Second Alcibiades 148c-149c: Amun between Spartan *euphemia* and Egyptian silence

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ABSTRACT

This study examines an implicit reference to Egyptian ethics in the *Second Alcibiades*, focusing on the mention of Amun, the Lord of the silent ones. The Egyptian "silent man" parallels the Platonic concept of *euphemia*, extending ritual silence into ethico-political conduct. While the dialogue contrasts *euphemia* and *blasphemia* through Spartan and Athenian behavior, Egyptian texts similarly oppose the "silent" to the "feverish" or "talkative" man. This intercultural parallel suggests a deeper Egyptian influence previously overlooked. Thus, this study explores Egyptian ethics, Greek contact with the Oracle of Amun in Siwa, Plato's adaptation of *euphemia*, and the implications for the dialogue's authenticity.

Keywords: *Second Alcibiades*; *euphemia*; silence; Egyptian ethics; Oracle of Amun

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This study aims to highlight an implicit reference to Egyptian ethics found in a passage of the *Second Alcibiades* that mentions the Oracle of Amun. This aspect has not yet been discussed in Platonic studies and therefore represents a gap that requires further attention. The author of the dialogue contrasts Spartan *euphemia* with Athenian pompous sacrifices, indicating that Amun privileges the more reserved attitude typical of the Lacedaemonians (*Alc. II* 149b). The point is that Amun, in Egypt, bears the epithet "Lord of the silent ones," and the figure of the silent one in Egyptian ethics corresponds well to Plato's use of the concept of *euphemia*, transposed into a meaning that goes beyond mere religious conduct. While, in the *Second Alcibiades*, εὐφημία and βλασφημία are contrasted and personified, respectively, by Spartan and Athenian attitudes, Egyptian ethics (particularly in the literary genre *sbꜣ.yt, i.e.,* "instruction", "teaching") repeatedly contrasts the silent one with the talkative or feverish one. In both cases, two ethico-political dispositions are set in contrast, presenting an intercultural parallelism that is even more noticeable when we recall several classical accounts indicating that Plato traveled to Egypt.[1] Thus, our aim is to discuss this Egyptian influence that appears in the *Second Alcibiades*, treating it as an autonomous dialogue and leaving aside any references to the *First Alcibiades*, while avoiding any reduction of this discussion to the purely religious aspect. Therefore, this study examines the following points: Egyptian ethics; the contact between classical Greeks and the Oracle of Amun; Plato's transposition of the concept of *euphemia*; the Egyptian presence in the Libyan oracle; and, finally, a brief consideration of the implications of this parallel for the debate on the authenticity of the *Second Alcibiades*.

WHY AMUN?

Given that this is a dialogue written in Greek which, in depicting the relationship between two Athenians (Alcibiades and Socrates), comments on the military conflict between Athens and Sparta, we must ask ourselves: "*Why Amun?*". What is the purpose of this Egyptian god in the text? Why did the author of the *Second Alcibiades* choose to point to Egypt when discussing the silent conduct of the Spartans ("τὴν Λακεδαιμονίων εὐφημίαν," *Alc. II* 149b3), in the midst of war, as a quality valued by this foreign god? In short, the choice of Amun, among so many gods, suggests that there is a reason for it. Some aspect of the cult of Amun is intertwined with the ethico-political conduct (which is not merely religious, given the context of war) advocated as a model of human action by the author of the dialogue. Let us now consider the most relevant passage:

> I would like to tell you another story which I once heard from some of my elders. There was a quarrel between the Athenians and the Spartans, and whenever there was a battle, whether by land or sea, our city always came off worse and could never win a victory. The Athenians took this hard, and cast about to discover how they could find relief from their troubles. After discussion they decided to send a delegation to consult Ammon, to ask in particular why the gods granted victory to the Spartans rather than themselves. "We" they said "offer more and finer sacrifices than the rest of the Greeks, and we surpass all others in adorning the temples with emblems, and every year we organize

> for the gods' benefit the most solemn and sumptuous processions, spending more money than all the other Greeks put together. But the Spartans have never taken any such pains, and they are so mean to the gods that they regularly sacrifice blemished animals and fall well behind us in the quality of their worship, in spite of being no less wealthy than ourselves." Having said that, they also asked what they should do to be relieved from the evils that beset them. The prophet, no doubt under divine instruction, called them to him and said simply this. "Thus saith Ammon to the Athenians: I prefer the terse Laconic utterance to all the sacrifices of the Greeks." That was all he said; not a word more. (*Alc. II* 148d-149b; transl. by Kenny in Cooper, 1997).

