Aeneas of Gaza

Twenty-Five Letters[1]

[1] This file was made by Roger Pearse, Ipswich, 2026, and placed in the public domain. The Italian translation by Positano was passed through Google Translate to create a basic English translation, and again using DeepSeek. The two were compared, and the result is mainly Google Translate. The output was interesting enough to share, and might be of use to someone, but has no scholarly value.

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Introduction

Since no normal person has ever heard of this writer, here are a few brief details about the author and his work, all taken from the works in the bibliography below.

The sophist Aeneas of Gaza was part of a circle of literary writers sharing many of the same friends in early sixth century Gaza, which is perhaps best known from the letters of Procopius of Gaza. He is spoken of by Zacharias Rhetor as "a most learned and Christian man known all over for his wisdom" (*Vita Isaiae* 8). From the letters it can be inferred that Procopius had been a pupil of Aeneas. The western Roman empire had fallen, but in the east the literary traditions still continued.

Other than the mention by Zacharias, Aeneas is known to us only from his dialogue *Theophrastus* and a short collection of 25 letters. The dialogue tells us that he was a pupil of the Neoplatonist Hierocles in Alexandria, and also that he was in Constantinople before 484 AD. The same work indicates that Africa was still under Vandal rule, and therefore must have been written before 534. This work circulated throughout the Middle Ages: see the edition and Italian translation of the *Theophrastus*, edited by M. E. Colonna, *Enea di Gaza: Teofrasto*, Naples (1958).

Twenty-five letters have been preserved in three manuscripts (M, S, R) plus the Aldine edition of 1499 (A), edited by Marcus Musurus, which is independent of them all:

- M = MS. Ambrosianus 81 B 4 sup., parchment, 10-11th century. Contains a mass of letter-writers.
- S = MS. Matritensis LXIII, of the National Library of Madrid (Iriarte no. 4693), paper of the 15th century, written by the hand of Constantine Lascaris, contains the orations and epistles of Aeschines and a few other epistolographers (Philostratus, Aeneas, Aelian).
- R = MS. Vaticanus Reginensis 139, paper of the 16th century, is also a collection of epistolographers.
- Ἐπιστολαὶ διαφόρων φιλοσόφων, ῥητόρων, σοφιστῶν ἓξ πρὸς τοῖς εἴκοσι. *Epistolae diversorum philosophorum, oratorum, rhetorum sex et viginti*. 2 vols, (1499). Online here.

The commentary in Positano is mainly concerned with the Greek text. This introduction, and the notes below is abbreviated from it. A very few additions have been made to assist the general reader.

Bibliography:

Lidia Massa Positano, *Enea di Gaza: Epistole*, 2nd ed., Naples (1961).
Edward J. Watts, "The Letter Collection of Aeneas of Gaza," in *Late Antique Epistolography*, eds. C. Sogno, B. K. Storin, and E. J. Watts, UCP (2019) pp. 384-393. Online here.

The Letters

1. To John.

If the book were yours and I desired it, it would rightly have been already in my hands, for some time: that is how friendship is made. But now the owner of the book is me; and yet you do not give it to me. Oh no, by Zeus the protector of friendship, may this not happen to me because it is a book; in reality it is all that I have; and such possession seems to me worthy of greater consideration than the talents of Croesus.

Certainly, one man loves the hoe (he is a farmer), and one has a passion for dogs (he is a hunter), another delights in the bow, another takes pleasure in horses: for me, it is books and discourses. But the very thing that brings most pleasure to its owner is what brings most pain when taken from him.

So if you return the book to me, I will be convinced that it is imprinted upon your mind. But if not, it will look as if you do not care about its contents, but rather about appearing to be its owner. But why do I say this? Certainly not in order to get pain from something that so often brought me joy.

> The letter is only intelligible if John is a rather wealthier man than Aeneas. The name John is very common; note that letter 14 is directed to a priest John, and another John is greeted in letter 11. Procopius of Gaza refers in letter 103 to a John who returns books swiftly, and addresses letters 5, 12, 33, 55, 95, 154 and 156 to him; but we cannot be sure the two are the same.

2. To Cassus.

In his old age, Laertes no longer wished to be king or rule over peoples; instead, he wanted to be a gardener and tend to trees. It seems to me that you have emulated him; otherwise, you would not have left the city and your own people to spend such a long time in the countryside conversing with plants. You ought, however, to have kept in mind not Laertes, but Socrates and the Socratic precepts, where he, discoursing with elegance and gravity, maintains that fields and trees are not disposed to teach anything, whereas the men of the city are. Listen to him instead: hold the fields in low regard, for it is unlikely that farmers there reap the fruit of wisdom; remember, rather, those familiar, customary discussions where one can learn and teach knowledge and, most importantly, bring joy to friends.

