## The Emperor's Pet Fish: a Conjecture on Martial 4.30.6

Martial describes the emperor's fishpond at Baiae, and the fish that know their own names and come when called by them (4.30.3-7 – there are no variants in these lines):

sacris piscibus hae natantur undae, qui norunt dominum manumque lambunt illam, qua nihil est in orbe maius. 5 quid quod nomen habent et ad magistri vocem quisque sui venit citatus?

I do wonder what species of fish would be varied enough in size and shape and coloring for anyone to be able to tell if they answered to the wrong names. Apollinaris' pet fish in Martial 10.30.19-24 are of several different species, and have their own *nomenclator*.

However that may be, it seems to me likely that Martial wrote *nomina*, not *nomen*, in line 6 of our passage. There is no difficulty getting the required meaning out of the Latin: *nomen habent* can of course mean 'they all have (each invidually) a name'. The problem is that *nomen habent* is ambiguous: it would also mean that the fish 'have a name' in the sense that they are collectively famous, as indeed they are. In his note on Ovid, *Amores* 1.3.21-22, McKeown notes that "the phrase *nomen habere* is peculiarly frequent in Ovid, occurring ninety-one times". In some of these, it clearly means 'be famous' rather than 'have a particular name assigned'. Examples could easily be multiplied – here are four:

- 1. The passage just referenced: carmina nomen habent exterrita cornibus Io / et quam fluminea lusit adulter ave.
- 2. Amores 2.17.28, of girls who wish Ovid to make them famous: et multae per me nomen habere volunt.
- 3. Ars Amatoria 3.219: quae nunc **nomen habent** operosi signa Myronis.
- 4. Tristia 3.14.22, on his Metamorphoses: illud opus potuit, si non prius ipse perissem, / certius a summa nomen habere manu.

The reader who takes *nomen habent* in Martial 4.30 to refer to the collective fame of the imperial fish must shift gears and reinterpret on reading the following context. Sloppy writing like this seems unworthy of a poet like Martial, and I think he avoided it by writing *nomina*. The elided -a would easily have been swallowed by the ensuing ha-.