

Ancient Roman Recipes

These recipes have been adapted to use ingredients and appliances available in the modern world, but are as close as possible to the recipes we think Romans used, based on actual recorded recipes, foods mentioned in other texts, and archaeological evidence.

Boiled Eggs with Pine Nut Sauce

Perhaps the most popular of all the Roman appetizers was the egg. In fact, the ancient Latin saying *ab ovo usque ad malum* literally means "from the egg to the fruit," which translates loosely as "the beginning of the meal to the end." In this recipe, the egg is adorned with lovely pine nut sauce.

Recipe:

4 medium-boiled eggs

2 ounces pine nuts

3 tablespoons vinegar

1 teaspoon honey

Pinch each of pepper and lovage (or celery leaf)

1. Soak the pine nuts 3-4 hours beforehand in the vinegar.
2. Mix all the sauce ingredients thoroughly in a blender. This exquisite sauce should be presented in a sauce boat so that each person can serve himself or herself, since the eggs cannot be sliced and placed on a dish in advance.



Garum (Fish Sauce)

As they are with modern Romans, sauces and marinades were an essential element in ancient Roman cuisine. One of the most popular was garum, a salty, aromatic, fish-based sauce. Like so many other Roman treasures, it was borrowed from the ancient Greeks. Apicius used it in all his recipes, and the poet Martial wrote of it: "Accept this exquisite garum, a precious gift made with the first blood spilled from a living mackerel."

We won't recommend you try the ancient version (see below). Instead, try the easier modern recipe.

Ancient Garum Recipe

Use fatty fish, for example, sardines, and a well-sealed (pitched) container with a 26-35 quart capacity. Add dried, aromatic herbs possessing a strong flavor, such as dill, coriander, fennel, celery, mint, oregano, and others, making a layer on the bottom of the container; then put down a layer of fish (if small,



leave them whole, if large, use pieces) and over this, add a layer of salt two fingers high. Repeat these layers until the container is filled. Let it rest for seven days in the sun. Then mix the sauce daily for 20 days. After that, it becomes a liquid.

Modern Garum Recipe

Cook a quart of grape juice, reducing it to one-tenth its original volume. Dilute two tablespoons of anchovy paste in the concentrated juice and mix in a pinch of oregano.

Pear Patina

The Romans referred to their dessert course as mensa secunda, or "second meal." They satisfied their fondness for sweets with desserts such as fruitcakes, pudding, sweet egg-based dishes, and sweet cheeses—and in this case, a delicious pear patina.

Recipe

A pear patina: Grind boiled and cored pears with pepper, cumin, honey, passum, garum, and a bit of oil. When the eggs have been added, make a patina, sprinkle pepper over, and serve.

Modern Pear Patina Recipe (serves 4)

4 pears

water or white wine (to cook the pears)

1 tablespoon honey

pinch each pepper and cumin

1/2 cup passum (a modern version of this raisin wine is the Italian dessert wine Vin Santo)

3 eggs

1 1/2 cups milk (optional)

1 tablespoon olive oil



Poach the whole pears in water or white wine. When they are done, peel and core them, then crush them into a puree, mixing in the honey, pepper, cumin and passum. Beat the eggs, adding the milk if desired. Then blend this into the pear mixture with the olive oil. Pour into a casserole and bake for around 20 minutes at 350° F.

Libum (Cheesecake)

Libum was a sacrificial cake sometimes offered to household spirits during Rome's early history. The recipe below comes from the Roman consul Cato's agricultural writings, which included simple recipes for farmers. Libum, sometimes served hot, is a cheesecake he included.

Recipe (serves 4)

1 cup plain, all purpose flour

8 ounces ricotta cheese
1 egg, beaten
bay leaves
1/2 cup clear honey

Sift the flour into a bowl. Beat the cheese until it's soft and stir it into the flour along with the egg. Form a soft dough and divide into 4. Mold each one into a bun and place them on a greased baking tray with a fresh bay leaf underneath. Heat the oven to 425° F. Cover the cakes with your brick* and bake for 35-40 minutes until golden-brown. Warm the honey and place the warm cakes in it so that they absorb it. Allow to stand 30 minutes before serving.

*The Romans often covered their food while it was cooking with a domed earthenware cover called a testo. You can use an overturned, shallow clay pot, a metal bowl, or casserole dish as a brick.

Columella's Herb Salad

A wonderful salad, unusual for the lack of salt (perhaps the cheese was salty enough), and that Columella crushes the ingredients in the mortar.

Recipe

100g fresh mint (and/or pennyroyal)
50g fresh coriander
50g fresh parsley
1 small leek
a sprig of fresh thyme
200g salted fresh cheese
vinegar
pepper
olive oil



Apart from lettuce and rocket many plants were eaten raw—watercress, mallow, sorrel, goosefoot, purslane, chicory, chervil, beet greens, celery, basil and many other herbs.

Roast Boar

Remove the bristles and skin from a joint of boar, then scatter over it plenty of sea salt, crushed pepper and coarsely ground roasted cumin. Leave it in the refrigerator for 2-3 days, turning it occasionally.

Wild boar can be dry, so wrap it in slices of bacon before you roast it. At the very least wrap it in pork caul. Then put it into the oven at its highest setting and allow it to brown for 10 minutes. Reduce the oven temperature to 350°F, and continue to roast for 2 hours per kg, basting regularly.

Meanwhile prepare the sauce. To make caroenum sauce, reduce 500ml wine to 200ml. Add 2 tablespoons of honey, 100ml passum, or dessert wine, and salt or garum to taste. Take the meat out of the oven and leave it to rest while you finish the sauce. Pour off the fat from the roasting tin, then deglaze it with the wine and the honey mixture. Pour this into a saucepan, add the roasting juices, and fat to taste.

Carve the boar into thin slices at the table, and serve the sweet sauce separately.

You may prefer to roast or fry your ostrich, rather than boil it. Whichever method you choose, this sauce goes with it well. For 500g ostrich pieces, fried or boiled, you will need:

- 2 teaspoon flour
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 300ml passum (dessert wine)
- 1 tablespoon roast cumin seeds
- 1 teaspoon celery seeds
- 3 pitted candied dates
- 3 tablespoons garum or a 50g tin of anchovies
- 1 teaspoon peppercorns
- 2 tablespoons fresh chopped mint
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 3 tablespoons strong vinegar

Make a roux with the flour and 1 tablespoon of the olive oil, add the passum, and continue to stir until the sauce is smooth. Pound together in the following order: the cumin, celery seeds, dates, garum or anchovies, peppercorns, chopped mint, the remaining olive oil, the honey, and vinegar. Add this to the thickened wine sauce. Then stir in the ostrich pieces and let them heat through in the sauce.

for the vinaigrette

- 3 tablespoons strong vinegar
- 2 tablespoons garum, or vinegar with anchovy paste
- 9 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 finely chopped shallots
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon lovage seeds
- 25g fresh mint

Put all of the vinaigrette ingredients into a jar and shake well to blend them together.

