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**GRAMMATIKOI AND GRAMMATISTAI:
TEACHERS OF LITERATURE AT AMMONIUS' TABLE
(PLUT. *QC IX*)**

In a vivid contrast to the less rigorous attitude displayed in other parts of the work, Book Nine of Plutarch's *Quaestiones convivales* describes a single banquet: held in the house of the Athenian philosopher Ammonius, the banquet is held in honor of the Muses – in accordance with this aim, it is attended by the most learned among the Athenian society, the best of Athenian teachers.¹ As I have discussed the contents as well as the actual structure of the book elsewhere (Komorowska 2014), it seems advisable to supplement that particular discussion with a consideration of yet another aspect, an aspect of particular importance given the theme of the present volume: with a roomful of teachers, it would be interesting to inquire into the possible peculiarities of their portrayal. My focus, however, will be on the single and possibly most colorful group attending the banquet, i.e. the grammarians, as set against the background of the two personages of particular importance in Plutarch's narrative, namely the host, Ammonius, and the one often hidden behind the tale, but frequently present within the tale, i.e. Plutarch himself. A methodological *caveat* should be however signaled

¹ The relevant research was facilitated by the Lanckoroński Foundation grant (2014). For some interpretative tenets I rely on my earlier article *Dar dla Muz* (Komorowska 2014). For the more frequent patterns of the *QC* compare Teodorsson 1996b. It should be noted, however, that in spite of the unique character of Book Nine, the scholar maintains that unity and consistency are most rigorously maintained in Book Three.

right at the beginning: my interest lies with a literary portrayal rather than factual reference, which effectively means that regardless of their possible ‘reality’ the *personae* of Plutarch’s will be considered as *prosopa* of the narrative², the internal dynamics governing their mutual interactions carefully traced in order to reconstruct something of the Cheronean’s attitude towards various academic disciplines as present in *QC* IX. By necessity, such a discussion will involve some narratological inquires relating both to the execution of actual narrative incl. authorial/narratorial choices involved and to the persona of the narrator.

One note must be made before one starts the relevant discussion: several chapters or *problemata* are missing from Book Nine, chapters devoted to matters of particular importance in the Middle Platonic philosophy (and hence, matters of considerable importance to Plutarch himself) and, even more intriguingly, chapters located at the very center of a carefully construed whole.³ Thus, lost are IX 8 on the consonant and melodic intervals, IX 9 on the cause of consonance, astronomical IX 10, possibly highly philosophical IX 11 (on the flux of substance) and major part of astronomical IX 12. This loss, a loss affecting chapters possibly relevant to the interpretation of *APT* in its mathematical and cosmological sections, proves a major obstacle in a conclusive reading of the work, or, for that matter, in considerations concerning other professional groups in attendance (doctors or mathematicians are particularly likely to have figured in *problemata* concerning cosmology, the natural world, etc.). Nevertheless, survival of the major part of the book allows at least for a tentative reading of Ammonius’ feast as a learned banquet *par excellence* as well as for a reconstruction of Plutarch’s outlook on the various professional groups invited when they participate in the surviving debates.

² On the literary character of Plutarch’s portrayal of his teachers and contemporaries in *QC* compare e.g. Klotz 2007; Brenk 2009; Teodorsson 1996b.

³ On the lost *problemata* as parts of a larger compositional scheme compare Komorowska 2014. On the importance of the material derived from *QC* for the reconstruction of Plutarch’s philosophy compare Ferrari 1994: 161 ff. *et aliis*; just to highlight the possible implications: the notion of substance’s flux has profound consequences for the debates concerning individual identity and unity (continuity) of living substances (on the issue compare e.g. Galen’s *QAM* 780-782 K.).

AMMONIUS AND THE SETTING

After a brief address to the dedicatee in the proem, the first *quaestio* of Book Nine opens with introductory explanations concerning the circumstances of the banquet: its origin lay in a display of scholarly achievements of the ephebes at the school of Diogenes. It was after this display that Ammonius, at the time one of the Athenian *strategoi*,⁴ invited the successful teachers for a celebratory dinner, a dinner which, very much in keeping with that paradigm of a philosophical banquet, the Platonic *Symposium*, will be a gathering of men distinguished by their intellectual achievements and erudition. Interestingly, at this point the actual names of the participants are withheld from the reader – they will be revealed later in the course of the actual narrative, but for now, everything that we are provided with is the self-explanatory remark:

Nearly all our friends were present, and quite a number of other men with literary interests (παρῆσαν δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων φιλολόγων συχνοὶ καὶ πάντες ἐπιεικῶς οἱ συνήθεις; 736d5-6).⁵

The reticence concerning the names (or indeed the number) of the participants shifts the present focus of the narrative to Ammonius: the host of the dinner, he has carefully planned the event in order to make the most of the company assembled. The acknowledged parallel (model) is Homeric, found in the *Iliad* 23.810 (καὶ σφινδοῖτ' ἀγαθὴν παραθήσομεν ἐν κλισίῃσιν), where Achilles invites the chieftains to the banquet – invites them, as Plutarch explains (and the reason appears solely in the *QC*), in order to lay to rest the animosities aroused by the fierce competition of the funeral games (736d6-10):

⁴ Ammonius' banquet takes places during the festival of the Muses, while the events of the paradigmatic text of philosophical symposiastic literature, the Platonic *Symposium*, are set immediately after Agathon's triumph in dramatic competition (i.e. at the time of a Dionysiac festival), which may be seen as an additional argument in support of the Platonic reference: both settings emphasize a certain literary quality of the text. As for the time of the banquet coinciding with Ammonius' tenure as the *strategos*, one may refer to the close relationship between notions of political and symposiastic leadership as present in Plutarch's writings: on the issue see Stadter (2009).

⁵ All quotations from *QC* in the English translation of E. L. Minar, F. H. Sandbach, W. C. Helmbold (Plutarch, *Moralia*, vol. IX, Cambridge 1961). The Greek text is that of C. Hubert (Leipzig, 1938) as accessible in the TLG Online database.

Now the reason why the only competitors to whom Achilles promised a dinner were those who had fought in single combat, was his wish, so we are told, that the contestants should, through sharing an entertainment at a common table, discard and relinquish any anger or ill-feeling that they might have conceived against one another in arms (εἴ τις ἐν τοῖς ὄπλοις ὀργὴ πρὸς ἀλλήλους καὶ χαλεπότης γένοιτο, ταύτην ἀφεῖναι καὶ καταθέσθαι τοὺς ἄνδρας ἐστιάσεως κοινῆς καὶ τραπέζης μετασχόντας).

Despite this illustrious precedent, what Ammonius achieves may well appear opposed to that aim (τῷ δ' Ἀμμωνίῳ συνέβαινε τὸ ὑναντίον, 737a1): in provoking discussion rather than quelling dissatisfaction his actions will, at least in some instances, lead to discord and discontent (still, not all discord is a destructive one, as we are duly reminded through the Hesiodic reference of 736e6-7). Hence, additional steps will be necessary in order to ascertain the success of the symposiastic endeavor.

The banquet proper (i.e. the banquet that will form the object of Plutarch's narrative) opens with a song by the singer Erato, who invokes the opening of the Hesiodic *Works* (736e6);⁶ Ammonius comments briefly on the song before he proceeds to consider the instances of apt quotation in a variation on the discussion of *kairos*. In a parallel manner, Plutarch's account closes with Ammonius' discussion of dance (an art fallen into disrepute due to many misconceptions concerning its nature and consequent misuse, 747b-748d),⁷ a discussion succeeded

⁶ While the name belongs to an actual person, it is hard not to think that such an opening would necessarily reinforce the impression of a Muses' banquet, of inspired and ancient wisdom. As for the quoted verse of the *Works*, the *Erga* 11 (it is interesting that the verse quoted is the opening of the *Erga* in a sense similar to the portrayed opening of the banquet: while not exactly the first verse in the poem it effectively introduces the work proper; compare Minar, Sandbach, Helmbold 1961: 221 *ad loc.*), it is useful to remember that Hesiod is the poet famously inspired to sing by the Muses of Helicon (*Theogony*), a fact not without some importance given the purpose of the portrayed banquet. On the importance of Hesiod in Plutarch's work compare Pérez-Jiménez 2004; Fernandez-Delgado 2009.

