down after full five days, but that is not likely, when the peaks of the Euboean mountains are so capped with clouds” (6), one of the best known meteorological proverbs. As soon as he enters the hunter’s hut, Dion utters a *sententia*: ἐπειράθην […] ὡς ἔστι πενία χρῆμα τῷ ὄντι ἱερὸν καὶ ἄσυλον “I could verify […] that poverty is in reality a sacred and inviolable thing”(9). The *sententiae* material is treated—rhetorically—in the same way as the poetic material and the authorial quotations, and is subjected to the same stylistic procedures.

The advent of the so-called adoptive Nerva-Antonine dynasty marks a new period for the *civitas* and for the whole empire, at its maximum territorial extension and, probably, at its cultural and economic peak. Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius guaranteed a century of internal peace and wellbeing. Many intellectuals praised the emperors; others, after the forced silence imposed by Domitian, recalled the past decades with severe judgments. The *sententia* tradition offers, in this case, an inexhaustible reservoir of morality and leads, in turn, to a style of *sententiae*.

An emblematic figure of the time is **Cornelius Tacitus**, belonging, as it seems, to an ancient senatorial family from Terni. He was opposed by Domitian and then appreciated by Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian. In his works, the *sententia* style became the main instrument of moral rigor and criticism of customs (especially of the past decades): in the biography dedicated to his father-in-law Agricola, victim of Domitian’s repressions; in the monograph on Germania; and, in what was by then in his mature style, in the two towering historical works, the *Historiae* and the *Annales*. *Sententiae*, which draw from the Roman gnomic tradition, but also result from mechanisms of original creation that exploit the codified rhetorical elements of the short form, became one of the fundamental and organic characteristics of Tacitus’ style.[187] Apart from a conspicuous use in the protagonists’ speeches, it is in the privileged initial and final passages of a chapter or section that Tacitus’ *sententia* commentary stigmatizes an episode or a historical figure, a decision of the *princeps*, or an attitude of his. There are old and new formulations of traditional *sententiae* which make Tacitus’ work similar to Livy’s, such as *vulgus mutabile*, “common people are changeable” (*Historiae* 1.69); *deos fortioribus adesse*, “the gods favor the braver” (4.17); *leges egregias apud bonos ex delictis aliorum gigni*, “in a community of honorable men, excellent laws and salutary precedents may have their rise in the delinquencies of others” (*Annales* 15.20). However, similar *sententia* formulations emerge in the narrative which seem new and original to us, and which will thus be perceived in their later reception:[188]

Solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant (*Agricola* 30)
They make a desert and call it peace.

Sine ira et studio (*Annales* 1.1)
Without anger or passion.

Corruptissima republica plurimae leges (*Annales* 3.27)
The more corrupt the state, the more numerous the laws.

Suum cuique decus posteritas rependit (*Annales* 4.35)
Posterity gives to every man his due honor.

The second ingenious chastiser of these times is another traditionalist, perhaps a lawyer and teacher of rhetoric, who arrived from Aquinum (Aquino) to the Rome of Domitian, remained

[187] I am not aware of any comprehensive study on the presence of *sententiae* and proverbs in Tacitus; for single cases see Renehan 1973; Sinclair 1992.
[188] For a collection of them, see Salanitro 2010.

disgusted, and, at the end of his years of censorship, composed "with indignation" (cf. *indignatio facit versum*, 1.79) sixteen *saturae* on social and political customs: **Decimus Junius Juvenal**. His satires are far removed from the Horatian concept of moderation: they are characterized by personal attacks (even if mainly directed against deceased figures), virulent unmasking of corruption and hypocrisies, scornful and sarcastic tones. These make the satires one of the most emblematic works both of the comic and satirical tradition of the *Italum acetum* (which had seen its literary archetype in Gaius Lucilius, almost a fellow countryman of the poet), and of the moral—and often moralistic—criticism of the opulent imperial society, which, behind its widespread wellbeing, hid dark sides of malpractice and cultural degeneration, according to the most attentive—but perhaps malicious—witnesses.
In Juvenal's captivating style, full of rare or semantically peculiar terms, of ambiguities and sometimes inexplicable allusions, the poet scatters numerous proverb references and fulminating *sententiae* that suddenly strike the reader, always at the beginning or end of the hexameter:[189]

Nota magis nulli domus est sua (1.7)
No one knows his own house better.

Probitas laudatur et alget (1.74)
Honesty is praised, but dies of cold.

Tacita sudant praecordia culpa (1.167)
His heartstrings sweat with silent guilt.

Greed and money, the excessive lust for social climbing, sex, education, and family relationships are the main areas from which Juvenal draws *sententiae* and proverbs. Of the latter, many are *hapax* for us, and the scholia alone can help us understand their nature, thus showing that the poet has also most likely drawn from the spoken language:

"*dat veniam corvis, vexat censura columbas*": *proverbium est* (2.63)
"That's a judgment that acquits the ravens and condemns the doves": it is a proverb.

"*occidit miseros crambe repetita magistros*": *proverbium, teste Probo, omnibus tritum* (7.154)
"All that rehashed cabbage kills the poor teachers": a proverb known to all, according to the testimony of Probus.

"*tot milvos intra tua pascua lassas*": *dictus est* "*habuisse fundos, quantum milvi volant*" (9.54) (defined *proverbium* by the scholium to Persius 4.26)
"You tire out all those kites within your pastureland": they say, "to have as much land as the kites fly for."

Alongside the two great indignant moralists, the decades under the adoptive emperors saw the development of a "convention and occasion" literature, which to some scholars seemed (and seems) too disengaged, and which today would be defined as "entertainment" literature or para-literature. A typical representative of such *literati*, trained in schools of rhetoric, politicians by passion, generally administrators, or scholars *tout court*, is **Pliny the Younger**, the scientist's nephew. He wrote the *Panegyric to Trajan*, the archetype of a prosperous genre in the imperial period, which features gnomic motifs typical of encomia. His also is a *corpus* of nine books of *Letters*, plus one to Trajan, where the whole repertoire of the proverb tradition on friendship and fortune is used, without ever exploiting signposting words such as *proverbium* or others. Pliny's epistolography, an extreme literary rarefaction of Cicero's model, offers a glimpse of a genre that, from the 2nd century onwards, will become widely practiced and will find in the presence of proverb and *sententia* expressions one of its peculiar characters. The proverb, in Rome as in

[189] As with Tacitus, a study and commentary on proverbs and *sententiae* in Juvenal, in the albeit rich harvest of studies on the linguistic aspects of the author, is still lacking.

Greece, was used in imperial epistolography for its shareability at an erudite level: the sender invited the recipient to discover the proverb, or explained its nature, often with smug irony. This is what emerges, moreover, from the other *corpora* of letters—openly literary, because they are addressed to fishermen and courtesans, parasites and peasants—of the mysterious **Alciphron**, probably to be placed in this century. Here, the mention of παροιμία tends to be increasingly confused with the learned poetic quotation, in a refined game with the reader.[190]
Among the most prominent scholars of the time is undoubtedly **Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus**, who was superintendent of the city libraries under Hadrian. In his works, which have come down to us only partially intact, he pays close attention to the gnomic and proverbial tradition. In his *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, Suetonius often mentions sayings and actual proverbs cherished by the emperors; in the treatises *On insults* and *On games,* both written in Greek, his aetiological interest prevails, and dozens of proverbs are taken into account. In Suetonius' exegeses, they originate from insulting creatures or phrases (e.g. λευκόπυγος—ὁ ἄνανδρος, "white-bottomed: the effeminate"; κερκωπίζειν, "to play the Cercopes [famous brigands]"; "λάρους" τοὺς εὐήθεις φαμέν, "'seagull': thus we call a good-for-nothing," and others), or from games. Precise and clear is the distinction between authorial *loci*, original proverbial expressions, and literary intersections. Let us see two exemplary cases:

Περὶ παιδιῶν, 1.94: Τῶν δὲ βόλων ὁ μὲν τὰ ἓξ δυνάμενος Κῷος καὶ ἑξίτης ἐλέγετο, Χῖος δὲ ὁ τὸ ἓν καὶ κύων. Λέγεται δέ τις καὶ παροιμία ἀπὸ τούτου, οἷον—Χῖος παραστὰς Κῷον οὐκ ἐάσω—ἀφ' οὗ καὶ Στράττις Λημνομέδᾳ (fragment 23 Kock)—"Χῖος παραστὰς οὐκ ἐᾷ λέγειν."
Among the dice rolls, he who succeeds in producing a six produces the "Coan," a roll which is deemed perfect. The "Chian," on the other hand, or the "dog," is the shot of whoever produces a one. Hence, a proverb is also said: "Starting with a Chian, I will not leave out a Coan"; hence Strattis in his *Lemnomeda*: "A Chian stands by and shuts the Coan up."

2.33: Κρατῖνος δὲ Χείρωσι (fragment 229 Kock) χαριέντως ὁμοῦ ἐγκαταμίξας καὶ τὴν "ὄνος λύραν" παροιμίαν ἔπλεξε τὸν λόγον οὕτως—"ὄνοι δ' ἀπωτέρω κάθηνται τῆς λύρας."
Cratinus, in his *Chirons*, elegantly varied the proverb "an ass and the lyre" into the expression "the asses sit at a distance from the lyre."

Lucius Annaeus Florus, of African origin, after a forced exile from Rome under Domitian, returned to the *urbs* and held positions of trust under Hadrian. Together with other scholars, he founded the circle of *poetae novelli*, who were inspired by archaic Latin poetry, in search of rare and precious terms. Too little, however, has remained of this effort. At the same time, in his prose, Florus followed the prevailing trend of the time, a puristic Atticism also dotted with obsolete and archaic words. In Florus' *Histories*, under the banner of *brevitas* and archaism, the *sententiae* and moralistic style of Sallust and Tacitus return in an even more accentuated way, with countless exclamations and rhetorical questions:

Sed quod ius apud barbaros? (1.7)
But what justice could there be among barbarians?

Nihil hospitalius mari (1.11)
Nothing is more inhospitable than the sea.

Tanta in virtute fiducia est! (1.18)
So great is the confidence inspired by courage!

Also of African origin, **Marcus Cornelius Fronto** was one of the most famous and appreciated rhetoricians of his time: a lecturer and panegyrist, he was entrusted by Antoninus Pius with the education of his sons, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. Only fragments of Fronto's many works have come down to us. However, we can read many letters from his epistolary efforts,

[190] The definitive study on proverbs in (Greek) epistolographers is still Tsirimbas 1935.

where a similar fragmented style emerges, favoring archaic terms which are obscure and, for this reason, precious. This erudite search for archaic vocabulary also includes the grafting of ancient proverbs (not infrequently taken from mime and the theatre) to be exhibited while hinting to cultured and curious readers. Fronto thus gives us some interesting pieces of archaic culture, almost always explicitly mentioned:

Aliud scurrarum proverbium: "*en, cum quo in tenebris mices*" (Naber p. 13)
Another jester's proverb: "Marry one with whom you can play odd and even in the dark!"

Quod cursorem fugitivom ferunt dixisse: "*domino sexagena currebam, mihi centena, ut fugiam, curram*" (Naber p. 25)
As the fleeing groom is reported to have said, "I have run sixty miles for my master, I will run a hundred for myself, to escape."

A disciple of Fronto, a scholar and a teacher of rhetoric, is **Aulus Gellius**, the author of one of the most emblematic works of this time: the *Attic nights*. It is a collection of historical, antiquarian, linguistic, literary, and pedagogical curiosities, and much more, similar, in many ways, to Plutarch's *Quaestiones* (*convivales*, *Graecae et Romanae*). Considerable attention is given to the Roman and Greek proverb and *sententia* tradition in all its forms. Beyond the numerous proverbs used in the first person, several chapters are devoted to the aetiology of a *proverbium* or the origin of a *dictum*:

3.9: *Quis et cuiusmodi fuerit qui in proverbio fertur equus Seianus*.
The characteristics of the horse of Seius, which is mentioned in a proverb.

4.5: *Historia narrata de perfidia aruspicum Etruscorum; quodque ob eam rem versus hic a pueris Romae urbe tota cantatus est:* "*Malum consilium consultori pessimum est.*"
A story told about the treachery of Etruscan diviners; and how, because of that, this line is chanted by the boys at Rome all over the city: "bad counsel to the giver is most ruinous."

In other chapters, Gellius transcribes the *sententiae* of famous people or authors on a single theme (1.15: on loquacity), for example, the mimographer Publilius (17.14). Many other chapters present actual χρεῖαι featuring philosophers and rhetoricians, historical, or legendary figures:

2.5: *Quam lepide signateque dixerit Favorinus philosophus, quid intersit inter Platonis et Lysiae orationem*.
How elegantly and clearly the philosopher Favorinus described the difference between the style of Plato and that of Lysias.

3.5: *Deliciarum vitium et mollities oculorum et corporis ab Arcesila philosopho cuidam obprobrata acerbe simul et festiviter*.
The vice of voluptuousness and the effeminacy of gazes and body severely yet humorously reprimanded by the philosopher Arcesilaus.

7.10: *Historia super Euclida Socratico*.
A story about Euclid, the Socratic.

8.11: *Quam festive responderit Xanthippae uxori Socrates petenti, ut per Dionysia largiore sumptu cenitarent*.
How wittily did Socrates reply to his wife Xanthippe, when she asked that they might spend more money for their dinners during the Great Dionysia.

11.4: *Sobria et pulcherrima Romuli regis responsio circa vini usum*.
The discreet and wonderful reply of King Romulus regarding his use of wine.

Similar in structure to the *Attic Nights*, in their being unsystematic and erudite, are other more or less contemporary works by Greek authors. **Athenaeus of Naucratis** composed the *Learned banqueters*, a title once again reminiscent of Plutarch's *Quaestiones convivales*: about thirty learned men of the time discuss the most varied topics, from food to music, from love to the objects of the table, recalling and quoting an impressive number of anecdotes, rare information, verses of authors now lost to us, and, not rarely, παροιμίαι and γνῶμαι. Of these, particularly interesting are the proverbs of popular origin, especially the calendrical ones, which are not preserved elsewhere, such as (3.73d: παροιμία) "σικυὸν τρώγουσα, γύναι, τὴν χλαῖναν ὕφαινε," "eat a cucumber, woman, and weave your cloak!" probably with a sexual undertone; or again (3.119e) σαπρὸς τάριχος τὴν ὀρίγανον φιλεῖ, "rotten saltfish likes marjoram." Very numerous, and always clearly introduced, are the proverbs employed by authors (especially comedians), as, for instance, in 6.266f: "μήποτ' οὖν διὰ ταῦτα καὶ ἡ παροιμία 'Χῖος δεσπότην [ὠνήσατο],' ἣ κέχρηται Εὔπολις ἐν Φίλοις," "this is perhaps the origin of the proverb 'A Chian purchased his master,' which Eupolis uses in *Friends*"; or in 3.89a, where it is recorded that the grammarian Apollodorus found a παροιμία in Sophron: "λιχνοτέρα τᾶν προφυρᾶν," "greedier than purple shellfish"; or [fragment 62 K.-A.] φησὶν ὅτι παροιμία ἐστὶν καὶ λέγει, ὡς μέν τινες, ἀπὸ τοῦ βάμματος, "he says that this is a proverb according to some authorities drawn from dyeing." Athenaeus also reports παροιμίαι filed and commented upon by scholars, as in 4.160b–c, where it is reported that Clearchus had recorded a proverb which, according to the words of Varro, ancestor of one of the diners, was also Roman: Κλέαρχος δὲ ὁ ἀπὸ τοῦ περιπάτου ἐν τοῖς Περὶ παροιμιῶν [fragment 83 W.] ὡς παροιμίαν ἀναγράφει τὸ "ἐπὶ τῇ φακῇ μύρον," ἧς μέμνηται καὶ ὁ ἐμὸς προπάτωρ Οὐάρρων ὁ Μενίππειος ἐπικαλούμενος, "Clearchus the Peripatetic, in his work *On Proverbs*, records as a proverb the expression 'the perfume's in the lentil soup,' and my ancestor Varro, nicknamed the Menippean, mentions it too." Often, finally, a παροιμία itself serves as a comparison with authorial verses, even series of verses, indicating the poets' source of inspiration: such is the case in 10.426d or in 10.427f. An aetiology is almost always present, derived from the countless sources Athenaeus could still read, especially in Clearchus and Didymus.

The two main works of another rhetorician and scholar working under the Antonine dynasty, **Claudius Aelianus**, are again unsystematic. In his Ποικίλη ἱστορία, the rhetorician from Palestrina collects numerous anecdotes about historical figures, kings, and philosophers, many of which are indeed presented as real χρεῖαι. In the Περὶ ζῴων ἰδιότητος (*The characteristics of animals*), he notes many brief treatises on the most curious peculiarities of each animal species: here, Aelian also includes some παροιμίαι from the animal world, providing their exegesis (12.10; 15.20; 17.28). He is also credited with a small *corpus* of epistles, where forms and functions of the proverb already seen in Pliny and Alcyphro return.

The literary movement which was centered on Atticism, on an elegant and precious style, on progressively more spectacular modes, like the lecturers of rhetoric, in its multifaceted relationship with the power of Rome, became self-aware in Greece in these decades. **Flavius Philostratus**, one of the most prominent rhetoricians, gave these authors a label destined to become famous and almost institutional—the Second Sophistic, recalling the movement in 5th-century Athens. The Second Sophists, too, were preoccupied with rhetoric (especially Atticism) and philosophy (especially Stoicism and Cynicism). In this approach, the rhetorical interest in the short form was welded to the philosophical interest in the gnomic tradition. The result takes to their extreme the tendencies already present and theorized about in Plutarch and Quintilian: the proverb and *sententia* increasingly become a literary tool.[191]

In **Aelius Aristides**, a native of Asia Minor, a rhetorician with a distinctive and adventurous biography, there is an abundance of striking γνῶμαι of Stoic matrix and of mainly religious content (his devotion to Asclepius is peculiar). His works also feature references to παροιμίαι, both of ancient tradition—such as οἷος ὁ τρόπος, τοιοῦτον εἶναι καὶ τὸν λόγον, "like character, like speech" (9.26), κοινὰ τὰ φίλων, "for friends all is shared" (249.29) or οὐδὲν πρὸς τὸν Διόνυσόν, "nothing to do with Dionysus" (511.11); and of unique attestation, and therefore

[191] Comprehensive paremiological studies are lacking for most of these authors.

perhaps of oral circulation—such as οὐ πόρρω θέομεν τὰ νῦν, "let us go no further" (380.9),[192] ἐξ ἀξίου τοῦ ξύλου καὶ πάσχειν ὑπῆρχεν, "suffering also comes from worthy wood" (510.35),[193] and many others.[194]

The same interweaving of philosophical themes and rhetorical interest emerges from the orations intended for a recitation (μελεταί) in the squares or theaters, written by other Greek protagonists of the Second Sophistic movement. In the writings of **Favorinus**, pupil of Dio Chrysostom, friend of Plutarch, Gellius, and Fronto, gnomic motifs (more than proper παροιμίαι) on the theme of fate and the paradoxicality of life abound. Even more reworked are the *sententiae* in the over 40 orations of **Maximus of Tyre**, an eclectic author with Platonic preferences, who was especially fond of themes that were typical of popular philosophy.

The most famous Second Sophist of the century, who in many ways escapes a precise classification, is **Lucian of Samosata**. A brilliant and multifaceted personality, a champion of satire and desecrating irony, the author of one of the largest and most successful *corpora* of the ancient world, Lucian is among the authors most dependent on proverbs of Greek culture.[195] In the enormous repertory of proverbs offered by Lucian's writings, there is room for all types. Proverbs about everyday life make up the largest number: body parts, gestures, work activities, arts and music, navigation and agriculture, hunting and fishing, activities of the house and public life are featured; expressions about peculiar characteristics of animals abound, from the most common ones (dogs, donkeys, pigs) to the most curious and extravagant (monkeys, camels, parrots). A close relationship and osmosis is thus established between fable and proverb. The vegetable world, instead, is less represented; and of the proverbs with legendary characters as protagonists, Lucian prefers the most famous ones that have become part of the common language ("the ring of Gyges," "the wealth of Midas"). The expressions centered on heroes and gods are not very numerous; on the contrary, there are many antonomastic comparative structures—as hyperboles, as it is easy to expect from the ironic author—that thematize heroic qualities ("faster than Achilles," "older than Tithonus"); finally, there are many *adynata*, which almost constitute a separate repertoire.

As already mentioned, it is with 2nd-century authors that the uses and functions of the short forms reach a clear and evident rhetorical codification: among these authors, Lucian is the one who best allows us to see the traditional proverb mechanisms at work. Thus, from time to time, the proverb or the γνώμη serves to raise or lower the tone, is distorted or even denied, to reveal a sharp irony or to carry out a social satire; it is used to trigger the process of familiarization with the myth, by desacralizing it; sometimes there are actual lists of proverbs to deepen the satirical and ironic effect; the proverb, finally, is subjected—by the same process applied to poetic quotations or other allusive *tesserae*—to mechanisms of re-creation and variation, amplification or allusive reduction.

It is my contention that Lucian's use of proverbs and γνῶμαι in different works is not accidental: the greatest presence is in satirical *pamphlets* (the *Hermotimus* counts 32, the *Timon* and the *Adversus indoctum* both 21; the *Zeus rants* 17, and so on); less emphasized, and more probably due to the imitation of everyday speech, is the percentage in the *laliai* (8 in the *Harmonides*; 5 in the *Scythians*, and so on). Explicit indications are very numerous, through the usual formulas κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν, ἡ παροιμία φησί, τὸ τῆς παροιμίας.

There are different opinions on the sources of Lucian's proverbs, especially between those who identify the prevalent derivation from authorial *loci*[196] and those who argue for a possible use of early paremiographic syllogies especially produced for schools of rhetoric.[197] I will come back to this aspect shortly, because, while it is true that many proverb allusions to literary *loci* are

[192] It will return in Theodore Metochites (ὁ λόγος φησίν, "as the saying goes") and Nicetas Choniates (ὡς λέγουσιν οἱ ἀντιλέγοντες, "as those who counterclaim say").
[193] Attested in Diogenianus 4.55.
[194] Some examples in Ruta 2020:50–53.
[195] In addition to the classic Rein 1894, and the section devoted to it by Bompaire 1958:405–424; an extensive study of proverbs in Lucian is Tomassi 2001, to which I refer here for the casuistry that I quote.
[196] Rein 1894.
[197] Bompaire 1958; Ruta 2020:45–72.

undeniable, it is also true that in the paremiographical collections that can be dated to the 2nd century—those of Lucillus of Tarrha and Zenobius—there are many of Lucian's παροιμίαι. However, the relationship between the two, in my opinion, should not necessarily be understood in a unidirectional sense, that is *from* the paremiographers *to* Lucian. We should not underestimate, moreover, the inevitable contribution of the author's endless readings, which, according to what we can ascertain, could still include hundreds of works that would be forgotten in a few decades.

A contemporary of Lucian was **Apuleius**, who also came from a peripheral region of the empire, the African Madaura. A rhetorician, lawyer, lecturer and traveler, an expert in magic, and a scholar of Platonic philosophy, Apuleius wrote a large number of works in Greek and Latin, most of which have not survived. His imaginative and captivating style, always leaning towards spectacular, ironic, and tragic elements, takes to its extreme consequences the rhetorical treatment of short forms (especially proverbs), encompassing proverbial and idiomatic expressions, although they are not high in number and are distributed in an allusive and surprising way, without particular attention to the characterization of the people involved.[198] Apuleius dedicated a work to proverbs, *De proverbiis*, which is now lost and of which nothing is known.

In his most famous work, the *Metamorphoses*, the astonishing adventure (narrated in the first person) of the young Lucius, who is transformed by a witch into an ass, only to become a man again and become faithful to the goddess Isis, distortions and rewritings of proverbs abound, especially with animals (crows, bulls, sheep, and, obviously, donkeys) or folklore creatures (witches and orcs) as protagonists. Thus, to give just one example, at the end of book 9, Lucius-ass recounts the daring episode in which one of his "owners," a horticulturist, after clashing with a soldier, was pursued by the latter's fellow soldiers and was discovered "because of the shadow of his ass peeping out"; a rewriting that contaminates two famous proverbial expressions, providing a surreal etiology (9.42):

Qua contentione et clamoso strepitu cognito, curiosus alioquin et inquieti procacitate praeditus asinus, dum obliquata cervice per quandam fenestrulam quidquam sibi vellet tumultus ille prospicere gestio, unus e commilitonibus casu fortuito conlimatis oculis ad umbram meam cunctos testatur incoram. Magnus denique continuo clamor exortus est et emensis protinus scalis iniecta manu quidam me velut captivum detrahunt. Iamque omni sublata cunctatione scrupulosius contemplantes singula, cista etiam illa revelata, repertum productumque et oblatum magistratibus miserum hortulanum poenas scilicet capite pensurum in publicum deducunt carcerem summoque risu meum prospectum cavillari non desinunt. Unde etiam de prospectu et umbra asini natum est frequens proverbium.

On hearing their quarrel and their loud noise, being an inquisitive ass endowed with indiscreet effrontery, I bent my neck and tried to peep through a little window to see what in the world was the reason for all that uproar, but just then one of the soldiers accidentally caught a glimpse of my shadow out of the corner of his eye and called all the others to watch. Immediately, a great clamor arose; some of them rushed upstairs, laid their hands on me, and dragged me down like a prisoner. With all doubt now removed, they inspected every part of the house with greater care now: this time they also uncovered that chest, where they discovered the poor gardener, brought him out, handed him over to the magistrates, and led him off to the public jail, no doubt to pay the price with his life. Meanwhile, they would not stop making fun of my peeping. And this is how the common proverb about the peeping ass and his shadow was born.

