

## No Reel Glory: The Lack of Burial in Oppian's *Halieutica*

Oppian's *Halieutica* has seen a bloom of interest in recent decades, focusing on the didactic elements of the poem (Kneebone 2020), the utilization of detailed similes and metaphors (Bartley 2003), and applications of queer theory to the stranger vignettes within (Telò 2023). This paper focuses on the Homeric echoes within the *Halieutica*, namely the prevalence of martial similes, metaphors, and hints towards ill-fated *nostoi* at the work's conclusion. These Homeric echoes portray the sea, and fishing by extension, as martial and Iliadic spaces, however, those lacking any assurance of *kleos* or proper burial. The programmatic opening of the *Halieutica*, ἔθνεά τοι πόντοιο πολυσπερέας τε φάλλαγας (*Hal.* 1.1) signals a preoccupation, not only with the Homeric, but the Iliadic specifically, despite its nautical orientation. The evocation of φάλλαγας, phalanxes, recalls the martial emphasis of the *Iliad*, however, as noted by Emily Kneebone, “for all its (intermittent) valorisation of bloodshed both in the fisherman's catch and in images of military victory, the *Halieutica* offers no heroised portrayal of warfare” (Kneebone 2020). The lack of heroization in the *Halieutica* coincides with a notable absence of *kleos* in marine “combat,” instead veering towards excessive violence.

The characterization of the sea as a battlefield on which there is no guarantee of *kleos* culminates in a vignette and simile in which Thracian fishermen capture a dolphin cow and her calves (*Hal.* 5.490-576). Oppian critiques the slaughter of mother and child alike by the Thracians as pitiless and compares the death of the dolphins by Thracians fishermen to the sack of a city, which evokes the sack of Troy (Bartley 2003; Kneebone 2020; Mair 1928). The striking Iliadic comparison highlights the destructive elements of fishing, but further illuminates a closely-linked reality to treating fishing as warfare: the corpses of the fishes find no grave. While

the Iliadic resonances suggest that fishing is a sort of marine warfare between fish “tribes” and separately against human fishermen, the Homeric anticipation of either burial on the battlefield or peaceful *nostoi* are notably absent.

Oppian depicts the sea as an Iliadic space which lacks the promise of *kleos* and a glorious death. Instead of magnificent burials, the *Halieutica* emphasizes the anxieties behind a *lack* of burial at sea and a concern that those lost at sea, both fishes and humans, will be forgotten and food for various marine animals. This concern for the lack of burial and loss of life is best exemplified through the final vignette of the poem. The *Halieutica* concludes with a sponge-diver being rent in half by a *ketos*, leaving his comrades to hoist the remains (*Hal.* 5.615-674). The risk to the sponge-diver differs from the approach of other fishermen in that they do not reel their prey up to the surface while safely on land, but rather they dip into the depths of the sea ὄφρα σφι πνοιή τε μένη ποτὶ βυσσὸν ἰούσιν/ ἀσκηθῆς (*Hal.* 5.622-3). The inability for the sponge-diver to achieve a proper *nostos* after diving into the depths suggests a heightened risk of inglorious death and danger, exceedingly for those who enter the marine battlefield, a space inherent with risk. The lack of land for burial in the *Halieutica* is further accentuated by the manner of destruction for the marine animals and sponge-divers alike. While the marine animals and sponge-divers die at sea, the primary hindrance to their burial is the presence of voracious animals, human and nonhuman alike.

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