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# 'LA SAUSSE VAUT MIEUX QUE LE POISSON': DAVID RUHNKEN'S 1754 PUBLICATION OF THE PLATONIC LEXICON OF TIMAEUS

Most scholarship takes place in the head; some of it is merely imaginary. The eighteenth-century English classical scholar Richard Porson wrote:

I went to Strassburg, where I got drunk/With that most learnd professor Brunck/I went to Wortz, where I got drunken/With that more learnd professor Ruhnken.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, David Ruhnken and Porson never met, and perhaps the verses were merely attributed to, rather than authored by, Ruhnken. Porson never left England, and yet the idea of a Republic of Letters, in which one met and drank and argued, was now so strongly entrenched in the faculties of classical languages of Europe that if not true, at least the quatrain was ben trovato. The language and poses of novelty, of heroic scholars cutting a swath through the barbarisms of earlier generations, so familiar from the humanists of the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, were by the early eighteenth century no longer really appropriate. New finds of any significance, such as the discovery of the Homeric digamma by Richard Bentley, were thin on the ground.<sup>2</sup> It is, in this regard, surely of interest that David Ruhnken turned, toward the end of his career, to the scholarly work of editing not an author of classical antiquity, but rather Marc-Antoine Muret, a humanist from the golden period of the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> He corrected Muret's Latinity, however, just in the same way as if he had been editing the faulty Latinity of a manuscript of Varro or Lucretius. Indeed, the interest in Muret was of longer duration, for we find Ruhnken reading Muret's Variae lectiones by 1754.4 This essay, however, does not deal with this larger issue of David Ruhnken's relationship to the changes in the classical scholarship of the early Enlightenment in general. Rather it confines itself to the role that Ruhnken's 1754 publication of the *Platonic Lexicon* of Timaeus played in the elaboration of this career forged in the twilight of the giants of philology. Written in the spirit of communicating to a wide interdisciplinary audience, this essay places the publication of the *Lexicon* in the larger context of the disciplinary reformations of what was once 'humane letters' and what was becoming *Altertumiswissenschaft*, in a way which is consistent with recent scholarly literature on the contribution of philology to the eighteenth-century 'invention' of the human and social sciences. However, its particular contribution is to examine critically the role of Ruhnken's Timaean philology in the wider "search for the historical Plato" and to, more narrowly still, suggest the relevance – for the *Lexicon* – of an unnoticed aspect of the private teaching of Tiberius Hemsterhuis, who had been Ruhnken's mentor in Leiden.

Ruhnken was born in 1723 in what is today Poland's Bydlino, but what is today Germany's Bedlin. His father was a "rentmaster" to the Graaf Podewils. It is accidental, but happily so, that Ruhnken should have been a classmate of Immanuel Kant in the Collegium Fredericianum, which, according to the most recent scholar, had affinities with, but no explicit influence from, the pietist formation by Francke at Halle.<sup>5</sup> The chief twentieth-century Ruhnken scholar E. Huhlshoff Pol refers to it, not unjustly, as "de beroemdste school von Noord-Duitsland".<sup>6</sup> In a letter exchange, much quoted by later scholars, Ruhnken and Kant were both a little dismissive of the education that they received at the Collegium, but if Kant was to travel further than Ruhnken from its strictures, both were in its debt. Yet Ruhnken's path was where the Greek was, and in the early eighteenth century, the University of Leiden was considered the great nursery of Hellenists. Ruhnken's life was from this point on essentially a Leiden life. And his closest influences were also all from Leiden: Iohannes Alberti, Tiberius Hemsterhuis, Valcknaer.

