

# Greek *khrómis* between sound and smell. Anthropozoology of a fish

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## KEY WORDS

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Greek-Latin fish names,  
Ovid's *Halieutica*,  
*immunda chromis*,  
brown meagre,  
shi drum,  
damsel fish.

## MOTS CLÉS

Sciaenidae,  
Pomacentridae,  
noms ethnobiologiques,  
noms gréco-latins de  
poissons,  
*Halieutica* par Ovide,  
*immunda chromis*,  
corb commun,  
ombrine côtière,  
castagnole.

## ABSTRACT

The Greek and Latin world viewed *khrómis* as essentially a vocal fish and a highly esteemed one, which does not match the identification, provided by Rondelet and ratified by Linnaeus, with the Mediterranean damselfish, *Chromis chromis* (Linnaeus, 1758) (also extended to the other pomacentrids of the genus *Chromis*). Trying to explain the reason behind Rondelet's misidentification deepens our understanding of the anthropozoology of the fish actually called *khrómis* by the ancients (in fact a sciaenid, most likely the shi drum, *Umbrina cirrosa* (Linnaeus, 1758)), while at the same time providing a possible interpretation to *immunda chromis* (lit. 'unclean *chromis*'), an obscure syntagma found in Ovid's (?) *Halieutica*.

## RÉSUMÉ

*Le grec khrómis entre son et odeur. Anthropozoologie d'un poisson*

Le monde gréco-latin considérait *khrómis* essentiellement comme un poisson vocal et très apprécié, ce qui ne concorde pas avec l'identification, fournie par Rondelet et ratifiée par Linné, avec la castagnole méditerranéenne, *Chromis chromis* (Linnaeus, 1758) (étendu aussi aux autres pomacentridés du genre *Chromis*). Essayer d'expliquer les raisons de la mauvaise identification par Rondelet permet d'approfondir notre compréhension de l'anthropozoologie du poisson effectivement appelé *khrómis* par les anciens (en fait un sciaenidé, vraisemblablement l'ombrine côtière, *Umbrina cirrosa* (Linnaeus, 1758)), tout en fournissant en même temps une possible interprétation de *immunda chromis* (littéralement '*chromis impur*'), une expression obscure qu'on trouve dans les *Halieutiques*, poème attribué à Ovide.



FIG. 1 — *Definiens* and *definiendum*: a human finger compared to *Solen marginatus* Pulteney, 1799, one among other mollusks called *dáktulos* (lit. 'finger'), or *ónux* (lit. 'nail') in Ancient Greek – e.g., Thompson 1947: 184 (Image by the author).

## INTRODUCTION

The ancient Greek and Latin names of aquatic animals are mainly constructed as descriptive terms with metaphorical reference to a phenotypical, eco-ethological or generally cultural feature perceived as essential to the identity of the named organism (Bodson 2009, 2012, 2014; Guasparri 2010). This is not surprising, being one of the major naming patterns found in ethnobiological nomenclatures cross-culturally (Berlin 1992: 35). As to the nomenclatures in question, the use of descriptive ethnobiological names (hereafter ethnobionyms) is particularly high, which makes it especially engaging to investigate their linguistic morphology in search for the “referential constraint” linking the name to its biological counterpart (Guasparri 2007: 74; 2013: 350). Indeed, if names can generally tell us a great deal about how the members of a society relate to a given animal (e.g., Blanchard 2015), this is notably true for descriptive ethnobionyms, which can be explained on the basis of a similarity between a metaphorical subject (i.e. the organism that needs to be identified or *definiendum*) and a metaphorical predicate (i.e. the domain of experience that is familiar or *definiens*). Detecting this similarity and therefore both the *definiens* and the *definiendum* can be more or less tricky. Indeed, the more the metaphorical predicate is universal (for example when it coincides with the parts of the human body), the more the metaphor encoded in the name will be transparent or clear even for us – cf., for instance, a mollusk with an elongated shell called “finger” (Fig. 1); the reverse is true in the case of metaphorical implications related to more culture-dependent domains, such as ritual, magic, etc. – cf. a flat fish called by the name of a musical instrument (Fig. 2).

