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Cereal processing and the performance of gender in archaic and classical Greece: iconography and function of a group of terracotta statuettes and vases

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Introduction¹

Anthropological research during the past one hundred years has demonstrated that food is intimately linked to identity, self- or group-definition. Gender identities are commonly associated with food provision in most cultures throughout human history.² The engagement at the household and in the community with the production, preparation and consumption of food on a daily basis provides the opportunity to establish, maintain, and/or undermine gender identities. Some of the principal ways in which gender is negotiated through food provision include its differential access and control, the gendered division of labor in the production, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, and symbolic associations to specific foodstuffs according to gender.³

This paper explores the negotiation of female gender identities in Archaic and Classical Greece through food preparation, more specifically cereal processing.⁴ I argue that a series of terracotta statuettes and vase-paintings of the Archaic and Classical periods representing women processing cereal were perceived as references to feminine industriousness and virtue, and belonged to the discourse on gender. Their archaeological contexts further suggest that they can be explained best as the material remains of ritual performance of female gender identities.

The terracotta statuettes and the vases

The group of terracotta statuettes includes more than seventy examples.⁵ They are part of a wider category of terracotta statuettes that represent almost exclusively women preparing food.⁶ Terracotta statuettes of women engaged in the preparation of food appear as early as the Mycenaean period. After a gap of a few centuries they re-emerge in the 7th century B.C. Mycenaean and 7th century B.C. statuettes, however, are known sporadically, and mostly from the Peloponnese.⁷ The greatest concentration occurs in the second half of the 6th century through the first decades of the 5th century B.C. in Greece and the Greek cities of South Italy, Sicily and Cyprus.⁸ All statuettes represent females. They are very small in size, usually around 10 centimeters in height. They are either completely handmade with rough facial features, and have been made evidently without major concerns about anatomical or other details. Increasingly toward the end of the 6th and into the 5th centuries, they are handmade with moldmade faces. On the basis of their chronology and distribution, as well as technical and stylistic observations the statuettes have been attributed to various regional workshops.⁹

In contrast to the terracotta statuettes, the known vase-paintings with relevant subjects are only eight, and are collected and presented here for the first time as a group.¹⁰ As with most terracotta statuettes their

¹ This article is based largely on my 2004 unpublished dissertation at Bryn Mawr College entitled "The Social Context of Food Preparation and Consumption in Greek Households of the 5th and 4th Centuries B.C." The references to ancient sources follow the abbreviation format of Liddell H. and Scott, R., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, 1996.

² Gender is generally defined as the "cultural interpretation of sexual difference": Gilchrist 1999, 1; Sorensen 2000, 41-59 on the terms *gender* and *sex*. Counihan, C. and Kaplan, S. L. (eds.), *Food and Gender* is a collection of important articles written on the topic during the 20th century and contains many bibliographical references.

³ Most of these ways of negotiating gender through food provision are discussed in Counihan, C. and Kaplan, S. L. (eds.), *Food and Gender*. Cf. also Jansen 1997 on a specific case study in Jordan.

⁴ Cereal processing is defined as the chain of operations that lead to the transformation of cereal from raw grain to edible food. In ancient Greece for the most part this process resulted either into bread or other similar baked goods, or into *maza*, another staple of the Greek diet. Scholars do not agree on whether *maza* was a porridge or a solid food. On *maza* see Amouretti 1986, 124-125; Braun 1995, 28-32; Brumfiel 1997, 153.

⁵ Brian Sparkes is the scholar who brought these terracotta statuettes to the fore as a category. He collected them in three relevant publications, Sparkes 1962; 1965; 1981. Paola Pisani has also recently worked on the same subject and added more pieces to the known list, cf. Pisani 2003. References to specific statuettes are given to Sparkes' and Pisani's catalogues. In a forthcoming article I discuss the meaning and uses of these statuettes and add a few more pieces to the known corpus, cf. Tsoukala *forthcoming*.

⁶ That these particular terracotta statuettes are representations of cereal processing and not food preparation in general is argued extensively in Tsoukala *forthcoming*.

⁷ On the history of these statuettes as early as the Mycenaean period cf. Tsoukala *forthcoming* with previous bibliography.

⁸ The catalogues in Sparkes 1962, 1965 and Pisani 2003 clearly demonstrate this.

