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## Cuprins/ Contents

### Studii/ Studies

#### A. Papers of the International Colloquium on “Epistolography, knowledge, and the Ancient World”, Bucharest, October 3-4, 2025

Carlos HEREDIA CHIMENO – Letters from a Broken Republic: Cicero’s Correspondence and Constitutional Transgression (91–79 BCE) .....	5-17
Florentina NICOLAE – The Silence of Men, reflected in “Heroides”, the imaginary letters of love written by Publius Ovidius Naso.....	18-25
Lorenzo MONACO – L’immagine delle campagne daciche traianee e di Decebalo in Plinio il Giovane, <i>Ep.</i> , 8. 4. 2.....	26-38
Jörg VON ALVENSLEBEN – Fronto’s letter <i>De nepote amisso</i> as lament, self-consolation and self-reflection.....	39-49
Giovanni TAGLIALATELA – Die Verwirklichung des quintilianischen Lehrideals in Fronto Pädagogische Tugenden und Lehren durch Briefe.....	50-68
Mariana BODNARUK – Inscribing Senatorial Authority: Epigraphic Epistles and Senatorial Legislation from Constantine I to Theodosius I.....	69-89
Ethan CHILCOTT – <i>Varietas</i> in the <i>Variae</i> : Erudition and Audience in Cassiodorus’ <i>Epistles</i> ...90-113	
Lorenzo MONACO – <i>Licet interdum confabulationis tale conuiuium doctrinae quoque sale conditur</i> : Jerome’s letters to Marcella, and biblical exegesis in epistolary form.....	114-127
Titus SARKAR, Letters of Obligation: Debt, Trust and Moral Economy in the Lekhapaddhati.....	128-140

#### B. Papers of the 13<sup>th</sup> annual session of CICSA, “Circulația persoanelor, a bunurilor și a ideilor (din Preistorie în Antichitatea Târzie)”/ ‘Movement of persons, goods, and ideas (from Prehistory to the Late Antiquity)’, Bucharest, April 25-26, 2025

Ioana-Teodora STAN – The Panathenaic amphorae: an instrument for the propagation of Athens’ discourse and a subject of symbolic conflict.....	141-150
Ana-Maria BALȚĂ – When distance is not an obstacle. Several preliminary considerations on <i>Liberalitas</i> coin types of <i>Nikopolis ad Istrum</i> and <i>Marcianopolis</i> .....	151-166

Aurelia PARASCHIV, Alexandra-Clara ȚÂRLEA – Roman glass vessels in funerary contexts from Tomis and Callatis. A reassessment of older publications.....167-194

### C. Interpretări și analize/ Interpretations and Analyses

Darius COVACIU – The ecclesiastic status of the see of Tomis between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. Reading notes on Ionuț Holubeanu’s research.....195-211

### D. Recenzii și prezentări de carte / Reviews and Book Presentations

Sergiu Popovici, *Cultura Usatovo. Arheologia funerară a unei societăți din epoca bronzului*, Târgoviște, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2023, 475 pag., ISBN 978-606-537-623-6 – Elena FERARU.....212-214

Anthony A. Barrett și John C. Yardley, *The Emperor Caligula in the Ancient Sources*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023, 203 pag., ISBN 978-0-19-885457-9 – Andreea Luisa MIHAL.....215-218

Eckart Frahm, *Assyria. The Rise and Fall of the World’s First Empire*, New York, Basic Books, 2023, 528 pag., ISBN: 9781541674400 – George Cătălin ROBESCU .....219-221

Daniel Unruh, *Talking to Tyrants in Classical Greek Thought*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2023, VIII+272 pag., ISBN 978-1-78962-123-5, ISBNe 978-1-78962-426-7 – Ioana-Teodora STAN....  
.....222-224