## UNEARTHING THE ANTHROPOZOOLOGY OF GR. *KHRÓMIS*

It is particularly in these latter cases – the more culture-dependent ones – that the analysis of descriptive ethnobionyms may allow us to reconstruct how the members of any culture, even a dead one, perceived, and ultimately lived, their unique anthropozoological

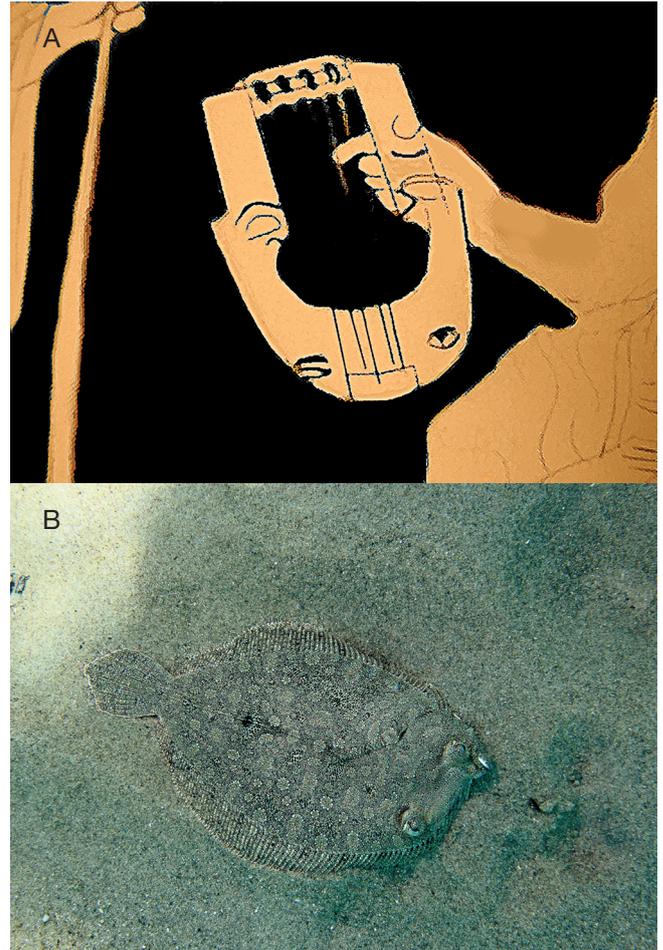


FIG. 2. — **A**, Round-based zither (*kithára*). Detail from a red-figure vase painting, about 430 BCE – cf. *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae, Apollon* 691a (Image by the author); **B**, Wide-eyed flounder, *Bothus podas* (Delaroche, 1809), a fish called *kitharos* by the ancient Greeks for its similarity to a round-based *kithára*. Cf. Guasparri 2005: 216 (Image courtesy of Laguna Project).

reality (although only limited bits of it can be disclosed). And since in our case such a reality can be only reconstructed through written sources, our knowledge of how the ancients perceived an animal can be useful in fields as different as philology (i.e. the “correct” interpretation of the ancient texts) or scientific nomenclature (or at least its history). Gr. *khrómis* is a good case in point.

This is a descriptive ethnobionym whose *definiendum* is a fish described by Aristotle (*HA*, 535b, 17) as producing a sort of grunting noise (*grulismós*), as having the most sensitive hearing (Aristotle *HA*, 534a, 9) and suffering in winter because of the stone in the head (Aristotle *HA*, 601b, 30) – what biologists call otoliths. A praised fish according to Ananius (*ap. Ath.* 7, 282b), *khrómis* is the best in spring. The animal is traditionally identified with a member of what biologists call Sciaenidae, a taxonomic family also known as “croakers” or “drums” because of the sound they produce (Ramcharitar *et al.* 2006). The members of this taxon, whose multi-branched swim bladder is used as a resonating chamber, are actually considered as “probably the most active sounds producers among fish” (Ramcharitar *et al.* 2006: 1426). Significantly enough, these fish have “exceptionally large