⁹ cf. mainly Sparkes 1962; Pisani 2003; Szabo 1994.

¹⁰ 1. Black-figured neck-amphora, St. Petersburg, Ermitage 2065, ca. 530 B.C.; A: Two women pounding inside a deep-mortar; B: Hermes carrying a ram, woman standing behind him; *ABV* 309, 95; Amouretti 1986, 137, footnote 13, pl. 19; von Massow 1916, 57, fig. 11; Sparkes 1962, fn. 5; Shapiro 1989, 81-83. 2. Fragment of Attic black-figured vase; from Eleusis; Eleusis 1055; ca. 530 B.C.; Two women pounding; Sparkes 1962, fn. 5; von Massow 1916, 58 fig. 13. 3. Black-figured

archaeological context is also obscure, although it will be shown that for a number of them it is possible to make some plausible hypotheses in this regard. The vases first appear in the 6th century and they continue until the middle of the 5th, while only one piece belongs to the 4th century. Most of them are Attic and two are Boeotian, and they are made both in the red- and in the black-figure techniques. Undoubtedly, more examples of these vases are to emerge with future targeted research.

These representations on vases and terracotta statuettes depict activities that are known from literary sources to have been the standard stages in the cereal processing operation.¹¹ According to the sources barley had to be roasted first to separate the hull from the grain. Wheat and barley were pounded inside a deep mortar and reduced to coarse meal and subsequently reduced to thin meal with the help of a grain mill. This flour was sieved to remove impurities, and used to make bread or *maza*. The dough was then kneaded and baking followed last. Most of these stages are depicted in statuettes and vases. On a few occasions more than one of these stages of cereal processing are depicted together on a vase, or simultaneously in terracotta groups, thus lending substance to the identification of the representations as cereal processing.

The following activities are represented in terracotta statuettes: pounding inside a deep mortar, grinding, kneading, carrying breads on a tray, baking bread or similar foodstuffs, sieving or a combination of the above. On account of their low numbers the vases do not present such a diversity of images: so far it appears that pounding and baking are depicted on vases almost exclusively.

Boeotian skyphos; ca. 530 B.C.; Athens, Canellopoulos Museum inv. 384, from Boeotia. A: Two women pounding inside a deep mortar, woman spinning to their left; B: Woman washing her hair with aid of second one who pours water over her head; third woman coming from the left with extended arms; dog and lion under respective handle; part of B missing; all figures accompanied by painted names; long painted inscription, now lost for the greatest part on B; Amouretti 1986, 137, fig. 20; Maffre 1975, 467-476, figs. 29 and 30. 4. Black-figured Boeotian lekythos, Serpieri Collection; Later 6th/early 5th century B.C. Register showing from the left woman preparing food? (possibly kneading or baking), two women pounding in the center, little figures playing the *seistra*, a figure in front of a fiery oven to the right; Sparkes 1962, 126, pl. VII.2. 5. Fragmentary red-figured cup by Akestorides painter; ca. 470 B.C. Paris, Louvre G476; A: Women baking bread in barrel oven; I: feasting? *ARV*², 782; Sparkes 1982, 174-176, pl. 2a, 3a. 6. Fragmentary red-figure cup attributed to the Painter of Munich; ca. 460-450 B.C. The Metropolitan Museum, L. 1982.110 (N. Zoullas Collection); A: Three females conversing, two on each side of a deep mortar holding a pestle each, the third woman gesturing to them; B: Three women around a barrel cooker; one touching its interior, the other holding a basket on top of the cooker. I: two women conversing. Neils 2004, 54-62, figs. 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4. 7. Red-figured *lekaneis* lid by the Eleusinian Painter; St. Petersburg, Hermitage St. 1791; ca. 360-350 B.C.; In continuous register a scene of preparation for a wedding; numerous women, two engaged in kneading in forming cakes on shallow basin and low table, respectively; *Erotas* hovering; *ARV*² 1476-77.3; *Para* 496; *Add* 381; Oakley and Sinos 1993, 23, fig. 44 and 45. 8. Fragmentary red-figured cup, New York (D. Von Bothmer), 500-450 B.C.; *Para* 360.93QUATER; The Beazley Archive, (online version) *non vidi*.

¹¹ On this in detail Amouretti 1986.

