At Quem Non Ceno, Barbarus Ille Mihi Est: Roman and Jewish Dietary Traditions in Antiquity

Amanda Grace Self

Spring 2012
At Quem Non Ceno, Barbarus Ille Mihi Est: Roman and Jewish Dietary Traditions in Antiquity

The consumption of food is a biological necessity. The manner in which it is consumed, however, is a matter of cultural construction. Romans and Jews elevated food beyond merely meeting nutritional needs; dining was an affirmation of familial, civic, and religious bonds. These two cultures used food as the primary social vehicle in two significant ways: a) to establish conviviality and thus confirm group identity and b) as an expression of piety and a focus religious of ritual. The respective behaviors of Romans and Jews towards dining and the consumption of particular foods differed undoubtedly. However, their overall use of food as a socially significant medium is a powerful correlation in understanding the interactions between these ethnic groups.

The consumption of food and drink amongst these peoples was the primary initiator of camaraderie. The sharing of a meal traditionally served as the first step in fostering a social relationship. In both societies, social exchange was foremost an expression of group identity rather than a reflection of personal experience. The act of dining was an exhibition of conformity to the traditions of one's culture and the acceptance of social responsibility. This concept of dining as an exercise of group identity diminished with the advent of Christianity. In regards to the Eucharist meal, which is the single occurrence of food used in Christian ritual, the dominant Pauline theology emphasized the personal aspect of consuming, not group fellowship.

Jews and Romans might have shared ideas on social obligations, but this did not mean they were going to share a table. Even if Jews had been willing to, which for the most part they were not, special accommodations had to be made for a convivial meal with gentiles. A rare example of such accommodations is evidenced in the Letter of Aristeas, written between 170 and

---

1 Goodman, Rome, 225; Grimm, From Feasting, 15; Rives, Religion, 106,
2 Slater, Dining in a Classical, 3; Garnsey, Food and Society, xii; Forbes & Foxhall, Food in Antiquity, 71
3 1 Corinthians 11.28-29
100 B.C.E. Upon arrival in Alexandria, the king thus welcomes a delegation of Jews:

I regard this day of your arrival as of great importance...It will therefore be my wish to dine with you this day. Everything of which you partake, he said, will be served in compliance with your habits; it will be served to me as well as to you.\(^4\)

It was possible for pious Jews to share a table with gentiles, but a convivial table was not the norm\(^5\). The more popular behavior of Jews towards non-Jews is described in 3 Maccabees as "because they worshipped God and conducted themselves by his law, they kept separateness with respect to foods. For this reason they appeared hateful to some."\(^6\) Jews abstaining from eating with gentiles reoccurs numerous times in their scriptures.\(^7\) The refusal to share a convivial meal had less grounding in the specific foods taboos, as those foods could simply not be eaten, and more substantiation in dining as a marker of group identity.\(^8\)

This typical abstention on the part of the Jews was not well received by their eventual sovereigns, the Romans. Refusal to dine commensally was seen as "base and abominable"\(^9\) by most Romans. Their general attitude towards antisocial eating practices is reflected in the Pompeian graffito that declares "the man with whom I do not dine, is a barbarian to me."\(^10\)

Food was the central medium for religious ritual in antiquity. Food products factor into nearly every aspect of cultic practice for Romans and Jews: both blood and bloodless sacrifice, incenses, and in the public meals that accompanied festivals and daily procedures. Because of their prevalence in ritual, certain food items almost automatically evoked religious connotations.

\(^4\) 180-181, trans. Schiffman
\(^5\) Goodman, Rome, 111
\(^6\) 3 Macc. 3.4
\(^7\) Dan. 1.8; Tobit 1.10-11
\(^8\) 2 Macc. 11.30-1; Noy, Sixth Hour, 136
\(^9\) Tacitus, Histories 5.5.1, trans. Schiffman
\(^10\) reference to title of paper, mentioned in Gowers, The Loaded Table, 26; Grimm, From Feasting, 3
Saffron, a highly valued Mediterranean spice that was used as incense at festivals, evidences this point of instantaneous religious expectation:

Now there was a tray covered with cakes. In the middle stood a pastry Priapus, and from his ample appendage hung a sling full of different fruits...At the slightest touch, every single cake and piece of fruit spewed out saffron- damp, messy stuff all over our faces, quite disgusting. We thought that a dish perfumed with this ritual substance was probably some important right, so we jumped up and yelled, 'Hail Augustus, father of our country.'

There were no weekends in antiquity; instead the calendar was divided between normal days and festivals or holidays. Macrobius explains the format of the calendar and religious celebrations as:

Numa divided the year into months and then each month into days, calling each day either 'festival,' 'working day,' or 'half-festival.' The festival days are dedicated to the gods; on the working days people may transact private and public business...thus on festival days there are sacrifices, religious banquets, games and holidays...the celebration of a religious festival consists of the offering of sacrifices to the gods, or a day that is marked by a ritual feast.

