

## Developing Art in the Text: A Look at Acrostics and Telestics in Oppian's *Halieutica*

In recent years, two trends have been emerging in the secondary literature of epic poetry. One of these has been an increased interest in the role that acrostics and telestics can play as intentional rather than accidental features of epic, particularly in the poems of Vergil and Ovid (Robinson 2019). Robinson convincingly argues that in the *Aeneid* as well as the *Metamorphoses*, both Vergil and Ovid deliberately mobilize acrostics and telestics in marked locations in order to add an additional element of depth to the text in a manner comparable to intertexts, such as the *arma* telestic which is completed by the last letter of *Aeneid* 1.92, the line in which Aeneas' name is first used. The second of these trends has been an increasing interest in the *Halieutica* of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE poet Oppian (Kneebone 2020). Kneebone argues that rather than being viewed simply as an epic which describes the lives and habits of fish, the *Halieutica* should be viewed instead as a commentary on the human condition which is colored by Oppian's own knowledge of the epic tradition.

The objective of this paper is to merge these two trends and examine the ways in which Oppian employs acrostics, telestics, and other types of textual manipulation within the poem in order to deepen our understanding of the *Halieutica*. In addition to Vergil and Ovid in the Latin tradition, previous authors in the Greek tradition such as Apollonius, Theocritus, and Aratus have been shown to employ acrostics in one form or another, perhaps most notably Aratus' *lepte* acrostic. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, however, the poet Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius (or more simply Optatian) goes beyond the use of simple acrostics or telestics and instead crafts elaborate shapes and messages within his texts, such as the *chi-rho* of Constantine mounted atop a trireme in his 19<sup>th</sup> poem.

Given that there is clear evidence for the use of these sorts of textual inclusions on either side of Oppian's lifetime, an examination of the *Halieutica* with an eye to uncovering this type of textual manipulation, explaining what effects it produces, and how those effects differ from or conform with previous didactic epic authors is certainly warranted. As such, the structure of this paper will follow the history and use of acrostics and telestics chronologically, beginning with the previously mentioned Hellenistic poets and moving forward to the *Halieutica*. The main focus of the paper, however, will be the examination of the presence (and absence) of acrostics at significant moments throughout the poem. The final portion will include a brief treatment of Optatian's poetry and textual manipulation.

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