

AELIAN (165/70-230/35 CE), RHETORICIAN, TEACHER, AND WRITER. Aelian's most famous work is his *Varia Historia*, a miscellany that brings together a wide variety of material, ranging from moralizing anecdotes concerning kings, philosophers, poets, and other noteworthy individuals to biographical sketches to strange facts about animals and the natural world to descriptions of customs, food, and drink. His moral didacticism—his favouring of those tales and anecdotes that would be 'improving' for the reader—made him popular among later Christian writers. There were two English translations of Aelian's *Various History* in sixteenth-century England, one by Abraham Fleming (1576) and the other by Thomas Stanley (1665).

THOMAS STANLEY (b. 1650), TRANSLATOR. Son of the far more famous classical scholar, translator and poet, Thomas Stanley (1625-1678), the younger Thomas entered Pembroke College, Cambridge in 1665, and published his *Claudius Aelianus, His Various History* in the same year.

From VARIOUS HISTORY (1666)¹

[...]

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 30: THAT GALETES² WAS BELOVED OF PTOLEMY³ NOT MORE FOR HIS BEAUTY THAN HIS PRUDENCE

King Ptolemy loved a youth named Galetes. He was very beautiful, but of a mind transcending his form, which Ptolemy frequently testified of him, saying, "O thou sweet of disposition! Thou wert never author of harm to any, but on the contrary hast done several good offices to many."

On a time, this youth rode forth with the King, and beholding afar off some malefactors led to execution, he readily said (speaking to Ptolomey): "O King, since it is our chance to be on horseback according to some good genius⁴ of those wretches, come, if you please, let us spur on and overtake them that we may appear to the unhappy men as the Dioscuri,⁵ preservers and succourers (so those gods are called)."

Ptolemy, much pleased with his sweet disposition and proneness to mercy, embraced him, and not only saved the malefactors, but confirmed and increased the affection he bore him.

¹ The 2nd edition.

² *Galetes* sometimes, the name is given as 'Galestes.'

³ *Ptolemy* Ptolemy VI, king of Egypt (reigned, 180-145 BCE). Aelian seems the sole classical source for this relationship.

⁴ *good genius* guardian spirit.

⁵ *Dioscuri* Castor and Pollux, sons of Leda, legendary founders of Rome, famed protectors of sailors, and emblems of perfect fraternal and homoerotic love. See 'Glossary,' print anthology.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 4: OF THE FRIENDSHIP BETWIXT CHARITON AND MELANIPPUS,⁶ AND THE TYRANT'S⁷ MERCY TOWARDS THEM

I will relate to you an action of Phalaris not agreeing with his disposition, for it expresseth a great humanity, and therefore seemeth not to suit with him. Chariton, an Agrigentine, loved Melanippus passionately, who was also an Agrigentine, of a sweet disposition and excellent form. Phalaris had injured this Melanippus in a certain business, for he, having brought an action against a favourite of Phalaris, the Tyrant commanded him to surcease the suit. He not obeying, the Tyrant threatened him with death unless he submitted, so being compelled he gave over the cause. And the judges under Phalaris nulled the proceedings, which the young man taking ill, said that he was wronged, and discovered his resentment thereof to his friend, praying him to join him in a plot against the Tyrant, intending also to engage some other young men, whom he knew proper and ready for such an attempt. Chariton seeing him enraged and enflamed with fury, and knowing that none of the citizens would join in the design for fear of the Tyrant, said that he also had formerly the same intention, and should ever be ready above all things to free his country from slavery; but it was dangerous to communicate such things to many persons, wherefore he entreated Melanippus to consider it more deliberately, and to permit him to find out an opportunity proper for the attempt. The young man yielded. Chariton thereupon undertook the whole business himself, not willing to engage his friend in it, that if he were taken and discovered, he alone might bear the punishment, and his friend not share in the danger. He provided himself of a falchion⁸ to assault the Tyrant when he should see a fit occasion. This could not be carried so privately but that he was apprehended by the guard, watchful of such things. But being carried to prison and tortured to make discovery of his complices,⁹ he courageously endured the torment. But this continuing a long time, Melanippus went to Phalaris, and confessed that he was not only a conspirator, but author of the treason. The King demanding the cause that moved him to it, he declared the whole business from the beginning: how he was obstructed in his suit, and that this was it which provoked him. The Tyrant wondering hereat set them both at liberty, but commanded them immediately to depart, not only out of all cities belonging to the Agrigentines, but quite out of Sicily. Yet he allowed them to receive the full benefit of their estates. These and their friendships Pythia¹⁰ afterward commended in these verses:

To men, true patterns of celestial love,
Blest Chariton and Melanippus prove.

