

INTRODUCTION

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF AULUS GELLIUS

COMPARATIVELY little is known about Aulus Gellius, the author of the *Noctes Atticae*, and our sources of information are almost entirely his own writings. There is difference of opinion as to the date and the place of his birth and of his death, as to the time and duration of his residence in Athens, and as to the time of his appointment as *iudex* and the beginning of his legal career. Opinions regarding these moot points are based upon his own statements or on the certain dates—also comparatively few in number—in the lives of various personages whom he mentions in the *Noctes*; and the estimates of different scholars vary greatly.

The *gens Gellia* was a clan of Samnite origin, which seems to have taken up its residence in Rome soon after the close of the second Punic war. Two generals of the family, Staius Gellius and Gellius Egnatius, fought against the Romans, the former in the first, the latter in the second Samnite war. The one was defeated and taken prisoner in 305 B.C.,¹ the other lost his life in the battle of Sentinum in 295.² At Rome one branch of the

¹ Livy, ix, 44. 13.

² Livy, x. 18-29.

INTRODUCTION

family attained noble rank, if not earlier, through Lucius Gellius Publicola, who was *praetor peregrinus* in 94 B.C., consul in 72, and censor in 70.¹ It was he who proposed to the senate that the civic crown should be conferred upon Cicero, in recognition of his services in suppressing the conspiracy of Catiline. Aulus Gellius also mentions two other members of the clan: Gnaeus Gellius, a contemporary and opponent of Cato the censor,² and another Gnaeus Gellius,³ of the time of the Gracchi, who wrote a history of Rome, entitled *Annales*, extending at least to the year 145 B.C. Aulus Gellius does not claim kinship with any of these Gellii, and tells us nothing of his own rank and social position. He was evidently of a good family and possessed of considerable means, being also, perhaps, the owner of a country estate at Praeneste.⁴ He lived on terms of intimacy with many eminent men of his day, all of whom owed their distinction, at least in part, to their intellectual qualities.

The birthplace of Aulus Gellius, or Agellius, as he was miscalled in the Middle Ages,⁵ is unknown. Some have thought that he was of African origin,⁶ but this is questioned by others.⁷ He is perhaps one of the few Roman writers who were natives of the eternal city; at any rate, he was in Rome at the time when he assumed the gown of manhood, probably at the age of between fifteen and seven-

¹ v. 6. 15.

² xiv. 2. 21 and 26.

³ xviii. 12. 6.

⁴ Cf. xi. 3. 1.

⁵ By joining his praenomen *A.* with the *nomen*; cf. the reverse process in M. Accius for T. Maccius Plautus.

⁶ Sittl, *Die lok. Verschiedenheiten* (1882), p 144.

⁷ Vogel, *Jahrb. f. klass. Phil.* 127, p. 188.

INTRODUCTION

teen.¹ The year of his birth has been variously conjectured from the few certain dates of his career. We know that he was in Athens after A.D. 143, since at the time of his residence there he refers to Herodes Atticus, who was consul in that year, as *consularis vir*. At the same time he speaks of himself as *iuuenis*, from which some have inferred that he was then thirty years of age; but too much weight cannot be given to Gellius' use of *iuuenis* and *adulescens* (or *adulescentulus*). Not only are *iuuenis* and *adulescens* used loosely by the Romans in general, and applied indifferently to men between the ages of seventeen and thirty or more, but Gellius seems to use *iuuenis* in a complimentary sense and *adulescens* with some degree of depreciation or, in speaking of himself, of modesty. Thus he commonly refers to his fellow-students at Athens, and to legitimate students of philosophy in general, as *iuuenes*, while the ignorant and presuming young men whose "taking down" he describes ordinarily figure as *adulescentes*.²

The date of his birth is variously assigned to A.D. 113,³ to the early years of the second century,⁴ to 123,⁵ and to "about 130."⁶ It is certain that no part of his writing was done until the reign

¹ xviii. 4. 1.

