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Συνουσία in Late Antique Neoplatonic Schools: A Concept between Social History, History of Education and History of Philosophy

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Abstract: It is well studied that some Pythagorean principles lied at the foundations of the Late Antique Neoplatonic School. The main reason for that conclusion to be drawn is the two biographies of the Samian sage written by the Neoplatonic philosophers Porphyry of Tyre and Iamblichus of Chalcis. Accordingly, the archetypical image of Pythagoras became a major ideal for which every pagan philosopher aimed in Late Antiquity. Henceforth, masters and their disciple circles comprised a micro-society which can reasonably be analyzed as a whole. Suffice it to say that they were small and cohesive charismatic communities whose isolation from the outside world aroused a living harmony from which emerged long-standing emotional bonds. Consequently, the Pythagorically rooted κοινός βίος (Iambl. *Vit. Pyth.* 6.29: τὸ λεγόμενον κοινοβίους) can easily be ascertained in the biographical literature around the philosophical schools from Plotinus to Damascius (cf. Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 18.6-14; Procl. *In Resp. passim*). It is a way of life in common which was also known at the old Athenian Academy (according to Plato's only explicit reference to Pythagoras (*Resp.* 600a-b: Πυθαγόρειον τρόπον τοῦ βίου) and has sometimes been defined even as "coenobitic", in analogy with other contemporary phenomena. But from our point of view, it can be better understood through an analysis of the concept of συνουσία—that is, the meetings of philosophers with their companions (ἐταῖροι) in a specific place which turned into a sort of spiritual household. With this contribution, we aim at focusing on the redefinition of the Neoplatonic συνουσία as a legacy of the Platonic notion of συνουσία, stemming from Pythagorean κοινοβίους. To sum up, we will revise this issue and the state of the art, with the redefinition of Late Antique συνουσία as a *terminus technicus* in the biographic literature around the Neoplatonic Schools, aiming at opening new paths for the understanding of the Pythagorean–Platonic heritage in Late Antiquity.

Keywords: Neoplatonism; history of education in Antiquity; Greek biography in Late Antiquity



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1. Introduction

As is well known, the Pythagorean tradition, through its Late Antique reworking, lies at the foundations of the Neoplatonic School (Goulet 1981; Fowden 1979, 1982; Watts 2007). The main reason for that conclusion to be drawn is the existence of two biographies of the Samian sage written by the Neoplatonic philosophers Porphyry of Tyre and Iamblichus of Chalcis (Macris 2014; O'Meara 2014). Accordingly, the archetypical image of Pythagoras as a founder father and precursor of the Platonic tradition became a major ideal for which every pagan philosopher aimed in Late Antiquity. Thus, it is possible to claim, along with Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé, that Plotinus "anime une communauté dont le mode de vie est inspiré par la règle pythagoricienne" (Goulet-Cazé 1982, p. 254). Henceforth, masters and their disciple circles comprised a charismatic-like micro-society which can reasonably be analyzed as a whole according to the numerous sources dealing with it. Suffice it to say that they were small and cohesive charismatic communities whose isolation from the outside world aroused a vivid harmony from which emerged long-standing emotional and family-like bonds. Consequently, the Pythagorically rooted common life or κοινός βίος (Iambl.

Vit. Pyth. 6.29: τὸ λεγόμενον κοινοβίους) can easily be ascertained in the philosophical schools from Plotinus to Damascius.¹ Furthermore, it was a common way of life which was also known at the old Athenian Academy, as the only and famous allusion in the Platonic corpus points out (*Pl. Resp.* 600a-b: Πυθαγόρειον τρόπον τοῦ βίου).

Having all these presuppositions in mind, some scholars have sometimes defined these philosophic communities and their austere atmosphere in terms of “pagan monasteries” (Fernández-Galiano 2011, pp. 180–81; Zamora Calvo 2010, p. 63; O’Meara 2003, p. 16; De Blois 1976, p. 192). However, as we will try to show in this paper, they may be better understood by employing, as they also did, the Greek concept συνουσία—that is to say, an intimate meeting of philosophers comprising the master with their companions (ἐταῖροι) in a specific place (usually the master’s own *domus*) whose esoteric power turned it into their genuine spiritual household. In short, with this twofold contribution, we aim at focusing on the redefinition of the Neoplatonic συνουσία as a legacy of the Platonic notion of συνουσία—in dialogues such as *Republic* or *Theaetetus*, among others, but also in the Pseudo-platonic *Minos*—stemming likewise from Pythagorean κοινόβια. The study of the Late Antique Greek biographical tradition written in the context of the Neoplatonic Schools—by authors such as Porphyry, Eunapius, Iamblichus or Marinus—can shed some light upon this issue.

2. The Concept of συνουσία and Its Pythagorean–Platonic Roots

To begin with, we should examine the semantics of the concept συνουσία as a technical term in the idiosyncratic framework of Greek παιδεία.² In the interpretive model of the transition of Greek culture between the 6th and 4th centuries BC from an oral system to a written one proposed by the influential studies of Eric A. Havelock, συνουσία works as a hinge element: “The mechanism, if it can be called such, for maintaining this education by guaranteeing its transmission from generation to generation was one typical of an oral society: namely the habit, sedulously cultivated, of close daily association (συνουσία) between adolescents and their elders who served as ‘guides, philosophers, friends’” (Havelock 1952, p. 100; 1986, p. 4). This idea triggered a hypothesis called “inculturation”, defended by Kevin Robb. It contains the general premise, that we share here, that “the term, when used in a technical sense, referred to the constant association of a younger generation with the older ... in need of formation and training ... they accumulated wisdom and skills of elders, and they sought to imitate their virtues” (Robb 1993, p. 82; 1994, p. 197).

Concerning an historiographical sense, the topic that we are dealing with must be understood within the field of the history of education in Antiquity: the centrality of the notion of “education”, παιδεία, in the Greek culture, as shown by the monumental work of Werner Jaeger (Jaeger 1933–1936), is impossible to underestimate. However, besides this wider sense stemming from German idealism, there is a specific history of Greek education. Another key Classical scholar of the 20th century, Henri-Irénée Marrou, published in 1948 a book that became the standard and classical modern reference study on the subject.³ Not only did he define the ancient world from the perspective of History of Education as “the civilization of παιδεία” (Marrou [1948] 1985, p. 129), but he also depicted it as a social phenomenon worthy of being studied by itself. In the same vein, Stanley F. Bonner’s classic analysis focused on the central role that ancient education in general played regarding moral issues (Bonner [1977] 2012). More specific was M. L. Clarke, for the author handled higher education, which is the educational frame where the topic of this paper lies, whose chronology he extended until the end of the Byzantine empire and even beyond (Clarke [1971] 2012, p. vii). Over the course of the last decades, there have been plenty of approaches in this field (Maurice 2013, p. xiii; Alviz Fernández 2021), but, because it adheres to our hypothesis, we stick to the modern heir to Marrou’s work, Yun Lee Too, who has recently pointed out that “teaching and learning ... occur elsewhere apart from childhood and in places other than the anachronistically conceived classroom” (Too 2018, p. 18). This is a notion of education that implies a strong emotional bond between individuals, which, from our point of view, is present in the concept of συνουσία. In short, it just

became part of the sociological infrastructure of Antiquity, so it transcends the classic definition given by scholars such as Arthur P. Urbano, who asserts the following in his study on the profession of the late antique teacher: “The *synousia*, a term indicating intimate company, was the classroom meeting of teacher and students” (Urbano 2018, p. 11). The educational sphere in which the ancient concept of συνουσία must be integrated could be defined by paraphrasing Pierre Hadot, i.e., it was one that could only be completed through κοινὸς βίος and dialogue between the teacher and disciple within a school (Hadot 1995, p. 93). In other words, the intense affective ties that held this master–disciple duality together and that triggered the intellectual processes contained in the συνουσία originated, sociologically speaking, through the charisma of the respective scholarch (σχολάρχης) or head of a school. This individual feature was systematized by the sociologist Max Weber at the beginning of the 20th century and is the basis, to a certain extent, of the corporatism that Sergi Grau describes when defining Greco-Roman higher education as an unavoidable vector of a specific way of life (βίος, later πολιτεία) in Antiquity.⁴

