



Malta
Classics
Association

MELITA CLASSICA

Vol. I

2014

*Journal of the
Malta Classics Association*

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Malta Classics Association,

The Department of Classics and Archaeology,

Archaeology Farmhouse, Car park 6,

University of Malta, Msida

classicsmaltasoc@gmail.com

www.classicsmalta.org

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From the Editor

Four years ago, the Malta Classics Association was founded with the aim of disseminating and furthering Classical Studies, and especially, the Greek and Latin languages – a daunting task, indeed, considering that the Classics Studies were only limited to University courses, and stood completely outside the curriculum of pre-tertiary education. Ever since its inception in 2010, the Association has successfully striven and has been instrumental in raising awareness of such an important aspect of Education, and its efforts are now bearing fruit. Moreover, the general public's response has been encouraging – membership has steadily increased, the web-site frequently accessed, Classical Studies introduced as a new subject in post-secondary education at the Junior College of the University of Malta, Naxxar Higher Secondary School and Gozo Higher Secondary School, and the public lectures held under the auspices of the Association have always been well-attended.

Inspired by that famous Latin proverb, *verba movent, scripta manent*, the Malta Classics Association has now taken this additional initiative of publishing its own annual Journal, *Melita Classica*, in which both local and foreign Classicists can find an appropriate forum wherein the fruit of their literary endeavours and their researches can be published. In this wise, no constraints are being made on contributors, save that the material submitted pertains generally to Classical Studies and Languages. Contributors are thus most welcome and are encouraged to submit original articles or material for future publications – writing guidelines are printed at the end of this journal.

On behalf of the Editorial Board, I wish to thank all the contributors to this first issue of *Melita Classica*, and earnestly hope that our readers would find the studies offered profitable and enjoyable.

Fra Alan Joseph Adami O.P.

Editor

classicsmaltasoc.editorial@gmail.com

Atticism and Attic Vernacular in Second-Century Athens

Jerker Blomqvist

Athens in the second century A.D. was one of the most important centres of intellectual activity in the Roman Empire. Athens was the seat of a number of prospering philosophical and rhetorical schools, which attracted students from all parts of the empire. Intellectuals of all sorts followed them, philosophers or would-be philosophers not attached to any particular school, grammarians and teachers of rhetoric who hoped to establish themselves in Athens, job-seekers who aspired to employment in the administration of the empire or in private enterprises. Tourists came to visit the famous city, to admire the monuments of its glorious past and the new buildings erected by benevolent emperors and by other benefactors. Different varieties of Greek were spoken in the streets and colonnades, Latin could be heard there, presumably other languages too. Those voices are silent now; when we try to reconstruct the linguistic situation of the ancient city, we must rely on the preserved texts. That is what I shall try to do here.

One year, in the mid-second century, probably in A.D. 155, the Athenians contracted the famous orator Aelius Aristeides of Smyrna to deliver the principal speech at the Panathenaic festival of that year and to praise the city as was customary on those occasions. Among the numerous reasons to praise the Athenians that Aristeides had found, he includes their language. “Thanks to you, the whole world speaks the same language”, he says in his panegyric.¹ And he continues: “You can see chariot-drivers² and shepherds and those who gain their

1 Aristid., Pan. 325 (p. 294 Dindorf, 180.27–33 Jebb): καὶ δι’ ὑμῶν ὁμόφωνος μὲν πᾶσα γέγονεν ἡ οἰκουμένη, ἴδοις δ’ ἂν καὶ τοὺς ἠνιόχους καὶ τοὺς νομέας καὶ τοὺς ἀπὸ τῆς θαλάττης ζῶντας καὶ πάντα ὅσα ἔθνη καὶ κατὰ πόλεις καὶ κατὰ χώρας τῆς παρ’ ὑμῶν φωνῆς ἐχομένους καὶ πειρωμένους τῆς γῆς ἀνθάπτεσθαι, καθάπερ τοὺς νεῖν ἀδυνάτους.

2 Oliver (1968) 140–141 suggests that Ἠνίοχοι, as he prints it, refers to the barbarian tribe on the Caucasus shore of the Black Sea and translates the phrase “the

living from the sea, all existing peoples of every city and every country holding on to your³ speech and striving to reach your soil, just as those who cannot swim.” This is a clear statement of the eminent position the Attic dialect held in the eyes of the peoples of the Roman Empire, both in relation to other varieties of Greek and in relation to other languages spoken in the empire.

Aristeides had been hired by the Athenians to praise their city and evidently had the ambition to give them their money’s worth; so there may be some rhetoric exaggeration present in these words. But, if at all, it is an exaggeration, not pure fantasy. It is an undeniable fact that the variety of Greek spoken and written all over the empire and in certain regions beyond its frontiers was based on the dialect of the Athenians, and the normative language of prose literature, of formal speech and of much of everyday communication originated from early fourth century B.C. Athens. So far, Aristeides is evidently right when he declares the speech of Athens to be the universal language of the world.

