

ARISTAENETUS, EROTIC LETTERS

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ARISTAENETUS, EROTIC LETTERS

Introduced, translated and annotated by
Peter Bing and Regina Höschle

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ABBREVIATIONS

GENERAL

f.	folio
fl.	<i>floruit</i> , flourished
fr(s).	fragment(s)
scil.	<i>scilicet</i> , namely
v(v).	verse(s)

PRIMARY RESOURCES

<i>Ach.</i>	Aristophanes, <i>Acharnians</i>
<i>Am.</i>	<i>Amores</i> (Ovid, Pseudo-Lucian)
<i>Anth. pal.</i>	<i>Anthologia Palatina</i>
<i>Anth. plan.</i>	<i>Anthologia Planudea</i>
<i>Argon.</i>	Apollonius of Rhodes, <i>Argonautica</i>
<i>Ars</i>	Ovid, <i>Ars Amatoria</i>
<i>Carm.</i>	<i>Carmina</i> (Catullus, Horace, Sidonius Apollinaris)
<i>Charm.</i>	Plato, <i>Charmides</i>
<i>Chron.</i>	John Malalas, <i>Chronographia</i>
<i>Cod. justin.</i>	<i>Codex justinianus</i>
<i>Cycl.</i>	Euripides, <i>Cyclops</i>
<i>Demetr.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Demetrius</i>
<i>Dial. Court.</i>	Lucian, <i>Dialogues of the Courtesans</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistle(s)</i> (Aelian, Aristaenetus, Synesius)
<i>Epigr.</i>	<i>Epigrammata</i> (Callimachus)
<i>Eph.</i>	Xenophon of Ephesus, <i>Ephesiaka</i>
<i>Epitr.</i>	Menander, <i>Epitrepontes</i>
<i>Ethop.</i>	<i>Ethopoieiai</i> (Libanius, Severus of Alexandria)
<i>Fam.</i>	Cicero, <i>Epistulae ad familiares</i>
<i>Gyn.</i>	Soranus, <i>Gynecology</i>

<i>Hal.</i>	Oppian, <i>Halieutica</i>
<i>Her.</i>	Ovid, <i>Heroides</i>
<i>Hermot.</i>	Lucian, <i>Hermotimus</i>
<i>Hipp.</i>	Euripides, <i>Hippolytus</i>
<i>Hymn Apoll.</i>	Callimachus, <i>Hymn to Apollo</i>
<i>Id.</i>	Theocritus, <i>Idyll</i>
<i>Il.</i>	Homer, <i>Iliad</i>
<i>Imag.</i>	Philostratus the Elder, <i>Imagines</i>
<i>Lys.</i>	Aristophanes, <i>Lysistrata</i>
<i>Metam.</i>	Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i>
<i>Nat. Child</i>	Hippocrates, <i>On the Nature of the Child</i>
<i>Nat. Hist.</i>	Pliny, <i>Natural History</i>
<i>Od.</i>	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i>
<i>Parm.</i>	Plato, <i>Parmenides</i>
<i>Phaedr.</i>	Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i>
<i>Protr.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Protrepticus</i>
<i>Pyth.</i>	Pindar, <i>Pythian Odes</i>
<i>Rep.</i>	Plato, <i>Republic</i>
<i>Soph.</i>	Plato, <i>Sophist</i>
<i>Symp.</i>	Plato, <i>Symposium</i>
<i>Theaet.</i>	Plato, <i>Theaetetus</i>
<i>Theog.</i>	Hesiod, <i>Theogony</i>
<i>W. D.</i>	Hesiod, <i>Works and Days</i>

SECONDARY RESOURCES

Adler	Adler, A., ed. <i>Suidae Lexicon</i> . 5 vols. Leipzig, 1928–1938.
CMG	<i>Corpus medicorum graecorum</i> . Leipzig/Berlin, 1908–.
CPG	<i>Corpus paroemiographorum graecorum</i> . Edited by E. L. Leutsch and F. G. Schneidewin. 2 vols. Göttingen, 1839–1851.
CSHB	<i>Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae</i> . Joannis Malalae Chronographia. Edited by L. Dindorf. Bonn, 1831.
de Boor	de Boor, C. <i>Excerpta historica iussu imp. Constantini Porphyrogeniti confecta</i> . Vol. 3. Berlin, 1905.
de Falco	de Falco, V., ed. <i>Iamblichi theologumena arithmeticae</i> . 2nd ed. Stuttgart, 1975.

- Felten Felten, J., ed. *Nicolai Progymnasmata*. Rhetores Graeci 11. Leipzig, 1913.
- FGrHist *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*. Edited by F. Jacoby. Berlin-Leiden, 1923–1958.
- Garzya Garzya, A., ed. *Synesii Cyrenensis epistulae*. Rome, 1979.
- Gow-Page Gow, A. S. F., and D. L. Page. *The Greek Anthology: Hellenistic Epigrams*. 2 vols. Cambridge, 1965.
- Helmreich Marquardt, J., I. von Müller, and G. Helmreich, eds. *Claudii Galeni Pergameni scripta minora*. 3 vols. Leipzig, 1884–1893.
- Kassel-Austin Kassel, R., and C. Austin, eds. *Poetae comici graeci*. 8 vols. Berlin, 1983–.
- Kühn Kühn, K. G., ed. *Galeni Opera Omnia*. 20 vols. Leipzig, 1821–1833.
- Kühner-Blass Kühner, R., and F. Blass. *Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache*. Vol. 1. 3rd ed. Hannover, 1890–1892.
- Littré Littré, E., ed. *Oeuvres complètes d'Hippocrate*. 10 vols. Paris, 1839–1861.
- Lobel-Page Lobel, E., and D. L. Page. *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta*. Oxford, 1955.
- Merkelbach-West Merkelbach, R., and M. L. West, eds. *Fragmenta Hesiodae*. Oxford, 1967.
- Patillon Patillon, M., and G. Bolognesi, eds. *Aelius Theon, Progymnasmata: Texte établi et traduit*. 2nd ed. Paris, 2002.
- Pfeiffer Pfeiffer, R. *Callimachus*. 2 vols. Oxford, 1949, 1953.
- PG *Patrologia graeca*. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857–1886.
- PMG *Poetae melici graeci*. Edited by D. L. Page. Oxford, 1962.
- Radt Radt, S., ed. *Tragicorum graecorum fragmenta*. Vol. 3: Aeschylus. Göttingen, 1999.
- Snell-Maehler Snell, B., and H. Maehler. *Bacchylides*. Leipzig, 1970.
- Voigt Voigt, E.-M. *Sappho et Alcaeus*. Amsterdam, 1971.
- West West, M. L. *Iambi et Elegi Graeci*. 2 vols. 2nd ed. Oxford, 1989–1992.

INTRODUCTION

FROM THE OFFICE OF DEAD LETTERS: THE REDISCOVERY OF THE EPISTLES

The year 1492 saw two notable discoveries, one greater and one lesser: Columbus came upon the New World while sailing across the Atlantic, and Janus Lascaris reported that while he journeyed through Apulia he found a manuscript¹ containing fifty letters by a previously unknown author. Some years later, this manuscript was bought by the humanist, doctor, and court historian in Vienna, Johannes Sambucus (1531–1584), who published the text for the first time in 1566.² The manuscript, dating from the twelfth/thirteenth century and coming from the region of Otranto,³ made its way, like many other manuscripts acquired by Sambucus, to the imperial library in Vienna. Known as the *Codex Vindobonensis philologicus graecus* 310, it constitutes our sole witness to the text.⁴ Its original

1. The coincidence in date is also noted by Arnott (1974, 353). For the text of Lascaris's reference to the Aristaenetus codex, cf. Müller 1884, 402, and also Bianchi 2008, 138–39.

2. *Ἀρισταινέτου Ἐπιστολαὶ ἐρωτικαὶ· Τινὰ τῶν παλαιῶν Ἡρώων Ἐπιτάφια; E Bibliotheca c.v. Ioan. Sambuci* (Antwerp: Plantin, 1566). See Mazal 1968 on this and other early editions.

3. A good summary of the manuscript's character and date is provided by Drago (2007, 9–10). Its *terminus ante quem*, as well as a link to the vicinity of Otranto, is established by the presence at the end of book 1 (on the verso of f. 40) of two poems by Nicolas Nectarius of Otranto (1155/56–1235), abbot of the nearby monastery of St. Nicolas of Casole between 1219 and 1235. Written in cursive, in a hand roughly contemporary with, or only slightly later than, that of the manuscript, these were first noted and published by Bast (1796, 7–8 n. 2). In the same note, Bast also mentioned a rendering of Aristaenetus, *Ep.* 1.22, in iambs in the lower right-hand margin of the manuscript (recto of f. 32). Jacob (1988) identified the hand as that of Palaganus of Otranto, datable to the early thirteenth century.

