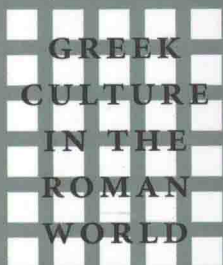


Kendra Eshleman

The Social World of Intellectuals in the Roman Empire

Sophists, Philosophers, and Christians



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THE SOCIAL WORLD OF INTELLECTUALS IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Sophists, Philosophers, and Christians

KENDRA ESHLEMAN



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107026384

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First published 2012

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by the MPG Books Group

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Eshleman, Kendra, 1973–

The social world of intellectuals in the Roman Empire : sophists, philosophers, and Christians /
Kendra Eshleman.

pages cm. – (Greek culture in the Roman world)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-02638-4

1. Social networks – Rome. 2. Social structure – Rome. 3. Group identity – Rome.
4. Identity (Philosophical concept) – History – To 1500. 5. Rome – Intellectual life.
6. Sophists (Greek philosophy) 7. Second Sophistic movement. 8. Philosophers – Rome.
9. Christians – Rome. I. Title.

DG78.E75 2012

305.5'520937 – dc23 2012018821

ISBN 978-1-107-02638-4 Hardback

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THE SOCIAL WORLD OF INTELLECTUALS IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

This book examines the role of social networks in the formation of identity among sophists, philosophers, and Christians in the early Roman Empire. Membership in each category was established and evaluated socially as well as discursively. From clashes over admission to classrooms and communion to construction of the group's history, integration into the social fabric of the community served as both an index of identity and a medium through which contests over status and authority were conducted. The juxtaposition of patterns of belonging in Second Sophistic and early Christian circles reveals a shared repertoire of technologies of self-definition, authorization, and institutionalization, and shows how each group manipulated and adapted those strategies to its own needs. This approach provides a more rounded view of the Second Sophistic and places the early Christian formation of "orthodoxy" in a fresh context.

KENDRA ESHLEMAN is an assistant professor of Classical Studies at Boston College.

GREEK CULTURE IN THE ROMAN WORLD

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The Social World of Intellectuals in the Roman Empire: Sophists, Philosophers, and Christians
Kendra Eshleman

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- 2 Genealogy of heresy according to Hippolytus, *Refutation* 228

Acknowledgments

This book began life as a dissertation written at the University of Michigan. Its seed was planted by David Potter: hearing that I wanted to write on early Christian heresy, he sent me off to read Hippolytus and Philostratus, two authors unknown to me, but who he promised would have much to say to each other. He was right, as he usually is. The project has evolved considerably from its initial form, but it has been nourished throughout by David's wisdom, enthusiasm, and apparent omniscience.

On the road to publication, a book accrues many debts. The bulk of the revisions were completed with the help of a Boston College Faculty Fellowship in the spring of 2010. An earlier version of Chapter 4 appeared in *Classical Philology* 103 (2008). Lauren Caldwell read more drafts than she probably cares to remember, and she helped to make straight much that was tangled and inelegant. The book would never have been completed without her. Others who commented on drafts, fielded queries, and asked inconvenient questions include Sara Ahbel-Rappe, Derek Collins, John Finamore, Daniel Harris-McCoy, Meredith Monaghan, Catherine R. Osborne, Pheme Perkins, Jim Porter, Adam Serfass, William Turpin, Chris van den Berg, Tim Whitmarsh, Meghan Williams, Ralph Williams, and two anonymous readers at Cambridge University Press. I am grateful as well to the many others who responded to portions of the work in progress at the American Philological Association, the Classical Association of the Middle West and South, the Boston Patristics Group, the MACTe Junior Faculty group, the University of Toronto, Georgetown, Oberlin, Skidmore, Boston College, and the Mennonite Congregation of Boston. Aaron Hertzmann helped to find the cover image and has generally been a font of practical wisdom. Corey Streitweiser was a prince among proofreaders.

