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The *Plemochoe* A Vessel from Thmuis¹

EDWARD L. OCHSENSCHLAGER

Although many of the pottery vessels used by the Greeks in antiquity have been equated with names preserved in ancient sources, there are some shapes which remain unnamed and some ancient names and descriptions which are unrecognised in surviving pottery examples. The *plemochoe* should be listed among these. In spite of the fact that it has been identified, from time to time, as one or the other of four different vessels, careful readings of the ancient texts demonstrate that none of these pots adequately compare with the descriptions given of the *plemochoe*. Furthermore, as described below, examination of these vessels yields plausible

reasons to suppose that they were called by other names in antiquity and were used for purposes irreconcilable with the functions of the *plemochoe*.

A pottery type, excavated at Thmuis by the Mendes Expedition² in 1966, now seems entitled to careful consideration as the real *plemochoe* on the basis of the historical sources describing that vessel and its use. This vessel (Pl. I Figs. 1 and 2) has a biconical body with an offset, flaring neck and plain rim. Its nipple type bottom is plainly pinched in by the potter's fingers, the imprint of which is still visible. This carelessly made pot, an example of local red ware, is 8.3 cm. high, 6.4 cm. in rim diameter, 7.4 cm. in body diameter, and has an average thickness of 0.85 cm. The vessel was excavated on the third packed-mud floor of Room 18, tentatively dated to the first half of the second century B.C. or slightly later. It was associated with seven other pieces of pottery, a terracotta figurine of Harpocrates, a bronze fibula, and two bronze Ptolemaic coins, one of which was badly worn, but the other clearly a coin of Ptolemy VI Philometor, and

¹ Work on this article was made possible by a summer research grant from the City University of New York. Special thanks are also due to Professor LeRoy Campbell of Brooklyn College, to whom I am indebted for many suggestions and valuable criticism. The following abbreviations are used in addition to those listed in the front of this volume: *AA*: *Archäologischer Anzeiger*. *AM*: *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung*. *Arch-Eph*: *Archaiologike Ephemeris*. *BSA*: *British School at Athens, Annual*. *Compte-rendu*, *Pétersbourg*: *Compte-rendu de la Commission impériale archéologique, St. Pétersbourg*. *CVA*: *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*. *DarSag*: Daremberg and Saglio, *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*. *Deltion*: *Archaiologikon deltion*. *IG*: *Inscriptiones Graecae*. *JdI*: *Jahrbuch des K. Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*. *JHS*: *Journal of Hellenic Studies*. *RE*: Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*. *SIG*: Dittenberger, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*. The abbreviations used in the citations of names of ancient authors and documents are the standard abbreviations and can be found listed in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (1949) ix–xix.

² The Mendes Expedition of the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University, with the support of the Brooklyn Museum, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, and, beginning next season, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, is excavating two mounds in the Delta of Egypt. One of these mounds was an important Graeco-Roman city in antiquity known to the Greeks as Thmuis; the other is the ancient Egyptian city called Mendes by the Greeks. The Mendes Expedition, directed by Professor Donald P. Hansen, is conducted under the auspices of the American Research Center in Egypt, Inc.

Euergetes, the future Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II, datable to 168–163 B.C.³

The word πλημοχόη comes from πλήμη, denoting a “flooding of water” or “flood-tide”, and χόη something that pours (χέω). It is then a “flooding” cup. From the name of the vessel, one can deduce that it was originally designed to contain water, for *pleme* means a flowing of water. Water was poured from the *plemochoe*, at least in its use in the Eleusinian Mysteries, since wine was taboo in the rites of Demeter.⁴ Although Hesychios (s.v.), Athenaeus, and Pollux, all mention the *plemochoe*, only the last two authors give some indication of its structure. Athenaeus (II.496b), the earliest, says:

Plemochoe [flooding cup], a ceramic dish like a whirling top⁵ sitting at rest, which some speak of as a little *kotulos*.⁶ They make use of it [= *kotyliskos*] in Eleusis on the last day of the mysteries which they name from it *Plemochoai*,⁷ on which day, after they have filled two *plemochoai*, making one stand up⁸ toward the east and one toward

³ JARCE 6 (1967) for a description of Room 18 and the reasoning behind our tentative dating; 34–39 and pls. XXI–XXII, figs. 36–40; for a brief catalog of the accompanying finds, cf. also 39–57 and text figs. 1–32.

⁴ *Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 206–9; see also quotation from Pollux and note 11 *infra*.

⁵ βεμβίλ = a thing that spins or whirls, consequently the author has to add ἐδραῖον ἡσυχῇ (sitting at rest) to emphasize likeness of shape rather than of the whirling. Our word “top” emphasizes the shape more than the whirling. *Bembix* can also denote a “whirlpool” whose shape, depending on the cause of the whirlpool and volume of liquid involved, would suggest that of a conical or a biconical cup without a foot.

⁶ κοτύλος or κοτύλη = small cup, κοτυλίσκος (smaller still) hence a “very small cup.” Here the emphasis is on the “hollow shape.” According to Apollodorus (Ath. 2.479 a): “The ancients used to call πᾶν τὸ κοῖλον (all the hollow space) a *kotyle*.”

⁷ *Plemochoai* = Flooding Cups. Note that Pollux says (*infra*) that the day was called *Plemochoe*. It is interesting to compare the second day of the *Antheateria* which was called *Choi* (Cups).

⁸ ἀνιστάμενοι has often been misunderstood and thus mistranslated in the past. It is middle voice but causal, not passive or intransitive. The ἀν- emphasizes the upright position.

the west, they overturn them while pronouncing a mystic formula. The author of the *Peirithus*, whether he is Kritias the Tyrant or Euripides, makes mention of them [= *plemochoai*] by saying the following: “That we may pour out these *plemochoai* into the earthy chasm with propitious speech.”

Athenaeus’ description of the *plemochoe*, as far as it goes, is clear. The *plemochoe* is a very small, ceramic cup shaped like a top or whirlpool. It is not steady on its base, for it must be made to sit upright. This unsteadiness, one suspects, is reflected in the name *plemochoe*. The vessel is a “flooding” cup because, unless it is made to sit upright, its unsteady nature will cause it to tip over, spilling out its contents in a “flood tide”.

The information from Pollux is somewhat less precise. In his discussion of wine vessels, Pollux (*Onom.* 10.73–74, Dindorfius) says:

But among the vessels would also be placed what Aristophanes in his *Holkasis* [*Holkades*] called *hyrchai*⁹ of wine, but in his *Geras* that on the security of a *hydria* holding five cups or more they loan money. Hence the *hydria* would be a vessel not only for water but also for wine, which one may also call a *phenaknis* and *phidaknis*,¹⁰ as in the *Demio-pratoi*, but frequently also a *plemochoe*.¹¹ It is a ceramic vessel not having a sharp bottom,¹² but on the contrary is sitting and stationary, which they use on the last day of the mysteries, which day they name from

⁹ ὕρχη (perhaps a different word from ὕρχη, a wine jar), “by the security of which (ὕρχη) sailors carry their fortune,” according to Hesychios.

¹⁰ Φενακνίς = Φιδακνίς. Note Φέναξ, a cheat or impostor (just as a *plemochoe* is a spilly or faulty cup). Φιδακνίς = πιθάκνη related to *pitthos*.

¹¹ Although the name *plemochoe* indicates that the vessel was originally designed for water, Pollux says that it was also used for wine. The alternate use, as a vessel for wine, would most likely be found in certain private funerary rituals or perhaps in the cults of other deities.

¹² Not having a sharp (or pointed) bottom, to distinguish it from a *rhyton*, or cone-shaped vessel.



Fig. 1. The *plemchoe* from Thmuis, side view.



Fig. 2. The *plemchoe* from Thmuis, showing the knob at the bottom and the flaring rim.

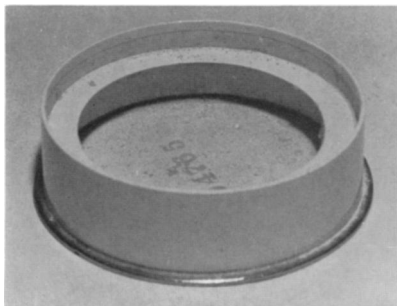


Fig. 3. A modern cardboard powder container.



Fig. 4. A Victorian powder container.

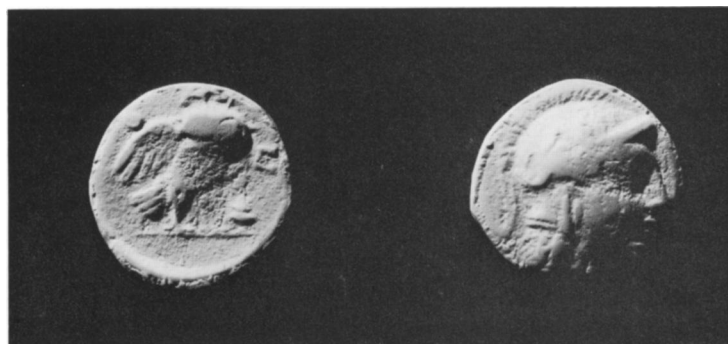


Fig. 5. A coin from Elusis which possibly pictures a *plemochoe*.

it *Plemochoe*;¹³ but included in these is also a *psykter*...

