

Sex and the Emperor: Homoerotics in the Epistles of Fronto

Marcus Cornelius Fronto has been, and still remains, a bit of an enigma. Although famous as an orator and as the imperial tutor of the Antonine dynasty, Fronto has not been a topic of much research in modern classical scholarship. In fact, many scholars have written off Fronto and his epistolary correspondence with the Antonines as inane and boring due to the often mundane topics of his letters – especially in comparison with those of Cicero or Pliny. However, in recent years, scholarship on Fronto has begun to recognize his letters to Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius as valuable both in terms of the primary sources they provide the social historian and in the literary artistry they employ. This is no more evident than in the interest garnered in the epistolary description of the possible amorous relationship between Fronto and Marcus Aurelius.

Amy Richlin, in her 2006 translation of a selection of Fronto's corpus, entitled *Marcus Aurelius in Love*, highlights the possible arch of their relationship and calls our attention to the homoerotic dimensions of the letters. Taoka 2013, building off of Richlin, explores the homoerotics of the relationship and argues that Fronto uses the language of love to create an elaborate metaphor through which "Fronto and Marcus are increasingly equated with one another" (411).

This paper seeks to build upon these foundational studies and will attempt to bring the social realities of the letters more clearly into the picture: who is the audience of these letters? why would Fronto depict his relationship with Marcus in homoerotic terms? what does it mean for Marcus' masculinity if he, an emperor-in-waiting, engages in such a relationship, literary or otherwise? moreover, is such a literary relationship revolutionary? To do so, this paper will begin with an exploration of the relationship as depicted in *ad M. Caesarem* 5.59 [74] and *Epistula*

Graeca 7, in which the relationship is described in both the vocabulary of Roman elegy and the Greek *erastes-eromenos* relationship. Once the parameters of the relationship are made clear, the paper will build out from these two letters to consider the intended audience and the potential ramifications of such a depiction, both for Fronto and Marcus.

Bibliography

Richlin, A. (2006). *Marcus Aurelius in Love: The Letters of Marcus and Fronto*. Chicago.

Taoka, Y. (2013). "The Correspondence of Fronto and Marcus Aurelius: Love, Letters, Metaphor", *CA* 32.2, pp. 406-438.