CORNELIUS FRONTO: A 'LIBYAN NOMAD' AT ROME∗

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ABSTRACT

On occasion Cornelius Pronto from Cirta in North Africa, teacher of Marcus Aurelius, refers to himself as a 'Libyan nomad.' This article places Pronto in the Roman society of his time, examines his attitude to the emperor and to his fellow-Africans and considers whether Pronto’s linguistic purism and love for archaism indicate the typically provincial 'cultural cringe' that results in a zeal for hyper-correctness, concluding that it does not.

Introduction

This article considers the Roman orator, Marcus Cornelius Fronto, teacher of the young Marcus Aurelius, in his guise as African expatriate at Rome. Its title is based on a claim that Pronto makes in a letter to Marcus Aurelius’s mother, written in Greek, that his Greek is bad, for he, like the Scythian barbarian-philosopher Anacharsis, is merely a ‘Libyan of the Libyan nomads’1 — that is, an African barbarian,2 whose Greek lacks polish. Fronto

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1 Έγώ δὲ Λιβυς τῶν Λιβυῶν τῶν νομάδων, Epist. Graec. 1.5 (=Ad M. Caes. 1.10.5 Van den Hout). References and quotations are from Haines’s Loeb edition (1919-20), checked against Van den Hout 1954. Where numbering in Haines and Van den Hout differ, both are given; the second reference is preceded by the initials ‘VdH’. Van den Hout organises the collection into twelve sections according to either addressees or topic, whereas Haines more usefully (but sometimes problematically) has attempted a chronological arrangement. Van den Hout’s 1988 edition was unavailable to me, making his Commentary difficult to use, for he employs page and line references to this volume, instead of letter, paragraph and line numbering.

2 Cf. the traditional contrast between geographical extremes; Anacharchis is also cited in a similar, but more overtly jocular, context by Apuleius, Apol. 24.6b. See Snowden 1983:56, 87, 103.
poses as a foreigner, a perpetual outsider, the quintessential Other of modern sociological discourse.

Rome, during the 2nd century AD, both allowed and apparently encouraged assimilation of provincials. A Spanish origin seems not to have affected the career of a man like Seneca, nor did it prevent Vespasian’s accession to the imperial throne. Neither seemed ever to emphasise his non-Roman origins as heavily as Fronto does here. His fellow-African, Apuleius, sometimes seems as strongly conscious of his origins, but he was living and writing in his home country. We need to examine Fronto’s self-designation in the light of his position within Roman society to come to some conclusion about whether he consistently felt like an outsider at Rome.

Fronto was intimately involved in the political life of his day, the result of his career as orator and his position as tutor to the prince. Fronto’s assertion of barbarity may simply be meant as a joke, as his letters often indicate a humorous bent. An accompanying letter to Marcus asks him to correct the Greek of the letter to his mother, ... tu, qui a Graecis litteris recentior es ... Nolo enim me mater tua ut Opicum contemnet (‘... because you have more recently been studying Greek. For I don’t want your mother to despise me as a country bumpkin’, Ad M. Caes. 1.8.7 [VdH 1.9.8]). Is Fronto serious here, or is this merely a playful game, a gentle gibe at Marcus’s preference for Greek?

Marcus, when himself on holiday at Naples, complains about local Greek panegyrists: Igitur paene me Opicum animantem ad Graecam scripturam perpulerunt ‘homines’, ut Caecilius ait, ‘incolumi inscientia’ (‘Hence “these men”, as Caecilius says, “with their untouched ignorance” drove me, almost a breathing bumpkin, to Greek literature’, Ad M. Caes. 2.6 [VdH 2.8]). This most surely is a joke.

3 Apul. Apol. 25.2, indignantly refutes an accusation by a fellow-African of having a ‘barbarian birthplace’ (patriam barbariam) while defending his mixed race origins (half Numidian and half Gaetulian), ibid. 24.1.


6 See Van den Hout 1999:59-60, on Fronto’s perfectly adequate Greek and his educational background.
Brief biography

Edward Champlin’s concise biography of Fronto (1980) gives the salient aspects of Fronto’s career. Born somewhere between AD 95 and 100 in the Roman colony of Cirta in North Africa (famous for Sallust’s description of its siege during the Jugurthine war), the young Fronto probably first studied in Alexandria and came to Rome at about the age of eighteen. True to Juvenal’s designation (Sat. 7.148) of Africa as the nutricula ca11sidorum, Fronto soon excelled at forensic oratory.

Fronto apparently never returned, even for a visit, but kept close ties with his patria. The young African made his serious way along the various steps of the normal cursus honorum, with a tour of duty as triumvir capitalis, later quaestor of Sicily, aedile plebis and finally, praetor. Simultaneously he was making a forensic name for himself and was soon considered one of the most prominent orators at Rome. His career naturally culminated in the consulship, AD 142, but this was a brief two-month stint as consul suffectus over the summer. Such a man was eminently suitable to be tutor to the adoptive sons of the emperor Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. Hence, from about AD 138 or 139 Fronto took on this task. He received no official salary, but references to his Roman mansion in part of the gardens of Maecenas may indicate a certain tangible reward (Ad M. Caes. 1.8 [VdH 1.9]). The friendship he and his family enjoyed with the imperial household must also have appeared an adequate compensation.

7 See Van den Hout 1999:vii-xi for a brief and rather dismissive overview of Fronto as public figure and man of letters in the Introduction to his Commentary.
8 Raven 1969:85-86 cites the fact that Cirta had its own permanent acting company (which presumably would have produced Classical dramas) as an example of the cultural level of Numidia.
10 The dates of Fronto’s birth and death are notoriously elusive: Van den Hout 1999:63-64, 377-81, the only certain date, 142, being this suffect consulship. This was always fixed at 143, but Eck 1998:194 n. 6 bases his cogent argument for the previous year on a recently discovered and clearly datable military diploma. Champlin 1980 and even Van den Hout 1999 both cite 143.
11 Significantly, his colleague, Herodes Atticus, teacher of Greek rhetoric to the young princes, was eponymous consul for the year 143. That this was an example of latent racism against the African Fronto must not be assumed. Fronto’s health was never good and the brief honorary position was perhaps all his physical powers could handle. Eck 1998:196 argues that Herodes Atticus, as son of a consul, was a more likely candidate for an ordinary consulship, but that the novus homo Fronto at least had the satisfaction of predating his friendly rival by half a year.
12 For discussion, see Van den Hout 1999:53.
Fronto, apparently, was from an indigenous (Nubian, or Black African) family that had been granted citizenship under the favour of a member of the gens Cornelia. Like so many other North African families, his (grafted) branch of the gens had over time become thoroughly Romanised; no sign of any language other than Latin or Greek as his lingua franca ever appeared. Inscriptions show the African urban élite of the 2nd century as Latin-speaking. Champlin (1980:16) asserts that there is evidence of a suppression by the educated élite of Roman North Africa of their non-Latin heritage.

In a letter to Antoninus Pius (8), Fronto thanks the emperor for having awarded him the proconsulship of Asia, his second choice. Presumably he had applied for Africa, where he had many friends, but his first choice was apparently awarded to a man with more children (five of Fronto’s six children had died in infancy). He started preparing for his post by calling upon friends and relatives from Cirta and Alexandria to serve as Greek correspondence clerks, and Julius Senex from Mauretania, ‘to suppress brigandry’, but also friends from Cilicia (‘whom I had patronised’). In the end poor health prevented Fronto from taking up the post.

