

MVSE

NUMBER SIXTEEN · 1982

ANNUAL OF THE MUSEUM
OF ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

A Spoon for Hecate

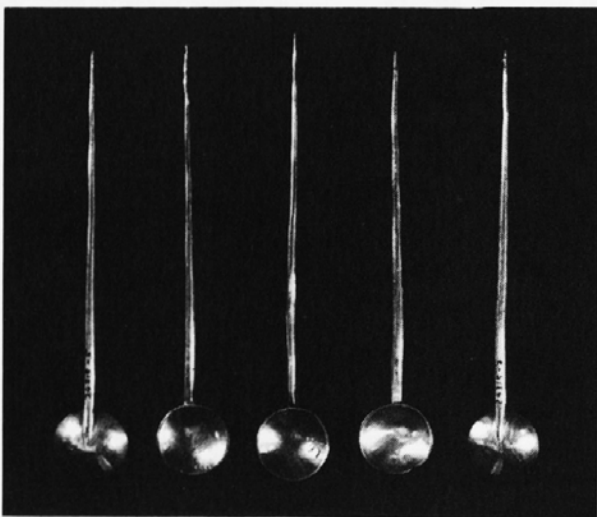
The eating spoon, an object so commonplace that we might assume it has always been with us, first becomes a widespread utensil in the first century A.D., and at first there are two distinct types: the *cochleare*, used for eating eggs or shellfish (as the name implies), with a pointed end to the handle and a bowl whose rim is in the same plane as the axis of the handle (Fig. 1); and the larger *ligula*, whose handle generally ends in a finial and whose bowl is offset from the plane of the handle (Fig. 2).¹

In the collection of the Museum of Art and Archaeology of the University of Missouri-Columbia there is an ancient silver spoon (Figs. 3 and 4) whose description, on which the author cannot improve, is catalogued in the museum's file as follows:

1. Examples of early cochlearia. Photo courtesy Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago.

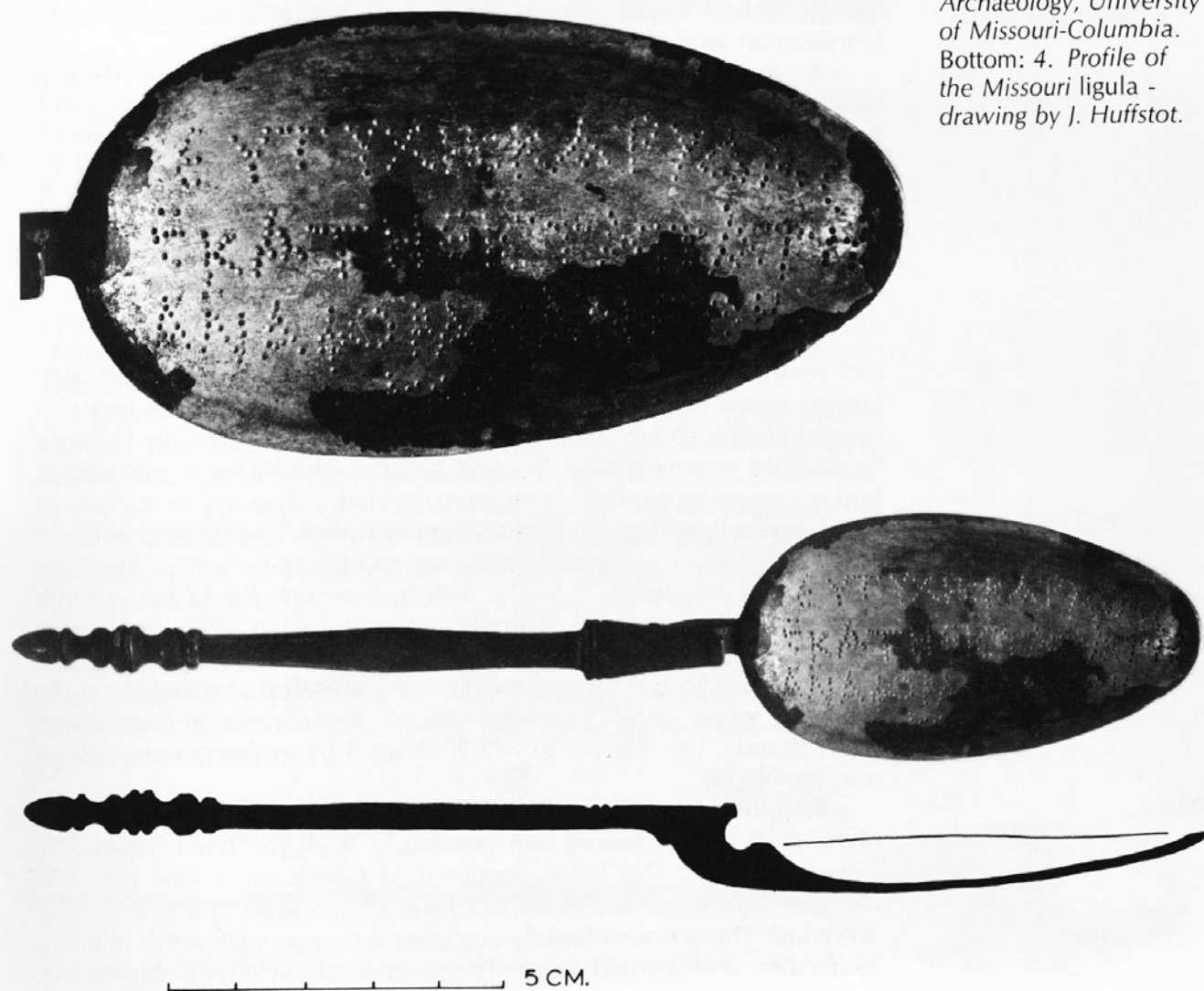
Right: 2. Examples of early ligulae. Photo courtesy Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago.