⁷ On the account of dance compare de Jesus 2009. The fact that Ammonius' exposition closes the tale of the banquet is discussed by Klotz (2007), yet the discussion occurs in the context of problems surrounding the self-portrayal of Plutarch. It is my belief that the decision to grant Ammonius the honor of the last, comprehensive discussion is linked to both his capacity as the host and symposiarch as well as his proficiency

in turn by authorial comments of the narrator (to be identified with Plutarch himself), an element in its own turn effectively mirroring the introductory proem of the book.⁸ In IX 1, however, his role is that of the *symposiarchos* – his introduction of the appropriate subject of the discussion (a conscious allusion on the part of the author to the theme discussed in *CQ* I 1, whether philosophy is an appropriate discussion subject for a *symposion*) proves successful. At the same time, while we have no inkling of the identity of those present, Plutarch is quick to point out that it is them rather than Ammonius himself who introduces a further variation on the subject: the instance of inept or inopportune quotation. Thus, IX 1 provides the reader with examples of both the advantages of erudition and its possible disadvantages when misused or incorrectly employed, a fact of possible importance for the present considerations.

When order has been restored through the learned, witty discussion of IX 1 (the lack of proper names acquires here the additional function of enlivening the debate, conveying the free, tumultuous character of the gathering), Ammonius decides on the further shape of his banquet (737de): in reversal of the traditional policy, some rules will be introduced to govern the forthcoming discussion, with participants challenging each other's intellectual abilities in such a way as to avoid the groupings of professionals:

as a philosopher, the latter element further highlighted by awarding the actual closure to the other philosopher within the text, Plutarch in his capacity as the narrator of the tale (in other words, at the close we are reminded both of Ammonius' leading role in the debate, and of Plutarch's own importance as the tale-weaver). Extensive narratological study of *QC* is still pending and the scope of relevant research far exceeds the limits of the present essay, but one notes that Plutarch persona remains intriguingly present in the tale (a maneuver similar to that employed in the *Lives*, for which compare Pelling 2004), often reminding the reader of the central role played by the narrator (Plutarch) and of the control the latter exercises over his story. Significantly, Pelling emphasizes the importance of proems and epilogues in the shaping of the narrator's *persona* – it might be expected that a similar tendency may be at play in the *QC*.

⁸ The closure effectively mirrors both the proem of Book Nine, with its comments concerning the number of *problemata* included in the book (in the address to the dedicatee and mention of the festival to Muses. For the problems related to Plutarch's self-portrayal in the *QC*, compare Klotz 2007; König 2011.

Ammonius, fearing that some professors of the same subject might be drawn together (μη τῶν ὁμοτέχων τινὲς ἀλλήλοις συλλάχῳσι), directed that, without any balloting, a geometer should put a problem to a teacher of literature and a musician to a teacher of rhetoric, and that afterwards they should change round and pay one another in kind (737d13-e2).

This decision is aimed to remedy the prior situation as well as to set and define the overall tone and character of the banquet. Refusing to follow the established custom, he decides on enlivening the evening with something akin to what we know as interdisciplinary interactions: individuals of various professions are encouraged to pose problems to those representing a different scholarly discipline: this Ammonian pattern will hence govern the explorations narrated in Book Nine, even in spite of several possible disruptions or threats – threats, as it happens, invariably posed by the teachers of literature.

Among the *grammatikoi*, the first to be mentioned (also, the first to be challenged) is **Protogenes**. The question he faces is, as will be seen, deceptively easy yet suitable for his profession, as it concerns the structure of the alphabet;⁹ unsurprisingly, he responds with what is described as ‘the stock reason given in schools’, ὁ δὲ τὴν ἐν ταῖς σχολαῖς λεγομένην ἀπέδωκε, 737e5-6). Yet, the reason he gives for the primacy of the *alpha* is patently considered insufficient: while Ammonios never expressly states his dissatisfaction, he immediately calls on Plutarch (the younger, ‘in the text’ version of the narrator) to provide another explanation – this second account, narrated in direct speech as well as in notably more detail, with an account of the theory’s origin and a number of illustrative examples, is clearly given precedence over the unoriginal and less than satisfying contribution of the grammarian.

Next to make his appearance is the schoolmaster (*grammatistes*) **Zopyrio**: his dismissive comments, only briefly outlined by the narrator, greet the account of proportions of consonants and vowels within the alphabet as given by the geometer Hermeias. Related in indirect speech (this immediately clashes with the rendering of geometer’s

⁹ Additionally, one cannot help but notice that the subject of this particular discussion may also serve as a reminder that this is the first actual challenge issued at Ammonius’ banquet: it concerns the letter alpha, the first letter of alphabet, an acknowledged symbol of unity, oneness and beginning.

account), his arguments reject the theory of proportional arrangement illustrative of more general order (738f):

While he was still talking, Zopyrio the schoolmaster was obviously laughing at him and kept making audible comments; when he came to an end, he let himself go and stigmatized all such talk as complete nonsense (Ἔτι δ' αὐτοῦ λέγοντος ὁ γραμματιστῆς Ζωπυρίων δῆλος ἦν καταγελῶν και παρεφθέγγετο· παυσσάμενου δ' οὐ κατέσχευ ἀλλὰ φλυαρίαν τὰ τοιαῦτα πολλὴν ἀπέκαλει).