So when Ruhnken, as we shall see, published an edition of a highly techincal work of philology on the corpus of Plato, what he thought he was doing was naturally conditioned by the changing patterns of the relation of philology to philosophy in the early eighteenth century. The grand tradition of such Renaissance giants, who squarely adopted a philological approach to philosophy had begun to falter. The great master of early enlightenment philology, Richard Bentley, notably steered clear of Aristotle and Plato. With the separation of the universal culture of Renaissance philology into the ever more specialized disciplines and 'studies of man' in full force, classical scholarship found itself on the defensive, or at least, operating in a very different 'social economy' of the universities than before. For one (I hope helpfully) schematic account of this, I represent here the work of Michael Carhart's account of these changes:

# The contribution of Renaissance philology to 'cultural studies' split three ways (*pace* Carhart, 2007, p. 240) in the 1770s

Philology (Scaliger, Casaubon, Grotius, Vossius, ?Ruhnken: 1600 - 1750) - Platner: cognitive psychology

- Meiners and Herder: sociology/history/anthropology

- Kant: critical reflection on human reason and its methodological implications

In this light, one *might* see the publication of the highly technical lexicographical work by Ruhnken as a contribution to this development. Yet that is too generalizing, and, as I hope to show, there are certain 'local' explanations that remain important. Furthermore, Carhart's thesis about Ruhnken's aims in the Timaeus *Lexicon* is also not yet made out, it seems to me. In order to explore this further, however, more should be said of the *Lexicon*.

The first thing to say about the work is that it is a very small book indeed. The work contains 468 words of supposedly Platonic origin, and for each word offers a simple gloss. It, is in other words, a work that would fit in a few pages of A4 typescript. Let us leave out of consideration for the time being that some of the words are not Platonic. And then the traditional ascription of the work to Timaeus the Sophist suggests plenty of other problems. Let us not dwell too long on the fact that some of the glosses by the author are unhelpful or banal. But its very unhelpfulness poses problems that, to the enquiring mind, are suggestive. Here is an apt characterization from a recent scholar:

Even more strikingly, in spite of its elevated claims (after all, we are dealing with a *lexicon vocum Platonicarum*), it takes account of a surprising number of non-Platonic words, deals with some issues of pure grammar (one may mention the appearance of positive, comparative, and superlative forms of þάδιον, 371-373), and refers to words or particles we would probably not deem worthy to include in a Platonic dictionary. All this may prove rather confusing to anyone expecting a work of, let us say, more ambitious aspirations – for such an individual, the lexicon might come as somewhat of a disappointment or, at the very least, surprise. Thus, it seems, the

work does demand some explanation: given that the introductory letter clearly defines Timaeus' aim as that of providing an instrument which would facilitate a better understanding of the Platonic dialogues, it seems reasonable to assume that the *voces non-Platonicae* appeared in the course of transmission, as a result of the marginal notes penetrating into the archetype. With regard to the grammatical issues or the explanations concerning particles we may assume they were deemed necessary in view of the development of Greek language in the imperial era (after all, notes of similar character can be found in Neoplatonic commentaries). These assumptions, however, do not explain anything but the most general framework, leaving a reader with several nagging questions.<sup>7</sup>

But such nagging questions are not merely 'in the air'; particular circumstances about the emerging study of lexicography in early eighteenth-century Leiden gave shape to the particular ways in which Ruhnken responded to these questions. Perhaps just as influential as any attractions of the work itself was the impact of the friendship of Joannes Alberti. The two men were close, and already in 1745, Alberti records in the preface to his edition of the Greek lexicographer Hesychius that it was the 22-year old Ruhnken, who helpfully provided him with a copy of the little book of the Leipzig professor, Ernesti, On the Correct Use of Dictionaries.<sup>8</sup> This work explicitly mentions Timaeus and his Platonic lexicon, and it is the likely immediate source for Ruhnken's view of the relation between lexicography and *imitatio*.<sup>9</sup> Its high humanist faith in the variety diversity of human wits and minds (varietas, diversitas, ingenii, mentes) combined with the belief that the stylistic copiousness and abundance of certain classical writers (above all Homer and Plato) - and hence their imitation – was sufficient to cope with such variety is perhaps less explicitly rooted in the particulars of the historical circumstances of the antique schoolroom than Ruhnken's account, but one sees the genesis of the latter in Ernesti. Alberti, perhaps at Ruhnken's insistence, chose to include the entire work of Ernesti as part of the prefatory matter to his Heyschius edition. In any case, the value of lexicography for the young Ruhnken was now clear in his personal career path, as evidenced by the Heyschius edition, as it was in his own thinking about Classical Antiquity.

