ΛΑΒΡΥΣ

Studies presented to Pontus Hellström

Edited by

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Abstract
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This volume contains studies on Classical Antiquity presented to Professor Pontus Hellström on his 75th birthday in January 2014. The 41 papers cover subjects ranging from the Etruscans and Rome in the west, to Greece, the landscape of Karia, and to the Sanctuary of Zeus at Labraunda. Many papers deal with new discoveries at Labraunda, but sites in the surrounding area, such as Alabanda, Iasos, and Halikarnassos are well represented, as well as Ephesos and Smyrna. Many architectural studies are included, and these examine both Labraundan buildings and topics such as masonry, Vitruvius, the Erechtheion, stoas, watermills, and Lelegian houses. Other papers deal with ancient coins, ancient music, Greek meatballs, and Karian theories on the origin of ancient Greece.

Keywords: Pontus Hellström, Labraunda, Karia, Ancient Turkey, sanctuary, Ancient Greece, Hellenistic, Roman, Hekatomnid, archaeological excavations

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A note on minced meat in ancient Greece

by

Gunnel Ekroth

Ancient Greek culture was very much focused on meat, primarily due to animal sacrifice being the main ritual within religion. A large quantity of the meat eaten came from sacrificed animals, and in Athens in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, judging from the inscriptions regulating cults on a state and communal level, an adult male Athenian citizen could be given free portions of sacrificial meat as often as every ninth day.[1] To this should be added private sacrifices as well as meat bought on the market. On the other hand, women, children, and slaves clearly were less well fed meat-wise and certain cults excluded these groups as well as foreigners from the distribution of the meat and participation in communal meals.[2]

In spite of the importance of meat, it always constituted a minor part of the diet. Greek food was divided into two basic categories: *sitos*—the staple dishes consisting of grain, bread, and porridge, complemented by *opson*, the extras, that is meat and fish.[3] When we hear of meat being eaten it is usually designated as *kreas*, or in ritual contexts as *merides*, which corresponds to the portions of meat of equal weight handed out at sacrifices.[4] These portions were either raw or cooked and could be eaten in the sanctuary or at home. Our sources also mention distinct cuts of meat, such as hind or forelegs, back sections, ribs, as well as tongues, brains, liver, kidneys, heart, and fat. Such pieces were primarily given to the priest or priestess as compensation for their work and outlays, and the distribution of such parts was often strictly regulated in cultic inscriptions.[5]

Was all meat consumed as cuts of some kind, either in the form of legs, chops, spare ribs, or as distinct portions of meat? In modern butchery the small pieces that are not really suited to selling and cooking are ground together with fat, the result being ground or minced meat.[6] This is an extremely convenient commodity, as one can make use of strips and

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[1] Rosivach 1994, 66.
[2] Cole 1992, 105–107 and 113; Butz 1996.
[3] Rosivach 1994, 2–3; Davidson 1997, 3–35; Dalby 2003, 212, s.v. meals. The consumption of fish and the attitudes to seafood in general by the Greeks is a complex chapter that reveals an ambiguous position, see Davidson 1997, *passim*.
[4] Ekroth 2008, 270–272.
[5] For the various meat sections given out as honorary portions, see Le Guen-Pollet 1991; Tsoukala 2009.
[6] The fat content is usually around 10% and rarely above 15% for ground beef (the maximum limit in the Swedish meat trade), while c. 20% for pork. Steak tartare made of beef, lamb, or horse should contain as little fat as possible.

trimmings which are difficult to prepare in a practical manner. Minced meat is certainly one of the staple kinds of meat in modern society, as anyone can cook something out of ground meat, in contrast to preparing larger sections of an animal, which requires knowledge of meat texture and what part is suited for grilling or braising and for how long in order to be tender and tasty. Ground meat can be shaped into hamburgers, meatballs, meatloafs, köfte, kebab, and sausages amongst many other items, or may be mixed with vegetables in soups and sauces, spaghetti bolognese being the ground meat dish *par excellence*. However, spaghetti bolognese requires not only the meat but also tomatoes and pasta, two kinds of food not available in ancient Greece. What about the ground meat—did it exist in Greek antiquity? In what follows, some comments will be made on the existence, usage, and production of this commodity among the ancient Greeks.