> The addressee was probably “Cassius”, but it is given as “Cassus” in the manuscripts, and Κάσσος does exist as a name, because it appears in the Suda.

3. To the Priest Alphius.

The opposite has happened. Anastasius is at peace, while you are making war. That course of action is not fitting for you, nor is it honourable. Shall I tell you how the conflict came about? Cornelius occupied Anastasius’s farm while the latter was away. Upon his return, the owner wanted to reclaim the land, while the farmer, for his part, wished to become the owner. And not for free either, for he had actually negotiated a price. They came to an agreement; a purchase contract was drawn up, and Cornelius was already preparing to hand over the money for the farm.

Then you swooped in unexpectedly and prevented the transaction, claiming ownership of the land yourself. Hence the anger and the conflict. If you are in the wrong, settle the dispute even before you come to us. If, however, there is only the appearance of wrongdoing rather than the reality, come and answer to the judges as soon as possible. For I would not want friends to be unjust, nor even merely to seem so.

> Anastasius inclines towards a reconciliation; Alphius, on the other hand, a priest, has assumed a litigious attitude. Both are friends of Aeneas. It’s possible that Alphius has invoked an ecclesiastical privilege over the land.
>
> This Anastasius is very likely the Anastasius whom Procopius mentions as his relative in one of his letters addressed to Gessius the physician, who is also a friend of Aeneas (ep. 68).

4. To the Sophist Zoneus.

May the excellent Epiphanius enjoy great happiness, because he filled us with joy. Indeed, in calling you a fine orator, he admired your character more than your eloquence. For—and this is the essential point—you proved yourself a sincere friend. He would often turn to me in jest, and this in your name; because you had instructed him to do so. You know what he is like: a man who cultivates every grace. To tell the truth, he was sometimes even a nuisance to me with his constant delivery of greetings on your behalf. But you are to blame. Had you sent me even a brief note, just to exchange a few words, I would have received it with pleasure.

> The name of the addressee is corrupt in the manuscripts. However a Zoneus is mentioned in Letter 107 by Procopius of Gaza, and it seems to be the same person. It is uncertain whether this is the same orator who wrote, according to the Suda lexicon both ἐρωτικαὶ ἐπιστολαὶ καὶ ἀγροικικαί and a treatise Περὶ τῶν σχημάτων. A short work Περὶ τῶν κατὰ λόγον καὶ κατὰ λέξιν has come down to us under the name of Zoneus, but the attribution is perhaps due to the 16th century forger Constantine Palaeocappa. It has also been thought that the letters attributed to Aristaenetus are instead by Zoneus. For Epiphanius see letter 12, addressed to him.

5. To Ulpia.

May the wicked, whoever they may have been, perish miserably for the damage that they inflicted upon your household. By the gods, I cannot express how deeply distressed I was by it. Yet, fortunately, a source of comfort has presented itself to me, albeit belatedly, and I felt it was right to share it with you, so that the misfortune will not have been entirely in vain.

Now indeed you will believe more firmly that, while gold, silver, and splendid garments are eagerly sought after by the many, they are insecure and unstable possessions, even for their actual owners, because anyone who wants to can steal them. Culture and wisdom, on the other hand, may be objects of ridicule for fools, but they are a secure and steadfast possession that cannot be taken away: a treasure, in short, that is proof against theft. Cling on to these things instead, and in future you will need neither walls nor weapons nor a troop of guards to protect your wealth.

> This and the following letter are letters addressed separately to Ulpia and Pampus to console them for a theft. The central theme of this letter, that culture and wisdom are the only secure possession, is a recurring motif in rhetoric.

6. To the Grammarian Pampus.

The joy of receiving your letter was overshadowed by the pain I felt at the news of the theft. This troubled me no less than if I had suffered it myself. Let this statement not seem incredible: for if friends share possessions, do they not share losses too. But why do I grieve so? Undoubtedly he who is superior to gain is also above loss. In this, we find comfort. I should like to know from you if I am right.