How does Ruhnken himself describe this work? Some of the detail of the preparation for this project has already been covered (albeit in a rare doctoral thesis published half a century ago), but I want to focus less on what actually happened than the way in which Ruhnken presents it. Let me paraphrase his preface. He starts in an eminently humanistic way, if by humanistic (in the Renaissance) we mean someone who takes style seriously. Plato wrote in a way, Ruhnken avers, that had a style far removed from normal speech. Thus there grew up a school of lexicography, first of whom was Harpocriton (Ruhnken draws his authority here from the Suda). Then one Boethus (for two citations of whose work, Ruhnken draws on the Bibliotheca of Photius). Although both these works were lost in the general 'shipwreck of letters' that the coming centuries caused, Ruhnken thinks that he can detect evidence of these lost works in the Timaeus work. He then proceeds to place Timaeus in the line of Platonist writers such as Porphyry, Jamblichus, Boethus and Plotinus. In other words, he adverts to the *philosophical* tradition within which this little libellus of lexicography may be seen. Turning to the moderns, Ruhnken is keen to start his constellation of scholars by quoting one of the greatest Dutch scholars of the golden age, Daniel Heinsius. Ruhnken quotes at some length a discussion taken from Heinsius' eighth dissertation of Maximus of Tyre. If only Heinsius had wished that the Platonists had not only produced accounts of Plato's doctrines, but also of his words. No mention of any of the Platonic revival philosophers of the seventeenth century follows, but rather Bernard De Montfaucon, who had actually discovered the manuscript. After that, we here of the meeting between Henry Gally and Ruhnken, which was influential in the genesis of the manuscript. Given that Ruhnken was still a young man when this project was mooted, one can see clearly a certain careerist tendency in this name-dropping. However, Ruhnken continues by discussing the role of imitation in ancient prose style. Plato's prose style found many imitators, since he was such a supreme stylist. Therefore Ruhnken needs to understand these words by reference to these later writers on occasion (Maximus of Tyre, Julian, Synesius, Themistius and so on). This is not only sensible, but also begins to suggest why Ruhnken found this a particularly valuable work on which to produce a vastly extended commentary of several hundred pages. It should be noted that Ruhnken is guite adept at correcting silently the more silly mistakes of the manuscript copyist.

What does Ruhnken do with this lexicon? Michael Carhart's recent book *The Science of Culture in Enlitenment Germany* already has a fascinating and provocative answer. In two hundred pages of text and commentary, Ruhnken built a case that the historical Plato was not the eighteenth-century Plato. Even the Plato of antiquity was not the historical Plato, but rather a construction built over generations.<sup>10</sup>

We will return to this interesting claim. Let me first reproduce here some of Ruhnken entries with an accompanying paraphrase in English.

23. άλαζών. Lysid. p.112 B. φοβοῦμαι μή ὥσπερ ἀνθρωποις άλαζοῖς, λόγοις τιςί τοιοῦτοις ἐντετυχήκαμεν. Hipp. Min. p. 232 D. τὸν Ἀχιλλέα εἰς τὸν Ὀδυσσέα λέγειν, λαζόνα. B Charm. P. 244 D [...]. Mendaces vates frequentissime λαζόνας dici, eleganter docet Hemsterhuis ad Lucian. Dial. Mort. XXVIII p. 447. Polit. VIII p. 498 D ψευδεῖς δὴ καὶ ἀλαζόνες, οἶμαι, λόγοι καὶ δοξαί. Sic etiam Gorg. p. 313 D ψεύδος καὶ ἀλαζονεια. Phileb. P. 94 E. Euthydem. p. 219 F. Phaedon. P. 391 B. Polit. VI. 470 A 471 D. Demodocus 378 C. Proprium autem erat sophistarum epitheton, qui, quod nesciebant, pulcre scire, fatuosa vanitate iactabant. Quem usum, Atticis familiarem observait Schol. Aristoph. ad Nub. v.102 et ad Ran. v. 282. Plato, vel, si mavis, Aeschines Socraticus, Eryx. p. 744.

