

MARTINA VENUTI

The Hidden Truth behind Names:  
Saturnus in the Etymological Interpretation of Late Latin Authors

*In the late Latin world, a crucial role in using etymology and in providing us information about etymologizing (and the general debate around this topic) is played by grammarians, commentators, teachers, mythographers, encyclopaedists, Neoplatonists, Christian apologists and writers, who developed these issues and whose influence on later approaches was enormous. Focusing on the etymology of Saturnus, the paper deals with the scope and purposes of etymologizing in late Latin authors.*

*Il lavoro si focalizza sul caso esemplare dell'etimologia di Saturnus fornita in età tardoantica dagli autori latini: grammatici, commentatori, mitografi, apologeti, enciclopedisti rivestono un ruolo cruciale nel fornirci informazioni riguardo all'uso (e al riuso) dell'etimologia nel corso dei secoli. Le loro interpretazioni, estremamente influenti sugli sviluppi successivi, mostrano una chiara stratificazione di testi e approcci, che di volta in volta si adattano ai nuovi contesti culturali.*

*Etymologia, quae verborum originem inquiri, a Cicerone dicta est 'notatio', quia nomen eius apud Aristotelen invenitur symbolon (σύμβολον) [De int. 2], quod est 'nota'. Nam verbum ex verbo ductum, id est veriloquium, ipse Cicero qui finxit reformidat. sunt qui vim potius intuiti 'originationem' vocent. Haec habet aliquando usum necessarium, quotiens interpretatione res de qua quaeritur eget, ut cum M. Caelius se esse hominem frugi vult probare, non quia abstinens sit (nam id ne mentiri quidem poterat), sed quia utilis multis, id est fructuosus, unde sit ducta frugalitas. Ideoque in definitionibus adsignatur etymologiae locus [Quint. inst. I 6,28]*

«In different times and at different places, etymology has meant slightly or entirely different things to the few or many people who, under varying sets of circumstances, have used that word, applying it to their own spheres of interests»<sup>1</sup>. Should we give today a generic definition of 'etymology', we could say that it is the origin of a word identified through a scientific study of its phonetic, morphologic, semantic history. In ancient times, the situation appears perhaps more complicated: the debate raised within what we can generally define as Language Studies (philosophy of language, science of language, grammar studies, rhetoric studies, commentaries, meta-poetic practices) shows that, in the Greek-Roman world, the definition of etymology itself and the practices of etymologizing assumed several meanings and uses, with a number of differing shades. «Etymology was a respected mode of philosophical argument [...] practiced by Plato and Aristotle»<sup>2</sup>; «the

<sup>1</sup> Malkiel 1993, IX.

<sup>2</sup> Dyck 2003, 56. See e.g. Plato's *Cratylus*, a crucial work in this respect: O'Hara 1996, 17 and n. 65; Long 2005.

oldest Greek and Hebrew writings take for granted that proper names can conceal and reveal the character and fates of their bearers»<sup>3</sup>. In the sixth century B.C. Theagenes of Rhegium had applied the physical allegorism to the poetic text trying to ‘save’ Homer’s gods<sup>4</sup>; the same exegetical approach was taken up later by Stoics with the support of etymology: «Stoic etymological thought exercised profound influence, both directly, through Stoic teachers and etymologists, and indirectly, through the impact of Stoic thought on the commentaries on the poets»<sup>5</sup>. This tradition had a great influence, *e.g.* on Alexandrian scholar-poets and, consequently, on later Roman authors: etymology was a refined tool of the poetic and rhetoric technique so that, thanks to their deep erudition, Latin poets offered in their lines effective wordplays, onomatopoeias, assonances and paronomasias based on a strong etymological consciousness. On the other hand, grammarians and teachers dealt with etymology as an important didactic, theoretical and exegetical tool: in this respect, Aelius Stilo and his pupils, Varro and Cicero, are some of the most important authors between the 2nd and 1st century BC, who deeply influenced the following generations of writers.

In the late Latin world and on the basis of this background, a crucial role in using etymology and in providing us information about etymologizing (and the general debate around this topic) is played by grammarians, commentators, teachers, Neoplatonists, Christian apologists and writers, mythographers, encyclopaedists, who developed these issues «in richness, strength and boldness»<sup>6</sup> and whose influence on later approaches was enormous<sup>7</sup>.

The excerpt quoted above as a small hint of this fascinating topic reproduces a famous text taken from the first book of *Institutio oratoria* by Quintilian: in a passage clearly inspired by Cicero’s *Topica*<sup>8</sup>, he speaks about etymology and gives

<sup>3</sup> Barney 2006, 11; see also Opelt 1966, col. 797-844.

<sup>4</sup> Biondi 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Long 1992, 58-66; O’Hara 1996, 20-21; Ramelli 2004, 458-478; Allen 2005, 14-55.

<sup>6</sup> Gualandri 2017, 125; Maltby 2003, 104: «The works of the ancient grammarians and commentators provide our best source of explicit ancient etymologies in Latin». See also Marangoni 2007, XX-XXXIII.

<sup>7</sup> Some references: Curtius 1953, 495-500; Agozzino 1972, 7-14; Kaster 1988; Brunet 2016; Zetzel 2018.

<sup>8</sup> See Cic. *top.* 35 *Multa etiam ex notatione sumuntur. Ea est autem, cum ex vi nominis argumentum elicitur; quam Graeci ἐτυμολογίαν appellant, id est verbum ex verbo veriloquium; nos autem novitatem verbi non satis apti fugientes genus hoc notationem appellamus, quia sunt verba rerum notae. Itaque hoc quidem Aristoteles σύμβολον appellat, quod Latine est nota. Sed cum intellegitur quid significetur, minus laborandum est de nomine.* See also GLK VII [Ter. Scaur. *De orth.*] 12,6.

a definition of it as «the study that looks for the origin of the words» (*verborum originem inquiri*), but he also refers to different meanings. In particular, he mentions those who devise etymology and use it as a rhetoric tool for supporting their own interpretation of things or their own argumentation; he also underlines the importance of etymology as an essential element of the *ratio*, such as one of the constitutional features of the correct *sermo*<sup>9</sup>. Quintilian's text clearly shows that «the debate and contestation of etymologizing interpretation was an important activity for many Romans»<sup>10</sup>. So, before delving into late Latin examples of etymologizing practices and references, trying to understand their main attitudes and aims, it would be useful to enquire further into some of the most authoritative voices of that debate.

The loss of a significant portion of the *De lingua Latina* by Varro is of course a *vulnus* in this kind of studies, since this work has been rightly given credit for providing Augustan literature (prose and poetry) and later authors with a large amount of 'linguistic' information and a meaningful discussion about etymologizing. However, thanks to the extant section and later witnesses, we can access many examples and references given by Varro, generally based on a Stoic line, shared with his *magister* Aelius Stilo. At the beginning of *De lingua Latina* Book V<sup>11</sup>, Varro announces the contents of that book, which will deal with *duae naturae uniuscuiusque verbi*, with particular attention to *cur et unde sint verba*: Greek authors call this ἐτυμολογία. Varro differentiates between this part and the second one (investigating *in qua re vocabulum sit impositum*), which is, according to Greek tradition, περὶ σημαιομένων. Then, he provides his readers with an explanation of etymology, and «distinguishes four levels of etymologizing: one accessible to the ordinary person, one to the grammarian, one to the philosopher, and the fourth, where the text is corrupt and the thought almost mystical, that of the *ady-*

<sup>9</sup> Quint. I 6,1. See also Ax 2011, 230-232.