In representations of pounding a woman is invariably in front of a deep mortar, holding a long pestle in her two hands (figures 1, 9, 10, 12, 13).¹² Pounding was very frequent among terracotta statuettes, and also the most frequent representation among vase-paintings (figure 1). Grinding is equally popular in terracottas (figure 2), while missing completely so far from vases. The manual hand mill used in Archaic and Classical Greece, the so-called saddle quern, is accurately represented in many statuettes: it consisted of two pieces of stone between which the grain was crushed: an upper stone, usually elliptical in shape, and a lower rectangular stone.¹³ Grinding was done sitting, standing, or kneeling in basins of various sorts. In representations of kneading a woman usually stands in front of a kneading trough, usually a basin on a pedestal (figure 4). On some statuettes emphasis was placed in the forming of the dough into various shapes. Little loaves or cakes are very often clearly defined inside the basin, sometimes with detail, thus leaving no question about the nature of the operation. The only certain depiction of kneading and forming of bread that is known to me in vase-paintings so far is depicted on the lid of a *lekaneis* by the Eleusinian painter with a wedding scene (figure 8).¹⁴ In a multi-figural scene of a wedding preparation two figures are engaged in the making of breads, presumably the *sesame* cakes commonly distributed during weddings.¹⁵ Two seated figures form the flat cakes, the right figure holding one in her hand, while to their left, a woman standing in front of a shallow basin on a pedestal is most likely to be perceived as kneading the dough.

A woman at the oven is another popular category among terracotta statuettes (figure 3). In all examples from Greece the oven is of the barrel vaulted type. This is a clay oven with a barrel vaulted baking chamber.¹⁶ A firing chamber is located under the baking compartment, a detail which is clearly rendered in some of the statuettes. In terracotta statuettes of bakers loaves or cakes are often shown inside the oven. A statuette in Athens is suggestive of the significance attributed by the coroplast to the baked product: the woman tending the oven is depicted holding an oversized bread or cake, whose shape is rendered in detail (figure 5). The same type of oven is also represented in the baking scene on a black-figured Boeotian lekythos of the end of the 6th century B.C., the only representation of such an oven on vase-paintings thus far (figure 10).¹⁷

¹² Deep mortars have been found in limited numbers in domestic contexts of the Classical period, and they are invariably made of stone. Presumably they were mostly made of wood and, hence, they do not survive. cf. houses at Thasos (Grandjean 1988, 220, 266 no. 190), Olynthos (Robinson 1938, 208, 335-336).

¹³ For such mills from Olynthos see Cahill 2002, 163-164.

¹⁴ *supra* footnote 10, no. 7

¹⁵ Oakley and Sinos 1993, 23.

¹⁶ Baking ovens are commonly located in the archaeological record, mostly with their barrel vaults collapsed. E.g. from Argilos in Bonias and Perreault 2002, 110-111, fig. 1, pl. 2.

¹⁷ *supra* footnote 10, no. 4.

The barrel cooker, a different type of oven, is essentially a terracotta cylinder, portable or built, with an open top.¹⁸ This oven has a long tradition in the Near East, from where its use was probably spread to the West.¹⁹ The fire was lit at the bottom of the cooker, and flat breads were stuck against the interior walls for baking. This not frequently represented in terracotta statuettes from Greece, and so far it is only represented in statuettes from Cyprus or Magna Grecia (figure 6).²⁰ It is interesting in this respect that two of the red-figured vases collected here show such an oven. On one side of a red-figure cup by the Painter of Munich in New York (figure 13)²¹ women around a barrel cooker are shown most likely removing breads from the walls of the oven and placing them in the basket. It is unclear whether the woman on the fragmentary cup by Akestorides Painter (figure 11) is placing or removing flat breads from the oven. Judging from the second figure who extends her hand to the first giving her something it is most likely that she is to be perceived as placing them in the oven. In fact, the fire is indicated at the bottom of the oven in this cup, whereas it is not in the former.

Carrying bread on a tray appears in a few cases among the statuettes, and it is not clear whether baking has already taken place. A statuette in Athens is a representative example of this category (figure 7).²² The cake on the pan has been rendered in detail, perhaps because the kind of cake or bread was of particular significance.

