Δεύς in Cornutus

1. Cornutus and Allegorical Mythology: the Ἐπιδρομή

In the first century AD, the Roman philosopher and grammarian Annaeus Cornutus wrote, in Greek, a manual of allegorical mythology, entitled A Survey of the Theological Traditions of the Greeks (Ἐπιδρομή τῶν κατὰ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν θεολογίαν παραδεδομένων). In this work, which has a didactic purpose, Cornutus makes a survey of the principal gods of Greece, for the benefit of a young disciple from Rome. By means of more-or-less imaginative etymologies, Cornutus attempts to decipher the allegorical meanings that are hidden in myths, following a theory that he shares with a good number of Stoic thinkers.

What we discover is that in the immense majority of cases within the Ἐπιδρομή, the interpretations of the gods are made in a physicalist vein. This is the way in which the figure of Zeus is studied, on whom Cornutus focuses in the second chapter of his work:

όσπερ δὲ ἡμεῖς ὑπὸ ψυχῆς διοικούμεθα, οὕτω καὶ ὁ κόσμος ψυχὴν ἔχει τὴν συνέχουσαν αὐτὸν, καὶ αὕτη καλεῖται Ζεύς, πρώτως καὶ διὰ παντὸς ξώσα καὶ αἰτία οὖσα τοῖς ζῶσι τοῦ ζῆν. (Corn. ND 2.3.3-6)

In the opinion of Cornutus and the ancient allegorists, a single name may be open to several distinct allegorical interpretations, without implying mutual exclusivity among them. Therefore, after saying that Zeus is the living soul of the cosmos, Cornutus adds a new explanation, according to which the supreme god is the cause par excellence. The first interpretation was based on the nominative of the name of Zeus; in the second case, Cornutus derives his interpretation from the

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1) In regard to Cornutus and his manual, cf. Nock 1931 and Most 1989. I will cite Cornutus according to the text of Lang 1881.

2) Not all Stoics, however: it should be remembered that Seneca manifested a very hostile attitude towards allegoresis (cf. Ben. 1.3-4, Ep. 88.5).
accusative form of Ζεύς, Δία, which in turn is related to the causal preposition διά, as other authors had already done before him.\(^3\)

\[\text{Δία δὲ αὐτὸν καλοῦμεν ὅτι δι’ αὐτὸν γίνεται καὶ σώζεται πάντα. (Corn. ND 2.3.8-9)}\]

2. Δεύς in Cornutus: A Dialectal Form?

I would like to draw attention to the third explanation of the meaning of Zeus’s name proposed by Cornutus. After describing Zeus as cause, the author states the following:

\[\text{παρὰ δὲ τοι} καὶ Δεύς λέγεται, τάχα ἀπὸ τοῦ δεῦειν τὴν γῆν ἢ μεταδιδόναι τοῖς ζῶσι ζωτικῆς ἰκμάδος. (Corn. ND 2.3.10-1)}\]

It should be noted that, in order to pass from the theonym to the notion of wetness, Cornutus has to change the name of the god, which ceases to be the habitual Ζεύς in order to become Δεύς, a form which is clearly relatable to δεύω (‘wet, drench’, according to \(LSJ\)). If we look up Δεύς in this lexicon, we see that it informs us that Δεύς is the Boeotian variant of Ζεύς, and is a variant which is testified to in such literary sources as Aristophanes, Corinna and the grammarian Herodian; in inscriptions, this form is also found in the Laconian and Rhodian dialects. It is also found in Corinthian, although this dialectal cognate is not found in \(LSJ\).\(^4\)

\(LSJ\) expressly references the passage in the second chapter of Cornutus in the entry for Δεύς. Since all other references to Δεύς proposed by this work have a dialectal character, it can be assumed that \(LSJ\) interpret Cornutus as relying on a dialectal, probably Boeotian, variant in the analyzed passage. Such an explanation is theoretically possible. However, I see difficulties with this position; in addition, it is neither the only nor the best explanation which can be proposed for this form.

3. Plausibility of the Hypothesis

An initial theoretical difficulty which has to be faced by those who believe that Cornutus is employing a dialectal variant involves the manner by which Cornutus would have been able, in the first century AD, to have knowledge of such an unusual dialectal form as Δεύς, Boeotian or not. \textit{A priori}, it does not seem very

\(^3\) Δία and διά are already seen as related in Pl. \textit{Cra.} 396a.