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ISLANDS IN THE STREAM: The Grammarians of Late Antiquity*

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In a well-known passage at the end of Chapter II of the *Decline and Fall*, Gibbon closes his survey of the Empire's internal condition in the age of the Antonines by remarking on the general spread and cultivation of letters and by lamenting, at the same time, their reduced state. The name of poet was gone, he says, the name of orator had been usurped by the sophist, and in the climactic member of his period, Gibbon heaps his alliterative scorn on the "cloud of critics, of compilers, of commentators [who] darkened the face of learning" and who were especially symptomatic of that "decline of genius" he found in the age — a prelude to the greater decline yet to come. Although he does not use the specific term 'grammarians', Gibbon's mention of 'compilers' and 'commentators' strongly suggests that he had them near the front of his mind. They are the men who are my subject: the *grammatici*, the professional scholars and teachers whose job it was to comment on literary — especially, poetic — texts, to compile the rules of correct usage in the *ars grammatica*, and to inculcate a knowledge of both texts and rules in the minds of their students, the young members of

* An earlier version of this paper was presented as a James C. Loeb lecture at Harvard University in April 1984, and to the seminar of Professors A.D. Momigliano and K.J. Shelton at the University of Chicago in October 1984; I wish to thank those present on both occasions for their comments. Heartly thanks must also go to Daniel J. Taylor, for his invitation to contribute to this volume and for his very helpful editorial suggestions. I should note that the paper concerns only one part of the ancient grammarian's sphere, his linguistic expertise ('grammar' in the more restricted, modern sense); I should note, too, that the emphasis falls on the grammarians of the Latin West — although for late antiquity my remarks could easily be extended to the Greek grammarians of the East. All the subjects raised in the following pages are taken up in Kaster (1987), and the interested reader is referred to that work for more complete discussion and documentation.

the educated elite who began their liberal studies in the grammarians' schools.

The general topic I want to consider is lurking in Gibbon's diagnosis of the "decline of genius": originality, the quality that can be defined, for our purposes here, as the ability to show that there is always a better way to think about a subject. More particularly, I want to discuss the problem of innovation — or its absence — in a scholarly discipline in antiquity, and the circumstances that foster or work against innovation. The matter is given special point, perhaps, by the Latin grammarians of late antiquity, whose works we possess in large number and who seem to exhibit a truly startling lack of originality. A day spent with the daunting bulk of Keil's *Grammatici Latini* is enough to confirm this general characteristic: belonging for the most part to the third through sixth centuries, the handbooks collected in those volumes appear intent, one after the other, on imposing a deadly uniformity on their material, as the grammarians repeat the same patterns of analysis, teach the same lessons — often in precisely the same words, repeated from older sources — and use for illustration the same examples that had been used for generations (see, e.g., the analyses in Jeep 1893, Lambert 1908, Barwick 1922).

Surely here if anywhere, one might think, we find the dead hand of the past: men who were perhaps not very intelligent individually (for if they were intelligent, how could they be so slavish?), and who in any case were certainly crushed, as a group, under the weight of tradition. Even scholars deeply and sympathetically engaged with the grammarians' work have had very much this reaction: so the author of a recent, massive study of the *ars grammatica* of Donatus is merely expressing the common opinion when he repeatedly laments the failure to 'evolve', the 'stagnation', or the 'paralysis' that he finds in his subject (see Holtz 1981, *passim*). Equally common coin is the hint that such 'failures' are all that can be expected from — and in fact might neatly typify — the fallen world of the 'Low' Empire.

Nor is the common opinion incorrect in the basic perception from which it proceeds. This is not to say that the grammarians were as dim as they are sometimes made out to be, or their teachings as numbingly monolithic: that is not in fact the case.¹ But the more or less clever variations that occur are scarcely more than that — variations on very well-known themes — and are a different subject. The central fact remains, that the general outline and the conceptual foundations of their work stayed the same for century after century. I would like, then, to take this fact and ask

why it should be so: why did those foundations remain unchanged? why was the work of these men so untouched by innovation?

It would clearly be reductive to suggest that there is a single answer to these questions; but there is, I think, one answer that contains an important part of the truth. To begin to sketch that answer, however, we must first turn away from such notions as 'paralysis' and 'stagnation'. These negatively charged terms are as basically unhistorical as they are despairing: they judge at the same time that they describe; and in judging, they import expectations and values which have no relation to the expectations and values of the period to which they are applied. The grammarians and their ways were certainly not free from criticisms already in antiquity;² but a 'failure to evolve' is very notably absent from those criticisms, and so must be presumed to have had no part in the expectations of the critics.

Yet when we have put such notions behind us, we are still less than halfway home: it may be poor method to impose our expectations on the very different values of a deeply traditional society; but the failure of method, however regrettable, is not very important in itself, and recognition of the failure brings no immediate, substantive gain. To go one step farther, then, one might suggest that the inevitable conservatism of such a traditional society can supply the answer to our questions. This would be fair enough: as a shorthand answer, a reference to 'the conservatism of a traditional society' plainly has a certain justice. But even that answer itself begs several important questions.

A 'traditional' society, after all, is not a frozen society. It keeps its traditions because they continue to satisfy certain needs — because they are felt, in some sense, to work; and it is also quite able to change them when they do not. This is nowhere more spectacularly true than in the very period we are considering, which experienced, in Christianity's rise to dominance, one of the most rapid, profound, and far-reaching changes ever taken on by a traditional society. Yet even in the midst of this great cultural shift, the grammarians' tradition remained essentially as it was. That is important, I think; for it suggests that the tradition continued, very powerfully indeed, to satisfy certain needs.