In the above passage, some key points can be identified. The account does not specify when the consultation took place, therefore, it is impossible to date it precisely or to know exactly which conflicts it refers to. However, since Socrates heard this story from his elders, we may infer that it occurred at some point during his childhood or even before his birth, likely between the Greco-Persian Wars and the First Peloponnesian War, in the 5th c. BCE. By that time, the Oracle of Amun at Siwa was already well known to the Greeks, as coins from Cyrene, in Libya, near this oasis, were already being issued (c. 530-480 BCE) depicting Zeus syncretized with Amun (Head, 1887, p. 727; Parke, 1967, p. 203). Furthermore, a statue base (Met Museum, 21.2.65; found in Thebes, Egypt), dating from the 6th c. BCE, attests to the syncretism of Zeus and Amun, that is, "Zeus of Thebes" ("Ζηνὶ Θηβαίωι"). Most significantly, in the 5th c. BCE, Euripides refers to the Libyan deserts in *Electra* v. 734, mentioning "the dry lands of Amun [ξηραί τ᾽ Ἀμμωνίδες],"[2] while Herodotus (*Histories* I.46 and II.54) clearly possesses knowledge of the Oracle at Siwa. In other words, when the author of the *Second Alcibiades* refers to an Athenian delegation to the Oracle of Amun ("πέμψαντας πρὸς Ἄμμωνα," *Alc. II* 148e2), this implies a θεωρία to a foreign land, namely the Libyan desert, for even though small temples of Amun had been established in classical Greece, the Oracle of Amun remained that of Siwa.[3] And what do the Athenians hear from this Oracle? That the god Amun prefers the Spartan *euphemia* to all the offerings of the Athenians ("τὴν Λακεδαιμονίων εὐφημίαν εἶναι μᾶλλον ἢ τὰ σύμπαντα τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἱερά," *Alc. II* 149b3). Soon after this passage, the dichotomy between these two types of conduct is explained:

> It would be a strange and sorry thing if the gods took more account of our gifts and sacrifices than of our souls and whether there is holiness and justice to be found in them. Yes, that is what they care about, I believe, far more than about these extravagant processions and sacrifices offered year by year by states and individuals who may, for all we know, have sinned greatly against gods and men. The gods are not venal, and scorn all these things, as Ammon and his prophet told us. Gods and men of sound mind are more likely to hold justice and wisdom in especial honor; and none are wise and just but those who know how to behave and speak to gods and men. (*Alc. II* 149e-150b; transl. by Kenny in Cooper, 1997).

In sum, the reserved attitude of the Spartans is more valuable in the eyes of the god than the Athenian attempt at bribery[4] ("ἐδωρούμεθα τοῖς θεοῖς," *Alc. II* 148e7; "δῶρα," *Alc. II* 149e2; "ὑπὸ δώρων," *Alc. II* 149e4; "πρὸς τὰ δῶρα," *Alc. II* 149e7) through lavish processions and sacrifices ("πομπάς τε πολυτελεστάτας καὶ σεμνοτάτας," *Alc. II* 148e8; "τὰς πολυτελεῖς ταύτας πομπάς τε καὶ θυσίας," *Alc. II* 150a1). Since the gods do not accept bribes ("οὐ δωροδόκοι ὄντες," *Alc. II* 150a4) and despise not only the wealth of these offerings but also the attitude of those who offer them, it is the Spartans who are favored by divine fortune, since they please the god through their ethical conduct, that is, they defeat the Athenians because they are pious, just, prudent, and reasonable people, in addition to being courageous, since they participate in mortal battles. This passage thus points to the ethical virtues[5] and the qualities that the Greek man must cultivate within himself, which are found in the Spartans and not among the Athenians. The latter are the true losers, for they are defeated not only in battle but also in their own self-improvement, from which they turn away while greedily pursuing a material victory. Thus, by valuing the restrained aspect of Spartan *euphemia*, the Athenians are, in contrast, characterized as βλασφημοί, perpetrators of sumptuous blasphemies, for the god does not hear their prayers and rejects their verbosity, dismissing their sacrifices and even potentially punishing them ("βλασφημούντων," *Alc. II* 149c4; "βλασφημοῦντός," *Alc. II* 150c4).[6] However, note that in the last sentence cited above ("τῶν εἰδότων ἃ δεῖ πράττειν καὶ λέγειν καὶ πρὸς θεοὺς καὶ πρὸς ἀνθρώπους," *Alc. II* 150b2), the scope of this ethical achievement is not limited to the individual, nor to the religious sphere. Instead, due to the implications of the military context, it extends to the realm of political decisions, that is, to human action within society. Consequently, the god in this passage from the *Second Alcibiades*, by refusing bribes and valuing human virtues, determines the victors, namely those who will survive and perpetuate their lineage, thereby establishing an ethical conduct regarding how one ought to act ("πράττειν") and speak ("λέγειν") in society.

So why Amun? Why seek a reference in Egypt? Precisely because Amun is an Egyptian god associated with the moral behavior of the "silent man" (*gr*), which resembles the broader discussion of the Spartan *euphemia* that extends beyond the religious sphere into the ethico-political realm, as discussed in the *Second Alcibiades*. Egyptian sources indicate that this god delights in the practice of silence,[7] which is neither limited to refraining from speaking nor connected to the practice of mysteries,[8] but is rather characterized by respect for the god through moderate and prudent actions. In other words, this Egyptian "silent one", in Greek terms, would be akin to the σώφρων or the φρόνιμος, but primarily the εὔφημος, in the broader sense that Plato and the author of this dialogue develop. These actions are carried out in daily life and not merely in relation to the conduct within the temple and toward the god, that is, they possess a meaning that extends beyond the religious and manifests itself in the ethico-political realm of human actions in society.