**Correspondence with the imperial family**

The voluminous collection of correspondence between him and the young princes, addresses to the emperor Antoninus Pius and letters to and from various friends is in a much mutilated state, all editions deriving from palimpsest discovered by Cardinal Mai in the Imperial Library at Milan in

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13 Boissier 1895 is still an accepted critical source, citing evidence from archaeology, anthropology and literature to give an exhaustive description of the indigenous culture of ancient North Africa (5-53). Punic was the original language of Carthage, Libyan of Numidia, but both areas had early been Romanised and the schools of Carthage ‘were equal to those of Rome’ (223-50). See Barton 1972:1-54 about the settlement of North Africa by Romans. Barton (p. 17) says about the annexation of Africa Proconsularis after the defeat of Carthage in 146 BC, ‘The collective mind of Rome was not quite sane’ about potential threats by African military powers. Also see Thompson 1969, Millar 1968, Charles-Picard 1962:18-53. Van den Hout 1999:viii-ix makes little of Fronto’s African origins, merely treating him as a member of the Roman élite, a nice man but no great litterateur.

14 Inscriptions in Latin only predominate. Carthage, the capital of the province of Africa Proconsularis, has some Latin-Punic inscriptions. Latin-Libyan inscriptions were found near Cirta, the capital of the province of Numidia (i.e. ‘Africa Nova’, annexed by Rome during the war with Jugurtha), so Charles-Picard 1962:52-53. Fronto’s near-contemporary, Apuleius, claims (Flor. 9.29) to writing with equal skill and enthusiasm in Greek and in Latin, and with a similar style in each.
1815 and in the Vatican Library in 1823. The contents are mostly rather trite — a disappointment to critics formerly familiar only with Fronto’s reputation. Of some letters we have only the opening words, found in the index, apparently from four pages missing from the codex. Sometimes several letters were exchanged per day between the young princes and their beloved teacher, rather like modern assiduous e-mail correspondents. Letters may celebrate a birthday or indicate one of the two correspondents’ being on holiday, but more often they simply celebrate friendship.

**Other sources:** Marcus Aurelius: ‘what I learned from Fronto’; Dio Cassius; Artemidorus; Aulus Gellius

The letters are our main source on Fronto, but there are others. None is critical of Fronto’s African origin. Marcus Aurelius begins his *Meditations* formally with a list of those people who influenced his thought most profoundly. If we judge by the fulsome devotion between the older and younger man displayed in the correspondence, we may be surprised that Marcus has so little to say about what he had learned from Fronto. Yet the two things he lists are telling: absolute power is accompanied by malice, craftiness and duplicity; the Roman aristocracy is largely lacking in ordinary humanity (ἀστοργόντεροι πως εἰσίν, *Med.* 1.11).

Dio Cassius (49.18) tells us that Fronto, in Hadrian’s time already the foremost advocate at Rome, once came home from a banquet in the small hours of the morning. He had promised to defend a friend the next day. Discovering that the emperor was still (or already) seated on the bench, Fronto rushed to court and greeted the emperor, not with the customary ‘Good morning!’ (καλεῖ), but with ‘good night!’ (γειάσω).18

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15 These parts were collated by Mai, with inputs from Peter Mazuchelli at Milan and the German scholars Niebuhr, Heindorf and Buttman, so Haines 1920:xii. The *Prolegomena* to Van den Hout’s editions (1954 and 1988) provide copious discussion of the collation and further fate of these pages.

16 Eumenius, *Panegyric on Constantius*, refers to him as Fronto Romanae eloquentiae non secundum sed alterum decus (‘not the second, but the other ornament of Roman eloquence’), presumably in comparison with Cicero.

17 The *Meditations* were an on-going exercise in philosophical practice, a kind of stream-of-consciousness review of matters that would school his own soul in the practice of virtue. For a sound critique, see Hadot 1998:28-51.

18 That is vale instead of ave. See Van den Hout 1999:607 for discussion of the confusion between these two manners of greeting. Haines *ad loc.* refers to Lucian, *Prop lapsus in salutando* 1 for extensive differentiation between the two.
We may assume that the language of the law court was Latin, but Fronto was fully bilingual. Bilingualism was the norm at Rome in the 2nd century AD: the Roman emperor Marcus's philosophical heart's language was Greek, the language of his most intimate Meditations. Artemidorus (De Somniiis 4.24) relates that Fronto dreamed that he found a manner to cure himself of his rheumatism.\(^{19}\) The interpretation of the dream hinged on a Greek pun.\(^{20}\) This story, if true, indicates the degrees to which Fronto's bilingualism was internalised and his daytime interest in word-play continued in his subconscious at night. He could dream in Greek,\(^{21}\) but Latin was his great love. Several anecdotes by Aulus Gellius in his Noctes Atticae\(^{22}\) relate to Fronto's interest in words, particularly the richness of Latin vocabulary. This interest ranges from reasons for certain words having only a singular or only a plural form (N.A. 19.8) to a suitable appellation for dwarfs (N.A. 19.13). Fronto's preference was for a short word (nannus) for a small person. Here, significantly, one of his interlocutors, Sulpicius Apollinaris, is quoted as saying that Fronto would have given this word 'citizenship', or put it into a 'Latin colony', had he deigned to use it, such was his influence as arbiter vocabularum. For Apollinaris, Fronto is the foremost (Latin-speaking) Roman of his day.

**Fronto's humanity**

The letters show Fronto as a kindly and generous man, a loving husband, father, grandfather and father-in-law, but also a trusted friend to the imperial family. His wife was a familiar of the dowager empress; both Fronto and his wife constantly moved in imperial circles. At least once Fronto thanks Marcus fulsomely for more than one letter a day, confessing 'he would like to kiss the prince' in terms reminiscent of a lover to his mistress: *Quid est mihi*.

\(^{19}\) The only remedies for this and other maladies, besides bedrest, that Fronto names, are 'abstemiousness and water drinking' (Ad Ant. Pfinn. 8) and 'the water cure' (Ad M. Caes. 5.42 [VdH 5.57]). Once he praises Lucius Verus for having submitted himself to blood-letting (Ad Ver. Imp. 2.6).

\(^{20}\) He dreamt he was in the suburbs. The word for 'suburb', προσότελον, is a synonym for πρόσολος, which can also mean 'bee-glue', Latin meligo, Van den Hout 1999:605.

\(^{21}\) Fronto was also well-versed in Greek rhetoric. In De Eloq. 4.3 (VdH 5.3) he expatiates on his problem with dialectics with reference to his own training by 'my master Dionysius the Rather Slender' (Tenuior).

\(^{22}\) Fronto seems himself to have been a little suspicious of Gellius's reportage of his erudition: Ad Am. 1.19; Van den Hout 1999:427-28. Gellius, too, may have been African-born (Raven 1969:100; Rolfe, 1946:xii n. 6, who cites as source a 19th century German scholar); this is also proposed about Suetonius Tranquillus by Barton 1972:76-77.
osculo tuo suavius? Ille mibi suavis odor, ille fructus in tuo collo atque osculo situs est ('What is sweeter to me than your kiss? That sweet fragrance, that enjoyment, lives in your neck and on your lips', *Ad M. Caes.* 3.13.2 [VdH 3.14.3]). Another letter avers that the cheap portraits of the prince displayed in shops make Fronto smile, showing him how much he loves the prince. He wants to kiss both him and his infant daughter (*Ad M. Caes.* 4.12). All Fronto’s protestations of love and admiration for Marcus and his brother may indicate the sycophancy necessary to an imperial courtier, but that is too facile an explanation for his frequent expression, for instance, of a desire to ‘kiss the baby princess’s feet and hands’.

