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KATARINA PETROVIČOVÁ

## INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF AULUS GELLIUS'S AND FLAVIUS MACROBIUS AMBROSIUS THEO- DOSIUS'S GENERAL EDUCATIONAL SCIENTIFIC WRITINGS

The existence of Roman general educational literature was first documented in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC in the form of Cato's unpreserved "proto-scientific" encyclopaedia *Ad Marcum filium*. Unfortunately, we have just very fragmentary information about this reference book, but it had certainly not been marked by the Greek approach to sciences as towards theoretical disciplines and it had conveyed practical skills from the Roman tradition, law, cult, cultural history, warfare, hunting or agriculture. However, the model of theoretical education in individual sciences (thus arts)<sup>1</sup> introduced by Plato and revised by Aristotle became a part of Roman education soon afterwards. The arts necessary for the education of each free Roman, thus "free arts", were introduced in a complex way in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC by Varro in a nine-volume unpreserved textbook *Disciplinae* (the number of books corresponded to the number of sciences, in which Varro also included – apart from the well-known seven free arts – medicine and architecture). Since then these sciences could not be missing in any Roman general educational work, although the extent of their representation and elaboration was naturally different. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD their number settled on seven and in the fairy-tale charming personification of seven heavenly virgins, created in the 6<sup>th</sup> century by Martianus Capella,<sup>2</sup> it was passed down on barbarian peoples of the transitional period between Antiquity and Middle Ages, and subsequently to European Middle Ages.

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<sup>1</sup> Plato deals with sciences within the dialogue *Constitution*. Grammar and rhetoric are neither defined, nor mutually differentiated, but as "verbal utterance" they are a part of the so-called creative education of guards (see *Pol.* 376e). On the other hand, the sciences of the later quadrivium are described very precisely as sciences important for a philosopher's education (*Pol.* 521c-531c). The education pinnacle in this model is dialectics as an almost divine science about the supreme and the most general concepts (*Pol.* 531c-535a). Aristotle differs from Plato in the understanding of dialectics; he regards mastering dialectics as a starting point of all further education (*Top.* 100a or *Met.* 1005a/b).

<sup>2</sup> For the influence of Varro's work on the conception of sciences present in Martianus Capella's work *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* see BOVEY 2003 or SCHIEVENIN 1998, 478–493.

Within the time of Varro's and Capella's activities two more scientific works are coming into being: Gellius's informational as well as genre-varied *Noctes Atticae*, and the scientific dialogue *Saturnalia* by Macrobius. The goal of this text is to present a critical comparison of their ideological context. Gellius's work emerged in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, in an intra-politically stable era of the rule of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius; the plot of Macrobius's *Saturnalia* is set to the end of the year 384 AD, but both of them rather reflect the nostalgically apologetic atmosphere of the time of their real origin, i.e. shortly after 430 AD when the religiously tolerant army-leader Aetius reigned on behalf of the then minor Valentinianus III.<sup>3</sup> In between the creation of both works, Roman society undergoes a crucial transformation. Open-minded, pluralistically thinking and polytheistic Romans gradually accept the exclusive monotheistic religion, which initially appears inconsistent with the original culture and scholarship. This transformation directly affected also the part of society that wanted to keep its antique roots despite the growing influence of Christianity. And thus, even though both compared scientific works actually had the same aim, to educate and to instruct an already partially instructed reader, the differences between them are more than enormous.