Brush your tuna fillets with oil, pepper and salt, then grill them on one side over a hot barbecue.

Turn them and brush the roasted side with the vinaigrette. Repeat. The tuna flesh should be pink inside so don't let it overcook. Serve with the remains of the vinaigrette.

400g crushed nuts—almonds, walnuts or pistachios

200g pine nuts

100g honey

100ml dessert wine

4 eggs

100ml full-fat sheep's milk

1 teaspoon salt or garum

pepper

Preheat the oven to 240°C/475°F/Gas 9.

Place the chopped nuts and the whole pine nuts in an oven dish and roast until they have turned golden. Reduce the oven temperature to 200°C/400°F/Gas 6. Mix the honey and the wine in a pan and bring to the boil, then cook until the wine has evaporated. Add the nuts and pine nuts to the honey and leave it to cool. Beat the eggs with the milk, salt or garum and pepper. Then stir the honey and nut mixture into the eggs. Oil an oven dish and pour in the nut mixture. Seal the tin with silver foil and place it in roasting tin filled about a third deep with water. Bake for about 25 minutes until the pudding is firm. Take it out and when it is cold put it into the fridge to chill. To serve, tip the tart on to a plate and pour over some boiled honey.

Rustic Yogurt Biscuits

A recipe for those who want to eat a cookie with ancient and rustic taste. In one recipe a set of ingredients that explode in the simplicity and lightness of yogurt that gently caresses the biscuit.

200grams of Soft wheat flour

100grams of White rice flour

1Egg

1Egg yolk

55grams of Low fat yogurt

75grams of Corn oil

150grams of Sugar

1tablespoon of Natural vanilla extract

5grams of Baking powder

1dash of Table salt

Mix all the liquids (eggs, oil and yogurt) and, in a separate bowl, all solids (flour, sugar, flavoring, salt and yeast).

Add these ingredients to the liquid and mix up to create the classic dough. Roll out the dough quite thick (about 1.5 cm) and create cookies.

Give them a rough and rustic shape. Bake on plate lined with parchment paper for about 15-20 minutes until golden brown.

Let cool on wire rack.

Vegetable Salad

This recipe shows the principles of the Mediterranean diet, through an easy but extremely tasty manner to use vegetables and olive oil (EVO). The origins of the Mediterranean diet, since the times of the ancient Romans, have been maintained through the centuries of Italian history, by poverty that characterized the Middle Ages in our country, when the people were forced to integrate with the vegetables their poor feeding, and then by the southern country cooking tradition, which has enhanced the poor food resources with a wise and varied use of its components.

100grams of Green peas
400grams of Whole potatoes
150grams of Carrots
100grams of Feta
150grams of Ham steak, thick sliced
80grams of Pine nuts
2tablespoons of Extra virgin olive oil (EVO), fruity

Boil all vegetables in a pot for 30 minutes or until tender. To maintain health benefiting properties of vegetables, better to peel them after cooked. Drain well and dice potatoes, carrots, ham and feta. Place all in a salad bowl.

Meanwhile, in a pan quickly toast the pine nuts, until lightly brown. Add them to a salad bowl.

Gradually add the extra virgin olive oil. Mix well.

Let cool at least 1 hour before serving.

Chicken and Beetroot Soup

"For Varro Beets, take black beets and clean the roots well. Cook them with mead and some salt and oil. Boil them down until the liquid is saturated - this liquid makes a nice drink. It is also nice to cook a chicken with this." - Apicius, 3.2.4



- 3 Raw Beetroot
- 1 Chicken Thigh
- 500ml White Wine
- 500ml Water
- 100g Honey
- 2 tbsp Olive Oil
- Salt and Pepper

• Begin by adding the wine, honey, oil and water to a saucepan. Add the chicken thigh too, then turn on the heat. This is the stock for the soup.

- Whilst waiting for

the water to boil, peel and either grate or finely chop the beetroot. This bit is incredibly messy and your



kitchen will probably resemble the fields of Cannae after Hannibal had his way with the Romans.

- When the stock is simmering away, add the beetroot. Simmer for 1.5 hours to reduce the soup.
- When the time is up, take the chicken out and shred the meat using two forks. Pop this back in the pan with the soup.
- Have a taste and season accordingly. When this is done, the soup is ready. Ladle some into a bowl and serve with some bread. Delicious!

Bucellatum – Roman Army Hardtack



The late-Roman Codex Theodosianus, a compilation of Roman laws, states that during expeditions a Roman soldier should be supplied with "bucellatum ac panem, vinum quoque atque acetum, sed et laridum, carnem verbecinam." or "hardtack and bread, wine too and vinegar, but also bacon and mutton." (VII.4.6). Soldiers were supposed to have the hardtack, mutton and vinegar for two

days and then have a day of bread, wine and bacon. What is hardtack?

Hardtack is a simple biscuit made from flour, salt and water. As the name suggests, it is rock hard, baked twice at low temperatures for a very long time, ensuring that no moisture is left inside. This makes bucellatum perfect for soldiering since without moisture it takes a long time to go off - ideal for prolonged campaigns in Britain where the weather would quickly spoil bread and flour. Just as bucellatum was perfectly suited to soldiering, it was perfectly suited to soldiers too - a tooth lost to this rock hard biscuit was just another war wound. In fact, so perfect was this match that Roman soldiers came to be known as bucellarii (Photius, Bibliotheca, 80). The association between hardtack and the military continues long past ancient Rome, with hardtack being eaten by crusaders, Elizabethan sailors and by folks fighting in the American Civil War.

Bucellatum may have been eaten dry, soaked in posca or softened in a stew - no doubt soldiers found a variety of ways to make this staple more exciting. Given how long it lasts, if you cook up a batch you can try new ways of preparing it for years to come. Whilst there is no surviving recipe for Roman bucellatum, there are plenty for hardtack. All are based upon flour, salt and water, ingredients which the Roman army had in abundance and distributed to its soldiers. Instead of oil, which some recipes call for, I have used a small amount of butter.

Bucellatum/Hardtack

(makes 8)



- 350g Flour (Wholemeal)
- 75ml Water
- 1 tsp Salt
- 10g Butter/Lard or 1 tbsp Olive Oil

Method

- Mix the flour, salt and butter.
- Add the water, bit at a time, to create a stiff (dry) dough - hardtack is supposed to be completely dry when finished.
- Roll the dough out until it is 1/2 inch thick. Some sources describe bucellatum as being round, so use an upturned glass to cut out the biscuits. You can cut it as you wish however - I can't imagine the soldiers being too fussy. Punch holes in the dough to allow the air - and moisture - to escape whilst baking. I used a chopstick to do this.