Marcus’s adopted brother Lucius Verus also fondly pictures himself being hugged and kissed by his teacher (*Ad Ver. Imp.* 2.5). In his reply the older man explains that *mouth to mouth* kisses are aimed at honouring speech (*Ad Ver. Imp.* 2.8.1). Such physical display appears odd to us in the context of the Anglo-Saxon reticence that we have come to accept as the norm. It was rather an example of Mediterranean warmth, perhaps heartily welcomed by a prince who had grown up in the dour imperial atmosphere. Sedgwick (1921: 62-63) speaks of the ‘warm, impulsive African’ humanity that was native to the tutor from Cirta. In the earlier years of the extant correspondence Marcus himself is equally exuberant in his loving protestations, such as *Ego hercule te ita <a>more deperno ...* (‘By Hercules, I’m so dying of love for you ...’, *Epist. Graec.* 7 [VdH Add. Epist. Var. Acep. 7], dated by Haines to AD 139). Many of the letters express similar sentiments. Fronto’s replies are equally effusive: ‘Marcus reconciles friends to one another’ (*Ad M. Caes.* 4.1), or ‘longing springs from love’ (*nam desiderium ex amore sit*, *Ad M. Caes.* 4.9).

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23 There is no space to devote to discussion of the implication of a potentially homoerotic relationship, and hence I leave it aside. See the next note below. I have not seen Amy Richlin’s *Marcus Aurelius in Love* (Chicago 2007) which apparently explores this and similar themes.

24 In *Ad M. Caes.* 5.52 (VdH 5.67) Fronto exclaims that, having seen Marcus’s baby daughter, he now loves the father ten times more than before. This is not the language of homoeroticism, although a romantic link between master and pupil has sometimes been inferred.

25 Kissing between women was apparently also common. In a letter complaining that his wife is now in Naples and that he has no-one left at Rome to kiss him, Fronto avers that she will ‘live contentedly on the empress’s kisses’. He is longing, however, for the prince. He hopes to be able to leave his consulship a day earlier in order to go to Naples ut *M. Aureliam complector* (‘that I may embrace Marcus Aurelius’, *Ad M. Caes.* 2.8 [VdH 2.10]).

26 For example, *Ad M. Caes.* 2.2, where Marcus designates Fronto ‘a winner in the contest in the great friendship-games’; also 2.6 and 3.9 (VdH 2.8; 3.10).
Fronto was concerned for his other students, too. As was customary, Fronto apparently had, beside the two young princes, a coterie of students whom he trained in eloquence. Some shared his home as live-in students, the so-called contubernales to whom he refers in various letters. Some may have been from Africa, or have had African connections. A polite letter to the father of one his contubernales, Squilla Gallicanus, praises the young man’s demeanour in his first appearance at the bar. The father, he says, could enjoy his son’s triumph praesens, and in instalments, as it unfolded, whereas Fronto sat anxiously at home, trepidaverim absens. The fragmentary letter ends with a flourish: *in forum descendit natalibus nobilis, de foro rediit eloquentia quam gener nobilior* (‘He went to the forum as a nobleman by birth; he returned from the forum more noble still in eloquence than in his lineage’, 27 *Ad Am.* 1.25 [VdH 1.27]).

Such warmth and selflessness could also underlie the kindness with which Fronto recommended various protégés to influential patrons, his loving interest in all his students, and even his often-expressed interest in Marcus’s health and exhortations to the young man to take more rest. On occasion Fronto even took the trouble to compose an elaborate laudatio to Sleep in order to persuade Marcus to unwind more often. Examples of rulers who deigned to relax here range from Julius Caesar to Augustus, to Romulus, who was *neque orsum ...neque abstemius* (‘neither hungry nor abstemious’) with, as dubious illustration, the latter’s plan to rape the Sabine women ‘for the sake of having some fun’.

In spite of this unsavoury joke, Fronto’s attitude to women was generally admirable. He is polite to the point of obsequiousness to the emperor’s mother, clearly values his own wife highly, and misses her when she is away visiting the dowager empress (*Ad M.* Cæs. 2.8), and, in another one of Gellius’s anecdotes (N. 4.13.29), admires the use of the phrase *cum mortalius multis* by the author Claudius Quadrigarius (*Annales* 13), rather than *cum hominibus multis*, because the term ‘would encompass people of all ages and both sexes’.

Marcus Aurelius and his adopted brother Lucius Verus, as adults, continued to vie for Fronto’s love. Once Lucius reproaches Fronto for not having come to greet him when he was at the palace (*Ad Ver. Imp.* 1.3 [VdH 1.2]). The older man tactfully thanks the prince for ‘caring enough to scold’ him

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27 The final sentence is extrapolated from the annotated margin of the Codex, according to both editors *ad loc.* After the heading of the letter a marginal note reads *mire scripta epistola.*
Pronto had an equally good relationship with Antoninus Pius while he was alive. A letter to Antoninus (9), commends Calpurnius Julianus Appianus (the historian Appian), requesting that 'the Greek' be granted the honour of a procuratorship without the obligation to carry it out, 'for he is old and childless, and needs some consolation!' The emperor must evidently have complied, and Appian was suitably grateful, for in Epistola Graeca 4 (VdH Add. Epist. Var. Aceph. 4) Appian reproaches Pronto for not wanting to accept his gift of two slaves, in particular for 'not wanting to be obliged to Appian'. Pronto's reply (Epist. Graec. 5 [VdH Add. Epist. Var. Aceph. 5]) breathes extreme tact, conceding that, although states send gifts to one another, people are not states. He, Pronto, is 'neither a god nor the Persian king' to exact expensive offerings - and even gods accept trifling gifts. Giving too large a gift is 'like toasting with too big a cup'. Argument is piled upon argument, culminating with advocacy of an equal gift - so Pronto is giving the two slaves back to Appian. The keep of the slaves will now give Appian an advantage in the value of gifts given. Therein, perhaps, lies Pronto's reason for returning the gift: two more mouths to feed could have embarrassed even his ample household arrangements.

From all this Pronto emerges as a 'really nice' man, everybody's rather fussy grandfather, kind and tactful, someone worth knowing.

**Fronto’s health: extreme valetudinarianism**

Not only Artemidorus speaks of Pronto’s rheumatism. Many letters refer to matters of health, rheumatism in his feet or knees, shoulders and hands, varied by pain in his side or groin, stomach cramps or fever. Fully fifty of slightly over two hundred documents refer to Pronto’s health. On occasion he admits that he does not covet good health, 'for it is wrong to yearn for the impossible' (Nihil est enim fas concupiscere ... quod ... frustra concupiscat, De Eloq. 1.9 [VdH 2.10]). Having grown up in the warmer and dryer North African interior, Pronto would have experienced the Roman winters as

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28 Fronto planned to write up the history of Verus’s Parthian campaign, but seems to have got no further than a disquisition on historiography (Principia Historiae) and an essay-like letter describing in glowing terms the prince’s abilities, in particular his prowess at oratory and rhetorical composition (Ad Ver. Imp. 2.7).
uncomfortably cold, causing him continuous discomfort. Yet he never seemed to contemplate a return to the warmer climate of Africa.

Marcus’s own health is sometimes a matter for concern, as in Ad M. Caes. 4.8: the prince reports feeling shaky after an illness. Often the imperial babies and toddlers displayed the common ailments of infancy. Once, Fronto is relieved that it is one of the tiny princesses who is ill, not their hard-working father (Ad M. Caes. 4.12). Sometimes the prince worries about his mother or wife (Ad M. Caes. 5.6 and 5.10 [VdH 5.20, 5.21]). Letter after letter attests a warm relationship between the two households and Fronto’s acceptance as a valued member of Roman society.