Prose tales that present several features similar to Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and to some of Lucian's work, centered on love and adventure stories, almost always concerning two lovers separated and then reunited after a thousand vicissitudes—the oldest folktale in the world—began to circulate, or so our current documentation tells us, in the 2nd century. About the authors of these "novels" we know almost nothing; their writings, however, follow the style and

[198] A comprehensive study of the presence of the proverb in Apuleius is lacking.

mechanisms of the Second Sophistic, and the rhetorical treatment given to the gnomic tradition is no exception. Thus, in *Chereas and Callirhoe* by **Chariton of Aphrodisias**, in the *Ephesiaka* by **Xenophon of Ephesus**, in the *History of Leucippe and Clitophon* by **Achilles Tatius**, in *Daphnis and Chloe* by **Longus**, and in the *Aethiopica* by **Heliodorus**—as well as in other minor works handed to us from papyri or preserved in the summaries of the aforementioned *Library* of **Photius**—we find the usual stylistic features of the Second Sophists, from allusion to rewriting, from authorial comments to *aprosdoketon.* Hundreds of γνῶμαι are scattered in the speeches of the characters and in the narrator's account:[199] the vast majority naturally concerns the themes of fortune and love, friendship and virtue, providing yet another ethical coloring to a genre that, at least in our eyes, is among the least dotted with formative and sapiential material.

The picture of the authors of the time would not be complete if we did not mention the singular and extraordinary presence of proverbs and *sententiae* in the scientific writings of the physician **Galen of Pergamon**, author of a *corpus* that would become a cornerstone of Western medicine until the Renaissance: in all his works, there are numerous proverbial *tesserae*, both signaled as such and not. This is a sign of the spread of παροιμίαι as rhetorical preciosities, now used in every form of writing.[200]

The rhetorical interest in short forms in the 2nd century is tantamount to an impressive interest also from the point of view of erudite reflection and research. Lexicographical studies, from Aristophanes of Byzantium onwards, had always shown a certain link with the paremiographic interest: often a scholar would have compiled lexicons and, at the same time, collections of proverbs, like Aristophanes, and later Didymus. Sinnius Capito, too, as we have seen, devoted considerable attention to the exegesis of *proverbia* and *dicta* in his *De significatu verborum*. Three lexicographers active between Hadrian and the Antonines, who were all more or less contemporary and Atticists as well, document the interest in γνῶμαι and παροιμίαι that can be inferred from authorial *loci.* More than 150, out of nearly a thousand, are the citations of παροιμίαι in the Ἀττικῶν ὀνομάτων συναγωγή (*Collection of Attic words*) of **Pausanias the Atticist**; about 20 out of about 800 lemmas in the Ἀττικὰ ὀνόματα (*Attic words*) of **Aelius Dionysius**; just over ten in the *Lexicon of Attic Orators* of **Valerius Harpocration**, the most reworked of the three. All these lexicons, originally in several books, were ordered κατὰ στοιχεῖον, "alphabetically," and were intended χρησιμώτατος δ' ὁ πόνος οὗτος τοῖς τε ἀττικίζειν ἔχουσι φροντίδα καὶ τοῖς τῶν Ἀττικῶν συγγράμμασιν ἐνομιλεῖν προαιρουμένοις, "for those who care to express themselves in good Attic style and who aim to familiarize themselves with the works of Attic authors," as the patriarch Photius, who could still read those intact in the 10th century, summarized in his *Library* (152: Aelius Dionysius). The παροιμίαι are marked with μέμνηται "he remembers the proverb," κέχρηται "he employs the proverb," or even simply by indicating the name of the author and the work, which are almost always provided. The sources, which are extremely rich, reveal that these three scholars had access to the entire ancient lexicographic tradition, and much more.

In these authors, however, the very intention of indicating the proverbial nature of an expression in an author's work seems to lead—paradoxically, and for the first time in the cultural history of short forms in ancient Greece—to cases of confusion in labeling an excerpt from an author as a παροιμία. With all the caution imposed by the not few stages of rehashing and epitomization in which these *lexicons* have reached us, some lemmas are indicative of what we might call the first phenomenon of "proverbialization" of expressions by authors (often consisting in reworkings of the basic form of a proverb). Perhaps a semantic shift of the term παροιμία also occurred: from a "proverb" technically and paremiologically intended, it will progressively tend to mean "an expression that is employed as a proverb," defining now a famous verse, now a joke, now an antonomastic comparison, now an idiomatic phrase or even a refrain from a childish game,[201] now a saying or an actual proverb. Let us explore some emblematic examples:[202]

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[199] There is no general study of the *sententiae* element in Greek "novelists."

[200] See Boehm 2011 on the theatrical γνῶμαι in Galen.

[201] As in Aelius Dionysius ε 43: ἐξέχειν τὸν ἥλιον—τὸ ἐπιτεταλκέναι. "ἔξεχε, ὦ φίλ' ἥλιε," κωλάριόν τι παροιμιῶδες ὑπὸ τῶν παίδων λεγόμενον, ὅταν ἐπινέφῃ ψύχους ὄντος (*Carm. pop.* fragment 40 D.[2]). Ἀριστοφάνης Νήσοις (II 1110 M. = fragment 389 K.)— "λέξεις ἄρ<α> ὥσπερ τὰ παιδί[α]—ἔξεχ' ὦ φίλ'

Pausanias α 45: "αἰετὸν κάνθαρος μαιεύσομαι"—παροιμία. τὰ γὰρ ᾠὰ τοῦ ἀετοῦ ἀφανίζουσιν οἱ κάνθαροι κυλίοντες, ἐπεὶ οἱ τοὺς κανθάρους ἀναλέγουσιν.
"I'll be the beetle midwife to your eagle's eggs": proverb; for the beetles steal the eagle's eggs by rolling them, since eagles prey on them.

The one lemmatized (in the first person) is a line from Aristophanes (*Lysistrata* 695), not the basic form of the proverb.

Pausanias γ 1: "γνῶθι σαυτόν"—ἀπόφθεγμα Χ<ε>ίλωνος. τάττεται δὲ ἡ παροιμία ἐπὶ τῶν ὑπὲρ ὅ εἰσι κομπαζόντων.
"Know thyself": apophthegm of Chilon. The proverb is used for those who boast beyond what they are.

This is the first case, to my knowledge, in which there is overlap between ἀπόφθεγμα and παροιμία.

Pausanias κ 60: "Κωρυκαῖος <ἠκροάζετο>."
"the Corycaeans eavesdropped."

After explaining the proverb, Pausanias quotes a literary testimony, introducing it, however, with the term παροιμία: ὅθεν καὶ ἡ παροιμία—"τοῦ δ' ἆρ' ὁ Κωρυκαῖος ἠκροάζετο,"—Μένανδρος Ἐγχειριδίῳ [fragment 137 Kö.], hence comes also the proverb "Aha! The Corycaean eavesdropped there!", in Menander's *Encheiridion*.

Pausanias π 9: "παρὰ κωφὸν ἀποπέρδειν"—παροιμία ἐπὶ ἀναισθήτων.
"to break wind in the presence of the deaf": proverb for ignorant people.

The lemma is actually a *detorsio* of the proverb of the comic poet Cratinus, not a παροιμία in itself ("to speak in the presence of the deaf").

Besides these very limited cases of terminological interference, inappropriateness, overlap, or outright confusion, there could be many examples of clear distinctions between παροιμίαι and literary *loci*, between the basic form and its *detorsio* or use by an author. See, for instance:

Pausanias ε 80: "εὕδοντι κύρτος αἱρεῖ"—παροιμία, καθεύδουσι γὰρ καθέντες τοὺς κύρτους. παρὰ τοῦτο ἐποίησε Κρατῖνος Ἀρχιλόχοις [fragment 3 K.-A.]—"εὕδοντι πρωκτὸς αἱρεῖ": "the trap does the sleeping fisherman's work": proverb; for after casting the trap, the fishermen sleep. On this Cratinus, in *The Archilochuses*, formed: "His bottom does the catching while he sleeps."

Aelius Dionysius ο 24: "ὄνος ἐν μελίτταις"—Κράτης Τόλμαις [fragment 36 K.], καὶ "ὄνος ἐν μύρῳ"—παροιμία: "a donkey among the bees": Crates in his *Daring deeds*, and "a donkey among perfumes": it is a proverb.

Aelius Dionysius τ 23: "τρία καὶ δύο"—ἐπὶ τῆς κράσεως τοῦ οἴνου. Ἀριστοφάνης Ἱππεῦσιν (1187)—"ἔχε <καὶ> πιεῖν κεκραμένον τρία καὶ δύο." Ἡσίοδος (*Works and Days* 596)—"τρὶς ὕδατος προχέειν, τὸ δὲ τέτρατον ἰέμεν οἶνον." Εὔπολις Αἰξίν [fragment 6 K.-A.]—"Διόνυσε

ἥλιε." "The sun comes out: that is, it rises. 'Come out, dear sun!' is a proverbial verse pronounced by the children, when it snows and it is cold. Aristophanes, in his *Islands*: 'you will say, like the children: come out, dear sun!'"

[202] The text of these examples, it should be stressed again, could result from an epitomization of the original: and certainly, it is possible that confusion in the definitions of verses and παροιμίαι was generated at a later stage, but the opposite is impossible, that cases of incorrect definitions produced texts with precise citations.

χαῖρε- μή τι πέντε καὶ δύο”; τοιοῦτο καὶ τὸ παροιμιακόν—“<ἢ> πέντε πίνειν ἢ τρί’, ἢ μὴ τέτταρα.” τὸ μὲν γὰρ πέντε ἐστὶ τρία καὶ δύο, τὸ δὲ τρία ἥμισυ καὶ διπλάσιον, τὸ δὲ τέτταρα ἴσον ἴσῳ.
“three to two”: for the mixing of wine. Aristophanes, in the *Knights*: “Have a drink, too, mixed two parts wine to three of water”; Hesiod: “first pour three portions from the water, then put in a fourth part of wine.” Eupolis, in the *Nanny-goats*: “Greetings, Dionysus, the five and two perhaps?”; the proverbial expression is this: “drink five or three, not four”: “five” means three parts of water and two of wine, while “three,” one of wine and two of water; “four,” instead, equal parts.

Harpocration ρ 54: “Περὶ τῆς ἐν Δελφοῖς σκιᾶς”—Δημοσθένης Φιλιππικοῖς. Δίδυμός φησι τὴν περὶ ὄνου σκιᾶς παροιμίαν παραπεποιῆσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ ῥήτορος λέγοντος “περὶ τῆς ἐν Δελφοῖς σκιᾶς”
“about the shadow of Delphi”: Demosthenes in the *Philippics*. Didymus asserts that the proverb “about the shadow of the ass” has been distorted by the rhetorician into the expression “about the shadow of Delphi.”

2nd-century lexicography, in conclusion, began to constitute in many ways a repository, and at the same time an epitomization, of the already long—almost half a millennium old!—Greek paremiographic tradition. In the general attention and precision of terminology, definitional overlaps were perhaps beginning to intrude, which could derive from the rhetorical and more extensive use of παροιμίαι, increasingly closer to that of an allusive and literary *tessera*.
Two other figures of rhetoricians and Sophists enrich the already polymorphic panorama of the proverb culture of the crucial 2nd century. Their names are perpetually linked to two fundamental texts for later Western paremiography—perhaps beyond the actual intentions of the authors.[203]
Of a Lucius or **Lucillus of Tarrha**, also called “the Tarrhaean,” we know very little, and even his name is uncertain. He was a grammarian and the author of a *History of Thessalonica* and of a *Commentary to Apollonius of Rhodes*; Stephanus of Byzantium attributes to him τρία βιβλία ἄριστα περὶ παροιμιῶν (“three very good books on proverbs”), of which only four indirect fragments seem to have come down to us. For another rhetorician, **Zenobius**, σοφιστής, παιδεύσας ἐν Ῥώμῃ ἐπὶ Ἀδριανοῦ Καίσαρος (“a sophist, who taught in Rome at the time of Emperor Hadrian”), an entry in the *Suda* (z 37) attests that ἔγραψεν Ἐπιτομὴν τῶν παροιμιῶν Διδύμου καὶ Ταρραίου ἐν βιβλίοις τρισί, “he composed an *Epitome of proverbs of Didymus and the Tarrhaean*, in three books.” Of this *Epitome,* which has come down to us, the title attested in the manuscript tradition is, however, different: Ζηνοβίου ἐπιτομὴ τῶν Ταρραίου καὶ Διδύμου παροιμιῶν (*Zenobius’ epitome of the proverbs of the Tarrhaean and of Didymus*). The difference has created many problems for scholars, along with the mention of the same number of books (three) for both authors: if Lucillus’ books were only three, in what proportion would Zenobius have epitomized them, compared, among other things, to the relationship with the thirteen books of Didymus? There are two positions on this matter: Zenobius would have epitomized both Didymus and Lucillus, in proportions that we cannot identify;[204] or, instead, he would have reduced in number only the entries of the Tarrhaean, which was already an epitome of Didymus’ large collection.[205] Another aspect must be considered within this issue, which seemed unresolvable to Bühler (1.36). Many extracts attributed to Didymus, and presumably derived from his Περὶ παροιμιῶν, are transmitted in other sources in a more complete way than Zenobius’. Although in principle it is certainly possible that it was Zenobius’ transmission that underwent reductions, as is well attested, it is nevertheless true that those testimonies could indicate that Didymus’ paremiographic work, as is indeed proven with certainty for other works of his, was still being read in the mid-2nd century, since not even two centuries had passed since the author’s death. It therefore seems more plausible that Zenobius conflated the two independent collections into a single work.

[203] See Lelli 2021:348–441, 1568–1642.
[204] Crusius 1883.
[205] Rupprecht 1949; Ruta 2020.

The chronological collocations of Lucillus and Zenobius constitute no fewer problems. The mention of Λούκιλλος ὁ Ταρραῖος ἐν πρώτῳ Περὶ παροιμιῶν, attested in the treatise Περὶ διαφορᾶς λέξεων (*On the difference of words*), by the Biblical grammarian Herennius Philon, born under Nero and still active under Hadrian, could bear witness to Lucillus' date within the 1st century. The work of Herennius, however, came to us in an epitomized and reworked form, and does not seem a solid point of reference. At this point, the dating of Zenobius comes into play. If the entry in the *Suda* states that the σοφιστής "taught" (παιδεύσας) in Rome "in the time of the emperor Hadrian," no data stand in the way of the hypothesis that his life may have reached the last decades of the century. This dating, in my opinion, as opposed to an earlier one—which is currently widespread—is more than plausible, for several reasons.

Two editions (or recensions) of paremiographic collections are attributed to Zenobius, transmitted by two manuscript traditions:

a) the so-called "Athoa" recension owes its name to an early 14th-century codex from Mount Athos (Par. suppl. 1164 = M), where there were five paremiographic "collections":

1. first "collection" or first book of Zenobius (89 proverbs), with the (lacunar) title < Ζηνο> βίου Ἐπιτομὴ τῶν Ταρραίου καὶ Διδύμου παροιμιῶν (*Zenobius' epitome of the proverbs of the Tarrhaean and of Didymus*)
2. second "collection" or second book of Zenobius (108 proverbs)
3. third "collection" or third book of Zenobius (175 proverbs)
4. fourth "collection," attributed to Plutarch, published by Leutsch in 1839 as *Alexandrian Proverbs*, but actually *excerpted* from the previous Zenobian collection
5. fifth "collection," anonymous and divided into three parts: 63 proverbs (edited by Spyridonidou-Skarsouli 1995); 8 proverbs taken from Sophocles and Lucian; 22 proverbs ordered alphabetically.

Thus, at least before the 12th century, a collection of three paremiographic works was circulating: three books attributed to Zenobius, one to Plutarch, and a fifth anonymous one, with further anonymous additions.[206]

b) the "Vulgate" recension, represented by more numerous and older codices, but, according to the unanimous opinion of scholars, less faithful to the structure of Zenobius' work. For in this edition, many proverbs of the five different "collections" of the *recensio Athoa* are presented alphabetically in a single collection of 552 proverbs (later divided into six *centuriae* by modern editors), in which many other lemmas appear that were absent in the Athoa recension.

The oldest and most faithful testimony is a Parisian codex of the 12th century (Par. 3070 = P), also called *recensio Parisina*.

In both of these redactions through which we have received Zenobius' text, in the course of the manuscript transmission, some additions (*additamenta*) have crept in, due to copyists who, in the late antique and early medieval period, inserted extracts from other authors known and available to them, where possible. This is the case, for example, of a lemma such as 3.23 διπλοῦς ἄνδρας ("double-minded men"), where in place of a paremiographic *interpretamentum*, a grammatical exegesis was introduced, with a quotation from Palladas, a 5th-century epigrammatist, who obviously could not have been quoted either by Zenobius or even less by the Tarrhaean. The same holds true, again, for the numerous *additamenta* derived from the *Library* of pseudo-Apollodorus, present only in the P-edition of Zenobius' Vulgate.

A similar problem is posed by the three quotations from Lucian—two of them explicit (Λουκιανός)—contained in three *interpretamenta* of the Vulgate redaction. According to most scholars, these mentions are the work of some rhetorician who, having read Lucian's texts, inserted them into the archetype of this redaction.[207] The problem lies in the fact that these quotations come from an author who was practically a contemporary of Zenobius himself: two of

[206] In Codex M, the fourth collection (the one attributed to Plutarch) was lost due to a mechanical fault (the loss of a quaternion), and, with it, proverbs 18–175 of the third Zenobian "collection." However, the text was recovered from the apographs of the codex.

[207] We cannot, however, for any of the three, get a match from the Athoa recension: here, in fact, the lemmas do not appear at all.

them derive from Lucian's works—the *Demonax* and the *Encomium of the fly*—that we can date with certainty after 170 CE (the philosopher Demonax died in that very year). But the hypothesis that they could have been inserted in the late antique age is not convincing both for philological reasons, and, above all, for historical and cultural ones.
If we look at the *testimonia* one after the other, in fact, we can clearly understand that the quotation contained in Zenobius' text has Lucian's text as its exact reference. Their parallel mention in the lexicographic tradition proceeds on another parallel track, which will meet with the paremiographic one only in Apostolius. See the case of 2.1, from Lucian *Philopseudes* 32 τὸ γοῦν τοῦ λόγου ἐκεῖνο, ἄνθρακες ἡμῖν ὁ θησαυρὸς πέφηνε ("what the proverb says has happened: the treasure turned out to be coal") and *Hermotimus* 71: Οἷά με εἰργάσω, ὦ Λυκῖνε, ἄνθρακάς μοι τὸν θησαυρὸν ἀποφήνας ("look what you have done to me, Lycinus, you have shown me that the treasure was coal"). In the paremiographic tradition, we have:

Zenobius 2.1: "Ἄνθρακες ὁ θησαυρὸς πέφηνεν"—ἐπὶ τῶν ἐφ' οἷς ἤλπισαν διαψευσθέντων. Μέμνηται αὐτῆς Λουκιανός—"Τὸ γοῦν τοῦ λόγου ἐκεῖνο, ἄνθρακες ἡμῖν ὁ θησαυρὸς πέφυκε" (*Philopseudes* 32). Καὶ πάλιν "Ἀνθρακάς μου τὸν θησαυρὸν ἀπέφηνας" (*Hermotimus* 71). "The treasure turned out to be coal": for those who are disappointed in their expectations. Lucian records it: "what the proverb says has happened: the treasure turned out to be coal"; and again: "you have shown me that the treasure was coal."

Diogenianus Vindobonensis 1.90 = 1.51: "Ἄνθρακες ὁ θησαυρός"—ἐπὶ τῶν ἐφ' οἷς ἤλπισαν διαψευσθέντων. Ὡς ὁ Λουκιανός—"Ἀνθρακάς μοι τὸν θησαυρὸν ἀπέφηνας." "The treasure is coal": for those who are disappointed in their expectations. As in Lucian: "you have shown me that the treasure was coal."

Gregorius 1.64: "Ἄνθρακες ὁ θησαυρὸς γέγονεν"—ἐπὶ τῶν ἐφ' οἷς ἤλπισαν διαψευσθέντων. "The treasure has become coal": for those who are disappointed in their expectations.

Macarius 2, 16: "Ἄνθρακες ὁ θησαυρὸς πέφυκεν"—ἐπὶ τῶν ἐφ' οἷς ἤλπισαν διαψευσθέντων. "The treasure has become coal": for those who are disappointed in their expectations.

In the lexicographic tradition:
Pausania Atticista α 125: "ἄνθρακες ὁ θησαυρὸς ἦσαν"—ἐπὶ τῶν ἐλπιζόντων μὲν ἀγαθά, κακουμένων δὲ ἀφ' ὧν ἦν αὐτοῖς ἡ ἀγαθῶν ἐλπίς. "The treasure was coal": for those who hope for something good, but are ruined precisely by what they hoped for.

Photius α 1968: "Ἄνθρακες ὁ θησαυρὸς ἦσαν"—ἐπὶ τῶν ἐλπιζόντων μὲν ἀγαθά, κακουμένων δὲ ἀφ' ὧν ἦν αὐτοῖς ἡ ἀγαθῶν ἐλπίς. "The treasure was coal": for those who hope for something good, but are ruined precisely by what they hoped for.

Suda α 2521: "Ἄνθρακες ὁ θησαυρὸς ἦσαν": παροιμία ἐπὶ τῶν ἐλπιζόντων μὲν ἀγαθὰ, κακουμένων δὲ ἀφ' ὧν ἦν αὐτοῖς ἡ ἀγαθῶν ἐλπίς. "The treasure was coal": a proverb for those who hope for something good, but are ruined precisely by what they hoped for.

The two tracks, as I said, meet only in Apostolius:

Apostolius 2.86: "Ἄνθρακες ὁ θησαυρός"—ἐπὶ τῶν ἐλπιζόντων μὲν ἀγαθά, κακουμένων δὲ ἀφ' ὧν ἦν αὐτοῖς ἡ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἐλπίς. ἢ ἐπὶ τῶν ἐφ' οἷς ἤλπισαν διαψευσθέντων, ὡς Λουκιανός—"Ἀνθρακάς μοι τὸν θησαυρὸν ἀπέφηνας." "The treasure was coal": for those who hope for something good, but are ruined precisely by what they hoped for; or: for those who are disappointed in their expectations, as in Lucian: "you have shown me that the treasure was coal."

It is well known how much the 2nd-century Second Sophists were inclined to exchange allusions with one another, and the *Suda*, as we have seen, defines Zenobius as a σοφιστής. Nothing can prevent us, then, from placing Zenobius' paremiographic work at a later age in order to include

the three direct quotations from Lucian as a tribute to a "colleague," perhaps even familiar to him. Recently, it has been suggested that Lucian may have derived some of his proverb insertions from one of Lucillus' or Zenobius' repertories.[208] As already noted, the rhetoricians of this period may have had at their disposal paremiographic collections from which to draw proverbs. In fact, if this picture is verifiably true from the 4th century onwards (with Libanius and his generation), it does not seem plausible for the 2nd century, when the direction of the citations seems rather to go the other way. Of the 550 proverb lemmas archived in the Vulgate Zenobius, almost twenty are present in Lucian: they are, above all, antonomastic expressions ("the horn of Amalthea"), idiomatic expressions ("with dirty feet"), and actual proverbs ("where the lion's skin will not reach, it must be pieced with the fox's," "treasure has become coal"). The matter of the attestations, as we will see shortly, is roughly analogous for all the 1st- and 2nd-century Second Sophists: less than ten Zenobian lemmas are present in Dio Chrysostom, Aelius Aristides, Alciphron, and Philostratus. Therefore, if we were to accept the hypothesis that these great personalities had access to the Lucilian/Zenobian collection (or collections), we would have to reach the drastic conclusion that the work of the two rhetoricians was not particularly appreciated. All the more so, if we compare these numbers with the debt that Libanius' writings reveal to Lucillus/Zenobius: almost one hundred proverbs of Libanius seem to be directly drawn from the two paremiographers. This unequivocal fact, combined with the mention of Lucian in three Zenobian *loci*, suggests, as I said, another possibility: Lucian could not have made use of Zenobius' *Epitome*, and perhaps not even of the work of the Tarrhaean, because these works should be placed after his activity. On the contrary, it was Zenobius who drew proverbs from the writings of Lucian, paying him direct homage with some explicit quotations. If I am not mistaken, this would lead us to perceive a pupil-master relationship between the rhetorician of Samosata and the author of the *Epitome of proverbs*. Perhaps the opposite could have been the case, both culturally and historically: that such famous and esteemed figures as Dio or Lucian had to resort to rather limited scholastic and rhetorical repertories (3 books) for their proverbs, made by scholars of little or no renown.

Therefore, Zenobius' chronology, in my opinion, should be moved forward, at least to the second half of the century, along with that of Lucillus. Two Lucii, both sophists, known to us from Philostratus and Aelius Aristides, and contemporaries of Herodes Atticus (who died in 177), could be identified with our Luci(ll)us of Tarrha. He, on the other hand, may have been a little older than Zenobius. The most probable hypothesis is that, upon the death of the Tarrhaean, both in order continue his work and to perpetuate his memory, Zenobius might have undertaken an epitome of the work (perhaps only) begun by Luci(ll)us, adding to it an epitome of Didymus. In this case, we would have a reason both for the ambiguous title attested for the Zenobian epitome, and for the coincident number of books (three).