Aristeides claims to be the first to have praised the Athenian language.⁴ This is not true, for the merits of the Athenian dialect were

Heniochi, both the herdsman and those who get their living from the sea”. Even with this interpretation, the words imply that Attic was spoken also by uneducated people in remote rural and coastal areas. However, Oliver does not convince. Since the Heniochi were known as pirates, the phrase *τοὺς ἀπὸ τῆς θαλάττης ζώντας*, with Oliver’s interpretation, cannot but refer to piratical activities. It would be out of place to praise the Athenians because their language was the one used by these Black Sea pirates. We are more likely to catch the significance of Aristeides’ utterance if we print *ἡνίοχους* and interpret this word as referring to people occupied with manual labour, just as the herdsmen and the fishermen. In the ancient texts, *ἡνίοχος* is mostly attested with reference to chariot-drivers in horse racings, but it could also refer to drivers of more trivial vehicles; cf. Plutarch, *Pericles* 12.6 (in an enumeration of manual labourers), *Alexander* 43.2 (with *ἀρομαμάξας*, which denotes heavy vehicles), Chariton 2.3.3 (with *ὄχηματα*, which also denotes heavy vehicles). The scholion on the Aristeides passage makes no distinction between *ἡνίοχους* and *νομέας*, but evidently regards both words as referring to professions. A scholion on Plato, *Theaetetus* 179b joins *ἡνίοχους* with *ποιμῆνας* and *κυνηγούς*.

3 *Ὁν παρ’ αὐτῶν* with “superfluous” *παρά*, cf. Radt (1989) 11–12.

4 He introduces his long section on the Athenian language in this way: *καὶ περὶ μὲν τούτων ἰκανά. ὦν δ’ οὐδεὶς τὸ μέχρι τοῦδε, ὅσα γ’ ἡμεῖς σύνισμεν, ἐν ταῖς κοιναῖς εὐφημίαις ἐμνήσθη, ταῦτα οὐ πρὶν εἰπεῖν παύσομαι* ‘Enough on this subject. But I shall not finish before having spoken of something that no one, to

extolled already by writers of the classical period.⁵ Isocrates points out that Athenian speech (φωνή)—he uses the same word as Aristеides—is particularly suitable for oratorical purposes and claims that this is one of the factors that attract students from other parts of Greece to the rhetorical schools of Athens.⁶ According to him, the Attic dialect is characterized by κοινότης ‘universality’ and μετριότης ‘moderation’, features that certainly were of advantage to a variety of the Greek language that was to become the κοινὴ διάλεκτος of all its speakers. Even the Old Oligarch, the author of the short pamphlet on the Athenian constitution that was written in the 420s B.C. and has been preserved among Xenophon’s writings, declares that the dialect contributes to the superiority of the city, since it is a mixture of features from all other dialects and even from non-Greek sources and, therefore, has something in common with every one of them.⁷

But we return to Aristеides. Also when he claims that this variety of Greek was a language not only for an educated or specialized elite, as, e.g., the archaizing language used by epic poets, but also a language for carriage-drivers, herdsmen and fishermen, he expressed a view of Attic Greek that his contemporaries shared with him. We may doubt that the talk of uneducated workers and farmhands had much in

the best of my knowledge, has mentioned in the public eulogies’ (*Pan.* 322 (p. 294 Dindorf, 180.1–3 Jebb)).

5 On the attitude of the Athenians of the classical period to their own dialect, cf. Davies (1993) and Crespo (2004).

6 Isoc., *Anti.* 296: πρὸς δὲ τούτοις καὶ τὴν τῆς φωνῆς κοινότητα καὶ μετριότητα καὶ τὴν ἄλλην εὐτραπελίαν καὶ φιλολογίαν οὐ μικρὸν ἠγοῦνται συμβαλέσθαι μέρος πρὸς τὴν τῶν λόγων παιδείαν. ὥστ’ οὐκ ἀδίκως ὑπολαμβάνουσιν ἅπαντας τοὺς λέγειν ὄντας δεινοὺς τῆς πόλεως εἶναι μαθητάς. ‘In addition to these advantages, they consider that the universality and moderation of our speech, with a general flexibility of mind and love of words, contribute not little to the education of orators. Therefore, they suppose, and not without good reason, that all skilful speakers are disciples of Athens.’ Cf. *Pan.* 48–50.

7 Ps.-X. *Ath.* 2.8: ἔπειτα φωνὴν πᾶσαν ἀκούοντες ἐξελέξαντο τοῦτο μὲν ἐκ τῆς, τοῦτο δὲ ἐκ τῆς· καὶ οἱ μὲν Ἕλληνας ἰδίᾳ μᾶλλον καὶ φωνὴ καὶ διαίτη καὶ σχήματι χρῶνται, Ἀθηναῖοι δὲ κεκραμένη ἐξ ἁπάντων τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ βαρβάρων. ‘Further, hearing every kind of dialect, they have taken something from each; the Greeks rather tend to use their own dialect, way of life, and type of dress, but the Athenians use a mixture from all the Greeks and non-Greeks’ (in a chapter on the advantages of Athens).