Oratory versus philosophy

Some eighteen tutors were appointed to train young Marcus and Lucius, three for oratory (Fronto for Latin, two others for Greek). One of the Greeks was Herodes Atticus, with whom he on occasion had severe differences (discussed in five letters, Ad M. Caes. 3.2-6), but whom on his own confession he came ultimately to love as a friend. Marcus Aurelius (Med. 1.7) ascribes his preference for philosophy to another beloved teacher, Junius Rusticus. In a letter Marcus expatiates on his desire to devote his life

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31 Toward the end of his life he explains that he has asked a friend to see to his funeral arrangements, to spare either his brother or his son-in-law grief (Ad Ver. Imp. 2.7). Fronto died relatively young, around 167, but the exact date is irrecoverable (Champlin 1980:139-40).
32 E.g. De Fer. Als. 1 and 4 refer to the fever of one of the little girls.
33 Marcus and Faustina lost four of their eleven children as infants. Given the fact that half of live births at the time did not survive their first year, the survival rate of the children of the imperial household was above average. See Claassen 2007 for mortality rates.
34 One letter reports that Marcus’s sister is ill and that his mother injured herself by banging against an item of furniture, but what has Fronto really worried is the scorpion Marcus found in his bed; Ad M. Caes. 5.8, 5.9 [VdH 5.23, 5.24].
35 Epist Graec. 3 (VdH Ad M. Caes. 1.8) is addressed to Herodes, consoing him on the death of his infant son. The major source of Herodes’s comfort will be the love of that good young man, Marcus Aurelius, but Fronto confesses to being Herodes’s rival for that love. Even during the famous altercation between the two men, which is clouded by obscurity, Fronto promises Marcus that he will not attack Herodes ad personam (Ad M. Caes 3.3). Herodes was thoroughly Romanised: his father had been consul; he himself was married to an Appia Annia Regilla; so Birley 1987:62-63.
36 ‘[Rusticus taught me] to avoid rhetoric, poetry and verbal conceits.’ His painting-master Diognetus had earlier ‘shown him the attractions of philosophy’, but his tutor in philosophy was Apollonius of Chalcedon (Birley 1987:37, 62).
to philosophy, bemoaning his non-attainment of his ideal (*Ad M. Caes. 4.13*). He confesses to having neglected his syllabus of classical authors to read Ariston, promising to turn to Cicero and some of the old playwrights. His greatest problem is that Ariston ‘will not allow him to argue both sides of a matter’, as Fronto had sought to teach him (*Ad M. Caes. 5.27* [VdH 5.42]).

Fronto himself had no time for philosophy. The highest praise he has for man is, ‘He is no philosopher’ (*Ad Am. 1.2*), although another letter, to a different correspondent, features the ‘ability to discuss Plato’ as one of another client’s virtues (*Ad Am. 1.4*). A large part of the correspondence with Marcus comprises Frohto’s attempts both to persuade his young charge to continue striving toward perfection in eloquence and to convince him that he was writing eloquent prose anyway. Elsewhere he adjures Marcus not to allow philosophical striving for modesty to impede his striving to excel in eloquence, even if he should feel inordinately (read ‘unsuitably for a philosopher’) pleased with his own declamatory prowess (De Elog.1.10 [VdH 2.11]). He reminds his pupil that, in spite of claiming the contrary, Plato himself was to the end concerned with his own fame (*De Elog. 11* [VdH 12]). Fronto’s essay, itself a good example of persuasive rhetoric, comes to a climax with the thought that eloquence will suitably clothe his philosophical thoughts: *Dabit philosophia quod dicas, dabit eloquentia qu<omodo dicas>* (De Elog. 18 [VdH 19b])**.** A letter to Lucius explains that ‘even philosophers each have their own style’ (*Ad Ver. Imp. 1.1* [VdH Epist. Acep. ad M. Ant. 1]).

The teacher Fronto builds on his pupil’s strengths and interests: the letter imploring Marcus to relax argues that even Chrysippus and Socrates used to get ‘plastered’ (*madescer*, ‘get wet’, a slang term). Marcus should also indulge (*De Fer. Als. 3.5*). An earlier letter hoists the young man with his own philosophical petard: he had objected to the niceties of diplomatic exchange as tantamount to acting in a ‘crooked’, ‘insincere’ or ‘laboured’ manner.

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37 The mix of rhetoric and philosophy in the career of Marcus Aurelius was more complicated than appears from Marcus’s own words. As future emperor he had perforce to be an accomplished speaker. C.T. Kasulke, as reviewed by Holford-Stevens 2007, argues strongly against the commonly-held idea of Marcus’s complete rejection of oratory. The reviewer plausibly interprets Marcus’s disavowal of oratory in *Ep. 4.13* as ‘a student’s excuse for not getting down to his assignment.’

38 Van den Hout 1999:ix: ‘while Fronto was Marcus’ teacher, he was] wise enough to refrain from any criticism of Philosophy (which at heart he detested)’; see also, for instance, id. 322-23.

39 The text is mutilated here, but the tendency of the passage makes this conjecture (by both Van den Hout and Haines) a certainty.

40 Another letter to Lucius Verus praises the eloquent style of Lucius’s despatches to Rome. Fronto asserts, ‘the soldier’s letter outdid both my own and a philosopher’s’ (*Ad Ver. Imp. 2.1*).
(oblique, insincere, anxio). Socrates himself had used the device of dissembling to entrap the Sophists: *quando autem aperta arte congressus est?* (‘When did he ever clash with someone with his full armoury in display?’ *Ad M. Caes. 3.15*).

This mini-essay continues with discussion of Socrates’s ironic dialectics. Yet elsewhere (*De Eloc. 4.3 [VdH 5.4]*), Fronto makes fun of the dialectical method that requires no more from students than verbal comment on the philosophical argument of a passage, contrastst with his own sturdier rhetorical syllabus of independent composition, memorisation, exercise in synonyms and translation into Greek.

**Fronto as teacher of oratory and style**

Fronto’s suitability to act as a tutor in Latin oratorical style was rooted in his own forensic practice, his reading and his activities as editor of newly-inscribed book rolls. He continued with his usual career, acting only as part-time mentor to the two princes. Several of his ‘letters’ are full-blown essays; some discuss or illustrate aspects of oratory and style. Fronto’s curriculum of studies for his students started with reading and more reading of the older classics: Naevius, Ennius, even Plautus, Lucilius, Cato, Gaius Gracchus, Lucretius, Caesar and Cicero, especially his letters.

Fronto encouraged his students to extend their fluency and eloquence by means of translation of passages from Latin to Greek and *vice versa*, coining of aphorisms and maxims and then expanding, contracting or paraphrasing.

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41 Fronto apparently used to edit new editions of well-known authors. He promises *Volumnius Quadratus* to send him books of Cicero, ‘corrected and punctuated’ (*Ad Am. 2.2*).

42 Haines’s conjectural chronological arrangement of the letters enables us to discern a certain progression over the years in the young man’s thinking, in his manner of addressing his beloved teacher, and in his own rhetorical control.

43 An essay (*Ambr. 195, col 2 [VdH Arioni]*) retells Herodorus’s tale of Arion, the dithyrambist, who was saved from pirates by a dolphin. It serves as a model of the *siccam genus* of narration. In *Ad M. Caes. 5.22* (VdH 5.37) Fronto sends Marcus a rhetorical theme (‘a consul fighting like a gladiator’) with the injunction to ‘put it into shape and develop’ its argument.

