Knowledge and Hermeneutic Plagiarism during the Renaissance (1250–1650)

An Archaeology of Preservation, Appropriation, and the Invention of Modern Thought

By

Heitor Matallo Junior

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Foreword

The Renaissance proclaimed itself a return—*renascentia*, a rebirth. As a historical moment and cultural ideal, it positioned itself as a recovery of classical antiquity's lost wisdom: the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, the medicine of Galen and Avicenna, the mechanics of Archimedes, the poetics of Homer and Virgil. From Petrarch's early appeals to Roman eloquence to Ficino's Neoplatonic translations and Leonardo da Vinci's anatomical drawings, the Renaissance saw itself as retrieving, restoring, and reinvigorating what time, war, and religious dogma had buried. But this return was never neutral. The act of rescuing knowledge was also an act of re-signifying it—reshaping ancient texts to serve the needs of courts, churches, and new political orders. It was, in short, a creative reappropriation.

Within this civilizational project of recovery, appropriation without attribution was not the exception—it was structurally embedded. The very reverence for ancient wisdom paradoxically enabled its suppression, as intellectuals selectively rewrote or reassembled past ideas in forms suited to the demands of their present patrons. Was this theft homage, or innovation? The Renaissance blurred these boundaries. Originality often meant strategic recombination; authorship often meant authority rather than novelty.

The term plagiarism today evokes fraud and ethical failure. But its etymology tells a different story. From the Latin *plagiarius*—a kidnapper, an abductor—the word migrated from the legal realm of stolen persons into the symbolic realm of stolen words. In the early modern period, however, this distinction was far less clear. Ideas circulated without fixed ownership, and texts were seen less as private

property than as shared instruments of persuasion, salvation, or prestige.

This book is not a history of philosophy, nor a history of science in the usual sense. It does not trace the development of ideas toward some higher stage of rationality, nor does it aim to evaluate epistemic claims according to the standards of truth or falsifiability. Nor is it a treatise in classical epistemology—that branch of philosophy concerned with the conditions, limits, and justification of knowledge. On the contrary, this book is interested in what epistemology typically forgets: the politics of forgetting itself. It explores not the accumulation of knowledge, but the systematic erasure of lineages, the selective occlusion of sources, and the strategic ignorance by which modernity redefined what counted as knowledge.

The modern ideal of knowledge—objective, autonomous, and universal—has long relied on a foundational narrative of rupture: a break with myth, with dogma, with tradition. In this story, the Renaissance marks the rediscovery of classical reason, and the Enlightenment its triumphant purification. What this book argues, however, is that such a narrative is itself the product of a deep hermeneutic operation—one in which key epistemic lineages were not only reinterpreted but selectively erased. At the core of this process lies a practice rarely acknowledged in histories of philosophy and science: plagiarism as a structural mode of knowledge formation.

This is not plagiarism in the conventional sense of copying texts. Rather, it is what we call *hermeneutic plagiarism*—a systematic act of epistemic appropriation in which prior systems of thought (particularly Islamic, Jewish, Hermetic, and Eastern traditions) were borrowed, repackaged, and stripped of context, then resituated within the emerging frameworks of modern Western thought. These acts of reconfiguration were not accidental, nor merely heuristic. They were

part of a broader cultural and political project: the fabrication of epistemic authority through the concealment of intellectual inheritance.

But not all hermeneutic plagiarism followed the same script. In this book, we distinguish multiple modalities of epistemic appropriation, each shaped by its medium, context, and strategic function. Some cases involve technical plagiarism, in which mechanical drawings and engineering designs were absorbed without attribution, as in the silent transmission from Kyeser to Taccola and, later, to Leonardo. Others take the form of visual plagiarism, where symbolic images or cartographies are recontextualized to erase their origins while maintaining their persuasive power. We also encounter poetic and theological forms of appropriation, in which cosmologies, myths, and metaphysical doctrines were reworked to serve new doctrinal or institutional agendas. Each of these modalities exemplifies not merely a theft of content, but a displacement of epistemic legitimacy—an operation that reassigns value and authority through selective interpretation, omission, and recoding.

