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Cooking stands and braziers in Greek sanctuaries

Abstract

The presence of dining-rooms in Greek sanctuaries shows that food was eaten and most likely also cooked on the premises. The study of both the preparation and the cooking of the food eaten in the sanctuaries would be too much, and this paper will therefore concentrate on the presence of cooking stands and braziers in Greek sanctuaries, their uses, and on other related means of carrying the pots. Cooking stands were meant to hold the cooking pots above the fire; they were open at the bottom and were placed in the fire or perhaps rather in the glowing embers of a fire. In Etruria, there were three types (types I–III): a cylindrical stand with a top plate with holes, a half-cylindrical stand with three supports attached to the inner side of the wall, and a barrel-like stand with a narrower top. Cooking braziers had, unlike the cooking stands, a closed bottom as well as the means to carry a pot.

Keywords: Cooking stand, brazier, sanctuary, dining, kitchen, *splanchna*, *bestiatorion*

Introduction

For this short article for Berit Wells, I wanted to write about something that we had in common. What I remember most was the help and support Berit provided more than 30 years ago when she, as editor of the periodicals of the Swedish Institutes, helped me with my thesis about cooking stands in Italy: *Acquarossa* II:1. *Cooking and cooking stands in Italy*. In this thesis, the Etruscan cooking stands were divided into three major types (I–III, see *Fig. 1*), dated, and the way they may have been used was considered.¹ Also, there are many happy memories from our participation in the “religious study group”, which was organized by Professor Robin Hägg. The presence and possible uses of cooking stands and braziers in Greek sanctuaries, i.e. well-known sanctuaries in Greece itself,

thus seemed like the proper choice for a contribution to the present volume.

That food was consumed in sanctuaries is testified not least by the dining rooms found in a number of sanctuaries.² However, cooking stands and braziers have only rarely been found in Greek sanctuaries, and although small fragments of crudely burnt clay could easily have been passed over, some traces should have been left, and there is still a lacuna to be explained. We shall have to resort to other means in order to show where and on what kind of object the food was cooked on the fire, starting with the *bestiatoria* or dining rooms.

Settings for sanctuary dining

In Troizen, a building consisting of rows of square rooms around a large inner courtyard has been identified.³ The shapes of the rooms show that they were dining rooms; against the walls there were couches with tables in front, and in the open area in the centre of the rooms there were sunken hearths with raised borders. Another example of ancient dining rooms comes from the Asclepion at Corinth, which has couches along the walls and rectangular holes in front of them for the table supports.⁴ In the centre of the rooms, “a square block, blackened and cracked by heat, which evidently carried a brazier” was found.⁵ The block exhibits no traces of curbs and may have been meant to carry a cooking stand, but unfortunately there are no other traces of either a cooking

¹ Scheffer 1981, 28–55, figs. 2–3.

² For dining rooms in general, see Bergquist 1990, 37–65. For the difficulties of identifying the places where cooking took place, see Scheffer 1981, 92–98.

³ Welter 1941, 32, pls. 14, 15, 19a.

⁴ *Corinth* XIV, 51 and 54f., fig. 13, Pl. 14:4.

⁵ *Corinth* XIV, 51.