4. On this manuscript and the transmission of the letters, see Lesky 1957.

cover page is lost, but a copyist seems to have replaced the title (or what he thought the title ought to be) at the top of the first page—obscured though it is by stains and corrections. It appears to read Ἐπιστολαὶ Ἀρισταίνετ^{ου},⁵ which Lascaris and almost all subsequent editors have taken as Ἐπιστολαὶ Ἀρισταίνετ[ου] (more on the rationale for this title in a moment). It has hence been customary to call the author of these fifty charming erotic letters “Aristaenetus” ever since.

SENDER UNKNOWN

The name Aristaenetus, however, is probably just a placeholder for the more apposite “Anonymous.” For although some have asserted his reality and even attempted to identify him with a particular historical personage,⁶ “Aristaenetus” seems more likely to have been fictitious, entering the ranks of ancient epistolographers as the result of guesswork, probably because a copyist speculated about the authorship of the collection.⁷ That precisely this sort of speculation prompted its attribution to Aristaenetus is plausible in light of the following considerations: (1) all but two of its texts start with a heading, listing the letter’s author and recipient; these are overwhelmingly fictional *sprechende Namen* (signifying names) wit-

5. Cf. Mazal’s (1971) note on the title of book 1 in his apparatus. His reading has been forcefully confirmed by Bianchi (2008, 137–38). By contrast, Vieillefond (1992) (who relied on a microfilm of the manuscript, not autopsy) claims in his apparatus to the title to be able to read no more than the letters “arist ...” (or “Arist ...”), followed by two characters obscured by a stain—possibly *ων*—over which appears the correction *αι*, scil. *ἀρισται*. In this he is followed by Drago (2007, 16 n. 38).

6. Thus Lucas Holstenius (1596–1661) proposed in a letter to Lambecius (*Ep.* 63) from the year 1646 that we identify the author with that Aristaenetus known as one of the orator Libanius’s closest friends and most frequent correspondents before his untimely death in an earthquake in 358 (see Boissonade 1817, 331–35, esp. 334). The identification is most unlikely given internal chronological indicators in the letters of Aristaenetus, on which see below. It is worth considering, however, whether our Aristaenetus might have adopted the persona of the learned friend and avid letter writer with whom Libanius shared both thoughts and books (see Gallé Cejudo 1999, 19). Drago (2007, 17) notes that others have—without justification—suggested identifying Aristaenetus with the figure mentioned by Synesius, *Ep.* 133 (Garzya) as having held the office of consul in the east for the year 404.

7. For the sake of simplicity, we refer to the author as Aristaenetus throughout the rest of the introduction, as opposed to placing the name in quotation marks or calling him Pseudo-Aristaenetus.

tily characterizing the speaker and his addressee; (2) Aristaenetus, who appears as author of the first epistle of book 1, which occupies the most prominent location in the text, perfectly fits this category, as his name means “Praisers of the Best,”⁸ an apt description of one writing here in praise of the charms of Lais, which are supreme; (3) from this position at the head of the first letter, it was an easy step to place Aristaenetus at the head of the corpus as a whole.⁹

POSTMARK UNCLEAR

It may strike us as fitting that Aristaenetus turns out to be a fictitious author of a collection of fictitious erotic letters, yet (as we have seen) one would more accurately call him Anonymous. He is an Anonymous, however, whose letters contain clues helping us situate him in a particular time and cultural environment. Internal indicators point to a date around 500 C.E. In *Ep.* 1.26, we find two important historical references. First, the narrator describes himself as a “public courier” (τῆς πολιτείας ἰππεύς), “acquainted with the new Rome and the old” (καὶ πρὸς γε τῇ νέᾳ τὴν πρεσβυτέραν ἱστορήκα Ῥώμην). Since Emperor Constantine officially established Constantinople as the “new Rome” in 324 C.E., the title provides a secure *terminus post quem* for the collection. This letter, however, also contains a reference to the famous pantomime Karamallos (“Woolly Head,” a designation likely pointing to the type of wig worn by the mime).¹⁰ A celebrated pantomime of this name appears in a poem by Sidonius Apollinaris datable to the years between 463 and 466 (*Carm.* 23.268–271). He may or may not be

8. Lesky (1951, 8) and Drago (2007, 17) suggest that the compound should rather be taken passively, that is, describing the author as worthy of the best praise; see also Arnott’s translation “Bestpraiseworthy” (1982, 293). But verbal adjectives ending in -τος, and their derivative names, can be either passive or active in sense (cf. Kühner-Blass 1.2:288–89).

9. No one would dream of taking “Aristaenetus” as anything other than fictitious if this letter did not come at the start of the collection but was located elsewhere. Zanetto (1987, 197–99), however, argues that because the collection includes several letters playfully purporting to be by Aristaenetus’s epistolographic models (see xxii below), we cannot rule out the possibility that the author would have wanted to take his place at the head of his work among these illustrious literary predecessors.

10. On the term ἔμμαλος with reference to mimes and various compound names ending in -μαλλος designating mimes, see the passage from Malalas cited below, as well as Maricq 1952, 362–68 and Gager 1992, 52 (with n. 27).

the same Karamallos depicted on a “contorniate medallion” from the reign of Emperor Valentinian III (425–455) bearing the Greek inscription “May you be victorious, Karamallos.”¹¹ Complications arise, however, regarding the reference in Sidonius since John Malalas (*Chron.* 15 [PG 97:573; *CSHB* p. 386:17–20]) notes how in the years between 478 and 481/82¹² Longinus, brother of Emperor Zeno, presented to the Green circus faction of Constantinople a bewigged (ἔμμαλος) Alexandrian dancer, Autokyon, nicknamed Karamallos (along with another, Rhodos, nicknamed Chrysomallos [“Golidilocks”]: ἔδωκε δὲ τοῖς Πρασίνοις ἔμμαλον τὸν Αὐτοκύονα τὸν λεγόμενον Καράμαλλον ἀπὸ Ἀλεξανδρείας τῆς μεγάλης, καὶ τὸν Ῥόδον τὸν λεγόμενον Χρυσόμαλλον). This Karamallos is unlikely to have been the same who bestrode the stage in Sidonius, since Malalas, writing about events some twenty years later, appears to envision a performer considerably younger and less established than others of his time or than the one highlighted by Sidonius.¹³ The complications multiply, moreover, as possibly still another Karamallos is referred to in the collection of historical excerpts made by Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (*Excerpta de insidiis* [170 de Boor]) in connection with events of the year 520 as being a particularly celebrated pantomime at the circus of Constantinople at that time. Perhaps, as scholars have suggested, these two or more Karamalloi belonged to different generations within the same theatrical family, an artistic dynasty,¹⁴ or perhaps they refer simply to a character type common among pantomimes of this period. Which Karamallos did Aristaenetus have in mind? There is no sure way to tell. These “wooly mime” stories, however, offer a range of possibilities between about 425 and 520 C.E.

A date in this general range harmonizes with the language of Aristaenetus. He emulates the Attic style of such classical authors as Plato and Menander, favorite models both, while also regularly drawing on second and third century C.E. Atticists such as Alciphron, Lucian, and Philostratus

11. On “contorniate medallions” (coins with a deep furrow on the edge, which were struck in the fourth and fifth century C.E.) depicting mimes in general and on the Karamallos medallion in particular, see Jory 1996, 6–8, and Drago 2007, 28.

12. On the date, see Burri 2004, 86 (with n. 18).

13. Earlier in the passage cited above, Malalas says that the wig-bearing pantomimes brought by Longinus were young (ὄρχηστὰς ἔμμάλους μικρούς) since he had set free Constantinople’s older, more famous ones, after giving them many gifts (ἦσαν γὰρ οἱ ὄρχούμενοι ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει εὐφημοὶ παλαιοί, καὶ ἐποίησεν αὐτοὺς λῦσαι, πολλὰ χαρισάμενος αὐτοῖς). Cf. Burri 2004, 86.

14. Cf. Burri 2004, 86–87; Drago 2007, 28.

the Elder. Yet “as with so many writers of late antiquity his aim often fell far short of the target, and his Greek abounds with solecisms,” as Arnott puts it (1982, 295). Prose rhythm is another factor placing Aristaenetus in the fifth century or later: he is one of the earliest authors to use accent-regulated clausulae, that is, a prose rhythm at the end of his sentences or before a sense pause that avoids “sequences of words there with one or no unaccented syllables between the last and penultimate accents, and favoring sequences with two or four such syllables” (Arnott 1974, 355).¹⁵

One final clue that may push our author’s date to the later end of the spectrum comes in *Ep.* 1.19. Here, the musician Melissarion bears a child to her lover, Charikles. He, in turn, “considered it the greatest injustice for his beloved, the mother of such a child, to still be called hetaira. So he liberated her at once from that shameful profession and made his beloved his wife, so as to plant in her the seed of legitimate children.” Mazal (1977, 3–4) has argued that this story presupposes the existence of the *Lex de nuptiis* enacted by Emperor Justin between 520 and 524, which specifically permitted actresses (*scaenicae*) to wed men of any rank provided they give up their dishonorable profession.¹⁶ Vieillefond (1992, x–xi) has objected that tales of young men raising up poor, socially inferior women so as to make them their legitimate wives are “un thème éternel dans la littérature comme dans la vie.” Yet the letter would undoubtedly acquire added point and topical significance in light of the recent promulgation of this law, since Melissarion’s transformation from actress/hetaira to legitimate wife finds a striking parallel in the life of the notorious actress/hetaira

15. Fundamental on this topic are Meyer 1905 and Nissen 1940. The latter demonstrates how Aristaenetus regularly modified the phrasing of antecedent texts he was quoting, so that they would follow this rule of prose rhythm.