Pollux only partially quotes or interprets the Athenaeus data, but at least he understands that the "flooding" or "spilling" cup is not cone-shaped, and that in its use in the mysteries it sits firmly on its bottom. Indeed, in a passage notably lacking in descriptive detail he makes a special point of the latter, perhaps because the data he uses stress the basic instability of the *plemochoe*.

Before one can consider the Thmuis vessel, the evidence for and against the claims of the simple *kernos*, the "*smegmatotheke*" (from *σμημα*, a soap or unguent and *θήκη*, a chest or container), a series of miniature cups found in the general area of important sanctuaries, and a bag-shaped vessel represented on late Geometric pottery, all of which have already been recognised by some authorities on pottery as the ancient *plemochoe*, must be considered. What follows first then, is an examination of these vessels in order to show that they could not possibly be the ancient *plemochoe*.

The *Kernos*

In 1892 L. Couve¹⁴ suggested that a vessel¹⁵ shaped like a bowl, with a firm base and sometimes a cover,¹⁶ which appears on certain Eleu-

sinian coins,¹⁷ and on the "altar of the Eleusinion at Athens,"¹⁸ was the *plemochoe*. This theory did not attain wide credibility.¹⁹ Couve himself rejected it eight years later, recognizing the vessel as a variety of *kernos*.²⁰ Although a few scholars believed that these vessels were *thymiateria*,²¹ most have agreed that they are indeed *kernoi*.²² A notable exception is

¹⁷ Couve cites Duruy, p. 587 and Beulé, p. 344 (note 20 *supra*). For some other coins of Athens and Eleusis on which the vessel is represented: B. Head, *A Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum, Attica-Megaris-Aegina* (London, 1888) nrs. 248, 286, 474, 475, 544, 565, 636; E. Cavaignac, *Études sur l'histoire financière d'Athènes au V^e siècle; le trésor d'Athènes de 480 à 404* (Paris, 1908) 16, 79-80; B. Head, *Historia numorum, A Manual of Greek Numismatics* 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1911) 376-7, 381-2, 387, 391; E. Babelon, *Traité des monnaies grecques et romaines III* (Paris, 1914) 127-141 and pl. 193, nr. 25; J. Svoronos, *Trésor des monnaies d'Athènes* (Munich, 1923-26) pl. 24, 33-40; pl. 33, 7-11; pl. 39, 6-10; pl. 75, 1-13; pl. 79, 35; pl. 81, 18, 19, 22-24; pl. 103, 29-32, 47-49; pl. 104, 8; pl. 106, 30, 45, 46, 48-51, 76-83; pl. 107, 1-23.

¹⁸ Couve cites J. Stuart and N. Revett, *Antiquities of Athens I* (London, 1825) Chap. 1 pl. II fig. 3; and F. Lenormant, *Recherches archéologiques à Eleusis* (Paris, 1862) 397. It was in reality an architrave block built into the south wall of the Little Metropolis to the northwest of the Eleusinion in Athens. See H. Thompson, "Two Centuries of Hellenistic Pottery," *Hesperia* 3 (1934) 447-48 note 5 and ref.

¹⁹ But note the designation "*plemochoe*" for the representation of these vessels on coins by B. Head, *British Museum Catalogue*; and E. Babelon (see note 17 *supra*).

²⁰ *DarSag* III, 1, s.v. *kernos*, p. 824.

²¹ H. von Fritze, "Συμβολή εἰς τὸ τυπικὸν τῆς ἐν Ἐλευσίνι Λατρείας," *ArchEph* (1897) 163-174; G. Pringsheim, *Archäologische Beiträge zur Geschichte des Eleusinischen Kults* (Berlin, 1905) 69ff.; D. Philios, "Ὁ πίναξ τῆς Νι(ι)ννίου," *ArchEph* (1906) 206-207. This is impossible as most later authorities have pointed out. Neither the rock-hard residue of gum characteristic of *thymiaterion* nor any trace of fire has ever been found in a vessel of this shape.

²² For bibliography see Leonard in *RE* 11 (1921) s.v. *kernos*, pp. 316-326; to which should be added, H. Thompson, *Hesperia* 3 (1934) 447-450; *Hesperia* 6 (1937) 208; F. Upson, *The Kernos in Ancient Cult*, Radcliffe Dissertation, 1942; T. Shear, "The Campaign of 1938," *Hesperia* 8 (1939) 208-9; D. Thompson, *Hesperia* 23 (1954) 101f.; G. Mylonas, *Eleusis and*

¹³ Does Pollux, perhaps, refer to the day as *Plemochoe* because he does not understand that two *plemochoi* were used in the ritual?

¹⁴ *DarSag* II, 1, s.v. *Eleusinia*, 574. Following V. Duruy, *Histoire des Grecs II* (Paris, 1888) 587; C. Beulé, *Les monnaies d'Athènes* (Paris, 1858) 344.

¹⁵ Usually called a *kernos* in modern archaeological literature.

¹⁶ Although these vessels are often represented with what appear to be solid covers, the lids excavated are of openwork. For a discussion of the *kernos* lid and its doubtful significance as ventilation for a lamp, see O. Rubensohn, "Kerchnos," *AM* 23 (1898) 286ff. Both Pollux (*Onom.* IV, 103) and the Scholiast to Nikander (*Schol. in Nic. Alex.* 217) mentioned that the *kernos* contained lights, but no trace of carbon smudge has been discovered in the preserved vessels or on their covers.

H. Möbius²³ who identifies as *plemochoai* two overturned vessels of this type, one represented to either side of Triptolemos mounted in his chariot on a gold band from the Stathatos Collection.²⁴

Athenaeus (II.476e-f)²⁵ described the *kernos* as:

An earthenware vessel, holding within it a large number of small cups cemented together. "In these," Polemon says, "are white poppy-heads, grains of wheat and barley, peas, vetches, okra-seeds, and lentils. The man who carries it, resembling the bearer of the sacred winnowing-fan, tastes these articles, as Ammonius records in the third book *On Altars and Sacrifices*."

Later on he gives a second description, quoting Polemon's treatise *On the Sacred Fleece* (II.478 c-d):²⁶

After these preliminaries [the priest] proceeds to the celebration of the mystic rites; he takes out the contents of the shrine and distributes them to all who have brought round their tray. The latter is an earthenware vessel, holding within it a large number of small cups cemented together; and in them are sage, white poppy-seeds, grains of wheat and barley, peas, vetches, okra-seeds, lentils, beans, rice-wheat, oats, compressed fruit, honey, oil, wine, milk, and sheep's wool, unwashed. The man who carries²⁷ it, resembling the bearer of the sacred winnowing-fan, tastes these articles.

Complicated *kernoi* which answer this description are easily identified. The simple *kernoi* which lack the *kotylisks* are another matter. In

general form, however, the two vessels are often remarkably similar. Certain features such as the flattened spherical body with equatorial flange appear frequently in the body styles of both the simple and complex varieties.²⁸ Then too, the flared lip or rim of the simple vessels is frequently repeated in the *kotylisks* attached to the complex *kernos* and sometimes these *kotylisks* resemble the simple *kernos* in detail of body structure as well.²⁹ An additional link between the two types is recognized in a series of vessels which seem to form an intermediate stage in structure, though probably not in chronology.³⁰ These vessels are of the same general shape as the simple and complex vessels mentioned above, but they have non-functional *kotylisks*, or the vestigial remains of them, attached to their rims. The similarity in form would seem to indicate that all these vessels are closely related.

Excavations at Eleusis, and on the site of the Eleusinion at Athens, have yielded most of the Greek *kernoi* we know. At both sites the simple and complex varieties were found together,³¹ further substantiating their relationship. Considering the find spots of these vessels, the conclusion that both played a part in the worship of Demeter seems reasonable.

Athenaeus tells us that the complex *kernos*, which he describes, was a ritual vessel used for first fruits. The simple vessel could be used for

the Eleusinian Mysteries (Princeton, 1961) 221-222; J. Boardman, *Excavations in Chios 1952-1955* (Oxford, 1967) 30-31, 175.

²³ *Gnomon* 27 (1955) 39.

²⁴ P. Amandry, *Collection Helene Stathatos, Les bijoux antiques* (Strasbourg, 1953) 86f nr. 230 pl. 34.

²⁵ Translation of C. Gulick in the Loeb edition, Vol. V 109.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 117.

²⁷ Perhaps a better translation of βασιτάσας, both here and in the quotation above, would be "the one who has lifted it up." See p. 59 *infra*.

