

On the Nature of Ancient Letter Collections*

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ABSTRACT

There exists a strong link in modern thinking between letter collections and biographical or historical narration. Many ancient letter collections have been rearranged by modern editors along chronological lines, apparently with the aim of realizing the biographical and historiographical potential of these ancient collections. In their original format, however, non-fictional Greco-Roman letter collections were arranged predominantly by addressee or by theme (often without the preservation of chronology within addressee or thematic groupings), or they might be arranged on the principle of artful variety and significant juxtaposition. Consequently, some purpose or purposes other than biographical or historical narration must be attributed to ancient letter collections. This paper asks what those purposes might be.

Keywords: letter collections; addressee; biography; history; Latin letter-writers; epistolography; chronological narration; arrangement

I INTRODUCTION

The personal prose letter is the one ancient literary form that ‘appears to have altered least in the course of its descent to us’,¹ and in consequence letter collections are one of the most familiar genres of ancient literature. Yet readers of modern editions of such collections frequently do not realize that their order is not that of the manuscript traditions, but has rather been imposed by a modern editor, often in the form of a scheme that presents the letters in strict chronological order. How were ancient letter collections originally organized? What does their original arrangement suggest about their uses for ancient readers? In order to answer these questions, a sample of ancient letter collections is reviewed below, and typical layouts and arrangements for letter collections — as they can be observed in the ancient manuscript traditions — are established.² On the basis of this sample, one important negative point will emerge about the nature and purpose of ancient letter collections, along with several positive hypotheses.

The negative point, briefly put, is that there is no systematic or straightforward association between ancient letter collections and biographical or historical narration. Such an observation is a necessary step in the defamiliarization of ancient letter

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¹ P. White, *Cicero in Letters: Epistolary Relations of the Late Republic* (2010), 3.

² My inspiration has been Mary Beard’s investigation of the ancient structuring (and modern dismemberment) of the Ciceronian letter collections: ‘Ciceronian correspondences: making a book out of letters’, in T. P. Wiseman (ed.), *Classics in Progress* (2002), 103–44.

collections. Modern letter collections, as will be seen below in Section V of this paper, are often assimilated to biography — a genre which in its modern form features chronological narration as one of its defining characteristics. Similarly, it is often assumed that it is the broad purpose of ancient letter collections to set up a roughly chronological story, whether about the letter-writer (in which case letter collections are understood to be a species of (auto)biography), or about the letter-writer's times (in which case the collections are assimilated to the genre of history). In fact, to judge from the sample reviewed below, it seems rarely to have been among the primary purposes of an ancient letter collection to allow the story of the letter-writer and his times to unfold in straightforwardly linear fashion.³

Nevertheless, the assumption that a letter collection will give a narrative of a life or its times appears to go back to antiquity itself. For in his *Life of Atticus*, Cornelius Nepos offers a notorious comment on the function of one of Cicero's collection of letters (*Att.* 16.3–4):

... undecim uolumina epistularum ab consulatu eius usque ad extremum tempus ad Atticum missarum; quae qui legat, non multum desideret historiam contextam eorum temporum. Sic enim omnia de studiis principum, uitiis ducum, mutationibus rei publicae perscripta sunt ...

... eleven rolls of letters, sent to Atticus from the time of Cicero's consulship right down to the end: the reader would little need a continuous history of the period. For they offer so full a record of everything to do with statesmen's policies, generals' failings, and changes in the state ... (trans. N. Horsfall)

This passage is not without its own difficulties, not least as regards the relationship of this 'eleven roll'-edition to our sixteen-book *ad Atticum* collection⁴ (and the fact that this collection would in all probability not enter general circulation until perhaps the time of Nero).⁵ But what is clear is that Nepos finds this (largely) chronological collection of letters comparable to, and even usable as, a history of the Late Republic.

Whatever the actual plausibility of Nepos' claim, it does at least cohere with modern use of the collection. For the *ad Atticum* is often pressed into service as a kind of narrative (or supplementary narrative) of the collapse of the Roman Republic. Nevertheless, Nepos' characterization of the *ad Atticum* collection is inadequate as a description of ancient letter collections as a genre. For, as is shown below, ancient letter collections appear to have been predominantly arranged by addressee or by theme — often without any strong commitment to internal chronology even within addressee or thematic groupings — or by some other principle than the strictly chronological. In this context, the (largely) chronological *ad Atticum* collection stands out as something of an exception, or rather as part of a small minority of chronologically arranged collections. As a consequence, it is necessary to discard the notion of a necessary link between ancient letter collections and a commitment to setting out the story of the correspondent's life and times in chronological order.

It is important to stress this negative point — about the absence of a systematic or routine link between ancient letter collections and biography or history — to a modern audience, in view of the fact that such collections have repeatedly undergone rearrangement to an extent that is hard to parallel in any other ancient genre. For, as a brief review will show in Section III, editors have been busy since early modern times on

³ Relevant here is a distinction between modern interests in character *development* versus the insistence of ancient literary theory that the letter is a privileged arena for the display of character *per se* (ps. Demetr., *Eloc.* 227). For an investigation of the 'failure' of ancient biographers to display much of an interest in character development, see C. Pelling, *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (1990), 224–44, also 253–9 (on Plutarch).

⁴ D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero's Letters to Atticus, Volume I* (1965), 69–72.

⁵ On the highly controversial issue of the general availability of the *ad Atticum* collection, see Shackleton Bailey, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 60–8, 72–3; Beard, *op. cit.*, (n. 2), 116–19; White, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 32–3, 174–5.

a project of reorganizing ancient letter collections along chronological lines from the earliest dateable letter to the last. Frustratingly, editors are often unilluminating about the actual motivations for their rearrangements, as if the reasons for, and the benefits of, a chronological scheme are somehow self-evident.⁶ (All the more reason, perhaps, for some urgent defamiliarization of ancient letter collections.) Nevertheless, occasionally an editor will explicitly concede what surely lurks behind most attempts to re-order ancient letter collections, namely the desire to release the historiographical or biographical potential of the letters.⁷

In order to understand the original nature and purpose of ancient letter collections, some ground needs to be cleared first. Section II of this paper introduces the sample of eleven letter collections which form the basis of investigation. Section III argues that only two collections in the sample display evidence of overall chronological arrangement (in their manuscript traditions), and contrasts this fact with the modern preference for systematic linear rearrangement of the same collections. Section IV establishes typical patterns of arrangement for the remaining nine collections in their manuscript traditions. In conclusion, Section V asks what these arrangements suggest about the purposes and rôle of ancient letter collections.

Only a representative sample of collections, of course, can be covered in the course of a single paper. In my sample I include Cicero's two major collections (the *ad Atticum* and the *ad Familiares*), plus nine other Latin letter collections. But I emphasize that even this vast acreage of prose represents a mere fraction of the large number of ancient letter collections — both Greek and Latin — which survive from the classical, late antique, and Byzantine periods.⁸ As a result, the conclusions of this paper may subsequently require revision when tested against the broad field of ancient epistolography, above all against the many extant Greek letter collections.⁹ This paper, then, is offered by way of a first exploratory foray into a vast field.

⁶ cf. Beard, op. cit. (n. 2), 113–15 on the editors of Cicero's letters. The impetus behind modern editors' re-ordering of letter collections, while a fascinating subject in itself, is formally separate from the topics considered by this paper. I treat it elsewhere in 'Letters in autobiography', forthcoming in F. Montanari and A. Rengakos (eds), *Generic Interfaces*.

⁷ cf. especially F. X. Schönberger, *M.T. Ciceronis Epistolae ... temporis ordine dispositae* (1813–14), v: 'hanc Ciceronis epistolarum editionem ita instituendam putavimus, ut ... epistolas omnes, ceu *chronica* temporum memoria dignissimorum lectori proponeremus', and the quotations from the prefaces to the important editions of C. M. Wieland, *M.T. Cicero's Sämmtliche Briefe* (1808–21) and C. G. Schütz, *M.T. Ciceronis Epistolae ... temporis ordine dispositae* (1809–12) analysed by Beard, op. cit. (n. 2), 113, 115; cf. below Section III on these editions. Note also, for example, the significant on-line paratext provided in 2011 by Oxford University Press for J. L. Baird, *The Personal Correspondence of Hildegard of Bingen: Selected Letters* (2006): 'Freed from the organizational restraints of the Latin edition of the letters, [Baird] has arranged them in roughly chronological order ... As a result, this fascinating collection serves as a kind of life in letters ...' (emphasis added).

⁸ On, for example, the ancient arrangement of the Pauline epistles of the 'New Testament' (the most widely disseminated letter collection of all), see D. Trobisch, *Paul's Letter Collection: Tracing the Origins* (2001); on the non-chronological arrangement of the (highly influential) Platonic epistles, see A. D. Morrison, 'Narrative and epistolarity in the "Platonic" epistles', forthcoming in E. Bracke, O. Hodgkinson and P. A. Rosenmeyer (eds), *Epistolary Narratives in Ancient Greek Literature*. On an altogether larger scale, note the vast letter collection of Libanius, where the central tranche of letters (*Epp.* 19–607) appears to represent six separate batches of Libanius' archive files nevertheless arranged (probably by their author) so that the first batch (19–96), covering the years A.D. 358–359/60 comes well before the sixth (494–607), covering the years A.D. 356–7; see further A. F. Norman, *Libanius: Autobiography and Selected Letters, Volume I* (1992), 35–43.

⁹ This paper focuses on non-fictional letter collections. The main body of exceptions to the rule of non-chronological arrangement within letter collections is in fact provided by Greek spurious or fictional letter collections. On the chronological arrangements of, for example, the *Letters of Chion of Heraclea*, the *Letters of Themistocles*, and the *Letters of Euripides*, see N. Holzberg (ed.), *Der griechische Briefroman: Gattungstypologie und Textanalyse* (1994); P. A. Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions* (2001), 48–55; J. Hanink, 'The life of the author in the letters of "Euripides"', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 50 (2010), 537–64. Why it should be that *fictional* letter collections are chronologically arranged, while their non-fictional counterparts often avoid this layout, deserves further study.

II ELEVEN LATIN LETTER COLLECTIONS

The chosen sample of Latin letter collections includes both well-known writers and rather more obscure figures, and stretches in time across six centuries. It consists of five pagan epistolographers from the first century B.C. to the fourth century A.D. — Cicero (106–43 B.C.), Seneca (c. A.D. 1–65), Pliny (c. A.D. 61–112), Fronto (c. A.D. 95–166), and Symmachus (c. A.D. 340–402) — plus five Christian authors from the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. — namely Ambrose (c. A.D. 340–397), Jerome (c. A.D. 347–420), Paulinus of Nola (c. A.D. 353–431), Augustine (A.D. 354–430), and Sidonius Apollinaris (c. A.D. 430–485). This sample combines disparateness of content with evident continuity of form. The politics of Cicero, the ethics of Seneca and the hypochondria of Fronto may at first appear incongruous when lined up alongside the Christian apologetics, Biblical exegesis and matters of ecclesiastical discipline which fill the pages of later writers. Nevertheless, it is arguable that the vast majority of their letters satisfy the minimum ‘contextual and formal characteristics’ normally attributed to the letter form, and that as collections they display strong family resemblances to one another.¹⁰ Furthermore, standard types of letter persist throughout the sample, e.g. consolatory, recommendation, exhorting, praising, etc. Finally, as will become clear below, despite fundamental changes in belief (and preferred narrative patterns) between the first and fourth centuries A.D., methods of arranging letter collections display not only some consistency of practice, but even continuity.

