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**FOOD AND PARTIES.  
SEDUCTION, EROTIC AND SEXUAL METAPHORS  
IN GREEK COMIC FRAGMENTS**

**(Sedução dos alimentos e festas, metáforas eróticas  
e sexuais em fragmentos de quadrinhos gregos)**

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**ABSTRACT:** It is possible to notice the role of the food in general and of the fish in particular in Greek comic fragments to persuade people from an erotic point of view. As Athenaeus (IX 402d) puts it: «the accounts of dinner parties offered by the comic poets provide more pleasure for one’s ears than one’s throat» (tr. Olson 2008). The metaphor is thus played on two levels: firstly, the lists of foods have the specific role to persuade people to take part in these comic gatherings; the food often hides double entendres for male and female genitalia or is explicitly aphrodisiac. Secondly, the comic fragments linked to the food show a wide range of sexual metaphors, which are the perfect surround for these descriptions. An example is Mnesimachus’ fr. 4 K.–A., the longest (together with Anaxandrides’ fr. 42 K.–A.) comic list of food at 65 lines. I will start from this fragment to show all the aspects that I have listed above (persuasive power of the food, metaphors linked to the food – fish and meat in particular – and the other sexual metaphors that stud the whole text), giving examples and *loci similes* from other comic fragments about the tantalizing power of food.

**KEYWORDS:** food, fish, sex, appetite, comedy.

**RESUMO:** É possível notar o papel dos alimentos em geral e do peixe em particular em fragmentos de quadrinhos gregos para persuadir as pessoas desde o ponto de vista erótico. Como Athenaeus (IX 402d) diz: “as quantidades dos jantares oferecidos pelos poetas de quadrinhos fornecem mais prazer para os ouvidos do que para a garganta” (tr. Olson, 2008). A metáfora é assim jogada em dois níveis: em primeiro lugar, as listas de alimentos têm o papel específico de persuadir as pessoas a participarem dessas reuniões de quadrinhos; o alimento costuma ocultar o duplo entendimento de genitais masculinos e femininos, ou é explicitamente afrodisíaco. Em segundo lugar, os fragmentos de quadrinhos ligados aos alimentos mostram uma ampla gama de metáforas sexuais, que são perfeitamente envolventes para essas descrições. Um exemplo é Mnesimachus’ fr. 4 K.–A., a lista de quadrinhos mais longa (juntamente com Anaxandrides’ fr. 42 K.–A.)

com 65 linhas. Eu começarei a partir deste fragmento para mostrar todos os aspectos acima mencionados (poder persuasivo da comida, metáforas ligadas ao alimento - peixe e carne em particular - e as outras metáforas sexuais que aparecem no texto todo), dando exemplos e símiles de outros fragmentos de quadrinhos sobre o poder tentador da comida.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** alimentos, peixe, sexo, apetite, comédia.

Because of the culinary interests of Athenaeus of Naucratis, a major source for Greek comic fragments, a great number of these texts, especially the ones from Middle and New Comedy, deal with food. Moreover, the food in comedy has often metaphorical meanings and specific dramatic functions. The aim of this paper is to show three ways in which food, and particularly fish, plays a seductive and erotic role in the comic fragments.

## I. PERSUASIVE POWER OF FOOD

Lists of food are very common in Middle and New Comedy. We can find them in 31 fragments of different lengths, by Alexis (fr. 84, 115, 132, 167, 179, 281<sup>1</sup>), Anaxandrides (fr. 28, 42), Anaxippus (fr. 6), Antiphanes (fr. 71, 130, 131, 140, 177, 191, 223, 233, 243, 273, 295), Axionicus (fr. 7), Dionysius (fr. 5), Ephippus (fr. 12, 13, 24), Epigenes (fr. 5), Eubulus (fr. 18, 37, 63), Heniochus (fr. 3) and Posidippus (fr. 15)<sup>2</sup>. Most of them are composed in anapaestic dimeters, which suggests that such catalogues were delivered in a standardised way. Another common feature of these lists is the presence of fish, which plays an important role in tantalising people on two levels. Firstly, it whets people's appetite. With the exception of some very cheap and common species<sup>3</sup>, the consumption of fresh fish was a marker of wealth and affluence. Going to the fish-market meant that you were rich (unless you were a parasite or a slave sent by someone else)<sup>4</sup>. Comic poets themselves often complain about the high price of fish<sup>5</sup>. The fact that the fish is such a luxurious good

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<sup>1</sup> All comic fragments are cited from the last edition by Kassel–Austin (1983–2001).

