

“SUPERSIZING” AT ZEUGMA

Among the late second century AD graffiti inscribed on the painted walls of the houses excavated at Zeugma, a few evoke the theme of food and its related metaphors.¹ One is carefully inscribed on the south wall of the triclinium (room P11) of the House of Poseidon (here, lines 2–5 only):²

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| | δευτέρῃ μηνὸς | On the second of the month, |
| | μορίδιον χρηστὸν | a little portion (is) nice, |
| | μορίδιον εἰς κύθη- | a little portion was brought |
| 5 | ραν ἠνέχθη. | into the pot. |

Here, it would seem, is the praise of a regular event, the attribution of a little portion of meat to be cooked in an earthen pot on the second day of every month.³ Might this be an ironic statement about “microsizing” made by a regular guest, or even by a slave who only received a token piece of meat? There are other possible interpretations, of course. In particular, an erotic connotation to the idea of bringing “a little piece of meat” into “a pot” (and recording the date on which this happened) may readily be envisaged. The word μορίδις (from *μορίς?) can also be thought of as a diminutive of the more common μόριον, which not only means a portion, but also a part of the body, often the *membrum virile*; the χύτρα is more allusive but nonetheless a suggestive receptacle.⁴ The longstanding *double entendre* of food and sex was likely at play in the dining-rooms and courtyards of Zeugma.

1 A. Barbet ed., *Zeugma II, Peintures murales romaines (Varia Anatolica 17)*, Paris 2005. The graffiti found by the Oxford rescue excavations are rather different: see R. Benefiel and K. Coleman, vol. 1, chp. 8, in: W. Aylward ed., *Rescue Excavations at Zeugma*, Los Altos 2013 (<http://zeugma.packhum.org/toc>).

2 J.-B. Yon in Barbet 2005: 35–36 no. 11A, with ph. fig. 8b (p. 32); cf. *SEG* 55, 1547. Lines 1 and 6–7 appear to be inscribed in different hands, or of a different style, and are not reprised here (as reported by Gatier ap. Yon, line 6 appears to be a maladroit copy of line 5). Contrary to what Yon supposes, there is no need to presume that a month name was specified at the end of line 2, since the text appears to be complete (cf. esp. the break at lines 4–5).

3 For μορίδις, cf. the portion known as a τεταρτημορίς σπλάγγων at Halikarnassos (*GIBM* 895, lines 11 and 14; J.-M. Carbon, Appendix 1: The Stele of Poseidonios, in: M. Horster and A. Klöckner eds., *Cities and Priests*, Berlin/Boston 2013: 99–114, line 39; *ZPE* 34 [1979] 211–13, no. 1, line 9, from Theangela), and cp. also the diminutive τὸ μερίδιον in *SB* 1.4630 (Hermopolis, 113–120 AD), lines 13–17: ἐκ τῶν | παρασκευασθέντων ἡμῖν πρὸς τὸ δ[εῖ]πνον κατάχρησαι, ἄδελφε, τοῖς [μετε] | μεριδίοις σου ἡμικόπων δέλφακος/ | καὶ ὄρνεισι [δ]υσὶ καὶ περιστεραῖς δυσί.

4 For μόριον in this sense, cf. *LSJ* s.v. II.2 (usually in the plural, but also found in the singular for both genders). For the χύτρα as a sexual metaphor, see *Ar. Pl.* 665–695 and 1204–1207 with the discussion in D. C. Walin, *Slaves, Sex, and Transgression in Greek Old Comedy*, diss. Berkeley 2012, Appendix A, p. 193–195 (http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/etd/ucb/text/Walin_berkeley_0028E_12425.pdf). Note also the possible sexual sense of χρηστός, cf. e.g. *LSJ* s.v. II.5, “strong, able” or even “pleasurable”.

By contrast with the “little portion”, we also find a hyperbolic example of conspicuous consumption in the same House of Poseidon (here: Room P9 / A6, the peristyle). As brilliantly interpreted by Angelos Chaniotis, the graffito should now be revised to read:⁵

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| <p>Ξάνθο<ς> ἔφ[α]γες φορν<ί>- την ἰ ἔ[κ]α[τ]ῶν λίτρων καὶ τέ[σσαρ]α μολόχια προ- έφαγες P[.]Φ</p> | <p>Xanthos, you ate a <i>phornites</i> weighing a hundred litres, and before (?) you also ate four <i>molochia</i> . . .</p> |
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All interpretations due to Chaniotis, except where otherwise noted. 1 Either ΞΑΝΘΩΦ or ΞΑΝΘΩΣΦ on the ph., so one should supplement either the final *sigma* or the *epsilon* – the vocative Ξάνθε would have been expected, unless a more unusual vocative Ξάνθο is possible (cp. the Modern Greek vocatives); ἔφ[α]γες C., and indeed the final trace on the ph. can be a lunate sigma: ΕΦ[-]ΓΕΟ Yon and SEG. 2 ἰ ἔ[κ]α[τ]ῶν is visible on the ph.: [-]Ε[-] Α[-]ΩΝ Y. and SEG, ἔ[κ]α[τ]ῶν C. 3 τέ[σσαρ]α? C., the first *tau* is difficult to discern, but the final *alpha* is visible on the ph., with the traces in the middle being faint and difficult; προ|έφαγες is a good possibility – see below – and does not require any supplement or correction to the reading: προ[σ]|έφαγες C. 4 There is only one letter missing in the gap P[.]Φ and it remains difficult to make sense of these final traces.

