

Economy and Gastronomy

Animals in Antiquity, Week 2

Ancient diet

- Grape, grain, olive
- High in fiber, low in cholesterol
- Meat eating connected to religious sacrifice (story about Prometheus – Hesiod, Theogony 535-57)
- Consumption of meat – symbol of status

Sacrificial meat

- Sacrifice and feasting from Iron Age
- In Classical period – fundamental feature of life in Polis (16 city-wide sacrifices/year)
- Bone deposit at Corinth – sacrifice would have fed 15 000 spectators for 4-5 days
- Mass sacrifices – emerging meat market in Athens (see decree of the deme Skambonidai)

- Sacrificial victim vs. commercial commodity
- The same official conducts sacrifice and sale: *mageiros*
- After 5th ce. AD the meat trade was less connected to religion



Appetites

- Meat consumption connected also to impious behavior (Homer, *Odyssey* 12.354-425 – Cattle of the sun)
- Appetites of gluttons in comedy (eating meat without sacrifice – carnal appetite)
- Golden Age – culinary simplicity – vegetarianism (Empedocles against sacrifice, Pythagoras) – not frequent
- Rejection of sacrifice – rejection of religion (ox made from spices, cakes, wheat)

- Eating raw flesh – *omophagia* – ritual destruction of animals
- Female followers of Dionysos (inverted pious treatment of meat)

Fish and Gastronomy

- Fish – the finest food
- No heroic or divine association
- Associated with women, boys and seduction
- Athenians avid fish-eaters
- Romans – rotten fish sauce *garum* -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLDIUGXJMFY>
- *Piscinarii* – Hortensius' fishponds – retreated from public life to tend to fish

Consumption and Taste

- Criticism of excessive consumption
- Petronius – Satyricon – Trimalchio's Feast
- Apicius
- Roman simplicity
- Marcus Antonius' love for banquets (condemnation by Plutarch) – competitions with Cleopatra

Value Economics

- Elite status – owning land and animals
- Socially acceptable forms of wealth – from agriculture (Cicero – De officiis 1.151)
- *„There is nothing more profitable than to take good care of cattle“* Cato, De agricultura 54.5
- Columella – De re rustica 8.27 – animals impact all aspects of human life – from food to clothing

Prioritizing animal husbandry over agriculture

- Animals – best return of investment – numerous young, grow quickly
- Large animals difficult to maintain, but offspring sold for high prices
- Smaller animals easy to feed (sheep, goats, pigs)
- Big animals – public impression
- Producing animals only for those of high status – big investments, big payoff

- Animals as symbol of status – horses, cattle
- Self-sufficiency, sustenance, manpower, resources
- Homer – „rich in flocks“ / “rich in herds“ epithets
- Cattle – currency?
- Latin word *pecunia* – from *pecus* - cattle?

Animals and the market

- Sacrificial demand
- Athens – state sponsored sacrifices – 6500 cattle, equal number of sheep, goats, pigs, birds, fish
- Lesser Panathenaia – 9-12 000kg of meat (7200-9600 portions – fed 30 000 people)
- Transport, sale, sacrifice, distribution of meat – *boonai* „cowboys“ to purchase animals from private sellers

- Anyone could sell animals to sanctuary – perfect ones – inspectors
- Urban markets – spike at festival times
- Smaller public and private sacrifices
- Complemented by demand for other animal products – wool, cheese, draught animals
- Athens - sheep – high quality wool
- Sparta – cattle, horses, sheep – larger herds

Delphi

- Sacrifice before consultation – steady demand for animals
- Isolated position
- Later sacred herds (cattle and racehorses) – pastured on sacred land and sold to pilgrims at sanctuary

Roman markets

- Year-round livestock markets in fixed locations in Rome: Forum Boarium (Bovarium), Forum Pecuarium, Forum Suarium
- Independent from sacrificial demand
- Romans ate more meat (especially cured pork)
- Goats primarily for milk