

FRAGMENTS FROM

THE LIFE OF LUXURY



*Figure 5. One of a series of fish dishes from Cumae, near Naples, which are discussed by Trendall in Red-Figure Vases of Southern Italy and Sicily (London, 1989), pages 169–70. The dishes are concave and hollow, with a hole at the centre of the upper surface into which juices from the fish may be collected, or sauce deposited. The series is further illustrated by figures 15 and 20, below. The fish at the bottom may be the striped bream, to the left, the two-banded bream.*

In the following pages, the words of Athenaeus are printed in italic (the *Context*), and his quotation from Arcestratus (the content) is printed in Roman characters. Commentary on each fragment, divided between context and content, follows immediately.

#### FRAGMENT I

[ATHENAEUS 4E]

*Arcestratus of Syracuse or Gela [wrote] a work called by Chrysippus, 'Gastronomia', by Lynceus and Callimachus, 'The Life of Luxury', by Clearchus, 'An Account of Dining', by others 'The Art of Good Cooking', an epic poem whose first line is: I offer an exhibition of my investigations to the whole of Greece.*

#### COMMENTARY

*Context.* Is Gela or Syracuse the home city? Since Syracuse was the more influential, especially in the world of food, Gela is more likely to be the correct city of origin. The sources are certain that he is Sicilian, the principal gourmet centre in the Greek world in the fourth century [see Introduction]. The poem is cited with various titles, suggesting either that it was well known or that it was often referred to, if by people who could not remember the title exactly. Lynceus (third century BC) was a *belle lettriste* who, according to Athenaeus, often referred to works on food; Callimachus (c. 310–240 BC) was the poet and librarian of the great library at Alexandria, whose evidence is generally believed. [On Chrysippus and Clearchus see fragment 3.] Further evidence in support of the title 'The Life of Luxury' (*hedupatheia*: lit. 'experience of sweet things') may be found in the adaptation by the Roman poet Ennius (born 239 BC). He follows Arcestratus closely in the only fragment which survives (some 11 lines), and entitled his poem 'On Eating Sweet Things', *Heduphagetica*.

## ARCHESTRATUS

*Content.* The first line is a version in hexameter form of the opening words of Herodotus' *Histories*. This is important. Epic poems generally invoke the muses or gods to help and inspire the poet; Arcestratus ignores such an invocation (unlike Matro) and presents his treatise, albeit with a flourish. Herodotus *publishes* his investigation; Arcestratus *exhibits* his; but they are both investigations (*historiai*) of distant parts, dispassionately done. Arcestratus has no narrow patriotism for his city, nor of course has Herodotus. It is notable, though, that Arcestratus keeps within Greece, and does not follow Herodotus into Persia and the East [see Introduction]. He does however resemble Herodotus as a traveller before the great eastern stimulus provided by Alexander the Great. He is writing for 'the whole of Greece', that is in international terms the ancient world. Herodotus wrote his *Histories* some 100 years before Arcestratus.

### FRAGMENT 2

[ATHENAEUS 278D]

*This Arcestratus, in his love for pleasures, travelled over every land and sea with precision, in a desire, as it seems to me, to review with care the things of the belly; and imitating the writers of geographical descriptions and voyages, his desire is to set forth everything precisely, wherever the best to eat and the best to drink are to be found.*

### COMMENTARY

*Context.* Athenaeus describes Arcestratus' motivations as pleasure and the belly (*gaster*): on pleasure see fragment 8; on a more forthright comment on the belly see the introduction to fragment 38; on reviewing with care and precision see fragment 37 and Introduction. Arcestratus does indeed set forth detail carefully and impressively and is a model in his method which reviews various locations where the best of a product is to be found. Arcestratus may be writing from hearsay or may have tested the products of these cities: exactly the same debate rages about Herodotus' descriptions of various locations. The writers of geographical descriptions and voyages are authors like Herodotus and his predecessors who wrote of distant cities and strange customs. Ultimately such works go back to the oral epics of Homer, with the voyages of Odysseus. [See further Pearson (1939) 1–108.] In the

modern world many gastronomes pontificate from a platform which is no more than a variation on patriotism, the general purpose being a celebration of home produce and its use. Arcestratus notes such people in fragment 60. Parallels can be drawn with current distaste for French apples in Britain despite the sometimes superior climate for apple growing in that country. It is difficult to imagine the popularity in Kent or Worcestershire of a book lauding Golden Delicious. Arcestratus' voyages around the known world, to places not even controlled by Greeks, make his findings that much more valid [see Introduction].

