The concept of the Sun as ἡγεμονικόν in the Stoa and in Manilius’ Astronomica

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Abstract: Hegemonikon in Stoic vocabulary is the technical term for the chief part or ‘command-centre’ of the soul. As we know, the Stoics considered the cosmos a living organism, and they theorised both about the human soul’s Hegemonikon and about its counterpart in the World-soul. My ultimate purpose in this paper is to show that the Stoic concept of the cosmic hegemonikon can be observed in Manilius’ Astronomica. The paper is divided into two parts. To begin with, I will examine and discuss the evidence concerning this concept in the relevant texts of the Early and Middle Stoa. The analysis will indicate that the concept of hegemonikon could involve a background of astronomical theory which some scholars attribute to the Stoic Posidonius. In the second section, I will go on to relate the concept of hegemonikon to the doctrines conveyed by Manilius. Additionally, we shall
see that Manilius’ polemic allusions to Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* suggest that the concept was intensely debated in the Post-Hellenistic philosophical circles.

**Keywords**: Ancient Cosmology; Stoics; Manilius; Greek Astrology.
Hegemonikon in Stoic vocabulary is the technical term for the chief part or ‘command-centre’ of the soul. As we know, the Stoics considered the cosmos a living organism, and they theorised both about the human soul’s Hedgeemonikon and about its counterpart in the World-soul. My ultimate purpose in this paper is to show that the Stoic concept of the cosmic hegemonikon can be observed in Manilius’ Astronomica. The paper is divided into two parts. To begin with, I will examine and discuss the evidence concerning this concept in the relevant texts of the Early and Middle Stoa. The analysis will indicate that the concept of hegemonikon could involve a background of astronomical theory which some scholars attribute to the Stoic Posidonius. In the second section, I will go on to relate the concept of hegemonikon to the doctrines conveyed by Manilius. Additionally, we shall see that Manilius’ polemic allusions to Lucretius’ De Rerum Natura suggest that the concept was intensely debated in the Post-Hellenistic philosophical circles.

I- The Stoics

There are two available doxographies listing the views of Stoic philosophers about the chief part of the cosmic soul and its location in the cosmos. These accounts do not contradict each other, and bring complementary information about the topic. One of them can be found in Arius Didymus’ Epitome, a work that usually contrasts different opinions of the Stoics about the same issue. The other list comes from the seventh book of Diogenes Laertius, the book devoted to Stoic philosophy. Diogenes’ doxography is introduced at the end of chapter
139, yet I include the preceding chapter given the importance of the context for the understanding of the respective opinions.

“Cosmos is the individually qualified being of the substance of the whole, or, as Posidonius says in the *Meteorology* (the elementary treatise), the systematic compound composed from heaven and earth and the natural constitutions in them, or a systematic compound composed from gods and men and what has come into being for their sake. Heaven is the last periphery in which is seated all the divine. The Stoics say that the universe is governed according to intelligence and providence (Τὸν δὴ κόσμον διοικεῖσθαι κατὰ νοῦν καὶ πρόνοιαν), as Chrysippus says in Book V of *On Providence* and Posidonius in Book III of *On Gods*, since intelligence pervades every part of it like soul in us; but actually through some parts it is more, through some less. For through some parts it has come as cohesion, as through some bones and sinews; through others as intelligence, as through the command-centre. The universe, in this way, then, taken as a whole is a living being and ensouled and rational, it has the aether as its command-centre, as Antipater of Tyre says in *On Universe*, Bk 8. But Chrysippus in Bk I of *On Providence* and Posidonius in *On Gods* say that the heaven is the governing principle of the universe, and Cleanthes says it is the Sun. Chrysippus, however, in the course of the same work gives a somewhat different account, namely, what of the aether is purer; the same aether which they declare to be pre-eminently God and always to have, as it were in sensible fashion, pervaded all that is in the air, all animals and plants, and also the earth itself as a principle of cohesion.” (Diogenes Laertius VII 138–139 = F 14; 21 and 23 E–K)¹

¹ E–K stands for the fragments of the Stoic Posidonius of Apamea organized in the collection of L. Edelstein and I. G. Kidd. All the translations of Posidonean fragments in this article belong to Kidd 1999.