² For example, i. 2. 3; i. 10. 1; viii. 3; ix. 15. 2; x. 19. 1; xiii. 20. 3.

³ Fritz Weiss, *Die Attischen Nächte des Aulus Gellius*, Leipzig, 1876, p. viii.

⁴ B. Romano, *Rivista di Filologia*, xlv. (1916), pp. 547 ff.

⁵ *Lectures and Essays*, 1885, p. 249 (from *Amer. Jour. of Phil.* iv. pp. 4 ff.).

⁶ Teuffel, *Römische Literatur*, 6th ed., 1913, iii., p. 95, and Pauly-Wissowa, *Realencyk. s.v. Aulus Gellius*.

INTRODUCTION

of Antonius Pius (138-161), since he always refers to Hadrian as *Divus*, and it probably continued during the first half of the principate of Marcus Aurelius (161-180). As he says nothing of the remarkable death of Peregrinus Proteus,¹ whom he knew and admired, some have assumed that he died before that event took place, in 165; but Radulfus de Diceto, writing in the early part of the thirteenth century, says: "Agellius scribit anno CLXIX."² It seems probable from the Preface to the *Noctes Atticae*, which was obviously written after the completion of that work, that Gellius died soon after completing his book, since he has not given us the continuation which he promises.³ It seems evident that at the time of writing the Preface he was in the prime of life; for his children were still continuing their education, while he himself was actively engaged in the practice of his profession, or of managing his property.⁴ On the whole, it seems probable that he was born about 123, and, if we accept the statement of de Diceto, that he died soon after 169.

Gellius pursued in the schools the usual course of study, consisting of grammar, in the Roman sense of the term, and rhetoric. Among his instructors in grammar was the celebrated Carthaginian scholar Sulpicius Apollinaris,⁵ who was also the teacher of

¹ Lucian, *De Morte Peregrini*.

² *De Viris Illust.* Radulfus is credited with using good sources (Teuffel, *Röm. Lit.* ii⁶, § 285, 3), but see Schanz-Hosius, *Röm. Lit.* iii³, p. 178, and Götz, *Ber. der Sächs. Akad.* 75 (1926).

³ *Praef.* 24.

⁴ *Praef.* 23, quantum a tuenda re familiari procurandoque cultu liberorum meorum dabitur otium.

⁵ vii. 6. 12, etc.

INTRODUCTION

the emperor Pertinax. He studied rhetoric with Antonius Julianus,¹ with Titus Castricius,² and perhaps with Cornelius Fronto.³ After completing his studies in Rome Gellius went to Athens for instruction in philosophy, and, as Nettleship thought, remained there from the age of nineteen to that of twenty-three. It is certain that he spent at least a year in Greece, since he mentions the four seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter in that connection. There is nothing, so far as I know, that indicates a longer residence; his book was merely begun in Athens,⁴ not finished there.

The question of the time of Gellius' stay in Greece is closely connected with that of his appointment as *index*.⁵ At the time of his first appointment he must have been at least twenty-five years old,⁶ although he refers to himself as *adulescens*, and it seems wholly probable that he began his legal career after returning to Rome;⁷ otherwise, since he continued to practise his profession for some time,⁸ if not to the end of his life, we must infer that his legal career was interrupted by his sojourn in Athens, which seems improbable.

Gellius' student life in Athens combined serious work with agreeable entertainment. With Calvisius Taurus he studied Plato and Aristotle, but to what

¹ ix. 15. 1; xix. 9. 2.

² xi. 13. 1.

³ ii. 26. 1; xiii. 29. 2; xix. 8. 1.

⁴ *Praef.* 4.

⁵ xiv. 2. 1; xii. 13. 1; cf. i. 22. 6. Two separate appointments are mentioned, unless Gellius is inaccurate in referring one to the praetors and the other to the consuls.

⁶ *Digest*, xlii. 1. 57; l. 4. 8.

⁷ The writer in Teuffel's *Römische Literatur* thinks it was after his visit to Athens.

⁸ See xi. 3. 1.

