

THE ALLEGORY AND ALLEGORIC AS HERMENEUTICAL TOOLS IN THE *HIEROGLYPHICAL HISTORY*

Narcis Zărnescu*

narciszarnescu.univofsheffield@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract: Starting from the premise that *The Hieroglyphical History* is a cultural sign, the author shall distinguish, on the one hand, the message of the work as sign, with a statute similar to the significant and on the other hand, the code, which functions like a significant.

Keywords: allegory, allegoric, code, metacode, metatexte, syntagmatic axis.

Many researchers, literary critics and historians (Nicolae Iorga, A. D. Xenopol, George Calinescu, P. P. Panaitescu, I. Verdes, I. D. Laudat etc.) described the work of Dimitrie Cantemir, that *uomo universale* from the beginning of the XVIIth century. Revaluating the sociological, ethical, philosophical, stylistic and historical analyses, which decoded at many levels the complex network of informative and axio-epistemic outlooks of this bio-bibliographical sign (Cantemir's life and work), a sign materialized in the semiotical system of Romanian culture, we suggest a rhetorical pattern of the allegory in *The Hieroglyphical History*¹.

If the allegory can be defined as a figurative mode of representation conveying meaning other than the literal,² the allegoric, in the frame of our hypothesis, is a hermeneutical instrument. *Intercorporal* hermeneutics means, in the context of the interface phenomenon, some interpreting and decoding techniques through which the terms of a tradition (the Romanian one) are translated/explained through the terms of the other tradition (the philosophic one). Thus, allegory is revealed as a specific means of relating the two cultural spaces to each other. The passage from the proper to the figurative sense is opened up through the intercultural exercise, that will be fulfilled by the allegoric mechanism designed to create a crisis at the level of the text, which will be overcome through the emergence of the figurative sense. Thereby the hidden meanings of the Cantemirean text could be comprehend unexpectedly by using an eleventh century tool, the Maimonides *Guide for the Perplexed* which was initially written in Arabic as *Delalatul Ha'yreen*: "This work has also a second object in view. It seeks to explain certain obscure figures which occur in the Prophets, and are not distinctly characterized as being figures. Ignorant and superficial readers take them in a literal, not in a figurative sense. Even well informed persons are bewildered if they understand these passages in their literal signification, but they are entirely relieved of their perplexity when we explain the figure, or merely suggest that the terms are figurative. For this reason I have called this book *Guide of the Perplexed*."³ Educated more by reading the works of Arab Muslim philosophers than by personal contact with Arabian teachers, Maimonides acquired an intimate acquaintance not only with Arab Muslim

* Ph.D. - Romanian Academy, Bucharest, University of Sheffield, UK.

¹ Dimitrie Cantemir, *Istoria Ieroglifică*, București, 1965, EPL.

² Kennedy, George A., *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*, 1999, UNC Press.

³ *The Guide for the Perplexed*, translated from the original Arabic text by M.Friedlander, Dover Publications, New York, 1956, p.2; see too *Studia Hebraica*, III/2003, Editura Universității, București, pp. 196-206.

philosophy, but with the doctrines of Aristotle. Thereby, in my opinion, the crucial and determinative argument is that Maimonides and Cantemir, each in his century, strove to reconcile the Arab Muslim philosophy, Aristotle and the science.⁴ The text thus opens up towards a new horizon of meaning: “One word on the plain level is understood as a code for a concept found on the symbolic or allegorical level, and thus one narrative is exchanged for another narrative. To a certain extent this exegetical development takes extratextual information as the clue to fathoming the hidden and sublime meanings of the canonical text. Thus, one semantic unit, usually a word, is deemed by the interpreter to point to a concept, often stemming from other cultural or intellectual layers than the interpreted text. We may describe this interpretation as intercorporeal, which means that bodies of literature are understood to correspond to each other.”⁵

Starting from the premise that *The Hieroglyphical History* is a cultural sign (the sum total of the aesthetical, ethical, philosophical, historical, political, literary coordinates), in other words an informational and axiological convergence, we shall distinguish on the one hand the message (of the work as sign), with a statute similar to the significant and on the other hand the code, which functions like a significant.

1. The Message, in our theory, is threefold stratified:

- the historical subtext, contains the facts placed on the axis of a *sensus historicus* from 1688, the year when Constantin Brancoveanu mounted the throne - to 1705, Antioch Cantemir's second mounting on Moldavia's throne.

