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[The Sacred Tales - suite]

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Présentation de la fiche

Coteb023_f0177

SourceBoite_023-7-chem | Aristide.

LangueFrançais

TypeFicheLecture

RelationNumérisation d'un manuscrit original consultable à la BnF, département des Manuscrits, cote NAF 28730

Références éditoriales

Éditeuréquipe FFL (projet ANR *Fiches de lecture de Michel Foucault*) ; projet EMAN (Thalim, CNRS-ENS-Sorbonne nouvelle).

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Notice créée par [équipe FFL](#) Notice créée le 19/03/2021 Dernière modification le 23/04/2021

THE ELDER SENECA

de singulis verbis in consilium cunt, necesse est
quac totiens animo suo admovent novissime adfig-
ant; at quorumcumque stilus velox est, tardior 11M
memoria est. In illo non tantum naturalis memor-
iae felicitas erat, sed ars summa et ad comprehenden-
da quae tenere debebat et ad custodienda, adeo
ut omnes declamationes suas quascumque dixerat
teneret etiam. Itaque supervacuos sibi fecerat
codices; aiebat se in animo scribere. Cogitata
dicebat ita ut in nullo umquam verbo eum memoria
deceperit. Historiarum omnium summa notitia:
iubebat aliquem nominari ducem et statim eius acta
cursu reddebat: adeo quaecumque semel in ani-
mum eius descenderant in promptu erant.

10 Video vos, iuvenes mei, plus iusto ad hanc eius
virtutem obstupescere; alia vos mirari in illo volo:
hoc, quod tantum vobis videtur, non operosa arte tradi
potest. Intra exiguum paucissimorum dierum tem-
pus poterit quilibet facere, illud quod Cineas fecit,
qui missus a Pyrrho legatus ad Romanos postero die
novus homo et senatum et omnem urbanam
circumfusam senatui plebem nominibus suis persal-
tavit; aut quod ille fecit qui recitatum a poeta nou-
um carmen dixit suum esse et protinus *<ex>* memoria
recitavit, cum hoc ille cuius carmen erat facere non
posset; aut quod fecit Hortensius, qui a Sisenna 12M
provocatus in auctione persedit per diem totum et
omnes res et pretia et emptores ordine suo argen-
taris recognoscentibus ita ut in nulla re falleretur

¹ For techniques of memorising, see Quintilian 11.2, where (§24) the story of Hortensius recurs (cf. Cic. *Brut.* 301). For Cineas' memory, see Cic. *Tusc.* 1.59; Plin. *N.H.* 7.88.

CONTROVERSIAE I. PREFACE 18-19

on the rack, holding debates over every word, in-
evitably end up by fixing in the mind what has so
often engaged it; but those who write quickly are
slower to remember. Not only had nature blessed
Latro with a fine memory, but he had supreme tech-
nique for grasping and for retaining what he had to
remember, so that he could recall all the declamations
he had ever spoken. He had thus made books super-
fluous—he used to say he wrote in his mind. What he
had mentally rehearsed he used to speak without his
memory ever failing in a single word. He had vast
knowledge of the whole range of history; he would
ask someone to name a general to him, and then im-
mediately detail his feats with fluency—so true was
it that he had at his finger-tips whatever had once
come his way.

I can see, my dear young men, that you are more 19
astonished by this talent of Latro than you should be;
I want you to admire other qualities in him—this one,
which you make so much of, can be acquired by a
technique that requires little trouble.¹ Within the
small space of a very few days, anyone can do what
Cineas did: this man, sent as ambassador to Rome by
Pyrrhus, next day, as a newcomer, greeted by their
correct names the senate and the whole crowd of
townspeople around the senate. Or he can emulate
the man who, hearing a new poem recited by its
author, said it was his own, and proceeded to recite it
from memory, even though its author could not do the
same; or Hortensius, who, challenged by Sisenna, sat
all day at an auction, and then listed without a mis-
take and in the right order all the articles, their prices
and purchasers, with the bankers authenticating the