Given Plutarch's vivid interest in philosophical mathematics, the fact that he has his Zopyrio stigmatize the account of proportion as a φλυαρία is hardly complimentary towards the grammarian (a pejorative undertone may also tint the epithet *grammatistes*). Then, one has to account for Zopyrio's behavior as such: no other guest behaves in a similar manner during the banquet, which seems to reflect the narrator's censure, particularly once we recollect the remarks concerning the conciliatory character of communal experience of banqueting mentioned in the opening chapter as well as Ammonius' care in structuring this particular symposium. Even more illustrative is the later account: in the place of alternative explanatory account, Zopyrio proposes a theory of accidental character of alphabet, a theory basically negating existence of any intrinsic order of language (739a1-5):

Both the number of the letters of alphabet and their order, he said, were what they were by coincidence, and not for any reason (μηδενὶ γὰρ λόγῳ συντυχία δέ τι καὶ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν γραμμάτων γεγόνεαι τοσοῦτον καὶ τὴν τάξιν οὕτως ἔχουσαν), just as it was an accidental consequence of chance (ἐκ τύχης και αὐτομάτως ἐπηκολουθηθέναι) that the number of syllables in the first line of the Iliad was the same as that in the first line of the Odyssey, while the same thing was again true of their last lines.

In an instructive turn of events, he is almost immediately (IX 4) bested by the rhetorician Maximus, who puts to him a problem derived from the very fundament of Greek education, the Homeric *Iliad* (the question seems particularly appropriate as the Homeric element was introduced by the grammarian himself). Though Zopyrio attempts to dismiss the challenge as an impossible one by claiming an attempt

at answering would equal the impossible feat of establishing which of Phillip of Macedon's legs was lame (739b; interestingly, he is described as countering Maximus' question with one of his own, the only attempt of this kind in the surviving account of Ammonius' banquet), he is quickly proven wrong as Maximus (the argument being quoted in direct speech) expressly negates the validity of the alleged parallel and demonstrates that the Homeric text provides enough clues to establish beyond any doubt which of Aphrodite's hands was hurt by Diomedes' spear. As a consequence of this encounter, Zopyrio emerges not only as ill-tempered and ill-behaved, but also as incompetent, the result of the rhetorician's challenge reflecting back on the prior exchange and, hence, on the critique of Hermeias. Additionally, one notes, his behavior threatens to disrupt the order of the banquet, a danger avoided due to the timely intervention of other guests and, most importantly, Maximus: for a moment, immediately after schoolmaster's critique of Hermeias, the debate threatens to become more of an open quarrel between the two adversaries (739b6-7) and it is only after Maximus' intervention that the convivial mood is restored (ταῦτα τοὺς ἄλλους ἅπαντας ἡδίους ἐποίησεν, 739e1).

Introduced in IX 5, the grammarian **Hylas** is described as having little luck with challenges: since he does not figure in earlier conversations, this is a point of possible importance not only in a narratological reading, but also within the framework of the present considerations. Dissatisfied with his performance until this particular point in the debate (οὐ πάνυ γὰρ εὐημέρησεν ἐν ταῖς ἐπιδείξεσιν, 739e4-5), he is playfully compared to the Homeric Ajax, sulking in silence – thus challenged, he responds with a terse reply on the general stupidity of men, and then, upon being met with good natured laughter, with an open display of anger. The relevant narratorial comments are as follows:

All this has put everyone in a more pleasant humour (ἡδίους), except Hylas the teacher of literature. Observing him to be maintaining a dejected silence (ἀποσιωπῶντα καὶ βαρυθυμούμενον) (739e3-6).

Hylas, still ruffled by his ill-temper, made an awkward reply (ἔτι δ' ἀνώμαλος ὦν ὑπ' ὀργῆς) (739f1).

Hylas replied with curses (ἀποσκορακίσαντος), imagining that he was being made fun of for his lack of success (740a3-5).