Within the sample, it appears certain that four authors edited and published their collections within their own lifetimes: Seneca, Pliny (with the possible exception of the tenth book of his correspondence, addressed to Trajan), Ambrose,¹¹ and Sidonius. Seneca’s philosophical correspondence with Lucilius survives in twenty books containing 124 letters, although both internal and external evidence suggests that there were more in antiquity.¹² The ten-book correspondence of Ambrose, comprising nine books of private letters on a variety of topics and one book of public business, is evidently modelled in structural terms on the correspondence of Pliny.¹³ The Plinian model is even more evident in the nine books of private correspondence published by Sidonius, since he draws attention to the parallels with Pliny at the opening and close of his collection (I.I.I, 9.I.I.).¹⁴

The remaining seven collections present a decidedly mixed picture. The somewhat mysterious circumstances surrounding the editing of the *ad Atticum* of Cicero were introduced earlier in connection with Cornelius Nepos. As for the collection we know as *ad Familiares*, Cicero certainly contemplated putting together a collection of letters to friends during his own lifetime (*Att.* 16.5.5; cf. *Fam.* 16.17.1);¹⁵ but the task of editing such correspondence seems to have fallen on either his secretary Tiro or some unknown early imperial figure.¹⁶ It is also unclear whether our sixteen-book *ad Familiares* was

¹⁰ For an analysis of such characteristics, see M. Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters: an Anthology* (2003), 1; for the application of the Wittgensteinian idea of the ‘family-resemblance concept’ to letter collections, see R. K. Gibson and A. D. Morrison, ‘What is a letter?’, in R. Morello and A. D. Morrison (eds), *Ancient Letters* (2007), 1–16.

¹¹ Another seventeen letters attributed to Ambrose are transmitted outside his ten-book collection (*epistulae extra collectionem*).

¹² See B. Inwood, *Seneca: Selected Philosophical Letters* (2007), xiii.

¹³ M. Zelzer, *Sancti Ambrosii opera: epistularum libri 1–10*, vol. 2 (1990), xvii–xxxvii; J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose of Milan: Political Letters and Speeches* (2005), 31–2.

¹⁴ See R. K. Gibson, ‘Pliny and the letters of Sidonius’, in B. J. Gibson and R. D. Rees (eds), *Pliny in Late Antiquity*, *Arethusa* 46.2 (2013). Poignantly, Sidonius cannot provide a tenth book of correspondence with an emperor, since by the end of his ninth book around the early A.D. 480s there was no longer an emperor to whom he might write.

¹⁵ On these passages and their contexts, see Shackleton Bailey, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 59–60.

¹⁶ For various views on the identity of the editor(s) and the date(s) of publication, see D. R. Shackleton Bailey,

'published' as a unified collection after Cicero's death (although this seems unlikely), or whether this unification was a product of later antiquity after individual books had been in separate circulation for some while.¹⁷ Certainly, many more books of letters to friends circulated in antiquity than have survived into the modern era.¹⁸

The editing of the letters of Fronto — discovered in a single copy in 1815 by Angelo Mai — is another matter for controversy. The corpus consists of various multi-book collections of correspondence, principally with Marcus Aurelius, but also with other members of the imperial household, and with a number of friends. Older critics argued for the arrangement and publication of the entire corpus by Fronto himself; but in the more recent view of Ted Champlin, it is 'not impossible that several editors brought the various books out at different times after Fronto's death, bringing into play different intelligences and different methods'.¹⁹ The correspondence of Symmachus, which contains around 900 letters, bears some resemblance to the Plinian model of nine books of private correspondence and one book of official communications to the emperor; but uncertainty once more hangs over the identity of its editor(s). Some argue that the collection and organization of letters in Book 1 and perhaps even Books 1–7 was the work of Symmachus himself; but others believe that either the first nine books or entire ten-book collection were the work of Symmachus' son. Other permutations have been suggested.²⁰

As for the editing of the remaining three collections, the situation here is less controversial, in as much as almost no modern critic favours an argument for a single authoritative editor. But the agreed absence of single editors inevitably points towards a highly complex state of affairs in the manuscript traditions. For the manuscripts of the letters of Jerome, Paulinus and Augustine offer little evidence of a canonical ordering of their collections, whether established by the author himself or by an editor in later antiquity. Around 123 genuine letters of Jerome are in existence today. In his own lifetime, Jerome allowed only a small number of his letters to circulate, whether as independent items or in structured collections. However, the vast majority of his correspondence appears to have circulated independently in various free-floating dossiers comprising limited numbers of letters. It was only in the early medieval period that these dossiers began to be put together to form larger compilations of various sizes; but even at this stage, no canonical ordering emerged.²¹

In the case of Paulinus of Nola, a correspondent created a catalogue of the contents of the letters within Paulinus' own lifetime (*Epist.* 41.1); but highly varied arrangements of the letters within the manuscript tradition suggest that neither Paulinus nor a later editor produced a definitive edition.²² Essentially the same situation — albeit on a considerably larger scale — obtains for the rather more voluminous correspondence of Augustine.

Cicero, Epistulae ad Familiares, Volume I (1977), 23–4; Beard, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 118–19 with nn. 46–8, 130; White, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 31–4, 174–5.

¹⁷ See Beard, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 117–18. On the difficulties of using 'publish' in the context of book circulation in the ancient world, see Beard, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 116 n. 40.

¹⁸ For the thirty-nine or more 'lost' books of Cicero's correspondence with other 'familiares', see J. Nicholson, 'The survival of Cicero's Letters', *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 9 (1998), 63–105, at 76–87; White, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 171.

¹⁹ E. Champlin, 'The chronology of Fronto', *Journal of Roman Studies* 64 (1974), 136–59, at 157.

²⁰ For these and other views, see A. Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (2011), 366–83, also J. F. Matthews, 'The letters of Symmachus', in J. W. Binns (ed.), *Latin Literature of the Fourth Century* (1974), 58–99; M. R. Salzman, 'Travel and communication in the Letters of Symmachus', in L. Ellis and F. L. Kidner (eds), *Travel, Communication and Geography in Late Antiquity: Sacred and Profane* (2004), 81–94; C. Sogno, *Q. Aurelius Symmachus: a Political Biography* (2006), 32–4, 59–63; G. Kelly, 'Pliny and Symmachus', in Gibson and Rees, *op. cit.* (n. 14). On the status of Book 10, see below n. 58.

²¹ See the authoritative account given by A. Cain, *The Letters of Jerome* (2009), 223–7; cf. the Appendix below.

²² See C. Conybeare, *Paulinus Noster* (2000), 12–15, 161–5.

He intended to redact his correspondence himself towards the end of his life (*Epist.* 224.2); but it seems generally agreed that Augustine died before any organization of his letters into personally sanctioned collections could take place. Nevertheless, for all that, a core group of between 120 and 140 letters — perhaps edited by an early disciple — seems to have circulated widely not long after Augustine's death. This initial collection gathered additions over time, reaching a total of over 300 letters in the modern era. As might be expected in these circumstances, the manuscripts display differing numbers of letters and differing systems of arranging them.²³

III CHRONOLOGICAL LETTER COLLECTIONS: ANCIENT AND MODERN

Of the eleven letter collections which comprise the sample introduced in Section II, only one can be described as truly chronological in its layout. And in a somewhat qualified sense. For Seneca's letters to Lucilius go to some length to avoid the provision of explicit chronological markers. Like nearly all the collections in our sample, Seneca's letters provide no authorial datelines for individual letters. The main exception to this rule is provided by Cicero, around one third of whose surviving correspondence gives the co-ordinates of composition, dispatch or receipt of a letter, with reference to place and/or date (usually day and month, rarely year).²⁴ In this context, the absence of authorial dates from Seneca's correspondence is unsurprising. But the author evidently aims to foster a time-free zone, inasmuch as he largely avoids reference to contemporary events of the kind that might allow a secure dating for individual letters. (Letter 91, on the conflagration at *Lugdunum*, is an exception that proves the rule.) Despite all this, not only do intellectual and moral progress provide a species of narrative scheme for Seneca's collection, but references to the seasons follow a natural sequence, events build on one another (e.g. the refusal to travel by sea in 57.1 refers back to the sea-sickness of Letter 53), and there is an increase in the length of letters and philosophical complexity over the course of the collection.²⁵ In other words, there is a detectable — if largely unobtrusive — chronological scheme to Seneca's letters. (This unobtrusiveness is perhaps related to the fact that the letters — as several recent studies have shown — ask largely to be read within the books built to house them inside the collection²⁶).

It is arguable that Seneca's address of his letters to a single correspondent, and their apparent preservation of narrative order, may point to the adoption of the *ad Atticum* collection as a model. Yet not even this Ciceronian collection, despite the presence of a good number of authorial datelines, preserves perfect chronological order. To cite just one notorious example, *ad Att.* 1.1 (July 65 B.C.) postdates 1.5 by some three years (November 68 B.C.). As Beard has argued, the ancient editor undoubtedly had a particular reason to disturb the order so visibly, inasmuch as the opening reference to

²³ See J. Ebbeler, *Disciplining Christians: Correction and Community in Augustine's Letters* (2012), ch. 1, summarizing earlier work.

²⁴ See the comprehensive analysis of O. Rossi, *Letters from Far Away: Ancient Epistolary Travel Writing and the Case of Cicero's Correspondence* (dissertation Yale, 2010), 34–122, also White, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 75–6. Perhaps many of our letter writers did provide dates for letters in the original autograph (cf. Cic., *Att.* 3.23.1); but such chronological material is highly vulnerable to removal in the process of editing and (particularly) transmission: see White, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 202 n. 52. Among documentary papyri surviving from Egypt, official or contractual letters are usually dated, but private letters often are not; see J. L. White, *Light from Ancient Letters* (1986), 5–8. But for the presence of 'archon' dates in the letters of Epicurus, see B. Inwood, 'The importance of form in Seneca's philosophical letters', in Morello and Morrison, *op. cit.* (n. 10), 133–48, at 143–4.

²⁵ See especially M. Wilson, 'Seneca's Epistles reclassified', in S. J. Harrison (ed.), *Texts, Ideas and the Classics* (2001), 164–87, at 184–5.