This is a not untypical passage where the word in question was indeed to be found in the Platonic corpus. So, in essence, here we have a word in the Timaeus Lexicon, and then its gloss ("liars"), to which Ruhnken gives a further range of Platonic parallels, pointing out that Tiberius Hemsterhuis had made already a contribution on the relation between this word and its particular appropriateness to deceitful prophets, and finally adding a comment that this was a word, according to Attic usage (exemplified by the ancient scholiasts on the Greek comic poet Aristophanes), had a derogatory flavour and was often applied to Plato's enemies, the "sophists". He closes noting that his source for this is an ancient dialogue of Plato, but which may have been by someone else (something that the well-diffused Diogenes Laertius had already recorded).

51. Ανδραποδώιδη τρίχα] pro ιδιον Suidas minus recte ιδίως, apud quem mox desunt verba, αί δοῦλαι τε καὶ. Pertinet glossa ad Alcibiad. I p. 32 A. ἔτι τὴν ἀνδραπαδώδη τρίχα ἔχοντες ἐπι τῆι ψυχῆι...Quem locum Olympiodorus commentariis in hunc Dialogum manu exaratis, quos inter libros Vossianos Leidensis Bibliothecae excussimus, egregrie illustrat: παροιμία ἐστὶ γυναικῶν, επὶ τῶν ελευθερουμένων δούλων, καὶ ἐἰμενοντων ἐν τῆι δουλείαι-ὅτι ἔχεις τὴν ἀνδραποδώιδη τρίχα ἐν τῆι κεφαλῆι, τουτέστιν, ἔτι τὴν δουλουκὴν τρίχα ἔχεις ...[Greek quotation continues for a few lines more]. Eandem observationem, sed minus integram, iam olim ex MS protulit vir magnus I. Casaubonus ad Persii. Sat. V p. 426. A Platone suo sumpsit Proclus in Tim. LI p. 31 διότι τὴν παντοίαν Αίγυπτων σοφίαν οὑ [illegible], ἀλλ' ὁι πλεῖστοι παρ' αὐτοῖς, τὴν ἀνδραποδώδη τρίχα ἔφερον ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς. Adde Eustathium Kustero laudatum ad II. A. p. 79. Multum differt illud Lysidis ap lamblich. V. P. cap. XVII p. 64. Πυκιναὶ γὰρ καὶ λάσιαι λόχμαι περί τὰς φρένας καὶ τὴν καρδίαν πεφυκάνται τῶν μὴ καθαρῶς τοῖς μαθήμασιν οἰγιασθέντων.

This passage (on the 51st lemma of Timaeus's Lexicon, "slavish hair") begins by making a small textual emendation on the passage from the Suida that accompanies the Timaean original. Then it gives a parallel from another Platonic work, the Alciabides, and then makes the point that Olympiodorus, a late antique commentator on Plato, had used the very same passage in making his own commentary on the Alcibiades. It had clearly become a proverb by the time of Olympiodorus that to have slavish hair in one's heart was to say, despite the non-servile long locks of the freedman, something "slavish" still stuck in his soul. Ruhnken notes that this was, if not in its entirety, an observation also that found its way into a manuscript version of Isaac Casaubon's commentary on Persius' Satires (which Ruhnken had found, he notes, in Leiden Library). Proclus liked this phrase sufficiently (that perhaps is the implication of 'suo') to add into his own commentary on the Timaues, and even Eustathius, the late commentator on Homer, is dragged in, showing how this little phrase had a life beyong the Homeric corpus (and perhaps suggesting why the phrase should have been selected by Timaeus). Then there is a rather hard to follow comment to the effect that this phrase is very different from the words put into the mouth of Lysis and quoted by lamblichus in his work on the Pythagorean way of life (which is something about how difficult is to free the mind and heart of irregular thoughts and ideas amongst those who have not received the pure training). One might call the gist of this passage a history of a Platonic proverb.

55. Ἀντυγες] Theaetet. P. 141 F. ἀλλ ἀγαπώμεν ἂν ἐρωτηθέντες ο τί ἐστιν, άμαξα, εἰ ἐχοῖμεν ειπεῖν, τροχοί, ἂξων, ὑπερτερία, ἂντυγες, ζυγόν. Quod ἂντυξ esset, vulgo paene ignorabatur, donec illud praeclare, ut infinita alia, exponeret Ti. Hemsterhus. Ad Lucian Deor. Dial. XXV p. 279.