But what, then, was the original structure of Zenobius' *Epitome?* The fundamental basis of the argument of those who see in the Athoa recension the most genuine Zenobian redaction has always rested in the coincidence between the number of books testified to by the *Suda* and the three "collections" of the *recensio Athoa*. The *Suda,* however, is a late testimony: we should discard, therefore, the hypothesis that it may have been the Byzantine writers of this "encyclopedia" who had the *recensio Athoa* in front of them and derived from it the number of three books for Zenobius. It has also been pointed out that the proverbs of the *recensio Athoa* correspond to an earlier stage of the text precisely because they are arranged thematically.[209] This observation does not seem to be supported by facts. In the succession of the three "books" of the Athoa, in fact, it is rare to find content-related or formal links between contiguous proverbs; even rarer is it to identify a veritable paremiographic "series"; internal references are practically absent. Certainly, one can invoke—as has been done—the high rate of manipulation, interpolation, and reduction that the text must have undergone from draft to draft. And yet, this observation loses much of its weight if we think—as we should—of the fact that the work was

[208] Ruta 2020:53–54.
[209] Crusius 1883:95; Bühler 1987:35; Ruta 2020:60.

presented already at its birth as an *epitome*, that is, as a synthetic text whose references should have been evident even in short sequences, if they were intentional.[210]

To reinforce the *opinio communis* of an original thematic structure of the *Epitome*, however, a mid-3rd-century papyrus was recovered in 2009: *P.Oxy*. 4942, where we read a text (more extensive than both the *recensio Athoa* and the Vulgate) containing the Athoa series 1.3–5, with the proverbs πάντ' ὀκτώ ("every eight"), Ἀράβιος αὐλητής ("an Arab flute-player"), πρὸς δύο οὐδ'ὁ Ἡρακλῆς ("against two, not even Heracles"). We should add to this testimony that of *PSI Congr.* XIII 2, again from the mid-3rd century, which reports a text commenting on the proverbs Ὕδραν τέμνεις ("you are cutting the Hydra") and Ὕλαν κραυγάζεις ("you are screaming for Hylas"). Although this second pair also offers an alphabetical order, in fact, it recurs identically in the *recensio Athoa* 1.10 and 1.11. The two testimonies, in conclusion, would seem to attest to an early date: the same sequence of the *recensio Athoa* guarantees its genuine closeness to the original. Even this information, however, does not invalidate the argument: on the contrary, it must be said, first of all, that if the series of the two papyri coincided with Zenobius' original version, we would have to conclude that Zenobius' text had already been epitomized before the middle of the 3rd century. This, however, is unlikely for a work dating from barely a few decades earlier, which was already presented as an *epitome*. Two other elements lead to a different hypothesis on the relationship between the *Athoa recensio* and the Vulgate Zenobius, and on the very nature of the two collections.

As is evident, and as has been pointed out by many scholars, in fact, the Athoa collection and the Vulgate differ not only for their arrangement of the proverbs, but also in other fundamental aspects. The Athoa is richer in quotations from literary authors and scholars; the Vulgate is more slender, and many quotations have been eliminated; the style of the Vulgate collection is more homogeneous and defined.

The alphabetical ordering of the Vulgate has been the main feature indicated by most scholars as a sign of a rehash from the original. However, alphabetical ordering of material (κατὰ στοιχεῖον) is attested from the Hellenistic age, and abounds in the 2nd century, beginning with Harpocration's *Lexicon* and the *Homeric lexicon* of Apollonius the Sophist, the grammatical treatise Περὶ διαφορᾶς λέξεων κατὰ στοιχεῖον attributed to Ptolemy, the *Comic Lexicons* of Didymus and Theon, several *Therapeutic repertories*, two *Lexicons* of Galen, and many more. If, therefore, the κατὰ στοιχεῖον order was by now widespread not only in lexicography but elsewhere, is it really appropriate to label as reworked the alphabetical order offered by Zenobius' Vulgate recension? In my opinion, instead of thinking of a genuine thematic Zenobian order (which we cannot reconstruct) and a subsequent alphabetical order, replete with additions, we should postulate a more economical, though more radical, possibility.

Ruta suggested that the 3rd-century papyri may constitute portions not of Zenobius' text, but of the Tarrhaean's.[211] These passages, as we have seen, correspond to sequences attested in the *recensio Athoa*. But then it is legitimate for us to ask: could not the three collections of the *recensio Athoa* have been falsely attributed to Zenobius? Could they have actually preserved the three books of the Tarrhaean? If we consider this scenario, many pieces of the puzzle seem to fit better: the papyri preserve the original stage of the Tarrhaean's text; the three Athoa collections preserve a reduced reworking of it, and it is no coincidence, with this in mind, that among the numerous quotations of scholars and grammarians in the three books, the name of the Tarrhaean is missing, though it is present in the Vulgate edition. The Tarrhaean is missing because the work

[210] Illuminating, in this perspective, is the comparison with two contiguous lemmas preserved in the albeit extensively reworked *Lexicon* of Harpocration: α 245: "Ἀρχὴ ἄνδρα δείκνυσι"—Δημοσθένης Προοιμίοις δημηγορικοῖς. Σοφοκλῆς μὲν οὖν ἐν ταῖς ἐλεγείαις Σόλωνός φησιν αὐτὸ εἶναι ἀπόφθεγμα, Θεόφραστος δ' ἐν τῷ Παροιμιῶν καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης Βίαντος. ("Power reveals man": Demosthenes in the proems of his demegories. Sophocles, on the other hand, in the elegies, claims that this was an apothegm of Solon; Theophrastus instead, in the book *On Proverbs*, and Aristotle, attribute it to Bias.") This is followed by α 246: "Ἀρχὴν ἰᾶσθαι πολὺ λώϊον ἠὲ τελευτήν"—ἄλλη παροιμία, "'The beginning is much better cared for than the end': another proverb," where ἄλλη ("another") clearly refers back to the previous entry.

[211] Ruta 2020.

is by the Tarrhaean; the three Athoa collections were falsely attributed to Zenobius, because Zenobius was by then the most famous author of Byzantine paremiography.
It follows, again, that the Vulgate recension of Zenobius is the original one, alphabetically ordered and epitomized (by the author) with respect to the collections of the Tarrhaean and Didymus: thus we can explain absences and additions of proverbs, different redactions of *interpretamenta*, and much more.
This hypothesis makes it possible to assign a specific physiognomy to both collections, without postulating unnatural orderings and radical rearrangements. The Tarrhaean's work opened with a terminological preface: this is testified to by fragment 1, which deals with the distinction between αἶνος and παροιμία. This important passage will flow into numerous grammatical and paremiographic collections (Diogenes, Apostolius) up to the Byzantine age. Lucillus is also attributed with the testimony of work, so to speak, on-site: ἤκουσα, "I heard," says the Tarrhaean in fragment 4 (on the Σαρδόνιος γέλως, "Sardonius rice"), a trace of an "interview" with the inhabitants of the places where the proverb originated. If, however, the first three Athoa collections, like the papyrus fragments found in recent decades, are to be attributed to Lucillus, we must conclude that his paremiographic archive was essentially literary in its nature: 150 exegeses, out of 372 lemmas, contain quotations from authors, especially comic (Menander, Aristophanes, Philemon, Plato *comicus*, and Epicharmus), tragic (Sophocles and Euripides), and other poets (Archilochus, Sappho, and others), as well as, though to a lesser extent, prose writers (Herodotus, Plato, and Demosthenes).[212]
Zenobius' epitome seems, instead, to have a very different appearance, probably also because of the many interpolations that this *recensio* has surely undergone: it lacks an introduction or preface, which must certainly have been present, and which perhaps took up some reflections and theorizing derived from the work of the Tarrhaean; very famous proverbs are missing; the explanations of the proverbs are often brief and even obscure; there are additions, as we have said, mainly of mythographic nature, taken (sometimes clumsily) from the *Library* of Apollodorus;[213] there are some indications of the changed spiritual climate and Christian morality;[214] and some proverbs have been inserted which, because of the historical facts to which they allude, are clearly more recent than the original collection.[215] Above all, compared to the proverbs of the Athoa collection, Zenobius' 552 lemmas (of the Vulgate edition) include a much wider range of short forms: beside the proper παροιμίαι and γνῶμαι, which do not amount to half of the total number, there are idiomatic and antonomastic expressions that, strictly speaking, a modern paremiologist would not include in a collection of "proverbs." See, for example, the first conspicuous initial series: "a dessert of Abydos" (Ἀβυδηνὸν ἐπιφόρημα), "the flute-playing of Agathon" (Ἀγαθώνιος αὔλησις), "the life of Abron" (Ἄβρωνος βίος), "a meeting of Cercopes" (ἀγορὰ Κερκώπων), "the wells of Agamemnon" (Ἀγαμεμνόνεια φρέατα), "a smile-less stone" (ἀγέλαστος πέτρα), "a sea of goods" (ἀγαθῶν θάλασσα), "an anthill of goods" (ἀγαθῶν σωρός).

[212] For a more precise list see Ruta 2020:62–67.
[213] See, e.g. Zenobius 1, 18, 30, 33, 41; 2, 6, 68, 87. One fact is significant: those who made these additions seem to have soon grown tired and to have given up on a complete work, for there are no extensive mythographic additions from *centuria* 4 onwards (with the exception of 5.33). See Dobesch 1965.
[214] Think, for example, of Zenobius 1.33, relating the story of the centaur Nessus who, dying, deceives Deianeira in order to take revenge on Heracles, advising her to keep his blood as a love potion. In Zenobius' account, the detail that such blood was to be mixed with "the sperm he had poured on the ground" (from Apollodorus 2.7.151, τόν τε γόνον ὃν ἀφῆκε κατὰ τῆς γῆς, the source followed in this passage) is intentionally omitted. Or think of a comment like the one interspersed in the *interpretamentum* of Zenobius 2.56: next to the headword "The course of the sacred rivers goes back to their sources" and to the explanation which follows immediately, "proverb for what is said or happens on reverse," we read: "as if a sodomite called a well-balanced man impudent," which precedes the genuine "because the rivers flow from the top to the bottom, not the other way around." (Ἄνω ποταμῶν ἱερῶν χωροῦσι πηγαί—παροιμία ἐπὶ τῶν ὑπεναντίως λεγομένων ἢ γινομένων· οἷον εἰ ὁ πόρνος τὸν σώφρονα ἔλεγε πόρνον. Ἐπειδὴ οἱ ποταμοὶ ἄνωθεν κάτω ῥέουσιν, οὐ κάτωθεν ἄνω.)
[215] Zenobius 2.35 (Ἄφωνος Ἱππαρχίων—κατὰ τοὺς προπάτορας ἡμῶν) preserves the strange lemma "wordless Hipparchus," an anecdotal proverb of which the *interpretamentum*, introduced by the unusual "in the days of our ancestors," furnishes an *aition* clearly datable to late antiquity.

To find the first παροιμία we need to reach the twelfth headword: "after bread, bread is also good" (ἀγαθὴ καὶ μᾶζα μετ' ἄρτον). We do not know—nor will we ever be able to—if Zenobius' method of epitomization included the autonomous insertion of other expressions, or if many of the proverbial antonomasias or idiomatic phrases contained in the vulgate collection are the result of late antique additions, or if, again, they were all contained in Didymus' collection (and it would have been possible, given its dimension). However, we can probably say that Zenobius made a choice, or followed his preference, in placing these expressions—and it was a choice that conditioned subsequent paremiography, perhaps in line with the cultural change of the time, and with the general rhetorical shift in the concept (and term) of παροιμία. This consideration leads to the question of what the intentions and destination of Zenobius' collection were. Several scholars have postulated a fundamentally rhetorical dimension: the milieu and audience of the rhetorical schools in the 2nd-3rd centuries.[216] With Zenobius, in essence, and perhaps already with the Tarrhaean, a change of interests in the tradition of collections of proverbs and *sententiae* must have occurred. From the original philosophical, antiquarian, and historical intentions, it turned into a stylistic-rhetorical interest, and a scholastic diffusion (in the specialized sense of the term). This hypothesis—plausible, in light of what has been said so far—has nonetheless some objections: first of all, the assumption of an original thematic, and not alphabetical, structure of all these syllogies. A repertory written to enrich passages of orations or various compositions should have been structured by themes, not κατὰ στοιχεῖον: the rhetorician would have needed to find proverbial expressions περὶ φιλίας, περὶ ἀκολασίας, περὶ κακίας (on friendship, on intemperance, on wickedness), and so on. This is confirmed by the structures of the gnomologies and the repertories of passages and *sententiae* typical of the late antique and Byzantine period, beginning with Maximus the Confessor and Joannes Stobaeus, but also by many *testimonia* in 2nd-century papyri, which are thus organized. *Ad usum rhetorum et scholarum* (for the use of rhetoricians and scholars), in sum, an alphabetical repertory would have been almost useless. The very limited attestations of Lucillan and Zenobian παροιμίαι in the 2nd century Second Sophists, moreover, suggest, as we have seen, that it was the latter who provided material to the paremiographers, not the other way around. Only from the 4th century onwards, with Libanius and his generation, will paremiographic repertories reveal their debt to the μελεταί and epistolography of sophists and lecturers.

Besides the possible scholastic and rhetorical use, in the paremiography of Lucillus and Zenobius there seems to be in play a wider cultural interest of moral teaching and pedagogical function, together with the erudite and antiquarian aspect (i.e. the preservation of literary *loci* and various anecdotes). That the gnomic and proverb tradition still had—perhaps above all—an active ethical function in society and in cultural formation is also demonstrated by the flourishing of collections of maxims and *sententiae* from authors, still in this very important 2nd century. Among the most widespread repertories of moral reflection and soul-formation is, from the first decades of the century, the Ἐγχειρίδιον, *Manual*, of the Stoic **Epictetus**, promulgator of a philosophical school first in Rome, then in Nicopolis, until 135. The work was composed by his pupil Arrian, who had himself listened to the teachings of the master. Famous, appreciated, transcribed, and reinterpreted throughout the Byzantine Middle Ages, and again in the modern age, the *Manual* of Epictetus contains dozens of *sententiae* of the Greek gnomic tradition, assembled in a Stoic key.

A Stoic influence is also present in the writing of the emperor **Marcus Aurelius**, entitled Τὰ εἰς ἑαυτόν, *To himself*, often translated *Meditations*. It is, in fact, a kind of diary in which the author writes down, along with his own reflections (which are in the majority), numerous γνῶμαι and thoughts of philosophers and wise men of the past, up to Epictetus, in order to "have some fundamental axioms ready for the diagnosis of things human and divine" (3.13: τὰ δόγματα σὺ ἕτοιμα ἔχε πρὸς τὸ τὰ θεῖα καὶ ἀνθρώπινα εἰδέναι). Series of γνῶμαι follow each other in its 12 books: by Heraclitus (4.46), Plato (7.35), various poets (7.38; 7.51), Epicurus (9.41), and many others. From this point of view, the work of Marcus Aurelius appears as a literary version of those private documents of gnomic and proverbial character attested by the aforementioned papyri of the 2nd-4th centuries: lists of *sententiae* and moral thoughts copied by individuals to

[216] Tosi 1993:191; Ruta 2020:45ff.

produce handbooks of wisdom—a practice well documented in the diaries of the past and of today.
In Marcus Aurelius' thoughts, Stoic providence, the guide to public and private life, often gives way to a disconcerting pessimism—a sign of the contradictions of the age—condensed into *sententiae* destined to a long survival:

Ὁ κόσμος ἀλλοίωσις, ὁ βίος ὑπόληψις (4.4)
The universe—mutation; life—opinion.

Πᾶν ἐφήμερον, καὶ τὸ μνημονεῦον καὶ τὸ μνημονευόμενον. (4.35)
Everything lasts a day, both the rememberer and the remembered.

Ὡς ταχέως ὁ αἰὼν πάντα καλύψει καὶ ὅσα ἐκάλυψεν ἤδη. (6.59)
How soon will time hide all things, and how many a thing has it already hidden!

The spiritual climate of the time, increasingly in turmoil due to the new philosophical and religious influences—including the message of Christ—that were spreading in the Romanized Mediterranean, dramatically emerges in two other *sententiae* collections that can be placed before the end of the century, as fascinating as they are mysterious.
Many of the philosophical conceptions ascribed to Pythagoras, already a few decades after the master's death, had been taken up by several thinkers, authors, and poets, and had been mixed with other traditions of thought, especially Platonism, but also Orphism and Epicureanism, which had reinterpreted its motifs and perpetuated its fortunes. Between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE, at the same time as the diffusion of originally oriental cults such as that of Mithras and Isis—which professed the immortality of the soul and initiation into a religious mystery promising salvation—Pythagoreanism, too, increasingly took on the character of a religious, mystical, soteriological, and esoteric conception. This was also due to the growing syncretism of these philosophical and religious currents, which were progressively embodied in uncanny and mysterious preachers, such as the legendary **Apollonius of Tyana**, to whom the sophist Philostratus had unsurprisingly dedicated a fascinating biography, featuring many wise sayings attributed to the master. At the end of the 1st century, in the syncretistic climate of Alexandria, Pythagoreanism had also incorporated influences from the Jewish and Persian religions, and was based on the radical dichotomy between Good and Evil, between spirit and matter: only purification of the soul and detachment from material goods, made possible thanks to the mystery teachings, could help "save" one's soul.
In this cultural framework, we should most likely locate the formation of a collection of *Pythagorean sententiae*, in a *corpus* that originally consisted of probably a hundred *sententiae*. Already quoted by Philostratus in the *Life of Apollonius* (1.7) as Πυθαγόρου γνῶμαι, and then in the 5th century by Joannes Stobaeus (3.1.30), they contain alphabetically ordered material of a Pythagorean character (or that can be traced back to Pythagoreanism). A large number of maxims that clearly reveal a Christian faith have also been conflated in it:[217]

4. ἄξιος ἄνθρωπος θεοῦ θεὸς ἂν εἴη ἐν ἀνθρώποις.
A man worthy of god is god among men.

10. βραχύλογον μάλιστα ἡ θεοῦ γνῶσις ποιεῖ—πολλῶν δὲ λόγων περὶ θεοῦ ἡ πρὸς θεὸν ἀμαθία αἰτία.
Knowledge of god makes for brevity in the highest degree; the reason for many words about god is the ignorance of god.

This Pythagorean collection is not the only one of the period. A second sylloge, which has several similarities to that of the Pythagoreans, is attributed in one part of the tradition to a certain **Clitarchus** (ἐκ τῶν Κλειτάρχου πραγματικῶν χρείων συναγωγή), otherwise unknown. Only

[217] See Lelli 2021:650–709, 1702–1713.

about ten maxims are repeated; it includes a conspicuous number of Christian *sententiae*. Its origin in scholastic circles is plausible, with an eye to the dimension of power, and with an accentuation of the more Manichean aspects of Pythagoreanism:

114. κρεῖττον ἀποθανεῖν ἢ διὰ γαστρὸς ἀκρασίαν ψυχὴν ἀμαυρῶσαι.
It is better to die than to impair a soul through over-indulgence of the belly.

115. ἄμεινον εἰδέναι ἀγνοῦντα ὅτι ἀγνοεῖ ἢ δοκεῖν μὴ γινώσκοντα γινώσκειν.
It is better to be ignorant and appear so than to be uneducated and appear so.

Yet another third collection circulated, at least at the beginning of the 3rd century, under the name of an unidentified **Sextus**: the Σέξτου Γνῶμαι, cited by Origen, the leader of the philosophical school of Alexandria between the last decades of the 2nd and the first decades of the 3rd century CE. Origen described it as a βιβλί*ον* φερόμεν*ον* παρὰ πολλοῖς ὡς δόκιμ*ον* "book considered admirable by many," much appreciated in the Christian communities of the time. In less than two centuries, in 399, the confirmation of the broad consensus for this collection of maxims will be provided by the Latin translation realized by the bishop of Aquileia, Rufinus. He will consider the text a handbook of Christian morals, but will identify its author with Pope Sixtus II (257–258)—a wrong attribution that, however, will tie his name to the very favorable reception of this Latin version: after only twenty years "it was read throughout many provinces," as Jerome testifies (*per multas provincias legitur*, *Epistulae* 43).
In the syncretism that emerges from these three Pythagorean-Christian collections, there is a significant Christianization of some already ancient *sententia* motifs, including the reworking of the maxim "a man is a god to a man" into "a man worthy of god is god among men" (*Pythagorean sententiae* 4); the case of the ancient *sententia* of the Seven Sages "a truly wise person uses few words," which becomes "a truly faithful person uses few words" (*Pythagorean sententiae* 10); the widespread substitutions of πιστός, the "faithful," in place of the traditional σοφός, "wise." We are, certainly, in a transitional phase from the pagan culture to the Christian one, bringing about the new conception of man that, after a century, will permeate all Western culture, both Greek and Latin.
Already at the beginning of the 2nd century, and then with increasing frequency in the 3rd, the first writings of the openly Christian faith began to circulate. Here we could open a whole separate chapter on the cultural history of the Greco-Roman gnomic tradition: that of its relationship with Christian morality, and of the latter's progressive appropriation of numerous wisdom motifs of the culture that was to be defined "pagan." A chapter that, in the eyes of the paremiologist, reveals, above all, the two mechanisms—rhetorical and cultural at the same time—with which Christians will relate to the proverb civilization of the ancients: sharing—through conceptual re-semantization—and opposing—in the name of different values. For the sake of brevity, it can be said that the entire literary production of Christian authors and, more generally, of all the Latin and Byzantine Middle Ages, was based on these two tracks.
From the beginning, the Hellenic gnomic tradition had penetrated the Greek literary production of the Jewish communities of the Eastern Mediterranean. In the Greek version of the **Old Testament**, which goes by the name of *The Septuagint* and was completed towards the end of the 2nd century BCE, the Hellenistic tendency to the short form was superimposed on the sententious style of Talmudic culture. An exemplary text of this syncretism, not only stylistic, was the *Book of Proverbs*, attributed to the Jewish wise man par excellence: Solomon.[218] Within the various collections of proverbs and *sententiae*, the translator made extensive use of *sententiae* images and Greek proverbial antonomastic expressions (such as "the Danaids' jar" or "the Tartarus"). These were perfectly integrated with the most properly proverbial sections of the work (10, 1–22, 16; 25, 1–29, 27; 30, 15–33; 31, 10–31), characterized by the typical bi-member form of the Hebrew proverb (11, 1–2):

1. ζυγοὶ δόλιοι βδέλυγμα ἐνώπιον κυρίου,

[218] See Angelini 2021.

στάθμιον δὲ δίκαιον δεκτὸν αὐτῷ.
False balances are an abomination before the Lord:
but a just weight is acceptable to him.

2. οὗ ἐὰν εἰσέλθῃ ὕβρις, ἐκεῖ καὶ ἀτιμία.
στόμα δὲ ταπεινῶν μελετᾷ σοφίαν.
Wherever wantonness enters, there will be also disgrace:
but the mouth of the lowly practices wisdom.

The coexistence of the two gnomic traditions, that of the *Torah* and that of Hellenic wisdom, had been a hallmark of Jewish literature in Greek: such is the case in the theological and philosophical writings of **Philo of Alexandria**, who had grafted Stoicism and Platonism onto the Jewish substratum, and in the historical and apologetic writings of **Flavius Josephus**, both from the 1st century, and both rich in Greek γνῶμαι juxtaposed with the usual references to *Scriptures*, typical of the Jewish tradition. This will be a constant feature in all Christian literature, in both Greek and Latin.[219]
In the *Gospels*, there are numerous *sententiae* expressions drawn from Greek culture, which are integrated with Old Testament quotations and with the "new" sayings of Jesus. These sayings not infrequently appear as veritable re-writings of famous and long established Greek γνῶμαι. It would suffice to think of the famous formulation ἀγαπᾶτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν, "love your enemies" (*Gospel of Luke* 6.27), which corrects the very ancient Greek (but also Roman) moral τὸν φιλέοντα φιλεῖν, τὸν μὴ φιλέοντα μισεῖν, "love those who love you, and hate those who do not love you," or again the equally famous δίδοτε καὶ δοθήσεται ὑμῖν, "give, and it shall be given you" (*Gospel of Luke* 6.38), which rewrites the very common καὶ δότε ὅς κεν δῷ, καὶ μὴ δότε ὅς κε μὴ δῷ, "give to one who gives, but do not give to one who does not give," attested as early as Hesiod (*Works* 354).[220] In the *Gospel of John*, we should note his unique use of the term παροιμία, which—with a semantic shift never attested before, but destined to great fortune—is used to define the "metaphors," the "parables" through which Jesus speaks to his disciples:

16:25 Ταῦτα ἐν παροιμίαις λελάληκα ὑμῖν—ἔρχεται ὥρα ὅτε οὐκέτι ἐν παροιμίαις λαλήσω ὑμῖν ἀλλὰ παρρησίᾳ περὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀπαγγελῶ ὑμῖν.
These things I have spoken to you in proverbs: an hour will come when I will no longer speak to you in proverbs, but will tell you plainly of the Father.

16:29 Λέγουσιν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ, "Ἴδε νῦν ἐν παρρησίᾳ λαλεῖς, καὶ παροιμίαν οὐδεμίαν λέγεις."
His disciples said, "Lo, now You are speaking plainly and are not using any proverb."