*Content.* There is no certain content. Arcestratus may or may not have made the declaration for the best quality food and drink.

### FRAGMENT 3

[ATHENAEUS 457C]

*In book one of his work on proverbs, Clearchus writes: 'the teasing out of riddles is not alien to philosophy, and the ancients displayed their educational training by means of them. In putting forward a riddle among the drinkers, they were not like modern people who ask, which form of sex is most pleasurable, or which or what kind of fish is sweetest, or which is most in season, or which is particularly eaten after Arcturus rises or the Pleiades or the Dog-star? In addition to this they offer as prizes for the winners kisses which are hateful to men of free birth and sensibility, and as punishment for the losers they stipulate the drinking of unmixed wine, which they drink more readily than the cup of health. In short, this is what you would expect of a man who was at home with the writings of Philaenis and Arcestratus, and who was keen on the so-called Gastrologies ...'*

### COMMENTARY

*Context.* Arcestratus may have written something like, 'which fish and of what kind is the sweetest food, or which is most in season, which is eaten in particular either after Arcturus and the Pleiades or the Dog-star?' Athenaeus reports related opinions of philosophers at 335d–e. 'In book five of *On the Good and on Pleasure*, Chrysippus writes of "books of Philaenis and the 'Gastronomia' of Arcestratus and stimulants for love and sex and in a similar way slave girls who become skilled in such movements and positions and practise for such things." Later he says: "they learn such things and acquire

things written on such subjects by Philaenis and Arcestratus and writers of similar works.” In book seven he says: “just as the learning of the works of Philaenis and the ‘Gastronomy’ of Arcestratus contribute nothing to the living of a better life.” Now you who have quoted this Arcestratus so many times have filled the symposium with unrestrained immorality, for which of the things that can damage us has that fine epic poet omitted? He is the only man who has emulated the life of Sardanapalus son of Anacyndaraxes.’ At 337b, Athenaeus reports: ‘Clearchus in his book on proverbs says that the teacher of Arcestratus was Terpsion who was the first to write a Gastrology and to instruct his students in what foods they should avoid.’ These fragments best state the hostile tradition which has in part infected Athenaeus [Introduction]. Clearchus (a Peripatetic philosopher in the school of Aristotle, 4th–3rd century BC) surveys various rituals of the banquet and articulates the ready association between eating and sex, linking at the same time Arcestratus and the supposed authoress of a sex manual, Philaenis [on whom see Parker (1992)]. Clearchus wrote a *Book of Love* himself, and it is not entirely clear how it differed from Philaenis: in some way though Philaenis and Arcestratus shared the unsatisfactory category of ‘luxury’. Clearchus’ scorn for fish in their season [on which see Introduction] makes it clear enough that Arcestratus’ poem is not for him.

Chrysippus the Stoic philosopher, who elsewhere [Athenaeus 101f and 104b] identifies Arcestratus’ poem with the whole of the philosophy of pleasure of Epicurus, attacks Arcestratus and links him with Philaenis. Athenaeus’ speaker adds a sarcastic note about the fine epic (parodic) poetry



*Figure 6. A silver coin of Gela (c. 450 BC) portraying a river god and fish (fish were often part of the design on Sicilian coins).*

of Arcestratus, at this point introducing a further indication of immorality, the emulation of the life of Sardanapalus, king of Assyria in the sixth century BC [compare fragment 21]. This king was for the classical world the archetype of the luxurious oriental despot. Athenaeus reviews his ‘excesses’ at 528f–530c. There is almost nothing of the East in *The Life of Luxury*, and less than in most cookery books, but Arcestratus stands as the figure-head for cooking in this hostile tradition [see Introduction]. On Greek ambivalence towards the East see Wilkins (1994). Nothing more is known of Terpsion.

#### FRAGMENT 4

[ATHENAEUS IIIE]

*Arcestratus in his Gastronomy discourses on barley meal and breads as follows:* First then I will list the gifts of Demeter of the fair tresses, my dear Moschus: keep it safe in your heart. Now the best to get hold of and the finest of all, cleanly bolted from barley with a good grain, is in Lesbos, in the wave-surrounded breast of famous Eresos. It is whiter than snow from the sky: if the gods eat barley groats then Hermes must come and buy it for them from there. In seven-gated Thebes too it is reasonably good, and in Thasos and some other cities, but it is like grape pips compared with Lesbian. Get that idea clearly into your head. Get hold of a Thessalian roll, rounded into a circle and well pounded by hand. They themselves call this roll *krimnitas*, but others call it *chondrinos* bread. Then I praise the son of fine wheat flour from Tegea, ash-bread. Bread made in the market, famous Athens provides for mortals, of an excellent quality. In Erythrae which bears clusters of grapes a white bread comes out of the oven, bursting with the delicate flavours of the season, and will bring pleasure at the feast.

