

Everyday cooking and eating: an interdisciplinary study of the remains recovered from a pantry at the Vilauba villa near Girona

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Traditionally, Roman dietary practices have been studied through information derived from literary sources, as well as from vessels associated with culinary practices; more recently, data derived from the analysis of plant and animal remains are being integrated. Each category of evidence provides different kinds of information, one complementing another. Written sources provide information on dietary recommendations, recipes, eating habits, product prices, and food preservation techniques, but the information is very general and in many ways biased towards the habits of the élite. This is also the case with Marcus Gavius Apicius' *De re coquinaria*, although when it was written and who wrote the recipes are unclear. It is generally believed to be a compendium of recipes from different sources added at different times by different authors, and to show the culinary tastes of élites or city-dwellers.¹ The work would lead one to deduce that meat was one of the main components of the Roman diet: out of its 10 chapters, one is devoted to mince recipes, one to poultry, one to mammals, and the last two to fish, but others have argued that Roman meals would mostly have been composed of cereals and legumes, making the diet primarily a vegetarian one.² Such literary works, however, were never intended to point to the amount of meat, legumes, cereals or vegetables being consumed at the time, nor by whom. Further, dietary habits not only varied through time, but also across the empire's different provinces, between different regions within each province, and between different social groups.

Study of vessels associated with culinary practices can also provide important information on how utensils may have been used to process, cook and serve food at the site in question.³ It is also possible to determine the cooking techniques and types of fuel employed.⁴ Other avenues of ceramic research, such as residue analyses, can provide evidence about the type of organic products (e.g., oils, lipids, fats) involved.⁵ When the cooked product concerns meat, it is the study of faunal remains associated with the vessels that provides the most detailed information. Zooarchaeological studies allow one to discern what species were raised for meat consumption, how old the animals were when slaughtered, how carcasses were processed, and which body parts were most consumed at a particular site. This information adds to the information on how food was obtained, processed

1 C. Grocock and S. Grainger, *Apicius: a critical edition with an introduction and English translation* (Totnes 2006) 8 and 23.

2 J. André, *L'alimentation et la cuisine à Rome* (Paris 1981) 134; J. Gómez i Pallares, *Apici. L'art de la cuina* (Barcelona 1990) 12; J. Gómez, "Instrumenta coquorum. Els estris de la cuina en Apici (amb testimonis, des de Plaute a Isidor de Sevilla)," in J. Aquilué and M. Roca (edd.), *Ceràmica comuna romana d'època alto-imperial a la Península Ibèrica. Estat de la qüestió* (Monografies Emporitanes 7, 1995) 25-36; N. Blanc and A. Nercessian, *La cuisine romaine antique* (Grenoble 1994); D. Thurmond, *A handbook of food processing in classical Rome* (Leiden 2006).

3 Gómez *ibid.* (1995) 25-36.

4 M. Bats, *Vaisselle et alimentation à Olbia de Provence (v.350-v.50 av. J.-C.). Modèles culturels et catégories céramiques* (RANarb Suppl. 18, 1988).

5 R. Evershed, "Organic residue analysis in archaeology: the archaeological biomarker revolution," *Archaeometry* 50 (2008) 895-924.