Such, at any rate, is my premise; and with that premise in mind, we might take our original, negative question — why was the grammarians' work so untouched by innovation? — and recast it in more positive terms: in what sense did the grammarians' tradition continue to work? what needs did it satisfy? The answer I have in mind involves a kind of dynamic equilib-

rium: it envisions a tradition held in place by the convergence of different interests, like the keystone of an arch. To develop this answer, therefore, I would like to consider these interests in turn: first, the grammarians' own interests, as professional scholars and teachers, then the interests of the mainstream of educated society. Finally, I shall offer a few comments about the place where those interests met, in social relations and patronage.

We can start by turning back to the second century and listening briefly to a man who was neither a grammarian himself nor one of their friends. In Book 17, Chapter 2 of his *Attic Nights*, Aulus Gellius has occasion to ponder a question of correct Latin usage; and in the course of his musings he refers contemptuously to those "who pay homage to the new-fangled conventions [*nova instituta*] of the grammarians, as though they were the sacred objects of sacred precincts".³ In this chapter, and throughout the work, Gellius has an ulterior motive, the desire to show that his own exquisite learning, and that of his friends, raise them above the people he calls the *vulgus senidocum* — "the common run of half-educated men."⁴ These are the people to whom he refers in the clause just quoted, the homage-payers: the *vulgus*, together with the grammarians themselves, form the background against which Gellius seeks to distinguish himself. In this respect, it is no more than typical that Gellius should here attempt to dismiss both the prestige of the grammarians' 'conventions' and the common run of men who gave them that prestige. But it is mildly curious that he should call those conventions 'new-fangled': after all, Gellius was writing in the second half of the second century, more than two hundred years since a Latin *ars grammatica* had been introduced at Rome and a century after the *ars* was given its fullest form in the comprehensive and influential work of Remmius Palaemon. At first one might think that the epithet was merely meant to add, by hyperbole, to Gellius' scorn, and no doubt some of that is present. On reflection, however, one sees that he did have a point.

In the systematized form known to Gellius, grammar was a very young discipline in the history of the liberal arts: compared, for example, with rhetoric and philosophy, which as systematic studies reached back all the way to the end of the classical age of Greece, grammar was barely out of its adolescence by Gellius' day (see Pinborg 1974 and 1975; Siebenborn 1976; Fehling 1979). More to the point, perhaps, its childhood at Rome had not been a sheltered one. It had had to try to grow up very quickly, and in rather unsettled circumstances.

The same century that separates our earliest reference to a Latin *ars*

*grammatica*⁵ from the comprehensive *ars* of Palaemon⁶ saw an institutional change of the first importance, as the liberal education of the upper classes took on the form it would retain throughout the history of the empire. I refer to the development of the school of grammar at the first stage and the school of rhetoric at the second: the school of grammar providing its students with some knowledge of literature and a grasp of correct language, before they moved on to develop the skills of composition and speech in the school of rhetoric. During this period, upper-class education moved increasingly away from the family, and into the schools. Just so, grammar gradually disengaged itself from the great households where it had first been domesticated, in the person of learned slaves and freedmen, and moved into a separate niche that was pivotally placed between the family and the outside world.⁷

This change had several consequences that are especially important for my theme. First, it meant that grammar could not be solely analytic or explanatory (in the manner, say, of much of modern linguistics), but had to be prescriptive:⁸ it had to tell its students the correct way to speak — on the level of phonology, morphology, and rudimentary syntax — so that they would be prepared for the rhetor. Prescription meant, in turn, that grammar acquired, virtually overnight, a fair amount of power: the power derived from telling people how to speak — and not just any people, but precisely those who would count for most in the civil life of their society. It also had two other results. Telling people the correct way to speak meant that grammar became embedded, from the start, in social relations and values beyond itself — a point to which I shall return. More directly, telling men how to speak meant that grammar had to develop the *authority* to do so, an authority that would match and justify its power — no small feat, when it was still so young, and when, not incidentally, the grammarians themselves, in whom this authority would be vested, were still by and large men of very low social status and prestige.

How, then, could grammar and the grammarians claim this authority? Obviously, they could not appeal to the authority of long tradition, the way things were done according to some time-honored *mos* of the profession. And it would be very difficult, to say the least, for them to claim to be charismatic. But where traditional authority and charismatic authority are not available, the only workable alternative is bureaucratic authority — in general terms, the authority derived from the control of a rationalized system of precisely formulated rules. That is, of course, just the kind of

authority that the grammarians developed; and they did so by elaborating their rules out of the three main analytical criteria or conceptual categories that would circumscribe educated speech down to the end of antiquity and beyond.

These categories are, briefly: 1) *consuetudo* or *usus*, that is, the 'habit' of contemporary 'usage'; 2) *auctoritas*, the 'authority' of accepted literary models — a category which quickly fell together with *vetustas*, 'antiquity', since most accepted models belonged to the past; and 3) *ratio*, 'reason' or 'systematic account' — that is, a category based on the belief that the language conformed to a coherent, rational system, that that system could be expressed through rules (*regulae* or *finitiones*), that the system and its rules grew out of and revealed the permanent nature of the language (*natura*), and finally, that uncertainties or apparent irregularities could be removed through the application of analogy.⁹ For example: if one happened to be unsure of, say, the correct forms for the oblique cases of the word for 'cucumber' — *cucumis* — one could look around to see how one's contemporaries declined it (*consuetudo*), or one could consult the texts of literary *auctores* and follow them, or one could turn to *ratio*, and construct an analogy based on another word with which *cucumis* shared certain other features — gender, declension, number of syllables, and so forth.¹⁰ Very commonly, the lessons of the three categories converged, and all was well; but where the three categories were in conflict, one would finally need to decide which category was most valid.