Gellius's *Noctes Atticae* are – in terms of form as well as contents – a varied blend of indoctrinations, in Gellius's words *varia et miscella et quasi confusanea doctrina* (*N. A. praef.* 5), and therefore, they are also ranked among the genre of miscellanea. However, this mixture, comprising the total of twenty books and apparently up to four hundred chapters, has a very conscientiously thought-out structure, the essence of which is the constant *variatio* of topics as well as forms so that the same proportion relations are preserved in the individual books and the reader can keep the attention and the interest in new knowledge. The collection is dedicated to the sons (*N. A. praef.* 1), nevertheless, this dedication is topic-oriented and serves mainly the identification of the work as an educational reference book (besides, Macrobius also works with the same topics: comp. *Macr. Sat. praef.* 1–2). It is more important that Gellius addresses his work to adult readers, who do not need a ceaseless guidance, but rather to fill gaps in their education:

Gell. *N. A. praef.* 12: ... *eaque sola accepi, quae aut ingenia prompta expeditaque ad honestae eruditionis cupidinem utiliumque artium contemplationem celeri facilique compendio ducerent aut homines aliis iam vitae negotiis occupatos a turpi certe agrestique rerum atque verborum imperitia.*

Therefore, Gellius leaves it up to the readers what and how they will study, and also challenges them unceasingly to prove individual pieces of knowledge, to assess them critically or to supply details in further literature. For illustration – in chapter 19,8 Gellius directly encourages, through the mouth of the renowned rhetor M. Cornelius, the participants in the debate about the existence of the plural of words *harena, caelum, triticum*, and the singular of words *quaedrigae*,

<sup>3</sup> For dating the origin of these works see esp. HOLFORD-STREVENS 1977, 93–109; MEYER 1989, 119–122 (Gellius); CAMERON 1966, 25–38; PANCIERA 1982, 658–660 (Macrobius).

*inimicitiae, arma* etc., and thus figuratively also the readers, to search for the occurrence of these words in an unusual number:

Gell. *N. A.* 19,8,15: *Ite ergo nunc et, quando forte erit otium, quaerite an ,quadrigam' et ,harenas' dixerit ex cohorte illa dumtaxat antiquiore vel oratorum aliquis vel poetarum, id est classicus adsiduusque aliquis scriptor, non proletarius.*

In chapter 18,1 the reader as well as Gellius witness a discussion of a Stoic and a Peripatetic about the way to achieve a happy life, which ends without being adjudicated:

Gell. *N. A.* 18,1,15–16: *Haec atque alia quaedam minuta magis et nodosa, tamquam apud arbitrum Favorinum, in suam uterque sententiam conferebant. Sed cum iam prima fax noctis et densiores esse tenebrae coepissent, prosecuti Favorinum in domum, ad quam devertebat, discessimus.*

It is obvious that Gellius leaves the final judgement unspoken deliberately so that the readers show further interest in both teachings and form their own, completely independent opinion on the problem. It is similar to the last example that I will mention in this context, from chapter 14,4, when Gellius first quotes – reportedly because of aesthetic quality – Chrysippus's description of justice in order to finally disclose the main purpose of the quotation:

Gell. *N. A.* 14,4,5: *Haec verba Chrysippi eo etiam magis ponenda existimavi, ut prompta ad considerandum iudicandumque sint, quoniam legentibus ea nobis delicatiorum quidam disciplinarum philosophi, Saevitiae imaginem istam esse, non Iustitiae, dixerunt.*

Cognition is introduced as a constant, never-ending and open process, in which everybody has the right to their own viewpoint and preference. Therefore, a lot of pieces of knowledge are presented in the form of various personal reminiscences of numerous discussions, disputes and even arguments, or in the form of non-dramatized polemic argumentations and commentaries.<sup>4</sup>

This does not mean that authority plays no role in Gellius's handbook. On the contrary, the reader is confronted with several authorities (particularly with Gellius's teachers or friends<sup>5</sup>). The important thing is that these models do not stand hypothetically "above" the reader. They are rather specific guides of the reader's own thinking. Moreover, they are not infallible.<sup>6</sup> They represent a certain clue, which the reader can use, but they do not have to.

<sup>4</sup> More than a quarter of all chapters in *N. A.* (including also unpreserved chapters, regarding which we also estimate dramatization according to the recorded contents, up to 129 out of assumed 400 may be concerned) are dramatized in different ways. The most elaborate are the chapters that Gellius is personally involved in (esp. in the sphere of linguistics and literary criticism – from dramatized discussions e.g. *N. A.* 13,31; 15,9; 16,6; 20,10 etc.; among undramatized argumentations e.g. *N. A.* 1,22; 2,3; 3,16; 4,17 etc.).