To understand how such practices emerged, we must begin not with the Renaissance itself, but with the longue durée of preservation regimes that preceded it. Before originality became a cultural ideal, preservation was a political and hermeneutic task. From imperial encyclopedias to multilingual archives, pre-modern cultures developed sophisticated systems for conserving, transmitting, and legitimizing knowledge. These systems were rarely neutral. They reflected and reinforced specific cosmologies, power structures, and institutional hierarchies. In ancient Rome, the encyclopedia served as an epistemic extension of empire; in the Islamic-Christian-Jewish context of Toledo, translation became a practice of negotiation across worlds. Far from being a neutral conduit, the Toledo School of

Translators functioned as a complex hermeneutic apparatus. Philosophical, astronomical, and medical texts from the Arabic-Islamic world—many of them originally Greek—were not merely transferred into Latin; they were reframed through Christian and scholastic lenses. What emerged was not a mirror of the original, but a layered reconstruction, where translation itself became a form of epistemic authorship. Figures like Gerard of Cremona and Dominicus Gundissalinus did not just transmit Avicenna, Averroes, or al-Fārābī—they helped reinvent the very categories of Latin thought. In this sense, Toledo was not a site of passive inheritance, but of active reconfiguration, a paradigmatic case of hermeneutic appropriation disguised as linguistic mediation.

This book insists that such mediations—whether explicit or disavowed—are central to how knowledge travels, survives, and reappears under new forms. What Toledo achieved through interlinguistic negotiation and epistemic reframing, other regimes pursued through different architectures of preservation and control.

In Ming China, the *Yongle Dadian* represents a contrasting modality: a vision of total knowledge not mediated by translation, but by imperial consolidation. Its vast compilation of classical texts sought not to reinterpret, but to stabilize—to fix meaning through bureaucratic fidelity and archival monumentality. Whereas the Toledo School restructured foreign knowledge under Christian categories, the *Dadian* enacted an internal harmonization of tradition, reaffirming cultural legitimacy through textual exhaustiveness. In both cases, however, preservation was inseparable from power: the act of collecting knowledge became an act of defining its future legibility.

Together with Vasari's *Lives*, which reimagined artistic production through a genealogical canon of styles and personalities, these cases—presented in Part I—form the archaeology of the hermeneutic practices

later transformed and, in many cases, reappropriated under the Renaissance.

The book is organized into four parts. Part I, *Archaeology of Hermeneutics*, reconstructs pre-Renaissance regimes of conservation—encyclopedism, translation, and genealogical canons—that later enabled Renaissance appropriation. Part II, *Hermeneutic Appropriations*, presents case studies in which theological, philosophical, and poetic recombinations absorbed non-Christian or marginalized sources while obscuring their lineages. Part III, *Instituting Meaning*, follows how reuse is reclassified and administered across three scenes: Renaissance Italy (knowledge as prestige under patronage), England (imitation moralized as civic virtue and methodized reuse), and France (standardized replication under academies, privilege, and censorship). Part IV, *Canon and Erasure*, tracks early-modern critiques of tradition and the rise of attribution regimes that moralize plagiarism, recoding imitation as citation, protocol, and replication.

By tracing both the regimes of preservation that preceded the Renaissance and the diverse strategies of appropriation that emerged within it, we seek to show how epistemic legitimacy is forged through acts of interpretation, omission, and reconfiguration.

To support the interpretive work developed across these four parts, the volume concludes with an analytical appendix: *Plagiarism Heuristics and the Hermeneutics of Appropriation: A Simplified Model*. Rather than presenting the full symbolic-logic formalism, this appendix offers an accessible version of the method—free of technical notation—organized around practical variables such as origin, erasure, epistemic dependence, and creative transformation. By making these dimensions analytically tractable in plain language, the appendix provides a methodological synthesis that both reflects the

logic underlying our case studies and invites further application across historical and disciplinary contexts

Hermeneutic plagiarism, as we define it, is not a moral category but an analytical one. It enables us to observe how certain cultural systems were incorporated into the edifice of Western modernity without acknowledgment—how Arabic logic, Jewish mysticism, Hermetic cosmologies, and Chinese encyclopedism were selectively absorbed, transformed, and ultimately silenced. These acts of epistemic appropriation did not merely distort the past; they actively constructed the image of modern knowledge as autonomous and original.