<sup>10</sup> Hinds 2006, 6. On the Quintilian's text, see Ax 2011, 273-275.

<sup>11</sup> Varro *ling.* V 1-2 *Quemadmodum vocabula essent imposita rebus in lingua Latina, sex libris exponere institui. De his tris ante hunc feci quos Septumio misi: in quibus est de disciplina, quam vocant* ἐτυμολογικήν: *quae contra ea<math>m</math> dicerentur, volumine primo, quae pro ea, secundo, quae de ea, tertio. In his ad te scribam, a quibus rebus vocabula imposita sint in lingua Latina, et ea quae sunt in consuetudine apud populum et ea quae inveniuntur apud poetas. Cum unius cuiusque verbi naturae sint duae, a qua re et in qua re vocabulum sit impositum (itaque a qua re sit pertinacia cum requiritur, ostenditur esse a pertendo; in qua re sit impositum dicitur cum demonstratur, in quo non debet pertendi et pertendit, pertinaciam esse, quod in quo oporteat manere, si in eo perstet, perseverantia sit), priorem illam partem, ubi cur et unde sint verba scrutantur, Graeci vocant* ἐτυμολογίαν, *illam alteram* περὶ σημαιομένων. *De quibus duabus rebus in his libris promiscue dicam, sed exilius de posteriore.*

*tum et initia regis*, which he hoped to reach»<sup>12</sup>. According to an effective definition given by Amsler in 1989, the aim of an etymologist like Varro is to «reverse the dynamic of *declinatio* and perform an archaeology in order to recover the immanent meaning»<sup>13</sup>. Varro enriches his argumentation with many examples taken from different authors: Aristophanes of Byzantium, Cleanthes, Chrysippus, Antipater of Tarsus, Democritus and Epicurus, Apollodorus of Athens and others, defining a rich repository of information, spread and re-used by many following authors<sup>14</sup>.

As everyone knows, Varro addressed a remarkable part of his *De lingua Latina* to Cicero, who, in turn, dedicated a great section of his *De natura deorum* to a treatise on Stoic allegorizing, set in Book II, where Balbus presents Stoic theology and a long series of allegorical etymologies of gods' names. Using etymology, myths and gods can be led back by allegorists to their original, true meaning, connected with the nature and the 'real world': so, a 'physical allegorism' was supported by etymological analysis<sup>15</sup>. Cicero's role in spreading this exegetical approach is really important, since he did not merely translate his Stoic sources, but he 'romanised' their content both by including Balbo's argument into the general architecture of *De natura deorum* – trying, this way, to be more effective in seeking for the favour of his readership – and by using Latin equivalents for a number of Greek gods' names (e.g. Uranus, Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Ares, Athena, Artemis, etc.), or even by using purely Roman deities. Cicero did not truly want to support the Stoic case – in fact, Cotta will be responding, sometimes strongly, against it within Book III – but he wanted to show how etymology can help in understanding the real nature of Roman gods<sup>16</sup>. This was the same cultural assumption that we find in Cornutus, the 1st century A.D. Stoic philosopher-etymologist who wrote an important and influent *Compendium* (Ἐπιδρομή) of the *Tradition of Greek Theology*, worth to be (at least) mentioned here<sup>17</sup>.

Many years later, in early 6th century A.D., in his exegetical work about Greek mythology, the North African allegorist Fulgentius explicitly shows (and refers to) this approach as his model. Fulgentius is one of those authors who played a pivotal role in the transition from a mythological/pagan view to a moral/Christian one. Of course, the Stoic tradition of textual exegesis, integrated with Neoplatonic influences and apologetic aims, perfectly fitted the new purposes of his time: Fulgentius' *Mythologies* are a collection of fifty *fabulae* introduced to the reader

<sup>12</sup> O'Hara 1996, 49 referring to Varro *ling.* V 7-9.

<sup>13</sup> Amsler 1989, 29; Zetzler 2018, 31-46.

<sup>14</sup> O'Hara 1996, 48-49.

<sup>15</sup> Long 1992, 52-53.

<sup>16</sup> Dyck 2003, 56-63.

<sup>17</sup> Most 1989; Long 1992, 53-57; Ramelli 2004, 277-313.

through a moralizing interpretation predominantly based on a (para)etymologic decomposition of names. A wide and complex prologue introduces the fables<sup>18</sup>.

From the specific point of view of the present paper, this prologue is particularly interesting because in it Fulgentius brings into play Cicero<sup>19</sup> and declares his didactic and philosophical goal: to show the inconsistency of the Greek *fabulosum commentum* and, as a consequence, to reveal the truth hidden behind words (especially divine and proper names) used in the mythological literature. In doing that, Fulgentius gives us a remarkable clue about his work, which is the result of a long stratification of other intermediate texts, most of them belonging to the tradition of late Latin commentaries, treatises, school-texts, where the etymological material flows like a river along a centuries-old path. So, let's give an example of this 'stratification': which etymology does Fulgentius provide, from where (from which kind of sources) does he likely derive it, and which is the final elaboration he proposes to his readership (and to us)?

I will take for this purpose a traditional and very popular mythological figure: Saturnus. Fulgentius tells the story at the beginning of *Mythologiae's* first book: his exegetical technique consists in giving a short account of the myth (sometimes just few lines), often starting from genealogies or familiar relationships and mostly focusing on characters' proper names. Etymology applied to those names is the main tool through which he introduces the allegorical meaning (Fulg. *myth.* 17,10)<sup>20</sup>:

Saturnus Polluris filius dicitur, Opis maritus, senior, velato capite, falcem ferens; cuius virilia abscisa et in mari proiecta Venerem genuerunt. [...] Saturnus primus in Italia regnum obtinuit; hicque per annonae praerogationem ad se populos adtrahens a saturando Saturnus dictus est. Opis quoque eius uxor eo quod opem esurientibus ferret edicta est. Polluris etiam filius sive a pollendo sive a pollucibilitate quam nos humanitatem dicimus. Unde et Plautus in comedia *Epidici*<sup>21</sup> ait: 'Bibite, pergraecamini pollucibiliter'. Velato capite ideo fingitur, quod omnes fructus foliorum obnupti tegantur umbraculo. Filios vero suos comedisse fertur, quod omne tempus quodcumque gignat consumit; falcem etiam fert non inmerito, sive quod omne tempus in se revergat ut curvamina falcium sive fructuum propter; unde etiam et castratus dicitur, quod omnes fructuum vires abscisae atque in humoribus viscerum velut in mare proiectae, sicut illic Venerem, ita et libidinem gig-

<sup>18</sup> Wolff-Dain 2013; Venuti 2015, 307; Venuti 2018. For a general introduction to Fulgentius, see the up-to-date (2019) *online* bibliography edited by Gregory Hays (<http://people.virginia.edu/~bgh2n/fulgbib.html>).

<sup>19</sup> Fulg. *myth.* 4,4

<sup>20</sup> All references for Fulgentius' text are according to Helm 1898.

<sup>21</sup> Actually, Plaut. *Mostell.* 22, 24.

nant necesse est. Nam et Apollophanes in epico carmine scribit Saturnum quasi sacrum nun - nus (νοῦς) enim Grece sensus dicitur - aut satorem nun quasi divinum sensum creantem omnia. Cui etiam quattuor filios subiciunt, id est primum Iovem, secundum Iunonem, tertium Neptunum, quartum Plutonem; Polluris quasi poli filium dicunt, quattuor elementa gignentem.

