THE ACADEMY IN THE MIDDLE PLATONIC PERIOD

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It is the purpose of this paper to enquire into two related questions: first, whether there was, during the period from the capture of Athens by Mithridates of Pontus in 88 B.C. down to the time of Plotinus in the mid-third century A.D., any physical entity that can properly be described as a Platonic Academy, and any succession of figures who can be described as Heads of such an institution; and secondly, if not, what were the conditions of instruction in Platonism during this period?[1]

At least since the exhaustive investigations of Zumpt, published in 1844[2], it has been generally accepted by historians of philosophy that the Platonic Academy maintained a continuous existence from Plato's own time down to late antiquity, until, indeed, Justinian closed the Academy in 529 A.D.[3] John Lynch, in his work mentioned above, has aimed some shrewd blows at this doctrine, but his suggestions deserve further elaboration, and the consequences of them for the nature of instruction and the conditions of succession within the Platonist movement need to be drawn out more fully. I shall here be concerned with the conditions of continuity in a philosophical school. How is authority maintained? How is orthodoxy preserved? How, in the absence of a system of 'certification', is it decided who is a Platonist and who is not? Further, how does one attach oneself to a teacher? How does one live? How does he live? Are there fees? Are there criteria of success or failure in the course? To many of these obvious and basic questions there are, I fear, no answers based upon clear evidence, but at least the asking of them may in itself turn up a few pertinent facts.

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1. I must acknowledge at the outset my debt to the lucid investigations of John Lynch, in his book *Aristotle's School* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972). Although primarily concerned with the fate of the Peripatos, his remarks on the nature and fate of the Academy (esp. pp. 54-67 and 177-89) first provoked me to consider the present question.
2. "Über den Bestand der philosophischen Schulen in Athen und die Succession der Scholarchen", *Abhandlungen der königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (1844), pp. 27-119.
3. Though even the significance of this sanctified date has been cogently challenged by Alan Cameron, "The Last Days of the Academy at Athens", *Proc. of the Camb. Philol. Soc.* n.s. 15 (1969), pp. 7-29.

Dionysius, Vol. III, Dec. 1979, pp. 63-77

I am not here concerned with the Academy from the time of Plato himself to that of Philo of Larissa. That subject has been well covered by many authorities[4]. During that period there was at least, without doubt, a formal institution, through which continuity could be preserved. One thing, however, even in this period, seems to have been too readily assumed, and that is the extent of the physical plant that at any time ever accrued to Plato's foundation. Was there ever, for instance, a marble-porticoed hall, with or without upon its front the solemn adjuration ΜΗΔΕΙϹ ΑΓΕΩΜΕΤΡΗΤΟϹ ΕΙϹΙΤΩ? Most authorities would not accept the historicity of the inscription, but the existence of some substantial building housing the Platonic School seems to be a widely-held, if not always acknowledged, assumption. What the evidence, such as it is, actually points to is, on the one hand, an estate owned by Plato in Colonus, bordering on the Academy park (ὅ Κῆπος ὅ παρά τὸν Κολωνόν mentioned by Alexander Polyhistor in his *Successions of Philosophers*, *ap*. Diog. Laert. III 5), and on the other the public facilities of the Academy, the gymnasium (where we find Carneades, for instance, still lecturing in the second century B.C., DL IV 63), the groves, the walks[5]. In all of these places there were, no doubt, areas understood to be set aside for the philosophers, but all business was conducted very much in public. The library of the school presumably found its home in the house of Plato, which must have passed to the successive scholarchs[6]. Whether other members, senior or junior, lived in this house with the scholarch is not known, but it is unlikely that many could have — perhaps only the scholarch's chosen successor or favorite (which might give rise to those recurring rumors of erotic connexions between master and pupil).