To my family – Ken and Myrna Eshleman, Tina Eshleman, Don Harrison, Olivia Page Harrison, Lin Albertson Thorpe – are due special thanks

for setting my feet on paths of scholarship and for their love and support through the long gestation of this book.

Finally, my husband, Jeremy Thorpe, to whom this book is dedicated. He prepared the figures, talked me through the hard bits, and knows more about Alexander the Clay-Plato than a reasonable person ought.

Note on abbreviations

Citations of periodicals follow the abbreviations used by *L'Année philologique*. Abbreviations for ancient authors and works follow the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* and Liddell–Scott–Jones' *Greek–English Lexicon*; for Christian texts not covered by those two works, I have followed the system of the Society of Biblical Literature.

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Introduction

"Who are you?" The social formation of identity

Asked for money by a man in the garb of a mendicant Cynic, the great Herodes Atticus, a man of consular rank and high culture, replies with a simple, devastating question: "Who are you?" The man responds indignantly that he is plainly a philosopher, but Herodes remains unconvinced. "I see a beard and a cloak," he says, "but I do not yet see a philosopher. But indulge me, please, and say what evidence you think we could use to know that you are a philosopher?" (Gell. 9.2.1-5).¹ There are no more basic questions than these: who are you, where do you fit, and how can we know? In this instance both Herodes and his hapless interlocutor speak as though it were easy to determine who deserved the "most holy name" (*nomen sanctissimum*) of philosopher and on what grounds (Gell. 9.2.9), but their very disagreement indicates otherwise. The prestigious title "philosopher" was "not an absolute but a differential category,"² maintained at the cost of an unending labor of discursive and social distancing from the others who marked its boundaries (the layperson, the charlatan, the sophist, and, eventually, the Christian). The same is true of "sophist," another notoriously slippery category often maddeningly entwined with "philosopher." The right to either label could not be established once for all but had to be continually defended through assiduous self-presentation that in turn advanced implicit definitions of one's own field(s) and its rivals. Contemporary Christians concerned to define the parameters of authentic ("orthodox") Christian identity confronted

¹ *Herodem Atticum, consularem virum ingenioque amoeni et Graeca facundia celebrem, adiit nobis praesentibus palliatus quispiam et crinitus barbaque prope ad pubem usque porrecta ac petit aes sibi dari εἰς ἄρτους. Tum Herodes interrogat quisnam esset. Atque ille, vultu sonituque vocis obiurgatorio, philosophum sese esse dicit et mirari quoque addit cur quaerendum putasset quod videret. "Video," inquit Herodes, "barbam et pallium, philosophum nondum video. Quaeso autem te, cum bona venia dicas mihi quibus nos uti posse argumentis existimas, ut esse te philosophum noscitemus?"* All translations from Latin and Greek are my own. Unless otherwise noted, translations of Nag Hammadi treatises come from *The Coptic Gnostic Library (CGL)*.

² Whitmarsh 2001a: 159.

similar problems of self-definition by pursuing a remarkably similar set of strategies.

The central premise of this book is that establishing and evaluating identity as a sophist, philosopher, or Christian was a matter not only of *being* – that is, conformity with certain cognitive, ritual, ethical, and/or professional standards – but also of ties to other members of the group, past and present – that is, of *belonging*. Demarcating these frequently intersecting categories from each other, as well as sorting out legitimate from illegitimate members within each group, was (and is) notoriously difficult. The dividing lines remained blurry and disputed and were too schematic to map fully the hybrid complexities of one person's identity. Further, as is often pointed out, the Roman world possessed "few explicitly professional qualifications, institutional structures for controlling and guaranteeing expertise"; lacking these, ancient intellectuals leaned heavily on rhetorical means of legitimation and group definition.³ This fluidity placed heavier weight on social modes of self-definition as well, so that integration into the social fabric of each community, past and present, served as a vital index of identity and a medium through which contests over status and authority were conducted.