16. *Cod. justin.* 5.4.23: “Thus since it would be unjust that slaves should be able to receive their freedom by imperial indulgence and be restored to their natural rights so as to live, upon bestowal of imperial beneficence of that kind, as if they had never been slaves and had always been free born, but that women who have been on the stage [*mulieres autem, quae scaenicis quidem sese ludis immiscuerunt*], but who have changed their mind and have abandoned a dishonorable profession, should have no hope of imperial beneficence which might lead them back to the condition in which they might have lived if they had not sinned, we grant them by this beneficent imperial sanction the right that, if they abandon their dishonorable conduct, and embrace a better and honorable mode of life, they may supplicate our majesty, and they will unhesitatingly be granted an imperial rescript permitting them to enter into a legal marriage” (Blume 2009).

Theodora, who by means of this law was to become the bride of the future emperor Justinian. Mazal's argument for a date after 520 thus gains a certain plausibility, the more so as it would place Aristaenetus in the context of the revival of classical literature in the reign of Justinian.¹⁷ But though suggestive and appealing, Mazal's proposal is by no means conclusive. We do best, therefore, to remain flexible: a date somewhat before or after 500 C.E. seems appropriate.

INTIMATE CORRESPONDENCE

Recent years have seen the publication of several translations that label Aristaenetus's epistles *Lettres d'amour* (Vieillefond 1992), *Lettere d'amore* (Conca and Zanetto 2005; Drago 2007), or *Lletres d'amor* (Pagès 2009). "Letters *about* love" they are, indeed—love letters they are, for the most part, not. Only a few texts in the collection grant us glimpses of an intimate correspondence between lovers, while a significant number bear only the slightest resemblance to actual letters: containing neither epistolary formulae nor references to the medium, to the composition of the message, its delivery, or its reception, they offer third-person narratives with no visible connection to either sender or recipient.¹⁸ In numerous instances nothing besides the heading (*X to Y*) and the context of the collection indicates that we are to envision the text in front of us as part of a written correspondence. As we shall see, the epistolary framework is indeed meaningful to Aristaenetus. Yet one can often lose sight of it, as the author's emphasis appears to lie more in presenting his readers with erotic tales or anecdotes, which would function equally well without their epistolary trappings.

The majority of Aristaenetus's letters are concerned with the description of extramarital affairs; they are full of lovers using every trope of erotic literature to praise their beloveds in over-the-top encomia, paramours hatching complicated schemes to achieve their desires, wily go-betweens who help smooth their way, unfaithful spouses barely avoiding

17. It is impossible to say where the author lived. Mazal's contention that Aristaenetus must have been part of that "humanistisch gebildeten Schicht in Konstantinopel" (1977, 5) remains purely speculative.

18. See Zanetto 1987, 196. Altogether, Aristaenetus's fifty letters contain only four brief references to the letter as medium (2.1; 2.3; 2.9; 2.17) and three more-detailed references to the act of writing (1.24; 2.5; 2.13); cf. Höschele 2012, 163–64.

capture in the midst of hair-raising and amusing infidelities—in short, the stuff of comedy, erotic poetry, and the ancient novel. We encounter, among other things, a man getting into bed with two women (1.2), a girl losing her virginity before marriage (1.6), a youth in love with his father’s mistress (1.13), a prison guard cuckolded by a man incarcerated for adultery (1.20), a serving girl caught *in flagrante* with the lover of her mistress (2.7), and a young husband filled with passion for his mother-in-law (2.8). The entire collection is pervaded by a spirit of frivolity and imbued with light-hearted humor; we are invited to laugh about the erotic adventures and misdemeanors of Aristaenetus’s characters. Despite its erotic topics, however, the corpus remains relatively tame in its description of amorous encounters, avoiding open obscenity and passing over the most delicate moments: it is titillatingly suggestive rather than explicit.¹⁹ Thus, the narrator in *Ep.* 1.2 concludes his recollection of a ménage à trois by stating: “So far my story is appropriate for anyone’s ear—but what follows, let me just sum it up and say that I found a rough-and-ready chamber fitting the need and did not disappoint either one.” Placed toward the beginning of the collection, this erotic aposiopesis has a clear programmatic function: so far, and not further.²⁰

In a similar vein, in *Ep.* 1.21 Telesippe, who grants her lover everything apart from intercourse, could be taken as an emblem of the narrative boundaries Aristaenetus set himself. “By all means touch my breasts,” she tells her lover, “enjoy the sweetest kisses, and embrace me while I’m still dressed, but don’t get on my nerves demanding sex, and don’t expect it, since you’ll only cause yourself distress and lose what you can have.” It would be wrong to take this reticence as a sign of prudery: Aristaenetus evidently likes to tease his readers and to appeal to their erotic imagination by withholding a graphic account of the sexual act itself. The reader thus is in a situation similar to Telesippe’s lover Architeles.²¹ His longing for closure is never entirely gratified, but this is precisely what keeps him hooked, as Telesippe herself points out: “as long as you’re wishing for intercourse, it’s sweet, gratifying, and utterly desirable. But once it has happened, it’s

19. Cf. Arnott 1982, 310–15.

20. As Arnott (1982, 311) has observed, Aristaenetus “prefers to draw a veil over the subsequent love-making. Or rather, a series of different veils: for even in this area of taboos he aims at variety.”

21. On the significance of the names, see notes on *Ep.* 1.21.

despised; and what had long seemed the heart's most urgent desire is suddenly discarded, spit upon, ignored."

There is, however, one erotic theme whose absence strikes us as conspicuous: nowhere does Aristaenetus make mention of pederastic relationships,²² which is particularly surprising in light of his obvious debt to Plato. As Arnott (1982, 314) poignantly puts it: "Why did 'Aristaenetus' embargo homosexuality while cheerfully tolerating marital infidelity and perhaps even incest?" He views Aristaenetus's cultural background as a possible reason for his exclusion of this topic: writing in an age when Christianity had become the official state religion, Aristaenetus might, he argues, have hesitated to portray a form of sexuality so utterly condemned by many of his contemporaries. Nothing in the collection indicates that Aristaenetus himself was Christian—quite on the contrary: given his nostalgic evocation of a pagan world,²³ it seems most likely that he was not. But whatever his personal beliefs, it is a fair assumption that Aristaenetus's omission of pederasty in some way reflects the moral climate of his time, as same-sex relationships of any kind came increasingly under attack during late antiquity, in Christian and non-Christian circles alike.²⁴

THE EPISTOLARY TRADITION

In composing fictional letters, Aristaenetus inscribes himself in a long literary tradition. The epistolary genre is notoriously difficult to define, and we will not offer a comprehensive discussion of its numerous subtypes.²⁵ Suffice

22. There are some vestiges of homoeroticism in the collection (cf. Aristaenetus's description of how those "who love the sight of beauty would jostle for a chance to see [Acontius] going to his teacher's" in *Ep.* 1.10, or his characterization of a youth, who has just started to grow a beard, as "equal parts lover and beloved" in *Ep.* 1.11, or again the very suggestive relationship between groom and horseman in *Ep.* 1.8), but there is no explicit portrayal of pederasty.

23. Arnott (1982, 303) calls his oeuvre a "valedictory hymn to paganism."

24. On the change in moral attitudes and conceptions of masculinity in late antiquity, see Kuefler 2001, esp. 87–96 on *impudicitia* and pederasty. Floridi (2012) shows how, for instance, Ausonius significantly toned down the pederastic elements in a poem about a dead youth vis-à-vis his earlier models. Boswell (1980) argues that early Christianity was relatively tolerant toward homosexuality.