<sup>5</sup> E.g. the grammarian Sulpicius Apollinaris (he appears in 12 chap.), rhetors Antonius Iulianus (in 7 chap.), Titus Castricius (4), and first of all M. Cornelius Fronto (5), the followers of the Second Sophistic Favorinus (33) and Herodes Atticus (4), the Platonist L. Calvenus Taurus (15), et al.

<sup>6</sup> In the already mentioned chapter 19,8 Gellius does not stop before the personality of Fronto

The same also holds for the resources of education which Gellius does not enforce on the reader, but he clearly defends his own resource, which is language research from the level of individual words and their components up to the all-round assessment of authors' styles (comp. note 4). Mastering the language science opens up the gate to the cognition as such. Perhaps most strikingly this conviction can be seen in the example of Sulpicius Apollinaris and Antonius Iulianus, Gellius's teachers of grammar and rhetoric. In Gellius's depiction Sulpicius Apollinaris not only understands and patiently explains to students the individual semantic nuances of words, but due to his primarily grammatical erudition he is even able to cover historical and legal questions. For instance, in chapter 13,20, he identifies M. Cato Nepos in a detailed way and as if incidentally introduces a few generations of Cato's kin. Gellius confirms the truthfulness of his information with his own reading:

Gell. *N. A.* 13,20,17: *Quae postea ita esse, uti dixerat [ie. Sulpicius Apollinaris: KP], cognovimus, cum et Laudationes funebres et Librum Commentarium de familia Porcia legeremus.*

In chapter 12,13 Apollinaris is able to help Gellius interpret the genuinely legal term *intra Kalendas*, and thus, also come to the court in time, again particularly thanks to his exceptional grammatical knowledge. Iulianus's knowledge of literature is in another chapter (*N. A.* 15,1) the key to physical knowledge, specifically to the determination of non-flammable substances which may be used for the protection of the town against fire.

And what is the goal of Gellius's book and of the knowledge presented in it? On the one hand it is entertainment and joy, on the other, however, the sense of duty and certain social prestige towards which the acquired information serves the reader. No matter how inconsistent this statement may sound, it has a great value of utterance since it represents the social milieu of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD as intellectually very favourable, when education was acknowledged as a value in itself. Gellius imagines ideal readers of his book as thoughtful, critical readers who do not content themselves with school education, but who want more, who want to get to know masters of individual fields.

So much to the intellectual context in which the readers of Gellius's work should move if they follow the author's extensive instructions. However, are the qualities required from the readers also Gellius's qualities? I am convinced that they are and that there exist more than just one supporting argument for this assumption in the text. Gellius does use the same techniques for knowledge elaboration that he recommends to his readers. And thus, although he is traditionally perceived as a loyal pupil of his teachers, especially of Fronto and Favorinus,<sup>7</sup> he

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and virtually finds words, the existence of which Fronto had refuted before: *N. A.* 19,8,17: *Quod unum [ie. verbum: KP] ergo rarissimum videbatur, invenimus, quadrigam numero singulari dictam in libro Saturarum M. Varronis...*

<sup>7</sup> Gellius is seen as in many respects a loyal pupil of Fronto esp. by MARACHE 1952, 208–213 and ID. 1957, 12 and 100ff. The significant influence of Favorinus is illustrated by PEZZATI 1973, 837–860.

does not hesitate to check their opinions and to base his decisions exclusively on his own judgement.