That identity is constituted through social interactions has been widely recognized,⁴ especially for the ancient world, where individuals were embedded in networks of family, class, city, ethnicity, patronage, and friendship. The relevance of belonging to Second Sophistic contests over identity and status has been explored only in rather limited ways, however.⁵ Except in the symposium, where socialization and the cultivation of social bonds are foregrounded,⁶ the "groupness" of early imperial *pepaideumenoí* as such is not immediately obvious and is sometimes dismissed as unimportant.⁷ Yet to the extent that sophists and philosophers thought of themselves as

³ König and Whitmarsh 2007: 25; cf. Lloyd 1979: 86–98; Gleason 1995: xxiv. ⁴ Jenkins 1996.

⁵ The entanglement of sophistic rivalries with inter-city competitions has long been recognized; see Bowersock 1969: 89–100. The role of quarrels in the self-fashioning of *pepaideumenoí* has been illuminated by (among many) Hahn 1989: 109–18; Gleason 1995: 27–8; and Whitmarsh 2005: 32–4. Remus 1996 considers the role of Aelius Aristides' social networks in facilitating his return to oratory. These analyses typically stop short of seeing such feuds and friendships as bearing on the shape of the sophistic movement or philosophy as a whole, however.

⁶ On the symposium generally, see Murray 1990, 2003. For the symposium as a site for the negotiation and display of elite *paideia* in the imperial period, see Schmitz 1997: 127–33; Whitmarsh 2000, 2001a: 279–93, and 2006; Amato 2005; König 2008; Lim 2008: 152–6.

⁷ E.g. Glucker 1978; Sedley 1989. Glucker in particular downplays the role of belonging to philosophical identity: "Here, a group of people is indeed included as an essential ingredient in [the definition of αἵρεσις]. But αἵρεσις is not defined in terms of the group – not to speak of an organized school or institution: it is identified with the *opinions* of such a group. Indeed, the group itself is defined only in terms of holding such opinions" (181).

belonging to an in-group distinct from various out-groups, they can be said to constitute groups.⁸ Philostratus represents his subjects as competing for recognition as “worthy of the circle of sophists” (VS 614, 625). That circle was no more than a dispersed set of men engaged in roughly the same pursuits. It was metonymically embodied, though, in a myriad short-lived assemblages that formed and reformed in classrooms and auditoria, at public performances, and even more informal gatherings. Invisible, fluid, and contested as its dimensions are, this “circle” has a definite reality in the minds of Philostratus and his subjects. As for philosophers, taking belonging into account might seem at odds with the ideal of disinterested inquiry. In Lucian’s *Eunuch*, candidates for the Peripatetic chair are judged not on their personal connections or academic record, but on the degree to which they look and act the part, exhibiting mastery of Aristotle’s writings and a life consistent with them. Some scholars have justly singled out these criteria as core constituents of philosophical identity.⁹ Others, however, have shown that personal relationships too, either with peers or with the “golden chain” of philosophers stretching back to the classical past, played a role in establishing philosophical identity and status in the imperial period.¹⁰ While not sufficient, such bonds served to locate philosophers in what could otherwise be a vertiginously unbounded disciplinary landscape. This category, too, was concretized in teaching circles, public performances, and learned soirees, any of which might become a literal site of contestation over who (and what) deserved to be counted as properly philosophical.

The interpenetration of being and belonging is more evident in the early church, despite the institutional fluidity and wide internal diversity that characterizes it in its first centuries. From the start, Christians conceptualized themselves in communitarian terms, as a family or a “third race,”¹¹ united by shared norms of belief, behavior, and belonging, even

⁸ For this cognitive approach to group formation, which has some points of contact with Benedict Anderson’s (1991) notion of imagined communities, see J. C. Turner *et al.* 1987, esp. 51–67; Jenkins 1996: 80–3.

⁹ Deportment: Hahn 1989: 33–45; Sidebottom 2009: 82–7. Mastery of and conformity with the founder’s writings: Glucker 1978: 182–4; Sedley 1989.

