

# All That Glitters Is Not Gold: The Role of Animals in the Golden Age through Greek Texts

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## Abstract

The preserved accounts of the myth of the Golden Race or Age—also known as the reign of Cronus—in the Greek world typically depict a time in the distant past when humanity lived in an ideal manner. In these texts, humans are portrayed as free from concerns related to death, labor, or sustenance thanks to the favor of the gods. However, what about the animals? In general, modern studies somewhat extend this ‘Edenic’ way of life to them as well, considering vegetarianism and a harmonious relationship between humans and animals as key features of the Golden Age. A closer analysis of the animals, their roles, and the relationships they establish with humans in each of the Greek versions of the myth will reveal that their significance varies considerably. This paper will show that animals actually play a secondary role within the general framework of Golden Age narratives. At the same time, it will provide insight into the various attitudes held towards animals in Ancient Greece, as the accounts of the Golden Age also offer a faithful reflection of the societies in which they were composed.

## 1. Introduction

The Golden Age is a conventional term used to describe one of the recurring themes found in various myths concerning the origins of the world in ancient texts. This motif alludes to a time of ideal happiness and well-being that humanity either experienced in a bygone era, currently enjoys in a distant location, or could potentially attain in the future. Additionally, it takes on different forms: in Graeco-Roman literature, it can appear, on the one hand, within the context of myths related to a succession of human races or ages associated with metals. On the other hand, it is linked to the reign of Cronus, the Titan god responsible for ruling the world before

his son, the god Zeus, overthrew him and established the current order of the world.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it is common to find both concepts within the same narrative.<sup>2</sup>

The motif of the golden age particularly portrays humans as free from concerns related to death, work, illness, or sustenance, thanks to the favor of the gods, with whom they usually maintain a close relationship.<sup>3</sup> Ancient authors primarily construct this idealization of the past by negating the characteristics they perceive as being typical of their own time.<sup>4</sup> In texts describing a golden age, therefore, humans are the main protagonists. But what about animals? What role do they play, and what condition do they possess in these types of narratives? A significant number of modern studies that broadly address the golden age motif, and even some that examine it based on specific texts, argue that one of its main characteristics is the harmony between humans and animals. This harmony is based on humans abstaining from consuming animal flesh and on a gentle and affectionate attitude of animals toward humans—and among animals themselves.<sup>5</sup> In general, these studies seem to extend the ‘Edenic’ state of human life to animals, at least to some extent. However, when we examine the earliest Greek author on this subject, Hesiod, who offers a relatively detailed narrative about this ideal period and serves as a significant influence on later authors, we observe the absence of these characteristics.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the

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<sup>1</sup> By the end of the 1st century BC, the Roman god Saturn came to be identified with Cronus. Hence, the term ‘reign of Saturn’ also came to denote the golden age, cf. Baldry 1952, 87; Guthrie 1957, 70-71 and Blundell 1986, 136-137.

<sup>2</sup> In *Works and Days* 109-126 Hesiod actually refers to a ‘golden race’ (*Op.* 109), and subsequent authors similarly speak of a ‘race’ (γένος, *genos*), not an ‘age’. It was not until around the first half of the 1st century BC that Latin authors coined the expression ‘Golden Age’ (*saecula aurea, actas aurea, tempus aureum*). Its frequent usage led to the term being widely employed, starting from the 1st century AD, to denote any time—past or future—that was considered better than the current one, cf. Baldry 1952, 87-90; Gatz 1967; Blundell 1986, 136 and Van Noorden 2015, 24-33.

<sup>3</sup> According to Guthrie 1957, 69, there are two primary branches in the tradition concerning the history of the human race, often perceived as contrasting. One focuses on the growth and development of life and institutions from primitive and wild origins, while the other, as explored in this article, is the golden age narrative. The golden age presents an idealized view of the past, contrasting it with the harshness of contemporary life and the perceived degeneration of human character.

<sup>4</sup> Blundell 1986, 135-136. Regarding the patterns of negation followed by this type of narrative, cf. Davies 1987.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, see Blundell 1986, 137; Gera 2003, 57-61 and Heath 2005, 12-14.

<sup>6</sup> Regarding the original source of the myth of the ages, cf. Van Noorden 2015, 30-31, which includes additional bibliography.

scholar Bodo Gatz, in his 1967 study, argued that vegetarianism is absent from the accounts of the golden age not influenced by specific ideas of the Orphic and Pythagorean movements. Consequently, he regarded vegetarianism and its logical consequences as secondary elements within the texts about this ideal period.<sup>7</sup>

In each of the existing golden age versions, animals assume different roles and establish various types of relationships with humans. Indeed, through their examination, one can discern a reflection of the diverse attitudes held toward animals in the societies where these narratives were composed.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, this article will undertake a comprehensive analysis of animals and related elements in various Greek narratives depicting the golden age.<sup>9</sup> Special attention will be dedicated to exploring the interactions and bonds between animals and humans. This endeavor aims to contribute to a clearer understanding of the relationships established between the two in antiquity.

## 2. Hesiod’s Golden Race: A Vegetarian Race?

As mentioned earlier, Hesiod is the author of the oldest surviving Greek text about the concept of the golden age, or more precisely, of a ‘golden race’ (χρύσειον γένος, *chryseion genos*) created by the gods during the era of Cronus. This concept is found in his version of the ‘ages of man’ myth in *Works and Days* (106-120):

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Gatz 1967, 165-171.

<sup>8</sup> Specific analyses on animals or related aspects within the context of the golden age motif have only been found in Gatz 1967, 165-174; Dombrowski 1984, 19-34; Gera 2003, 57-67 and Harden 2013, 110-121.