In the earliest Christian writings that have come down to us, identity-building intentions and polemical tones prevail. Such is the case in the *Epistles* of **Ignatius of Antioch**, characterized by bitter invective against Jews and Romans, and a wide use of *sententiae*; in the *Apologies* of **Justin Martyr**, active in Rome (and executed) under Hadrian, and in the *Discourse to the Greeks* by his disciple **Tatian**. In Roman Africa, which was about to become one of the richest territories for personalities in the centuries to come, the most outstanding figure was **Tertullian**, a rhetorician and jurist, active between the last decades of the 2nd century and the first decades of the 3rd. He embraced Christianity in his maturity and became its fervent and controversial defender, in the light of a moral rigorism that is often expressed in fulminating *sententiae* or radical negations of ancient precepts. See, for instance, the passage where he stigmatizes the *humana consuetudo qua ignoti vel ex inopinato apparentes "de caelo supervenisse" dicuntur*, "the human belief that unknown persons or people turning up unexpectedly 'have come from the sky'" (*Apologeticus* 10). There is no shortage of Christian reinterpretations of pagan motifs, such as time revealing the truth (of faith):

[219] See Taylor 1992:24-31.
[220] See Brown 1993; Ehrhardt 1953. For Paul's writings, see Holloway 1998.

Bene autem, quod omnia tempus revelat, testibus etiam vestris proverbiis et sententiis (*Apologeticus* 7)
It is well attested, even by your proverbs and *sententiae*, that time reveals all.

Or even a Menandrian monostich (56 J.: ἀνὴρ ὁ φεύγων καὶ πάλιν μαχήσεται, "the man who flees will also fight again") bent to emphasize the obstinacy of the persecuted Christians, who

Graecum versiculum secularis sententiae sibi adhibent: "qui fugiebat, rursus proeliabitur" (*De fuga in persecutione* 10)
apply to themselves that Greek versicle of worldly wisdom: "he who fled will fight again."

Tertullian's gnomic culture is boundless, ranging from quotations of Senecan *sententiae* and Ciceronian proverbs to rewritings of γνῶμαι of Hesiod (such as the very famous *sic figulus figulo, faber fabro invidet*, "the potter envies the potter, the smith envies the smith," from *Works* 25, in his *Adversus nationes* 1.19).[221]
Even more boundless, if possible, is the erudition of three other luminaries of Christian culture in these first two centuries. In the multicultural and polymorphic Alexandria, at the end of the 2nd century, an interpretative current of the Christian message was born, called gnosticism, which promoted an allegorical reading of the biblical texts, also—and sometimes especially—in the light of the traditional Greek philosophical systems. Among the first masters in this monastery, known as the *Didaskaleion*, was **Clement of Alexandria**, author of weighty writings of a pedagogical and doctrinal nature, in which Stoic, Platonic, and even Epicurean γνῶμαι are used with a view to reconciling classical and Christian thought, with a particular formative purpose: the education of the young.
Clement's successor at the *Didaskaleion* was **Origen**, active until the mid-3rd century, who blended Christian and neo-Platonic elements (and for this reason was condemned as a heretic) in the context of a vast erudition. In his treatise *Against Celsus*, a pagan opponent of Christianity, the classical gnomic tradition is as bitterly opposed as it is shrewdly bent to Christological meanings:

3.1: λέγει μηδὲν διαφέρειν ἡμῶν τὸν πρὸς ἀλλήλους διάλογον περὶ Χριστοῦ τῆς κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν καλουμένης "ὄνου σκιᾶς" μάχης.
Celsus states that "the discussions which we have with each other regarding Christ differ in no respect from what is called, in the proverb, 'a fight about the shadow of an ass.'"

Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius, another African by birth, gained considerable fame as a teacher of rhetoric and was called by Diocletian, at the end of the 3rd century, to hold the chair of eloquence in Nicomedia; later in life he became the tutor of Constantine's sons. In his major 7-book work, entitled *Divinae institutiones*, Lactantius sets out to illustrate the superiority of Christianity over traditional philosophies by means of a detailed analysis of all ancient and Christian moral principles and norms: even classical gnomic motifs are subjected to Christian refutation or appropriation—nor could it be otherwise. In his style, proverbial expressions abound, employed as cursory ironic comments: it is no wonder, then, that he will be called "the Christian Cicero."
If Christianity was by now penetrating the schools and the cultured classes of the empire, nothing of the new evangelical message seems to transpire in one of the most important syntheses of ancient philosophy that has come down to us, which has often been mentioned in this volume: the *Lives and opinions of eminent philosophers* by **Diogenes Laertius**, a person of whom we know virtually nothing, but who must be placed in these decades. In ten books, each dedicated to a philosophical school, and preceded by an interesting preface on the origins of Greek wisdom and philosophy, Diogenes traces the biography and doctrine of every figure in ancient thought, even

[221] Once again, the absence of a comprehensive work on the presence of proverbs and *sententiae* in Tertullian must be lamented.

minor ones. He records hundreds of maxims, and even more χρεῖαι featuring philosophers and wise men of every age, which often constitute, for us, the most precious testimonies. The whole structure of the work turns out to be marked by the concatenation of χρεῖαι: a sort of "philosophy in a nutshell" that perhaps represented, in the intentions of the doxographer, a way to preserve pagan thought for future centuries.

With the turning point of Constantine, in 313, Christians definitively entered the administration and hierarchies of the empire. Thus, a need was felt to reread past history in the light of revelation, championed by a pupil of Origen, **Eusebius**. As the bishop of Caesarea and then Constantine's collaborator and biographer, Eusebius produced two works of fundamental importance: the *Chronicon*, a list of events from the past, and the *History of the Church*, which goes from the birth of Jesus to Constantine. In the latter work, moralistic γνῶμαι, now codified by ancient historiography, are combined with biblical and evangelical quotations and allusions, always as a commentary on human affairs—a peculiar feature of future Christian historiography.

The "pagan" historiographical tradition, however, was still widely cultivated, especially by state officials and administrators. A prominent figure among them was **Cassius Dio Cocceianus**, a senator, a consul, and a governor of several eastern provinces under the Severan dynasty. His *Roman History* in 80 books (we have little more than 20 of them) follows in the footsteps of Thucydides and Tacitus, featuring many first-person intrusions of the author to comment on the events with general *sententiae*:

πολλῷ γάρ που ῥᾷον ἄλλοις ἐπιτιμῶσί τινες ἢ ἑαυτοῖς παραινοῦσι.
Some people, of course, can more easily censure others than admonish themselves. (36.40.5)

χαλεπὸν ὂν ὡς πλήθει τὸν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐν πολέμῳ καὶ ἐν εἰρήνῃ διαπρέψαι.
It is generally a difficult thing for the same man to excel both in war and in peace. (43.50.2)

Even more relevant are the γνῶμαι employed in the speeches of the protagonists, almost all of them relating to human nature, to the relation between man and fortune, and to power:

οὔτε γὰρ ἄλλως ἀγαθοῦ ἀνδρός ἐστιν ἄρχειν ἐπιθυμεῖν καὶ <τὰ> πράγματ' ἔχειν ἐθέλειν. […] τὸ μὲν γὰρ προπετὲς ἐν ταῖς ὑποσχέσεσιν […] πολλοὺς σφάλλει.
For a good man has no business, in any case, to desire to hold office and to manage public affairs. [...] For rashness in making promises […] causes the downfall of many (36.27.2: Gabinius' speech on the conferral of the exceptional *imperium* on Pompey for the war against pirates).

αἵ τε γὰρ μεγάλαι τιμαὶ καὶ αἱ ὑπέρογκοι ἐξουσίαι καὶ τοὺς τοιούτους ἐπαίρουσι καὶ διαφθείρουσιν.
Great honors and excessive powers excite and ruin even such persons (36.35.1: Lutatius Catulus' reply).

The same features of Cassius Dio's work can be found in the *History of the empire after Marcus Aurelius,* written in Greek by another provincial official, **Herodian**, another often salacious commentator on events, active in the first half of the century.

Power was increasingly concentrated—at least officially—in the hands of the emperor. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the second most important historical work of the time is a series of emperors' biographies, from Hadrian to Numerian (who was assassinated, like all the *principes* of this age, in 284), written by various figures, almost all of whom were senators or bureaucrats: the so-called ***Historia Augusta***. The author's interventions here are rarer, but more ironic, as the one about a court banquet organized by Lucius Verus (*Verus* 5.1):

Et notissimum eius quidem fertur tale convivium, in quo primum duodecim accubuisse dicitur, cum sit notissimum dictum de numero convivarum: "septem convivum, novem vero convicium."

One such banquet, indeed, became very famous. This was the first banquet, it is said, at which couches were placed for twelve, although there is a very well-known saying about the proper number of those present at a banquet that "seven make a dinner, nine make a din."

There is no lack of proverbial sayings or motifs attributed to emperors: Caracalla, for example, loved to repeat "*si libet, licet*," "if you want to, it is allowed" (*Caracalla* 10.2); Alexander Severus "*vendere fumum*," "to sell smoke" (*Alexandrus Severus* 23.8; 36.2).
We should probably place in this troubled 3rd century—which saw both clashes and syncretism between ancient philosophical schools and the new Christian thought—the composition of an important paremiographic collection: Παροιμίαι δημώδεις, *Popular proverbs* (in most codices).[222] This has come down to us in different editions, perhaps based on an older core and was attributed to the rhetorician **Diogenianus**, a native of Sicilian Heraclea. Diogenianus' *interpretamenta* are much briefer than those of other paremiographers: sometimes the entries are limited to the headword only. However, more often than in other collections, references to proverbs similar in theme or wording appear. Although many entries are identical to those preserved by Zenobius, the expressions Diogenianus excluded seem to be precisely those that would have caused more exegetical difficulties than others. At the same time, the properly Diogenian lemmas, absent in Zenobius, are mostly extraneous to the classical literary horizon, and were taken up from rhetoricians such as Libanius or from Christian and late antique authors. Such lemmas, proverbs, and colloquial expressions seem to be rightfully entitled to claim the qualification of "popular," and often offer more comparative insights with the proverbs of modern cultures. The compiler of this collection, I believe, intended to reduce the more literary and, in some ways, more obscure sections of the Alexandrian exegetical tradition, and to privilege many expressions perceived as popular and colloquial, perhaps even drawing some from personal experience:

1.71: Ἀετὸς θρίπας ὁρῶν.
An eagle looking at a woodworm.

1.78: Ἀνδρὸς γέροντος αἱ γνάθοι βακτηρία.
The jaws are an old man's cane.

2.45: Ἀγόμενος διὰ φρατόρων κύων.
A dog wandering among brothers.

At the beginning of the 4th century, authors and scholars became increasingly interested in folk culture. In the ancient popular traditions, including the proverb tradition, they could find identity-building values to be reassessed in an anti-Christian key on the one hand, and pagan concepts and *superstitiones* to be fought in a doctrinal key on the other.
Among the authors keenest to draw from the kaleidoscopic reservoir of popular culture was a cultured Greek from Antioch, **Ammianus Marcellinus,** who composed the *History* in Latin from the last years covered in Tacitus' *Historiae* until the Roman defeat at Adrianople against the Goths in 378. Its pages, written in a very peculiar style, are full of references to beliefs, superstitions, apotropaic practices, prodigies, and, to a remarkable extent, proverbs and popular expressions, many of which are never attested elsewhere, and often signaled with *dicunt*, *ut aiunt*, and other phrases.[223] The ironic and even sarcastic tone dominates over every other, encompassing emperors and freedmen, eunuchs and unknown figures of the *vulgus*:

Utque solent manum iniectantibus fatis hebetari sensus hominum et obtundi, his incelebris ad meliorum expectationem erectus egressusque Antiochia numine laevo ductante prorsus ire tendebat de fumo, ut proverbium loquitur vetus, ad flammam (14.11.12)

[222] See Lelli 2021:442–501, 1643–1668.
[223] I am not aware of any comprehensive paremiographic study on either Ammianus, the *Historia Augusta*, or Cassius Dio.

And since, when the fates lay hands upon men, their senses are apt to be dulled and blunted, Gallus [the Caesar of Constantius Chlorus, who summoned him for a fatal ambush] was roused by these blandishments to the hope of a better destiny and leaving Antioch under the lead of an unpropitious power, he proceeded to go straight from the smoke into the fire, as the old proverb has it.

Quae omnia si scire quisquam velit quam varia sint et adsidua, harenarum numerum idem iam desipiens et montium pondera scrutari putabit (14.11.34)

But if anyone should desire to know all these instances, varied and constantly occurring as they are, he will be mad enough to think of searching out the number of the sands and the weight of the mountains.

Cum exercere proludia disciplinae castrensis philosophus cogeretur ut princeps artemque modulatius incedendi per pyrricham concinentibus disceret fistulis, vetus illud proverbium "clitellae bovi sunt inpositae: plane non est nostrum onus" Platonem crebro nominans exclamabat (16.5.10)

When this philosopher [the erudite and learned emperor Julian], being a prince, was forced to practice the rudiments of military training and learn the art of marching rhythmically in pyrrhic measure to the harmony of the pipes, he often used to call on Plato's name, quoting that famous old proverb: "A pack-saddle is put on an ox; that is surely no burden for me."

A contemporary of Ammianus, and a teacher of rhetoric in his native city, Bordeaux, was **Decimus Magnus Ausonius**, whose life spans the entire 4th century. A prose writer, lecturer, scholar, poet, and epistolographer, Ausonius represents one of the most emblematic figures of his time and of the cultured, ironic, and playful use of both popular proverb culture and ancient gnomic tradition. If the former is extensively present especially in his epistles and epigrams, the latter is the protagonist of an entire poem, whose recitative purpose is not to be excluded: the *Ludus septem sapientum*, "*The play of the Seven Sages*."[224] The Seven Sages, by now legendary figures, take turns on the stage of a Roman theater and perform their *sententiae* both in Latin and in Greek, in a veritable wisdom competition. In this work, the literary and erudite aspects certainly prevail. The attention to political and public maxims, however, does not exclude a moral, pragmatic, or at least scholastic intent: the education of the youth among the ruling classes of the Gallo-Roman administration of the time.
Libanius was in many ways similar to Ausonius, culturally active in a lively provincial center as a teacher of rhetoric in Nicaea, Nicomedia, and, finally, in his native city of Antioch. He dedicated his life to higher education and he was honored and esteemed by his fellow citizens, becoming—he, a pagan—a symbol of coexistence between Christians and non-Christians. In his immense production (more than sixty *Orations*, about fifty *Declamations*, and the largest epistolary production in all antiquity), we find hundreds of παροιμίαι, antonomastic expressions, and explicit and allusive references to the gnomic tradition: the most conspicuous *corpus* of proverb short forms in the whole ancient world. That Libanius drew from paremiographic repertories, probably including Zenobius' and Diogenianus' sylloge, seems to be proved by the attestations of expressions found only in the two paremiographic collections and in Libanius' writings.[225] Libanius' work, however, even more so than that of the members of the Second Sophistic of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, always turns out to be a game with his audience or the recipients of his epistles, who are invited to discover the allusions and recognize the rare παροιμίαι, or the proverb character featured as its protagonist. See, for instance, the farewell of a letter to Themistius (*Epistulae* 434), a friend of Libanius and a rhetorician in Constantinople,

[224] See Scafoglio 2021.
[225] A survey of proverbs in Libanius is Salzman 1910. See also Ruta 2020:56–57, for the relation to the paremiographic syllogies.

where Libanius ironically quotes the proverbial expression "a kingdom in Scyros,"[226] attested only in the paremiographic (Zenobius 1.32 and Diogenianus 1.30) and lexicographic (Pausanias the Atticist) tradition:

τὸ δ' ἐμὸν οὕτως ἔχει—τὰ τοῦ σώματος ἀρωστήματα παραινεῖ μοι μένειν. εὖ δὲ ἴσθι, κἂν εἰ σφόδρα ἦν ὑγιής, ἐμαυτῷ σύμβουλος ἂν ἐγενόμην μένειν. τῇδε μὲν γὰρ ἀγέλαις νέων εὐωρία, τὸ δὲ παρ' ὑμῖν διδάσκειν λόγους "ἀρχὴ Σκυρία."
My own situation is as follows: my physical torments force me to stay here, but you may be sure that, however well I might be, I would have advised myself to stay, for here the flocks of students provide many results, whereas the teaching profession among you is "a kingdom in Scyros."

We also have a remarkable *corpus* of Libanius' *Progymnasmata*, the scholastic models of rhetorical exercises. Among them, some are dedicated to Χρεῖαι and Γνῶμαι: a further sign of the rhetorical process that had by now invested the gnomic tradition.[227]
What has been said of Libanius is almost exactly applicable, except for the quantitative data, to the writings of the other rhetoricians of the time, Christian and not: **Themistius**, friend of Libanius and teacher in Constantinople, fond of ethical γνῶμαι for teaching purposes; **Himerius**, private secretary of the emperor Julian and especially keen on quotations from authors; **Julian** himself, a supporter of a return to paganism and a champion of distortions of proverbs in an ironic key; **Cyril**, bishop of Alexandria, a fierce opponent of Julian, who quoted Greek proverbs only to refute them; **Theodoret of Cyrus**, who continued Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* and handed down sententious moral judgments on events and characters; **Eunapius**, who traced, in a doxographic work, the thoughts (and maxims) of philosophers, sophists, and doctors of the time.
A separate discussion should be made for **John** of Antioch, known as **Chrysostom**, a student of Libanius and then of Gregory of Nazianzus, who in the last years of his life became patriarch of Constantinople. The *corpus* of his works is immense—the largest one in all Greek literature—and the use of proverb and *sententiae* material in its codified forms and mechanisms is extensive. Some significant reflections and definitions stand out: the παροιμία is often referred to as δημώδης, "popular," a value of which John limits the (evidently perceived) negativity, when he states, for instance, that "a proverb testifies to the concept in question, popular, but very true" (*De virginitate* 34: Καὶ τοῦτο καὶ παροιμία τις ἡμῖν μαρτυρεῖ, δημώδης μέν, σφόδρα δὲ ἀληθής), or when he observes that "one should not despise popular proverbs, because they contain something wise" (*Patrologia Graeca* 62, p. 556: οὐ γὰρ τῶν δημωδῶν παροιμιῶν δεῖ καταφρονεῖν, ἂν ἔχωσί τι σοφόν). Also emblematic is his use of the definition ἔξωθεν παροιμία (*Homiliae* 6.6; *PG* 59, p. 430), which we should translate "the proverb of the pagans," and which deliberately intends to distinguish the ancient gnomic tradition from the new Christian one, as well as from the Biblical *Proverbs*.
Very interesting are John's considerations on the meaning and etymon of παροιμία in the preface to the *Synopsis of sacred scripture* (*Patrologia Graeca* 56, p. 370), which blend grammatical traditions, Christian allegorical suggestions, and, perhaps, autonomous reflections (taken *verbatim* from the contemporary *Synopsis* of Athanasius of Alexandria):

Εἰσὶ δὲ παροιμίαι λόγοι σοφοὶ, ὡς αἰνίγματα, ἅτινα ἕτερον μέν τι αὐτόθεν δηλοῦντά ἐστιν, ἕτερον δὲ ἐν ὑπονοίᾳ ἐπαγγέλλονται. Τῶν δὲ τοιούτων εἶδός εἰσιν αἱ παροιμίαι. Οὕτω γὰρ καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ τοῦ Κυρίου λέγουσιν ἐν τῷ κατὰ Ἰωάννην Εὐαγγελίῳ [...] Ὠνομάσθη δὲ παροιμία, ἐπειδὴ παρὰ πάσης ὁδοῦ ἐγράφησαν οἱ τοιοῦτοι λόγοι, πρὸς διόρθωσιν καὶ διδασκαλίαν τῶν ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς πορευομένων. [...] Τινὲς γοῦν ὁρίζονται αὐτὰς οὕτως, ῥῆμα παρόδιον ἀπό τινος ἑνὸς εἰς πολλὰ μεταλαμβανόμενον.

Proverbs [παροιμίαι] are expressions of wisdom, like riddles, which indicate one thing, but mean another. A genre of this kind are parables [again παροιμίαι]. For this is how Jesus' disciples

[226] The expression indicated an ephemeral power and was perhaps linked to the figure of Theseus, who ended his days in exile there.
[227] See Lelli 2021:748–749, 1779.

define them in the *Gospel of John* [...] They were called "proverbs" because expressions of this kind were written in every street, as a warning and instruction to passers-by. [...] Therefore, some defined them in the following way: "a sentence that accompanies you along the way," applicable to many situations from a single one.

Among the many writings preserved in the *corpus* of Eusebius of Caesarea is a pamphlet, *Against Marcellus*, in which the bishop polemicizes against another leading figure in the theological and cultural debate of those decades: **Marcellus,** bishop of Ancyra. He had written a text against Asterius, a disciple of Eusebius, perhaps to challenge the exegetical method the latter had employed in his *Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon*. In his work, now lost, Marcellus compared the *Proverbs* of the Old Testament to the παροιμίαι of the Greeks. Eusebius rose to defend his pupil: he wrote three books *Against Marcellus*, and in one section of the first book, he dealt specifically with Περὶ τῶν παρ' Ἕλλησιν παροιμιῶν (*On the proverbs of the Greeks*), as the title prefaced to the text reads, quoting (perhaps word by word) a long passage from the lost work (1.3.1–8). We can thus grasp the attention that Marcellus paid to the heritage of Greek proverbs. The idea of the bishop of Ancyra, if Eusebius' quarrel does not deceive us, is to place the Greek proverbs next to those of Solomon on the level of ambiguous, esoteric, symbolic language—a method which, as we have seen, was by now codified (1.3.17):[228]

τὸ γὰρ "ἢ τέθνηκεν, ἢ διδάσκει γράμματα" διὰ τήνδε, φησίν, ἐλέχθη τὴν ἱστορίαν, καὶ δι' ἑτέραν πάλιν γενομένην τοιανδὶ πρᾶξιν τὸ "Αἴξ τὴν μάχαιραν" εἴρηται—καὶ τὸ "ἅλις δρυός" ὡσαύτως, διὰ τὸ βαλανηφαγοῦντάς ποτε παύσασθαι τῆς τοιαύτης τροφῆς. εἰ δὲ καὶ Γλαῦκός τις ἐπιστήμων τέχνης τινὸς γεγονὼς διαφόρως ἐμνημονεύθη παρὰ τοῖς μετὰ ταῦτα διαφωνήσασιν ἐν τῷ περὶ αὐτοῦ λόγῳ, τί τοῦτο τὰς θεοπνεύστους Παροιμίας; οὐ γὰρ ὁμοίως ταῖς Ἑλληνικαῖς παροιμίαις καὶ αὗται ἔκ τινος ἱστορίας τὴν λύσιν ἐπιδέχονται. ἀμαθῶς ἄρα καὶ ἀπείρως τῆς τῶν θείων γραφῶν θεωρίας οὐ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐναντίως τῷ ἀποστόλῳ Μάρκελλος τοὺς Ἑλλήνων σοφοὺς <ἐν> τυχόντας ταῖς Παροιμίαις Σολομῶνος μαθεῖν καὶ ζηλῶσαι τὸ προφητικὸν γράμμα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν ἐκείνῳ γράψαι τρόπον ἀπεφήνατο.

They say the proverb "he must be either dead or teaching school" because of such an episode, and again, because of another matter, they say "goat and knife," and likewise "enough oak," because men had ceased to eat acorns. And if even a certain Glaucus, an extraordinary expert in some art, was remembered by those who dealt with these things in their books, what bearing does this have on the *Proverbs* inspired by God? These proverbs born from some anecdote, like the Greek ones, do not reveal salvation. Marcellus, therefore, has foolishly and inexpertly maintained that the Greek sages, having come upon the *Proverbs* of Solomon, learned and imitated the prophetic writing, and composed in the same manner as he did.

Allegory and the reinterpretation of ancient authors are at the center of the thought and work of three seminal figures of the century, all of whom come from the distant province of Cappadocia. The first, **Basil,** born in Caesarea to a wealthy family, left his bureaucratic career and became a monk, founding a monastery in Pontus. Here he was joined by his brother **Gregory**, who was to become bishop of **Nyssa**, and by his friend **Gregory of Nazianzus**, who was also highly educated. This was an "age of anguish": one of the most common proverbs in many authors is γλυκὺς ἀπείρῳ πόλεμος, "war is sweet for the inexperienced," which will come back at the opening of the fourth chiliad of Erasmus' *Adagia.* In this period, the three Cappadocian fathers founded a monasticism that spread rapidly throughout the Mediterranean and left important cultural traces in different territories, especially in Southern Italy. Authors of a large number of doctrinal works, commentaries on biblical books, epistles, homilies, and other works (Gregory of Nazianzus was also a poet), they used hundreds of pagan gnomic motifs, revisited in a Christian key—Basil's *Discourse to the young on how to profit from pagan authors* is emblematic of this—as well as παροιμίαι probably taken from erudite sources. For our purposes, there are interesting cases of popular proverbs, taken from everyday language, never attested before, or

[228] On Marcellus' treatise, see Lelli 2021:728–733, 1739–1741.

found only in other medieval authors, or in some Byzantine collections (such as the one attributed to Aesop or that of popular proverbs by Michael Psellus). Let us consider some instances: ἐκ τοῦ κρασπέδου τὸ ὕφασμα, "from the fringe the weaving is known"; ὁ τρώσας ἰάσεται, "you broke it, you fix it"; κατὰ κριοῦ μὴ νυστάζειν ἀντὶ προσώπου, "do not go near the muzzle of a ram"; δὶς κράμβη θάνατος, "cabbage twice is death." In parallel, the use of the *Proverbs* of the Old Testament, often in allusive mechanisms, is boundless; the term παροιμία, moreover, is often used to define the parables of Christ.[229]

The interweaving of the classical gnomic tradition, references to the Old Testamentt, popular expressions, and the school context is the subject of some significant reflections by both Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa. In one of his epistles (51.5), Gregory of Nazianzus, while dwelling on the stylistic elegance of the genre, says that it is necessary to aim at an expression which "is not devoid of rhetorical devices, such as γνῶμαι, παροιμίαι, and ἀποφθέγματα," as well as—note the juxtaposition—"σκώμματα and αἰνίγματα; it is not appropriate, however, to abuse these elements, for the one is rustic, the other generates satiety: one must employ them as purple in fabrics" (μήτε λίαν τούτοις φαινοίμεθα καταχρώμενοι—τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἀγροῖκον, τὸ δ' ἄπληστον. Καὶ τοσαῦτα τούτοις χρηστέον, ὅσα καὶ ταῖς πορφύραις ἐν τοῖς ὑφάσμασι). The definition of ἀγροῖκον, as it seems, must refer precisely to the use of proverbs of popular origin.

