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# The Stoa as a Microcosm. Did the Painted Porch of Athens Influence Zeno's Theology?

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## Abstract

This article presents a novel speculative interpretation of a significant aspect of Zeno of Citium's life as well as his Stoic philosophy, which is often acknowledged in scholarship but seldom explained. According to Diogenes Laertius, Zeno – the founder of Stoicism – led his philosophical inquiries under the Painted Porch or Στοά Ποικίλη in Athens: an open colonnade adorned with four paintings celebrating Athenian victories over mythical and historical foes. Through an examination of this location's functions, particularly its roles in law and religion, I argue that the philosopher perceived this place as an allegorical representation of divine governance through natural law. Three key factors underpin my interpretation: (1) the evidence that the early Stoics engaged in allegorical interpretations of artwork; (2) the qualification of Stoicism as an initiation to the divine; and (3) Zeno's analogy of the world to a city, which implies that the Στοά Ποικίλη is a microcosm symbolizing the universe.

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## Focus, applied concepts and methods

Stoicism was a philosophical movement founded by Zeno of Citium:<sup>[1]</sup> a Phoenician by birth who practiced philosophy in Athens. As recounted by his biographer Diogenes Laertius (*Lives of the Philosophers* VII 5), this movement derived its name from a spatial association. Zeno and his followers – notably Cleanthes of Assos and Chrysippus – were originally called 'Zenonians (Ζηνώνειοι),' as witnessed in a letter by Epicurus, but soon came to be known as 'Stoics' due to their frequent gatherings in the ancient Agora of Athens, specifically beneath the covered walkway or colonnade known as the Painted Porch (Στοά Ποικίλη).<sup>[2]</sup> This name is also derivative. The location was initially known as Peisianax' Stoa (ἡ Πεισιανάκτειος στοά), named after Peisianax, who erected it and was a cousin of Pericles as well as Cimon's brother-in-law (*contra* Di Cesare 2002). Pausanias (*Guide to Greece*, I 15.1–16.1 = T80 W.) informs us that the Porch underwent a transformation. The painter Polygnotus produced four paintings depicting a blend of two historical events (the battles at Oinoe and Marathon) and mythological narratives (the sack of Troy, the Amazonomachy). Unfortunately, these paintings have not survived. Following this, the stoa came to be known by the epithet ποικίλος ('painted' or 'multicoloured').<sup>[3]</sup> Zeno and his followers came to be known as 'Stoics' due to their association with philosophizing under the Athenian Porch.

It remains unclear whether the gatherings under the Στοά Ποικίλη were intentionally organized or simply the result of an inherited custom. A considerable number of sources (T50–51, T74–75, T78, 335 W.) indicate that this porch was frequented by many philosophers. While these would certainly

have included Stoics, there is nothing to suggest that intellectuals from other schools did not also gather there. However, the fact that Zeno frequented the Στοὰ Ποικίλη because other philosophers did so may have been only a secondary factor. After all, if his sole motivation had been to teach where his peers or rivals were already gathered, he had many other options beyond the Athenian Agora, such as the Academy, Cynosarges, or the Lyceum – a location where, incidentally, his successor Chrysippus would teach (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* VII 185 = *SVF* II 1). Thus, at the very least, Zeno made a conscious choice to frequent the Athenian Agora rather than less urban alternatives like those mentioned above.

It can also be added that this area was a place that was frequented by three philosophers whom he admired and who inspired his desire to philosophize. The first is Socrates, who happened to have philosophical conversations under two other porches, i.e., the Stoa of Zeus Liberator (Στοὰ του Ελευθερίου Διός) and the Royal Stoa (Στοὰ βασιλείου). The so-called Socratic dialogues indicate that Socrates engaged in discussions under the former with individuals such as Theages, Ischomachus, and Eryxias, while he conversed with the priest Euthyphro under the latter.<sup>[4]</sup> The second philosopher is Diogenes of Sinope, who frequented the Στοὰ βασιλείου and was another influential authority within Stoicism, as well as the founder of Cynicism. This philosophy derives its name from the emulation of the dog (κύων), as a manifestation of living freely in accordance with nature. This lifestyle, believed to offer a happiness unattainable within civilized society, often led its adherents to embrace a life of extreme poverty or even begging.<sup>[5]</sup> The third philosopher is Crates of Thebes, a disciple of Diogenes and Zeno's own mentor, accompanied by his wife Hipparchia of Maroneia, who already philosophized under the Στοὰ Ποικίλη.<sup>[6]</sup> This fact would have made the Athenian Agora more appealing.

Further support for the claim that Zeno of Citium found the Στοὰ Ποικίλη particularly significant comes from Diogenes Laertius. It is worth quoting the passage in full:

Ἀνακάμπτων δὴ ἐν τῇ Ποικίλῃ στοᾷ τῇ καὶ Πεισιανακτίῳ καλουμένῃ, ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς γραφῆς τῆς Πολυγνώτου ποικίλῃ, διετίθετο τοὺς λόγους, βουλόμενος καὶ τὸ χωρίον ἀπερίστατον ποιῆσαι. ἐπὶ γὰρ τῶν τριάκοντα τῶν πολιτῶν πρὸς τοῖς χιλίοις τετρακόσιοι ἀνήρηντ' ἐν αὐτῷ.