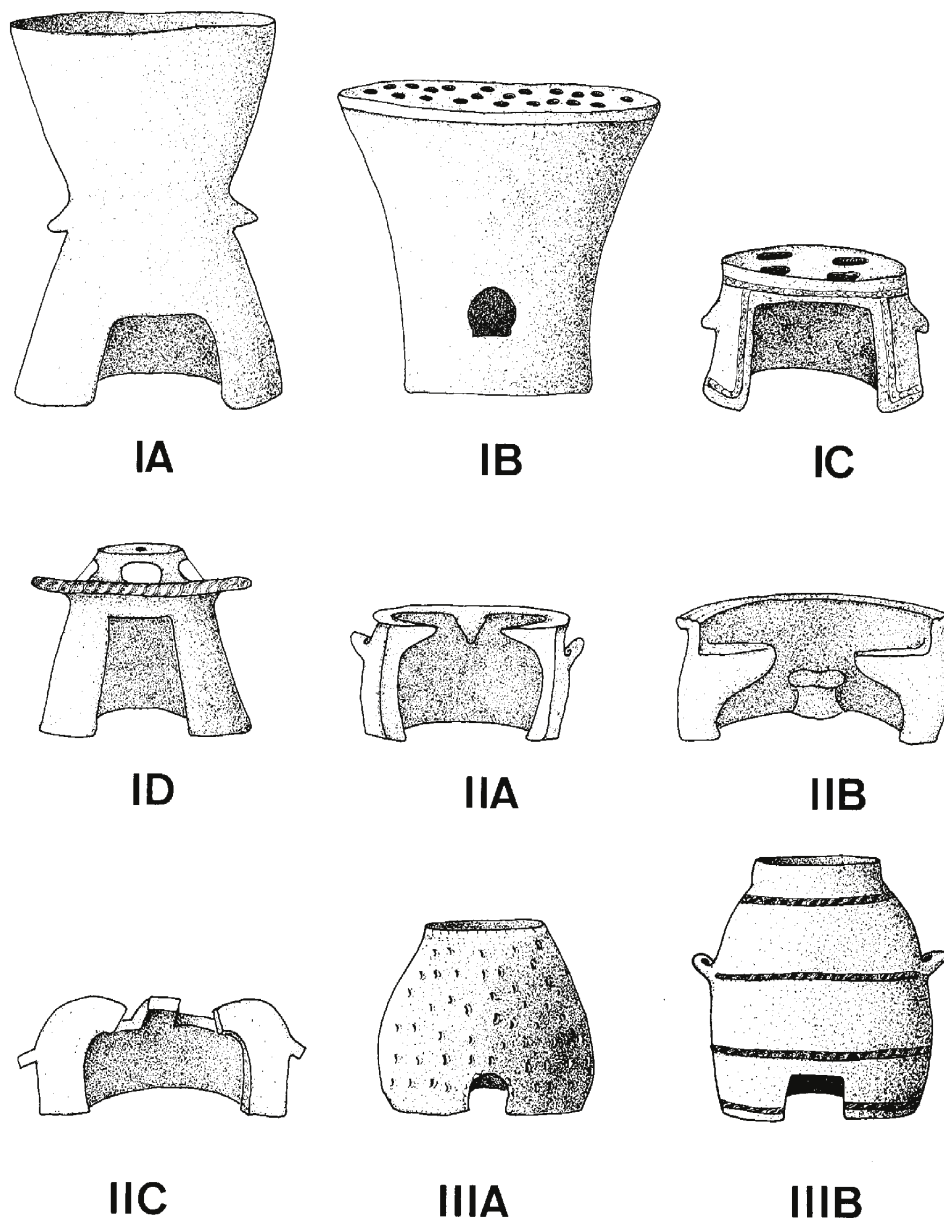


Fig. 1. The principle characteristics of cooking stands of types I–III. From Scheffer 1981, 29, fig. 2.

stand or a brazier. Yet another example of a dining room is provided by the site at Perachora.⁶ It has been suggested that the small building at this site, which was earlier presumed to be the temple of Hera Limenia, was a *hestiatorion*. This suggestion is based on its shape and dimensions, which indicate that it was meant to contain a number of couches. Here

also, there was a hearth in the middle of the room⁷ that was surrounded by reused stone blocks. One of these blocks was turned the wrong way and inscribed with the word *drachma*,⁸

⁶ Tomlinson 1990, esp. 332–334.