The author focuses on the genealogy of Saturnus (his father, Pollus; his wife, Ops; Venus, born from his genitals; his four sons: Jupiter, Juno, Neptune, Pluto). He underlines the iconographic representation of Saturnus as an old man, with covered head, carrying a sickle. The name ‘Saturnus’ is said to be etymologically derived from *saturare* (‘to feed’, ‘to saturate’): he was the first ruler in Italy and pleased his people by distributing them the harvest. His wife is Ops, since she is the goddess of the harvest, the one who feeds people with her richness. Saturnus is said to have eaten his sons and therefore connected to Time. The two interpretations – Saturnus as the *saturator* and Saturnus as the Time – are linked by the attribute of the sickle, which is used both by the farmer, to reap the wheat, and by the Time, as its symbol. The story of the castration makes the figure of Saturnus overlapping Uranus (see *infra*); however, it is explained with an allegorical/physical interpretation: Saturnus genitals fell into the sea giving birth to Venus (allegory of the *libido*) as well as the properties of the fruits, cut and collected from the ground, go into the fluids of human belly and here generate the voluptuousness. Eventually, citing an ‘Apollophanes *epicus*’, Fulgentius adds a quotation supporting a different, Latin-Greek etymology: Saturnus as ‘*sacer νοῦς*’ or ‘*sator νοῦς*’, such as ‘the divine intelligence creating and fulfilling everything’.

The rich explanation provided by this fable looks back to a long chain of previous texts, starting (at least) from Cicero and Varro<sup>22</sup> (Cicero *nat.* II 64):

physica ratio non inelegans inclusa est in impias fabulas. caelestem enim altissimam aetheriamque naturam id est igneam, quae per sese omnia gigneret, vacare voluerunt ea parte corporis quae coniunctione alterius egeret ad procreandum. Saturnum autem eum esse voluerunt qui cursum et conversionem spatiorum ac temporum contineret, qui deus Graece id ipsum nomen habet: Κρόνος enim dicitur, qui est idem χρόνος id est spatium temporis. Saturnus autem est appellatus quod saturaretur annis; ex se enim natos comesse fingitur solitus, quia consumit aetas temporum spatia annisque praeteritis insaturabiliter expletur.

After mentioning a list of Greek references – such as Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysi-

<sup>22</sup> Philippon 1939, 1190-1191; Maltby 1991, 546-547.

pus, who have dealt with the *physica ratio non inelegans inclusa* within the mythological tales of Uranus and Saturnus – Cicero gives a double etymological explanation: *Saturnus* as *spatium temporis* since his Greek name is Kronos<sup>23</sup>, whose etymology is connected with χρόνος<sup>24</sup>; *Saturnus* from *saturare*, since he *saturaretur annis*, perhaps meaning «the fact that [his] feast day was the 17<sup>th</sup> December, when the yearly cycle ‘was completed’ (*Saturnalia*)»<sup>25</sup>.

On the other hand, in his *De lingua Latina* Varro etymologically connects the name *Saturnus* with *satus/satio* (‘sowing’), even though this connection was originally to be meant as metaphoric<sup>26</sup>; Ops is also mentioned (Varro *ling.* V 64):

Quare quo caelum principium, ab satu est dictus Saturnus, et quo ignis, Saturnalibus cerei superioribus mittuntur. Terra Ops, quod hic omne opus et hac opus ad vivendum, et ideo dicitur Ops mater, quod terra mater.

These interpretations met later with great success and were used and re-used by a number of important North African Christian authors, such as e.g. Tertullian and St. Augustine, who explicitly quoted these passages (and, more in general, Cicero and Varro) in their apologetic writings against pagan gods (Tert. *nat.* II 12,5; II 12,17-19):

Ea origo deorum vestrorum Saturno, ut opinor, signatur. Neque enim si Var<ro><sup>27</sup> antiquissimos deos Iovem, Iunonem et Minervam refert, nobis excidisse debet, omnem patrem filiis antiquiorem, tam Saturnum Iove, quam Caelum Saturno; de Caelo enim et Terra Saturnus...  
<Sed> eleganter quidam sibi videntur physiologicè per allegoricam <argu>mentationem de Saturno interpretari, tempus esse, et ideo Caelum <et Terr>am parentes, ut et ipsos origini nullos, et ideo falcatum quia tempore <omnia> dirimantur, et ideo voratorem suorum quod omnia ex se edi-

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Hes. *Theog.* 159 ff.

<sup>24</sup> This equivalence was also attested for earlier authors; see Kaster 2011, 88-89: «first attested for Pherecydes of Syros (mid-6<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE), fr. 9.5-6 D.-K., cf. Arist. *On the Universe* 7 401a15, Cic. *On the Nature of Gods* 2.64 (citing Chrysippus)».

<sup>25</sup> Mastrocinque 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Guittard 1978, 55: «Varron explique le nom de Saturne non par l'idée concrète et technique de ‘semailles’ au sens propre, mais en fonction de l'idée plus générale de ‘génération’, ‘paternité’, ‘source première’ et même ‘principe générateur’. Cela n'exclut pas, d'ailleurs, que cette fonction génératrice trouvé une application secondaire dans les semailles proprement dites; toutefois, dans la pensée de Varron, Saturne ne tire pas son nom des semailles, mais il le doit à ce qu'il est une ‘source première’ (*satus*)».

<sup>27</sup> Varro *ant. div.* fr. 207 Cardauns.



ta <in semet>ipsum consumat. Nominis quoque testimonium compellunt: Κρόνον <dict>um Graece ut χρόνον. Aequè Latini vocabuli a sationibus rationem <deduc>nt, qui eum procreatorem coniectant, per eum semina lia caeli <in terra>m deferri. Opem adiungunt, quod opem videndi semina confe<rant, tum et> quod opere semina evadant.

Within the pagan pantheon, Saturnus is surely the most popular god in the Roman North Africa. He is associated with the ancient Punic Baal, connected with the Sky. Several sanctuaries and archaeological monuments attest to his importance in the area<sup>28</sup>. The interpretation provided here by Tertullian refers to the allegoric explanations of Saturnus both as Time (therefore *falcatus* and *vorator suorum*) and as the god of sowing (Saturnus from *satio/satum*); concerning the god's name, the author recalls the double derivation, underlining the importance given to etymology by ancient authors (*nominis quoque testimonium compellunt*): Κρόνος, which has to be etymologically associated with χρόνος, and *Saturnus*, which derives a *sationibus*.

Tertullian was born in Carthage around 155; he studied law in Rome; thanks to his sympathy with Stoicism, he got close to Christian ideas; he converted around 193 and went back to Carthage where he composed the *Ad nationes* in 197. «Tertullian constitutes the major source (with Augustine) for our knowledge of Varro's lost researches into Roman religion. None will wish to deny that Tertullian had excerpted these works for himself»<sup>29</sup>. Actually, we can say the same for another important representative of this tradition, i.e. Arnobius, active around one century later, in the same geographic area<sup>30</sup>. Paucity of evidence renders a full biography of this author impossible<sup>31</sup>: he makes large use of Tertullian's writings, as well as Minucius Felix's<sup>32</sup>; we have some information by Hieronymus about his activity as a rhetor in Sicca, in modern Tunisia. He must have been active some years before Firmicus and Lactantius and one century before Augustine; he deals with topics very close to these Christian writers and appears to be a crucial reference for them, even though they do not mention him directly.

Arnobius offers the same apologetic/euhemerist attitude present in Tertullian, meant to ridicule pagan theology<sup>33</sup>. So, not surprisingly, Lactantius, said to have

<sup>28</sup> Leglay 1966.

<sup>29</sup> Barnes 1985<sup>2</sup>, 197; Podolak 2006, 352-354.

