

## UDDERS, PENISES, AND TESTICLES

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**Sexual and lactating organs of animals are both foods and symbols. Because the organs are visible when the animal is mating or nursing, their shape is unmistakable, and their symbolic potency clings to them, even after slaughter. Cooking them might mask or magnify these qualities. This article reports on the means employed in different communities to render these organs as comestibles. (Cooked penis, testicles, udders, symbolic associations)**

Of all the parts of animals that might be elevated from a position of least preferred foods to one of desirable foods, organs associated with sexuality present a special problem. Their potency, both as organs and as symbols, is fully established by the behavior of the animal. Often visible when the animal is mating or nursing, these organs are a direct link between the animal and the human-as-animal. They are natural signs that verge on the anthropomorphic. That is, they communicate a direct association between the human and the nonhuman in ways that are immediately real and relevant without any further modification. The shape and color of these organs are congruent to their human counterparts in ways that make the act of rendering them as food difficult.

They signify existentially: ecstasy, pain, nurturance, and desire. Like the heart and the liver, they are vital organs, not in the sense that life cannot continue when they are removed, but in the sense that these are the sources of life. Yet, in my multi-ethnic city, Chicago, markets abound where the hearts of beef, swine, and sheep are displayed next to ground meat, kidneys, trotters, and split heads, especially from calves, pigs, and lamb. These organs manage to overcome their unsavory associations. Udders, penises, and testicles, however, are nowhere to be found. Their potency seems to cling to them indelibly. The reproductive organs are rarely discarded in those places of food production in which the slaughter of any animal is non-routine and imbued with an aura of sacrifice. Only in industrial food production are udders, testicles, and penises considered unfit for human consumption. Nevertheless, in those communities where these organs will be consumed, they must be treated in extraordinary ways to render them as food.

Udders are eaten in all those places where animals are raised for family consumption. I have easily found recipes for this organ for every part of the world. While the sample is not large enough to definitively assert that preparing udders to be consumed is universally marked in some way, there is enough evidence to suggest that such marking is widely distributed among people raising animals. Recipes from

Elizabethan England, rural France, rural Germany, Northern India, Russia, and North Africa in which penises and udders are ingredients include all manner of domestic animals: goat (Mediterranean, India, Southeast Asia, Africa), buffalo (Mediterranean, India, Southeast Asia), camel (West Asia), sheep (Great Britain, Mediterranean, North Africa, West Asia), llama (Western South America), pig (Mediterranean), cow (Europe, Northern Asia, Africa), and horse (Central Asia).<sup>1</sup>

The udder is the most productive feature of a mature female animal when she is alive and lactating. When her cycle of pregnancies is carefully managed, the protein produced through her milk over the course of her reproductive life exceeds the value of the muscle meat at slaughter. Since all of the animals described as being consumed by these sources are raised in nonindustrial, rural contexts, the udder belongs to an animal that was probably milked by the same people who will be cooking and eating the organ. All of the hands of the family tugged at those teats to produce the milk and butter to sustain the family while the animal was reproductive. The management of the animal's lactation cycle was a concern of the family, just as much as the cycle of crops in the field. But when it is past its reproductive value to the family, the beast is table fare, and the udder is just another piece of the slaughtered animal. How, then, will those associations be severed and the organ transformed into food?

This process of cooking is bound up with practices, rather than discourses. This is to say, the way of transmitting information about the transformation of udder into meat is through the process of cooking it. The potency of the organ is taken for granted. It need not be highlighted. Instead, the practice, once learned, is sufficiently different from other preparations of organ and muscle meats as to verge on the ritualistic. The udder, like penises and testicles, could always be served as a forcemeat. Once the organ was ground, mixed with binders and spices, and squeezed into a sausage casing, its potency was masked and its flavor merged with other elements. This is perhaps the most common form of preparation. When diners are aware that the meat on their plate is udder, the cooking practices are more critical.

It is possible to construct a generic recipe for udder that incorporates all the various practices into one. The organ is skinned and the connective tissue at the margins is cut away, leaving the glands and the interior connective tissue. The organ is soaked in several changes of lukewarm water for two to three hours, after which it is carefully washed and dried. As it dries, it may be weighted like sweetbreads. The organ is boiled in salted water for about 20 minutes and then cooled. The boiled organ is then cut into pieces and roasted. The cutting begins with splitting it down the middle, and then separating the glands. The roasting process brings the meat as close to the heat source as possible. This is monitored to insure that the meat is not burned, and then the meat is cut into small cubes and stewed. It is during the stewing that various flavors are infused into the meat. This description of the practice is found in the late sixteenth century (Casteau 2006 [1604]).