It is possible to see these categories already being brought explicitly into play in the middle of the first century B.C. By the middle of the first century A.D., they were thoroughly familiar to any educated man, and difficult men among the educated evaluated the various categories differently.¹¹ The elder Pliny, for example, showed a preference for *consuetudo*, as Quintilian did a generation later; in the second century, the archaizing Gellius not surprisingly placed great weight on *auctoritas* and *vetustas*.

Of course, the grammarians used these other categories too. But they became and remained, above all, the men of *ratio* and *regulae*, which met the needs of the new profession ideally: what better basis could there be, for the authority that the grammarians required, than rules grounded in the nature of the language itself, something stable and objectively valid, in contrast to *auctoritas* and *consuetudo*, things subject to the variations of authorial whim or fashion? Moreover, *ratio* carried with it an advantage for the individual grammarian, beyond what might be called its general advantage

for the profession. *Consuetudo* and *auctoritas* were things given — they were there before one's eyes, they wore their significance on their faces, they were accessible to everyone; but the nature of the language was deep, not all the rules were plain and simple, there were difficulties to solve and new rules to formulate — all of which gave scope to the exercise of one's wits and occasioned the bravura displays of ingenuity which could build a reputation and make for success. For self-made men in a self-made profession, *ratio* could scarcely be bettered.

Now someone like Gellius could no doubt have an immense amount of fun with all this. So, for example, one of his vignettes (*Noctes Atticae* 14.5) is a marvelous burlesque, which shows two famous grammarians of Rome having a very heated and very public argument over the correct form for the vocative of *egregius* — was it *egregi* or *egregie*? The two men all but come to blows, each one clinging to the rule he had formulated as though his life depended on it — as in a sense it did. Or take the chapter in which Gellius tells of one of his own arguments with a grammarian (*Noctes Atticae* 15.9). In the course of the argument, Gellius amuses himself by making up a rule on the spur of the moment to suit his case, and then sends the grammarian off with a derisive parting shot: the principle that I have just given you is wrong, Gellius tells him, but you cannot *prove* that it is wrong. The implication is clear: the vaunted, objective validity of *ratio* is something of a fraud; anyone can play that sort of game.¹²

But such mockery was easy, and from set purpose ignored the real and remarkable achievement of the grammarians in making the language an object of coherent study; and in any case, Gellius was clearly fighting a rear-guard action. By his time the grammarians were firmly entrenched: they had used *ratio* to carve out a niche for themselves in a cultural system to which they were relative newcomers, and in the process had gained a prestige which Gellius himself acknowledges even in the act of despising it. This remarkable success was in no way diminished over the following centuries: the grammatical literature grew, there were refinements or variations in points of detail among which one could pick and choose — in short, there *now* was a tradition to which one could point, as one late grammarian does with pride and not a little complacency, a tradition which "the brilliance of human talent has brought to a state of high polish."¹³ It is worth noting that these are distinctly not the words of a man who feels himself crushed or paralyzed by his tradition: quite the opposite, he revels in it and is buoyed up by it. By the fourth and fifth centuries, the conventions are no

longer 'new-fangled' by any reckoning; but their original power and authority remain: there are the same conceptual categories, the same emphasis on *ratio*, the same confidence in the system's validity and stability that had originally given the profession a firm place to stand. It is all something very much to be prized — and defended.

To round off this first part of the paper, then, I would like briefly to illustrate the mind-set of the profession from one of its typical members, Pompeius. Pompeius taught in Africa in the late fifth or early sixth century; we know him through his commentary on the *ars* of Donatus, which itself dates from the middle of the fourth century. I have chosen Pompeius because of the one characteristic that sets his work apart from other Latin grammatical texts. It is demonstrably the work of a man *talking*, with his words taken down by a stenographer; and not just talking, but talking freely, spontaneously, rambling on as his thoughts bubble to the surface, pursuing tangents, sometimes changing direction in mid-sentence, as he instructs an audience that is imagined to consist of another grammarian like himself.¹⁴ It is the value of Pompeius that his talk has none of the artifice of poised reflection, so that as he flows along, for the more than 200 closely printed pages in Keil's edition, he quite unself-consciously reveals the things that matter most to him.

Above all, there is the demand for clarity, precision, and logic that runs throughout the work. For example, when Donatus or some earlier grammarian is praised, it is typically for economy and exactness; conversely, when Donatus is criticized, the fault is usually superfluity or confusion in presentation, or imprecision in a definition. Pompeius occasionally softens such criticisms, where Donatus is concerned, by magisterially assuring the reader that Donatus really did know what he was talking about, even if he expressed himself less well than he should have. But he is unforgiving when he finds faults of logic, in explanations that lay themselves open to a *reductio ad absurdum* or are internally inconsistent. What does not have *ratio* can easily be dismissed: but what *ratio* *exigit*, what 'reason demands', is codified in the *ars*, to produce the *rigor regularum*. It is consistent that, when considering the etymology of the term *ars* itself, Pompeius should prefer the derivation from the Latin adjective *artus*, because of the power of the *ars* to embrace so many aspects of the language with its *artis praeceptis*, 'tight' or 'firm precepts'. Surrounded by these precepts, Pompeius is conscious of the special sphere of expertise that the *ars* defines for him and other grammarians, and this fortification fills him with exuberant

confidence: so, for example, he can differentiate between the definitions of the noun according to the grammarians and according to the philosophers, and dismiss the latter's as *ridiculum*.