The incorporation of food as a practice of religion reveals the fragility of the food supply. The susceptibility of the population to food shortage was manifested in various religious responses. This was witnessed by the addition of news cults, public purification ceremonies, scapegoat rituals, prayer, and often times for Jews with fasting. Fasting was a response for guilt, sorrow, suffering, and fear. The Jewish scripture promotes feasting when times are not as desperate:

---

11 Ovid, Fasti, 1.75; Miller, A Travesty, 197; Dalby, Dangerous, 138; Slater, Reading, 73; Grondona, La Religione, 84
12 Petronius, Satyricon, 3.60
13 Rives, Religion, 112
14 Saturnalia, 1.16.2-5
15 Garnsey, Food and Society, 3; Famine and Food, 27; Hamel, Poverty and Charity, 49; Wilkins & Hill, Food in the Ancient, 89
16 Grimm, From Feasting, 21; Hamel, Poverty and Charity, 49, 107
Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the Lord your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always.\textsuperscript{17}

Because of the structure the calendar, civic life was inextricably bound to religious celebrations, with food being at the essence of said celebrations. The primary means of ritual worship in antiquity consisted of blood or non-blood sacrifice followed by a meal shared between the worshippers and the god.\textsuperscript{18} As the sharing of a meal symbolized the establishment of conviviality, the religious feast expressed an affirmation of mutuality between religionists and their deity. These food practices “established and confirmed contact and contracts of care and responsibility not only between humans but also between humans and animals, and even between humans and their gods.”\textsuperscript{19}

Bloodless sacrifice consisted of offerings to the gods of any edible agricultural produce, usually in the form of cereal cakes and first fruits.\textsuperscript{20} Cato provides a recipe for sacrificial cakes composed of cheese, wheat flour, and eggs.\textsuperscript{21} Ovid illustrates a vivid picture of an idealized time prior to blood sacrifice and Hellenized luxury:

Long ago it was grain and the sparkling pinch of pure salt that served the goodwill of the gods for man. As yet no foreign ship had brought back bark-distilled myrrh cross the blue seas; the Eurphrates had sent no incenses, India no spice; nor were there threads of red saffron known to man. The altar would smoke, content with Sabine herbs, and laurel would burn up crackling loud...And the knife that now lays bare the entrails of the stricken bull then had no work to do in sacred right.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{17} Deut. 14:23
\textsuperscript{18} Wilkins & Hill, \textit{Food in the Ancient}, 83; Visser, \textit{The Rituals of Dinner}, 149; Rives, \textit{Religion} 25
\textsuperscript{19} Grimm, \textit{From Feasting}, 3
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Letter of Aristeas} 40; Wilkins & Hill, \textit{Food in the Ancient}, 107; Smith, \textit{Lectures on the Religion}, 222; Grimm, \textit{From Feasting}, 17
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{De agr.} 75, trans. Hooper and Ash
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Fasti} 1.337-61, trans. Warrior
Blood sacrifice was the most potent expression of piety.\textsuperscript{23} Killing a beast to consume its flesh was seen as competition with higher powers. Gods give life; therefore a peace offering must be made to compensate for the taking of life. This offering of an animate being was reciprocated by the continuation of life for the worshippers. Thus is the profound nature of blood sacrifice compared to mere agricultural offerings.\textsuperscript{24}

Meat had powerful connotations, not only was its offering believed to have greater significance to deities, but its distribution, or \textit{visceratio}, demarcated the rigid hierarchical structure of the community.\textsuperscript{25} The mass population did not eat meat in any large quantity. \textit{Epula}, public feasts, following religious celebrations provided the rare opportunity for the consumption of animal products for commoners.\textsuperscript{26} In Judea, domesticated animals were used almost exclusively for sacrifice, leaving only wild animals for the occasional fare.\textsuperscript{27} The religious and political officials received the best and most food, leaving commoners feasting on the rest.\textsuperscript{28} Although ordinary citizens at feasts did not receive as good or as much food as the elites, its distribution was used as a means of enforcing social control by occasional reward and incentive.\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Epula} played a crucial role in fostering group identity and creating strong social cohesion.\textsuperscript{30} In spite of the inequality, the convivial meal promoted solidarity among a community.\textsuperscript{31} Statius describes these feasts as a portrait of social harmony:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Wilkins & Hill, \textit{Food in the Ancient}, 149; Smith, \textit{Lectures on the Religion}, 222
\item \textsuperscript{24} Lev. 17:10-16; Grimm, \textit{From Feasting}, 35; Hamel, \textit{Poverty and Charity}, 29; Wilkins & Hill, \textit{Food in the Ancient}, 49
\item \textsuperscript{25} Donahue, \textit{The Roman Community}, 22; Rives, \textit{Religion}, 114; Garnsey, \textit{Food and Society}, 134; Hamel, \textit{Poverty and Charity}, 9, 24; Gowers, \textit{The Loaded Table}, 212
\item \textsuperscript{26} Wilkins & Hill, \textit{Food in the Ancient}, 143; Garnsey, \textit{Food and Society}, 16; Donahue, \textit{The Roman Community}, 19; Hamel, \textit{Poverty and Charity}, 25; Dalby, \textit{Siren Feasts}, 3
\item \textsuperscript{27} Hamel, \textit{Poverty and Charity}, 19
\item \textsuperscript{28} Statius, \textit{Silvae} 1.6.28-34, trans. Donahue; Goody, \textit{Cooking, Class}, 99
\item \textsuperscript{29} D’Arms, \textit{Slaves at Roman}, 176; Wilkins & Hill, \textit{Food in the Ancient}, 81
\item \textsuperscript{30} Donahue, \textit{The Roman Community}, 7; Grimm, \textit{From Feasting}, 19; Wilkins & Hill, \textit{Food in the Ancient}, 79; Goodman, \textit{Rome}, 58
\item \textsuperscript{31} Deut. 16: 11,14
\end{itemize}
Every class at one table,
Children, women, plebian, knight, senator:
Freedom has relaxed the sense of reverence
Now, whoever he is, poor, rich,
Boasts himself a dinner guest of the emperor.\textsuperscript{32}