<sup>9</sup> Due to the extensive nature of the material, this paper will focus on the Greek language versions of the golden age that place this ideal period within a specific chronological framework. Isolated mentions of Cronus’ reign or the golden age, as well as texts that locate them in a remote geographical space are not within the scope of this examination. Nor is the myth of the ages of Orphism addressed here, as the difficulties it poses for its interpretation would require a separate study. For a comprehensive study of the golden ages in Graeco-Roman literature, see Gatz 1967.

If you wish, I shall recapitulate another story, correctly and skillfully, and you lay it up in your spirit: how the gods and mortal human beings came about from the same origin. Golden was the race of speech-endowed human beings which the immortals, who have their mansions on Olympus, made first of all (χρύσειον μὲν πρῶτιστα γένος μερόπων ἀνθρώπων ἀθάνατοι ποίησαν Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχοντες). They lived at the time of Cronus, when he was king in the sky; just like gods they spent their lives, with a spirit free from care, entirely apart from toil and distress. Worthless old age did not oppress them, but they were always the same in their feet and hands, and delighted in festivities, lacking in all evils; and they died as if overpowered by sleep. They had all good things: the grain-giving field bore crops of its own accord, much and unstinting, and they themselves, willing, mild-mannered, shared out the fruits of their labors together with many good things, wealthy in sheep, dear to the blessed gods (οἳ δ' ἐθελημοὶ ἤσυχοι ἔργ' ἐνέμοντο σὺν ἐσθλοῖσιν πολέεσσιν. ἀφνειοὶ μῆλοισι, φίλοι μακάρεσσι θεοῖσιν).<sup>10</sup>

Right from the outset of his discussion on these races, it becomes apparent that Hesiod emphasizes his focus on humans and gods;<sup>11</sup> in contrast, animals receive only brief mentions.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, in his portrayal of the first race, animals are seemingly referenced in verse 120, where it is noted that the people of this race were ‘rich in flocks’ (ἀφνειοὶ μῆλοισι, *aphneioi meloisi*). However, it is worth mentioning that this verse is generally considered spurious. It is found exclusively in Diodorus Siculus (5.66.6), a text that diverges in some respects from the Hesiodic version preserved in the manuscript tradition, in addition to other sources.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, some scholars have proposed that Alexandrian philologists omitted this verse because they believed that the mention of a flock implied notions of private ownership and herding, which appear to be more in line with the characteristics of the fourth race, i.e. the race of heroes. Nevertheless,<sup>14</sup> West, while not confirming its authenticity, suggests that it bears a Hesiodic style and may

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<sup>10</sup> Translated by Most 2018.

<sup>11</sup> For an examination of verse 108, which contains the controversial claim that both humans and gods share a common origin, cf. Van Noorden 2015, 69-70.

<sup>12</sup> The only references to animals that appear in the myth of the ages are, in principle, two, and both are related to flocks: one is found in verse 120 (μῆλοισι), and the other in verse 163 (μῆλων ἔνεκ' Οἰδιπόδαο).

<sup>13</sup> Verdenius 1985, 84.

<sup>14</sup> Initially suggested by Rosenmeyer 1966, as cited in Verdenius 1985, 84.

represent more than a mere recollection from Diodorus or his source. According to him, this verse could have been inserted into a ‘wild text’, potentially borrowed from a similar passage in the *Catalogue* or another poem.<sup>15</sup>

The apparent absence of animals, combined with other factors, is indeed what has led the majority of modern scholars to attribute a vegetarian diet to the golden race.<sup>16</sup> Among these contributing factors are the following: firstly, the reference to the abundance of spontaneously growing fruits implies that the primary sustenance of this race consists of a vegetarian diet. Secondly, this type of diet is linked to their almost ‘divine’ life. The text describes the golden race as living a life similar to that of the gods (*Op.* 112), leading to the interpretation that, during this period, humans and gods not only shared the absence of work, hardships, and illnesses, but also shared meals and food. This is believed to explain the longevity of the golden race. Furthermore, some scholars, in their attempt to reconcile the myths of Pandora and Prometheus with that of the ages, postulate that the golden race existed before the episode of Prometheus’ sacrifice, when gods and humans separated at Mekone.<sup>17</sup> Thirdly, another argument supporting the vegetarianism of the golden race is based on the description of the bronze race, of whom it is said that they ‘did not eat bread’ (*Op.* 146-147: οὐδέ τι σῖτον / ἤσθιον, *oude ti siton / esthion*). This statement implies not only that this generation consumed meat but also did so because they had not yet practiced agriculture. Moreover, the meat they consumed presumably did not come from livestock they had raised, but from that which had been obtained through plunder during the numerous wars they waged. This condition is understood as a contrast to the preceding races, at least the golden one. Lastly, it is worth noting that some later authors’ reinterpretations of the motif have favored this view by clearly ascribing a vegetarian diet to humans in this ideal period, as it will be explored throughout these pages. For this reason, given Hesiod’s influence on the

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<sup>15</sup> West 1978, 179, 181.

<sup>16</sup> Within the bibliography I have been able to review, the only work that questions the vegetarianism of Hesiod’s golden race is Graf 1855, 13, as cited by Guthrie in 1957, 137. See also Saunders 2001, 244.

<sup>17</sup> Attempts to reconcile both myths, as well as those aiming to assert their incompatibility, have been numerous. Therefore, I provide a brief selection of references: Vernant 1960, 21-54d; Fontenrose 1974; Rudhardt 1981, 245-281 and Sourvinou-Inwood 1997. For further bibliographical citations, see Nelson 1998, 190, n. 42.

accounts of these authors, the abstention from meat has often been assumed as an inherent concept in his version and, therefore, inherited from him in some way.

