

Introduction

ALEXANDRA TRACHSEL / HENDRIK MÜLLER

1. The research context on Claudius Aelianus

The present volume is reflective of the still growing research interest in Claudius Aelianus. Commonly known as Aelian, he was a Roman intellectual from Severan times who wrote his works in Greek and whose Ποικίλη ἱστορία (more commonly known under the Latin title *Varia Historia*) is generally regarded as the eponym of ancient miscellanistic writing. While the writings of Aelian and other miscellanists found little recognition in the 19th century, especially among German scholars of Classical Philology, the discipline's occupation with literary miscellanies and their authors has increased noticeably in recent decades. Indeed, numerous translations of Aelian's two chief works – the *Varia Historia*; hereafter *VH* and the *De Natura Animalium* (in Greek: Περὶ Ζῴων Ἰδιότητος; hereafter *NA*) – into English, German, French, Italian, and Spanish have appeared. In the 1980s, three Spanish translations were published (Díaz-Reganon Lopez 1984, Otero 1987, Vara Donado 1989), followed in the 1990s by a German translation of selected parts of the *VH* by Hadwig Helms (1990), by two Italian translations (Wilson 1996; Maspero 1998), by a French translation by Alessandra Lukinovich and Anne-France Morand (1991), and finally, by three English translations that replaced the only earlier English version, which had been written by Thomas Stanley over three hundred years earlier (Stanley 1665).

This development intensified in the 2000s with a French translation of the *NA* by Arnaud Zucker (2001–2002) and a (currently only partial) German translation by Paul-Gerhard Veh for the Library of Greek Classics within the Hiersemann publishing house (2020). In 2018, Kai Brodersen published the first complete bilingual Greek–German editions of both the *VH* (under the title ‘Vermischte Forschung’) and the *NA* (under the title ‘Tierleben’) in the Tusculum Collection. Furthermore, already in 1999, a team from the University of Oviedo (Spain) led by Manuela García Valdés began work on a new Teubner edition of the *NA*, which appeared in 2009 and replaced the more-than-150-year-old version by Rudolf Hercher (1821–1878) from 1864. Similarly, for the letters and the fragments a new Teubner edition by Douglas Domingo-Forasté

(1994) was published, but for the *VH*, we still rely on the 1974 edition by Dilts, again a Teubner edition.

Nevertheless, a philological investigation into Aelian's miscellanies in the form of commentaries and in-depth studies that are dedicated either to his literary productions or to his literary practices and rhetorical skills remains an urgent research desideratum notwithstanding important early contributions, such as those by Hübner in 1984 and Kindstrand in 1998. For instance, the 2020s have borne witness to a short commentary on the text by Philipp Stahlhut; however, as Stahlhut's commentary is based on the above-mentioned translation by Paul-Gerhard Veh, which it accompanies, this commentary is currently available only for Books 1–8 of the work. Similarly, the first critical edition of the scholia to the *NA* was published in 2017 by Claudio Meliaddò. Further important input appeared in Steven Smith's 2014 monograph *Man and Animal in Severan Rome*, in which Smith demonstrates Aelian's proximity to Stoic doctrine and also attempts (albeit not necessarily undisputedly) to derive a political statement against Elagabalus' principate from Aelian's works.

This research sparked a series of detailed studies on a large array of themes relating to Aelian's two collections and their status among the miscellany tradition, as our readers can find in the University of Oviedo's continually updated online bibliography, which provides further details on existing and forthcoming studies. Among them a few studies are particularly relevant to the present volume: In those that accompany the Spanish Teubner edition, the primary focus is on Aelian's linguistic peculiarities, for example, in contributions by Lucía Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén (Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén 2005) and Nigel Wilson (Wilson 2006), the latter of whom was also responsible for the 1997 Loeb Edition of the *VH*. Other approaches focus on Aelian's enactments of literary practices that are shared among compilers and in which the notion of *ποικιλία* is central (Morgan 2007, Bevegni 2014, Grand-Clément 2015, Hindermann 2016, Trachsel 2023), while still other approaches investigate Aelian's texts with regard to the author's stance in relation to other zoological literature (Fögen 2009, Müller-Reineke 2010, Vespa 2013–2014, Humar 2018). Furthermore, a series of studies are dedicated to Aelian in relation both to the authors of the Second Sophistic (Athenaeus: Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén 2011 and 2020; Plutarch: Prandi 2005b; Physiologos: Nicklas/Spittler 2016; epistolography: Hodkinson 2013; ancient novels: Müller-Reineke 2006 and 2014, Hindermann 2013) and to the way in which Aelian deals with the past (Stamm 2003, Schettino 2005, Prandi 2005a, Campanile 2006 and most recently, Smith 2019). Finally, in approaching the topic of the present volume, we find works that deal with the way Aelian handles textual sequences from his sources (Rotstein 2007, Polito 2010, Mayhew 2017, Silvestini 2018).