25. Trapp (2003, 1) gives the following definition: "A letter is a written message from one person (or set of people) to another, requiring to be set down in a tangible medium, which itself is to be physically conveyed from sender(s) to recipient(s). For-

it to say that one may roughly distinguish between “real” letters, bound to a specific occasion and composed with a pragmatic purpose (be they official or private), and multiple forms of literary epistles, including semi-private letters (such as those by Cicero and Pliny), texts of various content (e.g., didactic or scholarly) cast into epistolary form, verse epistles, and fictional letters.²⁶ The boundaries are, of course, blurry, and one cannot expect every letter or epistle-like text to fit neatly into one of these categories.²⁷ Of particular interest in our context is the last of the aforementioned types: the fictional letter. Not only are letters frequently embedded in narrative texts, especially in historiographic prose and the novel, but they also appear as important plot devices on stage.²⁸ Furthermore, several collections of pseudepigrapha have come down to us, that is, letters written by anonymous authors in the voice of famous historical figures (among them Aeschines, Socrates, and Euripides), some of which in fact resemble modern epistolary novels.²⁹

Most closely related to Aristaenetus’s literary undertaking, however, are three corpora of Greek fictional letters from the period commonly known as the Second Sophistic. The term describes an intellectual move-

mally, it is a piece of writing that is overtly addressed from sender(s) to recipient(s), by the use at beginning and end of one of a limited set of conventional formulae of salutation (or some allusive variation on them) which specify both parties to the transaction. One might also add, by way of further explanation, that the need for a letter as a medium of communication normally arises because the two parties are physically distant (separated) from each other, and so unable to communicate by unmediated voice or gesture; and that a letter is normally expected to be of relatively limited length.” For further reflections on what constitutes a letter, see Gibson and Morrison 2007; on ancient epistolography, see also Stowers 1986; Stirewalt 1993; Morello and Morrison 2007; Ceccarelli 2013.

26. This is the classification proposed by Sykutris (1931), whose article is still an important starting point for any study of ancient epistolography.

27. With regard to Sykutris’s fourth and fifth categories, for instance, Rosenmeyer (2001, 12) rightly points out that “the difference between verse and prose ... is less crucial in an epistolary context than the difference between fictive or imaginative letters and letters whose writers and receivers are not invented.”

28. On Greek epistolary fiction, see the excellent study in Rosenmeyer 2001; see also Jenkins 2006 on intercepted letters in Greco-Roman literature; Olson 2010 on embedded letters in Josephus; Hodkinson, Rosenmeyer, and Bracke 2013 on epistolary narratives in Greek literature.

29. On the Greek epistolary novel, see Holzberg 1994, esp. his “Versuch einer Gattungstypologie” (1–52). On pseudepigraphic letter collections, see also Rosenmeyer 1994 and Luchner 2009.

ment during the early Roman Empire (ca. 60–230 C.E.) whose representatives immersed themselves in the rhetorical tradition and strove to assert their Greek identity by looking to the glorious past of Hellas, showcasing their knowledge of earlier literature and writing in the Classical Attic dialect.³⁰ Παιδεία (“education/culture”) was the ideal of the time; being a πεπαιδευμένος (“cultivated individual”) was not just a question of private learnedness but could also have great political significance.³¹ Replete with allusions and full of rhetorical flourish, the epistolary collections by Alciphron (ca. 170–220), Claudius Aelianus (ca. 175–235), and Philostratus of Lemnos (ca. 170–ca. 244–249)³² clearly reflect the spirit and culture of the time.

Alciphron’s four books revive the world of Menandrian drama through letters penned by fishermen, farmers, parasites, and courtesans, which grant the reader glimpses into the daily lives and concerns of nonelite characters from a long bygone era.³³ His epistolary impersonation of comic stock figures and notorious hetairas moves Alciphron’s oeuvre close to the realm of rhetorical *ethopoieia*, a form of school exercise that required the student to envision what a particular (historical or imaginary) person would say in a given situation, for instance, when faced with great emotional stress or when standing before an important decision.³⁴ “Impersonation” was one of fourteen so-called *progymnasmata* (“preliminary exercises”), which were designed to prepare future orators for more-advanced rhetorical studies; they usually took the form of short practice speeches but could, it seems, also involve the composition of letters.³⁵ Elevating this mode of writing to

30. On the Second Sophistic, see Anderson 1993; Swain 1996; Whitmarsh 2001; and Borg 2004.

31. Cf., e.g., Gleason 1995 and Schmitz 1997.

32. We know of four writers bearing the name Philostratus; most scholars identify the author of the letters with Philostratus the Elder, who is known, in particular, for his *Lives of the Sophists* and the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. Cf. Rosenmeyer 2001, 322, with further references.

33. As Rosenmeyer (2001, 257) remarks, “while Menander was praised for showing scenes of ‘real life’ to his audience, Alciphron creates for his readership a ‘reality’ based on the literary representations of Menander, so at a second degree of distance.” On Alciphron’s letters, see Anderson 1997; Rosenmeyer 2001, 255–307; Schmitz 2004; Hodkinson 2007; and König 2007. On the reception of New Comedy in Alciphron and other epistolographers, see Höschele 2014, with further references.

34. On Alciphron’s letters as *ethopoieiai*, see Ureña Bracero 1993.

35. This is attested by two grammarians from the first and fifth centuries C.E.:

literary heights, Alciphron's oeuvre, however, far transcends the world of rhetorical training.

One way in which Alciphron marks his debt to comedy and highlights the artificiality of his characters is his ubiquitous use of *sprechende Namen*. As we have seen, Aristaenetos too likes to give his senders and recipients "speaking" names, but they look rather innocuous in comparison to such monstrosities as Alciphron's Cothylbrochthisus ("Cup Guzzler," 3.5) or Dipsanapausilypus ("Thirst Assuager," 3.31).³⁶ The fictional nature of the world evoked in Alciphron's oeuvre is, moreover, evident from the tension between the writers' social status and their literary skills. The author draws our attention to this incongruity when he has a character justify his erudition by the fact that he comes from Athens, "where there is not a single man who hasn't had a taste of these things" (3.29.3). As Schmitz has observed (2004, 98), "the Athens where everybody has part in *παιδεία* is not any real landscape, it is located in the nostalgic imagination of the *πεπαιδευμένοι* of the Second Sophistic." A similar tension is palpable throughout Aelian's collection of twenty *Rustic Letters*,³⁷ which invites us to picture various rural characters, including Menander's misanthrope Knemon (*Ep.* 13–16), with pen in hand. Aelian likewise reflects on the paradox of erudite country folk by sealing his work with a programmatic statement that, though voiced by a farmer to his friend, is clearly targeted at the external reader (*Ep.* 20): "If this letter sent to you sounds too smart to be supplied by the country, don't be surprised: for we are not Libyan or Lydian, but *Athenian* farmers."

While Alciphron and Aelian slip into the roles of multiple characters, men and women alike, Philostratus writes in his own voice, or rather in the voice of a fictionalized alter ego.³⁸ The majority of his letters are love notes of varying length (some not longer than a sentence or two) to unnamed boys and girls, though the corpus also contains messages of nonerotic content addressed to specific individuals, most notably a missive to Empress Julia Domna on matters of rhetoric (*Ep.* 73). Although we may picture Philostratus as the composer of all these texts, the collection as a whole does not present us with a coherent narratorial voice, let alone any underlying

Theon of Alexandria (115 Patillon) and Nikolaos (67,2–5 Felten). On the role of letters in ancient education, see Criore 2001, 215–19.

36. On *sprechende Namen* in Alciphron, see Schmitz 2004, 99–100.

37. On Aelian's letters, see Rosenmeyer 2001, 308–21; Hodkinson 2007 and 2013.

38. On Philostratus's letters, see Rosenmeyer 2001, 322–38; Goldhill 2009.

epistolary narrative. His *billets d'amour* for the most part offer variations on amatory *topoi* and are concerned with winning over a beloved. For the sake of erotic persuasion Philostratus resorts to any kind of argument and does not shy away from contradicting assertions phrased in other letters—though seemingly sincere confessions of love, the texts are sophistic show-pieces written for the entertainment of an erudite audience.

ARISTAENETUS AND HIS EPISTOLARY MODELS

Most of the letters in these three corpora remain unanswered and leave it up to the reader to imagine how the various situations might have evolved. There are a few letter pairs and epistolary sequences in Alciphron and Aelian,³⁹ but in general the letters tend to be “soliloquies rather than dialogues” (Rosenmeyer 2001, 130). The same is true of Aristaenetus’s collection, in which not a single text is accompanied by a direct reply. His work does, however, feature epistolary dialogues of another (metaliterary and intertextual) kind, for Aristaenetus significantly pays homage to those earlier epistolographers by incorporating them as correspondents into his own oeuvre⁴⁰: *Ep.* 1.5 is sent from Alciphron to Lucian, 1.22 from Lucian to Alciphron; Philostratus appears as the author of *Ep.* 1.11, while book 2 opens with a letter from Aelian.