The verdict *ridiculum* is characteristic of Pompeius' magisterial tone, as he makes his way supported by the traditional doctrine of his profession, taking delight in that support and in the certain belief that on any given point he can separate the precious metal in one vein of the tradition from the fool's gold in another. Criticism is meted out with a curt "*stultum*", or (if the victim is lucky) a simple "*falsum*", and he adjudicates firmly and surely between competing views. He is plainly satisfied when the *maiores*, 'the ancients' — that is, the classical authors — can be thought to have followed *ratio* in their use of language — which is to say that he is satisfied when those authors can be thought to have behaved like him and his predecessors. But when their *auctoritas* goes against the strong rules which he has inherited, his satisfaction gives way to stern warnings against their blunders.

In fact, Pompeius is confident that we have come a long way in our understanding since the time of 'the ancients', and that progress is being made all the time. So on one occasion he praises Donatus for having laid down the law, to resolve the *confusiones antiquitatis*, 'confusions of antiquity' (GL 5:237.11-22); and in just the same way Pompeius himself later produces a new rule with a flourish, to resolve what he calls a 'great difficulty' (GL 5:242.15ff). On such occasions, we see Pompeius taking his place in the authoritative tradition and identifying intimately with it. He is ready, not surprisingly, to make the tradition's strength his own: when he is dealing with a tricky question of declension and proudly says, "I have *three* rules" (GL 5:191.16ff), he seems quite oblivious of the fact that the rules are not really 'his' but belong to Donatus. Yet before we conclude that he is simply pilfering from Donatus we should note that he is elsewhere just as ready to identify with the vulnerability of the inherited doctrine as with its strength. When he comes to deal with certain impersonal verbs, he realizes that his comments appear to contradict something that he has said previously, and goes on to explain why he has not made an error after all: "I was correct in what I said before", he says, "and I am correct in what I have said now" (GL 5:230.19ff). The noteworthy point is that the lapse into inconsistency is in fact due to Donatus, whom he is following: but instead of attributing the contradiction to Donatus and dealing with it in those terms, Pompeius treats the lapse as his *own*, and defends himself.

This need for self-defense is itself virtually a reflex, and is inseparable from Pompeius' magisterial tone. The confidence with which he passes his verdict *stultum* is constantly shadowed by the anxiety with which he contemplates an attack on his own expertise: the avoidance of 'captious criticism', *calumnia*, and the demonstration that he is not guilty of 'ignorance', *imperitia*, are leit-motifs of the commentary. We hear a hint of this in the many passages where he anticipates an objection or a counter-example that can upset his *ratio*. It can be heard elsewhere, in the constant warnings that Pompeius gives to his alter ego, the grammarian he imagines as his audience, to prepare him for the situations in which he can expect his judgment and expertise to be challenged. In short, there is everywhere that mixture of tension and self-satisfaction that is the sure sign of a man staking out his own territory.

Although they lie especially close to the surface in Pompeius' garrulous work, the same characteristics are found in the texts of the other late antique grammarians: the admiration for the rational ordering of the language's 'nature' and for the greater sophistication, relative to 'the ancients', which it has brought; the confidence that one could apply one's learning and reason to decide between competing views, or add a more solid piece here and there to the great edifice, and so leave one's mark on the tradition even as one merged with it; and the anxious need to protect the 'nature' of the language — and so, one's own expertise — from assault. There was in all this a nice cooperation between the grammarian and his tradition. The tradition fortified the grammarian in the authority and security of his niche; the grammarian preserved the tradition and paid it the compliment of his improvements. The grammarian was certainly not about to upset the tradition in any basic and general way, or be encouraged to do so by his fellows: the obvious urge to be right was independent of any drive to say what was both true and fundamentally new, in the conception of the language or the methods of dealing with it. In its broad outlines, and in much of its detail, the truth had already been found by "the brilliance of human talent". It is worth remembering that even the most significant innovation in the late antique *ars* — Priscian's treatment of syntax — is not presented as an innovation at all — a new way of thinking about the language — but as an infusion of earlier learning from a branch of the tradition (in this case, the Greek branch) neglected by his Latin predecessors (*GL* 2.2.2ff): what had worked before would continue to work, but would work even better for the adjustment.

By continuing to work, the tradition continued to provide the grammarian with a position of strength. This position was not an abstraction, but an important social fact.¹⁵ Although by late antiquity very few grammarians were men of humble origins, those who were could win, through the profession, an honorable status that would otherwise have been very difficult to come by; and the typical member of the profession — a man of respectable but undistinguished family — would become a man of consequence in his town. To be called a grammarian was itself a mark of respect: the title could carry with it various legal privileges,¹⁶ and the reputation won as a grammarian was a precious commodity. It provided the 'great name' that could be boasted on one's epitaph. It was something on which one's native town could preen itself, whether one taught at home or abroad. It might even catch the ear of the emperor. With such interests at stake, the grammarians were likely to do all that they could to see that the tradition continued to work. But as reference to their social standing reminds us, the grammarians' position of strength was embedded in a larger structure of status and honor. This brings us to the second set of interests that must be considered, the interests of educated society at large, on which I can be more brief.

