Professionals of *Paideia*? The Sophists as Performers

Thomas A. Schmitz

While the last decades have greatly advanced our understanding of the Second Sophistic, we still have to acknowledge that the precise meaning and ancient usage of the term "sophist" remain somewhat elusive. There was no formal degree which gave graduates the right to carry this title; there was no guild in which sophists had to enroll; no official body appointed aspirants to the rank of sophist. The epigraphic record reveals that there were many individuals who were proud to call themselves "sophists," but most of them are unknown to us from other sources, so we cannot even guess how they went about being sophists.[1] Hence, when we explore the sophists as professionals, we must keep in mind that we are looking at the tip of an iceberg – we can only study sophists about whose "professional" behavior we have some kind of information. Nevertheless, the questions of whether the sophists were professionals and to what degree it makes sense to consider the Second Sophistic a profession is an excellent way to gain insight into the nuts and bolts of this cultural movement.

The most important source for our knowledge about the Second Sophistic is Philostratus's *Lives of the Sophists*, written in the third century ce and dedicated to Gordian.[2] Its lively narrative and colorful anecdotes provide unmatched insights into the professional and private lives of the great sophists. However, we have to be wary of the fact that Philostratus does not intend to write an accurate history of the movement; instead, he aims to entertain and sometimes bedazzle his readers.[3] One of his striking anecdotes (*VS* 2.27, 618) about one of the sophistic superstars will provide the starting point for our exploration of the sophists as professionals.[4] Hippodromus of Larissa held one of the chairs of rhetoric in Athens during the early years of the third century.[5] However, as Philostratus tells us, he abandoned this position after just four years to manage his estates, which had begun to deteriorate in his absence. But even after retiring from his teaching position, he still
169 attended public festivals and declaimed, and he always kept up his reading of classical authors and
his rhetorical training. |
170 Hippodromus's semi-retirement occasioned an encounter with another sophist, which reveals the mechanisms of sophistic performances: he arrives in Smyrna, one of the most important centers of the Second Sophistic in Asia Minor. As a true *pepaideumenos*, he is eager to meet the local sophists and learn from them. As he walks through the town, he sees pedagogues and slaves with books in front of a temple and concludes (rightly) that this must be the place where some well-known sophist teaches. He enters, greets the sophist Megistias,[6] and quietly takes a seat in the audience. Megistias at first thinks that he must be the father of one his students, and asks him why he has come. Hippodromus replies: "Let us exchange garments."

1 There is an excellent collection and commentary of these inscriptions in Puech [21].
2 There is some debate whether the dedicatee was Gordian I or Gordian III, but the chronological difference between these two is only slight; see Jones [14].
3 On Philostratus, see Anderson [2], Bowie and Elsner [6].
4 On this anecdote, see Eshleman [10:40–1, 125]; KorenjakKorenjak [17:140–1]; WhitmarshWhitmarsh [34:30–2]. Text and translation of Philostratus's *Lives of the Sophists* are quoted from[20]; occasionally, I have slightly modified his translation.
5 The exact date is difficult to determine; see the discussions of his career in Avotins [3] and PuechPuech [21:309–10].
6 See Eshleman [10:132]: he must have been an eminent teacher and speaker, though not much is known about him, and Philostratus does not provide a biography of him.

> He was in fact wearing a traveling-cloak, while Megistias wore a gown suitable for public speaking. "And what do you mean by that?" asked Megistias. "I wish," he replied, "to give you a display of declamation." Now Megistias really thought that he was mad in making this announcement and that his wits were wandering. But when he observed the keenness of his glance and saw that he seemed sane and sober, he changed clothes with him. When he asked him to suggest a theme, Megistias proposed "The magician who wished to die because he was unable to kill another magician, an adulterer." And when he took his seat on the lecturer's chair, and after a moment's pause sprang to his feet, the theory that he was mad occurred still more forcibly to Megistias, and he thought that these signs of proficiency were mere delirium. But when he had begun to argue the theme and had come to the words: "But myself at least I can kill," Megistias could not contain himself for admiration, but ran to him and implored to be told who he was. "I am," said he, "Hippodromus the Thessalian, and I have come to practice my art on you in order that Imay learn from one man so proficient as you are the Ionian manner of declaiming. But observe me through the whole of the argument." Toward the end of the speech a rush was made by all lovers of learning in Smyrna to the door of Megistias, for the tidings had soon spread abroad that Hippodromus was visiting their city. Thereupon he took up his theme afresh, but gave a wholly different force to the ideas that he had already expressed. And when later on he made his appearance before the public of Smyrna, they thought him truly marvelous, and worthy of being enrolled among men of former days.