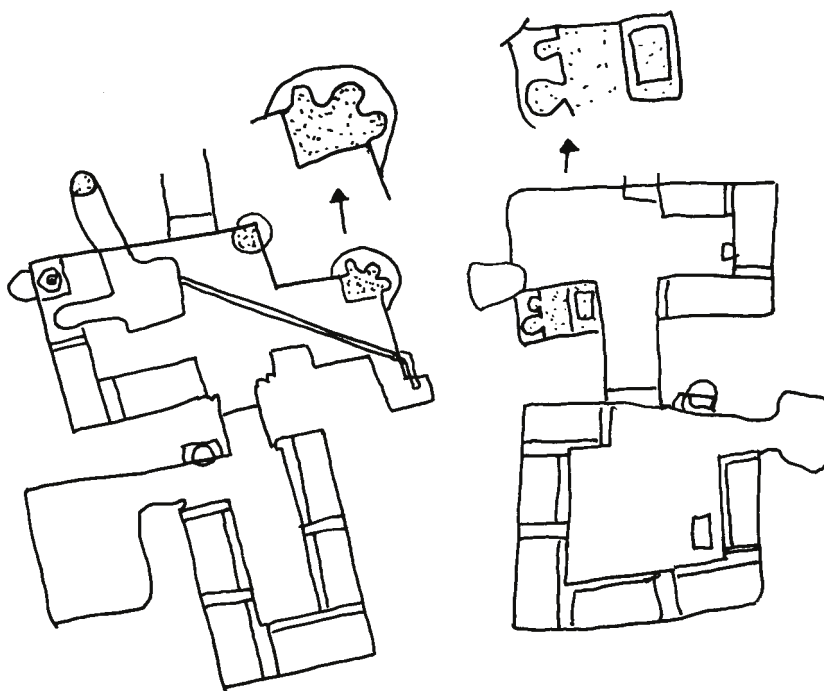
⁷ Among the first to discuss the temple of Hera Limenia as a so-called hearth-temple, i.e. as a place for cooking the sacrificial meat, was Martin P:n Nilsson, professor in Lund (Nilsson 1937; the temple of Hera Limenia is mentioned on p. 45).

⁸ Wade-Gery 1940, the first to publish the inscriptions; Tomlinson 1977, 197f.; Jeffery rev. ed. 1990, 122–125, compares them with the spits

Fig. 2. Isthmia, the Theater Cave. The two entrances to the double courts are roughly from the North. Each courtyard outside the dining room has a kitchen stove with two and three burners, respectively. Drawing after Broneer 1962, fig. 3.

which was interpreted as a dedication to the goddess mentioned—Hera Leukolenos. Another building, which was identified as a *hestiatorion* with two dining rooms, was later built not too far away, perhaps to make it possible for more people to take part in the celebrations.⁹

It is typical of some early rectangular buildings to have a hearth inside, and they have been previously described as hearth temples. The building at Kommos in Crete, which was identified as a temple by the excavators, is a good example of such a building with a hearth inside.¹⁰ It had benches inside, and these were most likely for the seated worshippers eating sacrificial meat. An altar, at least in some of the phases,¹¹ was found outside. Another theory was put forward in the research of Birgitta Bergquist,¹² proposing that most of these so-called hearth temples were instead to be identified as *hestiatoria*. Maybe these two theories are not irreconcilable, and the ceremony of cooking and eating parts from the sacrificed animals originally took place around the altar; perhaps the ceremony first took place near a building which in modern times is usually called a temple, and was only later transferred to more secular buildings. It is possible that in early times the Greeks did not differentiate clearly between the place of the god and the building where the worshippers ate their part of the sacrifice to the god.¹³ A clearer difference may have developed over time.



“Kitchen” areas

Possible outdoor kitchen areas were found at the sanctuary of Nemea,¹⁴ where a building has been identified as a *xenon*, i.e. a place where the athletes taking part in the games would stay and use the hotel-like building for lodging, bathing and eating. In connection with the building, several hearths consisting of small stones were found as well as a sort of built cooking stand; in connection with the hearths, fragments of drinking cups and some animal bones testify to their use. Of course, this establishment, although it was situated in a sanctuary, seems to have had the character of a hotel.

Two very interesting examples were found at Isthmia, in the Theater Cave (Fig. 2), both having cooking and dining facilities.¹⁵ The cave has two courtyards, each leading into a room provided with couches. In both courtyards, there is a sort of stove carved out of the clay—this would have held cooking vessels. There are also disposal pits as well as pottery deposits. In each of the inner rooms there is a cult niche. It has been suggested that these caves were possibly used by a group

given by the *hetaira* Rhodopis to Delphi (Hdt 2.134) and a dedication to the Heraion at Chostia, which should probably be identified as the ancient Chorsiai, in Boeotia (Tomlinson 1980, 221–224; Strøm 1992, 45–47).