7. To Diodorus Scholasticus.

The excellent Herodotus reconciled us through the power of his musical art, an art surpassing that of Orpheus and Thamyris. Now, finally, we actually know one another, as if we had previously been fighting a battle in the dark: and there is now lasting peace. Come, let us set up a mixing-bowl, as

befits a time of peace, and pour libations, among the gods to Hermes, and among men to Herodotus, for they are the ones who finally resolved the discord between us. In honouring them, we shall banish Comedy, with all its attendant vices, from our correspondence. For Comedy runs about impudently exposing the secrets of closest friends. Instead we shall make room for what safeguards every friendship: persuasion, grace, mutual pleasure, applause, and praise. With these, let us compose a nobler spectacle, forbidding Comedy to cause the slightest annoyance

> This letter, and letter 22, suggest that Aeneas and Diodorus had been fierce enemies, exchanging polemics and even personal attacks. The two have been reconciled by a mutual friend, Herodotus (not the historian).
>
> Witty personal attacks were part of the Greek Old Comedy – hence the introduction of Comedy – and were known as ὀνομαστὶ κωμῳδεῖν.
>
> Diodorus was a pupil of Procopius of Gaza, and accompanied him to Egypt, then settled in Caesarea as a lawyer. Sixteen letters of Procopius are addressed to him and often concern recommendations and gifts sent by him to the master.
>
> Orpheus and Thamyris were both legendary Thracian musicians.

8. To Zosimus the Premier.

I am well aware that your voyage has come to a happy conclusion. For, in truth, you did not set sail in order to engage in piracy, as the mighty leaders of old once did, nor for the sake of commerce, like most people today. Rather, you travelled out of a longing for cherished people and places. So it is fitting to say that Zeus, the guardian of friendship, was your companion on the voyage. And so, may the city be as favourable to you as the sea was, and, having received the love of friends, return to friends.

> From the papyri we learn that the πρωτεύων was the leading magistrate, official or citizen of a city, presumably Gaza; or Egyptian nome. One papyrus uses πρωτεύοντι Ἡρακλεοπολίτου for the leading citizen or magistrate of Herakeopolis. The letter is intended to flatter this important personage, suggesting that the voyage could never have gone wrong since Zeus Philios accompanied him.

9. To the Sophist Sopater.

I praise the spirit of the excellent Constantine but pity his fate. For, to be truly happy, he should have enjoyed only a single city, his home city. Instead, since fortune did not grant this, he has seen the cities of many men and he wanders about in order to earn a living, forced to glorify poverty while practicing a poetic art that originated not in Greece but in Italy. And thus he declaims in a heavy and baroque style. Having arrived here with this craft, he appealed to me to help him, and now I appeal to you. You, too, will surely guide him to a successful outcome by commending him to others.

> A reluctant and somewhat hostile letter of recommendation, on behalf of a visitor from the now barbarian-ruled Latin world. We do not know whether the addressee is the Sopater who is the author of an Ἐκλογαὶ διαφόρων (Photius, *Bibl.* cod. 161), of biographies (Cramer, *An. Par.* I 389), of Διαιρέσεις ζητημάτων and of scholia to Hermogenes (Walz, *Rhet. gr.* IV, V, VIII). At all events Aeneas simply hands his guest over to Sopater who must find friends for him.

10. To the Sophist Zosimus.

If the excellent Paul were young and a poet, he would still be worthy of honour. As it is, he is both a poet and an old man, and both of these qualities require someone who knows how to render them their deserved tribute. You wish to be foremost among those who do this, and rightly so. Here, then, is someone to whom you can do a good turn.

> Also a letter of recommendation. When you are young, it is enough to be famous. When you are old, you need material help too.
>
> The addressee cannot be the same as the Zosimus of letter 7. Letter 151 of Procopius of Gaza is also addressed to a Zosimus, who, after being his pupil, has now dedicated himself to the study of law. The Suda mentions a Zosimus of Ascalon, a sophist, who lived in the time of the emperor Anastasius and wrote an alphabetical lexicon and commentaries on Demosthenes and Lysias. But Aeneas was older than Procopius and so could hardly have had a pupil of Procopius – a young man – as an authoritative friend. It is possible that the Suda erroneously fused together information concerning two sophists named Zosimus, one native of Gaza put to death by the emperor Zeno (473-491), the other of Ascalon lived under Anastasius I (491-518). In all probability this second Zosimus was Aeneas' friend.

11. To Marinianus, of a consular family.

The excellent Ponton has surpassed the others in my school through his unflagging zeal, a quality that greatly aids the acquisition of learning. He has undoubtedly mastered the techniques of rhetorical oratory and added to them a multifaceted knowledge of the law. Yet he is not sated by these labours. Indeed, he has set out for your city like a skilled athlete heading to Olympia, superbly prepared for the contest. For if you inspire him, I prophesy that the young man will emerge an Olympic champion! May you brilliantly organize the games and offer prizes, not for boxing or wrestling, but for the art of eloquence and for wisdom. I greet the most illustrious Victor, the illustrious Stephen, and the most accomplished John, as well as your families and my friends.

> The addressee is clearly an influential person. A Marinianus was *praefectus praetorio Italiae, Illyrici et Africae* and then *consul ordinarius* in 423; another was bishop of Synnada in Phrygia; another was outright bishop of Gaza and took part in the Council of Ephesus in 449: to him John Chrysostom addresses epistle 128 (Migne *PG* 52, 638). It is clear, therefore, that this is a very influential Gazan family. The personal name Pontus is known from a Latin inscription.