- Place onto a baking tray and into an oven preheated to around 120 Celsius - you want to cook the hardtack at a low heat for a long time. Mine took 2.5 hours. Halfway through I turned the biscuits over and re-punched the holes.
- Leave the hardtack to cool in the oven for several hours. If any are still moist, cook in the oven until totally dry.

Dill Chicken

(Serves 2)



- Handful of Fresh Dill
- Handful of Fresh Mint
- 1/2 tsp Asafoetida
- 1 tbsp Red Wine Vinegar
- 2 tbsp Liquamen
- 5 Dried Dates
- 1 tbsp Wholegrain Mustard
- 1 tbsp Olive Oil
- 2 tbsp Caroenum or Balsamic Glaze
- 2 Chicken Breasts

- Add the dates to a mortar, removing the stones if there are any. Add just enough water to cover the dates, then crush with a pestle to form a date paste.
- Wash the dill and mint leaves. Chop them finely, or tear apart and add to the mortar alongside the asafoetida, red wine vinegar, liquamen, mustard, and caroenum/balsamic glaze. Crush everything until it is well mixed.
- Dice the chicken into bite-size pieces. You're going to cook the chicken using the hob, so heat the oil in a saucepan/frying pan/casserole/earthenware dish. When it is hot enough, add the chicken pieces and cook for a few minutes.
- Add the dill sauce to the pot, mix everything together, and cook on a low heat for 15-20 minutes. If you have a lid, use it to keep moisture in. If not, add a bit of water if it starts to look too dry. The sauce should be quite thick, so don't add too much water.
- Once the chicken is cooked, the Dill Chicken is ready to serve. I recommend it with the Lentil and Root Veg Mash, or the Parsnip Mash, as these absorb the sauce well.



Roman (French) Toast

So much of Roman cooking involves familiarising yourself with the unfamiliar - obscure ingredients, unusual methods of preparation, and high-on-non-existent instructions. So it took me by great surprise when, fumbling through the pages of Apicius, I found a very familiar recipe indeed - it would appear that the Romans had a thing for French Toast!



Needless to say the Romans were there first, so perhaps we should rename the recipe 'Roman Toast', but I can't help but imagine Vercingetorix, defeated by Caesar, being paraded through the streets of Rome with some French Toast in hand.



You may wonder what the point of posting this recipe is when I could just guide you elsewhere, but I think it's nice to see some continuity with the Roman world as well as the near-infinite differences. You'll notice that the recipe calls for 'fine white bread' - given how time consuming and wasteful it is to produce white flour, white bread was a luxury available only to the well-off in the ancient world. As it is written, this is a recipe of some status, but feel free to use whatever type of bread

you wish, whether fresh or stale.

Roman Toast (Makes 6 slices)

"Slice fine white bread, remove the crust, and break it into large pieces. Soak these pieces in milk and beaten egg, fry in oil, and cover with honey before serving." - Apicius, 7.13.3



- 3 Eggs
- 200ml Milk
- Honey
- 6 Slices Bread

- Thinly slice the loaf of bread - it fries better this way. Remove the crusts, and break into large chunks if you wish.
- Break the three eggs into a casserole dish or a bowl. Add the 200ml of milk and mix it all together.



- Soak the bread slices/chunks in the mixture for a few seconds on each side. If you soak them for too long, the end result will be more omelette than toast (still tasty mind you). Drain the excess mixture off.

- Drop the bread into a hot, oily frying pan. Turn it over occasionally, making sure it doesn't burn.

You know it's done when it starts to look like the picture below. When you're ready to serve, cover it in honey, as per the recipe. Cinnamon works well too, and was available to the Romans.



Posca

The Roman vinegar-based wonder-drink, is a bit of a mystery, because as much as people keep mentioning it, it is oddly absent from ancient literature. Posca appears in books and articles, being sipped by soldiers and passed around by pals, yet we don't even have a recipe for it!

Basically, we know that soldiers were given a vinegar ration (Vegetius, Concerning Military Matters, 3.3), and that this vinegar could be mixed with water and drunk. (Celsus, On Medicine, 2.27) Hadrian drank posca to 'be one of the soldiers' (Historia Augusta: Hadrian, 10.2), and from this we can infer that it wasn't a drink usually served to the rich. On the contrary, this was a drink sold on the streets! (Suetonius, Vitellius, 12.1) If you think about it, this makes a lot of sense - vinegar is what is left when wine production goes 'wrong', or if wine is left exposed for too long. Knowing how much wine the Romans got through, it stands to reason that there was a lot of vinegar knocking about - so, why not put it to use?

Clearly posca was good enough to keep a Roman army marching - in his soldiering days, Cato the Elder drank posca to fend off raging thirst. (Plutarch, Cato the Elder, 1.10). The sharpness of the vinegar masked the taste of questionable water, the acidity would have helped to kill off certain bacteria, and, according to a recent study, vinegar makes you feel more full after eating bread. We shouldn't rush to say that the Romans knew all of this, but it is important

nonetheless. What wasn't so important to the Romans was writing the recipe down, which leaves us in a bit of a pickle.

I've encountered several recipes online, some simplistic, and others quite complex. They're all feasible with regards to ingredients, so we're going to try them all and see how they taste. If anybody can find a reliable source for any of these recipes, please do get in touch! Before starting, make sure you use brewed vinegar (red-wine vinegar preferably), rather than distilled.

1) Ever-so-simple Soldier's Posca

All the sources say is that soldiers drank a mixture of vinegar and water, so that's going to be our starting point. Nothing fancy here.



Ingredients

- 2 tbsp Red Wine Vinegar
- 250ml Water

Methods

- Mix and drink!

Notes

- If you want to replicate that 'stuck-in-the-freezing-cold-north-of-England' feeling, or fancy something a bit more refreshing, use chilled water.

2) Sharp-but-sweet Posca

I've seen several websites suggesting that honey was added to posca (without providing sources mind you). It's a feasible suggestion, so let's pretend we're an entrepreneuring posca salesman looking to one-up the competition, and give it a go.

Ingredients

- 2 tbsp Red Wine Vinegar
 - 250ml Water
 - 1 tbsp Honey
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- If using set honey, melt it in the microwave for 20 seconds first.
 - Add the honey to the water, give it a stir, then add the vinegar.

Stale Bread Salad



With 'Best Before' and 'Use By' dates in abundance, I think we have grown scared of what we eat. How many times have you poured away milk, or thrown out a loaf of bread because it was past the little date written on the packaging? Or how many times have you gone rummaging to the back of the supermarket shelves to gain an extra day or two? I know I do it all the time! In reality, your loaf of sliced white isn't going to turn into a

rock-hard ball of blue fur the moment it hits midnight, and even if it does, it still has its uses.

This week we're taking stale bread, something which I imagine was abundant in ancient Rome, and giving it a little bit of extra life. To do so, we're going to enlist the help of our favourite Roman drink, Posca! The recipe, if followed literally, results in an unusual looking paste. Delicious though it is, it doesn't look very appetising, which is why I've made the salad a second way too.