²⁸ Compare D. Philios, "Ἀρχαιολογικά Εὐρήματα τῶν ἐν Ἐλευσίνι Ἀνασκαφῶν," *ArchEph* (1885) pl. 9 figs. 5 and 6; O. Rubensohn, *AM* 23 (1898) pl. 13 figs. 2 and 4; H. Thompson, *Hesperia* 3 (1934) 321 fig. 6 nr. A40 and 341 fig. 21 nr. B28; T. Shear, *Hesperia* 8 (1939) 209 fig. 8.

²⁹ Compare D. Philios, *ArchEph* (1885) pl. 9 fig. 8; O. Rubensohn, *AM* 23 (1898) pl. 13 fig. 8b; H. Thompson, *Hesperia* 3 (1934) nr. A40 and nr. B28; T. Shear, *Hesperia* 8 (1939) 209 fig. 8; G. Mylonas, *op. cit.* (note 22 *supra*) pl. 87, the *kotylisks* on the *kernos* to the far left.

³⁰ O. Rubensohn, *AM* 23 (1898) pl. 13, 5 and 6; for a discussion of these vases and their possible significance, pp. 283ff.

³¹ D. Philios, *ArchEph* (1885) 172; A. Skias, "Ἐπιγραφὰι Ἐλευσίνος," *ArchEph* (1894) 200; O. Rubensohn, *AM* 23 (1898) 280; H. Thompson, *Hesperia* 3 (1934) 448.

the same purpose. In the complex *kernos*, each of the elements was placed in a separate *kotylisk*. The simple *kernos* could contain a single fruit, or several mixed together, possibly made into some kind of compound. We know the names of two such compounds associated with the Mysteries: *pelanos*,³² and *kykeon*.³³ Simple vessels may also have served a private votive function. Filled with first fruits, or a particular first fruit, they would make ideal vessels for individual offerings. For a rough parallel to the function of the simple *kernos* found in the Shatby cemetery in Alexandria,³⁴ one need look no further than the χύτρα offered to Hermes Chthonios and departed kinfolk at Athens on the last day of the *Anthesteria*. Note that the *choe* was used on the preceeding day for tasting the new wine and pouring a libation to the same Hermes.³⁵

It is usually taken for granted, as in the translations quoted above, that Athenaeus speaks of carrying the *kernos* atop the head like the *liknon* or sacred winnowing-fan.³⁶ A very practical objection has been raised to the possibility of carrying some of the simple *kernoi* in this fashion. Thompson has suggested, because of the very small bases of these vessels, that they may have been carried instead in the hand, slung on a cord passed through holes found in their rims.³⁷ Indeed, examination of the Athenaeus text³⁸ shows one that the usual trans-

lation of the word βαστάσας may be slightly misleading. βαστάζω means to lift up high, or support, rather than to carry as in φέρω (λικνοφαρήσας). Perhaps the elevation of the *kernos*, like the elevation of the host in the Catholic Church, qualified the participant to taste the *pankarphia*. On the other hand, we do know that some of the simple vessels were carried on top of the head in the same fashion as the sacred basket (*kiste*), in the *kernophoria* and *kistophoria* processions. It is quite possible that the carrying of sacred vessels on the head was a traditional form emphasized in public festivals rather than in ordinary family rites.

On the main panel of the Ninnion Plaque³⁹ two different scenes are carefully separated by a white line. In each there is a woman bearing a simple *kernos* on her head. Close scrutiny of the *kernos* in the top scene reveals that its position is a precarious one, for it is fastened firmly to the woman's head by means of white *tainiai*, drawn through the loops formed by the handles of the vessel. With such aid, relatively small bases might well be supported, and the need for such *tainiai* could account for the holes drilled in the rims of some simpler *kernoi*. These are sometimes thought to be intended for attaching a lid to the vessel, but Thompson has pointed out that they exist on vessels whose mouths are unsuited for the reception of lids.⁴⁰

Mylonas analyzes the two scenes and comes to the conclusion⁴¹ that the lower scene on the main panel represents the *kernophoria* of the Greater Mysteries celebrated in the outer court of the Sanctuary of Eleusis at the end of the *pompe* from Athens. For this we have no literary

³² Dittenberg, *SIG* 13; apparently primarily the same as *alphita* or barley meal (Sannyrion, frag. 1, Koch). See also Ziehen, *RE* 18, s.v. *Opfer*, 584.

³³ Clem. Al., *Protr.*, II, 18; according to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (208–9) made of *alphita* and water flavored with pennyroyal. See also A. Delatte, *Le Cyceon breuvage rituel des mystères d'Eleusis* (Paris, 1955).

³⁴ E. Breccia, *La necropoli di Sciatbi* (Cairo, 1912) pl. 58 nr. 248.

³⁵ For the *choe* as jug, see G. Van Hoorn, *Choes and Anthesteria* (Leiden, 1951).

³⁶ For a discussion of the *liknon* as a basket for first fruits and illustrations of the way it was used, see J. Harrison, "Mystica Vannus Iacchi," *JHS* 23 (1903) 292–324.

³⁷ H. Thompson, *Hesperia* 3 (1934) 449.

³⁸ See note 27 *supra*. Νιννιον τοῖν θεοῖν ἀνέθηκον.

³⁹ A red clay *pinax* in the form of a *naiskos* discovered at Eleusis by the excavators in 1895 and known as the Ninnion Pinax because of the dedicatory inscription it bears: For the literature see: Leonard in *RE* XI, s.v. *kernos*, 320; L. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States* III (Oxford, 1907) 241–5, pl. 16; G. Mylonas, *op. cit.* (note 22 *supra*) 213–221 and notes, fig. 88; E. Simon, "Neue Deutung zweier Denkmäler des vierten Jahrhunderts vor Christus," *Antike Kunst* 9 (1966) 86–91.

⁴⁰ H. Thompson, *Hesperia* 3 (1934) 449.

⁴¹ G. Mylonas, *op. cit.* (note 22 *supra*) 216–219.

evidence, but it seems altogether reasonable. The upper scene, he believes,⁴² is a representation of the *kernophoria* of the Lesser Mysteries held at Agrai in Attica. A Scholiast to Plato's *Gorgias*⁴³ tells us that such a *kernophoria* was performed at the Lesser Mysteries. If Mylonas is right in his interpretation, we probably have textual assurance that the simpler vessel, as well as the complex one described by Athenaeus, was indeed called a *kernos*.

Mylonas points out that an artist could represent the two *kernophoriae* seen on the Ninnion Plaque, precisely because they were *not* part of the secret rites.⁴⁴ Indeed, it is the simple *kernos* which is always represented in art, to the exclusion of the complex type. Perhaps the complex *kernos* was never represented because it was used only in the secret ritual. The second quotation from Athenaeus, whether it is meant to apply to the Eleusinian Mysteries, or some other mystery in which the *kernos* was used, certainly adds weight to this argument. The contents of a shrine would only be exposed during the most secret parts of the mystery ritual.

Jane Harrison mentions the threefold use of the *liknon*, which was compared to the *kernos* by Athenaeus, and was also a container for first fruits. It was used for mystical purification,⁴⁵ for magical promotion of fertility,⁴⁶ and for the mysticism of the *palingenesia*.⁴⁷ Surely the functions of *kernoi* must have been similar. It is to see in the simple *kernos* a vessel used for mystical purification before the secret rites took place. The complex *kernos* would then be used for some sort of *palingenesia*⁴⁸ or magical promotion of fertility.⁴⁹

⁴² *Ibid.* 219–220.

⁴³ C. Hermann, ed., *Platonis Dialogi* VI (Leipzig, 1892) 123.

⁴⁴ G. Mylonas, *op. cit.* (note 22 *supra*) 220.

⁴⁵ J. Harrison, *JHS* 23 (1903) 314.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 314.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 323.

⁴⁸ J. Harrison (*ibid.*) refers to it as the “New, perhaps Egyptian mysticism of the *palingenesia*, ‘death unto sin and new birth unto righteousness;’” when in reality there is nothing new about it. The ancient

That the simple vessel is intimately related in form and function to the *kernos* described by Athenaeus is apparent. Both probably bore the same name in antiquity.⁵⁰ One thing is certain: it is impossible to reconcile this vessel with the descriptions of the *plemochoe* by ancient authors.⁵¹ The bases of some *kernoi* may be too small to be carried on the head, especially without the additional support of *tainiai*, but placed on a

literary sources bear incontrovertible evidence that such a concept played a major role in the Mysteries: the Orator Sopatros says, “By means of the *telete* I shall be prepared for every virtue (*arete*)” (Sopat. Rh. in C. Walz, *Rhetores Graeci* [Stuttgart, 1832–6] 114); “Thus the mysteries are profitable, thus we come into a visualization that was established for the training and correcting of life” (Arr. *Epict. Diss.* 3.21.422); “With respect to the doing of good deeds, it is not possible for others than those who have been initiated to understand (*akouein*) . . . Sharing in the rite they have sweet hopes about the perfecting of life and about the whole epoch” (Isoc. *Paneg.* 28); etc. The *kernos* would find its place here in ceremonies revealing the hidden means of the magical and perhaps dangerous reattainment of the essential purity and wisdom of the soul.

