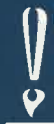


Ad Litteras

Latin Studies in Honour of J.H. Brouwers



Edited by A.P. Orbán and M.G.M. van der Poel
Nijmegen 2001



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THE FISH CATALOGUE IN AUSONIUS' *MOSELLA*
LITERARY BACKGROUNDS OF *Mos.* 75-149

V.J.Chr. Hunink

Among the numerous works of Decius Magnus Ausonius there are not many that have found widespread favour among scholars and readers.¹ Most tend to regard his extensive literary output² as the result of a lifelong devotion to studies, primarily aimed at parading erudition and writing skills, but showing little inspiration or genuine poetic genius. Indeed, puzzling poems such as the *Griphus trinarum numeri* and the *Cento nuptialis*, or poems touching upon religious themes,³ or the rather tiresome chains of portraits depicting towns, emperors, or relatives of the poet, are not easy to appreciate as works of art in their own right.

A notable exception, however, is formed by the poem *Mosella*, which has been hailed by many as one of the most precious creations of late Latin poetry. Its moderate length (only 483 lines), variety of themes and motifs, exquisite imagery, and its 'romantic' appeal have no doubt contributed to this general praise. The poem is probably too complex ever to become a bestseller, but some separate and easily accessible editions have become available in several languages,⁴ while the scholarly literature on the poem has grown to considerable proportions.⁵

¹ It is with great pleasure that I dedicate this article to prof. J.H. Brouwers. From my very first day at the university of Nijmegen, he has promoted my Latin studies whenever and wherever he could. Prof. Brouwers showed himself an immensely loyal and reliable 'Doktorvater', and his incessant, kind support has been a great help for me throughout the years. It is with pride that I call him my teacher.

² The standard edition is Green 1991; on which is based: Green 1999 (OCT). A convenient edition in two volumes is: Ausonius, with an English translation by Hugh G. Evelyn White, (Loeb Classical Library nrs. 96 and 115).

³ See now: Skeb 2000.

⁴ See notably Ausonius, *Mosella*, herausgegeben und in metrischer Übersetzung vorgelegt von Bertold K. Weis, Darmstadt 1994 (2nd impr.); and Ausone, *La moselle*, édition, introduction et commentaire par Charles-Marie Ternes, Paris 1972. A recent Dutch translation is: Ausonius, *De Moezel*, vertaald door Patrick Lateur, Amsterdam 2000. On the Internet, some material is available too. See e.g. a *pagina Ausonii* at www.restena.lu/cul/libellus/ausonius.html.

⁵ Among recent contributions may be mentioned Dräger 1997; Fuoco 1993; Kenney 1984; Nugent 1990; Martin 1985; Mondin 1994, esp. 228-40; Schröder 1998.

Scope and aim

The poem was written during Ausonius' long stay at the court in Trier, where he had been appointed as the personal tutor of prince Gratianus.⁶ The date of composition of the poem is generally considered to be the year 371.⁷ For all its beauty and variety, the poem confronts readers with countless problems, concerning not just the interpretation of individual passages or the identification of specific elements or names occurring in the text, but even the general aim of the poem.

As a consequence, the *Mosella* has led to several, sometimes conflicting interpretations. For example, the poem has been presented as a work of mostly political relevance, intended to please the emperor. The idealizing portrait of the countryside, and the jubilant descriptions of villas, baths, and other buildings could even seem to support the building policy of the emperor, who planned to develop the area around Trier.⁸ On a very different note, the poem has also been interpreted as far removed from reality, to such an extent that it seems to refer only to itself as text.⁹

Such extremes are, perhaps, to be avoided. The poem is obviously more than a piece of propaganda (Ausonius is too much a man of culture and a scholar for that), or a postmodern exercise in textual self-referentiality (Ausonius is, after all, a poet belonging to antiquity). Most readers will settle for what may be seen as a compromise: the *Mosella* is above all a literary creation, celebrating the local river in highly traditional terms. The poem combines a great number of venerable poetical genres, such as epic and didactic poetry, hymns, travel poems, city poems, effectively creating a new genre of its own, that of the 'river poem'.¹⁰ The work is literally crammed with references to earlier Roman poets, notably Virgil, Ovid, and Statius,¹¹ but Ausonius' conscious *imitatio* and *aemulatio* have resulted in a poem that

⁶ On Ausonius and his career see Sivan 1993; further Booth 1982. General notes may be found in most articles on Ausonius, and in handbooks as Von Albrecht 1994, esp. 1047-54.

