



Research project

Lucian's *Toxaris*, or the comparison of friendship between Greece and Scythia: a socio-anthropological survey for today's society

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Project presentation

A new way of reading and interpreting *Toxaris*, in order to try to appreciate Lucian's special 'method', seems to be needed. Lucian adopts an interesting perspective focused on the comparison between the Greek cultural forms and the Scythian ones in terms of 'presence and absence', with an emphasis on the differences between the two cultures and a interest in the varied aspects of the culture of the 'others', from the problem of the translatability of languages to that of the comparison about the representation of the 'divine' between the Greek world and the Scythian one.

Through a close analysis of the text and its topics, such as friendship, myth, polytheism, sacrifice, space, kinship, economics, metaphors, and images used in the dialogue, a rich 'panorama' of Lucian's strategies of representing cultural elements will emerge.

Current state of research

The most updated edition of the text is that by Marquis 2017, in which a detailed analysis of most of the terms and problems of *Toxaris* is offered, but where, for instance, the anthropological and sociological interest of this work lacks. Among the lines of research followed so far on this Lucian's dialogue, one is focused on the topic of friendship, considered above all from a 'philosophical' point of view¹. Moreover, there is a line of research relating to the distinction between the characters called *Toxaris* in *Toxaris* and in *Scythia*². A group of studies deals with the links between *Toxaris* and the tradition of the Greek novel³. The problem of the relationship with the Greek novels, in particular with those by Chariton, Heliodorus, and with the papyrus fragments belonging to the so-called 'Calligone novel', is underlined as a 'fictional' element of *Toxaris*, in which Lucian would create novelistic narratives, according to this view. On the one hand it is appropriate that the 'closeness' between *Toxaris* and the Greek novels should be highlighted. However, on the other hand it would be especially interesting to underline the component of 'truthfulness'⁴ in the narratives, where Lucian's perspective always tends

¹ On this topic see Pervo 1997; Lizcano Rejano 2000; Sowa 2019.

² See Anderson 1976a, 267-269. On the meaning of *Toxaris* see Gorrini 2003, 436.

³ On the relationships between *Toxaris* and the world of the Greek novels see Anderson 1976b, 12-33; Jones 1986, 56-58; Ní Mheallaigh 2014, 39-71; Tagliabue 2016.

⁴ On the presence of elements of 'truth' in *Toxaris*' narratives, see Anderson 2009.



towards the comparison between cultures.

Goals to achieve

The present research project aims to investigate the text of *Toxaris* from a socio-anthropological perspective. Lucian's point of view emerges from the text, presenting a comparison between a Greek and a Scythian in a 'speaking contest' on the value of friendship and the importance of the role friendship plays in Greece and among the Scythians. Therefore, the main goal will be to highlight the perspective with which the culture of the Scythians is presented in the text, attempting to constantly underline the way in which Lucian, a 'foreigner' coming from Syria, thinks and represents the Scythian world. An analysis of the elements of the Scythian culture, which Lucian, behind the character of Mnesippus, considers weird and interesting, will be needed: among these elements there are, for instance, the Greek belief that the Scythians eat human flesh, the Scythian worship of the Greek heroes Orestes and Pylades, the oath of Toxaris in the name of the wind and the scimitar. The series of questions from which the dialogue starts, and the comparison between the Greek habits and the Scythian ones 'put into practice' the 'competition' between the two speakers and show Lucian's interest in other cultures. This kind of comparative perspective places the educated audience of listeners or readers in front of the 'oddities' of a different and distant culture. The topic of friendship⁵ will be investigated starting from the latest research studies, in order to analyse the elements arising in relation to it, such as the distinction between flatterers and 'true' friends, the issue of mutuality and 'reciprocity', the exchange of favours between friends, the 'equality' of friends in terms of age, wealth and status⁶.