The large pear-shaped bowl classifies this spoon as a ligula. The end of the handle is decorated with an elaborate finial composed of a reel, a rounded head, a space, two reels, a bead, a space, a reel, and a rounded cone. The handle is rectangular in section, widest at the middle of its length, tapering slightly towards each end. The end near the bowl has a flat truncated triangular decoration with two incisions on the wide end. Underneath, a downward curving arm joins the blade of the spoon. The rim of the bowl is flat.²



Our spoon, with its elaborate finial, can be securely dated on stylistic grounds to the second or third century A.D.³ What is so unusual about it, for a spoon of so early a date, is that it bears a pricked inscription. Inscribed spoons are very rare so early⁴ and become common only in the fourth and fifth centuries.⁵ On spoons of that period, the inscriptions are often of the form *N. vivas* "may you live" or *N. gaudeas* "may you rejoice" and are obviously presents on such occasions as christenings or birthdays (Fig. 5). Others are votive, with inscriptions such as *Vo[tum] fecit Letus* "Letus made a vow" and *Fecit*

3. Photo (detail to left) of the ligula in the collection of the Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia. Bottom: 4. Profile of the Missouri ligula - drawing by J. Huffstot.





5. Example of a late-imperial ligula inscribed *potens vivas*. Photo courtesy Musée du Petit Palais, Paris.

votum Sat[urninus?] “Saturninus made a vow”. Frequently these inscriptions are combined with a Christogram, and together with spoons with inscriptions such as *Deo Gratias* or *Petri Pauli*, or with representations of fish, point to the fact that inscribed spoons are at least predominantly the product of a Christian environment. It has been suggested that many of these spoons may have been used for the administration of communion, such as is shown in numerous early Christian art works (Fig. 6).⁶

Against this background, the inscription on our spoon comes as a real surprise. It is a dedication to Hecate:

Εύτυχῆς καρυδᾶς
Ἐκάτῃ εἰς τὰ πάτῃ
ἀναφορὰν ἀνέθηκεν.

“Eutyches, the walnut dealer, gave (this) as an offering to Hecate for the πάτῃ.”