Dress for Success: Professional Attire Required

The first detail of this anecdote that I wish to emphasize is Hippodromus's change of dress: he does not wish to declaim in his traveling cloak, but wants to wear Megistias's gown, which is more suitable for a sophist. This can be interpreted as an outward sign of the separation of professional persona from private individual: sophists did not wear a uniform, but some sort of festive dress was
170 expected from a sophistic performer.[7] Philostratus mentions the sumptuosity that some sophists
171 displayed: Hadrian of Tyre | "wore very expensive clothes, bedecked himself with precious gems, and used to go down to his lectures in a carriage with silver-mounted bridles" (*VS* 2.10, 587); when Alexander "Clay-Plato" performed in Athens for the first time, "a low buzz of approval went round as a tribute to his perfect elegance" (*VS* 2.5, 572). To some observers, the sophist's attire might appear foppish and pretentious, as Lucian's description of the transparent tunic and effeminate shoes of the charlatan sophist makes clear.[8] For this sophistic dress code, we might compare the tuxedo or gown that a modern soloist in a concert of classical music is expected to wear: it emphasizes that the performance represents a special cultural space and that the performer transcends his usual private self. In the case of the sophist, it may also have helped his role playing: in their formal recitations, sophists usually embodied historical figures (such as Demosthenes or Themistocles), speaking in their name, adopting their classical Attic language and style, which was far removed from the spoken Greek of their own time. Wearing particularly elegant garments that were unlike their everyday clothing emphasized that they were stepping out of their usual environment.

While the sophistic performance was thus symbolically marked off as a privileged cultural space,

7 Quintilian 11.3.137–49 gives elaborate rules about the proper dress code for a public speaker – a clear indication that this was considered important both by performers and their audience.

8 Lucian, *The Professor of Public Speaking* 15. Cribiore [9] is right to remind us that the ironical stance of this satire is more difficult to define than many critics have seen; see also Zweimüller [37]. Cf. Antoninus's disapproval of the sophist Alexander as "the fellow who is always arranging his hair, cleaning his teeth, and polishing his nails, and always smells of perfume"; and see Gleason [13:74–6].

the anecdote shows that such declamations were not spatially removed from the real world: sophists were not restricted to any professional venue. Megistias teaches in a temple. Sophists often declaimed in concert halls or theaters, but we know that they also used town halls (βουλευτήρια) or market places for their performances. Korenjak, after an overview of the available evidence, rightly concludes that there was hardly a place in a town of the Roman Empire from which sophistic declamations would be excluded.[9] And as we see in Philostratus, not only these formal occasions, but also sophistic teaching was a semipublic affair, conducted in a space that was accessible to anyone. While Megistias is surprised to see a stranger whom he does not recognize, it was obviously possible to sit in on a sophist's lesson; a similar event occurs when the sophist Marcus of Byzantium attends the school of his famous contemporary Polemon: while some members of the audience recognize him, Polemon himself at first does not know him but is surprised that his listeners all look to "the rustic" (ἐς τὸν ἀγροῖκον, *VS* 1.24, 529). These anecdotes make it clear that sophistic teaching was performed in a public setting.

News of Hippodromus's success spreads like a wildfire in town, and "all educated people in Smyrna" (τῶν κατὰ τὴν Σμύρναν πεπαιδευμένων) flock to the place where Megistias teaches to listen to Hippodromus's declamation. We often hear similar stories about the popularity of sophistic performances: Aelius Aristides boasts that when he announced a declamation in Pergamon, the crowd in the town hall was so dense "that you could not even push a hand through it" (while a competing sophist drew an audience of seventeen only).[10] We will not take these allegations at face value: they are certainly exaggerated, and audiences were more often in the hundreds than in the thousands of listeners.[11] But they demonstrate that publicity was an important part of a sophist's business. His was not a profession which was exercised for a few customers only, but it was, at least
171 in his own mind, addressed to a larger public, to all members of the educated elite in the Greek
172 speaking world. |

Were Sophists in it for the Money?

One of the elements which drives Philostratus's narrative is the cognitive advantage that we readers have over one of the characters: we know that the man who enters Megistias's classroom incognito is a famous sophist while Megistias himself is completely unaware that he may be a colleague. These different levels of knowledge create a tension; we are looking forward to the moment when he will see his error, and we are not disappointed: the scene in which Hippodromus is taken for a madman but proves that he is a superb speaker is well prepared and narrated. Hippodromus may have retired, but he has kept up his rhetorical exercises (μελέται), and the opening of his speech demonstrates his rhetorical abilities. It is clear that he would not have been able to hold his own in the elite group of Megistias's school if he had not been scrupulous about his rhetorical exercises even in his retirement. Sophistic declamation was a highly specialized business that required systematic training and continuous practice, and Hippodromus takes it seriously: "he learned more by heart than any of the Greeks, and he was the most widely read." Sophistry is more than a mere hobby-horse: it is a serious occupation which demands a good deal of energy and attention. The training took several years and was expensive,[12] and from Philostratus's *Lives* we can see that this was the formative period of a young member of the social elite in which he found friends, learned to admire his teachers and to despise their competitors. When we look at Hippodromus's behavior after he has