Statius' mention of the diners being guests of the emperor is a reference to the common practice of euergetism. The allocating of food supplies to the poor by the rich was an institutionalized feature of both Roman and Jewish society.\textsuperscript{33} However, a crucial distinction must be made. Rome witnessed the practice of patronage, while in Judea the phenomenon was of a charitable nature.\textsuperscript{34} For Jews, charity was an obligatory factor of piety, and no reciprocation was expected.\textsuperscript{35} In Rome, the exchange went two ways: the poor were given food and the patron received social recognition and increased authority.\textsuperscript{36} Patronage provided the financial backing for all religious holidays and public feasts.\textsuperscript{37} Benefaction was originally expected of private citizens, but the imperial government saw to the gradual taking over of food distribution.\textsuperscript{38} Private benefaction made sense in the Republic for senators who vied for popularity, but it was incompatible in the Principate as it was seen as a threat to the political standing of the emperor.\textsuperscript{39} Distribution of food created the main social contact between ruler and the ruled and was crucial to the overall stability of society.\textsuperscript{40}

Public feasting might have been the only time that the poor of society were able to enjoy

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Silvae} 1.6.43-50, trans. Donahue
\textsuperscript{33} Garnsey, \textit{Famine and Food}, 15; Bober, \textit{Art, Culture}, 176; Garnsey, \textit{Food and Society}, 33; Rives, \textit{Religion}, 115; Veyne, \textit{Bread and Circuses}, 10
\textsuperscript{34} Garnsey, \textit{Famine and Food}, 58; Orsted, \textit{Salt Fish}, 14
\textsuperscript{37} Festus 284 L., trans. Warrior
\textsuperscript{38} Garnsey, \textit{Food and Society}, 125
\textsuperscript{39} Hadrill, \textit{Patronage}, 69-70; Garnsey, \textit{Famine and Food}, 84, 197; Veyne, \textit{Bread and Circuses}, 292-293
\textsuperscript{40} Donahue, \textit{The Roman Community}, 23; Goodman, \textit{Rome}, 46; Grimm, \textit{From Feasting}, 38; Nielsen, \textit{Royal Banquets}, 102; Hadrill, \textit{Patronage}, 58
lavish dining, but for Roman elites, sumptuous eating took on absurd, ostentatious forms at the private dinner party, or *convivium*. These communal meals display the Roman propensity for socializing and the significance placed on commensally dining. The word ‘*convivum*’ as explained by Cicero, implies “that we truly live together.”\(^{41}\) These banquets were another exhibition of patronage for the host who would invite selected guests to his home to dine after an evening spent in the bathhouse.\(^{42}\) Invitations to these dinner parties were almost essential for poorer citizens who lacked both kitchen space and a retinue of slaves to prepare their daily dinner.\(^{43}\)

The literary record offers various anecdotes of amusingly opulent *convivium* put on by hedonistic hosts. Plutarch tells of Lucullus a man who “took not only pleasure but pride” in his extravagance. On an occasion when he had no dinner guests, Lucullus was served an unacceptably modest one-course meal. He demanded further culinary elaboration in spite of his lack of guests by responding, “Dost thou not know that to-day Lucullus dines with Lucullus?”\(^{44}\) Petronius’ *Satyricon* provides perhaps the most notorious example of a lush *convivium*. The host, Trimalchio, goes to great measures to impress his wealth and sophistication upon his guests through his flamboyant menu:

> A platter followed, with a gigantic boar on it- a freedman’s cap on its head, no less. From its teeth hung little baskets woven from palm leaves, the one full of Syrian dates, the other of Egyptian ones. Set up to look as if they were pressed to the udders were little piglets made of biscuit dough...he drew a hunting knife and slashed the side of the boar passionately, and thrushes flew out of the gash. As these fluttered around the dining room, bird catchers with limed reeds caught them in no time.\(^{45}\)

\(^{41}\) *Ad familiars* 9.24.3; *De Senectute* 13.45, trans. Gowers

\(^{42}\) *Satyricon* 3.27-28; Goodman, *Rome*, 281; Garnsey, *Food and Society*, 137; Faas, *Around the Roman*, 41

\(^{43}\) Faas, *Around the Roman*, 41; Giacosa, *A Taste of*, 21

\(^{44}\) Plutarch, *Life of Lucullus*, 41.1-3, trans. B. Perrin

\(^{45}\) *Satyricon*, 3.40, trans. Ruden
Private convivium with menus that took on artistic, albeit garish, extremes did not evolve in Judea. The Seleucids, Ptolemies, and even Herod were known to be host to extravagant feasts, familiarizing the concept with Judeans. The dining hall in the royal palace in Jerusalem was reputed to have a blasphemous view of the Temple. Jewish scripture encourages followers to enjoy eating, however it does stress a limit to this physical pleasure. The pretension of luxurious dining was not much appreciated, as Amos declares:

You lie on beds adorned with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end

A curious note in this passage is the author’s particular denunciation against the common practice of reclining to eat. This was a trait believed to originate with the Assyrians, which was adopted by the Greeks, Etruscans, and eventually the Romans. In spite of Amos’ criticism, this peculiarity, in addition to other distinctly Roman dinner habits, were incorporated into the tradition Passover Seder where the participants “all recline on their left side, men and women at the same table, and the proceedings punctuated by the formal drinking of four glasses of wine.”