You'll notice that the recipe calls for the dish to be chilled with 'snow'. Snow wasn't exactly abundant in ancient Rome, but it was possible to import some, albeit at great expense. The use of snow in this recipe adds an opulence which we, with our humble refrigerators, cannot hope to emulate. If winter has arrived, then feel free to use all the snow you want (as long as it isn't yellow) - the rest of us can make do without. As a final note, I've chosen to leave out mint, as I find it very overpowering - include it according to your own tastes.

Stale Bread Salad
(Serves 1)

"Hollow an Alexandrine loaf of bread, soak the crumbs in posca, and make a paste. In the mortar put some pepper, honey, mint, garlic, fresh coriander, salted cheese, water, and oil. Chill in snow and serve." - Apicius, 4.1.3

Ingredients

- Stale Bread
- One Glass of Posca
- One Clove of Garlic
- 50g Hard Cheese
- 1/2 tsp Black Peppercorns
- Small Handful of Coriander
- 1 tbsp Honey
- 1 tbsp Olive Oil
- 50ml Water

Method 1 (The Paste Method)

- Add the pepper, cheese, coriander, and garlic to the mortar and grind it to a paste. Add the honey, oil, and water, and mix further. This is our dressing.
- Hollow out a loaf of stale bread - discard the crust (or put it to use if you can think of a way!)



- Soak the breadcrumbs in enough posca to make a paste. Place this paste in a serving dish, and smooth it out. Spoon over some of the dressing, refrigerate for half an hour, and serve to whoever is brave enough to eat it.

Method 2 (The Alternative)

- Make the dressing as outlined above.

- Remove the crusts, and cut the bread into triangles. Arrange these in your serving dish, and pour over plenty of the posca.
- Spoon over lots of dressing, refrigerate for half an hour, then tuck in.

I'll be the first to admit that neither of these dishes look particularly appetizing. Despite this, I still tucked into the both of them, and they were phenomenal! Posca brought the stale bread back to life, making it deliciously juicy, sweet, and easy to eat. The dressing was very reminiscent of moretum, one of the first recipes found on Pass the Garum - it was sweet, garlicky, and herby, with a bit of a kick from the black pepper. As for the two methods of making the dish, I would say that the first one tastes the best. I think we're all agreed, however, that the second is the better looking of the two. Take your pick.



Lentil and Root Veg Mash with Spelt Lagana



Roman food, as the picture suggests, was a bit hands on - our favourite soldiers and senators didn't use cutlery very much, preferring instead to tuck in with their fingers and toes (ok, not toes) instead. That makes eating Lentil and Root Veg Mash a bit tricky, which is why we shall serve it with some lagana - a type of Roman flatbread.

Flatbread is great stuff - all you need is flour, water, and a hot surface. With no need for yeast or fancy ovens, this is the kind of bread which anybody, rich or poor, could eat. I'm making mine with Spelt flour, a type of flour used in Roman Britain. I know Spelt can be quite tricky to find though, so feel free to use whatever flour you can find.

Laganum
(Makes 4)

Ingredients

- 100g Spelt Flour (+ extra for dusting)
- Water

Methods



- Prepare a work surface by sprinkling over some flour.
- Sieve 100g of flour into a bowl, and add just enough water to form a dough. Knead this by hand, adding more flour as necessary, until it is neither too wet nor dry.

- Divide the ball of dough into four equal pieces. Roll these one at a time until they are flat, disc-shaped, and uniformly thin.
- Add a drop of oil to a frying pan, and when it is hot enough, set a laganum in. As it cooks, it will start to puff-up in places as pockets of air are formed. When dark spots start to form on the underside, flip it over. Each side should take about a minute to cook. If needs be, press down on the top side to speed things up.

Despite being just flour and water, these lagana are great eaten straight out of the pan; the nutty flavour of spelt works wonderfully in this instance (in fact, it left my kitchen smelling vaguely of popcorn!) When eating with the mash, just rip a bit of bread off and use it to pick up some of the lentil & root veg goodness - it tastes good, and keeps your fingers nice and clean!



Lentil and Root Veg Mash (Serves 2)

"Boil the lentils in a clean pan with some salt. In the mortar, crush some pepper, cumin, coriander seed, rue, and fleabane. Add vinegar, honey, liquamen, & defrutum. Mix this with the lentils. Cook and mash parsnips, and add to the lentils. When it is cooked, add some extra virgin olive oil and serve appropriately." - Apicius, 5.2.1

- 1 Parsnip
- 1 Carrot

- 100g Split Red Lentils
- 1 tsp Coriander Seeds
- 1 tsp Rue
- 1/2 tsp Cumin Seeds
- 1/2 tsp Black Pepper
- 1 tsp Liquamen
- 1 tbsp White Wine Vinegar
- 1.5 tbsp Honey
- 3 tbsp Caroenum
- 1 tbsp Extra Virgin Olive Oil



- Add the lentils to a saucepan and pour in enough water to cover them. Throw in a pinch of salt, and bring to the boil. This will take approximately 20-30 minutes, and will require you to add more water every once in a while.
- Peel and chop up the carrot and parsnip, set them into a saucepan full of water, and bring to the boil.
- Whilst everything is boiling away, toast the various herbs and spices in a dry frying pan for around a minute, being careful not to burn them. Grind them all up together in a mortar and pestle.
- Once the lentils have turned to mush and the liquid has largely boiled away, add the spice mix and pour in the various liquids (except the oil). Stir it all together and let it simmer while you sort out the root vegetables.
- When the parsnips and carrots are cooked, drain the water from the pan and mash them up.



- Mix the lentils and root vegetables together with the tbsp of olive oil. Heat in the pan for a little while longer until the liquids have mostly evaporated. Serve and enjoy!

This mash makes for a remarkably filling meal - I had intended this recipe to serve just one, but it quickly became apparent that I would need help to finish it! Besides being filling, the dish was delicious. The lentils added a subtle, salty flavour to the meal, providing a wonderful backdrop to the sweetness of the parsnips and carrots. The sweetness of the root vegetables was further emphasised by the carouem and honey, and the saltiness of the lentils by our friend the fish sauce. The dish was afforded some warmth by the cumin and coriander seeds, but rather amazingly, the stand out flavour and aroma came from the rue, despite so little being used. Final verdict? Filling and flavoursome - always a good combination.

Parsnip Mash and Salt Pork

There is little which compares to the smell and taste of honey-roast parsnips lifted straight out of the oven; here is a food which gets me giddy with excitement! Not necessarily so for those ancient Romans and Greeks. Pliny's advice is to boil the life out of them so that you might rid them of their pungent flavour. Aretaeus, the ancient



Greek physician, describes them as "bad, even when boiled... (The parsnip is) flatulent and swells in the stomach." On the plus side however, Pliny reckons that if you simply carry one with you, you'll never be stung by serpents, and it does offer at least some excitement; it is a well known fact, apparently, that it is a powerful aphrodisiac!