Gregory of Nyssa, in his *Homily on Ecclesiastes* (5), points out that "the concepts of the proverbial expressions" (νοήματα τῶν παροιμιακῶν), of which "the obscure statements, the maxims of the wise, the riddles, and the elaborate extracts of the discourses" (οἱ σκοτεινοὶ λόγοι καὶ αἱ σοφαὶ ῥήσεις καὶ τὰ αἰνίγματα καὶ αἱ ποικίλαι τῶν λόγων στροφαί) are part, generate knowledge by exercising the mind (προγυμνασάντων τὸν νοῦν). For this reason, "the exercise on the *sententia* short form" (the παροιμιακὴ μελέτη) is one of the necessary steps to reach the doctrine (θεωρία), like the παροιμιώδης διδασκαλία, i.e. "the exegesis of the proverbial forms," of which his work is an example.

A reflection on proverbs—important to us because it contains the testimony of Aristotle's thought, which is one of the most emblematic (and fascinating) in antiquity—is found in **Synesius of Cyrene**. A rhetorician, a politician, and, in the last years of his life, bishop of his native city, in his hundreds of epistles and numerous works of various kinds, Synesius makes extensive use of proverbs and γνῶμαι, both pagan and Christian.[230] In a famous passage of the amusing *Encomium of baldness* he states (22):

Εἰ δὲ καὶ ἡ παροιμία σοφόν—πῶς δ' οὐχὶ σοφόν, περὶ ὧν Ἀριστοτέλης φησίν, ὅτι παλαιᾶς εἰσι φιλοσοφίας ἐν ταῖς μεγίσταις ἀνθρώπων φθοραῖς ἀπολομένης ἐγκαταλείμματα, περισωθέντα διὰ συντομίαν καὶ δεξιότητα; παροιμία δήπου καὶ τοῦτο, καὶ λόγος ἔχων ἀξίωμα τῆς ὅθεν κατηνέχθη φιλοσοφίας τὴν ἀρχαιότητα, ὥστε βόειον ἐπιβλέπειν αὐτῇ. πάμπολυ γὰρ οἱ πάλαι τῶν νῦν εἰς ἀλήθειαν εὐστοχώτεροι. τίς οὖν ποτ' ἐστὶν ἥδε, καὶ τί βούλεται; "οὐδεὶς κομήτης, ὅστις οὐ ..." τὸ δὲ ἀκροτελεύτιον αὐτὸς σὺ πρὸς τὴν ἠχὼ τοῦ τριμέτρου συνάρμοσον—οὐ γὰρ ἔγωγε φθέγξομαι τὸ δεινὸν ἐκεῖνο καὶ πρᾶγμα καὶ ὄνομα. εὖγε, ὅτι συνήρμοσας. πῶς οὖν, τί σοι φαίνεται; βαβαὶ τῆς ἀληθείας—χρησμὸς ἄντικρυς. δῆλα μὲν δὴ αὐτόθεν. ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅσους ἐφέλκεται μάρτυρας, τούς τε νῦν χρωμένους αὐτῇ, καὶ τοὺς ὅσοι προλαβόντες ἐχρήσαντο—τὸ γὰρ ἀπαθανατίζον τὰς παροιμίας αὐτὸ τοῦτό ἐστιν, ἡ συνέχεια τῶν χρωμένων, οὓς ἐφ' ἑαυτῶν ὑπομιμνήσκει τὰ πράγματα—ὁρώμενα γὰρ ἐπὶ τῶν ἑκάστοτε συμβαινόντων μαρτύρονται καὶ μαρτυροῦσι τοῖς παραδείγμασιν.

Now if the proverb is a wise thing (and how can it not be wise, when Aristotle says of it that proverbs are relics of an ancient philosophy, perished in the greatest calamities of mankind, preserved because of their conciseness and clearness?)—this, too, is a proverb, and it is also a saying which includes a self-evident principle in the most ancient past of that philosophy from which it sprang, and so we look at it intently. For in every way, the ancients were more skilled in aiming at the truth than our contemporaries. What, for instance, is the following line, and what

[229] I am not aware of any general study of proverbs in the Cappadocian Fathers. For Basil's relation to biblical *proverbia*, see Cavalcanti 1990 and Girardi 1991.

[230] On proverbs in Synesius, see Sollert 1909–1910.

does it mean? “There is no long-haired man who is not ...” The end you may yourself adapt to the rhythm of the trimeter; I myself will not utter that terrible word, nor the thing it alludes to. Well done, you adapted it correctly—well, what think you? Bless me! This is the truth! You are faced with the response of an oracle. It is self-evident; but how many witnesses does it drag into court, both those who are now using it and as many as have used it in the past! For what makes proverbs immortal is precisely the continuity of their use, because the matters themselves with which they deal are always calling them to memory. For things we see in what is continually happening call them to witness, and give evidence for them by new examples.

The testimony of Aristotle, for whom proverbs are “remnants by which to recall ancient philosophy,” has already been analyzed; but it is no coincidence, perhaps, that this Aristotelian definition re-emerges now, at the end of the 4th century, when the γνῶμαι, the παροιμίαι, and the ἀποφθέγματα of the authors of many centuries before have become a knowledge “of the ancients.”
Parallel to the three Greek Cappadocian fathers, Latin Christendom also counts, in the 4th century, three seminal linking figures between the past and future centuries. **Ambrose**, the youngest, was born in Gaul, in Trier, was educated in Rome, and became a young governor in Milan, where he was acclaimed bishop for his merits. In his many works, the Greek and Roman gnomic tradition is fully employed, often explicitly pointed out (*proverbium*, *dictum*, *ut aiunt*, and others), and subjected to the aforementioned process of cultural appropriation in a Christian key. See, for example, the re-elaboration of the motif according to which “the person who charges his neighbor with an evil should look at himself first” (i.e. Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes* 3,30,73: *est enim proprium stultitiae aliorum vitia cernere, oblivisci suorum*) which becomes:

Qui alterum peccati arguit, ipse a peccato debet alienus esse (*De officiis ministrorum* 3.11.72)
The person who charges his neighbor with sin must be free from sin himself.

From his native Dalmatia, shortly after 360, **Jerome** came to Rome, to the school of the great grammarian Aelius Donatus. Having taken the path of asceticism in the Antiochian desert, he returned to Rome and became the secretary of Pope Damasus I, who entrusted him with the official Latin translation of the entire *Bible.* Jerome’s enormous, erudite knowledge of both classical and biblical texts had a profound effect on his use of proverbs (above all) and *sententiae*, often juxtaposed with expressions from the *Scriptures*, in an oppositional or analogical way. This is especially the case in his epistolary production, his richest work from the point of view of proverbs.
The presence of proverbial expressions in the third extraordinary figure of the time, **Augustine,** is very small, compared to his quotations from the *Scriptures*. Born in Numidia, he became a teacher of rhetoric, first in Carthage, then in Rome. Struck by a debilitating spiritual crisis, he embraced the Christian faith and, in 396, became bishop of Hippo, where he remained until his death in 430. In his two masterpieces, *The City of God* and the *Confessions*, the scriptural references play the role of the gnomic tradition that emerges to a limited extent in the form of quotations of verses that have become proverbial—especially from Publilius Syrus[231]—or as reference to the *sermo cotidianus*—a precious testimony for us in any case. For example, in regard to the accusations against the Christians, Augustine recalls that “a popular proverb was born: ‘there’s not enough rain: it’s the Christians’ fault!’” (*ortum est vulgare proverbium: pluvia defit, causa Christiani sunt!, de civitate Dei* 2.3)
An exemplary case of the abundance of meanings that has become stratified in the Latin term *proverbium* in this period, is offered by the already mentioned passage in the *Gospel of John* (16:25), in which Jesus announces to the disciples that “he will no longer speak ἐν παροιμίαις (so

[231] For which see Keseling 1929. I am not aware, however, of any studies on proverbs and *sententiae* in Ambrose, Jerome, or Augustine. For the use of *sententiae* (from Latin comic poets) in Jerome, see Courtray 2011.

in the *Septuagint* version), but will openly announce the message of the Father." Jerome's *versio*, which takes up some attested earlier translations, reads:

haec in proverbis locutus sum ad vos; veniet hora, quando iam non in proverbis loquar vobis, sed evidenter de patre nuntiabo vobis.
I have spoken to you in proverbs; the time will come when I no longer speak to you in proverbs, but will plainly proclaim to you the Father.

In the commentary on the passage, however, Jerome clarifies: *proverbium: metaphoram translationemque significat*. After all, of *Solomon's Proverbs,* he had said: *in proverbiis parvulum docens et quasi de officiis per sententias erudiens*, "he teaches in part with proverbs, as if explaining morals through *sententiae*." A few years later, while quoting the passage, Augustine translated in the following way (*De trinitate* 1.10.21):

Haec vobiscum locutus sum in similitudinibus; veniet hora quando iam non in similitudinibus loquar vobis, sed manifeste de Patre nuntiabo vobis.
I have spoken to you in similes; the time will come when I no longer speak to you in similes, but will plainly proclaim to you the Father.

The 5th century, traditionally considered the last century of pagan literature and of ancient civilization in general, is a century of widespread and important works of anthology, epitomization, and compendia. The process of selection of the millenary Greek and Latin production started in great style in the 2nd century and touched its highest point in the 5th. This will constitute the fundamental basis for the Latin culture of the Western Middle Ages, and for the Greek culture of the Byzantine world, until the 15th century and beyond. The reservoir of gnomic sayings and proverbs from ancient civilization constitutes no exception.
The two greatest conservative figures of Roman culture in this century are **Nonius Marcellus** and **Macrobius**. The former is the author of an immense alphabetical encyclopedia, *De compendiosa doctrina*, which, in the wake of Latin lexicography, offers not a little space to proverbs, often providing exegeses and etiologies. Macrobius, a very cultured and refined connoisseur of classical works, composed the *Saturnalia*, which could be inserted into the genre of the banquets of wise men, such as those of Plutarch or Athenaeus. Indeed, many scholars of his time discussed literature, philosophy, religion, law, rhetoric, and much more, often speaking in proverbs, and clarifying their origin and terminology. The grammarian **Priscian**, perhaps a teacher of Latin in Constantinople under Athanasius and active until at least the third decade of the 6th century, provides, in several places, definitions of *proverbia* and *sententiae*, dividing the latter into five types (*sententiae verae, verisimiles, simplices, coniunctae, superlatives*).
Isidore of Seville, a descendant of a very ancient patrician family, an evangelizer of the Visigoths and a great scholar, who died in 636, played a fundamental role in that century's milieu. His most important work, the *Etymologiarum sive Originum libri XX*, *Origins or Etymologies*, constitutes an encyclopedia of the entire knowledge of the ancients, divided by subject and ordered by lexicon. Many definitions, the *summa* of those of the grammarians of 3rd–5th century, date back to him: they will have an immense fortune in the European Middle Ages and will be taken up by the grammatical and lexical *artes* until the 14th century.[232] See, for instance:

Paroemia est rebus et temporibus adcommodatum proverbium. Rebus, ut: "Contra stimulum calces," dum significatur adversis resistendum. Temporibus, ut: "Lupus in fabula." Aiunt enim rustici vocem hominem perdere, si eum lupus prior viderit. Unde et subito tacenti dicitur istud proverbium, "Lupus in fabula" (1.37.28).
A *paremia* is a proverb adapted to matters and occasions. It is adapted to matters, as in "you are kicking against the pricks," where it means resisting one's enemies. It is adapted to occasions, as

[232] See Hallik 2007:102–104, 110–111, 126–131, also for the reception of Isidore's definitions: Julian of Toledo, Remigius of Auxerre.

in “he has seen a wolf,” as peasants say that a man loses his voice if he should see a wolf looking at him. Thus this phrase is addressed to someone who suddenly falls silent.

Sententia est dictum impersonale, ut “Obsequium amicos, veritas odium parit.” Huic si persona fuerit adiecta, chria erit, ita: “Offendit Achilles Agamemnon vera dicendo”; “Metrophanes promeruit gratiam Mithridatis obsequendo.” Nam inter chrian et sententiam hoc interest, quod sententia sine persona profertur, chria sine persona numquam dicitur. Unde si sententiae persona adiciatur, fit chria; si detrahatur, fit sententia (2.11.1–2).
A *sententia* is an impersonal saying, such as “flattery wins friends, the truth breeds hatred.” If a person is added to this, it will become a *chreia*, such as “Achilles offended Agamemnon by telling the truth” and “Metrophanes won the gratitude of Mithridates by flattery.” For the difference between *chreia* and *sententia* is that the latter is uttered without a person, while the former is never said without a person. Hence, if a person is added to a *sententia*, it becomes a *chreia*; if the person is removed, it becomes a *sententia*.

Aphorismus est sermo brevis, integrum sensum propositae rei scribens. (4.10.1)[233]
An aphorism is a brief utterance which writes the complete meaning of the matter forth.

Especially in the Greek world, however, the phenomenon of anthologization plays a special—almost institutional—role, as it was more aimed at scholastic and educational practice in general. The most famous and incisive representative is **Joannes of Stobi**, called **Stobaeus**, a figure of whom we know virtually nothing. He is credited with four books of *Extracts, apophthegms, and precepts* (ἐκλογῶν ἀποφθεγμάτων ὑποθηκῶν βιβλία τέσσαρα), divided into metaphysics and physics (book 1), ethics (books 2-3), politics and society (book 4), which are in turn subdivided into thematic chapters, according to the specific content of each extract. The work offers material of gnomic character taken from more than 500 Greek pagan authors; parallelisms, juxtapositions, and oppositions give the immense work a common thread. Even in the jumble of quotations, there are several passages in which, again, a classificatory interest emerges, that turns out to be precise in indicating authors or παροιμίαι, such as:

2.31.10–12: Ἀντιφάνους [fragment 241 K.-A.] “Τὸ γὰρ πεπαιδεῦσθαι, μόνον ἄν τις τοῦτ’ ἔχῃ,” ἀληθές ἐστι καὶ τὸ <τῶν> ἀδικημάτων μὴ λαμβάνειν τὰς ἀξίας τιμωρίας, ἐλεεῖν δὲ πάντως. Παροιμία “Μελέτη χρονισθεῖσ' εἰς φύσιν καθίσταται.” Ἀλέξιδος [fragment 282 K.-A.] “Ὦ παῖ, μέγιστος ἔρανός ἐστί μοι τὸ σὲ / θρέψαι κατὰ τρόπον—ὃν γὰρ αὐτὸς ἀπέλαβον / παρὰ τοῦ πατρός, δεῖ τοῦτον ἀποδοῦναί με σοί.” Ἀριστοφάνους Νεφελῶν [961–1008]. “Λέξω τοίνυν τὴν ἀρχαίαν παιδείαν, ὡς διέκειτο.”
Antiphanes [fragment 241 K.-A.] “May one have only that: to be instructed,” it is true, and also not to take one’s legitimate revenge for slights, but to forgive completely. Proverb: “habit, in time, becomes character”. Alexis [Br. 282 K.-A.]: “Son, it is a great satisfaction for me to have given you the education I, too, received from my father: and this I had to give you back.” Aristophanes in the *Clouds* [961–1008]: “I will tell you, therefore, what the ancient education was.”
Within a series of quotations from the comedians (Antiphanes, Alexis, Aristophanes), Stoboeus mentions a trimeter which he calls παροιμία, and which he has already quoted a few paragraphs above, again referring to it as παροιμία.

3.4.40–44: in a series of authorial quotations a trimeter defined as παροιμία is inserted: Μενάνδρου Θετταλῇ [fragment 171 K.-A.] “Μικρά γε πρόφασίς ἐστι τοῦ πρᾶξαι κακῶς.” Φιλήμονος [fragment 138 K.-A.] “Ἐπὰν ὁ νοῦς ᾖ μὴ καθεστηκώς τινι, / οὐκ ἔστ' ἀκούειν τοῦτον οὐθὲν οὐδ' ὁρᾶν.” Κερκίδας ... Παροιμία “Ὄνος λύρας ἤκουε καὶ σάλπιγγος ὗς.” Θεόγνιδος [693–694] ... Ῥηγίνου ἐκ τοῦ Περὶ φιλίας …

[233] The definition of aphorism, not by chance, is found in the fourth book of Isidore (dedicated to medicine) and is considered a term proper to the medical field.

Menander, in *The Woman from Thessaly* [fragment 171 K.-A.]: "the justification for having acted wrongly is weak." Philemon [fragment 138 K.-A.] "when one has no brains, he neither hears nor sees any such thing"; Cercida ... Proverb: "a donkey hears the lyre, and a pig the trumpet." Theognis [693–694] ... the author from Rhegium, from his work *On friendship* ...

4.35.17: Σοφοκλέους Τυροῦς ... Φιλήμονος ... Πινδάρου Ὀλυμπιονικῶν ... Ἄμφιδος Φιλαδέλφων ... Παροιμία "Ὅπου τις ἀλγεῖ, κεῖσε καὶ τὸν νοῦν ἔχει." Ἀπολλοδώρου Γαλάταις ... Ἀντιφάνους.
Sophocles in his *Tyro* … Philemon … Pindar in the *Olympian Odes* … Amphis in his *Philadelphoi* … Proverb: "when one suffers, turn your mind to him too." Apollodorus in *The Galatians* … Antiphanes.

In his preface—which is now lost, but can be reconstructed from the *Library* of Photius—Joannes clarifies the approach and function of his book, which is, once again, fundamentally moral:

χρήσιμον δὲ τὸ βιβλίον τοῖς μὲν ἀνεγνωκόσιν αὐτὰ τὰ συντάγματα τῶν ἀνδρῶν πρὸς ἀνάμνησιν, τοῖς δ' οὐκ εἰληφόσι πεῖραν ἐκείνων, ὅτι διὰ συνεχοῦς αὐτῶν μελέτης οὐκ ἐν πολλῷ χρόνῳ πολλῶν καὶ καλῶν καὶ ποικίλων νοημάτων, εἰ καὶ κεφαλαιώδη, μνήμην καρπώσονται. Κοινὸν δ' ἀμφοτέροις ἡ τῶν ζητουμένων, ὡς εἰκός, ἀταλαίπωρος καὶ σύντομος εὕρεσις, ἐπειδάν τις ἀπὸ τῶν κεφαλαίων εἰς αὐτὰ τὰ πλάτη ἀναδραμεῖν ἐθελήσειε. Καὶ πρὸς ἄλλα δὲ τοῖς ῥητορεύειν καὶ γράφειν σπουδάζουσιν οὐκ ἄχρηστον τὸ βιβλίον.

This book is useful to those who have read the actual compositions of the writers for calling them to mind. It will be useful to those who have no acquaintance with the complete works because, by dint of continuous study of the selections, they will quickly acquire a summary acquaintance with many beautiful and varied concepts. Common to both will be the advantage of being able quickly to find what they seek, should they wish to proceed to the relevant section of the entire work. Moreover, the book is not without utility for those who endeavor to speak and write correctly.[234]

In the Byzantine Middle Ages, Joannes' *Anthologion* will become, in a cultural sense, a point of reference and archetype of numerous gnomological collections, thus opening up a new era that will base much of its cultural and literary commitment on the practice of συλλέγειν ("to collect") and συντίθεσθαι ("to put together").[235] The Byzantine gnomological tradition will be part of that "collection literature" aimed at constituting, in school practice but also in private reading and personal spiritual formation, "reference libraries," in the broader framework of the "culture of συλλογή."[236] The creation of another fundamental anthological and gnomological work is dated not even two centuries after Stobaeus: the so-called *Sacra parallela*, attributed to an Arab theologian, **John of Damascus**. Following a thematic division and a semi-alphabetical order, he excerpted texts from the Holy Scriptures and the Christian tradition, which aimed at the moral formation of the contemplative life. This will constitute the primary source for many later spiritual collections. Inquiries into the intricate filiations between Byzantine codices of *sententiae* materials[237] have made it possible to identify, within a complex textual tradition with a high level of vertical and horizontal contamination, three major categories: the Damascene florileges, which derive their material from the *Sacra parallela*; the monastic florileges, of ascetic derivation; and the sacred-profane florileges, in which material taken from both the Christian and pagan traditions converge.

[234] See Ciolfi 2021a.
[235] The bibliography on the Byzantine gnomological tradition is large; see, for instance: Bielohlawek 1940; Barns 1950; Morgan 2013, and the contributions collected in Funghi 2003 and 2004; Piccione-Perkams 2003 and 2005.
[236] Odorico 1990.
[237] See Richard 1964 and Odorico 1986 and 1990.

Alongside the gnomological and anthological tradition, Greek lexicography saw one of its pivotal points in **Hesychius of Alexandria**'s *Collection of terms of all kinds, in alphabetical order*, which is the most important Byzantine lexical tool until the 10th century. In its prefatory epistle, of extraordinary importance, Hesychius traces a brief history of the lexicography preceding him. Some authors, like Apion and Apollonius, the scholar states, collected Homeric glosses; others, like Theon and Didymus, the comic and tragic ones. Only "a certain Diogenianus," who lived after these authors, dared to compose a repertoire of glosses encompassing the Homeric, comic, tragic, lyric, medical, and historiographic ones. Every three or four letters, says Hesychius, Diogenianus compiled an index of the collected lemmas to facilitate the consultation. In addition to this collection of glosses, Diogenianus did not omit the παροιμίαι and composed "books" entitled Περιεργοπένηται, in the sense of *Poor* or *humble scholars*: Hesychius explains this title with his conviction that, with these proverbs, Diogenianus wanted to collect something useful even to humble people, in parallel to the glosses, addressed, by contrast, to wealthy people. Hesychius deeply praises Diogenianus, but also points out flaws: he would have preferred that Diogenianus had not collected "most of the proverbs loosely and without explanation" (τὰς πλείους τῶν παροιμιῶν ψιλῶς καὶ ἄνευ τῶν ὑποθέσεων; i.e. with no *interpretamentum*), that he had not neglected to juxtapose currently used synonyms with glosses, and, especially, that he had indicated "the titles of the works from which they are taken" (τὰς τῶν βιβλίων ἐπιγραφὰς ἔνθα φέρονται). Hesychius asserts that, as far as his memory and knowledge permitted, he filled these gaps by adding to the work of Diogenianus the glosses of Aristarchus, Apion, and Heliodorus, according to the teachings of the grammarian Herodian (if the expression κατὰ τὸν γραμματικὸν Ἡρωδιανόν is to be so interpreted). Moreover, "[he] added explanations to the proverbs" (ταῖς παροιμίαις ἀποδέδωκα τὰς ὑποθέσεις), synonyms to the glosses, and "pointed out the titles of every book he had before him" (τὰς ἐπιγραφὰς πάντων μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀντιγράφων προστιθείς).

In the more than 250 instances in which Hesychius mentions an expression that he explicitly calls παροιμία, we can clearly perceive what is considered to be taken from an author and what is considered to belong to the gnomic and proverbial tradition: he distinguishes παροιμίαι from verses by authors (especially comic ones), which are often distorted by means of formulas such as παρὰ τὴν παροιμίαν (β 978; ε 5684; ε 6418; κ 859, and others), ἀπὸ τῆς (ε 6767) or ἀντὶ τοῦ (τ 473).[238]

But the 5th century, in the Greek world, still saw the last *literati* who perpetuated the forms and citational mechanisms of proverbs and *sententiae*. In historiography, **Zosimus** and **Procopius of Caesarea** looked to the classical models of pagan historiography with an eye to their moralistic and *sententia* style: their writings feature comments and judgments centered on gnomic motifs. In the genres that were more technically influenced by rhetoric—epistolography, declamation, and a new type of prose dedicated to descriptions of works of art, *ekphrasis*—the writers of the so-called "school of Gaza," the Palestinian city that was the pearl and crossroads of cultures at the time, emerged: **Procopius of Gaza**, **Zechariah**, and **Coricius** worked on gnomic and proverbial material according to the rules of literary quotation, as well as being influenced by the transformations of the literary text that the declamatory genre underwent at that time. Thus, in these rhetoricians, jokes and literary and gnomic allusions became instruments of dramatization in order to arouse the attention of the public. Three poets, all of whom were epigrammatists, use γνῶμαι and παροιμίαι as effective closing features of their poems, to exemplify the situation or to play with the gnomic tradition, depending on their areas of choice: **Strato of Sardis**, for the (now literarily) pederotic themes;[239] **Paul the Silentiary**, who fully exploits the gnomic *topica* of love; **Palladas of Alexandria**, who weaves together dozens of pessimistic *sententiae* on his own experience as a schoolmaster and on the disappointments of everyday life, composing almost a *summa* of the Hellenic wisdom tradition.