Simultaneous representations of different stages in the process occur in a few instances both in terracotta statuettes and in vase-paintings. Three individual statuettes found together in a tomb at Akanthos are illustrative of this (figures 1, 2, 3).²³ One represents pounding, the other grinding, and a third one baking. Understood as a group on account of their intentional deposition inside the same tomb, they were likely intended to represent the most important steps in the process of making bread. In vase-painting the red-figured cup by the Munich Painter mentioned above is an interesting example (figure 13). One side of the vase shows the baking of the breads in a barrel cooker, whereas the other presents women with pestles around a deep mortar. The activity of the pounding of the grain is implied here, although the figures are not shown using the mortar. The images on the late Archaic Boeotian lekythos in the Serpieri collection, however, clearly show the connection between pounding and baking (figure 10). These two scenes can be clearly associated with the making of the bread. It remains unclear, of course,

whether the woman on one side of the image is to be perceived as kneading or forming the bread or as engaged in another activity. On account of the presence of pounding and baking in the same scene it is likely that the intention was to show her engaged in some food preparation activity relevant to preparing bread.

Cereal processing as women's work

Ancient Greek diet was largely cereal-based, and the processing of the cereal took place mostly within the household during the Archaic and Classical periods. Although literary sources on the subject are not plentiful, the preparation of food is attested as one of the major domestic tasks for women in Archaic and Classical Greece as early as the 7th century B.C.²⁴ It was a role that society assigned to them and formed part of their gender identities. During the late fifth and the beginning of the fourth centuries B.C. Aristophanes presents the preparation of food as a *de facto* activity performed by women since time immemorial. Thus, his audience was presented with images of women parching the barley (*Ec.* 221), women grinding barely and singing (*N.* 1358), women serving food to their husbands (*V.* 610-612). Despite the satirical character of these representations, the wide appeal of Aristophanes' comedies suggests that this was a situation with which large parts of his audiences were able to identify.

Status distinctions undoubtedly also played a role in household labor division. Xenophon and other writers of the 4th century clarify that in households of high socioeconomic status cereal processing and baking were tasks assigned to slaves.²⁵ It was the responsibility of the housemistress to supervise them. In Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, Ischomachos urges his young wife "to try to stand before the loom as a mistress of a household should, and furthermore, to teach anything that she knew better than anyone else, and to learn anything that she knew less well; to supervise the baker, and to stand next to the housekeeper while she was measuring out provisions, and also to go around inspecting whether everything was where it ought to be" (10.10; translation Pomeroy 1994).

It is very likely, as the text by Xenophon implies, that women were trained to perform such gender-appropriate domestic tasks already at a tender age in their homes regardless of socioeconomic status. Knowledge and performance would have been indicative of good upbringing and would be useful skills in managing one's own household later in life. The preparation of food and indeed cereal processing, upon which depended the very existence of the *oikos*, must have figured prominently among the skills to be mastered.

¹⁸ Sparkes and Talcott 1970, 233 (no. 2023, pl. 97, mid sixth century B.C.). On barrel-cookers see Sparkes 1981.

¹⁹ It is also known in modern terms as *tabun* or *tanur*. On such Iron Age ovens from Jordan see van der Steen 1991; 1992.

²⁰ cf. Pisani 2003, cat. nos. 94-99. Certainly this must be because of the poor recording of such statuettes, and I expect more of them to emerge in the future from mainland Greece.

²¹ supra footnote 10, no. 5

²² Brian Sparkes 1962, cat. no. 74.

²³ Pisani 2003, nos. 10, 59, 77; published in Kaltsas 1998, 65-72.

²⁴ Semon.fr.7W.59-62.

²⁵ For ancient Greek authors such as Aristotle for example, physical labor was appropriate for slaves, and cereal processing was also perceived as physical labor: Arist. *Pol.* I 1255b, 22-27.

This responsibility, which society assigned to women, was further reaffirmed as part of female gender identity through participation in the religious sphere. Religious and other ritual settings offered a great opportunity for the instruction and perpetuation of gender roles through ritual performance. Only one relevant piece of information survives from the Classical period, namely a short passage in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, a comedy first performed in Athens in 411 B.C. A chorus in the voice of an older woman reminisces on how she fulfilled her religious duties to the polis as a young girl and enumerates four different ritual roles she had assumed (lines 641-643). One of these roles was that of the *aletris* or grinder for the Lady, performed at the age of ten. No information exists about the nature and duration of this ritual service. Considering the context, it can be argued that the *aletridai* were girls who ground the flour that was used at a sanctuary of the Lady, variously identified with Athena or Demeter.²⁶ One of the consequences of such a ritual service was that by performing the act of grinding the grain young girls internalized this task as specifically appropriate for them, as a role that contributed to the well being of their households, and, by extension, to the well being of the community. At the same time, such a performance reaffirmed this gender-specific role in the eyes of the contemporary society that served as the audience.²⁷