<sup>2</sup> The order is alphabetical. For similar lists in Old Comedy, cf. Dohm 1964: 59–61. Arnott 1996: 225 notes that the interest in lists is not confined to the topic of food, as we have catalogues of constituents of love (Alex. fr. 247), Mediterranean islands (Alex. fr. 270), dice throws (Eub. fr. 57), drinks (Eub. fr. 93), and *hetairai* (Timocl. fr. 27).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Davidson 1997: 7, they are also listed by Mylona 2015: 150–152; see also p. 158.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. e.g. Timocl. fr. 11. 1–2 “seeing a marketplace full of fish is delightful / for a person who's well to do; but if he's poor, it's awful” (Olson 2008a: 97). For the fish as luxurious food *par excellence* see Gilula 1995b: 391–393; Purcell 1995: 136; Wilkins 1997: 20.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. e.g. Ar. *Ra.* 1065–1068, Alex. fr. 78 (with Arnott 1996: 216 ad loc.), Diphil. fr. 31–32; see Davidson 1993: 53–56; 1997: 226–227; Mylona 2015: 157–158. For criticism against fishmongers cf. e.g. Alex. fr. 16, Amph. fr. 30, Antiph. fr. 123, 145, 159, 164, 204, 217, Arched.

may seem surprising for a country so close to the sea, but, as Davidson notes, “apart from the difficulty of preserving and transporting it<sup>6</sup>, fish was probably so valued because the Mediterranean simply didn’t have a great abundance of good-tasting, decent-sized fish<sup>7</sup>: fish was expensive and desired because it was generally uncommon. In addition to its literal and culinary meaning, fish evoked (like today) also a wide range of sexual metaphors<sup>8</sup>. Comic poets and ancient Greek writers associated many sea creatures with the sphere of sexuality, thus making obscene jokes about courtesans and aphrodisiacs, as well as double entendres for male and female genitalia. In this way, the mention of fish whetted the audience’s sexual, as well as culinary, appetite.

A good example of this symbolic use of food (and of fish in particular) in a culinary list is attested in Mnesimachus’ fr. 4. Together with Anaxandrides’ fr. 42, the fragment is the longest preserved comic catalogue of food consisting of 65 anapaestic dimeters and describes a lavish feast consisting of every kind of desirable and imaginable food; the circumstance of the gathering is unknown. A character, the master or a cook, sends a slave to the *agora* to summon the late guests. However, the use of verbs in the perfect tense suggests that the dinner is already in progress<sup>9</sup>, so these latecomers can hardly be regular guests<sup>10</sup>; rather, they are probably young boys who are to provide erotic pleasure for the “real” visitors<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, the invitation is composed in such a way as to persuade the boys to come. The fragment consists of two lists: the first list, the shorter one, covers only 10 lines, from l. 10 to l. 20, and does not sound tempting at all: “the

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fr. 3, Diphil. fr. 67, etc.

<sup>6</sup> And fish transportation was not a secondary issue, cf. Mylona 2015: 155-156.

<sup>7</sup> Davidson 1997: 188. He suggests, however, that comic poets’ complaints about the price of fresh fish was a comic exaggeration and that also ordinary people could occasionally buy some good fish, cf. Fisher 2000: 368-369. Purcell (1995: 135-139, followed by Wilkins 2000: 300) believes that the main point was not the availability of fish in the Mediterranean in general, but rather the unpredictability of fish supply. See moreover Mylona 2015: 148-150, who points to the importance of focusing not on “the total available fish biomass, but the part of it that was accessible and exploitable by the fishermen in specific locations” (p. 150). Mylona (ibid.: 153-155) also focuses on the toolkit (and the skills) of the fishermen.