[238] There are very rare cases in which the definition of παροιμία is attributed to an author: α 6927: Ἀράβιος ἄγγελος ("Arabian messenger," from Menander); ε 6767: εὕδοντι δ' αἱρεῖ πρωκτός ("his anus does the catching while he sleeps," from Cratinus); π 563: παρὰ κωφὸν ἀποπαρδεῖ ("he farts to a deaf man," Cratinus again).

[239] For which see Floridi 2011.

While in Rome and Milan, in Gaza and Alexandria, in Antioch and Constantinople, Christian and pagan scholars were making an unprecedented effort to select and preserve Greek and Latin culture, at the far end of Europe, a bishop of British origin, **Patrick,** launched into the extraordinary adventure of evangelizing Ireland, of which he is, to this day, the primary patron saint. In addition to his *Canones*, in which he comments on verses from the Old and New Testaments, Patrick wrote the *Proverbia*, addressed to his ministers (*iudices Ecclesiae*), whom the bishop intended to instruct and strengthen in their new Christian faith. It is the oldest text, I believe, that re-elaborates the Latin gnomic tradition, both Christian and pagan, in a catechetical function (and many others will follow throughout the Middle Ages).[240] See, for instance:

10. *Patricius ait: exempla maiorum perquire, ubi nihil fallaciae invenies*.
Patrick says: follow the examples of your ancestors, where you will find no error.

11. *Patricius ait: iudices qui non recte iudicant iudicia Ecclesiae, non iudices, sed falsatores sunt.*
Patrick says: ministers who do not judge the judgments of the Church correctly are not ministers, but forgers.

Between the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th century, as the quotations in Christian writings of the time testify, collections attributed to the great *sapientes* of the past spread with great success: the ***Disticha Catonis*** and the ***Sententiae Varronis***, mentioned above,[241] the translation of the ***Sententiae of Sextus*** by Rufinus,[242] and, above all, three syllogies attributed to **Seneca**. It is well known that, ever since the 3rd century, in the Christian imagination, the philosopher of Cordoba had become a sort of precursor of the Messiah, a friend and correspondent of St. Paul, even *sanctus*. Small works of Christian (or Christianized) morals began to circulate under his name, perhaps derived from authentic lost works, but also from much other material. Three collections of *sententiae* and actual *excerpta* will constitute Seneca's paremiographic remnants until Humanism:[243] their function ranged from repertories of maxims for written and oral preaching, to their reuse in the numerous collections of *exempla* and *specula principis* ("mirrors for princes") typical between the 12th and 14th century.
The main sylloge (with about 150 maxims), which may date back to an authentically Senecan core, is transmitted in the numerous codices under the title *Liber de moribus* (*Book on customs*) or *Senecae de moribus* (*Seneca on customs*): it is explicitly mentioned in the final document of the Council of Tours, in 567. From the *De moribus*, in more recent times, some *sententiae* will be extrapolated—the shortest, in form; the most Christian, in content—that will contribute to forming, in addition to 68 others, a different collection circulating under the title of *Proverbia Senecae* or *Sententiae Senecae (Seneca's proverbs* or *sententiae)*, alphabetically ordered. Another collection was clearly derived from both the previous ones, but was already worked on in the 7th century, since it appears in the famous Codex Salmasianus that preserved the *Anthologia Latina*. This will circulate under the title of *Monita Senecae* (*Seneca's precepts*) and often appears alongside the medieval Latin translation of the *sententiae* of the Seven Sages. With these *Monita*, provided with an apocryphal and Christian preface, the transformation of Seneca from ancient philosopher to the moral author *par excellence* of the Christian Middle Ages will be completed:

Mor. 111. *Alteri semper ignoscito, tibi ipsi numquam*.
Always forgive others, never yourself.

Mor. 112. *Tantum ad virtutem adicies, quantum ex voluptate abstraxeris.*
You will turn to virtue as much as you turn away from pleasures.

[240] See Lelli 2021:749–750, 1780.
[241] See Balbo 2021; Barbieri 2021.
[242] See Lelli 2021:669–710, 1702–1713.
[243] See Lelli 2021:763–782, 1785–1789.

In the meantime, in another peripheral area of Europe, the Lusitanian region of what is now Portugal, there was a bishop of Balkan origin who dedicated himself entirely (until 579, the year of his death) to completing the evangelization of the Lusitanian people: **Martin of Braga**. Through a very interesting work, *De correctione rusticorum* (*On the correction of rural people*), he set himself the goal of eradicating pagan beliefs and superstitions still present in the popular culture of the time. With the translation of a Greek work lost to us, *The Sententiae of the Egyptian Fathers*, he intended to call the *communitas fidelium* of every rank and social extraction to the perfect observance of the life of a good Christian, and to the virtues on which it is based: temperance, contrition, love for one's neighbor, unconditional humbleness. It is a sylloge of over a hundred maxims of Christian wisdom, which can be placed in the wake of similar collections that had probably begun to circulate since the 4th century in the Egyptian and Middle Eastern areas, known as *Sententiae* or *Apophthegmata Patrum.* To the Jewish Fathers of the *Bible* were attributed *sententiae* of Christian morality, recast with authentic sayings extrapolated from the *Old Testament*:

10. *Dixit senex: "Si habitas cum proximo, esto sicut columna lapidea, qui si iniuriatur non irascitur, si glorificatur non extollitur."*
An elder once said: "If you dwell with your neighbor, be like a pillar of stone: don't get angry if insulted, don't get excited if praised."

The 74 *sententiae* transmitted in an anonymous collection, singularly entitled *Proverbia Graecorum***,** dating back to the end of the 7th century at the latest, are also mainly derived from biblical *proverbia* and scriptural sources, and will be included by **Sedulius Scotus**, poet and teacher of rhetoric at the court of King Lothair, in his *Collectaneum*, a sylloge of ancient moral and patristic *excerpta,* ca. 850 CE.[244]
Such collections circulated in alphabetical, thematic, or mixed lists, and were often influenced by the contemporary biographical production of saints and martyrs, rich in folkloric and miraculous elements, which provided their framework. This tradition encompasses the *Apophthegmata* attributed to **Macarius of Egypt**, imagined as monk Macarius' answers to his hermit disciples in the first person; the Παραινέσεις *To the monks* and *To a virgin*, as well as other short *sententia* collections[245] attributed to **Evagrius Ponticus**, also a hermit in Egypt; the *Masters and Disciples* assigned to **Nilus of Ancyra**, called the Ascetic; the collection attributed to **Paschasius of Dumium**, often transmitted in the same codices as the *Sententiae* of Martin—and uncoincidentally so—under the unique and significant title *Geronticon*, *Wisdom of the elders*.[246]
The importance of all these collections, from a cultural, if not literary, point of view, is immense: they document the vitality of a tradition that was by now syncretistic, pagan and Christian, both in the West and in the East—another great and unknown chapter of the Syriac and Arab versions could open up here—and that made the proverb and *sententia* short form one of the cornerstones of individual education and social morality.
Compared to the hundreds of anonymous syllogies or those with apocryphal attributions, some gnomological or paremiographic collections stand out for their citation of authors, or because they were luckily attributed to an important figure, thus obtaining a more institutional circulation and status.
Cassia was a very distinctive figure: she was a member of Constantinopole's aristocracy who distinguished herself at court for her erudition and beauty, becoming a nun and founder of a monastery, and the correspondent of one of the most cultured monks of the time, Theodore the Studite. Cassia escaped the iconoclastic persecutions and died on the small island of Casos in 865. She was the author of numerous liturgical works and of beautiful sacred hymns still used

[244] On the *Proverbia Graecorum*, see Simpson 1987.
[245] Edited by Elter 1892:52–54.
[246] A mention should also be made of the famous *Ladder of Divine Ascent* by **John Climacus** (an ascetic monk who died in 603), which contains 30 chapters of prescriptions and maxims of Christian wisdom which should help one climb the difficult path of individual sanctification. This is still one of the most popular texts in the Orthodox world. Here, however, the γνῶμαι are inserted into the argument.

today in the Orthodox liturgy. She also composed a collection of Γνῶμαι in elegant dodecasyllables and iambic trimeters, in which the gnomic tradition is used to unmask the hypocrisies of the manorial society and to lay solid foundations for the spiritual formation of the sisters:[247]

54. Πάντας δ' ἀγάπα, μὴ θάρρει δὲ τοῖς πᾶσιν.
Love everyone, but don't trust everyone.

56. Σύνεσις παίδων, γερόντων ὁμιλίαι.
The sagacity of the children, the words of the elders.

The so-called *Loci Communes*, attributed to **Maximus the Confessor**—a noble aide to the emperor Heraclius until 614, then a monk and ascetic in Egypt—probably date to the 10th century and soon encountered a widespread success. Divided into over 70 thematic chapters, within which extracts follow one another according to the authority of the source (biblical, patristic, Jewish, and finally pagan texts), they were to constitute one of the most popular repertories for Byzantine authors. The same fate was to befall a similar collection in two books of slightly later composition, attributed to an otherwise unknown monk, **Antonius Melissa**.[248] Hundreds and hundreds of paremiographic entries in the same period flowed into two extraordinary lexicographical collections that would constitute an endless and extremely precious reservoir of quotations and material of all kinds: the *Lexicon* of the Constantinopolitan patriarch **Photius** (died in 891), and the veritable encyclopedia that goes by the name of ***Suda***, formulated by various scholars in the same decades.
While the Byzantine East was going through a difficult period of internal doctrinal controversies and external wars with the Muslims, the cultural center of Christian Europe had now moved north. Therefore, the most representative figures of the Western gnomic tradition came from the territories now permanently colonized by the Franks and Saxons.[249]
The *Fecunda ratis*, *The well-laden ship*, by *magister* **Egbert** of the Liège Cathedral dates to the first decades of the 11th century, composed in hexameters and for didactic purposes. It is subdivided into two sections, *prora* and *puppa*, which contain, respectively, *sententiae* made of one or a few lines, and short *fabulae* of various literary and folkloric material (there is also an archetype of *Little Red Riding Hood*). The *sententia* material is drawn from Varro, Cicero, Sallust, Seneca, Boethius, Plautus, Terence, Horace, Ovid, and other authors.[250]
Between 1032 and 1070, with changing fortunes, **Otloh**, a Benedictine monk of **Saint Emmeram**, worked in Regensburg. He was the author of numerous works in verse and prose, hagiographic and biographical, doctrinaire and educational. Among these is the work that goes under the title of *Libellus proverbiorum* (*Booklet of proverbs*) which was born, as Otloh makes clear in its *praefatio*, with fundamentally didactic intentions: the elementary schooling of the students of the monastery, the first approach to Christian education in a simple and incisive Latin.[251] The material used by Otloh, arranged alphabetically, is mainly biblical, or taken from collections attributed to Seneca and Publilius Syrus, and more rarely pagan:

Haec vos, discipuli, pariterque notate, magistri;
Haec, rogo, devote, pueri et iuvenes, legitote.
Disciples, and likewise teachers, observe these proverbs;
children and youths, I ask you, devoutly read these proverbs.

Agnum quocumque ierit sequi specialiter congruit virginibus.
It is especially fitting for virgins to follow the lamb wherever he goes. [cf. Apostolius 14.4]

[247] See Ciolfi 2021b.
[248] For other collections dating from the 11th to the 12th century, see again Ciolfi 2021a.
[249] For an overview, see Taylor 1992. See also Hallik 2007.
[250] The *Fecunda Ratis* can still be read in Voigt's 1889 edition.
[251] See Nastasi 2021.

Attendentibus concessa divinae pietatis dona iugiter succedunt alia.
Those who await the gifts granted by divine mercy are immediately met by others.

Adversarius omnium iniquorum sermo Dei est.
The word of God is the adversary of all unrighteous men. [Augustinus, *Sermones* 387.1]

Avarus propriae est causa miseriae, ingerens sibi sitim avaritiae.
The greedy man is the cause of his own misery, for he ingests his own thirst for greed. [cf. Publilius, *Sententiae* 82]

Avarus nihil recte facit, nisi quod moritur.
The greedy man does nothing good but die. [Publilius, *Sententiae* 83]

An abridged version of Otloh's *Liber* was produced, probably not long after his death and perhaps in Britain, by an unknown compiler, who attributed its authorship to one of the most significant figures of the first English evangelization, **Bede the Venerable**, who lived between the 7th and 8th centuries. From the 12th century onwards, this pseudo-epigraphic collection became part of the *corpus* of Bede's works, and was transmitted, cited, and appreciated, sometimes even more than the original, precisely because of this fortunate attribution.[252]
Wipo of Burgundy was a chaplain at the court of the Ottonians Conrad II and Henry III between 1033 and 1050, and the author of numerous historical works of encomiastic nature. He wrote, in a popular meter, the *Proverbia centum* (*One hundred proverbs*), which belong to the tradition of the *specula principis* ("mirrors for princes"). They were dedicated to the young Henry (the future emperor) and focused on the themes of government and law, charity and love towards his subjects:[253]

3. *Legem servare hoc est regnare.*
Keep the law: that's what rulers do.

4. *Notitia litterarum lux est animarum.*
Culture is pure light for the souls.

5. *Saepius offendit qui lumen non attendit.*
He who does not wait for the light often offends.

The anonymous ***Liber Iocalis*** also dates to the 12th century: it is a poem of almost a thousand hexameters composed in the Germanic area for the education of *pueri* in elementary school, as the first verses make clear:[254]

Virtutum pannis primis vestire sub annis
attestans morem, conservans laudis honorem:
Curvum se prebet, quod ad uncum crescere debet;
quod nova testa capit, inveterata sapit.

Already in his early years he dresses in the robes of virtue,
strengthening morals and preserving the honor of praise:
what must grow curved, bends itself;
what a new vase takes in at the beginning, it keeps forever.

[252] See Maiuri 2021.
[253] See Zanusso 2021.
[254] The text is found in Lehmann 1938:55–93.

Within the frame of the *magister* who teaches children, there is a succession of *fabulae* and *apologi*, biblical references and, indeed, proverbs, almost always condensed in monostichs, drawn from the most disparate sources, including oral tradition:

Non coquus ex longo cultro nec virgo probatur
dependente coma nec clericus ampla corona.
Neither a cook with a long knife, nor a virgin
with long hair, nor a cleric with a broad hat is appreciated.

A collection of Christian *sententiae* mixed with original aphorisms, mainly in a philosophical and theological key, is the *Liber parabolarum* (*Book of proverbs*) of **Alain de Lille**, a theologian active in the abbey of Citeaux until 1202.[255] The work enjoyed great success and was included in several school *curricula*, as well as the contemporary anonymous collections of *excerpta* and *sententiae* that go by the name of *Florilegium Gallicum*, *Florilegium Angelicum*, *Florilegium morale Oxoniense, Florilegium Sancti Homeri*.[256]
A particular mention must be made of the more than 200 epigrams (mainly couplets) contained in the collection entitled *Liber proverbiorum*, by **Godfrey of Cambrai**, abbot of Winchester between 1082 and 1107: they elegantly imitate Martial's epigrams—even in the fictitious names of their addressees, which recall those of the poet of Bilbilis—and, in fact, they will even be confused with their model. They are centered on moral vices and faults, which often rework gnomic motifs, as for example (17):

Amicum tarde adquiri, sed cito amitti
Prudenti, Probe, consilio servandus amicus,
quem sero adquiris, sed cito perdis eum.

A friend is acquired late, but lost quickly.
Probo, with cautious advice, you must preserve a friend
who is acquired late, but lost quickly.

The first examples of theorizing about the short *sententia* form in the rhetorical and scholastic field also date to the 12th century.[257] One instance is the definition of *proverbium* provided by **Matthew of Vendôme**, a rhetorician and a poet, in his successful *Ars poetica*, published around 1175:

Generale proverbium, id est communis sententia, cui consuetudo fidem attribuit, opinio communis assensum accommodat, incorruptae veritatis integritas adquiescit.
The general proverb, that is, a common *sententia*, to which custom attributes trustworthiness, common opinion gives assent and the security of untainted truth acquiesces.

Huguccio, a theologian and judge in Bologna, then bishop of Ferrara until his death in 1210, in his *Magnae derivationes* (*Great etymologies*) distinguishes between *sententiae*, proverbs, and *chreiai* (note the obvious derivation from Isidore):

Item sententia quidam color rethoricus dicitur, scilicet brevis oratio aliquid moralitatis generaliter comprehendens, ut (Terence, *Andria* 68) *"obsequium amicos, veritas odium parit"; et est idem in rethorica sententia, proverbium, commune vel generale argumentum, communis vel generalis locus et generalis vel communis sententia et dictum impersonale. [45] Huic si persona*

[255] One can read the text in Limone 1993.
[256] For which see Olsen 1979 and 1980. Other florileges containing lengthy *excerpta* from prose authors (Cicero, Sallust, Boethius, Isidore of Seville ...) have different traditions and a different status: see Taylor 1992:27–28.
[257] For the use of proverbs and *sententiae* in the practice of *ars dictaminis* in the 12th–14th centuries, see Hallik 2007:165-170.

fuerit adiuncta, crian erit, ita: "offendit Achilles Agamennonem vera dicendo," "Metrofanes promeruit gratiam Metridatis obsequendo." (*Sententiae* 85, 44–45)
Similarly, a *sententia* is defined as a certain rhetorical color, that is, a brief utterance, which generally involves a moral theme, such as "flattery wins friends, the truth breeds hatred"; a proverb, a common and general topic, a commonplace, a common *sententia*, an impersonal saying also fall within the rhetorical *sententia*. If a person is added to this, it will become a *chreia*, such as: "Achilles offended Agamemnon by speaking the truth"; "Metrophanes won the gratitude of Mithridates by flattery."

Proverbium, similitudo, parabola ubi aliud dicitur et aliud intelligitur, quasi pro verbo positum vel quasi verbum pro alio, unde proverbiolum diminutivum, et proverbialis -le, proverbialiter, proverbialitas et proverbiosus -a -um, et comparatur, unde proverbiositas -tis, et proverbior -aris, proverbia dicere vel proverbiis vituperare. (U 21, 7)
A proverb, simile, or parable arises when one thing is said and another is meant, as if one term were placed for another, whence come the diminutive "little proverb," and "proverbial," "proverbially," "proverbiality" and "proverbious," whence again "proverbiosity" and "to speak with proverbs," "to say proverbs" or "to insult with proverbs."

Bene of Florence, active between 1220 and 1238, *magister* of *ars dictaminis* in Bologna, wrote in his treatise, entitled *Candelabrum:*

Et sic proverbium est velut quedam maxima que dat fidem aliis, sed non recipit aliunde.
So too the proverb is a kind of maxim, which gives trustworthiness to others, but is not derived from anything else.

Proverbium is juxtaposed with *maxima*, a term hitherto used in scholastic and philosophical dialectics: an overlap rich in developments in the Neo-Latin vernaculars. From the 13th century onwards, not surprisingly, syllogies of bilingual proverbs began to circulate: Latin-Provençal, Anglo-Latin, Latin-vulgar. But there were still dozens of lists and collections of *proverbia* circulating independently or at the end of the *artes dictandi* of the 12th-14th centuries.[258]
In the crisis-ridden Constantinople of the 11th and 12th centuries—threatened both by the Arabs to the south and, after the schism, by Latin Europe to the northwest—identity-based cultural motivations were probably the reason behind a fairly widespread interest in collecting popular proverbs in a non-literary language. The archetype of this new paremiographic genre is **Michael Psellus**, a multifaceted personality of great importance, a monk and advisor to emperors and empresses in the difficult period between 1040 and 1080. We can probably trace back to Psellus the nucleus of one of the first syllogies of proverbs in popular Byzantine language, provided with Ἑρμηνεῖαι, "Interpretations," of a purely Christian allegorical character such as, for example (2):

"Ἀπὸ κλέπτην κλέπτε καὶ κρῖμαν οὐκ ἔχεις!" Ὁ κλέπτης τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν ὁ διάβολος—κλέπτει γὰρ καὶ ἀφαρπάζει ἀεὶ ὁ τῆς ζημίας πειρατής. Ὁ γοῦν δυνηθείς, ἵνα ψυχὴν κατεχομένην ὑπὸ τοῦ δαίμονος "κλέψῃ," οὐ μόνον κρῖμα οὐκ ἔχει, ἀλλὰ καὶ μέγα‹ν› μισθόν—[ἀλλ᾽] οὖν δὲ αὐτῷ ἐξομοιοῦται τῷ εἰπόντι—"Ὁ ἐξάγων ἄξιον ἐξ ἀναξίου ὡς στόμα μου ἔσται."
"Steal from the thief and you will not sin": the devil is the thief of our soul, since that tempter of ruin always robs and steals. So, whoever is able to take away a demon-possessed soul, not only does not commit sin, but will also have a great reward, doing exactly as the one who says, "if you separate what is precious from what is vile, you will be like my mouth."

In this way, folkloric expressions, handed down orally for centuries and based on sometimes harsh motifs, find a doctrinal exegesis that justifies them and situates them in the orthodox system. It is not, therefore, a matter of scholarly game-playing, nor even of ignorance of the original and popular meaning of the oral saying, but rather of an identity-building intention to

[258] See the edition in Hallik 2007:464–621, with over twenty authors and texts.

"bend the common saying to the filter of the ethical and eschatological admonition."[259] The successful collection of Psellus—judging by the number of codices—was soon imitated by other learned personalities of the time, and of the following century, first of all **Michael Glykas**, a historian, poet, and astrologer active under the emperor Manuel I Komnenos, of whom he was first a secretary and then, having fallen from the emperor's good graces, a victim. Michael was imprisoned and, in 1161, as a gift, he sent the emperor his Ἀναγωγὴ δημοτικῶν τινων ῥητῶν, *Collection of popular sayings*, consisting of 19 sayings embedded in short explanations composed in dodecasyllables that provide an allegorical exegesis (1):

Ἔνι καὶ κλέπτης καὶ ἰσχυρός,
κλέπτης ὁμοῦ καὶ ἰσχυρός, λέγει δημώδης λόγος.
ξένον τὸ πρᾶγμά μοι δοκεῖ, ξένος ὁ λόγος οὗτος.
A thief and yet shameless.
"A thief and yet shameless," as the popular saying goes:
the matter seems obscure to me, and so does this saying.

The anonymous Σπανέας, or Διδασκαλία παραινετική, *Exhortative teaching*, a poem in 572 vernacular dodecasyllables must date back to the same decades. In some codices, it is attributed to Alexis, son of the emperor John II Komnenos (1087–1143), and, like the contemporary *Liber iocalis*, it embeds popular proverbs in the didactic framework of precepts to the emperor's son. As proof of the successful circulation of these works, the popular proverbs preserved by Psellus and Glykas, from the *Spaneas* to other anonymous syllogies, are not infrequently employed in the erudite writings of the great scholars of the time, first and foremost Eustathius of Thessalonica and John Tzetzes.

After the disaster of the Fourth Crusade, the Byzantine Palaiologan dynasty led by Michael VIII reconquered Constantinople; thus, from 1259, a new period of stability and prosperity began. Diplomatic ties were sought with the Latin West and the Papacy, in order to deal with the ever-increasing Arab pressure on the eastern territories, almost all of which had been lost. The attempts to spread the teaching of Latin culture and language should probably also be placed in this context. A leading figure in this movement was the monk **Maximus Planudes**, director of the *Didaskaleion* of the monastery of Chora in Constantinople until 1305. Author of numerous Greek translations of Cicero, Boethius, and Augustine, Planudes also produced a Greek version of the famous and widespread *Disticha Catonis*, with a clearly didactic function, for the elementary teaching of Latin through precepts of strict morality. As dozens of bilingual manuscripts of the time testify, students read Planudes' translation, annotating the text with marginal notes, perhaps taken from the lessons of the teacher himself: the reception of the Greek *Disticha*, even in later centuries, will be widespread.[260]

The time was ripe for a revival of literary paremiography in the wake of the ancient pagan collections. Ten centuries after the syllogies of Zenobius and Diogenianus, the patriarch of Constantinople, **Gregory of Cyprus,** produced two of them.[261] Born in 1241 in the Cypriot countryside of Nicosia to a wealthy family, after having attended the best schools of rhetoric and having been deeply disappointed, Gregory arrived in Constantinople immediately after 1261. Being man of action and preaching, rather than a *literatus*, he made a very rapid career, until his election as patriarch in 1283. Among his few works (epistles and a couple of hagiographies), one paremiographical syllogy stand out, preserved in two manuscripts: *Proverbs collected by the venerable Father Gregory of Cyprus in alphabetical order* (Παροιμίαι συλλεγεῖσαι παρὰ τοῦ ἁγιωτάτου πατριάρχου κύρου Γρηγορίου τοῦ Κυπρίου κατὰ ἀλφάβητον). It consists of nearly 500 παροιμίαι; most of them are taken from Zenobius' collections, but some additions seem to be drawn from the comic, tragic, and Platonic *scholia.*

A prominent figure in religious and political circles of this time was **Macarius Chrysocephalus**, the metropolitan bishop of the city of Philadelphia, in Asia Minor. A few decades after Gregory's

[259] Luciani 2021.
[260] See Ortoleva 2021.
[261] See Lelli 2021:1015–1055, 1831–1836.

syllogies, he began the compilation of a vast collection of moral *excerpta* from ancient and medieval authors, divided into two sections, prose and verse, entitled Ῥοδωνίαι, *Rose gardens*, which he probably continued until his death (1382). One section of this sylloge also contains a collection of 796 Παροιμίαι κατὰ στοιχεῖον, *Proverbs arranged alphabetically*, also derived almost entirely from a branch of Zenobius' collections. Macarius, however, adds not a few proverbs which seem partly drawn from the popular oral tradition, partly derived from literary quotations (iambic trimeters and trochaic tetrameters), most of which are unknown to us:[262]

8.32. Τί τὸν τάραντα πρός με ποικίλλεις ἔχων;
What is the need for oil if there is a legume soup?