Fronto became famous as a leading representative of the so-called “archaism” (linguistic as well as cultural), the typical features of which were enthusiasm about the customs of the past times and disregard of the present. If we look attentively into Gellius’s work, we will find out that the reported archaism is present in none of the disciplines the author deals with in his work. Even though, for example, in linguistics he sets republican grammarians as models in many places, it is not thanks to their exemplary way of expression, but thanks to the depth of their education which he finds missing at many contemporary linguists. If I should define Gellius’s attitude, I would probably use the term “linguistic aristocratism”, i.e. deliberate non-subordination of language norms to the common language usage, with the exemption of linguistic invention of exceptional personalities, completely independently of their age.<sup>8</sup> This approach to language reoccurs also in the field of literature, where Gellius does not support the so-called “classical authors” at the expense of different modernistic tendencies. Contrary to the followers of archaism, Gellius definitely did not mind Seneca’s and Cornutus’s innovative style resigning Cicero’s classical period. He opposed mainly their rejection of Vergilius (esp. *N. A.* 12,2,10–11 or 9,10,5), who he perceived as the central school poet and whose qualities were therefore not allowed to be decried by anybody in the context of science. At the same time, Gellius does not hesitate a moment to admonish Vergilius as well as Cicero if they have – in his opinion – committed a mistake, especially if they have approached a task, the stylistic adaptation of either a text or a translation, in a little more superficial way and without forethought.<sup>9</sup> On the contrary, he highlights for the same reason, i.e. primarily for accurate and sophisticated language work, two contemporaries of great Greek literature, Herodes Atticus and Favorinus.<sup>10</sup>

The mentioned authors feature in *N. A.* not only as literary authorities, but also as philosophical thinkers. Both of them are supporters of the so-called Second Sophistic, so it is logical to presume that also Gellius belonged to this Second Sophistic. And here Gellius manifests his independence again. He agrees with the

<sup>8</sup> Similar conclusions are also drawn e.g. by HOLFORD-STREUVENS 1993, 211–212 (he evaluates Gellius’s tendencies as manneristic) or WOLANIN 1999, 497–503.

<sup>9</sup> Vergilius: Gell. *N. A.* 10,16, cap.: *Quos errores Iulius Hyginus in sexto Vergilii animadvertit, in Romana historia erratos. Ibid.* 17,10,5–19: *...sed quae procrastinata sunt ab eo, ut post recenserentur, et absolvi, quoniam mors praeverterat, nequiverunt, nequaquam poetarum elegantissimi nomine atque iudicio digna sunt.* Cicero: Gell. *N. A.* 1,3,11–12: *Et cetera quidem quae sumenda a Theophrasto existimavit, ut ingenium facundiaque eius fuit, sumpsit et transposuit commodissime aptissimeque; hunc autem locum ... strictim atque cursim transgressus est, neque ea quae a Theophrasto penculate atque enucleate scripta sunt executus est, sed anxietate illa et quasi morositate disputationis praetermissa, genus ipsum rei tantum paucis verbis notavit...* *Ibid.* 15,6, cap.: *In libro M. Ciceronis De gloria secundo manifestum erratum, in ea parte in qua scriptum est super Hectore et Aiace.*

<sup>10</sup> See Gell. *N. A.* 19,12,1; 1,2,1 etc. – the praise of Atticus; *N. A.* 16,3,1; 12,1,24 ... – of Favorinus.

Second Sophistic in the accentuation of logical puns and philosophical argumentations sharpening the intellect, but in contrast, he expresses his understanding of human weaknesses and keeps tactful silence about them.<sup>11</sup> Instead of pointing at vices and offences of various personalities, he rather tends to emphasize their moral qualities and exemplary features of character.

However, the focal point of Gellius's work lies in something else than just in independence and healthy criticism. The basis of *N. A.* is the interconnection of Greek and Roman culture on all levels. The first signal of the power of this incentive is the title itself: *Noctes Atticae*. Gellius seemingly derives it from the place and time where and when he got the first impulse for his work, from the long winter nights of his Greek study stay, the emptiness of which he began to fill with writing down pieces of knowledge (*N. A. praef.* 10<sup>12</sup>). But in this way he does not exhaust the meaning of the title. In fact, there are several symbolic layers hidden in it: night as the expression of diligence, diversity contained in the used plural, and particularly the pursuit of Latin-Greek linguistic and cultural synthesis, which is the actual purpose of the entire work.<sup>13</sup>