⁷ See Green 1991, 456. Discussion, meanwhile, continues. For instance, Drinkwater 1999 proposes 375 as the year of composition and publication of the *Mosella*.

⁸ For such interpretations cf. e.g. Ternes 1970; and Martin 1985.

⁹ See notably the postmodern analysis by Nugent 1990.

¹⁰ Extensive descriptions and catalogues of rivers occurred earlier in epic, notably in Ovid and Lucan; see Dräger 1997. The *Mosella* is, however, the first separate poem devoted to a river.

¹¹ A discouragingly long list of parallels may be found in e.g. the Teubner edition by Peiper (457-66).

can be considered a work of art that is not devoid of personal and even original features.¹²

Fish

Many of the poem's characteristics occur in an important section on various species of *fish* that live in the *Mosella*. This long passage has surprised many readers, who generally experience some difficulty in understanding it, if only for the zoological details it presents. One of its literary backgrounds even seems to have escaped attention until now.

The passage in question extends from line 75 to 149 (forming almost one seventh of the whole work), and comes at an early stage of the poem. In fact, it is preceded only by three other sections: (1) the brilliant opening section (1-22), where the poet carefully introduces readers to the landscape, mentioning the river only in line 22; (2) a rather obligatory 'praise of the river' in the tradition of hymnic poetry (23-54); and (3) a minute description of the riverbed with its pebbles and grasses moving along with the streaming water (55-74). The last passage is often excerpted or quoted, as it shows considerable poetic talent, for which Ausonius has been widely given credit.¹³

There is an easy transition from stones and other objects in the river to the fish that swim in the water (74-5). The highlighted tiring effect on human eyes (*intentos tamen usque oculos errore fatigant... pisces*) further ties up with the preceding sections.¹⁴ By immediately referring to the various species of fish in the river which are too numerous to be listed completely (77-81), Ausonius clearly signals to his experienced readers that a *catalogue* of fish is to follow shortly. After calling in the help of a Naiad as his guide (82-4), he then actually starts the catalogue.

Its first member is the *capito*, the 'chub',¹⁵ which receives three lines. It is worthwhile to consider the pieces of information specified by the poet: two general points (it is scaly, and it can be seen on the sand) are immediately followed by some detailed ones concerning the texture of its

¹² Striking elements in the poem are its strong stress on visual effects (and illusions) and an intriguing un-classical sense of nature. For the latter notably Fuoco 1993 and Newlands 1988, esp.418.

¹³ Cf. Green 1991, 471 a.l.: 'This section is notably original in expression'; further e.g. Kenney 1984, 196-7; Fuoco 1993, 334-5.

¹⁴ Cf. in the section 55-74 the following words and expressions: *spectaris* (55), *liquidis obtutibus* (57), *nec prohibent oculos* (58), *visu* (59), *cernimus* (60).

¹⁵ The identification of fish is not always certain. I generally follow Green 1991, who relies on standard works such as D'Arcy Thompson.

flesh: it is soft and thick on the fishbones, and it must be served within six hours.

Next there are brief references to the *salar* 'trout', the boneless *rhedo* (more difficult to identify),¹⁶ and the *umbra* 'grayling' (88-90). The *barbus* 'barbel' receives more attention in a passage of six lines. With a traditional *apostrophe*, the fish is directly addressed by the poet (*tuque...*), which enhances the liveliness and brings some variety in the text. Four rather complex lines are devoted to its origin in another river (the Saar), and two to its development: with age it does not get worse, like all other living beings, but better. The detail seems puzzling at first sight, but can only refer to its gastronomical qualities: its taste gets better as it ages.

Next there are two rather long sections, of nine lines each, dealing with the *salmo* 'salmon' (97-105) and the *mustela*, probably the 'lamprey' (106-14). The salmon is noted for its red flesh, its broad tail moving in the water, and its scales. Some culinary details easily come in here: the salmon is fit for tables where one does not know what to choose (*dubiae facturis fercula cenae* 102), apparently a compliment to its widely beloved taste, and the fish can be kept for a long time without going bad. The portrait ends with some touches on the appearance of the fish, with spots on the head and a large flabby belly. The last element may well be gastronomical again, since such a belly promises much and rather fat meat. The picture on the *mustela* first highlights its origin in the Danube and its transfer to the Moselle with human aid (4 lines). Details on the fish itself mainly concern its colour (black, yellow and blue), but also include a remark on the fatness of part of its flesh (113).