Thus far, only a few academic endeavours have been dedicated solely to Aelian. Prior to the Hamburg conference in 2021, an international workshop on 'Elien en contexte: rhétorique, pratique de l'argumentation et savoir naturaliste' was held in October 2017 at the University of Nice Sophia Antipolis in France by the CEPAM research laborato-

ry (Cultures et Environment, Préhistoire, Antiquité, Moyen Âge). The workshop was organized by Marco Vespa and Arnaud Zucker and led to a further publication in 2020, just ahead of our own conference (Vespa/Zucker 2020).

The present volume is the result of the above-mentioned two-day conference in Hamburg in 2021 and provides an outline of the conference's developments. We were able to bring together an impressive selection of scholars who have substantially shaped the effort to better understand Aelian as an author in his own right. All contributors were keen to investigate Aelian as an Imperial intellectual who was inspired by the context of the Second Sophistic and who demonstrated a particular set of literary and rhetorical skills in composing his miscellanies. However, the goal of the conference was to begin with one of the most widespread literary practices that can be found in miscellanies in general and in Aelian's works in particular: namely Aelian's quotation practices. Nonetheless, as we understand quotations, they are only one type of literary device. Therefore, the conference also included – as does the present volume – studies that discuss other literary practices and the way that these practices handle quotations. Finally, the last two studies investigate how a close analysis of the literary devices that Aelian employs in his two main works can help us uncover more about the author behind the texts, including information on his education and convictions.

2. The outline of the present volume

The present volume mirrors the themes of the 2021 Hamburg conference and is thus divided into two parts. The first part consists of a set of three contributions that focus on Aelian's quotation practices and analyse them as a device from the author's rhetorical toolkit that he perfectly masters as a well-trained sophist and skilfully handles when composing his collections. The second part builds on these demonstrations and consists of four contributions that closely examine Aelian's literary practices in order to discover the author's messages behind the thematic variation of his compilations by investigating recurring features in the works. Together, the seven papers reveal a resourceful scholar who – despite the cumulative nature of his miscellanies – is in solid command of his texts. This aspect becomes the guiding thread for the present volume.

Our volume begins with Oikonomopoulou's paper on organization principles in miscellanies, and, in doing so, it makes a perfect start for our collection. However, the author's ultimate goal is to define the role that quotations play in Aelian's works in order to provide readers with some guiding principles that might lead them through the material exposed. To demonstrate this, Oikonomopoulou selects two case studies and focuses on the catalogues and lists they contain, which are literary formats that are fundamental for miscellanies. She begins with an example from Aelian (NA 7.43) that is also scrutinized from another perspective by Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén in the third paper of the present volume. In a second step, Oikonomopoulou completes her

study by enhancing her findings with observations on Athenaeus' earliest catalogues (*Deipn.* 2.49d–50b). Both passages appear *prima facie* to be chaotic constructs assembled at random; however, this initial impression does not do justice to the compiler's literary skills, as Oikonomopoulou shows by taking advantage of the modern concept of 'mental lexicon'.

The human mental faculty – which is defined by this concept of 'mental lexicon' – works with different levels of association between phonetic and semantic similarities, which form a network of concepts and words (e. g. prototypes, hyperonyms, and hyponyms). In her paper, Oikonomopoulou reveals how some of the tenets of this modern theory can aid in understanding how the often very heterogeneous lists found in miscellanies are organized into meaningful and memorable formats. Indeed, by being attentive to such mental associations, which may or may not be combined with phonetic and morphological resemblances, we can discover the playful construction of such lists of words.

Oikonomopoulou further argues that such literary practices also allow the author to increase the memorability of the content and to engage the reader in exploring the limits and/or the symbolism of human language. Oikonomopoulou argues that the quotations that are abundantly present in both case studies form part of these literary practices because they document the linguistic variety of the examined words and increase the scholarly credentials of the given catalogue. Especially in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae*, quotations represent an organic part of the catalogue by providing authority, by giving crucial context in showing, for instance, the different registers or genres of writing, and finally, by attesting various meanings of a word. The first contribution to the present volume therefore illustrates the overall theme of Part 1 by analysing quotations and their functions alongside many other literary practices that ancient compilers mastered, notably as part of the skilful arrangement of the material in the context of catalogues and lists.