This is clearly “epigraphy of the night”, as Chaniotis has called it: secretly carving a graffito to make fun of this poor fellow Xanthos, who may himself have later crossed it out in an attempt to obliterate the insult about his dietary habits. Yet it is also possible to go a bit further with the interpretation of the text: what exactly was Xanthos perceived to have eaten? Chaniotis leaves both *phornites* and *molochia* in transliteration. The word φορν<ί>της must surely be a variant of ὀφουρνίτης referring to something baked in the oven (*furnus*), no doubt bread.⁶ It is thus claimed that Xanthos ate an impossibly huge bread (100 litres heavy!), in addition to perhaps 4 smaller *molochia*. The singular of the latter word is τὸ μολόχιον, again a diminutive, which is attested as a variant of τὸ μαλάχιον, a type of female ornament, but also as a plant, mallow (*Malva*), from the word μαλάχη/μολόχη.⁷ Another comestible is plausible here. Shoots of mallow could perhaps be eaten in desperate circumstances, but, more importantly, the plant was (and still is) reputed for its emollient and laxative properties.⁸ The μολόχια at Zeugma must, I suggest, be little portions of mallow (μολόχη) used as a digestive aid, either before or after the meal in question (depending on whether one reads προ|έφαγες or προ<σ>|έφαγες in lines 3–4). In other words, our graffito

5 J.-B. Yon in Barbet 2005: 88 no. 9D (ph. fig. 45, p. 86), with the interpretation of Chaniotis in SEG 55, 1565. The writing is again careful, though tellingly the four lines of the text have been crossed out with horizontal scratches.

6 LSJ s.v. φουρνάκιος gives us “baked in the oven, Ath.3.113b; so φουρνίτης, ου, ὄ, Archig. ap. Gal.13.264; but fem. φουρνίτις, as epith. of Hecate, is cj. in Hymn. Mag.3.2”. The passage in Athenaeus clearly refers to “oven bread”; the medical recipe from Archigenes of Apameia in Galen likewise speaks of a φουρνίτου ἄρτου.

7 For μολόχιον in the sense I am suggesting here, cf. LSJ s.v. II (Suppl.) and V. B. Schuman, The Indiana University Papyri, CP 43 (1948) 110–115: 111–112 no. 3 (late 3rd c. AD, provenance unknown). Add notably also Ps.-Hippocr. Περὶ διαφορῶν καὶ παντοίων τροφῶν (A. Delatte, *Anecdota Atheniensia et alia*, vol. 2, Liège/Paris 1939: 480, lines 21–22), on vegetables: ἴντυβον ψυχρὸν καὶ ὑγρὸν. τὸ δὲ μολόχιον ψύχει καὶ καθυγραίνει.

8 For shoots of mallow eaten instead of bread as one of the gifts of Poverty, cf. Ar. Pl. 544: σιτεῖσθαι δ’ ἀντὶ μὲν ἄρτων μαλάχης πτόρθους (in Modern Greek, the fruits of the plant are called ψωμάκι). For the anti-inflammatory and laxative properties of mallow, see LSJ s.v. μαλάχη and add also several Roman sources, esp. Cic. Fam. 7.26 (beets and mallow used as a remedy after eating rich cooking); or Mart. 10.48.7–8 (in preparation for a banquet, as a preliminary precaution): exoneraturas ventrem mihi villica malvas attulit . . .

means: “Xanthos, you gorged yourself on an oven-bread of a hundred litres, and before (or: after) you took four little bits of mallow”. As the butt of the joke, Xanthos is thus subject not only to a comment about his gluttony, but also to the well expected comedic elements of digestion and, perhaps, scatology.

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Özet

Makalede, Zeugma'daki Poseidon Evi'nin duvarlarında bulunan ve İ.S. 2. yüzyıl sonlarına tarihlenen iki graffito (bk. SEG 55, 1547 ve 1565) yeniden incelenmektedir. Her iki graffitoda da yiyeceklerle ilgili bazı imalar yer almaktadır. İlkinde minik dozlardaki zevklere vurgu yapılmakta ama olasılıkla cinsel bir mecazî anlam (metaphor) da içermektedir. İkinci graffitoyu ise, Angelos Chaniotis'in yorumuna dayanarak, büyük miktarda fırın ekmeği (*phornites*) ve buna ek olarak hazmı kolaylaştırmak üzere dört küçük porsiyon ebegümece (*molokhia*) yiyen Ksanthos adındaki birinin sıradışı bir diyet alışkanlığına ilişkin esprili bir yorum olarak anlamak mümkündür.