He [Zeno] delivered his views while walking back and forth in the Painted Stoa, also called the Stoa of Peisianax but so named for the paintings by Polygnotus; he also wanted to keep the space ἀπερίστατον, since 1,400 citizens had been executed there under the Thirty [tyrants].<sup>[7]</sup>

I have deliberately left the term ἀπερίστατον untranslated, as its meaning is highly controversial, and any translation would immediately imply a particular thesis or interpretation. The following sections of this paper will offer two possible explanations. Meanwhile, I wish to highlight that the passage may suggest that Zeno consciously chose the Στοὰ Ποικίλη as his 'philosophical home.' First, we find the verb βουλόμενος, indicating an act of the will. Furthermore, the γὰρ immediately following ἀπερίστατον suggests a connection between the philosopher's teaching and the tragic memory of the mass murder committed by the Thirty Tyrants. It seems that, for reasons not explicitly stated, Zeno intended to counteract the site's dark reputation and transform it.

Starting from the premise that the Painted Porch was deliberately chosen as the ideal place for Zeno to express his philosophy, this paper aims to explore why the Stoic philosopher did so and to explore whether this setting significantly shaped Stoic philosophy. Three hypotheses remain open for

consideration: (1) The Stoics gathered under the Στοὰ Ποικίλη because they found there a physical embodiment of their philosophical theories; (2) this location inspired their theoretical perspective; or (3) both dimensions reciprocally transformed or influenced each other. My proposal is that the third perspective is the most plausible, although the arguments supporting it will largely remain speculative. As the reconstruction will reveal, this topic relies on very limited and fragmentary evidence.

The method employed in this study will be historical–philosophical and comparative. It will involve gathering literary and epigraphical evidence concerning the social functions carried out in the Στοὰ Ποικίλη in Zeno's time and earlier, as well as examining the concrete relationship between the Stoics and this location.

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## State of the art

Despite the extensive scholarship on Stoic philosophy and its historical origins, there have been relatively few attempts to explain why Zeno established his intellectual base under the Στοὰ Ποικίλη. Richard Wycherley (Wycherley 1953: 33–34; Wycherley 1978: 41) and Doyne Dawson (Dawson 1992: 161–162) argue, *mutatis mutandis*, that Zeno intentionally sought to make his teachings accessible to the public in an informal setting. This viewpoint is echoed by Mary–Anne Zagdoun (Zagdoun 2000: 32), following the lead of Agnès Rouveret (Rouveret 1989: 396), who adds that the ‘peintures excitaient sans doute l’admiration des Stoïciens’, although she does not specify why. Eduard Zeller (Zeller 1963: 54–55) offers a practical explanation: as a foreigner, Zeno was unable to purchase land to establish a school, thus leading him to ‘rent’ the Στοὰ Ποικίλη. Andrew Erskine initially embraced Wycherley's interpretation in his 1990 book *The Hellenistic Stoa*. However, he later proposed a thought–provoking addition: Zeno aimed to challenge the ideology of Athens' superiority over barbarians that was depicted in the Στοὰ Ποικίλη's paintings. Indeed, his barbarian or Phoenician origins did not prevent Zeno from excelling in philosophy and even being honoured by Athens with a public decree in 262/260 BCE.<sup>[8]</sup> Drawing from the abovementioned mass murder committed by the Thirty Tyrants, Julia Wildberger (Wildberger 2018: 147) suggests that this location was avoided by people and that Zeno chose it in order to engage in philosophical inquiry with the select few who joined his circle. Finally, Morison (2024) speculates that the philosopher, who believed that virtue is the only good (*SVFI* 179–189), may have been influenced in his decision by the paintings' virtuous depictions.

To anticipate the stance I will defend in this article's final paragraph, I contend that scholars such as Wycherley, Dawson, and partially Zagdoun, who argue that Zeno intended to make his philosophy public, are mistaken. This hypothesis is supported by two anecdotes recounted by Diogenes Laertius. He reports that Zeno discouraged crowds from approaching him and even convinced a young man to sit on the Porch's dirty steps and to adopt Cynic/beggar–like behaviour, thereby driving them away (*Lives of the Philosophers* VII 14 and 21 = T64–65 W.). These texts suggest that the philosopher was not intent on making his doctrines public and accessible.

Conversely, the interpretations offered by Zeller and Wildberger diverge from the historical context surrounding the Στοὰ Ποικίλη. Zeller's interpretation is questionable because it seems improbable that a public space – described by Francesco de Angelis as ‘un edificio “aperto”, accessibile a tutti’<sup>[9]</sup> –

could be rented by a private individual. Moreover, his claim would contradict the early Stoic rejection of private property, rooted in the belief that the wise person possesses everything, rendering the concepts of ownership and rent meaningless.<sup>[10]</sup> Wildberger's assumption that the Στοὰ Ποικίλη was avoided following the mass murder committed by the Thirty Tyrants is therefore unlikely. Historical evidence indicates that the Painted Porch was frequented throughout the centuries by a variety of people, including casual visitors, fishmongers, grammarians, parasites, poets, prostitutes, and street artists.<sup>[11]</sup>