- the allegorical text circumscribes the elements which can be inserted on the axis of a *sensus allegoricus*.⁶ By means of allegorization, the historical couple Brancoveanu-Cantemir becomes the allegorical couple Unicorn-Raven, and taken away from the chronology it is projected in the absence of time: “Mai denainte decât temeliele Babilonului a sa zidi. . .”

- the metatext contains the two “scales”: that of the number and words “streine tilcuitoare”, namely the allegory's decoding.

2. The Code (of the work as sign) has three levels:

- the subcode, exemplified by the Romanian spoken popular language, sequentially perceptible in proverbs or sometimes in the sentence's rhythm.⁷

- the zero code, represented by the stable stylistical unities and which are Cantemir's essentialized language. Dimitrie Cantemir acts on Romanian language, considered “brudie”, certain permutations or lexical-synthetical addings: “elinești dzic și letinești cuvinte și numere ici și colea” (I, 4); and the “mixed” topics— Latin, Greek, Turkish, Slavonic.⁸

- the metacode is given by the superposition of the metaphorical-allegorical-hieroglyphical rhetorical language to the “zero degree” of Cantemir's language, to which the compositional technique is added - the time of subjective narrative replaces the objective historical time: “mijlocul istorii la început și începutul la mijloc, iară sfârșitul scaunul său păzindu-și, pre cât slăbiciunea mea au putut, pre picioare mijlocul și capul să stea am făcut (I, 5)”.

⁴ Arthur Hyman, James J. Walsh and Thomas Williams, ed. (2010), *Philosophy in the Middle Ages: The Christian, Islamic and Jewish Traditions*. 3rd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company; Arthur Stephen McGrade, John Kilcullen and Matthew Kempshall, ed. & trans. (2001), *The Cambridge Translations of Medieval Philosophical Texts*. Vol. 2: *Ethics and Political Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵ M. Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2002, p.255.

⁶ Umberto Eco, “The symbolic method”, in *Semiotics and the philosophy of language*, Turin, 1994.

⁷ I. D. Lăudat, *Dimitrie Cantemir*, Iași, Ed. Junimea, 1973, p. 92.

⁸ Al. Rosetti, B. Cazacu, *Istoria limbii române literare*, București, Editura Academiei, 1961, pp. 11 and 304.

The law of the linguistic sign's arbitrary functions for the cultural sign as well, because the significat (the message) does not superpose exactly on the significant (the code). It is interesting to notice that at an immediately inferior level of significance the meta-code functions as significant for the allegorical text, while the meta-text is the significat of the zero code, etc.

Coming' back to the threefold "face" of the sign, we can add that the historical-subtext, that is the referential reality, is subject to a rhetorical "technology" („spre deprinderea ritoricească nevoiu-du-mă . . . ” I, 4) through which it reaches the level of the allegorical text. This first step of the creative process could be circumscribed by the couple producer-product. The next step (the creation of the metatext, that is the interpretative text, of the allegorical text's decoding) is related to the couple transmitter (Cantemir) - receiver. Thus the metatext gets the phatic function which assures the contact with the addressee and the control of the message. Hence the four terms of the creative process and implicitly of the cultural sign's existence are:

transmitter—► communication—► communication control—► receiver (subtext+text) —
►(metatext)

In *The Hieroglyphical History* we find an explicit argument for the threefold pattern mentioned above. In Dimitrie Cantemir's opinion there are three possibilities of knowing the world, according to the three temporal dimensions (II, 125-126). In the order of the work as sign, the operations of transfer and formalization, which take place in the threefold space of the message, can superpose the three chronological-ethical-gnoseological axes distinguished by Dimitrie Cantemir.

- „Pildele celor trecute”: the operation of cutting out or selecting elements from the social reality, already considered history, i.e. subtext, from the point of view of the text.

- „Deprinderea cestor de acmu”: the operation of combining or adding elements belonging to various axiological-significative categories (historical, literary, aesthetic, ethical, philosophical), in other words, the process of creation whose outcome is the allegorical text.⁹

- „Buna socoteală a celor viitoare”: metatextual operation or selection — combination or cutting out — adding of some elements. This operation has in view the phatic function of the message and the decoding, namely the relationship transmitter-receiver.