²⁶ See Wilson, *op. cit.* (n. 25), 179–86; J. Henderson, *Morals and Villas in Seneca's Letters* (2004), 6–52; C. Richardson-Hay, *First Lessons: Book 1 of Seneca's Epistulae Morales* (2006), 13–73.

Cicero's candidature for the consulship in 1.1. ('petitionis nostrae, quam tibi summae curae esse scio ...') provides a dramatically effective opening to the correspondence.²⁷ But if the *ad Atticum* — perhaps having just entered general circulation for the first time in Seneca's day (as noted earlier)²⁸ — inspired the apparent chronological ordering of the *ad Lucilium*, its influence may have ended there. For no other collection in our sample arranges a multi-book set of letters on the same principle, whether a collection addresses just one correspondent or many. The collections of Pliny and (to a lesser extent) Sidonius, it is true, display a kind of macro-chronology, whereby letters which come first are generally earlier than letters which appear in later books. But, as will become evident below, the dominant principles of arrangement for these three are quite different from that found in Seneca and the *ad Atticum*.

The contrast between the relative dearth of *ancient* collections of chronologically ordered letters on the one hand, and the arrangements preferred by *modern* editors on the other, is nothing less than striking. For eight — i.e. nearly three quarters — of our letter collections have been chronologically re-ordered in modern or early modern editions. Of these eight editorial rearrangements, seven have taken place in editions that were either authoritative or widely used in their day. In several cases, the editions, in fact, remain either authoritative or widely used.

Whatever the reasons for the interventions of modern editors, interest in the individual dates for each of Cicero's letters can be traced back (at least) to the 1555 commentary on the *ad Familiares* by Girolamo Ragazzoni.²⁹ The first attempts to systematically re-order any of the collections in our sample appear to belong to the early seventeenth century, with, for example, the 1611 edition of the *ad Familiares* by Adamus Theodorus Siberus.³⁰ The later seventeenth century, in fact, saw a boom in attempts to reorganize other letter collections along chronological grounds — a boom that would find a powerful reverberation in the nineteenth century. For in the closing two decades of the seventeenth century, the letters of Paulinus of Nola,³¹ Ambrose, and Augustine³² would all be re-ordered in chronological editions, to be joined in the early eighteenth century by the letters of Jerome.³³ The task was not undertaken without some recognition of the difficulties involved, since, for example, in the editions of the letters of Ambrose and Augustine, it was acknowledged that not all letters could be assigned a convincing date. As a result, a *classis* of undateable letters was printed separately in each case from the chronologically ordered items.

²⁷ Beard, op. cit. (n. 2), 128–9. As with Seneca, the ancient book divisions show signs of being meaningful editorial units on their own; see Beard, op. cit. (n. 2), 125.

²⁸ See above n. 5. At any rate, Seneca quotes a passage from *Att.* 1.16.5 at *Epist.* 97.4–6, and from *Att.* 1.12.1, 4 at *Epist.* 118.1–2; cf. also *Epist.* 21.4.

²⁹ Hieronymi Ragazonii, *In Epistolas Ciceronis Familiares commentarius: in quo brevissime, quo quaeque earum ordine scripta sit, ex ipsa potissimum historia demonstratur*. For the actual re-ordering of Book 16 in printed editions of the day, see Beard, op. cit. (n. 2), 131.

³⁰ *M. Tullii Ciceronis Epistolarum Familiarum nova editio*, etc. (1611).

³¹ J. B. Le Brun des Marettes, *Pontii Meropii Paulini, Nolani episcopi, Opera digesta in II tomos, secundum ordinem temporum, nunc primum disposita*, etc. (1685).

³² The 1690 chronological edition of Ambrose's letters was part of a complete edition of the author produced by the Benedictines of St Maur (1686–90), as was the edition of Augustine's letters (1679–1700). On the Maurists — the intellectual powerhouse of the French Catholic Church in their day — see D.-O. Hurel, 'The Benedictines of the Congregation of St.-Maur and the Church Fathers', in I. Backus (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists* (1997), 1009–38; H. M. Pabel, *Herculean Labours: Erasmus and the Editing of St Jerome's Letters in the Renaissance* (2008), 347–8.

³³ Domenico Vallarsi's edition of the letters was part of an eleven-volume complete edition of Jerome — published between 1734 and 1742 — based on an earlier Maurist edition by Dom Jean Martianay (1693–1706). The Maurist edition itself claimed to order the letters chronologically, but was soon judged defective by critics of the day, and eventually overtaken by Vallarsi. On both these editions of the letters, see Pabel, op. cit. (n. 32), 132, 348–52.

The chronological rearrangements of these late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century editions — authoritative in their day — would be given a new lease of life in the mid-nineteenth century. For, when the Abbé Migne began publication of his massive *Patrologia Latina* (1844–55), he chose these particular editions as the basis of his own texts of the letters of Ambrose, Jerome, Paulinus and Augustine.³⁴ Their influence would be extended into the twentieth century, as reprints and revised editions of volumes in the series continued to appear. Meanwhile, in the world of pre-Christian epistolography, C. M. Wieland (1808–21) and C. G. Schütz (1809–12) had undertaken the most radical chronological re-ordering yet conceived for any of the corpora in our sample.³⁵ Building on earlier attempts to re-order the *ad Familiares*, these editors undertook the task of combining the two major Ciceronian collections (*ad Familiares*, *ad Atticum*) with their minor fellows (*ad Quintum Fratrem*, *ad Brutum*) — more than 900 letters in total — and producing a single, continuous chronological series of letters.

Inspired explicitly by the efforts of Wieland and Schütz, the first editor of Fronto was moved to predict in 1823 the same happy fate for the corpus of letters which he had discovered.³⁶ But before that could happen (in the Loeb edition of 1919–20, where the fulfilment of Mai's prophesy is noted),³⁷ an influential re-edition of Cicero's complete letters in chronological order had begun under the auspices of R. Y. Tyrrell (soon to be joined by L. C. Purser). Begun in 1879, the project would not be finished until 1933.³⁸ Coincidentally, in the same year (1879), the French scholar M. E. Baret produced a chronologically re-ordered edition of the letters of Sidonius. It is fair to say that this edition of Sidonius — unlike many of those mentioned above — was neither widely used in its day nor regarded as authoritative.³⁹

Revisions of previous editors' chronological orderings of collections in our sample continued well into the twentieth century. The best-known example is perhaps that of Shackleton Bailey, who adopted the compromise position of preserving the separate identity of the four Ciceronian collections (1965–80),⁴⁰ but of re-ordering each internally according to a revised chronology (widely agreed to represent a significant advance on Tyrrell and Purser's editions).⁴¹ It is possible, in fact, that the editions of Shackleton Bailey represent the high-tide mark of the project of chronological rearrangement that has been going on since early modern times. Already in the late 1960s, for example, a movement to restore the letters of Ambrose to their authentic manuscript order had begun. A non-chronological edition initiated in 1968 by O. Faller would eventually be completed in 1990 by M. Zelzer.⁴² Similarly, the letters of Fronto were restored to their manuscript order in the authoritative 1988 edition of M. P. J. van den Hout (which itself revises his own earlier edition of 1954).⁴³

³⁴ PL 16 Migne (letters of Ambrose); PL 30 Migne (letters of Jerome); PL 33 Migne (letters of Augustine); PL 61 Migne (letters of Paulinus). On Migne, see R. H. Bloch, *God's Plagiarist. Being an Account of the Fabulous Industry and Irregular Commerce of the Abbé Migne* (1994).

³⁵ For their editions, see above n. 7.

³⁶ A. Mai, *M. Cornelii Frontonis et M. Aurelii imperatoris Epistulae* (1823), xviii.

³⁷ C. R. Haines, *The Correspondence of Marcus Cornelius Fronto* (1919–20), vol. 1, p. xxii.

³⁸ R. Y. Tyrrell and L. C. Purser, *Correspondence of M. Tullius Cicero, Arranged According to its Chronological Order ...*, etc. On this edition and its complicated publication history, see Beard, op. cit. (n. 2), 106–16.

³⁹ Part of the reason is that Baret's edition (*Oeuvres de Sidoine Apollinaire*, etc. (1879)) re-orders letters only *within* individual books.

⁴⁰ D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero's Letters to Atticus*, six volumes (1965–68); *Cicero, Epistulae ad Familiares*, two volumes (1977); *Cicero, Epistulae ad Quintum Fratrem et M. Brutum* (1980).

⁴¹ Notoriously, Shackleton Bailey has almost nothing to say on the rationale for this compromise position; see op. cit. (n. 16), 24.

⁴² O. Faller and M. Zelzer, *Sancti Ambrosii Opera. 10, Tom. 1–3, Epistulae et acta. Epistularum libri 1–10* (1968–1982–1990, CSEL 5.82).

⁴³ M. P. J. van den Hout, *M. Cornelii Frontonis Epistulae* (1988), with separate *ordo chronologicus* at op. cit., 292–4. For similar developments in recent editions of the letters of Jerome, see Pabel, op. cit. (n. 32), 170–3.

However, it remains the fact that many of the ancient letter collections in the sample continue to be read today in editions which follow a chronological order without any basis in the manuscript traditions of the relevant works. This is either because textually authoritative editions which establish a chronological order are available or continue to be produced (as in the case of Daur's new edition of the letters of Augustine),⁴⁴ or because chronological editions are convenient for less respectable reasons (e.g. Haines' Loeb edition of Fronto offers the only complete English translation). Even where manuscript order has been restored, the chronological ordering of earlier editions may lurk as a ghostly presence, as in the Faller-Zelzer edition of Ambrose, where the chronological numbering of the early modern editions is retained alongside the authentic book-and-letter numbering of the manuscripts (e.g. Ambros., *Epist.* 1.1 [7]).

In sum, if only two out of the eleven letter collections in this sample reveal the kind of chronological ordering familiar from modern letter collections, the labours of editors since early modern times have acted to obscure this state of affairs with a long-term project of introducing chronological order into ancient letter collections. The project has not been comprehensive — no one (so far as I know) appears to have attempted to re-order the collections of Pliny or Symmachus — but its success may be judged by the fact that editors rarely feel the need to explain themselves.

The next task is to step away from modern editions of ancient letters and return to the manuscripts, asking how the non-chronological items in our sample — nine out of eleven collections — were arranged by ancient authors and editors.

IV PATTERNS OF ARRANGEMENT IN ANCIENT LETTER COLLECTIONS

The remaining letter collections in the sample show two (or perhaps three) dominant patterns of arrangement. The first pattern — perhaps really two patterns (but often difficult to separate in practice) — involves arrangement by addressee or by loose topic, where letters may be ordered by addressee alone, by loose topic alone, or by addressee *and* loose topic in combination.⁴⁵ In each case internal chronology may be observed in the ordering of letters, but is just as often abandoned. The remaining pattern is arrangement for the sake of (artistic) variety. Here chronology is usually abandoned at the level of the book-unit, but may be maintained at the level of the collection as a whole. A majority of letter collections in the sample exhibit variations in style of arrangement in one book or more (usually more), i.e. most collections do not maintain a single pattern of organization throughout.