I am therefore more inclined to develop the interpretation supported by the remaining scholars (Erskine, Morison, Rouveret, Zagdoun), which posits that one of the reasons for Zeno's attraction to the Painted Porch was its paintings. My own hypothesis will diverge from these previous interpretations in two ways, however. Firstly, as suggested by the anonymous referee of the previous draft of this article, I will refrain from making the exaggerated claim that these paintings were the decisive cause of Zeno's decision to teach at the Painted Porch. My argument is more limited: the paintings reinforced a decision he had already made and were used to support Stoic philosophy. Secondly, while I agree with Morison's emphasis on the importance of virtue and I am persuaded by Erskine's idea that Zeno frequented the Painted Porch to challenge Athens' superiority over the barbarians, I believe this is only part of the story. I would add that these paintings, when properly interpreted, may also point to a transcendent divine principle governing human reality and universal human (i.e., not exclusively Athenian) values. In this regard, Zeno's approach was dialectical.

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## Historical and spatial exposition, agents

At the outset of this essay, I emphasized that the principal reason the Στοὰ Ποικίλη was labelled ποικίλος was due to the presence of four paintings. But it is also plausible that the painted subjects or events were more numerous, as suggested by the scholia or ancient footnotes to verses 382–385 of Aristophanes' comedy *Plutus* (T58 W.). These annotations seem to allude to the existence of a pictorial representation by the painter Pamphilos of Amphipolis depicting the myth of the Heraclids, the descendants of Heracles who sought refuge in Athens after their father's death.<sup>[12]</sup> Although this assertion is debatable, as Pausanias does not mention this fifth painting, it is bolstered by the discovery of an altar dedicated to Eleos or Pity near the Στοὰ Ποικίλη.<sup>[13]</sup> Moreover, Diogenes Laertius (*Lives of the Philosophers* VII 14 = T64 W.) notes the presence of another altar that was later relocated due to it obstructing the path of visitors to the Porch.

The focal point was then occupied by these four paintings, likely depicting a unified theme (Wycherley 1957: 40; Wycherley 1978: 118): the celebration of Athenian virtue and courage against both historical adversaries (the Persians) and mythological foes (the Amazons and the Trojans). This is clearly evident from various sources,<sup>[14]</sup> particularly the description provided by Pausanias (*Guide to Greece* I 15 = T80 W.), which emphasizes an important aspect. The victory at the Battle of Marathon was attributed not only to the Athenians but also to their allies, including the Phoenicians, as well as to the assistance of two gods: Heracles and Athena (§ 3). Their presence suggests divine providence played a role in the victory. Additional intriguing details about the Battle of Marathon's depiction can be found in the works of two other authors: Plutarch, who describes the Athenian

participants as demigods (*Life of Cimon* 4.5–6 = T86 W.), and Claudius Aelianus (*On the Nature of Animals* VII 38 = T47 W.), who mentions a depiction of a dog which had contributed to the victory against the barbarians in the painting.

The Στοὰ Ποικίλη also served as a venue for lawsuits and legal arbitrations, as mentioned by Demosthenes (*On the Crown* I 17 = T61 W.) and supported by epigraphical sources (T97–98 W., with Wycherley 1978: 96–97, and Boegehold 1995: 183–185). Notably, the statue of the lawgiver Solon was situated just outside this porch (cf. again in T80 W. = Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* I 16.1).

Lastly, a scholium on Aristophanes' *Frogs* (v. 369 = T57 W.) reveals that priests or torchbearers conducted the opening of the mysteries of Eleusis here and instructed the uninitiated to depart. Since this is an isolated piece of literary evidence, caution is warranted in assuming that the Painted Porch served as an institutionalized place of worship. When considering the depiction of Heracles/Athena in the painting of the Battle of Marathon, however, along with the presence of altars inside or in its vicinity, it could be inferred that the Στοὰ Ποικίλη held at least some religious significance (cf. Wycherley 1953: 30–31).

I do not mean to suggest that such religious–legal functions were exclusive to the Στοὰ Ποικίλη. In fact, the Royal Stoa also made the city's laws available to the public (T6, T9, T21, T27 W.). Similarly, the Stoa of Zeus Liberator housed a statue of the god, who served as the protector of freedmen and played an important cultic and social role (T28–29 W.). My simpler point is that these examples clearly show that the Στοὰ Ποικίλη also served these functions, meaning that its visitors would have perceived a religious–legal dimension within the space. Furthermore, I contend that Zeno was probably no exception, and his appreciation of the Painted Porch may have included a recognition of these elements.

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## Explanatory hypotheses, potential generalisations, possible relations to other factors

With this historical and spatial context in mind, we can now address the research question of this article. Why did Zeno engage in philosophical discourse in the Painted Porch?

One initial explanation is that since Crates of Thebes was already engaging in philosophy at the Painted Stoa, it would have seemed natural and spontaneous for his pupil to follow suit. This idea gains further support from Zeno's anecdote about covering his master with a cloak during a public encounter with his wife Hipparchia (cf. note 6 for references). While this is undeniably true, we have already seen that Diogenes Laertius mentions a supplementary reason given by Zeno, namely that he wanted to make the space of the Painted Stoa ἀπερίστατον. It is now time to focus on this crucial aspect.