Daniela Zaharia, Vladimir Crețulescu (coords), *Sensibilități, obsesii, fobii și istoriile lor neașteptate / Sensitivities, Obsessions, Phobias, and Their Intriguing Histories*, 2024, Editura Universității din București, 282 pag., ISBN: 978-606-16-1499-8 – Cristina POPESCU.....225-227

Plutarh, *Vorbele de duh ale spartanilor*, traducere din greaca veche, studiu introductiv și note de Liviu Mihail Iancu, ilustrații de Mihail Coșulețu, București, Editura Humanitas, 2024, 200 pag., ISBN 978-973-50-8647-3 – Florica (BOHÎLȚEA) MIHUȚ.....228-231

### E. Rezumate teze de licență și disertație/ Abstracts of Bachelor and Master Theses

Maria-Irina SOCOLAN – *A Comparative Analysis of Mithraic Imagery: The Regional Adaptation of the Tauroctony in Dacia*, (abstract of the Bachelor’s Thesis, 2025).....232-245

**Cronica activității CICSA, anul 2025**, Florica (BOHÎLȚEA) MIHUȚ.....246-247

# Fronto's letter *De nepote amisso* as lament, self-consolation and self-reflection

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**Abstract:** This article examines the implicit interaction between Emperor Marcus Aurelius and his former teacher Fronto in their correspondence *De nepote amisso*. The assumption I am arguing for is that Fronto writes his own letter of consolation, as the emperor's response seems too inadequate to him. His highly emotional letter also requires explanation, as it is not a traditional letter of condolence that can be classified into conventional rhetorical categories. Fronto implicitly conveys several messages to the emperor which are as follows: Emotional grief is justified in this situation; philosophy is unable to offer comfort; the parents of the deceased child can only offer each other comfort; Victorinus' virtuous character deserves to be held in high esteem by the emperor. Fronto, having reached the end of his life, finds comfort solely in his virtuous life.

**Keywords:** Fronto, Marcus Aurelius, grief, consolation, interaction.

## 1. The grief

It is an almost trivial observation that what happens in communicative interaction between correspondents is often not visible on the surface of the ancient text that has come down to us. Particularly when we consider the highly formalised relationships between individuals of the Roman upper class who were different in terms of their hierarchical social status, it seems appropriate to read texts as highly balanced works of diplomacy. A good example of this is the correspondence between Marcus Aurelius, who was first Caesar and then Emperor, and his mentor Fronto. On the one hand, Marcus is higher in the hierarchy and Fronto has to pay him his respects at the palace several times a week; on the other hand, the older Fronto is his rhetoric teacher and fatherly advisor. In any case, the correspondence is an interesting expression of the Antonine era and its subtle and sophisticated communication structures.

The complex interaction between the two correspondents can also be seen in four letters written shortly before Fronto's death, entitled 'De nepote amisso' ('On the death of the grandson') and probably dating from around 165 AD.<sup>1</sup> Fronto's grandson, the son of his

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. van den Hout 1999, 533.

daughter Cratia and his son-in-law Victorinus, died in Germania at the age of three without Fronto ever seeing him. Fronto's grief is deep, as his long letter shows. In the following, I would like to show that Fronto subtly and implicitly criticises the emperor's own letter of condolence in his letter, and that he writes down a kind of legacy of his own life and world view, a real *consummatio uitae*<sup>2</sup>, and at the same time does what plays a role throughout the entire correspondence: he makes recommendations for his relatives and friends. Intimate expressions of feeling, gentle reproach, justification and summary of one's own life flow together in his letter. Fronto's letter is both a monologue with himself and a dialogue with Marcus. And it is probably also addressed to a posthumous readership.<sup>3</sup> The first letter is Marcus' reaction to the death of Fronto's grandson.