9 Korenjak [17:27–33]; cf. Eshleman [10:25–8].
10 Aristid. *Or.* 51.31– 34; cf. Dio Chrys. *Or.* 32.2, 20 or Lib. *Or.* 1.87.
11 See Korenjak [17:42–6].
12 For details see Webb, chapter 9 in this volume.

revealed his name, we can also observe some pride in good craftsmanship: even after his declamation has been acknowledged as being of superb quality, he insists on continuing his speech to the end ("but observe me through the whole of the argument"), a further indication that for him, a sophistic declamation is a serious matter which demands the full attention of both performer and audience. In this sense, then, sophistry was certainly a profession.

Schools of rhetoric were ubiquitous in the Roman Empire; every town could be expected to have some sort of establishment where basic competence could be acquired; major centers hosted "graduate schools" in which some well-known sophist taught advanced students, who might spend several years in such a city solely for the purpose of learning from such a celebrity. The casualness with which Hippodromus takes the presence of some slaves with books as a sign of the presence of such a school is an indication of how commonplace they must have been. Megistias runs such a school; the exchange between him and Hippodromus takes place after the regular lesson has finished.[13] At first, he assumes that Hippodromus is the father of one of his students; such parent-teacher conferences seem to be a common aspect of his occupation.

All of this could be interpreted as a sign that Megistias was a professional teacher, very much like a modern professor at an institution of higher education (even if his establishment seems to be a one-man show). Was he a professional sophist in the sense that he made a living from his teaching?
172 Unfortunately, in the case of Megistias, we do not have enough evidence to answer this question.
We have more knowledge about | Hippodromus: he held the imperial chair of rhetoric at Athens
173 and thus received a regular salary of 10,000 drachmae per year.[14] Such endowed chairs (*thronos* or *kathedra*) existed not only in Athens, but also in Rome and in some other major centers of Asia Minor.[15] Their holders received a regular salary, which was paid by the emperor or by the cities. Competition for these positions was stiff, and holding one of them brought immense prestige.[16] However, Philostratus's narrative makes it clear that Hippodromus is independently wealthy: he leaves his Athens chair to administer his property (πλούτου) which had begun to deteriorate – the salary he receives is obviously less than he could make from managing his assets. Hence, Watts [33:34] is certainly right when he asserts: "the appeal of these chairs derived from the status attached to the position and not from the salaries they paid."

Nevertheless, it is true that sophists charged for their teaching, and Philostratus often mentions that large amounts of money changed hands: Proclus of Naucratis demanded a lump sum of 100 drachmae from each student (*VS* 2.21, 604); Damianus of Ephesus offered a discount on his fees when he saw that students had trouble paying (2.23, 606); Polemon asked 12,000 drachmae for representing a rich Lydian in court (1.22, 525). All of which suggests that sophists were professionals so far as they demanded payment for exercising their skills.

However, some details might give us pause. Philostratus (*VS* 1.25, 539) relates that when Polemon had performed a series of declamations in Athens, Herodes Atticus sent him the sum of 150,000 drachmae, or fifteen times the annual salary of the imperial chair of rhetoric at Athens.[17] But Polemon refused to accept the money – until Herodes raised the sum to 250,000 drachmae. Polemon was

13 Philostratus's florid language and/ or our lack of familiarity with the details of everyday school life prevent us from getting a clear picture of just what is involved. Philostratus says that Megistias talked to Hippodromus διακωδωνίσας […] τὰ μειράκια. These words have puzzled commentators; they may mean "after having dismissed his students" or "after having examined his students"; cf. Rothe [23:239].

14 See Rothe [23:23].

15 Many details remain unknown; see the discussions in Avotins [3]; Rothe [23:19–27, 39–40]. If Puech [21:456–7] is right in her interpretation of an inscription from Ephesus (*I. Ephesos* 1548), cities were competing for the services of famous sophists not unlike modern universities compete for academic stars.

16 See, e.g., Nicagoras's proud declaration of being a "sophist on the chair" (ἐπὶ τῆς καθέδρας σοφιστής) in *IG* II.3814 and the interpretation in Puech [21:358–9].

