

## PLATO'S DIALOGUES: MIDDLE ACADEMY'S THESAURUS

Ramón Román Alcalá has fairly stated that the Works of Plato is the starting point for Arcesilaus' particular way of philosophizing, and quoting Diogenes Laertius he translates: «He certainly seems to have admired Plato, and he had acquired his books» (D. L., IV, 32-33)<sup>1</sup>. I agree with that statement, but I respectfully disagree with his own rendering *ad verbum* of the corresponding Greek phrase which reads: «he had acquired his books». Of course, Román's translation has been supported by previous similar ones. For instance, Robert Drew Hicks translated it thus: «He would seem to have held Plato in admiration, and he possessed a copy of his works» (ἐώκει δὴ θαυμάζειν καὶ τὸν Πλάτωνα καὶ τὰ βιβλία ἐκέκτητο αὐτοῦ, IV, 32-33)<sup>2</sup>. On the light shed by both these translations, it seems to any one interested in Arcesilaus' very own philosophy that Román's rendering is good enough to convey the *denotation* of the Greek passage in Laertius' text. But what about its *connotation*?

My disagreement lies in the fact that I object to such a literal translation. Román's interpretation of it has been reinforced by his translation of D. L., IV, 32-33, and *vice versa*. In his own words:

«However, this passage has yet to be clarified. The claim that Arcesilaus personally possessed Plato's works is certainly interesting. It is clear that in addition to Plato's manuscripts, some written copies of Plato's works existed in the Academy and that Arcesilaus, as head of the Academy, would have had easy access to them. If this is so, why say such a thing? Why the decision to personally acquire Plato's βιβλία? The answer is either extremely simple or exceptionally complex. If we opt for the first, we confirm Arcesilaus' wish to avoid a certain amount of inconvenience (which we have all experienced) in consulting Plato's works by making or having made his own copy of them for use at his own convenience without having to resort to borrowing the works from the Academy's library. The answer to the second question is not as simple»<sup>3</sup>.

1. The Skepticism of the New Academy: A Weak Form of Platonism? *Philosophical Inquiry. An International Quarterly*, Volume 25, Number 3/4, 2003, p. 212, n. 35.

2. DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, translated by R. D. Hicks, Cambridge, Mass./London, Harvard U.P., Loeb Classical Library, 1995, vol. 1, p. 409. A. A. LONG and D. N. SEDLEY's translation resembles Hicks': «He certainly seems to have admired Plato, and he had acquired his books». *The Hellenistic Philosophers. Translations of the Principal Sources, with Philosophical Commentary*, vol. 1, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., p. 439.

3. Cf. *op. cit.* (n. 1), p. 205.



Each question is actually not so simple as it seems to be. His first explanation looks somehow insufficient to me, in spite of being plainly true in our profession. However, I shall put forward a plausible and complementary alternative for his rendering.

I suggest changing the aforementioned *ad verbum* translation of the verb ἐκέκτητο, in terms of meaning «he bought or acquired», to the following one *ad sensum*: «he treasured, or made a treasure of», Plato's books. For Arcesilaus, Plato's works, as Thucydides' unique history *On the Peloponnesian War*, are an invaluable *treasure for all time*: κτῆμα ἐς αἰεί<sup>4</sup>. I preliminarily propose this new translation: «He certainly seems to have admired Plato, and he had treasured his books», or «he made of Plato's works a [or, his own] Treasure». Perhaps, Arcesilaus and his platonic disciples had been responsible, as some scholars have proposed, for having edited Plato's *Dialogues* and *Letters*. Román supports the past existence of such an edition of Plato's works:

«Hence, it is likely that in Arcesilaus' time it was necessary to clarify this disconcerting panorama under the auspices of «indirect tradition». According to Wilamowitz and Bickel, a complete edition of Plato's work ordered into tetralogies was authorized by the Academy in the third century B.C.; precisely at the time when Arcesilaus was a scholarch or immediately thereafter. It is quite possible, then, that it was Arcesilaus himself who ordered the works to be edited. Although it is true that the edition included several interpolations, spurious writings in the *corpus* of the tetralogies, its authoritative character and excellence are not so much a result of its grammatical semantics, but the fact that Plato's legacy was able to survive in the Academy for so long»<sup>5</sup>.