Gellius's aim, and thus also the aim faced by the readers, is to master both dominant Mediterranean cultures as equal, regardless of language competence. And Gellius is not only convinced that it is possible, but in many of his chapters he proves that it is happening. For instance, grammarian Sulpicius Apollinaris, of African origin, complements with his ease the explication of Latin terms and phrases using analogies with Greek equivalents (*N. A.* 7,6; 13,18); the Hispanic rhetor Antonius Iulianus immediately recites the verses of several poets preceding Catullus to successfully compete with the best Greek elegiacs and to completely declass a certain conceited Greek youth intellectually (*N. A.* 19,9<sup>14</sup>). And the main model of Greek-Latin bilingualism, scholar Favorinus, speaks about Rome and in Rome, let it be either about the style of individual Roman and Greek literary figures, or about Latin translations, solely in Greek, and not in ordinary Greek, he uses the language the qualities of which (*amoenitates vero et copiae ubertatesque verborum: N. A.* 12,1,24) are unachievable.

Another important thing is that Gellius's aim does not protrude anywhere as an unreachable ideal, but it is repeatedly "affected" by Gellius with his own, from the translational point of view, fairly successful attempts. Perhaps the best of them is the translation of the elaborated syllogism from Plato's *Symposium* in

<sup>11</sup> From the reader he conceals e.g. Favorinus's frequently discussed physiological deviation (probably bisexuality: see *Luc. Peregr.* or *Philostr. Soph.* 533–4).

<sup>12</sup> *Gell. N. A. praef.* 10: *Nos vero, ut captus noster est, incuriose et inmediate ac prope etiam subrustice ex ipso loco ac tempore hibernarum vigiliarum Atticas Noctes inscripsimus, tantum ceteris omnibus in ipsius quoque inscriptionis laude cedentes, quantum cessimus in cura et elegantia scriptionis.*

<sup>13</sup> Ad symbolism of the title, see also VARDI 1993, 298–301.

<sup>14</sup> *Gell. N. A.* 19,9,9: „...Sed ne nos, id est nomen Latinum, tamquam profecto vastos quosdam et insubidos, ἀναφροδισίας condemnetis,... audite ac discite nostros quoque antiquiores ante eos quos nominastis poetas amasios ac venerios fuisse.“

chapter 17,20, to which he was provoked by a sarcastic remark of philosopher Taurus:

Gell. *N. A.* 17,20,1–6: *Symposium Platonis apud philosophum Taurum legebatur. Verba illa Pausaniae inter convivas amorem vice sua laudantis, ea verba ita prorsum amavimus, ut meminisse etiam studuerimus. ... Haec verba ubi lecta sunt, atque ibi Taurus mihi: „Heus,“ inquit, „tu, rhetorisce,“ — sic enim me in principio recens in diatribam acceptum appellitabat, existimans eloquentiae unius extundendae gratia Athenas venisse, — „videsne,“ inquit, ‘ἐνθύμημα’ crebrum et coruscum et convexum...?“*

From Gellius's reaction, evidence that Latin disposes of the same expressive means as Greek,<sup>15</sup> it is obvious that Gellius is convinced that Roman culture has already managed to absorb the best of the Greek culture and to occupy a place on an equal level. Thus, it created a unified Greek-Latin culture, the position of which in the Mediterranean is unshakeable. And this is – in my point of view – the basic enunciation of *Noctes Atticae* about the times when this remarkable instructional work originated.