The God¹¹ calling this love of theirs 'a divine friendship.'

⁶ *Chariton and Melanippus* These classical male lovers were famous, each being willing to suffer death for the other; their love became proverbial. See Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, 13.601A-B, 601E-605D.

⁷ *the Tyrant's* Phalaris, tyrant of Agrigentum in Sicily (reigned c. 570-554 BCE). 'Tyrant' was not necessarily an insulting label, but a title (like king or emperor), although Phalaris was reportedly given to torturing his subjects unmercifully at the slightest suspicion of disloyalty.

⁸ *falchion* sword.

⁹ *complices* i.e., accomplices.

¹⁰ *Pythia* priestess and prophetess of the sun-god Apollo at his famed shrine (Delphi).

¹¹ *the God* Cupid, god of love.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 31: OF PAUSANIAS HIS FRIENDSHIP WITH AGATHON THE POET.¹²

There was a great friendship between Pausanias a Ceramean and Agathon the poet. This is generally known, but I will relate what is less common. On a time the two friends came before Archelaus. He observing the frequent differences¹³ betwixt Pausanias and Agathon, and thinking that one friend despited¹⁴ the other, asked Agathon what was the reason that he had such frequent quarrels with him who loved him so well.

He answered, "O King, I will tell you. It is not that I am froward¹⁵ towards him, neither do I this through rusticity;¹⁶ but if I understand anything of behaviour, as well by poetry as other things, I find that the greatest pleasure of friends is after some falling out to be reconciled; and I am of opinion that nothing can happen to them more delightful. Therefore, I make him partake often of this pleasure, by falling out with him frequently. For he is overjoyed when I end the difference and am reconciled; whereas if I should use him always alike, he would not understand the difference."

Archelaus (as they say) commended this answer. It is reported that Euripides¹⁷ the poet also exceedingly loved this Agathon, and in favour of him composed his tragedy entitled *Chrysippus*.¹⁸ But this I cannot certainly affirm, yet know it to be attested by many.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 9: OF LOVE.

Who is able to fight with a lover that [is] not a lover himself, and when the business is to be decided by the sword? For he who loves not always shunneth and denieth a lover, as being himself profane and uninitiated with the god.¹⁹ He dares as much as the courage of his soul and strength of his body will bear, yet fears the other as one transported with divine fury, animated not by Mars only, which is common to both, but likewise by Love. For they who are excited with other of the gods, whereof one (as Homer sayeth) rageth equal with Mars; they, I say, which are possessed only with one, fight with as much courage as one god inspireth, but the servants of Love being inflamed with Mars and Love, serving both deities, have (according to the opinion of the Cretans) a double share of courage. But none therefore finds fault if a soldier who fights only by instigation of one god, refuse to encounter with him who is assisted both by Mars and Love.

¹² *Pausanias* and *Agathon* Virtually nothing is known about *Pausanias* (fl. c. 425 BCE), outside of what is revealed in Plato's dialogues, *Symposium* and *Protagoras*. *Agathon* (c. 450-399 BCE), poet and dramatist. Although Agathon's works have been lost, he is a speaker, along with Pausanias, in *Symposium* and *Protagoras*. They are most famous for having had a lengthy (it would appear life-long) love relationship, with Pausanias apparently accompanying Agathon when the poet went to live in Macedon, clearly hoping for patronage from King Archelaus (c. 413-399 BCE), a well-known supporter of poets and dramatists.

¹³ *differences* disagreements, arguments.

¹⁴ *despited* treated with contempt.

¹⁵ *froward* perverse, unreasonable.

¹⁶ *rusticity* lack of manners or sophistication.

¹⁷ *Euripides* famous Greek dramatist (c. 480-406 BCE). Reportedly, Euripides was in his early seventies at the time, while Agathon was in his forties.

¹⁸ In *Chrysippus* (of which only fragments remain), Laius, king of Thebes, is a guest in the palace of Pelops, king of the Peloponnese. Laius falls in love with Pelops' young son, Chrysippus, kidnaps, and rapes him. The boy later kills himself out of shame.