That cereal processing was a work for women and part of their gender identities is affirmed by later literary information, provided here with the cautionary note that it dates in the 2nd century A.D. In his *Onomasticon* the lexicographer Pollux mentions that Solon instructed brides to carry a barley roasting pan (*frygetron*) to their new homes "as a symbol of their skill of processing cereal (*semeion alfitourgias*)" (1.246);²⁸ further down he says that the bride carried a sieve (*koskinon*) to her new home, while a pestle (*yperon*), such as the ones used in pounding the grain, was hung outside the bridal chamber in the first night of the wedding. Both pestle and sieve were considered, according to Pollux, indications of her industriousness, *semeion autourgias* (3.37-8).

Images of cereal processing as signs for female industriousness

Returning to the statuettes and vase-paintings, it is clear that they represent stages of the processing of cereal in a visually consistent fashion. Their makers were not interested in an accurate rendition of the actual operation

of cereal processing, since all representations are elliptical. These emblematic figures that are not easily decipherable by the modern viewer were likely associated with concepts of female gender roles. In view of the literary sources examined above, I believe that they were painted statements about feminine industriousness and virtue.

The images on a black-figured Boeotian skyphos of the late 6th century illustrate this point most eloquently (figure 9).²⁹ The significance of this vase is that its painted decoration provides a firm association of an image of cereal processing with iconographic contexts that belong to the discourse on gender. On one side two women are shown pounding next to a third figure who is spinning (figure 9). Spinning and weaving were two activities particular to women in ancient Greece.³⁰ Representations of spinning and weaving were demonstrative of a woman's industriousness, and therefore virtue. Visual representations, particularly of spinners, occur frequently in vase-paintings since the middle of the 6th century BC.³¹ On the other side of the vase a woman washes her hair, while two other women help her. Washing, dressing and bedecking oneself with jewelry are associated in the literary sources with concepts of beauty and sexual allure, often with respect to young women of marriageable age.³² Bathing and washing the hair are associated in the iconography of the Archaic and Classical periods with the bride's wedding preparation, her transformation from a child to a sexually active woman.³³ It is therefore very likely that the representation of the washing of the hair on the Boeotian skyphos had sexual overtones and nuptial connotations. The potential nuptial connotations provide an attractive explanatory framework for the skyphos' painted decoration: on one side, the cleansing of the prospective bride, an image with purificatory and erotic overtones. On the other, images of women engaged in the duties that every girl was taught and every marrying woman would come to perform or supervise once in charge of her *oikos*.

The vase is covered with dipinti that provide a name for each figure, including the dog. A small part of what was once a long dedicatory dipinto in three lines survives on one side. Fortunately the work 'edoke' can be securely restored. This indicates that the vase was a gift either to a person, or to a sanctuary. The women of the vase are given names such as EUFARXA, EUPHROSYNE,

²⁶ It is impossible to surmise whether *aletridai* were particular to one cult or other cults as well, whether they featured in one or more festivals, and how common such a service was throughout Greece. The thought is hard to escape, however, that such a service would be particularly appropriate in a cult of Demeter, since she was the goddess responsible for the fertility of the fields, and according to myths, she was the one who taught people agriculture. So, Sourvinou-Inwood 1988, 136-148; also recently on the *aletridai* Goff 2004, 53-55.

²⁷ On this and other rituals for girls known from Athens, and which served to perpetuate gender roles see Brelich 1969; Calame 1977; Sourvinou-Inwood 1988; Bruit Zaidman 1992; Goff 2004.

²⁸ *Alfita* is a word that described the coarse meal produced by processing barley, cf. Rep. 372b. Moritz 1958, 149-150.

²⁹ Supra footnote 10, no. 3. A detailed interpretation of this fascinating skyphos is the subject of a future article.

³⁰ Hdt. 2.35.8-10; 4.162; X. *Ec.* VII. 21-22. Also in Homer: *Il.* 3.124-126; 6.454; *Od.* 2.93-105.