⁴⁹ Harrison (*JHS* 23 [1903] 315–317) also points out that the *liknon* was used to symbolise fertility in the marriage ceremony, basically an initiation rite. Such fertility ceremonies are likely to have both exoteric and esoteric significance in the Mysteries; an exoteric significance related to the material benefactions of Demeter and an esoteric significance, perhaps frequently connected with the *palingenesia*. The ancient sources are most persuasive that such fundamental fertility concepts played a part in the Mysteries: The “nature of things rather than of the gods is recognized” (Cic. *Nat. D.*, I, 42); “But the Greater Mysteries are still left, not to teach about the totality of things but to give a vision and understanding about physical nature and its workings (*physis* and *pragmata*)” (Clem. Al., *Strom.* V, 11, 688P f); etc.

⁵⁰ A very similar name, however, appears in a list of inventoried objects kept in the Athenian Eleusinion for the years 408/7 and 407/6 (*IG*, I² 31317; 31423). Was *χέρυκος*, one wonders, another word for *χέρυκος* or is it the specialized name by which the simplified *kernos* was known? Note that J. Boardman, *op. cit.* (note 22 *supra*) 31, prefers to use the name “goblet” for the examples found at Chios, and restricts the name *kernos* to the complex *kernoi* when used in the cults of Demeter and Cybele.

⁵¹ See pp. 56–57 *supra*.

fairly even patch of ground, they would have nothing of the element of instability we seek. Nor do they bear any particular resemblance to ancient whipping tops. If one were to detach the foot, remove the lid, and take off the handles the resemblance to a top would be more apparent. The point is, however, that Athenaeus is describing the *plemochoe* as it existed, not as it might look after some fanciful mutilation.

The overturned simple *kernoi* represented on the gold band from the Stathatos Collection⁵² are much more likely connected with Triptolemos' distribution of seeds than with the ritual of the *Plemochoi*. Seeds, after all, were proper contents of the *kernos*. The *kernos* may have been thought to be the vessel from which Demeter received the *kykeon* and in which she presented the seed corn to Triptolemos for distribution to mankind. Some such belief, one must imagine, was thought to give an historical basis to the sacred character and ritual usage of the simple *kernos*.

The "Smegmatotheke"

Rayet, Pottier and Michel⁵³ were among the first to suggest that a certain type of vessel with a flat body, turned-in rim, high foot and sometimes a lid,⁵⁴ was in reality the *plemochoe*. They reached their conclusions on the basis of their reading of the literary sources,⁵⁵ and the pictorial representations of the vessels on vases. Previously these vases had been recognized by most authorities as vessels designed to hold liquid or semi-liquid perfumes.⁵⁶

⁵² See p. 58 and notes 23 and 24 *supra*.

⁵³ O. Rayet, *Catalogue de la collection de O. Rayet* (Paris, 1881) 34, 41; E. Pottier, *Étude sur les lécythes blancs attiques à représentations funéraires* (Paris, 1883), 67; C. Michel *DarSag, s.v. Plemochoe*, Vol. IV, 1, pp. 509–10.

⁵⁴ Called also a *kothon*, *smegmatotheke*, or *exaleipton*. For the true *kothon* see P. Mingazzini, "Qual'era la forma del vaso chiamato dai Greci Kothon?" *AA* (1967) 344–361.

⁵⁵ See pp. 56–57 *supra*.

⁵⁶ L. Stephani, *Compte-rendu Pétersbourg* (1860) 19 who along with Benndorf calls the shape a *lekane* which it definitely is not, cf. D. Amyx, "The Attic

In 1911, R. M. Burrows and P. N. Ure subjected the whole problem of the use of these and similar vessels with turned-in rims to a thorough re-examination on the basis of 416 terracotta examples of several distinct types, including 112 excavated by the authors in graves at Rhitsóna, dating from about 540–500 B.C.⁵⁷ They divided the known examples into seven classes: three major classes based on shape (A, B, and C) with additional classes for vases with spouts (E), of stone (F), and of metal (G), and a miscellaneous class (D) for those with attributes of two or more of the six major classes. Although they were unable to reach definite conclusions about any of them, they decided that class B of terracotta, the type which had been identified as *plemochoi*, and the apparently associated class F of stone,⁵⁸ were most naturally explained as holding scent.⁵⁹ The authors also concluded that pictures of similar vessels in vase paintings, some of which are datable to the last half of the 5th century and differ from the terracotta examples in decoration and shape, could just as easily be representations of the stone vases as of the terracotta variety.⁶⁰ Classes A and C, they indicated, were probably lamps.⁶¹

Stelai Part III, Vases and Other Containers" *Hesperia* 27 (1958) 202–5, pl. 48, d–f; O. Benndorf, *Griechische und sicilische Vasenbilder*, (Berlin, 1868) 41; A. Furtwängler, *Die Sammlung Sabouroff* (Berlin, 1885) pl. 52 nr. 17; E. Robinson, in *Trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts* (Boston) *Twenty-fourth Annual Report, for the Year . . . 1899* (Boston 1899) 74. But see also E. Pernice, "Kothon und Räuchergerät" *JdI* 14 (1899) 68; K. Kourouniotes, "Θυμιατήρια" *ArchEph* (1899) 235.

⁵⁷ R. Burrows and P. Ure, "Kothons and Vases of Allied Types" *JHS* 31 (1911) 72–99.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 87.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 86–87, 96.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 86–87.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 95–96; for a discussion of the shape of these related vessels see R. Hopper, "Addenda to Necrocorinthia," *BSA* 44 (1949) 231; for evidence that the name may rightfully belong to an ordinary one-handled cup with flat bottom, see O. Broneer, "Excavations at Isthmia," *Hesperia* 28 (1959) 335 and n. 46 pl. 70 i.

Although some authors adopted the new terminology without criticism,⁶² designation of the shape as a *plemochoe* was not particularly popular during this period. Most specialists in pottery ignored the identification,⁶³ and J. D. Beazley rejected it outright in 1928.⁶⁴ The majority, however, were convinced by the arguments of Burrows and Ure that the vessel was designed for holding scent.⁶⁵

In 1935, G. M. A. Richter and M. J. Milne accepted the theory that these were perfume vases and decided that they might also be the Greek *plemochoi*.⁶⁶ They based their conclusion on their translation of the literary sources,⁶⁷ and the fact that the shape of the vessel, the variety of scenes in which it is represented in vase paintings,⁶⁸ and its use as a *plemochoe* could all

be reconciled with, and explained by, the use of perfume in antiquity.⁶⁹ This identification, they pointed out, was far from certain, and they drew attention to the fact that the name *plemochoe*, as it appears in literature, seems too specialized for this vase.⁷⁰ Miss Richter's uncertainty was underlined the following year. Although she tentatively identified certain representations of this vase on vessels in the Metropolitan Museum as *plemochoi*, she carefully placed a question mark after that word.⁷¹

Since then a number of authorities have accepted this vessel as a *plemochoe*, apparently without reservations.⁷² Others, however, were not convinced that this type of vase could be so identified.⁷³ I. Scheibler, the most recent

⁶² For example A. Cook, *Zeus I* (Cambridge, 1914) 424; F. Mayence and V. Verhoogen, *CVA 4, Bruxelles: Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire 3* (Bruxelles 1929) Jb, pl. 3-4, Id, pl. 15.

⁶³ For example A. Fairbanks, *Athenian Lekythoi* (New York, 1907 and 1914) called a *smegmatotheke* throughout; M. Edgar, *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire, Greek Vases* (Cairo, 1911) 27 nr. 26201, pl. X called a *kothon*; E. Pfuhl, *Malerei und Zeichnung der Griechen* (Munich, 1923) 47, 305, called a *kothon*; L. Caskey, *Attic Vase Paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Part I* (Oxford, 1931) 49, called a *smegmatotheke*; Chr. Blinkenberg, *Lindos: Fouilles de l'acropole 1902-1914 I* (Berlin, 1931) 654 nr. 2728b, called a *smegmatotheke*.

⁶⁴ J. Beazley, *Greek Vases in Poland* (Oxford, 1928) 43 n. 1.

⁶⁵ L. Caskey, *op. cit.* (note 63 *supra*) 49, agrees that it is primarily a perfume vase but suggests a variety of possible uses. E. Pfuhl, "Zur Geschichte der griechischen Lampen und Laternen" *JdI* 27 (1912) 52, mentions an example found on Aegina that held red pigment.

⁶⁶ G. Richter and M. Milne, *Shapes and Names of Athenian Vases* (New York, 1935) 21-22.

⁶⁷ For discussion of the literary sources see pp. 56-57 *supra* and notes.