common with the oratorical masterpieces composed by Aristides and his colleagues. But in certain literary works of the second century A.D., we are presented with a number of examples of how even the lower strata of the Athenian population are supposed to master the language of Attica. I am thinking of the fictional letters of Alciphron and Claudius Aelianus and of Lucian's dialogues of Athenian courtesans, hetairai. Geographically, these are set in Athens, but it is a timeless and, therefore, imaginary Athens that has much in common with the universe of the New Comedy and where every character is competent to speak and write impeccable Attic, at least as Attic impeccability was defined in the second century A.D. Galen—the famous doctor and medical writer, who was an ardent critic of the Atticists—testifies that the Atticists, when hunting for genuine Attic words, consulted also people practising simple professions in the contemporary society.⁸ Thus, the Atticists evidently imagined that Attic was spoken in all layers of the society. This is in accordance with the anecdote, reported by Cicero and Quintilian, about Theophrastus, who was famous for his linguistic skill, but whose non-Attic origin was detected by an old saleswoman in the market-place when he asked her for the price of her merchandise.⁹ Cicero also reports that the courtesan or prostitute Leontion, who wrote a book against the same Theophrastus, used a language that was both skilful and Attic.¹⁰

Both Isocrates and the Old Oligarch imply that the dialect of Athens occupied some sort of middle position among the Greek dialects. It

8 Gal., *Dif. puls.* 8.582.17–583.4 Kühn ὁ δ' οὐδὲν μὲν ἔξει τῶν Ἑλλήνων δεῖξαι βιβλίον, ἐξ οὗ τὴν χρῆσιν πιστώσαιτο. μόνον δὲ ἴσως ἀρκέσει αὐτῷ λέγειν παρὰ τοὺς ναῦταις, καὶ τοὺς ἐμπόρους, καὶ τοὺς καπήλους, καὶ τοὺς βαλανεύσιν. αἰεὶ γὰρ ἐπὶ τούτους καταφεύγουσι μάρτυρας, ὅταν ὑπὲρ ὀνόματος ἢ ζήτησις ἢ 'He will not be able to point to a Greek book by which he could verify the usage. But he will perhaps be content with speaking only among sailors, merchants, shopkeepers and bath-attendants, for it is to those witnesses they always resort when there is a discussion about a word'; 587.6–7 μήτ' ἐμπόρων μοι, μήτε καπήλων, μήτε τελωνῶν χρῆσιν ὀνομάτων ἔπαγε, οὐχ ὠμίλησα τοιούτοις ἀνθρώποις. ἐν ταῖς τῶν παλαιῶν ἀνδρῶν βίβλοις διετράφην 'Don't give me merchants', shopkeepers' or tax-collectors' usage of words! I have not been conversant with such people. I grew up with the writings of the men of old.'

9 Cic., *Brut.* 172, Quint., *Inst.* 8.1.2.

10 Cic., *N.D.* 1.93: *scito illa quidem sermone et Attico.*

had elements in common with every one of them, it had no extreme features that set it apart from the other dialects, and the Old Oligarch even visualizes a process by which this dialect had changed and developed into its present state through contacts with other dialects or other languages over a period of time. Aristeides most probably made himself a quite different image of Attic. He lived in the heyday of Atticism, and Atticism—in particular the radical form of Atticism that dominated education and oratory during the second century—strived to re-create the variety of Greek that was spoken and written in the fourth century B.C. One basic presupposition for such ambitions must have been that the Attic dialect of the classical period was something unique, that it possessed qualities that differentiated it from other varieties of Greek, and made it particularly suitable for providing a norm for Greek usage in all times. The language advocated by the Atticists may have been characterized by universality, κοινότης, to use Isocrates' terms; it was not characterized by moderation or mediocrity, μετριότης, in their eyes, but by a superiority that set it apart from other dialects.

Atticism dominated education in the second century. When children who had learnt another variety of Greek at home went to school, they were forced to abandon that sort of speech and to adopt what their teachers claimed to be the only correct way of speaking and writing Greek. We have a testimony to that effect by Galen, who indignantly informs us that what he had learnt from his well-educated father was not accepted by the teachers at school.¹¹ In those parts of the empire where children did not learn Greek from their parents, it was the Atticist variety of Greek that they were confronted with when they were sent to school. Pedagogical and medical expertise recommended both Greek and Roman parents with a new-born baby to hire a wet-nurse who spoke good Greek, “in order that her nursling should get

11 Gal., *Dif. puls.* 8.586.17–587.5 Kühn: ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡμᾶς ἀναγκάζουσιν, ἐν ἣ τεθράμμεθα καὶ πεπαιδευμέθα φωνῇ, ταύτην καταλιπόντας, ἐκμανθάνειν τὰς ἐκείνων ... πατήρ ἦν ἐμοὶ ἀκριβῶν τὴν τῶν Ἑλλήνων διάλεκτον, καὶ διδάσκαλος καὶ παιδαγωγὸς Ἕλληνας. ἐν τούτοις ἐτράφημ τοῖς ὀνόμασιν. οὐ γνωρίζω τὰ σά 'But they even force us to abandon the speech with which we were brought up and educated and to learn theirs ... I had a father who was highly skilled in the Greek language and a Greek teacher and instructor. With those words I was reared. I am not familiar with yours.'