We're lucky that somebody decided parsnip was worth a go - the Apicius volume contains quite a lot of parsnip recipes. Let's see how they taste.

Parsnip Mash with Salt Pork

(Serves 1 - multiply quantities accordingly for more)

"Mash the parsnips, then add cumin, rue, liquamen, passum, oil, coriander leaves, and leeks. Serve. Goes well with salt pork." - Apicius, 3.20.4

- 2 Slices Of Bacon or Salt Pork
 - 1 Parsnip
 - 1 Inch Of Leek
 - 1 tsp Coriander
 - 1/4 tsp Cumin Seeds
 - 1/2 tsp Rue
 - 1 tbsp Liquamen
 - 1 tbsp Olive Oil
 - 1/2 tbsp Passum
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- Chop the parsnip up into chunks - this makes for easier boiling and mashing. Add them to a pan of boiling water for 15-20 minutes, or until done.
 - Meanwhile, toast the cumin seeds and grind with the rue, coriander, and leek. Mix this with the liquamen, passum, and olive oil.
 - If using bacon, grill or fry it. If you are using salt pork, boil it in water for a few minutes before frying it, or else it will be unbearably salty.
 - When the parsnip is boiled, drain away the water and mash it up. Add all of the herbs, spices, and liquids. Mix this together so that it is well blended. Serve with the pork and enjoy.

Honey and Poppyseed "Dormice"

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Of course, we're not really going to be serving up dormice - they're not exactly easy to come by in the shops!

Honey and Poppyseed Dormice

"The dishes for the first course included... some small iron frames shaped like bridges supporting dormice sprinkled with honey and poppy seed." - Petronius, Trimalchio's Feast



- Chicken Thighs & Drumsticks
 - Extra Virgin Olive Oil
 - Honey
 - Poppy Seeds
 - Salt
 - Pepper
-
- Rinse the chicken and cut off all the nasty bits. Leave the skin on if you want the 'mice' to be nice and crispy! Once rinsed, pat the chicken dry.
 - Set the chicken onto an oiled/greased baking tray, making sure to rub some of the oil into the skin. Season with salt and pepper and place into the oven, uncovered, for 30 minutes at 180 Celsius.



- Just before the chicken is due to come out of the oven, gently heat some honey in a pan, and sprinkle some poppy seeds out onto a plate.
- Whenever it looks ready, roll the cooked chicken around in the honey and then the poppy seeds. When all is done, pour the remaining honey and poppy seeds over the top of the chicken.
- To make our thighs and drumsticks look more 'mousey' we're going to add some tails - stick a cocktail stick into each bit of chicken, as shown below. Having the mouse on a stick also makes it much more easy to eat! The drumsticks are already rather mouse-shaped, so you can leave them be.



Future historians will no doubt be equal parts amused and confused by the [Asparagus Festival](#), an eight week celebration of the British asparagus season which sees people wear all manner of silly costumes and paint themselves several shades of green. To celebrate this season I think it's only appropriate to cook up a Roman Asparagus Patina, given that it was the Romans who brought this most delicious of plants to Britain in the first place!

The 'Patina' is rather difficult to explain; all Patinas are egg-based, however some resemble oven-baked custards, whilst others are closer to frittatas and omelettes. Regardless of how they turn out, they make for very tasty eating all the same. So, whilst asparagus is at its finest, I urge you to go out, buy some, and get baking.

Asparagus Patina

(Serves 4)



"Make Asparagus Patina as follows: put asparagus tips into a mortar and add pepper, lovage, green coriander, savory and onions. Dilute this with wine, liquamen, and olive oil. Add this mixture to a well greased pan, adding some beaten eggs to thicken it if you like. Cook without boiling the eggs and serve with finely ground pepper." - Apicius, 4.2.6

- 10-15 Asparagus Spears
- 180 ml White Wine
- 25 ml Fish Sauce ([Liquamen](#))
- 25 ml Raisin Wine ([Passum](#))
- 40 ml Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- 1/2 tsp Black Pepper
- 1/2 tsp Lovage Seeds
- 1/2 Small Onion
- 2 tbsp Fresh Coriander

Methods

- Using just the tips of the asparagus seems rather wasteful, so we're going to prepare the whole lot. Set 4 spears to the side for garnishing the dish at the end, and steam what is left for just a few minutes until tender. Make sure to chop off the woody ends.
- Grind up the peppercorns and lovage and chop up the onions and coriander. Add these, alongside all of the liquids (leaving a bit of oil for later), to a food processor. The following magical transformation should occur.



- Pour this mixture into an oiled baking dish of some sort. I am using the base of my tajine, but any oven proof dish should do the trick. After spreading the mixture out, crack two eggs onto the top and beat them in thoroughly.



- This will take approximately 25 minutes in an oven set to 180 Celsius.
- The dish is cooked when it is omelette-like in consistency. Use the asparagus spears you left over at the beginning to garnish the dish. Sprinkle with a touch of pepper and serve straight away. One similar recipe in Apicius (an Asparagus Patina with the addition of cooked bird embryos - no thanks!) suggests that it can be eaten cold, so refrigerate any leftovers and give that a go if you think you might enjoy it.



Numidian Chicken

(Serves 2)

Prepare the chicken, clean it, and parboil it. Season it with pepper and asafoetida before frying it in a pan. Next, grind pepper, cumin, coriander seed, asafoetida, rue, fig dates, and pine nuts. Moisten these with vinegar, honey, fish sauce, and oil to taste. When boiling this sauce, thicken it, strain it, and pour it over the chicken. To serve, sprinkle with pepper. - Apicius, 6.9.5



- 2 Chicken Breasts
- 1/2 tsp Black Peppercorns
- 1/2 tsp Cumin Seeds
- 1/2 tsp Coriander Seeds
- 1 tsp Asafoetida
- 1/2 tsp Rue (see notes)
- 2 tbsp Pine Nuts
- 50ml White Wine Vinegar
- 1 tbsp Honey
- 2 tbsp Fish Sauce
- 1 tbsp Olive Oil
- Handful of Dried Figs

- Start off by washing the chicken breasts, cutting off the fat and the yucky bits. Dice the chicken breasts into bite-size chunks.
- Bring water to the boil in a saucepan, and add the chicken chunks for about five minutes. Remove the chicken without pouring away the water - we need this!