Yet, clearly, in contrast with the aggressive Zopyrio, Hylas chooses a more passive mode of displaying his dissatisfaction with the banquet – instead of being outright rude and dismissive of other participants’ arguments, he chooses offended silence or terse witticism intended to hint upon his inability to communicate the talent he possessed to his fellow banqueters (ironically, the effect he achieves is quite the opposite, for he appears as a person who has very little to say). His response, however, introduces the theme of further debate (from which, however, he remains significantly absent, to be reintroduced at the beginning of IX 6 with conciliatory remarks of Menepylus): the discussion turns to Plato’s *Politeia* and the myth of Er, the main question concerning the place given to the soul of Ajax in the drawing of lots (ironically, the focus on Ajax, that paradigm of sullen temper and obstinate silence, highlights the sullen silence of Hylas, further emphasizing the aptness of Sospis’ observation). Two consecutive explanations are provided by Plutarch’s brother, Lamprias, but the *problema* ends with the account of yet another grammarian, **Marcus** (640e1-f5): the explanation links the text of the *Politeia* to that of the *Odyssey* XI, with Plato making a conscious allusion to the Homeric text, and relating events in his own *nekyia* to the great precedent in the work of his predecessors, while underlining certain additional complexities of the tale, such as the unique status of Tiresias or the depths of Palinurus’ misfortune.¹⁰ Significantly, Marcus, with his detailed knowledge of Homer and Plato, appears to be the most proficient of the four grammarians, the only one to provide a self-contained and coherent interpretation of the problem, an interpretation based on individual insight and erudition. Polite and imaginative, he displays neither the malice of Zopyrio nor Hylas’ discontent: instead, he is portrayed as competent and well-versed in literary material, appreciative of Plato’s literary talent even when incapable of appreciating the possible hidden meanders of his thought. Even more importantly, he displays a particular affinity to the tone of the debate and the issues raised in IX 1, one that puts him very close to the polished ease of Sospis. At the same time, his employment of literary sources

¹⁰ The two are excluded from the sequence because of their unusual status: Tiresias retains his memory, while the soul of Palinurus, whose body still awaits to be buried, is banished from the realm of the dead.

contrasts with the awkwardness of Hylas, even further highlighting the ill-temper of the latter.

Somewhat surprisingly, given his not so persuasive presence in the opening *problema*, Protogenes returns in the later considerations – in IX 12 he is portrayed as deploring the apparent success of the rhetoricians in the debate:

At this Protogenes got to his feet and, calling me by name, “What is the matter with us”, he asked, “that we let these orators have it all their own way, deriding others but not being asked any questions themselves or contributing anything of their own to the conversational pool?” (741c14-17).

Significantly and in keeping with grammarian’s inability to influence the current of discussion (one notes that Protogenes’ comment almost openly if unintentionally betrays his helplessness with the rhetoricians), the complaint is quickly undermined by an observation of Plutarch, who points out that no question has been hitherto addressed to the professors of rhetoric (ἀλλ’ ἡμεῖς οὐδὲν αὐτοὺς ἠρωτήκαμεν, 741d4). Given the ease of Maximus’ success in his encounter with Zopyrio, the circumstance appears hardly accidental: it may well be that teachers of literature are in no position to ask questions of others. Moreover, instead of complaining, the young Plutarch is prepared to pose an adequate (and quite pertinent) question concerning the conflict of formulas in Homeric *Iliad* and the antinomy it involves (IX 13). This ability to amend the *status*, to actively participate in the debate and to influence its actual course, appears to set Plutarch apart from the more passive grammarian: while the latter is shown as capable of noticing a certain weakness of the debate, but not necessarily of actively influencing the course of the discussion, Plutarch demonstrates his ability to act and improve. Even more importantly, his question is approached with extreme care by both Glaucias and Maximus: it is the latter who will present a decisive argument in the discussion, arguing in favor of the authority of the oath formula over that of the challenge (it is the latter that was preferred by Glaucias). Interestingly, this short exchange has the additional merit of filling a part of the gap occasioned by the loss of central chapters – owing to Protogenes we know that no

rhetoricians figured in the lost section of the work. Also, we may infer that the lot of the grammarians could not have been much better than in the opening part: otherwise, the grammarian would have no cause for complaints.