It is common knowledge that the Greek term συνουσία is originally composed of the prefix συν- and the substantive οὐσία. On the one hand, συν- carries the relational idea of “company” while providing a meaning of simultaneity (“with, together, at the same time”). On the other hand, the substantive οὐσία is formed on the feminine participle (οὐσα) of the verb εἶναι, plus the suffix -ία, which points at some sort of abstraction and refers to that which belongs to or is part of the individual, its very essence or existence, and that which is one’s own, one’s substance or one’s property. Together, they become the verb form σύνειμι, from which ultimately comes the feminine noun we are dealing with in this paper. It means, literally, “to be with, be joined or linked with” and, as can be expected, it develops in multiple semantic nuances (“to live with, to be joined with, to be acquainted with, to be engaged in, to have intercourse with, attend, associate with a teacher”). For instance, that which describes the hero Odysseus “dealing with” a series of misfortunes in the form of a storm by the god Poseidon, who threw him into the country of the Phaeacians (Hom. *Od.* 7.270); the philosophical reasoning “along with which moved” Aristophanes’ Pheidippides (A. Nu. 1404); or the “coexistence” between some men and poverty, as it was personified by the famous comedy playwright (Arist. *Pl.* 504). However, we are interested in those other meanings that show a close interpersonal relationship. See, for example, when it is argued in the *Symposium* that the god Eros is always “in the company” of the youngsters (Pl. *Smp.* 195b) or when its use emphasizes the “friendly relationship” (φιλικῶς) and “hospitability” (οἰκειῶς) between Xenophon and another high-ranking army officer (X. *An.* 6.6.35); in this regard, it is not unusual to find the verb σύνειμι in warlike contexts in the form of “comrades” (X. *Cyr.* 8.2.2; Ar. V. 475); likewise, this technical term is used to refer to the “companions (of travel)” or just “companions” of Paul of Tarsus at the time of his conversion (Acts 22:11), and it also refers to the “cohabitation” under the same roof of a man and a woman (Hdt. 4.9.3), as well as to sexual “intercourse” (A. Ec. 619; Arist. Pol. 1262a33, HA 540a13, also referred to animal copulation), a sense which, as it is well-known, has prevailed nowadays in modern Greek (Babinotis 2008, *sub uoce*).

Through this string of meanings, we intend to show a sample of the polysemy that abounds in an idea that we consider the key in our work. Namely, the tendency toward intimacy with the subject of the action to which the verb form σύνειμι refers in each case. In this paper, we are concerned, more specifically, with a meaning that is also related to said root since ancient times, that is, “to associate” with a teacher or school (Pl. *Ap.* 25e; X. *Mem.* 1.2.24), “to attend” his public audiences or be part of those present at a banquet (X. *Smp.* 1.15), “to meet” or “to have intercourse” with him (Pl. *Tht.* 151a) or “to frequent his company” (Pl. *Tht.* 151a) along with the rest of the “disciples” (X. *Mem.* 1.2.8).

On the other hand, through the term συνουσία, the verb σύνειμι and its meanings become an all-encompassing noun. However, despite that the concept is not found as such neither in Homer nor in Hesiod (Bosch-Veciana 2000, p. 38), this is not an obstacle for mythological depictions of didactics between adults and young people to appear in their

works.⁵ These sorts of descriptions laid the foundations of the classic topic of the wise teacher instructing the still inexperienced disciple. Only over the next two centuries will its use become established thanks to a significant increase in the use of writing. Already at this point, συνουσία highlights the notion of being in a certain space together with another person or in the company of a group of them, where it is natural to produce some kind of dialectical or conversational exchange (e.g., Pl. *Tht.* 150d, *Sph.* 217e, *Smp.* 176e; Isoc. 4.45, A. *Th.* 21). More specifically, the context is usually philosophical, educational or spiritual (e.g., Pl. *Plt.* 285c, *Prt.* 318a; X. *Smp.* 1.2.13, 1.2.60, 1.6.11), and, finally, the aforementioned meaning of sexual intercourse must not be forgotten (Pl. *Lg.* 838a-e, *Smp.* 206c, 192c, etc.). Yet, this last erotic meaning declined in importance within the framework of the educational process when παιδεία (Robb 1994, p. 204) (as well as its συνουσία (Lynch 1972, p. 63)) institutionalized during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

The term is recurring in the *Corpus Platonicum*, which was an empirical fact that led Carl Joachim Classen to attribute its coinage as a linguistic innovation or technical term to Plato himself.⁶ Despite its polysemy (it has philosophical, social and even erotic nuances), Cristián De Bravo has recently defined it in the Platonic framework as a communal concept whose background clearly indicates “the bond between generations in the ancient polis” (De Bravo Delorme 2019, p. 172). It was in this context where the young students learnt from their elders and attempted to imitate their ἀρετή. According to Plato, unlike the συνουσία of the sophists, which was in exchange for money (Pl. *Ap.* 19d-20a), only required attending the teacher’s lecture and took the form of a monologue (Pl. *Prt.* 318a-319b),⁷ the Socratic συνουσία demanded the participation of all those present in the meeting by means of the so-called maieutic method. In short, its essence was constituted by the process of searching for the truth, i.e., “the practice of the dialogue, namely, the giving and receiving of *logos* ... the space of care through the shared word”.⁸ We must bear in mind the physical proximity between the teacher and disciple (Pl. *Smp.* 175c-d), which, in communion with other aspects of the extraordinary personality of the former, has currently contributed to the emergence of hermeneutic proposals of charismatic leadership from disciplines such as Sociology of Religion.⁹ Thus, the scholar Harold Tarrant claims that “the word συνουσία implies a relationship with a mentor rather than a lecturer or instructor in logic” (Tarrant 2005, p. 141); and, for his part, Robb call those mentors “older male initiators (through ‘association’ or συνουσία)” (Robb 1994, p. 233).

These inner ties of the intellectual community were shaped not only by the grace of the teacher’s charisma but also by sharing a “common life” (κοινὸς βίος), and it was a way of life or πολιτεία that was boosted by the educational system of the Hellenic παιδεία. This *modus vivendi* must be comprehended above all in the spiritual realm of the individual, which is an area that is embedded into the term συνουσία, as we attempt to demonstrate in this paper. But first, it is critical to emphasize that this idea has Pythagorean roots, and this hypothesis is made explicit by Iamblichus of Chalcis, who in his *On the Pythagorean Life* wrote the following:

“On his first visit, to the famous city of Kroton, he made many disciples, it is reported that he had there six hundred people who were not only inspired to study his philosophy, but, actually, became ‘coenobites’ according to his instructions”.¹⁰

With this biographical treatise on Pythagoras, which follows that of Iamblichus’ own teacher Porphyry of Tyre, he does nothing but project an image which could be called a *coenobium* (κοινόβιον)—that is to say, in this case, a higher education community of philosophy. This may be understood nearly as similar as those institutions headed by late antique Neoplatonic sages from Plotinus to Damascius, including Iamblichus.¹¹

Not surprisingly, as we will try to show in the next section, one of the foundations that define the way of life of Late Antique philosophical communities is that very κοινὸς βίος. Some of these Neoplatonic schools, in fact, especially from Iamblichus onwards, claimed to be rooted in the Pythagorean tradition regarding the Pythagorean “way of life” as a community of living and learning together and even sharing all goods and patrimony.