The second contribution – by Lucía Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén – broadens the perspective of the present volume in two ways: Her study goes beyond case studies of single sections and examines a selection of passages that encompass all the quotations from tragic poets transmitted in Aelian's miscellanies (29 in total). Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén's detailed observations of the function that Aelian gives these passages in his writings and the techniques he uses to embed them in his texts demonstrate that Aelian follows instructions from rhetorical treatises with regard to smoothly incorporating quotations into his own writing.

Indeed, Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén draws revealing parallels between Aelian's practices on the one hand and the more theoretical considerations found in some of the rhetorical treatises attributed to Hermogenes of Tarsus on the other hand. Moreover, she points to the fact that Aelian's quotations of tragic poets fall into several categories that he uses according to the structure of his anecdote, the place given to the quotations there, or their function within Aelian's own message. The scale extends from

the faithful reproduction of several metrical lines to the copying of single words and also includes paraphrases and references to the content of plays. Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén's contribution therefore demonstrates how rewarding it can be to closely analyse Aelian's quotation practices and reveals that deviations from the wording that is transmitted in the plays themselves are seldom errors; rather, these deviations document how the author – as a well-trained sophist – follows rhetorical principles that we can trace in rhetorical treatises as well as how he uses these quotations as part of his communication strategies with his readers.

The last contribution in Part 1 of the present volume – by Alexandra Trachsel – is dedicated to yet another aspect of Aelian's quotation practices while nevertheless complementing Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén's paper. Trachsel also deals with poetic quotations, but from another text corpus: namely the Homeric epics. As the Homeric epics are extant, Trachsel is able to combine in her analysis the use of quotations in Aelian's text as part of his communication strategy with the interpretation of the original context from which the textual re-uses originate. By choosing one highly telling case study (NA 10.26), she demonstrates how Aelian constructs his statements by skilfully using his knowledge about the original context of the Homeric lines and the issues raised therein.

Aelian's awareness of the richness of the debate about the chosen passages is found to guide him in selecting the information he collects for his compilations, in composing his own text accordingly, and finally, in formulating his quotations. The testimony from Eustathius – which Trachsel adduces for her argumentation – corroborates her findings and shows that educated readers of the time recognized the scholarly controversies to which Aelian's quotations point and could therefore appreciate Aelian's skills and educational background. Trachsel's contribution completes the picture that the entire first part of the present volume paints: By analysing Aelian's quotation practices as one aspect of his elaborated technique of composing each of his sections, we are able to see Aelian as a resourceful author who is well-trained in rhetorical skills and is aware of all the means and devices that allow him to produce an instructive yet also enjoyable work for his readers.

The picture that emerges from the first three papers is developed and strengthened in Part 2 of the volume, which introduces a shift in approach: The four contributions of Part 2 add a new component by highlighting how we can grasp the convictions and beliefs that Aelian conveys in his miscellanies by analysing his literary practices and his quotations, in particular. This combination of a close analysis of Aelian's quotation practices and the search for information about the author's voice can be found in the contribution by Zucker, in which the statements attributed to Aelian's use of the author's ἐγώ are compared with quotations from Aelian's other informants. However, despite its new orientation, Zucker's contribution represents a continuation of Trachsel's results because Trachsel also demonstrated how Aelian used the pronoun ἐγώ both alongside and in response to quotations of external pieces of evidence.

Zucker is well aware of the pitfalls that can appear when trying to find an author's voice behind textual conventions. Therefore, he bases his analysis on nine carefully selected excerpts that clearly indicate that Aelian uses the personal pronoun *ἐγώ* to voice his own personal experience. In his analysis, Zucker compares Aelian's quotation practices for reporting pieces of information from other informants with the author's quotation practices for reporting material from his own experiences. In this respect, Zucker's contribution completes and expands upon the theme of the first part of our volume while also introducing and illustrating the focus of the second part of volume, which reveals how an analysis of Aelian's literary practices grants access to the author's world and to his convictions.

Zucker deserves therefore to stand at the beginning of the second part, as his paper demonstrates how the analysis of literary practices enables him to further define Aelian's own stance within his works by clearly showing how Aelian subtly introduces his own reflections, judgements, and choices concerning the transmitted information and by displaying several different attitudes, such as a sceptical evaluation of the sources, thereby putting into perspective the reported pieces of knowledge or introducing his own convictions. Zucker's conclusion once again illustrates our underlying conviction that Aelian's works are more than mere compilations; rather, they are the product of an intense and well-informed treatment of the material that enriches the gathered lore. Moreover, Zucker sheds further light on Aelian by highlighting the compiler's scientific personality, which is distinct from the author's more-often-analysed philosophical personality. Zucker's contribution thereby functions as a companion to the later paper by Humar, who focuses precisely on this philosophical personality by analysing how Aelian interweaves his own opinions on animals into his well-thought-out description of their emotions.

