

P. G. MAXWELL-STUART  
Queens' College,  
Cambridge,  
England

UDC 807.5—73

### A LACUNA IN ATHENAEUS

An account of bread, given by Athenaeus ad 3.113 b—c, based upon a passage in *De Panificio* by Chrysippos of Tyana, whose date appears to be post first century A. D., runs as follows.

'The Greeks have a bread called „soft“ (ἀπαλός), which is made with a little milk, oil, and the requisite amount of salt. The dough must be quite soft. This bread is called *Cappadocian* since it is chiefly in Cappadocia that 'soft' bread is made. Bread of this kind is called *lachma* by the Syrians and is very useful in Syria because it can be eaten while very warm. It is . . . . like a flower (ἄνθει παραπλήσιος)'.<sup>1</sup>

Just before that last phrase there is a gap in the Greek, representing quite a big loss, including what is usually taken to be the name of a flower. It is not possible to restore the Greek, of course, but no bread ever looks anything like a flower and in consequence it looks as though one should suggest another meaning for ἄνθος. This is not difficult to do. Both Stanford and more recently Borthwick have pointed out that ἄνθος also refers to 'anything thrown out upon the surface', for example, the fluffy nap collected on the surface of cloth during weaving, the scum on wine, or froth on top of the sea<sup>1</sup>. A natural growth which is to look like Syrian *lachma* will be somewhat puffy, since the salt has been added partly as a leavening agent, and will have a brownish-white appearance as though cooked or baked.

Such a description surely better fits some kind of fungus rather than a flower, and indeed fungus might well be characterised as 'something thrown out upon the surface' of the earth. So I am going to propose that Chrysippos's ἄνθος could have been an Ascomycete

<sup>1</sup> W. B. Stanford. 'In Lexicographos, another heresy', *G&R* 5 (1936), 156—7. E. K. Borthwick: 'Flower of the Argives, a neglected meaning of "ΑΝΘΟΣ', *JHS* 96 (1976), 6. Cf. a related term in Theophrastus. The fruit (ἀνθήλη) of *Erianthus Ravennae* is like a cake, soft (μαλακός), and reddish, *HP* 4.10.4.

fungus, perhaps a species of *Terfezia* known as *Terfezia leonis*. This was described by L—R. and Ch. Tulasne as follows. 'Subsphaericus crassus, basi obconica obtusa strato tenui mycelii tomentosi arenae immixti innato-obducta; cuticulae tenuis glabrae colore ex elbido tandem fucato, glebae albido et denique brunnescenti; strato peridii crasso albido . . . Crescit verno tempore subterraneus in sylvis quercneis ad promontorium Circaeum Italiae mediae, haud procul a Terracina; rustici effossum libentissime comedunt; . . . Nascitur etiam abunde in arenosis Mauretaniae ferè ubique. . . Apud Arabes et colonos gallicos in deliciis est et exeunte hieme vereque in plateis maxima in copia advehitur'<sup>2</sup>. A coloured plate shows a light-brown lump reminiscent of baked dough<sup>3</sup>.

A full description of the way *Terfezia* can be cooked and eaten was given by the sixteenth century Arab writer usually known as Leo Africanus. 'Terfez', he noted, 'is to be called rather by the name of a root than of a fruit, and is like unto a mushroom or toad-stoole, but that it is somewhat bigger. It is enclosed with a white rinde and groweth in hot and sandy places. Where it lieth, it may easilie be perceiued by the swelling and opening of the ground. Some of them are as big as a walnut, and others as a limon. The phisicians, which call it Camha, affirme it to be a refrigeratiue or cooling fruit. It groweth in great plentie upon the Numidian deserts, and the Arabians take as great delight in eating of the same as in eating sugar. This fruit being stued upon the coles, and afterward made cleane, and sodden in fat broath they esteem for great dainties. Also the Arabians seeth it in water and milk, and so eat it. It groweth likewise plentifully in the sandes near unto the towne of Sela'<sup>4</sup>.

It is interesting to compare this process with a modern description. Professor P. H. Davies informs me that during the War, he observed Bedouin in the Syrian Desert dig up specimens by yanking them out with a prong as soon as they began to crack the surface of the soil. They then cooked and ate them<sup>5</sup>. Both bread and fungus have to be cooked before they can be eaten, and so it seems possible that some visual similarity between *Terfezia leonis* or a similar fungus and small lumps of dough no bigger than a walnut (the usual size required for making chapatis, for example) could have suggested the comparison made by Chrysippos of which the Mss. of Athenaeus have unfortunately failed to retain a complete account.

Received 10<sup>th</sup> of Jan. 1983.

<sup>2</sup> 'De genre Choiromycete et Picoa e tubernacearum familia,' *Annales des Sciences Naturelles*, 3rd series (Botany), 3 (1845), 350.

<sup>3</sup> *Fungi Hypogaei*, (Paris 1851), plate VII, no V.

<sup>4</sup> *The History and Description of Africa*, trans. J. Pory (1600). Edited R. Brown, 3 vols. (London 1896), 3. 969.

<sup>5</sup> Personal communication.