used to the most beautiful of languages".¹² If the children were destined for one of those careers that were open to the elite of the empire, it was necessary to teach them both Latin and Greek. Students who visited the schools of Athens had to master Greek in order to enjoy the intellectual opportunities of the city, for all the teaching was in Greek and we have evidence to suggest that Roman students in Athens also spoke Greek between themselves when more serious matters were on the agenda.¹³

Thus, when the prospective students arrived in Athens from all over the empire, we must suppose that they had received a rather extensive schooling in Greek dominated by Atticist ideas. If not, they were offered such schooling on the spot. The Swedish excavations at Labraunda in Caria disclosed an inscription honouring the grammarian Tiberius Claudius Anteros, probably a local man who had been active in Athens and who was praised by the Athenians "for his virtue and for his teaching of young people in diverse disciplines" with the result that "both numerous citizens and foreigners from many places studying with him made great progress".¹⁴

What were such students taught? What was on the curriculum in the Greek classes throughout the empire.

Vocabulary and morphology were of particular concern to the Atticists of the second century. A grammarian could gain everlasting fame by compiling an Atticist lexicon.¹⁵ Such a book would consist of a list of words that were recommended as "correct", since they could be attested in texts of the classical period, sometimes with remarks on their likewise "correct" declination and with the occasional snipe at a colleague who had made a mistake. These were paired with words

12 Sor., *Gyn.* 2.19.15: χάριν τοῦ τῆ καλλίστη διαλέκτω ἐθισθῆναι τὸ τρεφόμενον ὑπ' αὐτῆς. Cf. Ps.-Plu., *Lib. educ.* 3E-4A, Quint., *Inst.* 1.1.4-5, 11-12.

13 Gel. 1.2, 12.1.24, 14.1.1, 16.3.2, 18.7.4.

14 ILabr 66.4-15 (Crampa (1972): ... Τι(βέριον) Κ[λ(αύδιον)] | Ἀντέρωτα γραμματικόν | ἀρετῆς ἕνεκα καὶ παι|δεύσεως νέων ἐπὶ | ποικίλας ἐπιστήμας | εἰς μέγα τῶν πολλῶ[ν] | ὑπ' αὐτοῦ προαχθέ[ν] | των πολιτῶν [τε] | καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς | ξένης πολλα[χό] | θεν αὐτῶι σχο|λασάντων ...

15 Examples of such lexica are the works of Aelius Dionysius, Moiris, Pausanias, Phrynichus and Polydeukes/Pollux. Cf. the survey of the Atticist lexicographers and their followers in Alpers (1990).

to be avoided, since they did not occur in the canonical texts. I give a few examples from the most well-known of these Atticist purists, Phrynichus:

Ἐκοντήν οὐ χρὴ λέγειν, ἀλλ' ἐθελοντήν.

'One must not say ἔκοντήν but ἐθελοντήν.'¹⁶

Βελόνη καὶ βελονοπώλης ἀρχαῖα, ἡ δὲ ῥαφίς τί ἐστίν οὐκ ἂν τις γνοίη.

'Βελόνη and βελονοπώλης are ancient, but no-one would know what ῥαφίς is.'¹⁷

Αἱ νῆες ἐρεῖς, οὐχ αἱ ναῦς· σολοικὸν γάρ. ἤμαρτε μέντοι Φαβωρίνος, Πολέμων καὶ Σύλλας αἱ ναῦς εἰπόντες. τὰς νῆας οὐκ ἐρεῖς, ἀλλὰ τὰς ναῦς. Λολλιανὸς δὲ ὁ σοφιστὴς ἀκούσας παρὰ τινος, ὅτι οὐ χρὴ αἱ ναῦς λέγειν, ἀλλὰ αἱ νῆες, ᾤθη δεῖν λέγειν καὶ τὴν αἰτιατικὴν ὁμοίως, τὰς νῆας. οὐκ ἔχει δὲ οὕτως, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ μὲν τῆς εὐθείας δισυσλάβως, ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς αἰτιατικῆς μονοσυσλάβως.

'You should say αἱ νῆες, not αἱ ναῦς, for that is a solecism. However, Favorinus, Polemon and Sulla committed the error of saying αἱ ναῦς. You should not say τὰς νῆας but τὰς ναῦς. But Lollianus the Sophist, when he heard from someone that one should not say αἱ ναῦς but αἱ νῆες, believed that he must say the accusative in the same manner, i.e., τὰς νῆας. That is not the case, but the word has two syllables in the nominative and one in the accusative.'¹⁸

Writings of that sort have enjoyed a much greater reputation among later generations of scholars than their narrow-minded approach to language deserves, and what remains of their works has been regarded with next to superstitious reverence even in our times. Galen and other critics regarded the Atticist insistence on lexical consistency as absurd.¹⁹

16 The Greek words mean 'voluntarily'.

17 Βελόνη and ῥαφίς mean 'needle'; a βελονοπώλης is a 'needle-seller'.