The next portrait, that of the *perca* 'perch' (115-9) is even exclusively focused on gastronomical qualities: it is called *delicias mensarum* (115) and compared to sea fish and mullets. The taste is strong and the flesh is conveniently divided between bones,¹⁷ a picture that seems to aim at making the reader's mouth water.

¹⁶ Lewis and Short s.v. *redo* 'a kind of fish without bones', which comes dangerously close to the notorious definitions like 'unidentified fish', with which lexicographers have so often plagued their readers. The *rhedo* may be the 'rudd' or the 'burbot' (Green 1991, 475).

¹⁷ Green 1991, 477 notes that the last phrase would be true of many fish, and states that the sentence is a weak sequel to 116-7. But in defence of Ausonius it may be remarked that the lines show a careful construction and strong alliteration and assonance of -s, which was already dominant in 115-7 and here is perhaps reminiscent of kitchen sounds like *frying* or sizzling in a pan (cf. line 127 *stridentesque focis*). The detail of the meat lying on the bones is not meant to be

By contrast, the *lucius* 'pike' (120-4) is merely ridiculed for its 'Roman' name, and earns some disparaging comments: it lives in swamps and is served not on tables of connoisseurs but only in cheap taverns (*feruet fumosis olido nidore popinis* 124), places from which our poet obviously distances himself. The *tinca* 'tench', *alburnus* 'bleak', and *alausea* 'shad' (125-7) are mentioned almost in passing, with just a few details suggesting that these species too are fit only for consumption by the common people.

With the *sarius* 'salmon-trout' (128-30) and *gobio* 'gudgeon' (131-4), the catalogue gradually draws towards its close. It has been noticed that the syntax is rather loose here (a main verb is lacking in 131-4), and the poet may have hastened on a bit.¹⁸ We do read, however, that the gudgeon is agreeably fat and round, which seems to qualify it for use in the kitchen.

Finally, as a climax of the whole catalogue appears the *silurus* 'sheat-fish'. In an exalted portrait of no fewer than fifteen lines (135-149) the fish is hailed as an impressive 'river-dwelling dolphin', gently gliding through the calm water, admired by all nature, and causing no harm or large waves.¹⁹ The picture of the impressive fish rounds off the catalogue of fish, which is confirmed by the following lines (cf. *multiplicasque satis numerasse cateruas* 151), after which follows a series of 'scenes along the waterside', starting with some details about viticulture and trade (152-68). After the great stress on the river as a provider of excellent fish for human consumption, it is surely no coincidence that the area is presented as producing wine as well.²⁰

Structure and sense

Ausonius' catalogue of fish is carefully embedded in the structure of his *Mosella*. It was already pointed out that the catalogue smoothly followed the passage 55-74 about the clear water allowing a view of the riverbed, and is followed itself in a natural manner by the section on viticulture.

Overlooking the poem as a whole it appears to be quite well-ordered: having introduced the river itself and everything that it contains

zoologically informative, but to suggest that the fish is almost 'ready for consumption'.

¹⁸ Green 1991, 478 observes that Ausonius confuses three species of fish in his short account of the salmon-trout.

¹⁹ There is a surprising comparison '*a contrario*' of the whale in the Atlantic Ocean, that, on coming ashore, causes high waves and 'frightens the mountains'. The *silurus* then seems quite innocent: in a neat turn it is qualified as *nostrae mitis ballena Mosellae* (148).

²⁰ Perhaps typically for Ausonius' erudite and allusive style of writing, the actual produce *uinum* is not mentioned in the passage, but left implied.

within its stream, the poet then, so to speak, moves to the surface of the water and the shores, adding numerous details of all that happens around the water. There follow sections on e.g. playing satyrs and Naiads, optical illusions on the water, fishermen, and buildings and luxurious villas (150-349). Finally, the poem is concluded with another catalogue, now one of tributaries (349-80),²¹ some further tributes to the river and a rather autobiographically coloured section functioning as a *sphragis* of the poet (381-471).