A BRIEF LOOK AT TWO OTHER PROFESSIONAL GROUPS

Since Plutarch's portrayal of other professional groups does not fall under the scope of this particular article, I shall limit myself to pointing out the characteristics which may be seen as influencing our perceptions of the grammarians or, for that matter, our visions of *technai* and *epistemai* as such. As a result of the losses suffered by the work only two groups, i.e. rhetoricians and philosophers, may be viewed as emerging from the work with a relative clarity. Among the rhetoricians, the one most prominently present is probably **Sospis**, who proves his erudition in the encounter with Hylas – it is him who makes the reference to Ajax in 739e (it is, however, not him who manages to calm the grammarian down – this is achieved by the Peripatetic Menephyllus through his reference to both Hylas' known area of expertise and mythological stories of Poseidon). Then, there is **Maximus**, who quells the incipient feud between Hermeias and Zopyrio in IX 4, where he deftly defeats the latter with a skillful reading of Homer, and **Glaucias** whose explanation of the conflicting formulas in the Iliadic challenge scene is patently privileged over that of Sospis (IX 13). The last one is **Herodes**, who participates in the controversy concerning Muses (interestingly and in keeping with the character of the banquet itself, this subject attracts considerably more interest from all groups present than any other in Book Nine).

Should we believe the text, three philosophers are present at the banquet: Ammonius, Plutarch himself, and the Peripatetic Menephyllus (IX 6). The last one appears only briefly, yet it seems advisable to pay him some consideration – his *prosopon* is neither Plutarch's self-portrait, nor Plutarch's portrayal of his favored teacher, which may eliminate some necessary complications and biases. The part he plays attracts attention because of the actual effect of his intervention: while

the remarks of Sospis in IX 5 have patently angered the already dissatisfied Hylas, Menephyllus deftly disarms the sulking grammarian, drawing him into a discussion concerning defeats of Poseidon at hands of various divinities, a discussion that relies on Hylas' alleged predilection for stories concerning Poseidon's own defeats (741a5-10):

You are yourself always relating to us (αὐτὸς εἰθῶς ἱστορεῖν ἡμῖν) how he was worsted on many occasions, here in Athens by Athena, at Delphi by Apollo, at Argos by Hera, in Aegina by Zeus, and in Naxos by Dionysus, but everywhere took his failure with an easy-going absence of resentment (πρᾶον δὲ πανταχοῦ καὶ ἀμήνιτον ὄντα περὶ τὰς δυσημερίας).

Unfortunately, as the *problema* survives only in fragments, we are in no position to reconstruct the entire discussion – yet, at least at the beginning, the intervention of Menephyllus appears to work for the benefit of the assembled company and, strikingly, for the benefit of Hylas himself, who is portrayed as plainly taking comfort in Menephyllus' words (ὥσπερ ἠδίων γενόμενος, b2).¹¹ This, is nothing else, might be indicative of the philosopher's supremacy over the rhetorician: his remarks succeed in restoring harmony, in putting to rest the disquiet that threatened the symposium.

CONCLUSIONS

To summarize: only twice are the grammarians awarded the honor of the final argument – in IX 3, the argument is that of Zopyrio, who all but interrupts Hermeias' arithmetical speculations with his own interpretation (or, in fact, with his argument in favor of the accidental origin of the alphabet), which effectively weakens the force of his contribution. The other instance is that of Marcus, who advances a Homer-related reading of Plato's portrayal of the allotment of souls – the case is interesting in its inclusiveness, for the Homeric reading of Plato does not necessarily invalidate those presented earlier by Lamprias. Even more importantly, I contrast with other professional groups,

¹¹ For a more detailed study of the Peripatetic element in the *QC* compare Oikonomopoulou 2011; Becchi 1999.

the grammarians are occasionally portrayed as inattentive or even rude (Zopyrio), touchy, and sulky when unappreciated (Hylas), as well as prone to misplacing responsibility (Protogenes). Then, Zopyrio, while so prone to criticize others, proves inadequate to the task of interpreting Homer when directly challenged by Maximus; in his turn, Hylas appears to intentionally misunderstand jokes of his companions, emulating the heroic temper of Ajax where more socially acceptable paradigms are easily available (the circumstance quickly pinpointed by Menepylus). The resulting image is hardly complimentary: in spite of their relatively prominent presence, the grammarians (with possible exception of Marcus) display none of the qualities of the two other prominent groups of professionals: neither the wit of rhetoricians nor the erudition and the rhetorical proficiency of philosophers. Interestingly, this image agrees to some degree with that encountered in Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* where grammarians all too often fall victims to the supreme wit of the sophists Favorinus, or, as a matter of fact, to the pen of Gellius himself. It is highly likely that with intellectual supremacy allotted to philosophers (or philosophizing rhetoricians), grammarians remain at the lower level of the respective development, their intellectual weakness mirrored by impaired social skills.

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