Affluent Romans were inundated with a plethora of choices when it came to foodstuffs and used food as the ideal means of expressing wealth. Culinary opulence was often the target of castigation, as in Juvenal’s Satire 11 who chastises “men whose sole reason for living lies in

---

46 Esther 1:3-8; Goodman, Rome, 280; Wilkins & Hill, Food in the Ancient, 149
48 Deut. 14:26; Noy, Sixth Hour, 137
49 Amos 6:4-7
50 Faas, Around the Roman, 63; Visser, Rituals of Dinner 153; Wilkins & Hill, Food in the Ancient, 68; Bradley, The Roman Family, 39
51 Goodman, Rome, 293, also discussed in Faas, Around the Roman, 63; Noy, Sixth Hour, 138, asserts that reclining was synonymous with dining in Roman Palestine
52 Garnsey, Food and Society, 113; Faas, Around the Roman, 27; Goodman, Rome, 281
Horace speaks to his appreciation of a simple diet and repulsion of superficial profusion:

The greatest pleasure’s not in costly flavours, it resides in you yourself. Obtain your sauce by sweating: pallid diners, living bloated from excess, Can’t take delight in their ocean wrasse, or oysters, or imported grouse. Yet I could hardly change your wish to kiss your palate with the peacock when it’s served, and not the pullet, you’re seduced by vain show, a rare bird costs gold, with its ornate tail spectacularly spread: as if it mattered. Do you ever eat those feathers you admire? Does it have the same beauty when it’s cooked? The meat does not differ between the two, yet to think that you prefer this to that, deceived by the appearance.  

Some writers lambasted the use of foreign products in their meals. Horace boasted not of his lack of ability in acquiring exotic products, but of his lack of desire to do so. Martial recommends, though not for himself, a modest and exclusively Italian meal consisting of olives, wine, and chickpea soup.

A common critique was the egression from home cooking to more commercial forms, seen when Pliny reminisces on times when:

There were no bakers at Rome until the war with King Perseus, more than five hundred and eighty years after the building of the City. The ancient Romans used to make their own bread, it being an occupation, which belonged to the women, as we see the case in many nations even at the present day.

This harking back to the more simple, egalitarian times of the Republic is a common theme to Roman writers who act as moralizers condemning “their own time as corrupted and in

---

53 *Satire* 11.2, trans. Ramsay  
54 *Satire* 2.2.19-30, trans. Kline  
55 *Odes* 3.16.18-39  
56 *Epigrams* 1.103  
sad decline from a golden age of fortitude.” Striving to emulate the diet of the earlier times, Ovid describes:

You asked why the menu for June first reads: fat bacon and a steaming mess of beans and barley? Carna’s an old-time goddess, sustained by familiar foods, and she doesn’t indulge in exotic banquets. Folks back then still left the fish to swim in peace and oysters were safe in their shells…. The peacock provided no pleasure except with its plumage…The pig was prized, they would butcher a pig to keep their feasts. The earth gave only beans and hardy barley.

From this we gather numerous critical points to understanding the common Roman diet, much different from the haute cuisine represented in literature: a) the staple foods were cereals and legumes, b) if meat was present in a meal, it was most likely pork, and that c) seafood had little significance.

For ancient peoples the daily diet was overwhelmingly composed of cereals with supplements of legumes and pulses. The dominance of cereals and legumes is explained simply in terms of efficiency: plants, rather than animals, produce more food per unit of land and at less expense. Cereals were the most crucial food for survival, hence the familiar appeal for “our daily bread.”

The Romans, always quick to establish a hierarchy, of course had their preferences when it came which cereal they devoured. The primary cereal crop of Greece, because of its suitability to the land and climate, was barley. Barley can thrive with less rainfall and on thin limestone

---

59 Grimm, From Feasting, 56  
60 Fasti 6.169-180, trans. Nagle  
61 Donahue, The Roman Community, 19; Wilkins & Hill, Food in the Ancient, 114; Garnsey, Food and Society, 118; Braun, Barley Cakes, 25; Hamel, Poverty and Charity, 34  
62 Donahue, The Roman Community, 19  
63 Matt. 6:11, Luke 11:3; Hamel, Poverty and Charity, 12, 24  
64 Braun, Barley Cakes, 25; Wilkins & Hill, Food in the Ancient, 115-7; Garnsey, Food and Society, 119; Garnsey, Famine and Food, 51; Dalby, Siren Feasts, 22
soil, such as that found in Attika and the Judean hills. The Romans, on the contrary, displayed a proclivity towards wheat, which grew well in the Italian climate. Barley was often the subject of vituperation in Roman texts, evidenced by Pliny who voices that “experience has condemned barley-bread, though it was anciently much used, it is now mostly fed to animals.” It was generally agreed upon in the ancient Mediterranean that wheat was a superior grain because the natural gluten enables bread to rise, whereas barley is less desirable for bread making and is better suited for cakes and flatbreads. So looked down upon was barley, that on occasion it replaced wheat rations as a form of punishment to the Roman army.

To the Romans, barley bread was a symbol of rural poverty. As mentioned, barley was the crop most suitable to the land of Palestine. The Old Testament provides evidence for the prominence of barley in the diet of the Jews. The Book of Ruth shows Ruth arriving in Bethlehem at the time of the barley harvest. Because of her impoverished state, Ruth must glean the fields with the men. The story goes on to include Ruth sharing a convivial meal of barley bread dipped in wine vinegar with her future husband, Boaz. Wheat is mentioned, but only in passing, showing the secondary nature of its importance because of its later harvesting time. As the first crop of a harvest was seen as the most suitable for offerings, barley assumed a greater religious significance to the Jews. Affluent Jews had access to wheat, but barley was predominant for the majority of the population.