By moving across disciplines, geographies, and media—from philosophical doctrines to mechanical blueprints, from translation practices to artistic lineages—this book advances a historical hermeneutics that takes seriously the politics of attribution. In doing so, it challenges us to rethink not only the content of our intellectual inheritances, but also the very structures through which something becomes recognizable as "ours."

The idea of *neutral appropriation*—as if one could transmit, compile, or reuse knowledge without inscribing meaning into the gesture—is one of the most persistent illusions in intellectual history. Hermeneutics, by contrast, reveals that every act of preservation is also an act of framing; that every gesture of memory carries within it a logic of inclusion and exclusion, of visibility and erasure. To appropriate is never merely to borrow—it is to intervene in the temporality of knowledge itself, deciding what enters into continuity and what vanishes from collective awareness.

If modernity was built upon a paradox—revering the past while erasing its traces—then recovering those traces is not an antiquarian

exercise. It is a gesture of epistemic accountability. The stories that follow are not merely about who copied whom; they are about how cultures remember, forget, and fabricate the very conditions of knowing.

Toward a Theory of Hermeneutic Plagiarism

Despite a wealth of scholarship on authorship, textual transmission, and intellectual appropriation, there remains a conceptual lacuna at the intersection of hermeneutics and plagiarism. While numerous studies have deconstructed the modern figure of the author or examined the practices of compilation and citation across historical contexts, none have fully articulated plagiarism as an interpretive structure in its own right—a *hermeneutic modality*, rather than merely an ethical infraction.

The foundational critiques of authorship developed in the second half of the twentieth century laid the groundwork for such a rethinking. Roland Barthes's declaration of *"the death of the author"* (1967) and Michel Foucault's *author-function* (1969/1977) dismantled the modern ideal of individual originality, revealing instead a textual economy governed by discursive positioning, institutional power, and interpretive multiplicity. Foucault, in particular, emphasized that the figure of the author functions less as a historical person than as a regulatory principle that structures the circulation and reception of discourse (Foucault, 1977, pp. 113–114).

While these insights unsettle the metaphysics of originality, they stop short of offering a framework for understanding appropriation itself as a hermeneutic **act**. In parallel, historians such as Anthony Grafton (1997) and Ann Blair (2010) have illuminated the historical prevalence of textual compilation, marginal annotation, and intertextual borrowing in early modern Europe. Their work has revealed that the boundary between invention and repetition was often blurred, and

that intellectual labor frequently consisted in reordering, excerpting, and adapting previous knowledge. Yet even these accounts—meticulous as they are—tend to preserve a latent opposition between faithful transmission and illicit reproduction.

This book proposes a different approach: to theorize *hermeneutic plagiarism* not as a mere breach of authorship, but as a historically embedded, epistemically generative, and interpretively creative operation. Rather than reducing appropriation to moral failure, this framework situates it within broader regimes of meaning-making—structured by specific cultural, political, and institutional constraints. Plagiarism, in this view, becomes not the opposite of originality, but a mode of epistemic production.

Hermeneutic plagiarism, as developed here, refers to a spectrum of appropriative practices in which the act of reusing, rewriting, or recontextualizing a text does not merely transmit or clarify meaning, but actively reconfigures its epistemic position—often by omitting origins, suppressing attribution, or transforming authorship. More than a violation of citation norms, it is understood as a historically situated mode of interpretation, in which appropriation becomes a method of meaning-production. These practices, whether strategic or unconscious, perform a structural function: they reorient textual authority within new frameworks of legitimacy, continuity, or innovation. In this sense, hermeneutic plagiarism is not reducible to deception or forgery—it is a form of epistemic reinscription that reveals the conditions under which knowledge is preserved, recoded, or erased.