17 Cf. *VS* 1.21, 521: Scopelian receives the equally impressive amount of 180,000 from Herodes Atticus and his father Atticus for an extempore declamation.

a powerful and rich individual, and he certainly was not in need of this money (or else he would have accepted the initial payment). He found the sum insufficient for his perceived status as the foremost sophist of his period. Refusing it showed that he was not somebody who had to work for wages;[18] instead, he demonstrated that he was receiving a donation from a peer; the exorbitant amount reflects and enhances his dignity and honor. When Polemon refused the initial payment, he was not haggling over a particular sum of money, he was heightening and demonstrating his social status.

When Philostratus highlights the enormous sums that sophists received, he is eager to depict them as members of the upper class who are not wage earners but receive lavish gifts from members of their own group. One reason why he is so eager to emphasize this aspect of sophists may be that in terms of social status, sophists were in a somewhat delicate position: on the one hand, many of them came from rich and powerful families and considered themselves representatives of the cultural and social elite of the Roman Empire. On the other hand, most were involved in some sort of teaching and demanded money for their services. This made them perilously similar to members of a much lower class, schoolteachers, who taught basic literacy and cultural skills to younger students. Philostratus wants to depict sophistry as one of the most noble and important occupations, hence the stress he puts on the nature of these payments. We may compare the modern use of the word
173 "honorarium," which certain professions use instead of "fees" or "wages." The etymological origin
connects this term with | "honor": an honorarium is given as a point of honor; it is a "voluntary
174 donation." This emphasizes that the money which is given for certain services is not a form of payment, but represents a free exchange of help and gifts among equals.

The "Circle of Sophists"

Even if sophists were not card-carrying members of a formal club, Philostratus uses the expression "the circle of sophists" several times, most often when he considers whether or not certain individuals are worthy of being included into this circle.[19] There can be no doubt that sophists were perceived as a group of practitioners who shared certain traits; this is especially visible when they are opposed to other groups such as philosophers.[20] It is thus not surprising that for Philostratus, sophistry is a τέχνη,[21] consisting of skills and systematic knowledge, comparable to occupations such as medicine or architecture.

Who was competent to decide if an individual deserved to be admitted into this circle? When we analyze Philostratus's account, it becomes clear that there is an intricate network of academic affiliations and competitions and that he is unabashedly subjective in his judgments: practitioners of sophistry who are affiliated with his teachers and friends are included, while others are disparaged as "playthings rather than real sophists" (*VS* 2.23, 605) or as declaiming "in low wine-shops" (2.33, 627).[22] As our anecdote about Hippodromus and Megistias shows, for the public perception of a sophist, the most important factor was the recognition by his peers. The culminating point of Philostratus's narrative is the long-awaited moment when Hippodromus proves his sophistic competence. His behavior indicates the self-confidence (or even arrogance) of the man who is certain

18 The same negative attitude toward wage earning can be seen, e.g., in Lucian's *On Hired Academics*, see Eshleman [10:79–83].

19 See, e.g., *VS* 1.12, 514; 2.25, 608; 2.32, 625; cf. 2.23, 605.

20 The literature on the relation between philosophy and (second) sophistic is vast. Recently, Kasulke [15], esp. 49–187, has tried to show that there was no real opposition between these two, but his arguments fail to convince; against, see Lauwers [18], Schmitz [25] and Sidebottom [29].

21 See, e.g., *VS* praef., 479; 1.9, 492; 1.24, 528; 2.9, 525; 2.27, 616.

22 Eshleman [10:125–48] gives a very good overview; lots of valuable information can be found in Naechster [19].

that he knows his trade: he lets Megistias propose a topic (*hypothesis*) for his declamation, and after a moment's preparation, he begins his speech. Improvisation was considered an important part of a sophist's trade, and Hippodromus demonstrates that he is able to give an impromptu speech on an arcane topic.[23]

Yet it is not only Hippodromus who is put to the test. As we have seen, Philostratus's readers know more than his Megistias, and thus his reaction to the declamation of this person (unknown to him and potentially a madman) is as significant as Hippodromus's artful declamation. As a true connoisseur, he has to hear only a few words of Hippodromus's speech to recognize that the speaker must be a sophist in his own right. When Philostratus says that Megistias was "besides himself" (*exepesen heautou*) with admiration, he is not claiming that he had lost control of himself and of the situation;[24] much rather, this is the only reaction that is adequate to such a superb performance. We may compare an encounter between Alexander and Herodes Atticus (*VS* 2.5, 574). Again, a few words suffice to elicit the admiration of the true expert: "In the course of his argument, with tears in
174 his eyes, [Herodes] uttered that famous and often quoted supplication: 'Ah, Nicias! Ah, my father! As
you hope to see Athens once more!' Whereupon | they say that Alexander exclaimed [ἀναβοῆσαι]: 'O
175 Herodes, we sophists are all of us merely small slices of yourself!' " Alexander's exclamation is a sure indication that he is a true specialist, that he has grasped the sheer brilliance of Herodes's words.