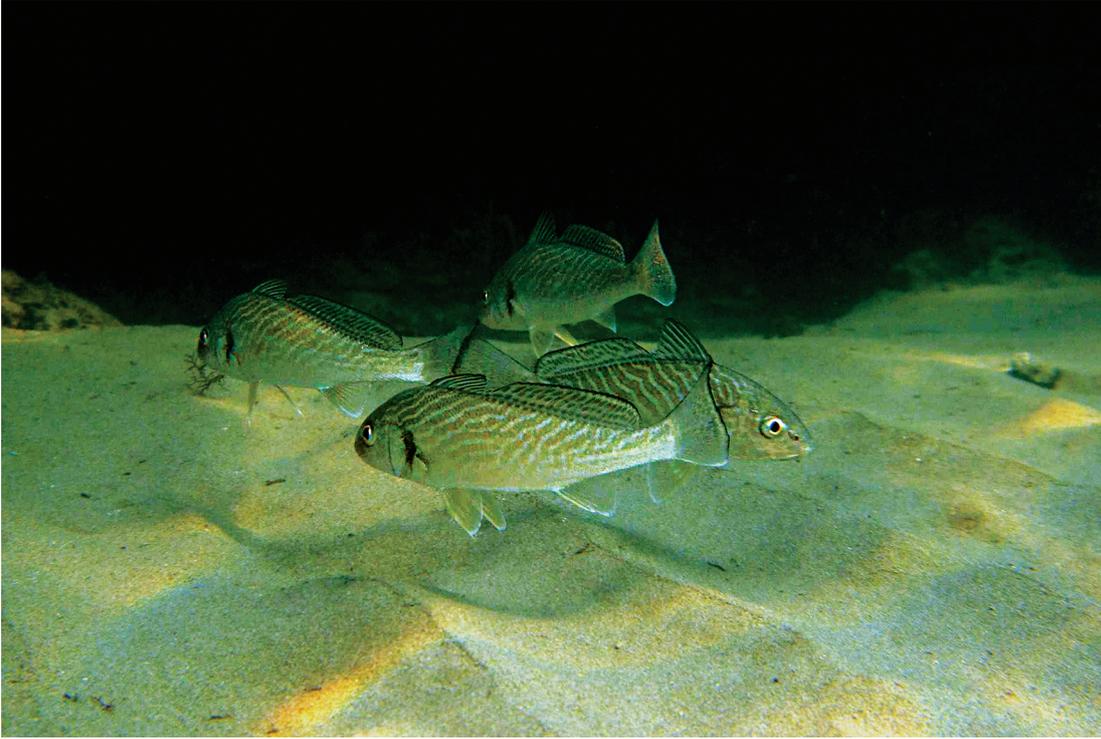


FIG. 3. — Shi drums (*Umbrina cirrosa* (Linnaeus, 1758)) in their natural environment (Image courtesy of Laguna Project).



FIG. 4. — Brown meagres (*Sciaena umbra* Linnaeus, 1758) in their natural environment (Image E. Sáez Goñalons & V. Martínez Moll, wikimedia.org; CC BY 3.0).

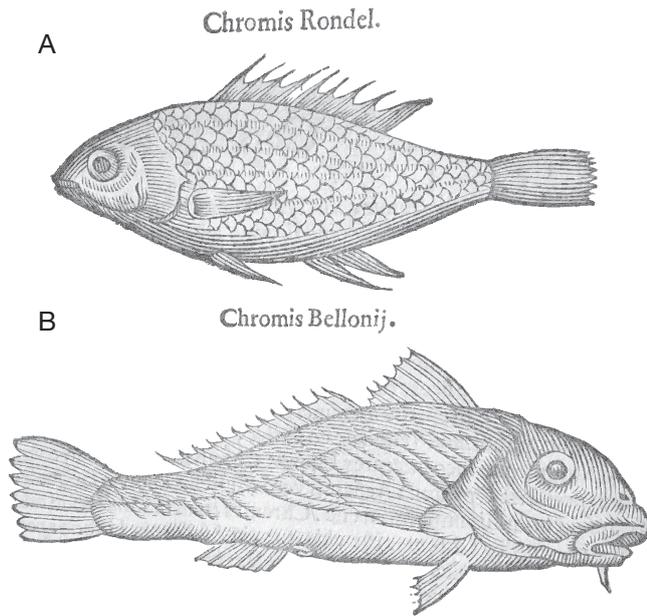


FIG. 5. — **A.** *Chromis chromis* (Linnaeus, 1758) and **B.** *Umbrina cirrosa* (Linnaeus, 1758) as reproduced in Aldrovandi (1613) after the original engravings in, respectively, Rondelet (1554) and Belon (1553). Notice the lack of proportion (common length for *Chromis chromis* is 13 cm vs 40 cm for *Umbrina cirrosa*; cf. Froese & Pauly 2016). Image courtesy of Biblioteca Digitale Università di Bologna.