In what follows, we articulate four distinct typologies of hermeneutic appropriation: (1) the erasure of origins, as in Paracelsus and Agrícola; (2) the direct copying of content, as seen in the transmission of technical diagrams from Kyeser to Leonardo; (3) the aesthetic

reinvention of inherited materials, especially in the work of figures like Ficino; and (4) the strategic exclusion of rival genealogies, as exemplified by Isaac Casaubon and canonical historiography. From the encyclopedic compilations of Diogenes Laërtius to the architectural silences of modern philology, these typologies reveal plagiarism not as theft, but as a hermeneutic operation of remembering and forgetting—a recursive process that shapes the very boundaries of knowledge.

To elucidate this framework, we now turn to the four historical typologies of hermeneutic appropriation. These are not rigid categories, but analytical lenses—heuristic tools designed to reveal the interpretive logic embedded in different forms of unacknowledged reuse. Each typology illustrates a distinct strategy of textual or conceptual transformation, shaped by the epistemic conditions and cultural imperatives of its time. From subtle acts of erasure to overt replication, from aesthetic refashioning to historiographical suppression, these cases trace a genealogy of plagiarism as a practice of selective memory. What emerges is not a simple opposition between fidelity and falsification, but a gradient of interpretive operations, each mobilizing appropriation as a means of negotiating authority, innovation, and intellectual inheritance.

1. Appropriation through Erasure of Origins (Paracelsus and Agricola)

One distinct mode of hermeneutic appropriation emerges when new works absorb pre-existing ideas while deliberately omitting or obscuring their sources. This form of appropriation presents inherited knowledge as if it were entirely original, effectively erasing the genealogical line from which it arose. Such erasure may result from

strategic positioning, intellectual contempt, or the desire to amplify the appearance of innovation.

A striking example is Theophrastus von Hohenheim, better known as Paracelsus, a physician and alchemist of the early sixteenth century. Renowned for his rejection of traditional medicine, Paracelsus openly denounced classical authorities such as Galen and Avicenna. In 1527, he performed a symbolic act of rupture by publicly burning canonical texts—an emblematic gesture of epistemic rebellion. While claiming to found a radically new medical paradigm rooted in alchemical experimentation and lived experience, Paracelsus nonetheless drew upon medieval traditions of chemical medicine that he systematically disavowed. His erasure of predecessors allowed him to repackage older ideas as a singular revolution, obscuring the intellectual scaffolding upon which his innovations rested.

A parallel case can be found in Georgius Agricola (Georg Pawer), whose seminal treatise *De Re Metallica* (1556) systematized mining, metallurgy, and occupational diseases in a work that became authoritative for centuries. Although Agricola clearly drew upon earlier sources—especially Vannoccio Biringuccio's *Pirotechnia* (1540), from which he even copied passages—he failed to acknowledge these debts. Moreover, he dismissed or excluded figures such as Paracelsus, whose alchemical framework he rejected. By presenting his synthesis as self-contained and empirically grounded, Agricola offered a vision of technical knowledge as if born ex nihilo, severed from the contemporaneous traditions that fed into it.

This level of appropriation—marked by absorption without attribution—was relatively common during the Renaissance. Authors often saw themselves as renovators and preferred to emphasize the novelty of their contributions. The result was a methodological pattern: knowledge advanced through the assimilation of past

insights, followed by an apparent "reset" in which the traces of origin were effaced. Both Paracelsus and Agricola exemplify this epistemic posture: while their works were in many ways original in synthesis and ambition, they achieved this originality through a hermeneutic act of occlusion—transforming inheritance into invention.

2. Direct Copying and Content Appropriation (Kyeser, Taccola, Francesco di Giorgio, Leonardo)

A more intense and visible level of appropriation occurs when an author directly copies materials or concrete ideas from another—what we might define as intellectual theft in the strict sense, that is, plagiarism. In the history of Renaissance engineering and invention, there are numerous cases of direct transmission of diagrams and descriptions of machines from one treatise to the next, without acknowledgment of the original authors. In such cases, appropriation does not consist merely in absorbing general ideas but rather in the direct reuse of technical details, illustrations, and even textual passages in near-literal form.

