

Tarsos in the *Amores* Ascribed to Lucian

C. P. Jones

NO INCONSPICUOUS CITY (οὐκ ἄσημος πόλις): so Tarsos is described by its best-known son, the apostle Paul. It is mentioned by many ancient authors, and has been much discussed by modern ones.¹ In the following I argue that the dialogue on love ascribed to Lucian is set in Tarsos, and gives unnoticed information about a celebrated festival there.

The *Amores* uses the Platonic device of enclosing a long central dialogue within a brief outer one that begins and ends the work. The chief speaker, Lycinos, converses with his friend Theomnestos on the occasion of an annual festival of Heracles, the Heracleia. Since early morning Theomnestos has been recounting his many adventures in love, with both males and females, and thus Lycinos is reminded to describe an experience he had when sailing from “town” (evidently the place in which the outer, introductory dialogue is set) to Italy. While stopping in Rhodes he met two old friends, Charicles of Corinth and Callicratidas of Athens, and sailed in their company over to Cnidos to see the sights. Charicles is an inveterate lover of women, and Callicratidas of boys, and after viewing the famous statue of Aphrodite by Praxiteles, they debate the superiority of their preferences, making Lycinos umpire; he gives his verdict for pederasty. When the outer dialogue resumes, Theomnestos endorses the opinion of Lycinos, and the two of them go off to the agora; “they are probably lighting the pyre in the god’s honour, and it is quite an agreeable spectacle, reminding those present of his sufferings on Oeta.”²

“Lycinos” is the Hellenized form which Lucian uses for his own name in several of his dialogues, and the subject matter of the *Amores* recalls genuine works of his at several points. Nevertheless, the style is so unlike Lucian’s, and so like the style he parodies in satires such as the *Lexiphanes*, that the *Amores* is generally agreed to be

¹ The basic discussion is by W. Ruge, *RE* 4A (1932) 2413–39; note also C. Bradford Welles, “Hellenistic Tarsus,” *MéUSJ* 38 (1962) 41–75; C. P. Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom* (Cambridge [Mass.]/London 1978) 71–82. Paul: *Act.Ap.* 21.39.

² [Luc.] *Am.* 1, 4 (annual Heracleia), 6–11 (journey to Rhodes and Cnidos), 54 (pyre).

spurious, though written under his influence.³ Partly for that reason, and partly no doubt because of the subject, it has suffered some neglect, and several classic translations of Lucian omit it.⁴ The only satisfactory treatment in this century has been the excellent dissertation of Robert Bloch,⁵ though certain passages important for the history of the Greek novel and of ancient art and architecture continue to draw attention.

For the setting of the outer dialogue the most obvious clue is given at the beginning of the inner one, when Lycinos describes his visit to Rhodes (6–7).

I was intending to sail at full speed, and a ship had been prepared for me . . . I went from town (*ἀπ' ἄστυος*) in a mule-cart down to the sea; then, after shaking hands with my companions (for I was followed by a crowd of persons eager for culture, who talked to me constantly and were reluctant to let me go), I climbed onto the poop-deck and sat near the helmsman. We were soon carried away from land by the energy of the rowers . . . When we had passed the coast of Cilicia and had gained the bay of Pamphylia, we doubled with no little difficulty the Chelidonian isles, those blessed boundaries of ancient Hellas, and stopped at each of the Lycian cities, where most of our pleasure was in myths: for there is no clear remnant of prosperity in them. Then we put in at Rhodes, the island of Helios, and decided to break the continuity of our journey for a short while.

The earliest discussions of Lycinos' point of departure favored Athens; but this is geographically absurd, and though the word *ἄστυ* is often applied to Athens as the capital of Attica, like 'town' in English it can designate any large agglomeration, for example Rome or Alexandria.⁶ A better suggestion was made by J. T. Lehmann in his edition of 1825: "Cogita potius Syriae caput, vel Phoeniciae forte. Antio-

³ Thus R. Helm, *Lucian und Menipp* (Leipzig/Berlin 1906) 354–55; *RE* 13 (1927) 1730 s.v. "Lukianos."