otoliths” (Bailly 2015a) that are reported to be still used in traditional medicine as a remedy for urinary tract infections (Bailly 2015b), which is exactly what Pliny says, although with regard to the otoliths of another species (Pliny *Nat.* 32, 102; cf. Duffin 2007: 80). As to their having a most sensitive hearing, this too has been confirmed by modern biologists (Wysocki *et al.* 2009: 2104) – although the question remains how Aristotle and/or his informers have correctly reached this conclusion: otoliths’ size? Fishing experience? A detail provided by Aelian (the fish has a conspicuous chin barbel)<sup>1</sup> may even lead to identify *khrómis* more precisely with members of the genus *Umbrina* Cuvier, 1816, such as the shi drum, *Umbrina cirrosa* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Fig. 3). In fact, given their similarity, it is very likely that also the brown meagre, *Sciaena umbra* Linnaeus, 1758 (Fig. 4), had been called *khrómis* by the ancients (cf. Thompson 1947: 291f)<sup>2</sup>. This is normal, since there is not – and there can never be – an exact correspondence between scientific classification and the biological taxonomies of local groups (the former as well is indeed a cultural construction; cf. Anderson 2011: 4).

## RONDELET VS BELON

Anyway, the identification of *khrómis* with *Umbrina cirrosa* dates back at least to Pierre Belon (Belon 1553: 112ff), one of the “five great naturalists of the sixteenth century” (Gudger 1934).

1. Aelian *NA* 15, 11, 27. Aelian has the alternative form *khrémēs*, which is perfectly consistent with the etymology of *khrómis* (see etymology provided next).

2. This is the situation nowadays, as confirmed by the names these fish share in the Mediterranean area. See, e.g., the common names of shi drum and brown meagre in Froese & Pauly 2016.

Guillaume Rondelet, however, the other major French ichthyologist of the Renaissance, reached a different conclusion from his contemporary and colleague by suggesting another species: the Mediterranean damselfish, *Chromis chromis* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Rondelet 1554: 152f). The divergence between the two naturalists is meaningfully represented in iconographical terms by Ulisse Aldrovandi, as the original captions to the engravings in his *De piscibus* (Aldrovandi 1613: 168) explicitly show (Fig. 5):

Clearly these are two very different fish. The Mediterranean damselfish (Fig. 6) is indeed assigned by biologists to the taxonomic family Pomacentridae, which mostly comprises coral reef fish (Allen 1991). Apart from other major morphological differences, the Mediterranean damselfish does not have particularly conspicuous otoliths, is considerably smaller than the shi drum and, contrary to the sciaenids, not particularly esteemed (Ramcharitar *et al.* 2006: 1426).

However, when it comes to sound emitting abilities, the pomacentrids as well are considered by biologists as typical “vocal” fish, i.e. fish that expressly produce sounds for communication purposes (Amorim *et al.* 2015: 3ff; Ladich 2015). Sounds are characteristically produced by males mostly to attract females during courtship (Picciulin *et al.* 2010: 126; Amorim *et al.* 2015) or during agonistic interactions with other males (Amorim 1996: 266; Picciulin *et al.* 2002: 237). Since tropical damselfish are quite popular aquarium fish, the detection of their vocal products is frequently reported by fish-keepers (and sometimes also by divers)<sup>3</sup>. But these reports do not involve *Chromis chromis*, the only damselfish living in the Mediterranean Sea. The same seemingly goes for the ancients: although, as a common fish forming shoals near rocky reefs, it is not to be excluded that the ancients had been aware of its vocal abilities, no ancient text reports anything of the sort for *korakinos* – the Greek name for *Chromis chromis* (Saint-Denis 1947: 27f; Thompson 1947: 122f; Guasparri 2005: 148). The name is derived from *kórax* ‘crow’, seemingly in reference to the dark colour of the fish (e.g., Aristophanes *ap.* Ath. 7, 308f; Oppian *Hal.* 1, 133). Its taste, as expected, is deplored by the ancients (e.g., Arcestratus *ap.* Ath. 7, 294a; Amphip *ap.* Ath. 7, 309d). Currently only biologists seem familiar with its sounds, described as “pops” consisting of single pulses peaking at about 400 Hz and recorded both at sea or in tanks during aggressive and courtship behaviours (Picciulin *et al.* 2002: 272; 2010: 126).

