

Are Plutarch's sophists of a kind with those of Philostratus? The Second Sophistic of the second and third century, as described in Philostratus' *Lives*, has certain well-established characteristics: a culture of one-upmanship, court gossip, cutthroat rivalry, bombast, charlatanism, name-dropping, intellectual and social insecurity, ornate and splashy performance, clever improvisation coupled with brilliant, withering riposte, and a backward looking to an idealized Athenian past. We also get a glimpse of political activity on the part of Philostratus' sophists – tinged with all these “glittering” characteristics, to be sure, yet sober and responsible just the same: embassies, benefactions, interventions, panegyric orations and the like, most on behalf of or involving local communities.

But what did the movement – if such it is – look like at its presumed beginning in the first century? Philostratus begins with the obscure Nicetes, whose writings we do not have; we do, however, have those of his slightly younger contemporary Plutarch. Plutarch is not among Philostratus' sophists, for he does not fit readily into the sophistic world described in the *Lives*, and Philostratus does not intend to be complete; he is shaping an image, not writing a history. And yet Plutarch is a major literary figure that stands at the beginning of the Second Sophistic; Syme calls him a herald, something more than a precursor (*Roman Papers* v. 2, pp. 572f.). What is his relation to Philostratus' sophists? Investigation of his epideictic writings, since they are the kind of declamation practiced by Philostratus' sophists, is one avenue for understanding this. One might also examine the portrayal of sophists in his works and compare them with the later sophists: what did Plutarch have to say about sophists, their activities and the world in which they moved? Specifically, how does he use the term “sophist”? This paper examines and analyzes in Plutarch's *Moralia* the occurrences, uses and contexts of the word σοφιστής, its cognates and related words and concepts.

At first glance much of this looks exactly like the world of the later Second Sophistic: the example of Niger refusing to yield to his rival even though incapacitated by a fish bone (*Mor.* 131A) could have come right out of Philostratus' *Lives*. Just as telling are the stories of the sophist's encounters with rulers: the quips related in the series of Spartan Apophthegmata are to be expected – such ripostes were certainly conventional, but the account of a sophist consorting on such familiar terms with Alexander as to abuse him (11A) goes beyond this, anticipating the intimacy enjoyed, with less fatal results, by Philostratus' sophists.

There are differences, however. Although display oratory, ostentation and concern for reputation is clearly described in Plutarch, there is little if any sense of the adulation and constant insecurity about reputation which is endemic in the Second Sophistic; we see no perfumed peacocks, no simpering cross-dressers tilting their necks in affectation. Plutarch's sophists attended rulers, but did not turn royalty out of his lodging at midnight, as Polemo did to Antoninus. Where the sophistic public audience is mentioned at all it is illiberal (46E) and raucous (791A); even in private audiences there is little sense of Philostratus' cultivated audience of peers, whose members could spot an inconsistency, an accidental solecism, a lapse in diction or pronunciation – and close in for the kill. All this is sophistic culture, I would argue, but without the glitter. We find in Plutarch a nascent Second Sophistic, the elements in place even for some time before Plutarch, but undeveloped and unrefined until (as Syme observed) Roman imperial influence lifted Greek eloquence to favored status.