<sup>8</sup> In this paper I will only discuss the link between fish and pleasure/persuasion. This obsession about fish occurs in another famous comic metaphor based on the relation between fish and power. People who displayed lack of self-control in their appetite for fish were not good and worthy citizens and, most of all, good politicians (the most famous example is the accusation of anti-democratic leanings to Bdelycleon when he buys groupers instead of membrades at the fish-market in *Ar. Vc.* 488-499), see e.g. Davidson 1993; 1995: 207-213; 1997: 186-190, 234-236, 278-301; Wilkins 2000: 249.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. ll. 12 *herpastai* “[snacks] have been pulled” and 13 *exeiretai* “[meat] has been removed”. I use Olson’s translation (2008b: 377-383) for the quotations of this fragment.

<sup>10</sup> That is, friends or acquaintances of the host, who are already taking part to the feast, as it is described at ll. 18-20: “a wild dance is being thrashed out; / the boys are having dirty thoughts; / and everything in the house is upside-down”.

<sup>11</sup> See also Gilula 1995a: 144-145.

fish is cold, the wine's warm, / the barley-cake's dry, and the bread's dry too" (ll. 10-11). The second list extends from l. 27 to l. 65. In spite of the speaker's stated intention (l. 24 "I'll start over and tell you again"), the second description is not a word-by-word repetition of the first: some details are left out, others are just outlined (for example, the bread is only in the first list at l. 11, but the appetizers and the first courses are only in the second one, ll. 29-31). The greatest difference, however, relies in the numerous additions; among these the role of the fish is relevant both in terms of space and significance: in the first list, fish is just generically mentioned (l. 10 *opson*), while in the second it covers 15 lines and comprises 46 different species. The catalogue of the fishes seems to follow a decreasing order of size: first, the speaker presents the biggest ones that are served in slices (*temache*, l. 31, i.e. tuna, sheatfish, dogfish, monkfish and conger eel). Then, two fishes served whole at l. 33 (*phoxinos holos*, *korakinos holos* "a whole *phoxinos*<sup>12</sup>, a whole *korakinos*<sup>13</sup>"). At the end, (ll. 34-5) we find the smaller ones, i.e. smelt, mackerel, *thunnis*, goby. What comes next does not follow any order and thus creates a feeling of endlessness and exhaustiveness, as if the speaker is listing all the species he knows. This list presumably sounded unreal to the spectators of the comedy. In the first place, it was not possible for a cook to prepare such a large number of fishes for a party and it would have been prohibitively expensive<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, the most knowledgeable audience probably realized that it was impossible to find such a variety at the market at the same time, since these fish have different geographical origins and are fished in different times of the year<sup>15</sup>. The symbolic value of fish-eating and its tantalising powers occur also in Anaxandrides' fr. 34. The situation presented by Anaxandrides seems to recall that of Mnesimachus' speaker. In any case, his intention and target are the same: the seduction of a beautiful boy (*horaion meirakyllion*) through fish. Anaxandrides has the speaker describe this erotic conquest through a climax of three verbs linked with the hunting sphere: *halisketai* "capture" (l. 13)... *damazetai* "conquer" (l. 15)... *agusi* "bring" (l. 17), with the final verb (*klinein* "lie down", l. 18) as the goal. Therefore, the intent is the same and the fish is the way to achieve it. Another metaphorical use of fish as a vehicle of persuasion is attested in Lynceus

<sup>12</sup> *Phoxinus phoxinus* L. (?), cf. Thompson 1947: 276. The fish has not been identified with certainty.

<sup>13</sup> *Sciaena umbra* L. / *Umbrina cirrosa* Cuv. or *Chromis castanea* (Cuv. = *Chromis chromis* L.), cf. Thompson 1947: 122-125; García Soler 2001: 201-203; Dalby 2003: 76, 112, 232-233; Davidson 2002: 96-7. Again, the identification of the species is not sure, since the name may be referred to at least four different kinds of fish. It is often described as a not extremely appetizing fish (Anaxandr. fr. 34, Amph. fr. 22, Arcestr. fr. 20 O.-S.) and listed with small and low-price fishes (Pherecr. fr. 62, Alex. fr. 18).