In *The Hieroglyphical History*, the allegorical discourse develops under the sign of two narrative manners: the “retrospective-mimetic” manner (Mr) and the “projective-interpretative” one (Mp). In the retrospective sphere of the manner (Mr), the facts are prior to (1703-1705) the creative act, the mimetic sphere artistically reflects the social existence and conscience contemporary with Cantemir. A variant of this manner is the “retrospection of adjoining” (the frequent recurrences with long tales on the events prior to the period of time of the work). This stylistic phenomenon is formally circumscribed by the retrospective manner, but it substantially transcends (1685, Constantin Cantemir mounts the throne) the chronological limits imposed by the author to the work.

The projective sphere of the second manner (Mp) shows some of Cantemir's ideas, which surpass their epoch (the problem of man's social freedom, I, 75; the political idea of a centralized monarchy, his *avant la lettre* enlightenment); and the interpretative one points out the fact that many of the textual events, circumscribed by the retrospective manner are not only mimetically reflected but they are also metatextually interpreted (the legends, the. proverbs, “sentențiile” /the sentences/ - implicit decoding, “scările”

⁹ L. Wittgenstein, Notes on “*The Golden Bough*”, Milan, 1975.

/the scales/ - explicit decoding). The explicit interpretation and decoding represent “the projection of adjoining”, correlated to the “retrospection of adjoining”. These two narrative manners can be considered as belonging to a superior modal category - the relational-integrative manner (Mr) - which functions at all the levels of the cultural sign. The mechanism of this manner which assures the “relational” is the following: a narrative unit of the X degree can be integrated in a superior narrative unit and, at its turn, it can integrate units of inferior level, becoming thus an integrative unit. Therefore Mr is sometimes integrated in Mp, and sometimes integrator of Mp; both manners are integrated in Mr etc. Some rhetorical operations add to these modal categories; the most important is the permutation (we shall mention the other ones all along the essay). This operation functions both at the formal level of, the discourse and at the substantial one: (1) the formal level - lexical transfer (the introduction of foreign words in Romanian language, keeping the initial form or translation of words from a foreign language – “a le moldoveni” or “a le români”, I, 7) and the syntactic level (the verb at the end of the sentence); (2) the substantial level - double transfer (the characterological human data are first transposed on the zoological level, then inserted in the historical context; cf. MR). In this semiological-stylistical macro-context which functions as a relational manner for the allegorization, we shall analyze the allegorical sign. As a first definition, the allegorical sign (SA), just like any other sign used for intercommunication, is a physical signal used by the transmitter's conscience (Cantemir) as a means (the allegorical language and technique), which indicates an object (the historical reality) and gets a significance for a certain interpreter. The allegorical sign sends on the one hand to the relationships of the real world and to objects, and on the other hand to significances, i.e. to functions of conscience. In our opinion the allegorical sign includes the relational existence of two essential elements: the allegorical subject (Sa) and the allegorical predicate (Pa); the disappearance of one of them implies the dissolution of the allegory. We call "allegorical subject" (Sa) the performers, namely those elements essential to the allegorical narrative (the Raven, the Unicorn etc.) which can establish, from the syntactical point of view, intra and meta allegorical relationships with the allegorical predicate. We call “allegorical predicate” the variants of verbal, gestural, performing context, through which an allegorical subject circumscribes itself („prinderea Liliacului în ventrele corăbiei”). In order to fully understand the relationships established between (Sa) and (Pa), we shall further briefly analyze the immediate components of the two syntactical elements. (Sa) is the outcome of the arbitrary superposition (in the linguistic sense) of a human subject (Su) - historical characters - and a zoological subject (Sz); the first term functions as a significat and the second as a significant. (Pa) at its turn is made out of a human predicate (Pu) - the typically human actions – and a zoological predicate (Pz) - the typical actions of the animals. The combination between the two essential elements of the allegorical structure (Sa-Pa) can be represented by a zero degree equation (conventional value of the “ideal” allegory) in which all the terms are equal from the informational point of view: Sa (Su/Sz), Pa (Pu/P). The relationships established in the sphere of the allegorical sign between the nominal group will be referred to as intraallegorical or implicit: “Vidra (Sz) prin gârle vînatul peștelui în împutinează” (Pz), (I, 68). We have here an example of literal “zoological” sentence, which gets no allegorical value, i.e. it does not be an allegorical sentence for the receiver but by means of the (implicit) relation with the referential decodifying sentence (chosen by the transmitter): “C. Duca se ocupă de afaceri în mediu otoman”, (Pu)¹⁰. Within the allegorical sign, the significant “zoological” sentence sends us to the referential significative sentence, metatextually integrating it (cf. MR). On the other hand,