#### COMMENTARY

*Content.* This long fragment is interesting mainly for showing the variety of bread making. Bread is more effectively and economically baked in quantity. The use of grains in porridge obviously better suits home preparation, especially as home ovens were primitive [Sparkes (1962)]. Competition in style and quality of bread would be stimulated by these market conditions: in this fragment commercial baking seems to be at the centre (Hermes god of markets, Athenian market bread); in the next, good home baking. Particular praise of fine barley flour is remarkable, but white barley is found

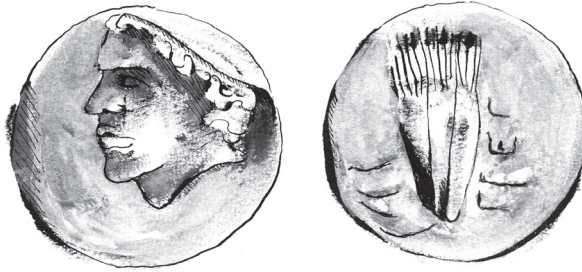


Figure 7. A bronze coin of the third century BC from Eresos on Lesbos. Head [Historia Numorum (Oxford 1911), p. 560] noted the close link between Archestratus' remarks on Hermes and barley and the coins of Eresos with a head of Hermes and an ear of grain. This is further evidence that the poem is firmly based in the markets and kitchens of the city states described.

elsewhere in fourth-century texts, such as the lyric poem, *The Banquet* of Philoxenus of Leucas and in the comedy of Alexis, *The Woman Drugged on Mandrake* [fragment 145]. Although he does not say so, Archestratus is probably describing flatbreads here, to which barley flour may give more flavour, while the gluten of wheats, necessary if using yeast, is not needed. The fragment is characteristic for its survey of quality products from certain cities, expressed with a hint of epic language. So 'Demeter of the fair tresses' and 'keep it safe in your heart' clearly derive from epic, while phrases such as '[ash bread] son of wheat flour' and flour 'whiter than snow' are characteristic of comedy and epic parody. 'The wave-surrounded breast of famous Eresos' has an epic ring but no clear epic antecedent. There is a notable reference to the gods favouring the barley groats of Eresos, clearly a mark of quality, similar to remarks in fragments 23 and 59–60. The way gods ate – for the Greek gods ate like all other creatures – took two forms. In the first they ate immortal foods – ambrosia and nectar and the smoke of marrow in thigh bones on sacrificial fires. In the second they shared human food, receiving a portion on an altar of first fruits or barley cakes before the humans ate. This was hospitality for a visiting god. That is what we have here, though there is something playful and exaggerated about this statement, helped by reference to Hermes god of exchange and commerce who in comedy is not beyond a little thieving and deception [Aristophanes, *Peace*]. The wheat bread of



Athens, praised here, was widely praised in Athenian sources also. Athens, an international centre, was able to import wheat on a scale many Greek cities could not match. Athenians exploited the opportunity by developing a famous range of breads and pastries. Moschus, one of the addressees of the poem [compare fragment 17]’ is an equivalent of Perses, the addressee of Archestratus’ model, Hesiod’s *Works and Days*. *Krimnitas* and *chondrinos* derive from terms for coarsely milled barley.



*Figure 8. A Boeotian terracotta of a woman kneading bread (early fifth century BC). A number of similar activities – grilling, grating, roasting, putting rolls in an oven – were represented by Boeotian artists in this style. See Sparkes (1962). The chief town of Boeotia was Thebes.*

ARCHESTRATUS

FRAGMENT 5

[ATHENAEUS FRAGMENT II2B]

*After this [i.e. fragment 4] the chef Archestratus advises that you have a breadmaker from Phoenicia or Lydia, unaware of the fact that breadmakers from Cappadocia are the best: Get yourself a man from Phoenicia or Lydia in your house, a man who will know how to make every kind of bread product on a daily basis, whatever you order.*

COMMENTARY

*Context.* Athenaeus' comments on the superiority of Cappadocian bread are irrelevant except to show continuing variety in bread-making. The term for chef (*tenthes*) also means gourmand and may be insulting.

