“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. One is carefully inscribed on the south wall of the triclinium (room P11) of the House of Poseidon (here, lines 2–5 only):

δευτέρα μηνός
μορίδιν χρηστὸν
μορίδιν εἰς κύθραν
5 an ἡνέχθη.

On the second of the month,
a little portion (is) nice,
a little portion was brought
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. 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 membra virile; the χύτρα is more allusive but nonetheless a suggestive receptacle. The longstanding double entendre of food and sex was likely at play in the dining-rooms and courtyards of Zeugma.


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 τεταρτημορὶς σπλάγχνων at Halikarnassos (GIBM 895, lines 11 and 14; J.-M. Carbon, Appendix 1: The Stele of Poseidonomos, 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 πρός τὸ δὲ [ṇ]πον κατάχρησαι, ἄδελφε, τοῖς | μετε | μετε | μετε | 

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:\(^5\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ξάνθος} & \text{ ἔφαγες φόρνιτες} \quad \text{Xanthos, you ate a phornites} \\
\text{τὴν ἕκαστήν} & \text{ λίτρων} \quad \text{weighing a hundred litres,} \\
\text{kai τέσσαρα} & \text{ μολόχια προ-} \quad \text{and before (?) you also ate} \\
\text{ἐφαγες Ρ.Φ} & \text{four molochia...}
\end{align*}
\]

All interpretations due to Chaniotis, except where otherwise noted. 1 Either ΞΑΝΘΟΣΦ or ΞΑΝΘΟΣΦ 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: ΕΘ-ΙΕΩ Yon and SEG. 2 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.

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, οῦ, ὁ, 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 φουρνιτοῦ ἄρτου.


8 For shoots of mallow eaten instead of bread as one of the gifts of Poverty, cf. Ar. Pl. 544: σπειράθη δ’ ἀντί 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 olası bir 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 ebegümeci (molokhia) yiyen Ksanthos adındaki birinin sıradışı bir diyet alışkanlığına ilişkin esprili bir yorum olarak anlamak mümkündür.