44 On occasion Marcus reports on having been reading Cælius and Cicero, and requests Fronto to send him something of his own, or of Cato, Cicero, Sallust, Gracchus or of poets like Lucretius or Ennius (*Ad Ant. Imp. 2.1 [VdH 4.1]*). Sciarrino 2009 quotes Zetsel in Fitzgerald and Gowers 2007 on Cicero’s influential reception of Ennius. Van den Hout 1999:vii comments, ‘[Fronto] could hardly reject Cicero, but … Cicero is not his man.”
them and collection of words and synonyms (Ad M. Caes. 3.2). As example, he rattles off a list of six adjectives denoting ‘a stammer’, and five indicating ‘fluency’ (De Elog. 3.1-7). Students were to make collections of memorable lines and of archaic words; Fronto disapproved of the coining of new words. Yet old words, being often ‘discoloured and spotted like a nurse’s apron’, must be used with care (Ad M. Ant. De Orat. 12, 13 [VdH 17-19]). Above all, the right word had to be sought from the Latin thesaurus to clothe each striking thought (Ad M. Caes. 3.1, 4.3; Ad Ant. Imp. 1.2).

Fronto freely criticised essays or speeches by the prince, occasionally peremptorily commanding him to remove a certain word from a speech (Ad M. Caes. 5.3), or asking the young emperor what he meant by a florid circumlocution. The teacher cites the offending phrase, demolishing its component parts _quo periculo se scripsitis vel indigna defecto aliquo libro_ (‘where you dangerously wrote what would even be unworthy of some really bad book’, Ad M. Ant. De Orat. 12 [VdH 17]). Almost every letter to Marcus and Lucius instructs the young men in matters of style by precedent rather than precept. From these examples the elements of what has been termed an ‘African’ style emerge. Fronto often sent Marcus copies of his own speeches. The young, enthusiastic Marcus occasionally declaimed Fronto’s speeches to his father. Fronto was suitably gratified. Only a simile could do justice to the prince’s condescension: ‘Food is tastier in a golden dish; my mediocre, even sorry, speech _a doctissimo et facundissimo omnium Caesare illustratia est_’ (‘was given lustre by the most learned and eloquent Caesar’, Ad M. Caes. 1.7.2-3).

The use of similes (_elkóves_) is another characteristic of Fronto’s style (as in Ad M. Caes. 4.1), which he frequently advocates (Ad M. Caes. 3.3, 3.7). Whether his excessive use of similes must be ascribed to the influence of

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46 Letters to friends similarly mull over aspects of language, as in Fronto’s discussion of the two kinds of figures of speech, verbal and cerebral (Ad Am. 1.11).
47 This exuberant, archaising ‘Asiatic’ style is also discernible in the writings of Fronto’s fellow-African Apuleius.
48 Even after Marcus had succeeded his adoptive father as emperor, the letters still often comprise discussions of finer points of oratory, choice of words and choice of suitable reading matter as a means of perfecting the young emperor’s style.
49 When Marcus worries about having used a simile that is possibly unsuitable to the dignity of the Senate, Fronto reassures the young man that such concern is a mark of his ability, conceding, however, that grand thoughts should be clothed in grand words and praising Marcus’s use of _praeteritio_ (παρατέριτε, Ad Ant. Imp. 1.2.3-9 [VdH 1.2.4-11]). Fronto’s essay on eloquence again starts with discussion of words: their quality, the need to ‘double or treble, quadruplicate or multiply even more’ the
some sort of African linguistic background or indigenous idiomatic usage Fronto may have imbibed from his nurses when a child, is dangerous to postulate and impossible to prove. He himself says his teacher and parens, Athenodotus, taught him to use similes (Ad M. Caes. 4.12). In the Greek letter to Marcus's empress mother, Fronto self-consciously comments on the style of his own simile-ladenmissive as he writes (Epist. Graec. 1.1-2). Elsewhere, Fronto advises the prince on how to formulate a speech so as to please his audience, using words that soothe and please 'just like a garment woven from wool or silk, soft but not with effeminate colouring' (Ad M. Caes. 1.8.3 [VdH 1.9.3]).

Fronto is equally fond of paranomastic word-play. When he reproaches Marcus for working too hard while on holiday, Fronto expostulates, 'It is easier to reconcile you to a polecat (volpem) than to pleasure (voluptatem)' (De Fer. AIs. 3, transl. Haines). Many letters feature discussions of words, especially archaic Latin, in which Fronto and his student were both passionately interested, as for example, Marcus’s discussion of the Hernican word for the head covering worn by a flamen at Anagnia (Ad M. Caes. 4.4.1). That this interest was of paramount importance to Fronto is borne out by Gellius's anecdotes and by many letters.

Fronto consistently 'practises what he preaches' in his application of his own stylistic norms. Although he decries the style of a 'modern' such as words appropriate to a situation, to extract the most suitable from the total 'word population' and, like a press-gang, to hunt up the 'skulkers' and impel them into service (De Eloq. 1.1-2 [VdH 2.1-2]). Such an extended play with a single metaphor illustrates what it advocates.

50 Van den Hout 1999:43-44, 322-23 sums up the controversies surrounding Fronto’s youth and early education.

51 Marcus praises this speech in slang that can be almost exactly translated and still convey the same (opposite) meaning: Horribiliter scriptisti!—'You wrote awfully [well]' (Ad M. Caes. 2.3).

52 Even a letter reporting an injury — bath attendants banged his knee against the scalding spout of the hot water outlet — has an ornamental flourish: his knee is both ambrasum et ambatum ('bruised and burnt', Ad M. Caes. 5.44).

53 In this letter the young man is clearly trying to please his teacher by various rhetorical flourishes such as a series of alliterative word games relating to enjoyment of the grape harvest: nimis rancidos racinos ... acidos acinos ...; uras ... passas ... paboros ...; malum eas pedibus calcare quam dentibus consisse ('too nauseating clusters ... bitter berries ...; grapes parched rather than pulpy ...; I would rather stamp them with my feet than champ them with my teeth' [ibid. 2, transl. Haines]).

54 Once the older man confesses rather pathetically to his son-in-law that he would rather 'not have known' the words for any part of his body, if only all those parts could have been free from pain (Ad Am. 1.13).
Seneca, he is not above ‘turning’ an aphorism by Seneca’s contemporary Juvenal from the original allusion to *panem et circenses* (*Sat.* 10.78) to *annona et spectaculis*.\(^5\) In general, however, Fronto avoided, even decried, the ‘moderns’,\(^5\) preferring the earliest classics of Latin literature. Apparently he had early managed to form Marcus’s taste to prefer the older authors; the prince often asks to borrow a volume of this or that author’s works, once even pretending to wanting to share a bribe with Fronto’s librarian (*Ad M. Cæs.* 4.5).

### Fronto’s African connections

Fronto himself very seldom spoke of himself as other than Roman, but his African connections do emerge in the correspondence or elsewhere. Minucius Felix (*Octavius* 9.8) rather cryptically quotes Fronto as *Cirtensis noster*, the source for the scurrilous assertion that early Christians at their banquets committed incest.\(^5\) In a letter to the Triumvirs and Senate of his *patris*, Cirta (*Ad Am.* 2.11), Fronto declines their request that he act as their *patronus*, referring them to Aufidius Victorinus, then betrothed to his daughter, and to several prominent Africans at Rome, not all from Cirta.\(^5\) Apparently, Fronto assumed that the people of Cirta would consider Victorinus’s engagement to the daughter of the most prominent African at Rome tantamount to ‘being an African’.

