AULUS GELLIUS AND HIS CIRCLE*
by Barry Baldwin
(University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada)

Though lacking the Scotsman's self-absorption, Gellius is to some degree recognisable as a Roman Boswell, serving a considerable number of cut-price, and sometimes cut-throat, Johnsons. A student and hierophant, he was acquainted with the luminous, as well as the voluminous, intellectuals of the first half of the second century. Gellius was himself born to play second fiddle. He never penetrated the corridors of power. No emperor is mentioned by name save Hadrian; always divus and respectfully regarded.1 Two attendances at imperial salutatio are registered.2 Both seem to belong to the reign of Pius; one of them, indeed, with the help of a plausible textual emendation by Gronovius, is datable to c. 150. However, Gellius is concerned only to record the donnish chat that went on before the levées, and he is explicit in stating that omnium fere ordinum multitudo waited in the outward rooms. No mark of honour here. Unlike so many of the Eastern, and the occasional Western, sophists, Gellius' career did not advance beyond one or two legal appointments and a good deal of bathing in reflected glory.

The most frequent exhibit in the Noctes Atticae is Favorinus of Arelate. This exotic creature makes twenty-seven appearances, and is cited or alluded to on six other occasions.3 Gellius' delineation is plausible as far as it goes. Favorinus is constantly introduced as philosophus; he descants at the drop of a reference on the minutiae of Greek and Latin vocabulary; he has a fund of recondite knowledge which he is only too willing to share with all comers. Gellius, of course, provided the sort of audience professors dream of. The picture is consistent with that given by Philostratus and the Suda.4

As far as it goes: that is the operative phrase. The other sources accord a sensational career to Favorinus. He was notorious for being sexually over or under endowed. Hermaphrodite or eunuch? The sources cannot decide, but

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1. NA 3. 16. 12; 11. 15. 3; 13. 22. 1; 16. 14. 4.
2. NA 4. 1. 1; 20. 1. 2.
3. NA 1. 10. 1; 1. 15. 17; 1. 21. 4; 2. 5; 2. 12. 15; 2. 22. 1; 2. 26. 1; 3. 1. 1; 3. 6. 6; 3. 16. 17; 3. 19. 1; 4. 1. 1; 5. 11. 8; 8. 2; 8. 14. 9; 8. 3. 9; 13. 5; 10. 12. 9; 11. 5. 5; 12. 1. 1; 13. 25. 2; 14. 1. 1; 14. 2. 11; 16. 3. 1; 17. 10. 1; 17. 12. 1; 17. 19. 1; 18. 1. 1; 18. 7. 2; 19. 3. 1; 20. 1. 2.
the anatomical jesting extends through Lucian and Philostratus to the Suda. Gellius is predictably silent on the matter. However, in one item in the *Noctes Atticae* (9. 4. 16), the elder Pliny is thus quoted: *gignuntur homines utriusque sexus, quos hermaphroditos vocamus, olim androgynos vocatos et in prodigiis habitos, nunc vero in deliciis.* Favorinus would not have liked this classification; one speculates, and hopes, that there is a touch of sly humour in Gellius' quotation.

Identical silence is displayed on Favorinus' quarrels with the emperor Hadrian and the sophist Polemo, his possible exile to Chios, and his friendship with Herodes Atticus. Nor, apart from a conventional plaudit for his *Graeca facundia*, is any great stress laid on his sophistic abilities. Why this unremitting silence? The same circumscribed pictures are presented in other cases; notably those of Herodes and (perhaps) Peregrinus Proteus. The suppressions might be deemed logical. Gellius set himself up as scholar, not Roman precursor of Philostratus. Yet he was by no means a master of relevancy; surprise that more personalia do not intrude into his discursive pages is valid. Perhaps tact is the operative word. Most of Favorinus' memories were unhappy ones, best relegated to oblivion. Even so, it is signal that Gellius permits himself no unkind word about Hadrian, the instrument of Favorinus' severest misfortunes. It was not mandatory to be indulgent to the memory of the late emperor in the Antonine period. *Divus* he might be, but Fronto can cast a stone at his spurious archaism. And on the *divus*, Gellius may have been devious. Conspicuously absent or played down in the *Noctes Atticae* are the scholars Terentius Scaurus and Velius Celer. Both were on terms with Hadrian; Charisius and Priscian attest learned correspondence between them and the fractious scholar-emperor. Perhaps Gellius sought to take oblique revenge for Favorinus by denying due credit to Hadrian's perhaps more favoured littérateurs.