Methodology

As far as the research methodologies are concerned, the investigation of *Toxaris* will involve the use of an updated bibliography, favouring an anthropological approach to the central themes of the text itself, i.e. primarily on friendship, but also on the meanings of the myth, on religious representations, on descriptions of power and conflict, on kinship structures.

In order to carry out our investigation, we will need to resort to the practice of an interdisciplinary approach, which will prove fundamental for the analysis of the text in its literary, historical, geographical, religious, philosophical aspects. Therefore, comparisons with other literary texts focused on friendship will be made, such as with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*⁷, Cicero's *Laelius de Amicitia*, Seneca's *De beneficiis*, Plutarch's *Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur*, *De amicorum multitudine* and *De fraterno amore*. For the study of the presence of Toxaris in Greece, and so on the role of the Greek *paideia* in the foreigner's oratory skills, the method adopted will consist in the comparison with other works of the Lucianic corpus, and in particular with the other two 'Scythian' works by Lucian, i.e. *Anacharsis*⁸ and *Scytha*, in order to be able to develop a comparative analysis of the Scythian cultural forms presented in the three texts, and therefore to define Lucian's interest in the Scythian world and in the 'oddities' and cultural differences.

For the first year we can estimate a work of translation and the 'arrangements' for the commentary. Moreover, we will tackle the role of friendship in our contemporary world, in order to

⁵ On an example of a study of friendship in an anthropological key, relating to Plautus, see Raccanelli 1998. For the anthropological analysis of friendship in the Roman world see Raccanelli-Beltrami 2014.

⁶ For an overview of friendship in *Toxaris*, see Konstan 1997, 118-120. For friendship in relation to peace-building and the vocabulary of diplomacy see Cozzo 2018a, 91-115. On friendship and peace, but above all on the forms of arbitration, mediation and interposition, see also Cozzo 2014.

⁷ See the jingle φιλότης ἰσότης, "friendship is equality", in Aristot. *EN* 1157b.

⁸ For a commentary on the text of *Anacharsis*, see Angeli Bernardini 1995.



reflect on the possible connections between what we read in *Toxaris* and the problems of today's society, especially in relation to friendship.

In the second year, we will write the commentary, which will aim to offer an overall analysis of the text, with special attention on the connections between *Toxaris* and other texts typically associated with the Second Sophistic, the links of the text with other authors, such as Herodotus⁹ and Euripides, and the tradition of the Greek novel contemporary with Lucian's works.

It is foreseen that the work of the third year will involve the introduction to *Toxaris*, in which, in addition to the contextualization of this dialogue within the Lucianic corpus¹⁰, with particular attention on the clues of dating and the relationship between the main character of the dialogue and the homonymous character of *Scythia*, the socio-anthropological interest of the text will be underlined under a variety of aspects, ranging from religious representations among the Scythians to forms of friendship that become ties of kinship and guest-friendship. Therefore, a wide-ranging investigation of friendship in the ancient world will be important, and it could be useful as a tool for comparison with Lucian's text, and so we will write an essay about friendship in Lucian and in the ancient world, with a socio-cultural perspective open to our societies in today's world.

Relevance of the project to the educational objectives of the PhD

The study of *Toxaris* through a translation, an in-depth commentary and an introduction will allow us to 'grasp' and appreciate the interesting aspects mentioned in the text, such as the structures of kinship, the manifold forms of friendship, the modes of reasoning in this Lucian's dialogue, the political, religious and economic articulations in Scythia. Furthermore, the investigation of the dynamics of friendship in the text will be gone with a research on friendship in our contemporary world, useful for understanding similarities and differences between the distant past and our contemporary world in relation to friendship.

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⁹ On natural and environmental elements in the Scythian world described by Herodotus, see Cozzo 2018b, 226-227.

¹⁰ On Lucian's interest in 'different' cultures in relation to the *spoudogeloion*, see Angeli Bernardini 1991, 178. For the figure of Lucian as a 'foreigner', see Camerotto 2014, 135-159.



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