⁹ Tomlinson 1990, 335f.

¹⁰ Kommos IV, esp. 675–690, pls. I.30–31.

¹¹ Kommos IV, 670–674.

¹² Bergquist 1973, esp. 19–34, and Bergquist 1998.

¹³ The problem has recently been thoroughly treated by Prent 2005, 441–476. Another suggestion situates the communal eating originally in the chieftain’s/king’s house; later, when kingship was abolished, the temple was substituted for the king’s house, Mazarakis-Ainian 1985, esp. 46f. and 1988, esp. pp. 116–119. For a different view of the matter, cf., however, Schilardi 1988.

¹⁴ Kraynak 1992, 142–145, 152–153, 156–159 and 185–187.

¹⁵ Broneer 1962, 4–7, fig. 3, pls. 2c–d; Broneer 1973, 38f. and pls. 18a and d and 57; Gebhard 2002, 69–71.

of worshippers: for instance, worshippers of Dionysos. What is certain is that the caves were meant for a restricted group of diners who had come together to celebrate a common god. The shape of the hearths in the Theater Cave resembles a modern stove, with several burners, but also a large cooking stand, partly carved out of clay and partly constructed of brick and clay. One of the hearths is placed on a shelf which is 82 cm wide, 55 cm deep and 46 cm high. The only measurable burner is 18.3 cm wide and 19 cm deep. The other hearth consists of two burners on a shelf which is 160 cm long, 90 cm wide and 50 cm high.

A similar, but much larger, establishment is to be found in the Demeter and Kore sanctuary on the slopes of Acrocorinth.¹⁶ Here, on the lowest of three terraces, there are a fairly large number of buildings, some of which include a kitchen or a cooking area as well as a dining room. In one of the buildings, there are three rooms: a dining room with five couches, a sitting room (we do not know for whom or for what purpose), and a kitchen with a bathing stall and a raised hearth 40 cm high, 130 cm long and 111 cm wide (Fig. 3).¹⁷ Arms of clay and earth project into the centre of the hearth to create four burners on which cooking pots could be placed over the fire. In the other buildings, there are different solutions for rooms with dining couches, sometimes sitting rooms, bathing stalls and cooking places, but no other special facilities for carrying the cooking pots have been found. It is further stated by the excavators that braziers are almost non-existent and portable ovens are completely lacking although boiling and stewing must have been the essential way in which the food was prepared.¹⁸ It seems that in some of the rooms the fire was lit directly on the floor;¹⁹ quite often there is a line of fist-sized fieldstones along the walls, at least one course high, which were possibly covered with clay in order to protect the walls from the heat from the fire.²⁰

The preparation of food

After having looked at these few examples of possible kitchens, we now move on to a serious question: Why are kitchen areas with some means of carrying the pots over the fire found

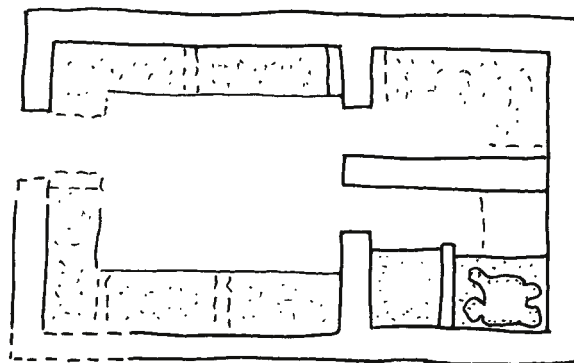


Fig. 3. Corinth, the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore, Building K-L 24–25 of the Dining establishment. The building consists of a dining room, a shower, and a kitchen with a stove that has four burners carved out of the clay. The entrance is roughly from the north. Drawing after Bookidis & Stroud 1997, fig. 14.

only in the two previously mentioned sanctuaries? The dining establishments at Acrocorinth and Isthmia have a factor in common—they probably served people belonging to cult-groups, people who may have wanted the means to cook their food and eat it in privacy. We should also note that at Corinth the dining rooms are a little bit up the hill, but there was probably no need for secrecy. In an ordinary temple area, on the other hand, there must have been plenty of space to store vessels and other cooking equipment, and it would have been easy to bring them to the place where they were to be used.