The absorption of Aristaenetus’s literary predecessors into his epistolary universe is, in fact, prefigured by Alciphron’s invention of an epistolary exchange between Menander and Glykera, which seals the fourth and last of his books (*Ep.* 4.18/19).⁴¹ After evoking, throughout his oeuvre, a world largely based on that of New Comedy by having comic figures voice their concerns not on stage but on the written page, Alciphron intriguingly transforms the playwright into a letter writer himself. Aristaenetus, in turn, manifests his awareness of Alciphron’s strong ties to New Comedy by featuring him as sender/recipient of two letters replete with Menandrian echoes.⁴² Significantly, not only are *Ep.* 1.5 and 1.22 connected through their pair of correspondents (this is the only instance in the collection that a sender and recipient reappear!), but they also form, as Zanetto has seen

39. Rosenmeyer 2001, 315–19; Hodkinson 2007, 293–95.

40. Zanetto 1987, 197–99; Drago 2007, 22–24.

41. Rosenmeyer 2001, 301–6; Höschele 2014; for a commentary on this letter pair, see Bungarten 1967.

42. See Höschele 2014.

(1987, 198–99), a thematic diptych, insofar as each tells of a woman who cunningly regains a man's affection with the help of another female.

In *Ep.* 1.5 we hear of a married woman lured by a prospective lover to a banquet, from where she flees in panic upon noticing her husband. In order to divert his suspicions, she hands her robe, which he had seen at the party, over to a friend, who subsequently saves her from the man's fury by pretending to have borrowed the garment in question. Their trick has the desired effect: letting go of his anger, the husband even asks for his wife's forgiveness. As Arnott (1973, 203–5) has demonstrated, Aristaenetus's letter recalls Menander's *Samia* in its depiction of the raging husband. Though the plot of this comedy has little to do with the event reported by Alciphron—its main intrigue is centered on getting a youth married to the neighbor girl he had seduced—Aristaenetus repeatedly draws on the vocabulary used by Menander with reference to angry old men.⁴³ To name just the most conspicuous parallels: the rather exotic word that characterizes the women's deceit (βουκολέω, “bamboozle”) twice appears in the *Samia* (530, 596), where it is employed by Demeas and Nikeratos in the midst of heated arguments. In addition, the conduct of the jealous husband, who leaps over the threshold (εἰσπεπήδηκεν) and screams at the top of his voice (κεκραγώς), resembles the furious behavior of Menander's Nikeratos (εἰσπεπήδηκεν, 564; κεκράξεται, 549; κέκραγε, 553; κέκραχθι, 580) upon discovering that his daughter has had a baby.

Beyond these and further verbal parallels detected by Arnott, one might, we suggest, also note a structural analogy between the two texts. In Menander's play, Demeas's concubine Chrysis passes off as hers the baby to whom Plangon, impregnated by Moschion during a festival,⁴⁴ has given birth in their fathers' absence; this pretense leads to great trouble, as Demeas ends up suspecting innocent Chrysis of having slept with his son. In Aristaenetus, on the other hand, the guilty wife clears herself of any suspicion by eliciting the help of a neighborhood friend, who passes off as “hers” the incriminating *corpus delicti*. Could this deception acted out by the two women not recall the female scheme that stands at the beginning of the *Samia*? A robe is, of course, no baby, and the women's trick in and of itself would hardly point to Menander's comedy. But a reader whose poetic

43. For a discussion of the parallels, see also Drago 2007, 151–53.

44. Note that the banquet to which the wife is invited in Aristaenetus also takes place during a public festival (Πανηγύρεως ἐν προαστείῳ πανδημεί τελουμένης ...).

memory of the *Samia* has already been triggered by its verbal echoes might very well note a similarity between the two intrigues.

Be that as it may, it is certainly no coincidence that the tale attributed to Alciphron is thus infused with Menandrian language and motifs. Significantly, the same is true of the letter addressed to Alciphron by Lucian (*Ep.* 1.22). As a composer of dialogues, this Second Sophistic author (ca. 125–180 C.E.) may be said to represent a genre related to epistolography, insofar as the ancients regarded a letter as “one half of a conversation” (Pseudo-Demetrius 223).⁴⁵ Lucian’s *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, which show close similarities to Alciphron’s *Letters of Hetairai*, also served as an important source of inspiration for Aristaenetus’s portrayal of the erotic demi-monde.⁴⁶ Could Aristaenetus evoke Lucian’s association with the genre of dialogue by having him “answer” Alciphron’s story with an erotic anecdote of his own? As noted above, these are the only two letters in the collection with an identical pair of correspondents. Even if Lucian does not explicitly reply to Alciphron’s message, his tale is, from its first sentence, marked as a companion piece to that of his addressee through its reference to a common acquaintance, Charisios (“you know what the boy is like”). For this seems to pick up Alciphron’s aside concerning another common acquaintance, Charidemos, toward the beginning of 1.5 (“you know what a womanizer the boy is”).⁴⁷ Alciphron and Lucian are thus envisioned as exchanging stories about people belonging to their mutual circle of friends; this is the closest we come in Aristaenetus to an actual epistolary *exchange*, a fact that makes the choice of dialogue-writing Lucian as one of the correspondents seem highly pointed.

On a metapoetic level, Lucian’s parenthetical comment about Charisios might, as Drago (2007, 349) has observed, also appeal to the reader’s literary knowledge: “you know the boy and his ways—*since you are familiar with his model*.”⁴⁸ As in the case of *Ep.* 1.5, the letter’s generative nucleus is

45. Among Lucian’s texts we also find four *Saturnalian Letters* (see Slater 2013), but he is best known for his composition of literary dialogues.

46. Cf. Drago 2007 on *Ep.* 1.16, which she views as deriving from Lucian, *Dial. Court.* 3, and the textual notes below on *Ep.* 1.24 and 1.25.

47. Cf. Zanetto 1987, 198; Drago 2007, 348–49.

48. Interestingly, the words are themselves an almost verbatim quotation of a passage in Plato’s *Phaedo*, where they are used of Apollodorus, one of Socrates’s disciples who was present at his death (οἷσθα γάρ που τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ τὸν τρέπον αὐτοῦ, 59B).

to be found in a text of New Comedy: this time, the *Perikeiromene*.⁴⁹ Like Polemon, the lover in Menander's play, Charisios is portrayed as rash and arrogant; both are, moreover, filled with jealousy toward an imagined rival. In Menander, Polemon shaves off his beloved's hair in a fit of rage after misinterpreting an embrace between Glykera and her brother. In Aristaenetus, by way of contrast, Glykera and her slave Doris—their names are identical to those of Menander's female characters—deliberately provoke Charisios's jealousy so as to rekindle his passion. For this purpose Doris pretends that her mistress is crazy about a man named Polemon (!) and filled with hatred for Charisios, which immediately makes him seek his beloved's forgiveness. Jealousy, then, is a crucial element in both texts, yet its function in Aristaenetus's tale is opposite to that in Menander (there it sets off the crisis; here it brings about its solution). This prominent structural reversal is, we suggest, reflected in Aristaenetus's switch of names vis-à-vis his model text (turning Polemon from lover into rival)—a switch that is, moreover, paralleled by the letter's reversal of sender and addressee (Lucian to Alciphron) in relation to *Ep.* 1.5.

WHY LETTERS?

It goes without saying that it is possible to enjoy the two anecdotes told in *Ep.* 1.5 and 1.22 for their own sake; but an intertextually alert reader may find further pleasure in recognizing Aristaenetus's playful adaptation of Menandrian material and appreciate his sophisticated homage to Alciphron and Lucian: far from using the names of these two authors haphazardly, Aristaenetus attaches them to letters that mirror central aspects of their work, such as Alciphron's predilection for New Comedy or Lucian's association with dialogue. Similar observations could be made about Aristaenetus's engagement with Philostratus in *Ep.* 1.11 and Aelian in *Ep.* 2.1,⁵⁰ but the principle underlying his allusive technique should have become sufficiently clear from our preceding discussion. The question to be addressed at this point is, Why letters?

49. While Arnott (1973, 205–6) detects only general reminiscences of comedy in the letter, and though Magrini (1981, 154–55) views Lucian's *Dial. Court.* 8 as the letter's generative nucleus, Drago (1997, 178–86; 2007, 342–47) has persuasively argued that its main model is the *Perikeiromene*. Since she offers a detailed discussion of the parallels, we limit ourselves to a brief comparison.

50. See Drago 2007 (*ad loc.*) and our notes.

To be sure, the collection contains a few texts designed to look like actual love letters. We hear, for instance, Mousarion assure Lysias of her devotion (1.24), Euxitheos declare his love to Pythias (2.2), or Myrtale reproach Pamphilos for running after another woman (2.16). The corpus, moreover, includes various messages relating to matters of love, which are addressed to a rival (2.6) or friend (Glykera, for example, complains to Philinna about her husband [2.3], while lovesick Parthenis asks Harpedone for advice [2.5]). As mentioned above, however, there are many more texts that exhibit a mere veneer of epistolarity, and the overall scarcity of epistolary markers raises the question of why Aristaenetos opted for this genre at all. Did he, perhaps, simply follow in the footsteps of his epistolographic models without giving much weight to the generic implications of letter writing? We believe not: his choice of the epistolary form is anything but fortuitous.