In one of his early works St. Augustine has occasion to remark on the education of his cousins — or rather, their lack of education, since, as he puts it, they had "suffered not even a grammarian" (*De beata vita* 1.6). Such a statement revealed a good deal about the mens' linguistic and literary attainments; but it revealed just as much about their standing as respectable persons, as respect was reckoned in the world. To make such a statement matter-of-factly, as Augustine did, without blush or scorn, was a clear sign that one was turning one's back on the secular culture of prestige. It was a move that very few of Augustine's contemporaries, whether pagan or Christian, were prepared to make. By the time one reached the age at which Augustine wrote those words, a quarter century of conditioning would have taken place, forming assumptions of prestige and privilege that would have become second nature. These reflex assumptions are found everywhere, from the common document we will consider shortly — the letter of recommendation — to more unexpected or oblique forms: for example, the knowledge that a reference to one's education was an item appropriately included in a legal appeal, as the basis for a claim to special consideration; or the casual assumption that educated men, even if pagan, would be appropriate judges in a religious debate between Mani and a Christian bishop, by virtue of their cultural authority and social standing.

This cocoon of assumptions was formed by a system of schools that was markedly exclusive in its social organization (for the following, see esp. Jones 1964:997-98, Booth 1979a & b, and Kaster 1983). On the one hand, there was the population at large, massively illiterate, served — to the extent that it was served at all — by the 'schools of letters' (*ludi litterarii*). Institutions of low prestige which provided a general, utilitarian literacy. On the other hand, there was the tiny number of those whose circumstances gave them access to the liberal schools of grammar and rhetoric, who would learn their elementary letters at home or in the lower reaches of the grammarian's school, and who would thus meet the grammarian as their first teacher. A very few students who began in the low prestige *ludus* might cross the institutional divide and continue in the schools of grammar and rhetoric: so Augustine seems to have done, though only through the extraordinary sacrifices of his father and the timely benefaction of a family connection. But the typical product of the schools of liberal letters was completely insulated by his experience from contact with the lower orders, as the teachers of liberal letters were distinguished by their higher fees and legal privileges from the common *magister ludi*.

The radical exclusiveness of the high literary culture had at least one consequence that is relevant to our subject: the recurrence of 'letters', or the like, as one of the three or four most important marks of status — what Paulinus of Nola means, for example, when he refers to "office, family, and letters" as the "tokens of prestige in the world" (*Carmina* 24.481-82), or what St. Jerome has in mind when he thinks of the "man who is noble, eloquent, and wealthy", a vivid figure flanked by an "accompaniment of the powerful", set off against the backdrop of the "mob" (*Epistulae* 66.6). At one extreme, the possession of 'letters' would provide eminence at the tomb, if nowhere else — a fact which accounts for the scores of funeral inscriptions that record the attainments of children or youths, as pathetic reminders of dignity achieved and promise cut short. At the other extreme, one's literary culture followed one through life, to be included regularly, for example, on inscriptions honoring men who had gone on to hold the highest offices of state. On such occasions 'letters' are joined with other virtues such as men might claim, like *iustitia* or *integritas*:¹⁷ the union with 'justice' and 'integrity' is not as strange as it might first seem, for the literary culture was itself a guarantee of virtue, its acquisition a sign that one possessed the discipline, the appetite for toil, and the other ethical qualities that marked a man fit to share in the burden of government. *Doctrina* pre-

sumed *mores*, to be a scholar presumed that one was the right sort, a gentleman. 'Letters' validated claims to status, both moral status and social status — although the two were hardly separate in the eyes of the liberally educated man: the learned were, simply, the good; the uneducated were the *inertes*, the 'crude and slothful'.

Such assumptions did not undergo very deep or broad changes as more of the educated came to be Christians. We can listen to a child pray at his baptism, "Lord, give me the grace of good understanding, that I might learn my letters and gain the upper hand over my fellows", before he is taught his ABCs by his uncle and is sent off to the grammarian's school (Eustratius presbyter, *vita Eutychii* 8 [*Patrologia Graeca* 86²:2284A]). With that prayer in mind, we can perhaps find it a bit less startling to see the old commonplace — that the educated are as superior to the ignorant as human beings are to beasts — emerge, as it does, from under the pen of a Christian bishop (Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae* 4.17.2). Some Christians, to be sure, hit upon more subtle ways of accommodating their prized literacy to their faith, the better to face the canonical reminder that Peter and John were illiterates (*Acts* 4:13) or the claim of Paul to be "ignorant in speech, but not in understanding" (2 *Cor* 11:6); and a few — most notably, in the West, Jerome and Augustine — were unable to reach any comfortable accommodation at all, and were haunted all their lives by the division between what they had been and what they had become. But for the great majority who passed their lives in the world, the culture of liberal letters formed a common ground of shared prestige, where they could slip into a "respectable, aristocratic Christianity".¹⁸ Even if that prestige and its pride were thought by some to produce rank weeds, they struck their roots deep, and were no more easily wrenched out and tossed aside than were the claims of birth and wealth.

All this is by way of suggesting that the mainstream of educated society would have taken a very lively interest indeed in the maintenance of the grammarian's tradition: for in terms of its own standing, this very narrow and very self-conscious elite had scarcely less invested in the continuity of that tradition than did the grammarians themselves. Set at the foundation of liberal studies, the tradition sustained the educated layman in his superiority at the same time that it elevated the professional: in this way the interests of the two groups tended to come together. Still, the force of these converging interests would perhaps not have been so strong if they had not met directly, to combine with and re-inforce each other, in the personal

relations between the grammarians and their patrons. In order to complete our sketch, then, we need to look briefly at these relations.

