

Animals in Antiquity – final project

Introduction

This essay, which is a part of the final project for the Animals in Antiquity, is about Roman ancient cuisine, its cookbook by Apicius and animals that were consumed back then. There will also be introduced recipes from Ancient Rome. Some of those recipes will be tried out and documented with a little bit of commentary.

Theory

Most of what we know nowadays about culinary adventures in Ancient Rome are from the work of Marcus Gavius Apicius from the 1st century AD (reign of the Roman emperor Tiberius). He is known as a passionate gourmet and supposed author of *De Re Coquinaria* (*On the Subject of Cooking*). This cookbook is a collection of Roman cookery recipes. These recipes are mostly for the wealthiest classes because they are ingredients of an exotic nature (such as flamingo) that could not be available for the poorer people.

De Re Coquinaria is divided into ten books:

1. *Epimeles* — The Careful Housekeeper – wine, oil, garum etc.
2. *Sarcoptes* — The Meat Mincer, Ground beef
3. *Cepuros* — The Gardener – Vegetables
4. *Pandecter* — Many Ingredients
5. *Ospreon* — Legumes
6. *Aeropetes* — Birds, Poultry
7. *Polyteles* — The Gourmet – Sumptuous dishes
8. *Tetrapus* — The Quadruped – Four-legged animals
9. *Thalassa* — The Sea – Seafood
10. *Halieus* — The Fisherman – sauces for fish.

We find out from the cookbook that the Romans were not penurious when it came to what should they eat. If we focus mainly on the animals, it seems they consumed a lot more kinds than we do today. In the book's recipes are mentioned these animals:

Birds – ostrich, crane or duck, partridge, dove, wood pigeon, squab (young pigeon), thrush, figpecker, peacock, flamingo, parrot, pheasant, chicken, goose.

Sumptuous dishes – sow/pig, snail.

Quadrupeds – wild boar, deer, chamois, gazelle, wild sheep, ox, calf (young ox), kid (young goat), lamb, pig, hare, dormouse.

The Sea – shellfish, ray, calamary, cuttlefish, polypus (octopus), oysters, bivalves, sea urchin, mussels, sardines.

The Fisherman – conger, horned fish, mullet, tunny, perch, red snapper, murena, lacertus fish, tooth fish, dory, sea scorpion, eel.

Here is an example of Apicius's recipe from book VI (we can notice that Apicius was not a cook because of the lack of measurements in his recipes):

231 For Flamingo and Parrot

Scald the flamingo, wash and dress it, put it in a pot, add water, salt, dill, and a little vinegar, to be parboiled. Finish cooking with a bunch of leeks and coriander and add some reduced must to give it color. In the mortar crush pepper, cumin, coriander, laser root, mint, rue, moisten with vinegar, add dates, and the fond of the braised bird, thicken, strain, cover the bird with the sauce and serve. Parrot is prepared in the same manner.

1 Prior to removing the feathers; also singe the fine feathers and hair.

232 Another Way

Roast the bird. Crush pepper, lovage, celery seed, sesame, 1 parsley, mint, shallots, dates, honey, wine, broth, vinegar, oil, reduced must to taste.

Romans were greatly influenced by the Greek culture and with that came also their culinary inspirations. Romans held social events such as dinner parties (*convivium*) which were similar to Greek *symposium* but that was more focused on drinking instead of food.

Here is a very brief introduction into Roman food: They were two types of bread – wheat bread for the richer, barley bread for the poorer. Farming was valued back then because vegetables and legumes were important part of Roman dishes. They ate olives, nuts and olive oil was essential. Meat eating was discouraged even though a lot was prepared (bacon, sausages). Milk of goats and sheeps was used rather than from cows and was used to make many types of cheese. Sweet foods including pastry used honey as a sweetener because they did not know sugar properly yet. But had a variety of dried fruits (figs, dates, plums). Salt was expensive in Rome but important for the making of *garum* (fermented fish sauce adopted from Greeks – *garum*). As for seasoning, they used garden herbs, cumin, coriander, juniper berries and some imported ones – pepper, saffron, cinnamon and fennel. And Roman beverages included mainly wine mixed with water (“straight” wine was for barbarians) and forerunner of absinthe.

Project

This part of the paper is focused on three chosen recipes from the era of ancient Rome. Those recipes are adjusted for our time – e.g. we bake in the oven instead of on the fire etc.

Pork soup with fruit

Bake half a kilo of salted minced pork belly with a little bit of olive oil in the oven for circa 30 minutes (180°C). Take 400 ml of water and 400 ml of sweet white wine, 2 spoons of fish sauce (nowadays substitute of garum), 50 ml of olive oil and put it into the pot and let it boil. Add one minced onion and the pork belly and let it cook on an easy flame. Parch a little roman cumin and black pepper, crush and add to the pot also with mint and dill. Salt the soup with the fish sauce. You can improve the taste by adding vinegar and honey. Thicken the soup with wholegrain flour stirred in cold water. Add minced spring onion, rough minced dried figs and apricots. Cook for circa 3-5 minutes. Serve with bread or other pastry.



Picture 1: Minced onion, dried fruit, baked pork belly and dough for the flatbread.



Picture 2: beginning of the soup cooking.



Picture 3: the finished soup.

Spelt flatbread

Spelt flour, salt and water stir in a bowl and make a dough out of it to make thin flatbreads. Fry it on a pan or bake it in the oven.

Cheap and easy recipe. Probably eaten mostly by the poorer people and as a side dish. This recipe was used in this project for a side dish to the pork soup.



Picture 4: baked flatbread.



Picture 5: finished meal-soup with the flatbread as a side dish.

Roman toasts

Stir an egg with milk in a bowl. Take a wheat bread (or a white stick loaf), put it in the bowl and let it soak with the egg-milk concoction. Then fry it on a pan with oil. Coat the bread with honey before serving.

This meal was probably served to wealthier people for breakfast because of the wheat bread. The recipe is basically known to us nowadays as a French Toast with some minor adjustments. But it is very easy to prepare and can be eaten as a breakfast or a dessert.



Picture 6: finished Roman toasts.

Closure

In this project I tried out three recipes from the ancient Rome. I chose those because of the availability of ingredients and easiness of the process. The cooking was not difficult but the soup took some time. In the end I would not recommend the pork belly soup because it was quite fat/oily and I do not like cooking with wine. The flatbread was challenging in the matter of stickiness of the dough but overall easy. And about the Roman toasts – I liked them. It was super easy to prepare and tasted good. I will probably make those in the future for breakfasts.

Sources:

BERANOVÁ, Magdalena a Jaroslav ŘEŠÁTKO. *Jak se jedlo ve starověku: římská kuchařka*. Praha: Libri, 2000. ISBN 80-7277-021-7.

MARTIA, Tita Iuventia a Appius Sullanius PERTINAX. Z Antické kuchyně: Dobové recepty. *Castra Romana: Antický Řím / Ancient Rome* [online]. Plzeň [cit. 2020-02-15]. Dostupné z: <http://castraromana.cz/Kucharka.html>

Food and dining in the Roman Empire. In: *Wikipedia: the free encyclopedia* [online]. San Francisco (CA): Wikimedia Foundation, 2001-, 29 January 2020 [cit. 2020-02-15]. Dostupné z: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Food_and_dining_in_the_Roman_Empire

THAYER, Bill. Apicius: De Re Coquinaria. *Bill Thayer's Web Site* [online]. Chicago, 2016 [cit. 2020-02-15]. Dostupné z: <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Apicius/home.html>

Pictures 1-6 photographed by Jitka Provazníková for this project.