As often, Philostratus's story invites (or rather coerces) his readers to adopt this interpretation: if we want to be worthy members of the educated elite (*pepaideumenoi*), we had better understand the overwhelming mastery of Hippodromus's or Herodes's words.[25]

By his sound judgment, Megistias thus demonstrates that he too is a real professional whose spontaneous judgment is right on target. And it is immediately confirmed: when more and more people gather to listen to Hippodromus, he improvises a new speech on the same topic, but manages to give it a completely different turn, an exploit for which other sophists are also praised in Philostratus's *Lives of the Sophists*.[26]

It is this mutual recognition which is key to understanding the anecdote. Similar scenes occur several times in Philostratus's work, as in a tale about Marcus of Byzantium who attends a class in the school of Polemon, one of the greatest of all sophists (*VS* 1.24, 529). Like Hippodromus, he is at first mistaken for someone who is far below the status of a famous sophist. But when he speaks up and offers to perform a declamation, "Polemon, who recognized him partly by his Doric dialect, addressed himself to Marcus in a long and wonderful speech on the spur of the moment, and when he had declaimed and heard the other declaim he both admired and was admired." Philostratus's style, with its word play on ἐθαυμάσθη καὶ ἐθαύμασεν, underlines the reciprocity that is the defining moment of the scene: ultimately, a successful sophist is the only judge competent to decide who should be included into the "sophistic circle."

However, as all these anecdotes make clear, you had to fight to obtain this form of recognition: sophists were alpha males and reluctant to give you respect and honor unless you were willing to challenge them. Philostratus points out that "having quarreled with a sophist was evidence enough" for those who claimed that Favorinus was a sophist himself, "for that spirit of rivalry of which

23 Russell [24:26 n. 38] rightly points out that magic is common in Greek literature during the first centuries ce (Lucian and the novel), but relatively rare in declamation; however, cf. Philostr. *VS* 2.10, 590; Ps.-Hermogenes, *Inv.* 3.10: "A magician asks for a girl's hand in marriage. When her father refuses, she falls in love with a ghost; the magician is accused of poisoning her."

24 As Rothe [23:242–3] and Korenjak [17:75] think.

25 On this aspect of Philostratus's *Lives of the Sophists*, see Schmitz [26].

26 See, e.g., *VS* 2.5, 572: "[Alexander] made a further wonderful display of his marvellous powers in what now took place. For the sentiments that he had so brilliantly expressed before Herodes came he now recast in his presence, but with such different words and different rhythms, that those who were hearing them for the second time could not feel that he was repeating himself." Cf. Russell [24:84–6].

I spoke is always directed against one's competitors in the same craft" (*VS* 1.8, 491).[27] Competition and "cultural one-upmanship"[28] were hallmarks of the sophist: Plutarch tells the gruesome story of the sophist Niger who had swallowed a fish bone; nevertheless, he insisted on declaiming when another sophist wanted to perform for fear "that he might be perceived as giving in" (*Advice about Keeping Well* 131a–b). Niger died in the exercise and provided Plutarch a paradigm of competitiveness gone wrong.[29] Yet there are also examples of a more playful mode of rivalry. When Polemon was still a young man, Dionysius of Miletus made an ambiguous remark about him, claiming that he "possessed strength, but it does not come from the wrestling-ground" (*VS* 1.22, 525). Dionysius had heard Polemon speak in an actual lawsuit and wanted to imply that his style had impressed him, but he was less efficient as an advocate than as a sophist.

> When Polemon heard this he came to Dionysius' door and announced that he would declaim
> 175 before him. And when he had come and Polemon had sustained his part with conspicuous
> success, he went up to Dionysius, and leaning shoulder to shoulder | with him, like those who
> 176 begin a wrestling match standing, he wittily turned the laugh against him by quoting "Once
> O once they were strong, the men of Miletus."

Polemon's witty quotation of a well-known proverb demonstrates not only his willingness to take up Dionysius's challenge, but also his skillful manipulation of the cultural code of the *pepaideumenos*.

Sophistry is thus one of the numerous playing fields (or sometimes even battlegrounds) on which members of the social elite found an outlet for the competitiveness which pervaded ancient society.[30] Wealthy individuals were willing to ruin their families to outdo rivals in lavish public spending (euergetism);[31] inscriptions go to great lengths to find new superlatives honoring an individual as the "first and only among the sophists";[32] and even in a private setting, Plutarch warns against "sophistic competitions" which may spoil a dinner party by letting it degenerate into "ambitious or aggressive rivalry."[33] Hence, every sophistic performance was a crisis: what was at stake was the social status of the speaker.