AMUN AND THE IDEAL OF THE SILENT MAN IN EGYPTIAN ETHICS

Let us examine some examples from Egyptian texts that allow us to perceive the

connection between Amun and the figure of the silent one. First, the most explicit case, which functions as his epithet, appears in a hymn found on the Stela of Nebre: "Amon, the lord of the silent one [*Jmn pꜣ nb n gr*]" (col. 4).[9] In another stela from the same period (19th Dynasty), belonging to the scribe Ray, a hymn characterizes Amun-Ra as a god who "lives in truth [*mꜣꜥ.t*]" and "loves the silent ones [*gr.w*]".[10] In general, this is a trait predominantly appreciated by the gods, as appears in the *Chester Beatty Papyrus IV* (*verso* 5.2): "God loves the silence [*sgr*]," further referring specifically to Amun: "The god loves the silent one [*gr*] more than him of the loud voice [*qꜣ ḫrw*]" (*recto* 5.8).[11] For this reason, a priest of Amun defines himself as the "truly silent [*gr(.w) mꜣꜥ*] of Thebes, […] the even-tempered [*qb-srf*][12] of the Temple of Amun, the one with a closed mouth [*tmm-rꜣ*]".[13] This autobiographical text reveals that Paenkhemenu bequeathed to eternity his self-portrayal as someone of cool temperament (the opposite of the silent person being the "feverish" or "heated" one), that is, he is one who soothes the heat of conflicts, and ultimately, a peacemaker who calms those who arrive at the temple inflamed with demands, since Amun prefers tranquility and rewards only the silent.

Then, what would be this Egyptian "silent man"? In brief, one could describe him as an idealized ethical figure who serves as a model for human conduct. He is favored by the gods, respected in society, and, through his moderate and prudent behavior, manages to establish himself among the great and important. He is the opposite of the feverish, greedy, and impulsive man who, like every chatterer, talks a lot and does not consider the consequences of his words, since he lacks sound judgment. The action of the silent one does involve literal silence (avoiding speaking or displaying non-verbal reactions), but it goes far beyond this. It is a posture of restraining negative feelings, of curbing passions, of one who thinks and reflects carefully before acting, ensuring that his word remains in accord with what he feels, since he lives as a truthful person, governed by *mꜣꜥ.t*, the most widespread ethico-political concept in Egypt, symbolizing order, righteousness, truth, and justice.[14]

Thus, on many occasions, the "silent one" (*gr*) is discussed through a dichotomy with its opposite counterpart, which is represented at times as "hot-tempered" (*tꜣ.w*) and "feverish" (šmm), at times as "talkative" (*mdw.tj*), or even as "the hot-mouthed" (*pꜣ tꜣ-rꜣ*), thereby combining both ideas. For the sake of concision, and aiming merely to illustrate this concept, which has been properly discussed by Cariddi (2023), Gallardo (2025), and Shupak (2009), I will list some short phrases that demonstrate how this dichotomy persisted over millennia and extended into an ethico-political sense: *Maxims of Ptahhotep*: "Be silent [*gr=k*] because it is more profitable than chattering" (D365);[15] *Instruction of Amenemope*: "Start no quarrel with the hot-mouthed man [*pꜣ tꜣ-rꜣ*]" (5.10);[16] "Do not befriend a heated man [šmm], Let not a hostile man approach you!" (15.13-14);[17] "Keep your tongue safe from words of detraction" (10.21);[18] *Instruction of a Man for His Son:* "The prosperous man is the one who restrains his mouth [*ḥnn m rꜣ=f*], since accusations degenerate into words of conflict [*ṯs.w ꜥḥꜣ*]" (24.9-10);[19] *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*: "Be patient [*wꜣḥ-jb=k*], so that you may know the truth [*mꜣꜥ.t*]. Control your desires, so that all may go well in serenity [*gr.w*]" (B1, 241-242);[20] *The Teaching for King Merikare*: "One who disseminates talk [*mdw.tj*] is a disrupter of the city. […] Be proficient in speech [*mdw.t*], so that you may be strong, For the strength

of a king is his tongue" (27-32);[21] *Instruction of Ankhsheshonq*: "More pleasing is muteness [*ꜣbꜣ*] than hastiness of the tongue" (15.16).[22]

Thus, the Egyptian "silent man" resembles the ideal represented by the Lacedaemonians in the *Second Alcibiades*, a dialogue that, at 138c, divides men into the μαινόμενοι ("madmen", "enraged", "furious") and the ὑγιαίνοντες ("healthy", "sane", "reasonable"), since in this passage μαίνεσθαι ("to rage") is contrasted with φρονεῖν ("to be prudent"), consequently identifying the Athenians with this enraged and unrestrained figure,[23] similar to the Egyptian "feverish one" (šmm), which likewise carries a medical connotation.[24] Between 139c-140b, the author of this dialogue characterizes the majority of Socrates' fellow citizens as unwise and mad ("ἄφρονας", "μαινομένους"), while the reasonable (φρονίμους) are only a few, further discussing certain diseases, including inflammatory conditions that cause fever, thus portraying the Athenians as feverish, arrogant, and irascible (πυρέττειν in 139e, μεγαλοψυχία[25] in 140c, ὀργή in 141a). Accordingly, the Athenian is the inflamed person, the sick one, the feverish one.[26] By contrast, the Spartan is the one who possesses serenity,[27] which is favored by divine fortune; and at 140e, Socrates explains this behavior saying: "the wise [φρονίμους] are those who know what should be done [πράττειν] and said [λέγειν]." So, what is the attitude that Socrates ultimately values in the *Second Alcibiades*? Precisely that of keeping silent ("βέλτιστον εἶναι ἡσυχίαν ἔχειν," *Alc. II* 150c7), a conduct that resembles the discussion originated in Egypt, since it likewise does not amount merely to keeping the mouth shut. In this way, there is an interplay of oppositions that, even in Greek, reactivates the peculiar Egyptian dichotomy brought by the reference to Amun. In both cases, the conduct that the god prefers is characterized as that of one who lives justly and with sound judgment, in a healthy manner, in contrast to the maniac, who is sick and unreasonable. Thus, among the various Greek words for silence, the one that most closely resembles the Egyptian ideal of *gr.w* is εὐφημία, precisely because, in Plato, it takes on a meaning beyond religious ritual.