¹⁰ Interactions with peers: Hahn 1989: 109–18; Watts 2006: 7–13. “Golden chain” (of Platonists): Dillon 1979: 77, 1982: 66–9; Swain 1997: 181, 186. Apuleius describes himself as a member of the *Platonica familia* (Apol. 64.3; cf. 22.7 [*Cynica familia*]). His relationships with other members of this *familia* seem to be largely mediated through text, and in this instance are defined by shared cognitive commitments, but the metaphor resonates; see Hijmans 1987: 416 n. 82 for parallels.

¹¹ On “ethnoracial” reasoning in Christian self-definition, see Buell 2005; she explores the implication of Christianity in “cultural struggles over forms of affiliation and identification” (12) complementary to the ones treated here.

if disagreement persisted as to what those norms were.¹² Perhaps as a result, the social dimensions of Christian identity have received more attention, in studies of conversion, congregational life, and the role of ritual participation in Christian socialization and self-definition.¹³ Despite a growing integration of Christianity into treatments of Roman religion,¹⁴ however, early Christian struggles over individual and corporate self-creation have rarely been seen as relevant to the strategies of self-fashioning employed by early imperial *pepaideumenoi*.¹⁵ Setting early Christian controversialists alongside Second Sophistic intellectuals helps to highlight the less often noticed dynamics of inclusion and exclusion among the latter.

This project sits at the intersection of several lines of recent scholarly interest. In classical studies in the past two decades, interest in the self-fashioning or “symbolic representations” of Greek sophists and philosophers has breathed fresh life into the perennial debate over what exactly it meant to be a philosopher or a sophist in the early Empire, and what distinguished them from each other and from Greek urban elites generally;¹⁶ this discussion has blended with broader investigations of the (re)construction of Greek identity under Rome.¹⁷ At the same time the formation of early Christian identity within and against the Jewish and Greco-Roman world

¹² Kreider 1999: 4–7 abstracts this formula from Justin Martyr’s statement that the eucharist is restricted “to the one who believes that our teachings are true, has received the washing that is for the forgiveness of sins and for rebirth (i.e. baptism), and lives as Christ handed down” (τῷ πιστεύοντι ἀληθῆ εἶναι τὰ δεδιδαγμένα ὑφ’ ἡμῶν καὶ λουσαμένῳ τὸ ὑπὲρ ἀφέσεως ἀμαρτιῶν καὶ εἰς ἀναγέννησιν λουτρὸν καὶ οὕτως βιοῦντι ὡς ὁ Χριστὸς παρέδωκεν, *Apol.* 66.1).

¹³ Understanding conversion as a social process has significantly revised, if not entirely replaced, the Jamesian view of conversion as an individual, psychological event: see e.g. L. M. White 1985–6; Gallagher 1993; Sandnes 1994; Taylor 1995; Finn 1997 and Ch. 1 n. 68 below. Closely related is recognition of the place of ritual in Christian identity formation: e.g. Meeks 1983: 140–63; Theissen 1999: 121–38; Pagels 2002; D. E. Smith 2003: 173–217. Lieu 2004: 147–77 offers a nuanced discussion of the interplay of practice and (textual) discourse in the formation of Christian identity. On social models of congregational life, see n. 49 below.

¹⁴ Exemplified by the inclusion of Christianity in Beard, North, and Price 1998.

¹⁵ Exceptions include Brown 1988; Gleason 1995: 55–81; Goldhill 2001c; König 2008; J. Perkins 2009: 17–44.

¹⁶ For the vexed question of the definition of “sophist,” and what distinguished sophists from philosophers or rhetors, see Bowersock 1969: 10–15, 2002: 161–7; Stanton 1973: 351–8; Jones 1974: 12–14; G. Anderson 1986: 8–10, 1993: 16–17; Swain 1996: 97–100; Schmitz 1997: 12–13; Puech 2002: 11–14. On the self-presentation of Greek *pepaideumenoi*, see G. Anderson 1989: 88–99, 170–92, 1993: 55–64; Hahn 1989; Gleason 1995; Swain 1996: 43–51; Schmitz 1997; R. R. R. Smith 1998; Connolly 2001; Goldhill 2002: 82–93; König 2005; Whitmarsh 2005: 13–22, 32–56; Rife 2009; Sidebottom 2009. On self-fashioning in Roman rhetoric, see Richlin 1997; Gunderson 2000.