8.33. Τί δ' ἂν κάπηλλος παρὰ καπηλίδος λάβοι
What can a shopkeeper gain from a shopkeeper?

On 29 May 1453, exhausted after long years of siege, Constantinople fell under the assault of the Ottomans led by Mehmed II. The Byzantine Empire was thus dissolved: scholars, poets, and *literati* from every part of Byzantine Greece sought refuge in the West. In the same years, in Crete, a professional copyist, just over thirty years old, **Michael Apostolius**, was compiling a συναγωγή of proverbs, sayings, and apophthegms, collected from paremiographic and other sources, which, at first, he dedicated (and sent, certainly on commission) to Gaspare Zacchi, bishop of Osimo. We have it in the autograph Codex Mazarineus 4461. Another autograph manuscript from a little later, the Parisinus 3059—roughly with the same material, and also commissioned—is dedicated, instead, to Laurus Quirinus, a Venetian scholar who died in 1466. Michael's fame as a scribe and perhaps as a paremiographer reached Venice: called by cardinal Bessarion, Michael arrived there at the end of 1466, and began to associate with other important figures of Italian Humanism. With the help of new materials, he transferred the text of the Codex Mazarineus into a new manuscript which we are still lucky enough to possess: the Angelicus 27.[263]
Michael's working method follows the well-established practice of Byzantine compilers. To some of the main sources (Zenobius, Diogenianus, and the *Suda*), he added, by analogy, *excerpta* from other authors: Eustathius, Stobaeus, Plutarch, Aelianus, and Palaephatus' *Incredibilia*, the singular euhemeristic work of the Byzantine scholar who reinterpreted all the myths of antiquity in a rationalistic way. Michael, however, also recorded proverbial expressions that are not attested in ancient sources and that offer the possibility of comparison with the oral tradition of modern European proverbs: proverbs that, as Erasmus will affirm, derive "from the dregs of the people," or "from Apostolius' drinking companions," not from "good authors." A few examples are significant:

2.75: Ἀμαθὴς ἀναξυρίδα περιθέμενος πᾶσι ταύτην ἐδείκνυ
A fool shows everyone the underpants he is wearing.

6.98: Ἕκαστος αὐτοῦ τὸ βδέμα μήλου γλύκιον ἡγεῖται
Each person thinks that the smell of his own fart is sweeter than an apple.

8.5: Ἔτρεχέ τις μὴ βρεχθείῃ, καὶ εἰς βόθρον ἀπεπνίγη
He was running to avoid getting wet and fell into a ditch.

12.97: Ὁ πηλὸς ἢν μὴ δαρῇ κέραμος οὐ γίνεται
One who doesn't get muddy is not a potter.

13.92: Πᾶν μοι τὸ χρέος κρόμμυα καὶ τὸ τίμημα σκόροδα
Every debt is an onion and every loan is garlic.

[262] See Lelli 2021:1056–1105, 1837–1844.
[263] See Lelli 2021:1140–1383, 1889–1927.

These proverbs are almost never accompanied by an explanation—a sign, perhaps, of the fact that they were circulating widely, and that there were no literary *loci* to comment on. Although he left us no explicit theorizing on this subject, Apostolius is the first author who merged in a single full-scale collection the trend of literary paremiography and that (inaugurated, as we have seen, by Psellus) of paremiography of oral and popular traditions. Michael's interest in the world of folklore is confirmed by the numerous headwords devoted to popular beliefs and superstitions filed in his collection, derived from various authors (Plutarch, Aelianus, various lexicons) but also from direct evidence. This, I believe, is Apostolius' most important contribution to the history of modern paremiography.

Nonetheless, the spark that will initiate a great season of modern paremiology is the arrival of Michael's paremiographical codices in Italy. He was certainly familiar with the codex of Apostolius **Politian**, who will cite him in his *Miscellanea* and will conceive of the project of making a collection of proverbs himself (a trace is preserved in the Magliabecchian codex VII 1420). Politian's friend **Lorenzo Lippi**, professor of rhetoric in Florence, was also likely to have seen the codex. He dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici a *Liber proverbiorum* containing 100 proverbs, to serve as a travelling companion for the politician. The first edition of Zenobius' collection was printed in Florence in 1497, after it was perhaps brought to Italy by Michael Apostolius, who, however, died in 1478, and so did not manage to see it.

In the meantime, however, his son **Arsenius Apostolius** arrived in Italy. Active between Florence and Rome, he began to rework his father's collection and disseminate it in manuscript copies, as we know from some letters of 1492–1494. In 1494, Arsenius went to Venice with the promise of soon printing his father's collection of proverbs. He was in the process of completing the three other sections which Michael had already envisaged alongside the proverbs, in a project never attempted before, something new and modern: *sententiae*, apophthegms, and proverb anecdotes (γνῶμαι, ἀποφθέγματα, χρεῖαι). It is to him that we owe what was to be the final title of the collection, Ἰωνία (*Violet*), presented to Pope Leo X between 1516 and 1519.

Collections of proverbs were to multiply in the last years of the 15th century. In 1498, the *Proverbiorum libellus* (*Booklet of proverbs*) by **Polydore Vergil**, secretary of Bessarion, was published in Venice; in 1499 the *Oratio proverbiorum* or *proverbialis* (*Oration on proverbs*) by **Filippo Beroaldo**, professor in Bologna, was published.

The first paremiographic experiment of **Erasmus of Rotterdam**, "a task hitherto attempted by no one" (*opus hactenus a nemine tentatum*), published in Paris, dates to 1500. Although the volume was produced "in a few days and with little care" (*pauculis sane diebus, nec ... admodum accurate*), it contained 800 proverbs, mostly derived from Latin sources: at that time, Erasmus did not know Michael directly, but only the collection attributed to Diogenes in the codices, from which many were drawn. In 1507, finally, Erasmus was able to read, in Venice, the codex of Michael the Apostle and the Aldine edition of Zenobius. These two new sources give the Dutch scholar the opportunity to create, with the edition of 1508 and then with that of 1513, the largest paremiographic collection of the Humanistic age, with over 6,000 Greek and Latin expressions, arranged in about 3600 headwords.

Erasmus' *Adagia*,[264] as we know, will be the main model for all the proverb collections of the European humanists of the 16th and 17th centuries, and the reference point for every author who will give an important role to proverbs in his work. He is, ultimately, the link between the proverb knowledge of the ancients—fixed in the very first collections of the sayings of Pythagoras and the Seven Sages—and that of the moderns, which still today perpetuate the forms, contents, and functions of the Greek and Roman gnomic traditions.

3. Forms and motifs of the ancient proverb

If we apply the morphological typologies of modern paremiology to the endless repertoire of Greek and Roman proverb and *sententia* short forms, a rather clear picture of cultural continuity emerges, on which some general considerations can be made.

[264] See Lelli 2013.

Proverbs and ***sententiae***, in the terminology and perception of the ancients, had quite definite and partly parallel paths. With the term παροιμία, from its first attestations in the mid-5th century BCE (in Aeschylus and Sophocles) until at least the beginning of the Imperial age, the Greeks indicated short forms characterized by an ethical focus and traditional structure (παλαιά), whether metaphorical or not, but, in any case, never cited from an author. A frequent terminological alternative was τὸ λεγόμενον. This, however, more often indicated also all those colloquial and idiomatic expressions which, for modern paremiology, are characterized by an aspect of proverb diffusion, but do not constitute proper proverbial sayings. The definitions of φάτις (Heraclitus) and of ἔπος (Herodotus, also with παλαιόν) are also attested, but to a much lesser extent, and again for anonymous formulations. The term γνώμη was employed, probably from the beginning (Theognis) and with evidence from the end of the 5th century, to designate only the anonymous but not metaphorical expressions, i.e. what we call *sententiae*. This was perhaps due to the influence of judicial, political, and even medical terminology (Thucydides, Gorgias, Hippocrates). From the mid-4th century, the term began to also define the expressions quoted from philosophers (Epicurus), and to be applied to sayings attributed to the great σοφοί of the past (Isocrates), or to *sententiae* of poets collected in anthologies (Menander, Euripides). From Herodotus and Euripides onwards, finally, one of the most widespread ways of signaling proverbs and *sententiae* was, and will remain, a *verbum dicendi*: mainly (ὡς) φασι, λέγεται, λέγουσι, and a few other variants.

Among the very first definitions of wisdom short forms in Rome, we have *verbum* (Plautus) and *dictum* (Ennius), at the end of the 3rd century BCE. In particular, *verbum*, with the common qualifications of *vetus* and *verum*, is widely attested up to the end of the 1st century BCE, when it will be supplanted by *proverbium* (in Cicero and, in poetry, only in Ovid). Like παροιμία, *proverbium* never indicates, at least until the 4th century CE, an expression quoted from an author. Other terms, which, however, enjoyed less success, are *praeceptum* and *adagio*. *Sententia*, employed to indicate one of the very first collections—that of Appius Claudius—of *sententiae* quoted from an author, is the term that, in parallel with the Greek γνώμη, will become common during the 1st century BCE to also define non-metaphorical and non-authorial proverbs, due to the influence of legal terminology. As widespread as the Greek τὸ λεγόμενον, (ὡς) φασιν, λέγεται, λέγουσι are, finally, the indications *dicunt*, *dicitur*, (*ut*) *aiunt*, and the like, as well as the generic *illud*.

In ancient Greece, from the 4th century (Xenophon and Aristotle), the *sententiae* attributed to a certain person of note—be it a sage, a philosopher, a poet, or others—were indicated with the term ἀποφθέγματα, and, increasingly, with γνώμη too; they enjoyed the same status as our **aphorisms**. Ἀφορισμοί, too, is a term well attested from the late 5th century BCE, but limited to the medical field. A sense of authorship was also embedded in the term ῥῆμα, which was much less frequent, but of more ancient attestation (Pindar, Plato); other terms such as παραινέσεις, παραγγέλματα, ὑποθῆκαι, and more, also employed for authorial expressions, were not that frequent either. Never, at least until the 2nd century CE, was the term παροιμία employed for expressions to which authorship was assigned. In Rome, *apophthegmata* is used by Cicero in relation to Cato; then, from the 1st-2nd century, it is almost always *sententiae*, and, less often, *dicta* or *monita*, but never *proverbia*, at least until the Middle Ages. Only at the beginning of the 13th century does the term *maxima* appear in this sense (Bene of Florence).

The distinctive grammatical manipulation of authorial *sententiae* gave birth, first in Greece and then in Rome, to the well-defined typology of the χρεία (*chreia* in Latin): an episode (real or imagined) concluded by a joke made by a specific person of note (a sage, a philosopher, a poet, a general, or others). Collections of χρεῖαι are attested from the beginning of the 4th century BCE (Socrates, Diogenes), and will soon spread at least from the 1st century BCE, not least because of their use in schools.

Forms of **Wellerisms** appear in Greece from Aristophanes onwards, and then to a greater extent from the Hellenistic age. In Rome, they appear much later, starting with Gaius Lucilius; however, they do not have a defined category, nor a terminology that distinguishes them.

The huge and varied repertoire of **colloquial expressions** (idiomatic, antonomastic, comparative, expressions of preference and of *adynata*) employed as proverbs, which, however, modern paremiology does not consider to be proverbial, was defined, in Greece, with the broader sense of

παροιμία, with the even less connotative τὸ λεγόμενον, and with the aside (ὡς) φασιν, λέγεται, λέγουσι; never with γνώμη, ῥῆμα, or other terms. In Rome, this repertoire was indicated with *dicunt*, *dicitur*, (*ut*) *aiunt,* and the like.

The terminology, and, therefore, the awareness and the cultural perception of Greeks and Romans with respect to short forms were clear and precise, at least until the Late Antique period: only then, among the syncretism of religious and cultural movements that affected ancient civilization, will conceptual interferences and overlapping terminology arise, which will then develop during the Middle Ages.

All the proverb and *sententia* morphologies listed above are combined, in different ways, in the main thematic areas of ancient proverbial material:

- "human types," concepts, personifications;
- objects and inanimate elements of practical life and the natural world;
- animals;
- places and peoples;
- anecdotal or historical figures;
- mythical characters, gods, and heroes.

The first group almost always presents the standard and metaphorical form of proverbs, with a definite situation, a subject, and an action which is regularly expressed. The most frequent actors are "human types" embodied in arts, crafts, social categories, and characters (ἀγροίκου μὴ καταφρόνει ῥήτορος: "do not despise a rustic speaker"; *fabrum caedere cum ferias fullonem*: "to cut down the smith when you strike at the cloth-fuller"); ages of life (ἀνδρὸς γέροντος αἱ γνάθοι βακτηρία: "the jaws are an old man's staff"; *salva res, saltat senex*: "all is well, the old man's dancing"). General non-metaphorical formulations, sometimes with ethical concepts, follow in proportion (πενία σοφίαν ἔλαχε; *paupertas artes docet*: "poverty sharpens the wits"). Rhetorical devices are particularly exploited (repetition, homeoteleuton, polyptoton). In this group, we find the highest number of authorial *sententiae* which come from literary texts and then become proverbial, as well as maxims and apophthegms attributed to historical figures (κοινὰ τά φίλων, *amicorum communia omnia*, "between friends all is common," attributed to Pythagoras). Sometimes, these expressions of philosophers, sages, politicians, and poets become part of the proverb heritage, and their authorship can even be lost. However, the opposite can also happen: it is not uncommon to find sentences attributed *tout court* to an author recognized as "proverbial," or to find single expressions attributed to several wise men or poets. Finally, it is significant that in this thematic category there are very few cases of expressions with a different formulation (e.g. with antonomasia, comparison, or other).

In every culture, everyday life has always offered inexhaustible material for the elaboration of proverbs that, through the metaphor of everyday objects and actions, have highlighted numerous universally recognized teachings and values. Greek and Roman cultures do not deviate from this pattern: the group of proverbs starring the so-called *Realien* is quantitatively relevant, as well as qualitatively very important from the point of view of anthropology or of material culture, for instance. All the morphological typologies mentioned above are exploited in this thematic field.

These are, for the most part, proper proverbs, in which the analogical mechanism is employed. The most popular framework is the natural one, such as the world of cooking (ζεῖ χύτρα, ζεῖ φιλία: "pot boils, friendship lives"; *sociorum olla male fervet*: "the company's pot goes off the boil"), and that of the physical elements of the human body (γόνυ κνήμης ἔγγιον: "the knee is nearer than the shin"; *frons occipitio prior*: "forehead before occiput"). A prominent place is given to proverbs connected with seafaring and agriculture—a very important sphere of life to Greek and Roman civilizations respectively (ἄλλοι μὲν σπείρουσιν, ἄλλοι δὲ ἀμήσονται: "some sow, others reap"; *fundum alienum arare*: "to plow the field of another"). The field of musical objects is also noteworthy; and there is no lack of expressions derived from competitive activities and sports, games, or the world of childhood. The subgenre of *adynata* is well attested. To a lesser extent, the typologies of comparison and antonomasia are exploited.

Animal proverbs play a remarkable role, as a direct consequence of the great importance that they have always had in human life, especially in ancient societies. Since ancient times, the animal world has aroused man's curiosity and the animal has become the protagonist of tales, fables, and proverbs. Animals, from this point of view, have often constituted the privileged place of man's

"mirroring" process, being both near and far, capable of producing fantasies and meanings—in short, according to a famous and fortunate definition, constituting the main irreplaceable objects "to think with."[265] This high potential for metaphorization inherent in the animal world has facilitated, in many cultures (including the ancient ones), the use of these actors in the most disparate morphological categories. There are numerous proper proverbs in which all kinds of known animals are represented—from domestic to wild and ferocious ones, to exotic animals, from mammals to fishes, from birds to insects. An important place is occupied, however, by those animals that are symbolic of positive and, more often, negative qualities: the donkey, the pig, the dog, the mouse, the lion, and the fox. This material has been perpetuated in the Western tradition (ἂν ἡ λεοντῆ μὴ ἐξίκηται, τὴν ἀλωπεκῆν πρόσαψον: "if the lion-skin does not suffice, put on the fox-skin"; μία χελιδὼν ἔαρ οὐ ποιεῖ: "one swallow does not make a summer"; *vulpis pilum mutat, non mores*: "the fox changes his fur, not his habits"; *viperam sub ala nutricas*: "a viper nursed at the bosom"). Within the animal imaginary, there are also expressions of comparison, as well as antonomastic formulations, often linked to similarly proverbial places.

As Suetonius noted in his treatise *On Insults* (fragment 13, p. 62 Taill.), "many peoples have formulated insults on other peoples in proverbial form." For it is inherent to all cultures of all ages to assign to this or that people (and to this or that country) a certain characteristic, a particular quality—either positive or, more often, negative—which becomes an antonomastic and proverbial symbol.[266] Proverbs that have peoples and places as their protagonists constitute an important category of the great paremiographic repertoire. Alongside those concerning the animal or the pragmatic sphere, they can no doubt testify to a more directly popular genesis and are indicative of profound social and cultural beliefs, common clichés, and anthropologically relevant prejudices. Athens—which, in the 5th century BCE, opened up more than ever to commercial and cultural traffic, thus becoming a key transit point at the crossroads of the Hellenized world (and further afield)—obviously placed itself at the center of this paremiographic circulation. Strabo produced a compilation that transmitted many geographical proverbs to subsequent collections (οὐ παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἐς Κόρινθον ἔσθ' ὁ πλοῦς: "not for every man is the voyage to Corinth"; ἀεὶ φέρει τὶ Λιβύη καινὸν κακόν: "Libya always bears some new evil"). Rome, on the other hand, will not take center stage in proverbs as often as Athens; expressions about Italic cities or people, conversely, are well attested (*quasi eant Sutrium*: "as if they were going to Sutrium"; *Sabini quod volunt somniant*: "the Sabines dream what they will").

Two morphological typologies are represented in this context: standard proverbs and antonomastic expressions, which are particularly congenial to highlight, through an effective connection, the exalted or (more frequently) ridiculed quality of a certain place. If, on the one hand, Athens recurs as a common *locus* in Greek geographical proverbs, on the other hand, it also offers, in an almost unparalleled way, considerable material for the formation of another group of proverbs that was characteristic of that city, insofar as it was appropriate to such a closed and communitarian ancient society: the expressions featuring anecdotal and, in part, historical characters as their protagonists. Walking through the *agora* or in front of the Athenian *lesche* in the 5th century BCE must have been an extraordinary, yet daily, experience for residents. Politicians and philosophers, masters of rhetoric, and artists mingled with the crowds of rowers

[265] Claude Lévi-Strauss' famous definition was taken up by Bettini 1998:219–234, who stresses the importance of animals in man's imagination, pointing out how he tends to construct them on the basis of his own categories, according to a twofold and opposite tendency: on the one hand, the "Aesopization" (i.e. in a manner similar to Aesop's practice, the animal world is treated as a representation of human society), on the other, the "bestiarization" (i.e. the emphasis lies on the animals' wonderful and exceptional characteristics). On animals in Greek proverbs, see Marzucchini 2011: within this category, there is a clear tendency to distribute, according to literary genres and the "noble" or "humble" contexts, proverbs with this or that animal, in an ideal correspondence between the value scale of literary genres and that of animal symbolism that appears to be valid for the entire ancient literary scene.

[266] It would suffice to think of our "to go Dutch" or "British humor" or "to take French leave." The negativity that often characterizes proverbs about other cultures is a sign of the deep nationalistic and xenophobic spirit that lurks in every nation, in every cultural context. The Greeks and Romans, of course, were by no means exempt from these prejudices—quite the contrary!

and peasants. Everyone was within reach. One could also have the chance to meet people, both noble and not, known for their extravagant characteristics or special talents in the restricted environment of the city. In such a community, where everyone knew everything about everyone else, strengths and weaknesses, physical qualities, and anecdotes soon became the talk of the town, slowly turning into antonomastic and, finally, proverb elements. We have a jumble of proverbs featuring the most varied characters—politicians, sycophants, merchants, courtesans—which constitutes one of the most interesting and idiosyncratic paremiographic categories, and by far the most conspicuous one within the scope of the Athenocentric tradition. It is a vast and significant category, but also one of the most problematic, because of both its often unclear connections with literary evidence (see below), and the frequent "speaking names" of its protagonists (Ἀκεσίας ἰάσατο, "he was cured by Acesia"). In Roman culture, expressions with unknown protagonists are much less widespread: the centrality of the *gentes* in the political system of the *civitas* probably enabled proverbs and antonomasias to be forged on episodes related to prominent personalities, who were almost always historically documentable (*uni testi nec Catoni creditum*, "one should not believe a single witness, not even if he is Cato").

The absence of sacred books or of a religious caste and the ambiguous meaning of the very concept of faith make the religious sensibility of the Greeks and Romans something profoundly different, and less radical, than the conceptions of the great monotheistic religions of the Western and Eastern traditions. In the Jewish, Christian, and Arabic cultures, one can find a relevant paremiographic typology centered on characteristics and anecdotes of the god and his prophets, born from popular feeling and from the syncretism of many pre-existing religious traditions with the new universal faiths. Thus, similarly, we will not be surprised by the massive presence, within the Greek and Roman proverb heritage, of maxims and expressions that feature gods and heroes caught in their strengths and weaknesses, in their passions, and in the most disparate events of the myths.

Within this mythological/religious sphere, the most functional morphological typology seems to be that of antonomastic expressions, which exploit, with effectiveness and brevity, a well-known and immediately understandable attribute of the divine (or heroic) character. Proper proverbs are less frequent (ἀεὶ γὰρ εὖ πίπτουσιν οἱ Διὸς κύβοι: "for in dice-play Zeus's throw is always lucky"; *sine Cerere et Libero friget Venus*: "without Ceres and Bacchus, Venus would freeze"). The figure of Heracles/Hercules is particularly present—a hero in other ways popular for his somewhat "burlesque" characteristics, such as gluttony and bravado (οὐδὲ Ἡρακλῆς πρὸς δύο: "against two, not even Heracles"; *Herculi clavam subtrahere*: "to take the club from Hercules").

These, then, are the main thematic categories of the ancient proverb repertoire. Alongside them, or sometimes separate, it is possible to trace other thematic strands which lead to interesting considerations, not least on the basis of the comparison with the repertories of modern cultures.

First of all, the proverbs about women. Traditionally considered the cause of misfortune and danger because of their deceptive charm, women are the negative protagonists of most ancient literary *testimonia*. Ancient culture, as we know, is permeated with misogyny and will be even more so after its syncretism with Christianity. However, it must be stated, the abundance of misogynistic material detectable in the literary tradition is not matched by an equal number of misogynistic proverbs (γυναικὶ μὴ πίστευε, μηδ' ἂν ἀποθάνῃ: "do not believe a woman, even in death"; *mulier recte olet, ubi nihil olet*: "a woman smells sweetest when she smells not at all"). The data are remarkable and lead one to think that the popular culture reflected in proverbs was actually much less misogynistic than the learned and literary culture known in the tradition of *sententiae*. That ancient proverbs are dense with misogyny is, in other words, a cliché to be debunked.

The theme of old age, on the other hand, is much more common: here, proverb tradition and literary tradition seem to coincide. As it has been pointed out,[267] the ancient thought, which is reflected in proverbs, unfolds in two strands: on the one hand, old age is considered a source of wisdom and experience; on the other hand, old people are often marginalized because they are weak and unable to think properly (δὶς παῖδες οἱ γέροντες: "old men are twice children"; *mature fias senex, si diu velis senex esse*: "get old early, if you want to be old for a long time").

[267] Tosi 1995:365–379.

In many other respects, the ancient proverb material is very similar to that of modern cultures, and this is a clear indication of how much the Western proverb tradition seamlessly constitutes a unitary human and cultural *continuum*. There are few contextualizable elements of difference. For instance, a peculiar feature of the Greek tradition is the presence of numerous oracular verses, extrapolated and reused in the form of maxims and proverbs. On the other hand, the scarcity of proverbs belonging to the morphological typology of the calendrical warning is also peculiar: perhaps it fell gradually into disuse due to the obscurity of the references caused by the adoption of new (Christian) calendrical systems and was excluded from the Late Antique paremiographic collections and from authorial quotations.

From the point of view of the (necessarily literary) attestations of the proverbs, it is also possible to follow the diachronic course of different formal and thematic categories. Proverbs about gods and heroes, for instance, can be found to an ever greater extent if we move towards the culturally "cunning" ages: the Hellenistic age, for Greece; the Augustan age, for Rome.