This is a fairly straightforward instance of praise of Hemsterhuis. No-one had understood what this word had meant until Hemsterhuis explained

it in his work on Lucian. What I want to emphasize, and although here I have provided merely a few examples, they are examples that could be very significantly multiplied, is how far these examples are from proving what Carhart seems to suggest. The first substantive result of my research relates to Carhart's thesis about Ruhnken's separation of Plato from Platonism. Ruhnken's notes to the Lexicon distinguish Plato from his later predecessors. Although the basic arguments about this distinction had been made a few years before Ruhnken, Ruhnken picks them up. I must say that I do not understand how this understanding has happened. I appreciate that only some of you know Latin, but it is guite clear from a look at the Ruhnken text that there is in fact very little of this disambiguation going on. Now, at one point in the preface, he does say that Ruhnken takes particular pleasure in showing where later authors have taken a particular passage from Plato. But this is more about imitatio, than intellectual history, since we are talking about the history of particular tags and phrases rather than positions. What we have seen rather is how later authors select particular phrases of Plato and then re-use them. But this is very different from saying that what we think about Plato is different from the real Plato. At one level, of course, simply reiterating that Platonic commentary often reuses particular phrases and took place within a curriculuar context of imitation of Platonic style is already to refuse to talk about the Platonic system in the way that, perhaps, Ficino would have done. But it is not to say that the generally accepted view of the Platonic system is incorrect to the historical actuality of the Platonic corpus.

This is, perhaps, merely a matter of emphasis, and naturally saying how important philology to philosophy is is already to take a certain position on the historicity of Plato, but I think we must resile from the bolder formulation of Carhart. A person may understand the problems of philosophy and its characteristic argumentative moves very well, have a certain intrinsic talent for some flavours of philosophy, and yet not really want to 'do' philosophy. What made that more true in the early modern period that, in large measure, education just was philosophy: every student spent an entire year on the study of Aristotelian logic, in a way that later generations of classical scholars often would not, thereby creating a greater institutional difference between philosophy and philology. For two hundred years, the only people who write commentaries on ancient philosophy are themselves scholars who devote themselves entirely to ancient philosophy, whereas before a scholar, such as Ruhnken might work on both Aristotle, and say, one of the ancient poets, such as Apollonius Rhodius. One consequence of this (which is not explored in the text) is the answer to the question, what is the relavant unit of analysis in the history of philosophy: word, phrase, sentence, paragraph? This has further consequences (at least methodological, if not philosophical *stricto sensu*), even if I am sceptical about the historicizing thesis of Carhart. Namely, for Ruhnken and all such philologists, the starting point of exposition in philosophy is the word.

Furthermore, I think we can pinpoint some more precise elements of Runhken's enthusiasm for this edition of a work of philosophical lexicography. And rather than suggest that Ruhnken is part of some unstoppable tide of historicism, an explanation leaves out the scope of what I call more local and more precise factors, let us attend to something else. Let me underscore the influence of Tiberius Hemsterhuis, Ruhnken's tutor. What I want to suggest is that in addition to the general interest in what sort of Plato was necessary, Ruhnken's tutor inspired in him an interest in philosophy in general, and, most interesting, and what I should like to underline is that Hemsterhuis did *not* just approach philosophy as a philologist. We have already seen the impact of Hemsterhuis on particular details in relation to particular words in the Lexicon. One would imagine therefore that the impact of Hemsterhuis was, in a narrow sense, philological. One piece of evidence, however, inclines us to a more sophisticated picture of what Hemsterhuis thought he was up to, and, then, perhaps, also Ruhnken. Ruhnken, in a eulogy made after his tutor's death, note that how addicted to the study of philosophy Hemsterhuis was. He (Hemsterhuis) would compare ancient and modern philosophy, calling John Locke an Aristotelian, and Leibniz a second Plato, though he was quite clear that in the field of Metaphysics no progress had been made since the ancients.<sup>11</sup> But despite his tutor's interest in ancient philosophy, there is no evidence for this interest in his published works - it was a private passion clearly (if we take Ruhnken's testimony seriously). Still more interesting is something else that Ruhnken says about Hemsterhuis's approach to philosophy. Ruhnken says that Tiberius Hemsterhius was amazed that, despite the massive amount of material that it offered, the discipline of the history of philosophy had barely been touched. What does this mean? We can see both sides of the philosophical choice in Hemsterhuis, between viewing the history of philosophy as a forum in which you can make comparsions, because philosophy is about arguments and ideas, and on the other hand, viewing philosophy as in essence a historical discipline which will need to start with philology. Ruhnken

