



Presentation of the recent volume

Writing Herstory through Ancient Greek Letters: Representations of Women in Fictional Epistolography,

by Antonios Pontoropoulos (Affiliated researcher, Swedish Institute in Rome/Uppsala University)
Bloomsbury Academic 2026

ABSTRACT

Pontoropoulos offers a re-evaluation of ancient Greek fictional letters through a feminist critical lens. The volume constitutes the first monograph to provide a sustained feminist analysis of ancient letters, aiming to reconstruct a “herstory” within a literary tradition that has long been approached from predominantly androcentric perspectives. The book focuses on the Roman Imperial period and Late Antiquity (2nd-6th centuries CE), eras in which letter-writing flourished as a sophisticated literary genre. It examines in detail the epistolary collections attributed to Aelian, Alciphron, and Aristaenetos, texts in which female characters emerge as rhetorical, speaking and desiring subjects rather than passive objects of male desire. Through their letters, women express desire, negotiate expectations, and articulate forms of agency within the constraints of their cultural and gendered environments.

Methodologically, the study combines close philological reading with theoretical insights drawn from modern feminist criticism, particularly Frech and Anglo-American feminist theory. Employing these theories as a framework, the book explores questions of gendered agency and subjectivity. Fictional letters are treated not merely as literary imitations of real correspondences, but as dynamic sites in which gender identities are constructed, contested and reimaged. A central concern of the volume is whether texts authored by men can nevertheless provide meaningful representations of female subjectivity. Rather than offering reductive answers, the analysis foregrounds ambiguity and tension, showing how female voices in fictional epistolography function within - and sometimes against - dominant ideological frameworks. The women who write these letters appear as complex figures whose identities are shaped through rhetorical performance and emotional expression.

The book makes significant contribution to several fields. It repositions ancient letter writing within contemporary debates on gender and literary representations while also proposing a new critical vocabulary for reading ancient texts alongside modern theoretical discourses. In doing so, it bridges the gap between classical philology and gender studies, demonstrating the relevance of ancient literature to current discussions of voice, authorship, and power. *Writing Herstory through Ancient Greek Letters* will be of interest to scholars and students of Classics, gender studies, comparative literature, and literary theory, as well as readers concerned with the historical construction of female gender and voice.

Prof. Vassilios Vertoudakis & Dr Marianna Thoma, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens will discuss the book in dialogue with the author.

The presentation takes place **Tuesday, May 5, 2026, at 19.00 (Athens)** with live presence at the Swedish Institute and online via Zoom. To participate (in-person or via Zoom), please register at: <https://www.sia.gr/en/events.php?eid=566#ParticipationForm>