I mention these points about the pre-Mithridatic Academy simply to remind the reader that there was never, even at the best

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4. *E.g.* G. C. Field, *Plato and His Contemporaries*, London, 1930; H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (Eng. trans.), London 1956; Harold Cherniss, *The Riddle of the Early Academy*, Berkeley, 1945. A useful survey of the evidence in W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy, Vol. IV*, pp. 19-24.
5. Lacydes used to lecture (ἐσχόλαζεν) in a garden in the Academy which had been laid out for him by King Attalus of Pergamum, and which came to be called the *Lacydaeum* (DL IV 60).
6. Though it must be noted that Plato's own will makes no mention of the estate at Colonus (DL III 41-2), and Arcesilaus in his will left all his property to his brother Pylades (*ibid.* IV 43). (These are the only Platonic wills we have preserved to us.) One may deduce from this that the Platonic School, unlike the Peripatos, was not deemed to be the personal property of the scholarch.

of times, such a thing as a separate 'Institute of Advanced Studies' in the Academy grove; just the estate at Colonus, and certain familiar haunts in the public park. There was plainly, however, at this time, an organised succession of scholarchs and their associates, making up an official and continuous corporate entity, from at least 347 B.C. (arrangements during Plato's lifetime were probably rather less formal) down to 88 B.C. It is only after this period that the physical nature of the 'Academy' becomes obscure.

II

What happened in 88 B.C. that led to a radical break in the tradition? We learn from Cicero (*Brutus* 306) that "at this time (*sc.* the consulship of Sulla and Gn. Pompeius, 89 B.C.) Philo, the head of the Academy, along with a group of loyal Athenians, had fled from Athens because of the Mithridatic War and had come to Rome." Philo never, it seems, returned to Athens, dying in Rome some years later. As for the Academy grove, it was laid waste by Sulla, who used its trees for timber in his siege of the city in 86 (Plut. *Sulla* 12, 1-3), and, though it was later restored, we do not hear of it being used again as a haunt of philosophers. Whether any faithful followers of Philo returned to Athens we do not know (his follower Heraclitus of Tyre is found in Alexandria in 79 B.C., Cic. *Acad. Pr.* 11), but if they did they seem to have made no impact. The man who became the dominant figure in Platonism in this period was rather Philo's dissident pupil, Antiochus of Ascalon. If we check in with him, in the winter of 79 B.C., when Cicero attended his lectures, we find quite a different arrangement in effect. Antiochus lectured, not any longer in the grove of the Academy, which was deserted, but in the Ptolemaion gymnasium in the centre of the city.[7] Cicero describes himself and his friends at the beginning of Book V of the *De Finibus* as walking out to the Academy one day after the afternoon lecture, and brooding about among the ruins. There were no ruins of buildings, we may note; just seats — "This is where Xenocrates sat", "This was Carneades' seat", and so on. We do not know what Antiochus' procedure was, though he is reported as lecturing with great eloquence (Plut. *Cic.* 4). The remarkable interpretation that he gave of Plato's doctrines

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7. The site of this has not yet been found, but it is generally agreed to have been not far from the Agora, in the present-day Plaka (Pausanias I 17.2). It was founded, probably, by Ptolemy Philometor in the 150's and almost immediately (about 141/0) attracted the attentions of philosophers (*Index Academicus* col. XXXII, p. 103 Mekler).

and of the development of philosophy since Plato does not primarily concern us now.[8] He felt justified in taking the great bulk of Stoic theory and terminology as a kind of updated version of Platonism, and thus begins, from our perspective, the pattern followed by School Platonism ever afterwards, until a serious attempt was made at the beginning of the last century by German scholars such as Schleiermacher to get back to the doctrine of Plato's dialogues.[9]

After Antiochus' death in about 67 B.C., his school was taken over by his brother Aristus, who seems to have been of no distinction as a philosopher (Plutarch, *Brutus*, 2, 2). He survived until at least 50 B.C. when Cicero visited him on his way back from governing Cilicia. By 44 B.C. Artistus had been succeeded by one Theomnestus of Naucratis, whose lectures Brutus attended in that year, while getting his forces together to face Antony. What happened to the school after this we have no idea. Possibly nothing.[10]

Our next glimpse of Platonist school activity in Athens comes from a century afterwards, when Plutarch records himself as studying under Ammonius, in 66-7 A.D. and later. Plutarch refers to himself once as 'joining the Academy' (ἐν Ακαδημεία γενόμενος, *De E ap. Delph.*, 387 F), but since this is the only possible reference to the Academy as a living institution in this whole period I am inclined to interpret the phrase metaphorically, as meaning simply 'became a Platonist' — or a more orthodox Platonist — as opposed to an enthusiast for Pythagorean number-mysticism, as he portrays himself at this time.[11] If he joined a material Academy, than I suggest it was no more than Ammonius' school, which seems to have been a fairly simple foundation.