EUPHEMIA BEYOND ETYMOLOGY

The Egyptian concept of the silent man, and its ethical dichotomy, is alluded to in the *Second Alcibiades* through the figure of Amun. It is expressed through a contrast between the behavior of the εὔφημος, represented by the Spartans, and the βλάσφημος, personified by the Athenians. Both terms relate to the concept of εὐφημία and to the verb εὐφημέω, which are ultimately derived from the verb φημί ("to say") combined with the prefix εὐ ("well"), in the sense of uttering auspicious words. Common in Greek texts, including the Platonic dialogues, the imperative εὐφήμει is often translated as "Be silent!" or "Hush!".[28] However, its actual meaning goes far beyond merely keeping one's mouth shut, as what must be avoided – and what the imperative magically attempts to prevent in an apotropaic manner – is the utterance of ill-omened words. Such utterances would bring harmful consequences and must therefore be forestalled through an energetic and symbolic ritual that wards off evil. This duality between remaining silent and uttering auspicious words, which pertains to the oral dimension of *euphemia*, is expressed in the tragic poetry of Aeschylus: "I warn you to maintain proper speech, keeping silent where necessary and saying what is appropriate [ὑμῖν δ᾽ ἐπαινῶ γλῶσσαν εὔφημον φέρειν, | σιγᾶν θ᾽ ὅπου δεῖ καὶ λέγειν τὰ καίρια]".[29] Nonetheless, εὐφημία is

not restricted to the utterance or non-utterance of words (or the production of noises), but also regulates one's actions and behavior (as in *Alc. II* 150b2, which emphasizes "πράττειν καὶ λέγειν");[30] thus, its meaning extends beyond the more conventional concept of silence (such as that represented by σιγή or σιωπή):[31]

> Because euphemia characterizes an attitude as well as a sense of the potency of language, it entails constraints equivalent to the linguistic reserve in other dimensions of communication: dress, movement, and gesture must be analogously intensified and well omened as well. (Stehle, 2004, p. 130–131).

Although Stehle's (2004) interpretation remains within the realm of religious ritual, especially as expressed in tragic choruses, the categories of "dress, movement, and gesture", along with knowing what to say and when to remain silent, indicate how moral values interact with the concept of *euphemia*.[32] However, as Gödde (2011, p. 315-341) points out,[33] in Plato the meaning of εὐφημία extends beyond the religious domain: in ritual, the moral goodness of the worshipers does not matter, whereas in the context of Platonic philosophy *euphemia* becomes associated with the idea of the good and with the criterion of truth. It thus becomes subject to the category of what is or is not correct, thereby permeating the ethico-political sphere. The appropriation of this concept, which originated in religious ritual, is evident in Plato's use of the imperative "εὐφήμει," turning it into a way of challenging the interlocutor's discourse so that it does not stray from the truth (Gödde, 2011, p. 316). This is seen, for instance, in *Gorgias* 469a, where Socrates prevents Polus from holding a false opinion regarding the discussion of what is just and unjust. But, above all, when, in *Laws* V 735e-736a, Plato employs "δι' εὐφημίας" as a kind of euphemism for colonization, a solution regarded as a "milder purge" to eliminate the evil members of a society, who would be akin to "a disease that has developed in the body politic".[34]

Moreover, whereas the traditional notion of *euphemia* invokes a special state, distinct from everyday life, where sacredness is performed only on rare occasions (Stehle, 2004, p. 129), in Plato, on the other hand, this attitude of connection with the divine becomes a standard of perfection that the philosopher must pursue on a daily basis. This is because the ideal of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ stipulates that "a man should make all haste to escape from earth to heaven; and escape means becoming as like God as possible; and a man becomes like God when he becomes just [δίκαιον] and pious [ὅσιον], with understanding [φρονήσεως]" (*Theaetetus* 176a-b).[35] In other words, the philosopher must practice the same virtues that Amun values in the Spartan *euphemia*, virtues manifested in daily life and not merely during sacred rites, as in the passage analyzed above (*Alc. II* 149e-150b). Thus, for the author of the *Second Alcibiades*, *euphemia* aligns with the broader projection into the ethico-political sphere that we find in Plato.

With regard to the conceptual intersection discussed in this study, it is clear that the meaning of *gr.w*, implied by the mention of Amun[36] in the *Second Alcibiades*, reinforces the shift in the meaning of εὐφημία toward the ethico-political domain. This occurs both through the context of the military conflict and through the god's favored conduct (which ensures victory in battle), namely, that of the man of virtuous character. Considering that the conduct of the "silent one" from Egypt is,

above all, a practice of *mꜣꜥ.t* (personified by a goddess, Maat), that is, an expression of conscious and measured deliberation regarding speech and action, its scope likewise extends beyond the religious realm and is inherently ethico-political. It is ethical insofar as it concerns human development in accordance with esteemed moral virtues; and political since these actions impact society and everyday human relations. Therefore, the religious figure of Amun, both in the *Second Alcibiades* and in its Egyptian context, unites social practice and personal development through a key concept, whether *gr.w* in Egypt or εὐφημία in the expanded sense as developed by the author of this dialogue. Furthermore, in both cases, these concepts are not limited to the narrowest sense of silence as the absence of sound (voice or noise), nor to any initiatory silence associated with the mysteries or arising from the ineffable; rather, they constitute a thoughtful and deliberate practice that permeates both speech and action (*Alc. II* 150b).