On the contrary, the sciaenids are well known as vocal fish also beyond the biological field, as their common English names clearly attest (see above) – e.g., brown meagres are easily detected (unfortunately for them) by spear fishermen, who can tell not only where but also how big they are by the type of “frogs’ croaking sounds” they emit (Volpe 2004). “These sounds are fairly audible even from out of the water when there are several animals involved (chorus) and therefore are easier to learn” (Picciulin pers. comm.).

3. The internet has many videos documenting this e.g., (as of January 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hH8pUZYFmxk>



FIG. 6. — A Mediterranean damselfish (*Chromis chromis* (Linnaeus, 1758)) in its natural environment (Image A. Kok, wikimedia.org; public domain).

Picciulin also confirms that the sounds emitted by *Sciaena umbra* and *Umbrina cirrosa* are similar (cf. also Picciulin *et al.* 2013: 77).

#### “NEIGHING” FISH OR “GRUNTING” ONES?

As a consequence, sound emitting can definitely make a salient trait in the cultural construction of the sciaenids’ identity. This does not only go for contemporary cultures<sup>4</sup>, but appears to be also true for the members of the cultures in question. Indeed, it is precisely such *referential constraint* that appears encoded in the morphology of the Greek descriptive ethnobionym.

Linguistically, *khrómis*, like many other nouns in *-i-*, is derived from a nominal base which is in turn derived from a verb, although with an *o*-grade, instead of an *e*-grade, in the root syllable (Buck & Petersen 1945: 14f; Chantraine 1933: 112). In particular, the ethnobionym appears to be formed as  $[[[khrómōē]_{N+i}]_{N+s}]$ , i.e. from such nouns as *khrómos* or *khrómē* ‘the neighing of horses’ (Liddell *et al.* 1940: 2008), both connected to the verb *\*khrémō*, analogically reconstructed from such attested forms as *khremetízō*, *khremízō* ‘neigh’<sup>5</sup>. By analogy with the other morpho-

logically parallel forms, the semantics of the suffix can be generally expressed as ‘someone or something provided with x’ (where x is represented by a trait hyponymically related to the semantics of the derivational base – cf. the examples in Buck & Petersen 1945: 14; see also Guasparri 2005: 115). Thus *khrómis* will be a fish ‘provided with a neigh’ (cf. Strömberg 1943: 67; Chantraine *et al.* 1968-80: 1272). However, a neigh is very different from a croaking sound, a drum-like sound or, at any rate, a sound like the ones actually produced by the Mediterranean sciaenids.

In fact, although the nouns *khrómos* or *khrómē* and the related verbs *khremízō/khremetízō* are glossed in the dictionaries as ‘neigh, whinny’ (cf. Liddell *et al.* 1940: 2003), such definitions appear incorrect if we think only in terms of the high-pitched prolonged sound we consider typical of a horse; horses also typically emit a grunting noise, and, by comparing the semantics of other forms connected with the verb *khremízō* or *khremetízō*, it appears that it is to the latter sound that the Greek name may refer to. The term *khrómē*, for instance, is only found in Hesychius (φ 753) with the gloss *phruagmós*, a parallel form to *phruagma* ‘violent snorting’ (Liddell *et al.* 1940: 1958), also said of the sound produced by a boar in Oppian (*Cyn.* 2, 457). Moreover, such related forms as *Khremētēs*, a river name (lit. ‘croaker?’), *khrómadōs*, used in the *Iliad* (23, 688) for the creaking sound of the boxers’ jaws being hit with a

112) and Aelian (*NA* 15, 11) – see note 1 above. For the sake of completeness cf. also the fish name *khrémus* in Hesychius (χ 696), whose gloss, however, refers to *onískos*, the European hake, *Merluccius merluccius* (Linnaeus, 1758).