However, although these arguments convincingly suggest that Hesiod’s golden race was vegetarian, I believe there are other elements in the text that seem to contradict this idea. After all, it is somewhat peculiar how Hesiod supposedly implies this vegetarianism. As Davies points out, Hesiod’s golden age fits into the category of narratives describing a blissful life using negative terms (*Op.* 111-115).<sup>18</sup> Given this framework, it is curious that the abundance of fruits is not reinforced by a negation emphasizing the abstention from animals, in contrast to the later races.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, there are two references that, in my view, are crucial. First, in verse 115, we read that this race ‘delighted in banquets’ (τέρποντ’ ἐν θαλίησι, *terpont’ en thaliesi*), which parallels works like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In these narratives, not only do gods indulge in banquets rich with nectar, but humans also offer animal meat to the divinities during their feasts.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, in verse 136, there is a reference to the absence of sacrifices by the silver race, one of the reasons Zeus eliminates them. According to Gatz, who argues for the compatibility of the Prometheus and Pandora myth with that of the ages, the silver race is marked by the introduction of sacrifice, but Hesiod is merely reproducing the final phases of this race when it departs from this practice.<sup>21</sup> From my perspective, however, this interpretation seems somewhat forced, especially because this reference to sacrifice is problematic only if one attempts to find correspondence between both myths. I agree with Bernabé when he states that both myths “coexist, albeit without cohabitation. Hesiod does not aim to construct a coherent narrative but rather to tell stories and present things from diverse perspectives. What unites these perspectives is the theme of the transition from an initial state of happiness to the present condition of unhappiness, from an era of communion with the gods to another wherein it appears that these

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<sup>18</sup> Davies 1987.

<sup>19</sup> Graf 1885, 13, in fact, suggests that if Hesiod had wanted to contrast the vegetarianism of the golden race with the diet of the bronze race, he would have somehow described their abstention, but he does not.

<sup>20</sup> Cf., e.g., Hom. *Il.* 1.595-604 and *Od.* 8.75-76, 11.602-604.

<sup>21</sup> Gatz 1967, 40-41.

deities have forsaken humanity to their fate”.<sup>22</sup> For this very reason, at the beginning of the myth (*Op.* 106), Hesiod specifies that he is going to tell ‘another story’ (ἕτερόν τοι ἐγὼ λόγον, *heteron toi ego logon*) about the origin of the current race of men.<sup>23</sup> In this second narrative, it seems that he places less emphasis on specifying when cultural markers that define the human condition are introduced.

This imprecision can indeed be observed in various textual details. For example, as previously mentioned, the golden race celebrates banquets, but it is important to note that even though its members live like gods (ὥστε θεοὶ δ’ ἔζωον, *hōste theoi d’ezoon*), these banquets consist of perishable foods, like the human species itself, regardless of whether they include meat or not. Another representative example can be found in the description of the silver race, where the existence of women and the practice of sacrifice as an act of due worship to the gods are taken for granted. In contrast, in the previous myth Hesiod presented, it is specified that the actions of Prometheus led to the creation of Pandora, a decisive factor in humanity’s downfall.<sup>24</sup>

All of this leads me to believe that it is not possible to affirm or deny the vegetarianism of the golden race because Hesiod himself has no interest in reflecting it, just as he does not dwell on the topic of animals, at least in this part of his work.<sup>25</sup> Other details and ideas in the narrative capture his attention. For this reason, one cannot extract the vision of a harmonious and friendly relationship between humans and animals.

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<sup>22</sup> Bernabé 2023. I thank Professor Bernabé for sharing his paper with me to ensure accurate citation.

<sup>23</sup> Regarding the various interpretations of this expression, cf. Van Noorden 2015, 68-72.

<sup>24</sup> It is said that the bronze race also possesses houses, weapons, and tools (*Op.* 150-151), but it has not been specified when they acquired the τέχνη (*techne*, skill) to build them. Regarding the contradiction posed by the possession of tools by this race, considering that they are not engaged in agricultural work, cf. Vernant 1960, 34-40.

<sup>25</sup> After the myth of the ages, however, the fable of the hawk and the nightingale is narrated (*Op.* 202-285), from which Hesiod speaks to Perses about Δίκη (*Dike*, justice) and introduces a clear distinction between animals and humans when he states that Zeus granted justice to humans, and animals, not possessing it, devour each other.

### 3. Post-Hesiodic golden ages

Subsequent to Hesiod, we have versions of the golden age dating from the 5th century BC onwards that feature a greater presence of animals.

#### 3.1. Empedocles of Acragas and the Reign of Cypris

The fragments of Empedocles of Acragas provide the following extensive account of a golden age.<sup>26</sup> Empedocles reinterprets the motif to incorporate it into his complex cosmogonic system.<sup>27</sup> One of his contributions is to present the goddess Cypris, i.e., the personification of one of the driving forces of his cosmic cycle, Love (Φιλότης, *Philotes*), as the symbol of the golden age in fragment DK 31 B 128 (F 134 Graham):

They had no Ares as their god, nor Tumult, not Zeus the king, nor Cronus nor Poseidon, but Cypris the queen . . . whom they propitiated with reverent statues, with painted pictures, delicate perfumes, and offerings of undiluted myrrh and fragrant frankincense, pouring to the ground libations of yellow honey. The altar was not moistened with the pure blood of bulls, but this was the greatest abomination to men, to take away their life and devour their goodly limbs.<sup>28</sup>

Vegetarianism in this text clearly emerges as a predominant feature of this ideal period. Offerings made to the goddess are bloodless, unlike those customary in the philosopher's time.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, this vegetarianism appears to be accompanied by harmony among species, as reflected in fragment DK 31 B 130 DK (F 136 Graham):

They were all tame and gentle towards men, both beasts and fowl, and friendly feelings radiated.