Sausages

There is not abundant evidence for the use of ground or minced meat in ancient Greece, and this product seems mainly to have been used for sausages.[7] In Aristophanes' comedy *The Knights* one of the main characters is Agorakritos, who is a sausage-seller, an *allantopôlês*. There are a number of terms for ancient sausages, the most common one being *allas*, though the terminology to a large extent refers to the casing, that is the kind of intestines used to hold the stuffing.[8] Of the meat filling we know less, but it must have been finely processed in order to fit into the casing. Interestingly enough, the same suspicions that the sausage could contain the kind of meat that could not be sold unless "hidden" in a sausage, which are often raised today, were also current in ancient times. Agorakritos uses intestines, tripe, and offal for his sausages, but it is also suggested that donkey and dog meat went into his produce, hardly the most desired kind of food.[9]

On the whole, minced meat and, in particular, sausages seem to have been more popular in the Roman period, or at least the Roman evidence is more abundant. The recipes of Apicius contain a number of dishes with minced meat, based on fish, sea food, eggs, blood, and pork, which are mixed with an abundance of herbs and spices and then turned into sausages or croquettes.[10] Some of these ingredients are ground in a mortar while others are finely chopped or both. In Athenaios an elaborate dish of a stomach stuffed with various kinds of meat is described—birds, pig's abdomens and wombs, egg yolks, bird's entrails and ovaries, as well as meat shredded into thin strips.[11] The term *isikion* is used, but it is also

[7] Ancient sausage production is discussed by Frost 1999.
[8] Frost 1999, 248–249.
[9] Frost 1999, 246–247, quoting Hipponax 84 (West); cf. Ar. *Eq*. 1399. There are also jokes in Attic comedy about the similarity in shape and colour between a sausage and the male sexual organ.
[10] Apicius 2.1–5.
[11] Ath. 9.376b.

pointed out that the word is not proper Attic vocabulary. In fact *isikion* is a loan word from the Latin *isicium,* which is used by Apicius as well and refers to ground meat that comes from any kind of animal. The term in the form *salsa isicia* ("salted minced meat") gave rise to the English *sausage* as well as the French *saucisse*.[12] The fine division of the meat that made up *isicia* is evident also from the Late Roman Macrobius who provides a discussion on the difficulties of digesting an *isicium*.[13] The meat had to be finely ground to break down its solidity, but this on the other hand resulted in the food being so light that it would float in the stomach, thereby hindering digestion. Also, grinding the meat energetically was said to trap gas in the meat and the stomach first had to deal with the gas before it could break down the solids. Sausages of minced meat were thus not an ideal or a high status kind of food for a number of reasons.

Before the meat grinder

It is true that ground meat can be a way of passing off the visually less attractive but still good parts of an animal, but there is another problem with such meat, namely that it spoils easily, because the ground meat provides multiple surfaces to which the bacteria can attach themselves. Even in modern Western societies, including Sweden, there are recurrent food scandals where ground meat that has passed its use-by date for consumption has been repacked, relabelled, and even reground, and then presented for sale anew.[14] Keeping the meat chilled is the most important element, thus minimizing the risks for bacterial growth, while assuring that the machine used for the preparation is impeccably clean is another must. Even more essential is that the meat should not be kept in its ground state for long before it is cooked, usually not more than two days. Many modern butchers do not keep any ready ground meat on display but only prepare it on demand, bringing the pieces of meat directly from the cooling room and grinding them in the customer's presence. When sold in department stores the plastic boxes with ground meat can be filled with carbon dioxide to ensure that the meat keeps fresh longer.

The preparation of ground meat therefore seems like an impractical procedure in antiquity considering the lack of suitable equipment for keeping the meat chilled. Still we perhaps tend to overstress the hygienic difficulties of meat handling in antiquity, since meat actually keeps better than one would think. Large chunks of meat, as well as entire flayed carcasses, stand heat much better than is usually assumed, as the surface of the meat partially dries out, creating a protective layer which prevents or at least delays bacterial growth. Experiments have demonstrated that meat can be hung in order to tenderize at a temperature of up to 25°C during three days without spoiling, as long it hangs freely, allowing for