¹⁷ Bowie 1974 is seminal. A sampling of more recent work: Alcock 1993; Woolf 1994; Swain 1996; Braund and Wilkins 2000; Goldhill 2001a and 2002; Whitmarsh 2001a; Stadter and Van der Stockt 2002; Konstan and Said 2006; Bowie and Elsner 2009.

has been incisively studied from a variety of angles in recent years,¹⁸ as has the rise of normative Christianity and the Christian rhetoric of authenticity, a process that intersects at many points with the first.¹⁹ Work in both veins has benefited greatly both from the “linguistic turn” in historical scholarship and from a greater engagement with social-scientific approaches to identity; both have encouraged scholars to eschew essentializing views in favor of understanding identity as socially and discursively constructed, always plural (and hybrid), and continually subject to negotiation. These studies have done much to illuminate the interplay of social and rhetorical strategies in Christian identity formation. On the whole, however, they have focused more on the construction of borders with (and within) the Jewish and Greco-Roman matrices, than on internal boundary construction as such, insofar as those things can be disentangled. While much labor has gone into mapping early Christian diversity at the regional and local levels,²⁰ only fairly recently has the social articulation of Christian “orthodoxy” begun to receive detailed attention.²¹

The anecdote with which we began hints already at the interpenetration of personal authority, corporate identity, and social ties. The definitions of “philosopher” implicitly advanced by Herodes and the would-be Cynic are ostensive rather than descriptive: the Cynic defines the word by pointing to himself, Herodes by invoking Musonius Rufus; Aulus Gellius, meanwhile, records this story in part as a way of touting his own friendship with Herodes, and hence his own credentials as an evaluator of other intellectuals. The same holds for our other categories as well: *what* Christianity or sophistry is depends to a large degree on *whom* one regards as prototypical Christians and sophists, while authority to make those judgments rests in

¹⁸ See esp. J. Perkins 1995 and 2009; Cooper 1996; Horrell 2002; Lieu 2002 and 2004; King 2003, esp. 22–38, and 2008b; Boyarin 2004; Castelli 2004; Buell 2005; Sandwell 2007; Holmberg 2008; Harland 2009, and n. 41 below. Essential starting points on early Christian self-definition generally are Sanders 1980 and Meyer and Sanders 1982.

¹⁹ Two watersheds in twentieth-century scholarship on the construction of “orthodoxy” and “heresy” are Bauer 1971 [1934] and Le Boulluec 1985; M. A. Williams 1996 and King 2003 have spearheaded an ongoing revolution in the study of the phenomena long lumped together under the heading “Gnosticism.” In addition to these, I have profited especially from Wisse 1971; Elze 1974; Koschorke 1978; Vallée 1981; P. Perkins 1993; Buell 1999 and 2005; Inglebert 2001a and 2001b; Irinisch and Zellentin 2008a; King 2008b.

²⁰ Although many of the specific historical claims of Bauer 1971 [1934] have not held up under scrutiny, his central insight, that early Christianity was characterized by wide diversity and that its history must be written regionally, remains foundational, even for studies (like this one) that seek to trace translocal patterns.

²¹ E.g. Wisse 1986; R. Williams 2001; Bird 2002; Pagels 2002; King 2003: 32–6 and 2008a; Lieu 2004: 126–42; Thomassen 2004; Brakke 2006: 254–9; Perrin 2010.

part on the social and intellectual pedigree of the judge.²² As a result, the self-presentation of individuals and the (self-)definition of the communities to which they belong are mutually implicated: a notion of philosophy oriented around Musonius Rufus will be different from one centered on a pugnacious mendicant Cynic. As self-professed members of each group jockey for position, therefore, they also seek to shape those groups in ways that provide meaningful and advantageous contexts for their identities and activities. As a result, the present investigation will move back and forth between the level of the individual and that of the community, both small- and large-scale. Pride of place will necessarily be given to those individuals who sought to claim definitive authority for their vision of their community – and hence to secure their own position within it – through writing, but I will also try to compare these textual strategies with the real-world behavior of the authors' colleagues, to the extent that that can be glimpsed through the textual record.

