

2001

A Note on Apuleius's Magical Fish

Max Nelson
University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/llcpub>



Part of the [Modern Languages Commons](#), and the [Modern Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Nelson, Max. (2001). A Note on Apuleius's Magical Fish. *Mnemosyne*, 54, 85-86.
<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/llcpub/14>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures at Scholarship at UWindsor. It has been accepted for inclusion in Languages, Literatures and Cultures Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholarship at UWindsor. For more information, please contact scholarship@uwindsor.ca.



BRILL

A Note on Apuleius's Magical Fish

Author(s): M. Nelson

Source: *Mnemosyne*, Fourth Series, Vol. 54, Fasc. 1 (Feb., 2001), pp. 85-86

Published by: [BRILL](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4433185>

Accessed: 25/04/2014 11:18

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



BRILL is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Mnemosyne*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

A NOTE ON APULEIUS'S MAGICAL FISH

Apuleius, accused of having cut a fish as part of the general charge against him of using love magic to acquire his wife Pudentilla (see *Apol.* 40.5 and 42.2),¹⁾ ridiculed the possible uses of a *brutus et frigidus* fish in love magic (30.4), saying that, once caught, a fish was to be cooked, not used in magic (31.1), that magicians and fish had nothing in common (32.1). In a recent article, Keith Bradley has rightly shown that fish were indeed used in magic, and even love magic, and that Apuleius most likely knew this.²⁾ A further text could be cited to support this contention. In the first century A.D. *Cyranides* the following prescription appears (4.62.8-10):³⁾

τρίγλας δὲ εἴ τις τὸ γένειον κείρη ἔτι ζώσης αὐτῆς, αὐτὴν δὲ ζῶσαν ἀπολύσῃ ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ ἀπελθεῖν καὶ δώσῃ ἐν ποτῶ γυναικί, ἐρωτικὴν ἐπάγει μεγίστην συμπάθειαν καὶ φιλίαν. 'If one were to cut the chin of a red mullet which is still living, and release it [the fish] alive into the ocean to depart, and then offer [the chin] to a woman in a drink, it brings on great sexual desire, harmony of feeling, and love.'⁴⁾

Adam Abt, in his commentary on Apuleius, had already noted the magical connotations of the τρίγλη, which was linked, because of its three-sounding name, to Hecate.⁵⁾ Furthermore, Pythagoreans were said to abstain from the τρίγλη,⁶⁾ and Apuleius at least knew of a story in which Pythagoras had fish thrown back into the water (*Apol.* 31.2-4; found also in Plut. *Mor.* 91c and 729e, Iambl. *Vit. Pyth.* 8, and Porph. *Vit. Pyth.* 25).

There can be little doubt that Apuleius knew about the use of magical fish, and lied. Apuleius's mendacity is further shown in the fact that he said that a statue of Mercury which he owned was made out of ebony simply because that wood was at hand (*Apol.* 61.7-8). Apuleius stated himself that it is not from any type of wood that one ought to sculpt out a mercury (43.6; also in Iambl. *Vit. Pyth.* 34, and perhaps ultimately from Nicomachus of Garasa's life of Pythagoras), and indeed in a Greek magical papyrus the wood of Hermes is precisely said to be ebony.⁷⁾

VANCOUVER, BC, Canada V6T 1Z1,
University of British Columbia,
Department of Classical, Near Eastern, and Religious Studies

M. NELSON

1) Apuleius was accused specifically of using the poisonous sea hare (actually a type of slug) and two fishes named after the male and female pudenda, respectively, on which, see F. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Mass. 1997), 72-73.

2) K. Bradley, *Law, Magic, and Culture in the Apologia of Apuleius*, Phoenix 51 (1997), 203-223, at 209-212, defending A. Abt, *Die Apologie des Apuleius von Madaura und die antike Zauberei* (Giessen 1908), 141-144, who believed that fish had been used in love magic, against A.-M. Tupet, *La magie dans la poésie latine I* (Paris 1976), 67-68, to which could be added Tupet, *Rites magiques dans l'antiquité romaine*, ANRW II.16.3

(1986) 2591-2675, at 2640-2641. V. Hunink, *Apuleius of Madauros Pro se de magia (Apologia)* (Amsterdam 1997), vol. 2, 100, has sided more with Tupet, contending that there is little evidence for the use of fish in love magic. See now also C. A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge, Mass. 1999), 121-122 on the κιναιίδιος fish (*Cyranides* 1.10).

3) By necessity I use the text of D. Kaimakis, *Die Kyraniden* (Meisenheim am Glan 1976), 287. David Bain is presently working on an improved edition.

4) Interestingly, in Plato Comicus the τρίγλη is considered an antaphrodisiac (189.20 Kassel-Austin = 173.20 Kock). For the τρίγλη in general, see D. W. Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Fishes* (London 1947), 264-268.

5) Abt (note 2), 141-142.

6) D.L. 8.33 = *FGrH* 273F93 and Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 4.5.2 (Pythagoras would not eat any fish); Aristotle said that Pythagoras would not eat any sacred fish (fr. 195 Ross³ ap. D.L. 8.34), but two species were especially forbidden since they were considered chthonic, the μελάνουρος and ἐρυθθίνος (Iambl. *Vit. Pyth.* 109 and *Protr.* 21). On the whole question of abstaining from fish, see R. Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford 1983), 361-363.

7) *PGM* VIII.13, cited by Abt (note 2), 302 and Graf (note 1), 80-81.