Something of this social relevance is visible in our anecdote about Hippodromus and Megistias: the tension here is halfway between Polemon's witty wrestling match and Niger's deadly fish bone. The unknown stranger offering to declaim is a challenge to Megistias's authority, a riddle which he solves successfully. The decisive moment when this stranger triumphantly pronounces his name ("I am Hippodromus the Thessalian, and I have come to practice my art on you") is similar to a number of other anecdotes in Philostratus where sophists reveal their identity. One of the most memorable examples can be found in his biographical sketch of Dio of Prusa, who has been forced into exile by the emperor Domitian and has been hiding in anonymity. When Dio learns that the emperor has been killed, he quotes a line from the *Odyssey* (22.1) in which Odysseus gives up his disguise as a beggar, "and thus revealed that he was no beggar, nor what they believed him to be, but Dio the sage, [and] he delivered a spirited and energetic indictment of the tyrant" (*VS* 1.7, 488).

However, this significant act of revealing your name and thus your identity as a sophist was not without risks: if the audience or your interlocutor failed to recognize you (or pretended they did

27 On the depiction of competition in Philostratus, see König [16].
28 Anderson [1:124].
29 See van Hoof [32:234–5].
30 On competitiveness and ambition in imperial Greek culture, see Fisher/van Wees [12]; Roskam/de Pourcq/van der Stockt [22].
31 On euergetism, see Veyne [31], Zuiderhoek [36].
32 See, e.g., *I. Smyrna* 2.635 for the sophist Lollianus. As Puech [21:333 n. 1] points out, the hyperbolic and illogical μόνος καὶ πρῶτος had already been satitirized by Lucian.
33 *Advice about Keeping Well* 133 E; cf. van Hoof [32:237–40].

not know you), you were in danger of losing your face. This is what happened to Philagrus: he got into a heated argument with a student of Herodes Atticus who pretended he had no idea who he was (*VS* 2.8, 579): " 'And who are you?' inquired the other. […] Whereupon Philagrus said that it was an insult to him not to be recognized wherever he might be."[34] As a sophist, you had to make a name for yourself; you always had to confirm and uphold your status by showing your knowledge, your mastery of the sophistic *techn ê*, and your unswerving confidence. And the sophists found this challenging themselves: "when [Polemon] saw a gladiator dripping with sweat out of sheer terror of the life-and-death struggle before him, he remarked: 'You are in as great an agony as though you
176 were going to declaim'" (*VS* 1.25, 541). If keeping your calm when faced with difficulties and critical
177 challenges is an aspect of professionalism, the sophists certainly were professionals. |

"To Thine Own Self Be True"

So far, we have seen a number of factors which seem to suggest that the sophists were indeed professionals. We will now return one last time to our anecdote to gain a more nuanced view. Let us look at the reason for which Megistias was willing to exchange garments with Hippodromus and to listen to his declamation: "when he observed the keenness of his glance and saw that he seemed sane and sober, he changed clothes with him." In fact, this small detail is the peg on which Philostratus hangs his entire anecdote, which he claims he heard from Megistias himself: "Though he was somewhat rustic in appearance, yet an extraordinary nobility shone out of his eyes, and his glance was at once keen and good-natured. Megistias of Smyrna also says that he noticed this characteristic of his, and he was considered second to none as a physiognomist."

Physiognomy was a subject with which several sophists were fascinated; we still have some meager fragments of a treatise by Polemon on this "science."[35] It is reputed to detect the true nature of a person, no matter how much she or he tries to conceal it; a number of anecdotes relate that some famous physiognomist was able to see through the veils of pretense that people put on to hide the unsavory traits of their character. Philostratus occasionally takes some care to describe the look of his sophists:[36] Marcus of Byzantium was, like Hippodromus, somewhat "rustic" (ἀγροικότερος; *VS* 1.24, 529), yet "the expression of his brows and the gravity of his countenance proclaimed Marcus a sophist. […] This was evident from the steady gaze of his eyes."

Such passages show that for Philostratus and for his readers, sophistry was a curious mixture of ingredients which we moderns would consider contradictory. On the one hand, as we have seen, he emphasizes that it demanded rigorous preparation and hard work. He has a somewhat ambivalent attitude toward laborious studies:[37] while he admires natural abilities and does not believe that they can be replaced by training and instruction, he reserves his highest praise for sophists (like Scopelian or Herodes Atticus) who provided an outward image of effortlessness, yet spent their nights studying.[38] Hippodromus receives praise for his wide reading and good memory, and it is his rhetorical training that enables him to emerge victorious from his encounter with Megistias.

