

In the *Deipnosophistae*, Athenaeus is deeply concerned with the theme of extreme luxury leading to moral decadence and then the actual physical destruction of cities. In this context (principally in Book 12), he quotes from numerous authors as early as the fourth century BC and does so in a manner that suggests to most modern scholars that he is drawing his fundamental thesis from those authors as well (Ampolo 1993; Cozzoli 1980; del Corno 1993). However, by establishing a comparison with his use of surviving authors (Pelling 2000; Ambaglio 1990), we can see that elements in Athenaeus that are commonly regarded as stemming from earlier, non-extant authors should be considered with substantial caution. It is possible and even likely that moralizing themes especially may have been added subsequently by Athenaeus or an intermediary source to bare facts culled from the earlier authors.

Evidence for the idea that Athenaeus reinterpreted fragments to fit his own argument on luxury can be found in the word-phrasing employed in these passages. Several questionable phrases can be identified, but the clearest evidence concerns the rather odd idiom, (ἐξ)οκέλλειν εἰς τρυφήν (“to shipwreck on luxury”). In the extant *Deipnosophistae*, this or a very similar phrase occurs eight times and is attributed perhaps to Aristotle and without doubt to Timaeus, Phylarchus, Polybius, and Nicolaus of Damascus. If we leave aside these examples, there are no securely attested instances of our phrase ἐξοκέλλειν εἰς τρυφήν in any authors before Philo Judaeus in the first century AD. After this first appearance, the expression occurs with frequency in a wide range of authors of the first and second centuries CE and beyond, including Plutarch, Josephus, Ps.-Longinus, Herodian, Cassius Dio, Pausanias, Clement of Alexandria, Aelian, and Origen. Given these facts, it seems best to locate the source of the occurrences of ἐξοκέλλειν εἰς τρυφήν from Athenaeus in that writer’s own milieu. Such an interpretation is supported by a further consideration: it stretches credulity to believe that Athenaeus, in selecting examples of τρυφή from Timaeus, Phylarchus and the rest, would by some coincidence quote so many instances of what could not have been anything but a rare phrase. Thus we conclude that ἐξοκέλλειν εἰς τρυφήν represents “spin” applied to the evidence cited by Athenaeus. The facts by themselves would not be understood as examples of immorality without Athenaeus’ words, and so such passages cannot be taken as the solid basis upon which to support a theory of moral causation in Hellenistic historiography.