*Content.* The advice to get a specialist foreign baker (a slave perhaps) into the house is clearly for the rich only. Bread provides breadcrumbs when dry, and is more portable than porridge (unless porridge is dried into bricks). Phoenician-style bread is more likely to be leavened, as is attested by biblical references to yeast. Greek sources speak of leavened bread, but much more commonly of flatbreads.

FRAGMENT 6

[ATHENAEUS 64A]

*Archestratus:* Bulbs. I bid farewell to vinegar-dishes of bulbs and plant stalks, and to all the other side-dishes.

COMMENTARY

*Content.* Bulbs, probably of the hyacinth and iris family, were often eaten as appetizers in antiquity, for example with a vinegar dressing. Their use in modern cooking in the Mediterranean world is described by Patience Gray [(1986) 53, 182, 190, 202]. She stresses their bitterness, a characteristic of many ancient plants, confirmed for asparagus bulbs by Galen [6.652–4 Kühn]. The mention of 'plant stalks' (*kauloî*) does not make clear what the stalks are. Cabbage is possible, the herb silphium the most likely. Silphium [see Introduction] is mentioned in Eubulus (quoted below) in association with bulbs, though it is odd that an expensive item is dismissed along with a cheap one (though see fragment 49 on silphium in a cheap dish – perhaps

locally grown silphium was available at a much lower price). Athenaeus says [133a], ‘the ancients used foods to whet the appetite, such as olives in brine’: these are often referred to, and Archestratus’ dismissal of all other side dishes as well is surprising. He could be dismissing all appetizers or a particular style of serving, or particular vessels, since olives are served in fragment 7; or he could be dismissing tired old appetizers in favour of simple but good quality matured olives. The language is similar to Eubulus fragment 7.3–5 (comedy of the mid-fourth century): ‘I haven’t come here to scoff plant stalks or silphium juice or sacrilegious and bitter side-dishes or bulbs’. Eubulus is Athenian: comedy is a further influence on Archestratus to place beside Homer and Hesiod. The majority of comedy was Athenian, but not all. The Sicilian poet Epicharmus has much on foods in his plays.

FRAGMENT 7

[ATHENAEUS 56C]

*Archestratus in his Gastronomy:* Let them serve you wrinkled and tree-ripened olives.

COMMENTARY

*Content.* In the passage quoting this fragment, Athenaeus lists many kinds of preparation for olives.

FRAGMENT 8

[ATHENAEUS 298E]

*Concerning the eel Archestratus records this:* Eels. I praise all eels, but by far the best is the eel caught from the sea off the straits of Rhegium. There, citizen of Messina, in being able to put such food to your lips, you are richer than all other mortals. Of course, the eels of Copais and Strymon have a great reputation for excellence. They’re huge and amazingly fat. All in all I believe the eel lords it over everything else at the feast and is a guide to pleasure, though it is the only fish that has no scrotum.

COMMENTARY

*Content.* The eel (*egchelus*) is rich in oil and is now mainly used smoked or jellied in the UK. Eels are prized – especially the head – in Cantonese cooking

[Yan-kit So (1992) 267, 269]. The comparison with China is important since texture clearly counts for something in this poem, as seen in the use of head and tail meat [Introduction]. It may be the fat of the eels that made them attractive to the Greeks: this is comprehensible since they valued the flavour residing in the fat of fish in general, and the fattiness of the eel perhaps signified its pre-eminence over others. In this fragment, Arcestratus covers sea, river and lake eels. The last are a puzzle, for Lake Copais (north of Thebes in Boeotia) has no access to the sea, except possibly by deep underground gullies, and the overland route to the sea appears too far and too hilly for eels to contemplate. A. Mair in his edition of Oppian [Cambridge, Mass. 1928] lxxi–lxxiii suggests that the eels may have been trapped in such land-locked lakes, producing perhaps a fat eel, unable to reproduce. The Strymon is a river in northern Greece. Whitehead [(1986) 71] notes: ‘both sexes migrate into freshwater, where females predominate (the reverse in estuaries and lagoons).’ The Greeks were not aware of the migration of eels to and from the Sargasso sea, though they knew something of migration and Aristotle believed they were born in mud, because of their apparent lack of sexual organs [*History of Animals* 569a]. Arcestratus appears to refer to their having no organs. The interpretation of the Greek is here controversial: many editors, including Lloyd-Jones and Parsons (1983), understand ‘having no backbone’ or ‘having very little bone’. We would argue that while ‘having little bone’ is possible, the eel is not unique in this. Nor of course is the eel unique in having no apparent genital organs, but this is a more striking aspect of the fish, and may have been prompted by the reference to pleasure in the previous clause. [On pleasure see Introduction. On the eel (*Anguilla anguilla* (L.)) see further Davidson (1981) 53, Palombi-Santarelli (1961) 198–9 and Thompson (1947) 58–61.]