Actual practices are variations of this master recipe: the initial boiling and the stewing with flavor elements are combined (Vehling 1977 [1936]); the roasting stage

is skipped (Russia, Northern India); the boiled udder is sliced, breaded, and fried (Germany); or stir-fried with flavor ingredients (India, Viet Nam) instead of roasted. Finally, many recipes used to cook tripe can be used to cook udder after it has been boiled and sectioned. The practices in West Yorkshire and East Lancashire, where udder is commonly sold already boiled as triperies for finishing at home,<sup>2</sup> provides the following: The organ is beaten to squeeze out as much liquid as possible. It is then boiled until tender. This can take more than six hours. After cooling in the pot overnight, the meat is boiled for an additional two hours and then chilled rapidly. The trimmed meat can be added to soup, warmed in a sauce, or diced cold and dressed with a vinaigrette (MacClancy 1992:162).

Boiling seems to be the common practice in all these recipes. The element in the organ that must be removed to transform it from producer of milk to consumable meat is the milk. Milk is a liquid. Boiling draws out the milk, rendering what remains as meat. Soaking can reduce the boiling time. As the soaking water becomes cloudy and is refreshed, the cook becomes convinced that the milk is leaving the organ. Boiling is the final stage of this soaking process. Once it is boiled, the udder becomes like any other piece of meat.<sup>3</sup> Alan Davidson (1999) confirms this analysis by citing boiling as the technique that prepares the organ for consumption; the flavor of any remaining milk would taint the meat (Davidson 1999:815).

Eating the penis and testicles of an animal represents an opposing cultural logic because the problem is to retain the potency of the sign as the organ is transformed into food. Animal penis eating is used in several parts of the world as a means to enhance male qualities of strength, virility, and prowess. Maintaining the organ's properties does not depend upon the shape of the finished food or its accompaniments, although some dishes magnify the signifiers to enhance the aphrodisiac qualities. An example of this is the Malaysian *sup kambing*, one of Malaysia's best-known dishes. It is a goat soup flavored with tomatoes, Chinese celery, and garam masala. Substituting bull penises for the goat makes it *sup torpedo*. The penises are served whole in the broth. The diner bites off pieces, just as one might eat an uncut sausage. At the Kuala Lumpur restaurants where the penile variety is served, diners have the option of enhancing the dish further by adding ingredients that build the symbolic power of the dish with bones and tendons. The ultimate combination is *sup torpedo campur grenade* (bull penis and goat testicles) (Cheong 2007). The retention of shape suggests a logic of sympathy between donor (animal) and recipient (diner) where the qualities of the former become imbued in the latter.

This is not the only strategy for retaining the potency of the organ during cooking. A restaurant in Beijing, Guo-li-zhuang, specializes in serving penises of various animals, domestic and wild. The restaurant is self-consciously health oriented. Diners are attended by both a waitress and nutritionist. Customers include both women and men. The health benefits for men revolve around virility. Eating penis is considered even more effective than taking Viagra. Women are told that the enhanced yang provided by eating animal penis will improve the skin, although they

are warned away from eating testicles. The organs are prepared in a variety of styles, depending on size and shape: julienned (dog); battered and deep fried (goat and dog); steamed whole, stir-fried, sliced length-wise like bacon (horse and donkey); diced (ox); even flambéed (yak); or in a combination (a hot pot of six different penises and four different testicles) (Spencer 2006). In this location, the active quality (yang) is inherent in the organ, not in its shape. The practice focuses on providing different preparations to make the experience of eating the food more enjoyable, without reducing its physical potency.

This logic is also found in other parts of the world. A North African recipe available in an English commercial cookbook serves penis sliced cross-wise, like sausage. The raw bull's organ, which weighs about one pound, is scalded with hot water, skinned, and pared of veins and any connecting tissue. It is then boiled for ten minutes, drained, and sliced. Aromatics, like onion, garlic, and coriander are fried in oil until soft, and the penis slices are then warmed in the vegetables. Seasoning is added along with water. The mixture is then braised for two hours (Dickson and Paterson 1998). A similar Yemini preparation, called *geed*, adds the flavors of chopped tomato, pepper, cumin, and saffron to the braise. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2002).