A BRIEF EXCURSUS ON THE ORACLE OF AMUN BETWEEN EGYPT AND LIBYA

The Oracle of Amun is situated on the hill of Aghurmi in the Siwa Oasis, a region of ancient Libya that is now part of modern-day Egypt and which only became an Egyptian nome during the Roman period.[37] This temple was founded in the 6th c. BCE by the Egyptian king Amasis,[38] whom Herodotus (*Histories* II.178) describes as a philhellene. Moreover, Amun was the principal Egyptian demiurgic god of the Theban cosmogony, and the archaeological evidence from the temple housing the Siwa Oracle indicates that, during the Archaic and Classical Greek periods, this Amun is, more specifically, Amun-Ra, in his ram-horned form, an iconography typically associated with his cult in Thebes in Egypt, and who was syncretized with Zeus by the Greeks of Cyrene in Libya.[39]

In sum, although the Oracle was located in Libya at that time, the cultural milieu of the temple was Egyptian in orientation – a fact reflected even in the mythical origins recounted by Herodotus in his *Histories*.[40] By stating this, I wish to dismiss any oversimplified objection that this reference to Amun would not reflect Egyptian ethics simply because the Oracle is located in Siwa, a territory that at the time belonged to the Libyans. Fakhry (1944, p. 42), the leading archaeologist to work in that region, is categorical in stating that the "Oracle of Amun at Siwa was a branch of that of Thebes." The Oracle of Siwa thus reveals an intercultural environment, defined, above all, by the prevalence of Egyptian theology, closely aligned with the ideology stemming from the great temple of Amun (which had housed an oracle since the time of Hatshepsut) at Karnak, in Theban Egypt (Waset).[41]

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND OBSERVATIONS ON THE *SECOND ALCIBIADES*' AUTHENTICITY

The *Second Alcibiades* has remained on the margins of Platonic studies, since the prevailing view is that it is inauthentic and, for that reason, it is often not seriously discussed. For example, some editors omit it from their collections of Platonic works, and others refer to the *First Alcibiades* simply as *Alcibiades*, thereby completely silencing this other text.[42] Even the designation as the "second" already reflects a judgment that has been passed down, as it is

positioned as secondary, both in quality and chronology, to the "first," which is regarded as more authentic and is therefore more widely debated. Consequently, the mention of Amun and the connection it establishes with Egyptian thought has not been considered a valid hypothesis worthy of debate. There is, therefore, a genuine novelty here that merits more thorough discussion, since, as this article shows, there is a wider context that has not yet been properly explored. This is particularly true when one recognizes that this neglect implies a double devaluation: on the one hand, the dialogue is underestimated due to the consensus that considers it inauthentic; on the other, Eurocentric assumptions contribute to the devaluation of Egyptian texts in philosophy, consequently hindering hypotheses such as this from being taken seriously.

However, the passages discussed throughout this study show that the reference to Amun in the *Second Alcibiades* is neither meaningless nor a frivolous literary embellishment. After all, the Egyptian concept of *gr.w*, praised by Amun, reinforces the serenity of Spartan *euphemia* in daily life.[43] This argumentative approach draws on knowledge of Egyptian ethics, which establishes the "silent man" as the ideal to be followed by those who cultivate wisdom. Furthermore, it is connected to Amun, the supreme god and demiurge of the Theban cosmogony, to whom Plato makes an implicit reference when he mentions "the great city of the upper region, which the Greeks call the Egyptian Thebes, and they call the god himself Ammon" (*Phaedrus* 274d).[44] Thus, beyond merely imitating Platonic stylistic mannerisms and philosophical themes, the author of the *Second Alcibiades* would also be someone well versed in Egyptian philosophical thought, a subject with which Plato shows familiarity, as evidenced by several ancient accounts claiming he studied there.[45]

Even if the mention of Amun demonstrates knowledge of Egyptian ethics, this fact alone does not, in itself, corroborate the authenticity of the entire *Second Alcibiades*. However, between the opposing poles of the inauthentic and the authentic, we should consider the possibility that it is a reconstituted dialogue, containing core sections of Platonic authorship alongside other parts that were later reworked (perhaps due to the poor condition of the papyrus or wax tablets), resulting in the adoption of a later vocabulary, or even as an attempt, still within the Academy, to unify draft passages set aside by Plato himself, which were only reassembled into a complete text at a later date by one of his own disciples. After all, the alternative would be to accept the existence of a copycat who knew Plato's philosophy and prose style, as well as his vocabulary and even Egyptian thought, so thoroughly as to be mistaken for the master himself. I believe that not even Eudoxus of Cnidus[46] would be capable of such an achievement, especially since we have no record of an *Alcibiades* written by him. In sum, the simplest solution would be to move away from the prevailing duality (whether entirely authentic or not), and reconsider the possibility that this dialogue is a draft abandoned by the original author and reworked by a member of the Academy.[47] Such an approach would satisfy both the critics who dismiss the dialogue as inauthentic and the tradition that has preserved it in the *corpus Platonicum*, by reconciling these positions under the assumption that the text contains original Platonic elements alongside later deviations. Considering that details regarding the transmission of this dialogue from the Academy to the Library of Alexandria are scarce, it is preferable to avoid categorical judgments. In this respect,

the discussion presented here, concerning the Egyptian ethical assumptions related to the role of Amun in the *Second Alcibiades*, serves to raise new questions not yet addressed in Platonic studies.