³¹ On the figure of the spinner as a sign of industriousness and feminine virtue Ferrari 2002, 12-34, esp. 12-17 with previous bibliography.

³² Ferrari 2002, 49-52.

³³ Oakley and Sinos 1993, 15-21. An examination of wedding imagery indicates that most scenes represent the procession to the bath, and the wedding *loutrophoroi* are clearly indicated. The washing of the hair is a more unusual representation in wedding scenes, although a part of the real ritual. Cf. a red-figured pyxis of about 420 B.C. in New York (Metropolitan Museum of Art 1972.118.148) with scenes of the bride's preparation for the wedding, including the washing of the hair in Oakley and Sinos 1993, 16, 20-21, and more extensively Sabetai 1997.

EUFARIA, MOLPA, KODOMA. Even the dog is given a name, FILOTHERA, a sign that it was a female dog! The name EUFARXA appears twice, once on each side, attached to a different figure: on the first side to one of the pounders, on the second to the woman washing her hair. EUFARXA means ‘she who governs well’, EUPHROSYNE means ‘she with a good cheer’, EUFARIA ‘she with the pretty mantle’, MOLPA likely means ‘she who sings’. The meaning of the name KODOMA is unclear, but Pollux clarifies that it is the name of the slave who roasted the barley.³⁴ Finally, FILOTHERA means ‘she who loves hunting’. Such names, I believe, were not accidental, nor were they intended to be perceived as those of specific persons. Rather, they were used deliberately to evoke positive qualities in the figures that they accompanied, or qualities that were descriptive of their activities. Presumably, EUFARXA would be the description of a capable housemistress. The dipinti were painted in the Boeotian alphabet before the firing of the vase, which indicates that it was made to order. A vase made to order as a gift allows the hypothesis that this gender-specific imagery and the text on it were meaningful to the person who commissioned it. It is possible, therefore, to claim that the image of one or two women pounding is equivalent to that of the spinner, and therefore denoted positive qualities of industriousness and virtue associated with women in Archaic and Classical Greece.

Cereal processing tools that were closely connected in Attic imagery with concepts of feminine virtue and industriousness could also turn into lethal weapons in the hands of women in danger, according to a couple of vase-paintings. This is illustrated on a couple of 5th century red-figured vases. This is the case, for instance, on a red-figured cup by Brygos depicting Ilioupersis, where a woman is shown defending herself with a pestle against her attackers.³⁵ The utensil that very frequently appears in the vase-paintings and terracotta statuettes of pounders examined above.

The context

While the dedicatory dipinto on the Boeotian skyphos examined above certainly establishes its function as a gift, its archaeological context is unknown. The fact that most of it is preserved, however, supports the idea that it was located in a tomb. Finds from sanctuary or household contexts mostly result in potsherds, rather than entire pots. Additionally, this vase was likely bought in the market, and was not located in an official excavation. Tombs in Boeotia have been looted systematically since

last century, and it is therefore plausible that the skyphos was found in one of them.³⁶

Like the skyphos, the finding location of almost all vases examined in this article remains unknown with the exception of a black-figured sherd located in the early excavations of Eleusis (figure 12).³⁷ Although the larger image to which the two pounders belonged is lost, a representation of women pounding grain is rather appropriate as a dedication at a sanctuary of Demeter, the goddess responsible for agriculture and the fertility of the cereal fields in particular. An intact black-figure neck-amphora with two pounders on one side, the Boeotian lekythos in the Serpieri collection and a fully preserved red-figure cup were likely found in tombs and subsequently sold in the arts market.³⁸

More information exists about the function of the terracotta statuettes, primarily on account of their higher numbers. Those with known provenance have been found either in tombs or in sanctuaries. Regional beliefs and practices were naturally defining in terms of how the terracotta statuettes were deposited, and they would have varied. In this respect it is interesting that most of the terracotta statuettes from Greek sanctuaries have been located in the Peloponnese, more specifically at the sanctuaries of Hera at Perachora and Argos, at Tiryns, at the sanctuary of Helen and Menelas at Sparta, at the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia in Sparta, at Mycenae, at Corinth, at the sanctuary of Artemis at Kombothekra.³⁹ The few terracotta statuettes of women processing cereal of the Mycenaean period have also been found in the Peloponnese. It is conceivable that there was an uninterrupted tradition reaching the Archaic period in the Peloponnese, which is presently not detectable in the archaeological record. Furthermore, the presence of these terracotta statuettes in sanctuaries of deities with special import in the world of women should not be dismissed lightly, although certainly more information from well excavated and published sanctuary sites is necessary in order to be able to draw more specific conclusions.⁴⁰ The lack of such statuettes in sanctuaries of Demeter, the goddess of the grain *par excellence*, however, is interesting in this respect. It is possible that relevant

³⁶ The history of looting in Boeotia, and Tanagra in particular, is given in Higgins 1986,

³⁷ supra footnote 10, no. 2.