<sup>30</sup> Fragu 2010, XXVI-XXVII.

<sup>31</sup> McCracken 1949; Laurenti 1962; Amata 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Fragu 2010, XXVI. Minucius Felix being perhaps the Latin apologist to be under the greatest obligation to Cicero's *nat. deor.*: see Pease 1955-1958, 54, n. 1.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Arnob. *nat.* IV 9 [*Qui est enim qui credat*] *Saturnum praesidem sativis?* See Maltby 1991, 546.



been his pupil, some years later, at the beginning of his *Institutio divina*, speaking about *de falsa religione deorum*, relaunches the Stoic argument presented by Cicero and gives an enriched explanation of Saturnus' name (Lact. *inst.* I 12,3; 9-10):

Sed homines respectu elementi quod dicitur caelum totam fabulam explodunt tamquam ineptissime fictam, quam tamen Stoici, ut solent, ad rationem physicam conantur traducere. Quorum sententiam Cicero de natura deorum [II 24,64] disserens, posuit [...].

Quid quod ipsi Saturno non divinum modo sensum, sed humanum quoque adimunt, cum adfirmant «eum esse Saturnum, qui cursum et conversionem spatiorum et temporum continet eumque Graece id ipsum nomen habere. Κρόνος enim dicitur, qui est idem χρόνος, id est spatium temporis. Saturnus autem est appellatus, quod saturetur annis». Haec Ciceronis verba sunt exponentis sententiam Stoicorum» [II 25,64]. Quae quam vana sit, cuius intelligere promptissimum est. Si enim Saturnus Caeli est filius, quomodo potuit aut tempus e Caelo gigni aut Caelum a tempore abscidi aut postea tempus imperio spoliari a filio Iove? Aut quomodo Iuppiter natus ex tempore est? Aut quibus annis saturari possit aeternitas, cui nullus est finis? [...]

Of course, Lactantius' aim is again to counter and confute the divine nature of pagan gods<sup>34</sup>: he concludes that the pagan view is completely inconsistent and without logic (*quae quam vana sit, cuius intelligere promptissimum*). He then tries to find something true in the euhemerist argument. In order to do that, he tells the story of Saturnus given by Ovid and Vergil (Lact. *inst.* I 13,6-9):

Fugit igitur expulsus et in Italiam navigio venit, cum errasset diu, sicut Ovidius in Fastorum libris refert [I 233-234]:

Causa ratis superest. Tuscum rate venit ad amnem  
ante pererrato falcifer orbe deus

Hunc errantem atque inopem Ianus excepit [...]. Omnes ergo non tantum poetae, sed historiarum quoque ac rerum antiquarum scriptores, hominem fuisse consentiunt, qui res eius in Italia gestas memoriae prodiderunt: Graeci Diodorus et Thallus, Latini, Nepos et Cassius et Varro. Nam cum agresti quodam more in Italia viveretur [Verg. *Aen.* VIII 321-323],

Is genus indocile ac dispersum montibus altis

<sup>34</sup> As the author says, he is looking for something true in the mythological tales; therefore, he first [I 11,55] mentions Minucius Felix's 'euhemeristic' explanation of Saturnus's history, included in the *Octavius* (XXIII 10-12); then, he quotes the 'physical' Stoic argument.

composuit legesque dedit Latiumque vocari  
maluit, his quoniam latuisset tutus in oris.

Lactantius transmits here that Saturnus, *falcifer* as described in Ovid's text, escaped from his son Jupiter and came to Italy as an exile, where once settled he gave laws to the uneducated inhabitants. The author brings into play as *auctoritates* not only poets, but also *historiarum ac rerum antiquarum scriptores*: among them, Varro and Vergil. The latter tells us that Saturnus wanted his new region to be named *Latium*. This is one of those interesting cases where Vergil himself plays with etymology as a poetic and rhetorical tool: in fact, *Latium* is etymologically connected to the history of the god, and precisely to the verb *lateo* (l. 323): «Vergil (or Evander) derives the name *Latium* from the fact that Saturnus hid there (*latuisset*) [...]». Here *vocari* is an etymological signpost, and *maluit*, as Servius [*ad l.*] notes, calls attention to the fact that Latium had other names<sup>35</sup>. So, these Virgilian lines hide a stratification of etymological sense, elaborated by Ovid<sup>36</sup>, included in the tradition of Christian authors<sup>37</sup>, but also explained by Servius in his commentary:

LATIVM QVE VOCARI MALVIT bene 'maluit': nam et Saturnia dicta est, ut [*Aen.* VIII 329] *et nomen posuit Saturnia tellus*. et Vergilius Latium vult dici, quod illic Saturnus latuit<sup>38</sup>. [...] Varro autem Latium dici putat, quod latet Italia inter praecipitia Alpium et Apennini<sup>39</sup>.

Of course, Servius' text is a crucial 'hub' for later authors, especially for those interested in commenting and using Virgilian poems as Fulgentius was<sup>40</sup>. Therefore, it could be useful to look at the occurrences of Saturnus within the whole commentary:

<sup>35</sup> O'Hara 1996, 207.

<sup>36</sup> See also the lines just following the two quoted by Lactantius [*Ov. fast.* I 235-238]: *Hac ego Saturnum memini tellure receptum / [Caelitibus regnis a Iove pulsus erat]. / Inde diu genti mansit Saturnia nomen; / dicta quoque est Latium terra latente deo.*

<sup>37</sup> Maltby 1991, 329.

<sup>38</sup> The same gloss is included in the commentary to *Aen.* I 6: *Latium autem dictum est, quod illic Saturnus latuerit.*

<sup>39</sup> O'Hara 1996, 207-208: see here the reference to the figure of *metonomasia* and further bibliographical information about *Latium*. Specifically, about Servius and etymology, see Brunet 2016.

<sup>40</sup> It is worth remembering here that Fulgentius was author of the so-called *Virgiliana continentia*, a short allegoric commentary to the *Aeneid*, extremely influent in later centuries: he surely was aware of and used scholiastic material to Vergil. See Agozzino 1972.

Serv. *georg.* I 336

Saturnus deus pluviarum est, unde etiam senex fingitur: nam senes semper novimus esse gelidos.

Serv. *georg.* II 406

ET CVRVO SATVRNI DENTE id est falce, quae est in eius tutela. nam Saturnus dicitur patri Caelo virilia falce amputasse, quae in mare cadentia Venerem creaverunt: quod ideo fingitur, quia, nisi umor de caelo in terras descenderit, nihil creatur. alii Saturnum deum esse temporum dicunt, quae, sicut falx, in se recurrunt. alii vero dicunt Saturnum in progressu nihil nocere, cum retrogradus est, esse periculosum; ideo que eum habere falcem in tutela, quod et ipsa protenta nihil valet, retro acta vero, quicquid ei occurrerit, secat.

Serv. *georg.* IV 150

Saturnus, ut diximus, temporum deus est, quae in se revolvuntur in aeternum.

Serv. *Aen.* III 104

IOVIS MAGNI sane nati Iovis fabula haec est: Saturnus postquam a Themide oraculo comperit, a filio se posse regno depelli, natos ex Rhea uxore devorabat [...] ut autem fingatur Saturnus filios suos comesse, ratio haec est, quia dicitur deus esse aeternitatis et saeculorum. saecula autem annos ex se natos in se revolvunt: unde Graece Κρόνος quasi χρόνος, id est tempus, dicitur.