was clearly impressed by the force of his tutor's interest in philosophy, even though Hemsterhuis's published works do not betray this interest; it was clearly an example of the more free-wheeling style characteristic of oral tuition. And we see that, given the changed nature of the times, the chance discovery of a highly lexicographical Platonic manuscript, pushed Ruhnken in the second of these directions. Already in 1801, the scholar Rink saw the relation between Hemsterhuis and Ruhnken as a peculiarly close and important one, and I am happy to pay tribute to Rink's groundbreaking work.<sup>12</sup> And, furthermore, before we dismiss this Ruhnken kind of philological detail of as no interest to philosophers, let us remind ourselves that probably the most intellectually powerful and productive scholar of ancient philosophy today, the Oxford and Geneva based Jonathan Barnes, has collaborated with Magadalena Bonelli to produce a recent commentary on this very same lexicon of Timaeus, a commentary that is gargantuan compared to the tiny compass of the original work: 500 pages.<sup>13</sup> Truly, Valcknaer said of Ruhnken's work on the Lexicon, quoting, with a certain self-conscious piquancy, Scaliger, "La sausse vaut mieux que le poisson".<sup>14</sup>

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> M. L. C., *Richard Porson: A Biographical Essay*, London, p. 16.
- <sup>2</sup> For Bentley, see now K. Haugen, *Richard Bentley: Poetry and Enlightenment*, Harvard, 2012, with full bibliography.
- <sup>3</sup> *Marci Antonii Mureti Opera Omnia,* 4 vols., ed. D. Ruhnken, Leiden: Luchtmans, 1789.
- <sup>4</sup> *Lexicon*, p. 36.
- <sup>5</sup> *Die Schule Kants: Mit dem Text von Christian Schiffart....,* p.1. He cites there further bibliography for the conflict between Wolf and Halle, however, that caused the works of Wolf to be influential in the curriculum at the Collegium.
- <sup>6</sup> Studia Ruhnkeniana, p. 14.
- <sup>7</sup> Bryn Mawr Classical Review, 2010.10.03.
- <sup>8</sup> Joannes Alberti, *Hesychii Lexicon....*, Leiden: Luchtmans, 1746, sig. ++++++++2<sup>r.</sup>
- <sup>9</sup> J. A. Ernesti, *De vero usu et indole glossariorum Graecorum*, Leipzig, sig. B2<sup>r-v</sup>.
- <sup>10</sup> Michael Carhart, *The Science of Culture in Enlightenment Germany*, Harvard, 2007, p. 123.
- <sup>11</sup> See David Ruhnken, *Elogium Tiberii Hemsterhuisi*, Leipzig: Teubner, 1875, p. 13. There is a more recent edition of this: H. Nikitinski, *Ruhnkenii Elogium Tiberii Hemsterhusii*, Munich/Leipzig, 2006, which I have not been able to consult.
- <sup>12</sup> F. T. Rink, *Tiberius Hemsterhuis und David Ruhnken*. *Biographischer Abriss ihrens Lebens*, Koenigsberg, 1801.
- <sup>13</sup> Madalena Bonelli and Jonathan Barnes, *Timee le sophiste. Lexique platonicien*, Leiden, Brill, 2006.
- See Studia Ruhnkeniana, p.152 n.64 (and for the quotation from Scaliger, "Secunda Scaligerana, Groningen, 1669, II.5", which I have taken from Studia Runhkeniana, and which must, slightly confusingly, refer to the book with the title 'Prima Scaligerana quibus adjunta et altera Scaligerana', there being no other such work published in that year at Groeningen).

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(where titles are in both Greek and Latin, I have, in keeping with the conventions of the NEC yearbook, restricted myself to giving one title in Latin)

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