[12] Dalby 2003, 294, s.v. sausage.
[13] *Sat*. 8.1–3.
[14] The last instance that was widely reported by Swedish media concerned the food chain ICA in 2007, where the use-by date was repeatedly moved one day ahead to allow for ground meat which was too old to be passed off as safe and suitable for sale.

the air to circulate.[15] When the meat was to be prepared and eaten, the surface was trimmed away and beneath it was found to be in an excellent condition. A similar procedure is used by modern butchers, but the meat will be hung in a cooling room and for a longer period of time before being regarded as tenderized enough. Interestingly, at some sacrifices in antiquity the meat was not distributed immediately but one or two days later, perhaps allowing for it to hang and become tender.[16] Minced meat, on the other hand, would have had to be prepared and eaten more quickly, but can in this sense be compared to blood, another commodity that has to be taken care of within a short period of time so as not to go bad, and which was definitely eaten in antiquity. At Greek sacrifices the blood from the victims was collected in a basin, presumably whipped to prevent coagulation, and then prepared as blood sausages, black puddings, or soups.[17] The cooking and consumption of such sensitive foods also in antiquity should not be excluded simply due to a lack of modern cooling facilities.

A different obstacle to ancient ground meat would be the technology. In modern times, meat is ground in a meat grinder, either manual or electric. If no such machine is available, the meat can be finely chopped or even scraped with a knife, which seems to have been one method employed in antiquity, but there are also other possibilities. Minced meat is actually a part of the cuisine of preindustrial cultures, though it was not made with a meat grinder or a knife but with the help of a mortar and a pestle. In the Middle East ground meat is called *kebbe* or *kibbeh*, and is made of lamb or veal.[18] It can be eaten raw as *kebbe nayyeh*, and can be used to fill shells made of bulgur, as well as a variety of other dishes. Today *kebbe* is ground in a machine but the traditional way of producing this meat is by pounding it in a stone mortar called a *modaqqa* with a pestle, *jorn*, a procedure with is very laborious and time consuming, but it results in a product with a smooth texture (*Fig. 1*).[19] This method of producing a kind of minced meat is of great interest for the understanding of ancient Greek meat preparation, as it shows that something similar to modern ground meat could in fact be manufactured by a simple mortar, a pestle, and sheer arm strength.

The technology and equipment of the Greek kitchen remains an understudied area in spite of Brian Sparke's short but important papers from the 1960s, but recently the topic has experienced a revival through the work of Alexandra Villing and Elisabeth Pemberton, which discusses mortars and mortaria.[20] The modern term "mortar" can be misleading because scholars often use it for two types of items in ancient Greece, the *thyeia*, which was a plain, shallow grinding bowl, and the *holmos*, which

[15] Rixon 1989, 53–54.
[16] Ekroth 2008, 277–279; *IG* II^2 1183, lines 32–35; Zimmermann 2000, 473–478.
[17] Ekroth 2002, 247–251; Ekroth 2005, 17–19.
[18] Khayat & Keatinge 1961, 18–19.
[19] Properly prepared *kebbe* must be pounded for at least one hour, see Khayat & Keatinge 1961, 18–19.
[20] Sparkes 1962; Sparkes 1965; Villing 2009; Villing & Pemberton 2010.

was a large pounding trough.[21] Both served for mincing food, but the first kind was used for grinding and the second for pounding. The *holmos* could be made of wood or stone, materials that support repeated pounding with a large wooden pestle, and such mortars seem to predominantly have been employed when pounding grain, though dried fish, beans, nuts, olives, and even drugs were processed in this manner as well.[22] The use of the *holmos* clearly recalls that of the mortar and pestle found in (pre)modern *kebbe* making, and the question is if *holmoi* may have been used for the preparation of minced meat in antiquity as well.

