

Preface

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**Grammar and Philosophy in Late Antiquity: A study of
Priscian's sources**

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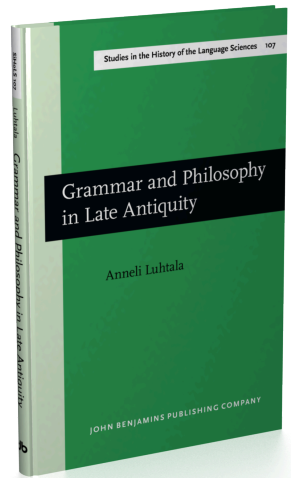
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PREFACE

This book has its origin in my long-lasting interest in Priscian's grammatical theory. Having drifted from one historical period to another and from one topic to another, I will now focus on Priscian's own context, the Late Antiquity. These wanderings have taught me to look at Priscian in a new way. While studying Priscian's syntactical theory, I thoroughly investigated his sources – a number of notoriously difficult texts ranging from Apollonius Dyscolus to the fragmentarily preserved sources for Stoic logic. All these texts are relatively new sources for linguistic historiography since they have received scholarly attention only during the last thirty years or so. Karl Barwick wrote his highly influential works at a time when neither the works of Apollonius nor the Stoics were well known. Thus, our received account of language study in Antiquity fails to take these theories properly into account. Moreover, at the time of Barwick the authenticity of the *Techne* preserved under the name of Dionysius Thrax was taken for granted, whereas in the course of the last decade, the question of its possible inauthenticity has become a topical issue.

The second major concern of my scholarly activity has been the reception of Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae* in the Carolingian Renaissance. When faced with the problems that medieval scholars had in expounding Priscian's philosophical doctrine, I began to wonder – together with the medieval Priscian commentators like John Scottus Eriugena, Peter of Helias and William of Conches – about the inconsistencies in its philosophical framework. “Priscian gives obscure definitions”, was a famous claim by William of Conches. The words of this twelfth-century author are true, and this book is an attempt to explain Priscian's inconsistencies owing to his use of varied sources.

The major part of this study consists of a systematic examination of Priscian's philosophical framework and a comparison with his principal source, Apollonius Dyscolus. It reveals that the fundamental philosophical influence of Priscian's theory is Stoic logic, which is present not only in the syntactic theory but even in the definitions of the parts of speech. These definitions lean on the Stoic ontological categories of substance and quality. However, the Stoic theory of Apollonius is not sufficient to explain Priscian's entire philosophical framework, which contains distinctly Neoplatonic elements. This may give

occasion for surprise, since our linguistic historiography does not recognize a Platonist influence in late antique grammar. The discovery of a Platonist element in Priscian led to a series of other questions concerning his philosophical apparatus, and I found myself asking the following questions: where do the philosophical subcategories used in the description of the common noun come from, such as generic and specific nouns, polyonyms, various relational nouns, and so forth? When were they introduced into grammar? Why are these semantic categories similar in Priscian and in Latin schoolgrammars? Moreover, these categories are strikingly absent from a number of other grammars, the *regulae*-type grammars and what is even more surprising, from the *Donatus minor* as well as Augustine's grammar. Finally, the very same semantic categories occur in the *Techne*, but were in all likelihood absent from Apollonius' discussion on the noun.

Given that the *Techne* is now dated by many scholars to Late Antiquity, or to the period after Apollonius Dyscolus, it seemed possible to think that the semantic subcategories of the noun were introduced into grammar after the second century A.D. If, indeed, grammar was influenced by philosophy in Late Antiquity, when the study of philosophy was syncretistic, Priscian's famous inconsistencies would be more readily understandable; his grammar contains mixed Stoic, Peripatetic, and Platonic influences. This book is a rather bold attempt at once to explain Priscian's inconsistent philosophical framework and to think through the consequences of the probable inauthenticity of Dionysius Thrax' *Techne*.

To me, the various articles written by Vincenzo di Benedetto in the late 50s arguing in favour of the inauthenticity of the *Techne* have proved to be convincing. Thus, when finishing this book, my gratitude is due, above all, to Vincenzo di Benedetto and other scholars who have highlighted the importance of this topic: to the late Jan Pinborg, who was the first scholar to think out its consequences in the 70s; and to the late Vivien Law, who organized a conference in the 90s – together with Ineke Sluiter – to consider the consequences of the issue. I would also like to thank Sten Ebbesen, who has carefully read my manuscript and commented upon it, and the two anonymous referees who recommended it for publication. My gratitude is also due to the editor of the series, Konrad Koerner, who has always shown a keen interest in my work. Finally, I am grateful for the Academy of Finland for financing this study (71611), and for permitting me to employ two excellent research assistants, Marke Ahonen and Vesa Vahtikari.