12. To the Sophist Epiphanius.

For other lovers, the mere sight of the beloved's sandal suffices to relieve the pangs of love. But you ask for portraits of both soul and body. Words, which clearly interpret thought, truly delineate the soul itself, and that is precisely why they are given you. For my part I had resolved never again to have an image of an image reproduced. Yet, out of regard for your affection, I summoned the portraitist who resides here, and I sat before him, motionless of face, maintaining a solemn silence, and holding my pose, and allowed art to mirror nature. Having captured my likeness, the painter's hand fixed it and rendered it in colour. The portrait is now with you, so that you may converse with it and gaze upon it, and have nothing less than those who stand beside me. The excellent Euthymius performs this service for us, willingly braving the sea to do so; which seems to be a hard thing for rivals in love. Come then, let us make him forget his hardships through our affectionate solicitude.

Aeneas addresses letters 12 and 23 to Epiphanius, who is also the subject of letter 4. Epiphanius was part of the circle of Gazan sophists, and was also known to Procopius, who came to know him on the recommendation of Peter (ep. 142). Procopius tells us that Epiphanius became a jurist (ep. 70), and settled in Alexandria (ep. 122). So it is likely that Aeneas is writing to him in Alexandria, enclosing a portrait. The relationships of the three men are revealed here: Epiphanius is the one asking Aeneas for letters and a portrait; while Procopius is the one addressing Epiphanius and asking for letters and a portrait (ep. 53, 61, 94). The letter also explains the relation of Epiphanius and Euthymius to Aeneas: Euthymius is Epiphanius' rival in affection for Aeneas, and the more painful his service, the more meritorious his journey precisely because he is bringing Aeneas' portrait to his rival.

13. To Encratius.

Yesterday he was a teacher and guide to youths. Today he is led by a boy. Once he seemed venerable to the young. Now he appears so worthy of compassion. Such is fate. What then? Shall we merely commiserate without coming to his aid? You certainly would not. If a soldier were suddenly deprived by fortune of the very hand with which he had distinguished himself in valour, do you think his fellow soldiers would not pool a share of the spoils for his sake? We draw our livelihood from letters; let us not be considered inferior in loving our neighbour to those who live by the sword.

Another letter, like letter 10, in which Aeneas acts to help an old man of letters, a teacher.

14. To the Priest John.

I have just seen the [present of] vegetables with more pleasure than I once felt for the honey-and-almond cake. Back then, indeed, the unjust accusation levelled against the boy robbed the honey of its taste and pleasure. Now, however, the gentleness of his disposition makes the vegetables seem like gold to me. Truly sweet is the father who does not get angry because of an unjust accusation, but instead urges his son to turn away from thoughtlessness and to pursue virtue, and encourages the teacher to be solicitous towards him.

The relationships here are not quite clear. Possibly Aeneas is the boy's teacher, and the priest John is responsible to the parents for the boy. Perhaps John had sent Aeneas a letter asking about the boy's conduct, and accompanied by the cake. Aeneas replied; and now a further letter has arrived, accompanied by vegetables, but accepting that the accusation was false.

15. To the Priest Stephen.

This is not the first time that I have conversed with you. I did so once before. We used to talk by the Nile, back when I played with the Muses upon its banks. Our conversation would fashion elegant conceits, and while being serious, seemed to laugh. There was a contest of beauty: the Greeks were the judges. The contenders were Nireus, who was "the handsomest of men on earth," and Thersites, "the ugliest of men who came to Ilium." And the most amusing part was that Thersites thought it right to win; indeed, the discourse awarded him the prize, undeterred by Homer's mockery, who named every part of his body after its deformity and ridiculed the man from head to toe.

In truth, that is how you used to jest with your listeners back then. Now, however, I hear that you devote yourself to serious subjects, and in the temples you act as the herald of noble doctrine, and

with your words you reform the morals of the citizens. Thus, today, the mason and the carpenter have something to say about divine things, and during their work—men who, before hearing your words, chattered only of stones and wood—they now discourse about virtue.

Great happiness, then, to the excellent Eustratius, who traveled to many cities and filled them all with your name. May that no good man go unnoticed! It was he who prompted me to send this letter, lifting my hopes to the skies with the promise of even greater things: "gold in exchange for bronze," your letter in exchange for mine. Come then, let us not be disappointed in this fair hope.