One of the reasons why I chose Macrobius's scientific work *Saturnalia* for the comparison with *Noctes Atticae* is the fact that Macrobius almost literally takes approximately five percent of his text from Gellius.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, a substantial difference between both works, which can be most strikingly observed mainly in the adopted passages, was a comparatively great surprise. The first thing about *Saturnalia* that attracts attention is Macrobius's penetrative confrontation with Gellius's idea of a scientific work as a diverse mixture presented right in the introduction. To this purpose, he uses not only negations of Gellius's aims by means of Gellius's original turns of phrases,<sup>17</sup> but also several metaphorical figures, out of which I regard as the most cogent the comparison of work composition to “parts of body in mutual unison” (*membra[m] [ie. corporis: KP] cohaerentia: Sat. 1, praef. 3*). Macrobius exerts noticeably huge efforts, so his book provides a coherent view of individual thematic areas (*Sat. 1, praef. 5–9*<sup>18</sup>). He creates an educational compendium connected by a compact frame of an imaginary three-day symposium dialogue in a closed group of intellectuals, outstanding personalities of Roman aristocracy, celebrating the festivities of Saturnalia just before the death of the focal character of the dialogue, symposiarchus Praetextatus (17/12–19/12, 384 AD).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Gell. *N. A.* 17,20,7–9: *Haec admonitio Tauri de orationis Platonicae modulis non modo non repressit, sed instrinxit etiam nos ad elegantiam Graecae orationis verbis Latinis adfectandam; ... proinde nos ea quae in Platonis oratione demiramur non aemulari quidem, sed lineas umbrasque facere ausi sumus.* Gellius's modesty is surely just topic-oriented here.

<sup>16</sup> GAMBERALE 1975, 41–42.

<sup>17</sup> Comp. esp. the first three paragraphs of the prefaces of both works.

<sup>18</sup> Macr. *Sat. 1, praef. 8: Ex omnibus colligamus unde unum fiat, sicut unus numerus fit ex singulis. Hoc faciat noster animus: omnia quibus est adiutus abscondat, ipsum tamen ostendat quod effecit...*

<sup>19</sup> Macr. *Sat. 1,1,1–2: Saturnalibus apud Vettium Praetextatum Romanae nobilitatis proceres*



Apart from Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, the major participants, out of the total of twelve, are Nicomachus Flavianus and Q. Aurelius Symmachus, leading representatives of pagan Roman senator aristocracy. The goal is to prove Vergilius's universal abilities,<sup>20</sup> but it is set in the biggest Roman celebration of the Sun, the celebration of winter solstice.<sup>21</sup>

Macrobius apparently wants to capture the original Roman world.<sup>22</sup> He reveals this intention by situating the dialogue into the times nearly two generations older than he was himself as well as by the choice of speakers representing the leading representatives of "pagan" antique culture of the closing 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. However, Macrobius chooses the past for the plot and a milieu untouched by Christianity (at least in the dialogue), and he does not try to restore old orders. And no wonder, the cultural situation of Rome did change. Between the time of the composition of *Noctes Atticae* and of the dialogue *Saturnalia*, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire and the original cult was gradually eliminated. At first, the traditional Roman religion of a state nature was „disestablished”, when in 380 Theodosius declared orthodox Christianity the only state religion by issuing the Edict of Thessaloniki, and as a result of this it was also cut off the state finances. Then followed the physical removal of original religious symbols, out of which Gratianus's ejecting the altar of goddess Victoria from the Senate in the year 382 was obviously the most painful for non-Christianized Romans.<sup>23</sup> While Christians proceeded uncompromisingly against a part of the heritage of the old world, the supporters of antique culture tried to find such an intellectual frame that could comfortably include the old as well as the new confession. The theoretical basis of this movement was Neo-Platonism, which allowed to accept Christian principles and to keep the antique way of life at the same time. It enabled Macrobius to overcome the vicious circle of mutual accusations and to create an atmosphere of understanding in the dialogue. This is also apparent in the dialogue characters. We know that some of them were in a close personal contact

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*doctique alii congregantur et tempus sollenniter feriatum deputant colloquio liberali, convivia quoque sibi mutua comitate praebentes, nec discedentes a se nisi ad nocturnam quietem. Nam per omne spatium feriarum meliorem diei partem seriis disputationibus occupantes cenae tempore sermones conviviales agitant...* For the deduction of the year when the symposium took place see e.g. CAMERON 1966, 28.