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<sup>26</sup> After Hesiod's version, there would supposedly be one transmitted in the *Alcmaeonid*, according to a testimony by Philodemus (*De pietate* p. 51 Gomperz). However, no further information or fragments about it are preserved.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Guthrie 1957, 72-73.

<sup>28</sup> The translations of the fragments of Empedocles are by Graham 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, it does not even seem that there is a use of plants that involves their destruction; instead, their derivatives, myrrh (σμύρνα, *smyrna*) and frankincense (λίβανος, *libanos*), are utilized.

Abstinence from consuming animals and respect towards them are essential aspects of Empedocles’ philosophical doctrine, and these fragments depicting one phase of the cosmic cycle are evidence of that. Empedocles believed that all living beings formed a community by virtue of sharing ‘life’—understood as *ψυχή* (*psyche*). Hence, it was not permissible for them to devour each other, not only in that phase of the cycle but also in the present time. Additionally, his theory of daimon transmigration postulated that daimons who had committed bloodshed must transmigrate into different living beings until they were completely purified. Therefore, reverence for life also ensured respect for these daimons.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, Gatz considers that Empedocles possibly integrated Orphic and Pythagorean ideas, positioning him as a successor to Orphic thought in relation to the golden age. In fact, from his perspective, the vegetarianism that appears in these types of narratives would be grounded in Pythagoreanism and its theory of metempsychosis. However, he posits that the assimilation of vegetarianism to the golden age primarily stems from the idea of abstinence promoted by the Orphic doctrine and linked to the myth of the ages of man that the movement itself teaches.<sup>31</sup> On the contrary, I think that this argument does not carry sufficient weight. Empedocles’ doctrine, although influenced by Pythagoreanism and Orphism, presents an original and distinct system that could well have contributed to the inclusion of the *ἀποχή τῶν ἐμψύχων* (*apochē ton empsychon*, ‘abstinence from the consumption of the living beings’) in the accounts of the golden age. Additionally, it is worth considering that the motivations behind the type of vegetarianism and animal welfare that Empedocles and these movements proposed were different from each other.<sup>32</sup> For these reasons, I do not believe that Orphism can be

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<sup>30</sup> Due to limitations in space, I cannot delve into his doctrine here. Therefore, I recommend referring to my work, Flores Rivas 2023, 257-277, for an extensive elaboration and specific bibliography, particularly with a focus on animals.

<sup>31</sup> Gatz 1967, 165-168, who asserts also that, in contrast to the Orphics, the teachings of Pythagoras are not associated with myths about the ages of man.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. De Paz Amérigo and Flores Rivas 2019 and Flores Rivas 2023, 209-241, 257-277.

considered the sole introducer of the idea of abstinence in the reign of Cronus. It is possible that this phenomenon was equally linked to the Pythagoreans and Empedocles.<sup>33</sup>

### 3.2. Old Comedy and Spontaneous Food

The reign of Cronus was a motif often employed by authors of Old Comedy. One of its most distinctive features, the *αὐτόματος βίος* (*automatos bios*, ‘a spontaneous way of life’), was particularly highlighted.<sup>34</sup> The depiction of food and comforts that arise without labor and in abundance is varied and, compared to traditional narratives, it tends to be exaggerated, as it is natural in comedy. However, unlike what was observed in earlier authors, in these comedies *automatos* food also includes animal meat on the menu.

Nevertheless, even though in the plots of these comedies animals generally serve as food,<sup>35</sup> one work stands out in which they seem to play a role that goes beyond becoming edible beings: Crates’ *Theria* (Θηρία, Beasts). Based on the testimonies and fragments that have been preserved, it can be deduced that the chorus was composed of animals, which appeared to possess the power to establish a golden life for humans in the future.<sup>36</sup> One of the requirements they ask for is precisely that humans abstain from consuming them—although fish constitute an exception<sup>37</sup>—as found in *Theria* PCG IV fr. 19 *apud* Ath. 119c1-2:<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> In fact, it seems more feasible to me, basing on the research works cited in the preceding note. In any case, this topic deserves to be thoroughly addressed elsewhere.

<sup>34</sup> A passage from Athenaeus (6.267e-270a) is quite illustrative in this regard, as it presents several ‘gastronomic utopias’ related to an *automatos bios*. In these utopias, animals are sometimes described as cooking themselves and leaping into the mouths of diners. While not all of these utopias are directly related to the reign of Cronus, they are equally associated with idealized places and times, cf. Pellegrino 2000; Ruffell 2000 and Farioli 2001.

<sup>35</sup> Fragments of two comedies of this kind are preserved, which specifically seem to set their plot during the reign of Cronus: *Amphiktyones* by Teleclides and *Ploutoi* by Cratinus. However, regarding *Ploutoi*, it is not possible to ascertain whether a vegetarian golden age actually existed, due to the scarcity of material.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Farioli 2001, 57-58, 67-68.

<sup>37</sup> For Empedocles, vegetarianism also appears to extend to fish, as can be inferred from fragment DK 31 B 117 (F 124 Graham), in which the philosopher claims to have transmigrated into a fish. In contrast, concerning Pythagoreanism, the testimonies are not as clear; see, e.g., Alex. fr. 27 Kassel y Austin, D.L. 8.33 (Pythag. DK 58 B 1a), D.L. 8.34 (= Arist. fr. 157 Gigon) and Iambl. *VP* 21.98.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. also *Theria* PCG IV fr. 16 *apud* Ath. 6.267e.

(A) Also you may boil cabbages and roast fresh and salted fish, but keep your hands away from us.