⁶⁸ The vessel appears in scenes of purification ceremonies, in scenes at the cemetery where its use is probably similar, in scenes of women at their toilette, women at their baths, women or goddesses receiving gifts, in wedding scenes and on a vase suggesting the first bathing of the newborn Dionysos child (*CVA. Louvre* (2) III Ic, pl. 21, 2). For some of the many vase paintings in which the vessel appears, see Burrows

and Ure, *JHS* 31 (1911) 86 notes 97-99; M. Solnit, *A Study of the Representations of Vases in Attic Vase-Painting, Sixth and Fifth Centuries B.C.*, M. A. Thesis at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University (1950) 152-5, where the vessel is called a *plemochoe*; I. Scheibler, "Exaleiptra" *JdI* 79 (1964) 72-108.

⁶⁹ Richter and Milne, *op. cit.* (note 66 *supra*) 21-22.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 22.

⁷¹ G. Richter, *Red-Figured Athenian Vases in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New Haven, 1936) 80, 150, 158, 173, 179, 184, 202.

⁷² For example, N. Plaoutine and J. Roger, *CVA 1, 16, Musée National Rodin* (Paris, 1945) pl. 20 nr. 3 and 6-9; R. Lullies, *RE* 21 pt. 1, s.v. *Plemochoe*, p. 225; R. Cook, *Greek Painted Pottery* (Chicago, 1960) 369; J. Boardman and J. Hayes, *Excavations at Tocra 1963-1965, The Archaic Deposits I* (London, 1966) 106 pl. 85 nr. 1138.

⁷³ For example H. Smith, *CVA 6, 5, University of California 3* (Cambridge, 1936) 1 pl. 43, 1, called a *smegmatotheke*; L. Caskey and J. Beazley, *Attic Vase Paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Part II* by J. Beazley (Oxford, 1954) 38 nr. 84; *AVB* (Oxford, 1956) 348-9 where the actual vessel is called a *kothon*, but note that when Beazley refers to representations of these vessels throughout *ARV* (Oxford, 1963), he refers to them as "perfume vessels"; D. von Bothmer, *Ancient Art from New York Private Collections* (New York, 1961) 60 pls. 85, 92, nr. 237; and perhaps, more recently in his review of *Excavations at Tocra* (see note 72 *supra*) in *AJA* 71 (1967) 317; Mylonas, *op. cit.* (note 22 *supra*) 320. O. Rubensohn, *Das Delion von Paros* (Wiesbaden, 1962) 64-5 where the vessel is identified as a *κωλῖχης*. It is difficult to know where to place W. Fuchs, "Archäologische Forschungen und Funde in Sizilien von 1955 bis 1964" *JdI* 79 supp.

authority to deal extensively with this vase shape, believes that all vessels with this unusual rim were called *exaleiptra* in antiquity.⁷⁴

The single most important characteristic of this vase for the determination of its use is its deeply turned-in rim. Robinson⁷⁵ first suggested that it was intended to prevent a liquid from spilling while being carried, and experiments show that it performs this function.⁷⁶ Experiments also show, however, that pouring a liquid from the vessel is a difficult and wasteful procedure. If one tries to pour out a small amount, most of the liquid merely runs over the rim, follows the contours of the curved surface, and runs down the side of the vase. If one tries to pour a larger amount, the turned-in rim deflects the liquid into a very wide stream. Another difficulty lies in the fact that it is impossible to pour out all the liquid, for a certain amount is trapped by the rim and cannot be entirely dislodged.

Pollux indicates that the *plemochoe* was used for water and wine. One thing seems clear: if the "*smegmatotheke*" was designed as a container for these liquids, it is one of the most functionally awkward vessels the Greeks ever constructed. It seems particularly strange in view of the fact that a number of jars, pitchers and *amphorae* with incurved shoulders and narrowed mouths are known from all periods which could be used for carrying liquids without spillage and still allow the liquid to be easily poured out with a reasonable amount of control.

Just as strange, in my opinion, is the idea that it might have been designed for liquid perfumes. Flasks for toilet oil and liquid perfume are well known in antiquity, and are distinguished by their narrow apertures and their smallish size. Such forms as the *lekythos*, *askos*, *aryballos*, and *alabastron* have long been recog-

(1964) 737 and pl. 51 facing. He refers to the vessel as a *plemochoe* but encloses that word in quotation marks.

⁷⁴ I. Scheibler, *JdI* 79 (1964) 72–108 has also given careful attention to the datable examples of these vessels and has arranged the various types in chronological sequence according to their place of origin.

⁷⁵ E. Robinson, *op. cit.* (note 56 *supra*) 76.

⁷⁶ Richter and Milne, *op. cit.* (note 66 *supra*) 22.

nised as vessels designed for this purpose, as have the later Hellenistic fusiform *unguentaria*. The small opening, tightly sealed when the vessel is not in use, prevents evaporation or dissipation of the scent, and serves a useful purpose in allowing small amounts of liquid to be poured into the hand or applied directly, as the user preferred. In comparison, one notes the extreme difficulty in pouring large or small amounts of liquid from the very wide mouth of the "*smegmatotheke*".

It is interesting to note that the "*smegmatotheke*" and the *aryballos* were found in large quantities and frequently in the same graves at Rhitsóna in Boeotia.⁷⁷ If the "*smegmatotheke*" contained toilet oil or liquid perfume as a grave offering, what then did the numerous *aryballoi* contain? It seems extremely unlikely that two such different vessels were thought of as interchangeable containers for the same contents.

Many of these vessels have been found without covers and some, without proper rim supports, were obviously not designed for them. Furthermore, in some examples where the cover has been preserved the joint between the lid and vessel is not air-tight. Scheibler has suggested that perhaps a wool pad or sponge, used for dabbing or dipping up the contents, served also as a cover.⁷⁸ The lack of a tight fitting lid, however, presents an additional problem in recognising these vases as containers of perfumed liquids, for it would allow a free evaporation of the liquid or dissipation of the scent. Perfumed water, wine, or solutions in alcohol would rapidly evaporate and perfumed oils would lose the strength of their odor and turn rancid.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ R. Burrows and P. Ure, "Excavations at Rhitsóna" *BSA* 14 (1907–8) 250ff, esp. graves 18, 26, 31, 49; and "Excavations at Rhitsóna in Boeotia" *JHS* 29 (1909) 316ff, esp. graves 12, 46.

⁷⁸ I. Scheibler, *JdI* 79 (1964) 73.

⁷⁹ Theophrastus (*De. Odor.* 9.41) clearly indicates that the necessity for airtight vessels for perfume was clearly recognised in antiquity. A. Lucas, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries* 4th ed. rev. by J. Harris (London, 1962) 85–86, points out that the liquid perfumes of the period we are concerned with were probably not solutions in alcohol.

Richter and Milne⁸⁰ have suggested that the size of the vase may indicate the use of a diluted or cheap perfume, but the wastage from pouring and evaporation or dissipation would still be present. The effect of the latter would be redoubled in a diluted product, and both could destroy in a short time the price advantage of the cheaper commodity. It seems just as likely that the less costly perfume was bought by those who could not, or did not, wish to afford the more expensive products, but used it in identical fashion and probably in identical vessels.

Burrows and Ure⁸¹ have suggested that the vessel was intended for a liquid perfume used up *in situ*. For home use, this would necessitate dipping into the liquid scent with some kind of ladle, wool pad, sponge, or with the fingers. The awkwardness of this procedure, the fact that the Greeks were as aware as we are today of the consequences of pollution of a liquid perfume with even tiny amounts of a foreign substance such as the natural oil or perspiration of the human skin,⁸² and the fact that we still have the somewhat less than airtight cover or no cover at all to contend with, all seem to militate against such a solution. The size and peculiar structure of the vessel seem quite unsuited to a liquid perfume vase.

Similar difficulties face one in identifying these vessels as containers for semi-liquid scents.⁸³ The problem of contamination or dissipation of the scent still remains, and evaporation would soon dry up the contents. We also know that the ordinary container for ointments and semi-liquid cosmetics was the *pyxis*, whose rim formed a reasonably airtight seal with its cover. Burrows and Ure⁸⁴ have suggested that the turned-in rim may have served as a handy

surface for the scraping off of excess unguent taken up on the finger or a brush, but it should be pointed out that the plain rims of the *pyxis*, like those of modern ointment jars, serve that purpose equally as well and are much easier to clean.

Scheibler⁸⁵ suggests that the vessel is a suitable container for powder but later rejects the idea that it may have been used for that purpose⁸⁶ on the grounds that no powder has ever been found in them, that powder is not suitable for grave ritual and the cult of the dead, and that the use of διαπράσματα, a scented powder to sprinkle over the person, is not known in archaic and early classical times. In spite of these objections, the theory that these vessels may have been intended for powder seems especially worthy of consideration.