Appropriately enough, treatment below will be by topic rather than strict chronology. We begin with arrangement by addressee and/or loose topic in the *ad Familiares* of Cicero.

Arrangement by Addressee and Topic

The sixteen books of the *ad Familiares* demonstrate tremendous variety in terms of principles of internal organization, although in each case the fundamental principles are those of addressee and/or topic. For example, Book 13 consists entirely of letters of recommendation, while Book 14 contains twenty-four letters to Cicero's wife Terentia (and other family members). The combination of addressee *and* loose topic(s) as organizing principles can be seen, for example, in Book 4, which consists of six letters

⁴⁴ K. D. Daur, *Augustinus: Epistulae 1–CXXXIX*, CCSL 31, 31A, 31B (2004, 2005, 2009).

⁴⁵ This classification, in fact, can be applied to the two collections discussed earlier in Section III, since Cicero's letters to Atticus and Seneca's letters to Lucilius obviously belong to the broad category of arrangement by addressee, and — to a lesser extent — arrangement by topic.

to and from Servius Sulpicius Rufus (49–45 B.C.); four letters to and from M. Claudius Marcellus, the colleague of Servius Sulpicius Rufus in the consulship of 51 B.C. (all from the period of Marcellus' 'exile' in 46 B.C.); an on-site report from Servius on the death of Marcellus in Athens in 45 B.C.; and finally three letters to ex-Pompeians, also currently in exile (from 46–45 B.C.). Here, against a pervasive background of exile and displacement during the civil war era, the editor of this book has evidently decided to place side-by-side sets of letters where shared high office connects the two main addressees. Chronological order is largely preserved within the correspondence groups, but has not been imposed across the book as a whole.

Despite the ragbag appearance of such books, and the lack of a premium put on strict chronology, they can be read as satisfying artistic units — as Mary Beard has shown for *ad Familiares* Book 16 — in the manner of an Augustan poetry book (an analogy to be pursued in Section V below).⁴⁶ Book 16 consists of twenty-six letters to Tiro from Cicero and other family members, plus one epistle from Cicero's brother to Cicero himself on the subject of Tiro. In its original manuscript order, the book has a distinct design — invisible in re-ordered editions of the correspondence — where two groups of eleven letters from separate periods (50–49 and 45–44 B.C. respectively) are placed on either side of a central group of five focusing on the event of the manumission of Tiro. This central group of letters probably belongs to 53 B.C. and is thus — quite visibly — out of chronological sequence within the book (not to mention the chronological 'disorder' evident *within* each of the three sections which make up the book). However, Cicero's concern with Tiro's health is a constant concern throughout the book: a theme which hardly requires strict chronological ordering to emerge successfully as a motif in the relations between master and (ex-)slave.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the placement of the 'manumission' letters as a separate group in the centre of Book 16 turns them into a pivotal moment in the relationship between Cicero and Tiro.⁴⁸

After the *ad Familiares*, we leapfrog Seneca (mentioned earlier) and Pliny (treated below) to arrive at the correspondence of Fronto. The Fronto corpus resembles the *ad Familiares* in terms of the variety of ways in which the ancient editor(s) chose to structure its various constituent books.⁴⁹ Owing to the complications of the transmission process, uncertainty hangs over the exact number of letters in some books of the collection, and their exact placement (not to mention the fact that some 40 per cent of the single surviving codex is known to be missing). Nor can we be sure that the broad order of the collection as we have it represents an order that was canonical in antiquity.⁵⁰ Be that as it may, it is clear that the consolidation of various letters into topic-based groupings has now been formalized with the explicit provision of appropriate titles by an ancient editor. Thus, for example, four letters written to Marcus Aurelius after his accession, all united by the emperor's retreat to the seaside resort of Alsium, are grouped under the title *de Feriis Alsiensibus*.⁵¹ A more heterogeneous set of letters to Marcus Aurelius heads the collection in five books, where occasional groupings of

⁴⁶ Beard, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 130–43; cf. Shackleton Bailey, *op. cit.* (n. 16), 23: 'all the Books [of the *ad Familiares*] show varying degrees of internal cohesion, some of them more than has been generally recognised' — before definitively dissolving the Books.

⁴⁷ Beard, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 134–5.

⁴⁸ Beard, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 140.

⁴⁹ For a detailed and authoritative survey of the entirety of Fronto's correspondence, its constituent books, and principles of organization, see Champlin, *op. cit.* (n. 19). A conspectus of both newer and older views on the chronology of the books can be located in M. P. J. van den Hout, *A Commentary on the Letters of M. Cornelius Fronto* (1999).

⁵⁰ For a clear overview of the transmission and editing of Fronto, see A. G. Freisenbruch, *The Correspondence of Marcus Cornelius Fronto* (dissertation Cambridge, 2004), 15–43.

⁵¹ Note that some *titles* for ancient groupings are modern supplements for lost originals; see van den Hout, *op. cit.* (n. 49), 313.

letters by shared theme can be discerned.⁵² But chronology appears not to have been a principle of arrangement adhered to either here or (for the most part) elsewhere in Fronto's correspondence.⁵³ Typical, here, is the first of two books *ad Amicos*, which collects twenty-seven letters to various friends (not, in fact, grouped together by recipient), where 'chronology is very obviously upset';⁵⁴ but where there does appear to be a species of thematic ordering.⁵⁵

Rather less varied, in terms of differing principles of arrangement, is the correspondence of Symmachus. The first seven books of the letters are ordered by correspondent, with each correspondent group kept strictly separate from its neighbours, albeit without strong internal chronology for any given group. Most books feature a plurality of addressees, although Book 2 contains letters to a single correspondent covering thirty years (Nichomachus Flavianus senior, A.D. 360–94), while Book 6 is entirely devoted to letters to Symmachus' daughter and her husband (Nichomachus Flavianus junior). There appear to be signs of conscious overall design inasmuch as Book 1 opens with a series of letters to Symmachus' father (1.1–12), while Book 7 opens with a series addressed now to Symmachus' son (7.1–14): a pairing matched by the address of Books 2 and 6 to Flavianus senior and junior. It has been argued that the order of the correspondents in Books 1–7 reflects, in broad terms, the main phases of Symmachus' influence or career, beginning in the years before A.D. 384 and ending c. A.D. 402;⁵⁶ but the truth of this may be doubted.⁵⁷ Books 8–10 display a rather more heterogeneous set of principles of arrangement (including rough arrangement by shared subject).⁵⁸

So far, then, the *ad Familiares* of Cicero, plus the correspondence of Fronto and Symmachus, demonstrate a variety of ways in which letters may be grouped by addressee and/or theme. Internal chronology within individual books or groupings of letters appears to be relatively unimportant in Fronto and Symmachus. As for the *ad Familiares*, groups of letters to single correspondents often show internal chronological order; but this rule is far from invariable. In the formulation of Peter White, '[the editor] organized the material he had selected into intelligible sequences, usually by putting together all letters to or from a particular person and then clustering those letters by time period. But he did not always bother to put them into exact chronological order even when they were dated'.⁵⁹

The state of affairs observable in the texts of *ad Familiares*, Fronto and Symmachus does not greatly differ from that found in the correspondence of Jerome, Augustine and Paulinus of Nola — except in so far as the manuscript traditions of the latter trio exhibit no canonical order. A summary of various styles of arrangement in those traditions can be

⁵² For example, noting that the two most significant events in Fronto's life were his appointments as imperial tutor and consul, van den Hout, op. cit. (n. 49), 3 suggests: 'The ancient editor, ... wish[ing] to draw our attention to these events' clusters letters relating to them into Books 1 and 2 respectively.

⁵³ See Champlin, op. cit. (n. 19), 139–45, also van den Hout, op. cit. (n. 49), 3. One possible exception is formed by the first five letters of the first book of *Ad Antonin. Imp.*, which may record in narrative order the interchange of letters between Fronto and Marcus Aurelius just after the birth of the latter's twins in August A.D. 161: see Champlin, op. cit. (n. 19), 145–6; but this is disputed by van den Hout, op. cit. (n. 49), 223–4.

⁵⁴ Champlin, op. cit. (n. 19), 153.

⁵⁵ i.e. letters of commendation (1.1–10), consolation (1.22–5) and (perhaps) those dealing with literary affairs (1.11–21) all grouped separately, albeit without any strong principle of ordering internal to the individual groupings, beyond occasional clustering by shared addressee; see Champlin, op. cit. (n. 19), 149–53; van den Hout, op. cit. (n. 49), 399.

⁵⁶ i.e. Book 1 (c. A.D. 370–384), 3 (c. A.D. 370–90), 4 (c. A.D. 398–402), 5 (A.D. 376–96), and 7 (c. A.D. 379–402); see Matthews, op. cit. (n. 20), 66–7.

⁵⁷ See Sogno, op. cit. (n. 20), 60–2; Cameron, op. cit. (n. 20), 368–9.

⁵⁸ On Books 8–9, see Matthews, op. cit. (n. 20), 67–8. Book 10 contains official communications to the emperor, arranged without internal chronological order (Cameron, op. cit. (n. 20), 367). As extant, this book consists of two letters only; but the separately transmitted *Relationes* of Symmachus is often thought to form the missing part of Book 10; see Kelly, op. cit. (n. 20).

⁵⁹ White, op. cit. (n. 1), 61; cf. 56.

found in the Appendix at the end of this paper. There it will be seen that a preference for arranging letters by addressee and/or theme prevails into later antiquity. An interest in preserving chronological order within dossiers is observable, particularly in the letters of Augustine (and, in one striking instance, in a short collection put together by Jerome during his own lifetime); but in no case is chronology systematically pursued in the manner familiar from modern letter collections.

Before turning to other styles of arrangement, a preliminary comment may be offered on the significance of ancient editors' preference for ordering letters (particularly) by addressee. It is likely that this editorial tendency catered to a simple thirst among readers for knowledge about the great figures of the day with whom the letter-writer exchanged correspondence. For example, Cicero — in the lost books of his letters — corresponded with Julius Caesar, and there were good reasons for editors to collect these letters together for a readership no doubt eager to see how Cicero interacted with this highly significant figure. If the preserved books of the *ad Familiares* (plus later collections from Fronto to Augustine) are anything to go by, readers might even be able to read some of Caesar's replies blended in alongside Cicero's originals.⁶⁰ In other words, many ancient letter collections were not necessarily all about the writer, but also about the correspondent and perhaps particularly about the writer's relationship with — and in some cases actual dialogue with — that correspondent.

However, this can only be a very partial account of the reasons behind ancient editorial choices. Further suggestions will be made in Section V below.