(B) So, as you [pl.] say, we won't be eating meat any more, no tripe any more, no meat pies, no sausages?<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless, due to the scarcity of preserved fragments, it cannot be affirmed whether this new animal order was established at the end of the play or not.<sup>40</sup> In this fragment, we also find the expression ‘keep your hands away from us’ (χρῆ ... / ἡμῶν δ’ ἄπο / χεῖρας ἔχεσθαι, *chre ... / hemon d'apo / cheiras echesthai*), a comic parallel to Empedocles' fragment DK 31 B 141, which concerns abstaining from eating beans.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the abstention from animal meat, preached by Empedocles, was also, as has been already noted, a philosophical precept of the Pythagorean and Orphic movements,<sup>42</sup> indicating that this line of dialogue constituted a satirical allusion to the principles and precepts of both these movements and Empedocles.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, this plea for ‘vegetarianism’ seems to accompany an attempt to establish a friendly, or at least respectful, relationship between humans and animals. This is further supported by the fact that these *theria* have the ability to communicate with humans.<sup>44</sup>

### 3.3. Plato's Divine Shepherds

Plato employs extensively the golden age motif in two of his works: *Statesman* and *Laws*. Both dialogues depict this period with similar characteristics, although the former provides more details.<sup>45</sup> In *Statesman*, the reign of Cronus is integrated into the explanation of the periodic reversal of the universe and its consequences for life on Earth (*Plt.* 268e-274e): during the period

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<sup>39</sup> Translated by Storey 2011.

<sup>40</sup> Ceccarelli 2000, 455.

<sup>41</sup> According to Farioli 2001, 69, rather than an imitation, as argued by Bonanno 1972, 100, it is more of a formula. This restriction was also characteristic of Pythagoreanism, cf., e.g., Burkert 1972, 183-185.

<sup>42</sup> See Flores Rivas 2023, 229-241 with bibliography.

<sup>43</sup> It is difficult to assert whether the satire was confined to specific jokes or if the theme of vegetarianism was connected to a broader philosophical controversy in this comedy, according to Farioli 2001, 71, n. 112. In any case, in Attic comedy in general, it is common to find parodies of Orphic and Pythagorean beliefs; see, e.g., Battezzato 2008; Bernabé 2011, 197-201 and 2014, including bibliography.

<sup>44</sup> Dillon 1992, 29-30, n. 17 suggests that the ability of animals to speak was a traditional feature of the golden age.

<sup>45</sup> See Vidal-Naquet 1978; Dillon 1992 and El Murr 2010 for a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the golden age in Plato's work.

when the god governed the circular revolution of the universe, humans and animals were cared for by divine shepherds.<sup>46</sup> Animals, grouped by species and in herds, were tended to by specific daimons. For this reason, Plato mentions that they coexisted peacefully and did not devour each other (*Plt.* 271e). Furthermore, when he describes the life of humans, who in this case emerge from the earth, he specifies that they could communicate with animals.<sup>47</sup> This detail suggests that humans in the reign of Cronus did not consume animal meat, especially when considered alongside the fact that animals themselves respected one another and the traditional description of abundant vegetation in the context of human diet. In *Laws* 782c, although it is not specified that the discussion pertains to the golden age, there is indeed mention of a distant past in which an ‘Orphic life’ was practiced, meaning that beings with soul (*psyche*) were neither sacrificed nor consumed.<sup>48</sup>

However, in *Statesman*, there is also a detail about animals that deserves special attention: unlike Hesiod’s account, Plato’s interpretation of the reign of Cronus, as understood by El Murr, presents a closer relationship between humans and animals than between humans and divinities. In contrast to Hesiod’s golden age, on the one hand, the humans living under Cronus’ rule do not live ‘like gods’ but are shepherded by the gods. Therefore, the distinction between deity and human is equated with that between shepherd and flock. On the other hand, the *automatos* aspect of life not only affects vegetation or food production in general but also humans, who spring from the earth, setting them apart from the successive races of humans created by the gods in *Works and Days*. Hence, the generation of humans is more related to the growth of plants than to any divine creation.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Leg.* 713c-714b.

<sup>47</sup> Moreover, depending on the type of conversation that men engage in with each other and with animals, whether it is focused on philosophy or not, it is implied that they were happier or less happy than the men who lived under the rule of Zeus (*Plt.* 272b-c). In fact, El Murr 2010’s interpretation of the text reveals that Plato is presenting a rather ambiguous reign of Cronus.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Bernabé 2011, 51-53.

<sup>49</sup> El Murr 2010, 290-291.

### 3.4. Dicaearchus and the Abstention from Living Beings

The description of the golden age provided by Dicaearchus is transmitted through Porphyry (fr. 56A Mirhady *apud* Porph. *Abst.* 4.2). Although it is a biased account, where Porphyry’s main interest is to support the central idea of his own work, i.e. the abstention from animal meat, it remains a reliable testimony. Dicaearchus’ account of Cronus’ reign bears similarities to Hesiod’s text, but it presents a rational and natural version that emphasizes the provision of food by humans.<sup>50</sup> Regarding animals, Dicaearchus only seems to mention them when he states that the people of this era did not kill any living creature (μηδέν φονεύειν ἔμψυχον, *meden phoneuein empsychon*).<sup>51</sup> Therefore, this assertion, coupled with the fact that people are described as having a frugal diet, suggests that Dicaearchus was proposing a vegetarian golden age.<sup>52</sup>

### 3.5. The Deprivation of Animal Speech in Callimachus

The following text that mentions a reign of Cronus is the *Iambics* 2 (fr. 192 Pfeiffer) by Callimachus, a critique of the verbosity and loquacity characteristic of men, specifically certain authors and artists of his time:

It was in that time, when the winged  
and that which dwells in the sea, and likewise the four-footed  
used to give utterance as does the Promethean clay  
.....  
in the time of Cronus’ rule, and still before[  
and [saying] how [. ]υ c[. ]νημεναιc. [ 5  
just is Zeus, but not justly ruling,  
he cut off the voice of those which crawl,  
yet the race τ. υτ. [. ]. ρον—as though we had

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Saunders 2001, 241-254.