One can find an approximate parallel to this vessel's peculiar rim in modern containers designed to hold bulk facial powder. In the cardboard cartons in which the powder is often sold, a fairly wide projecting flange, or rib, is always attached to the inside, about one quarter or more of the box's total depth from the top (Pl. I Fig. 3). When these powder vessels are made of porcelain, their rims curve inward, and then either downward, or upward, to form a collar. Some of those with turned-in rims from the Victorian era (Pl. I Fig. 4) resemble our vessel rather closely. These rims serve to prevent the scattering of powder in clouds of dust when powder is removed from the center of the container. Reasoning by analogy, it is possible that the "*smegmatotheke*", with its highly specialized rim, was a container for powder in antiquity.

What kind, or kinds, of powder would be suitable for the several scenes in which we see the vase represented? Certainly there is not good reason to limit its use to a single kind of powder for such vessels might serve as containers for all types of powder used in antiquity. There is, however, one particular powder, with the approximate consistency of baking soda,

⁸⁰ Richter and Milne, *op. cit.* (note 66 *supra*) 22.

⁸¹ Burrows and Ure, *op. cit.* (note 57 *supra*) 86.

⁸² Theophr., *op. cit.* (note 79 *supra*).

⁸³ Although direct evidence for the use of animal fats impregnated with pleasing odors is lacking, it seems altogether probable that such ointments were well-known in Greece, Egypt, and throughout the Near East. See A. Lucas, *op. cit.* (note 79 *supra*) 85-86.

⁸⁴ Burrows and Ure, *op. cit.* (note 57 *supra*) 86.

⁸⁵ *JdI* 79 (1964) 73.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 89, n. 83.

which seems to fit all the scenes in which the vessel is represented by vase painters. Natron, a compound of sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate,⁸⁷ was well-known in antiquity. If this was indeed the usual content of these unusual vessels, the red color of natron found near Philippi in Thrace,⁸⁸ or the pink color of some other impure natrons,⁸⁹ may well account for the red "pigment" found in the vase on Aegina.⁹⁰

In scenes of women at the bath, natron would be perfectly appropriate, for natron mixed with water was considered excellent for washing.⁹¹ For especially stubborn grease or grime it could have been used dry or in concentrated solutions, as it most certainly was in the washing and scouring of fabrics.⁹²

It may have been used also in the Athenian rites of the *Aponimma* in honor of the dead at the cemetery, or for purification of the unclean. According to Anticleides in the *Expositor*⁹³ it was customary to:

Dig a trench on the west side of the grave.
Then standing beside the trench face the west, and pour over it water, reciting these words: "Water for cleansing to you for whom it is meet and lawful." After that pour scented oil.

Richter and Milne mention this quotation in order to show that perfume was offered at the grave.⁹⁴ They also point out⁹⁵ that our "*smeg-*

⁸⁷ Called *nitrum* by the Romans, *νίτρον* by most Greeks and *λίτρον* in Attica. See, for instance, Hdt. 2. 86–88; Pl. *Ti.* 60D, 65D and E; Ar. *Ran.* 711; Poll. 7. 39; 10. 135; Hesychius, *s.v.*

⁸⁸ Hippoc. 573. 37, 44; 631. 29.

⁸⁹ Dioscor. 5. 130; Plin. *HN.* 31. 107.

⁹⁰ See note 65 *supra*. Apparently no chemical tests of the substance were carried out, but even when such tests are made, the nature of the original substance is often elusive. Although traces of the contents survive, it is often impossible to tell if they existed originally as a solid, powder, or were mixed with water, oil, or fat.

⁹¹ Strab. 11.529; P. Newberry & F. Griffith, *El-Bersheh I* (London, 1895) pl. X.

⁹² Isid. *Orig.* 16.2.7.

⁹³ Ath. 9.410a; translation of C. Gulick in the Loeb edition, IV, 357. Cf. Soph. *El.* 433ff.

⁹⁴ Richter and Milne, *op. cit.* (note 66 *supra*) 22.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 21.

matotheke" is often associated with the *alabastron* in scenes from the cemetery on vase paintings. Surely the *alabastron* is a more suitable container for the "scented oil" than the vessel we are examining.

In an article on Funus,⁹⁶ Ledrivain has chosen two representative scenes from Attic vase paintings in the Louvre to illustrate his discussion of the cult of the tomb. By chance, they are also perfect illustrations of the difference in use of the "*smegmatotheke*" and the *alabastron* in cemetery ritual. A scene from one vase (fig. 3348) shows two women, each pouring perfume from an *alabastron* on a funerary stele. In the other (fig. 3349), three women with offerings gather around a dead woman, represented as seated before her monument. One of the women is carrying a large basin of the kind used for washing and in it one can see a "*smegmatotheke*". Surely the association between the basin and the "*smegmatotheke*" is due to more than chance and reflects the use of the "*smegmatotheke*'s" contents for washing ceremonies in Attic grave ritual.

Dorotheus, referring to the purification of suppliants in the ancestral ritual of the Eupatridae, says:⁹⁷

Thereupon, after you and all the other participants in the sacrifice have received water, wash the hands and purge yourself and wash away the bloodguilt of him who is to be purified; after that shake the water of purification and pour it into the same place.

In view of the use of natron dissolved in ordinary washing water to enhance its cleansing properties, it is reasonable to suppose that it was also used in the ritual washing of the dead or the living to enhance the purification properties of the water.⁹⁸ Certainly there are abundant parallels in Egypt for the use of natron in the

⁹⁶ *DarSag* II, 2, 1281.

⁹⁷ Ath. 9.410b; translation of C. Gulick in the Loeb edition, IV, 357.

⁹⁸ For a discussion of ritual purification effected by running water, see E. Rohde, *Psyche* (London, 1950) Appendix V, 588–9.

purification of both the living and the dead.⁹⁹ One should also not forget the close relationship in the Greek world between grave and fertility ritual. In this connection it is interesting to note that Theophrastus¹⁰⁰ recommends soaking seeds overnight in a solution of natron to enhance their sprouting and growth.

One would naturally expect to find purification ceremonies connected with the celebrations of the great transitional moments of human existence such as birth, marriage, death, and perhaps puberty as well. This could easily account for the presence of the "*smegmatotheke*" in scenes depicting these festive occasions.¹⁰¹ Such purification would also be necessary in other religious ritual, and especially in the mystery religions.

We know, for instance, that purification was a requirement for initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries. The pig sacrifice on the day *Elasis*, or, *halady mystai*,¹⁰² has been correctly identified as a part of a specific cleansing of the *mystes* in preparation for the secret rites to follow, and it has been suggested above that the simple *kernos* may have been used for purification. An examination of the general and specific requirements for purification indicates that a rite similar to the *Aponimma* could also easily find a place in the purification of the *mystai*.

Libanius (*Or. Corinth.* 4 = p. 356 Reiske) says: For they declare these other things are in common for the pure *mystai*, such as to be

⁹⁹ For example, the fourfold purification of the wailing women who bemoaned Osiris (H. Junker, "Die Stundenwachen in den Osirismysterien . . .," *Abh. d. Wiener Ak.* 54 (1910) 6) who also washed their mouths and chewed natron that both they and their songs of lamentations might be pure (*ibid.* p. 70). See also the corpse washed with various kinds of natron dissolved in water (*Book of the Dead* CLXIX 18f); the balls of natron and incense in the opening of the mouth ceremony (*ibid.* CIXIX 6-8). Compare the final purification ceremony in the daily ritual at Edfou: M. Alliot, *Le culte d'Horus à Edfou au temps des Ptolémées* (Cairo, 1949) 94ff and n. 3 on p. 96.

¹⁰⁰ Theophr., *Hist. Pl.* 2. 4. 2.

¹⁰¹ I. Scheibler, *JdI* 79 (1964) 84-88.

¹⁰² Plut., *Phocion* 28.

pure in deeds [hands], spirit [soul], and in language Greek.

Later (p. 368) he tells us, probably preserving part of the *Prorrhesis*:

This proclamation is proclaimed, "Whoever of Athenians is not pure in hands, whoever does not understand the language. . ."

As for deeds, or unclean hands, Apollodorus (2.5.12) says:

When Herakles was about to depart to fetch Cerberus, he went to Eumolpus at Eleusis with the desire to be initiated. Not being able to see the mysteries because he had not been cleansed of the slaughter of the Centaurs, he was cleansed by Eumolpos and then initiated.

We know that this cleansing took place at the Lesser Mysteries at Agrae, for according to Diodorus (4.14.3):

Demeter instituted the Small Mysteries in honor of Herakles that she might purify him of the guilt he had incurred in the slaying of the Centaurs.

Natron, either dry or mixed in water, is obviously well-suited for the purification of unclean hands, and it would not be surprising therefore to find the "*smegmatotheke*" connected with the Mysteries.

Purity of soul, on the other hand, seems to have been largely a matter of diet.¹⁰³ One might well reject the idea of chewing natron for purification of the soul, as in Egypt, but the simple *kernos*, perhaps filled with some form of corn such as the *kykeon* which once cheered the heart of Demeter, would be an admirably suited vessel for the conveyance of purifying food.