A clear example is the sequence of military and engineering treatises that links Konrad Kyeser (author of *Bellifortis*, c. 1405) to Mariano Taccola (*De ingeneis* and *De machinis*, 1430–1440), and from these to Francesco di Giorgio Martini (engineering treatises, ~1480) and Leonardo da Vinci (notebooks, late 15th century). There is a direct continuity in both visual and technical content: Taccola's works were extensively studied and copied by later Renaissance engineers, including Francesco di Giorgio and Leonardo da Vinci. Many of the machines drawn by Taccola—cranes, hydraulic pumps, war devices— reappear in Francesco's and Leonardo's manuscripts.

Taccola himself had already compiled ancient and medieval machines, occasionally citing sources like Vegetius and Kyeser. However, most

of his drawings were appropriated by successors without attribution. Francesco di Giorgio, in particular, incorporated large amounts of Taccola's material. Modern research has shown that many diagrams in Francesco's treatises—such as certain hydraulic pumps and military machines—originate in Taccola's manuscripts, although Francesco redrew them with improved style and possibly refined some technical aspects.

Francesco was aware he was building upon the foundations of others: in the prologue to one of his books, he openly admits having "extracted many conclusions from various books" and states his intention not to fall into "the vice of ingratitude" or "to adorn himself with the feathers of others," warning the reader not to assume everything in his work was of his own invention. This remarkable statement suggests that Francesco regarded citation and acknowledgment as a virtue—unlike many of his contemporaries. Nevertheless, he rarely identified which authors provided the foundations for specific machines. The common practice was to incorporate others' ideas and move forward.

Francesco's need to justify himself already indicates the sensitivity of this practice: he harshly condemns those who "adorn themselves with others' labor and usurp the glory of an invention that is not theirs." Here, we see a clear distinction between legitimate appropriation—studying and improving the technical legacy—and intellectual theft. Francesco tries to position himself on the legitimate side: one who benefits from prior knowledge while acknowledging the debt, criticizing those who merely copy for undeserved acclaim.

Leonardo da Vinci, in turn, stands at the end of this chain. He studied Francesco's manuscripts (there is evidence he owned an annotated copy), and thus inherited Taccola's contributions contained therein. In Leonardo's notebooks we find drawings of machines—hydraulic devices, parachutes, gear mechanisms, and war tanks—that clearly

derive from earlier models described by Taccola and Francesco. Leonardo frequently modified and refined these with his own ingenuity, practicing appropriation as a method of learning and innovation. He rarely, however, acknowledged his sources. It is worth noting that Leonardo's writings were not published during his lifetime; thus, the "plagiarism" here was primarily for personal use—unlike the others, who published treatises. Even so, the dynamic is comparable: knowledge transmission through direct visual copying and reinterpretation without credit, forming yet another link in the cumulative tradition of technical treatises.

It is important to stress that in the context of the 15th and 16th centuries, there were no clear rules regarding copyright or modern concepts of intellectual property. The copying of others' illustrations and texts was socially tolerated to some extent, particularly if it served to disseminate and improve technical solutions. Many engineers viewed their compilations as part of a collective effort toward technological advancement, even as they sought individual prestige for innovations introduced. However, as Francesco di Giorgio's complaints reveal, there was already an ethical awareness that reproducing others' work without acknowledgment was condemnable—an unmistakable form of intellectual theft.

In sum, this historical sequence reveals appropriation in its rawest form, where one author's content is almost entirely reused by another. This intense degree of appropriation borders on plagiarism, even though at the time there existed a gray area between learning from predecessors and copying their inventions.

3. Transformative Appropriation and Conceptual Reengineering

A third and more sophisticated level of appropriation occurs when earlier ideas are not merely adopted or copied, but reworked into entirely new frameworks—what might be called *conceptual reengineering*. In these cases, appropriation is not hidden nor merely decorative; it becomes a productive engine of meaning, in which the borrowed material is systematically reinterpreted to serve a new philosophical, theological, or epistemic purpose. This mode of appropriation—transformative and strategic—plays a central role in Renaissance intellectual culture.

Ramon Llull, for instance, created his *Ars combinatoria* by fusing Christian theology with elements of Islamic logic, mystical cosmology, and mnemonic devices. Rather than citing his Islamic sources (such as al-Fārābī or Ibn Sīnā), Llull reassembled their structural principles—like the combinatorial rotation of concepts—within a Christian framework aimed at converting non-believers. The result was not a simple act of concealment, but a deliberate reengineering of logic as a spiritual tool. Llull's system appropriates not just content but *method*, recoding Islamic epistemology into a Christian missionary logic machine. His silence about these origins, however, effectively transforms this appropriation into a kind of erasure.