An indicator of cereal’s importance to the diet was the formalized position of grain

---

65 Braun, *Barley Cakes*, 25  
66 Braun, *Barley Cakes*, 34-5; Garnsey, *Famine and Food*, 51  
67 *NH* 18.74  
68 Wilkins and Hill, *Food in the Ancient*, 117  
69 Livy 27.13.9; Cassius Dio 49.38.4  
71 Ruth 1:22; 2:2-23  
72 Lev. 23:10; Braun, *Barley Cakes*, 26  
73 Hamel, *Poverty and Charity*, 32
commissioner. Referred to as *aediles* in Rome and *agoranomos* in Judea, this officer had access to a permanent grain fund and supervised the market where grain was bought and sold. No other food product warranted the creation of a formal office to see to its distribution.\(^7^4\)

Pork was undoubtedly the most popular meat in antiquity.\(^7^5\) Oxen were much too valuable for motive power and required a large amount of grazing land. Goats and sheep offered useful by-products such as milk and wool.\(^7^6\) This left the pig as the only livestock raised for the sole purpose of consumption.\(^7^7\) Varro found it highly improbable that any Roman with a farm would not raise swine on it.\(^7^8\) Romans did not enjoy the pig solely because of its practicality, the flavor and versatility of the meat was much savored. Pliny exalts the pig when saying:

No other animal produces so much material for cooking: the pig has about fifty different flavours, which is why the sumptuary laws prohibits pigs’ chitterlings, sweetbreads, testicles, womb or check from being served at dinner.\(^7^9\)

In the cookery book of Apicius pork is the standard meat,\(^8^0\) it is so pertinent that often Apicius writes simply ‘meat’ when he means ‘pork’.\(^8^1\) The adaptability of pork to different flavors and textures lent itself well to the Roman penchant for culinary disguise.\(^8^2\) Roman haute cuisine promoted bold flavors achieved through complex mixtures of spices, herbs, and sauces.\(^8^3\)

Individual ingredients were not to be discernible, more desirable rather was a mélange of

---

\(^7^6\) Garnsey, *Food and Society*, 123; Frayn, *Markets and Fairs*, 71
\(^7^7\) Faas, *Around the Roman*, 255; Wilkins & Hill, *Food in the Ancient*, 147; Frayn, *Roman Meat Trade*, 114
\(^7^8\) *De Re Rustica*, 2.4.3
\(^7^9\) *NH* 8.77, trans. Bostock, mentioned in Gowers, *The Loaded Table*, 70; Giacosa, *A Taste of*, 85
\(^8^0\) *De Re Coquinaria* 13.12.366-381
\(^8^1\) Faas, *Around the Roman*, 255
\(^8^2\) *De Re Coquinaria* 4.2.139; Sat. 3.33, 3.49, 3.60; Bober, *Art, Culture*, 149; Vehling, *Cookery and Dining*, 32-3, Goody, *Cooking, Class*, 102
\(^8^3\) Solomon, *Apician Sauce*, 115-127; Faas, *Around the Roman*, 4-5
intricate flavorings, hence Pliny’s acclamation to swine’s fifty different tastes. An interesting addition to this is the Testamentum Porcelli, a fictional will composed by a piglet, M. Grunnius Corocotta, making his way to his inevitable slaughter and feasting at the festival of Saturnalia. Pertinent to the discussion is Grunnius Corocotta’s preoccupation with his appropriate seasoning as he declares “if you will prepare my body properly and flavor it well with good condiments, nuts, pepper, and honey!”

It is known that pork was a prominent staple in Roman dining, evidenced by Apicius numerous recipes, the frequency of pork dishes in Trimalchio’s feast, and its inclusion in sumptuary laws. However, because of its popularity among all classes of people in Rome, the elite did not consider pig an impressive menu item compared to more rare creatures. Rather than display his affluence and refinement, Trimalchio’s excessive use of pork and pork products lends to the theme of vulgarity that Petronius so obviously bestows on his comic freedman. This popularity also led to the diminished importance of pigs as sacrificial animals, with the exception perhaps at Saturnalia. The hierarchy of meat for sacrifice was largely related to its cost of production. A more rare and valuable meat product, namely beef, was more worthy of sacrifice to the gods.

There is an obvious point of divergence when it comes to the pork consumption of the

---

84 Champlin, The Testament, 176
85 trans. Vehling, Cookery and Dining, 198
86 Sat. 3.33, 3.40, 3.49
87 Pliny, NH 8.77.209; Gellius, Attic Nights 2.24; Wilkins & Hill, Food in the Ancient, 149; Gowers, The Loaded Table, 73
88 Wilkins and Hill, Food in the Ancient, 149
89 Martial, Epigrams, 14.70
90 Wilkins & Hill, Food in the Ancient, 152
91 Garnsey, Food and Society, 124; Faas, Around the Roman, 271; Giacosa, A Taste of, 12; Grimm, From Feasting, 16
Jews. Jews, in accordance with their laws did not eat pork. The observation of this law is witnessed in archaeological evidence that shows 65-75% of animal remains from Roman Palestine belonged to sheep and goats, followed by 10-15% being that of large cattle, and lastly a miniscule amount of swine, the breeding of which was not prohibited.