¹⁰ cf. Index in *Istoria Ieroglifică, II*, p. 44.

intersemiotic relationships establish between the allegorical sign and the referential sign (reality as a system of signs - different from the work of art -, as a semantic collection where the transmitter can *choose* from). We shall not deal with this kind of relationship here. If we give a value greater than zero¹¹ to one of the terms of the equation of zero degree: Sa (Su/Sz). Pa (Pux/Pz) we get an equation of minimum informational surplus where the metaallegorical relationships of interference function: "Toate dihaniile (Sz) (...) rîsul cu hohot își clătinară" (Puj) (I, 77), or "între pasiri era o Brehnace bătrînă (Sz), care în multe științe și meșteșuguri era deprinsă (Pu)" (I, 104). In both examples (Sz) is combined with a (Pu) - the syntagmatic axis. The normal relation (Sz-Pu) is replaced by a deviated relation (Sz-Pz), a relation of interference due to (Pu) of different index. The predicative term of the referential sentence is integrated and is integrating the subjective term of the "zoological" sentence. The allegorical sentence: can be understood by means of only one decodifying, implicit operation of permutation (the paradigmatic axis), on the basis of a pre-established synonymy: Sz=Su (cf. "the scale": dihanii = boieri; Brehnace = the High Steward Constantin Cantacuzino). Another metaallegorical fact - because it belongs to the reference - is the double articulated speech of the animals. The pure allegory, un- and antireferential, could be thought as a collection of onomatopoeias at the level of the first utterance. The articulated speech makes it communicable destroying: the hypothetical integrity of the allegory. Hence the articulated language reconstitutes the transmitter-receiver dialogue (essential for every-cultural sign) conferring on the work, thanks to the above mentioned couple, the axiological dimension.

The classification of the allegorical relations (under the two invariants of relation) was made by permanently comparing them with the "ideal", the complete pattern-allegory in which the process of allegorization confines itself to personification ("zoologization") without interfering with the referential's categories (excepting no doubt the language, the expression, the neutral, objective pattern-code which assures its ontological condition). We conclude that:

Sentence 1: if and only if the index of value of all the allegory's terms is equal to zero can we talk about intraallegorical relations.

Sentence 2: if and only if the index of value of (minimum) one of the terms is greater than zero (in other words, if the axiological stress falls on Sz or on Su etc.) then metaallegorical relations can be established.

Therefore a grammar of the allegory will study the relationships between (Sa) and (Pa) because these two entities cannot function separately: both of them have a contextual statute.

We can distinguish several types of allegories relating them to the technique of composing the allegorical signs. The metonymical allegory with synecdochical value is the most frequently used rhetorical figure; it integrates the other categories of allegories and tropes. The metonymy, whose basic principle is *pars pro toto*, is one of the fundamental characteristics of the works, attaches itself to the realistic trend (Roman Jakobson); this would be a stylistic argument for Cantemir's "realism", for the often disputed documentary value of *The Hieroglyphical History*. Just like the cubism which changes the object in a series of synecdoches, Dimitrie Cantemir changes (Su) or (Sz), (Pu) or (Pz) in a synecdoche, sometimes in a series of synecdoches (see the two "scales"), conferring on the allegorical term a certain polysemy ("publica" means: "politiie", I, 19; "sfat boieresc", I, 20, or country. The people: "jiganiuța", "adulmecatoriu vînatului" of

¹¹ The value (informative 4- allegorical) superior to the zero degree is due to the operations of adjoining, cutting out or permutation of the signs (cf. Rhétorique générale, le groupe μ , coll. «Langue et Langage», Paris, Ed. Larousse, 1970).

the Lion “povața Leului”, cf. the note 2, I, 75), or a polymorphic statute (Struțocamila, Camilopardalul, Monocheropardalis, etc.).

