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Social Stereotypes in Hellenistic Literature

I propose to approach the social stereotypes of "city" and "country" in Hellenistic literature by considering the work of Alciphron, who writes in the 2nd c. CE, but sets his fictional Letters in Athens at the time of Menander. Hellenistic literature offers ample sources for polarized urban and rustic lifestyles: Menander's misanthrope in the *Dyskolos*, Theocritus' bourgeois Alexandrians (*Id.* 15), or Callimachus' peasant hosts (*Hecale*, *Victoria Berenices*). But Alciphron attributes his letters to four specific types: fishermen, farmers, parasites, and courtesans. Why does he select these particular figures rather than others (e.g., cooks, philosophers, clever slaves)?

Because of the shift away from the closed politics of the classical polis, and the increasing social mobility of the populations of Alexandria and Rome, questions of social behavior and politeness became more important in Hellenistic times. We observe these concerns in the shift in philosophical literature towards stereotypes: Aristotle's "reasonable man", or Theophrastus' *Characters*, sketches of types who deviate from normal rules of social behavior. Courtesans and parasites, viewed by some as "deviants", found themselves in a new urban setting, and defined themselves as "normal" products of the city. *Hetairai* and *kolakes* (or *parasitoi*) both raise important questions about hierarchies of power. Their roles highlight issues of urban economic exchange in a society where what really matters is who regulates supply and demand in two great areas of consumption, i.e. food and sex.

Farmers and fishermen are less "sexy" categories, and therefore less studied; I explore how they define themselves in opposition to their urban counterparts. I suggest that Alciphron's category of rusticity was inspired not only by the rustic characters in Menander's plays, but also by the dedicatory epigrams of the Greek Anthology, particularly book 6. There we find huge numbers of poems in the voices of farmers and fishermen, dedicating the tools of their trade at shrines and temples. A favorite conceit is the triple dedication, made by hunter, birder, and fisherman (*AP.* 6. 11-16, 179-87; authors include Antipater, Leonidas, Lucian). Leonidas of Tarentum is particularly prolific in the "country" genre: he imitates the voices of fishermen and sailors, hunters and poor working women. This paper thus discusses the dynamics of "country" vs. "city" in the epigrams of the Greek Anthology, and connects these specifically Hellenistic categories with their later manifestations in the works of Second Sophistic authors such as Alciphron, Aelian, and Lucian.