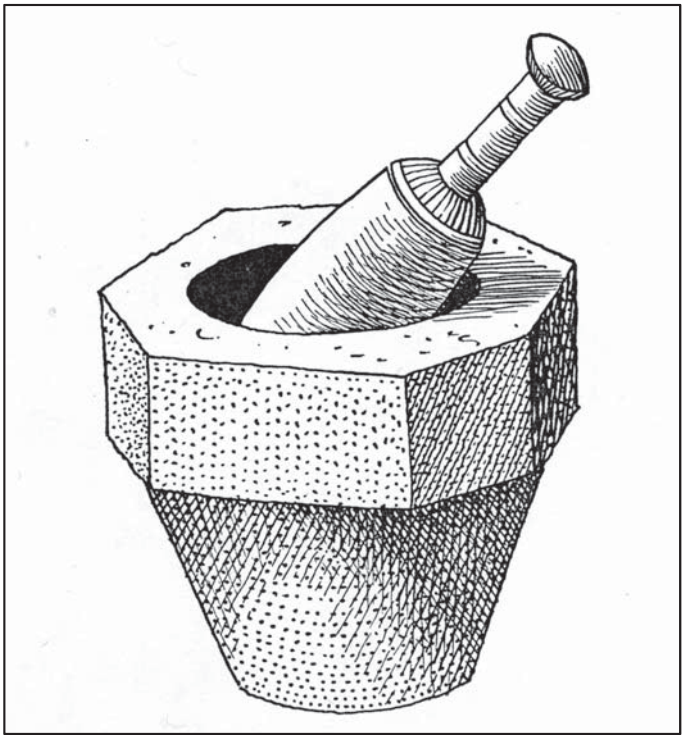

Fig. 1. Libanese stone mortar, *modaqqa*, and wooden pestle, *jorn*. From Khayat & Keatinge 1961, 18.

Meat in the mortar?

Large mortars made of stone have occasionally been preserved from Greek contexts, though the wooden versions as well as the pestles made of wood are gone. The iconographical evidence depicting mortars and pestles, in particular the Attic vase-paintings, as well as terracotta figurines, are therefore of importance for the study of ancient ground meat and dishes made with that kind of produce. There are a number of scenes that include women, and occasionally male figures, working at mortars, and these vases are usually considered to represent the pounding of grain.[23] A cup in a private collection now in New York, recently discussed

[21] Villing 2009.
[22] Villing 2009, 322–323; Sparkes 1962, 126.
[23] For the ceramic evidence, see Villing 2009, 323–328; Neils 2004.

in a paper by Jenifer Neils, is of particular interest for our topic (*Fig. 2*).[24] On one side we see three women: two hold pestles and flank a large waist-high mortar while looking at a third woman who perhaps is giving them instructions. On the other side three women are gathered around an oven or barrel cooker. The cup seems to be a representation of bread making, but it is the appearance of the mortar itself that should be noted.