The inner structure of Ausonius' catalogue of fish has been carefully devised too. A total of fifteen fish are discussed, with a clear variation between longer and shorter sections, species that are exquisite or less commendable, renowned or less well-known. An intriguing suggestion about the underlying structure of the catalogue was proposed by Dräger 1997, 456-8. His graphical presentation of the section, based on the number of Latin lines devoted to each species, clearly results in the picture of *a fish*. The section, then, would be almost a *technopaegnon* of 'Hellenistic' colour. The idea is all the more convincing since plays on numbers, notably on the number 'seven',²² occur throughout in the poem.²³

Even if the section is well embedded in the poem as a whole and shows a clear inner structure, we may still wonder why Ausonius chose to include it at all. For, one might object, the detailed catalogue is hardly essential in the picture of the Moselle and even distracts attention from the river itself.

An obvious answer is that almost every element in the poem does exactly the same. Since little indeed can be said about a river (for what else is it but a stream of water?) anything that is somehow related to the Moselle will do to add to its praise. So the fish that are caught here commend their natural habitat, and the details about their physical beauty, gastronomical qualities, or interesting properties make excellent sense: it must be a superb river that brings forth such fine species. The zoological theme enables the poet to expand on what now seems a commendable quality of the river. More prosaically, it provides him with some suitable 'content' to fill up his poem.

Some scholars have gone further and have attributed a deeper, symbolic significance to the fish. For instance, according to Martin, the

²¹ On this catalogue, see notably Dräger 1997.

²² This number probably reflects a Pythagorean influence; see additional evidence in Dräger 2000.

²³ The fish catalogue would then have to be analyzed as consisting of twice seven fish, plus one extra fish, the impressive *silurus*, that is, indeed, different from all others. For one thing, the picture of the *silurus* contains not a single culinary feature.

various species contain a political message: 'il y a des poissons nobles, des poissons bourgeois, des poissons plébéiens - et puis au-dessus d'eux il y a l'imposant silure, sorte de poisson-roi, ou de poisson-empereur, authentique souverain de ce monde aquatique'.²⁴ One wonders whether the Roman emperor will have felt quite happy if he had been related to 'sheat-fish', even though it is said to be peaceful and innocuous. It would perhaps be wisest for a poet in court to avoid symbolism of this kind.

The significance of the section is to be found, again, not on the political but on the literary level. By presenting his complimentary details about the fish in the form of a *catalogue*, Ausonius clearly signals that what he is doing is more than showing off erudition and ichthyological expertise or playing a game of political allegory: he is actually inserting his work in the venerable tradition of epic and didactic poetry, where catalogues had been a standard element for over a thousand years.²⁵ The choice of the literary device itself conveyed an obvious message to the ancient readers: they are dealing with a piece of learned Roman literature.

Real species

Even a learned poet creating literature must ultimately rely on facts. So it is relevant to ask what sources Ausonius used for his observations on fish.

Many readers will feel tempted by the idea that Ausonius simply studied the Moselle himself in a direct way. After all, he lived in Trier himself and must have had plenty of time to make personal observations in the region. However appealing this idea may be, however natural it may seem to us in our post-romantic age, it need not apply to the Roman poet, who may well have done his work at a desk in his study rather than near the riverside.

It is of course impossible to establish with certainty what species did or did not occur in the Moselle in Ausonius' time, if only because of the changes in climate and environment²⁶ which must have affected the population of fish. But some elements in the catalogue actually raise suspicion, notably the *silurus*. This fish is recorded to become as long as three meters and weigh up to 150 kilograms.²⁷ It is pretty hard to imagine

²⁴ Martin 1985, 247-8.

²⁵ The earliest example is, of course, the catalogue of ships in *Iliad* 2. Further material may readily be found in studies and commentaries on individual catalogues. For some studies of Roman examples, cf. e.g. Hunink 1992, 105 on Lucan 3, 169ff.

²⁶ Nowadays, nothing is left of the cristal-clear water hailed by Ausonius, since pollution has taken its toll. On a visit to the region in 1997, I found there was an official ban on swimming in parts of the river.

²⁷ Weis 1994, 81.

such a huge fish in the small Moselle. Today, it seems to occur only in Eastern Europe.²⁸

As a matter of fact, Ausonius' wealth of detail about the fish was met with some skepticism and disbelief in his own days. There is a telling testimony by Symmachus in a teasing letter to Ausonius.²⁹ After stating that the *Mosella* enjoys wide circulation³⁰ and politely complaining that he has not been sent a personal copy, he briefly discusses the veracity of the poem. In what seems a rather ironical twist, Symmachus argues that he would not believe everything, if he were not certain that Ausonius cannot lie even in a poem. Then he continues:

'Où donc avez-vous découvert, aussi variées de noms que de couleurs, aussi différents par la grosseur que par le goût, ces bandes de poissons de rivière qu'au-delà des dons de la nature la palette de votre poème a enluminées? Et cependant maintes fois reçu à votre table, j'admire bien d'autres poissons qu'on nous servait alors au repas du palais, sans que jamais j'en aie rencontré de ce genre. Comment sont donc nés dans votre livre ces poissons qui n'étaient pas dans vos plats?'³¹

Symmachus' disbelief is unmistakable: Ausonius' poetical description went beyond nature, and the fish described by him were not even to be found at his own table.