Serv. *Aen.* III 707

DREPANI PORTVS Drepanum civitas est non longe a monte Eryce, trans Lilybaeum, dicta vel propter curvaturam litoris, in quo sita est, vel quod Saturnus post amputata virilia Caelo patri illuc falcem proiecit, quae Graece δρεπάνη dicitur: quod verisimile putatur propter vicinitatem Erycis, consecrati Veneri, quae dicitur nata ex Caeli cruore et spuma maris.

Serv. *Aen.* VIII 356

MONUMENTA VIRORVM hoc sermone ostendit etiam Saturnum virum fuisse.

All these passages offer a rich image of Saturnus. In *Aen.* III 104 Servius gives a general short account of the story: Saturnus, father of Jupiter, is said to have eaten his sons since he is the god of Time according to the etymology of his Greek name (Kronos / χρόνος). In *georg.* II 406, the focus is on the sickle and Servius offers further details<sup>41</sup>: Saturnus used it to evirate Uranus and give birth to Venus. This has got a physical explanation since the moisture from the sky is needed to create life on the ground; after the emasculation, Saturnus threw the sickle into the sea, not far from Eryce, sacred to Venus: this is the origin of *Drepanum* harbor. Again, Servius uses an etymological explanation, since the Greek name of *falx* is

<sup>41</sup> See also Fest. 202 L.; 432 L.; Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 42; Ov. *fast.* I 234; Macr. *sat.* I 7,24.

δρεπάνη<sup>42</sup>. The sickle, even though actually referred to Sabinus, appears in connection to Saturnus in another passage of Vergil, where the god is described as an old man, among the *effigies veterum avorum* (Verg. *Aen.* VII 177-180):

Quin etiam veterum effigies ex ordine avorum  
antiqua e cedro, Italusque paterque Sabinus  
vitisator, curvam servans sub imagine falcem,  
Saturnusque senex...

This short *excursus* into Servius' work is useful to understand the approach of a teacher and a grammarian, and specifically of the influential commentator of Vergil's poetry, interested in allegory, rhetoric and language; an approach that in late Latin authors is unavoidably combined with the apologetic one: it is well-known how «most of those Christian writers and advocates [...] were taught to read, write, interpret, and argue by Greek and Roman grammarians»<sup>43</sup>. So, let's turn now to another main passage in the chain that leads to Fulgentius, an author who certainly shared in both those 'souls': St. Augustine.

In his writings, Augustine shows a number of different attitudes towards etymologizing. In a famous passage of *dialect.* VI 20, he is skeptical (*ut somniorum interpretatio ita verborum origo pro cuiusque ingenio iudicatur*), but in fact he generally offers in his works a very long list of etymologies<sup>44</sup>. As far as Saturnus is concerned, we are interested specifically in two points of *de civitate dei* (VI 8):

Multi enim et ipsa ad eundem modum interpretati sunt, usque adeo ut, quod ab eis inmanissimum et infandissimum dicitur, Saturnum suos filios devorasse, ita nonnulli interpretentur, quod longinquitas temporis, quae Saturni nomine significatur, quidquid gignit ipsa consumat, vel, sicut idem opinatur Varro, quod pertineat Saturnus ad semina, quae in terram, de qua oriuntur, iterum recidunt. Itemque alii alio modo et similiter cetera.

Of course, Augustine speaks against the inconsistency of myth. Pagan poets said that Saturnus ate his sons, and he tries to explain this *inmanissimum et infandissimum dictum* according to the two (already traditional) interpretations, presented as alternatives: an allegory for the consumption caused by the *longinquitas temporis* or (*vel, sicut opinatur Varro*) for the life-and-death agricultural cycle (*Saturnus*

<sup>42</sup> But see Fulg. *Verg. cont.* 94, 13 and Maltby 1991, 196.

<sup>43</sup> Amsler 1989, 58.

<sup>44</sup> Gualandri 2017, 128.

*pertinet ad semina*)<sup>45</sup>. Moreover, elsewhere Augustine adds further interesting details to the picture (Aug. *De consensu evangelistarum* I 23,34-35):

[34] Quid dicunt de Saturno? Quem Saturnum colunt? Nonne ille est qui primus *ab Olympo venit* [Verg. *Aen.* VIII 320-324]

*Arma Iovis fugiens et regnis exsul ademptis  
qui genus indocile et dispersum montibus altis  
composuit legesque dedit, Latiumque vocari  
maluit, his quoniam latuisset tutus in oris?*

Nonne ipsum eius simulacrum, quod cooperto capite fingitur, quasi latentem indicat? Nonne ipse Italis ostendit agriculturam, quod falce demonstrat? Non, inquit; nam videris, si fuit ille homo et rex quidam, de quo ista narratur; nos tamen Saturnum interpretamur «universum tempus», quod Graecum etiam vocabulum eius ostendit; vocatur enim Κρόνος, quod aspiratione addita etiam temporis nomen est, unde et Latine Saturnus appellatur, quasi saturatur annis. Quid iam cum istis agendum sit, nescio, qui conantes in melius interpretari nomina et simulacra deorum suorum, fatentur maiorem deum suum et patrem ceterorum tempus esse. Quid enim aliud indicant, quam omnes deos suos temporales esse, quorum patrem ipsum tempus constituunt?

[35]. Erubuerunt hinc philosophi eorum recentiores Platonici, qui iam christianis temporibus fuerunt; et Saturnum aliter interpretari conati sunt dicentes appellatum Χρόνος, velut a satietate intellectus, eo quod Graece satietas κόπος, intellectus autem sive mens νοῦς dicitur. Cui videtur suffragari et latinum nomen, quasi ex prima Latina parte et Graeca posteriore compositum, ut diceretur Saturnus, tanquam satur esset, νοῦς. Viderunt quam esset absurdum, si filius temporis Iuppiter haberetur, quem deum aeternum vel putabant vel putari volebant. At vero secundum istam novellam interpretationem, quam veteres erorum si habuissent mirum si Ciceronem Varronemque latuisset, Saturni filium Iovem dicunt tamquam ab illa summa mente profluentem spiritum...

In this section of his work dedicated to the problem of the Gospels' texts, Augustine introduces the history of Saturnus and Jupiter as *fabulae interpretandae a sapientibus aut ridendae* (I 23,31), referring to euhemerist and Stoic cases (historic and physical explanations) and recalling Varro and Cicero (I 23,31-32). He largely uses Vergil's lines in order to explain how Pagans looked at these gods. Concerning Saturnus, Augustine introduces him by quoting, as an integrated part of his sentence, Vergil's *Aeneid* VIII 320-324: we have already met these lines in Lactantius' text and as the subject of the etymological comment by Servius (*Latium/latere*).

<sup>45</sup>The Varronian etymological connection of Saturnus with *seminatio* and *sero* is then mentioned again a little further in Augustine's work: *civ.* VII 3 and 13.

Augustine enriches the idea of a hiding Saturnus by referring to his iconography as a figure whose head is covered (*Nonne ipsum eius simulacrum, quod cooperto capite fingitur, quasi latentem indicat?*); then his connection to agriculture is explained by the image of the sickle (*Nonne ipse Italis ostendit agriculturam, quod falce demonstrat?*). Eventually, he calls into play Cicero's reference, underlining how the etymological derivation of the god's Greek name has been formed: *vocatur enim Κρόνος, quod aspiratione addita etiam temporis nomen est*. At the end, he recalls the Latin one: *Latine Saturnus appellatur, quasi saturetur annis*.