On the other hand, this sophistic training is regarded as a natural character trait which is visible in a person's countenance; it is something which cannot be acquired, but is an inborn talent. Take the case of Agathion:[39] when this somewhat mysterious, superhuman figure meets Herodes Atticus, the sophist is struck by the purity of his language and asks him: "'How were you educated, and by whom?

34 Eshleman [10:7–10] provides a very perceptive reading of this passage.
35 On physiognomy in the Second Sophistic, see the brilliant remarks of Gleason [13:55–81].
36 See Rothe [23:83–4].
37 See Castelli [7].
38 *VS* 1.21, 518 and 2.1, 565.
39 On him, see Schmitz [27:190–3]; Swain [30:80–3].

177 For you do not seem to be an uneducated man.' 'The interior of Attica educated me,' Agathion replied, 'a good school for a man who wishes to be able to converse'" (*VS* 2.1, 553). Philostratus seems to suggest that Agathion received no formal education, but is a survivor, as it were, from | the
178 classical age; he is a sophist's dream come true: his pure Attic is a natural gift, not the result of hard work. The entire cultural elite aspired to this ideal, as we can see in numerous inscriptions, where concepts such as "education" (παιδεία) are combined with words denoting the character (ἦθος) or overall excellence (ἀρετή) of a person:[40] being a *pepaideumenos* is more than simply having received an education, it underlines the natural superiority of every member of the social and political elite.

This conception of sophistry as a mark of your entire personality is what separates it most from our modern notion of "profession." As we have seen, there was some kind of separation between the sophist as an individual and his public role. Nevertheless, each and every performance showed who you really were: it was not primarily about what you had learned and read, but about your general superiority. Hippodromus's declamation simply confirms what his physiognomy had already indicated: his "extraordinary nobility" (ἀμήχανον εὐγένειαν; the Greek expression directly refers to the "genetic" dimension of this power). This is also expressed when the audience at Smyrna pays him the highest compliment that any sophist could aspire to: he is deemed "worthy of being enrolled among men of former days" (οἷος ἐν τοῖς πρὸ αὐτοῦ γράφεσθαι). One of the most important aspects of sophistic performances was the effort to embody the great heroic figures of the classical Greek past, to imitate their language as closely as possible, to become one of them. When Herodes Atticus is called "one of the Ten,"[41] he has reached the highest pinnacle that a sophist could hope for, and Hippodromus is here "counted among the classics." Being a sophist connected imperial Greeks with what they considered their most valuable and important heritage, the classical past.[42] Hence, sophists were much more than simple professionals: they were representatives of what an entire culture found important about itself.

Further Reading

Korenjak [17] and Whitmarsh [34:23–40] provide lively and informative descriptions of the sophists as public performers and their interactions with audiences. Schmitz [28] and Connolly [8] explore some of the implications of sophistic performances. Schmitz [27] is a book-length study of the function of sophistic rhetoric in imperial Greek society. Eshleman [10] analyzes the ways in which sophists defined their professional in-groups. Gleason [13] is an excellent study of the role of physiognomy in sophistic self-fashioning.

40 Cf. Puech [21:29–31]; Schmitz [27:136–46].
41 *VS* 2.1, 564; what is meant is he that he is one of the canonical classical orators.
42 See Bowie [5], which is still relevant.

Works Cited

[1] Anderson, Graham: *The Second Sophistic: a Cultural Phenomenon in the Roman Empire*, London: Routledge 1993.

[2] Anderson, Graham: *Philostratus. Biography and Belles Lettres in the Third Century A. D.*, London: Croom Helm 1986.

[3] Avotins, Ivars: "The Holders of the Chairs of Rhetoric at Athens," *Hardard Studies in Classical Philology* 79 (1975) 313–24.

[4] Beck, Mark, ed.: *A Companion to Plutarch*, Chicester: Wiley Blackwell 2014.

[5] Bowie, Ewen L.: "Greeks and Their Past in the Second Sophistic," *Past and Present* 46 (1970) 3–41 (reprint in [11], 166–209).

[6] Bowie, Ewen L. and Elsner, Jaś, eds.: *Philostratus*, Cambridge (Engl.): Cambridge UP 2009.

[7] Castelli, Carla: "Le fatiche del sofista: Note sul lessico dell'attività letteraria nelle 'VitaeSophistarum' di Filostrato," *Rendiconti dell'Istituto Lombardo* 135 (2001) 247–59.

[8] Connolly, Joy: "Reclaiming the Theatrical in the Second Sophistic," *Helios* 28 (2001) 75–96.