To begin with, we need to bear in mind that the grammarian's *schola* was basically a one-man operation. There was no "Office of Admissions", no administration, no institutional buffer between the grammarian and the lay public, no real institutional continuity beyond the grammarian himself. This meant, first, that everything the teacher had, he had to get for himself. Most fundamentally, students: every teacher had to recruit his own students, one by one, and this he could only do by establishing personal relations with the families of each. This in turn could only be done through his own previous acquaintance with the family or through the intervention of a well-disposed third party — a father or some other patron willing to urge other fathers to send their sons to one's school. At this most basic level, then, one was personally and directly dependent on the good opinion and judgment of others outside the profession. The same was true wherever one turned in one's professional life. If, for example, one was teaching in a town that used some of its public funds to pay selected teachers a salary over and above the fees collected from students, and if one wanted a salary like that for oneself, it would be necessary to have the town council pass a decree to that effect in one's favor: success here depended on one's general reputation and especially on the recommendation of well-placed supporters among the quality of the town. And so it went, whenever a question of merit or competence might arise: in a world without specialized training or objective certification of any kind, one was held to be competent because the community at large believed one was competent, and above all because respected and prominent members of the community said one was competent. This situation had two important consequences, one concerned with the way one went about gaining patrons, the other concerned with the patrons' expectations and their notion of competence.

In coming to the notice of prospective patrons, the grammarian was at something of a disadvantage compared with, say, a rhetorician, who would make his name in part by the display of his talents in public contests: such opportunities for star-turns were part of the greater visibility which rhetors and sophists enjoyed more generally. In this respect, as in others, the grammarian's trajectory was lower. His expertise did not lend itself to public displays from which stellar reputations could be won; instead, his expertise tended toward displays in private settings, and toward the less dramatic accumulation of a reputation through contacts made face-to-face. As a

result, we commonly see the grammarian playing the part of a private consultant: he receives some composition of a patron which he is asked to inspect and approve; he offers advice on a question concerned with a moral or philosophical nicety; he is invited for a holiday on a patron's country estate, where he can expect to pass the time in the conversations of learned leisure. In all such transactions, the grammarian's *mores* were as much on display as his learning: the patron could quickly judge whether or not the man before him was a gentleman and a scholar — with the emphasis on 'gentleman'.

That emphasis was due to the patron's expectations and his notion of competence — a notion which stressed personal qualities as much as, if not more than, it stressed technical attainments. We see these expectations at work most vividly in letters of recommendation. In these documents the patrons speak of the teachers in much the same way that they speak of other dependents, and — not very remarkably — they single out for praise the attributes they value in themselves: the language of patronage runs to the consideration of birth — where that is available for praise — to *doctrina*, and to *mores*. *Doctrina*, which is interchangeable with *memoria*, 'memory', means the accumulation of what has been known and thought, and what is, accordingly, unthreatening. *Mores* characteristically means such qualities as modesty or virtuous restraint or diligence — qualities, that is, which assure that the man being commended knows his place and will work hard in it. What is conspicuously missing is any sort of premium placed on originality: the vocabulary of the patron did not typically include the command, "Astonish me!"

That vocabulary is instead summed up in a letter of recommendation which can stand as a concise example of them all, written by one patron to another, prospective patron, on behalf of a grammarian who was changing his place of teaching. It says: "As for the grammarian [Alexander], consider him a good man and one very well versed in literature, and enroll him among those who know how to be a friend" (Libanius, *Epistulae* 1256.3). The reference to the grammarian's competence, in the narrow, modern sense — his knowledge of his subject — is enclosed, and almost lost, between two ethical judgments, that he is a 'good man' and one 'who knows how to be a friend'. Implied in those judgments is an important promise: that the grammarian Alexander will fit snugly into the new patron's network of connections and clients, his 'friends'. If successful, the letter would ease Alexander into a position of mutual obligation and genteel dependence, as the lesser member of the relationship. The patron could presume-

bly be relied on, for example, to spread the word among his connections in order to guarantee Alexander a healthy number of students in his new position. In return, Alexander could be relied on, if needed, to put his knowledge at the patron's disposal, and more generally to play the part of a friend, by spreading the word of his patron's loyalty and influence. In short, the letter promised that the grammarian would fit in, and not disrupt the stately world in which learned gentlemen lived: it promised that the grammarian would not be insolent, either in the common sense of the word, or in the root sense — untoward in behavior or thought.

Such a relationship would have exercised a powerful constraint — though I should quickly add that probably neither party to the relationship was conscious of the constraint. The patron was merely following the pattern set by values that were both ancient and much to his advantage; the grammarian, for his part, would probably have shared much the same values and certainly derived considerable advantage in his turn. The interests of the professional and the layman met and mingled on this common ground; and the common ground exerted a strong gravitational pull: the profession would be less free to follow its own lead (for better or worse, toward new understanding or the merely fashionable), less free to spin off in the direction of more esoteric concerns or become fragmented (in the manner of many modern professions) in proliferating sub-specialties and techniques.

I hope that this brief sketch has suggested a few of the reasons why the grammarians' tradition remained as it was for so long. In particular, I hope that the sketch has suggested that the tradition remained as it was, not because it was exhausted, but because it was too buoyantly self-confident and because, in a social sense, it was too prosperous and worked too well. Changed circumstances might bring, in time, different conceptual challenges for it to meet and different interests for it to serve: then one could look for innovation. But in the still very 'classical' world of late antiquity, that time was not yet.