Fronto kept up other African connections. Aulus Gellius (*NA.* 19.10) tells of going to visit Fronto (laid up with rheumatism), together with the Numidian (‘Nubian’) Julius Celsinus.\(^5\) Various of Fronto’s correspondents in Italy were fellow-Africans: besides Julius Celsinus and Arrius Antoninus,

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\(^5\) [Seneca] *populum Romanum duobus praecipue rehus, annona et spectaculis, teneri.* (‘We know that the Roman populace is fascinated particularly by two things, the corn dole and spectacles’, *Principia Historiae* 17 (VdH 18).

\(^5\) In *Ad M. Ant. De Orat.* 2.3 Fronto inveighs against Seneca and Laberius, decrying their tautological style and ‘flashes of wit’ that are ‘like eating olives by throwing them into the air and catching them in one’s mouth: showy but not decent’ (transl. Haines).

\(^5\) Van den Hout 1999:570-79 argues against the assumption that Fronto composed a formal *Contra Christianos*.

\(^5\) See Van den Hout 1999:460-61 for a list of Cirtensians at Rome in Fronto’s time.

then governor of Transpadane Gaul, perhaps also Claudius Julianus (Ad. Am. 1.7, 17, 19, 20) and Praecilius Pompeianus (ibid. Ad Am. 1.15, 16, 24). Once Fronto tries to conciliate the parties affected by an 'ill-advised' attack on one Gavius Maximus by his late friend Niger Censorius, 'who had other prominent friends and served the state well.' This letter (Ad Ant. Pium 3) is considerably mutilated, but the gist comprises conciliation of the emperor and restoration of the reputation of the deceased friend, whose name suggests a possible fellow-African. Elsewhere Fronto commends Saenius Pompeianus, the tax farmer for Africa, whose affairs were about to come up for scrutiny by Antoninus Pius. Other types of patronage occur. Once, Fronto explains (Ad M. Caes. 5.44 [VdH 5.59]) that he is to support a friend, his familiaris, presumably either a fellow-African or a contubernalis, or both, in court.

Elsewhere, Fronto mourns the untimely death of a contubernalis, a young man with whose whole family he was involved. First, he recommends Sardius Saturninus, the father of two of his students, to Caecilius Optatus, legatus of Numidia in 166 (Ad Am. 1.9). Probably the letter went to Caecilius while in Africa, which makes Sardius a local inhabitant. Next, Fronto recommends one of the boys, Sardius Lupus, to Petronius Mamertinus (Ad Am. 1.10). Finally, another missive concedes with Saturninus on the death of the other boy, iucundissimum contubernalem (‘the most delightful of housemates’) (Ad Am. 1.20 [VdH 1.22]).

Even here, matters linguistic occur. A letter to Lollianus Avitus, recommending another of the contubernales in glowing terms, complains that the Romans do not even have a word for Licinius Montanus’s most outstanding characteristic. He is frugi, probus and ‘philostorgus’ (careful, upright and ‘full of loving-kindness’), to which a marginal note adds cuius rei nomen aput

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60 Ad Am. 2.6-9. Van den Hout 1999:440 cites inscriptions to Arrius found at Cirta (Dessau 1118, 1119). Letter 2.7 intercedes with him for a certain municipal senator, Volumnius Serenus, who had been exiled. Fronto is requesting that he be granted a chance to expurgate the stain on his honour by serving again as decurio, or municipal senator, in spite of the fact that he had been exiled.

61 Ad Am. 1.15 concerns a speech for the Bithynians, but both Van den Hout and Haines ad loc. suggest that he was a fellow-Cirtan.

62 The letter is one of a set of three, Ad Ant. Pium, 3, 7 and 4, two to Antoninus Pius, and one to the wronged Gavius, of which the last serves as a covering letter to a copy of the previous, hence all three to the emperor Pius Antoninus. For discussion, Van den Hout 1999:385-90.

63 Ad M. Caes. 5.34 and 35, Marcus’s reply (VdH 5.4, 50).

64 The cognomen 'Saturninus' often indicates African origins as it is the Latinised form of names relating to the Nubian god Ba'al Ammon, so Charles-Picard 1962:79, Barton 1972:56-58.
Romanos nullum est (‘something for which there isn’t even a word among the Romans’, Ad Am. 1.3). This concept Fronto elsewhere asserts is sadly lacking in the Roman aristocracy (Ad Ver. Imp. 2.7.6, VdH 2.7.7). 65 This, perhaps the most critical of any of Fronto’s rare strictures on the Romans, does not expressly contrast their lack of warmth with a mooted ‘African heartiness’. Yet we may deduce that Montanus was not a native-born Roman aristocrat. He was perhaps a Romanised Cirtan who had gone home for a visit, for Fronto explains that poor health had compelled Montanus to return to Italy from Cirta; he needed a coastal holiday retreat.

Nowhere does any of this correspondents make any direct reference, either disparaging or approving, to Fronto’s race or possibly dark skin tone. 66 A much mutilated letter from Fronto himself to Claudius Julianus 67 discusses correct procedures for provincial administration, admonishing Julianus to ‘treat the provincials with respect’, continuing with the wish that Marcus and Lucius should love Julianus, the ‘partner of my body and mind’ (Haines), 68 as they love him, Fronto (ut te quoque participem mei corporis et animi diligant, Ad Am. 1.18 [VdH 1.20]). This odd expression can hardly, in the context of the uxorious Fronto’s amply-attested family life, be taken to mean that the two men were homosexually involved. The ‘sharing of a body’ must refer either to the state of both men’s health or to the stature or physical appearance of both. A similar expression at Ter. Ad. 957, tu germanus ‘s pariter animo et corpore (‘You’re equally my brother in [both] mind and body’), has the paramount implication of close resemblance. It is conceivable that Fronto may be referring to a recognisably similar, African physiognomy. Yet the concluding parts of the letter refer to Fronto’s ill-health, ending on an earnest admonition that Julianus should watch his own health. So perhaps Claudius Julianus was merely a fellow-valetudinarian. 69

Clearly, Africans were at the time very rarely noted as ‘being different from Romans.’ The Scriptores Historiae Augustae, at best a dubious source,
feature letters reputedly from Marcus Aurelius about two contemporaries of Fronto’s. The names of both Pescennius Niger and Clodius Albinus appear significant to our colour-conscious eyes as possibly denoting black African origins. The latter the spurious ‘Marcus’ designates as *Afro quidem homo sed non multa ex Afris habens* ... (‘an African man, but with little of the African in him’). This African hero was appointed by Marcus to lead two cohorts and awarded a ‘double salary’ and ‘quadruple stipend’. A next (perhaps equally spurious) ‘letter’ praises his constancy during the rebellion of Avidius Cassius. Another ‘letter’ praises Pescennius Niger, expatiating on his appointment to a similar command position. These two later rebelled after the death of Marcus’s son and successor, Commodus. They were beaten and their imperial aspirations thwarted by the first African to succeed to imperial rank: Septimius Severus, who, it is said, retained an ‘African accent’ to the end.