An interesting comparison is the laws that the two cultures observed to control consumption, particularly the consumption of animal products. The laws “granted the indiscriminate and unlimited use of the products of earth, vine and orchard,” thus conveying the significant implications of eating meat. These regulations differ most greatly in that Roman laws reacted to a perceived excessiveness, while Jewish laws preemptively curbed a presupposed desire.

Jewish dietary laws “translated a material poverty.” It was not feasible for meat to be a regular food item because of its high production cost and the more practical, renewable uses of animals. The most commonly known animal that the Jews abstained from was the pig. This fact was baffling to Roman writers as pork was their meat of choice. The Roman love of pork sheds light on Jewish dietary laws and enforces the notion introduced by Hamel. The regulations gave shape to human desire and promoted a level of consumption that realistically fit with economic consideration. Pork was believed to be delectable, so in forbidding it, the desire would simply not manifest for Jews.

Economic consideration, the curbing of appetite, is not necessarily the only reason for Jewish dietary restrictions. Historians give credence to the notion that the observance of said

---

92 Lev. 11:7-8; Deut. 14:8; Luke 8:32-34; Mark 5:11-13
93 Dar, Food and Archaeology, 332
94 Gellius, Attic Nights, 2.24.7; Frayn, Markets and Fairs, 125
95 Hamel, Poverty and Charity, 29
96 Tacitus, Hist. 4.2, trans. Schiffman; Plutarch, Quest. Con. 4.1-3, trans. Schiffman; Rives, Religion, 194; Goodman, Rome 366-68
97 Hamel, Poverty and Charity, 29
laws fit into the Jewish separatist ideology.\textsuperscript{98} For at the heart of their religion, the Jews believed that they were the chosen people, distinguished from all others.\textsuperscript{99} A compelling argument can be made that a common diet distinguished a group ethnically to others and establishes solidarity and self-identity within the group.\textsuperscript{100} This idea discharges dietary restrictions as simply an economic practice as they also function to provide “a sense of group cohesion and belonging.”\textsuperscript{101}

In Rome, the passage of numerous sumptuary laws exhibited the conceived need for a curtailment on the extravagant dining of the upper class.\textsuperscript{102} These laws, passed intermittently between 161 BCE with the Lex Fannia until the early first century CE, aimed to moderate profligacy in the aspiration of promoting the antique virtue of a simple diet.\textsuperscript{103} Gellius elucidates this reasoning:

> Frugality among the early Romans, and moderation in food and entertainments were secured not only by observance and training at home, but also by public penalties and the inviolable provisions of numerous laws.\textsuperscript{104}

Unlike the Jewish dietary laws that restricted specific items, these sumptuary laws attempted to moderate the spending habits of the “many men of abundant means [who] were gormandizing, and recklessly pouring their family and fortune into an abyss of dinners and banquets.”\textsuperscript{105} This legislation dictated a limit to the number of guests at dinner parties, the amount of money that could be spent on \textit{convivium}, and forbade certain exotic delicacies.\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{98} Grimm, \textit{From Feasting}, 16
\textsuperscript{99} Gen. 17.7; Exod. 19.5-6; Deut. 7.7-8, 14.2
\textsuperscript{100} Wilkins & Hill, \textit{Food in the Ancient}, 141; Gowers, \textit{The Loaded Table}, 51; Garnsey, \textit{Food and Society}, 91-92
\textsuperscript{101} Wilkins & Hill, \textit{Food in the Ancient}, 79
\textsuperscript{102} Tacitus, \textit{Annals}, 3.52-53; Goody, \textit{Cooking, Class}, 103; Frayn, \textit{Markets and Fairs}, 125; Clemente, \textit{Le leggi}, 1
\textsuperscript{103} Garnsey, \textit{Food and Society}, 125; Gowers, \textit{The Loaded Table}, 2; Clemente, \textit{Le leggi}, 14
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Attic Nights} 2.24.1
\textsuperscript{105} Gellius, \textit{Attic Nights}, 2.24.11
\textsuperscript{106} Bober, \textit{Art, Culture}, 170; Faas, \textit{Around the Roman}, 22; Vehling, \textit{Cookery and Dining}, 24
sumptuary laws fell short of their intended effect, as they were difficult to enforce and generally ignored by citizens.\textsuperscript{107}

The Pythagoreans were a philosophical sect within Roman society who also enforced dietary restrictions.\textsuperscript{108} Ovid describes basic Pythagorean food avoidances:

\begin{quote}
Destroy what harms; destroy but never eat; 
Choose wholesome fare and never feed on meat!\textsuperscript{109}
\end{quote}

Pythagoreans purposefully avoided animal sacrifice because of their belief in the transmigration of the soul, implying that eating flesh carries the risk of cannibalism.\textsuperscript{110}

Our souls are deathless; when they leave their former home, 
Always new habitations welcome them, to live afresh\textsuperscript{111}

Vegetarianism was not an uncommon idea in antiquity; meat, as has been discussed, was never the primary source of nutrition or the focus of meals with the exception of the elite.\textsuperscript{112} However, the Pythagoreans' refusing to participate in sacrificial ritual was a point of hostility with other Romans who saw "nothing moral or healthy in observance of such taboos."\textsuperscript{113}