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ENDNOTES

1 For these accounts, see Svoboda (1952).

2 My transl.; cf. Denniston (1964, p. 142).

3 Greek presence in Siwa predates the narrative date of this dialogue (5th c. BCE). In Plato's time, incursions into Libya to consult Amun were relatively commonplace. Consequently, there is no reason to invoke Alexander's famous visit to this oracle as a justification for the inauthenticity of the *Second Alcibiades* (see Tarrant, 2023, p. 127-128; Reale, 2015, p. 43-45). Amun's popularity and the expeditions to his Libyan oracle were in the intellectual horizon of a 4th-century BCE Greek, such as Plato; it is thus unnecessary to impose the Hellenistic period as the background for the events narrated in the dialogue. Furthermore, Plutarch (*Life of Nicias* 14.5-7) states that Alcibiades consulted the Oracle of Siwa. See also the inscription *IG II*² 1642 (dated no later than c. 360 BCE), which records in the Parthenon that θεωρίαι were sent to Siwa (possibly as a later dedication); notably, Callias, son of Telocles, the brother-in-law of Andocides and an associate of Alcibiades in the mutilation of the Hermae, appears as a θεωρός sent to Amun in Siwa (Woodward, 1962). There was even a trireme dedicated to religious expeditions named Ἀμμωνίς (Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution* 61; frag. 443 Rose), and *IG II*² 338 attest the existence of a temple of Amun in Piraeus during the 4th c. BCE.

4 Both "gifts" and "bribes" are possible translations for δῶρα. On bribery, see Harvey (1985, p. 90-91). Ephorus of Cyme (*FGrH* 70 F 206) reports that the Spartan general Lysander attempted to bribe the Oracle of Amun with gold.

5 In this passage, the following terms appear: "ὅσιος καὶ δίκαιος", "τοῖς νοῦν ἔχουσι", "δικαιοσύνη", "φρόνησις"; note how similar they are to the ἀρεταί esteemed by Plato.

6 In the *Second Alcibiades*, it is necessary to have knowledge of what is best prior to making a prayer (*Alc. II* 146d-e; see Reale, 2015, p. 57-61), thus avoiding praying for evil thinking it is good (*Alc. II* 148b). Consequently, the worst blasphemy would be praying hastily and without any prudence, since such an unreasonable attitude could lead to divine penalties (*Alc. II* 150c-d). For this reason, Alcibiades accepts Socrates' advice and refrains from offering a sacrifice at the end of the dialogue (*Alc. II* 151a).

7 In Egyptian ethics, silence is "*gr.w*," with variations such as "*gr*," "*sgr*," or even "*gr(.w) mꜣꜥ*," that is, "truly silent" or "true silence"; see Gallardo (2025, p. 4); Shupak (2009, p. 249). An important observation to highlight the ethical nature of *gr.w* was made by Araújo (2000, p. 200-201), who chose to translate this Egyptian concept as "serenity," identifying a parallel with the Greek virtue of temperance (σωφροσύνη), which was also noted by Lichtheim (1997, p. 6-7, 87), who states that the Egyptian silent one is essentially the σώφρων. The concept of the silent one is also expressed by similar words, such as "calm" (*hr.w*); see Shupak (2009, p. 246-247). Note that in *Alc. II* 149a-b, the phrase "ἄλλο μὲν οὐθὲν

ἀποκριθῆναι τὸν προφήτην – τὸν γὰρ θεὸν οὐκ ἐᾶν δῆλον ὅτι – καλέσαντα δὲ αὐτόν" indicates that the Oracle's prophet, acting under Amun's guidance, pauses before delivering a concise response, thereby exemplifying the prudent attitude of the silent man; see Reale (2015, p. 167) for a more literal translation.

8 On the theme of silence in Plato and other Greeks, such as Aeschines of Sphettus (one of the Minor Socratics), the Orphics, and the Pythagoreans, see Bernabé, 2007; Moriani, 1988; Pentassuglio, 2019; Petit, 1997. However, even when these works discuss different types of silence (relating to keeping quiet, self-control, the ineffable, religious mystery and rites, or the concealment from the uninitiated), they focus primarily on silence as the result of σιγάω and σιωπάω. In Plato, this type of silence is ambivalent, oscillating between positive and negative values. However, none of these studies correlate the theme of *euphemia* with the Egyptian ethics of the "silent man," even though both Orpheus and Pythagoras are reported in various classical accounts to have visited Egypt. On the other hand, Aeschines of Sphettus does not figure among the philosophers said to have traveled to the Nile, thus, his absence reinforces the possibility that a similar valuation of silence was already present in the historical Socrates himself (independently of the Platonic character), suggesting a connection to Pythagorean and Orphic thought, and thereby, indirectly, to Egypt. Also, Xenophon, who served as a mercenary in the Persian army during the interval between the two periods of Achaemenid rule in Egypt, demonstrates how the Spartan education relates to the practice of silence (*Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* 3.5; Pentassuglio, 2019, p. 9-10); while Pausanias (*Description of Greece* III, 18.3) observes that among the Greeks, the Spartans were the ones who most frequently consulted the Oracle of Siwa, where Amun, the god of the silent ones, reigns.