- Sprinkle half of the asafoetida and ground pepper over the diced chicken, tossing them together to cover. Leave this whilst you prepare the other ingredients.
 - To make the sauce, toast the cumin and coriander seeds in a dry pan. Grind these up with the pepper, pine nuts, rue, and the rest of the asafoetida.
 - Chop the handful of figs into little tiny bits and pieces.
 - Heat the olive oil in a frying pan before adding the parboiled chicken chunks.
 - Once these start to brown, add the fish sauce, vinegar, honey, and a tiny bit of the water you boiled the chicken in. Pour in your ground up herbs and spices, and add the chopped up figs. Cover if you can and leave to stew for half an hour. Add more seasoning according to taste.
 - After removing the chicken, you can either strain the sauce through a sieve and thicken it with cornflour/tracta, or if, like me, you want a rich sauce, just blend the whole mixture.
 - If you made the thinner sauce, pour it over the chicken. The thicker sauce works well for dipping, so serve it separate from the chicken. Sprinkle with pepper.
-
- Really, I found that Rue added little to the flavour. Feel free to leave it out if you cannot find it.
 - This can be cooked in a casserole dish just as easily. I actually used an earthenware pot on a gas hob, but make sure to do your research if you choose this option.

Roman Porridge

(serves 1)

Pour groats into a clean pot with fresh water and bring to the boil. When cooked, slowly add enough milk that it turns into a thick cream. - Cato, de agricultura, 86



- 40g Semolina
- 75ml Water
- 25ml Milk
- Add the semolina and water to a saucepan, and bring to the boil. You don't want too much water, so add just what you need.
- When it starts to thicken up (5 or 10 minutes), add the milk bit by bit and let it simmer for a while. If it's too watery, or if you like your porridge thicker, add more semolina.

This porridge looks and tastes like a bowl of hot semolina, which is unsurprising because that is exactly what it is. It is certainly filling, and not at all unpleasant to eat, but just a bit boring and utilitarian. Needless to say I feel a bit more sympathy for the everyday Roman whose entire eating life was spent alternating between this porridge and heavy bread.

Cumin and Coriander Cabbage

(serves 1)



Mash cabbage leaves and season them with coriander, onion, cumin, pepper, raisin wine (passum) or condensed wine (defrutum), and a little olive oil. - Apicius, 3.ix.3

- 1/3 Cabbage
- 1/4 Small Onion
- 1/4 tsp Cumin Seeds
- 1/4 tsp Black Peppercorns
- 1 tbsp Raisin Wine
- 1 tbsp Olive Oil
- 1 tbsp Baking Soda

- Add the baking soda to boiling water before adding the washed and chopped up cabbage. It should take just 3 or 4 minutes to cook. Reserve some of the cooking liquid, but drain the rest away and set the cabbage to the side.
- Heat up a frying pan, and toast the cumin and peppercorns until they start to release their aroma. Remove them from the pan and grind with a mortar and pestle.
- Chop the onion and add it to the pan with a bit of the cabbage cooking liquid.
- When the onions are cooked (again, just a few minutes), add the ground spices, the raisin wine, the olive oil, the chopped coriander, and finally the cabbage. Let this cook for a few minutes, allowing some of the liquid to evaporate.
- Dish up!

This cabbage certainly looks a lot more appetising than the red mush which was the last recipe, but by Jupiter is it spicy! The cabbage, which we're used to eating boiled and bland (think school dinners), has developed quite the kick when cooked this way. In Apicius this recipe was simply cabbage 'another way', but so prominent are the cumin and coriander that I feel they deserve a place in the title. One MASSIVE thing to note is that this dish is entirely lacking in fish sauce!

Roast Cabbage Stalks

(also serves 1)



Place the cooked stalks in a baking dish. Add some fish sauce and oil, season with cumin, and sprinkle with ground pepper, leeks, and chopped green coriander. - Apicius, 3.ix.2

- Cabbage Stalks
 - 2 Inches of Leek
 - 1.5 tbsp Fresh Coriander
 - 1/2 tsp Black Peppercorns
 - 1/4 tsp Cumin Seeds
 - 1 tbsp Fish Sauce
 - 2 tbsp Olive Oil
-
- When preparing some of the other cabbage recipes, cut away the thick stalks running through the centre of the leaves. Chop these in half lengthways.
 - Cut the bottom 2 inches off a leek, and chop it up finely. Mix the leeks with the cabbage stalks, and steam however you see fit. I opted for the metal colander over a saucepan of boiling water approach.



- Chop up the coriander, toast and grind the peppercorns and cumin seeds, and pop the lid off your fish sauce and olive oil. When the leeks and cabbage stalks are ready, put them in a baking dish. Pour/sprinkle everything else over them, ensuring that they are well coated.
- Put the baking dish in an oven at 180 Celsius for 20 minutes.
- When finished, sprinkle with a bit more black pepper, and enjoy.

With a little bit of love and attention, the stalks become the best thing about the cabbage. Thanks to the fish sauce and the leeks, these are a salty, savoury treat well worth the making. I was actually taken aback by how enjoyable they were, and only wish I'd made more to eat!

Placenta Perfecta

- 270g Filo Pastry
 - 250g Ricotta Cheese
 - Lots of Honey
 - Dried Bay Leaves
 - Olive Oil
-
- Put all of the Ricotta into a bowl, and add as much honey as you'd like. Taste it as you go along until you've reached perfection. I added about 5 tbsps.
 - The Filo, when bought, should come in folded sheets. Take 3 or 4 full sheets for your outer crust. Then fold what is left in half, and cut into rectangles 2 or 3 sheets thick. These rectangles will create the layers inside the placenta, taking the place of the tracta, so size them accordingly.
 - Oil whatever tray or dish you plan to bake this on, and arrange enough oiled bay leaves to form your base. Place the crust layer of Filo on top of this, and one of the Filo rectangles in the middle of that.
 - On top of this rectangle, spoon the cheese/honey mixture. Place another Filo rectangle on top of that, and continue until the cheese is gone, or until you wish to stop.
 - Fold the outer crust over the top, chopping off any excess. Decorate with an oiled bay leaf, and place into a cold oven at 150 Celsius. We are NOT covering the placenta this time, as we want the pastry to be crisp. Cook for 45 minutes.
 - Serve, love, and enjoy!

Egyptian Sweetmeats

- 6 or 7 Dried Dates (OR Date Syrup)
 - 1 tsp Cinnamon Powder
 - 1 tsp Cardamom Seeds
 - 3 Handfuls Walnuts
 - 2 tbsp Honey
-
- Remove the stones from the dates, chop them into small pieces, and mash up with a mortar and pestle with some water. You're looking to create a date paste of sorts. If you have date syrup you can use this instead, or combine the two.
 - Break open the cardamom seeds to get at the little seeds inside - grind these with a mortar and pestle to make a powder.
 - Add the cinnamon and cardamom to the date liquid, and mix it all together.
 - Smash up the walnuts so they're not too big, and add to the mixture. Stir this all together to create a very festive smelling walnut/date dough of sorts.





- With wet hands, take a bit of this dough at a time and roll it into little spheres. Mine ended up being ping-pong ball sized, but you can make them smaller or bigger.