<sup>51</sup> I agree with Saunders 2001, 243-244 when he remarks regarding the prohibition of harming living beings: “One must, I think, accept that as a genuinely Dicaearchean position, though whether it had a Pythagorean inspiration, and whether he dwelt on it with Porphyry’s messianic zeal, is much less certain—indeed wholly improbable, in my view, or Porphyry would have reported as much, probably at some length”.

<sup>52</sup> Saunders 2001, 244 points out that Hesiod does not explicitly state that the golden race did not consume meat; this idea must be inferred from the way in which he describes how this race obtained food (cf. Gatz 1967, 40-41). Therefore, the scholar argues that such an inference is attributed to Dicaearchus and has, in turn, been emphasized by Porphyry in the text.

not enough power to give the first fruits even to others—  
... ]ψ [he turned] to [the race] of men. And Eudemus has 10  
the voice of a dog, and Philton that of an ass, and of the parrot[  
and the tragedians have that of those  
who dwell in the sea. And all men  
are both wordy and babbling  
from that time, Andronicus. These things Aesop 15  
from Sardis said, whom the Delphians  
did not receive well as he sang his tale.<sup>53</sup>

This version presents animals endowed with articulated language, just like humans. Nevertheless, as a result of the daring actions of the swan and the fox, for which we have details within the *Diegesis*,<sup>54</sup> Zeus deprives animals of the ability to articulate speech and also transfers their voices to humans. This, in turn, leads to the talkative nature that humans possess today.

Given the fable-like nature of the poem, no further details are provided about the characteristics of the golden age. However, the idea that both humans and animals use the same language implies a sense of mutual respect among different species, indicating that it is reasonable to assume that these conversational partners did not become prey for one another. Nevertheless, one should not automatically infer a community stemming from possessing the same faculty.<sup>55</sup> It is only known that the animals seem dissatisfied with what they have been given and demand more, which constitutes an act of *hybris* that leads to their punishment by Zeus. This punishment, in turn, leads to a rift between humans and animals and implicitly marks the end of the golden period, which is also indicated by Zeus’s assumption of power.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Translated by Acosta-Hughes 2002.

<sup>54</sup> Callim. *Ia.* 2, fr. 192a Pfeiffer.

<sup>55</sup> Gera 2003, 31.

<sup>56</sup> Gera 2003, 32. Regarding the Hesiodic and Aesopic influences evident in Callimachus’ text, see, e.g., Sistikou 2009 and Scodel 2011.

### 3.6. Aratus and the Agricultural Golden Race

In Aratus' *Phaenomena* (96-136), the myth of the ages from Hesiod is reworked. In his version, the golden race is described as engaging in agriculture, the only context in which animals are mentioned in relation to this ideal period (*Phaen.* 100-114):

There is, however, another tale current among men, that once she actually lived on earth, and came face to face with men, and did not ever spurn the tribes of ancient men and women, but sat in their midst although she was immortal. And they called her Justice: gathering together the elders, either in the market-place or on the broad highway, she urged them in prophetic tones to judgements for the good of the people. At that time they still had no knowledge of painful strife or quarrelsome conflict or noise of battle, [no] but lived just as they were; the dangerous sea was far from their thoughts, and as yet no ships brought them livelihood from afar, but oxen and ploughs and Justice herself, queen of the people and giver of civilised life, provided all their countless needs. That was as long as the earth still nurtured the Golden Age.<sup>57</sup>

Thanks to agriculture, which is carried out by oxen and the plow, and thanks to Justice, the protagonist of the text, men have an abundance of sustenance. In this case, there are also no direct references regarding the consumption of animals, but the interpretations of Aratus' text once again led to associating a vegetarian diet with the golden race. Overall, this association stems from previous interpretations of Hesiod's golden race, the influences of Empedocles detected in the text, and the interpretation of the lines in which Aratus describes the bronze race (*Phaen.* 129-134)<sup>58</sup>:

But when these men also had died and there were born the Bronze Age men, more destructive than their predecessors, who were the first to forge the criminal sword for murder on the highways, and the first to taste the flesh of ploughing oxen, then Justice, conceiving a hatred for the generation of these men, flew up to the sky ...

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<sup>57</sup> The translation of the *Phaenomena* passages is by Kidd 1997.

<sup>58</sup> See, e.g., Traglia 1963; Nelis 2004 and Harden 2013, 110-111.

However, I believe that, as in Hesiod, there are elements in the text that cast doubt on the idea of a vegetarian golden race. On the one hand, regarding the act of killing and consuming the flesh of the ploughing-oxen, it has normally been extrapolated as the beginning of animal sacrifice in general, both by some ancient authors and by some modern scholars.<sup>59</sup> However, it is important to note that this animal held a special value as one of the primary tools for agriculture, as specified by the accompanying adjective, ‘for ploughing’ (ἀρότρων, *arotron*).<sup>60</sup> Killing an animal that was closely collaborating with humans was already considered an impious act.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, this act later came to be referred to as βουκτασία (*booctasia*, ‘the slaying of an oxen’) and was considered a criminal offense.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, it should also be considered, as pointed out by Kidd, that the decision not to kill the working oxen was probably for a practical reason: they were too valuable to be used as food. Nonetheless, later tradition associated this practice with the vegetarianism of the Orphics and Pythagoreans.<sup>63</sup>

On the other hand, the second reason that leads me to doubt the vegetarianism of Aratus’ golden age is that, although the text does not explicitly mention Cronus or Zeus,<sup>64</sup> the presence of Justice could imply that there was already a separation between humans and animals. This separation would align with the idea that Zeus granted justice exclusively to humans, as described in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* 274-280.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Cf., e.g., Plut. *De esu carniūm* 998A; Gatz 1967, 61-62; Dombrowski 1984, 28-29; Blundell 1986, 144-147; Kidd 1997, 228; Gera 2003, 63-64 and Harden 2013, 111. However, once again, like in Hesiod’s work, Aratus’ text does not specify each and every characteristic identifying each race, which, in my opinion, leaves open the question of when the relevant cultural markers, such as sacrifice, were established.