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NOTES

- 1) As, e.g., Holtz (1981) demonstrates in his subtle analyses of Donatus' doctrine concerning the pronoun and the *virtutes orationis*, and the relation of that doctrine to the tradition.
- 2) To note only some of the more important, representative criticisms within the classical tradition itself: Seneca, *Epistulae* 88, 108, 30ff (cf. *Epistulae* 58); Valerius Probus *ap. Aulus Gellius, Noctes Atticae* 13.2; Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 1.41-320; Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.24.12-13 (with Kaster 1980); and see further below, on Gellius.
- 3) *Noctes Atticae* 17.2.15: ... *qui nova instituta grammaticorum in reviviscere videtur observant*.
- 4) *Noctes Atticae* 1.7.17 (thereafter simply *videtur*). Cf. the phrase *semiductus grammaticus* at *Noctes Atticae* 15.9.6. The place of learning in the larger competition for prestige and social standing among Gellius' contemporaries is well described by Champlin (1980:45ff).
- 5) At *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.12.17 (probably to be dated to the 80s B.C.). The anonymous author of that treatise says that he intends to write an *ars*; we do not know if that intention was carried out; but in any case Cicero, writing in 55 B.C., could include grammar among the branches of learning that had been *conclusa artibus* (*De oratore* 1.42.187).
- 6) Active under the emperors Tiberius and Claudius; see Suetonius, *De grammaticis* 23, with Christes (1979:98ff).
- 7) On the date of the emergence of the grammarian's school, see esp. Booth (1978). On the structural differentiation of the schools of liberal studies, in a systematic account of institutional change at Rome in the first century B.C., see Hopkins (1978:76ff), and on the competition within the aristocracy as a spur to the development of the liberal schools, see the remarks of Wallace-Hadrill (1983:30ff). For the generally low social standing of the early grammarians at Rome, see esp. Suetonius, *De grammaticis*, and, more generally, Christes (1979). For the curriculum of the grammarian's school, the best and most recent surveys are by Marrou (1965), Clarke (1971), Bonner (1977).
- 8) Cf. Holtz (1981) regretting the "subordination de la grammaire (linguistique) aux nécessités de l'école antique" and the consequent absence of a 'proper' grammatical science.
- 9) For *natura*, *analogia* / *ratio*, *consuetudo*, and *auctoritas*, the most venerable Latin text is Varro frag. 115 (in Goetz and Schoell 1910), where *ratio* and *analogia* are used interchangeably; the best commentary on the passage is given by Barwick (1922:183-84), pointing out the particularly close link between *natura* and *analogia*. Also important are Siebenborn (1976) for the Greek background and Blank (1982) for the importance of 'nature'. An accessible and useful introduction is provided by Bonner (1977:204-08).
- 10) On the method of analogy, see esp. Siebenborn (1976:63ff); cf. also the subsequent studies of Erbse (1980) and Ax (1982).
- 11) For the ways in which the Latin scholars of the first century B.C. and first century A.D. balanced the components of the language, the survey of Barwick (1922:203-15) remains fundamental.
- 12) For Gellius and the *grammatici*, beyond the chapters already noted, see *Noctes Atticae* 4.1, 5.4, 6.17, 8.10 praef., 13.3, 13.31, 16.6, 18.6, 18.14, 19.10, 20.10.
- 13) Diomedes (*GL* 1.299.2-3) *artem merae Latinitatis puraeque eloquentiae magistrum ... humanae solertiae claritas expolivit*.

14) The basically oral character of Pompeius' work was correctly seen by Holtz (1971:50, a good and brief characterization, and 1981:236). For more detailed analysis of Pompeius' method and audience, and for references — too numerous to repeat here — to passages that reveal the characteristics noted in the following paragraphs, see Chap. IV in Kaster (1987).

15) The best brief survey of the teachers' social circumstances in late antiquity is provided by Jones (1964:998ff).

16) Most importantly, the immunities bestowed by the emperors, which exempted teachers of liberal studies from the obligation to perform various financial or personal services for the local or imperial government. Begun in the late first century, these immunities were continued through late antiquity; the most important texts for the latter period are: *Codex Theodosianus* 13.3.1 (A.D. 321/4) + 13.3.3. (A.D. 333), 11.16.15 (A.D. 382) (cf. 11.16.18 [A.D. 390]) 13.3.16-17 (A.D. 414), 13.3.18 (A.D. 427). These privileges had long since been limited to the teachers of liberal letters (the grammarian and rhetor, as opposed to the mere *magister ludi*, see below): *Digesta* 50.4.11 (Modestinus); cf. 50.5.2 (ps.-Ulpianus); 8.

17) Thus *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL) 6.1751: *nobilissis cultum, literarum et eloquentiae homini, auctoritatis exemplo, ... humanitatis auctori, moderatioris patrono, devotionis antistiti*; 6.1772: *eloquentia, iustitia, integritate, auctoritate praestanti, in omni denique virtute perfecti*; and cf. CIL 6.1698, 1735.

18) See Brown's study (1972) of the Christianization of the Roman aristocracy (the phrase quoted in the text appears on p.177).

SUMMARY

The Latin grammarians of late antiquity seem to personify the cultural stagnation and decline that have commonly been thought to typify the age. Resting upon conceptual foundations that had been laid centuries earlier and repeating the same doctrine from generation to generation, their texts appear by and large to be wholly untouched by originality. This paper addresses the question: why was this so? To suggest one answer to this question, the argument begins from the premise that the tradition remained as stable as it did because it continued to satisfy certain needs; the paper then goes on to consider these needs and their interaction.