The only occasion on which Plutarch mentions formal instruc-

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8. An attempt to evaluate Antiochus' philosophical position is made in Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, London/Cornell 1977, Ch. 2.
9. In a most useful survey of this question, E. N. Tigerstedt, *The Decline and Fall of the Neoplatonic Interpretation of Plato*, Helsinki 1974, wishes to remove this distinction from Schleiermacher, and push it back to Jean de Serres (1540-98), *op. cit.* pp. 39-43.
10. The heroic effort of Zumpt (see above, n. 1) to find a 'golden chain' of scholarchs to preside over a putative Academy during these centuries has had a lasting influence, from Zeller and Praechter (in Überweg's *Grundriss*) to Philip Merlan, in his contribution to the *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Mediaeval Philosophy* (Ch. 4), but the attempt must founder on lack of evidence.
11. Lamprias' reference at *Def. Or.* 431A to 'recalling the Academy to our minds' is clearly a reference to the Academic tradition (here, of scepticism), rather than to any tangible institution.

tions by Ammonius is in an anecdote recorded in his essay *How to Tell a Flatterer* (70C):

> My professor (καφηγητής) Ammonius, at an afternoon lecture (ἐν δειλινῇ διατρίβῃ) perceived that some of his students had lunched rather too elaborately, and so he ordered his freedman to chastise his own servant, remarking by way of explanation that "the boy can't seem to eat his lunch without a tot of wine!" At the same time he glanced towards us, so that the rebuke took hold of the guilty.

It sounds from this, as from other indications, as if Ammonius ran his school in his own house,[12] and what we hear later of Calvenus Taurus confirms this impression. Plutarch is not specific about the circumstances of the *De E*, but it sounds like a *conversazione* of the school, presided over by Ammonius. We get the impression of about a dozen students at a time, at most. Elsewhere, Ammonius appears as presiding over dinner-party discussions which, again, we know from reports of Taurus to be a basic feature of school life. The whole of Book IX of Plutarch's *Table Talk* consists of conversations held over dinner at Ammonius' house during a festival of the Muses (whether a public or a private, Platonist, festival is not clear). At the time, Ammonius was acting as *strategos* of Athens, a most prestigious post which he actually held three times (*Quaest. Conv.* VIII 3, 1) a sign of the political importance of philosophers at this period.

In Ammonius' case, then, we can discern no very elaborate format. We also do not know what form instruction took. Plutarch himself later presided over a group in his native town of Chaeroneia, which he refers to as a *schole*, (e.g. *De E.* 385A) and to which he lectured, or allowed questions to be proposed for discussions, the results of which he records in various dialogues. Texts of a controversial nature were often read aloud, it seems, and then discussed. Such was the case with Colotes' essay "That it is not possible even to Live according to Doctrines of the Other Philosophers" which the group then makes response to (*Adv. Col.* 1107EE). Straight commentaries on Plato are not included, though he frequently brings in Platonic passages to clinch an argument, and one surviving work, the *De Procreatione Animae*, is a

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12. If Ammonius used a public place to lecture, it may have been the Diogeneion gymnasium, where he is recorded by Plutarch QC IX 1, 736D), as conducting an examination of the ephebes. This, however, was in his capacity as *strategos*, and proves nothing about his normal place of lecturing.

commentary, dedicated to his sons, on the account of the creation of the soul in the *Timaeus*. There is also a collection of comments on problematic passages in Plato. Mainly, however, he is discussing topics such as the nature of God, fate and freewill, and other ethical and metaphysical questions, on which Plato could be quoted as an authority, and here one can see how notions of what Plato taught can suffer strange transformations. We have no evidence that there was actually a handbook of Platonic passages on the various topics going the rounds, but there was certainly a series of set passages always used to illustrate the same themes, and these come to form the basis for a scholastic codification of his doctrine.