<sup>60</sup> Βοῦς ἀροτήρ (*Bous aroter*) is a Hesiodic expression (*Op.* 405).

<sup>61</sup> Porph. *Abst.* 2.31. There is indeed a testimony in which Aristoxenus claimed that Pythagoras allowed the consumption of any living being, with the exception of the ram and the ox (Diog. Laert. 8.20).

<sup>62</sup> Calderón 2004, 145. Cf. also Varro, *Rust.* 2.5.4; Columella, *Rust.* 6,*praef.*7.; Pli. *HN* 8.180 and Val. Max. 8.1.*damn.*8.

<sup>63</sup> Kidd 1997, 229.

<sup>64</sup> These gods would be part of the genealogy of Justice if Aratus is thinking of Zeus as her father (Hes. *Theog.* 902); cf. Kidd 1997, 217-218.

<sup>65</sup> The passage would also be inspired by Hesiod’s description of Justice in *Op.* 220-262; cf. Kidd 1997, 216.

### 3.7. Philo of Alexandria and the Animal Tower of Babel

A narrative similar to Callimachus’ golden age can be found in Philo of Alexandria (*De confusione linguarum* 6-8).<sup>66</sup> However, unlike the version by Callimachus, Philo does not seem to attribute a common language to humans and animals. Instead, animals are endowed with a universal language that allows them to communicate only among themselves, even across different (non-human) species. This linguistic interaction, enabling them to share their experiences and emotions, results in the formation of a community. This, in consequence, grants them the privileges of that time. Nevertheless, their satiety with this abundance of goods also leads them to desire more, specifically eternal youth, which results in the fragmentation of their common language and the inability to understand each other. It is from this incapacity that the rupture of their community can be inferred, and therefore, the end of the golden age.<sup>67</sup>

It is also worth noting that while the Callimachean tale aimed to explain human loquacity through animals, in Philo’s narrative, animals are the main subject. Consequently, in this case, we should rather refer to it as a specifically animal golden age, above all, since humans are not mentioned within this period. This distinction is likewise in line with the fabulistic nature of the text.<sup>68</sup>

Conversely, in Philo, as in Callimachus, we see the motif of the animal embassy again, although this time it is not specified which animals lead it or to whom it is directed.<sup>69</sup> Instead,

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<sup>66</sup> It is highly likely that Philo constructed his text based on Callimachus’ version and the original fable, cf. Acosta-Hughes 2002, 179-180.

<sup>67</sup> See *infra* note 69.

<sup>68</sup> According to Gera 2003, 20, “... animal fables conventionally took place in the age of Kronos. Various fables actually refer to the time when animals had a common language with each other or with men. We find, for instance, the fable opening ‘when the animals spoke’ *ὅτε φωνήεντα ἦν τὰ ζῷα* (*bote phoneenta en ta zoa*) already in Xenophon (*Mem.* 2.7.13), a passage which pre-dates extant Aesopic collections”.

<sup>69</sup> It is possible to think, however, that the embassy is once again directed towards Zeus, as in Callimachus’ text. This detail also seems to imply that animals had the ability to communicate with the gods. Philo does not explicitly state that his narrative takes place in the reign of Cronus, but this context can be inferred if one considers the way he begins it: “Another similar story is to be found in the writings of the mythologists, telling of the days when all animals had a common language. The tale is that in old days all animals, whether on land or in water or winged, had the same language ...” (*De confusione linguarum* 6). Translation by Colson and Whitaker 1939.

the serpent is mentioned, a symbol of eternal youth and reincarnation.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, Philo, who places this text within his discourse on the biblical history of the Tower of Babel, does not deprive animals of language as Callimachus does. Their punishment, by contrast, consists more of a fragmentation of language similar to what occurs in the Tower of Babel.<sup>71</sup>

### 3.8. The Gildest Golden Age: The Prologue of Babrius' *Fables*

The prologue of Babrius' *Fables* goes a step further in its description of the golden age in relation to animals:<sup>72</sup>

'Twas a race of just men who lived first on the earth, Branchus my boy, the race that men call Golden. After them there came, they say, a different generation, the one of Silver; and we are third in descent among these, and ours is the generation of Iron. Now in the Golden age not only men but all the other living creatures had the power of speech and were familiar with such words as we ourselves now use in speaking to each other. Assemblies were held by these creatures in the midst of the forests. Even the pine tree talked, and the leaves of the laurel. The fish swimming about in the sea chatted with the friendly sailor, and quite intelligibly, too, the sparrows conversed with the farmer. Everything grew from the earth, which made no demands on men, and good fellowship prevailed between gods and mortals. That this was so, you may learn and fully understand from wise old Aesop, who has told us fables in the free manner of prose. And now I shall adorn each of those fables with the flowers of my own Muse. I shall set before you a poetical honeycomb, as it were, dripping with sweetness, having softened the hard chords of the stinging iambic.<sup>73</sup>

In this narrative, humans converse with both animals and gods. Moreover, not only do animals possess articulated voices, but even nature itself, as stones and leaves are also granted speech. This expands the community of beings, which is further reinforced by the fact that

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<sup>70</sup> For a deeper analysis of the serpent in Greece and Rome, see Ogden 2013.