Not only is this, so far as I have been able to determine, the only known spoon from the cult of Hecate, but it appears to be only the second known spoon with an inscription which specifically ties it to the cult of a pagan divinity. The only parallel which I have been able to find is a spoon in the British Museum,⁷ a dedication to Juno Sospita of Lanuvium in Italy (Fig. 7). It bears the inscription *IVNONI LANVMVINAES P S SVLP QVIRIN*, i.e., “Junoni Lanuvinae sua pecunia Servius Sulpicius Quirinus (dono dedit).” As the British Museum ligula has a fairly pointed handle with finial, it would appear to be later than our Hecate spoon, and roughly contemporary with the Christian inscribed spoons.

Surprises do not by any means end here. The inscription on the Missouri spoon itself provides two of them, one a question of interpretation, the answer to which escapes us in the present state of our knowledge.

First, the word *καρυδᾶς*, “walnut dealer,” although of fairly obvious meaning, seems not previously to have been attested in Classical Greek. The latest treatment of Greek masculine nouns in *-ᾶς*⁸ does not know the word, nor have I been able to find it in other literature. These nouns largely comprise a category of words referring to persons, and derived mostly from names of inanimate objects, and

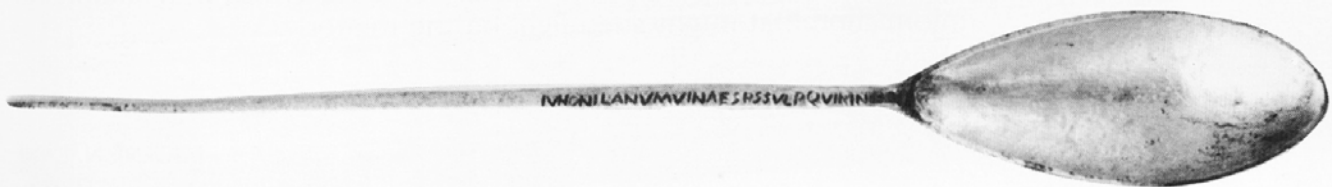


6. Administration of communion by spoon, fresco from Meteora. Photo courtesy Verlag Walter DeGruyter.

the category is extremely productive of names of professions, meaning “maker” or “dealer.” Although the earliest attestation of such a noun is in the fifth century B.C.,⁹ it does not become widespread until the Roman period, and is still widespread in Modern Greek. Naturally, such names of professions often give rise to proper names, and often are attested first as such. An instance is *μαχαίρᾱς*, “knife maker,” which first occurs as a proper name in the first century B.C.¹⁰ Our word *καρυδᾱς*, although not attested in Ancient Greek, is currently, via its being a proper name, the name of a chain of department stores in Thessaloniki.

Now *καρυδᾱς*, in turn, is derived from *καρύδιον*, diminutive of *κάρυον*, “walnut,” and this diminutive survives into Modern Greek as *καρύδι*, the regular term for the delicacy in question. This diminutive, again, is first attested in the fifth century B.C.,¹¹ but likewise does not become widespread until the Roman period. There it is quite well attested, and replaces the earlier term for “walnut.” For instance, in the papyrus Archive of Theophanes, a functionary on the staff of the Prefect of Egypt, particularly in the travel-expense account of an official trip he once made to Antioch,¹² there are abundant mentions of walnut purchases. Indeed the man seems to have subsisted on the things, and his trade alone might have sufficed to make a walnut merchant wealthy!

7. Inscribed spoon with dedication to Juno. Photo courtesy British Museum, London.



The second linguistic challenge posed by the inscription on the spoon is the phrase εἰς τὰ πάτη. At first glance, it would appear that the phrase might mean “at the (cross) roads,” and hence that the spoon might have some connection with the meals known to have been offered to Hecate at such places. Unfortunately, however, for that simple interpretation, the word translated “road” is ὁ πάτος, masculine, and the spoon really presents the word τὸ πάτος, neuter. Even if we admit that we are dealing with an inscription by someone uneducated, who is likely to make grammatical errors, errors of gender are not those most frequently made, least of all if they involve the transfer of a word from a commoner to a rarer inflectional category.