4. In addition to the names given above cf. the “crow-related” ones spread in the Mediterranean area for the shi drum and the brown meagre (e.g., It. *corvo*, Ar. *g’rab*, Alb. *korb*, etc.). See the common names of both in Froese & Pauly 2016.

5. Cf. also *khremēs* (gen. *-tos*), a variant of *khrómis* found in Oppian (*Hal.* 1,

blow, and, most significantly, *khrémps* (cf. *khréptomai* ‘clear one’s throat’ – see Strömberg 1943: 67; Chantraine *et al.* 1968-80: 1272), a variant form of *khrómis* found in Aristotle (*HA* 534a8), confirm that the sounds emitted by this fish resemble the croaking sounds produced by *Umbrina* sp. (or *Sciaena umbra*) rather than the “pops” produced by the Mediterranean damselfish.

#### AN UNDERSTANDABLE (MIS)IDENTIFICATION

The identification of Greek *khrómis* seems, therefore, exclusively limited to fish of the Sciaenidae family such as the shi drum and the brown meagre.

How to explain, then, the identification with the damselfish provided by Rondelet and accepted as such by most ichthyologists after him? Answering this question will lead us to both clarifying the interpretation of a passage from the *Halieutica* (a poem traditionally ascribed to Ovid) and, incidentally, putting in doubt – but only from a historical point of view – the scientific taxonomic biologists use for referring to the genus *Chromis*, a fairly numerous taxon comprising fish of the Pomacentridae (not the Sciaenidae) family – notably, the name has been assigned by Linnaeus himself based on Artedi’s authority, the latter based in turn on Rondelet’s identification of Gr. *khrómis* with the Mediterranean damselfish (Artedi 1738; Linnaeus 1758: 280).

Rondelet’s succinct paragraph about *khrómis* ends with the quotation of Ovid’s remark *immunda chromis* (*Ov. Hal.* 121), lit. ‘unclean *chromis*’, the only negative statement about the fish in the ancient sources and, therefore, easier to pinpoint.

Rondelet, much like many other scholars after him (e.g., Aldrovandi 1613: 168; Saint-Denis 1947: 23; Capponi 1972: 529), has taken the adjective as referring to the qualities of the fish as food, which cannot match with the tremendous reputation of the sciaenids. The bad reputation of the Mediterranean damselfish, maybe only second to that of the saupe (*Sarpa salpa* (Linnaeus, 1758)), whose discredit goes for the ancients as well (e.g., Epicharmus *ap. Ath.* 7, 321d; Pliny *Nat.* 9, 68), will have played a primary role – what is more, when it comes to fish that thrive in grassy sand, Ovid’s verse mentions just the saupe as *merito vilissima* (‘rightly most worthless’) immediately after *immunda chromis*, a pairing which might have been difficult to resist for Rondelet and his followers, although the fish lists in the poem do not follow the criterion of phenotypical similarity. Moreover, Pliny (*Nat.* 32, 153) quotes *chromis* among the fish quoted in turn by Ovid, saying that it builds a nest underwater. This might be the only actual reference to the Mediterranean damselfish in the ancient texts, since these fish are “nesters” (Quignard & Pras 1986), unlike the Sciaenidae – Thompson (1947: 292), for instance, relies both on this fact and on Ovid’s *immunda* remark for additionally identifying *khrómis* with the Mediterranean damselfish. In fact, Ovid’s passage assigns this reproductive habit not to *chromis* but to *phycis* (= the wrasse *Symphodus* sp., another “nester” fish; see Guasparri 2005: 368); the fact that *phycis* is mentioned in the verse immediately fol-

lowing the one where *chromis* appears (*Hal.* 122) may explain Pliny’s (or maybe the copyist’s) misreading (cf. Aldrovandi 1613: 168; Saint Denis 1947: 23).

#### LAT. IMMUNDUS

As to the adjective *immundus*, this is never used in the Latin sources in reference to (bad) gastronomic qualities. The word occurs from Plautus onwards mostly in its denotative meaning, i.e. for describing something “unclean or untidy in appearance” (Glare 1968: 838), which seems rather odd for a fish.