⁴ Thus Wieland, Tooke, the Fowlers; the first German translation was apparently by Hans Licht, *Eros: Ein Gespräch über die Liebe von Lukian* (Die Werkstatt der Liebe 1 [Munich 1920]); the first English one that I know of is that in the Loeb, M. D. Macleod, ed. and tr., *Lucian VIII* (Cambridge [Mass.]/London 1967) 151–235.

⁵ *De Pseudo-Luciani Amoribus* (DissPhilolArgentor 12.3 [Strassburg 1907]). The introduction and notes of Licht (*supra* n.4) are voluminous but add little; those of Macleod (*supra* n.4) are inevitably brief.

⁶ Athens is tentatively favored by Moses Solanus (du Soul) in the great Amsterdam edition begun by Hemsterhuys: *Luciani Samosatensis Opera* II, ed. J. F. Reitzius (Reitz) (Amsterdam 1743) 404. Surprisingly, it is also supported by M. P. Nilsson, *ArchRW* 21 (1922) 313 n.4 = *Opuscula Selecta* I (Lund 1951) 351 n.11. For these two senses of *ἄστυ* see Stephanus, *Thesaurus* 2275B–C s.v.; LSJ s.v. II.

chia saltem eruditus omnis generis, de quibus modo mentio fit, admodum erat illis temporibus referta.”⁷ Lehmann seems to have supposed that if Lycinos was to skirt the Cilician coast sailing westwards he should have started from a point further east. Yet Cilicia has two parts, the level with its low terrain and several large harbors such as those of Aegaeae, Tarsos, and Soloi (Pompeiopolis), but also the rough, which juts out towards the south and presents a formidable barrier to shipping. A sailor who had started westwards from a harbor of the level part could well talk of “passing the coast of Cilicia.”

Another detail is decisive for Tarsos: the festival of Heracles and the “pyre” in the god’s honor. A passage of Dio Chrysostom has hitherto been thought the only reference to this ritual. Rebuking the Tarsians for their habit of “snorting,” Dio says: “What do you suppose if, as is likely and as people say, founding gods or heroes often go about their own cities, invisible to everyone, at times of sacrifice and certain public festivals; well, suppose your founder Heracles were to be present, although at the time of the pyre which you build for him in such splendid style, do you think he would be very pleased to hear such a sound?”⁸ This Heracles, whom other authors besides Dio mention as one of the principal divinities of Tarsos, is a Hellenized form of the epichoric god Sandan or Sandon. As early as Antiochos VII and as late as Trajan Decius coins of Tarsos show Sandan framed by a triangular structure, which in turn rests on an ornate rectangular base. While this was long thought to be the pyre mentioned by Dio, recent opinion has regarded it as some kind of permanent structure designed to display the god’s image: however, it may have been only a temporary object, perhaps made of wood.⁹ Whatever the correct identification, Dio’s evidence establishes the cardinal importance of the pyre in the cult of Heracles at Tarsos, and no other city is known to have honored the god in this way. Moreover, Lycinos’ description of his departure, a journey by mule-cart from “town” to his ship, perfectly fits Tarsos, with its harbor some

⁷ J. T. Lehmann, *Luciani Samosatensis opera* V (Leipzig 1825) 575; Antioch is also favored by Bloch (*supra* n.5) 8. Licht (*supra* n.4) 133 n.114 thinks the city indeterminate; Macleod (*supra* n.4) offers no opinion.

⁸ Dio Chrys. 33.47: for the incomprehensible ἤτοι before πυρᾶς οὐσῆς I follow L. Robert, *BCH* 101 (1977) 96 n.36, and read καίτοι.

⁹ On Heracles-Sandan in Cilicia, Höfer in Roscher *Lex.* 4 (1909–15) 323–26; Ruge (*supra* n.1) 2421–22; most recently, P. Chuvin, *JSav* 1981, 319–24. For coins showing the structure, essential bibliography at Höfer 323–24; there have been many additions, e.g. *SNG Copenhagen* 333–36, 396–97; *Sammlung von Aulock* 5971–72, 5992, 6057. On the vexed problem of its function see now Chuvin 321 n.49.

twenty kilometers away on a coastal lagoon; a traveller starting from Antioch might be expected to mention its port-city Seleuceia.¹⁰