Giambattista Vico, centuries later, would perform a similar operation with the figure of Homer. In his *Scienza Nuova*, Vico reinterprets Homer not as a historical poet, but as the collective voice of an early poetic people. In doing so, he appropriates the epic tradition not merely to analyze it, but to invert it: Vico's Homer becomes a cipher for his own theory of cultural formation and poetic consciousness. Here, appropriation is hermeneutically layered—it does not erase the

past, but overwrites it with new significance. Vico's originality lies not in creating new myths, but in re-narrating existing ones under a new epistemic regime.

Marsilio Ficino offers another paradigmatic example. His translations and commentaries on Plato, Plotinus, and the *Corpus Hermeticum* reframe ancient philosophy within a Christian-Neoplatonic worldview, deliberately fusing metaphysics with theology. In Ficino's hands, Plato becomes a prophet of Christ; Hermes Trismegistus, a proto-Christian sage. This is not simply an ideological projection, but a hermeneutic act: Ficino actively reorganizes the philosophical lineage of antiquity to serve the intellectual and spiritual aspirations of the Medici court. The act of translation becomes simultaneously an act of theological reinvention. While Ficino acknowledges many of his sources, the conceptual transformation they undergo amounts to a systematic redirection of meaning.

In all these cases, the borrowed materials are not merely incorporated—they are transfigured. The logic of appropriation here is one of *internalization and redirection*. Texts, figures, and concepts are drawn into a new interpretative economy that assigns them altered functions and symbolic roles. Such practices blur the boundary between homage and theft, between continuity and rupture. They represent not the passive transmission of knowledge, but its reassembly through new lenses, under new pressures—cultural, theological, and political.

This level of appropriation thus demands a different analytic vocabulary. It is not defined by concealment alone, nor by direct replication, but by *hermeneutic instrumentalization*: the use of inherited structures to articulate novel visions. In this sense, transformative appropriation functions less as epistemic parasitism and more as a generative act. Yet it remains an appropriation nonetheless—one in

which authority is absorbed, reworked, and resituated within a new intellectual architecture.

4. Canonical Erasure and the Hermeneutics of Exclusion

A fourth and final level of appropriation operates not through the incorporation or transformation of previous knowledge, but through its systematic exclusion. In this modality, intellectual erasure becomes a hermeneutic tool: to appropriate, in this case, is to suppress. This form of appropriation is not additive but subtractive—it removes competing genealogies, silences alternative authorities, and overwrites plural origins with singular narratives of legitimacy. We may call this *canonical erasure*.

A striking example is the philological intervention of Isaac Casaubon, whose work in the early 17th century radically reframed the *Corpus Hermeticum*. By demonstrating that these texts were not written by ancient Egyptian sages but by late Hellenistic authors under Christian influence, Casaubon delegitimized centuries of Neoplatonic and Hermetic interpretations. His analysis—while historically rigorous— functioned as a form of epistemic boundary-setting: it closed the door on the Hermetic tradition as a source of metaphysical authority, thus reinforcing the emerging Protestant and rationalist paradigms of his time. This act of critical demystification is a form of appropriation by negation: Casaubon reclaims the past not by adopting it, but by disqualifying it.

Similar processes occurred in the editorial practices of Renaissance humanists. The production of new critical editions of Aristotle, Plato, and Galen often involved selective exclusion of Arabic commentaries or medieval glosses. These omissions were not accidental: they reflected a deliberate attempt to purify the classical tradition by erasing the Islamic and scholastic intermediaries who had preserved

and expanded it. In these instances, appropriation consists of curating absence—removing evidence of transmission in order to fabricate an unbroken line of descent from antiquity to modern Europe.

This pattern extends into modern historiography, where the contributions of Jewish, Islamic, Byzantine, and vernacular thinkers are frequently minimized or cast as secondary. The Renaissance, in this optic, becomes a uniquely European rebirth, rather than a hybrid recovery built upon centuries of cross-cultural translation. Such historiographical erasures constitute perhaps the most enduring form of intellectual appropriation: not only do they rewrite the past, they also condition the future by delimiting who counts as a contributor to the archive of knowledge.