Marcus Aurelius to Fronto (*De nepote amisso* 1, p. 235.3–10 ed. van den Hout)

*MAGISTRO MEO SALUTEM*

*Modo cognoui de casu. Cum autem in singulis articularum tuorum doloribus torqueri soleam, mi magister, quid opinaris me pati, cum animum doles? Nihil conturbato mihi aliud in mentem uenit quam rogare te ut conserues mihi dulcissimum magistrum, in quo plura solacia uitae huius habeo <quam> quae tibi tristitiae istius possunt ab ullo contingere. Mea manu non scripsi, quia uesperis loto tremebat etiam manus. Vale mi iucundissime magister.*

To my master greeting.

I have just heard of your misfortune. Suffering anguish as I do when a single joint of yours aches, my master, what pain do you think I feel when it is your heart that aches? Under the shock of the news I could think of nothing else than to ask you to keep safe for me the sweetest of masters, in whom I find a greater solace for this life than you can find for your sorrow from any source. I have not written with my own hand because after my bath in the evening even my hand was shaky. Farewell, my most delightful of masters.<sup>4</sup>

It is a somewhat bold comparison Marcus makes in this letter. He speaks about himself, about his own grief and his relation to Fronto, and stresses the importance of Fronto for himself. In other words, he communicates the message that *he* needs comfort and gets it from Fronto, more than Fronto could get it from any other source. Besides, Marcus wants to justify the fact that even in this situation where Fronto needs comfort he is not able to write the letter with his

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. the term in Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2024, 267.

<sup>3</sup> See Keulen 2024, 5–10 for the thesis that it was Fronto himself who edited the collection of letters for publication.

<sup>4</sup> Translation: Haines 1963, slightly modified by myself (in accordance with the changes in the Latin text by van den Hout).

own hand for health reasons.<sup>5</sup> It becomes clear that Marcus' letter is, on the one hand, rhetorically very well composed, on the other hand, intended to convey honesty and authenticity, and thirdly, that Marcus is neither able nor willing to make any attempt to comfort Fronto.<sup>6</sup> However, Marcus's desire not to disguise himself and his lack of consolation do not seem to be the problem here, in my opinion. Rather, the problem seems to be his focus on himself in comparison to Fronto.<sup>7</sup>

In his reply (*De nepote amisso* 2), Fronto does not use any polite phrases at the beginning, which is unusual for his correspondence: he immediately begins to recount the tragedy of his life, the loss of five children (only daughters, since Fronto had no son<sup>8</sup>). This abrupt beginning emphasises the emotional involvement of the letter writer.

Fronto to Marcus Aurelius, *De nepote amisso* 2, p. 235.12–17 vdH:

ANTONINO AUGUSTO FRONTO

*Multis huiusmodi maeroribus fortuna me per omnem uitam meam exercuit. Nam ut alia mea acerba omittam, quinque amisi liberos miserrima quidem condicione temporum meorum, nam quinque omnes unumquemque semper unicum amisi, has orbitatis uices perpessus, ut numquam mihi nisi orbato filius nasceretur. Ita semper sine ullo solacio residuo liberos amisi, cum recenti luctu procreaui.*

Fronto to Antoninus Augustus.

With many sorrows of this kind has Fortune afflicted me all my life long. For, not to mention my other calamities, I have lost five children under the most distressing circumstances possible to myself. For I lost all five separately, in every case an only child, suffering this series of bereavements in such a way that I never had a child born to except while bereaved of another. So, I always lost children without any left to console me and with my grief fresh upon me I begat others.