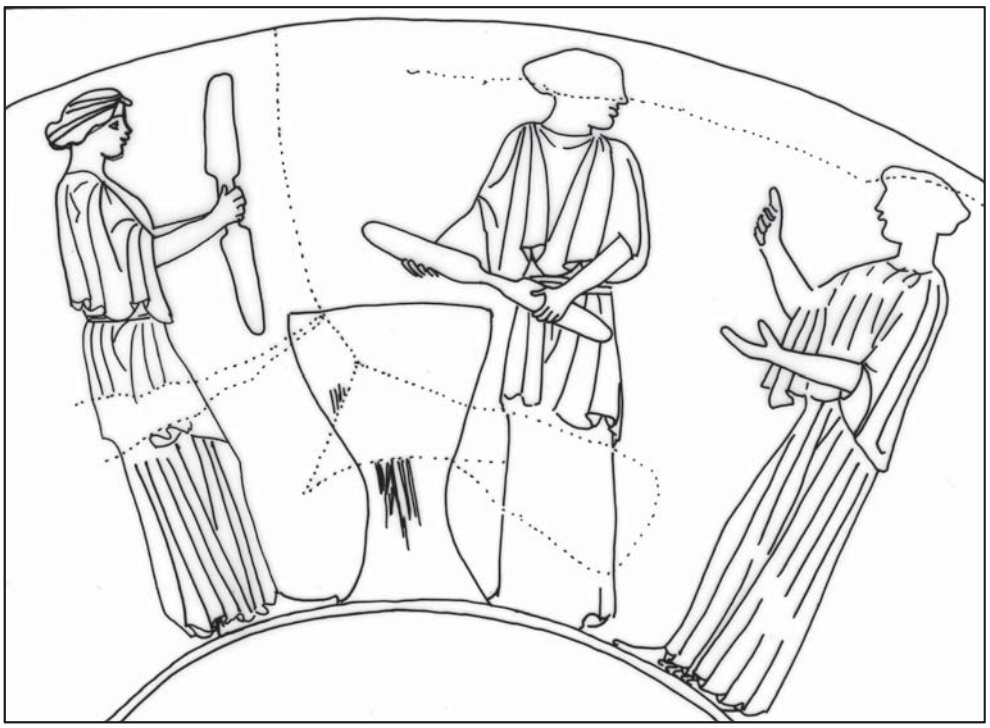

Fig. 2. Attic red-figure cup attributed to the Painter of Munich 2660, c. 460–450 BC. Collection of Nicholas S. Zoullas, on loan to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, L1982.110. Drawing after Neils 2004, 55, fig. 4.1.

The cup is unfortunately partly damaged and was restored in modern times, but on the preserved section of the mortar diluted streaks of paint are visible on the outside, suggesting that something has been spilled over the top. Neils points out that they recall the representation of blood on altars.[25] This is definitely an interesting observation and comparison, as both altars and *sphageia* (the vessels for collecting and preparing the blood at animal sacrifice), as well as other objects that have come in contact with blood, often bear such streaks. A particularly explicit case of the representation of blood in this manner is found on a fragmentary vase in the National Archaeological Museum at Athens, which depicts the hunter Aktaion being torn apart by his dogs next to a stone or rock which carries precisely the same kind of streaks, presumably Aktaion's own blood (*Fig. 3*).[26] Turning back to the cup with the women at the mortar, why would the mortar have such streaks if it only contained of dry grain? An alternative interpretation would be that these are women occupied with

[24] Neils 2004.
[25] Neils 2004, 56. For blood stains on altars on Attic vases and *sphageia*, see Ekroth 2005.
[26] Athens, National Archaeological Museum, Acropolis collection 2.760; Beazley Archive no. 206295.

pounding meat, an activity which is suggested by the blood stains on the outside of the mortar.