A central, if not *the* defining, feature of Aristaenetos's work is his constant intertextual dialogue with earlier writers, which seems to be fueled by a fervent wish to bridge the gulf between himself and the admired authors of old. Aristaenetos's inclusion of writers from other eras as correspondents within his oeuvre gives vivid testimony to his desire to bring the literary past into his own here and now. And the medium of the letter constitutes, we submit, the ideal tool for such an undertaking.⁵¹ As a means of communication between two persons who are physically separated, a letter serves to transport words from one locale—and one temporal moment—to another. Could the intervening distance between writer and addressee that marks any epistolary exchange not reflect the temporal, spatial, and cultural remoteness of earlier authors in relation to Aristaenetos, who attempts to overcome that distance in the act of reading and writing?⁵²

Throughout Aristaenetos's collection we hear the voices of writers past whose words are inscribed into his epistles. In this context it is significant to note that the ancients attributed to letters the capacity to make the absent present. Authors frequently assert that they feel their addressees to

51. This and the following observations are based on Höschle 2012, 161–66.

52. In a similar vein, Höschle (2009, 148) argues that the coupling of Catullus's two translations from Sappho (*Carm.* 51) and Callimachus (*Carm.* 66) with two poetic epistles (*Carm.* 50 and 65) is not coincidental: the transportation of words across time and space through the medium of the letter parallels Catullus's transportation of words from a distant time, an alien culture, and a foreign language into his own here and now through the medium of translation.

be virtually present while writing to them. One example is from Cicero's correspondence with C. Cassius (*Fam.* 15.16.1): "It somehow happens—I don't know how—that you seem to be quasi present when I write something to you, and not just as a vision."⁵³ It is, we submit, precisely this mediating function, the letter's ability to evoke with such intensity the physically and temporally distant, that makes it so attractive a vehicle for an author like Aristaenetus. On a metaliterary level, the epistolary form may thus be said to embody the intertextual dialogue that stands at the core of his collection.

STOLEN MAIL: ARISTAENETUS, AN ARTFUL THIEF

In the previous section, we suggested how Aristaenetus's engagement with the literary past may be figured in the very form he adopted, the epistle. The method of his dialogue with antecedent texts differs, however, from that employed by his Second Sophistic models. To be sure, like these he emulated the language of fifth- and fourth-century B.C.E. Athens. But he went further than them in the extent to which he appropriated earlier material: he not only infuses his texts with learned allusions to, and choice phrases from, the classics of the tradition, both poetry and prose; he regularly lifts big chunks—lengthy, almost-verbatim extracts—from these works, rarely with attribution. Plato and Attic comedy hold pride of place as a source of plunder (we have already seen something of what he takes from Menander), but he had also clearly read in detail and with care the learned third-century B.C.E. poet Callimachus, basing two of his letters (1.10 and 1.15, respectively) on the tales of *Acontius and Cydippe* and *Phrygius and Pieria* from book 3 of that poet's *Aetia*, and appropriating some of his exotic vocabulary.⁵⁴ Aristaenetus's epistolographic models—Alciphron, Aelian, Philostratus—also yield rich spoils to him, as do other Second Sophistic authors, such as Lucian and the Greek novelists (in particular, Achilles Tatius and Xenophon of Ephesus). Aristaenetus has consequently been disparaged as a "common burglar" and "jackdaw."⁵⁵

53. On the so-called *parousia* topos in ancient letters, see Thraede 1970.

54. For the manner and detail of his thematic and lexical appropriations, see the apparatus to Pfeiffer's edition of Callimachus, frs. 67–75 (*Acontius and Cydippe*) and frs. 80–83 (*Phrygius and Pieria*); see also Arnott 1982, 308; Harder 1993; Harder 2012.

55. Arnott (1973, 202) describes Aristaenetus as a "common burglar," or again

In literary terms, however, burglary was a time-honored figure for appropriation in antiquity; its connotations could be quite positive.⁵⁶ The sneering adjective “common” here misses the mark, for Aristaenetus was, demonstrably, an artful thief. His larceny could at times be grand, in the sense of both large scale and marvelous. By way of illustration, let us examine an instance of such grand larceny: a long, near-verbatim quotation in *Ep.* 1.19. This will offer insight into our author’s allusive method inasmuch as it shows both how he extracts an extended passage from a model and how he uses it most artfully to his own ends.

In the letter, a slave woman named Euphronion tells how her fellow theater artist Melissarion, though raised by an impoverished mother, managed to escape her lowly origins: her brilliant artistry as a performer (*μουσουργός*) opened every door, and Melissarion did her utmost to keep those doors open wide, for as the narrator puts it (1.19):

Her company highly prized [*πολύτιμον*], Melissarion socialized with the richest men.

It was crucial that she not get pregnant, lest the birth of a child cheapen her in the eyes of her lovers and she spoil the flower of her youth too soon in labor. The musician had heard the tale that women tell each other, that when a girl is going to be pregnant the seed doesn’t come out of her at all, but rather it stays inside, held back by nature. When she heard this, it made sense to her, and she always kept it in mind. And on noticing that this had in fact happened to her, that is, that her seed had not come out, she told her mother about it, and they reported it to me, as I was more experienced in such matters. No sooner had I learned of it than I ordered her to do what I knew had to be done and quickly freed her of her anxious forebodings.

What the narrator, Euphronion, evidently knew through her greater experience was how to induce a quick abortion, whereby she freed Melissarion of her anxious forebodings. Later, however, when Melissarion fell in love with the rich and handsome Charikles (*ἐπισήμου καὶ κάλλει καὶ πλούτῳ*) and found that he shared her feelings, she bore him a child. He thereupon made her his lawful wife, allowing her to leave her disreputable profession.

(1974, 359) as “a jackdaw, embellishing his pages with vivid passages and phrases culled verbatim or with minimal alteration from a variety of earlier authors.”

56. Theft as a figure for an author’s use of the earlier tradition appears already in Callimachus, *Epigr.* 43 Pfeiffer (= 13 Gow-Page = *Anth. pal.* 12.134); cf. Bing 2009, 166–69; Hinds 1998, 22–25; McGill 2010.

Along with her new status, she adopted a new name: henceforth she has been known as Pythias.

As has long been noted, the passage above is taken with just a few minor alterations and clarifying supplements⁵⁷ almost word for word from Hippocrates, *On the Nature of the Child* (περὶ φύσιος παιδίου [7:490 Littré]).⁵⁸ Its narrative framework, however, is quite different. In *On the Nature of the Child*, the author explains how he came to see a seed (embryo) when it was in its sixth day. He was able to observe its appearance because a kinswoman of his owned a slave girl, a high-priced performer (μουσοεργὸς πολύτιμος, as in Aristaenetus), who had to avoid childbirth to maintain her value with the men she went with. When, however, the girl noticed that telltale sign of pregnancy mentioned also in the epistolographer, she informed her mistress, who in turn told Hippocrates. As a remedy, he ordered her to jump into the air, kicking up her legs so as to strike her buttocks with her heels. “And when she had made seven kicks the seed fell to the ground with a noise, and when she saw it she gazed at it and marveled. I shall tell how it looked: it was as if someone removed the shell of a raw egg so that the fluid inside showed through the inner membrane.”⁵⁹

Despite Aristaenetus’s verbatim fidelity to his source, it is striking to see how artfully he adapts the Hippocratic passage, subtly altering its complexion so as to fit his own narrative: he is anything but slavish. Neither, as it turns out, is his heroine (a change that can, we think, be read metapoetically). For his μουσουργός is no longer the slave girl of the medical text but the daughter of a free, though penniless, woman, Aglais. Aristaenetus further individualizes the anonymous performer of his source by giving her a name, Melissarion. While the nameless Hippocratic slave confides the news of her pregnancy to her mistress (ἔφρασε τῇ δεσποίνῃ), Melissa-

57. See Arnott 1973 (198–200), who notes how the epistolographer “translates the Hippocratic Ionic as best he can into his own pseudo-Attic, with the mistakes typical of his period” (198).

58. Γυναϊκὸς οἰκείης μουσοεργὸς ἦν πολύτιμος, παρ’ ἀνδρας φοιτέουσα, ἣν οὐκ ἔδει λαβεῖν ἐν γαστρὶ, ὅπως μὴ ἀτιμοτέρη ἔη· ἡκηκόει δὲ ἡ μουσοεργός, ὅκοια αἱ γυναῖκες λέγουσι πρὸς ἀλλήλας· ἐπὶ γυνὴ μέλλη λήψεσθαι ἐν γαστρὶ, οὐκ ἐξέρχεται ἡ γονή, ἀλλ’ ἔνδον μένει· ταῦτα ἀκούσασα ξυνήκε καὶ ἐφύλασεν αἰεὶ, καὶ κως ἦσθετο οὐκ ἐξιοῦσαν τὴν γονήν, καὶ ἔφρασε τῇ δεσποίνῃ, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦλθεν ἕως ἐμέ.