This does not mean that all the companions were always literally living together under the same roof but rather that, as in the case of the ancient Academy of Plato, they participated in doctrines that kept them in spiritual communion with one another.¹² Furthermore, the physical space in which the intimate meetings or συνουσίαι took place was also of great importance on an emotional and symbolic level, a place that in Late Antiquity became associated with the home of the respective teacher. This space was given a high meaning by the community of disciples. For example, there is the reverential description written by Eunapius of Sardis of the house of his teacher, the rhetor Prohaeresius: “Poor and humble as it was, nevertheless from it breathed the fragrance of Hermes and the Muses, so closely did it resemble a holy temple”.¹³

However, the different attempts by historians of philosophy and classicists to establish clear boundaries between the meanings come up against the transversality and tangentiality of concepts such as “meeting”, “encounter” or “association”.¹⁴ Concerning this issue, Antoni Bosch-Veciana has studied in depth the concept of συνουσία as a technical term in the works of Plato (Bosch-Veciana 2003). He states that it may be defined as “aquella [trobada] que es dóna entre un adult i un(s) noi(s) o jove(s) i que s’adreça a la formació (*paideia*) d’aquests darrers”, and he insists that “hi és decisiva la relació interpersonal” (Bosch-Veciana 2000, p. 41). In his opinion, *Lysis* is the dialogue that most clearly allows for a glimpse into the staging of a Socratic dialogical συνουσία with its three differentiated parts, namely, the initial encounter, the intercourse development and its dissolution (Bosch-Veciana 2000, p. 51); additionally, he states that “està directament relacionada, doncs, amb la *paideia* dels joves” (Bosch-Veciana 2004, p. 42), and he considers that during a συνουσία, relations of esteem that the Greeks understood within the framework of φιλία and ἔρος were displayed, and, as he concludes, silence and solitude were also necessary complements, the συνουσία just being a transitional moment between them (Bosch-Veciana (2004, p. 51). Regarding this issue in Late Antiquity, it is important to underline that the search for “solitude” (ἡρεμία) in order to find “inner peace” or “spiritual tranquility” (ἡσυχία) through “retreat” (ἀναχώρησις) or some sort of “spiritual exercises” (ἀσκήσεις) was a horizon of elevation toward which Neoplatonist philosophers also aspired (who also worked as high education teachers).¹⁵

In sum, it is the notion of the concept as a relational phenomenon that combines the physical and spiritual (Tarrant 2005, p. 154) realms that have permeated the term since the old Plato’s Academy. It happened above all in the field of παιδεία, especially in its higher stage, in which students attended lectures of rhetoric, philosophy, law and medicine (See Clarke [1971] 2012). However, as can be inferred, it is ultimately necessary for the researcher to study each particular case systematically in a way that takes into account the specific context (not only philological but also historical) surrounding the noun.¹⁶ Henceforth, during the Hellenistic period, the frequency of appearance of the term συνουσία decreases considerably. For instance, concerning the Lyceum, the Aristotelian tradition does not use the traditional terms with which we are dealing in this paper to describe the relationships between the members of his community but rather prefers some other, more general words with political nuances, such as *koinonia*.¹⁷ During the 2nd century AD, already in Roman imperial times, the frequency rises again in the Platonizing works of the polymath Plutarch of Chaeronea to remain in force among Late Antique authors such as the philosopher Porphyry of Tyre or the sophists Libanius of Antiochia and Eunapius of Sardis (Cf. Bosch-Veciana 2000, 38 n.11). The Antiochian literate and his first *Oratio* is a good illustration of the use of the concept under study. Indeed, the four cases found in that famous autobiographical text are associated with academic–philosophical meetings.¹⁸ In this regard, Raffaella Cribiore concludes that throughout his work, Libanius uses the term as “the course of his teaching (*synousia*, ‘getting together’)”.¹⁹ Among the ancient writers, as John W. H. Walden explained in his classic book, “the usual words for the association of teacher and student are *synousia* (Philostr. *Vit. Soph.* 604), and *homilia* (Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 5)” (Walden 1909, p. 220 n.4). In other words, the verbal noun is used primarily to refer to the cenacles of the higher education communities to which they themselves belonged.

It is important to bear in mind that there are differences between the use of *συνουσία* in the philosophical communities and in the schools of rhetoric, referring precisely to the essentially different approaches of both types of higher education: a detailed study on these divergences could yield some interesting conclusions, but it goes beyond the aim of this paper.

In short, in the lines that follow, we are going to approach *συνουσία* as a classical cultural legacy that lived on in Late Antiquity, namely, that of the “convivencia de una comunidad de discípulos” (Hernández de la Fuente 2020, pp. 71–72) gathered around the master.

3. The Concept of *συνουσία* in the *βίοι* of Late Antique Neoplatonic Masters

3.1. *Porphyry of Tyre's Vita Plotini*

First, it is interesting to start by considering the use of the term by Porphyry of Tyre in his *Vita Plotini*. The treatise belongs to the literary genre of *βίος*, and its protagonist could be considered as the head of the genealogy of sages that would later inspire the sophist Eunapius of Sardis to write his collective biography. Eunapius himself confirms that he had read it and that he possessed it in his personal library.

Altogether, Porphyry uses the noun *συνουσία* as many as fifteen times. Let us analyze how its meanings are distributed among those previously exposed. Most of them refer specifically to the scholarly “réunions” (Brisson 1992, p. 9) of the philosophy masters: ten of them to the meetings of Plotinus himself;²⁰ see, for instance: “Amelius had a friend Carterius, the best of the painters living then, whom he got to enter and attend the meetings—it was, in fact, open to anyone to come into the meetings—”;²¹ one to his mentor’s Ammonius Saccas: “Now a pact had been made between Herennius, Origen and Plotinus that they would not reveal any of the doctrines which Ammonius had elucidated for them in his meetings”;²² and one more to the stoic Lysimachos’, who was the former instructor of Plotinus’ auxiliary, the philosopher Amelius (Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 3.43). Only a pair of cases point to the notion of “academic stay” and the implicit idea of the longtime company between the two closest disciples of Plotinus, Amelius (“Now in the tenth year of the reign of Gallienus, I Porphyry, having come from Greece with Antonius the Rhodian, found Amelius in the eighteenth year of his association with Plotinus”²³) and Porphyry (“He none the less makes mention of me Porphyry when I was still at the beginning of my association with Plotinus”²⁴). Lastly, just once is *συνουσία* referred to under the meaning of “sexual relationship”, and it happened in the context of a controversial debate precisely on the master–disciple ideal relationship as it appears in Plato’s *Symposium* (“for the sake of instruction in virtue, one ought to submit to intercourse with a teacher who desired sexual relations”²⁵).

With respect to the use of the verb *σύνειμι*, it must be added that it can be found for the most part in an academic context (“être en relation avec un maître” (Goulet-Cazé 1982, 236 n.3)). Accordingly, Plotinus is described as a lecturer or, given in a more technical way that has its roots in the Old Academy (See Watts 2007), as the guide and tutor of the intellectual meetings (Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 3.27, 3.35, 5.4), where just one disciple (Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 7.12, 7.46), or in other cases, several of them, are mentioned (Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 3.37, 20.28, 23.35), and by means of this verb it is also well stressed the significant fact for the students of attending the meetings in person (Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 7.2, 7.48, 23.34), as well as the notion of fully comprehending the master (Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 10.37).²⁶

3.2. *Eunapius of Sardis' Vitae Philosophorum et Sophistarum*

This distinctively Late Antique treatise, which has been recently drawing the attention of quite a few modern scholars,²⁷ was penned by the Sardian rhetor towards the year 399 or 400 AD (Goulet 2014, I.96), and it could be ascribed to the literary genre of the collective biography.²⁸ Admittedly, this is an essential text for increasing our knowledge of Social History and higher education in Late Antiquity (See Alviz Fernández 2021). The closeness and intimacy between the teacher and his disciples in these ubiquitous intellectual com-

munities are also underlined by Eunapius employing *termini technici* in the same vein as Porphyry and even as Philostratus in his *Lives of the sophists*. Therefore, the presence of a shared family of words in the works of these authors to describe the school context reveals that its regular use extended throughout the 3rd and 4th centuries AD.²⁹

Let us analyze in the first place the verbal form σύνειμι in the Eunapian biographical treatise. Additionally, we include the verbs συνέρχομαι and φοιτάω because they also mean to attend the lectures of a master or to be in company with him. Altogether, they make up a total of ten appearances,³⁰ four cases of which meaning philosophy and/or rhetoric school meetings (“entretiens philosophiques/privés” (Goulet 2014, vol. I, pp. 163–64)); in two of them, the verb refers to conversations or somehow special meetings held with the teachers (Eun. Vit. Soph. 7.2, with Maximus of Ephesus; 16.10, with Libanius of Antiochia); and in one of them, it means to join the circle of sophists of the court of Julian (Eun. Vit. Soph. 7.47, vd. infra), to live in the company with the gods (Eun. Vit. Soph. 23.10, when describing the physiognomic or mantic abilities of Chrysanthius of Sardis) and to give a lecture to an audience of rhetoric students (Eun. Vit. Soph. 23.34, Chrysanthius).