> Stephen is called περιβλέπτος, "illustrious" in letter 11, so must have been a man of consequence. Some letters of Procopius are also addressed to a Stephen, who must be identified with ours, notably letter 18 which also mentions the Nile with reference to his stay and studies in Alexandria.
>
> In this letter Aeneas recalls his youthful years, when he was in Alexandria at the school of Hierocles. It seems likely that here Aeneas is alluding to Lucian, *Infer. Dial.* 25, where there is also a contest of beauty between Nireus and Thersites and the Homeric verse B 673 is also cited.

16. To Sarapion.

I have learned of your ordeal and watered the very earth with my tears, because this war originates with the very priests who profess to be heralds of peace. And if our ruin comes from the very source from which salvation should come, what way of escape remains for us? In my opinion these things call for loud lamentation. Yet I feel both sorrow and satisfaction. For while it is painful to have endured such perils, on the other hand steadfastness in the face of danger is the ultimate test of greatness of soul. What virtue can ever be called acquired, if no trial preceded it? Unless, of course, you would call a man an excellent general who has never once faced the enemy! But it is right for us to endure and not lose heart, for it is through war that peace is secured for us; and if this is so, let us face the war with courage rather than cowardice. But what a fine service you have rendered to your friends! In your presence, I used to profess my love for rhetoric, trusting that I would find a cure for it in you. But the opposite has happened: you have intensified that love rather than extinguishing it, by stirring up the applause of the spectators whom your letter summoned together. How then can one despise what you extol?

> It seems that Sarapion has got into trouble with the church. Practicing rhetoric could be dangerous, and Aeneas has himself been trying not to do so.

17. To the Sophist Dionysius.

Mount Pelion once seemed like the common school of heroes. But now that role belongs to your city, the city of the Muses. Fathers trust that, by attending your classes, their sons will either learn the literary arts or show knowledge of them. And no wonder, for the city is ancient and rich in old legends. Many beautiful songs celebrate it, among them the tale that Calliope, captivated by the city, dwells among you, having forsaken Helicon, and persuades her sisters to live there too. Hermes, surely, would not bear to forgo joining his sisters in their pastimes. Even Apollo, the god of music, loves your city more than Parnassus. For the knife of Delphi does not seem to him comparable to the beauty of these youths, nor the Delphic rock to this grove of Daphne, where even the water senses the deity's presence and is said to echo with soft music. But finest of all is

Dionysius, who truly teaches divine rites. This awakens the old and draws in the young. Therefore I hope that excellent opportunities await the young man, especially because, having received an initial initiation and learned of the good things we offer, he has set out on his journey, much like those in Athens who are initiated into the Lesser Mysteries before the Greater ones.

Welcome the young man kindly, then, and gauge his character by the passion he now harbours, a passion that drives him to cross the seas and traverse vast lands, despite his frail physique. May he also have, thanks to my letter, something more! Indeed, it ought to be bold—and feel no shame, though this is its first visit to you—in asking that you welcome it warmly and speak a kind word to it. May it return to you many times!

> This is addressed to the sophist Dionysius of Antioch, probably a pupil of Procopius of Gaza. Dionysius was an official orator in the ceremonies of the city. He has left 85 letters to us, which have been called "the emptiest in Greek literature" (*Realencyclopadie* V 975, n.127).
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> Calliope had a sumptuous temple in Antioch (Müller, *Antiq. Antioch.* p. 69, n. 4, and p. 106 f.).
>
> The grove of Daphne was near Antioch and sacred to Zeus and Apollo (v. Julian. ep. XCVIII), which is why, as Aeneas says, the water is possessed by the god. Cf. Procopius ep. 103. Splendid games took place in the grove (Polyb. 31, 3, 1; Liv. 33,49), including musical contests. Such games lasted until the 6th century; therefore they were still in use in Aeneas' time, to which he probably alludes with "echo with soft music". Initiation into the lesser mysteries was a preparatory stage to the great ones.
>
> Aeneas flatters Dionysius by presenting his own teaching as preparatory to that of Dionysius. In reality, the custom was widespread among masters of various cities of exchanging their pupils for further refinement (see also ep. XI). Alexandria was considered by Procopius as "the common mother of orators", and the Gazans used to send their pupils also to the famous law school of Beirut, to Antioch, where the school of theology was famous, to Caesarea, and to Constantinople.

18. To the Sophist Theodorus.

Smyrna takes pride in Homer and Aristides; now let my rhetorician Theodorus also share in this honour. This honour is entirely mine as well, if it is true that noble deeds performed by sons are considered to belong to the father too. Hail, then, to the elegance of your speech, thanks to which young Athenians seek to learn pure Attic not from their fathers, but from Syrians. Indeed they no longer dock at the Piraeus eager for instruction at the Academy, nor do they frequent the Lyceum, for they deem that the Academy and the Lyceum are to be found here with us. So I receive ample reward from you if the Ionians sing of me, thanks to you, as a progenitor, and if, by clearly discerning the images of my soul, they are already able to sketch my physical appearance as well. The garment you provided makes my figure shine more brightly and enhances the beauty of your own renown.