59. καὶ ἐγὼ ἀκούσας ἐκελευσάμην αὐτὴν πρὸς πυγὴν πηδῆσαι, καὶ ἐπτάκις ἤδη ἐπεπηδήτο, καὶ ἡ γονὴ κατεβύθη ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, καὶ ψόφος ἐγένετο, ἀκαίνη δὲ ἰδοῦσα ἐθεήτο καὶ ἐθαύμασεν. Ὅκοιον δὲ ἦν ἐγὼ ἐρέω, οἶον εἴ τις ὠοῦ ὠμοῦ τὸ ἔξω λεπύριον περιέλοι, ἐν δὲ τῷ ἔνδον ὑμένι τὸ ἔνδον ὑγρὸν διαφαίνοντο.

tion does so to her own mother (ἔφρασε τῇ μητρὶ).⁶⁰ She in turn informs a friend (the narrator), Melissarion's fellow showgirl, who has her best interests at heart. This contrasts starkly with the Hippocratic tale, where the slaveholder turns to a kinsman, Hippocrates, whose remedy aims only to protect the financial interests of the mistress. For Aristaenetus, Melissarion's abortion serves as an expedient, a necessary step in her pursuit of happiness, her personal journey out of poverty to riches and status.

It tells us a good deal about the epistolographer's use of his sources to see how he develops the whole story of Melissarion's rise into an upper-class milieu out of the seeds of two key terms he found in his source, *μουσοεργός* and *πολύτιμος*.⁶¹ In Hippocrates, both appear without elaboration. We do not know what sort of *μουσοεργός* his anonymous slave girl is, nor in what sense she was *πολύτιμος*.⁶² Aristaenetus, by contrast, specifies that Melissarion's activities as *μουσουργός* were not those of a demi-mondaine at symposia, as the term sometimes connotes;⁶³ rather, she performed in a larger public setting on stage (*σκηνή*) and was "immersed in the theater" (*θεάτρου μεστὴ γεγονυῖα*). Further, she became a *μουσουργός* *πολύτιμος*, a highly prized artist (as opposed to Hippocrates, where the same words suggest only a high-priced entertainer), by making herself *εὐμουσοτέρα*, "more accomplished in her artistry" than her peers (*πασῶν γέγονεν εὐμουσοτέρα τῶν ὁμοτέχνων*). Aristaenetus emphasizes her artistic skill (*τέχνη*), saying that it even transformed her appearance: "she came to look even more beautiful through the adornment of her art" (*καὶ τῆς τέχνης, ὅα φιλεῖ, κοσμηθεῖσα τὴν ὄψιν ἐδόκει βελτίων*). While Hippocrates states only that his performer consorted with men (*παρ' ἀνδρας φοιτούσα*), Aristaenetus changes this straightforward phrase by addition of a single word: Melissarion socialized with *the richest* men (*παρ' ἀνδρας πλουσιωτάτους ἐφοίτα*). These, moreover, are characterized as her "lovers" (*ἔρασταί*), who bestow on her ever more, and more valuable, gifts. What moves them to do so is her skill's renown (*εἶτα καὶ πλείους φιλοτιμότερον τε χαριζομένους διὰ κλέος τῆς ἐπιστήμης*). Again, artistry is the key to esteem (the lovers' gifts

60. The above changes are also noted by Kapparis 2002, 111 n. 72.

61. Arnott (1973, 199) likewise notes the importance of these Hippocratic terms to Aristaenetus's letter.

62. In the Hippocratic text, the worry that pregnancy would make the *μουσοεργός* less valuable (*ἀτιμωτέρα*) suggests that her *πολυτιμία* derives only from her looks, not from musical talent as in Aristaenetus.

63. Drago 2007, 318–19.

grow ever more distinctive, φιλοτιμότερον, relative to her own growing distinction, πολύτιμος). In thus embellishing his model's simple account of a nameless performer, Aristaenetus explicates the (Hippocratic) epithet πολύτιμος, justifying its application to his μουσουργός. He thereby makes plausible Melissarion's happy ending, the heroine's blissful union with the outstandingly handsome and wealthy Charikles: each is exceptional; like has found like. Thus Melissarion transcends her origins, and Aristaenetus exceeds his Hippocratic source. Heroine and author alike break out of the (narrative) constraints that form the core of the Hippocratic text: there, the abortion tale is self-contained, functioning to maintain the status quo by permitting the μουσοεργός simply to carry on as before; here, by contrast, it enables a different conception—narrative and biological—a further chapter in the story, where Melissarion produces new life, achieves higher status, adopts another identity.

To be sure, Hippocrates's lowly slave-girl performer is still present in this story. Aristaenetus has displaced her onto the role of his narrator, Euphronion. This character's fate, like that of her Hippocratic prototype, is to remain forever a slave (ἐγὼ δ' οὖν τὸν πάντα δουλεύσω χρόνον),⁶⁴ in which capacity she toils in out-of-the-way theaters and goes with brutish lovers (ἀτόποις τε θεάτρους καὶ ἀγνώμοσιν ἐρασταῖς). Despite her lowly occupation, however, Euphronion is "more experienced" than most in medical matters, so it is no surprise that Melissarion's mother turns to this figure for help with her daughter's predicament (ὁ λόγος ἄτε πρὸς ἐμπειροτέραν ἦλθεν ὡς ἐμέ). Her expertise appears at once in her prompt appraisal of the case and prescription for a course of action: "I ordered her," she says, "to do what I knew had to be done and quickly freed her of her anxious forebodings" (καὶ ταύτη διαπράξασθαι ἅπερ ἦδεν ἐγκελευσαμένη, τῆς προσδοκωμένης ἐλπίδος ἀπήλλαξα τάχιον). This statement, which caps the long quotation from *On the Nature of the Child*, implicitly points Aristaenetus's readers back to his literary model—at least those among them who, like his narrator, are "more experienced" and so familiar with his source.⁶⁵ For

64. Her words quote Menander's *Epitrepontes* (560), where the slave Onesimos complains ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τὸν πάντα δουλεύσω χρόνον ("But I shall serve as a slave for all time"). As Drago points out (2007, 319–20), the larger situation in Aristaenetus also resembles that in Menander's play, since Onesimos says this of himself when marveling at how the hetaira Habrotonon has hatched a plot that will, she hopes, win her freedom.

65. A second, less erudite readership is also figured in the text, namely, the broader group that has "heard the tale that women tell each other" (1.19). Their knowledge, as

Euphronion suggestively omits the Hippocratic remedy's most colorful details (the vigorous kicks to the buttocks while leaping, and the ensuing miscarriage).⁶⁶ She thereby invites us to supplement what she has left out.⁶⁷ Led thus to recall the literary paradigm, we are able to appreciate how the author embellished his source.

Such knowing play with the Hippocratic intertext clearly suggests that Aristaenetus was a learned author. His expectation, moreover, that readers understand his play suggests that he wrote for an elite reading community such as Johnson (2010) has described for the high Roman Empire—an audience of shared culture and learning, willing to apply its intelligence, readerly acumen, and care to the study of a text.⁶⁸ Does Aristaenetus's use of this source here, however, necessarily suggest that he had read deeply in the Hippocratic corpus, not to say scoured it in search of literary fodder? Does it suggest that his audience has done the same? Not necessarily, it seems. For although the anecdote of the *μουσοεργὸς πολύτιμος* and the termination of her pregnancy does indeed originate with Hippocrates, *On the Nature of the Child*, it turns out to have been much cited, debated, and admired—a circumstance generally ignored in Aristaenetan scholarship.

Already Soranus (fl. 98–128 C.E.) in his *Gyn.* 1.60 refers to it, mentioning both treatise and author by name, to show how it was a subject of controversy: Hippocrates's advice here to induce an abortion evidently contradicted his ban on abortion elsewhere in his work.⁶⁹ How were these

the text suggests, comes via popular, purely oral transmission. Contrast the suggestion of literacy in the case of Euphronion (cf. n. 67 below).

66. It may be “characteristic of this author ... to break off a story the moment before insalubrious or lubricious detail becomes necessary,” as Arnott contends (1973, 199), but the meaning of the omission does not end there.

67. How much does Euphronion as a character know, and from where does she get her knowledge? Aristaenetus seems to flirt with the idea that she has read the model text herself. After all, Euphronion serves as the author of this letter; she is surely literate. The long quotation from Hippocrates appears in her mouth. Does the character cite it knowingly? A sort of holdover from the Hippocratic tale, she describes herself as *ἐμπειροτέρα*, “more experienced” (1.19), a term that one may be tempted to read as referring specifically to the narrator's knowledge of the Hippocratic cure.

68. For these qualities, see Johnson 2010 throughout, but especially ch. 5, “Doctors and Intellectuals: Galen's Reading Community,” pp. 81–84, 91–96.