III

If we turn to the next generation, in the mid-second century A.D. we are quite well informed by the Roman lawyer Aulus Gellius about the circumstances and habits of his teacher in Platonism, L. Calvenus Taurus. Gellius nowhere speaks of Taurus as being head of an Academy. He refers to him only, rather vaguely (*NA* VII 10), as *'vir memoria nostra in disciplina Platonica celebratus'*, implying simply that he was the leading Platonist of his time in Athens. Thanks to his reminiscences, we have a reasonably full picture of the workings of Taurus' school. There were obviously formal sessions, at which the works of Plato were read and commented on, and even, it seems, works of Aristotle (though only, perhaps, the more strictly 'scientific' ones, such as the *Problems*, *NA* XIX 6). At *NA* XVII 20 we find the *Symposium* being read in class. One might alternatively take a set problem in philosophy and discuss that, adducing various authorities. After the formal discourse, Taurus encouraged his pupils to raise questions. We see the process described at *NA* 1 26:

> I once asked Taurus in the *diatriba* whether a wise man got angry. For after his daily lectures he often gave anyone the opportunity of asking whatever questions one wished. On this occasion he first discussed the disease or passion of anger seriously and at length, setting forth what is to be found in the books of the ancients and in his own commentaries.

The great man, then, quoted on occasion from his own works. On this occasion, besides telling an anecdote about Plutarch, he makes reference to Plutarch's essay *On Freedom from Anger*, and the 'ancients' referred to by Gellius would perhaps be those whom Plutarch was relying on in that work.

Taurus was in the habit of inviting certain favoured pupils to his home for dinner (if in fact they were not already there!), and, as Gellius tells us (*NA* VII 13), one was expected on these occasions to bring along (in lieu of a bottle) topics for discussion, which were raised after dinner. We have a number of examples of these, and they closely resemble those presented by Plutarch in his *Table Talk*. The problem raised in VII 13, for instance, 'At what moment can a dying man be said to die?' leads Taurus into an exposition of the notion of 'instant', based on Plato's *Parmenides*, 156D. At XVII 8 the question arises as to why oil congeals, the problem being raised on this occasion by the prank of a slave boy.

Besides dinner parties, there were expeditions to the country. At XVIII 10 some of the school accompany Taurus to visit Herodes Atticus' villa at Cephisia, where Gellius is lying ill, afflicted with a bout of diarrhoea. On this occasion Taurus is recorded as setting an ignorant country doctor right on the difference between veins and arteries. At XII 5 we find an account of a journey to attend the Pythian Games at Delphi, on which Taurus is accompanied again by a group of pupils. We also find him, in II 2, receiving distinguished visitors, namely the Governor of Crete, presumably a former pupil, who had come to Athens expressly to visit the philosopher, accompanied by his father. Here Gellius portrays Taurus as sitting outside the door of his *cubiculum* (which sounds like a small room) after class. When the Governor and his father arrived, there was only one spare chair (on which circumstance the anecdote turns). All this seems to denote a very simple establishment.

These glimpses of academic life are most welcome. What they reveal is, not a full-scale Academy, but rather a one-man show. There is no suggestion of any other professors besides Taurus himself, or of any other property beyond his (modest) personal possessions. If we talk about the Platonic Academy at this period, then, we must bear in mind that it may be no more than what we see described here.

Taurus did write commentaries, of which we have evidence, on Plato's *Gorgias* and *Timaeus*,[13] in the latter of which, among other things, he wrestled with the problem of Plato's meaning at *Tim*. 28 B when he states that the world is created. It is not Taurus, however, but another Platonist of this era, Albinus, who seems to have taught in Smyrna, in Asia Minor, who gives us a comprehensive survey of Platonism as it was understood in this

13. On the *Gorgias*: Gellius *NA* VII 14; on the *Timaeus*: Joh. Philoponus, *De Aeternitate Mundi*, p. 520, 4ff. Rabe.

age. There is no reason to suppose that Albinus is any more 'eclectic' than a supposedly 'pure' Athenian school of Platonism. 'Purity' of doctrine in our sense is simply a mirage in this era.

Of Albinus' activity as a teacher we can derive some notion from his brief work, *An Introduction (Eisagoge) to the Dialogues of Plato*.[14] The *Eisagoge* discusses, in six short chapters, first the nature of the dialogue form in general, then the various types of Platonic dialogue, and lastly the order in which the dialogues should be read in order to provide a coherent course in Platonic philosophy. The whole work is of a suitable length and format for an introductory lecture of an hour or so, and indeed is probably a bald record of how Albinus customarily started his course in Platonism.