> Aelius Aristides (129-189 AD) was born at Hadrianutherai (today Balukeser) in Mysia, but, after much travel, fixed his residence in Smyrna. When the city was destroyed by an earthquake in 178, he worked very hard to have the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus rebuild it, and so Smyrna considered him its citizen and even erected a statue of him in the agora.

19. To the physician Gessius.

Procopius is mine. And may the son of that Elpidius become yours, he whom I wish were still alive, and through whom the medical art flourished among us. Indeed, it is difficult for one studies hard to keep his body healthy.

I have already described what I have suffered, yet you have become like a spectator of my affliction. What am I to do now? My kidney pains are severe and acute, but it seems like you are slow to attend to me. How much longer must we exchange letters? For a sick man even a single day feels like many years. Or perhaps the illness is very serious only when the sufferer is not a philosopher?

Have you forgotten the art? Are the ingredients for the medicine not ready? What hindrance is there, other than that you have forgotten our friendship? It is better, truly, to be accused of ignorance than of malice; for a judge directs his anger not at one who has erred through ignorance, but at one who has sinned out of malice. Oh, the betrayal of dearest friends! I remain in the grip of illness, you keep the remedy to yourself, and even as we discourse, I am being torn apart by pain.

> Aeneas has described his illness to Gessius in previous letters, but a reply with treatment is slow in coming. This Gessius is known to us from four letters of Procopius of Gaza (epp. 38, 68, 123, 134) and an article in the Suda lexicon. In the dialogue *Ammonius* by Zacharias, brother of Procopius, Gessius appears as a fellow student of the author. The meaning of the opening reference to a "Procopius" and a "son of Elpidius" is unknown to us. An Elpidius or Helpidius was a Greek physician of the 6th century AD living in Arles, then Spoleto, who attended Theodoric in his final illness in 526. Libanius was also a sufferer of kidney illness and mentions this in his letters.

20. Again to Gessius.

The excellent Nemesion, renowned for his legal expertise, commands even greater admiration for his character. What is the finest proof of this? That he knows how to win friends, and rejoices in their good fortune, while grieving over their undeserved misfortunes. And I would wish that you too, adhering to a different philosophy, would also do this. But will you do so by remembering all your friends, or only those who are close at hand? Indeed, as long as the cause of a disease remains hidden, the remedies remain hidden too, even those close at hand, and treatment proceeds by guesswork. But the diagnosis of the illness, shining like a light upon the physician's art, opens the way to abundant remedies and removes all uncertainty from the cure.

We did describe the illness, if by chance you recall? How a prolonged agitation came first, how a copious flow of blood followed, rather than superfluous fluid, and how rest and diet caused the condition to go dormant. Then came renewed agitation, another flow of blood, and further rest and diet. But when the disease was no longer dormant, a spasm came on, at first moderate, then not slight, and finally unbearable, which tortured and inwardly tormented, and was utterly tearing at the navel. Why, indeed, should we conceal from you what nature itself does not hesitate to reveal?

There remains, in fact, one remedy to combat the disease single-handedly (unless, through your own wisdom, you discover another): a pill compounded with the herb that physicians solemnly call *physallis*. For this alone is capable of warding off the insidious ambushes of the disease.

Another plea to Gessius for assistance. The text most likely depicts kidney stone disease (nephrolithiasis), particularly the process of renal colic caused by stones and hematuria (blood in the urine). The spasms are caused by the stone moving.

In the Suda, the name Nemesion is given with a quotation from the *Life of Isidorus* by Damascius. So he may have been a disciple of Isidorus, that is, of the Athenian school.

The "φυσαλλίς" is a medicinal herb, *Physalis Alkekengi,* which is often mentioned in ancient physicians as a remedy for kidney or bladder illnesses. The physalins have a certain anti-bacterial effect.

21. To the Priest Dorotheus.

The common people rush upon sacred things with unwashed feet, as the saying goes, in the same way as that bald blacksmith of Plato's who approached his mistress while still stinking of smoke and filth. But you pass from one sacred calling to another; from philosophy to the priesthood. The bearer of this letter is a minister of sacred things, so he belongs to your sphere. He loves peace and, having learned, I know not how, that there is a mountain consecrated to God, a place of solitude well-suited to peace, he sets out for it. But poverty and the obstacles that it brings stand in his path. You can remedy this by giving orders to the priests of that region to help and support the man on his journey to the mountain.

The clerical addressee is unknown, and cannot be the man to whom Procopius addresses several letters.