¹⁰³ Libanius says (*Or. Corinth.* 4 = p. 368 Reiske): "And likewise if you taste of this, that, or the other, you are not purified; and there is much supervision of this among the *mystagogoi*." Pausanias (1.37.4), speaking of the taboo on beans, says: "Whoever in fact has seen the *teletē* at Eleusis or has considered the things called Orphic knows what I am saying." According to Porphyrius (*De Absten.* 4. 16): "It is proclaimed at Eleusis to abstain from domestic birds, fish, beans, and from both pomegranates and apples" (and also eggs and sea mullet according to a scholiast).

The vessels shown in scenes of women at their toilet could be satisfactorily accounted for by the use of natron in washing alone; but there are several other purposes it might serve as well. Pliny tells us that natron was used as a dentifrice,¹⁰⁴ and as an ingredient in the composition of a number of unguents, medicinal plasters and eye washes.¹⁰⁵

Such a substance, in its proper container, would make an excellent gift for a woman or goddess. The more so as it was also used as a salt for bread,¹⁰⁶ and in cooking vegetables to make them tender and preserve their green color.¹⁰⁷

There is no reason, however, to believe that the use of the "*smegmatotheke*" need be limited to natron alone. It seems entirely logical that it might be used for any kind of powder. It would make an ideal container for several cleaning compounds¹⁰⁸ that come in powder forms, such as various earths¹⁰⁹ and perhaps various salts. Bean flour or *lomentum*¹¹⁰ was used both as a cleaning powder and as a cosmetic. Mixed with an equal part of pulverized, dried snails, it formed a powder used to soften and whiten the skin,¹¹¹ and it was the basic ingredient in a paste used to conceal wrinkles.¹¹² Among other cosmetics kept or used in powdered form, one might include red ochre,¹¹³ kohl, pulverized

antimony, and lamp black. Perhaps also it served as a container for powdered perfume¹¹⁴ which was used in medical preparations,¹¹⁵ for combating the odor of perspiration,¹¹⁶ for bad breath,¹¹⁷ and for perfuming bedding.¹¹⁸

The vessel may also have held, from time to time, certain kinds of incense kept or used in powdered form, or even the agglutinated tears of frankincense or myrrh, which produce a quantity of fine powder, from friction between the pieces, when they are transported from place to place. The broken pieces of a fragmentary "*smegmatotheke*" found at Old Smyrna in Asia Minor are said to have smelled strongly of vanilla when first discovered.¹¹⁹ If the report is accurate, one must suppose that this particular vessel did indeed hold a resinous substance containing coniferin which is found in the sapwood of fir trees and from which vanillin can be artificially prepared. It seems highly unlikely that pods of the orchid genus *Vanilla* were imported from Mexico in antiquity!

If this vase was indeed used for powdered substances, the word *plemochoe*, with its implications of a spilling or flooding of water, seems an unlikely name. Even if we are entirely wrong about the use of this vessel we would still be forced to conclude that it was not the ancient *plemochoe*. First of all, there is nothing unsteady about it, although such unsteadiness is implied in both the name *plemochoe* and the descriptions of that vessel by Athenaeus and Pollux. Secondly, this vessel does not really resemble any known ancient whipping-top, nor could a functional whipping-top be constructed on the basis of its proportions and profile, even if the vessel's foot were removed. Thirdly, we are told quite specifically by Pollux that the *plemochoe* was a vessel used for wine and water, neither of

¹⁰⁴ *HN.*, 21. 117.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 31. 118f.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 31. 115.

¹⁰⁷ Theophr. *Caus. Pl.* 5. 6. 12; Plin. *HN.* 19. 143; 31. 115; Mart. 13. 17; Apicius, 3. 1; Colum. 11. 3. 23; Pallad. *Febr.* 24. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Designated by the general terms ῥύμματα or ῥυπτιχά.

¹⁰⁹ For example: γῆ πλυντήρις, Theophr. *Caus. Pl.* 2. 4. 3; γῆ κιμωλία, Ar. *Ran.* 710f; σμηχτήρις, Poll. 7. 40; σμηχτήρις, Galen, *Glossar. hippocr.* p. 90 and 139; σμηκτήρις, Eupolis, 380; and the earths extracted at Selinonte and Chios according to Galen, 12, p. 180.

¹¹⁰ Mart. 3. 42. 1; cf. Pallad. 11. 14. 9 who uses this word for pea flour also.

¹¹¹ Plin. *HN.* 30. 127.

¹¹² Mart. 3. 42. 1; 14. 60. 1-3.

¹¹³ A naturally occurring red oxide of iron used as a powder or as a base for rouge in Egypt, see A. Lucas, *op. cit.* (note 79 *supra*) 84-85.

¹¹⁴ On the making of powdered perfumes see Theophr. *De Odor.* 12. 57-59.

¹¹⁵ Paulus Aegineta 7. 13; Oribasius 10, 33.

¹¹⁶ Dioscor. 1. 131; Plin. *HN.* 21. 19. 73; Plut., *Mor.* p. 660e.

¹¹⁷ Mart. 1. 88.

¹¹⁸ Theophr. *De Odor.* 12. 58.

¹¹⁹ J. Anderson, "Old Smyrna: The Corinthian Pottery" *BSA* 53/54 (1958/59) 143f nr. 78 pl. 23.

which have ever been suggested by anyone as the proper, or even possible, contents of this extremely unusual vessel. A further difficulty is created by the uselessness of the turned-in rim, the vessel's most distinctive feature, in its ritual function in the Eleusinian Mysteries. The *plemochoai* were first filled and set up, then solemn words were pronounced over them, and they were overturned. They needed no specialized rim to protect their contents from spilling while being carried.

But even if ancient descriptions fitted perfectly, I think one would still have to discard the "*smegmatotheke*". With well-omened words the officiant consecrates the offering to its purpose and inverts the vessel. A large amount of the offering runs off into the earthy chasm, but there still remains inside a considerable amount of liquid trapped by the turned-in rim. Even a violent shaking would not dislodge all the consecrated liquid. The "*smegmatotheke*" is not only a most complicated and unlikely vessel for performing this simple ritual, it also presents the very serious religious problem of what to do with the consecrated offering that remains because it cannot be dispersed. The turned-in rim, which Richter and Milne state is "important for the determination of the use of the vase"¹²⁰ seems to me a particularly good reason against its consideration as the *plemochoe*.

Although the exact name born by the vessel in antiquity is uncertain, the name *smegmatotheke* seems the most accurately descriptive of those currently used to designate this vase. The word *σμημα* could easily be used to designate a wide variety of powders or earths including those already related to it linguistically.¹²¹ As Scheibler points out,¹²² *θήκη* is not a word commonly used to distinguish a vessel. It ordinarily means a *case*, *chest*, *grave* or *tomb*, although by extension it could be thought of as meaning *container* for if is precisely this function that all its meanings have in common. Mention of a *σμηματοφορεῖον*¹²³

might have reference to its ritual use, like the *kernos*, in public purification ceremonies.

Miniature Cups

Large quantities of miniature cups have been found at Eleusis in dumps from the sanctuary, as well as at Athens in a presumed sanctuary of Demeter Thesmophoros on the crest of the Pnyx and in a large cistern near the Metroon.¹²⁴ Although the profiles of these vessels are extremely varied, two particular types have been singled out for identification as the *plemochoe*. One is a miniature Corinthian cup which was found at Eleusis itself,¹²⁵ the other a cup found in the Grotto of Pan near Eleusis.¹²⁶ Unfortunately, there is no evidence which would help us distinguish either of these cups as *plemochoe*, in preference to the many miniature cups or bowls of other shapes, with which they are often found.¹²⁷ The context of these finds, when it is clearly defined, reveals the characteristics of a votive deposit and it seems reasonable to suppose that both types of cup actually served a votive function in antiquity.

It is, of course, possible that the *plemochoai* would be disposed of after their ritual function was completed in deposits of votive vessels. These miniature cups, however, have very firm bases which would seem, once again, to contradict the descriptions of our ancient authors and the implications of the name *plemochoe*. Furthermore they bear no resemblance whatsoever to a whipping top.

Bag-shaped Vessels

W. Hahland¹²⁸ equates the *plemochoe* with representations of bag-shaped vases which

¹²⁴ H. Thompson, "Buildings on the West Side of the Agora" *Hesperia* 6 (1937) 207. See also *Hesperia* 5 (1936) 179-180.

¹²⁵ *Deltion* 15, 1933-5 (1938) Παραρτημα 33 fig. 34 left.

¹²⁶ *Deltion* 16, Vol. 2, 1960 (1962) Χρονικά pl. 43.

¹²⁷ Cf. for instance, *Hesperia* 6 (1937) 207 fig. 125.

¹²⁸ "Neue Denkmäler des attischen Heroen- und Totenkultes," in *Festschrift für Friedrich Zucker* (Berlin, 1954) 177-194.

¹²⁰ Richter and Milne, *op. cit.* (note 66 *supra*) 22.

¹²¹ See note 109 *supra*.