As far as the term συνουσία is concerned, it is important to bear in mind what some exegetes of the Eunapian work have claimed. Robert J. Penella asserted the following: “It is not clear to me precisely what Eunapius means (...) by συνουσία” (Penella 1990, p. 104 n.51). It is indeed a complex Greek concept that has been usually neglected by the scholars (Robb 1994, pp. 183 and 198), and, along with some others of a long tradition such as συσσιτία, ξενία or συμπόσιον, they constituted genuine institutions of Hellenic civilization. Thus, Kevin Robb states that “no modern translation does justice (...) they can get lost in translation” (Robb 1994, pp. 94 and 197).

Given the significance and complexity of the concept, it is pertinent to analyze its fourteen cases in the Eunapian *Lives*. For the sake of a better interpretation of the data, we have divided them into two groups regarding their direct reference to the intimate academic meetings of either philosophers or sophists (eleven), as Eunapius makes no distinction in this regard between both kinds of Greco-Roman higher education professionals,³¹ or their indirect reference to them (three)—that is to say, those that contain some other nuances and that add color to the hermeneutical picture with which we are dealing in this paper.

On the question of the latter, let us first consider the passage in which Eunapius explains through the term συνουσία the methodology of the philosophical meetings of the Alexandrian Alypius, who was a close friend of Iamblichus: “Now Alypius had many followers, but his teaching was limited to conversation (μέχρι συνουσίας μόνης), and no one ever published a book by him”.³² Although it is true that higher education lectures predominantly developed orally,³³ it seems that most of the teachers turned to written-based resources. As Robert Lamberton puts it: “The classes [συνουσίαι] seem to have consisted of lectures based on readings from commentators on Plato, lectures that might be interrupted or even suspended by questioning by the students” (Lamberton 2001, p. 441). Concerning the other two references of this kind, they have a very similar meaning associated with exceptional virtues of the individual personality, which could be defined as charismatic. On the one hand, in the final paragraph of the iatrosophist Oribasius of Pergamon’s βίος, it can be read as follows: “Such harmony, such charm radiates from Oribasius and attends on all intercourse (ταῖς συνουσίαις) with him”.³⁴ Unfortunately, barely any translation grasps the depth and nature of the concept in this sentence (Cf. Goulet 2014, I, p. 95, “entretiens”). In that assertion, Eunapius attempts to describe the philosophical aura of his friend when interacting or being in close company with other people (an atmosphere not far from the one within higher education meetings). On the other hand, the kindness of the philosopher Chrysanthius in the next passage must be underlined: “In intercourse (κατὰ τὴν συνουσίαν) he was amiable to all men, so that everyone went away from him with the conviction that he was especially beloved”.³⁵ The fragment evidently shows the special relationships held between those present at the συνουσία, with the master being the subject of the sentence, either the teacher (Goulet 2014, vol. II, 282 n.2) or the disciple (as in Wright’s translation).³⁶

Regarding the other eleven cases, not only are all of them clearly framed in the academic context, but almost all of them display the atmosphere of proximity and affection characteristic of these student communities under study. Overall, they comprise up to eight philosophers and a sophist. The first philosopher is Iamblichus of Chalcis, whom one of his disciples addresses in a direct but extremely respectful style, mentioning the moment when, after Iamblichus' spiritual exercises, he "associated with them" or "went to their company (ποιῇ συνουσίαν)"³⁷—in other words, he gave a lecture. Next, we find in one single fragment a twofold reference to a pair of philosophers who also tutored these kinds of academic meetings, namely, Aedesius of Cappadocia and Sosipatra of Pergamon. In this case, both lived together in the Mysian city, "and after attending the lectures of Aedesius (μετὰ τὴν Αἰδεσίου συνουσίαν), the students would go to hear hers;"³⁸ and there was no one, Eunapius adds, who did not greatly adore and revere (σεβάζομαι) the woman's inspired teaching (ἐνθουσιασμός). The next case happens in the context of the emperor Julian's conversion to Neoplatonic philosophy under Maximus of Ephesus (Eun. Vit. Soph. 7.11-26).³⁹ He was a student at the school of Aedesius in Pergamon, and the term appears when referring to the "intellectual meetings" (συνουσίαι) of different members of the community.⁴⁰ This famous duality of Maximus-Julian, as instructor and pupil, lasted over time, and, already at the moment when Julian was emperor, their affinity became clear in a sentence bordering on the religious zeal: "The divine Julian was so devoted⁴¹ the latter's society (τῆς τοῦ ἀνδρὸς συνουσίας) that he wrote to both men (to the philosophers Priscus and Chrysanthius) as though they were his intimate friends, and implored them as though they were gods to come and live with him".⁴² A similar commitment of a disciple for his master was proven by the itinerant sage Hellespontius of Galatia, who "crowned with noble words and deeds he came to ancient Sardis to enjoy the society of Chrysanthius (διὰ τὴν Χρυσανθίου συνουσίαν);"⁴³ by his side, he experienced what could be defined as a conversion by the word when he spoke for the first time with him (Eun. Vit. Soph. 23.55).

Another significant aspect of these learned meetings, as inferred in the next cases, is that those who attended were to be somehow "allowed to study/worthy of attending the lectures (συνουσίας ἀξιωθείς)", as was the case of Julian under Aedesius in this passage.⁴⁴ The expression may suggest that the novel student must possess a minimum of prior expertise that could be verified perhaps through a personal interview. The statement recurs in relation to Antoninus, the son of Sosipatra, to whose retreat in a temple on the coast of Canopus a multitude of followers pilgrimed from all over the ecumene, but hardly after "being granted (or being considered worthy of) an interview (συνουσίας δὲ ἀξιωθέντες)"⁴⁵ had they the opportunity to come near him. And once again, the same expression can be found in the biographical section of the sophist Libanius.⁴⁶

Lastly, the βίος of the said Antiochian sophist contains three more cases of the concept under study. Two of them appear next to other *termini technici* belonging to a school context, as they are ὁμιλία⁴⁷ and ἐπίδειξις.⁴⁸ Concerning the former, admittedly, it is not easy to figure out the difference between the two nouns;⁴⁹ however, we could rank them in terms of closeness to the teacher, the συνουσίαι being more personal and informal encounters.⁵⁰ Regarding the latter, in the same vein, the term implies that Libanius displayed his charismatic personality in his lectures while, on the other hand, he also succeeded in the so-called epideictic speeches.⁵¹ To end with, Eunapius alludes one last time to Libanius' intimate intellectual meetings in this case in the section dedicated to his style.⁵² To conclude, Civiletti claims that in this case, the term means "discorsi orale, e può indicare tanto le conversazioni quotidiane del retore quanto le sue lezioni scolastiche, i discorsi rivolti ai suoi allievi" (Civiletti 2007, p. 633 n.760).

3.3. Marinus of Neapolis' Vita Procli

Marinus was a Neoplatonist philosopher born in the Samarian city of Neapolis, and most scholars give him a *floruit* in the end of the 5th century AD. It is unknown when and how he became a student of Proclus (412–485) the Diadoch. However, curiously enough,

the sources state that he had previously abandoned the Jewish faith and turned to Hellenism.⁵³ Finally, according to Damascius, when his master died “he took over the philosophical school of Proclus”.⁵⁴ At this moment, Marinus wrote a biography of his master following the literary tradition of the Neoplatonic school.⁵⁵ That is to say, as John Dillon puts it, Marinus depicted Proclus as a genuine θεῖος ἀνὴρ (Dillon 2019, p. 231). For his part, Marinus’ latest translator into English Mark Edwards says that the Samarian philosopher’s “work is more than a biography of Proclus” because he had “an intention to make biography a vehicle of philosophy” (Edwards 2000, p. li). And it is precisely in this very sense that his *Proclus* or *On Happiness* (as was its real title) should be comprehended in order to fully understand the subject of this study on the concept of the “spiritual communion”, which was the genuine meaning of the word συνουσία for the Neoplatonic communities.