The saying or proverb referred to is also found in Lucian, *rhet. praec.* 14 (παροιμία φησίν), in the scholia to Lucian *Pseudoi* 4, in Syrianus in *Hermog.* II, 3, 19 f. Rabe, in Bekker *Anecd.* I 405, 16 (= Bachmann, *Anecd.* I 99, 16), in Photius, *Lex.* p. 142, 12 Reitz., in the Suda Lexicon (ed. Adler I p. 221 nr. 2476), as well as in the paroemiographers: Zenob. *cent.* I 95, Append. prov. I 29, Diogenian. I 49, Apostol. *cent.* III 20 (ed. Leutsch-Schneidewin I p. 31, 1. 383, 11. II 8, 9. 291, 8).

The citation of the Platonic passage (*Republic*, book 6, 495e) is not quite accurate. Plato speaks of a small, bald blacksmith who, having gotten rid of his tools, washed himself at the bath, dressed himself in a new garment, as befits a groom, goes to celebrate his wedding with his master's daughter. With this comparison, Plato wishes to stigmatize those who, without natural disposition or cultural preparation, wish to accede to philosophy. Just as the children of the well-born girl and the blacksmith – Plato continues – will be ill-born, so the thought of these spurious philosophers cannot be other than vain sophistry and will have nothing to do with true science. Aeneas thus contrasts the common people who, without preparation, discoursed of sacred things (this was the evil of the age) and Dorotheus who, having always remained in a high intellectual sphere, had naturally passed from philosophy, itself a sacred thing for Aeneas, to the priesthood.

22. To Diodorus Scholasticus.

If war invites us to speak often with one another, while peace instead entails a long silence, then this war alone is better than peace. For what is more delightful than frequent conversation with those we love? Let us, then, put an end to either the peace or the silence. Let not the sun see friends silent, let alone orators!

This is the same Diodorus as in ep. 7. The serious enmity addressed there has given way to peace, and somehow they have nothing more to write to each other.

23. To the Sophist Epiphanius.

The man to whom we have entrusted this letter has devoted himself to a noble life and to writing well. Yet he also knows how to manage a wealthy household for his master with perfect integrity and excellence. Many have wanted him to share their lives, but he loves his homeland more than riches. Having visited many cities like an Odysseus, he comes to you as to an Alcinous. He will tell you of his wanderings, just as the other did to his host; and you, having brought his wanderings to a close, must welcome him back to his homeland, just as the other did for him. Nor let the hope that leads him to turn to you through me be disappointed.

> For Epiphanius the sophist and jurist see ep. 12. The suggestion here is that bearer of the letter, being endowed with such qualities, can also administer Epiphanius' opulent house with integrity and skill. The protégé's homeland must have been Alexandria, where Epiphanius had moved from Gaza.

24. To Marcianus.

You invited me to be your friend, and already I am beginning to make requests. The bearer of this letter has suffered a grave injury. He was traveling to buy dates, carrying the money needed for the purchase. But, oh misfortune! not even poverty is immune to danger! He rode along buoyed up by high hopes, but the vilest of the barbarians who profess friendship toward us fell upon him, beat him up, mistreated him, and, brandishing drawn swords, threatened to finish him off entirely. Finally, having robbed him of his gold, they told him he ought to be grateful that his lot had changed but his life had not ended. Justice, who is swift of wing, has caught some of the culprits. The praetor was informed; he was outraged because he has always hated thieves more than open enemies, and rightly so. Because one can take precautions against the latter in time, whereas the former treacherously attack their friends. The praetor ordered that the poor man's loss be made good and that he get back what had been taken from him. Such was the praetor's decree, it is true, yet the poor man still laments his destitution. Come now, put an end to the villainy of the one party and the distress of the other. I greet the magnificent, most pious praetor.

> Positano suggests that the barbarians are mercenaries in the pay of the praetor, with whom Marcianus will have to intervene. "Magnificent", Μεγαλοπρεπέστατον, and "Most Pious", θεοφιλέστατον are among the titles pertaining to high Byzantine dignitaries.

25. To the architect Julian.

I feel as though I possess the very garden of Alcinous, thanks to the ingenious contrivance that you invented and that the workman constructed. I shall now attempt a description, for the view is truly delightful.

There are two large wheels, connected by a plank and pegs, so that to an outside observer they appear as one; at the bottom of the plank, inside the structure, a young servant, who remains in the same spot, runs continuously; the wheel moves with him, and follows him. The axle, around which the large wheel rotates on a fixed center, also drives, through its motion, a smaller wheel located above the cistern. Ropes and buckets are attached to this smaller wheel at regular intervals.