18 The entry concerns the irregular declination of the substantive ναῦς, 'ship'.

19 Cf. e.g. Gal., *Al. fac.* 6.579.8–18 Kühn, 584.5–586.1, 605.11–16, 612.4–8, *Dif. puls.* 8.587.17–590.4, *Sim. med.* 12.283.7–13, *Comp. med.* 13.407.8–408.9, *Praen.* 14.624.12–625.2, *Plu.*, *Rect. Rat.* 42D, Lucianus, *Demon.* 26, *Hist. conscr.* 21, *Sol.* 7, *S. E.*, *M.* 197–199, 232–235.

But, evidently, the Atticists were successful, and most writers tried to adapt themselves to their demands. Both vocabulary, morphology and syntax were influenced.²⁰

However, when a schoolboy first went to school, he was not at once taught to observe these linguistic details; they belonged to a higher level of education. One thing that the disciples were introduced to and taught already in the elementary classes was spelling. Greek orthography of today is notoriously difficult; the spelling rules are essentially the same as those introduced for official documents by the Athenian assembly in 403 B.C. Already at that time they were obsolete in the sense that they mirrored a pronunciation that was no longer current,²¹ and in the second century A.D., the pronunciation had deviated even more from what it was originally, as is shown by numerous spelling mistakes in contemporary documents.

However, if you look through the original texts that have been preserved from Athens, you get the impression that the school teachers had been successful in teaching their disciples the rules of Greek spelling. Especially in the official inscriptions there are very few mistakes; only one sound seems to create difficulties. It is the long [i:] sound, which is written promiscuously either with I or with the digraph EI (τεῖμῆσαντες, ἀίσιτος, ἀείσειτος, Ἄντονεῖνος). The short [i] causes no problems, and there appear no other so-called itacistic errors, and very few mistakes regarding vowel quantity. The private inscriptions contain a little more mistakes, but far less than the contemporary Egyptian papyrus documents (partly explicable from the fact that most of the Egyptian documents are of a different character; the only original texts that have been preserved from Athens and Attica are inscriptions). Thus, the spelling in preserved contemporary documents gives little

20 For a list of features that reveal the influence of Atticism in texts of the second century see Horrocks (2010) 138–139. It should be kept in mind that, even before the appearance of the Atticist movement, the normative variety of Greek for prose writing was Attic, except for a small number of Attic peculiarities that had been eliminated, e.g., -ττ- for -σσ- and ξυν- for συν-; it was the ambition of the Atticists to reintroduce those exclusively Attic features, and they partly succeeded.

21 The diphthongs εἰ and οὐ were monophthongized into [e:] and [u:], respectively, and the Athenian alphabet used the digraphs EI and OY both for those sounds and for the secondary [e:] and [u:] sounds that had developed by contraction and compensatory lengthening.

indication that the pronunciation of the language in second-century Athens was much different from the pronunciation in the classical period 500 years before.

The picture is the same if we turn to the ancient grammarians, or even more homogeneous. There are practically no indications that in those 500 years the distinction between long and short vowels had almost disappeared, all the diphthongs had been monophthongized and the vowel system was on its way towards the Modern Greek system with five quantitatively undefined vowels and no diphthongs. According to the grammarians, there are still five long and five short vowel sounds and up to thirteen diphthongs, including *ει* and *ου*, which had been monophthongized into [e:] and [u:], respectively, already in the classical period. Only two isolated remarks on monophthongization of diphthongs disturb the picture.²² Nothing in the grammatical literature indicates that what was written as *I*, *H* or *EI* was pronounced as [i], that the digraph *AI* represented the same sound as *E*, i.e., [e] or [ɛ], or that *Υ* and *OI* both represented [y].²³ The spelling habits of original documents indicate that those sound changes had taken place.

Obviously, the grammarians of the Atticist era taught their students what they regarded as the true classical pronunciation, and that pronunciation comes close to the reconstructed, so-called Erasmian pronunciation that has been used in the schools of most West European countries since the seventeenth century. In the era of Atticism, that was also the pronunciation used in practice for formal speech and, e.g., for the recitation of poetry.²⁴ Side by side with this traditional, archaizing way of pronouncing Greek, there existed local vernaculars in which the sound changes that had occurred since classical times were actually present; the vernacular spoken in Attic was of this sort. It means that,

22 D. T. (first century B.C.) *Tech. gram.* 1.1.58.8–9 Uhlig: ἡ δὲ δευτέρα διὰ τῆς *ᾱ* διφθόγγου, προσγραφομένου τοῦ *ι*, μὴ συνεκφωνομένου δέ, οἶον *βοῶ βοᾷς βοᾷ*. "The second [conjugation of contract verbs declines] with the diphthong *ᾱι* [in second and third person singular], with the *iota* written beside but not pronounced, e.g. *βοῶ βοᾷς βοᾷ* (with *ᾱι*) recognizes that the digraphs *AI* (with long *α*), *HI* and *OI* did not any more represent diphthongs. S. E. (writing c. 200 A.D.), *M.* 1. 116–118, comments on monophthongous pronunciation of the short diphthongs *αι*, *ει* and *οι*.