First, there are the needs of the grammarians themselves. From the beginnings of the profession's history in the first century B.C. and first century A.D., when the grammarians' schools first emerged as distinct institutions at Rome, the grammarians' doctrine, with its emphasis on the rational analysis of the language's 'nature', provided them with the authority they needed to prescribe correct speech for the social and cultural elite that they served. Once this exercise of reason had made a place for the grammarians as relative newcomers to the world of liberal letters, the doctrine was some-

thing to be prized and defended: the vivid instruction of the late antique grammarian Pompeius shows us a man fortified and buoyed up by his profession's tradition, eager to assert its soundness or to add an improving touch here or there — and without the least wish or incentive to attempt some fundamental innovation: for to do so would be to tamper with the honorable social position that the profession provided. At the same time, the mainstream of the educated elite — the second group whose needs must be considered — would themselves have had little reason to encourage innovation: since a liberal education, based of course on grammar, had come to be one of the most important marks of social — and even moral — status, the honorable position of the elite was as much tied as the grammarians' to the maintenance of the traditional doctrine. As a result, when the interests of the grammarians and the educated elite met in the institution of patronage, on which all teachers depended, the stability of the tradition was reinforced: for patrons did not seek innovative brilliance in their dependents, nor did they even look primarily for technical competence; they rather looked first for traditionally valued personal qualities like modesty and diligence, and other such qualities that would tend to preserve the *status quo*.

RÉSUMÉ

Les grammairiens latins de la Basse-Antiquité personnifient, semble-t-il, la stagnation et le déclin culturels, considérés en général comme caractéristique de cette période. Reposant sur des fondements conceptuels établis des siècles plus tôt et reprenant la même doctrine de génération en génération, leurs textes paraissent, à tout prendre, dépourvus de toute originalité. La question que nous posons ici: pourquoi en fut-il ainsi? Pour suggérer une réponse, nous partons de la prémisse suivante: si la tradition resta stable à ce point, c'est parce qu'elle satisfait encore bien certains besoins; ce sont ces besoins, et leur interaction, que nous examinons ensuite.

Il y a d'abord les besoins des grammairiens eux-mêmes. Depuis les débuts de l'histoire de cette 'profession', au premier siècle avant notre ère et au premier siècle après notre ère, période où apparemment à Rome, en tant qu'institutions différenciées, les écoles des grammairiens, la doctrine des grammairiens, qui mettait l'accent sur l'analyse rationnelle de la 'nature' de la langue, fournissait à ces spécialistes l'autorité dont ils avaient besoin pour prescrire un parler correct à l'élite sociale et culturelle qu'ils servaient.

A partir du moment où ces exercices de raison avaient ménagé une place aux grammairiens, plus ou moins nouveaux venus dans le monde des lettres, la doctrine devenait quelque chose qu'il fallait prôner et défendre: le vivant enseignement que nous donne le grammairien de la Basse-Antiquité Pompéius nous révèle un homme conforté et soutenu par la tradition de sa profession, avide d'en affirmer la solidité ou de lui donner ici ou là une touche d'amélioration, mais sans souhaiter ou encourager le moins du monde quelque tentative d'innovation fondamentale: c'eût été là toucher à la position sociale, fort honorable, que garantissait la profession. En même temps, le courant principal de l'élite cultivée — le second groupe dont il faut tenir compte — n'aurait eu lui-même guère de raisons d'encourager l'innovation: étant donné qu'une éducation libérale, fondée bien entendu sur la grammaire, était devenue l'une des traits principaux du statut social — et donc moral —, la position avantageuse de l'élite était aussi liée que celle des grammairiens au maintien de la doctrine traditionnelle. En conséquence, les intérêts des grammairiens et ceux de l'élite se rejoignent dans l'institution du patronage, dont dépendaient tous les enseignants, la stabilité de la tradition s'en trouve renforcée; car des 'patrons' ne cherchaient pas, chez leurs 'clients', le brillant de l'innovation, ni même avant tout la compétence technique; ce qu'ils voulaient plutôt, c'étaient des qualités personnelles traditionnellement reconnues, telles que la modestie et l'application, ou des qualités tendant à préserver le *status quo*.

THE *TEKHNĒ GRAMMATIKĒ* OF DIONYSIUS THRAX

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Introduction

The *Tekhnē Grammatikē* ("Art of Grammar") of Dionysius Thrax is usually credited in histories of linguistics with being the first surviving grammar of the Greek language (2nd-1st century B.C.). However, since antiquity, there have been disputes as to the date and the authorship, and recently these have been given new life by the work of Di Benedetto (1958-59, 1973). The *Tekhnē* as it appears in Uhlig's edition of 1883 (Uhlig's text has been followed, with one or two exceptions, in this translation) comprises 20 sections — less than 3000 words of Greek text. It starts by giving a definition of grammar (section 1), and goes on to devote nine short sections successively to reading, accent, punctuation, rhapsody, the Greek letters (*stoikheia*), and syllables. The rest of the work is a description of the 'parts of speech' or 'parts of the sentence' (sections 11-20). The descriptive part of each section is characteristically very brief, but most sections include examples.

One of the main reasons why doubt has been cast on the attribution of the *Tekhnē*, as described above, to one author is the fact that the enumeration of the parts of grammar in section 1 is not developed as we might expect it to be in the remainder of the work. The definition of grammar and the description of its divisions are in tune with the literary approach of the Alexandrian scholars (see below), that is, they suggest that grammar should be directed towards giving a proper understanding and appreciation of literary texts. Sections 2-4 seem to be relevant to this, listing and developing the factors to be observed in reading aloud. Section 5 is an oddity; some have treated it as an interpolation, while others have assumed that a passage has been lost, so that the relevance of the section as it stands is obscured. Sec-