Nevertheless, in most of the temples we cannot say for certain how the food was cooked. Pots could hardly have been placed directly in the fire, and that braziers were actually used is proven by the finds from the Demeter and Kore sanctuary and by some finds from Hellenistic times which are connected with the *hestiatoria* of the sanctuary of Poseidon at Tenos.²¹ Another possible solution may be that metal tripods were used—see the figurine with the worried mother trying to teach her young daughter the art of cooking for an example of such a tripod.²² More striking examples are those tripods with a lebes on top; for example, the tripod in which Medea cooks the ram in order to persuade the daughters of Pelias to rejuvenate their father by treating him in the same way.²³ Of course, this is all

¹⁶ Bookidis 1993, 52–54; Bookidis & Stroud 1997, 407–410 (dining rooms in general); Will 1976, 357f.

¹⁷ Bookidis & Stroud 1997, 112f., fig. 14, pls. 18b–c: Room 3, both bathing room and kitchen (Pl. 18b) and raised hearth with burners (Pl. 18c).

¹⁸ Two braziers were found: one (a rim) in KL 23–24 (Bookidis & Stroud 1997, 109), and the other in the layers of the building which was dismantled for the new building N-O 23–24 (*ibid.*, 135).

¹⁹ Bookidis & Stroud 1997, 187.

²⁰ Bookidis & Stroud 1997, 187.

²¹ Etienne & Braun 1986, 50–56 (kitchens), 165–170 (*hestiatoria*), 212, 222–223 (Hellenistic braziers and a bell-shaped cover or oven), pls. 95 (Bb 14), 104 (Ea20), 106 (Eb16), 107 (Eb15) and 120 (Ea20).

²² Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 5th century BC; Scheffer 1981, fig. 85.

²³ LIMC s.v. Peliades, nos. 4–8 and 10–11; s.v. Pelias, nos. 10–12, 16, 18–19 and 21; s.v. Iason, nos. 59 and 62. See also Benton 1934–1935 (pr. 1938), 127f.

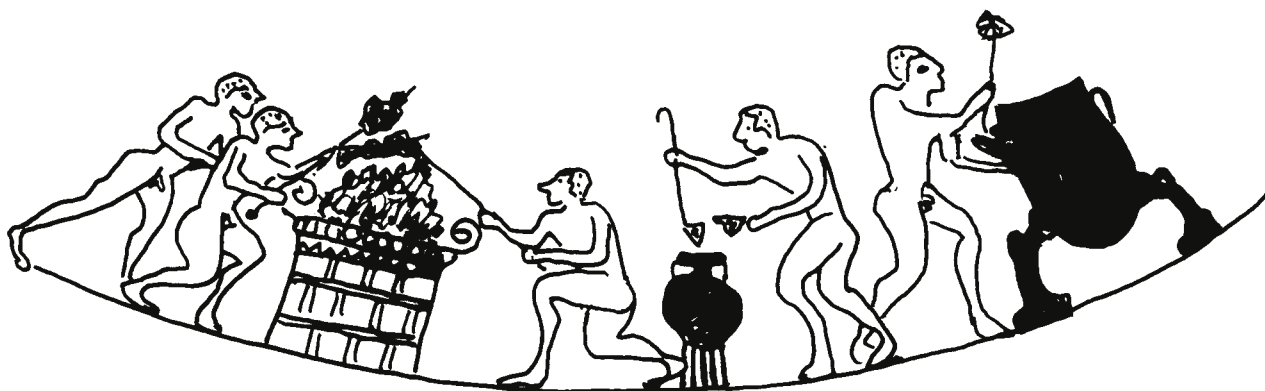


Fig. 4. The shoulder field of the so-called Ricci hydria, now in the Villa Giulia Museum in Rome. The splanchna are being roasted on spits held by youths over the altar. Further to the right, another youth is drawing wine from an amphora, and a cauldron is placed on terracotta support—the so-called lasana. Drawing after Detienne & Vernant 1979, pl. II.