INTRODUCTION

extent is uncertain. He seems to have seen a good deal of Peregrinus Proteus, of whom he gives us a very different impression from that conveyed by Lucian, and he was on intimate terms with the famous rhetorician Tiberius Claudius Herodes Atticus, who was afterwards, at Rome, the preceptor of Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius.¹ With his fellow-students he enjoyed the hospitality of Herodes at his villa at Cephisia and elsewhere. He made an excursion to Aegina with his comrades,² and with Calvisius Taurus a trip to Delphi.³ Every week the young philosophers met at dinner, where they indulged in various intellectual diversions.⁴

After his return to Rome Gellius continued his interest in philosophy and other learning, and it was there that he became intimate with Favorinus, the friend of the emperor Hadrian.⁵ He speaks with particular admiration of Favorinus, whose Παντοδαπή Ἰστορία may have suggested the form of the *Noctes Atticae*, and perhaps have furnished some of its material. He was intimate also with the poets Julius Paulus⁶ and Annianus,⁷ and with other intellectual men of the time.

The *Noctes Atticae* is a collection of interesting notes on grammar, public and private antiquities, history and biography, philosophy (including natural philosophy), points of law, text criticism, literary criticism, and various other topics. It gives us valuable information in many fields of knowledge,

¹ *Scr. Hist. Aug., vita M. Anton.* ii. 4 (*L.C.L.* i. p. 136),
v. *Ver.* ii. 5 (*L.C.L.* i. p. 210).

² ii. 21. 1.

³ xii. 5. 1.

⁴ xv. 2, 3.

⁵ *Scr. Hist. Aug., vita Hadr.* xiv. 12 (i. p. 49 *L.C.L.*).

⁶ xix. 7. 1.

⁷ xx. 8. 1-2.

INTRODUCTION

and it contains extracts from a great number of Greek and Roman writers (275 are mentioned by name), the works of many of whom are otherwise wholly or in great part lost. While his ability is only moderate, Gellius is in the main accurate and conscientious, although he sometimes gives the impression that he has consulted original authorities when in fact he took his material at second hand. It is believed that he cites from no one whom he does not mention at least once by name, but it is not certain that this applies to the single works of a writer; it does not apply to his contemporaries. He seems to have consulted no authority earlier than Varro (116-28 B.C.), and often to have resorted for his quotations from earlier writers to commentaries and grammatical works. He sometimes tries to pass off the learning of others as his own, particularly in the case of his contemporaries.¹

The style of Gellius is sometimes obscure, and although he deprecates the use of obsolete words, his own writings are by no means free from unusual and archaic words and expressions.² His faults are largely those of the time in which he lived, when the reaction which led to the so-called Silver Latin had come to an end and an archaistic tendency had taken its place. He frequently cites Cicero and Virgil, and always speaks of them with respect, but his authorities for the use of the Latin language are in large part the writers of the ante-classical period.

¹ For fuller details see Nettleship, *l.c.* (p. xiii, n. 5) *passim*.

² See Knapp, *Archaism in A. Gellius*, *Class. Stud. in hon. of H. Drisler*, New York and London, 1894; Foster, *Studies in Archaism in A. Gellius*, Columbia Univ. Diss., New York, 1912.

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



The Complete Text can be found on our CD:
Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature
which can be purchased on our Website :
www.Brainfly.net

or

by sending **\$64.95** in check or money order to :
Brainfly Inc.
5100 Garfield Ave. #46
Sacramento CA 95841-3839

TEACHER'S DISCOUNT:

If you are a **TEACHER** you can take advantage of our teacher's discount. Click on **Teachers Discount** on our website (www.Brainfly.net) or **Send us \$55.95** and we will send you a full copy of *Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature* **AND** our *5000 Classics CD (a collection of over 5000 classic works of literature in electronic format (.txt))* plus our *Wholesale price list*.

If you have any suggestions such as books you would like to see added to the collection or if you would like our wholesale prices list please send us an email to:

webcomments@brainfly.net