20 Macr. *Sat.* 1,24,10: ...audi quid de operis sui [ie. Vergilii: KP] multiplici doctrina ipse pronuntiet.

21 The scope of the celebration is also documented by the introductory religious-philosophical exposition presenting the so-called solar theory of gods (Praetextatus unfolds the basic idea that all deities are just various attributes of a single god, the god of the Sun: *Sat.* 1,17,1–1,23,22).

22 For nostalgic atmosphere of the dialogue see CAMERON 1966, 34–36.

23 A clear view is mediated in a preserved polemic that was led by means of correspondence with emperors by two significant authorities: the pagan senator Symmachus (so-called third relation to Emperor Theodosius) and Ambrosius, the Christian bishop of Milan (17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> letter to Emperor Valentinianus). For the relation of Christian and pagan intellectuals see also CAMERON 1977, 1–30.

with Christians, some were baptized themselves, others assumed a completely opposite attitude, but there is no mention about it in the dialogue. The reason for this is not Macrobius's concealed aversion towards the new religion as some interpreters of *Saturnalia* attempted to prove, but only a desire for concord, so even the "arch-assailer" of the dialogue Euangelus, who constantly brings critical impulses into the argument,<sup>24</sup> is more and more content as the dialogue advances, and he even utters words of praise:

Macr. *Sat.* 7,15,1: *Hic dictis favor ab omnibus exortus est admirantibus dictorum soliditatem, adeo ut attestari vel ipsum Euangelum non pigeret.*

Roman culture in Macrobius's model of thought is an entity quite analogical to the formal complex of the dialogue, it is a body composed of many parts and sustained by many substances,<sup>25</sup> which may be completely different, but still indispensable for the organism. The brain of this organism is the objective truth of philosophy, in which each organ, or each teaching, participates to a certain extent.<sup>26</sup> For Macrobius there is only one all-encompassing Romanized culture that may also include Christianity, although it is not stated anywhere in the dialogue explicitly. From Macrobius's dialogue radiates a deep Neo-Platonic conviction, a belief enabling reconciliation and elimination of mutual barriers.<sup>27</sup>

I would like to illustrate this deeply apologetic character of the dialogue *Saturnalia* by the last example. It originates in a discussion in which the diners are proving Vergilius's admirable translational prowess. Macrobius draws specific examples from Gellius, but he substantially modifies them.<sup>28</sup> He palliates, understates all allusions to errors or turns them into Vergilius's favour. So Vergilius did not succeed in individual verses from Homer either because the quality of the original is exceptional and he does not have to be ashamed of „being minor to

<sup>24</sup> The character of Euangelus was originally interpreted as a Christian figure (see e.g. also PUTNA 2002, 37). However, this interpretation was rejected as inadequately politicized by all people who thoroughly examined the dialogue also from the literary point of view. In the dialogue, Euangelus namely plays a role of an "uninvited guest" and a "rebel", which was common in symposium literature. Representing all see FLAMANT 1977, 202f.

<sup>25</sup> Macr. *Sat.* 1, praef. 6–7: ... *quod in corpore nostro videmus sine ulla opera nostra facere naturam: alimenta quae accipimus, quamdiu in sua qualitate perseverant et solida innatant, male stomacho oneri sunt: at cum ex eo quod erant mutata sunt, tum demum in vires et sanguinem transeunt.*

<sup>26</sup> Macr. *Sat.* 1,24,21: ... „*philosophia... quod unicum est munus deorum et disciplina disciplinarum, honoranda est anteloquio...*“ *Ibid.* 7,15,14: „... *videris mihi ... oblivioni dare, philosophiam artem esse artium et disciplinam disciplinarum: et nunc in ipsam invehitur parricidali ausu medicina, cum philosophia illic se habeatur augustior ubi de rationali parte, id est de incorporeis, disputat; et illic inclinatur ubi de physica, quod est de divinis corporibus vel caeli vel siderum, tractat.*“

<sup>27</sup> For Neo-Platonism in the dialogue *Saturnalia* see esp. FLAMANT 1977.

