Infelicium Avium
Reconsidering Passerat’s Conjecture at Apul. Met. 3.17.4

Leonardo Costantini
University of Leeds
cllc@leeds.ac.uk

Received March 2016 | Accepted April 2016

1 Introduction and Scholarship on the Reading

At Met. 3.17.4-5 Photis describes to the protagonist of the tale Lucius the goetic paraphernalia (apparatus) of the eerie laboratory (feralis officina) of her mistress, the Thessalian maga Pamphile,1 which is set up with

omne genus aromatis et ignobiliter lamminis litteratis et infelicium [n]avium durantibus damnis, defletorum, sepultorum etiam cadaverum expositis multis admodum membris.

every type of herb and metal tablets with undecipherable inscriptions, and the desiccating remains of inauspicious birds, as well as several body parts taken from mourned and even buried corpses.2

In this study I shall comment on infelicium navium (‘of ill-fated shipwrecks’) at Met. 3.17.4, which is the reading handed down by the Laurentianus Plut. 68.02 (siglum: F)—the most authoritative MS containing the Apologia, the Metamorphoses and the Florida3—and by the other MSS alike, and I shall add content-based and palaeographical evidence to defend the emendation infelicium [n]avium (‘of inauspicious birds’), originally proposed by the

---

1 Pamphile’s magical notoriety is already made clear at Met. 2.5.3-8.
2 Translations, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.
French humanist Jean Passerat.\(^4\) This emendation has witnessed changing fortunes in modern critical editions of the *Metamorphoses*: although Helm accepts it in his first edition,\(^5\) he prints *navium* in the text of his second and third editions,\(^6\) as do Giarratano,\(^7\) Robertson,\(^8\) Giarratano and Frassinetti,\(^9\) and recently Martos\(^10\) and Zimmerman.\(^11\) A strong case for retaining the *lectio tradita* was put forward by Adam Abt,\(^12\) who comments on the marine debris mentioned in *Apol.* 35.4—which Apuleius paradoxically associates with magical practices—and cautiously proposes a comparison between the *resticulae* (‘pieces of strands’)\(^13\) and *PGM* VII.594-595,\(^14\) a passage from a prescription for love-magic, where it is said ποίησον ἐλλύχνιον ἀπὸ πλοίου νεναυαγκύτος (‘make a wick of the hawser of a wrecked ship’).\(^15\) According to this argument, Abt\(^16\) explains that the emendation \([n]avium\) in Helm’s first edition would be unnecessary since *navium* would reflect this practice of implementing the remains of shipwrecks in magic. Van der Paardt\(^17\) aptly stresses a parallel with *Apol.* 58.2, a passage in which Apuleius reports that, according to his prosecutors, the presence of smoke and birds’ feathers would evidence that he had performed some impious nocturnal sacrifices (*nocturna sacra*) in the house of Iunius Crassus with his friend Quintianus. Nevertheless, van der Paardt seems fundamentally