A curious note on the Pythagoreans' dietary restrictions was their inclusion of beans in banned foods.\textsuperscript{115} This quirk was not a point of contention with other citizens, as it did not affect the civic cult. Avoidance of legumes is again linked to the transmigration of souls. The bean is the only plant devoid of nodes in its stem, and the hollow stem was believed to be a route of interchange between the living and the dead; therefore, eating beans was seen as tantamount to

\begin{thebibliography}{115}
\bibitem{107} Garnsey, \textit{Food and Society}, 125; Vehling, \textit{Cookery and Dining}, 25; Frayn, \textit{Markets and Fairs}, 127; Clemente, \textit{Le leggi}, 1
\bibitem{108} Wilkins & Hill, \textit{Food in the Ancient}, 106; Detienne, \textit{The Gardens}, 40
\bibitem{109} \textit{Meta}. 15.75-6, 477-8, trans. Melville
\bibitem{110} Detienne, \textit{The Gardens}, 151
\bibitem{111} \textit{Meta}. 15. 158-9, trans. Melville
\bibitem{112} Wilkins & Hill, \textit{Food in the Ancient}, 142; Osborne, \textit{Ancient Vegetarianism}, 221-222
\bibitem{113} Rives, \textit{Religion}, 184; Detienne, \textit{The Gardens}, 45
\bibitem{114} Goodman, \textit{Rome}, 301
\bibitem{115} Faas, \textit{Around the Roman}, 196; Bober, \textit{Art, Culture}, 52; Detienne, \textit{The Gardens}, 29
\end{thebibliography}
murder.\footnote{Detienne, \textit{The Gardens}, 49-51}

Josephus noted the similarity he discerned between the Pythagoreans, whom he broadly calls “the sons of Greece,” and the Jewish sect of the Essenes who also believed in the transmigration of the soul:

\begin{quote}
It is indeed their unshakable conviction that bodies are corruptible and the material composing them impermanent, whereas the soul remains immortal for ever.\footnote{BJ 2. 154-155; trans. Williamson}
\end{quote}

The Essenes had a unique perspective towards dining in respect to other Jews. Philo of Alexandria reveals that “their food is common through the institution of public meals.”\footnote{Every Good Man is Free 12.86} These communal meals were the primary expression of full membership in the community.\footnote{Bilde, \textit{The Common Meal}, 153; Magness, \textit{Archaeology of Qumran}, 115} As explained in the Rule of the Community,\footnote{Rule of the Community, 6.2-4} the meals carried great religious significance and acted as substitution for blood sacrifice at the Temple.\footnote{Bilde, \textit{The Common Meal}, 161; Magness, \textit{Archaeology of Qumran}, 114-115} Josephus described Essene dining habits in the following way:

\begin{quote}
After this purification they assemble in a building of their own to which no one outside their community is allowed to enter; they then go into the refectory in a state of ritual cleanliness as if it was a holy temple and sit down in silence. When they are quietly seated, the baker serves out the loaves of bread in order, and the cook serves only one bowlful of one dish to each man.\footnote{Bilde, \textit{The Common Meal}, 160-162}
\end{quote}

This passage reflects the restriction of the meal to the sectarians who are in a ritual state of purity, in correspondence with the Torah’s provision for men participating in ritual meals at the Temple.\footnote{BJ 2.30-31, trans. Williamson} With the exception of the individual serving dishes, the Essene communal meals resemble many characteristics of the traditional Roman banquet with a fixed seating order,
libations, chanting of hymns, and sacral foods.\textsuperscript{124}

Fresh seafood was not a central feature of the ancient diet.\textsuperscript{125} Fish had little religious significance since it was generally not used for sacrifice.\textsuperscript{126} The eating of fish did not exist on a large scale, apart from coastal regions, because of the unpredictability of supplies\textsuperscript{127} and the difficulties in transporting it before it spoils.\textsuperscript{128} Fish, and other animal products though not as frequently, could be preserved in numerous methods to overcome these challenges. Most common preservation methods included salting, smoking, and curing.\textsuperscript{129} For Jews, fish was more common fare as it became the standard meal for Sabbath evening.\textsuperscript{130} Due to the inconsistency of the fish supply, it generally had a high market value:

\begin{quote}
And fish is costly. Cato hit the nail on the head when, in his battle against luxury and excess in Rome, he said that a fish costs more than a cow.\textsuperscript{131}
\end{quote}

While Plutarch’s statement is assumed to be slightly hyperbolic, it reflects the status of fish as a luxury item for the elite.\textsuperscript{132} The owning of a fishpond on one’s country estate was a potent status symbol to Roman elites.\textsuperscript{133} Juvenal’s Satire 4 expounds on a great excitement attributed to “a marvelous hulk of an Adriatic turbot came to light.”\textsuperscript{134} Horace scorns those preoccupied with luxurious seafood as “madman, you praise a three pound mullet you’ve to eat

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{124} Magness, The Archaeology of Qumran, 114
\textsuperscript{125} Donahue, The Roman Community, 19
\textsuperscript{126} Wilkins & Hill, Food in the Ancient, 154
\textsuperscript{127} Wilkins & Hill, Food in the Ancient, 155
\textsuperscript{128} Garnsey, Food and Soicety, 16; Hamel, Poverty and Charity, 20; Frayn, Markets and Fairs, 71; Higginbotham, Piscinae, 56
\textsuperscript{129} Cato, De Re Agri, 162; Pliny, NH, 31.87; Frayn, Markets and Fairs, 71; Wilkins and Hill, Food in the Ancient, 143;
\textsuperscript{130} Goodman, Rome, 293; Smith, Lectures on the Religion, 219; Hamel, Poverty and Charity, 25
\textsuperscript{131} Moralia 4.4.668, trans. Faas 323
\textsuperscript{132} Purcell, Eating Fish, 136; Higginbotham, Piscinae, 43
\textsuperscript{133} Plutarch, Lucullus, 39.3; Pliny, NH, 9.170-172; Petronius, Satyricon, 3.48; Higginbotham, Piscinae, 55-7
\textsuperscript{134} Satire 4.37, trans. Kline
in portions." Pliny the Elder, one quick to condemn such opulence, scoffs at the exorbitance of seafood:

But why mention such trifles as these... no more rapid advances have been made by luxury, than those effected through the medium of shell-fish? Of all the elements that exist, the sea is the one that costs the dearest to the belly; seeing that it provides so many kinds of meats, so many dishes, so many exquisite flavours derived from fish, all of which are valued in proportion to the danger undergone by those who have caught them.\(^{136}\)

Fresh fish did not factor largely into the ancient diet, but preserved fish, typically in the form of a sauce, was ubiquitous. *Garum*, the sauce made from fermented fish, was produced on a large scale in specialized factories.\(^{137}\) In Apicius’ cookbook *garum* is omnipresent, though he typically refers to it as *liquamen*, a more delicate variety.\(^{138}\) Pliny the Elder describes the process as “place in a vessel all the insides of the fish... salt them well. Expose them to the air until they are completely putrid. In a short time a liquid is produced. Drain this off.”\(^{139}\) It is hard to imagine fetid fish as appetizing but Martial asserts to “accept this exquisite sauce made from the first blood of the expiring mackerel; an expensive present.”\(^{140}\) Fish sauce in fact has survived to modern day; its counterparts include Britain’s Worcester sauce and a similar variety in various Asian cuisines. Pliny also tells of a kosher *garum* produced from fish with scales for Jewish consumption.\(^{141}\)

The differences between Jewish and Roman food and dining behaviors are inescapable. Romans loved pork while the Jews renounced swine. The Roman cereal of choice was wheat, and the Jewish was barley. Dining together was the primary means of establishing social

\(^{135}\) *Satire* 2.2.33-34, trans. Kline  
\(^{136}\) *NH* 9.53.34, trans. Bostock  
\(^{137}\) Wilkins & Hill, *Food in the Ancient*, 143; Brothwell, *Food in Antiquity*, 159-160; Higginbotham, *Piscinae*, 56  
\(^{138}\) Solomon, *Apician Sauce*, 121; Bober, *Art, Culture*, 152; Faas, *Around the Roman*, 145  
\(^{139}\) *NH*, 31.43.93, trans. Bober  
\(^{140}\) Ep. 13.102  
\(^{141}\) *NH*, 31.44; Deut. 14:10; Goodman, *Rome*, 126
connections, yet the Jews refused to share a table with Gentiles. Romans turned cooking into a highly valued form of art, while the Jews showed little interest in developing a haute cuisine.\textsuperscript{142}

However, with the rise of Christianity these differences are downplayed. As enumerated by Goodman, the similarities between pagans and Jews in relation to their religious practices, all of which have connections to food and drink, are significant: centrality of cult to sacrifice, libations and the burning of incense, and the special sanctity ascribed to the part of the building which housed the divinity.\textsuperscript{143}

Apart from these idiosyncrasies, the broad manner in which Jews and Romans ascribed social significance to convivial dining, as a way of formalizing group identity and enforcing social hierarchies, was stripped away with the popularization of Christian thought. Pauline theology expunged notions of food demarcating social stratification as the religion emphasized equality among all peoples.\textsuperscript{144} It also denied the correlation between food and piety.\textsuperscript{145} The only occurrence of food used in Christian practice is the Eucharistic meal, which deemphasized the actual dining aspect and promoted individual reflection on the “meal’s” symbolic significance.\textsuperscript{146}

Sacrifice was definitively removed from Judaism in 70 CE with the destruction of the Temple.\textsuperscript{147} The communal meal took on even greater significance for Jews at this point as a means of preserving identity.\textsuperscript{148} For the pagans however, it was more of gradual degeneration that followed suit with the Christianization of the empire. The cessation of the civic cult came

\textsuperscript{142} Goodman, Rome, 293
\textsuperscript{143} Goodman, Rome, 376
\textsuperscript{144} 1 Cor. 11:18-22; Hallbäck, Sacred Meal, 169, 171
\textsuperscript{145} Rom. 14:17; Rom. 14:17
\textsuperscript{146} Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; John 13:26; 1 Cor. 11:23-32; Hallbäck, Sacred Meal, 172-175; White, Regulating Fellowship, 184, 195
\textsuperscript{147} Millar, The Jews of, 115-116
\textsuperscript{148} Noy, Sixth Hour, 140; Bilde, The Common Meal, 163
under Theodotius in 391 CE when he officially banned all sacrifice.\textsuperscript{149} The inability to sacrifice meant the end of the prominence of paganism; the Jews however, adapted their religion to accommodate this change.

Prior to Christianity becoming a significant force in the Roman Empire, there was a preoccupation with all the ways in which Romans and Jews were different in regards to food and dining. The list seemed almost too hefty to ever assert that the two groups were more similar than they were different. However, the Christianization of Rome erased the common aspects of the cultures and thus trivialized their disparities.

\textsuperscript{149} Millar, \textit{The Jews of}, 116
Bibliography


Carcopino, J. Daily Like in Ancient Rome: the People and the City at the Height of the Empire. Trans. E.O. Lorimer. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1940.


Grimm, V. “Fasting Women in Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity.” In J.M. Wilkins, D.