<sup>71</sup> Gera 2003, 31.

<sup>72</sup> There are two different versions of the text in question, cf. Gera 2003, 19, n. 6. However, the variations do not affect the current subject of study.

<sup>73</sup> Translated by Perry 1965.

Babrius seems to attempt to eliminate linguistic boundaries between gods, humans, and animals, although he does not place them in the same conversational group.<sup>74</sup>

Given that members of these three groups are able to converse with each other, one can imagine again that they did not consume each other. However, it cannot be ruled out that some animals were used as tools for work. The text mentions elements that would be characteristic of later ages, such as the farmer (γεωργός, *georgos*) and the sailor (ναύτης, *nautes*), figures who could have made use of them. Nevertheless, given the idealized scenario, it would be expected that, in any case, there was a friendly collaboration between humans and animals.

### 3.9. The Prepared Banquets of Lucian

The latest accounts of the reign of Cronus that should be considered within the scope of this study belong to Lucian: *Saturnalian Letters* 1.20 and *Saturnalia* 7. Both texts revolve around the Roman festival of the Saturnalia as their main theme, and it is in this context that the reign of Cronus is briefly described, who is identified with Saturn.

In the first text, there is no mention of any animals as such. The passage mainly focuses on a land that generously yields its fruits, along with rivers of wine, milk, and honey. However, it also speaks of meals or banquets already prepared (δείπνον ἔτοιμον, *deipnon hetoimon*), which could include animal-based foods like meat and fish. This possibility appears likely when considering *Saturnalia* 7 as well. In this text, Lucian also includes the privileges mentioned in the previous passage while explicitly stating that ready-baked bread and ready-cooked meats emerged directly (ἔτοιμος ἄρτος καὶ κρέα ἐσκευασμένα, *hetoimos artos kai krea eskeuasmena*).

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Gera 2003, 20.

#### 4. Conclusions

The analysis conducted in these pages reveals that the characteristics associated with animals in Greek narratives about the golden age are diverse and vary in their significance. When it comes to human attitudes towards animals, two characteristics stand out: firstly, the abstention from sacrificing and consuming animals, which is mentioned in some texts, either explicitly or implicitly; and secondly, animals endowed with articulate speech. This ability normally enables them to interact with each other, humans, and potentially even with the gods. Furthermore, when communication is established between human and animal species, it often leads, though not always, to the formation of a community or a harmonious relationship between different species. This is not only because humans usually do not include their dialogue partners on the menu, but also because the animals have a gentle nature, facilitating interaction. The friendly nature of animals can sometimes exist even without the capacity to speak. However, the respectful treatment of animals does not always exclude their use as tools for work or potential sources of resources (such as milk, wool, etc.), as can be found in, for example, Aratus, or can probably be inferred from the prologue of Babrius' *Fables*.

Now, can any of these characteristics be considered fundamental to the golden age motif? In my opinion, it is not possible, as the presence and significance of animals in each narrative differ greatly. In the texts of Crates, Callimachus, Philo, and Babrius, all the mentioned characteristics are clearly present, with only minor exceptions. In fact, animals play a central role in each of these stories—a role which is also linked, at least in the case of the latter three authors, to their association with the fable genre. However, in Crates' fragments, the prominence of animals is related to the possibility that *Theria* contains a satire of Orphic, Pythagorean, and Empedoclean beliefs regarding abstaining from animal flesh.

Concerning the texts of Empedocles and Plato, animals, despite not acting as protagonists, constitute one of their central elements. This role is consistent with Empedocles' philosophical doctrine, where animals occupy an essential position. In Plato, their significance is more

contextual. In the passage from the *Statesman*, animals are equated with humans to some extent, but this occurs within an ambiguous representation of the reign of Cronus.<sup>75</sup>

Between the mentioned philosophers and the subsequent authors, we find Dicaearchus. In the surviving testimony about his golden age, while there seems to be a consideration of abstaining from living beings, the importance of animals cannot be definitively assessed, as it is unclear to what extent Porphyry's thought influenced the transmission of his ideas.

In a very different line from the authors discussed so far are Hesiod, the ancient comedigraphers in general, Aratus, and Lucian, whose texts barely feature animals. Aratus presents the ox as an animal suitable for agricultural tasks, but the question of vegetarianism, as seen, remains ambiguous. Ancient comedies and Lucian's works on the Saturnalia, on the other hand, view animals as nothing more than a source of food. And lastly, in Hesiod, with whom this study began, curiously, animals are conspicuous by their absence.<sup>76</sup>

It can be concluded, then, that ideas about animals are applied and developed in a heterogeneous manner within each version of the golden age. These ideas mainly revolve around the function that the motif serves within the narrative that contains it. While Gatz rightly noted at the time the anthropocentric nature of these narratives, where animals often serve as secondary elements defining human condition and position in the world, this analysis has also aimed to provide an alternative perspective on some of the arguments discussed by this scholar in reaching this conclusion.<sup>77</sup> It has particularly reconsidered two points: the apparent vegetarianism of the Hesiod's race of gold and how the idea of this practice was introduced into the following narratives of the golden age.

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<sup>75</sup> I follow the interpretation of El Murr 2010.

<sup>76</sup> In any case, if their presence is accepted (Hes. *Op.* 120), they appear as livestock, that is, animals that ultimately serve a practical purpose for humans.

<sup>77</sup> Gatz 1967, 165-168.

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