But what follows is even more interesting to us: in chapter 35, again in order to show the inconsistency of pagan theology, Augustine refers to the 'Platonists' (*Erubuerunt hinc philosophi eorum recentiores Platonici, qui iam christianis temporibus fuerunt; et Saturnum aliter interpretari conati sunt...*) and transmits a different etymology for Saturnus name: Saturnus as derived from *satietas*, which is *κόρος* in Greek. This derivation would be confirmed by the Latin name as well, composed by the first part from Latin, the second one from Greek: *satur* νοῦς ('fulfilled spirit'), such as 'someone full of spirit'. «This derivation is formed in analogy to Kronos = 'koros nus' and is already found in Plato's *Cratylus*»<sup>46</sup>; at this point, one more text has to be quoted here, and this is Macrobius (*Sat. I 8,6-12*)<sup>47</sup>:

Est porro idem Κρόνος καὶ Χρόνος. Saturnum enim in quantum mythici fictionibus distrahunt, in tantum physici ad quandam verisimilitudinem revocant. hunc aiunt abscidisse Caeli patris pudenda, quibus in mare deiectis Venerem procreatam, quae a spuma unde coaluit ἀφροδίτη nomen accepit. [7] Ex quo intellegi volunt, cum chaos esset, tempora non fuisse: si quidem tempus est certa dimensio quae ex caeli conversione colligitur. [Tempus coepit] inde ab ipso natus putatur Κρόνος qui, ut diximus, Χρόνος est. [8] Cumque semina rerum omnium post caelum gignendarum de caelo fluerent et elementa universa quae mundo plenitudinem facerent ex illis seminibus fundarentur, ubi mundus omnibus suis partibus membrisque perfectus est, certo iam tempore finis factus est procedendi de caelo semina ad elementorum conceptionem, quippe iam plena fuerant procreata. Animalium vero aeternam propagationem ad Venerem generandi facultas ex humore translata est: ut per coitum maris feminaeque cuncta deinceps gignerentur. [9] Propter abscisorum pudendorum fabulam etiam nostri eum Saturnum vocitaverunt παρὰ τὴν

<sup>46</sup>Mastrocinque 2006; Plato *Crat.* 396b. For a short introduction to Augustine, etymology and (Neo)Platonists, Den Boeft 1979, 242-245. See also Amsler 1989, 31-56. The topic of hybrid etymological derivation is extremely interesting and would be worth pursuing both as a part of the general studies of bilingualism and as a specific practice of Latin authors. About hybrid compounding for nouns in Late antiquity, see Filos 2010, 221-252.

<sup>47</sup>Agozzino 1972, 7-9. Kaster 2011, XI-XLII.

σάθην, quae membrum virile declarat, veluti Sathurnum: inde etiam satyros veluti sathyros<sup>48</sup>, quod sint in libidinem proni, appellatos opinantur. Falcem ei quidam aestimant attributam quod tempus omnia metat exsecet et incidat. [10] Hunc aiunt filios suos solitum devorare eosdemque rursus evomere: per quod similiter significatur eum tempus esse, a quo vicibus cuncta gignantur absumenturque et ex eo denuo renascantur. [11] Eundem a filio pulsum quid aliud est quam tempora senescentia ab his quae post sunt nata depelli? Vincitum autem, quod certa lege naturae conexas sint tempora vel quod omnes fruges quibusdam vinculis nodisque alternentur. [12] Nam et falcem volunt fabulae in Siciliam decidisse, quod sit terra ista vel maxime fertilis.

Macrobius mentions the etymological equivalence between Kronos (Saturnus) and Chronos (Time) offered by Cicero, and states that he prefers the ‘physical’ interpretation of Saturnus’ tale instead of the several versions offered by *mythici*. So, the idea of Time is connected to seeding since all the elements that fill the world took their start from seeds coming from Uranus’ emasculation (*Cumque semina rerum omnium* [...]) and falling into the sea, from where Venus was born, with the Greek name of Aphrodite<sup>49</sup>: the process of bringing forth seeds from sky for the creation of the elements comes to an end at a fixed moment in time (*certo iam tempore finis factus est* [...]), being transferred from water to Venus (*animalium vero aeternam propagationem ad Venerem generandi facultas ex umore translate est* [...] *gignerentur*). After that, Macrobius adds a different etymology, based on the *abscisorum pudendorum fabula*: *nostri eum Saturnum vocitaverunt* παρὰ τὴν σάθην, *quae membrum virile declarant*: σάθη is ‘penis’ in Greek. The portrait of Saturnus is then completed with the reference to the sickle and to the story of eating his children and then vomiting them back again as symbol of Time, which cuts all things, but also creates them again. After a quite obscure reference to Saturnus’ bondage, the sickle is connected with the fertility of Sicily, where it fell after the emasculation of Uranus<sup>50</sup>.

So, it is time to go back to Fulgentius and to collect the different threads on etymologizing in these late Latin authors. As we have said, Fulgentius starts with the genealogy of Saturnus. One strange point is Saturnus’ father, said here to be *Pollus*. No other sources mention this name or this fatherhood, but later writers, e.g. the so-called First and Second Vatican Mythographers, show the same text as Fulgentius does. According to Bode, editor of these late anonymous collections of

<sup>48</sup> The text is uncertain here: Kaster chooses the proposal by Jan against the *concordia codicum*: Sathurnum [...] sathyros Jan : Sathunnum [...] sathunos ω. For the parallelism with the etymology of *satyrus* see Maltby 1991, 547 and Kaster 2011, 90, n. 127.

<sup>49</sup> ἀφρός is ‘foam’ in Greek: see Hes. *Theog.* 188-198.

<sup>50</sup> Kaster 2011, 91.



myths in 1834, Etienne Wolff, in his notes to Fulgentius' *Mythologiae*, says that «la forme doit s'expliquer par une faute de lecture imputable soit à Fulgence lui-même, soit à son modèle»<sup>51</sup>: in fact *Telluris* could have been read by Fulgentius as *Polluris* (in some cases banalized into *Pollucis*, as interlinear glosses of Fulgentian manuscripts point out)<sup>52</sup>. *Tellus* is the Latin name of Greek Gaia (Earth), mother of Kronos. This explanation is not unlikely and the mistake should have been introduced by Fulgentius himself, because two etymologic explanations of the corrupt name *Pollus* are integrated within two different sections of the text and transmitted by all manuscripts of *Mythologiae*: *Polluris etiam filius sive a pollendo sive a pollucibilitate quam nos humanitatem dicimus* (myth. 17,17-18) and *Polluris quasi poli filium dicunt, quattuor elementa gignentem* (myth. 18,12-13). Facing a non-existing name, Fulgentius does not lose heart and builds an etymology based on a hapax: *pollucibilitas*, on its turn deriving from a hapax, this time found in Plautus' *Mostellaria* (22-24): *dies noctesque bibite, pergraecamini, / amicas emite, liberate: pascite/ parasitos: obsonate pollucibiliter. Pollucibiliter* such as 'richly', 'sumptuously' – from the verb *polluceo*, which means 'offer something to a deity on a sacred altar'<sup>53</sup>. Fulgentius translates *pollucibilitas* as *humanitas*, such as 'generosity', 'abundance'<sup>54</sup>. The second etymology for *Pollus* is instead a Greek one: Saturnus is *Polluris filius*, since *Pollus* comes from the genitive of Greek πολύς – and Saturnus is then 'son of abundance', as he generated altogether the four elements composing nature (Jupiter, Juno, Neptune and Pluto, his sons).

The last section of Fulgentius' fable is also interesting, since here the author – even though in this case without any evidence – applies a Greek-Latin etymology and calls into play a Greek *auctoritas*: Apollophanes, who, in his *epicum carmen*, is supposed to have offered a mixed etymology for Saturnus' name<sup>55</sup>: Saturnus as 'sacer νοῦς' or 'sator νοῦς', such as 'the divine intelligence creating everything'.