the more striking if this was the normal way of cooking food not only at home but also in the temples. At the games in honour of Pelias, tripods are again present,²⁴ but here presumably they were prizes for the winners. These tripods seem to be in one piece, and they have high legs, a fairly shallow basin and large, circular handles, whereas the vessels in which the ram is being cooked are deeper and often seem to be either cauldrons placed on a separate tripod stand or large, three-legged cauldrons. The tripods found, for instance, in Olympia and Delphi are mostly of the lighter, one-piece type.²⁵ Benton, who has studied the evolution of the tripods, states that they began as cooking pots, but eventually the tripods made for cooking were substituted by “hammered tripods which looked rather nice, but could not cook and did not last”.²⁶ Feasts were often accompanied by games, and tripods (being convenient prizes) became a symbol of athletic victory.²⁷ If we hypothesize that metal tripods or tripod stands are connected with the lack of cooking stands and braziers of terracotta, the hearth inside or outside the temple, or maybe rather in the *hestiatorion*, could easily have held the boiling pot on its tripod. Another way of raising the pot over the fire is presented by the famous East Greek, black-figured, so-called Ricci hydria in the Villa Giulia Museum in Rome (Fig. 4),²⁸ where a youth is transfer-

ring pieces of meat into a large cauldron which is placed on two supports (or rather three supports; the one behind the pot was probably left out because it would not have been visible behind the pot).²⁹ These supports have fairly recently been identified as *lasana*, i.e. a sort of terracotta support made to hold the cauldron over the fire.³⁰ Others have identified them as bellow nozzles,³¹ but at least on the Ricci hydria they are certainly supports holding a cauldron, and this seems to be the use generally accepted in modern studies.³² There was probably no great difference between the objects used in sanctuaries and those used in domestic contexts. In the *Agora* publication, the objects, although not yet properly identified, are said to have been found “both near and far, and often on sanctuary sites”,³³ which would suit their presumed use for boiling the meat from the sacrificed animals. Excluding the *splanchna*, the rest of the meat was boiled; this was a way to eliminate

van Straten 1995, V 154, 117 and 147–150; Gebauer 2002, no. Zv 38, 324–330, figs. 200–201.

²⁹ The three specimens (one complete and fragments from two others) found together in a well in Corinth (Morgan 1937, 547, fig. 11) support the possibility of three supports; against this possibility is a joke in Aristophanes’ *Peace* (890–893) about a woman’s legs looking like a pair of *lasana* (pointed out by Morris 1985, 398f.). To understand the joke properly, see Papadopoulos 1992, pl. 47.

³⁰ Grandjean 1985; Morris 1985.

³¹ Voigtländer 1986, esp. 41, discusses the purpose of the objects and suggests either “Aufsatz einer Blasebalge” or “Stützständer für grosse Gefässe in Brennöfen oder anderer Feuerstellen”; the latter suggestion is not too far from their now generally accepted use as a two-piece (Morris 1985, 397f.) or three-piece cooking stand. In *Agora* XII (231f. and 251, pl. 11, nos. 2014–2015), it is suggested that the objects are torches or taper stands, which does not agree at all with their portrayed use on the Ricci hydria.

³² Papadopoulos 1992.

³³ *Agora* XII (supra, n. 31), 231f.

²⁴ LIMC s.v. Peliou athla, nos. 6, 11–12 and 18.

²⁵ Rolley 1977 (Delphi), figs. 1–2; Willemsen 1957, pl. 63 and Maass 1978 (Olympia); Amandry & Ducat 1973, figs. 13–18 and 20–29 (Delos).

²⁶ Benton 1934–1935, 114f.