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<sup>5</sup> We can notice the fact that, throughout the correspondence, it is always important whether someone writes by his own hand or has someone else write for him. Cf. on this topic Freisenbruch 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Lucius Verus also writes a short letter of condolence to Fronto (*Ad Verum Imp.*, I 9, 113 van den Hout). He too says that he does not dare to console his “teacher Fronto with learned phrases” (*grauiora mala quam ut magistrum doctis dictis consolari audeam*). At least he admits that in such a situation a father must “pour out his heart full of love and affection” (*sed patris est pectus amoris pietatisque plenum effundere*).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. also Fleury 2006, 82 : « On pourrait croire que ce moyen de peindre la tristesse n'est que l'expression emphatique et rhétorique du sentiment : le manque de mots illustre la profondeur de la compassion [...]. » Fleury herself, however, sees this more as a rhetorical *topos*, insofar as Marcus (and likewise his brother Lucius Verus) hide behind silence and consternation because they feel unable to offer comfort. In my opinion, however, the two explanations are by no means mutually exclusive: Marcus is concerned and has no desire to offer banal words of comfort that appear to be empty phrases. But he is going too far with his comparison. Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2024, 273 also refers to the virtue of *ueritas*, which is evoked here by Marcus. She speaks of a “competition” and a “latent provocation” on Marcus' part: “Wer tröstet besser?” (see *ibidem*, 277).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. van den Hout, 1999, 535.

These lines convey profound sorrow, yet they also appear to be meticulously composed from a rhetorical standpoint (cf. the phrase *ut numquam mihi nisi orbato filius nasceretur*). Fronto presents himself here as a tragic figure (cf. *cum recenti luctu procreavi*), who has unknowingly provoked the anger of higher powers. However, as Fronto makes clear, it is particularly the grief of his daughter and son-in-law that causes him great pain. He thus extends the perspective to include his relatives. He emphasises that the worries in his life that affected him alone would not have tormented him so much:

*De nepote amisso* 2, p. 235.17–22 vdH:

*Verum illos ego luctus toleravi fortius, quibus egomet ipse solus cruciabar. Namque meus animus meomet dolori obnix oppositus quasi solitario certamine unus uni, par pari resistebat. At nunc amisso nepote luctus mihi dolore filiae, dolore generi multiplicatur: meum motum pertuli, meorum luctum ferre nequeo; Victorini mei lacrimis tabesco conliquesco.*

But I bore with more fortitudes those woes by which I myself alone was tormented. For my mind, struggling obstinately with my own grief, as in a single combat man to man, equal with equal, made a stout resistance. But now after I have lost my grandson, my grief is multiplied by my daughter's pain and by the pain of my son-in-law. I can no longer bear the consummation of my woes, but as my Victorinus weeps, I waste away, I melt away along with him.

Fronto paints a tragic picture of a man who had to struggle with fate throughout his life and had to become hardened as a result. The confrontation with the suffering he sees among his own relatives now overwhelms him. Here he cannot fight anymore, here he can only suffer with them. The modern reader may wonder whether Fronto exaggerates his own or his relatives' grief in Roman terms of virtue. But I would argue that it is precisely the differentiation between one's own suffering and that of others that prevents Fronto from appearing too soft-hearted to potential Roman readers of the letters, and that sympathy for the family and the sympathetic relationship are kindly accepted.

At this point, Fronto changes his tone: grief turns to anger against fate and the powers of destiny. Fronto begins a discussion of theodicy and of divine justice in the world. It is hard to imagine that he is not addressing Marcus's own stoic positions in doing so because he is very familiar with the philosophical and Stoic orientation of his former student. It is also important to note that Victorinus, as the father of the deceased child, is now described as a prime example of Roman *uirtus*, not Fronto.



*De nepote amisso* 2, p. 235.23–236.9 vdH:

*Saepe etiam expostulo cum dis immortalibus et fata iurgio compello. Victorinum pietate mansuetudine veritate innocentia maxima, omnium denique optimarum artium praecipuum virum acerbissima morte fili adflictum, hoccine ullo modo aequum aut iustum fuit? Si prouidentia res gubernantur, hoc idem recte provisum est? Si fato cuncta humana decernuntur, hoccine fato decerni <debut>? Nullum ergo inter bonos ac malos fortunarum discrimen erit? Nulla deis, nulla fati diiudicatio est, quali uiro filius eripiatur? Victorinus, uir sanctus, cuius similes quam plurimos gigni optimum publicum fuerit, carissimo filio priuatus est. Quae, malum, prouidentia tam inique prospicit? Fata a fando appellate aiunt: hoccine est recte fari?*