23 Changes in the pronunciation of consonants are not discussed here.

24 Cf. Teodorsson (1974) 271–281, Horrocks (2010) 140–141.

when a student from another part of the empire arrived in Athens to be enrolled in one of the institutions for higher education that existed there, he would hear a considerably different sort of Attic than the one he had been taught at school. He had been taught that the Athenians spoke the only correct form of Greek; on the quayside in Pireus and on the streets of Athens, he heard something different. The grammarians, who were the authorities of correct language, were of course aware of that fact too, although in their writings they give very few glimpses of it; their task was to prescribe what was correct Greek and to teach their disciples to follow their prescriptions. Their grammars were prescriptive, not descriptive. It is only in the writings of those who criticized Atticism that it is revealed to us that there existed several varieties of the Attic dialect, *πολλὰ Ἀτθίδες*,²⁵ and spelling errors in preserved documents confirm that the traditional pronunciation was not the only one to be used in practice.

Faced with these facts, the Atticists had to explain why not one but several varieties of Attic existed in their time. By investigating the canonical texts of the classical period, they had created a set of rules for how the genuine Attic dialect was to be written; but by listening to what was spoken in the heartland of Attica itself, they must recognize that the speech there was a different one. To us, that is not a problem. We know that language change is a natural phenomenon; we can observe how our own language and other languages in a man's lifetime undergo changes of many sorts. And linguists of today regard a considerable portion of those changes as caused by intra-linguistic factors; it belongs to the nature of language to undergo changes; they are more seldom induced by external factors, such as migrations, political upheavals or influence by neighbouring languages. To us, it is no wonder that the dialect spoken in Attica had changed in the half millennium that separates the classical period from the era of Atticism. We regard change as a natural element in the dynamics of a language. Language change is always going on, it is inevitable. Its causes are inherent in language itself; change is not only due to the influence of extra-linguistic factors.

25 S. E., *M.* 89, 228, *Gal.*, *Dif. Puls.* 8.585.1–2 Kühn.

The ancients, on the other hand, mostly regarded a language as something static. It did not contain in itself the mechanisms that triggered change. If change did occur, it much have been induced from outside. This made language change something unnatural and undesirable; it was a deformation of something that nature had created, a degeneration. The task of the linguist was to prevent change—that is the rationale behind the prescriptive grammars of antiquity—and if change occurred, you much identify its external causes in order to explain it.

A number of those external factors that could be invoked to explain the emergence of varieties of the Attic dialect that existed beside the canonical one are illustrated by a passage in *Lives of the Sophists* by Philostratus the Elder.²⁶ The Herodes appearing there is the famous, enormously rich Athenian sophist and politician Herodes Attikus. The other person present there was called Agathion or Sostratus.²⁷ He lived an outsider's unsettled life in the western part of Attica, subsisting on what he could earn from temporary jobs in the farms and from gifts given to him by the rural population who showed him some reverence. His bodily strength earned him the nickname Heracles, and he became a celebrity of sorts. Herodes, himself a celebrity but of a much different sort, found reason to visit him and then to invite him to his estate in Marathon. He had reported on his dealings with Agathion in a letter to a certain *Ἰουλιανός*, possibly identical with the consul suffectus of 158, Tiberius Claudius Julianus; the letter was the source used by Philostratus for his retelling the episode. Herodes was evidently surprised at how well-spoken this Agathion was, for he asked him how he had learnt such good Greek. Agathion answered:

26 Philostr., *V. S.* 553.21–31 “τὴν δὲ δὴ γλῶτταν”, ἔφη ὁ Ἡρώδης, “πῶς ἐπαιδεύθης καὶ ὑπὸ τίνων; οὐ γάρ μοι τῶν ἀπαιδευτῶν φαίνει.” καὶ ὁ Ἀγαθίων “ἡ μεσογεία”, ἔφη, “τῆς Ἀττικῆς ἀγαθὸν διδασκαλεῖον ἀνδρὶ βουλομένῳ διαλέγεσθαι· οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἐν τῷ ἄστει Ἀθηναῖοι μισθοῦ δεχόμενοι Θράκια καὶ Ποντικά μειράκια καὶ ἐξ ἄλλων ἔθνῶν βαρβάρων ξυνεροηκότα παραφθείρονται παρ’ αὐτῶν τὴν φωνὴν μᾶλλον ἢ συμβάλλονται τι αὐτοῖς ἐς εὐγλωττίαν· ἡ μεσογεία δὲ ἄμικτος βαρβάρους οὐσα ὑγιαίνει αὐτοῖς ἢ φωνὴ καὶ ἢ γλῶττα τὴν ἄκραν Ἀτθίδα ἀποψάλλει.”

27 On this figure, cf. Kindstrand (1979–80); on his meeting with Herodes, Gray (2006).

The middle land of Attica, ἡ μεσογεία, is a good school to a man who wishes to speak. The Athenians in the city open their doors for money to young Pontians and Thracians and youngsters from other barbarian tribes who flock there, and their speech is distorted by them, more than they contribute to their eloquence. The middle land, on the other hand, is untainted by barbarians, their speech is healthy and their tongue sings perfect Attic.