The Plinian Model: Artistic Variety and Significant Juxtaposition

From Symmachus in the fourth century A.D. we must now track back to the late first century, and turn our attention to the highly influential letter collection of Pliny the Younger. His immediate predecessor was, of course, Seneca, who had published his collection only four decades previously. Pliny, in fact, decisively rejects Seneca by abandoning both chronology and addressee as principles of arrangement, in favour of a method he describes as follows (*Epist.* 1.1.1):

collegi non seruato temporis ordine (neque enim historiam componebam), sed ut quaeque in manus uenerat

I have collected them, without preserving the order of dates (since it was not history that I was compiling), but just as each came to hand. (trans. J. D. Lewis)

A first reading of Pliny's collection may appear to substantiate this claim to random placing. A reader accustomed to finding letters clustered by addressee (or theme) may be disconcerted to discover that not only is it on the rarest of occasions that Pliny places two letters to the same addressee side by side (i.e. 2.11–12, both to Arrianus), but also that he allows no subject to dominate for long. It is only in Pliny's tenth book that the letters are collected by addressee and, for the most part, united by subject. For here either Pliny himself or a later editor has gathered together his correspondence with the emperor Trajan, where the vast bulk of the letters (10.15–121) belong to the period of Pliny's stint as governor of Bithynia-Pontus.⁶¹

⁶⁰ In this connection, it is worth noting that Ciceronian letter collections were often known and identified in antiquity by the name of the correspondent; cf. e.g. Gellius 1.22.19, 4.9.6, 12.13.21 'in libro M. Tulli epistularum ad Servium Sulpicium', Beard, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 117–18.

⁶¹ Note that while Pliny's Bithynian letters appear in uncharacteristically strict chronological order, Trajan's replies are paired with the letters of Pliny to which they respond. This pairing disturbs the original chronological order of Pliny's actual sending and receipt of letters, and effectively groups them by topic, since

Nevertheless, on a second reading of the nine-book correspondence, some patterns begin to emerge. First, letters on the same subject, although often widely scattered, almost invariably preserve narrative order from one instalment to the next.⁶² Secondly, as hinted in Section III, it eventually becomes clear that each successive book contains letters that are generally later than those in immediately preceding books. Pliny is not absolutely systematic here — Letter 1.10, for example, would clearly find a better home in Book 2, and Letter 2.1 in Book 1⁶³ — but the principle is honoured rather more often than it is breached. Thirdly, and most strikingly, a reader who reaches the end of Book 9 will encounter a coded claim to artistic design in the collection. For, as Alessandro Barchiesi and Ilaria Marchesi have shown,⁶⁴ the address of the final letter of Book 9 to **Fuscus Salinator** (9.40) is designed to create a dialogue with the very first letter of the collection, which is addressed to **Septicius Clarus** (1.1). The reader is invited to recognize that the nine books of Pliny's letters trace a path from light to dark — from the dawn of the collection to its dusk. The result is a hermeneutic burden placed on the reader. The collection must be read again, this time with an eye to the unity and design apparently promised by the play on light and dark in the addressee's names.

Evidence of such design can be found in a number of areas. For example, a careful reading of individual books of the collection will reveal that Pliny has introduced symmetry into his plan, such that, for example, the final three letters of Book 6 carefully match the first three letters of Book 6 in terms of subject matter or dominant motifs.⁶⁵ The result is an invitation now to view not only Pliny's collection as a unity, but also to read his individual books as meaningful units (a form of reading we have already encountered in connection with Cicero and — more briefly — Seneca). Book 6, for example, gives a non-linear — but artistically powerful — picture of the flourishing of Pliny's courtroom career in the immediate aftermath of the death of his greatest rival, the hated **Regulus** (whose association with Domitian is offset by an unusually strong emphasis on the emperor Trajan in Book 6).⁶⁶

Finally, the reader may become attuned to Pliny's habit of creating artistic links between juxtaposed (but seemingly unconnected) letters, such as 6.20 (an account of the eruption of Vesuvius) and 6.21 (on the efforts of a contemporary poet in the genre of Attic Old Comedy). Far apart in subject matter, the letters are subtly linked by the address of the first letter to Tacitus, and an allusion in the opening sentence of the second to the *Dialogus* of Tacitus.⁶⁷

Ambrose, as noted earlier in Section II, appears to adopt the Plinian model of nine plus one books of private and public communications, and organizes his letters likewise on the principle of variety rather than that of addressee or loose theme. Like Pliny, Ambrose often

⁶² 'None of the replies [from Trajan] listed under year one [109 C.E.] will have reached Pliny until year two [110 C.E.]' (F. Millar, *Government, Society and Culture in the Roman Empire* (2004), 40).

⁶³ cf. the series of letters on the successive actions of the Bithynians against their former governors, dispersed across the central books of the collection (4.9, 5.20, 6.5, 6.13, 7.6, 7.10).

⁶⁴ See A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny* (1966), 27–41; R. Gibson and R. Morello, *Reading the Letters of Pliny the Younger* (2012), 21–2, 27.

⁶⁵ A. Barchiesi, 'The search for the perfect book: a ps to the new Posidippus', in K. Gutzwiller (ed.), *The New Posidippus: a Hellenistic Poetry Book* (2005), 320–42, at 330–1; I. Marchesi, *The Art of Pliny's Letters* (2008), 249–50.

⁶⁶ See Gibson and Morello, op. cit. (n. 63), 39–43: 6.1 and 6.34 are joined by the deployment of strong Ciceronian motifs; 6.2 and 6.33 by the flourishing of Plinian rhetoric in the context of the death of his rival **Regulus**; and 6.3 and 6.32 by the shared subject of (rare) gifts to women.

⁶⁷ Gibson and Morello, op. cit. (n. 63), 36–73.

⁶⁸ Pliny 6.21.1, 'sum ex iis qui mirer antiquos, non tamen (ut quidam) temporum nostrorum ingenia despicio' makes significant allusion to Tac., *Dial.* 15.1, where one character upbraids another for his pessimistic view of modern literature: 'non desinis, Messalla, uetera tantum et antiqua mirari, nostrorum autem temporum studia inridere atque contemnere'. For further examples of such 'daisy chain' connections between Pliny's letters, see Gibson and Morello, op. cit. (n. 63), 187–96.

creates thematic connections between juxtaposed letters addressed to different correspondents, although he is less concerned than Pliny to ensure that letters to the same correspondent are kept well apart.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, at the macro-level, Ambrose surpasses Pliny by entirely abandoning chronological arrangement at every level of his collection. Not only does Ambrose avoid chronological order at the level of his individual books; but the collection as a whole appears to make no effort to move forward in time, at the macro level, between individual books, so that each succeeding book displays no discernible chronological advance on the last.⁶⁹

More can be said about the ambitions of Sidonius, not least because he too places a hermeneutic burden on the reader, in a manner modelled on Pliny. For, in evident allusion to the play on names beginning with C and F which frame Pliny's nine-book collection, Sidonius addresses his very first letter to Constantius and the final letter of Book 9 to Firminus. This is not only a comment on the steadfastness of purpose displayed by Sidonius and his correspondents ('from the constant one to the firm one') during the trying times of late fifth-century Gaul; but clearly also a call to the reader to find (Plinian) unity and design in the collection.⁷⁰ As in Pliny, letters are mixed without regard to strict chronology within individual books.⁷¹ There is also a tendency towards Plinian chronological progression from book to book across the first three of Sidonius' instalments, although it appears to become less important from around Book 4 onwards.⁷² Nevertheless, unity and design in the collection are to be found in the artful construction of individual books. For example, the devotion of a large number of letters in Book 1 to Sidonius' involvement in secular government is balanced in Book 2 by a series of letters on aristocratic leisure; while Book 3 introduces the letter-writer's assumption of a bishopric in a manner designed to recall Pliny's ascent to the consulship in *his* Book 3.⁷³ Book 6 and the first half of Book 7, however, discard the Plinian template by gathering together a series of letters united by correspondent type (i.e. bishops). Nevertheless, the Plinian model is resumed from the midpoint of Book 7 to the end of Book 9.

In sum, the 'Plinian' model of a letter collection balances chronological disorder *within* individual books against a progressive chronology for the collection as a whole (at least in the letters of Pliny himself and the first three books of Sidonius). This macro-chronology, however, is perhaps not so immediately evident or important as the existence of thematic connections between adjacent letters (Pliny and Ambrose), or the intent to create individual books with artistic and thematic significance (Pliny and Sidonius). Above all, the collections of Pliny and Sidonius — with their play on the names of addressees at beginning and end — mean to encourage the reader to discover such artistry and design.

⁶⁸ e.g. letters 1 (to Iustus) and 2 (to Simplicianus) both engage with the same work of Philo; for such connections, see further Zelzer, *op. cit.* (n. 13), xix–xxxv. Addressees: Book 4 contains a run of six letters in a row addressed to Irenaeus (*Epist.* 11–16).

⁶⁹ On the character and content of the collection, see further K. and M. Zelzer, 'Retractiones zu Brief und Briefgenos bei Plinius, Ambrosius und Sidonius Apollinaris', in *Alvarium: Festschrift für Christian Gnülka* (2002), 393–405; Liebeschuetz, *op. cit.* (n. 13), 32–8.

⁷⁰ On this and other examples of Sidonius' engagement with Pliny as model, see Gibson, *op. cit.* (n. 14).

⁷¹ On the chronology of the letters, see A. Løyen, *Sidoine Apollinaire: Tome II: Lettres I–V; Tome III: Lettres VI–IX* (1970); R. Mathisen, 'Strategies for dating the letters of Sidonius Apollinaris', forthcoming in J. van Waarden and G. Kelly (eds), *New Approaches to Sidonius Apollinaris, Volume One*.

⁷² Books 1–2 appear to contain no letter from before Sidonius' consecration as bishop in A.D. 470, while Book 3 includes letters from after that consecration, but without reference to the betrayal of his seat of Clermont to the Visigoths in A.D. 475. Thereafter, from Book 4 onwards, Sidonius appears happy to mix letters from the latest stages of his life (e.g. from after his return from exile c. A.D. 477: letter 4.10) with those of much earlier periods; see R. K. Gibson, 'Reading Sidonius by the book', forthcoming in van Waarden and Kelly, *op. cit.* (n. 71).

⁷³ For Books 1 and 2, see J. Harries, *Sidonius Apollinaris and the Fall of Rome, AD 407–85* (1994), 7–10; for Book 3, see Gibson, *op. cit.* (n. 14).

V THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF ANCIENT LETTER COLLECTIONS (WHAT ARE LETTER COLLECTIONS FOR?)

What do the varying styles of arrangement for ancient letter collections reviewed in Section IV tell us about the nature and purposes of ancient letter collections?

