



Oppian  
Complete Works

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Ancient Classics Series

*The Complete Works of*

**OPPIAN**

(fl. 2nd-century AD)



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Version 1

*The Complete Works of*  
**OPPIAN OF CILICIA**



*By Delphi Classics, 2021*

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## The Translations



*Ruins at Anazarbus, an ancient Cilician city. Under the late Roman Empire, it was the capital of Cilicia Secunda. Biographies attached to medieval manuscripts of Oppian state that his birthplace was Caesarea (Anazarbus), southern Anatolia (Turkey).*

## Fishing



*Translated by A. W. Mair, 1928*

Oppian of Cilicia was a second-century Greco-Roman poet, who flourished during the reign of the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus. He is chiefly remembered for writing the *Haliëutica*, a five-book didactic epic on fishing. It is composed of about 3,500 lines, bearing a dedication to Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus, approximately dated to the time of their joint rule (176-180 AD). The poem can be divided into two parts: Books I and II concern the behaviour of fish and other marine animals, while Books III-V describe various fishing techniques. The content of the text is not sufficient to serve as a practical guide for fishing, though it provides examples of good and bad behaviour. The fish in the *Haliëutica* are depicted in an anthropomorphic fashion, as their behaviour is generally motivated by emotions such as hate, love, greed, jealousy and amity. The fish are also frequently the subject of Homeric similes. In many cases, Oppian reverses the Homeric technique: e.g. where Homer compares epic heroes with animals, the actions of animals in the *Haliëutica* are compared to all types of human behaviour.

After the introduction and dedication, the first half of Book I contains a catalogue of marine animal species, sorted by their habitat. The second half of the book describes their reproductive behaviour. The second book concerns the 'battles' of fish, how predators catch their prey and techniques that fish use to avoid capture by other fish. Book III starts with a description of the preparations for fishing, before explaining how fish escape fishermen. The main section of the book features various techniques of capturing fish through their gluttony, followed by a list of fish that can be caught due to their aggression, before culminating with tuna fishing.

The principle theme of the fourth book is fishing through the manipulation of the love and lust of the fish. The rest of the book describes techniques of frightening fish and fishing with poison. The final book serves as a grand finale, teaching how to catch the largest animals of the sea, including whales, sharks and dolphins. The didactic epic is concluded with a section on the fatal outcome of sponge diving.



*Marble bust of the dedicatee, the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, c. 170 AD, Musée Saint-Raymond, Toulouse, France*



*Bust of Commodus as Hercules, c. 192 AD, Capitoline Museums, Rome*

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*A mosaic depicting ancient fishermen, Utica Punic and Roman archaeological site, Tunisia*

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