If the *Amores* can be made to yield a precise location, it does not so readily yield a date. The only person to look for one seriously was again Bloch. If the work was from Lucian's lifetime, he argued, Lycinos' praise of Rhodes' "beauty" would be odd after the great earthquake of *ca* 142 (which also devastated Lycia); on the other hand, when Lycinos says that there is "no clear remnant of prosperity" in the cities of Lycia, he must be speaking of a time when the emperors no longer poured funds into the cities, and so may refer to the troubles of the later third century.¹¹ Rhodes, however, is known to have been lavishly rebuilt, and a few years later Aristides can call it "the most beautiful of Greek cities."¹² While Lycinos' comment on the cities of Lycia might refer to some decline caused by natural or human disasters, it should rather be judged against his taste for the glories of antique Hellas, the celebrated paintings in the Rhodian Dionysion, the colonnades of Sostratos, and Praxiteles' Aphrodite on Cnidos.¹³ To such an observer Lycia might appear to retain "no clear remnant of prosperity" earlier than the late third century. The *Amores* seem to belong to a time when Lucian was still influential, but which favored a preciousness of style far from Lucian's and more like that of the younger Philostratos: perhaps, therefore, the late second or the first half of the third century, roughly the span that is often assigned to Alciphron.¹⁴

With the reservations which this uncertainty of date imposes, some conclusions may be drawn for the history of Tarsos. The *Amores* provides some new details on the Tarsian cult of Heracles. It has sometimes been inferred from Dio that the festival was actually called 'Pyre':¹⁵ the name is now shown to have been the more natural one of 'Heracleia'. The pyre was built in the agora and lit, as might have been expected, at or towards nightfall. Lycinos' phrase, "to light the

¹⁰ On the harbor of Tarsos, Ruge (*supra* n.1) 2438. For Seleuceia see *Act.Ap.* 13.4, *Tac. Ann.* 2.69.2.

¹¹ Bloch (*supra* n.5) 53–56 (Rhodes), 56–57 (Lycia). His dating is accepted by Macleod (*supra* n.4) 147.

¹² Repairs: Paus. 8.43.4, *HA* Pius 9.1. Aristides: *Or.* 24.45, ἡ πόλις ὑμῶν καλλίστη τῶν Ἑλληνίδων. Bloch (*supra* n.5) 53 mentions Aristides' description, but does not seem to see the consequences for his own argument.

¹³ *Am.* 8 (Dionysion), 11 (colonnades), 13 (Aphrodite).

¹⁴ For Alciphron's date and apparent debt to Lucian see A. R. Benner and Francis H. Fobes, ed., *The Letters of Alciphron* (London/Cambridge [Mass.] 1949) 6–18.

¹⁵ *E.g.* A. B. Cook, *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion* I (Cambridge 1914) 600, "the Tarsian festival of *Pyra*." *πυρᾶς οὔσης* in Dio (*supra* n.8) means no more than "at the time of the pyre."

pyre for the god,” does not support the notion sometimes favored that Heracles was burned in effigy.¹⁶

The *Amores* also gives an insight into the cultural life of Tarsos. The “crowd eager for culture” which saw Lycinos off suits a city whose large number of cultured men is noted by Strabo (14.5.13–15 [673–75]). According to Philostratos, Apollonius of Tyana received part of his education there, but then moved to Aegaeae, finding the Tarsians too devoted to luxury (*τρουφή*) and their fine linen clothing; Lycinos in the *Amores* gently mocks Theomnestos for his “brilliant clothes that fall in luxury down to the feet.”¹⁷ The habit of “snorting” which Dio condemns in the first *Tarsian* is obscure, but may be some kind of sexual licence.¹⁸ The *Amores*, a scarcely veiled plea for pederasty, suits a city ‘not inconspicuous’ for its lax atmosphere.

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¹⁶ Rightly criticized by A. D. Nock, *Gnomon* 33 (1961) 583 n.1 = *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World II* (Oxford 1972) 930 n.5.

¹⁷ Philostr. *VA* 1.7 (where *ἄτοπον* means ‘wicked’, not ‘harsh’ as Conybeare in the Loeb); [Luc.] *Am.* 3.

¹⁸ Jones (*supra* n.1) 73–74.