Thus, all possible explanations of the syntagm *immunda chromis* rest on the connotative uses of *immundus*. However rare in the ancient texts, such occurrences are well worth considering in detail. By reviewing all the occurrences found in the Latin sources, two seem the semantic spheres targeted through the metaphorical use of *immundus*<sup>6</sup>. The first is connected with smell. Virgil (*G.* 3, 564) says *immundus* of the sweat secreted by the smelling limbs of someone wearing clothes made out of the wool of plague-affected sheep<sup>7</sup>. The other smell-related passage is particularly significant because it is not only found in Ovid himself but it also involves an animal (although not a fish). Drawing an analogy between human and non-human sexual behaviours, Ovid (*Ars* 2, 486) says that a she-goat “bears her *immundus* male”. Even though the reference to smell might not appear explicit to us city-dwellers, he-goats are mostly quoted throughout Latin literature as the standard example of a stinking animal (cf. e.g., MacCary & Willcock 1976: 210) – Pliny, for instance, labels the he-goat as *foedissimum animalium*, lit. ‘the foulest of animals’ (Pliny *Nat.* 37, 60).

The second connotational field attested for *immundus* in the Latin texts is taboo-related. Horace uses the adjective for describing the erotic dream (*immundum visum*) which leads him to stain his nightshirt<sup>8</sup>. The same author labels the language of the Satyrs in satyric dramas as filled with *immunda dicta*, i.e. “obscene” or “bawdy words” (Horace *Ars* 247; cf. e.g., Fairclough 1942: 471).

#### KHRÓMIS, SAPÉRDĒS AND KORAKĪNOS: A “PONTIC” SYNONYMY

In view of the above connotative uses, let us try and explain why Ovid has called this sciaenid fish *immundus*. Everything relies on two additional Greek fish names: *sapérdēs* and, again, *korakinos*.

*Sapérdēs* labels both a food item consisting of salted fish (*tárikhos*) typically prepared in the Black Sea region (Pontus; cf. Varro *Men.* 312; Persius 5, 133; Archestratus *ap. Ath.* 3, 117a) and the fish called by the same name – a pairing food/fish which

6. In particular, out of a total of 29 occurrences, two are taboo-related (Horace *S.* 1, 5, 84; *Ars* 247) and two smell-related (Ovid *Ars am.* 2, 486; Virgil *G.* 3, 564). All the rest consists of denotative uses (i.e. *immundus* as ‘unclean’).

7. “Foul sweat” as the English translation for *immundus sudor* is well established among Virgil scholars. E.g., Fairclough 1934: 195; Thomas 2008: 64.

8. Cf. e.g., translations such as “salacious” (Schlegel 2005: 65) and “obscene” (Brown 1993: 59).

is not uncommon in both the ancient Greek and the Latin world, which typically viewed the sea as an inexhaustible larder (Guasparri 2005). In the same Pontic area this fish is also called *korakīnos* (cf. Hesychius, σ 184), the most esteemed of which is found in the Palus Maeotis (Sea of Azov) (cf. Dorius *ap.* Ath. 3, 118b). But what species is it? *Korakīnos* (see etymology given earlier) has a threefold identification, one of which involves just the two sciaenids we have considered so far to be the referents of *khrómis* (cf. Thompson 1947: 122f). This identification is not only supported by the similarity between the ancient and the modern names of the two fish involved (all “crow-related”)<sup>9</sup>, but, above all, by *sapérdēs* being described as a “big” fish (Diphilus *ap.* Ath. 4, 157a) and a “broad-snouted” one (Timocles *ap.* Ath. 7, 339e), which definitely excludes both the other referents denoted by *korakīnos* (the damselfish and – for different but obvious reasons – the Nile tilapia, *Oreochromis niloticus* (Linnaeus, 1758)), all to the advantage of the two sciaenids – and of the shi drum in particular, given its “massive head” (Costa 1991: 188).

We can therefore conclude that all three ethnobionyms, *khrómis*, *sapérdēs* and *korakīnos*, denote the shi drum (or the brown meagre), although, as to *korakīnos*, this reference is seemingly only found in the Black Sea region. This, however, is hardly a problem, since, according to Pliny (*Nat.* 32, 152), Ovid has begun his book when in exile on the Black Sea at the end of his life and, therefore, he has included fish typically found there.