³⁸ supra footnote 10, nos. 1, 4, 6, respectively.

³⁹ Sparkes 1962, cat. nos. 40 (three statuettes, Perachora); 42 (Hera at Argos); 41, 43 (Tiryns); 38 (three statuettes, Spartan Menelaion); 39 (fragments of over 20 statuettes, Artemis Orthia at Sparta); 37, 37A (Mycenae); 35, 36 (Corinth); Pisani 2003, cat. no. 26 (Artemis at Kombothekra) with bibliography published in Sinn 1981, 70, pl. 7.6. Outside of Greece proper a Demeter sanctuary in Catania is the only place that has yielded such terracotta statuettes thus far: Sparkes 1965, cat. no. 85B; published in Rizza 1960, 253, fig. 19.1-2 (two terracotta statuettes).

⁴⁰ It is clear from ancient sources that especially Artemis and Hera were goddesses that protected women, and oversaw their transitions in various significant moments of their lives, such as marriage, childbirth and others. cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 1988.; Brelich 1969; Calame 1977; Kahil 1977; and on the related material culture Kahil 1981. On a similar cult in Messene as it is known through epigraphy Themelis 1994.

³⁴ Poll. *On.* 1.246; 6.64.

³⁵ Paris, Louvre, G152, *ARV*² 369.1, 398, 1649, *Add* 111, *Add*² 224, Tiverios 1996 148, 150, Figs. 124, 126 (Ilioupersis: woman defending herself with pestle); also Pelike by Myson, Munich, *Antikensammlungen*, 8762, *ARV*² 1638.2BIS, *Add*² 201 (A: Herakles with spit or spear in the house of Nereus, cup, oinochoe, amphora, sea; B: woman (Nereid?) running with pestle).

material will emerge in the future. The possibility should also be entertained that some dedications in sanctuaries were likely interchangeable. For instance in some sanctuaries a real baked bread or a terracotta equivalent of it might be dedicated, whereas in another sanctuary of another region a terracotta statuette of a woman baking might be dedicated instead.⁴¹ Understandably this complicates the archaeologist's interpretation process, but it should be considered seriously as a possibility, particularly with reference to food dedications, or images of women preparing the food.

Terracotta statuettes found in burial contexts were widely distributed throughout mainland Greece and the Aegean islands, South Italy, Sicily, and Cyprus. While in most cases the only available information is simply that a statuette was included in a tomb, a few recently published burials with terracotta statuettes afford more insights. The burials with published contexts are few and geographically dispersed, but there are interesting similarities among them that should be pointed out. Five tombs, one each at Akanthos, the Athenian Kerameikos, Argos, Lipari, Medma-Rosarno (Locri)⁴² contained burials of females.⁴³ Combinations of objects that typically occur in tombs of women such as skyphoi, pyxides, spindle whorls, mirrors, jewelry have been found in all of them. Significantly, in three of the five tombs, namely at Akanthos, Lipari and most likely the Athenian Kerameikos the burials belonged to girls.⁴⁴ The grave at Akanthos is particularly interesting as it was found intact.⁴⁵ It contained significant burial accoutrement in comparison to tombs, and, among others, three statuettes depicting different stages of cereal processing, which were mentioned earlier (figures 1, 2, 3), along with one of a figure inside a bath tub.

Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the fact that grave offerings are often related to roles the deceased had assumed in society, or roles he/she could have assumed later in life.⁴⁶ In women's tombs the statuettes may have

evoked gender roles the deceased had assumed as a wife. In girls' tombs they could have been gender-specific toys for girls, chosen to accompany them to the grave. Further, they could have been mementoes of a relevant ritual service rendered to a deity, such as that of the *aletris*. Whichever the case, the presence of such terracotta statuettes in girls' tombs is indicative of deeply engrained perceptions about a female's role in preparing food, especially in processing cereal. The same most likely holds true about the vases examined earlier, despite the fact that much less information is preserved than in the case of these statuettes. They were probably mostly dedications at sanctuaries and tombs. It is not unlikely, in fact, that the Canellopoulos skyphos was a gift on occasion of a young woman's marriage.