As previously noted, the challenge with ἀπερίστατον lies in its ambiguity due to its multiple meanings. We can rule out the interpretation 'uncrowded' or 'solitary' (see Pseudo-Phocylides, *Sentences* v. 26), since we have seen that the Στοὰ Ποικίλη was a bustling place where solitude or small gatherings were unlikely. Similarly, we can dismiss the meanings 'vulnerable' or 'unprotected' (Polybius, *Histories* VI 44.8), as this would contradict Diogenes Laertius's account that Zeno sought to respond

to the mass murder committed by the Thirty Tyrants. Rather, his teaching seems to have been aimed at dispelling the memory of this event and transforming the Painted Porch into an invulnerable or protected space.

This leaves us with only two other interpretations of ἀπερίστατον. These can be examined through the lens of two Stoic-Cynic texts.

On the one hand, ἀπερίστατον could mean 'without danger' or 'risk-free'/'uneventful.' This interpretation finds strong support in one of the fictional letters attributed to Crates. In the letter addressed to one of his pupils, he – or, more accurately, his literary persona – writes:

Τὸ μὲν σύντομον καὶ ἀρμοστὸν πρὸς πᾶσαν περίστασιν, ὃ τιμιώτατε ἄνερ, ὁ τῶν ἀρχαίων χρησμὸς ἔφησε τὰ ἀναγκαῖα μὴ φεύγειν· τὸν γὰρ φεύγοντα τὰ ἄφυκτα ἀνάγκη δυστυχεῖν, καὶ τὸν ὀρεγόμενον τῶν ἀδυνάτων ἀνάγκη αὐτῶν ἀτυχεῖν. (...) ἐγὼ γὰρ ἀπ' ἐμαυτοῦ τεκμαίρομαι, ὅτι τότε θλιβόμεθα ἄνθρωποι, ὅταν ἀπερίστατον βίον ζῆν ἐθέλωμεν. τοῦτο δὲ ἐστὶ τῶν ἀμηχάνων· ἀνάγκη μὲν γὰρ ζῆν μετὰ σώματος, ἀνάγκη δὲ καὶ μετ' ἀνθρώπων, αἱ δὲ πλεῖται περιστάσεις γίνονται ἕκ τε τῆς ἀνοίας τῶν συμβιούντων καὶ πάλιν ἕκ τοῦ σώματος. ἐὰν μὲν οὖν ἐπιστήμων τις ἐν τούτοις ἀναστρέφεται, οὗτός ἐστιν ἄλυπος καὶ ἀπάραχος, ὁ μακάριος ἀνὴρ.

The oracle of the ancients, honoured Sir, has given advice that is concise and fitting in regard to every circumstance: Do not flee from what is necessary. For the one who flees from what is inevitable must be unhappy, and the one who desires what is impossible must fail to obtain it. (...) For I have concluded from my own case that we men are distressed precisely when we wish to live a life without hardship. But this wish is impossible. For we must live with the body, and we must live with men as well, and hardships issue from the folly of those who live in society and, in turn, from the body. If, therefore, a wise man lives by these principles, he is free from pain and confusion, a happy man.<sup>[15]</sup>

The key part of the passage is Crates' assertion that people seek an untroubled life (ἀπερίστατον βίον). The context makes it clear that this refers to a life free from the hardships inevitably associated with having a body prone to distress and interacting with other people who inevitably cause annoyance. Moreover, the conclusion of the passage offers a paradoxical resolution. Crates suggests that one can achieve this ἀπερίστατον βίον by embracing those very hardships. The implicit reasoning, often repeated in the epistles, is that the Cynic acceptance of hardship leads to a kind of immunity from hardship itself.<sup>[16]</sup> One could argue, then, that Crates' concept of ἀπερίστατον influenced Zeno, and that the latter may have believed that teaching under the Painted Porch could help to achieve this goal of an untroubled life.

On the other hand, there is a more abstract interpretation of ἀπερίστατον that we can consider, which agrees with Epictetus. In his *Diatribes* (IV 1.151–159 = *SSRV* B 73), Epictetus employs the term (§ 159) to describe Diogenes of Sinope's life and conduct. The Cynic led a life physically detached and even hostile to human society. Yet, Epictetus suggests that Diogenes sought this solitude to align himself with his true homeland: the gods (§ 154) and the divine law they established (§ 158). We might guess that Zeno used ἀπερίστατον in a similar vein, namely that he saw the Στοᾶ Ποικίλη as a space where he could experience spiritual detachment from the crowd, thereby providing a transcendent experience. In this context, the term could mean 'forbidden to the uninitiated'.