Needless to say that this is a way to *treasure* Plato's writings. Obviously, to have accomplished that editing task, Arcesilaus' Middle Academy students, in charge of making a κτῆμα ἐς αἰεί out of Plato's writings, had previously to possess in their own hands the scrolls containing Plato's Works. But probably Arcesilaus did not need to buy a copy of Plato's books, since most likely, as Leonardo Tarán has sustained, in the Academy there was a set of Plato's Works. Arcesilaus' Middle Academy has been accredited by some scholars to have rearranged thematically Plato's *Dialogues* (resembling the edition of Greek Tragedies) in *tetralogias*, such as, for example, *Platonis Dialogi Secundum Thrasylli Tetralogias Dispositi*<sup>6</sup>. Arcesilaus' Middle Academy admired so much Plato's books, that they edited, treasured and composed a *thesaurus* out of them all (Plato's *Pseudographica*). For example, the compilation of *Platonic Definitions* turns to be a little *thesaurus*. On the contrary, for Tarán: «Surely the fact that Arcesilaus admired Plato and acquired a copy of his works (DIOGENES LAERTIUS, IV 32); *Acad. Philos. Index Hercul.*, XIX 14-16 [Mekler] is not evidence that he edited Plato»<sup>7</sup>. Long and Sedley did not go so far, but, commenting D. L., 4, 32-33, have said that Arcesilaus probably possessed Plato's own manuscripts and lectured

4. Thucydides says: «But those who will want to look into the truth of things past and future (since, as in all human matters, those will be the same or similar to these), they will judge my work useful. Indeed, it is more an enduring possession than the entry into a contest, something to be enjoyed in passing» (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1, 12, 4 [*loc. cit.* Ilaria MARCHESI *The art of Pliny's letters: a poetics of allusion in the private correspondence*, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 2008, p. 167]).

5. Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 206.

6. L. TARÁN, *The Manuscript Tradition of Plato's Phaedo, Collected Papers* (1962-1999), Leiden - Boston - Köln, Brill, 2001, p. 281.

7. Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 282, n. 7.



on them, which could explain the fanciful suggestion of Sextus Empiricus (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1, 232-234) that he transmitted Platonic doctrines to suitable pupils<sup>8</sup>. Notwithstanding, it seems to Augustine of Hippo not so fanciful at all.

According to Saint Augustine, the Academics used to *conceal* his own platonism like a *treasure* under the earth, in order to be ultimately revealed to those apt disciples who have showed themselves worthy of Plato's *Mysteria*. Laertius' employ of ἐκέκρητο fits harmoniously to Arcesilaus' favourite *modus docendi*. Unfortunately, Román is reluctant to grant any credit to the hermeneutical hypothesis of Arcesilaus' Secret Platonism<sup>9</sup>. It seems to me that he thinks it was a misunderstanding stemming from the conflict between Philo of Larissa and his disciple Antiochus of Ascalon, whose commitment with the Stoicism Cicero preferred rather than Philo's antagonism against his disciple's stoicizing of Plato's Philosophy. And that stoicizing Platonism was supposed to be for Augustine of Hippo the Old Academy Philosophy which was used by him as, so to speak, a *pia fraus* to bring authority and prestige upon his Christian religion as the culmination of a natural theology like the one in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica*.

I don't think that Augustine's testimony on Arcesilaus' Secret Platonism was a personal guess wrongly based, of that african Bishop of Hippo, or founded, on some of Cicero's confused texts. Augustine, from his *Contra academicos* till his *Enchiridion* (without ruling out two important letters of him), confesses that he has never attempted to refute the Academics' Philosophy on those subject-matters they had successfully refuted the Stoic pantheism, sensualism, and materialism. Reasonably, I am not so fond of the vague idea that it was possible for Plato's *Dialogues* and *Letters* either to have ever disappeared from the Academy, or been neglectfully unread, or out of anyone of its Directors' hands, at least till Arcesilaus. And, in spite of my obvious difference with Tarán's opinion that Arcesilaus' having admired Plato and acquired a copy of his works doesn't amount to be evidence that Arcesilaus' Middle Academy has edited Plato, I agree with his statements saying:

«The Academy must surely have possessed copies of Plato's dialogues, and there is no reason to think these copies were not reliable, even if they were not Plato's own autographs. The first generation of Plato's students, including Aristotle, was intimately acquainted with his works and it is reasonable to suppose that they were to be found in the Academy. Moreover, the evidence we have leads to the conclusion that the unfinished *Critias* and the posthumous *Laws* were published after Plato's death and that the editors did not tamper with the text (cf. L. TARÁN, *Academica: Plato, Philip of Opus, and the Pseudo-Platonic Epinomis*, Philadelphia 1975, pp. 128-133). The editor of the *Laws*, Philip of Opus, was a member of the Academy and it is reasonable to suppose that the same thing is true of the editor of the *Critias*. It is, therefore, appropriate to infer that the Academy took an interest in the preservation of the *ipsissima verba* of Plato»<sup>10</sup>.

How could it be possible to Crantor of Solis, for instance, to have composed a commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, if Plato's writings were somehow almost unavailable for him at the Academy? At least, we must recognize that Román has admitted the pos-

8. Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 445.

9. R. ROMÁN ALCALÁ, *El enigma de la Academia de Platón*, Servicio de Publicaciones, Universidad de Córdoba, 1994, pp. 80-81.

10. Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 282, n. 6.



sibility that Arcesilaus did really have his own copy of Plato's Works (probably inherited from his immediate antecedents, Polemo, Crates, or Crantor, his teachers and, at the same time, intimate friends):

«It is therefore likely that Arcesilaus referred solely and exclusively to the Books of Plato in his attempt to clarify what must have been a very confusing situation indeed. This would explain Diogenes' curious and yet explicit reference to the fact that Arcesilaus possessed or had acquired (ἐκέκτητο) his books. That Diogenes chose to use the verb ἐκέκτητο, the pluperfect of the verb κτάομαι, hints at Arcesilaus' very personal relationship with Plato's books. Whether Arcesilaus bought the books or had a copy of them made for his personal use, we have the sensation that Arcesilaus wanted to mitigate the philosophical views that were inconsistent with Plato's written doctrine. Arcesilaus' efforts to keep Plato's written discourse and the λόγοι Σωκρατικοί that it contained may have been a response to the enormous confusion that abounded regarding prevailing theories, hence Diogenes Laertius' claim that Arcesilaus was a bridge between Plato and the Late Academy of Lacydes and Carneades»<sup>11</sup>.

*Plausibly, handing down the Founder's Works to the next successor in the archonship of the Academy was an official act of his legitimacy as a living link in the great chain of platonic philosophical tradition.* Hence, ἐκέκτητο should be interpreted also *ad sensum* as having Arcesilaus turned to be the Head of the Academy. Echoing of *Theaetetus*' metaphor of the Great Golden Chain of the Sun (153c 2-153d 5; cf. HOMER, *Iliad*, 8, 18).

There is another feasible reason for Laertius-Arcesilaus' use of the verb ἐκέκτητο. It's a reminiscent of some memorable lines of Plato's *Theaetetus*, Aristocles' «*Kehre*» to his Master's Scepticism<sup>12</sup>, cyphered in Irony and *Docta Ignorantia*. Any knowledge is some sort of grasping. Opinion is to knowledge, as possessing is to having. According to that Socrates, there is a difference between «to possess» and «to have». For example, anyone could buy a book and so be his or her owner, but if the book remains unread, then it has not been had by the owner, or possessor. In order *to have* rather than *to possess* the bought, or acquired, book, it has to *be read*. Some of the books we have bought have been so delightfully readable, that they have been reread several times, committed to memory as to repeat some portions of them by heart, and ultimately rewritten *with originality* in our own works. For Plato's Socrates, a library is like an aviary. Laertius' reference at 4, 32-33 points out to those passages in the late Platonic *Theaetetus*.