<sup>14</sup> Wilkins says this of comic banquets in general (2000: 300): "List of fish at banquets revel in all the variety – and do not necessarily reflect 'real' luxurious meals in Athens in the fourth century, where a few expensive fish may have sufficed".

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Gallant 1985: 43-44.

of Samos' fr. 9 Dalby, apparently a letter to Diagoras, quoted by Ath. 7. 295b. Talking about the relationship between Tlepolemus and the young Theseus, Lynceus says that the former seduced the latter with a fish: "Because I suspect, he says, that Theseus – who was a good-looking boy – gave Tlepolemus what he wanted, when Tlepolemus gave him this fish"<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, Oppian claimed that Pan lured Typhon out of his lair with a meal of fish, in *Hal.* 3. 18-19: "for he tricked terrible Typhon with promise of a banquet of fish".

Back to Mnesimachus' fr. 4, after the extensive list of different fishes, we find also a catalogue (ll. 46-9) of several kinds of meat. Clearly, we are not dealing with a description of an actual meal, but a tantalising description of a meal that surely never actually took place. As Athenaeus says at the beginning of his work (Book 1. 5a): "Not everything can be prepared at the same time, but it can all be discussed quite easily". The whole fragment is also peppered with sexual metaphors and erotic allusions, such as the lascivious actions that are going on inside the house at ll. 18-20 ("a wild dance is being thrashed out; / the boys are having dirty thoughts; / and everything in the house is upside-down")<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, in the list of actions at ll. 54-55, some verbs with a double entendre are found elsewhere, i.e. *chairei* "enjoying"<sup>18</sup>, *paizei* "play amorously"<sup>19</sup>, *lordoi* "lying on their back"<sup>20</sup>, *kentei* "driving in it"<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Transl. Olson 2008: 365-367.

<sup>17</sup> One can also notice the numerous synonyms for the sausage, possibly alluding to the male sexual organ, at ll. 14-15 (*allantos* "sausage", *chordes* "gut-sausage", *physkes* "large-intestine sausage"). For the double meaning of *allas* see Hippon. fr. 86,17 Dg.2 with Degani 2007: 120 ad loc. and Henderson 1991: 20. For *chordes* see e.g. the explicit erotic allusion in *Ar. Ra.* 339 with Dover 1993: 237-238 and Pöhlmann 2012: 124-125 ad loc. Finally, although *physke* apparently has no erotic connotations elsewhere, the speaker seems to be keen on emphasizing the abundance of 'meat' at the gathering.

<sup>18</sup> An erotic context may be seen in Eup. fr. 356 "But I rejoice also in your *paidika*" (transl. Olson 2014, 74). Photius (p 23 = *Sud.* p 858 = Synag. p 9) introduces the fragment pointing that Eupolis employs the term *paidika* for relations with women, cf. *Ar. Vē.* 573. The verb in the middle voice (*charesthai*) – an ungrammatical form put in the mouth of a Persian – is connected to masturbation, cf. e.g. *Ar. Pax* 291 (cf. Olson 1998, 129) and Henderson 1991: 221.

<sup>19</sup> LSJ9 1288b I.5. This meaning is common in poetry (Alcm. *PMG* 58, Anacr. *PMG* 357, 417, Theoc. *Id.* 11. 77 "Many a maiden bids me spend the night in sport with her"), in comedy (*Ar. Av.* 1099 with Dunbar 1995: 590, *Th.* 795, *Ra.* 415, *Ec.* 881, etc. and see *Ar. Ra.* 411 *sympaistria* with Sommerstein 1996: 193), and in prose (cf. e.g. Xen. *Symp.* 9. 2), cf. Henderson 1991: 157.