Often, I even find fault with the immortal Gods, and I scold the Fates with reproaches. Victorinus, a man of entire affection, gentleness, sincerity, and blamelessness, a man, further, conspicuous for the noblest accomplishments to be thus afflicted by his son's most untimely death, was this in any sense just or fair? If Providence does govern the world, was this too rightly provided? If all human things are determined by Destiny, ought this to have been determined by Destiny? Shall there, then, be no distinction of fortunes between the good and the bad? Have the Gods, have the Destinies no power of discrimination as to what sort of man shall be robbed of his son? Victorinus, a blameless man, is bereaved of his darling son, and yet it would have been in the highest interests of the state that as many as possible of his kind should be born. Which Providence, to the hell, provides so unfairly? The Destinies, they say, are called so from the word "to destine": is this to destine rightly?

In Fronto's presentation, Victorinus is both, a sensitive family member and an important pillar of the Roman state. This justifies his grief. For Fronto, virtue and sensitivity are obviously not mutually exclusive (and we can conclude from the often very warm-hearted letters and remarks in Marcus's *Meditations* that this was also the case for Marcus). Despite all the authentic emotional excitement that Fronto probably felt, we can see here that the text was carefully written, is rhetorically effective and aims to make an impact.<sup>9</sup> This is evident from the rhetorical questions, figures of speech and puns (*fata a fando appellate aiunt: hoccine est recte fari*). Fronto suggests that the Roman empire itself should grieve over Victorinus' loss, as it is dependent on such men. In other words, Marcus should not only be sorry for Fronto, but he should also appreciate the damage that such a death causes to the Roman Empire, and he should hold Victorinus in high esteem.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ramírez de Verger 1983 and also van den Hout 1999, 534, who defends Fronto against the accusation of rhetorical exaggeration.

But there is the possibility that the proverb is correct that says “those whom the gods love die young”. Fronto says that he would rather believe in the truth of this proverb than in an unjust or non-existent fate.<sup>10</sup> However, this is not a consolation for those who remember the dead. It is only a philosophical argument in philosophical discussions. Once again, Fronto rejects philosophy: when it comes to existential matters, philosophy cannot help. The memory brings the deceased person so vividly to mind that grief cannot help but break through.<sup>11</sup> The problem is the absence of the deceased person from the family circle, not a metaphysical question about continued existence after death.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Some self-consolation or: last words in letters

Up to this point, Fronto has lamented his own difficult fate and that of his relatives, as well as the loss to the empire, and has rejected any philosophical approach to coping with it. In the second part of the letter, he will make clear what gives him and his relatives at least some comfort. Since he himself cannot comfort his daughter and son-in-law, they must comfort each other.

*De nepote amisso* 2, p. 238.1–5 vdH:

*Senex ego parens indigne consolabor. Dignius enim foret ipsum me ante obisse. Neque ulla poetarum carmina aut sapientium praecepta tantum promouerint ad luctum filiae meae sedandum et dolorem leniendum, quantum mariti u<o>x <ex> ore carissimo et pectore iunctissimo profecta.*

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *De nepote amisso* 2, p. 236.20–26 vdH: *Quodsi mors gratulanda potius est hominibus quam lamentanda, quanto quisque eam natu minor adeptus est, tanto beator et deis acceptior existimandus est, ocius corporis malis exutus, ocius ad honores liberae animae usurpandos excitus. Quod tamen uerum sit licet, parui nostra refert, qui desideramus amissos: nec quicquam nos animarum immortalitas consolatur, qui carissimis nostris dum uiuimus caremus.* / “But if death be rather a matter for welcome than for mourning, the younger each one attains to it the happier must he be accounted and the greater favourite of the Gods, and he will have been released more quickly from the ills of the body and called forth to inherit the privileges of an enfranchised soul. Yet all this, true though it be, makes little difference to us who long for our lost ones, nor does the immortality of souls bring us the slightest consolation, seeing that in this life we are bereft of our best-beloved ones.”