- Heat up some honey in a little dish, spoon some cinnamon powder, powdered almonds, and ground pepper onto a plate (or if you're not too worried about being authentic you can use dessicated coconut as I have, or maybe even chocolate powder!).



- Dip each sweetmeat into the honey, and roll it in the dusting of your choice. Let them set for a little bit, then enjoy!

- Be careful not to have too much liquid in the early mixture, as you'll need a LOT of nuts to make it dry enough to mould into spheres.

The nearest 'modern' food I can compare these sweetmeats to is, perhaps, alcoholic chocolate truffles. The flavours and aromas are all very intense, with the cardamom and cinnamon lending these treats the taste of Christmas. When coated in cinnamon the initial taste can be quite bitter, but it soon transforms into something more acceptable. Almond, a taste which I'm not fond of, lends it that marzipan taste, which I'm also not fond of. Pepper made it pleasantly tingling, but care must be taken not to use too much. Perhaps the outright winner was the ever-so-authentic coconut covering, which I urge you to try if you make a batch.

Dulciaria (Pepper and Pine-Nut Stuffed Honey Dates)



Thus far we've been dining on hearty stews and heavy breads, which, whilst all very filling and tasty, have done little to cater for those with a sweet tooth. "Where are all the desserts?" I hear you ask. "Didn't the Romans enjoy brownies and trifle and Victoria sponge? What about panna cotta, pavlova, and tiramisu?" I am afraid I must be the bearer of bad news, because Apicius is largely silent on all things dessert. This is not entirely surprising when we consider that the

Romans had no sugar, no chocolate, and flour better suited to throwing in the bin than into a cake mix. What they did have, however, they made excellent use of.

Whilst Apicius is largely silent on tasty little treats, it is not without. One recipe which we do have is the recipe for dulciaria, coming from the Latin *dulcis*, meaning sweet. These sweets are made as follows:

To make little home-made sweets, remove the seeds from dates and stuff them with nuts and ground pepper. Sprinkle salt on the outside, candy them in honey, and serve. - Apicius, 7.13.1

These are all ingredients we've seen before in our Roman cooking - we've used nuts, pepper, honey, and salt extensively. Now it is time to combine them all in a most delicious way. I am going to experiment and use dried figs too, just to see how it turns out. I am leaving out measurements for this recipe because it all depends on how many dulciaria you want to make - use as much as of each ingredient as you think you'll need!

Dulciaria - Little Sweets



- Dried Dates and Figs
- Pine Nuts
- Black Peppercorns
- Set Honey
- Salt

- Remove the stones from the dates, and cut a pocket in the figs.
- Crush some peppercorns in a mortar and pestle and mix with the pine nuts.
- Stuff the dates and figs with this peppery pine nut mixture.
- Sprinkle the tiniest bit of salt over the stuffed fruit, rubbing it in a little bit to ensure that it sticks.



- Cover a plate/baking tray with some non-stick greaseproof paper.
- Put a few spoonfuls of honey into a saucepan (I used 2 tbsp) and bring to a simmer. The honey will start foaming up after a little while. When it does this, take the pan off the heat.
- Stick a cocktail stick/skewer through the first bit of fruit and dip it into the practically molten honey. It helps to tilt the pan so that it all gathers on one side. Roll the fruit around a bit to make sure it is covered, before setting it onto the greaseproof paper. Use a fork to prize the fruit off the cocktail stick/skewer, and repeat.
- When all are done, pour any leftover honey over all of the dulciaria and leave to 'set'.
- Removing the stones from dates can be tricky - I found it best to chop a bit off one end (the end which the stone is attached to - you'll soon work it out) and squeeze the stone out.
- The honey will be HOT. Do not put your fingers or toes anywhere near it, and certainly do not try to taste it.
- The honey doesn't 'set' as well as the candy on a candied apple might. I found it helpful to put the tray in the fridge (once the honey had cooled a bit).

These were quick and easy to make, and a pleasure to eat. It goes without saying that they are sweet, but the salt on the outside gives them a depth of flavour which means that they taste of more than just honey. Biting into them, you get the crunch of the pine nuts, followed a second later by the spicy-sweetness of black pepper. The warmth of the pepper lingers, leaving you with fond memories of what went before. These sweets remind me of the taste of Christmas (rather anachronistic I know). The figs and dates both worked equally well, with the figs being juicier and the dates crunchier. I look forward to seeing your attempts!

Baked Honey Ham in Pastry with a Fig Sauce



Today is one of those lucky days when meat is on the menu - perhaps we got lucky at the gladiatorial games and won a few coins, or maybe our patron was feeling very generous with his gifts, or it might just be that we walked out of the front door of the farm and saw Porky the Pig standing there looking awfully delicious. Poor Porky - now you're chopped up and waiting to be cooked.

Today's recipe comes from Apicius, 7.9.1, or recipe number 287 if you want to go by that instead. I was inspired by Grainger's take on this (Grainger, S., *Cooking Apicius*, (Totnes, 2006) pp.62-63), and found some of her methods very useful, but I've changed a few of the ingredients. The recipe in Apicius reads roughly as follows:

Braise the ham with a generous helping of figs and three laurel leaves. Peel off the skin, chop it into squares, and cover it all with lots of honey. After, make a dough with flour and oil and wrap the ham up inside. Bake slowly and serve as soon as it's ready. - Apicius, 7.9.1

There are the usual issues with 'what type of ham should we use?', 'how many figs are needed?', and 'how much dough do we make?', but I'm starting to like the Romans' way of going by feel and using my instincts. I found that the following worked well:

Baked Honey Ham in Pastry with a Fig Sauce

The Meat



- 750g Lump of Unsmoked Gammon
- 8 Dried Figs
- 3 Bay Leaves
- 125g Set Honey

The Pastry

- 250g Spelt Flour
- 100ml Water
- A Pinch of Salt
- A Splash of Extra Virgin Olive Oil
-
- Briefly sear the meat in a hot frying pan before adding to a saucepan. Add cold water, the three bay leaves, and all of the figs. Bring to the boil, then reduce to a simmer. This meat needs 20 minutes, with an extra 20 minutes per 500g. However, I gave mine just

40 minutes in total and it came out perfect. Remove the meat from the sauce and leave it to cool.



- Whilst this is happening we need to make the pastry dough. Prepare a work surface (I used the kitchen bench) by giving it a clean and sprinkling it with flour. Take out a rolling pin and dust it with flour too.
- Mix the flour, salt, oil, and water and knead it until smooth. Take half of the dough and keep it covered with a moist towel to stop it from drying out. Place the other half onto the work surface and get ready to roll.
- This dough has to be VERY thin. The best way to do this is to roll it at the edges with a rapid backwards and forwards movement. Once you have a roughly rectangular batch of dough, place it on a floured surface and repeat with the second batch.
- By this stage the meat should be quite cool - this is important because we're adding honey to it, and it will melt otherwise. Remove the skin and chop it into little pieces. Score the meat with a knife on all sides, creating grooves for the honey to seep into. Now, grab a handful of honey and rub it all over the meat.
- With the meat honeyed up, lay one sheet of dough out on a baking tray and brush the top side with olive oil. Place the meat at one end and roll it all up!