Neither proposal is perfect. Against the use of Crates' epistles, one could point out that the collection is a forgery and offers little insight into the historical Cynic philosopher. His reference to the pursuit of an ἀπερίστατον βίον postdates Zeno and therefore could not have influenced the philosopher. This view is further supported by the fact that the key term περιστάσεις never appears in authentic evidence relating to Crates, while it is frequently found in Stoic fragments.<sup>[17]</sup> Conversely, against the occurrence of ἀπερίστατον found in Epictetus, it should be emphasized that his portrayal of Diogenes of Sinope is intentionally inaccurate. The early Cynic philosophers were either atheists, completely disinterested in theological matters, or at most agnostics. This makes it unlikely that Cynicism recognized a divine natural law. Epictetus therefore idealizes Diogenes by presenting him as a religiously inspired thinker.<sup>[18]</sup> At the same time, in favour of both sources, one could argue that their use of the term ἀπερίστατον reflects the original meaning attributed to it by Zeno. Crates' epistle and Epictetus's *Diatribes* may not provide historical evidence of the influence of Diogenes and/or Crates on the Stoic philosopher. It may be the other way around: Zeno's use of ἀπερίστατον may have shaped these later texts, contributing to the Stoic idealization of the two Cynics.

Let us now return to the characterization of the Στοὰ Ποικίλη as ἀπερίστατον. If both meanings 'without danger' and 'forbidden to the uninitiated' are plausible, which should be preferred? In my view, it may not be necessary to choose between them, as Zeno may have understood ἀπερίστατον to encompass both meanings. He may have believed that the Στοὰ Ποικίλη facilitated an understanding of Stoic philosophy that both removed the sinister reputation of the place following the mass murders committed by the Thirty Tyrants, making it 'without danger,' and revealed the divine order of the universe under natural laws, which could only be fully grasped by those 'initiated' into Stoicism. This religious dimension may even underlie the fictional Crates' use of ἀπερίστατον. In his letters, he often emphasizes that his confidence in the Cynics' ability to endure hardship was also rooted in a belief in divine providence (*Epistles* 11, 16, 26–27).

Therefore, Zeno may have perceived the Στοὰ Ποικίλη as an environment conducive to connecting with virtue, divinity, and its laws. This moral-spiritual ambience might have been fostered by the presence of the priests of Dionysus or the Eleusinian Mysteries, associated with a cult that was forbidden to the uninitiated; by the pictorial representation of Athena and Heracles, the latter being a god that attracted Zeno's attention (cf. *SVFI* 109 = Tatian, *Oration against the Greeks* 5); by the virtuous and heroic deeds of the fighters; and by the presence of the altar that may have been approached by the Heraclids as supplicants. Moreover, the Στοὰ Ποικίλη served as a venue for justice and legal debates.

Zeno even merged these two dimensions, implying that the religious atmosphere and the pursuit of justice/virtue would have appeared as an inseparable whole. He believed that divine law coincides with nature and is synonymous with God. This led him to speak of a 'natural law' that permeates the universe and governs it through its 'seminal reasons,' namely seeds that cause the ordered growth and flourishing of all beings, a concept he believed was already endorsed by Socrates.<sup>[19]</sup> The paintings in the Στοὰ Ποικίλη depicting gods aiding virtuous individuals and even their accompanying animals (recall the detail of the dog) against barbarians would have reinforced his belief that this legal-religious authority governs both the human and the animal worlds. Far from being decorative, these depictions symbolize the universe and its divine-legal order.

Applied to the mass murders ordered by the Thirty Tyrants, this interpretation might clarify how the Painted Porch could be seen as a place 'without danger' or ἀπερίστατον. Those unfamiliar with Stoic teachings would perceive only the tragic reality of the massacre, in which many innocent Athenian citizens lost their lives. However, the Stoics would see behind this tragedy the rational action of God and the working of natural laws. This terrible event, though beyond human comprehension, occurred for the greater good of the universe. At the very least, it gave the citizens of Athens an opportunity to exercise courage and virtuous resistance to evil. A similar line of reasoning might explain Zeno's response to the shipwreck that destroyed his merchant fleet (see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* VII 2–3, and Seneca, *On the Tranquility of Life* 14.3 = *SVF* I 1 and 277). What appeared to be a tragic or unfortunate event, leading to financial ruin, ultimately became a stroke of good luck, as it set the philosopher on the path to becoming an intellectual who lived happily by following nature. With this perspective in mind, a visitor to the Στοὰ Ποικίλη would no longer perceive it as a place marked by something sinister, but rather as a space where the presence of a benevolent God operates through rational, if mysterious, means.

My case can also find further support from Cleanthes of Assos and Chrysippus. Both interpreted Heracles and Athena as symbols or manifestations of a pervasive divine power, simultaneously representing cosmic justice that guides our just behaviour.<sup>[20]</sup> In the case of Chrysippus, one could add that he interpreted the fall of Troy, one of the motifs depicted in the Painted Porch, as a manifestation of providence, specifically as God's will to reduce the excessive number of human beings through war (cf. Plutarch, *On the Contradictions of the Stoics* 1049A = *SVF* II 1177). It is also noteworthy that both Stoics employed an allegorical interpretation of paintings. There is explicit evidence that Chrysippus applied this method of allegory to an obscene pictorial representation of the goddess Hera engaged in oral sex with Zeus, which he normalized as an allegorical reference to the 'seminal reasons' that natural law promotes, as well as to some pictorial representations of the three Graces as symbols of the wise benefits and of the personification of Justice as an austere/authoritative maiden.<sup>[21]</sup> The same could be tentatively said about Cleanthes, who, according to Cicero (*On Ends* II 69 = *SVF* I 553), visually depicted the behaviour of a person consumed by vice, portraying pleasure seated on a throne and virtues merely as 'servants' working towards this base goal. Finally, Chrysippus compared the study of nature and traditional deities as a path to initiation into the true God that permeates everything (*SVF* I 538, II 42 and II 1008, with Brehier 1951: 194–196).