Before moving on to this second strand of Aelian's personality in Humar's paper, Stahlhut's contribution presents another facet of the compiler's personal autopsy: By returning to the case study of a single item, Stahlhut analyses Aelian's use of material sources of information and – in so doing – also aptly expands the focus to include Aelian's use of other literary practices (aside from quotations) to convey his knowledge and personal expertise. Stahlhut's paper highlights Aelian's personal contribution to information gathering by showing that Aelian's selection criteria may include more than the faithful reproduction of pieces of knowledge from other experts. Either by alluding to his personal autopsy of pieces of information or by mentioning the opinions of others as a guarantee of reliability, Aelian is able to shape his own persona as a knowledgeable compiler who is able to navigate through the material to which he has access thanks to his personal expertise.

This finding holds true in Humar's paper even with the shift to Aelian's philosophical personality and the focus on the zoological content of the *NA*. Humar's close readings and well-documented analyses reveal how Aelian conveys some of his thoughts despite the apparent disorder of his composition thanks to Aelian's subtle method

of composing some of his anecdotes. The selection of analysed examples shows that Aelian attributes a large range of different emotions to a series of animals. This attribution seems *prima facie* to stand in contradiction to previous analyses of Aelian's text, which have mainly underlined the Stoic ideas Aelian develops in his work. Indeed, the analysis of these emotions brings Aelian closer to Plutarch, whose works often eschew this Stoic nature and display a pronounced respect for animals. This finding leads to a larger debate on the status of animals in Roman society. Aelian contributes to this debate, although he maintains the principle of variation in his composition. In so doing, he requires his readers to combine different levels of reading that range from a more playful enjoyment of the surprising thematic variation of his compilation to the perspicacious recognition of the interwoven messages that are subtly fleshed out by Aelian's mastery of literary practices.

Exactly how precisely Aelian guides his readers through the great thematic variety of the miscellanies is demonstrated in the volume's final paper. By beginning from modern research on reading and writing practices in the context of web-based tools and the changes this context entails both for us as readers and for the way we see texts in general, Müller's contribution explores Aelian's miscellanies as a first (proto-)example of a non-linear text in which readers may choose for themselves how to go through the work and which trail to pursue. In order to support this claim, Müller's paper lists a series of literary practices that Aelian uses to allow such a non-linear reading. The contribution first discusses the different mechanisms of associating thoughts (e.g. similarity, contrast, and contiguity) and second reveals a set of other narrative devices, such as the repetition of words, narrational interventions (which provide a larger context to Trachsel's contribution as well as to the papers by Zucker and Stahlhut), and even cross-references.

Among the analysed literary practices, we also find some that are used to structure the individual anecdotes, such as presentation markers – including framing an anecdote with headlines and concluding sequences – and finally, the shaping of the material as a ring composition in order to highlight the unity of the anecdote. This aspect of Müller's paper resonates with the first papers of the present volume and wraps them up nicely. Indeed, Oikonomopoulou's study demonstrates how quotations are used by Aelian to structure the composition of the analysed anecdotes and how the position of these anecdotes within this structure allows readers to take an active role when they are aware of these rhetorical devices.

The present volume therefore paints a broad picture of the richness of Aelian's use of literary practices and his mastery of a large array of rhetorical devices. We prioritize quotations because collecting pieces of knowledge from other authors is one of the distinctive features of a compilation, as is the principle of *ποικιλία* with which the material is presented. Nonetheless, our contributions demonstrate how skilful and well-trained an author such as Aelian has to be when handling these features in order to be appreciated by his readers. Quotations certainly do not stand alone and are part of

a much larger array of rhetorical skills that are described in contemporary rhetorical treatises and applied in other miscellanies, such as Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae*. Our volume ends here, but it is intended to serve as an inspiring stepping stone for further research that compares other compilations beyond Athenaeus' text in order to deepen the study of Aelian's works.

The Hamburg conference 2021, as well as the present volume, was financially supported by a Research Grant of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) as conclusion of the project "Claudius Aelianus: a Case Study from the Imperial Period on Ancient Quotation practices" (A. Trachsel). The publication of this volume was made possible thanks to further generous financial support by the Chair of Latin Studies at the Institute for Greek and Latin Philology of the University of Hamburg (Prof. Dr. Claudia Schindler) and the University Council from the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). We are grateful to the editors for including this book in the series *Hamburger Studien der Vormoderne* and last, but not least, we want to thank the proofreader and the anonymous reviewer for his editorial improvements.