

Ars grammatica e latino parlato nelle noctes atticae

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at describing and explaining several relevant passages in Gellius' Noctes Atticae, which concern the linguistic development of spoken Latin during the early stages of its history. Gellius' awareness for even minimal features of Latin phonology is well-known to the scientific literature of the last decades. His own grammatical sensitivity is evident through most of the capitula of his anecdotal work. Many sociolinguistic varieties are inspected by Gellius ranging along a wide spectrum, from clear low sociolects to the so-called "neo-standard" Latin, which was proper to the higher layers of Roman society. In particular, four interesting testimonia confirm that, during the 2nd century AD, the quantitative oppositions in the vowel system, both in stressed and unstressed syllables, were disappearing. Therefore, these unequivocal texts indicate that the quantitative collapse in spoken Latin was precocious. Moreover, some specific aspects of Gellius' metalinguistic judgments, such as the absence of any statement about the quality differences of the vowels involved in the phonological processes of neutralization, might testify to a possible African origin of the author of the Noctes Atticae.