Needless to say, this process of 'mixed language etymological decomposition' is a crucial point, and recalls Augustine and the *Platonici recentiores* he mentioned (see *supra*), who tried to explain the name of Saturnus by offering an etymology based on the Greek word νοῦς in connection to 'satietas' (κόρος). Fulgentius does not mention Cicero's or Varro's etymologies, but, in some way, thanks to the stratification of all the previous tradition, he uses and takes them *both* for granted: *a sa-*

<sup>51</sup> Wolff - Dain 2013, 147, n. 110.

<sup>52</sup> E.g. ms. Erfurt, Forschungsbibliothek Erfurt/Gotha (Memb. I 55, XIII cent.), *ad l.*; the banalization also depending on the following explanation.

<sup>53</sup> Ernout - Meillet 1959, 519.

<sup>54</sup> *ThLL* VI/3 3083,55-56.

<sup>55</sup> About Apollophanes *epicus* we don't have any information; Tertullian quotes an Apollophanes Stoic philosopher: *anim.* XIV 2.

*turando Saturnus dictus est; Opis quoque eius uxor eo quod opem esurientibus ferret* (see Tertullian); *filios suos comedisse fertur, quod omne tempus quodcumque gignat consumit* (this interpretation being present in all the authors we read). The story of the Uranus' emasculation and of Venus' birth, which in Fulgentian text is developed into a more precise physiological sense (without any support of etymology), is already expressed e.g. by Servius and Macrobius (with support of etymology).

In this perspective, before coming to a conclusion, it is impossible not to mention finally an author, such as Isidore. His importance to our argument is crucial, not only because etymology takes pride of place in his work (*Etymologiae sive Origines*), but also because, as perhaps the last 'guardian' of Latin ancient knowledge, he collects and surpasses the earlier tradition (VIII 11,29-33):

Quaedam autem nomina deorum suorum gentiles per vanas fabulas ad rationes physicas conantur traducere, eaque in causis elementorum composita esse interpretantur. Sed hoc a poetis totum fictum est, ut deos suos ornarent aliquibus figuris, quos perditos ac dedecoris infamia plenos fuisse historiae confitentur. Omnino enim fingendi locus vacat, ubi veritas cessat.

[30] Saturnus origo deorum et totius posteritatis a paganis designatur. Hunc Latini a satu appellatum ferunt, quasi ad ipsum satio omnium pertineat rerum, vel a temporis longitudine, quod satiretur annis. [31] Unde et eum Graeci Cronos nomen habere dicunt, id est tempus, quod filios suos fertur devorasse, hoc est annos, quos tempus produxerit, in se revolvit, vel quod eo semina, unde oriuntur, iterum redeunt. [32] Hunc Caeli patris abscondisse genitalia dicunt, quia nihil in caelo de seminibus nascitur. Falcem tenet, iniquiunt, propter agriculturam significandam, vel propter annos et tempora, quod in se redeant, vel propter sapientiam, quod intus acuta sit. [33] In aliquibus autem civitatibus Saturno liberos suos apud gentiles inmolabant, quod Saturnum poetae liberos suos devorasse solitum tradiderunt.

Saturnus' tale is included in the 8<sup>th</sup> Book of *Etymologies*, the one dedicated to the Church and the sects. In this section, the author deals with pagan gods. The introduction of the fable (par. 29) is a theoretical statement, which synthesizes Isidore's thought and earlier tradition: pagan fables are empty stories, where gods' names are used to connect deities to the origin of the elements and to physical causes. Poets contribute to this by enhancing their gods with figures of speech and rhetorical ornaments, but the historical truth reveals their inconsistency. So, when truth is lacking, there is room for every kind of fiction.

Isidore explains the meaning of Saturnus' name according to the etymologies given by *Latini*: 'Saturnus' deriving *a satu* or *a saturando*. The two threads descending from Varro and from Cicero are again together, even though without any mention of them. The following explanation collects all the information com-

ing from ancient times, with a number of remarkable differences: the etymological interpretation of Saturnus' name is given without referring the Greek/Latin original word and something new is added to the symbolic image of Saturnus: the sickle is no more only the symbol of agriculture or Time, but it also represents the *falx sapientiae*, and this is a Christian metaphor taken from Ambrose<sup>56</sup>. «Isidore rewrites the pagan encyclopedia within the frame of Christian etymological grammar and so articulates a verbal ontology whereby the knowledge of things derives from the knowledge of words»<sup>57</sup>.

In conclusion, what can we say about the etymological approach of these late Latin writers? I think that it is possible to see different lines merging together: an author like Fulgentius recovers the ancient idea of etymology as an instrument for philosophical (better: moral) argument, but this tool is trivialized and used by him as a didactic mode rather than in order to enact a real ontological inquiry. In fact, he uses etymologizing not specifically to explain words or names, but «in order to create focal points in *his* interpretation»<sup>58</sup>. Of course, he has been influenced by other interpretative approaches: the apologetic/Christian one, which used etymologizing as a tool against pagan theology; the Virgilian tradition with its commentaries, first of all Servius, where the rhetoric value of etymologizing is first emphasized by the poet and then amplified by the commentator for different purposes (in this category, we can perhaps count Macrobius as well, with his Neoplatonic view of Virgil's *Aeneid*)<sup>59</sup>; lastly – but maybe the most important one –, we can see the teaching/school/didactic practice of using a patchwork of sources and references in order to give the largest amount of information possible, reworked again and again, aiming at building a rich and bold explanation, no matter if cumbersome and incorrect: the «main purpose was to designate the range of meaning(s) a word possessed or the broadening of this space by relating it to other cluster(s) of meaning(s)»<sup>60</sup>. This means using mixed (wrong) etymologies, without any reference to the original words, or even applying them to a corrupted name. This path will lead to the encyclopedism of later authors like Isidore: «the core of the work [will be] not apologetic, but informational»<sup>61</sup>.

---

<sup>56</sup> Ambr. in *psalm*. CXVIII 2,13 *quid est se noscere, nisi ut sciat unusquisque hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem dei factum, rationis capacem, qui terram suam excolere tamquam bonus agricola debeat aratro quodam et falce sapientiae, ut uel dura findantur uel luxuriantia recidantur, qui inferiorem sui portionem animi imperio debeat gubernare?*

<sup>57</sup> Amsler 1989, 134.

<sup>58</sup> Peraki-Kyriakidou 2002, 488 (not specifically speaking of Fulgentius).

<sup>59</sup> Agozzino 1972, 7.

<sup>60</sup> Peraki-Kyriakidou 2002, 487.

<sup>61</sup> Barney 2006, 19.

So, it is possible to say that, for these late Latin writers, etymologizing has been, at the same time, the research of the hidden truth behind names (especially gods' names), but also the disclosure of hidden lies, or even a way to build hidden truths – which of course were actually lies, but presented as based on authoritative sources and for high purposes.

By the way: no one of the several etymologies we have discussed for Saturnus' name seems today to be scientifically acceptable: «les philologues modernes ont fait justice de ces rapprochements et proposé, avec bien plus de vraisemblance, une origine étrusque»<sup>62</sup>.

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia  
martina.venuti@unive.it

Keywords: *Saturnus*, Late Latin Literature, Etymology, Etymologizing

Parole chiave: *Saturnus*, letteratura tardolatina, etimologia, etimologizzazione

---

<sup>62</sup> Guittard 1978, 53. See also Herbig 1917, 446-459.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Agozzino 1972

Fabio Planciade Fulgenzio, *Expositio Virgilianae Continentiae*, a cura di T. Agozzino – F. Zanlucchi, Padova 1972.