<sup>20</sup> The erotic innuendo with the meaning of "bend oneself supinely" (LSJ9 1061b) is obvious: Henderson 1991: 178-180 cites Mnesimachus' fragment for the obscene use of the verb. See Davidson 1997: 118, who remarks on the sexual position: «the woman bends backwards and thrusts her hips forwards». Cf. also *Ar.* fr. 147 and Plato *Com.* fr. 188.17 with Kassel-Austin ad loc.

<sup>21</sup> The verb is the cornerstone of the double meaning *kentron/phallus* exploited in Aristophanes' *Wasps*, see ll. 225-226, 407, 431-432, 1060-1062. See also Henderson 1991: 122, 133, 171, 179. In Mnesimachus' passage the erotic innuendo was so obvious that someone interpolated the verb *binei* "to have intercourse with", which Meineke (1840: 574) later identified as explicative of *kentei* and expunged as unmetrical.

## 2. SEXUAL AROUSAL AND APHRODISIAC FOOD

The image of the food in general and fish in particular as a means for seduction and erotic conquest is not limited to parties and dinners. Numerous poets of the Greek comic tradition also connect food with sexual arousal and play with the erotic qualities of some kinds of food. Apart from the colourful sexual metaphors involving food attested in comic fragments<sup>22</sup>, aphrodisiac food is very common in comedy.

In Alexis' fr. 175, the speaker appears to be returning home from the market after having bought foodstuffs that are mostly identified as aphrodisiacs: "What's more useful for a man who's in love, Cteson, / than what I've brought you now? Whelks (*kerykas*)<sup>23</sup>, scallops (*ktenas*), / hyacinth-bulbs (*bolbos*)<sup>24</sup>, a big octopus (*pulypun*)<sup>25</sup>, and some nice fat fish"<sup>26</sup>. Again, in fr. 281 Alexis lists seven aphrodisiacs and implies that the speaker has used them in pursuing an affair with an *hetaira*: "*pinnas*, a crayfish (*karabon*), / hyacinth bulbs (*bolbos*), snails (*kochlias*), whelks<sup>27</sup> (*kerykas*), eggs (*oia*), pigs' trotters (*akrokolia*), / things like that. If anyone who's in love with a courtesan / finds other drugs more useful than these..."<sup>28</sup>. In Plato Comicus' fr. 189, a character reads aloud a list of food items from Philoxenus' cookbook that are supposed to help with sexual arousal<sup>29</sup>. The meaning of the list is not clear at the beginning (especially l. 6, "I shall begin with hyacinth bulb and conclude with tuna"), but it becomes more explicit at ll. 9-10 (referring to *bolbos*, the hyacinth bulb: "subdue the hyacinth bulbs with hot ash; drench them with sauce; / and eat as many as you can. For this makes a man's body

<sup>22</sup> Already catalogued by J. Henderson in his *Maculate Muse*.

<sup>23</sup> Labelled as aphrodisiac also in the following Alex. fr. 281, cf. Alciph. 4. 13,16. See Hopfner 1938: 282; García Soler 2001: 203-204; 2005: 592.

<sup>24</sup> Considered an aphrodisiac food that enhances the male erection (also in Alex. fr. 281 and Plat. Com. fr. 188, 189, quoted *infra*) or the production of sperm (cf. Heraclid. fr. 241 Deichgräber, Diph. Siph. fr. 10 García Lázaro). These characteristics are quite widespread also in non-comic authors (pace Dobrov 1995: 135-137): cf. Galen. 6 p. 625 Kühn, Oribas. *Syn.* 5. 19, Dioscur. 2. 170, Plin. 20. 105 (especially the Megarian ones). See Hopfner 1938: 286, García Soler 2001: 59 and 2005: 587-589.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Xenarch. fr. 1. 7-10 (where there is also a *double entendre* of the octopus meaning phallus, cf. Shaw 2014: 566-567) and medical authors such as Diocles (fr. 222 van der Haijk = 132 Wellmann ap. Ath. 7. 316e) and Mnesitheus (fr. 38 Bertier ap. Ath. 8. 357c-d); see Hopfner 1938: 282; Thompson 1947: 208; Alfageme 1981: 437-438; Wilkins-Hill 1994: 89; Degani 1998: 89; García Soler 2001: 140; 2005: 590-592.