Conclusion

The consistent visual language of the statuettes and vase paintings examined above, and their iconographic associations suggest that they were invested with symbolic meaning relevant to the discourse on feminine gender roles. They are in complete agreement with the literary sources which describe cereal processing as a role that society assigned to women, and one that was part of their gender identities. It was argued that these images were visual references to female virtue and industriousness, much in the same way that representations of weaving and spinning were in Archaic and Classical Greece. Beyond the iconographic analysis, the archaeological contexts in which some of the statuettes and probably some of the vases were found now enriches our understanding of their meaning and opens interpretive perspectives about their functions. They can be understood best as the material remains of ritual performance of feminine gender identities.

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⁴¹ Cf. Brumfiel 1997 for terracotta images of breads and cakes at the sanctuary of Demeter in Corinth.

⁴² Pisani 2003 cat. nos. 10, 59, 77 (Akanthos); 50 (Kerameikos); 5 (Argos); 28 (Lipari), Sparkes 1962, cat. no. 83 (Medma-Rosarno). Three tombs, one each from Thebes, Ragusa, Megara Hyblaea have also been excavated by archaeologists but more information is needed about the contextual finds in order to be able to interpret the terracottas found in them. These are: Pisani 2003, cat. no.16 (Thebes), 88 (Ragusa), 98 (Megara Hyblaea).

⁴³ While skeletal analysis is the most secure way to assess biological sex this was apparently done only in the case of Akanthos. Cf. following footnote. The gender of the rest was assessed on the basis of the burial offerings.

⁴⁴ It is possible that this was also the case with the tomb from Argos (Pisani 2003, cat. no. 5), which contained the remains of two adults and an infant. Although the finds from this cist-tomb cannot be clearly associated with each individual burial, the excavation report suggests that the terracotta statuette is to be associated with the second adult burial, which was also accompanied by a laconian skyphos, a pyxis, a pyxis lid, a three-legged pyxis, two attic cups.

⁴⁵ The tomb is published in Kaltsas 1998, 65-72. According to the publication the skeleton disintegrated apart from parts of the skull and parts of the ribs (Kaltsas 1998, 65).

⁴⁶ A very important work in combining archaeological theory and practice in this respect is that of Daniel Graepler who analyzed

specifically the function of terracotta vessels and statuettes in the Hellenistic cemetery of Taranto (Graepler 1997). His findings clearly demonstrate an association of specific combinations of tomb offering with social roles, especially those relating to gender. Cf. Graepler 1997, 149-161 on a discussion of theoretical problems with respect to funerary offerings and literature. On archaeological approaches to death see most recently Rakita et al. (eds) 2005; Pearson 1999. Interesting relevant theoretical points are made by Haerke 1997.

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Fig. 1 Polygiros Museum, from Akanthos tomb 1427, after Kaltsas 1998, pl. 72



Fig. 2 Polygiros Museum, from Akanthos tomb 1427, after Kaltsas 1998, pl. 72



Fig. 3 Polygiros Museum, from Akanthos tomb 1427, after Kaltsas 1998, pl. 72



Fig. 4 Athens, National Archaeological Museum 4052, © Athens National Archaeological Museum



Fig. 5 Athens, National Museum 12637, © Athens National Archaeological Museum



Fig. 6 Paris, Louvre B302; After Sparkes 1981, pl. 4c



Fig. 7 Athens, National Archaeological Museum 4756; Photo: Author



Fig. 8. St. Petersburg, Hermitage St. 1791; after Oakley and Sinos 1993, fig. 44



Fig. 9 Athens, Canellopoulos Museum inv. 384; after Maffre 1975, fig. 29



Fig. 10 Serpieri Collection; after Sparkes 1962, pl. VII.2



Fig. 11 Paris, Louvre G476; after Sparkes 1981, pl. 3a



Fig. 12 Eleusis Inv. 1055; after von Massow 1916, pl 58, fig. 13



Fig. 13 New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art L.1982.110; after Neils 2004, fig. 4.4