- Brush the outside with olive oil now and wrap the whole bundle with the second bit of dough. Oil the outside of this so that it goes nice and crispy in the oven. Place back on the oiled baking tray and into an oven preheated at 180°C. Cook for 1 hour, adjusting the heat if necessary.
- For the final 15 minutes, strain the concoction you cooked the ham in through a sieve and add half of it to a pan to reduce. Using a pan with more surface area means it will reduce more quickly.
- Remove the ham from the oven, let it sit for 5 minutes, then chop it up and put it onto a plate. Pour some of the fig sauce over. Delicious.

Moretum



Moretum is a cheese, garlic, and herb spread mentioned in a wonderful little poem, also called Moretum, by the poet Virgil. The poem tells us about the farmer Symilus and his morning meal. Waking up early he lights his lamp and works his way to his grain stores. He gathers his grain, mills it down into flour, and makes a bread not unlike the one we made before. The farmer notices that he has no meat, and worries that the bread might not be tasty enough on its own, so he sets about making some moretum to go with it. Seeing as our bread could use a little lift, I'm going to follow this Roman farmer's example and make some of this cheese spread. The whole poem, which really is worth a read, can be found by clicking [here](#). It's too long to post in full, so I've summarised the important bits here:

- Symilus gathers four heads of garlic (!), celery, parsley, rue, and coriander seeds.
- He grinds the garlic in his mortar and pestle, and adds salt and cheese.
- He then adds the celery, rue, parsley, and coriander seeds. He also grabs his crotch for extra leverage with the mortar and pestle, or so Virgil says.
- The smell is so strong that it makes his eyes water!
- He adds some olive oil, finishes off the mixture, and slaps some on his freshly baked bread.

So, what to make of this? Well for one there is far too much garlic; Symilus might have been able to work alone in his field without his breath offending anyone, but most of us don't have that luxury. I'll have to tone it down a bit to prevent garlic overpowering the other ingredients. Secondly, Virgil mentions a herb called 'rue'. Rue is a bitter plant used to flavour lots of Roman dishes, and it grows quite freely here. However, it is also poisonous. Until I find a good supplier

and understand it a bit better, I'll be leaving out the rue. Finally, crotch grabbing whilst cooking is unhygienic, so I'll be leaving that bit out too.



Symilus with his packed lunch.

Virgil's Moretum

Ingredients



- 1 Clove of Garlic
- 1/2 of a Celery Stick (with its leaves)
- A Small Bunch of Flat-Leaf Parsley
- 1 tbsp of Coriander Seeds

- A Pinch of Salt
- Some Cheese (I used Feta as it was easy to work with. With the benefit of hindsight, I would choose a milder cheese)
- 1 tsp Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- A Splash of Vinegar

Method

- Peel the garlic, add to the mortar, and give it hell.
- Add the salt, the cheese, and the celery to the mortar and mash them up too. Really make sure to mix them well with the garlic from earlier.



- To this paste, add the coriander seeds, parsley, oil, and vinegar. I find that it is helpful to add the parsley in batches and break it down bit by bit rather than trying to do it all at once and making a mess. Test for flavour - if it is too garlicky, add more parsley.
- Break off a lump of bread, spread some of the moretum on, and enjoy!



Results

Moretum was a great accompaniment for my Roman bread - its creaminess complimented the 'rough' texture of the bread, and the strong flavours drew attention away from the overly wheaty taste of the bread. In fact I'd go so far as to say that the wheaty after-taste provided by the bread was the perfect follow-on flavour for this cheese spread. However, even though I used just one garlic clove, this spread was verging on being too strong, something not helped by the saltiness of the feta either. Thankfully, a bit of extra parsley stopped that being so. Despite the inadequacies of this first attempt at moretum, it is a spread which I recommend you try, and one which I am looking forward to making again.

Cato's Roman Bread



So, you've just arrived back from the grain distribution up on the Aventine and on the way home you popped into the miller's shop to get it ground up. You're sitting there with a sack of flour. Great, how do you eat this? Well, today we're going to start with the simplest of all recipes, and we're going to bake some bread. I'm taking inspiration from Cato the Elder's agricultural handbook, *de agri cultura*. This manual, written around 160 BCE, is the oldest piece of Roman prose we have, and is a guide to managing a farm. I like this recipe because it's a simple recipe dating from simple times and thus requires few ingredients and relatively little preparation - it's the kind of bread any Roman could have been making at any stage of Roman history. Cato writes:

Recipe for kneaded bread: wash both your hands and a bowl thoroughly. Pour flour into the bowl, add water gradually, and knead well. When it is well kneaded, roll it out and bake it under an earthenware lid. -Cato, *On Agriculture*, 74

I'm going to take some liberties when it comes to baking the bread under an earthenware lid, as I don't actually own one, but his advice on washing hands and equipment is timeless. As Cato doesn't provide quantities or timings, I've experimented and come up with the following:

Cato's Roman Bread

Ingredients

- 500g Spelt flour
- 350ml Water
- A Pinch of Salt
- A Splash of Olive Oil

Method

- Preheat an oven to 180°C.
- Wash hands and wash a large bowl - we're being authentic here!
- Add the flour to the bowl along with the pinch of salt. Give it a bit of a mix to distribute salt.
- Pour a splash of olive oil into the bowl.
- Slowly add in the water, mixing as you go, until you get a dough which isn't too floury and isn't too sticky.



- Knead the dough well and form into a circular shape. With a knife, score the top of the loaf, dividing it into 8. This doesn't particularly help with the baking process, but it's how the bread preserved at Pompeii looked, and it's how it's often depicted.

- Place on some greaseproof paper on a baking tray and place in the oven for

45 minutes. By this stage the bread should be lovely and crispy and golden on the outside. A good way to tell if it's ready on the inside is to tap the bottom of the loaf - if it's ready it will sound hollow. Because there is no yeast, the bread won't have risen much if at all.

- I added the olive oil because it keeps the bread softer for longer, and added salt to enhance the flavour of the bread a bit. I need some bread leftover for my moretum recipe. These two ingredients are ones which any Roman might have access to, so are not inauthentic.
- The bread lasted four days before it started to go mouldy.



The bread was a success, and everybody who tried it enjoyed it. The texture and the taste were very 'wheaty' because of the use of Spelt, and I personally am not sure what to make of this flavour. At the minute I find it quite overpowering, but with olive oil and vinegar for dipping the bread is very tasty indeed. Do I envy the Romans? In this instance, not quite.