I wish to draw attention in particular here to the information that one can derive from this source as to the course in Plato practised by Albinus. He divides the dialogues (in ch. 3), along the lines laid down in the previous century by Thrasyllus, Tiberius' court philosopher, into dialogues of instruction and dialogues of enquiry, though he considerably simplifies the elaborate scheme of subdivisions of these which Thrasyllus had laid down. Albinus actually rejects Thrasyllus' order of the dialogues as a useful order for teaching. Thrasyllus' arrangement, by tetralogies, beginning with the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo* (the order still preserved today) seems to follow, he says, a dramatic principle rather than a pedagogical one. Albinus prefers to begin with *Alcibiades* I, since it concerns knowledge of self, the first requisite for a would-be philosopher. Then one should turn to the *Phaedo*, which teaches the nature of the philosophic life, taking as a premise for this the immortality of the soul. Then the *Republic*, since it sketches a complete educational theory, and lastly the *Timaeus*, since it takes us through the whole range of things natural and divine, leading us to a clear view of divinity (*ta theia*). The *Parmenides*, we may note, has not yet become anything more than a good exercise in logic. Only in certain Pythagorean circles, at this time, it seems, did anyone see any 'higher' metaphysical significance in the hypotheses of the *Parmenides*. All this is less elaborate than the course of ten dialogues laid down in the next century by Iamblichus, with the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides* following as the two summits of philosophy, but it operates on the same educational principle.

In the final section of his work, Albinus adds that before studying positive doctrine one should purge the mind of false notions and exercise the wits by studying the dialogues of enquiry, namely the early Socratic dialogues. What chronological order is to

14. Printed in Vol. 6 of C. F. Hermann's edition of Plato, Leipzig 1921-36.

be followed is not made entirely clear, but we derive a picture of an articulated course of instruction in Platonism, which prefigures the more elaborate order of Neoplatonic times.

We get a glimpse then, from the *Eisagoge*, of the nature of instruction in at least one Platonic school of the period. A course in Platonism is also intended to be a course in moral and spiritual development, beginning with knowledge of self, and ending with a complete course in physics and theology, based on the *Timaeus*. Thus the study of the dialogues of Plato is virtually co-extensive with higher education in general. Aristotle's logical works, also were plainly used by Albinus, though not by every Platonist of the period, as an introduction to philosophical study.

IV

The Platonic school of which we know most, however, is that of Plotinus in Rome, in the middle of the third century, A.D. Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, from which we derive our information about it, has been subjected to repeated study, but there are nevertheless a number of interesting gaps in his account which have never, I think, been given the attention they deserve.

The first point is a general one, and I think it is of prime importance. Porphyry is neither blind to, nor reticent about, Plotinus' various eccentricities, but at no point does he suggest that the general organisation of the school, or Plotinus' position in it, is noticeably peculiar. This I find significant. Porphyry, after all, had come to Plotinus from Longinus in Athens; he was presumably also familiar with the establishment of the Platonic *diadochos* Eubulus, even if Longinus himself was not part of that establishment; yet he does not note in the *Life* any startling change of structure, such as from a large, organised 'research institute' to a totally personal, informal group of 'friends'. Certainly, he notes that Plotinus' method of commentary was remarkable (ch. 14), but this in itself emphasises that the overall set-up was not a shock to him at all. My conclusion from this is that Plotinus' school was — apart from the personality of the Master himself — not in any essential way different in structure from that of any other teacher of philosophy in these centuries.

What, then, was Plotinus' situation? As far as we can gather from Porphyry's narrative, he lived, when Porphyry knew him, and presumably for long before that, in the house of a wealthy and respectable widow called Gemina (ch. 9). The household included Gemina's daughter, and a number of young boys and girls who had been entrusted to Plotinus' care on the death of their parents.

Whether this was Gemina's only residence, or just a house belonging to her, is not quite clear, but it was obviously a fairly large and elaborate establishment, in which young ladies and middle-aged philosophers could live decently together.