It is uncertain whether Cleanthes and Chrysippus' allegorical/initiatic method can be traced back to Zeno.<sup>[22]</sup> However, the latter's interest in painting or at least iconographic arts seems to resonate with a fragment that presents the image (εἰκόν) of a young wise man as if he were a statue (cf. ἀνδριαντουργεῖ in *SVF* I 246 = Clement of Alexandria, *Pedagogue* III 11.74; see Rouveret 1989: 397). Moreover, a significant passage by Cicero (*On the Nature of the Gods*, II 63–72 = *SVF* I 166 *partim*) reports that Zeno argued that the traditional gods are false divinities, while at the same time acknowledging that they can be interpreted via reason and physics (§ 63: *ex ratione et quidam physica*) as symbols of natural forces. Cicero adds that Cleanthes and Chrysippus elaborated in greater detail (*pluribus verbis*) what their master had stated (see also Brisson 2004: 44–46). It is therefore plausible that their allegorical reading of paintings and their use of the language of initiation might have been an evolution of practices already cultivated by Zeno.

In summary, I cautiously conclude how the founder of Stoicism would have considered the *Στοὰ Ποικίλη* as *ἀπερίστατον*. The Painted Porch reflected the most significant quality that Zeno recognized in the universe: the presence of God governing everything, including nature, the animal world, and human justice or virtue. However, this vision might not have been evident to those uninitiated into Stoicism and its understanding of the true divinity underlying traditional deities such as Heracles and Athena. To a non-Stoic observer, the paintings might have been perceived merely as beautiful depictions of important events in Athenian history, and the people inhabiting the place (priests, judges, etc.) would have been seen as ordinary individuals carrying out their mundane duties. Only a few, such as Zeno and his followers, would have discerned the spiritual force underlying both the human creations and the moral agents within.

This argument gains further support from a topic extensively explored by numerous scholars, which I cannot delve into again in this context: Zeno's comparison of the universe to a city, a theme that may have been elaborated in his controversial work *On the Republic* and that finds a partial precedent in Cynicism.<sup>[23]</sup> It is also reinforced by Chrysippus' depiction of the universe as a divine artwork, for which he employed the term *ποικίλος* (cf. Čelkytė 2020: 120–124 and 171–173, quoting i.a. *SVF* II 1009, 1013–1015, 1163). The *Στοὰ Ποικίλη* therefore emerges as an urban space that vividly illustrates the idea that the world resembles a city, where both wise Stoics and ordinary individuals live, interact, and engage in their activities under the God's wise guidance, and where they can finally perceive themselves as living 'without danger' or protected against menaces such as the Thirty Tyrants. After all, Cleanthes – followed by later Stoics (see *SVF* II 528, 1130) – defined the city as a habitable refuge (*οἰκητήριον*), or a place that protects justice and citizens.<sup>[24]</sup> We could then hypothesize that Stoic philosophy and the physical environment of the Painted Porch mutually influenced or transformed each other. The *Στοὰ Ποικίλη* not only inspired the concept of the cosmic city, but may also have been interpreted as a reflection of this spiritual realm.

Two objections could be raised against my reconstruction. The first is that Zeno had no strong attachment to Athens, as evidenced by his refusal to become a citizen of the city (Plutarch, *On the Contradictions of the Stoics* 1034A = *SVF* I 26). This suggests that he might not have attributed profound symbolic significance to the paintings depicting the glory of Athens, and he could have been indifferent or even hostile to the political propaganda conveyed by these artworks, as suggested by Erskine. The second objection is that Zeno demonstrated disdain for the religious significance attached to the objects within the Painted Porch by ordinary people. In the preceding paragraph, I mentioned that there was an altar that was moved away because it obstructed the visitors' path (T64 W.). Zeno offensively remarked that ordinary people should also be moved away, indicating his disregard for the spiritual significance of such a religious artefact. Moreover, his treatise *On the Republic*<sup>[25]</sup> advocated for the destruction of human altars and law courts. This implies that he believed that the veneration of God and the pursuit of justice should be achieved solely through reason or by adhering to Stoic philosophical teachings.

I have a single response to both objections. Zeno's indifference or hostility towards Athenian ideology, its altars, and its law courts may not have necessarily prevented him from recognizing a spiritual force behind them. On the contrary, his potential allegorical interpretation of the paintings and traditional gods might have been his dialectical attempt to distinguish the false human meanings attached to them by ordinary people from the divine significance they hide beneath the surface.<sup>[26]</sup> A similar endeavour may have been undertaken by Chrysippus. Diogenes Laertius (*Lives*

of the *Philosophers* VII 201) lists among his works a treatise titled *Against Painted Representations* (Πρὸς τὰς ἀναζωγραφίσεις). Given the evidence of Chrysippus' symbolic interpretations of these paintings, it is plausible to suggest that his criticism was not aimed at the outright rejection of these artistic works but rather at their reinterpretation from a Stoic perspective.