Most modern commentators also feel a little uneasy about Ausonius' fish and reckon with secondary influences of some kind. Some try to save Ausonius' reputation as an observer of nature, suggesting that the species that did not occur in the Moselle were to be found in the larger Rhine area,³² or point to possible influences of polychrome Nile mosaics that were so popular in Rome.³³

Bookish fish

Meanwhile, it may be more profitable to look for some literary antecedents of fish, particularly since Roman literature presents quite a number of passages on fish. As a connoisseur of literature, Ausonius may be expected

²⁸ Green 1991, 474.

²⁹ Symmachus, *Epist.* 1,14.

³⁰ *Volitat tuus Mosella per manus sinusque multorum diuinis a te uersibus consecratus* (1, 14, 2).

³¹ Translation by Jean Pierre Callu in the Budé edition of Symmachus' letters (Collection des Universités de France), Paris 1972, 79.

³² Weis 1994, 81.

³³ Cf. e.g. Callu 1972, 79n4 (see n. 31 above); Green 1989, esp. 314.

to have known all of the relevant texts. To mention one or two examples, he may have enjoyed Juvenal's fourth satire about a *rhombus* 'turbot',³⁴ or Martial's series of epigrams in the *Xenia* dealing with various species.³⁵ Perhaps the most interesting predecessor is a poem by Ovid on fish, the *Halieutica*. In this fragmentary text (of which 134 lines have been preserved), Ovid mentions many fish. His list includes a number of species that also occur in Ausonius' catalogue: the *mustela* (*Hal.* 43), the *umbra* (111-2), the *perca* (113) and *gobius* (130).³⁶ Some other details (the mention of frogs) and the explicit judgments on the fish, whether positive or negative, seem to confirm the relevance of this model to Ausonius, and hence in turn of Ovid's literary models.³⁷

Meanwhile, there are great differences too. First, Ovid's text deals with marine fish. More importantly, his perspective is rather different, since he concentrates on the proper means to catch fish, adding many particulars about their natural means of defence and habitat.³⁸

There is, however, a particular quality in Ausonius' text that can bring us a little further. From a close reading of the descriptions above, it appeared that the poet specifies a rather limited number of details: the size and colour of the fish, their anatomical properties and their origin in other rivers. But no doubt the most striking element is their culinary and gastronomical qualities. We find quite explicit particulars of this kind on the *capito*, *barbus*, *salmo*, *perca*, and *lucius*, and some less conspicuous but clearly similar ones on the *rhedo*, *mustela*, *tinca*, *alausea* and *gobio*, that is: on ten out of fifteen fish, two thirds of the whole catalogue.³⁹

³⁴ This is, of course, a parody and the text deals with one fish only; see Gowers 1993; 202-11. In Juvenal 5 there is a dinner-party with fish too; see Gowers, 115-6.

³⁵ Martial *Xenia* 79-90 mentions the following species: *mullus*, *muraena*, *rhombus*, *ostrea*, *squilla*, *scarus*, *coracinus*, *echinus*, *murices*, *gobius*, *lupus*, and *aurata*.

³⁶ The name variant *gobio/gobius* is irrelevant for its identity; cf. OLD lemma *gobius*, which also attests spellings *cobius* and *cobio*.

³⁷ For full details see the edition by F. Capponi, *P. Ovidii Nasonis Halieuticon*, Leiden 1972, a commentary of 615 pages. For Ovidius' Greek sources (Nikandros, Aristoteles) and later texts (Oppianus), see introduction by Capponi, 1-28.

³⁸ Ovid's poem in this respect seems to be more closely followed by Oppianus' *Halieutica*, a Greek didactic poem in five books on fishing, composed under the regime of Marcus Aurelius. Oppianus too focuses on the means to catch fish, and so on manners to overcome their natural shrewdness; cf. Capponi 1972, 34.