Around Plotinus in this establishment was gathered a circle of 'companions' — Porphyry does not speak of pupils, only of 'companions', *hetairoi*. These companions may be divided into three classes: (1) wealthy patrons, (2) close companions, and (3) more casual auditors. The first category is not exclusive of the other two, but the latter two categories represent, I think, the distinction in the establishments of Ammonius and Taurus in the previous two centuries between young men who attended philosophical lectures to complete their education (as would be the case with Aulus Gellius or Apuleius), and serious students of Platonism, who would go on to become masters themselves, and one or other of whom would, normally, be the master's chosen successor (as Albinus was, presumably, of Gaius).

In Plotinus' case, patrons included the wealthy senators Castricius Firmus, Marcellus Orontius, Sabinillus and Rogatianus (ch. 7), the last of whom in fact went rather overboard, giving away all his possessions and adopting the philosophic life. This did wonders for his gout, it seems, but presumably rather lessened his usefulness as a patron. The others, however, seem to have found philosophy compatible with the *bios praktikos*. Castricius Firmus was a particularly good friend. Plotinus was always welcome, one gathers, at his country estate at Minturnae, and when the philosopher was afflicted by his final illness in 269, it was to an estate adjacent to this in Campania that he retired (ch. 2). This estate belonged to, and was presumably bequeathed to him by, a prosperous doctor of Arabian extraction called Zethus, who had himself been given it by Castricius — interesting patterns of patronage are revealed here. "His Wants",Porphyry tells us, "were provided in part out of Zethus' estate, and for the rest were furnished from Minturnae, where Castricius' property lay." We see in all this Castricius providing very much the same range of services for Plotinus as Herodes Atticus did for Taurus.

Plotinus' patrons actually came to include the Emperor Gallienus himself, and his wife Salonina (ch. 12), which imperial favor led Plotinus to propose a wild project to establish a philosophic city in Campania, to be called Platonopolis and to be run according to Plato's *Laws* (presumably with Plotinus and his circle acting as a kind of Nocturnal Council). This project came to nothing, Porphyry tells us, through opposition at court. Perhaps it is just as well.

The presence on the scene of the lady Gemina and of Castricius explain, perhaps, a question which might bother the modern observer. What were the financial arrangements, in an ancient philosophic school, between master and pupil? Such matters are, after all, never mentioned in our sources. The answer is, I suggest, that they were left quite vague. The pupil was expected to provide for himself (Porphyry, at least, had a house of his own, ch. 11), and perhaps to contribute to such communal meals as were held. The pupil's father, or he himself, if he were mature and rich, might make the philosopher presents of various sorts, but such matters would not be regulated to the extent of constituting any sort of fees. As far as one can see, one simply presented oneself at the house of the master of one's choice and hoped to be allowed to enter his circle.

About attending lectures there was, it seems, no great difficulty. Plotinus' lectures, at least, were open to all (ch. 1). Amelius was once able to bring along a friend of his who was a noted portrait painter, to gather material surreptitiously for a portrait of the Master, and no notice was taken of this. Visitors in town might drop in unexpectedly, as did once, to Plotinus' great confusion, his former fellow-pupil Origenes (ch. 3).

As regards the outer circle of followers, Porphyry gives a comprehensive list of what he calls 'enthusiasts' (ζηλωταί). These included a number of doctors (medicine being, after all, a species of applied philosophy), Paulinus, from Scythopolis, Eustochius of Alexandria, and the aforementioned Zethus, who besides being a doctor had been successful in public life, in what capacity we are not told (ch. 7). There was also the critic and poet Zoticus, and the rhetor Serapion (whom Porphyry dislikes). All of these, I would suggest, were more than able to pay their way, in one form or another.

Of philosophers proper, Porphyry mentions only Amelius and himself. Here an interesting rivalry becomes apparent. Amelius Gentilianus, an Etruscan by origin, had been one of Plotinus' earliest adherents, having joined him only two years after his arrival in Rome in 244. When Porphyry arrived in 262, Amelius had been at Plotinus' right hand for sixteen years. However, in the course of the next six years it is plain that Porphyry gradually supplanted him. "I myself, Porphyry of Tyre", so Porphyry ends his catalogue, "was one of Plotinus' very closest companions, and it was to me that he entrusted the task of revising his writings." This supplanting cannot have taken place without certain tensions, but Porphyry writes always warmly of Amelius, who was dead by the time he wrote the *Life*. Amelius had in fact left Rome in 269, a