This fourth modality—canonical erasure—reveals the negative dimension of hermeneutic power. Whereas earlier forms of appropriation absorb or transform, this one excludes and effaces. It is the appropriation of legacy by monopolization: by constructing a canon that privileges certain voices while erasing others, it enacts a structural theft of intellectual lineage. What is taken is not the content of a text, but its right to be remembered.

5. Moralized Reuse: Civic Method and Licensed Borrowing

A fifth mode emerges when imitation is recoded as virtue. In late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, the rhetoric of humanist imitation was folded into a nascent public of readers and a pedagogy of decorum. Under these conditions, reuse ceased to be a private currency of patronage and became a civic credential: to borrow well—clearly, decorously, with improvement—was to demonstrate moral and stylistic probity. What modern regimes would later file under "plagiarism" appeared, here, **as** licensed borrowing: a

repertoire audited by citation practices, genre expectations, and school exercises that rewarded methodized reuse over ex nihilo invention.

This moralization of imitation reclassifies appropriation not by hiding origins but by curating them. Sources are acknowledged when useful to elevate ethos; silently absorbed when conventional; debated when competing claims threaten communal standards of taste. In this ecology, provenance yields to improvement: the benchmark is whether the act of reuse clarifies, ennobles, or stabilizes a shared canon. The result is a distinctive hermeneutic economy in which repetition—properly disciplined—counts as evidence of character and as a proto-method for knowledge.

6. Administrative Standardization: Authorized Replication under State Protocol

A sixth mode appears when reuse is institutionally engineered. In seventeenth-century France, academies, printing privilege, and censorship integrated interpretation into state procedure. Here, replication is not an ethical ideal but an administrative requirement: dictionaries, tables, reports, and *comptes rendus* function as formats of fidelity, where following the template outranks individual provenance. Censors and editors operate less as police than as pedagogues of form**,** converting the repertoire of imitation into a protocol of verification.

Under this regime, standardized replication becomes an epistemic virtue. To repeat correctly—genre, style, measure—constitutes proof; deviation risks jurisdictional offense rather than purely moral blame. Appropriation is domesticated as methodized reuse: a pipeline that moves materials from regulated production to administrative reading and back as policy. In this configuration, plagiarism does not vanish;

it is absorbed—authorized when channeled through protocol, condemned when it escapes it

In this sense, the hermeneutics of exclusion operates as a covert mechanism of authority. It enforces epistemic hierarchies not through argument, but through selective silence. And it is perhaps this silent form of appropriation—subtle, enduring, and difficult to reverse—that most deeply shapes our understanding of what counts as knowledge, and whose past is allowed to shape our present.

This reconceptualization carries several key implications:

1. **It displaces the moral binary of originality versus imitation**, foregrounding instead the socio-historical conditions under which memory is produced and intellectual authority is constructed.
2. **It reframes citation as a political act**, and its absence not necessarily as erasure, but as a form of epistemic reconfiguration—an intentional recontextualization of meaning within new regimes of knowledge.
3. **It positions patronage, translation, and compilation not as distortions or corruptions of truth**, but as foundational mechanisms of knowledge transmission—acts that generate epistemic legitimacy precisely through transformation and selective continuity.

Taken together, the six modalities unsettle the moral binary of originality versus theft. They relocate appropriation within the jurisdictions that license it—from erasure and direct copying, through reinvention and exclusion, to England's moralized reuse and France's standardized replication—showing plagiarism to be a technique of memory: a way of building authority by deciding what will be remembered and in what form.

From this vantage, the Renaissance does not simply inherit antiquity; it reauthors it. Reauthoring proceeds through discrete hermeneutic modes that preserve while recoding the past. This book does not denounce such practices as duplicity; it maps the interpretive infrastructures that enabled them—and, in many contexts, rendered them necessary.