Ancient vs. Modern Letter Collections

I begin with the negative hypothesis set out in Section I, namely that there is no systematic or straightforward association between ancient letter collections and biographical or historical narration. Stated in this fashion, without further context, the claim would perhaps seem counter-intuitive to a modern audience — and for good reason. Modern letter collections are routinely assimilated to (auto)biography or to history. This assimilation is largely effected by paratextual means,⁷⁴ whether through the addition of a title ('A Life in Letters'), the provision of biographical information alongside the text (as annotation and introduction),⁷⁵ or an editor's express hope that a subject's letters will stand in for the autobiography which he or she never actually wrote.⁷⁶ Despite the obvious differences between such letter collections and a formal autobiography, the assimilation between the two is facilitated by a shared feature. The classic or default format for modern biography (as for history) is chronological: as Philippe Lejeune ruefully remarks in his influential work *On Autobiography*, 'almost all autobiographers end up falling back, after some qualms, some complaints, or some attempts at innovation, into the rut of chronology'.⁷⁷ The same applies to modern letter collections, where the default position is for editors to publish a series of letters to a range of addressees arranged chronologically by date of authorial composition from earliest letters to last. Those who from time to time choose other arrangements for the publication of a correspondence — such as grouping letters by addressee — may find their work criticized and the letters subject to eventual re-editing.⁷⁸

As became evident in Section IV of this paper, however, arrangement by strict chronology is not the default position for ancient letter collections. Furthermore our sample of Latin epistolographers yielded no evidence whatsoever for the ancient equivalent of a modern collected correspondence in the sense just outlined. Despite this fact, as seen in Section III, editors have been busy on a project of re-ordering ancient letter collections into chronological order, working *both* against manuscript traditions which offer multiple and competing ways of arranging the letters, *and* against those traditions which preserve a canonical ancient or late antique order. In this context, it is perhaps hard for modern readers *not* to see biography (or history) as the root purpose of a letter collection, ancient or modern.

Nevertheless, few ancient letter collections in our sample could operate convincingly in their original manuscript order as a species of biography or history. The *ad Atticum* is an obvious exception (as the chronologically-minded Nepos would agree), as perhaps also are

⁷⁴ On the importance of paratextual features mediating between book and reader, see G. Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997).

⁷⁵ See, for example, M. D. Fehsenfeld and L. M. Overbeck (eds), *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume I: 1929–1940* (2009); C. Reid (ed.), *Letters of Ted Hughes* (2007); H. Hardy (ed.), *Isaiah Berlin. Flourishing: Letters 1928–1946* (2004).

⁷⁶ See, for example, P. H. Davison (ed.), *Orwell: A Life in Letters* (2010). Alternatively, reviewers may take it upon themselves to attribute (auto)biographical status to published collections of letters. Add to this the simple — but brute — fact that booksellers market letter collections generally within the confines of the biographical sections of their stock.

⁷⁷ P. Lejeune, *On Autobiography* (1989), 73; cf. J. Sturrock, 'The new model autobiographer', *New Literary History* 9 (1977), 51–63. For a few exceptions to the chronological rule, see J. Sturrock, *The Language of Autobiography* (1993).

⁷⁸ See, for example, D. Parker, *Michelangelo and the Art of Letter Writing* (2010), 27 on the deficiencies of the important edition of Michelangelo's correspondence published by G. Milanesi in 1875.

the letters of Seneca to Lucilius, although this collection usually proves ‘disappointing’ to biographers and historians by dint of its ‘failure’ to show much interest in anything other than personal philosophical progress.⁷⁹ Rather more promising are the letters of Pliny, which clearly can be made to yield a species of autobiographical and historical narration, thanks to the forward movement of the collection in time, from book to book. However, while the text does not resist the construction of a narrative, the realization of the autobiographical potential of the *Letters* is a task placed firmly in the hands of the reader.⁸⁰

The remainder of the letter collections in our sample, at least in their original format, present more or less formidable difficulties to readers in search of biographical or historical narrative. To illustrate the point further, we might imagine a reversal of the re-ordering process surveyed in Section III, and let an ancient editor loose on a modern collection of letters. On being given a copy of, for example, the *Letters* of Ted Hughes — published, of course, in strict chronological order⁸¹ — an ancient editor might immediately set about breaking up the letters into correspondence groups, i.e. letters to Seamus Heaney, to Hughes’ brother, to Aurelia Plath, Sylvia Plath, his various publishers, and to newspaper editors. Individual letters would not necessarily be ordered within the correspondence groups according to strict chronology. Thus the letters to Sylvia Plath might come in an order that entirely disrupted the usual narrative of meeting, marriage, and disaffection. Alternatively, an ancient editor might prefer to group the entire corpus of letters by theme (poetry, relations with Sylvia Plath, fishing, career as poet laureate, etc.), again perhaps without paying much regard to the chronology of individual letters within thematic groupings. Or, finally, an editor might so arrange the entire corpus that thematic variety was preserved from letter to letter (where, again, chronology would not be a guiding principle). In other words, an ancient editor’s re-ordering of the correspondence of Hughes would arguably sever the connection between letters and biography/history which seems fundamental to modern ideas about the nature and purposes of letter collections.⁸²

If it is not the purpose of most ancient letter collections to narrate the story of the letter writer’s life or his times, what *is* their purpose? Given the highly varied nature of the material, there can be no grand unifying hypothesis. Instead, a series of ideas can be put forward to cover different types of layout and styles of treatment within the collections.

Letters in Books

I begin by making explicit the assumption that underlay the thought experiment of what an ancient editor might do to the *Letters* of Ted Hughes. That is to say: the non-chronological ordering of letters is likely to be the product of positive choice, and is not (negative) evidence for an editorial incompetence that somehow pervades ancient culture. Angelo Mai, with his own experience of trying to make sense of an ancient edition of Fronto, thought precisely the opposite:⁸³

... in codice nulla vel temporum vel personarum aut materiarum ratio habetur. ... Neque idcirco est quamobrem magnopere miremur inconcinnam hanc librarii veteris dispositionem – sic enim et in aliorum auctorum libris, praesertim epistularibus, saepe usuvenit ...

⁷⁹ On the frustrations of Seneca’s letters for historians and biographers, see C. Edwards, ‘Self-scrutiny and self-transformation in Seneca’s Letters’, *Greece and Rome* 44 (1997), 23–38, at 23–6.

⁸⁰ See Gibson and Morello, *op. cit.* (n. 63), 10–19.

⁸¹ *op. cit.* (n. 75).

⁸² Contrast a widely disseminated on-line paratext (source unknown, 2011) which markets Hughes’ letters in a typical fashion for letter collections: ‘This selection ... *documents the course of a life* ... a life pared down to essentials and yet eventful’ (emphasis added).

⁸³ Mai, *op. cit.* (n. 36), xvii–xviii.

... in the codex [of Fronto] no account is taken of time, persons, or subject matter. ... There is no reason why we should be greatly surprised at this clumsy arrangement by an ancient scribe — this is what often happens in books by other authors, particularly in books of letters.

It is true that variations from writer to writer in the practice of dating letters (or not dating them) must have made it very difficult for ‘ancient scribes’ to use chronology as a systematic principle of arrangement.⁸⁴ But were they really trying to so use it — and (thanks to their incompetence) repeatedly failing? Using the same evidence as Mai — ancient books are often unchronological in their arrangement, *particularly* books of letters — we can come to a different conclusion: namely, that the preference for ordering principles other than the strictly chronological was, in fact, a *cultural* preference. Without a hypothesis of this sort, it is very hard, in particular, to account for the behaviour of those who arranged their *own* correspondence — such as Pliny, Ambrose, Sidonius, and perhaps Symmachus — and presumably knew the rough date of each letter, and *still* decided not to make it the basis of their organization of their letters.

A cultural preference for patterns of arrangement other than the narrative-chronological can be glimpsed in an entity already shown to be germane to the reading of the letter collections of Cicero, Pliny and Sidonius, namely the Latin poetry book. There are obvious similarities between books of letters and poetry collections which gather together short-to-medium pieces of varying character. The formal parallel is particularly clear in, for example, Propertius Book 1, where the vast majority of the poems display named addressees (four male friends, in fact, receive eleven of the book’s twenty-two poems). But while the individual books of Propertius and indeed Ovid’s *Amores* each have a distinctive character, there is apparently little intent to arrange the poems so as to create a strong linear narrative *within* a book about the course of their love affairs.⁸⁵ In other collections, potential narratives may even be visibly disrupted. Whoever put together Catullus’ poems evidently had no concern to tell an evolving story about the progress of the affair with Lesbia: the relationship is pronounced definitively over by poem eleven, only for it to keep beginning and ending, without narrative rationale, throughout the remainder of the 116-poem collection. Similarly, in Tibullus Book 1, the poem which provides a key ‘narrative’ transition — between the poet’s refusal to be a soldier (1.1) and the sudden revelation that he is on his way to campaign (1.3) or returning therefrom (1.7) — is delayed till final position (1.10). Not only is linear narrative not sustained, it is actively refused. Other examples could be given.⁸⁶

It is not necessary to argue that the editors of ancient letter collections were directly influenced by, for example, the Augustan poetry book. Rather, it is enough to say that classic poetry books are evidence for a broad literary environment in which a narrative-chronological ordering of one’s material was not a necessary or even a ‘natural’ choice. Indeed, it could be argued that greater cultural prestige accrued to methods of arrangement other than the chronological.

Nevertheless, the parallel between letters and books of poetry has one potential consequence for understanding the nature and purpose of ancient letters. For books of

⁸⁴ See above n. 24.

⁸⁵ See R. Gibson, ‘Loves and elegy’, forthcoming in T. S. Thorsen (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Love Elegy*. Propertius preserves traces of a macro-narrative (the affair is in progress apparently by 1.2 and ends at 3.25); but even this is disrupted by the unexplained reappearance of Cynthia in 4.7–8. Nevertheless, for an attempt to argue for a species of narrative in Ovid’s *Amores*, see N. Holzberg, *Ovid: the Poet and his Work* (2002), 46–70.

⁸⁶ Horace, *Epistles* 1, however — like the later philosophical epistles of Seneca — does offer readers the chance to reconstruct from an implied ‘narrative’ the story of the poet’s *moral* progress; see A. D. Morrison, ‘Didacticism and epistolarity in Horace’s *Epistles* 1’, in Morello and Morrison, op. cit. (n. 10), 107–31. Nevertheless, in other poetic books of letters, such as Ovid’s *Heroides* and the *Epistulae ex Ponto* 1–3, there is little sign of an attempt to maintain narrative ‘chronology’; on the design of the latter, see J. F. Gaertner, *Ovid, Epistulae ex Ponto Book 1* (2005), 2–5.

letters created by editors — where these exist in an author's manuscript tradition — might often have as their broad purpose the elevation of the 'life' of the writer into an art form (rather than a merely documentary one). This art form requires interpretive techniques not formally dissimilar from those applied to the decipherment of first-person poetry books familiar from the early Empire and later. Such techniques have already been successfully applied to the study of selected portions of Cicero, Seneca, Pliny and Sidonius, and to lost (but reconstructed) books of letters edited by Jerome.⁸⁷ No doubt this success can be widened.⁸⁸

Ancient Letter Collections, Ancient Biography, and the Didactic Mode

More can be learnt about the rôle and purpose of ancient letter collections if we now leave broad editorial ordering patterns and turn our attention towards specific topics and themes which editors use to unite the constituent parts of their collections. Below it will be suggested that a range of collections in the sample display certain similarities to ancient biography (and encomium), as well as displaying features best described as broadly didactic.