**Fronto’s claim to foreignness; his loyalty to Rome**

To return to the question of Fronto’s designation of himself as Libyan nomad: an early essay in Greek probably dates from the first year of Fronto’s appointment as tutor. Fronto sent his *Ewriko logos* (‘A discourse on love’ [VDH Add. Epist. Var. Aecph. 8]) to Marcus together with essays by Lysias and Plato. This third essay, he notes, was composed by this foreigner, in speech little short of a barbarian’ (Haines): διὰ τούτου τοῦ ἔξουν ἄνδρος, τὴν μὲν φωνήν ὀλίγου δεῖν βαρβάρου. This is ordinary authorial modesty, in the vein of other references to his Latin speeches as being ‘poor’, but its significance lies in the ‘barbaric sound’ of his speech, again an apparent indication of Fronto’s awareness of his otherness, ‘non-Romanness’. Fronto may, like Septimius Severus, have retained a distinctive African accent. Alternatively, he may have had a rasping, unpleasant-sounding voice, the result of frequent colds. The first explanation seems more likely in the context of his self-designation as ‘this foreigner’ and choice of the word ‘barbarian’.

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70 From Julius Capitolinus’s *Vita Albini*, 10.6 and 9 and Aelius Spartanus’s *Vita Pescennii*, 4.1.

71 In an earlier letter (*Ad Am. 1.6*) Fronto praises Avidius’s exploits that, he says, were equal to those of Plautus’s *Miles Gloriosus*, ‘and all true’.

When Fronto elsewhere refers to his African connections, there is no trace of such self-denigration. Once he expresses admiration for the youthful Marcus’s erudition, saying wistfully that, at that age, he had himself scarcely touched the works of any of the old masters (Ad M. Caes. 1.8 [VdH 1.9]). This is more a reflection of Fronto’s having spent his early years in an outpost of the empire, where books were perhaps scarcer than at Rome, than an admission of any degree of barbarism in his education or background.

Nowhere is Africa spoken of as inferior to Rome, but Africans are also nowhere portrayed as superior to Romans. One-sided praise of matters African never occurs. An essay directed at Marcus on figures of speech (Ad Ant. Imp. 6) contains generous quotations from Sallust’s Bellum Jugurthinum, several in praise of Jugurtha (B.J. 6.1, 20.1 and 2), another describing the North African countryside (B.J. 17.5), others decrying the avarice of the consul (B.J. 28.5), the demoralised state of his army (B.J. 44.1 and 4-45) and praising the energy of Marius (B.J. 63.1-7, 100.3-5). It also quotes from Sallust’s description of the Catilinarian conspiracy (Sempronius, Cat. 25; despair in the city, ibid. 31.1-3; denigration of the urban masses, ibid. 37.3). Here Fronto could easily have expatiated on the odious comparison between African hardiness and Roman effeminity that underlies Sallust’s approach to historiography, but there is no hint of such. Fronto merely quotes Sallust as a master of descriptive prose.

A long letter to Lucius Verus after his victory over the Armenians, praising both princes’ skill – not as soldiers, but as rhetoricians – describes Fronto’s praying to his ‘ancestral gods’, imploring ‘Hammo Jupiter’, that is, Ba’al Ammon, te Libye ... (Ad Ver. Imp. 2.1.4 [VdH 2.1.6]). The sentence is fragmentary, but from the context (he reports holding the speeches of Lucius and Marcus in either hand) we may deduce that he prayed for further eloquence to be fostered in the young men. This essay

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73 It is tempting to ascribe Fronto’s preference for the ‘old masters’ above the moderns of his time to this conjectural dearth of books in his African youth, but that involves, unenabily, basing an assumption on an assumption. The library at Alexandria had already been an intellectual jewel two centuries earlier and its destruction under Julius Caesar may not even have been total (Dio Cass. 42.38 against Plut. Caes. 49).
74 For a view of literary flowering in North Africa, see Charles-Picard 1962:219-31, who also writes of a ‘good library’ as available at Carthage (p. 230).
75 By the 2nd century AD complete syncretism between Greek, Roman and African names for the supreme god had long since been accepted.
76 Haines's conjecture, based on Mai, from *etelii / *etelbi / *teli. Van den Hout 1954 omits it, except in his *apparatus criticus* and does not discuss the conjecture in 1999 *ad loc.*
praising Lucius also touches on matters military, asserting that Lucius ‘learned to exact discipline’ from the example of Hannibal,\textsuperscript{77} (Scipio) Africa-nus, (Q. Caecilius) Metellus (Numidicus) and strategy from Cato, the latter being \textit{orator idem et imperator} (ibid. \$20 [VdH 23]). Combatants from both sides are indiscriminately quoted – Roman or African, each could serve as an example of military excellence.

The fragmentary remains of an apparently earlier speech before the Senate, thanking Antoninus on behalf of Carthage, possibly for aid after a severe fire, is another indication that Fronto remained concerned with African affairs.\textsuperscript{78} Out of about 2,600, only some 400 letters from the end of the speech are consecutively decipherable. Scattered words refer to Carthaginian sea-power and empire, to \textit{seditiones orbi}, to a shrine, and (so Mai) to the elder Faustina. The intact paragraph appears as a prayer for the health of the emperor, ending significantly with a wish for an unspecified entity to continue as ‘an ornament of the Latin name’. As far as it is decipherable, Fronto’s speech apparently makes of his fellow-Africans loyal Romans. Similarly, a commendation to Claudius Severus, the father-in-law of one of the imperial princesses, praises one Sulpicius Cornelianus as ‘hard-working, patriotic (\textit{patriae amantissimus}) and a congenial friend with literary tastes’ (\textit{Ad Am.} 1.1). Had Cornelianus been a Roman, his patriotism would scarcely have merited special mention.\textsuperscript{79} If he was an African, this patriotism would have been to Rome.

In sum, Fronto sees, and refers to, himself as a Latin-speaking Roman and views his fellow-Africans similarly. An extended essay (\textit{De Bello Parthico}), written some time before the letter to Lucius quoted above, is aimed at comforting the emperor after the defeat of Severianus and his legion at Elegeia on the upper Euphrates, in AD 162. Fronto reminds him that the

\textsuperscript{77} Haines comments \textit{ad loc.} that Fronto’s portrait of Lucius Verus, in the severely mutilated \textit{Principia Historiae} addressed to Verus, is based on Livy’s sketch of Hannibal, showing the African as a flawed hero with much to commend him, but with a vicious streak. That there were certain similarities in character between Lucius and Hannibal may be guessed, but Fronto is here probably guilty of excess in his florid panegyric of the prince, who was otherwise reputed to be less virtuous than his adoptive brother.

\textsuperscript{78} M. Fronto\textsuperscript{is} \textit{gratianum actio in Senatu pro Carthaginensi}, also found by Cardinal Mai on a palimpsest (\textit{Cad. Palat.} 24ff., 53 and 46). See Van den Hout 1954: \textit{Prolog. LXXVIff.} or 1988: LXXIXff. and 1999: 568, where he dates the oration to between 143 and 155: most probably, 153 AD.

\textsuperscript{79} Van den Hout 1999:401 identifies him as the rhetor Cornelianus to whom Phrynichus dedicated his \textit{Eclogae} and as, perhaps later, \textit{ab epistolis Graecis} at court for Greek legal texts. The next letter, \textit{Ad Am.} 1.2, written in Greek, commends him to an Appius Apollonides, otherwise unknown.
gods do on occasion give the Romans a hard time, listing as examples of such defeat: Allia, Caudium, Cannae, Numantia and Cirta (referring to the defeat of Albinus in 109 BC, during the Jugurthine war). Even in the context of a victory by Fronto’s own compatriots, he unselfconsciously aligns himself with the Roman cause. The essay breathes the kind of patriotism that could raise the spirits of the young emperor after the defeat of his army.