The relative neglect of Favorinus' sophistic career is paralleled by similar playing down in the case of Herodes. The latter also has *facundia*, but appears as *consularis* and mocker of fake philosophers. The latter role is piquant, when we remember Peregrinus. Gellius' attitude may be a compound of ideology and personal frustration. He uses the term *sophista* as one of rebuke, and is fond

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5. Favorinus is both eunuch and hermaphrodite in Philostratus, hermaphrodite only in the Suda, and a eunuch by his own reckoning and by that of Lucian (*Demonax* 12 and perhaps *Eunuchus* 7).
6. Dio, 69. 3. 4; *HA*, Hadrian 15. 12; 16. 11; Philostratus, *VS* 489.
7. See G. W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* (1969), 90f, for a dissection of Philostratus' account.
8. See Bowerstock, 35f; for Favorinus' treatise on Exile, see Norsa-Vitelli, *Studi e Testi* 3 (1931), and Barigazzi, 375f.
10. Keil, *GL* 1. 209 (Charisius on Scaurus); 2. 547 (Priscian on Celer).
11. *NA* 17. 5. 3.
of comparing sophists with philosophers to the disadvantage of the former.\textsuperscript{12} In the case of Polemo, there were special reasons for neglect. This sophist did not overly impress the young Marcus Aurelius in performance,\textsuperscript{13} though Philostratus claims a greater respect at a later date.\textsuperscript{14} Worse, Polemo penned a very nasty description of Favorinus' physique.\textsuperscript{15} Gellius' distaste for sophists is relatively anachronistic for the second century. He may well have been more sincere than Lucian, the obvious point of comparison. But Gellius was human, in spite of Nettleship,\textsuperscript{16} and may have resented the success which sophistic talents gained so often in this age.

Another notable feature of Gellius' descriptive technique is his general refusal to bring his great men together in debate. One exception stands out. \textit{NA} \textit{2. 26. 1} narrates how Favorinus took Gellius with him to visit the gouty Fronto. Sickbed settings are quite routine in the \textit{Noctes Atticae}; Gellius himself was visited in Herodes' Cephisia retreat by his other philosophic mentor, Calvisius Taurus, when he was suffering from a bout of 'Greek tummy'.\textsuperscript{17} Herodes is not there at the time. These morbid settings fit an age of hypochondria. Gout never interfered with Fronto's eloquence, and he has a lively discussion with Favorinus on colour words in Greek and Latin. Was it this seance which provoked Fronto's one unequivocal reference to Favorinus? \textit{multa de Favorini nostri pigmentis fuci quisnam appingere prohibet}?\textsuperscript{18}

Favorinus is never copulated with Herodes in the \textit{Noctes Atticae}, though Philostratus claims they were intimate friends. Less surprisingly, in view of their frictions and litigations, Herodes and Fronto are kept apart. There are indeed minor and perhaps significant geographical patterns. Favorinus is almost always encountered in Rome, and is never outside Italy. Herodes is always in Greece, as is Calvisius Taurus. Least surprising is the separation of Herodes and Peregrinus.

Gellius really does not have much to say about Herodes or Fronto. The former gains four mentions,\textsuperscript{19} Fronto five.\textsuperscript{20} Both are dubbed consulars, thus setting up the year 143 as a rare chronological pointer for Gellius' own dates. In spite of the confidence of Van den Hout, there is no certain reference to Gellius in Fronto. The Gellius alluded to in a cryptic letter to Claudius Julianus (not registered in the Loeb of C. R. Haines) need not be Aulus.\textsuperscript{21} There was no

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{NA} \textit{5. 3. 7}; 17. 12. 1.
\textsuperscript{13} See the letter of 143 from Aurelius to Fronto (Haines, 1. 116); in general, see H. Jütter, \textit{De Polemonis rhetoris vita operibus arte} (1898).
\textsuperscript{14} Philostratus, \textit{YS} 540.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Physiog.} 1 (Foerster), 161f.
\textsuperscript{16} H. Nettleship, 'The \textit{Noctes Atticae} of Aulus Gellius', \textit{AJP} \textit{4} (1883), 391f.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{NA} \textit{18. 10. 2}; see 12. 5. 2 for another example of the motif.
\textsuperscript{18} Haines, 1. 48.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{NA} \textit{1. 2. 1; 9. 2. 1; 18. 10. 1; 19. 12. 1.}
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{NA} \textit{2. 26. 1; 13. 29. 2; 19. 8. 1; 19. 10. 1; 19. 13. 1.}
\textsuperscript{21} See P. K. Marshall, 'The Date of Birth of Aulus Gellius', \textit{CP} \textit{58} (1963), 143f.
shortage of Gellii in this period, though Aulus mentions no contemporary of
the name. P. K. Marshall might well be right in equating Fronto’s Gellius with
the addressee of Arrian (identified by G. W. Bowersock\textsuperscript{22} with L. Gellius
Menander of Corinth).