In our opinion, Hegel is the only one who noticed the metonymic characteristics of the allegory: “The intuitiveness of the more precisely indicated features is taken from the manifestations, the effects and the consequences which come out into relief from the significance when it becomes real in the concrete existence or from the instruments and means significance uses for its actual realization. For example, fight and war are indicated by means of arms, swords, cannons, trumpets, flags etc.”¹² Here are some conclusive examples of metonymic allegory with synecdochical value: “The Bees”. The significant “bee” does no longer send to the significant from the entomologic stratum “insect”, but to the ethical connotation of the sign. According to the metonymic principle *pars pro toto*, a common symbol (from all the connotations) diligence, production - both for the referent, the human subject (the peasants who make the food) and for the zoology subject (*the bees*) represents the relation and the motivation of the sign and of the allegorical process. In a sentence of the „Struțocămila” (“... puterea stomahului atît imi este de vîrtoasă, cit și pre fier a amistui poate”, I, 76), the syntagm “puterea stomahului” assures the intraallegorical relation (we already know the visceral characteristics of the ostrich and of the camel) and comparing it with the ethical human level (the power of destroying everything, of using any kind of means) it represents the analogical semic nucleus (*pars* = “a amistui”; *pro toto* = the psychosomatic complex of the character) which confers on the allegory its metonymic character. Another variant of the allegorical sign is the side or parenthetical allegory, materialized in the proverbs, the legends and the inserted tales. Just like in the fable, between the narrated event and the ethical norm stipulated in the moral, in the allegory a semantic equation establishes at the level of socio-pedagogical significance between the narrative discourse and the ethical-didactic one, between experience and exemplariness. The moral in a fable, the “sentences” in the *History* fulfill a metalingual function, representing a manifest indication of the code (implicit ethical decoding). They diminish the decoding's number of the semantic alternatives (the degree of ambiguity) placing the receiver's perception on an approximately correct line of significance. The side allegory can be considered both on the paradigmatic axis, that of the substitutions (the replacing of the typically-human sense with the generally-human one: Moldavia's history with the history of a potential humanity), and on the syntagmatic axis, that of the combinations (the coexistence of both senses in simultaneity, underlining the immanent moral of the allegorical text). The parenthetical allegory is akin rather with the metaphorical allegory than with the metonymy one, because the metaphor has a higher degree of abstracting, of generalizing, being therefore able to replace or characterize different referents (having no relations between them) in different contexts (see the frequency with which the same proverb is applied in diverse narrative circumstances, while the metonymy has a less arbitrary motivation, but particularizing-objective).

The cultural existence of *The Hieroglyphical History*, the aesthetic, poetical, socio-historical and philosophical values of the message and of the code cannot possibly appear but in the couple text-reader and transmitter-receiver sphere. The communication with its two poles, theorized by most of the contemporary aestheticians and linguists, concerned Dimitrie Cantemir as well, in the XVIIth century. Take for instance the “Izvoditoriul cititorului, sănătate” („după numărul fețelor însemnate, pre cît mai chiar a le descoperi s-au putut, după înțelegerea limbii noastre a ți le tilcui mi-au căutat. Deci fiete / care cuvînt strein și neînțeles, oriunde înainte ți-ar ieși după rîndul

¹² G.W.F. Hegel (1832-1887), *Werke...*, Berlin, Duncker und Humboldt, vol. X (Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik, 1842, third edition); Ed. von Hartman (1886); Die Deutsche Ästhetik seit Kant, Berlin, pp. 88-112.

azbuchelor și după numărul fețelor, la scară îl cearcă,, că așe pofta să ți să plinească nedejduiesc”, I, 4) or the two „scări tâlcuitoare”.

The modern reader has at his disposal a double perspective of decoding the cultural sign, of interpreting and decoding of the message-code. The addressee can close the allegory's circle, projecting it in the context of the respective epoch on the axis of that *sensus historicus* (objective referential decoding) or can interpret the message by means of his collection of signs - knowledge, manners, ideals - (subjective referential decoding) or, the last possibility, he can describe a spiral line to the open symbol, source of eternally human valuable perspectives (axiological metareferential decoding). The unforeseen virtues of *The Hieroglyphical History* reveal themselves, this work representing not only the first Romanian novel but also the first Romanian rhetorical text. Unlike other well-known and commented rhetorical texts, *The Hieroglyphical History* has a double statute: it is at the same time materialization of some rhetorical figures and their theorization; it is a lesson, unique in the history of rhetoric, of decoding the allegory and of initiation in decoding. *The Hieroglyphical History* is still waiting for its discoverer. The transfer at the level of significance is possible through the acceptance of philosophy and its instrumentalization - allegory and allegoric - in recovering and decrypting the deep-mysteries and the hidden meanings of the political or the linguistic philosophy.¹³

¹³ Richard Rorty. *Introduction: Metaphilosophical difficulties of linguistic philosophy*. In Richard Rorty (ed.). *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1967.