Herodes' question indicates that he regarded education as a prerequisite for being able to speak good Greek. He had himself received the best education his father's money could buy and his own intellectual capacity—which was considerable—was able to assimilate. Agathion had presumably not received any formal education at all. The exchange between the two indicates that lack of education was usually regarded as a factor that could explain a person's incorrect handling of the Greek language.²⁸ Lack of education could also explain why whole groups of people out of ignorance spoke a variety of Greek that diverged from the correct one. Only, it appears that in the case of Agathion that explanation does not apply.

A second explanation that is hinted at in Agathion's answer is based on the dichotomy town–countryside. The towns and their populations were traditionally considered to be more sophisticated, more fashionable, intellectually more advanced than the rustics. Consequently, their handling of the language was more skilful and their knowledge of what was correct Greek and what was not surpassed that of the rural population. If someone—or a group of people—spoke a language that deviated from what was considered to be correct, the speaker's shortcomings could be explained from his belonging to the population of the countryside, not to an urbanized area, such as the one around Athens and Pireus. In the case of Agathion, that explanation is not relevant. He certainly belongs to the rural population, and he even

28 Cf. S. E. on the effects of Epicurus' ἀπαιδευσία on his language (M. 1 ... τοῦτο προκαλύμμα τῆς ἑαυτῶν ἀπαιδευσίας εἶναι νομίζοντες· ἐν πολλοῖς γὰρ ἀμαθῆς Ἐπίκουρος ἐλέγχεται, οὐδὲ ἐν ταῖς κοιναῖς ὁμιλίαις καθαρεύων [The Epicureans attacked education] because they believed that was a means to hide their own lack of paideia, for Epicurus is exposed as an ignoramus in many fields, not even using pure Greek in normal conversations').

lives—by his own choice, it seems—a much more primitive life than most of them. Yet, his Attic is impeccable.

We may safely suppose that, normally, education was regarded as important for acquiring knowledge of correct language and that town-life promoted linguistic skills more than country life. However, in this case, an uneducated rustic is claimed to possess enough linguistic skill to impress one of the leading sophists and orators of his time. If we are to believe Aristeides when he claims that Attic was the language of the whole population of the known world, including the lower strata of society, Agathion was not unique; on the contrary, this is, according to Aristeides, precisely what is to be expected from farmhands, fishermen and other manual labourers all over the known world. Aristeides and other Atticists insisted on the universality of the Attic language. Attic was, in their eyes, the language not only of the educated urban elite, but also of simple rustics like Agathion.²⁹

However, the “middle land” of Attica, the Μεσογεία or Μεσογαία, had a reputation for producing the speakers of the best Attic, and that reputation possibly belonged to those features that were traditionally ascribed to that region of Attica. There is a hint of the old date of that reputation in a fragment from an unidentifiable comedy by Aristophanes,³⁰ quoted by an approximate contemporary of Philostratus, viz., Sextus Empiricus.³¹ Aristophanes may have

29 Kindstrand (1979–80) 69 suggests that Agathion as described by Philostratus/ Herodes displays certain features that are typical of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ. One of those features was a remarkable capacity for speaking correct Attic; cf. Philostratus’ remark on Apollonius of Tyana: ἡ γλῶττα Ἀττικῶς εἶχεν ‘His tongue had an Attic quality’ (V. A. 1.7). However, even if Agathion may have been equipped with certain traits in common with another character described by Philostratus, the Atticists did not regard the capacity to speak good Greek as a prerogative of either urban elites or holy men but as a talent shared by the majority of men.

30 Ar., Fr. 706 Kassel–Austin (685 Kock).

31 S. E., M. 228: οὐχ ἡ αὐτὴ μὲν τῶν κατὰ τὴν ἀγροικίαν ἢ αὐτὴ δὲ τῶν ἐν ἄστει διατριβόντων, παρὸ καὶ ὁ κωμικὸς λέγει Ἀριστοφάνης: “διάλεκτον ἔχοντα μέσην πόλεως, οὐτ’ ἄστειαν ὑποηλυτέραν οὐτ’ ἀνελεύθερον ὑπαγροικότεραν” [the grammarians say that the usage of the Athenians is] not the same among those of the country and those living in the city, and that is the reason why the comedian Aristophanes says: “having the middle speech of the polis, neither urbane and too womanish nor slavish and too peasantry”.

meant something else,³² but Sextus interprets the passage as referring to a distinction between the speech of the city and the speech of the countryside and to an intermediate form which avoids the extremes of the two others and, for that reason, is more pleasant to the ear than they are; the geographical location of that intermediate form may have been the Μεσογεία. In another passage of Lives of the Sophists, Philostratus indicates that, in his life-time, the speech of that region was regarded as superior to other varieties of Attic; he praises the Roman sophist Claudius Aelianus for having learnt the Greek language to the perfection of Athenians in the Mesogeia,³³ evidently because that variety of the dialect was considered to be the most perfect one.