Now if we look for the word τὸ πάτος, we find that it does indeed exist. It is used in a fragment of the Alexandrian poet Callimachus¹³ and means a special type of robe or gown made for the goddess Hera. We also know from papyrus commentary on the epic poet Antimachus¹⁴ that Callimachus got this rare word from Hagius and Dercylus, who were local historians of Argos, where Hera was particularly worshiped. Thus a literal translation of the phrase εἰς τὰ πάτη would give us “for the (sacred) gowns.”

But does this make any sense? One may speculate that Hera was identified with the Roman Juno, also the recipient of a spoon, or that an obscure tradition makes Hecate daughter of Zeus and Hera,¹⁵ or that a sacred snake is known to have been fed (with a spoon?) in the cult of Juno Sospita,¹⁶ but all these interrelationships do not explain to us how Hecate could have used a spoon “for the gowns.”

To pose the main question: Why would a wealthy walnut merchant give a spoon to Hecate? Why would someone give one to Juno Sospita, for that matter? Clearly there must have been some use for spoons in the cults of these goddesses but what it was remains a matter for speculation. It is sometimes stated in the literature,¹⁷ but without citation of specific evidence, that spoons could be used for sprinkling incense onto a holy fire. Even more intriguing, given the fact that spoons with Christian inscriptions, later than the Hecate spoon but contemporary with the Juno spoon, almost certainly were used for the administration of communion, is the possibility that we might be justified in seeing the spoon as intended for some kind of sacramental meal in the cult of these pagan divinities.¹⁸ This is an intriguing idea indeed, but finds no support in other information which we have concerning either cult. And furthermore, how could we reconcile it with the phrase εἰς τὰ πάτη?

Thus our analysis of this unusual gift of an apparently wealthy walnut merchant to a goddess who had somehow helped him has raised perhaps more questions than it has answered. The author would be grateful to anyone who could come forward with additional information that might shed light on the matter.

EUGENE N. LANE
University of Missouri-Columbia

- ¹D. E. Strong, *Greek and Roman Silver Plate* (Ithaca 1966) 129 and 155-56. Dates as early as the second century B.C., however, are tentatively proposed for some of the spoons in the exhibition catalogue *Silver for the Gods* (Toledo 1977).
- ²Acc. no. 74.147. It is 18 cm. long; 3.9 cm. wide; and weighs 37.8 grams. It was acquired by purchase, and the provenience is unknown.
- ³Strong, *op. cit.*, 178-79. Our example belongs to his category fig. 36 c. In later times, the finial goes out, even on ligulae, *ibid.*, 204-06 and fig. 40.
- ⁴*Ibid.* 178.
- ⁵*Ibid.* 206; the fullest discussions I have found of inscribed spoons are those of Horst W. Boehme, "Löffelbeigabe in spätrömischen Gräbern nördlich der Alpen," *Jahrbuch des römisch-germanischen Zentral-Museums* 17 (1970) 172-200 and Vladimir Milojcic, "Zu den spätkaiserzeitlichen und merowingischen Silberlöffeln," *Bericht der römisch-germanischen Kommission* 49 (1968) 11-148. It is from these two articles that the examples are taken.
- ⁶Milojicic, *op. cit.* 112-13, with plates 19-21.
- ⁷O. M. Dalton, *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities*, etc. (London 1901) 72, no. 322.
- ⁸F. T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, II (Milan 1981) 16-21.
- ⁹Ἐμβαδᾶς, meaning "shoemaker" in a fragment of Theopompus Comicus, preserved by the Scholiast on Plato's *Apology*; Edmonds, *Fragments of Attic Comedy*, I (Leiden 1957) 868, no. 57-58. See O. Masson, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 9 (1972) 97-101.
- ¹⁰See O. Masson, *ZPE* 11 (1973) 1-19.
- ¹¹In a fragment of Philyllius Comicus, preserved by Athenaeus, Edmonds, *op. cit.* I, 906-07. It is hardly accidental that both the diminutive and the profession-name formative are first attested in comic writers, with their use of colloquial speech.
- ¹²*P. Ryl.* IV, 629 *passim*. The spelling used is καρπίδιον, and the document can be dated between 317 and 323 A.D.
- ¹³Frag. 66, 2-3 Pfeiffer, assigned to the third book of the *Aetia*. The fragment is known from a quotation in the Byzantine medical writer Meletius and from *P. Oxy.* 19, 2211, fr. 1', 1-9. The word is also cited by the lexicographer Hesychius, who presumably has it from Callimachus.
- ¹⁴*P. Mil. Vogl.* I, 17, col. II, 23, of the second century A.D.
- ¹⁵A fragment of the comedian Sophron, preserved by the Scholiast on Theocritus II, 12b, Kaibel, *Comicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* I, i (Berlin 1899) 161.
- ¹⁶Propertius IV, 8, 1-14.
- ¹⁷E.g., *Pauly-Wissowa, Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, s.v. Löffel, col. 967.
- ¹⁸We do indeed hear of monthly Hecate banquets at Lagina-Stratoniceia in Caria, A. Laumonier, *Les cultes indigènes en Carie* (Paris 1958) 397 ff., relying on epigraphical evidence, but these occasions seem to be as devoid of inner spiritual meaning as pagan sacrifices and banquets usually are, and hardly provide a proper parallel to the Christian sacrament.