In this *Life of Proclus*, the notion of συνουσία is used as a distinctive term referring to the philosophical “seminar” of this Neoplatonic teacher⁵⁶ opposed to the “rhetorical studies”,⁵⁷ which in this case are mentioned a few lines before. In the same vein, the comparison between philosophy meetings or συνουσίαι and the rhetoric lectures recur in the first chapters of the *Life*. There Marinus exposes his master’s academic *Grand Tour* around the imperial *pars orientis*, and at one moment he says: “But before this he returned to Alexandria, and said farewell to the rhetoric and other arts of which he had lately been so fond; then he sought out the seminars of the philosophers there”.⁵⁸ Thus, the opposing duality of ῥητορικῇ–φιλοσόφων is consciously highlighted in the text by Marinus as well as the choice made by Proclus, which becomes clear. On the other hand, that is why platonic dialectic exercises are still alive in Late Antiquity if we consider the combination of rhetoric and philosophy that is to be seen in the oral intercourse or συνουσίαι between masters and disciples in the Proclian school.

Two more straightforward references to Proclus’ philosophy meetings can be found in the following passage: “In his seminars also he dealt with each point ably and clearly and wrote everything down in treatises. (...) He also conferred with the other philosophers, taking the initiative, and in the evening held further seminars that were not written up”.⁵⁹ This fragment reminds us of the importance of philosophy as a living creation between masters and disciples. The living *logos* following the platonic tradition cannot be just written in the treatises and commentaries of philosophical exegesis traditionally ascribed to Neoplatonic schools, but in the case of Proclus’ and his school, his biographer tries to show the relevance of the community experience of philosophy in the teaching room. Here, we can mention the double tradition of written lectures and oral seminars, which is also attested in the case of Hypatia of Alexandria.

The next passage to be commented on is the following one:

“And indeed, because of his *intelligence* and graciousness in *common academic meetings*, as well as in his own sacred festivals and other such activities, even while he lacked nothing in dignity, he drew his companions to him and sent them away with lighter hearts”.⁶⁰

It is a vivid description of Proclus’ charismatic personality and the deep symbolic significance that the philosophical meetings with him had among his disciples. However, it must be said that we have slightly modified Edward’s translation (the Italics are ours). First, regarding the aggregate ἐν ταῖς κοιναῖς συνουσίαις, we prefer “common academic meetings” instead of just “common associations”. Following up the research path of this contribution, the reason for that choice to be taken is the more intimate meaning that had the word συνουσία in the Neoplatonic mentality. Second, regarding the latter, we much better read ἀστεῖόν as “intelligence” or even “honesty” or “refined” (see, *infra*, Dam. *Isid.* 90A) rather than “urbanity”. In any case, the picture drawn by Marinus in this fragment clearly shows the kindness and generosity (εὐθυμοῦς) that provided a close master–disciple relationship. Another philosopher’s συνουσίαι such as the ones headed by Demonax were described in a similar fashion by his disciple Lucian of Samosata—that is to say, full of graceful discourses that also lifted the hearts of those who heard him.⁶¹

Finally, it is worth adding in full the following passage with a daily scene showing what happened after a lecture of Proclus' master:

"Now Olympiodorus was a polished speaker, and few of his listeners were able to follow him on account of his cleverness and volubility. Proclus, however, when he left the seminar after hearing him, recited the entire proceedings, in the very same words, to his companions and there was a great deal, as I have heard from one of his fellow students, Ulpian of Gaza, another man whose philosophy is sufficiently apparent in his life".⁶²

Again, oral tradition is a part of the golden chain of philosophy. It is a key aspect of the platonic dialectics reworked by the Neoplatonists. *Συνουσία* seems to represent here a kind of utopian experience of a perfect community that is obviously isolated from the outside, predominantly Christian environment and shapes the community based on the pagan tradition of living together and experiencing together this living philosophy. The same goes for the last director of a platonic Academy in Athens, Damascius, who represents the same idea of communitarian knowledge.

3.4. Damascius' *Vita Isidori* or *Historia Philosophica*

The set of biographies pinned in the frame of the Neoplatonic schools ends with the one by Damascius (c. 460–538), preserved in the *Bibliotheca* of the Patriarch Photius of Constantinople.⁶³ This philosopher, born in the ancient city of Damascus, was the last scholar of the Platonic school at Athens, "whose ultimate flowering was brought about by Damascius himself" (Athanasias 1999, p. 20). It is suggesting to highlight yet another description of Damascius made by the eminent scholar Polymnia Athanasias: "He belonged by right of birth to that charmed circle of holy men and literati, whose achievement and shortcomings he undertook to appraise for his own pleasure and for that of posterity in his *Life of Isidore*" (Athanasias 1993, p. 2). It was shortly after Damascius became the head of the Academy in the early 6th century when he wrote the *Vita Isidori* or *Φιλόσοφος Ἱστορία*.⁶⁴

In that collective *βίος*, which has survived only in fragments, the word *συνουσία* appears just four times. However, it is possible to glimpse the meaning with which we are working in this paper. Let us turn now to the first one:

"He was refined and sociable not only at serious gatherings but also on light-hearted occasions, so that he was extremely pleasant as well as being useful to those who approached him".⁶⁵

Damascius describes here the personality of the Syrian philosopher Domninus, a pupil of Syrianus and a fellow student of Proclus.⁶⁶ In this text comes again the adjective *ἁστεῖος* (see, *supra*, Marin. *Procl.* 6.144–147) in relation to a "divine man" and his intimate philosophical meetings or *συνουσίαι* (which Athanasias understands simply as "gatherings"). This time, in fact, we have two different versions of *συνουσία*: according to Damascius, there were "serious" (*σπουδάζουσιν*) and "light-hearted" (*παίζουσιν*) academic meetings. It is difficult to know what exactly Damascius refers to by this distinction. It could well be an allusion to the meetings of the inner circle of the community and outer one. In this sense, for instance, it is said of the Neoplatonist Aedesius of Cappadocia (c. 280–355) that "after their competitions in literature and disputations, he would go for a walk in Pergamon accompanied by the more distinguished of his pupils".⁶⁷

The same idea of positive spiritual company implied by the notion of *συνουσία* recurs once again in the following passage:

"Thus, as for the practice of dialectics, he claimed to have the strength of it for having frequented the companionship around Isidore. He said that Isidore had reached such a degree of oratory that he was able to eclipse all the men that time had produced in that generation".⁶⁸

To start with, it is worthy to point out that we find another isolated passage in which *συνουσία* appears in a context of dialectics: "Refreshing his soul with dialectic

intercourse".⁶⁹ Therefore, as can be inferred, among the 6th century Platonists, that ancient method of examining the cosmos in order to search for the Truth or of finding a solution to a philosophical problem by making questions was still vigorous. In conclusion, that way of discovering what is true, which had become a genuine mystery in Late Antiquity, could be learned by adhering oneself to a "divine" master such as Isidore (Ἰσιδώρου συνουσίας).

On the contrary, the idea of συνουσία could also carry negative connotations. It is precisely this that can be seen in this last fragment:

"Diomedes [the son of one of Hegias' sons] too had been corrupted by their [Hegias' sons] company and, not having any natural distinction, he became even more subservient towards the Law".⁷⁰

With regard to Hegias' sons, whose names were Eupeithius and Archiadas, Damascius claims that they were untrained in philosophical matters⁷¹ and replete with all kinds of passions.⁷² That would be thus be Diomedes's rationale for not showing interest at all in the field of philosophy. What is more, he even respected the anti-pagan religious laws issued by the late Empire (Athanasias 1999, p. 323 n.387). Thus, according to the Neoplatonic mentality studied in this paper, had Diomedes attended the συνουσία of a sage master, he would have acquired the virtues of a true philosopher.

4. By Way of Conclusion

Beyond its common and polysemic use in Greek, συνουσία is term whose academic meaning must be considered as a *terminus technicus* used regularly in Late Antique biographical sources when referring to the close relationship between a master and his community of disciples at both the individual and collective level. We have gone through the etymology and semantics of the term in Greek literature, from Archaic to Late Antique times, and examined the variety of meanings and the slight shift in its use along the ages, with special attention to the Platonic tradition, very relevant also for later Christian usage of the word. Thus, in reference to Late Antique philosophy and after the examples analyzed above, no longer may it be considered a broad reference just implying company or mere social interaction and above all when it is used by Neoplatonists or any member of their intellectual communities. As we have shown, the notion of συνουσία constituted the core of the Platonic παιδεία in Late Antiquity, understood as a relational and a dialogical learning phenomenon without which that philosophical education could not be understood. And with regard to the higher education stage, by virtue of its Pythagorean roots, it could be considered as the philosopher's educational space *par excellence*. Συνουσία represented in the Greco-Roman mentality almost a *locus amoenus* for superior learning, a space both physical and intergenerational where an academic-spiritual community headed by a charismatic leader ("it suggests great personal charisma" (Bradbury 2014, p. 221)) was developed, whether he (or she) played a role as a guide, teacher, mentor, friend or initiator. These συνουσία held by the Platonic communities along Antiquity, but especially attested during Late Antiquity, contributed to forging a collective identity in communion with the charismatic, pedagogical and institutional authority of the master. In the "final Pagan generation", as Edward Watts would put it (Watts 2015), those cenacles of learned scholars (πεπαιδευμένοι) represented one of the last strongholds of traditional spiritualism and ritualism that still maintained its validity with some vigor as a private practice in an already Christian Empire.