Another phenomenon that can be clearly grasped in the diachronic framework of proverb attestations is the widening of the spatial horizons of the Greek man first, and of Roman man later: the geographical proverbs are a clear indicator of this. From the restricted local sphere offered by archaic Greek lyricists (Archilochus and Alcaeus mention only their nearest islands) or by early Latin authors (Cato and Plautus mention only the towns of Latium or central Italy), we move onto the wider—and more political—world of democratic Athens, and, with the Hellenistic and Roman world, to the Mediterranean (and other) horizons that now range from Britain to the Indus.

If with the Hellenistic age, in Greece, and with the conquest of the Mediterranean, in Rome, the horizon of geographical proverbs widens, conversely, the frequency of anecdotal proverbs, indissolubly linked to the socio-cultural context of the life of the *polis* and the republican *civitas,* decreases almost to the point of disappearing.

In this picture, characterized by variation, there is, however, one constant element: the proverbs with animals and *Realien*, which appear in each period of Graeco-Roman civilization, and concretize the pragmatic and down-to-earth attitude which consistently characterized the ancients. Within this category, a tendency clearly emerges to consciously employ the proverb material with this or that animal or this or that object according to the literary genres and the noble or humble contexts, in an ideal relationship between the value scale of genres and that of animal and material symbolism which remained valid for the entire ancient world.

4. Proverbs and cultural identity

In the field of paremiological and anthropological studies, the proverb has long been analyzed as one of the most significant factors of the cultural identity of a group. Within the globalized world of the last decades, this notion has been even more highlighted.

In the courts of the royal palaces of the Akans in Ghana, it is customary to express oneself in proverbs accompanied by the sound of drums: proverbs codify laws and social prescriptions of an ethnic group, in contrast to different or unaccepted behaviors. Representations of proverbs are carved onto the typical walking sticks of the elders and constitute a further sign of identity.[268] The proverb traditions of Nigeria's three ethnic groups (Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo) are characterized by identity-building elements, and, at the same time, they differ from those of other neighboring populations in a number of expressions that emphasize their brotherhood and common "mythical" origin.[269] The Hadoti region of north-central India expresses its linguistic, cultural, even environmental (i.e. relating to plants and animals) identity, in comparison with other ethnic groups, through its proverb heritage.[270] A similar picture emerges from investigations conducted on the proverb tradition of the Pakpaks, among the oldest ethnic groups in Sumatra: local flora and fauna become identity metaphors.[271] Again on the Indian scene, the incidence of the Punjabi

[268] Asare 2020.
[269] See Usman-Mustafa-Agu 2013; Olanrewaju 2020.
[270] See Dwivedi 2015.
[271] See Ramin 2019.

proverb tradition in the construction of female identity has been analyzed: proverbs of male origin convey the image of a fragile, insecure woman, in need of a husband—elements peculiar to the Punjabi cultural tradition.[272] In the Latin American cultures of Cuba, Mexico, and the West Indies, a tradition dating back to European colonizers has elaborated a repertoire of "negative" proverbial expressions of identity, used to oppose Caribbean natives and African Americans.[273] Finally, there are many cases of crisis of traditional proverb and identity heritage at the expense of the new globalized mass culture conveyed by social media, particularly in those territories and ethnic groups that are in closer contact with technologically advanced societies: among the Tartars of Turkmenistan, for instance,[274] or among the Native Americans in the United States[275] and elsewhere.

To inquire into the identity-building function of the proverb in Greece and Rome, we must inevitably rely on the written accounts of literary authors. We must, therefore, consider the possibility of a distorting lens when it comes to the now lost oral tradition. However, even this distorting lens can offer, in turn, interesting food for thought.

The attitude of educated authors towards proverb imagery is marked, both in Greece and Rome, by the awareness of a cultural superiority with respect to a field of knowledge perceived as popular and explicitly classified as belonging to a lower (δῆμος, *vulgus*), non-urban (ἀγροίκοι, *rustics*), and orally transmitted (λέγουσι, *dicunt*, and others) socio-cultural level. There is also a widespread awareness of the antiquity of the proverb expressions, signaled by adverbs and adjectives which project it into the distant past (πάλαι, παλαιός, *vetus*).

All these semantic markers turn out to be the same ones that ancient authors used to define the area of cultural traits that we now call "popular traditions" or, more synthetically, folklore.[276] From this point of view, proverbs were juxtaposed to beliefs and superstitions, fables and popular medicine, as an ancient and anonymous expression of popular wisdom. As with other aspects of ancient folklore, literary authors have analyzed the proverb tradition from a twofold perspective. In the most ancient *testimonia* we have (Hesiod and the Seven Sages, in Greece; Appius Claudius and a few others in Rome), the proverb was an integral part of an identity that was still socially indistinct (or at least presented as such) and of a wisdom that seemed common to the intellectuals and to the popular tradition. However, after only a relatively short period since these early authors, we see an inexorable change of perspective with respect to the proverb heritage, increasingly conceived as an element that was certainly ancient and true, but belonging to a subordinate culture. This element legitimized a certain detachment, sometimes a blatant irony and, even more, an allusive game with the educated public, who was the recipient of ancient literature. This attitude is detectable from the 5th century BCE in Greece, with Euripides and Aristophanes, and from the 2nd to the 1st century BCE in Rome, with the comedians, and then, above all, with Cicero. Significant, in this perspective, are the positions of many philosophers (starting with Heraclitus) who seem to have dealt with proverb knowledge by disputing it or making adjustments to it, thus using it as a heuristic device (especially Plato). Finally, from the 4th century BCE, they began to preserve it, in a manner that we could define as museum-like, as a widespread and identity-building "ancient knowledge," to be commented upon and preserved (Clearchus, Dicaearchus). Philosophers and, increasingly, poets—also competing with the wise men in the role of educators of the community—will set, in opposition to proverbs (παροιμίαι, *verba*, and *proverbia*), either their own *sententiae* (γνῶμαι) or different ones, re-elaborated on traditional proverb motifs, which will abandon their metaphorical guise and material contents to focus on ethical concepts and terminology. This is the case with Democritus and Epicurus in Greece and with Publilius Syrus and Seneca in Rome.

Therefore, if we look at the *testimonia* and terminology of the ancients, the identity-building function that the proverb heritage played in the common—or, as we would say today, "mass"—culture of the Greeks and Romans was extremely important. The intellectual elite would not have

[272] See Mir 2018.
[273] See Sankhé 2019.
[274] See Yusupova, Mugtasimova, Nabiullina, and Denmukhametova 2015.
[275] See Mieder 2010.
[276] See Lelli 2014:19–40.

taken it into consideration, had it not been a dominant aspect of daily social communication. The comparison with other contemporary cultures offers indisputable material to confirm this picture. Other considerations become necessary if we re-read the history of the presence of the proverb in Greek and Roman authors to underline its identity-building function.

In archaic Greece, as we have noted, the identity-building value of the proverb heritage emerges very clearly in the first centuries of literary sources. The numerous proverb expressions that appear in Hesiod's *Works and Days* constitute an identity-based picture of the pastoral community. The various proverb motifs adopted by the wise men of the 7th-6th centuries BCE, politicians and legislators, respond to the need to institutionalize precepts and oral popular traditions. As we can read between the lines of some Herodotean passages, they also chime with the need to establish a heritage of values common to the different Greek γένη (τὸ Ἑλληνικόν) as compared (and often opposed) to the non-Greek peoples that, in those centuries, had come into close contact with the Hellenic world (Thracians, Persians, Egyptians, Phoenicians). It was probably in this period that the proverb expressions related to the negative portrayal of the ethnically and culturally "different" were born—and they are very numerous in the Greek repertoire. Even in the symposia of the aristocratic classes of the time, the use of proverbs had a predominantly identity-building value: in a metaphorical and allusive political language, proverb expressions represented one of the most effective means of communication to strike the adversary or to mark a situation, even with ironic overtones (Alcaeus, Archilochus, Theognis). At the same time, the codification, first oral and then written, of the fable tradition contributed to establishing another aspect of the identity-building function of the proverb: the symbolic quality of the animals that abundantly feature in the proverb's imagery. Some of these characters are similar to those of other ancient Mediterranean cultures (Mesopotamian, Jewish) and probably draw on a common ancient heritage. The contents expressed by this archaic proverb culture appear to be centered on the respect for one's own limits and for social norms: a sign, perhaps, of the difficult balance between social classes in an age of significant economic and political change.

Another important aspect, in my opinion—and one of immense comparative relevance at that—is to be found in the social status of the authors who constitute our sources: except for a few, they all emigrated from one territory of the Greek world to another (Hesiod, Archilochus, Pythagoras), sometimes they were even exiled (Alcaeus) or born in recently-founded communities (Epicharmus). The use of proverb material in these authors constitutes, not least from this point of view, an element of identity, in opposition to other Hellenic cultural groups or, again, to other peoples, in an analogous way to what happened and is documented for other ethnic realities in different periods, and even today.

The aristocratic Pindar, a contemporary of Heraclitus, is the first in whom one can clearly see an attitude of cultured detachment towards the proverb tradition. Conversely, from Aeschylus onwards, and throughout the rest of ancient literature, the rhetorical use of proverbs to characterize humble characters or those considered as such in social perception (women, the elderly, servants, and peasants) is evident. The lower register makes comedy one of the most proverb-filled genres; but their sly use in Cratinus and Aristophanes reveals that the identity-building function of the proverb tradition was liable to be reinterpreted and reworked in ironic and irreverent ways. The secularization of popular culture and the development of a rationalistic culture within the economically stronger classes, therefore, played an increasingly important role in overcoming the proverb heritage. This occurred in a way that is quite similar to what was happening at the same time in other areas of popular knowledge, such as beliefs, therapeutic practices, and even musical traditions. The comparison with similar phenomena of other cultures and other ages, once again, leads to important discoveries.

The codification of rhetoric as an autonomous discipline, between the 5th and the 4th centuries BCE, relegated the proverb to one of the numerous argumentative tools (and not even among the main ones), especially for its shareability: Aristotle's reflections and the contemporary oratorical practice bear witness to this. An educational function in the training of the wealthy classes was increasingly assigned to the already conspicuous tradition of γνῶμαι, authorial and not, and to extracts from philosophers and various authors, as the explicit remarks of Isocrates and the sources for Socrates show.

In the meantime, between the 4th and the 3rd centuries BCE, as mentioned above, the proverb tradition began to be the object of preservation and commentaries. This fact is relevant because it does not come close to similar forms of preserving related Greek folkloric material (beliefs, superstitions, songs, therapeutic practices), except for the fable. This is a sign, I suppose, that fables and proverbs constitute cultural elements of identity that were more important—and probably more widespread—than others, that were certainly viewed with less suspicion by intellectuals, and that were more familiar from the point of view of social classes.

The Hellenistic age opened with two authors who, in my opinion, reveal a strong identity-building function in their use of proverbs, albeit in their prevailing erudite attitude: Callimachus and Theocritus. In both of them, who had emigrated to the cosmopolitan Alexandria, there is a sense of belonging to an original Hellenic territory whose tradition they intended to (re-)affirm. The basic message that emerges from the proverbs attested in this period reveals the individual's sense of precariousness, the fear of social conflict and poverty; but, at the same time, it underlines the profound value of φιλία, to be understood in a deeper sense as a bond of brotherhood and mutual aid.

In Rome, the first evidence of a proverb tradition that must have been much older appeared only at the end of the 3rd century BCE, and already in the form of *sententiae*. An example is the famous "everyone is a smith of his own destiny," which seems to highlight the social situation of extreme ferment of the time, and which is attributed to Appius Claudius Caecus. It was in the theater—tragedy, comedy, and, later, mime—that a proverb dynamic developed to great proportions, one in which the republican *civitas* found its own identity. The emphasis on property as a value, the respect for family ties and paternal authority, and the insistence on the function of work as a means of achievement and wealth are the fundamental themes of the proverb material attested in this period. They fully reflect the identity characteristics of the expanding Rome that are simultaneously attested by various sources.

Next to the theater, the author who, more than others, bears witness to another important aspect of the Roman proverb tradition, namely its pastoral element, is Cato the Censor, who initiated the important literary and cultural strand of agronomy (followed by Varro and Columella).

Meanwhile, from the 2nd century BCE onwards, Greek culture was growingly penetrating the Roman world, and, with it, the Hellenic proverb tradition. There are many cases of the same proverbs being attested in Greek and Latin, probably independently: these are, I suspect, expressions whose Mediterranean origin goes back, in an oral form, to very remote times. Many more, however, are the proverbs explicitly quoted as Greek proverbs translated by Latin authors, as well as many others directly quoted in Greek, especially from the 1st century BCE. The emphasis on the different cultural origins of the proverb underlines the Roman identity, and it is not by chance that, often, those very Greek proverbs are employed by Latin authors in an ironic way and with an attitude of detachment.

In Rome, too, the proverb tradition had to deal with the progressive affirmation of a gnomic tradition, which was not metaphorical and often authorial. Its first protagonists were the historians (Sallust), who increasingly associate Latin historiography with a moral—if not moralistic—quality. The philosophers, who were less numerous in Rome, and in any case linked to the Greek tradition, join the historians in the elaboration of *sententiae* set in competition with the proverb knowledge, which was considered popular and often overtly contested (Lucretius, Seneca).

It is no coincidence that the first forms of erudite archiving of popular Roman knowledge also emerged in Rome in the 1st century BCE, as an identity-based response to the definitive affirmation of the Hellenizing culture. In the encyclopedias of Verrius Flaccus and Sinnius Capito, later taken up by a lasting lexicographic tradition, considerable space is devoted to proverbs of popular origin, as well as to other forms of folkloric culture such as beliefs and apotropaic practices.

The theoretical arrangement granted to rhetoric in the period between Cicero and Quintilian, in parallel with the Greek tradition, ascribes a marginal role to proverbs, almost exclusively used in a comic or ironic way. This reveals another distinctive feature of the elite culture about what is indeed considered an ancient and truthful element, but still a popular one. In a similar way, the proverb is employed to lower the tone and style, or to insert popular elements, in the refined

poems of Catullus, Virgil, Horace, and Ovid. For these poets, the proverb material is supplanted by *sententiae*, either their own or traditional, but less familiar ones.
The identity-building nature of the proverb attracted the attention of a Greek geographer who emigrated to Rome: Strabo, who collected dozens of local expressions from different Hellenized regions of the Mediterranean in his work. Meanwhile, in the 1st century CE, the fable tradition, too, was codified in Rome by Phaedrus: alongside the revival of the Aesopic tradition, his proverb repertoire—still mainly expressed through animal characters—offers us a critical picture of Roman society at the time, prey to such anti-values as social careerism, injustice, and prevarication of honest people. The same portrayal will be found, shortly thereafter, in the proverb material of Persius and Petronius, and will even be accentuated in that of the conservative Juvenal, at the beginning of the 2nd century CE. Petronius, above all, seems to have preserved the identity-building imagery that was most loyal to the popular culture of that time: the protagonists of his "novel," rich freedmen and prostitutes, express the values of their world, from the obsessive exaltation of material wealth and the *self-made man*, to social envy and the precariousness of the human condition. Petronius' testimony comes close to the precious and contemporary evidence of the proverb graffiti found on the walls of Pompeii and Herculaneum: a scarce one, indeed, but still indicative of an individualistic society, aimed at wealth and profit.
In the schools of all levels, both Greek and Roman, the common learning path was identified in a particular form of gnomic elaboration, the *chreia*, one of its most widespread exercises: the joke of a famous personage was the object of rewriting and memorization, as a grammatical and stylistic test. The emergence of the *chreia*, I believe, definitively contributed to marginalizing the proverb tradition of anonymous and popular origin, thus granting it a rhetorically and stylistically connotative role in literature, and an increasingly socio-culturally humble image within the identity-based imaginary. This is demonstrated by the hundreds of playful allusions to proverb material in the authors of the Second Sophistic, from Apuleius to Lucian.
From the 2nd and 3rd centuries onwards, the gap between learned culture and folklore was definitive, in both Hellenic-speaking and Latin-speaking territories. The cultural identity conveyed by proverbs suffered yet another blow at the hands of the Christianization of the Greco-Roman world. With the Gospel message, expressions of Jewish origins became part of the Late Antique proverb repertoire, thus progressively replacing many ancient proverbs. Yet it was above all Christian authors, in their homilies or epistles, who preserved much of the oral and popular proverb heritage. Through the Middle Ages, this heritage reached the modern age—after being re-adapted from century to century for identity-building functions that were in part different, but that, in any case, focused on the most recurrent elements that ultimately constituted the cornerstones of Greek and Roman proverb culture: the value of mutual aid, the necessity of work, the respect for authority, and the limits imposed by past generations and by nature itself.

5. The reception of Greek and Roman proverb and sententiae short forms

Little more than five centuries have passed since the first printed editions of the most famous Greek paremiographic collections—Zenobius (1497)—and, above all, since the monumental *Adagia* by Erasmus of Rotterdam (1508), which had the merit of putting back into circulation thousands of Greek and Latin expressions that had been obscured by time.
To retrace the reception of the immense ancient proverb and *sententia* heritage in modern Europe and, therefore, in the Western world, would imply retracing the stages of all (or almost all) the cultural, artistic, and literary movements of these five centuries.
Ancient proverb material, especially through the filter of many great authors, had already penetrated the nascent Romance literature: we see it in the *sententiae* of Latin origin present in French poetry and in the Italian vernacular poetry of the 13th century, from Dante to Petrarch;[277] then, we see it again with Humanism and the rediscovery of the classics, from Ariosto to Molière, from Racine to Shakespeare. Proverb intertextuality—as it has been appropriately defined by Renzo Tosi—provides material for poetry, theater, philosophy, historiography, memoirs, and,

[277] It would suffice to think of the song on proverbs: Petrarch, *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta* 105.

finally, for the melodrama and opera of every century. It provides such material even today, in fact: in newspaper headlines, in novels, on the web.

On the other hand, a lesser known—but equally active—oral tradition preserved, through the impervious and often rugged paths of linguistic transmigration, numerous ancient proverb motifs in the dialectal idioms of many European and Mediterranean territories. The continuity between Greek and Roman proverbs and proverbs of modern regional cultures is a field still largely to be explored, but extremely productive and fascinating: parallel to the continuity of the high literary tradition, there emerges an impressive continuity of the popular and oral proverb tradition.[278]

An entire volume would not suffice for either of the two cultural histories of the reception of ancient proverb material—namely, the high literary one and the popular oral one, for they both constitute fundamental chapters of Western civilization. In summary, however, we can trace the history of the cultural impact that the study of ancient collections of proverbs and *sententiae* has had over the last five centuries.

Erasmus' work provided the *impetus* for a flourishing season of paremiographic studies: collections of proverbs linked to both oral and literary tradition were being published all over Europe. Within the proverb imagery, they looked for the "wisdom of the peoples" and the spirit of the renascent nationalities, but also for an archetypal repertoire of freedom of speech and unbridled naivety—one that was detached from the canons of the Counter-Reformation and the official "classicist" culture. While Rabelais made the protagonists of his *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532) travel across a fantastic sea where they came across the "island of Proverbs," the Dutch artist Bruegel the Elder produced one of his most idiosyncratic paintings, the *Netherlandish Proverbs* (1559), which portrayed about 120 proverbial expressions, often involving useless, impossible, bizarre, or wildly immoral actions.

Meanwhile, the scholarly work on ancient Greek collections continued. The first (and still fundamental) modern edition, that of Andreas Schott, with the last extant Latin translation[279] and a philological commentary, dates back to 1612. However, the attention to the popular and folkloric elements of the nations (suffice to think of Giambattista Vico), was about to be marginalized by the Enlightenment culture and the radical Classicism of the 18th century.

In fact, we have to wait more than two centuries to register a new cultural interest in proverb material, both ancient and modern, on the part of a new movement which, more than ever, placed the popular and genuine element of the spirit at the center of its worldview: Romanticism. While the Grimm brothers, in Germany, were compiling their monumental repertory of fairy tales and folk tales (1812–1822), while scholars such as Giuseppe Giusti in Tuscany (1852), Giovanni Spano in Sardinia (1852), and Giuseppe Pitrè in Sicily (1880) were establishing the proverb heritage of their lands in collections that are still irreplaceable, scholars—especially German ones—who were trained on the new assumptions of historicism and were free from the classicist exclusivism of the Enlightenment, gave life to the densest season of paremiographic studies of all time.

It was an Englishman, Thomas Gaisford, who initiated this season, publishing an edition of the *Paroemiographi Graeci* (1836) which included the Bodleian and Diogenian editions, alongside Zenobius' vulgate. Three years later, two very young German scholars from the University of Göttingen, Friedrich Wilhelm Schneidewin and Ernst Ludwig von Leutsch, in their early thirties, produced the edition of the Greek paremiographers that to this very day is still a point of reference: one that included all the Late Antique and Byzantine syllogies (*CPG*: *Corpus Paroemiographorum Graecorum*). The work, begun by Schneidewin, was continued by Leutsch alone, after the premature death of his colleague, to whom we owe the preface and Zenobius' edition. Their work was in some ways pioneering, though certainly not backed up by a series of preliminary studies on the manuscript tradition; nevertheless, their edition, though not always reliable, still constitutes an indispensable point of reference for scholars.

In 1868, E. Miller had made known the Athoa edition of Zenobius; thus, a new edition of the Greek paremiographers was planned, a few decades later, by two German scholars: Otto Crusius

[278] On this, see Lelli 2008a; Lelli 2014.

[279] Previously, in 1584, Giuseppe Giusto Scaligero had compiled a collection of metrical proverbs from Zenobius, with a Latin version.

and Leopold Cohn. The former, a multifaceted personality devoted to the study of popular culture, the editor of Herondas and a connoisseur of the fable tradition, produced, at a very young age, a series of fundamental works on paremiographers. The latter, an expert in manuscripts, lexicography, and Greek grammarians, had inspected numerous *codices* in search of new textual evidence on the paremiographers.[280] From their teaching, especially that of Crusius, a school of scholars emerged that, between 1880 and 1910, produced an impressive series of repertories, studies, and disparate works on proverbs in Greek and Roman antiquity: dozens of dissertations that, even today, represent the only point of reference for many ancient authors. The extraordinary work *Die Sprichwörter und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten der Römer* (1890) by August Otto was added to this profusion of studies. Therefore, Crusius and Cohn prepared themselves, with enthusiasm and with the help of these forces, for the titanic enterprise mentioned above when, between 1915 and 1918, the end of the *Belle époque* and of the Central Empires and, with them, of the greatest season of Prussian philology, abruptly and dramatically vanquished that dream with their death.

Thereafter, in the field of *Altertumswissenschaft*, the study of Greek and Roman proverbs was marked for many years by disinterest, which only recently seems to be coming to an end. In the last few decades, a few fierce scholars have rediscovered the ancient paremiographic and proverb tradition in general, especially Winfried Bühler in Germany and in USA, Renzo Tosi in Italy, Fernando García Romero in Spain. Over the last twenty years, I have tried to contribute to this rediscovery with individual and collective works that can document the fascinating world of ancient proverbs, even for non-specialists.

A further impulse to the analysis of this important area of ancient culture may come, I suspect, from the combination of the philological and literary approach with other disciplines. First of all, of course, with modern paremiology and paremiography, which now have a definite place in the international scientific scene through specialized journals, documentary collections, and bibliographies. Secondly, with the contribution of other fields of knowledge which are consistently drawn in by the world of proverbs—a sign of a high cultural potential and rich perspectives.

Linguistics and semiotics, most of all, have paid particular attention to the definition of proverb structures and to the recognition of recurrent elements from a morphological point of view, as well as to dialectal attestations and spatio-temporal variants in proverb material.

Anthropological and folklore studies, likewise, assign to the proverb a role of primary importance for the reconstruction of social and family relationships, as well as the economic and practical life of a people. They have also investigated the proverbs' transition from oral to written tradition. Another very important field of analysis is the relationship between the fable and the proverb: two popular traditions that often intersect and interpenetrate.

Psychology and psychoanalysis are interested in proverbs as revealing indicators of social attitudes and conventions and generational relations. Proverbs are also used as analytical tools for psychiatric tests.

Historical sciences have traced in many proverbs various social and cultural conceptions, which are interesting for the reconstruction of social mentalities that form the background to the relationships between peoples and nations, particularly with regard to phenomena such as colonialism or wars.

Scholars and historians of religion were the first to attempt a cultural comparison of ethical *sententiae* and didactic expressions, in search of a common "wisdom of the peoples."

The pedagogical and didactic aspects of proverbs have also been explored, and modern pedagogy has underlined their value in the context of traditional and popular education. Ancient collections of proverbs, after all, were often created as learning tools in schools, as we have seen.

Even art scholars have been interested in proverb imagery, which was often the iconographic subject of paintings and tapestries in the modern age, up to caricatures and contemporary comics.

In the future, I believe, it will be appropriate to place paremiological research on ancient civilization within this interdisciplinary perspective, as it is a fundamental element of the current scholarship on proverbs.

[280] Most of their studies were collected in the *Supplements* to *CPG*.

The challenge of future paremiology, according to the opinion of the most authoritative scholars, is the establishment of an international database that collects for purposes of comparison the proverb expressions of the most diverse cultures of the world, from old Europe to the Far East, from the Americas to Africa. In this way, we could perhaps reach the definition of a "minimum repertoire" of *universal proverbs*, and the reconstruction of the heritage of human wisdom, which is all the more radical and effective because it is polygenetic. This would finally build a solid and safe bridge between cultures, thus overcoming the constraints of time and space that have too often hindered—and continue to hinder—communication between peoples.

Greek and Roman proverbs, in this perspective, might—or must—play a decisive role: ancient proverbs for the third millennium.

Emanuele Lelli

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