³⁹ Of the five other fish, the *salar* was no doubt best known for its taste, for which it is still loved today; the *alburnus* is listed between two fish eaten by the common people; and the *sarius*' fame, mentioned by the poet, was no doubt based on its culinary virtue too. This leaves just the *umbra* and the *silurus* as fish without any gastronomical implication whatsoever. But the *silurus* is in many ways a case apart

These gastronomical comments have often surprised, or even embarrassed, readers who considered them as rather less suitable in a lofty poem like the *Moselle*.⁴⁰ Perhaps because of this, it has escaped scholarly attention that for this element too, there is a distinct and respected literary background.

Poetry on fine food

For this, we have to look in a rather remote corner of Greek literature, to the remains of a poetical work by Archestratus of Gela of the 4th century B.C. His work, called *Hedupatheia*, must have been a striking piece of poetry, that mainly deals with fish.⁴¹ Even a quick glance at the 62 extant fragments, mainly preserved by Athenaios, shows his consistent culinary stand: Archestratus tells us how fish should be prepared and cooked and where they can be found or bought. His book may properly be called a cookery book in verse. Compared with the rather heavy style of cooking in the more famous Roman book by Apicius, Archestratus advocates an appealingly 'light' and low-fat style. One sample may suffice here:

'take the tail of the female tuna -- and I'm talking of the large female tuna whose mother city is Byzantium. Then slice it and bake all of it properly, simply sprinkling it lightly with salt and brushing it with oil. Eat the slices hot, dipping them into a sharp brine. They are good if you want to eat them dry, like the immortal gods in form and stature. If you serve it sprinkled with vinegar, it will be ruined.'⁴²

The intention of the *Hedupatheia* is not entirely clear, but most likely it was meant to be recited during symposia of the elite. Occasional touches of irony

in the catalogue, see above, n.23. As far as the *umbra* is concerned, the point allows for an explanation: given its name the poet cannot resist a little game on 'visual perception' again (*effugiensque oculos celeri levis umbra natatu*). He thus takes up a central motif in the poem; cf. above with n 14.

⁴⁰ Cf. disparaging comments by even modern authors like Kenney 1984, 191 ('caviare to the general') and Nugent 1990, 33 ('the section... *least* appealing or interesting to modern taste').

⁴¹ See now also: Archestratos of Gela, *Greek culture and cuisine in the fourth century BC*, edited with translation and commentary by S. Douglas Olsen and Alexander Sens, Oxford 2000. A convenient English version is: Archestratus, *The life of luxury*, translated with introduction and commentary by John Wilkins and Shaun Hill, Totnes 1994.

⁴² Translation by Wilkins/Hill 1994; Frg. 37 (Ath. 303e).

suggest that the work has some parodic tendencies, but Arcestratus' poem nonetheless represents a side branch of ancient didactic poetry.

Since identifying Greek names for fish involves additional uncertainties, an exact comparison with Ausonius cannot possibly be made.⁴³ But even here we need not even expect close parallels, if only because of the geography: the river *Mosella* and the Mediterranean sea are different environments. Moreover, as a poet striving after *aemulatio* of his models, Ausonius would select different species rather than directly copy them from his model.

In the absence of specific links in the *Mosella* to the *Hedupatheia*, it might seem dubious whether Ausonius knew the Greek poem in the first place. There are, however, two intermediate texts in the Roman tradition which Ausonius must have known well, that must have bridged the wide gap in time and place. In the early 2nd century B.C. the great poet Ennius made an adaptation in Latin hexameters of Arcestratus' didactic poem, in a version entitled *Hedyphagetica*. Ennius took over some details, as well as the general pattern of his model, specifying places where to find or buy a fish, its properties and qualities for use at the table.

This 'minor' work by Ennius is still largely neglected by scholars,⁴⁴ which is somewhat surprising, because we actually know something about it and even possess a precious 11 line-fragment of his text,⁴⁵ that may be compared to the Greek original.⁴⁶ Ausonius' familiarity with Ennius' poetry seems beyond doubt, even though he generally preferred classical poets like Vergil and Ovid.⁴⁷ More specifically, two of the fish in Ennius' lines also occur in Ausonius' poem: the *mustela* (1) and the *umbra* (9).⁴⁸

⁴³ For some rather general parallels, cf. Fr. 16 (moray, often confused with the lamprey, according to Wilkins/Hill 1994, 54); 20 (grey-fish); 51 (Nile perch). We do not know, of course, what other species were discussed in the parts of the *Hedupatheia* that have gone lost.