To sum up, and according to the Neoplatonic biographical tradition, it was in these intimate spiritual and academic meetings or συνουσία where some students experienced a genuine spiritual or philosophical conversion: an ἐπιστροφή, using the spatial metaphor, and even sometimes a μετάνοια, "change of mind" or "subsequent knowledge", if we prefer to recall a word with interesting later implications and roots in Hellenistic philosophy. These συνουσία facilitate, in metaphorical-spatial terms, the transference from one place (ignorance, error, evil) to another (wisdom, truth, virtue) (Herrero de Jáuregui 2005, p. 69), and that is precisely what can be glimpsed in some specific passages in the βίοι of late antique Neoplatonic masters. Thus, it is beyond doubt that the master-disciple affections

emerged through a sociological process of charisma that, not infrequently, reached devotion. However, we must bear in mind the complexity entailed by the translation and interpretation of the notion of συνουσία, which may sometimes seem elusive and full of nuances for the researcher. That is why every case must be studied on its own above all when it is framed within the Greco-Roman educational context.

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Notes

¹ Cf. Porph. *Vit. Plot.* 18.6-14; Procl. *In Resp. passim*.

² Cf. [Alviz Fernández \(2021\)](#) to find a previous version of these views but related to one specific passage of Eunapius' *Vitae philosophorum et sophistarum* where the sophist employs the concept συνουσία.

³ His work superceded Lechner's *Erziehung und Bildung in der griechisch-römischen Antike* (1933).

⁴ [Grau Guijarro \(2008, p. 90\)](#). The debate on the “ways of life” (contemplative or active) in ancient philosophical texts is traditional ([Joly 1956](#)). The usual word in Antiquity is βίος, as is well known, but later, πολιτεία would be added in Late Antiquity with a prevalent use in the Christian milieu. It is important to highlight the specificities and continuities of the concepts in each period: the “lives of saints” of the later Byzantine period are often entitled βίος and πολιτεία and in modern Greek culture it is a widely attested juncture, as the famous 1946 novel by Nikos Kazantzakis *Βίος και Πολιτεία του Αλέξη Ζορμπά* (internationally *Zorba the Greek*, goes to show.

⁵ E.g., the centaur Chiron and Phoenix as tutors of the hero Achilles (Hom. *Il.* 9.434-444, 485-494).

⁶ [Classen \(1959\)](#). This is a hypothesis accepted, on the one hand, by ([Bosch-Veciana 2000, p. 41; 2004, p. 34 n.3](#)) and, on the other, questioned by Harold Tarrant, for whom the technical term would have been used only in association with the sophists—“a rather formal relationship” ([Tarrant 2005, p. 138](#)); regarding Socrates, especially in the *Theaetetus* (150d-151a), the presence of συνουσία would have been interpolated by scholars from the early 3rd century BC to adapt the figure of the philosopher to the *modus* of their own time ([Tarrant 2005, pp. 145-50](#)). See also one of the latest papers on the issue in ([Pentassuglio 2020](#)).

⁷ See more specific examples of sophistic συνουσίαι in ([Tarrant 2005, 133 n.11-12](#)).

⁸ [De Bravo Delorme \(2019, p. 173\)](#). For this author, the Socratic συνουσία is a philosophical-spiritual therapy of the individual.

⁹ [Tarrant \(2005, p. 132\)](#): “the author [of the Pseudo-Platonic dialogue *Theages*] may be trying to depict the impact of *charisma*”. See ([Alviz Fernández 2021](#)).

¹⁰ *Iambl. Vit. Pyth.* 6.26: καὶ ἐν πρώτῃ Κρότωνι ἐπισημοτάτῃ πόλει προτρεψάμενος πολλοὺς ἔσχε ζῆλωτάς, ὥστε [ἱστορεῖται ἑξακοσίους αὐτὸν ἀνθρώπους ἐσχέκεναι, οὐ μόνον ὑπ' αὐτοῦ κεκινημένους εἰς τὴν φιλοσοφίαν, ἧς μετεδίδου, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ λεγόμενον κοινοβίους, καθὼς προσέταξε, γενομένου].

¹¹ See the monumental work of ([Hartmann 2018](#)). Needless to say that this usage of *coenobium* will play a key role in Late Antique and Medieval Christianity.

¹² ἑταῖρος is another *terminus technicus* belonging to Greco-Roman higher education, namely, “all who have studied with the same teacher” ([Bradbury 2014, pp. 223 and 226](#)).

¹³ *Eun. Vit. Soph.* 9.4: μικρὰν μὲν καὶ εὐτελῆ τινα, Ἑρμοῦ δὲ ὁμῶς καὶ Μουσῶν περιπνεύσαν, οὕτως ἱεροῦ τινος ἀγίου διέφερον οὐδέν (ed. [Goulet 2014](#). Cf. ([Watts 2006, p. 54](#))).

¹⁴ Cf. only regarding Plato: ([Des Places 1964, p. 486](#)), s. u. “*synousia*”: “1. Réunion; 2. Entretien, discussion; 3. Fréquentation: (a) pédagogique; (b) intime; (c) amoureuse”; ([Bosch-Veciana 2000, pp. 39-40](#)): “1. Companyia, tracte, convivencia; 2. Conversa (privada), reunió, simposi, trobada; 3. Comunió (amb Déu, amb el diví); 4. Relació sexual”; ([Tarrant 2005, pp. 132-33](#)): “(1) an educational purpose, (2) repeated contacts, and (3) a relationship between a pupil and a mentor ... [(4)] A polite means of designating sexual intercourse”; in general, ([Liddell et al. \[1940\] 1996](#)): “1. *being with or together*, esp. for purposes of feasting or

conversing; intercourse with; communion with; conversation (together); 2. habitual association; 3. intercourse with a teacher, attending at his teaching; 4. sexual intercourse”.