<sup>28</sup> Comp. *N. A.* 9,9,12 and *Sat.* 5,13,1; *N. A.* 13,27,3 and *Sat.* 5,13,11; *N. A.* 17,10,8–19 and *Sat.* 5,17,7–14.

Homer<sup>29</sup>,<sup>29</sup> or because he is too devoted to his model (*Sat.* 5,13,40<sup>30</sup>). Macrobius excuses again in advance Vergilius's translation of Pindaros, criticized by Gellius as an extreme failure (*N. A.* 17,10,8–9<sup>31</sup>), saying that it is no wonder because:

Macr. *Sat.* 5,17,7: ...*Pindarum... Flaccus* [ie. Horatius: KP] *imitationi inaccessum fatetur*.

It is almost startling how rigorously Macrobius clears away any thought of conflict. However, I suppose it has a comparatively simple explanation. Macrobius was an extremely well-educated, erudite as well as politically active citizen. He could well observe all the changes the society was undergoing and, similarly to other personalities, he was conscious of how rapidly the antique cultural heritage might be lost. And in such a situation he did not want to offer the opponents of antiquity any weapons in the form of criticism of matters that he himself regarded as its pinnacle. On the contrary, his aspiration was to show that antique culture was a syncretic, non-problematic entity.

The attitude of Macrobius and his contemporaries proved to be very far-thinking. As the time passed, his conflict-free approach smoothed down the radical deprecatory attitude of Christianity, and thus enabled not only the penetration of other Neo-Platonic motives into Christian dogmatics, but the actual preservation of antique culture, including its original plurality and self-assured criticism.

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<sup>29</sup> Macr. *Sat.* 5,13,1: ....*non est erubescendum Vergilio si minorem se Homero vel ipse fateatur...*

<sup>30</sup> Macr. *Sat.* 5,13,40: *Sed haec et talia ignoscenda Vergilio, qui studii circa Homerum nimietate excedit modum. Et re vera non poterat non in aliquibus minor videri, qui per omnem poesin suam hoc uno est praecipue usus archetypo. Acriter enim in Homerum oculos intendit ut aemularetur eius non modo magnitudinem sed et simplicitatem et praesentiam orationis et tacitam maiestatem.*

<sup>31</sup> *N. A.* 17,10,8–9: *In his autem, ..., quae videntur retractari et corrigi debuisse, is maxime locus est, qui de monte Aetna factus est. Nam cum Pindari, veteris poetae, carmen, quod de natura atque flagrantia montis eius compositum est, aemulari vellet [ie. Vergilius: KP], eiusmodi sententias et verba molitus est, ut Pindaro quoque ipso, qui nimis opima pinguique esse facundia existimatus est, insolentior hoc quidem in loco tumidorque sit.*

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## RESUMÉ

V příspěvku autorka dokumentuje pomocí charakteristických rysů dvou všeobecně vzdělávacích děl – obsahově i žánrově pestré práce *Noctes Atticae* A. Gellia z 2. pol. 2. stol. po Kr. a Macrobiova dialogu *Saturnalia* z počátku 5. století po Kr. – změny v chápání úrovně vlastní kultury a s ní souvisejících vzdělávacích cílů, k nimž došlo u příslušníků intelektuální elity vlivem postupného rozšiřování křesťanství i rozpadu římského imperia. Zatímco Gellius nabízí čtenáři jednotlivé poznatky v celé šíři a opakovaně ho motivuje k samostatnému, zdravě kritickému přístupu včetně hodnocení kvality jednotlivých poznatků, čímž ukazuje římskou kulturu jako dostatečně silnou (schopnou unést nesouhlas), Macrobius již evidentně vnímá vlastní kulturu jako ohroženou. V důsledku toho její výdobytky nezpochybňuje, a naopak se je pokouší přes vzájemné odlišnosti zapojit do uceleného, pokud možno neproblematického rámce, aby tím zajistil jejich odolnost vůči stále vlivnějším neantickým kulturám (barbarské i křesťanské).

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