¹⁹ *the god* Cupid, god of love.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 10: OF LACEDAEMONIAN FRIENDSHIP.²⁰

Of the Lacedaemonian Ephori²¹ I could relate many excellent things said and done. At present, I shall only tell you this: if amongst them any man preferred in friendship a rich man before another that was poor and virtuous, they fined him, punishing his avarice with loss of money. If another that were a virtuous person professed particular friendship to none, they fined him also, because being virtuous he would not make choice of a friend, whereas he might render him he loved like himself, and perhaps divers;²² for affection of friends conduceth much to the advancement of virtue in those whom they love, if they be temperate and virtuous. There was also this law among the Lacedaemonians: if any young man transgressed, they pardoned him, imputing it to want of years and experience, yet punished his friend, as conscious and overseer of his actions.²³

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 12: OF FRIENDSHIP AMONGST THE LACEDAEMONIANS.²⁴

Friendship among the Spartans was truly innocent: if anything unlawful happened, both persons must either forsake their country or their lives.

BOOK 7, CHAPTER 8. OF ALEXANDER'S GRIEF AT HEPHAESTION'S DEATH.

When Hephaestion died, Alexander cast into the pyre his arms, and gold and silver, to be burnt with the dead body, as also a vest of great esteem among the Persians. He likewise caused all the chief soldiers to be shaved, himself acting a Homeric passion, and imitating his Achilles.²⁵ But he did more eagerly and fiercely, laying waste the castle of the city Ecbatana, and throwing down the wall. As to the shaving of his hair, he did in my opinion like a Greek, but in throwing down the walls, he expressed his mourning like a barbarian. He also changed his vest, giving all over to grief, love, and tears.

Hephaestion died at Ecbatana. It is reported that these things were intended for the burial of Hephaestion, but that Alexander used them dying, before the mourning was over for the young man.

²⁰ *Lacedaemonian* Spartan.

²¹ *Ephori* the five powerful magistrates who enforced Spartan law.

²² *and perhaps divers* i.e., the older Spartan man might not simply inspire his younger male beloved to emulate the older's virtues, but this relationship might inspire others as well to imitate the older man and perhaps the younger as well.

²³ *conscious and overseer of his actions* the friendship between an older Spartan warrior and his younger counterpart was central to Sparta's military; the older man was the younger's mentor and (frequently) his lover, and was responsible for the younger's training in war and civic responsibility.

²⁴ See Plutarch's discussion of male friendship and love among the Spartans (Lacedaemonians) in *The Life of Lycurgus* (excerpted in Plutarch, *Online Companion*).

²⁵ *a Homeric passion ... Achilles* Alexander highly honoured Homer's *Iliad* and had publicly opined his lack of a 'Homer' to memorialize his great deeds. For Achilles' deep grief over the death of his lover Patroclus, and its expression in Patroclus' elaborate funeral games, see Homer, *Iliad*, Book 23 (excerpted in the print anthology, pp. 148-52).

BOOK 12, CHAPTER 7: OF ALEXANDER AND HEPHAESTION.

Alexander crowned the tomb of Achilles, and Hephaestion that of Patroclus, signifying that he was dear to Alexander as Patroclus to Achilles.

BOOK 12, CHAPTER 14: OF PERSONS EXCELLENT IN BEAUTY.

They say that the most amiable and beautiful amongst the Greeks was Alcibiades, amongst the Romans, Scipio.²⁶ It is reported also that Demetrius Poliorcetes²⁷ contended in beauty. They affirm likewise that Alexander, son of Philip,²⁸ was of a neglectful handsomeness, for his hair curled naturally and was yellow, yet they say there was something stern in his countenance. Homer speaking of handsome persons compares them to trees:

“—he shoots up like a plant.”

BOOK 12. CHAPTER 19: SAPPHO.

Sappho the poetess, daughter of Scamandronymus, is (by Plato, son of Aristo) reckoned among the Sages.²⁹ I am informed that there was another Sappho in Lesbos, a courtesan, not a poetess.³⁰

²⁶ Publius Cornelius *Scipio* (later, Scipio Africanus), one of Rome's most successful generals. The historian Livy mentions that Scipio's physical beauty joined with his confidence and dignity to make him an object of awe, even among those he had conquered.

²⁷ *Demetrius Poliorcetes* i.e., Demetrius I of Macedon (reigned, c. 294-288 BCE). For Plutarch's 'Life of Demetrius,' which emphasizes his beauty, see *Online Companion*.

²⁸ *Alexander son of Philip* i.e., Alexander the Great. He was famously beautiful.

²⁹ *Sages* the legendary Seven Sages of Greece were a group of early philosophers and statesmen, particularly famed for their practical wisdom in the realms of politics and social relations.

³⁰ For this ancient division of Sappho into two figures (the excellent poet and the licentious woman), see the headnote to selections from Sappho's works in the print anthology, pp.153-54, 161.