The essay on the Parthian war is interesting as an example of the kind of style that Fronto was still seeking to inspire Marcus to by both precept and example, even when his erstwhile pupil was emperor of the Roman Empire. Elegant word-play was one of the building blocks of true eloquence. A single example will suffice. After Cannae, three bushels of rings were drawn from the fingers of the Roman dead, but soon after, Carthage was defeated; illi, qui anulos detraxerunt, catenae inditae sunt (‘Those who had pulled off rings, were cast into chains’, De Bell. Parth. §8). The next sentence speaks admiringly of the multitude of Carthaginians and Africans captured by Scipio. No ‘phil-African’ patriotism is noticeable here.

**Bilingualism at Rome: the evidence of Quintilian and Fronto’s Latinity**

Latin-Greek bilingualism was taken for granted in Roman élite circles. As we noted, the Roman Marcus Aurelius unselfconsciously wrote his meditations in Greek, the language of philosophy.\(^8^0\) Letters to and from the imperial princes were occasionally in Greek; Greek was favoured by the ladies of the court. Quintilian (Inst. Orat. 1.12) advocates the introduction of Greek before any formal education in Latin; a child’s nurse should speak properly and a paedagogus should correct any solecisms (§§4, 8-11). The Afro-Roman élite would have followed similar educational practices, and clearly spoke both Latin and Greek.\(^8^1\)

Nowhere is there any reference in Fronto’s correspondence to an indigenous African language, not even Punic. Time and again Fronto refers to ‘us’ and ‘our’ when speaking of himself and his contemporaries as Latin speakers,

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\(^8^0\) See Hadot 1998:51-52 on Marcus’s bilingualism.

\(^8^1\) Thompson 1969 speaks of a ‘brilliant flowering of Romanitas in Roman Africa’ with no exclusive ‘colonial society’ in the British sense. Within three generations indigenous élites had been assimilated into the Roman settlers living among them, with no ‘rigid and immovable barriers between settler and native elements.’ See Thompson 1969:151-81 for lists of names and statistics indicating assimilation. For a good description of the process of Romanisation in North Africa, see Barton 1972:18-66; for linguistic mix, Millar 1968.
even when he is addressing a fellow-African, Junius Celsinus. Fronto, we
see, is often considered the first of a distinct, exuberant but pure, African
Latin, a style also characteristic of authors as widely divergent as Apuleius
and Tertullian. Fronto’s interests, we also noted, hark back to the ancients,
venerable authors such as Lucilius or Ennius, but also the borderine banal,
semi-obscene, broad comedy of Plautus. Although Fronto considers
Cicero’s letters, with their conversational Latin spiced with Greek vocabu-
larb, as the epitome of Latin style, his own is far less interspersed with Greek
words, only occasionally a technical term such as σχήματα or ἐικόνες.
However, at Ad M. Cn. 15.3 (VdH §4) Fronto praises both Marcus’s
‘elegant arguments’ and his use of a mixture of Greek and Latin.

Fronto appears fiercely defensive about the virtues of Latin as language.
Gellius relates a discussion about the names for colours. Fronto defended
Latin as not being poor, in comparison with Greek, which the Gaul Favori-
nus had claimed to be altogether prōlixior fusiorque quam nostra (‘more
comprehensive and copious than our own’, N.A. 2.26, §2). On this Fronto
discussed a series of Latin terms for various shades of red before asserting,
Non ... species rufi coloris plures apud Graecos quam apud nos nominantur (‘[different]
shades of red do not have more names among the Greeks than with us’,
N.A. 2.26, §4).85

Sweeping statements are dangerous, but perhaps Fronto’s tendency
toward hyper-correctness indicates an awareness for the need to ‘out-Roman’
the Romans, to ‘out-Latin’ the Latin-speakers in choice of vocabulary, while
keeping almost fanatically to those classical authors that stood for pristine

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82 Significantly, Latin seems to have long retained its purity in North Africa until it
was later swamped by the Arabo-Semitic tongues. There is no Afro-Romance
language such as the vernaculars that developed independently in Gaul, the Iberian
Peninsula and Moesia-Pannonia.
83 Barton 1972:77. Charles-Picard 1962:228-29 sees this style with its ‘noble
archaisms’, fondness for acrostics and word-play and general ‘preciosity’ as typically
African, dating from long before Fronto.
84 We have noted Fronto’s aversion to Seneca; he seems simply to ignore Vergil and
Ovid, but not, apparently, because they wrote poetry, whereas his interest lies in
prose: many of the older writers he praises were poets. Rather, we should ascribe to
Fronto the feeling, not unfamil ar today, that ‘older is better.’
85 Perhaps not the philosopher: Van den Hout 1999:496-97 identifies him rather as a
hairdresser whose speciality was hair-dyeing.
86 For discussion see Van den Hout 1999: 583-84.
Roman values and unadulterated Latinity. Such fanatical purism often betrays a certain insecurity in its proponents.

Would this then imply that Fronto consistently felt himself as something of an outsider? Over-anxious adherence to an imagined ideal model often indicates an attempt by outsiders to pose as insiders: that is, overcompensation resulting from an inherent ‘cultural cringe’. This does not seem to be the case with Fronto. Whether he ever felt himself to be an outsider – or even thought of himself as not Roman, except in occasional mock self-deprecation – is not apparent from the bulk of the correspondence. Perhaps he was, in earliest infancy, sung or talked to by a Libyan-speaking or Punic nurse, but all available evidence indicates that Fronto grew up as a Latin-speaker, with Greek as his second language. Fond as he was of the poet Ennius, Fronto displays no quasi-Ennian disjuncture: no *tria corda* for him. His having been born in Cirta is an accident of fate that in no way affected Fronto’s self-view as a Roman. True, he did display an interest in the affairs of his native city, but, although obviously remaining aware of his place of origin, Fronto was also interested in the Greek East. His correspondents and friends ranged from various Africans, to the imperial family and various Roman senators, to the Gaul Favorinus, and the Greek historian Appian.

**Conclusion**

All the evidence, Fronto’s close relationship with the imperial family, his warm, fatherly personality and frequently playful manner, his status as foremost orator, his patronage of both Africans and Romans and the respect with which he was treated by fellow-members of the Roman elite – all this shows us Fronto as a fully integrated Roman ‘insider’. When Fronto referred to himself as a ‘Libyan nomad’, and when he pretended that his Greek was bad or his speech barbaric, he was being as playful as when he pretended that he needed to seal up a copy of some verses by Marcus so that Victorinus could not read them (*Ad M. Caes* 1.8.6 [VdH 1.9.6]) or when he described Marcus Aurelius’s sons as ‘one a philosopher and the other a prince’, because one was eating brown bread and the other white (*Ad. Ant. Imp.* 1.3). Fronto may have had Libyan origins, but he was not a nomad, in any sense of the word. He had travelled to Rome in his youth, and there settled down. With

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87 Raven 1969:100 refers to Fronto as ‘more Roman than the Romans themselves’, but also notes that ‘Latin gave Africans a tongue.’ Evidence from North African inscriptions indicates a remarkable degree of linguistic purity in the Latin generally employed. See Boissier 1895:296-305.

88 Van den Hout 1999:60 *ad* 24.9 is worth quoting: ‘Frondo ridicules himself. He is not particularly conscious of his African origin.’
the exception of a stint as quae'stor in Sicily, he ranged no further than fashionable Baiae in the summer. In sum, Cornelius Fronto was a 'Libyan nomad' at Rome only in his sense of fun.

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