Furthermore, against the first objection I can return one last time to a detail of the painting depicting the Battle of Marathon. I noted that this victory was not solely attributed to the Athenians but also to their Phoenician allies. Given Zeno's Phoenician background, he might have appreciated this detail and felt proud that his people were guided by God toward the path of justice and virtue.<sup>[27]</sup> In other words, he could have formed an attachment to the painting of the Battle of Marathon, at the very least, and studied it with attention.

Zeno's attitude is intriguing. It cannot, however, be generalized to other ancient philosophical schools, nor can it be extended to later Stoicism. We have already seen that Chrysippus moved into the Lyceum to philosophize, and that the term 'Stoic' eventually became more abstract (Wycherley 1953: 34; Wycherley 1978: 272). Roman followers of Stoicism continued to use this epithet and were drawn to the Athenian stoas, as evidenced by Panaetius' desire to walk near one of them – possibly the Ποικίλη – before his death.<sup>[28]</sup> But the lack of evidence suggests that they no longer attached significance to the topographical origin of their ideas. The connection between Stoic philosophy and the Στοὰ Ποικίλη would not of course completely disappear, as indicated by Lucian of Samosata's account of the Stoic Timocles agreeing to debate the Epicurean Damis precisely within this location (*Zeus Tragoedus* 14–15, 32 = T76 W.). Nevertheless, this remains a faint echo of Zeno's profound connection with Athens' Agora.

On a positive note, we can interpret Zeno's relationship with the Στοὰ Ποικίλη as unique in the history of ideas. His attitude powerfully demonstrates how a philosophy can become intertwined with a place and resonate with its complex architecture from its inception.

## Footnotes

1 I thank the journal's anonymous referee for their professional critique of the first draft of this article. I have attempted to address all of their objections and suggestions for improvement. Any remaining oversights or errors are my sole responsibility.

2 Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* VII 5 = Epicurus, 138 F (ed. Erbì 2020; on which see Kechagia 2010: 138); *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* I 2, (ed. von Arnim 1903–1924), from now on just *SVF*; source 63 of Wycherley 1957, henceforth quoted with the string 'Tx W.', where T stands for *Testimonia* and x for the source number. Cf. also Strabo, *Geography* XVI 2.24, who attests that Apollonius of Tyre compiled a catalogue of the 'Zenonians' and their literary works; and Suda, *Lexicon* Σ 1150 (= T91 W.)

3 This event's historicity is a subject of intense debate. Pausanias stands as the sole witness to the battle at Oinoe, while more ancient historians such as Thucydides maintain an inexplicable silence on the matter. For further exploration, see Francis and Vicker 1985; Schreiner 1988: 74–75; de Angelis 1996: 140–141 and 165; Taylor 1998, and Luginbill 2014. Personally, I find the hypothesis posited by Stansbury-O'Donnell 2005: 78–81 convincing, suggesting that this painting might be a later addition.

- 4 Plato, *Euthyphro* 2a, and *Theaetetus* 10a (= T19–20 W.); Pseudo-Plato, *Theages* 121a, and *Eryxias* 392a (= T33–34 W.); Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 7.1 (= T36 W.); and Aeschines, *Miltiades*, T116–117, (ed. Pentassuglio 2018). On the Socratic pedigree of Stoicism, cf. Alesse 2000; Long 2002: 67–96, and Brown 2006.
- 5 Cf. especially Dudley 1937: 96–99; Goulet-Cazé 2003; Goulet-Cazé 2017: 251–252 and 349–354; Bees 2011: 7–26 and 263–269. Also useful are Mansfeld 1986: 317–351, and Navia 1998: 133–138. On Diogenes, I recommend Navia 1998; Goulet-Cazé 2017, and Helmer 2017.
- 6 T52 W. (= Apuleius, *Florida* 14; *Socratis et Socraticorum reliquiae*, ed. Giannantoni 1990, chapters V H 24 and V I 4, henceforth just 'SSR'), with Wycherley 1953: 32. For the Cynics' presence in general, cf. also T72 W. and, more cautiously, T95 W. and Eunapius, *Lives of the Sophists* 10.2–4.
- 7 Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* VII 5, transl. by White 2020: 266.
- 8 This new interpretation is introduced in Erskine 2000: 55. Interestingly, it is not included in the second edition of *The Hellenistic Stoa* = Erskine 2011: viii, 5, 102. The decree honouring Zeno is documented by Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* VII 10–12 = *SVFI* 7–8. While it is generally regarded as authentic, Haake 2004 provides a summary and critique of the arguments supporting its authenticity.
- 9 de Angelis 1996: 133. Wycherley 1953: 33 admits the difficulty: 'That a philosopher should choose for his school a much-frequented place in the Agora, in preference to the more secluded suburban gymnasia such as the Academy and the Lyceum, or the garden of Epicurus, may seem strange at first.'
- 10 See Mitsis 2004.
- 11 Cf. T50–51, T69, and T73–74 W., and also T81 and T90 W., which attest that a statue of Aeschylus and a portrait of Sophocles adorned the front of the stoa, thus explaining why the place may have been attractive to poets and grammarians.
- 12 Other scholia, however, suggest that the Pamphilos mentioned by Aristophanes was a tragedian who dramatized the myth of the Heraclids. This perspective is tentatively documented in chapter 51 of the collection *Tragicorum graecorum fragmenta* (ed. Snell 1971: 189–190).
- 13 Thompson 1952: 52 n. 19; Wycherley 1957: 34–35, 67–74. Doubts in Taylor 1998: 46–47.
- 14 T49, T54, T62, T70–71, T79 W., and Aeschines, *Against Ctesiphon* 183–184.
- 15 *Epistle* 35.1–2 (ed. Hercher 1965: 216), transl. Malherbe 1977: 89. For this meaning of ἀπερίστατον, see also Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertation* 36. I thank the anonymous referee for the intriguing suggestion.
- 16 *Ep.* 4 (Εἴθ' αἰρετὸν πόνος, εἴτε φευκτόν, πόνει, ἵνα μὴ πονῆς· διὰ γὰρ τοῦ μὴ πονεῖν οὐ φεύγεται πόνος, τῷ δὲ ἐναντίῳ καὶ διώκεται) and 33.1 (τὸ πονεῖν αἰτιὸν ἐστὶ τοῦ μὴ πονεῖν). See also *Epistles* 19–20 and 29.
- 17 See i.a. *SVF* III 416 and 496. On the Cynic 'forgeries,' see Olivieri 1899: esp. 411; Malherbe 1977: 10–11, and more recently Junqua 2004.