year before Plotinus' death, to settle in Apamea in Syria, the home town of his greatest hero (after Plotinus), the Neopythagorean philosopher Numenius. What exactly prompted him to leave, other than reverence for Numenius' memory, we are not told. Porphyry himself had retired a year before that to Lilybaeum in Sicily, to recover from a depression which had almost led him to suicide (until Plotinus came round to his house and talked him out of it). In fact, at Plotinus' death, only the faithful doctor Eustochius was present (ch. 2), a rather peculiar situation at which Porphyry betrays some embarrassment.

But to return to the structure of the school: it is plain that it was of the simplest. The main activity was the lecture or seminar:

> At the conferences (συνουσίαι) he (Plotinus) used to have treatises by various authors read aloud. Among the Platonists it might be Severus or Cronius, Numenius, Gaius or Atticus; and among the Peripatetics Aspasius, Alexander, Adrastus or some such writer, at the call of the moment. But it was far from his way to follow any of these authors blindly; he took a personal, original view, applying Ammonius' approach (νοῦς) to the investigation of every problem.

Porphyry expands on this further in ch. 18:

> He was entirely free from all the inflated pomp of the professor. His lectures had the air of conversation, and he never forced upon his hearers the severely logical substratum of his thesis.

One thinks of Wittgenstein, or of Austin.

We may note here — and it is significant, I think, for the growth of the scholastic tradition in Platonism, — that what are being read are not primarily texts of Plato or Aristotle, but rather commentaries upon them, these commentaries depending in turn upon previous commentaries. No doubt the group also read works of these authors which were not explicit commentaries on a dialogue or treatise, such as essays *On the Soul, On the Gods,* or *On Happiness*, but these would also be based on an interpretation of Plato or Aristotle. On these works Plotinus in turn would comment, inviting questions from the group, and pursuing long trains of argument, even to the exasperation of certain auditors — as once when Porphyry kept on at him for three days about the problem of the soul's relation to the body (ch. 13):

> He was always as ready to entertain objections as he was powerful in meeting them. At one time I myself kept interrogating him during three days as to how the soul is associated with the body, and he continued explaining; a man

> called Thaumasius entered in the midst of our discussions; the visitor was more interested in the general drift of the system than in particular points, and said he wished to hear Plotinus expounding some theory as he would in a set treatise, but that he could not endure Porphyry's questions and answers. Plotinus asked, "But if we cannot first solve the difficulties Porphyry raises, what could go into the treatise?" (MacKenna's trans.)

In fact, no doubt, these deliberations form the basis of what we have in *Problems of the Soul* (*Enn*. IV 3-4). Plotinus encouraged questions — as did Taurus, indeed, and no doubt every philosopher of this period worthy of the name — and the tractates which we have, Porphyry tells us (ch. 4), arise out of these questions and the debates they engendered. Since Plotinus, we are told (ch. 8), wrote as he thought, in a continuous flow, not checking over what he had written (his eyesight was bad), we should in theory be able to discern behind his writings the course of the discussion and even the content of the treatise upon which he is basing himself at any particular time. We know, for one thing, that to the superficial observer his philosophy seemed to be hardly distinguishable from that of Numenius (ch. 17), which should be a useful clue. In fact, in the absence of anything more than the sparsest fragments of his immediate predecessors, all reconstructions must remain precarious, but at least from the titles of his tractates one may derive a fair idea of the subjects most often discussed by the Platonists of previous generations.

Over and above normal participation in the seminar, tasks might be set to various trusted disciples, some arising out of the seminar, some not. When Porphyry first arrived, and raised difficulties in the seminar about the relation of *nous* to the *noeta* (he was still under the influence of Longinus), Plotinus set Amelius to reply to him (ch. 18). Later, when Eubulus, the Platonic Successor, wrote from Athens, sending treatises on some questions in Platonism, Plotinus turned them over to Porphyry to answer (ch. 15). One would dearly love to know more about this exchange. Also, before Porphyry came on the scene, Amelius had been doing the service for Plotinus that Albinus appears to have done for his master Gaius (and which, one might add, various pupils have done for Wittgenstein), that of taking notes of the proceedings in the seminar, and these he had compiled in something like a hundred treatises (ch. 3). Whether this Amelian version of Plotinus' teaching has left any trace in the Neoplatonic tradition is a question of which there has been a certain amount of inconclusive

discussion among scholars. At any rate, Porphyry informs us that it was he whom Plotinus entrusted with the editing of his writings (ch. 7), and it is Porphyry's edition which has prevailed.