[9] Cribiore, Raffaella: "Lucian, Libanius, and the short road to rhetoric," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 47 (2007) 71–86.

[10] Eshleman, Kendra: *The Social World of Intellectuals in the Roman Empire: Sophists, Philosophers, and Christians*, Cambridge (Engl.): Cambridge UP 2012.

[11] Finley, Moses I., ed.: *Studies in Ancient Society*, London: Routledge 1974.

[12] Fisher, Nick and van Wees, Hans, eds.: *Competition in the Ancient World*, Swansea: Classical Press of Wales 2010.

[13] Gleason, Maud: *Making Men. Sophists and Self-Representation in Ancient Rome*, Princeton: Princeton UP 1995.

[14] Jones, Christopher P.: "Philostratus and the Gordiani," *Mediterraneo Antico* 5 (2002) 759–67.

[15] Kasulke, Christoph Tobias: *Fronto, Marc Aurel und kein Konflikt zwischen Rhetorik und Philosophie im 2. Jh. n. Chr.* (Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 218), Berlin: de Gruyter 2012.

[16] König, Jason: "Competitiveness and Anti-Competitiveness in Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists*," in: [12], 279–300.

[17] Korenjak, Martin: *Publikum und Redner. Ihre Interaktion in der sophistischen Rhetorik der Kaiserzeit* (Zetemata 104), Munich: Beck 2000.

[18] Lauwers, Jeroen: "Systems of Sophistry and Philosophy: The Case of the Second Sophistic," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 107 (2014) 331–63.

[19] Naechster, Moritz: *De Pollucis et Phrynichi controversiis*, Leipzig: Seele 1908.

[20] Philostratus and Eunapius*, With an English Translation by Wilmer C. Wright*: *Lives of the Sophists* (Loeb Classical Library 134), Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1921.

[21] Puech, Bernadette: *Orateurs et sophistes grecs dans les inscriptions d'époque impériale* (Textes et traditions 4), Paris: Vrin 2002.

[22] Roskam, Geert, de Pourcq, Maarten J. G. M. and van der Stockt, Luc, eds.: *The Lash of Ambition. Plutarch, Imperial Greek Literature and the Dynamics of* Philotimia, Leuven: Peeters 2012.

[23] Rothe, Susanne: *Kommentar zu ausgewählten Sophistenviten des Philostratos. Die Lehrstuhlinhaber in Athen und Rom* (Sammlung Groos 38), Heidelberg: Groos 1989.

[24] Russell, Donald A.: *Greek Declamation*, Cambridge (Engl.): Cambridge UP 1983.

[25] Schmitz, Thomas A.: "Plutarch and the Second Sophistic," in: [4], 32–42.

[26] Schmitz, Thomas A.: "Narrator and Audience in Philostratus *Lives of the Sophists*," in: [6], 49–68.

[27] Schmitz, Thomas A.: *Bildung und Macht. Zur sozialen und politischen Funktion der zweiten Sophistik in der griechischen Welt der Kaiserzeit* (Zetemata 97), Munich: C. H. Beck 1997.

[28] Schmitz, Thomas A.: "Performing History in the Second Sophistic," in: [35], 71–92.

[29] Sidebottom, Harry: "Philostratus and the Symbolical Roles of the Sophist and Philosopher," in: [6], 69–99.

[30] Swain, Simon: *Hellenism and Empire. Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World AD 50–250*, Oxford: Oxford UP 1996.

[31] Veyne, Paul: *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism*, London: Allen Lane 1990 (original French edition Paris 1976).
[32] van Hoof, Lieve: *Plutarch's Practical Ethics. The Social Dynamics of Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford UP 2012.
[33] Watts, Edward: *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage 41), Berkeley: University of California Press 2006.
[34] Whitmarsh, Tim: *The Second Sophistic* (New Surveys in the Classics 35), Oxford: Oxford UP 2005.
[35] Zimmerman, Martin, ed.: *Geschichtsschreibung und politischer Wandel im 3. Jh. n. Chr. Kolloquium zu Ehren von Karl-Ernst Petzold (Juni 1998) anläßlich seines 80. Geburtstags* (Historia Einzelschriften 127), Wiesbaden: Steiner 1999.
[36] Zuiderhoek, Arjan: *The Politics of Munificence in the Roman Empire. Citizens, Elites, and Benefactors in Asia Minor*,: Cambridge UP 2016.
[37] Zweimüller, Serena: *Lukian, »Rhetorum praeceptor«. Einleitung, Text und Kommentar* (Hypomnemata 176), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2008.

First published in: Daniel Richter and William Johnson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook to the Second Sophistic*, Oxford UP: Oxford 2017.