69. “And an ‘expulsive’ (*ekbolion*) some people say is synonymous with an abortive [*phthorion*]; others, however, say that there is a difference because an expulsive does

views to be reconciled? This question stood at the heart of a longstanding and heated dispute.⁷⁰

Controversy aside, the passage was also singled out not just as an example of Hippocrates's acute eye and diagnostic skill but as an especially fine instance of his pleasing style and narrative art. The doctor and philosopher Galen, for instance, refers to the passage in four separate works, twice quoting the entire story verbatim (*On Semen* 4.525–526 Kühn; *On the Formation of the Fetus* 4.653–655 Kühn).⁷¹ Each time he declares it to be by Hippocrates.⁷² For Galen, what makes this passage so memorable is its combination of “accuracy of observation” (τῆς θεωρίας ἀκρίβεια) and “pleasure” (τέρψις). Here is what he says in the first of those citations when discussing the appearance of the uterus as it surrounds the seed enclosed in its membrane:

But it is better to hear what Hippocrates says on the same subject in his work *On the Nature of the Child*; he will instruct us by the accuracy of his observation, and he will delight us, as he tempers his narrative with pleasing language, so that for a short time the seriousness of the account is relaxed and we are refreshed with enjoyment combined with profit, in order that we may thereafter with increased vigor apply ourselves more intently to the remainder of the account. And now let us listen to Hippocrates.⁷³

not mean drugs but shaking and leaping, ... For this reason they say that Hippocrates, although prohibiting abortives, yet in his book ‘On the Nature of the Child’ employs leaping with the heels to the buttocks for the sake of expulsion [ἐκβολῆς χάριν τὸ πρὸς πυγὰς πηδᾶν]” (Temkin 1956, 62–63).

70. The debate is still evident in the seventh-century C.E. commentary on the Hippocratic passage by John of Alexandria: “It is customary to object at this point that it was he himself who said in the Oath ‘I will not give the means to induce abortion.’ How is it, then, that he orders the woman to perform the buttocks leap [κελεύει ἐπὶ πυγὴν πηδῆσαι τὴν γυναῖκα]? Numerous responses to this objection are current” (*Commentary on Hippocrates’ On the Nature of the Child* 216 [CMG 11.1.4:146–47]). John’s commentary goes on to enumerate the responses.

71. The two shorter references are in *On the Natural Faculties* 2.3 (3:163,18–20 Helmreich) and *Against Lykos* 7.3 (CMG 5.10.3:24,20–22).

72. In the latter passage he also weighs whether it might be by Hippocrates’s student and son-in-law Polybus. In this regard as well, then, the passage was the subject of discussion.

73. Galen, *On Semen* 4.525–526 Kühn (CMG 5.3.1:77,28).

It is remarkable here how Galen attributes an almost therapeutic quality to the Hippocratic anecdote, one that sharpens the focus and nurtures the zeal of the reader. Immediately hereafter, Galen quotes verbatim the entire anecdote from Hippocrates as it appears also in Aristaenetus.

Lest one think that, prior to Aristaenetus, only medical writers found the Hippocratic passage appealing, we should point out that it is also quoted in full in the *Theologumena arithmeticae* (61 de Falco), attributed to Iamblichus (ca. 245–ca. 325 c.e.), though largely excerpting and incorporating the work of the mathematician Nicomachus (ca. 60–ca. 120 c.e.). Strangely, the author uses it in a part of the work on the *heptad* (i.e., sevens), so as to illustrate the universal importance of that number. To this end, he slightly alters the chronology of the Hippocratic narrative. While Hippocrates recounts “how I saw a seed that was *six* days old” (ὡς δὲ εἶδον τὴν γονὴν ἑκταίην εὐῶσαν ἐγὼ διηγῆσομαι), Iamblichus speaks of the seed’s appearance when it was *seven* days old (ἡμέραις δὲ ἑπτά). Indeed, he adds to the doctor’s tale that it was specifically upon hearing that it was “seven days old” (ἑβδομαίαν οὔσαν) that he ordered the slave girl to make her leaps. Hippocrates had already specified that it took *seven* leaps to expel the seed (καὶ ἑπτάκις ἤδη ἐπεπήδητο, καὶ ἡ γονὴ κατερρύη ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν). Did that detail inspire Iamblichus to change the timing, thus enabling him to render the numbers more pleasingly congruent?⁷⁴

Be that as it may, it is clear that Aristaenetus need not have turned to the original Hippocratic treatise to read the saga of the *μουσουργὸς πολύτιμος*.⁷⁵ As an oft-quoted tale, it was available in a variety of works, perhaps more than have survived. Our survey of them has opened a window, revealing a whole panorama of potential sources. This circumstance in no way diminishes our assessment of the sophistication and breadth of Aristaenetus’s reading; far more, it increases it. For from what we are able to glean of Aristaenetus’s reading habits, we can exclude *none* of them (nothing suggests that Aristaenetus drew on a *florilegium*): our epistolographer was learned enough to plausibly have used any of these as his prototype.

Similarly, there were doubtless those among his readers who—whatever the source he was using—were able to recognize and enjoy his allu-

74. It is hard to account otherwise for the change, the more so as the previous chapter of the *Theologumena arithmeticae* is on the *hexad*, “sixes”: Why did he not put it there?

75. His extensive verbatim quotation demonstrates conclusively that he encountered the tale through a written medium, rather than oral tradition.

sive play, both here and throughout the collection: that elite community of readers mentioned above. Yet this is only one aspect—and the least accessible one at that—of the letters' artistry. For ancient audiences as well as modern, they can hold a more general appeal. Aristaenetus tells a good tale, delighting readers with humorous incident, titillating them with risqué detail, charming them with vivid portraits of love's never-ending entanglements.

PS ON THE TRANSLATION

Ours is the first complete translation of the letters of Aristaenetus into English in nearly three hundred years.⁷⁶ The last was the elegant, though rather free work of an anonymous translator: *Letters of Love and Gallantry: Written in Greek by Aristaenetus* (1716). It was preceded by selections translated by Thomas Brown in Voiture's *Familiar and Courtly Letters* (1701)⁷⁷ and by A. Boyer in *Letters of Wit, Politicks and Morality* (1701) and followed by a verse rendering of just the first book by the playwright R. B. Sheridan and N. B. Halhed (1771). Since then, nothing, Time alone, then, would seem to justify, if not necessitate, a new attempt, even for so minor an author as this one. Yet Aristaenetus also deserves to reach a modern audience for his own sake. His letters are sexy, funny, learned, diverting—not necessarily at once, but by turns and recurrently. And they exude a winning passion for the Greek literary tradition (already quite ancient by his time), which Aristaenetus channels throughout his own writing, though his style also admits some later Greek peculiarities.

In our translation, accompanied here by a Greek text,⁷⁸ we, too, have aimed at a somewhat archaizing, thoroughly literary style. Readers should not be surprised if they hear echoes of earlier poetry and prose, including epistles. We have not shied, however, from leavening these with contemporary touches. Such a mixture is also evident in our inconsistent spelling of

76. The absence of a modern English version is particularly striking if one considers the number of translations into other modern languages from the twentieth century and after: Licht (1928) and Lesky (1951) into German; Brenous (1938) and Vieillefond (1992) into French; Conca and Zanetto (2005) and Drago (2007) into Italian; Gallé Cejudo (1999) into Spanish; Pagès (2009) into Catalan.

77. Brown enlarged his selection by several letters some years later in Brown 1707.

78. We diverge from Mazal's 1971 critical edition of the single manuscript in several places; see the list at the start of our notes, p. 103.

proper names: we Latinize the more familiar (e.g., Plato rather than Platon) but for the most part transliterate the Greek (e.g., Philokalos, not Philocalus). Throughout, we tried to create an Aristaenetus whose English is pleasing and readable—one moreover whose classical learning is no obstacle to enjoyment (we provide readers with basic help in the notes corresponding to each letter, although we do not point out every allusion⁷⁹). Finally, we hope that our translation will help Aristaenetus find an English-speaking audience, perhaps even admirers, once again following a centuries-long absence from the scene.

PPS: THANK-YOU NOTE

Atlanta-Toronto, February 14, 2014

A collaborative translation like ours, spun out over years and between distant cities, involves pleasures comparable to those of a stimulating epistolary exchange. Ours have been enriched by the help of many friends. We would like to thank Emilia Barbiero, Lucia Floridi, and Niklas Holzberg for their astute comments and suggestions. We are indebted, too, to Patricia Rosenmeyer, who put her incomparable knowledge of the epistolographic tradition at our disposal in evaluating our typescript for the press. David Konstan, an editor of the Society of Biblical Literature's Writings from the Greco-Roman World, encouraged us to submit the volume for this series. Last but not least, our institutions, Emory University and the University of Toronto, generously provided us with research funds, which helped bring our project to fruition. We dedicate this volume to all those who have nurtured eros through the medium of the letter.

Peter Bing
Atlanta

Regina Höschele
Toronto

79. We note only those allusions that seem especially prominent; for a fuller list of parallel passages, see the apparatus in Mazal 1971 and the discussion in Drago 2007.