<sup>26</sup> Transl. Olson 2008b: 133. For a commentary to the fragment see Arnott 1996: 513-514.

<sup>27</sup> I change here Olson's translation, that has "trumpet-shells" (differently from the aforementioned Alex. fr. 175).

<sup>28</sup> Transl. Olson 2006: 357. On the interpretation of the foods listed as aphrodisiacs see Shaw 2014: 565.

<sup>29</sup> See Pellegrino 2000: 237-261; Pirrotta 2009: 353-366.

stand up straight”<sup>30</sup>) and the whole fragment proceeds in the same direction: *lopas* (“casserole”) at l. 12 is employed as a metaphor for female genitalia also in other passages, for instance at Ar. *Eq.* 1034. Here, the Sausage-seller obscenely compares Cleon to a dog at work on the personified cities while Demos sleeps, licking at the bowls and the islands at night<sup>31</sup>. While we are not sure that also *tagenon* at the same line has a double entendre, the verb *tagenizein* clearly recalls Eup. fr. 385, where the first speaker claims (l. 1): “I hate living like a Spartan, but I would pay to use the skillet” and the other replies (l. 2): “many women I think now have been fucked!”<sup>32</sup>. The expression “Living like a Spartan” apparently means “to have sex with boys” – as glossed at Hesychius and Photius (and *Suda* consequently)<sup>33</sup>, citing Ar. fr. 358 (but the alleged Spartan fondness for anal intercourse in general is also familiar from Ar. *Lys.* 1162-1164, 1174<sup>34</sup>) – and “use the skillet” would indicate having sexual intercourse with a woman. Plato Comicus’ description continues with a short list of fishes including the octopus, a sea creature whose aphrodisiac power is well-known (vd. supra). The fragment itself ends with an obscene joke in perfect comic style: “The bullhead, on the other hand—” (B.) “Will, I hope, sneak up and sting you in the ass!” (l. 22).

The large number of examples like these and the belief in the aphrodisiac qualities of some foods help to explain less explicit comic scenes, for example Ar. *Ec.* 1089-1092. In this scene, the second old woman offers to prepare a potful of bulbs (*bolbon chytra*) in order to seduce the reticent young boy and to enable him to have intercourse with the two old women. Here, although the qualities of the hyacinth bulb are not explicitly mentioned, the spectators surely understood the meaning.

### 3. FISH NICKNAMES AND ANTHROPOMORPHISED FISH

The last type of association between food and sexuality in comic fragments involves the use of fish names to describe human objects of desire. The most impressive example is attested in Antiphanes’ fr. 27. The fragment’s language works on two different levels, as it lists a catalogue of fishes but, since every fish alludes to a contemporary personality, it also functions as a catalogue of people. The metaphors are based on word-plays on: (a) the name of the fish

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<sup>30</sup> Transl. Olson 2006: 25-29.

<sup>31</sup> But also Xenarch. fr. 1. 9-10 and Eup. fr. 60, cf. Henderson 1991: 144; Shaw 2014: 567-568.

<sup>32</sup> Transl. Olson 2014: 123 and see commentary ad loc., although he is very cautious since the text is uncertain.

<sup>33</sup> Phot. l 48 = *Suda* l 62 (cf. Hsch. l 224).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Olson 2014: 126. See also Henderson 1987: 204-205.