The purpose of this book is not to denounce such practices as duplicity, but to illuminate the interpretive infrastructures that made them possible—and, often, necessary. The chapters that follow explore these infrastructures as they crystallized in Renaissance Europe: a historical moment in which interpretation became sovereignty, and plagiarism became method. What emerges is not a catalogue of forgeries, but an archaeology of epistemic reinvention—a genealogy of how the West learned to inherit by altering, and to canonize by forgetting.

Finally, while this book focuses on the Renaissance as a privileged site of hermeneutic plagiarism, it is important to recognize that the practice of epistemic appropriation transcends any single historical period. From early modern philosophy to postmodern aesthetics and contemporary algorithmic production, the logic of uncredited reuse—whether strategic, aesthetic, or systemic—persists in new forms. What follows is not a full analysis, but a brief typological extension to indicate the broader theoretical horizon in which the Renaissance cases participate. These categories fall outside the scope of this study but help situate its core claims within a *longue durée* of intellectual appropriation.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a form of programmatic reframing emerged: appropriation was no longer concealed but openly declared—only to be ideologically absorbed. Thinkers such as Hegel and Auguste Comte did not deny their debts to predecessors;

instead, they subsumed past contributions into overarching philosophical systems. The ideas of earlier thinkers were recoded as embryonic stages within a dialectical or positivist narrative, rendering citation a tool of epistemic annexation rather than critical homage.

In the twentieth century, modernist and postmodernist aesthetics redefined originality as a practice of curated recombination. Artists and theorists such as Walter Benjamin, Jorge Luis Borges, and Roland Barthes embraced appropriation as method. The author became a collector, an arranger of fragments, and meaning emerged through juxtaposition rather than invention. In this context, plagiarism was not a transgression but a style—an intentional gesture of citation without subordination.

The twenty-first century, in turn, introduces a new dynamic: algorithmic recombinance. Here, appropriation is no longer the act of an individual but a structural feature of machine learning systems. Artificial intelligence generates outputs based on massive, uncredited corpora, producing knowledge that is less inherited or authored than statistically regenerated. In such cases, the very notion of plagiarism becomes ambiguous—distributed, infrastructural, and epistemically opaque.

These modern and contemporary modalities do not fall within the empirical scope of the present volume. Yet they remind us that hermeneutic plagiarism is not a deviation from the norm of intellectual production, but one of its enduring modes. The Renaissance merely crystallizes a set of tensions—between authorship and transmission, credit and concealment, preservation and transformation—that continue to define the politics of knowledge today.

As a final note, this methodological interlude also opens toward future formalizations. The typology developed here—ranging from acts of

erasure to direct replication—offers a foundation for more precise analyses of epistemic appropriation. While embryonic, this framework points toward a broader research agenda in which historical cases may be systematically compared and evaluated according to formalizable criteria.

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   → Importante para discutir práticas de citação, autoridade textual e apagamento.
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Part I

Archaeology of Hermeneutics: Regimes of Preservation and Knowledge Transmission before the Renaissance

Introduction to Part I
Fragments of an Early Tradition

The five chapters that compose this first part of the book are not merely case studies in the history of knowledge transmission; they are windows into distinct hermeneutic regimes—epochs and practices in which memory, authority, and interpretation assumed forms different from our own. Before hermeneutics became a formal method in philosophy or philology, it was already at work in acts of selection, compilation, commentary, exclusion, and reframing. What we encounter here is not only a prehistory of theory, but also a history of hermeneutic action, performed through the bodies of texts and the labor of transmission.

Pliny the Elder represents the imperial encyclopedic mode—a hermeneutics of taxonomy and domination—in which knowledge about the natural and technical world is ordered to reflect the structure and ambitions of empire. His *Naturalis Historia* does not merely list the world; it reframes it under the aegis of Roman rationality.

Diogenes Laërtius enacts a biographical hermeneutics, in which philosophical meaning is not extracted from abstract principles but sedimented in lives, gestures, and lineages. His *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* constitutes a mosaic of ethical exempla and doctrinal dissonance—a curatorial epistemology that privileges preservation over system.

The Toledo School of Translators embodies a hermeneutics of transformation through translation, where meaning is neither fixed nor merely transferred, but rearticulated across cultural and linguistic edges. Far from being a passive conduit, Toledo reshaped