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *De nepote amisso* 2, p. 236.26–237.4 vdH: *Istum statum, vocem, formam, animam liberum quaerimus, <f>aciem defunctorum miserandam maeremus, os obseratum, oculos eversos, colorem undique deletum. Si maxime esse animas immortalis constet, erit hoc philosophis disserendi argumentum, non parentibus desiderandi remedium.* / “We miss the well-known mode of standing, the voice, the figure, the mentality of our children. We mourn over the pitiable face of the dead, the lips sealed, the eyes turned, the colour fled. Be the immortality of the soul ever so established: that will be a theme for the disputations of philosophers, it will never console the yearning of a parent.”

<sup>12</sup> In this context of the visualisation of the dead child, Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2024, 289–291 refers to the connections with ancient Roman death cults and ancestral masks (*imagines*).

It will scarce befit me, as an aged father, to comfort her (sc. the daughter). For it were more fitting had I myself been the first to die. Nor would any poet's songs or philosopher's precepts be so much useful to console my daughter's grief and soothe her pain as her husband's voice issuing from lips so dear and a heart so near her own.

Here we encounter once again the strong emphasis on family loyalty and mutual support, which does not exclude grief and strong emotions. Fronto's own consolation lies in having led a morally irreproachable life and especially in the fact that he will die very soon. In other words, we hear an extremely pessimistic Fronto, who is nevertheless proud of his life's work and now provides a kind of self-reflection of his life for Marcus and perhaps also for posterity.

*De nepote amisso* 2, p. 238.6–12 vdH:

*Me autem consolatur aetas mea prope iam edita et morti proxima. Quae cum aderit, si noctis, si lucis id tempus erit, caelum quidem consalutabo discedens et quae mihi conscius sum protestabor; nihil in longo uitae meae spatio a me admissum, quod dedecori aut probro aut flagitio foret; nullum in aetate agunda avarum, nullum perfidum facinus meum extitisse; contraque multa liberaliter, multa amice, multa fideliter, multa constanter saepe etiam cum periculo capitis consulta.*

My comfort, however, I find in my life being almost spent and death very near. When it comes, be its advent by night or by day, yet will I hail the heavens as I depart and what my conscience tells me I will testify, that in my long span of life I have been guilty of nothing dishonourable, shameful, or criminal; my whole life through there has not been on my side a single act of avarice or of treachery, but on the contrary many of generosity, many of friendship, many of good faith, many of loyalty, undertaken, too, often at the risk of my life.

The same pride and emphasis on political and civic virtues can be seen here as in the passage above about Victorinus. Feelings of grief and brave resilience are not mutually exclusive, neither are warm-hearted generosity and loyalty towards friends and one's own integrity. And once again we see in this passage a Fronto who seems to be addressing the higher powers on the orator's platform or, perhaps, on the bench in the underworld court (cf. the judicial term *protestabor*).<sup>13</sup>

Family loyalty is also evident in his words about his brother. Fronto rejoices in his brother's close ties to the imperial family and emphasises the harmony in which he lived with his

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2024, 295f., who thinks of the setting of an underworld court.

brother.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, immediately afterwards, he does not emphasise his position as the emperor's teacher or friend, as one would expect. Instead, he highlights his own integrity and incorruptibility, presenting himself as an intellectual who has devoted his life to study.<sup>15</sup> This emphasis on incorruptibility corresponds to what Marcus will later say about Fronto in his *Meditations*.<sup>16</sup> It seems that Fronto proudly presents himself as an independent and free patrician who does not want to make his existence solely dependent on his political position towards the imperial family.