I begin with the didactic function of ancient letter collections. In Section IV above, it was suggested that arrangement of letter collections by addressee catered to a taste for information about the letter-writer's contacts with the great individuals of the day. This idea can be widened to embrace another kind of information, namely knowledge of *how* the letter-writer conducted himself in his relations.⁸⁹ (For this purpose, famous addressees are not strictly necessary, although they make for more interesting reading, no doubt.) For example, the self-consciously 'exemplary' letters of Pliny and Symmachus fit a didactic billing rather well. One critic has usefully suggested that audiences will read Pliny's letter on the imperial alimentary scheme he has set up at Comum (1.8) 'for the same reason they will read his *Panegyric* ... to learn how to do the job themselves when their turn comes'.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, by far the easiest part of Pliny's correspondence to use for didactic purposes is Book 10, which collects correspondence by addressee (Trajan). Although the book has a specific purpose — to present a particular image of both Pliny and Trajan (in his civic rather than military guise)⁹¹ — it also offers fellow members of the senatorial élite important information on how to write to an emperor, and not just on issues of government. The book's fourteen 'private' letters to Trajan contain classic examples of letters of imperial congratulation (10.1), thanks (10.2), and requests on behalf of self and others (10.4, 10.5), etc.

As for Symmachus, the arrangement of his letters by addressee allows the reader to grasp the nature of the writer's relationship with a range of correspondents, some of whom were pagan (like Symmachus) and some Christian. By showing that he was able to engage diplomatically with both camps, 'Symmachus was setting an example of cooperation rather than resistance'.⁹² Christians might learn that not all pagans were intransigent, and pagans learn that one could get on with Christians without compromising traditional practices.

⁸⁷ See the Appendix.

⁸⁸ For readings of the first book of Symmachus, see Salzman, *op. cit.* (n. 20); Cameron, *op. cit.* (n. 20), 371–3. For a creative attempt to read the first five books of Fronto's collection, see Freisenbruch, *op. cit.* (n. 50), 43–60.

⁸⁹ Of course, many collections contain individual letters which are didactic in that they aim to inculcate particular forms of behaviour, or they contain important statements about doctrine, belief, and practice (as, most obviously, in Seneca and the Christian collections of Late Antiquity). But here we are concerned with the didactic possibilities of collections as formal entities.

⁹⁰ S. Hoffer, *The Anxieties of Pliny the Younger* (1999), 100.

⁹¹ C. Noreña, 'The social economy of Pliny's correspondence with Trajan', *American Journal of Philology* 128 (2007), 239–77.

⁹² Cameron, *op. cit.* (n. 20), 377, with broader discussion at 373–83.

Within the correspondence of Cicero, the devotion of an entire book to letters of recommendation (*ad Fam.* 13) has clear didactic uses.⁹³ The seventy-nine letters of the book are in fact rather hard going as a unit if read for any purpose other than how to compose one's own recommendation in a variety of (sometimes tricky) circumstances. Furthermore, if one wishes to know how to write appropriately to a father, fellow senator, son-in-law, or son, then Books 1, 2, 6 and 7 respectively of Symmachus provide copy-book examples for a late antique audience. Churchmen eager to know how best to write to a fellow bishop will find Sidonius Books 6–7 of particular interest — and so on. In sum, ancient letter collections may be understood as a field of 'significant performance', where the writer's skill in managing social and familial relationships (dealing with others right, and comporting oneself right in such dealings) is put on public display and held up for imitation. The reader's interest is assumed to lie more in observing the ability of the letter-writer to conduct social relations with his family and the most powerful men of the time in an appropriate manner, and to lie less in following his life story. (Which may cause us to wonder whether such an assumption is a cultural factor contributing to the relative dearth of ancient autobiography.⁹⁴) At any rate, the organization of correspondence by (type of) addressee or by theme allows these social abilities to emerge with particular clarity. And chronological ordering is hardly vital to their emergence.

However, an exemplary mode or didactic intent will not explain all of the letter collections in our sample. For further illumination we must look elsewhere.

Despite the distinction made earlier between ancient letter collections and modern biography (plus modern letter collections) in terms of relative commitment to narrativity, it can be argued that a number of the collections in our sample display formal similarities to a particular type of *ancient* biography. This species of biography also lacks strong narrativity, and is characterized rather by an interest in categories and topics in a subject's life. As is well known, ancient biography tends to mix synchronic and diachronic approaches, and a purely diachronic approach is rare enough.⁹⁵ But one common sub-type of ancient biography largely avoids a chronological scheme (except for early years and death), and prefers to treat the subject's life under a series of headings shared with the nearby genre of encomium.⁹⁶ The classic practitioner here is, of course, Suetonius, who will typically begin one of his lives of the Caesars with a section on the emperor's birth, ancestry, and life prior to the assumption of the principate. The emperor's reign — the bulk of the biography — is then treated under a series of non-chronological rubrics. In Suetonius' own description of his method of handling the life of Augustus, 'Having stated the main themes, as it were, of his life, I shall set out the individual details [*partes*], not according to the order of events but by topic [*neque per tempora sed per species*]' so that they may be more clearly perceived and assessed' (*Aug.* 9, trans. C. Edwards). The topics thought proper to assessing emperors usually include the typically imperial virtues of military success, treatment of the populace, and style of administration, in addition to the more private categories of character and habits.⁹⁷

⁹³ cf. Book 9 of Symmachus, which is made up almost entirely of letters of recommendation, 'giving it virtually textbook status' (Cameron, *op. cit.* (n. 20), 367 n. 64).

⁹⁴ Nevertheless, Roman autobiography — to the extent that it may be said to have existed as a genre at all prior to Augustine's *Confessions* — may well have exhibited the same mixture of diachronic and topic-based treatment found in Augustus' *Res Gestae*; see C. Pelling, 'Was there an ancient genre of "autobiography"?', in C. Smith and A. Powell (eds), *The Lost Memoirs of Augustus and the Development of Roman Autobiography* (2009), 41–64.

⁹⁵ See the useful analysis of R. A. Burrige, *What are the Gospels?: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (1992, 2nd edn 2004), 150–84, with summary at 163.

⁹⁶ See n. 98 below.

⁹⁷ D. W. Hurley, *Suetonius, Divus Claudius* (2001), 17–19; cf. A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius* (1983), 13–15, 44, 158; Burrige, *op. cit.* (n. 95), 161–2.

The letter-writers in our sample are not emperors, and can hardly have entirely the same rubrics applied to them. Nevertheless, roughly comparable categories of treatment can be discovered in letter collections and in Suetonian biography. Further parallels are evident also with the ancient encomiastic tradition; see below. (Ancient encomium shares with the Suetonian biographical tradition a preference for treating a person's life by broad categories rather than by chronology.⁹⁸) Suetonius, for example, shows an interest in documenting his subjects according to the topics of relations with wives, children, and slaves or freedmen.⁹⁹ This has obvious structural parallels with Books 14 and 16 of the *ad Familiares* (mentioned earlier in Section IV), which allow insight into Cicero's relations with family members and with a slave member of his household. The books and groups of letters addressed by Symmachus to his son, son-in-law and daughter (also discussed in Section IV) play a similar rôle within his correspondence, as does, even more obviously, the suite of letters addressed to his father which opens Book 1 (1.1–12). Formally comparable, here, is Suetonius' recurrent interest at the beginning of a *vita* in the ancestry and parentage of his subject.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Suetonius' tendency to include a review of the literary accomplishments (eloquence, style, writings) and literary tastes and opinions of his subjects,¹⁰¹ can be compared to the organizational habits of the editor(s) of Fronto, who show a predilection for bundling together letters which demonstrate the letter-writer's views on a range of literary topics (*de Eloquentia, de Orationibus, Principia historiae*).¹⁰² More broadly, the Suetonian rubric of 'treatment of friends and relations' (*Calig.* 26.1, 'quo propinquos amicosque pacto tractauerit')¹⁰³ has an obvious bearing on grasping why many ancient letter collections show a tendency to organize a proportion of their contents by addressee, particularly where many are indeed friends.

Furthermore, in the encomiastic tradition, one of the topics recommended for treatment as part of 'external circumstances' ('extra nos bona') is a subject's 'power and influence' ('potentia et gratia').¹⁰⁴ Again, this provides context for the habits of a range of ancient editors, many of whom — as suggested already in Section IV — demonstrate particular interest in preserving (and grouping together) letters addressed to great or influential correspondents. To use the example of Cicero's letters once more, the editor preferred to preserve his (lost) letters to Caesar, Pompey, and Octavian, and evidently passed over Cicero's presumably voluminous correspondence with the dignitaries of his hometown of Arpinum, clients acquired from his days as quaestor in Sicily, and a host of Greek intellectuals and Roman business intermediaries. In the useful summary of Peter White, 'The [ancient] editor cared most about the social identity of Cicero's correspondents': a social identity that emerges most clearly in a scheme where letters are organized (largely) by correspondent.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ For the typical headings of encomium (and its preference for non-chronological treatment), cf. Cic., *de Orat.* 2.342–8, Quint., *Inst.* 3.7.10–18, Theon 61 Sp., Menander II 368–77 Sp., ps. Aristid. 35, and see D. Innes, 'The *Panegyricus* and rhetorical theory', in P. Roche (ed.), *Pliny's Praise: the Panegyricus in the Roman World* (2011), 67–84. Interestingly, Pliny chooses to follow the less common method of arranging his *Panegyricus* (largely) by chronology: an interesting parallel with his decision to adopt a type of chronology at the macro-level in the *Letters*.
⁹⁹ e.g. *Aug.* 62–4, 67 (wives, children, slaves), *Tib.* 52 (children), *Calig.* 25 (wives), *Claud.* 26–8 (wives, children, slaves).

¹⁰⁰ *Aug.* 1–4, *Tib.* 1–4, *Calig.* 1–7, *Claud.* 1, *Nero* 1–5, *Galb.* 2–3, *Otho* 1, *Vitell.* 1–2, *Vesp.* 1.

¹⁰¹ e.g. *Iul.* 55–6, *Aug.* 84–8, *Tib.* 70–1, *Claud.* 41–2, *Dom.* 20.

¹⁰² On the character and contents of these collections, see van den Hout, op. cit. (n. 49), 313, 357–8, 462–4.