9 Berlin Museum, 20377; transl. Wente in Simpson (2003, p. 285). The translation of this epithet varies, as it may derive from *sgr*, a causative verb meaning "to make silent." Thus it has a dual meaning: "lord of the silent ones" (*nb gr.w*; or "silent," in the singular, *gr*) and "lord of silence," since the suffix *.w* indicates both the plural and the substantivization of an abstract concept (and may even be omitted). The epithet is also attributed to other deities, such as Wepwawet and Osiris, being associated with the realm of the dead, since the afterlife necropolis can also be called *Jgr.t*, "the land of silence." However, this interpretation is insufficient, as it ignores the ethical aspect of the judgment, in which the dead justified in *mꜣꜥ.t* (the "true of voice", *mꜣꜥ-ḫrw*) is one who lived in righteousness, thus personifying the conduct of the "silent one." A similar concept is implicit in the name of the goddess Meretseger ("she who loves silence," *Mr.t-sgr*). As far as our context is concerned, Amun is the god of the silent ones (or of silence), as well as an oracular god of great prestige among the Greeks, to whom Athenian expeditions consulted, as attested in the *Second Alcibiades* itself.

10 Cairo Museum CG917; my transl., based on Assmann (1980, p. 2-3); Cariddi (2023, p. 84).

11 British Museum EA10684; transl. Shupak (2009, p. 255); see also Cariddi (2023, p. 72); Gardiner (1935, p. 30, 42).

12 Literally "cool temperature", i.e. the one of a calm, cool disposition.

13 Text #55, col. 15-17, found in Paenkhemenu's tomb (TT 68); 20th Din.; my transl., based on Cariddi (2023, p. 82); Seyfried (1991, p. 62-65).

14 According to Hornung (1992, p. 131-145), *mꜣꜥ.t* is the basis of life from a social perspective, requiring individuals to speak and act in accordance with it, as only proper behavior in daily life can ensure order in the world. One of the most significant texts on this concept, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*, urges us: "Speak Ma'at! Perform Ma'at!" (B1, 319; transl. Tobin in Simpson, 2003, p. 42). Stephens (2016) argues that the political system of the *Republic* is a "reworking" of this Egyptian concept of justice.

15 Transl. Shupak (2009, p. 247).

16 Transl. Shupak (2009, p. 251).

17 Transl. Shupak (2009, p. 253).

18 Transl. Simpson (2003, p. 231).

19 My transl., based on Cariddi (2023, p. 70); note that *ꜥḥꜣ* has the proper sense of "battle", "combat". We must also recall the importance of legal proceedings in Athens and the heated debates within the Assembly, which often triggered wars and military conflicts.

20 My transl., based on the transliteration from the *Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae*.

21 Transl. Tobin in Simpson (2003, p. 155).

22 Transl. Ritner in Simpson (2003, p. 515), with a slight modification: "muteness" instead of "dumbness", to avoid ambiguity; see also Gallardo (2025, p. 14).

23 Plato is critical of Athens' military greed, which is evident in the Atlantis myth.

24 The term *šmm* is attested in Egyptian medical papyri (such as the *Edwin Smith Papyrus*, Diagnosis XIV), but it becomes a metaphor in the ethical teachings. In Greek medicine, there is also a connection between the feverish and the one with an unbalanced temperament; see Galen, *The soul's traits depend on bodily temperament* 777k, 804k; Aristotle, *Problems* XXX.1. Given the delirium and mental confusion resulting from high fever, it is not difficult to understand the transition from the physical illness to the metaphorical meaning. In contrast, the silent one is healthy, for he is "cool-tempered" and "cold-bellied" (Shupak, 2009, p. 247).

25 Note that μεγαλοψυχία ("high-mindedness", but here in negative connotation: "arrogance") is somewhat rare within the *corpus platonicum* (attested only in *Alc. II* 150c8 and *Def.* 412e9, where it carries a positive meaning); however, it resembles the

Egyptian word ꜥ3-*jb* (the "conceited-one," or literally, "great of heart"). In this context, both *jb* (heart) and ψυχή show an equivalence as the locus of human interiority.

26 Alcibiades is described by Aeschines of Sphettus (*SSR*, VI.A.42) as an unreasonable sick man: "a violent high fever [πῦρ] seized him, further clouding his judgment" (my transl.). However, within the dramatic time of the *Second Alcibiades*, Alcibiades is still young and receptive to Socrates, i.e., he does not embody the figure of the feverish man. Nevertheless, this textual composition was necessarily written after his youth, foreshadowing his future personification of a madman (*Alc. II* 150c-e) who inflicted damage on Athens with his expedition to Sicily. In *Republic* II 372e-374a, Plato depicts a sick and inflamed city ("φλεγμαίνουσαν πόλιν"), using terms related to Hippocratic medicine, a description that could correspond to the Athens of his time, which sought to acquire luxurious goods through war.

27 In *Protagoras* 343a-c, Plato praises the wisdom found in the laconic nature of Spartan culture.

28 Cf. *Alc. II* 143d2; *Hipparch*. 228b1; *Euthd*. 301a7, 302c3; *Prt*. 330d7; *Grg*. 469a2; *Men*. 91c1; *R. I* 329c2, VI 509a9; Lg. III 696c1, X 907a1. The scholium on *Grg*. 469a explains what this imperative would mean: "'Silence!': Be quiet, do not chatter [εὐφήμει. σιώπα, μὴ ἀκαιρολόγει]" (my transl.). Obviously, there is also the plural εὐφημεῖτε. See Stehle (2004, p. 126) regarding this more traditional meaning of auspicious speech that prevents someone from continuing to utter something offensive.