As we have seen, the letter contains several surprising twists and turns, leading to a somewhat conciliatory conclusion: after lamenting and attacking the forces of fate, Fronto finds some consolation in reflecting on his achievements. The grief remains, but it can be contained and overcome through the *consummatio uitae*. This type of epistolary structure contradicts the usual patterns of a letter of condolence.<sup>17</sup> Of course, we cannot exclude the possibility that Fronto may have rhetorically reinforced this impression of emotional spontaneity to a certain extent. But rhetorical composition of the letter and emotional involvement were certainly not a contradiction for Fronto. It is possible that Fronto was prompted to write this letter by the brief response in Marcus' letter, which he perhaps disapproved of.<sup>18</sup> But he gradually transforms his emotional distress by using the letter as a medium for reflection, in which he recapitulates his life and character, praises his son-in-law and his brother, and somewhat dramatically announces his coming death.

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. *De nepote amisso* 2, p. 238.12–15 vdH: *Quom fratre optimo concordissime uixi, quem patris uestri bonitate summos honores adeptum gaudeo, uestra vero amicitia satis quietum et multum securum uideo.* / “With the best of brothers I have lived in the utmost harmony, and I rejoice to see him raised by your father’s kindness to the highest offices and resting in the friendship of both of you in all peace and security.”

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *De nepote amisso* 2, p. 238.15–17 vdH: *Honores quos ipse adeptus sum, numquam improbis rationibus concupiui. Animo potius quam corpori curando operam dedi. Studia doctrinae rei familiari meae praetuli.* / “The honours which I myself have attained I never coveted to gain by unworthy means. I have devoted myself to the cultivation of my mind rather than my body. I have held the pursuit of learning higher than the acquisition of wealth.”

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Marcus Aurelius, *Med.*, 1.11.

<sup>17</sup> See also Fleury 2006, 84, who considers the structure of the letter to be original and not based on standard arguments. She distinguishes (*ibid.*, 67–68) between two types of *consolatio*, neither of which Fronto’s *De nepote amisso* fits into very well: philosophical *consolatio*, which shows that death is not a negative event, and consolation aimed at honouring the virtues and achievements of the deceased. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 97: “Mais la lettre frontonienne ne possède aucun modèle antérieur ou contemporain et donne une large place à l’éloge, d’abord du père de l’enfant, puis de l’auteur lui-même.” Differently argues Ramírez de Verger 1983, who sees in the letter a typical arrangement insofar as philosophy is rejected. Fleury contests this opinion, arguing that the letter would then be more of a lament than a letter of consolation. However, the letter is not entirely a letter of consolation, but rather a well composed ‘final letter’ of a pessimistic old man who has been struck by misfortune and tries to cope with it. On the peculiarity of Fronto’s letters to incorporate genres (such as the genres of consolation and lamentation), see Keulen 2024, 10–23.

<sup>18</sup> This strong reaction to a rather brief letter from the emperor is not unique in the letter corpus. In the correspondence *De feriis Alsensibus*, Fronto also writes a long reply to Marcus’ rather short and banal letter. For more details on *De feriis Alsensibus*, see the analysis of von Alvensleben 2024 *passim*.

Even if we do not know for certain whether the letter subsequently transmitted by Marcus (*De nepote amisso* 3) followed immediately after Fronto's, the emperor's reaction would fit perfectly. Marcus had to respond to this long letter and its pessimistic tone. And it is typical of this relationship that Marcus adapts himself completely to Fronto and, in a sense, admits that he is helpless in the face of his friend's suffering.

Marcus Aurelius to Fronto, *De nepote amisso* 3, p. 239.17–240.1 vdH:

MAGISTR<O FRONTONI> SA<L>

*Doleo, m<i m>ag<ister, v>e<re>; aliud en<im n>ich<il> reperio quod dicam a<ut> pr<odam> tibi. Mi<hi> personam indu<e>re uideor, <si> consoler e conexu ueritatis nostra<e>, cum ipse indigeam solacio.*

To my master greeting.