¹⁰³ cf. *Iul.* 72–3, *Aug.* 66, *Tib.* 55, *Calig.* 26.

¹⁰⁴ Quint., *Inst.* 3.7.13–14; for Quintilian's categories in the context of the broader encomiastic tradition, see Innes, op. cit. (n. 98), 68–77.

¹⁰⁵ White, op. cit. (n. 1), 60, with analysis at 59–61. In fact, 'The editor's consciousness of the [...] relative status [of Cicero's addressees] is evident also in sequences where he groups them by type, as leading senators or knights or exiles' (White, loc. cit.).

Similar editorial preferences can be glimpsed in the letters of Fronto (the vast majority of whose letters are addressed to members of the imperial household), Symmachus, and various Christian letter-writers in the sample. For example, the correspondence of Symmachus features letters with all the great power-brokers of the era, often strategically placed, and Book 1 is dominated by exchanges with high-ranking former praetorian prefects.¹⁰⁶ Branches of the traditions for Jerome and Paulinus of Nola show a tendency to give prominence to letters exchanged with Augustine,¹⁰⁷ while many manuscripts of Augustine's own letters give pride of place to his correspondence with Volusianus, the one Roman aristocrat to whom Augustine appears to have written.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore Sidonius, as noted above, breaks his reliance on the Plinian model of artful variety to devote the entirety of one book and half of the next (Books 6–7) exclusively to correspondence with bishops of the day. The organization of letters in such a way as to highlight powerful connections is analogous to the encomiastic category of assessing a subject for his 'power and influence'.¹⁰⁹

At any rate, the Suetonian method of biographical treatment has broad explanatory value for the purposes of a range of letter collections. That is to say, some editors show a tendency to group letters according to a series of preconceived categories that corresponds structurally to the editorial practices of the Suetonian biographical tradition. The result, in both instances, is that the interest of the reader is directed towards grasping a life's constituent aspects, rather than towards following a life's evolving story.

In Suetonius this procedure is clearly related to forming a judgement about the merits of the emperor, and editorial interventions are regularly made to firm up the judgement already implicit in the material presented.¹¹⁰ Letter collections in their ancient form lack these kinds of editorial interventions: at most, as in the collections of Fronto and Symmachus, an editor will merely state his rôle or identity. In this context, it might prove helpful to think further about the connections with encomium. For it is likely that the purpose of many letter collections is broadly encomiastic, not least because (in many instances) it is admirers, disciples or family members who evidently prepared the letters for publication. Suggestive here is the fact that, of those whom we know for certain edited their own collections (Seneca, Pliny, Ambrose, Sidonius), none chose to arrange their correspondence by type of addressee or topic (with the exception of Sidonius' bishop letters). Perhaps there was too great a risk of seeming to assess (and praise) oneself according to categories similar to those employed by encomium and biography?

This paper has attempted to argue that ancient letter collections, in their original forms, do not have historical or biographical narration (of the sort familiar from modern letter collections and biographies) as a primary purpose. Rather, arranged predominantly by addressee and theme — often without the preservation of internal chronology — or on

¹⁰⁶ See J. Weisweiler, *State Aristocracy: Resident Senators and Absent Emperors in Late-Antique Rome* (dissertation Cambridge, 2010), 121–4.

¹⁰⁷ Cain, *op. cit.* (n. 21), 226–7, Conybeare, *op. cit.* (n. 22), 162.

¹⁰⁸ See the Appendix below.

¹⁰⁹ It can be added that even letter collections which organize themselves entirely or in part on a principle other than 'the addressee' might come equipped with paratextual material which allows the reader to re-focus attention on the correspondent. Tables of contents which list the addressees found within a book or books can be found in the manuscript traditions of Pliny (Gibson and Morello, *op. cit.* (n. 63), 45–7, 274–5), Fronto (van den Hout, *op. cit.* (n. 43)), perhaps also Sidonius (cf. *Epist.* 8.16.1), and certainly in Carolingian manuscripts of Cicero's *ad Familiares* (Shackleton Bailey, *op. cit.* (n. 16), 19). Letter collections equipped with tables of contents are in a particularly good position to display the writer's network of correspondents, and so present in textual form a map of the extent of his 'potentia et gratia'.

¹¹⁰ cf. e.g. *Claud.* 29, where Suetonius returns to pass explicit moralizing judgement on his subject's wife and slaves (they had too much influence), after laying out relevant material on these two categories of relationship at *Claud.* 26–8.

the principle of artful variety and significant juxtaposition, ancient letter collections demand other explanations of their rôle and purpose. In one sense, each of the letter collections in our sample requires an individual hypothesis about its likely purpose. Not only is each collection different from all the others in terms of precise arrangement, but the content (and likely readership) of the collections demonstrates strong variations. Nevertheless, links with ancient poetry books, with ancient biography-encomium, and a perceptible didactic function, suggest a range of purposes and uses for ancient letter collections other than those associated with historical or biographical narration. Those purposes suggested above are not exhaustive, and it is to be hoped that further research will add more.

APPENDIX: PATTERNS OF ARRANGEMENT IN JEROME, PAULINUS, AUGUSTINE

The letters of this trio are united by the fact that there exists no late antique canonical edition or ordering of their correspondence; see Section II. As shown by Andrew Cain,¹¹¹ there appear to be three broad phases in the circulation of the letters of Jerome. The first phase took place in Jerome's own lifetime, when he allowed a number of individual letters and letter collections to circulate. Two collections — neither extant (but perhaps embedded within letter sequences in later manuscripts) — are of particular interest. The *ad Marcellam epistularum liber* collected Jerome's correspondence with the aristocratic Marcella. Whether it was also arranged chronologically is unknown; but its broader purpose appears to have been to promote an image of Jerome as at the centre of a powerful group of holy women.¹¹² The other collection, as its ancient title suggests (*Epistularum ad diuersos liber*), was addressed to a variety of correspondents. But this collection may well have maintained internal chronological order in an attempt to convey the story of Jerome's gradual achievement of an ascetic lifestyle.¹¹³

Jerome, known for his own interest in chronology (and for the production of an auto-bibliography which would list his works partly in order of composition down to A.D. 393), may perhaps be seen in the *Epistularum ad diuersos liber* as the late antique equivalent of Atticus. (The convergence of the largely chronological *ad Atticum* and the interests of both Atticus and Nepos in chronology was noted in Section I.) Be that as it may, strict chronology was not an interest much shared by Jerome's later editors.¹¹⁴ In the four centuries following his death, small dossiers of letters often united principally by theme (or correspondent) appear to have circulated, eventually coming together to form bigger compilations (which themselves show few signs of editorial effort to produce more systematic internal order).¹¹⁵ Eventually, in the eighth and ninth centuries, even more extensive compilations of between forty and seventy (or more) letters began to appear, building on the dossier approach of earlier manuscripts. Arrangement by theme and correspondent predominates, with internal chronology apparently preserved or ignored somewhat indifferently.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Cain, *op. cit.* (n. 21): I rely on his account here; cf. Pabel, *op. cit.* (n. 32), 115–73, who surveys the non-chronological arrangements typical of medieval manuscripts and early printed editions of Jerome's letters, prior to the early modern editions mentioned above in n. 33.

¹¹² Cain, *op. cit.* (n. 21), 68–98.

¹¹³ Cain, *op. cit.* (n. 21), 13–42.

¹¹⁴ Cain, *op. cit.* (n. 21), 16.

¹¹⁵ See Cain, *op. cit.* (n. 21), 225–7: dossiers of thematically related letters observable in one manuscript include epistles on repentance (letters 147, 122), consolation (60, 66), and monastic life (14, 125), plus one dossier linked by addressee (83, 84).

¹¹⁶ One representative Escorial manuscript of the eighth century highlighted by Cain, for example, contains two exegetical letters written to women in southern Gaul, sixteen letters from the Jerome-Augustine correspondence, the remnants of the *Epistularum ad diuersos liber*, eight letters to or by Theophilus of Alexandria on the Origenist controversy, plus various other short correspondent-based clusters, etc. In sum, 'only four ... of the forty-three items are free-floaters that seem to be situated haphazardly among clusters with which they have nothing in common' (Cain, *op. cit.* (n. 21), 227).

The correspondence of Paulinus and Augustine may be treated more briefly, since the results of the transmission process are not greatly different from those associated with Jerome's letters, even if (particularly in the case of Augustine) a large number of letters is involved. The manuscripts of Paulinus present roughly three differing ways of ordering the letters — each with a slightly different selection or number of letters.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, the majority of the tradition, in terms of numbers of manuscripts, favours arrangement of letters by addressee, usually without evidence of a commitment to chronological ordering within addressee groups.¹¹⁸

As for Augustine, even greater diversity is found in the tradition of his correspondence, with a wide range of manuscripts offering differing numbers of letters in different orders.¹¹⁹ Letters continue to be discovered and added to the corpus in modern times.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, the ordering found in one important tenth-century manuscript (Munich Clm 6266) may be given by way of illustration. This manuscript contains over 140 letters, out of a total modern corpus of more than 300, and orders its opening nineteen epistles in the following manner. (The Maurist 'chronological' numbering is given in brackets after each grouping.) First, three letters to and from Volusianus (132, 135, 137); then four letters to and from Marcellinus, and one to Italica embedded in third place in the sequence (136, 138, 92, 143); next twelve letters to and from Jerome, with a letter to Praesidius embedded in sixth place in the sequence (28, 40, 67, 68, 39, 74, 73, 72, 71, 75, 81, 82).¹²¹ As is evident, arrangement was by correspondent or dossier, with some concern — as in the *ad Familiares* of Cicero — for maintaining chronological order within the groupings, but not systematically so.

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¹¹⁷ Conybeare, *op. cit.* (n. 22), 12–15, 161–5, synthesizing the work of earlier editors. I summarize her account in the next footnote.

¹¹⁸ Ms. O (using the sigla of Hartel's 1894 edition) arranges by correspondent, without internal chronological order. Mss. PFU largely follow O's arrangement, but with additional letters, and in the case of U a formal arrangement into five books, where the first book is a novel creation extracting letters known from PF. Mss. LM follow arrangement of PFU in one instance only (i.e. for the letters addressed to single correspondents); but are otherwise different again.

¹¹⁹ For a convenient overview of the tradition in both manuscript and print, see Ebbeler, *op. cit.* (n. 23), ch. 1.

¹²⁰ See H. Chadwick, 'New letters of St. Augustine', *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 34.2 (1983), 425–52. The thirty-one new letters were published by J. Divjak as vol. 88 of the CSEL series.

¹²¹ For a report of the contents of this manuscript (in the context of showing the reliance of early printed editions on such manuscripts, prior to the Maurist chronological ordering), see G. Folliet, 'L'édition princeps des lettres de saint Augustin parue à Strasbourg chez Mentelin vers 1471', *Sacris Erudiri* 34 (1994), 33–58.