- 15 Finn (2009, pp. 27–33); (Fowden 1982, pp. 57–58). E.g., Eun. Vit. Soph. 5.6: “Occasionally, however, he did perform certain rites alone, apart from his friends and disciples, when he worshipped the Divine Being” (ὀλίγα μὲν οὖν χωρὶς τῶν ἐταίρων καὶ ὁμιλητῶν ἐπραττεν ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ, τὸ θεῖον σεβαζόμενος, ed. Goulet 2014); and Iambl. Vit. Pyth. 3.14–15, this is a passage in which Pythagoras of Samos “withdraws in solitude” (μονάζω) to dedicate himself to contemplation, an exercise that he also practiced with his disciples in a grotto on the outskirts of Samos (Porph. Vit. Pyth. 9; Iambl. Vit. Pyth. 5.27 and its parallel in Iamblichus’ *uita* in Eun. Vit. Soph. 5.12).
- 16 For the use of συνουσία and its cognates in Xenophon, see the notes of (Tarrant 2005, 138 n. 28).
- 17 Lynch (1972, pp. 85–86): “Normally Aristotle’s words are κοινωνία (*koinonein*) or some *syn-* compound other than *synousia*”; the author explains it by the opposition between the cooperative methodology of the Peripatetics and the dialectal one of the Platonists, which was defined to a greater extent by said term. On the notion of *koinonia* in ancient philosophy, see Hernández de la Fuente (2014).
- 18 Lib. Or. 1.28: ὥς εἰ του φαινοίμην ἐν συνουσίαις ἐπιδείξ, ἐκ τῆς αὐθις ἐπὶ ταῦτα πορείας ἀπολογήσομαι; 1.125: αἱ δὲ συνουσίαι λόγους τε ἡμῖν τοὺς ὑπὲρ λόγων εἶχον καὶ ἐπαίνους τῶν εὖ πραττομένων ἐκείνων καὶ μέμψεις τῶν ὀλιγωρημένων; 1.164: αἰδοῦμενον δὲ καὶ σοφίαν καὶ λόγους, λόγου δὲ ἐν σοφῶν συνουσίαις οὐκ ἀποροῦντα· τουτὶ δὲ αὐτῷ παρὰ τῆς φύσεως ἦν; 1.243: ἐπὶ συνουσίᾳ τῶν παιδῶν καθήμενος.
- 19 Cribiore (2007, pp. 201 and 183 n.56). E.g., Lib. Ep. 1081, μικρὰ συνουσία.
- 20 Porph. Vit. Plot. 1.13, 1.14, 3.46, 5.6, 13.1, 14.10, 14.21, 15.16, 16.10, 18.7 (ed. Brisson 1992).
- 21 Porph. Vit. Plot. 1.13: ἔχων φίλον ὁ Ἀμέλιος Καρτέριον τὸν ἄριστον τῶν τότε γεγονότων ζωγράφων εἰσιέναι καὶ ἀπαντᾶν εἰς τὰς συνουσίας ποιήσας—ἐξῆν γὰρ τῷ βουλομένῳ φοιτᾶν εἰς τὰς συνουσίας—(ed. Brisson 1992, transl. Edwards 2000).
- 22 Porph. Vit. Plot. 3.34: Πλωτίνος δὲ ἄχρι μὲν πολλοῦ γράφων οὐδὲν διετέλεσεν, ἐκ δὲ τῆς Ἀμμωνίου συνουσίας ποιούμενος τὰς διατριβὰς (ed. Brisson 1992, transl. Edwards 2000).
- 23 Porph. Vit. Plot. 4.1–4: Τῷ δεκάτῳ δὲ ἔτει τῆς Γαλιήνου βασιλείας ἐγὼ Πορφύριος ἐκ τῆς Ἑλλάδος μετὰ Ἀντωνίου τοῦ Ροδίου γεγονῶς καταλαμβάνω μὲν τὸν Ἀμέλιον ὀκτωκαίδέκατον ἔτος ἔχοντα τῆς πρὸς Πλωτῖνον συνουσίας (ed. Brisson 1992, transl. Edwards 2000).
- 24 Porph. Vit. Plot. 21.12–13: ὅμως μνησθεῖς ἐμοῦ Πορφυρίου ἔτι ἀρχὰς ἔχοντος τῆς πρὸς τὸν Πλωτῖνον συνουσίας (ed. Brisson 1992, transl. Edwards 2000).
- 25 Porph. Vit. Plot. 15.8: ἀρετῆς ἕνεκα μαθήσεως εἰς συνουσίαν αὐτὸν παρέχειν ἐρῶντι ἀφροδισίου μίξεως τῷ καθηγεμόνι (ed. Brisson 1992, transl. Edwards 2000).
- 26 Of the total number of twenty-one appearances of σύνειμι, twelve times it does so in the school context and five in the mystical–spiritual or demonological context (Porph. Vit. Plot. 10.18, 10.25, 10.32, 10.29, 13.11), whereas the remaining four are framed in the cohabitation in Plotinus’ house either with the children he tutored (Porph. Plot. 11.9) or with his partner Porphyry (Porph. Vit. Plot. 23.17), in the “constant concern” of the master for many different matters at once (Porph. Vit. Plot. 8.19) and as a reference to the emperor’s inner circle (Porph. Vit. Plot. 12.10).
- 27 See the recent edition of the *Lives of philosophers and sophists* of Goulet (2014) (whose numbering of passages and edition of the Greek text is the one we have followed in this paper).
- 28 In general, see Urbano (2017, p. 15) and, more specifically, on Eunapius’ *Lives*, see Cox Miller (2000).
- 29 Note that in the comparison of the collective biography of Eunapius with Porphyry’s *Vita Plotini*, both συνουσία and σύνειμι (to whose number of appearances we add, in the case of Eunapius’, their synonyms συνέρχομαι and φοιτάω) are present to a similar degree: fourteen and twenty-five versus ten and twenty-one, respectively.
- 30 Eun. Vit. Soph. 5.6, Iamblichus’; 8.4, Priscus’; 23.34–35, Chrysanthius attended his rhetoric students in the morning and met Eunapius in the afternoon, both with σύνειμι; 23.44, Iustus’ and Chrysanthius’.
- 31 Since the 2nd century AD, the pejorative connotations towards the σοφιστής fully dissappeared, “con este título, exponente de renovada dignidad, se designó a los hombres que llegaron a formar (y perduró hasta el final del helenismo) un influyente estamento social cuyos méritos básicos eran la enseñanza del más alto grado de las artes retóricas y el ejercicio competente de la elocuencia artística” (Giner Soria 1999, pp. 30–31).
- 32 Eun. Vit. Soph. 5.27: ζηλωτὰς μὲν οὖν εἶχεν πολλοὺς ὁ Ἀλύπιος, ἀλλ’ ἡ παιδείους ἦν μέχρι συνουσίας μόνης, βιβλίον δὲ προέφερεν οὐδὲ εἰς (ed. Goulet 2014).
- 33 E.g., Plotinus focused during the first period of his teachings in Rome on a dialogical and conversational methodology without writing anything (Porph. Vit. Plot. 18).
- 34 Eun. Vit. Soph. 21.14: τοσαύτη τις ἡ διὰ πάντων ἐστὶ προϊοῦσα καὶ παρατρέχουσα ταῖς συνουσίαις ἁρμονία καὶ χάρις (ed. Goulet 2014).
- 35 Eun. Vit. Soph. 23.21: πᾶσιν τε εὐνοὺς ἦν κατὰ τὴν συνουσίαν, καὶ τῶν ἀπιόντων ἕκαστος, ὅτι φιλοῖτο μᾶλλον, ἀπῆει πεπεισμένος (ed. Goulet 2014).