and the name of the person (*Kobion* at l. 19<sup>35</sup>), (b) the name of the fish and the trade of the person (*kitharos* fish name – *kitharoidois* “citharodes” at ll. 15 and 17, *tarichos* “saltfish” – sons of a salt-fish merchant at l. 22) or (c) the popular nickname of the person (Kallimedon *ho Karabos*<sup>36</sup> at l. 5)<sup>37</sup>. It is also very interesting that Sinope, Pythionice and Theano (ll. 12, 20, 24) were all contemporary prostitutes<sup>38</sup>. Antiphanes seems to be referring to courtesans with a number of different seafood appellations<sup>39</sup>: *sepia* (“cuttlefish” l. 1), *karabos* (“crayfish” l. 5), *mainides* (“sprats” l. 5), *triglai* (“red mullets” l. 10), *gongros* (“conger eel” l. 12), *aphyai* (“anchovies” l. 23), *trygon* (“sting-ray” l. 23). The text exclusively deals with food and eating (*katedet(o)* “gulp down” l. 7, *edesma* “food” l. 10, *katesthiei* “to devour” l. 11, *edestes* “eater” l. 15, *geusetai* “taste” l. 21) and eating is often a metaphor of having a love-affair (ll. 9-10 “I stationed you here on the right, / Red Mulletts, here, delicacy for the noble Callisthenes” and 15-16 “But here’s a *Kitharos*, / if he sees *this*, he won’t keep his hands off it!”<sup>40</sup>). At lines 9-22 a series of love-affairs between contemporary men and *hetairai* are presented metaphorically as purchases of fish, or love-affairs and fish-purchases become two sides of the same coin<sup>41</sup>. Courtesans nicknamed as fish are not unique to Antiphanes’ fragment: we know that the term *aphyai*, “anchovies” was commonly given to courtesans from Athenaeus’ Book 8 (568a-b) and perhaps<sup>42</sup> a similar

<sup>35</sup> PAA 588990, cf. Arnott 1996: 270 on Alex. fr. 102, where he’s again listed together with Callimedon.

<sup>36</sup> PAA 558185, politician and orator; he is nicknamed “Crayfish” because of his passion for this fish (or eating fish in general: this is the main reason why he’s mocked in comic fragments, cf. Alex. fr. 57, 102, 173, 198, 249, Antiph. fr. 77, Eub. fr. 8, Philem. fr. 43; in Alex. fr. 149 and Men. fr. 224 his favourite seems to be the eel) or, more likely, because of the squint in his eyes (cf. Alex. fr. 117, 118, Timocl. fr. 29), see Arnott 1996: 178-179 on Alex. fr. 57 (about the relationship between the fishmongers and Callimedon). See Nesselrath 1997: 276-277.

<sup>37</sup> See Kostantakos 2000: 70 and cf. Nesselrath 1997: 279-281.

<sup>38</sup> Sinope (PAA 823225) is named also by Antiph. fr. 23, 43, 114, 168, Alex. fr. 109, cf. Ath. 13. 585f-586a; Pythionice (PAA 793690) cf. Alex. fr. 143 with Arnott 1996: 418 ad loc., Timocl. 15, 16, 27 and see Ath. 13. 594d-595f, 586c; Theano (PAA 501887) is cited elsewhere only at Anaxil. fr. 22.

<sup>39</sup> For the assimilation of women (and particularly *hetairai*) to animals cf. Foka 2011. For the treatment of the *hetairai* in Greek comedy cf. e.g. Auhagen 2009, 40-58 (*archaia*), 59-79 (*mese*), 80-135 (*nea*). The comparison between courtesans and food also depends on the imaginary depiction of *hetairai* as ‘meat for consumption’, cf. Foka 2014, 86-87 on Alex. fr. 103, where prostitutes are linked to the heads of slaughtered animals sold at the market: «the fragment in fact not only characterizes courtesans as greedy but also comically refers to emotional and physical trends within the ‘courtesan market’» (p. 87).

<sup>40</sup> Transl. Olson 2008b: 43.

<sup>41</sup> See Davidson 1997: 10, “it is hard to know at any one time whether he is satirizing his victims for their love of fish or for their excessive devotion to hetaeras and boys”.

<sup>42</sup> But it is not certain since the fragment is corrupted.

double entendre occurs in Archippus' fr. 19: "the boiler ran into the anchovy and sucked her right down"<sup>43</sup>.