²⁷ See Willemsen 1957, pl. 62, for a tripod leg with two men fighting over a tripod of a distinctly non-cooking nature.

²⁸ Ricci 1946–1948, pls. III–IV; Durand 1979, 135–157, pls. II–III; Laurens 1986, 47 and 49, fig. 4, and the whole article for the interpretation of the whole vase with the sacrifice to Dionysos on the shoulder;

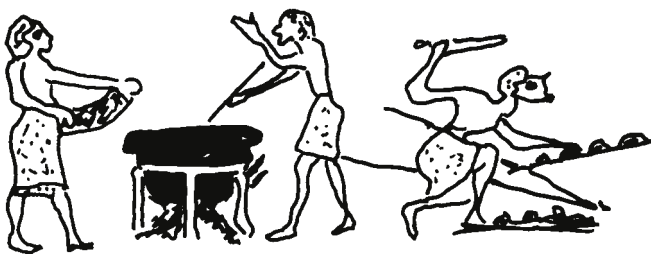


Fig. 5. Fragment of a volute krater, Acr. 554, now in the National Archaeological Museum of Athens. Two men are busy around a cauldron placed on a tripod over the fire. The man to the right is dipping something like a ladle into the contents of the cauldron, stirring or lifting up a piece of meat; the one to the left may be holding a sort of tray for receiving the piece of meat. Further to the right, a man is preparing spits for later use. Drawing after Gebauer 2002, fig. 163.

the differences between pieces of meat from different kinds of animals and different parts of the animals.³⁴

On the Ricci hydria, to the left of the just described picture, another important way of “cooking” in the sanctuary is depicted: the roasting of the *splanchna* on the altar fire.³⁵ Three young men are holding spits over the fire, and a bit further to the right, beyond the tripod carrying the cauldron, more young men are preparing spits with pieces of meat, probably for another, later use.³⁶ A similar scene is found on a black-figure fragment from the Acropolis, now in the National Museum of Athens (Fig. 5).³⁷ Two men are busy boiling something in a large cauldron placed on a tripod over a burning fire. Satyrs and maenads are dancing on the left, and on the right spits are being prepared for grilling or taking away.³⁸ A.-F. Laurens, in an article about the Ricci hydria,³⁹ takes up the point that the spits used by *splanchnoptes* have pieces of meat only on the upper part, whereas the spits which were meant to be kept for later use and/or taken out of the sanctuaries are fully loaded with meat.

Spits, *obeloi* in Greek, have been found mostly in tombs, sometimes in bundles of twelve, and there has been a lively discussion as to their possible pre-monetary uses,⁴⁰ but it may

be that the spits served a double use just like the tripods—both as practical kitchen objects and as objects of value. In sanctuaries, spits would have been purely utilitarian objects. In the Heraion of Samos, for instance, some wells were found containing animal bones, pieces of charcoal and iron cooking spits.⁴¹ Tomlinson, in an article about inscriptions found in Boeotian sanctuaries, also presents evidence about the utilitarian use of spits in sanctuaries.⁴² He suggested that this was the most common reason for the dedications of spits in sanctuaries. Spits were, of course, also used for cooking outside the sanctuaries; for instance, in a dining place in the Athenian Agora, fragments of *escharai* with supports on the rim (spits were meant to be placed on these supports) have been found.⁴³ In tombs, the spits could have been placed in order to serve the dead person as practical instruments, but maybe they were also a reminder of earlier sacrifices to the gods and, of course, a testimony to the wealth of the deceased or his descendants.

Grills of terracotta with a wavy upper rim were probably meant to hold spits. If placed on stands, they could probably also have been used to roast pieces of meat. Examples of this kind have been found in the area belonging to the temple of Athena in Miletos.⁴⁴

Conclusions

This has been a fairly superficial review of objects probably used for cooking in Greek sanctuaries and a more thorough search may certainly find more material. If, however, something preliminary is to be said about the role of cooking stands and similar objects in the world of Greek sacrifice so far, it is that this type of vessel was not used to a greater degree in cultic contexts. The reason for this may be that sacrifices were meant for a reasonably large group of people, and each cook-

³⁴ Detienne 1974, esp. 1201–1208; Detienne 1977, esp. 173–182; Ekroth 2007 and 2008.