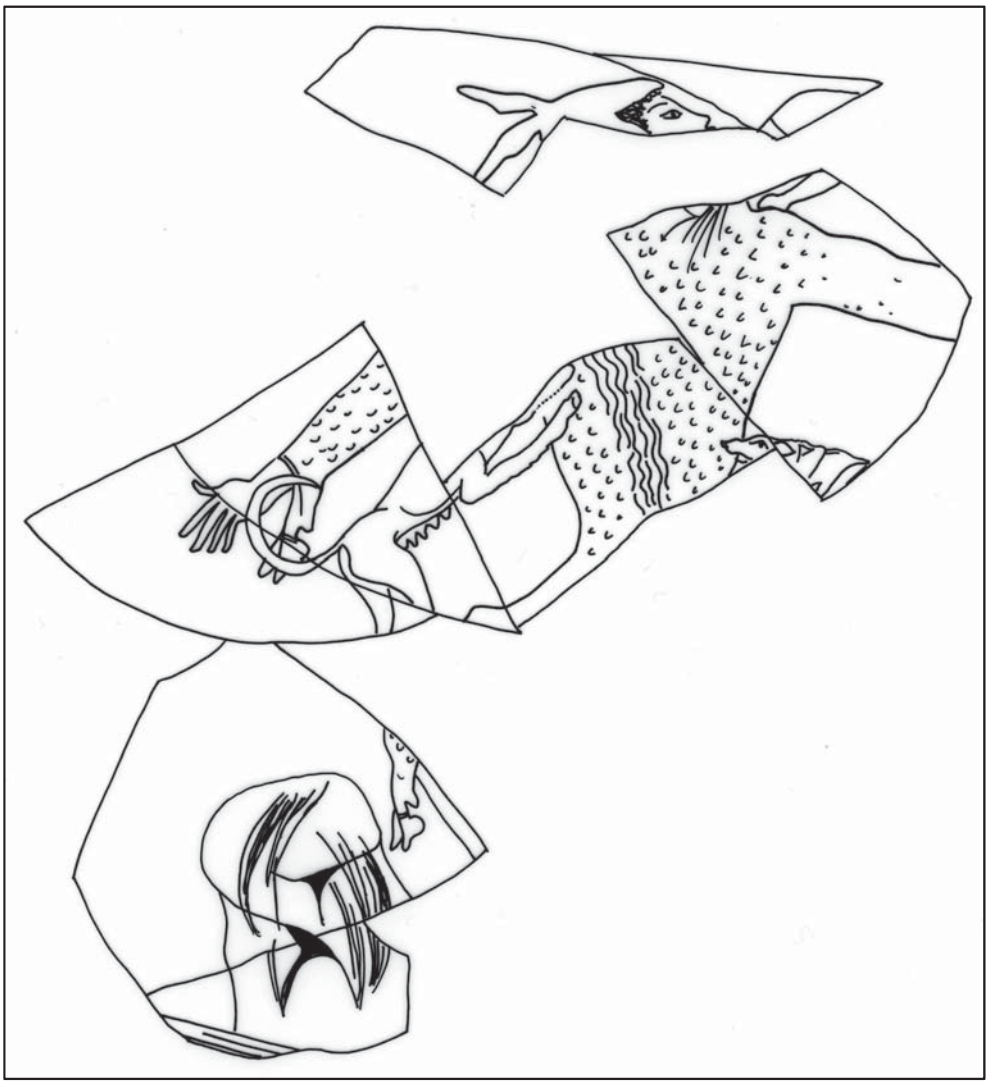

Fig. 3. Attic red-figure fragmentary column krater by the Pan Painter, c. 460 BC. Athens National Archaeological Museum, Acropolis collection 2.760. Drawing after Beazley Archive no. 206295.

Such an interpretation might be supported by the terracottas of women working at mortars.[27] Some of these figurines show the bowl of the *holmos* filled with small, rounded lumps, or such lumps are represented in a container next to it. These chunks seem to be too large to correspond to grain, although the coroplast might have had difficulties in rendering individual grains on a smaller scale, or they are meant to be cakes, especially if placed outside the mortar.[28] On the other hand, if we allow for the use of a *holmos* for the preparation of ground meat as well, the lumps both inside and outside the mortar could then represent pieces of meat being processed. Even if the main use of such mortars must have been to

[27] Pisani 2003, 13–14; Villing 2009, 324.
[28] Villing 2009, 324.

pound dry gods, and especially to de-husk grain, the preparation of minced meat remains a possibility.

Another piece of household equipment that may have been used in the preparation of minced meat, and especially food made with such produce, are the shallow or almost flat basins placed on high stands made of stone or clay. These are depicted on Attic vase-paintings, both black- and red-figure, and are also represented as terracotta figurines (*Fig. 4*).[29] The shape is what would be called a *perirrhanterion*, a large shallow water-filled bowl which was placed at the entrance to a sanctuary and used for the visitors to purify themselves, or a *louterion*, a deeper bowl which was used for washing and is usually found in domestic contexts or baths.[30]

Fig. 4. Attic red-figure cup by Douris, c. 480 BC. Tarquinia, Museo Nazionale RC1116. Drawing after Beazley Archive no. 205297.

The vase scenes and figurines show women (and sometimes men) working at the basins, leaning over them, and with their hands on the basin's bottom. The usual explanation has been to see the basins as equipment for food preparation, in particular the kneading of dough to make bread or cakes. However, a possible link between such shallow basins on stands and meat is found on the famous "Ricci hydria", an East

[29] Pimpl 1997, esp. 257–269; Pisani 2003, 10–13; Villing 2009, 329–331.
[30] Pimpl 1997, 5–8.

Greek vase dated to c. 520–500 BC now held in the Villa Giulia museum in Rome (*Fig. 5*).[31] The shoulder of this vase bears one of the most explicit ancient depictions of animal sacrifice, beginning with the butchering of the animal to the left, passing through the burning of the god's part and the grilling of the *splanchna* on the altar in the centre, followed by the boiling of meat in a large cauldron and the threading of meat onto long spits further to the right. In between the last two activities are two naked men bending over a basin on a stand with both their arms hidden in the bowl. The context of the basin on the "Ricci hydria" in the midst of the processing and cooking of meat after a sacrifice opens up the possibility for uses other than the making of bread or cakes. Furthermore, some of the rounded objects or lumps represented in basins on the vase-paintings and the terracottas may perhaps be meat instead of dough.

Fig. 5. East Greek black-figure hydria, c. 525–500 BC. Rome, Villa Giulia, no number. Drawing after van Straten 1995, fig. 122.