In other cases, fish function as objects of desire through anthropomorphisation, as in Diphilus' fr. 32<sup>44</sup>, or in a comparison to beautiful, desirable maidens as the conger-eel in Ar. *Ach.* 883-894. Here, after the Theban has extracted an eel from a basket, Dikaiopolis plays a paratragic invocation with poetic vocabulary to glorify it<sup>45</sup>. Again, in Ar. *Pax* 1013-1014, Trygaeus lists the material benefits that the Athenians may have after the restoration of peace and of trade all over Greece. He mentions "Copaic eels coming by the basketful" (l. 1005) from Boeotia and imagines the reaction of Melanthius, a fish-loving tragedian, who arrives too late at the marketplace and finds no eels anymore. He desperately shrieks in pain and launches into a pathetic soliloquy taken from his own *Medea*: "I'm done for, done for, and bereft / of her that lay in amid... beets!" (ll. 1014-1015)<sup>46</sup>. Finally, at Ar. *Lys.* 701-702 the eel is "the *hetaira* next door" to invite for a party. Moreover, the eel is called "a young woman, still unmarried" (*nympha apeirogamos*) in Eub. fr. 34, or it is even referred to as a goddess, as in Eub. fr. 64 "(of) a young Boeotian girl / from Copais; because I'm hesitant to refer to a goddess by name"<sup>47</sup> and Matro fr. 1. 38-40 O.-S. "in his tracks came a white-armed goddess-fish, / the eel, who claims to have spent time in the arms of Zeus. / She was from Copais, whence comes the race of wild eels"<sup>48</sup>.

Therefore, the fish themselves can both represent metaphorically an object of sexual desire and refer to specific people.

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<sup>43</sup> Transl. Shaw 2014: 570; cf. Archipp. fr. 27, where some fish are identified with human categories: "we for our part our Thraittas, Atherine the pipe-girl, Sepia the daughter of Thyrsus, the Triglai, ..." (transl. Olson 2008: 557-559). Moreover, in Antiph. fr. 192, 1-4 fish names may allude to courtesans and their clients: "a man who expected to cast a net around a large number of fish caught a single perch at enormous expense; and a grey mullet who was disappointed in the perch brought another † equal her. A perch willingly follows a *melanouros*" (transl. Olson 2009, 155, cf. Auhagen 2009, 77-78). For courtesans named by fish cf. McClure 2003: 72-73. See also Davidson 1997: 318, n. 11, who notes that "the goddess of Madurai in Tami Nadu who seduces Shiva and becomes his bride is known there as Meenakshi, the Fish-eyed goddess". This is what Henry (1992: 257) calls "feminized sexualization of food". Although she refers to Athenaeus' work with her definition, it seems pointless to separate Athenaeus' passages from the literary texts he quotes.

<sup>44</sup> "But all the same, if one of them smiled at me, / groaned and paid whatever he asked me for". Transl. Olson 2008: 25.

<sup>45</sup> See Olson 2002: 294-297 and Rau 1967: 144-148.

<sup>46</sup> Transl. Henderson 1998: 555.

<sup>47</sup> Transl. Olson 2008: 395.

<sup>48</sup> Transl. Olson-Sens 1999: 57 and comm. ad loc. pp. 99-100. Moreover, see Degani 1995: 423-425; Gilula 1995b: 389-390 and Wilkins 2000: 37-38.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this analysis shows three ways in which food in general, and fish in particular, play a symbolic role in Greek comic poetry through sexual metaphor and erotic imagery. In the first example, Mnesimachus' fragment, the enormous list of food has a tantalising effect aimed at persuading people to join a party. In other fragments, fish are described as a powerful means to lure other persons. In these cases, aphrodisiac foods have both literal, culinary denotations and metaphorical, erotic connotations. Lastly, in the third section, it is possible to notice how thin the line between fish and human beings is when they are both objects of desire: we often find imagery of human beings represented as fish – especially *hetairai*, seen as women for consumption – or passages in which the fish are anthropomorphised, sometimes even personified, as a god.

Food and sex are two inextricably connected elements in ancient comedy. As Terence in his *Eunuchus* has Chremes say “Verbum hercle hoc verum erit: «sine Cerere et Libero friget Venus»” (*Eun.* 732): “the proverb turns out to be true: «Without food and wine love is cold»”.

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