about the authors

Jane C. Biers is Curator of Ancient Art at the Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia. She received a Ph.D. at the University of California-Berkeley, doing her dissertation on "A Roman Bath at Corinth," which is now in press. Other publications include monographs on Cypriote archaeology, an article in *Muse* (3), and in the *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* (1977). Her excavation experience has been in England, Greece, Israel and Portugal.

William Biers, Professor of Classical Archaeology in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at the University of Missouri-Columbia, has excavated extensively in Turkey, Israel, Greece and Portugal, and is a frequent contributor to *Muse* (see volumes 5, 6, 7, 13 and 15). His book, *The Archaeology of Greece*, published by Cornell University Press, is a standard text for university students in archaeology.

David Butler, Education Coordinator/Registrar at the Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia, received his B.A. and M.A. in Art History at Florida State University in Tallahassee before coming to Missouri three years ago. His particular interest—seventeenth century art—is the result of several lengthy stays in Italy and a year at the Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida. He prefers Florida winters.

William Coulson is Associate Professor of Classics and Classical Archaeology at the University of Minnesota where he has taught since 1968. He received his Ph.D. degree from Princeton University and has worked on excavations at Nichoria (Greece) and Tel Mikhal (Israel). He is at present Co-Director of the Naukratis excavations.

Professor **Eugene Lane** has been with the Department of Classical Studies at the University of Missouri-Columbia since 1966, and is currently serving as Chairman. His publications have been primarily in the area of late paganism, and he has written extensively on the cults of Mên and Sabazius. His previous contributions to *Muse* have concerned the cults of Sabazius and Attis, as well as a group of votive and grave steles from Byzantium (*Muse* 3, 4 and 8).

Albert Leonard, Jr. is Associate Professor in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at the University of Missouri-Columbia. With a Ph.D. in 1976 from the University of Chicago, he has been Director or Co-Principal Investigator of excavations in Greece, Italy and Jordan, and is currently Co-Director of the Naukratis excavations.

Gloria S. Merker, Chairman of the Classics Department of Rutgers University in Newark, received an M.A. from the University of Missouri-Columbia, and a Ph.D. from Bryn Mawr College. She has participated in Missouri excavations at Jalame and Tel Anafa, and also at Tel Dan, in Israel. Her previous articles about Greek vases in the Museum's collections have appeared in *Muse* (1 and 8). Currently engaged in a long-term project at the American School of Classical Studies excavations in Corinth, she is also an Associate Editor of the *Israel Exploration Journal*. She recalls being the *very first* Museum Assistant in Missouri, helping the Weinbergs to move the study collections from Jesse Hall to the Museum's first official home in Ellis Library.

David Soren, Chairman of the Department of Classics at the University of Arizona, was formerly with the Department of Art History and Archaeology at the University of Missouri-Columbia; he is a regular contributor to *Muse* (9, 13, 14 and 15). In addition to his work as Director of the first session at Mirobriga in 1982, he has directed excavations at Kourion on Cyprus, and several sites in Tunisia.