A third explanation of language change is alluded to in Agathion's answer, viz., the impact of other languages. The shortcomings of the Greek spoken by the Athenians in the city are imputed to young people who flock there from other parts of the world. This is a very common way of explaining linguistic change, and it remains an accepted strategy up to the time in the nineteenth century when the study of historical linguistics was established. A late example of a scholar who tried to explain the changes the Greek language had undergone primarily as an effect of the influence of other languages was my compatriot and predecessor Matthias Norberg, professor of Oriental languages and Greek at Lund University between 1780 and 1820.³⁴ He was familiar with Modern Greek from a year-long stay in Constantinople, a knowledge he shared with very few university professors of Western Europe at that time. Norberg was of the opinion that languages do not change unless under some sort of foreign influence. The variety of Greek that he had become acquainted with in Constantinople was, according to him, identical in all respects, including pronunciation, with the classical language, provided the traces of other languages

32 Cf. the commentary of Blank (1998) *ad loc.*

33 Philostr., *V. S.* 2.624.5–9 Αἰλιανὸς δὲ Ῥωμαῖος μὲν ἦν, ἠττίκιζε δέ, ὥσπερ οἱ ἐν τῇ μεσογείᾳ Ἀθηναῖοι. ἐπαίνου μοι δοκεῖ ἄξιός ὁ ἀνὴρ οὗτος, πρῶτον μὲν, ἐπειδὴ καθαράν φωνὴν ἐξεπόνησε πόλιν οἰκῶν ἑτέρᾳ φωνῇ χρωμένην ... 'Aelianus was a Roman, but he spoke Attic as the Athenians in the *Mesogeia*. This man seems to me to merit praise, firstly because he worked out a pure speech, although living in a city that used a different language ...'.

34 Cf. Blomqvist (2005).

could be eliminated. He displays a remarkable, if futile, ingenuity when he strives to explain—or explain away—all differences between classical and contemporary Greek as the result of foreign influence, Turkish in particular.

In the case of second-century Attic, Agathion thinks he is able to pinpoint the origin of the foreign influence that was the primary cause of the deterioration that was evident in the language of the urbanized area of Attica: it was due to the young people from Thrace, Pontus and other localities who had flocked to Athens. Who were these people? Commentators on the Philostratus passage seem to believe that Agathion is thinking of servants and slaves whom the Athenians had in their households. Gray, e.g., following the Loeb translation,³⁵ renders the words *μισθοῦ δεχόμενοι*, which describe the relationship of the Athenians to these foreign youths, simply with ‘hire’, implying that *μισθοῦ* refers to wages paid by the Athenians to the youths for services rendered. But the verb *δεχόμενοι*, with which *μισθοῦ* is construed, points to a different interpretation. *δέχομαι* with a word denoting a person as its object refers to a friendly welcoming of a guest, not to the hiring of a servant, and *μισθός* may denote house-rent etc., not only wages paid to an employee.³⁶ The young people whom Agathion speaks of are most likely to be students, young people who came to Athens in order to study philosophy or rhetoric and paid for their lodgings in the city houses of the Athenians.³⁷ That is the foreign element which according to Agathion, as reported by Herodes via Philostratus, was to be blamed for the deterioration of the town-people’s language. Could that be the true explanation? Did the foreigners—students and others—residing in Athens make an impact on the language spoken there by the Athenians themselves? We are of course aware that the principal cause of the deviations of the second-century Athenian vernacular from what the Atticists taught as correct Attic was the natural transformations of

35 Commentators and translators use words or explanations such as ‘hire’ (Gray).

36 Cf. L. S. J. s. *vv.* *δέχομαι* II.1 and *μισθός* I.

37 That Agathion most probably refers to the students was realized by Karin Blomqvist during one of the seminars arranged in the context of the research project *Athens as the Cultural Metropolis of the Roman Empire* that was going on at Lund University in 2000–05.

the language that had taken place in the 500-year time span, so the foreign presence in Athens is certainly not the decisive factor. On the other hand, if there was a difference between urban and rustic speech, and if the language of a rustic like Agathion was closer to classical Attic than the town-people's speech, could the foreigners present in the city have contributed to creating that difference? Phrased in that way, the question does not immediately evoke a negative answer. Athens in those days may have resembled a small European university town of today, such as Greifswald, Tartu or Lund – to cite a few examples from present-day Northern Europe. In those cities, the student population has had evident effects on both language and other fields of human life. In second-century Athens, a similar impact may have been felt.

Summing up: The Greek language in Athens and Attica in the second century A.D. was not homogeneous, but there existed differences between individuals, settlement areas and social groups. When very little is mentioned about those differences in the works of the contemporary grammarians, the reason is that their primary aim was prescriptive, not descriptive. Their intention was to teach students and school-children the normative Attic or Atticizing variety of Greek, and other varieties were regarded as undesirable deviations from that norm.

However, the grammarians must have been aware that the ordinary speech of the day often diverged from the norm, both in the city and in the countryside. When trying to explain the causes of such deviations, the grammarians did not generally invoke the chronological gap that separated their time from the classical period of Athens. Unlike us, they did not assume that change is an inevitable consequence of the dynamics of language. Instead, they explained the deviations from the norm, e.g., as symptoms of insufficient education, as caused by unfamiliarity with urban sophistication or as signs of foreign influence; the most popular explanation seems to have been the supposed influence of other languages and their speakers. Given the great number of students and other visitors present in Athens in those days, this latter explanation is probably not quite beside the mark, even if the true cause of most deviations must have been the natural development of the language over time.

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