Allen 2005

J. Allen, *The Stoics on the Origin of Language and the Foundations of Etymology*, in D. Frede – B. Inwood (ed.), *Language and Learning*, Cambridge 2005, 14-55.

Amata 2000

B. Amata (ed.), Arnobio, *Difesa della vera religione*, Roma 2000.

Amsler 1989

M. Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Amsterdam 1989.

Ax 2011

W. Ax, *Quintilians Grammatik (<Inst. Orat.> 1,4-8). Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar*, Berlin-Boston 2011.

Barnes 1985<sup>2</sup>

T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian. A Historical and Literary Study*, Oxford 1985<sup>2</sup> [1971].

Barney 2006

S. A. Barney and Others (ed.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Cambridge 2006.

Biondi 2015

F. Biondi, *Teagene di Reggio rapsodo e interprete di Omero*, Pisa-Roma 2015.

Brunet 2016

C. Brunet, *Servius et l'étymologie, une approche de la création lexicale*, in A. Garcea – M.-K. Lhommé – D. Vallat (ed.), *Fragments d'érudition: Servius et le savoir antique*, «Spudasmata» 168, 2016, 125-141.

Curtius 1948

E. R. Curtius, *Letteratura europea e Medioevo latino*, tr. it. Scandicci 1992 [ed. orig. *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, Bern 1948].

Den Boeft 1979

J. Den Boeft, *Etymologies in Augustine's De civitate Dei X*, «Vigiliae Christianae» XXXIII, 3 (1979), 242-259.

Dyck 2003

A. R. Dyck, *Etymologising the Gods: Cicero's Experiments at N.D. 2.63-69*, in Ch. Nifadopoulos (ed.), *Etymologia. Studies in Ancient Etymology*. «Proceedings of the Cambridge Conference on Ancient Etymology, 25-27 September 2000», Münster 2003, 55-64.

Ernout – Meillet 1959

A. Ernout – A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine. Histoire des mots*, Paris 1959<sup>4</sup> [1932<sup>1</sup>].

Filos 2010

P.Filos, *Greek Papyri and Graeco-Latin Hybrid Compounds*, in T.V.Evans – D.D.Obbink (ed.), *The Language of the Papyri*, Oxford 2010, 221-252.

Fragu 2010

B.Fragu, *Arnobe*, Paris 2010.

Gualandri 2017

I.Gualandri, *Words Pregnant with Meaning. The Power of Single Words in Late Latin Literature*, in J.Elsner – J.H.Lobato (ed.), *The Poetics of Late Latin Literature*, Oxford 2017, 125-146.

Guittard 1978

Ch.Guittard, *L'étymologie Varronienne de Saturne (Varr. LL. 5, 64)*, in J.Collart (ed.), *Varron. Grammaire antique et stylistique latine*, Paris 1978, 53-56.

Helm 1898

Fabius Planciadis Fulgentii V.C. *Opera*, rec. R.Helm, Lipsiae 1898.

Herbig 1917

G.Herbig, *Satre-Saturnus*, «Philologus» LXIV (1917), 446-459.

Hinds 2006

St.Hinds, *Venus, Varro and the vates: towards the limits of etymologizing interpretation*, «Dictynna» [online] 3, 2006: <http://journals.openedition.org/dictynna/206>.

Kaster 1988

R.A.Kaster, *Guardians of Language. The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity*, Berkely and Los Angeles 1988.

Kaster 2011

Macrobian Ambrosii Theodosii *Saturnalia*, rec. R.A.Kaster, Oxford 2011.

Laurenti 1962

Arnobio, *I sette libri contro i pagani*, a cura di R.Laurenti, Torino 1962.

Leglay 1966

M.Leglay, *Saturne africain. Histoire*, Paris 1966.

Long 1992

A.A.Long, *Stoic Readings of Homer*, in R.Lamberton – J.J.Keaney (ed.), *Homer's Ancient Readers: the Hermeneutics of Greek Epics Earliest*, New Jersey 1992, 41-66.

Long 2005

A.A.Long, *Stoic Linguistics, Plato's Cratylus, and Augustine's De dialectica*, in D.Frede - B.Inwood (ed.), *Language and Learning: Philosophy of Language in the Hellenistic Age*, Cambridge 2005, 37-55.

Malkiel 1993

Y.Malkiel, *Etymology*, Cambridge 1993.

Maltby 1991

R.Maltby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies*, Leeds 1991.

Maltby 2003

R.Maltby, *The Role of Etymologies in Servius and Donatus*, in Ch.Nifadopoulos (ed.), *Etymologia. Studies in Ancient Etymology: Proceedings of the Cambridge Conference on Ancient Etymology, 25-27 September 2000*, Münster 2003, 103-118.

Marangoni 2007

C.Marangoni, *Supplementum Etymologicum Latinum I*, Trieste 2007.

Mastrocinque 2006

A.Mastrocinque, *Saturnus*, in *Brill's New Pauly*, consulted online on 11 July 2020 ([http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347\\_bnp\\_e1102470](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e1102470)); first published online: 2006.

McCracken 1949

Arnobius of Sicca, *The case against the pagans*, I-II, ed. G.E.McCracken, Westminster 1949.

Most 1989

G.Most, *Cornutus and Stoic Allegoresis: A Preliminary Report*, in W.Haase (ed.), *Philosophie, Wissenschaften, Technik. Philosophie (Stoizismus)*, Berlin-Munich-Boston 1989, 2014-2066.

O'Hara 1996

J.J.O'Hara, *True Names. Vergil and the Alexandrian Tradition of Etymological Wordplay*, Ann Arbor 1996 (See also the new and expanded edition, which I could not access: Ann Arbor 2017).

Opelt 1966

I.Opelt, *Etymologie*, «Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum» VI, 1966, 797-844.

Pease 1955-1958

A.S.Pease (ed.), *M. Tulli Ciceronis De natura deorum*, I-II, Cambridge Mass. 1955-1958.

Periaki-Kyriakidou 2002

H.Periaki-Kyriakidou, *Aspects of Ancient Etymologizing*, «Classical Quarterly» LII, 2 (2002), 478-493.

Philippson 1939

R.Philippson, *M. Tullius Cicero*, in *Pauly-Wissowa*, VII A, 1939, 827-1191.

Podolak 2006

Tertulliano, *Ad nationes*, ed. P.Podolak, in C.Moreschini – P.Podolak (ed.), *Tertulliano. Opere apologetiche*, Roma 2006, 339-467.

Ramelli 2004

G.Lucchetta – I.Ramelli (ed.), *Allegoria. Vol. I. L'età classica*, Milano 2004.

Venuti 2015

M.Venuti, *Spoudogeloion, Hyperbole and Myth in Fulgentius' Mythologiae*, in



P.Moretti – R.Ricci – Ch.Torre (ed.), *Culture and Literature in Latin Late Antiquity. Continuities and Discontinuities*, Turnhout 2015, 307-322.

Venuti 2018

M.Venuti, *Il prologus delle Mythologiae di Fulgenzio. Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commento*, Napoli 2018.

Wolff – Dain 2013

Fulgence, *Mythologies*, traduit, présenté et annoté par E.Wolff – Ph.Dain, Villeneuve d'Ascq 2013.

Zetzel 2018

J.E.G.Zetzel, *Critics, Compilers, and Commentators*, Oxford 2018.