18 The best account is that of Goulet-Cazé 1995: esp. 57–74, who criticizes the past scholarly trend of seeing the Cynics as theists. Other analyses are in Dudley 1937: 18–19; Niehues-Pröbsting 1979: 77–79 and 186–195; Billerbeck 1996: 207–208; Husson 2011: esp. 159–163; Long 2002: 57–60; Goulet-Cazé 2017: 237–238 and 316–319; Helmer 2017: 123–131; Vimercati 2019: 391–393. More generally, cf. Delatte 1953; Ierodakonou 2007; Schofield 2007, and Comella 2014: 398–408. Navia 1998: 133–134, claims that Diogenes recognized a non-divine natural law.

19 Cf. the texts collected in *SVFI* 162. I follow DeFilippo and Mitsis (1994) and Sedley (2007: 210–231). For alternative readings, cf. i.a. Vander Waerdt (1994b; 2003), Vogt (2008: 161–216), Comella (2014: 36–38), Kullmann (2010: 38–48), Dienstbeck (2015: 99–128), and Wildberger (2018: 71–75). Cf. also Lapidge (1978: 143–148) and Hahm (1977: 60–74), for the cosmogonical theory regarding these seminal reasons.

20 *SVFI* 514, II 908, II 1093. On the Stoic allegorical method, cf. Brehier 1951: 199–203; Vimercati 2019: 400–403; Algra 2009; Ramelli 2011–2012: 336–341, and Comella 2014: 51–56.

21 Cf. the texts collected in *SVF* II 1071–1075, 1081 and von Arnim 1903–1924: vol. 3, 197–198, with Rouveret 1989: 392–401; Zagdoun 2000: 31–33 and 242–250; Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004: 95–96 and 111–113, and Algra 2009: 239–240.

22 The judgment of Zagdoun 2000: 32 is negative: ‘Zénon semble s’être désintéressé de la question.’ More confidently Algra 2001.

23 Cf. Aristocles F3 (ed. Chiesara 2001) = Eusebius of Caesarea, *Preparation to the Gospels* XV 14, *SVFI* 98. Cf. here Vander Waerdt 1994: 281–289; Vogt 2008: 73–75 and 87–88; Atkins 2015, and Wildberger 2018: 51–57. *Contra* Obbink 1999, who contends that the analogy between the universe and a city emerges only from Chrysippus onward.

24 *SVF* I 587 (πόλις... οἰκητήριον κατασκευάσµα, εἰς ὃ καταφεύγοντας ἔστι δίκην δοῦναι καὶ λαβεῖν) and Laurand 2005: 87–91.

25 This topic is intensely discussed. Cf. Dawson 1992: 167–181; Schofield 1999a: 157; Schofield 1999b: 175–203; Zagdoun 2000: 34; Rowe 2002: 301–302; Sellars 2007: 8–20; Dorandi 2011; Bees 2011: 61–80; Erskine 2011: 9–42, esp. 21; Walter 2018; Wildberger 2018: 34–41, and Vimercati 2019: 396–413. For references and analysis on Crates’ cosmopolitanism, cf. Moles 1995 and Pons Olivares 2009.

26 Alternatively, one might consider, as suggested by Algra 2009: 238–239, that these institutions will eventually become redundant but will not be entirely abolished.

27 Mazza 2001: 31–34.

28 Philodemus, *On the Stoic School* col. 70 (ed. Dorandi 1994) = Panaetius T1 (ed. Alesse 1997).

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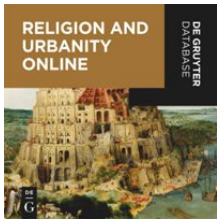
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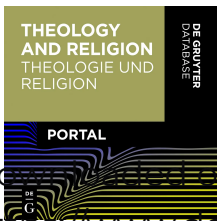
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