But while the movement is extremely rapid, the middle part of the small wheel offers too narrow an opening, allowing it to catch only the initial spurts of water. Most of the water falls back easily into

the cistern, and once it has poured back down, it is difficult to lift it up again. This problem, therefore, must be remedied. But for one who has discovered the fundamental principle, completing the work is not difficult.

Let us not, then, allow such a magnificent spectacle to require the expertise of another architect. Nor let us suffer the fate of a painter who, while seeking to fully capture the beauty of Helen, forgets to paint her head.

> Aeneas has installed a slave-powered hydraulic machine to water his garden, designed by the architect Julian. The effect is like the garden of Alcinous (Odyssey 120 ff.), except that the machine is mis-designed – the output channel is too narrow and much of the water is lost. Aeneas would like Julian to fix it.

Appendix – Diagram of the water-lifting machine in letter 25

The machine is simple, but hard to visualise in words, so I have tried to generate a picture (below). Unfortunately it contains errors, listed at the end.

The purpose of the machine is to pick up lots of water from a tank, and then feed it down a chute to the gardens.

The AI-generated image below gives the main features of the system. Two wheels, connected by the axle. A slave walks inside a large open-framed wooden wheel. This is the drive-wheel. The drive wheel shares an axle with a smaller open-framed wheel with buckets around the rim. So as the slave walks, both wheels turn.

The buckets on the small wheel dip into the tank, fill, and are carried up to the top of the wheel. There, as they come over the top, they empty into a trough. This is at right angles to the wheel and in the middle of the top, where the buckets empty. This trough feeds into a pipe taking the water where it is wanted.

The same principle is used in the water lifting "noria," which is described in Vitruvius.

Unfortunately the AI has got some bits wrong in the diagram. The trough at top right, feeding water in, should be receiving waters from the buckets, and it should be parallel to the main axle, sticking out to the right. Also the slave is actually pushing the drive-wheel in reverse. I could not get Gemini to make those changes.

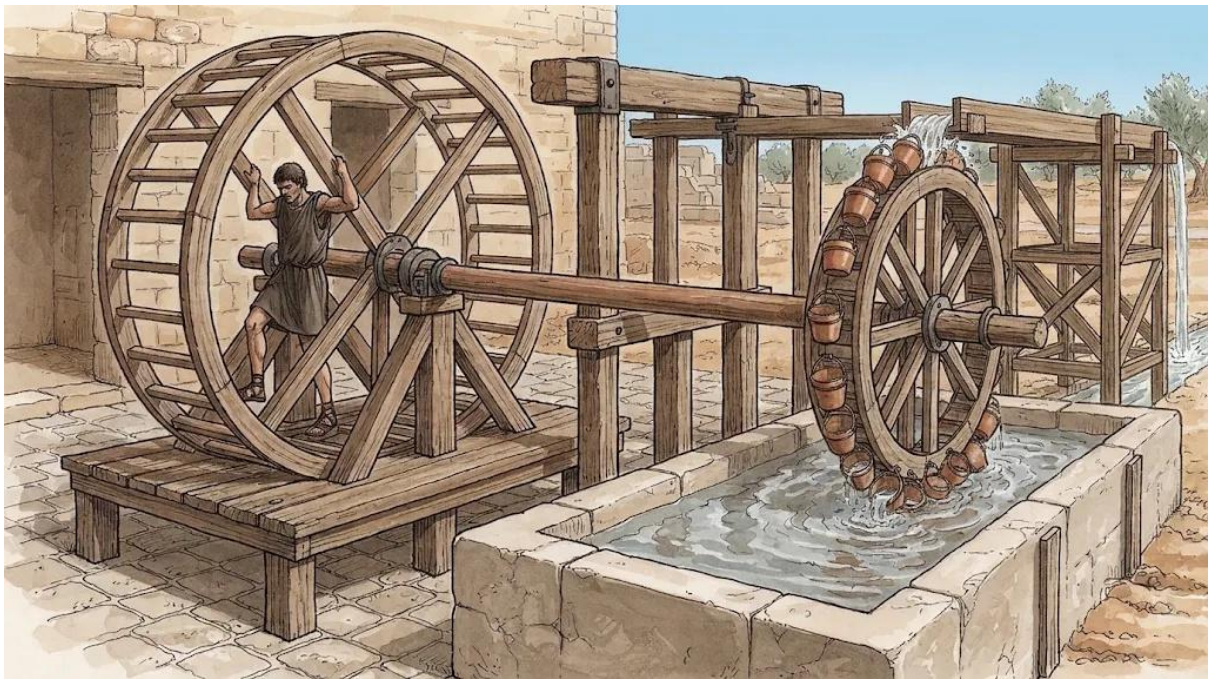

Figure 1: AI-generated image of the water machine.