As a result, although referring to *sapérdēs*, Ovid might have used *khrómis* hinting at its “Pontic” synonymy with both *korakīnos* and *sapérdēs*. This hypothesis, i.e. Ovid’s allusion to the scienids in question through the adjective *immunda*, can actually be strongly supported in terms of both the connotative uses of *immundus* seen earlier. A first case in point is provided by Athenaeus: Parmeniscus, one of “the learned banqueters” portrayed in the *Deipnosophists*, quotes a verse by the comic poet Diphilus in which a “big” and “somewhat smelly” (*hupodusōdēs*) *sapérdēs* makes its *entrée* at a “flowery” dinner table, which is possibly (the text is partially corrupt) what brings a burst of laughter from the other banqueters.

The second case in point is provided by Strabo (*geogr.* 13, 2, 6), who quotes *sapérdēs* among several other “indecent” words writers avoid because of the phonetic connection to such taboo-terms as *pordē* ‘flatulence’ and *pérdomai* ‘break wind’: “Some writers, to avoid the indecency of the names, say that in this place we should read “Poroselene”, and that we should call Asporenium, the rocky and barren mountain round Pergamum, “Asporenium,” and the temple of the Mother of the Gods there the temple of the “Asporene” mother. What, then, shall we say of Pordalis and Saperdes (Sapérdēs) and Perdiccas, and of the phrase of Simonides, “banished, ‘pordacian’ clothes and all”, instead of “wet” clothes, and, somewhere in the early comedy, “the place is ‘pordacian’,” that is, the place that is marshy”? (Jones 1929: 147).

This might not only explain Ovid’s text both in terms of the smell and the taboo-related connotations of *immundus* (the fish would be “unclean” for both its smell as a *tárikhos* and its flatulence-like sound, hence the pun), but also account for Ovid’s avoidance of *sapérdēs* in his poem.

But what about *korakīnos*, the synonym which both fish names share? Why not use it?

*Korakīnos* is commonly the damselfish for both Greek and Latin speakers, but, as just seen, not in Pontus, where it labels the *sapérdēs*, or rather what is commonly also called *khrómis*. Thus the latter seems the only ethnobionym available to Ovid, and not only because it unequivocally denotes the same fish as *sapérdēs*, but also because of its anthropozoological identity: indeed its morphology bears a semantic/onomatopoeic relation to the “croaking” sound produced by the fish, which is key for letting the reader grasp the underlying smell/sound associations and therefore the pun resulting from the ethnobiological pairing with *sapérdēs*, a fish sauce well known in Rome and, perhaps not incidentally, only found in the works of satiric poets such as Lucilius (1, 54 Marx), Varro (*Men.* 312) and Persius (5, 134) – it is not to be excluded that also Diphilus, a comic poet, may hint at not just the pungent smell of the rotting sauce but also at the flatulence-related sound when labelling the fish as “somewhat smelly” (see above).

Such a verbal play seems to perfectly match the only apparently frivolous parody of didactic poetry which is embodied in the *Halieutica* (Toohey 2004: 237) – be it the work of Ovid or of one of his many (gifted) imitators. Indeed, if there is a Latin poet that can be considered the master of word-play, constantly challenging his readers on the multivalence of his verses, it is Ovid (e.g., Ahl 1985; Papaioannou 2005). Even in his exilic works he simply cannot resist multi-layered verbal ambiguities, be they *double entendres*, puns, riddles, etymological plays etc. (e.g., Claassen 2008: 134).

## CONCLUSION

To sum up and return to the main goal of this article, the above is yet another example of why the traditional identification of Gr. *khrómis* with the Mediterranean damselfish should be rejected, all to the advantage of the two scienids considered so far, and of the shi drum in particular. First of all, this identification makes it possible to deepen our understanding of the anthropozoological identity of the fish in question as it emerges from both the (sound-related) etymology of its descriptive ethnobionym and the otherwise inconsistent testimonies found in ancient authors. Secondly, it questions the current scientific name of both the Mediterranean damselfish, i.e. *Chromis chromis* (Linnaeus, 1758), and the superordinate taxon, i.e. genus *Chromis* – *Chromis chromis* being the type species. However, inasmuch as Linnaeus’s authority is involved, this can only be a matter of historical interest.

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9. See e.g., Thompson 1947: 122; Froese & Pauly 2016.

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