Evangelos Moutsopoulos epitomizes masterfully Plato's aviary-knowledge simile for the sake not only of the History of Philosophical Ideas, but also for the synchronical vindication of the role of imagination in that human phenomenon we are fond of calling «knowledge»:

«Effectively, true opinion lies between ignorance and science, and false opinion lies in an inferior level which is intermediate between ignorance and true opinion; this is what differentiates it from the latter, to which however it is approximated, due to its nature, since it is false only by accident; thus according to the *Theaetetus*, the pigeon-breeder who, penetrating into his dove-cot tries, amongst the agitation caused by his presence, to capture a precise pigeon, finally captures another one (197a ff.). It is in this sense

11. Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 206.

12. Cf. LONG & SEDLEY, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 445.



that the opinion is compared to ignorance and science to wisdom (*Rep. IV*, 444a). False opinion evaluates non beings as beings (*Soph.*, 240d), not only imaginary forms (*Soph.*, 260e), which are false by definition. At this level, the notion of the imaginary will not be rehabilitated until Plotinus and, over all, until Proclus. In effect, it is within late neoplatonism that the non being loses its absolute and irreducible character, this being rooted into Plato's initiative appearing in the *Sophist* (264e). If, however, the imaginary still remains a non being for Plotinus, Proclus converts it into a *quasi* being<sup>13</sup>.

Eros as archi-philosopher in Plato's *Symposium* guides us to look for a *sublime acquisition* preceded by its corresponding *possession* and *having*. Therein lies the role of imagination, not only in Platonic philosophies, but also in Neoplatonic ones.

As Aristotle has wisely asserted: «The acquisition (κτησις) of this knowledge, however, must in a sense result in something which is the reverse of the outlook with which we first approached the inquiry» (*Met.*, 983 a 22).<sup>14</sup> That is to say, if Arcesilaus began his own *acquisition* of a somehow Socratic-Sceptic philosophy by having admired and acquired Plato's Writings, either by having firstly bought or edited them all (which implies Arcesilaus' admiration), he must, in a particular sense, culminate in something which synthesized the opposite of his original endeavours, namely: *His well-read acquisition of Plato's so admired Writings as his own Thesaurus*, with all the implications we have suggested till now: *To Know Plato's Works by heart and for all time*. That's the reason why Arcesilaus never wrote any book on platonic philosophy: *They all have been very well written by Plato*. Arcesilaus had been unceasingly rewriting Aristocles' *Dialogues*, each time the *disputatio in utramque partem* took place as his remaking-it of Socrates' maieutics. It's not enough for Plato's Socrates to possess firstly and then to have it; to accomplish the task of self-realization by means of Platonic philosophy it is necessary to return to the former's possessing *via* having had, or read, as premier *Treasuring*: «Reproaching him, someone, that it was not necessary for the philosopher to fall in love, the philosopher Arcesilaus replied: *Indeed, it is necessary to possess him, rather than to be possessed by him*» (*Gnomologium Vaticanum*, STERNBACH 65)<sup>15</sup>. Consequently, for the Pitanaeus, Head-in-Chief of the so called Middle Academy, it would have been more opportune not to be possessed by Plato's Works (*i.e.*, left them all unread by Arcesilaus himself and his mostly apt pupils), but to possess Plato's *Complete Works*, by having read, edited and reenacted the genuine Socratic platonism, together with his devoted students. In sum, τὰ βιβλία ἐκέκτητο αὐτοῦ means to me that Arcesilaus treasured, or made his own philosophical *Thesaurus* out of, Plato's Works, ... α κτήμα ἐς αἰεί.

Rubén SOTO RIVERA  
 (Puerto Rico)

13. Evangelos MOUTSOPOULOS has kindly provided me with the English translation of these lines of his own book *Filosofía de la Cultura Griega*, trad. de Carlos A. Salguero-Talavera, Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2004, p. 82.

14. *Metaphysics. Books I-IX*, translated by Hugh Tredennick, Cambridge, Mass. / London, Harvard U.P., Loeb Classical Library, 1996, p. 15.

15. Hans Joachim METTE, *Zwei Akademiker heute: Krantor und Arkesilaos, Lustrum*, Jahrgang 1984 / Band 26, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, p. 62, fr. 15 (*Translation of the above quoted verses is my own*).