One possible kind of activity where a shallow basin of this kind would be used is in the manufacture of sausages. When the meat has been ground it is mixed with spices, onions, or other condiments, and then it has to be thoroughly kneaded in order to produce a smooth stuffing to facilitate the filling of the casings. A shallow basin of the kind seen on the vases and the figurines would come in handy. Many preserved shallow marble basins have a picked central area while the terracotta ones have added grit in the centre, creating an uneven surface which may have facilitated the kneading or blending process.[32] Another more tentative suggestion for the use of such basins in the making of sausages regards the preparation of the actual casings, which consisted (and still consist nowadays) of intestines.

[31] Van Straten 1995, 222, V154, fig. 122.
[32] For the treatment of the surface of such bowls, see Pimpl 1997, pl. 1.2 and 4.2; Villing 2009, 330–331. For preserved examples, see *Agora* XII, 218–220.

These need to be carefully cleaned of fat on the outside, but they also need to be turned inside out and then scrubbed in order to remove the inner mucosa lining. Perhaps the shallow basins with a slightly rough surface would have served such a purpose as well.

An interesting Attic black-figure stand, which is now in Toledo, Ohio, depicts four naked men and a dressed woman performing what looks like household tasks.[33] The woman is working on something in the basin while the man in front of her holds a rounded object. Behind him comes a man carrying an oblong object, and behind him two men are standing next to a fire. One of them is fanning the fire, the other holds a basket. This seems to be a scene of cooking, perhaps the representation of dough and bread making, but another possibility would be that the woman is handling meat in some way or perhaps cleaning the intestines used to make sausages.

A ritual connection…

In a number of cases the mortars and the basins on the vase-paintings are being used in a surrounding that is filled with household objects such as baskets, buckets, tables, wineskins, and beds (*Fig. 4*). Still, scholars have suggested that persons working at the *holmoi* or basins of the *perirrhanteria* type, whether they are represented on pottery or as terracotta figurines, are not performing simple domestic chores, but that they are preparing particular kinds of foodstuff intended for cultic purposes.[34] Cakes are ubiquitous in Greek cult, either as independent offerings or as complements to animal sacrifice, this is evident from inscriptions, texts, reliefs, vases, and even plastic representations, the most detailed ones being the small terracotta *likna* from the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Korinth.[35] An oinochoe from Spina, which depicts a young man and a woman working at a basin on a stand in the presence of a naked, seated youth, has been suggested to represent the manufacture of a *pelanos*, a kind of cake or brew offered for the departed.[36] The young man is then to be interpreted as being heroized after death.

The use of mortars and shallow basins for the manufacture of ritual cakes and bread is both possible and likely, but we should take into consideration that these objects could have had a practical role in the manufacture of minced meat and sausages as well. Such food actually had a role in ritual, as among the prerequisites of priests and priestesses in sacred laws, next to choice parts such as legs, fillets and tongues, sausages are occasionally mentioned.[37] The handling of meat lies at the centre of

[33] Toledo (Ohio), Museum of art 1958.69B, 510–500 BC, Beazley Archive no. 351251; *CVA, Toledo, Museum of art* 1, pl. 16.1–4 (*USA* 17, pl. 796).
[34] Neils 2004; Villing 2009, 326–333; Burkert & Hoffmann 1980.
[35] For cakes, see Kearns 1994 and 2011; for the miniature terracotta *likna* from Corinth, see Brumfield 1997.
[36] Burkert & Hoffmann 1980; Ferrara, Museo Nazionale di Spina 2504 (T719), Beazley Archive no. 220596.
[37] *Chordê* is listed in *IG* II^2 1356, lines 4, 9, 11, 15, 19, and 23; cf. Sokolowski 1955, 44, line 10, *chordion*, and 11, *cholix*. The latter inscription also mentions a blood sausage, *haimation* (line 12).

Greek religion, and is to a large extent used to define the distinctions between gods and men, but also to create a sense of belonging among those entitled to a share of the meat. The women at the *holmos* with possible blood-stains on the cup in New York, and the men at the basin in the midst of the aftermath of animal sacrifice on the "Ricci hydria" may reveal new aspects to the *cuisine du sacrifice*, that of minced meat and sausages.

* * *

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