We must say something about Peregrinus Proteus. Even more remarkable
than the man himself is the respect accorded him by Gellius. \textit{NA} 12. 11. 1
bills him as \textit{virum gravem atque constantem}. Gellius often went to catch his
philosophical pearls outside Athens, where Peregrinus (not yet called Proteus)
lived à la Diogenes \textit{in quodam tugurio}. Now there is no reason to doubt that
Gellius’ view of him was honest. One automatically judges Peregrinus by the
malevolent pamphlet of Lucian: no criterion could be less safe. More pertinent
is Philostratus’ confirmation of Lucian’s claim that Peregrinus was wont to
clash in public with Herodes. In the \textit{Noctes Atticae}, Herodes is represented as
an opponent of long-haired pretenders to philosophy.\textsuperscript{23} Either Gellius dropped
his respect for Peregrinus at a hint from Herodes, or he had a winning ability
for respecting opposites in friends. Our initial comparison between Gellius
and Boswell may again be invoked. The adaptable Scot could get along with
John Wilkes as well as Samuel Johnson. Also, there may be an extra dimension
to Lucian’s spleen. It is true that there is no warrant for F. G. Allinson’s
notion that Lucian (and Apuleius) participated in the soirées at Cephisia.\textsuperscript{24}
A faint pattern may yet be traced. Lucian’s \textit{Convivium} could conceivably be
a skit on the donnish talk and convivial settings of Gellius. There are as many
banquets as sickbeds in the \textit{Noctes Atticae}; some might see a connection.
Lucian was not specially enamoured of Herodes;\textsuperscript{25} he liked to repeat the jokes
about Favorinus’ anatomy; he sought to blast the fame of Peregrinus; there
are possible references, not complimentary, to Fronto and Arrian in the
\textit{How to Write History}. An inconclusive collocation, but perhaps indicative of
a desire to deflate the luminaries of Gellius’ circles.

The chronology of Gellius is vexed. Radulphus de Diceto asseverated that
\textit{Agellius scribit CLXIX: quot homines tot sententiae}. If true, why no mention
of Peregrinus’ self-immolation in 165? We have seen that the omission of such
a spectacular episode is not alien to Gellius’ method. Conversely, he might have
noted the event. Peregrinus featured in an item in the missing Book 8 of the
\textit{Noctes Atticae}. Other personalities provide pertinent chronological allusions
and delusions. Through Sulpicius Apollinaris, Gellius had some knowledge
of the prestigious Erucius Clarus, now known (from the \textit{Fasti Ostienses}) to
have died in March, 146.\textsuperscript{26} Calvisius Taurus (who might or might not be the
Taurus of Tyre claimed by Philostratus as one of Herodes’ tutors) has been

\textsuperscript{22.} Op. cit., 113,
\textsuperscript{23.} \textit{NA} 9. 2. 1.
\textsuperscript{24.} \textit{Lucian: Satirist and Artist} (1927), 18–20.
\textsuperscript{25.} \textit{Demonax} 24, 33; the attitude of \textit{Peregrinus} 19 is ambiguous.
\textsuperscript{26.} On all this, see Marshall’s article.
equated with the Calvenus Taurus to whom the Delphians set up an honorific inscription at the Pythian games of 163. Favorinus once took Gellius to hear him dissuade a new mother from wet-nursing her son (NA 12. 1). Birley conjectured that this may refer to Domitia Lucilla and the birth of Marcus Aurelius. Unlikely; but it shows the depth of our ignorance of Gellius' life.

Some writers, notably Nettleship, have expressed horror at the alleged intellectual futility manifest in the anecdotes of the Noctes Atticae. Nettleship did not perceive that his own scholarship might be vulnerable to the same charge. The circles of Gellius show devotion to minute studies of language, textual criticism, and style. What was wrong with that? Certainly, any contributor to this journal would not be out of place in a Gellius soirée. He was no Lexiphanes. Gellius and Favorinus alike ridicule excessive love of archaic style; the tone is that of Lucian. Nor is there need to see Gellius' interlocutors as men of straw, 'throwing pseudo-light onto non-problems' (as Amis' Lucky Jim puts it). The Noctes Atticae are in tune with the vignettes of Lucian, Philostratus, and (later) Athenaeus. If they are sterile, it was a mark of the age, not just of poor Gellius. An assemblage of cantankerous scholars engaged in one-upmanship is all too plausible. Gellius' interests are diverse and reasonable.

27. Again, see Marshall.
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