It pains me, truly, my teacher. I cannot find anything else to say or convey to you. I feel like I have to act like a player when I am supposed to comfort you in view of the bonds of sincerity between you and me, when I myself am in need of comfort...

This is probably the last letter in the corpus that we have from Marcus. Unfortunately, only the first few lines are legible. But these lines show that Marcus understood Fronto's letter and his pessimistic state of mind. And once again, he emphasizes his own need for comfort and the absolute obligation of honesty, which prohibits all acting and mere rhetoric. Once again, he points to the almost symbiotic friendship between himself and Fronto, to the bonds of sympathy that cause both of them to suffer when one of them is suffering. He signals very clearly to Fronto that he empathises deeply with his suffering and has understood the deeply tragic content of the letter. Fronto's concluding letter (*De nepote amisso* 4), which is unfortunately also mutilated at the beginning, ends abruptly in silence. Fronto says he can no longer write because of pain and illness.

Fronto to Marcus Aurelius, *De nepote amisso* 4, p. 240.16–19 vdH:

D<OMINO MEO FRON>TO

[...] *Multum et grauiter male ualui, mi Marce carissime. Dein casibus miserrimis adflictus sum: uxorem amisi, nepotem in Germania amisi, miserum me! Decimanum nostrum amisi. Ferreus si essem, plura scribere non possem isto in tempore. Librum misi tibi quem pro omnibus haberes.*

I have suffered from constant and serious ill-health, my dearest Marcus. Then afflicted by the most distressing calamities I have further lost my wife, I have lost my grandson in Germany, I unfortunate one! I have lost my Decumanus. If I were of iron, I could write no more just now. I have sent you a letter which you can take as representing all my thoughts.

Here, Fronto seems to be announcing the end of the correspondence itself, as it were.<sup>19</sup> We don't know exactly which document he is referring to in the last sentence. Perhaps it is a document unknown to us, perhaps it is the rhetorical declamation of *Arion*, which follows this letter as the last in the corpus.<sup>20</sup> But another possibility would be to refer this remark to his previous long letter (i.e. *De nepote amisso* 2), which he wants to be understood as his last words and *consummatio uitae*.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps reference is being made here once again to this letter, which is to be read by Marcus as a last representative statement of Fronto.

Certainly, Fronto is employing rhetorical devices in this long letter and may well have borrowed certain arguments and phrases from Cicero's letter of consolation on the death of his daughter Tullia, as van den Hout has suggested.<sup>22</sup> But this rhetorical skill and education serves Fronto's purpose of using the medium of the letter to express an existential consternation in the face of his loss. Marcus, on the other hand, admits that he cannot find the right words for this loss. In this respect, Fronto once again proves himself a master of epistle writing, albeit one who has now reached the end of his life and career. The letter gives him the opportunity to portray his daughter, his son-in-law, his deceased grandson, his brother and himself in the warmest light and to sketch a balance of emotional grief and other character virtues as far as he and his relatives are concerned.

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<sup>19</sup> See Keulen 2024, 5–10 for the hypothesis that it was Fronto himself who edited the collection of letters for publication.

<sup>20</sup> This is the assumption of Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2024, 301f. The translation “which you can take as representative of my feelings” by Davenport and Manley 2024, 206 is certainly not correct. The words *pro omnibus* must instead refer to other writings.

<sup>21</sup> It is unclear who Decumanus is. Van den Hout 1999, 533 thinks that Decumanus is another grandson who died but this is not probable. Above all, it would be surprising if Fronto first referred to a grandson generally as “grandson” and then referred to another grandson only by his nickname (*Decumanus* refers to the tenth legion stationed in Germania). Davenport and Manley 2024, 207 therefore properly reject van den Hout's proposition.

<sup>22</sup> The Ciceronian letter is partially preserved in the *Institutiones Divinae* of Lactantius, see van den Hout 1999, 534.

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