⁴⁴ For example, it is left unmentioned in Gowers 1993. A rare example of scholarly interest is: Fucarino 1991-93.

⁴⁵ For the text (*Var.* 34-44 Vahlen; *Hedyph.* Warmington) see: Courtney 1993, Ennius Fr. 28. Further discussion in: Kruschwitz 1998.

⁴⁶ Ennius' lines correspond with Arch. Fr. 56 (not remarked by Wilkins/Hill 1994, a.l.)

⁴⁷ Cf. Green 1991, index nominum s.v. Ennius.

⁴⁸ In Ennius' text both fish are further specified as sea fish: (*mustela marina; umbramque marinam*), but this is only natural given the Mediterranean context. The two fish in question do not correspond with the Greek fish mentioned in Arcestratus' Fr. 56. Ennius' adaptation appears to be rather free.

A second, important Roman text brings us even closer to Ausonius. For the lines of Ennius' *Hedyphagetica* have been preserved in a text from the 2nd century A.D., the *Apology* by Apuleius.⁴⁹ In this brilliant self-defence against a charge of magic, there is a rather longer section in which fish are the key issue (c.29-41). The speaker had been criticized for his great interest in fish, which he allegedly collected for magical purposes. In his elaborate reply to this charge, he then adduces many authorities to prove his innocence. Among them is the great Ennius and his poem with the various species of fish. To underscore his point, Apuleius then quotes a significant passage of 11 lines (*Apol.* 39) in court.

Generally speaking, it is most likely that Ausonius knew Apuleius' text. Confirmation of this may be found in the very passage of the *Mosella* which contains the fish catalogue. In line 133 Ausonius uses the adjective *ouiparus*, which is a rare word that has been coined by none other than Apuleius, as he tells us himself with some pride in *Apol.* 38,3.⁵⁰ It may be added that in the *Apology* this passage comes at less than a page before the quotation from Ennius.⁵¹ Ausonius obviously knew Apuleius' text, and may even have had a copy at his disposal. If his library did not contain a copy of Ennius' works, he will, at least, have read these 11 lines of didactic poetry on fish.

Literature

In conclusion, the presentation of fish in the catalogue of the *Mosella* owes a great deal to a marginal, almost forgotten tradition in ancient didactic poetry, the subgenre of 'poetry on good food' of which the Greek Archestratus was the founder. Ausonius may have known his *Hedupatheia* either directly or indirectly through the Latin adaption of Ennius. It seems certain that he had some knowledge of Ennius' text through its presence in Apuleius' *Apology*.

⁴⁹ For text and commentary see Apuleius of Madauros, *Pro se de magia (Apologia)*, edited with a commentary by Vincent Hunink, Amsterdam 1997. For an English translation: Apuleius of Madauros, *Rhetorical works*, translated by Stephen Harrison, John Hilton and Vincent Hunink, Oxford 2002.

⁵⁰ (...) *de solis piscibus haec uolumina a me conscripta, (...) quibus membris et causis discerit natura uiuiparos eorum et ouiparos - ita enim Latine appello quae Graeci ζωτόκα et ψτόκα - (...).*

⁵¹ The Apuleian origin of *ouiparus* is duly noted by Green 1991, 479, but he has not observed the link with the Ennius fragment in *Apol.* 39. Neither is Archestratus mentioned by Green here (or, for that matter, by other commentators of the *Mosella*). Only once in his large volume, Green refers to Archestratus: 608-9 on the occasion of *Ep.* 3, a 51 line poem on fish, in which the influence of Archestratus is manifest.

Even in advance, the erudite Ausonius may be credited with a profound knowledge of the entire Greco-Roman literary tradition. Through the element of fish we now can get a grip on a facet of the literary background of the *Mosella* which until now has remained undetected.

In the *Mosella* everything seems - in the end - to be literature. The catalogue of fish perfectly exemplifies this, combining as it does the traditional device of a catalogue with echoes of passages on fish in different genres of Roman poetry. Even the apparently awkward or inappropriate gastronomical elements do not clearly reflect real life or personal experience. They rather seem to have been included in the text in order to represent a small, but well-established literary tradition that can be traced back to the 4th century B.C. The *Mosella* epitomizes the whole of Greek and Roman poetry in only 483 lines. It does so even more completely than readers have been inclined to think.

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