FRAGMENT 9

[ATHENAEUS 285B]

*Arcestratus, the Daedalus of tasty dishes, says:* Small fry [*aphue*]. Value as shit all small fry except the Athenian kind. I’m speaking of *gonos* which the Ionians call foam. Get it when fresh and caught in the beautiful bay of Phaleron, in its sacred arms. It is also of good quality in wave-girt Rhodes, if it is local fish. And if perhaps you desire to taste it, you should buy at the same time [sea] nettles,

nettles with long locks. Mix them together and bake them on a frying-pan, grinding the fragrant flowers of the greens in oil.

COMMENTARY

*Context.* ‘The Daedalus of tasty dishes’, is mocking, and implies excessive artifice: Daedalus is the mythical technician, among whose achievements were the labyrinth and the wings of Icarus [Apollodorus 3.15.8, Epitome 1.12–5]. Recipes do not bear this out. ‘Tasty dishes’ (*opsa*) in Greek often means dishes based on expensive fish, inappropriate in this case. This introduction is found also in fragments 22, 25, 35, 57, 62; this type of preface is discussed in our own Introduction.

*Content.* ‘Value as shit ...’: this is surprisingly comic language. In writing about food, Arcestratus has something in common with comedy, on which we comment in the Introduction. Here comic language (comedy speaks of shit with the word *minthos* either literally, or in a term of dismissal as here), contrasts sharply with the epic phraseology. Athenian small fry (sprats and other small fish of various species, equivalent probably to whitebait) are common elsewhere, and are one of those foods which Arcestratus shares with comic commonplaces. Milesian sea bass is another. Sea nettles, or sea anemones, are combined with the small fry, and a dressing of nettles added (a linguistic joke in the Greek). The fragrant flowers of the greens may be the tips of the nettles which are to be eaten young, or other unspecified green plants to be added later. The eating of young nettles is mentioned at Aristophanes, *Knights* 422, other tender plants at Galen 6.635–6, 644 Kühn. Cooking in a ‘frying-pan’ (*teganon*) is common. Some of these have been found by American archaeologists in the Athenian *agora* [Sparkes (1962)].



Figure 9. A silver coin of Syracuse (c. 455 BC) showing a goddess and fish.

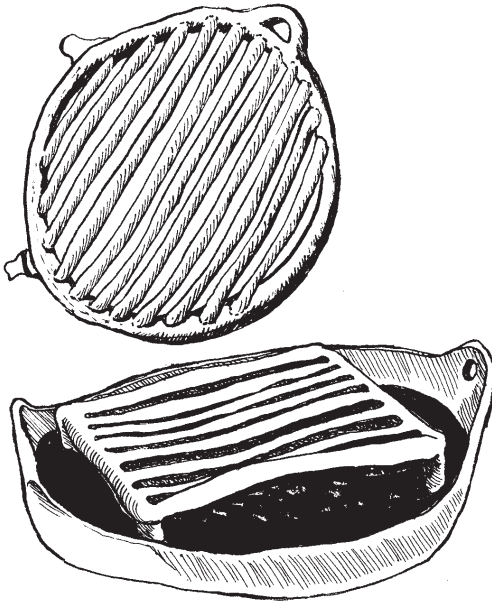


Figure 10. Kitchen equipment: grills and a frying-pan (teganon), all in terracotta, found in the Athenian agora. The 'frying-pan' might also be used to hold hot charcoal under the grill.

FRAGMENT 10

[ATHENAEUS 285D]

*Clearchus the Peripatetic in his work on proverbs says, of small fry: 'because they need little heat in the pan, the school of Archestratus direct that small fry be tossed on to a hot pan and taken off sizzling.'*

COMMENTARY

*Context.* This fragment comes from the same work of Clearchus, *On Proverbs*, as fragment 3. He refers to the school of Archestratus (literally 'those around Archestratus'), but the reference could be to cooks in general. The cooking of small fry is in a *teganon*, or frying-pan as in fragment 9, and as indeed in Davidson (1981) 44.