A second aim of this book is to place the construction of Christian orthodoxy in the second and early third centuries within the broader context of the formation and (self-)regulation of intellectual communities in the early Roman Empire. I hope to contribute to an understanding that the formation of a dominant orthodoxy was not only an intellectual and theological project but also a social one. The role of discourse, both oral and textual, in the crafting of Christian identity has been well recognized: as Averil Cameron puts it, "if ever there was a case of the construction of reality through text, such a case is provided by early Christianity."²³ Yet discourse cannot be divorced from social behavior; it arises out of and seeks to intervene in social reality. There is an obvious difficulty in trying to tease out from texts the social realities they address and seek to affect; the glimpses we catch of those realia can never be more than partial. Nonetheless, the historian must undertake that effort, if we are not to confine ourselves solely to textual analysis. The works under consideration here both describe and prescribe ways of interacting with others who call themselves Christians. Their prescriptions were not always heeded, or not as their authors intended, as their frequent complaints make clear. Yet many of those complaints point to a widely shared assumption that social contact could and should be used to regulate the boundaries of

²² Formulation adapted from Markus 1980: 5. G. Anderson 1986: 8 notes that "it is characteristic of [Philostratus'] habit of mind to quote any number of examples of who is a sophist or who is not, without actually stating his terms of reference." I contend that this inductive procedure is not merely a Philostratean quirk.

²³ Cameron 1991: 21.

the “orthodox” community, however understood. Rhetoric and action are mutually informing; I will argue that early Christian texts operated in a dynamic feedback loop with behavior “on the ground,” conditioned by and seeking variously to enforce or revise the social “rules” by which believers and congregations daily made and remade (their) Christian identity.

Treating second-century Christians within the world of the Second Sophistic offers a fresh angle on the Christian discourse of orthodoxy and heresy, especially as it played out in the life of Christian congregations. At the same time the more richly documented, self-conscious process of Christian identity formation can shed useful light on the strategies employed by pagan intellectuals to define their own communities. Examining early Christian self-definition alongside the authorizing practices of contemporary *pepaideumenoí* broadens our view of the cultural and social world of the Second Sophistic and helps to bring the stakes in play for intellectuals and their historians more sharply into focus. I do not propose that the parallels identified here arose through direct interchange between Christians and *pepaideumenoí*. Rather, the conjunction of their behaviors reveals a set of culturally available technologies of identity formation, authorization, and institutionalization, which early Christian modes of self-definition mirror, map, and transform.

TWO ENCOUNTERS

The congruence between sophistic and Christian modes of community formation, and the intertwining of personal authority, social connection, and group identity that will be at the heart of this book are illustrated in a pair of anecdotes from the middle of the second century. The first takes place in Athens in the 130s, where the irascible sophist Philagrus of Cilicia had an unfortunate run-in with the student Amphicles of Chalcis.²⁴ As Philostratus tells it in the *Lives of the Sophists*, Philagrus had recently arrived in Athens for a lecture tour and was wandering around the Kerameikos with a few groupies (οἱ τοὺς Ἀθήνησιν οἱ τοὺς σοφιστὰς θηρεύοντες) when he came upon Amphicles, star pupil of Herodes Atticus (*VS* 578):

Seeing that a young man on his right with a fair number of companions kept turning around, and supposing that the man was somehow making fun of him, Philagrus said, “Who are you, then?” “I am Amphicles,” replied the man, “if indeed you have heard of that man of Chalcis.” “Then stay away from my lectures,” said

²⁴ I follow Puech’s dating (2002: 55–7), which is more plausible than a date c. 150 (Papalas 1979–80) or in the 160s (Bowie 2009: 22). Unless noted, all dates are CE.