¹²² *JdI* 79 (1964) 79.

¹²³ Pollux 10. 127.

appear on late Geometric vessels. These bag-shaped vases, which sometimes look more like water bags than pottery, are often illustrated in some kind of cultic performance where two seated men face one another on either side of an altar. Each man holds two vessels, one of which, it appears, is upright, while the other is inverted. Certainly the parallel between what we know of the *plemochoe* rite and this illustrated performance is striking. Hahland thinks these sketchily represented vessels were fruit-shaped and similar to such pomegranite or poppy-shaped vases as the bronze vessel found on the Acropolis at Athens.¹²⁹ Aside from the fact that they lack an element of instability, the size and shape of such fruit-shaped vessels come closer to the ancient description of the *plemochoe* than any of the other vessels we have so far examined.

Due to the schematic nature of drawing in the late Geometric Period, the identification of these bag-shaped vessels with vessels shaped precisely like a poppy or pomegranite is still somewhat speculative. That such may have been the intention of the artist can not be disproved, but on the other hand, his schematic representations have as much and perhaps more in common with the *plemochoe* found at Thmuis which can itself be seen as a highly stylized representation of fruit. One should also consider that these bag-shaped vessels may actually be water bags used in precisely the same fashion and with the same basic religious significance as the *plemochoe*. As I hope to show elsewhere, the basis of the *Plemochoi* ritual was fundamental to early religious belief and similar ceremonies were undoubtedly to be found in the worship of a multitude of deities, as well as in the cult of the dead.

THE PLEMOCHOE

(Pl. I Figs. 1-2)

The vessel found in excavations at Thmuis during the 1966 season answers the descriptions

¹²⁹ A. de Ridder, *Catalogue des bronzes trouvés sur l'acropole d'Athènes* (Paris, 1896) 39-41 fig. 13 nr. 114.

of Athenaeus and Pollux perfectly.¹³⁰ First of all, it is a very small cup resembling the shape of a whipping-top. Although not matched exactly by one of the very few tops which have survived from antiquity, it does have a shape which would permit it to be spun by a whip. It is not too different from the general shape of a top in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts,¹³¹ whose short, cone-shaped base is surmounted by a projecting flange and tipped by a semi-cylinder with concave walls. A small accentuation of the latter feature would produce a shape very similar to the bi-conical body and flared neck of the Thmuis vessel. Furthermore, a parallel for the nipple bottom can be found in a series of tops from Roman Egypt, where a few wooden examples have been preserved, with pegs for turning bases.¹³² At the same time, it is not conical in shape nor does it end in a point like the rhyton. Under certain causal conditions, the shape of a whirlpool closely resembles the vessel's shape.¹³³

Furthermore, it is completely unsteady or faulty on a smooth, hard surface, and if filled with water and placed there would immediately tip over, spilling its contents and flooding the area with liquid. On the other hand, experimentation shows that it can be quickly placed in a steady, upright position in the earth—even if the soil is well-packed—by applying slight pressure to the top. The small button-like nipple easily penetrates the soil, which in turn supports the bottom and sides of the vessel directly.

It is interesting to note that the profile of the *kotylisks* of the *kernos* and the profile of the *plemochoe*, whose alternate name was *kotyliskos*, according to Athenaeus, are often remarkably similar. A sharply biconical body is sometimes found in *kotylisks* from *kernoi*, simple *kernoi*, and our *plemochoe*, but cannot be paralleled in

¹³⁰ See pp. 56-57 *supra*.

¹³¹ Nr. 99. 536. Illustrated in A. Klein, *Child Life in Greek Art* (New York, 1932) pl. 18, B.

¹³² See F. Petrie, *Objects of Daily Use* (London, 1927) pl. 50 nr. 360; note also nr. 359 with a lathe-turned, nipple-like turning base.

¹³³ Note, for instance, the whirlpool called the "Old Sow" in Passamaquoddy Bay, Maine, which at certain times exhibits a definite biconical form.

the profiles of other pottery vessels of the period.¹³⁴ Some *kotylisks* from *kernoi*, or simple *kernoi* themselves, also have the distinctive flared, collar-like neck seen on the Thmuis *plemochoe*.¹³⁵ It seems likely that the extraordinary similarity between these vessels, all three apparently used in the Eleusinian ritual, is significant.

The fact that the Thmuis vessel matches the descriptions of Athenaeus and Pollux, and also shows a marked similarity to the *kernos*, is not quite enough to make its identification certain. Luckily, there is more evidence, overlooked in the past, on an Eleusinian coin in the British Museum (Pl. I Fig. 5).¹³⁶ This coin belongs to a series thought to represent *kernoi* used in the Eleusinian Mysteries, but there is something peculiar about it. Shown on the reverse is a vessel which looks very much like a simple *kernos*, except for the fact that it does not have a base or handles. The vessel has a biconical body with a pronounced collar, and appears to be resting with its bottom inserted into the ground line on which the Athenian owl stands. There can be no doubt that, although it belongs to the Eleusinian series, it does not represent the simple *kernos*. Its striking similarity to the description of the *plemochoe* given by Pollux and Athenaeus is unmistakable, and so is its similarity to the Thmuis vessel. The vessel is even called a *plemochoe* in the museum catalogue, but then Head, who was apparently influenced by the Couve article,¹³⁷ refers also to simple *kernoi* as *plemochoai*. In the case of this coin, however inadvertently, he is apparently correct.

The very crudeness of the vessel, which might seem to preclude its use as a cultic vessel, is actually an argument in favor of its identification as a *plemochoe*. Sacred vessels used in religious cults, like other sacred objects and

ritual itself, are apt to retain their archaic and primitive character. At the height of Roman wealth and influence, the pottery vessels used for offerings by the Roman Vestals, called "Numa's Crockery," were very coarsely made without the use of the wheel.¹³⁸ There is some reason to believe that the Vestals may have originally been responsible for making this pottery themselves, like the early Rex Sacrorum who was his own potter.¹³⁹

If the Thmuis vessel is indeed an example of the ancient *plemochoe*, one must ask why no such vessel has ever been excavated at either the precinct of Demeter at Eleusis or the Eleusinion at Athens. Actually, it is not certain that none have been found. A fragment of the body of a *plemochoe*, lacking the nipple base, would undoubtedly have been listed as a fragment of a *kotylisk* from a complicated *kernos*, or as the fragment of a simple *kernos*, because the existence of a similar shape in the *plemochoe* was not known. Unless a portion of the nipple or base-stem were preserved, it would be impossible to tell from which vessel the fragment came. Then too, unfortunately, we do not know where the *Plemochoai* rites were performed. They could have been performed anywhere within the *temenos* at Eleusis, conceivably outside the *Telesterion* since the ritual took place on the last day of the festival, and was almost certainly not a part of the secret rites. If they were used, by chance, within the *Telesterion*, they would undoubtedly have been taken up at sometime after the ceremony and buried within the precinct. In the light of our knowledge of the devastation wrought by the construction of later villages and cemeteries within the precinct,¹⁴⁰ it should not seem surprising that such deposits have not been discovered in modern times, even if they once existed.

There is very little chance that we are excavating an Eleusinion at Thmuis, although one

¹³⁴ See page 58 and note 28 *supra*.

¹³⁵ See page 58 and note 29 *supra*.

¹³⁶ B. Head, *A Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum, Attica-Megaris-Aegina* (London, 1888) nr. 245 pl. 6, 12. Dated to 220-189 B.C.

¹³⁷ *DarSag* II, 1, s.v. *Eleusinia*, 574.

¹³⁸ Valer. Maxim. 4. 4. 11; Ovid, *Fasti*, 6. 310; Cicero, *Paradoxa*, 1. 2; *Nat. D.*, 3. 17. 43; Persius, *Sat.* 2. 59f; Juvenal, *Sat.* 6. 342ff.

¹³⁹ J. von Orelli, *Inscrip. Lat. Selec.*, No. 2281.

¹⁴⁰ G. Mylonas, *op. cit.* (note 22 *supra*) 9-12.

apparently existed at near-by Alexandria.¹⁴¹ Further excavation will be necessary before the mud-brick structure from which the *plemochoe* came can be accurately identified. There is certainly no reason, however, to think that the use of the vessel need be limited to the Demeter ritual; indeed, the statement of Pollux that it was used both for water and for wine would seem to indicate more than one use for the vase. Nor does the quotation from the Peirithus¹⁴² preclude other uses. Although the words are fitting for the Eleusinian rites, we do not know

in what context they were spoken in the play, and in its present form the formula is equally suitable for other Chthonian cults and private funerary libations. The *plemochoe*, like the *kernos*,¹⁴³ was undoubtedly used both in the ritual of other deities and in private funerary or fertility ritual.

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¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* 300.

¹⁴² See page 56 *supra*.

¹⁴³ For example, the *kernos* is mentioned in connection with the cult of Kybele (Leonard in *RE* 11, s.v. *Kernos*, 325ff). See also page 59, note 34 *supra*.