29 Aeschylus, *Libation bearers* v. 581-582; transl. Brown (2018, p. 123). Gödde (2011, p. 11) regards these verses as a definition of *euphemia*.

30 The correspondence between action and speech also appears in the *Instruction of Amenemope* (13.10-14): "Do not converse falsely with a man, | For it is the abomination of God. | Do not separate your mind from your tongue"; transl. Simpson (2003, p. 233). This suggests that both must be in harmony, as they originate in the reflection within the heart-*jb* (equivalent to the modern concept of the mind and Plato's λογιστικόν).

31 Bernabé (2007) highlights that σιγή refers to silence as the absence of noise, while σιωπή indicates the speaker's deliberate choice to remain silent, even though their meanings overlap in dictionaries.

32 Compare this with *Laws* VII 800b-e, where the Athenian comments on blasphemy in choral performances and emphasizes the necessity of defining good models.

33 Cf. Stehle (2014) for a critique of Gödde (2011).

34 Transl. Saunders in Cooper, 1997; see Gödde (2011, p. 331).

35 Transl. Levett in Cooper, 1997.

36 In *Phaedrus*, there is a reference to a certain prophecy of Amun concerning the solemn silence of writing (*Phdr*. 275c8: "Ἄμμωνος μαντείαν"; *Phdr*. 275c8: "σεμνῶς πάνυ σιγᾷ").

37 According to Helck (1974, p. 130-131), oasis administration did not have a fixed status, but varied according to the political and administrative convenience of the moment; in the case of Siwa, it was only during the Roman period that it was recognized as a nome.

38 Amasis' cartouche can be seen on the mural depicting the pharaoh who founded the Oracle standing before Egyptian gods (Fakhry, 1944, p. 91).

39 See Parker (1967, p. 194-241); Fakhry (1944, p. 90-95).

40 In *Histories* II.54-55, Herodotus reports what he heard from the priests of Amun in Thebes (the Theban Zeus) and from the priestesses of Dodona, suggesting an Egyptian origin for the Libyan Oracle. In *Laws* V 738b-c, Plato mentions the three great oracles: Delphi, Dodona, and Amun.

41 The oasis of Siwa lies between Cyrene and the Nile, at a time when the Greeks were seeking to expand into Libyan territory, leading to a conflict that culminated in Amasis' rise to the throne shortly thereafter. His predecessor, Apries, was reluctant to rely on Greek mercenaries (mostly Ionians) and thus led Egyptian troops against Cyrene in support of the Libyans, who were allied with Egypt and threatened by Greek expansion. However, the defeat in this campaign proved decisive: Amasis, then merely a general under Apries, led a popular revolt fueled by the perception that native troops had been sacrificed while foreign mercenaries were spared. See Herodotus, *Histories* II.161-163, II.169; Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History I*.68; and the Elephantine Stela.

42 Reale (2015, p. 35-70) argues that there are hermeneutical biases surrounding the *Second Alcibiades*, further pointing out how it has been dismissed without proper justification. Grote (2010, p. 348-350) and Apelt (2004, p. 131-143) emphasize the influence of Schleiermacher's (1885, p. 259-261) unfavorable judgment on modern tradition, which led to the rejection of this dialogue despite its acceptance in antiquity. It was included in the catalogue of Thrasyllus of Mendes (D. L. III.57-59), and only Athenaeus (*Deipnosophists* XI 506c) raised doubts about its authorship, suggesting Xenophon as the author, a hypothesis dismissed by Schleiermacher (1885, p. 259-261).

43 Both concepts are sometimes reduced to a Christianized caricature of monastic quietude that does not accurately reflect either the Greek or the Egyptian world.

44 Transl. Fowler (1913, p. 563). *Laws* V 738c refers directly to the Oracle of Amun.

45 The most recent scholarship regarding Plato's familiarity with Egypt is found in works exploring potential links between the myth of Thoth in the *Phaedrus* and Egyptian texts, such as Mathieu (2015) and Poetsch (2021). For a more traditional view, which holds that his knowledge would not

differ from his Greek contemporaries, see Brisson (1987) and Froidefond (1971, p. 267-342).

46 Eudoxus was a disciple of Plato and spent time with him in Egypt (Str. XVII, 1.29).

47 While Thesleff (1989, p. 7-8) discusses the possibility of Platonic drafts, Tarrant (2023, 2025) rejects the authenticity of the *Second Alcibiades*, attributing its authorship to Crantor of Soli, even if he had reworked a preliminary sketch outlined by Plato (Tarrant, 2023, p. 213). A fragment of Crantor (8 Mette) suggests a slight possibility that he may have visited Egypt, since he alludes to the content of Egyptian stelae, thus making it possible that he also heard about the *gr*. Furthermore, Tarrant (2023, p. 205-206; 2025, p. 126-127) notes that both Crantor and the author of the *Second Alcibiades* approve the same type of prayer (trusting in the judgment of the gods). However, I am inclined to think that the mention of Amun is more representative of Plato, given that: a) he also expands the concept of *euphemia* into the ethico-political domain in other works; b) there are many ancient sources attesting his travel to Egypt; c) his work contains explicit mentions demonstrating a well-founded knowledge about Egypt.