³⁵ Ricci 1950, pls. III and IV; Durand 1979, 149, pl. II; about *splanchna* in general, see van Straten 1995, 131–136 and 189f. See also Gebauer 2002, 356, and Berger 1998, 76–124.

³⁶ Durand 1979, 154f., pls. III–IV.

³⁷ Athens, National Museum Acr. 654, Karouzou 1955, 192, fig. 15, pl. IX; Laurens 1986, 47 and 49, fig. 4; van Straten 1995, V 212, 148, fig. 154; Berger 1998; Gebauer 2002, no. Z1, 296f., fig. 163.

³⁸ According to van Straten (1995, 147), “part of the meat is put on spits, to be roasted eventually (or possibly as a convenient means of transport) and part is boiled in a kettle”. A good example of the preparation of spits for this use is the famous lid in Adolphseck (van Straten, V 238, 237, fig. 158), depicting several men loading spits with meat. See also Gebauer 2002, Zv 40, 331f., fig. 202.

³⁹ Laurens 1986, 49 n. 10; Courbin 1957, 368–370, figs. 52–53 (about *obeloi* found with two firedogs, i.e. as useful objects) and 370–385, figs. 54–65, pl. V (firedogs).

⁴⁰ Courbin 1983; Kron 1971, 126 and 131–144; Furtwängler 1980; Kilian 1983, 133, figs. 1 and 5; Strøm 1992.

⁴¹ Kyrieles 1993, 137.

⁴² Tomlinson 1980, 221–224.

⁴³ Rotroff & Oakley 1992, nos. 320–321, 47f. and 120f., pl. 57.

⁴⁴ Schiering 1968, 156 and 160, pl. 39:3; Aydemir 2005 (pr. 2006), 90–94, nos. 5–6, figs. 11–14.

ing stand or brazier could only serve a very limited number of people. We may in fact presume that cooking stands and braziers were mostly used in domestic contexts. In the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore on the slope of Acrocorinth, they were almost non-existent, which must mean that they were very few and that those few may have had something to do with the private character and restricted number of participants of the cult communities, and the fairly long way down to the inhabited areas at the foot of the hill.

There are, of course, also other possibilities, such as that cooking stands and braziers, being useful even in other situations, were removed when diners left the dining places as a precaution against thieves or unsuitable uses of the god's property, or later, because they were still useful objects.

The true answer to the question about the lack of cooking stands and braziers in sanctuaries may, however, be quite different: namely that cooking in sanctuaries almost exclusively used sacrificial meat which was divided into two parts: the *splanchna* or interior organs, which were roasted on the spits found in several sanctuaries, and the rest, which were boiled in large cauldrons. These cauldrons were maybe placed on metal tripods, later removed and melted down, or perhaps on *lasana*. Maybe the cooking stands and braziers were everyday utensils which were used for household cooking, and thus there is no real reason for them to be found in sanctuaries. But maybe this little article in memory of Berit Wells may give voice to forgotten cooking stands and braziers in sanctuaries and show that they were useful also in a religious context.

CHARLOTTE SCHEFFER
Department of Archaeology and Classical Studies
Stockholm University
SE-106 91 Stockholm
charlotte.scheffer@antiken.su.se

Abbreviations

Agora XII = Sparkes, B.A. & L. Talcott, *The Athenian Agora* XII. *Black and plain pottery of the 6th, 5th and 4th centuries B.C.*, Princeton, N.J. 1970.

Corinth XIV = Roebuck, C., *Corinth XIV. The Asklepieion and Lerna*, Princeton, N.J. 1951.

Kommos IV = *Kommos. An excavation on the south coast of Crete by the University of Toronto and the Royal Ontario Museum under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* IV. *The Greek sanctuary*, eds. J.W. Shaw & M.C. Shaw, Princeton, N.J. 2000.

LIMC = *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, Zürich 1981–2009.

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