- Cf. (Civiletti 2007, p. 259), “con la convinzione di avere un motivo in più per vantarsi”; (Wright 1922, p. 549), “that he was specially beloved”.
- Eun. Vit. Soph. 5.8: τὴν πρὸς ἡμᾶς ποιῇ συνουσίαν (ed. Goulet 2014).
- Eun. Vit. Soph. 6.81: καὶ μετὰ τὴν Αἰδεσίου συνουσίαν, παρ’ ἐκείνην φοιτῶντες (ed. Goulet 2014).
- I.e., to paganism. According to Teitler (2017, pp. 10 and 14) around the year 351 AD.
- Eun. Vit. Soph. 7.19: γενομένης δὲ τῆς συνουσίας (ed. Goulet 2014).
- ἐξεκρέματο, literally, “hang from”, cf. E. El. 950: Ἄρεος ἐκκρεμάννυται; once again in Eun. VS 6.4, 6.39, 7.26 and 23.36.
- Eun. Vit. Soph. 7.47: καὶ οὕτω γε ἐξεκρέματο τῆς τοῦ ἀνδρὸς συνουσίας ὁ θεσπέσιος Ἰουλιανός, ὥστε τοῖς μὲν ὡς φίλοις ἐπέστελλεν, καθάπερ θεοῦς ἰκετεύων ἐλθεῖν καὶ συνεῖναι (ed. Goulet 2014).
- Eun. Vit. Soph. 23.47: καλῶν δὲ ἔργων καὶ λόγων ἀνάπλεως γενόμενος, καὶ εἰς τὰς παλαιὰς Σάρδεις ἀφίκετο διὰ τὴν Χρυσανθίου συνουσίαν (ed. Goulet 2014).
- Eun. Vit. Soph. 7.11: συνουσίας ἀξιωθείς τῆς Αἰδεσίου (ed. Goulet 2014).
- Eun. Vit. Soph. 6.106: συνουσίας δὲ ἀξιωθέντες (ed. Goulet 2014).
- Eun. Vit. Soph. 16.9: οὐδεὶς τῶν συλλεγόντων Λιβανίῳ καὶ συνουσίας ἀξιωθέντων ἀπῆλθεν ἄδηκτος (ed. Goulet 2014).
- Eun. Vit. Soph. 16.3: ταῖς μὲν ὁμιλίαις καὶ συνουσίαις (...) ἐλάχιστα παρεγίνετο (ed. Goulet 2014; cf. Lib. Or. 1.16, Ep. 1458). Cf. the following translations: “Ne se rendait que le moins possible aux cours et aux entretiens” (Goulet 2014, II, p. 86); “nahm nur noch äußerst selten am Unterricht und den Zusammenkünften teil” (Becker 2013, p. 130); “frequentava pochissimo le lezioni e gli incontri con il maestro” (Civiletti 2007, p. 229); “he very seldom attended the lectures and meetings of the school” (Wright 1922, p. 519). See Alviz Fernández (2021) for a previous version of these views.
- Eun. Vit. Soph. 16.6: ταχὺ μάλα καὶ κατ’ αὐτὴν ἐξέλαμψεν, εἰς συνουσίαν τε ἄριστος καὶ χαριέστατος φανείς, καὶ εἰς ἐπίδειξιν λόγων ἐπαφρόδιτος (ed. Goulet 2014).
- E.g., in the two cases that ὁμιλία means “meeting” in the Vita Plotini (Porph. Plot. 3.2 y 5.5), there is no difference at all among the attending students.
- Civiletti (2007, 628 n.740): “homilia, come anche synousia ... è il termine comune per designare l’associazione di insegnante e studente ...; homiletes designa propriamente, allo stesso modo di φοιτητής, l’allievo ufficialmente iscritto nella lista (katalogos) di un professore di retorica”.
- According to Graham Anderson (1993, p. 16), the epideictic speeches were “ornamental or display rhetoric for audience entertainment as distinct from that practised in the law courts (‘dicanic’, or more commonly in its Latin form ‘forensic’) or in attempting to persuade public assemblies (‘symbolaetic’)”.
- Eun. Vit. Soph. 16.14: περὶ δὲ ἐπιστολᾶς καὶ συνουσίας ἐτέρας, ἱκανῶς ἐπὶ τὸν ἀρχαῖον ἀναφέρει καὶ διεγείρεται τύπον (ed. Goulet 2014). Cf. other translations: (Becker 2013, p. 131): “in seinen Briefen aber und den übrigen mündlichen Vorträgen;” (Wright 1922, p. 523), “and other familiar addresses;” (Goulet 2014, II, p. 88), “mais dans ses lettres ainsi que dans les entretiens”. For a complete commentary on the passage, see (Alviz Fernández 2021).
- Dam. Isid. 97A.
- Dam. Isid. 2.38A: οὗτος [Μαρίνος] τὴν Πρόκλου διατριβὴν παραδεξάμενος (ed. and transl. Athanassiadi 1999).
- See Männlein-Robert (2019), the latest critical edition with translation and monograph chapters on the issue.
- “Another person present at the [Proclus] seminar was Lachares”, cf. Marin. Procl. 11.270: παρὴν δὲ τῇ συνουσίᾳ καὶ Λαχάρης (ed. Männlein-Robert 2019, transl. Edwards 2000).
- Marin. Procl. 11.268: τῶν ῥητορικῶν διατριβῶν (ed. Männlein-Robert 2019, transl. Edwards 2000).
- Marin. Procl. 9.212-214: Ἐπανελθὼν δὲ πρότερον εἰς Αλεξάνδρειαν καὶ ῥητορικὴ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις περὶ ἃ πρόην ἐσπούδαζε χαίρειν εἰπὼν, τὰς τῶν ἐκεῖ φιλοσόφων μετεδίωκε συνουσίας (ed. Männlein-Robert 2019, transl. Edwards 2000).
- Marin. Procl. 22.547-549 (...) 552-553: ἔν τε ταῖς συνουσίαις δυνατῶς ἅμα καὶ σαφῶς ἐπεξεργαζόμενος ἕκαστα καὶ ἐν συγγράμασιν ἅπαντα καταβαλλόμενος. (...) συνεγίνετό τε τοῖς ἄλλοις φιλοσόφοις προῖων καὶ ἀγράφους ἐσπερινὰς πάλιν ἐποιεῖτο συνουσίας (ed. Männlein-Robert 2019, transl. Edwards 2000).
- Marin. Procl. 6.144-147: καὶ γὰρ διὰ ‘τὸ ἐν ταῖς κοιναῖς ‘συνουσίαις’ καὶ ταῖς ἱεραῖς αὐτοῦ ἐστιάσει καὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις δὲ πράξεσιν ἀστειὸν τε καὶ ‘εὐχαρί’, καὶ ταῦτα δὲ οὐκ ἔξω τοῦ σεμοῦ, τοὺς συνόντας αἰὲ ἐπῆγετο καὶ εὐθυμοτέρους ἀπέπεμπεν (ed. Männlein-Robert 2019, transl. Edwards 2000, slightly modified).
- Luc. Demonax 6.
- Marin. Procl. 9.221-228 Ὀλυμπιόδωρου δὲ ἀκροώμενος, ἀνδρὸς δυνατοῦ λέγειν καὶ διὰ τὴν περὶ τοῦτο εὐκολίαν καὶ ἐντρέχειαν ὀλίγοις τῶν ἀκουόντων ὄντος ἐφικτοῦ, ἐξιών αὐτὸς μετὰ τὴν συνουσίαν, ἅπαντα πρὸς τοὺς ἐταίρους τὰ τῶν πράξεων ἀπεμνημόνευεν ἐπ’ αὐτῶν λέξεων, πλεῖστα ὄντα, ὥς μοί τις εἴπε τῶν συμφοιτητῶν, Οὐλπιανός ὁ Γαζαῖος, ἀνὴρ καὶ οὗτος τὴν ζωὴν ἱκανῶς φιλοσοφῆσας (transl. Edwards 2000).
- See the edition and translation of Athanassiadi (1999).
- This is the title that bears Damascius’ work in the Suda (s.v. “Δαμάσκιος”) and in Photius (Bibl.181, 125b).

- ⁶⁵ Dam. *Isid.* 90A: ἀστεϊός τε ἦν καὶ εὐόμιλος, οὐ μόνον πρὸς τὴν σπουδάζουσιν ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς τὴν παίζουσιν ἐνίοτε συνουσίαν, ὥστε καὶ ἡδιστος εἶναι τοῖς πλησιάζουσι πρὸς τῷ ὠφελίμῳ (ed. and transl. Athanassiadi 1999).
- ⁶⁶ Dam. *Isid.* 89A.
- ⁶⁷ 67. Eun. *Vit. Soph.* 8.5: καὶ μετὰ γε τοὺς ἄθλους ὅσοι περὶ λόγους ἦσαν, πρὸς περίπατον ἐξῆι κατὰ τὸ Πέργαμον, καὶ τῶν ἐταίρων παρήσαν οἱ τιμιώτεροι (ed. Goulet 2014). Shortly in the same text, another synonym for defining Edesius' inner circle disciples: σωφρονέστεροι (Eun. *Vit. Soph.* 8.8).
- ⁶⁸ Photii *Bibliotheca*, cod. 181 p. 127a: τῆς μέντοι διαλεκτικῆς τριβῆς τὰς Ἰσιδώρου συνουσίας τὴν ἰσχὺν αὐτῷ διατείνεται παρασχεῖν· ὃν καὶ ἐπὶ τῇ τοιαύτῃ τῶν λόγων δυνάμει πάντας ἀνθρώπους, ὅσους ὁ κατ' ἐκείνην τὴν γενεὰν ἤνεγκε χρόνος, ἀποκρύψασθαι φησιν (ed. II p. 192 Henry, transl. D. Hernández de la Fuente).
- ⁶⁹ Dam. *Isid.* 129A: διαλεκτικαῖς συνουσίαις ἀρδόμενος τὴν ψυχὴν (ed. and transl. Athanassiadi 1999).
- ⁷⁰ Dam. *Isid.* 146E: ὁ δ' οὖν Διομήδης διέφθαρτο καὶ αὐτὸς ὑπὸ τῆς συνουσίας καὶ οὐδὲν ἔχων ἔξαρμα φύσεως ἔτι ταπεινότερος ἐγγεγόνει πρὸς τὰ ἐπιταττόμενα (ed. and transl. Athanassiadi 1999).
- ⁷¹ Dam. *Isid.* 146A.
- ⁷² Dam. *Isid.* 146E.

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