Besides the activities of the seminar, there were other formal activities of the school, as we saw in the case of Taurus. The birthdays of Plato and Socrates were celebrated with a sacrifice and feast, at which every member of the circle who was able was expected to deliver an address (ch. 2), on the model of the *Symposium*. At one feast of Plato, Porphyry tells us that he read a poem 'abounding in mystic doctrine conveyed in veiled words and couched in terms of enthusiasm', called "The Sacred Marriage", which provoked mixed reactions (ch. 15). On another occasion, a nasty fellow called Diophanes, a rhetor, read a defence of Alcibiades' conduct as described in the *Symposium*, greatly to Plotinus' displeasure.

To conclude, then, my contention is that Plotinus' school, despite the remarkable character of its master, was not essentially different in structure from the other philosophical schools of that and the preceding centuries. What sort of establishment Eubulus, the Platonic *diadochos*, maintained in Athens at this time we do not know. If, as I assume, he was the official Professor of Platonic Philosophy, incumbent of the Chair set up in 176 A.D. by Marcus Aurelius (Dio Cassius, LXXII, 31), then he had a salary from the State (the original endowment provided for a salary of 10,000 dr. per annum), and, no doubt, a somewhat more elaborate library than Plotinus, but there is no evidence that he presided over anything comparable to a modern university or institute, or that he was any more than a one-man show (though, like Plotinus, assisted by senior pupils). We must never underestimate the simplicity and informality of the arrangements in any ancient philosophical school.

V

A survey of Platonic school instruction could be carried on for centuries more, down to the time of Proclus and beyond (when, indeed, our information as to what went on is considerably more copious), but my concern at present is particularly with what may be termed the Middle Platonic period.[15] My purpose has been simply to suggest that our image of the Platonic school during this period, and indeed at any stage of its development, is in danger of becoming far too elaborate. After 86 B.C., I do not believe that

15. Cf. the recent article by Garth Fowden, "The Platonist Philosopher and His Circle in Late Antiquity", ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑ[7] (1977), pp. 359-383.

there was any such thing as an official Platonic Academy, until (perhaps) Marcus Aurelius founded his Regius Professorships in 176 A.D. This foundation, then, over a century or so, will have taken on the trappings and the consciousness of a Platonic Academy, until finally, in the fifth century A.D., it came to believe that it had always been there.[16]

As to the conditions of instruction and study, they were, I suggest, oral to a far greater degree than we generally seem to recognise. One learned one's philosophy from one's Master, as he had learned it in his turn from his Master. With this Master one lived in close personal contact, sometimes staying in his house, often dining with him, sometimes marrying his daughter. Only after one's views had been largely formed did one proceed to direct study of the original texts of Platonism. Such a scenario would, I think, go far to explain the remarkable distortions of doctrine which appear in the tradition from Antiochus of Ascalon onwards.

If one goes on to ask how one is to know that a given teacher is an 'official' Platonist, in the absence of any system of examinations, accreditation of schools, or conferral of degrees, I can only suggest that, in what was after all a very small world by modern standards, it simply became generally known that so-and-so had studied under so-and-so (say Albinus under Gaius), was, perhaps, his favorite pupil, and had inherited his library and thus received his official blessing. Students then gather round him, making whatever personal arrangement, financial and otherwise, may be mutually agreeable (I would suggest the possibility of a series of 'gifts' conveyed to the philosopher by the pupil himself, or his parents). But our final admission on all these questions must be, I fear, that we are miserably ill-informed.[17]

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16. See on this question J. Lynch, *op. cit.* pp. 185-7, emphasising the ambiguous nature of Damascius' evidence.
17. For a study of medical education in antiquity, on parallel lines to the present one, see the excellent article by Vivian Nutton, "Museums and Medical Schools in Classical Antiquity", *History of Education*[4] (1976), pp. 1-15.