Testicles are treated similar to penises in China. The retention of shape is less important than enhancing the dining experience for the consumer. Testicles are commonly eaten from all domestic animals, especially bulls, buffalo, horse, pigs, lamb, sheep, and turkey. The best known preparation in North America is to remove any connective tissue from the testicles of younger animals and cut them into cubes. These are then battered in seasoned flour and cornmeal, then fried, drained, and served with a vinegar-based pepper sauce.

Like penis cookery, there is shock value in eating testicles, similar to that associated with eating sheep eyes in North Africa. A plate of fried testicles is more likely to be ordered as a dare among young men testing their group social rank, than ordinary diners looking for a tasty repast. The organs are served, but often under pretense. I once encountered testicles that were simply sautéed and served on dressed greens as a lunch salad in a tiny Parisian restaurant. When I shared my experience with a chef of French origin and training, he confirmed that turkey or duck testicles, the most abundant and cheapest source of the organ in the market, are sometimes served in France as chicken liver would be served. In Spring 2007, San Francisco's Incanto restaurant served duck testicles with bacon and peas on the regular menu (Cosentino 2007).

Udders, penises, and testicles are not common foods, even though they are as plentiful as liver, sweetbreads, kidneys, and hearts, organs commonly found described and elaborated in cookbook recipes. Udders were once far more commonly available and eaten, both at home and in public eateries. Davidson (1999) refers to Samuel Pepys's diary indicating that he had a meal of udder with his wife and friend at a public house in 1660 as evidence of this previous ubiquity. They started

disappearing from easy availability in the late nineteenth century in urban Europe and North America (Davidson 1999:815).

Penises and testicles never seem to have been favored in the marketplace. Perhaps their associations with male virility elevated the organs from ordinary food to a more potent and dangerous substance, to be taken only when symptoms require them. A group of men sitting and eating testicles is more likely to be viewed as benign in spaces where only male access is permitted.

The Beijing restaurant serving the various animal penises was described by one of the waitresses as “an unusual place to work, partly because . . . [she] has to recite tales proving the vigor of the animals in question as they are being eaten, and partly because of the interaction with the clientele.” The waitress is quoted as saying, “I did find it embarrassing at first [and] sometimes the customers take advantage of me by asking rude questions” (Spencer 2006). Reciting tales to prove the vigor of animals and the rude questions from diners both point to the positive association of self with the animal organ in this location where that linkage is healthy, and by inversion, to the negative where that linkage is excessive, dangerous, or otherwise out of place. Eating foods perceived as dangerous when there is no need to do so is dirty in the deepest and truest sense. It is self out place.

My argument is that udders, penises, and testicles are difficult to separate from the self and hence persistently problematic as foods. This persistence can be attributed directly to their congruence with their human counterparts. The similarity renders them as self, instead of as food. People make sense of what might be comestible through systems of signs that are read from the parts of animals and plants. This system of signs, like those of locations that are good for sleeping, water that is good to drink, or strangers who are likely to be friendly, are among the most ancient, involve the fewest number of elements, and are the most widely distributed of all communities of signs. In the case of udders, penises, and testicles, as with all organs and muscles, the salient features are the organs’ functions in the living animal.

#### NOTES

1. The tripe dresser at these triperies is also likely to offer dark and light tripe, cows heel, neat’s-foot oil, and black (blood) pudding, as well as elder (udder) (Davidson 1999:815).
2. My mother, a conservative Jew for whom the very thought of eating milk with meat was nauseating, would acquire an udder from her butcher about once a year. The acquisition itself was problematic for both the Kosher butcher and my mother. If it were known that he offered the organ to a customer, the Orthodox community would ostracize him and the kosher status of his shop would be in jeopardy. He carried the organ from his back door to my mother’s truck without her ever having to see it displayed in his meat case. He also informed her of its availability in whispers, out of earshot of other customers. For her part, the organ was equally problematic. She had committed to keeping her home Kosher under the more liberal practices of the Conservative denomination of the faith, and udder was acceptable as long as the milk was completely removed. She actually consulted her mother-in-law initially to make sure her practice coincided with my father’s family’s customs on this most problematic of meats for religious Jews. She employed all of the techniques of the master recipe, as

well as three changes of soaking water. For her, the milk was not completely gone until after the roasting.

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